



Excerpts From *The Moon Under Her Feet* By Derwin Mak Published by Windstorm Creative, 2007

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Father Mark Wycliffe, a Roman Catholic priest and space engineer, flees from Earth's wars by serving aboard a Mars space station. Above Mars, he meets a mysterious woman who claims to be the Virgin Mary. He is skeptical of the vision; could it be an illusion created by asteroids called Siren Stones?

Later, on the Moon, he meets Jessica, a teenaged girl in a Catholic school uniform. Jessica loves to shop in the Moon's largest shopping mall and hang out in its coolest nightclub. But Jessica also claims to be Jesus and uses her special powers to start a nuclear Armageddon on the Moon and the Earth. Father Wycliffe, the Virgin Mary, scientists, and clergy must stop Jessica from carrying out her Father's will. While the mortals and her immaculate mother try to foil her, Jessica happily splurges on designer clothes, luxuries she never had in first century Judea.

"An entertaining story about faith that manages to avoid preaching or disrespect. Especially charming is the essence of the Christian savior filtered through a teenaged girl without stepping over the line. I recommend this one." – Tangent Online

"What follows is a clever, often brilliant, weaving of two story lines: as international tensions escalate, the mystery of the Marian Apparition deepens. Mak brings science and theology together in ways few other science fiction writers would even contemplate..." – John-Allen Price, *Mutant Chronicles* author.

ΩΩ

Jessica, who thinks she is Jesus, has gone shopping with Carla, a waitress on Timonium Base, the largest shopping mall on the Moon. Father Mark Wycliffe awaits Carla at the medical center, where Carla has volunteered to have her brain scanned for scientific and theological research...

Father Wycliffe waited in the reception area of the medical center. He heard the bell ring, signaling that someone was entering the room. Carla walked in, but she was not alone. To Wycliffe's surprise, Jessica walked in too.

The two young women held shopping bags.

"Carla knows all the fabulous shops," Jessica raved. "Look at this!" She pointed to her feet to show the black go-go boots that had replaced her flat black shoes. "Aren't these totally awesome?"

Jessica held out a bottle of perfume and sprayed into the air. The girls laughed.

"That is such a fantastic scent!" Carla said.

To Father Wycliffe, the perfume smelled like jellybeans.

Jessica and Carla pulled clothes out of their shopping bags: skirts, blouses, tops, shorts, pants, and belts. They recited the names of the famous designers whose boutiques sold the clothes. They must have spent hundreds of gold units.

Jessica held up a lacey red bra and giggled. "This is so skanky!" she squealed.

"You skank!" Carla cried.

"No, you're the skank!" Jessica accused.

Carla laughed and grabbed the bra away from Jessica. Jessica snatched the bra back and slapped Carla with it.

Father Wycliffe forced himself not to guess which girl would wear the bra. He would go to Hell for wondering and imagining.

Father Alexei, Dr. Hall, and a nurse came into the reception area.

“You again!” Dr. Hall cried.

Jessica smiled. “Oh, Dr. Hall, you’re here too? The Moon’s become the place where everyone hangs out.”

Carla looked puzzled. “Do you two know each other?”

“Dr. Hall and I used to work on the same space station.”

“You worked on a space station? What did you do?”

“I was the cook.”

Wycliffe steered Carla away from Jessica. “Carla, this is Father Alexei, who is both a priest and a psychiatrist, and this is Dr. Thomas Hall, a neurologist,” he said. “They will conduct the psychiatric and neurological tests. Gentlemen, this is Carla Delgada.”

“Carla, I am very pleased to meet you,” said Father Alexei.

He turned to the nurse and asked, “Have you set up the video recorder and the notepad?”

The nurse nodded. “It’s all set up. I even recharged the notepad’s batteries. We’re ready.”

“Thank you, Miss Hennessy.” Father Alexei turned back to Carla. “Miss Hennessy and I will interview you for an hour. After that, Dr. Hall will give you a monitoring device, and you can go anywhere you wish. You won’t be inconvenienced too much this weekend, I promise.”

