



The Mathematicians

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Transcriber's Note:

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They were in the garden. "Now, Zoe," said Zenia Hawkins to her nine-year-old daughter, "quit fluttering around, and papa will tell you a story."

Zoe settled down in the hammock. "A true story, papa?"

"It all happened exactly like I'm going to tell you," said Drake Hawkins, pinching Zoe's rosy cheek. "Now: two thousand and eleven years ago in 1985, figuring by the earthly calendar of that time, a tribe of beings from the Dog-star Sirius invaded the earth."

"And what did these beings look like, father?"

"Like humans in many, many respects. They each had two arms, two legs and all the other organs that humans are endowed with."

"Wasn't there any difference at all between the Star-beings and the humans, papa?"

"There was. The newcomers, each and all, had a pair of wings covered with green feathers growing from their shoulders, and long, purple tails."

"How many of these beings were there, father?"

"Exactly three million and forty-one male adults and three female adults. These creatures first appeared on Earth on the island of Sardinia. In five weeks' time they were the masters of the entire globe."

"Didn't the Earth-lings fight back, papa?"

"The humans warred against the invaders, using bullets, ordinary bombs, super-atom bombs and gases."

"What were those things like, father?"

"Oh, they've passed out of existence long ago. 'Ammunition' they were called. The humans fought each other with such things."

"And not with ideas, like we do now, father?"

"No, with guns, just like I told you. But the invaders were immune to the ammunition."

"What does 'immune' mean?"

"Proof against harm. Then the humans tried germs and bacteria against the star-beings."

"What were those things?"

"Tiny, tiny bugs that the humans tried to inject into the bodies of the invaders to make them sicken and die. But the bugs had no effect at all on the star-beings."

"Go on, papa. These beings over-ran all Earth. Go on from there."

"You must know, these newcomers were vastly more intelligent than the Earth-lings. In fact, the invaders were the greatest mathematicians in the System."

"What's the System? And what does mathematician mean?"

"The Milky Way. A mathematician is one who is good at figuring, weighing, measuring, clever with numbers."

"Then, father, the invaders killed off all the Earth-lings?"

"Not all. They killed many, but many others were enslaved. Just as the humans had used horses and cattle, the newcomers so used the humans. They made workers out of some, others they slaughtered for food."

"Papa, what sort of language did these Star-beings talk?"

"A very simple language, but the humans were never able to master it. So, the invaders, being so much smarter, mastered all the languages of the globe."

"What did the Earth-lings call the invaders, father?"

"'An-vils'. Half angels, half devils."

"Then, papa, everything was peaceful on Earth after the An-vils enslaved the humans?"

"For a little while. Then, some of the most daring of the humans, led by a man named Knowall, escaped into the interior of Greenland. This Knowall was a psychiatrist, the foremost on Earth."

"What's a psychiatrist?"

"A dealer in ideas."

"Then, he was very rich?"

"He'd been the richest human on Earth. After some profound thought, Knowall figured a way to rid the earth of the An-vils."

"How, papa?"

"He perfected a method, called the Knowall-Hughes, Ilinski technique, of imbuing these An-vils with human emotions."

"What does 'imbuing' mean?"

"He filled them full of and made them aware of."

Zenia interrupted, "Aren't you talking a bit above the child's understanding, Drake?"

"No, mama," said Zoe. "I understand what papa explained. Now, don't interrupt."

"So, Knowall," continued Drake, "filled the An-vils with human feelings such as Love, Hate, Ambition, Jealousy, Malice, Envy, Despair, Hope, Fear, Shame and so on. Very soon the An-vils were acting like humans, and in ten days, terrible civil wars wiped out the An-vils' population by two-thirds."

"Then, papa, the An-vils finally killed off each other?"

"Almost, until among them a being named Zalibar, full of saintliness and persuasion, preached the brotherhood of all An-vils. The invaders, quickly converted, quit their quarrels, and the Earth-lings were even more enslaved."

"Oh, papa, weren't Knowall and his followers in Greenland awfully sad the way things had turned out?"

"For a while. Then Knowall came up with the final pay-off."

"Is that slang, papa? Pay-off?"

"Yes. The coup-de-grace. The ace in the hole that he'd saved, if all else failed."

"I understand, papa. The idea that would out-trump anything the other side had to offer. What was it, father? What did they have?"

"Knowall imbued the An-vils with nostalgia."

"What is nostalgia?"

"Home sickness."

"Oh, papa, wasn't Knowall smart? That meant, the An-vils were all filled with the desire to fly back to the star from where they had started."

"Exactly. So, one day, all the An-vils, an immense army, flapping their great green wings, assembled in the Black Hills of North America, and, at a given signal, they all rose up from Earth and all the humans chanted, 'Glory, glory, the day of our deliverance!'"

"So then, father, all the An-vils flew away from Earth?"

"Not all. There were two child An-vils, one male and one female, aged two years, who had been born on Earth, and they started off with all the other An-vils and flew up into the sky. But when they reached the upper limits of the strato-sphere, they hesitated, turned tail and fluttered back to Earth where they had been born. Their names were Zizzo and Zizza."

"And what happened to Zizzo and Zizza, papa?"

"Well, like all the An-vils, they were great mathematicians. So, they multiplied."

"Oh, papa," laughed Zoe, flapping her wings excitedly, "that was a very nice story!"

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