

Tilting at Bed Bugs

How I exterminated a light bed bug infestation in my home all on my own with no chemicals or heat treatments in 2023

by GinUp

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This is a crazy story, all the crazier because it's true.

It started in mid-March, 2023. I was in the living room of my one bedroom apartment, sitting on my daybed that I'd tricked out as a couch, reading a novel on my iPhone, just as I did almost every day all day. I noticed a bug on my t-shirt, walking in a line from my left shoulder to my right hip. I didn't recognize it and I was really into the story I was reading, so I just flicked the bug away. Two days later, another bug did almost the same walk. I flicked it away. Next day, another bug, same path. I squished it dead with a tissue. I said, "What's wrong with these bugs!! Are they nuts?! Why are they doing this?!"

A couple days later, the backs of my thighs were really itchy, so I scratched. When I got ready for bed that night, I noticed I had a hell of a rash covering the backs of both thighs. I said, "What the ...?!" and went to bed. Next day, both my bum cheeks were itchy, and that night, rashes there too. I thought I might be suddenly allergic to something that got on the decorative bedspread I covered the daybed with, so I looked for something to put on top of that. I had a few blankets to choose from, and, fortuitously picked a fuzzy fleece one; non-binary flag colours on one side and white on the other. (Now the thing is, even though I had a double bed in the bedroom of my apartment, I had been sleeping every night on the twin-sized daybed in the living room for at least two weeks or so because I was into a wardrobe project and needed the double bed for a horizontal display surface.) So, yeah, I cloaked the daybed bedspread with the fuzzy fleece blanket (with the white side up so as not to wear out the colourful, non-binary flag on the other) and slept on top of that.

Next day, I noticed what looked like a few bug bites on my arm and face and also a small scattering of little black balls on the white fuzzy fleece blanket. The following morning, when I first opened my eyes, I saw a bug walking on the white blanket about six inches from my face. Oh, oh. I finally put two and two together, said a bunch of bad words, then looked up 'bugs in the house' on the internet. I still remembered what those bugs looked like that had walked across my torso when I was reading and yeah, bed bugs!!!



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Bed! Bugs! Biting my face?! Man, I was totally freaked out! I thought I was gonna puke. I guess I got as close to a panic attack as I've gotten since that one time when I was practicing law. And shame!!! Man, I felt sooooo ashamed. Unclean! And trapped! Helpless! Horrified! In. Big. Trouble!!

When I was finally rational enough, I used the internet to learn everything I could about what I might do, which all seemed to boil down to laundering everything I owned, clearing everything out of and vacuuming my whole place

(and then taking apart my vacuum and cleaning the whole thing) and then paying a professional to come in and exterminate. Well ... a few problems with that.

Problem 1: I was barely living on my fixed income, so how was I gonna pay an exterminator? Maybe the Housing Authority would pay, but I couldn't tell them. I never tell them anything.

Problem 2: I didn't like having strangers in my apartment. I didn't even like anyone knocking on my door.

Problem 3: I've had Bipolar II for over 30 years, which for me meant living with a big helping of clinical depression (with four or so random offerings of *suicidal* clinical depression now and then) , and, a small side-dish of mania. Like a lot of people who live with medicated depression for a long time, I'd come to a place where I didn't do anything hardly at all. I didn't do dishes, I didn't do laundry, I didn't vacuum and I sure as hell didn't dust! I didn't go out—one time I went four and a half days without eating, cuz I couldn't get myself out of my apartment to go grocery shopping, even though I have a car! I've gone up to a year without showering and I brushed my teeth maybe once every three months. Believe me, it's a thing with long term medicated depression. Look it up online. Depression and personal hygiene. Depression and housekeeping. Yes, every day, I saw that it all needs doing but to do anything at all felt like it required a deep strength from within that I know I used to have but just didn't have anymore. Partly it's a total lack of motivation and some kinda disconnect between seeing the mess and the mess meaning anything close to important. (I've even had friends come over a couple/three times to do dishes when my whole kitchen was choked with all my pots, pans and tableware, and, probably at least five times, I took my dirty dishes to a friend's house in a laundry basket so she could run them through her dishwasher while I visited. Now that's ... even I don't know what that is!) So, how was I gonna do all the things you're supposed to do even before the exterminator arrives?!

Problem 4: I read on the internet that some people with a bed bug infestation have committed suicide.

Problem 5: I was so ashamed, I couldn't ask anyone for help, even if I had still had friends, or even if my family had cared about me in a way that counted. (What could they do, anyway?) I knew I should tell my apartment building manager, but I just couldn't. I couldn't tell anyone.

So ... it was up to me.

During my internet searches, not only did I learn stuff to do about bed bugs, I learned a lot of stuff about bed bugs themselves, and as I paced around my living room that evening, **some of the stuff I'd learned came together like pieces of a puzzle** until suddenly, I had an idea of how I could attempt an extermination.

Piece 1: Bed bugs are nocturnal. During the day, they hide in nooks and crannies in mattresses and bed linen and behind wall mouldings and in furniture and carpets and electrical outlets and even in computers and so on and so on and the internet said you are supposed to look for them in all those places and to declutter to reduce the number of places. (Major bed bug hiding spots are called nesting or harbourage sites, but bed bugs do not truly exist in colonies. They survive independently from one another, but they do harbour together, though not all in one big nest. As their numbers increase in a particular home, the number of harbourages aka nests increases.) I had absolutely no desire to look in all those places, or declutter (on a scale of 1 to 10 of clutter and filth, where 10 requires a HazMat suit, my apartment happened to be maybe a four or five at the time. It's been worse). I did check the corners of the fitted sheet on my day bed and, sure enough, looking just like on the picture below from the internet, in every corner I found numerous clusters of little black smushed spots from bug excrement bleeding out on the fabric (yuck, yuck, yuck!) I found only a tiny bit in only one corner of the double bed in the bedroom which I fortuitously had stopped sleeping in apparently a few days after the bed bugs invaded!



© Unknown

But no, bed bugs are nocturnal, i.e. they come out of hiding at night. I didn't have to search for them at all. They'd come out to me, on their own.

Piece 2: Bed bugs live on blood, though not just human blood. However, with mine being the only blood in my apartment, I was their only target. Again, they'd come to me.

Piece 3: Bed bugs come to people, at night, in our beds because that's where most people are at night. In our beds. Bed bugs can sense our body heat and our CO₂ output as we breathe. When we lay in our beds at night, we produce a big neon sign of body heat, perfumed with a captivating cloud of CO₂. Loud and clear, our bodies say, "Here we are! Come and get it!"

Piece 4: When they came to my bed at night, I could kill them.

Piece 5: I'd have to be up at night. I'd have to become nocturnal.

Piece 6: Instead of lying down on the daybed at night, could I just use part of my body to lure them? Could I just use, say, ... my feet?! Would my feet give off enough body heat?

Piece 7: If I used my feet as a lure, and they came, I'd get lots of bites on my feet, and though bed bugs aren't known to transmit disease, [they do cause a variety of negative physical and mental health issues](#). Some material on the internet even suggested the danger of blood loss leading to anemia. And remember the part where some people commit suicide when they have bed bugs? Would I be safe?

After calling myself nuts a whole bunch of times, I decided I could at least try it once, that night, as an experiment. I didn't want to leave my apartment in case I took bed bugs out with me and gave them to other people, so I gathered what I thought I might need from what I had at home. Peacock blue exercise leggings to protect my legs. A t-shirt and a black hoodie to cover the rest of me. A flashlight to surprise and reveal the bed bugs once they had gathered around my feet. A box of tissues to wipe the bug guts off my fingers after I squished them dead. Hydration fluid (for me). My iPhone, so I could pretend to read while the bed bugs gathered in the dark. And to keep time.

Articles on the internet said bed bugs come out from about midnight until 5 am, so I decided to start at 11 pm as a buffer, and just continue until they weren't coming out anymore. Calling it an experiment helped a little with the creepiness of what I was going to do, but mostly I tried not to think ahead. I moved my two big red plush back cushions off the daybed (after an inspection for bed bug spoor on them found nothing—for some reason, they never did go for those two cushions—maybe they should be studied) to my green upholstered armchair (also searched—no spoor) back in a corner about five feet crossways from the daybed. The Net said bed bugs will travel up to 20 feet from their nest to the target bed, but if they're not nesting somewhere on the bed itself, they usually have a hidey-hole within about five feet away. I didn't want to put the couch cushions in the bedroom in case they were infested,

cuz I wanted to try to keep the field of action in the living room around the daybed. The other furniture I had in the living room was a big heavy heavy wooden desk from the 60's for my computer and a big medium heavy wooden sideboard from the 50's, both along the wall across the room from the daybed. From what I'd learned so far, there shouldn't be much nesting happening on them. Well, maybe in my computer stuff. God, I hoped not.

I'd put a bit of thought into what living nocturnally would mean for me. Mostly, it seemed like it would be relatively easy. I was 67, retired, basically a shut-in, living alone in a Housing Authority apartment building for seniors. I had no friends, no family visited me, and I rarely mixed with the other tenants. I had nowhere to go, no one came to see me, and no one would wonder where I was if I didn't show up anywhere for a long time.

So, my daybed, the **killing field**:



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Metal legs and a three-sided metal frame with a twin-sized mattress with four items of bed linen covering it in layers—the lowest layer, a mattress cover, then a light green fitted sheet, both with bed bug spoor already on them (I'm pretty sure the mattress had spoor on it too, but I can't check now, because the mattress is currently sealed in an anti-bed bug mattress encasement), then the thin multicoloured quilt bedspread that was my couch seat cover and, on top of that, the white fuzzy fleece blanket that was supposed to stop the alleged allergy rash. (At some point in the first week, I named the white fuzzy fleece blanket '**The Blanket of Doom**'.)

My lure station: I positioned my upholstered office chair close enough to the open front of the daybed so when I sat on the chair, I could situate the heels of my feet on top of the middle of the white fuzzy fleece blanket, but with the

chair far enough away so when I lifted my legs off the blanket and put the balls of my feet on the floor and spread my legs, my knees did not touch the daybed.

I had a wooden kitchen chair from the 50's (back missing), painted white, that I placed beside the office chair as a small war table to hold my heavy-duty, double-D flashlight, a box of tissues, a bottle of water and my iPhone on a small tripod for a timer (and so I could pretend to read while the bed bugs gathered around my bare heels). **My lure station** was set.



