

The Human Aesthetic

At observation station 431 there was a shadow. Then another—and then—a third. A confirmed extra-peripheral object displaying quantifiable, distinct kinetometric spacial displacement. It was moving. The station coordinator swallowed hard. He felt a weird sweaty chill overtake him, and a fist knot itself in his stomach. Seven shadows later the speed and course were ascertained, and a call went out to the president. Someone was coming.

"At the current rate of travel we will be receiving a spacecraft into our atmosphere within three to four weeks. Yes sir, there has been no error, and, no communications on any known frequency. Stealth, sir. That is an intentional action. Silence betrays their motives, sir. Remember the Hawking Analysis of probable alien intention? Our analysis confirms it. They are not going to be friendly. We are like insects to them—look at their technology, sir. Silence can only mean one thing." So the president was informed.

He spoke to the nation and the world, "Let us become as iron rods bound tightly together, for we are the tool of the lord, our God, indivisible and courageous in the face of the unknown. Let us be as one instrument in His mighty, loving hand, and become as a single blade, so he may crush the wicked life from this parasite, cut and cleanse the earth, and place us with Him on high, clasped safe to His breast, forever safe, anointed in His righteousness! Now the time of our reckoning has come, let it bind us fast together so we may be a single steel lance in the hand of the All Mighty. God grant us the strength: *to live!*"

Now muslims and jews, atheists and lovers, haters and the disinterested alike, all heard and awoke. All of humanity seemed tempered in common purpose, each now gladly but a part, a surrendering to the whole, a mortification and preservation through surrender and cooperation. Indeed, a fist had tightened in the gullet of the world, and all eyes seemed to cast a single anxious squinting gaze upon the horizon.

At the conference of the nuclear nations where the plans for defense were to be brooded and hatched, the same desperate good will was having its effect. Cooperation and disclosure were now an open invitation to anyone with long range aspirations. As the hens squawked and clucked, told and cracked open their secret eggs, a few clever omissions and large ears would gather the future together in a golden basket for the foxes. Of course it is foxes who have learned how to cluck, strut and chatter best—in silence. So is there profit in desperation for cool heads, and so did their unseen plans emerge: fear can blind the eye with the hope it needs, and hide from us, the taste of the wind, and the scent of foxes. How many countries had pointed these weapons at each other? Now the hate and fear seemed to vanish in a broth of honesty and openness which would save this world. Who knows, after this was all over, such a broth might even feed us all. It was with idealism, desperation and hope that the number of weapons and their locations were disclosed, and their targeting arrays centralized under a single command. When the aliens landed, that quarter of the globe would be annihilated. But no one, had tasted the

wind.

Aboard the spaceship there was an uneasy optimism. Cultural exchange was the highest form of sacrifice and science for the Xantheans. Artistic expression, the primal beauty of the unfettered wish and its sublimated expression in art was the highest of their most valuable assets, and they had amassed a vast treasure of music and knowledge, beauty and lies of the greatest worth and measure. They were ready. However, the broadcasts coming from the planet were disturbing. These creatures were dangerous. Stupid, paranoid and passionate, they had all the makings of high culture, but had yet to meet, much less master themselves. Scary, primitive creatures. It was decided not to contact them, and hope to discover a higher form of life which might be found to offer up an artistic exchange. They would tread delicately and softly, such a proliferation of life on this tiny planet! Surely there were millions of species here! Such art as they had never dared to dream must be hidden in these caves and caverns, these lush swamps and grasslands must conceal a species with the need, the need to understand themselves and transform the result, the artistic need: the mark of ascension and higher life.

As the Xantheans crept into orbit and began their preliminary scans for intelligent creative activity, the scanners were clogged with cerebral interference. Dreadful and vile, undeveloped reactive thoughts and hungers which were untransformed, pains unfelt and happiness unrealized, a random storm of chaotic affect threatened to overload their equipment, now flooded with self-deception, suffering and flattery of every kind. As they shut the cerebral detection array down for recalibration to eliminate the human interference, a strange beautiful flower of radiation, a cobalt plume of delicate blue ionized gas and thermonuclear haze lifted its swollen shimmering head into the dark sky from the skin of the distant azure sphere below.

Now, the Xantheans all gathered around the porthole facing the planet. First, a tiny dot of light, and then, the expanding plume of radiance and color pouring upward, stretching toward the infinity of annihilation, a glowing tendril of luxuriant beauty, curling a twisting, arching, spiral finger toward the hungry ink of heaven, its aqua and lapis fingers of light intertwining with eternity, beyond all preconception—such an exquisite flower as only the unborn, or the dead may imagine, as only a secretive nebula may dare to enfold, a thimble of boiling eternity stretching outward toward oblivion—then another—and another—and another—until the whole planet was engulfed in exquisite turgid ascending clouds of light, pouring upward into each other. And the entire circumference of the earth glowed purple and azure, its cheeks red and lush in the black palm of the heavens.

The Xantheans wept in pleasure as the cinder evaporated into beauty, and a frothing thunderhead of gratitude spread its arms around the little Earth, wrapping it in a gracious shawl of purple, lavender and rose, all of creation set aglow and ablaze, over full, spilling over and through itself with the hues, inner secrets and shades of eternity concealed in the very heart of each atom, turned inside out, unfolded from within to reveal the blush, the hidden blood and light, the rising torrent of the eternal now unrefused, uncontained, spilling upward and outward around the curve of the blue green horizon.

The Xantheans knew that their mission was a success even if no contact was made. In all of their travels they had never seen a more fulfilling or singularly exquisite and beautiful sight than the spontaneous thermonuclear evaporation of this world. All of their lives had been entirely realized in this single moment, this jewel of the highest aesthetic pleasure and value... so it was another undeserved ecstasy to discover that the scanners were now free! Soon it was obvious what had happened. They had sorely misjudged these violent, primitive Earth creatures, who had annihilated themselves in a cloud of sheer and absolute beauty for the Xantheans to behold. The Earthlings had plainly committed the ultimate artistic sacrifice to exchange their worthless, mean-spirited, selfish, ugly lives for a moment of ultimate aesthetic splendor—a godly sacrifice, and the highest gift ever offered to any Xanthean.

Soon the cerebral scanner revealed hints of yet another possible treasure...creative cerebral activity was detected! This was nothing like the dismal, violent straining rage and cruel sexuality which emanated from the other now extinct inhabitants. This indication, although creative, was different than any cerebral patterning with which the Xantheans were familiar. The humans had left something behind them in their apostasy—something worthy! Scans indicated these creatures never lied, and built the most intricate subterranean structures. They has strange art, and voiceless songs, stories with no words, dances with many legs and thousands of partners. Yes, as the Xantheans learned their language, they became sure they had found a people worthy of their cultural mission. It was difficult to tell them apart, and they were very numerous, but soon it would become easier to communicate. As they exited their ship to accept the remaining Earthling's hospitality, they struggled to pronounce the name of their new allies. However, the Xantheans had no reason to fear if they accidentally missed a word or committed an unintentional breach in decorum— The cockroaches were and ancient, honest, and patient people.

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