

Expedition to a Life-Bearing Moon

By Anna Lugthart

From the Personal Log of Jola the Inquisitive of Androga
Translated by Annasteph Bradford
SCY 3C-9B97AC

263.2.A

I leave Androga in less than two points.¹ This being my first solo expedition, and one of some significance, my friends at the university have thrown me a farewell party in true Earth fashion. We played music from my favorite human artists, ate a delicious meal, and even opened a bottle of sparkling grape juice Ponva had been saving since their trip (the more common celebratory beverage enjoyed there is poisonous to us). I am back in my apartment now with everything ready for my departure. I just applied a fresh patch to my neck and packed enough for the rest of the trip. The only thing left to do is catch some rest, but I doubt I will get much.

263.4.9

Liftoff! As I count I have been in space on at least thirty-two occasions but I still get excited every time. The rumble of the engines, the mighty force pushing you into your seat, a brief moment of weightlessness, and finally gravity sets in once more. Then, you look out the viewport and there before your eyes is your entire world, everything you have ever known and loved, home. But without wasting a moment, you

¹ A Drogon unit of time equal to about 12.2 Earth hours

say farewell for now, set your course, and journey onward. Such a thrill is not the only reason I became a scientist, but it is certainly one perk.

263.5.3

I just left Drogon space earlier this point. I have done a full post-launch examination of the craft and all seems to be in good shape. One of the thrusters appears to have sustained abnormally high heat scarring, but the damage appears only cosmetic.

266.1.5

I try not to spend too much time on my log during voyages, but one naturally gets bored. In such a vessel there are vast amounts of entertainment in storage, but at some point one gets tired of consuming media and begins to desire conversation. And though I am generally one to appreciate time spent alone, I am starting to think (perhaps for the first time in my life) I may get too much of it on this trip. In the absence of living company, I find it necessary as a social life form to imprint² my thoughts here.

It has been thirteen points since I left home. Apart from routine check-ins with the university and occasional maintenance of the ship, my time has mostly been spent preparing for experiments, exercising, reading, and watching the latest Earth films. Nowadays they make some specifically

² Drogon written languages consist of pictographic dots and are generally written by imprinting marks on a surface with a set of styluses.

targeted at Drogans, but I have actually never liked them very much. My favorites are historical dramas about Earth. There are tales of bold peoples crossing treacherous seas, the first humans to leave their planet, and many of the tragic war that brought their civilization to a halt.

I just watched a one about the first Drogan expedition to Earth. It was a good production, about two subyears³ old with excellent performances from actors on both sides. It did not really cross my mind at the time, but many of those actors, human and Drogan, were alive when it actually happened. It feels like we have known them for so long, but it was not three subyears before my making that we met.

268.2.C

I am getting close. The star is bright in the distance and I can feel the change in gravity as the ship reaches full acclimation. Every so often I feel a flutter in my chest as a footfall lands softer than expected. Supposedly the moon's gravity is not unlike that of Earth's. I have always imagined it must be a very floaty place.

That thruster is acting up. I think I will go out and check on it.

269.1.4

I now approach the host planet, a great yellow gas giant. Though I cannot yet see it, orbiting this body is a moon, comparatively small though nearly twice the size of Androga. And somewhere in its orbit resides the familiar satellite that

³ A Drogan unit of time equal to about 14 earthyears.

spurred this entire expedition. Twelve years⁴ ago, we received its scans, a lovely blue and green orb with swirling clouds and little ice caps at the Northern and Southern tips.

If it were not so far away from the known galaxy, it surely would have already been found and colonized, and now that it has been discovered, I doubt it will take long. Ever since their first two attempts within their own system, the humans have been searching for more planets to spread to. As a species they seem to have an obsession with finding new places to inhabit. Keeping them away from this planet until we have fully studied it will certainly prove an interesting challenge.

Part of the privilege of solo expeditions is the right to name the celestial bodies one studies. Provided I find no lexical life forms which have already named this moon, (which our scans do not seem to indicate) I can name it whatever I please. I have decided to wait until I conclude the expedition and come up with the name the moment I leave. Surely one should learn a thing or two about a moon before naming it.

For now, I eagerly await commencing my investigation. I have checked in with the university and I am now in communication with the satellite, which should assist me with landing. I will imprint again upon my landing.

I have doomed myself. There was fire, and I gathered what I could, but I fear the worst. Will they come for me? I cannot reach them. It is all burned up. The patches too, they are gone. Mine is nearly spent. I fear they will find a monster.

⁴ ~97 days. Androga orbits its sun every 8.12 Earth days.

My feelings of panic have subsided and I have calmed down somewhat. Perhaps now I can give a more accurate description of my crash.

I was orbiting the moon, and had just been given the go ahead to land by the satellite. My ship was on target, descending into the atmosphere, when very suddenly something gave. With little time to think, I turned on manual control. The ship was veering off course and heading for the ground at a dangerous pitch so I tried to right it and land but careened into a dense patch of forest instead (I am no pilot).

