

## Tales from the Mole Chronicles / Keith Waterland

I hadn't been living at my new home for more than two weeks when I had my first encounter with the varmints. In fact, in those days, I referred to these little denizens of the deep as moles and I thought of them as a mild nuisance, a curiosity of sorts when I saw that first earthen mound in my back yard. Being a recent landowner, it never occurred to me that I would be sharing my property with others, especially those who raise these brown mounds of dirt wherever they fancy, spewing rocks to the surface to clatter on mower blades. But this first encounter seemed innocent enough. I had walked out onto the deck of my older four-bedroom home, that I had recently purchased, and was surveying my property with the eye of a baron. I had just over five acres, and my lawn around the house gently sloped down to a creek. On the other side of the creek, that once had been a farmer's pasture land, was now a mown field that was anything but manicured. It was, however, neatly cropped and under my control. I breathed in the morning air and felt what was right with the world swirl around and through me. It was when I was exhaling a gray, cool breath of morning air, that I noticed a single brown disturbance directly in the middle, metamorphosing my field into a brown-eyed Cyclops. At this time, I found this image intriguing and amusing, but my curiosity and delight has since waned. Waned is really not an accurate description of the change. That would be like saying a healthy appendage, like a perfectly good foot, waned into a festering green, putrid, yellow gangrenous mass with purple and red decaying tumors. That is how my disposition has "waned" in my relationship with moles.

At first I spent a great deal of time shoveling all the dirt and rocks from the molehills into the wheelbarrow and using it to fill in a low spot. As I did this, my frustration grew as I realized that for every molehill I

removed, the next day two appeared in its place. I then had over twenty-five new molehills. Being a sensitive human being, who captures spiders and releases them outside when my girlfriend, Amy, demands their execution, I was now faced with the dilemma of what to do with these moles. Obviously, being Mr. Nice Guy hadn't worked. I was being forced to take a hard line. Well, there is something to be said for dealing with your enemies from a position of strength, and it was incumbent upon me to strike fast and strike hard, and so, I unleashed the great water campaign. Having three outdoor faucets, I ran three hoses into several of the main runs for over an hour. It was beginning to get dark, so I switched them to three new holes and ran them for another hour. When I came out it was dark and I turned off the hoses by the house. I remember thinking when my head hit the pillow, *if I were a mole I would move to the neighbor's*.

As the light flooded through my sleepy eyes, I was delighted with the realization, I did not dream of moles. I made a conscious decision to not engage my mind with conflict. In making some fresh Brazilian coffee, I took out the golden bag of whole beans and poured some into my grinder. For a minute the beans reminded me of the brown pelts of a mole. I did not resist the thought but simply let it pass through my consciousness. Like a fleeting cloud it disappeared. I pushed the button on the grinder and I imagined the tortured screams of bloody brown mole pelts. I released the thought. Released, released, released.

As the water from the coffee carafe cascaded into the white plastic of my drip machine, I remembered I'd left the third hose on all night. Dashing through the living room and out the sliding door, I arrived just in time to see a piece of lawn slide off the slope in the back field and collide with a mound of muddy debris. "Damn you moles," I screamed as I raced to shut off the water.

My patience had been stretched taut like a bipolar in a manic episode. I have tried all the folk remedies that I had gotten from family, friends, neighbors and even people at checkout lines in stores who feel no reservation about burglarizing a conversation between the checkout clerk

and me. On one such invasion, a complete stranger shared, unsolicited, how her great grandmother would pour day old urine into all the mole holes and she never had another mole problem. Well, I had tried them all from horsehair and steel wool, to Juicy Fruit gum, and none of them had worked.

Slamming drawers and clawing cupboards open, I fell upon the telephone book with homicidal desperation. So far I had been just casually trying to deal with the moles as one gentleman to a rodent, but now I was serious. With trembling hands, I turned the yellow pages through excavating to exterminator. It rolled off my tongue with a sadistic purr. I imagined subterranean terminators with charcoaled-smearred faces, Uzis and Mac 10's strapped to incendiary explosive laden vests. Flame-throwing, target-painting, air-strike professionals with bad hygiene, and that little flicker in the back of their eyes revealing a soul that likes to snap necks and twist heads off little kitties while their pulse rate drops to forty. I had been driven to this now and I called the exterminator. Perhaps my imagination was a bit fertile, but I would never in a thousand years have imagined what fate would bring to me.

He arrived in a Ford pickup with a silver canopy, the name Orkin written in red and "pest control" written in black. He was a chubby, childlike man, somewhere between teenager and adult. He was lost in that vortex of time where life seems to hold those special few in stasis. White as the underbelly of a fish with splotches over his face where his acne still erupted. He approached the house with a silver steel box that held paperwork. On his brown, Orkin shirt was a name tag probably sewn on by his mother that said Danny. My spirits plummeted. I knew in my soul he was not a hunter. I could hear the silent laughter of my moles as they feigned terror with exaggerated trembling and words like, "Now we've done it. He's called," —dramatic pause— "Danny!" followed by howls of laughter.

