

ARMY ANTS



▲ The queen of an army ant colony lives for several years. At each bivouac, the queen lays as many as 300,000 eggs.

- 1 Forget lions, tigers, and bears. When it comes to the art of war, army ants are among the most frightening creatures on earth.
- 5 With powerful mouth parts, these fighters can skillfully cut creatures much larger than themselves into pieces. Acting together in great numbers, army ant colonies succeed at making tens of thousands of such kills each day. Their **capabilities** do have limits, though. Contrary to popular belief, they almost never take down large animals or people.

One of the best places to **observe** army ants is Barro Colorado, an island in a lake
10 created by the Panama Canal. The island is home to as many as 50 colonies of *Eciton burchellii*, the most studied army ant in the world. It is one of 150 types of army ants in the New World; more than 170 other types live in Asia, Africa, and Australia.

The colonies of this army ant are huge, ranging from 300,000
15 to 700,000 ants. They never stay in one place long, moving from **nest** site to nest site. Linking legs together, they use their own bodies to form
20 enormous nests called *bivouacs*, which they hang beneath a fallen tree. There they stay for about 20 days as the queen lays as many as 300,000 eggs.

25 When the ants go hunting, as many as 200,000 of them leave the nest in a group that **broadens** into a fan as wide as 14 meters. This *swarm raid*
30 takes a slightly different course each day, allowing the hunters to cover fresh ground each time.



▲ Army ants use their own bodies to form huge nests called *bivouacs*, which they hang beneath a fallen tree.

¹ An **ant colony** is a group of ants that live together in an organized society.

35 Protecting the ants wherever they go are the soldiers, recognizable by their oversized jaws. If their frightening looks don't scare enemies away, soldiers also have a powerful bite—and the attack is often suicidal.² Because their jaws are shaped like fishhooks, the soldiers can't pull them out again. Amazonian tribes³ have used soldier ants to close wounds, breaking off the bodies and leaving the heads in place.

40 *Eciton burchellii* are **blind** and can't see what's ahead of them, but they move together in such great numbers that they easily kill the non-army ants, insects, and other small creatures that **constitute** their prey.⁴ When the group happens upon a break in the path, ants immediately link legs together and form a living bridge so that the group can move forward without any **delay**.

45 In Japanese the word *ant* is written by linking two characters: one meaning “insect,” the other meaning “**loyalty**.” Indeed, individual ants are completely loyal to their **fellow** ants. They display many examples of selfless **cooperation** that, while certainly extreme, can't fail to win human admiration.

² In a **suicidal** attack, the attacker loses its life in carrying out the attack.

³ **Amazonian tribes** are human societies living in the Amazon rainforest.

⁴ An animal's **prey** are the animals it hunts and eats in order to live.



▲ The jaws of the soldier ants are shaped like fishhooks; once the soldier bites, it can't pull its jaws out again.



▲ When they face a gap in the path, the ants link their legs to form a living bridge.