© GinUp

So it's 10 pm and I'm ready as I'll ever be. Really?!? Ready to sit in the dark in front of my daybed and place my bare feet on it for half an hour knowing that bed bugs may be attracted to my feet and would then bite them and suck my blood? NOT!! (Half an hour was just a first guesstimate of the time period that might be required to lure enough for me to kill in one session, but not too high a count to allow any to escape as I tried to kill them all.) Was I actually going to do it? (See the divots from my heels in the middle of the Blanket of Doom above. Pretend the whole room is dark and it's your heels in the divots. Could you feel ready?)

I dressed in my leggings to protect my legs and the t-shirt and hoodie to cover the rest of me. I anxiously repositioned the war table and the items on it in order to achieve the perfect configuration of accessibility for the mission. At about 10:30 pm, I turned off all the lights in my apartment, sat in the office chair in front of the daybed, and practiced reaching for items from the war table, having memorized their placement on it. (On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is lit a lot and 10 is dark, my living room's max darkness is about a 7 or 8, cuz of the lights flooding the parking lot behind our building, and the one across the alley, which seep through the closed, off-white vertical blinds covering my wall-to-wall window.) During my dry runs, I kept knocking over the flashlight (which I had positioned to stand on its

head—there wasn't enough room on the war table for its lying-down footprint), so I relocated it to the floor between the office chair and the war table. I futzed around further, waiting for 11 pm to arrive. I turned the living room light back on. I wrapped masking tape around the bottom of my leggings to keep bed bugs from crawling inside. I spent some time wondering how I should organize meals now that I was nocturnal. I fretted that bed bugs would climb all the way up the outside of my leggings and hoodie to my face in the dark.

When 11 finally arrived, I turned off the light, reluctantly took my position on the office chair, double checked the position of each item on my war table, checked for the flashlight on the floor and sighed. Then I just sat there—sat pretty well motionless for many moments in the dark, trying to hang on to my plan. I saw on my iPhone it was 11:05 pm, I sighed again, then resignedly lifted my bare feet up over the front edge of the daybed and placed them in the middle of the white fuzzy fleece blanket, my heels about 8 inches apart. Cripes!

Half an hour later, I grabbed the flashlight for the start of the first sally, turned it on and pointed it at my feet, fearful and sickened. There wasn't one bed bug to be seen.

I re-evaluated and decided the lure part of the second session should last 45 minutes. (For the sake of logistics and nomenclature, **a session was comprised of two parts:**

1. a timed trap i.e. **the lure**, starting from when I placed my bare heels in the middle of the white fuzzy fleece blanket in the dark until I sprang the trap by turning on the flashlight and pointing it at my feet, and
2. **the sally**, me jumping up and tilting forward to attack the siege of bugs (who in the first flash of light instantly reverted from the siege to the run), which sally ended when all the visible bed bugs on the Blanket of Doom were dead,

and each night's series of sessions was a shift.)

While I waited the 45 minutes of the second session's lure, I mulled stuff over. Was my body putting out enough heat with only my feet and lower legs actually on the bed? Was enough CO₂ wafting onto the bed from where I was sitting? I purposefully blew out exhalations of breath harder toward my feet a few times, till I felt like I might hyperventilate.

Then, again, the lure ended. And, again no bed bugs. It was now almost 12:30 am. I decided to go back to a 30 minute lure for the third session. Why? Cuz I was scared, OK? What if a 45 minute lure now resulted in an overwhelming horde of bed bugs? Did I mention I don't do well with any kinda bugs? Did I mention I also suffer from constant low-grade generalized anxiety? (What I didn't know then was that this was just a light bed bug infestation, that I had caught it quite early—that there would never be hordes of hordes.)

So, the third session. The third lure. The first sally. The lure ended at 1:00 am and I went for the flashlight on the floor, my heart pounding. I knocked the flashlight over, felt around for it, found it, picked it up, turned it on and shone it at my feet. Bed bugs surrounded my heels, maybe 10. They immediately started scrambling to get away. Horrified and revolted, I jerked my heels up off the blanket, brushed at my heels with my free hand, struggled to get my feet between the bed and the chair, planted them on the floor, stood up, leaned over the bed without touching it and started killing bed bugs within the circle of the flashlight's glare. Right thumb and forefinger, reach and pinch. Pick a target, reach, pinch, repeat. The bugs were running for their lives and the blood that spurted out of them when I squished them was mine.

After I'd killed the bugs closest to where my heels had been, I shifted the light to find those that had gotten further away. They were all pretty well running for one of the four edges of the blanket. If any made it over the edge, I'd have

lost them, as I could only effectively work with the top surface of the bed (except for the front edge—more on that later). I didn't want to lose even one of them, cuz that meant they'd get away fed, and not have to come back for a while (5 to 10 days), and could meanwhile breed like rabbits. I moved as fast as I could, my hands shaking from my hand tremors (from Lithium) and from spiked adrenaline and from traumatic stress. (Over time, I fell into using a bit of a grid pattern, to make the search as efficient as possible.) When I was sure I got them all (a couple right before the edge), I double and triple checked the blanket's entire surface by the grid with the light. When I finally stopped, I was extremely overheated and whipped off my hood with my bloody hand. End of the first sally.

I wiped my fingers on a tissue. I counted the dead. Eight. I counted the bites on my ankles. Fifteen. I didn't take a photo of my ankles that night, but here's one from three weeks later:



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In retrospect, I could have tried just one heel on the bed per shift to give bites on the other heel an extra 24 hours to heal, but I didn't think of it. (Of course, that would have doubled the bites on the lone heel.) As bad as this picture of an almost 68 year old foot looks, the constant attacks on my heels never escalated into a health issue. It seemed to me the bites healed faster as the experiment went on, and itched less and less. I think probably one heel on the bed at a time would have been a more comfortable position during the length of a lure, but I don't know if one foot would have given off enough body heat to make the lure as effective as it was with two. Someone else could easily test that out.

After the first sally ended, I went to the bathroom to wash my hands, quite obsessively, with lots of soap. Twice. I went back to the living room and prepared for session four.

I killed about 40 that first night, having carried out about seven sessions, the last one or two lures garnering no bugs. I took breaks between sessions to soap and wash my hands, use the toilet, top up my water, have a snack, try to pull myself together and so on. I didn't do a lot of introspection of what I was doing (killing) and how I was feeling (about killing) that first night. The process and mechanics were so new to me, I had mostly just numbly followed the plan. Lure, sally, rally, repeat.

So I had started my new nocturnal life. And a war. (A war that, admittedly, the other side wasn't even aware of.) I wouldn't be able to sleep in my apartment again at night until every last bed bug was gone. How long would it take? Could I last that long? Could I win or was I just tilting at bed bugs as uselessly as Quixote tilted at windmills?

(For those of you who aren't familiar, I found this on Wikipedia for you (an August 2024 version): "[Tilting at windmills](#)' is an English idiom that means 'attacking imaginary enemies'. The expression is derived from *Don Quixote*, [a Spanish epic novel written by Miguel de Cervantes and published in two parts (1605/1615)], and the word "tilt" in this context refers to jousting. [In one of his adventures, the 'hero' rides his horse at windmills, jabbing at their blades with his lance, believing them to be ferocious giants.] The phrase ... may also connote an inopportune, unfounded, and *vain effort* against adversaries *real* or imagined." Nowadays, Merriam-Webster defines tilting in our context thusly:

- 1) to incline, tend, or become drawn toward a course of action
- 2) to make an impetuous attack.

As well, Cervantes uses the Spanish word 'salida', meaning sortie (a brief trip away from your home base, perhaps as a military deployment), throughout the novel when speaking of Don Quixote's movements. The English translation uses 'sally'.)

Yes, I was definitely tilting at bed bugs, inclined perhaps uselessly toward a course of madcap action, charging into an impetuous, stumbling attack, possibly in vain. But at least the evil I tilted against was real.

I was kinda at loose ends the next day. I didn't want to try to get some sleep on the daybed right away, not so soon after seeing all those bed bugs trampling and bleeding all over it. I realized how perfect the white fuzzy fleece blanket was for the Blanket of Doom killing field. Of course, that it was white made the bed bugs as visible as they could get, but almost as importantly, it slowed them down. The surface of a *bedsheet* would have let them zip away like greased lightning but the blanket, made of thousands of tiny tufts, forced them to climb up and down little mountain peaks of tufts all along their way. That was a singular military advantage for me.



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You may remember that I had other blankets to choose from when I thought the problem might be that I was allergic to something on my bedspread, so it was really fortuitous that I had chosen the white fuzzy fleece one, and had positioned it white-side up (so as not to wear out the colourful, non-binary flag on the other). Yay, me!

The blanket was of a size that it hung down over the front edge of the daybed about 16 inches. It was harder to catch them when they made it onto the overhang because there was less support behind the blanket that I could squish against. What with my hand tremors, one or two escaped from me there every night.

I rattled around my apartment, looking for anything I could put to use in the war. I found a black Sugoi cyclist's skull cap that made my head look like a bug head, so I thought it would make a good disguise and had the potential to help me get into the enemy's mind-set.



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Yeah, I made the bug grey to look more like me in this image, but even in bug-real-life-reddish-brownish, in the dark, we were practically twins!

Early on, I started talking to the bugs during the lures. I would say things like:

“Hey, guys, how ya doing tonight? Ready to rock and roll!”

“Come out, come out, wherever you be. The Blanket of Doom is waiting for thee.”

When I went to the kitchen during a break between sessions, I'd say, “I'm going to the kitchen. Does anybody want anything?”

And more stuff like that. (For months, as it turned out.)

Remember the itchy rashes I got on my thighs and butt early on. That's from an allergy to bed bug saliva. Not everybody is allergic. Same with bites. Some people get red bite bumps and some people don't. Some people think they don't get bitten at all, but it's just that they don't have a reaction. I was not that lucky. My ankles were covered in bites right from the beginning of the experiment (I'd get at least 50 bites per shift, but as time went by, I think I started to develop immunity, whereby the bites cleared up faster and faster). Components in bed bug saliva act as an anesthetic and promote increased blood flow at the bite site, making the feeding process quick and nearly painless. If you don't get red bumps and you don't feel the bites, you don't even know bed bugs were there. There are other [first signs](#) but it takes most people a while to notice them.

It seemed to me that the bugs had corrosive, caustic body fluids. (The smell of squished bed bugs in the morning has a very strong anomalous caustic component. When bed bugs are crushed or threatened, they release an alarm pheromone from their scent glands. The odour apparently smells quite similar to a stink bug's odour, and different

people report that it smells musty, woody, rotten, or sweet. Many people compare it to the smell of concentrated coriander. To me, it was mostly like an odious, corrosive, chemical smell.)