Danny broke the silence. "Good morning sir. My name is Danny. I understand you have a mole problem."

I tried to take my eyes off of one angry pimple on his forehead that threatened to spontaneously erupt as I responded, "Yes, Danny, I have a mole problem." As I gestured toward the yard and began walking out, he walked past me into the kitchen, pulled out his clipboard and a three-page contract while launching into his pitch.

While he told me what he could do for sixty-five dollars a month and what he could do for an additional fifteen dollars a month, I was imagining what I could do with various parts of his body as plugs for various mole holes. I caught myself drifting into these thoughts and brought myself back into the room with Danny-me-boy. I told myself, while he explained that their two-part system included setting traps and spraying to destroy the mole's food source, "It sounded good. A two-pronged pincer attack; disrupt and destroy their supply lines, capture and crush the furry little blighters." Despair washed away with a new rising hope. This made sense. Let's go out and starve and crush, I thought, but Danny seemed to prefer sitting in the living room talking about the campaign. It was then I noticed that he kept glancing over at the T.V. I thought this was odd. His eyes held some deep attraction and as I watched, I realized my nephew had left his X-Box and Danny-me-boy was like a heroin addict looking at his favorite elixir.

I jumped up, "Let's go into the yard!" His eyes cleared and then pleaded, his body drooped. I dragged him outside like a bad dog, which had lost the power to bend its legs. He wanted to discuss options and play salesman while having erotic fantasies about my electronics. I said, "Danny me boy, let's kill us some moles." He followed me out into the yard exuding a disdain for fresh air and exertion.

His eyes were still glazed over with the thought of the X-Box, as he suffered like a cat in the winter, pressing itself next to a window in an effort to capture escaping heat and a sympathetic eye. I drove him around the yard with the lash of my passion explaining the extent of my problem while kicking a fresh mound of mole eruption. When I tried to get him to go from the lawn around the house to the mown field in back, he balked.

He began backing up and his nostrils flared and before I realized what had happened we were back in my kitchen signing contracts and eating bagels smeared with peanut butter and raspberry jam. Danny loved peanut butter and raspberry jam.

Before Danny left he got out a canister with a hose and spray nozzle and went around spraying the yard. This was to eradicate the food supply. He then took out three metal traps and placed them in the mole holes with a bit of dirt over them. He did this all without crossing the creek and going into the backyard. When he was departing he assured me that someone else would be by to spray again and check the traps.

The moles thrived under this Orkin campaign and my hope was once again replaced by a growing despair. Each morning I would go out and check the traps without disturbing them and I would discover they were empty. I called the Orkin office every three days and they told me to be patient and asked if I would like to extend my five-week contract or have some nitrogen put in my lawn. I tried the nitrogen and although it didn't improve the lawn, it did add new luster to the mole's coats. I knew from the beginning these peanut butter and jam eating doughboys couldn't help me. I could feel it in my soul. They were business people, not hunters and I needed a hunter.

After a barrage of telephone complaints to Orkin, Mike arrived. As we walked the property he discovered the traps were not functioning, "These damn things are too old and they are in all the wrong places. Let's get some of mine out of the truck."

Liking his use of damn and not wanting to break this spell of new vitality and rising hope, I allowed the "lets" to stand and followed him to the truck. I asked, "Have you ever met Danny?"

He replied, "Danny?" with a quizzical look.

"Yeah, he was the guy who put in the traps."

"No, I've never met Danny but I just started working Friday and this is a big outfit." I liked his use of outfit. It conjured up images of farmers and ranchers. People familiar with varmints. After replacing the

traps, Mike also sprayed, assuring me when the food supply for the moles is disrupted the ones who survive the traps will move to "greener pastures."

Two weeks had passed and the moles had survived the traps. The day was new and stirred with new possibilities. The night before I had seen a commercial that lauded the virtues of an electronic device that drove moles away. The ad claimed moles cannot tolerate the subsonic vibrations. I believed! We were in the information and electronic age, and it was time to put my faith in the stainless steel god of science. Although I didn't understand the particulars, I realized through the empiricism of the scientific method, that put Voyager on the Red Planet, a relatively simple problem such as moles would hardly flex the intellectual muscle of this new god. So with hope and faith, I drove into the city, for our little county store had not fully embraced the modernity of the coming millennium.

