



The Island of the Colour-blind

Author of An Anthropologist on Mars

OLIVER
SACKS

Island of the Color Blind

Anna HALPRIN

Sacks has always been fascinated by islands -- their remoteness, their mystery, above all the unique forms of life they harbor. For him, islands conjure up equally the romance of Melville and Stevenson, the adventure of Magellan and Cook, and the scientific wonder of Darwin and Wallace. Drawn to the tiny Pacific atoll of Pingelap by intriguing reports of an isolated community of islanders born totally colour-blind, Sacks finds himself setting up a clinic in a one-room island dispensary, where he listens to these achromatopic islanders describe their colorless world in rich terms of pattern and tone, luminance and shadow. And on Guam, where he goes to investigate the puzzling neurodegenerative paralysis endemic there for a century, he becomes, for a brief time, an island neurologist, making house calls with his colleague John Steele, amid crowing cockerels, cycad jungles, and the remains of a colonial culture.