“Sounds okay to me,” Carla said.

Alexei motioned for Carla to follow Hennessy to the room. Carla turned to Jessica and said, “See you in a couple hours at the food court, alright?”

“You got it!” Jessica replied as she put the clothes back into the shopping bags.

Hennessy led Carla away. Alexei went to Jessica and said, “I see you’ve been shopping.”

“Totally. I haven’t seen hot clothes like these since I was in Egypt. That was two thousand years ago. I liked Egyptian styles. The Egyptians were so more *haute couture* than Judeans.”

“Humans can create such works of artistry, beauty, and creativity. But if you were to end our human race, you would never see such clothes again.”

Jessica grinned. “I get to resurrect the dead. Some of them designed really hot clothes when they were alive. Like Coco Chanel and Gianni Versace. The Kingdom of God will rock!”

Alexei turned to Wycliffe. “Our attempts to convince Jesus to postpone the end of the world are not working. Pray that we are experiencing some form of mass hallucination, and that is all it is.”

Alexei walked away to join Carla and Hennessy.

Humming “Havah Nagilah”, Jessica carried the shopping bags to the door. Father Wycliffe and Dr. Hall silently watched her leave the medical center.

Dr. Hall said, “That’s the girl who thinks she’s Jesus. But she crashed the shuttlecraft into Mars. She’s dead!”

“Haven’t you heard about resurrection?” Wycliffe said. “She’s a bit late this time. Instead of three days, she took three years.”

“Be serious,” Thomas insisted. “I don’t know what she is, but she’s not human. Is she an alien?”

“One who can turn invisible to our cameras? That teenaged girl is a space alien? That’s highly speculative, if not preposterous,” Wycliffe said.

“No more preposterous than a virgin woman getting impregnated by a ghost and giving birth to a god,” Thomas rebutted. “At least it’s scientifically plausible that Jessica could be an alien.”

“Scientifically plausible? Does she look like an alien? Does she talk like an alien? Is it

scientifically plausible that someone who looks and talks like a human is an alien? There's no proof that life exists beyond Earth, so how can you say Jessica is an alien?"

"It's theoretically possible..."

Wycliffe knew that Thomas would never accept that, perhaps, the Troika crew had lost the shuttlecraft. Spacer pride would not accept the blame.

The other alternative to blame was God, but for Thomas, God does not exist.

With neither humans nor God to blame, Thomas had to blame a hypothetical alien. To the fundamentalist atheist, a space alien was more plausible than God.

ΩΩ

The Chinese have successfully launched a nuclear missile from their moonbase, thus bringing the Moon and the Earth closer to war. Jessica returns to Timonium Base after a two-day absence...

Father Wycliffe and the Virgin Mary watched Jessica come back to St. Dominic's Church. The girl, smiling incessantly, pranced past them and went to the kitchen. They followed her there.

As Jessica sang "Havah Nagilah", she took a pitcher of water from the refrigerator and poured the water into a glass. The water turned into red wine as it filled the glass.

Mary grabbed the glass of wine and poured it down the sink. "You're too young to drink," she warned.

Jessica pouted. "Oh, Mommy, you're such a spoilsport," she whined. "It's not as if I was really born yesterday. You, of all people, should remember. I was born over two thousand years ago."

"You've been missing for two days. We've been worried about you," Father Wycliffe said. "Where have you been?"

"At Yue 1," Jessica replied. "Don't you think that's a dorky name for a moonbase? It means 'Moon one' in Chinese. What an unoriginal name."

"Oh, no, you were at the Chinese moonbase," Mary muttered. "Dear, what were you doing there?"

"I broke the fifth seal. I wonder if they noticed I signed my name five times?"

"The fifth seal from the *Revelation of John*," Father Wycliffe realized. "Oh my God."

"You got it, Father. I figured out how to launch their new missile. With a superpower ready to deliver death and destruction anywhere on the Moon, the time of tribulation and martyrdom is coming. Five down, two to go!"

