

The Maxim Ostracod Tracer Round

The Maxim Ostracod Tracer Round has the distinction of being the only tool of war to ever be successfully banned by the Royal Interplanetary Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. And it took some doing: the British Empire's Venusian forces swore by the things. But even the most jingoistic regimental colonel would privately concede that the RISPCA perhaps had a point.

The ostracods, on Earth, are a class of seafloor shrimp that, at best, grow up to an inch. Some species of them also have the ability to bioluminesce as a defense mechanism; a fish that eats that kind of ostracod will suddenly glow bright blue, in an environment where that's a lure for predators. When that happens, the fish promptly vomits/spits the ostracod out, typically in a bizarrely beautiful [light display](#). When Royal Society savants doing deep-sea bathysphere experiments came across this phenomenon, they watched it with no little scientific awe. Then they sent a heliograph of the news to Venus, whose seas are full of things just like Earth's; only they're more aggressive, and **huge**.

And they duly found huge bioluminescent ostracods on Venus. “Huge” in this case means “about an inch and a half long:” but that’s still about fifteen times as large as the Terran ostracods that bioluminesce, so it still counts. The Venusian Glowing Ostracod also is one of those species that goes into hibernation when covered in clay and dried; this is usually a survival trait (more than one giant Venusian aquatic species is known for scooping up seafloor mud and throwing it at prey on the shore), but it stops being so when the species happens to be small enough to be an easy replacement for the bullet in a .303 Maxim cartridge. Just roll the ostracod in clay, wrap it in Venusian Wasp paper, let everything dry, and voila!: the Maxim Ostracod Tracer Round.

The cartridge has several useful qualities. While it will absolutely not penetrate any armor and has a problem with regular clothing, any hit with a Maxim Ostracod Tracer Round will cause the unlucky shrimp inside to splatter bright, persistently glow-in-the-dark blue fluid all over whatever it hits. This alone was useful for the Venusian regiments, given how often fog was a factor in engagements. “Better,” the gunk was also extremely nasty, biologically speaking. Native Venusians who got any on their skin -- or breathed it in -- would spend the next five minutes doubled over in pain and intense vomiting.

Earthmen hit with the stuff would get a milder version of the pain, but intense hallucinations. Martians -- in typical Martian fashion -- find Venusian Ostracod Fluid to be a delightful, powerful, and slightly addictive narcotic.

As noted above, the RISPCA fought long and hard for five years to get the Maxim Ostracod Tracer Round banned. Eventually it was agreed that, despite the spectacular results that could result in using them, the side-effects to the natives, the native monsters, the people making the cartridges, the people firing the cartridges, the people cleaning up after the battle, and anybody who had been exposed to Venusian Glowing Ostracods for long periods of time were simply too dangerous. It was that last one that settled matters: the unfortunate mental condition of "Venusian Fog Terror" -- manifesting as a sudden but recurring mania that the mists concealed horrible monsters about to attack -- was directly linked to handling the tracer rounds. This news almost started **another** Mutiny, which is why Her Majesty's government stopped using the cartridges.

But they're not hard to make. And the mists and fogs of Venus certainly haven't gotten any better. And some private adventurers and other ne'er-do-wells think that the risk is worth the reward. So you can still find them, here

and there. Often in the hands of people who don't believe in leaving witnesses anyway.

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