I entered the automatic glass doors of a home improvement store that stretched for eternity. A collection of thoughts, inventions and technology glistened under the fluorescent lights. A man with a name tag and a colored vest greeted me at the door. I felt like I had finally come home... back to the world of technology, where man had assembled an array of things to bend, shape, and manipulate the unpredictable forces of that wild ass bitch, nature and her little minions, the mole people. Excuse the digression, I meant where man had employed technology and the grace of science to control and adapt a hostile environment. Where with a switch and a system, one can have 70 degrees of comfort no matter what the ambient temperature is.

After walking by many devices I didn't see the mole zapper thing. A fear surfaced. What if I couldn't find it? How could I ask for something when I'd forgotten what it was called? Was it a Ronco Rodent Repeller? Hmm, no. Was it a Sunbeam Silent Mole Slapper? Hmmm, how could I go up and ask someone for a mole zapper? Will they think I am nuts? Everyone looked weird under those fluorescent lights. I passed three employees with those colored vests and name tags but I just kept looking for

a while longer. So I pressed on. I couldn't find it. Thirty minutes passed. God, it was a big store. I thought should ask someone, "Do you have that electronic device that repels moles?" Then I passed another colored vest. Thinking I'd grab the next one, thirty minutes lapsed. Where did they all go? I hadn't seen an employee for some time now and I found myself in the plywood section in some remote enclave of the store. In fact, I was not sure I could find my way to the front door. Furthermore, the four cups of coffee I drank earlier began swelling my bladder and there were absolutely no bathrooms anywhere. If I could just have found my way back to the front of the store, I am sure the old greeter guy would have helped me. God, I had to pee. I felt like I was suffocating in fluorescent lights and hardware. Trapped in a maze of shelves that rose to the ceiling, a part of me wanted to sit down and weep and another part wanted relief. So I pressed on.

Somehow I found my way back to the front of the store. I was delighted to find greeter still there. He saw me approaching and seemed to pull himself back from some distant thoughts. I imagined him remembering Lincoln's inaugural speech or a Booth Tarkington book-signing. But in fact, he was simply between thoughts, dreaming of a dollar off coupon from the pharmacy. I asked, "Do you know where the mole zapper things are?"

His eyes came clearly into focus and he replied. "They're right over there," while pointing to a sale table right in front of the checkout stand. Looking a little sheepish, I thanked him and headed over to the table that I must have passed when I came in. Either they had set it up while I was wandering in the bowels of home improvement or when I came in I, like the greeter, had simply been between thoughts.

Red and golden dots pulsated on the back of my eyelids where the sun sliced through my bedroom window illuminating a new day. I rose with hope in the stainless steel new day with surgically scrubbed blessings and an empirical faith. Better living through chemistry pulsated through my mind saturating my fears with euphoria. I walked into the kitchen

of modernity as my red L. E. D. displayed on my coffee pot flashed the message: Good Morning, Good Morning, Good Morning, joining in the rhythm that had seemed to pervade my sleep. I marveled at the technology that held back the darkness. I opened the freezer and took out the whole beans that were grown at a certain altitude in Columbia, picked at ripe perfection, spirited from another world and brought here for me. I poured them into my electric grinder and pulverized them for my pleasure. I sat in my living room meditating while the coffee dripped. I simply let thoughts pass through me like clouds of delusions. I did not resist or desire. The pulsating returned. It continued its subtle throbbing. My nose itched, but I resisted scratching. It continued to itch in cadence with the throbbing. I watched the patterns of my mind. Irritation clung to the edge of the pulsing. It activated a vein on the side of my forehead. The vein began to throb with the cadence. I continued to breathe. I simply focused on my breathing until I could no longer stand it.

"What the hell is that noise?" I shouted. I opened my eyes and listened. By God, I still heard it. It was that mole zapper.

I hurried into the kitchen, abandoning my efforts at meditation and poured myself a cup of coffee. I strolled through the living room and opened the glass door. I walked out onto the deck, its cedar planks laden with tiny beads of dew that my water seal resisted and repelled demonstrating once again the power of science. With a twinge of doubt, I looked to the east where I heard the pulsating mole zapper. I took a look. Just a quick look and my heart skipped a beat. Where there had been one molehill, where I had placed the mole zapper previously, there were now seven new mounds surrounding the zapper as if the moles had gathered around a campfire to roast their worms.

It was at this moment the pulsating struck a chord deep within my psyche and I dropped my coffee smashing the porcelain and disgorging the contents onto the deck. I charged the zapper like a maniacal bull and flung it over the three-strand barbed wire fence into the neighboring thicket and blackberry patch. My faith in the stainless steel god of science



crumpled like fast-food foil and something boiled over inside of me and I screamed, "Damn you moles!" It was then, that Amy appeared in an open window and with a withering tone said, "Will you please just leave those poor little moles alone," before closing it in disgust. Now alone in the mud slide battlefield that once had been my yard, I stood humiliated with Amy's voice still vibrating in my ear to the cadence of the mole zapper that continued incessantly and now quite irretrievable from the blackberry patch.