
PASTWATCH: THE REDEMPTION OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

by Orson Scott Card

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Pastwatch

Some people called it "the time of undoing"; some, wishing to be more positive, spoke of it as "the replanting" or "the restoring" or even "the resurrection" of the Earth. All these names were accurate. Something had been done, and now it was being undone. Much had died or been broken or killed, and now it was coming back to life.

This was the work of the world in those days: Nutrients were put back in the soil of the great rain forests of the world, so the trees could grow tall again. Grazing was banished from the edges of the great deserts of Africa and Asia, and grass was planted so that steppe and then savanna could slowly reconquer territory they had lost to the stone and sand. Though the weather stations high in orbit could not change the climate, they tweaked the winds often enough that no spot on Earth would suffer drought or flood, or lack for sunlight. In great preserves the surviving animals learned how to live again in the wild. All the nations of the world had an equal claim on food, and no one feared hunger anymore. Good teachers came to every child, and every man and woman had a decent chance to become whatever his or her talents and passions and desires led them to become.

It should have been a happy time, with humanity pressing forward into a future in which the world would be healed, in which a comfortable life could be lived without the shame of knowing that it came at someone else's expense. And for many -- perhaps most -- it was. But many others could not turn their faces from the shadows of the past. Too many creatures were missing, never to be restored. Too many people, too many nations now lay buried in the soil of the past. Once the world had teemed with seven billion human lives. Now a tenth that number tended the gardens of Earth. The survivors could not easily forget the century of war and plague, of drought and flood and famine, of desperate fury leading to despair. Every step of every living man and woman trod on someone's grave, or so it seemed.

So it was not only forests and grasslands that were brought back to life. People also sought to bring back the lost memories, the stories, the intertwining paths that men and women had followed that led them to their times of glory and their times of shame. They built machines that let them see into the past, at first the great sweeping changes across the centuries, and then, as the machinery was refined, the faces and the voices of the dead.

They knew, of course, that they could not record it all. There were not enough alive to witness all the actions of the dead. But by sampling here and there, by following this question to its answer, that nation to its end, the men and women of Pastwatch could tell stories to their fellow citizens, true fables that explained why nations rose and fell; why men and women envied, raged, and loved; why children laughed in sunlight and trembled in the dark of night.

Pastwatch remembered so many forgotten stories, replicated so many lost or broken works of art, recovered so many customs, fashions, jokes, and games, so many religions and philosophies, that sometimes it seemed that there was no need to think up anything again. All of history was available, it seemed, and yet Pastwatch had barely scratched the surface of the past, and most watchers looked forward to a limitless future of rummaging through time.

Chapter 1 -- The Governor

There was only one time when Columbus despaired of making his voyage. It was the night of August 23rd, in the port of Las Palmas on Grand Canary Island.

After so many years of struggle, his three caravels had finally set sail from Palos, only to run

into trouble almost at once. After so many priests and gentlemen in the courts of Spain and Portugal had smiled at him and then tried to destroy him behind his back, Columbus found it hard to believe that it wasn't sabotage when the rudder of the Pinta came loose and nearly broke. After all, Quintero, the owner of the Pinta, was so nervous about having his little ship go out on such a voyage that he had signed on as a common seaman, just to keep an eye on his property. And Pinzón told him privately that he had seen a group of men gathered at the stern of the Pinta just as they were setting sail. Pinzón fixed the rudder himself, at sea, but the next day it broke again. Pinzón was furious, but he vowed to Columbus that the Pinta would meet him at Las Palmas within days.

So confident was Columbus of Pinzón's ability and commitment to the voyage that he gave no more thought to the Pinta. He sailed with the Santa Maria and the Niña to the island of Gomera, where Beatrice de Bobadilla was governor. It was a meeting he had long looked forward to, a chance to celebrate his triumph over the court of Spain with one who had made it plain she longed for his success. But Lady Beatrice was not at home. And as he waited, day after day, he had to endure two intolerable things.

The first consisted of having to listen politely to the petty gentlemen of Beatrice's little court, who kept telling him the most appalling lies about how on certain bright days, from the island of Ferro, westernmost of the Canaries, one could see a faint image of a blue island on the western horizon-- as if plenty of ships had not already sailed that far west! But Columbus had grown skilled at smiling and nodding at the most outrageous stupidity. One did not survive at court without that particular skill, and Columbus had weathered not only the wandering courts of Ferdinand and Isabella, but also the more settled and deeply arrogant court of John of Portugal. And after waiting decades to win the ships and men and supplies and, above all, the permission to make this voyage, he could endure a few more days of conversation with stupid gentlemen. Though he sometimes had to grind his teeth not to point out how utterly useless they must be in the eyes of God and everyone else, if they could find nothing better to do with their lives than wait about in the court of the governor of Gomera when she was not even at home. No doubt they amused Beatrice-- she had shown a keen appreciation of the worthlessness of most men of the knightly class when she conversed with Columbus at the royal court at Santa Fe. No doubt she skewered them constantly with ironic barbs which they did not realize were ironic.

More intolerable by far was the silence from Las Palmas. He had left men there with instructions to tell him as soon as Pinzón managed to bring the Pinta into port. But no word came, day after day, as the stupidity of the courtiers became more insufferable, until finally he refused to tolerate either of the intolerables a moment longer. Bidding a grateful adios to the gentlemen of Gomera, he set sail for Las Palmas himself, only to find when he arrived on the 23rd of August that the Pinta was still not there.

The worst possibilities immediately came to mind. The saboteurs were so grimly determined not to complete the voyage that there had been a mutiny, or they had somehow persuaded Pinzón to turn around and sail for Spain. Or they were adrift in the currents of the Atlantic, getting swept to some unnameable destination. Or pirates had taken them-- or the Portuguese, who might have thought they were part of some foolish Spanish effort to poach on their private preserve along the coasts of Africa. Or Pinzón, who clearly thought himself better suited to lead the expedition than Columbus himself-- though he would never have been able to win royal sponsorship for such an expedition, having neither the education, the manners, nor the patience that it had required-- might have had the foolish notion of sailing on ahead, reaching the Indies before Columbus.

All of these were possible, and from one moment to the next each seemed likely. Columbus withdrew from human company that night and threw himself to his knees-- not for the first time, but never before with such anger at the Almighty. "I have done all you set for me to do," he said, "I have pushed and pleaded, and never once have you given me the slightest encouragement, even in the darkest times. Yet my trust never failed, and at last I got the expedition on the exact terms that were required. We set sail. My plan was good. The season was right. The crew is skilled even if they think themselves better sailors than their commander. All I needed now, all that I needed, after everything I've endured till now, was for something to go right."

Was this too bold a thing for him to say to the Lord? Probably. But Columbus had spoken boldly to powerful men before, and so the words spilled easily from his heart to flow from his tongue. God could strike him down for it if he wanted-- Columbus had put himself in God's hands years

before, and he was weary.

"Was that too much for you, most gracious Lord? Did you have to take away my third ship? My best sailor? Did you even have to deprive me of the kindness of Lady Beatrice? It is obvious that I have not found favor in your eyes, O Lord, and therefore I urge you to find somebody else. Strike me dead if you want, it could hardly be worse than killing me by inches, which seems to be your plan at this moment. I'll tell you what. I will stay in your service for one more day. Send me the Pinta or show me what else you want me to do, but I swear by your most holy and terrible name, I will not sail on such a voyage with fewer than three ships, well equipped and fully crewed. I've become an old man in your service, and as of tomorrow night, I intend to resign and live on whatever pension you see fit to provide me with." Then he crossed himself. "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Having finished this most impious and offensive prayer, Columbus could not sleep until at last, no less angry than before, he flung himself out of bed and knelt again.

"Nevertheless thy will not mine be done!" he said furiously. Then he climbed back into bed and promptly fell asleep.

The next morning the Pinta limped into port. Columbus took it as the final confirmation that God really was still interested in the success of this voyage. Very well, thought Columbus. You didn't strike me dead for my disrespect, Lord; instead you sent me the Pinta. Therefore I will prove to you that I am still your loyal servant.

He did it by working half the citizens of Las Palmas, or so it seemed, into a frenzy. The port had plenty of carpenters and caulkers, smiths and cordwainers and sailmakers, and it seemed that all of them were pressed into service on the Pinta. Pinzón was full of defiant apologies -- they had been adrift for nearly two weeks before he was finally able, by brilliant seamanship, to bring the Pinta into exactly the port he had promised. Columbus was still suspicious, but didn't show it. Whatever the truth was, Pinzón was here now, and so was the Pinta, complete with a rather sullen Quintero. That was good enough for Columbus.

And as long as he had the attention of the shipworkers of Las Palmas, he finally bullied Juan Nino, the owner of the Nina, into changing from his triangular sails to the same square rigging as the other caravels, so they'd all be catching the same winds and, God willing, sailing together to the court of the great Khan of China.

