

the epic character of mahabharat



arjuna



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# Arjuna



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ISBN 81-87897-16-3

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## ARJUNA BORN IN THE FOREST

King Pandu returned from conquering the world and told his two wives, Kunti and Madri, that his fighting days were over. He asked them to pack a few things and get ready to go and live in the mountains.

They lived in a cottage near a waterfall, and his wives learned to cook simple foods on cow dung fires. Their neighbours helped them settle into their new way of life. Generally dealings with the local people were pleasant and friendly, but one day King Pandu made a terrible mistake

while he was hunting in the forest, and he incurred the anger of a local sage. He did not know that the deer was a sage in disguise and he shot him. Just before the sage died he cursed Pandu to never have children.

“You will die if you ever embraced either of your wives,” the sage said.

King Pandu was bitterly disappointed because he had been planning to have lots of children. However when his senior wife, Kunti, told him that she knew secret *mantras* to call demigods who would give her children. Pandu was pleased and asked her to call Dharmaraj, the demigod of religion. As a result Yudhistir was born.

Next Pandu asked her to call Vayu and Bheem was born. Then Pandu asked her to call Indra and the handsome archer Arjuna was born. Queen Kunti was pleased with her three sons and did not want any more.

“Don’t ask me to call any more demigods,” she said to her husband. “We have three wonderful sons and three is enough.”

Kunti’s sons were inseparable. They played together on the mountains near their home, and they were tutored by sages in nearby *ashrams*.

## ARJUNA’S FATHER DIES

Sadly, Pandu’s life came to an abrupt end. Admiring the beautiful countryside, he was walking with Madri. In his happiness, he forgot the sage’s curse and he hugged Madri.



She begged him not to hold her, but it was too late. He died in her arms.

The children thought that their father was an invincible warrior, and at the shocking news of his death, they lay on the ground and cried for days. Kunti could hardly hold back her own tears, but she tried her best to comfort them. Madri lost all desire to live. She waited until her twin boys, Nakula and Sahadev, were born, and then she entered King Pandu's funeral pyre and followed him to the heavenly planets.

Kunti took the five boys back to the palace at Hastinapur and put them in the martial arts school with their cousins, the Kauravas. Together the boys learned to use many kinds of weapons.

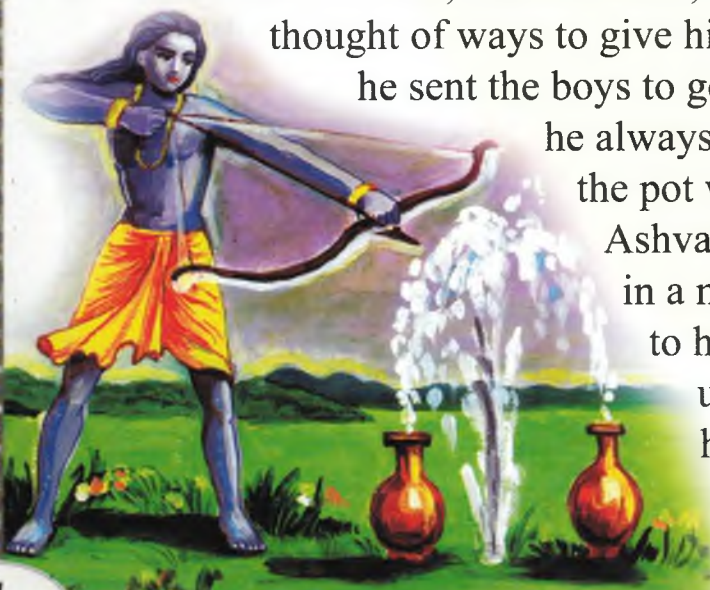
## ARJUNA OUTWITS HIS TEACHER'S SON

Drona was the main teacher at the school and naturally he wanted his own son, Ashvatthama, to be the best. He

thought of ways to give him extra lessons. When he sent the boys to get water from the river,

he always gave Ashvatthama the pot with the widest neck.

Ashvatthama filled his pot in a moment and ran back to his father. Arjuna soon understood what was happening and made a plan to get water

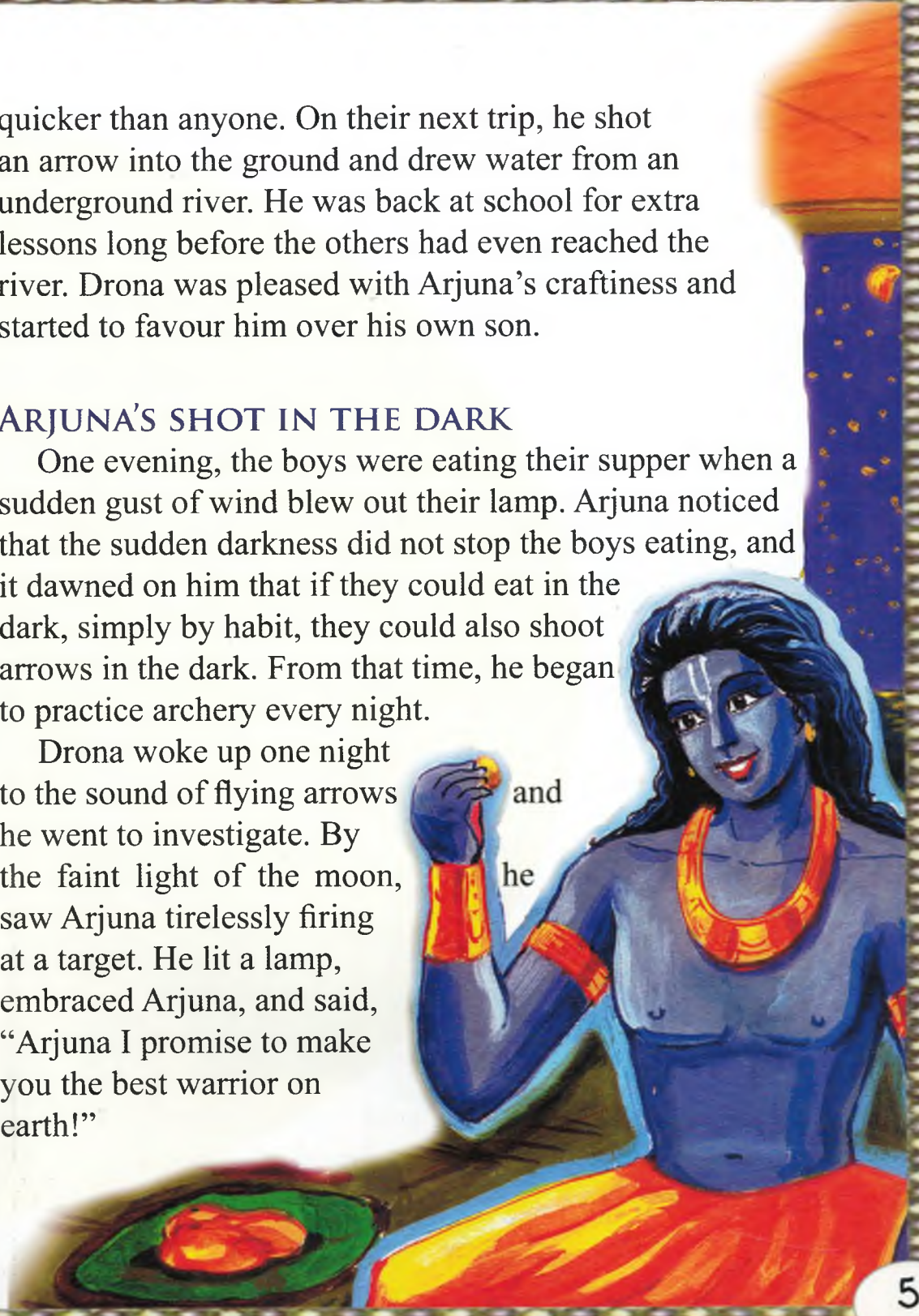


quicker than anyone. On their next trip, he shot an arrow into the ground and drew water from an underground river. He was back at school for extra lessons long before the others had even reached the river. Drona was pleased with Arjuna's craftiness and started to favour him over his own son.

### ARJUNA'S SHOT IN THE DARK

One evening, the boys were eating their supper when a sudden gust of wind blew out their lamp. Arjuna noticed that the sudden darkness did not stop the boys eating, and it dawned on him that if they could eat in the dark, simply by habit, they could also shoot arrows in the dark. From that time, he began to practice archery every night.

Drona woke up one night to the sound of flying arrows and he went to investigate. By the faint light of the moon, he saw Arjuna tirelessly firing at a target. He lit a lamp, embraced Arjuna, and said, "Arjuna I promise to make you the best warrior on earth!"





## ARJUNA'S SUPREMACY THREATENED

Arjuna became the greatest archer, and he met his rival just when he thought that no one could match him.

He was walking in the forest and heard a dog barking furiously. He ran to find it. As he drew near, the barking suddenly stopped and Arjuna was flabbergasted when he saw that the dog's mouth had been sealed with arrows. A dark-skinned boy, carrying a bow, came from behind a tree and said that his name was Ekalavya. He explained that he had become a good archer by worshipping Drona.

"Your teacher refused to be my guru," he said, "so I made a clay statue of him. By worshipping him daily, I've become as skilled as you."

Arjuna was horrified and he wondered how this dirty tribal boy dared to make the great Drona his guru?

Arjuna ran home and told his teacher, and they set off at once for the forest. Ekalavya was waiting for them and he fell at Drona's feet.

"So! You are my disciple!" said Drona, "Then give me guru *dakshina*."

"My lord I will give you anything you ask," said Ekalavya.

"I ask only for your right thumb," said Drona.

Ekalavya took out his knife, cut off his thumb, and gave it to Drona.

"Here is your *dakshina*," he said. Arjuna gasped, knowing what Ekalavya had given up, knowing that no one can practice archery with out their right thumb. Drona accepted

Ekalavya's thumb, and before leaving he held up his hand to bless him.

As they went home Drona praised Ekalavya. "He disobeyed me and worshiped me without permission," he said, "but he gave me his thumb without a thought!"

Arjuna was gloating privately, glad that Ekalavya was no longer a threat. Drona understood Arjuna's thoughts and said, "There will be many difficulties in your life Arjuna. Just wait and see what the future brings."

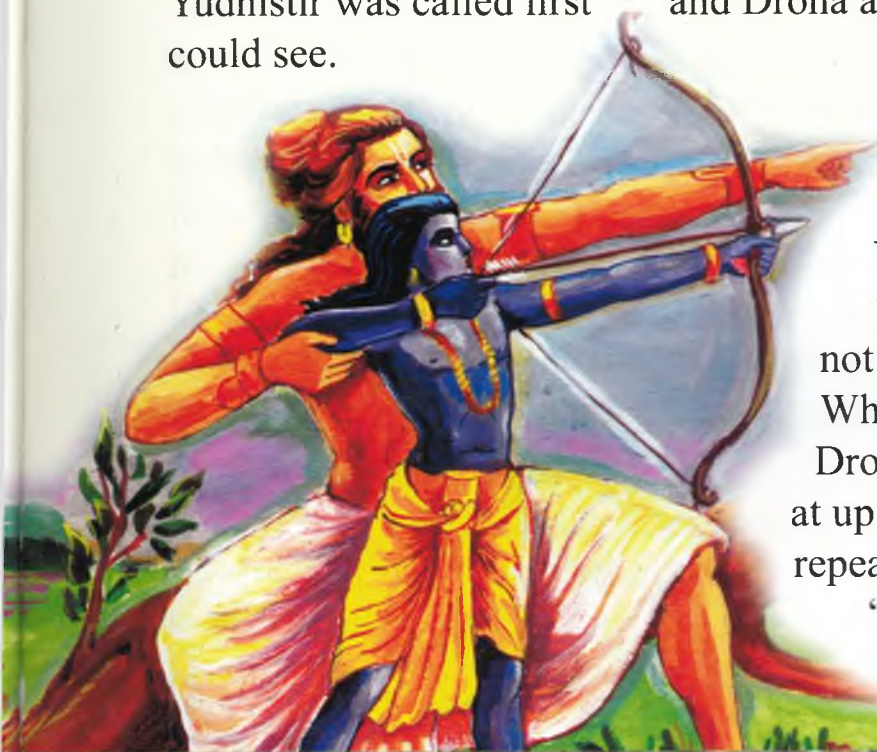
### ARJUNA FOCUSES ON THE TARGET

One day Drona put a fake bird in a tree to test his pupils' skill. The boys stood in a group near him and, one by one, he called them to come forward and aim at the eye of the bird. Yudhistir was called first and Drona asked him what he could see.

