

GREEN MONKEY SYNDROME

綠猴劫

Disaster, biological warfare, environmental destruction, and resistance to hegemony. No, it's not a description of 2020; it's Andrew Yeh's gripping short story collection, Green Monkey Syndrome. These stories, written over thirty years ago, reflect a dystopian future resonant with our own, it's as if they came out yesterday.

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After the first story, "The Ancient Sword", the four subsequent stories narrate the struggles of the tiny island nation of Buron to resist the onslaught of its hegemonic neighbor via any means necessary. "Green Monkey Syndrome" describes the disaster of a pathogenic weapon leaked among indigenous tribespeople; "The Gaoka Case" tracks through case files a pharmaceutical offensive designed to take advantage of the enemy's patriarchal culture; "I Love Wynona" and "Lost Birds" describe campaigns to manipulate disastrous weather patterns and deliver bio-weapons through migrating birds.

These stories, fortified by the author's own extensive research, paint a picture of transnational warfare and brutal environmental imbalance that will chill the blood of anyone who has been reading this year's news. Yeh's surgically precise language and compelling narratives read like *1984* meets *Brave New World* meets the front page of the *New York Times*.



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GREEN MONKEY SYNDROME

By Andrew Yeh

Translated by Joshua Dyer

1. The Researcher

3:42 a.m., August 6, 1984

No. 16 finally dies after more than twelve hours of struggle. He was a large fellow, strong and well-muscled, self-assured, the alpha male of the troop housed in our facility. I liked this king among monkeys, and I never would have imposed this fate on him if the protocol hadn't demanded our healthiest specimen. But, at this stage we have to assess the range of individual resistance to the green monkey bacteria, because, for the time being, this is the only practical way to project mortality rates.

In deepest hour of the night, a wan fluorescent light illuminates the contents of Isolation Ward Two: an aluminum dish filled with fruit and sweet potato, a half-filled aluminum water bowl, and, in one corner, the curled up body of No. 16. His corpse displays all the classic signs of green monkey syndrome: major edema of exposed dermis and mucosal tissues – eyes, mouth, buttocks, reproductive organs, and so on – with no trace of flush, the pale flesh instead bearing the eponymous greenish tinge. Without performing an autopsy I know there is massive internal bleeding. His kidneys, liver, and spleen have been ravaged by the microbe.

It was an impressive feat, holding out as long as he did. Inhalation induces markedly rapid onset and progression compared to ingestion. In previous experiments, few of this monkey king's subjects had survived even eight hours.

As always, I dispose of the food and water. We know the infected monkeys never eat or drink – they're in too much pain – but we always prepare them something. After all, even criminals on death row get a last meal. I turn out the lights, light a cigarette in the darkness, and walk to the window. The dark sea rises and falls at the base of the cliff below me, glimmers of white foam appearing as wave after wave crashes against the rocks. I open the window and stick my head out. Across the water, scattered points of hazy light mark the location of Tai-Ping City on the shore of our island nation. To my left, where the village of Nilu natives ought to be, there is only darkness. Everyone is asleep, civilized men and savages alike. Only someone like me, a lonely pathologist at a research station on the shore of a remote island, would be up at this hour with a monkey cadaver to remind him that he still has work to complete.

This facility, the Chi-Ming Island Station, is listed as a branch of the National Tropical Bioresearch Institute, but that's just a cover. In truth, we share no connection to any outside universities or researchers. Even the other branches of the Institute don't know we exist. We, on

the other hand, can access every report and dissertation they've ever produced. Our superiors ensure that we are rapidly supplied with anything we need for our research, any academic publication from anywhere in the world. Some of the shorter articles even arrive by teletype. We eat well, and our station has its own generators, well water, and medical supplies. The helicopters that serve our station keep us eternally stocked with the necessities. For the most part we have no need to spend even a cent of our generous salaries.

Naturally, comfort comes at a price: our research entails great risk. Not long ago, green monkey syndrome was thought to be a rare and often fatal condition affecting certain species of monkeys. More importantly, it was only known to exist on a few islands in the western Pacific, and was of little interest to academic researchers. Combing through years of journals and dissertations has yielded but one brief report in an obscure journal of veterinary medicine with a limited distribution. However, after conducting thorough investigations of our own, our team unanimously concluded that green monkey syndrome is a bacterial disease communicable to all primates, including any monkey, ape, or human. The non-occurrence of a large-scale human outbreak can only be attributed to the remote location of the islands where the bacteria is prevalent.

Only by accident did the director of our research station discover that the monkeys on Chi-Ming Island carried the disease. Pursuing a hunch, he acquired populations of monkeys from nearby regions – Japanese and Formosan macaques, and southeast Asian long-tailed macaques – and found that all of them could be infected. Stunned by the result, he resolved to expand his experiment. He convinced his superiors to establish this facility, and recruited us to help carry out this bold line of research.

