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Introduction by **Ray Bradbury**

This business of having me introduce *Flatland* is like asking a blind man to describe rainbows, Quasimodo to give lessons in grace and motion to Baryshnikov, King Kong to instruct Peter Pan in flying. What you have before you is the least scientific of all the science-fiction writers since Time began. I barely made it through primitive geometry, flunked algebra four years running, opted out of physics and chemistry, and wound up battered but unbowed over in those safe territories provided by cornmeal-mush biology and zoology. Why then the fourth-rate drop-out dropping in here to survey two-dimensional territory? Curiosity, for one. I read *Flatland* for the first time some 40 years ago. I wanted to see how I felt about it, this late on. The rest of it is admiration for imagination. *Flatland* strikes me as a complete work, a work with an individual skin around it, one that very few other writers could ever have set out to do and actually have done it. For, let's face it, the wondrous thing about Edwin A. Abbott is that he seems to have 'thought of everything.' Consider those special nights in your own life when you invite four or five special and truly grand and loud friends in, and toss up some fancy, some idea, some notion. The seals then cavort, don't they? First one, then another, of the loud-mouths happily nose the fancy, tap or knock the idea or notion higher. Each, in turn, adds to the exercise, rounding the concept as it jumps, moves, sails above your friends who, if they are not careful, get drunk on their powers of imagination. Everyone suddenly wants to seize and fatten and transform the merest molecule of a dream into a great touring balloon in which to soar over the world and vanish beyond the Moon. The next morning, of course, it may all be hogwash and tripe. Not so with Edwin A. Abbott. He does all of the above alone. He is his own team of friends. He sits in every chair. And when an Isoceles Triangle drifts down here or a Square or Pentagon floats there (or cuts in sidewise, I should say, remembering the two dimensions we are working with here), Abbott is game and knocks the idea end around end, sends it skittering, then runs to receive and cudgel it on the other side of his manuscript room. Why has the book remained so popular for almost a hundred years? Because, like Mark Twain, Professor Abbott must have thought: I refuse to be serious about a serious subject. Churches brim with seriousness and snoozers snooze. Scientific conferences of one denomination or another drone on through endless and ungoiden afternoons and one chooses the catnap as against suicide. The only medicine is high spirits and good humor. Professor Abbott has both in tonic proportions. I cannot help feeling that those who shared his home with him while he was flattening his concepts to fit his pen must have heard quick bursts of laughter from his den when it suddenly struck him to write, for instance, those sections on 'feeling' as a means of identification amongst the Flatlanders. There are serene and marvelous sexual under-and-overtone here perhaps more for us in this neo-barbarian age, than for those who inhabited the three-plus-one dimensions of 1884. Abbott, in other words, is able to play himself and win. Given the measurements of Flatland he moves out intuitively and with huge delight to 'feel' his own creations, sum

them up in shapes, and report back to us. We go with him, because it is not often we have such a guest, in our living room, so full of mathematical logic leaning into fun that we are quite content to shut our mouths and score his game. Yet, after we've shut the book, we can replay the game ourselves, make new teams, come up with new components, new challenges, new revelations, hoping to find some Flatland area neglected by Professor Abbott and stake out our own territorial imperatives there, if we are lucky. Which is what a good/fine book is all about. Any book worth its fertilizer is a book that, when finished, the mind delights in making its own. If the book has a decent Idea, we then write our own sequels. The books we love most are those that make us feel brightest, most creative. We may well read *Principia Mathematica*, or some of Einstein's deepest hip-boot explorations, but they cripple us with a severe attack of Dumb. Stunned by them, we feel dwarfed and depressed by our own genetic brain-lack as we shut the covers. Abbott reverses this, bless him. Along the way, though some of his paragraphs may have to be read twice to insure the aim and guarantee the fun, he invites us into the fray, the frolic, the soccer-game laughing its course across Flatland. Finished, we are sore tempted, while knowing it impossible, to write *Flatland II*. Abbott is that best of houseguests, met some half-dozen times in my life, usually English, and joyfully welcome, that guest who modestly pretends that you, yes, you are the one present at tea who has the sun-bright brains and the Ageless Ideas. Such guests, as does Abbott, grow you to a size. I recall Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard and Bertrand Russell, who, with Abbott, should have worn signs about their necks reading: Drink Me. Like Alice, we could but obey and, doing so, borrow their brains and smile all the while. As for women, does someone know, can anyone tell me, how many have read this book? Is it for lady/women/females at all? Come right down to it, are most men's games for women ever, no matter what the Liberators say? I pose the question seriously, with no chauvinist intent. It will be interesting to see, in the next century, how many ladies trot over into the supposed fun and games of men's toys logics, physics. Will Flatland, with its amusing and perhaps irritating attitudes on females, forever remain a male preserve? (I can hear a bray and a trumpet of Red Queens out there, just now, crying: Off with his head!) My guess is that Professor Abbott and the rest of us smart-ass males will be seen entering and leaving the Reform Club, arm in arm, a century from now, even as we entered and left it 100 years ago, carrying copies of Abbott's book with us. In sum, the voice of the male turtle will be heard throughout Flatland. The women will not join us. Why? For the best reason: we men are bores. The things we talk of, the notions and fancies we doodle with, the toys we build and fly are, by in large, bores. To women, that is. If this were a world of women alone the toyshops would long since have shut down. As for men, we'd as soon destroy a world as give up one Toy. Go ahead, argue me. Abbott, true to his race, and men are a race apart from women, made up of large-sized boys with stupid interests, is a make and runner of Toys in a mathematical land looked down upon by women. We men must play here, practically deserted and alone with our sex, with a few tomboys along for good company and fine chat. Enough of that. For those of us who invade and come out of this book, what is the final result? That we look up, look down, look

