

*Relations That Suck:
The Story of Eva and Dries
by Marilyn Yu*

Study Guide

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1. Characters

Eva

Vampire Symbolism: Vampires represent the darker aspect of human-kind. They are a symbol of the self-destruction that results from denial and a lack of self-awareness. Instead of taking responsibility for oneself, blame is placed on another, the vampire. Like all unresolved and repressed energy, it builds up and becomes dangerous. The vampire is a cannibal, who feeds on its host/prey, the end result is death for both. However, once awareness is reached, the vampire disappears.

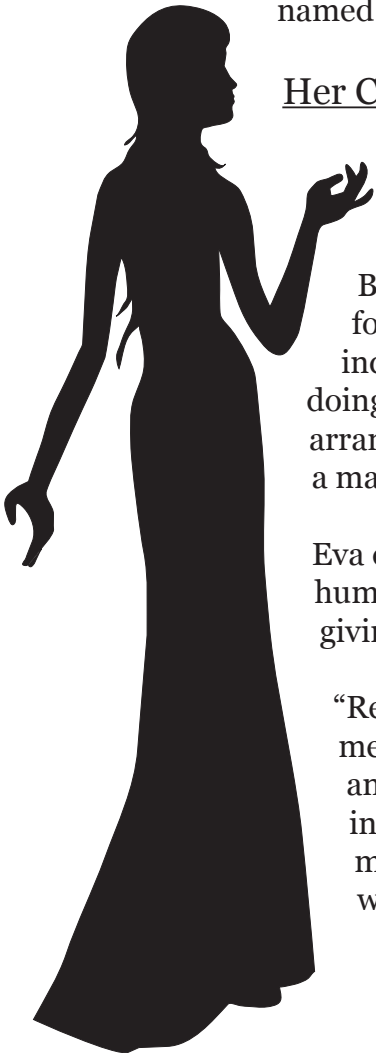
History: Eva was born in the early 1400's and spent most of her first century in a Coptic monastery near Cairo. After the last of her family died, she traveled throughout the rest of the Ottoman Empire for several decades. Nostalgic for the church, Eva made her way to the Vatican. In the middle of the 17th century, Eva was sent to Spain on a mission by the Pope. When the Enlightenment reached Spain, Eva was inspired to move to France. Disillusioned by the backlash in the early 19th century, Eva decided to start over in the New World. Like many others, she pioneered to San Francisco. After the great earthquake and fire of 1906, Eva retreated to the deserts and forests on a quest for a new vision. Eventually she returned to San Francisco where she befriended a spider named Dries.

Her Character: Eva's path reflects the struggle of the church in reconciling its spiritual mission while maintaining itself as an institution in this world. Eva has compassion for humans and tries to reconcile this with her physiological need to feed on human blood.

By the time we meet her in "Relations That Suck" she hasn't killed anyone for 150 years. She flirts with death by sipping from her victims, but doesn't indulge. When she almost kills a man, she reacts strongly by withdrawing and doing penance. Dries draws her attention away from herself by feeding her. This arrangement ends when Dries encourages her to be true to her vampire-self and kill a man. Eva retreats permanently from life and stops eating.

Eva does not want to be a vampire. She represents the compassionate side of humanity. Unfortunately she cannot overcome who she is by nature and ends up giving up her will to live.

"Relations the Suck" is the story of the end of Eva's life. Her life's story is a metaphor for humanity's quest for spirituality and the conflict between that quest and humanity's base emotional being. Eva was brought up as a Coptic Christian in Egypt and the church plays a large role in her life. Her struggle is also a metaphor for the struggle of the church as it strives to fulfill its spiritual mission while building and maintaining a powerful institution in this world.



Dries

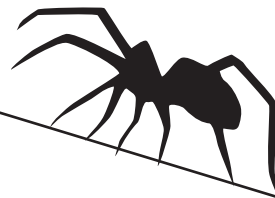
Spider Symbolism: Spiders are the creators and care-takers of man-kind. They are the weavers of destiny. The spider spins the thread of life from its own substance and attaches all people to itself by the thread of the umbilical cord and binds them to, or weaves them into, the web pattern of the world.

