

Genomorph

A Mercynaries Story from <https://www.patreon.com/SinComics>

The agent pressed his thumb to the dusty panel on the metal siding. Hot from the desert heat and the long car ride, he wiped the sweat from his brow and curled his hair again. He had to make a good impression on his first day at the new facility. It looked like nothing more than a run down solar station but that was to camouflage everything special that was buried below.

Shuddering, the door slid to the side and a rush of cool but stale air escaped past the agent. He ambled down the long corridor; most people never would have noticed the pinholes throughout the walls. Safety mechanisms, no doubt. Some kind of poison gas if an intruder ever made it this far or the facility was compromised. As the door slid shut once more, the entranceway was overcome by darkness. The agent kept on his path until a tiny flicker appeared several meters in front of him. It was as if the air itself was guiding him. As he approached the corner, he put his hand into the glow but felt nothing. Must be something the facility cooked up themselves. He couldn't wait to see what other wonders he'd encounter from now on.

The elevator came to a stop so smoothly that he could barely tell the ride was over. It had been such a long trip, endlessly down as best the agent could tell, that he started to space out. As the doors opened, he was startled back to reality by the presence of another man and the bustle of an office in front of him. The man was tall, maybe fifteen to twenty years on the agent. Hair graying at the temples, but he wore it well.

“Sir! Thanks for having me, I'm-”

“No thank you, Agent. No civilian names from here on out. I'm registered as Agent Colorado and since you'll be assisting me, you have been designated Agent Denver.”

The agent nodded. Had a ring to it. He could make that work.

“You have the files?” Colorado was already turning away, full well knowing the answer.

Denver reached into his jacket and pulled out a small envelope. “Yes, sir.”

“We'll drop them off with Idaho and she'll take the case from there. Once Boise has you registered, we'll take the tour.”

Denver followed in lockstep behind his new boss. The facility had a more casual air than he would have expected for a place tasked with secretly warehousing and testing the world's most potentially dangerous and unexplained technologies and artifacts. Colorado waved to two lab workers sipping cheap coffee from Styrofoam cups as they performed a scan on a vase. Looking straight at it, it was nothing more than clay pottery, but as he turned away and from the corner of his eye, glowing symbols like flower petals flowed across its surface and it took on an almost iridescent sheen. Turning back to it, it was again nothing different from any of the thousands of vases stashed across any thousands of museums.

Colorado ticked his head towards some hangar doors. "This is our beat."

Denver walked through the more human-sized entrance and was bathed in a light mist and paused as an intense blue light crossed over him. Colorado didn't even break his stride as he passed through the decontamination room.

The elder agent nodded towards room after room in the new hall. Some no bigger than an office space, others large enough to house a plane.

"We do the more off-world stuff. Teams out by Idaho do your standard archaeology finds, buried treasure, and the like. Anything biological is another trip down. They're sectioned off a bit more."

There was a lone office not completely closed off to the facility. Denver jerked a thumb towards the glass room.

"What's that about?"

Colorado gave a bemused chuckle and changed his path towards the office. "Orb. They found it on the moon. No clue what it does, just floats there. Been floating for a few decades. No radiation, doesn't X-Ray, not magnetic, doesn't heat up. It just... orbs. Kind of became a mascot for the division so we stuck it up front for visitors from the other teams to ponder."

Denver bent closer to the device. It was shiny under the facility's bright lights yet he couldn't see his own reflection in it.

"So compared to the other things here, how weird is th-".

Denver pulled back as the device started to quiver. As he opened his mouth to get his lead's attention, the orb dropped to its pedestal and a fine mist suddenly surrounded the object. The mist solidified into a set of tiny spikes that shot through the air and into Denver's face and neck. They burrowed into his skin, but painlessly so. Or it all happened so quickly that he didn't have time to notice the pain.

The new agent grasped at his neck, struggling to form words, but his legs gave out and he slumped to the ground.

Bright lights and a gentle hum welcomed Denver back to consciousness. As soon as he stirred, he acutely heard footsteps and the muffled shuffling of feet covered in sanitary booties. There was a crackle and a voice from above beamed down to him.

