



Jabal Shams, Sab Bani Khamis

In praise of sublime beauty of OMAN

Dear readers, first of all I would like to thank you for your loyalty towards my articles. Today is the closure of a three year long journey through the marvellous country that is Oman. I wanted to share the experiences I have lived with my family and friends through short stories and descriptions of the most beautiful and remote places of the Sultanate we have visited in the past twenty years. I hope that you've enjoyed my 147 tales every Monday since April 2013 and wish to come back to you soon in

another form. I would like to thank my wife Marta, my daughter Mona, my son Kevin, Khalid al Siyabi aka "the Everest guy", Ahmed al Jabri aka "Mismar", Mihai Catrinar aka "my adopted son" and all "The Majaneen" who followed me in my trips, and last but not least, all the warm welcoming countrymen of Oman. A very special tribute goes to "Patou, My climbing Master" Patrick Cabiro, may he rest in peace, who's left us way too soon in a tragic accident last summer and I wish patience to his better half Nathalie Henriot. One last time, I leave you to enjoy our sublime Oman in a selection of some grandiose sites.



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110m "3AM drop" wadi Halfein



140m Buqeer drop Saqa Jabal Akhdhar



100m Great Toboggan drop



Khaled, Mona, Kevin and Marta



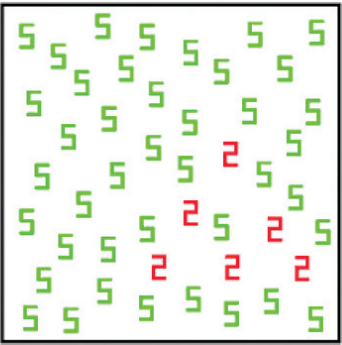
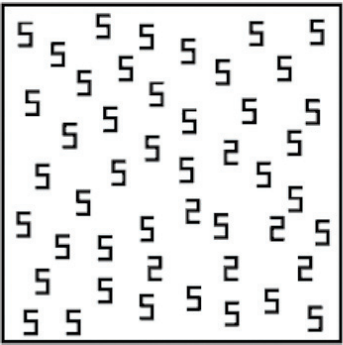
Cavers at the entrance of Tahri cave



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Jane, your name tastes like purple

Jokes about accidental wrong calls and crosstalk have now become a thing of the past, thanks to advanced digital technology in telecommunication that can handle complicated networks of connections. However, the connections in our brain still seem to malfunction at times for some of us. In the 19th century, Francis Galton — a cousin of Charles Darwin — found that certain people have a peculiar sense that when they hear a specific tone, they experience a specific colour. Some may see C sharp as red, F sharp as blue and so on. This truly fascinating condition has been named 'synesthesia' — an anomalous blending of the senses. Synesthetes hear colours, taste shapes and feel sounds. If you look at the following monochrome image on the left and see the figures apparently in different colours as in the image on the right, you may have a certain type of synesthesia. The portal synesthete.org provides a battery of tests to identify various such conditions.



Next time you are at a concert and someone comments on the colour of the music, don't be surprised. They might have sound-to-colour synesthesia, chromesthesia, that occurs in roughly one in 3,000 individuals. Popular visual artists and musicians like Vincent Van Gogh, Wassily Kandinsky, David Hockney and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov are notable synesthetes. This reminds me of one of my very good chemistry teachers at school who always got annoyed when someone tore paper. She complained about a tingling teeth sensation when she heard a tearing sound. During our chemistry classes, an over-reacting friend had the habit of tearing paper for everything, which led him to neither understand chemistry nor obtain a decent score. Later he became a choreographer and still unfortunately keeps on talking about chemistry — but between dancing partners. Auditory-tactile synesthesia triggers a sensation in the body when specific sounds are heard. In another rare type called mirror-touch, the synesthete feels someone else's sensation, though I'm unsure if shedding tears when Mufasa dies in "The Lion King" comes under this category. If you happened to watch a popular BBC documentary called "Derek Tastes of Ear Wax", you could imagine someone tasting waffles every time they heard the word "basketball". This condition is called Lexical-gustatory synesthesia.

What causes synesthesia? Although we don't know the exact reason, there are two theories explaining this condition. In first, irregular sprouting of new neural connections (similar to accidental crosstalk or cross wiring) seems to be the reason behind this condition. The other theory suggests that all of us are born synesthetes; that is, the baby in the womb sees and smells its mother through her voice, but as we grow and mature our brains become pruned or blocked. Who knows what type of synesthetic condition that Edward may have when he sent this Nick Wong's poem to his Jane:

the way I feel
you in every
colour and see
you in every song.
maybe one day
you can cure my affliction, but
till then, my longing
will always
taste of you.

EMOTION

Easily stressed? At risk of developing high blood pressure

The tendency to take more stress during youth may increase the risk of developing high blood pressure later in life, suggests a study. Also, stressed youths who are overweight are three times more likely to develop high blood pressure, showed the findings, published online in the journal *Heart*. Casey Crump, researcher from the Stanford University in California, US used the national disease registry data to track the health of more than 1.5 million 18-year-old men, who had been conscripted into the army in Sweden between 1969 and 1997, till the end of 2012. None of the conscripts had high blood pressure when they began their stint in the military. Their stress resilience level was measured by structured interview. The men were quizzed about psychological adjustments made, their conflicts and successes, and responsibilities assumed at school, home, or at work, to gain a picture of an individual's emotional stability and maturity and arrive at a score of between one and nine on the stress resilience scale, with nine indicating high resilience. Between 1969 and 2012, some 93,000 of the conscripts were diagnosed with high blood pressure. The average age of the men at the end of the monitoring period was 47, and the average age at diagnosis was 49. A low stress resilience score at the age of 18 was associated with a heightened risk of developing high blood pressure in later life. Men in the bottom 20 per cent of scores had a more than 40 per cent heightened risk of the condition than those in the highest 20 per cent of scores.