

# The Ramayana



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF R. K. NARAYAN

R. K. Narayan was one of six boys and two girls in his family. His father was a school headmaster and due to frequent moves, Narayan's grandmother cared for him for parts of his childhood. His family spoke primarily English, and Narayan read a number of books by British authors as a child. Narayan's experience of higher education was difficult; he failed his university entrance exams the first time, and when he was finally accepted, it took him a year longer than expected to finish his bachelor's degree. While at university and directly after, Narayan wrote book reviews and stories for English newspapers. In 1933, Narayan met and married his wife, Rajam, who was 15 years old when they met. Two years later, Narayan finally published his first novel, *Swami and Friends*, which he finished writing before he married. Rajam died in 1939 of typhoid, which sent Narayan into a period of depression. He published the book that's now considered his masterpiece, *The Financial Expert*, in 1951. Narayan began working on his translation of the *Ramayana* in the mid 1960s to fulfill a promise he made to his uncle years earlier, and he published his condensed translation of the *Mahabharata* in 1978. He spent the later years of his life traveling, writing, and dabbling in farming. He stopped giving interviews after a photo shoot to accompany an interview in *Time* magazine landed him in the hospital for several days. Narayan died in the hospital, after asking his publisher to purchase him a specific notebook in which to start another novel. While Narayan translated the *Ramayana*, he did not write the original. Valmiki is considered the "first poet" in Sanskrit literature, and probably wrote the original *Ramayana*. Because the *Ramayana* has been changed and embellished so much over the years, it's impossible to date either Valmiki's life or when he wrote the *Ramayana*. Scholars believe now that Valmiki and the *Ramayana* can be dated to between 500 BCE to 100 BCE. However, many believe that Valmiki was actually a contemporary of Rama's, and gave Sita shelter when Rama banished her the second time.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As a religious text, the *Ramayana* provides a basis for understanding the guiding principles of Hinduism. Hinduism is a polytheistic religion and the three most important deities are Shiva, the destroyer of evil; Brahma, the creator; and Vishnu, the protector. It's these gods that orchestrate Rama's victory over Ravana. The *Ramayana* also hinges on the logic of Dharma, which refers to a universal order, practical morality, and the correct way of living. The laws of Dharma govern why, for

instance, Rama must abide by his father's decision to banish him; had Rama allowed himself to be crowned, he would've upset both his own Dharma and that of his father.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Valmiki is celebrated as the first Sanskrit poet. The *Mahabharata*, another ancient epic, was written by the sage Vyāsa around the same time. Together, these two epic poems form the Itihāsa (translated as "history") of the Hindu religion, and function in much the same way that the Bible does in Christianity. As an ancient epic poem, the *Ramayana* also shares a number of similarities with other works that fall under the same umbrella genre, such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Sundiata*, and the *Odyssey*. The *Ramayana* has remained an endless source of inspiration for Southeast Asian authors and artists; some version of the *Ramayana* exists in every Southeast Asian country, and in some cases has been adapted to fit the guiding principles of either Jain or Buddhist religions. One of the most recent retellings of the *Ramayana* is Samhita Arni's 2011 graphic novel *Sita's Ramayana*, which tells the story from Sita's point of view.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Ramayana (originally called Kaavyam Ramayanam Kritsnam Sitaayaas Charitham Mahat)
- **When Written:** Valmiki probably wrote the original Ramayana between 500 and 100 BCE
- **Where Written:** Kosala Kingdom
- **When Published:** The edition used in this LitChart was published in 1972
- **Literary Period:** Classical Sanskrit; Post-Vedic
- **Genre:** Epic Poem
- **Setting:** The Kosala Kingdom of ancient India and the island of Lanka
- **Climax:** When Rama kills Ravana
- **Antagonist:** Ravana, various other rashakas and demons
- **Point of View:** Third person, though the author occasionally addresses the reader directly.

### EXTRA CREDIT

**The First Poet.** Valmiki is credited with inventing the shloka meter of verse poetry, which is the most common meter in classical Sanskrit poetry. Legend has it that he uttered the first shloka in grief and anger when he saw someone suddenly shoot a mating duck.

**Squirrel.** R. K. Narayan only mentions squirrels in passing, but Valmiki's *Ramayana* states that Rama stroked a squirrel in thanks for his help building the bridge to Lanka. The path of Rama's three fingers formed the three white stripes that run down the backs of Indian palm squirrels.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Dasaratha, king of Kosala, is childless and desperately wants a son to succeed him as king. He asks his mentor for help. His mentor remembers a vision in which the gods appealed to Vishnu to help them defeat Ravana, a demon who uses his powers for evil. Vishnu agreed to incarnate as a human to defeat Ravana. The messenger tells Dasaratha to call a specific sage to conduct a sacrifice. When the sacrifice is complete, Dasaratha's three wives bear sons. Kausalya has Rama, Kaikeyi has Bharatha, and Sumithra has the twins Lakshmana and Sathrugna.

One day, the sage Viswamithra comes to Dasaratha and asks that Rama accompany him to protect him during a sacrifice. Dasaratha is heartbroken, but agrees, and sends Lakshmana with Rama. As Viswamithra travels with the boys, he tells them the story of a demoness named Thataka. Thataka appears and threatens to eat the travelers, but Viswamithra instructs Rama to kill her. Rama does, and the gods ask Viswamithra to teach Rama about weapons. Viswamithra tells the boys several more stories before they reach the site of the sacrifice. Rama assures the sages and saints of their safety as they begin the sacrifice, and he shoots the gathered demons with his **bow**. Viswamithra then takes the boys to Mithila City.

When they enter the city, Rama sees a beautiful young woman on a balcony. The woman, Sita, sees Rama as well and immediately overcome with love for him. She spends the night moving from bed to bed, trying to get comfortable. Rama does the same. The next day, Rama meets King Janaka. When he sees Rama, Janaka laments that Rama can't marry his daughter, Sita: he set the condition that a suitor must be able to lift and string Shiva's **bow**, a massive bow once owned by the god. Viswamithra asks if Rama can attempt to string the bow. Rama not only strings the bow, he breaks it. A handmaid tells Sita, and she's overjoyed to learn that Rama won her hand. Janaka invites Dasaratha to the wedding in Mithila. After the ceremony, Rama's brothers marry other women from Mithila, and they return to Ayodhya, the capital city of Kosala.

Dasaratha realizes he's getting old and names Rama his successor. Rama accepts this, and they begin to prepare for Rama's coronation the following day. Everyone is happy that Rama will be king except for Kooni, Kaikeyi's companion. She convinces Kaikeyi that Rama will treat her poorly if he's crowned king. When Dasaratha comes to Kaikeyi that night, she asks him to grant her two boons that he promised her years

ago, and asks that Dasaratha banish Rama to the forest for 14 years and crown Bharatha king instead. Dasaratha doesn't want to agree, but feels he must. The next morning, advisers find Dasaratha and Kaikeyi, Dasaratha in a faint. Kaikeyi explains what happened and asks for Rama. When Rama arrives, he agrees to go into exile. Ministers, Lakshmana, and Kausalya attempt to convince Rama to stay, but he insists on leaving. Rama dresses in clothes made of bark. Though he tries to convince them to stay, Lakshmana and Sita insist on joining Rama in exile. As Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita leave the city, a sad crowd follows them. Sathrugna helps the three escape unnoticed that night. When he tells Dasaratha the next day that Rama left, Dasaratha dies. When Bharatha returns to the city and finds out what happened, he dresses in bark and goes to Rama to try and convince him to return. Rama insists on remaining in exile, however, and Bharatha decides to rule as a regent from outside the city.

Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita travel far away from Ayodhya so that people won't come to convince them to return. They meet Jatayu, a great eagle who was a friend of Dasaratha's. He promises to protect Rama until he can return from exile. One day, Rama sees a beautiful woman approaching their dwelling. Though she uses a fake name, she's Soorpanaka, a demon and Ravana's sister. She tries to woo Rama and convince him to marry her, but he refuses. Soorpanaka spends the night in agony and decides the next morning that if she can kill Sita, Rama will love her. When Rama leaves the dwelling the next day, Soorpanaka stalks Sita and jumps on her. Lakshmana rescues Sita and chops off Soorpanaka's nose, ears, and breasts. When Rama returns, he tries to explain to Soorpanaka who he is, but it has no effect on her. Rama tells Lakshmana that he can kill Soorpanaka if she won't leave.

Soorpanaka crashes into Ravana's court and tells him what happened. She tells him that Sita is exceptionally beautiful and Ravana should take her for himself. Ravana falls in love with the image of Sita that Soorpanaka creates and goes to his uncle Mareecha for help. Though Mareecha is a demon, he's trying to live a virtuous life. Ravana threatens Mareecha, and Mareecha agrees to help abduct Sita.

Mareecha turns himself into a golden deer and walks near Rama's home. Sita sees the deer and asks Rama to capture it for her as a pet. Rama agrees and goes to chase the deer, leaving Lakshmana to guard Sita. Rama chases the deer for miles before he realizes it's a trap. He shoots the deer, but with his dying breath Mareecha impersonates Rama and cries for help from Sita and Lakshana. Sita hears the cry and convinces Lakshmana to go help Rama. When Lakshmana is gone, Ravana disguises himself as a Brahmin and approaches Sita. Eventually, Ravana is unable to maintain his disguise, and he assumes his demonic form. Sita cries for help, but Ravana digs into the earth and carries Sita away, along with the ground she stands on. Jatayu attempts to save Sita, but Ravana chops off his wing.

Rama and Lakshmana find Jatayu and he relates to them what happened, but dies before he can tell them where Ravana was going with Sita.

In their search for Sita, Rama and Lakshmana enter the land of Kiskinda, which is populated by monkeys. There they meet Hanuman and Sugreeva. Hanuman is Sugreeva's helper and recognizes that Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu. Sugreeva is the king of Kiskinda, but his brother, Vali, banished him after a misunderstanding. Rama is moved by Sugreeva's story and offers to help kill Vali. Sugreeva calls for Vali to come fight, and the brothers clash violently. As Lakshmana and Rama watch the fight, they debate if it's right to get involved. Rama then shoots Vali from a hidden spot. Vali is surprised that someone can kill him, and asks Rama to explain his actions. Rama explains that he killed Vali to right past wrongs, and Vali accepts this and names Sugreeva his successor. After Sugreeva's coronation, Rama instructs him to gather an army and report back to him after the rainy season ends.

The rain lasts for months and Rama spends the entire time depressed. When the rains end, Sugreeva doesn't arrive. Rama sends Lakshmana to find out why, and it comes to light that Sugreeva has spent the rainy season drinking and enjoying women. Sugreeva vows to give up alcohol, however, and promptly summons his armies for Rama. Vali's son Angada and Hanuman are sent south to look for Sita. Rama gives Hanuman his ring and tells him how he can recognize Sita.

When Angada and Hanuman reach the seashore, they nearly lose hope. An advisor, however, explains to Hanuman that Hanuman has the power to grow very large. Hanuman makes himself huge and steps over the sea to Lanka, where Ravana lives. In Lanka, he makes himself small again and begins to search for Sita. He finds her in a garden where rakshasa women are tormenting her. Ravana torments her too, and when they finally leave her alone, Sita prepares to commit suicide. Hanuman shows himself to Sita and tells her that Rama is coming. As he leaves Lanka, Hanuman allows Ravana's army to capture him. He then escapes and lights the city on fire before returning to Rama.

Ravana has his city rebuilt and calls a council of his brothers and commanders. They all tell Ravana that taking Sita in the manner he did was wrong, but at this point they must fight and either win or die. Ravana's youngest brother, Vibishana, insists that Ravana give Sita back to Rama. Ravana banishes him, and Vibishana goes to Rama's camp. Hanuman declares that Vibishana has a good heart and Rama accepts him as the king of Lanka. Vibishana helps Rama form a plan of attack. When they're ready, Rama stands on the seashore and asks the sea god to help him cross the sea. The sea god finally agrees to help make a bridge with whatever Rama's army can bring. The animals help build the bridge, and Rama's army crosses into Lanka.

Ravana sends his soldiers out to fight Rama, but nobody

returns. Ravana tries to convince Sita that Rama is dead, but she remains resolute and faithful to Rama. Rama sends Angada to ask Ravana to concede, but Ravana refuses and Rama officially declares war. The battle rages for days. Ravana finally decides to join the battle himself. Hanuman lifts Rama onto his shoulders and they fight Ravana. They break his crown and send him back to his palace. Ravana then wakes his brother, Kumbakarna, and sends him to the battle. When Kumbakarna dies, Ravana cries, and Lakshmana kills Ravana's son, Indrajit, not long after.

Ravana decides that he has to finish the battle himself. He dresses for battle and climbs into his chariot. The gods send Rama Indra's chariot, which is driven by Matali. Rama gets into the chariot and the battle begins. Ravana ignores the ominous signs and chases Rama. He shoots arrows with his many arms, but none of them reach Rama. The battle moves to the sky and Rama and Ravana circle the world several times before Ravana begins using supernatural weapons. Rama destroys every attempt with either meditations or his own weapons. Finally, Rama sends a weapon at Ravana's heart and kills him. When they land, Rama notices a scar on Ravana's back and fears that he killed him dishonorably. Vibishana explains that the scar is old.

Rama sends for Sita. She dresses beautifully and presents herself in front of Rama, but he tells her that it's improper to accept her back. Distraught, Sita asks Lakshmana to build a fire, and she steps into it. The god of fire carries her back out and presents her to Rama, insisting that she's pure. Rama accepts her, but his test worries the gods. They address him and remind him that he's divine. They then send Dasaratha to earth to meet Rama, which makes Rama very happy. Finally, the gods tell Rama to return to Ayodhya, as Bharatha will kill himself if Rama doesn't return on time. Vibishana summons a magical vehicle that carries Rama and all his army to Ayodhya. They arrive just in time, and Rama and Sita are crowned king and queen and rule for many years in peace. The narrator then explains some storytelling customs, and admits that he's not telling the story of the sequel, in which Rama and Sita part again for morally questionable reasons.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Rama** – Rama is the titular protagonist and the first son of King Dasaratha. Though in this story Rama is a human, he's actually an avatar of the god Vishnu, who decided to take a human form in order to kill the evil rakshasa (demon) Ravana. Because of this, Rama's true identity is identifiable by his desire to rid the world of evil. He's exceptionally strong and skilled in battle, which is also an early clue to those around him that he's an incarnation of Vishnu. Rama uses this strength to string **Shiva's**

**bow** and win Sita's hand in marriage. Though every citizen of Kosala wants Rama to be king, Rama demonstrates his intense loyalty and honor when he insists that Dasaratha uphold his promise to Kaikeyi, one of his wives, and crown Rama's brother, Bharatha, king instead. Rama retreats to the forests with Sita and his brother, Lakshmana, for 14 years, during which time Rama battles demons and rakshasas. When Ravana kidnaps Sita, Rama works closely with the monkeys of Kiskinda to rescue her. During the fight with Ravana, Rama behaves honorably by allowing Ravana time to recover from fainting spells, and even doubts the legitimacy and righteousness of his victory when he notices an injury on Ravana's back and fears that he inflicted it while Ravana fled. Though Rama has a streak of jealousy and possessiveness, especially when it comes to Sita (and even more so in a later episode that is left out of this version of the epic), in general he is presented as the ideal hero and man.