It is thanks to modern spacecraft engineering—and no doubt a great deal of luck—that I am still alive. When I came to in the burning wreck I panicked and fled, leaving my patches behind. Thinking only of my equipment, I ran to the cargo hold where I found most of it ruined. I salvaged what I could and set up a makeshift camp away from the blaze.

The crash should have triggered an automatic distress beacon, that is, if ship communications were not destroyed first. Since I have only a radio and nothing for intersystem communication, I have to trust they dispatched a rescue team, which, if it left immediately, would arrive in roughly six years.⁵

Once I thought to look through a medical kit I had saved, I found four backup patches. It is not enough, but it is something to work with. I have already applied one, and plan to use them intermittently, so as to spread out the dose.

Since I have the protector gene, if I fail to get enough medicine, my body will launch a hormonal process that could leave me permanently disfigured, physically and cognitively.

⁵ 49 days. Again, the author references Drogan years.

It was a great adaptation for our ancestors. They lived in a wild, tumultuous world, full of raging storms and great beasts hungry for little Drogans. So some had to adapt, sacrificing brain for brawn to protect the rest. Then there came a time when we quieted the storms, killed the beasts, and created a world of peace in that little band of Androga we now call home. And in this new world, they no longer needed us.

We very nearly died out, cast away from the others to the very edges, to the land of shivering twilight, but eventually they found a cure, a medicine that would suppress the gene, and at long last, they brought us back in. They say that some remained, continued life in the old way, but I do not know if it is true. Now, save for the little patches on our necks, and the constant fear of transformation, we are no different from the others. In fact we are so well incorporated into the gene pool that any infant in the tanks could emerge with that vestigial gene, just as I did, 1,536 years ago.⁶

269.A

I count the rotations of the moon in the back of this log. From that number and the approximate time of my crash, I can discern within a point the time back on Androga, though it seems irrelevant now. This orb has its own rhythm of day and night.

It is a strange feeling, to sit on a thing that spins, spending half its time in light and the other half in shadow. I

⁶ The author likely means this as an approximate age, since in the Drogan base 16 this is a round number (0x600). This is about 34 in earthyears, though Drogans are generally less meticulous than humans at keeping track of age.

know that among the known peoples of the galaxy, there are many spinning planets. Earth, for one, makes a full rotation in just under two points. But the unending light of my planet is what I know best. When the sky darkens at night I feel lonely and afraid.

Time passes slowly here. It has not been much over a year since the crash, and on Androga such a length of time would have felt short, but here there is a forced awareness that draws everything out. I seldom think of Androga as a planet when I am on it. There is the university of course, and my apartment. There are the apartments of my friends, the rest of the city, and places beyond it. In my mind they are all locations all unto themselves. Here I am constantly reminded I sit on an orb that is throttling through space. I see the sun and the gas giant move across the sky as the moon spins on and on, endlessly.

26A.3

In my boredom I have taken to exploring the area around the crash and undertaking my botanical studies as best I can. That is, after all, why I came here in the first place. Being a forest of autotrophs and only autotrophs, many of the features one might normally expect in an ecosystem are missing. Not a single species has the closest semblance of thorns, spines, or other protective structures. Undergrowth flourishes where normally it would be trampled, (so thick in some places that travel is near impossible) and not a single bush is laden with berry, fruit, or nut.

When the wind is calm and the plants cease their swaying, the forest becomes deathly quiet. At these times, I find my senses so amplified I can hear the roaring duet of air and blood in my body, pumping, pulsing, flowing, as if they were a living song apart from myself. At first I wanted to escape, to make some loud noise that would break the silence, but I have since come to tolerate it.

The success of my intermittent medicine dosing scheme is still unclear. I feel different, sort of mentally cloudy, but it is difficult to determine the source. It could be hunger or perhaps even the effects of social isolation. I hope I can attribute it to this.

26A.D

During my studies, I have determined that most species of plants in the vicinity are poisonous. Poisonous to Drogans, that is. A species must adapt to its environment, and, to their credit, our ancestors evolved to eat nearly everything alive on Androga. But being a planet of little biodiversity, they had no need to evolve mechanisms for digesting the many complicated nutrients of this galaxy.

There are a few species which I have determined safe to eat. Most exciting of these is Species 0x0039, a sprout that grows in shady patches of undergrowth whose root makes an excellent tea. It has a sweet, pungent aroma with a mellow flavor, and turns the water a pale red color when steeped. Perhaps my gastronomic senses have been somewhat dulled on this expedition, but I might have even enjoyed this delicacy in normal times.

The rest of the edible plants are leaves of some level of bitterness whose taste I find unpalatable. I will continue searching and testing, but for now it seems this planet has little to sustain a Drogon. I am, of course, out of place here, a visitor turned accidental colonist. If I had not salvaged food from the wreck, I would be dead by now.

