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Black Hole: How An Idea Abandoned By Newtonians, Hated By Einstein, And Gambled On By Hawking Became Loved



Synopsis

For more than half a century, physicists and astronomers engaged in heated dispute over the possibility of black holes in the universe. The weirdly alien notion of a space-time abyss from which nothing escapes - not even light - seemed to confound all logic. This engrossing audiobook tells the story of the fierce black-hole debates and the contributions of Einstein, Hawking, and other leading thinkers who completely altered our view of the universe. Renowned science writer Marcia Bartusiak shows how the black hole helped revive Einstein's greatest achievement, the general theory of relativity, after decades during which it had been pushed into the shadows. Not until astronomers discovered such surprising new phenomena as neutron stars and black holes did the once-sedate universe transform into an Einsteinian cosmos, filled with sources of titanic energy that can be understood only in the light of relativity. Celebrating the 100th anniversary of general relativity, *Black Hole* uncovers how the black hole really got its name and recounts the scientists' frustrating, exhilarating, and at times humorous battles over the acceptance of one of history's most dazzling ideas.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Black holes are unusual objects. They are now recognized as some of the most important cosmic laboratories for studying all kinds of physics phenomena, from general relativity to quantum mechanics. And yet as science writer Marcia Bartusiak describes in this book, their road to success has been paved with a lack of interest from their own pioneers and many haphazard detours. Bartusiak traces the conception of the idea of black holes to a Cambridge don named Joh

Mitchell who asked whether an object could be so dense that even light would not escape its gravitational pull. This idea lay buried in the scientific literature until the early 20th century when astronomers began asking questions about the constitution of stars. It was a young Indian astrophysicist Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar who first thought about gravitational collapse on his way to graduate school in England. Bartusiak describes well Chandrasekhar's battles with the old English establishment of astronomers in getting his ideas accepted. He was so frustrated in his endeavors that he switched to studying other topics before he finally got the Nobel Prize for his work decades later. The next actors on the stage were the volatile Fritz Zwicky and the brilliant Lev Landau and Robert Oppenheimer. Landau and Zwicky laid out the first contours of what's called a neutron star while Oppenheimer was really the first scientist who asked what happens when a star completely collapses to a point, what was later called a singularity. Interestingly both Oppenheimer and Einstein - whose general theory relativity shines in all its glory in black holes - either refused to accept their reality or showed a complete lack of interest in them in their later years. After his pioneering work Oppenheimer never even entertained the subject.

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