

The Challenge From Beyond

Ever eager as we are to present our readers with unusual features, it affords us exceptional pleasure to offer for this issue, our Third Anniversary Number, what we believe is the most unusual fantasy feature of them all.

Fascinated as we were with the possibilities for a science fiction story and a weird fantasy tale written around the title, "The Challenge from Beyond," we asked five of our most prominent science fiction authors, and five equally eminent weird fantasy authors to cooperate in writing the two stories, both of which we proudly present as the special feature for our Third Anniversary Number. Because we feel sure that our readers are eager to know the parts written by the various authors, we have listed the collaborators in the by-line in the order of their appearance, and in the story proper set off the first line of each one's installment with *italics*.

by Stanley G. Weinbaum, Donald Wandrei,
Edward E. Smith, Harl Vincent, & Murray Leinster

"There is no such thing as truth!" barked Professor Thaddeus Crabbe, staring truculently at his youthful assistant, Jerry Blake. "No fact and no statement is entirely true!"

"Except that last statement of yours, I suppose," grinned the younger man, looking up from the dusky corner of the Crannan Foundation's astrophysical laboratory. "What brought forth that remark, anyway?"

Crabbe drew his enormous bulk erect. "I repeat," he said with the impressive dignity of a fat man, "that truth is a purely relative matter. It depends, as Einstein showed, on the point of view of the observer. Like everything else in an Einstein or de Sitter universe, it is entirely relative, and

what's more, it's probably curved as well. Interesting idea," he concluded reflectively. "Curved truth."

Blake chuckled. "Why the outburst?"

The professor glowered again. "Those fool directors!" he blazed. "No appropriation unless I can produce evidence that my theory is based on truth. And they want assurance that the experiment will not reflect on the Foundation. Ever since the biochemistry division poisoned that subject last year they've been afraid of trouble. Truth—bah!"

"What experiment?" asked Blake.

"I've half a notion to tell you." Crabbe eased his enormous midsection into a chair. "You wouldn't understand, of course, being

merely a statistician, but perhaps you can appreciate the validity of the concept. Even a statistician ought to know something about the facts represented by his figures."

"Well, a professor seldom knows anything about the figures represented by his facts," observed Blake cheerfully.

"Curved space," muttered Crabbe. "Curved time. The infinitely distant future is the same as the infinitely dead past. And what's more," he said, "curved size! Why not? If I postulate a telescope that will pierce into infinite largeness and a microscope that will probe into infinitesimalness, why should they not see the same thing? Of course! Looking into either, we should see the intermediate between the macro and micro cosmos, which is to say ourselves. We stand halfway between electron and star. And therefore, why not curved truth?"

"Why not?" queried Jerry imperturbably.

"You don't seem to take me seriously," said the professor suspiciously. "Naturally you fail to understand the paradoxes of relativity, the very paradoxes which my experiment was to have explored, if those fools of directors had allowed me to hire a subject."

"I thought," said Blake, "that you were going to explain what your experiment was."

"Explain? How am I to explain to a fool who merely juggles figures? But listen if you care to. You will not understand, however, for to quote Jeans: 'Most of the symbols used by the mathematical physicist today convey no physical picture to his mind.' But for the purpose of explanation, Shapley has made the more pertinent statement, to the effect that the spiral nebulae do not obey all known laws of mechanics. He makes a very significant suggestion when he observes that these vast nebulae act as if matter were somehow being forced thru them into our three-dimensional space from—beyond. It was that observation that led me to a study of vortices, for the colossal spirals of the extra-galactic nebulae are each but an inconceivably vast vortex. It occurred to me to attempt to duplicate nebular conditions on a laboratory scale, and that is the heart of the experiment—a vortex. But not a vortex in the ordinary sense of the word."

"Of course not," agreed Blake amiably.

"No, not an ordinary vortex. In the first place, it has to take place in a gas so rare that one might call it practically a complete vacuum, for of that degree of rarity are the gaseous hearts of the nebulae. And of course the star streams that are the spiral arms are beyond human duplication." Crabbe paused frowning. "But a nebula is more than a vortex of rarefied gases. There is as well a vast gravitational vortex, which is also beyond mortal powers. However, for that I substituted a magnetic vortex, a whirling field of force. And at last, to complete the known phenomena, I superimposed on these vortices, a vortex of radiation."

