

A Mantis Confrontation by Patricia Moloney Dugas, Palm Springs, California

On a morning like any other desert morning, I was in the garden raking leaves felled and yellowed by 110 degree weather – pretending I was back in New England raking fall foliage felled by rain and frost, when out from amongst the leaves crawls this pale creature with a large head.

I knew it was a Praying Mantis because of the tell-tale alien shaped head. I'm sure that when weird Hollywood was looking for a ominous, creepy shaped head to bedeck their extra-terrestrials, they copied the dome of the Mantis. Remember Close Encounters? So, having identified my visitor, I stopped in my tracks. He/she was pale pink – not glossy green. A pinky-beige predator?



Slowly I crept... into the house to get my Fugi digital with the 10x zoom lens. I knew I could capture the fleas on his knees with all this digital power. Here is my picture of the creature that stood there, posing in all his/her pinky splendor. Look at those big wings! Well he/she was quite proud of its prayerful appearance catching the sun.

My 10x Fugi lens caught the beauty and the pose. Are those elegant almost butterfly-like markings – on a Mantis? As I stared at it, clicking away with my mega zoom, it became aware that I was there.

That's when it got personal.

It slowly turned and faced me, looking at me with its “beady little eyes” of course. All bugs have beady little eyes. He changed his stance from a passive prayerful pose to one of cautious agitation, lowering his arms. Then, sensing a predator, (or lunch – I hear they eat anything moving...), he turned, spread his legs in a military stance, stretched his arms from a resting position to wide open - like a gun fighter in a stare down.

There was no more praying for this mantis! If he prayed for lunch, it had arrived. Because it was becoming increasingly adversarial, I shall call it 'him'. Wanting more pictures, I slowly waved the shadow of my hand across him path to make further contact with him. He began to dance, as though to avoid the cloud I was imposing on him.



Then it got scary.

He spread his arms wider. Then, as though to really scare me, **he lowered his antennae and pointed them straight at me.** This little creature was preparing to take me on! If this were truly an alien, I would have been scared out of my earthly wits – expecting death rays to spring from these antennae poised to fire. I had to maintain my cool and keep the camera steady.

Honest! See this next picture! I was amazed at his willingness to confront me rather than fly or leap away.



I did not want our confrontation to end badly, like what I would do if he leaped on me. If he did, he would still be scraping stucco off those pretty wings!

I left the scene, left the leaves, and left in wonderment at what this creature had aroused in me. As though we were communicating on the bug plane.

My creative senses returning, I re-entered the house to the computer to be sure the pictures were good. At 10x, your shots can be chancy. I could have caught the cat in the window.

When I returned to the site of my visitation, (good grief - it was only a bug – not a being – not a sentient being that is...but a big, scary, carnivorous predator with big claws with paralyzing venom however...), my visitor had vanished.

It reminded me that – we are not alone..... in the garden anyway....

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