

THE ULTIMATE JURASSIC PARK EXPERIENCE[©]

By
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My mother arrived by car from Los Angeles on a balmy evening in June, greeted by crickets that rhythmically announced the ninety-five degree temperature. It was her first visit to my home on the Utah/Nevada border.

I waved my arms enthusiastically. It had been a long trip for her across the barren, Nevada desert—seven hundred miles to be exact—but this determined and astute woman in her sixties could handle anything.

She stepped out of the car, and after fleeing the clamor and hubbub of city life, marveled at the tranquil silence and stared in awe at the orange and yellow sunset that spread its colors across the landscape and reflected in the waters of our local lake. The ecstatic look on her face said it all. She had found her Walden Pond.

I got her settled, and we went to bed.

It was about midnight when I heard her terrified screams.

Yikes, I forgot to warn her!

Throwing my legs over the side of the bed I leaped out, forgetting normal precautions, and headed for the shrieks coming from the bathroom.

There she was, perched atop the commode, her bare feet planted on opposite sides of the toilet seat, her toes curled up—even the hairs on her legs were standing straight out. Both hands clutched her nightgown, which she had yanked to mini-skirt level.

Hoarsely, she gasped, “I turned the light on—there are *hundreds* of them!”

I felt terrible. “Oh, yeah—I forgot to tell you. They come out at night. You have to . . . uh. . . use a flashlight when you get up.” I then guided her trembling body back to bed.

I knew from childhood that like most fearless mothers she could confront almost any kind of creepy-crawly thing—spiders, mosquitoes, snakes, caterpillars, worms and slugs. But now she had come face to face with a species she had never encountered before . . . the *c-o-c-k-r-o-a-c-h!*

Now, I’m not talking about the kind that look like miniature grasshoppers, but the ones called water bugs, palmetto bugs, roaches, granddaddies—in other words, the B-I-G, UGLY ONES!

From the Blattidae family, they have large, flattened oval bodies, antennae that function as a nose, and a head with mandibles for chewing and

grinding. They lived 300 million years ago, and predated the dinosaurs by 150 million years. Out of the 4,500 species that exist today, some are large enough to weigh as much as two sparrows. They have six, long hairy legs with jagged spines on them, five to each leg, which enables them to climb walls. And they have eighteen knees, which allow them to run at twelve feet per second. Now, that's FAST!

In my opinion, to live with these formidable creatures is the ultimate Jurassic Park experience. I believe the *Cockrochasaurus* (as I have named it), or more correctly, *Periplaneta Americana* for the American species, can be placed on a par with any fifty-ton Brocheosaurus or carnivorous Tyrannosaurus Rex. This is because roaches are omnivores, meaning they eat anything—animal, vegetable, food, paper, clothing, books, shoes, bones and dead insects, with pregnant females particularly going after anything that smacks of protein.

After co-existing with them in Texas for six years, I moved 3,000 miles to the Utah desert, believing I had left them behind for good. But, I soon found out that these smug creatures are common to all warm and humid locales.

Cunning and crafty, they hide during the day. This fiendish strategy to hide is because they want you to feel secure. To achieve this goal, during the day they secrete themselves under kitchen sinks, around leaky toilets, inside the caulk around bathtubs, in water drains and floorboards. But, at night, like a sinister band of cat burglars, they creep from their secret sites.

Silently mobilizing across the floors, they head for my flour, soap, toilet tissue, closets, dresser drawers, kitchen cabinets, and they know the exact location of my Fruit-loops and Wheaties. Often I have poured my "Breakfast of Champions" into a bowl, and for one elated moment thought General Mills had added raisins. (The female cockroach's egg cases also resemble wheat berries.) One must always be on guard. For example, adult bodies look like dates, so if you have any dates in your cupboard, before eating them you must carefully inspect them for signs of legs or antennae.

The only thing that will deter them is light (*never* put one foot out of bed at night without first turning on the light). Then, faster than electrons in a bubble chamber, they scatter in all directions and disappear . . . which brings me back to my mother. I was sure that by morning she would be okay. I was mistaken.

She didn't speak to me until noon. Then, she let me have it.

"Why didn't you warn me!" she screamed. "I could have *squished* one in my bare feet!"

