

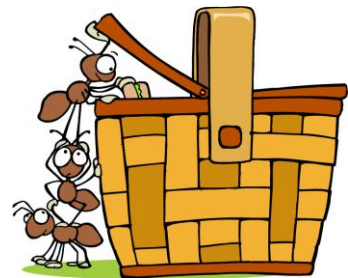
There Are No Ants in Antarctica

Who would have thought that maple syrup would taste so good? At the time I didn't know what all of that sticky stuff was or why other ants loved it so much. It made it hard for me to walk, and when you have six legs, it really complicates things. I began to wonder, "Is this heaven? And if it is, why do I deserve to be here?" But more about this later . . .



An ant's world is not complicated. We are born into a hard-working society that prides itself in conformity, organization, and efficiency. Our instincts are unparalleled and our communication skills rate among the best of nature's creatures. And speaking of communication, I better soak up as much of this maple syrup as I can, because as you probably know, word of such finds has a way of getting out in the ant kingdom.

As a young ant, I learned early in life that sharing is an important part of our culture. We rarely find ourselves alone in anything we do. This includes how we live, the way we hunt for food, and the dependence we have on other ants for survival. When we do find ourselves alone or in a strange environment, our antennae are always up. You can never tell when you might need to summon reinforcements either for protection, or simply to help haul away a newly discovered food supply for the colony. Reflexes and instincts like these have helped us survive for over 100 million years. You might say that our brains are small. Well, my 250,000 brain cells might pale in comparison to your 10,000,000, but they are quite efficient in everything that matters in the ant kingdom.



I'm not much of a physical specimen, but I do manage to stay in shape. There isn't an ounce of fat on me, because my work ethic is second to none. I started out as a worker ant laboring day and night moving our queen's eggs . . . up near the surface during the day, and down into the nest for the night.



Exhausting! I can lift more than twenty times my weight. Can you name a human that can come close to that feat? (Remind me to tell you the story of how I placed third in the Twig Lifting event at the Ant Olympics last season.) Ever since I can remember, I have instinctively known the right things to do and the proper way to do them. Perhaps it was my strong family

upbringing. I've always been close to my 1,320 brothers and sisters, mostly because we lived in the same colony. For as long as I can remember, I've never had privacy!

What's in a name?

Ants have names, but not in the same sense as humans. We don't have surnames that have elaborate histories. Each of us goes by a single name, and that suits me fine. Remember, we only have 250,000 brain cells, and there's no sense in cluttering them up with unnecessary information. I learned a lot from my dad. He was a carpenter ant and was extremely good at his trade. Much of his work has been recognized colony-wide. He certainly made the most of his opportunities. At family gatherings, he would often recount stories about my

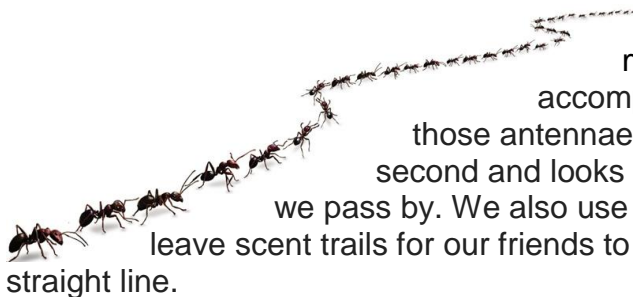


Dad



grandfather and how close he was to our queen. ServAnt would work along with other drones to make her journeys around the colony as comfortable as possible. My dad proudly showed us pictures of him and his fellow drones actually carrying our queen (even though he didn't appear to be enjoying himself in many of those old photographs).

When you look down (and that's what you need to do most of the time to see us), you can learn much about our unique culture by simply observing. If you were to go back in history, you would find that ants were around when dinosaurs roamed the earth. Well, we're still around and T-Rex and his prehistoric pals didn't survive the Ice Age and several of those major meteorite impacts. If I have to say it myself, we are pretty amazing creatures.



We communicate by means of our antennae. This is accomplished by touching each other with those antennae. This process takes less than a second and looks similar to a human's "high five" as we pass by. We also use chemicals called pheromones to leave scent trails for our friends to follow. Rarely do we travel in a straight line.

Ant families are large. Our queen lays over 2,500 eggs per day! If you research ant colonies, you will see that there are three types of ants in the general population: males, female workers, and the queen. Each has specific duties to perform, but if you simply view it that way, it appears as though we are completely devoid of personalities or individual traits. That simply isn't true. You might need to get down on your hands and knees to get a true "ant's eye view."

