

RAVANA

ROAR OF THE DEMON KING

If any character in mythology has as many apologists as it has denouncers, it is Ravana.

Born of a union between Brahmin intelligence and demonic aggression, Ravana rose from the obscurity of life in a hermitage to conquer the world, and beyond. No less than a god to his own people, he is the embodiment of evil to his enemies. This arrogant demon brooks no hindrance to snatching his heart's desire, and his terror seems unstoppable even to the gods. But then he makes the mistake of abducting the wife of Lord Rama, the divine prince of Ayodhya.

Ravana is the story of a demon who dared to challenge the gods, and almost got away with it. So what was it that proved to be the downfall of someone as powerful as Ravana? Was it only the desire for a woman? Or was it something more, rooted in the incidents of his life, in the history of his race?

Culminating in a massive battle at his island fortress, Ravana's tale is one that never fails to inspire awe and fear.

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ABHIMANYU SINGH SISODIA

RAVANA

ROAR OF THE DEMON KING

ART BY SACHIN NAGAR



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CAMPFIRE™

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New Delhi

RAVANA

ROAR OF THE DEMON KING

Sitting around the Campfire, telling the story, were:

AUTHOR ABHIMANYU SINGH SISODIA

ART SACHIN NAGAR

COLORIST SACHIN NAGAR

EDITORS EMAN CHOWDHARY & ADITI RAY

EDITOR (INFORMATIVE CONTENT) RASHMI MENON

LETTERER GHAN SHYAM JOSHI

PRODUCTION CONTROLLER VISHAL SHARMA

ART DIRECTOR RAJESH NAGULAKONDA

COVER ART SACHIN NAGAR

DESIGN JAYAKRISHNAN K. P.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Born in the scenic but war-torn valleys of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1986, Abhimanyu Singh Sisodia's relationship with literature began at an early age. He was introduced to the art of storytelling through an ingenious device by his mother: she would read half a story to him at bedtime, and at the most tantalizing cliffhanger, she would ask him to finish it himself!

Home schooled during his early years, Abhimanyu later attended The Lawrence School, Sanawar, which lies tucked away in the wooded foothills of the Himalayas, and grew up amidst the intense rivalry and everlasting camaraderie that such an environment fosters.

Abhimanyu holds qualifications in diverse fields, but it was his lifelong passion for words that developed into a serious obsession with the character of Ravana.

A self-confessed adventure seeker, Abhimanyu makes it a point to squeeze in a little travel between writing assignments. Besides reading, he also has an intense passion for music, and is reasonably good with more than one instrument. His favorite genre of literature is historical fiction, but he also loves fantasy and superhero tales for the sheer scope of possibilities that they represent. Abhimanyu is a keen animal lover, and is currently a resident of New Delhi, India.

MANDODARI

RAVANA



SITA

RAMA

HANUMAN



Dashananda, Lankeshwar,
Dashagreeva, Dashkandhar, Vaishravan.

I am known by many names.

I conquered both heaven and hell,
and even the gods bowed to me.
The sun rose when I told it to.

I was strong, wise, and just, and my
subjects never knew hunger or poverty.

I authored one of the most powerful books
on Hindu astrology, and wrote music that far
surpassed even the greatest compositions of
my time, on an instrument of my own creation.

Yet I am the most reviled
villain in all Hindu mythology.

How did this come to be? How
did one with such obvious talents
come to be hated so universally?

Listen then, and learn. From
the mistakes of a demon
who was almost a god.

My grandfather, the *daitya* king Sumali, did not want my mother to marry just any mortal.



Many great kings—both demon and human—came for her hand, but she turned them all down.

Disdainful of the mighty *kshatriya* kings, she sought one among those whose power held far greater depth.



The Brahmins.

*Born of the mind rather than the body



My grandfather and my mother finally settled for Vishrava, son of Pulastya, who in turn was none other than the mind-born* son of Brahma and one of the Saptarishis.

Although Vishrava already had a wife and children, he gladly came when my mother beckoned.

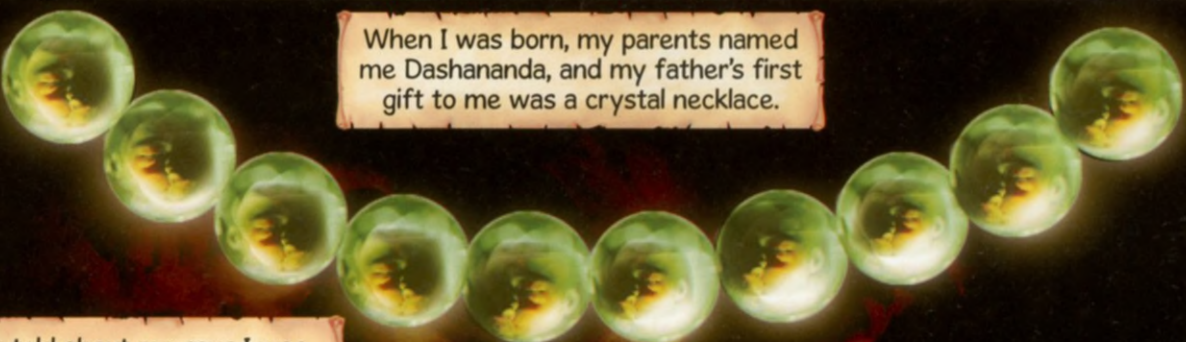
And so, through a union between *rakshasa* aggression and Brahmin intelligence, the foundation for the terror that I would become was laid.



And while many celebrated, not all were happy.

Not all.





When I was born, my parents named me Dashananda, and my father's first gift to me was a crystal necklace.


One story told about me says I was born with ten heads, and my father had to cast a spell to hide my ugliness!

They say, when I was born, all the wolves in the world started howling uncontrollably.

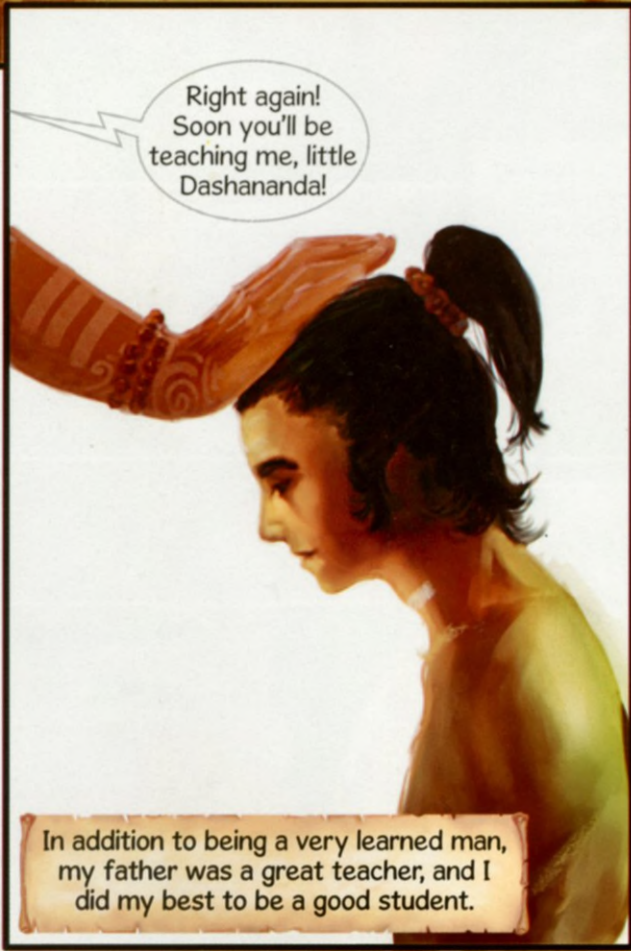
And all the dogs began barking.

But that did not bother my mother. She loved me, as all mothers are wont to do.

My son.
My pride.




I grew up in my father's ashram, in the village he had founded. As a young child, I spent most of my time alone, but when I grew older, my father took over my education.




Right again!
Soon you'll be teaching me, little Dashananda!

But it was my siblings who made my life complete.


In addition to being a very learned man, my father was a great teacher, and I did my best to be a good student.



DASHANANDA!




Feel like taking a break and spending some time with your neglected younger siblings?



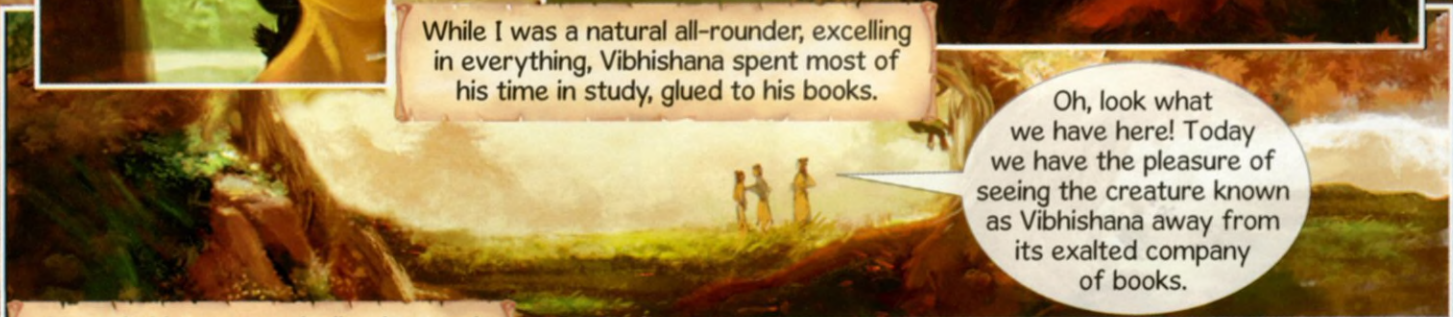
May I go and play, Father?

Though I had many brothers and sisters, I was closest to three of them.




Ha ha ha! Go, my eager, young scholar!

While I was a natural all-rounder, excelling in everything, Vibhishana spent most of his time in study, glued to his books.




Oh, look what we have here! Today we have the pleasure of seeing the creature known as Vibhishana away from its exalted company of books.

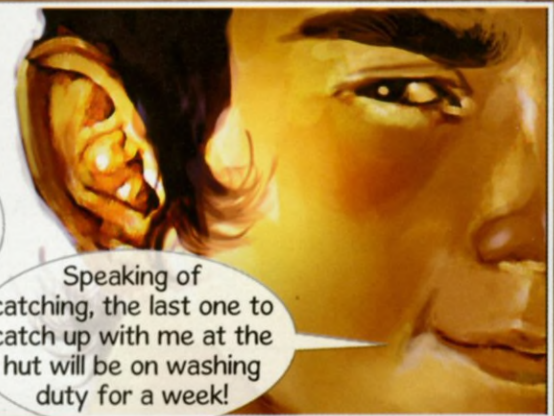
Meenakshi was more inclined toward outdoor pursuits, but had a fiery temper to match her physical strength.



Dashananda bhaiya, somebody's stolen my favorite doll!



I haven't seen it since this morning. When we catch the thief, let's give him a beating! Or at least, let's watch you give him one!



Speaking of catching, the last one to catch up with me at the hut will be on washing duty for a week!

Kumbhakarana, on the other hand, was not what you would call physically fit, but was more big-hearted than any of us.

Where are the other two, Kumbhakarana?

I... huff... don't... huff... know, Dashananda. They were... huff... right behind... huff... me!

They should at least be within sight. Something has held them up. Let's go check. Come on, fatty!

I'm not... huff... fat, I'm just... huff... big-boned!

Stop it! Behave yourself, Meenakshi!

I'll kill you this time, Vibhishana! I really will!


What happened now, my fiery-tempered little sister?

She really needs to learn to control her temper! Especially when her nails are so big and sharp!


That she does! A little *shoorpa-nakha*, that's what she is!

He's the one who hid my doll! And then he even justified his crime, saying it was to 'help me pay more attention to my studies!' But when I asked him to let me get ahead of him in the race, he started lecturing me on fair play!

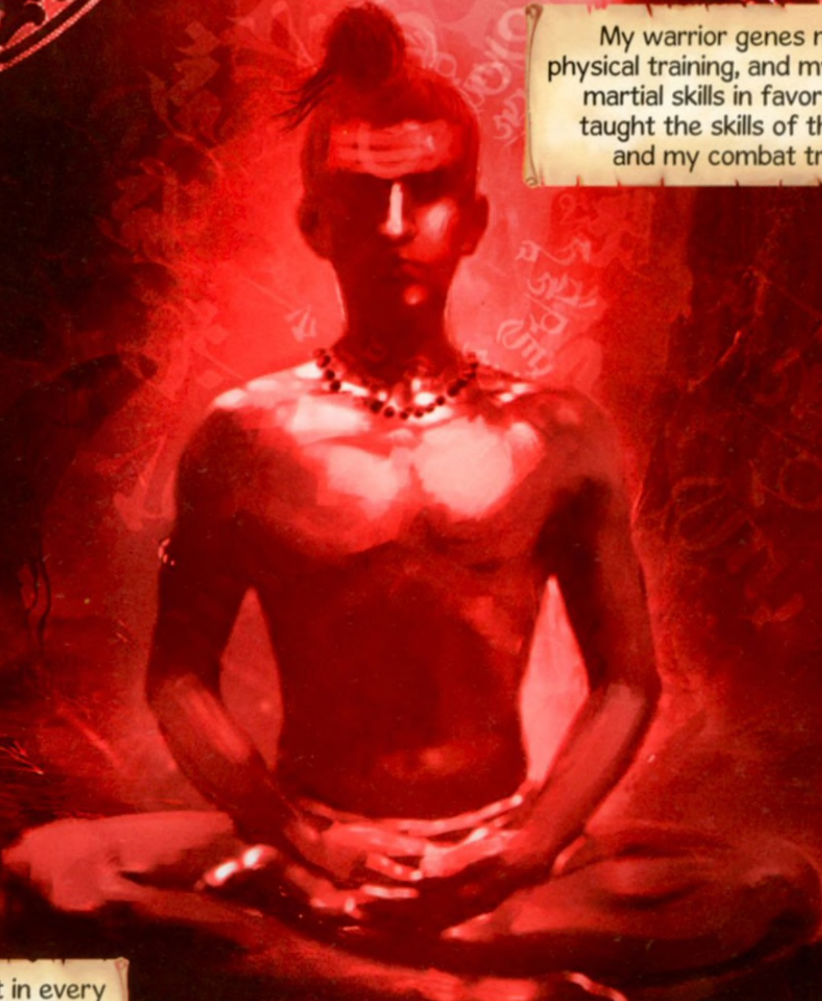
And the name stuck. Meenakshi was soon known by no other name than Shoorpanakha, which means 'big-nailed'.




My training at my father's ashram was hard, for both the body and the mind. I studied the four Vedas and the six Upanishads—the most powerful texts of the time—and by the time I reached adulthood, my mastery over all ten texts was absolute.



Anger is weakness, Dashananda! A true warrior keeps his head as cool as the blade of his sword!




My warrior genes meant I took well to physical training, and my father did not neglect martial skills in favor of knowledge. I was taught the skills of the warlike *kshatriyas*, and my combat training was strong.



I put my skills to the test in every manner possible. My father was pleased, but not everybody was.


What are you doing?! That bull is holy!

Holy or not, can it put back the crops that took me three months of hard labor to grow, and just one afternoon for it to tear down?




The foundation for the mighty leader that I would become was laid early, and was strong and sure. My father ensured that my education was complete in all respects.

Just knowledge and strength are not enough to make a man truly great, Dashananda. It is important that you have some creative pursuits as well.



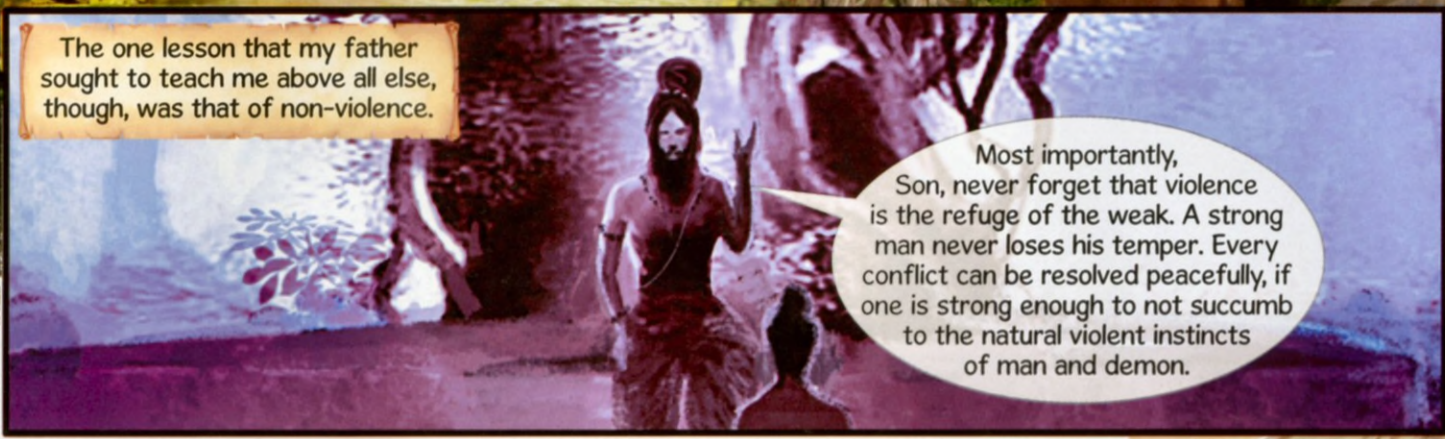
I heeded this advice and began to learn a musical instrument known as the *veena*, for which I developed a great liking.

I would spend hours alone, enjoying the varied sounds that could be produced by the simplest vibration of its strings.



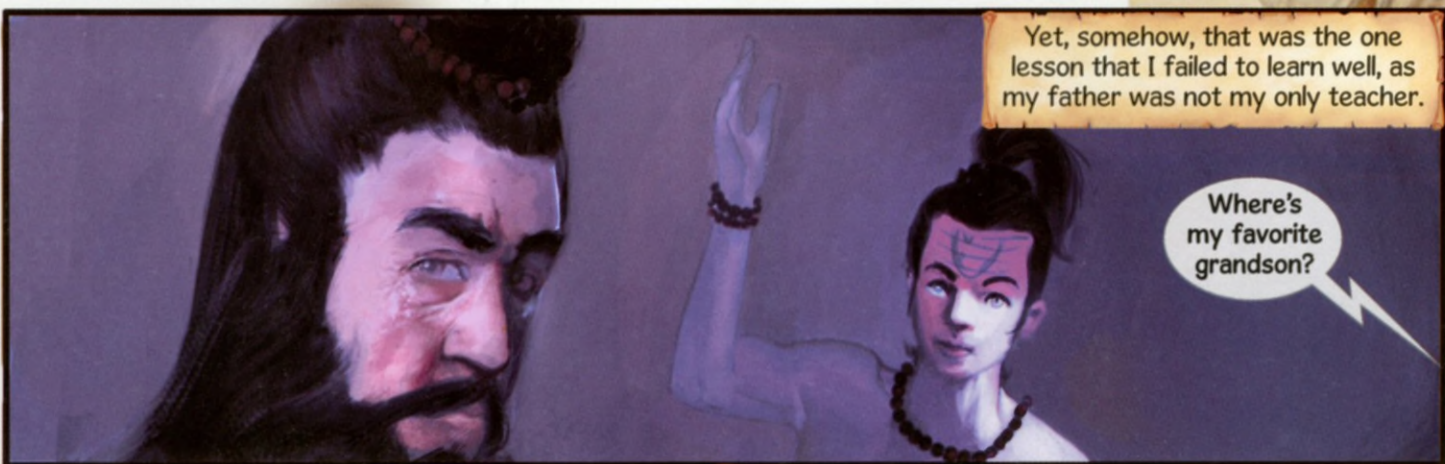
People would gather all around whenever I sat down to play my music.