History: In the winter in New York City, Dries was born pre-mature when his egg was violently separated from the egg sac. He reached maturity under the dotting care of his mother. After being betrayed by his first love and suffering the loss of his mother, Dries left all vestiges of normal spider life and became an explorer/traveler. The wind took him eastward around the world to San Francisco where he befriended a vampire named Eva.

His Character: Dries' story illustrates the power of interdependence. His experiences with a female spider and his mother drive him to forsake his spider nature. He looks down on mundane existence as the toil of Sisyphus. Unable to transcend he leaves his past behind to seek new experiences and move toward the future.

When he meets Eva, he decides to try living in the present. He starts reconnecting with his nurturing/caretaker side. This is new to him and his only example to follow is that of his over-bearing mother. He is a little heavy-handed in trying to get Eva to recognize her vampire-self, but he is well-intentioned.

Eva's rejection of him reminds him of his first love and returning to find her dead reminds him of his mother. Unable to break free a second time, he succumbs to Eva's aura of hopelessness and joins her fast to death.



2. Their Relationship

Neither of them is fundamentally doomed. Their relationship brings out issues that they both have. Eva ignores her issues. Dries makes an attempt to explore his, but is unable to overcome them. In the end, they choose death.

By the time we meet Eva, she has been dealing with her inner conflict for centuries. She is a Catholic vampire who believes that it is a sin to kill people. One hundred and fifty years before she meets Dries, Eva moves to the city that she now lives and tries to start over. She decides to stop killing people. Over time she develops a system of snacking on people that sustains her, yet doesn't kill anyone.

When she meets Dries, she is freed from obsessing about eating – what she eats and when. This seems ideal. As we all know, friends sometimes help us to see things about ourselves that we may not be aware of. Dries doesn't want Eva to be ashamed of who she is. Eva, on the other hand, would rather die than face the fact that she is a vampire and to reconcile that with herself.

As for Dries, meeting Eva inspires him to explore his creative and nurturing side. He is a little aggressive with Eva and ends up pushing her away. He views her death as a failure of his. His guilt makes him susceptible to the self-destructive trajectory she is on and leads him to his death as well.



3. Visual Story-telling

Thematic Imagery

Eva's Style: Eva's eight gowns, hair styles, and make-up tell the viewer a number of things from Eva's history reflected in the style of clothing, Eva's perception of herself, and the passage of time.

Eva's wardrobe is a mixture of elements that shows her eclectic taste refined over continents and centuries. Since Eva is most active at night, her clothing is primarily evening-wear. Rebuffing the stereo-typical image of a vampire, Eva likes a bit of color and appears only once in a black dress.

As we are initially introduced to Eva, she wants to make a good impression so her attire and style are a bit more formal: her coiffure is neat, her nails trimmed, and her dresses refined and genteel. As the story progresses we see a more intimate vision of a dejected Eva. Her tresses begin to unravel, her nails grow out, and her dress more loose and casual. Delving deeper into her vampire-side, Eva's hair burgeons into a mane like an animal ready for attack. Her garb also reflects her previously-suppressed aggressive, predatory nature.

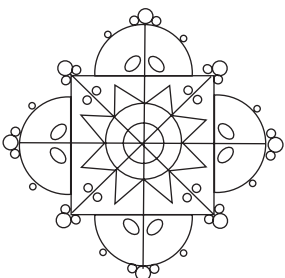
The story starts off in the winter, with Eva wearing floor-length gowns. As the seasons change she dresses for warmer weather. In chapter two, the repetition of the dresses from chapter one lets the viewer know that we are seeing the same period of time, but from Dries' perspective.

