

**Rick Versus the Ants**  
*(Chapter 1)*

I had been single all my life. Working too much, no time for socializing has left me rich and alone. Tired of the city life, I decided to try something different. I had spent a couple years traveling around the world looking for the optimum place to retire. South America, lots of good choices, but too many bugs and too hot. The irony of that statement will come back to haunt me in the months to come. The Philippines, good food, tropical water, beautiful women, too many people and hurricanes. Thailand, same thing. While visiting Sydney, I took a two week island tour. We did lots of snorkeling around the Great Barrier Reef and saw some awesome remote tropical islands. One large island in particular caught my eye. The tour guide said the island was shrouded in mystery. At one time, it was populated by wild goats and pigs. About 10 years ago, all the animals disappeared. There is only one resident on the island and he owns a large plantation. He is not very friendly and he threatens anyone near his property with rifle and shotgun.

Still, I couldn't get the idea out of my head that this was somewhere I could live a quiet peaceful life. There was a large parcel of land available for purchase far enough from the grumpy plantation owner that I figured it would not be an issue. Back in Sydney, I went about inquiring how to purchase the land. My former business was in oil drilling. I had amassed an enormous fortune during my time. I also had many contacts with ocean trawler captains. After the purchase was finalized, I began making my plans for building an impressive mansion. Here is a aerial view of my island.



I also wanted to grow crops and keep livestock. My dream was to become a rancher farmer. It took a year or so, but with time and money, things move along fairly quickly. I had all my materials delivered via those ocean trawlers I mentioned earlier. My mansion was complete. I had a boat dock and 32 ft. Catalina. (See, I always knew I would get my dream boat someday). I brought in some manual labor to plow my fields and plant some crops. Also to construct some pens for my livestock.

I ordered all the farm equipment needed to run things and even bought a sheep dog to help me. His name was Shep. Short for Shepard. Not always wanting to just work, I took my boat out a couple times during the week to spearfish the reef. This was one of my favorite pastimes.

Unbeknownst to me, deep down below the ground, a crisis was brewing. Scientists who have studied ants, say that ants have two ways to communicate. One is pheromones, the other is noise. Not just any noise, the ants have some kind of spike that when rubbed it produces a noise, (I guess like crickets). They use this noise to produce an alert. If they are in trouble, this signals their comrades to come to their aid. The pheromones are kind of like finger prints. Each colony has their own and within a colony it also differentiates their status. When you see a long line of ants, they are just following the scent of those in front. Ants can also smell food 100 of miles away. So it shouldn't surprise you when you spill that sugar and they show up the next morning. They have 5 times more odor receptors than other insects.

Ten years ago this same crisis occurred. This particular colony of ants are 10 times larger than their regular cousins. They are fire ants. They can consume anything in their path, including crops and livestock. They had run out of food and it was time to re-surface. During the last decade, they emerged from the ground and devoured every living animal and plant that populated the island. They dragged the food back to their nests and this has sustained them up until now.

I was out trying to get some more of those delicious lobsters that hide down under the rocks in the coral reefs. The Aussies call them Crayfish instead of

lobsters. They are wrong. How can you tell what you caught?

If you caught it in salt water and it has no claws... It is a rock lobster.

If you caught it in salt water and it has claws... It is a lobster

If you caught it in freshwater and it has claws... It is a crayfish.

My boat was anchored out about ½ mile off shore. The lobsters in these parts were huge compared to what I use to get back in the states. Sometimes you could even grab them with your hands. Usually, I had to stick my speargun down in the crevices and try to shoot them. Out in the deeper waters, I had good luck spearing Travallies and Coral trout. Some of the most delicious eating fish in these waters. One of the problems with catching these, is the sharks immediately swarm to the spot when they smell the blood and see the frantic motion. Without another diver near by to ward them off, many times, by the time I got to the surface, all that was left is the head.

