

The Children of Atlach-Nacha

A New Threat for Delta Green

By Dennis Detwiller, © 2015

Discovered in 2009 on the Bonn-Grant Expedition to the *Serranía de los Yariguíes* in Colombia, in the vast, unexplored regions of the the Yariguíes Mountains, *Acanthogonatus comis* is a first for a spider-species in that it lives in a hive-like community.

Dr. Steffen Bonn named the spider *comis* (“friendly”) due to its cooperative nature, but this title is misleading. Despite being small the spiders readily bite, and secrete a paralyzing poison that can be deadly in large doses.

This odd, small, purple-green spider lives and works in colonies of up to a thousand, assembling huge webs across gaps up to 30 feet wide amidst the thin trees on the mountainside. The spiders build a strange structure Bonn dubbed the *web hive* beneath each of these nets, by spinning piles of webs and shaping them into networks of tunnels. This hive is used to store food captured in the communal web, lowered to spiders who work below.

Young are bred and hatched within the web hive, but most individuals in the community work the web. When the web hive is threatened, the spiders retreat to it. Larger specimens defend it by leaping or dropping from above to sting and poison.

The spiders' webs are extremely strong and the creatures are prolific spinners. Uniquely, they can group-spin, forming shapes and webs together in complex weaves that take on unusual patterns.

Usually, a newly discovered species is a slight change from its genus, and is difficult to identify with certainty. *Acanthogonatus comis* was obviously novel. Bonn collected dozens of samples (stung twice and made ill once) to transport back to Columbia University in New York, many more were pinned and stored for later examination.

Pinned samples of the spiders were also sent upon request to the Bishop Museum in Hawaii, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., the Australian Museum in Sydney, and the Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia. Live samples were sent at request to Duke University and University at Berkeley.

Dr. Steffen Bonn

Dr. Steffen Bonn is professor of entomology (specializing in arachnology). He taught insect biology at Columbia University in New York from 2003 until his mental collapse and disappearance in 2010. He now lives on the streets of New York, quite mad. His homeless colleagues call him the "Spider-Man."

Before his rapid mental breakdown, Bonn was a respected member of the entomology community. He was considered an up-and-coming star due to his discovery of *Acanthogonatus comis*, a dramatic new spider species.

In 2007, several papers concerning the so-called "spider mountains" in Colombia caught Bonn's attention. In these areas, largely unexplored, seven independent spi-

der species had been identified in a 34-year period. Still, no one had gone very deep into the area. Bonn hoped to change that. He spent almost a year attempting to find a sponsor for an expedition before he was approached by Grant Industries, a materials science company interested in bio-materials derived from spider silk. A modest budget was set aside and Bonn assembled a team of four.

They found *Acanthogonatus comis* and it seemed Bonn's fame within the entomological community was assured. That was when the voices started.

To his friends, Steffen Bonn underwent a dramatic psychotic episode in May 2010, from which he never recovered. Usually jovial, he became sullen and withdrawn. He failed to appear either socially or at class for several weeks. Finally the biology department head, Dr. Lillian Tish, confronted him on the steps of the Butler Library. A fight ensued.

Bonn was arrested for assault after repeatedly striking Tish with a stick which turned out to be the handle of a mop, sawn in half. Bonn was incoherent and filthy, and as police moved him off campus he began to struggle and fling garbage from his jacket, screaming, "I AM STAYING HERE."

The police finally subdued him. He was summarily fired, and after several attempts by the HR department to set up psychological assistance, written off.

Bonn was released from the local lock-up after a friend bailed him out, but the friend quickly found that Bonn was "not himself." Bonn's contemporaries last saw him on July 12, 2010, as he wandered down Broadway from the midtown lockup. He never returned to the university or his apartment.

Since that time Bonn has lived on the streets of New York city. But he's not alone. He hasn't been alone in years.

