



Redstone Science Fiction #22 Cover

**Detail from Photo by
Jeronimo Nisa/The Decatur Daily**

Redstone Science Fiction #22 - March 2012

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Editor's Note – March 2012

by Michael Ray

As is often the case here at Redstone, we feel like we are catching this month's writers on the rise. Both Michael Jordan and Lynette Mejía presented us with quality *science fiction* stories that we are excited to publish. They both demonstrate storytelling ability that will, no doubt, lead them to find success in their writing careers. We expect to see many more stories from them published in the coming months and years.

[I Will Love You Forever](#) by Michael Jordan considers many traditional SF themes, including human-robot interaction and what planet colonization might be like, while [Steady State](#) by Lynette Mejía is a heartbreaking take on the SF ideas of the solitary space traveler and a black hole's event horizon. We think you will enjoy them both. Both authors, [Michael](#) & [Lynette](#), also generously submitted to interrogation by our publisher Paul Clemmons. Great questions and answers across the board this month.

We are also excited here at Redstone this month because [a local paper has published a story](#) about our growing publishing business here at Redstone SF. We hope the publicity will draw even more attention to the excellent stories we've had the privilege to publish. We are particularly pleased with the Bladrunner-esque picture that photographer and filmmaker Jironimo Nisa composed and took for the story.



(Photo Copyright: Jeronimo Nisa/Decatur Daily)

If only editing Redstone Science Fiction looked nearly this cool.

But most importantly, enjoy discovering these entertaining stories and emerging authors.

Your Friend,
Michael Ray
Editor
Redstone SF

I Will Love You Forever

by *Michaele Jordan*

It never ceased to amaze him that she could cook. He didn't come from a world where women cooked. (Certainly, his mother never had!) He loved to watch her doing it; it looked like some kind of conjuror's trick. From an armload of ingredients that did not, to his un-kitchened eye, even look particularly edible, she would assemble (at astonishing speed) stew, or stroganoff or bread. And it was always delicious. Which was more than you could say for the food at the trendy restaurants his mother had always insisted on trying.

She was making pizza, which touched him hugely. He would have expected something fancier, what with a guest in the house, but instead she was going with his favorite. Sliced onions, peppers and olives fanned out around her fingertips, like a magician's deck of cards; mounds of diced tomatoes and grated cheese stood ready; the freshly made pesto sauce still foamed.

He could have watched her all night, but eventually she looked up from rolling the dough and said, "So?"

He knew what she meant, of course, but he wasn't going to admit it. "What, so?"

Once the dough was rolled, assembling the pizza took seconds. "That Kim," she said, stooping to slide it into the oven. "He seems nice."

Kim isn't nice!, he wanted to shout. Instead, he shrugged and turned away. She wasn't pushy. If he stalled she might back off.

She sighed and continued, "At least that's what I thought when I went out to the garden. But you looked pretty upset when I got back." So apparently she thought it was too important to back off. She offered him a teasing smile. "Really, our first visitor in all these years, and you manage to get into a fight with him. What am I to do with you?"

"It wasn't a fight." He slid down from his stool and headed toward the dining room. "Guess I better set the table."

"Please, David. What did he say?" She was chopping again, lettuces and radishes this time. Her voice was very soft. "I know you don't want to talk about it. But I think I need to know."

"It was nothing important," he snapped. And then, because he'd snapped at her—and he never snapped at her, how could he when she was so perfect?—he saw that the reason he was snapping was because he was lying to her. He took a very deep breath and said, "Kim says you don't love me. That you can't love me—because you're not human."

She stopped chopping, even with the salad unfinished, and the silence was riveting. He didn't have to turn around to know how she looked, with the knife poised halfway up, her mouth frozen slightly open and her eyes slightly shut, so focused on what she was thinking that she forgot to move. He froze with her, waiting for her to come back.

Finally the knife came down again, but only once. Then she set it gently down on the cutting board and let her arms drop to her sides. “I see,” she sighed, and took a very long pause before adding, “Did he offer you transport?”

“What? For God’s sake...” He turned and went back to her, grasped her arms—but gently, he didn’t want to hurt her. She looked up at him. She looked human. Her eyes were green, with tiny gold flecks. Gold flecks to match her skin, he’d always joked, because her skin was an exotic tawny shade—an unusual color, but not so unusual that it didn’t look human. “Kati, how can you say such a thing?”

“But it’s obvious,” she answered. “Why would he mention that I’m not human, unless he was explaining why he wouldn’t give me transport? And why would he have to explain why he wouldn’t give me transport unless he was at least willing to take you back?”

He stared at her. He often forgot, in the day to day routine, just how inhumanly smart she was. It gave him chills to hear her pluck facts out of the air, from such tiny observations and seemingly tenuous chains of logic. But she was always right. Finally he managed to answer, “It doesn’t matter what he offered. I’m not interested.”

She picked up the knife and resumed preparing the salad. “Please don’t make any rash decisions, David. Certainly not on my account. Think it over carefully. Who knows how many years it will be before you get another chance to go home? If ever? This isn’t a good place for you, not conducive to human life. And you ARE human. You need to get away if you can.” She glanced up and her look was very sad. But level. God help him, she really meant it.

“This IS home,” he assured her. “It’s rough, yes, just a scouting post. But I’m here with you, and that makes it home. Now that we’ve got some fresh supplies, we can fix the place up, make it more comfortable, safer. Think what a difference that new generator and shield will make. You heard what Kim said. They’re still planning to build a colony here. So we just hold on until the colonists get here.”

