

THE FORUM

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ARCVAD THE TERRIBLE

BENJAMIN DE CASSERES

ARCVAD ascended to the top of his observatory and looking through his giant telescope he had, in a moment, the planet earth under his microscopic eye.

Arcvad was one hundred and fifty years old, as they say on the planet Earth; and he was just in his prime. Though he lived in the first city of Mars, Ulfete, no city claimed him as her own. Among the Martians Arcvad was called *the* Martian. He was the crowning glory of the Martian mind, the apex of its mental evolution. He was the summation of race-aspiration. His psychic nature was a fusion, dilated a thousand-fold, of the psychic natures of Shakespeare, Newton, Euclid, Edison, Moses and Leonardo da Vinci, of the planet Earth.

The equivalent of Ecce Homo! among the Martians was Arcvad. The equivalent among the Martians for Messiah was Arcvad. For one hundred and thirty-five years there had poured from that supreme mind inventions, poems, visions and new harmonies constructed of the débris of lesser minds.

His ideas had revolutionized life on the planet. Ulfete was a city of marvels, as were Ixrid, Poltum and Pranfar. These marvels had come from the pullulating brain of Arcvad.

Life on Mars had been hard from the beginning. Nature was niggardly and "man" had developed early. He had to develop and perpetuate all his latent powers quickly to survive the menace of the common enemy, Nature. There was consequently now only one race. Nationalities were unknown, though skin complexions differed in different parts of the planet. A common

fear had amalgamated their instincts. Out of this early amalgamation had come a superb race of mental and physical giants. A common fear had wrought out a marvellous civilization. Their consciousness had an *awareness* that to us would be supernatural. The physical and mental laws known to Earthlings had been forgotten by them thousands of years before the present time. What to Earthlings is occult, to them is commonplace. Arcvad in one hundred and thirty-five years had added miracle to miracle, marvel to marvel, ceaselessly transforming and re-adapting the lives of these giant planetarians.

But his supreme scientific poem was yet to be uttered. His stupendous deed was yet to be done. He would do under the very eyes of his fellow planetarians, he said, what heretofore had only been in the power of Og to do. Og is the Martian algebraic formula for the unknowable and ineffable IT. The Martians admitted the existence of this Thing behind all phenomena, but expressed it algebraically as Og.

The twenty-five million inhabitants of Mars (the Martians put to death with a drug that brought beautiful dreams all the sick, stunted and ill-born, hence pity was rudimentary with them) had lived thus in a state of expectation bordering on ecstasy for three years, since the day Arcvad had announced his intention of doing that which, as he said, would at once be an act of supreme power and supreme mercy. And the Martians now spoke of this as the coming apotheosis of the genius of Arcvad.

Arcvad ascended to the top of his observatory and looked through his telescope. He was a giant even for a Martian. Above nine feet in height, his face was of a deep copperish red from which flamed two worlds, two mighty black suns. His head was surmounted with a raven black crown of hair. His face was a Venice of furrows, lines and seams. The Martians said the face of Arcvad was a map of the planet, which is, indeed, a Venice with forty thousand canals.

The night was brilliant. The Earth shone to the north-east—a scintillating purple patch. Arcvad had, through the powers of his monstrous telescope, made himself master of worlds. It was two thousand feet in length and the lens was five hundred

feet in diameter. Its magnifying power was beyond all comprehension to Earthlings. One had but to look through it, and the rest was silence—and awe. It brought the planets of our sidereal system so near to the eye that only small parts of them could be seen at a time. It took Arcvad many years before he had seen all of Jupiter.

He had discovered all the planets to be uninhabited—except the Earth and Saturn. But the Earth was the especial study of Arcvad. He was the master of that planet. For fifty years his eye and brain in conjunction with his fearful instrument had dissected the life of the beings on the neighboring planet. The life-drama on the little purple light in the distance was more familiar to Arcvad than to any Earthling. He was the perpetual spy of space.

