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Natishma, Shaman of the Chesapeake, Friend of the Roanoke Colony

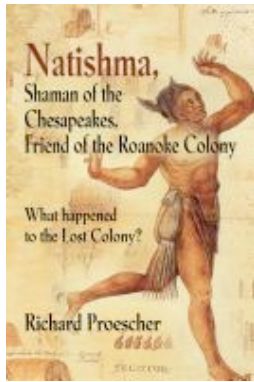
What happened
to the Lost Colony?

Richard Proescher



SECOTON

the place wherein the Tombe of their Heywouds standeth



Natishma is a thirteen-year-old physically deformed boy from the Chesapeake tribe of Tidewater Virginia. He is taken to the spirit world and told that a moon-colored people will arrive among his tribe by the time he is initiated into manhood. Natishma, Shaman of the Chesapeake, Friend of the Roanoke Colony is the story of the extraordinary adventure when, in 1585, the Roanoke Colony lives with the Chesapeakes for two decades before being killed by Powhatan.

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**Natishma, Shaman of the Chesapeakes,
Friend of the Roanoke Colony**

A Novel

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Natishma, Shaman of the Chesapeake, Friend of the Roanoke Colony is a work of historical fiction. Apart from well-known actual people, events, and locales that figure in the narrative, all names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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Prologue

The light swept Natishma into the center of its glimmering radiance. He shook with an intense force, pulled by the shafts of illumination consuming him. He could not remember the journey toward the source of this brightness but was aware of being sprawled on the ground at the foot of a towering oak tree. He lay in a meadow spattered with red and yellow bits of sunlight. The perfume of flowers filled his nostrils, and a gentle breeze cooled his face. He was on a bluff; a river meandered through a broad valley in the distance. The river disappeared into a forest spreading out beyond the horizon. Overhead, the sun broke through thin clouds. The place was unlike anything in his coastal homeland.

Turning, he saw a campfire that had not been there before. Elders wrapped in deerskin mantles sat cross-legged around the fire. One of the elders took a clay pipe he cradled in his arms, and lit it with a burning twig from the fire and took a puff. He offered a prayer to the four directions before passing the pipe to the elder on his right.

“Where am I?” Natishma asked in disbelief.

“You are in the upper world,” said the apparent leader of the elders. He wore a tuft of eagle feathers in his hair. “The Chesapeake ancestral elders have brought you here to begin your instruction. The world your people have known since the dawn of creation will face a terrible invasion by a moon-colored people when you reach your manhood. You are chosen as a prophet of the events that will befall your people. We will prepare you to become the shaman of the Chesapeake.”

“But you have made a mistake. I am a boy with a deformed back.”

“You were chosen not to be a warrior but to be a prophet,” the leader said. “That is why you carry the mark of a seer. We know you will not fail because the spirit beings will be with you. You will be sent back to your village now, but you will again return to us when it is time for further instructions. We have spoken.”

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The smoke from the pipe thickened until it enveloped the council of elders. Natishma heard a swirling sound, and the elders, meadow and flowers vanished.

Chapter 1

Summer 1575

The Chosen One

“Natishma... Natishma, are you all right?” Teogonpa, his mother asked.

“No. I can’t do this. No, No,” Natishma said, thrashing back and forth on the ground.

“Fetch him some water,” Teogonpa said to one of her sisters.

When the thundering in his head ceased, Natishma recognized his aunt Menonata. She held a water gourd to his lips.

“Here,” Menonata said. “Drink some water. You fainted from the heat.”

“I’ll be all right. I got too hot,” Natishma said, knowing he could not share his experience with his mother and the others.

“Let’s get him under some shade so he can rest,” his aunt Oshpennoa advised.

Supporting him by his arms, Oshpennoa and Menonata moved their nephew under the shadow of a Sycamore tree. Still groggy, Natishma rested until his strength returned and then walked back to the village with his family and the others who carried heavy baskets of strawberries.

Natishma remembered picking strawberries in the fields near his village, Skicóac, nestled above the western bank of the Machahominy River.

His mother shooed away a flock of ravens with her silk grass basket to keep them from devouring the berries. Young girls giggled

as he passed. *Were they secretly talking about me? Were they saying I would never be a warrior because I have a humped back?* he thought.

Feeling the shame their voices brought, Natishma moved farther ahead until the girls disappeared behind a stand of loblolly pines. He ignored the silly girls as he picked the berries clinging to the bushes, heavy, sweet and bursting with flavor. The sweat from his forehead soaked into his eyelashes, making the sky shimmer and ripple like water on the river. His hands fell idle, his feet like heavy stones. Drifting to the shadeless outer edges of the bushes, his legs buckled, and he fell into the tall grass. The strawberries tumbled from his basket.

