

Pandemic Technomice

It's been all over the news. Swarms of aggressive rats are infesting closed restaurants and stores. That makes perfect sense, with no people around to keep them in check. But I have a different kind of rodent problem.

We've lived here for almost twenty years and never had to deal with mice. Suddenly the little bastards are showing up- even though now we're always at home. We're not just seeing subtle hints of little mouse jimmies or chewed-through cereal boxes. They come right out and parade in front of us with an attitude. So, this is not like the city rat problem. We live in the suburbs anyhow.

The most disturbing thing is, like a good house pet, they seem to have taken on some of our traits. I'm an old audiophile from the analog days. I worked my way through school selling the stuff but could never afford much. So, in my twilight years I've gone nuts. I have a penchant for surround systems. I've got them in my family room, bedroom, basement, backyard, and most recently, in my retirement office. For some reason, my wife considers this a sickness. My installations are functional, but with between six and eight speakers for each, there's a rat's nest of wires hidden behind the hardware cabinets. These critters seem to have a fondness for consumer electronics too.

The first sighting was in the basement, where I like to watch TV shows that my wife isn't interested in. Right in the middle of a *Fauda* episode with a frighteningly loud ricocheting gunfight, I see him running along the wall. He disappeared behind the equipment-jammed cabinet and didn't come out of the other side. I was faced with the prospect of pulling the cabinet away from the wall to chase it. I've never been able to do this without one or more of the dozens of connectors popping out of their sockets. I'm getting too stiff and impatient to mess with that stuff, so I just let it be. Besides, I was into the show.

Not wanting to add to my growing list of health worries, I decided against bringing in an exterminator and possibly trading a mouse problem for a virus. I masked up and went to the grocery store for two kinds of cheese (swiss and sweet Muenster) and a humane mouse trap- the kind that simply embarrasses the rodent so you can release him unharmed in your least favorite neighbor's yard.

For two nights I checked the trap. The doors were open, but the cheese was gone! This guy was smarter than your average mouse. He was also unusual in that like me, he liked both kinds of cheese- even though my cousin Leon told me the cheese thing is fake news pushed mostly by old Tom and Jerry cartoons. Leon said peanut butter was the way to go.

The next sighting was in our bedroom. At 3:30 in the morning we woke up to some banging noises. A fat little furball had something in its mouth and was trying to climb into my Bose subwoofer's front vent. I'm not sure what was in his mouth (a bucked-toothed country mouse?) but every time he tried to clear the vent it made a loud click against the plastic. My wife and I both woke up and I looked around to find the noise. Even with the lights on and the scary sight of me in my underwear, this thing just shrugged and kept trying to breach my subwoofer. Finally, as I got closer, he scurried under the hutch where a snaggle of wires were hidden.

Trap number two had peanut butter (extra chunky). I remember as a kid, feeding PB to my dog to watch her mouth contortions and hoped it would be as hard for this little prick to eat too- those big teeth wouldn't help either. He cleaned out the trap without being caught. This was war. I bought a super-poisoned bait trap nothing.

My wife has a fondness for chocolate and often keeps a stash on the dresser. This week it was a bag of individually wrapped mini-Reeses cups. She was down to the last two and threw the bag away. Now, this dresser is right next to the subwoofer. We think the mouse was trying to climb the speaker on his way to the Reese's. Last night I fired up the phone light and looked under the hutch. Next to a crumbled piece of Reese's foil was a fat little grey bundle that appeared to be sleeping in a nest of wires. So, he liked audio and chocolates. That was the last straw. We called the exterminator. Even though we are high-risk oldsters, we were fighting a very visible (and ballsy) enemy. The risk was justified.

Yesterday, my swimming pool guy told me we need a new heater because a nest of mice chewed up all the wiring and shorted out the main circuit board! Since my gym is closed, I'm itching to heat up the pool and swim laps while listening to my outdoor eight-speaker system. This was getting personal. I've just ordered another \$2,000 heater and for some reason, speaker #8 isn't working. It's the one nearest the heater.

As I write this, the exterminator is here. The grey ball was still under the bedroom hutch. We pulled it out expecting a mouse, dead from over-eating. It was a decoy made of rolled up fabric. That sumbitch is messing with me!

I just paid the exterminator \$160. He told me I finally caught a white-foot mouse in the basement trap. According to the guy, they are the *easy* ones to catch. He's never heard of mice that are into audio equipment, but he did know that they liked chocolate. I guess the combo with peanut butter would be irresistible.

We'll get a follow-up visit in two weeks. In the meantime, we're not buying anymore electronic gear or chocolate- just in case.