"Y'okay? Heck of a first day. What did you do wrong?"

"C-Colorado?"

"Yeah. Team has you quarantined for now, but no missing limbs. So what did you do?"

Denver groggily propped himself up on his elbows and forearms. He was on an uncomfortable hospital bed covered in a plastic tent that muted the lights above. He could make out the blurry shapes of people shuffling around him.

“I didn't 'DO' anything. You were there.”

“Orbs don't just sit there for decades then up and decide to act. You must have poked something.”

Denver grumpily moaned. “ I didn't to- Uhg... Everything tastes like... cotton candy.”

There was a flurry of typing and scribbling around the room at this new information. Some muffled conversations happened around the room until the intercom finally back back.

“Well, keep up your reports and these folks will stay on it. See you later.”

Denver slumped back to the bed, more annoyed by his partner's attitude than being assaulted by some intergalactic orb.

Days passed and Denver was poked and prodded, his every move watched and recorded. Outside of the first day's strange tastes and weaknesses, he felt fine. A sentiment begrudgingly backed up by a team of scientists desperate to find something strange and exciting about him post-incident. They grew increasingly angry about his... normality and eventually discharged him back to his partner's watch.

“Well, glad we don't have to stick you in one of these rooms too. Real waste of training and resources that would have been.”

“... Thanks.” Denver adjusted his collar, fidgety and ready to get back to work.

“Lab made me promise to bring you back if anything happened. Maybe just finish our tour. Make sure you don't have any other reactions to the exhibits.”

“Sir, I'd... I'd prefer if this incident not define my work and become a whole... thing.”

Colorado chuckled. “Too late, Agent. The group out front has a whole mess of artifacts they're begging you to poke. Kentucky was practically beating down your door to test out some goop they're working on.”

“Wonderful.”

That night, Denver returned to his quarters, still fidgety and full of energy despite the day's tour and fighting off requests from every department. He grabbed a cup of water from the bathroom but started to feel that sugary sweet taste in his mouth. Glass after glass of water did nothing to dilute it.

Denver slapped the emergency pin the doctors had clipped to his shirt and steadied himself at the sink. The taste was too sweet. Sickeningly sweet and all-encompassing. Denver could barely stand it anymore, doubled over, and retched onto the bathroom floor. He shook himself off and looked down at the black mass spreading a wet spot on his rug.

“Oh, shi- Is that my liver?! No, it...” Too big to be a liver. Tumor? Did that orb give him an alien tumor?! Why would an alien tumor taste like cotton candy...

The door to his quarters slammed open and Denver could hear boots spread through the space. A tech finally made it to the bathroom and Denver just furrowed his brow and wiped the drool from his mouth before tilting his head to the mass on the floor. The tech followed the motion down and pondered the discovery.

“Hey. Neat.”

After last night's further incident, Colorado and Denver were removed from active duty. Denver spent his days in the labs, being studied but never getting results back.

All agents maintained strict physical fitness standards, but Denver was feeling better than usual. Lighter and more free after getting that... thing out of his system. He'd lost weight, felt slimmer, but felt stronger too. He'd lost muscle mass but had no problem initially meeting his last physical's performance, and now a few days in was exceeding it.

The treadmill beeped, signaling that Denver hit his ten-kilometer mark and then it slowed. He wiped the lone drop of sweat from his brow and swept back his hair.

“Well?”

Colorado looked up from his book, the agent lounging in the lab chairs.

“I could do that too.”

Denver rolled his eyes and walked to the screen to towel off and change.

“I think all these fitness tests are starting to build up muscle again. Slacks are getting tight around the hips. Does the facility... have its own tailor or something.”

He could hear Colorado shrug and flip a page. “I'll put in the request. Just keep the lab wonks happy so we can both get back to work. Didn't join the agency to be a babysitter.”

At the end of the week, Denver was once again propped up on a pedestal, arms out. It was the third time today they were taking measurements.

“Agent, I asked you stand up straight.”

Denver huffed. “I AM.”

The tech huffed back and pushed her specimen's hips forward. “No, you're sticking your butt out. Stand straight so we can finish.”

