

TENANT TROUBLES

Think your living conditions stink? Chances are you're living the high life compared to these two luckless students.

I just can't get them out of my bed

Concordia's Terrine Friday recounts the attack of the super pests

MONTREAL—Hi, my name is Terrine, and I had a bedbug problem.

The popular bedtime rhyme is familiar to us all: "Good night, sleep tight, don't let the bedbugs bite." But who knew that therein would lie such a horrid truth?

The bedbug, a tiny blood-sucking pest, has recently resurfaced in North America after a 50-plus-year hiatus. The tiny suckers are visible to the naked eye but are incredible at playing hide-and-seek. Bedbugs are most commonly found in the seams of mattresses and box springs, in wood furniture, and in your bedding. Bedbug bites are red, very itchy, and often found in multiples of threes.

They devastate the lives of many and appear when you least expect them: after a relaxing vacation, during the mid-semester rush, or between final exams. Most importantly, they fester in neighbourhoods with high turnover rates—areas such as student ghettos.

This may make you think twice about dumpster-diving for cheap finds.

In order to conquer the bedbug debacle, I reached out for some info and soon realized that I was not alone.

Georgia Shearman is a Concordia University student who had the time of her life dealing with bedbugs this fall.

"People don't really understand how difficult it was to deal with," she said. Shearman isn't sure about where the bedbugs in her apartment came from, but she believes that other tenants in the same building had prior bedbug outbreaks.

Shearman's situation became so catastrophic that she decided to move. Just to be on the safe side, she also bought a new bed, couch, and pillows. The new furniture and consecutive loads of laundry amounted to over \$1000, which is often more than the average student budget allots on a whim.

of the MORE House outbreak. "We hired a cleaning company."

Unfortunately for some, it was too little, too late: "One guy's grad suit was destroyed."

Johnson couldn't confirm how the bedbugs invaded the MORE House; however, she believes that they took over soon after a resident moved a couch in from off the street. The bedbug ordeal in the new residence started after a student came back from visiting family in the United States. Although Johnson had experience dealing with other pests, she didn't have an action plan for bedbugs.

"Even the pest control people were trying new things," she said.

The Concordia Off-Campus Housing service knows exactly how to help students in a pesty situation.

"You need to contact the city inspectors after advising your landlord by registered mail," Stephanie Smith, an assistant at the housing office, explained. She referred to a handout with simple, three-step instructions. Once the city inspectors visit your residence, they complete an assessment on behalf of the municipal government. The owner of the building under investigation then gets a copy of the assessment, which may or may not detail health infractions.

Smith has heard about the lingering bedbug situation from Concordia students more recently.

"They're not like roaches or mice," she pointed out. "Bedbugs are very hard to get rid of."

What's difficult to accept is that bedbugs will never really be extinct. DDT, a synthetic pesticide, was the standard extermination treatment for bedbugs. This mostly removed them from the face of North America. When DDT was banned for its harmful effects on the environment, exterminators and pest controllers developed new products to zero in on other vermin.

The only problem is that they forgot to develop a formula for bedbugs. Aside from the fact that bedbugs can be dormant for up to a full year in your bed and environs, they're now stronger and more chemical-resistant than ever. This means that there is currently no safe, yet still effective way to permanently get rid of them—and I had to learn the hard way.

After throwing out my old bed, buying a new one, doing some serious laundry duty, immersing the legs of my new bed in water and washing the

frame with vinegar water, changing my sheets every other night, sweeping and vacuuming consistently, and three rounds of extermination, the bedbugs didn't want to budge. Everything short of pouring table salt around my bed and doing a traditional voodoo dance was done to salvage my apartment and my sanity. I therefore decided that if they weren't going to move, I would. The problem? I had a binding lease. The outcome? I moved anyways.

This doesn't mean that you can, or should, break your lease if you are hosting a bedbug bonanza in your apartment. In order to abandon your lease, the city inspectors must rule your living quarters to be inadequate. If this isn't the case, you must have more than sufficient evidence that the living situation is not up to par.

Jonathan Elston, coordinator at the Concordia Housing office, walked me through the risks of breaking my lease.

"You must call the Rental Board so that they are aware of your situation," he advised. Elston then presented me with a list of bases to cover and people to call. Finally, it all seemed to come together as I weighed my options: continue to roam the streets of Montreal with bedbug lesions on my face, trunk, and arms, or move and run the risk of being sued. I decided to go with the latter.

I'm not suggesting that one should make the same decision under similar circumstances. I was scrupulous with my paperwork and research. I am, therefore, confident that I can live in peace today.

After spending over \$1200 in order to ensure that I was indeed sleeping alone, I must say that the benefits are worth the steep price. Moving mid-semester is an option for those who can manage the finances, but may be unthinkable for many.

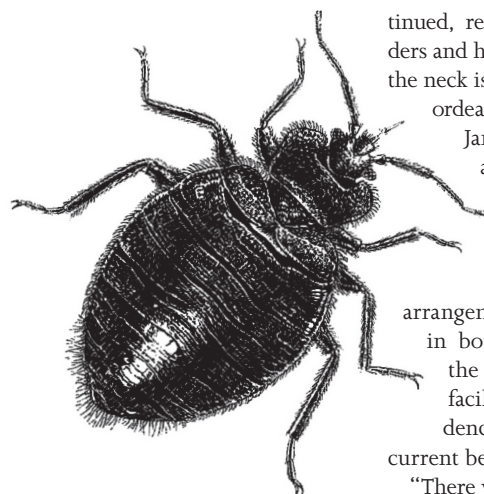
The thought of sleeping alongside pests may make you squirm, but in the long run, they're not dire to your physical health—they're only dire to your sleep quality, social life, self-esteem, thriving sex life, soundness of mind, and academic performance. If the latter don't outweigh the financial cost, then I suggest you surrender with your white flag in tow and get to know your new roommates a little better. If you can't beat them, you might as well join them.

—Terrine Friday

The Link (Concordia University)

After throwing out my old bed, buying a new one, doing some serious laundry duty, immersing the legs of my new bed in water and washing the frame with vinegar water, changing my sheets every other night, sweeping and vacuuming consistently, and three rounds of extermination, the bedbugs didn't want to budge.

My bedbug dilemma was costly and time-consuming. It's very difficult to get rid of the nasty critters and almost impossible to know exactly where they came from. They can be transported in your bags, on your clothing, or from suitcase to suitcase at the bottom of a Greyhound bus. It's very common for them to linger in old furniture as well.



Shearman's roommate appeared to be bite-free, while Shearman was suffering in silent agony. Although bedbugs normally invade an entire household, they can remain predominantly in one room once they've found a suitable host. According to Pest Control Canada, some people have no reaction to bedbug bites.

"I still have scars," Shearman continued, referring to both her shoulders and her psyche. A random itch of the neck is a constant reminder of the ordeal she went through.

Janice Johnson is the manager of Student Housing at McGill University.

Last year during the fall semester, she had to find alternative housing arrangements for students living in both the new residence and the MORE Houses—shared facilities houses serving as residences at McGill—due to concurrent bedbug crises.

"There were 15 people living in the house, so it got to everybody," she said