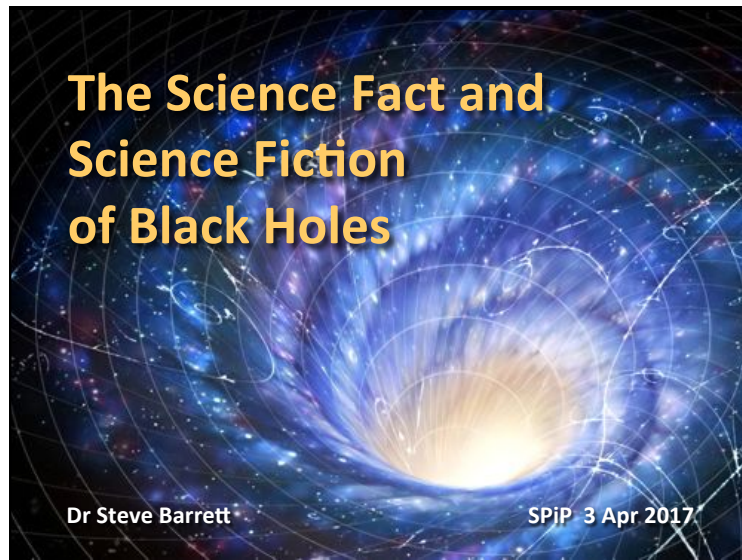


The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes



Contents

A Brief History

Science Fact

Science Fiction

The Future



2

A Brief History

Black Hole [definition]:

A region of space from which nothing, not even light, can escape.

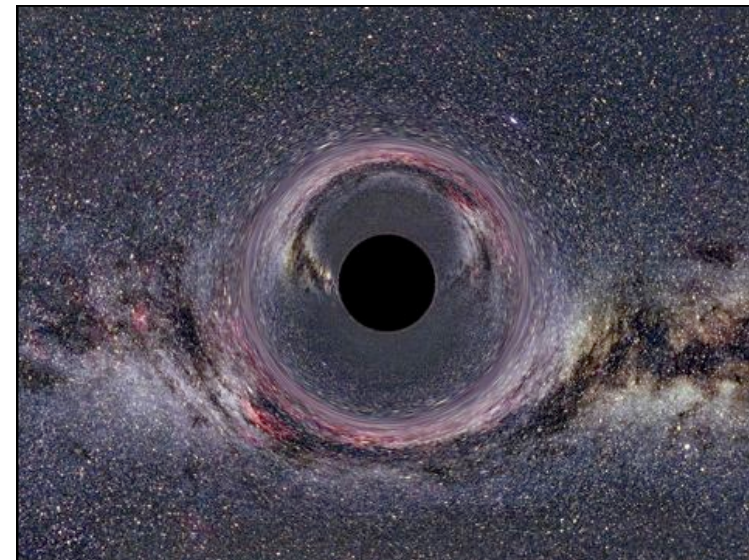
When did the concept of a black hole originate? Earlier than you think.

Rev John Michell (1783) – "If [the size of] a sphere of the same density of the Sun were to exceed that of the Sun in the proportion of 500 to 1 ... all light emitted from such a body would be made to return towards it by its gravity."

In the 1800s the idea of such '**dark stars**' was largely ignored.



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The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes

A Brief History



Einstein (1915)
General Theory of Relativity



Schwarzschild (1916)
Calculation of gravity
of a compact mass



Eddington (1926)
Stars compressed to the
'Schwarzschild radius'



Chandrasekhar (1931)
Massive stars at the end
of their lives will collapse



Oppenheimer (1939)
Nothing can stop the
collapse of massive stars

General Relativity predicts that
time stops at the Schwarzschild
radius and so such collapsed
stars were called '**frozen stars**'.

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A Brief History

Finkelstein (1958)
At the Schwarzschild radius there is an
event horizon – a 'one-way membrane'

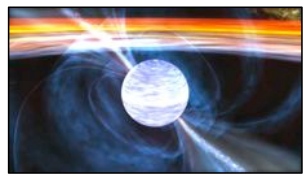
Golden Age of GR and BH (~ 1960 – 1975)
Kerr / Newman / Penrose / Hawking

1964 First use of the term '**black hole**'

1967 Discovery of pulsars

1969 Identified as neutron stars

Gravitational collapse of stars is not
just a hypothetical possibility!



