

# **Met-Chron Sanctuary**

Metamorphosis Chronicles

Book 1

by

Ron S. Nolan

## **Planetropolis Publishing**

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## Dedication

*Michael H.D. Dormer*

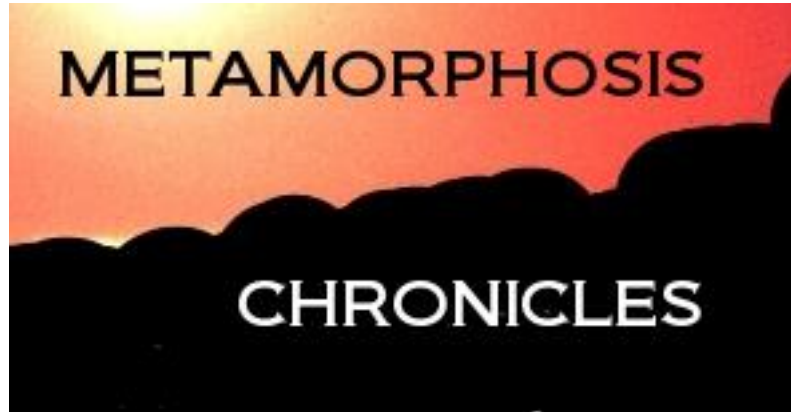


Michael H.D. Dormer was a master of the creative process and the art of thinking outside the box. This novel is devoted to his memory.



Michael H.D. Dormer's art is featured on the cover. The mixed media painting, which he created decades ago, seems to presciently depict Jasmine and Europa gazing at Comet Hope as it transits the solar system.

**Metamorphosis Chronicles**  
*MET-CHRON*



Metamorphosis Chronicles is a new series of novels and screenplays that explore the future of a human society that is confronted with the threats posed by AI cloud beings, New-Humans, robots and a white-hot planet Earth.

MET-CHRON SANCTUARY is the first book in the series.

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## **MET-CHRON Acronyms**

**BGI:** BioGenetics International Laboratories: conducts research into genetic modifications directed at enhanced human longevity

**CHIRUS:** a government-corporate state formed by the union of China, Russia and North Korea

**CREOS:** SDL members that are fanatical followers of the Reverend LeRoque's teachings.

**IRANVEN:** a government-corporate state formed by the union of Iran, Iraq and Venezuela

**SDL:** Seekers of the Divine Light, headed by Reverend Granger LeRoque

**USACO:** United States of America Corporation—a  
Government-Corporate state formed by the union of the United States, Great Britain, and Israel

**VIDAS:** Independent thinkers who believe in the merits of science and genetics.

## — Chapter 1 —

Year 2029  
*BioGenetics International (BGI)*  
Berkeley, California

**Dr. Astra Sturtevant**, a head-turning Brazilian girl in her mid-twenties was not only beautiful but also brilliant...and in big trouble! She was just concluding the third year of her postdoc in advanced longevity research at BioGenetics International and so far she was shooting blanks in terms of positive results.

The foremost researchers from universities around the world came to BGI to investigate, probe and manipulate the fundamental elements of living systems. As long as they were productive and young, which the lab director narrow mindedly believed to be one and the same, they were welcome. But as soon as they lost their edge, or they reached the grand old age of thirty, they were discarded like last year's model car. Nevertheless, still running fine and with good rubber on them, they were shipped off to make room for the next fleet of brilliant, young scientists charged with new energy and new ideas

According to the standard measure used to rate scientific institutions, i.e. papers cited in the technical literature, the strategy was a resounding success. The lab had produced more than its share of biomedical breakthroughs and generated a hefty number of burned out minds as well.

In the mid-morning light, the modern research laboratory in the center of the BGI campus seemed to fade and emerge as waves of fog rolled in from across the bay. The fog provided a bit of relief from the blistering heat when it momentarily blocked the sun. In spite of the two decade drought and strict water rationing, a fountain at the entryway ostentatiously gushed water into the air attracting flocks of thirsty pigeons and kids wading in the pool. By the time Astra reached her office on the third floor, preferring to walk instead of taking the elevator, she was dripping with sweat. But like most modern day women working in the sweltering Bay Area these days, she kept a backup blouse and slacks ready for a quick change.

Now wearing fresh clothes, she slid into a lightweight, plastic lab coat with 'Dr. Sturtevant' embroidered above the BGI emblem, snapped on the mandatory surgical gloves and bio-filter mask and then unlocked the door of her small, private lab. Depending upon a researcher's chosen field of study, a molecular biology lab might house rhesus monkeys, cell cultures, or even a collection of plants. Astra's lab was unique in that it contained dozens of aquaria each providing a home for hundreds of very small, freshwater flatworms known scientifically as Planaria.

