

Diving Deeper into the Depths

A Vision Quest Tale (A fictional story)

**by
Dan Ford**

This was an interesting narrative written for me to include as an episode here by a man who liked to dive in ocean waters all over the globe. To him, each dive was a Vision Quest because of Creation's evident glory no matter what you look at or where you go to. The colors and the creative forms are so diverse and so stunning that you can't really ever take them for granted. I think you might enjoy this first-person narrative of a particular dive he had in the South Pacific



I have been scuba-diving in and over reefs in tropical waters for many years and in many different locales worldwide. Although the experience at each diving

site was unique to that specific place, they all had the same sensation of being otherworldly and fabulously beautiful.

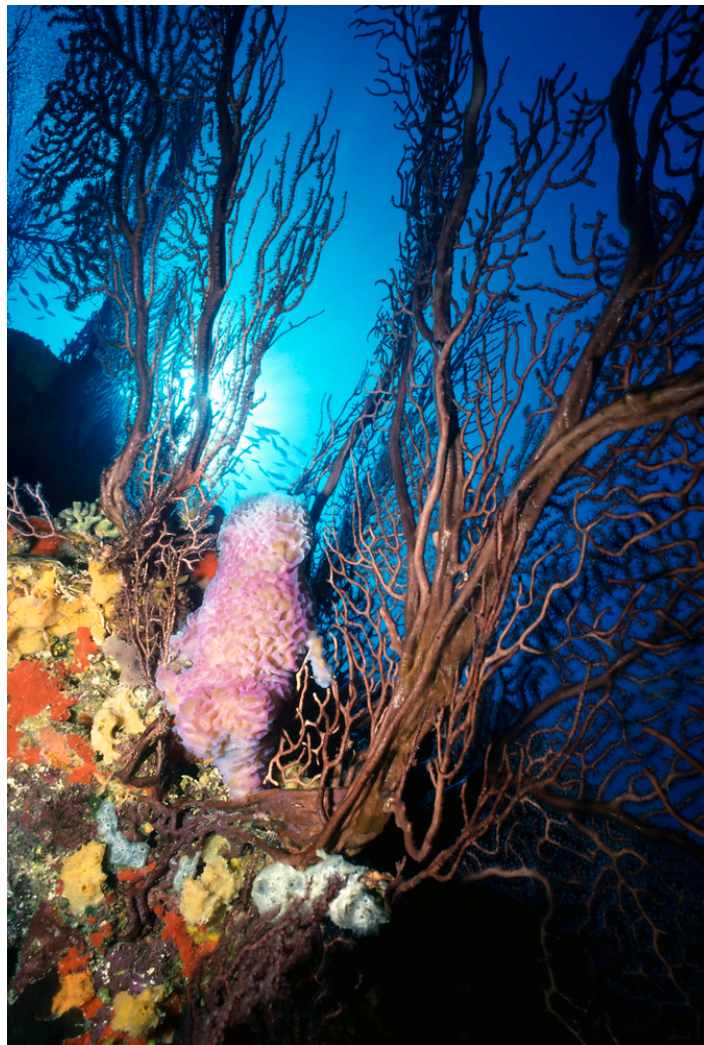


Experiencing those visual treats and having the sensation of an almost superpower-like feeling of flying through the aquatic environment never diminishes for me. Swimming in a lake, a river, or a swimming pool is altogether different because you seem to be enclosed by visual restrictions. Because of some form of barrier, as in the enclosure of a swimming pool or perhaps less clear water quality diminishing visual range as in most lakes and rivers. The crystal clear waters at most Pacific or Atlantic ocean's tropical diving sites is almost as pure as the air we usually walk in. But while the open-air realm requires us to resist gravity, swimming in these aquatic environments allows for a respite from that gravity drag and imparts a sense of freedom.

In this tale, I will tell you about a special dive in the South Pacific Island of Rongelap in the Marshall Islands. These islands are pretty much in the middle of nowhere if you look them up on the map, but in reality, when you are there, they are, of course, the center of your Universe and a very attractive center they most certainly are. The Marshall Islands themselves are not especially dramatic as there are no tall mountains, rivers or waterfalls, but the ocean they are surrounded by is magnificent. The coral reefs are what the term "pristine" was invented to describe. Still, they rarely are seen as most people other than the natives of Rongelap are not

there in any great number, and therefore there is no degradation of the aquatic environment. The water itself is quite simply a brilliant liquid aquamarine gemstone. Very fortunate are those people that can experience the reality of entering into those waters. It seems as though you are immersing yourself in a totally different and mystical environment and not one of this world and in a genuine way.

The magic of Creation is in full force in these waters, and it would appear that no restrictions have been placed on the Creators. It indeed seems to go way beyond the general tenets associated with a theory of evolution by natural selection.