Natishma was brought to his mother's lodge where a bowl of milk made from powdered hickory nuts settled his stomach. After eating, he pretended sleep to avoid questions from his mother and aunts.

The women rolled out mats on the sleeping platform after the sun melted below the sky, and the central fire was the only light in the lodge.

Natishma visited the temple the next the morning. He walked to the edge of the village when the sun first appeared on the horizon. The temple stood under the protective shade of several trees within the palisade, a short distance from the bank of the Machahominy River. Natishma passed through the ring of posts carved in the likeness of animal spirits guarding the structure. He pulled back the thick bearskin from the entranceway and paused before entering to allow his eyes to adjust to the dim light. His legs shook, and his heart pounded. Slivers of light entered from cracks in the bark layers tied to the temple's sapling ribs. Poles and mats divided its interior. Natishma entered the enclosure where the tribe's straw totem animals were kept, and he noticed the shell eyes of a gray fox following him.

He whispered his petitioning prayer to the animals for successful hunts as demanded of anyone entering this sacred chamber.

"Four-legged ones, forgive your two-legged brothers for taking your lives, but your meat is needed to feed our women and children."

Natishma's nostrils quivered from the strong smell of sage burning in large seashells on raised platforms. He distinguished the

sweet scent of herbs hanging from poles, curing in the smoke from a small fire in the center of the temple. Sucking in his breath, he felt the presence of spirits in the temple's musty space.

His heartbeat quickened when he saw the wooden image of Okeus beneath one of several raised platforms of red cedar planks where the leather-wrapped bones of the tribe's rulers rested. The vengeful god was painted black and bedecked in strings of pearls and studded with polished stones. His face remained frozen as if engaged in war. Natishma hurried past the platforms. He was careful not to offend Okeus with a negative thought and rushed toward the partition opening into the anteroom where his grandfather tended the fires and guarded the sacred temple.

"Grandfather," Natishma called to announce himself.

Opechantough put aside a leather bag he was embroidering with porcupine quills when he heard his grandson. So old now that his darkened flesh clung to his bones, he nevertheless sat erect on a mat by the small fire in the middle of his partitioned area. Having survived without serious illness for sixty winters, he was the most respected of the Chesapeake shamans.

"Grandson," Opechantough answered. "It is good that you have come to the temple." He picked up his clay pipe and lit it from a thin piece of ignited wood he took from the fire. "Come, sit here and tell me what brings you to see me."

The skin on Opechantough's broad skull was like old leather, tanned by countless council fires few people remembered. The right side of the patriarch's head was plucked free of hair in the fashion of Chesapeake men, but since he was a shaman, one lock of hair remained just above his right ear. The long hair on the left side of his head was well oiled and groomed daily with a porcupine-tail comb. A deerskin mantle embroidered with small shell beads was draped over shoulders painted mulberry red from a mixture of pulverized roots and bear grease. The mixture provided protection from the cold winters and from the heat and mosquitoes in the hot season.

Natishma sat on a mat, his legs crossed. He remained alert to discern the presence of the spirits of the ancient ones. He was barefoot and wore a simple deerskin breechcloth.

“Grandfather,” Natishma said. “Yesterday, I went with my mother, my sister Keotapa, aunts, and the young children to pick strawberries. I picked berries alone. It was very hot, and I fainted. The next thing I remember is being surrounded by a council of elders in a beautiful land. The leader told me I was in the upper world. He said I was chosen to prophesy things to come when our world would be shattered by a terrible invasion.”

Opechantough put aside his pipe and picked up a gourd rattle cradled in the folds of a bearskin. He shook it vigorously.

He spoke. His words were brittle like the crackling brown leaves blown by the wind. Natishma’s heart pounded.

“You are of the Crow Clan, my grandson. Among the animal people, the crow is the visionary who sees beyond the shadows of this world. The great visionaries among the Chesapeakes have come from the Crow Clan. My father and his father before him were walkers in the upper world, and so the ancient ones have chosen you to be their spokesperson.

“Natishma, you are being called to walk the twilight land as your ancestors did. Only those of great strength are chosen.”

“But why have they chosen me? I am not strong; I have a crooked back and am physically limited.”

“I knew you would be a visionary when you were born,” Opechantough said. “You were marked as a contrary, unlike the ordinary children who were not born with a sign from the spirit world. Before your birth, I dreamed I saw your pregnant mother surrounded by three crows in a field of snow. Each crow carried an evergreen twig in its beak. When they dropped their twigs around your mother, a brilliant circle of light formed.”