"And when you were all thru," asked Blake rhetorically, "what did you have?"

Crabbe's watery blue eyes flashed to his face, and the round visage of the professor quivered into a smile. "I had a hole," he announced. "A hole or a tunnel."

"A hole in what? A tunnel to where?"

"Well, in what I cannot say. To where I don't know."

"Well, I must say I can't blame the directors! There's a proverb about pouring money into a hole."

Crabbe ignored him. "In the center of the vortex I produced a hole," he continued. "Unfortunately rabbits and cats lack what we humans are pleased to call our intelligence, and those I sent thru were unable to devise a means of returning, if they were in physical condition to return. Since this end of the hole is *in vacuo*, it was necessary to send them thru in closed jars, an environment not conducive to long survival unless they managed to escape. And several times I tried the scheme of attaching a cord to the container, and drawing it back again. The cat or rabbit reappeared indubitably frightened, but whether more frightened than it would have been if lowered into a sewer and withdrawn I am unable to say."

"Can you see into the hole?"

"A limited distance," said Crabbe. "The optical effect is rather startling, for the cat and jar seem almost to diminish instead of to recede. The appearance is as if one peered into the large tube containing my vortex and

there observed container and cat suspended and receding, but receding into a distance that is, so to speak, within arm's length. Very queer. If the fooldirectors had allowed me to hire a human volunteer to go thru, observe, and be withdrawn to report—" The professor turned a sudden watery glare at Blake. "By heaven! You can go!"

"I? You're crazy!"

"Crazy, eh! Who cares what happens to a statistician?"

"I do," announced Blake decidedly.

"But think of the possibilities! Haven't you any feeling for the glories of science? Why, I'd consider it an honor to risk my safety in such a cause!"

"Why don't you, then? That is, if you could squeeze yourself thru the hole."

For some time Crabbe stared thoughtfully at the younger man. "All right!" he snapped in sudden decision. "I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll fix up two protective suits with oxygen tanks, and we'll *both* go!"

"Up to now, I didn't dream of going, but since you've proved you don't know anything about the figures represented by your facts, I'll shag along just to keep an eye on you," Jerry Blake retorted blithely.

Crabbe turned purple. "What do you mean by insolence!" he roared. "I could have you fired for this—this—"

"Brazen insubordination they usually call it. But you won't. You see, we're going to fix up *three* suits."

The professor's enormous bulk quivered, but he got more interested than angry. "Why three? There are only two of us."

"That proves you're no statistician," said his young assistant with another dig at the professor's ego. "In the first place, we ought to take along a spare for emergency. In the second place, maybe we won't betwo when we go thru the vortex. Maybe we'll be curved also, curved into a flock of distortions of ourselves in any number of dimensions. As a matter of fact, we ought to take along more suits than we could possibly manage."

"In the third place?" said Crabbe acidly.

"In the third place," Jerry continued, unperturbed, "even if we only needed two

suits, we might want to bring back someone or something."

"What?"

"How the heck do I know?" Jerry answered with a frown. "Maybe a four-dimensional egg, maybe a five-sexed you-name it, maybe real reality."

"Four-five-real—" spluttered Crabbe.

"Why not? Look at a mirror and you see yourself. Look at a bigger mirror and you see yourself plus some buildings. If you built a big enough mirror, it would reflect the universe. But suppose the universe is just a mirror? If we get thru the vortex, maybe we would find that the universe is just a mirror to reflect real reality—beyond."

"What an idea!" Crabbe growled.

"What an idea!" Blake crowed. "You don't exist. I don't exist. Nobody exists. The universe is a fraud. It's just a colossal mirror, reflecting the nature of the reality beyond. You've dug a hole, a tunnel, a vortex thru—and now we'll get out."

The professor's huge curvature suddenly bounced up and down as he waddled away. "Shut up! Stop talking! Get busy! The Crannan Foundation has all the supplies we need. We start tomorrow night."

