

THE INNOVATOR AND THE DOME

It had been a long, long time since such a crime had not been committed, and, as punishment, the innovator would receive a sentence, which had not been heard of for a long, long time, not since the days of the great-greats.

It was a sentence at once terrible and horrifying the one the High Court and the Corporators felt that should be given to the Innovator. It was the expulsion from the Dome!.

The citizens lined both sides of the street, their expressions, a mixture of hatred and awe, as their eyes followed the progress of the Innovator, escorted by a cordon of Corporators towards the site.

Gamblers in the crowd were busy making bookings on how long it would take for the Innovator to die, once he was outside the Dome and on whether, it would be death from fall out or poison gas.

There was no doubt that he would soon die - *for imbedded deep in the mind of each citizen was the truism that no human life could possibly exist outside the protection of the Dome, that beloved plastic canopy erected by their great-great-great grand fathers, which stretched over the city from limit to limit, cuddling it in a benevolent, air-tight grip*). The only question was how long would death take to come and in what form.

The Corporators and their prisoner had arrived at the death trap. The crowd retreated now in a minor panic for fear that some poisonous fume might enter the Dome when the death trap was opened. The mechanism was still good, although it had been unused for all these generations.

At a press of the button from the Officer, the thick transparent door of the trap swung jerkily open. The innovator, with a last mournful look over his shoulder was pushed roughly into the small compartment. The door was then shut and the citizens held their collective breath as the Chief Officer, touched the next button. The outer door swung open with a great hissing into that unhealthy green outside.

At his first breath of the outside's air, the Innovator fell headlong, coughing, doubled up with a giant convulsion. The Corporators nodded their heads in satisfaction. But then the terrible thing happened. The Innovator slowly raised his head from the dust and, with a smile of great joy upon his face, filled his lungs deeply

He sat up and they could see his chest bulging with gulp after gulp of that alien air. The people were so startled that they cried aloud when he suddenly jumped

from a sitting position straight up, coming down in the first steps of a wild dance.

“It must have hit his brain first,” said one spectator, his nose flattened against the Dome wall. The Innovator stopped his dance abruptly as he turned to see the faces peering out at him. He smiled at them – a broad, toothy smile with no malice in it at all. He even opened his arms wide to them making a beckoning gesture!

After making many gestures of well-being to those amazed and still uncomprehending faces, the Innovator snapped his fingers and stopped to pick up a stick. With it, he wrote in large letters upon the ground, “Come on out, the air is fine!”

One after another shocked faces left the peepholes, not to return. Again he wrote in the dirt, this time with more urgency, “It is fresh air not poison”. Still more left. This time, almost frantic to make himself understood, he wrote, “You don’t need the Dome any more. You can live outside. It is better out here!”

With this, every face disappeared from the clear places in the grimy walls and the Innovator was left alone in the outside, with its brilliant sun, its fresh and moving air, its trees and plants, three times the size of those inside the Dome, and its birds and animals.

The newspaper the next morning carried grisly stories of the Innovator’s immediate death outside the death trap. The city Fathers decided in an emergency session that the interior of the Dome should be painted opaquely to a height of twenty feet all around.

And those watchers who could not be scared into abject submission, were sent to the asylum where the talk of living outside the Dome could be taken for what it was – the raving of a lunatic.

Paul Vaz. s.j.