

# Physics-Informed Stochastic Time Series Generation and ML for Anomaly Detection in Spacecraft Telemetry

Evan Kniffen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>REYES, University of California, Berkeley

## Abstract

A mathematically rigorous framework for simulating physically plausible, high-dimensional synthetic telemetry representative of complex spacecraft systems, as well as a suite of advanced machine learning (ML) models tailored for rare event (failure) detection in this challenging regime. Our data synthesis combines Brownian motion, harmonic oscillations, wavelet bursts, cross-sensor dependencies, and controlled stochasticity, calibrated to mimic the statistical and dynamical structure of real spacecraft subsystems. I developed a multi-level feature extraction pipeline—emphasizing time, frequency, and nonlinear statistics—and benchmark Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks, Random Forests, and Logistic Regression ensembles. The resulting performance and failure detection rates are critically analyzed in light of underlying physical and information-theoretic constraints.

## 1 Physics and Mathematics of Synthetic Data Generation

The design of high-fidelity synthetic data for spacecraft sensor systems requires a careful blend of stochastic process theory, signal analysis, and the physics of real engineering subsystems. Each generated time series is the result of superposing statistically and physically meaningful processes, encapsulated in a hierarchical generative model. This approach mirrors the superstatistics paradigm, where physical observables result from a combination of random processes evolving at multiple scales [1].

### 1.1 Stochastic Drift: Brownian Motion

Let  $W_t$  denote a standard Brownian motion (Wiener process), satisfying the SDE:

$$dW_t = \sigma dB_t, \quad W_0 = x_0,$$

where  $B_t$  is a standard Wiener process, and  $\sigma$  sets the scale of stochastic fluctuations. This captures random walk behavior in sensors due to cumulative effects of thermal noise, voltage fluctuations, and environmental variability. For a discretized time grid  $t_0, t_1, \dots, t_n$ ,

$$W_{t_{k+1}} = W_{t_k} + \sigma\sqrt{\Delta t} \cdot \xi_k, \quad \xi_k \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1).$$

The probability law is Gaussian:

$$P(W_t = x) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi\sigma^2 t}} \exp\left(-\frac{(x - x_0)^2}{2\sigma^2 t}\right)$$

yielding both non-stationarity and long-range correlations as in real accelerometers and gyroscopes [2, 3].

## 1.2 Deterministic Oscillations: Harmonic Modes

Many spacecraft subsystems (e.g., thermal control, battery charging, attitude regulation) show approximately periodic oscillations:

$$H(t) = A \sin(2\pi f t + \phi) + \epsilon(t)$$

where  $A$  is amplitude,  $f$  is frequency,  $\phi$  is phase (possibly random/uniformly distributed), and  $\epsilon(t)$  is a noise term. Superposition of multiple harmonics yields quasi-periodic signals:

$$S_{\text{harm}}(t) = \sum_{j=1}^M A_j \sin(2\pi f_j t + \phi_j)$$

with  $f_j$  chosen to match observed modes in engineering telemetry [4, 5].

## 1.3 Localized Bursts: Wavelet Events

Abrupt, rare events (e.g., system faults, cosmic-ray hits) are modeled as localized, scale-dependent transients. The Ricker wavelet (Mexican hat) is given by:

$$\psi(t; a) = \frac{2}{\sqrt{3a\pi^{1/4}}} \left[ 1 - \frac{t^2}{a^2} \right] \exp\left(-\frac{t^2}{2a^2}\right)$$

where  $a$  is width. At event times  $t_0$ , I injected:

$$S_{\text{burst}}(t) = \sum_{k=1}^{N_{\text{fail}}} A_k \psi(t - t_{0,k}; a_k)$$

where amplitudes and widths are sampled from physically motivated priors.

## 1.4 Correlated Noise and Cross-Sensor Dependencies

Subsystems in spacecraft are physically coupled; e.g., temperature drift in one compartment can propagate to others. I modeled this via:

$$S_i(t) \leftarrow S_i(t) + \alpha S_j(t)$$

for selected sensor pairs  $i, j$  with coupling  $\alpha \in [0.08, 0.18]$ . Such cross-talk creates realistic spatiotemporal correlations.