Jerry subsided and went to work. The three suits were prepared by early dawn. But the three suits were only two when Crabbe and his assistant met in the laboratory that night.

The professor glared at Blake. "What do you mean by hiding the third suit?"

"Search me. Why the dickens would I want to hide it?"

Crabbe glowered at the vortex. "I suppose next you'll tell me it just walked into the vortex of its own accord. Confound it, I hate mysteries. You and I have the only keys to the laboratory except the one in the Directors' safe. Did you make a thoro search of the laboratory?"

"No. I just got here before you did. But I distinctly remember leaving the three suits assembled on the table-top. Say—maybe something came thru the vortex—"

"—and took one of the suits? Phooey!"

The professor snorted. "Anything that came

thru would have its own suit to protect it from our atmosphere. It wouldn't have any use for one of our suits."

"But I would!" a voice chimed in brightly from behind them.

They whirled around. A weird encasement, a cross between a diving suit and a space suit, enclosed a figure just coming out of a dark room closet at one end of the laboratory. The voice came clearly thru a device built into the helmet. But all they could see of the figure was a small, belligerent nose and brown eyes with a gleam in them.

"Thief." I order you to get out of my suit immediately." Crabbe roared.

"I order you to stop screaming," mimicked the malicious voice of Leora Crannan. "Besides, I'm not a thief. My grandfather established this Foundation, and my father's one of the Directors. Their money runs—"

"But my brains built the suit. And the vortex. Blake and I are going into it."

"Go ahead, so am I," she continued blithely toward the vortex. "In case you didn't know it, sound-recorders were built into the walls of all the laboratories years ago. The Foundation's Directors know about your plans, and I'm going along."

"See here, Lee, we can't let you!"

"I forbid you to enter my vortex!"

"Since when did anybody obtain exclusive rights to a hole, especially a hole in space?" Leora inquired sweetly, answering Crabbe, and stepped into the vortex.

"Oh, good Lord, she means it," Jerry frowned. "Get going. We'll have to pile into our suits and scam after her right away or we'll lose her."

As they worked feverishly, they saw a strange phenomenon. Leora, in the vortex, receded into the far distance, and drew closer to their eyes. It was a queer, dual illusion, of infinite distance at extreme closeness, with Leora departing toward them.

She paused, however, and looked toward them, just as they were entering the vortex, and just as they feared she would pass above or below the range of vision. Her courage weakened when she found herself alone in the vortex, but when she saw Crabbe and

Jerry on the trail, she resumed her way.

"Snap this strap into one of your belt-rings, Jerry!" Crabbe had directed before they left the valve, or airlock, leading into the gigantic tube which housed the vortex. "I foresee difficulties in keeping ourselves together otherwise—we are about to come into personal contact with 'i'".

Now, inside the vortex, the prophecy of the rotund scientist was amply fulfilled. The two men could see each other, it is true, and they could see the strap connecting them; but ordinary directional perception was entirely meaningless in this new and startling continuum. The strap stretched an infinity of distance, yet a distance inexplicably approaching zero as a limit; and when they attempted to approach each other that strap tightened, forcing them apart! They could dimly see the laboratory thru a glaring haze, its every familiar line weirdly distorted into an incomprehensible perspective; but they had little time to stare.

"Jerry, help!" Leora's shriek reached their ears before they could ponder even briefly their unwonted sensations. "I took just one step—one motion, anyway—toward the door I came thru and it disappeared! I can just barely see you now, but I'm afraid to move toward you for fear you'll disappear too. What'll I do?"

"Do nothing whatever," Crabbe instructed her, coolly. "While neither the purely mechanical brain of a statistician nor the pony brain of a woman could be expected to understand the fact, this region is characterized by the actuality of 'i'; which you, Jerry, at least, know to be the square root of minus one. Therefore the line of sight and all other vectors must be corrected by that amount. Since it is of course impossible for Miss Leora to determine the true direction, I shall move toward her, towing you by the strap."

He moved off at an inexplicable angle, and in a moment Leora was clinging frantically to Jerry's arm.

"But now what'll we do?" she wailed. "We can't see the door, lab, or anything!"

