

NATURE'S DEVIL

The scorpion prefers privacy

by Otha C. Spencer

IN THE PREHISTORIC days when Nature was creating the insects and animals of the world, there must have been a few spare parts left over. From these parts a tiny monster was created that was neither animal nor insect. He had the pincers of a crab, the body of a cockroach, spidery legs and a segmented tail with a vicious sting.

Several hundred million years later, a doctor from Ohio was sitting quietly on a ledge in the Davis Mountains of Texas. With his .405 rifle across his legs, he waited for a deer or an elk to cross his sights. This was a hunting trip he would enjoy. Suddenly he threw his gun in the air, let out a wild scream and ran back to camp. "I've been bitten by a rattler," he moaned. A quick inspection revealed that the doctor had come into intimate contact with Nature's devil—the stinging scorpion.

According to scientists, the scorpion is one of the world's oldest creatures. The little monster greets thousands of vacationers each year as they travel through the South and Southwest. Homefolks and tourists alike fear the scorpion for the sting of his whip-like tail and his ominous appearance. He has been found in at least 30 states, but

lives in great numbers only in the warmer, dry climates.

However, even in heavily-infested areas, few people really know much about the scorpion. He is seldom observed by man. Only a few people have studied his habits and still fewer have learned the secrets that make the scorpion one of Nature's most interesting creatures.

Early pioneers, Indians, cowboys, and desert prospectors had respect for the scorpion. Only the rattle snake was a more unpopular inhabitant of the range. Cowboys, living in the open, had a special technique for getting out of the bedroll every morning. The open-air sleeper would slide very carefully from his blanket lest he disturb the scorpions and occasional snakes sleeping under the warm bedroll. Failure to look in boots before putting them on resulted in many a vicious "hotfoot."

Biologically the scorpion is not an insect. He is first cousin to the spider and resembles a small dehydrated crayfish. Averaging about two inches in length, the scorpion has a flat, oval body and a long, segmented tail, famous for its poison tip, always ready for action. In front he has two pincers and under his body are tiny legs which can

move him along at a fast pace. His body seems to have been sculptured from dirty amber and has the translucence of muddy water. The scorpion is a repulsive looking creature and even his name has an evil, villainous connotation, like the dreaded scourge.

From prehistoric times to the present, the scorpion has been feared and respected. The ancients honored him with a place in the Zodiac and gave his name to a constellation in the sky. He is mentioned in the Bible, in Revelations 9:5, "... and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings a man."

After study of Silurian fossils, formed over 350 million years ago, scientists were convinced that the scorpion roamed the earth 150 million years before the dinosaur. They lived under warm rocks of the tropical regions of a young earth. Since that time, scorpions have not changed their habits or appearance.

Today he makes his home under rocks, in dark corners, in crumbling brick and stone, under piles of lumber, in old books and newspapers, and his occasional presence in bed clothes makes restful sleep uncertain.

After nightfall, scorpions leave their hiding places to prowl across yards, floors and walks. They respect neither the privacy nor insect-proofing of modern homes. If I open my desk drawer to get paper, I can expect Scorpio to be nosing

around my pencils; if I take a walk through the house at night, he will be scurrying along the baseboards or trying desperately to climb the side of the wash basin or bathtub where he has trapped himself; and if I sit on the terrace, I can expect to see no fewer than half a dozen hurrying to meet a friend in some unknown rendezvous.

THERE ARE ABOUT 600 species of scorpions, from the deadly tropical ones to harmless varieties found in less severe climates. By a happy decision of Nature, only two of the 40 species living in the United States are dangerous to man. These are relatives of the terrible Durango scorpion of Central Mexico, and are most often found in Arizona. A few have been reported in West Texas and California.

More than 40 people have died in Arizona from scorpion stings, and 1,600 have died in Mexico. For years the only treatment available was a serum developed by Mexican doctors. This medicine was expensive, hard to get, and often caused severe toxic reactions. In 1951, Dr. Herbert L. Stahnke, director of poisonous animals research at State College, Tempe, Arizona, developed a harmless antivenom. Through its use the death rate has now been reduced to one or two a year. To help develop the antivenom, citizens of Arizona organized a live-scorpion hunt and caught 10,000 specimens for his laboratory.

