



# How Many Apes?

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Tangor's Pastiche and Fan Fiction

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*In a land where physical adventure abounds, the discovery of an adventure of the mind can be extraordinary!*

With one hand and both feet, the young ape held the bundle of white leaves above his face. This strange wala held many such bundles, white leaves squashed between two stiff pieces of bark, leaves and bark all the same shape and unlike anything else in the jungle. Many leaves were covered with rows of little black marks like bugs, while some

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leaves in some bundles showed flat images of other things. Some had larger bugs beneath the images, and the combination had allowed him to puzzle out the meaning of the bugs and to 'read' the bugs on the leaves and in the 'books.' Often he came to the wala to exercise his mind in ways the other apes didn't understand. On this particular day, he was reading a book with big pictures and short words in short sentences.

"How many apes? One ape. Two apes. Three apes. Four apes. Five apes." He sounded each letter aloud, using the names he had given them, stating too whether it was male or female, big or little, capital or lower case. The concepts behind the strings of bugs were as clear to him as the far away author might ever have wished, though the sounds would have been atrociously alien.

"How many bears? One bear. Two bears. Three bears. Four bears. Five bears. How many cats? One cat. Two cats. Three cats. Four cats. Five cats. How many dogs?" And so on. The young ape turned back to the leaf with the apes; these apes didn't look much like him, since except for his head, he was hairless, though they did resemble the other apes of the band.

"Mangani," he said in the language of the apes, placing a finger against the picture of a single ape. "Ka-mangani." He placed fingers on the two pictured apes. "Ad-mangani." Three fingers touched three apes; few of the mangani ever used the word 'ad.' Four fingers touched four apes, but his lips were silent. The young ape tilted his head; was there a mangani word he didn't know? He was

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always the most talkative in the band. Five fingers touched five apes, but still he was silent. With his other hand, he added a finger to the single ape; from other books, he knew the word 'six,' but he had no mangani equivalent. The little bugs made many more words than the mangani had.

A little later, the ape with no fur left the wala by the big water and took to the middle terrace of the trees, returning to his band. They might well be searching for food down on the ground, where it was hot, moist, and dark, but it was much faster to travel higher in the trees, and he liked to race along at top speed. Well before he expected to come upon his band, he heard their traveling calls ahead. They were moving quickly, and danger calls were mixed with the others. He paused on a sturdy branch, giving the greeting hoot and letting them come to him. Soon the band came to a halt around him, catching their breath and looking back the way they had come. Even the huge males seemed more interested in what might be chasing them than in the slender hairless one who so often tormented them.

Kala, the female he knew as his mother, answered his query as to their flight through the trees. "Jar-mangani."

The hairless one tilted his head. "Strange apes? "How many?"

Kala seemed surprised by his question. "Ho-mangani. Many apes."

"More than in the band of Kerchak?" he asked.

She tilted her head and repeated her previous answer. "Ho-mangani."

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None of the other apes was able to give a clearer answer, and he was not surprised. If he had not been reading the picture books in the cabin by the sea, he might not have thought to ask the question. But he had been reading the books. He looked around at Kerchak's band. Seven adult males. Other younger males would be alone or in pairs in the jungle. Eighteen adult females. Twenty eight younger mangani, including balus and himself. Any of the others in the band would have said many males, many females, and many young. He set off through the trees again backtracking on the trail of the band. Contrary to the ways of the apes, he did not utter the traveling call; he was hunting.

At Kerchak's favorite watering stream, he found the strange mangani. He stayed downwind from them and high in the trees where the adult apes, both male and female, would not go. His eyes were keen, much sharper than the eyes of any of the other apes, and soon he knew how many were moving in and out among the trees: five males, eleven females, sixteen younger mangani. He started back toward where Kerchak's band had been, though he did not follow a direct route. Instead, he went rather haphazardly through the jungle, pausing occasionally to give the gathering cry. Other males soon came to the cry, and to each he gave the same explanation. "Strange mangani in our hunting ground." When he reached Kerchak's band, ten males followed close behind, males born to the band but not yet grown strong enough to fight for a place in it.

Kerchak and the other males bellowed chal-

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lenges to the younger males, but the hairless one managed to come between them and silence the din. Praising the mighty muscles and terrible fangs of Kerchak, he gave the mangani the idea that the old male had brought them all together to fight off the strange ones at the stream. Such was the simplicity of the ape minds gathered around him that the ruse was easily accomplished. Soon the band was again on the move through the middle terrace, augmented now by the addition of the young males. Silently they traveled, so as not to scare off their prey.

When the band reached the stream, the young ape made no effort to interfere with the natural course of things. Kerchak was the first to bellow his challenge, and the other adults and young males of the band followed suit, the hairless one joining in, though his voice was still thin as a balu's. At the first sound, the adults of the strange band leapt to the defense of their own balus and young, but when the apes started dropping from the trees, they turned to flee. Like other predators, the apes chased their prey. Three of the strange males and two females were killed. Two males, four females, and three balus escaped. The rest of the females and young were taken into Kerchak's band.

The next day the young ape returned to the wala by the big water and found the book with the pictures of apes, bears, cats, and dogs. Kerchak's band was now big enough that it would soon split into two smaller ones; all the apes could sense it coming. Only the young, hairless one knew that there were sixty one in the band, along with the

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young males in singles and pairs. Someday soon, he would learn how to divide that number in half, but none of the other apes would understand when he tried to explain.

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