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## Table of Contents—July

<b>THE TIME VALVE</b>	
By Miles J. Breuer. M.D. ....	102
<i>They were savages—these remnants of the human race in the year 200,000. Bound by superstition they were, until Wendelin came across time . . .</i>	
<b>THE FLIGHT OF THE MERCURY</b>	
By Charles P. Tanner .....	106
<i>All day on that hot Martian desert, they watched each other, man and mechanical beast. But then night fell . . .</i>	
<b>THE BAT-MEN OF MARS</b>	
By Wood Jackson (concluded) .....	122
<i>Across the gap in the wall swept the bat-men hordes. Above them hung the space ship, its guns trained . . .</i>	
<b>AFTER 5000 YEARS</b>	
By Victor A. Endersby .....	136
<i>Was this a dream come true after 5000 years, or a horrible coincidence . . .</i>	
<b>THE WAR OF THE GREAT ANTS</b>	
By Jim Vanny .....	140
<i>Above them could be heard the din, the struggle as the two great races of ants locked in combat. Who would win? Would it mean freedom or greater torture?</i>	
<b>A SUBTERRANEAN ADVENTURE</b>	
By George Paul Bauer (Part 2).....	150
<i>They had watched the tortures of the condemned man. Now the jailers came for THEM. Sarro's face lit in triumph.</i>	
<b>THE RED PLAGUE</b>	
By P. Schuyler Miller .....	170
<i>Prize Story February 1930 AIR WONDER STORIES Cover Contest.</i>	
<b>WHOSE FLIGHT WAS THE MORE HAZARDOUS?—Prize Letters</b>	178
<b>SCIENCE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS</b>	180
<b>THE READER SPEAKS</b>	181
<b>SCIENCE NEWS</b>	187

### ON THE COVER

this month, taken from Charles P. Tanner's "Flight of the Mercury," our space traveler is shown waving his fist in defiance to the creature who has kept him marooned. Toward the rear of the space ship is seen the three "ether" propellers that carry the ship across space.

## NEXT MONTH

**THE ANNIHILATOR COMES**, by Ed Earl Repp. Yielding to the demands of our readers our popular author gives us now a sequel of his "Beyond Gravity." In this thrilling story, we get the further adventures of the great airship "Annihilator," and its brave commander, Bob Allison. Into the frozen north they go, to search for the missing explorers; and they encounter adventures and a terrible menace that man had never dreamed of. Incidentally our author gives us a new view of the Arctic zones that is startling and revolutionary, yet has a good deal of authority for it.

**THE MARTIAN REVENGE**, by Hendrik Dahl Juve. You can always depend on this author to furnish an unusual story, and in this interplanetary adventure he has indeed fulfilled our expectations. He has shown us indeed the perils that attend communication with a strange civilization and in this story has illustrated vividly the horror that might attend the revenge of an outraged race. Indeed, through the stirring story, he shows us many of the things which must be avoided if interplanetary travel is to be a success.

**THE TORPEDO TERROR**, by Edsel Newton. It has already been acknowledged that it is possible to send an airplane into the air and guide it by radio controls without the need of a pilot. The immense importance of this in a war in the air cannot be overestimated. For by means of radio controls it will be possible for a nation to send thousands upon thousands of planes laden with high explosives over the enemy lines. But "The Torpedo Terror" is not a war story, in fact it is the working out of a great mystery and the saving of the world from a terrible disaster.

**A SUBTERRANEAN ADVENTURE**, by George Paul Bauer. The third installment of this marvelous story of subterranean life finds our two explorers from the surface again at grips with their captors. Stupendous are the scenes pictured by our author—as he shows two men, aided by a girl, engaged in battling against a hostile nation in their own land. This story with every page is approaching an inevitable climax of drama and power.

**PRIZE CONTEST**—The second prize winning story from the February, 1930, AIR WONDER STORIES COVER CONTEST will be published in the August issue.

### AND OTHERS

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# The War of the Great Ants

by Jim Vanny



(Illustration by Leonard)

The ant darted toward the Malay. David had no choice. He threw his revolver to his hip and fired.

## THE WAR OF THE GREAT ANTS



WHEN David Marsden entered the Malay jungle on the first of May, 1945, little did he realize that he was entering upon one of the most astounding adventures ever to befall a human being.

Penetrating the interior with a party of five Malay "boys" for the purposes of surveying the territory near Southern Siam for a railroad, they had stopped for the night on the banks of the narrow, sluggish Tanum River, up which the party had been wending its way all day.

After the Malays had dragged the two gracefully carved dugouts upon the shore, they proceeded to a small clearing nearby. Here David broke away from the others, and while they proceeded to make camp and prepare supper, he took the opportunity of the few fleeting moments before dark to survey the surroundings.

They were in the interior of a tropical jungle. The vegetation was particularly dense; as seen only in these tropical forests where the decay of vegetable matter during ages past has enriched the soil to an unbelievable depth. From this has sprung a prodigious mass of vegetation in the form of huge trees, shrubs, underwood, creepers, thorns, and climbing and trailing vines, all struggling to reach the upper level of that almost unbroken growth.

Lateral branches are rare; instead they shoot straight and smooth, for a hundred feet before they branch out, cabbage-like at their summits. Ferns, mosses, orchids, and other parasitic plants in countless varieties cover the trees from top to bottom.

