

Except from Chapter Two

He could see the cavern from wall to wall by the light of the fish, but then when he thought he had seen about everything, he saw something that utterly amazed him again. There in the river was an island! It had a sparkling white sand beach. Scott took the oar and turned the craft toward the oasis of sand. To his surprise, the island had trees and bushes growing on it, but they were white rather than green. Since there was no sunlight, they had no chlorophyll so they were white, but they stood many feet high in the moist air of the cave. He paddled the small craft till it struck the soft sand of the beach, and leaping onto the island, he pulled the craft partially upon the shore and tied the rope to a tree to prevent it from being carried away in the current.

He had to have a better look so, he moved to the trees and found that they did not have a hard bark; it was soft, almost like skin and moist. The leaves were fully formed as any tree; he had no idea what kind of trees they were, but he was sure there was nothing like it on the earth's surface. He found that some of the trees had what looked like fruit hanging from them.

He took one of the fruits in his hand and pulled it from the tree. It was soft, white, and yet firm. He peeled the skin from it, and it was very thin, but the flesh was moist and smelled like citrus fruit. He wondered if he should taste one, or should he leave it alone, because it may be poison. He may die an excruciating death or maybe even become tremendously ill, and he certainly needed neither of those, but the smell was so enticing!

He finally decided to taste the juice on his finger, and when he did, it was delicious! So he licked all of his fingers, and then decided that it was too good to pass up, so he ate a small plug of the fruit. It was good to have something fresh and sweet and moist for a change.

Before he realized it, he had eaten the entire fruit. He wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his shirt and walked around among the grove, waiting to see what was going to happen next. He felt no ill effects from the fruit after an hour or more, so he decided to have another, and so he did. No one would believe that he was eating fruit in the heart of the earth where the sun had never shined. He decided the light from the fish gave the tree what it needed to be able to grow and bear fruit. There were a few smaller bushes growing under the trees, which

were white also. The sand of the island was like course sugar, unrefined. He made deep footprints as he walked and he was sure they would remain there like the footprints of the astronauts on the moon, because there was nothing to erase them.

He returned to the small craft and decided to spend the night. He climbed into his module to lie down, and for the first time, found light to be an irritant. It was hard to go to sleep with all of the light around him. He tried to place things against the portals to block the light, and finally, he drifted off into the land of sleep.

He awoke after a few hours and as usual, everything was the same as before he had gone to sleep. Except the fish had moved away from his vessel, and did not remain near it, as they did when it floated in the water. One thing different he noticed was that there was no tide, which increased or decreased, as it did on the surface. The small craft was exactly as it had been before he had gone to sleep the night before. His footprints still faded off into the distance. After eating two more of the fruits, and gathering several to take with him, he pushed the *Heartworm* away from the shore, and paddled it out into the current again.

For the next few hours, he drifted by island after island, most of them having trees and underbrush growing on them. The fish had joined him again, and it was like he was traveling with a giant fluorescent light, as he moved in the giant caverns of the earth.

The current moved him along at a good pace, and to this point, he had not had to start his motor for maneuverability. He was letting the water carry him wherever it was going and he could only hope that somehow, someday, he would find a way to reach the surface.

Scott noticed there were caves that left the river and disappeared into the darkness, but he decided that his best chance, was to remain in the water for some reason, and he was content to float, watching the changes occurring constantly in his environment. The fish were his constant companions, and when he decided it was time to sleep, he paddled to one of the islands, pulled the small craft up on shore, tied it to a tree in case the current tried to pull the vessel away from land, and that became his ritual for sleep.

He had now been in this subterranean world for over six weeks. How far he had traveled, he had no idea. His compass didn't work, he assumed, because of the magnetic structure of the rock, so he had no idea of which direction he was traveling. The one thing that did disconcert him at times, was that he knew water moves from higher to

lower levels, so he could only conclude that he was deeper in the earth now than when he had begun.

The eyeless, glowing fish had lost interest in him and had gone to other things. He guessed they had gone to feed. He wondered what they ate, because he had seen nothing but the lighted fish, nor any evidence of anything else.

He began to leave the islands behind and he missed the fresh fruit they had provided for him. The fish seemed to be fewer in number, and so the cavern was gradually becoming darker, when suddenly his craft struck sand again and lurched to a stop. It had beached on a bar in the midst of the river, and the water had turned into white water rapids around him. He could see the water as it splashed, and rippled, and disappeared into the darkness beyond.