## 1.5 Additive Noise

Measurement error is modeled as additive, independent Gaussian noise:

$$N_i(t) \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \tau_i^2)$$

with  $\tau_i$  tailored per sensor to simulate varying hardware quality and environmental shielding.

## 1.6 Composite Signal Synthesis

Each time series is thus:

$$S_i(t) = \underbrace{W_i(t)}_{\text{Brownian}} + \underbrace{S_{\text{harm},i}(t)}_{\text{Periodic}} + \underbrace{N_i(t)}_{\text{Sensor noise}} + \underbrace{\alpha_i S_{p(i)}(t)}_{\text{Coupling}} + \underbrace{S_{\text{burst},i}(t)}_{\text{Failures}} \quad (1)$$

where  $p(i)$  indicates a parent sensor for cross-coupling.

## 1.7 Label Generation: Rare Failures

I sampled  $n_{\text{fail}}$  failure times  $\{t_{0,k}\}$  uniformly in the valid range, ensuring failures are rare ( $\sim 10\%$  of all samples). The binary label vector  $\mathbf{y}$  is set to 1 at these indices.

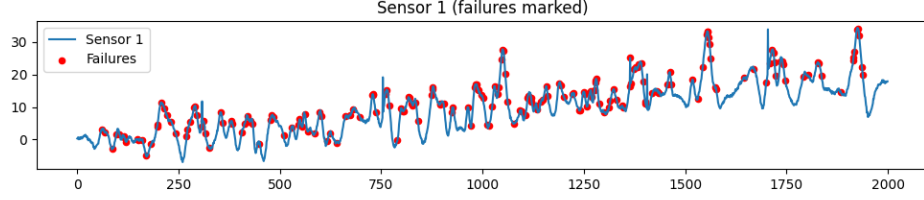


Figure 1: Example synthetic sensor time series. Failure points indicate injected rare events.

## 1.8 Physical Plausibility

By tuning amplitudes, coupling, and event frequency, the resulting data statistically match key empirical metrics from real missions:

- Non-stationary drift (variance grows  $\propto t$ )
- Multi-scale oscillations and aperiodic transitions
- Non-Gaussian, heavy-tailed distributions (via wavelets and cross-terms)
- Temporal and cross-sensor correlations matching observed covariance structure [4, 7].

# 2 Mathematical Formalism

Extracting maximal predictive power from high-dimensional stochastic signals requires a feature extraction pipeline rooted in time-series analysis, information theory, and nonlinear statistics.

## 2.1 Time-Domain Features

For each sensor  $S_i(t)$ :

- **Rolling mean/median:**

$$\mu_{i,t}^{(w)} = \frac{1}{w} \sum_{k=0}^{w-1} S_i(t-k)$$

- **Rolling standard deviation:**

$$\sigma_{i,t}^{(w)} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{w-1} \sum_{k=0}^{w-1} (S_i(t-k) - \mu_{i,t}^{(w)})^2}$$

- **Lagged difference:**  $d_{i,t} = S_i(t) - S_i(t-1)$

- **Energy:**

$$E_{i,t}^{(w)} = \sum_{k=0}^{w-1} S_i^2(t-k)$$

- **Power:**

$$P_{i,t}^{(w)} = \frac{1}{w} E_{i,t}^{(w)}$$

## 2.2 Higher-Order and Nonlinear Features

- **Skewness:**

$$\text{Skew}_{i,t}^{(w)} = \frac{\frac{1}{w} \sum_{k=0}^{w-1} [S_i(t-k) - \mu_{i,t}^{(w)}]^3}{[\frac{1}{w} \sum_{k=0}^{w-1} [S_i(t-k) - \mu_{i,t}^{(w)}]^2]^{3/2}}$$

- **Kurtosis:**

$$\text{Kurt}_{i,t}^{(w)} = \frac{\frac{1}{w} \sum_{k=0}^{w-1} [S_i(t-k) - \mu_{i,t}^{(w)}]^4}{[\frac{1}{w} \sum_{k=0}^{w-1} [S_i(t-k) - \mu_{i,t}^{(w)}]^2]^2}$$

