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Tempting monkey mutiny

Phnom Penh's roaming monkeys are no strangers to mischief – but might they be heading for a *Planet of the Apes*-style showdown with humans?

BY JOEL QUENBY

THE saying "He's got a monkey on his back" almost rang true for a moto driver on Street 104 last Wednesday, after he kidnapped a baby monkey from its tribe, enraging its elders.

The mischievous driver lured the infant macaque from a rooftop using food as bait. He then snatched the youngster, drawing a furious reaction from the dozen-strong group, which assembled on the leading edge of the terraced roofs like a squadron preparing for battle.

A boisterous crowd of on-lookers congregated on the pub-packed riverside lane. As the human contingent laughed, jeered and gesticulated, it seemed the agitated simians were considering a confrontation.

"He [the driver] just wanted to know what would happen with its parents; he didn't really want to keep the monkey," said witness Mary Ngim, 23, who works on the street.

However, the driver hung on to the infant macaque for around 30 minutes – a long time in monkey years – before finally releasing it. The animal shot across the street, up a porch scaffold and back to its troop.

Edvin Engeland, the 44-year-old Norwegian owner of the street's Velkommen Inn, agreed that the impromptu monkey-napping was "just for fun". But he also cautioned that "the monkeys might remember the person who took the baby".

Indeed, macaques are fa-

MACAQUE MADNESS

In May 2008 Phnom Penh City Hall reported that some of its more delinquent macaques had been seen sniffing glue, apparently having learned how to do it from watching Cambodian youths do the same.

voured by animal testing facilities for their psychological and physical similarity to humans. Bearing testament to their power of recall, Mary Ngim says that recently, "a dog bit a monkey that fell down from the roof."

"Then the next day another monkey jumped on top of the same dog and held it to the ground so that the dog could not move."

The roaming tribe, which visits Street 104 every day, is presumed to hail from Wat Phnom, the nearby Buddhist pagoda and popular tourist attraction overrun by simians.

In 2007, deputy district governor Pich Socheata put three large macaques on a police hit list after the trio repeatedly bit tourists, plundered laundry and uprooted internet cables.

"There are more than 200 monkeys there, but only three that behave badly... like gang leaders," said Pich Socheata at the time.

"The other monkeys are afraid of people. But these monkeys are not – they are scaring tourists."

Authorities initially attempted to drug the unruly faction with eggs laced with sleeping pills but were al-



Innocent monkeys or glue-sniffing gangsters? Wat Phnom's macaques get frisky. TRACEY SHELTON

ways outsmarted, she said. After several failed attempts, the governor eventually put a \$US250 bounty on the troublemakers' heads.

Officials ramped up their efforts after a woman out jogging received a serious head

THE AGITATED SIMIANS SEEMED TO BE CONSIDERING A CONFRONTATION.

injury after being set upon by a pair of rogue monkeys near Street 106. Marksmen eliminated a 20-kilo suspect up a tree in Wat Phnom park soon afterwards.

The undesirables seem to like Street 104. Around a year ago all the buildings on the terraced street had to be re-roofed with sheet metal, after their mischievous visitors kept dislodging the roof tiles and throwing them onto the street below.

Post section editor Nathan Green says the pests stole a camera worth \$1,000 from his room at the street's Pickled Parrott – "they were seen playing with it," he claims – although admits he had been feeding them through the window beforehand.

And one day Edvin Engeland was in bed with his wife Tilda when she noticed a monkey

sitting on their balcony eating her freshly sliced mango. "He must have walked past us on the way through," Edvin marvelled, noting that the creature had ventured a considerable distance into the guesthouse to reach the fruit.

"They know how to open a tap," he cautions, recalling how he once ventured onto the roof to check his water tank and found a monkey lying beneath a faucet and guzzling away.

Thank heavens for small mercies. "Last year there were up to 25 of them coming here," says Edvin.

"This year there's not so many."

IN BRIEF

100 HOURS OF 'JACKO' REHEARSALS ON TAPE

AEG Live, producers of Michael Jackson's ill-fated O2 Arena residency, recorded 100 hours of film and audio of the singer's rehearsals, according to *Billboard* magazine. A full rehearsal was recorded at the Staples Center in Los Angeles on 24 June, the day before Jackson suffered a fatal cardiac arrest. Enough audio exists to fill two studio albums. Jackson never released a solo live concert album during his lifetime. Sales of his material have spiked in the wake of his untimely death.

RELAXNEWS

SWINGING SEOUL GOES ONLINE

South Korea's first swingers' club has made a roaring debut, leaving police struggling to respond. The club opened this month in Seoul's Kangnam District. Many visitors have praised the club on its Web site. Couples watch or have sex with one or more partners. "Law experts told us there is no legal basis to crack down," one of its unidentified owners was quoted as saying. The club's Web site crashed under the strain of thousands of people trying to log on at the same time. AFP

CALL FOR ANNOTATED MEIN KAMPF

A Bavarian minister has called for Adolf Hitler's autobiography-cum-manifesto *Mein Kampf* to be republished with accompanying commentary from historians. Wolfgang Heubisch, science and research minister, said that he believes such an edition would help to remove the potential for misuse by neo-Nazis once Bavaria's ownership of the publishing rights expires in 2015.

RELAXNEWS

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