

HORRIBLE CAVE SPIDER

"EL GUABÁ"

WHEN I WAS A BOY MY FRIENDS WANTED TO SHOW ME THE SURROUNDINGS OF MY HOME. THEY TOOK ME TO A NEAR BYCAVE, "LA CUEVA PITA". THIS CAVE WAS EMBEDDED IN A HILL OF WHITE ROCKS CLOSE TO THE FARM OF MY UNCLE MANUEL. THAT PARTICULAR DAY WE GOT OUT OF BED VERY EARLY IN THE MORNING. OUR EQUIPMENT CONSISTED OF ROPES, CANDLES, FLASHLIGHTS, TORCHES MADE OF RAGS IMPREGNATED WITH KEROSENE TO LIGHTEN THE CAVE INTERIOR. WHILE WE DEPARTED TOWARD THE DEEP CAVE, MY FRIENDS TOLD ME THE STORY OF A MYTHIC ARACHNID LOCALLY CALLED "EL GUABÁ". THEY ALSO TRIED TO FRIGHTEN ME TOGETHER WITH THE HAIRY TARANTULAS THAT ENCIRCLE THE HILLS THAT SURROUNDED THE CAVE.

THERE ARE MANY CAVES IN OUR BEAUTIFUL CARIBBEAN ISLAND OF PUERTO RICO, CAVES THAT ARE THE IDEAL FOR SCENES OF LEGENDS AND FANTASTIC STORIES...TO ME NOTHING COULD BE TRUTH OF A PREDATOR SPIDER THAT COULD REACH A SIZE OF ONE FOOT THAT COMPLETES ITS LIFE SPAN IN THE DARK INTERIOR OF A CAVE. I DISREGARDED THE STORY OF THE GUABÁ. WE CONTINUED THROUGH THE DARK CAVE AND PASSED THREE WELL DEFINED ROOM CHAMBERS. DURING OUR EXPLORATION WE SAW STALACTITES AND STALAGMITES. SOME ROCKS AND STALACTITES THAT WERE HANGING FROM THE CAVE ROOF WERE HUMID AND DISTILLED FILTERED CRYSTALLINE DROPS OF COLD WATER. THERE WERE NUMEROUS BATS FORMING A LARGE COLONY HANGING UPSIDE DOWN FROM THE CAVE WALLS.

WE ARRIVED AT A FOURTH CHAMBER BUT THERE WAS NO END... A CUL-DE SAC...BUT ON THE ROOF WAS A SMALL CAVITY THE SIZE OF A BARREL LIKE A 10 FEET CHIMENEY. IT TOOK US TO A SUPERIOR CHAMBER THAT HAD AN EXIT TO THE EXTERIOR OF THE CAVE. WE CLIMBED THROUGH THIS CAVITY THAT WE NAMED AS THE "SLIPPERY SOAP TUNNEL" SINCE IT WAS HUMID, SMOOTH AND SLIPPERY. HALF WAY IN THIS NARROW CLAUSTROFOBIC SPACE. SUDDENLY I HAD AN ENCOUNTER FACE TO FACE WITH A HUGE "GUABÁ" (*Phrinus longipes*)... IT WAS AT FIVE INCHES FROM MY FACE, BLACKISH AND HAD A TERRIBLE APPEARANCE, HUGE, ABOUT 10 INCHES LONG. ALTHOUGH NOT POISONOUS SINCE PRODUCE NO VENOM, COULD INFLICT A BITE. WHEN IT WALKED SLOWLY SIDEWAYS LIKE A CRAB; PANIC ME MORE.. THIS ONE HAD ALREADY HATCHED EGGS THAT THE MOTHER WAS CARRYING ON TOP TO PROTECT THEM FROM ANY DANGER. THIS CAVE SPIDER HAS A BROOD SAC FROM 40 TO 90 EGGS. THIS ARACHNID LIKES DARKNESS, IT IS NOCTURNAL, REASON WHY LIVES IN CAVES. THERE PREYS HUNTING ON

CRICKETS AND LARGE COCKROACHES. THEY ARE SIT-AND-WAIT PREDATORS AND HAS NO WEB.

THIS CAVE DWELLER HAS 8 PAIRS OF LEGS. SIX OF THEM ARE USE TO WALK. TWO OF THEM ARE SENSORY ORGANS TO DETECT PREY AND TO NAVIGATE IN ITS ECOSYSTEM. HAS EIGHT EYES; I SAW THE TWO ONES ON THE FRONT AND THREE PAIRS ON THE SIDES THAT I COULD NOT SEE. IT IS KNOWN THAT OCASSIONALLY IS CANNIBALISTIC CAPTURING PREY WITH SPINY ARM-LIKE PEDIPALPS.

I WILL NEVER FORGET WHEN I WAS CLIMBING THE SLIPPERY SOAP TUNNEL IT WAS THE CULMINATING OF THAT ADVENTURE. SINCE THEN I DEVELOPED THE PSYCHICAL SEQUEL OF ARACHNOFOBIA. IN THIS ADVENTURE OF CLIMBING ROCKS AND GOING DOWN ON THE CAVE LARGE ROCKS WE LOST THE TIME NOTION AND EXIT THE CAVE AT NIGHT. IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL MOONLIGHT AND OUR FAMILIES WERE ALLREADY WAITING TO RESCUE US. IT WAS MY FIRST SPELEOLOGICAL ADVENTURE AND ENDED AS A PROHIBITION BY MY MOTHER. I PROMISED NOT TO REPEAT IT.

SPIDERS ARE NOT INSECTS THIS IS WHY CHILDREN ARE CURIOUS ABOUT INSECTS, SPIDERS, REPTILES AND OTHER CRITTERS FROM NATURE. THERE IS A LOT OF IGNORANCE ABOUT THIS CAVE SPIDER. IT HAS NO POISONOUS BITE AND IT HAS NOT A STRONG PAINFUL STING AS LOCAL PEOPLE BELIEF. IT DOES NOT HIDE UNDERNEATH THE BEDS TO BITE AS THE MERENGUE SONG SINGED OF CELIA CRUZ.

END OF THE STORY.