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Kamikaze ants protect the colony

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THE ants of Borneo go out with a bang, thanks to a body built to blow up during a suicidal death grip.

They are known to grab enemy ants and expel a lethal sticky substance in a final act of altruistic defence of their colony which kills attacker and intruder. Now, [Johan Billen](#) of the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL), Belgium, and his team have shown just how much the ants invest in their suicide strategy - with the largest gland reservoirs yet known in ants.

All 10,000 species of ant have glands in their jaws to release chemicals in alarm or defence. But Billen found that in the south-east Asian *Camponotus cylindricus* ants most of the body is given over to storing the deadly secretion. The insects operate on a hair-trigger; their abdomen walls ruptured even when researchers lightly touched them with forceps (*Acta Zoologica*, DOI: [10.1111/j.1463-6395.2011.00523.x](#)).

"It's too bad for the ant itself, but its nest mates will survive," says Billen. "It makes perfect sense genetically," agrees [William Foster of the University of Cambridge](#). "Fight for your siblings, protect the nest."



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A carpenter ant (*Camponotus cylindricus*) has ruptured her body to spew a sticky yellow glue, which has killed both her and the larger worker of another ant species (Image: Mark Moffett/Minden Pictures/FLPA)

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