

River's Tales of Time

(*Note - I am going to venture to some "different" time travel - stay with me.)

THE VIEWER

The planet was dying. They had known that for a while now. They had been searching for a new home, but so many seemed unfit, and others, they were dying too.

Graciela walked down the hall to the observatory, the new data was coming in but the planetary system was 6.8 light years from the home planet. She flipped through the files shaking her head and muttering "maybe" over and over.

"Ah there you are," a man's voice drifted down the hallway. "Have you found anyplace?"

"No, nothing unless we reach light speed."

"We're getting there - what do you have?"

She sighed, "A planet 6,8 light years away. 40 billion miles under the speed of light - how?"

"We could use generation ships . . ."

Gracelia turned to face the voice. "I want to see the place - not my children."

"So it's personal?" and there was a laugh.

"Yes."

She had been doing the searching and researching for over 100 years. Yes, they were a long lived society but she didn't see her travel as being viable for much longer . She had railed against the crimes her people had perpetrated against the planet. Dividing it up, failing to see it as whole, squandering resources, and now, the planet was dying and they were looking for a new home. Sadly it would mean leaving their system, and so the search for others had begun.

Graciela continued to the observatory. The halls are sterile and her footsteps echoing. She realized that only a few years before they had been noisy and alive with students, all excited by the research. Gradually the excitement waned and there were only a few left, but a few were all that were needed.

2

Mastika was an old world. It's twin suns made it bright and the three moons created amazing eclipses. The older portions of the planet were covered with beautiful carvings, many now damaged by random asteroid showers, yet still beautiful.

The new city, the domed city , as it was known, was nearly clinical in line and style. I was saving energy and resources but it was too much, too little and too late. Graciela had never been in the old cities, but she had seen pictures and read of the wars and the terror from the skies. The dividing up of the planet, those that only saw portions and not the whole. She had grown up knowing her planet was doomed. That escape was the only option. Escape to where, another star system ? There were, in this portion of the universe , many stars aging and dying - the need, therefore, was to find a young star

with one or several planets that would support life. The search was now reaching its fiftieth year.

3

She looked through the telescope, and there it was. Shining, blue and green it held so much promise of a new start. There was talk that the generation ships were ready. It wasn't as though it was the end of the universe, Maybe 200 years at sublight speed, Maybe they could cryo-freeze her. She had found the planet after all.

Taylor entered the observatory. They had worked together for years.

He smiled, "Are they letting you go ?"

"I think so...I passed the physical. What about you ?"

"Oh that was the easy part. I'm signed on as a pilot. It's the tech testing that will be the hard part. I was hoping maybe you could help me with the navigation"

Gracelia smiled as she stepped down from the platform with the scope, "I think I can be a bit of help along the way. "

Taylor smiled and headed back down the hall leading from the observatory. He had much to learn and much to do. A generation ship was a big responsibility. One hundred pairs would be chosen to make the journey. They would have to have supplies and the ship would need to be capable of being cannibalized to provide shelter for the first year. Over time the population of the ship would shrink and grow as children were born and elders passed during the journey. There was a great deal to prepare for, and time was running out.

Months had passed and the ship neared completion. Graciela prepared to present her work to the crew . There were enhanced images, The most recent and they were stunning.

Miwas a blue world, Vegetation rich and not many signs of a civilization. There were some life forms, unusual and they had no way to scan the seas, so there could be many more. All of the team waited anxiously for the launch. Every year, the plan was to look at the planet again, and see what had developed. There was a lot to see and still a long way to go. The launch was to be next week, the scopes were set and Graciela was checking the data daily. That was when she first saw the change, something on the planet had changed, it looked like a change for the better. The green areas had increased in size, the polar caps were slightly smaller, but best of all there was a greater deal of cloud cover. Fluffy, marshmallow white masses. The oceans seem to have sprung to life as well, at least there was some sort of life evolving. She would alter her schedule of observation, but now she had to board the ship.

Part two 50 years out....

Most of the colonists were in cryo sleep. The ship had just awakened Graciela. It saved her a few years but in the long run she doubted that she would see Miwas. Time was not always kind. Time had not allowed for generation ships. It was leave now or never. The climate had changed so

rapidly, storms stopped the observations , so the only way was to leave.
Leaving in itself was a problem .

