

Extinct

By
Douglas Hoover

Have you ever been afraid of something your whole life? Afraid of something that has terrified you even though it never really made any sense? Some people are afraid of spiders, even the smallest of them. Some are afraid of snakes, even if they aren't poisonous, and a lot of us never got past being afraid of the dark. That's why, as adults, we keep the bedside lamp within arm length. Oh, we say it's for reading, but if we were totally honest with ourselves, it's so we can have a quick light to ward off the boggies that go bump in the night.

As for me? Ever since I can remember I have been afraid of dying alone. For some reason I've always felt that if you die alone you have to spend the rest of eternity that way. I know that all religions tell us differently, but the idea has been stuck in my head ever since I was a kid and it still haunts me. Kind of the same way some adults will make sure that their feet don't hang off

the side of the bed so what ever might be hiding under there won't be able to reach on up and grab an ankle.

And now in the last few hours of my life, I am forced to face one of my worst fears, and die alone.

It's inevitable, I know. Fate has decided it and I can't change it. When it comes right down to it, I have worked hard to ensure that is exactly what happens. So if you're alive enough to read this now, please remember me, Mike Fallis, the unknown paleontologist who may have saved the world, and died alone all because of his clumsiness.

Yet, perhaps by writing this I have found a way to cheat a little. By having you in my thoughts I won't be completely alone when death finds me. I know I will die soon. I can feel my life slipping away. It will be a release. I can feel them inside of me. Alive. Growing. Eating.

There is another sore, this one on the back of my left shoulder and like the others, it burns. I know what this means. Another hatching. More have matured, and they are gnawing their way out.

As much as this hurts, I need to ignore it, (if I can). I need to fight through the pain so I can write this down, so you'll understand what has happened. How nature tricked us. My last act of defiance toward these damn things will be to sit here and type as long as I can, and die at this keyboard.

But first, let me explain while I can.

All of us were so excited when we came up here on this dig. I mean, what more could twelve dinosaur seekers ask for? An almost perfectly preserved mammoth, frozen beneath the surface, and hiding away on this Russian island. All the questions we were going to answer, we

were going to learn so much. And we did accomplish that I suppose. The elusive question of how they died off, I think, has finally been answered. Most of us subscribed to the asteroid theory, but the truth turned out to be so much smaller. These damned winged demons.

We were in awe when we discovered them. So amazed that something so fragile could survive being frozen for so long. It was a scientific find that would be talked about for decades to come, and we found it! We worked so hard to save them. The care we gave them. The attention. The love. We managed to revive almost three dozen of them.

Renee was the one that was most intrigued. She was the one who actually saw them first, and devoted all of her time to them. Renee's biggest professional goal was to get her name into the history books, and she was sure that finding these things would do just that.

She was right of course. Her name will go into the books, but she'll never know it. She was the first of us to die.

It's my fault that she's dead. It's my fault that we're all dead. It was my clumsiness that stranded us here. Shortly after we got here we started moving things around to better suit our needs, and I accidentally knocked our only radio to the floor and it broke. Too cold to go anywhere without transportation, and no way to call for help, I cut us off from the outside world. Isn't it ironic that I had to watch the others die? Poetic punishment for my clumsiness!

At the time none of us really considered the loss of the radio a major problem. We had all the supplies we needed for our month stay.

Franklin Weeks, the guy who graciously funded this expedition, had supplied us with everything we needed, and the lab was totally set up by the time we got here. Weeks is a very strange guy. I think that he is rich beyond most imaginations. How else could he pull this off? He

got the information about the mammoth before any one else. He was able to get into northern Russia, and build this underground lab without interference from the Russian government and I'm not sure how. A find this big demands a certain amount of prestige, and nobody would just willingly give it up without compensation or acknowledgment. Besides, if the Russian government knew about the dig we would be above ground, not beneath it. Only loads of money has the power to do that. I can only imagine that everyone who knows about the dig received enough money to keep quiet about it.

I don't know if that makes much sense to you, or if you understand what I'm trying to tell you. It's getting hard for me to focus. I can feel the toxin slowing my mind, but my memory seems fine so far. So far.