It starts with the seawater itself. As incredibly beautiful as that element is, when you begin to acclimate to a submerged reef environment, you begin to expand your views, widen your perspectives and sharpen your perceptions. It becomes evident that you have entered into an entirely different world. It is at this time that you must make a bold decision internally. You can decide that you are a separate entity visiting this aquatic world or that you are a spiritual entity that becomes embedded within this magical realm. It was on this drive that I made the decision to do the latter. I sincerely wanted to be a part of this place and not simply be a visitor.



Once I made that decision, everything changed for me. I became aware of the interaction between my body and the seawater itself. Obviously, that comparison had always existed, but I didn't really pay much attention. It was just something that happened, but now I was deep-diving into a new perception of the world I was experiencing. I had always been aware of the myriad of color, texture, and style of the coral reef itself and knew that it was composed of living organisms that took on their own specific forms. But that was simply knowledge and what I was observing was undeniably real, understood, and sensed. The corals were actually moving and generating their own shapes and colors before my eyes. Somehow, I made my perceived psychic timeframe speed up, at least as registered by my consciousness. It was like the difference between a still photograph and a motion picture. I first saw the reef as a static scene, and then suddenly, it morphed into a totally alive and vigorously growing entity. Everything connected to the coral was moving and moving with a purpose. The coral procreated along a determined path of creative urging and displayed magnificent shapes and vibrant colors during the process.



In a great display of this fast time, or perhaps no time at all, the coral was creating mini-mansions for the families of fish and crustaceans, mollusks, and heaven knows what other marine animals wanting and needing to establish a residence within this unbelievable coral kingdom. I came upon a magnificent giant clam that was not only huge but also impossibly beautiful.

As I swam over the top of the reef and glided downwards along the deepwater side of this exotic marine city, I began to focus on other aquatic sea life. I attempted not to gasp too much because I was wearing a scuba mask. I had always thought that our Creator did a fantastic job of establishing life on land. Still, it seems that it was possibly going to be an even greater effort when it came to the ocean and, in particular, to this coral reef community. I mentally started to count the various large fish working their way in and out of the coral crevices but soon gave up because they were way too numerous. Then I was soon swimming through clouds of uncountable gemstone-colored fish. They were swarming in and out and over the top of the reef in incredible numbers. When a huge school came towards me, they simply swarmed over and around me without any semblance of panic. And it wasn't just the brilliant colors of these fish, but also the incredible shapes and configurations of these creatures. I thought to myself that this was Creation at its finest. And without any seeming innovative restrictions being placed on their design by the Creator. It was obviously a case of, "You think of it, and there it is".

I quickly got the impression that this coral reef had been conjured up by a Supreme Creator and used with a palette board that allows a Creator's Imagination to design ever more wondrous lifeforms. I was invited to see all of them in their glory being created and then paraded before me. I also knew that this was a particularly egoistic attitude, but the entire environment was so welcoming and suggestive of that end. I was enthralled.

You would think that I would have been overwhelmed by being immersed with thousands of amazing schools of fish cavorting over a superbly beautiful coral reef. I was also able to notice large individual marine animals moving towards me to make an introduction. First, there was a couple of huge groupers, each with different markings coming within inches of my face with their fins moving ever so slowly, so they were actually hovering in place. Then they moved aside to allow me to meet two moray eels slithering out of some coral wall crevices and



tentatively moving towards me and then darting back in and then repeating their performance. I had always been a bit wary of these eels, but not on this dive for some reason. A proper introduction seems to work wonders.

While I was moving about after meeting those amiable finny residents, I felt a looming presence approaching. Ever so slowly, I looked back over my shoulder and saw an enormous black form, and my heart quivered with an emerging sense of fear. This form was entirely too large, with no well-defined shape, probably because of my distance. But that creature, whatever it was, suggested danger, so I decided to leave the tranquil place I was at and swam away from the assumed menace. The form followed, and I started to swim faster, occasionally glancing backward, and I saw that this scary thing was still following me, but maintaining the same separation in the distance. Apparently, it was not very certain of me either. I decided that I better exit this environment and swam up the side of the reef wall and came to the surface. I broke through and saw the sun and sky, but I first thought that I might have dodged something dangerous. After all, I was actually now far more vulnerable because I was floating on the surface. I gained my senses and then dove back down into the deep. I felt better.

And then that dark form returned. But now, I decided that even though I was a newcomer into this world, I had felt that I was actually welcome and belonged

here. So.....! I swam directly towards this unknown creature with an intent to introduce myself and soon met up with it, face to face. It was a beautiful black Manta-Ray and suddenly, both of our perceptions altered. I was no longer afraid of the ray, and the ray was no longer that curious or apprehensive about me. After a good look and perhaps finding me somewhat dull, the Manta Ray decided to turn and swim off and look for something that suited its interests better. I was very relieved and perhaps had learned my lesson not to be afraid of something until I had a good reason to be.