**Sita** – Sita is Rama's wife and the incarnation of the goddess Lakshmi, Vishnu's wife—Sita was literally made for Rama. In the human world, King Janaka found the infant Sita in a plowed field and raised her as his own. To protect her from unsuitable callers, Janaka set the test that any man who wished to marry Sita must be able to string **Shiva's bow**, which is an impossible task for a simple mortal man. Sita represents the ideal wife and woman: she's exceptionally loyal to her husband and follows him into exile; she's beautiful even when she's dressed in tree bark and under duress; and she passes every test of her faithfulness to Rama. Despite her positive qualities, however, Sita at times is vain, petulant, and disobedient. Her disobedience leads to her kidnapping by Ravana.

**Lakshmana** – Lakshmana is Rama's half brother, and son to King Dasaratha. The two are very close, and Lakshmana represents the ideal brother. He chooses to go with Rama when the sage Viswamithra asks for Rama's help as boys, and when Rama is exiled, Lakshmana chooses to go into exile with his brother. He's extremely adept at fighting and Rama is also surprised to discover that Lakshmana is gifted with the skills of an architect. Lakshmana is, however, somewhat more emotionally driven than Rama is; at several points in the story, Rama has to talk Lakshmana out of making rash or violent decisions without thinking them through. At other times, Lakshmana shows that he's equally as level-headed as his brother. Though he marries Sita's sister, Lakshmana's wife doesn't factor into the story in a major capacity. Similarly, though he's a twin to Sathrugna, he's much closer to Rama than his twin.

**Ravana** – Ravana is a rakshasa (demon) with ten heads and ten sets of arms, and is the king of the island Lanka. Long before Rama's birth, Ravana acquired powers from the gods Brahma and Shiva through prayer and sacrifices. Because of this immense power, Rama became evil and now wants to destroy the world and the gods, and create havoc wherever he goes.

Ravana is very lustful; he keeps many women in addition to his wife for his pleasure, though he's cursed to die if he touches a woman without her consent. His lust leads him to kidnap Sita after his sister, Soorpanaka, comes to him with stories of Sita's beauty and Rama's ferocity in protecting her. However, because Sita resists Ravana, Ravana digs under Sita's feet and picks her up from the ground she stands on—so as to not touch her—and then imprisons her with a number of women who are tasked with breaking down Sita's defenses to make her agree to have sex with Ravana. Rama finally kills Ravana by countering Ravana's evil and destructive weapons with defensive weapons that provide strength and clarity.

**Hanuman** – Hanuman is a monkey who initially serves Sugreeva. In his childhood, Hanuman's father told Hanuman to dedicate his life to serving Vishnu. Hanuman is the first monkey to realize that Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu, and in following his father's instructions, Hanuman becomes one of Rama's most trusted and loyal advisers. He's also an excellent judge of character; he correctly judges Vibishana, Ravana's brother, as being loyal to Rama's cause. Hanuman is also extremely powerful, though he's unaware of his powers for much of the story. When Hanuman is reminded of his great power, he finds he's capable of growing to a massive size and can step over the ocean in one step. He's tasked with finding Sita in Lanka, and keeps Sita from committing suicide out of despair. When Rama is finally crowned king in Ayodhya, Hanuman chooses to stay with Rama and serve him.

**Dasaratha** – Dasaratha is the emperor of Kosala and Rama's father. He has three wives, Kausalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumithra, none of whom have children, but after offering specific sacrifices, he has four sons: Rama, Lakshmana, Sathrugna, and Bharatha. Dasaratha cares deeply for all four of his children and resists Viswamithra's request to take Rama on a journey to protect him. However, Dasaratha is extremely dutiful, and finally agrees to Viswamithra's wishes. Later, when Dasaratha realizes that he's getting quite old and should pick a successor, he chooses Rama to succeed him. When Kaikeyi insists that Dasaratha crown her son Bharatha instead of Rama to fulfill a boon he granted her years ago, Dasaratha feels he has no choice but to agree, though agreeing to this leads to Dasaratha's death.

**Sugreeva** – Sugreeva is a monkey from Kiskinda. His brother, Vali, banished him from the kingdom because he believed that Sugreeva tried to usurp the crown, though Sugreeva remained honorable and loyal to his brother's claim. Sugreeva asks Rama for help in killing Vali, but feels extremely guilty when their plan works and Vali dies. As the king of Kiskinda, Sugreeva gives himself over to material pleasures and spends his time drinking alcohol and enjoying the company of beautiful women, causing him to ignore the promise he made to Rama to provide an army to search for Sita. When Sugreeva is made to see the error of his ways, though, he vows to give up alcohol and becomes one

of Rama's greatest and most loyal allies in the fight against Ravana.

**Vali** – Vali is the initial king of the monkeys in Kiskinda. He's a very powerful being in his own right, but he also has the special power of being nearly invincible. When someone wishes to fight Vali, they give up half their power to Vali, making him even stronger. However, this power makes Vali an unwilling listener. He banishes his brother, Sugreeva, because he was unwilling to listen to Sugreeva's truthful account of a past event, and instead Vali chose to believe that Sugreeva wanted to usurp him. This lack of rational and considerate thought leads Rama to side with Sugreeva and kill Vali without listening to Vali's version of events. However, as Vali dies, Rama convinces him that even though he's a monkey, he is capable of accessing and using a more nuanced and human system of conduct and thought. This allows Vali to find eternal peace in the afterworld.

**Bharatha** – Bharatha is the son of Dasaratha and Kaikeyi. Like his brothers, Bharatha is a skilled warrior and exceptionally thoughtful. He is extremely angry when he hears that Kaikeyi forced Dasaratha to name him as the next emperor of Kosala instead of Rama. Bharatha attempts to bring Rama back from exile through a philosophical debate, but Rama insists that Bharatha follow their father's wishes and rule until Rama returns from exile. Bharatha agrees, but rather than rule as an emperor, he places Rama's sandals on the throne and rules as a regent from a settlement outside the capital city. When Rama returns from exile, Bharatha gladly transfers power to his brother.

**Kaikeyi** – Kaikeyi is Dasaratha's favorite wife and the mother of Bharatha. Though she's a kind and generous woman at heart, her companion Kooni encourages Kaikeyi to behave jealously and blackmail Dasaratha into crowning Bharatha king instead of Rama. Kaikeyi is able to do this because she saved Dasaratha's life years ago and he granted her a boon in thanks, which she chose to redeem at a later date. When Rama returns from exile, Kaikeyi accepts him as the rightful king and appears to have realized the error of her earlier actions.

**King Janaka** – King Janaka is Sita's adoptive father and the king of Mithila. He cares deeply for Sita, and to protect her from possibly having to marry an unworthy man, he declares that any suitor must be able to string **Shiva's bow**, a massive bow and a family heirloom. Though he fears Sita might never marry because of this, he feels that he cannot go against his word and do away with the condition.

**Soorpanaka** – Soorpanaka is Ravana's demoness sister. Though her demon form is horrific, with long fangs, a distended belly, and wild hair, she's also capable of assuming the form of a beautiful woman. She falls madly in love with Rama and consequently becomes extremely jealous of Sita. When she won't leave Rama alone, Lakshmana cuts off her ears, nose, and breasts.

**Kooni** – Kooni is a hunchback woman and one of Kaikeyi's companions. When Rama was a child he made fun of her deformities and threw clay balls at her, which causes Kooni to harbor ill will towards Rama for the rest of her life. To take revenge, Kooni encourages Kaikeyi to use her promised boons from Dasaratha to banish Rama to the forest for 14 years. She convinces Kaikeyi that if Rama becomes king, he'll treat Kaikeyi badly.

**Vishnu** – Vishnu is one of the gods that make up the Hindu Trinity (alongside Shiva and Brahma). Vishnu is referred to as the protector. In his divine form, he carries a conch and a wheel and rests on the coils of a serpent. Lakshmi is his wife. Vishnu agrees to incarnate as Rama in order to destroy Ravana and the other rakshasas.

**Brahma** – Brahma is one of the gods that comprises the Hindu Trinity, along with Shiva and Vishnu. Brahma is the creator and has four faces. Though Brahma initially granted Ravana boons that made him very powerful, he asks Vishnu for help in defeating Ravana when Ravana begins to use his powers for evil. Later, Brahma takes it upon himself to remind Rama of his divinity.

**Indra** – Indra is a lesser god in Hindu mythology. He becomes obsessed with the perfect woman, Ahalya, and tricks her into having sex with him before assuming the body of a cat to escape. As punishment, Ahalya's husband curses Indra's feline body to be covered in "a thousand female marks." When Indra's embarrassment at his state causes him to be unable to perform his duties as a god, Ahalya's husband changes the "female marks" to eyes, and Indra is known from then on as the "thousand-eyed god." He offers Rama his magical chariot to help defeat Ravana.

**Jatayu** – Jatayu is a great eagle and was at one point a dear friend of Dasaratha. When he comes across Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita in the forest, he vows to stay alive and protect them until Rama's exile comes to an end. Ravana kills him when Jatayu tries to prevent Ravana from abducting Sita.

**Mareecha** – Mareecha is Thataka's son and Ravana's uncle. Though he's a demon, he attempts to correct his life by giving up his violent ways and praying. When Ravana threatens him, however, Mareecha agrees to help abduct Sita. Mareecha is correct in believing that this decision will be the end of him: Rama shoots and kills him.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Shiva** – With Brahma and Vishnu, Shiva is one of the gods that makes up the Hindu Trinity. He's referred to as the destroyer. Shiva is one of the gods who granted Ravana the boons that made him powerful, and he assists Brahma and Vishnu in orchestrating Ravana's later downfall.

**Kamban / The Poet** – Kamban was a medieval poet who composed a Tamil translation of the *Ramayana*. The narrator

uses Kamban's version as source material to write this edition of the *Ramayana*, and refers to Kamban as "the poet" when describing how he refers to certain plot points or descriptions.

**Vibishana** – Vibishana is Ravana's youngest brother. He's the most logical and good-hearted of all Ravana's brothers and tries to convince Ravana to release Sita. When Ravana refuses and banishes him, Vibishana joins Rama's army and offers intelligence on Ravana's weapons and army that allow Rama to plan a successful attack.

**Lakshmi** – Lakshmi is a Hindu goddess and the god Vishnu's wife. She incarnates as Sita when Vishnu incarnates as Rama.

**Kausalya** – Kausalya is Rama's mother and Dasaratha's wife. She's devoted to her husband and loves her fellow wives' sons as her own.

**Sumithra** – Sumithra is the mother of the twins Lakshmana and Sathrugna, and one of Dasaratha's wives.

**Viswamithra** – Viswamithra is a sage, though he was once a powerful king. He teaches Rama about weaponry.

**Angada** – Angada is the son of Tara and Vali. He's an instrumental figure in Rama's fight against Ravana.

**Thataka** – Thataka is the first demoness that Rama kills. She eats everything that crosses her path, and her evil spoils the land and turns it into a desert.

**Sampathi** – Sampathi is Jatayu's brother. He's disfigured because the sun god burnt him many years ago. When he meets Angada and Hanuman, he hears Rama's name and this restores Sampathi to his original, majestic form.

**Tara** – Tara is initially Sugreeva's wife, but becomes Vali's wife when Vali banishes Sugreeva. She has one son, Angada.

**Sathrugna** – Sathrugna is Lakshmana's twin and the son of Dasaratha and Sumithra. He helps Bharatha rule in Rama's absence, and helps Rama enter into exile safely.

**Sumithra** – Sumithra is Dasaratha's third wife. She's the mother of the twins Lakshmana and Sathrugna.

**Ahalya** – Brahma created Ahalya to be the most beautiful and perfect woman. The god Indra tricked Ahalya into having sex with him, and as punishment, Ahalya's husband cursed her to turn to stone until she hears Rama's name.

**Kara** – Kara is a demon warrior who serves Ravana and protects Soorpanaka. Rama kills him.

**Indrajit** – Indrajit is one of Ravana's sons. He wholeheartedly supports his father.

**Kumbakarna** – Kumbakarna is one of Ravana's brothers. He's massive, violent, and a deep sleeper—it takes an entire army to wake him.

**Matali** – Matali is the driver of the god Indra's chariot. The gods send him to assist Rama in the battle with Ravana.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### HEROISM

The *Ramayana* tells the story of Rama, a man who is an avatar (incarnation) of the Hindu god Vishnu. As such, Rama possesses all of Vishnu's godly qualities in the body of a man, and is therefore meant to represent an image of the ideal man according to Hindu philosophy. As the characters travel through the text, interacting with other honorable characters as well as less-ideal characters, the text seeks to discover what truly makes an ideal hero or person, and how readers or listeners can use Rama's example to create for themselves a more ideal life.

As the ideal man, Rama is exceptionally strong, handsome, skilled in battle, extremely thoughtful, and loyal to his family members. The first indicator of Rama's greatness, and one that carries throughout the entirety of the story, is Rama's exceptional strength and abilities in battle. When Rama is a boy, the sage Viswamithra asks that Rama and Rama's brother, Lakshmana, accompany him to a sacred place to defend him against evil demons during a sacrifice. As Viswamithra performs his sacrifice, Rama and Lakshmana successfully fight off all the demons who wish to interrupt Viswamithra's prayers. This stands as an early indicator that both Rama and Lakshmana are great fighters and possess great strength. Further, this initial victory causes the asthras (weapons powered by supernatural forces) to pledge themselves to Rama, which reinforces the righteousness of Rama and allows him to triumph over Ravana later. Later in the same journey, Rama successfully strings **Shiva's bow** in Mithila, demonstrating his godly strength and his worthiness to marry Sita. King Janaka designed this nearly impossible test to discourage unworthy young men from asking for Sita's hand, and the fact that Rama is not just able to string the bow, but break it stands as a public announcement of Rama's strength and perfection.

Alongside his great strength, what sets Rama apart from other characters, including the similarly strong Lakshmana, is Rama's desire to do only good, and to carefully weigh the evidence in order to make the decision that will lead to the most good. This suggests that one of the most important qualities of a hero is that he first of all seeks to champion good, and that he does so by being particularly thoughtful and considerate. Though Rama and Lakshmana both possess impressive strength and military knowledge, Rama rises far above Lakshmana when comparing

their tempers and thoughtfulness. Lakshmana certainly has good intentions, but at times he attempts to act rashly and without fully considering the consequences of his actions, as when he threatens to take on anyone who opposes Rama's claim to the throne of Ayodhya. When Lakshmana behaves this way, Rama demonstrates his own positive qualities by reasoning with his brother and leading him towards the correct path.

Rama discusses with a number of characters throughout the book as to why his reasoning is the most correct, pointing out to them exactly why their logic is flawed. In all cases, Rama is successful in teaching other characters how and why a particular path is correct. In other situations, Rama allows other characters to convince him of why a choice is the correct one. This shows that part of being the perfect hero is being willing and able to both teach and learn from others, so that everyone can become similarly ideal. Though Rama does at times make decisions that call his morality into question, as when he forces Sita to prove her fidelity, the book overwhelmingly presents the idea that being willing to listen, learn, and then teach is a crucial part of what makes Rama the ideal hero. Further, by humanizing Rama in this way (even the gods intervene at that point and remind Rama of his purpose and divinity), the ideal set out by Rama seems even more possible for a reader or listener. Even Rama makes mistakes, but his willingness to listen and learn allows him to remain a revered hero.



### DUTY, HONOR, AND LOYALTY

The characters in the *Ramayana* place a great deal of importance on honor, loyalty, and behaving dutifully to their family members. Honor and

loyalty control every character in the story, humans as well as the demons and the gods. Even though honoring one's promises and behaving loyally often has disastrous short-term consequences for the characters, they overwhelmingly choose to follow through with their promises, which later result in long-term success. This suggests that though behaving loyally or honorably may be difficult or unappealing initially, it's entirely necessary for future happiness.