“I told you, I'm-” Denver looked at his reflection in the mirrored glass. He kind of was. But he was standing at ease and it all felt natural. He tried to adjust but it just didn't seem right and it too rigid upright like that.

The tech prodded him with her pen. “Feet flat on the ground. Hips forward. Chest back. Then we can all go home for the night.”

Denver sheepishly complied and the measurements continued.

The more the scientists ran tests, the more uncomfortable and uneasy Denver grew. For a few hours, he felt like he forgot how to walk and was tripping over himself. He just cleared his mind and tried to stop thinking about. When he calmed down and found his gait again, it felt natural but almost like it shouldn't. His posture had changed and it just seemed like there was too much side to side motion in his hips.

Denver swept back a strand of hair from in front of his eyes and sighed. "Were the chairs always this uncomfortable? They feel so small lately..."

Colorado raised an eyebrow but then turned to the lab tech entering the room. She motioned to Denver to roll up his sleeve for blood work, a routine he was now well-experienced in. A quick prick of a needle later, she went to a device on the table and started to mix the sample with some others.

"Huh."

Denver leaned forward in his chair. "What does that mean?"

Without looking away, she waved off the question. "It's nothing."

Denver gripped the chair's arms, separating the cushioning from the metal and forcing it down. "I can't take it anymore!" He stamped his foot on the ground and then had to brush the hair from his eyes again.

The doctor nodded. "A rather hormonal reaction from the subject..."

Denver shuffled behind the team of scientists. They all seemed to walk so slow and he wanted to get this over with. Whatever this "new team" wanted with him, he wanted to give them a few words too.

The tech behind them tapped away at a tablet with some reports. "This does match what the new crew suggested. An interesting path to investigate and not one that would have crossed my mind given the subtle presentations..."

Colorado and Denver turned down a new hallway today and were led to a bright, sparsely decorated lab. Inside, two techs seemed to be goofing off more than doing actual research. Upon noticing them, the blond woman shuffled some papers around and made a poor attempt at having looked busy. The redhead walked right to Denver with an arm out.

"Called it!"

Denver crossed his arms and leaned back in the chair. "Ridiculous. Even if it wasn't so fantastical, I would have noticed."

Colorado shrugged. "Maybe it's harder for you to see it? Just feels natural for you now?"

Denver looked away. "You too? I thought you were my partner..."

Colorado shrugged again. "Haven't shaved in at least three days but no stubble. Hair on your head is growing faster though. Slimmer frame but you've gone up two pants sizes this week. You carry yourself differently. Started wearing baggier shirts but still complain they chafe."

Denver uncrossed his arms, refusing to look anybody in the eyes. "Again, ridiculous. I'm not... turning into a woman."

The redheaded scientist waved some papers. "Fraid so. Tests say Ruth and I are right. Look at this week's blood work. Your chemical levels and these kinds of hormones, only one kind of person has results like this. If I showed these results to any doctor, they'd say it was a pregnant woman. Mystery is, you're clearly not pregnant so it seems more like your body is preparing itself for something."

The blonde scientist turned to the facility worker. "May we, give the agent some privacy?"

Colorado nodded towards the techs and then motioned his head to the door. They silently vacated the room and left Denver with the two questionable scientists.



The redhead loosened her collar and relaxed against the lab table. “Look, man, going to get real with you since the next hour or so is probably going to get rough and you'll be a lot more willing to believe what I'm about to say. Ruth and I are agents of a kind too. That alien tech is going to transform you and we don't know why, but we do need your help to track down who did it and how to fix you.”

Denver sighed. “You've gone too far now with the aliens. If you think that for one minute I be-”. Denver was cut off and gasped for air. For a split-second, he felt like his body was being crushed inwards and now it was struggling to contain itself from exploding out.

The blonde tossed her papers down and ran to the table drawers. “Maybe- Maybe messed up those time estimates. I don't know how most of this equipment works!” She pulled out a slick white gauntlet that was furiously glowing green.

