

**Carnivorous  
Crickets  
of  
Colorado**

# 1

When most people think of the word ‘carnivore,’ they tend to think of vicious, meat-eating creatures, such as dinosaurs or tigers. Or sharks, killer whales, polar bears . . . any number of animals around the world that prefer eating meat over plants. After all, that’s what the word carnivore means: any animal that eats meat.

But *crickets*?

No one—including myself—would ever think of tiny crickets as dangerous predators. Crickets are just harmless, little insects that make soothing, chirping sounds by rubbing their wings together. Some crickets chirp during the day, some

chirp all night long. They eat vegetation, not meat.

And there are different kinds of crickets: camel crickets, bush crickets, ant crickets, spider crickets, sand crickets, and more. In some countries, crickets are considered a delicacy, and people actually *eat* them! That just seems *so* gross. You would never catch me eating an insect in a million years. I don't care if I was starving. Just the thought of putting a bug in my mouth and chewing it up makes me want to puke. Yuck.

Most people in America are familiar with common field crickets that are found just about everywhere. These are small, shiny, black crickets that usually get no bigger than an inch. They're harmless. Field crickets are tiny and innocent and have never posed a threat to human beings. There has never been a good reason to be afraid of average, ordinary field crickets . . . until one horrifying day last summer in Aspen, Colorado.

But it had nothing to do with harmless, little crickets. No, the madness that began that horrible day wasn't because of small, chirping insects. It

was caused by gigantic, predatory monsters—  
enormous field crickets of huge proportions—all  
brought about by an experiment that went  
horribly, horribly wrong.



# 2

My name is Kendra Delaney, and I live in Aspen, Colorado. Although I've lived here all of my life and I've been to only a few other states, I can tell you that Aspen is probably one of the prettiest places in the United States. Sure, there are many other great places in the country. But Aspen has everything that I love: mountains, forests, rivers, streams, and lakes. The people are very friendly and nice.

But best of all, Aspen has snow. Tons and tons and tons of snow. Not all year, of course.

However, during the winter, it's common to get several feet of snow and even more farther up in the mountains.

Which is one of the reasons why Aspen is one of the most popular skiing destinations . . . not only in the country, but in the world. People come from all over to ski the fresh, powdery snow and take in the beautiful, majestic surroundings of Aspen.

I'm a great skier and snowboarder. My dad taught me how to do both when I was very little, so skiing and snowboarding are as natural to me as walking or running. Winter, as you can imagine, is my very favorite time of year. Oh, there's nothing wrong with summertime. I like the warm weather, hiking in the woods, and swimming in the pool, lakes, and rivers.

It's just that I love winter so very, very much. All summer long, I look forward to our first snowfall. I look forward to the ski resorts opening up. I look forward to wearing my cold-weather gear and hanging out with my friends on the

slopes.

But there is another reason altogether why I like winter better than summer. Winter is the time when the animals hibernate, the time for insects to go away. But spring always follows winter, and summer follows spring . . . which means the return of mosquitoes, bees, grasshoppers, houseflies, and all sorts of other insects.

Including crickets.

I know it sounds silly, but just the sound of that word—*crickets*—makes my blood turn cold and my skin turn to ice. I imagine you would feel the same way, too, if what happened to me happened to you.

Looking back, I should have known that something was wrong in July of last year. Two of my friends—Kiersten Cooper and Bryson Hatfield—and I had been hiking in the woods on a trail near our house. The trail winds through a thick forest, but there are also sections of rock that jut up into the air like canyon walls. The path

passes by an old abandoned farm with several barns and a large pasture. Never before had we seen anyone in or around the old farm.

Until one day last July.

Bryson was the first to see something unusual, and he stopped walking. I was right behind him, followed by Kiersten, and the two of us stopped, too.

“Look at that,” Bryson said.

Kiersten and I stepped around Bryson to have a look. In the driveway of the old abandoned farm was a big box truck about half the size of a semi-trailer. It sort of resembled a giant, square bug, with a white cab for its head and a white block for its body. On the side of the box was a cartoon character of a large, black cricket. Above the insect were the words

*Carpenter’s Cricket Farm*

*Cricket for Any Purpose*

“What does that mean?” Kiersten asked. “I

mean . . . what do you use crickets for?”

Bryson shrugged. “My dad uses them for fishing bait,” he said. “He usually buys them at the sporting goods store. I guess I never thought about where crickets came from.”

“That’s it, then,” I said. “They’re probably going to raise crickets and sell them to sporting goods stores, so they can sell them to fishermen.”

At the time, it seemed a little strange that someone would try to raise crickets in Aspen, Colorado. I guess I just figured that the cold weather would kill the crickets in the winter, and I thought that there might be other places in the country that would be better to raise insects, somewhere warmer, like maybe Arizona or California. Or maybe some of the southern states like Mississippi, Alabama, or Georgia.

While we watched, a man walked to the back of the truck. He raised a large door that rolled up, and what we saw made our jaws drop.

Inside the truck were two *gigantic* crickets, nearly as tall as the man himself!



# 3

The three of us were spellbound, horrified, and mystified.

*“Holy cow,” Bryson breathed. “Look at those things.”*

However, after a moment, we realized what we were seeing. The crickets weren’t alive; they were simply large replicas of insects. While we watched, the man called to yet another man who came to his assistance. Together, they pulled out a ramp stowed away beneath the truck and carefully carried the two monstrous insects out of the white

box, placing the motionless, giant bugs in the grass. Now that they were out of the truck and in the open, we could see that the characteristics of the insects were over exaggerated and cartoon-like.

“They must be using them as advertisements,” Kiersten said.

“I’d like to have one of those in my front yard,” Bryson said. “Could you imagine what people would think when they drove by? At a glance, those things look real.”

