

A smooch to go



Photo by John Stock

Students Holly Bressler and Brandon Brown part after riding to campus with a kiss in front of the EMU.

HAWKING

Continued from Page 7

At the universe's beginning, scientists believe all matter was at one single point, which expanded in an explosion known as the big bang. Hawking said the extreme conditions inside a black hole would be similar to those early in the universe's history; hence, understanding a black hole could provide clues to the birth of the cosmos.

Hawking, at times, touched on the fantastic. He said particles entering a black hole might emerge somewhere else in the universe, which some believe could allow for "rapid intergalactic travel."

"The trouble is it might be too rapid, and you would arrive at your destination before you departed," Hawking said. His assistant then displayed a picture on the overhead, depicting a cartoon man shooting his own mother before his birth, an impossible paradox.

"Fortunately for us and our mothers, the laws of physics do not allow for time travel," he said.

His assistant then showed a picture of strange creatures stepping off a tour bus.

"The best evidence that there is not time travel is that we have not been invaded by hordes of tourists from the future," he said.

After the lecture, Hawking, with the help of his assistant, answered questions from the audience. The answers, which Hawking entered into his computer word by word, took about 10 minutes each to prepare. Audience members who stayed were treated to the insights of the following questions and Hawking's answers:

- Instead of dark matter, could there instead be an undiscovered force, like gravity, acting on the universe?

Hawking said many scientists have looked for

'In the tradition of oracles and prophets, I'm hedging my bets by predicting both ways.'

— Dr. Stephen W. Hawking
theoretical physicist, Cambridge University

such a force, but regardless of whether it exists, the force would be too weak to affect the universe or its expansion.

- Does Hawking believe in life on other planets?
"The universe is so enormous that there ought to be life somewhere else," he said. "However, the probability for life on a given star would be very low, otherwise we would have been visited already by aliens."

- What started the big bang, and does Hawking believe it could have had anything to do with God?

"One can't say that anything started the big bang," he said, noting that time itself as we know it began with the big bang. "It is like asking for a point on the earth that is further north than the North Pole."

As for any divine assistance in the universe's beginnings, "that depends on your view of God."

- Where in the universe would Hawking most like to visit?

"It would be inside of a black hole," he said, "but only if I could come back again."

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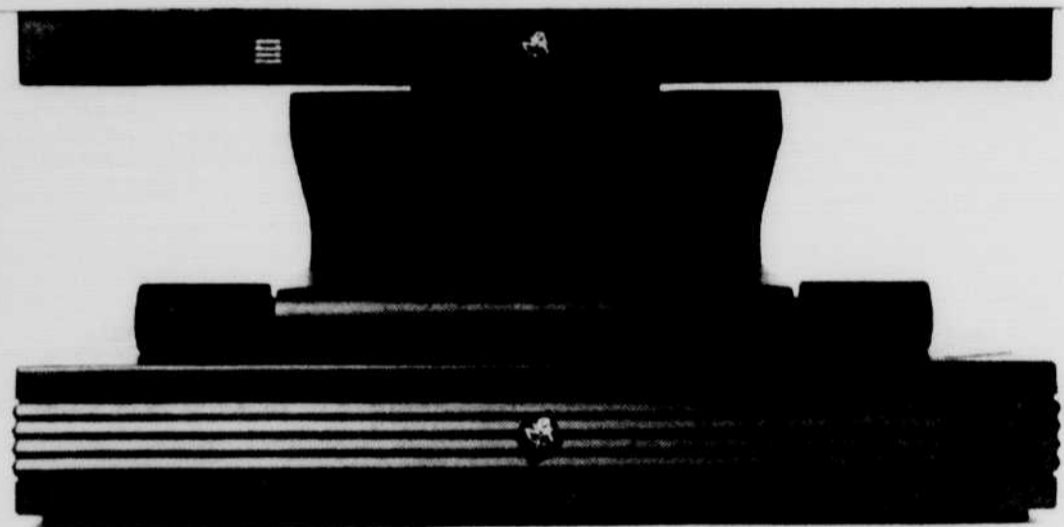
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