It took only a week to have all three ships in better shape than they had been in upon leaving Palos, and this time there were no unfortunate failures of vital equipment. If there had been saboteurs before, they were no doubt sobered by the fact that both Columbus and Pinzón seemed determined to sail on at all costs -- not to mention the fact that now if the expedition failed, they might end up stranded on the Canary Islands, with little prospect of returning anytime soon to Palos.

And so gracious was God in answering Columbus's impudent prayer that when at last he sailed into Gomera for the final resupply of his ships, the banner of the governor was flying above the battlements of the castle of San Sebastidn.

Any fears he might have had that Beatrice de Bobadilla no longer held him in high esteem were removed at once. When he was announced, she immediately dismissed all the other gentlemen who had so condescended to Columbus the week before. "Cristobal, my brother, my friend!" she cried. When he had kissed her hand she led him from the court to a garden, where they sat in the shade of a tree and he told her of all that had transpired since they last met at Santa Fe.

She listened, rapt, asking intelligent questions and laughing at his tales of the hideous interference the king had visited upon Columbus almost as soon as he had signed the capitulations. "Instead of paying for three caravels, he dredged up some ancient offense that the city of Palos had committed -- smuggling, no doubt--"

"The primary industry of Palos for many years, I'm told," said Beatrice.

"And as their punishment, he required them to pay a fine of exactly two caravels."

"I'm surprised he didn't make them pay for all three," said Beatrice. "He's a hard loaf, dear old Ferdinand. But he did pay for a war without going bankrupt. And he has just expelled the Jews, so it isn't as if he has anybody to borrow from."

"The irony is that seven years ago, the Duke of Sidonia would have bought me three caravels from Palos out of his own treasury, if the crown had not refused him permission."

"Dear old Enrique -- he's always had far more money than the crown, and he just can't understand why that doesn't make him more powerful than they are."

"Anyway, you can imagine how glad they were to see me in Palos. And then, to make sure both cheeks were well slapped, he issued a proclamation that any man who agreed to join my expedition would win a suspension of any civil and criminal actions pending against him."

"Oh, no."

"Oh, yes. You can imagine what that did to the real sailors of Palos. They weren't going to sail with a bunch of criminals and debtors -- or run the risk of people thinking that they had needed such a pardon."

"His Majesty no doubt imagined that it would take such an incentive to persuade anyone to sail with you on your mad adventure."

"Yes, well, his 'help' nearly killed the expedition from the start."

"So -- how many felons and paupers are there in your crew?"

"None, or at least none that we know of. Thank God for Martin Pinzn."

"Oh, yes, a man of legend."

"You know of him?"

"All the sailors' lore comes to the Canaries. We live by the sea."

"He caught the vision of the thing. But once he noised it about that he was going, we started to get recruits. And it was his friends who ended up risking their caravels on the voyage."

"Not free of charge, of course."

"They hope to be rich, at least by their standards."

"As you hope to be rich by yours."

"No, my lady. I hope to be rich by your standards."

She laughed and touched his arm. "Cristobal, how good it is to see you again. How glad I am that God chose you to be his champion in this war agamst the Ocean Sea and the court of Spain."

Her remark was light, but it touched on a matter quite tender: She was the only one who knew that he had undertaken his voyage at the command of God. The priests of Salamanca thought him a fool, but if he had ever breathed a word of his belief in God's having spoken to him, they would have branded him a heretic and that would have brought an end to more than Columbus's plan for an expedition to the Indies. He had not meant to tell her, either; he had not meant to tell anyone, had not even told his brother Bartholomew, nor his wife Felipa before she died, nor even Father Perez at La Rdbida. Yet after only an hour in the company of Lady Beatrice, he had told her. Not all, of course. But that God had chosen him, had commanded him to make this voyage, he told her that much.

Why had he told her? Perhaps because he knew implicitly that he could trust her with his life. Or perhaps because she looked at him with such piercing intelligence that he knew that no other explanation than the truth would convince her. Even so, he had not told her the half of it, for even she would have thought him mad.

And she did not think him mad, or if she did, she must have some special love of madmen. A love that continued even now, to a degree beyond his hopes. "Stay the night with me, my Cristobal," she said.

"My lady," he answered, unsure if he had heard aright.

"You lived with a common woman named Beatrice in Cordoba. She had your child. You can't pretend to be living a monkish life."

"I seem doomed to fall under the spell of ladies named Beatrice. And none of them has been, by any stretch of the imagination, a common woman."

Lady Beatrice laughed lightly. "You managed to compliment your old lover and one who would be your new one, both at once. No wonder you were able to win your way past the priests and scholars. I daresay Queen Isabella fell in love with your red hair and the fire in your eyes, just as I did."

"More grey in the hair than red, I fear."

"Hardly any," she answered.

"My lady," he said, "it was your friendship I prayed for when I came to Gomera. I did not dare to dream of more."

"Are you beginning a long and gracefully convoluted speech that will, in the end, decline my carnal invitation?"

"Ah, Lady Beatrice, not decline, but perhaps postpone?"

She reached out, leaned forward, touched his cheek. "You're not a very handsome man, you know, Cristobal."

"That has always been my opinion as well," he answered.

"And yet one can't take one's eyes from you. Nor can one purge one's thoughts of you when you're gone. I'm a widow, and you're a widower. God saw fit to remove our spouses from the torments of this world. Must we also be tormented by unfulfilled desires?"

"My lady, the scandal. If I stayed the night--"

"Oh, is that all? Then leave before midnight. I'll let you over the parapet by a silken rope."

"God has answered my prayers," he said to her.

"As well he should, since you were on his mission."

"I dare not sin and lose his favor now."

"I knew I should have seduced you back in Santa Fe."

"And there's this, my lady. When I return, successful, from this great enterprise, then I'll not be a commoner, whose only touch of gentility is by his marriage into a not-quite-noble family of Madeira. I'll be Viceroy. I'll be Admiral of the Ocean Sea." He grinned. "You see, I took your advice and got it all in writing in advance."

"Well, Viceroy indeed! I doubt you'll waste a glance on a mere governor of a far-off island."

"Ah, no, Lady. I'll be Admiral of the Ocean Sea, and as I contemplate my realm--"

"Like Poseidon, ruler over all the shores that are touched by the waves of the sea--"

"I will find no more treasured crown than this island of Gomera, and no more lovely jewel in that crown than the fair Beatrice."

"You've been at court too long. You make your compliments sound rehearsed."

"Of course I've rehearsed it, over and over, the whole week I waited here in torment for your return."

"For the Pinta's return, you mean."

"Both were late. Your rudder, however, was undamaged."

Her face reddened, and then she laughed.

"You complained that my compliments were too courtly. I thought you might appreciate a tavern compliment."

"Is that what that was? Do strumpets sleep with men for free if they say such pretty things?"

"Not strumpets, Lady. Such poetry is not for those who can be had for mere money."

"Poetry?"

"Thou art my caravel, with sails full-winded --"

"Watch your nautical references, my friend."

"Sails full-winded, and the bright red banners of thy lips dancing as thou speakest."

"You're very good at this. Or are you not making it up as you go along?"

"Making it all up. Ah, thy breath is the blessed wind that sailors pray for, and the sight of thy rudder leaves this poor sailor full-masted --"

She slapped his face, but it wasn't meant to hurt.

"I take it my poetry is a failure."

"Kiss me, Cristobal. I believe in your mission, but if you never return I want at least your kiss to remember you by."

So he kissed her, and again. But then he took his leave of her, and returned to the last preparations for his voyage. It was God's work now; when it was done, then it was time to collect the worldly rewards. Though who was to say that she was not, after all, a reward from heaven? It was God, after all, who had made a widow of her, and perhaps God also who made her, against all probability, love this son of a Genovese weaver.

He saw her, or thought he saw her -- and who else could it have been? -- waving a scarlet handkerchief as if it were a banner from the parapet of the castle as his caravels at last set forth. He raised his hand in a salute to her, and then turned his face westward. He would not look again to the east, to Europe, to home, not until he had achieved what God had sent him to do. The last of the obstacles was past now, surely. Ten days' sailing and he would step ashore in Cathay or India, the Spice Islands or in Cipangu. Nothing could stop him now, for God was with him, as he had been with him since that day on the beach when God appeared to him and told him to forget his dreams of a crusade. "I have a greater work for you," God said then, and now Columbus was near the culmination of that work. It filled him like wine, it filled him like light, it filled him like the wind in the sails over his head.

Chapter 2 -- Slaves

Though Tagiri did not put her own body back in time, it is still true to say that she was the one who stranded Christopher Columbus on the island of Hispaniola and changed the face of history forever. Though she was born seven centuries after Columbus's voyage and never left her birth continent of Africa, she found a way to reach back and sabotage the European conquest of America. It was not an act of malice. Some said that it was like correcting a painful hernia in a brain-damaged child: In the end, the child would still be severely limited, but it would not suffer as

much along the way. But Tagiri saw it differently.

