The Three-body Problem from Pythagoras to Hawking

Mauri Valtonen, Joanna Anosova, Konstantin Kholshevnikov, Aleksandr Mylläri, Victor Orlov, Kiyotaka Tanikawa

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This book, written for a
general readership, reviews and explains the three-body problem in historical
context reaching to latest developments in computational physics and gravitation
theory. The three-body problem is one of the oldest problems in science and it
is most relevant even in today's physics and astronomy.

The long history of the
problem from Pythagoras to Hawking parallels the evolution of ideas about our
physical universe, with a particular emphasis on understanding gravity and how
it operates between astronomical bodies. The oldest astronomical three-body problem
is the question how and when the moon and the sun line up with the earth to produce
eclipses. Once the universal gravitation was discovered by Newton, it became immediately
a problem to understand why these three-bodies form a stable system, in spite
of the pull exerted from one to the other. In fact, it was a big question
whether this system is stable at all in the long run.

Leading mathematicians attacked
this problem over more than two centuries without arriving at a definite
answer. The introduction of computers in the last half-a-century has
revolutionized the study; now many answers have been found while new questions about
the three-body problem have sprung up. One of the most recent developments has
been in the treatment of the problem in Einstein's General Relativity, the new theory
of gravitation which is an improvement on Newton's theory. Now it is possible to
solve the problem for three black holes and to test one of the most fundamental
theorems of black hole physics, the no-hair theorem, due to Hawking and his
co-workers.

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