The money I received for coming up here was enough to buy my silence. It was also enough to buy a nice house for Lynn and me.

Lynn, I feel sorry for her most of all. Our wedding is only six weeks away, all set up and ready to go. She thought out every detail, and we could hardly wait. Starting a family was an important dream that we both shared. Lynn's mother's health is not the greatest, and it's important to Lynn to give her mom the opportunity to see her grandchild in the time she has left. In my family, I am the only male born to this generation. It's up to me to pass on the proud name of Fallis. Something my dad would not let me forget. Me having a son was important to the whole family. Lynn has already stopped taking the pill, and we were going to try for a baby right out of the gate.

It is not going to be easy for her to understand why this happened, and yet, I think some

how she knew this was coming. A sixth sense perhaps, or some kind of premonition. What ever you call it, she knew. She tried to tell me this was coming, but I wouldn't listen. We had a fight three days before I left to come up here. She was so insistent that I not go. "I just have this funny feeling that something bad is going to happen to you." She told me. I told her that it was just nervousness about being separated; we haven't spent a lot of time apart since we met. I remember she told me, "It took me a long time to find you, and I wasted a lot of time in the search so I'm making up for it now."

Man, I miss her. Who ever said that it is better to have loved and lost then never to have loved at all, never went through anything like this. Lynn is a fine woman. Smart, caring and thoughtful. She gives of herself and asks for little in return. I wonder if she will be the same wonderful, person when she learns that fate has used the man she loves to spawn demons.

What I wouldn't do for a radio now. The things I would give to trade some of my clumsiness for some of the grace of these damn bugs.

The bugs were, and I suppose still are, beautiful to look at. As if they are made of black velvet. So soft. When the light shines straight down on them, you can see the royal blue trim that high lights their delicate wings. Ancestor to the butterfly I imagine. And there's something else. The way they move their wings when they're not flying. There's a strange rhythm to the idle movement. It starts at the tip of the wing, and then rolls inward to the center of the body, crosses with the slightest movement, and then picks up in the other wing, moving from the center out. Like a ripple moving across a still pond. When the wave reaches the tip of the opposite wing, it simply changes direction and goes back the other way. There's a mesmerizing, almost hypnotic quality to it and if you look at it long enough you drift off into a peaceful, happy place. Then

they kill you.

Renee was so excited when the first one started hovering around her. She held out her arm and followed its movements, almost begging it to land on her. She was so proud when it finally chose her to perch on. "It tickles." were the only words she got out before it attached. The six legs beneath its belly penetrated her skin.

It stings, you know, when they first attach. Your first reaction is to swat it and brush it off. That's what Renee did. She killed it, and died six hour later.

Wow! I just got a strange rush through my body, and it made me shake all over. That's not going to help. It's already getting hard to write, and this is taking longer than I thought. I'm a good typist but Im losing coordination in my fingers. I expected all of this, but didn't think it would happen this fast.. It's all part of the process that I've seen several times now.

When Renee got sick the rest of us started to study the bugs with new respect. Sounds noble doesn't it? Study. New respect. Self-defense is what it was. We were trying to save our own asses. But for the sake of pride I'll call it study. And studying them quickly became a morbid exchange, because what we learned, we learned from the dead. Both theirs, and ours.

Trying to catch one of the bugs is hard because they are fast and never hold a steady flight. It's like trying to catch a butterfly between your fingers, but these bugs are amazingly fast, and their endurance is incredible. They're like moths on steroids. They never land unless they want to, and usually it's on you, and that's the last thing you want to happen. We tried different tricks, bright colors, and fruit, but their not attracted to such things. They're not really attracted to light either. They have stung as many of us in the dark as they have in the light.

We wore thick clothes, and kept as much of our skin covered as possible. We set up

watches and slept with the lights on. Each taking turn shouting the alarm if a bug happened to get into the room. Then we ran. I've seen them flatten out and shimmy under the door, and come through the ventilation vents. I know it sounds strange, but these bugs seem smart.