Opechantough paused to pick up his pipe and knock its ashes free.

“Your son will be a Kwiokosuk; he will be a shaman of the Chesapeakes,” one of the crows said. “No one shall live to be greater than he.”

“When I woke from the dream,” Opechantough said. “I heard crows cawing. I stepped out of my lodge and saw three crows perched in an oak tree. I spread tobacco and white cornmeal around the tree as

an offering. I swore to the crows that I would train you in the ways of the shaman.”

“I feel frightened, grandfather.”

“I understand, grandson. You are being called by the spirit forces, and you feel uncertain of yourself.”

“Grandfather, I do not feel worthy.”

Opechantough’s wrinkled face glowed in the firelight. Natishma looked into his face. His dark eyes searched for comfort.

“I have heard you talk with animals, and I have heard your conversations with the stone people.”

“But I don’t know the language of the spirits, grandfather,” Natishma said.

“You remember the heron you rescued only two winters ago? Do you recall what happened?”

“Yes, grandfather, I remember. I was walking late in the evening by the riverbank. I passed a dead heron washed up on the shore. I walked past, hardly noticing the bird. Then I clearly heard a voice say ‘Go back.’ Startled, I walked back. The heron’s body was covered with wet sand. When I picked him up there was no sign of life. Blood was matted in the down of his head. I carried the heron away from the edge of the water. My only thought was to place him under a dry bush where he would not be washed away.”

“And you believed the bird was dead?”

“I saw no sign of life,” Natishma responded. “I placed him under some bushes and walked away, but I heard the voice. ‘Go back,’ it said again. I returned. When I again picked up the heron, I noticed one of his eyes was open, but there still was no sign of life. It was the eye that pierced my heart and compelled me to bring the heron to my mother’s lodge and offer him the warmth of a fire.”

“But you spoke to him as if he were alive and could hear your every word,” Opechantough said. “You described your mother’s lodge and told the heron of its warmth.”

“When I arrived home I placed the bird in a basket lined with fur and set him near the fire. I closed my eyes in meditation and envisioned the heron flying. In my vision, the bird was healed.”

“And that’s when you were startled because the heron hopped out of the basket and scampered under the sleeping platform,” Opechantough added.

“I caught him and placed him back in the basket, covering the opening.”

“And what happened the next morning, grandson?”

“I will never forget,” Natishma said. “I took the basket outside. When I removed the top, the heron leapt out and rose in flight. He soared high in the sky and above the trees. I thought that was the last of him, but he circled above me. During his last circle the heron swooped down, just over my head, before it made an arc and disappeared.”

“The heron was showing his gratitude,” Opechantough said. “It was a blessing to you for saving his life. It is clear that you receive visions through dreams. You can restore life through your visionary powers. In dreams, you will see our enemies before they reach us. You will see the face of the earth before our tribe came upon it. In dreams, you will fly to the upper world.”

Tears trickled down Natishma’s cheeks. He was afraid of the future, afraid he would disappoint the ancestors. He knew his grandfather often protected him from the boys who concealed themselves in darkness and spoke lies against him.

“There will be hardships,” his grandfather’s voice cautioned.

Natishma wept, shaking uncontrollably. He wept for his lost father and for the terrible night when he would have to stand alone.

“I have prayed to Ahone,” Opechantough said, pointing the stem of his pipe toward the central fire’s smoke hole. “In three seasons, you will be old enough to undergo the huskanaw initiation ceremony. The boy you are now will die, and you will become a Chesapeake man.

“You are chosen to receive the gifts of the spirit world. Train yourself to listen to everything—to the tree people, the ant people and the stone people. Listen to the clouds in the sky and the wind that moves through the grassland. They are your spirit helpers who will guide you on your journey.”

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Opechantough shook his rattle and chanted: *Aheena, tonaho, Nasseeghaw, Aheena, ahenna, tonaho, tonaho.*

“Natishma, you see beyond the shadows of this world. The Chesapeakes are known for their great shamans who see the shape forms of things to come. You are of this lineage. Ah-ho, it is good,” Opechantough said with finality. He lit his pipe and slowly blew smoke toward the smoke hole.