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Pieces of the Puzzle

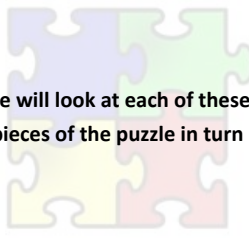
Escape
Velocity

General
Relativity

Stars and
Galaxies

Detecting
Gravity

We will look at each of these
pieces of the puzzle in turn



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Pieces of the Puzzle

Escape
Velocity



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The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes

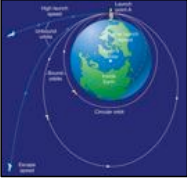
Escape Velocity

What goes up must come down? Right?

Wrong, not if it goes up fast enough.

The threshold speed needed for an object to escape the gravitational pull of a body is called the **escape velocity**. If you throw something up with a speed less than the escape velocity then it will fall back.

The force of gravity pulling an object (like you) towards a body (like the Earth) depends on both of the masses involved and the distance between them. The escape velocity does not depend on the mass of the object — the escape velocity for a 1 kg satellite is the same as for a 1 ton satellite or even a 1000 ton space station.



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Escape Velocity

The escape velocity at the surface of a body depends on the ratio of the mass to the radius $\frac{M}{R}$

Some escape velocities:

Velocity to escape the Moon	= 2 km/s	(= 5,000 mph)
Velocity to escape the Earth	= 11 km/s	(= 25,000 mph)
Velocity to escape the Sun	= 600 km/s	(> 1,000,000 mph)

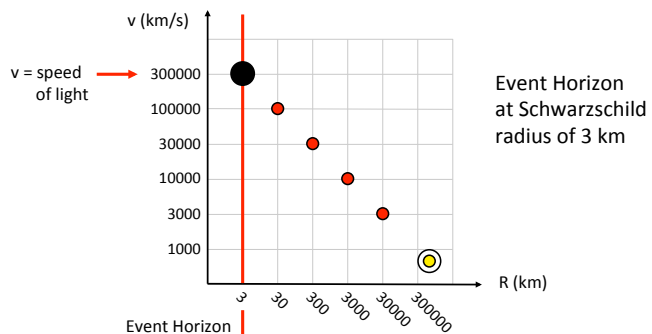
600 km/s may sound like a lot, but it is only 0.2% of the speed of light

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Escape Velocity

Let's compress the Sun to smaller sizes and see what happens to the escape velocity.



Event Horizon at Schwarzschild radius of 3 km

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Escape Velocity

If we compress the Sun into a sphere of radius 3 km then we form a black hole.

What if we start with a body with a different mass?

For the Earth	the Schwarzschild radius is	~ cm	
Moon		~ 0.1 mm	
Mt Everest		~ atom	

We know of no way that this can happen for any mass smaller than that of a star, but that doesn't mean that it's impossible.

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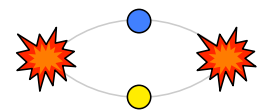
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The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes

 **Escape Velocity**

Although all sizes are possible, small BH don't last.

Aside: Quantum Mechanics* allows particles and antiparticles to be created from borrowed energy, as long as they annihilate and pay back the borrowed energy on very short time scales.

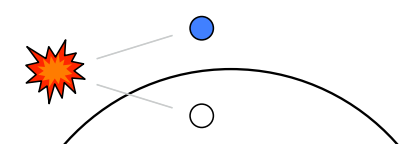


 * See "The Weird World of the Very Very Small" 13

 **Escape Velocity**

Although all sizes are possible, small BH don't last.

How is this particle-antiparticle creation relevant to the lifetime of BH?
What might happen if they are created *just* outside the event horizon?

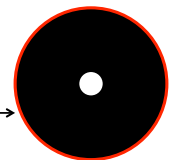


There is a net flux of particles radiating from the event horizon of the BH called **Hawking radiation**. This radiation increases with decreasing mass, so small BH evaporate! More about this later in the talk.