What we believe- keep in mind that were not chemists- is that small sacks in the center on the legs manufacture poison. When the legs penetrate the skin, a small amount of this toxin is injected to help the process take place. Kind of like a lubricant. Same characteristics as a mosquito. The initial sting isn't fatal. Maybe it's their way of letting you know that they're there. The legs are barbed, and once they've penetrated the skin, the legs are folded inward like a fishing hook, so once you're on, you're on. If you brush or pull the bug off, the legs tear off above the sacks, leaving the lower part of the leg intact, muscles and all. The same way a venom sack of a honeybee will stay with the stinger. The leg muscles contract and keep pushing the venom from all six legs, and a lethal dose is administered. Brad was the second to die, his reaction being the same as Renee's, and we did not yet understand what was happening.

After you see it once or twice you start to recognize the symptoms and the effects of the toxin on the mind and body. Physically the poison works by deteriorating body functions. The victim starts to feel distant from the body. Not too long afterwards the motor control abilities are attacked. The hands start to shake, and the legs start to lose coordination. Falling down is common. Then the victim starts to sweat regardless of the room temperature. In the later stage bladder control is lost and soon after, bowel control. Near the end the eyes shut down one at a time, but the sense of smell and hearing are increased. Eventually there is a series of flash backs of ones life that are very vocal, and soon after, death.

The effects on the mind are harder to describe. It seems as if the rational is reduced

slowly, but the imagination is somehow heightened. It appears that when you start to lose your sense of reality, hallucinations come in greater detail. The mind runs off without the owner and makes the victim see the illogical as logical. We termed it *Brain Flux*, because the victim fluctuates between sanity and insanity. They start to imagine certain unrealistic ends to the problems they face, and to them the solution is so simple, and they believe it so fully, that they will do some incredible things for what they believe will save them, regardless of how absurd it really is. Once the victim gets an idea stuck in what's left of their mind, they can't seem to shake it or be talked out of it.

By the time Tom got stung we had learned enough to be afraid to swat it or kill it, so he decided to let it go about its business. What choice did he have? What we didn't understand at the time is that the under belly of these things has a small slit in the skin. This slit is a cavity that houses a proboscis that looks like the tubed nose of a mosquito. It penetrates the skin, and feeds in the same manner. It sucks your blood. It seemed to us that was all it wanted. It stayed locked on Tom's arm for only a minute, then detached and flew off leaving nothing more than six small holes, and a small bump from the bite in the center.

Tom seemed to be fine, but thirty-two hours later a sore spot started to form not far from the bite. It grew red, and expanded to the size of a shot glass. Tom kept telling us how much it burned. Six hours after he showed it to us, small holes in the center of the sore started to bleed, and then opened up to let the offspring out. Larva stage of course. Looked like maggots. We humans, it seems, are the right temperature to hatch eggs.

The bugs lay their eggs through the same tube that it feeds from. Our own body temperature incubates the eggs, and the larvae are subsequently hatched into a perfect

environment. Warm, protected, and with an unlimited food supply. They grow until they mature and strong enough to gnaw their way to the surface.

If you kill them as they come out, they secrete the same toxin as the adults, and the open wound is a window to the blood stream. If you allow them to crawl onto the out side of your skin, they leap off and release an odor that you can smell if you put your nose close enough to the wound. To me it smells like rotting meat. At leased I think it does. Nothing much has been done with the mammoth since we found the bugs, and it is rotting quickly. The whole place smells like dead meat. Draw a quick breath through your mouth and you can taste it.

The odor released by the young home how signals the near by adults that a suitable incubator has been found, and that the young need a lift. The adults come at you from all directions. Some flutter in a pick up as many young as they can carry. The young hold on to the small barbs of the legs, and off they go. Other adults land and attach to start the process over again. Where the adults take the young I dont know, but I can only imagine that they prepare them for the chrysalis or cocoon stage.

Tom freaked right out when the other adult bugs rushed him. He started swatting and pulling as soon as he felt a sting. Five in all. With that much toxin in his blood, he died within the hour. Moving from one deadly effect to the next so fast that we could barely tell what stage he was in.