Immense vines that more nearly resemble ropes or great hawsers trail from tree to tree, up and down and over each other. They sometimes reach lengths of five or six hundred feet and appear to bind the jungle together in one great tangle.

Here indeed is the florists' paradise. Orchid plants abound on every side. To one on the ground however, their blossoms, like other flowers, are quite scarce. For it is the roof of the jungle that blazes with a myriad of wonderful colours, little or none of which is apparent from within.

David walked in a half circle from the clearing, coming out again on the river bank about two hundred feet above camp. The yellow waters of the Tanum flowed silently past on their leisurely journey to the China Sea. The sun had almost set

and as David watched the blazing path it struck across the jungle stream, an object bobbing up and down on the little waves, passed before his eyes, slowly floating downstream with the current.

David's attention was drawn immediately from the beauty of the tropical sunset. Objects floating down these streams were not uncommon. Quite the contrary. Broken bits of coconut shell, logs, old clothing, even large trees when there has been a storm in the mountains above are often seen.

But this was nothing like that. It glittered in the last rays of the dying sun and as the young engineer started along the river bank to follow it, he noticed there were corrugated rings about it. No, it could not be a tin can—it was too large. Now David began running, arriving at camp slightly ahead of the floating object.

"Tok!" he cried, calling his head guide. "Quick! Come here!"

In a moment the Malay came running through the bush to where David stood on the bank.

"Look!" cried David, pointing to the shining object that was floating by. "I must have it. Quick! Get it for me."

In another instant Tok had plunged into the muddy waters. A few powerful strokes took him to the object and a minute later his dripping form was again beside David on the bank

of the Tanum. In his arms he held a two quart thermos flask, similar to the kind the party carried in their own equipment.

David and Tok returned to camp where the Malays now had supper ready. But the first thing David did was sit down and give full attention to the mysterious flask. It was almost dark now but by the light of the camp fire, David turned to the flask. There was no cap on it, nor was there a cork. The neck of the bottle was plugged crudely with a roughly rounded piece of wood. By dexterous use of his hunting knife, David soon had the plug removed and a moment later drew forth a sheath of thin bark, carefully rolled so as to fit into the flask.

He now gave full reign to his curiosity. Supper was forgotten. The Malays ate without him. They could not understand why anyone should want an old thermos bottle more than a good cooked supper after a weary day's journey up the river.

With fingers trembling with excitement, David unrolled the curious script and peered into its contents. The singular appearance of it had fired



JIM VANNY

*WE humans give our small neighbors the ants credit for too little intelligence. We watch their amazingly efficient activity and comment on it as mere "instinct." Yet a great many competent students of ant life say that it is a reasoning intelligence rather than instinct that allows the ant to conquer his environment in the astonishing manner that he has.*

*Ants are really clever creatures, and it is possible, as our author pictures, for them to build up great cities, and make slaves of animals that despise them. Suppose, for example, ants could make slaves of us and have us do their work for them? As our readers can realize, this is a most intriguing idea, and Jim Vanny has used it here to work out a corking adventure story.*

his curiosity and he could hardly wait to see what mystery it might hold. Why had it been placed within this thermos flask and cast to the care of the waters of the Tanum? David carefully spread it before the camp fire.

### The Manuscript

**I**T is the 18th day of April, 1945, (the manuscript ran) as I sit in my prison and pen this chronicle of my experiences since January, 1944. After months of captivity, I have at last formulated a plan by which I soon hope to escape from this city of horrors. At least I believe I shall soon be safe again. If God wills, I shall leave behind forever this terrible place. Through careful secrecy I am able to prepare this manuscript. Should they discover either the manuscript or my plans to escape, I should be put to instant death. So before making my attempt, I shall cast it, sealed in this thermos flask, over the river wall. Then should I fail to escape or be unable to reach civilization after leaving here, may this reach the proper hands. For the world must know of this terrible menace. Also I want my little Lureen provided for. Thank God I have enough to leave to her so that she shall not want anything. And should I never see her again, I want her to know that my last thoughts were of her. How she must have suffered from the uncertainty of the last year!

My name is John McConnell, of London. I am a professor of biology and a member of the staff of the British Museum.

On January 30, 1944, I was granted funds by the British Museum with which to organize an expedition to the Malay Peninsula to make a study of some curious biological phenomena to be found there. World progress has little changed these jungles—they remain the same as they have been for innumerable ages. When Charles Darwin called the Malay Peninsula the "Topsy Turvy Land," little did he realize the full significance of his statement. But I must get to my story. At any moment I may be discovered and then all would be lost.

I selected five other men to accompany me on this expedition. The world will undoubtedly recall these gallant sons of science, namely: Lemuel Corson, Geologist; John C. Kroll, Zoologist; James Earl Addison, Interpreter; Henry E. Longworth, Botanist; Jess Lynch, Photographer.

We worked with great haste and two months after funds had been granted for the expedition, we found ourselves in the midst of the tropical jungle.

I have forgotten those first days in the Malay jungle. Our party consisted of three dugouts, six white men, and nine Malay "boys" for guides, cooks, and general assistants. For two days we passed up the waters of a sluggish stream, taking photographs, collecting specimens of the insect life and the flora of this section and noting the general data. We were in our glory. I have never known happier moments in my life. The only cloud on the landscape was the fact that my daughter, Lureen, could not be with me. But this is no place for a white woman. There are a few here, to be sure, but it is a hard life for them.