DR. STEFFEN BONN

Gateway for the Spider-God

STR 11, **CON** 11, **DEX** 6, **INT** 14, **POW** 15, **CHA** 6

HP 11, **WP** 15, **SAN** 0, **Breaking Point** n/a

SKILLS Accounting 22%, Anthropology 41%, Art (Sketching) 30%, Drive Auto 24%, History 51%, Melee Weapons 30%, Science (Arachnology) 76%, Science (Biology) 55%, Stealth 45%

WEAPONS Syringe (Melee Weapons skill), Damage 1D4-2*

Children of Atlach-Nacha Swarm (see below)

Heralds of Atlach-Nacha Release (see below)

NOTES *Bonn's syringe* contains a thick, greenish-purple liquid which is pulped children of Atlach-Nacha. On injection, this guarantees the victim a *hune* infestation.

Dr. Bonn's Condition, Obsession and Goals

Bonn is a madman, infected by Atlach-Nacha. He is covered in boils and sores from the numerous bites from his "kiddies," the spiders which call his body home.

Bonn has a web hive in his coat. He keeps stuffed stacks of rotting garbage (which draws flies readily) and various other "edible" rotting bits in his clothing. The spiders see him as a movable feast. When there is not enough food, they eat Bonn. He doesn't mind.

At first glance, Bonn looks unremarkable among the homeless of the city. He is filthy, he stinks, and he wears a huge army-surplus jacket covered in stains. His hair is grey and wild, matted with dirt and other fluids, long dried.

Those stripping him of his coat (at his screaming protest) will see *hundreds* of tiny, glistening purple spiders rush out of the light down his body to the safety of the

shadows beneath him (SAN loss: 0/1D2). Such an assault is likely to cause an attack by the Children.

Something is wrong with Bonn's right arm. He keeps it beneath his coat and seems overly protective of it. Occasionally, as he uses his clumsy left hand, he seems pained by his right. Those exposing and examining it find it green and black, the skin sloughing off from poison, and the muscle tissue beneath pregnant with *huge* fluid-filled tumors as big as a fist (SAN loss: 0/1D3). If the arm is lit with a flashlight, inside can be seen the sleeping, twitching bodies of spiders the size of a ferret (SAN loss: 1/1D6).

If Bonn is ever cornered or forced to expose his arm, he will dig his fingers into it, suffering 2 HP damage but freeing three Heralds of Atlach-Nacha who will fight to defend him.

Bonn makes his home beneath a bridge overpass near Riverbank State Park in northern New York City. This bridge has long been avoided by the local homeless population, who know it is covered in webs and spiders. The "entrance" is a darkened hole through a metal support girder into a black expanse about the size of a baseball diamond, with a low, sloping ceiling that thrums with traffic.

The influence of the spider-god has drawn every spider in a twenty block radius to the overpass, where they spin prolifically, coating Bonn's hideout in vast sheets of webbing. Anyone attempting to enter must make three Luck or DEX×5 rolls, whichever is better, or step into webbing. That means 1 HP damage and loss of 0/1 SAN from being swarmed by conventional spiders. (The *comis* stay exclusively with Bonn.)

Bonn walks without concern around the webs, which he seems to understand on a level not obvious to anyone else.

Agents making their way to Bonn's "home" find a pile of bones—small animals such as dogs and cats and rats—as well as a heavily marked expanse of cement cov-

ered in often-erased and redrawn chalk patterns. Here Bonn works on the problem of the “door for the mother.” The spiders show him patterns and he spends much of his day attempting to make the shapes “work” within the circle.

The Children of Atlach-Nacha

The spiders Bonn discovered are not normal. They are creatures spat from the womb of Atlach-Nacha, the spider-god, a Great Old One who exists beyond the limits of our dimension. In areas where the dimensional membrane is thin, this being can protrude her influence into our world, but only in tiny amounts, and then at great cost. These spiders mark the earliest stages of such a dimensional bleed.

These beings weave patterned webs to mark spaces for more of their kind to come through. But their true purpose is to find and infect conscious beings in our world, and influence their behavior for the good of the spider-god. Only through humans can the spider-god breach through into our world.

Folklore and History

These spiders are well known by the people of Colombia as *las arañas malignas* (“evil spiders”). Most backwater people who know this legend consider it a fact and actively guard against small purple spiders, while those few who know of it in civilized areas consider it simple folklore. Still, almost all Colombians know stories of spider bites leading to madness and obsessions with patterns. There have even been Colombian horror movies based on the idea (such as *Los filamentos de la locura*, “Webs of Insanity,” 1999, produced by Film Pavo).