But none ventured too close. It was a well-known fact that I preferred solitude to company.



The one lesson that my father sought to teach me above all else, though, was that of non-violence.

Most importantly, Son, never forget that violence is the refuge of the weak. A strong man never loses his temper. Every conflict can be resolved peacefully, if one is strong enough to not succumb to the natural violent instincts of man and demon.



Yet, somehow, that was the one lesson that I failed to learn well, as my father was not my only teacher.

Where's my favorite grandson?

My other teacher was my grandfather, Sumali. He taught me a lot, too, though not quite in the same manner as my father.

Come here, you little demon!

Grandpa!
What have you brought for me today?

Here, my little warrior, this is for you.

Wow! It shines! And there's a claw at the end!

Ha ha, yes it does shine! And this claw is no ordinary claw—it once belonged to a savage beast of the Himalayas!

Then how did you get it?

Ah, young warrior, that was not so easy! Let me tell you how it came into my possession...

'I had heard tales of a savage beast that used to come down from the mountains in the winter and terrorize the human villagers. Being on the lookout for adventure, I thought it would be good sport to kill it.'

'And so, armed with spears and swords, my companions and I set off up the mountain, where the villagers claimed the beast had its lair.'

'Suddenly, we came upon the beast! Without warning, and miles from where we thought it would be!'

Hold steady, soldiers!

'But I am a *daitya* king, and I was ready for it.'

'As the beast leaped at me, I jumped beneath it, and plunged my sword into its soft flesh, aiming true and straight for the shoulder, but taking care not to hit the heart.'

'But why did you not aim for the beast's heart? Surely you wanted to kill it?'

'Ah, my little demon! You have spent so much time with humans that you have started to think like them!'



I did kill him, but not before letting him suffer a lot of pain. The claw that now graces your neck was ripped out of the beast's paw while it still breathed.

GRANDPA!
That's brutal!



You are a mighty *rakshasa* warrior, my little prince. You are NOT cattle, like these human livestock you frolic with.



But run along now, and go and play with your brothers!

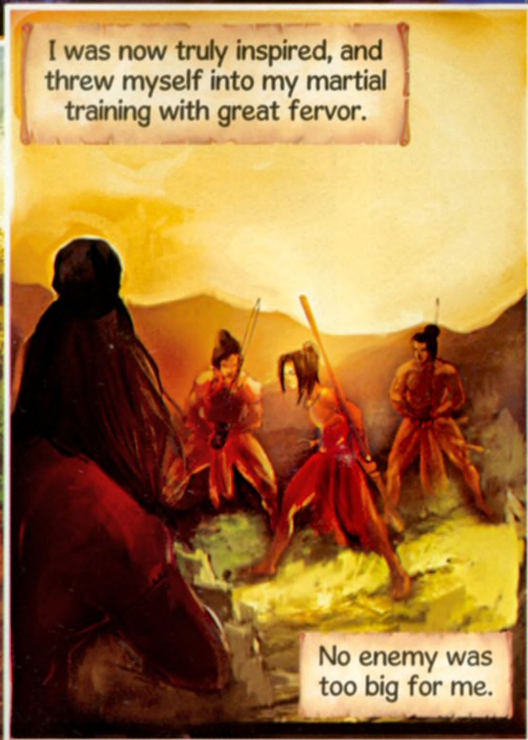


Remember what I said. You are not cattle!

My grandfather's words had a profound impact on me—more so than any of the beautiful words I had heard coming from my own father's mouth. And though I was part-Brahmin, the fact that I had certain demonic features always led humans to see me differently. Years later, they would even deny me the right to marry one of them.

I was now truly inspired, and threw myself into my martial training with great fervor.

But one enemy was special.



No enemy was too big for me.



Guess who's here!

Make way for Kubera, treasurer of the gods!



Kubera. My half-brother from my father's previous marriage. He had never quite forgiven my mother, and this hatred naturally extended to me and my siblings.



Out of the way, little demons!

Why, how dare you--

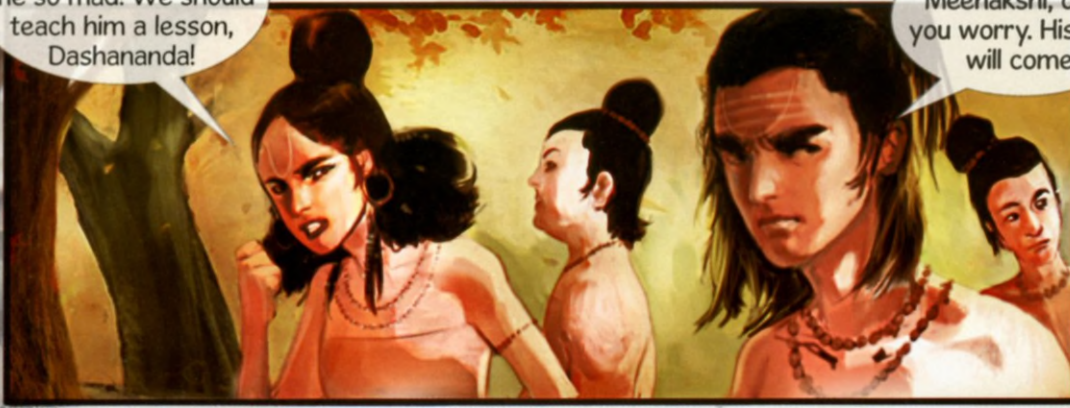
Kubera believed that my grandfather had convinced my mother to seduce Vishrava into marrying her in a bid for more power.



Now, now, let us make way for our 'brother'. Father always says we should be kind to those beneath us.

That little dwarf! Ooh, he makes me so mad! We should teach him a lesson, Dashananda!

And we shall, Meenakshi, don't you worry. His time will come.



Violence is not the answer, Brother. We must learn to forgive our enemies.

Of course, no one paid any heed to Vibhishana's words.

But how, Dashananda? He is a god, and we are but mortals. Besides, he's got Lanka! He is too big for us!

Moreover, that island fortress is unassailable! They say it can never be conquered. Just getting across the sea to reach it is considered an impossible task. Kubera got it from the great god Vishnu himself.



We all have reason to hate him, Brother, but face it—he's too powerful.

I've heard that Vishnu didn't really give Lanka to him, but drove away the *rakshasas*, our people, from there, leaving it empty for Kubera to occupy sneakily. And besides...

...the bigger they are, the harder they fall.



Years passed, and our training came to an end.

Rise, my children! The time has come for you to venture forth into the world, and make use of what you have learned here!



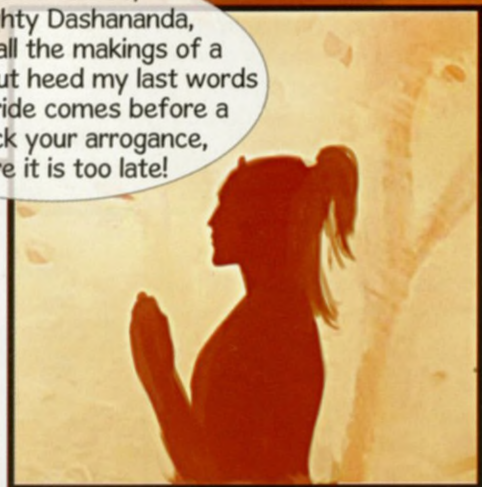
Virtuous Vibhishana, I am truly proud of you. You do indeed give your brothers something to aspire to. May you always tread the path of virtue.



Jovial Kumbhakarna, though you sleep much, you laugh more, and that is something which will hold you in as much good stead as your immense strength. Over the next few years, your size will grow, till you tower like a giant over man and beast alike.



And of course, the mighty Dashananda, you have all the makings of a conqueror! But heed my last words to you—pride comes before a fall. Check your arrogance, before it is too late!



Am I that arrogant, Father? I am no more arrogant than a *dai*tya prince should be.



If only I had heeded my father's final piece of advice. It was to be the most important lesson he had ever given me.

My grandfather, however, had an entirely different plan for us.

Look at my grandchildren—all grown up to be such mighty young men!



We will always remain your grandchildren, Grandpa.



So you shall, young Dashananda! You are mighty *daitya* princes, descended from the greatest demon kings!

But, in addition to that, you are also great-grandchildren of none other than Lord Brahma, the creator of the universe!

And the time has now come for you to collect your rightful inheritance.

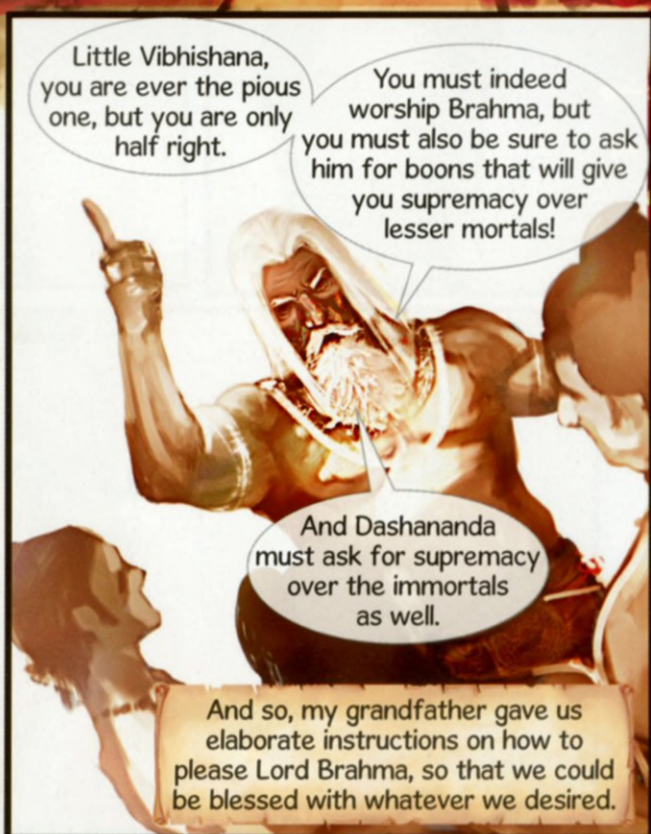
Ah, yes, Grandfather! We must now devote ourselves to him, and abandon all worldly pleasures.



Little Vibhishana, you are ever the pious one, but you are only half right.

You must indeed worship Brahma, but you must also be sure to ask him for boons that will give you supremacy over lesser mortals!

And Dashananda must ask for supremacy over the immortals as well.



And so, my grandfather gave us elaborate instructions on how to please Lord Brahma, so that we could be blessed with whatever we desired.

We proceeded to climb a hill, in order to engage in meditation.



But, after a while, my patience began to run thin.



Each of us meditated in our own way, depending upon what we sought from our great-grandfather.




Come rain or hail, our concentration never wavered, and for countless days, we remained immersed in our meditation.



He was our ancestor, and we deserved better than what we were going through.

So I decided to go one step further, and risk it all.





Hear me now, creator of the universe!


Although we beseech you with great devotion, you refuse to appear before us!

If you do not show yourself, the blood of your great-grandchildren will be on your hands! I will cut off my own head!

I was determined to endure.

But just then, as I was about to cut off my head for the tenth time...

But of course, Brahma would not appear simply in response to a threat.




So be it! This is no idle threat! Let the universe know that its creator would not save the life of his own great-grandson!

And I did it!

What is this? Have I become immortal?


But Brahma, as wise as he was, made my head grow right back!

Nine times I cut my head off, and nine times he made it appear again.



Do you want to test my resolve, Brahma?

STOP!




I have heard and acknowledged your devotion, children. What do you want from me, sons of Vishrava?

Since Dashananda has undertaken the severest test of all, let him speak first.



Lord Brahma, I ask that you grant me immortality.


But the wise Brahma realized that if he granted me immortality, I would be unstoppable. So the boon he gave me was conditional.




Here, take this. It is the potion of immortality. So long as you keep it safe, no man can kill you.

Here is another valuable thing. Use the mantras in this book to change your form at will.


I tucked the valuable potion in my navel, a place which nobody would reach for.



Thank you, Lord. I am indeed grateful. But I have one more request.



Grant me such might that no god or beast is able to match me in combat, let alone slay me!




Granted. You are too ambitious for your own good, Dashananda. But tell me, what of humans? Do you not want supremacy over them as well?

I have no fear of those puny mortals!




Well then, I have one final gift for you.



I return to you the nine heads you sacrificed to me!

It was a cruel joke that Brahma played on me. All my heads had a distinct voice and personality, and at times their voices drove me mad.




My lord, I ask only that I never stray from the path of righteousness.


Granted!

I left my brothers with Brahma and set off down the hill. But leaving my innocent brother Kumbhakarna to seek his boon on his own was a mistake that I would come to regret.

Your turn, good Vibhishana.




DASHANANDA!



KUMBHAKARNA!

As he asked, so he received.

Kumbhakarna had been tricked by a goddess into asking for eternal sleep instead of eternal life!



Lord, let him not sleep forever!

What has been said cannot be taken back. But I can do one thing for you.

Every year, he will sleep for six months, awoken for a day, and then sleep for another six months. I have spoken.

And so my brother's boon became a curse.

Having met Brahma, I returned to my grandfather, who was, as usual, on a campaign of conquest.

Grandfather, we have done as you guided us.

Yes, so I have heard. What happened to Kumbhakarna was unfortunate, but you must march on to fulfill your destiny regardless.

Yes, Grandfather. But there is one thing I was hoping you could help me with.

What is it, my child?



I will soon be a king, and the first thing a king needs is soldiers. I need help with raising an army, Grandfather.



Then you shall have it. Ten cohorts* of my fine army are yours to command! It is your birthright! But that is not all you need, Dashananda...

*Bands of warriors



Tell me... What kind of king has no kingdom?



Now that you mention it, there is one place that is fit to be my kingdom...

Ha ha ha! I know what you're thinking! Good choice! But before you do that, for goodness sake, grow a mustache! You look like a girl!



A few days later...


Huh??!



Why,
hello, little
god!

I've 'invited'
you today to ask for
something you have held for
me long enough—Lanka. Give
me the city, or I shall snatch
it from your dead
hands!

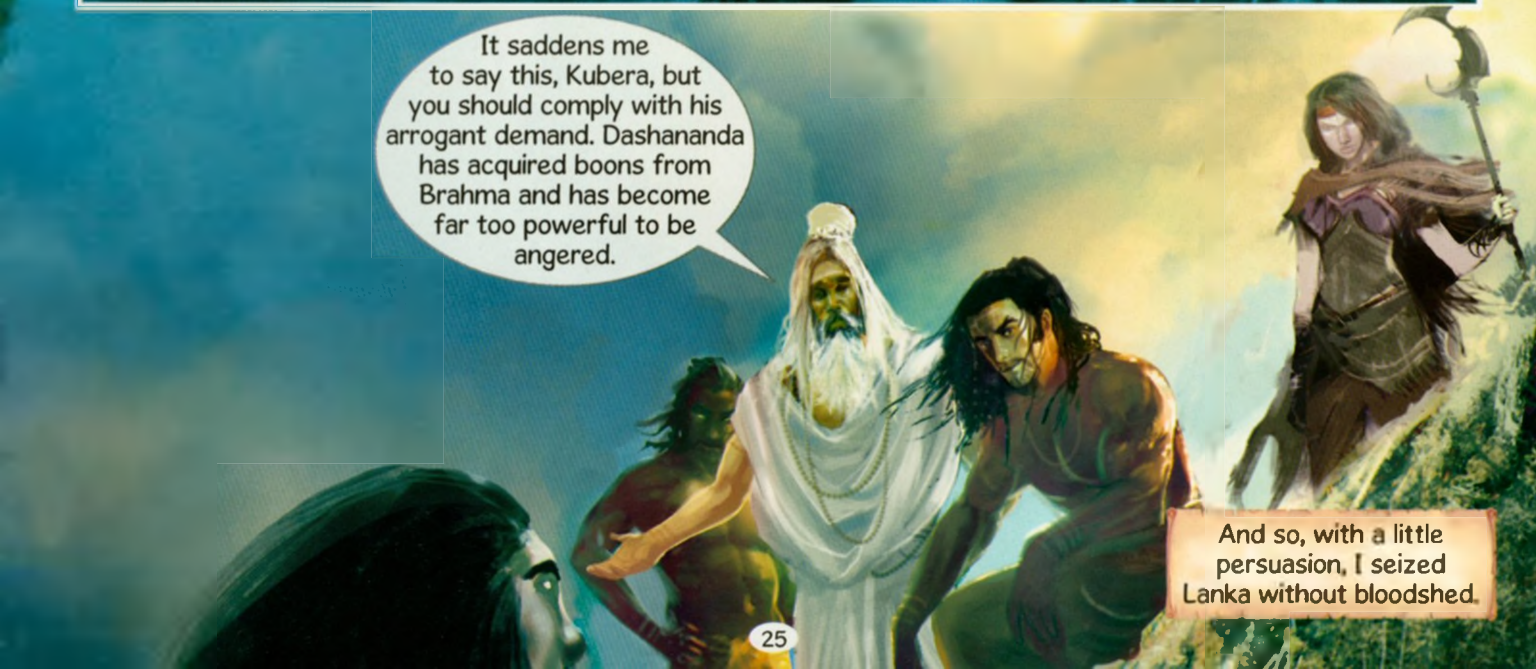
With the help of my brother
Ahiravana and Shoorpanakha,
I had laid a trap for Kubera!



But...
but... how can
you do this?? I
cannot--




Father!
Thank you for
coming! Deliver
me from this
beast!



It saddens me
to say this, Kubera, but
you should comply with his
arrogant demand. Dashananda
has acquired boons from
Brahma and has become
far too powerful to be
angered.


And so, with a little
persuasion, I seized
Lanka without bloodshed.




Lanka. The new capital of my people. Soon to be home to every imaginable race of demons.

They love you, *bhaiya!*

My doors were closed to none of the *asura* races. *Daiya*, *pishacha*, *danava*—all were welcome there. The world's rejects had found a home. And I was their protector.



And they will... always. I will ensure that even the poorest in my kingdom have utensils of gold.