I tried to explain that they really didn't *squish*—it was a cross between a *crack* and a *pop*. I read up on them,” I began, “and they’re actually, quite fascinating. The reason they crack and pop instead of squish, is that unlike humans their muscles are *inside* their skeletons, so when you step on one, what happens is . . .” I could see she wasn’t interested.

“They’re really quite harmless,” I pushed on, as I nonchalantly opened a kitchen cupboard. A black body slid down the inside of the cabinet door and landed with a thud on the kitchen floor.

“Oh,” I hysterically laughed, “it's only a little one . . . sorta.”

Horrified, she watched as I grabbed the broom and hammered it to death until there was no recognizable body left. With twenty-five paper towels, I wiped the huge smear up, waiting proudly for her comment on how I had bravely diminished the enemy’s forces by one.

For a long time she just stared and said nothing. Then quietly packing her belongings, she headed back for Los Angeles.

It was then, that I had a long talk with God.

First, I did what was proper. I genuflected and crossed myself, got down on my knees, and then bowed my head and positioned my hands in the usual palm-to-palm manner. Having a degree in psychology, I knew it was always good strategy to start out with the positives before lowering the boom.

I first expressed my appreciation for his creating the world, and thanked him for his humility in recognizing his blunder and eliminating the dinosaurs. I also told him I could understand why he had allowed bugs of all kinds to exist for millions of years like the mosquitoes, gnats and worms—after all, birds do have to eat—but, there was absolutely no rhyme nor reason for the cockroach.

“They contaminate my food,” I explained, making a helpless gesture toward the ceiling. “They voraciously ingest the bindings of my favorite books; frolic in my clothes hamper and eat holes in my unmentionables; drop on me from unsuspecting places, and are embarrassing when company comes. To top it all off . . . I might never see my mother again!

After two days with no answer from above, I’d had it. I insightfully concluded that God’s sole purpose for the cockroach was to test the human race. Well, I would meet the challenge!

Armed with ten Save the Earth bags, I burst through the door of the local supermarket and charged down the main aisle.

Locating the pesticide section I wildly began pulling cans of multi-bug killers, beetle bombs, insect sprays, nest-bait and roach motels. I even grabbed five packages of mousetraps. (Like I said, these cockroaches are BIG.) Loaded with eighty-nine dollars worth of weaponry, I dashed home, launched my diabolical plan, and then waited. Suffice it to say, nothing worked.

Mystified, I went to the library. My research uncovered amazing facts about why they're so indestructible. In fact, I read that the growing consensus among scientists and theologians is that it will be the cockroaches that "inherit the earth." This is because they can outlast a nuclear war, having a higher tolerance to radiation resistance than vertebrates, tolerating six to fifteen times that for humans.

Further, roaches can remain active for a month without food; can go without air for forty-five minutes; and can recover from being submerged under water for half an hour (longer, if they keep resurfacing periodically for air), which is probably why they survived Noah's flood.

They also have six brains, one in their head and the other five in their legs, and can live without a head for as long as a week to a month. If headless, they will eventually die because, having no mouth, they are unable to drink water. Now, admittedly, slicing off their heads would be a solution to my problem, but I decided that performing this feat would be a tad difficult.

After absorbing all these facts, I knew when I was beaten. Therefore, my only alternative was to fall back on the old adage, "If you can't fight 'em, join 'em." This meant I was left with no choice but to modify my life style so as to successfully co-exist with them.

Late one afternoon, resting in my new indoor hammock—strung from the ceiling for obvious reasons—I was fantasizing about how I could contact Steven Spielberg and arrange for him to come and suck up all these obnoxious, multiple-brained creatures with a huge vacuum and transport them back to his Jurassic Park.

While musing on this possibility, I happened to look down. I spied a female emerging from beneath a door. Following her in single file, I counted twenty tiny offspring. As I gazed at her new brood, for one senseless moment I forgot myself.

"Oh," I exclaimed, "isn't that cute . . . babies!"

My face suddenly glazed over, and I gasped in unspeakable horror at my acquiescence. What on earth was I saying!

Shocked at myself, I continued peering wide-eyed over the edge of the hammock. Why were they coming out in broad daylight? Something inexplicable was going on here.

It took only a few seconds for me to realize that something exceptional was taking place . . . they did something I had never witnessed before.

They brazenly began to march around the entire room. They were soon joined by hundreds of other roaches that materialized out of the woodwork. I watched them goose-step in amazing military precision to their stridulating sounds. Twirling their feelers in a kind of baton-like strut, they began a foot-stomping march worthy of John Phillip Souza.