He had pondered for years on the phenomena of Earth-life. His essays and notes filled hundreds of volumes. These books, together with the moving pictures of Earth-life, which were thrown on giant screens in the great halls of granite, were the fairy tales of Mars. These moving pictures, the invention of Arcvad, were taken direct from the telescope by means of a wonderful instrument, the flwong. The first Earth moving-pictures—the cinematograph itself had been a source of amusement to the Martians hundreds of years before the present time—had appeared at about the time of the American Civil War. Every event on the planet from the firing on Fort Sumter to the foundering of the *Titanic*—by what mighty good luck had Arcvad's telescope rested just against that portion of the Earth that night!—was seen and known intimately to the Martian. In the place of acting, the Martian faced reality. Wars and wrecks being hardly comprehensible to the Martians, these pictures were a source of inexhaustible amazement and fascinating horror to them. The films were preserved for future generations and were valued beyond all the canvases on Earth of Da Vinci and Rembrandt. The life of Tokio, Berlin, Timbuctoo, Canton and Paris was the common mental property of the Martians. They understood nothing of the insane motions of crowds and the ugliness of the cities of the Earth was to them hallucinatingly fascinating. The monstrous

novelty of London, for instance, froze them with an unspeakably pleasant horror.

As Arcvad looked through the telescope on this particular night the lens englobed that part of the Earth's surface called New York. The diameter of the lens just covered the greater city.

He looked at the city for an hour. "Proof-positive," he muttered, and his face gleamed with Promethean scorn. The Great Event he had promised the Martians was near parturition time.

"Have you decided?"

Arcvad looked up and saw standing behind him his most famous disciple, his beloved Astar—Astar the Magnificent he was called among the Martians. He looked enough like Arcvad to have been his son, except that his hair was reddish gold. An Earthling would have said he was the epiphany of Da Vinci's *Golden Boy*. He was fifteen Martian years old, which on Earth would have made him about thirty. His inventions and discoveries had already made him an immortal. The most useful of his inventions was an instrument by which one could bring the light from Deimos and Phobos—Mars' two moons—to any particular spot on Mars, thus doing away with the necessity for artificial light of any kind in the streets and houses. Another and sublimer invention of Astar's was the establishment by means of telepathy—long a psychic commonplace on the planet—of a common language between the inhabitants of Mars and Saturn. It was also possible for him to evoke beings from the invisible sixth and seventh dimensional realms, the fourth and fifth dimensions having long been explored by previous scientists.

"I have decided," answered Arcvad. "You know all my notes on this famous disease spot,"—indicating to Astar New York through the telescope. "These people, if they are people, or only a species of degenerate termite, as I firmly believe, are totally devoid of intelligence of any kind. In that city in particular all life seems devoid of reason or imagination. If, as we believe, we discovered a rudimentary brain among the inhabitants of this patch of land"—putting his finger on Gorilla Land in Central Africa on a huge revolving map of the Earth—"it has

disappeared entirely when we get to this city. Observe the antics of those who climb those huge towers, observe their motions, observe their gestures. They seem diseased past all hope."

"Their manner of living, master, too, would argue a total absence of intelligence. Myriads seem to live in holes or shelves into which they crawl and emerge mechanically, while a few have constructed castles that resemble ours. These few seem to be living on that other swarm—literally eating them alive, sucking them dry. And the stupidity of those hordes that consent to be the food of those few! Could anything equal it? With them the part is greater than the whole."

"They have never even seen our signals," said Arcvad. "How quickly the Saturnians answered us! The insects on Thir"—the Martian name for the Earth—"or at least those in this particular city spend their lives erecting great towers and tearing them down again. They seem incapable of looking up. We have never seen their eyes!"

"No worse, though, after all, than the rest of Thir," replied Astar. "One spot has, however, always attracted me more than any other, for here there are signs of order and even something of a sense of beauty." Astar put his hand on the green spot on the map which on Earth is known as Paris.

"The only sign of intelligence on the planet outside of Tel-tex,"—indicating Gorilla Land in Central Africa—said Arcvad. "But how explain *this*?"

Arcvad crossed the room, followed by Astar. They entered a vast room, the private cinematograph hall of the great Arcvad. He flashed on the canvas, by making a motion in the air, the totally incomprehensible spectacle of the Siege of Paris and the crimes of the Commune.

"Our animals are more intelligent than those murderous termites or blood-letting infusoria, or whatever they are," muttered Astar.

"And they never sicken of blood and death down there, do they?" said Arcvad, and on the vast stage, by another wave of the hand he had the carnage of Siege and Commune turned off and the scenes from the Balkan War turned on.

"What are they trying to do? What is their object in living

that way?" asked Astar as the comedy of Lula Burgas began. "See with what fiendish delight and satisfaction they cut out one another's entrails and walk into one another's squashed brains. Is it a sport, I wonder, something like our great games in rudimentary form? And look at the way that thing with a giant cross on his breast is mutilating that other thing with a crescent hanging from his neck."

