

## Chapter 4: A Rose By Any Other Name

That evening after supper, Lionel, starts reading the Song Yet Song novel. Chapter 1 starts:

### “the code”

“On a gray morning in March 1850, a colored slave named Liz Spocot dreamed of the future....<sup>1</sup>“

The flow and drama within the novel rapidly draw Lionel into the story. Almost three hours later that he “comes up for air.”

“Sandi, have you read a Song Yet Song or any James McBride?” asks Lionel.

“I have read two of his novels, Miracle at St. Anna and Song Yet Song,” replies Sandi. “McBride has a tendency to assign mystical allusions through the two novels I read. You will find the cadence of the stories a great change from the legal and crime mysteries you normally read.”

The discussion continues for another fifteen - twenty minutes before they call it a night.

Sometime in the early morning close to four AM, Lionel has a moment of wakefulness. “Did I miss something?”

Over a morning yogurt bowl with blueberries and pecans Lionel resumes last night's discussion with Sandi. He opens with, “Early this morning my subconscious popped the thought into my mind that I may have missed a message that Stacy or more likely Frank was attempting to pass through the Song Yet Sung.”

“The first chapter is titled ‘the code’. The the novel introduces Liz, a slave on the run in Eastern Maryland coastal plains. She is dreaming of a fearful future reflecting the chaos of modern urban living for Blacks. Then it launches into dialogue about listening for the coded communication.

“My intuition tells me Stacy or Frank was using this novel to communicate message or safeguard something.”

“Lionel you are just reading too much into a coincidence of their disappearance and the transfer of their condo furnishings,” cautions Sandi.

“Heh Sandi, Stacy and Frank were a young couple. They are both college graduates who were well aware that they should not ‘screw around with Type 1 diabetes’. I would not expect them to fly-off somewhere without arranging for pharmaceutical support. I don’t want to upset Maduka Bankole’s family but this does not sound right.

“Using a book like the novel, the album, or the coffee table books would be a good way to ‘hide or safeguard’ something in plain site.

“Now if either of them decided to use a book to ‘store, hide, or safeguard’ they could have inserted some type of media into the physical body of the book. Or they somehow embedded their information in the text of the book itself and some technique for encoding/decoding like a Ouija board, planchette, Enigma machine, three letter code sheets Field Codes, or ASCII randomization. They did

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1 McBride, James, Song Yet Sung, Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd, London, 2009

have a Ouija board and a collection of various size planchettes. Finally, they might have used some type of invisible ink.

“The problem with this approach is that it would basically be a one-time collection of information like a time capsule. Then the question becomes if they knew or suspected that they were in trouble or needed to hide the information, why didn’t they go to the authorities or relatives for help.

“No, I do not want to see anything sinister. It is probably private nudie pictures of a young couple that are best kept in a ‘Safe Folder’ on ones cell phone.”

A moment later after catching his breath, Lionel continues, “Sandi, I don’t plan to burn much more of my time just to find embarrassing pictures.

“I don’t have x-ray or ultrasonic probe gear. But I do have a Zircon MultiScanner HD800 for finding studs, wiring, and metal. The scanner uses changes in magnetic field to identify hidden objects and features. That may help identify any metallurgical embedded information or hidden features. It is sensitive enough to find small metal objects if they are not deep in the wall or ground.

“I will give it a try later this morning after coffee call at Claude’s.”

Shortly after breakfast, Sandi and Lionel head to Claude’s for a morning cup of coffee and social conversation among the ‘usual suspects’ of the brew crew. The banter across the table with the brew crew involves the upcoming basketball rivalry game between UNC and NCSU. ‘Smooth’ and ‘Usher’ are staunch UNC fans. Sandi, Lionel, and ‘Boilermaker’ have a more ambivalent view of the rivalry. They jokingly prod the two UNC fans about the season’s ups and downs. ‘Ole Shoe’ arrives late from a doctor’s appointment. ‘Smooth’ asks to see the ‘late note’ from the doctor. Arriving with no ‘late-note’ cost ‘Old Shoe’ a Quarter fine. Not having a Quarter, ‘Ole Shoe’ antes-up the smallest bill he has, one of his signature Jefferson Two Dollar bills. As treasurer Lionel notes that ‘Ole Shoe’s’ contribution has pushed the brew crew past the agreed upon threshold where a decision on where to donate the brew crew’s fund needs to be made again. Fortunately, that discussion deflects from the basketball rivalry and carries through until adjournment.

Returning from coffee Sandi goes to her office to pursue her ancestry search support of a national registry. Lionel changes into athletic clothing and prepares to start his typical stationary cycle ride. He starts a session with the Milan classical music station he typically streams. He mounts the stationary cycle and stets-up for his hour ride. His goal is long-term 18 miles of distance in an hour. But recovering from a recent injury the distance target for today is 17 miles. Using a keypad he sets his wight and age. He then adjusts the riding stress level to 12. He will finish the last three minutes with a stress level of 15. Then he fires-up the cycle.

