

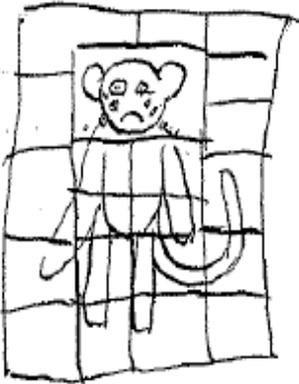
Escape to Monkey Island

Written by Stuart Baum

Illustrations by Camilla Baum

*Dedicated to the young girl on the bus.
The brown girl with the blue dress.*

First you have to know that I am no storyteller. Second you have to know that I am a monkey. A Rhesus monkey named RS4-19. The monkeys in the nearby cages all called me Leo, short for leopard, because of the spots on my side.



I learned to read and write in the laboratory. I also heard about Monkey Island there. Monkey Island is a small island only for monkeys. There is plenty to eat and, when there is not, people – *human* people – bring more food. And instead of giving you medicine that turns you from well to sick, they give you medicine that turns you from sick to well. Imagine that!

None of us monkeys really believed in Monkey Island. We hoped for it. We dreamt about it. But, if you had asked us, not one of us would have said we really believe in it. Even if it were true, none of us expected to go there.

That was before I met the girl on the bus. The brown one with the blue dress. She had been there, she said. Not to me, but to her friend. A white girl in a green shirt and blue pants. She had taken a boat there and watched the monkeys from the boat. Then she put on a mask and something else and dove into the water and watched the fish.

I was already on my way to Monkey Island when I overheard her on the bus, even though I didn't believe it really existed. Even though I didn't really believe in Monkey Island, I had nowhere else to go, since I was not going back to my cage where the researchers gave me medicine that made me sick.

The brown girl with the blue dress was telling her friend about her vacation.

“An island full of monkeys?” the white girl in the green shirt and blue pants asked. “Are you for real?” She did not give the brown girl in the blue dress a chance to answer either question before asking a third, “Did you get to touch one?”

“No,” answered the brown girl in the blue dress. “People aren’t allowed on Monkey Island. Only monkeys and researchers.”

I was hiding in the luggage rack and had to stop myself from jumping up and down with happiness. Monkey Island was real! I knew what I had to do next. I had to go to Monkey Island.

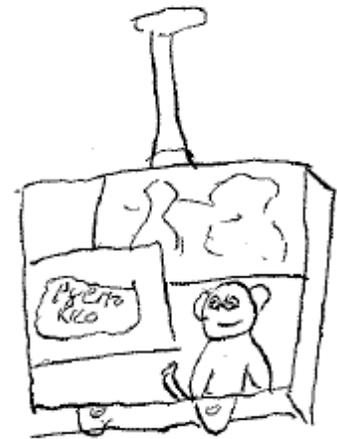
The two girls kept talking and I learned that the brown girl in the blue dress had visited Monkey Island on her trip to visit her grandmother in Puerto Rico. So Monkey Island was in Puerto Rico!

Just then the bus was stopped and a policeman came on board. He spoke to the driver. The driver then spoke to all the passengers. The driver told all the passengers that they had to leave the bus and take all their belongings with them. “The police are looking for a missing item. Sorry for the inconvenience.”

Then I saw two of the men from the laboratory. They were looking for me!

I quietly opened the suitcase next to me on the luggage rack, slipped in, and locked myself inside. I was careful not to make a sound, even when the suitcase was dropped to the ground outside.

Soon we were all back on the bus and the policeman had said ‘sorry for the inconvenience’ and many people asked ‘what were they looking for?’ but no one knew and we were on our way. Only problem was, I was stuck inside the suitcase! I tried to figure out how to open the suitcase from the inside without making too much noise but, soon, the bump-bump-bump of the bus made me tired and before I knew it I was dreaming of Monkey Island.



The brown girl in the blue dress was waving to me from a boat and I was waving back from the shore. There were many other monkeys there, as well. Some of us were in trees eating bananas and some of us were on the shore eating loaves of bread. There were researchers on the shore with us. They were smiling, handing out loaves of bread and patting us monkeys on the heads. The water was clear blue, fish were jumping from it and you could see the reflection of the banana trees in the water!

When I woke up, I was still in the suitcase. It was quiet. I felt my hand on the edge of the suitcase and found the inside of a zipper. Slowly, gently, I edged the zipper open just a little bit – just enough so I could look outside. It was dark. We were no longer on the bus. I was in a room with many posters of horses and butterflies. This must where the brown girl in the blue dress lived.