Biology

The tiny spiders appear natural, if unusual and perhaps unique, in color and build. But deeper examination reveals oddities in their physiology. The brain is much larger than usual and split into two sections, and the heart and carapace are much larger than other spiders of that size.

Dissection by an Agent or ally with Science (Biology) 30% or better finds another oddity: in the center of the brain sits an odd, minuscule, black, glass-like fleck. This unique item defies conventional examination. (An Agent who has Unnatural 15% or better can learn that in some “hypergeometrical” texts such a structure is called a *hune* and is thought to have psychic properties.) Through this dangerous, non-terrene material a creature may be controlled by Atlach-Nacha. Touching this item with bare skin incurs a Luck roll. If it fails the agent is “infected” and is subject to the “Influence of Atlach-Nacha”; see below.

The spiders’ toxin is also unique in that it is both neurotoxic and cytotoxic. It causes both paralysis and tissue destruction in every kind of animal. This venom is highly unusual in chemical structure and is still not fully understood. However, the effect is well understood, though dependent on the amount of venom injected.

A single spider bite leaves a small ulcer and causes numbness. With a dozen or so the situation becomes much more dire. Suffering more than 100 can easily mean a horrific death.

Behavior

Acanthogonatus comis is unlike any other spider species in its behavior. It clusters in groups and moves in organized patterns more like an ant than a spider. When a member of a group is threatened, the group acts in force.

Likewise, construction of webbing is done in groups with concerted actions seemingly organized to some unknowable plan. The geometric patterns they create in their webs are unique and incredibly complex.

When left for a time in a new location, *Acanthogonatus comis* set upon the construction of a web and then a web hive, in that order. If there is a ready food supply, the group begins to breed and spread out as far as possible. If not, the group remains small and waits.

Attacks

When threatened, or driven to act by Atlach-Nacha, the spiders' methodology is always the same. They swarm and sting. During the attack, one or more of the spiders burrows *into* a bite, where it dies and then rots.

Dozens of such "breaches" can occur in a large attack, but eventually—after the spiders achieve their appalling goal—the attack ceases. Once a spider insinuated beneath the skin rot, it exposes its *hune*, the non-terrene matter that is a conduit to the Great Old One. This opens a connection between the victim and Atlach-Nacha, warping the victim's perceptions to become more in line with the spider-god.

An Agent attacked by the Children of Atlach-Nacha must roll a CON×5 roll every minute or suffer 1 HP damage and make a Luck roll. This continues until the Agent clears the spiders off, either by being submerged in water or making *three* DEX×5 rolls in a row (two or if assisted by others).

An Agent who loses more than 4 HP in this manner must make a CON×5 roll at -20%. If it fails, ulcerating wounds cause an additional 1D6+2 damage and the Agent is paralyzed for 2D20 minutes, awake and breathing but unable to move or act. Once the victim is paralyzed, the Children of Atlach-Nacha enter the nose and mouth to burrow closer to the brain. Since the agent is conscious, this costs 2/1D6+1 SAN.

The spiders attack until the victim fails a Luck roll. That means the *hune* has been implanted.

Heralds of Atlach-Nacha

Grown in humans infected by *hunes*, these are the next step in the children of Atlach-Nacha. They are huge spiders, obviously non-terrene, approximately nearly a kilogram to nearly two kilograms in mass (1.5 to 4 pounds). Just seeing one costs 1/1D4 SAN. Each contains up to a dozen *hunes* which are the source of their size and power, and which manage to make them defy earthly physics by simply *existing*. Spiders of their scale should not exist, much less be able to *breathe*.

They are aggressive, and have multiple, intelligent looking eyes which seem to plot and plan. They *always* split up. If a group is found, the vanguard of the group attempts to distract the victims, followed by a wave of the tiny Children of Atlach-Nacha, while another Herald escapes to continue its mission.

