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Will the Hadron Collider send the world into a black hole?

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It's mildly alarming when people with access to futuristic super-machines begin publicly musing about how they might shatter reality as we know it. It's worse when they seem gleeful at the prospect.

This 2007 file photo shows a view of the large hadron collider in its tunnel at a particle physics laboratory near Geneva. A huge scientific experiment launched Sept. 10, 2008 is described as an Alice in Wonderland investigation into the makeup of the universe.

AP FILE PHOTO

Last week, Sergio Bertolucci, a research director working on the Large Hadron Collider, said that the giant particle accelerator could tear a "door" into another dimension when it's started up in the near future.

"Out of this door might come something, or we might send something to it," Bertolucci said, in all likelihood while rubbing his hands together and laughing menacingly.

Mike Lamont, another LHC mucketymuck, threw cold water on the theory. By way of explanation, he told online tech bible The Register that Bertolucci is a "theorist." Dirty word in science, apparently.

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Lamont suggested that anyone requiring a reality check should read *Warped Passages* by Harvard physicist Lisa Randall.

Naturally, we've been up all night since, watching and rewatching *Stephen King's The Mist*.

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Three things: Where did I leave my tentacle cutter? Why does Thomas Jane keep getting work? And will I be atomically disassembled soon?

Eventually, we found our hyperventilating bag and took some encouraging breaths. Then we called Randall and asked, "Should I be preparing to bow down before my extra-dimensional overlords?"

Short answer: No. Long, long answer: *Wellll* ...

First, Randall spoke to us like an adult. That didn't go too well.

Then she began to recalibrate her converso-intellectual speech barometer (Us: "Lower, please. Lower. Much, much lower.")

The upshot is this. When the LHC kicks in, scientists hope that a small, extremely brief peak into the up-until-now theoretical extra-dimensional world is achieved.

How will they know if that's happened?

"What you expect are (theoretical, extra-dimensional) Kaluza-Klein Particles, that effectively have momentum in other dimensions," Randall said. "If you see these new particles, they would be an indication that these extra dimensions exist."

Okay, particles. Not so scary. What else is in this extra dimension?

"At the very least, there would be gravity in the extra dimension."

Gravity. Good. Now, just in case there is something lurking in there, could stuff pass from this dimension to the other, or vice versa?

"Yes, in principle ... it's possible that gravity could take matter out into another dimension."

Um. Is that a problem?

"No. It wouldn't happen that much."

If we look into the extra dimension, what do we expect to see?

"People talk about higher dimensional black holes, which is, in principle, possible. But really what you expect to see are new gravitational interactions associated with the extra dimensions."

Alright, great. But I'd like to back up juuuust a little. "Black holes"?

"In principle, if you had enough energy, you could make a higher dimensional black hole. But the fact of the matter is that the LHC won't have enough energy."

So, just to be perfectly clear, the world is not going to get hoovered through a minuscule crack in space-time in the next couple of weeks?

"That's correct," said Randall, in tones reserved for art history majors who've wandered into the physics lab. "The world will not disappear."

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