

## COLIN

Colin still couldn't grasp what had happened. His belief that he was experiencing some kind of exotic hallucination was beginning to wear off. Surely even if his drink had been spiked, the effect would have worn off by now. This was longer, more detailed and more - well, alien, than any dream. Perhaps he might still wake up, and find that this world had all gone. And yet, how could he explain the colours and the sight?

What if he was dead? Perhaps he'd suffered a heart attack in his sleep and this was some kind of heaven. There came no answer to his musings, and he wondered whether an answer was possible at all in the total silence he was now experiencing. That was the most unnerving part of the whole situation. If he were dead though, why was he the only one here?

His thoughts were interrupted as he reached the side of the embankment, discovering that he could roll up it quite easily without slipping. That surprised him. On reaching the top, he saw a structure which stretched for miles in each direction. It looked like a highway, but one different from any road he had ever seen. It seemed to be something between a road and a tram track: tightly compacted earth with symmetrical large grooves cut in it. For a moment it reminded him of a bobsleigh track carved out of snow.

Colin rolled forwards to investigate, finding that he could easily slot himself into a groove. His body fitted perfectly, his feelers engaging with the sides and the bottom of the channel. Clearly this road had been designed for creatures with this body. He tried undulating his feelers and felt the instant thrill of acceleration. By this means he

would be able to travel very quickly, if he had anywhere to go. As he started to roll, he felt exhilarated by the ease at which he could hurtle along.

Colin started to travel faster. The chute wound to the left and then to the right, hugging the landscape. He continued to accelerate. The road flashed in an indescribable colour, but one which was closer to that of a red traffic light than anything else he could recollect. He knew, instinctively, that it was intended as a warning of some kind. But, he reasoned, nobody could tell him what he should and should not do when exploring this strange spherical body. He continued to roll, experimenting with slowing down and then speeding up whilst going round a corner. The feeling was exhilarating, better than any rollercoaster he had ever experienced.

After speeding along for quite some time, Colin spotted a collection of spheres similar to himself straddling the road. He continued to approach, noticing that they all seemed to be wearing the same dull plastic-like material that he had earlier discarded. Their feelers were sticking out of it. The only part of them that was uncovered was a small circular opening, through which the light of their inner eyes shone.

It looked, Colin reflected uneasily, like a roadblock. He slowed down rapidly, just managing to stop in front of them.

The other spheres gathered around him and a complex succession of flickering flashes emanated from the inner eye of the nearest creature. At first he was at a loss to understand what was happening, but after a while he found that he could understand what was being said.

“...you did not heed the warning. You are under arrest on three counts:

travelling on the wrong side of the road, speeding, and most seriously travelling without your covering - and therefore seeing all over. You must cover yourself at once, and then come with us.”

Colin found that he could respond, flashing his own lights indignantly:

“I am new here. I could not know of speed limits or which side of the road I am supposed to roll. And what is wrong with seeing? Why should I cover up an eye which is capable of seeing such beauty?”

A couple of the beings came to him with the dark plastic and covered him up. He could only see through the front, and his feelers were poking through the material. It was very uncomfortable just like the covering he had discarded.

“You can argue with the Judge tomorrow.”

The beings escorted him along the chute at a ludicrously slow pace, which made Colin feel like going to sleep. The journey was interminable, making Colin wonder how a hallucination could possibly last this long. Perhaps this was, in some sense, real. But how could that be?

None of his captors spoke to him, and any attempt at conversing was met with a quick flash: “No speaking allowed!”

Perhaps talking was also illegal on this strange slow-motion road. Still, Colin was able to enjoy the show of lights and the wonderful colours pouring into him. He thought happily to himself about how wonderful the light was, glowing with joy. It would still be better, he mused, without the plastic covering - but apparently, he was in enough trouble already.

His captors, on the other hand, seemed to take no pleasure at all in the remarkable lights surrounding them. Perhaps they were simply used to it.

Despite the yawningly slow pace, eventually they arrived at what Colin assumed to be a small town. It was covered in dome-shaped structures, some large and some small. They reminded Colin of igloos, or perhaps...molehills. Now there was a great deal of traffic. Creatures like him were travelling in and out of the town on other roads which also converged there.

They approached the largest dome of all, and Colin's captors - or, perhaps, jailers - ushered him to roll off the road and enter it. Colin was awestruck by the interior. In the gloom of the dome, all creatures' feelers glowed with a pleasant brightness, their tips sparkling like optic fibres and the eyes glowing brightest of all. It was infinitely more dazzling than any light show. The Northern Lights could not compare, and a firework display seemed pitiful in comparison. There was no earthly comparison which might even come close to doing it justice.

The building had neither lights nor windows. Everything already glowed; the beings themselves were sources of light. As they spoke, the colours flashed and shone about the dome.

Colin was led deep underground and placed, along with a few others, in what he assumed to be a cell. Here it was much darker, and he already yearned for the light he was missing. There was no talkative multitude to illuminate this dome. The room had a roughly spherical shape, and its other occupants were mainly scattered around the roof. Evidently that was one ability Colin had not learned yet, to crawl up surfaces like a spider might. He found the creatures beautiful and

mesmerising, something which they sadly did not seem to recognise in themselves.

The room had been as dark as anything he'd seen since arriving on this strange world, if it was indeed a world, but after a discreet pause the dome flashed with speech.

"What have they got you for, eh? Space rock peddling?"

"I don't think so Evets. He's got the Priestly Mark. Probably a dirt eater, a blind eye. Can't control his sight."