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 **Escape Velocity**

What happens if we compress an object to a size *smaller* than the Schwarzschild radius?

The event horizon, the point at which the escape velocity is equal to the speed of light, is still the same (the Schwarzschild radius). → 

For massive stars ($M > 10M_{\odot}$) nothing that we know of can stop the core collapse during a supernova and so all the mass is compressed to an infinitely small point – a **singularity**.

We cannot tell if this is what actually happens inside a BH because it is all hidden inside the event horizon. Could we ever see a "naked" singularity? Not according to the **Cosmic Censorship Hypothesis**.

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General Relativity



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The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes



General Relativity

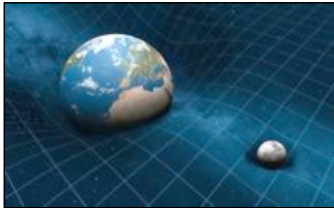
Einstein's General Theory of Relativity
First presented in 1915 and published in 1916

What does it say? $G = 8\pi T$

The main principle of GR can be expressed by this one equation that looks deceptively simple.

G is the geometry of space
 T is the distribution of mass

Mass distorts space!



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General Relativity

$$G = 8\pi T$$

The equation is sometimes reduced to the more prosaic description

Mass tells **space** how to **curve**
Space tells **mass** how to **move**

What do we mean by curved space?

Any image trying to explain this uses the analogy of 2-dimensional space curving into a third dimension.

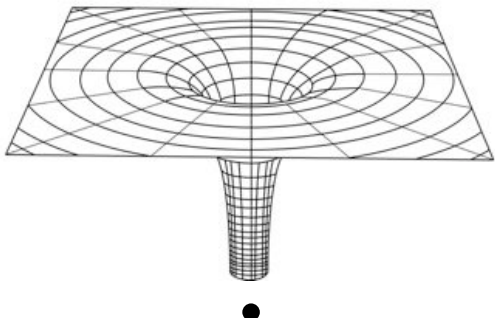
To warp or curve 3-dimensional space we need a fourth dimension which humans, not unnaturally, find very difficult to imagine.

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General Relativity

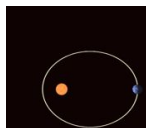
Black holes produce infinitely warped space



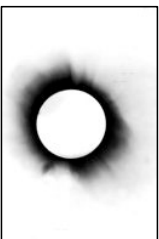
19



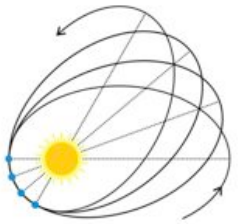
Predictions of General Relativity



The precession of the orbit of Mercury



Gravitational lensing



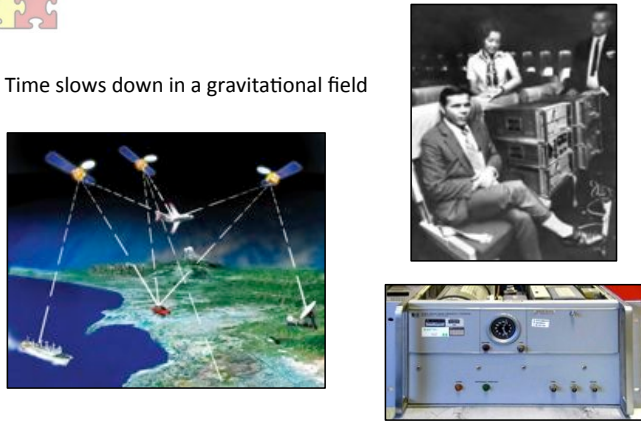
Stars seen during the total solar eclipse of 1919 were found to be slightly shifted in position.