After a week and a half or so of pinching dozens of bugs every night with my bare fingers, the skin on my fingertips started to etch away from the corrosive body fluids. Ouch! Burning and stinging! I tried using dish-washing gloves, but they were too cumbersome even if I didn't have hand tremors, and they didn't work with iPhone touch. (I just assumed latex gloves would have the same touch-screen issues, so I dismissed ordering some. I assumed wrong.) I tried more thorough hand washes more times and with more soap between sessions and then switched to my left hand every second night, but I'm definitely not ambidextrous and my hand tremors were worse in my left hand, so I lost my edge a bit when it was 'left-hand' night. Switching hands eased the dissolving fingertip problem a bit though. I eventually bought a hand cream with cucumber extract and aloe vera (both apparently soothing) to use during the day, which seemed to relieve my fingertips and keep the burning to a minimum, but it may also have been that the skin of my fingertips toughened up or could only be injured so far or the nerves were deadened or whatever. I dunno. I couldn't think of anything else to try, but at least the damage didn't get worse and worse.

The problem one finds oneself in, in a dire situation like this, is that a lone, highly stressed individual is lacking in brainstorming power (having only the one lone brain) and ends up with tunnel vision, so it's hard to improve on methodology—one just puts one's head down and trudges forward, doing what has always been done. Lure, sally, rally, repeat. Even though I washed and washed my hands after each session and at the end of each night, I just couldn't completely clean away or neutralize the bug's bodily fluids. The next day, if I touched the corners of my eyes, they really stung, and if I picked my nose, yowsers!! (Try not doing either of those things ever after handling squished bed bugs!! Remember how hard it was to not touch your eyes at the beginning of Covid. I sent an 'is it just me?' text to my family and friends back then, and it wasn't just me.) Even now, writing this a year later, I don't know what else I could have tried. 'Course, I haven't asked anyone else for their thoughts or ideas. Perhaps an entomologist or a dermatologist could make suggestions. Now that I know latex gloves are touch-screen friendly, I'd try those, but are they strong enough to stand up to the corrosive bed bug body fluids? Again, someone else could easily test that out.

On and off through a shift, I started throwing out names at bugs that were on the Blanket of Doom, all starting with 'B', like Bob, Brian, Benny, Burt, while I talked to them. "Hey, Bob, I must have missed you last night!" was my favourite quip. "Nice to see you've come for a visit, Brad," was another. Also, "Is that you, Bentley? How was your day so far?"

After about three weeks, I realized I needed to pull the daybed away from the wall, cuz the bed bugs hiding behind the wall moulding would climb up the wall and crawl onto the bedspread where it was touching the wall. (Yeah, I should have figured that out sooner, smarty pants, but you weren't there, were you, in the bed bug trench with me, all alone, your skin crawling, and so freaked out you couldn't think?!) After I pulled the daybed out, some bed bugs still climbed up the wall (again following the body heat and the CO₂), but now there was no way for them to get onto the bed from the wall, so they just hung there, anywhere from just below the height of the mattress to over three feet, even four sometimes, above it. Sometimes only one or two, but often up to six or eight, spread out from one end of the bed to the other. I dubbed them the Wallies. What a bunch of doofusses; all climbed up with nowhere to go.

I didn't take any live photos of the Wallies or of any of the bugs. I actually drew Wallies on the wall with a pencil for the following photos. (I'm very artistically inclined.)



© GinUp

Again, imagine the whole room is dark and you have to sneak up on each Wallie with a flashlight!



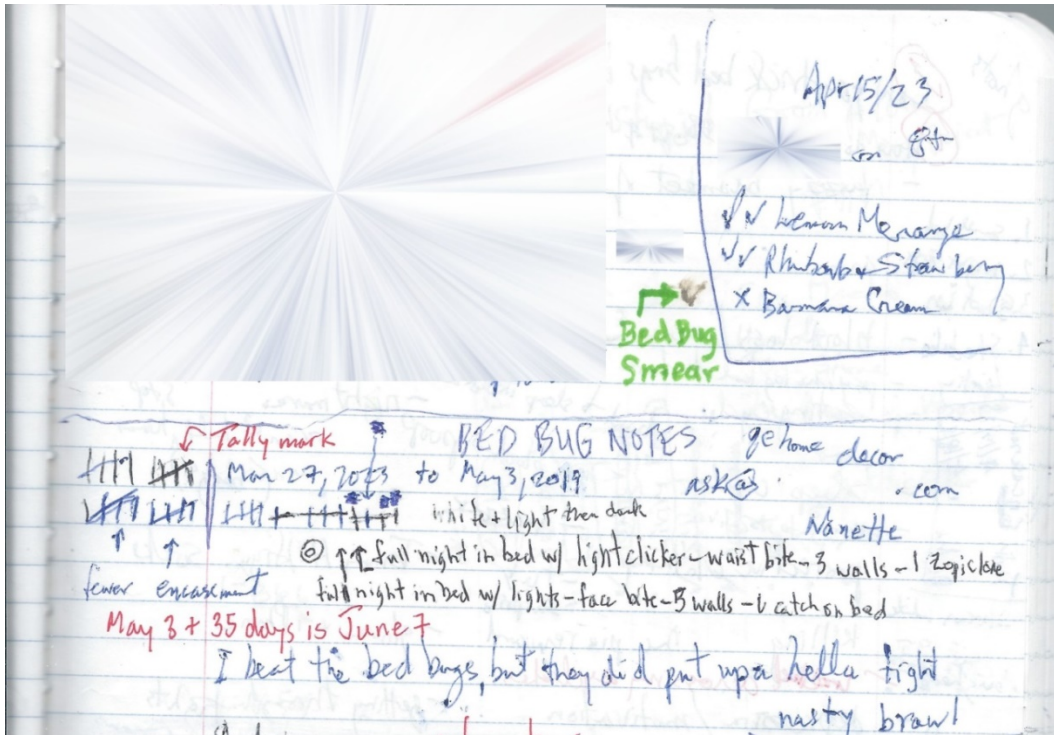
© GinUp

Piece 8: Bed bugs can't jump! Can't, can't, can't! No matter what anyone tells you, bed bugs can't jump. (Or fly.) The Wallies could and did, however, poof, abruptly let go of the wall, veering right or left depending on which legs on which side let go first, then plummet straight down to the floor.

Again, what with my hand tremors, plus the vertical bars you can see in the frame of the daybed getting in the way (one every seven inches), one or two escaped from me off the wall every night when I tried to squish them against the wall. It's like I was a soccer goalie defending against a penalty kick; if I guessed right and the bug went left, oops! I

had to get quicker on the draw. I had to get them before they let go, before the veer. Hand tremors and the bars interfered with sneaking in slowly and stealthily and then bam, the final squish, denying them time to veer. (Out of probably at least 15 Wallies that escaped off the wall with a veer and a drop over the whole war, I captured and killed I think two (maybe three) after they hit the floor and before they ran to hide under the wall moulding, only because they landed right at the end of the bed where I could reach them. There was still a bit of a desperate chase on both sides once they hit the floor though.) I always felt like a contemptible failure whenever a Wallie managed to dive away safely, and, each time, I actually had to take a moment to recover my confidence and stop kicking myself. I think I feared that if I lost any skirmish, even with just one Wallie, I would ultimately fall behind the proliferation of the horde, and lose the war. That belief terrified me.

All along, I knew I should, but I never kept very comprehensive stats or anything like a journal, though I did write down a word or a phrase once in a while and kept rough kill numbers in my head during a shift. I also have a very good memory for events. I ended up making 1½ pages of notes in my notebook. The first bit of notes, with the all-caps centred heading of 'Bed Bug Notes' was obviously to begin—sometime in April—documenting the developments and results, but fizzled after only a third of a page.



© GinUp

As you can see, that bit started with a couple muddled lines showing a time duration in days (March 27, 2023 to May 3, 2019 [sic], a mistake I couldn't have imagined ever making, proof of how muddled my mind was) accompanied by seven tally marks (this is one tally mark: +++) . I'm pretty sure that the tally marks count up the days after May 3, 2023, which takes us to June 7, but I know I forgot to make lines for the tally marks some days, possibly as many as ten or more. That means that the exact dates of the arrows indicating the installation of the daybed encasement and the nights I first lay full-out on the bed with the lamps on for a killing session and then with the lamp clicker are, for all intents and purposes, not rigorously determinable. My head was really messed up most of the time. I have an IQ of about 139, but I wasn't getting enough sleep and my mind was waaayyy stressed. Plus, my brain was almost 68 years old. Keeping stats just fell by the wayside. (Oh, and up in the top right hand corner of that same page is a reference to pies dated April 15/23 which I will come back to later.)

The one full page of my notes, dated April 11/23, was something I added to, one word or phrase at a time, over the rest of the experiment:

g hosts

Can you trick bed bugs into coming out? April 11/23
 How do you trick BB out of hiding? Freezer + Tub

1. small bed
 2. night shift arm
 3. 5' not in
 4. Schedule - blood-loss/anemic ^{poop + bugs out} - bike mask backwards
 - psychological torture
 - eating cycle - hard to sleep in bed at night ~~blanket!~~
 - sleep cycle - my blood → poop - night mares - stop
 - allergy to saliva - freezer - can't help hours (bugs)

Freezer not
 4/15/23
 4/18/23
 Double =

Tub
 Double =

- in car white
 - killing the pie reward - surprise - Tommy Hilftrogen socks
 - bug head → walked across my eyelashes - gloves + iPhone + 8 pin 14

- smell - depression/motivation - getting through fights
 - as many as 50 bikes/night - stinging nostrils + eye corners
 - conversations → names - chrome legged chair

- Trip's feet
 - schedule be at bed at mid-nite, take short breaks
 12 → 7 → 12 ← Bed Bug Smear
 - squishing harder than I imagine - flash on a bed at night they'll come
 → clutter doesn't matter; put live human flesh on a bed at night they'll come
 - photo studio - up the wall + diving off or left - body heat - read
 - they don't all come every time - life + death - desk
 - sizes + blood engorgement - size of bed - hit sink
 ← Bed Bug Smear - rods - session

- floods - 2-5 sec freezing/panic in straight lines + circles
 - peripheral vision - Bart in freezer

Don't jump internet - poison - come to your house
 - causticity bodily fluids - behind my back - the desk

I think it ended up being so scattered cuz that's what a session's fleeing cohort of bed bugs looked like. Hey, I'd been having a slumber party with bed bugs every night for almost a month; of course they rubbed off on me. This page was instrumental in reminding me of stuff that happened, though, and of points to cover in this account.

