

Monkey Road™

An e-book

By J.T. Robbins



I. The Monkey Source

It was 5:00 a.m. and the little island of Murisa was reluctantly waking up, being nudged by clusters of dark violet storm clouds that were slowly creeping their way in from the west. The tall, elegant, but aging pualona trees were bending agreeably with the scattered gusts of wind coming off the beach while the morning tide predictably delivered its rolling succession of whitecaps to the shoreline. Soon, the first glow of the sun would find its way above the horizon and baptize the gentle island with its golden beams.

Ritalu had already finished his bowl of fruit and rice and could hear his fellow tribesmen in the other surrounding huts rustling about preparing for the day. He wondered if the threatening storm would prevent them from another full day of work. Such storms had done so in the past, sometimes lasting two or three days, and too much lost time could wipe out the entire season. All that could be done was to hope that the winds would blow the clouds over the small mountain on the northeastern side of the island and on out to sea. Meanwhile, the preparation for today's work had to proceed.

Capturing monkeys, or any wild animal for that matter, is no simple proposition and requires careful planning to be carried out successfully. Like many such activities involving close-knit groups of people, as in the sports world, the element of teamwork is crucial in carrying out a game plan to success. Leading up to this day for laying out the nets, long hours had already been spent, mostly by the women and young girls of the village, in the design and weaving of the large

capture nets that would today be placed at pre-determined locations throughout the jungle floor. The nets had to be strong and they also had to be tied closely together so that a frantic, 15-20 pound primate running on surges of adrenaline could not stretch the hand-woven twine and escape. While it was very tedious work, it also was a labor that had paid off time after time for these simple village people. It was no easy business, this monkey capturing, but it was a business the Ualawi tribe had been active in since the 1930's when the first white traders discovered their idyllic little island off the coast of Indonesia. In those days, the grandfathers and grandmothers of today's tribal members worked on handshakes and smiles with white traders from all over Europe, Australia and the United States. Their pay in those days was in cheap trinkets and farming tools and sometimes, rifles and pistols and ammunition, the primates being gathered mainly for zoos and carnival acts. The business thrived well enough in the old days, but paled in comparison with the huge demand that had arisen in recent years from the worldwide demand for research animals.

Now the tribe was under an exclusive contract with a British firm that had strategic business agreements all over the globe with companies that specialized in the importation of laboratory-quality primates for research purposes. Demand had literally outstripped supply and the people of this small tropical paradise with a seemingly endless supply of monkeys, had been thrust into the forefront of an aggressive worldwide research effort to discover cures for the ills of mankind. Payment to the tribe now was in the form of modern housing, schools, raw materials for their fledgling clothing business, and plenty of British pound sterling notes. In today's market for research animals, the Ualawi could literally name their price. Every research center in the world was crying out for more primates to conduct more and more research studies heavily financed by multinational pharmaceutical companies and prestigious universities, and a seemingly endless supply of research money was being made available every day.

Ritalu knew his job and did it well. He was a man of the jungle and capturing monkeys was something he had done as a way of life since he was a boy. But he only knew his work from a tribal point of view and had but a dim concept of the monkeys' fate after they left the island. Many of the tribe's traditions and ceremonies had focused on the lore of the monkeys for generations and although the monkey was viewed as their brother, the monkey was, nevertheless, ultimately destined to be given up as a sacrifice for the survival of the tribe. This belief had its origin with past generations when the monkey was an important food staple for the tribe. But once it was understood by the tribe's leaders that the white traders would pay and pay well for each monkey captured alive, the concept of monkeys as food was abandoned by the tribe. And whatever the future held for the monkeys, it was, for the Ualawi, still in line with the concept of the monkey as their sacrificial brother.

The crates were stacked five-high in a perfect six-foot by six-foot square of crates---a living Rubik's cube of primates. As soon as the last crate was set in place, a tall, black half-African, half-Indonesian native picked up a nearby water hose and aimed the nozzle toward the crates and with precision accuracy, masterfully shot a continuous stream of water into each individual crate, exactly at the point where the water cup in each was located.

As soon as his task was completed, a team of four other natives draped a large web

of shipping net around the cubed pallet and pulled it tightly into place while locking it securely at all four corners as well as on each side of the cube, now bustling with 125 live, screeching cynomolgus monkeys. Once the last lock had been snapped into place, a well-used, near antique forklift arrived, commandeered by a youthful-looking native, and in one fell swoop the arms of the forklift scooped up the pallet and carted it off to a nearby staging area at the edge of a natural earth tarmac at the end of a crude, jungle runway. There the crate was joined with nine other already completed pallets to await the arrival of the aging Huey helicopter which would eventually shuttle the entire contingent of 1,250 primates to the Lomcok, Indonesia, airport and a waiting chartered Turkish Airlines cargo plane. Final destination: Bush Intercontinental Airport, Houston, Texas USA.