An ant's eye view

The first thing you'll notice is just how big you are compared to my family and me. Opening a pack of sugar and not getting all of it in your coffee just might lead to a wonderful mid-day snack for us. Just leave those granules around and see how many new friends in the ant kingdom you will make. I know I can carry one of those granules away and enjoy it later. Ants don't know that sugar isn't good for them. All we know is that it tastes great!



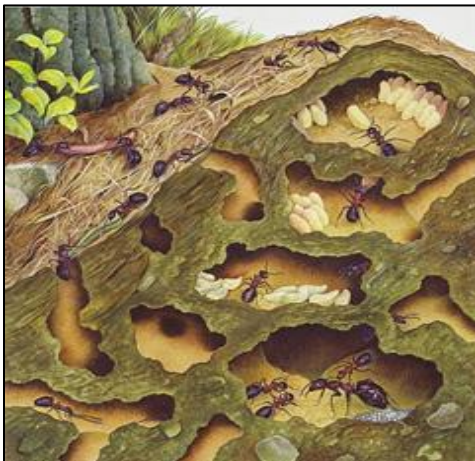
Objects that look small to you appear gigantic to me.

One of my first colonies was located just off the sixth tee of a golf course. The picture on the left shows what I saw when I peeked out from our mound. Those blades of grass you see appear tree-like to us, and yes, we can climb them. When you take your dog for a walk in the park, this is how Fido looks to us.



The Colony

Design and practicality are just two of our strengths. The more you learn about ants, the more you will marvel at the skillful way we do things. We plan well and that gift has been with us for as long as anyone can remember. Our "engineers" make sure our tunnels and caverns are all connected and serve specific purposes. If you could shrink down to my size and sneak a peek at how we live, this is what you would see. If you're an ant, there's never a boring moment.



What you see



What we see

Growing up in a colony

I don't remember much about my early life. I barely have memories of me as an egg, larva or pupa. What I know about that period mostly comes from accounts of those events from older friends and relatives. Apparently I was large as an egg (lots of baby fat), but when I entered into the pupa stage, the rest of the colony's population seemed to catch up with me size wise.



With the average population of an ant colony in the thousands, I never had a problem finding friends. Yes, I said friends. While I had many ant acquaintances, I only counted a select few as real friends. Defi**Ant**, Acceler**Ant**, Account**Ant**, Bouy**Ant**, Consult**Ant**, Unimport**Ant**, Intellig**Ant**, Vigil**Ant**, and Ignor**Ant** shared many of my youthful experiences, and are still true friends today. We did what all good friends did growing up. We tested the rules and often got into trouble. Looking back, I guess we're all lucky to be alive.

The Anteater

Ants have something in common with all living things, and that is a fear of our natural enemies. For ants, it is the anteater. Even though anteaters have no teeth, they are true predators. They draw prey into their mouths by means of a long, flexible, rapidly moving tongue covered with sticky saliva. Their tongue can be flicked up to 150 times per minute causing havoc on any populated ant colony. A fully-grown anteater can eat upwards of 30,000 ants or termites a day. From an early age, I learned what do to during anteater drills. Each time I heard the Anteater Alert, I treated it seriously, knowing that someday it could be real and our colony could be under attack.



One cool and cloudless afternoon, we had just finished moving a new harvest of eggs from the lower chambers to several rooms near the surface when Vigil**Ant** sensed that something was wrong. We were taking a short break when seemingly out of nowhere he said, "Guys, I've got this feeling that something strange is going to happen."

"You're always saying crazy stuff, like the time you told us there was going to be a flood and turned out to be a broken pipe in the golf course's sprinkler system," said Unimport**Ant**."

"No, I know that this time will be different. Clairvoy**Ant** feels the same way and told me so. You know yesterday, I spotted that giant anteater again. He had his nose in the trunk of that big oak tree across the field; you know . . . the one

with all those termite nests. I guess the guys that survive will be looking for a new home.”

“Hey, maybe Vigil**Ant** is right. We might have a problem, but what can we do?” said Intellig**Ant**.

