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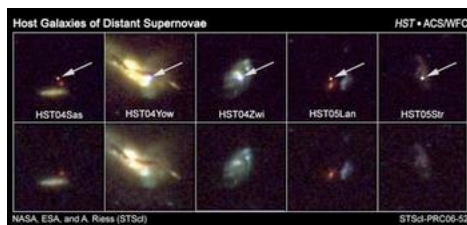
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Mystery solved: Dark energy isn't there

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Mathematicians have come up with an answer Monday for the mystery of "dark energy" tearing the universe apart at an accelerating rate. It ain't there.

Discovered in 1998 with the finding that exploding stars in distant galaxies are spreading away from us at an increasing speed, dark energy has puzzled cosmologists for a decade, unable to understand a force that acts across vast distances to push stars apart. Physicist Michael Turner of the University of Chicago famously said that the only thing really known about dark energy is its name.

What's the answer? It doesn't exist, suggest mathematicians Blake Temple and Joel Smoller, in a study released Monday by the *Proceedings of the National Academies of Science*.

Instead, "expanding waves" from the Big Bang, 13.7 Billion years ago, are propelling the trillions of galaxies filling the universe apart, suggests the study. Dark energy is an illusion if their equations are right, and the universe, at least 27.2 billion light years across, is spreading at an increasing rate into an even bigger vacuum empty of any matter, propelled by the energy of the Big Bang.

The only problem is that for the equations to work, we must be "literally at the center of the universe, which is, to say the least, unusual," says physicist Lawrence Krauss of Arizona State University in Tempe. "I think this is plausible mathematics, but it doesn't seem physically relevant."

Physicist Sean Carroll of Caltech also was skeptical of the mathematical solution to dark energy, observing that it doesn't explain other evidence for an increasing expansion of the universe seen in other observations.

By Dan Vergano

Photo: These snapshots, taken by NASA's Hubble Space Telescope, reveal five supernovae, or exploding stars, and their host galaxies. The arrows in the top row of images point to the supernovae. The bottom row shows the host galaxies before or after the stars exploded. The supernovae exploded between 3.5 and 10 billion years ago. (NASA, ESA, and A. Riess)

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