2

The storms were worse than usual. Graciela came running to the observatory , the winds held the door open, rain like a wall pushing in, wrapping everything in its wet grasp. Like the hand of a giant it lifted her and sent her flying down the hallway.

Struggling to her feet she dragged herself back and grabbed the door and threw her weight behind it. Slowly it yielded to her pressure and began to close . Drained, she slid down the door and onto the wet floor.

Taylor found her there, she was too exhausted to move, so he gently carried her to her office, and wrapped a blanket over her.

"We have to leave, " he said quietly. "There isn't any more you can do"

" NO, we need more information, we don't travel at light speed - we could be heading to a place that doesn't even exist. Just the light."

He looked at her, his eyes held compassion for her. She would never live to see her planet, her Miwas, even if she went on the mission. At 30,000 mps it would be a long time and she wasn't a young woman .

He held out his hand, "Okay, take one more look and then I am putting you in with the rest of the crew. When the storm breaks we'll launch. "

Together they climbed up to the scope, which despite its size shook in the wind. Focusing the scope and finding Miwas, was like finding a quiet garden, a tiny picture of blues and greens. Graciela smiled , "It's blooming. We should go soon. Before biology takes over" She laughed and climbed down and slowly gathered her things.

Memories of all the good times , when the planet was healthy and everyone was so confident they could solve problems forever. She took a picture, three books and a mug with her name. The rest would have to be left. Maybe someone would come here someday and find things and it would serve as a warning.

3

Elton was right - Mars ain't the kind of place to raise your kids. It really was cold as hell and the colonists knew it was just a jump off point - they needed a better home. One of the scientists had found a small exoplanet so the work was being done. Teegarden's Star was about 12 light years - and they had been building the generation ship since they first arrived in 2030. In 2031 they found the wormhole. They had been working on accessing it ever since . Johnson and Jennings were focusing on the wormhole. Where would it take them? When would it come , it wasn't a consistent thing. So they spent a great deal of time plotting the course. A wormhole and a generation ship - they could save so many people.

4

Jennings was the science advisor. His concern was that the colony was in trouble even though they had escaped the horror that was engulfing earth. There were signs of the sun expanding early. The terraforming of Mars was not proceeding as planned , so the planet was still very, very cold. He crossed a littered office, maps and charts covering every surface and poured a cup of coffee. They had found wormholes and were working on creating one - but would it get them where they wanted to go? Would they even still be human when they got there? He went out and gazed at the night sky. Something was coming .

Part Three - The destinations

1

On the blooming planet that Graciela had described, time had moved forward, the blooming garden had enveloped the planet. Things had evolved. It wasn't exactly happening as Graciela had predicted. It wasn't anything like she'd thought it would be. There was no humanoid population, at least not yet. Everything was growing in abundance. The dominant species, the Sotongian, resembled a large octopus. Graceful and amazingly fast it moved on land and in the water with ease. It could easily camouflage itself and had few enemies. There were colonies of the Sontongian's all across the planet. They had a generous food supply with the smaller creatures. Still they would not be the same when the ship arrived at Miwas. Time was moving.

2

Jenning's world, as it would come to be called, was a different matter. Far across the galaxy, into another galaxy, it was old and already in decline. Those living there were not welcoming any new explorers and were becoming tribal and hidden. The planet had been ravaged by wars and pollution. It was one place in the universe you would think twice about going to but wormholes were a bit of a toss up - never know what's at the other end. When they arrived it was a wasteland. Better than Mars, but the life native to the planet was now coming back. The humanoid population had kept them at bay and now they were thinning out. The giant insects were moving into the abandoned buildings, and hunting the smaller humanoids. The planet was becoming wild again. Wild and dangerous. Dangerous for visitors about to arrive.

3

Hurting through the wormhole the humans braced for the arrival to the unknown planet that ,in their way, they called Jennings world . The atmosphere was rough, and they bounced about desperately as the ship creaked and groaned. The pilot looked to find a place to land and found a place that seemed to be some type of landing strip, abandoned but smooth . Maneuvering to land as gently as possible and hearing the sound of gear breaking, snapping as the ship bounced and shuddered to a stop. There was no screaming, as the pilot bolted to the passenger section to find the 60 people all breathing sighs of relief - this was their new hom

4

THE GENERATION SHIP - Miwas

Miles and years had passed - but Graciela, had entrusted the observation to others and had been deep in cryosleep and was slowly being awakened - they were a mere 5 years away and it was time to look at the planet again. Obviously, it was a different world now. Much of the lush green was gone, and it appeared that there was a form of humanoid that had evolved . Five years was only a blink of the eye. Changes were massive, there were signs of some sort of invasion. Not just one either, but pieces of several different ships seemed to be scattered about.

