



Foreword

My first sighting of Mohamed was in a picturesque little village in Switzerland. We had agreed to meet in a parking lot, and as I sat in my car waiting, I noticed a little yellow jeep tearing down the mountainside at high speed. Assuming the driver to be a teenager, I was surprised when the jeep screeched to a halt beside me and a handsome and distinguished looking man leapt out and greeted me warmly. Grinning boyishly, Herr Professor addressed me as 'Fractal Man', chided me for taking so long to cross the alps to meet him, and bade me follow him up the hill to my hotel. In the ensuing high-speed chase I taxed the limits of my little car to keep Mohamed in sight. Twice I had to back rapidly out of a cul-de-sac to avoid being run over by my host, who was clearly enjoying the drive, if not entirely certain of where he was going. The route eventually revisited the parking lot we had started from, and by the time we reached the hotel I had absorbed the charms and ambiance of the little village, having traversed most of its streets and alleyways at least once.

When the dust had settled and I was safely installed in my hotel, my genial host invited me over to discuss physics. It was a fantastic evening that I shall never forget.

My own work was not well known and was, to put it mildly, outside of mainstream physics. I had travelled my own path for fifteen years and considered I knew every rock, pebble and fallen branch on the route I had taken. I was also familiar with trying to entice colleagues into the uncharted territory that my trail explored. It was usually an unrewarding process. Physicists tend to be conservative, preferring the tidy well-kept routes of a civilized hierarchy. Anticipating the usual reluctance, I was surprised that my mischievous friend not only offered no resistance to exploring my path, he leaped over me like a gazelle and took off along the route in what I thought to be indecent haste. In vain I tried to slow him down, pointing out this treasured rock, that carefully assembled marker. But, as all who are lucky enough to have discussed physics with Mohamed will know, resistance is futile. Listening to Mohamed gambol along what I considered 'my path' was a revelation indeed. Mohamed never ambles, he leaps. The added height of those leaps allows him to see many things hidden to the average traveller. Although I knew and treasured the local details that Mohamed would cross in a single bound, I had never seen the surrounding country that he was able to see. Mohamed embedded my one-dimensional path in a landscape of higher dimension, and more intricate beauty. That landscape was riddled with the ideas and paths of many people, all woven into a coherent fabric by a gifted raconteur. Like the trip up the mountain to the hotel, I was thoroughly stretched to follow his enthusiastic pace, but in the process I saw the beauty of an inspired synthesis of ideas that would have otherwise been beyond my vision.

Science is, in the end, a process of exploration. Few people have the combined talents and circumstances to explore more than a small patch of well-charted ground. One needs the intuition that is the scientist's compass, the knowledge and imagination that is his spy-glass, the technical skill to travel swiftly and safely, and finally the courage to visit, alone if necessary, territory that is overlooked or spurned by colleagues. Mohamed has all of these qualities in larger-than-life measure. This special issue is from a few friends who rejoice in, and benefit from the inspiration of Mohamed's passion for Physics. It is a small but affectionate salute to our favourite Editor/Explorer-in-chief, on the occasion of his 60th birthday.

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