After we learned what would happen if we got bit, we each made our own decision about what we would do if that time came. Lastthing we wanted to do was to allow more to hatch, but there is only one way to stop them from maturing once they are in your body. You're not much of an incubator when you're dead.

Bill got bit, and hung himself. “Captain of his own ship” was the way he explained it. Derek ran out into the snowy wasteland, and we never saw him again. I can only assume that he froze to death and died like a big Dereksicle. Maybe some day a group of scientist will dig up, and study Derek. Tammy tried to fight them medieval style. She slit her wrist, and tried to ‘bleed out’ the eggs. Just so you know it does’nt work any better today then it did then. She died all the same, just a lot bloodier.

Molly, Cliff, and Rodney simply pulled the bugs off and let the toxin take them. Each suffering the effects of the poison on the mind, all with completely different ideas on how to save their own lives. Molly’s brain flux caused her to become obsessed with body heat, and was convinced that by doing things to lower the body temperature, she could keep the bugs from hatching. She said that most body heat escapes through the head, and saw her hair as a problem, so she shaved her self bald. By the time she did this there was a loss in motor control, and she cut herself several times, but she managed to cut it all off, and was bald when she died. She was also completely naked, thinking that clothes, any clothes would aid the bugs inside her. For the last three hour of her life she was exposed to the world, and packing herself in ice. Becky tried to cover her up once, but she got bit on the thumb for her effort. Not just a nibble, I’m talking about a teeth to bone kind of a bite. I’m sure if Molly had the strength left in her jaws she would have bitten Becky’s thumb clean off.

Cliffs’s brain flux had him setting up rows of books like dominos. He would line them up, knock them over, and then poke a small hole in his finger. He would then care fully put one drop of blood onto a slide, and look at it under the microscope. He would then release a string of curses, convinced the bugs were still alive. He would then run back to the books and start the

process all over again. He was convinced that doing these actions would kill the larva inside of him. What he couldn't remember is that he pulled the adult off as soon as it attached, and the bug never had time to lay any eggs. But he kept doing the book and blood thing over, and over.

Rodney was convinced that if he were to look more like the bugs then they would leave him alone. 'They would never kill their own kind' he said. He made antennas for his head out of some plastic zip ties, and fuzz from his socks. He tied them on his head, then tried to tape them, and then finally resorted to using the staple gun. If stapling things to your own head sounds bizarre, it's mild compared to the his next idea. He said that if he were to change his body to resemble the bugs he could fool them. He was convinced that if he lost his ability to walk, his body would grow wings so he could fly. That has to be the stupidest idea ever conceived, but apparently it made perfect sense to Rodney. I learned how seriously he believed this when he tried to hack off his own feet with the edge of a screwdriver.

It's cold in here, and I'm sweating. I'm beginning to think those damn bugs inside me have found their way to my inner ear. I can hear them whispering. You know it kind of sounds crazy, but I just realized that no one has ever tried talking to these things. I wonder if they speak English. Hold on, and Ill see what I can do.

Great news! If I yell really loud with my head in a bucket, they can hear me. They do speak English and I am happy to report that I have opened a channel of communications with the bugs, and we are now in negotiations. These sessions are closed to the public, and Im not allowed to talk about this with anyone. So if the bugs ask, you didn't hear a thing from me. Ill try to talk them into allowing me to give you reports every now and then, but I'm sure that theyll want something in return. In the mean time, I have asked them what it would take to keep them

from killing me. They said that they would have a meeting, and get back to me. They told me to just go on typing and they would let me know.

Brave Josh decided to take the fight to the enemy. He was our warrior, and survivalist. He had an emergency kit that was chocked full of stuff, and he was prepared for just about anything. He was like the ultimate boy scout. Heavy into fitness, he was in great physical shape, and he was sure that he could either catch, or kill one of the bugs without getting stung. He locked him self in a room with one, and the fight was set. Josh vs. the bug, a fight to the death. A promoter would have loved it.