"I see you, my brothers, the tree, and the bird," Yudhistir said.

"No, no! That will not do. Look again. What do you see?" said Drona. Yudhistir looked at up at the tree and repeated his answer.

"Do not fire. You





will not be able to hit the target,” said Drona, “Step down!”

Duryodhan was called next, he gave the same answer. He too was told to step down. However when Arjuna was called he said, “I see only the bird’s head. I cannot see its body or anything else.”

“Shoot,” said Drona, and Arjuna hit the eye, dead centre, knocking the wooden bird to the ground.

“Well done!” said Drona, and he hugged his best pupil with obvious delight.

### ARJUNA AND THE CROCODILE

One day Drona and his students were bathing in the River Ganges when a crocodile bit Drona’s leg. It locked him in its jaws and would not let go. Drona screamed for help. Actually he could have killed the crocodile easily. He was just testing the boys. When he cried out most of the boys were too shocked to move. Arjuna fired arrows into the water and hit the crocodile hard so that its mouth opened, and Drona was released.

Drona was so pleased with Arjuna that he took him aside and gave him his *brahmastra* weapon, along with a serious warning: “Use this weapon only against supernatural enemies. If you use it against ordinary men, it will destroy the world!”

## THE MARTIAL EXHIBITION

When Drona was satisfied that he had taught the boys all he knew, he arranged a contest so that they could display their talents to the citizens. He built a huge arena and people came from all over the kingdom.

The boys entered the arena on horseback, and performed a group display in which they fired millions of arrows that never missed their targets. Then several duels were fought. Bhima and Duryodhan smashed each other with maces so angrily that they had to be torn apart to prevent them killing each other. Finally Arjuna rode onto the stage for his solo act. Without thinking about Ashvatthama's feelings, Drona turned to the crowds and shouted; "Arjuna is dearer to me than my own son!"

Arjuna responded heartily. With his heavenly weapons he produced fire and water. He caused a violent wind to blow and made a hill appear. Then he used another weapon to make them disappear. Next he showed his skill with his sword and his mace. Then by his mystic powers he became as tall as a tree and as small as a thumb.

The crowd had decided that he was the best in the world. Then as his display ended, an unknown youth in villager's clothes walked onto the stage. With his head held high he said, "I am Karna. I challenge Arjuna to fight."

Arjuna wondered at the arrogance of this poor man. How dare he challenge him? Arjuna never refused a fight and he drew his sword at once.





Duryodhan was delighted. He could see that Karna was as strong as an elephant and he had high hopes that he could defeat Arjuna. He embraced Karna, hugging him again and again and slyly watching Arjuna's face redden with anger. Arjuna pushed them apart and



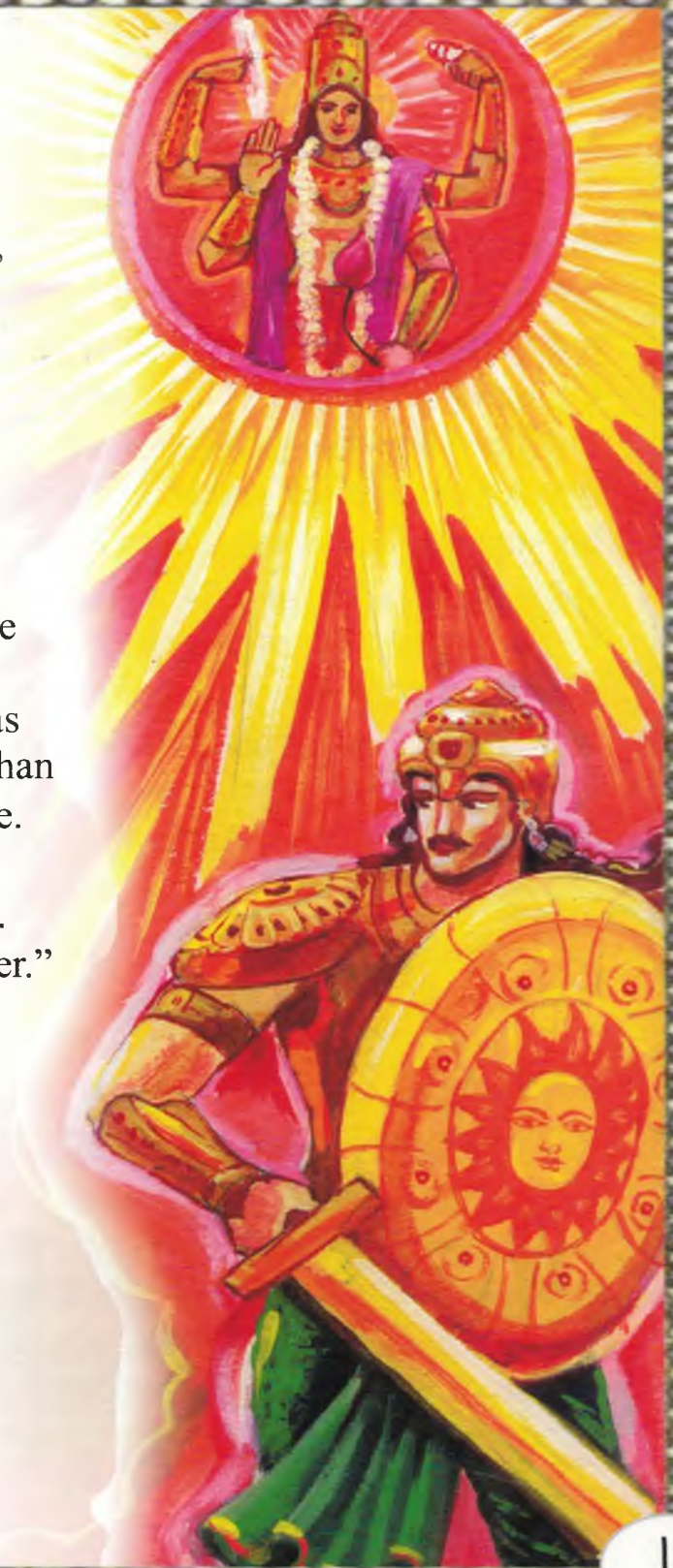
told Karna to select his weapons.

They faced each other, poised ready to strike, but Kripa jumped between them.

“Fights can only take place between equals,” he said. “If Karna wants to fight Arjuna he must first prove his royal blood.” Karna blushed; obviously he was not a prince. But Duryodhan sprang to Karna’s defence.

“Nobility doesn’t depend on birth,” he said. “It depends upon character.” Duryodhan was thinking fast.

“Bring me a crown! Karna shall be a king!” he said, smiling at his own cleverness. A crown was supplied and Karna was made King of Anga. Arjuna was livid. He paced back





and forth, waiting to fight the newly-made king.

The crowd cheered. This display was more entertaining than anything they had expected. Then appearing from nowhere, heavy clouds covered the sky, momentarily making the arena as black as night. Just as quickly the sun burst through the clouds and blinded the people with its brilliance.

Queen Kunti alone knew the reason for the storm. Indra was Arjuna's father and he had supplied the clouds to show his support for his son. Surya had brought the sunshine to show his support for his son, Karna.

The storm had barely settled when a poor man jumped out of the audience and ran into the arena. He rushed to Karna with outstretched arms, and Karna knelt down and placed his head at the man's feet.

"This is my father Adhiratha," he said.

"Adhiratha is the name of a charioteer," scoffed Bhima. "Do you expect my brother to fight with the son of a chariot driver?" Duryodhan defended Karna again.

"Look at his strength and his beauty! Note the auspicious marks on his body!" Duryodhan glared at The Pandavas, threatening to kill anyone who did not accept Karna as a king.

The crowd supported Duryodhan, and it seemed that the youths would fight, but just then the sun went down, marking the end of the day's fighting.

Queen Kunti sat in the audience, almost fainting with shock. Karna was her first son, a son born in secret and

abandoned at birth. She recalled placing him in a box, and watching him float down the river, leaving his future to fate. Kunti's heart ached for Karna, but something stopped her from running to him and telling him that she loved him.

The citizens returned home. Some of them glorified Arjuna, some praised Duryodhan, and others talked enthusiastically about Karna, their new hero.

### ARJUNA CAPTURES KING DRUPADA

When the boys graduated from school they asked Drona what to give him as *dakshina*. He had awaited this question for a long time, and the answer came to him very easily.

"I want King Drupada. Bring him to me unharmed, but bring him as a prisoner," he said. The princes gladly accepted the challenge and rode at once to Panchal to attack Drupada's capital. The Pandavas watched from the city boundary as the Kauravas rushed into attack. Arjuna knew that the Kauravas would not be able to capture Drupada, and as he watched their attempt he made a plan to defeat Drupada.

King Drupada surrounded the Kauravas with thousands of soldiers, quickly overpowering them, and forcing them to abandon the fight and flee. Arjuna laughed at their failure and he set off in his chariot with Nakula and Sahadev at his side. Bhima rode in front, swinging his club proudly in the air. Yudhistir stayed back with Drona to watch.

The city gates were blocked with a row of massive elephants. Bhima dived at them, jumped on their backs,



and smashed their heads with his club. The Pandavas rode through the elephants' dead bodies and attacked the Panchal army. Arjuna singled out King Drupada. He defeated the king so easily he made it look like a scene from a drama. He tore off Drupada's armour and grabbed him tight. Then holding his sword at Drupada's throat, he dragged him across the battlefield and presented him to Drona. Drona had him bound with ropes and thrown onto the chariot. Drona was delighted. Years before, Drupada had insulted him, and his desire for revenge had grown, day by day. He was satisfied at last and to show his gratitude to Arjuna, he rode back to Hastinapur on Arjuna's chariot.



## ARJUNA MEETS ANGARAPARNA

Duryodhan had pushed the Pandavas out of Hastinapur and had tried to burn them to death in a house fire. The Pandavas had escaped and gone into hiding. They were staying in a village when they heard of a competition to win Draupadi's hand in marriage; the Pandavas set out to walk to Panchal. To arrive on time, they had to walk all day and all night. After several days of walking, they came to the River Ganges, and were looking for a place to cross when someone called out to them, warning them not to enter the water.

A demigod appeared, announcing that he was Angaraparna. He told them that he bathed in the evenings and said that no one was allowed to go into the water while he was bathing. Arjuna laughed, saying that he would bathe whenever he liked. He told the demigod to step aside. Angaraparna raised his bow and fired at the Pandavas, but Arjuna used his burning torch to send the demigod's arrows to the ground. He then touched his torch to Angaraparna's golden chariot and set it alight. Seeing his precious chariot burning, Angaraparna fainted and his wife jumped from the chariot and begged Arjuna to spare him.

Angaraparna returned to consciousness, glad to be alive. He thanked Arjuna for sparing him and offered to give two boons in exchange for Arjuna's *mantras*. He offered Arjuna four powerful white horses and the mystic power to see everywhere in the universe.