HERALD OF ATLACH-NACHA

Death on Eight Legs

STR 2, **CON** 6, **DEX** 18, **INT** 12, **POW** 12, **CHA** n/a

HP 4, **WP** 12, **Armor** 1

SKILLS Athletics 99%, Dodge 85%, Stealth 35%

ATTACKS Leap and Bite 45%, damage 1D6+1+poison*

Attach and Burrow* 25%, damage 1D6 per round

NOTES *Poison* triggers a CON×2 roll. If it fails, the victim is paralyzed for 1D4 turns. If it fumbles, paralysis last 2D20 minutes.

Attaching and Burrowing is possible only following a successful Leap and Bite attack. On the second turn of this attack, the Herald has a chance to inject a *hune* in the victim. The victim must make a Luck roll. If it fails, the victim is infected.

SANITY LOSS 1/1D4

The Influence of Atlach-Nacha

A human infested with an alien *hune* falls under the influence of Atlach-Nacha. Each step of this process causes the victim to fall further and further under the influence of the Great Old One. The only way to stop this process is to find and remove the embedded *hune*; otherwise, eventual mental collapse is guaranteed.

Finding and removing the *hune* requires a Surgery roll. If the spiders managed to embed it in the victim's brain, the roll is at -20%. If the roll fails, either the *hune* remains in place or the victim suffers 1D10 HP damage and loses the same amount from any one stat of the Handler's choice. If the roll fumbles, the *hune* remains in place *and* the victim takes that damage; or else the *hune* may be removed but the victim suffers 2D10 damage and loses the same amount from a single stat.

If at any time the victim drops to 0 SAN, skip immediately to Step 4 of the process.

Voices (Step 1)

Every time the victim is left alone somewhere quiet, he or she begins to hear ghostly, whispering voices (SAN loss: 0/1). Victims quickly learn to turn on radios or televisions or to stay in busy areas to avoid the voices. Sleep also seems to calm them, though a victim must make a Sanity roll to get a good night's sleep despite the voices.

Anyone with Psychotherapy 30% recognizes the symptoms of schizophrenia.

What the voices say is unintelligible at first, but after the second failed Sanity roll (which moves the victim on to Step 2) the victim hears them clearly chanting: "Across the black gulf, the spinner moves ever closer. Sing for its freedom, serve it, and live forever."

Dreams (Step 2)

By now the victim hears the chant constantly, but soon it becomes an interminable drone that the victim hardly even notices. Even sleep does not help. In dreams the victim sees a black expanse hung with ghostly green-white webs the size of steel bridge supports. A repetitive noise, liquid and clicking, is heard.

On the third night of these dreams, the victim sees *it*: a huge spider, the size of a dump truck, spinning a vast web across the endless black (SAN loss: 1/1D6). The victim wakes, screaming. This happens night after night until the victim either goes either temporarily insane, permanently insane, or develops an indefinite insanity. Then the victim moves on to Step 3.

Spiders (Step 3)

At this point the victim begins to seek out spiders and collect them. Strangely, the spiders seem compliant, even *drawn* to the victim. Some victims *eat* said spiders, which do not struggle or sting when consumed.

The victim begins to draw patterns, circles marked with odd geometric shapes, each taking 1D6 days to complete. After finishing each pattern the victim must make a Luck roll while considering his or her handiwork. If it fails, the victim loses 1/1D8 SAN, seeing *through* the wall of this dimension into the black gulf beyond. This keeps happening until the victim goes permanently insane and moves on to Step 4.

Collapse (Step 4)

At this stage the victim is at 0 SAN and is fully under the sway of Atlach-Nacha. Boils begin to sprout near the *hune* infection site. Soon they burst with a half a dozen Children of Atlach-Nacha (SAN loss: 1/1D6), who then breed normally, quickly forming a colony.

Anyone in this state is beyond recovery. Infected thoroughly by the *hune*, the victim serves the Great Old One forever.

Other Leads

The mystery need not begin and end with Bonn.

GRANT INDUSTRIES: Who knows what horrors Grant Industries, the sponsors for the discovery of the new spider species, have perpetuated with their live samples?

THE OTHER SAMPLES: Many other samples of this lethal spider, including live ones, were sent all over the globe, making the possibility of outbreak simply a spider bite away.

THE MOUNTAINS OF COLOMBIA: The initial infection of alien spiders continues unabated on the slopes of the Yariguíes Mountains. How far has that infection gone towards opening a gate to the black gulf in which the weaver spins its web?