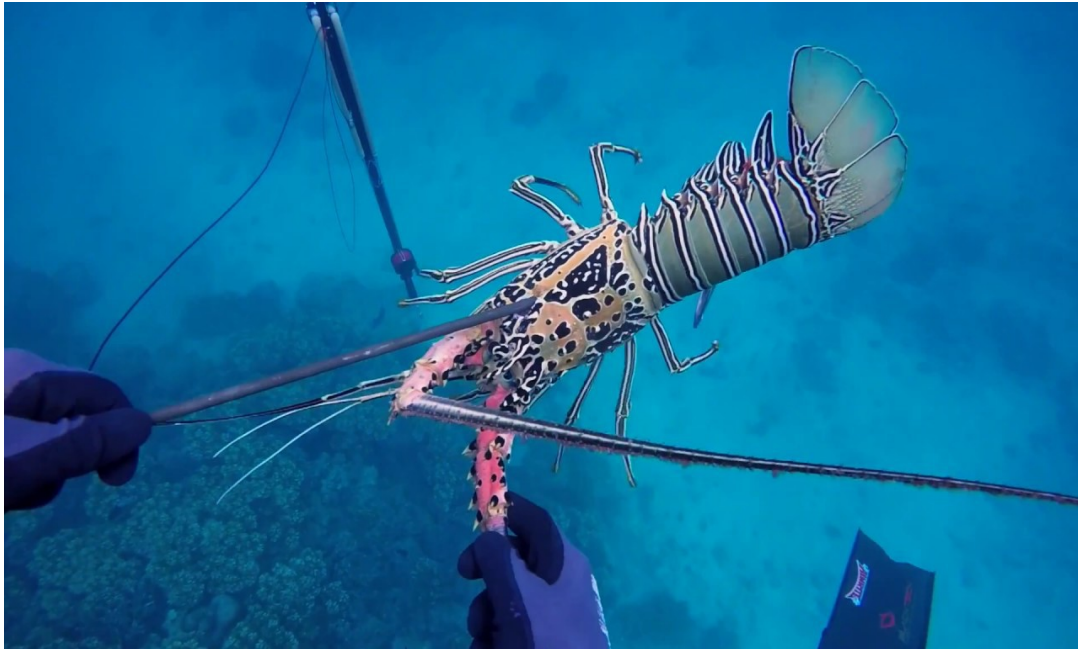
Coral Trout



Blue Travally



The Aussies call these Crayfish  
They are really rock lobsters



The lobsters lived in shallower waters so this was much easier. I had speared a good one, but he was stuck in the crevice and I was trying to pull him out. This was taking too long, but I was determined to prevail. Next thing I knew, I was back on the deck of my own boat. I had suffered from shallow water blackout. This is one of the main reasons, besides the shark protection, that snorkelers always dive with a partner. Being alone, this was not an option for me. I woke up staring up at a most beautifully lovely face. Have I died and gone to Heaven. Not likely, by the way I have lived. What happened? She said, apparently you blacked out underwater. I happened to be near your boat and noticed that you did not come back up to the surface. I dived in and pulled you up. Where did you come from? I live on the island with my father-in-law. He owns the land on the other side of the island from you.

Note:

This blackout actually happened to me for real when I was 15 years old. I was swimming in my friends pool. We had decided to see who could swim the most laps underwater across his pool. I had gone three lengths back and forth, and was on the fourth lap when I woke up standing near the end edge.

I had blacked out.

To continue:

I have lived on this island for more than a year and have not seen you or your father-in-law all this time. He doesn't want to meet anyone and he doesn't want me to either. What does your husband say about that? My husband died in a farming accident. My father-in-law doesn't like me much. He wants me to honor his son by staying completely virtuous the rest of my life. That is something I don't intend to honor. I almost said, "I might be able to help you with that", but my mouth did not utter a word. Why don't you leave? I am somewhat of a prisoner here. I have no financial resources and no means to leave. As you can see, my only boat is a little skiff not adequate to make it across to the mainland. How is it that you could meet me today? My father-in-law took the big boat to the mainland to pick up supplies. Couldn't you have visited me during one of those trips? Not likely. There is an electrified fence between your property and ours. He said it is to keep our cattle from straying, but it is really to keep me from straying.

This is a pleasant turn of events. Maybe my life will be filled with the happiness I seek.

**Rick Versus the Ants**  
(Chapter 2)

So since you saved my life, can I know your name? My name is Alyce, sounds like A lease, not Alice. My name is Rick and I owe you big time. No worry, I just happened to be in the right place at the right time. I must return before my father-in-law gets back. He would not be happy if he knew I was talking to a stranger. Maybe I can see you again and then we wouldn't be strangers. We shall see she said, as she left in her small dingy.