As the Director constantly reminds us, all countries must prepare for the likelihood that modern warfare will involve bio-weaponry. Every year the Americans and the Soviets dedicate untold economic and human resources to this area of research, as do our enemies, the Gasians. We've heard reports that the Gasian bio-weapons production center is enormous in scale, with specialized facilities producing microbes for Black Death, typhoid, and cholera, and the capability to produce anthrax, various molds, and concentrated snake venoms in smaller quantities. We must catch up with them, or face the possibility that all of our other armaments will be rendered useless.

And catch up we will. That's no empty boast – our practical and theoretical foundations are sound. Theoretically speaking, the only bio-weapon against which there is no defense is a bacterium or virus that humanity has not encountered before. By the time the enemy isolates the pathogen and develops a vaccine or cure, most of the population will already be dead. That's why we don't fear Gasian cholera or plague – we've already prepared the vaccines and medicines we'll need. But if we attack them with a pathogen they've never seen before, but for which we've already vaccinated our own population, then victory in history's first bio-war will be ours.

The issue that vexed our superiors was where to seek a novel pathogen. The Director's discovery of green monkey syndrome here on Chi-Ming Island was the first ray of light. The way he tells it, he gambled his life to complete those early investigations. Only once he had a good

candidate did vigilance kick into gear. He put every possible quarantine and containment procedure in place, and recruited researchers like myself to join him on the island.

Here, we work as one, exploring uncharted territory, willing to lay down our lives in order to defeat our foes. Our two years on this island have not been spent in vain: in addition to macaques, we've conducted successful experiments on rhesus monkeys, gibbons, chimps, and assorted New World monkeys. Tonight's sacrifice of the king of the local macaques provides us with another piece of the puzzle: a prime case study to resolve the question of variation in individual resistance. Success is not far off. Yet on a night like tonight, I can feel the excitement of a predicted experimental result slowly fading into exhaustion and doubt.

This island is too small, nothing but the crashing of waves and a shoreline covered in thorny plants. Those, and the eternally backward Nilu, chirping at each other in their barbaric tongue and doing God-knows-what every day. The dense jungles of the mountainous interior conceal only large troops of macaques. Li, the caretaker of our monkeys, is probably the only one who feels at home here. A graduate in animal sciences, he only came to the island after failing to find a job anywhere else. He captures monkeys from the jungles, or arranges for their purchase, and cares for them after their arrival, supplying us with our experimental subjects. The consummate caretaker, Li keeps each specimen well-groomed and well-fed. In his spare time he plays matchmaker for his wards, a hobby which has become the butt of many a joke. *Before you know it, that old pervert is going to set himself up with of the chimps* – that sort of thing.

Musing about Li and his monkeys buys me a few minutes of leisure during which memories long submerged beneath the pressures of work begin to surface. I studied infectious diseases in school, and was strong in microbiology. I had completed my MS, and was halfway through my PhD when I got into an argument with my advisor about research methods. Who could have imagined that a simple disagreement would lead to accusations of unethical treatment of subjects. The university sided with my advisor and forced me out. My parents had passed away years ago, my older brother was studying anthropology in the US, and my girlfriend left me for another man. Not long after I left university, I received my draft notice. I was to report for infantry training, the lowest of the low.

My bad luck eventually ran its course. Just as my tour of service was about to end, the Director found me. After one meeting, I was an employee of the Chi-Ming Island Station. Once on the island, I discovered my colleagues all had stories similar to my own. Our employment contract swears us to secrecy and waives our rights to seek damages in the event of an accident. Contact with the outside world is necessarily limited; I've only had one brief visit with my brother since he returned after completing his PhD. Gathered together here on the northwest corner of the island, we soon discovered our common sentiments. No one prattles on about ethics or the humane treatment of animals. Here, we are liberated from the old constraints. When nothing is forbidden, true scientific research begins.

Our research program is nearing completion. I have an idea of the virulence of green monkey syndrome, and microbe production has been successfully scaled up. We all know that the only way to have 100% confidence in our findings is to perform experiments with human subjects,

but we also know that none of us could ever bring ourselves to do that. Our willingness to break the rules doesn't extend that far. We're not mad scientists from some science fiction movie.

Though our work is meaningful, our non-working hours are nearly unbearable. Given the destructive capacity of green monkey syndrome, and the all-too-real possibility we might become unwitting subjects of our own experiments, ubiquitous containment protocols and frequent safety drills occupy much of our free time. Women and alcohol are not permitted onsite, and we are forbidden to have contact with anyone else on the island. The only allowances made for our entertainment are a gym full of exercise equipment and a game room stocked with games and puzzles.