Graciela had been awakened, she groaned and moved slowly getting out of the sleep chamber. She was alert and as she adjusted to the ship's gravity with little difficulty.

Reaching the observatory , she stopped short and caught her breath. After all this time, the centuries in deep sleep, she was actually seeing her planet, which was how she thought of it, and it was real. It was not what

she had expected, or rather hoped it would be. It had evolved. All that time seeing it when they were so far away, looking at visions from the past could not have prepared her for the present.

She looked eagerly for the cephalopod creatures, only to find the cities destroyed, and no remains of the creatures that she had seen before. What she saw now was a crashed ship, as though another ship had come but she saw nothing that indicated they established a civilization that had blossomed. She called her team for any data that they had as they had moved into the now compared to what they had seen so many millions of years ago.

5

They sat in a conference room aboard the ship, the slick looking table was covered with photos taken at all phases of the journey. Tablets with data breakdowns of what they had recorded. Yes there was some notice of the arrival of another ship. There were images of humans and later some of them adapting the cephalopod structures. Now they looked at the most recent photos and the humans seem to have changed. Still this data was 5 years in the past. What would they find when they actually arrived?

Graciela sat in the room, alone and deep in thought. She had expected that things would be different but how did they miss that another group had settled on the planet. She slowly shifted through the photos again, looking for the first sign of the humans, and then, as she moved her thumb she saw the edge of a ship. It said Mars Colony 1 - jumpship. She tried to enlarge the image and finally got a clear image. It was a small group, but they seemed aggressive. There were no live recordings or at least not many, they had only focused on the side and area they had planned to land on but one was found.

It showed the other colonists approaching the cephalopods and it seemed to be friendly.

Seemed to be. . . she put her head on the desk and silently cried.

6

100 years earlier

Jennings rounded up his people. They had a home, or so he told them. It was his world and he would make it bend to his will. The land was verdient and flowers bloomed everywhere. There were the comforting sounds of bubbling brooks and the scent of fruit in the air, sweet and crisp. The breezes were soft and warm, a far cry from what they left on Mars. The colonists were used to following his orders, there was none of that freedom they had on earth. It was a unit and would function as one. There were natives on this planet, they had homes but they were not human. The Sotongan's were not Jennings' cup of tea. They were immensely clever, they had created a wonderful green world and they had technology. That alone made them dangerous to Jennings and many of his crew. He knew he should try and speak with them, and so he and a few of his men went to the Sotangian's village.

It was an odd looking place, large shell like structures and a network of fibers connecting them. Something that looked like jewels as connectors, Everything was natural and yet it looked as high tech as anything they had left on earth. It was the Sontangians themselves who gave him the creeps. The multicolored tentacles, that beak, all combined with a sing-song voice that didn't seem real. He knew that other species would be different, but this was too different. Maybe they could build a wall. Keep these creatures away.

Sadly the Sontangians were trying to help. They showed Jennings where the best food sources were and tried to help with the building of a city for the humans. They were highly intelligent, the cities were advanced and still the colonists shied away from them. They would rebuild the planet as another Earth. At least that's what they had planned.

MIWAS - One year out

1

Graciela and Taylor walked to the observation chamber. A year wasn't long and it was actually moving before their eyes, like a timelapse they could see what appeared to be the rise and fall of a civilization. It was not the cephalopods, but that of the humanoids. There was some sort of conflict. The ship members seem to separate into factions, and stay apart from the rest of the creatures on the planet. They seemed to become arboreal dwellers , almost as if they had abandoned the technology that had brought them into space to begin with.

Upon closer inspection it seemed that some of the craft had been destroyed. While the Sontagians had far advanced technology the humanoids would not interact with them. After the first meeting, the humanoids cannablized the ship.

Graciela turned to Taylor, "What happened ?"

"I wish I could say, the planet seems fine, but these areas are destroyed. "

90 years earlier.