The flatworms were tiny critters about a half inch long and an eighth of an inch wide. Although they had no real commercial value, Planaria remained a mystery to science. If they were cut in half, the head end would regenerate a new tail. But if they were sliced in two lengthwise down the middle; each half would develop into a separate living worm, thus generating a new pair of flatworms. That might be of interest to scientists studying tissue regeneration, but the current research thrust at BioGenetics International was the aging process in higher level organisms—not simple flatworms as the director was fond of reminding her.

Scientists had known for years that a culture of human stem cells would flourish in a culture dish as long as nutrients were provided. They would grow and divide time after time, but after a certain number of cell divisions they would suddenly stop reproducing and perish. Millions of research dollars later, all that was known was that something turned off the gene that instructed the DNA of the stem cells to replicate. One theory that had gained a certain degree of popularity conjectured that a genetic clock was somehow embedded into the DNA code.

The foundation of Astra's studies began back in the 1960s when a zoologist from the University of Kansas published an obscure paper which was soon buried in the literature with little recognition at the time by the scientific community. He had found, and Astra always wondered why anyone would ever have thought of such a novel experiment, that if he alternately starved and fed a certain species of Planaria, it would live for decades—normally that particular species had a lifespan three years or less. And like back then, no one at BGI today regarded the flatworm rejuvenation phenomenon to be anything more than a mere curiosity...except Astra who seemed to have the entire field to herself—at least no one else had published any follow-up studies in recent years. Experiments spanning decades were rarely conducted and Astra often wondered how the KU zoologist had had the persistence to monitor his experiments for twenty-plus years.

Astra couldn't conceive of waiting that long for her results so she used a genetically modified Planaria that had a limited lifespan of only two weeks due to a mutation that she had induced that restricted their ability to synthesize telomerase, an enzyme that protects chromosomes when they replicate. She reasoned that if she could identify and manipulate the mutated worms' genetic clock to increase their lifespans to four weeks, she would be able to claim a one hundred percent increase in longevity—but so far the experiments had been a dismal failure.

Although ostensibly part of the BGI Gerontology Research Group, the offbeat nature of her work had not endeared her to the lab director. Now in her third year of wheel spinning, even she was beginning to wonder if she might have chosen the wrong subject to investigate. It looked more and more like a dead end and the way Director Horowitz treated her, she had begun to doubt that her contract would be renewed for another year.

Horowitz had seemed skeptical from the outset that Astra's work with Planaria might meaningfully contribute to the development of commercial longevity enhancing drugs for the burgeoning pharmaceutical market, but Astra's grant from the World Institute of Health had opened the door at BGI. And since her work did involve the study of aging, Horowitz had begrudgingly accepted Astra's appointment to the lab. Astra's research certainly lacked the luster of other aging related projects at BGI and she found herself increasingly on her own with little interchange or opportunity for collaboration with other scientists.

There were plenty of other organisms that had lengthy lifespans. Bristle cone pines in the California desert had been dated at well over three thousand years of age so her research on a twenty-year-old flatworm wasn't nearly as glamorous as compared to the work of Horowitz's showcase of postdoctoral prima donnas which was focused on systematically refining the map of the human genetic code and determining which genes might regulate the aging process.

Since experimenting on humans was currently illegal, the research at BioGenetics International was only theoretical and intended to provide a foundation for gene manipulation that might occur decades in the future. Still the possibility of prolonging the human lifespan was currently the hot topic for commercial drug companies and medical practitioners. Understandably Horowitz was taking full advantage of the opportunity to secure as much funding for as many new research projects as possible.

The termination of Astra's appointment at BGI would mean that she could no longer put off joining her father's herbal products company back in Brazil and she would have wasted three precious years of grant funding, which would likely taint her chances for financial support down the road. It would definitely be a major blow to her career.

Astra activated her notepad and prayed that she would finally make a breakthrough. Suddenly the lab lights flickered out and then snapped back on just as a tremendous clap of thunder reverberated throughout downtown Berkeley's forest of skyscrapers.



Astra looked out the window and was happy to see a sprinkling of raindrops on the glass. Tropical squalls like this were quite rare in the Bay Area and never lasted long, but Astra was from Brazil and dearly loved the rain. Even though most of the precipitation evaporated before it hit the ground, she thought of the brief downpour as an omen of good things to come. She laughed and said, "World get ready...my worms and I are coming to set you free!"

## — Chapter 2 —

*Deep Space Mining, Inc.*  
*Moonbase*  
*Mare Tranquillitatis*

**The lunar spaceport was bustling** with traffic as space-suited workers directed the loading of regolith ore shipments rich in titanium and other heavy metals—the primary export from the moon. Suddenly an alarm sounded and red lights began flashing inside the entry bay. A computer voice announced, "WARNING! WARNING! WARNING! ALL PERSONNEL REPORT TO SAFETY STATIONS."

