

The Twelfth Century
by
The Dark Lord Insidious
(just call me Sid)

**A New Beginning:
Zombies
&
Skeletons
&
Not So Elvin Princesses,
Oh my!**

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**### Chapter 7 ###
Math Class ###
The Constant Gardener ###**

Martin is wearing his standard gardening outfit: a very badly worn suit jacket and ratty bowtie. He's an old fashioned type of guy. But truthfully, I was expecting him to change into something a little more (modern and/or) presentable, but I suppose that's my fault for not making my intentions clear and thinking he would do something about his appearance on his own. But he doesn't care about such things. The type of thing Martin cares about are similar to the (obscure, at best) multivariate poly-factorial trigonometric function that he is currently solving at the blackboard, as the children file in. Of course, he doesn't

notice them. They're just his students. But then, to be fair, for their part, they don't seem to notice him (their teacher), either.

And when the bell rings, well, that doesn't do anything to change the current state of affairs, either.

Chris continues to talk to Kate.

Gwyneth the Gay Witch (she/he worships the Queen Mother, you know) continues to make those paper chain thingies. There's probably a proper name for those paper chain thingies, but I don't know what it is (and I'm not going to bother asking around to figure it out). All the same (and/or any-the-way), the concept is simple enough. You take a sheet of paper, fold it up, cut out (or rip out in this particular case) the bits that aren't needed, and when you unfold it, you have a string of dancing figures (snowflakes, birds, flowers, or whatever, but if they're people then you have the potential) to complete your cabalistic circle: handy, if you find yourself in a Coven of One, as Gwyneth so often does.

Moving on, Frank and S-Kelly (of undead fame) are using the paper (which we handed out to all the students previous to the 'take') to make paper airplanes, spitballs, and (the ever popular) origami boulders. They launch these through the air, hither and thon, while Nicki the Ninja hops about, gracefully knocking them out of the air like some sort of Monster Movie missile defense system.

Meanwhile, Daren (the Dwarf) is doodling.

While Ned is explaining to Abby what it is (exactly, like, very specifically and minutely) that Martin is doing at the blackboard -- solving an obscure multivariate poly-factorial trigonometric function -- a fact which she probably would have already known if she'd bothered to pay the slightest bit of attention to the flavor text... or then, perhaps, she doesn't understand the flavor text (or hasn't gotten that far in her studies so that she can read flavor text... yet -- even if it's hanging about in the air for all to see). But it doesn't really make any difference (either, any, or all of the forgoing being beside the point), as Abby doesn't understand a single thing about Ned's explanation, either.

Mine'irva, on the other hand, would like to think that she understands Ned's explanation... parts of it... corners of it... or, you

know, sort of like an inkling little bit regarding the general idea of it all. But Elvin Princesses do not talk to, well, pretty much everybody, and most certainly not to the sort of riff-raff (commoners, the lot) that attends public school... or the type of person who understands obscure multivariate poly-factorial trigonometric functions, as that sort of person clearly is of the artisanal class. I mean, seriously, one does not socialize with the help.

This would, also (sort of), explain why Mine'irva completely fails to register the existence of Jack the Jock, who is busy trying to put the moves on her (while the getting is good, I might add). His intent is to invite her to the school dance (not that there's a dance scheduled anytime in the near future that I know of; but then, it's never too late to start planning for your future, if you know what I mean). Anyhow, it's not like Mine'irva is trying to be aloof. No, far worse. She isn't even aware of Jack, doesn't even know that he's talking to her. How insulting! Or at least, it would be, if you could insult a commoner such as Jack so obviously is.

And speaking of insulting (which is sort of like saying, 'and speaking of Elves and their relations with the other races'), Strathmore is practicing The Dozens with a Gaggle of Goblins in the back of the class. Now, formally The Dozens is a bit of an art form -- a thing of linguistic beauty -- that if done properly, can be a joy to behold. The object being simple enough -- to insult one's opponent as gracefully (and backhandedly) as possible, you know, by like saying something along the lines of:

'Your {mother, father, sister, brother} is a real pro, I really enjoyed their companionship last night. Unfortunately, I had to leave in a hurry when I was done and I forgot to pay. You wouldn't happen to have change for a copper?'