"Elementary, my dear child, elementary" soothed Crabbe, loftily. "It is simply a matter of latitudes and departures, which I

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have already computed mentally, with sufficient exactitude. Come with me; I can find the way back very easily."

He moved along another sense-wrenching line, and soon an opening did indeed appear—but it was not the three-dimensional airlock separating the vortex from the astrophysical laboratory. Instead there was revealed beyond that portal an infinity of purplish-green light filled with matters which their minds failed to grasp; and thru that opening thererushed out, past them and *thru* them, a torrent of something that was both invisible and impalpable, yet at the same time as tangible as solid iron!

"Ah, yea—no fact and no statement is entirely true," mimicked the irrepressible Jerry. "Not even the one that you were able to find your way back quite easily!"

"A mere detail," the Professor airily waved one grotesquely mittened hand. "Not being a statistician, it is not surprising that I overlooked the negative root. That, however, is a trifle, to be corrected at will. But now that I am here, what a contribution to science I can make by analyzing and reporting upon this extra-dimensional universe tapped by my vortex!"

Now at the very orifice of the vortex, a scene spread before them at sight of which even the supremely egotistical Crabbe was awed to silence—a scene in essence, in fact, and in detail to human intelligence incomprehensible—paradox made manifest and material! And gradually something inherent in the stream rushing down the sinuous tube endowed their minds with a superhuman clarity and scope of perception. They gradually became cognizant of an entire universe, macroscopic and microscopic. Galaxies, solar systems, planets, molecules, atoms and electrons, each with its teeming billions of intelligent entities—down to the ultimately tiny building blocks of the ether itself, whose existence Crabbe's vast mathematical knowledge had enabled him so dimly to comprehend—all these things were spread before them in the one space and at the same time; not, with all their newly acquired knowledge, could the three intruders perceive where they themselves stood in the fantastic scheme of this unbelievable cosmos;

whether they were in fact larger than this entire outlandish super-universe or whether they actually were insignificant motes upon the surface of one of the tiniest of its electron worlds! Nor could they understand their motion thru this strange continuum, which they knew to be an Earthly vacuum. Certainly they did not walk; nor did they fly; nor soar—but at will they moved, and indeed, sometimes involuntarily.

Thus they now moved thru the orifice, and saw that its lip was surrounded by massed and tiered mechanisms, each of which was directing flaming forces against the vortex—forces which clawed and tore at the structure in mad abandon, but which as yet had made no headway against the powerful generators which had brought it into being.

"Ah, I understand it all!" Crabbe exclaimed. "The vortices of the nebulae are tunnels into the beyond—tunnels built by the intelligent beings of this cosmos. As the spillways of our terrestrial dams allow the escape of superfluous water, so these tunnels carry away something—probably excess energy—which our universe receives as incipient matter. Our vortex has punctured something which should have remained whole, and they are attempting to repair the breach!"

"But suppose they fix it?" Leora cried, apprehensively. "Then we won't be able to get back home, ever!"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that..."

Jerry's reassurance was interrupted rudely by an invisible force, which swept the three visitors thru the "air" and held them immovably poised before a towering, monstrously jointed creature or structure of multi-colored metal. Simultaneously a thunderously silent voice reverberated in their brains

"Who are you? Whence came you? Why?"

"Aha!" The Intelligence had probed their minds and now impressed a thought upon them. "From the Lower Energy Levels, eh? Know, feeble intellects, that such intrusion is intolerable!"

The attention of the Intelligence relaxed the interlopers as suddenly as it had seized them; but they felt and understood its voiceless command to the operators of the mechanisms upon the brink of the vortex:

"This opening was driven up to our universe by certain semi-intelligent entities of the Second Level. Assemble a force X72B318Q45 and pull it out bodily!"

As the new force came into being, ever more violently flaming streamers of coruscant energy raved from the massed projectors ringing the pit's mouth; leaping in ever more frenzied incandescence upon the madly vibrating vortex thru which the three hapless human beings had come.

"Lower Energy Levels, eh? Feeble intellects, eh!" The vast convolutions of Professor Crabbe's encaisement vibrated shudderingly to the fury that stirred within him. "Let them assemble their forces and try it against those of my vortex. Let them..."