The workers quickly donned space suits and scurried to their duty stations while thick metal shields closed over vulnerable parts of the base and the landing bay doors folded shut.

Miguel Castaneda, Head of Security, briefed Robert Sanders, Base Manager and majority stockholder in Deep Space Mining, Inc. Miguel was tense; meteor showers were dangerous. He focused on the vidscreen, then turned to Sanders and delivered the SITREP. "Meteor shower—a big one!" There was a series of pings then a loud thud. A few seconds later the overhead lights dimmed, flickered then went out. After an uneasy delay, the emergency power kicked in and the lights snapped back on. A technician tapped Miguel on the shoulder and gave him a thumbs up signal.

Sanders queried, "Status?" and got "Everything secure" from Miguel.

"That was a big one, Miguel." The technician pointed to the vidscreen. "Power was down for a few minutes. The solar array took a hit and will likely need some repairs. But otherwise the shields seem to have done their job."

As the staccato series of pings tapered down, Sanders asked, "Is it over?"

Miguel replied, "Seems like it—at least for now. I just received a message from the SpeeZees Lab. They report an issue with one of their backup systems. I'll go check it out."

"Great, sound the all clear. I'm going outside to look at the array."

Sanders put on his helmet, slung a pack over his shoulder and whistled *Here Comes the Sun* as the doors swung open and he stepped out into the brilliant sunshine.

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The central meeting point for the base residents was appropriately known as the 'Luna Lounge'. It was outfitted with a huge vidscreen behind the bar and looked pretty much like a neighborhood bar back on Earth, but with a few added high tech features. The crowd waiting at the entrance cheered when the bartender unlocked the door and the air was charged with animated conversations about the meteor alert. Some of the new arrivals were visibly shaken while the veterans laughed it off as another day at the office. Two digital clocks on the vidscreen behind the bar ticked down the time until the next shuttle arrival and the next lunar sunset.

A veteran of the Moonbase took a seat at the bar next to a cute girl named Diane. In his deep southern drawl he threw out his standard opening pitch, "Hi, what's a cute, little darlin' like you doing floating around in a joint like this?" She smiled, so he sat down on the stool next to her and said, "I haven't seen you here before. My name is Auggie."

Diane smiled, "I came in on today's shuttle." She pointed at the clocks and asked, "What's that mean...lunar sunset? I thought the moon stood still."

Auggie explained, "Not really, if you think about it, the moon has to rotate to keep the same face pointed towards Earth. It takes about twenty-nine Earth days to make a full cycle. So that makes it fourteen Earth days between the last sunrise and the next sunset. The changeover happens in minutes because the moon is so small." Diane pointed at the clock on the screen.

*00 Earth Days  
45 Earth Minutes  
28 Earth Seconds*

"Looks like it's almost time for the sunset. Where did the name Auggie come from? It sounds like the name of a football team."

"Nope, just born in August, that's all. This is your first time off planet, right?"

Diane flushed, "Is it that obvious? My name is Diane."

"Glad to meet ya. The bar special is called a 'lunatic', want to try one?"

"Sure why not?"

Auggie caught the eye of Genie, the bartender, and held up two fingers. Genie had orange hair cut in a butch and was enormous, but because of the low gravity moved effortlessly as she brought them tall glasses streaming bluish vapors. Auggie and Diane clicked glasses, swallowed deeply and then both suddenly burped what sounded like an old fashioned trumpet salute.

Diane gasped, "What fun! Do they always make that sound when you swallow? I want to try that again. This place is a real blast!"

Auggie picked up a remote control from the bar and pointed. "The ceiling and walls are all vidscreens. Anybody in the lounge can use one of these to select feeds from cameras all around the base. Sounding an even louder trumpet blast as she took another sip of her lunatic, Diane grabbed Auggie and gave him a hug, "This is so cool!"

Auggie keyed the remote to shift to different views of the mining operations. The vidscreen showed expanses of pure, white regolith and a mountain range in the distance. He explained. "This setting is called 'Home Base'. It's how it would look if we were outside on the surface. Here you try it." He handed her the remote.

Diane, wide eyed, used the remote to shift scenes. "Wow! The folks back in Minnesota would be totally amazed!"

Genie joined them and Auggie made the introductions. "This is Genie. She runs the joint. Be sure to stay on her good side. We'll take a couple of more lunatics, Genie my love. And how about some of your famous spicy space cheezies to go along with them?"