First, it's important to note that the importance placed on loyalty and duty works in the logic of the story and in Hindu society because of a widespread belief in fate and destiny. Essentially, if someone violates a promise or refuses to grant a promised boon, the cosmic order of society will be catastrophically interrupted. On the other hand, following through with one's promises allows a person to actually follow the cosmic order, even if it doesn't make logical sense at the time.

As the protagonist of the story and the ideal hero, Rama is intensely loyal and honorable—at times, nearly to a fault. He acts as a model citizen, demonstrating for other characters as

well as readers or listeners the importance of behaving honorably, loyally, and remaining dutiful to one's family. When King Dasaratha is forced to send Rama into exile to fulfill an earlier promise he made to his wife Kaikeyi, Rama refuses the pleadings of his family members and advisors to stay and obey the desires of his father's heart, rather than his father's words. The gods watch these discussions closely, worried that Rama will interrupt his fate by allowing himself to be crowned. When Rama insists on honoring his father's words, he insures three things: that his father upholds his promise to Kaikeyi; that Rama himself behaves obediently to his father; and that he will be able to go on and fulfill his destiny of destroying the rakshasa demons. This choice also means that when Rama does return, his rule will be legitimate.

Even though upholding one's promises is of the utmost importance to the characters in the *Ramayana*, the characters also look for ways to use loopholes and technicalities to orchestrate events and behave in a way they believe to be correct. This is practiced by mortals and gods alike, and shows that though the gods might control fate, they can't always insure that their actions or promises will lead to good. For example, Ravana, the story's villain, becomes extremely powerful because he was initially decent and virtuous, and the gods agreed to reward him for his virtue. Ravana's resulting power corrupted him and led him to use his power to subjugate the gods who pledged protection to him. This in turn leads the gods to concoct the plan for Vishnu to be born as Rama, as it allows them to utilize the fact that Ravana never asked a human for protection. Other gods incarnate as monkeys, since Ravana is cursed to expect his downfall from a monkey. By doing this, the gods are able to technically keep their promises to Ravana while simultaneously removing him from power. Bharatha, Rama's brother, engages in a similar thought process when Rama insists that he follow Dasaratha's wishes that he stay in Ayodhya to rule. While Bharatha technically follows his father's wishes, in actuality he rules as a regent from outside the city and waits for Rama's return. These situations show that though ideas of duty, honor, and loyalty are extremely important for society to function at all levels, individuals can still exert some control over their lives and fates by working within the confines of these expectations.



### GOOD VS. EVIL

On a very basic level, the *Ramayana* is a simple tale of good triumphing over evil. However, such a simplistic reduction doesn't do justice to the story's interrogation of what actually makes someone good or evil. Most importantly, the story suggests that good and evil exist on a spectrum, and one's choices in life can move one's life closer to one pole or the other. Similarly, the story also offers regular reminders that just because someone made a poor choice, there are almost always opportunities to remedy the results of

that choice, suggesting that good and evil aren't simply black and white ideas and providing nuance to a very simple story.

The *Ramayana* presents, overall, a cast of very rounded characters. It's able to do so because it presents the idea that good and evil exist on a spectrum, rather than as complete opposites. All characters, good or bad, fight a personal battle between their desires to do good and their desires to follow a path that's comparatively evil. By framing good and evil as fluid concepts that can be somewhat remedied through choice, the story suggests that people have some degree of power to control their fate. However, it's important to note that though it makes this suggestion, no characters actually choose to go against fate; they all choose the paths that are in line with what the gods have set out. This shows that while the choice itself may be an illusion of sorts, the process of deciding to act a certain way helps a person gain a deeper understanding of good and evil.

The story does offer the possibility that good comes more easily to some than to others. Rama, as an incarnation of the god Vishnu, has a relatively easy time of behaving in acceptable ways, while Vali considers himself less capable of good because he's a monkey and doesn't have access to human reasoning. The idea that good is more accessible to some while others are more prone to evil does break down along gender lines—many of the demons that Rama encounters early in the text are female, and the underlying reason for Rama's exile is female jealousy. Further, the text equates true romantic love with good, while it equates lust and desire with evil. When Rama, Lakshmana, and the sage Viswamithra encounter the demoness Thataka, Rama initially shows his goodness by stating that it would be improper to kill Thataka because it's improper to kill women. In reply, Viswamithra tells Rama, "a woman of demoniac tendencies loses all consideration to be treated as a woman," suggesting that Thataka is less than a woman because of her choices to do evil deeds, as well as that Rama will be carrying out a *good* deed by killing her.

Though this is an extreme example of the gender divisions between good and evil, it sets up the idea that the responsibility for controlling female evil and protecting female goodness falls to men. Rama later takes Viswamithra's advice to the extreme when he's unwilling to accept Sita after rescuing her from Ravana. He fears that she gave in to Ravana's desires and had sex with him, and Rama forces her to prove her sexual purity with a test designed to kill her if she hadn't remained faithful during her captivity. Sita passes this trial by fire exactly because of her purity—the purity of her heart and the strength of her love are enough to overpower the fire god's duty to burn her, and he carries her out of the fire unharmed. Here, Viswamithra's advice about dealing with female evil (or good) comes full circle: Sita can't be killed because she's so overwhelmingly good, and is therefore returned to her status as a good woman.

By showing situations that offer characters the opportunity to remedy bad decisions, the story offers a hopeful outlook on the play between good and evil. Sugreeva, Vali's brother and the next king of the monkeys, chooses to remedy his downhill situation. He ultimately comes to Rama's aid as promised, and when he sees the error of his ways, he vows to give up alcohol. Kaikeyi similarly realizes that she behaved poorly in insisting that Dasaratha banish Rama, and accepts Rama as her rightful king when he returns to Ayodhya. Ravana, on the other hand, meets his end when he insists on remaining on his destructive and evil path rather than choosing a more righteous path. This suggests that, in the universe presented in the epic, it's never too late to make decisions that will bring one closer to goodness.



## STORYTELLING, TEACHING, AND MORALITY

This edition of the *Ramayana* makes it very clear that the story has been condensed into an abridged, prose version of the original *Ramayana*, which consists of over ten thousand stanzas of poetry. Further, Narayan draws his story from a Tamil version of the *Ramayana* by the medieval poet Kamban, who in turn created his version from the original Sanskrit version by Valmiki. Because of this, it's made very clear by its structure and history that the *Ramayana* is a product of many different time periods and individuals who had a hand in creating the story. Though particulars vary from version to version, it remains an instrumental and extremely popular morality tale and religious text.

Both introductions to the book by R. K. Narayan and Panjak Mishra state several facts that are necessary to understanding the cultural significance of the *Ramayana*. They note that the *Ramayana* was first, and for many years, an oral story that existed long before the sage Valmiki put it in writing sometime between the fifth and first centuries BCE. They then stress that the *Ramayana*, and the life story of Rama in general, are major guiding forces, if not the most important guiding forces, in Indian society. They state that every child is encouraged to be like Rama, and the *Ramayana* itself is recited during various holidays and festivals throughout the year.

Narayan's writing style seeks to showcase the best or most interesting elements of Kamban's work, rather than treating it as simple source material. By referring at times to Kamban as "the poet," pointing out inconsistencies, or making comments about a particular plot point, Narayan makes it clear to the reader that the tale has many different iterations and is at time reflective of different beliefs or, possibly, different authors. This also makes it clear that the *Ramayana* functions as a historical text as well as a morality tale, as it reflects the individual histories of those who wrote a particular version. It's thus

absolutely necessary to consider the *Ramayana* as a story with multiple authors and a rich history, which in many ways colors the way in which the different authors deal with the idea of Rama's morality. In particular, Narayan states clearly his intent to leave out the ending of the *Ramayana*, in which Rama banishes Sita to the forest after questioning her fidelity a second time. He states that this ending is generally considered to be a later addition to Valmiki's *Ramayana*, and one that majorly calls Rama's morality into question. By choosing to end his narration with Rama triumphant as the ruler of Ayodhya, and Rama and Sita's marriage intact and happy, Narayan demonstrates how storytellers have the power to dictate which moral questions the story asks. This version paints a far more flattering image of Rama, and one that's intended to appeal to more audiences.

Narayan casts himself as a mere messenger rather than an independently driven author, particularly when he prefaces the chapter in which Rama kills the monkey king Vali for questionable reasons. He notes that even though Rama is normally ethical and reasonable to an extreme, this action is very out of character for him, as he shoots Vali before hearing Vali's version of events. By making this observation about Rama's break of character, Narayan suggests that Rama is as much an avatar for Vishnu as he is a reflection of the people who wrote the story, people who aren't perfect and instead sometimes made rash and poorly considered decisions. This brings a distinctly human element to the otherwise saintly perfection of Rama's character. By allowing Rama flaws and lapses in judgment, a storyteller can then help an audience understand that attempting to emulate Rama is indeed possible. Everyone, even Rama, makes mistakes, but it's also possible to try to be good and moral, as he does.

deflect all of Ravana's ill-begotten and evil weapons.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Books edition of *The Ramayana* published in 2006.

### Prologue Quotes

☛ Ravana can be destroyed only by a human being since he never asked for protection from a human being.

**Related Characters:** Vishnu (speaker), Shiva, Brahma, Rama, Ravana, Dasaratha

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 4

#### Explanation and Analysis

When the gods ask Vishnu for help in destroying the newly powerful Ravana, Vishnu agrees to incarnate as a human (Rama) and gives this reasoning for why incarnating as a human will allow the gods to successfully do away with Ravana. Here, Vishnu shows how the gods look for loopholes and utilize technicalities to make sure that good prevails, while still honoring their promises.

This also is the moment that creates Rama's destiny. It shows that Vishnu and the gods are, first of all, in control of mortals' destinies: Vishnu can dictate how events play out on earth. By saying simply what is going to happen, Vishnu makes it so.

### 1. Rama's Initiation Quotes

☛ You cannot count on the physical proximity of someone you love, all the time. A seed that sprouts at the foot of its parent tree remains stunted until it is transplanted...Every human being, when the time comes, has to depart and seek his fulfillment in his own way.

**Related Characters:** Viswamithra (speaker), Rama, Dasaratha

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 9

#### Explanation and Analysis

When Dasaratha expresses worry and sadness at



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### BOWS AND ARROWS

For much of the story, Rama's weapon of choice is the bow and arrow. As such, bows and arrows in general are symbolic of Rama's great strength. This becomes particularly apparent when Janaka asks Rama to try to string Shiva's bow, a massive bow that any of Sita's suitors must be able to string in order to be considered worthy of marrying her. Rama not only strings the bow; he snaps it with his strength. In this situation, the bow is more than just a symbol of Rama's great strength; it also acts as a symbol for Rama's goodness, worthiness, and divine origins. This repeats later during the battle between Rama and Ravana, when Rama's arrows, which are imbued with prayers and Rama's goodness, neutralize or

Viswamithra's desire to take Rama on a quest, Viswamithra kindly tells Dasaratha that Rama will have to leave his father eventually. Viswamithra's words impress upon Dasaratha the duties of a father; namely, to let go of his children and allow them to flourish, rather than stunting them by insisting on their constant presence. As the story is very concerned with the duties of family members to each other, this stands as a very important reminder to Dasaratha, as well as a reminder to listening or reading parents of their own duties to their children. These words also foreshadow Rama's eventual departure from Ayodhya. Though all the characters agree that Rama would absolutely make a fantastic king, this suggests that assuming the crown when Dasaratha first asked him to would stunt Rama's growth. Instead, Rama has to truly leave, grow, and then return to take Dasaratha's place as the new "parent tree" in Ayodhya.

☛ You will learn the answer if you listen to this story—of a woman fierce, ruthless, eating and digesting all living creatures, possessing the strength of a thousand mad elephants.

**Related Characters:** Viswamithra (speaker), Thataka, Lakshmana, Rama

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 11

### Explanation and Analysis

Rama asks Viswamithra how the desert they're passing through came to be so desolate, and Viswamithra asks Rama and Lakshmana to listen to his story of Thataka. This framing device of placing stories within the story shows how important storytelling is to the actual idea of Rama and the *Ramayana*: even the characters in the story tell stories. Importantly, the stories that Rama hears throughout the book function as teaching tools. Through Thataka's story, Rama learns about the effects of meanness, and is taught soon after that there are times when it is acceptable to kill a female. In the same way, a reader or listener of the *Ramayana* is encouraged by either the text or the storyteller to take lessons from the story and apply them to their own lives.

☛ Just as the presence of a little loba (meanness) dries up and disfigures a whole human personality, so does the presence of this monster turn into desert a region which was once fertile.

**Related Characters:** Viswamithra (speaker), Thataka, Lakshmana, Rama

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 12

### Explanation and Analysis

Viswamithra finishes telling Thataka's origin story by reminding Rama of the bad things that come from being mean. Though Rama uses this story to learn about Thataka in particular so that he can go on to kill her, Thataka's story also functions as a standalone morality tale for both Rama and for listeners or readers. When taken in this way, it's possible to apply this line of thinking to other evil characters such as Ravana. The story states that Ravana was once a devout and honorable character, but his power corrupted him and turned him into an evil being. In doing so, Ravana's meanness destroys what could've been a helpful, honorable, and contributing member of society, both on earth and in the lands inhabited by gods and supernatural beings.

☛ A woman of demoniac tendencies loses all consideration to be treated as a woman.

**Related Characters:** Viswamithra (speaker), Thataka, Lakshmana, Rama

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 12

### Explanation and Analysis

When Rama is finally confronted with Thataka, he initially insists that it would be improper to kill her because she's female. Viswamithra, however, insists to Rama that because Thataka is evil, it's acceptable to consider her as less than a woman and to kill her.

This logic equates true womanhood first and foremost with goodness. It suggests that a female being that doesn't exhibit positive qualities or character traits is less than a woman, and doesn't need to be treated with the respect that the story indicates women deserve. Further, it suggests that it's the responsibility of men to rid the world of these less-than-women. Simply by not mentioning any equal or

opposite phrases about demonic men, the story sets up the system in which women must consistently prove their goodness to the men around them in order to be treated as women. This line of reasoning leads later to Rama refusing to take Sita back after rescuing her from Ravana. Rama believed that Sita had given into "demonic tendencies" by not conducting herself faithfully, which in his eyes, makes her less than a woman and worthy of death. Similarly, when Sita does prove that she remained faithful to Rama, Rama restores her to her state as his wife.

## 2. The Wedding Quotes

☞ The sun set beyond the sea, so says the poet—and when a poet mentions a sea, we have to accept it. No harm in letting a poet describe his vision, no need to question his geography.

**Related Characters:** Kamban / The Poet, Sita, Rama

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 23

### Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes some of Kamban's (the poet) language on the night that Rama and Sita first see each other. At several points throughout the book, the narrator steps back and makes observations like this about either the original Valmiki *Ramayana*, or the Kamban *Ramayana* that he used to write this version. These observations make it very clear to the reader that the *Ramayana* is a living, historical document. As a result, it contains inconsistencies like this where the geography of the Kosala kingdom might be somewhat questionable. However, rather than insisting on fixing Kamban's questionable geography, the narrator instead presents this as charming evidence that Rama's story has gone through a number of changes, and the particulars of the story reflect those changes.

☞ As time passed Janaka became anxious whether he would ever see his daughter married and settled—since the condition once made could not be withdrawn. No one on earth seemed worthy of approaching Shiva's bow. Janaka sighed. "I tremble when I think of Sita's future, and question my own judgment in linking her fate with this mighty, divine heirloom in our house."