She shook her head. “He said they MIGHT still build a colony here. Assuming his report doesn’t change their minds, which it probably will, since I can’t imagine it will be very positive. Even if they go ahead with it, it might not be for another fifty years. You can’t hold on for fifty years. Conditions here are too hostile; we can’t watch each other’s backs every minute of the day. We’ve been lucky so far, incredibly lucky. But the luckier we get, the more inevitable it becomes that someday the law of averages will cut in. You have to get out.”

“And leave you here alone?” He would have continued but she raised a finger to his lips.

“It’s different for me. You know that.”

He took a deep breath. He didn’t like to argue with her, but he had to win this one. “How different? Is Kim right, then? You don’t love me? You’re incapable of love?”

She froze again. When she finally answered, she sounded like a lost child. “So many people have told me so many times that I’m incapable of real love that I have to face the possibility they may be right. But nobody seems to be able to define love well enough for me to verify it for sure.” She drew in a deep, shaky breath. “You are the center of my world, my reason for continuing to function. Every minute of the day, I’m always listening for you, no matter what else I’m doing. My reward for working is seeing you pleased. I think that means I love you.”

He drew her into his arms. “Then you’re not different enough for it to matter. We stay together.”

She opened her mouth. “But David…”

He kissed her mouth closed again. “No ‘buts’. There’s nothing left for me to go back to by now anyway. And if I were capable of leaving you here alone, then I wouldn’t be human either.”

“Be that way, then,” she chuckled, burying her face in his chest. “I will love you forever.”

* * *

He woke—if you could really call it that—too groggy and disoriented to function, but driven by some desperate urgency. He had no idea where he was, and had no way to find out. He couldn’t see; he couldn’t hear; he couldn’t think; but still he knew that something was utterly, terribly wrong. He thought he opened his eyes, but everything stayed black, so black he couldn’t see his hand before his face, and when he tried to lift his hand to his face, just to see if he could see it, he couldn’t move his hand. Nothing else would move either. That scared him. He felt pressed on from every direction, as if he had somehow been buried alive. Was he even alive? Could he move enough to breathe? Blind and paralyzed and lost, he started to panic.

Then he heard a sound, a faint but distinctive beep, followed by a hiss, then another beep. Small as it was, the sound relieved most of his fear; it was familiar. It was the beep of a transport capsule alert; it meant that his oxygen intake had increased to abnormal levels. The hiss was the medical support system revving up to prepare a sedative. Suddenly he was not blind and paralyzed, but merely confined in a transport capsule. The only thing that still scared him was the hiss; he did NOT want to be sedated. So he sucked in all the air he could, and held it. And held it. And held it.

The beeping slowed and stopped. When he was sure that no further beeps were coming, he permitted himself to exhale slowly, just in time to prevent the system from becoming concerned that his oxygen intake had decreased to abnormal levels. He spent a few more minutes just breathing in and out, making sure that his respiration stayed level, trying not to worry. Why was he in a transport capsule? Was he still on his way to the assignment? Were all those years at the post with Kati just a transport dream? Not possible. He loved her too much. He remembered her too well. Dreams faded, whether they came from transport or normal sleep. But his memory of Kati grew only more vivid and detailed. Not a dream.

Some of the old skills came back to him. He didn’t have to lie in the dark and worry. “Visual feed, please,” he said, as clearly as his fuzzy, fat tongue would permit. A lighted screen jumped

up in front of his face. It took a moment to focus his eyes on the swirl of brightly colored icons, dancing across the screen. Most of them were unfamiliar, so he just asked, “Where am I?”

The yellow icon that might (or might not) have been a cartoon of a smiling spaceship flashed. The other icons fled, and a ship’s schematic with registration cards slid in from one side. It was a minimal blueprint, but enough to clarify that he was on the Jolie Fille, a scout-and-inert-cargo vehicle. Despite considerable external scaffolding, the ship itself was very small; the area contained within life support consisted of a control console and a single room, with a wash-cabinet and sleeping drawer folded into one wall. And it was a small room. It made the scouting post look spacious. But there was a glowing red rectangle indicating where his capsule was.

“Itinerary?” he asked, and the blueprint slid right while a star chart slid in from the left. They were going to Earth; in fact they were nearly there. Which actually made sense. The transport capsule would have kept him knocked out for most of the trip. But it still didn’t explain what he was doing on a ship in the first place. Jolie Fille—wasn’t that the name of Kim’s ship?

Worth a try. “External audio link,” he said, and followed it up with, “Kim? Are you there?”

There was a startled squawk, and some unidentified noises. “Man, are you awake already? I’m sorry, I should have checked on you sooner.” There was movement; he was being hauled up into something like a seated position. His head was lifted, his neck was turned. Then the star chart flipped out from in front of him and he was back in the real world, looking out of a helmet with a raised visor.

Kim was right in front of him, apparently with one foot in the capsule with him, still hauling him awkwardly up until his back and head were approximately upright. With a shock, David realized he wasn’t even in a real transport capsule. Apparently Kim had just laid a storage locker horizontally on the floor, and jury rigged the space suit inside it to serve as a capsule. (Clever, thought David. Suits and capsules had a lot of functions in common.) Kim looked awful—pasty, baggy eyed and unshaven with hair sticking straight up, dressed only in boxers and a T-shirt. He looked like he’d just crawled out of his own transport capsule.