Before long, however, some of the guys came up with ways of making do. Most of the time that meant visiting the Nilu village and to do some trading. The dirt-poor natives are fond of tobacco and booze; if you sneak some cigarettes or other daily necessities out of the station, it's a cinch to trade them for a few bamboo jugs of palm wine and the company of local girls. Porcupine, our guy in charge of culturing bacteria, and Huang, who maintains the electrical equipment, are the real experts at this sort of commerce. Porcupine says even the agar jelly he uses as a growth medium can be traded to the Nilu. Add a little glucose syrup, he says, and they gobble it right up. The Director eventually caught wind of their dealings, but decided to look the other way. Maybe he thought it wasn't worth the trouble since the government forbids the Nilu to leave the island.

I went with them once, but I didn't enjoy the experience. I quickly realized I wasn't going to find what I wanted in the arms of a filthy Nilu girl called "the Concubine" (I often wonder who coined that one). Watching Huang and Porcupine jabbering in Nilu as they pulled contraband out of their backpacks only reinforced the uneasy feeling that their spoils were ill-gotten. On a summer night like this, in the wee hours before dawn, the sky full of stars and the waves in my ears, what I dream of is a city girl in a fancy cocktail dress, a bottle of brandy, and a table for two in one of those upscale restaurants with burgundy tablecloths.

Finally, I turn on the lights and insert the photograph I took of the king of the macaques into his file. I thrust my arms into the double-layered rubber gloves set in the plexiglass wall separating me from Isolation Ward Two, and grab hold of the body of the dead primate. With a sigh, I continue my examination.

God, I need a vacation.

2. The Brother

10:00 a.m., August 12, 1984

The small plane takes off from Tai-Ping Airport and in less than a minute we're over the deep blue of the Pacific. The sun is out in front of us, the emerald isle directly beneath it, its coastline drawing my gaze like a magnet, surprising me with its nearness. I'm finally returning to Chi-Ming.

Anthropology is inseparable from fieldwork – that’s an ironclad rule in my book – but for most of the year I’m stuck teaching in the bustling and affluent environs of the capital on the main island. Springtime in the capital is hot and humid, and my stifling classroom at the university reeks of rain and sweat from the bodies of my meager assembly of young students. But when I mention the importance of field research in cultural anthropology, the weary students seated before my podium perk up for a moment. Near the end of the semester, when I made this point once more, a student raised his hand:

“Professor, when are we going to Chi-Ming?”

At that moment, I felt “the joy of gathering and teaching the greatest talents of the kingdom”, as Mencius described it. If you want to research the indigenous cultures of our nation, Chi-Ming is the only place to go.

Chi-Ming Island is located in the Pacific, off the east coast, about seventy kilometers from Tai-Ping City. The island is about sixteen kilometers long and nine kilometers wide. The indigenous Nilu belong to the Oceanic subfamily of the Austronesian ethnolinguistic group. Their population numbers around one thousand individuals. The entire island is a restricted zone, a place to dump whatever our nation prefers to keep out of sight and out of mind. A high-security prison once occupied the southeast corner of the island. Later, the prisoners were moved to make room for nuclear waste storage. The north coast, all steep cliffs, is home to radar and weather stations. I’ve also heard there is a mysterious research facility on the northwest horn of the island, but everything about it is shrouded in secrecy. The Nilu villages are found on the west central coast, where the harbor and airport are located. Special travel permits are required for all visitors from the main island. The application process is a bureaucratic nightmare, and few succeed in visiting. The Nilu, for their part, are forbidden to leave the island under any circumstances, even if they marry an outsider.

You could say it’s the Nilu’s fate that their island home is a dumping ground for the cast-offs of the civilized world. Yet, because they are forbidden to leave and have little intermarriage with outsiders, the Nilu culture and bloodline have survived intact. Moreover, the Nilu seem to have made peace with their fate. They fish the ocean in hand-carved dugout canoes, plant the mountain slopes with upland rice and millet in slash-and-burn fields. They only ask for enough to fill their bellies. The majority of their time they spend chatting in the shelter of their palm frond huts, or pounding whatever metals they can find into thin sheets, from which they fashion symbols of wealth.

The simplicity of their material culture contrasts with their abundance of legends, ceremonies, and rites of passage – a rich heritage which needs to be better understood. My mentor was one of the scholars who helped revive the field of Nilu cultural studies. He was the first to suggest that the animistic beliefs of the Nilu – which ascribe spirits to everything from natural phenomena, to ancestors and physical objects – maintain a particular reverence for monkeys and related species. In particular, my mentor observed that primates are often associated with the spirits of retribution and death in Nilu myth. If his hypothesis is proven correct, it would be a striking contribution to the study of indigenous religious belief.