As he cycles he reads the Song Yet Sung for the next thirty minutes. Moving past the thirty minute mark, he continues cycling at the 12 stress level, quits reading, and takes a drink of water. That level of exertion continues until 57 minutes into the ride. At that point the stress level is increased to 15 to simulate finishing going uphill. That bit of extra stress drives his heart rate just above the suggested max rate. Finishing the hour ride Lionel remains seated on the cycle and notes his reported heart rate. As time passes he monitors the drop in his heart rate during the two minute cool-off period. At the end of the cooling-off period he notes that his heart rate has drifted down some 48 beats per minute. Then he dismounts and records that day’s ride heart rate drop over the two minute cool-off.

Following a shower and dressing Lionel once again returns to the Song Yet Sung quest. Activating the headset, booting the video camera, and starting Audacity audio record he proceeds. Like in prior forensic recordings he provides header information of who, where, what, when, and how. As he continues he verbalizes the steps he is taking.

At his workspace/office he loads a fresh 9V battery into the Zircon scanner. Upon turning the scanner 'on' and setting it to Metal Scan, the display panel lights a light blue background and displays "METAL" mode. Laying the scanner directly on the front cover of the novel he begins a slow sweep left to right, drops about half an inch and sweeps back to the left. Both sweeps produce no response from the scanner. He repeats this right/left scan with gradual drops numerous times with no response.

He then flips to novel and starts the same process on the back cover. On the tenth swipe to the right the scanner begins to acquire an object near the book spine region. The display begins to throw two pairs of flashing lines. On the next drop and swipe it adds two more lines to both pairs. Then on the next swipe to the right the indicator light shows a hit and there are six lines in each pairing plus a high pitch tone signaling a hit on something metallic. Using the scanner and slow sweeping Lionel locates the metallic object as beginning about three inches above the bottom. The signal begins to flutter to 'off' at about two inches above the bottom. Sweeping from left to right he locates the start of the signal about two inches in from the book spine. That signal dies about one and a half inch from the book spine.

"Okay so now we have something," muses Lionel. "And what is it?" At this time he verifies that the audio and video recording equipment are functioning properly.

First he removes the cover from the novel. "Removing the novel's jacket. Measuring in from the bottom of the back cover about two inches. Then I will measure in from the spine one and a half inch."

He then measures from the bottom two inches and from the book spine one and a half inch. He places a light pencil mark at that location.

"I am opening the back cover and intend to locate the object for gaining a general measurement and idea of orientation."

After reporting he then opens the back and scans the inside back cover. The scanner flashes and then pops the indicator light just as it did on the closed back cover.

Using draftsman pencil resting in the sighting-notch of scanner magnetic sensor, Lionel slowly draws horizontal and vertical lines following the 'strongest' metal indicator signals. That technique yields a generalized 'I-beam cross-section shape' on the inside cover of the novel. After completing the I-beam shape drawing, Lionel measures the edges.

"I find the length to be half an inch running parallel with the spine and five/eights width running in general parallel to the bottom of the novel."

Closing the novel, Lionel's attention turns to the closed back cover. With a Micro-Tec fine needle probe secured in a holder Lionel begins 'feeling and probing just under the spine tape run. Moving from the light pencil mark he first made on the back cover he proceeds along and just under the tape.

"I am using Micro-Tec fine needle probe to lever under the spine tape from my earlier pencil mark along the under edge of the spine tape. There feels like there is something just under the tape here. I will need to cut the tape to see the object.

"I am using an Exacto knife and thin blade to slice the tape while I slightly raise the tape with the needle probe.

“Here it comes. It appears to be a double sided tape which is sticking to the just cut tape. It appears to be holding to be a micro-SD card. The tape and SD were in a cavity. The cavity appears to have been carved from the back cover. The SD card is dusty but appears to be serviceable.”

Lionel inserts the micro-SD card into a SD adapter. He then places it in a USB 3.1 card reader. Not wishing to contaminate his systems and network he detaches an isolated desktop that he uses as a LinuxCNC simulator. If something unwanted migrates or jumps from the micro-SD card, he can rebuild an exact image of the LinuxCNC simulator from a Clonezilla image he made at the first of the month.

He cautiously turns-on the LinuxCNC simulator desktop. As the desktop comes alive he logs-in. Then he inserts the card reader. Instead of a routine mount he is met with an error message that notifies him that the micro-SD card is formatted in exfat. That is a high compression media format used for digital cameras and other modern media. This apparent format mis-match occurs between newer medias and older devices, like his ‘old’ LinuxCNC simulator. Lionel is forced to use an older Ubuntu operating system on the LinuxCNC simulator because of specialized needs to support computer controlled milling.

Lionel has dealt with this problem of mismatched format support problems before by employing a low risk work-around. The work-around employs a Samsung S2 Android pad for transferring using an OTG, on-the-go, connector cable between the exfat media and the Android pad. Once the transfer to the pad is completed he merely downloads the transferred content to a USB thumb drive which has an acceptable format such as FAT32 or NTFS.

Briefly pausing the audio recording he uses the work-around to produce a thumb drive copy which is readable on the LinuxCNC simulator. Lionel inserts this thumb drive copy on the LinuxCNC simulator. Lionel attempts to read its properties and contents.