“What am I doing here?” demanded David.

Kim fell back and, since one leg was still in David’s storage locker, tripped and fell on his butt. Just as well—there wasn’t enough room behind him to fall down flat. He gazed mournfully up at David and opened his mouth several times. Finally he said, “You don’t know?” He sighed heavily and shook his head. “Okay, just how much do you remember?”

“I remember you coming to dinner,” answered David. “We had pizza. You offered to bring me back to Earth with you. I told you, ‘Thanks, but no thanks.’ You left. As I recall, I insisted on you leaving.”

“You don’t remember calling me back and saying you’d changed your mind?” Kim’s voice was so confused and forlorn that David found it hard to believe he could be lying.

“I did?” But he wouldn’t have!

“Yes! You said you had it all figured out, and you wanted to come!”

Figured all what out? David was suddenly stabbed by a flash of hope so sharp it was painful. “You mean I figured out how to get us both on board?” he burst out. “Thank God. Where’s Kati?” He tried to scramble out of the storage locker, but the locker was a tight fit, and space suits were not built for scrambling. Still, he leaned out and craned his neck in every direction. “Kati?” There was no sign of her. Maybe still in the transport capsule? There was one over against the far wall. But only one. Kim’s. Kim had had to jury rig his space suit into a second capsule. But Kati wasn’t human, she didn’t really need a capsule. But then, where was she? David turned slowly back to Kim, almost afraid to look at him.

Kim was blinking owlishly up at him. “Kati?” He shook his head and repeated the name, as if trying to remember where he’d heard it. “Kati?” Then comprehension dawned. “Oh, God, you mean the robot?”

“Tell me she’s here,” whispered David. “I wouldn’t have come without her. Never. Please tell me she’s here.”

Kim looked left and then he looked right. He hauled himself to his feet, and backed a little further away from David. But not very far. It was a very small room, and most of it was already occupied by furniture. He tried to smile. “You see anyplace I could be hiding your robot?” He waited while David absorbed that information. Eventually he continued, “Look, it... I mean she, was a very high quality piece. I can see how it would be a wrench to lose it... her. But look around. This ship was never meant for two, let alone three. It was all I could do to squeeze you in. The only way to bring... Kati along would have been to shut her down and dismantle her, and put her outside in storage.”

“She was a colony model. She wasn’t built for deep space,” said David faintly. “Your hull’s magnetic. Her memory would have been wiped before we even got clear of the system.”

“Exactly.” Kim attempted a smile. “That’s why we left her there. She said she would keep the post going, and prep for colonists. The company’s going to be thrilled—they really need a new colony, and at least the place was borderline habitable. Trust me, we’re both going to come out of this rich.”

David scarcely heard him. “I agreed to this?” Kim didn’t answer, just stared at him, so he continued, “Did you actually speak to me in person? Or just get a call?” Kati would have had no trouble faking the call. “And when you came to pick me up, I suppose I was already too sedated to talk?”

Kim bit his lip, and looked away. Then he seemed to think of something, and reached into a drawer. “She left you a message,” he said, pulling out a data coin. David was still mostly in the suit, so Kim plugged the coin into an input slot for him.

There she was on the screen, large as life, cocking her head with a rueful half-smile. “Please forgive me, David,” she murmured. “I know you must be angry, but I had to do it. You know I will love you forever.”

* * *

Once again, he woke in a transport capsule, but this time he knew exactly where he was. Just outside colony headquarters, in New Colonist Revival and Reorientation. The overworked staff was delighted to find that he already knew the drill and could clean up and move on to Processing on his own. Except, of course, he didn’t go to Processing. He went to Records. What he found was not pleasing. Fortunately he had his own records with him, so he tracked down the Registrar.

The Registrar looked a little uneasy, but attempted a confident show. “You must understand, Mr. Holmes, that we found the item in question abandoned. Our right of salvage was obvious, so we took possession.”

“Begging your pardon, Sir, but that is not strictly accurate,” David replied levelly. It was never a good idea to lose your temper with either a lawyer or a chief administrator and the Registrar was both. “You found an item that appeared to you to have been abandoned. Your mistake is understandable, but the item was not, in fact, abandoned, only temporarily unguarded. Salvage rights do not, and never did, apply.”

“Unguarded? Come, Mr. Holmes, you left the planet. You were gone for years!”
“I do not see that the length of my absence is a relevant issue.” David plucked up a paper from the table. “Here is my deed of ownership. It does not appear to include any time limitations.” He paused, but not quite long enough to let the Registrar attempt a counter argument. “I was always expected back. Why not examine the item’s internal records? They will certainly document that it received instructions to prepare for my return.”

The Registrar shifted in his chair. His face grew more mask-like, which looked to David like he was getting very nervous. “I’m afraid that’s not possible, Mr. Holmes.”

David already knew that, but saw no reason to admit it to the Registrar. “Really? Why not? Surely checking the records is the obvious thing to do in a case of disputed possession.”

“The internal records are no longer extant.” David assumed a bewildered look, forcing the Registrar to continue. “You must understand, the colony was very gratified to acquire...” he paused and considered David’s face. “When we believed ourselves to have acquired such a valuable and productive asset. Starting a new colony is hard work, back-breaking work, I might even say. The item in question promised—and eventually—proved to be enormously useful, relieving our limited population of a large number of difficult tasks.”

