

Return of Rex

A neurotic's view of roaches

By DENNIS MAGGARD

I think you should know that I hate dormitories, and I'll never go back inside one. On my list of priorities they rate one notch below a spinal tap.

I was hanging around campus the other night with nothing to do, so I decided to go and visit my old suitemates in Avery. As I approached the dorm I heard the usual commotion, an avant-garde combination of bluegrass, rock, jazz, disco and classical music, the psychedelic result of 238 different stereos playing simultaneously. But interspersed with this soothing blend of contemporary American music were the shrieks and screams of an Indian war-dance, and I knew instantly what caused them. Quick as a flash I ran up the stairs to the fifth floor and into my old suite, and there he was, an old friend of mine—a gangster cockroach the size of a lawnmower.

He and his band of warriors—at least a dozen of them—were screaming and whooping and running in a circle around my former suitemates Tom and George, who were crouched in fear in the middle of the room. The whole scene was straight out of an old western, with my suitemates playing the cowboys with the old Conestogas drawn into a protective circle, and the roaches playing the Apaches. I whipped out my trusty can of Raid, which I always keep on me for just this sort of emergency, and the roaches scattered—all except the leader, who seemed to be having an identity crisis mix-up with King Kong.

You've seen them before. They have these six pairs of Arnold Schwarzenegger biceps, and these nasty radar-like antennae sticking out all over, not unlike some people I've met at mixers. And they're humongous; these suckers are so

big they're frequently mistaken for the Loch Ness monster, except they don't swim so well. They hide in the walls lifting weights and doing push-ups, then come out when they get hungry and terrorize the tenants, like in an old Hitchcock movie I once saw.

So all the roaches have scattered except this big thyroid case. He's just standing there, daring us to take him on. And you can't reason with them—I know; I tried. I tried non-directive counseling, which I learned from Psych 10; I tried transactional analysis, psychoanalysis, free-association and semantics. But this bastard is the entomological equivalent of a construction worker. There was only one way to get through him, as George symbolized by throwing his size-14 extra-heavy-duty Frankenstein hiking boot at him. The bug picked it up and threw it back. So we're here trying to reason with this monster, this gangster-big cockroach, this product of a broken home, when George pulls his next stunt. He gets a piece of unwaxed dental floss and tries to lasso the thing.

"Whuttheheller you doing?" I cried. "He'll grab that string out of your hand and then tie us up with it! I've seen 'em do it, in a Bergman movie I once saw where—"

"He's my friend! His name is Rex." Rex the Wonder Roach.

"Fine, what do you want to do, capture and rehabilitate him?"

"Why not? He's got feelings just like you and me." George insisted. It was then that I realized I was dealing with an idiot. Make that two idiots, for next Tom spoke up:

"Yeah. Roaches are beautiful beings. They can develop into really fine personalities, given love and understanding."

"We'll send him to the finest schools," George sang. "He'll learn to play the violin; we'll read to him the philosophical teachings of Voltaire, Kant and Mozart; he'll learn to speak French and how to read a wine list." Here I am, standing in the threatening presence of The Roach That Ate Cleveland; this guy's trying to perform Will Rogers tricks with a piece of

dental floss, while he and another cretin are seriously considering putting a roach through college.

I couldn't take it anymore. I kicked the creature (the roach) as hard as I could in the exoskeleton; it didn't even phase him. He murmured something in broken English, something about having friends on the East side of the wall, and I froze in fear, recalling a late-night creature-feature I once saw where a fellow insulted a giant moth, and the moth gathered his friends together and they nabbed the guy in the shower two months later.

I snapped back to reality, and instantly grabbed a nearby grocery sack and threw it over the beast's head and jumped on it. I closed the sack around him and could hear him thrashing around on the inside, cursing as those uncouth dorm roaches are inclined to do. George screamed, "Wait a minute, you can't do that to my roach!" and John, the local pothead across the hall, stuck his face out of his door, filling the hall with smoke, and whispered, "Roach? Someone say roach?"

I tried to kick it's way out of the bag, but before it could tear out with those razor-sharp claws and mandibles I heaved the bag out the window, where it fell 300 feet to the ground floor—but not to its death, because, as you know, roaches have nine lives—or maybe it is dogs that have nine lives—anyway it didn't die, and we heard immediate cries of terror rising from the first floor. "Jesus Christ, look at the size of this roach!!"

It was loose. And a feeling of dread overpowered me as I realized that it would crawl slowly back up the stairway, then hide out in the ceiling, waiting. And next time I come around it'll get me. Just like in this after-midnight science fiction movie I saw once where Bella Lugosi turned into a giant tick and hid in the Pope's laundry until....

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