

# Alice

# Down The Rabbit Hole

Darrin Vernier

Phoenix, Arizona USA

My first tarantula was a full grown female *Brachypelma smithi* (then called a redleg) purchased in 1984 for the sum of \$15.

We bonded immediately, as much as people can believe that spiders do. Unlike those who buy tarantulas to show off, or scare people, she was a private spider, and we trusted each other. One day I wanted to see what she looked like underneath. I didn't have a piece of glass for her to walk on, so I just put her on my face and got a close up. It just seemed like a natural thing to do. Unfortunately, that was about the time my college roommate and his friends walked in the door. That was when I learned not what it is to be a spider person, but what that intangible is that makes a person not a spider person. To me, a spider person does not have anything wrong with them, he or she simply has an additional ability to perceive something that others don't or can't see. Perhaps it's a gift of wisdom and sensitivity bearing with it a bit of additional responsibility for the privilege. Unfortunately, not long after that time, she was stolen, probably for the purpose of a drunken college stunt, and my reverie was interrupted.

Sixteen spider-less years later, I found myself with a house full of various arthropods, but no tarantulas. It was similar to my position on the Grand Canyon, that I

did not wish to go there to look from the rim. I wanted to wait until I could take a genuine river trip and get the full experience. But, much like the patient waters of the canyon, the tarantulas continually wore away at my resolve. Oddly, I found myself suddenly reading everything I could about tarantulas. Not that I was ever going to get any, just so that you understand that aspect from the beginning.

Not owning a tarantula, nor wanting to, I went to the ATS show in Carlsbad. Arriving too late at night to socialize, I cruised the back roads with my high beams. The night produced four choice male *Aphonopelma* and a *Scolopendra heros* centipede of the red headed variety. These were my first wild collected tarantulas, so I went back the next day to record locality information. This included the wind direction, cloud cover, and phase of the moon. I also collected a female from a burrow. Two of the males were given at the show to a taxonomist, and the remaining tarantulas came home with me for future breeding efforts as indications were that they were uncommon. Not that I would ever collect any tarantulas in the field again. Nor that I would ever buy or breed any other tarantulas. This experience was just something that was handed to me by the fates that I felt I had a responsibility

to respond to in an appropriate manner.

A few weeks later I saw a *Grammostola rosea* at a pet store nearing a molt, and crawling with crickets. I remembered my promise to myself that I wasn't going to keep tarantulas, but with the thought of that tarantula needing my help, the last thread of my resolve gave way, and another experience was handed to me. I responded by bringing the tarantula home. That was less than a year ago, and I just finished building the spider

room yesterday, though I am continually thinking of new ways to fit ever more shelving units into it, and thinking of where I could move to so that I can have more than one spider room! There is always a new acquisition or yet another wildcaught tarantula from an about-to-be-developed area. Don't forget to save room for eggsacs and spiderlings. Alice plunges ever deeper into the rabbit hole.