The plane begins its descent. The four students accompanying me are excited and nervous. Applying for funding and travel permits was difficult enough, eating up half their summer vacations. Now that we are underway, they can hardly contain themselves. At the same time, they know to expect hardship over the coming weeks. This attempt to advance our understanding of Nilu culture is an enormous responsibility, and my plan of study centers around participatory research. Excepting extraordinary circumstances, we will avoid contact with others from the main island, and live exclusively among the Nilu.

All of my students will live in Nilu homes, eat their food, work alongside them, and learn their language. In addition to making general observations, I have assigned each of them a specific area of research. One will focus on Nilu techniques of construction and manufacture. One has an interest in music, so I have asked him to document Nilu folksongs and dances, and also handicrafts. Our lone female student will interview Nilu women to understand marriage customs, childbirth and childrearing, and the status of women within Nilu society. The last student will assist me in researching Nilu myths, beliefs, and religious rituals. We only have six weeks. Everyone will need to adapt quickly to Nilu society, and gain the trust and acceptance of our hosts. Otherwise, our time will be up before we can complete an accurate sketch of Nilu culture.

The Chi-Ming airport consists of a single earthen runway. Our little plane strains against the bumps and jolts of landing and then slowly taxis to the simple wooden structure that serves as a terminal. First to deplane, I take a deep breath of the fresh, salt-tinged air. The students file out behind me, and we remove our bags from the luggage compartment. Chi-Ming Island greets us with brilliant sunlight, gentle ocean breezes, emerald ridges, and series of troublesome security procedures.

While waiting for our luggage to be inspected, I pull out a picture of my wife and child. As a husband and father, I feel guilty being away from them during summer vacation. Strict island security will make it hard to send them any kind of letter beyond a simple greeting. I make up my mind to spend some quality time with them when I return, hopefully in the company of my brother, who has been busy working for some organization whose name he won't reveal. We're both so busy, in fact, that we've seen each other only once these past two years.

We finally make it through baggage inspection. From the terminal I lead the students north to the Nilu village. Soon, we're all sweating under the weight of our luggage. As I raise a hand to wipe my brow, I spot a naval helicopter approaching the northwest coast, where the classified research facility is said to be. Whoever's in that helicopter must have good connections – better than my sweat-soaked students and I, at any rate.

3. The Researcher's Story

Approximately 8:10 a.m., September 11, 1984

The shrill alarm starts abruptly, accompanied by a repeating broadcast: “Seal all doors and windows. This is not a drill.” I haven’t been awake for long and need a few moments to recover from shock before I remember the protective face shield beside my bed and clumsily pull it on. In the hall outside I can hear a confusion of footsteps and moving bodies. Thanks to our frequent drills I quickly regain composure and run through the required checks. Once I’m sure that nothing looks out place, I lock my room and run to my lab.

Inspecting the lab takes more time. Our safety manual instructs us to check first for pathogen leaks and missing specimens. Next, check all equipment for damage or malfunction. If there are no problems in your area, report to the conference room, bringing your personal safety equipment, sidearm, and any classified documents under your control. I draw my pistol and inspect the lab. Fortunately, the problem doesn’t seem to have originated here. As I retrieve the documents from my safe, a new broadcast begins.

“Security division: Wang Li-Chung and Yang Ta-Jen, don protective armor and immediately secure Storage Bay Zero. Animal subjects division: Li Hung-Nien, continue testing and securing all animals. All other personnel: report to the conference room immediately upon completing checks of your personal facilities. Repeat, this is not a drill...”

More than half of my colleagues have already assembled in the conference room by the time I dash through the door. Everyone is crowded by the window, pointing towards the main gates of the station. I go over for a look and see two prone bodies convulsing on the path inside the gates: Porcupine and Old Huang. Porcupine is lying face down, his back heaving with each inhalation. Old Huang is on his side, facing us, eyes and lips swollen, his body contorted with pain. A shiver passes through my body and I suck in a breath of air. Green monkey syndrome.

I turn away from the scene outside to face my colleagues, registering their alarm through the translucent plastic face shields. An emergency door opens in one corner of the conference room, and the Director and his chief of security stride in. Neither is wearing protective gear. Our director, who is rather small of stature, clears his throat to get everyone’s attention.

“You can remove your face shields.”

My colleagues turn, and upon seeing the Director most of them remove their face shields. A few hesitate for a moment before sheepishly following suit.

“Everyone relax. I’ve already sealed the animal enclosures, bacterial storage, and isolation wards. Please report the status of your individual facilities.”

