

"Don't Let the Bed Bugs Bite"

My friend Bob retired early from teaching high school and now manages a movie theatre in a Big City. Several years ago, the local TV station, always seeking sensationalism, decided to host a panel of experts on “the growing bed bug epidemic.” (Two infestations one year, three the next = one epidemic.)

Their researcher discovered that bed bugs can infest many places: nursing homes, cruise ships, hotels, college dorms, homes, and movie theatres. To speak for the latter, they invited Bob to the panel. Since its regularly-scheduled, heavily-hyped comedy show had been abruptly cancelled, due to its star slipping yet again into rehab, the national network had picked up the bed bug show and would broadcast it live across Canada.

Bob had grudgingly surrendered to youth the things that are youth, including his hair. The makeup lady quailed when he walked into the studio. She applied two different powders, but Bob’s chrome dome still gave off a blinding glare under the bright spotlights.

She rummaged deep in her bag and extracted a very small tube of a very expensive anti-glare gel. Bob’s head took the entire tube. That blew her makeup budget for the month.

Bob’s fellow panellists were the vice-president of a pest control company and a professor of entomology. The prof had brought along a sealed vial containing dozens of live and hungry bed bugs. The producer was overcome with joy, but the rest of the TV crew and Gloria, the carefully-coiffed bottle-blond on-air host, exchanged nervous glances.

The show’s theme music sounded, Gloria mangled the introductions, and the panel got underway. Everything went well, until the professor suggested letting a bed bug dine on the arm of the V-P, who had to agree, to preserve his macho image. The producer gleefully ordered a cameraperson to get a close up

of the feeding. Gloria squirmed in her chair, barely hiding her revulsion.

The bug was extracted, placed on the victim's arm, and promptly began to gorge. The prof placed the resealed vial with the rest of the colony on the table between him and Bob, and everyone watched the feasting insect.

Gloria asked Bob about the (admittedly rare) occurrence of bed bugs in theatres and he launched into his reply with gusto. Because of his years of teaching, Bob talked with his hands.

One of his sweeping gesticulations connected with the vial, sending it flying off the table. Bob made a futile grab for it as it arced through the air. Gloria's perfectly-lipsticked mouth was just forming a shocked "O" when the glass shattered on the hard floor.

Gloria uttered an unearthly shriek and launched straight up from her chair. She hit the ground running, heading for the studio door. She would have made it too, except she forgot she was "miked." The cord attached to the microphone attached to her jacket snapped taunt before she had taken three steps. She was yanked backward, her feet flew out from under her, and she crashed to the floor. The same floor now crawling with bed bugs.

Anyone impressed by her first shriek were positively astonished with her second one. Though the studio was soundproofed, people heard it two floors down.

One dedicated cameraperson filmed the whole thing, broadcasting it live, nationwide.

Apart from the area lit by spotlights, TV studios during a show are dark places, full of cracks and crevices. Bed bugs love the dark and live in cracks and crevices, which is what the colony scurried into posthaste.

Everyone fled the studio, with the pest control V-P yelling into his cell phone that he had a Code Red - major infestation - requiring room quarantine and an extermination team IMMEDIATELY.

The insect was still on his arm.

Although this story is partially fictional, I still sleep fitfully.