After Genie delivered their order, she picked up the remote and pointed to the sunset clock, "It's about time to bring in Torch's herd." She keyed a feed showing the landing bay. The vidscreen showed a herd of black and white cows milling around the ramp. Diane asked, "Is this some kind of joke? I don't get it."

Genie laughed. "Not at all, Torch's herd is programmed to gather at the ramp just before every lunar sunset. You know, like a herd coming back to the barn to be milked, but in this case to deliver mineral samples that they have collected for lab analysis."

A worker guided the cows up the ramp. One of the lounge regulars set his lunatic to make mooing sounds. Soon most of the patrons joined in roaring with laughter.

Diane grabbed Genie's hand. "Come on! Cows can't live up here...can they? I thought that they needed oxygen."

Genie laughed then waved her finger at Diane, "Naw, they're just high tech robots. Torch experimented with a bunch of different designs and found out that the best all-terrain vehicle for use up here was a four-legged walker. They can climb most any wall and carry quite a load suspended from their midsection which led Torch to model of them as cows."

"What do they do?"

"They're supposed to locate areas rich titanium, scoop up a load and then bring it back to the station to be refined. After initial processing, the ore is shipped back to Earth in containers hooked to the shuttles. I think that Torch designed the robots to look like cows as a prank. Right now they don't do much but make sand patties until Torch gets back to work on their nano matrix system—whatever that is."

Diane was captivated as she watched the line of cows meandering up the ramp. "Torch? That's a weird name."

"Just a nickname. He got it because he loves to weld things together—like robot cows and moon motorcycles. He has free run of the base since he is the boss's son."

Diane giggled, "I'd love to meet him sometime."

"Maybe you will if you stick around. He's definitely been downside way too long. I can't wait for him to come back home."

As the last cow passed by, the worker held up his index finger to the camera. "We're one short, only nineteen showed up. Torch will be steamed."

Auggie pointed to the sunset clock while the bar patrons began the ritual countdown chant. At the count of 'one' all of the vidscreens suddenly went black.

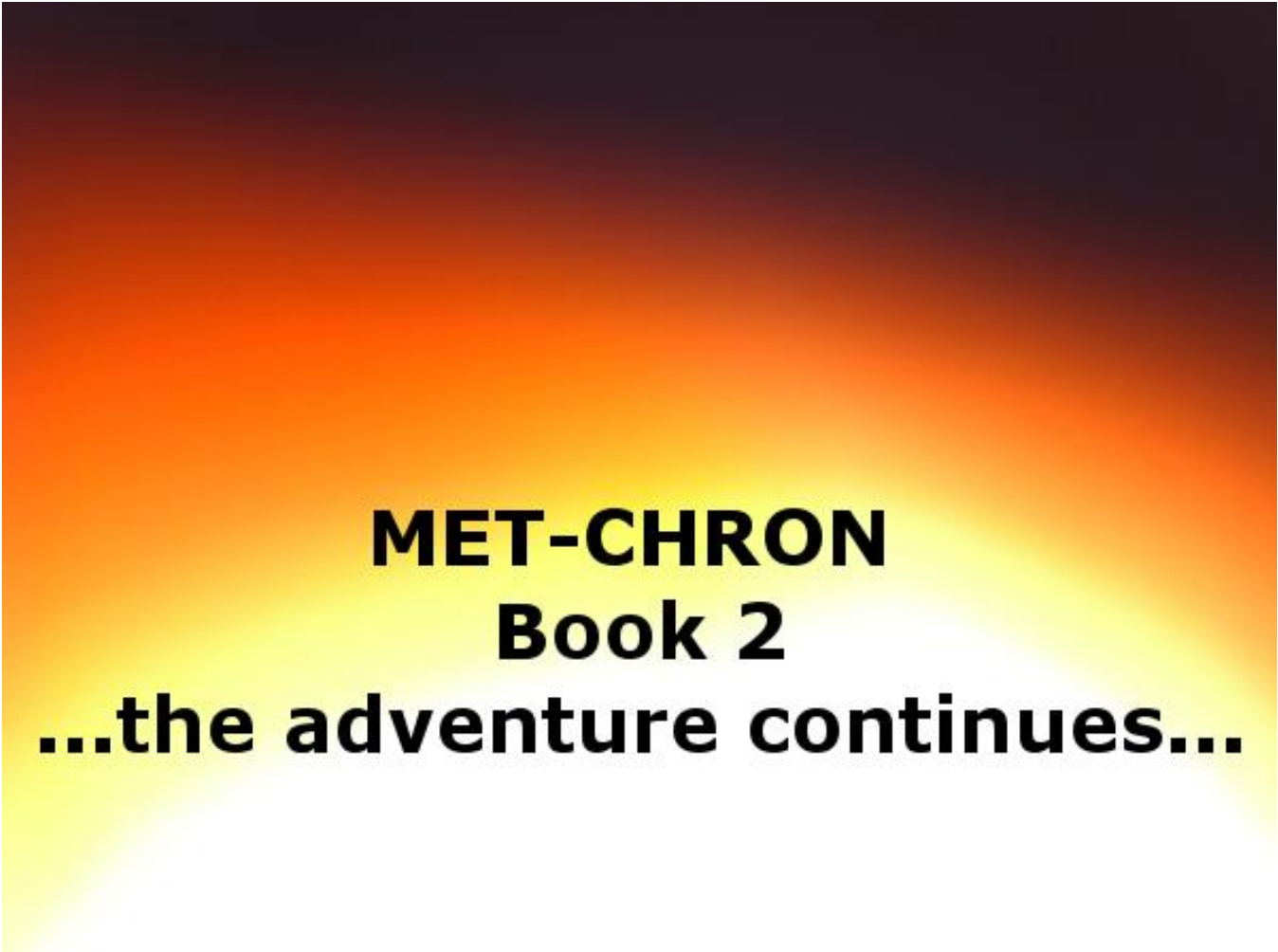
Genie punched keys on the remote shifting the ceiling vidscreen to a view of Earth. The bar ambiance suddenly went silent for a moment than the patrons began pointing out the lights of the cities. One of the regulars with a beautiful baritone voice began the tune, "May old acquaintances be forgot..." and everyone joined in.