Chapter 2

April 1585

The English Depart

Splashing water against the side of a ship was a familiar sound to Thomas Hariot. He stood on the deck of the *Tiger*, the flagship of a fleet of five that was getting underway from Plymouth for the voyage to the new found lands of Virginia. The other four were the *Lion*, the *Roebuck*, the *Dorothy*, and the *Elizabeth*. Hariot was frequently seen around the docks of London, Plymouth and Portsmouth. Over the past three years, he interviewed sea captains and the rough salty dogs of the Atlantic whose muscle and sea-faring knowledge were pitted against the unpredictable fury of the oceans. He talked to shipwrights and dock workers, and recorded copious notes on the observations, which eventually resulted in his two handbooks: *Arcticon* and *The Regiment of the Sun*, recognized as the most important documents on ships and navigation. He now anticipated one of the greatest adventures of his life.

Hariot watched from the forecastle as piles of supplies on the wharf were stored in the ship's hold. Workers brought artillery, small arms, and gunpowder on board along with building tools and agricultural implements.

There was no need to carry wood on board since it was so plentiful in the New World, but nails, a few pitsaws, and a forge remained essential. There were supplies to last the treacherous six-month voyage and dry goods to last the colonists nearly one year. Barrels of salted pork and beef rolled up the gangplank.

Salted and dried codfish sat in storage bins below deck among sacks of flour, wheat and other staple grains. Most of the food stores were placed on the *Tiger*, the remaining on the *Roebuck*, a sturdy

broad-beamed vessel of 140 tun, under the command of Captain John Clarke.

As tutor to the eight-year-old son of the powerful and wealthy Sir Walter Raleigh, Hariot gained Raleigh's favor and soon came under his patronage. The Queen's courtier recognized in Hariot the fulfillment of his dream to establish a colony in the New World. Twenty-five-year-old Hariot was an expert in applying mathematics to oceanic navigation.

He taught the rudiments of navigation to assure that the men who were to command and navigate the ships Raleigh outfitted for the voyage to Virginia could read charts and maps and could determine latitude and longitude. It was of the utmost importance that they know their location on the high seas and their destination. He used his *Acticon* as his navigation textbook.

Among the 600 brave men embarking on the voyage were two tall Indians, Manteo and Wanchese. Arthur Barlowe brought them to England from the first expedition to the new lands in 1584. Hariot acquired a proficiency in the Algonquin language while they were guests in the Durham House, the estate provided by Sir Walter. He produced a phrase book and alphabet of the Algonquin language. The alphabet consisted of thirty-six characters and represented every sound of the native language. Hariot learned invaluable information about the lands the new colony would soon established because of his understanding the Algonquin language. He learned from his numerous conversations with Manteo and Wanchese that the area around Roanoke lacked the most basic raw materials. Even stone was scarce. Everything to establish a colony was shipped from England.

Hariot appreciated the natives of the New World. Theirs was a rudimentary culture with the simplest technology. But in matters of war and religion, they were not unlike his own countrymen. Manteo and Wanchese were intelligent as any Englishman, and Hariot passed many pleasant hours in their company to learn their customs and religion. Manteo quickly learned English although Wanchese showed no interest in knowing anything about England.

Manteo, a Croatoan, and Wanchese, a Roanoke, held high positions in their respective tribes. Hariot felt assured they would

provide a bridge of lasting friendship between the English and the Indians of Virginia.

Dressed in the clothes of a man who paid no great attention to fashion, Hariot could easily mingle in the crowded streets of London and remain anonymous. He felt at home with books, navigation and optical instruments.

If the occasion demanded, he would wear a doublet but did not enjoy the overly-padded Dutch fashion of the peasecod belly then in vogue. He preferred a small open ruff rather than the large cartwheel ruff, except when required at court appearances. He felt most comfortable in the ankle-length black robe he purchased on the day he arrived in Oxford when his was in his study or in conversation with Manteo.

Hariot was a studious man, often so absorbed in his studies that he forgot to eat. His face tapered at the chin, emphasizing his large forehead. His beard was short and well trimmed; his eyes reflected an inquisitiveness that invited conversation.

“Captain Grenville,” shouted Ralph Lane, the governor-elect for the upcoming Virginia colony, who was now overseeing the loading, “All the supplies are accounted for, and you can order the removal of the gangplank.”

“Well done, Master Lane,” the Captain shouted back. “Secure the gangplank. Prepare to set sail.”

The order sent sailors scurrying across the deck to get underway. The gangplank creaked loudly as they hoisted it into the gangway. The mooring ropes were freed. Sailors dressed in loose blouses and canvas slops pulled the wet ropes onto the ship’s deck.

“We can say a prayer of thanks that we have Thomas Hariot on this voyage,” John White said. He approached the forecastle and spoke loudly to catch the attention of the nearby sailors. “He knows more about navigation on the high seas than anybody in the kingdom. He’s taught navigation to our finest seafarers. We are honored to have him aboard.”

