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RECLINE AT YOUR OWN RISK

BY JAMES J. COLLINS

Purchasing a recliner should not be damaging to your health. Mine tried to kill me.

The recliner came into our lives filled with promise, fresh from the factory with only a short sojourn at the show room. Since we had purchased it in New Hampshire, we expected that it might have an independent nature. After all a state that has as its license plate title "Live free or die," tends to raise nonconformist personalities, and this can rub off to other elements of the environment. However, nothing prepared us for the actual experience. You have to understand, this recliner didn't come with a warning tag. In retrospect it should have had a large red tag that proclaimed 'DON'T TURN YOUR BACK ON THIS CHAIR.'

Round soft warm and inviting the dark brown recliner was one of a pair that my wife and I had decided to splurge on after several years of pushing the old furniture,"just a couple of more months." We went to the show room and looked at the wide selection, and each settled upon a design that suited our own personal tastes. Hers was high-backed, with a very pleasant pattern a little more fashionable rather than comfortable. Mine, however, was large and massive capable of holding my two hundred pounds as gently as you would cradle an egg. Cunningly designed, you could place it two inches from a wall, extend it fully, lift your feet up, and it was still only two inches from the same wall. On the right hand side was a lever that you used to advance and lock the mechanism in its three positions. It would move your feet from resting flat on the floor, through two intermediate orientations, to a position where they were elevated slightly above your head; all in all a very comfortable chair in which to rest and sleep.

The recliners showed up with as much pomp and ceremony as royalty. Two men in a large truck arrived and opened the large doors to display the chairs. Unloading followed a ritual with each man gingerly carrying the base of one chair which was precisely positioned in it's

respective position in the family room. They went back and got the seat backs which were assembled with great care, sat in the chairs and ran them through the entire repertoire of commands. Then they gave us specific instructions in the care and feeding of our chairs; told us we would have no problems with them what so ever, and left.....They lied!

Two weeks after joining our happy little family, the first of the episodes began. Easing into my chair, after a hard day's work, I was getting ready to watch my favorite TV show. Snacks were set on the side table, my newspapers and a book were in place, the reading lamp was adjusted and I settled back. As the chair slid forward to its predetermined position, I reached down for the lever and exercised it to bring my feet up to position three, fully reclined. As the lever advanced, position one went through smoothly, and position two stopped. This had not happened before. The mechanism is such that you can't go back down to position one without first going up to position three. Since it refused to go through position two, I was in a dilemma. I was now caught, stuck half way back, with my feet half way up in the air and was unable to get out of this massive chair. I attempted to slide the chair back to enable me to raise my back up to a vertical position where I could exercise some control and get out of the chair. But lo and behold, the chair refused to budge. It had set itself in place like a center for the L.A. Rams, and was not to be moved.

When you're six foot two, two hundred pounds, you don't go through life walking on egg shells. You learn that the world is a very big place, and you have to bring a little pressure to bear to get things done. So since my motto is "If it doesn't work, use a bigger hammer," it was necessary to lean into the lever figuring something minor was stuck. This really irritated the chair. The foot rest obediently went to position three, elevating my feet, and a loud CLUUNKK could be heard out of the chair as I felt my lower extremities drop another two inches closer to the floor. The noise was the first indication that something was wrong, something significant that is. Until this point the chair was just acting stubborn, now it was acting malicious. I was caught, head down, with my feet over my head, the chair dragging on the floor, waving my arms trying to get help to get out of the chair. The chair had also religiously stayed two inches from the wall, so there was no way to go out the back of the chair, and, with the tables on each side, I was effectively pinned in. My wife and two of my sons came in to witness this event, and after fifteen minutes of laughing on their part, they condescended to come over and help me out of the recliner. To do this, they had to remove

the two tables on either side, and my sons who are in the six foot category had to lever me out of the chair. Once relieved of my bulk, the chair seemed to recover. It responded quite easily to moving the handle and went right back to its normal mode. We could no longer replicate the noise, the hang up, or the drop. When we turned the chair over everything seemed perfectly normal in the complicated mechanism underneath. So the chair smiled to itself at its duplicity and sat back and waited.