**Related Characters:** King Janaka (speaker), Shiva, Sita, Rama, Viswamithra

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 26

### Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains that Janaka, Sita's father, has declared that any suitor of Sita's must be able to lift and string Shiva's bow. Unfortunately, Janaka comes to realize that this task is impossible for most, if not all, mortal men. Notice, however, that the narrator insists that Janaka absolutely cannot go back on his decision. Whatever the consequences, he must remain firm or risk upsetting the cosmic order. The reader will be also aware that given the way the story presents destiny, this implies that it's predestined that nobody but Rama is able to string the bow, thereby insuring that Rama marries Sita. However, Janaka's worry about setting this condition shows that however "right" something might be in terms of destiny, for the humans who don't have insight into the divine, following destiny is an often uncomfortable path. Because Janaka stays his course despite the discomfort and confusion, though, Rama and Sita can go forth and complete the rest of their destinies.

## 3. Two Promises Revived Quotes

☞ He is perfect and will be a perfect ruler. He has compassion, a sense of justice, and courage, and he makes no distinctions between human beings—old or young, prince or peasant; he has the same consideration for everyone. In courage, valor, and all the qualities—none to equal him.

**Related Characters:** Dasaratha (speaker), Rama

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 34

### Explanation and Analysis

Dasaratha has assembled his advisors and courtiers and tells them that he'd like to name Rama his successor, since he's beginning to age. In justifying his decision, Dasaratha lists all of Rama's good qualities. This list can be taken as the story's definition of the perfect hero: compassionate, courageous, and just. Further, Dasaratha suggests that there's nobody else who can meet all these requirements—thus reinforcing Rama's sense of divinity. Rama is as perfect as he is because he's an incarnation of a god; his companions experience faults because they are,

essentially, more human than he is. This suggests that in many ways, Rama's perfection is impossible for most humans, who are without divine roots, to create for themselves.

☞ "My father's name is renowned for the steadfastness of his words. Would you rather that he spoke false? ... I am thrice blessed, to make my brother the King, to carry out my father's command, and to live in the forests. Do not let your heart grieve."

**Related Characters:** Rama (speaker), Kaikeyi, Bharatha, Dasaratha, Kausalya

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 46

### Explanation and Analysis

Kausalya has just begged Rama to stay and allow himself to be crowned king, but Rama refuses and insists on remaining true to Dasaratha's command. This shows again how much importance the story places on remaining true to one's promises. For Rama, it's extremely important both that he follow his father's wishes, but also that his father keep his word. By making sure that his father stays true to his word, Rama allows Dasaratha to later die an honest man, rather than one sullied by going back on his word.

Rama also insists that Kausalya not worry too much about this seemingly terrible turn of events, which demonstrates his belief and faith in fate. He understands that it's his fate to do as Dasaratha asks him to do, and that agreeing to go along with what fate has dictated will bring good to the world. This alludes to Rama's divinity and also suggests Kausalya's humanity. She doesn't possess the divine origins that Rama does, and therefore struggles to understand and accept this turn of fate that she sees as exceptionally unjust.

☞ "I'll be the fate to overpower fate itself," said Lakshmana, with martial arrogance. Rama argued with him further. "I'll change and alter fate itself, if necessary..."

**Related Characters:** Lakshmana (speaker), Bharatha, Kaikeyi, Dasaratha, Rama

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 52

### Explanation and Analysis

Lakshmana has just found out that Rama is going to be banished, and he dresses for battle and wanders through the streets to challenge anyone who challenges Rama's claim to the throne. In this situation, Lakshmana's arrogance and belief that he can singlehandedly change fate works to make Rama seem more like the ideal hero. By encouraging the reader to compare Rama's reaction to Lakshmana's reaction, it's clear that Rama embodies the perfect hero by accepting his banishment happily and without question; Lakshmana, on the other hand, looks arrogant and foolish by trying to change it. However, Lakshmana does later show that he too can take on some of Rama's heroic qualities, as he does allow Rama to talk him out of this course of action. The fact that Rama argues with Lakshmana also allows Rama another way to demonstrate his heroism, as he attempts to teach others how to behave heroically like he does.

☞ "Oh, impossible thought—did he commit a wrong? But if Rama committed a seemingly wrong act, it would still be something to benefit humanity, like a mother forcibly administering a medicine to her child."

**Related Characters:** Bharatha (speaker), Rama, Kaikeyi

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 57

### Explanation and Analysis

Kaikeyi has just told Bharatha that Rama has been banished, and Bharatha wonders what Rama did to deserve banishment. Bharatha's reasoning shows how wholly perfect and heroic Rama is—it's entirely inconceivable that Rama would commit a wrong act. This indicates that everything Rama does is for good, which further underscores Rama's goodness and works too as proof of Rama's divine origins.

Bharatha also suggests that when Rama does something that appears as though it's wrong, others should trust that Rama actually did it for the good of humanity. This provides a framework to understand some of Rama's questionable actions later in the story, such as killing Vali or insisting on testing Sita's fidelity. It suggests that only Rama understands how these actions fit into the grand scheme of the world and the universe, and mere mortals (including the

reader or listener) must accept Rama's judgment, as he's the perfect hero.

#### 4. Encounters in Exile Quotes

☛☛ Rama's whole purpose of incarnation was ultimately to destroy Ravana, the chief of the asuras, abolish fear from the hearts of men and gods, and establish peace, gentleness, and justice in the world.

**Related Characters:** Ravana, Vishnu, Rama

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 63

##### Explanation and Analysis

Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana are traveling through the forests in exile, and the narrator reminds the reader of Vishnu's purpose in this human life as Rama. This also reminds the reader of the role that fate plays in the logic of the novel. Rama is destined to be successful in destroying Ravana because the gods intervened and orchestrated a situation in which he can be victorious in this quest. Again, this underscores the fact that Rama is the perfect hero. The narrator mentions that at this point in his journey, Rama is entranced with the idyllic landscape and life he's living with Sita and Lakshmana, but he never allows himself to get distracted or forget that he's on earth to deal with Ravana.

#### 5. The Grand Tormentor Quotes

☛☛ The kings of this earth whom he had reduced to vassal-dom stood about with their hands upraised in an attitude of perpetual salutation, lest at any moment Ravana should turn in their direction and think that they were not sufficiently servile.

**Related Characters:** Ravana

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 74

##### Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes Ravana's court, where gods, humans, and other beings exist to do nothing but serve Ravana's every whim and passing fancy. This passage as a whole illustrates how much power Ravana has as a result of the boons granted to him by Brahma and Shiva. Further, it shows the extent of that power's corruption. Ravana

obviously enjoys his power and wants to perform it for those who serve him, as evidenced by these kings who must continually salute Ravana. This is entirely a power trip, and shows that Ravana enjoys power for power's sake. He has no interest in using his power to enact good in the world, but only to build himself up.

☛☛ "You are the overlord of seven worlds, mightier than the mightiest. Why do you feel sad and unhappy? Go and get her; that is all. Take her. She is yours. Is there anything beyond your reach? Stir yourself. Leave this desolate mood. Go forth, snatch her, because she is yours, created for you and waiting for you."

**Related Characters:** Soorpanaka (speaker), Sita, Ravana

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 78

##### Explanation and Analysis

Ravana is madly in love with Sita after Soorpanaka described her beauty, and Soorpanaka encourages Ravana to go and abduct Sita. This passage primarily shows how evil of a character Soorpanaka is. Her underhanded motives can't be denied; she seems to actually care little for Ravana's feelings, and is far more concerned with finding a way to take Rama for herself. This paints her as selfish and self-centered. Further, Soorpanaka also lies when she insists that Sita was created for Ravana, though it's unclear if she realizes this is a lie. Sita is actually an incarnation of the goddess Lakshmi, Vishnu's wife, and is therefore literally created for Rama. However, Soorpanaka's omission of this fact only continues to situate her as an evil character, whether Soorpanaka actually believes Sita was made for Ravana or not.

#### 6. Vali Quotes

☛☛ The perfect man takes a false step, apparently commits a moral slip, and we ordinary mortals stand puzzled before the incident. It may be less an actual error of commission on his part than a lack of understanding on ours; measured in Eternity, such an event might stand out differently.

**Related Characters:** Sugreeva, Vali, Lakshmana, Rama

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 90

### Explanation and Analysis

The narrator prefaces this chapter by stating that what Rama does in this chapter is very out of character for him. However, notice that the narrator attempts to give Rama the benefit of the doubt by suggesting that "ordinary mortals" such as readers (and the narrator himself) might simply be incapable of grasping how Rama's actions work when considered on a much grander scale than that of the story. This drives home again that Rama is indeed the perfect hero, and even when he does potentially commit a wrong, we as readers are encouraged to trust that Rama knows what he's doing. In this way, the story suggests also that Rama is the perfect hero because although he's human, he has divine origins that other people and characters simply don't have. It also pulls in ideas of fate. In the logic of the novel, everything Rama does is predestined, making it certain that this possible misstep was also predestined.

☞ "We should not become too analytical about a friend, nor look too deeply into original causes; but accept only what appears good to us in the first instance, and act on it."

**Related Characters:** Rama (speaker), Bharatha, Sugreeva, Vali, Lakshmana

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 99

### Explanation and Analysis

Lakshmana wonders out loud if he and Rama are meddling improperly in Vali and Sugreeva's relationship, but Rama insists that they're right to be involved and correct in supporting Sugreeva's claim. This instance is one in which the narrator has previously asked the reader to take this passage with a grain of salt, as Rama's insistence that he kill Vali is out of character for him. As confusing as Rama's reasoning may be, this event does humanize Rama and make him more relatable, as it insists that even though Rama is divine, he's not without very human faults and foibles.

This lapse in judgment is also potentially indicative of the *Ramayana's* history, as it's possible that this event was added by someone other than Valmiki. It reminds the reader

that this story is exceptionally old and holds the history of many different writers and sages who contributed to it and changed it over the years.

☞ "Creatures in human shape may be called animals if they display no knowledge of right and wrong and conversely so-called animals which display profundity cease to be animals and will have to be judged by the highest standards."

**Related Characters:** Rama (speaker), Vali

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 103

### Explanation and Analysis

Rama explains to Vali (who is a monkey) why he's insisting on considering Vali's actions with human metrics of morality and goodness. With this explanation, Rama fleshes out how he conceptualizes his own view of humanity's capacity for goodness. This idea that humans are good, while non-humans (including animals and demons) are less good is part of the guiding logic of the story. By drawing the line between animals and humans in this way, Rama insists that all humans are capable of good as long as they work towards being as human as possible. However, evil or immoral thoughts or actions move someone closer to being considered an animal.

☞ "In spite of my obstinacy you have helped me attain a profound understanding and opened my mind with your magic. While other gods confer boons after being asked, you confer them on the mere utterance of your name. Great sages have attempted, after eons of austerities, to obtain a vision of God, but you have bestowed it upon me unasked."

**Related Characters:** Vali (speaker), Rama

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 104

### Explanation and Analysis

Vali thanks Rama for considering him using human standards and praises Rama's divine goodness before he dies. Vali's phrasing suggests that Rama is better and more moral and kind even than the gods themselves. This develops further the idea that Rama is the ideal hero and a

fundamentally good character. Part of Rama's goodness comes from the fact that he's open and willing to share his goodness with others, even when they don't ask for him to do so. In this way, Rama spends every moment of his life teaching others how to emulate him. Here, this insures that Vali will die an honorable death and achieve, as he says, "a vision of God" that will allow him happiness and satisfaction in the afterlife.

## 7. When the Rains Cease Quotes

☝ "Even in jest, do not hurt anyone's feelings, not even the lowliest," he said—remembering how he used to make fun of Kooni's deformity when he was young...

**Related Characters:** Rama (speaker), Kooni, Sugreeva

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** Book Page 106

### Explanation and Analysis

Following Sugreeva's coronation, Rama gives him advice on ruling kindly and properly. Rama offers several pieces of advice, and taken together they begin to form a picture of what a good person or ruler looks like. This continues to develop the idea that the *Ramayana* is a teaching tool that seeks to educate listeners or readers on the proper codes of conduct for Hinduism.

Rama's reflection in this piece of advice in particular is indicative of Rama's humility. Even though he's an incarnation of a god and is supposed to be the ideal man, he's not without fault. He's willing to learn from his mistakes—which in the case of his antagonism of Kooni, ultimately led to his banishment—and then use what he learns to teach others how to avoid those mistakes. In the world of the story, this willingness to make mistakes, learn, and then teach is one of the major ways that Rama is differentiated from other characters as being the ideal.

## 9. Ravana in Council Quotes

☝ "You have done incompatible things. You have desired to appropriate another man's wife, which is against all codes of conduct, and now you are thinking of your prestige, reputation, fame, might, and eminence."

**Related Characters:** Kumbakarna (speaker), Rama, Sita, Ravana

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 125

### Explanation and Analysis

Ravana has called his brothers to offer advice as to how to manage Rama's declaration of war, and his brother Kumbakarna offers his advice. Though Kumbakarna is described as being one of the evil characters, his counsel to Ravana shows that his evil doesn't keep him from thinking critically and objectively about Ravana's actions. By allowing the unsavory characters to engage with the text in this introspective manner, the *Ramayana* becomes even more of a teaching tool, as its more didactic lessons come from characters other than just the idealized Rama. Further, by having Kumbakarna acknowledge his brother's transgressions and less ideal thoughts, the story cements its claim that good and evil exist on a spectrum. Even though Kumbakarna is an evil character and is later punished for it, in this moment he takes on qualities of more moral characters and therefore becomes more moral himself.

☝ "Is there anyone who has conquered the gods and lived continuously in that victory? Sooner or later retribution has always come."

**Related Characters:** Vibishana (speaker), Ravana

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 126

### Explanation and Analysis

Ravana's youngest brother, Vibishana, insists that Ravana give up his fight with Rama and accept defeat, as defeat will come soon enough to him anyway. Vibishana's counsel suggests in a very underhanded way that good will always triumph over evil, and similarly, that evil can't go on being evil forever. In comparison, this bolsters Rama's goodness and foreshadows his later triumph. Further, Vibishana essentially asks Ravana to rethink his course of action in which he conquers the gods and instead choose to take a more moral path. This reminds the reader or listener again that good and evil exist on a spectrum and can be controlled or altered by making choices.

## 10. Across the Ocean Quotes

☝ "After all, one who seeks asylum must be given protection. Whatever may happen later, it is our first duty to protect."

**Related Characters:** Rama (speaker), Vibishana, Hanuman

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 132

### Explanation and Analysis

Vibishana has come to Rama's camp asking for asylum, and Ravana decides to grant his request after hearing Hanuman's counsel. Rama's reasoning shows his intensity of belief in behaving morally; he trusts wholeheartedly that if he does the right thing, whatever happens as a consequence of that will work out. This is also indicative of his belief in fate and destiny, which will naturally favor those who choose good over evil. Lastly, this quote further develops the particulars of Rama's own destiny. The narrator mentions at various points throughout the story that Rama's purpose in this life is to protect, and this decision shows Rama choosing to accept his destiny and follow his prescribed path. In doing so, Rama will complete his tasks and rid the world of evil.

things in tandem, Rama will win and will further situate himself as the ideal hero.

☝ While he had prayed for indestructibility of his several heads and arms, he had forgotten to strengthen his heart, where the Brahmasthra entered and ended his career.