Light and Shadows: Echoing the relationship of humans and vampires, light defines the shadow and shadow explains the light. Vampires are the darker aspect of human-kind who live in the shadows. Dramatic lighting create animated shadows throughout the book. In some images only the shadows are visible.

Doilies: Stephani Martinez's creations embody the weaver connection between Eva and Dries. Her doily art represents both the lace medallions created by Eva as well as the webs spun by Dries.

Scene Descriptions

Portraits: The first two images introduce the two sides of Eva: the vampire and the human, the dark and the light, the predator and the mother, the blonde and the red-head, and so on.



The cover portrait shows Eva the vampire. She's dressed in black and exudes confidence. Her mane-like hair surrounds her face as she scrupulously sizes up her victim with her claws ready. The light is coming from behind and her face is in shadow.

The second portrait shows Eva as she'd like to be seen: civilized and demure. Looking off to the side, her face is framed by a Victorian-esque collar of silk and lace with her hair neatly pinned up.

Chapter One

Eva's Home: Eva is dressed in a green/purple dupioni silk ensemble with a border of pleats and ribbons topped off by a matching toy hat with pheasant feather. Her hair is neatly pinned up and her nails trimmed. She graciously welcomes us to her home. The industrial windows and wide open spaces echo the text to reveal the renovated mill she lives in. Seated in her Louis arm-chair, encircled by her lace medallions (Martinez's doilies) she is ready for an audience.

Other Vampires: Eva is distinguished from the other shadowy, anonymous vampires.

The Lounge: Next we see how Eva feeds. Dressed in a Victorian-esque collar with lace and organza trim and a bias-cut black and white floral dress, as a proper lady, she wipes a remnant of blood from the corner of her mouth after a snack. The black and white photo of her pouncing on her victim is the first glimpse we have of her blood-thirst. She returns to her in-color, composed self quickly with a slight concerned glance cast in the man's direction.

Penance: Languishing at home after nearly killing someone, Eva dons a lace-like white dress with cut-outs and maroon ribbon as she consoles herself by making lace. The red roses in her hair remind the viewer of another femme fatale, Bizet's Carmen. As time passes, her hair comes undone while she tries to immerse herself in her lace-work and the image blurs the line between dress and doily.

Chapter Two

Graphic Ornament: Chapter two opens with a montage of an Arabic architectural ornament that appears throughout the book. It offers a hint to Eva's history as well as repeating the intricate patterns that appeal to both Eva and Dries.

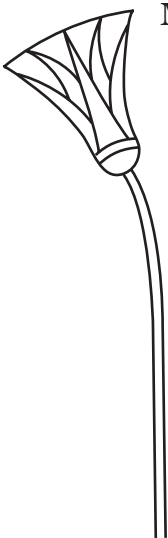
Dries' Perspective: Three scenes from chapter one are repeated shown from Dries' vantage-point, watching Eva from outside the window or behind a chair.

Hungry: An intimate portrait of Eva's struggle. She is hungry and baring her fangs, but resisting the urge to feed.

Chapter Three

Meeting: In the soft light with her shadow behind her, Eva meets Dries. Her hair is down, plaited, and decorated with ribbons and feathers. She wears a dark blue lace dress with a velvet shrug. Their shadows converse and connect.

Friendship: As their friendship forms and the mood lightens, Eva adorns herself in a light dress of blue and orange. Martinez's artwork now also depicts Dries' webs which Eva holds in her hand. A light from within the doily illuminates her face exemplifying the new hope that Dries brings. However, the light also creates another shadow behind her.



Exploring: In a shimmering silver and lavender dress and scarf, Eva takes Dries to the sky. As a vampire, Eva has the ability to fly. They leave the lights of the city below and explore the depths of the night.

Chapter Four

Re-encounter: Eva and Dries see the man from above. When they land, the perspective shifts to that of the man, watching as Eva's image emerges from the fog. Like a predator sizing up her prey, Eva's hair is flared into a mane. She's outfitted in a warrior-like bronze bustier and with matching shin-guards.