2

The Sontagians approached the Jennings and his crew. They had seen them dismantle the ship. Watched as they took over ancient structures that had been old when the Sontagians had come from the seas, but they were more fitted for the humanoids. They weren't surprised, it was a very old planet and had many civilizations that had ruled. So the new people adapted the older structures and made them work for them. They began to mine the area and create energy sources, but they found something similar to petrochemicals but all efforts to reduce the toxicity were fruitless.

Jennings called a conference of the colonists. Among them was a tall young man. He moved like a dancer, but could not maintain a focus. He seemed distracted and moved around the others.

"What's wrong with you?" screamed Jennings. He looked old. It had only been five years since they arrived and the entire crew was aging rapidly.

"I've been drinking the water, what's wrong with you old man ? " And in a stunningly graceful and horrifying turn, collapsed on the floor.

The water, yes they had tested it but there was nothing in it that seemed unusual . But everyone seemed to be affected - everyone except Johnson. Johnson made "hooch" said he'd never trust water and everyone laughed at him

Johnson was clever, he had abandoned his flight suit upon entering the new atmosphere, and steered clear of the water. There were chemicals in the suits, they had leached into the water and made it toxic. The DNA was corrupted and the colonists were rapidly deteriorating. Johnson was doing better but he too was dying.

3

THE GENERATION SHIP

They were now looking ten years in the past. Ruins were everywhere, but there seemed to be a society of the Sontagians, more advanced. A beautiful crystalline city, sparkling pools, and verdant green gardens. The wall between the human area and the Sontagians was crumbling.

Graciela thought the next ten years would feel like forever and she returned to her cryo chamber.

Time Collides

Time is like a movie. Or maybe like a roll of film - pictures at the beginning of the roll are the past and the end are the present. If you have a long enough roll of film you can see back in time. It's much the same when you observe a planet from light years away. You are looking into the past.

What Graciela was looking at was still 10 years in the past. Her mind was alive with the thought, what was the future going to present them. They had traveled so far and with so much hope. What had happened 10 years ago ?

JOHNSON'S TEAM -

The crew was ill. It was of their own making. They had polluted the water and by avoiding the natives they had refused knowledge that could have helped them.

Johnsone and a handful of the survivors made their way to the wall. They called out to the Sontangians but no reply was forthcoming. Johnson needed help, but the natives of the planet had changed. They had returned to the sea. All that was left were the coral buildings and they were no longer colored.

Johnson began to cry and then spotted a lone Sontagian, he rushed to the creature, arms outstretched, but the creature was suddenly inside Johnson's mind.

"Stop ,Stop,human, you did not want our help. We were repulsive to you and you built a wall, you did not need us. We could have told you of the water of the inner rivers of the planet , but you knew better. You built things your ways, you poisoned our home because you wouldn't learn, wouldn't listen. What do you want of me ?"

Johnson fell to his knees, but the Sontagian began to move toward the sea.

Johnson cried " How can we survive, we are only five men ?"

The Sontagian replied as he slid into the sea, "you are the end of your species. At least here. They may be others somewhere, but on this planet you are extinct."

Johnson and his men built a camp and spent a year by the sea and one by one they succumbed to the planet .

ARRIVAL - Generation Ship

Graciella climbed from the cryo chamber for the last time. How many thousands of years had she been asleep ? She made her way to the observation deck and Taylor helped her into the chair. Things had changed over the course of time but the sea was a deep rich blue, the way Graciella had first seen it. Near the shore a settlement was being built, a wall was crumbling and near the wall was a site she couldn't wait to see in person.

"I must go down, I must see it all - I've waited several lifetimes " Taylor laughed and guided her to the jumpship. He climbed into the pilot's seat and launched them towards the planet.

Landing near the crumbling wall, Graciella moved slowly toward the new settlement. A Sontangian appeared from the ocean and she greeted him. He looked at the strange female creature, she was unlike the humans that had been here before - and yet similar. She was open and curious, her mind was open. Her arms were long and slender but there was delicate webbing between her fingers. Her eyes were large and gentle.

"You are not human ? " he asked.

"I am from the far stars. I have watched your world from near its beginning. I have brought my people here, to live again. I am a living being in search of a home."

"You then are welcome. Other's have come, they came quickly and violently, they did not listen and they failed. You must listen to the planet."

Graciela smiled, and watched as the other natives of the planet came to welcome her.

She had come home.

**note* I am expanding on this theme as part of a project for GISH - so this is the "first draft" of a much longer piece. Stay tuned for a new story called - Detour*