Denver dropped to his knees, gasping. He leaned back, dropping his shoulders, and with a great moan felt the building pressure release from within. Two bulges strained against his shirt, uncomfortably tight holding everything in. His hips jerked out and flared, his slacks straining against the first swell and then tearing as the inflation finished.

The agent wiped away tears of exhaustion and sat, panting and groggy for several seconds. “What did- How- I...” His voice was breathy and deep between groans.

The redhead winced. “Guess that's one way to finish off the tracking. Give us a minute and they should be here any time.”

The blonde cocked her head. “You, uh, need a hand there.”

Denver rose slowly, feeling the heft of himself leave the ground. “Just- huff... leave me alone...”

The trio shared an uncomfortable silence as the gauntlet cycled through several colors until it finally dimmed. A static tingle passed through the room and all the air was sucked towards the middle for just a second.

Mercy piped up first. “Can you hear us?”

There was static again and a feeling that the room itself was wobbling before it corrected itself. “Ah, you finally opened the package! Took you long enough!”

Ruth shook her head. “Yeah, no, this isn't allowed. This kind of interaction needs to be cleared first. What gives?”

The voice filling the room turned defensive. “We're doing you a favor! Their separation, this whole 'Y chromosome' thing is a mistake. Genetic anomalies swarming that whole planet and it has to be cured. Now you have your first good sample thanks to us and it can go spread our cure. Fix your planet right up in a few generations.”

Denver felt like he was in a delirium. With every breath he was worried his new curves would come spilling out of a shirt doing its damndest to stay buttoned and now some supposed aliens were telling him that this was all good for him.

The voice seemed to fill the room. “Don't take that tone with us! We made you better. Human organs are mess of inefficiency. You're genetic waste dumps. Few revs more and you'll all break down into biological goop. This is the thanks we get?”

Feeling the tensions rising, Ruth raised her hands to the voice. “It's all okay. Thankful for the intent but the delivery leaves something to be desired. You can't just leave the future of a species in the hopes of this dude pumping out genetically fixed offspring.”

“What?!” Denver stepped forward towards the voice but Mercy waved him down.

“Nobody is going to blame you if the human race wipes itself out. Thanks for the assist, but... let's figure out something better.”

The two “scientists” and the alien voice conversed and dealt back and forth, shooting down input from Denver and generally pushing him aside. Frustrated and wanting to pace but uncomfortable with the motion and sensation of his new body, Denver huddled against the corner wall until the two

sides sounded like they were closing out talks. The room shifted and pulsed once more and the presence of the voice was no longer felt.

Mercy gave Denver a thumbs up. “All figured out. You just need to stay for one cycle, your body will produce enough samples that can be harvested, and you can make a vaccine or something to spread. It's not quite as efficient as the aliens' plan, but it will prevent any short term extinction-level breakdowns!”

Ruth nodded happily. “And, hey, no babies!”

Denver glared at the two with all the hate he could manage.

Denver walked through the decontamination room, brushing the spray from his hair and flipping it back over his shoulders.

“Morning, Den!”

Denver gave a halfhearted wave to the supply workers refilling the kitchen snacks. He strode towards his lead's office, happy he could start starting longer and faster strides without the accompanying bouncing and wobbling now that he was starting to deflate again. He hated how Colorado referred to it as “deflating” but it was an apt way to describe his body returning to average proportions before he would start to change back to normal.

Colorado gave him a wave as he entered and sat at his desk. The lead agent spoke without breaking his gaze from his filing. “Last day for the extractions?”

“Last official day. I'm sure they're going to keep drawing blood work at the lab and treating me like a pincushion for years to come, but after today, the samples will be too diluted to work with and I'm on the road back to... normalcy.”

“Hey, good for you.”

“Can you believe Cheyenne had the nerve to say she'd miss the 'new' me when I turned back?”

Colorado chuckled. “Yeah, I can.”

“So when are we doing it, sir? When do we move?”

Colorado finally looked up from the drawers. “Pardon?”

“Oh, please. I've been able to see it on your face since this whole mess started. When are we going to track down the creatures that started this? And now there are those two women that managed to infiltrate the facility and pose as scientists to consider. When do we go after them? They're menaces!”

Colorado smiled and nodded.

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