I laughed. “Yeah,” I said. “That would be pretty funny, all right.”

Just then, one of the men turned and looked in our direction. I waved, and the man waved back.

“Let’s go and say hi,” I said, and the three of us began walking again.

When we arrived at the truck, the two men were leaning against it, resting. Nearby, the two gigantic cricket statues glistened in the sun.

“Hi,” I said, waving my hand.

“Hello,” one of the men said. He was wearing blue jeans, a red T-shirt, and a white baseball cap.

“Are you moving in?” Bryson asked.

The man with the baseball cap nodded. “That’s right,” he said. “Still have a lot of work to do to get the place ready, though.”

Kiersten pointed at the two enormous cricket statues. “Are you guys opening a cricket farm?”

The other man was wearing brown overalls with a white T-shirt. He had thick, long, dark brown hair pulled into a ponytail.

“Right again,” he said. “I’m Bill Carpenter, and this is my brother, Brad.”

Brad, wearing a baseball cap, nodded.

“Are you raising crickets so you can sell them?” I asked. I know it seemed like a silly question, but I was still a bit mystified as to why someone would have a cricket farm in Colorado.

Bill Carpenter nodded. “We’ve been raising crickets our entire life,” he said. “We sell them to sporting goods stores and pet stores.”

Bryson frowned. "Pet stores?" he said. "People have crickets for pets?"

Bill and Brad Carpenter erupted into laughter.

"No, no," Brad said, shaking his head. "We sell them to pet stores, and they sell them to people who feed the crickets to their pets."

Again, Bryson frowned. "You mean dogs and cats eat crickets?"

Once again, Bill and Brad broke into a fit of laughter.

"Of course not," Bill said. "But lots of people have exotic pets like lizards, iguanas, snakes, and tarantulas. They need to eat, just like any other pet."

I guess I'd never thought of that. But, then again, I've never had a pet like that. We have a cat named Spaceman, and all we feed him, of course, is cat food.

Kiersten pointed to an address and a telephone number on the side of the truck. "Is that where you're from?" she asked. "Louisiana?"

Bill and Brad nodded. “We still have an operation in Baton Rouge,” Brad answered. “But we want to try an experiment, and we need a location that has colder temperatures for five or six months out of the year.”

“And Aspen seemed like the perfect place,” Bill continued. “The summers here are warm, and the winters are cold with lots of snow. That’s what we need for our experiment.”

I was just about to ask another question, but Kiersten beat me to it.

“What kind of experiment?” she asked.

Bill and Brad looked at each other. They seemed reluctant to speak. Finally, Brad replied.

“Well,” he said, “we just can’t say right now. Cricket farming is a competitive business, and we don’t want any of our competitors to find out what we’re up to. If our experiment works, we’ll have the biggest cricket farming operation in the country, and quite possibly the entire world.”

“We’ll be famous,” Bill said, with a proud nod.

While we had no idea what their experiment was all about, we would soon learn one thing for sure: it was going to backfire in the worst way imaginable . . . and it wouldn't be long before Kiersten, Bryson, and I were in a battle with giant insects, fighting for our lives.

# 4

Fall came, followed by winter, and it was one of the best seasons ever. It snowed and snowed and snowed from October through April. There was always fresh snow on the slopes and in the woods. On top of that, we had a number of snow days, and school was canceled. On those days, Bryson, Kiersten, and I went snowboarding and skiing.

And by the time the snow melted in the spring, by the time the days were getting warmer, and I began to notice a few flowers blooming and insects buzzing around, I'd forgotten all about the

Carpenter brothers and their cricket farming operation in the old farmhouse in the woods . . . until one day in June when I noticed something very strange in the woods not far from our house.

I had called Bryson and Kiersten to see if they wanted to go to a nearby park, but Bryson had a dentist appointment, and Kiersten was busy helping her mom with something. It was a nice day, so I decided to go for a walk in the woods. I took our cat, Spaceman. We adopted Spaceman a couple of years ago. Actually, it was Spaceman who adopted us. He showed up on our doorstep one day, skinny and scraggly. We took him in, and to my surprise, Mom and Dad really liked him. It was Dad's idea to call him Spaceman, because he was all black with white around his face. He looked like he was wearing a white space helmet.

The funny thing is that Spaceman thinks he's a dog. He follows me around everywhere, especially when we're outside. Although we keep him in our house, he likes to go on walks with me.

He walks right behind me and never runs away. He doesn't seem the least bit interested in catching mice or birds, either. And at night, he curls up and sleeps at the foot of my bed. He loves attention and affection, and he loves it when I scratch him behind his ears and rub his back.

On this particular day, I set out on the trail that winds through the woods behind our house. Spaceman was right behind me. The day was sunny and warm. Birds chirped in the trees, and once in a while a mosquito buzzed by my head.

I continued walking along the trail until I saw the old farmhouse in the distance. I had forgotten all about the Carpenter brothers and their cricket farm, but now I wondered how they were doing and whether their experiment, whatever it was, had worked. Probably not, because I hadn't heard or seen anything about them on television or in the newspapers. If their experiment had worked, they thought they would be famous. Apparently, that wasn't the case.

Suddenly, I was struck with the feeling that

I was being watched, and I stopped on the trail. I slowly turned my head, peering through the woods, around branches and tree limbs. Spaceman rubbed against my leg, arching his back and purring. He didn't seem to sense that anything or anyone was watching us.

Still, I had an odd feeling, and I couldn't shake it.

I looked at the old farmhouse in the distance. It was too far away to really see much of anything, except a large barn and part of the house. There didn't seem to be anyone around.

Brushing off my uneasiness, I took a step forward . . . and that's when something exploded from its hiding place in the bushes and came right at me.