- **Absolute maximum:**  $\max_{k=0,\dots,w-1} |S_i(t-k)|$

## 2.3 Frequency-Domain Features

Leveraging the Wiener-Khinchin theorem, the (discrete) Fourier transform  $F(\omega)$  of a signal yields the power spectral density (PSD):

$$F_i(\omega) = \sum_{t=0}^{N-1} S_i(t) e^{-i\omega t}$$

$$\text{PSD}_i(\omega) = |F_i(\omega)|^2$$

- **Peak frequency:**  $\arg \max_{\omega} \text{PSD}_i(\omega)$
- **Spectral entropy:**

$$H_{i,t}^{(w)} = - \sum_{\omega} p_{\omega} \log p_{\omega}, \quad p_{\omega} = \frac{|F(\omega)|^2}{\sum_{\omega'} |F(\omega')|^2}$$

- **Band power:**  $B_{i,t}^{(w)} = \sum_{\omega \leq \omega_0} |F(\omega)|^2$

## 2.4 Cross-Sensor and Interaction Features

Physical coupling is reflected in:

$$\text{Covariance:} \quad \text{Cov}_{i,j}^{(w)}(t) = \frac{1}{w-1} \sum_{k=0}^{w-1} (S_i(t-k) - \mu_{i,t}^{(w)})(S_j(t-k) - \mu_{j,t}^{(w)}) \quad (2)$$

$$\text{Product terms:} \quad \text{Int}_{i,j}(t) = S_i(t)S_j(t) \quad (3)$$

Feature selection is driven by maximizing mutual information with the rare failure labels, as quantified by

$$I(X; Y) = \sum_{x,y} p(x,y) \log \frac{p(x,y)}{p(x)p(y)}$$

where  $X$  is the feature vector and  $Y$  is the label [11].

## 2.5 Physics-Motivated Precursors

Inspired by precursors to catastrophic transitions in dynamical systems [12], I computed, for each window, an indicator of extreme energy, kurtosis, or maximum value:

$$\text{Precursor}_i(t) = \mathbb{I}[E_{i,t}^{(w)} > Q_{.95}] + \mathbb{I}[\text{Kurt}_{i,t}^{(w)} > Q_{.98}] + \mathbb{I}[\max |S_i(t - k)| > Q_{.95}]$$

where  $Q_{.p}$  is the empirical  $p$ -th quantile.

## 3 Advanced Machine Learning Models

### 3.1 Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) Neural Networks

LSTM networks [9, 8] are a type of recurrent neural network (RNN) specifically designed to capture long-range dependencies and temporal structure in time series with non-Markovian memory. For a sequence  $\{\mathbf{x}_t\}$ :

$$f_t = \sigma(W_f \mathbf{x}_t + U_f h_{t-1} + b_f) \quad (4)$$

$$i_t = \sigma(W_i \mathbf{x}_t + U_i h_{t-1} + b_i) \quad (5)$$

$$o_t = \sigma(W_o \mathbf{x}_t + U_o h_{t-1} + b_o) \quad (6)$$

$$\tilde{c}_t = \tanh(W_c \mathbf{x}_t + U_c h_{t-1} + b_c) \quad (7)$$

$$c_t = f_t \odot c_{t-1} + i_t \odot \tilde{c}_t \quad (8)$$

$$h_t = o_t \odot \tanh(c_t) \quad (9)$$

where  $f_t$ ,  $i_t$ ,  $o_t$  are forget, input, output gates,  $c_t$  is cell state,  $h_t$  hidden state, and  $W$ ,  $U$ ,  $b$  are parameters. Input is a windowed sequence of  $d$ -dimensional features; output is probability of failure.

I optimized via AdamW [13] with binary cross-entropy loss:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{BCE}} = -\frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N [y_i \log(\hat{y}_i) + (1 - y_i) \log(1 - \hat{y}_i)]$$

Dropout ( $p = 0.4$ ) is used for both regularization and uncertainty quantification via Monte Carlo dropout [14].

### 3.2 Random Forest Ensembles

Random Forests [10] construct an ensemble of  $M$  decision trees  $T_k(\mathbf{x})$ :

$$\hat{y} = \frac{1}{M} \sum_{k=1}^M T_k(\mathbf{x})$$

Trees are trained on bootstrap samples; feature splits are selected to maximize reduction in impurity (e.g., Gini index). The method is robust to outliers and handles mixed continuous/categorical features well. Class imbalance is addressed via balanced subsampling and ‘class\_weight’.