After a moment of silence in which the only sound was the hiss of the air circulation system, Genie chimed in. "Everybody, listen up. Drinks are now on the house."

As the crowd cheered, Auggie took hold of Diane's hand and softly said, "You know, I have a super view in my quarters. Like to join me?"

Diane waved goodbye to Genie and wobbled off with Auggie while sipping another lunatic and giving a final trumpet burp blast on the way out of the lounge.

Genie smiled and blew them a farewell kiss.



**MET-CHRON**  
**Book 2**  
**...the adventure continues...**

## About the Author

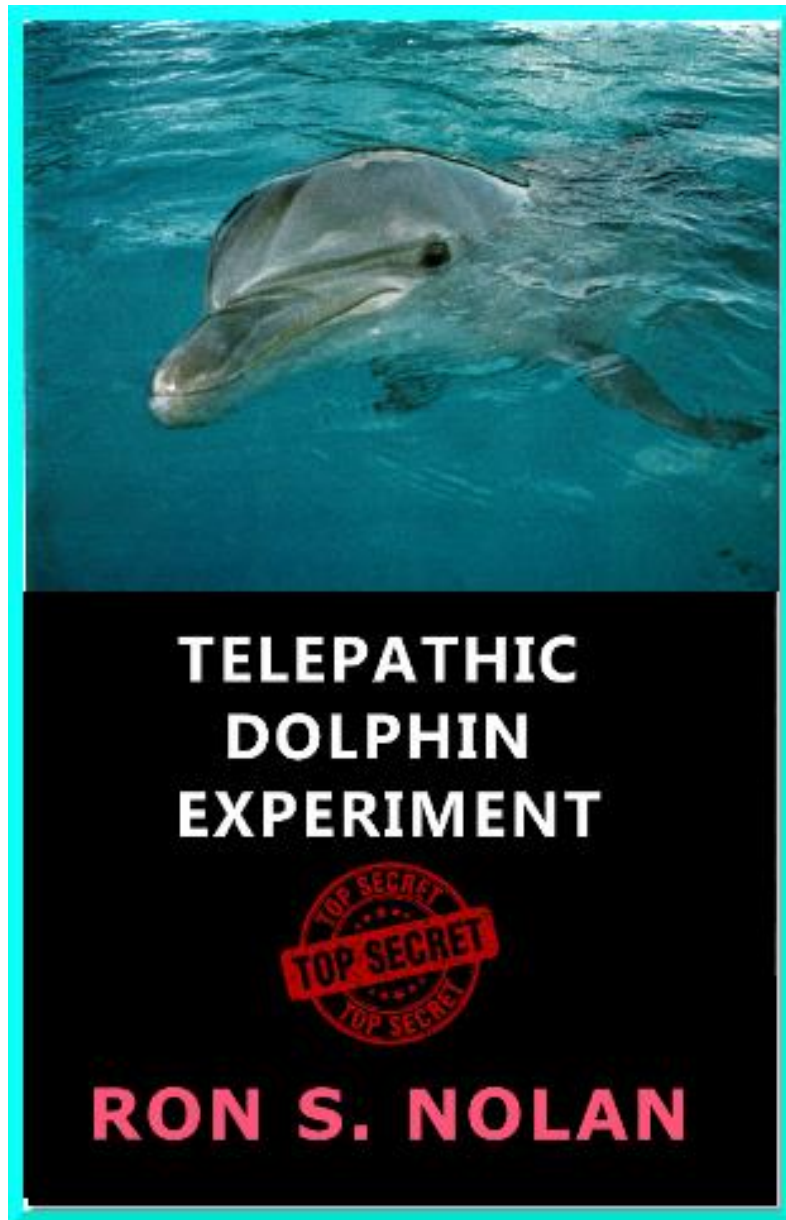


Ron S. Nolan, Ph.D. lives in Aptos, California near the sunken ship at the end of the pier in SeaCliff Beach. He spends his days working out, running, writing and performing tech patent research.... quite a leap from his early days in Western Kansas where he shared the farm outhouse with a nest of half frozen rattlesnakes and learned to read by the light of a Coleman lantern! To learn more about his latest novels and screenplays, please visit...

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## Other Books by Ron S. Nolan

*An engaging adventure about a pair of paranormal dolphins!*



## Preview--Chapter One

*Key West, Florida 1965*

**Newcomers to Key West**—at least those who came in search of island history, often as not received directions to the order of, "It's near the center of the grounds...just look for the birds. You'll find it." And looking up they would seem to notice for the first time the gaggles of gulls circling and screaming—a kind of parody of nearby Duval street along which shuttled disoriented tourists in a never ending, back and forth, coast to coast rush. Homing in towards the center of attraction, the visitors would find a full-sized, steam-powered locomotive, a relic of Averell Harriman's inter-island railroad, standing rock-solid on a short section of track, baking waves of searing heat from its shiny black plate. Seagulls perpetually slid and crisscrossed overhead, sometimes landing briefly before lifting off towards the crystalline sand of Baker Beach and the rich fishing grounds of the Gulf. The train served as a social commons for the birds; a strutting ground where newly formed pairs enacted their preprogrammed rituals of courtship—leaving beneath their perches frozen drips, like vanilla frosting melting in the hot sun. Small well-kept clapboard houses crafted in the classic style of historic Key West bordered Mac Arthur Park. Like most of the homes in the neighborhood, the Grant residence was washed chalk-white. The front porch was screened as protection against Florida's ravenous mosquitoes and remained cool even in the heat of the afternoon.