He shined his light ahead and could see that water was before him, so he decided that he was simply on something like a sand bar that reached across the river. There were little channels that flowed across the sand, but nothing large enough, or deep enough to take the *Heartworm* across the bar, so he had to figure out somehow to get his craft to the other side. He checked the depth of the water with his oar and found it was only about a foot deep. He wondered if he could stand in the water on the bar and pull the small craft across without his weight. He slowly slipped into the water, the current pulling at him, while he was holding on to the small craft. He pulled his bow rope over and lashed it around his waist, so at least he was fastened to the vessel if something happened.

He moved a few steps away from the *Heartworm* and found that the bar continued for quite a distance. He pulled on the rope, and the craft moved ever so slightly, further upon the sand, so Scott put all of his weight into the pull and the craft slid all of the way upon the bar. The large rudder dug into the sand; it had worked well for steering the craft, but now it had become a problem! He took his hands and sought to dig a trench for the rudder to move in, but there was too much rock. He tried to lift the rudder while pushing, and that helped slide the small vessel a little farther upon the sand barricade, but there was too much weight in the *Worm* for him to move it far.

As he surveyed his condition again, the current was pulling at his feet and legs, and he was sure it was pulling on the craft as well. Maybe, if he removed some of the items from it that would help, especially the oxygen bottles. He tied a cord to the valve of the bottles and pulled them one by one out of the craft; then they immediately

washed over the barricade, floating in the water, and they began to pull on the craft as well. Scott moved to the front again, and pulled with all of his weight joined by the oxygen cylinders pulling, the craft came across and Scott could not stop it! It came with a lurch and pulled him and the bottles into the deep water on the other side.

Scott found himself tethered to the floating craft, getting farther and farther from the bar all of the time. He began trying to swim to the craft, but as he swam, it allowed the craft to gain speed in the swift water. Scott decided to simply pull himself to the craft, and this he began to do.

Suddenly something seized his leg, and he could feel the weight of something pulling at him as he slipped beneath the surface. Scott struggled to pull himself up with the weight still pulling on his leg. He made it back to the surface gasping for breath!

He pulled his weight and the extra weight, even closer to the small bobbing vessel in the distance. The thing on his leg seemed to close its grip and the pain was becoming intense. He became afraid it might take his leg off! He was pulled beneath the water, and this time, as he struggled to reach the surface, he was not having success. He was beginning to run out of air, and for the first time since the first day, Scott felt real fear!

"How would be the fastest way to die?" he thought to himself. "Should I just go down, open my mouth and breath in, filling my lungs with water and end it quickly?"

The thing seemed to pull him even farther under water in the darkness. He was beginning to get dizzy from lack of air, when suddenly he broke the surface of the water again, pulling with all of his might toward the small craft at the end of his rope. The pressure on his leg became even greater, and now he felt warmth on his leg, and decided that it must be blood. He pulled even harder, as finally he could reach the side of the craft, and he began to try to pull himself up on it. The thing on his leg was pulling in the opposite direction, and his grip on the wet craft began to loosen. Just as his fingers slipped and he slid back under the water, a second object appeared in the water, crashing into his leg! Not his leg, but the thing gripping his leg. The grip relaxed a little, and Scott reached the surface again, but then the second object struck again! This time, the weight on his leg released its hold and Scott bobbed to the surface, pulling himself to the craft, onto the small metal vessel and out of the water. He was in complete

darkness, when he heard a high-pitched whistle behind him, and felt a second presence near him.

Fear gripped him, for now it had come out of the water after him! It seemed to whistle and yet it had a familiar sound to it. He had heard that sound at a large aquarium.

“That sounds like a dolphin,” he thought, “but surely there are no dolphins here!”

He climbed into the cockpit, and having turned on his light, discovered his leg was covered with blood. He tore his pants away from the wound, and tried to clean it as best he could, then wrapped it with bandages found in the first aid kit he’d retrieved from the platform wreck.

He then turned the light outside, and there, facing him without eyes, was what looked like a bottle nosed dolphin, whistling. Its head lay on the cylinder attached to the *Heartworm* and Scott was slightly amused at its actions. It seemed as though it almost wanted to talk to him and was trying to communicate.