"Young lady, you are grounded!" Mary scolded.

ΩΩ

Father Wycliffe tries to convince Jessica not to end the world...

Since his only child never grew into his teen years, he had no real experience with teenagers. He imagined this is how fathers have talked to their wayward teenagers since time immemorial.

Wycliffe knocked on Jessica's door. "Come in, the door's unlocked," came the reply.

He entered her room and gawked at the scene. The room was full of flowers and plants. Scores of pots and vases lined the floor along the walls. The plants came in every color, including red, yellow, green, blue, purple, pink, black, and white. A vase of red roses and tropical greens sat on her table.

"Do you like the redecorating I did?" Jessica asked. "Carla took me to a flower shop, and we bought all these plants and flowers. I like plants and flowers. I used to hang out with my friends at a garden."

Wycliffe knew of the garden: the garden that Jesus visited before his crucifixion, the

garden where Jesus felt his agony, the garden where Judas betrayed him.

Jessica was sitting at her table. She was looking at 3-D photographs of her, Carla, Roxanne, and Auguste.

“Don’t these look so incredible?” she asked him, seemingly no longer disappointed at him.

Wycliffe took the photos from her. They were photographs taken in an instant photo booth in Café Méliès. They showed Auguste and Roxanne hugging and kissing. They showed Carla and Jessica together, making faces for the camera. How typical; teenagers and young adults had been posing like this since the twentieth century.

“Such memories, such friends,” Wycliffe said as he handed them back to Jessica. “You’ll keep these photos forever, I expect.”

Jessica grinned. “Oh, totally, forever and ever. I’ve had so much fun with Carla, going to the nightclubs and fashion boutiques and movies with her, hanging around with her. I haven’t had this much fun since Magdalena was around. Carla and I are Best Friends Forever.”

“Except the world -- at least the world where you and your friends can hang around in photo booths, nightclubs, fashion boutiques, and movie theaters -- won’t last forever, will it?” Wycliffe said.

Jessica’s grin faded. “Oh, yeah, that,” she said as she turned away from him.

She stood up, walked to a mirror, and looked at herself. Her face turned grim.

She turned back to face him. “I have to do it. It’s my job to judge the living and the dead. It’s God’s will. He’ll be really pissed off if I don’t do it,” she declared.

“What will happen if you don’t do it? What then?” Wycliffe asked.

“How should I know?” Jessica sighed loudly in exasperation. “Do you think I know everything? Who do you think I am, God?”

Wycliffe nodded.

“Uh, yeah, I suppose I am,” Jessica said, “but I’m only one of three persons in a single God. I don’t always know what the other two are thinking, even if I have co-existed with them since eternity.”

She dropped to her knees and sobbed. “Oh, I wish He would take this cup away from me!” she cried. “The only thing more painful than sacrificing yourself is to sacrifice your friends!”

Her sobs grew into a torrent of tears. Wycliffe knelt down beside her and put his hands on her shoulders, but she brushed him off.

For the first time, Wycliffe felt sorry for Jessica. The mental torment she felt now must be more agonizing than in the Garden of Gethsemane.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” he asked.

Jessica shook her head and continued crying.

Wycliffe stood up and saw Mary standing in the doorway. She had that agonized face of a mother seeing her child in pain.

The Mother of God took a deep breath, went to her daughter, knelt down, and hugged her.

Wycliffe quietly walked out of the room. *Tonight, nobody will betray you*, he thought.

Jessica cried for an hour until Mary coaxed her into bed.

After the girl fell asleep, Wycliffe asked, “Is she okay?”

“As much as any teenaged girl with the weight of God and the universe on her shoulders,” Mary said. “Yeah, it’s not easy being a teenager, especially this teenager.”

“I don’t know what to do,” Wycliffe said.

“Pray for us all,” Mary said. “She told me when the Apocalypse will happen.”

Wycliffe felt cold fear.

“One standard Earth month from now, and there’s nothing we can do to stop it.”