Overhead, suspended by brass links, a carved wooden sign in bright paint announced 'GRANT'S PET SHOP.' A green and red enameled parrot grasped the top of the 'O' in the word 'SHOP' hanging tight with yellow talons. A busy jungle of tropical banana, pink and red bougainvillea, and blazing birds of paradise engulfed the small yard separated from the sidewalk by a cedar hedge. Cement birdbaths and low benches were stashed haphazardly in the lush foliage. Looking more like a home than a business, a passerby would have never guessed the extent of the menagerie within—especially in the middle of a very quiet neighborhood in Key West, Florida during the summer of 1965.

Past the porch packed with faded wicker furniture and choked waist-high with neat stacks of yellowed newspapers, a wooden door with a cracked white porcelain knob led into the shop proper. Assorted bamboo birdcages, small and large, jammed side-by-side, harbored chirping, and flitting, tropical birds in effulgent plumage. A chorus of demanding minas, punctuated by piercing monkey screams, blended with whirling hamster wheels and the rhythmic throbbing of electric aquarium pumps. The whistles, chirps, and whisper of fine bubbles bursting free from row upon row of fish tanks laid a matte finish synthesis upon which grew warm earthy smells reminiscent of a moist, tropical rain forest spiced with the aroma of fragrant pipe tobacco.

Grandma Erma Grant sat on her favorite wooden stool, hidden behind a forest of suspended aquarium nets, dog brushes and red and yellow displays of Hartz Mountain parakeet seed. As usual, she was absorbed by the shop's ambiance, daydreaming amidst the collage of sounds, motions and smells and listening to the dialog of the animals as they freely expressed themselves in languages that she seemed to fully comprehend.

As a rule, she favored loose-fitting flowered blouses and long skirts which gave plenty of breathing room to her ample girth, but she never appeared in the shop without her forest green, full-length apron with pockets bulging with thermometers, sunflower seeds, yellow wooden pencils and cellophane-wrapped packets of Kleenex. She wore her thick silver hair braided and wrapped tightly in a bun just barely restrained by sturdy hairpins. She was the kind of person that people liked immediately upon meeting for the first time.



Grandma Grant stooped over gingerly and looked down into the cardboard box lying on the floor behind the counter. Seeing just an empty bowl of water and a few wilted lettuce leaves, she frowned and then called in a deep, rich voice toward the back of the shop, "Grandpa, I just knew it. I knew something was wrong around here. He's got out again, that little rascal. Shut the back screen and help me find him, will you dear?"

