Colliding Galaxies NGC 4038 and NGC 4039
Hubble Space Telescope • Wide Field Planetary Camera 2
This Hubble Space Telescope image provides a detailed look at a brilliant "fireworks show" at the center of a collision between two galaxies. Hubble has uncovered over 1,000 bright, young star clusters bursting to life as a result of the head-on wreck.

A ground-based telescopic view of the Antennae galaxies (known formally as NGC 4038/4039) - so named because a pair of long tails of luminous matter, formed by the gravitational tidal forces of their encounter, resembles an insect's antennae. The galaxies are located 63 million light-years away in the southern constellation Corvus.

The respective cores of the twin galaxies are the orange blobs, left and right of image center, crisscrossed by filaments of dark dust. A wide band of chaotic dust, called the overlap region, stretches between the cores of the two galaxies. The sweeping spiral-like patterns, traced by bright blue star clusters, shows the result of a firestorm of star birth activity which was triggered by the collision.

This natural-color image is a composite of four separately filtered images taken with the Wide Field Planetary Camera 2 (WFPC2), on January 20, 1996. Resolution is 15 light-years per pixel (picture element).

Credit: Brad Whitmore (STScI), and NASA


Image files also may be accessed via anonymous ftp from oposite.stsci.edu in /pubinfo: gif/n40389w.gif, gif/n40389d.gif (GIF), jpeg/n40389w.jpg and jpeg/n40389d.jpg (JPEG). Higher resolution digital versions (300 dpi JPEG) of the release photograph are available in /pubinfo/hrtemp: 97-34a.jpg, 97-34b.jpg (color), 97-34abw.jpg and 97-34bbw.jpg (black & white). Full resolution TIFF images are available in /pubinfo/tiff/1997/34a.tif, 34b.tif, 34c.tif, 34d.tif, 34e.tif and 34f.tif.