Arjuna gave Angaraparna the *mantras*, but refused to take



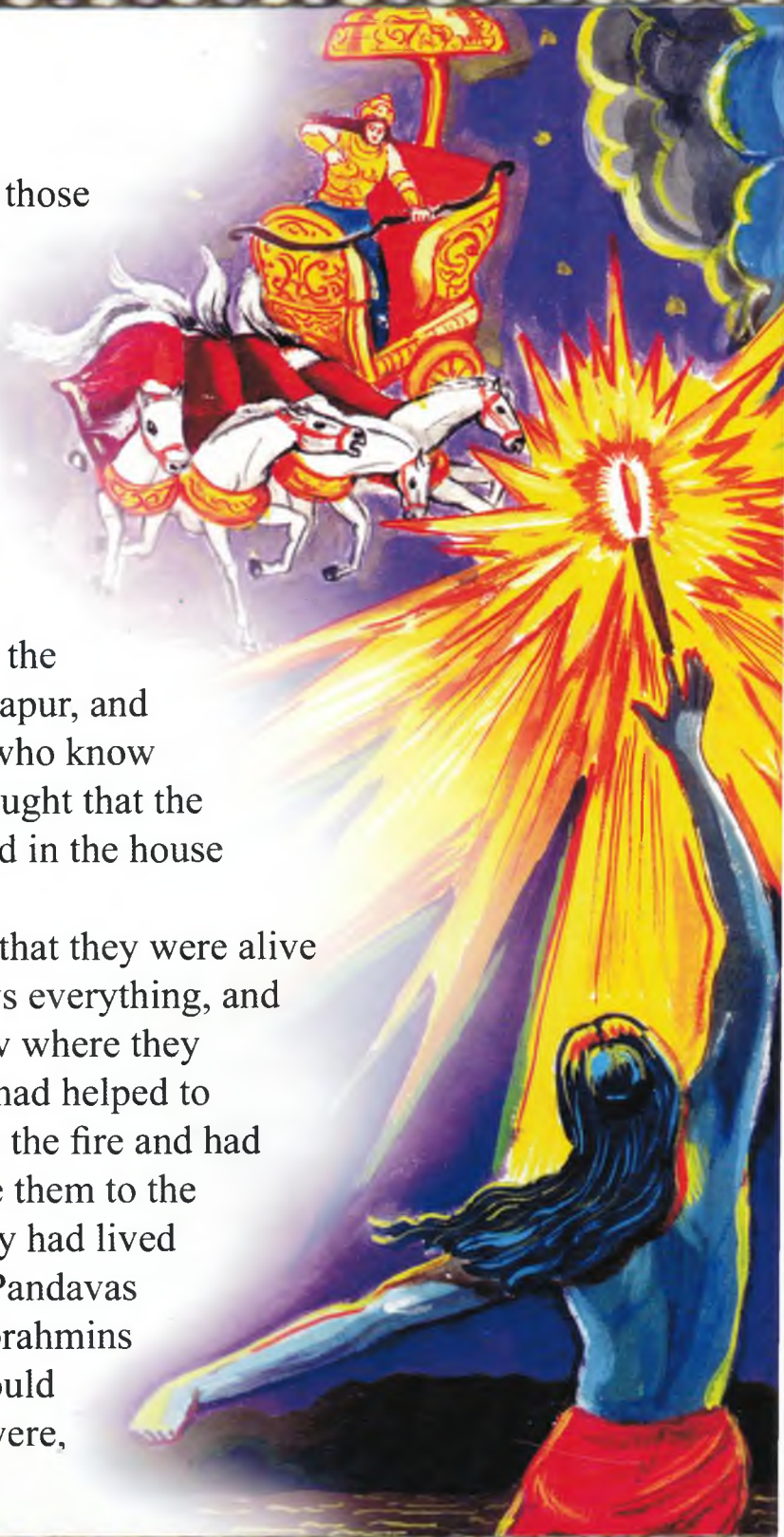
the boons.

“If I ever need those things, I will call you,” Arjuna said, but I will not take them now.”

## ARJUNA WINS DRAUPADI

The Kauravas, the citizens of Hastinapur, and nearly everyone who know the Pandavas, thought that the Pandavas had died in the house fire.

Krishna knew that they were alive because He knows everything, and Vidura even knew where they were because he had helped to rescue them from the fire and had sent men to guide them to the village where they had lived in disguise. The Pandavas were dressed as brahmins so that no one would guess who they were,





and their first appearance in public was at Draupadi's arena. Although they were strange-looking brahmins, with their massive shoulders and muscular bodies, no one in the arena, except Krishna, recognised them.

A fake fish hung rotating from the ceiling, and the contestants had to shoot it in the eye while looking at its reflection in a pool of water. It was a difficult task and none of the warriors were able to do it. Most of them could not even lift the enormous bow they had to use. When they had all failed, the "brahmins" stepped forward to take their turn. With apparent ease, Arjuna lifted the bow and without looking up from the pool of water, he shot the fish in the eye.

Looking shy but very happy, Draupadi came into the arena, and to the sound of loud cheering, she garlanded her future husband.

Ashamed that they had been defeated by warriors, the brahmins and they joined forces to attack them. However, even as a group they were no match for Arjuna and Bhima. The warriors were easily defeated, and the Pandavas returned to the cottage to show Queen Kunti Arjuna's prize.

Arjuna called out to his mother, asking her to see the alms they had







brought. Without looking, Kunti shouted, “Share it among you.” When she realized that they were referring to Draupadi, she was devastated. She had not spoken a lie in her life. Now she had said something which it seemed could not come true. But Kunti’s words did come true, because, following the advice of a great sage, all the Pandavas married Draupadi. When the Kauravas realized that the Pandavas were still alive, they called them back to the palace and eventually gave them some land, where they built a palace of their own. They lived there together happily for several years.



## ARJUNA BREAKS A RULE AND GOES AWAY

Draupadi lived happily with her five husbands until the day when Arjuna left. One evening a farmer rushed to the palace and asked Arjuna for help.

“Someone is stealing my cows!” he yelled. “Please come and help me.” Arjuna dashed into the room where Yudhishir and Draupadi were sitting and grabbed the weapons kept there. Then, having rescued the farmer’s cows, he returned to the palace to apologize to Yudhistir and Draupadi and to say “goodbye”.

The Pandavas had agreed that when one of them was alone in a room with Draupadi the others must not enter. If they did, they had to leave the palace for a year. Yudhishthir and Draupadi did not take the interruption seriously and they begged Arjuna to stay, but Arjuna insisted on leaving. He





set off to the Himalayas accompanied by brahmins chanting hymns, and servants carrying riches for Arjuna to distribute in charity. Draupadi was very upset.

“In this huge palace there are many rooms where weapons are kept. Arjuna could have taken weapons from the hall downstairs. He came in here to spite me,” Draupadi said bitterly. “Arjuna has had to wait for his turn to be with me, and just when the time has nearly come for us to be together he is going away. He did this to make me wait for him. How can we get through the year without him?”

### ARJUNA'S PILGRIMAGE

Arjuna walked around India slowly, enjoying the time to think about his dear friend Krishna. He walked north to the Himalayas and he stopped each day to bathe in holy rivers. One evening he was bathing in the River Ganges when a mysterious force dragged him down into the water. He was pulled along the riverbed into a beautiful underwater palace.

A young girl was waiting for him. She told him that her name was Ulupi, and she asked him to marry her. Arjuna's thoughts turned to Draupadi and he refused Ulupi, but when she threatened to kill herself he agreed to marry her and to stay with her for only one night. They exchanged garlands and Ulupi brought him a wonderful meal. The next morning she took him back to the riverbank where his servants were waiting for him. As they parted Ulupi said, “My dear husband, I bless you. You shall be invincible in

water. You will be able to defeat the most vicious water creatures in the world.”

Arjuna’s servants accompanied him to Bhrigu Mountain, and Arjuna gave most of his wealth to the sages who lived there. Then he walked over the Himalayas and travelled east to Kalinga. From there he sent most of his servants home and continued to Manipur with just a few men.

In Manipur, Arjuna visited the king and asked to marry his beautiful





daughter, Chitrangada. The king agreed to the match, but he made Arjuna promise to give him their first son. Arjuna agreed and married Chitrangada. He stayed in Manipur for three months and when he left he promised to take Chitrangada to Indraprasta at the end of his pilgrimage.

### ARJUNA FREES FIVE APSARAS

He travelled south along the coast and one day he met some sages who lived by five great lakes. The sages complained that they could not bathe in the lakes because crocodiles lived in them. Arjuna decided to take advantage of Ulupi's boon and kill the crocodiles.

He dived into Lake Agastya, grabbed a crocodile, and pulled it out of the lake. On the shore he bashed it against a rock and when it died, a beautiful



lady came out of its body. She told Arjuna her story:

“My name is Varga and I am an *apsara* from the heavenly planets. My four friends and I once danced and sang before a sage who was meditating in the forest. He became very angry with us and cursed us to become crocodiles. Narada Rishi arrived while we were pleading with the sage to forgive us. Narada said that we would have to stay in the water until you came to save us. My friends live in the four lakes nearby. Please release them.”

One by one, Arjuna killed the crocodiles and *apsaras* came out their dead bodies. The five *apsaras* thanked Arjuna for releasing them and rose up to the heavens.

### ARJUNA KIDNAPS SUBHADRA

From Southern India, Arjuna travelled along the west coast along the vast beaches to the north. He walked until he came to the bridge marking the entrance to Dwaraka. When Krishna heard that Arjuna was entering the city, He ran to meet him.

Krishna knew that Arjuna wanted to marry his sister Subhadra. He also knew that Balaram wanted Subhadra to marry Duryodhan. So Krishna made a secret plan for Arjuna to win Subhadra. Krishna told Arjuna to enter Dwaraka disguised as a *sannyasi*.

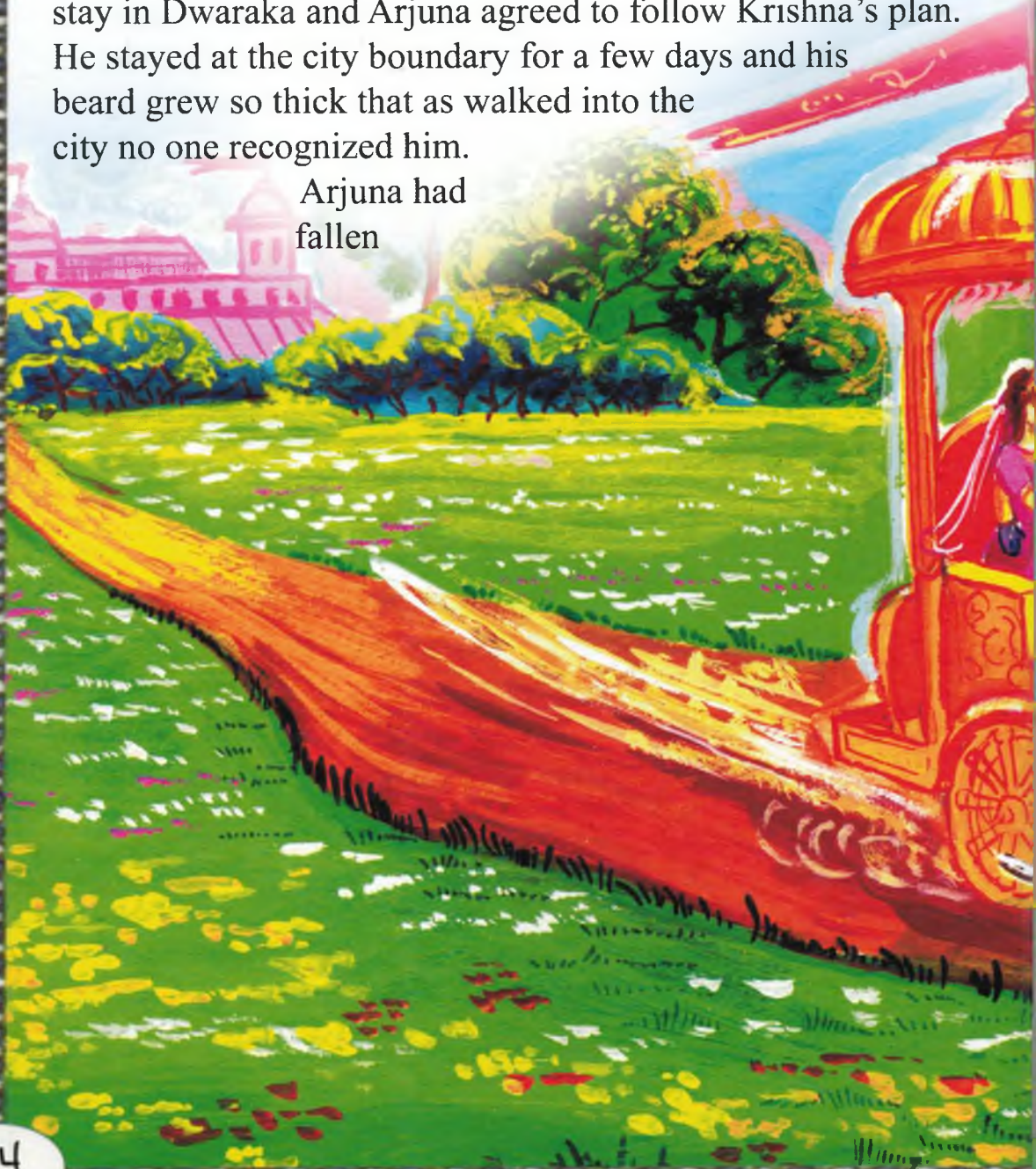
He said, “Cut your hair and grow a beard. Balaram will not recognise you, and thinking you are a great sage, he will invite you to lunch. Subhadra will serve you and you can get



to know her well. During your stay here you are sure to get the opportunity to kidnap her.”