"Silence!" boomed the soundless voice of the Intelligence near whose massive mechanical form they still hovered. "And note you, apostles of ignorance, you are spared only that you may observe the destruction of your pony handiwork."

"Bah!" snorted the professor.

He subsided, quivering with new-born apprehension, as the roaring forces at the lip of the vortex filled all space with the beating of their massed energies. The Intelligence, neglecting them as of no immediate account, faded into distant awareness.

"They are succeeding," wailed Leora. "Look, Jerry—Professor—the hole is closing in. We'll never get back."

What she said was not precisely descriptive of the actual happenings. The massed mechanisms rimming the vortex had taken on tangential positions and each of the myriad number had become a flaming and steaming nozzle, pouring off into surrounding space vast columns of velocity energy. The vortex itself, propelled as by the reaction jets of a huge turbine wheel, was speeding up its normal rate of rotation with incredible acceleration. As they watched, it spun ever more swiftly until the whole was a flaming, blurred mass.

"Fireworks," granted Jerry. "Reminds me of a gigantic pinwheel."

"Can't you be serious?" moaned Leora.

"Can't you see what is happening? They'll drive it so fast it'll be bound to blow up—"

"Nonsense!" blurted Crabbe. "Energy is indestructable."

"And no fact or statement is entirely true," began Jerry. A dig administered judiciously in his ribs by Leora prevented his further badgering of the professor.

Incomprehensively now, the vortex, instead of expanding due to the centrifugal forces of its spinning, was contracting in size. It was closing in, as Leora had originally stated. At the same time it drew nearer to the position of the three adventurers in the purple-green infinity. The hot breath of the mad energies forced them back.

"And now," biased the unheard voice of the Intelligence, "your worthless existences shall end with the intruding mechanism you have blunderingly contrived."

"Ah," breathed the professor, grasping Jerry and the girl. "This way."

He propelled them along a line that was neither straight nor curved, a line that followed no earthly equation or form. There was a thump as of the warping of the very universe and they were in a new and alarming environment. For a moment all was utter blackness, utter nothingness, then in the dim distance a pinpoint of brilliant light appeared. Jerry, suddenly aware that the girl was pressing close to his side, felt the uncontrollable trembling of her slight form.

"Now we've lost it all," she cried.

Professor Thaddeus Crabbe had lost some of his pomposity of manner. "Wait," he advised in tones almost humble.

The light speck increased in brilliance and drew swiftly nearer. Then with sudden, soundless magnificence it burst, showering the vast darkness with blazing fragments. Jerry muttered, "more fireworks."

The myriads of light-flecks came to rest, studding the distant vastness with stars, constellations, nebulae. They were in a new and unknown universe, as cut off from their own sphere of existence and from the strange universe they had just left as if they had indeed ceased to exist at all as human entities.

Leora gulped audibly but, gamely, did not cry out her fears.

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professor, with a hint of helplessness in his voice. "is our own universe, our vortex—I do insist they could not have destroyed it—our laboratory. Somehow we shall reach it—them."

"The Foundation," suggested Jerry, unable to resist the gibe.

His remark brought forth no retort, which was something most unusual for the rotund man of science at his side. Evidently the situation was more serious than they had bargained for.

Leora, in a voice grave but steady spoke: "Somewhere, you said, Professor. Somehow. Have you any plans?"

"It calls for much thought, careful thought," Crabbe admitted. "Calculations of a most involved sort must be made and great care taken to insure their accuracy."

"On the sound-recorders in your laboratory," Leora said with seeming irrelevancy "were certain words of yours having to do with truth. Curved truth, I believe—"

Jerry chuckled. "Twisted truth."

"I'm serious," the girl reproved, "what I'm getting at is this theory of the curvature of space, even this space we're in. Couldn't we follow a curved line and return to our starting point in that way?"