Adjusting to a nocturnal cycle seemed easier than I thought it would be. Staying sharp through the first two nights was a breeze. On the third night, however, I kept nodding off, then jerking awake. I promised myself not to let that happen ever again—it was so disconcerting to set myself up as live-bait and then lose consciousness. Then I think it was near the end of the second week that I fell asleep during a lure and didn't wake up for three hours!! Slept through the sally! I was sooo disappointed in myself; I felt like I had really messed up. What if none of them ever came back for a month because they were all so sated? And the thought of the bed bugs crawling all over me for three hours, feasting on my feet and legs like free-range chickens really freaked me out. I didn't realize till just now as I write this that that's what it's like for everyone lying in their beds at night in their bed bug infested home, just like it was for me before I started the experiment, but it still feels creepier somehow. Better not to know you let bed bugs crawl all over you for three hours when you were asleep, don't ya think? Anyway, I never fell asleep during a lure again after that. (Yes, the irony is that that's what happens to millions of people all around the world every night.)

Sleeping during the day was not easy because it was not natural; it was not easy because I knew some bed bugs wandered around during the day; and it was not easy because, due to the hell I went through every night, I was pretty freaked out most of the time even during the daytime. After a day nap when I felt a bed bug walk across my eyelashes (horrible, very memorable, sensation), I tried wearing a bike balaclava backwards, but the balaclava was so tight across my face, I could hardly breathe. I never got enough sleep no matter what I tried.

I also never really settled on a schedule of nocturnal meal times. Perhaps if I had sat down to work out on paper or on Word or Excel, when would be the reasonable times to eat in comparison to when I used to eat during the day, but I never did that. I couldn't really have and didn't really want to have a meal during a night shift, or take a lunch break, so I just snacked, and then ate meals whenever during the day.

Piece 9: Speaking of nocturnal, *my* bed bugs consistently came no earlier than the 12:30 am lure and then wound things up and skittered off to their hidey-holes about half an hour before sunrise, although there were occasionally a couple wandering around at times during any given day. (One very positive point to remember in their favour is that they don't stay on their hosts after feeding; instead, they dine and dash. Apparently, bed bugs don't like our smell. Certain [lipids in human skin repel the bugs](#), researchers at the University of Kentucky reported in 2021 in *Scientific Reports*. This makes them retreat to daytime hiding places, marking their trails with pheromones.)

The sally: Leaning over a twin bed all night from the waist, in a standing position, one arm and hand guiding a heavy flashlight, the other reaching to police a surface area of 18 square feet, my fingers aiming for scuttling bugs, while not letting my legs make contact with the front of the mattress (so the bugs couldn't escape up my legs) was hell. My body was in an unnatural tension for hours upon hours and my back and lower legs suffered by the end of the first sally, never mind by the end of a shift of them. By the end of each night, my shoulders were knotted and aching and my lower back screamed in pain. One thing I realized even after just the first night: I never would have been able to hold the line if I'd been sleeping on the double bed. Not just way too much territory for me to have to cover after a lure was sprung for me to catch all the bed bugs aiming for the farthest edge of a surface area seven and a half square feet larger, but I simply could not reach all the way across that extra foot and a half width of the double bed without tipping over onto the field of battle. Running around to the other side of the bed would have lost me

precious seconds. Perhaps roommates or a couple could set up from both sides. I wonder, if I had been sleeping in the double bed when I noticed the invasion, would I have figured out that by switching to the daybed I could force the horde to follow me and take the battle from the double bed to the twin in the living room? I'd hope so. Again, though, from the get-go, I was not at my best, strategic-thinking-wise.

But, wow, did I ever learn a lot about bed bugs!

They come in all sizes: big adults a quarter of an inch long (6 mm) down to 1st instar aka first-stage nymphs (just hatched) 1/20 of an inch (1.5 mm). I was blown away the first time I saw a first-stage nymph. It was so small and practically invisible—see-through, like a ghost (so I dubbed them **ghost nymphs**—they have no colour till they first eat.) I thought I was imagining things. I just stared at it as it wisped along, as I said, like a tiny, tiny ghost. It was like someone had drawn an outline of a little tiny bug with a light grey pencil crayon and didn't colour it in. I thought I was seeing something that wasn't really there, but why? Was I stoned on bug fumes? Had I actually lost my mind? Was I having a migraine aura? Finally, I went for it, it tried to evade, I pinched it and it was gone. Yeah. Real. And then I saw more amongst the older bugs, and realized what they were. Newly hatched bed bug babies.

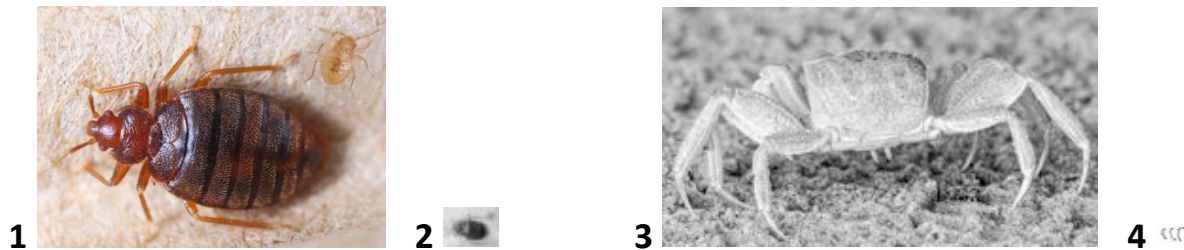


Photo 1: an adult bed bug (used under license from [Shutterstock](#)) and a **ghost nymph**, to compare the sizes.

Photo 2: shows them about actual size. You can see how practically invisible the real size ghost nymph is; in the gray shadows of the **tufts**, they were even more so. I realized later that what I thought were little, tiny bugs were actually only parts of their 3 legs on one side—their bodies, antennae and the thinnest ends of their legs were absolutely invisible to me. It was the running movement that gave the legs away. The legs looked like they were from little, see-through, grey sand crabs, which added to my confusion about what I was seeing. (**Photo 3:** a sand crab (used under license from [Shutterstock](#)) with eye-stalks photoshopped out.) I drew **Photo 4** so you are really with me—but **think smaller**. And barely visible. Like you're hallucinating tiny, ghostly, see-through, moving legs. I only saw one side because all the nymphs came from my right and just kept going directly for where my heels were, even after I turned on the light and removed my heels—even after the bigger bugs adopted alarm antics. The ghost nymphs only reacted at the last nanosecond before I easily squished them. Rookies!

I never saw a ghost nymph with my blood in it; they were so small, the mountain peaks of the Blanket of Doom were so much higher for them and I suspect the trek to my heels took them so long they couldn't get there before the light came on. (Maybe that's why they just kept heading toward where they thought my heels were; they hadn't fed yet and were driven to. The adults they were mingled in with had fed and were in alarm mode, beating it outta there. The tiny ghost nymphs were moving against the current.) Plus, let's face it, they were rookies at everything—zoning in on the direction to the increasing body heat (like little kids playing the warmer-warmer game) and then figuring out that they had to climb onto the skin and how and where to take the bite (bed bugs don't try to bite through the thicker skin on the bottom of the foot—probably their proboscis isn't long enough). I was thinking, though, that if a ghost nymph didn't feed the first time out, it might not survive the long trek back into hiding and then back the next night. (My guesses about ghost nymph survival were right. The first instars aka first-stage nymphs aka ghost nymphs are

particularly vulnerable. Newly hatched nymphs, being exceptionally tiny, can't travel great distances to locate a host. If an egg is laid too far from a host, the first instar may die of dehydration before ever taking its first blood meal.)

The sudden appearance of the first ghost nymphs was a concern, of course. The invasion was multiplying; eggs were being laid and were hatching. Could I keep up with that?

There's a big difference in the appearance and handling of a bed bug that hasn't eaten for a while and one that is full of blood (the latter is said to be engorged). The big bug on the cover is empty; the four little bugs on the cover have some blood in them that's being digested, and the bug on page 1 of the story is slightly engorged. See also the relative engorgement in the three photos on the next page. Especially the adults that were empty of blood (very flat, with duller back ends) were really, really hardy, very hard to kill, and very fast. Many's the time I tried to pinch one of those buggers and it just slipped through my fingers and scuttled around my hand so I'd be flipping my hand from palm to knuckles and back, trying to get a handle on it, hoping desperately it wouldn't go up my arm, leaving me outmaneuvered. Using a tissue slowed them down a little because of the many more folds and convolutions, making it easier to actually pinch one, but believe it or not, no matter how hard I pressed when I finally pinched one, when I let go, it would often still try to scuttle away, using the complexities of the tissue terrain to its advantage now. If I was able to catch it again, and pinch with all my might (to the point where my poor raw fingertips screamed with pain), same thing; when I let go, off it went half the time. It was unbelievable. Mind you, of those that actually got away from me in the end, I have no idea if or how long they survived having been squished so hard more than once. I mean, I thought their internal organs had to have taken a real beating. (I just realized, when their back ends were empty, they were about as vulnerable to being squeezed flat as an empty leather wineskin. I needed to also squish their front ends, their heads, their brains. Smaller target though. And I only had one hand because of the flashlight.)

The engorged bugs, on the other hand, their rear ends red and bulbous with their load of blood (mine!!), were slower, and easier to catch and kill. One pinch blew out their whole back end from the pressure as the blood blasted out of them. See the progression of engorgement from empty to full in the photos below:



1. under license from [Shutterstock](#)

2 & 3. public domain; CDC/ Harvard University, Dr. Gary Alpert; Dr. Harold Harlan; Richard Pollack.
Photo Credit: Piotr Naskrecki

The run: When the light of the flashlight would hit my feet suddenly in the dark, the bed bugs immediately reacted in three typical ways; most would take off as fast as they could in a straight line, some would run around in circles, and a few would freeze, pretending they weren't there, waiting for me to make the next move. (Sometimes I tried to see how long a 'frozen' one would wait. I was amazed to see that it could wait up to at least five seconds. I was the one who didn't have the patience (or the time) to wait longer than that.) When one of them realized I was zeroing in on it, it would often alter the escape mode it had chosen and try another. I think the younger ones were the ones that ran in circles most often, but every stage tried the freeze trick. Every frozen bug was waiting for the danger that was me to pass over them, but why would I, so as I kept coming, the frozen would, of course, finally, run. (Hey, maybe it's the ones who didn't make it to the heels to feed that froze.)

Bed bug alarm antics were often pretty amusing actually, and entertaining. A little bug running around and around in a ½ inch diameter circle (1.3 cm) was adorable. A little bed bug running hell bent for the hills while literally struggling over 'miles' of tufted hills was cute and comical. Eight bed bugs taking off in a starburst pattern, like a synchronized

swimming team, just as the light hit and I raised my heels, was awesome. Even their poop was cute; little tidy black balls, the smaller the bug, the tinier the ball. 'Course those cute, tiny balls were products of my blood! I looked on the internet to see if bed bug poop could be used for DNA testing. Didn't find an answer to that, but blood from engorged bed bugs can.

