

WRITE OR WRONG

'Proof,' I said, 'is always a relative thing.'

Raymond Chandler (1940)

That's not even wrong.

Wolfgang Pauli (1957)

**Cosmological evolution and the state of the universe when it began
can have a profound impact on the physics we currently observe.**

Brian Greene (1999)

**Science's greatest gift to civilization is its acknowledgment of
fallibility.**

John Polanyi (2009)

**The single best thing you get from the Web is the ability to be
proven wrong fast.**

Avinash Kaushik (2010)

**The dream is to find an ultimate theory that explains everything—
we are far from that.**

Fabiola Gianotti (2012)

She's still out of town but as usual I'm at the office before six. My key's still in the lock when a sensation stops me dead. It's a feeling that I get when someone's broken in. Nothing I can put a finger on. It's just a sense the office isn't quite the way it was.

I circle, touching nothing. At first nothing seems to have been touched. *Alles in ordnung*, I think to myself or maybe say aloud dispelling evil wights. The phone sits on her desk. It's in the right place but looks wrong. The cord, I realize. It drapes across the desk at a new angle. It's not much but all my life I've been observing changes. When you're bombing shoreward from the pack off Margaret River, it's a habit that may save some skin.

On the floor behind the desk a little box is in the line. A third cord, thin and black, leads to a USB jack plugged in back of our file server. I lift the handset, peering over at the box. A little light comes on.

Once I'm booted and online it takes a sixty-second search to find it. It's called the Spy Matrix Stealth USB Phone Recorder. Cute. They—whoever they are—supply the Stealth. On sale they can buy it for two hundred bucks. We—whoever we are—supply power, hard drive and the voices to record. Few voices though, and kind of boring, at least while I'm here. Maybe they don't know about

the boring bit. Whoever they are, I think once again and, maybe, *sotto voce*, say. One thing I know is the server has no Net connection so to hear the boring voices they'll be back.

I could remove it. I could tell her that it's there. I could call the LAPD. But it's *her* game the intruders are invading. I'm not supposed to know she *has* a game. Better that I hold my tongue. Even as I think this thought I know it is disloyal but I turn that thought aside. My notes have loaded; click the tab, move on.

It might come as a surprise to some that for any scientific premise it's a badge of honor that it can be wrong. Wouldn't it be better if it can't? Well, actually, no. This isn't like predicting stocks or baseball where infallibility is fine. Science has that definition of what's true: Does it work? If checking a prediction shows it works then curiously that is not much help. Unless, that is, it was a most unlikely-seeming outcome. For example, it wouldn't be impressive for someone to predict a fair coin toss as 'heads' and have it come down 'heads.' A prediction that the next ten tosses will be 'heads' might make a small impression if it turns out to be right. One would want to check the penny and then see it done again. And if it works a second time it's likely, like a knife thrower, the coin tosser has learned to time the spin.

He has said little about how to prove him wrong. It's as if he doesn't care. The one prediction I remember, about missing big black holes, he got from me. I don't think he thinks he needs predictions. His forte is explaining things that are already known. He's counting on new physics to make his predictions. His case is a simple challenge: If you don't buy my Beginning come up with a better one.

One other thing he has left open: Where does all this go?