"History is not prelude," she said once. "We don't justify the suffering of people in the past because everything turned out well enough by the time we came along. Their suffering counts just as much as our peace and happiness. We look out of our golden windows and feel pity for the scenes of blood and blades, of plagues and famines that are played out in the surrounding country. When we believed that we could not go back in time and make changes, then we could be excused for shedding a tear for them and then going on about our happy lives. But once we know that it is in our power to help them, then, if we turn away and let their suffering go on, it is no golden age we live in, and we poison our own happiness. Good people do not let others suffer needlessly." What she asked was a hard thing, but some agreed with her. Not all, but in the end, enough.

Nothing in her parentage, her upbringing, or her education gave any hint that one day, by unmaking one world, she would create another. Like most young people who joined Pastwatch, Tagiri's first use of the Tempoview machine was to trace her own family back, generation before generation. She was vaguely aware that, as a novice, she would be observed during her first year. But hadn't they told her that as she learned to control and fine-tune the machine ("it's an art, not a science") she could explore anything she wanted? It wouldn't have bothered her, anyway, to know that her superiors nodded knowingly when it became clear that she was following her matrilineal line back to a Dongotona village on the banks of the Koss River. Though she was as racially mixed as anyone else in the world these days, she had picked the one lineage that mattered most to her, the one from which she derived her identity. Dongotona was the name of her tribe and of the mountainous country where they lived, and the village of Ikoto was her foremothers' ancient home.

It was hard to learn to use the Tempoview. Even though it had extraordinarily good computer-assisted guidance, so that getting to the exact place and time you wanted was precise within minutes, there was no computer yet that could overcome what the pastwatchers called the "significance problem." Tagiri would pick a vantage point in the village -- near the main path winding among the houses and then set up a time frame, such as a week. The computer would then scan for human passage and record all that took place within range of the vantage point.

All this took only minutes -- and enormous amounts of electricity, but this was the dawn of the twenty-third century, and solar energy was cheap. What ate up Tagiri's first weeks was sorting through the empty conversations, the meaningless events. Not that they seemed empty or meaningless at first. When she started, Tagiri could listen to any conversation and be enthralled. These were real people, from her own past! Some of them were bound to be ancestors of hers, and sooner or later she'd sort out which ones. In the meantime, she loved it all -- the flirtatious girls, the complaining old men, the tired women snapping at the rude children; and oh, those children! Those fungus-covered, hungry, exuberant children, too young to know they were poor and too poor to know that not everyone in the world woke up hungry in the morning and went to bed hungry at night. They were so alive, so alert.

Within a few weeks, though, Tagiri had run into the significance problem. After watching a few dozen girls flirting, she knew that all girls of Ikoto flirted in pretty much the same way. After watching a few dozen teasings, tauntings, quarrels, and kindnesses among the children, she realized that she had seen pretty much every variation on teasing, taunting, quarreling, and kindness that she would ever see. No way had yet been found to program the Tempoview computers to recognize unusual, unpredictable human behavior. It had been hard enough to train them to recognize human movement in the first place; in the early days, pastwatchers had had to wade through endless landings and peckings of small birds and scamperings of lizards and mice in order to see a few human interactions.

Tagiri found her own solution -- the minority solution, but those who observed her were not surprised that she was one of those who took this route. Where most pastwatchers began to resort to statistical approaches to their research, keeping counts of different behaviors and then writing papers on cultural patterns, Tagiri took quite the opposite route, beginning to follow one individual from the beginning to the end of life. She wasn't looking for patterns. She was looking for stories. Ah, said her observers. She will be a biographer; it is lives, not cultures, that she will find for us.

Then her research took a twist that her superiors had seen only a few times before. Tagiri had

already worked her way seven generations deep into her mother's family when she abandoned the biographical approach and, instead of following each person from birth to death, she began to follow individual women backward, from death to birth.

Tagiri began doing this with an old woman named Amami, setting up her Tempoview to keep shifting vantage points to track Amami backward in time. It meant that except when she overrode her program, Tagiri was unable to make sense of the woman's conversations. And instead of cause and effect unfolding in the normal linear pattern, she was constantly seeing the effect first, then discovering the cause. In old age Amami walked with a pronounced limp; only after weeks of following her backward in time did Tagiri find the origin of the limp, as a much younger Amami lay bleeding on her mat, and then seemed to crawl backward away from the mat until she uncrumpled and rose to her feet to face her husband, who seemed to draw his walking stick sharply away from her body again and again.

And why had he beaten her? A few more minutes of backtracking brought the answer: Amami had been raped by two powerful men from a nearby village of Lotuko tribesmen when she went for water. But Amami's husband could not accept the idea that it was rape, for that would have meant that he was incapable of protecting his wife; it would have required him to take some kind of vengeance, which would have endangered the fragile peace between Lotuko and Dongotona in the Koss Valley. So for the good of his tribe and to salvage his own ego, he had to interpret his weeping wife's story as a lie, and assume that in fact she had been playing the whore. He was beating her to get her to give him the money she had been paid, even though it was obvious to Tagiri that he knew there was no money, that his beloved wife had not gone whoring, that in fact he was being unjust. His obvious sense of shame at what he was doing did not seem to make him go easier on her. He was more brutal than Tagiri had ever seen any man in the village -- needlessly so, continuing to cane her long after she was screaming and pleading and confessing to all sins ever committed in the world. Since he was doing this beating, not because he believed in the justice of it, but so that he could convince the neighbors that he believed his wife deserved it, he overdid it. Overdid it, and then had to watch Amami limping through the rest of her life.

If he ever asked forgiveness, or even implied it, Tagiri had missed it. He had done what he thought a man had to do to maintain his honor in Ikoto. How could he be sorry for that? Amami might limp, but she had an honorable husband whose prestige was undiminished. Never mind that even the week before she died, some of the little children of the village had still been following after her, taunting her with the words they had learned from the previous batch of children a few years older: "Lotuko-whore!"

The more Tagiri began to care about and identify with the people of Ikoto, the more she began to live in the back-to-front timeflow. As she looked at other people's actions, in and out of the Tempoview, instead of waiting to see the results of actions, she waited to see the causes. To her the world was not a potential future awaiting her manipulation; to her, it was an irrevocable set of results, and all that could be found was the irrevocable causes that led to the present moment.

Her superiors noted this with much curiosity, for those few novices who had experimented with backward timeflow in the past usually gave it up quite soon, because it was so disorienting. But Tagiri did not give it up. She went back and back and back in time, taking old women into the womb, and then following their mothers, on and on, finding the cause of everything.

It was because of this that her novice period was allowed to extend long past those uncertain months when she was still gaining skill at handling the Tempoview and finding her own way past the significance problem. Instead of giving her an assignment in one of the ongoing projects, she was allowed to continue exploring her own past. This was a very practical decision, of course, for as a storyseeker instead of a pattern-seeker, she would not fit in with any of the ongoing projects anyway. Story-seekers were usually allowed to follow their own desires. However, Tagiri's continued backward watching made her, not just unusual, but unique. Her superiors were curious to discover where her research would lead her, and what she would write.

They were not like Tagiri herself. She would have watched herself in order to discover, not where her peculiar research approach would lead, but rather where it had come from.

If they had asked her, she would have thought for a moment and told them, for she was and always had been extraordinarily self-aware. It was my parents' divorce, Tagiri would have said. They had

seemed perfectly happy to her all her life; then, when she was fourteen, she learned that they were divorcing, and suddenly all the idyll of her childhood turned out to be a lie, for her father and mother had been jockeying all those years in a vicious, deadly competition for supremacy in the household. It had been invisible to Tagiri because her parents hid their pernicious competitiveness even from each other, even from themselves, but when Tagiri's father was made head of Sudan Restoration, which would put him two levels higher than Tagiri's mother in the same organization, their hatred for each other's accomplishments finally emerged into the open, naked and brutal.

Only then was Tagiri able to think back to cryptic conversations over breakfast or supper, when her parents had congratulated each other for various accomplishments. Now, no longer naive, Tagiri could remember their words and realize that they had been digging knives into each other's pride. And so it was that at the cusp of her childhood, she suddenly reexperienced all of her life till then, only in reverse, with the result clear in her mind, thinking backward and backward, discovering the true causes of everything. That was how she had seen life ever since -- long before she thought of using her university study in ethnology and ancient languages as an entree to Pastwatch.

They did not ask her why her timeflow ran backward, and she did not tell them. Though she was vaguely uneasy that she had not yet been assigned to anything, Tagiri was also glad, for she was playing the greatest game of her life, solving puzzle after puzzle. Hadn't Amami's daughter been late to marry? And hadn't her daughter in turn married too young, and to a man who was far more strong-willed and selfish than her mother's kind but compliant husband? Each generation rejected the choices of the generation before, never understanding the reasons behind the mother's life. Happiness for this generation, misery for the next, but all traceable back to a rape and an unjust beating of an already miserable woman. Tagiri had heard all the reverberations before at last she came upon the ringing bell; she had felt all the waves before she came, at last, to the stone dropping into the pool. Just as it had been in her own childhood.

By all signs, she would have a strange and intriguing career, and her personnel file was given the rare status of a silver tag, which told anyone who had authority to reassign her that she was to be left alone or encouraged to go on with whatever she was doing.

