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## The Spider God

Nicholas Ramos

It's been over ten years since I left, but I will never feel like I actually escaped the spider web that is religion. My entire education has been at one religious school or another. The first was a Catholic school, but I was too young to retain any memories of it. Well, except for that one fly of a memory that randomly buzzes around my head every so often, reminding me of the traumatic time I made some simple mistake and had to be dragged to the principal's office to be paddled. Luckily, the Christian school I went to after that did not have physical punishment as part of the curriculum, but psychological abuse can be just as annoying a pest as any other.

If I'm being honest, I can't say that I have *no* fond memories of my time at that school. In fact, I have many little ladybugs that eat away at the other bad memories, but the reality is that there are far too many aphids in the garden of my head for those brave warrior women to fight off. Still though, I remember many rainy evenings at that school. The vast, warped, metal legs of the giant spider that spread itself across the entire school kept me dry as I wandered about the campus. Sometimes I just walked aimlessly, completely taken in and calmed by the beautiful chorus of raindrops that were so exceedingly common in the Florida weather.

Even when the sky screamed and flashed at me with all its might, I felt safe under the spindly legs of the metal spider. She protected me, kept me safe. Perhaps this is only because I in turn kept her offspring safe. Indeed, my brain was a breeding ground for her egg sacs of religious beliefs, as all the students' minds were. Our job was to keep our minds free of any outside thought from the world around us so that

the emptiness of our brains could be comfortably occupied by the Word of the Lord, in all its pulsating and ready-to-burst glory.

I performed my duties admirably, pushing myself to learn more about the parasite to which I devoted my brain and my life, reading His word so that I could be a more deserving host. However, the more I read and learned, the more I became disillusioned with my role in life. Regardless of my own personal interests and desires, was my only real goal to convince others that they too should open their minds to the infestation of my Tarantula God? I'm supposed to accept that my life, on its own, is meaningless outside of how many others I bring to His webbed altar?

Well, I did. I wasn't entirely happy about it, but I'm also just a nest. So, my desires were nothing in the face of His many eyes that see and know all. And under the protection of her silvery legs stretched all across the school, I was content with the fate that was chosen for me. While the school planted her eggs in my skull, I allowed His Arachnid Excellence to fill those empty egg sacs with His many offspring in the form of His teachings. I was a good host, doing my best to prepare myself for when I would one day leave this cave so that I could lure others back inside.

Until, of course, the day I realized I was an abomination. In His own Words, I had become that which deserved only the hottest flames of hell in which those heathen insects would burn for eternity. Rather than continue my role as one who breeds with the opposite sex so that I can make even more hosts for His Hairy-Legged Holiness, I had made the *choice* to find interest in those of the same sex, from which no hosts could possibly be farmed. I was an affront to the plan that is His eternal web. I needed to be ousted like the pest I was.

Somehow though, He saw fit to allow me to continue to survive in His presence and under the protection of her metallic appendages. Truly, I was blessed and shown mercy. I would finish out the rest of my training for maintaining a proper nest despite my head being filled with the pesticide of free thought. You cannot understand the intense fear one feels when they believed themselves to be among people who cared and loved for them, only to realize they had simply given over

control to the spiders that had hatched inside of them and that they only cared for the spiders inside of yourself. It would be easy to run away from that situation, but when those spiders have offered you the only protection you have ever known in your life, you sit down and act the part, doing your best not to show any sign of the abject horror you are now constantly experiencing as the ocean of spiders crawls all over you and the bodies of those you loved.

As I said at the beginning, I escaped that nest, and my mind is no longer one as well. Now, it is a garden that I take care to maintain, raising all manner of beautiful flowers and nourishing plants. Pests may come and attempt to eat at the fruits of my labor, but they do not last so long as I remain vigilant. Could I one day fall prey to yet another insectoid beast wishing to hollow me out and use my flesh and bones for its personal breeding ground? Absolutely. But my memories of being a nest will not leave me any time soon. I can't let those kinds of experiences go. Not easily.

For that reason, I am on constant guard, always asking what the motive of any line of thought from someone else may have. Do they want to help? Or do they want to hurt? Worse yet, do they want to control? The thought of giving my mind up for someone else's use terrifies me to this day. That level of fear may not be healthy, and it may even stunt the growth of my garden, but it keeps me safe.

Perhaps one day I will live in a world where it's safe enough to relax my mind. A world where I don't have to listen out for the buzzing of wings or the death-tapping of spindly legs. But that day has not yet come. And so, I remain guarded. Always listening, always watching. Always knowing that, even though I escaped His web, there are millions still writhing inside, bursting open to pour His legion out to the rest of the world.

**Nicholas Ramos** is a gay, Puerto Rican military vet from Florida. His life is weird and he's weirder, but he expresses it all through his writing—and that seems to be working well for him so far!