I kept my word. Hunger was totally unknown in Lanka, and my people were happier than the subjects in most human kingdoms.

But of course, all of this took some time.



Well?



Well, what?

Well, are you satisfied now?

You've stolen the most beautiful city in the world, and from your own half-brother, no less!




Vibhishana... you know I am never satisfied.

But what more do you want? You have everything a king could possibly desire.


My campaign to subjugate the three worlds will begin soon. But first...

...a king needs a queen.




Since the first time I heard of Sita, I was smitten. Tales of her beauty, virtue, and talents were the stuff legends are made of.

It was said that she was the daughter of none other than Mother Earth herself.




However, my request to her father, King Janaka, for her hand in marriage was denied because I was a demon king.

I later heard that he had held a *swayamvara* for her, and her hand was won by Rama, the prince of Ayodhya. Some said he was divine, and had performed a miraculous feat to win her hand.



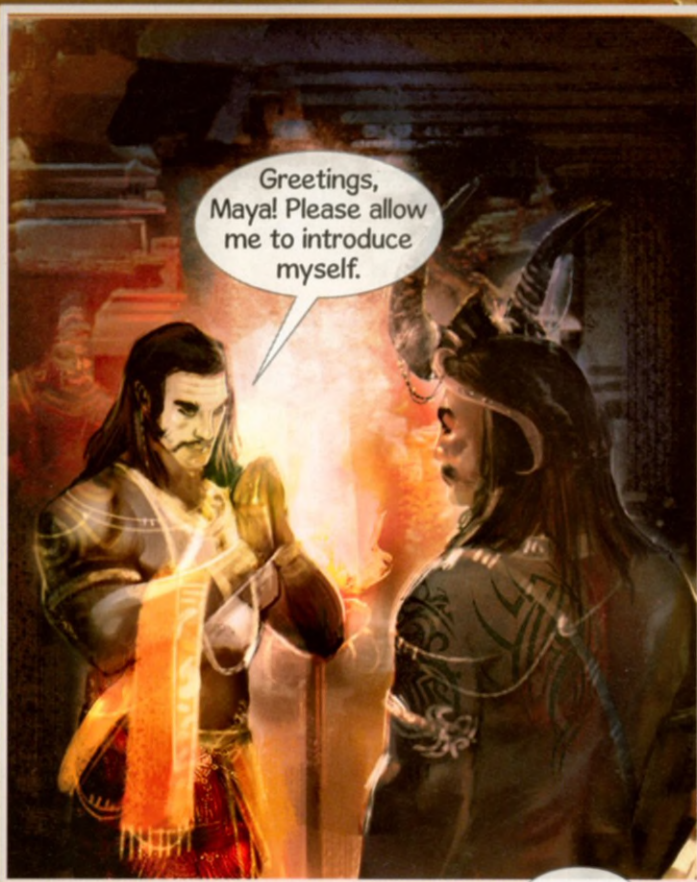
Nevertheless, I was destined to find love, and that too with a woman whom history would remember as one of the *panchkanya*—the five women who serve as role models of virtue for all women.



One day, as I was passing through a forest...

...I was struck by a vision of loveliness. There, in front of me, stood the most graceful woman I had ever seen. And beside her stood Mayasura, the architect of the *asuras*, and creator of all manner of fearsome weapons.

I knew at first sight that I wanted to marry her.



Who does not know you, mighty ruler of Lanka! It is a pleasure to meet you. Please be seated, Lankeshwar.





Mandodari's response delighted me beyond words, and we were married amid great pomp and ceremony.



My wife's virtue was even greater than I had thought.

My people took a liking to their new queen immediately. If anything, her welcome was even grander than mine!



She possessed everything I did not.

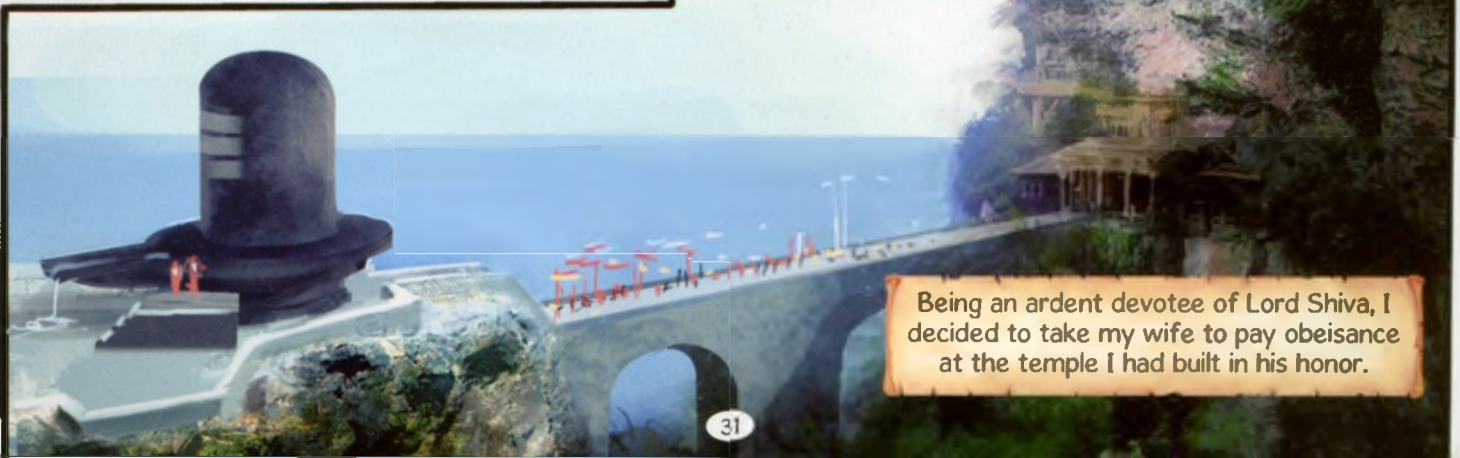
Patience, humility, kindness.




I still wonder how I remained such a vicious conqueror, when I had people like Vibhishana and Mandodari so close.




Being an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva, I decided to take my wife to pay obeisance at the temple I had built in his honor.






But I was not alone in my devotion. My mother was a great devotee too. One day she summoned me to her bedside where she lay ailing.

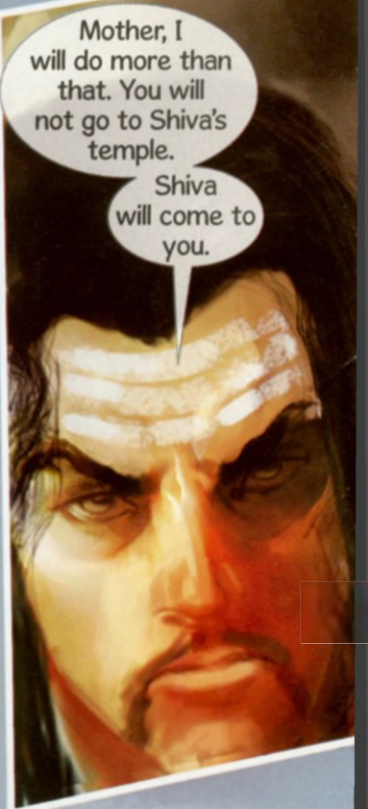


My son...




...this sickness causes me great pain. But what causes me far greater anguish is my inability to worship Lord Shiva. It has been such a long time and it's affecting my inner peace. Please, help me to visit his temple for one last time.

You will help your old, ailing mother, won't you?



Mother, I will do more than that. You will not go to Shiva's temple.

Shiva will come to you.



And so I set off for Mount Kailash, the abode of Lord Shiva, with the intention of uprooting it and carrying it back to my mother.

At the base of the mountain, I surveyed the task ahead of me.

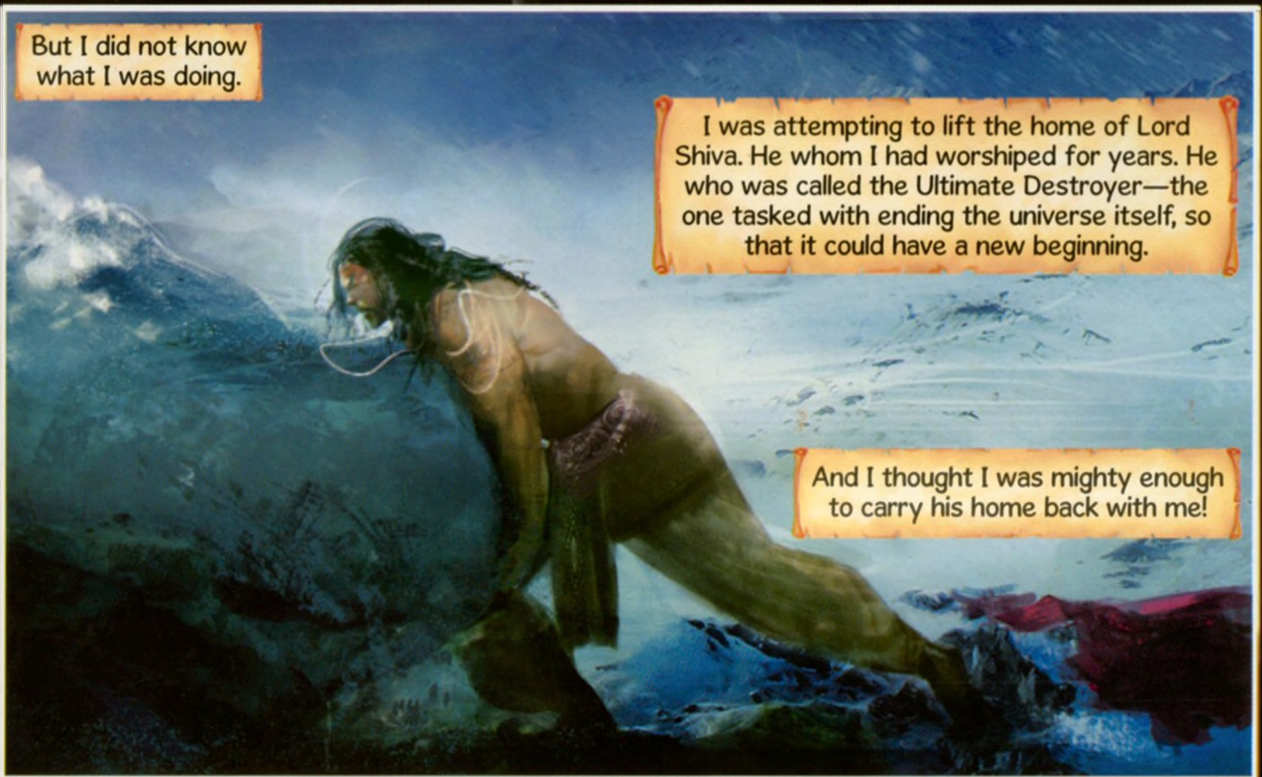
It would be no easy feat, but I felt confident of my success, so arrogant had my prowess made me.



But I did not know what I was doing.

I was attempting to lift the home of Lord Shiva. He whom I had worshiped for years. He who was called the Ultimate Destroyer—the one tasked with ending the universe itself, so that it could have a new beginning.

And I thought I was mighty enough to carry his home back with me!



I was strong enough to do it too! But in my arrogance, I did not consider how Shiva would react to my display of power.



Shiva had but to press his little toe on the tip of the mountain, and I was crushed beneath it!

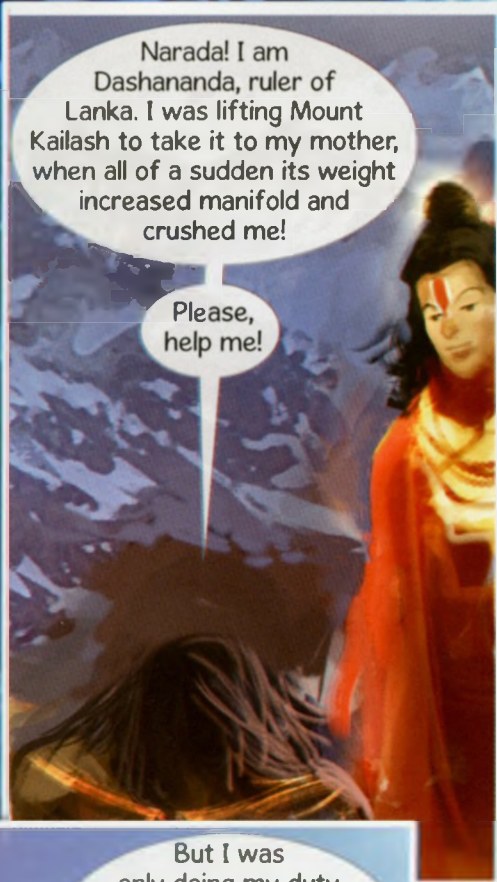


RRRAAAAAGGGGHHH



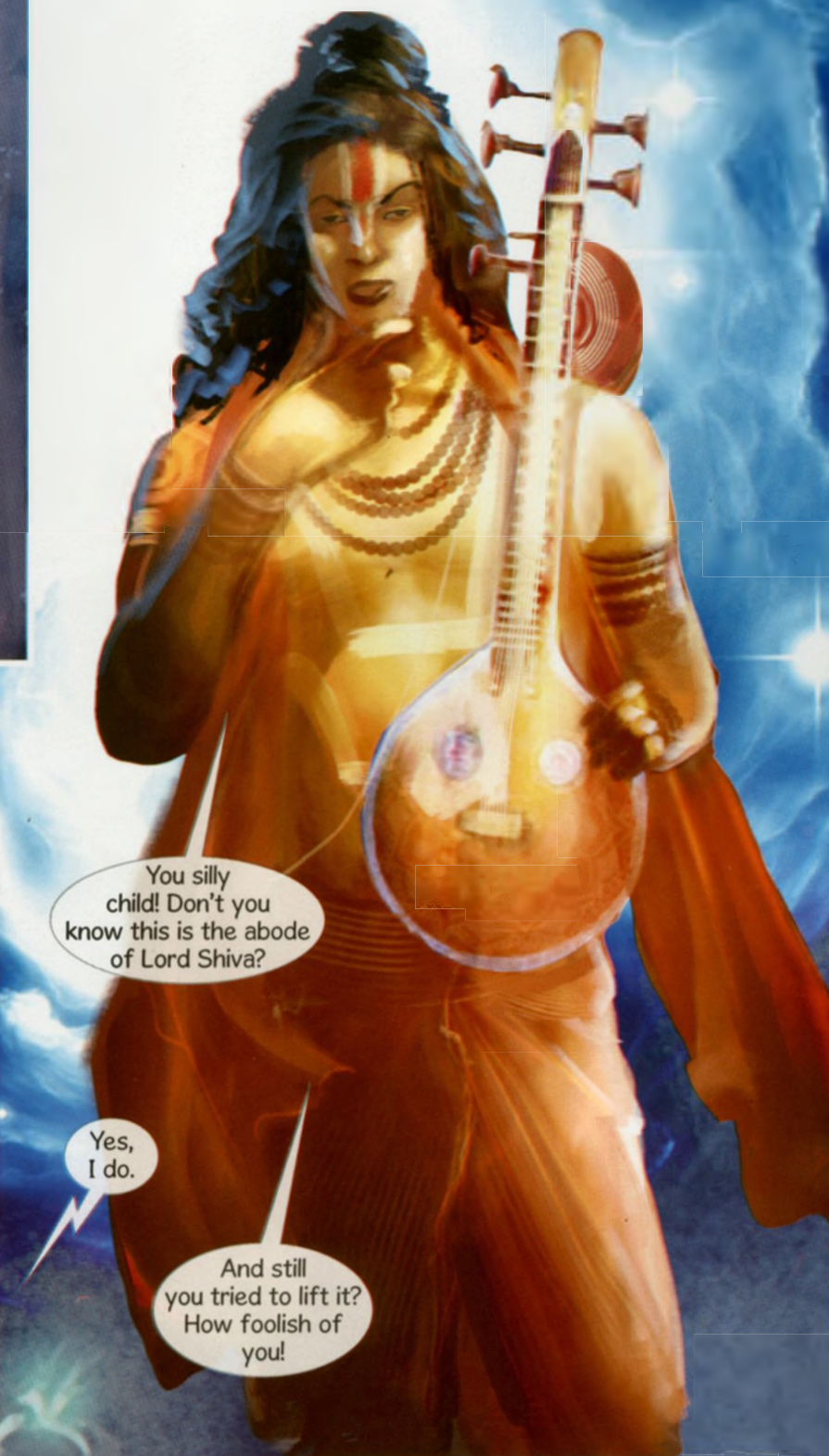


Oh, look! There's a little demon stuck here!



Narada! I am Dashananda, ruler of Lanka. I was lifting Mount Kailash to take it to my mother, when all of a sudden its weight increased manifold and crushed me!

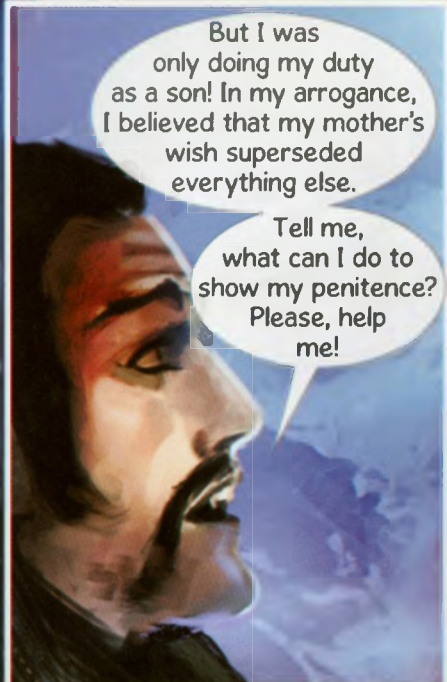
Please, help me!



You silly child! Don't you know this is the abode of Lord Shiva?

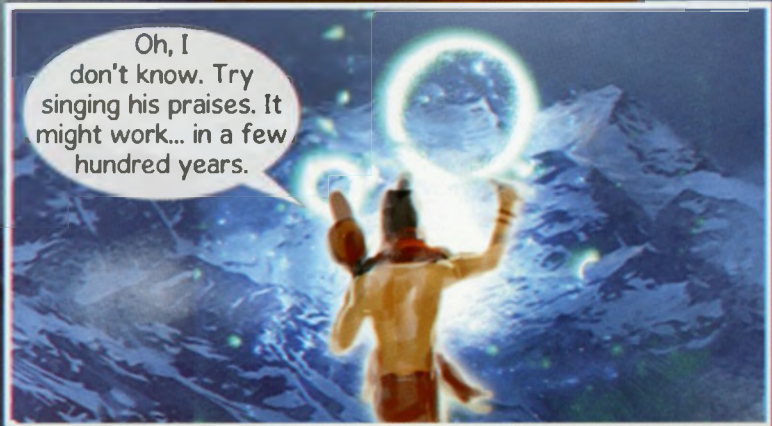
Yes, I do.

And still you tried to lift it? How foolish of you!




