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Gooney Ducks and Naked Physicists

Part XIII

Squeezing Sunlight Out of Cabbages and Cucumbers

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Abstract: An allegory of modern science.

Part XIII

The royal physicists of the Emerald City drew in their breath, chortled, and exclaimed: “*Magnifique! Nysseligt! Excellent!*” Medals of honor and exalted titles were lavishly bestowed.

As the emperor, atop a mighty elephant, rode in procession through the city, the people, fearing to appear stupid and not daring to admit they didn’t see the nonexistent, cheered in chorus, “What incomparable colors! What intricate square patterns! The emperor’s new clothes, how beautiful!”

But amid the spectacle and fanfare, a small voice was raised.
“Why doesn’t the emperor have any clothes on?”

The emperor was silent for a moment.

Then, with face reddening, he shuddered and uttered a resounding, “Harumph! You mean to tell me, all this time I’ve been parading around wearing nothing at all? I’m naked now?”

All I can say is, enough with the pretenses!

By imperial order, cease the charade! Pass me my royal robe!”

I know it’s wishful thinking, but a fella could only hope that physicists would follow “suit” and put some clothes on!

Yeah, Eva always tells me I live in a fantasy world, but my hat’s off to science!

I have to take a back seat!

I can only admire the audacity!

Spinning the fantastic fabric of theoretical physics from the “squaring” of line!

Weaving the invisible cloth from the imaginary thread!

What strange charms! What flavours! What an illusion perfectly tailored to fit the fantasy!

The squaring of time, mass, velocity, and light—incredible!

What confusement!

Almost four centuries of working with something that doesn’t work!

For four centuries the parade of naked physicists atop the festival elephants has continued!

I can only shudder in astonishment!

Maybe it's not the time or place; it's probably not appropriate, but I just can't help myself.

All this talk about naked physicists riding elephants reminds me of that old joke:

A circus had arrived in a small town, and one morning one of the elephants managed to escape. The fugitive pachyderm made its way to the backyard garden of an elderly (and very near-sighted) woman, where it began hungrily uprooting her cabbages with its trunk and eating them.

Alarmed by the apparition in her garden, the woman called the police, exclaiming, "Sheriff, there's a big cow in my garden pulling up my cabbages with its tail!"

"What's the cow doing with them?" he asked.

To which the woman replied, "You wouldn't believe me if I told you!"

So, is Descartes' "squaring" of line just another tale/tail of how the cow ate the cabbage?

"Squaring" a line? Just what are physicists trying to do?

Trying to create "squares" of time, light, velocity, and mass
by combining the squares of algebra with the squares of geometry?

Sure sounds catawampus to me!

It's like the cognitive *Clash of the Titans*: the right-brain geometry verses left-brain algebra!
Certainly goes against everything in my brain!

Makes me wonder though:

Does "squaring" a line break the laws of geometry, the laws of algebra, or both?

Is it possible that Descartes exceeded the parameters of algebra?

Wow! Finally, some mathematical substance to sink my teeth into!

Now we're talking!

A mathematical concept so outrageous, so earthshaking, unthinkable, and unspeakable...
even forbidden!

"Squaring a line": The Verboten math?

Ooh! I gotta take a closer look at this!

Twenty-five

Elephants of the Emerald City? A little irreverent?

No worries!

Even I can see the gravity of the present theoretical physics and mathematics crisis!

So, maybe from now on I should treat this situation in a proper scientific manner—perhaps like an article in one of those prestigious peer-reviewed journals.

First, I would naturally need a title—something provocative and intellectually intriguing.

Perhaps “The Squaring of Line: How to Squeeze Sunlight Out of Cabbages and Cucumbers”?

Nah, I’ve got it:

“IS THE CARTESIAN GRID AT RISK?”

Then, of course, the required academic, mathematical bona fides.

Hmm, in my case, I’ll just have to make up an impressive-sounding nom de plume (or a nom de guerre) like

Dr. Emil Schaffhausen-Gravitas
Master of Communication Disorders
Ph. D., Lic., etc., etc.

Finally, I would need an obscure abstract.

In honor of Descartes, perhaps something in French:

Par le biais d’une analyse touchant les concepts de La Geometrie de René Descartes, l’essai explore les limites fondamentales et les présomptions opposées qu’impose le langage des mathématiques et de la philosophie inspirée par la physique. Cette interrogation jette également les fondations d’une réforme des mathématiques.

Boy howdy! That should do it!

Reminds me of Eva’s story about her sister trying to order lunch in French from a Swiss German waitress in Geneva (Yeah, I know. You’re probably thinking she’s way out of my league; nevertheless, sure looking forward to meeting her tonight...ooh la la! But I digress.)

Well, now I better get down to brass tacks—the all-important stuff: the “proof” or “disproof.” So fasten your seatbelts and hold on tight! (And remember; please remain seated until the ride comes to a complete stop.) Here we go!