On the third day out we made camp near a small village on the Tanum River. After supper had been

finished, our Malays wandered off to the village and left us six white men alone to discuss events together. We had been sitting about the camp fire for about an hour when an old Malay returned with three of our "boys." He seemed greatly excited over the fact that we intended to penetrate farther into the interior toward *Gunong Tahun*, which is Malay for "Forbidden Mountain." It seems that only a few hours before our arrival, the village had been raided by a giant white ant (according to its inhabitants) and some of their children carried off. So they were holding a great religious ceremony that these evil ones might not return.

I have heard many of the superstitious tales of the Malay, but never anything like this. My interest was aroused as was the other members of the expedition, and we bade the old fellow join our circle and tell his story.

## CHAPTER II

### Omar's Story

(as interpreted by Addison)

**L**ONG ago," began old Omar, "there came to this jungle a large, white ant. From the beginning he was an aggressor and soon established himself monarch in the country about the headwaters of the Tanum. He would attack other ant villages and carry off the young to be brought up in slavery in the city of the white ant.

"The city of the white ant was built both underground and above, the excavated portion being used for storage and the growth of fungus upon which the white ant lived almost entirely. The upper part of the city was constructed of boughs and leaves gathered from the surrounding forest.

"As time went on, this ant evolved from an insect of about two or three inches in length to an enormous creature some three or four feet from tip to tip. But his smaller prey did not increase in size like the great white ant. Yet, as the ant city grew, the need for slaves increased—slaves who could do the work that the smaller ants could no longer do. So one day a squad of white ants raided a Malay village and carried off many children. The Malays were frightened but furious. A searching party was at once organized and sent in search for the missing children. Only one member of the party returned, his body covered with savage bites and his system racked with poison. Before he died he told an unbelievable story of a city of giant ants, many miles up the river.

"In all the jungle the great white ant became feared—by all but one. He was the driver ant, who, in spite of his relative smallness, was feared by the giant slave hunters. Through generations of slavery the white ant had become a rather lazy, inactive creature. The driver on the other hand, was an industrious, active insect.

"Since that first invasion of the Malay village, many others have occurred. Other villages have been raided and the natives of the interior live in constant fear of this terrible ant. Surely he must be some god and if the proper sacrifices are offered, he will in time be appeased."

\* \* \* \* \*

As David reached the end of Omar's story, he stirred the dying embers of the camp fire and called to Tok for more wood. The fire replenished, he turned once more to the fascinating manuscript under the light of the brightening blaze.

\* \* \* \* \*

Omar's interesting story (the manuscript went on) caused much jovial comment on the part of the six members of the British Museum Expedition.

"Ants," scoffed Corson, digging his boot heel into the soil. "More likely the poor devils were carried off by a tiger."

"If they were carried off at all," returned Lynch.

"Righto!" It was Addison talking now. "You know the Malay is as rich in tales of folklore as any race in the world."

We agreed that Omar's tale was a most extraordinary one; and with laughing good-nights, we turned in shortly thereafter, the tale of the aggressive ant forgotten.

The following day we pushed on up the Tanum which seemed to grow narrower at every yard of travel, losing itself in the tangle of tropical jungle.

We pushed on upstream for another day until at noon of the second day our boats scraped bottom. By building a lock, the "boys" were able to go farther up the shallow stream. Then we built three or four locks that afternoon, dragged the boats over low waterfalls by using jungle creepers for ropes, until sundown forced us to again make camp on the river bank.

It is strange that our Malays had never heard the story of the giant ants, but they came from the more populated district far below the superstitious jungle villages and being less religious than the people of the interior, were less influenced by their fantastic tales.

Slowly we made camp for we were tired from a more than usually strenuous day. Monkeys abounded on all sides; and we were never wanting for fresh fish, for the Malays were excellent fishermen with their spears. After supper I conferred with Saru, my head man, and found that we were only a day's march from the source of the Tanum River. Here we would have to abandon the boats and go on afoot toward *Gunong Tahun*. Then, weary and tired, I turned in.

### The Attack

IT must have been along toward midnight when I was awakened by a strange murmuring sound that I could not place. I lifted myself on one elbow so that I might better catch the sound. All about the camp there appeared a dull, phosphorescent glow as if many giant pairs of eyes circled us. Tigers! I reached slowly to my side and grasped my rifle. With caution, although I felt that every move was being watched, I aroused the camp.

Two of us were armed with heavy repeating rifles. The others gripped the handles of .45 calibre automatics. Saru threw more wood on the dully glowing campfire. It blazed up. The eyes advanced from the shadows of the forest. But even as they did so, our blood froze with horror. For not the lean body of the tiger followed them. A tangle of spindly legs—a long, white body!

"Omar's white ants!" yelled Longworth hysterically, and simultaneously his automatic shattered the solemn silence of the jungle. We followed suit. As the staccato of shots died down, a half dozen of the ugly insects lay on the ground convulsing in their last earthly struggle.

But we could never load and fire fast enough to check the advance of that onrushing insect horde. We fought wildly, grasped our rifles by their barrels and beat at the invaders with the butts. But with no avail. Their strength was appalling. I heard the terrified screeching of the Malays. I saw my comrades go down, felt myself going—and a merciful blackness spared me further agony.

\* \* \* \* \*

David shuddered as he turned the next page of the manuscript and glanced apprehensively about the deep shadows of the jungle. He threw more wood on the fire and again turned to his reading.