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The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes

 **Predictions of General Relativity**

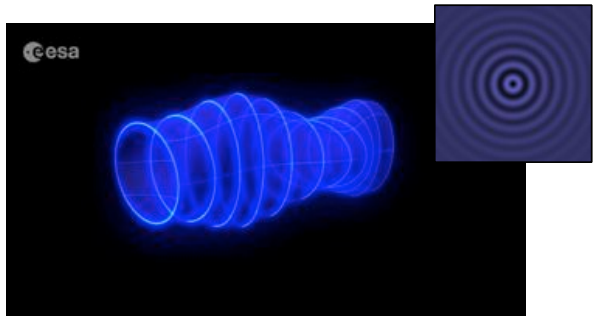
Time slows down in a gravitational field



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 **Gravitational Waves**

One of the predictions of GR is gravitational waves.



The ripples in spacetime are tiny — 1 part in 10^{20}

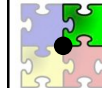
 22

 **Gravitational Waves**

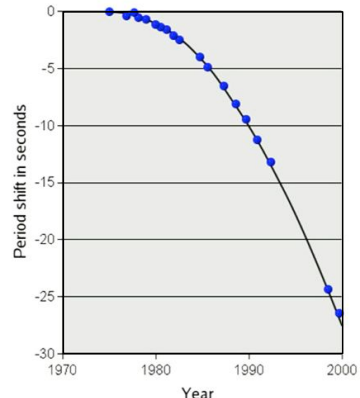
Merger of two neutron stars



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 **Gravitational Waves**

If binary pulsars emit gravitational waves they must be slowly losing energy, and this would mean that they would be expected to slow down (black line). This is precisely what is observed (blue points).



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The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes

Stars and Galaxies



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Black Holes Are Born

Core collapse of a massive star – Supernova*



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* See "The ABC of Stellar Evolution"

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Black Holes Feed

Infalling matter forms an accretion disk



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Black Holes Feed

Accretion disk and x-ray jets



Accretion disks form because objects passing close to the BH are ripped apart by huge tidal forces.

The effect is more popularly known as spaghettification or the noodle effect.

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The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes

 **Black Holes Feed**

Accretion disk and x-ray jets



The infalling matter is heated by the tidal forces and emits light and x-rays.

The accretion process can convert more than 25% of the infalling mass into energy.

Compare this to nuclear fusion in stars, where less than 1% of the mass is converted into energy.

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 **Black Holes Feed**

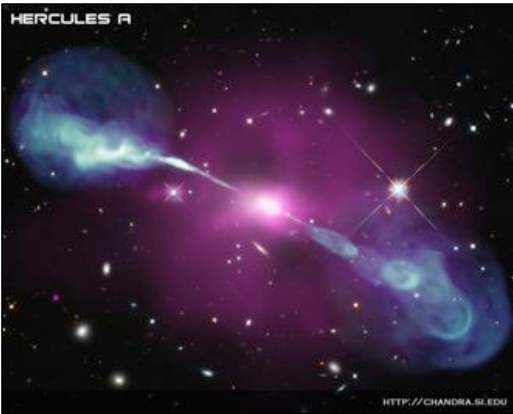
Is this how black holes feed on neighbouring stars?



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 **Black Hole Jets**



HERCULES A

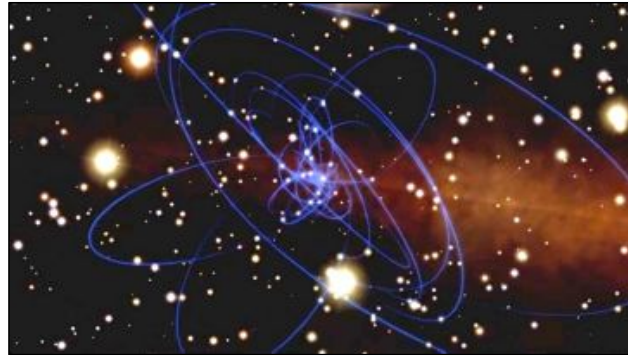
[HTTP://CHANDRA.SI.EDU/](http://chandra.si.edu)

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 **Supermassive Black Holes**

Zooming in to the centre of the Milky Way



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The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes

Supermassive Black Holes

Stars orbiting the BH at the centre of the Milky Way



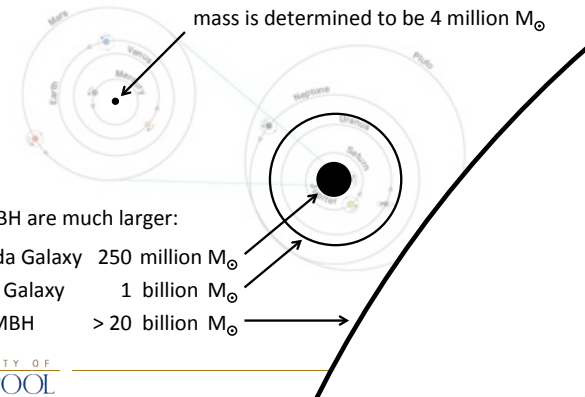
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Supermassive Black Holes

How big is the SMBH at the centre of the Milky Way?

From the orbits of the stars the SMBH mass is determined to be 4 million $M_{\odot}$

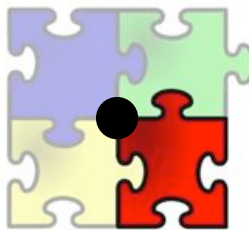


Other SMBH are much larger:

- Andromeda Galaxy 250 million $M_{\odot}$
- Sombrero Galaxy 1 billion $M_{\odot}$
- Largest SMBH > 20 billion $M_{\odot}$

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Detecting Gravity

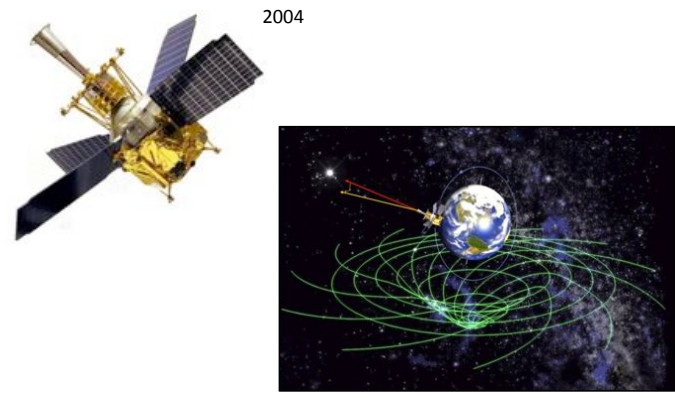


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Measuring Curved Space

Gravity Probe B
2004



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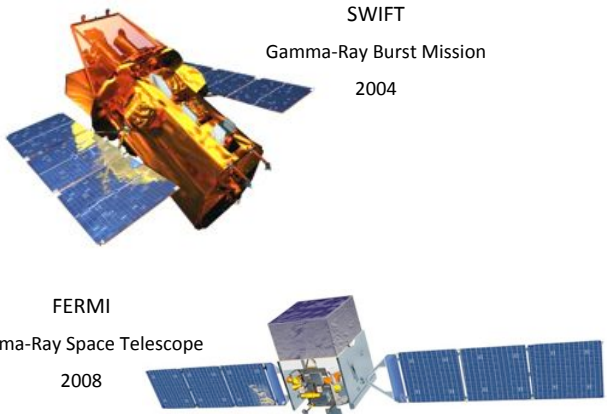
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The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes

 **Detecting Extreme Gravity**

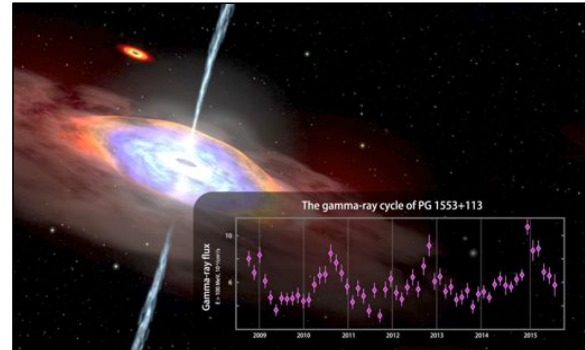
SWIFT
Gamma-Ray Burst Mission
2004

FERMI
Gamma-Ray Space Telescope
2008



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 **Detecting Extreme Gravity**



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 **Detecting Gravity Waves**