In the meantime, unknown to her, a monitor would be permanently assigned to her, to track all her work, so that in case (as sometimes happened with these strange ones) she never published, upon her death a report on her life's work would be issued anyway, for whatever value it might then have. Only five other people had silver tags on their files when Tagiri achieved this status. And Tagiri was the strangest of them all.

Her life might have gone on that way, for nothing outside her was allowed to interfere with the course she naturally followed. But well into her second year of personal research, she came upon an event in the village of Ikoto that turned her away from one path and into another, with consequences that would change the world. She was backtracking through the life of a woman named Diko. More than any other woman she had studied, Diko had won Tagiri's heart, for there was from the day of her death on back an air of sadness to her that made her seem a figure of tragedy. The others around her sensed it, too -- she was treated with great reverence, and often was asked for advice, even by men, though she was not one of the omen-women and performed no more priestly rites than any other Dongotona.

The sadness remained, year before year, back and back into her years as a young wife, until at last it gave way to something else: fear, rage, even weeping. I am close, thought Tagiri. I will find out the pain at the root of her sadness. Was this, too, some act of her husband's? That would be hard to believe, for unlike Amami's husband, Diko's was a mild and kind man, who enjoyed his wife's position of respect in the village while never seeming to seek any honor for himself. Not a proud man, or a brutal one. And they seemed, in their most private moments, to be genuinely in love; whatever caused Diko's sadness, her husband was a comfort to her.

Then Diko's fear and rage gave way to fear alone, and now the whole village was turned out, searching, hunting through the brush and the forest and along the riverbanks for something lost. Someone lost, rather, for there were no possessions among the Dongotona that would be worth searching for so intently, if lost -- only human beings had such value, for only they were irreplaceable.

And then, suddenly, the search was unbegun, and for the first time Tagiri could see the Diko that might have been: smiling, laughing, singing, her face fined with perfect delight at the life the gods had given her. For there in Diko's house Tagiri now saw for the first time the one whose loss had brought Diko such deep sadness all her life: an eight-year-old boy, bright and alert and happy. She called him Acho, and she talked to him constantly, for he was her companion in work and play. Tagiri had seen good mothers and bad in her passage through the generations, but never such a delight of a mother in her son, and of a son in his mother. The boy also loved his father, and was learning all the manly things from him as he should, but Diko's husband was not as verbal as his wife and firstborn son, so he watched and listened and enjoyed them together, only occasionally joining in their banter.

Perhaps because Tagiri had watched with such suspense through so many weeks, searching for the cause of Diko's sadness, or perhaps because she had come to admire and love Diko so much during her long passage with her, Tagiri could not do as she had done before, and simply continue to move backward, to Acho's emergence from Diko's womb, back to Diko's childhood home and her own birth. Acho's disappearance had had too many reverberations, not just in his mother's life but, through her, in the lives of the whole village, for Tagiri to leave the mystery of his disappearance unsolved. Diko never knew what happened to her boy, but Tagiri had the means to find out. And besides, even though it meant changing direction and searching forward in time for a while, tracking, not a woman, but a boy, it was still a part of her backward search. She would find what it was that took Acho and caused Diko's endless grief.

There were hippos in the waters of the Koss in those days, though rarely this far upriver, and Tagiri dreaded seeing what the villagers assumed -- poor Acho broken and drowned in the jaws of a surly hippopotamus.

But it was not a hippo. It was a man.

A strange man, who spoke a language unlike any that Acho had heard -- though Tagiri recognized it at once as Arabic. The man's light skin and beard, his robe and turban, all were intriguing to the nearly naked Acho, who had seen only people with dark brown skin, except when a group of blue-black Dinkas came hunting up the river. How was such a creature as this possible? Unlike other children, Acho was not one to turn and flee, and so when the man smiled and talked his incomprehensible babble (Tagiri knew he was saying, "Come here, little boy, I won't hurt you") Acho stood his ground, and even smiled.

Then the man lashed out with his stick and knocked Acho senseless to the ground. For a moment the man seemed concerned that he might have killed the boy, and he was satisfied to find Acho was still breathing. Then the Arab folded the unconscious child into fetal position and jammed his small body into a bag, which he hoisted over his shoulder and carried back down the riverbank, where he joined two other companions, who also had full bags.

A slaver, Tagiri realized at once. She had thought they did not come this far. Usually they bought their slaves from Dinkas down at the White Nile, and the Dinka slavers knew better than to come into the mountains in groups so small. Their method was to raid a village, kill all the men, and take the small children and the pretty women off for sale, leaving only the old women behind to keen for them. Most of the Muslim slavers preferred to trade for slaves rather than to do their own kidnapping. These men had broken with the pattern. In the old marketeering societies that nearly ruined the world, thought Tagiri, these men would have been viewed as vigorous, innovative entrepreneurs, trying to make a bit more profit by cutting out the Dinka middlemen.

She meant to resume her backward watching then, returning to the life of Acho's mother, but Tagiri found that she could not do it. The computer was set to find new vantage points tracking Acho's movements, and Tagiri did not reach out and give the command that would have returned to the earlier program. Instead she watched and watched, moving forward through time to see, not what caused all this, but where it led. What would happen to this bright and wonderful boy that Diko loved.

What happened at first was that he was almost liberated -- or killed. The slavers were stupid enough to have captured slaves on their way up the river, even though there was no way to return except by passing near the very villages where they had already kidnapped children. At a village

farther downstream, some Lotuko men in full warrior dress ambushed them. The other two Arabs were killed, and since their sacks contained the only children the Lotuko villagers cared about -- their own -- they allowed the slaver who carried Acho on his back to escape.

The slaver eventually found his way to the village where two black slaves of his were keeping the camels. Strapping the bag containing Acho onto the camel, the surviving members of the slaving party got under way at once. To Tagiri's disgust, the man didn't so much as open the bag to see if the boy was still alive.

And so the journey down the Nile continued, all the way to the slave market of Khartoum. The slaver would open the bag containing Acho only once a day, to splash some water into the boy's mouth. The rest of the time the boy rode in darkness, his body cramped in fetal position. He was brave, for he never wept, and after the slaver brutally kicked the bag a few times, Acho stopped trying to plead. Instead he endured in silence, his eyes bright with fear. The bag no doubt stank of his urine by now, and since, like most children of Ikoto, Acho's bowels had always been loose from dysentery, the bag was certainly foul with fecal matter, too. But that soon grew old and dry in the desert, and since Acho was fed nothing, this pollution at least was not renewed. Of course the boy could not have been allowed out of the bag to void his bladder and bowel -- he might have run off, and the slaver was determined to realize some profit from a trip that cost the lives of his two partners.

In Khartoum, it was no surprise that Acho could not walk for a whole day. Beatings, liberally applied, and a meal of sorghum gruel soon had him on his feet, however, and within a day or two he had been bought by a wholesaler for a price that made Acho's captor temporarily rich in the economy of Khartoum.

Tagiri followed Acho down the Nile, by boat and by camel, until he was finally sold in Cairo. Better fed now, well-washed, and looking quite exotic in the bustling Arab-African city that was the cultural center of Islam in those days, Acho fetched an excellent price and joined the household of a wealthy trader. Acho quickly learned Arabic, and his master discovered his bright mind and saw to his education. Acho eventually became the factotum of the house, tending to all while the master was off on voyages. When the master died, his eldest son inherited Acho along with everything else, and relied on him even more heavily, until Acho had de facto control of the entire business, which he ran very profitably, expanding into new markets and new trade goods until the family fortune was one of the greatest in Cairo. And when Acho died, the family sincerely mourned him and gave him an honorable funeral, for a slave.

Yet what Tagiri could not forget was that through all of this, through every hour of every day of every year of Acho's slavery, his face never lost that look of unforgotten longing, of grief, of despair. The look that said, I am a stranger here, I hate this place, I hate my life. The look that said to Tagiri that Acho grieved for his mother just as long and just as deeply as she grieved for him.

That was when Tagiri left her backward search through her own family's past and took on what she thought would be her lifelong project: slavery. Till now, all the story-seekers in Pastwatch had devoted their careers to recording the stories of great, or at least influential, men and women of the past. But Tagiri would study the slaves, not the owners; she would search throughout history, not to record the choices of the powerful, but to find the stories of those who had lost all choice. To remember the forgotten people, the ones whose dreams were murdered and whose bodies were stolen from themselves, so that they were not even featured players in their own autobiographies. The ones whose faces showed that they never forgot for one instant that they did not belong to themselves, and that there was no lasting joy possible in life because of that.

She found this look on faces everywhere. Oh, sometimes there was defiance -- but the defiant ones were always singled out for special treatment, and the ones who didn't die from it were eventually brutalized into wearing the look of despair that the other faces bore. It was the slave look, and what Tagiri discovered was that for an enormous number of human beings in almost every age of history, that was the only face they could ever show to the world.

Tagiri was thirty years old, some eight years into her slavery project, with a dozen of the more traditional pattern-seeking pastwatchers working under her alongside two of the story-seekers, when her career took its final turn, leading her at last to Columbus and the unmaking of history.