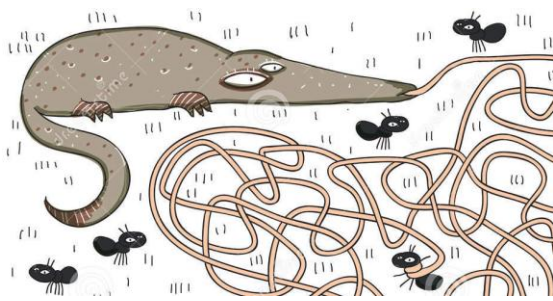
Acceler**Ant** chimed in, “I don’t know about the rest of you, but I’ve got nothing to worry about. I’ll simply outrun that sticky tongue. I’ve done it before. As I always say, it’s the survival of the fittest.”



Intellig**Ant** pondered the situation and said, “Sure, that’s easy for you to say, but what about the rest of us? And what about our Queen? We just can’t leave her unprotected. She’ll surely become anteater dessert. We need a plan. Anyone got an idea?”

“Sure,” said Ignor**Ant**, “Let’s just wait for him to stick his tongue down here and we’ll tie it in a knot. Then he’ll get stuck and we can escape. Wouldn’t that be something?”

Everyone just stopped what they were doing, looked at Ignor**Ant**, shook their heads, and slowly rolled their eyes. It was then that Consult**Ant** spoke up. “I think there just might be something in what Ignor**Ant** said. With the way our



colony is constructed at the base of the tree, all of those connecting chambers and tunnels could be used as escape routes for us and confusing to any predator. If the anteater sticks his nose in here, we just might be able to lead him on a tongue-tying chase that won’t end well for him. He could end up being stuck for days. Hey Acceler**Ant**, are you

sure you can outrun that dude’s tongue?”

No sooner had Consult**Ant** finished what he was saying when the ground began to tremble and whatever light that managed to seep into the upper chambers of the colony slowly disappeared. In its place was the distinctive sound of a muted buzz-saw . . . the bellow of a giant anteater.

Amid the collapse of the upper portion of the colony’s mound, granules of sand and dirt began to crumble and fill some of the tunnels. All of the colony’s ants were intuitively notified and began putting into practice what they had learned during all of those anteater emergency practice drills. Red Alert was now a reality as thousands of ants did what their instincts told them to do.



“Guys, this is for real!” cried Intellig**Ant**. “Let’s do the plan! Acceler**Ant**, you stay here until you see the tongue. The rest of us will make sure these top tunnels are clear. That’s the way Acceler**Ant** will lead

the anteater's tongue until it gets wrapped around the tree roots just off the main chambers. Got it?"

"OK, you guys just keep those tunnels clear and I'll do the rest," said Acceler**Ant**.

It resembled a small-scale earthquake. The sheer weight of the giant anteater caused many of the tunnels and chambers near the surface to collapse as its long, muscular tongue forced its way down through the upper portion of the colony. As if on cue, Acceler**Ant** looked up and was almost knocked over by a sweeping movement of that giant tongue. The swing was futile, but the anteater knew there was food down there and he extended his tongue further. It was then that Acceler**Ant** began his sprint through the maze of tunnels, passageways, and chambers. Like a miniature bullet fired from a rifle, he ran quickly through the chamber, zigzagging up and over roots and through passageways. His route took him high and low and crisscrossed itself several times. In less than a minute, the anteater's tongue had become bent, twisted, and inescapably entwined around several tree roots, Cries of panic echoed throughout the cavern as the anteater tugged and pulled in an attempt to dislodge his tongue. The more he tried to free himself, the tighter those knots became, similar to what happens to your fingers once they are stuck in one of those old Chinese finger traps. At that point he totally lost interest in his ant cuisine and wanted nothing more than to free himself.



We spent the rest of the day moving the eggs to a new location despite the rumbling on the surface of the stuck anteater. That task was relatively easy due to the extensive network of underground tunnels that we had previously built.

True Love

As part of the maturation process, nature sets off a series of time-released triggers throughout the body. This is not only true with human beings; there is a similar process that takes place in the insect world. As ants grow into maturity, they too become aware of the opposite sex.

Perhaps it was her distinctively seductive pheromones that turned my antennae her way as she walked by. I wasn't the only one who stopped working and began to stare. She was the most beautiful arthropod I had ever seen. Being an awkward *adolescant*, I began to experience sensory overload. A female that beautiful was used to getting attention from the opposite sex everywhere she went, and seemed to take all of those compliments in stride. As she passed by, her head slowly turned in my direction and for a brief second and we made eye contact. That look stopped me cold. I nodded my head and signaled "Hi" to her through my antennae. She appeared to



look at me and nod back. From that moment, I couldn't think about anything else. Her name was Rom**Antic**.



