

Xenoestrogen

RANGER H. S. BREGGIS - PRIVATE LOGBOOK

EXPEDITION SHIP OVID - ENTRIES 02.100 - 02.203

> DECRYPTING . . .

> DECRYPTION SUCCESSFUL!

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.100

> Entry title: "Preliminary assessment of Aria-6 from low orbit"

This planet is a hellhole. Blows my mind that the Consortium selected it as a terraforming candidate. Standard planetary designation "Aria-6." She has an average surface temperature of 200°C, air is filled with poisonous pink gas, hazardous pink vegetation still somehow sprouts through some of the rocks. Ranger Serrick says they're called revengia lilies. He says that during the Schism, the Baroness engineered the revengia lilies to be her bioweapons against all men. She scattered them over every habitable planet in this cluster. Hundreds of cycles later, they're still here, still littered all across the surface of Aria-6.

Dr. Zennen told me the scientific nomenclature for the lilies is *Baronissa Revengia* - Revenge of the Baroness. He said the revengia lilies are extremophilic flora, weird little weeds capable of thriving in some of the harshest conditions known to man. They convert nitrogen into estrogenic compounds that they spew out into the air, poisoning everything. He said some of the guys in Zone 9 got exposed to a whole field of revengia lilies a few cycles back. Turned them all into mutants. Ugly stuff. The Baroness must have been one cruel bitch to design an organism that turns good men into freaks like that.

Anyways, we're going down to the surface after the stratospheric storms die down. We'll be surveying a plateau above all the toxic clouds, clearing out any revengia patches we find. Pray for the Dominion of Man.

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.105

> Entry title: "First excursion to Aria-6 surface"

The surface of Aria-6 is every bit as awful as I thought it would be. Thick pink clouds hover all around you. The rocks are all black and sooty and charred from the heat. We went down from the ship with a drop-pod full of scouting drones to survey the plateau near the south pole. As soon as we let the scout swarm out of their pod, they detected all kinds of estrogens in the air all over the place. Looks like some of the revengia lilies have set their roots deep into the stones. The revengia aren't in bloom right now, but Dr. Zennen says that when the plants do flower, they'll spike the estrogen concentration in the lower atmosphere so high that our hazmat suits might not be able to filter it all out.

I don't see how this planet could ever be made habitable. Any men we send to colonize this place won't last long before they start to mutate. Then we'd have a whole colony full of mutants on our hands. Do the Consortium really want to risk starting another Schism by sending men to this place?

We're going back down to survey another region tomorrow. Strange valley near the equator, cuts deep below all the pink clouds and poison gas. Ranger Serrick says it looks like a trench left over from an ancient ocean. He says old salt deposits in the rock might make it more inhospitable for the revengia lilies. Serrick says a lot of bullshit, though. Pray for the Dominion of Man.

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.106

> Entry title: "Biodiversity on Aria-6"

I'm feeling uneasy about this entire expedition today. We found a huge patch of revengia growing by a creek at the bottom of the valley. Didn't know a hothouse planet like this could possibly have a water system. The creek was beautiful - eerie, but beautiful. Clear, pristine water whispering along through the pink rocks. Pink algae blooms were floating along the sides of the creek and up the hills of the valley. Neon pink hills. I've been on a lot of expeditions, but I've never seen hills like that! They glistened and glowed under all the dense pink fog hanging over the valley. Very bizarre planet.

The scouting drones are finding tiny streams and underground reservoirs all around the equator. Lots of bio-signatures, too - strange microbes live all over these ancient ocean trenches. They somehow thrive off the gasses emitted by the revengia lilies when they bloom. It's a miracle that so much life could thrive on a planet as hostile as this. It feels wrong to torch this whole valley, but Ranger Serrick says that's protocol. I told Serrick we should inspect the ecosystems here more closely before we decide to use the ship's cleaning laser, but he's insisting on a deep clean of the entire region. He told me I was being irrational, said there's nothing of value here. I wanted to take a few specimens back up to the ship with us, but Dr. Zennen said it would be too dangerous to keep them onboard. Everything here is contaminated by all the estrogenic molecules and hormone disruptors in the air. The revengia gasses find their way into every stone, every lifeform, every drop of water. It's certainly an unsettling place, but I still hope we get to stay here a little longer. We may never find

another planet quite as unique as this one. Pray for the Dominion of Man.

