

Hardware Space

It's sort of like Terry Pratchett's L-Space, except that it involves giant hardware stores, has considerably fewer books, but also considerably less active danger. You see, all hardware stores across the multiverse -- at least, all hardware stores above a certain cultural level -- are interconnected, spatially. Maybe temporally, too? It's hard to say. Nobody's ever reported a time-slip. But then, nobody's ever reported a time-slip, so it'd be evidence either way, right?

Fortunately, the vast majority of dimensional shifts that take place in Hardware Space are between places where it'd take you a million eons of searching to find a significant difference. It's barely demonstrable that people even *are* switching between them, but the math is ultimately clear. But every so often somebody finds an aisle that they shouldn't have, and then they get promptly, and quite comprehensively, lost.

Most of them just end up in a different timeline, and there are usually mechanisms for sorting that sort of thing out. But a few end up in *Hardware Space*: a place of infinite aisles and displays, each more surreal and confusing than

the last. Tools for tasks that cannot exist in your world. Paints that would ignite in your atmosphere, nails with too many dimensions, items that would implode if brought forth into what you naively call your 'reality.' A zone of chaos and incongruity. *Forever.*

Although it's not actually as bad as it sounds; virtually all of the stuff that you will see can't actually hurt you, including all the stuff that probably *should*. Hardware Space filters out, somehow, all the immediately lethal physical and chemical contradictions, since it is a shared metaphysical hallucination of a Platonic Ideal... it's *magic*. But not Pratchettian magic. It's much, much more benign. Kind of interesting, really.

Of course, there are still physical needs for the unwary traveler to worry about. But there's a reason why most big box hardware centers have snacks and drinks for sale; and it's not because construction workers like Cherry Coke. It's to keep the unwary traveler alive and hydrated until somebody can track him down and put him back in his home dimension. That usually falls on local store employees -- and, yes, they're constantly having to do that, alas.

And now you know why you can never find a staffer when you don't really **need** one, for rather esoteric values of the word 'need.'

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