

The World Ends With Realization

The first reports of it came only hours after the measurements were taken. A journalism major from MIT, Maria Trimble, had caught wind of it at a party a month before. A drunken Dalia Dreil, a young grad student trying to impress Maria, she was standing with her legs apart in an ill-planned attempt to get closer to head level with the couch, sipping from a half-assed vodka cocktail. Dalia had relayed every detail of the experiment to the bemused Maria, also drunk, leaning on the couch, practically sideways.

"I'm technically not supposed to tell you about this." Dalia kept saying. She had fallen asleep soon afterward.

Maria, on the other hand, had been just a little less drunk and took keen note of Dalia's revelation. She had practically camped out next to the test site during the weekend they were supposed to take the measurements. Being an undergrad journalism student, Maria was underprepared with nothing but a thin jacket, sweatpants, and a granola bar nestled in her pocket. It was a mercy that the Massachusetts team set up early on a Saturday to coordinate with the team from the University of Western Australia. At 6:00 AM, they had begun their test, and by 10:00 AM, Maria had her story, realized by the explosion of cheers from the tent in the open field where the team had lugged their atomic force microscope out to the antipode of the team in Perth, Australia who had set up a base on the high seas to conduct this experiment.

"It just happened!" Maria tweeted, "They found a graviton! I'm writing an article about it now!" She approached the rented white canvas tent to ask questions about the discovery but was given the cold shoulder by the team of scientists trying to verify and reproduce the results with the Australian team in the middle of an ocean on the other side of the planet.

Articles written by much more professional journalists were published within a day. They all got the science wrong and interviewed the minimum amount of people for the story. But one thing the headlines never failed to capture was the significance of the discovery.

One of the articles read: "The smallest thing we will ever perceive has been discovered: The Graviton. It was discovered on January 28th, 2034, in a collaboration between MIT and the University of Western Australia. Though it sounds like a particle, it is anything but the likes of an electron or a neutron. Our "observation" of the Graviton was only in describing the effect it had propagating the force of gravity in accordance with the unified field equation. The equation, now that it's solved, allows us to predict the behavior of systems with nearly unlimited precision. Or, as the acclaimed theoretical physicist Michio Kaku puts it, this discovery 'allows us to read the mind of God'."

The article continues for another quarter of a page, but nothing of interest is said. Instead, a brief and thorough biography of the young grad student, Andy Bird, fills a few paragraphs before circling back to how monumental the discovery was.

The experiment was confirmed and repeated multiple times as every quantum research organization worth their salt scrambled to be a part of the hype.

Maria's article never came out. How do you build a story around one of the greatest discoveries of mankind? She asked herself. She lost interest pretty quickly. Instead of writing the article, Maria hosted a party. She invited all of the undergrads involved in the experiment, ostensibly to celebrate the new discovery, but in reality, Maria only wanted to see one person there.

Not long after the party, Dalia and Maria began to go out. It was a good thing for Dalia too, her life spiraled out of her control not long after the MIT group gained notoriety. Due to her close connection to the experiment and her made-for-internet charm and personality, Dalia began touring the world as the top expert on the discovery. Not that she strictly was, Dalia was smart, and a good communicator, but there were multiple professors who were the top-billed authors on the project who had much more technical knowledge of the experiment, but they didn't have the youth or the attitude to keep up the schedule Dalia maintained.

A few weeks after the news began to spread, Dalia found herself booked at least three times a week for the next four months. Dalia was excited to get the word out, she developed rote answers for the most common questions.

"So what does [this discovery] mean for humanity?"

"Well, not much is going to change, cause all we did was prove that nothing was wrong with the world." Dalia giggles. After being asked the same question dozens of times over the same number of interviews, she developed the addendum: "But I think it actually represents an opening up of opportunities for us. There are so many applications of the completed unified field theory, both to problems we're already aware of, and new inventions people still might discover! It sounds crazy but this will soon allow us to do things like harvest perfectly clean, sustainable energy, and create systems that are almost 100% energy efficient, even crazier is that maybe in the far future, this discovery could allow for traveling faster than the speed of light! Yeah, we're probably just getting started with science, you know? This is the start of a new paradigm! Like, we've finally broken through the surface into some *really* crazy science. This is the key to unlocking the universe!"

Dalia got very good at spinning the conversation to talk about quantum physics and science in general. "Inspiring" is how a lot of articles put the conversations, though they could never quite point to the revelations she had made.

Every new show Dalia went on wanted to continue the story. Find some new direction to go and be the first to break some big news that might be hiding in this rote discovery. Generally, they couldn't.