Ants dream, and I know this first hand. Many of my early childhood dreams consisted of discovering hidden mounds of sugar at picnics or finding a piece of crumb cake that had been abandoned near a trashcan. In those dreams I would eat and eat and never get full. I guess that's why dreams are just that . . . dreams, and a temporary departure from reality. Those nightly adventures were about fictional scenarios . . . things that were not real, until I started dreaming about Rom**Antic**.

When you're an ant, time moves at a faster pace than it does in the world of humans. We experience the same days and nights, but somehow they seem to go by faster in our world. Maybe it's because we do so much more in that time frame. Before I knew it, Val**Antine's** Day was approaching. I had not experienced this yearly phenomenon personally, but I had seen many of our older ants go out of their way to give presents to their female friends. They would search far and wide for sweet things that were heart shaped and ceremoniously present them on that special day. Inside my head, those 250,000 brain cells kicked in again and instinctively told me that I needed to do something like that for Rom**Antic**.

Ant Hormones

It is in times like these that newly activated hormones and emotions run high. They seem to dominate logic and common sense sending you on a strange journey that takes you places you have yet to experience. In youth there are many unanswered questions, and rarely do we have the answers. So, what did we do? We asked our friends. That afternoon, Intellig**Ant**, Defi**Ant**, Ignor**Ant** and I were taking a break from work, sharing some crumbs from a cupcake when I got up the nerve and asked the inevitable question, "What do you guys get your girlfriends for Val**Antine's** Day?"

"Girlfriends," said Defi**Ant**, "Did I hear you correctly? Who around here has a girlfriend?"

"Well, I sort'a have one." I replied.

"Sort'a? What 'sort'a' girlfriend do you have?" said Intellig**Ant**. "And when did all of this happen, last night in one of your dreams?"

Feeling a bit embarrassed I said, "Come on guys, I want to get something for Rom**Antic**. Something she will appreciate and that tells her that I really care."

"Rom**Antic**!" they both cried in unison.

"What makes you think she even knows who you are?" said Intellig**Ant**. "I'll bet she has hundreds of boyfriends. Those guys will be lined up all day long in front of her place just waiting to give her Val**Antine's** Day presents. If you really want to do this, you better do something special . . . something different that she will really appreciate."



“Yeah,” said IgnorAnt, “Like a whole chocolate donut!”

Later that day, I had exhausted all of my resources in an attempt to find the ultimate ValAntine’s Day present. As I went in search of that perfect gift, my route took me past the tunnel that led to RomAntic’s place.



IntelligAnt was right, the line was even longer than I had imagined. There were hundreds of ants lined up, all bearing gifts and presents. I even caught glimpses of her politely rejecting several suitors and their offerings. I felt discouraged, but then those 250,000 brain cells of mine kicked in and I got an idea.

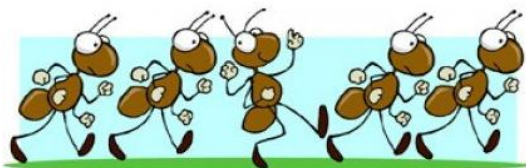
From what I had just witnessed, if I were to stand in that line, I probably wouldn’t get to RomAntic’s place for several hours. That was if the flow of suitors continued at its current pace. I needed to get noticed, but in a good and memorable way.

I think the sign might have worked, because I saw her glance my way as I stood near the entrance of her tunnel. Despite the hundreds of other ants vying for her attention, she went out of her way to acknowledge my sign and the “handsome” ant that was holding it. I knew then that I had made the right choice. Even though our antennae never touched, it turned out to be my best ValAntine’s Day ever!



The “Crumbiest” Vacation

When ants are young, they all dream of taking a vacation to **Antarctica**. While it’s true that no ant that I’ve ever known has been there, we all talk about going some day. I guess it’s the way human children talk to their parents about going to Disneyland. But Disneyland isn’t a vast frozen tundra with sub zero temperatures and violent winds that make living there virtually impossible. Ant



Yippee! We’re going on vacation!

parents know this, and discussions about the realities of **Antarctica** fall in the same class as the discussions human parents have with their children regarding Santa Claus. Sometimes it becomes a “delicate” subject to discuss with youngsters.

Besides being a great carpenter, my father was excellent at planning. Whether it was a picnic, the design of our cavern, or our vacations, he left no detail to chance. So, when he announced that we would be going on a vacation and leaving first thing in the morning, we couldn’t contain our excitement.