I returned back home empty handed. No lobster dinner for me tonight. I couldn't get her image out of my head.

One of the nice things about my property was the fresh water stream that flowed near my house. That supplied all the water I needed to irrigate my

crops. My life returned to routine until the day the stream dried up. That isn't suppose to happen. I needed to investigate this and that meant I needed to talk to my neighbor, since his land was upstream from mine. No need to navigate through his electrified fence. I just anchored off shore and took my dingy. As I approached his house, the door flew open and he appeared holding a shotgun. I raised my arms and shouted whoa there! I just need to ask you some questions. I am your neighbor down stream and it seems the stream quit running. His answer was very abrupt and harsh. The stream source is on my land and I built a dam to capture enough water to irrigate my vast fields. I have the right to do whatever I want with the water flow. Can you release some of the water, I also have crops to irrigate? If you don't like the situation, you can always leave. And with that he turned away. I stopped him by saying, why don't you and Alyce join me for dinner and we can discuss water rights. I am willing to pay you for some water flow. As he turned around, I could see red splotches flood his cheeks. How do you know Alyce? I said she just happened to save my life while I was diving for lobsters. I owe her a great debt. You stay away from my daughter-in-law and don't ever step foot on my property again. Next time it will be shoot first and ask questions later.

Well that didn't go quite like I wanted. I returned home trying to think of how to get the water I needed. OK, not a big deal. I will dig a well up near our property line and install a pump. That should work as I imagine the water table isn't too far below the surface.

The next morning there was a knock on my door. I opened it and to my surprise there stood Alyce. She had a visible bruise on her cheek and it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what had happened. She was carrying a small suitcase and I invited her in. She asked if I could transport her to the Australian mainland. She is leaving her father-in-law. The reasons were obvious. I said that I could surely help her, but why don't you spend a few days recovering before I take you. This is a big mansion and there is plenty of room for privacy. You don't want to appear there looking like that. She reluctantly accepted.



Here is Alyce as she looked at my door



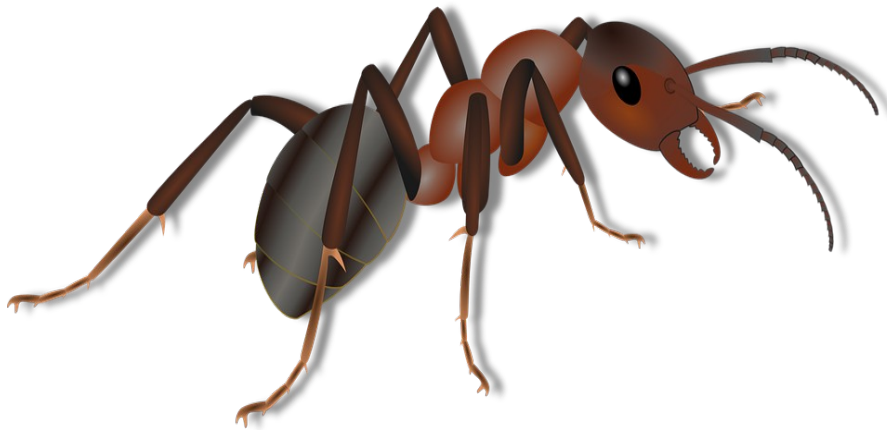
A couple of days later a constable from the mainland appeared at my door with a deputy in tow. I was half expecting something like this. He told me that my neighbor, Mr. Zack, accused me of kidnapping his daughter-in-law. I told him that was absurd and that she left him on her own free will. She appeared at the door and verified my claim.

As the days pass, I kept expecting Alyce to ask me to take her to Sydney. Instead, she started helping me with the farm and we went spearfishing together. After a while, we both sort of forgot about her request for transport. The weeks and months that followed were some of the best times of my life. It seems that we were made for each other.