"A woman's mind—" began the Professor in his old manner. But he immediately subdued his tones and continued more respectfully: "It is the only way possible, my dear young lady; we *may* return along a curved line. But the distances involved are unthinkably great, running into thousands and thousands of light years. Besides—"

A thundering yet soundless voice from out of nowhere mocked him, the voice of the Intelligence: "Besides, ignorant one, the great curved lines of space do *not* return to their starting points. Not precisely, due to external forces beyond your puny comprehension, and the gap between the misplaced ends of the great circle you would need to follow is still too great for you to cross. Try, if you will, foolish intruders; you can never return."

The Intelligence ceased to be near, and only three small figures remained, huddled together in an emptiness, an immensity be-

yond parallel. They felt no sensation of weight. They might be motionless. They might—it was more likely—be sweeping thru sheer vastness in some colossal orbit which in a thousand years or so might bring them near a giant sun. And then the slowly leaking gasses from their suits would make a cometary tail to the tiny mass of their bodies. There was no star they could recognize as nearer than any other. There was no possible source of help or rescue. And they had no more of life remaining to them than there was oxygen in the pitifully small tanks strapped to their backs.

There was a bump against Jerry's helmet Leora had put her own into contact with his so to speak, since the breath-diaphragms were useless in the vacuum of this space.

"Jerry, I—don't like that Intelligence. I think he's mean!"

"I suppose," said Jerry philosophically, "mosquitoes sometimes think humans are mean, when they run against a window screen. I'm afraid he wins the argument, tho. I began to get all mixed up just about the time the Professor began to move sideways in order to go up, and forward to go down, and backwards to go sidewise, and around in circles to get ahead... Say!"

"What?" Leora's voice was tiny, thru the metallic helmets, but it was definitely doleful, if still game. "What, Jerry?"

"The Professor was doing something impossible, then! Wait a minute! Let me get him in on this! Professor!"

He tugged at the strap that bound him to the professor. The scientist's helmet crashed into his with a thunderous sound.

"Idiot!" snapped the Professor. "You nearly smashed my helmet! What is it?"

"I've thought of the way to get home!"

"A statistician doesn't think," said the Professor testily. "I have calculated that sooner or later we must reach our own universe, by the sheer operation of the laws of probability. I am calculating the most probable time."

"We started out with oxygen for maybe three hours. Does that sound promising?"

"No! It will be of the order of millions of years. Or billions."

"Interesting, but impractical," said Jerry. "Now listen to me. You walked about and moved in the direction you wanted to go, back there, by working with the square root of minus one. But you didn't anticipate having to use that, did you?"

"Of course not! But I saw the conditions and understood them."

"You understood them!" repeated Jerry, in satisfaction. "That's the point. I did too for a while. I saw clearly that time is only a dimension, that the future and the past are one, and that all things and times coexist. I knew it perfectly, then. But not having a brain trained to register such things, I remember it now as I might a dream, with very essential elements left out. Has any of it slipped away from you?"

"Of course not! Why should it?"

"It shouldn't," agreed Jerry absently "because your mind is trained to handle just facts as mathematical abstractions, and they should be utterly clear when they're concrete. Which gives us our break!"

The Professor's voice sounded suspicious. "Now what are you getting at?"

"Simply this," said Jerry. "We're in a three dimensional space again, and of sheer habit we think in three dimensional terms. I can't really think in any other. But back there we were in a space of an infinite number of dimensions, and we thought in multi-dimensional terms. We saw all space and time at once. Now, I can't, but you ought to be able to think in that same multi-dimensional fashion now, if you deliberately try to. And if you do it—"

Leora said miserably: "I don't want to think of dimensions. I want to go home!"

"Hm..." said the Professor. "With long training, Jerry, you might amount to something more than a satisfician. Let me think!"

Again there was stillness. Three tiny space suits, hanging in infinity and eyed by distant, bright, and hostile stars. Some movement of some one of them had set all this unguessed at universe into sedate rotation about them—the actually, of course, it was they who revolved. The oxygen valve in Jerry's helmet hissed and coked. Suddenly, it seemed to him that its noise was

changing. The oxygen pressure was going. Jerry reached out his gloved hand.

"Better hurry up, Professor," he said, "my oxygen's about gone."

Then he felt queerly cold. His hand, groping, had reached emptiness. He jerked his head about. And in the cold light of many stars besaw that the Professor had vanished. Leora's voice came, frightened:

"Jerry—my oxygen! It's—finished..."