Though she never left Juba, the town where her Pastwatch observatory was located, the Tempoview could range anywhere over the Earth's surface. And when the TruSite II was introduced to replace the now-aging Tempoviews, she began to be able to explore farther afield, for rudimentary translation of ancient languages was now built into the system, and she did not have to learn each language herself in order to get the gist of what was going on in the scenes she saw.

Tagiri was often drawn to the TruSite station of one of her storyseekers, a young man named Hassan. She had not bothered to observe his station much when he was using the old Tempoview, because she didn't understand any of the Antillean languages that he was laboriously reconstructing by analogy with other Carib and Arawak languages. Now, however, he had trained the TruSite to catch the main drift of the dialect of Arawak being spoken by the particular tribe he was observing.

"It's a mountain village," he explained, as soon as he saw that she was watching. "Much more temperate than the villages near the coast -- a different kind of agriculture."

"And the occasion?" she asked.

"I'm seeing the lives that were interrupted by the Spanish," he said. "This is only a few weeks before an expedition finally comes up the mountain to take them into slavery. The Spanish are getting desperate for labor down on the coast."

"The plantations are growing?"

"Not at all," said Hassan. "In fact, they're failing. But the Spanish aren't very good at keeping their Indie slaves alive."

"Do they even try?"

"Most do. The murder-for-sport attitude is here, of course, because the Spanish have absolute power and for some that power has to be tested to the limit. But by and large the priests have got control of things and they're really trying to keep the slaves from dying."

Priests in control, thought Tagiri, and yet slavery is unchallenged. But even though it always tasted freshly bitter in her mouth, she knew that there was no point in reminding Hassan of the irony of it -- wasn't he on the slavery project with her?

"The people of Ankuash are perfectly aware of what's going on. They've already figured out that they're just about the last Indies left who haven't been enslaved. They've tried to stay out of sight, lighting no fires and making sure the Spanish don't see them, but there are too many Arawaks and Caribs of the lowlands who are saving some bit of their freedom by collaborating with the Spanish. They remember Ankuash. So there'll be an expedition, soon, and they know it. You see?"

What Tagiri saw was an old man and a middle-aged woman, squatting on opposite sides of a small fire, where a jar of water was giving off steam. She smiled at the new technology -- to be able to see steam in the holographic display was amazing; she almost expected to be able to smell it.

"Tobacco water," said Hassan.

"They drink the nicotine solution?"

Hassan nodded. "I've seen this sort of thing before."

"Aren't they being careless? This doesn't look like a smokeless fire."

"The TruSite may be enhancing the smoke too much in the holo, so there may be less of it than we're seeing," said Hassan. "But smoke or not, there's no way to boil the tobacco water without fire, and at this point they're near despair. Better to risk their smoke being seen than to go another day without word from the gods."

"So they drink."

"They drink and dream," said Hassan.

"Don't they give greater trust to dreams that come of themselves?" asked Tagiri.

"They know that most dreams mean nothing. They hope that their nightmares mean nothing -- fear dreams instead of true dreams. They use the tobacco water to make the gods tell them the truth. Farther down the slopes, the Arawaks and Caribs would have offered a human sacrifice, or bled themselves the way the Mayas do. But this village has no tradition of sacrifice and never adopted it from their neighbors. They're a holdout from a different tradition, I think. Similar to some tribes in the upper Amazon. They don't need death or blood to talk to the gods."

The man and the woman both tipped pipes into the water and then sucked liquid up into their mouths as if through a drinking straw. The woman gagged; the man was apparently inured to the liquid. The woman began to look very sick, but the man made her drink more.

"The woman is Putukam -- the name means Mid dog, " said Hassan. "She's a woman noted for her visions, but she hasn't used tobacco water much before."

"I can see why not," said Tagiri. For now the woman named Putukam was puking and retching. For a moment or two the old man tried to steady her, but in moments he too was vomiting; their discharge mingled and flowed into the ashes of the fire.

"On the other hand, Baiku is a healer, so he uses the drugs more. All the time, actually. So he can send his spirit into the body of the sick person and find out what's wrong. Tobacco water is his favorite. Of course, it still makes him vomit. It makes everybody vomit."

"Making him a candidate for stomach cancer."

"He should live so long," said Hassan.

"Do the gods speak to them?"

Hassan shrugged. "Let's zip ahead and see."

He rushed the display for a few moments -- Putukam and Baiku may have slept for hours, but to the pastwatchers it took only seconds. Whenever they stirred, the TruSite automatically slowed down a little; only when it was clear that the movements were signs of waking, not the normal wriggling of sleep, did Hassan bring the speed back to normal. Now he turned up the sound, and because Tagiri was there, he used the computer translator instead of just listening to the native speech sounds.

"I dreamed," said Putukam.

"And I," said Baiku.

"Let me hear the healing dream," said Putukam.

"There is no healing in it," he said, his face looking grave and sad.

"All slaves?"

"All except the blessed ones who are murdered or die from plagues."

"And then?"

"All dead."

"This is our healing, then," said Putukam. "To die. Better to have been captured by Caribs. Better to have our hearts torn out and our livers eaten. Then at least we would be an offering to a god."

"What was your dream?"

"My dream was madness," she said. "My dream had no truth in it."

"The dreamer does not know," said Baiku.

She sighed. "You will think I am a poor dreamer indeed, and the gods hate my soul. I dreamed of a man and woman watching us. They were full grown, and yet I knew in the dream that they are forty generations younger than us."

Tagiri interrupted. "Stop," she said.

He stopped.

"Was that translation correct?" she demanded.

Hassan spun the TruSite back a little, and ran the scene again, this time with the translator routine suppressed. He listened to the native speech, twice. "The translation is right enough," he said. "The words she used that were rendered as 'man' and 'woman' are from an older language, and I think there may be overtones that might make the words mean hero-man and hero-woman. Less than gods, but more than human. But they often use those words for talking about each other, as opposed to people from other tribes."

"Hassan," she said, "I'm not asking about the etymology. I'm asking about the meaning of what she said."

He looked at her blankly.

"Don't you think that it sounded very much as though she were seeing us?"

"But that's absurd," said Hassan.

"Forty generations. Isn't the time about right? A man and a woman, watching."

"Out of all possible dreams, can't there be dreams of the future?" asked Hassan. "And since Pastwatch scans all eras of history so thoroughly now, isn't it likely that eventually a watcher will witness the telling of a dream that seems to be a dream of the watcher himself?"

"Probability of coincidence," she said. She knew that principle, of course; it had been thoroughly covered in the later stages of training. But there was something else. Yes. As Hassan showed the scene yet a third time, it seemed to Tagiri that when Putukam spoke of her dream, her gaze was steady in the direction from which Hassan and Tagiri were watching, her eyes focused as if she could actually see them, or some glimmer of them.

"It can be disorienting, can't it?" Hassan grinned at her.

"Show the rest," said Tagiri. Of course it was disorienting -- but scarcely less so than Hassan's grin. None of her other subordinates would ever have grinned at her like that, with such a personal comment. Not that Hassan was being impertinent. Rather he was simply ... friendly, yes, that was it.

He started the TruSite viewing beyond what they had seen before.

"I dreamed that they watched me three times," Putukam was saying, "and the woman seemed to know that I could see her."

Hassan slammed his hand onto the Pause button. "There is no God but God," he muttered in Arabic, "and Muhammad is his prophet."

Tagiri knew that sometimes when a Muslim says this, it is because he has too much respect to curse the way a Christian might.

"Probability of coincidence?" she murmured. "I was just thinking that it seemed as though she could see us."

"If I go back and we watch the scene again," said Hassan, "then it will be four times, not three."

"But it had been three times when we first heard her say how many. That will never change."

"The TruSite has no effect on the past," said Hassan. "It can't possibly be detected there."

"And how do we know that?" asked Tagiri.

"Because it's impossible."

"In theory."

"And because it never has."

"Until now."

"You want to believe that she really saw us in her nicotine dream?"

Tagiri shrugged, feigning a nonchalance she didn't feel. "If she saw us, Hassan, then let's go on and see what it means to her."

Hassan slowly, almost timidly, released the TruSite to continue exploring the scene.

"This is prophecy, then," Baiku was saying. "Who knows what wonders the gods will bring in forty generations?"

"I always thought that time moved in great circles, as if all of us had been woven into the same great basket of life, each generation another ring around the rim," said Putukam. "But when in the great circles of time was there ever such horror as these white monsters from the sea? So the basket is torn, and time is broken, and all the world spills out of the basket into the dirt."

"What of the man and woman who watch us?"

"Nothing," said Putukam. "They watched us. They were interested."

"They see us now?"

"They saw all the suffering in your dream," said Putukam. "They were interested in it."

"What do you mean, interested?"

"I think they were sad," said Putukam.

"But ... were they white, then? Did they watch the people suffer and care nothing for it, like the white men?"

"They were dark. The woman is very black. I have never seen a person of such blackness of skin."

"Then why don't they stop the white men from making us slaves?"