Among the Martians the scenes from the Balkan War, next to the massacre at Kishineff, were the most applauded in their cinematograph halls. Every mind speculated on the meaning of the fascinating charivaris on Thir. No one had arrived at any satisfactory solution. In the great colleges of learning every hypothesis had been ventured, but, like Arcvad and Astar, the learned minds were not able to arrive at any explanation. They had discovered things on Saturn by means of telepathy which awed them; on the Earth they had discovered things that either puzzled them or sent them into paroxysms of laughter. That little purple patch called Thir—was it the insane asylum of the three-dimensional world, or some rotten cancer in space, or a satire invented by Og?

The incomparable scenery of the Earth was a source of eternal delight to the Martian, whether he saw it through a telescope or on the perfected cinematograph; but the minute the Martian eye caught the motions of a ril—Martian for Earthman—there were perplexity, paradox, mystery, horror or laughter.

And it was whispered that the Great Event promised by Arcvad had something to do with Thir and the fate of the insane insect ril.

On the twentieth day after the colloquy between Arcvad and Astar the Martians did no work. It was the day of the Great Astral Event. Telescopes of every conceivable kind were in use and the few with the cinematographic attachment awaited the signal from Arcvad in his observatory. The night fell—a night of stars and lambent immensities. Never had the Earth shone so brilliantly. Her purple rays advanced on space like screaming swords.

It was the last day of the Earthling, and Arcvad the mighty

had decreed their death at midnight on Mars—at a midnight which should be equivalent to 11 A. M. in New York City. And as the planet Thir turned on its axis and presented its face to the sun 11 A. M. would sound the knell of sentiency for the murderous, insane, foolish ril.

For many years Arcvad had contemplated this act of mercy. The means of accomplishing it was of course a simple one to the Martian, and to Arcvad in particular. Among the forces known to this giant of the fourth and fifth dimensional world was a substance—bal—that once let loose in a given direction under the influence of propulsive instruments that only Arcvad could control would “electrocute,” so to speak, all forms of sentiency that it crossed. It pierced the etheric waves with the ease with which the electric bolt pierces the atmosphere of Earth. At the moment of euthanasia this substance, superior to the law of gravitation (a law that the Martian had discarded fifty thousand years before the birth of Arcvad), immobilized and petrified its object.

The plan of Arcvad was to electrocute mankind on Earth, turning them into statues and embalming them simultaneously. The sudden petrification of the ril on Thir and the throwing open of this vast museum to the eyes of his fellow-Martians for a period of fifty years, after which, with a subtle substance known as fi, he would as suddenly decompose the whole mass into gas and ether—this was what Arcvad, the omnipotent and merciful Edison of the fifth dimension, proposed to himself on this night!

And the Event, is it not recorded on the cinematograph films in the pleasure palaces of Mars? The ambush in the light! That phantasmology of the petrified ril! That eternal uncreate to-morrow of Earthlings! That landscape of manikins caught in the act of living by the act of a scientific god! Those two billion air-bibbers who’ll drink no more o’ the air! The massed and serried dreams of the Earthling cut off forever from issue! That tragic ironym pronounced only fifty million miles away!

Such smiling calvaries! Such a massacre of nonsense! Life stunned in its cells!

The stockbroker transfixed and doomed for fifty years to look with wide open eye at the price of Standard Oil.

The devotee whose knees shall wear cups in the hard flag and whose eyes must forever be riveted on the symbol of his impotent god.

Five million pedestrians in New York, Paris, Berlin, London, Tokio and Calcutta that shall never see their errands' end.

One million soldiers on dress parade in France, Germany, Italy, England, Japan and at West Point turned to automata, tin soldiers for daws to peck at.

The harlot who will never earn that dollar. The millionaire churchwarden congealed in the act of ordering a rise in the price of beef, as powerless now as the socialist who sits there at his desk, his fulmination forever frozen in his brain.

"Any given moment in time," Arcvad once wrote in one of his beautiful metaphysical studies, "is the epitome of Time itself, because the only point in Time that really exists is the now, the present moment."

And it is because of this profound truth that the life on the planet Earth—the life of the ril on Thir—is visible in the ghastly but fascinating pictures seen through the telescopes and the cinematograph films on Mars. The Earthling in his petrified gestures and attitudes epitomizes his evolution—such as it was; and to Arcvad the omnipotent and all-merciful the rils owe the abridgement of their sufferings through future cycles.

It is thus that Ril the Inconsequent, Ril the Obtuse, became Ril the Marvellous, Ril the Beautiful.