\* \* \* \* \*

When I again came to my senses I found myself in a very peculiar prison. It was built up of logs from the surrounding forest and the interior greatly resembled a log cabin except that there were no windows. A small doorway about four feet square was sealed tightly with a log door. The floor and ceiling were also of logs fitted tightly together.

From without came a curious low hum of teeming insect life. I listened intently but could make out nothing distinctly. Then I examined myself from head to foot.

I was none the worse for my experience. My clothes had been torn to tatters, a two quart thermos flask which I usually carried strapped to my belt was still there. I remembered that I was so tired that its empty weight had been forgotten and I must have lain down to sleep without removing it. The only other article that remained on me was a short pencil in one of my shirt pockets. With no clear idea in mind I removed the flask, placed the pencil inside it and concealed them under a pile of straw which lay in one corner of my prison.

Shortly thereafter the sound of footsteps outside the door arrested my attention and a moment later my door swung in and a native Malay entered with food. I attempted to converse with him but he would say nothing. I spoke a few words of Malay with no better success.

He left the food and went away again. It consisted of a drink of sparkling water and a durian. Unused to this famous Malay fruit, I could eat but little, for, although regarded by the Malays as a rare delicacy, to me it was like attempting to eat a very bad egg. It certainly smelled as such. The water was very fine, however, and after washing down what little of the foul food I had been able to partake, I felt somewhat better and eager to learn more of this strange colony into which I had been made a prisoner.

I was not kept in my prison long. Through the Malays I was told that there was no use attempting to escape. I was therefore divested of my tattered clothes, dressed in a *sarong* and made to consider myself a slave of the great white ant.

This ant city is built in a circle like an ant hill, except that the "hill" is constructed of wood and contains living

quarters and various chambers. Through my weeks of slavery I have never allowed an opportunity to escape in which I might learn something about these amazing creatures. This species of ant is greatly like the tropic ant known to scientists as the *Oecophylla smaragdina*, which forms leaf nests fastened together by silks. The ant, in my opinion, is a direct descendent of this little tropical cousin. The ant of this city, however, has in the course of evolution, acquired the diclosis or slavery trait. Just how it has been acquired, I am not prepared to state. It greatly parallels the European *Formica sanguinea*, who raids the nests of other species and carries off the *pupae*, from which workers subsequently develop.

#### "If We Make It."

THAT these creatures are ants there can be no doubt. They are at once recognized by their elbowed antennae, and conspicuous "waist" formed by the constriction of the abdomen where it unites with the thorax. There are no wings.

The ants appear to have no outward means of conversation. When they touch their antennae, their thought travels from one to the other and there is no necessity of any words. I do not know if they can read the human mind. It is obvious that they have some way of conveying their demands to their native slaves, for the Malays all seem to know what is required of them.

I have no idea where the others of our expedition were carried to. I do not even know if they survived. And I have no way of finding out. These ants live chiefly on fungus growth which they cultivate themselves in underground chambers or "gardens." It is in one of these chambers that I have been put to work.

For days now I have been planning an escape. Saru, the Malay "boy" who I mentioned before, has just been put to work in the same chamber as I. There is a flume or rather underground tunnel which enters this chamber conveying water to the fungus chambers. It was evidently dug by the ants from some stream or river outside the city. There is a gate at this end and I am sure one at the other end for the water may be stopped flowing when the chamber gate is open. I have mentioned this sluice to Saru and he is willing to attempt an escape through it with me. How far it reaches or where it comes out I have no idea. Perhaps that is why others have not tried to escape through it. But Saru agrees with me that anything would be better than a life of slavery under the white ant.

I only wish I knew the fate of the other members of the expedition. Saru says that many of the Malays were killed resisting the ants. That makes me shudder. For we white men certainly resisted the attack.

By constantly peeling the bark off the logs of my prison room (which I am using to write this manuscript) I have made an opening large enough to slip my thermos flask through. I can just see water when I peer through and I believe it is the source of the Tanum River. I must take a chance. Perhaps if luck is with us we can escape and bring succor to our unfortunate companions, if indeed they are yet alive. If Saru and I do not make it, it may fall to the lot of this thermos flask to do so. It is almost time for me to return to the fungus

chamber so I must stop writing. Until we meet again—  
Farewell!

### CHAPTER III

#### A Meeting in the Jungle

THUS the absorbing manuscript came to a close. The camp fire had again died down to a heap of glowing coals. The Malays all lay sprawled about, sleeping. Their worries were not many. They had had a good supper and there was nothing for them to do but sleep until the morrow.

For a long time David sat and smoked his pipe in the brooding silence of the jungle. There was many things he wanted to ask Tok, but he, too, lay sleeping with the others. At length David knocked the cold ashes from his pipe and followed their example.

After the engineer and his Malays had breakfasted the next morning, David called Tok to him.

"Tok," he asked, "have you ever heard of a legend of a great white ant?"

The Malay thought for a moment.

"I have heard of such a story, *tuan*," he replied in his native tongue. "But I have never heard it told. We Malays do not believe all the stories that come from the interior. You see, *tuan*, many of them originate with the Orang Utans. (Jungle Men)."

Tok carefully questioned the others but they likewise were ignorant of the curious insect. So David derived from the information that the ant city, if such existed, must lay near the base of *Gunong Tahun*, the Forbidden Mountain.