“I imagine so,” purred David. “I certainly always found it so. But what has that to do with checking its internal records?”

There was a knock on the door, which then opened. Kati looked terrible. Most of her hair had fallen out, and a strip of skin was missing from the left side of her face, revealing a disturbingly non-human support structure. Her right arm had been replaced with a metal multi-tool. Her eyes were still green with gold flecks, but she looked at David with no recognition. She offered him a polite nod and turned her attention to the Registrar. “You sent for me, Sir?”

“I see you didn’t bother with maintenance,” snapped David.

“You mean,” the Registrar snapped back, “We didn’t bother with cosmetic maintenance. There was no need, once it had been reprogrammed for work more useful than service as a sex toy. It is in perfect working condition, and remains a prized asset to our community.”

David sucked in his breath and counted to ten. It was still never a good idea to lose your temper with either a lawyer or a chief administrator. “You reprogrammed it? In and of itself, there’s no harm in some reprogramming; it was always a multi-function unit. But it’s beginning to sound like you didn’t just reprogram it, but erased its memory.” Without waiting for the Registrar to respond, he turned to her. “Kati, do you remember me?”

She turned and studied him carefully. “No, Sir, I’m afraid not. Is there some reason why I should?”

“You knew me before you were reprogrammed,” he told her. “My name is David Holmes.”

She remembered the name. He could tell, because she froze, just as she had always used to do when thinking too hard to waste processing time on social appearances. As always, he waited for her to come back. “David Holmes,” she mused, at last. “You are that same David Holmes who was my former owner?” He nodded. She smiled. “It is good to make your acquaintance, Sir, or perhaps I should say to renew our acquaintance. I regret that I have no memory of our time together, but the arithmetic makes plain that you were the longest association of my life. I hope I gave satisfaction—I no longer remember why we separated.” She laughed. It was exactly the laugh he remembered. “To be honest, I don’t even recall how we came to be together in the first place.”

“I won you in a card game,” he told her, and she laughed again. He had always loved that laugh. “And you didn’t just give satisfaction. You were perfect.” She smiled hugely, and something that looked exactly like a blush crept up over her right cheek. Her human simulation algorithms had always been superb.

He turned back to the Registrar. “I gather you did not keep a backup of the memories you erased?” The Registrar looked away, unable to hide his uneasiness. “That was careless of you. It could be construed as a deliberate attempt to conceal ownership. Certainly it leaves you with no legal record to support your salvage claim.” He smiled. “I, however, have clear documentation of ownership. I could sue. I would have to take the case back to Earth, of course, which would generate enough court costs to destroy this whole colony when I won.” The Registrar, he saw, had turned pale gray. “Unless we settle.”

“It is always better for all parties if an amicable settlement can be found,” whispered the Registrar.

“I’m not out for blood,” confessed David. “I just want my Kati back. You can start with restoring the cosmetics, and searching your files for a forgotten back-up.” He turned to Kati. She was looking uneasily between him and the Registrar. He smiled at her and she smiled back. “You know there’s always something left, even if you reformat the drive: a file tree with no files, a few nameless, unidentified jpegs. I’ll tell you everything I remember; maybe something I say will trigger a pointer. And if not... well, we’ll build new memories. Obviously, your behavioral programming is still intact. It’s still you in there.” She looked puzzled so he took her hand and squeezed. “Trust me—you deserve better than digging sewers and hauling trash.”

She cocked her head with that same rueful half-smile he knew so well. “But why are you doing this, Sir? Couldn’t you just get a new robot?”

He shook his head. “No, I couldn’t. It has to be you. I will love you forever.”

The End

Michaele Jordan was born in Los Angeles, bred in the Midwest, educated in Liberal Arts at Bard College and in computers at Southern Ohio College. She has worked at a kennel, a Hebrew School and AT&T. She’s a bit odd. She lives now in Cincinnati with a grumpy cat, a long-suffering husband and many invisible playmates. Her first novel, Blade Light, was serialized in Jim Baen’s Universe. Her new novel, Mirror Maze, is on the stands now, thanks to the good people of Pyr Books.

Steady State

by Lynette Mejia

Log Entry, Vitruvius, 2115-26. FTL Propulsion, terminated. Navigation Systems, normal. Suspension and Life Support Systems, normal. Crew Vital Signs, normal. Speed: 276005.965 km/s. ETA, LMC-2015 Singularity: 240h, 42m. Suspension terminated. Begin crew reanimation sequence: T-Minus 36 hours, 12 minutes. Packet prepared, 2115.06.24, 22:25. Packet transmitted, 2115.06.24, 22:27.

* * *

In the sleep chamber Adam Steward dreamed. He was at a party, a barbecue. It was summer, hot, so hot that sweat streamed down his back, soaking his shirt. He was standing over a grill, cooking, or trying to, cursing because the smoke was in his eyes and the hamburgers were burning. Nikki behind him suddenly, the rush of cool air on his neck that gave him goose bumps. She pressed a cold beer into his hand, cold enough that ice crystals tickled the inside of his mouth when he took a drink. She laughed, and the sun shone in her hair. Funny, how he'd never noticed that before, how the light glittered between the strands when she turned at just the right angle. He'd had this dream a hundred times, and every time there was something new to see. Some detail, however minor, that had escaped his attention on the day he'd actually lived it.