**Related Characters:** Ravana, Rama

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 146

### Explanation and Analysis

During the battle between Rama and Ravana, Rama is able to kill his adversary because Ravana neglected to "strengthen his heart"; in other words, he's able to kill Ravana because Ravana used his powers for evil. This suggests, first of all, that Ravana at some point had a choice. It implies that Ravana could've chosen to strengthen his heart, and that might have saved him from death. This again brings in the idea that good and evil exist on a fluid spectrum, and it suggests that Ravana had at one point the potential to choose good. Notably, Ravana's choice to favor evil comes in the form of praying for physical strength and indestructibility. This suggests that strength alone isn't enough to win the favor of the gods or a battle against one with a strong heart like Rama's. Though Rama is also physically strong and skilled in battle, he's most notably far more devout, and it's his spiritual devotion that allows him the power to win this battle.

## 12. Rama and Ravana in Battle Quotes

☝ Rama at once invoked a weapon called "Gnana"—which means "wisdom" or "perception."

**Related Characters:** Ravana, Rama

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 144

### Explanation and Analysis

As the battle between Rama and Ravana goes on, they eventually shift to using asthras (weapons powered by supernatural forces) instead of conventional weapons. Here, as Ravana invokes weapons that rely on either multiplied brute strength or trickery, Rama uses asthras that specifically allow him wisdom, perception, and knowledge. Rama's victory with these weapons shows that these qualities are far more important and powerful than trickery or brute strength, which suggests again that Rama is going to be the victor of this battle. This weapon calls on some of Rama's most heroic qualities; it functions as a merger between Rama's great strength, prowess with his bow and arrows, and his ability to carefully consider all angles of a story, person, or situation. By using all of these

## 14. The Coronation Quotes

☝ The gods, who had watched this in suspense, were now profoundly relieved but also had an uneasy feeling that Rama had, perhaps, lost sight of his own identity. Again and again this seemed to happen. Rama displayed the tribulations and the limitations of the human frame and it was necessary from time to time to remind him of his divinity.

**Related Characters:** Shiva, Brahma, Ravana, Rama

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 151

### Explanation and Analysis

Following Rama's disturbing decision to test Sita's fidelity, the gods are worried that Rama has lost sight of his divine roots and his purpose on earth. Rama's habit of losing sight of his divinity and identity works to flesh out the fact that he's not fully divine; he is indeed human. By "displaying the tribulations and the limitations of the human frame," the story considers the boundaries of what humans can do, and offers a more realistic role model for listeners or readers to work towards. Though it's troubling to the gods, Rama's foibles make him a better hero.

The gods' worry also suggests that though Rama's fate

certainly influences his actions, he's also in control of his life and what he does with it. They seem to worry that though he has at this point fulfilled his purpose in this life, he might not actually continue to do so. This continues to develop the sense that though the gods are extremely powerful, they're not all-powerful. They too are subject to the whims of man, and though they can attempt to show Rama how to live his fated, good life, they can't force him to make good decisions. They can only remind him of his goodness, divine roots, and his duty to do only good to save humans from evil.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## PROLOGUE

The narrator explains that Kamban's poem begins by describing the land of Kosala, where the story takes place. He describes the people at work on the land, and the animals that live among them. The capital city, Ayodhya, is a fabulous city ruled over by King Dasaratha. Though Dasaratha is a compassionate and well-loved king, he laments that he's childless. One day, he mentions to his mentor that he has no sons to succeed him, and asks his mentor for help.

*From the outset, Narayan makes it clear to the reader that he's working very closely with Kamban's version of the Ramayana, and commenting on the text itself while also furthering its story. Dasaratha's plight introduces the idea of familial duty: there's nobody to perform the duty of carrying on the kingship after Dasaratha dies, and Dasaratha hasn't yet performed his duty of having children.*



The mentor remembers a vision he had in which all the gods appealed to Vishnu for help in defeating Ravana. The gods explained to Vishnu that they'd promised Ravana extraordinary powers, but Ravana is now using the powers for evil. Neither the gods Brahma nor Shiva can help, as they gave Ravana his powers in the first place. Vishnu promises to reincarnate himself as the human son of Dasaratha, since Ravana never asked a human for help and can therefore be killed by a human. Shiva explains that his conch, wheel, and serpent will also reincarnate as his brothers, and all other gods will reincarnate as monkeys, since Ravana is cursed to be destroyed by a monkey.

*Here, Narayan introduces the reader to the binding power of promises. This is a very important element of the story's logic, and this particular instance shows that even the extremely powerful gods aren't able to get around their promises. Vishnu figures out how to allow the gods to technically keep their promises to Ravana while still making sure that good eventually prevails. This shows that though promises are supposed to be binding, they can still be manipulated to fit an individual's needs.*



The mentor keeps the memory of his vision to himself, but instructs Dasaratha to arrange for the sage Rishya Sringa to perform a sacrifice. The mentor explains that this sage will be difficult to fetch, as he currently lives at the court of Agna in luxury. Dasaratha invites the sage to Ayodhya, where he conducts a yearlong sacrifice. At the end of a year, a being emerges from a sacrificial fire carrying a plate of rice. The being places it at Dasaratha's feet and returns to the fire.

*The supernatural world is closely linked to the real, day-to-day world in the story, and there's a very strong and ubiquitous relationship between the human characters and the deities they worship. The sacrifices are one way the humans demonstrate their loyalty to the deities, and the deities make good on what's promised from the sacrifices.*



The mentor instructs Dasaratha to divide the rice among his three wives, who will then have children. Within the year, Kausalya gives birth to Rama, Kaikeyi gives birth to Bharatha, and Sumithra bears the twins Lakshmana and Sathrugna. Dasaratha dotes on his sons and makes sure they're trained in yoga, philosophy, and combat. Rama is especially considerate and always speaks kindly to the crowd that gathers daily to watch the brothers walk to or from their lessons.

*Even as a boy, Rama stands out as being especially kind and magnanimous. Notice, though, that it's not just that Rama likes his father's subjects; they overwhelmingly like Rama in return. Dasaratha performs his fatherly duty by making sure his sons are properly trained in the skills and arts they need to function as royalty in society.*



## 1. RAMA'S INITIATION

Dasaratha spends his days in his assembly hall meeting with dignitaries and citizens alike. One afternoon, his messengers announce the arrival of Sage Viswamithra. Viswamithra used to be a king until he chose to become a sage. As a sage, Viswamithra is in complete control of his body and mind. Dasaratha greets him politely, and Viswamithra explains that he's planning a sacrifice at a holy place near the Ganges river. However, this location is filled with powerful evil creatures.

Dasaratha offers to protect Viswamithra during the sacrifice, but Viswamithra suggests Dasaratha send Rama in his place. This shocks the king. Viswamithra is offended, and states that he wants Rama to protect him. The king miserably says that Rama is too young, and offers again to send an army to protect Viswamithra.

Viswamithra ignores Dasaratha and begins to walk out of the assembly hall. Dasaratha's priest encourages Dasaratha to convince Viswamithra to return, and hurries forward himself to stop Viswamithra's exit. The priest reminds Viswamithra that he himself was once a king, and implores him to use his experience as an "ordinary man" to be more empathetic of Dasaratha's feelings. Viswamithra agrees to return and discuss the matter further.

The priest tells Dasaratha that there's surely a divine reason that Viswamithra asked for Rama. Dasaratha, still worried, seems to concede his position, and Viswamithra kindly reminds the king that people you love won't always be in close proximity, and he promises to keep Rama safe. Dasaratha asks if Rama's brother Lakshmana can go as well, and orders his minister to fetch the boys.

Rama and Lakshmana follow Viswamithra until they reach a spot where Shiva once meditated. Viswamithra explains that ever since then, saints who pray to Shiva have come here to perform sacrifices. Viswamithra and the boys stay overnight, and the next afternoon they come upon the driest, most desolate desert Rama has ever seen. Rama and Lakshmana notice animal bones and feel worried, so Viswamithra mentally transmits them two mantras on which to meditate. Through meditation, the boys feel as though they're walking through a cool stream. Rama asks why the desert is so awful, and Viswamithra tells the boys the story of Thataka.

*Again, the supernatural world and the real world are one and the same in the logic of this story. Here though, the reader is introduced to the fact that it's not just positive and good deities that exist in the human world; evil demons also exist to make life (and performing one's duty through sacrifices) difficult for humans.*



*Dasaratha struggles to figure out where his duty and loyalty actually lies. He can't decide whether he's duty-bound to offer Viswamithra the exact help he asks for, or if he's instead responsible for protecting his young son from possible danger.*



*The narrator begins to draw up major differences between sages (individuals who have dedicated their lives to spiritual pursuits) and "ordinary men." Viswamithra straddles both worlds, which allows him to connect with both gods and humans. Because of the strength of his spirituality, he seems far less interested in fighting "human" fights, like his attempt to make Dasaratha send Rama.*



*The priest essentially suggests that Rama is destined to follow Viswamithra, and that Dasaratha shouldn't get in the way of his destiny. Viswamithra's kind words foreshadow Rama's later departure from Ayodhya, while Dasaratha's insistence that Lakshmana go too also foreshadows later events.*



*Places become sacred when gods perform spiritual activities there; these locations allow humans to connect more fully with deities and demonstrate their loyalty to the gods. Rama and Lakshmana's worry is indicative of their youth and inexperience, which leaves room for them to grow up and develop over the next several chapters. Again, by meditating and becoming mentally and emotionally closer to the gods, the humans can escape the negative aspects of the mortal earth.*



Thataka was a demigod's daughter who married a chieftain and had two sons, Subahu and Mareecha. Her sons and husband delighted in destroying the landscape and its animals. Finally, this caught the attention of a minor saint, and the saint cursed Thataka's husband and killed him. Thataka and her sons went to seek revenge, but the saint cursed them as well to become asuras (demons). Thataka's sons left, while Thataka remained in this deserted place to breathe fire, harass hermits, and eat anything that crosses the desert. Viswamithra explains that this demon's presence destroys the landscape in the same way that meanness destroys a person's personality.

Rama asks where he can find Thataka, and she suddenly arrives. She spits fire and roars that she will eat the party. Rama hesitates, thinking that she's still a woman and therefore shouldn't be killed. Viswamithra tells Rama that "a woman of demoniac tendencies loses all consideration to be treated as a woman," and says it's Rama's duty to kill Thataka. Rama agrees, and counters Thataka's attacks with his own **bow and arrows**. Rama successfully kills the demon, and the gods assemble in the sky and tell Viswamithra to give Rama all his knowledge. Viswamithra obliges the gods and teaches Rama about weaponry, and the ashras (supernatural beings that control specific weapons) pledge themselves to Rama.

Later, Viswamithra tells Rama and Lakshmana the story of Mahabali. He explains that the ground where they're walking was once where Vishnu meditated. While Vishnu was thus engaged, Mahabali seized earth and heaven and crowned himself the ruler of both. To celebrate, he performed a sacrifice to honor all learned men. The gods went to Vishnu to ask for help, and Vishnu decided to take the form of a Brahmin dwarf. When Vishnu in his disguise appeared before Mahabali, Mahabali realized the little man had power and greeted him politely. Vishnu flattered Mahabali, and Mahabali offered the disguised Vishnu to ask for anything. Vishnu asked for as much land as he could cover in three steps.

Mahabali agreed, but one of his advisors tried to steer him away from granting Vishnu's wish. Mahabali told the advisor that it would be improper to not grant this request, poured water on Vishnu's small hand, and asked him to take his three steps. Vishnu then grew to a massive size and took one step that covered the earth and another that covered the heavens, leaving no space for a third step. Mahabali offered his own head for the third step, and Vishnu stomped him down to the netherworld.

*Thataka's story acts as a morality tale that encourages Rama and Lakshmana to never act cruelly—if they do, they're liable to end up in an arid, uninhabitable desert. Rama and Lakshmana complete much of their growing up process as they listen to and internalize the stories that Viswamithra tells them. This adds another layer to the idea of storytelling as a teaching tool, as the reader or listener is encouraged to internalize the story in a similar fashion.*



*Rama shows that he has a very developed sense of right and wrong already—though he understands initially that Thataka is evil and should be killed, he also knows that it's a very bad thing to kill a woman. Viswamithra then makes the rather disturbing suggestion that when women don't behave appropriately, they become less female and therefore lose the protections afforded to women in this society. Rama's success here is an indicator of his divine roots and his goodness, as evidenced by the gods' reaction to his victory.*



*Mahabali's story begins to develop Vishnu's role as a protecting god and a righter of wrongs, but it also suggests that gods like Vishnu are certainly not invincible if someone can so easily take earth and heaven from him. This adds a distinctly human quality to the gods' characters and makes it easier for a reader to connect to them. Note too that even though Mahabali did a horrible thing by stealing earth and heaven, he's still relatively generous and wants to keep his promises (as evidenced by promising Vishnu land).*



*Again, Mahabali may be the "villain" of the story, but he's still bound by duty and loyalty to his promises. Further, once Vishnu has demonstrated his own power and goodness to Mahabali, Mahabali is entirely powerless to go back on his promise and must allow Vishnu to stomp him down from the earth.*



Viswamithra reaches the spot for his sacrifice and instructs Rama and Lakshmana to protect him and the other saints who mean to join Viswamithra in this sacrifice. The asuras assemble with deadly weapons and try to intimidate the humans below. Rama assures the saints of their safety, and he and Lakshmana begin shooting **arrows** at the asuras. Rama shoots Thataka's sons, killing Subahu and wounding Mareecha. The other demons leave in a panic, and Viswamithra thanks Rama for his help. Viswamithra explains that next they'll travel to Mithila City for a sacrifice performed by King Janaka, and he phrases it as a pleasant diversion for Rama.

*Rama and Lakshmana, though they're just boys or teenagers, are already extremely skilled in battling demons. This again delineates Rama in particular as being divine and predestined to become the perfect hero. Here, Rama's arrows act as a tangible symbol of his proficiency and his goodness. Rama also has the interpersonal skills to assure the saints of their safety, which alludes to the fact that he'll one day be a good ruler.*



By evening, Viswamithra, Rama, and Lakshmana reach the Ganges River. Viswamithra tells the story of Ganga, the goddess of the river. Long ago, a man planned to perform the "Horse Sacrifice," a very important sacrifice in which a horse is set free to run through kingdoms that then become vassal kingdoms of the horse's owner. Because the horse's owner can challenge the god Indra after completing this sacrifice, the gods become nervous when they hear that this sacrifice will happen.

*Though the gods are certainly more powerful than humans, there are things humans can do that allow them to truly meet the gods as equals. Further, the fact that this sacrifice makes the gods nervous suggests that it's not just good humans who can challenge Indra after this sacrifice; this sacrifice has the potential to truly upset the power balance between mortals and deities.*



This man's horse set out but was quickly abducted by Indra and taken to the underworld, where Indra hid the horse behind a sage. The man's sons began digging, discovered the horse behind the meditating (and innocent) sage, and tormented the sage. The sage turned the sons to ashes, and only one grandson survived. They did free the horse, however, and the horse sacrifice was completed.

*As we'll soon see, Indra doesn't play by the rules; he'd rather try to take matters into his own hands. The sage's actions show that being particularly pious gives people exceptional powers, while tormenting those who are pious can have disastrous results.*



When the grandson of one of the men turned to ash learned that his grandfathers' souls were stuck in limbo, he prayed to Brahma for a way to help the souls reach salvation. He prayed to Shiva and then Ganga for thousands of years. It soon became a war between Shiva and Ganga. Finally, Ganga descended to earth in a "roaring deluge." Shiva stood strong and absorbed Ganga's water into his hair. Shiva then allowed a trickle of water out of his hair, which the son used to wash his ancestors' bones.