David had several times pondered upon the possibility of a hoax, and had it not been for the fact that the disappearance of the McConnell Expedition had been the talk of England some months previous, he would undoubtedly have forgotten the strange manuscript and gone on with his surveying. But after careful consideration, he decided that there might be something to it. So after coming to the conclusion that the manuscript should be placed in the hands of the authorities without delay, he dispatched two Malays on a return journey to Singapore, where they were to turn the script over to the British authorities.

From here David went on with the search. A week passed but they found nothing. Time passed quickly. Too quickly, David thought. He had practically abandoned all the survey work and had devoted himself in earnest to the task of locating some clue that would give a foundation to the amazing manuscript.

It was early afternoon on their fifteenth day in the jungle. They were traveling through a dense forest of bamboo by the way of an old elephant track. It had been worn to a deep rut from generations of elephant traffic.

Suddenly Tok who was in the lead halted and held up a hand in warning.

"*Diam!*" he whispered, which in Malay means "Be quiet."

Cautiously he disappeared around a turn in the trail. For five minutes we waited, then he returned as silently as he had gone.

"It is another party, *tuan*," he informed David

quietly.

"Another party?" David repeated in some surprise. "Who is it?"

"They are camped just ahead, *tuon*. There are only four people in it. Two Malay boys, and a white man and woman."

"A white woman!" exclaimed the engineer. "What nonsense is this—?"

"A white woman, *tuon*," insisted Tok firmly.

"Good Lord!" cried David. "What can a white woman be doing in this God-forsaken country?"

Then turning to Tok. "How old is she?"

"She is young," replied the Malay.

"And the white man?"

"He is not young, yet he is not so old."

"I see. Let us go on."

It was indeed a surprise but when the party ahead found it was friends, they were more than glad to welcome the engineer and his Malays.

"How good it seems to see a white man!" cried the girl. Her companion laughed. He was a monocled Englishman with a small, sandy mustache and cold blue eyes.

"Not so complimentary for me, wot?" he suggested.

"Oh now, Robert," said the girl in a soothing tone. "Don't take it that way. You know I should never have gotten along in this frightful wilderness without you."

"All right, Lury," he replied. "But perhaps we had best introduce ourselves."

"That goes for myself," put in David. "I am David Marsden, of London, surveying for a government railroad."

"This is Sir Robert Darcy," the fair haired girl introduced her companion who bowed politely to the young engineer. "And I," she went on, "am Miss Lureen McConnell of London—"

"Lureen McConnell!" grasped David hardly believing his ears. "Are you related—that is—do you know Professor John McConnell—"

"Yes, yes," the girl's eyes were shining with a new interest now. "He is my father. Do you know him—"

"For God's sake, man!" cried Sir Robert stepping to David's side. "If you know where Professor McConnell is don't keep us in suspense!"

**D**AVID shook his head. "No, I don't know. But I have a very strange story to tell you. If you will sit down—it is rather long."

"Of course. I beg your pardon," replied Lureen. "In my excitement I quite forgot."

"As I told you," began David, "my reason for entering the jungle was to survey the route of a proposed railroad for the British government. . . ."

The girl hung on to every word he said. Through the entire course of the story she never interrupted once. And when David had finished she sat for several minutes in silence.

"I believe we shall find Daddy," she said earnestly. "I've always hoped and prayed that he would some day return. But the suspense of waiting was too much. So I insisted that Sir Robert assist me in searching for him. We came to the Peninsula ourselves, got these Malays to guide us, and came into the jungle. You see,

we thought it would be wiser than to bring a large party of inexperienced persons into the wilderness."

"You were very wise," David assured her. "But now that we have met, I believe it would be wise to organize a plan of search. That is—if you care to have my assistance."

"Why—of course. It is really more than I had expected. You see—"

"Yes, I understand," broke in David. "But the interests of science and humanity come foremost with the government. They would insist that I abandon my present work and follow up the clue furnished by the manuscript. So my 'boys' and myself are at your disposal, Miss McConnell."

The girl smiled in sincere appreciation.

"That is so good of you, Mr. Marsden," she replied. "But please do not insist on being so formal in the forest. I should feel much easier if you would just call me Lury."

The engineer chuckled softly.

"Certainly. And all my friends call me Dave."

It was the girl's turn to laugh.

"All right—Dave."

"And when addressing me," chimed in Sir Robert, "kindly make it Darcy."

"You see," he explained, "we get so much formalities, we are glad to get away from them for a little while. Lury and I are engaged to be married and we've been attending so many formal teas, dinners, parties and what nots that we've become rather bored with it all."

"Oh—I see." There was a note in David's voice that he did not understand and he wondered why the girl turned away and appeared occupied at something else when Sir Robert spoke of their engagement.

But David's manner did not betray his sudden interest in Lureen McConnell. Instead he went on making plans with his two new found friends for the rescue of the girl's father. The girl did most of the talking for herself and Robert while the Englishman sat and languidly puffed on an Egyptian cigarette.

On the following morning the two search parties went on as one. On account of the small number of them it was deemed wiser and safer to continue thus. Farther and farther into the interior they penetrated until at length they came to the slopes of *Gunong Tahun*. The clatter of birds and numerous chattering monkeys were the only means of breaking the monotony of the primeval forest. And once an elephant passed nearby, but was soon lost in the dense wooded fastness.