The kill: Killing bed bugs was *not* entertaining. At the beginning, killing them just felt necessary, but after night after night of killing, killing, killing, it sometimes made me feel sad, sometimes horror, sometimes vile, sometimes just so very, very wrong. They were really so helpless. There was nothing they could do to stop me. I could so easily lure them to their deaths. I could so easily kill them, end them, erase them from existence, do to them the last thing a living being could suffer. This is why I had originally thought to name this account 'Dead Bugs Walking'.

I sometimes brought death-from-above 50 times a night and more. I felt the dark power every time my pinch ended a life. End, end, end, end ... end. Sometimes I hesitated in the moment because I just didn't want to do it anymore, though I never just let one escape. Even if an individual bed bug, by every measure we put stock in (e.g. sentience, brainpower, size, strength, and ultimately, usefulness) doesn't account for much, can those not-very-muches, when added together, night after night, finally amount to something, to enough?

The Wallies underlined some sort of other point. The other bed bugs scuttled around in *my bed*, filled with *my blood*, but the Wallies just hung, empty, motionless, harmless, inoffensive as spots on a wall. No harm, no foul, right? Not one of them was culpable on the night of its death ... and they had such a cute name

(Yeah, my mind took me into weird places during my experiment, but *you* watch your own bloody fingers take ten lives in ten seconds, then do it again half an hour later and then again and again and again, all night long for two and a half months, and see where that takes *you*.)

Yes, I realize the Wallies hadn't been invited into my home, and therefore were not *innocent* innocent, but wall-hanging was such a stupid thing to do, they made me laugh. I have no idea if any of the ghost nymphs climbed up the wall—if they had, they would have been invisible against the white-painted, textured cement.

As I gained experience, I made improvements to **my protective gear**:



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Turned out, the bugs were able to get through my thin exercise leggings, so I added my dark grey muddy-buddies over the leggings with tape on the bottom and taped my hoodie sleeves at my wrists. I didn't want to have to tape up every night so I just left it on all day, day after day. I thought I should untape when I went out for food and meds and stuff, so I didn't look like a weirdo, till I just finally covered up with a jacket and baggy pants that fit over and hid my protective gear, including the tape. It would probably have been best to wear white during a shift, so I could maybe see what had crawled up my legs and onto the rest of my body during a lure, but I had nothing suitable. Instead, I just freaked myself out imagining what was crawling towards my eyes, nose and mouth in the dark. I swatted along my torso every once in a while. I looked up cheap hazmat suits online, but I decided they would be too cumbersome.

I took the photo of me in my protective gear in my photo studio, which is a huge white tablecloth (for an 8 foot long table) hanging from the ceiling in a corner of my living room. (You can see the collapsed edge of it on the right-hand side of the first daybed photo on page 4.) I should have taken it right down during the experiment, but I didn't. About

a dozen bed bugs crawled up and down it during the war, mostly at night, following some whiffs of CO₂, lost. I searched for them every night with the flashlight, and tried to squish them against the free-hanging cloth. When I was successful, it left bed bug smear spots on the cloth. (They hadn't fed, and they sure were fast on that smooth cloth! I got maybe 50% of them. Again, the tufts on the Blanket of Doom were a godsend.) Maybe you can see the little black smear dot to the right of my right shoulder above and the one to the left of my left foot. There's also one behind my head.

It came to me that this job I was doing was actually a 'job' and that I wasn't the only person in the world to ever have such a crappy job. Yes, I was working the midnight shift (12 to 7), the work was dreary and isolating and stressful, and I hated it and couldn't wait for the shift to end, but I realized that billions of people throughout the history of the world and now in the present went and were going through just what I was going through, the evil of the hated job. You may know what I mean; you hate having to go to it and you dread almost every minute of your time there. I'd had other hated jobs before in my life: I was a chambermaid at a big hotel in downtown Vancouver one summer-off from university; articling and lawyering were pretty crappy at times; and I often despaired at the call centre I worked at 20 years ago (though at both the latters, I helped some terrific people, and I had some great times on call centre calls. A few older women even offered to have me come live in their basement suites as permanent, on-site, tech support. In Florida!) Anyway, the realization that I wasn't alone in suffering at a wretched workplace helped. And at least I didn't have a mean boss along with the rest of the misery, and believe me, I've had some terrible bosses (and some great ones—shout outs to Dr. W.W.K, Monica, Elena, Tara, Kevin and Elizabeth!).

Notwithstanding that bed bugs are nocturnal, they do wander around during the day on occasion, alone, with not another bed bug in sight, like those three did at the beginning of this story. Apparently, this usually means their hiding location has been disturbed or else they are very hungry and are desperately seeking a blood meal. (In thinking about it over a year later, including my confusion with their behaviour at the time, it came to me that the bugs walked across my chest three days in a row at the very beginning because I had switched to sleeping in the daybed, and when I didn't show up in the double bed, they got a little desperate and had to go looking for me whether it was night or not. They just didn't do a very good job of gaining anything from it when they found me. Also, I think, as an infestation grows, more and more bugs will show up during the day.)

During the *days* of the war, I spent most of my time at my desk, reading on my iPhone or using my computer. I thought of my desk as bug-free land because it was all hard, flat surfaces and edges—hard to make a nest there. But I sat at my desk on my upholstered office chair, the same upholstered office chair that, every night, I set in front of the daybed and sat in during each night shift, making a bridge to the daybed with my legs while my heels were on it for the lure. A bridge that the bed bugs could use to get to my office chair. A bridge that I didn't really consider.

So, sure enough, one day, I'm sitting at my desk and I see a bed bug come merrily out from behind my right-hand computer screen and begin sauntering brashly across my open hard-copy notebook. I killed it. You can see the two streaks from its demise on the second page of my attached notes on page 13. I flipped quickly through my notebook and found another. Killed it too. I searched behind the aforementioned computer screen, found a couple/three more in a loose pile of odd-sized papers, managed to kill one, but the others fled. I trashed the papers.

A few days later, while I was again sitting at my desk, another bed bug walked out of somewhere on my desk and straight towards the front edge of the desk and me. I decided to sit there as still as can be to see what would happen when it got to the front of the desk. Believe it or not, it just kept walking until it dropped off the front of the desk and fell, plop, right on the front edge of my keyboard drawer slide, luckily missing the keyboard (imagine trying to chase a bed bug in and out of the keys of a keyboard, trying to kill it). See, *again*, that was amusing and entertaining; a doofus

bed bug strolling right off the edge of the desk, right in front of me! I killed it. I realized that it wasn't a coincidence that bugs came out across my desk toward me even during the day—the old body heat and CO₂ output.

For the first time, I checked slots in my computer and the ports on my USB hub. Nothing. 'Trip' (my iPhone/tripod combo—that's him on the white war table at my lure station on page 5) was sitting on my desk with me and I checked him. OMG, he had a bed bug nest in one of his little feet! That was so disgustingly wrong. I was appalled and shattered on both our behalves. I cleaned out his foot with a straightened paper clip. Then I cleaned it out again. I took him to the kitchen and ran hot water over his foot for a long time. Then his other two feet. Then went to the bathroom and cleaned out his foot with a Q-tip and soap. Then more hot tap water.

When I got back to my desk, and was about to sit back on my upholstered office chair, I thought about my upholstered office chair. The one that the bed bugs could get to over the leg bridge during the night shift lures. So I checked the chair. A third of the way into the search, I found them. Three bed bugs slap bang up against each other, cheek by jowl, hidden behind a crease I pried open made by an upholstery-roll edge, all three staring up at me, clearly abashed that I had found them. Freak! Out! When I had just minutes before been sitting in the chair, if I'd leaned back, they would have been like an inch from my shoulder. Yuck! Eck! Eck! I killed them, searched the rest of the chair (didn't find any more) and vacuumed the whole chair in a bit of a frenzy, then the other upholstered chair in my living room (the green one). Then had to clean the whole damn vacuum! Jesus! Bed Bugs! Like I didn't have better things to do!

The crash: Not even three weeks into the ordeal of nightly killing sessions and random bed bugs showing up in and on my things and wandering around during the day, I hit a wall, hard. Halfway through a shift on April 14, I was brought to my knees when a sense of total inadequacy and oppression overwhelmed me. It suddenly all just felt too insurmountable to carry on. There I was, alone, in the middle of the night, waiting for a lure to run its course while bed bugs gathered at my feet in the dark to bite me and suck my blood—for the hundredth time—on a bed I couldn't sleep on, in my home that hadn't been a home for weeks, as low as low could feel, tired, crushed, physically tortured and desperate. Despairing. My back was killing me during every lure now because I'd had to switch to my wooden Captain's chair in place of my upholstered office chair and jamming an easily castaway bolster pillow in between me and the wood didn't help at all! Great idea for an experiment, Gin!

But ... there's gotta be something, I told myself. Something I could do to help pick myself up. What, oh what could that be? What could in actual reality bolster me, at this time and in this hell? "What about ... a ... a reward?" asked a meek little voice in my head. OK, this may sound sad, but that word 'reward' in truth perked me up momentarily. In fact, the idea of it turned into a little bright spot in the hell I was going through. But that still begged the question: *What* for a reward? I sat there alone in the dark for minutes, as the lure inevitably counted down. I seemed unable to imagine a thing. Not one idea presented itself; not a glimmer. Nothing. My head was empty. Dark with despair. Murky. Clotted. Defeated. The least able to perform the act of thinking it had ever been.

The problem was just too enormous for me to attempt to impact. My tilting at bed bugs was clearly totally misguided. Nothing could keep me from failing. The little bright spot from the thought of a reward that could save me was dying. The moment was distressingly slipping away. And then it just popped into my mind: pie. The reward of pie. I love pie. I hadn't had pie for a long, long time. Pie! Pie might do it. No. Wait. Pies. At least three. Lemon meringue, strawberry rhubarb and banana cream. All three, all at the same time. Have you ever imagined eating from three different flavours of pie at the same time? Not just from slices, but from three whole pies? How could that not bring life back into my wretched existence? The life of pie! So the very next day, I went out and came home with three pies (see the list dated April 15/23 in the top right-hand corner of the first page of my notes on page 12). Just seeing the pies

sitting there on my desk, all three of them in a row, before I'd even taken a bite, I knew this was going to work. (I just hoped a bed bug didn't walk across one of them. It's not like it would make me not want to eat the pie if one did, it's just I wanted the reward to be so perfect, so pure, that I could be in a place for just one moment in my bed-buggy life where there were no bed bugs. Just the life of pie.)