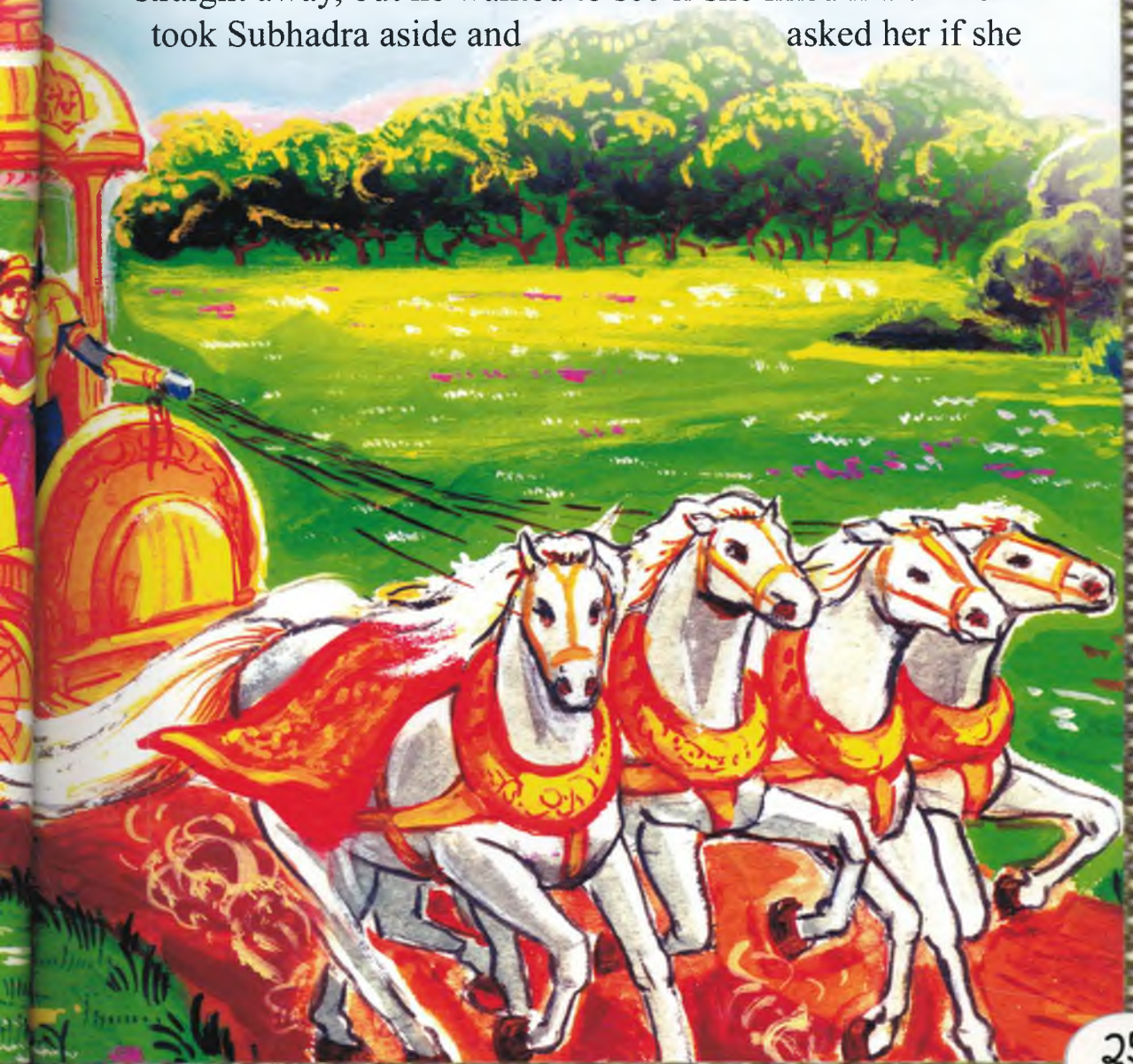
The rainy season was just beginning. It was a good idea to stay in Dwaraka and Arjuna agreed to follow Krishna’s plan. He stayed at the city boundary for a few days and his beard grew so thick that as walked into the city no one recognized him.

Arjuna had  
fallen





in love with Subhadra long ago, simply by hearing about her from a friend. He was longing to meet her and luckily he did not have to wait long before Balaram invited him to lunch. Subhadra served him and from their first meeting, Arjuna could not take his eyes off her. He could have kidnapped her straight away, but he wanted to see if she liked him. Krishna took Subhadra aside and asked her if she





would like to marry Arjuna. Subhadra realized who the *sannyasi* was and she said, “Yes!”

Krishna told Arjuna the good news, and a few days later, at a festival on the outskirts of the city, Arjuna borrowed Krishna’s chariot, rode up to Subhadra at lightning speed, pulled her on to the chariot, and drove away with her.

Lord Balaram was furious. He called for a meeting of the city elders and suggested punishing Arjuna. The city elders were so keen to capture Arjuna that they wanted to set out at once. They called to their drivers to bring their chariots and their weapons immediately.

Balaram noticed that Krishna was not in agreement and asked Krishna to tell them why.

Krishna said, “Call them back. I like the idea of forming an alliance with Arjuna’s family.” Krishna told the elders that He thought Arjuna was a perfect husband for Subhadra, and he reminded them that since Arjuna had already spent time alone with Subhadra, no one else would marry her. Balaram and the assembly agreed, and they sent messengers to invite the young couple to return.

The city was decorated, and soon after Arjuna was soon married to Subhadra. After the wedding celebrations were over, Arjuna’s year in exile was finished and he took Subhadra home to Indraprasta.

## THE KHANDAVA FOREST FIRE

Arjuna and Subhadra had just settled into the palace when

Krishna and Balaram brought Subhadra's huge dowry. After a few days Balaram returned to Dwaraka, taking the valuable gems he had received from King Yudhishthir, but Krishna stayed to spend a little time with His good friend Arjuna.

One hot day, Krishna and Arjuna went to the River Yamuna. They relaxed for a while in one of the family houses facing the river, and then they walked through the forest along the riverbank.

They sat down beside the river to admire its beauty, and a golden-skinned brahmin wandered up to them, complaining that he was hungry. Krishna asked him what he wanted to eat, and he said that he wanted to eat the Khandava forest.

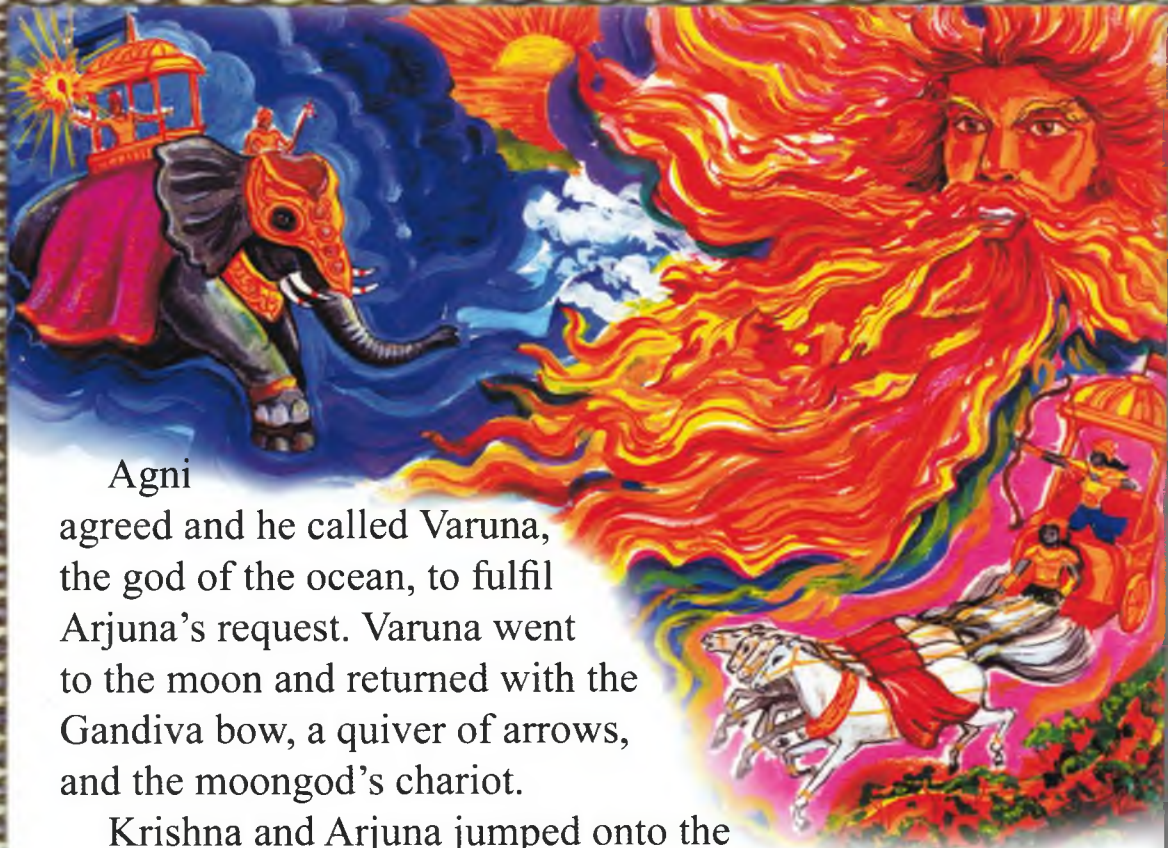
"My name is Agni, the god of fire, and Lord Brahma told me to ask you for help," the brahmin said. "I have tried many times to eat the forest, but each time Indra sends a downpour of rain to put out my flames because he wants to protect the snake, Takshaka, who lives in the forest. Please help me."

"But why do you want to eat this particular forest?" Arjuna asked.

"Because I ate too much ghee and I feel sick. All the herbs I need to make me healthy grow here," Agni said. "Lord Brahma also told me that the forest should be burned to the ground because the creatures living in the forest are sinful and deserve to die."

"Give me a bow, an inexhaustible quiver of arrows, and a chariot pulled by heavenly horses and I will help you," Arjuna said.





Agni agreed and he called Varuna, the god of the ocean, to fulfil Arjuna's request. Varuna went to the moon and returned with the Gandiva bow, a quiver of arrows, and the moongod's chariot.

Krishna and Arjuna jumped onto the chariot.

"Blaze up, Agni! Devour the forest," Arjuna said, "And don't worry about Lord Indra. I'll take care of him." Agni set the forest alight and the flames rose high into the sky. Screams of burning animals could be heard above the roaring crackle of the blazing fire.

Indra and his clouds rushed in. Sheets of rain fell, and the sky filled with steam, almost putting the fire out. Arjuna fired hundreds of arrows that wove themselves into a gigantic umbrella. The rain bounced off its surface, and the fire continued to burn happily.

At the time of the fire, Takshaka was not at home, but his snake wife and snake son were there, caught in the flames.

When they could no longer stand the heat, they rose into the air to escape. Arjuna grabbed Takshaka's wife and cut off her head, but Takshaka's son was too quick and he slid away.

Indra appeared from the clouds and threw his thunderbolt at Arjuna. Arjuna defeated Indra with his wind weapon, and then used the wind to fan the flames until they were massive.

Indra jumped on his elephant and charged at Krishna and Arjuna, but again Arjuna held him back with his arrows. Indra smiled; glad to be defeated by his magnificent son. As a final test, Indra threw boulders at them, but Arjuna's arrows smashed even the largest rocks into dust.

Indra was beaten, and he told his companions to stop the fight. For two weeks the forest blazed and Arjuna shot all the demons rushing out of the flames. Then, when all that was left of the forest was a smouldering pile of ashes, Agni was satisfied.