"You take everything so seriously," she said the first night they met. "You need to lighten up. Smile once in a while. Live a little." She took his hand, led him out onto the dance floor, the science nerd in the button-down shirt and tie at a bar on a Friday night. He was nervous, scared shitless if the truth be told, holding all the anxiety in by white knuckle courage and endless mental repetitions of the periodic table. Of course he was serious. She was beautiful, and she'd asked him to dance. He still couldn't believe he'd allowed his friends to talk him into coming here.

"Do you go to school here?" She was shouting above the sounds of the music, a deep, rhythmic thumping that Adam couldn't have identified with a gun to his head.

"Yes," he yelled. "I'm a graduate student."

"Oh yeah? In what field?"

"Astrophysics." He hesitated, waited to see if her eyes glazed, smiled a little bit inside when they didn't. "I'm doing research connecting supermassive black holes with the Steady State theory." He stopped before he lost her interest. "And you?"

"I teach literature at the lab school. Faulkner, mostly, but I've gone crazy the last couple of semesters and thrown in some Eudora Welty. You wanna get out of here?"

He smiled. "I would love to."

* * *

Log Entry, Vitruvius, 2115-27. Propulsion and Navigation Systems, normal. Life Support Systems, normal. Crew Vital Signs, normal. Speed: 275998.772 km/s. ETA, LMC-2015 Singularity: 216h, 31m. Crew reanimation, complete. Radiation scan and survey complete. (Enclosure: images 55-76, visible light, x-ray, gamma radiation) Packet prepared, 2115.25.06, 22:25. Packet transmitted, 2115.25.06, 22:27.

* * *

He was groggy, and cold. The temperature of the saline solution had been a fraction of a degree too low, and he awoke chilled and violently shaking. His first thought was ridiculous, inane: Time to make the donuts. As if the bedside alarm clock had just gone off, and he was rolling out of bed for a shower and another day of teaching. As if Nikki were still alive, warm and peaceful beside him. As if Mikey would come padding in on footed pajamas, corn silk hair tousled from sleep, and crawl in between them.

His muscles had atrophied despite the electro-muscular stimulation, and it had taken days to regain full bodily control. After years of intravenous feedings his stomach was shrunken. It was as if it no longer remembered how to digest food. Even with great effort he could only keep down the tiniest bites, violently throwing up anything more than a couple of ounces of broth.

When he was strong enough, he reviewed the past year's logs, manually checking each system for integrity and function. When that was done he reviewed the mission objectives, experimental protocols, and the procedures for filing reports. Everything seemed to be in order, though the deceleration from light speed had taken longer than they had anticipated, reducing his working time. Given his plans, that would not pose an insurmountable problem. Satisfied, he took a seat near the nose of the craft, opening the radiation shields that covered the cockpit windows.

Despite months of preparation and study, despite understanding on a scientific level what to expect, he was nonetheless awestruck. The view was vaguely familiar to be sure; he'd been looking at stars his entire life. But this...this was an entirely new neighborhood, a view even Edwin Hubble could never have imagined.

A 360° telescopic scan with infrared and visible overlays revealed clusters of white-hot Type Ia supergiants wrapped in a magnificent glowing reflection nebula, its bilateral structure a pair of wings that swept the skies. The Butterfly Nebula, Adam thought. That's what Mikey would have called it.

In the echoes of his heart the thing begins to flap its wings, spiraling upwards into the hot summer sky. "Burr-fly, Daddy." The little boy smiles, proud of his identification skills, his entire universe contained in this tiny meadow. From a distance, Nikki's voice: "Food's ready! Come on, you two, even scientists have to eat." Without looking Mikey reaches up with a tiny hand, wrapping it confidently around one of his father's fingers. Adam marvels over it, the meaning of his life encapsulated in this small space, this moment in time.

* * *

Log Entry, Vitruvius, 2115-28. Propulsion and Navigation Systems, normal. Life Support Systems, normal. Redshift scan and survey initialized. Data Collection, 58% complete. Speed: 275441.332 km/s. ETA, LMC-2015 Singularity: 192h, 54m. Thermodynamic mapping complete. (Enclosure: Local group spectroscopic analysis, LMC-2015 Radio/X-Ray recording) Packet prepared, 2115.26.06, 22:25. Packet transmitted, 2115.26.06, 22:27.

* * *

The cockpit viewing panels were filled with a deep, red vaporous glow that drowned out the darkness of space. He knew it for what it was – the end, or possibly the beginning, depending on how you looked at it. It was getting closer, drawing him inexorably into its wide, endlessly voracious orbit. Adam’s heart pounded as he watched it, ticking ever closer. It was a strange feeling to see your destiny stretched out before you, like a fortune teller scrying in tea leaves. In a thousand dreams, he’d imagined what it would have meant to see the future, to take a different path. If he could have called her. If he had stayed home that day. If the weather had been different. Eventually, though, he’d realized the truth of it all – that the future isn’t comprised of a million branching possibilities, infinitely changeable. It’s a line, clean and simple and straight. There is no deviation.

* * *

Log Entry, Vitruvius, 2115-29. Propulsion and Navigation Systems, normal. Life Support Systems, normal. Data Collection, 65% complete. Speed: 275975.031 km/s. ETA, LMC-2015 Singularity: 168h, 41m. Hawking Radiation analysis 1 complete. (Enclosure: Data Package, Images 77-125) Packet prepared, 2115.27.06, 22:25. Packet transmitted, 2115.27.06, 22:27.