I used a big spoon and took a bite of the lemon meringue. I was in heaven. Then the strawberry rhubarb. More heaven. The heaven of pies. Then the banana cream—yuck! Turned out, the banana cream pie really sucked so I threw it out. The filling was almost tasteless and it was GRAY! No problem; still two pies, still the heaven of pies. You know that thing that happens when you're eating something wonderful, but after a while, it stops being so wonderful because, well ... you've had it and the wonderful just wears off. (It's called habituation—growing accustomed to a stimulus.) Well, if you eat two wonderful things at the same time, a bite of one (and chew and swallow) and then a bite of the other (and chew and swallow), and back and forth and back and forth, the wonderful lasts much longer. And I had two wonderful pies. The absolute, long-lasting, heaven of pies.

At that first sitting of pie heaven, I ate almost a third of both pies. (The strawberry rhubarb was a six-incher and the lemon meringue was a big pie, a 9-incher.) The next day, I had pie for every meal. Only pie. And, God I felt good! The reward worked way better than I had imagined it would! I was back! My will to live was back! (So, yeah, every time I went for groceries after that, even after the war had ended, I came home with two pies. For about a year. Thankfully, the store started stocking only smaller lemon meringue pies, so I was finally able to wean myself off a life of pie, but it was heaven while it lasted.)

I didn't start working on the Timeline until after I had already written at least half of this story. I couldn't remember when the crash-leading-to-pie thing happened, and hadn't noticed the dated pie list up in the corner of my notes. My first guess was actually April 14, because I thought the pie uplift might have been the impetus to finally ordering anti-bed bug mattress encasements and bed bug traps, which I started doing on April 15 and which I had been dragging my feet about for some reason. (Would ordering those things make it too real? Hello?! Too real!?! How much more real could it get? Or maybe I thought they wouldn't do any good anyway. I dunno.) But April 14 seemed too early for the crash. I couldn't have been so lacking in strength of character less than three weeks into the thing, could I? Then I found the April 15 pie list. Yes, apparently, I guess I could be that lacking in strength of will. Good thing I rallied and thought of pie. Good thing pie existed. Good thing the pie induced me to finally order the encasements and bed bug traps I would need. Here's to the life of pie!

(An **anti-bed bug mattress encasement** is basically a big bag you can slip your mattress into and zip up, made of a material bed bugs can't get through, with special seams and zippers that bed bugs can't get through, that are also air tight so any bed bugs caught inside eventually suffocate, and there is no piping, seams or tags on the outside where bed bugs can nest.)

(A **bed bug trap** is like a no-tip doggie dish situated under and around a bed leg so the bugs have to crawl up the slope of the 'dish' to get to the leg (to get to the bed).



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The slight slope on the outside of the trap up to the top edge of the 'dish' is relatively rough so the bugs can easily climb up it, then when they get to the top edge, they fall in (as we know from my desk adventure, bed bugs just don't *get* edges) and they find themselves on a circular track with one inch high, vertical, very smooth walls on each side that they can't get a grip on to climb out. And round and round they go.)

Some weeks in, an acquaintance of mine came to my door one evening. I had told her near the beginning of the experiment that I had a very difficult project I was working on and that I had to stay in my apartment and no one could come in and it would take a long time (I didn't want to take any bugs downstairs to the common room where we visited, and I didn't want anyone coming into my apartment and leaving with any bugs. I also, of course, didn't want to tell anyone about the bugs, period.) Anyway, she knocked on my door one Friday evening. I looked through the peep hole and saw it was her. She was crying. I left the chain on and opened the door a couple/three inches. I reminded her she couldn't come in. She turned to leave. I asked if she could tell me what it was out in the hallway. I thought it must be one of her attacks of depression. She asked if I could come down to the common room and visit with her. I felt I had to tell her I just couldn't. That's all I could think of to say, having conversed only with bed bugs for so long, and having been so completely closed off in an alternate universe where it was just me 'n horror 'n bed bugs. She finally went away. I felt terrible for making her talk to me in the hallway, in tears, me standing there tongue-tied, hiding behind my door, trying to conceal my protective gear. Furtive and ashamed. It's a bit telling, though, isn't it, that during the months-long run of the experiment with me squirrelled away in my apartment, that that was the only contact I had from anyone in my building? I was perfect for this experiment!

Sometime in May, I noticed there were fewer and fewer adult bugs showing up, until there were only medium sized ones and little ones. And I realized I could only remember there being ghost nymphs the one time, maybe twice. Also, total numbers were down. Was this crazy miserable experiment actually working?

You can see from the Timeline that I didn't install the daybed mattress encasement and bed bug traps until a month and a half after they were delivered. My intuition was, the later I employed the encasement, the fewer bugs would be left outside it (and, though perhaps trivial, the less blood and poop would get on it), and the later I installed the traps,

the more I could first get rid of with the lure. And I didn't want to have to rely on them—I wanted to rely on myself. But when I saw and killed only five bed bugs on the Blanket of Doom during the night shift of June 4, I decided that it was finally time to deploy those tools.

On June 5, I removed all the linen from the daybed mattress (except for the mattress cover because I forgot to buy a new one; hell, the mattress itself had bed bug spoor on it, so big deal if the cover did too, eh?—besides, I didn't really relish dragging the cover off, tugging at straps all covered with bed bug spoor). I bagged all the removed linen separately, the bags with the Blanket of Doom and the quilt going into the freezer, and the bag with the fitted sheet going into the bathtub (more on that later). I installed the daybed mattress encasement and the traps that same day, and only one bug showed up for the lure on the encasement that night. I ended the heels-on-the-bed-lure-and-killing sessions on June 13, after seeing no bugs on the encasement surface since June 5.

I'm not absolutely sure why I didn't bag the braided throw rug between the daybed and my desk when I bagged the daybed linens on June 5. (You can see one end of the rug in the first daybed photo on page 4.) The rug was a good candidate for bug nests. I remember thinking that it was too big and stiff to bag and to put in the freezer, but quite possibly, because it *was* such a good candidate for bug nests, I just couldn't bring myself to pick it up. I didn't want to see hordes of bugs abandoning the thing and dropping to the carpet as it hung from the tips of my fingers by a corner. So I left it there for a few more days until sometime between June 6 and 13. Then, on whatever day, I just finally made a quick decision, marched to the rug, frantically folded it in half and then again (all the time pretending I was not in fact touching it), and dashed with it into the bathroom and dumped it into the bathtub. The bagged fitted sheet was already in there (had been since June 5). I was using the bathtub because I believed it to be a giant bed bug trap, with vertical, very smooth sides that bed bugs couldn't climb up. This may have been truer if I had first cleaned the bathtub, but I had not (had not, in fact, cleaned it for years), so it proved not to be 100% escape proof. (I've only ever showered in my bathtub, never bathed, so not cleaning it for years is not as suboptimal and uncivilized as it sounds. No ring, eh? At any rate, I still believe that a cleaned bathtub would make an excellent, emergency bed bug holding pen for stuff one wanted to quickly drop somewhere to deal with later.)

During the next night shift, when I entered the bathroom to wash my hands after the first session, I looked into the bathtub immediately upon switching on the light and saw two bed bugs hanging about halfway up the inside walls of the tub. One, startled by the light, immediately tried to scuttle up further but lost its footing and slid all the way back down. The other just hung there, frozen, like a Wallie. No, a Tubbie! This sight freaked me out significantly (because every new bug thing since the start of the experiment freaked me out significantly). I killed them both. I revisited bagging the rug and getting it into the freezer, but inexplicably just left it there, though I did unfold it and then folded it once lengthwise to give its bugs the best chance to be free of it so they could make for the bathtub walls. (I find that impulse also inexplicable, but I say again, I was not at my best. I guess I just wanted them out of my rug.)

From that point on, every time I entered the bathroom and threw on the lights, I yelled "Surprise!!!!" like one does at a surprise birthday party. Well, no, at *first* I yelled "Surprise!!!!" every time like one does at a surprise birthday party, but then there came a time when there were no more bed bugs to be seen climbing up the walls, or (having successfully climbed the wall) sitting on the bathtub rim, and my enthusiasm waned, and I started just saying "Surprise!" somewhat loudly, and then there came a time when I only muttered "Surprise", then said it with almost zero affect, and then whispered it with almost zero affect. I found this gradual diminution in my utterance of "Surprise" quite amusing.

A couple/three times when I was sitting on the toilet during the days that followed, I saw a bed bug walking from the direction of the bathtub toward the bathroom door. I killed them and then worried about all the bed bugs I hadn't

seen and wouldn't see walking from the direction of the bathtub towards the door, but then I shrugged, allaying my concerns with the reminder that they would soon enough be drawn into the bedbug traps under the daybed. I was now in complete control of the doings in my apartment.

The return: On June 14, I began lying on the daybed on the bare encasement the whole night, in protective gear, with no cover, with spotlights on the whole night. I got one face bite that night and a waist bite the next, but I may very well have unknowingly carried those bugs onto the bed myself. No bites on the 16th. The internet said lights wouldn't keep the bugs back, but I just couldn't bring myself to start lying on the bed again in the dark. Needless to say, not much sleeping took place.

By June 16, there were no signs of bed bugs at all except in the bed bug traps.

The nights of June 17, 18 and 19 on the daybed are well documented in the Timeline at the end. I still didn't use a cover—I couldn't bear the thought of being confined under a blanket with bed bugs all around me, especially after all the hundreds of bed bugs I had seen running around on the Blanket of Doom. Yes, I knew intellectually that bed bugs wouldn't show up under any cover anymore in numbers, but still.

Between June 5, when I installed the bed bug traps, and June 19, about twenty bugs were caught in the traps. I spent a good deal of time watching them go round and round the tracks of the traps looking for the way out that didn't exist, climbing over the bodies of bed bugs that had already died in there. It was somewhat amusing and entertaining, and, I am moderately chagrined to admit, rather satisfying for me, having long been tortured by free ranging bed bugs. They would actually die in there, after a couple weeks, using up all their energy trying to find a way out. First they'd just collapse, still alive, but immobile. I'd nudge them with a pencil to see if it was over, and they'd start up again for a while.

As luck would have it, a friend and her two kids were arriving from Germany on July 1. They had their own house, but the kids would surely want to come over to my place as soon as possible, especially since, other than on WhatsApp, we hadn't seen each other for 5 years. I tried very hard not to rush the final extermination process so as not to make any mistakes in the last stages, but the pressure was definitely on. I didn't tell her about the bugs until she asked me to go over to check out what shape the renter had left her house in. I had to tell her I best not in case I took bugs over with me.