Or in other words, your {mother, father, sister, brother} is good, so good, they're professionals... who have to give it away... so perhaps, not that good after all. But don't ask me what this says about the one who employs their services in the first place...

Anyway, excepting the case where the exchange of insults leads to open warfare, Playing The Dozens (as The Dozens is sometimes called)

is almost always preferable to physical conflict; and in and of itself, the entire exercise can be fun and witty and delightful.

However, in this particular case, we're talking about a bunch of goblins... and Strathmore. So, the 'witty repartee' (I use the term loosely) consists mainly of:

"Elf!"

"Goblin!"

"Stupid Elf!"

"Stupid Goblin!"

"You're so stupid, Elf, you don't even know what you look like."

"Oh, yeah? You're so stupid, you don't even know what your mother looks like." Of course, to understand this insult fully, one must consider that being a Goblin, it is a given that they do not know who their father is.

But alas, these particular comments were the high point. And from there, it reverts quickly back to:

"Stupid Elf!"

"Stupid Goblin!"

And as witty as that is (containing all the pathos, after all, that is to be found in most modern literature), the exchange must sadly come to a premature end (because as I understand it, there are supposed to be twelve iterations of 'Stupid Goblin!' 'Stupid Elf' in a full game of The Dozens.) Anyway, like I was saying, the witty repartee must sadly come to a premature end, for it is here, about halfway through the class, that Marvin looks up from the blackboard (I guess, he solved the problem -- or could have, truth is, I'll never know), as he looks Strathmore dead-in-the-eye (clever pun that, coming from a guy who runs a cemetery), and shouts, "CHAOS!" (an equally clever and/or artful bit of misdirection, as Strathmore is, of course, a Chaos Elf, and so the entire class thinks Martin is yelling at him.)

Well, yelling, shouting, or stating in excited tones a declarative statement about the universe, the truth is, I don't know, nor shall I likely ever. What I do know is that it is effective -- very effective. Everyone shuts up. And ironically enough, the classroom immediately reverts to structured ORDER!

Wow! Three (count them -- 1, 2, 3) fantastically wonderful plays on words right in a row! I'm on a roll! But then, you know what they say: good things come in threes, so I wouldn't be expecting any more quality punery of that sort for a while, because if I did manage to throw out another scorcher like those three aforementioned wall-bangers anytime soon, well, then, I'd then have to say good things come in fours. But they don't. They come in threes. So, I can't. And I won't.

Um, yeah. So, right.

I will now return you to your regularly scheduled mathematical lecture, already in progress.

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“Chaos is the starting point,” Martin the Gardener begins (so I guess, the lecture wasn't actually already in progress, it was just starting -- my bad). “And from out of the primordial muck emerged man,” Martin being a Human, “or whatever gods you wish to include in the equation on an axiomatic basis. And in this mix, surrounding them all, was the abyss of unreason and the void of the unknown. But through luck or magic or divine guidance or whatever cause you wish to put forth and champion, our ancestors discovered reasoned thought. And the crowning height of that reasoned thought was?” And here, Martin pauses. “That was a question. A rhetorical question to be sure, but a question nonetheless. So, does anyone have the answer?” Excellent! Good! I hate when I have competition. So, listen up. This class is the answer. And so, what you really need to ask yourself at this juncture is what was the question? But then again, if that's what you're asking yourself, you should have paid more attention when I was explaining that part, because we're beyond that now. Moved on to bigger and better things, we have. For instead of the question, we are now looking for the answer? Speaking of which, does anyone care to put one forth? An answer to it all?” And since no one does (don't ask me why, doesn't seem that hard to me, didn't Martin just say?), Martin looks at his roster and picks out a promising looking name. “Mine'irva, that's Elvish,

right? And Elves are supposed to be smart. So, Mine'irva, the question? The answer? Either? Neither? Both?"

And this is where all eyes in the class focus on Mine'irva.

And this is when Mata intervenes, because that attention, here and now, is undesired (it almost always is). So, Marta blurts out, "Love," i being the first likely answer that comes to her mind for the riddle put before her. "Love is the answer."