*The story presents an extremely duty-bound individual, which sets a good example for Rama and for listeners alike. It shows too the importance of familial relationships and insuring that one's family members maintain a good relationship with the gods. Though Rama is, of course, already very dutiful to his father, this will impress upon him the importance of familial loyalty.*



When Viswamithra, Rama, and Lakshmana catch sight of Mithila City, Rama brushes a slab of stone that turns into a beautiful woman. She bows and stands aside. Viswamithra introduces her as Ahalya, and tells her story to Rama. Brahma created her to be absolutely perfect. Indra wanted Ahalya, but Brahma found a sage to raise her instead. When it was time for the sage to return Ahalya to Brahma, Brahma appreciated the man's purity of mind and told the sage to marry her. They married, but Indra remained obsessed with Ahalya. One day, Indra drew the sage away from the house, assumed the sage's form, and tricked Ahalya into having sex with him. Her husband returned and caught the two in bed. Ahalya stood ashamed, while Indra turned himself into a cat and tried to escape.

The sage cursed Indra the cat to be covered with a thousand "female marks," and Indra slunk away back to his world. The sage then accused Ahalya of sinning and cursed her to be a piece of granite that could only be returned to human form by Rama. Indra became a joke and refused to show himself, and was therefore unable to perform his duties as a god. Later, Brahma asked the sage to somehow remedy the situation. The sage then turned Indra's thousand "marks" into eyes.

Viswamithra addresses Rama, saying that he was born to restore righteousness and eliminate evil. Rama tells Ahalya to return to her husband. She joins Viswamithra's party and when they pass her husband's hermitage, Viswamithra tells the sage that Ahalya's heart is purified. Viswamithra, Lakshmana, and Rama then continue to Mithila City.

## 2. THE WEDDING

Mithila is a bustling and wealthy city—lost jewelry is left in the streets, as there's no reason for the residents to pick it up. As Viswamithra, Lakshmana, and Rama cross the moat, Rama notices Sita on a balcony and is stunned by her beauty. She meets his eyes. The narrator explains that the two had been together as Vishnu and his wife Lakshmi not long ago, but as humans, they don't know this. The moment Rama is out of sight, Sita becomes agitated and feels ill.

Sita's attendants help Sita into bed, but she's inconsolable. She prattles on about the mysterious man's beauty. The narrator says that "the poet" mentions the sun setting behind the sea, and Sita is annoyed by a bird calling for its mate. Sita's attendants move her to a bed of moonstone, but she remains agitated and uncomfortable. She wonders if the man tormenting her was a sorcerer or an illusion.

*Again, Indra doesn't follow codes of conduct and is driven by his own selfish desires which continues to develop the idea that gods are powerful, but are at times driven by very human desires. This story introduces the idea of a god-created, perfect and good woman. However, Ahalya's actions (or gullibility) show that women aren't infallible, even when they're literally created to be perfect. The story suggests that female purity is exceptionally important to a marriage. This includes both physical purity as well as mental and emotional purity.*



*Ahalya's punishment continues to suggest that it's an unforgivable mistake for a woman to even accidentally accept another man's advances—essentially blaming the woman for the man's suspicions or even crimes. The method of redemption, however, again suggests Rama's divinity and his fate to restore peace and goodness on earth.*



*After spending an indeterminate number of years thinking about her "misdeeds," Ahalya is once again able to serve her husband properly. This is meant to show that through meditation, people are capable of making themselves better and aligning themselves with good.*



*The narrator's aside that Sita is an incarnation of the goddess Lakshmi suggests that as Sita, she's another version of the perfect woman. This also shows that Sita and Rama are destined to be together in this life. Yet however divine in origin Rama and Sita might be, they're still stuck in their comparatively small and human understanding.*



*Notice how Sita deals with falling so madly in love—she's so overcome that she can barely function and certainly can't make logical sense. This is a completely emotional reaction, which falls in line with the story's gender logic: women are simply more prone to this sort of thing. The extremity of her reaction also emphasizes both Rama's divine beauty and the fact that the two are destined to fall in love.*



When Rama reaches his guesthouse, he wonders about the girl on the balcony and, though he remains outwardly composed, he feels disturbed. Rama reasons that she must be unmarried, because if she were married he would've involuntarily recoiled from her. He daydreams about embracing her and doesn't sleep much.

At dawn, Rama prepares to meet King Janaka. At the assembly hall, Viswamithra introduces Rama and Lakshmana, and Janaka laments that Rama can't marry Sita. The narrator explains that Janaka owns a huge **bow** that once belonged to Shiva. When Sita was a child and began to grow exceptionally beautiful, suitors started to ask for her. Janaka set the condition that any man must be able to lift and string the bow before being considered worthy to be Sita's husband. Over time, it became obvious to Janaka that no earthly man would be able to complete this task, though now Janaka can't withdraw his condition.

Viswamithra comforts Janaka and asks to see the **bow**. Janaka agrees and asks his army to fetch the bow. It takes a carriage with 16 wheels and many men to get the bow to the assembly hall, and the people there can barely see the entire bow given its size. They laugh at Janaka setting this requirement for Sita's husband.

Rama looks to Viswamithra for permission and then approaches the **bow**. The assembly speculates that this is cruel to Rama, and they completely miss seeing Rama quickly lift the bow, string it, and break it. Gods shower flowers and blessings on the assembly, and the people of Mithila prepare for a wedding.

Sita is unaware that Rama broke the **bow**; she continues to move from bed to bed in an attempt to find someplace comfortable. Suddenly, one of her maids leaps into the room singing love songs. Sita snaps at her, but the maid only offers mysterious half-sentences about a man from Ayodhya. When Sita finally understands, she states that if the man who broke the bow isn't Rama, she'll commit suicide.

*Though Rama is definitely disturbed by the experience of suddenly falling in love, he still manages to maintain his composure (unlike Sita). Male love is presented as more rational and controllable than female love.*



*Once again, the logic of fate isn't always apparent to those on earth—the reader can likely infer by this point that it's fate that Janaka set this ridiculous condition for Sita's hand, as it insures that Rama marries Sita. However, it causes Janaka a great deal of pain as he worries that he did the wrong thing. He's still bound by this promise, though, and must keep the promise or risk upsetting fate.*



*The bow is ridiculously large, which makes it obvious that anyone capable of lifting it must be divine and not purely human. Here Janaka's subjects doubt his wisdom, though Janaka himself remains true to his promise. This shows that Janaka is a good and honorable man.*



*Rama finally proves his divinity. However, notice that he asks for permission first; he remains conscious of the fact that he must honor individuals like Viswamithra, even if he is divine.*



*Even though Sita is being dramatic here, this declaration shows how loyal she is to Rama before she even formally meets him in this life. This begins to develop the relationship between Sita and Rama as one characterized by intense devotion and loyalty to each other.*



Viswamithra counsels King Janaka to invite Dasaratha to Mithila for the wedding. Dasaratha is thrilled to receive the news and orders everyone able to travel to begin the journey to Mithila. Soon, the road is filled with men, women, and elephants. Musicians play and sing, and it's a merry procession. Dasaratha's wives and other sons follow their subjects, and the king follows his wives. When Janaka sights Dasaratha's party, he rides out to meet Dasaratha. Dasaratha is filled with pride when he reaches the city and sees Rama.

The narrator describes how carefully Kamban describes the wedding festivities, taking nearly 1,000 lines to do so. After Rama and Sita are married, Rama's brothers marry women from Mithila as well. The people from Ayodhya begin the return journey home, and Viswamithra bids Dasaratha goodbye. He leaves for the Himalayas to spend his life in contemplation.

*Dasaratha's son is now fulfilling his duty to Dasaratha by marrying. The description of the procession allows the narrator to showcase more of Kamban's narrative style and how it merges with his own. This shows again that the Ramayana is a group effort to tell or to record; many different voices offer to help create the tale.*



*The mention that Kamban's poem takes so much time and space indicates how important weddings and ceremonies in general are to the story. This falls in line with the emphasis the story gives to sacrifices as well; these festivities are a way for humans to connect with the deities and move closer to the side of goodness.*



### 3. TWO PROMISES REVIVED

One day, Dasaratha realizes that he's growing old. He decides to retire before he loses his faculties, and summons a minister to gather all his officials at the assembly hall. Dasaratha mentions a few people to be omitted from this summons, including Janaka, Bharatha, and Bharatha's maternal grandfather. When everyone is assembled, Dasaratha speaks about his advancing age and the necessity of naming Rama his successor. He lists Rama's virtues and asks for the assembly's blessing. The assembly shouts with joy. Dasaratha decides that Rama should be crowned the next day.

Dasaratha gives orders for the city to prepare and sends for Rama. He tells Rama that he's crowning him as his successor, and Rama accepts this gracefully. Dasaratha instructs Rama on how to properly rule, and then sends Rama away. Soon after, however, Dasaratha summons Rama again. Dasaratha explains to his son that he's having dreams and premonitions and wants Rama to be crowned immediately. Rama listens politely, and Dasaratha says that Rama should be crowned while Bharatha is away at his grandfather's palace. Dasaratha fears that Bharatha will question why he's not crowned king, but will likely happily accept Rama as king if there's no room to argue.

*Dasaratha prepares to set himself up to remain dutiful to the end. This time, he's trying to behave dutifully to his subjects by naming a successor to the crown who's well liked and will be a good and honest ruler. Rama is still evidently a crowd favorite, which suggests that Dasaratha's assessment of Rama's character isn't clouded by fatherly love—apparently Rama truly is as good as Dasaratha says.*



*Dasaratha's speech to Rama regarding how to properly rule sets up this exact conversation as a motif that repeats throughout the story when there are transfers of power. This shows that Rama truly does take everything he's told into consideration; he goes on to actually use and promote what he learns as a child and a young man. Dasaratha's fear of his dreams suggests that the dreams and premonitions that people have in the story are more than just dreams, which further cements the idea that the supernatural world is closely tied to the real one.*



The narrator says that Dasaratha's fear was valid. Kooni, a hunchbacked companion of Bharatha's mother, Kaikeyi, is perturbed at the fact that Rama is going to be crowned. She wakens Kaikeyi and begins to suggest that Kaikeyi is only Dasaratha's favorite because she's beautiful. Kooni explains that Dasaratha is going to crown Rama king, and Kaikeyi is thrilled. She explains to Kooni that Rama is like her own son. Kooni, distraught, tells Kaikeyi that when Kaikeyi married Dasaratha, Dasaratha promised Kaikeyi's father to make Kaikeyi's son king. Kooni insists that when Rama is king, he'll send Kaikeyi away.

Kaikeyi remains indifferent to Kooni and insists that Rama will be a kind king. Kooni, however, says that Rama will surely try to behead Bharatha, and will make Kaikeyi a handmaid to his own mother. This sends Kaikeyi into a full-blown panic, and Kooni suggests that Kaikeyi demand Dasaratha make good on his two promised boons to Kaikeyi.

Later that night, Dasaratha goes to find Kaikeyi, but a maid tells him that she's in the part of the house reserved for those who need to work out a bad mood. Dasaratha is grumpy to have to seek Kaikeyi there, but goes anyway. He finds her sprawled on the floor and asks her if she's sick. Kaikeyi speaks as though the entire world is out to annoy her, and refuses Dasaratha's request that she sit on a couch with him. Finally, he sits on a low stool next to her.

Kaikeyi asks Dasaratha to swear to make good on the boons he promised her years ago. This makes Dasaratha uneasy, and Kaikeyi reminds Dasaratha of how she revived him on the battlefield, and in thanks, Dasaratha promised her two boons, to be redeemed at a later date. Dasaratha is filled with dread. Kaikeyi asks Dasaratha to banish Rama to the forest for 14 years and crown Bharatha king instead.

Dasaratha feels ill and calls Kaikeyi a demon. He stays with her all night and tries to talk her out of banishing Rama, but she won't budge.

*Kaikeyi demonstrates first that she truly is a good woman: she likes Rama and thinks that he'll be a fantastic king, and her feelings aren't hurt at all that Dasaratha didn't crown Bharatha. Kooni's motivations are very unclear at this point. It doesn't seem as though she's going to get anything out of this aside from satisfaction that Rama doesn't become king. She primarily acts as a necessary antagonist to ensure that Rama faces certain struggles.*



*Kooni finally gets a rise out of Kaikeyi when she manages to convince her that Rama will behave selfishly, and convinces Kaikeyi to behave selfishly to counter this. This sets up selfishness in direct opposition to goodness and aligns it with ideas of evil.*



*Kaikeyi behaves very similar to how Sita behaved when she first fell in love with Rama. This continues to develop the idea that women are at the mercy of their emotions, and that being this way makes them more prone to drama and selfishness. On the other hand, Dasaratha shows how selfish he is not. Though he's an old man, he gets down on her level to comfort her.*



*Like the gods who granted Ravana boons, Dasaratha cannot get out of granting Kaikeyi these requests without upsetting the order of the universe. Dasaratha, essentially, must remain good and dutiful, even in the face of his wife's destructive request.*



*Dasaratha's word choice recalls Viswamithra's counsel about demonic women. It suggests that Kaikeyi is less of a woman for behaving in this way.*



The next morning, people begin to wonder where Dasaratha is. Rama is dressed for the coronation, and Dasaratha's chief minister finally decides to find the king. When the minister enters the room, he's startled to see Dasaratha look so unwell. Kaikeyi asks for Rama. When Rama arrives, Dasaratha nearly faints. Kaikeyi explains what happened and tells Rama that it's his duty to follow his father's wishes. Rama thinks for a moment and agrees to do as his father asks, stating that he has no interest in being king, but only wishes that Dasaratha had told him this directly. Rama asks Kaikeyi to tell Dasaratha that he's not bothered by his father's decision, but Kaikeyi tells him to leave immediately.

When Rama arrives at the assembly hall, he explains the situation to Kausalya. She breaks down in tears, and Rama explains that he feels blessed to follow Dasaratha's orders. He encourages Kausalya to stay with Dasaratha rather than follow him to the forest. Kausalya goes to her husband to try to convince him to change his mind, but realizes it's impossible.

Kausalya wails loudly, attracting the attention of the high priest. He joins Dasaratha and his wives and asks Kaikeyi for an explanation. She airily asks that the priest announce that there's a change in the arrangements. The priest demands a full explanation, and Kaikeyi explains that Rama surrendered the throne to Bharatha and will live in the forest for 14 years, but that the king and Kausalya are refusing to accept this.

The priest revives Dasaratha, who asks if Kaikeyi has changed her mind. The priest implores Kaikeyi to change her mind, but she refuses. The priest accuses Kaikeyi of using her status for her own benefit, knowing that Rama would honorably obey. In a sudden outburst, Dasaratha calls Kaikeyi a devil and asks if Rama is gone. Kausalya tells Dasaratha that he can't hold Rama back now, but Dasaratha insists that he'll die if Rama leaves.

Dasaratha desperately tries to take back his promise to Kaikeyi and disowns her and Bharatha. The priest goes to talk to Rama, and Dasaratha explains that the priest will be unsuccessful in holding Rama back: years ago, Dasaratha accidentally shot and killed a young boy, and the boy's parents cursed Dasaratha to someday suffer a similar fate.