One by one we report that our facilities are clear. As we are winding up a phone rings. The Director presses a button on the wall and a video phone lights up behind him, displaying an image of Li in a hazmat suit. He is standing next to the door of Storage Bay Zero in the bacterial storage facility, pointing to a metal cage on the floor. A small monkey is shrieking and hopping around in the cage under the careful watch of two security officers. The Director looks to me.

“Wu Chih-Kang, if a small monkey like this is infected with the green monkey bacteria, how long until symptoms show?”

I sense the tension in the room as everyone waits for my answer.

“Sir, ten minutes if the bacterial load is large enough. Twenty minutes at lesser exposure, perhaps longer.”

“Good. This monkey has been isolated for twenty-five minutes without showing signs of infection. Li Hung-Nien, put him back in there and check at ten-minute intervals. Report immediately if anything changes.”

Encumbered by the hazmat suit, the onscreen Li salutes awkwardly, though no one finds it humorous under the circumstances.

The Director signals everyone to come closer, and speaks in a soft voice that is both intimate and foreboding.

“I accept responsibility for having tolerated Chu Wan-Shan and Huang Huan-Cheng’s misadventures. Now, it’s too late. They left the facility sometime after five p.m. yesterday. Did anyone see them after that?”

Heads shake.

“So they were infected outside,” volunteers Chin Yu-Ming, who is in charge of developing serum therapies and vaccines. In a quiet voice he adds, “But how did the bacteria get out there?”

The Director responds.

“According to the security officer at the gate, they were carrying a bunch of expired foodstuffs to give to the Nilu. Later, a box of bacteria was found to be missing from Storage Bay Zero. In its place was a box of agar treated with glucose syrup.”

Everyone’s eyes widen. Heads turn and whispers are exchanged. The Director raises his voice.

“Quiet! This is no time for gossip. Everyone return to your stations and perform another round of checks. We will meet here again in half an hour. Wu Chih-Kang, Chin Yu-Ming, please stand by.”

After everyone leaves the Director motions Yu-Ming and me over to the window before speaking.

“A helicopter from the main island will be arriving in a few minutes. They will remain hovering to deal with these two men from the air. You two will coordinate with the helicopter crew over the two-way radio.”

He pulls a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and passes one apiece to Yu-Ming and me. Yu-Ming isn’t a smoker, but he accepts the gift anyway. I light our cigarettes. As I exhale a puff of smoke, I say the words that have been pressing against my chest for the past minute or so.

“Director, last night Porcupine... I mean Chu Wan-Shan and Huang Huan-Cheng – they went to see the Nilu. If they accidentally took a box of bacteria and infected themselves, then the Nilu village, the airport, the harbor, everything nearby... it could be a disaster.”

The Director nods and a strange light flashes in his eyes. After a moment, he speaks:

“You’re right, but for now the airport and harbor have nothing unusual to report. The Nilu village is empty save for a few old people. Last night they had some kind of ceremony. Everyone went to a valley in the island interior—”

He is interrupted by the two-way radio on the table.

“HN1, HN1, this is KG6. Please respond.”

The Director grabs the radio.

“KG6, this is HN1. The targets are just inside the main gates on the south side of the facility. I have two colleagues here to assist you.”

Our ears catch the thrum of the approaching helicopter, and I take the radio from the Director. From his manner of speech, I guess the pilot is a middle-aged man of few words. He reports that they’ve brought a tank of gasoline. A moment later the helicopter is hovering outside the window above the two stricken men. The other member of the helicopter crew, a younger man, asks in disbelief, “HN1, you want us to spray the gasoline here?”

The Director snatches the radio.

“No! First spray the building with foam, the entire side facing the targets.”

Snow white fire-retardant foam falls from the sky, pouring over the window. I glance at Porcupine and Old Huang once more before the window is completely covered. They are about to be burned alive for their carelessness as much as for their moral failings, but even that will be a relief compared to the agonies of green monkey syndrome. The foam now completely obscures our view. I tell the crew to spray the gasoline over a wide area, but avoid any equipment on the ground.

The helicopter reports that they have finished spraying. One more thought flashes through my mind. I hear my voice quaver as I speak.

“KG6, when you fire your guns to light the gasoline, can you target the two men?”

The middle-aged pilot responds, his voice steady: “Roger.”

I know the Director and Yu-Ming understand my request, and so must the pilot. The conference room goes quiet. The roar of the helicopter outside the window grows louder, and we hear four shots fired. Half a second later there is a loud *woomph!* and through the foam we see a bright orange glow erupt into the sky.

The Director takes the intercom and thanks the pilot. Though we’ve never seen his face, it feels as if something intimate has passed between us.

The younger crewman speaks again.

“HN1, we’ll return after picking up some people at the radar station. Shall we land in the rear?”

He pauses for a moment, then continues.