But I was only doing my duty as a son! In my arrogance, I believed that my mother's wish superseded everything else.

Tell me, what can I do to show my penitence? Please, help me!




Oh, I don't know. Try singing his praises. It might work... in a few hundred years.

And that is what I did. I sang Shiva's praises for years as I lay buried under that mountain.




In my devotion, I composed a song called the *Shiva Tandava Stotra*, which is sung to this day.



But Shiva paid me no heed. In desperation, I tried a different ploy.

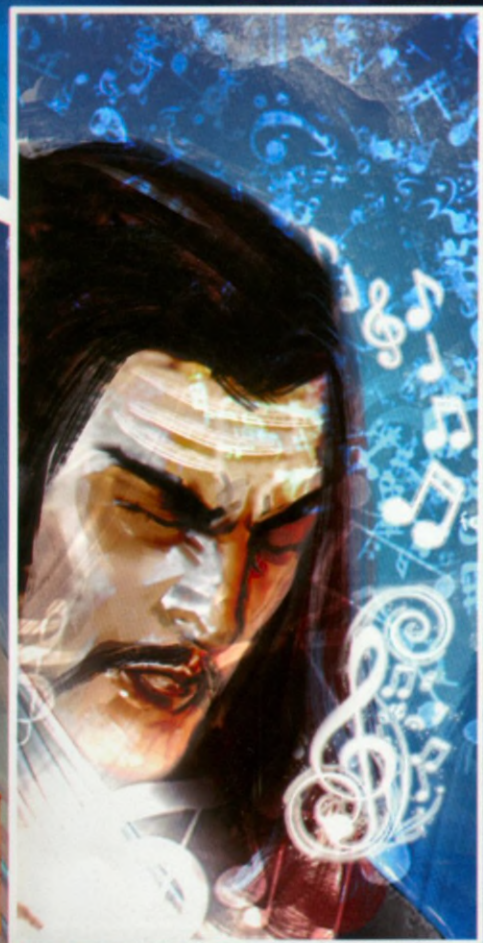
Lord, I wish to compose the greatest hymn ever sung in your honor. I will be able to do that best with a *veena*. Pray, provide me with a *veena*, so that I may do full justice to the hymn.

Still Shiva remained silent.



But I had always been stubborn.

I proceeded to tear out my own veins and fashioned a *veena* out of them. This *veena* came to be called the *rudra veena*.



Then suddenly, after singing for a long time, I found I was free and standing in front of Lord Shiva!



I am pleased with your devotion, Ravana.

My Lord, I am your eternal devotee. Forgive my folly, for I knew not what I was doing.


But Lord, why did you call me Ravana? My name is Dashananda.



As a reward for your penance, here is a small gift.




My devotee, the arrogant and mighty ruler of Lanka!




Here, take this blade. It is the fearsome moon-blade—the *chandra-haas*. It will stay sharp forever, and will never break. It is as light as gossamer. Anybody you throw it at will be slain instantly. There will be no escape.

But remember: you may hold this weapon in your hands and fight with it as much as you please. But once you throw it at someone, it will be lost to you forever. So use it wisely.

And as for my calling you Ravana, it is a fitting name...



...for it means He of the Terrifying Roar, Whose Cry Makes the Universe Tremble.



The name held, and from then on I was known as Ravana. Needless to say, Lord Shiva showered his blessings upon my mother.



One day, as I held court...

Move half the workers from the forest to the gold mines. There's no sense in gathering lumber when we have no need for it. And raise their pay, as an incentive against theft--



MY LORD!!




There stood a woman whom I remembered as being one of the early settlers in the dark forests of Chitrakoot. A few bands of my people still lived in human lands.

My lord, those humans... they've... it's terrible...

There, there, woman. What is the matter?



They've killed everybody. **THEY'VE KILLED US ALL!**




The woman explained to me how some *kshatriyas* had begun to clear entire forests of demons to make them safer for humans.

It was enough to spike my anger.

Ragaka! Call my generals at once! We will convene in the war room in two bells.

Yes, my lord.




But my lord, must you exact vengeance on someone for winning a battle? It is not the *daitya* way to fight. And is loss not an inevitable outcome of war?

The war with the humans for territory is no different from any you have fought. And the land they attacked is not Lanka! Do the sons and brothers of all you have slain in combat seek you out for revenge?


They don't. But I am Lankeshwar, ruler of Lanka! And those were my people! How dare those human vermin attack them? Do they not know who I am?

They must pay. Men must know what it means to tangle with anything that is even remotely related to the mighty Ravana.



Ravana,
Dashananda... please
don't do this. We are happy
here, in our island paradise!
We have no need to pick
fights with those who
are beneath us!

Look around
you—are we in need
of anything? You don't
have to run to the rescue
of every *rakshasa* who
comes to you
for help!




What
happened to the
Dashananda who first
set foot in Lanka, the
Ravana who was a
just ruler?

Is it fair to
intervene in the battles
of others who are only doing
what you would have done
in their place? How, indeed,
did you acquire Lanka?


Mandodari,
you are wise, and
I love you.

But you know
nothing of what it means
to be a *daitya* who has
succeeded in finding a place
where his people can
be safe.

I cannot allow
anyone to interfere
with MY people. Anybody
who dares to do so
must pay.




The time
has come to make
men fear me, and
my vengeance.



And so, I set off on my first campaign of conquest. I was accompanied by my brothers Ahiravana, Khara, and Dushana. Khara and Dushana happened to be favorites of Shoorpanakha, or I might not have made them my generals.

Conquering the human kingdoms was easy, thanks to the boons I had received from Brahma, and the training I had received from my father.


However viciously they fought, the humans were no more than insects to the might of my forces.



ATTACK!

I made examples of all those who opposed me. I cared nothing for their crowns, or their gold. All I wanted to do was roar so loud that it echoed in the farthest corners of the world.

HAHAHA



Soon, my conquest of the Earth was over, and I had reached the underworld.

The undead souls of the underworld fought hard and well, and their terror was almost too much even for my hardened demon army. But we fought bravely, and soon defeated them.

By the end of my first campaign, I was not only feared everywhere above ground, I was also the ruler of the underworld.

But I was not a selfish ruler, and I never forgot those who stood by me—especially my family.

The time has come to confer honor on all of you who have supported me! I am truly proud of you. And let it never be said that Lankeshwar was an ungrateful king!

My brother Ahiravana, who fought valiantly by my side in the underworld, deserves to keep it! I crown you ruler of *pataal*, the underworld.

Thank you, Brother.

Khara and Dushana! You have truly surprised me. I hereby declare Dushana the viceroy of Janasthan, the farthest outpost of my kingdom. And Khara, you will help him.

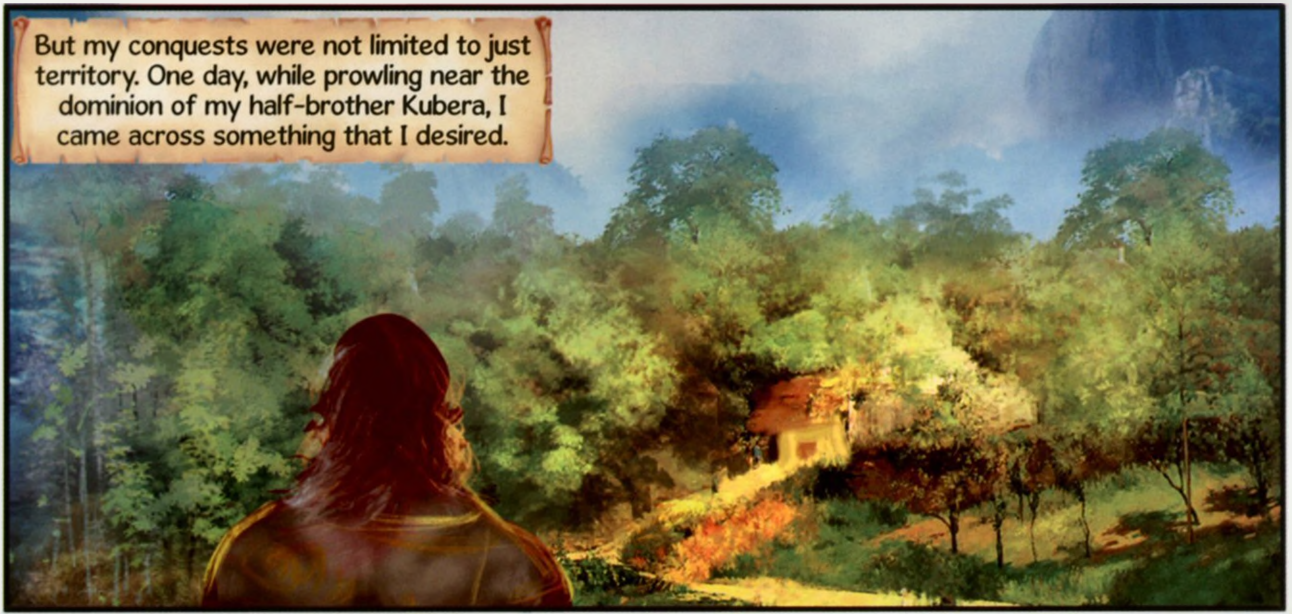
It is a big responsibility. Do not disappoint me.

Thank you, Brother!

And now, leave me, all of you. We're done here.

I savored the intense feeling of peace I got from knowing that I was lord of all I saw.

But my conquests were not limited to just territory. One day, while prowling near the dominion of my half-brother Kubera, I came across something that I desired.



Rambha. An *apsara* at the court of Lord Indra, the king of heaven, her beauty was legendary.



She was betrothed to Kubera's son. Nonetheless, I tried my best to seduce her, but she wasn't as open to the idea as I had expected.

How DARE you! I belong to none other than your half-brother's son!



I wasn't used to refusal. And so I took forcibly what she would not give willingly.

How can you do this? I am like a daughter to you!





Kubera's son arrived to rescue his beloved, but by then it was too late.

Ravana!



This time you have gone too far, foul demon! This time you will pay!



You think so?



Vile creature, no longer will you molest women! If you ever force yourself on a woman again, may all your ten heads fall off!

This is my curse on you, son of my father's father!

This curse was by far the most fatal one ever cast upon me. But without realizing it, Kubera's son had also done Sita a great service.



RAVANA!

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!



You've gone too far this time, Ravana! There will be retribution!

The gods are watching, and they will come for you, you filthy demon!



THEY will come for ME? It is I who will go after THEM! I fear no god!



One day, Ravana, you will be humbled. You say you fear no god? Then you are a fool! Don't worry, the gods are watching from above, and YOU WILL PAY.



Run along, little god! And tell your friends up in heaven that I am coming for them! And Kubera...

...I'll be looking ESPECIALLY for you.

And so, having already conquered most of the Earth, I embarked on my campaign for the conquest of heaven.

Soldiers of Lanka!

For too long have we lain idle in this beautiful city of ours! The time has come to go forth once more and claim what is ours!

Our soldiers are mighty, and our beasts are ferocious.

My son Akshaya Kumar. You will lead our cavalry through the enemy ranks and pave the way for our main force.

My son Meghnad. You will lead the main onslaught with the infantry. You will be the clean-up force. Leave no enemy standing! Sweep through them meticulously, once Akshaya Kumar has cleared the way for you.



Do not
pray tonight, my
brothers...

...for
tomorrow
we become
GODS!

The next morning, we launched our attack on heaven. Of course, they knew we would be coming.

They're coming! The demons are coming! Sound the alarm!

Indra, the king of the gods, was reluctant to fight me, but like a true king he opened the gates for us and accepted our challenge.

INDRA! You false god of war! I have come to lay claim to your city. Defend it, if you can!

RAVANA! Your arrogance knows no limits! You DARE challenge the gods?

Come, then, and let me show you what we do to little demons who think they are gods!

Soldiers of heaven, **ATTACK!**

The battle raged fiercely, and the soldiers of heaven lived up to their fame.



But while Indra may have been able to deal with me, to deal with me AND my sons was too much for him.



Step aside, Father.



Indra is down. The battle has been won!



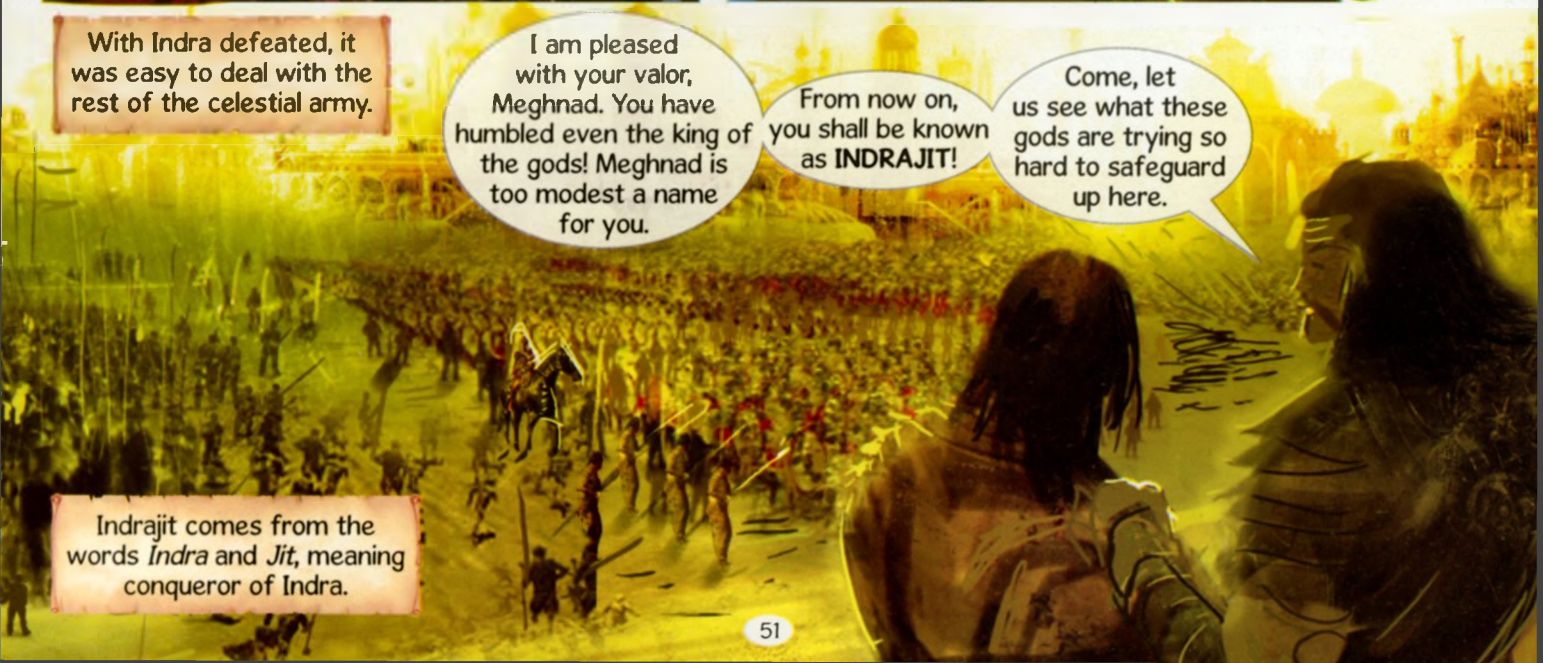
With Indra defeated, it was easy to deal with the rest of the celestial army.


I am pleased with your valor, Meghnad. You have humbled even the king of the gods! Meghnad is too modest a name for you.

From now on, you shall be known as **INDRAJIT!**

Come, let us see what these gods are trying so hard to safeguard up here.


Indrajit comes from the words *Indra* and *Jit*, meaning conqueror of Indra.






I have heard tales of a flying machine they have here. Something called Pushpak Vimana. We must seek that out. Leave nothing behind for these gods.

Distribute all the gold among our soldiers. We have enough of our own. But let nobody touch the celestial weapons.




Here it is, the famed Pushpak Vimana! The flying machine that can change its shape to accommodate as many riders as need be. This will take me back to Lanka.



And where do you think you're going, Brother? Did you think I'd forgotten you?

Of course, I singled Kubera out for particular humiliation. But I would rather not go into the details of what we did with him.



And thus, I conquered heaven. Such was my power that I could command the sun to rise and set at my will.

But Indra's trials did not end there. I had more planned for him.

I kept Indra chained in the center of the biggest market in Lanka, so my people could look at him and see the greatness of their ruler.

There stands the king of gods!

Ha, ha, ha!

Enjoy your victory while you can, vile demons, for it will not last. I will have my vengeance!

It had been a great victory for me. I was pleased, and my entire kingdom rejoiced. I shared my pride in the sons I had sired with the mother who had borne them—Mandodari.

But Indra had friends in high places, and one day I had a surprise visitor.

I, of course, had only the highest respect for Brahma.

But of course, my lord. Your wish is my command. He shall be set free at once.

Ravana! I hear that you have imprisoned Indra in your kingdom. Release him at once!

Even after Brahma's visit, and the loss of what I foolishly considered a trophy, the celebrations at Lanka continued for a long time.

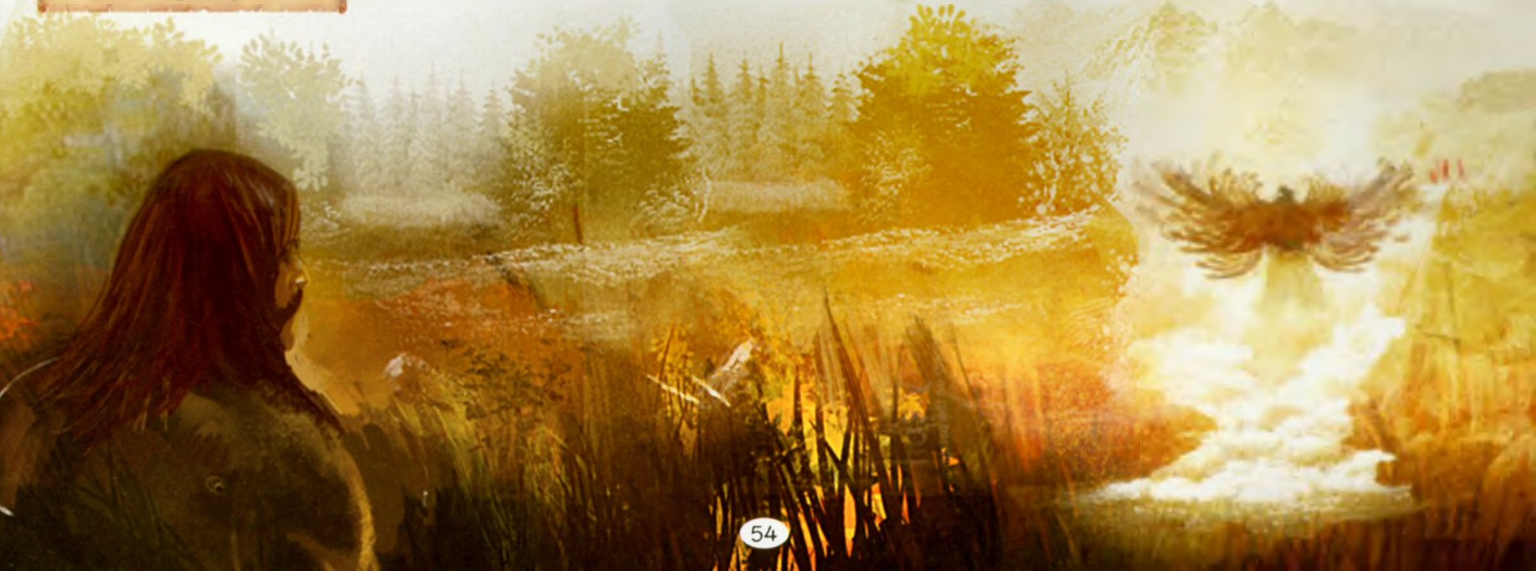
But I was soon to face the same ordeal that I had forced Indra to endure, for such is the law of karma.