"Maybe they can't," said Putukam.

"If they can't save us," said Baiku, "then why do they look at us, unless they are monsters who enjoy the suffering of others?"

"Turn it off," said Tagiri to Hassan.

He paused the display again and looked at her in surprise. He saw something in her face that made him reach out and touch her arm. "Tagiri," he said gently, "of all people who have ever watched the past, you are the one who has never, even for a moment, forgotten compassion."

"She has to understand," murmured Tagiri. "I would help her if I could."

"How can she understand such a thing?" asked Hassan. "Even if she really saw us, somehow, in a true dream, she can't possibly comprehend the limitations on what we can do. To her, the ability to see into the past like this would be the power of the gods. So of course she will think we can do anything, and simply choose not to. But you know and I know that we can't, and therefore choose not at all."

"The vision of the gods without the power of the gods," said Tagiri. "What a terrible gift."

"A glorious gift," said Hassan. "You know that the stories we've brought out of the slavery project have awakened great interest and compassion in the world around us. You can't change the past, but you've changed the present, and these people are no longer forgotten. They loom larger in the hearts of the people of our time than the old heroes ever did. You have given these people the only help that it was in your power to give. They're no longer forgotten. Their suffering is seen."

"It isn't enough," said Tagiri.

"If it's all that you can do," said Hassan, "then it is enough."

"I'm ready now," said Tagiri. "You can show the rest of it."

"Perhaps we should wait."

She reached down and pressed the button to resume the display.

Putukam and Baiku gathered the dirt where their vomit had formed mud. They threw it into the tobacco water. The fire under it had died, so no steam was rising, yet they put their faces over the water as if to smell the steam of the dirt and the vomit and the tobacco.

Putukam began a chant. "From my body, from the earth, from the spirit water, I ..."

The TruSite II paused automatically.

"It can't translate the word," said Hassan. "And neither can I. It's not in the normally used vocabulary. They do use scraps of older languages in their magicking, and this may be related to a root in the old language that means shaping, like forming something out of mud. So she's saying, 'I shape you,' or something related to that."

"Go on," said Tagiri.

Putukam's chant began again. "From my body, from the earth, from the spirit water, I shape you, O children of forty generations who look at me from inside my dream. You see the suffering of us and all the other villages. You see the white monsters who make us slaves and murder us. You see how the gods send plagues to save the blessed ones and leave only the cursed ones to bear this terrible punishment. Speak to the gods, O children of forty generations who look at me from inside my dream! Teach them mercy! Let them send a plague to take us all, and leave the land empty for the white monsters, so they will hunt and hunt for us from shore to shore and find none of us, no people at all, not even the human-eating Caribs! Let the land be empty except for our dead bodies, so that we will die in honor as free people. Speak to the gods for us, O man, O woman!"

And so it went on like that, Baiku taking over the chant when Putukam wearied. Soon others from the village gathered around them and sporadically joined in the chant, especially when they were intoning the name they were praying to: Children - of - Forty - Generations - Who - Look - at - Us - from - Inside - the - Dream - of - Puthukam.

They were still chanting when the Spanish, led by two shamefaced Indie guides, shambled along the path, their muskets, pikes, and swords at the ready. The people made no resistance. They kept up the chant, even after they had all been seized, even as the old men, including Baiku, were being gutted with swords or spitted on pikes. Even as the young girls were being raped, all who could speak kept up the chanting, the prayer, the conjuration, until finally the Spanish commander, unnerved by it all, walked over to Putukam and drove his sword into the base of her throat, just above where the collarbones come together. With a gurgle, she died, and the chanting ended. For her, as for Baiku, the prayer was answered. She was not a slave before she died.

With all the villagers dead, Tagiri reached down again, but Hassan's hand was there before her, stopping the display.

Tagiri was trembling, but she pretended not to feel strong emotions. "I have seen such terrible things before," said Tagiri. "But this time she saw me. Saw us."

"Or so it seems."

"She saw, Hassan."

"So it seems." Now the words admitted she might be right.

"Something from our time, from right now, was visible to her in her dream. Perhaps we were still visible when she awoke. It seemed to me that she was looking at us. I didn't think of her seeing us until after she awoke from her dream, and yet she saw that I knew she could see us. It's too much to be chance."

"If this is true," said Hassan, "then why haven't other watchers using the TruSite II been seen?"

"Perhaps we're only visible to those who need so desperately to see us."

"It's impossible," said Hassan. "We were taught that from the beginning."

"No," said Tagiri. "Remember the course in the history of Pastwatch? The theorists weren't certain, were they? Only years of observation convinced them that their theory was right -- but in the early days there was much talk of temporal backwash."

"So you paid more attention in class than I did," said Hassan.

"Temporal backwash," she said again. "Don't you see how dangerous this is?"

"If it's true, if they really saw us, then it can't be dangerous because, after all, nothing changed as a result of it."

"Nothing would ever seem to change," she said, "because we would then live in the version of the present created by the new past. Who knows how many changes, small and great, we might have made, and yet never knew it because the change made our present different and we couldn't remember it being any other way?"

"We can't have changed anything at all," said Hassan. "Or history would have changed, and even if Pastwatch itself still existed, certainly the circumstances where we decided to stand here together and watch this village would never have happened in just that way, and therefore the change we made in the past would have unmade our very making of that change, and therefore it couldn't happen. She didn't see us."

"I know the circularity argument as well as you do, Hassan," she said. "But this particular case proves it false. You can't deny that she saw us, Hassan. You can't call it coincidence. Not when she saw I was black."

He grinned. "If the devils of her time are white, then maybe she needed to invent a god as black as you."

"She also saw that there were two of us, that we watched her three times, that I knew she could see us. She even got our era approximately right. She saw and she understood. We changed the past."

Hassan shrugged. "I know, " he said. Then he sat up, alert again, having found an argument. "It doesn't mean that circularity is proved false," he said. "The Spaniards behaved exactly as they would have anyway, so any change that came about because she saw us watching her made no difference in the future because she and all her people were so soon dead. Maybe that's the only time the TruSite II has a backwash effect. When it can't possibly make a difference. So the past is still safe from our meddling. Which means we're also safe."

Tagiri did not bother pointing out that even though the Spaniards had killed or enslaved everyone, it didn't change the fact that because of what Putukain saw in her vision, the people were chanting a prayer as they were taken. That had to have an effect on the Spaniards. It had to bend their lives, just a little bit, the sheer strangeness of it. No change in the past would fail to have some kind of reverberation. It was the butterfly's wing, just as they taught in school:

Who knew whether or not a storm in the North Atlantic might not have been triggered, far back in the chain of cause-and-effect, by the flapping of a butterfly's wing in China? But there was no point in arguing this with Hassan. Let him believe in safety while he could. Nothing was safe now; but neither were the watchers powerless, either.

"She saw me," said Tagiri. "Her desperation made her believe I was a god. And her suffering makes me wish that she were right. To have the power to help these people -- Hassan, if she could sense us, it means that we're sending something back. And if we're sending anything back at all, anything, then perhaps we could do something that would help."

"How could we save that village?" said Hassan. "Even if it were possible to travel back in time, what would we do? Lead an avenging army to destroy the Spanish who came to take this village? What would that accomplish? More Spanish would come later, or English or some other conquering nation from Europe. And in the meantime, our own time would have been destroyed. Undone by our own intervention. You can't change great sweeps of history by changing one small event. The forces of history go on anyway."

"Dear Hassan," she said, "you tell me now that history is such an inexorable force that we can't alter its onward march. Yet a moment ago you told me that arty change, however small, would alter history by so much that it would undo our own time. Explain to me why this isn't a contradiction."

"It is a contradiction, but that doesn't mean it's untrue. History is a chaotic system. The details can shift endlessly, but the overall shape remains constant. Make a small change in the past, and it changes enough details in the present that we would not have come together at exactly this place and time to watch exactly this scene. And yet the great movements of history would be largely unchanged."

"Neither of us is a mathematician," said Tagiri. "We're just playing logic games. The fact is that Putukam saw us, you and me. There is some kind of sending from our time to the past. This changes everything, and soon the mathematicians will discover truer explanations for the workings of our time machines, and then we'll see what's possible and what isn't. And if it turns out that we can reach into the past, deliberately and purposefully, then we will do it, you and I."

"And why is that?"

"Because we're the ones she saw. Because she ... shaped us."

"She prayed for us to send a plague to wipe out all the Indies before the Europeans ever came. Are you really going to take that seriously?"

"If we're going to be gods," said Tagiri, "then I think we have a duty to come up with better solutions than the people who pray to us."

"But we're not going to be gods," said Hassan.

"You seem sure of that," she said.

"Because I'm quite sure the people of our time won't relish the idea of our world being undone in order to ameliorate the suffering of one small group of people so long dead."

"Not undone," said Tagiri. "Remade."

"You're even crazier than a Christian," said Hassan. "They believe that one man's death and suffering was worth it because it saved all of humankind. But you, you're ready to sacrifice half the people who ever lived, just to save one village."

