

**BROKEN
WORLD
STORIES**



LANCE MANION

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along came a mobile home

There is a line in the movie *Doom*, delivered masterfully by Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, that captures Duncan’s passion towards his mobile home.

“I need soldiers. I don’t need anybody else but soldiers.” Replace the word

“soldiers” with “mobile home” and you’ve got a pretty good grasp on his priorities.

You’d also have a pretty awkward sentence. (You’d also have to switch the word “anybody” to “anything,” but I thought including that information might really bog down the story, so I stuck this observation in parentheses.) (Just seems slightly less obtrusive.)

Ironically, the movie *Doom* revolves around the consequences of scientists playing with forces beyond their control. The “mad scientist” archetype began shortly after the first man began a systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment. Show me a man with a microscope and I’ll show you another who believes that magnifying things is unnatural.

In the case of Duncan, and for the purposes of this story, the second man might have a point.

Duncan genetically engineered eight giant tarantula legs that he then attached to his mobile home. Not eight mechanical legs that function like a spider’s, but eight giant, hairy, living, forty-foot long tarantula legs that allowed his mobile home to pick up and move anywhere he desired.

With one stipulation.

(Another archetype, whenever breakthroughs occur, there are always mysterious strings attached. Limitations that make any powers or abilities more interesting. Limitations that often require parentheses.) His mobile home could only come to rest in a mobile home park. His all-terrain mobile home could move swiftly and silently across any landscape 3

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but when he needed a break from his travels, he needed to find a mobile home park to rest.

Every morning, his day would start the same way, hearing the terrified screams of women and/or children seeing his home for the first time.

Often, no amount of explanations would suffice and he’d be forced to have his tarantuhome head off to greener pastures.

If you have not already pictured his eight-legged mobile home moving, I would invite you to do so now. It might be the creepiest thing you’ll think all day.

He had thought of attaching more whimsical-looking grasshopper legs instead but quickly thought better of it as every time it launched itself skyward, no amount of bubble wrap and packing peanuts would save the dishes and glassware on impact.

(Which goes a long way to explaining why grasshoppers are rarely seen with such items.)

Scientists like Duncan rarely watch movies like *Doom*. They much prefer movies that have a more pro-science bent. This is unfortunate because many scientists, especially those that fall into the “mad” category, of which Duncan is certainly a member in good standing, need the occasional reminder that the road to hell is often paved with good intentions.

You don’t need to have seen *Doom* to understand how things turn out in that particular movie. It’s right there in the title.

For Duncan, it was unwillingness to accept that the slow growth of hair on the surface of his mobile home, originally localized to the areas where the legs were attached, might be foreshadowing that the need to come to rest in mobile home parks might not be the only unintended consequence of his experimentation.

This was especially true some weeks later when he saw the tiny fangs beginning to grow above the front door.

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the cricket

The truth is that during the summer, the windows are closed because the air conditioner is always on, so it's only in the fall that Otto gets to drift off to sleep to the sound of crickets. A pastime he enjoys immensely.

Beginning in mid-September, he will have the windows fully open and he will turn off anything in the house that makes even the slightest noise so he can immerse himself in the relentless come-ons of the male cricket.

Then, starting around mid-October, things start to get a little chilly, which on one hand just makes falling asleep with the windows wide open that much better. Nothing like a little nip in the air to make one snuggle down just a little deeper into the blankets. On the other hand, the number of chirping crickets starts to decrease. Not only that, but their stridulation (the act of producing sound by rubbing body parts together) begins to slow down. By late-October, the cacophony has been replaced by only a few stragglers. Otto wonders how much of the chirping is trying to find a mate and how much is just trying to keep warm. How many female crickets are even in the market for copulation with winter just around the corner?

One day in very-late-October, Otto decided to get off the bench and insert himself into the game. When corduroy pajama bottoms wouldn't do the trick, he bought a secondhand violin and removed the fingerboard, peg box, and strings and duct taped them to his inner thigh. On his other thigh, with the assistance of the aforementioned duct tape, he affixed a bow.

Then he laid in bed and chirped to the best of his ability.

I implore you to picture this before moving on.

For the next few nights, he sat in bed rubbing his legs together, doing his best to keep warm and perhaps attract a mate. The latter part being something that Otto had been exceptionally bad at up until those very-late-October evenings. It's not that he's particularly unattractive; it's just that he's the kind of guy who would buy a violin so that he could tape 5

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various parts of it to his thighs in order to chirp. You can see how this act would not get much play outside of the cricket community.

Especially if you took the time, as advised, to imagine how he looked sitting in bed rubbing his legs together.

And then one very-very-late-October evening, there were no crickets chirping whatsoever. The last of them had decided to call it a day and expire. This caused Otto no small amount of heartache. It did not, however, cause his stridulations to cease. In fact, in his grief, he was chirping much louder and longer than he'd ever chirped before.

And that's when his doorbell rang. One of his neighbors had complained to the local authorities and outside his front door stood an officer of the law.

A female officer of the law.

He opened the door, the violin parts and bow still taped to his thighs, and inquired as to the reason for her visit. She looked at his thighs as if putting the last piece in a very odd puzzle, only to find it didn't fit.

He broke the awkward silence. "The crickets stopped chirping tonight. Not even one of them left," he said. He looked forlorn.

"And so you were..." She could not finish the sentence herself. It was the kind of sentence that invited further explanation, but Otto just looked too sad for her to continue her enquiry.

"Can I ask you to stop?" she asked politely.

"Got it. It's just that I feel less lonely when I know other things are out there calling out for companionship." He paused and then added, "Going to be a long winter."

The officer smiled and nodded.

Otto, his thighs rattling together quietly, turned and closed the door.

Upstairs, he closed the windows, removed the violin parts and bow, and got into bed. Sleep was hard to come by and an hour later Otto, wide awake and climbing out of bed to make himself a cup of warm milk, heard his phone chirp, alerting him to the fact that he had a text.

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The text read, "Hi. It's the police officer from earlier tonight. Still up?"

followed by a winking face emoticon.

It was his turn to smile.

So it came to pass that Otto, on a very-very-late-October evening, with no stridulation or hesitation, chirped back.

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