*In the face of such a surprising upset, Rama shows his family and the reader that he's nothing if not true, good, and obedient to a fault. Despite the fact that Dasaratha in particular is so distraught over this turn of events, Rama's banishment is part of his destiny. This recalls Viswamithra's wisdom again, saying that Rama will need to leave in order to flourish. Interestingly too, Kaikeyi seems to be very aware of this fact, as she's insistent upon reminding Rama of his duty and the necessity of being obedient in this situation that she herself created.*



*Again, Rama sees this turn of events as an opportunity to remain dutiful to his father and follow the cosmic order. This is indicative of Rama's divine origins, as those who are merely human struggle with this in a way that Rama seems to be incapable of doing.*



*Though she knows she's behaving poorly, Kaikeyi is truly an agent of fate as she insists that Rama leave Ayodhya and live in the forest. This again shows the limits of human perception: none of the humans here seem remotely aware of the consequences of Kaikeyi's actions, let alone that they're going to end in good.*



*The priest recognizes that Rama's honest nature will possibly be his downfall, as he remains insistent that individuals follow through with their promises even if it hurts him personally. Kausalya has finally realized that agreeing with Rama is the only way forward; Dasaratha, however, remains overcome with emotion.*



*Dasaratha's emotion takes on a new tenor: this ill fate is something he deserves because of past actions. This shows too that curses from normal humans aren't just words. Like curses from gods and sages, they have real-world consequences.*



When the news begins to spread that Rama won't be king, everyone in the city cries. Lakshmana becomes very angry, dresses for battle, and walks through the streets, vowing to kill anyone who opposes Rama's claim to the throne. Rama confronts Lakshmana and tells him to stop his angry nonsense, explaining that it's fate that he should be banished. Lakshmana insists that he'll overpower fate, but Rama replies that going to the forest will be a privilege. Lakshmana finally relents.

Rama bids his stepmother Sumithra goodbye. A servant brings clothes made of tree bark, and Lakshmana orders tree bark clothes for himself and insists on following Rama. Rama goes to tell Sita goodbye, but finds her dressed in bark as well. She insists on joining her husband, and Rama finally agrees.

When Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana emerge from the palace in their tree bark clothes, the crowd cries and curses Kaikeyi. The priest attempts to stop Rama a final time, but Rama resists and begins his march out of the city. The crowd matches Rama's every step until Sathrugna arrives with a chariot. Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana get in, but are still confined to a walking pace due to the crowd. When they reach the river to camp for the night, the crowd falls asleep. Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana sneak off, and Sathrugna heads back to the city.

Dasaratha remains lucid. Sathrugna enters his father's chamber and tells him that Rama crossed the river, and when he hears this Dasaratha dies instantly. Dasaratha's officials send for Bharatha to return to Ayodhya immediately. When Bharatha reaches the city, he notices that the streets are empty. When he enters the palace he can't find his father, but soon finds Kaikeyi. When Bharatha asks after his father and brothers, Kaikeyi explains what happened. Bharatha is extremely angry, and tells Kaikeyi he'll spare her life only because Rama would be upset if he killed her.

Bharatha goes to Kausalya and cries, convincing Kausalya that he had nothing to do with Kaikeyi's plan. Ministers fetch Bharatha so he can perform Dasaratha's funeral rites, though when Bharatha is about to light the funeral pyre, the minister remembers that Dasaratha disowned Bharatha. Sathrugna is tasked with lighting the pyre, and Bharatha locks himself away for five days to mourn.

*Lakshmana shows that he's exceptionally loyal to Rama over anything else. Rama demonstrates his levelheaded nature and his belief in following his father's wishes. He also demonstrates qualities that denote him as a hero by talking Lakshmana out of behaving rashly and with unnecessary violence. By insisting that Lakshmana come to Rama's way of thinking, Rama insures that Lakshmana will also be heroic.*



*Both Lakshmana and Sita show Rama how dutiful they are to him. For Sita in particular, insisting on going with him to the forest is one of the ways that she demonstrates her marital fidelity and the strength of her relationship with Rama.*



*Sathrugna is loyal to his siblings and sister-in-law as well, but performs his loyalty and duty by remaining behind instead of following. The crowd's reaction to Rama's departure reminds the reader again of how beloved Rama is to his would-be subjects. It makes this event poignant and tragic, but it also suggests that these people will remain dutiful to Rama and wait for him to return.*



*The success of Kaikeyi's plan hinged on Bharatha being happy that she'd done this, but Bharatha proves that he's more honorable than his mother is. Even though Bharatha and Rama are relative equals, Bharatha's reasoning for not killing Kaikeyi shows that he uses Rama as a role model for good behavior. It also, however, suggests that Bharatha believes he no longer has to be dutiful to his mother now that she's behaved so poorly.*



*The fact that Bharatha doesn't challenge Sathrugna for the privilege of lighting Dasaratha's funeral pyre shows that even though he's been recently disowned, Bharatha remains loyal and dutiful to his father's wishes. He's been unwillingly included in Kaikeyi's plan, but as an inherently good character, he's going to make the best of it.*



After five days, officials ask Bharatha to become king. Bharatha refuses and sets out with an army to find Rama. They find him quickly, and Lakshmana wants to kill Bharatha until they realize that Bharatha is wearing the same tree bark garb that they are. Rama and Lakshmana welcome Bharatha, and Rama cries when he hears that Dasaratha died. Rama and Bharatha engage in a philosophical debate over who should be king. The gods watch the debate, fearing that if Rama agrees to return, Vishnu's incarnation will be for naught. Finally, Bharatha agrees to rule as a regent and asks for Rama's sandals to leave on the throne. He promises to burn himself alive if Rama doesn't return immediately after 14 years.

*The narrator's mention of the fearful, watching gods suggests that Rama does indeed have the ability to choose whether or not to follow his destiny. However, Rama is able to convince Bharatha to rule because Rama is the perfect hero and must follow his destiny. Bharatha's final act of the chapter situates him again as an exceptionally loyal character. He remains dutiful to Rama and Rama's claim to the throne, even if Kaikeyi didn't.*



#### 4. ENCOUNTERS IN EXILE

Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita travel far away from Ayodhya to keep people from trying to persuade Rama to return home. They meet sages along the way, all of who treat Rama kindly. One sage's wife gifts her clothes and jewelry to Sita. One day, they meet the great eagle Jatayu. He explains to Rama that he was a friend of Dasaratha, cries when hears that Dasaratha died, and swears to end his life. Jayatu promises to stay alive until Rama returns to Ayodhya, though, and promises to protect Rama and Sita while they're in Panchvati, where the asuras live.

*As Rama begins his time in exile, these promises from Bharatha and Jatayu work to cement Rama's fate and the fates of his companions: Bharatha now will die if Rama doesn't return, and Jatayu is duty-bound to offer his protection or else suffer the consequences of failing. Though he hasn't been told outright, Rama's divinity leads him to the asuras so he can rid the world of them, as he's destined to do.*



As they travel, Rama is enchanted by Sita's loveliness, particularly when she wears the jewelry from the sage's wife. They reach Panchvati and Lakshmana constructs a home. Though Rama is delighted with the house and with Sita, he can't forget that he's come to Panchvati to destroy the asuras that plague the region.

*Rama is still definitely human and subject to human pleasures. Though he enjoys the idyllic life he's leading at the moment, his divinity keeps him from forgetting that he does indeed have a greater purpose in being in this area, and it keeps him from shirking his duties to fate.*



One night, Rama notices an exceptionally lovely woman in the woods. This makes him nervous, though he's struck by her beauty. She introduces herself as Kamavalli (Soorpanaka), the demon Ravana's sister. Rama is surprised at her human form, but the woman explains that she wants to be different from her evil relatives and became beautiful through prayer. She continues, saying that she's rejecting her brother and his evil ways, and she asks Rama for help. Rama agrees to help her if her request is proper.

*Though we'll soon learn that Soorpanaka is lying, she suggests here that it is entirely possible for someone who's born a demon or evil to make themselves better through prayer and devotion—a possibility that plays out more sincerely elsewhere in the story. This introduces the idea that individuals have some degree of control over where they fall on the spectrum of good and evil at any given time.*



Soorpanaka refuses to outright state her purpose, but Rama realizes she wishes to marry him. He realizes that though she looks beautiful, she's actually "cheap and shameless." Rama pities her and offers several reasons why they cannot marry, and she counters every one. Rama pokes underhanded fun at Soorpanaka, which Soorpanaka doesn't understand.

*Rama, of course, can't marry anyone else because of his and Sita's divine origins. They were made for each other, not for others. Notice, though, that Rama isn't angry with Soorpanaka—instead he pities her. This again shows his goodness and how much he cares for people, regardless of status.*



Sita comes out of the cottage, stunning Soorpanaka with her beauty. Soorpanaka asks who Sita is, thinking that Sita and Rama are the perfect man and woman. She decides that Sita must have snuck up on Rama and seduced him, and tells Rama this. The narrator notes that Soorpanaka may as well have been confessing her own intentions (her normal state is enormous and demonic, and Ravana allows her to roam through this forest. She saw Rama earlier, fell in love, and adopted her human form to seduce him). Rama plays along, giving Soorpanaka hope. She yells at Sita, but then Sita runs to her husband.

Rama tells Soorpanaka to leave before Lakshmana sees her. Soorpanaka tries to convince Rama again to marry her, but he turns and walks with Sita back into the house. Soorpanaka nearly faints and heads back to her lair. She cannot find comfort, and feels tormented by everything that touches her. She hallucinates that she's touching Rama. Finally, she decides that if she can eliminate Sita, Rama will love her.

The next morning, Soorpanaka returns to Rama's house and watches him go to the river. She sees Sita leave the house to pick flowers and begins to stalk her. Lakshmana, however, notices her from afar, and when Soorpanaka pounces on Sita, Lakshmana attacks Soorpanaka. When he realizes that Soorpanaka is a woman, Lakshmana chops off her nose, ears, and breasts and leaves her screaming on the ground, calling out to her brothers.

Rama sees her when he returns from the river and asks Soorpanaka why she's all bloody. She cries that Rama doesn't recognize her, and Rama realizes that she's the same "damsel" from the night before. Rama asks Lakshmana what happened, and he explains. Rama tells Soorpanaka to leave, but Soorpanaka threatens that Ravana will take revenge on Rama if he doesn't marry her. She offers to help Rama make the rakshasas (lesser demons) his slaves. Rama tells her that he can deal with the demons himself and tells her again to leave.

Thinking it will help, Rama explains to Soorpanaka who he is and how he came to be in the forest. He mentions that he destroyed Thataka, which causes Soorpanaka to suggest that she can teach Rama all the tricks of the rakshasas. She then offers to marry Lakshmana, making Lakshmana angry. He asks if he can kill her, and Rama says he can if Soorpanaka doesn't leave. Finally she leaves, but promises to return with Kara.

*Soorpanaka unwittingly realizes the truth when she thinks that Rama and Sita are perfect—they literally are. Because Soorpanaka is actually a demon and not trying to be good like she said, she doesn't have the skills to truly convince Rama that she's human, or overpower Rama's goodness. This is an early suggestion that good will always triumph over evil, even in relatively minor conflicts like this one.*



*Soorpanaka's reaction to falling in love is shockingly similar to Sita's, which suggests that overwhelming love is an equalizing female trait, regardless of whether the female is human or demon. Soorpanaka demonstrates her own evil by deciding to eliminate Sita; she doesn't care at all for Sita's emotional wellbeing.*



*Lakshmana has evidently forgotten the lesson that demonic women can be killed just like men, yet he also shows no mercy in his brutal mutilation of Soorpanaka. This also makes good on Rama's earlier threat that Lakshmana would hurt Soorpanaka if she didn't leave.*



*Though it's unclear if Rama is truly aware that he's the living embodiment of the perfect hero, he does seem to understand that he has a great deal of power over demons. Soorpanaka's threat here acts as a promise, and therefore foreshadows the conflict of the rest of the story, as Ravana is now duty-bound to try to take revenge on Rama for his sister's sake.*



*Here Rama's goodness is almost a fault, as he immediately reveals his plan to destroy the rakshasas and asuras. He doesn't take into account that the demons don't seem to respond to logic in the same way that he does.*



Kara is a warrior demon with a vast army who protects Soorpanaka. Soorpanaka explains to Kara what happened, and Kara instructs his commanders to attack Rama. When Rama sees Soorpanaka and the commanders coming, he instructs Lakshmana to protect Sita, and singlehandedly uses his **bow** to decimate the army. Soorpanaka returns to Kara, who gathers an army of rakshasas to wipe out Rama's house. Rama again defeats the army. Soorpanaka heads for Lanka to tell Ravana what happened.

## 5. THE GRAND TORMENTOR

Ravana sits in his hall, surrounded by attendants. Kings of the earth stand in perpetual salutation, women dance around him, and enslaved gods attend to his every need. Soorpanaka crashes into the hall, screaming. When Ravana sees her mutilated body, he asks who did this to her. Soorpanaka explains what happened and mentions her admiration for Rama, though she adds that he's cruel. Ravana asks how Rama provoked Soorpanaka, and Soorpanaka says that Ravana should take Rama's beautiful wife, Sita, for himself.

Interested, Ravana asks Soorpanaka to describe Sita. He falls instantly in love with her image, and Soorpanaka urges him to capture Sita. Ravana walks out of his hall, ignoring his wives, and shuts himself in his private room. He rages and feels that everything is out to torment him. He moves to the garden, where he finds the late winter cool uncomfortable. Ravana shouts at the weather, which obligingly changes to early summer. Ravana is still unhappy with the weather, so monsoon season arrives. Finally, Ravana banishes all seasons and years disappear. He eventually asks for the moon, but finds it too bright and recalls the sun. This wreaks havoc on the world, as birds wonder where night went and astronomers can't figure out what happened. Finally he orders complete darkness, and hallucinates about Sita.

Ravana summons Soorpanaka and asks her to confirm that he's hallucinating about Sita. Soorpanaka insists that she sees Rama, and that since he damaged her she can't forget him. She urges Ravana to go fetch Sita, and Ravana calls for his advisers. He only values them for the formality, however, and soon leaves to speak with his uncle, Mareecha. Ravana explains that Rama mutilated Soorpanaka, and Mareecha advises Ravana to stay away from Rama. Ravana asks Mareecha to come along and help him steal Sita, but Mareecha is trying to live a virtuous life and tries to refuse.

*Through these two scuffles, Rama demonstrates to the reader, as well as to Soorpanaka, that he is indeed the ideal hero and a competent archer at that. Rama's skills with the bow are indicative of his heroism and his strength. Remember too that Rama is also using supernatural weapons (asthras) in addition to his physical bow and arrows, which he obtained because of his goodness.*



*Ravana is evidently extremely powerful, and enjoys performing this power for his subjects. He does seem to care for his sister, however, which suggests that though they're demons, there is a sense of familial loyalty between Ravana and Soorpanaka (it's also worth noting that Ravana is not always an evil figure in Hindu mythology—he just happens to be the primary antagonist of the Ramayana). Notice also that Soorpanaka tries to tell a story that makes her look better and also transfers Ravana's attention away from Rama.*



*Ravana's temper tantrum is demonstrative of his extreme power over the world. The reader is reminded that at this point Ravana is selfish and not at all interested in using his powers for good, as the beings subject to his whims and fancies are at least shocked, if not harmed by his changes in the weather. Also, unlike Rama (but like Sita and Soorpanaka), Ravana is completely derailed by falling in love. Though Rama was disturbed and didn't sleep, he still managed to function. Ravana's inability to do so further distances him from Rama's heroism and goodness, and aligns him with the reactions of women and evil.*



*Rama continues to behave selfishly. Rather than wanting to truly consult others to formulate the best plan, he only wants to speak to advisors so that he feels important. Here we see Ravana operating essentially as a lone agent and bullying others into following him; the story will later show that behaving like this has disastrous consequences. Mareecha's attempts to refuse, however, continue to suggest that it's possible to choose good over evil and right past wrongs.*



Mareecha begins to feel as though he's coming to the end of his life and his spiritual quest. He tells Ravana that this quest will bring about the end of the rakshasas, angering Ravana. When Mareecha describes Rama's strength, Ravana threatens to kill Mareecha, and Mareecha finally agrees to help. He attempts to convince Ravana of a plan that would save them from destruction, but Ravana won't be convinced. Ravana instead instructs his uncle to take the shape of a golden deer and draw Sita out of the house. Mareecha reflects that this is certainly going to kill him.