* * *

The ship was cold. Climate control was struggling to warm the interior from the absolute zero of deep space. The gravity field was stronger now, as if tidal forces were pulling and stretching him like toffee. Physically, it was becoming harder to walk, harder to carry on normally. Adam gripped the cup of coffee, wrapping his fingers around its warm circumference. The only sound was the white noise of the humming engines, pushing him ever onward. With no more responsibilities other than periodic systems checks, he drifted in a haze of jumbled thought and memory. Back to the university. Back to the time before.

“Black holes were originally known as “Frozen Stars.” Can anyone venture a guess as to why?” A few nervous glances, some shifting in their chairs. “It’s a perception issue, really; since the light of objects near the event horizon will never actually reach the viewer, the black hole appears “frozen,” if you will. Stuck in time.” He stopped, surveying their faces, watching for the ones on the edges of their seats, playing the game with himself where he tried to pick out his future graduate assistants. “Yes, it sounds strange. It is strange to think of time as something that can be stopped. Of course, don’t expect something like that to work when your term papers are due.” The class laughed, more at ease now.

This was the moment, he realized. This was where the idea was born; the idea that although time was linear, it didn't have to move at a constant speed. Hell, it didn't have to move at all. At the singularity, the fourth dimension took on the characteristics of the third; became a road that could be traversed, forward or backward. It was only a kernel then, however; not yet born, not yet connected to his life. Later, when grief and sorrow were his only companions, it would return, and set him on that path once more.

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Log Entry, Vitruvius, 2115-30. Propulsion and Navigation Systems, normal. Life Support Systems, normal. Data Collection, 87% complete. Speed: 273498.221 km/s. ETA, LMC-2015 Singularity: 72h, 22m. Full spectrum scan, initiated. Hawking radiation analysis 2 complete. (Enclosure: Data Package, Images 126-189) Packet prepared, 2115.01.07, 22:25. Packet transmitted, 2115.01.07, 22:27.

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Another year gone by. Adam drifted, awash on a sea of moments that sloshed over him, lapping at his feet like waves. They pulled and pushed, learning him, committing him to memory. Outside the red glow had deepened, wildfire in the distance, a burning door.

He closed his eyes and suddenly he was in the hallway of the new physical sciences building, dedicated just a week before. Painters were still moving among the students. Electric outlets still needed covers.

"Dr. Steward." The policeman was soaked from the pounding rain that smacked against the windows. He had a look on his face that stopped Adam's heart.

"Dr. Steward, I'm sorry, but there's been an accident."

"My wife?" The words were thick; his tongue was swollen and heavy in his mouth.

"She's in critical condition, at Mercy General Hospital. I can take you there right away."

"My son? What about my little boy?"

"I'm sorry, Dr. Steward. You should come with me."

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Log Entry, Vitruvius, 2115-31. Propulsion, terminated; Free Fall initiated. Navigation Systems, normal. Life Support Systems, normal. Data Collection, 92% complete. Speed: 289621.555 km/s. ETA, LMC-2015 Singularity: 48h, 04m. Event Horizon gravitational measurement complete. (Enclosure: Data Package, Images 190-244) Packet prepared, 2115.02.07, 22:25. Packet transmitted, 2115.02.07, 22:27.

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He still slept, though fitfully. It was noticeably hotter in the cabin, so much so that he perspired heavily most of the time, even though the air conditioning was cooling at maximum capacity. The heat gave an air of unreality to his dreams, mixing memory with madness, the type of thing one might experience during a fever. Images blinked before his eyes like a film played at slow speed, flashes in the dark behind his eyelids. Nikki, smiling, in the sunshine. Mikey, playing with an oversized yellow shovel and pail at the beach. The funeral; staring at the casket that held his life, waiting for it to be lowered into the cold, hard earth. The night sky. The singularity, out there, waiting for him, rushing up to meet him with arms open wide.

* * *

Log Entry, Vitruvius, 2115-32. Navigation Systems, no reading. Crew Vital Signs, no reading. Speed: 1132.010 km/s. ETA, LMC-2015 Singularity: 24h, 17m. Packet prepared, 2115.03.07, 22:25. Packet transmitted, 2115.03.07, 22:27.

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He hadn't anticipated the frequent loss of consciousness, the blackouts and missing time. It was the heat, mostly, though the intense gravity that felt like it was pushing and pulling apart every atom in his body. His senses had suffered, coming and going in no particularly discernible pattern. He made one last report, one last transmission sent out into the blackness. Perhaps someone would find it, someday, and think of him, if even for a moment.

He took a deep breath, as much as his compressed lungs could manage, and slid the helmet over his head. The eye shields would only provide protection for a moment or two before the super-intense burst of light would overwhelm his retinae. The gloves and the suit he'd already put on earlier, despite the sickening heat; a flimsy, worthless barrier that would, at most, gain him time that couldn't even be measured by a standard clock. Still, he had done it, had made all the preparations. Around him the ship shuddered, coming apart at the seams as it approached the event horizon.

In the distance he felt her calling to him; saw the sunlight glinting off the strands of her golden, burning hair. Over the sounds of the ship tearing apart he could hear Mikey's voice: "Burr-fly, Daddy." They were here, he knew; here at the intersection of death and creation, and, as he had known, they were waiting for him.