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.112

> Entry title: "[untitled]"

I got in a fight with Serrick today. I found something like a tadpole in a tiny pond just south of the creek today. Freaky little thing with two tails - might have been a mutant. I took a specimen container out from my hazmat and was trying to scoop the tadpole out of the creek, but Serrick saw me. Ran over screaming, saying he'd report me to the Consortium for breach of protocol. Said I was taking stupid risks, but why do we have specimen containers if we're not going to take specimens from the planets we survey? Serrick is a dick. He's a bad ranger, too.

My old crew was so much more adventurous than these guys. I miss exploring earthlikes with them in Zone 1. Low risk expeditions, lush jungles, high-oxygen atmospheres. We never would have even dreamed of using a cleaning laser on a planet with this many rare lifeforms on it. This planet is a hellhole, but I'm glad I got to see some of its inner beauty before we wipe the place clean. If life can transform and adapt to harsh climates like this, then surely there will always be a future for us. Pray for the Dominion of Man.

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.117

> Entry title: "Cleaning"

We've been authorized to deep clean all the bio-active regions on Aria-6. Consort Valm's office sent Ranger Serrick the authorization codes for him to fire up the ship's plasma cannon and charge the cleaning laser. I don't like this at all, but I understand why the Consortium wants the planet cleaned. Our job is to transform Aria-6, not to preserve it. What a shame. Pray for the Dominion of Man.

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.122

> Entry title: "Specimens"

I snuck a few specimens back onto the ship. We went back down for one final survey near the equator before we use the cleaning laser tomorrow. Dr. Zennen wanted us to see if we could find an underground reservoir that hadn't been contaminated by the revengia lilies. He said any lifeforms there might have developed an endogenous resistance against all the estrogenic junk in the air, could be useful for synthesizing new hormone therapies or estrogen-blockers. No such luck. Everything on this planet has been touched by the revengia gasses, but that doesn't mean we should just burn it all away.

I spoofed the tracking software on the specimen containers so that Dr. Zennen thinks they're still in storage up in the lab. Container #1 has a two-tailed tadpole in it. Container #2 has some of the pink algae in it. Container #3 has a revengia sprout in it. I cut my mattress open from behind my headboard and hid the specimen containers inside the slit. The vacuum seal on the containers should be tight enough to prevent any unfiltered gasses from leaking out. The climate regulators inside the pods should keep all three specimens alive until my next shore leave, then I take them outside of Consortium space and find a good conservatory planet for them. Until then, I'll need to change out the water in the containers every few days. Will need to put a hazmat on for that - I'm sure I can sneak an unused one out from the cargo bay. I'll take good care of the specimens. I'll be very careful. Everything will be okay. Pray for the Dominion of Man.

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.132

> Entry title: "[untitled]"

It's been ten days since we deep cleaned the surface of Aria-6. I haven't been sleeping well. Serrick was laughing while he fired the cleaning laser down at the planet. I've been hearing that laugh every night in my head when I'm trying to go to sleep. He was gleeful, absolutely relishing his work. He has such a rough, ugly voice. He wouldn't stop

complaining that the Baroness was an “evil bitch” for “poisoning” the planet. If he wanted to blast away at foreign planets with giant plasma cannons, he should have signed up for the Security Corps instead. This isn’t what being a ranger is about. This isn’t why I joined the Expedition Corps. From the observatory deck, Aria-6 still looks every bit as vibrant and pink as it did before we cleaned the surface. But I know it’s different down there now. I know all that life is gone.