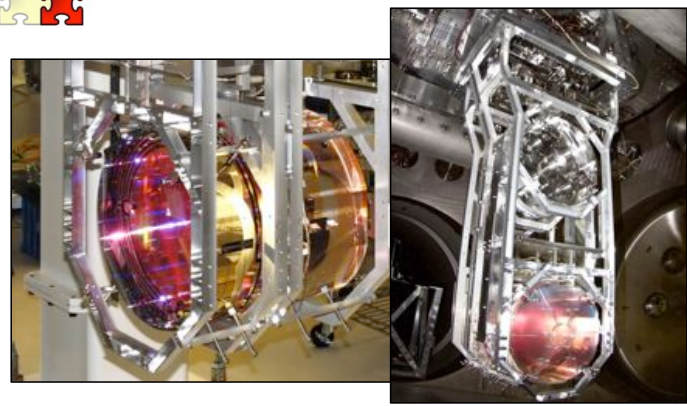


LIGO
Laser
Interferometer
Gravitational
Wave
Observatory



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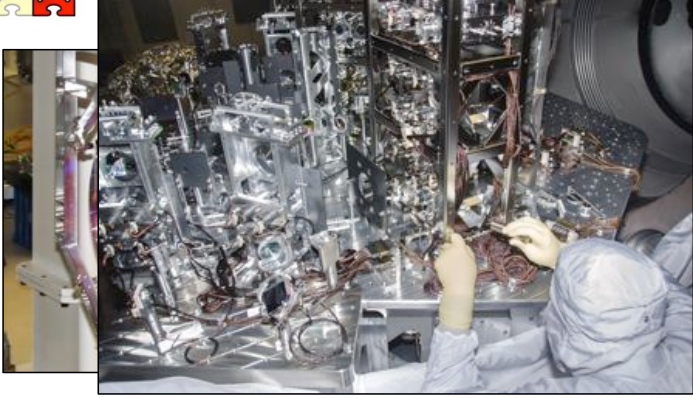
 **Detecting Gravity Waves**



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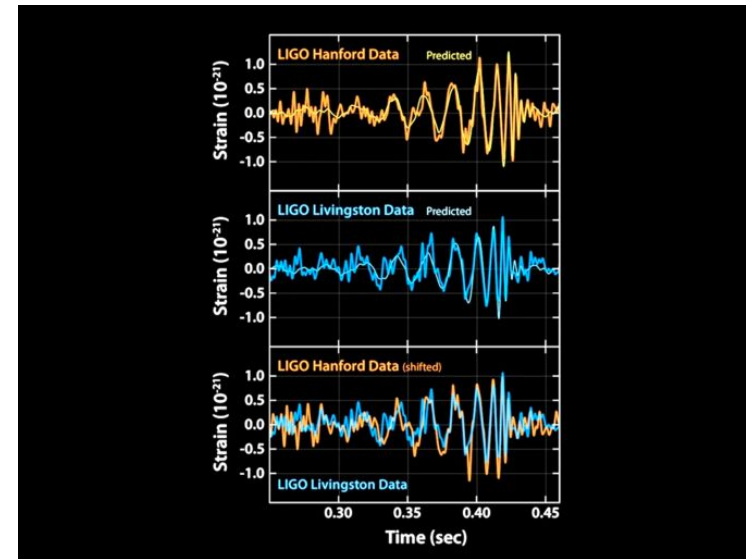
The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes

 **Detecting Gravity Waves**



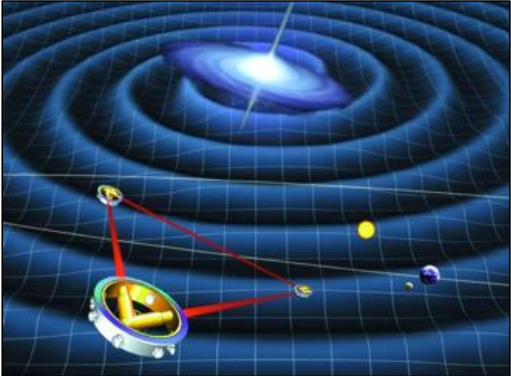
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 **Detecting Gravity Waves**

eLISA = Evolved Laser Interferometer Space Antenna



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 **Detecting Gravity Waves**

eLISA = Evolved Laser Interferometer Space Antenna

LIGO is sensitive to waves with periods of less than a second. This means that it can detect waves created by the merger of two black holes, but this does not happen very often.