26B.1

I made a curious discovery today. I ventured farther into the forest than I normally would and came upon a great, deep, gorge, at the bottom of which lies a beautiful clear pool of water. Within this chasm lies an entirely new ecosystem with many unfamiliar plants. I could not stay long for lack of supplies, but I plan on returning shortly and continuing my investigation. At this point in time I have a fairly complete survey of the flora near my camp which I should be able to wrap up in four or so points.

In truth, this is mostly a distraction. I do not have the equipment to conduct a proper study of this planet, and all of this work will have to be redone to conform with Androga's scientific standards. But it has done a good job distracting me from the utter vulnerability of my situation.

I have become accustomed to resting in the dark times—there is not much else to do—but as of late an ever growing fear has kept me awake. I truly do not know when or if anyone will come for me. Therefore, I feel completely and utterly alone. I may spend the rest of my life here, however short it may be. And if so, long before I run out of food, I will run out of medicine. I will experience a slow decline, until in

my final days of starvation, I will not even be afforded the dignity of dying in a familiar body. All because I left my patches to burn.

26B.5

I am troubled. In the early light, as I crawled out of my shelter, I hit my head. I went back in and repeated the motion, and found again I had to duck lower than I remembered. For three years now, I have been crawling in and out of this shelter, but today something was different. I have grown.

At first I considered the possibility that it may be the lower gravity of the moon, but I now realize my plan has not worked. Intermittent use of the patches is not enough. However, there is nothing to do. It seems I am still of sound mind and in control of my body, at least for now.

My survey is complete here. For now I will prepare, and at first light of the next cycle I will set off for the gorge.

26B.A

I have arrived in the gorge and found a suitable site to conduct my survey from. I must say it is also more aesthetically pleasing than my first one. I sit near the bottom of the gorge overlooking the water, though I have been careful to stay high enough to avoid floodwaters. For now the pool is low, but channels running down the slope and bare clay near the shore indicate the pool swells with rain. I have constructed another shelter here for myself and my equipment. Everything is prepared for my next survey.

26C.0

For the first time since arriving on this moon, I feel hopeful. I have discovered a truly incredible species here in the gorge, Species 0x009E. Not only is it nutritious and edible, but within its leaves I have discovered olavera, a compound extracted from a plant of the same name on Androga which is used to make the very medicine I need. It exists elsewhere on the planet and has even been discovered on other worlds, but to find it here is incredible. Perhaps a Drogon could cut out a life here after all. Perhaps this will be my salvation.

However, my problem is not immediately solved. Extracting olavera is an industrial process. Here, I have only basic gear and what few pieces of my scientific equipment escaped the wreck. But if I can gather a sufficient amount of leaves and determine some way to extract and concentrate the olavera, I may be able to supplement my deficiency of medicine until help arrives.

Next cycle I will return and collect the rest of my gear. I am moving operations to the gorge.

26D.4

I realize now it has been some time since I have imprinted in this log. I have been busy with my efforts to extract olavera from Species 0x009E, which has so far been unsuccessful. I have grown considerably. My shelter, which was once of ample size, is now cramped. I find it harder to focus, and I feel I am either very tired or slipping away. At this point I believe I should just be applying my last patch, but as I

recall it has already been on for twelve or so points. They are supposed to last for eight. I do not know how long I can go on.

I just had a curious thought. If only I had landed here, or found this place sooner, my work might already be done.

I cannot extract the olavera. Perhaps I was never supposed to. I have lost track of the time on Androga too. I forgot to mark two cycles, at least. They all blend together.

I am not sure I ever had it right. The time of the crash was a guess, and the length of the day cycle I vaguely recalled from the briefing. It could be four, five, maybe six years I have been here. I do not know. Each cycle at first light I send a message from my radio. If they are close, they will receive it. Perhaps they will send a message back. So far I have caught nothing but old, jumbled transmissions.

I have just remembered I was going to give the moon a name when I left. I still have not thought of one.

I heard heavy rain outside. I was lying in water. I stood up. I was outside of my shelter. Rain fell on my back, the gas giant hid behind dark clouds. I saw my things in the bushes.

The treeline was ripped open by a wide stream which emptied into the gorge. It was salt water. I ran down the slope for my things. With all four arms I grabbed the containers. I climbed the slope, away from the storm. My strength surprised me.

High above, a grey cloud circled. I ran. There was the charred hull. I climbed inside and I waited.

The sky is clear now. The samples are safe. The log is safe. My radio is gone.

Twilight is near. Everything is cloudy. Imprinting is difficult. I am not the same as before, but I have found peace.

Interstellar Rescue Mission Report
SCY 3C-9B97AC
26F.A.E

Distress signal followed to moon in System 0x0C3.
Radio transmissions detected upon system approach.
Shipwreck found at coordinates of distress signal, encampment nearby. Landscape displays signs of damage from recent hurricane activity. Crew member Jola not found in proximity of wreck or encampment. Thorough search of surrounding region conducted. Crew member not found. Personal log, notes, and samples retrieved from shipwreck. Food and supplies left on site. Mission aborted, returned to Androga.