Now, hospitals in all parts of the infested area have the serum to combat the once-deadly bite.

The two poisonous varieties are the *Centruroides sculpturatus*, and *Centruroides gertschi*. These can cause quick death to children and severe nervous seizures, semiconsciousness, and sometimes death to healthy adults. However, the chance of being bitten by one of these two species is extremely rare, since they are so few in number.

Scorpions are very shy; the belief that they will attack humans is more of a legend than a fact. The scorpion wants to be left alone and will not sting unless molested. Although the scorpion is one of the best equipped of fighters he is afraid of the most delicate insect. He never fights except in the mating season or when trapped, and his common habit is to run when any enemy approaches, but in a life-or-death fight, his tail can whip out and leave its deadly sting quicker than the eye can see. No other poisonous creature can kill so quickly within its own world.

ALTHOUGH ALL living things use food as a source of energy, the scorpion can live for ten to 12 months without food and still show no signs of hunger or poor health. Dr. J. Henri Fabre, famous French scientist, advanced the theory that the body of the scorpion is nourished by solar energy. Just as bats, for centuries, have made use

of radar, and homing pigeons have used magnetic forces for navigation, this creature of the sun-baked desert may be able to transform the sun's heat into living energy.

The scorpion is among the few low creatures to take only one mate. Early in spring, he will select his "wife." Taking her pincers in his, he will guide her off to his den. There the "lovers" may sit motionless for days, hand in hand, making no move and no sound. Periods of "courtship" may be broken by a "waltz" as they walk with locked pincers, the male moving backward and the female following.

Mating is the last living deed of the "husband." While still near his mate, the male is killed by his "wife" and eaten.

The young are born alive from the mother's body, in tiny sacs, much the same as a human infant. Immediately after birth, the mother patiently and carefully rips open each sac with her pincers, removing each small white baby scorpion, and hoisting it to her back. She will bear from 40 to 60. After a two-week period of riding, the babies shed their skins, leave their mother and go into the world.

The scorpion is a product of the desert. He asks to be left alone, and to those who invade his privacy, he gives quick and painful punishment. His body holds many secrets of Nature, which he protects with a shy personality and a reluctant—but very effective—weapon.

KHRUSHCHEV'S AFRICAN ★ FOOTHOLD

*Guinea's Sekou Toure
must swing Left
to retain leadership*

by George S. Schuyler

THERE WERE HEARTY chuckles in the Kremlin last September when General DeGaulle decreed the total independence of Guinea, following its vote of 1,136,000 to 57,000 against the new French constitution. Nowhere in black Africa have the Communists had it so good, nor Red agitators fanned anti-white-ism more fervidly, nor are the recently enfranchised masses more rigidly organized behind a dedicated Leftist leader.

The 36-year-old Sekou Toure is the undisputed boss. He is the grandson of Samory, great native ruler of the 1890's. Unlike other French African leaders, he had not been to France until elected Deputy in 1956; he had, more importantly, made the traditional pilgrimage to Moscow. As far back as 1945, he attended the Institute of Economic (sic) Studies in Prague and he was once on the executive board of the World Federation of Free Trade Unions. The General Union of Black African Workers (UGTAN) which he has headed since 1952,

was until recently an arm of the Communist-controlled Workers General Confederation of France (CGT) which belonged to the WFTU, deserted by the American, British, Dutch and other free labor movements in 1950 because of its Kremlin control.

The UGTAN is militantly active throughout all French Africa. Its members are mostly transportation and dock workers, clerical and government employees, who are thoroughly indoctrinated in Red philosophy and tactics. In late April, M. Sekou Toure boasted to this reporter that UGTAN had won all strikes it launched. This is easy to believe. It is actually the other face of his powerful RDA (*Reassemblément*