

Monkey Business

by Matt DeVirgiliis

An insurgent buries his newest creation — a pressure activated IED — under a long, narrow pile of dust and sand. The two slim and shiny slabs of metal lay between two previously charred minivans. He runs away.

Benjamin stands beside his bed and unpacks his few things — wire cutters, knife, tape, line, two blocks of C-4, wallet, brush, and a small stuffed animal — a monkey.

You brought the lucky monkey? asks Trevor, a member of the team.

Benjamin picks up the monkey. When I was a kid, my cousin and I both had one. Didn't need any other toys. We lived far from each other but whenever we got together we brought the monkeys along. And we hung onto them. So no, not good luck.

Benjamin leads his small squad down another dirt road through the heart of Baghdad. Mothers shepherd their children through a busy market, vendors haggle and scream, but it's somehow quiet. No one acknowledges Benjamin's troop. Two burnt out minivans sit on either side of the team.

Keith from Kansas looks back at Benjamin. Can I rub your monkey, tough guy, he jokes?

Benjamin gives Keith the finger and looks down at the monkey hanging off his belt. The sun glares off something behind it on the ground. Benjamin freezes, not even letting his lead foot down.

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Hold!

His team freezes in place. Benjamin squats down and looks over the device. Clever, he thinks. But not clever enough. It will make a good souvenir. He looks down at the monkey again; its plastic eyes stare back.

I guess it is lucky, he yells.

Luckiest fucking monkey I know, says Keith from Kansas.

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