“Busy schedule today. Fires to set, fires to put out, extractions. And we still have supplies from the airport to drop off.” He laughs awkwardly. “See you soon. KG6 out.”

The Director’s countenance grows grim. We understand. Our superiors want as few people as possible to be involved, thus the lone support helicopter. The Director tells us that everyone from the radar and weather stations and the nuclear waste facility will all need to be quarantined here. We will have make a judgment call on whether or not to vaccinate them despite the fact that our vaccine hasn’t been tested on human subjects.

Yu-Ming thinks hard for a moment, then asks:

“Director, clearly our men were infected last night, quite possibly at the Nilu ceremony. If the village is empty that means that none of the Nilu returned from the ceremony. Surely not all of them died. So where did the survivors go?”

The Director acknowledges the question with a nod before answering.

“That’s not all. I’ve been told that a group of anthropology students were also present at the ceremony. There’s been no word from them. We’ll have to go to the ceremonial site and have a look for ourselves.”

The Director tells me to summon all personnel. As I move towards the wall to activate the signal, Li appears on the video phone pointing at the monkey in the cage. The monkey is alert and hopping around, thankfully, but my heart tightens as something else flashes through my mind – my brother is an anthropologist, and this is the time of year he usually conducts his fieldwork....

4. The Brother’s Story

8:39 a.m., September 11, 1984

A fierce north wind whips the deep blue water at the base of the cliff into whitecaps. I and my two Nilu companions are seated with our backs to a wall. Five or six steps away, a uniformed man from the radar station keeps watch over us, rifle in hand. I only learned this was the radar station a few moments ago. Somehow, we fled all the way to the northern tip of the island.

Having the cold black barrel of a rifle pointed at me doesn’t bother me much. On the contrary, being forced to sit still allows me to finally catch my breath. I do my best to review my jumbled impressions of everything that has happened in the past few hours. Nika and Bateo are seated beside me, eyes closed, legs stretched out in front of them, their faces more deeply etched with wrinkles than I remember. Both are around fifty, already elders in Nilu society, but the surprising strength with which they recently dragged me through the mountains belied their age.

Everything went wrong just before dawn today, the thirty-first day of my visit. In the preceding month I have experienced nearly every aspect of Nilu life, and managed to amass a large collection of research materials. The project was going far better than anticipated, but somehow, unimaginably, everything ended in disaster.

My students’ projects had also been going well. The guiding principle I passed to them was this: we are all human. The goal of this kind of participatory research was to force my students to pay attention to their commonalities with the Nilu, not just their differences. And sure enough, after a period of time, we were all beginning to see the world through the eyes of the Nilu.

The employees of the various stations on the island, however, saw things differently. From time to time, one or two of them would sneak into the Nilu village with food to trade for bamboo containers of local palm wine. Then, booze in hand, they would lead a Nilu woman out into the jungle to release their pent-up frustrations. It never occurred to them that their little games were

polluting the innocent Nilu with the casual materialism of our “civilized” society. Nor did they waste any thought on the mixed-race children they would likely leave behind.

There was nothing I could do to stop these incursions. I could only make the most of this precious opportunity to document Nilu culture before it vanishes. For this reason, we refrained from sharing anything of our culture with the Nilu, whether intangible or material. I imagine my students will never forget the experience of planting millet in a patch of freshly burned jungle with only a sharpened stick for digging. Obviously, each of us knew the work could be done more efficiently with a plough, or even a hoe, but we said nothing. I felt I was playing along at a child’s tea party, dutifully sipping at an empty teacup, but when I glanced at my students, laboring over their sharpened sticks, I suddenly saw them as the Nilu do: clumsy, unskilled, so ignorant in the ways of the world it was a miracle their race had survived into the present era. And I was certain the Nilu regarded me in exactly the same light.

When the Nilu rested, our real work began. One student, Kao Chun-Chih, attempted to reproduce Nilu tools under the guidance of Nilu craftsmen. Lin Cheng-Hsien dealt with the challenges of making the Nilu sing into the microphone of his tape recorder. Lu Jo-Lan got along famously with the Nilu women. Hu Chuan-Wei busied himself surveying the Nilu youth, asking how much they still believed of their ancient myths and legends. I spent most of my time with the elders, bombarding them with questions about everything from creation myths to which Nilu children would soon have their coming-of-age ceremonies. My only regret was they continually refused to answer questions on the topic I most cared about: the dark spirits said to possess the monkeys.

But the Heavens reward the faithful, and our friendly attitudes and willingness to participate in their lives eventually won the trust of the Nilu. In early September, the Nilu chieftain, a shark-tooth necklace (his emblem of office) draped around his neck, invited us to attend the monkey spirit sacrifice on the night of the approaching full moon.

