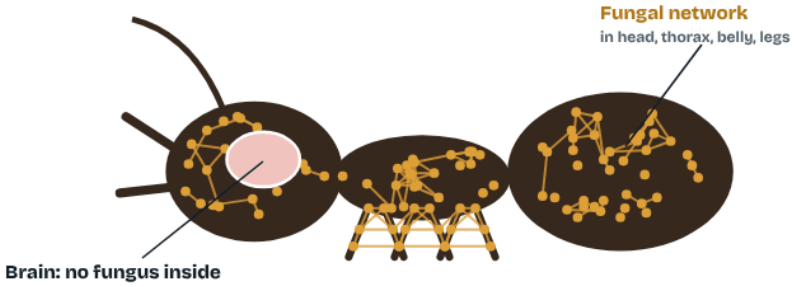
That is why

How does a fungus take over an ant?

It spreads through the body and works the muscles, leaves the brain alone, and parks the ant in the perfect spot.

A Inside the ant: everywhere but the brain



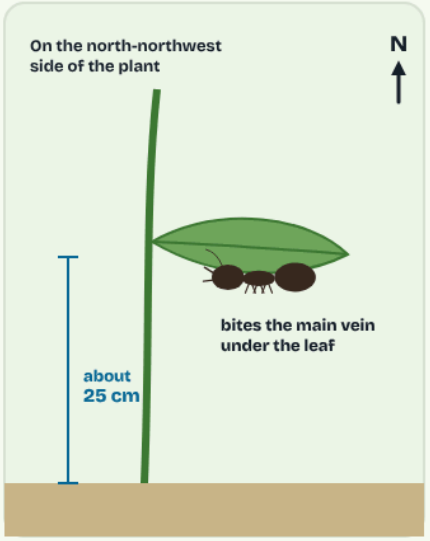
The fungus wraps around and invades the muscle fibers, and works the legs and jaws.

How we know

In 2017, scientists sliced infected ant tissue into layers 50 nanometers thin, imaged 2,000 of them over 24 hours, and built a 3D map. Fungal cells crowded around the outside of the brain, but none were inside it.

Drawing simplified, not to scale.

B The death grip



1 Around noon
it bites and holds on.

2 By sunset
the ant has died.

C Locked on, then spores

1 Jaws locked
The fungus wastes the jaw muscles, so the mandibles stay shut.

2 A stalk grows
Within a few days, a stalk pushes out of the dead ant's head.

3 Spores fall
They drift to the forest floor below. The ants nest high in the canopy, far from the fungus.

The fungus takes the body, not the brain.

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