“Get some rest,” he told us. “We have a lot of traveling to do in the morning.”

“Are we going to **AntArctica**?” asked InfAnt.

Some of us started to giggle, but a glaring look by our parents reminded us that we weren’t that far removed from our little brother’s belief in that fantasy. None of us dared to speak, if for no reason but to see how our father would handle this delicate issue.



“No, InfAnt, not on this trip. **AntArctica** is really far away and we just can’t afford that much time away from our colony. I’ve done a lot of planning and I promise that this will be one of the best vacations ever . . . and I just know that everyone will have fun” said the father.

“But dad, I’ve never been to **AntArctica**. I haven’t seen those mountains of sugar and beaches of white bread crumbs where we can eat all we want and not have to worry about getting full or fat. I want to play in the big lake made of maple syrup.”



*Once upon a time in a land called **AntArctica** . . .*

I remember when I thought exactly like InfAnt. There were nights I would have trouble falling asleep because thoughts of actually being in **AntArctica** with all those sweets kept my excitement and anticipation levels peaked. I really don’t remember how old I was when the doubts started. Everything **AntArctica** was supposed to be to young ants was beginning to seem just too good to be true. Then came the day of reckoning.

It was just after Christmas. Some of my brothers and I were chewing on a left-over sliver of candy cane that some careless human dropped on the floor when I overheard laughter from a neighboring cavern. Several older ants were humorously discussing the fact that two of their younger siblings still believed that some day they would go on vacation to **AntArctica** and play on those mountains of sugar and beaches of white bread crumbs. I thought it was strange that they were making fun of our “land of plenty.” Young ants always assumed that if you didn’t believe, you would never get there. That evening those persistent doubts continued, and I knew that I needed to ask my father about them.

“Son,” said dad slowly, “I always enjoyed the smile on your face each time we talked about **AntArctica**. Your childhood joy was genuine, as it was with all of our children. Yes, **AntArctica** does exist, but not as you and other young ants believe. It is a vast land of snow and ice, with very little life. The only animals that call that place home are penguins and seals. It’s very similar to what humans tell their children about Santa Claus and the North Pole. Well, Antarctica is our South Pole and it is on the very bottom of the earth.”



It is so cold in Antarctica that even the penguins wear sweaters!

Amid sniffles and a tear or two as I attempted to hide my disappointment, I shuddered and said, “You mean . . . there are *no* ants in Antarctica?”

“Yes, son,” whispered dad, “There are no ants in Antarctica. But there are lots of places not too far from our colony that have all the sweet things every ant loves. As you grow up, you’ll understand why we let you believe as long as we could.”

Memories of that day rematerialized as I heard my father speak those same words to Inf**Ant** on the eve of our vacation.

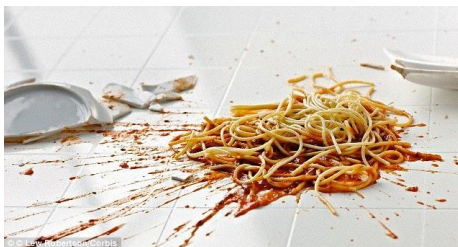
The Plan

We started before dawn because we travel well in the dark. None of us needed a trail of bread crumbs to see where we were heading. There was a slight element of danger as we crossed several yards of concrete leading to the entrance of the bakery. How did dad know the bakery would be the ideal first stop? As ants, we have a distinct advantage over other visitors . . . we didn’t have to open the front door to enter. We just walked under it!



It was like waking up in the middle of a wonderful dream! My antennae were virtually overloaded with signals transmitted from family members. Cakes, pies, and breads were everywhere, and I didn’t know where to start. Some of my brothers looked like miniature PacMen as they gobbled up every crumb in their path. I found a chocolate cupcake and burrowed in!

We ate until we could barely move. Then dad signaled that it was time to move on to our next destination. The single-file caravan began at the door and led to Nino’s Pizzeria that was right next-door. As luck would have it, the first thing we stumbled upon was a plate of spaghetti that had fallen on the floor. How



lucky could we get? Curiosity got to me as I watched **Antipasto** eat more spaghetti than I thought could fit into his corpulent body. I wondered if we would have to widen some of the tunnels back at the colony to accommodate his new waistline. I concentrated on finding pizza crust. There are always pizza crust crumbs if you know where to look.