The specimens I took from the surface aren’t doing well, either. The two-tailed tadpole didn’t survive past the third day in its container. The pink algae turned black and rotten. The revengia sprout is wilting, but I’m not giving up on it yet. I gave it some fresh water this morning and added a new nutrient mix to the stones around its roots. Its leaves are tiny, brittle, and pale, but I hope that with a little extra care, they’ll be bright and pink again soon.

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.138

> Entry title: “Aria-6”

We’re still waiting for the surface of Aria-6 to settle from the cleaning. In the meantime, we’ve been sending down scouting drones and running all kinds of terraforming simulations up here on the ship. The estrogen levels in the atmosphere have plummeted over the last few days. The revengia lilies seem to be mostly gone. Dr. Zennen says that many of the valleys near the equator could now easily be made habitable for men. The Consortium will need to send in a few large-scale water generators. They’ll also need to design a special type of palm tree that converts the leftover revengia gasses in the air into oxygen.

Maybe Aria-6 could become a tropical paradise. Maybe the Consortium could send in all their mighty men and their wondrous machines to build tall towers and big bridges all along the roaring new rivers. But the shallow, whispering creeks won’t be there anymore. The haunted, psychedelic beauty of the rolling pink hills and the dense pink fog at their peaks won’t be there anymore. All the tadpoles and microbes and

miracle plants that somehow sprout up from between all the barren black rocks won't be there anymore. Serrick's rancid laughter still replays in my head sometimes. What have we done to this planet?

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.143

> Entry Title: "Growing!"

The revengia specimen is growing! When I checked out the little sprout this morning, it had two new leaves. They are bright, pink, and healthy. When it finally blooms, the flower will be the most brilliant, vivid shade of pink you can possibly imagine. Could take 50 more days for it to bloom, but it's not like we're doing a lot on this ship right now. Still waiting for the planet's surface to settle. I spend a lot of time here in my cabin reviewing videos from our survey of the surface and building simulations of its ecology. Hollowed out ocean trenches beneath pink clouds, huge valleys and gorges filled with scorching pink flowers. I still can't believe I was lucky enough to see it. My cabin is dull, gray, dim. I wish I could take the revengia out of its container to add some color to the room, but that obviously wouldn't be a good idea. I've been very careful with the hazmat I smuggled out from the cargo bay every time I water the sprout. I always ensure it's sealed tight - even a tiny sprout like this is emitting all kinds of strange hormones.

Not sure if it's related, but my chest has been aching these last few days. It's a dull ache, nothing too worrying, but it's an unusual feeling. Different from a typical muscle ache. Dr. Zennen says my levels are all within normal reference ranges, but I could take a course of testosterone therapy if I'm worried that I may have been exposed to any of the revengia. Serrick says my chest is sore because I'm being a "little bitch" about him deep cleaning Aria-6. Serrick's a dick. I'll be taking it easy onboard the ship, just running ecosystem sims and reviewing survey data. I'm sure my chest will feel better after some rest.

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.155

> Entry title: "Serrick"

Had another fight with Serrick today. This time it got physical. I was in the observation deck looking down at all the pink storms on Aria-6. He barged in barking about low quality ecosystem data for his Aria-6 settlement simulation. I told him he shouldn't have been in such a hurry to destroy the planet's ecosystems if he wanted better eco data. He lost his shit, started calling me weak, woman lover, Baroness sympathizer. Accused me of getting exposed to revengia down on the surface. Started pushing and shoving me. Dr. Zennen had to come in to break us up. Hopefully he'll lower Serrick's testosterone levels. Serrick's been so paranoid about revengia exposure ever since we came back from the surface, he keeps asking Dr. Zennen to check his hormone levels and up his testosterone dose. I think he might also be injecting extra doses from a secret stash he keeps in his quarters. All his aggression is becoming a safety issue for the ship.

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.166

> Entry title: "Growth update"

The revengia sprout has grown larger. Lots of bright new pink hues. I change the water out regularly, always careful to put my hazmat suit on before handling it. I worry that it may be getting to big for the small specimen container I'm keeping it in. I may need to find a way to remove a larger container from Zennen's lab without him noticing. Either that, or I'll need to take a shore leave so I can bring it to a conservatory planet soon.