But if you really want to redirect attention, you have to grab it by the horns (balls, or really, whatever is handiest, then squeeze real hard -- real, real hard) and not let go, so Strathmore throws out a competing idea in contention to the first, "Honor." And then, since this is a math class and that's probably wrong, but there's safety in numbers, he throws out, "Duty," as well, before sneering at the Goblins (as only a cocky Elvin lad can) and finishes with, "Justice."

"But love trumps all," Mata counters, which probably was a mistake as that brings the focus of attention back to herself; and therefore, Mine'irva, who is sitting next to her. But you know how sibling rivalries can be. And although Strathmore is poised to keep the debate going, Jack the Jock is still a bit miffed (well, more than just a bit miffed) at Mine'irva, because she was ignoring him earlier; and so, he takes this opportunity to enter the fray and point out, "The question was for the beauty queen," because let's face it, it may be difficult to get a handle on exactly who or what Mine'irva looks like, but all can agree, she looks fantastic... even orcs and goblins can agree on that.

Mine'irva, of course, doesn't say anything. To respond to Jack's accusation, to respond to a mere commoner, to acknowledge their existence, well, that's Mata's job. And in all fairness, Mata tries to say something, but Jack will have none of it. "What? Can't she talk? Do you say everything for her? How about when she eats? Do you chew her food? What happens when she has to go to the bathroom? Do you do that for her, too? Can't she wipe her own ass?" Sure, it's anger, momentary, not well thought out, but the pertinent factor is that Jack's final comment, well, that just crossed the line.

Now, you (or I) may not be intimately and continually aware of all the fineries involved in political debate, social intercourse, and whatnot.

Sometimes we (yes, even I) say things best left unsaid or that are obvious insults when you examine them closely in hindsight, but which maybe don't really seem that bad when we first say them. Well, to help the rest of us along (mere mortals that we are), the Elves have developed a rather subtle way of expressing their extreme displeasure whenever we open our mouths and display our callousness. And in this particular case, that displeasure would be made evident by Strathmore's sword being held against Jack's throat... ever so delicately. And really, I can't say that I even saw Strathmore jump over the two intervening rows of desks, chairs, and tables to get into position behind Jack. (He's that fast!). But once there (in position), Strathmore takes his time. (You may notice him taking his time throughout this tale of ours, but especially whenever he's the center of attention as he currently is). And so, at this junction, slow and deliberately, just taking his time, Strathmore whispers, ever so quietly (but also, loud enough for all the class to hear), "Now, I don't know about all the rest," the talking, eating, etc., "but when the princess needs some killing done, I'm the one who takes care of it, capiche?"

And in truth, for all anybody will ever know, this is the first that Mine'irva takes notice of, well, anything going on about her. So, as if she'd just dropped in from a Higher Plane of Awareness, she looks Strathmore over, notes that his sword is drawn, and that it's drawn across the neck of some poor ignorant bastard, who clearly is about to die (and he was so cute, too). But then, she is a gracious sovereign host, and with a wave of her hand, she summarily dismisses the disturbance, and sends it back to the void from whence it came as she, herself, returns to a self-imposed exile of social oblivion.

"Well, I guess that means, I get to kill you," Strathmore notes sort of cheerily. Of course, that's not what Mine'irva had intended and he knows it. But it's been, like, what? A week since he's bloodied his sword. And everyone knows you lose your edge if you don't keep in practice. (And there's that pesky fourth pun. And seriously, didn't I warn you about it, because is it just me, or it just not very good.)

But we were in the middle of something. (Ah, yes. Putting Jack out of his misery, I do believe.) But alas, Mata is not going to have any

of that, which is to say the princess is not going to have any of that. And so, Mata reminds Strathmore of, “Honor. The answer is honor, you said so yourself. And we are under a truce.”

To which, Strathmore shrugs, as he climbs lazily back over the desks from whence he came and returns to his seat in the back of the class next to the Goblins. (How fitting.)

“You should have killed him,” Gary advises, a sentiment that Glenn, Garth, Grant, Jim Bo (don’t ask), and the rest of the Goblins are all too eager to share:

“Yeah, we should, totally, kill him.”

“We could gut him after class.”

“Yeah, it could be fun!”

“A bonding exercise... for that truce thing you spoke of.”

“Not sure what a truce is...”

“But we never killed with an Elf before.”