With the last strength he could muster, he pressed the button on the console that opened the cabin radiation shields. He smiled as the photons assaulted him, as light and time and space merged with elemental finality. Dimensions opened, unfolding before his eyes like the petals of a flower. Time became a road and Adam walked upon it, back to his wife and son, back home.

From a distance it was a barely discernible blip, a particle suspended in the event horizon, an infinitesimally small ripple in a tiny corner of the universe.

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Final Log Entry, Vitruvius, 2115-33. Contact with LMC-2015 Singularity: T-Minus 2 hours, 29 minutes. All systems normal. Packet prepared, 2115.04.07, 23:54. Packet transmitted, 2115.04.07, 23:56.

The End

Lynette Mejía writes science fiction, fantasy, and horror prose and poetry. Her stories have appeared in "The Absent Willow Review", "Everyday Weirdness", as well as the anthologies "Children of the Moon" and "Penny Dread Tales, Volume 1". She is currently working on a master's degree in English at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette with a concentration on Pre-Raphaelite poetry and creative writing. She is also hard at work on her first novel. She lives in Lafayette, Louisiana with her husband, three children, four cats, and one fish.

A Conversation with Michael Jordan

by Paul Clemmons

From our first email contact, I was wowwed by you (even if you didn't follow our submissions guidelines), and I am so glad that we are getting the opportunity to publish one of your stories. What is the source of this amazing charm of yours?

Amazing charm? Me? If only everyone had your profound insight and perception! But it's funny you should mention my failure to follow your submission guidelines. I swear it was an accident; usually I am almost paranoically rule-bound. Ironically (or perhaps it is simply my unconscious at work) my greatest successes are often those occasions when I—always accidentally—break the rules and then have to sweet talk my way out of it.

You write such well-crafted and engaging stories. What is your writing background?

Thank, you again! My trick is to burn my failures.

I went to a posh (and otherwise nasty) private school that drilled me rigorously in grammar, vocabulary and paragraphing, then spent the afternoons in my grandmother's library, which contained nothing written after the nineteenth century. Once I was out in the work force, I spent most of my business career writing for other people—letters, contracts, flyers, proposals; I've composed and edited hundreds of newsletters over the years. All very boring stuff, but the fundamental tool of writing is language, and my tools are pretty deeply ingrained by now. Combine them with my ever-present invisible playmates...

Your website shows us Michael with Vulcan ears and Michael the wicked witch. Is SF&F Fandom a big part of your life? What are the outlets that your creativity finds when you are not writing?

Fandom pretty much is my life. You've heard the story before—lonely nerd finds fandom, and turns into a real person. Way back in... well, long ago, I was a friendless egghead, home from college looking for work. I was recruited by Lou Tabakow—one of the sweetest men ever to walk the earth—into his local club, the CFG (Cincinnati Fantasy Group). Suddenly there were people in my life who didn't look at me funny when I used big words, or move away from me when they heard I would rather read a book than watch a sports event. The guys thought I was cool even though I never wore make-up. I had friends. Still do. And I still can't get over that! I met my husband in the CFG—and that turned out to be true love! Barring immediate family (of which I have very little) everybody in my life came to me from the CFG.

On those (embarrassingly frequent) nights when I collapse in front of the TV, I like to crochet. That way I haven't 'wasted' my evening relaxing. (Again, I'm rule-bound. Time is precious, you know.) It's a wonderfully calming activity—almost like a meditation. (I've taken my crocheting to potentially long meetings to keep me busy and sweet tempered when the boredom approached terminal levels.) I'm pretty good at it by now. Would you like an afghan? I have twelve or thirteen spares. **YES!**

What can you tell us about your career in adult film industry?

Oops! You let one interviewer ask you about your most daring exploit... Yes, I was in not one, but two, adult films. I did not take my clothes off. They had professionals for that. But I was in

them. I had a ‘featured cameo’ as an aggressive lady lawyer in Killer Sex Queens from Outer Space and I was a co-star in Hookers in a Haunted House, playing a ‘Newsbabe.’ (I had a script and everything!) Again, I did NOT take my clothes off. But I threatened to!

To what SF&F writer would you most like to hear yourself compared or contrasted, and what qualities you most wish to develop as a writer?

This is a hard question. There are so many wonderful books out there, and I don’t always want to write like the books I read, anyway. Michael Chabon writes things I wish I could have written. Parke Godwin for his evocation and reinvention of the old stories. Phillip K. Dick for his ability to trap the supernatural within the real, leaving the real trapped within the supernatural. Peter Beagle for sweetness that does not cloy. Fritz Lieber for making S&S witty and articulate—and for the conservation of reality. Iain M. Banks for creating the universe I want to live in—and for deleting his middle initial long enough to write Whit. Andre Norton for getting me started. Jonathan Carroll. James Tiptree, Jr. This could go on all day. And if you ask again tomorrow you’ll get a different list because I’ve left so many great ones off.

What are you working on now?

I’m about half way through two novels. (I rarely only work on one thing at a time. I’m always getting stuck. Now that I’m a professional (ooh, I love to say that!) I can’t take time off, just because I’m stuck on one thing, so I go work on another. Novel #1 is Jocasta and the Indians which will be a rollicking steam punk adventure with tons of authentic historical detail. (If you don’t believe it, go check out my occult thriller Mirror Maze, on the stands now thanks to the good people of Pyr Books. Pages and pages of what Publisher’s Weekly called “charming historical end-notes”) Novel #2 is Invasion, my first full length SF adventure, and it’s.... well, let’s just say, the title is a come-on, not a give-away.