around, and realize how fragile is our vision, how circumscribed our imaginations. We sense all over again that we are victimized on all sides, top and bottom, in and out, by our blood, our environment, our faulty senses. We are baffled by the microscopic which dares us to see it because it is Too Small, and the Cosmos which dares us to take it all in because it is Too Much. Suddenly we are Flatlanders. Perhaps not as prevented from actions or thoughts as the amiable inhabitants of this volume, but most certainly put upon by the baffling relativities of Gravity, mysterious Space, inexplicable Light, and rushing Time. If we feel burdened with our ridiculous situation, we can also feel electrified by the fact that we have learned as much as we have learned, and moved as far as we have moved out of the caves, into cities and up toward some new technological Olympus while hoping for Far Beyond. We have murdered along the way, but saved as many as we murdered, with new medicines, mostly in the last half-century. Along the way to becoming what we seem to inevitably wish to become, a handbook of insights might well be this Flatland. It won't necessarily prevent us from being fools, but it may help us not to be absolute fools. Finally, *Flatland* does what any good fiction based on science, moving into fantasy, does—presents a reverse image of our own world, or an image elongated or shortened or fattened or thinned to the marrow. For Realism rarely works. Realism is for many, including myself, a turnoff. If people know you are out to get them with the Real and Only The Real, they will shut their eyes, then shut the book. Metaphor is everything. If I set out to write a novel about automobiles impacting our society, your best and most honest response might be: I know that already. Tell me something New. The Something New is always Metaphor. Turn reality inside out or wrong-side-to, and we'll sit up and blink. In my *Fahrenheit 451* I ran my hero Montag across town, escaping the book-burning villains of a future time who pursued him in helicopters. The police didn't catch Montag, but a clutch of maniac kids in a drunken beetle car almost ran him down, just for the hell of it. The incident is metaphor. And it says more about our car culture than any bishop's preachment or any dogeared tale of Realism ever written. So it is with *Flatland*. Pancake yourself through this book and you come out the far side with a nice fantastic conceptualization of our own mores, foibles, chauvinisms, but done by painless, therefore invigorating, metaphor. Abbott pretends to be doing one thing, but is truly doing another. Off-guard, you sidle up and peer over his shoulder. At which moment, he whirls, cries "Gotcha!" and flattens you with his literary steamroller. Too late you realize you have been entertained and taught-a-lesson, all in one. In one of the earlier Introductions I re-read in writing this, I came across the following condescension: "This is no rifling tale of science fiction. Its aim is to instruct, and it is written with subtle artistry." Piffle. As if all really good science fiction wasn't written to instruct, always hoping for subtle artistry. But above all, good Lord hear us, to Entertain. Edwin A. Abbott's *Flatland* is a highly entertaining funfest of concepts that just happens to instruct. Let's keep our lines clear there. God save us from the do-gooders in literature who are out to 'improve' us. That sort of thing leads to Inquisitions and firing-squads. May their like meet up with the needle-pointed isosceles Triangle that sneezes, inflicting fatalities! For now, *Flatland* awaits you. The fun,