Josh did his best and almost had it cornered three times, but it fluttered away and the fight went on. Five hours after it started Josh was spent, and the damn bug never landed once. Josh stopped to catch his breath and take a breake. When he tried to leave he turned his back and the bug floated in and landed on the back of his neck, and attached. Josh was not amused. He tore it off, and stomped on it twelve times. Once for each of us I suppose. He used a snakebite kit in his emergency pack, and cut open the skin around the sting, and tried sucking out the poisoned blood with this plastic suction ball, fill it up, and then let it spit back out all over his shoes. I bet he spilled a half a pint, and left bloody footprints allover. Do you think anyone will complain about that? I don't know if that helped or if it was because he was in such good physical shape, but Josh lasted over twelve hours after the bite. By then he had his fingernails and toenails pulled off, jerked out most of his teeth, and discussed the problem with several dead relatives.

Hold on ! I can hear the bugs calling me from the inside. I have to answer them, and I need my bucket. I Think that its important for me to remember that I am negotiating not only for myself, but for the whole human race as well. That is an honor that you have given me, and I do

not take lightly.

The bugs have just given me some thing to work with, and I have accepted out of love for you. They have suggested that if I were to give them something better to eat,(it seems we are not very tasty) that they would consider letting me live. I rationalize that if they were to get something that they were more accustom to that would satisfy them and suggested the mammoth. They tell me that if I eat some, they will consider letting me live. I think that is a small price to pay to insure that the talks continue.

It was the worst thing that I have ever put in my mouth, but at least I didn't have to chew much, it was already mostly rotted and falling apart. I ate until I was full, and am hopeful to hear from the bugs again soon. I fell on the way back and hit my head. I hope when they find me they won't think I did that on purpose. In the mean time I will continue to bring you up to speed.

If I haven't told you already, I was the last one bitten. When I was trying to comfort Becky through the last half hour of her life, one landed on my shoe, crawled up the inside of my pant leg and bit me on the calf. I knew that there were still things that I needed to do, so I let the damn things lay its eggs. I knew that being last one alive I had things I needed to do. I think that I have done all that I can to keep people out, and protect you. If these things ever got released into the world I doubt that we could stop them. Humans would end up going the way of the dinosaur. Were not due to be picked up for four days and I'm hoping that it will be another day before anyone can get in. I hope the bugs will freeze by then. See, I turned the heat off so it will get cold in here, but I'll probably be dead before the cold becomes a problem. (if talks go well I can always turn the heat back on. my little safety net if the bugs try to double cross me. I pulled one

of the bugs off for hours ago, and now I wait for this nightmare to end. The batch of larva that will soon be crawling out of the holes they are making will be the forth hatching Ive allowed to live so I could try and save your life. The thought of those maggots eating me from the insideout makes me throw up, so I try not to think about it. Especially now that negotiation are going well. I might lose a major token of trust.

I'm so embarrassed to tellyou that I have just peed my self. please don't tell my ma. Shell beat me .

I stacked the others in one room, so they would be all together. Like soldiers killed in battle, and buried in a mass grave. That was somthing we all decided to do after tom died. Actually I only had to stack the last few. I had help for the first brunch. I put a big note on the outside of the door, telling everbody to saty out, and let these things go back to hell where they cane from. I locked and bolt the door, and then blocked it with as much stiff as I could find. It will take a bull dozer to get that door open. I broke some of the lab stuff when I did it I hope i dont have to pay for it. They might not like me bustin up his stuff.

I have to try and get a hold of the bugs and see if the mamoth was okay. If it was I'l ask then to fix the radio.

I jried for half hour and lost my voice form screaming. They wont answer.Maybe their still eating. my right eye is not working very well, and I cant feel my face, but i think Im spitting down the front of my shirt. Hope my mom do'nt see me she will no i was doing something bad.

I dont, want to die, not here , not by myselfe1 There is a tear in my left eye, but nothing is working in my right. I kant even see out it now. Ill call forthe bugs agan.

no andswer. mabye their train broke down. or their fone wont workBugs bugs can you read. talk

to me/ I didnt mean to broke the radio mom itt just fell. pease domt tel dad

I wasnet running i wsajustttttttfcxz

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