And then!!!!!! I saw an enormous tiger shark approaching me. It was not attacking but was seemingly intent on a close investigation, and I was now faced with the reality of my new convictions. Was I truly welcomed into this aquatic world, or was I just going to end up as an appetizer for a superior predator that dominates this realm? It would certainly be natural if the latter was to be the case. The tiger shark swam directly to me, stopped within 2 feet from my face, and then peered directly into my eyes. I wasn't sure what to do and just let my instincts, of which I knew I had very few, take over my actions. I reached out with one hand and stroked the top of the shark's head. It just waved its huge tail fin to maintain its position and then started to roll completely over with its back hovering over the sea bottom. I took this to be a very good sign and then continued to rub this now gentle creature all over its white belly. I swear I could hear the shark purr, but that was more my overactive imagination than reality, but I could see that the huge shark enjoyed the attention.

While I was petting my new friend, I was aware that my ministrations attracted a certain amount of attention on the reef. Myriad schools of colorful fish were beginning to swarm around the tiger shark and me. They were very interested in this new budding relationship. Obviously, new action on the reef and curiosity seemed to lure most living creatures, even here. Large groupers, such as the giant coral and brown-marbled types and many small snappers and Napoleon wrasses, were attracted to the scene. I even saw two octopi slither up the side of the reef to take a look. I swear that they were holding hands or actually tentacles while they watched. A gang of shrimp scampered out from behind a large brain coral. They were chattering a lot between each other, perhaps discussing how things were getting out of hand when you let a human being type hang around their



neighborhood. I hadn't yet figured out the language being used in this water world, but somehow, I just knew what was being said or felt by my fellow reefy friends.

A large leatherback turtle glided into view and joined the other visitors looking and perhaps discussing what was happening here somehow. He was always concerned when a tiger shark was in the vicinity as they have been known to crack the shell of a leatherback every so often and then gobble down the turtle inside. However, this tiger shark didn't look like he was in a mood to do that, so the turtle decided to stick around to see how this crazy human could make the tiger loll about with his mouth half-open.

Apparently, the word quickly got out because suddenly, white tip sharks, zebra sharks, gray reef sharks and nurse sharks started to appear on the scene. They circled us, and although I should have been threatened with their arrival, I wasn't at all. One by one, they swam by us and sort of tilted their sides a bit as though they would like to be belly scratched as well. I would have been willing but certainly didn't want the tiger shark to get angry at this point.

Imagine just how wonderful this was to have all of the denizens of the reef that I have previously mentioned challenging me to accept them. And not mention them by name, except that I think I have to mention the surgeonfish and parrotfish

because they would be upset that I didn't acknowledge their arrival. You could tell by the look on their faces. Then came some big nose unicorn fish along with big eye emperor fish. A few fork-tail rabbitfish, peacock groupers, and three more giant coral groupers joined the party.

Good grief, there were too many of these fabulous creatures to count, to identify or to name. The word had obviously gotten out that there was a crazy Who-man rubbing the stomach of a tiger shark, and everyone had to see this happening to believe it.

Larger fish such as the groupers, sharks, and rays decided that this overly friendly activity was very nice to behold. They gave into an impulse to open their mouth wide so the blue cleaner wrasses could dart in and out and rid their teeth and gills of all kinds of edibles that the larger fish didn't want, but the wrasses loved. There was a virtual orgy of tending to others erupting throughout the reef. I was very happy that I was causing at least a part of this.

However, as we all know, all good things have to come to an end. I began to feel the telltale subtle changes in the air supply in my scuba tank, informing me that my dive would soon come to an end and that I must leave and return to the surface. I didn't want to but knew I had to, so I slowly stopped rubbing the belly of my new friend. It didn't take long for the tiger shark to roll upright again and look me directly into my eyes. I became a little bit nervous again, but I held my ground, trusting in the powers of Creation that had just allowed the wondrous things that had just taken place here.

I reached out and rubbed the tiger's head and it sort of nodded, perhaps offering a thank-you? Then it turned to swim away. In a flash, all of the other participants of this impromptu gathering rushed back into their routines. The party was over.

I, too, needed to rush back to the water's surface and leave this fantastic world. Our inflatable raft was anchored nearby, and I swam upwards to reach it and soon pulled myself onto it, pulling off my mask just as all of my air had depleted. My dive buddy had already returned and was half dozing as the water lapped against the thin rubber bottom, and the sun was shining brightly overhead.

I started to say something to him but realized that I could never explain what had just happened. He simply smiled at me and said, "Somethings don't need saying, they just need doing," and then he fell asleep in this cozy warm raft.

So did I.

"Wasn't the narrative by this scuba diver fun? That was a real Vision Quest if I ever read one. I think he did an excellent job describing that marine world he was diving in, and I know he made me want to dive it as well.

How about you?"