Post-kill: Satiated with some blood still dripping from her mouth, Eva's eyes roll back in ecstasy. Before taking off for home, she surveys her victim with a tinge of remorse.

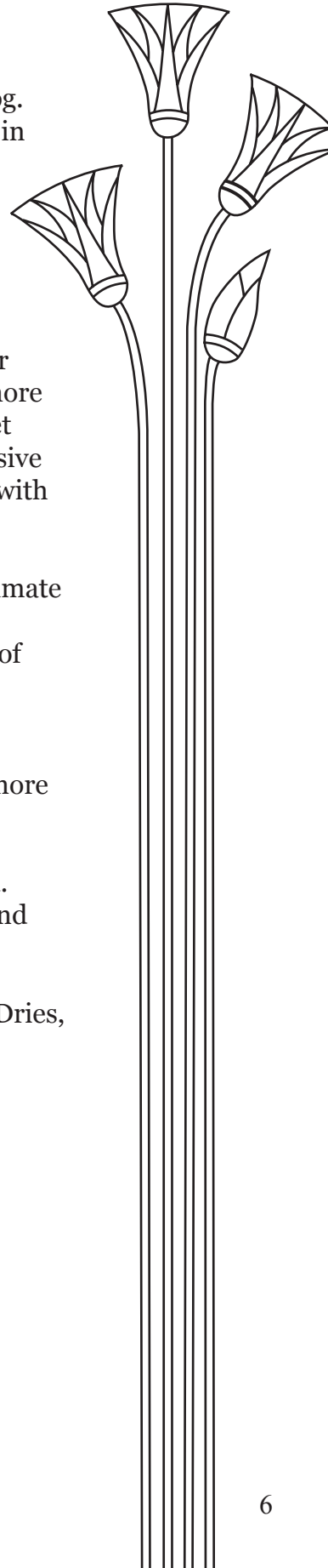
Grieving: Now we see Eva the vampire as she is instead of who she'd like to appear to be. This scene is in direct contrast to earlier depictions of Eva. In place of her more colorful dresses, she's dressed in black. Her hair, reminiscent of when she first met Dries, plaited and decorated with ribbons and feathers, is now a billowing, aggressive mane. Her Louis armchair is replaced by her coffin which gives clues to her roots with images of the Nile and papyrus on the sides and the goddess Isis on the lid.

Argument: Distress brings out people's true nature. The end scenes show very intimate interactions between Eva and Dries. They fight on and in Eva's coffin. The scene excludes all other objects that have brought them together in the past. A close-up of Dries inside the coffin reveals that he is truly an urban spider having taken on the camouflage of re-bar.

Moon: Dries journeys far when he storms off. He leaves the city and flies off to a more remote area with less light.

Death: Dries sees an image of himself in the shadow formed by Eva's lifeless hand. Unlike the last time he had seen her, he crawls into the coffin to console himself and Eva.

Sunrise: The rising of the sun signals the end of the night and the end of Eva and Dries, both nocturnal creatures.



4. Author

As one of San Francisco's premier genre-busting artists, Marilyn Yu has interwoven media, ideas, and people in her creations for over a decade. Her work has encompassed art, raising awareness, and organizing people and institutions. From collaborative art projects to urban planning, Yu has balanced the amount of structure needed for efficiency with the flexibility needed for spontaneity and organic development. She has striven to create safe spaces to build trust so people can open up to new ideas and ways of working.

Yu's artwork has always mixed her lighthearted and humorous perspective with critical topics ranging from urban sprawl to the culture of consumerism. Indeed, she was a pioneer in introducing sustainability to high fashion with her award-winning, hemp-based clothing line, Plutonium Clothing. At a time when hemp-clothing was aimed at the niche hippie market, Plutonium offered a sophisticated, fashion-forward option for the nascent market of environmentally-conscious consumers.

