Casimir Effect

Gabriel Strange-Wood & Lydia Strange-Wood

ECKSMARK MEDIA

Casimir Effect

By Gabriel Strange-Wood & Lydia Strange-Wood
©2009

Set in Square721 BT & Data

Casimir Effect

Dutch physicists Hendrik B. G. Casimir and Dirk Polder first theorised the existence of the Casimir Effect 1948. On a quantum scale the Casimir Effect is so strong that it becomes the dominant force between uncharged conductors. It is theorised that the Casimir Effect holds the quantum particles of an atom together; it is literally the binding force of the universe.

Paradox dominates a narrative in which the compulsion to love is a compulsion to die, and death is the price for an absolute.

The Oxford Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet, 2000 pp3, Levenson J. L.

In the Beginning, everything must End

In the year 2204 the once great city of Iolanthus stands in ruins, all useable materials have been salvaged for use in the construction of the massive colony ship hovering above the centre. The world has rotted away, leaving a carcass of something that was once majestic and thrived with life. Massive buildings reach toward the corrupted brown sky, like skeletal hands reaching from the grave.

A lone figure in a long heavy and hooded coat hurries towards an abandoned Titus Robotics warehouse on the edge of the city. The figure passes beneath its dilapidated sign which forlornly hangs off the wall, no one cares anymore about what it used to advocate. The figure stops at the entrance glances up to the threatening sky, their mouth and nose obscured by a gas mask, and their coat tugged and pulled by an ill wind. Shaking their head, eyes peering sadly to the colony ship where the old skyline once stretched.

Broken machines and the detritus of times past are strewn around this once high-tech science lab many of them gutted, mere shells hinting at their original purpose.

A portentous chair stands alone in the middle of a cleared area; the Wormhole Generator a malevolent looking array hangs above it as though reaching down for its next victim. Conduits and pipes lead from devices attached to the chair into large machines situated around the area's edge, each of them unique, looming as though part of some wicked experiment.

A young man is slumped over a glowing computer panel, he mumbles to himself; his stained lab coat has seen better days and his bleached hair is in desperate need of attention. He glances up at the sound of a door slamming shut and echoing around the chamber.

The figure enters a makeshift room, which has been built into the edge of the cleared area. The figure solemnly pulls their coat off and throws it over a metal drum, revealing a crumpled cotton shirt and worn jeans. Reaching behind their head the figure unclips the mask, to reveal a young and attractive feminine face with a hard to place heritage, her straight shoulder length brown hair is tied back tight to her scalp. She was born with the name Alice Sharpe but will disregard that name for the job she must now do, the most important job in the universe and also the last she will ever do.

The young man stands up "Alice?" he splutters "I mean Dr Sharpe."

"Mark, you're here?" Alice shouts. "Well, hurry there isn't much time left."

Alice strides with a false confidence from the room and over to one of the machines and tentatively holds out her hand, a stream of codes appear in the air curling and looping around her fingers. A red light on the console flickers on and fades as it is starved of the power that gave it life.

"The power drain is too much! Damned thing?" she stabs a few more faintly glowing symbols on the console.

"Iolanthe?" Alice barks over her shoulder to the empty room.

A stunning and distinctive woman materialises from nowhere, remarkably neat and dressed in what was the height of fashion before the city's death. Iolanthe was never born she is an A.I., created with a purpose of being the architect and warden of Iolanthus, and as many have said she is its very heart and soul. Her robotic body salvaged to build the colony ship, all that remains is her hologram, she looks like a ghost, not quite solid, glitches and ripples cover her as though she might melt into a puddle of light.

"Peachy day Alice. Here again?" Iolanthe despite being a machine sounds very human and her voice oscillates between an emotional and detached state.

"Yes, please help me."

Iolanthe sighs, "Alice dear, you know there is nothing I can do. Your destiny is a predetermined Significant Event; you must go back and…" Her voice settles down with humanistic tones and inflections.

"I know." Alice stops, and puts her hands tentatively on the machine, her fingers caress its dull metal surface, her shoulders slump and she lets out a long slow breath. "I just - I can't. I know what must be done." A single tear falls to the floor at her feet, motes of dust scatter as though trying desperately to get away before dancing back to sully its purity. Iolanthe looks at where the tear landed, a sense of longing in her eyes.

Mark watches the conversation with a look of horror on his face. "No, you can't, you have to stay. I, we need you." he pleads feebly, walking towards Alice who shakes her head, trying desperately to hold back her tears. She pulls a worn envelope from her shirt, stained and browning with age. He tentatively takes it, opens and reads it, dread and uncertainty in his eyes.

"This can't be true? Alfred must have made a mistake." Mark glances pleadingly at Iolanthe.

"You know she is not of this time. This is how events must unfold," replies Iolanthe taking the letter. A loud crackle and sparks come from a machine tucked away in the corner. Iolanthe's hologram flickers slightly and she becomes more opaque, less of a shadow of her former self. "You don't need to stay. Go, the last ship leaves in an hour, your fate lies elsewhere. Forget what's unfolded here; it's no longer your concern." Iolanthe places a hand on his shoulder and smiles sympathetically.

"I don't...." starts Mark, but Iolanthe pushes the letter back into his hand.

"Keep this safe!" she orders.

"Leave, now Mark," orders Alice, "we don't want you here. I don't need you."

Mark pauses as if to argue, Iolanthe gives him another understanding but determined smile. Knowing not to argue with the intellect of an AI he sighs, grabs a large bag and runs towards the door, he stops short "My NeuroSys, it won't cut it?"

Iolanthe sighs and saunters over to Mark; he flinches as she reaches out towards his neck where a small silver port protrudes slightly from his skin. Iolanthe taps it, and a holographic readout appears. Lines of incomprehensible code swiftly change from green to blue. "All done! Mark, please remember if all this goes well none of this will have happened."

Mark stares longingly past Iolanthe towards Alice. "Good luck. I, maybe we - In another timestream maybe?"

Alice doesn't acknowledge Mark's departure, the sound of the door echoes through the warehouse. Alice looks at where he was, wiping a tear from her eye "If only things were different." Iolanthe puts her arm around Alice to comfort her.