

CASUAL

STRUNG OUT

BY WOODY ALLEN

I am greatly relieved that the universe is finally explainable. I was beginning to think it was me. As it turns out, physics, like a grating relative, has all the answers. The big bang, black holes, and the primordial soup turn up every Tuesday in the Science section of the *Times*, and as a result my grasp of general relativity and quantum mechanics now equals Einstein's—Einstein Moomjy, that is, the rug seller. How could I not have known that there are little things the size of "Planck length" in the universe, which are a millionth of a billionth of a billionth of a billionth of a centimetre? Imagine if you dropped one in a dark theatre how hard it would be to find. And how does gravity work? And if it were to cease suddenly would certain restaurants still require a jacket? What I do know about physics is that to a man standing on the shore time passes quicker than to a man on a boat—especially if the man on the boat is with his wife. The latest miracle of physics is string theory, which has been heralded as a T.O.E., or "Theory of Everything." This may even include the incident of last week herewith described.

I awoke on Friday and because the universe is expanding it took me longer than usual to find my robe. This made me late leaving for work, and because the concept of up and down is relative the elevator I got into went to the roof, where it was very difficult to hail a taxi. Please keep in mind that a man on a rocket ship approaching the speed of light would have seemed on time for work—or perhaps even a little early and certainly better dressed. When I finally got to the office and approached my employer Mr. Muchnick to explain the delay, my mass increased the closer I came to him, which he took as a sign of insubordination. There was some rather bitter talk of docking my pay, which, when measured against the speed of light, is very small anyhow. The truth is that compared to the amount of atoms in the Andromeda Galaxy I actually earn quite little. I tried to tell this to Mr. Muchnick, who said I was not taking into account that time and space were the same

thing. He swore that if that situation should change he would give me a raise. I pointed out that since time and space are the same thing, and it takes three hours to do something that turns out to be less than six inches long, it can't sell for more than five dollars. The one good thing about space being the same as time is that if you travel to the outer reaches of the universe and the voyage takes three thousand earth years, your friends will be dead when you come back, but you will not need Botox.

Back in my office, with the sunlight streaming through the window, I thought to myself that if our great golden star suddenly exploded this planet would fly out of orbit and hurtle through infinity forever—another good reason to always carry a cell phone. On the other hand, if I could someday go faster than a hundred and eighty-six thousand miles per second and recapture the light born centuries ago, could I then go back in time to ancient Egypt or Imperial Rome? But what would I do there: I hardly knew anybody. It was at this moment that our new secretary, Miss Lola Kelly, walked in. Now, in the debate over whether everything is made up of particles or waves Miss Kelly is definitely waves. You can tell she's waves every time she walks to the water cooler. Not that she doesn't have good particles but it's the waves that get her the trinkets from Tiffany's. My wife is more waves than particles, too, it's just that her waves have begun to sag a little. Or maybe the problem is that my wife has too many quarks. The truth is, lately she looks as if she had passed too close to the event horizon of a black hole and some of her—not all of her by any means—was sucked in. It gives her a kind of funny shape, which I'm hoping will be correctable by cold fusion. My advice to anyone has always been to avoid black holes because, once inside, it's extremely hard to climb out and still retain one's ear for music. If, by chance, you do fall all the way through a black hole and emerge from the other side, you'll probably live your entire life over and over but will be too compressed to go out and meet girls.

And so I approached Miss Kelly's gravitational field and could feel my strings vibrating. All I knew was that I wanted to wrap my weak-gauge bosons around her gluons, slip through a wormhole, and do some quantum tunnelling. It was at this point that I was rendered impotent by Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. How could I act if I couldn't determine her exact position and velocity? And what if I should suddenly cause a singularity; that is, a devastating rupture in space-time? They're so noisy. Everyone would look up and I'd be embarrassed in front of Miss Kelly. Ah, but the woman has such good dark energy. Dark energy, though hypothetical, has always been a turn-on for me, especially in a female who has an overbite. I fantasized that if I could only get her into a particle accelerator for five minutes with a bottle of Château Lafite I'd be standing next to her, with our quanta approximating the speed of light and her nucleus colliding with mine. Of course, exactly at this moment I got a piece of antimatter in my eye and had to find a Q-tip to remove it. I had all but lost hope when she turned toward me and spoke.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I was about to order some coffee and Danish but now I can't seem to remember the Schrödinger equation. Isn't that silly? It's just slipped my mind."

"Evolution of probability waves," I said. "And if you're ordering I'd love an English muffin with muons and tea."

"My pleasure," she said, smiling coquettishly and curling up into a Calabi-Yau shape. I could feel my coupling constant invade her weak field as I pressed my lips to her wet neutrinos. Apparently I achieved some kind of fission, because the next thing I knew I was picking myself up off the floor with a mouse on my eye the size of a supernova.

I guess physics can explain everything except the softer sex, although I told my wife I got the shiner because the universe was contracting, not expanding, and I just wasn't paying attention. ♦