"This is the neighborhood—" began David. The girl shook her head in understanding. Then looking up the wooded slopes of *Gunong Tahun* she asked: "Can this be it?"

David turned to Tok with a question. Then he turned once more to Lureen.

"Tok says this is the mountain your father mentioned in his manuscript," he assured her.

"Then we must be near the ant city," the girl ventured softly. "Oh, where is it?"

"We can't be sure," replied David. "You must remember we are in a vast expanse of jungle. The city will be but a mere speck in its vastness."

"You will remember also," he continued, "that it was

at the base of this mountain that Professor McConnell and his expedition camped. We must not follow his example. I propose to ascend this mountain from which we can get an excellent view of the surrounding forest. Perhaps we can even locate the ant city from its heights."

"An excellent idea," was Darcy's opinion.

For half a day they toiled up the steep slopes of the forbidden mountain. Gradually, through breaks in the vegetation, they could see the panorama below them begin to unfold. Then, about an hour before sunset, they came out upon a high point not far from the mountain's summit and saw spread below them the wild maze of the tropic jungle. It seemed to lie in an unbroken blanket as far as the eye could reach. But after piercing the distance with a pair of powerful binoculars, Sir Robert Darcy turned to David.

"Tell me what you see off to the southeast," he said handing them to the engineer.

David looked. "The ant city!" he cried a moment later.

### On to the City!

THE girl grasped the binoculars eagerly and peered through the powerful lenses. It was as her father had described it in his manuscript. A round mound of logs and materials that had been gathered from the surrounding forest. From their point of vantage they judged the thing to be a mile across with a wall some thirty feet in height all around it.

"The ant city," said Lureen again.

"Or an aboriginal village," suggested Robert. But David only shook his head.

"I don't believe you will find an aboriginal village so far in the interior—or so near this mountain," he said.

"And to think we may be looking down upon my father's prison," murmured Lureen softly.

"We shall soon know," David assured her.

"How?" was the girl's eager question.

"We will camp on the mountain to-night," replied David. "No camp fires—we must take every precaution. After dark I shall reconnoiter a bit. I can easily slip through the forest—I shall take Tok with me. Perhaps we can learn something of this queer city in the jungle. We shall try—"

"But Dave," there was an anxious note in Lureen's voice. "There is danger. You may be captured—or killed. Isn't it best we all go—together?"

The engineer shook his head. "Tok and I must first get the lay of the land. The whole party would be taking too great a risk."

With reluctance the girl gave in. Darcy made no comment. He probably felt that David would have his own way eventually in spite of all protests.

After a cold supper, Tok and David prepared for their trip. They took only bare necessities including water and ammunition for David's automatic. Tok's arms consisted of a good stout club.

At nine o'clock they slipped noiselessly away from camp. They had determined that the city lay not less than five miles away from their camp on the mountain and therefore they must make haste. They did not expect to return before daylight.

"If I do not return by noon tomorrow," David told Lureen and Robert at parting, "it is best you and your boys go on over the mountain for help at the island of Penang which lies not more than seventy-five miles beyond."

The girl nodded, but from the expression on her face, David felt that she would do no such a thing. She would in all probability follow him and Tok. He said no more. But in his mind he formed a firm resolve to come back.

Tok led the way down the mountain. It was a precarious route made more so by the darkness. They covered three miles with no mishap, although they knew that the danger which lurked on every side was closer as they drew nearer the forbidden city. It was past midnight and the silence of the jungle night was appalling.

Nearer and nearer the Malay and the engineer approached the city. Greater grew the danger of detection. But they kept steadily on. Presently Tok halted and pointed through the trees.

"Look!" he whispered in the white man's ear.

Almost at their feet ran a yellow, sluggish stream that appeared black and forbidding under the cloak of night. It was about ten feet wide and directly across on its opposite bank ran a clearing some fifty feet in width. It terminated in an abrupt wall. The ant city, without a doubt!

Tok clutched the heavy club he carried. David nervously fingered his automatic revolver. And as they stood there uncertain of their next move, the black's form stiffened and he again drew David's attention, this time to the top of the wall.

There, plainly outlined against the sky, stood a giant white ant!

## CHAPTER IV

### Breathless Moments

FOR a minute the thing stood perched thus as if trying to determine something, uncertain of its next move. Then it came swiftly down the perpendicular wall and headed toward the stream. With a single bound the thing had cleared the ribbon of water and was making for the brush where the two spies lay concealed.

"Quick, Tok! Your club!" whispered David sharply.

The Malay swung at the giant insect with all his strength. With a quick move as he came on, the ant sidestepped the blow and darted toward the Malay. David had no choice. He threw his revolver to his hip and fired.

As the echo of the deafening report died in the jungle, other ants suddenly began to pour over the wall of the city. Then suddenly from somewhere up in the wall came a human's voice.

"Help! Whoever you are, do not leave me—Help! Help! Help!"

"Who are you?" called out David.

"John McConnell of London. I—"

"We are outnumbered!" David shouted back. "We must run! But we will return. Don't give up hope. We will be back!" And with these parting words he followed Tok back into the jungle.



The two men fled blindly. They had the advantage of a slight start, but from somewhere behind they could hear the low drum of many feet moving swiftly through the brush. They knew that their hideous enemies were in hot pursuit.

They ran in a half circle, heading back toward the stream considerably below the ant city. It seemed they must soon give up. The pursuers were closing in. Both men were nearing exhaustion from their rapid flight. Then suddenly there was a splash and they stumbled into the water. Quickly recovering, they found it to be not over a foot deep.