On June 20, I shed my protective gear for a white long-sleeved t-shirt and light purple PJ pants, plus socks (Tommy Hilfiger) and gloves, started taking Zopiclone again to facilitate the return to being diurnal, and began to actually sleep on the daybed encasement, with a spotlight on/off clicker to use if (when) I woke up. Any decent period of sleep was foreshortened by nightmares. Guess what they were about.

On June 26, I threw the bagged daybed fitted sheet that was stored in the bathtub into my building's outside garbage bin, along with the double bed linen I removed and bagged that day. Bart showed up on the rug when I picked it out of the bathtub to bag it. I chased him around a bit all over the rug, then gave up, bagged him with the rug, and put the bag in the freezer. Every time I opened up the freezer after that, I always had something to say to Bart. "Hey, Bart, how ya doin'? Finding it a little chilly?" Stuff like that. When I took the bagged rug out of the freezer after about a month and shook it out in the bathtub, Bart's empty exoskeleton, along with those of about 10 of his friends, dropped off the rug. Freaked me out, of course. (The internet said three days in a freezer would kill bed bugs, but who on earth wouldn't multiply that by ten?)

The last time I cleaned the bed bug traps out was June 26. No bed bugs showed up anywhere after that. Here's an excerpt from the Timeline showing the anti-climactic, housekeeping items that followed:

- Jun 30 Since June 26, no bed bugs in bed bug traps under daybed
Slept on daybed encasement without lamp clicker
- Jul 01 No bed bugs in bug traps under double bed and no signs of live bugs on mattress
Mattress encasement installed on double bed
- Jul 02-05 Replacement linen and pillows for double bed delivered
Made up double bed with new fitted sheet and pillow
- Jul 06-12 Replacement linen and pillows for daybed delivered
- Jul 13 Made up daybed with new fitted sheet and pillow
Moved back to sleeping in double bed in bedroom
Still no signs of bed bugs
- Aug 13 **Finally using cover to sleep**
Still no signs of bed bugs

(Bed bugs can live for several months without a blood meal. How could I be sure some of them weren't just lying low, hiding in hibernation, waiting to pop out months later? If all their hiding places weren't tracked down and treated, how could I be sure? I could be sure because bed bugs only remain in a state of hibernation until they detect the signals that there is a host to feed on close by, i.e. I could be sure because bed bugs are driven to come out of hiding (mostly at night) when a blood host is available. I was available and none were coming out, day or night. And unhatched eggs aren't viable for months; bed bug eggs hatch within 10 days after they've been laid, period. If they hadn't hatched within two weeks of the death of the last bed bug, they never would.)

It was over. I had done it. Mission accomplished. And I was the only person in the world who knew.

I didn't really celebrate to any extent. Maybe a little the first time I slept in the double bed, with all new linens, 100% free of the fear of bed bugs (OK, 99.9%). I did make up a little song about it though:

"I beat the bed bugs, but they did put up a hella fight!" —Sung to the tune of "I shot the sheriff"

Understandably, the victory took a while to sink in. And this may be the weirdest thing I've yet to say: For a while, maybe a month or so after they were for sure gone, I missed them. Every once in a while. They had been part of every hour of my life for over two months. We'd had conversations (okay, one-sided). I'd named them (okay, I couldn't tell them apart. Well, except for the Wallies. And the Tubbies). I'd teased them. We had bonded. I'd felt really bad some nights when I killed them. Maybe it was a sort of twisted Stockholm syndrome. Even now, writing about it a year after it was all over, I remember missing them. I remember missing the caustic smell even. I remember taking all their lives.

'Course, even over a year later, I still think I see a bug in my peripheral vision now and again, or I imagine a horde of them gathering behind my back. It was probably good that my friend and her kids arrived when they did. Gave me a much-needed distraction.

I hope to never, ever, see another live bed bug again in my life. So, was it worth it? It took three months to end my infestation and I spent under \$250 on mattress encasements and bed bug traps for my daybed and my double bed. I didn't have to look for bed bugs. I didn't have to attack them where they hid. I didn't have to hot launder all my clothes over and over. I didn't have to declutter. I only vacuumed my apartment once, at the beginning, cuz the internet said I should and I was more easily manipulated at the beginning. I didn't lose a stick of furniture. I'd use the same strategy again if necessary, but the second time, I'd know all along that my strategy was actually going to work. There'd be much less freaking out and no pie required.

A retired couple living 11 floors above me got bed bugs a year after I did. The housing authority has in-house exterminators. Two initial inspections revealed no bugs. Then the exterminators put traps down and three bugs were caught. It was deemed a 'light infestation.' The exterminators ended up spraying on three separate occasions before the biting stopped, and then once more for good measure. Before each treatment, the couple had to look for bed bug hiding places, declutter, and box up most of their stuff. They had a lot of plants, which were all moved to the hallway the first three times. Throughout, they had to hot launder and vacuum, vacuum, vacuum. After each treatment, they had to wait eight hours to return to their apartment. They had to buy a bed mattress encasement and they lost a couch and a recliner (replacement cost: \$3,000). From the initial discovery to the final 'All Clear' was six months. Yes, my nights were a horror show, but they lived horror 24/7 for twice as long.

P.S. After my success was without a doubt, it came to me that I could hire myself out to rid other people of their bed bug problems. Yeah, for a million bucks a pop!

The Extant Science—Piece 10 (which gelled only after I had finished writing the narrative and was doing more research; before Piece 10 fell into place, I only knew Tilting at Bed Bugs would be a unique and gripping story, not that it might be consequential to the world)

The following six paragraphs are from [Getting rid of bed bugs: Trickier than ever](#) by Ute Eberle Jan 31/24 in Knowable Magazine (aka [The 'Unthinkable' New Reality About Bedbugs: Another, much stronger species is headed north](#) Feb 10/24 The Atlantic):

Bed bugs have grown resistant to many standard pesticides—to the point that some experts say they wouldn't bother spraying should their own home become infested. By now, bed bug resistance has been reported against most of the prevalent insecticides, including organochlorines, organophosphates, carbamates, neonicotinoids, aryl pyrroles and pyrethroids. Some of today's bed bug strains tolerate pesticide doses that are many thousands of times higher than those that used to consistently kill them. Resistant bed bugs have either developed gene mutations that prevent pesticides from binding effectively to their cells, or they produce enzymes that quickly break down the toxins in their bodies. Others are growing thicker exoskeletons that the poisons can't easily penetrate.

Currently, the only bed bug sprays that still tend to work are certain combination products that blend different classes of pesticides, [not available at the supermarket]. But it's only a matter of time before these, too, will fail, experts say: Reports of resistance have already been documented. Increasingly, exterminators incorporate nonchemical approaches such as heat treatments, in which trained professionals warm up rooms to above 120 degrees Fahrenheit (49°C) for several hours. They often sprinkle a floury dust called diatomaceous earth around rooms, which clings to those bugs that hide from the heat in wall cracks or under mattresses. The dust abrades the insect's exoskeleton, dehydrating it to death.

Such measures—combined with more awareness—have helped to plateau, or even partly reverse, the spread of bed bugs in some places.

But while effective, nonchemical methods tend to work slowly. **“It’s very common that an elimination takes one to two or even three months,”** says Changlu Wang, an entomologist at Rutgers University in New Jersey. **Meanwhile, residents must keep living in their infested quarters.**

If bed bugs do invade a home, “the biggest mistake is to try and get rid of them on one’s own,” says entomologist Stephen Doggett of the Department of Medical Entomology at Westmead Hospital in Sydney. “The average person doesn’t appreciate how challenging it is to control bed bugs and will use supermarket insecticides that are labeled for bed bugs but don’t work. The infestation will spread, and the costs escalate.”

This all adds up to a sobering new reality: For many people, bed bugs are becoming a fact of life again, much as they used to be throughout humanity’s history. But as scientists race to find new strategies to combat these pests—everything from microfabrications that entrap the insects to fungal spores that invade and kill them—they also learn more about the often bizarre biology of bed bugs, which might one day reveal the parasite’s Achilles heel.

The following paragraph is from [Bed bugs are a global problem](#) Oct 25/23 The Conversation:

The future for bed bugs is unclear. Those we see today [are resistant](#) to most pesticides, are [masters of subterfuge](#), and are not going anywhere. They have [co-evolved with humans](#)—so our best option for reducing their impact on our lives is for researchers and pest control professionals to **spend less time trying to kill them** [with treatments], and **more time trying to understand how they function within our world. Maybe then, we will work out a way to limit or even remove them from our homes for good.**

The Takeaways

Let me make one thing clear: My strategy would have been sadly inadequate against a heavy bed bug infestation, probably even against a moderate one. (See [How can you tell the severity of a bed bug infestation?](#)) I succeeded because I noticed the infestation early and, within three days, went to war against it, i.e. started the killing. Next time, I start three days earlier.

So, keeping in mind the notion of light infestation: Most of the advice on the internet says if you have bed bugs you have to look for all the places they might be hiding (and seal them up if you can) and you have to declutter to reduce the number of those places and you have to vacuum those places often and you have to hot launder everything you own a lot. And then you have to call a professional exterminator, who probably would have to come over more than once to apply the treatment. And it could take months to be sure the bugs were all gone.

I did not look for all the places bed bugs hide. Nesting sites contain droppings, eggs, egg shells, shedded skins, and insects in various stages of the life cycle, and look like this mess:



under license from [Shutterstock](#)

Who wants to go looking for, never mind see, nastiness like that? Course, with a light infestation, you shouldn't have anything like this yet.

I did not declutter. I only vacuumed once, at the beginning, cuz the internet said I should and I was more easily manipulated at the beginning. (Well, and then I vacuumed my office chair once later on during a freak-out frenzy.) I did not launder anything or bag or freeze anything before only a very few bed bugs were left, and the only things I laundered at that point were the Blanket of Doom, my daybed bedspread quilt and the living room braided throw rug, and only after they had been in the freezer for over a month. I never laundered any clothing.

I didn't have to look for bed bugs. I didn't have to attack them where they hid. I didn't have to launder all my clothes over and over. I didn't have to hire an exterminator. All I had to do was keep luring the bugs to me until I had lured and killed them all. I did use an anti-bed bug mattress encasement and bed bug traps but not until I had reduced the number of bed bugs that responded to the lure to five for the whole night—see **June 4 and 5 on the Timeline**. The night after I installed the encasement, only one responded to the lure! (BTW, I posthumously named that last lure responder 'Bingo' at the suggestion of a 10 year-old.)

