

Black Hole Theory

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[Keith McLachlan](#)

Norman liked space. It was a cold, distant infinity beyond our minor planetary shores; like a great, cosmic ocean with us as passengers clinging to a random twig of driftwood. The cosmos did not care nor judge, nor even consider such brief, inconsequential things like the lives of humans, let alone their feelings.

The doctor was talking, and his wife was sobbing and grabbing him. They both felt far away, and Norman's thoughts drifted back to the cosmos and the great black hole at the center of our galaxy.

Scientists had theorized that galaxies had supermassive black holes at the center of them, and then they had found one at the center of *our* galaxy.

Yes, at the center of the Milky Way was a supermassive black hole that was slowly sucking everything into its oblivion. Whole stars, planets and solar systems were being eaten. Whole worlds were being swallowed as the World Eater quietly drew everything into its vast, incomprehensible maw...

"There are options, Norman," his wife was sobbing into his neck, the doctor was nodding grimly, "We can enter you into the drug trial--"

"No," Norman said quietly.

His wife stopped sobbing and looked up. The room fell quiet.

"No," Norman repeated, "I am not going to do that, dear."

The doctor nodded grimly, averted his eyes and shuffled some papers on his desk. Norman wondered how many times the doctor must have delivered news like this to someone? Each time he did so, he must get slightly numb? Each time, slightly more numb?

Kind of like the World Eater: slowly swallowing everything and turning it into oblivion. Slowly getting colder and colder, heavier and heavier. Quietly eating world after world, steadily and repeatedly watching your patients inevitable fall into oblivion...

Weeks had passed and the tears had dried as the time got dearer. The shock had turned to frustration and, ultimately, into quiet acceptance.

Life no longer held uncertainty for him. Anyone with uncertainty also had a future. He would no longer exist soon and *that* was very much a certainty.

His wife was wonderful and Norman thanked her constantly for her companionship and care while apologizing as he got weaker and weaker. She would shush him and hug him tightly. If he kept his consciousness in the coming oblivion, he knew he would spend it missing her the most.

The kids—now all grown-up—would drop by and hug him too. They and some close friends were like satellites regularly popping by on their orbit around him and his personal apocalypse while briefly broadcasting their emotions before disappearing again.

But his thoughts constantly strayed back to the great black hole at the center of the Milky Way.

The World Eater.

It had a name: *Sagittarius A*, and was about four million times the mass of our little Sun. Cold and silent, the World Eater floated out there. Older than time and hidden in its own darkness with the swirling cosmos around it, the World Eater would eventually consume everything.

It was strangely comforting to know that even if he had been immortal, he would never have lived forever. Eventually, the World Eater would swallow him too.

Eventually, we all lose our uncertainty with pure certainty.

Norman's ethereal form floated untethered from the physical-world over the lip of *Sagittarius A*. Gravity had no pull on his form as his form had no mass. All around him, though, planets, stars and gas were being sucked into the World Eater, slipping over the Event Horizon and being lost to the outside world.

It was incredible.

More surprising than the separation from his body at the point of death was his isolation as a disembodied soul. Where were all the other dead people and their ethereal forms? Why was he all alone in the universe? Did each soul make its own way to whatever afterlife it wanted? How did they know because he knew nothing of the sort?

At first, he had watched over his beloved wife and their children. Unable to interact, though, but it had still provided comfort. Years later, though, his wife had passed and then their children...

Eventually, little tethered him to that planet and he had begun wandering the cosmos.

Naturally, he had been drawn to the World Eater. Why not? He had nothing else he was doing?

Slowly he floated over the Event Horizon, planets stretching out and gas sucking by and through him. He felt nothing and it had no bearing on him, though to witness it was awe-inspiring.

The moment he crossed that invisible—but very real line—reality began to progressively warp. Objects began to stretch into noodles and atoms were separated. And then, as he floated closer and closer to the center of the black hole, the atoms themselves were torn apart and—far from “black”—reality was pure *light* around him that slowly and steadily got brighter...

Until, right at the center that Norman floated closer and closer to, even the light got compressed into an infinite point of brilliance: the singularity itself.

Norman floated in awe for a while amidst all that swirling dazzling radiance as all space, time and matter compressed on itself, folding over and over as it collapsed on itself endlessly.

Eventually, Norman himself floated towards the singularity. The shredded atomic dust of entire galaxies whirled past him as pure light towards that magical, single point. He suddenly knew what he wanted. He knew where he was *meant* to go, and he floated his incorporeal consciousness directly into the infinite point of space, time and matter as it punched through to the other side. Right at the edge of it, staring into blinding infinity, he leaned forward and stuck his head through it...

The baby's head burst through as the mother screamed in agony. The father was squeezing her hand so hard it hurt it while repeatedly telling her to breathe. The doctor gently held the baby as the rest of the pure, innocent little life entered the world.

The mother collapsed under waves of endorphins, exhaustion and exhilaration while the father kept squeezing her hand, his eyes wide-open at the creation held in the doctor's sterile hands.

“It's a boy,” the doctor said calmly, smiling; it had been a good birth with no complications, “Congratulations to both of you. What will you be calling him?”

The father opened his mouth as if to reply but the mother propped herself up on her elbows and answered for both of them:

“Norman,” she said, without a pause, “Like my great grandfather, he is a Norman.”