



## ***PROLOGUE***

Tied up and under guard, Jirugi still looked dangerous. He was large even for a mandrill: the strongest of the monkeys. His face was dirty after the long fight but his eyes glowed with rage as Master Chan rose to give the Kuro council's decision.

‘Jirugi, the Warrior Monkeys have no choice. You have betrayed the values of kindness and justice that make our law. You have continued to use your strength



to abuse others and shown no remorse for your actions. We banish you from the Shanti Islands with immediate effect. Do you have anything to say?’

Jirugi spat on the floor, an act of disrespect that caused several of the Kuro to wince. There was an almost imperceptible rattle of wooden armour as the guard bears quivered with anger. Their simple loyalty to the warrior code was absolute: an insult to the Kuro was an insult to all the Warrior Monkeys and to all creatures who shared the Shanti Islands. Their prisoner had plenty more to add.

‘I don’t care about your laws of weakness and wishy-washy nonsense,

Chan! If you think the islands can be kept safe with good deeds and bravery then you're even more stupid than I thought. Power is for the strong, and it needs to be used by the strongest; for the good of everyone!'

Master Chan sighed, sorrowfully shaking his head at his former student. 'I don't regret giving you so many chances to find a better path, Jirugi. But I do regret the pain you have caused us all, and it now has to stop. We will take you over the sea to Gimandesh and you can make a new start. You can never return here. Is that clear?'

'Am I supposed to be grateful for this new start? Ridiculous! If you really

wanted to protect your precious islands you would kill me, but you don't have the guts. Let's get this over with. I've had enough of your pathetic teaching. I've learned nothing from you.'

Chan swept back his magnificent hair and his calm, strong face seemed etched with wisdom, sadness, and resolution.

'Learned nothing . . . well, that much seems to be true. Guards, take him away.'