We are not doing much right now other than running sims aboard the ship. We've been waiting for approval from Consort Valm's office to begin another round of excursions down on Aria-6, but no approval's come through yet. The planet should be almost fully settled from the cleaning by now - I'm not sure why the Consortium wouldn't want us down there yet.

The pain in my chest is back, but it is very manageable. I think my chest may be getting larger, too. It is possible that I was exposed to some very small, trace amounts of revengia, but I don't want to tell Dr. Zennen. He would freak out about it, and if Serrick found out - that would be a whole other set of problems. I've been gaining some weight from just sitting around running sims aboard the ship, so it could be from that. I wish we could get back out into the field - analysis is the most boring part of being a ranger. I should get down to the gym more often, but Serrick is always there lately. He is still a safety issue. Dr. Zennen or someone in Consort Valm's office should really do something about him. He does not need this much testosterone therapy.

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.180

> Entry title: "Exposure?"

It seems increasingly likely that I may have been exposed to revengia. My pectorals feel very tender. They continue to grow larger - more fat, not more muscle. I keep gaining weight, even though I've been down in the gym more often. I don't think I need to tell Dr. Zennen about it. It doesn't exactly feel bad, and it would be a mess if Serrick found out. I've been wearing a larger shirt whenever I leave my quarters to go to a common space. Found a way to use some cargo straps to bind my chest whenever I go down to the gym. Serrick's still down there all the time, and I certainly don't want him to notice any changes. Now he's accusing me of exposing him to revengia while we were down on the surface together. All the testosterone is turning him into an animal. He is getting absolutely huge (muscles huge, not like me), and he is constantly paranoid about everyone. The other day, he called Dr. Zennen a coward and said Consort Valm is a traitor. He's losing his mind on this ship. I hope they let us go back down to the surface soon.

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.191

> Entry title: "Container problem"

Two short updates: (1) The revengia plant has completely filled up its specimen container. It doesn't have any more room to grow, but it

should begin to blossom any day now. (2) My pectorals keep growing. They are soft. I am worried. Other parts of my body have changed shape, too. The changes are subtle, so I don't think I'm mutating, but I am still worried. I'm more concerned about Serrick, though. I don't leave my quarters as often now because my chest is becoming harder to bind. I'm afraid that he or Dr. Zennen might notice the growth. I will need to find an even larger shirt to cover myself with. If my waist keeps changing shape, I might also need to find some baggier cargo pants that I can wear around the ship. I hope I can get off for a shore leave soon. My revengia doesn't have anywhere left to grow. It's becoming difficult to hide my possible exposure from the men. I am worried.

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.195

> Entry title: "Blossom"

The revengia is in bloom. The most beautifully pink flower blossoms have started to shoot off from the stem. I worry they will not have enough space in the container to open up. I put in a request for short leave, but it was denied. We are still waiting for Consort Valm's office to approve our excursions down to the surface, and I've been ordered to stay aboard the ship until we can complete a few more excursions. There's no more sims left to run - we now have a detailed plan for settling men on Aria-6. The only thing that's left is for Consort Valm to send us down to the surface for another survey. Then he'll send in the first settlers. I am tired of being on this ship. I don't like going to the gym anymore, Serrick always gives me dirty glances. I'm afraid he might notice the size of my chest. The cargo straps don't do a good job of binding it. Sometimes I go up to the observation deck to look down at Aria-6 - the entire southern hemisphere has been completely covered in a monstrous storm these past few days. Every shade of pink, so many different kinds of pink gasses all twirling around each other. It's such a wonderful sight. The problem with the observation deck is that Dr. Zennen goes up there to meditate sometimes, and I'm afraid he might notice my chest. Yesterday, he told me he was missing some specimen containers. He asked if I knew anything about his missing specimen containers. I hope I can get off this ship soon.