She glared at him. "You're right," she said. "For one village, it wouldn't be worth it."

She walked away.

It was real, she knew it. The TruSite II reached back into the past, and the watchers were somehow visible to the watched, if they knew how to look, if they were hungry to see. So what

should they do? There would be those, she knew, who would want to shut down all of Pastwatch to avoid the risk of contaminating the past with unpredictable and possibly devastating results in the present. And there would be others who would trust complacently in the paradoxes, believing that Pastwatch could be seen by people of the past only under circumstances where it could not possibly affect the future. Fearful overreaction or smug negligence, neither was appropriate. She and Hassan had changed the past, and the change they introduced had in fact changed the present. Perhaps it had not changed all the intervening generations between then and now, but certainly it had changed Hassan and her. Neither of them would think or do or say anything that they would have thought or done or said without having heard the prayer of Putukam. They had changed the past, and the past had changed the future. It could be done. The paradoxes didn't stop it. The people of this golden time could do more than observe and record and remember.

If that was so, then what of all the suffering that she had seen over all these years? Could there be some way to change it? And if it could be changed, how could she refuse? They had shaped her. It was superstition, it meant nothing, and yet she could not eat that evening, could not sleep that night for thinking of their chanted prayer.

Tagiri got up from her mat and checked the time. After midnight, and she could not sleep. Pastwatch allowed its workers, wherever they dwelt, to live in the native manner, and the city of Juba had chosen to do so, as much as possible. So she was lying on woven reeds in a loose-walled hut cooled only by the wind. But there was a breeze tonight, and the hut was cool, so it wasn't heat that kept her awake. It was the prayer of the village of Ankuash.

She pulled a robe over her head and went to the laboratory, where others also worked late -- there were no set working hours for people who played so loosely with the flow of time. She told her TruSite to show her Ankuash again, but after only a few seconds she could not bear it and switched to another view. Columbus, landing on the coast of Hispaniola. The wrecking of the Santa Maria. The fort he built to hold the crew that he could not take back home with him. It was a miserable sight to see again -- the way the crew attempted to make slaves of the nearby villagers, who simply ran away; the kidnapping of young girls, the gang rapes until the girls were dead.

Then the Indies of several tribes began fighting back. This was not the ritual war to bring home victims for sacrifice. Nor was it the raiding war of the Caribs. It was a new kind of war, a punishing war. Or perhaps it was not so new, Tagiri realized. These oft-viewed scenes had been completely translated and it appeared that the natives already had a name for a war of annihilation. They called it "star-at-white-man's-village war." The crew awoke one morning to find pieces of their sentries' bodies scattered through the fort, and five hundred Indie soldiers in feathered splendor inside the stockade. Of course they surrendered.

The Indie villagers did not, however, adopt their captives preparatory to sacrifice. They had no intention of making these miserable rapists, thieves, and murderers into gods before they died. There was no formula declaration of "He is as my beloved son" when each Spanish sailor was taken into custody.

There would be no sacrifice, but there would still be blood and pain. Death, when it came, was a sweet relief. There were those, Tagiri knew, who relished this scene, for it was one of the few victories of the Indies over the Spanish, one of the first victories of a dark people over the arrogant whites. But she hadn't the stomach to watch it all the way through; she took no joy in torture and slaughter, even when the victims of it were monstrous criminals who had tortured and slaughtered others. Tagiri understood too well that in the minds of the Spaniards, their victims had not been human. It is our nature, she thought, that when we intend to enjoy being cruel, we must transform our victim into either a beast or a god. The Spanish sailors made the Indies into animals in their minds; all that the Indies proved, with their bitter vengeance, was that they were capable of the identical transformation.

Besides, there was nothing in this scene to tell her what she wanted to see. Instead she sent the TruSite to Columbus's cabin on the Nina, where he wrote his letter to the King of Aragon and the Queen of Castile. He spoke of vast wealth in gold and spices, rare woods, exotic beasts, vast new realms to be converted into Christian subjects, and plenty of slaves. Tagiri had seen this before, of course, if only to marvel at the irony that Columbus saw no contradiction between promising his sovereigns both slaves and Christian subjects out of the same populations. Now, though, Tagiri found something else to marvel at. She knew well enough that Columbus had seen no

serious quantities of gold, beyond what might have been found in any Spanish village where the wealthiest household in town might have a few trinkets. He had understood almost nothing of what the Indies had said to him, though he convinced himself that he understood that they were telling him of gold farther inland. Inland? They were pointing west, across the Caribbean, but Columbus had no way of knowing that. He had seen no glimmer of the vast wealth of the Incas or the Mexica - those were not to be seen by Europeans for more than twenty years, and when the gold at last began to flow, Columbus would be dead. Yet as she watched him writing, then spun back and watched him write again, she thought: He isn't lying. He knows the gold is there. He is so sure of it, even though he has never seen it and will never see it in his life.

This is how he turned the eyes of Europe westward, Tagiri realized. By the force of his unshakable belief. If the king and queen of Spain had made their decision solely on the basis of the evidence that Columbus brought back with him, there would have been no follow-up to Columbus's voyage. Where were the spices? Where was the gold? His first discoveries had not begun to repay even the costs of his own expedition. Who would throw good money after bad?

Without real evidence, Columbus made these extravagant claims. He had found Cipangu; Cathay and the Spice Islands were close at hand. All false, or Columbus would have had a cargo to show for it. Yet anyone who looked at him, who heard him, who knew him, would recognize that this man was not lying, that he believed in his soul the things he said. On the strength of such a witness as this, new expeditions were financed, new fleets set sail; great civilizations fell, and the gold and silver of a continent flowed eastward while millions of people died of plagues and the survivors watched helplessly as strangers came to rule their land forever.

All because Columbus could not be doubted when he spoke of things he had not seen.

Tagiri played the recording of the scene in Ankuash, of the moment when Putukam told of her dream. She saw me and Hassan, thought Tagiri. And Columbus saw the gold. Somehow he saw the gold, even though it lay decades in the future. We with our machines can see only into the past. But somehow this Genovese man and this Indie woman saw what none can see, and they were right even though there was no way, no sensible way, no logical way they could be right.

It was four in the morning when Tagiri came to the door of Hassan's wind-cooled hut. If she clapped her hands or called to him, it would waken others. So she slipped inside and found that he, too, was still awake.

"You knew that I would come," she said.

"If I had dared," he answered, "I would have come to you."

"It can be done," she said, blurting it out at once. "We can change it. We can stop -- something. Something terrible, we can make it go away. We can reach back and make it better."

He said nothing. He waited.

"I know what you're thinking, Hassan. We might also make it worse."

"Do you think I haven't been going through this in my mind tonight?" said Hassan. "Over and over. Look at the world around us, Tagiri. Humanity is finally at peace. There are no plagues. No children die hungry or live untaught. The world is healing. That was not inevitable. It might have ended up far worse. What change could we possibly make in the past that would be worth the risk of creating a history without this resurrection of the world?"

"I'll tell you what change would be worth it," she said. "The world would not have needed resurrecting if it had never been killed."

"What, do you imagine that there's some change we could make that would improve human nature? Undo the rivalry of nations? Teach people that sharing is better than greed?"

"Has human nature changed even now?" asked Tagiri. "I think not. We still have as much greed, as much power-lust, as much pride and anger as we ever had. The only difference now is that we know the consequences and we fear them. We control ourselves. We have become, at long last, civilized."

"So you think that we can civilize our ancestors?"

"I think," said Tagiri, "that if we can find some way to do it, some sure way to stop the world from tearing itself to pieces as it did, then we must do it. To reach into the past and prevent the disease is better than to take the patient at the point of death and slowly, slowly bring her back to health. To create a world in which the destroyers did not triumph."

"If I know you at all, Tagiri," said Hassan, "you would not have come here tonight if you didn't know already what the change must be."

"Columbus," she said.

"One sailor? Caused the destruction of the world?"

"There was nothing inevitable about his westward voyage at the time he sailed. The Portuguese were on the verge of finding a route to the Orient. No one imagined an unknown continent. The wisest ones knew that the world was large, and believed that an ocean twice the width of the Pacific stretched between Spain and China. Not until they had a sailing vessel they believed was capable of crossing such an ocean would they sail west. Even if the Portuguese bumped into the coast of Brasil, there was no profit there. It was dry and sparsely populated, and they would have ignored it just the way they largely ignored Africa and didn't colonize it for four long centuries after exploring its coast."

"You've been studying," he said.

"I've been thinking," she said. "I studied all this years ago. It was because Columbus came to America, with his relentless faith that he had found the Orient. Merely stumbling on the landmass meant nothing -- the Norse did it, and where did that lead? Even a chance landing by someone else on Cuba or the eastern tip of Brasil would have meant no more than the meaningless landings on Vinland or the Guinea coast. It was only because of Columbus's reports of boundless wealth that never came true until after he was dead that other sailors followed him. Don't you see? It was not the fact that somebody sailed west that led to the European conquest of America and thus of the world. It was because Columbus did it."

"One man, then, was responsible for the devastation of our planet?"