As I often did after a campaign, I set out to engage in penance.



But suddenly, the water in the river where I was meditating disappeared!

I decided to investigate, and was greeted by a strange sight.



A human king, with what appeared to be hundreds of arms, had dammed up the water using his hands, so that his queens could bathe!



I learned that he was the famed Kartavirya Arjun.



Sire, he has been granted a boon that makes it impossible for anyone to defeat him.



Bah, we shall see!



Kartavirya Arjun! You have ruined my meditation by damming the water of this river.

And for that, you must pay!





YAAARRGGGHHH!!!!

I take it you have no knowledge of the boon I possess. Worse still, you decided to attack me unarmed, even though I have a thousand arms.

Tie this animal up properly and drag him to the fortress.

As punishment I was paraded through the marketplace of Kartavirya Arjun's capital.



Even worse, I was chained up in a corner, where the citizens of his fortress pelted me with stones and fruit.



Though the chains were nothing to me, and I could have broken out easily, I allowed myself to feel the humiliation.

In captivity, I meditated upon how I could have been beaten by one man. The answer was simple. I was rash, hasty, and unprepared. And that had allowed this mere human to defeat me, though Brahma's boon made me invincible even to the gods.



Yes, I deserved it.

Ravana! You're being released. The great sage Pulastya himself has pleaded with Kartavirya Arjun on your behalf.



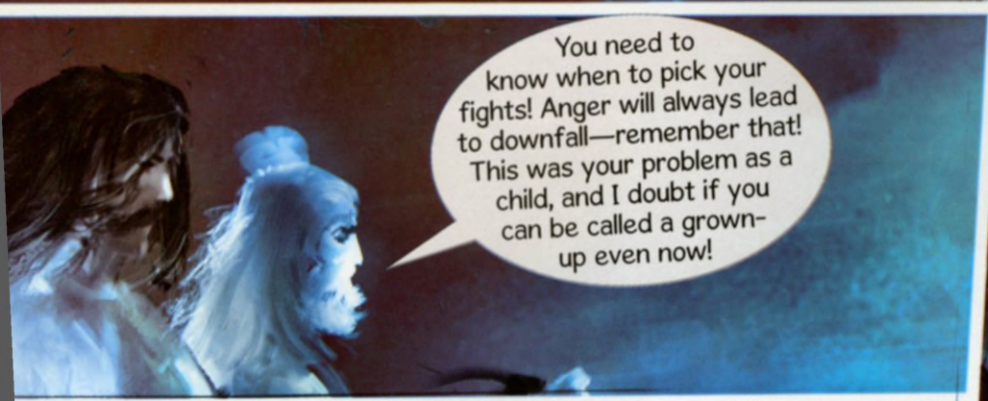


Got yourself into trouble again, haven't you?

Pulastya, my paternal grandfather, was quite fond of me, having seen me grow up at my father's ashram.



Have you learned nothing from your father? If it wasn't for me, you'd still be rotting away in there! You're fortunate one of your ministers approached me right away, knowing Kartavirya Arjun would let you go at my behest!




You need to know when to pick your fights! Anger will always lead to downfall—remember that! This was your problem as a child, and I doubt if you can be called a grown-up even now!




Well? Have you nothing to say? What have you learned from this?



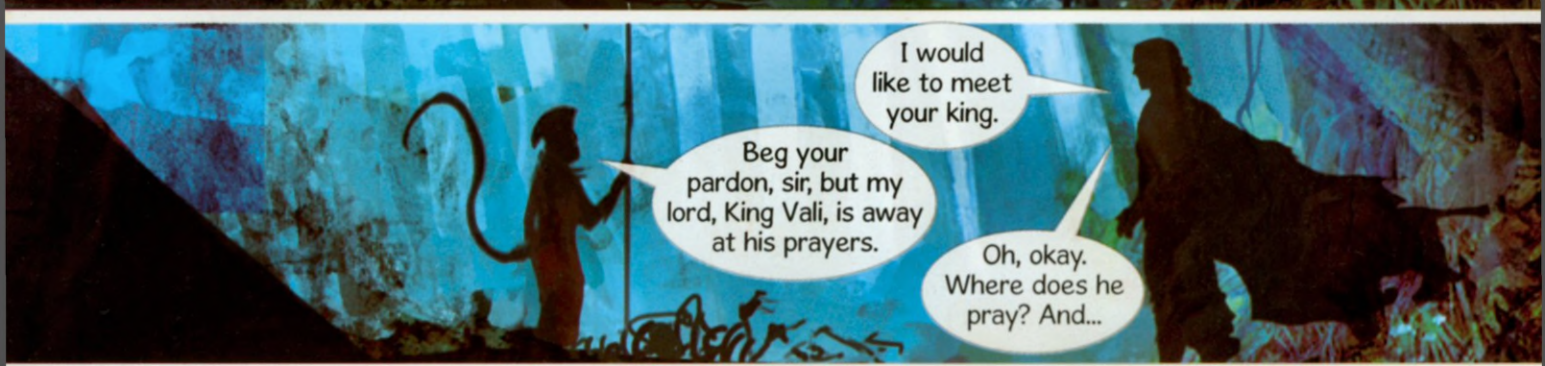
I've learned that I need some allies.



Kishkindha. Home of the *vanaras*. A jungle city populated by a race of agile, monkey-like beings of tremendous strength.



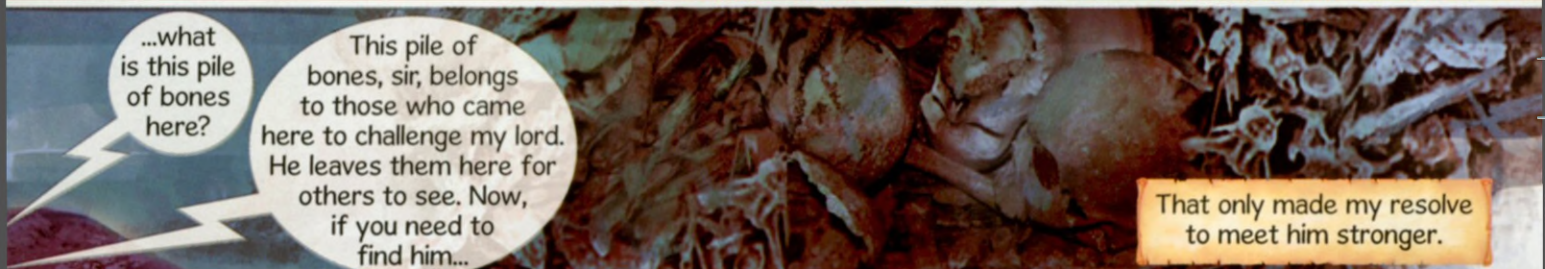
I had heard tales of the great strength of the *vanara* king Vali. They said his hunter's instincts were so acute that he could track and kill any prey he desired, and could leap over entire forests in a single bound.



I would like to meet your king.

Beg your pardon, sir, but my lord, King Vali, is away at his prayers.


Oh, okay. Where does he pray? And...



...what is this pile of bones here?

This pile of bones, sir, belongs to those who came here to challenge my lord. He leaves them here for others to see. Now, if you need to find him...

That only made my resolve to meet him stronger.



I followed the directions given to me, and found King Vali. I watched his impressive figure from afar as he prayed.

Although I knew he had a sharp sense of smell and the instincts of a great hunter, I thought I had covered my tracks well enough for him not to sense me.

But in the time it took me to blink my eyes...



...Vali had leaped the hundred feet between us, and was poised to attack!

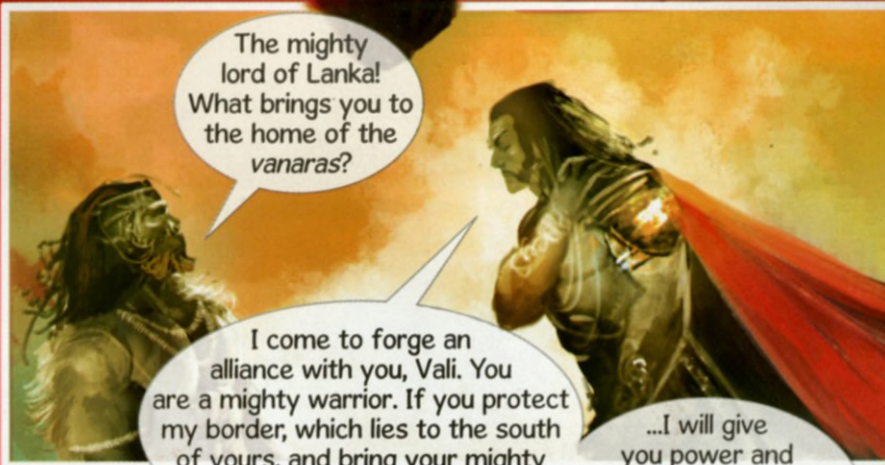


Although I knew I only had to wish it to crush him like a fly, I chose to let him subdue me.



Stop, Vali! It is I, Ravana, King of Lanka! I come in peace, to offer you my friendship!

The mighty lord of Lanka! What brings you to the home of the *vanaras*?



I come to forge an alliance with you, Vali. You are a mighty warrior. If you protect my border, which lies to the south of yours, and bring your mighty army to my aid whenever I need them...

...I will give you power and riches beyond your imagination, and come to your aid whenever you call for it

I do not need to think even for a moment, my lord. I agree!



Excellent! Let us light the sacred fire and make a pact.

We are brothers now.



And that was how I made my first and only real ally.

Meanwhile, in the forests of Panchavati...

...all hell was about to break loose. My sister Shoorpanakha was prowling about, when she came upon a sight that made her heart skip a beat.

Rama. Exiled prince of Ayodhya. Husband of Sita. Brother of Lakshman.

So true was he to the tenets of dharma, the laws that govern all men, that he had willfully gone into exile to honor a promise made by his father to one of his wives. This meant that he had to forego his claim to the throne, which was his by right.

Many said he was divine. He inspired so much love and respect that not only his wife, but also his brother Lakshman decided to accompany him on his fourteen-year exile in the darkest forests known to mankind.

For days she observed them—the two brothers and Sita.

Rama was the kind of man who made every other man look like an ape in comparison.

And my sister, that most capricious of beings, fell in love immediately.

Being used to getting whatever she wanted, she went straight up to the object of her affection.

RAMA!

I have admired you from afar for days, and I am convinced. We are meant to be together! I love you, Rama. I'll do anything for you. Please, come away with me! I will make you a happy man.

I thank you for your generous offer, *daitya* princess, for I can see you must be a princess.

But unfortunately, my heart belongs to my wife, Sita. However, my brother Lakshman here may take another wife.

Rama's light-hearted reply did not go down well with my sister.

I will have no other but you, Rama! That hag! What do you see in her? Leave her, and come with me!

ENOUGH!

SHHHRRRIINGG!

Lakshman, ever protective of his elder brother's wife, drew his sword and cut off my sister's ears and nose!

You'll pay for this, you will! My brother will come for you, haughty princes of Ayodhya!



That was wrong, Lakshman. Rash and wrong. How could you do something like that to an innocent woman in love?

Woman, bah! That vile temptress insulted Sita *habhi!* It was unforgivable.



You should not have done that. Violence is not what we resort to for every little thing! Sita was not in the least perturbed by her remarks, was she?



And so one day, soon
after that incident,
when I was practicing
archery at the range...



As if the defeat of Khara and Dushana was not enough...

I beg your pardon, sire, but there is some bad news.

Well then, speak, before I decide to rip your tongue out and leave the message unheard.

Sire, the armies of Janasthan have been wiped out by the princes of Ayodhya. We have suffered great humiliation and defeat.

WHAT??!!

This has gone on long enough. I've had enough of these puny humans. It's time to teach them a lesson.

Have the Pushpak Vimana brought to the top of Lakegala at once!

I climbed to the highest point in Lanka, and got ready to implement the idea that Shoorpanakha had planted in my head—the abduction of Sita.

I used the celestial glider—the Pushpak Vimana—to aid my purpose.

STOP!

Ravana, what are you doing?

Mandodari pleaded with me...

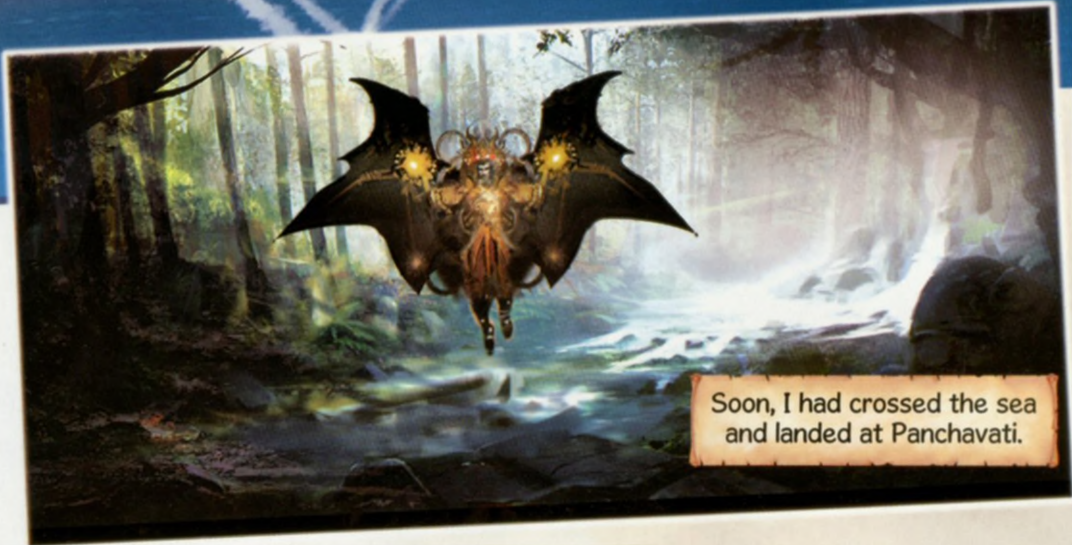
Ravana, I beg of you, do not embark on this mad venture! Sita is a good woman; she does not deserve this!

...and so did Vibhishana.

Rama is known for his sense of fair play. He would never attack unprovoked... you know this! Shoorpanakha is a brat, and this type of deception is typical of her!

You know nothing! I will be back with Sita!

And though I ignored the advice of the two wisest people I knew, deep down I was aware that this had to be Shoorpanakha's fault. But that did not stop me, so blinded was I by the thirst for vengeance and the desire for Sita.



Soon, I had crossed the sea and landed at Panchavati.

I instructed one of my minions, Mareech, a shapeshifter, to assume the form of a golden deer and excite Sita's desire to keep it as a pet, so that she would send Rama out to catch it.



Go now, and do not let him catch you for as long as there is breath in your lungs!

Mareech did not fail me.

LOOK!

It's a golden deer!

Rama, will you please catch that deer for me? I wish to keep it.

Alright, my dear. For you, I'll do anything.

Lakshman, look after Sita in my absence.

I will, Brother!

A while later, Sita became concerned.

It has been quite some time since Rama left. He's a good tracker, and should have returned long back.

**LAKSHMAN!
LAKSHMAN!
HELP ME!**

That sounds like Rama. He needs help! Lakshman, you must go at once!

But what of you, Sita bhabhi? I cannot leave you alone. Rama would never have wanted that.

Can't you hear him? He's in danger, Lakshman! You must go to him at once!

Yes, you're right. But before I go, I must ensure your safety. Promise me...

...you will not cross this line. So long as you stay within it, no harm can come to you.

I promise. Now go!

I then used the book
Brahma had given me to
disguise myself as a hermit.

I come here
in the Lord's name,
Sister. Will you not invite an
old ascetic into your house
and feed him, so he can
continue doing the work of
the gods?

I cannot,
I am sorry...

Oh! I had heard
tales of the piety of
the great and virtuous Sita,
daughter of Janaka. Will you
not fulfill your dharma, and
give an old hermit some
nourishment?

I tried to cross the
line but stepped back
as flames shot up.

Or would
you have his death
upon your hands, and
be answerable to
the gods?

Oh, alright,
learned one. Here, let
me come across and
give you some
food.



HAHAHA
HAHAHA



Where are you running to, little princess? You're coming with me!




NO!

Yes, with me to Lanka!


And so, through deceit, I captured Sita. She fought like an animal, but I was the mightiest warrior who walked the earth, and her efforts were futile.




By the time I reached the Pushpak Vimana, she had fainted.



All kinds of obstacles came in my way, and tried to prevent me from abducting Sita.




The forest itself came alive, as the children of the Earth, who was Sita's mother, rose up and tried to save her.




An old vulture tried to fight me, too. The audacity!


I swiftly cut off its wings. However, it was this same vulture that later told Rama I had abducted his wife, as it lay dying from its wounds.




I landed in Lanka amidst a mixed response. The abduction did not make any of my subjects particularly happy.




I took Sita to the most luxurious of my palaces, and left her in the care of the most skilled maids in my kingdom, as she recuperated.



Vibhishana and Mandodari sounded the first note of censure.



You know there will be a reprisal, Brother! Rama will come for her, with a mighty army!



Then let him come. I am ready.

My wealth and grandeur did not impress Sita. She preferred a garden of *ashoka* trees as her place of confinement.

Sita! Here, I have brought you a gift.



This is Butterfly Dream Cloth, made from the wings of a million butterflies. It took much hard fighting to win this from Indra's coffers. I want you to have it.



Stay back, and do not speak to me! I demand a curtain between us!

But I mean you no harm, Sita! I only want to marry you, and make you my wife. There is no need for curtains between us. I'm sorry, but that is one wish I cannot grant. Ask for anything else, and it shall be yours!



Fine.



This blade of grass, plucked from my mother's own womb, is curtain enough. We shall never be without barriers. Now go, let me be!



Despite my repeated efforts, Sita refused to even look at me, much less talk to me. But I persisted, and took great care never to offend her.



My lady!

Hanuman. The greatest *vanara* warrior in Rama's army. His loyalty to Rama and Sita was unto death, and somehow he had found his way into Lanka.

