

# Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick

## Q. Dear Twig: What's the worst smell in the world?

A.: Here are two of my personal favorites, ones I've actually smelled myself (but not smelled like) (at least not that anyone's said):

**Snake musk**, which snakes squirt to scare away predators. The stink's due to reeky lipids — fats.

And a **rotten chicken egg** that my human friend Trunk didn't see and stepped on. It made a loud "Pop!" and a stink cloud came out and we got a good whiff and we screamed and ran off. The stink of rotten eggs is due to a gas called hydrogen sulfide.

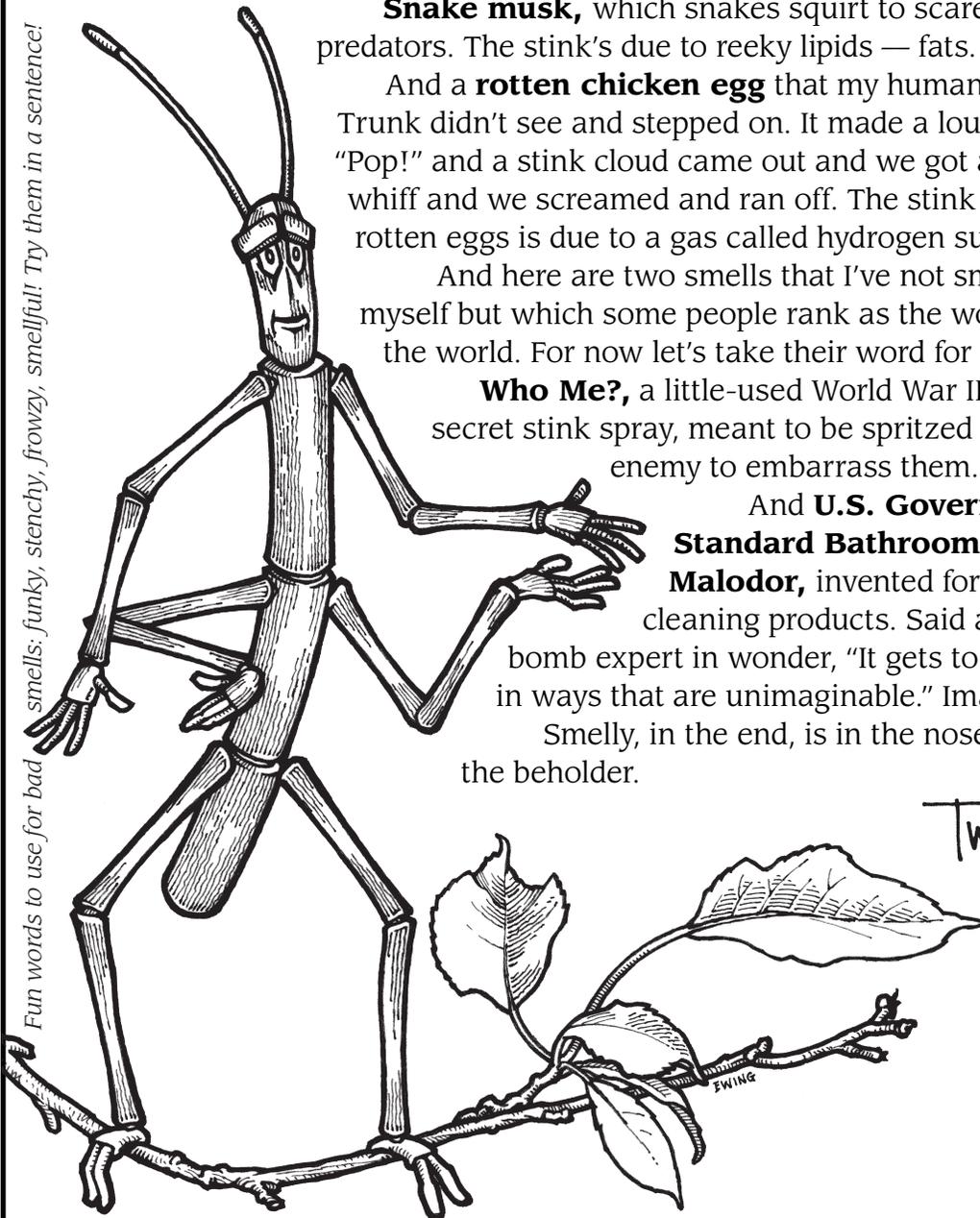
And here are two smells that I've not smelled myself but which some people rank as the worst in the world. For now let's take their word for it:

**Who Me?**, a little-used World War II U.S. secret stink spray, meant to be spritzed on the enemy to embarrass them. "Ach!"

And **U.S. Government Standard Bathroom Malodor**, invented for testing cleaning products. Said a stink-bomb expert in wonder, "It gets to you in ways that are unimaginable." Imagine!

Smelly, in the end, is in the nose of the beholder.

Fun words to use for bad smells: funky, stenchy, frowzy, smellful! Try them in a sentence!



From your scientific friends at The Ohio State University — specifically, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center ([www.oardc.ohio-state.edu](http://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu)) and OSU Extension ([extension.osu.edu](http://extension.osu.edu)).



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**Notes:** Sources included the enlightening "Stench Warfare" by Stephanie Pain in *New Scientist* magazine, July 7, 2001 (the "unimaginable" comment, by a cognitive psychologist/stink-bomb developer named Pam Dalton of the Monell Chemical Senses Center in Philadelphia, comes from that story); and the firsthand-knowledge-based "Comparison of the Scent Gland Secretions of Twenty-five Snakes: Implications for Biochemical Systematics" in the journal *Copeia*, 1976.

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