



PART IV

Epilogue

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It is appropriate to look back at Earth and its dynamic geologic systems now that you have a firmer grasp on how it works. One way of doing this is by examining the relationship between people and the planet. Nowhere is this relationship more clear than in the realm of our natural resources. Just like the planet itself, human societies rely on energy and a host of materials, all of which are derived from Earth. Another fruitful way to look back at Earth is from the vantage point of space. Earth is but one planet among many that orbit our Sun, having formed from a swirling mass of gas and dust 4.55 billion years ago. By comparing and contrasting Earth with these other bodies, you will see how truly unique Earth is. You will see how a delicate balance between planet size, location, and composition has allowed Earth to be a haven for life. With only a few minor changes in any of these factors, Earth would have been a radically different place, inhospitable for life as we know it.