"Of course not," said Tagiri. "I'm not talking about moral responsibility anyway, I'm talking about cause. Europe was already Europe. Columbus didn't make it that way. But it was the pillaging of America that financed the terrible religious and dynastic wars that swept Europe back and forth for generations. If Europe hadn't had possession of America, could it have imposed its culture on the world? Would a world dominated by Islam or ruled by Chinese bureaucracy have ever destroyed itself the way we did in a world where every nation tried to become as European as it could?"

"Of course it would," said Hassan. "Europeans didn't invent pillage."

"No, they invented the machines that made their pillaging so madly efficient. The machines that sucked all the oil out of the ground and let us carry war and famine across oceans and continents until nine-tenths of humankind was dead."

"So Columbus is responsible for the age of technology."

"Don't you see, Hassan, I'm not affixing blame?"

"I know, Tagiri."

"I'm finding the place where the smallest, simplest change would save the world from the most suffering. That would cause the fewest cultures to be lost, the fewest people to be enslaved, the fewest species to fall extinct, the fewest resources to be exhausted. It comes together at the point where Columbus returns to Europe with his tales of gold and slaves and nations to be converted into Christian subjects of the king and queen."

"So you would kill Columbus?"

Tagiri shuddered. "No," she said. "Who is to say that we could ever travel physically into the

past in such a way that that would even be possible? We don't need to kill him, anyway. We only need to turn him away from his plan of sailing west. We have to find out what's possible before we decide how to do it. And murder -- I could never agree to that. Columbus was no monster. We've all agreed to that, ever since the Tempoview showed the truth of him. His vices were the vices of his time and culture, but his virtues transcended the milieu of his life. He was a great man. I have no wish to undo the life of a great man."

Hassan nodded, slowly. "Let us say this: if we knew that we could turn Columbus away, and if after much research we were sure that stopping him would really stop the terrible course of the world from that time forward, then it might be worth undoing this age of healing on the firm chance of making it unnecessary."

"Yes," said Tagiri.

"It might be the work of lifetimes, finding the answers to those questions."

"It might," said Tagiri. "But it might not."

"And even after we were very sure, we might be wrong, and the world might end up worse off than before."

"With one difference," said Tagiri. "If we stop Columbus, we can be sure of this: Putukam and Baiku would never die under Spanish swords."

"I'm with you this far, " said Hassan. "Let's find out if possible and desirable to do this thing. Let's find out if the people of our own time agree that it's worth it, that it's right to do it. And if they agree that it is, then I'll be with you when it's done."

His words were so confident -- yet she felt a dizzying vertigo, as if she stood on the edge of a great chasm, and the ground had just shifted a little under her feet. What sort of arrogance did she have, even to imagine reaching back into the past and making changes? Who am I, she thought, if I dare to answer prayers intended for the gods?

Yet she knew even as she doubted herself that she had already made up her mind. The Europeans had had their future, had fulfilled their most potent dreams, and it was their future that now was the dark past of her world, the consequences of their choices that now were being scoured from the Earth.

European dreams led to this, to a deeply wounded world in convalescence, with a thousand years of physicking ahead, with so much irretrievably lost, to be recovered only on the holotapes of Pastwatch. So if it is in my power to undream their dreams, to give the future to another people, who is to say that it's wrong? How could it be worse? Christopher Columbus -- Cristobal Colón, as the Spanish called him; Cristoforo Colombo, as he was baptized in Genova -- he would not discover America after all, if she could find a way to stop him. The prayer of the village of Ankuash would be answered.

And by answering that prayer, her own thirst would be slaked. She could never satisfy the hopeless longing in the faces of all slaves in all times. She could never wipe away the sadness in the face of her ancient great-grandmother Diko and her once-joyous little boy, Acho. She could never give their lives and bodies back to the slaves. But she could do this one thing, and by doing it, the burden that had been building up inside her all these years would finally be lifted. She would know that she had done all that was possible to heal the past.

The next morninva Tagiri and Hassan reported what had happened. For weeks the most important leaders of Pastwatch and many leaders from outside Pastwatch, too, came to them to see the holotape, to discuss what it might mean. They listened to Tagiri and Hassan as they raised their questions and proposed their plans. In the end, they gave consent for a new project to explore what Putukam's vision might mean. They called it the Columbus Project, as much because it seemed the same kind of mad impossible journey that Columbus had embarked on in 1492 as because the project might lead to undoing his great achievement.

Tagiri kept the slavery project going, of course, but with Hassan she now launched the new project with a very different team of workers. Hassan led the group that studied history to see if

stopping Columbus would have the effect that they desired, and to discover if some other change might be more desirable or more easily practicable. Tagiri divided her working hours between the slavery project and coordinating the work of a dozen physicists and engineers who were trying to find out exactly how it was that temporal backwash might work, and how to alter the time machines in order to enhance the effect enough to allow the alteration of the past.

Early on in their collaboration, Tagiri and Hassan married and had a daughter and a son. The daughter they named Diko, and Acho was the boy. Both children grew strong and wise, immersed in their parents' love and in the Columbus project from their infancy. Acho grew up to be a pilot, skimming over the surface of the Earth like a bird, fast and free. Diko did not stray so far from home. She learned the languages, the tools, the stories inherent in her parents' work, and spent her days beside them. Tagiri looked at her husband, her children, and more than once she thought, What if some stranger from a faraway place came and stole my son from me and made a slave of him, and I never saw him again? What if a conquering army from a place unheard of came and murdered my husband and raped my daughter? And what if, in some other place, happy people watched us as it happened, and did nothing to help us, for fear it might endanger their own happiness? What would I think of them? What kind of people would they be?

Chapter 3 -- Ambition

Sometimes Diko felt as if she had grown up with Christopher Columbus, that he was her uncle, her grandfather, her older brother. He was always present in her mother's work, scenes from his life playing out again and again in the background.

One of her earliest memories was of Columbus giving orders for his men to capture several Indies to take back to Spain as slaves. Diko was so young she didn't realize the significance of what was happening, really. She knew, however, that the people in the holoview weren't real, so when her mother said, with deep, bitter anger, "I will stop you," Diko thought that Mother was speaking to her and she burst into tears.

"No, no," said Mother, rocking her back and forth. "I wasn't talking to you, I was talking to the man in the holoview."

"He can't hear you," said Diko.

"He will someday."

"Papa says he died a hundred years ago."

"Longer than that, my Diko."

"Why are you so mad at him? Is he bad?"

"He lived in a bad time," said Mother. "He was a great man in a bad time."

Diko couldn't understand the moral subtleties of this. The only lesson she learned from the event was that somehow the people in the holoview were real after all, and the man called variously Cristoforo Colombo and Cristobal Colón and Christopher Columbus was very, very important to Mother.

He became important to Diko, too. He was always in the back of her mind. She saw him playing as a child. She saw him arguing endlessly with priests in Spain. She saw him kneel before the King of Aragon and the Queen of Castile. She saw him trying vainly to talk to Indies in Latin, Genovese, Spanish, and Portuguese. She saw him visiting his son at a monastery in La Rabida.

When she was five, Diko asked her mother, "Why doesn't his son live with him?"

"Who?"

"Cristoforo," said Diko. "Why does his little boy live at the monastery?"

"Because Colombo has no wife."

"I know," said Diko. "She died."

"So while he's struggling to try to get the king and queen to let him make a voyage west, his son has to stay somewhere safe, where he can get an education."

"But Cristoforo has another wife the whole time," said Diko.

"Not a wife," said Mother.

"They sleep together," said Diko.

"What have you been doing?" asked Mother. "Have you been running the holoview when I wasn't here?"

"You're always here, Mama," said Diko.

"That's not an answer, you sly child. What have you been watching?"

"Cristoforo has another little boy with his new wife," said Diko. "He never goes to live in the monastery."

"That's because Colombo isn't married to the new baby's mother."

"Why not?" asked Diko.

"Diko, you're five years old and I'm very busy. Is it such an emergency that I have to explain all this to you right now?"

Diko knew that this meant that she would have to ask Father. That was all right. Father wasn't home as much as Mother, but when he was, he answered all her questions and never made her wait till she grew up.

Later that afternoon, Diko stood on a stool beside her mother, helping her crush the soft beans for the spicy paste that would be supper. As she stirred the mashed beans as neatly but vigorously as she could manage, another question occurred to her. "If you died, Mama, would Papa send me to a monastery?"

"No," said Mother.

"Why not?"

"I'm not going to die, not till you're an old woman yourself."

"But if you did."

"We're not Christians and it's not the fifteenth century," said mother. "We don't send our children to monasteries to be educated."

"He must have been very lonely," said Diko.

"Who?"

"Cristoforo's boy in the monastery."

"I'm sure you're right," said Mother.

"Was Cristoforo lonely, too?" asked Diko. "Without his little boy?"

"I suppose," said Mother. "Some people get very lonely without their children. Even when they're surrounded by other people all the time, they miss their little ones. Even when their little ones get older and turn into big ones, they miss the little ones that they'll never see again."

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