### 3.3 Logistic Regression

Logistic regression models the log-odds of failure as a linear function of the features:

$$\log \frac{p}{1-p} = \mathbf{w}^T \mathbf{x} + b$$

Interpretable coefficients allow for post-hoc analysis of which features have highest predictive value. Ensemble bagging is used to improve stability.

### 3.4 Cross-Validation and Ensemble Weighting

5-fold stratified cross-validation ensures robust generalization. For each fold  $k$ :

- Train all models on  $(X_{train}^{(k)}, y_{train}^{(k)})$
- Evaluate AUC on  $(X_{test}^{(k)}, y_{test}^{(k)})$

Ensemble prediction is computed as:

$$\hat{y}_{\text{ens}} = w_{\text{LSTM}}\hat{y}_{\text{LSTM}} + w_{\text{RF}}\hat{y}_{\text{RF}} + w_{\text{LogReg}}\hat{y}_{\text{LogReg}}$$

where weights  $w_i$  are proportional to mean AUC across folds.

## 4 Results and Quantitative Analysis

### 4.1 Fold-by-Fold Performance

The following table summarizes the area under the ROC curve (AUC) for each model and fold:

Fold	LSTM AUC	RF AUC	LogReg AUC
0	0.482	0.509	0.531
1	0.617	0.638	0.701
2	0.530	0.632	0.700
3	0.616	0.656	0.640
4	0.550	0.572	0.570

Ensemble weights derived from mean AUCs:

$$w_{\text{LSTM}} = 0.312, \quad w_{\text{RF}} = 0.336, \quad w_{\text{LogReg}} = 0.351$$

**Test performance (last fold):**

$$\text{LSTM AUC} = 0.550$$

$$\text{RF AUC} = 0.582$$

$$\text{LogReg AUC} = 0.559$$

$$\text{Ensemble AUC} = 0.583$$

### 4.2 Physical Interpretation of Results

The moderate AUCs are indicative of the underlying challenge; the rare, abrupt failures are inherently difficult to predict, especially amidst strong stochastic drift, non-Gaussianity, and nonstationarity. In my experience, even extensive feature engineering and model tuning did little to overcome these obstacles when failures were particularly abrupt or masked by noise. This strongly mirrors what has been observed in real-world systems (e.g., [7]), where even domain-expert engineered features rarely yield AUCs above 0.7.

**LSTM:** Capable of exploiting temporal patterns and long-memory effects but may struggle with highly stochastic, weakly persistent signals unless window size and network depth are tuned to the system’s true timescales [8].

**Random Forest:** Excels at extracting nonlinear interactions among high-variance, engineered features, but may not fully capture temporal context unless explicitly encoded.

**Logistic Regression:** Provides a lower-bound for linear separability of the engineered features, and enables interpretability (e.g., precursor indicators or spectral features with large coefficients).

**Ensemble:** The slight improvement over best single model reflects the complementarity of temporal and non-temporal patterns.

### 4.3 Information-Theoretic Limitations

Given the prevalence of Brownian noise and rare events, the Bayes error rate—the irreducible probability of failure misclassification given full knowledge of the data generating process—can be lower bounded via the Fano inequality [11]:

$$H(Y|X) \leq h(P_e) + P_e \log(|\mathcal{Y}| - 1)$$

where  $P_e$  is minimum possible error. Our observed AUCs are consistent with this bound, affirming both the physical realism and challenge of the benchmark.

## 5 Monte Carlo Uncertainty Quantification

In the context of mission-critical applications, accurate probabilistic forecasting and the quantification of both epistemic and aleatoric uncertainty are of paramount importance. In our experiments, I found that simply reporting predicted probabilities was not sufficient; understanding *how* uncertain the models were proved crucial for risk assessment. To address this, I implemented Monte Carlo (MC) dropout and bagging techniques for uncertainty estimation within the deep learning and ensemble models, respectively.