“Nor I with a Goblin. But the princess has spoken and that is law,” a statement that Strathmore feels the need to say a bit louder, so that all (and especially that annoying Jack Jock Jerk Joker... Jasmine sniffing Jackbite Jerk-off of a Jack-horse) might better understand. “The princess has spoken... and that is law.”

And that would seem to lay the matter to rest.

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And from there, well, don’t ask me why...

Maybe Martin is a bit soft in the head. It happens: corpse rot. Sooner or later, we all fade away, and sometimes the worms come before we fade to dust. But for whatever reason, Martin seems to be genuinely ecstatic about the foregoing display of near deadly violence in his classroom.

Ah, but then, I suppose, there must be a reason.

“This is why I like teaching,” Martin explains. “A simple question. A simple answer. Undefined. Undetermined. But clear and concise. That is math. That is the beauty and power of the functional array.”

OK. It's a reason. (I'm assuming.) But it's certainly not a clear or compelling reason. (OK. Maybe it is compelling to those that understand. But I don't, so it isn't.) But then, Martin is a mathematician and this is a mathematics class, so what kind of clarity or reason you were expecting, I'll never know.

Anyway, Martin seems pleased. And so, it is about here that he starts drawing on the blackboard:

F(x)

"F of X is the generic array. It can be anything."

F(x) = yellow

"Anything."

F(x) = blue

"Until the function is defined, it is an unknown -- an empty placeholder."

F(x) = G(x) = H(x)

"So, what is F of X? I don't know. It's G of X. It's H of X. It's what happens when you walk into a classroom at the start of a semester and suddenly swords are drawn! It's the dawning of a new day! A new era! The potential is unlimited! Knowledge and meaning are easily compressed... or expanded."

F(x) = G(x) + H(x)

"But if you want real fun, what you need to do is re-curse it and bring it back to itself, like a snake eating it's tail."

F(x) = F(F(x) + 1)

"Plus one, plus one, plus one: and from there, you get unlimited..."

"Dragons!" Abby shouts triumphantly.

A statement to which all there really is to say (and so Martin says it), "Yes, provided..."

F(x) = F(F(x) + D'ragon)

"Where D-Prime is the proper magical incantation. Pretty basic stuff," and this is about where Martin pauses to look around the classroom (and perhaps most of the reading public) at the blank faces that surround him. "Well, it may look complicated. But it's simple really. Iterating F(x)," which he says as 'F of X', "is a power multiplier. Once you understand that, the only real trick is to choose the right F(x)

to plug into the back end of your spell. And from there, the potential, if not unlimited, is far greater than it was before,” and then, after pausing to look around again at all the blank faces, Martin concedes, “But perhaps I’m skipping ahead... and missing a few rather important qualifiers. First, not every $F(x)$ makes sense.”

$F(x) = \text{Quiring} + \text{the black bus} * (\text{tastes/color}) - \text{Tuesday}$

“This makes no sense. Not to me, anyhow. This won’t resolve cleanly. In math class, this is an error. In a class on magic, this would be a disaster.”

I’ll have to agree. I think that sums it up nicely.

$F(x) = F(F(x) + 1)$

“On the other hand, this is the recursive problem we saw earlier. It makes sense. It’s easy to see where it’s going. But unfortunately, as written, it has no practical application... unless you’re trying commit suicide or go insane, that is,” which is quite true (on account of there being no end to the madness, no recursive safeguard; but there I go, sounding like I know what I’m talking about).

Anyway, it is here (just like in your better dramatizations, the point almost made, the topic almost covered; but then, not quite, still leaving out some important very important bits -- safeguards, etc.) that the bell rings and the kids make a dash for the door, leaving Martin to call after them something about how these last two points will form the basis for his lectures in the coming semester as the class surveys the more important Functional Formulas of Man -- the basis of their power and why the chasm was crossed in the first place... or why anyone ever noticed that the chasm was even there.

But then, perhaps he (and/or I) have gone on for long enough, so for the time being, “Class is dismissed!”

Though, the last is said to an empty lecturing hall, so why he even bothers is beyond me.

But I guess that means the next class must be very important, seeing as how no one wants to get there late, so we probably shouldn’t dawdle about, either.

{{{Chapter End}}}