The other creatures in the dome lit up, not quite in unison. It seemed that they found the comment amusing. Colin didn't have a clue what it meant, but he felt a stinging pain emanating from deep inside him. He knew that he was being insulted, with words forming inside him:

"Why speak to me so? You shouldn't be doing this. Your inner eye, the central part of you, should be clean and pure as light itself! Then you would speak of clean things not dirty insults."

Colin had no idea why he was lecturing them about purity and cleanliness, words which would have had little meaning to him a day or two earlier.

"Oh, I get it. He's one of those new sectarian priests telling the traditional priests they've got it all wrong. Globes like you make me want to eat dirt."

Before Colin could respond to the insult, a door opened and a pile of rocks, which looked like marble, tumbled to the floor. Immediately all the occupants of the room gathered around the rocks, and began

to shine very intense beams of light onto them. Colin realised that somehow energy was being released from the rocks, which would radiate all kinds of coloured wavelengths. The light from the rocks was then absorbed by the beings as they fed. Some of the weaker prisoners were being pushed back and prevented from feeding. There was one notable absence: Colin.

“What’s the matter? Prison food not good enough for you, priest?”

Again the others all laughed. Still, Colin did not eat. Instead he withdrew into a shadow and, pondering his predicament and the strange comments of his new-found companions, fell asleep.

He woke with a start and soon confirmed that he was still in his strange new alien body, not back in his bed on earth. He was still surrounded by the overwhelming light of this other place. At least sleep here seemed very much like sleep back home. Colin felt refreshed and revitalised.

## NILOC

Niloc slowly came to his senses. Another rectangular room, with large rectangular openings through which 'light' poured in. He could barely call it light, for he could count just seven colours. Better than the last room, he thought. Perhaps he was beginning to recover. He hoped he was passing this test.

This light coming through the rectangular openings, though still utterly dull, felt at least more natural than the strange artificial light of the night before. Nonetheless, he still felt heavy and sluggish, and the 'tunnel vision' was hard to cope with. Cut off from the Great Spectrum, a fate worse than death.

The light was shining through a transparent material which reminded him a little of his old body. He wondered what it tasted like. He noticed many other stick bodies sharing his room. They lay on flat, raised surfaces throughout it. As they turned their split, darkened, sightless eyes towards him, Niloc's nausea and panic began to rise inside him again.

He became aware once more of the vibrations. There was a device with a peculiar latticed texture to the side of him. The vibrations seemed to be entering him on either side of his nodule. Perhaps, like the aliens, he had feelers on the top of his nodule. He tried to brush his hair against the source of the vibrations, but felt nothing. Yes, his feelers were just as dead as those of the other strange wormlike people.

They seemed to use their stalks. Perhaps he ought to do the same. He raised his stalks up to the side of his nodule and was able to feel two shell-like protuberances, which he supposed were receiving the



vibrations. He looked around and could see that the other stick-people had them too.

How remarkable to have an entirely new sense; how drastically astonishing that his being should suddenly be exposed to a completely novel sensation. It was a really pleasant sensation too, even though he felt the utter newness of it could disturb his mind too much. He needed to keep it clear for his journey to the High Priestly dwellings.

The vibrations reverberated through Niloc's body, and inexplicable emotions welled up inside him. Niloc discerned a vast array of different vibrations, vibrating faster or slower, higher or lower, some vast and some gentle. All were speaking with different voices. Niloc tried to move closer to their source.

"So you like music, then?"

Another vibration, but this time coming from the other side. How inconvenient. Niloc could only see by turning his entire body round, not an easy task when his body was so oddly-shaped.

He was surprised to recognise some of the words in this strange place, even though they had not been flashed to him in the usual way. One made no sense to him at all.

"What is that?", asked Niloc. He was surprised also that he could instinctively respond in the same way that he understood the words. "Is music the vibrations that come from...this lattice...and from my nodule?" He gestured by flinging his stalk in the vague directions he was talking about.

His hand touched the hole on his own nodule - that was certainly



where his words had come from. The nurse seemed surprised by his question, as though some of his words did not fully make sense to her.

“That”, she said, pointing to the lattice, “is where the music comes from. We call that machine a ‘radio’. But from your mouth...”, and this time she pointed to his nodule, “...you are talking. Talking and music are different things. I will be back to check on you soon. If you need anything, my name is Mandy.”

The nurse left the room, somewhat shaken, to consult with the doctor.

## COLIN

Colin was still waking up, somewhat dazed and disoriented as he remembered that he was now in the dome. He was jolted from his thoughts by one of the guards.

“Prisoner Niloc, you are to follow me now to be judged.”

Niloc? Was that what they thought his name was? No need to correct them right now - and yet, it did have an odd familiarity about it.

He rolled up the wall and followed the guard through the curved door. After climbing a short chute, Colin found himself in the open air. From here he had a much better view of the ‘town’, which was a vast expanse of dome-shaped buildings. There were many chutes or roads, interwoven in a great criss-crossing network, and still a great deal of traffic - all of it moving interminably slowly. But far better than the view was the chance to be bathed again in the astounding light.

All too soon, however, Colin was led inside once again - into a vast dome which he assumed to be the court. He was ushered into a room and instructed to roll along a raised platform to the very centre, in full view of the globes who lined the roof and floor. The beauty of the scene took Colin’s breath away: the glowing creatures bathed the whole chamber in myriad colours, sparkling from their feelers and their eyes. He could not have found words to describe the beauty of the sight.

Before him, on a separate platform, was a globe whose covering was different from all the rest. There was something magisterial about that globe, who Colin correctly presumed was the Judge.