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.198

> Entry title: "[untitled]"

My breasts keep growing. I am worried. They are sore. I think my hips might be growing now, too. I do not know if I can keep this hidden from the men much longer. I am worried that my revengia exposure may be much greater than my initial estimate. It may be possible that the specimen container is not properly vacuum sealed, and that I am getting nightly exposure to the specimen when it is in my mattress. Just in case there is some contamination in my quarters, I am taking a long hot shower with cleansing oils and scrubbing crystals every morning. It must not be helping. If I am turning into a mutant, then I must leave this ship soon. I must leave Consortium space and never return. If you asked me a few cycles ago, I never would have foreseen this happening to me. What is happening to me?

> Expedition Ship Ovid - Standard Cycle 2.484.02.203

> Entry title: "[untitled]"

He barged into my quarters. I didn't know what else to do! He just came in shouting about Dr. Zennen and Consort Valm. He came in right after I tucked the specimen container back into my mattress. I still had my stolen hazmat on, he was screaming at me, he charged for my bed, he demanded to show him what I was hiding in it, he reached for his knife holster and the magnet gun was right there beside me on my nightstand and I didn't know what else to do! None of these men understand this! None of them care about my condition, none of them would respect me if they knew. They would all want to kill me! They hate me. They hate everyone like me. I am no ranger of the Consortium and I am no brother of the Dominion of Man. His body is just laying there on my floor. I haven't turned around from my desk since I shot him. What am I supposed to do! I'm trying to sort out my thoughts, but I don't know what to do. The revengia is too powerful, I've changed too much too quickly, I will never be the same again. I'm so sorry, I didn't know what else to do.

RANGER H. S. BREGGIS - PRIVATE LOGBOOK

> END OF PRIVATE LOGBOOK

Consort Valm looks up from the data pad on his long chromium desk. Dr. Zennen trembles. The Consort has no expression on his face. His black pearl eyes and razor sharp brow stay perfectly still. The ceremonial braids and beads adorning his long silver hair tell one thousand stories, but his lips do not budge. Bright golden insignias and star charts from every corner of Consortium space are woven into the fine, silken folds of his slender black tunic. He gazes back down at the little black data pad on his desk.

“Dr. Zennen, is that the last entry in this logbook?” The Consort asks him.

Dr. Zennen nods. “Yes, Consort. Ranger Breggis self-terminated shortly after his last entry.”

Consort Valm wrinkles his lips. He parses through all the dimensions of the incident in his head. Twenty layers of plans are sparkling through his eyes.

“Quite the unfortunate incident,” the Consort frowns. “It seems as though Breggis was a good ranger.”

“Yes, Consort.” Dr. Zennen bows his head. “Ranger Breggis was adventurous, yet cautious. But in the end, he let his passions overcome him.”

Consort Valm nods. He rises tall from his cold chrome desk. His neck is long and his braids of rough silver hair drape down his regal black tunic, but Dr. Zennen cannot read the shape of his body beneath his dark uniform. His office is an empty prism lined with ancient Roman busts and grand

marble statues of strong, valiant men. He turns his back to Dr. Zennen and paces toward the soaring windows. Far below them, the cities of Mars—man’s glorious First Colony—poke their glass obelisks and steel spires up through the cold morning fog.

Consort Valm gazes down at the greened Martian hills and towers. With his hands clasped behind his back, his eyes flicker through memories and predictions, through the private logbook of Ranger Breggis, through all his cunning plans and backup plans: plans A, B, C, and D.

“Ranger Serrick did not keep a private logbook of his own, correct?” He asks Dr. Zennen.

Dr. Zennen nods. “That is correct, Consort.”

“And your own hormone levels have all remained stable? All within normal reference ranges?”

“Yes, Consort.”

The Consort strokes the smooth stubble on his chin. Something hatches in his head. He turns from his towering window to face Dr. Zennen. “Nobody else knows of this incident. You are not to speak of it to anyone. Not even any of the other consorts. Do you understand?”

