

## **“When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.”**

Hunter S. Thompson



The universe is weird. With only 5 percent of the universe in our sight, potential new families of particles, possible extra dimensions, and mass created by an all-pervasive, invisible field, our understanding almost looks feeble.

Ideas that once

belonged to science fiction are now some of our best guesses for reality. The universe is weird—and now it is time to turn pro.

Understanding these newly-appreciated mysteries requires more sophisticated questioning, needing more elaborate tools. The Large Hadron Collider will come online in 2007, finding partial answers to these questions. However, the LHC is not enough. Another tool, the proposed International Linear Collider, would resolve some of the greatest quandaries science has faced. But there is a long way to go before the International Linear Collider is more than a plan.

In the village of Snowmass, Colorado, nearly 700 physicists and engineers from around the world hunkered down for two weeks to refine their plans and launch a newly-structured effort to design the machine needed to answer physics' compelling questions. There is no doubt that such a machine can be designed. Yet finding the

best design in a form that is scientifically, economically, and politically optimal will take some work.

On the Saturday night in the middle of the meeting, a few miles down the road from Snowmass village, and practically within earshot, Hunter S. Thompson's ashes were blasted into the sky amid a burst of fireworks above his Owl Farm home—a flamboyant last gasp for the father of “Gonzo” journalism. Thompson once wrote, “It never got weird enough for me.”

Confronting weirdness is what science is about. It presents both challenge and opportunity to see more clearly into the unknown. In the two weeks of the meeting, physicists teased their imaginations, applied their sharpest analytical insights, and, above all, let the collective brainpower of their best meld to confront the tough but inspiring questions facing them.

In two weeks, they plotted a path toward a machine that they hope will take form in future years, a tool to address questions of fundamental human and scientific interest. The process is just beginning, but physicists now have the outline of a map that will lead them right to the edge of the unknown, where their minds will be stretched to comprehend whatever it is the universe has in store. What they find will probably be weirder than most expect.

If Thompson had been around to drive up the hill from his ranch to Snowmass village, he might have discovered that the world could really be weird enough. I think he would agree that the revelations ahead will make it worthwhile to, as he often advocated, “Buy the ticket, take the ride.”

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