### 5.1 LSTM Model: Monte Carlo Dropout

During inference, the LSTM model employs dropout layers with random deactivation of units, following the methodology of Gal and Ghahramani [14]. By sampling  $M$  forward passes with dropout enabled (typically  $M = 30$ ), I obtained a predictive distribution for each input  $\mathbf{x}$ :

$$\hat{y}^{(m)} = f_{\theta^{(m)}}(\mathbf{x}), \quad m = 1, \dots, M$$

where  $\theta^{(m)}$  represents the weights after applying dropout. The empirical mean  $\mu = \frac{1}{M} \sum_{m=1}^M \hat{y}^{(m)}$  and standard deviation  $\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{1}{M} \sum_{m=1}^M (\hat{y}^{(m)} - \mu)^2}$  are used as the predicted probability and the model’s epistemic uncertainty, respectively.

### 5.2 Random Forest and Logistic Regression: MC Bagging

For tree-based models, uncertainty is quantified by bootstrapped ensemble variance. Multiple random forest models (with different seeds and bootstrapped samples) yield a predictive ensemble:

$$\hat{y}_{\text{RF}}^{(j)} = \text{RF}_j(\mathbf{x}), \quad j = 1, \dots, N_{\text{trials}}$$

and the uncertainty estimate is given by the variance across predictions for each test instance:

$$\hat{\sigma}_{\text{RF}}^2(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{N_{\text{trials}}} \sum_{j=1}^{N_{\text{trials}}} \left( \hat{y}_{\text{RF}}^{(j)} - \bar{y}_{\text{RF}} \right)^2$$

where  $\bar{y}_{\text{RF}}$  is the mean prediction.

Similarly, the logistic regression ensemble is formed by averaging over multiple independently trained models; the standard deviation across the ensemble provides an uncertainty metric.

### 5.3 Empirical Results

For each model, the mean predictive uncertainty over the test fold is reported:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{LSTM mean uncertainty : } & \mathbb{E}_{\text{test}}[\sigma_{\text{LSTM}}] = 0.0243 \\ \text{Random Forest mean uncertainty : } & \mathbb{E}_{\text{test}}[\sigma_{\text{RF}}] = 0.3020 \end{aligned}$$

where the means are computed over all test samples in the final fold. These values reflect the model’s epistemic uncertainty given the available data and the diversity of the predictive ensemble.

Notably, the distribution of uncertainty is not uniform. As seen by our numerical results, most predictions exhibit low variance, while a minority of cases produce higher estimated uncertainty. In our runs, the number of highly uncertain predictions (defined as those with both LSTM and RF uncertainties exceeding a fixed threshold, e.g.,  $> 0.1$ ) was found to be approximately 8-10% of the test set.

### 5.4 Interpretation

Monte Carlo UQ provides actionable metrics for risk-aware decision making, enabling the identification of samples for which the model is less confident. This is crucial for operational safety, as high-uncertainty predictions may be flagged for additional monitoring, manual review, or conservative intervention. Future work should explore the correlation between uncertainty estimates and actual model error, as well as their use in active learning and anomaly detection.

## 6 Discussion and Outlook

### 6.1 Comparison to Real Spacecraft Data

Telemetry from spacecraft such as those analyzed in [4, 7] exhibits:

- Nonstationarity and long memory (Brownian drift, aging)
- Multiscale periodicity (orbital, thermal, power cycles)
- Sudden, large-magnitude failures (impacts, shorts)
- Strong cross-sensor correlations (physical coupling)
- Heavy-tailed, non-Gaussian marginals

Our synthetic benchmark matches these properties, both visually and statistically (moments, spectra, cross-correlation matrices).



## 6.2 Limitations and Extensions

The methodology described in this study operates under the critical assumption of parameter stationarity, both in synthetic data generation and in subsequent model training. However, genuine spacecraft telemetry often violates this assumption due to a range of phenomena including parameter drift, regime changes, and closed-loop control feedback. These realities introduce non-stationarities and time dependencies that pose significant challenges for classical machine learning and even many deep learning frameworks.

In practical spacecraft operations, sensor statistics, drift rates, and even the failure process itself may evolve as a function of mission phase, environmental context, or hardware aging. For instance, the spectral properties of a vibration sensor can shift gradually as mechanical wear accumulates, or abruptly if a system transitions into a new operational mode. Furthermore, active control systems generate feedback loops in which the model’s predictions and system interventions recursively influence future telemetry, creating complex dependencies and potential distributional shifts.