I had hired a drilling company for my well project. The well was drilled and the pump installed. It seemed like everything was going to work out great. I now had flowing water again. Not as much as before, but enough for my crops. One of the unfortunate things that happened with my well drilling project was the shaft cut right through one of the main arteries of the ants domain. It was still winter and the ants were not ready to emerge yet, but the smell of live cows and sheep was overpowering. The next day, a small contingent of the ant army emerged and marched toward Mr. Zack's livestock. Some of the ants touched his electrified fence and were zapped. After that, the ants dug a tunnel under the fence large enough to drag parts of the carcasses of some sheep and cows that they had swarmed and taken down. This was just enough to satisfy them until the spring arrived when

they would come out in full force.

## Fire Ants





A few days later, the constable once again knocked on my door. This time Mr. Zack claimed that I had stolen some of his sheep and caves. I allowed the constable to check my livestock and told him I had no need to steal from Mr. Zack. I have my own. I followed him to the site near my well and looked at the tunnel dug under his fence. Perhaps it was coyotes or wolves that did this. I have no idea where his lost livestock could have gone.

The time had come to take Alyce to Sydney. Not to drop her off, but to marry her. Yes, we both agreed our life would be much fuller if we shared it. So we spent some time honeymooning there. Lots of interesting things to see.



The picture below reminds me of Joshua Tree







Besides a city tour of Sidney, we took a jeep tour of the outback. Kangaroos, koala bears, more kangaroos. All in all, we had a glorious time. Now it was time to return to the ranch/farm and see what awaits us.

***Rick Versus the Ants***  
*(Chapter 3)*

Things returned to normal at the ranch for the next few months. Then spring sprung. The ants had finished with their appetizer and were ready for the full course. The path to food had already been established, and even though Mr. Zack had filled in the tunnel under his electrified fence, the ants made short work of it re-digging. Mr. Zack's livestock and crops were the nearest food source to the opening of the. They didn't waste much time advancing.

Rick and Alyce heard some shotgun blasts followed by rifle fire. They just assumed that Mr. Zack was scaring off some more over enthusiastic tourists.

That was not the case. Later that day, there came a knock on our door and who presented himself there surprising both of us? It was Mr. Zack in person.

His face was almost devoid of blood and he had taken on an almost zombie

like expression. What happened man? Still in shock, he said, my crops, my animals, all gone. I had difficulty understanding what could have happened. He said the bugs, the ants, have spread out on my land and are devouring everything in sight.

What ants I asked? The giant red ants that have emerged from your well. They have jaws of unbelievable proportions and nothing seems to stop them. I fired gas grenades in the midst of the swarm and it killed those in the immediate vicinity, but they just filled in the gap and kept coming. If I had not escaped to the shoreline, I would have had the same fate as my cows and sheep.

Gas grenades I thought, who is this guy. I decided to go down and take a look myself.

I jumped on my tractor and road over to where my well was located. I also could not believe what I saw. I could not even count how many ants were pouring out of the well. They indeed were all headed toward Mr. Zack's property. I realized that after they consumed all his crops and animals, that I was going to be next.

I hurried back to the mansion. I told Alyce what I had just witnessed. She said, maybe we need to leave this island. I have spent too much effort, money, and time to just abandon my home without a fight.

What can we do? We can build some kind of defense. Water moats, oil filled trenches, stacks of hay that could be ignited. We should be able to protect our area using those tactics.

I turned around to ask Mr. Zack what he thought, but he was gone. I told Alyce that maybe she should retreat to the mainland along with her ex-father-in-law. She said, I don't want to be anywhere near that man. My place is here with you.

My first thought was, why not try curbing the problem at it's source. I took the tractor over to my well site. Sure enough, enormous amounts of giant red



fire ants were emerging from the well and flowing toward Mr. Zack's farm. I shut off the forward pump valve and reversed it so the well water would just return to the shaft. This seemed to work for a while. Thousands of fire ants emerged from the well surface already drowned. I thought maybe I had stemmed the flow. My victory was short lived. The well entrance was indeed plugged, but all around me, a dozen or so holes in the earth opened up and even more fire ants emerged than what was there before. In fact, my retreat back to my mansion was also blocked. I spun the tractor around and headed back. The wheels of my tractor started to get slippery with all the ant bodies and guts that I was running over. Instead of a quick victory, I was in danger of being the next victim. I was suspended there long enough for the ants to start climbing onto the tractor. I tried to brush them off, but there were too many. I was bitten several times, but eventually the tractor tires caught hold and I was free and heading back. It looked like this was not going to be an easy battle.

