I just can't get them out of my bed
Concordia's Terriene Friday recounts the attack of the super pests

MONTREAL—It's my name is Terriene, and I had a bedbug problem. The popular bedding rhyme is familiar to us all: “Good night, sleep tight, don't let the bedbugs bite.” But who knew that there'd be such a literal truth! The bedbug, a tiny blood-sucking pest, has recently resurfaced in North America after a 50-plus-year hiatus. The tiny suckers are visible to the naked eye but are incredible at playing hide-and-seek. Bedbugs are most commonly found in the seams of mattresses and box springs, in wood furniture, and in your bedding. Bedbug bites are red, very itchy, and often found in multiples of three. They devour the lives of many and appear when you least expect them: after a relaxing vacation, during the mid-semester rush, or between final exams. Most importantly, they fester in neighborhoods with high turnover rates—areas such as student ghettos.

This may make you think twice about dumpster-diving for cheap finds. In order to conquer the bedbug dilemma, I tracked down a pest control operator, and soon realized that I was not alone.

Georgina Sherman is a Concordia University student who had the time of her life dealing with bedbugs this fall. “People don't really understand how difficult it was to deal with,” she said. Sherman, 21, said about how the bedbugs APC were in full swing. She believed that other tenants in the same building had price bedding concerns.

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

“Your need to contact the city inspectors after advising your landlord by registered mail,” Sherman said. “The city inspectors visit your residence, they complete an assessment and give you a contact in the municipal government. The owner of the building under investigation then gets a copy of the assessment, which may or may not detail health infractions.”

She has heard about the lingering bedbug situation from Concordia students more recently. “They're not like wasps or mice,” Sherman said. “Bedbugs are very hard to get rid of.”

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

The only problem is that they forgot to develop a formula for bedbugs. Bedbugs can be domesticated in a hotel, in your bed and environment, they're now stronger and more chemical-resistant than ever. This means that even the most fume-resistant bed, they could notrightarrow—but that I had to learn the hard way.

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

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

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

“I still have scars,” Sherman continued, referring to her shoulder and her psyche. A medium itch of the neck is a constant reminder of the ordeal she went through.

Kris Johnson is the manager of Student Housing at McGill University. Last year during the fall semester, she had to find alternative housing arrangements for students living in both the new residence and the MORE Houses—shared facilities houses serving as residences at McGill—for the current bedbug crisis.

"There were 15 people living in the house, so it got to everybody," she said of the MORE House outbreak. "We hired a cleaning company. Unfortunately for some, it was too little, too late. Our guy's grill was destroyed." Johnson couldn't confirm how the bedbugs invaded the MORE House, however, she believes that they took over soon after a resident moved in from the United States. Although Johnson had experience dealing with other pests, she didn't have an action plan for bedbugs.

"Even the pest control people were trying new things," she said. The Concordia Off-Campus Housing service knows exactly how to help students in a crisis situation.

"You need to contact the city inspectors after advising your landlord by registered mail," Sherman said. "They are not helpful to the municipal government. The owner of the building under investigation then gets a copy of the assessment, which may or may not detail health infractions.

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The thought of sleeping alongside pests may make you squirm, but in the long run, they're not dire to your physical health—they're only dire to your sleep quality, social life, self-esteem, drinking life, soundness of mind, and academic performance. Without the financial cost, I suggest you surrender with your white flag and go to know your new roommates a little better. If you can't bear them, you might as well join a new student house.