The next time the chair decided to spring a trap on me, it waited until my sons were out of the house. It knew it would get me. You have to recognize that this was a very smart chair. It didn't attack until it had you in its clutches. You could sit in that chair all day long in the upright position, and move the control arm and foot rest through all positions. If you had your feet elevated, but you were in a position where you could spring out, it worked. It worked like a well oiled machine, smooth and clean, no noise, no treachery. In this position you could even slide forward carefully, poised to leap out at the first sign of a sneak attack. But the chair was patient and it would wait. It waited till you were relaxed; till you were fully extended; till you were in a weakened condition, and then, . . . it pounced.

It wasn't until several episodes had occurred that I learned its modus operandi (M.O.).It waited till you were totally off guard; truly tired; till you had sunk way back anticipating the rest of the weary. It waited till you first slid forward, fully extended. It sensed your feeling of relaxation. It waited till you put your hand on the control arm. It felt for that limpness of body associated with the exhausted. It let you go through position one, the point of no return. It waited till you approached position two, and then it struck.

CLUNNNKK BAAAMMMM CLICCKKKK JAM

It was as if your feet were grabbed by a noose and you were extended feet first overhead to a tree. You were now captured body down, feet up, constrained on either side and from behind. Forward was the high ground and the chair held it. In any military confrontation, the one who holds the high ground has a decided advantage. The attacker has to climb the hill expending his energy. The defender has the high ground, and is able to rain death and destruction on his opponents. This chair must have trained under Napoleon.

Now I was faced with the reality of my position. The chair had me; I was alone in the house; and the chair knew it. I had two choices. I could sit in the chair in this compromised position, and wait till help came. But I did not know when they were due home, and I knew if

I dozed off, the chair would finish me off. So I had to go to plan two. I had to risk all, and get out of the chair.

First, I hoisted myself up with my arms by pressing down on the arms of the recliner and drew my legs down and folded them under me. Next, I lifted myself forward on my knees. The chair rocked ominously. I settled back, and the chair relaxed. It was playing cat and mouse with me. Then my right foot was moved forward on the upraised foot rest. It now looked like a diving board, and I knew there was no water below to stop my fall.

I had two choices, move slowly and allow the chair time to counter attack, or move quickly and try to take it by surprise. I opted for the latter. I leaped forward throwing my weight onto the foot rest, but the chair was waiting for me. It collapsed the foot rest, dropping me to the floor, kicked back and rolled over like a horse trying to pin me underneath its bulk. But having ridden a few nasty horses, I was ready and rolled to the right. The chair continued forward and ended right side up after completing a full forward roll. For an instant, in my mind's eye, it looked like a sumo wrestler squat and ominous. Then, the image passed. I thought for a second that the chair was trying to turn. Just then I heard my wife open the front door. "Hi, I'm home," she cried, and the chair stopped. I now knew that I was facing a master. This chair was really smart.

I related the events to my family that night and all I got were laughs. They wanted to check the coffee and the tea to see what had been added to them. I even had to demonstrate to them, using the test given to drivers for DWI, that I was cold sober. They still didn't believe me.

But the chair had made a major mistake, I was now forewarned, and I had survived its first great onslaught. So now I arranged my tactics. Immediately, I removed the tables on each side. No more would the chair have the advantage of having flanking support elements I could now escape from either side, or from the front. I thought the chair would concede, but I had underestimated the tenacity of the chair.

One of my sons was drafted by me, as we disassembled the chair and took it back to the store. The owner said, "no problem, leave it in the shop for a couple of days and we'll get it right back to you." Five days later, he called and said, "we found a few metal bars that were bent and we replaced them. The chair works perfectly but we would like to know how you bent them up like that." I tried to explain that it wasn't me that it was the chair, but he

wasn't buying it. So I went back to retrieve the chair and we went to round two.

We each had a short rest, but unfortunately the chair had a chance to develop some new tactics. I was ready for the old antics, but chair had added a few new frills. Sending a chair back to a store for repair must be like sending a first time criminal into the penitentiary. There they meet hardened criminals, three time losers, the hard core members of the furniture mafia. There they learn new tricks, new ways to get even. I had sent the chair back, hoping to rehabilitate it. Little did I know that the recidivism for repaired recliners is very high.