"We've got maybe five minutes on the air in our suits," said Jerry firmly, "and the Professor's disappeared."

Then the thunderously silent voice of the Intelligence seemed to reverberate in their brains. It had returned for a final mockery.

"Fools! Your vortex is destroyed. And one by one, as you die, meditate upon your presumption!"

It ceased. And Jerry suddenly raged.

"That damned Thing—" he panted, "—that damned Thing has taken the Professor and killed him. It's going to take us, one by one, Leora! I'm going to hold you close. So close that nothing can ever take you away! We're going to die, but we'll die together, anyhow!"

Leora's voice came to him thru the close-touching helmets.

"Jerry—I want to tell you. I came on this—adventure because you were coming. You never paid much attention to me, but if we've got to die, I'm glad it is—together."

Her arms went about his neck, outside the grotesque space suit. A universe of stars revolved sedately about two midges in infinity, two close-clasped marionettes formed awkwardly of rubber and steel and glass, who clung to each other while the many-colored lights of many stars played on them.

"Damn!" said Jerry bitterly, "and I didn't dare show you I loved you because you'd so much money and you'd think I was fortune hunting! These infernal helmets... I've got to die without even kissing you! That's the hell of it!"

And then something pulled at him. Incredibly. Intolerably. He held fast to Leora, fighting at the same time against the pull.

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"That damned Intelligence," he said between clenched teeth, "trying to separate us..."

The pull became irresistible. They clung together with every ounce of their strength. Something gave. A wrenching nausea. An incredible, soul warping dizziness. Then a feeling of weight...

They fell sprawling to the floor. There was a floor beneath them. Light shone upon them. Hands tugged at them.

"Feeble intellect, eh?" The Professor's voice sputtered. "Lower level, eh? I'll show him!"

Jerry stared about him. He jerked off his helmet. He made haste, clumsily, to get Leora's helmet off. He kissed Leora. Several times. They were back in the laboratory and Professor Crabbe, his own space suit completely removed, gesticulated madly.

"Look!" he commanded furiously. "He destroyed my vortex! Look!"

Jerry felt his hand dragging at his shoulder to make him look. Reluctantly, he turned his head. But he still held Leora close.

"Er—you got back, sir?" he asked.

The Professor glared at him.

"That question," he said witheringly, "would be asked only by a statistician. You were right in one matter. From force of habit I was thinking in terms of three dimensions when I had just had the unparalleled opportunity to see mathematical abstractions as concrete facts. Immediately you reminded me of the practical aspect of the knowledge I had just gained, of course I was able to imagine the exact direction in which I must move in order to be in my laboratory. In fact, I reached out my hand and pulled myself into the laboratory by the doorknob, I removed my suit to write down

my notes, and then I noticed the vortex was gone, and then I remembered you. So I pulled on the strap attached to my suit. You arrived. And you ask if I got back!"

Jerry said apologetically:

"It does sound silly, sir."

Professor Crabbe thawed a little.

"After all," he conceded, "one must not expect too much of a statistician. And you did make one useful suggestion. From that empty space in that other universe, I had only to reach out my hand to this doorknob to be at home. And now, purely, by that knowledge, travel in all dimensions is simplicity itself. I shall return to that space in which we were, and then come back. Just to show you how simple it is. Look!"

He grasped the doorknob, smiling scornfully. Jerry suddenly flung himself forward.

"Wait! Wait! Don't do it yet—"

But the Professor had vanished. Like a blown-out candle flame. And Leora instinctively moved closer to Jerry. Jerry went white. The Professor remained invisible. He did not come back. One minute, two, three—four...

"The devil!" said Jerry slowly and helplessly. "Isn't that the devil? Just by knowing how, he could travel between universes. But of all conceivable places, he had to choose to go back to that place where we were marooned!"

"Why shouldn't he?" asked Leora. "Why not? The Intelligence?"

"No!" said Jerry bitterly, "the space-suit. He had taken it off! And how long could he live in that vacuum between the stars? He's dead, confound it, and he's the one man who could have answered the challenge of that damned Intelligence, the challenge from Beyond."

The End