Then, I noticed something that proved even more frightening. They had acquired a zombie-like look on their faces, as if under some hypnotic spell—like some entity had taken over each individual cockroach's six brains. But, who? What? I knew something sinister was evolving, but had no answer.

Flexing my brain, I could think of nothing . . . unless . . . unless. Yes—of course!

I remembered an article I read. It was either in the *Scientific American* or *National Enquirer*. Whichever one is irrelevant, as both are backed up with impressive references.

Could it be, as the article suggested, that the latent DNA of determined prehistoric ancestors were rising up within the subterranean consciousness of these cockroach descendants to facilitate the re-emergence of their mammoth species?

Fear etched its way across my face. I pictured primordial roaches resuscitating their dormant genes by activating them through the long-buried circuitry of the cockroach's *ventral pallidum* in their prefrontal cortex, the area below the conscious brain, formerly called the reptilian brain.

Next, would come the birth of huge, mutant babies, longer and wider in body, and instead of being confined to small recesses beneath floorboards, drains and pipes, now with bigger claws on their legs they could boldly climb to heights no cockroach had gone before. With apologies to Captain Kirk, the final frontier for man would *not* be to seek out new life forms in space, but to face, right here on planet earth, this new, horrendous threat against the human race.

As omnivores that love to chew and grind their food, so the females in particular would find humans the best source of protein to ingest as nutrients for their young. Even now, there are reports of cockroaches biting humans, especially children who have more tender skins. I shuddered. Once they bit and grabbed hold, the sticky structures on their legs, the *eoplantulae*, would prevent the strongest person from escaping their clutches.

Call it revelation or inspiration if you will, but suddenly in my mind I heard these prophetic words: *“Do not ask for whom the bell tolls . . . it tolls for thee.”*

I gulped. “Me?”

My mouth went dry, as the full realization of this diabolical evolution slowly shifted up my jugular. It would only be a matter of time before these prehistoric roaches would rampage the continent—soon, the world! My mind rolled into panic. There would be no stopping them. Mankind would be involved in a battle of survival of the fittest. My heart pounded so violently, I thought it might pop a valve.

My impulse was to scream—to scream and keep on screaming—to give release to the fear that ricocheted through every ligament of my body. Yes, I admit it. For the first time in my life I was scared, and rightly so. The ramifications of this were far worse than anticipating a face-to-face encounter with one of Spielberg’s saliva-dripping Tyrannosaurus Rexes. But, I consoled myself. At least his monsters were confined to an island. Then, I stopped dead in my mental tracks. Cockroaches had to be on that island, too. And they can fly!

I clung to the edge of the hammock, still staring down at them as they marched around and hissed like undaunted conquerors. There was no doubt in my mind that this same scenario was taking place all over the world. I became breathless as panic took over.

I needed to escape. But, how? If I jumped from my hammock and tried to make it to the door with no shoes, I’d squish—whoops—crack or pop hundreds of their bodies with my bare feet. The house would sound like a giant bowl of Rice Krispies. Would the neighbors hear and rescue me? But, my closest one was half a mile away! A cold sweat broke out across my forehead.

I took a deep breath and calmed myself, and wisely decided that I would bide my time until they crept back into their sanctuaries. Surely, at some point, they would have to sleep. I would figure out then what to do.

I continued listening to their chirring and hissing, wondering what they were saying to each other. Then, something unexpected happened.

I cocked my head and listened as their hiss and clicking sounds raised an octave higher . . . then, higher. Suddenly, I began to receive thoughts and images in my head. They were communicating with me by some kind of telepathy! The hairs on my arms stiffened as I listened to the Jurassic roar of their antediluvian predecessors giving me the final word. Their message was chilling.

“We’re back . . . and this time we’re here to stay!”

It was a breath-stopping moment. I felt as if all the air had been sucked out of the room.

But suddenly providence came to my aid. A surge of something like adrenalin shot up from deep inside me, and I heard the dormant genes of my *own* ancestors rise up in a shouting response.

“Our species will survive! We did it once, and we can do it again!”

Spurred on by this epiphany, I determined not to let the roaches conquer me—I’d show ‘em!

I put my home up for sale and moved back to Los Angeles.

THE END

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