To everyone's surprise, a demon called Maya had hidden underground, and he lifted himself out of the dirt and ran to escape. Agni chased him, and Krishna raised His Sudarsan chakra to kill him, but Maya ran to Arjuna and begged him for protection. Arjuna agreed to help him and let him run away. At that moment, Indra approached Arjuna.

"You are a skilful and brave warrior," he said. "Ask me for any boon you desire." Arjuna asked for all of Indra's celestial weapons. Indra said, "I will give you them later. For now, I will give you the boon that you can travel anywhere in the universe."



Later that day, Krishna and Arjuna met Maya again, and Maya offered Arjuna a boon. Arjuna wanted no reward, but Krishna told Maya to build an assembly hall for Yudhisthir.

“Make it fit for the heavens,” he said. “Make it grander than anything ever seen on earth!” Maya soon drew up plans, and went to fetch diamonds and other jewels from the Himalayas to decorate the hall.

### ARJUNA RECEIVES WEAPONS FROM THE GODS

Duryodhan would stoop to the dirtiest tricks in order to ruin the Pandavas. When he saw that they had turned their home in the desert into a paradise, he was determined to get rid of them forever. He invited them to play a game of dice and cheated the Pandavas out of their kingdom and their wealth. He banished them and Draupadi to the forest.

While they were living in the forest Yudhisthir finally accepted that Duryodhan would never be fair to them and he told Arjuna to prepare for war. He asked Arjuna to go to

the Himalayas, to call Indra, and to ask him for the weapons he had promised. Arjuna hurried to Mandara Mountain and waited for Lord Indra.

Lord Indra arrived almost at once and told Arjuna that Lord Shiva would help him.

“Stay in this forest, live simply, and offer prayers to please Lord Shiva,” Indra said.

After one month, as a result of Arjuna's austerities, he began to glow like the sun and the heat from his body spread throughout the universe. The demigods became afraid and begged Lord Shiva to stop him.

Lord Shiva and his wife Uma dressed as hunters, and with thousands of their followers went to the Himalayas to see Arjuna. A demon, in the form of a boar, arrived with them, and it charged at Arjuna. Lord Shiva and Arjuna saw it at the same time and they shot it with their arrows. They both hit the boar, but Arjuna claimed the victory.

"I killed him," said Arjuna. "Why did you insult me by firing at my enemy?"

"I saw the boar first," said Lord Shiva, "and it was my arrow that killed him."

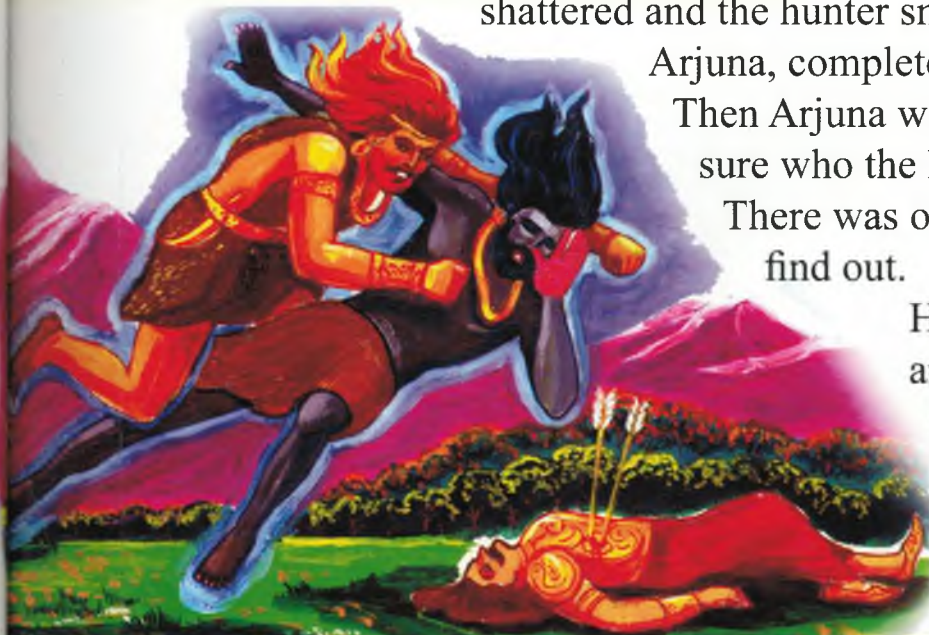
The argument developed into a furious fight in which the hunter broke nearly all of Arjuna's weapons. Finally Arjuna brought his sword down on the hunter's head. The sword shattered and the hunter smiled at

Arjuna, completely unhurt.

Then Arjuna was almost sure who the hunter was.

There was one way to find out.

He sat down and scrapped mud from the ground





to make a deity of Lord Shiva. Then he picked some yellow flowers and began to offer the petals to the deity. When Arjuna saw yellow petals falling on the hunter's head, he knew that the hunter was indeed Lord Shiva.

Arjuna bowed and begged Lord Shiva's forgiveness, but Lord Shiva wanted no apologies. He was pleased with Arjuna and he returned his weapons in perfect condition. He said, "You are Nara, Lord Narayan's eternal friend. There is no man equal to you on earth. Your arrows will be invincible. Ask me for anything you want."

Arjuna asked Lord Shiva for his most powerful weapon, the Pashupata. Lord Shiva agreed to give it, and admitted that he would never have given it to anyone else. Just then, many demigods arrived.

Yamaraj, Varuna, and Indra gave Arjuna their weapons, along with the mantras to throw them. Lord Indra said that his chariot driver, Matali, would soon take Arjuna to the heavenly planets.

He said, "You will receive more weapons and the mantras to use them." The demigods gave their blessings and returned to the heavenly planets.



## ARJUNA GOES TO THE HEAVENS

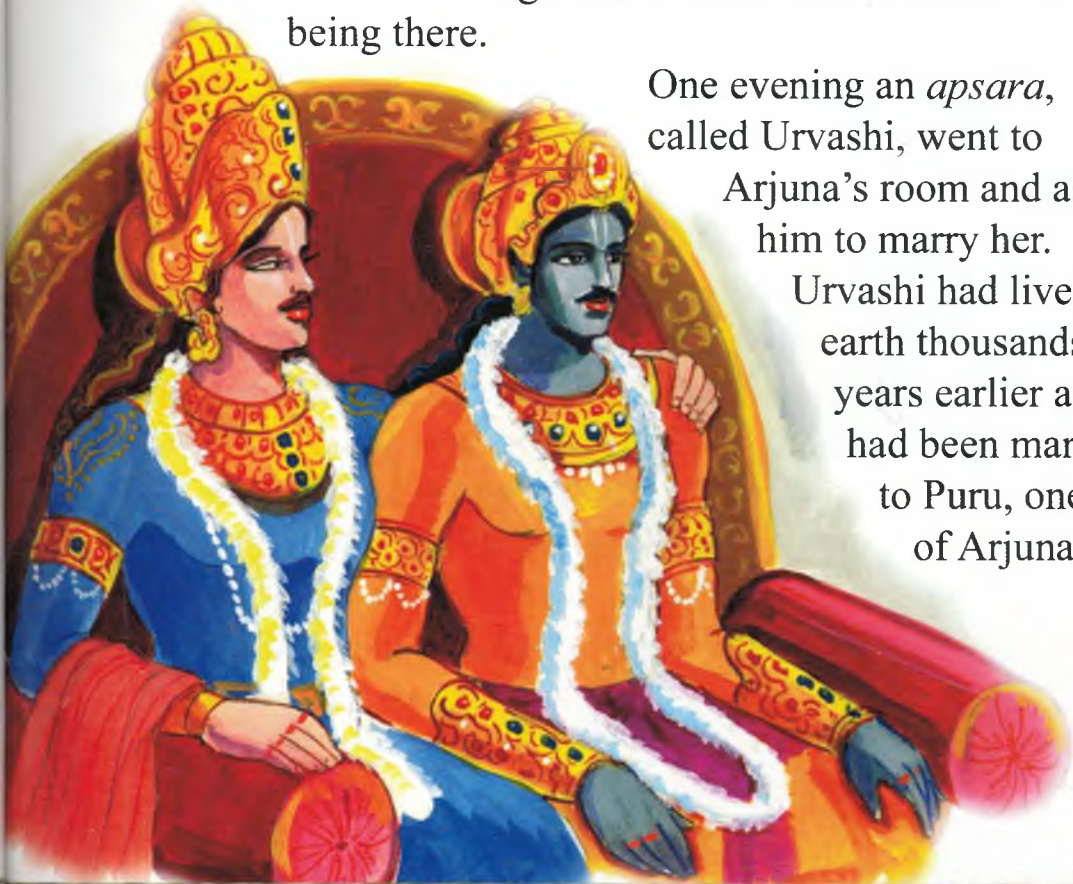
A golden chariot, filled with weapons, flew through the sky and landed next to Arjuna. The driver, Matali, beckoned Arjuna to join him and they started their journey to Indra's palace at Amaravati. Arjuna was seated on the throne next to Lord Indra.

Humans cannot normally see heavenly riches, but Indra gave Arjuna the ability to see the divine beauty around him. He told Arjuna to learn weaponry and heavenly singing and dancing.

Arjuna stayed with his father for five years, but in all that time he never forgot his brothers or his reason for being there.

One evening an *apsara*, called Urvashi, went to Arjuna's room and asked him to marry her.

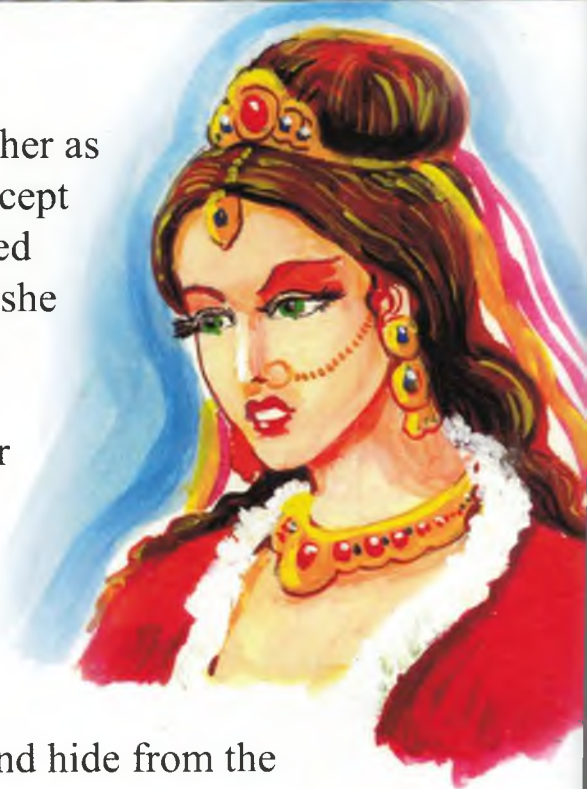
Urvashi had lived on earth thousands of years earlier and had been married to Puru, one of Arjuna's





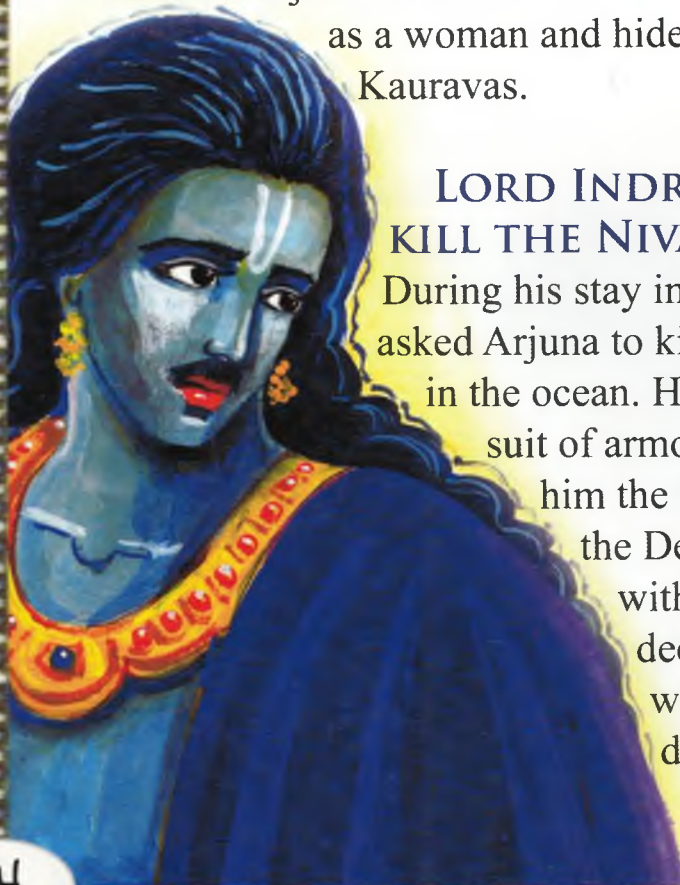
ancestors. Arjuna thought of her as a mother and he could not accept her as a wife. When he refused her, Urvashi was furious. As she stormed out of the room, she turned back and cursed him. "One day you will loose your manhood. You will live as a dancer in the company of women." Later, Urvashi's curse was very useful as it enabled Arjuna to dress

as a woman and hide from the Kauravas.



