Cosmic Crashes
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Because space is so big, it is not often that objects in space collide. It is even more rare for us to find clues or evidence of these cosmic collisions, but a team of astronomers have done just that!

Research using data from the NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope has found a growing cloud of dust that was created when a giant and rare collision took place between two large bodies orbiting a bright nearby star called Fomalhaut.

Fomalhaut is 25 light-years from Earth. It is much hotter than our Sun and is more than 15 times as bright!

This is the first time such a catastrophic event has been imaged around another star. Researchers believe that each of the objects measured about 200 kilometers across - that’s about as long as the English Channel!

The objects that collided are known as “planetestimals”. Despite having the word “planet” in its name, these objects do not look like the planets we are familiar with. Instead, they are much like baby planets made of rock, ice and dust or various shapes and sizes that have not yet developed to become full sphere-shaped planets.

The researchers believe that a collision takes place between objects in orbit of the Fomalhaut star once every 200,000 years.

Image credit: ESA/NASA, M. Kornmesser
COOL FACT!

The dust cloud that was created from this giant collision grew to a size of 160 million kilometers wide. That’s close to the size of the orbit of Venus around our Sun!

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