By comparison, eLISA will be sensitive to waves with much longer periods, from seconds to hours. This should mean that eLISA can detect signals from BH within our galaxy and SMBH in other galaxies.



It is also hoped that eLISA will be able to detect the gravitational waves created by the biggest singularity of them all – the Big Bang.*

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* See "The Beginning of Everything"

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The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes

Measuring an Event Horizon

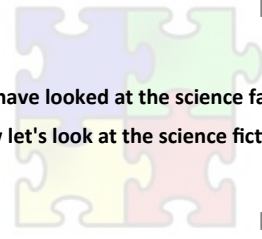


Event Horizon Telescope

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Pieces of the Puzzle



Escape Velocity

General Relativity

Stars and Galaxies

Detecting Gravity

We have looked at the science facts
Now let's look at the science fiction

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Science Fiction

Does Hollywood ever get it right?



Ship is parked right next to the event horizon

Ship is pulled in to a planetary black hole

Ship is powered by an onboard black hole

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Science Fiction



Is a BH-powered star drive possible?

For BH with mass **less** than a kg, not much energy is available ($E=mc^2$).

For BH with a mass **more** than that of Mount Everest, Hawking radiation is very weak.

For BH with mass ~ 1 million tons the power in the Hawking radiation would be equivalent to the output of ~ 100 million nuclear power stations and the BH would last ~ 100 years.

If the radiation from such a BH, smaller than an atom, could be captured or directed, then that is enough energy to power a starship.

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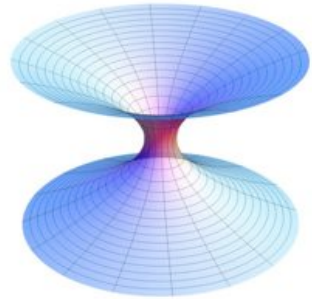
The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes

Science Fiction

What about shortcuts through space?

Wormholes?

Hyperspace?



Science Fiction

What about shortcuts through space?

Wormholes?

Hyperspace?



Science Fiction

What about time travel?



Science Fiction

What about time travel?

Hawking proposed the

Chronology Protection Conjecture

A wormhole allowing time travel will collapse before anything has time to travel through it.

"Making the Universe safe for historians"



The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes

The Problem

There's a problem.

General Relativity (GR) works really well for **massive** objects (like stars).

Quantum Mechanics (QM) works really well for **tiny** objects (like atoms).*

But, what if the object is massive **and** tiny?

Then we need (drum roll)... **Quantum Gravity**.

The problem: GR and QM are not good bedfellows.

A universal 'Theory of Everything' has proven to be elusive.



* See "The Weird World of the Very Very Small"

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The Future



Maybe quantum mechanics will prevent a singularity from forming, thus avoiding the horrible properties like infinite density and infinitely warped space.

For instance, String Theory describes a ten-dimensional universe in which the fundamental building blocks are 'strings' rather than the more familiar 'particles'.

If String Theory is right, black holes are 'fuzzballs' without a singularity at their core. They are just 'balls of string'.

But, is the universe described by String Theory the one in which we live?



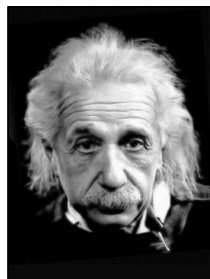
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The Future

Einstein never really believed that quantum mechanics was the right description of the microscopic world.

He spent most of his later years wrestling with a Theory of Everything.

If a genius like Einstein could not get his head around the problem, what will it take?



Maybe some unexpected discoveries, for instance from LIGO or eLISA, will point the way forward to a better understanding of black holes.



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The Science Fact and Science Fiction of Black Holes

<http://www.liv.ac.uk/~sdb/Talks>

Dr Steve Barrett

SPiP 3 Apr 2017