### LORD INDRA SENDS ARJUNA TO KILL THE NIVATAKAVACHAS

During his stay in the heavens, Lord Indra asked Arjuna to kill a race of demons living in the ocean. He gave him a magnificent suit of armour and the demigods gave him the famous conchshell called the Devadata. Arjuna travelled with Matali on Indra's chariot deep into the ocean, and when they arrived at the demon's city, the demons







were  
waiting  
to attack them.

They threw masses of spears and clubs and fired millions of arrows, but their weapons were no match for Arjuna's. With his special weapons he killed most of them, and the others fled deep into the water, or escaped into the sky.

On the way back to Amaravati they passed through the city of the Kalakanya demons. Matali told Arjuna that Lord Brahma had said a human would destroy them, and he asked Arjuna to attack them right away. They entered the demon's beautiful city, and without difficulty, Arjuna killed most of the demons. The few survivors fled in fear.

### ARJUNA RETURNS TO EARTH

While he was away, the Pandavas and Draupadi thought about Arjuna every day. They missed him terribly and were



be returning soon. Lomasha Rishi told them to climb higher into the mountains and wait.

They had climbed for days when Indra's chariot sailed through the sky towards them. Arjuna was there, shining like the sun, and he waved joyfully at his dear family who stood to greet him. As Arjuna jumped from the chariot, they were unable to hide their excitement. It was wonderful to be together again!

### THE PANDAVAS SAVE THEIR CRUEL COUSINS FROM CERTAIN DEATH

Although Duryodhan had succeeded in removing the Pandavas from his kingdom, he could never get them out of his mind. He decided to spy on them, and he lied to his father, saying that he wanted to inspect some large herds of cattle grazing in the mountains. With his brothers and a huge party of followers, he travelled north. When he found the Pandavas, he camped beside a lake, opposite them.

Duryodhan and his party wanted to bathe before setting out to attack the Pandavas. They were ready to enter the water when Chitrasena, the Gandharva king, asked his men to surround them.

"This lake belongs to me," he said. "I forbid you to put one foot inside it." Duryodhan laughed and told his soldiers to remove Chitrasena from his sight. The demigods were not impressed by Duryodhan's arrogant threats and they began a fight which developed into a full-scale battle. Karna was

badly hurt at the start of the fight and he left the battlefield to recover. It was not long before the rest of Duryodhan's men were wounded. Drove of them were captured and bound. Even Duryodhan, his brothers, and wives, were captured and held prisoners.

Bhima watched the Kauravas and was amused at their plight. He was delighted to see his cousins in such an embarrassing situation, but Yudhistir, who was always kind, asked his brothers to rescue them.

Arjuna never hesitated to follow Yudhistir's order. At once he approached Chitrasena and asked him to

release the Kauravas. And when Chitrasena refused, Arjuna invoked the fire weapon and killed thousands of





Gandharvas. At the same time, the other Pandavas killed millions of demigods with their deadly arrows. It wasn't long before Chitrasena accepted defeat and released the Kauravas.

Karna recovered from his wounds just after the Kauravas had been released. Not knowing the truth, he congratulated Duryodhan on his victory. Duryodhan wanted to die with shame at having to admit that the Pandavas had rescued them. There was no way to hide the fact that Duryodhan's life-long enemies were still stronger and more skilled. He sank into a state of depression, and only his dear friend Karna was able to encourage him to face the future.

### ARJUNA THE DANCER

The last year of the Pandava's exile was spent incognito. In Virata, they lived in disguise. Arjuna dressed as a woman and acted as a teacher of dance. He was called Brihannala. Thanks to Urvashi's curse he lived quite naturally among the women of Virata's palace and he became one of their favorites. Arjuna taught dancing to Uttara, the king's daughter and she later married his son Abhimanyu.



## THE BATTLE AT VIRATA

The Kauravas suspected that the Pandavas were hiding in King Virat's palace, and in order to draw them out, they arranged for the Trigartas to steal King Virat's cattle. King Virat heard about the theft and with four of the Pandavas he attacked the Trigartas. Arjuna was still dressed as a woman and did not go.

After their victory, to follow custom, the warriors were spending the night on the battlefield. This was exactly what Duryodhan wanted.

The Kauravas rushed in to the palace grounds, stole the cattle, and hoped that Arjuna would come out and fight them. Arjuna could not fight without breaking his disguise, but the only other warrior in the palace was the youngest prince Bhuminjaya. Bhuminjaya decided that he would fight the Kauravas, and he agreed to have Arjuna as his chariot driver.

Bhuminjaya was confident when he mounted his chariot, although he did not have much faith in Arjuna as charioteer. However, when he saw the Kauravas he almost fainted with fear, and he told Arjuna he would not fight. He asked him to turn the chariot back.

Arjuna persuaded Bhuminjaya to swap places with him, so Bhuminjaya took the reins of the chariot and, following Arjuna's orders, he drove them to the tree where the Pandava's had hung their weapons almost a year earlier. The weapons had been covered in cloth and had been made to

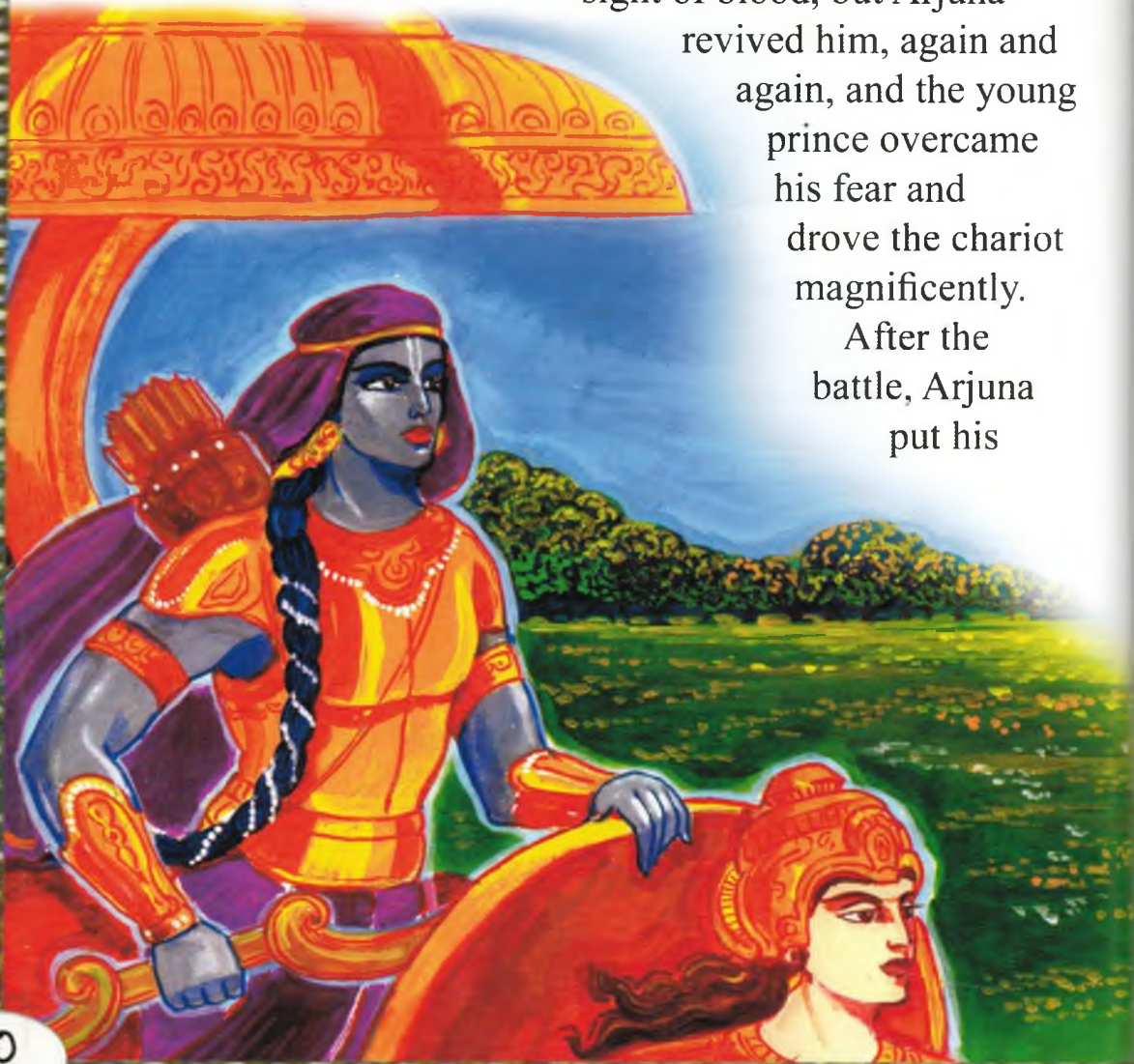


look like a dead body. Not surprisingly no one had touched them.

When the Kauravas saw the chariot thundering toward them, they recognised Arjuna at once and got ready to fight him. Although Arjuna fought alone, he had the strength of millions, and he easily defeated the Kauravas with their huge army. At times Bhuminjaya was almost overcome by the

sight of blood, but Arjuna revived him, again and again, and the young prince overcame his fear and drove the chariot magnificently.

After the battle, Arjuna put his



weapons back in the tree and he told Bhuminjaya who he really was. He asked him not to tell anyone, and when they returned to the palace, in order to keep Arjuna's secret, Bhuminjaya pretended that he alone had defeated the Kauravas.

The Pandavas' exile was over and they asked the Kauravas for five villages, just enough land to live on. Duryodhan was as mean as he had always been and he said that he would not give them enough land to drive the point of a pin. Many great heroes, including Lord Krishna, tried to persuade Duryodhan to be fair to his cousins, but Duryodhan preferred to start a world war than to do the right thing.

## **DURYODHAN AND ARJUNA VISIT KRISHNA**

Before the battle of Kuruksetra began, Duryodhan and Arjuna decided to visit Krishna and to ask Him to help them in the war. When Arjuna arrived he saw Duryodhan going into Krishna's room. Krishna was sleeping. While they waited for Him to wake up, Duryodhan sat by Krishna's head, and Arjuna stood at His feet. When Krishna opened His eyes, he saw Arjuna standing in front of him. He was very pleased and he asked Arjuna what he wanted. Duryodhan had arrived first and said that his request should be fulfilled first, but Krishna had seen Arjuna first and said that Arjuna should make his request first.



He told Arjuna to choose between Himself and His army. Krishna said, "If you choose me, I will not fight, but I will drive your chariot,"

Without a moment's hesitation Arjuna chose Krishna and Duryodhan was left with Krishna's huge army. Duryodhan laughed inwardly. He thought that Arjuna had made a stupid mistake.

