



The art of ant war:

Montreal exterminator gets into his enemies' psyche

by Chris Barry

Name: Paul Novak, aka the Antman
Age: 36
Job title: Exterminator
Salary: Enough to get by.

Bio: This Villeray resident began his vermin-killing career exterminating the staples like rats, roaches and spiders but quickly got bored with those creatures and chose to specialize in carpenter ants “because of the challenge they presented.” He claims that each infestation he takes on is special and “has to be treated as an individual mission” involving wit, strategy and perseverance. The top ant killer in town, he is modest about his status and has been studying industrial electronics with an eye to maybe entering that field some time, when he determines his killing days are over. “I love my work but I have a couple of kids now and I have to consider the long-term health effects of always being around insecticides.”

Does he feel a healthy respect for his arthropod adversaries? Yes. “I wouldn’t be able to hunt them down and kill them otherwise.”

Are ants the trickiest vermin to dispose of? “Yes, because you have to find their nest, and ants are really smart about hiding them in hard-to-find locations. You have to eliminate the nest! Most exterminators will just spray, but they’re fooling their customers because, before long, the ants will be back again. You have to

get into the psyche of the ants to really be able to exterminate them effectively.”

Does he feel that most people underestimate the intelligence of ants? Definitely.

How often he has been forced to concede defeat to an ant colony: Only once or twice in his entire 16-year career.

How passionate is his hatred for carpenter ants? Not that intense. The Antman says he doesn’t hate ants and won’t go out of his way to crush them on the sidewalk.

Does he ever feel guilty after wiping out an entire civilization of happy-go-lucky, industrious insects? Absolutely not. But he still feels pretty bad about having once annihilated a nest of baby squirrels back when he was still breaking into the extermination business.

How often people express disappointment when he doesn’t show up as the Antman in a superhero outfit: All the time.

How often people call him up in a panic saying they have “ants in their pants that are just driving them baty”: Much less often.

Best part of the job: Meeting people and being able to solve their infestation problems.



Worst: Crawling around in people’s tiny attics first thing in the morning and being knee-deep in prickly and potentially toxic home insulation.

Hobbies: The Antman sings with a variety of amateur bands.

Musical tastes: Ella Fitzgerald, Zep, Floyd.

Last book read: Les Fourmis, by Bernard Werber. “I got a lot of really good information about ants from this novel.”

Favourite recent film: American Beauty

Philosophy: “Life and business aren’t just about money. A lot of it is about honesty. Don’t screw people. And spend time with your kids.” •