Her husband, Roland Grant, was five years older than she. Tall and thin, his bristly jaw was forever clenched to the stem of a briar pipe filled with tobacco. And like most pipe smokers, he enjoyed the ceremony of filling, lighting, tamping and scraping almost as much as the taste of the Wedgeworth tobacco smoke. Grandpa Grant could either be jovial or cantankerous and sometimes a little bit of both at the same time. He was set in his ways and accustomed to doing things according to his own well-established routine. So like many people do for some reason, he pretended not to hear her on the first call even though his hearing was as sharp as ever.

Grandma smiled, knowing his tricks, she repeated her request, but a notch louder this time.

From the rear of the shop, over the effervescence of aquarium air stones, she heard his deep baritone answer, "Old Gopher Brain is back here, dear."

Grandpa, wearing a blue work shirt and faded overalls, shuffled up the aisle hefting a struggling ten-pound desert terrapin whose stubby legs vainly breaststroked in empty space.

As he lowered the AWOL tortoise back into the box, he continued, "He's just getting senile like the rest of us. Didn't get back 'fore you noticed he was gone this time did he?"

Grandpa gave the turtle a gentle rap on the top of its shell. "Here you go old Gopher Brain, you are a tricky fella, aren't ya? 'Bout time for Sandra to be comin' home, ain't it? Bet she stopped off at the park. She sure loves that train, doesn't she Grandma?"

"Grandpa, I love that child. I just wish her parents could have lived to see how she is turning out. She's a real charmer, and sharp too! Some young man is going to thank his lucky stars when she says 'yes'."

"You're right, but I don't think that's gonna..."

Grandma's eyes suddenly rolled up into the back of her head and she slumped forward. Her broad elbows landed with a thud on the wooden counter. She cradled her head in her palms and slowly rocked back and forth.

Cut off in mid-sentence, Grandpa snapped his jaw shut and puffed a cloud of blue-gray smoke from the stem of his pipe. It was another one of her 'spells' and he had learned to keep still at moments like this. Not until several years into their marriage had she cautiously revealed her secret—that she often heard voices from another place and time. By now Grandpa was convinced that she often did. The best thing he could do was to relight his pipe and sit tight.

Roland...Grandpa...I just had the most wonderful vision about Sandra. I've known for years that she has my psychic gift. She is already starting to develop a power like mine in some ways, but different in others. I saw her grown into a beautiful young woman and swimming in the sea with dolphins. There was a very handsome man falling in love with her...and so were the dolphins."

"But Grandma, Sandra told me that she was going to wait for me until she grows up," laughed Grandpa. "But since she's only in junior high school, I don't think we have to worry about marrying her off quite yet. She still insists she wants to go to the University of Miami and become a psychologist. She sure has your way with the critters around here, I'll vouch for that."

Grandpa exclaimed "Hey! I just heard the front door slam. I bet that's her. Let's get the milk and the cookies going. This jabbering is making me mighty hungry for some of those wonderful, home-made chocolate chips you just baked."

Dr. Sandra Grant, Assistant Professor of Parapsychology at Randamount College had been waiting on pins and needles for a call from Robert McCord, a long-time friend that she had known from way back in her high schools days in Key West. If they had chosen different career paths—he to become a corporate lobbyist for defense contractors and she to become a researcher studying the paranormal, they might have hooked up. But that was water under the bridge.

Still, their friendship remained strong. Two weeks ago when Sandra explained to Robert that she was having difficulties raising funds for her research on dolphin behavior, he requested a copy of her proposal and promised to do what he could to help.

When they spoke a week later, they went over a list of Robert's questions and he told her, "I don't want to get your hopes up, but I have a possible lead for you. I am meeting with General Pratt Houston this evening and I will call you as soon as I get his answer."

Sandra oscillated between pacing back and forth and staring at the phone. But after waiting until midnight on the East Coast with no call, she figured it was a no go and went to bed. Just as she closed her eyes the phone rang.

She prayed, let it be Robert with good news.

It was Robert and he had very good news. His voice boomed, "Sandra, I apologize for the late hour, but I gave your proposal to the source I mentioned. You got it. Full funding...one hundred percent of your proposed budget and two bottlenosed dolphins to boot courtesy of the NUC!"

"You mean it? Really? That's fantastic! A pair of dolphins and full funding?"

"Yes, the whole package. I'm over at General Houston's house right now and you wouldn't believe the shindig. Every who's who in defense contracting is here. These defense guys really love their fireworks and firewater. Anyway, the General took me to his study, unlocked his private bar and brought out a special twenty-year-old bottle of scotch. I knew that was a good sign, but I was still surprised. Lots of very happy defense contractors here tonight. Congratulations!"

