

## Respecting the Culture (Aquatic Alien TFTG)

**By FoxFaceStories**

*An exploration crew returns to retrieve their ambassador after two years on a planet of all female anglerfish-like aliens. To the crew's surprise, the once-male ambassador has gone quite literally native!*

### Respecting the Culture

*Transcript of Interview between Captain Alarn Jennings of the EUS Orpheus and former Ambassador Gerald Hydecker, now Ambassador Shelia Lightbringer-from-the-Deep. Date of interview is 2241.09.26. Interview took place at Hubbard Station, the Earth United installation permitted to exist below the surface of Androxica.*

**C. Jennings:** So . . . you're a fish person.

**A. Shelia:** (Laughter). I suppose so!

**C. Jennings:** Well, you've got fins, a tail, and an angler thingy with the bright glowing bulb-

**A. Shelia:** It's a lure, Alarn. We use it to lure in prey to eat, and also to communicate across long distances. Oh, and look! See? I can make it change colour. You'd be surprised at how vibrant an Androxican party can get.

**C. Jennings:** I suppose you've seen a few. It's just . . . you're a fish person, Gerald."

**A. Shelia:** It's Shelia, now. Shelia Lightbringer-from-the-Deep, but you can just call me Shelia Lightbringer. I know you humans don't go big on meaningful names like we Androxicans do."

**C. Jennings:** (Slapping forehead). This is insane. 'You humans.' You ARE a human, Gerald! Shelia. Lightbringer. However you want to call yourself! I know that because I dropped you off two years ago after an eighth month voyage. We played Tarakk together. Poker. You were a damn movie buff. You were Earth's pride, sent out to talk to the third sapient race we'd ever discovered, and the first one to ever let us have an ambassador stationed on their home planet. And now you're a fish person! A FEMALE fish person, at that! We discussed women! You have an ex-wife!

**A. Shelia:** I prefer Androxican. But you're not wrong, I am a fish person. And a female one at that. But it's a moot point, because all Androxicans are female. We breed by migrating to the reef spores, which have a complex relationship to us. It allows for impregnation and genetic diversity to be maintained without, strictly speaking, requiring a male partner. In many ways, our children are of the reef, hence the saying that-

**C. Jennings:** I don't need to know the saying, Gerald.

**A. Shelia:** *Shelia. Shelia Lightbringer-*

**C. Jennings:** *From the deep, okay, okay, I get it! But by the stars, man - woman - I don't need to know how you make babies-*

**A. Shelia:** *Eggs. Well, pups inside the eggs. They chew their way out.*

**C. Jennings:** *Again, I don't need to know that! I need to know why you became one! Why am I looking at a fish lady in front of me who's a mix between a mermaid and an anglerfish! I mean, you've got breasts and everything! A real hourglass figure! That long black hair of yours ain't covering much up, and even if you've still got legs that long tail speaks for itself, not to mention those webbed digits! Can't you at least put on some clothes?*

**A. Shelia:** *(Bobbing in her tank, tail curling in an Androxican gesture of confusion). But we don't wear clothes? What would be the point, when our civilisation is under water? It took my kind long enough to figure out how to convert subnautical technology to spacefaring purposes, and even then, we aren't built for living above the surface, or even tropical-style oceans. We need to be deep: clothing is of little concern. And besides, I look much more beautiful than I ever did, so why not have it be appreciated?*

**C. Jennings:** *(an exasperated sigh). I don't even know how to respond to that. I mean, sure, you've got a certain . . . hypnotic look to you. The Androxican appearance has taken off back on Earth, and people are curious. But THIS level of curiosity? No way! What possessed you to do this?*

**A. Shelia:** *(her frills extend, a gesture of Androxican thoughtfulness). Two years is a long time to stay with an alien culture, and yet be distant from it. I came to not only know these people, but deeply understand them. They don't kill among themselves, you know. And they live in harmony with their environment, only taking what they need to prosper and explore. Even the lures, which would be a sign of hunting, can be used to communicate, to play practical jokes, to express emotion, even joy! And . . . as you said, they - WE - are indeed beautiful. The all-female forms, the patterns and stripling effects along our backs. The fact that we change colour across our long lives. And, let me just say, there's also the mating.*

**C. Jennings:** *But - but you're all female!*

**A. Shelia:** *I thought the same at first, but female-female relations are crucial to transfer eggs at necessary stages, as well as to maintain hormonal balance and arouse one another to procreate with the aid of the reef in the first place. It's a complicated process, but a beautiful one, like a dance. And I fell in love with it. I fell in love with them. I found myself so isolated, the only creature on this planet who couldn't thrive in the ocean, who had to walk around in this deep sea base like an intruder. And when I discovered that the Androxicans were developing genetic technology so that they could have one of their members finally go above the surface and walk on land, serving as a proper ambassador to Earth, well, I had a different suggestion for us to have 'closer relations.' And, to put it bluntly, they took the bait.*

**C. Jennings:** *I can't believe what I'm hearing.*

**A. Shelia:** *Well, you'll have to, captain. I don't know who they're bringing in to replace me, but the Androxicans won't accept him or her. I'm officially their ambassador now, not to mention their first successful genetic test that will eventually, hopefully, lead to our kind to live on coastal regions of planets and in tropical waters. I'm an Androxican female now, and as you can tell by my lure, I'm rather excited about it (the lure turns a teal blue, the Androxican hue of boastful joy). But I'd be happy to take on this new human as my assistant, or partner, so that we can build better Human-Androxican relations.*

**C. Jennings:** *I . . . I'm not gonna win this one, am I?*

**A. Shelia:** *That's the wonderful thing about my adopted kind, Captain. We don't obsess over winning like humans. We just want to get along. Now, you think about what deal you can offer me while I enjoy a swim along the Reddened Reefs. I might be a little while in returning. It IS mating season, after all.*

**C. Jennings:** *(A resigned tone). Yeah. Go ahead. I'll just . . . stay here, I guess.*

*(A. Shelia swims away from the tank of water at Hubbard Station and out into the Androxican seas. Her movements are recorded as 'far too damn smug' by C. Jennings.)*

**The End**