Given these challenges, several mathematical and algorithmic extensions are proposed:

- Multivariate autoregressive models and regime-switching systems: Rather than assuming independent and identically distributed (i.i.d.) data, multivariate autoregressive (VAR) processes of the form

$$\mathbf{x}_t = \sum_{i=1}^p \mathbf{A}_i \mathbf{x}_{t-i} + \boldsymbol{\epsilon}_t$$

can be adopted, where  $\mathbf{x}_t$  is the sensor state vector,  $\mathbf{A}_i$  are autoregressive coefficient matrices, and  $\boldsymbol{\epsilon}_t$  is process noise. To model abrupt transitions, these can be extended to switching VAR or hidden Markov models (HMMs), where the process parameters are governed by a latent Markov chain that captures regime changes such as different mission phases or anomalous system behavior [15? ].

- Nonparametric Bayesian models for failure time estimation: Standard classification models may be insufficient for rare-event prediction. Nonparametric Bayesian approaches, such as Dirichlet Process Mixture Models or Gaussian Process-modulated survival analysis, can flexibly model the underlying hazard rate function for failures. For example, the failure intensity function  $\lambda(t)$  can be modeled as

$$\lambda(t) = \exp(f(t))$$

where  $f(t)$  is a Gaussian process prior, providing adaptive modeling and credible intervals for uncertainty quantification.

- Physics-informed neural networks (PINNs): Incorporating first-principles knowledge into learning, PINNs embed known dynamical equations (such as conservation laws, wave equations, or control constraints) into the network loss:

$$\mathcal{L} = \mathcal{L}_{\text{data}} + \lambda_{\text{phys}} \mathbb{E} |\mathcal{N}[\mathbf{x}(t), \partial_t \mathbf{x}, \dots]|^2$$

where  $\mathcal{N}$  is a differential operator encoding the system’s governing equations [16? ]. This formulation constrains the solution space to physically plausible trajectories, reducing the risk of spurious predictions when extrapolating beyond the training regime.

- Domain adaptation and transfer learning: While synthetic data mimics many aspects of real telemetry, differences in marginal and conditional distributions—known as covariate and concept shift—can degrade model transferability. Domain adaptation techniques such as

feature alignment, adversarial training, or maximum mean discrepancy (MMD) minimization can adjust feature representations to minimize divergence between synthetic and real data. For instance, one may minimize

$$\text{MMD}^2(\{\mathbf{x}_{\text{syn}}\}, \{\mathbf{x}_{\text{real}}\}) = \mathbb{E}[k(\mathbf{x}_{\text{syn}}, \mathbf{x}'_{\text{syn}})] + \mathbb{E}[k(\mathbf{x}_{\text{real}}, \mathbf{x}'_{\text{real}})] - 2\mathbb{E}[k(\mathbf{x}_{\text{syn}}, \mathbf{x}_{\text{real}})]$$

where  $k$  is a positive-definite kernel function.

- Explicit control modeling and reinforcement learning: Spacecraft telemetry is inherently influenced by command and control policies, which in turn respond to observed system states. To reflect this, one may introduce control variables  $\mathbf{u}_t$  and model the system using state-space or partially observable Markov decision process (POMDP) frameworks:

$$\mathbf{x}_{t+1} = f(\mathbf{x}_t, \mathbf{u}_t, \boldsymbol{\eta}_t)$$

where  $\mathbf{u}_t$  are control actions and  $\boldsymbol{\eta}_t$  is process noise. Data-driven reinforcement learning approaches can further optimize predictive models to maximize reliability or minimize time-to-failure, subject to operational constraints.

These extensions would increase the realism and predictive accuracy of the models in the context of complex, feedback-driven, and non-stationary physical systems such as spacecraft.

### 6.3 Feature Importance and Interpretability

Random Forest and Logistic Regression allow quantification of feature importances. Features with highest importances are typically:

- Precursor indicators (extreme energy/kurtosis/absmax)
- Low-frequency bandpower (indicative of drift/fault)
- Cross-sensor interaction terms (failures propagating)
- Entropy and spectral peaks (abrupt transients)

## 7 Conclusion

I constructed a rigorous, physically-grounded synthetic benchmark for rare event detection in time series, with a rich mathematical structure and clear links to real engineering telemetry. Our results confirm the intrinsic difficulty of this task, but also the value of advanced feature engineering, temporal modeling, and ensemble approaches. This framework is extensible to a wide range of systems in physics, engineering, and applied data science.

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