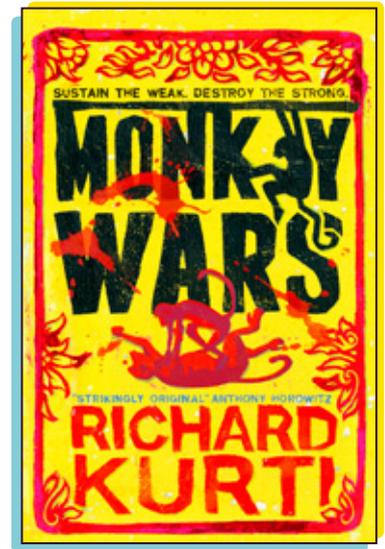


# Ink Slingers

STORIES SET FREE

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



### Monkey Wars

by Richard Kurti

9781406346107 ■ £7.99 ■ Paperback ■ eBook available

#### ABOUT THE BOOK

When Rhesus monkeys are brutally massacred on the dusty streets of Kolkata by a troop of power-hungry Langur monkeys, Mico's life is changed for ever. As the young Langur attempts to help the surviving Rhesus, he becomes increasingly entangled in the secrets that lie at the heart of the corrupt Langur leadership. And as more blood is split, Mico begins to realize that choosing between right and wrong will not be as easy as he first thought. Because when monkeys turn on each other, there will be no survivors...

#### DISCUSS...

1. "The people to fear are not the Strong, but the Weak. It's the Weak who'll buckle when you're least expecting it, the Weak who'll betray you without warning, the Weak who will stop at nothing to save themselves."  
What was your interpretation of this quotation before reading *Monkey Wars*? Had it changed the end of the book?
2. At the beginning of *Monkey Wars*, who is "weak" and who is "strong"? Does this change during the story?
3. Compare the Rhesus and the Langur groups at the beginning of the story. How are they constructed, and how does this affect how they function? Which group is the most successful at the beginning of the story?
4. Trumble: "It all comes down to trust. We don't have to question everything, because we trust Lord Gospodar."  
Mico: "But asking questions is... it's what monkeys do."  
Throughout the novel, Mico repeatedly states that "monkeys question". To what extent is he proved right? By the end of the novel Mico fears that General Tyrell has been proved right, "Monkeys are born to be led". What leads him to this conclusion? What are your thoughts about these two different value systems?
5. "The life Papina described was a far cry from the cemetery that Mico had inhabited, and the more she saw of Langur life, the more she understood why the Troop was so successful. But success wasn't the same as happiness..."  
The Langur believe that monkeys can survive only if they adhere to strict roles, and respect authority unquestioningly. Do you believe, as Papina does, that they sacrifice happiness for success?
6. The Langur's acquisition of the cemetery is momentous to the Troop, due to their previous status as slum monkeys. How does their past shape their motivations and actions for their future?
7. *Monkey Wars* explores layers of morality; metaphors relating to power, freedom, the right to question, loyalties and tolerance. Why do you think Richard Kurti chose monkeys to convey these messages? To what extent is this method more effective than if the characters were human? Why do you think so?

8. Consider the role of humans in *Monkey Wars*. How do humans view the monkeys?
9. Tyrell's brand of leadership is carefully crafted. How does Tyrell manipulate the culture of the Langur to his advantage? What are the pivotal points in *Monkey Wars* that allow Tyrell to develop his role in the Langur troop?
10. "The monkey who controls the past, controls the future." How does Tyrell use the past, both his own and of the Langur Troop, to achieve his goals? How does he utilise propaganda to his advantage? If history can be so easily manipulated by those who hold power, what use does history have in education and in society? Can history ever be objective?
11. Throughout the novel Mico questions violence and Langur ways but still feels a great alliance to them, even helping them to massacre other groups. Why? Who or what has shaped this alliance? What is the tipping-point that makes him turn his back on the Langur?
12. Consider the ending of the book. To what extent have Mico and Papina succeeded? What do you think could happen next?
13. There are several points in *Monkey Wars* where Richard Kurti references other dictatorships. For instance, Tyrell talks about a "permanent solution" and you may have read or learnt about Hitler's "final solution" used as a euphemism for the Holocaust. Tyrell also adopts a symbol for the Twopoints in a similar way to the Nazi appropriation of the Swastika. When you were reading *Monkey Wars*, were you reminded of any other political contexts? What role can fiction play in developing our understanding? Is it different from watching a documentary or reading a news report?
14. The main characters in *Monkey Wars* are a male and a female from different troops of monkeys. How would the story have been different if Richard Kurti had chosen two males or two females? Do you know any other stories in which a male and female character come together across a divide?
15. *Monkey Wars* is based on real-life events; Delhi's deputy mayor SS Bajwa died in a monkey-related fall on 21 October 2007 and as a result Langur monkeys are now used to intimidate the troublesome Rhesus. In the media Rhesus monkeys are portrayed as clever, cunning and ruthless, whereas Langur monkeys are seen as more compliant and timid. Diljan Ali, a langur handler: "(The macaques) are very smart. They know when they have the advantage. They attack in numbers and when they do it's pre-planned."

Dr N P S Chavhan, a Primatologist at the Wildlife Institute of India: "It's quite possible the monkeys have adapted to the intimidation and fear of Langurs and hit back whenever possible."

Why do you think Richard Kurti chose to portray the two species so differently to their media personalities?

## **ABOUT RICHARD KURTI**

After studying Philosophy & English at King's College, Cambridge, Richard worked at the BBC as a TV sound recordist. This led to a career as a freelance director, and then a move into full time screenwriting. Richard's film writing includes 14 completed commissions for US studios (Universal, Warner Bros, Miramax and Laika) and UK companies such as Working Title and Pathé. In television his writing has been primarily for mainstream audiences, with BBC adaptations of *Kidnapped* and *Sherlock Holmes*, episodes of *Robin Hood*, *Primeval* (ITV), *Sinbad* (Sky) and large-scale adaptations of *Terry Pratchett's Going Postal* and *Unseen Academicals* (Sky). These shows have earned widespread industry recognition with BAFTA nominations and RTS Awards. He lives in Essex.

Check out Richard's website at [www.MONKEYWARS.CO.UK](http://www.MONKEYWARS.CO.UK)

Watch the trailer at [www.INK-SLINGERS.CO.UK/WATCH](http://www.INK-SLINGERS.CO.UK/WATCH)

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