"I don't want to go on The Meeting!" (The Monday Morning Meeting was the nation's largest live-streamed internet broadcast. Listened to by over a hundred thousand around the

country every week.) The couple was stumbling home from a bar, tomorrow's Sunday was one of the first days in a while that Dalia didn't have any media to report to.

"Aww, why's that?" Maria asked.

"I'm just... Over it." Dalia's voice cracked at the end of her sentence. Maria hugged Dalia with one arm, they stumbled into each other as they fought their feet to match each other's pace. "All these things are boring," Dalia said as they caught up to one another. "They've stopped asking me anything interesting. I'm not scheduled on any show even adjacent to science for another two months! Everyone's figured out that there's not much to talk about. Science moves slow, and no one really cares about it until it gives them a new phone or whatever!"

"You could-" Maria cut herself off before she said 'quit'. The couple had had that conversation many times before. "Never mind," Maria said quickly. She saw Dalia going to respond in protest. She *had* to do this tour, it was bringing so much attention and money to the research, not to mention it was the most important thing Dalia had done in her life. "I said never mind, I know how you feel, don't worry about it."

The largest story on Dalia's news run ended up being her breakup with Maria on the Monday Morning Meeting. The podcast had invited the couple on in order to gain a new perspective on a story that so quickly grew stale.

"So, how did you two meet each other?" Greg, one of the hosts of the podcast, spoke with heavy vocal fry, which endeared him to his audience.

"Oh, I was going to write a story about Dalia's discovery. Well, I hosted a party and invited her. I told her I wanted to interview her about the discovery and, well, the interview didn't go as planned..." The whole group laughed.

"You never wrote an article on it though. You had the scoop! What happened!?" Cat, the other host said.

"Yeah, I was kind of an idiot," Maria responded. "I didn't really know what I was doing and I just quit halfway through. Maybe it was cause I didn't get the interview I wanted!" Maria nudged Dalia and they laughed.

"I told you what you wanted to know when you asked!" Dalia feigned insult.

"I know I know." Maria laughed. "Well, maybe it was because I only got to interview the undergrad on the project."

The hosts laughed along with Maria. Dalia was shocked, she playfully slapped Maria on the shoulder again.

"Oh come on Dalia I know I could have talked to anyone. I'm just a bit of a quitter."

"You could have got all the information from me! I knew just as much as anyone else in the experiment!"

Maria laughed at this but Dalia looked genuinely hurt. Maria and the hosts bantered for another minute or two while Dalia brooded silently until Dalia walked out of the room. "Hey, where are you going babe?" Maria called after Dalia.

"Ooooooooooh!" One host started but they finished in unison.

Maria glared at the hosts briefly and followed Dalia out of the room. The Monday Morning Meeting never got the big scoop that had been planned for it, that the paper co-authored by Dalia was to be published the next day, finally.

Barely a day had passed since the scientific paper on the experiment had been published when it fell into the hand of an excited Matvey Vinogradov, an 87-year-old Russian quantum physicist, who was fading in and out of lucidity. He only read scientific articles for fun anymore, his grandson had hooked up his computer to an RSS of various journals via a desktop shortcut. All Matvey knew how to do was to push his computer's power button and double-click on the shortcut, and if he was ever navigated away from his familiar web pages he would simply restart the computer.

After the document was printed, Matvey sat down on his large plush armchair in the corner of his room. He had marked this day on the calendar when he had read the proposal for the experiment a year ago. He had a cup of tea on the side table and the catheter was practically empty.

It took Matvey an hour and a half to skim the paper. It took Matvey another 2 hours to read the important bits of the paper in-depth. Matvey had been studying what this might have meant for a while. Making multiple assumptions about what a graviton might do for the current model of physics. It had consumed him for the last couple of years of his career, nothing to ever be published, just Matvey, screwing around with his tenure. The results were depressing. This discovery was in line with some of Matvey's models, and he had proposed a very salient explanation, that these explanations that explained these particles were recursive, or redundant. Essentially, the underlying logic of them *equaled* nothing. There was emptiness at the bottom of the well that was discovering how the smallest interactions in the universe interacted. Their world, which they had described in more and more detail for decades was nothing but the consequence of any given instant of the infinite gazing upon itself, distilling timeless, ephemeral meaning on itself which did not exist. Humanity was forever falling into a vast emptiness.

This realization, in the tiny wooden room of an informed professor, was the culmination of what was truly a void understanding the emptiness of itself once more. And thus, the world, solar system, galaxy, and multiverse that Matvey existed in collapsed. Or perhaps more accurately, it never existed at all as it realized, unequivocally, through this one minute act of comprehension, that it was only ever mere nonexistence perceiving itself.