Tunnel Vision

Roger Zelazny

It flew, thing of fiery feather and shimmering underside, occasionally changing shape in its passage through the brilliant void toward the blazing flower about which the others circled. It shed a fearful trail and looked backwards often. Several times, its movement grew erratic but always it recovered and headed on till at length it fell into orbit about the rootless, flaming bloom, then glided, absorbing the healing emanations of that place.

At length⁠—though time meant little here⁠—another such as itself altered its circling course and came to parallel its passage.

“Loxas,” said the other, “your colors are wrong. What is the matter?”

“Tork,” replied the first, “I have seen such things as I never knew nor heard of, and I am no longer the same as before I grazed the destroying vortex.”

“Be grateful you survive to recall it. What happened?”

“I was careless and did not note its approach until it was too late. I was struck, obliquely, and my senses spun away from me. When they returned I found myself being drawn down a long tunnel which darkened as I went. Finally, it took me to a great cave where creatures whose beings were divided into two sorts dwelled. Always they faced to the rear of the cave, observing the shadows that passed there, unwilling or unable to turn and regard the cavemouth beyond which wonders lay. I felt myself drawn to one sort of the creature⁠—big-bellied, it was, and within I could see where it was growing a smaller version of itself. I was overwhelmed then by a desire to enter there and become that smaller creature. As I advanced upon it, I was suddenly halted, and a voice said, ‘No. It is not yet your time. You must return.’ Then I was hurled back up the tunnel toward the light where I emerged. I came here to repair myself and to meditate upon it. Have you ever heard of such a thing?”

“Yes,” Tork replied. “Others have undergone it from time to time, though it is not at all a common occurrence. I have overheard the Elders discussing the phenomenon. What you saw and felt is a thing that is known as a near-life experience.”