Specializing in mission-based organizations in transition, Yu has helped agencies working in areas of youth development, micro-finance, community development, and the arts to increase their capacity and effectiveness. She has served as staff as well as Chair and Treasurer on Boards of Directors. Yu has created bridges within and between agencies, communities, ethnic groups, and across multiple generations.

A believer in self-determination, Yu is dedicated to empowering people with knowledge and skills and increasing transparency. She has provided opportunities for people to acquire skills and put them into practice. In her various workshops on design, sewing, metalwork, and myth-creation, Yu has enjoyed seeing students' perspectives shift as they gain new skills and new opportunities appear.

In this her latest work, Yu has taken fine art out of the gallery, high fashion off the runway, and has added stunning visuals to prose in order to aggregate and intensify their impact on and connection to life. For *Relations that Suck*, Yu assembled a unique group of artists and professionals with a passion for beauty and pushing boundaries. Together they have created a piece of art in book form that bridges the worlds of fine art, fashion, and writing. She has created two mythological characters for the 21st century who struggle with their cultural inheritance and how they relate to others. This project has been a unique product of San Francisco, reflecting the city's support of creativity and encouragement of entrepreneurship and experimentation. It has been a collaboration of visionary women, small businesses, and local arts spaces.

Living in a time of great cultural transition as advances in technology break down traditional boundaries, Yu finds our inherited cultures unskilled at dealing with the collisions of different ideas and views. She believes that as our interdependence increases, the ultimate ramification of misdirected aggression is self-destruction. This motivates her to strive for



compassion and self-exploration in order to shed inherited expectations and obligations. She hopes to inspire others to manifest by showing, through her work, that ideas and dreams can become reality.

Yu's vision is to bring diverse people together in order to develop new patterns of behavior by encouraging reflection, critical thinking, and cooperation. Her dedication to building and transforming consciousness and community-based organizations impels her to assemble teams that question the status quo and love to experiment. She works through a collaborative process that creates space for spontaneity and organic development.

Marilyn Yu lives and works in San Francisco. She has a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Sculpture from the Rhode Island School of Design and a Masters in City and Regional Planning from UC Berkeley.

5. Discussion Topics

Some suggested topics for discussion

1. In Chapter 3 why does Dries get angry? Why is he hurt?
2. In Chapter 2 and 4 why does Eva stop eating?
3. The mis-alignment of mind, body, and soul cause internal conflict. How are Eva and Dries mis-aligned?

6. Frequently Asked Questions

How did you come up with the title?

The title came pretty early on in the writing process. I like it because it is simple, but still encompasses the theme and the characters in the book. It refers to Eva and Dries individually as creatures that suck their food. It also refers to their relationship which leads them to their deaths.

How did you come up with the characters?

I started with the vampire. I wanted a character that had a dramatic inner conflict, something fundamental to her nature that she couldn't change. Eva is a Catholic vampire who believes it was a sin to kill people. Instead she tries really hard to be creative to make up for her destructive side. In Chapter One after she almost kills someone, she becomes depressed and obsessively makes a lace medallion as penance.

Then I needed a character for her to form a friendship with. I wanted someone who would initially seem like an odd choice for a vampire to be friends with, but who had similar characteristics that would feel familiar to her. Vampires and spiders are most active at night, many people are both fascinated and afraid of them¹, they suck to feed, and they are cannibalistic.

Additionally, this spider also has an inner conflict. In many cultures, the mythology of the spider is that of the creator and caretaker of the world and humans. Dries sees existence as futile and hopeless, so rebels against his nature forsaking web-spinning and regular spider life.

Can a spider and a vampire be friends? Can a man and a woman be friends?

Each individual is unique and therefore will have a unique relationship with any other individual. This question is not really about whether a relationship can exist, because clearly it can, but the nature of that relationship. We live in a society with strict parameters defining social and sexual behavior which doesn't allow for the kaleidoscope of actual relationships. Exploration of non-conventional relationships then falls into the realm of the deviant, the same realm that vampires occupy.