I opened the suitcase zipper and slipped out. It was night and the brown girl in the blue dress was asleep in a very comfortable-looking bed. Next to her were a small horse, a bear, and another animal I did not recognize. They were not real, but I did not think it mattered, so I curled up next to the little girl and went back to sleep.

When I woke up, the brown girl in the blue dress was gone and I had a chance to look around the room in the daylight. There were all sorts of fake animals in the room ... even a fake monkey. This gave me an idea.

I wrote on a piece of paper the following:

I want to go to Monkey Island. Draw me a map from here to there.

Then I left the paper and the pencil next to the fake monkey, so the brown girl in the blue dress would think he wrote it.

When she came home, the brown girl in the blue dress was now wearing a white shirt and a blue skirt. She saw the note, looked around the room curiously, and then said out loud, "Is there a real monkey in my room?"

I kept quiet.

"I know there is a real monkey in my room," the brown girl in the blue dress said. "Stuffed monkeys cannot write."

I kept quiet.

"Okay," the brown girl in the blue dress said. "I will draw you a map to Monkey Island, but first answer a question. Okay? Okay? Were the police looking for you on the bus?"

I kept quiet.



The brown girl in the blue dress laughed. "You are one smart monkey," she said. "I thought for sure you would fall for that trick."

The brown girl in the blue dress went over to her desk and turned on her computer. "You come behind me. I promise I will not turn around, but you need to look over my shoulder at the screen."

I quietly snuck up behind her and climbed up onto the back of her chair.

The brown girl in the blue dress typed ‘Puerto Rico Monkey Island’ into the computer. Click. Click. And there on the screen was a picture of a small island in the middle of the water!



“This is Monkey Island,” the brown girl in the blue dress said. “It is just off the Eastern coast of Puerto Rico.” Click, click, click. And there was a map of Puerto Rico. The brown girl in the blue dress pressed her finger to the screen, just to the right side of Puerto Rico. “Right here. You have to take a boat. We took a boat to get there. Captain Paco let my brother steer the boat. It is not that far away from shore, but far too far to swim, so you will have to take a boat.”

I was ready to go, but the brown girl in the blue dress quickly said, “Wait! There is some bad news. You are in Illinois. Chicago. You have to take a plane to Puerto Rico. And then a car from the airport to the boat.”

Click, click, click, click.

“Here is a map of North America. You are here.” The brown girl in the blue dress pointed to Chicago. “You need to get to here.” The brown girl in the blue dress moved her finger down, down, down, down, into the blue places, which I knew was water, past a number of other islands and to an island on the very side of the map. “This is Puerto Rico. It is a long plane ride away.”

The brown girl in the blue dress reached her hand backwards without looking. “But you are a smart monkey and I am sure you will find it.”

I put my paw in her hand.

“Wait,” she said. “Did you escape from the zoo? Tap my hand once for ‘yes’ and twice for ‘no.’” I tapped twice. “Did you escape from a testing center?” I tapped once.

She typed ‘monkey escape testing center’ into the computer. On her screen appeared a picture of a Rhesus monkey. It was my picture!

“You had better hurry,” the brown girl in the blue dress said. “They are still looking for you.”

The brown girl in the blue dress was right. The plane ride was long. I fell asleep and dreamed about Monkey Island.

The brown girl in the blue dress was yelling, "Hurry, hurry, hurry!" Men in white lab coats were chasing me and I was running towards the water. I was running as fast as I could, but the water was so far away. The brown girl in the blue dress yelled, "Hurry, hurry, hurry!" again. The men in the lab coats were getting closer and closer and just when I felt their hands on my fur, I heard the brown girl in the blue dress yell, 'Jump!' So I jumped and I flew through the air, over the heads of the men in lab coats and across the water to Monkey Island. But a large bird landed on my back and said, 'Monkeys cannot fly.' He was so heavy, I started to fall. I flapped my arms but it was no use. I am a monkey, not a bird. I fell faster and faster and down below there was a boat. Inside the boat were men with lab coats and they held a cage open in just the spot I would land! I tried to avoid the cage but it was no use. I was falling right into it! Just when I was about to land in the cage, I woke up.

I was in Puerto Rico! If you think it is amazing that a Rhesus monkey could sneak onto a plane to Puerto Rico, you should remember that Rhesus monkeys flew space ships before humans did. This is true.*

The brown girl in the blue dress said I needed to take a car from the airport to the Eastern side of Puerto Rico. She forgot that I was a monkey and that Puerto Rico is a tropical island. I traveled at night, from tree to tree. I did not want the men in lab coats to catch me.