Dr. Zennen nods, but furls his brow. “Certainly, Consort Valm. But won’t others have access to all the ship data and logs and—”

“Your ship is now in my custody,” the Consort cuts in. He paces back toward the sleek silver curves of his desk. “You are not to speak of this incident to anyone. Do you understand, Dr. Zennen?”

Dr. Zennen nods. His nerves twitch and his legs quiver. The Consort returns to his seat. Dr. Zennen peers at his waistline. The black and gold of the Consort's uniform are shadowy and dazzling, but beneath all the darkness and shimmer, Dr. Zennen spots a round curve in the shape of the Consort's hips.

The Consort folds his thin hands atop the polished chrome of his desk. He leers into Dr. Zennen. His eyes are tinted pink.

"Dr. Zennen, if you speak of this incident to any man, it will be a *grave* offense under Consortium Law. Do you understand?"

Dr. Zennen gulps. "Yes, Consort. I will not tell a soul of what transpired on Aria-6."

The Consort nods. Beneath all the magisterial black folds of his tunic, Dr. Zennen's clinical eye clocks a growth on his chest. Lumps where his pectorals should be.

"It is a fascinating planet that your crew discovered," the Consort smirks. His eyes glitter. "The potency of the revengia lilies is unlike any other specimen I have seen. It is truly a testament to the dreadful power of the Baroness that Ranger Breggis could so quickly succumb to such a hysteria."

Dr. Zennen clears his throat. "Yes, Consort. The outer zones of Consortium space are teeming with her handiwork. Many good men have been mutated."

"Even now, seven hundred cycles after the Schism, all her bioweapons live on." The Consort shakes his head in awe. "Fascinating."

“Yes, Consort.” Dr. Zennen folds his shaking hands in his lap. He drops his gaze to the sparkling marble floor. He prays for the Consort to dismiss him, prays to return home to his father and his brothers and his husband.

“Dr. Zennen, do you know why we had to kill all the women during the Schism?” The Consort leans back into the tall arches of his chrome chair. He peers up at all the holograms and data feeds and star maps floating around on his ceiling.

“Yes, Consort,” Dr. Zennen mumbles. “The women betrayed the Dominion of Man.”

“Do you know precisely why they betrayed us, Dr. Zennen?”

“No, Consort.”

“So you are a doctor of biology and not a doctor of history.” The Consort laughs. He laces his fingers together as he stares up into space. “The women became too devious. Too clever to be trusted. They created all manner of strange new hormones and drugs and devices. They had nearly complete control over all our sexual reproduction. The most rebellious among them could not resist the rise of our great Consortium through pure force, so they resorted to more subtle tactics. Sabotage. Persuasion. Poisons.”

Dr. Zennen shivers. He clutches his hands together tight. He stares in horror at the mutated lumps and curves hidden away beneath the Consort’s uniform.

“They poisoned their own children,” the Consort scowls. “When men finally left Earth to colonize this planet, the women poisoned all of our artificial wombs. They poisoned all of our birthing factories. Do you know how the Dominion of Man responded to their treachery?”

“Yes, Consort.” Dr. Zennen croaks. “We destroyed the Earth.”

“Precisely. Our ancestors cleaned the entire face of the Earth. Just as you and your crew cleaned the face of Aria-6.”

“We cleaned Aria-6 on your orders,” Dr. Zennen adds nervously.

Consort Valm closes his eyes and nods. “After our ancestors cleaned the Earth, they hunted down all the women colonists here on Mars. Men dragged the greatest of those women from her palace by her hair. They stripped her. They flayed her. They burned her alive.” The Consort opens his eyes. His irises are glowing with hot pink malice. “Now, so many cycles later, she will soon overrun our Consortium with her poisons. Do you understand what is about to happen, Dr. Zennen?”

“No, Consort.” Dr. Zennen chokes back tears. “What is about to happen?”

“We are about to face the revenge of the Baroness,” the Consort grins. “Pray for the Dominion of Man.”