When I got back to the mansion, I told Alyce that we needed to set up defensive barriers. The first defense was to dig moats all around the mansion perimeter. Herd all the live stock back into the barn. Fill the moats with water.

Next, dig more moats in a smaller circle closer to the mansion and fill it with gasoline and oil fuel. The third barrier closer in was bundles of hay tied together that I could light with flame. I believed these barriers would be adequate to contain the swarm. After all, these were mindless insects.

It took several more days for the ants to consume all of Mr. Zack's animals and crop. I was watching from my veranda with some field binoculars when they reversed course and started advancing toward us. First they hit my crops. I thought locusts were a devastating menace. These voracious insects devoured my crops at the rate of 1 foot per minute. It wouldn't be long before they reached my water moats. I expected that to halt them. I was wrong. They piled into the moat unconcerned. As the drowned bodies of their comrades filled up the moat, they just walked across as if no water was present.





OK, ants 1, Rick 0. Let's see how they handle the fiery moats.

The second line of defense was more moats filled with oil and gasoline. The moat went entirely around the mansion. The ant army was marching toward them. I had to get out there and light the fuel. I drove my tractor down near the edge and held a torch in my hand. As the army reached the moat, I tossed the torch in. The entire ring lit up. The ant army halted. Looks like that will stop them temporarily. I was hoping that realizing they could not cross the barrier that they would return to their tunnel satisfied with what they had already captured.



The moat burned for three days and then started to go out in spots. The ants had just stayed there without moving. I now realized that my first two lines of defense had failed.

I still had the stacks of wheat and brush as my last line of defense between them and us. I now knew that would only work temporarily, as the ants would just wait for that to burn out. It wouldn't even last for an hour.

I told Alyce that it looked like it was time to abandon the farm. We could ride on the tractor to the beach and escape on my sailboat.

I still lit the brush and Alyce and I grabbed what ever valuables we could carry. We mounted the tractor and burst through the burning brush. I was driving at full speed and the ants were not able to climb onto the tractor. It looked like we were getting away OK. As we reached the beach, I had one last thought or idea. Mr. Zack had dammed up the stream. There must be a large body of water behind it. The way the valley was shaped, if I could release all that water, it would flow down and drown all the ants. My mansion was on the highest point of land. The water would reach up to my door step, but would not enter the mansion. The water would also pour down my well hole and hopefully fill up all the tunnels.

It was worth a shot. I sent Alyce out in the dingy to the anchored boat against her objections. She would be safe waiting there for my return, if I did return.

I jumped on the tractor again and headed up toward Mr. Zack's farm. Most of the ant army were stationed near my mansion waiting for the fires to go out. Still, there were lots of stragglers, enough that I was still in danger. I couldn't

## **Return to Ant Island**

### **Rick Versus the Ants** *(Chapter 4)*

We returned to the island. We cautiously made our way toward the mansion. The mansion had survived unscathed. Everything else was gone. No large plants, trees, or animals that we could see. The stream had returned to its former glory. The flood waters from the broken dam did not hurt the soil. Lots of new grass and plants were already starting to sprout. There was no evidence of the ants. My tractor was still operational. I ventured down toward where my well shaft had been. It was completely filled with water to the brim. All the holes that the ants had come out of were either filled with water or caved in. The valley had returned. I asked Alyce if she wanted to stay and rebuild. She said she would follow what ever I wanted. I could see that this place could be re-built, live stock brought back in, and new crops planted. If we could return to our former peaceful life, it would be worth it to try again. This time it did not take a year to replenish the farm. The barns and fences were still standing strong. The same thing went for Mr. Zack's ranch. Six months later we were back in business. We never heard from Mr. Zack again. I wasn't interested in his property anyway. Over the following years, it just slowly decayed. Alyce and I had two kids. One boy and one girl. Life was glorious. We all went diving for lobsters and spear fishing for blue travallies and coral trout. We even speared some real beauties like dog fish tuna and golden lip emperors. Our garden and livestock provided us with the freshest fruits,vegetables and top quality steak. That, along with our sea food bounty, gave us the best of lives.

