

Ants (Trapper Juan)

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As Juan sat eating his meal, he noticed that there were no old people in the village. Most of the natives were young women and warriors. There were perhaps fifty children of varying ages, but no one in the village appeared to be older than thirty. It was very odd, he thought.

After they had eaten, Tikki, using sign language, made it clear that he was very interested not only in the weapon that Juan had carried with him to the village, but where Juan had come from. Juan drew a crude map in the dirt and, again through sign language, was able to convey to the chief the land that he called home. He then patiently showed Tikki how to clean the rifle and how to load and fire it. The warriors crowded around the two men. They, too, were fascinated by the weapon. Finally, Juan loaded the rifle, a Remington 30-06, and handed it to the chief. Tikki eagerly accepted it and aimed it in the air. When he pulled the trigger, the explosion sent the warriors scrambling and laughing hysterically. Juan placed a melon on a nearby log and showed Tikki how to aim at the target. The chief pulled the trigger and the melon exploded into a thousand pieces. Tikki erupted into laughter and handed the gun to one of his sons who proceeded to mimic his father and shoot at a melon. The result was the same.

Tikki made a gesture to Juan. He wanted to trade with Juan for two rifles. Juan was hesitant to part with his weapons but decided to see what was being offered. Tikki spoke and his wife raced to their hut and brought back a wide selection of gifts to trade. Juan picked through the many feathered headdresses and arm bands, the carved wooden statues, the wood and stone battle axes, and then something unusual caught his eye. It was a small, tarnished silver box approximately nine inches square. It was obvious that the Indians didn't craft this. Where did it come from, and how did it get here? Juan looked at the box with feigned indifference and put it aside. Tikki's brother came over to the pile and added a jade figurine and a pair of solid gold earrings. Juan held the jewelry in his hand and realized by the weight that the gold earrings alone would pay for the rifles. He told Tikki that he would take the jade figurine, the gold earrings, and the silver box in exchange for two rifles and 300 rounds of ammunition. Tikki nodded and smiled. Although he did not want to part with the silver box, he knew that the rifles would do much to insure the safety of his people.

"I must leave now, go back to my camp," gestured Juan.

"I will have my men take you back." Gesturing towards the gifts, Tikki told Juan to leave in peace.

They grasped arms and smiled at each other in friendship. Juan climbed into the canoe with the three warriors and they pushed off into the dark night. It was

pitch black as the canoe glided over the dark brown river. When they reached his camp, Juan brought out the second rifle and the ammunition and put them into the canoe. As the warriors moved off into the current, Juan smiled and waved goodbye. They were quickly swallowed by the darkness. Then, Juan packed his treasures in his canoe. He had decided to cut his season short and return to Lima as soon as possible. He was eager to see what the gold earrings and the silver box would fetch on the antiques market.