Where can our readers find more of your excellent work?

Why, thank you for asking! As I said, Mirror Maze is in bookstores now. My first novel, Blade Light, (a charming traditional quest fantasy, pretty much YA) is currently available as an e-book. (It was originally serialized in Jim Baen’s Universe. I’m still hoping to get it out in paperback.) Both are available on Amazon. Or you can find links to them on my web-site, www.michaelejordan.com. Watch your spelling or you will end up looking at basketball pictures.

I have a wonderful time-travel romp called The Once and Future Cake coming out soon in Buzzy Magazine. (If it were only 500 words shorter it would have been eligible for Redstone!) And my short story Wizard will also appear soon in Fantasy and Science Fiction.

Is there anything that you’d like to shout from the rooftops?

Recycle

Don’t waste water

Be kind to animals; they deserve better than us.

Please, check me out and friend me on Facebook.

Peace!

A Conversation with Lynette Meija

by Paul Clemmons

Your story, ‘Steady State’ is very well-written and touching, and is an excellent example of the sort of ‘hard’ science fiction that we love. Where did you get the idea for this tale, and how did you research it?

Although I’m a writerly-type person, I’ve always been interested in science, and I’ve loved reading science fiction since I was a kid. “Steady State” came to me one day as I was puttering around on the web, reading various blog posts and articles. One of them mentioned steady state theory, and the phrase just sort of stuck in my mind. I started thinking about the idea of time being frozen, and whether or not that could ever be a desirable thing.

For help with getting the science right, I turned to an old friend who was my roommate in high school, and who is now a professor of astrophysics. She was very gracious, and let me send her a long list of questions about black holes and what scientists think an event horizon might look like. It was really helpful, because she could give me answers to many of my very specific questions about how time behaves under such immense gravitational forces.

In your story, the sense of loss and desperate hope are palpable. Can you tell us how you approached this story?

Regardless of genre, all stories are human stories at their core. I wanted this to be a story about time, and black holes, and relativity, but as I thought about it, I couldn’t help but think about how personal time is for all of us. We all have those days in our memories, those perfect days that you just wish you could make last forever. And I thought, how many of us, if given even the tiniest chance, would go back and capture that moment, just stay there forever, suspended in bliss. Would you risk everything for that chance?

On your website, you mention a novel that you’ve been writing. What can you tell us about it?

The novel is something I’ve been working on for a few of years now. It’s about Lilith, Adam’s first wife, who was cursed by God for refusing to submit to the will of her husband. She is variously depicted in Jewish folklore as either a demon or as an immortal, perpetually fallen woman. I started thinking about what it would be like to be given immortality, not as a gift, but as a curse. The novel takes place in modern times, after all these millennia wandering the Earth, as she finally comes to grips with her own power. I hope to have it finished by the end of the year, and send it out into the great big world.

In ‘Steady State’, your voice, through your protagonist, was identified by several members of our team as having a “Southern feel” (Southern United States). Do you self-identify as a ‘Southerner’ and how do you see your background as influencing your writing?

I was born and raised in South Louisiana, so yes, I’d definitely identify myself as a Southerner. South Louisiana, however, is something of its own little niche within the region, and it’s this very specific place that calls to me as a writer. Also, I think that the South is somewhat underrepresented in contemporary sci-fi and fantasy, and I’d like to change that. We have such a history of storytelling here, and I’m very interested in extending it, within the realm of speculative fiction, beyond vampires and voodoo.

Do you remember the first SF story to really ‘grab’ you, and can you tell us about it?

I think the first book I ever read that could be called science fiction was *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L’Engle. I think I was ten or eleven, and it just completely rocked my world. Not much later I discovered Isaac Asimov, and that’s when my love of the genre really took off. I still remember reading “Nightfall,” and just being totally blown away by the idea of a planet where the entire concept of civilization is based on having more than one sun. From then on I was hooked. When I was in high school I wanted nothing more than to be a scientist, specifically an astrophysicist, until I came to the realization that what I really wanted to do was write about science.

What are you working on now?

I’ve got a couple of short stories I just finished. One is about a boy with autism who may, or may not, be a superhero. The other takes place in the far future, during the next Ice Age. It’s about a young woman meeting a mysterious stranger who teaches her the lost art of reading actual books. I’m also smack dab in the middle of getting a master’s degree in English Literature, which takes up a lot of my time these days. This semester I’m studying John Milton and William Blake, though, so I don’t mind a bit!

Where can our readers read more of your excellent work?

Last year I had two short stories in small press anthologies. One is a Steampunk meets Frankenstein story set in 19th century New Orleans, in a collection called [Penny Dread Tales](#). The other is about a werewolf who’s also a priest in an anthology called [Children of the Moon](#).

Where can our readers learn more about you and the things that interest you?

Just check out my website, www.lynettemejia.com. I have a blog that I keep there, where I post the latest news on my work and occasionally rant about this or that.

Thanks, again, for the opportunity to publish ‘Steady State’, and we look forward to working with you again in the future.

Thanks for the great interview questions. I look forward to seeing the March issue!