Only a few minutes earlier General Pratt Houston, a staunch Republican and an unyielding supporter of President George Scott, had announced to Robert in his typical patriotic fashion, "I spoke with Commander Cummings about the dolphin proposal that you provided us. You know I have found that timing is the key to success and this seems to be one of those occasions. It turns out that supporting this project would help us in a very pressing diplomatic matter that has been causing all sorts of problems. Our Military Application of Marine Mammals Program has come under fire by animal rights groups and we need to show that we have cleaned up our act so we will fund this project through the National Science Foundation as an unsolicited proposal. Robert enjoy this fine whiskey and use my private line to give Dr. Grant the good news."

In a lower tone of voice after giving Robert a joyful slap on the back on his way out, the General confided, "And tell your boys at Richoh that they are looking good for the semiconductor contract. Would'a taken it down today, but those lame brains in the General Accounting Office need some other kind'a damn disclosure form or something. It's just a technicality—not to worry."

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Sandra hugged herself with joy. Nearly a two million-dollar federal commitment to pursue her studies in dolphin behavior. Plenty of funds for travel and equipment—and to outfit a dolphin research lab including study animals. Fantastic!

Sandra Grant was young, brilliant, single and much sought after by Randamount College's cadre of bachelors for whom she could spare no time and had little interest. In fact, she had no steady lover or felt that she needed or wanted one—an occasional overnigher was enough. Her work was her life and she was already recognized as one of the pioneers in the new and begrudgingly accepted field of parapsychology. She possessed rare, dual Ph.D.s from the University of Miami. Her first doctorate was in probability mathematics. After completing the requirements for her doctorate in math in a brief three-year period, Sandra had surprised her graduate adviser by continuing on and winning a second degree in theoretical psychology.

Her training in math provided a crucial foundation for her work in parapsychology. By employing the exacting discipline of probability analysis, she was gaining insight into the phenomenon known popularly as 'coincidence'. In fact, Grant called her work the 'quantification of coincidence'.

Not on close personal terms with her adviser, she had only revealed that she wanted to be certain that she could find a job when she graduated. But really, all was unfolding according to a plan laid long before she had moved up the coast from Key West to Miami for her college education and on to Santa Rosa for her first faculty position. She had always been extremely careful never to mention that she possessed paranormal abilities—or that she had been raised in a pet shop of all places and by a psychic grandmother! She reckoned that there was only so much eccentricity that the university establishment would tolerate as she tried to make her way through the system.

Now in her second year on the faculty at Randamount College, she was venturing for the first time beyond number crunching and the painstaking analysis of mounds of probability data into the study of the causal mechanics of paranormal events. But to avoid the skeptical reaction of her colleagues, she only revealed that her new project would be focused on understanding dolphin behavior—especially the means by which they communicate with one another.

However, Sandra lusted to discover the mechanisms responsible for telepathy and to learn the 'how' and 'why' of ESP. Her telepathy experiments might even break the communication barrier between man and animal—something that her Grandmother seemed to have achieved long ago.

With this new major source of research funding, her new experimental subjects would be Pacific bottlenose dolphins. Now she just needed to hire lab assistants and building contractors. At last she would be able to test her theories in a controlled environment without the strain of worrying about project funding.

Sandra moved to the old oak table in her cozy kitchen. She knew every scratch and stain on its surface. The table had been a graduation gift from her grandparents when she had moved to an apartment in Miami. Sitting at the table brought back memories of her college days when then, like now, the table served as her connection to her grandmother.

She made sure that both of her feet were firmly planted on the linoleum floor, and then pressed her palms against the grain. Within moments, she felt pressure as the smooth wood gripped her skin. Her palms tingled electrically.

The table tipped upward at a sharp angle braced on two legs. Then it pulsed slowly up and down, barely touching the floor with the tips of its front legs.

Sandra asked, "It's you, isn't it Grandma? I can feel your presence." The table slid forward towards Sandra until it nudged softly against her waist. She could feel a sensation of warmth around her navel. The table nuzzled like a loving pet greeting its master.

"Thank you, Grandma, for the healing. You know my project has been funded. I am so happy. Look I'm crying." The table lifted and then made a series of fast, light taps that sounded much like laughter. Closing her eyes, she could see her Grandmother's smiling face and bright blue eyes.

"Tell Grandpa that I love him too. Thanks again for all you do. I'll be thinking of you both always."

The table fell lifelessly from her palms and banged to the floor. What only minutes before seemed alive and full of energy was now just an ordinary kitchen table. Her grandmother had gone.

Just sitting at the table brought back so many wonderful memories. Sandra leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes...

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