Vampires have always been associated with unacceptable behavior. During the Victorian era vampires openly pursued women and engaged in homosexual behavior. Over time as female sexuality and homosexuality have become more accepted, vampires have become linked with taboo sexual practices such as fetishism, polyamory, and BDSM (bondage-discipline, dominance-submission, sado-masochism).

How did you go from designing clothes to writing a book?

¹ There isn't any extensive research on vampires, but in the case of spiders, most spiders aren't harmful to humans. Still, arachnophobia is one of the most common phobias (second to a fear of heights).



What I like to do most is explore intersections. Designing clothes or writing a book can be interesting in and of itself, but what interests me most is the possible combinations of various activities. I've been working in many different fields that are traditionally mutually exclusive, for example designing clothes, making art, organizing people and institutions, putting on events, and raising awareness about issues. Now I'm trying to see how I can bring them all together.

How did you come up with the story?

I wanted to write a story about relationships – specifically, about a modern relationship. Historically relationships were often formed primarily for economic benefit, personal benefit was less of a priority. Now, in the post-industrial age, economic stability is less of a factor in relationships which allows for more choice. This doesn't necessarily result in better relationships though. Having more choice also means that the individual is more responsible for themselves and the choices they make.

In this story, one character is not honest with herself about who she is and ends up destroying herself and those around her. The other character has little experience relating to others. He views relationships as a sacrifice, which brings him to conclude that he must sacrifice himself when he fails his friend.

How did you come up with the names?

I wanted names that used the letters in the words “vampire” and “spider.” Their full names are Eva Prim and Dries P.

Why are there multiple models for each of the characters?

This story is a fable, a parable, a myth. It is a metaphor and is not intended to be an account of historical events that actually occurred. Each of the characters is a symbol/archetype to help illuminate some of the mysteries of our own inner life and relationships we have with each other and the world.

All the objects in the book are symbols and not intended to be realistic representations of objects they resemble. Dries is not a biological spider. His web is not a real spider's web. The medallions are not flat pieces of lace. Instead they are three-dimensional objects with depth. Eva's bed is not really an ancient sarcophagus. She is born in the 1400's, when Egypt is a colony of the Ottoman Empire, long past the glory days of Ancient Egypt.

Likewise, I didn't want people to fixate on a specific person as Eva (or the man she kills). I want to show visually the multiple dimensions of Eva's inner life. Some of this is done through hair, make-up, and dress. Some of this is achieved through multiple models.

Additionally, this is a large project and there are many talented people out there. I want to collaborate with as many people as possible, while still keeping the process efficient and maintaining artistic integrity. The input and perspectives that everyone brings add a lot of depth to the project. I have really enjoyed meeting and working with all the people who are involved in this project. I would have liked to have had more people involved in the creation of the “fine” art elements. There is only one other fine artist who has her work featured in the book, Stephani Martinez. I would have like to have been able to include more, but unfortunately it didn't work out that way.

What's Next?

I am working on Eva's story. This book will cover the first 600 years of Eva's life.

I am also working on a Myth Creation class. Myths are stories that embody spiritual beliefs to help guide people's lives. They are an internal operating system. Artists help operationalize myths by creating physical manifestations that reflect the heart, mind, and soul. Our current mythologies are out-of-date and not constructive in today's world; they need an upgrade.

I want to bring people together in order to develop new patterns of behavior, by encouraging reflection, critical thinking, and cooperation, and encoding new guides in dynamic new mythologies. Our thoughts create our world and our emotional mind steers our behavior. The language of the emotional mind is symbolic: metaphor, simile, poetry, song, fable, dream, and myth. "Loose associations determine the flow of narrative, abiding by the logic of the emotional mind.... Giving voice to the 'wisdom of the unconscious' – the felt meanings of our dreams and fantasies, the symbols that embody our deepest wishes."²

2 Goleman, Daniel. Emotional Intelligence. Bantam Books: New York. 1995.

7. Spider Facts

Ballooning: Ballooning is a term used to describe airborne migration that many spiders use to disperse through the air. The spider lets out enough silk for the wind to catch and lift the spider into the air. Large spiders, heavier than 1 mg, are not likely to use ballooning because they are too heavy.

