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Fact-checked by

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A Scientific Inquistion by

25 THINGS  
WE CAN LEARN FROM  
SLAVE-MAKING ANTS

- 1 Sometimes they are all female.
- 2 They do not know how to find food for, clean, or feed themselves.
- 3 They survive exclusively by finding other ants and convincing them to do all of the work for them.
- 4 I am totally not kidding about any of this.
- 5 There are fewer than 100 species of slave-making ants, and about an equal number of enslavable ant species. Sometime over the last 120 million years, they co-evolved into these categories. For now, at least, they are stuck in them. So, somehow, despite our contemporary social understanding to the opposite, nature has determined the capture and control of another species within your same genus a completely efficient method of survival.
- 6 I'm not advocating slavery, I'm just saying.
- 7 One species of slave-making ant will always raid a specific species of enslavable ant. They exist in a one-to-one ratio; no species of slave-making ant will invade a species found to be enslavable to another. This may seem to resemble a deeply lodged code of conduct among slave-makers, an "honor-among-thieves" kind of thing just on a whole new level of thieving, but really it's laziness.
- 8 While technically, yes, what they do *is* capture and enforce labor, and thus *enslave* another species, they really prefer the term "stewardry."



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Anne Elizabeth Moore's work has been collected by major museums, praised by the business press, and gotten her ejected from more than one retail establishment. It is weird, because pretty much she spends most of her time writing funny little essays and taking cat breaks. Her next book, *Unmarketable: Brandalism, Copyfighting, Mocketing, and the Erosion of Integrity* will be out on the New Press in November, or check [www.anneelizabethmoore.com](http://www.anneelizabethmoore.com) for more.



**14** Ants that are not involved in the slave trade at any end of the deal are called free-living ants. There are approximately 15,000 species of free-living ants, and while they can find

**13** New York-based slave-making ants have been found to be far more aggressive than the others, even other slave-making ants that also live on the East Coast. Even ants of the same species. In fact, it is thought that when a New York-based slave-making ant moves to, say, West Virginia, it mellovs out a little, begins to enjoy all it has worked for. You know. The sheer density of the slave-making ant population in New York is believed to cause individuals great anxiety: job competition is fierce, space to live in great demand, the queen—very high-strung, Enslaved populations in New York are therefore made to work harder, but are also more liable to revolt. (Please see number 4, above.)

**12** Many species of many kinds of animals survive off the labor of different species of animals. Sometimes the dominant species will go far as to kill the other and eat them, other times they limit themselves to boyftend-stealing and word-of-mouth marketing. Most of the time, though, it does not seem this, ummmm, mean.

**11** Rape, meaning, you know, the carrying away of an individual against their wishes.

**10** Survival of certain slave-making ants, the Polyergus for example, hinge on the scout. She searches out other ant colonies—Formica colonies, specifically—and later returns with troops, leading an attack against her chosen nest. She is the head ant in charge of the rape division.

**9** Ladies in the audience, try this once: go over to your neighbors' house, and be all, "I'm hungry." And after your neighbor has fed you, go, "OK, now come over and clean my house." You will discover real fast that enslaving others is not so easy as the ants make it out to be.

food, clean their nests, and eat on their own, few scientists think to investigate whether or not they want to. There are probably some ants, after all, who'd rather hire a maid if they could afford one. And some who'd like to keep busy, all the time. Even in free societies.

**15** Once back in the enemy camp, the kidnapped brood integrates quickly. They adjust to their new underground lives, adapting to the unfamiliar smells and curves that mark their new nest. They feed their new queen, and care for her as if she were always their own. In human psychology, this is called identification with the captor, or Stockholm Syndrome. Sometimes, when humans are kidnapped like this, like young humans in high-profile kidnap cases, for example, they do not escape even when given the chance to. And later, when their captors are captured, they speak kindly of him, miss him, ask after him. Rarely, however, do kidnapped humans, upon kidnapping, participate in vicious attacks against their own families. Enslaved ants do. They will join—and, some say, instigate—later raids on their own species.

**16** I'm not saying we're any better than the ants. After all, Patty Hearst. The Manson Family. Colonel Tigh.

**17** One imagines it would be very confusing for certain ants to see a sister approaching, smell her familiarity, and then watch her eat one of her own. Confusing and, probably, horrifying.

**18** Working in independent media, and on a magazine devoted to forwarding non-corporate-created content exclusively, I am often faced with people—men, mostly—who want to advertise in our magazine, but cannot, due to the fact that their businesses are owned by a Major Media Conglomerate. "But I am so cool," they will say, "I am a subscriber," and, "Get with the program." Also, "You are living in 1994." All of this may be true, but when our ad policy states "no Major Media Conglomerates" in just that way, there isn't really any discussion to be had. Still, these men are often so sure that they are in the right, so absolutely positive that *their* Major Media Conglomerate somehow transcends notions of megacorporate vs. independent ownership, that

**25** Although very small numbers have been found in Europe, and one also in Japan, the greatest density of slave-making ant species live in North America.

**24** When I was growing up, a woman that worked in the hospital where I was born was arrested for baby-switching. This was something of a popular pastime in the 1970s, where the staff of neonatal wards would switch newborns around, just because they could. Also popular at the time was baby *stealing*, which I am told has made a recent comeback. I always rather liked the idea that I had been switched at birth with another baby, and that my parents could have been better, and also could have been worse. That there maybe no biological connection to the people who raised me, but that it was sort of just happenstance. Luck. The careless game of a bored nurse. It lent this sort of VC Andrews-style potential to my youth, a "we-just-discovered-your-real-parents-and-guess-what, you're-rich" kind of thing that allowed me to, like, wear tataras 'cause who knows? I might actually be a princess. And eat gruel because I should be prepared at all times to go back to that. One highly doubts that the ants see it that way, but the scientific fact is that we do not know how the ants see it, or if they think about it at all.

**23** This would probably be a violation of some legal code, were there an ant legislature to uphold it in an ant court. It would also be ethically unjust, were ants thought to have an innate individual sense of right or wrong. And it would certainly be a violation of moral standards, if ant morality were not, in fact, based on the good of the species as a whole over the good of the individual. So ultimately? Really? In the end? This is just biology.

they will continue to argue. "Being wholly owned by TimeWarner does not make us Major Media," one told me recently. Although that is exactly what it does. This is how I imagine it feels to watch an enslaved ant of your same species attack your own nest.

**19** If you are a six-year-old boy, and you are caught using a magnifying glass to fry ants, which is something people freak out about because it is the kind of thing serial killers do for practice, a good excuse is to say that you are only frying *slave-making* ants. People will let serial killers get away with a lot if they think there's a good enough reason for the serial killing.

**20** The term used to describe the smell put out by slave-making ant species is "propaganda substance."

**21** There are different kinds of enslavement, though, and I don't mean to imply that there aren't. In one species, a foreign queen will enter a new nest and, because ants associate exclusively by smell, will initially startle the workers. The foreign queen quickly attacks the reigning queen—*outgoing*, now—and licks her repeatedly, chemically adopting her scent, proving for once and for all, all those stories we always heard about cannibals. The workers are quelled, her foreign smell dissipates, and she is honored as the long-standing queen of the brood. Yet despite that fleeting moment of anxiety, and the fact that, technically, they now serve a different mistress, the ants of this nest have had no change whatsoever in job description. They continue to do exactly what they did before, without interruption. That they now raise the eggs of a queen of an entirely different species is a fact they will never be capable of perceiving.

**22** It is easy to imagine that the one individual to get any glee out of this scenario at all would be the queen, the great heist-maker, the ultimate con-woman of the colony. But to whom could she brag?