"Quick!" cried Tok grasping David by the arm.

With haste the two plunged downstream. One hundred feet, two hundred feet—on and on they went. Perhaps it would serve to throw the insects off their trail. Yet at any moment they expected to see the pursuing horde loom upon either bank and overwhelm them.

\* \* \* \* \*

The morning light was breaking when David and Tok finally came to the foot of the mountain on whose slopes they had made camp the previous night. Their bodies were wet and tired, sore and burning from their hasty flight through the tearing, clawing brush. Even now they went on cautiously. No telling how far these creatures had spread their net to ensnare them.

It was nearly noon when they at last reached the site of their camp. Anxiously David peered ahead for some sign of greeting from those they had left behind. None came. But as David and the Malay broke through the tangle of brush and stood once more where their camp had been they started back in horror.

Scattered about in confusion was all that remained of the camp they had left in such perfect order the night before. The bodies of several of the Malays lay crumpled about the wrecked camp. They were terribly mutilated. And as David's eyes fell on one limp form, he sprang forward with a cry of mingled rage and sorrow. Sir Robert Darcy lay quite still, his cold hands still clutching the automatic rifle whose chamber was empty. The empty shells scattered on the ground about him gave mute testimony of his losing battle.

Both he and the dead Malays were bloated from the formic acid poisoning. Tok and David were sickened at the sight. What had happened to Lureen and the other Malays? It was not hard to guess their fates. The ants had discovered the camp before David and Tok returned.

With sorrow written on their faces and vengeance in their hearts, the engineer and the Malay guide buried the dead as best they could. David marked each grave with a crudely carved piece of wood from the jungle. And when his task was finished he stepped back.

"God!" he breathed in anguish. "What can we do? How will we find them? How will we save them?"

"Tok find them," replied the Malay with assurance.

David gave his head a little twist of determination.

"We've got to find them, Tok," he said, gripping the Malay's hand.

#### David Again

**W**HEN the great white ants appeared suddenly from the surrounding jungle and attacked their

camp, Sir Robert Darcy and the Malays fought with all the intensity that comes of despair. But as in the case of the British Museum Expedition, they were outnumbered beyond all hope.

Sir Robert emptied his automatic rifle into the maze of creatures before he was over whelmed and felt their terrible jaws sink into his body. Then a merciful blackness overtook him and he passed beyond the realm of mankind.

The Malays were putting up a losing fight with clubs of firewood while Lureen stood transfixed at the sight of the terrible thing that had overcome Sir Robert.

The defenders were soon beaten down, killed, or carried off into the enveloping blackness of the jungle. Such was the fate of Lureen. Sharp pincers pierced her soft skin as one of the hideous things carried her along in its mouth. She was covered with saliva from its dripping jaws and she shuddered in horror as she was borne away. To what fate? Must she become a slave of these overgrown insects? Must she toil for the remainder of her life in the fungus beds of the white ant? Then she thought of her father and wondered if he had escaped as planned. She longed to see him, but not in the power of these awful creatures. She hoped that he should never see her in such suffering, nor she him.

Then she thought of David. What had been his fate? And Tok? Good, faithful Tok. Had they too fallen prey to the ants? Or had they, by some miraculous chance, been spared this fate? Somehow she felt that David had escaped the creatures. And she knew he would soon rescue her. And in her thoughts of him she found comfort.

The ants moved swiftly through the jungle. And long before dawn had unfolded the mantle of night, Lureen saw looming walls before her and knew that she had come at last to the ant world.

There were no portals to be opened; no gates to be guarded. Quickly the insects mounted the perpendicular wall, clambered into an entrance high above the ground and Lureen found herself in pitch darkness. She knew these ants could see their ways about. But she was utterly helpless in the stygian gloom.

Presently she felt the grip on her relax and she dropped suddenly to a bed of dried brush or straw. She heard retreating footsteps and she knew that she was alone. Her first impulse was to get up and run—anywhere—but her cooler sense told her that her captors had foreseen this. She was a prisoner, and a prisoner she would stay.

And so, tired from the previous day's travel, weary from the terrible events of the night, and with the bronzed face of a young civil engineer haunting her dreams, Lureen McConnell slept fitfully through the dark hours before dawn.

When Lureen awoke she gazed about her in a rather dazed condition. Slowly the events of the night previous came back to her.

The sun had been up for some time. She arose and examined her prison. It was similar to that described by her father in his manuscript. She wondered what fate these creatures had in store for her and as she recalled the previous night's experience, she shuddered.

A native Malay brought her food as he had done Professor McConnell, but the girl was able only to drink the clear water. Then she sank limply into the pile of straw and tried to think. Was there no possible means of escape from this dreadful city? As she pondered the door of her prison swung slowly open and Lureen sprang to her feet with a stifled cry of joy as David entered the room.

"Shhh—" he cautioned. "Quick! We must get out of here."

Obediently she followed him. They passed from the log room to the passage outside and quickly along its dark interior. The girl wondered at the absence of the creatures she thought would infest the place.

### In the Flume

**P**RESENTLY they entered a chamber that was a great garden of fungus.

"But how did you ever gain entrance to the city?" asked Lureen of David.