Five long nights after I landed I found myself in a rain forest**. It was beautiful! There were waterfalls from which to drink and fruit trees from which to eat. Mangos and guavas and bananas! There were people here, of course, but they mainly stayed on the trails so they were easy to avoid. I knew this was not Monkey Island, but I was so tired from traveling that I decided to stay here for a few days to rest. This was a big mistake!

My dream of men chasing me quickly came true. They were not wearing white lab coats; they were wearing blue shirts. And they were not trying to catch me with their hands; they were shooting darts at me! One hit the tree right next to me.

The good news is that I am a monkey. I can jump from tree to tree and the humans have to run below. Soon I got away from them, but it was clear I could not stay in the rain forest. I had to get to Monkey Island. And quickly.

Once I made it to the shore, finding Monkey Island was easy. I followed the shoreline, at night of course, staying in the trees the whole way. Actually, I smelled the island before I even saw it. Now you might not think that the smell of hundreds of monkeys would be a good smell, but to me, it was the best smell in the whole, wide world!

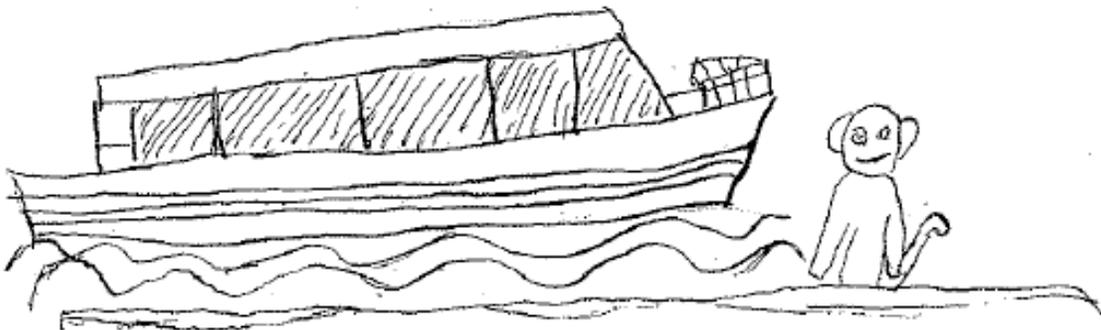
And then I saw it! Out there in the water. Just like the picture on the computer. Monkey Island. It was real. Can you imagine! I reached my paw out and made as if to touch it.

Just one problem left. How to get across the water to the island?

I knew I couldn't swim that far. Monkeys are not fish.

Then I remembered about the boat that the brown girl in the blue dress took to the island. If I could find the boat, I could sneak on board and then, I was shaking to think of it ... I would be on Monkey Island.

If you are worried that I would be stopped so close to my journey's end ... don't be. The boat was bright red, yellow and blue. It was easy to find. I saw a few people get on board, go to Monkey Island, swim around right near the shore (with monkeys watching their every move) and then come back. That very night I snuck on board, climbed on top of the canvas covering, and waited until the boat took me to Monkey Island!



I was too excited to sleep. And, anyway, I no longer needed to dream about Monkey Island. I was only one short boat ride away!

That was a couple years ago.

Every day I go down to the shore and wait for the bright red, yellow and blue boat to arrive. I watch the people crowd to the edge of the boat, pointing excitedly towards us monkeys. Of course I am looking for the brown girl with the blue dress. She would be older now and would not be wearing the blue dress, I know. I will recognize her when I see her. I am sure of it.

Here comes the boat now, so I have to end my story. I hope the brown girl with the blue dress is on the boat today. Or another day. If not, I hope she reads this story and realizes that she made my dream come true.



A couple years ago I was in a cage being fed medicine that made me sick. Now I am on an island just for monkeys where people take good care of me and feed me all that I can eat.

Can you imagine *that*?

THE END.

Notes:

Monkey Island (Cayo Santiago) really exists. It's just offshore from Naguabo, on the Eastern side of Puerto Rico. The island has a free ranging population of about 1,000 Rhesus monkeys. Only researchers are allowed onto the island, but anyone can charter a boat that will take you close enough to see the monkeys on the shore. If you charter La Paseadora, say hello to Captain Paco for me.



This is an actual picture of 'Monkey Island.'

**The first American monkey in space was named Albert II. This was in 1949. He was a Rhesus monkey. I was told that Albert II originally came from Monkey Island, though I could not confirm this.*

*** The El Yunque National Forest is the only tropical rain forest in the U.S. National Forest System.*

Last, but not least... [This story is really dedicated to Camilla on her 10th birthday.](#)