I thanked the chieftain profusely. I knew the monkey spirit sacrifice was the most important ceremony of the year, and outsiders were only rarely invited. The sacrifice takes place in a canyon in the island’s interior beneath the first full moon after the seasonal shift in the winds. I had heard a little about the ceremony from a local drunk while mailing a letter at the harbor. He had been invited after showering the Nilu with gifts. Most of his memories involved wine, women, and food, although he also described an unsettling atmosphere that attended the otherwise joyful proceedings. In any event, the ceremony was an essential piece in the puzzle of Nilu spiritual belief. I began counting down the days after the wind shifted, and for the past forty-eight hours had thought about almost nothing else.

Yesterday, the skies were clear. After their afternoon siesta the Nilu began preparations, and we joined in as best we could. Four squealing pigs were slaughtered and cleaned. Sweet potatoes, rice, coconuts, bananas, and home-fermented wine were piled together. Children played in a boisterous tangle, while dogs barked from the sidelines. When everything was ready, the entire village rose and headed southeast into the mountains. Full of excitement, my students and I fell into the procession, doing our best to take part by helping to carry food.

As sundown approached, we followed a dry streambed southward into a canyon. The canyon terminated at a modest but impressively vertical cliff face whose stone surface had been marked by the flow of water. The canyon walls were steep earthen slopes topped by dense jungle, while the floor was littered with stones of various sizes and clumps of wild grass. Upon entering the canyon, the Nilu set about various tasks in small groups. Some collected firewood, some cleared the ground. Before long a number of campfires were going, and the pigs were mounted on bamboo spits to roast.

The sky slowly darkened and I grew hungry, but the Nilu continued to busy themselves with their preparations. At about seven thirty, two more guests appeared.

The two outsiders entered the canyon breathing heavily under the weight of oversized backpacks. These they opened onto the ground, and began distributing packs of cigarettes to the Nilu tribespeople who gathered around. Everyone soon sat down together. It was clear that the Nilu were familiar with the two men, and I concluded they must be employees of one of the facilities on the island who got wind of the ceremony and snuck out to enjoy the festivities. They didn't notice myself or the students, and I told my students not to greet them. I further advised Lu Jo-Lan to be on her guard.

When the moon rose above the tree line, the Nilu chieftain rose from his seat on a pile of stones near the cliff face. As he turned his face to the sky and spread his arms wide, a shaman beside him began to beat a steady rhythm on a large sheet of ancient metal. The Nilu stood in solemn silence. Even the children dared not utter a sound.

The rhythmic clanging stopped. The shaman pointed into the distance with his mallet, and yelled, "Ha!" At once, a dark, simian form appeared among the trees atop the right-hand slope. The large shadowy form clambered down from the trees, and, with a bounding gait, circled its way down to the canyon floor, finally leaping between the chieftain and the shaman to land amidst the assembled islanders. Only then did I understand that I was seeing a short, stocky Nilu man outfitted with a carved wooden mask and a fake tail. The man circled around in an aggressive dance, at times approaching groups of Nilu who would immediately retreat, the women and children crying out in alarm. At last the faux monkey bounded into the area set aside for the wine and roasting pigs. The man made an exaggerated show of sniffing at various foods before slowing his movements and lumbering away along the same path by which he had arrived.

Now the shaman stepped forward. He walked to the roast pig the monkey had sniffed, cut off an ear with a knife, threw it into the fire, and further sprinkled wine over the flames. The fire gave off a thick white smoke. The shaman circled the fire, his head lolling, a strange song on his lips. With my limited Nilu I could only make out *majayo*, the name of the evil spirits that possessed the bodies of monkeys. When the lengthy recitation was finished the shaman stood before the chieftain. The chieftain nodded and the shaman struck the metal sheet once more as he spoke the words, "The *majayo* accept our sacrifice."

The Nilu appeared to suddenly relax as they gathered around the fires in small groups to begin carving and eating the roasted pork. Jugs of wine were passed around, and everyone was free to partake of whatever food and drink they desired. My head filled with questions, I set about

filling my belly with food and a few sips of wine. The first few containers passed my way were bamboo tubes filled with Nilu palm wine. After that it was cheap bottles of whiskey.

Again becoming aware of the outsiders, and concerned how their presence might alter the course of the night, I decided not to stick around for the Nilu dances that would follow. In any event, Lin Cheng-Hsien was there, and I had faith in his powers of observation. I slapped the shoulders of two vaguely tipsy elders at my side, Nika and Bateo, and asked if they could tell me more about the monkey spirits.