How could this get any better? A bakery and then a pizza restaurant . . . how could anything top those? Amidst the munching and chewing sounds audible only to us, the universal signal to move on came across our antennae. Again, the single file line formed and dad led us to our next stop.

IHOP

By this time we had the routine down. We marched towards the back door of the IHOP wide-eyed and filled with anticipation. As I looked up, I could see the large sign above telling me that we had arrived at perhaps the top ant vacation destination in the world in terms of popularity. This place has everything an ant could ever want . . . sugar, pancakes, waffles, coffee grinds, and most importantly, an endless supply of syrup!



Our customary discipline seemed to vanish as we moved excitedly in different directions in search of our particular favorites. Our family of ants was everywhere and into everything!

One thing humans do not realize is that as much as they try to keep things clean, they always miss something. They leave tell-tale signs behind that have scents that are easily discoverable in the insect world. Humans are just too big to see what they leave behind. In the ant world, we call this advertising. Scents were everywhere, and it was just a matter of time before I was able to sift through the overabundance of signals and home in on the one that mattered most to me . . . maple syrup!



The climb was steep and at times treacherous, but I found the tray that housed the syrup dispensers. The fact that I was alone at this point surprised me, but I attributed that to the sheer number of other culinary delights that were being explored by the members of my family. My antennae were burning with desire at the realization that I was about to experience perhaps the ultimate pleasure in the arthropod world. My efforts were soon to be rewarded because the top of the dispenser was now close. In the back of my mind were warnings and reminders telling me to be careful because everyone knows that ants can't swim, but I also knew that syrup was thick and I could simply jump in and pretty much walk on its surface. I might have resembled an Olympic diver on the high board. When I reached the lip of the syrup dispenser I jumped. The judges would have scored my swan dive into the thick heavenly liquid a perfect ten!



There might not be ants in **Antarctica**, but right now I'm pretty sure I'm in **AntHeaven**!

My Family Tree (and Mound)



Characters and Family Members:

- AccelerAnt – The fastest ant in the colony.
- AccountAnt – The “numbers” guy who is great at analyzing everything.
- AcceptAnt – The most tolerant ant in the colony.
- Antacid – The grouchy old aunt who gossips and complains about everyone and anything.
- Antagonize – A brash ant that gets under your skin.
- Antiaircraft – Colony lookout who watches for predatory birds and insects.
- Anticlimax – Always ruins the ending of stories and punch lines of jokes.
- Antipasto – The fattest ant that is always getting stuck in narrow tunnels.
- Antisocial – The loner of the colony.
- AttendAnt – Good friend and worker ant who serves the Queen.
- BuoyAnt – The only ant who can swim.
- ClairvoyAnt - The ant that can seemingly see into the future.
- ConsultAnt – The colony’s expert on most things.
- Defiant – The brashiest ant who has no respect for authority or rules.
- DespondAnt – Mr. Gloom and Doom.
- FlamboyAnt – Consistently the best dresser.
- Hesitant – Never the first to act.
- IgnorAnt – Not the sharpest tool in the shed.
- ImplAnt – She disappeared one day and came back several weeks later with considerable improvements.
- Inconsistent – The least reliable ant.
- Indignant – Sarcastic and disrespectful to everyone.
- InfAnt - The baby of the ant family.
- Intelligent – The smartest and most logical ant in the family.
- IntoxicAnt – Not his real name, but his nickname after falling into a beer can and staying there a little too long.
- ItinerAnt – Always traveling and exploring.
- PleasAnt – Miss Congeniality. Nice to everyone.
- PregnAnt – Wanted to be the queen but didn’t qualify. She kept her new name anyway.
- RepentAnt – Always sorry and full of regret.
- RomAntic – The most beautiful ant in the colony.
- ServAnt – Grandfather and personal valet to the Queen.
- Soldiers - CombatAnt, MilitAnt, LieutenAnt, SergeAnt, and GallAnt
- TyrAnt – Power-crazed and ruthless.
- UnimportantAnt – Lowly ant totally lacking in self respect and confidence.
- VigilAnt – Always watchful and on alert.

About the Author:

Robert Guise is a former English teacher and sales management professional who enjoys creating humor pieces, fiction, and satirical short stories based on simple, every-day subjects.

“I have two goals I try to accomplish with each story I write:

- 1) To make my readers smile.
- 2) Hopefully, you will read about something in my stories, and say to yourself, 'I never knew that.'”