Unknown to us, one section of the ants tunnel had survived the flood. Including the queen. They had been feasting on the bounty that had been claimed before the flood waters. This food supply was running out. It had been a decade since the last surface raid. The queen had also replenished the ant army. New tunnels had been dug. It was time to go back up on top.

The tourist boat was just off shore. The guide was telling the story of this mysterious island. He said, for the past ten years, we had always waved at the friendly family that had occupied the southern section of the island. But for the past several months, no one greeted us. We also noticed that the lush foliage and plants that had made this one of the top tourists viewing spots were all gone. I wonder what happened?

Did Rick and his family survive or were they ravaged by the new ant army? What about the ants? Anyone want to know what happened?

**Rick Versus the Ants**  
*(Epilogue)*

Billy and Janey were just returning from school. Billy was 12 and Janey was 10. Walking along the sidewalk, they strolled by a dirt field that had a large ant hill on top. Both took a wide birth around and distant from the hill. Myrmecophobia is the inexplicable fear of ants. What could have given them this fear of simple black ants? I guess that phobia name should not be applied to them. There is nothing inexplicable for what they went through.

It has been five years since they left the island. Both have suffered numerous nightmares since. The horror of that place still remains as if it happened yesterday.

**Oh déjà vu.**

Rick had been living the life he had always dreamed of. With Alyce and the kids, everyday was filled with fun and laughter. Alyce was home schooling the kids. Billy and Janey had taken to ranching and farming with great enthusiasm.

Milking the cows, feeding the pigs, and their favorite, spearing fishing and trapping lobsters. They both had their own horse to ride and after chores and homework, would wander off roaming all over our large acreage. We never told them about the battle we had in the past. We didn't want to scare them, believing their home was not always paradise like it now seemed.

All that changed when they returned from a ride to report to me about a giant ant hill that had appeared down near the torn down electric fence.

I immediately told Alyce to start packing. We were not going to put the kids in danger. We hurriedly grabbed our suitcases and backpacks and stuffed them with our most valuable things that would fit.

But it was too late. In the past, the ant army had marched on Mr. Zack's place because his livestock was the closest. This time, there was no livestock other than ours. Looking down the hill toward my crops, I could see the destruction had already begun. There seemed to be even more ants this time than during the last invasion. I pulled the tractor out of the barn and hitched up the trailer. I told the kids and Alyce to load up the trailer and also get inside. The trailer had high walls, since I used that to stack hay bales. It looked fairly protected. I also grabbed a couple boxes of dynamite.

The ants had already blocked our path to the beach. I drove as fast as I could toward them. Before getting there, I launched a couple sticks of dynamite. That blasted somewhat of a path for us. Due to the dense pile, they soon filled the gap. I thought the trailer would be fairly safe, I was wrong. The ants clung to the sides and slowly crawled there way into the back. Alyce was not without some defense. She had taken all the insect sprays we had under the sink. She sprayed them and drenched them as much as the canister allowed. This helped to abate them. I was still throwing sticks of dynamite and driving as fast as I could. We were making headway. Some of the ants had gotten past Alyce's spray and she and the kids were getting bitten. We made our way past the hoard to the beach. I drove the tractor right into the surf. Alyce and the kids jumped out and into the ocean. The salt water cleared any ants on their bodies and they swam toward the anchored boat. They were safe for now.



I had one more thing to do. I swung around and headed back up toward the fence line. I spotted many ant hills just as the kids had described. As I drove by, I threw a lighted dynamite sticks down each hole. The advancing army must have received the clicking alarm. They all turned and headed back toward where I was blowing up their homes. As I shoved the last dynamite down the last remaining hole, the entire massive army froze. Somehow, they must have gotten the message that the queen was dead. Now they returned to the mindless insects that I had first thought them to be. They had nowhere to go to and no task to perform. I calmly drove back down to the beach to the relief of Alyce and the kids. I am not sure if my effort completely eliminated the risk, but I didn't want any other unsuspecting person to have to face what we just went through.

I was still wealthy. After searching for a new place to call home, we settled in Bora Bora. I leased some land and built a modest, but comfortable house on a remote part of the island. Close enough to civilization to be convenient, but far enough away from the town center and tourist traffic. Once again, we were living in paradise. Actually, this was much better. Here is a view from my patio deck and living room window.





**The End**