Restarting the audio report, Lionel observes “The micro-SD card is a Sandisk Ultra 256GB formatted to exfat. It was subsequently discovered to contain one very large file named ‘210203\_dahlongega.rar’. It appears to be an archive file containing at least one file compressed with the RAR compression algorithm. The archive file and its packing list are not readable under my archive manager because its access is password protected.

“Using conjecture I am assuming that the 210203 is February 3, 2021. ‘dahlaongega’ may refer to Dahlongega, GA. Dahlongega, GA is North of Atlanta in the mountains. It is home of the Georgia gold rush of the early 1800’s. It is also the site for the Mountain Phase of US Army Ranger training. I am not familiar enough with Stacy or Frank to know what link if any they might have with that town. Nor am I familiar enough with Stacy and Frank to be knowledgeable about how technically savvy they are. My attempting to guess their level of password protection or the contents encryption has a very low probability success.

At this point Lionel begins a brief, futile effort to circumvent or to unlock the archive file.

“I am calling time on my efforts to unlock the archive file. Someone else with a bit more power and knowledge will need to assist.

Returning to the novel Lionel weighs and records the displayed reading, “Note that upon re-weighing the novel with its jacket, it now falls well in the mean of the bell curve at 20.639 ounces.

“Recommend handing-off to local authorities for further investigation as they may deem appropriate.

“My plan is

- 1> to cease further work on this venture, transcribe this audio with recommendation, and present the micro-SD card to Aminu for relay to Maduka for his disposition.
- 2> to continue reading the novel since it now seems to be just a novel with an empty carved hole near its spine.”

Shortly after transcribing the audio narration of the micro-SD discovery Lionel calls Aminu.

Recognizing the incoming call Aminu answers with “Prince Jones what’s going on?”

“Aminu, I may have stopped a bit early in my first effort. Anyway after reading a couple hours in the Song Yet Sung last night, a thought stuck in my subconscious that may be I was missing something. After sleeping on it, I became more convinced. Anyhow a little more work and the usage of a magnetic scanner helped to locate a cavity in the cover that was holding a micro-SD card. It seems to be holding a large file. The contents on the SD card are password protected. I have no idea what the contents might be. I have no idea how the cavity was created or by whom.

“It is time to have the authorities take another look to see what they think. I have the micro-SD card and a transcript of my audio report of its discovery packed. You can send someone around to pick it up this afternoon. Or I can drop it by the warehouse tomorrow morning.

“It will be Maduka decision to take the micro-SD card and my report to the local authorities.

“Please let him know that the SD card might contain embarrassing pictures.”

“Lionel, we are busy this afternoon. Why not meet me for coffee at Caffetteria Turandot? I will call Maduka after we hang-up here to see if he wants to talk to you briefly then. Thank you for your extra effort.”

“Caffetteria Turandot tomorrow around 0830 hr is fine with me. See you then.”

Next morning Lionel skips coffee with the brew crew and instead meets Aminu at Caffetteria Turandot.

“Maduka will be with us shortly.” greets Aminu. The two old friends continue in conversation until Maduka takes a short break. Lionel hands the micro-SD card and a copy of the audio transcription to Maduka .

“Prince Jones, thank you for taking the extra step,” acknowledges Maduka.

“It was my duty,” responds Lionel. “The micro-SD card contains one large file. The file is an RAR archive file like a ZIP file. But it is password protected. So I can not access it.

“I do not know what is on the micro-SD card because I was not able to read it. But may be the local authorities may see value in continuing to evaluate it. I am just sorry that it did not provide an answer.”

“Thank you again. Please keep that copy of the Song Yet Sung as a token of appreciation of your kindness.”

“I must return to work. But I will pass this package to the authorities.”

“Please advise Aminu if the authorities are able to unlock the contents of the card.”

As Maduka returns to work, Lionel restarts his conversation with Aminu, “Sorry I could not be more helpful with the micro-SD card. Even if I was able to unlock the card’s contents just trying to look at 160GB would have required lots of computer time and luck.”

“Maduka understands. He and his wife are returning to Nigeria to visit the old village next month. He was summoned to join the Council of Elders for our village. It is an honorary title that has a long history in our culture. It is kind of like the Masons and Don Corleone without the Hollywood mobster context theme. They work to resolve issues and crisis that surface within the community.”

Three days later Lionel receives an email from Aminu. Aminu wrote “Prince Jones, thank you again for your assistance. Maduka told me the authorities have no interest in pursuing the contents of the SD-card. He has asked a cousin of his, Prof Yakubu to have a look at the SD-card. Prof Yakubu teaches computer science at NCSU. He teaches compiler theory and cyber security. Prof Yakubu will assign the decrypt task to a team of his students. That will provide the resources.

“Maduka told me that Prof Yakubu is aware of the possibility of embarrassing information being revealed. But Prof Yakubu indicated that he can contain it by digitally monitoring what he called the ‘unscrambling, decrypt, parsing of the contents’ and selectively using specific students with the needed talent. He feels certain he can control it with digital monitoring and compartmentalization of the tasks.

“I will keep you advised as Maduka updates me.”