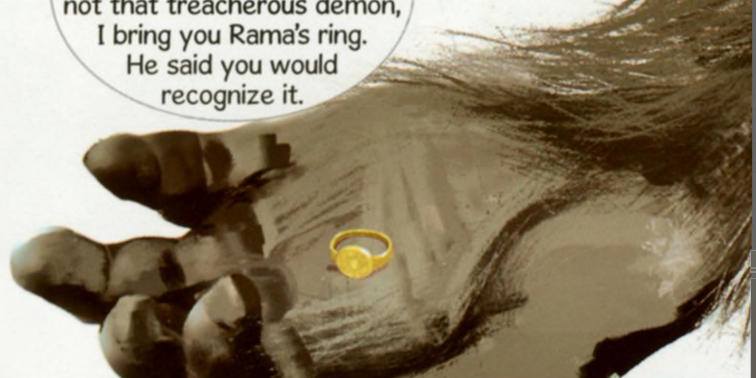



My lady, I come to you from Lord Rama. He has sent search parties far and wide, and will soon come to rescue you. You should have no fear.




I do not believe you! If you could come, then why not Rama? This is another of Ravana's tricks!

My lady, your suspicion is justified. As proof that I am indeed a servant of your husband and not that treacherous demon, I bring you Rama's ring. He said you would recognize it.






The ring!
It is Rama's! You truly are from Rama!




Yes, my lady. Let me take you back with me.




Take me back! Has Rama become so weak that he cannot come to rescue his own wife? I will leave Lanka with no one but Rama. He will come.

Yes, he will, my lady. He asks you to have no fear. He has amassed a large army of *vanaras* and bears, and is preparing for war even as we speak.



Go then, brave warrior, and bring my Rama to me!

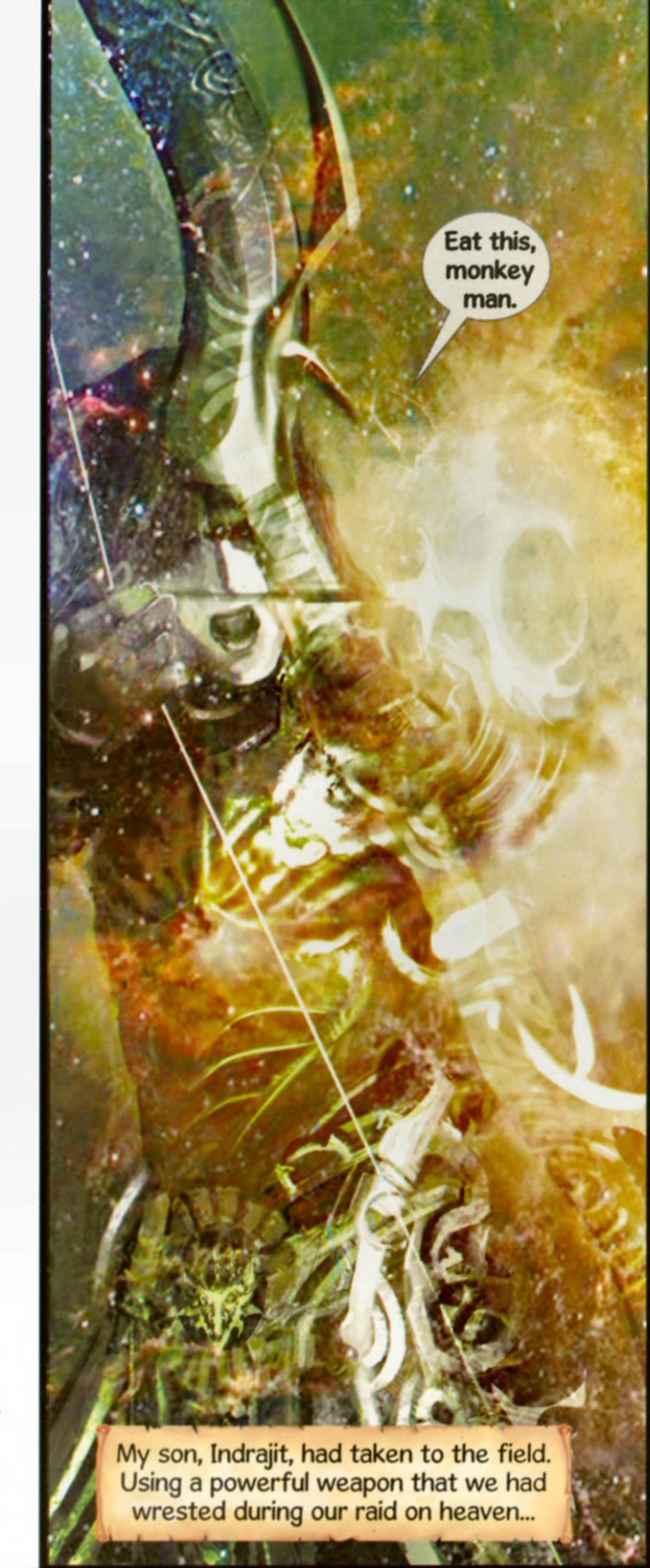


Yes, my lady. But before I go, I have some unfinished business to take care of.



Hanuman then went on a rampage in the garden, as a taste of the retribution that was to come.






Eat this, monkey man.

My son, Indrajit, had taken to the field. Using a powerful weapon that we had wrested during our raid on heaven...



...he attacked and subdued Hanuman.

Indrajit bound the great *vanara* warrior, and brought him straight to me. But not before letting the people have a little fun.



Hey there! Monkey man!

Ha ha ha!



Ah, my son, you have brought something for our zoo! But we already have too many monkeys.



Look at yourself. Your behavior is closer to that of an animal, and yet you call me a monkey!



Ah, a courageous warrior! I can respect that!

But come, let us negotiate. Why are you, a *vanara*, fighting me? Your King Vali is my ally. I take it you are here on behalf of Rama?



The demon wants to negotiate! Your dog, Vali, has been slain. Sugreeva is the new king.

Negotiations happen between kings, Ravana, and you are no king!

Is that so?
We'll see how brave
you are when you're
burning!

Indrajit,
set his tail
on fire!



Let it
burn! HA HA
HA!

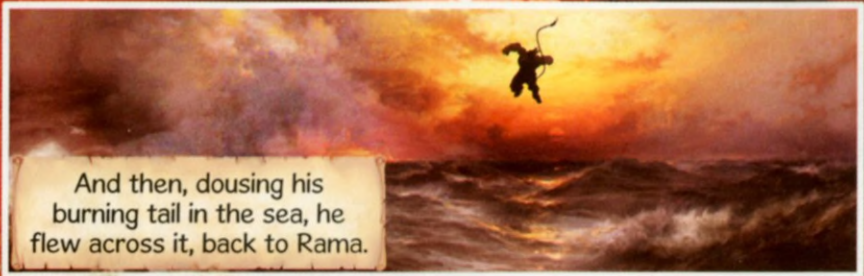


Your doom
is at hand, Ravana!
Your petty chains can't
hold a soldier who has
the love of Rama in
his heart!




And then Hanuman grew in
size till he was a giant, and
escaped! But not before...

...ravaging my beautiful city once more!
Hanuman set fire to the entire city, and
burned many buildings to the ground before
any attack could be launched against him.




And then, dousing his
burning tail in the sea, he
flew across it, back to Rama.




You MUST stop this madness, Ravana! Rama will destroy us all! They say he is the incarnation of Vishnu himself!

I'll defeat him, Vibhishana. I know I will. Sita will be mine.




Don't be foolish, Brother! Face it. You CANNOT fight Rama! Give up, before it's too late! We cannot dare to fight one as holy and blessed as him!



SILENCE! You, a citizen of MY kingdom, sit here and sing praises of that human! Treacherous kin are more dangerous than enemies!

If I were not such a fool as to care for my family so much, I would have cut off your head! Get out of my sight! GET OUT!



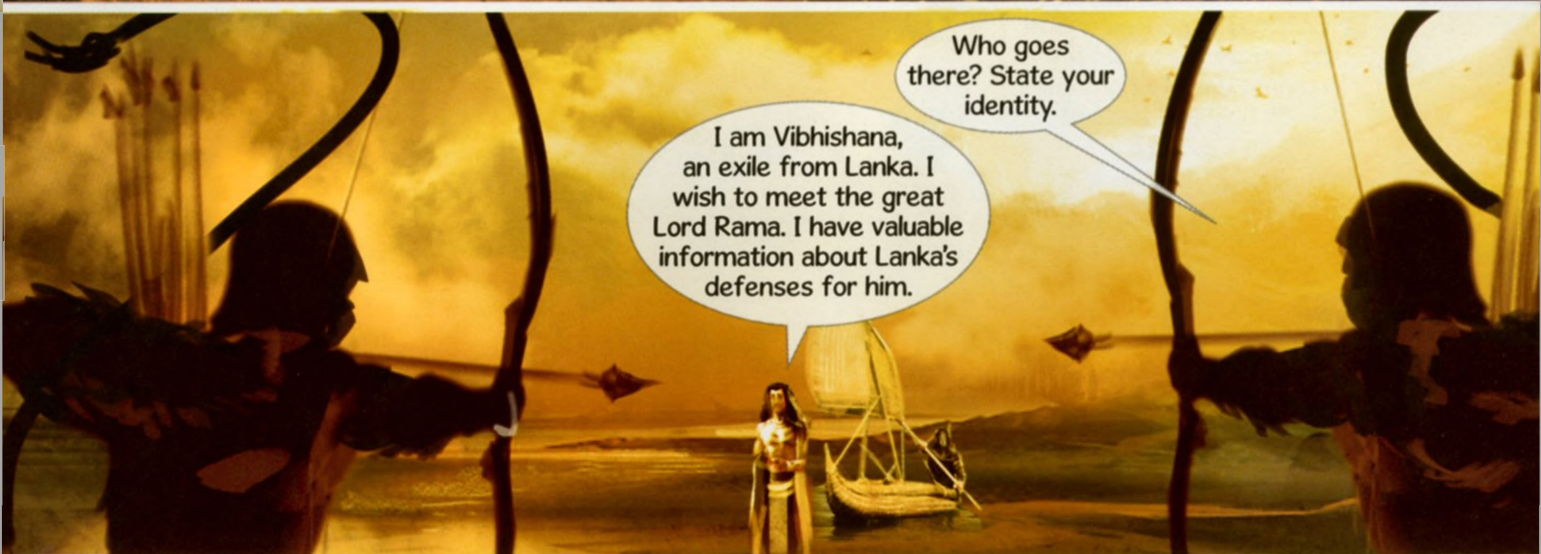
Alright. I will leave your city, Ravana. I cannot be a silent spectator of what you are about to do.

And before I knew it, my brother was gone. But what I failed to realize was that not cutting off Vibhishana's head would cost me my own.

Rama's march to Lanka had met with a hurdle: the wide sea, which was full of dangerous creatures. No boat could have taken him across easily and safely.

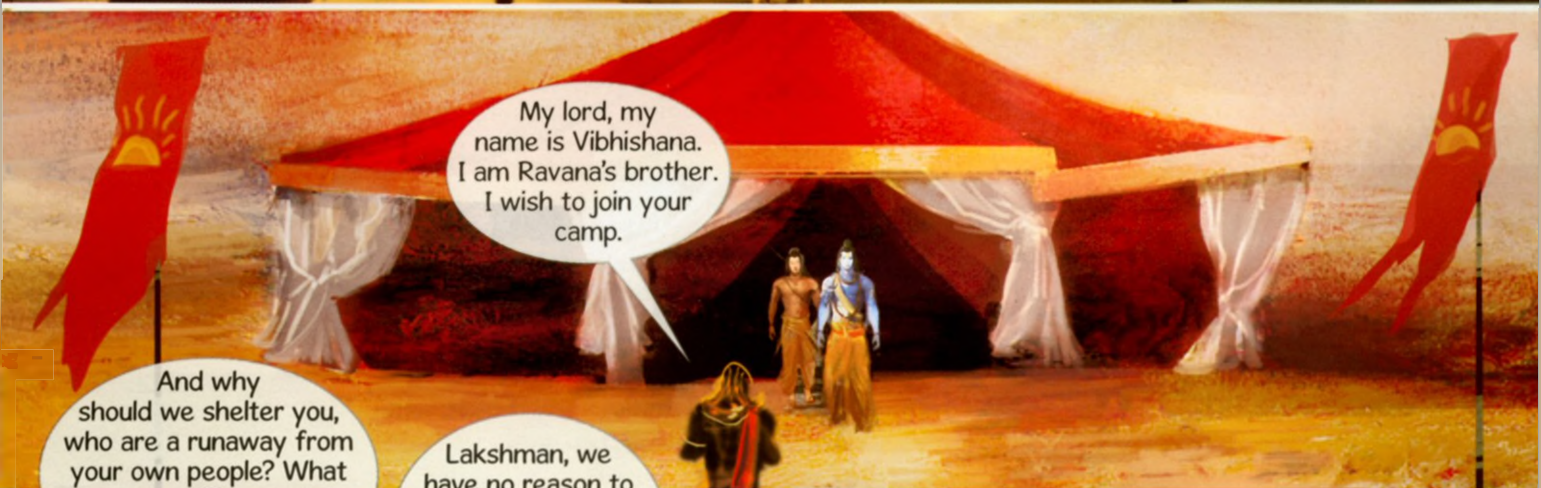


LOOK!
A boat is
approaching!



Who goes
there? State your
identity.

I am Vibhishana,
an exile from Lanka. I
wish to meet the great
Lord Rama. I have valuable
information about Lanka's
defenses for him.



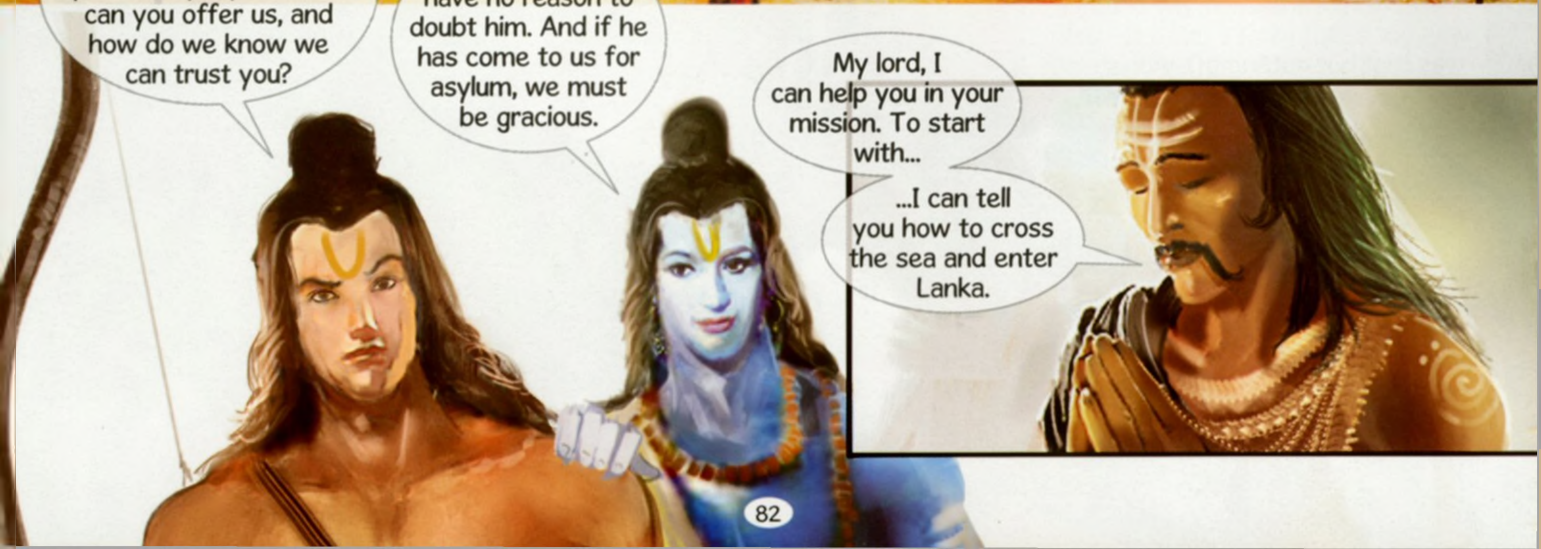
My lord, my
name is Vibhishana.
I am Ravana's brother.
I wish to join your
camp.

And why
should we shelter you,
who are a runaway from
your own people? What
can you offer us, and
how do we know we
can trust you?

Lakshman, we
have no reason to
doubt him. And if he
has come to us for
asylum, we must be
gracious.

My lord, I
can help you in your
mission. To start
with...

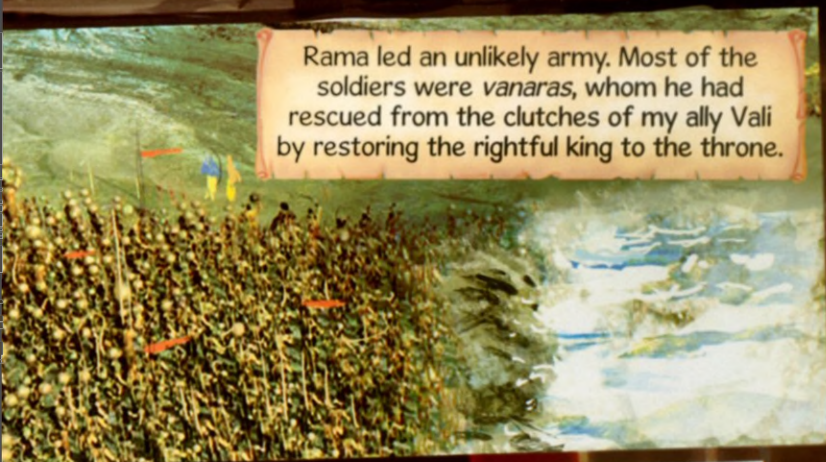
...I can tell
you how to cross
the sea and enter
Lanka.



Soon, with Vibhishana's help, Rama magically constructed a bridge across the sea to my island. To this day, a popular saying in households across India tells children to beware of treacherous relatives like Vibhishana.



Rama led an unlikely army. Most of the soldiers were *vanaras*, whom he had rescued from the clutches of my ally Vali by restoring the rightful king to the throne.



Bring me my armor.



Soon his army was at the gates of my impregnable city.



It was time. The final battle was about to commence.




The combat
was fierce.

Never in its history had Lanka
been invaded, and the land had
never seen such rivers of blood.

The vanaras, driven by undying
loyalty to Rama, and my demons,
driven by their insatiable blood
lust, fought each other fiercely.

Fully expecting my vicious soldiers to be
more than a match for the vanaras, I was
surprised to see the fierceness with which
those monkeys fought for their lord.



