

INTERNATIONAL SPECULATIVE FICTION

FIRST SHORT STORY

14 MAY 2012

Regina Catarino (Portugal)

“SPACE ODDITY”

The first piece of fiction presented today is “Space Oddity” featuring Portuguese short fiction writer Regina Catarino. “Space Oddity” was first published in Portuguese in the first number of a magazine that I edited called “Conto Fantástico” and was a success in the opinion of Portuguese readers and reviewers of the magazine. As the title already reveals, it is a story influenced by David Bowie’s music.

I really like Regina’s ability to tell great stories using only a small amount of words.

Today we will also publish a short story by Alette de Bodard, another one of my favorite writers of the moment!

*The Editor In Chief:
Roberto Mendes*



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SPACE ODDITY

Regina Catarino (Portugal)

—§—

The countdown begins.

I am strapped to my seat, waiting for lift-off. I wonder what you’re doing now?

A few seconds later, the brutal acceleration smashes me against my seat. How many G's? I really don't know.

I'm leaving without knowing very well if or how will I return. This is an old ship, repaired at the last minute for this urgent mission with isolating panels, fixed way too quick and carelessly. I would almost bet they used staples and duct tape instead of the proper titanium alloy rivets that were supposed to – that would have taken a lot more hours than those actually spent.

I wasn't supposed to be here. My shift had already ended but the other pilot had the flu. For once, they really needed me. And I could never say no to a request for help.

–§–

Time slides silently. I hum a song which name I cannot remember while I perform routine tasks. All seems to be going well. For now, at least.

–§–

I've dropped the satellite in the right orbit and I'm now delivering the supplies to the Space Station. Those folks sound really anxious for whatever I'm bringing. They seemed very happy to see me arriving at the docking station.

–§–

Hmm. An alarm on the console. I was expecting that... I turn off the audio and nothing's left but an orange light blinking sadly, in an almost frustrated manner.

–§–

Finished unloading. The space station astronauts hugged me gratefully and rushed in to open the containers. I wonder what was in it? Food? Books? Music? I have no idea. Time to go back, now.

–§–

Oh bugger, the alarm again. Now I have two lights blinking alternately, lending the cabin a shady, sleazy look, like a cheap bar in the suburbs on a big football match night. I wish I was home with you, gazing at the stars instead of flying closer to them.

–§–

A few more hours pass by. Reentry approaches and the blinking orange lights turn red.

Thinking of you makes me unaware of time. I miss you dearly.

—§—

One more hour passes. I hum the same song again, and this time I recognize it: David Bowie. Quite adequate, don't you think?

—§—

Reentry in less than an hour. I strap myself to the seat again. From the intercom, hysterical voices disrupt the silence. I turn it off. I don't want to listen. I know better than them what's happening.

Through the small plexiglass window on the hatch I saw a piece of panel drifting away slowly into orbit. I knew those staples wouldn't hold it... no duct tape can perform miracles.

—§—

We both knew one day this could happen. I'm sorry I didn't get to talk to you before take-off. I didn't even leave a message on your voicemail. I know you don't pay much attention to them, so... never mind.

"This is Major Tom to Ground Control... .. tell my wife I love her very much... she knows"

—§—

Tonight, I won't be in your arms gazing at the stars. But if you come out and turn your head up, you will see my last goodbye – without a kiss but full of bright light.

Tonight, I will shine like a star above you.

THE END

Regina Catarino

Born on the Far East, she moved to Portugal in 1971.

Her first SF short stories were published in 2004 ("Memória") and 2005 ("O guardião", a six-hand round-robin with Ricardo Loureiro and Rogério Ribeiro) by Hyperdrivezone, edited by Ricardo Loureiro, now a good friend to whom she gives great credit for being the first to believe in her writing skills. Recently, it was Álvaro Holstein and Roberto Mendes who have challenged her to contribute to their edition adventures: Fénix #0 ("And now for something completely different", 2010), Jornal do Conto Fantástico (with the original version of "Space Oddity", 2010) and Vollüspa ("Vermelho", 2012).

When asked what makes her write, she answers: "I write because it allows me to create new worlds and/or realities. Every sci-fi fan experiences a longing for the stars, the vast and unknown universe. When I write, my words carry me up there."

She is currently part of the Fénix fanzine editing team and wishes more women in Portugal would write Sci-Fi. "Ok, we can't pretend laws of physics do not exist. But what seems unrealistic on today's Earth might be normal in the far future - or in a parallel universe. There's no limit for the imagination."

