**2045: Atta & Yet A Strange Place**

Dawn broke in the east, and its light spread out across the water. The sun lit Atta mountain, and all parts of it, from the summit to the shoreline, lay bathed in the red glow.

The first light fell on three figures, still as corpses, who lay half-in and half-out of the surf. Beside them and around them lay a scree of metal parts.

Only the slow movement of their chests gave any sign that the three men yet lived; beyond that the only motion around them came from the rising and falling waves, and the wind- and wave- swept tatters of their clothing.

The first of the three to stir was Junior. His eyes snapped open suddenly, and then closed again; then he slowly lifted a hand to his eyes to sweep away the accumulated sand and salt. His eyes opened again, and he attempted to raise himself, but his exhausted body would not comply.

His arms seemed to have no strength, and the world seemed to spin under his body, making it impossible for him to keep himself upright.

Finally Junior managed to sit up. By now the sun had made it halfway over the horizon, and he swept his bleary eyes over the shore and the sea, looking for landmarks, looking for anything familiar. He noticed first Zed and Azim lying close by, and then the metal debris around him, the remains, apparently, of Leo’s boards.

Now Junior remembered: after a few hours’ operation, the heat they generated had begun to tear the boards apart; there had been a few more hours of terrified flying as the boards decayed and their legs nearly failed from fatigue, and then—a shadow rising before them and a last panicked sensation of falling as the boards broke into pieces. They had not been built to fly so far, but they had been built well enough to fly them to safety.

But where were they? With difficulty, Junior got himself to his knees so that he could survey the shore. As he moved, he heard Zed and Azim stirring, and soon all three of them were up and looking out on this strange territory.

Finally, Junior rose to his feet. He nearly overbalanced as he did so; he stumbled like one drunk. But then, shading his eyes, he looked up and down the shore.

“Do you see anything, Junior?”

Zed was trying to stand now, but he couldn’t seem to find his balance, and his legs seemed unwilling to support him. “Junior?”

Junior did not respond. He was staring south along the shoreline.

Azim groaned as he struggled to get to his feet.

“Has he found something?”

Zed called again.

“Junior?” At last, his legs shaking a little, he stood up.

He looked south in the direction Junior had turned—and he nearly lost his balance again, stumbling forward for a few paces until he could hold himself upright.

Beyond a narrow place in the beach, where a ridge of the land sloped down quickly and almost into the water itself, Zed saw the edge of an enormous structure. He staggered toward it, his mind instantly filled with images of the underwater building he had explored just a day ago, and Junior followed him, with Azim finally struggling to his feet and following them both in turn.

**As they approached, the full size of the structure became apparent: They walked around it and found that it was two stories tall and about half a kilometer long.**

**The roof curved down around the building like the edge of a seashell, and under the tarnish left on it from years underwater and exposed to the elements Zed could see that the roof had once been made of gold, or a metal that was meant to mimic gold. For Zed could tell the structure wasn’t new-built. It was covered with the dried remains of algae and other sea life, and sand had drifted high on its seaward side.**

**Zed stared at the structure, certain it had been built by the same people whose drowned homes he had explored. His first urge—overriding even his hunger and thirst—was to enter and explore: if he did so, he knew, he would find more evidence of his origins. But as he and his companions circled the building, they discovered that every door, every window, every gap left by the elements within a twice a man’s height of the ground had been sealed off with scrap metal.**

“I wonder where we are.”

Azim placed a hand on one of the structure’s walls.

“Do you think we’ve made it to the place where they build such things?”

Zed had no answer for this: it seemed fantastic—he was sure they had flown west last night, as much as possible in the direction in which Atta must lie, but still his heart leapt at the possibility that they had found a new land, the home of those whose skeletons he had discovered.

And then Junior dashed Zed’s hopes.

“We’re home.” He pointed inland.

“If that isn’t Atta, I must be dreaming. We’ve just come around the northern point.”

Zed looked up: sure enough, by coming around the edge of the ridge, they had brought a familiar skyline into view: there lay the summit of Atta, with its crown of dark clouds. And lower he could see the un-mistakable profile of Chen’s lightning farm.

“Atta?” Zed couldn’t believe it.

Neither could Azim.

“But, this thing is here. And—“ Azim swept his hand southward “—look at all those palm trees. The eastern shore doesn’t have that many.”

“The land doesn’t lie.”