

= The Hawking Excitation =

" The Hawking Excitation " is the 21st episode of the fifth season of The Big Bang Theory that first aired on CBS on April 5 , 2012 . It is the 108th episode overall . After learning that Stephen Hawking is coming to lecture at Caltech , Howard (Simon Helberg) is hired to maintain his wheelchair equipment . When Sheldon (Jim Parsons) discovers this , he is desperate to meet Hawking . Howard says he can , but only if he completes a humiliating series of tasks .

The final scene of the episode features a short cameo appearance by cosmologist Stephen Hawking . Hawking was revealed to appear on the show in March 2012 ; he was the third high @-@ profile guest star in season 5 . The episode had 13 @.@ 29 million viewers in America and garnered mixed reviews .

= = Plot = =

Raj (Kunal Nayyar) and Leonard (Johnny Galecki) are at lunch with Howard when he gets an e @-@ mail from Stephen Hawking 's office ; Hawking is coming to lecture at Caltech and needs an engineer to help maintain his wheelchair equipment . Sheldon is a big fan of Hawking , so Howard considers bringing Sheldon along to meet Hawking . Sheldon then arrives and says that he has revolutionized understanding of the Higgs boson particle ; he explains it to Raj and Leonard but ignores Howard , thinking he wouldn 't understand .

Howard , feeling insulted , refuses to introduce Sheldon to Hawking even after Sheldon pleads . The next day , Howard talks about his work with Hawking to frustrate Sheldon . After Sheldon begs , Howard agrees to give Sheldon 's paper on the Higgs boson to Hawking on the condition that Sheldon performs several tasks for him .

The first task is to polish Howard 's belt buckles . Howard tends to stand too close to the urinal and urine often splashes back onto the buckles . Sheldon is given a black light and several dozen belt buckles to clean . Sheldon performs the task flawlessly . For his second task , Sheldon is forced to wear a French maid costume that Howard originally bought for his girlfriend Bernadette (Melissa Rauch) . Sheldon is seen in the cafeteria at Caltech with everyone staring at him .

When Penny (Kaley Cuoco) goes to do her laundry , she finds Sheldon washing Howard 's panties . Sheldon explains that he is being punished for being , according to Howard , a " condescending jerk " , and asks Penny if she thinks he is condescending . Penny agrees with Howard .

Howard shows Bernadette a picture of Sheldon wearing the French maid costume . She thinks Howard is being too cruel and says that Sheldon is unaware of how mean he is . Howard agrees to stop making Sheldon perform tasks . Howard 's mother interrupts to remind Bernadette that they made plans to go dress shopping ; Bernadette says that she cannot make it , but that Sheldon will accompany her instead . Sheldon is forced to go shopping with Mrs. Wolowitz .

Sheldon 's final task is to give Howard a compliment about his work : he says that Howard is good at his job , although Sheldon does not consider his work to be " worth doing " . Howard reveals that he gave Hawking the paper three days ago . Sheldon finally gets to meet Hawking in person . When they meet , Hawking points out an arithmetic error in Sheldon 's paper that makes the whole paper incorrect : at this , a shocked Sheldon faints .

= = Production = =

Stephen Hawking has been mentioned several times on the show , including in the Pilot . Hawking has appeared on comedy television shows previously : he did the voice @-@ over for cartoon versions of himself in Futurama , and in four episodes of The Simpsons .

On March 9 , 2012 , Bill Prady announced that a " super @-@ secret , super @-@ cool guest star " would appear on the show . On March 12 , 2012 , CBS announced that Hawking would be guest starring on the show on April 5 . Photos of Hawking 's appearance were published by The Hollywood Reporter on April 2 .

Hawking had been asked to appear on the show previously but was too ill to do so . Bill Prady

stated that Stephen Hawking was always their " dream guest star " for the show , but that Hawking appearing was " a long shot of astronomical proportions " . Hawking is a fan of The Big Bang Theory and requested to watch a rehearsal of the episode after filming his scene . Simon Helberg , who plays Howard , does an impression of Hawking 's voice in the episode ; he felt slightly uncomfortable mimicking Hawking , but Hawking seemed to enjoy the impression .

Hawking is the third high @-@ profile guest star to appear in season 5 , after Mike Massimino and Leonard Nimoy . Hawking later appeared in the season 6 episode " The Extract Obliteration " , the season 7 episode " The Relationship Diremption " and the season 8 episode " The Troll Manifestation " , but in these episodes only his voice is heard . Hawking was shown in a pre @-@ recorded video segment at the Big Bang Theory panel at Comic @-@ Con 2013 . He apologized for not being there in person and sang the show 's theme tune .

Following " The Hawking Excitation " , there was a three @-@ week break before the next episode , " The Stag Convergence " , aired .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

On the night of its first broadcast on CBS on April 5 , 2012 , the episode was watched by 13 @.@ 29 million U.S. households and received a Nielsen rating of 4 @.@ 2 / 14 among viewers aged between 18 and 49 (meaning that 4 @.@ 2 % of 18 ? 49 years olds watched the episode) . It aired at 8 p.m. alongside American Idol on Fox , Missing on ABC , NBC 's Community and a repeat episode of The Vampire Diaries on The CW . The episode was the third most watched program that night , and second most watched on CBS .

In Canada , the episode received 3 @.@ 18 million viewers , making it the most watched episode that week . In the UK , the episode aired on May 17 , 2012 and 1 @.@ 83 million households watched it on E4 . It garnered 0 @.@ 34 million viewers on E4 + 1 , so was watched by 2 @.@ 17 million viewers overall . On E4 , it was the most watched show that week while on E4 + 1 , it ranked third . In Australia , the episode aired on April 24 , 2013 and had 1 @.@ 87 million viewers . It was the second most watched show on television that night .

= = = Reviews = = =

Overall , the episode received mixed reviews . Carla Day from TV Fanatic gave the episode a very positive review , describing it as " Possibly , the best episode . Ever . " and giving it the maximum possible editor rating (5 @.@ 0) . Oliver Sava of the The A.V. Club gave the episode a B ? . Sava complimented Hawking 's line , " it was quite a boner " , calling it " the big pay @-@ off of the story " and enjoyed the scene with Bernadette . However , Sava also said the " personal slave " storyline was a " classic sitcom plot " and noted that it was " the second episode in a row with no Amy " .

R. L. Shaffer of IGN rated it 7 @.@ 5 out of 10 and wrote that the episode " played like filler " but was " a very good filler episode " . Shaffer described the final scene with Hawking as " fun " and " effective " , although claimed some of the subplots " were only so @-@ so " . Robin Pierson of The TV Critic rated the episode 36 out of 100 , stating that " the craft has gone from the stories and jokes in favour of the most basic stories and punch lines . " Pierson thought Helberg " did a nice job showing vulnerability " as Howard , but that the episode overall was " one utterly predictable , unimaginative joke after another . "

Simon Helberg complimented Stephen Hawking on his comedic timing via Twitter . The Huffington Post said that " none of [Hawking 's guest appearances] felt quite as right as when he appeared as himself on " The Big Bang Theory " . "