

# Intelligent Life

A Short Story

by

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The morning broke beautifully. The sky was a brilliant cerulean blue with tiny flecks of orange left over from the sunrise. The air was crisp and cool but not cold and it was moderated by a warm, radiant sun. It was, in short, a beautiful morning.

A dispassionate observer would have noted the incongruence of the glorious weather with the frightening events that were about to unfold. Given the nature of these events, there were, however, no dispassionate observers to be found.

Shortly after 9 a.m. a huge, hulking flying saucer appeared, quite literally, out of the blue. It hovered menacingly over the city in complete silence. People stared at the UFO with a mixture of amazement and dread although, to be sure, dread had the upper hand.

Suddenly a disembodied voice with an “electronic accent” spoke to the assembled crowd. “Greetings, Earthlings. We come from the planet Alpha. We, like you, are scouring the universe in search of intelligent life. However, unlike you, we have a rather higher standard of what ‘intelligent life’ means. We have been observing you Earthlings for some time and we have concluded that you are, indeed, a life form but we have our doubts about your intelligence. We, on Alpha, are fully

rational. We have observed that you Earthlings behave quite irrationally a great deal of the time.”

The voice left the crowd to ponder these remarks and then continued. “We have come to make you an offer. If you can demonstrate that your intelligence, such as it is, is the equal of ours, we will leave you in peace. If, as we strongly suspect, you cannot, we will destroy you and your planet.”

As the people stared at one another in panic, a young Mathematics Professor from the local university named Michael stepped forward. “We accept your challenge,” he said with a degree of confidence not fully shared by the rest of the crowd.

Suddenly, a strange alien creature materialized and addressed Michael. “Show me your proof.”

Strangely calm, Michael turned to the creature and asked, “How shall I address you?”

“You may call me Delta,” the alien responded.

“Like the airline?” asked Michael.

“No, you stupid human, like the Greek letter! Now, I repeat, show me your proof.”

Michael took a piece of paper from his pocket and wrote the following in block letters:

THIS SENTENCE IS FALSE.

Michael turned the paper so that the alien could read it. "Tell me, Delta, what does your rationality lead you to conclude about whether this sentence is true or false."

Delta, who was naturally green, turned greener still. He began to vibrate. White smoke emanated from his ears. Then, he began to shrink. He grew smaller and smaller. Soon he was infinitesimal. And then, in an instant, he vanished. Moments later, the UFO vanished, as well.

The crowd turned to Michael for an explanation of what had just transpired. "A purely rational being cannot tolerate a logical paradox. Besides," he added, "as anyone who has ever studied calculus knows, Delta always goes to zero."