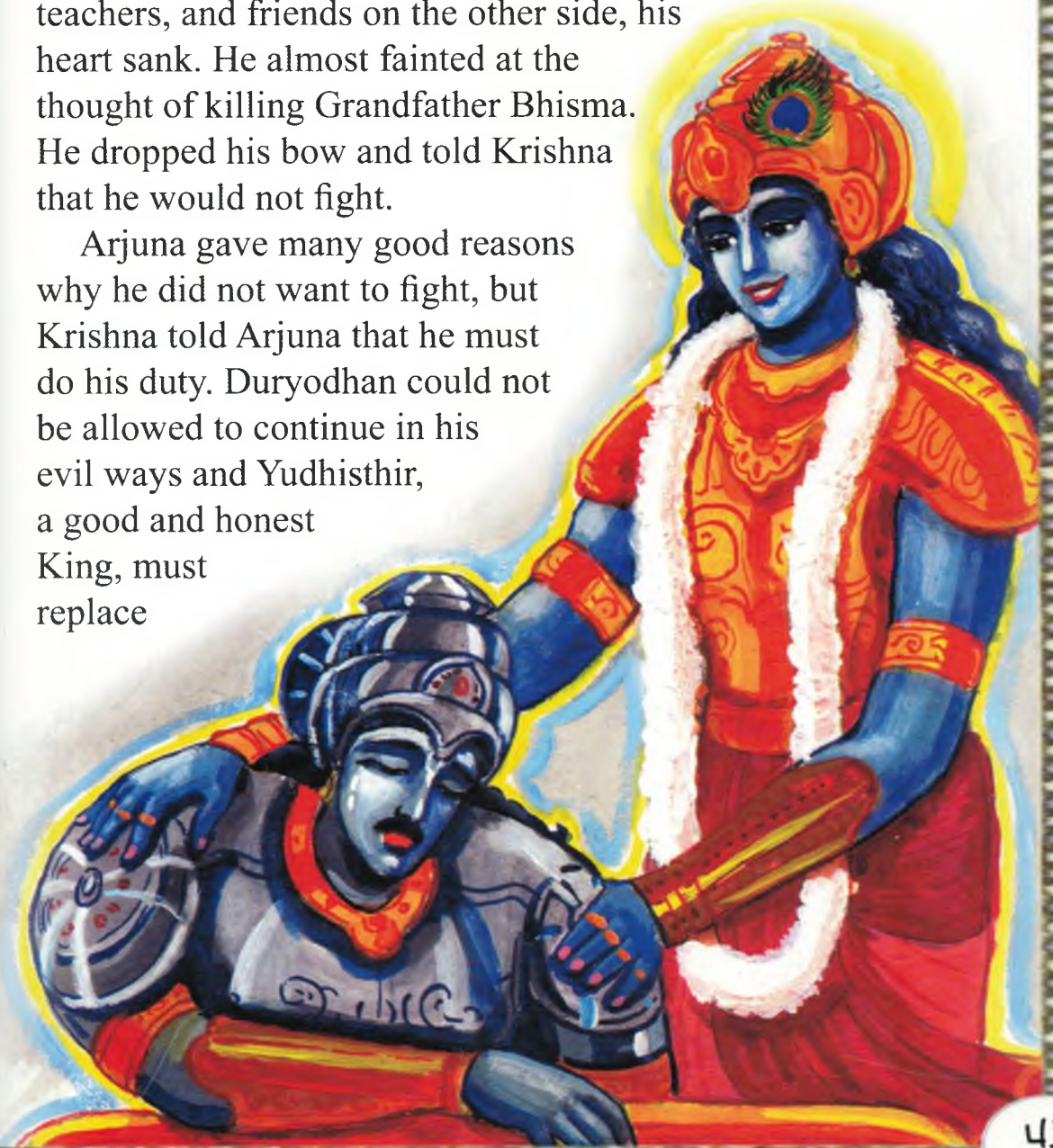




## THE SONG OF GOD

The warriors arrived at Kurukshetra and took their places on the Battlefield. Krishna drove Arjuna's chariot between the two armies. When Arjuna saw his family members, teachers, and friends on the other side, his heart sank. He almost fainted at the thought of killing Grandfather Bhishma. He dropped his bow and told Krishna that he would not fight.

Arjuna gave many good reasons why he did not want to fight, but Krishna told Arjuna that he must do his duty. Duryodhan could not be allowed to continue in his evil ways and Yudhisthir, a good and honest King, must replace





him. Krishna spoke with Arjuna for an hour. He defeated all of Arjuna's arguments and cleared away all of his doubts, and at the end of their conversation, Arjuna agreed to fight.



Millions of warriors heard Krishna's wonderful words on the battlefield five thousand years ago. And Krishna's words remain fresh today and are read in the Bhagavad-Gita by millions of people all over the world.

## THE BATTLE OF KURUKSETRA

In just eighteen days sixty-four million warriors were killed. All of them are considered to have died a glorious death, but perhaps the death Arjuna's son,

Abhimanyu was most memorable.

Abhimanyu was only sixteen years old and he was killed by six of the greatest warriors that ever lived. Arjuna had been lured away to fight the Trigartas in a distant part of

the battlefield, and Abhimanyu was the only one who could break the Kaurava's military formation. He rode into the middle of the huge Kaurava army. Bhima and other great heroes tried to follow him, but Jayadrath stopped them by using a boon he had received from Lord Shiva. Abhimanyu fought alone with the Kauravas.

No one could have killed him in a fair fight, but Abhimanyu was killed in way that broke all codes of warrior conduct. Karna cut his bowstring from behind; Drona killed his horses; Kripa killed his charioteer; Kritavarma smashed his chariot; Ashvatthama destroyed all of his weapons; and finally Durjaya killed Abhimanyu with his mace.

When Arjuna heard what had happened, he vowed to kill Jayadratha by sunset the next day.

Drona hid Jayadrath behind a huge arrangement of soldiers, making it almost impossible for Arjuna to reach him. Arjuna spent nearly the whole day fighting his way threw the army towards Jayadrath. Then, just when Jayadrath's flag was in view and Arjuna was ready to attack him he was challenged by Duryodhan.

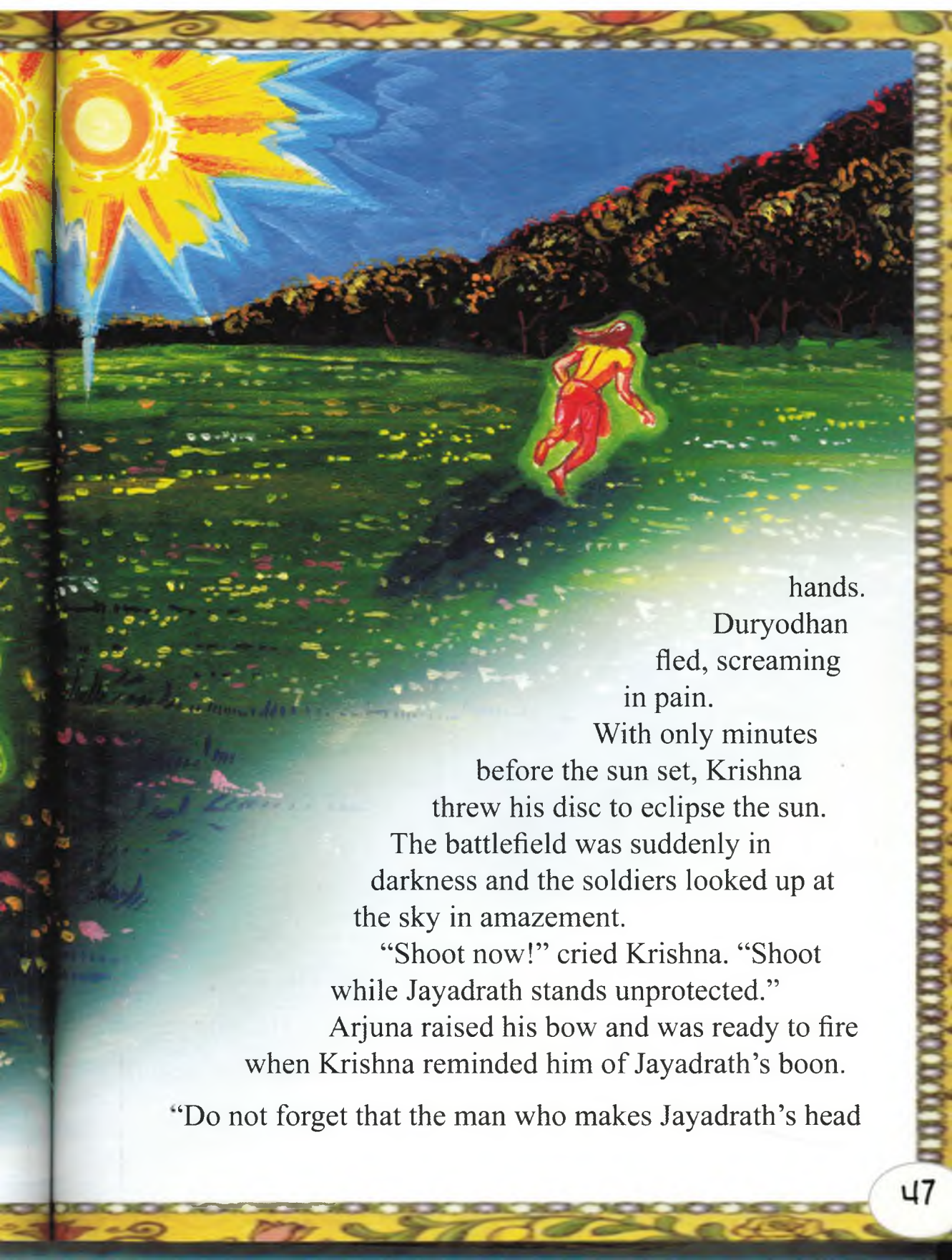
Duryodhan was wearing invincible armour which none of Arjuna's weapons could pierce. Time was moving fast and Arjuna was becoming more anxious. He had to reach Jayadrath before sunset, but he could not get past Duryodhan without defeating him.

"Your hand seems to be loosing its power," Krishna said, and Arjuna took the hint at once, and fired at Duryodhan's bare









hands.

Duryodhan  
fled, screaming  
in pain.

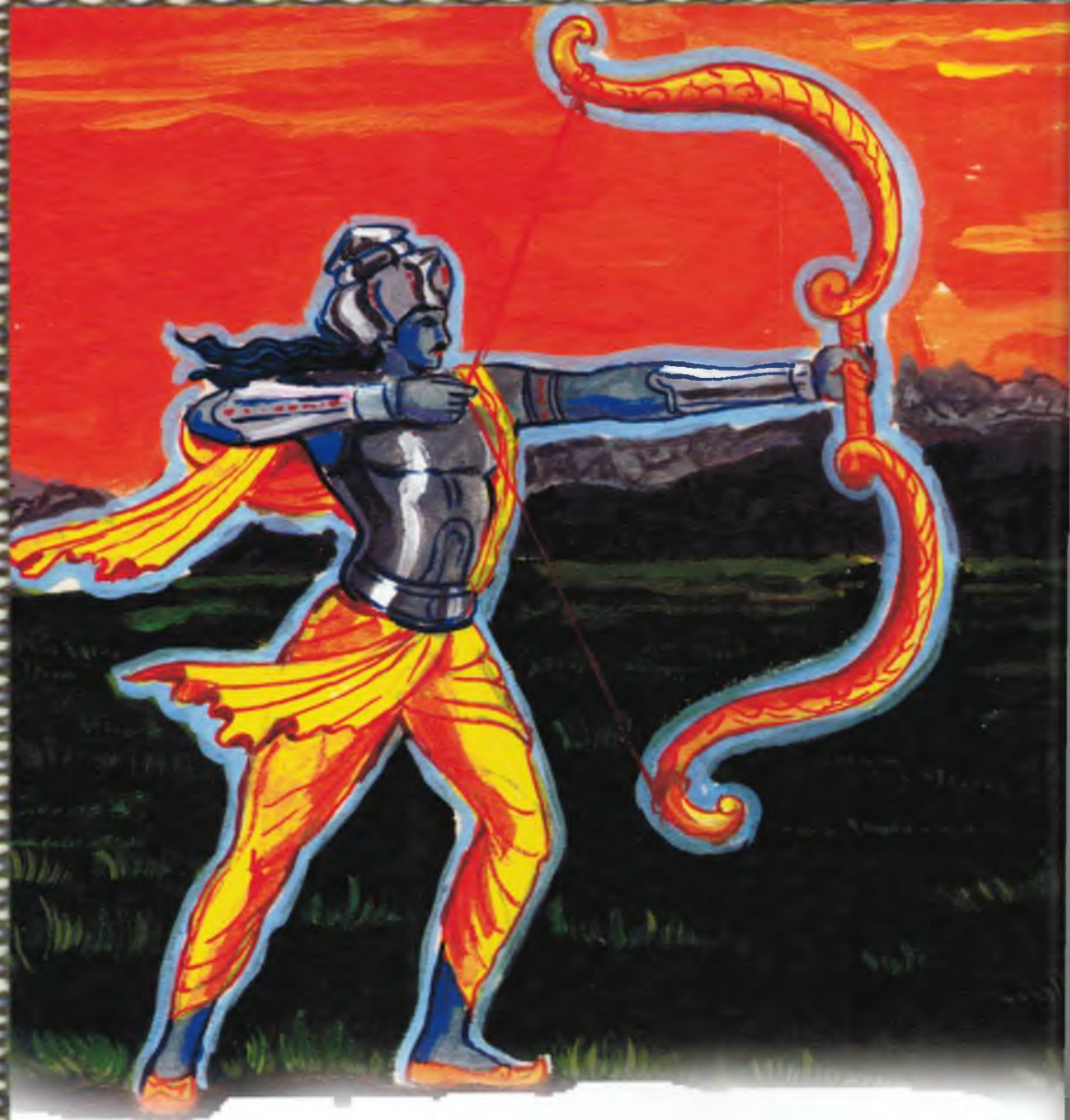
With only minutes  
before the sun set, Krishna  
threw his disc to eclipse the sun.  
The battlefield was suddenly in  
darkness and the soldiers looked up at  
the sky in amazement.