Though the wine had loosened their lips somewhat, Nika and Bateo didn't have much to share. According to ancient legend, there is a kind of evil spirit that attaches itself to monkeys. A person who isn't careful might be caught by such a spirit and consumed by it. This was the reason for the monkey spirit sacrifice. When their food supply is at its peak, just after the harvest and before the schools of fish brought by the southern winds depart, the Nilu feed the monkey spirits. Otherwise, the famished spirits might decide to feast on human flesh.

By the time the moon was directly overhead my two Nilu friends had had their fill of wine, food, and dance. The rest of the night belongs to the young, they said. To bolster the population against the predations of the monkey spirits, Nilu youths engage in lovemaking after the annual monkey spirit sacrifice. "Join in, if you're interested," they told me. "Otherwise, we may as well continue discussing the old stories."

I knew this must be a collective coupling ritual, and I feared it was the reason the two outsiders came. Ill at ease, I followed Nika and Bateo to the mouth of the canyon where we sat outside the perimeter of the assembled youths. Our backs to the gently building north wind, Nika and Bateo took turns telling tales of the spirits. Slowly, the desire for sleep overcame us, and the night passed quickly.

The trouble started just before dawn.

It wasn't immediately clear what was happening. Though it was well past midnight, the tribespeople were still drinking and wandering around, eating what food remained. At first it seemed that one or two of them had fallen with a cry, but the mostly drunken Nilu paid little attention. Yet soon after, unconscious revelers began to wake with screams of agony. Those who were still sober went over to investigate, and the agonized cries quieted down for a moment before erupting again in a wave that passed through the entire canyon. Now, Nika and Bateo heard them. As they approached the mouth of the canyon, a piercing cry broke through the hubbub.

It was the voice of the shaman, shouting, "*Majayo!*"

It was difficult to know for sure what happened in the canyon after the shaman's cry. In my memory, anyone who could still move seemed to lose possession of themselves, joining in a terrified chorus of "*Majayo!*". Some were on their knees, some were madly climbing the canyon walls. The ones nearest the mouth of the canyon fled towards us. I froze to the spot, unable to react. Nika and Bateo each grabbed me by a shoulder and hauled me away from the canyon as if our lives depended on it. Like the others, they were shouting, "*Majayo! Run!*"

Nika and Bateo dragged me up a pathless mountain slope. When we reached the ridge we turned north towards the wind, and continued our mad flight. In the beginning we could hear

cries and screams behind us, but the sounds soon faded. I was gasping for breath, but the two Nilu elders wouldn't let me rest. As we raced along a cliff edge at top speed, I nearly slipped and fell into the abyss. Nika and Bateo urged me on a bit longer before we finally stopped to catch our breath.

By this time, the sky was growing light over the sea to our right. Nika began explaining between labored breaths that a human being has no chance of surviving an attack by the evil spirits known as *majayo*. Fortunately, there had not been an attack since he was a child, and that had been an isolated incident. Now, it seemed that all the *majayo* on the island had struck *en masse*. The monkey population had been shrinking these past few years, and the monkey spirit sacrifice was no longer as extravagant as it once was. Perhaps the *majayo* couldn't find enough homes within the bodies of the monkeys, or perhaps they wanted to punish the Nilu for not feeding them well.

Nika stopped speaking and cocked his head, listening for something. Bateo spoke to me softly, "Someone's coming."

Listening closely I could make out Nilu voices behind us, perhaps where the cliff was. I was about to say something when I heard a man cry out, followed by a woman screaming.

"*Majayo!*"

Nika and Bateo sprang into motion, pulling me along as I tripped and stumbled behind them. More voices could be heard now: men, women, and children. The confusion of voices rose to a heart-rending crescendo.

"*Majayo! Ahhhh!*"

The cries lasted a few seconds, seeming to travel down the cliff. Fighting against exhaustion and shock, I hurried forward. We reached a grassy rise as day broke. Ahead of us, at the top of the slope, lay a white-domed structure capped by a large radar dish. When the uniformed man ordered me to freeze, I barely had the strength to raise my hands over my head, and tell him in the common tongue of the main island, "ID...in my...pocket..."

His expression betraying a deep suspicion, the uniformed man looked over my documents, and then ordered us to sit with our backs to the wall of the building.

Bateo heaved a sigh of relief as he sat down, saying the *majayo* most likely wouldn't find us now.

How did he know?

"An old saying. The only way to escape the *majayo* is to flee into the wind to the highest possible point."

I asked him why the Nilu behind us had jumped from the cliff. His answer was tinged with pride and grief.

"If a Nilu knows a *majayo* has already found him, he will not return to his village. As long as he can draw breath he will move as far as he can from other people and kill himself. If there's a cliff, he will jump."

"This way the evil spirit dies with the man," Nika added. "Otherwise, after consuming the first victim, the *majayo* will seek another."