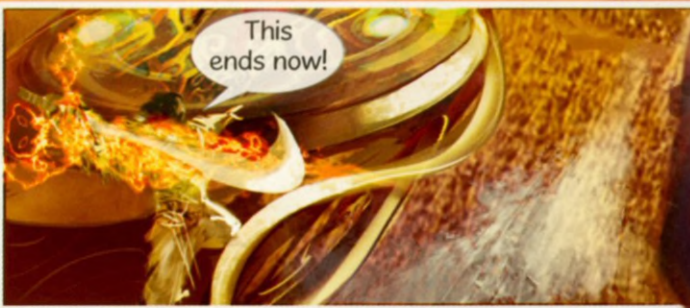
And the fiercest warrior of them all was Hanuman! He could fly, change his size, and possessed strength far beyond anything I had ever seen. I learned that he was the son of none other than Vayu, the god of wind.

But the deciding factor was the two exiled princes of Ayodhya. No matter how many soldiers I sent their way, the brothers dispatched them with ease, and never seemed to tire!

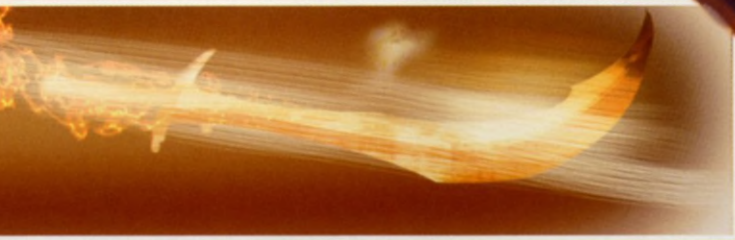
Mad with rage, I took out my deadliest weapons and prepared for a fresh assault.



Rama!



This ends now!



NO!



LAKSHMAN!

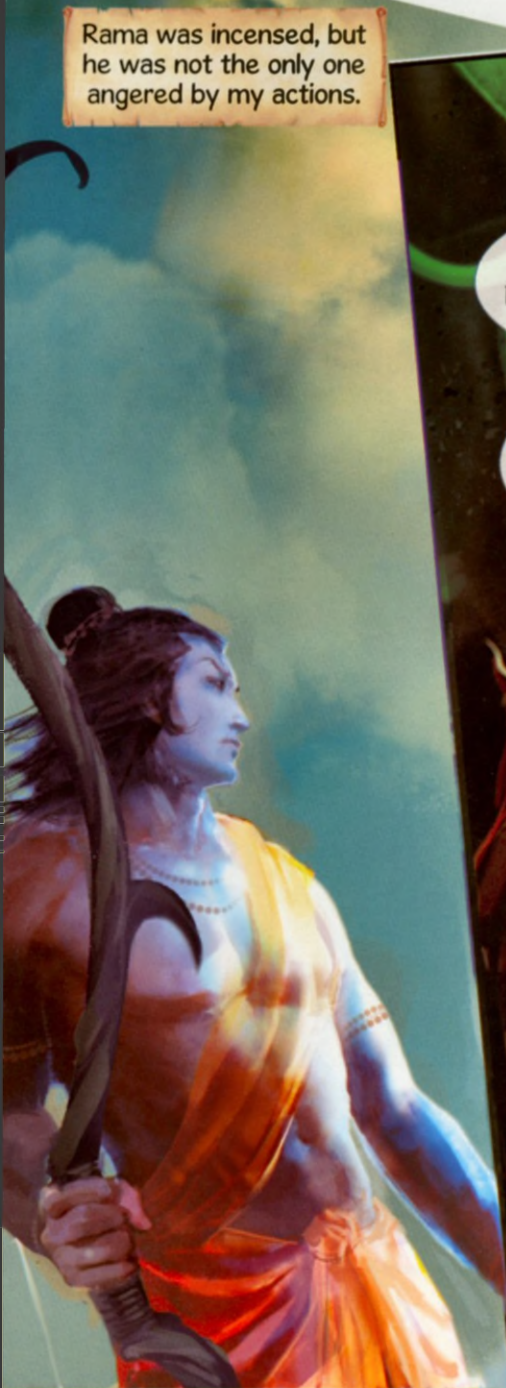
My blade did not get to Rama. Nevertheless, I thought I had dealt a major blow, for Rama would be crippled without his mighty warrior brother by his side.

To my disappointment, however, Lakshman soon recovered.



Do not despair, my lord. Lakshman is better now.

Rama was incensed, but he was not the only one angered by my actions.



You MUST stop this, sire! Rama's forces are invincible.

But sire, we are losing men by the day!

I've beaten gods before.

SILENCE!
Your incessant prattling helps nothing! Get out of my sight, all of you! Leave me alone to think this over!



They did as I asked.



I had never felt so alone.



Father?

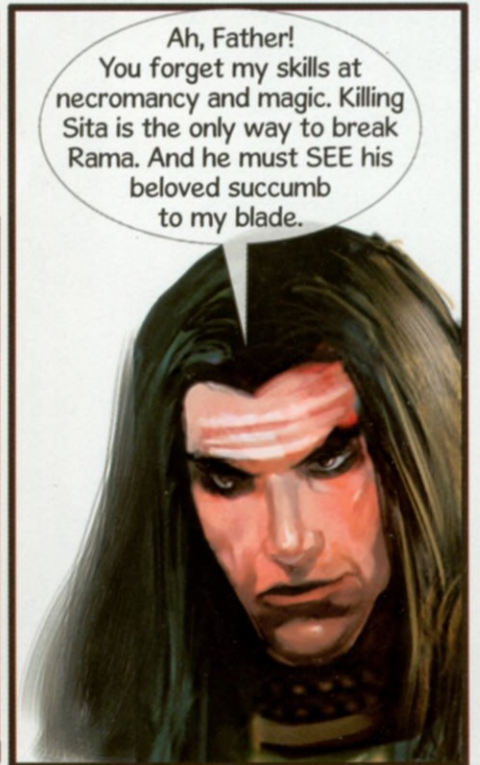
Father, why do you despair while I still live? Let anybody who wants to go Uncle Vibhishana's way leave. He is weak, and unworthy of being on our side. I have broken Indra before. I will break Rama now.



But how, Indrajit? Lakshman is still alive. We have little hope of defeating them!

Yes, but what if we kill the object of their quest? What if we kill SITA?

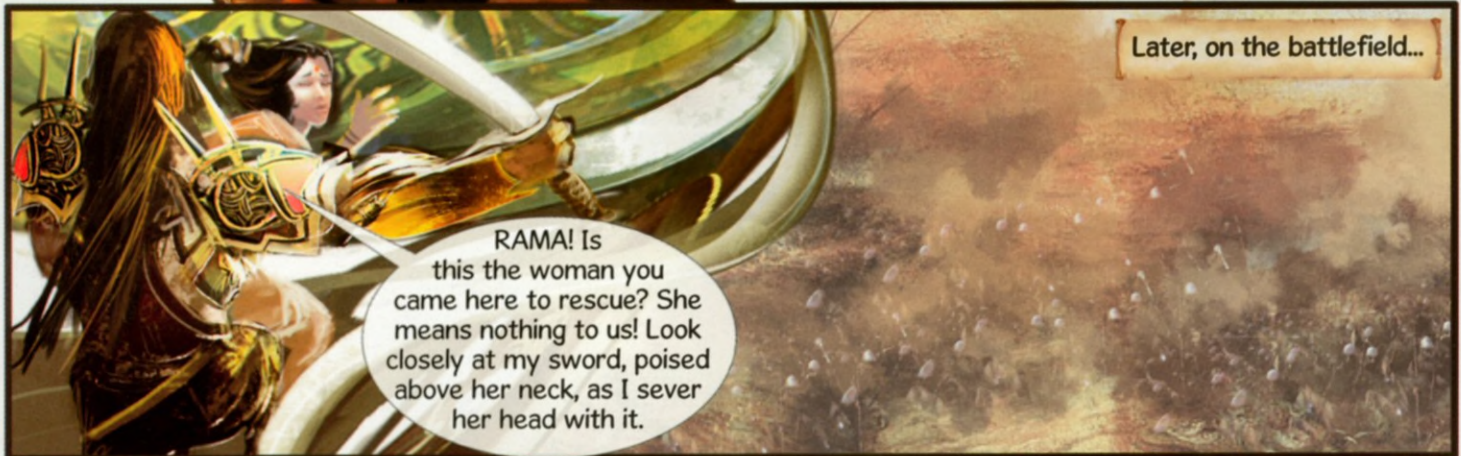
INDRAJIT! Do you know what you're saying? We cannot kill Sita!



Ah, Father! You forget my skills at necromancy and magic. Killing Sita is the only way to break Rama. And he must SEE his beloved succumb to my blade.



You truly are my son, Indrajit. Yes, killing Sita could be the only way.




Later, on the battlefield...

RAMA! Is this the woman you came here to rescue? She means nothing to us! Look closely at my sword, poised above her neck, as I sever her head with it.






SITAAAAAIIII




RETREAT!
All generals regroup
in the war council's
tent!




Run along
now!

When Rama's war
council convened, he
had almost given up.



My Lord,
why do we sit
idle? We must
strike again!

Yes, my
lord, we must make
the demon pay! But I
must admit, the morale
of the troops is
very low.



What is the
use of fighting now?
Who are we fighting for?
What use is the great victory
we are trying to win here?
Sita is dead! I have
failed!

Sita is not
dead. Ravana would
never kill her—of that I
am certain. His cold, brutal
rationality would not extend to
Sita. What we saw was an
illusion created by
Indrajit.

In fact, Indrajit
will now be at the
temple of our clan-goddess,
Nikhumbila, performing a *yagna*. He
will be unarmed. I will take your best
warriors there. If he finishes the *yagna*,
his power will grow so much that he
will be invincible, and our defeat
will be inevitable!

And so, the pious Vibhishana led Lakshman and a small army of *vanaras* and bears to the temple of Nikhumbila, the most holy of places, to slaughter his nephew while he prayed.



There! As I promised, Indrajit is immersed in prayer. Now is the time to strike!



INDRAJIT!
The time has come for retribution! I have come for your head!



Uncle Vibhishana! So you have left your great clan to become a servant of Rama?

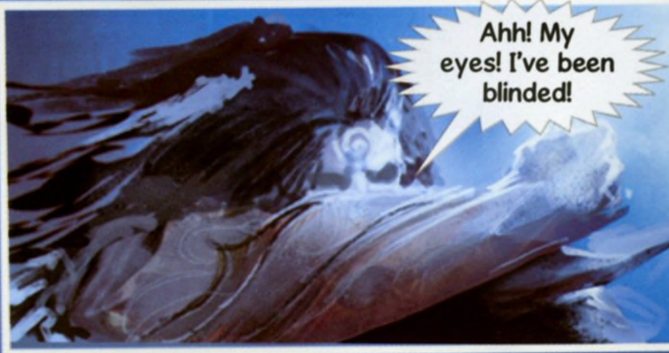
And now you've led this impudent fool to defile the temple of our goddess! Every child in Lanka will laugh at you, and the cowardly warrior Lakshman, who breaks the great code of his precious dharma and attacks an unarmed warrior!

But not for nothing am I known as the conqueror of Indra. I fear nothing!

Though unarmed, like a true warrior, Indrajit did not give up. He picked up whatever was at hand and flung it at Lakshman's band of warriors, holding them at bay.

Come on, then, cowards, and let me show you what a scion of this great clan can do even when he is unarmed!

But this fight was not to be between just Indrajit and Lakshman. Fearing the might of even an unarmed Indrajit, the gods themselves came to assist Lakshman. Indrajit was surrounded by fearsome, magical warriors!



Ahh! My eyes! I've been blinded!

By some divine magic, the reflection of light from Lakshman's sword blinded Indrajit, and my mighty son fell.




It's over, Indrajit.

SHUNCK!!




My son!




No, no, no!
How could this happen? Speak to me, Son. SPEAK TO ME!

I went mad with grief and despair. It was now time to call forth the strongest warrior in my army.



Sire, your sons are dead! We are losing soldiers to Rama by the minute! All is lost!



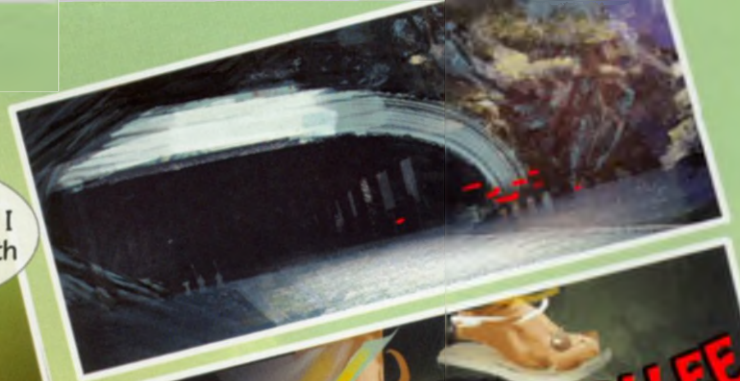
SILENCE! We are NOT defeated yet! I still have...

'...Kumbhakarna.'

Is he...
is he awake
yet?


I'm not
sure. Do you think
I should send
some more
elephants to
trample him?

Wait! I think
he's coming out!
I can feel the earth
tremble.




AAAAaaaaahhhh

Kumbhakarna had grown into a giant that slept for six months, woke up for one day to eat and drink copious amounts of food and alcohol, and went back to sleep for another six months.

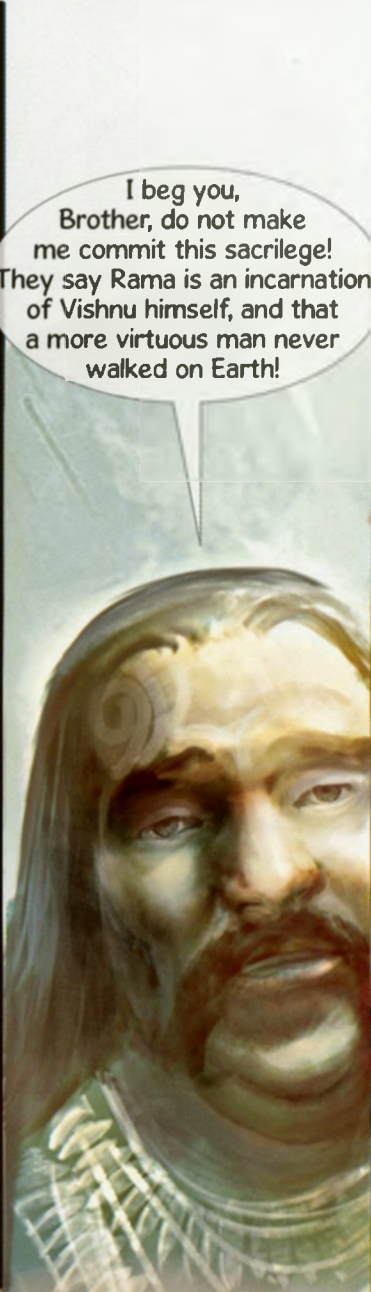


My little brother! It's such a pleasure to see you awake again!

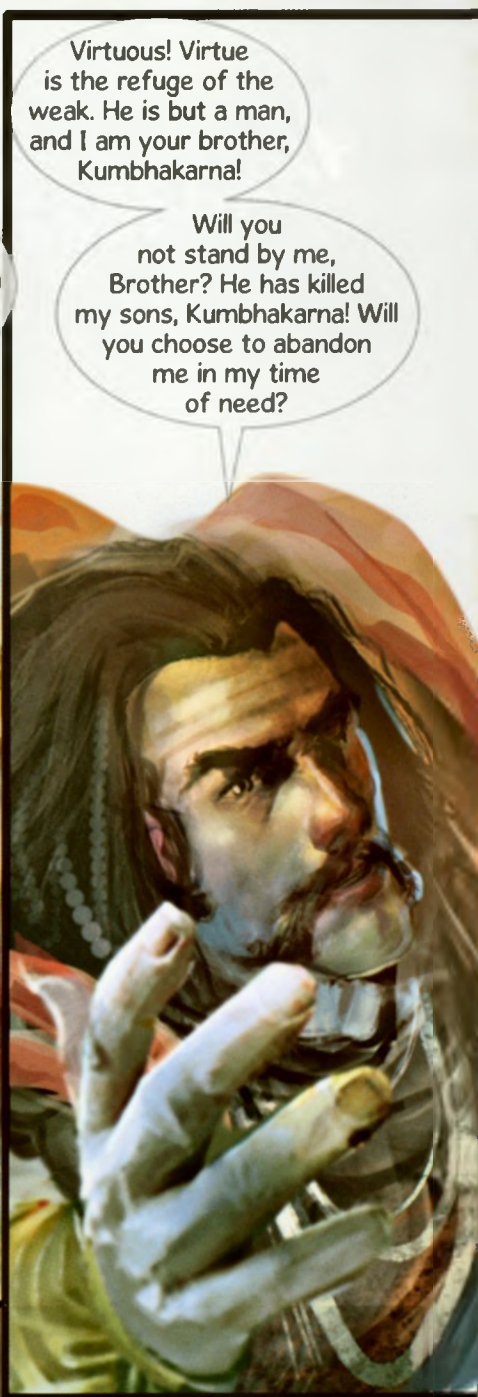


We have much to discuss, Brother. Lanka is at war.

I informed Kumbhakarna of all the events that had transpired since he had last been awake. I left nothing out.




I beg you, Brother, do not make me commit this sacrilege! They say Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu himself, and that a more virtuous man never walked on Earth!




Virtuous! Virtue is the refuge of the weak. He is but a man, and I am your brother, Kumbhakarna!

Will you not stand by me, Brother? He has killed my sons, Kumbhakarna! Will you choose to abandon me in my time of need?




Don't even think I would ever do that! We are brothers, Ravana, and I love you more than anything else in the world.

May the gods forgive me for this...




Come on!
Fight me!

Kumbhakarna was a giant,
even among demons, and
he fought valiantly.




Such was my brother's strength
that he even succeeded in
injuring the mighty Hanuman!



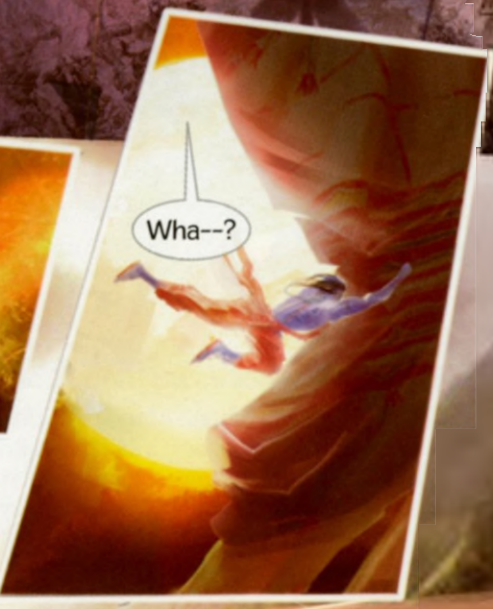
Lakshman! We
need to take him
down now!

So long as
he is on his feet, he
is invincible! Distract him
while I bring him down to
a height at which we
can fight him!



Come
here, you little
mosquito!