“Shoot now!” cried Krishna. “Shoot  
while Jayadrath stands unprotected.”

Arjuna raised his bow and was ready to fire  
when Krishna reminded him of Jayadrath’s boon.

“Do not forget that the man who makes Jayadrath’s head





fall will die himself, so make sure that it lands on his father's lap. His father is meditating in a place called Samantapanchaka. He will get such a shock when his son's head lands on his lap that he will throw the horrible thing to the ground." In this way Arjuna





killed Jayadrath and his father at the same time. Krishna and Arjuna blew their conches, and when the Pandavas heard the sound of victory they were delirious with joy.



## GRANDFATHER BHISMA

Arjuna drove toward his dearest and most beloved grandfather and asked him to tell him how he could kill him. Bhishma did not hesitate to tell him. He said that he considered Shikandi a woman, because he had been born as a woman and had changed into



a man. Bhishma told Arjuna that Shikandi should stand in the front of Arjuna's chariot and act as a barrier. Bhishma said, "Attack me! I will not retaliate while Shikandi stands before you."

Shikandi drove

Arjuna's chariot close to Bhishma's and the fight began. Both Arjuna and Shikandi fired at Bhishma, but only Arjuna's arrows struck him. Bhishma's body was soon pierced by hundreds of arrows and he fell from his chariot. He did not touch the ground. He lay on the arrows which ran threw his body.

Choked with tears of love, Arjuna ran to him and asked him how he could serve him. Bhishma's head was hanging down uncomfortably, and he asked Arjuna for a pillow. Arjuna shot arrows into the ground and rested Bhishma head on them. Bhishma lay on his heros' bed of arrows, thinking of Krishna, and waiting for the right time to leave this world.

## KARNA

Since their first meeting, Arjuna and Karna had wanted to kill each other and their hatred had grown strong over the years. Before the war, Queen Kunti had arranged to meet Karna alone and had told him her secret: She was his mother. She had hoped that if Karna knew that Arjuna was his brother, he would give up his hatred and make friends with the Pandavas. She thought that he might even stop the terrible war, but sadly, Karna could not give up his loyalty to Duryodhan. He did not even consider making friends with the Pandavas. The best he could do was to promise Kunti that he would kill none of her other sons.

"At the end of the war there will still be five Pandavas," he said. "Either Arjuna or I will die."



Arjuna and Karna finally came face to face on the battlefield of Kuruksetra. Armed with their celestial weapons, they were ready to fight to the end. Krishna drove His Chariot round Karna and encouraged Arjuna to fire his most violent arrows. Soon Karna was badly wounded and was struggling to stay alive. Then Karna noticed, with utter frustration, that the wheel of his chariot was sinking into the earth. He dropped his bow and jumped to the ground to try and free the wheel. Struggling bitterly, he shouted, "Don't attack me while I have no weapons." He begged Arjuna to remember the warrior codes of honour.

Krishna laughed and reminded Karna of the times when he had abandoned virtue, of the times when he had encouraged and assisted the Kauravas in trying to kill Arjuna and his family.

Karna, boiling with rage, returned to his struggle with the wheel. As Arjuna drew his Gandiva bow, the battlefield became strangely quiet. He took aim. Arjuna's arrow flew straight at Karna's neck and cut off his head.

The sun grew into a huge red ball and sank to the horizon. A light rose from Karna's body, rose into the air, and drifted into the sun.

## **ARJUNA PUNISHES ASHVATTHAMA**

In the middle of the night Ashvattama crept into the Pandava's tent and killed Draupadi's five sons while they were sleeping. Arjuna found Draupadi crying in absolute

misery, and he promised that he would take revenge. He immediately captured Ashvatthama, bound him with ropes, and brought him into the palace. The Pandavas discussed a suitable punishment. It was difficult to know how to deal with a man who had done such a wicked thing, a man who was also a brahman and the son of their guru.

Arjuna raised his sword, but he did not kill Ashvatthama. Instead Arjuna cut off Ashvatthama's hair and sniped the jewels from his turban. As they fell to the ground, guards were summoned and ordered to throw Ashvatthama out of the kingdom.

“There is no need to kill him,” Arjuna said. “His reputation is ruined and he is as good as dead.”

## THE WAR ENDS AND THE PANDAVAS REGAIN THEIR KINGDOM

King Yudhishthira took his rightful position on the throne and, with the help of his brothers, he ruled the people perfectly. Arjuna was often called to protect the kingdom and to make sure that justice was done.

## ARJUNA KILLED BY HIS SON

Yudhishthir planned an elaborate sacrifice, but the horse chosen for the sacrifice was stolen and Arjuna was sent to search for it. One day Arjuna was attacking a thief when





Babhrubahana, his son by his wife Chitrangada, came to the battlefield and offered him gifts of gold and jewels. Angry that Babhrubahana was not taking part in the fight, Arjuna scoffed at the gifts and challenged his son to a duel. Another of Arjuna's wives, Ulupi, appeared on the scene by her mystic powers and she





encouraged Babhrubanhana to fight.

“You should fight with your father, because he wants you to,” she said.

Babhrubahana reluctantly agreed to fight with Arjuna, and he finally killed him by shooting an arrow into his chest. When Babhrubahana, who was badly wounded, saw his



father lying dead, he fell unconscious, overcome by grief.

Chitrangada heard that her husband and son lay on the battlefield and she went there at once. She scolded Ulupi, blaming her for the killing of Arjuna.

“If you had not encouraged this fight, our husband and my son would still be alive and well,” she said. Ulupi simply smiled and used a powerful jewel to bring Arjuna back to life and to heal Babhrubahana’s wounds.

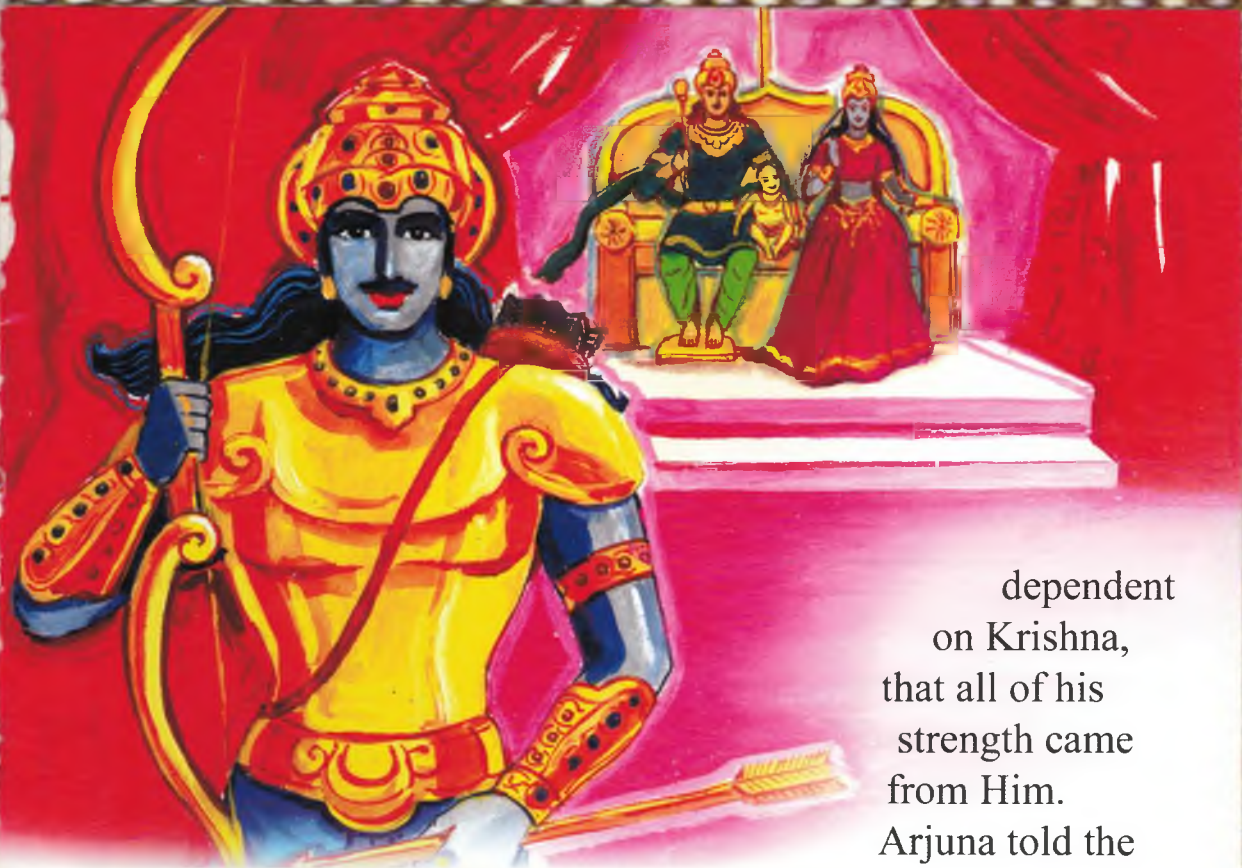
When Arjuna opened his eyes, he saw his two wives and his son standing before him, and he asked what had happened. Ulupi explained.

“When you killed Bhishma, a group of sages went to the Ganges and complained about you to the goddess of the river, saying that you had unfairly killed her son. The goddess of the Ganges was upset that Bhishma was dead and she agreed that justice should be done: You should be killed. That is why you had to die. And now I have revived you by the power of this special jewel.”

Arjuna was very pleased to see his wives and his son again. He had to continue in his search for the horse, but he promised to visit them as soon as he could.

## ARJUNA LOOSES HIS POWER

After Krishna left the earth, Arjuna fought with some cowardly men who had stolen Krishna’s wives. At that time Arjuna was helpless and he could not defeat even the simple cowherders. He could understand that he was completely



dependent  
on Krishna,  
that all of his  
strength came  
from Him.

Arjuna told the  
other Pandavas about

Krishna's departure from the world and they decided it was also time to leave. Without telling anyone, they set off for the Himalayas. They walked for months and as they climbed into the mountains, one by one, they fell down and died.

It is said that Arjuna died because he had not kept a promise he had made before the war. It is said that he had spoken proudly, declaring that he would kill all the Kauravas on the same day, but had not done so. The real reason Arjuna left was simply that it was time for the Pandavas to join Krishna. We can not tell where they are today, but we can be sure that they are on one of the earthly planets enjoying great adventures together.





## EPIC CHARACTERS OF MAHABHARAT

- |            |              |          |
|------------|--------------|----------|
| ✓ DRAUPADI | ✓ VIDURA     | ✓ BHISMA |
| ✓ KUNTI    | ✓ DHARMARAJA | ✓ BHIMA  |
| ✓ ARJUNA   | ✓ KRISHNA    | ✓ KARNA  |



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