Camouflage: Spiders rely heavily on camouflage for protection.

Eggs: Generally eggs are laid in the dry season (Autumn) and hatch in the wet season (Spring). A female spider will lay from 1 – 1000 eggs per batch. Most enclose eggs in silk sacs. Some leave the sac in a web, under a leaf, or buried in the soil; while others carry it with them.

Eye-sight: In general spiders have poor eye-sight. Instead, they are highly-sensitive to vibrations, using the hairs on their legs to detect air and water vibrations.

Food: Spiders mostly eat live insects and other spiders. They use venom to paralyze their prey then regurgitate digestive enzymes in or onto their prey. The liquefied tissue is then sucked into the spider's stomach. A spider can store nutrients in its digestive tract for a long time, enabling the spider to go for weeks or even months without the need to catch prey.

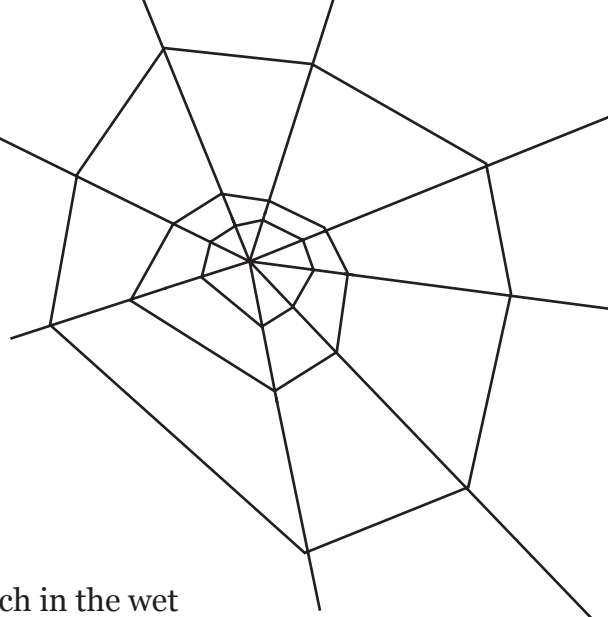
Life-span: Most spiders live for one year. Some can live up to 4-5 years. Occasionally tarantulas have been known to live up to 25 years.

Mating: Basic of mating and breeding:

1. Mate recognition – A male needs to find a female of the same species.
2. Male needs to avoid being mistaken as prey.
3. Female selects a male from amongst his competitors.
4. Male stimulates the female so she becomes sexually receptive rather than just hungry.
5. Male avoids being eaten after fertilizing eggs. Cannibalism associated with mating is common among spiders, but rare among other creatures. Most males survive a few matings.
6. Male competes to ensure that no other male fertilizes any of the female eggs.

Silk: Spider silk is the strongest natural fiber known. It is light, strong, and elastic. Spiders' webs can be used as natural gauze to bind wounds. They provide immunity from microbial attack and help blood coagulate.

Venom: While the venom of a few species is dangerous to humans, scientists are now researching the use of spider venom in medicine and as non-polluting pesticides.



S. Feedback

Marilyn would love to know what you thought of the book

Feel free to write her and share your thoughts.

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Here are some questions to get you started.

1. What did you like or dislike?
2. Did you enjoy it? Is it possible to find a book interesting without “enjoying” it?
3. Did you have expectations of it? If so did it live up to them?
4. Had you read reviews before reading it? If so, do you agree with the “official” reviewers or not?
5. Would you give it as a gift? If so, who would you give it to?
6. Can you see yourself reading it again?
7. If you had to halve the size of your book collection would this be one of the books you kept?