My home was bug-free in three months and has remained so for over a year. After about nine months, I packed the bed bug traps away because they don't go with my décor and they are a pain underfoot, but about a month later, I heard a guy in the building saying F**k a whole bunch of times because it seemed he had bed bugs. I freaked out and reinstalled my bed bug traps! I won't ever un-trap my bed legs again.

Could my strategy work for anyone else? Sure, if they caught it early (within a month or so), were willing to be unflinching shut-ins, with no commitments outside their own home (like work, friends or family) so they could live nocturnally for one thing and not spread their bugs for another, with a bed no bigger than a twin (unless there was more than one person shut in to work the sessions, two to a bed or very tall people for a queen and king size), with access to a car for groceries (it'd be morally unacceptable to use public transportation), were willing to kill, and, most importantly, were crazy! Did I mention unflinching? **The whole experience was one of the worst times of my life, however I know if I got re-infested, I'd tilt at them again, and I'd do it much more effectually and confidently, and with far less angst and fewer existential qualms. And a lot less freakin' out!** (see **Takeaway 2** below).

Takeaway 1 in a couple/three sentences: As a friend said, my method of exterminating bed bugs isn't practical for most people. The infestation would have to be caught within a month or so, it would take an unflinching household willing to be non-social shut-ins, go nocturnal, and conduct killing sessions every night for at least a couple/three months. Not many people could pull it off. Imagine the Kardashians tilting at bed bugs! Or did I miss that episode?

Takeaway 2: The crazy question is: which makes more sense these days, the faltering professional exterminator agenda or my strategy? Word from current science, as revealed above (which I didn't have a full grasp of when I undertook my experiment), is dire:

- a. Bed bugs have grown resistant to many standard pesticides—***to the point that some experts say they wouldn't bother spraying should their own home become infested.***
- b. "It's very common that a [non-chemical] elimination [such as heat treatments and/or diatomaceous earth] ***takes one to two or even three months,***" says Changlu Wang, an entomologist at Rutgers University in New Jersey. ***Meanwhile, residents must keep living in their infested quarters.***
- c. If bed bugs do invade a home, ***"the biggest mistake is to try and get rid of them on one's own,"*** says entomologist Stephen Doggett of the Department of Medical Entomology at Westmead Hospital in Sydney. "The average person ... will use supermarket insecticides that are labeled for bed bugs but don't work. The infestation will spread, and the costs escalate."

But not only did I TRY to get rid of them on my own, I DID get rid of them on my own. Without chemicals, without heat treatments, without diatomaceous earth. Yes, it took almost three months for me, too, but, unlike my first encounter with bed bugs, if I were invaded again, I now have traps to act as an early warning system, I'd recognize the bugs on first sight, I'd know what the rashes and bites meant. I'd immediately clean my bathtub, move my daybed away from the wall, cover it with the Blanket of Doom and start luring them the very first night. It would take me less time to exterminate them because they wouldn't have a chance to build up their population at all before I started killing them. Plus I've purchased protective gear that I'll feel less exposed in (including latex gloves that I now know do work on a touch-screen) and, unlike during my first encounter, I'd know the whole time that my strategy was actually going to work. It'd possibly take less than a month and a half. No pie required. That's my Resident's Lure Strategy.

No outside exterminator could get a household through it in a month and a half what with the residents having to first identify the problem, then make first contact with the contractor, schedule the inspection, carry out instructions arising from the inspection regarding hunting for nests, vacuuming, decluttering and hot laundering, and then, finally, schedule treatment and follow-up. That's the Exterminator Treatment Strategy.

- d. ***our best option for reducing their impact on our lives is for researchers and pest control professionals to spend less time trying to kill them [with treatments], and more time trying to understand how they function within our world. Maybe then, we will work out a way to limit or even remove them from our homes for good.***

And that's what I did. And what if other people were equipped with the knowledge and expertise I now have. My strategy might not be so crazy or impractical in that case. What if other people put bed bug traps under their bed legs (before they ever had bed bugs) for early warning, and familiarized themselves with [what bed bugs look like](#), and got protective gear, and prepared a plan to go nocturnal [at the first sign](#) before the bed bug population got growing. (I'm drafting a plan for the website.) And if friends dropped off pie?

Or they could use the Resident's Lure along with hiring an Exterminator. Remember, the Resident's Lure Strategy would be sadly inadequate against a heavy bed bug infestation, probably even against a moderate one. Exterminators would have to be hired who would hopefully use treatments that worked (that the bed bugs aren't yet resistant to). But if the residents are still living in the infested quarters, they could augment the Exterminator's efforts with my Resident's Lure Strategy, and help bring the whole thing to a close sooner.

Exterminators would have to honour the efforts and efficacy of the Resident's Lure Strategy, and vice versa. With a moderate or heavy infestation, probably nests would have to be located so they can be treated. Residents would have to vacate the home and wait up to 15 hours after treatment before returning home, but then they could carry on with my Resident's Lure Strategy.

Takeaway 3: There may be other **takeaways** within my narrative such as:

- new learnings about bed bug behaviours,
- specific fresh strategies I used to impact that behaviour, and
- considerations about the most effective deployment of tools such as mattress encasements and bed bug traps,

that researchers and experts can mine out of it and incorporate into current extermination approaches to improve them. I am too close to my story and too removed from scientific expertise to see those mini-takeaways, but light bulbs may go on for others informed by my experiences. Bed bug-wise, the world is currently In. Big. Trouble! Even the bed bug **genome** (the complete set of DNA in an organism) was sequenced in 2016 as potential information to help us humans destroy them. My tilting at bed bugs may be a part of that. Bottom line, tilting worked!

The Timeline

I started putting the Timeline together when I was about halfway through the story to help me remember and keep track of what happened when. It isn't needed to fully appreciate the narrative but some readers might find it another matter of interest. I wish I had kept ongoing stats of the turnouts per session, including ages, and the kills, instead of being left with a lost opportunity. I have a Bachelor of Science in Biology, so I should have known better, but in my defence, I was mostly out of my mind. It won't happen a second time.

2023

Month One: Descent into Hell

Mar 17	First bug walked across my chest while reading on couch; flicked it away
Mar 19	Second bug; flicked it away
Mar 20	Third bug; killed it
Mar 22	Bad rash on back of thighs

- Mar 23 Rash on ass cheeks; thought allergic to daybed quilt
- Mar 24 Covered daybed quilt with white fuzzy fleece blanket and slept on top of that
- Mar 25 Noticed what looked like a few bug bites on my arm and face and also a small scattering of little black balls on the white blanket
- Mar 26 That morning, I saw a bug walking on the white blanket about six inches from my face; spent the day freaking out, researching on internet, making a plan
- First night of killing sessions**
- Mar 28 Named the white fuzzy fleece blanket the 'Blanket of Doom'
- Apr 14 **Halfway through the night I crashed** (see page 19 of story)
- Apr 15 **Started life of pie**
Twin (daybed) mattress encasement ordered
- Apr 18 Double bed mattress encasement ordered

Month Two: Heavenly Life of Pie

- Apr 20 Double bed mattress encasement delivered
- Apr 22 Twin bed mattress encasement delivered
- Apr 23 Eight bed bug traps ordered
- Apr 25? Eight bed bug traps delivered
- May 16? **Realized there had been fewer adults the last couple nights**
- May ? **No adults at all**

Month Three: Floundering Out of the Abyss

- May ? **Total numbers per night down**
- May ? **Total numbers per night significantly down**
- Jun 04** Only five bed bugs seen and killed on Blanket of Doom all night
- Jun 05 **Blanket of Doom and daybed quilt bagged separately and stored in freezer;**
daybed fitted sheet bagged and stored in bathtub
Mattress encasement installed on the daybed
Bed bug traps installed under daybed
Only one bed bug seen and killed on surface of mattress encasement that night
- Jun 06 Bed bugs found in bed bug traps that morning (no stats kept)
- Jun 06-13 Killing sessions with bare heels on mattress encasement**
No bed bugs seen on surface of mattress encasement since June 5
- Jun 14-16 In protective gear, plus socks and gloves, lying on daybed encasement with spotlight lamp on the whole night at each end of bed** (each lamp has three spotlights)
No cover, no pillow, no sleeping; read a novel on my iPhone

(I have a little tripod named Trip that can hold my iPhone sideways for me to read in bed)

Conducted a bug search every now and again

- Jun 14 One face bite; killed 5 Wallies and one bug on bed
- Jun 15 One waist bite and 3 Wallies
- Jun 16 No signs of bed bugs except in bed bug traps
- Jun 17-19 In protective gear, plus socks and gloves, lying on daybed encasement
with spotlight lamps attached to clicker
Set alarm to wake me every 2 hours; when awakened, turned lamps on with clicker to conduct search
Not much sleeping; no signs of bed bugs except in bed bug traps
- Jun 19 Since June 5 installment of bed bug traps under daybed, some 20 bed bugs caught in bed bug traps

Month Four: Return from the Netherworld

- Jun 20-30 **In white long-sleeved t-shirt and light purple PJ pants, plus socks and gloves**, began to actually sleep on daybed encasement with lamp clicker to use if (when) I woke up
Started taking Zopiclone again for return to being diurnal
No signs of bed bugs except in bed bug traps
- Jun 24 Eight more bed bug traps ordered (daybed has 9 legs; double bed has 4)
- Jun 26 Eight more bed bug traps delivered
Bed bug traps installed under double bed
Double bed linen removed, bagged and deposited in outside garbage bin;
The bagged daybed fitted sheet stored in bathtub deposited in outside garbage bin;
Bart showed up on the rug when I picked it out of the bathtub to bag it; I chased him around all over the rug, then bagged him with the rug, and put the bag in the freezer
Replacement linen and pillows for daybed and double bed ordered;
Cleaned dead bed bugs out of bed bug traps under daybed
- Jun 30 Since June 26, no bed bugs in bed bug traps under daybed; couple/three under double bed
Slept on daybed encasement without lamp clicker
- Jul 01 No bed bugs in bug traps under double bed and no signs of live bugs on mattress
Mattress encasement installed on double bed
- Jul 02-05 Replacement linen and pillows for double bed delivered
Made up double bed with new fitted sheet and pillow
- Jul 06-12 Replacement linen and pillows for daybed delivered
- Jul 13 **Moved back to sleeping in double bed in bedroom**
Made up daybed with new fitted sheet and pillow

Still no signs of bed bugs

Aug 13 **Finally using cover to sleep**
Still no signs of bed bugs

2024

Dec 31 Still no signs of bed bugs