“John White, you give me praise that will surely be put to the test in the coming months,” Hariot replied. “I trust your art supplies have been stored on board properly. Your importance on this expedition

can hardly be overestimated. Our countrymen will see the New World for the first time through your illustrations and paintings.”

“I only pray I have as much talent as I have supplies for this voyage,” White said as he reached out to shake Hariot’s hand. “I think I am better prepared than when I accompanied Martin Frobisher to Baffin Island. That was quite a remarkable adventure, but I look forward to seeing the lands of Virginia most of all.”

White came from a Cornish family of little substance. He became an apprentice in the minor guild of Painter Stainers and advanced in society by selling his drawings of exotic places he visited. The merchant class demanded his work, and he made numerous contacts with wealthy men at court. He and Hariot shared a fascination with strange cultures and the flora and fauna of the New World. They were more at home in the wilds than in the company of the refined London gentry.

The mist shrouding the harbor earlier lifted as the sun rose above the storehouses and tenements beyond the docks. Patches of white clouds gathered in the early April sky. With the *Tiger* in the lead, the ships eased out of their moorings and slowly turned toward the open channel.

“It’s a good omen when the sky is clear, don’t you think?” Ralph Lane asked.

“It’s indeed a good omen,” Hariot replied. “We should have good weather at least for the coming week.”

Like Hariot, Lane was the overseer of every detail that fell to his responsibility on the voyage.

“I was inspecting the ship several weeks before, and watched as the master rigger Whitehead worked,” Lane said. “Although he’s an older man, he can still out-climb and out-splice even his youngest apprentices.”

“We’ve got some of the best men on these ships,” Hariot replied. “I trained most of them myself. But some seamen were pressed into service from prisons and taverns. Too many of our mariners are afraid of being captured by the Spaniards in the New World; they’ve heard horrible tales of torture at the hands of the Inquisitors.”

“I’ll confide my concern,” Lane said to Hariot and White as they overlooked the ship. “Captain Grenville is not a seasoned mariner. I hear he has done no more than sail across the English Channel.”

“I’ve heard the same rumor,” White replied. “Sir Walter thinks the world of him, however. I think it has benefited our captain that he and Sir Walter are both from Devonshire. Captain Grenville does have an impressive military history, but he is known for his hotheaded ways.”

White looked over his shoulder with discretion as he spoke, careful not to be overheard.

The clamoring sounds on the docks and the squalor of Plymouth harbor faded as the *Tiger* made her way west through the English Channel toward the open sea. The sailors set fast to raising the running rigging for the sails to catch the wind. A gentle breeze filled the sails of the main and foremast. The ships plowed through the channel along the familiar English coastline. Hariot caught sight of St. Austell, its fishing boats bobbing in the water close to the channel. A green slur of farmland interspersed with a cluster of farmhouses stretched across Cornwall. He could see Lizard Point. The *Tiger* left behind a flourishing civilization as it departed the coast of Cornwall and entered the Atlantic Ocean. A trackless uncertain wilderness beckoned beyond the ocean.

The western sky darkened, and the air suddenly turned chilly midday on the tenth day at sea. One side of the sun melted away and was consumed in blackness. Manteo and Wanchese threw themselves on the ship’s deck. With chants, they beseeched the darkness to depart. Hariot knew they saw this as a sign of calamity to come.

“It is merely an eclipse of the sun,” Hariot shouted across the main deck. “There’s no reason to feel afraid. My calculations indicated an eclipse in 1585 on the 19th of April.”

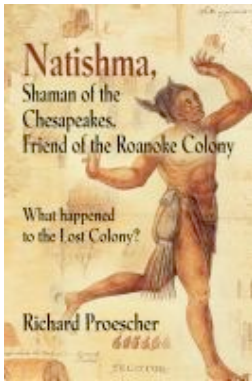
A gloomy silence fell over the ship. Sailors gathered on the main deck and shaded their eyes as they gazed at the sun.

“Don’t look directly into the sun,” Hariot warned. “You can go blind. There’s nothing to be afraid of as long as you don’t stare at the sun. The eclipse will soon end.”

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When the sun finally emerged out of the darkness, Manteo and Wanchese raised their hands and gave praise for the light that reasserted itself. The sailors' apprehension dislodged.

Confidence in Hariot rose rapidly as the darkness obliterating part of the sun vanished, and the bright orb again appeared intact. Manteo and Wanchese believed Hariot was a conjuror who defeated the sky monster that tried to swallow the sun. This only strengthened their belief that the white men possessed God-like powers unknown to even their shamans.



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