"Tok and I got back to camp at noon yesterday and found your raided camp," he explained quickly. "We needed no one to tell us what had happened. We have been scouting this city ever since. Our chance came about an hour ago. Some white ants returned from the forest on the run and when they got to the others great excitement prevailed. I don't know what it is but I've a hunch—"

"What is it?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Driver ants! The white ants are making great preparations for the defense of the city. You remember your father said they feared none but the drivers."

"Yes. And Daddy—where is he—"

"Safe," replied David shortly. "Hiding in the flume the ants use to bring water in from the river to their gardens. During the excitement, Tok and I dammed the upper end of the flume and entered the city by it. Your dad and Tok are there now with a few other Malay boys we rescued from the city. Come."

Lureen asked no more questions. She followed David to the entrance of the flume where a man whose careworn features and gray hair made him look old, waited for them. And as Lureen saw him she flew into his arms.

"Daddy!"

"Lureen! Yes, it is my own little Lureen."

They embraced. Then David reminded them of their situation and all three retreated into the flume. Tok was there and his joy at Lureen's rescue was evident. And then the girl turned once more to David.

"And—what about—Sir Robert?" she asked haltingly.

David turned his head away. The girl laid a reassuring hand on his arm.

"I—understand," she said softly, in genuine sympathy. There was no trace of grief in her voice.

"Sir Robert died like the gallant gentleman he was." David reassured her when he found his voice. "We found him still clutching his rifle."

"Poor Robert," murmured the girl.

Her father reached out and took her hand.

"Perhaps it is better this way," he said to her. "But through five years of misfortune I have realized what

an old fool I had been in insisting on such a match. Had Robert lived, Lureen, I want you to know that I would have released you from your pledge."

"Dear, dear Daddy," were her only words.

"You—" began David; but Tok broke in.

"We must get this entrance barred, *tuan*," he said. "At any moment we may be discovered."

Together they swung closed the great trap door that sealed the passage.

"Let us hope it withstands the attack," said David desperately.

"It must," were Professor McConnell's grim words. "If the driver ants ever get through—well, nothing can stand before them."

"But haven't the white ants repulsed similar attacks?" asked David.

"Yes. But I hope that they will not withstand this one. Each attack has been stronger and each time it has caught the white ant lazier and weaker. These white ants have developed, it is true, to a high state of intelligence. But they have lost much through the institution of slavery. It has weakened them as a race—made them less hardy. You see—"

David nodded.

"If the white ants win the battle we stand little chance of ever getting out of here," David said. "If the driver wins, I understand he will go on away leaving the city devastated."

"That is true," replied the professor. "Let us wish the best of luck to the driver ant," and he chuckled in spite of the hardships he had passed through.

### The War of the Ants

**A**N hour sped by. Then suddenly from without, came a cry in Malay. Tok turned to the others.

"They are coming," he said simply.

In the inky blackness of the flume they could see nothing except when David used his flashlight. He was sparing with this for he did not know how long the fugitives would have to stay in the tunnel. He had sealed the lower end so that they would get enough fresh air while they were thus hidden.

And now from outside came sounds of great activity. Then came sounds of confusion, noises of combat, the yells of Malay slaves. The city trembled under the tramp of many feet and those within the flume knew that the driver ant had launched his attack. The battle was on in all its deadly intensity.

"God, if they should break through!" murmured the professor.

"They won't," David assured him as they listened.

For an hour the battle raged in fury.

"Will they ever finish?" asked the girl. "Oh, it is so horrible!"

But no one answered. For at that moment there came the sound of a terrific explosion. The earth shook and portions of the ceiling of the flume fell on the fugitives within.

"What was that?" cried Professor McConnell alarmed.

"That was a man-made explosion!" cried David excitedly.

"Man-made?" came Lureen's voice. "What do you

mean?"

"I don't want to raise false hopes," continued the young engineer breathlessly, "but I believe the government has answered your manuscript, professor."

Another deafening explosion followed.

"We can't stay in here much longer," David said, flashing his light about to note the damage. "We don't want the walls to fall in on us."

From outside came the staccato bark of a machine gun. The sound of scurrying insect life was rapidly dying out. Several more explosions followed the intermittent barking of the machine gun. Then a voice with a broad English accent hailed the city.

"'ello! Anybody 'ome?"

David waited to hear no more. Calling to Tok he turned his attention to the barred doorway. In another minute it was swung open and the little party emerged from the dripping, stuffy interior.

And the sight of a detachment of Britain's soldiers poking about the ruins of the shattered ant city was never more welcome to David and his-companions.

They stayed only long enough to completely search the defeated insect world. But there were no traces of

the five men who had accompanied Professor McConnell on the expedition five years before. Sadly they turned away from the strange city, yet with hearts thankful that they had been spared the fate that had overtaken the others.

\* \* \* \* \*

The sun had dropped behind the forest top when they made camp once more on the banks of the lower Tanum, and the twilight that overspread the jungle seemed to breathe of peace. And when the twilight had faded into night it was not long before a crescent moon rose over the tree tops across the river and filled the cloudless sky and surrounding country with its silvery sheen. They sat upon the river bank, Lureen and David, while the warm breeze whispered softly across the river and blew the golden curls from her forehead. Her hands were in David's and as they looked out upon the bright path thrown across the river by the moon, it seemed that they were in a fairy world; the old one was forgotten. And they were content to let it be so for the present. The clouds of yesterday were gone and they built only castles in the dream world of tomorrow.

THE END.