Next the chair turned to a guerilla warfare strategy . It was no longer willing to make a head on assault. Instead it picked away, little by little, at my patience and my pocket. It tried to demoralize me by its cunning and its scorched earth tactics. On a regular basis, change was extracted from my pockets any time I leaned back. Unfortunately, the change could never be found. You could hear it rattling down through the mechanism and you would expect to find it on the floor under the chair. But search as you might, it was gone forever. Pocket combs, pencils and keys and anything else that could be extracted from your pockets was taken. The larger functional items were ground up by the mechanism, so that they were no longer useful. The chair was being petty. Any one else who would sit in the chair also had their pockets picked. However, when they rose out of the chair all their paraphernalia was left in a very orderly array on the seat of the chair. Apparently its vendetta was only with me, and it wanted me to know. Like an old fashioned feud, vengeance is sweeter when the victim knows where his distress is coming from. The chair was always watchful, waiting for that unique opportunity when it could show its true colors. I thought that the chair had capitulated and was falling back on these minor tactics to show its independence and to maintain pride by demonstrating its rebellious nature. . . The sign of a conquered but defiant people. The chair, however, did not agree with my assessment.

It waited until the day I sat down with a hot cup of soup and a newspaper. As I went back carefully, and reached for the control arm, the old tactic was sprung upon me.

CLUNNNKK BAAAMMMM CLICCKKKK JAM

Hot soup was liberally applied to my lap and my chest.

This time I got out of the chair like a shot by launching myself over the side and I was frantically fanning myself trying to cool off the singed portions of my anatomy. I had been

professionally ambushed. It might have been my imagination, but I thought I heard a chuckle from the chair.

The recliner went back to the shop where an identical diagnosis was generated. The parts that were found to be destroyed were replaced, and the chair was purportedly functioning as delivered from the factory..

To make a long story short, there were eight more episodes, which required the chair to be returned to the store. In each case a number of structural elements were replaced, but the owner could find nothing wrong with the chair. On the eighth trip, I set it down on the floor at the show room. and requested the owner to get into the chair, relax and go through the prescribed ritual He assured me there was no problem with the chair but he would humor me. For four separate attempts, I watched him exercise the chair perfectly. He was starting to get impatient and said, "There's nothing wrong with this chair. I'm wasting my time. If it was broken, it would have shown up by now, besides there's nothing that can go wrong with one of these that I can't fix.." The chair must have heard his challenge, for on the fifth excursion, all heard,

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The owner had to be helped out of the chair by his assistant and myself. His comment was, "Oh, this is what you mean. I've never seen this problem before, one of the engineers will have to look at it. We'll have to send it back to the factory".

The factory must be located in Outer Mongolia. The recliner went on a truck and was gone for two month. I suspected that the chair was sent into solitary confinement because of the length of the stay. This may be the accepted method of retraining a recalcitrant recliner. Upon its return, the owner called me down to the shop to see what had been done. Proudly, he turned the chair over to demonstrate what the factory had wrought. The wooden frame had been replaced; new metal frames had been installed; special reinforcements had been added; new bearings were in evidence as were new counter balances. They had done everything to the chair except give it a forward lobotomy. The owner said, "Whatever was wrong with the chair has probably been taken out with the replaced parts. We've almost totally rebuilt it for you. You should have no more problems." . . . Again they lied!

Now, I don't know what the chair learned at the factory, but it must have had access to power tools. On the six month anniversary of our original meeting, it decided to get even

again. This time it ran out a brand new tactic. When I extended the foot rest, it didn't jam, rather it dropped two six inch long lag bolts, and the whole mechanism skewed. It lay there looking like a drunken erector set. After this, no matter what I did, I couldn't get it to fold up. My son and I decided to load this elongated accordion with rigor mortis into the rear of my hatch back. As I was lifting it into the back, it was ten inches over the deck of the car when it suddenly closed trying to shear off my fingers in its scissors mechanism. Luckily, I was too fast for it and extracted my fingers in time. I never trusted that chair and my vigilance paid off. To this day, I believe the last snap that I heard as the chair hit the deck reminded me of a person snapping their fingers when they have just missed an opportunity.

When the owner saw us arrive, he threw up his hands in dismay. He stated,"if I had one more chair like that out there, I would take gas." I know the feeling.

Well the chair has been repaired for, I hope, the final time. It sits in the family room and glares defiantly at me. When I sit down it now lets out a low growl and vibrates menacingly. Yesterday, I put an ad in the papers

FOR SALE

One recliner; almost new ; best offer; warrantee included; will deliver

As I called in the ad, I swear I heard the chair chuckle again. It knows it won!

THE END

THE RECLINER

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