That's right!
Just keep looking
at me, you fat,
ugly demon...



Wha--?



My...
lord...

And so, after my sons, I lost my dearest brother.

CLICK!



SNAP!



SHRRINGG!

Alone, abandoned by all but my faithful wife, Mandodari, I stepped onto the battlefield for the last time.

The ferocity of the *vanaras* left me in no doubt that the gods, whom I thought I had humbled in heaven, had taken the *vanara* form to help Rama in his noble quest.

All the enemies I had made in my arrogant disregard for others had come together to destroy me.

And my disregard for humans, against whom I had not asked Brahma for any protection, proved to be my downfall.



When I saw Vibhishana standing next to Rama, I knew all was lost. Vibhishana knew that the secret of my immortality was stored in my navel, and that was my only weak point.

In his hands, Rama held the famed *brahma-astra*—the weapon before which all other weapons paled. If the *brahma-astra* hit me on my navel, nothing could protect me. And there was only one person who could have given it to Rama.

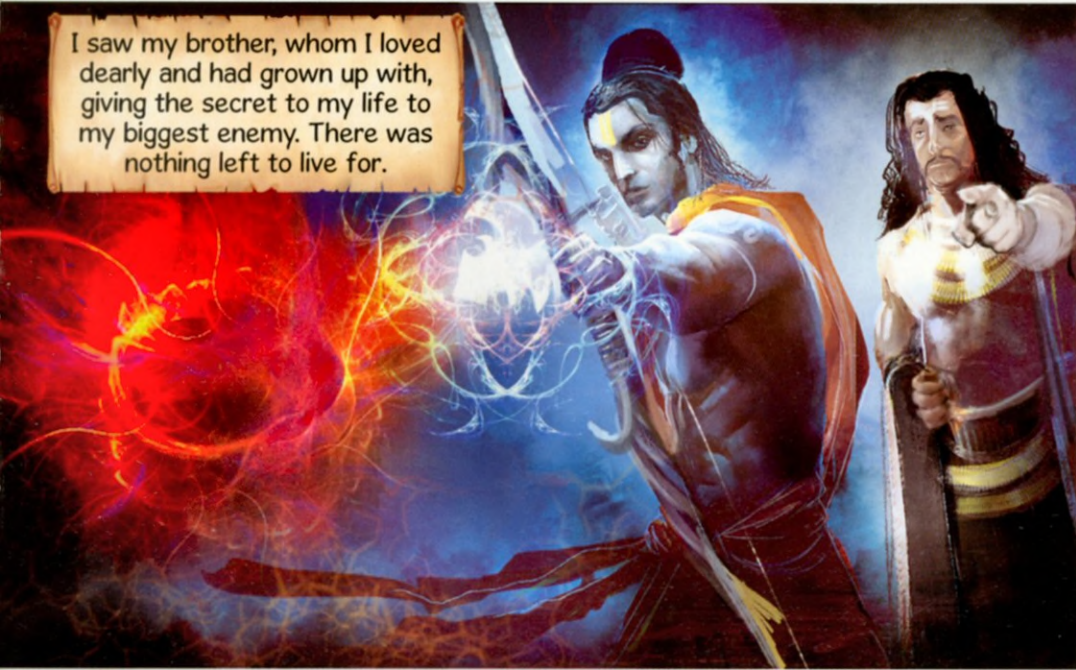


Indra. The god I had humiliated publicly. Now it looks like he had the last laugh.

And in my final moments, I saw my beloved capital, the home of my people, burning.



I saw my brother, whom I loved dearly and had grown up with, giving the secret to my life to my biggest enemy. There was nothing left to live for.

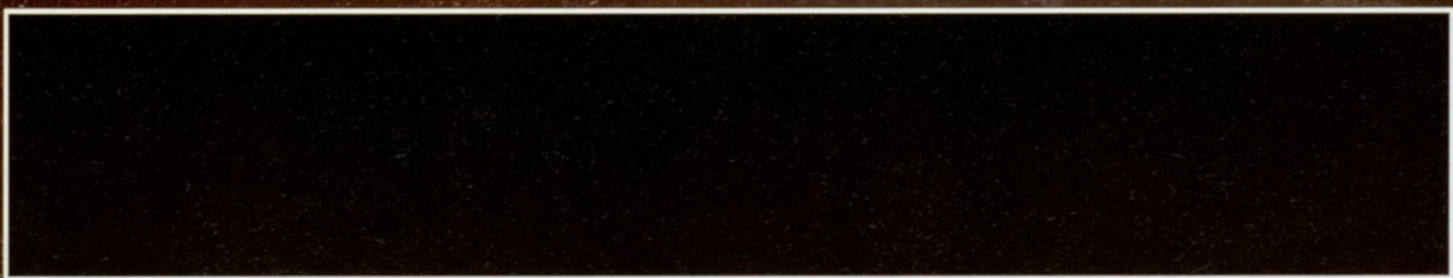
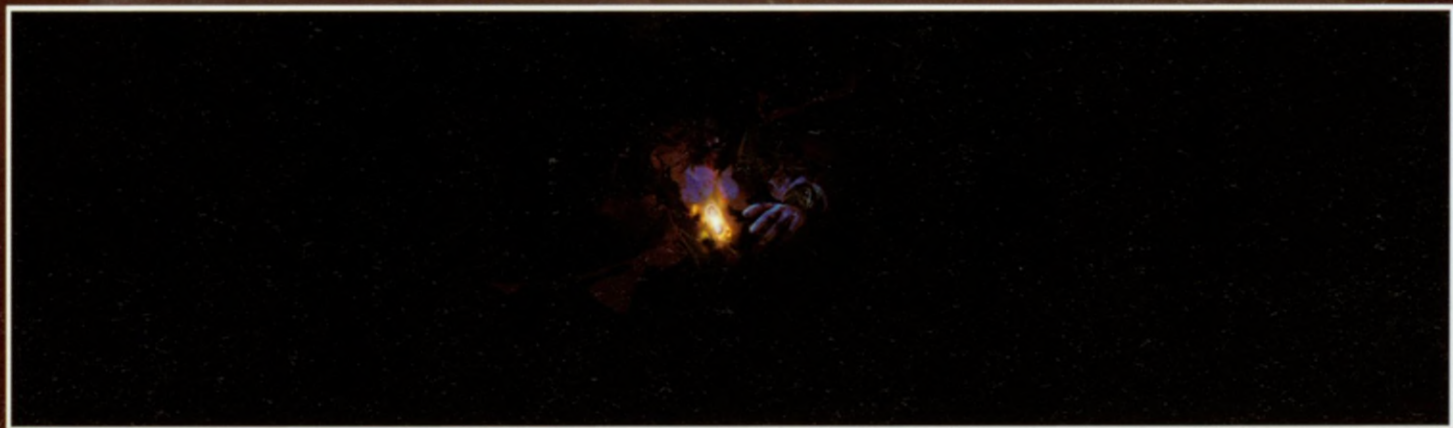
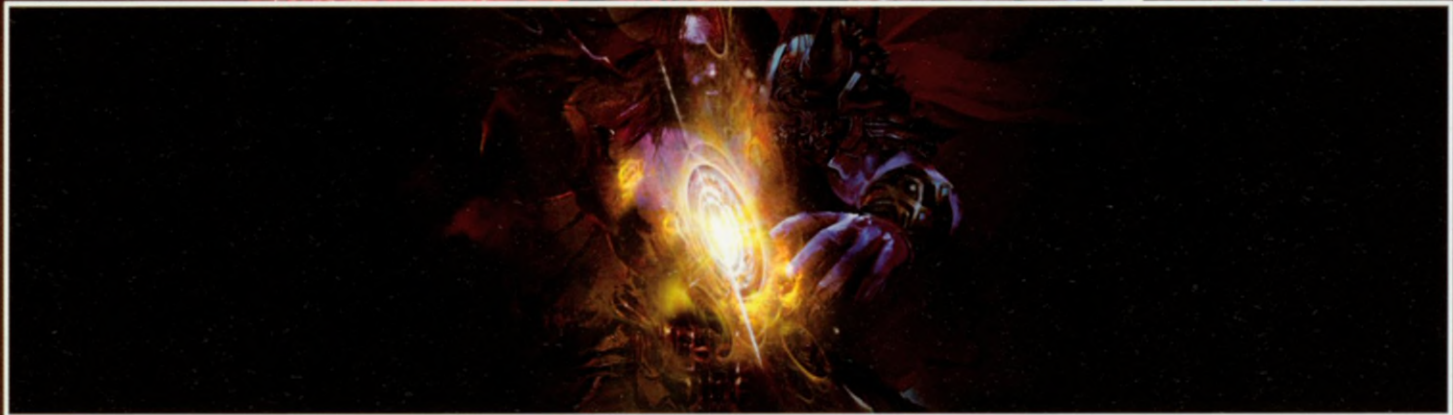


So I threw off my armor...

...and justified my name for one last time.



COME ON! FIGHT ME!!





Get up, don't die yet! You're too wise to die so soon! Give us your knowledge first, and we will surely make good use of it.

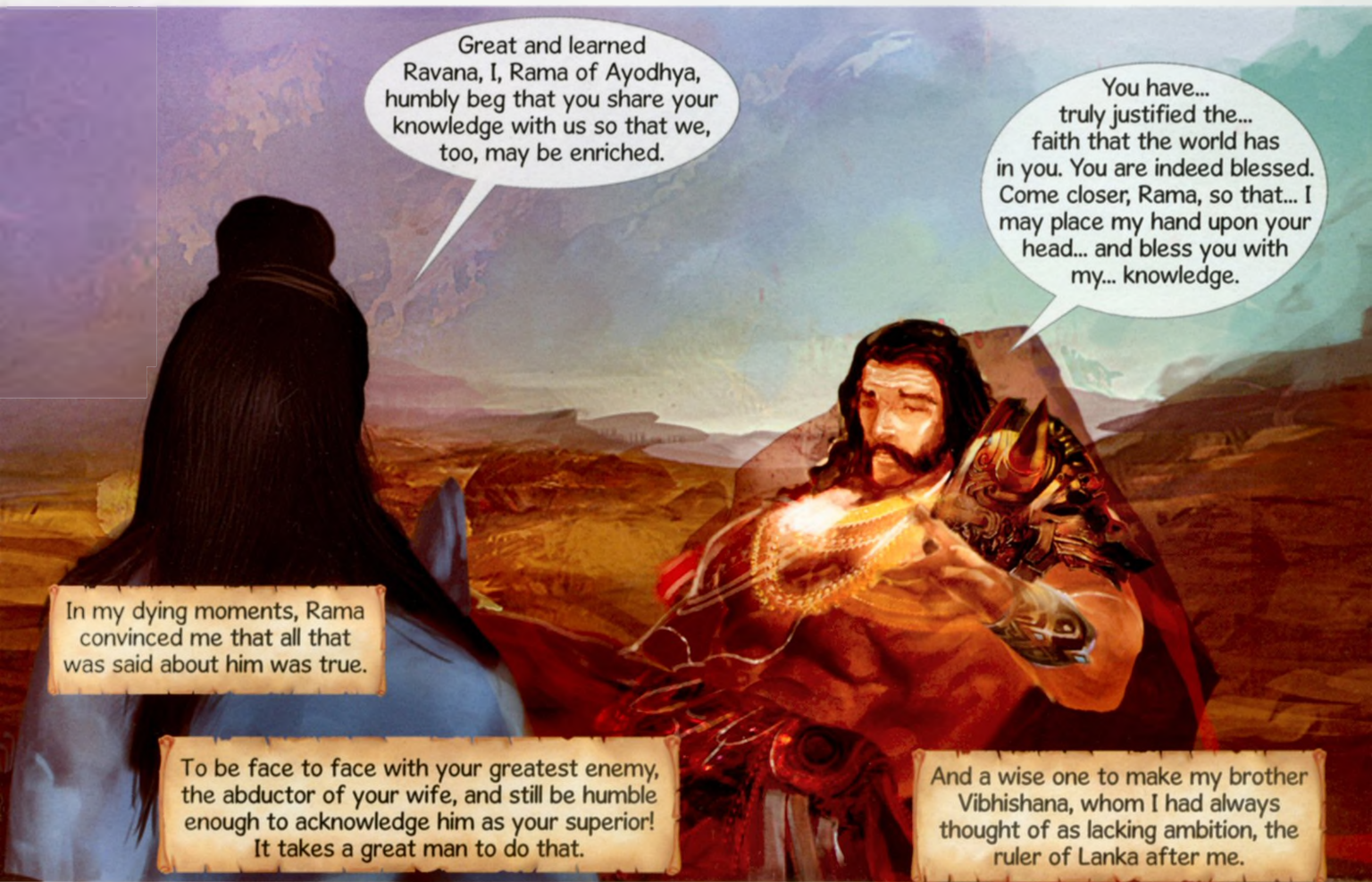
They jested.



They would not even let me die in peace.



Step aside, Lakshman. That is no way to talk to one as learned as Ravana!




Great and learned Ravana, I, Rama of Ayodhya, humbly beg that you share your knowledge with us so that we, too, may be enriched.

You have... truly justified the... faith that the world has in you. You are indeed blessed. Come closer, Rama, so that... I may place my hand upon your head... and bless you with my... knowledge.

In my dying moments, Rama convinced me that all that was said about him was true.

To be face to face with your greatest enemy, the abductor of your wife, and still be humble enough to acknowledge him as your superior! It takes a great man to do that.

And a wise one to make my brother Vibhishana, whom I had always thought of as lacking ambition, the ruler of Lanka after me.



So this is my story. The story of Ravana.
Master of the Vedas, Emperor of the
Three Worlds, Abductor of Princesses,
Defier of Gods, Warrior Supreme.

Let this be a lesson to all—pride
comes before a fall. He who
disregards the good in the world
must end his life in disgrace.

Looking back, I should have realized what I
was in for when I challenged Rama. It was not
for nothing that Rama's father's name was
Dashratha, which means He Who Fights in Ten
Directions. Rama's tryst with the ten-headed
Ravana had, maybe, a foregone conclusion.

I hope that generations after me
learn from my mistakes. I could
have been a truly great soul, had I
not gone down the wrong path.

My power was legendary, and despite being a
demon, I did everything a god could do. There
remains but one thing. Gods often come down to
Earth in avatars. Perhaps one day, when the world
is weak, I will have my chance for redemption...

GLOSSARY

Apsara: A dancer in the court of Indra, the king of the gods. Apsaras were known for their beauty and grace

Ashoka: *Saraca asoca*, a tree recurring in the cultural traditions of the Indian subcontinent. The name literally means 'without sorrow'

Asura: A demonic, power-seeking being opposed to the devas, or gods

Bhabhi: Elder brother's wife

Bhaiya: Elder brother

Brahma-astra: A weapon of Brahma that caused total destruction

Daitya: A race of rakshasas

Danava: A race of rakshasas

Dharma: A code of laws informing a person's obligations and duties

Kshatriya: A caste, the members of which excel in martial pursuits. The ruling class and most of the soldiers were kshatriyas

Lakegala: A mountain in Sri Lanka. Ravana used it as a launching pad for his flying machine, the Pushpak Vimana

Narada: A divine sage who could travel to different worlds or planets

Narayana: Another name of Vishnu, one of the gods in the Hindu Trinity

Paatal: The underworld

Panchkanya: Five women from across Hindu mythology believed to be perfect role models for women to aspire to in terms of virtue

Pishacha: A race of rakshasas

Rakshasa: A demon

Saptarishi: Seven sages who were believed to be tasked with helping humanity come closer to God

Swayamvara: A custom in ancient India, whereby a princess would select a suitor from among many kings and princes assembled. Usually some sort of test would qualify the suitor for the princess's hand

Upanishads: A set of ancient Indian texts believed to contain valuable information on diverse subjects, from medicine to astrology

Vanaras: A race of monkey-like humanoids who were renowned for their agility and strength

Veena: A stringed musical instrument from India, consisting of a long, hollow, fretted stick to which one, two, or three gourds are attached to increase the resonance

Vishnu: One of the gods of the Hindu Trinity, and the preserver of the universe

Yagna: An ancient ritual that involved a fire sacrifice to appease the gods

DEPICTION OF RAVANA

IN OTHER VERSIONS OF

THE RAMAYANA

Many cultures in Southeast Asia have been influenced by Hinduism—a result of trade with South India from around the first century A.D. Many Southeast Asian countries have their own version of the *Ramayana*. In the *Ramakien* (Thailand's version of the *Ramayana*), Ravana is not as evil as the one portrayed in the Indian *Ramayana*. He is known as Tosakanth, and some of the verses are actually sympathetic toward him. Similarly, the character of Rama in the *Ramakien* does not have the kind of divinity that is associated with Rama in the Indian *Ramayana*.

RAVANA WORSHIP



During the festival of Dushehra, when most parts of India celebrate Lord Rama's life and his victory over evil by burning effigies of Ravana, a small temple in Kanpur worships Ravana instead! Ravana is the main deity in this temple, and it is claimed that hundreds of years ago, Maharaja Shiv Shankar built the temple in his honor. The devotees of this temple believe in highlighting Ravana's positive side. The temple is opened only once a year during Dushehra.

Many of Ravana's heroic exploits are chronicled in important Shiva temples, including the famous Ellora caves. The sculpture at the Ellora caves shows Ravana trying to lift Mount Kailash, the abode of Lord Shiva, with his bare hands. In Shiva temples as far apart as Deogarh in Madhya Pradesh and Tirukoneswar in Tamil Nadu, there are images of Ravana worshipping Shiva in the main shrine.



A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT CREATED BY RAVANA?

Yes! The Ravanhatha or Ravana Hasta Veena is said to have been invented by Ravana. The Ravanhatha is claimed to be the first musical instrument with strings to be played with a bow.



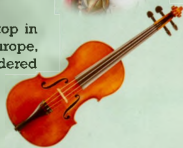
WHAT IS RAVANHATHA MADE OF?

The lower part, which looks like a bowl, is made of coconut shell, the mouth of which is covered with goat hide. A stick made of bamboo is attached to this shell. There are two main strings—one is made of steel and the other is made of horsehair. The long bow has numerous bells attached to it to provide musical accompaniment.

LEGEND AND HISTORY

Legend has it that after the battle between Rama and Ravana ended, Hanuman picked up a Ravanhatha from Lanka and brought it to North India, where it became a popular musical instrument in the royal courts. In places like Rajasthan and Gujarat, the Ravanhatha was the first instrument that young princes learned to play. The Ravanhatha continues to be a common fiddle played in Rajasthan and Gujarat.

However, the journey of the Ravanhatha did not stop in India. It traveled to Europe and the Middle East. In Europe, it came to be known as the Ravanastrom, and is considered to be the forerunner of the present day violin.



DID YOU KNOW ?

Mandor, a town near Jodhpur in Rajasthan, India, is claimed to be the place where Ravana married Mandodari. An ancient altar, named Ravan ki Chanwari by the locals, is said to be the exact place where the marriage took place.

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