Near Rama's cottage, Mareecha assumes the shape of the golden deer and walks past the cottage. Sita notices it and asks Rama to catch it for her. Rama agrees, but Lakshmana insists that the deer is a trick. Rama goes outside to look at the deer himself and promises to get it for Sita, though Lakshmana again tries to deter him. Sita sullenly says that Rama will never get the deer and goes inside. Rama instructs Lakshmana to protect Sita and approaches the deer with his **bow**. He tracks the deer for miles and miles and finally realizes that it's a trick. He shoots at the deer, and as Mareecha dies, he uses Rama's voice to shout for help from Lakshmana and Sita.

Rama worries that Sita heard Mareecha's false cry, but reasons that Lakshmana will assure her that it was a trick. Sita did hear the cry, and asks Lakshmana to go help Rama. Though Lakshmana insists that it was a trick, Sita becomes more and more agitated and finally panics. She suggests that Lakshmana isn't truly loyal to Rama, and Lakshmana finally agrees to go help Rama. He tells her that Jatayu will protect her.

Once Lakshmana is out of sight, Ravana assumes the guise of a hermit and calls to Sita from the garden gate. When Sita appears, Ravana is overwhelmed by her beauty. Sita asks Ravana where he came from, and he gives a strange account of his past in the third person. He insists that rakshasas are misunderstood, and are actually good to hermits such as himself. Sita explains that Rama's mission is to destroy the rakshasas, and Ravana asks what Rama will do when faced with Ravana's ten heads and 20 arms. Sita mentions a time when Ravana was indeed bested by a normal man, and Ravana is overcome with rage.

Ravana abandons his human form and towers over Sita. He says he'd eat her if he weren't in love with her, and asks her to be his queen. Sita tells him to leave before Rama returns and begins to crying for help. Ravana remembers that he's been cursed to die if he touches a woman without her consent, so he digs up the ground under Sita and lifts the earth and Sita with it. They speed away in a chariot.

*Mareecha has evidently learned a lot since Rama shot at him last; his attempts to encourage Ravana to consider the wellbeing of the rakshasas demonstrates an understanding that an individual's actions impact more than that one individual. Mareecha's thought process shows that he's in control of the particulars of his destiny, even though death is inevitable. Ravana continues to behave selfishly, which at this point makes Mareecha look particularly good.*



*In this exchange, Rama and Lakshmana's roles flip as Lakshmana acts as the voice of reason while Rama refuses to listen. It's important to note, though, that Rama is acting this way in an attempt to show his devotion to Sita; even though he's not fully considering the possible outcomes of chasing the deer, he makes his decision for the right reasons. And even though Rama sees the truth too late to make a difference, the fact that he learns shows another aspect of his heroism: he's willing to learn and admit his mistakes.*



*Suggesting that Lakshmana isn't appropriately loyal to Rama is quite the insult, given the importance the story gives to loyalty. This is a somewhat underhanded blow from Sita, as their domestic unit immediately starts to break down in Rama's absence.*



*On her own now, Sita does demonstrate that she's exceptionally loyal to Rama in her exchange with Ravana. This situation mirrors what happened to Ahalya in Viswamithra's earlier story, which suggests that Sita is going to suffer for falling for this trick—simply because she's a woman. Ravana continues to show that he's unable to maintain his composure under pressure, as he can't properly pull off his deceit.*



*The curse on Ravana works in much the same way as promises or boons work in the rest of the story; this one is so successful because breaking it results in death. Sita continues to show how loyal she is to her husband when she refuses Ravana's advances.*



Sita faints and when she comes to, tries to jump off the chariot. She yells at the animals to tell Rama what happened. Ravana laughs at Sita as she insults him. Jatayu challenges Ravana, telling him that Rama will destroy all the rakshasas if Ravana doesn't let Sita go. Ravana and Jatayu fight, and Ravana cuts off Jatayu's wing. Ravana picks up Sita and carries her off to Lanka. Jatayu manages to stay alive until Rama and Lakshmana find him. Though he tells them what happened, he dies before he can tell Rama which direction Ravana went.

*Jatayu tries to keep his promise to Rama, but is ultimately unsuccessful. The fact that the story doesn't mention any punishment for Jatayu not keeping his promise suggests that death is one of the few ways someone can get out of a promise without consequences (though death itself is also a major consequence, of course). Jatayu's words to Ravana act as a promise: they put into words the fact that Rama must destroy the rakshasas. At the same time, Jatayu's death taking place at exactly the wrong moment heightens the suspense and "cliffhanger" aspect of the tale.*



## 6. VALI

The narrator prefaces this chapter by saying upfront that it's a puzzling episode: Rama, the perfect man, commits a morally questionable act by shooting a creature that didn't harm him. The narrator says that this is one of the most controversial episodes in the story. He introduces the land, Kiskinda, which is ruled over and peopled by monkeys that possess the intellect and nobility of humans.

*The narrator makes it very clear that Rama doesn't always behave like the perfect hero he's supposed to be. This lapse is possibly a later addition to Valmiki's text, which continues to develop the idea that the Ramayana has gone through a number of changes over the course of various centuries and cultures.*



Rama and Lakshmana enter Kiskinda while searching desperately for Sita. Hanuman, the helper of Kiskinda's king, Sugreeva, watches them enter. He assumes the form of a scholar and observes that Lakshmana and Rama look human, yet godlike. He steps out and introduces himself, welcoming the men to Sugreeva's kingdom. Rama realizes that Hanuman is powerful, despite looking like a scholar. Lakshmana introduces himself and Rama to Hanuman, and tells him their story.

*Our introduction to Hanuman (one of the most popular characters of the epic, and Hindu mythology in general) sets him up as being an extremely observant character: he recognizes outright that Rama is divine, and Rama similarly recognizes Hanuman's power. Lakshmana also acts ideally in this meeting by taking charge of the introductions and generally behaving as Rama's right hand man.*



Hanuman bows at Rama's feet, though Rama insists that a scholar shouldn't do that. Hanuman explains that he only assumed this form to greet Rama. He retakes his monkey form and returns with Sugreeva. Sugreeva mentions offhandedly that like Rama, he suffers in exile. Hanuman tells Sugreeva's story.

*Hanuman already shows devotion to Rama. Taking a human form to greet Rama and Lakshmana is one way that Hanuman shows his goodness: he cares for his companions' comfort and doesn't want to scare them.*



Hanuman says that Sugreeva's brother, Vali, long ago won immeasurable strength. He also has the power that states that anyone who fights him gives half their strength to him. Everyone and everything, including Ravana, feared him. He was the king of Kiskinda, with Sugreeva second in command, and everyone was happy. One day, a demon challenged Vali to a fight and Vali chased the demon into an underground passage, telling Sugreeva to rule until he returned. After 28 months, Sugreeva's advisors thought Vali had surely died and sealed the tunnel, crowning Sugreeva as king.

*Vali emerges as one of the most physically powerful characters of the Ramayana, though it's still unknown whether he has emotional intelligence, goodness, or loyalty to match his physical strength. Sugreeva is already demonstrating that he is exceptionally loyal: he did exactly what his brother asked him to do, and consulted his advisors before taking action to fill Vali's role as king.*



Eventually, Vali tried to exit the tunnel and was enraged when he found the tunnel blocked. He broke out of the tunnel, reached Kiskinda, and when Sugreeva tried to welcome his brother, Vali accused Sugreeva of trying to bury him alive. As Vali pummeled Sugreeva, Sugreeva tried to explain what happened but couldn't. Sugreeva escaped to this particular mountain, where Vali can't set foot because of a curse. Vali returned to Kiskinda, assumed the role of king, and took Sugreeva's wife.

This story moves Rama, and he offers Sugreeva his help. Hanuman and Sugreeva speak privately, and Hanuman says that he believes that Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu and should therefore be able to defeat Vali. Further, Hanuman was told by his father years ago to dedicate his life to serving Vishnu. He says to test Rama's identity, they must ask him to shoot an **arrow** through the trunks of powerful trees. They return to Rama and ask him to do so. Rama shoots an arrow through seven trees, seven worlds, and seven seas, and the arrow returns to his quiver.

Rama then notices a pile of bones and asks Sugreeva about them. Sugreeva tells Dundubi's story. Dundubi was a monstrous buffalo-shaped demon. Dundubi had sought out Vishnu and asked for the privilege of fighting forever. Dundubi was eventually directed to Vali, and the two fought for a year. Vali finally bested the demon and flung his body into the sky. It came down on the mountain where a sage was performing a sacrifice. The sage then cursed Vali.

Rama tells Lakshmana to get rid of the bones. Lakshmana kicks the bones away, returning the spot to its sacred state. Sugreeva tells Rama that he saw Ravana carry Sita away a while ago, and gives Rama some of Sita's jewelry. Rama cries and faints. Sugreeva promises to find Sita. Rama laments that he let Sita down, but Hanuman and Sugreeva begin to engage Rama in plans to find Sita.

Hanuman says that they must first do away with Vali so that Sugreeva can be crowned king. The group travels to a mountain in Kiskinda, where Sugreeva shouts and challenges Vali to a fight. Vali is asleep, but when he hears the challenge he angrily wakes up. Vali's wife, Tara, tries to reason with Vali, but Vali is intent on fighting Sugreeva. Tara quietly mentions that Rama has joined with Sugreeva, and Rama has an invincible **bow**. Vali calls Tara foolish and insists that Rama is too righteous to try to kill him. Vali leaves and runs to the mountainside for the fight.

*Vali allowed his emotions to overpower his thinking. At least in Hanuman's presentation, there's no indication that Sugreeva was indeed trying to bury Vali alive or usurp the crown. This encourages a reader or listener to identify with Sugreeva, as he possesses loyalty and goodness, but not the physical strength of his brother.*



*Rama proves his heroic nature by using his bow and arrow. This mirrors his stringing of Shiva's bow; both events are indicative of the fact that Rama is the ideal hero in part because of his skill with the bow. Rama decides to give his loyalty to Sugreeva outright rather than attempt to talk to Vali first. While Rama's newfound loyalty is entirely within the bounds of his character, not even attempting to discover the other side of the story is not.*



*The stories of Vali's exceptional strength create some tension as to how exactly Rama plans to kill this magnificent being. The story of Dundubi also continues to develop the idea that the gods play a very direct role in life on earth, though their interference doesn't always yield positive results: the sage was likely praying to one of the gods that caused this to happen.*



*Rama spreads good in the world by ridding the mountain of the cursed bones. He also shows how dedicated he is to Sita with his breakdown; this is the first mention of Rama fully losing composure over the loss of his wife. His rational nature wins out, however, as Hanuman and Sugreeva turn his attention to planning.*



*Though Vali shows that he's driven by anger and a desire to fight, he also functions under the assumption that all parties involved in a fight are going to behave honorably. What he knows of Rama is that Rama is honorable to a fault. Though under normal circumstances Vali isn't wrong, it's suggested that Vali will be punished for this extreme self-assuredness.*



Hidden away from the battle, Rama is in awe of Vali's strength. He and Lakshmana debate whether involving themselves in this fight is proper. Lakshmana questions whether or not Sugreeva is trustworthy, but Rama insists that they shouldn't be overly analytical. The monkeys fight brutally during this discussion. In a pause, Sugreeva begs Rama for help. Rama asks Sugreeva to wear a vine around his neck so he's identifiable, and the monkey brothers return to their fight. When Vali lifts Sugreeva over his head, Rama shoots Vali straight through the heart with an **arrow**.

*Lakshmana again demonstrates that he's just as capable of thinking rationally and logically as Rama is. In this case, he certainly has a point. However, Rama believes that he's behaving loyally to Sugreeva and upholding the promise he made to help him, which allows him to shoot Vali with a clear conscience. This lapse, however, does help create the sense that Rama is very much human and prone to human mistakes despite his divine origins. Alternately, it could show a discrepancy in the source material for the poem, as Rama's apparent break in character could be the result of another poet's influence.*



Vali pauses, slowly lets go of Sugreeva, and wraps his hands, feet, and tail around the **arrow**. The god of death steps back in admiration. Vali wonders who could have possibly shot him, and feels admiration for whoever shot the arrow. He draws the arrow out of his chest and blood spurts out, sending Sugreeva into tears. Vali studies the arrow and sees Rama's name, thinking that Tara had better judgment than he did.

*Vali's strength doesn't diminish as he's close to death, as evidenced by the god of death himself allowing Vali to live a little longer. The narration presents Vali's impending death as punishment for not listening to his wife or advisors: teaching the lesson that good listening skills are absolutely necessary to rule well.*



Vali asks Rama why he did this, saying that this destroys Rama's virtues. He questions if this is a heroic act on Rama's part, and asks if Rama seeks to engineer in Kiskinda the same thing that happened in Ayodhya. He says if Rama had asked, he would've killed Ravana instantly. Vali asks again how Rama's actions were honorable.

*Because the narrator already suggested that Rama's actions are very out of character, the reader is supposed to see that Vali makes very good points in his address to Rama. However, Vali's address also allows Rama something to refute and use logic to escape from, rather than damning him.*



Rama approaches Vali and explains to the dying monkey what happened after he pursued the demon into the tunnel. He explains to Vali that he didn't offer Sugreeva any mercy and instead, tried to kill him. Rama continues, saying that taking Sugreeva's wife was dishonorable, and since Sugreeva asked Rama to help, he was duty bound to kill Vali.

*Even if Rama is at fault here, he doesn't acknowledge it at all. Instead, he uses the qualities that make him an ideal hero, namely the willingness to teach, to show Vali why he needed to be killed.*



Vali tells Rama he's misjudging everything: it's a legitimate action in the monkey society to take his brother's wife. He insists that human codes of ethics aren't applicable to monkey society. Rama refuses to be swayed; he says that the monkeys are intelligent enough to know right from wrong and because of their intelligence, should be judged by high standards.

*Rama essentially insists that if one is capable of thinking and behaving like a human, one must be held to human standards. This shows that he believes that humans are more capable of good than animals, and that being considered human should be a compliment to a monkey like Vali.*



Vali accepts this and asks Rama why he shot him from hiding. Lakshmana explains that if Rama had spoken to Vali, he might have been forced to break his promise to Sugreeva. Again, Vali sees the logic in this and says that "simple-minded ones like me" constantly struggle with eternal truth, and that Rama's reasoning is elevating and honoring. Vali says that he hopes Sugreeva will be worthy of Rama's trust, and asks Rama to treat Sugreeva kindly if Sugreeva betrays him.

*Though the narrator's preface to this chapter suggests that Rama certainly should've spoken to Vali before killing him, Lakshmana insists that Rama was in actuality following through with his promises and acting honorably. Regardless, Vali becomes more human, in a sense, as he understands Rama's explanation (however problematic modern readers might find it). This shows that Rama can use his ability to teach to help others elevate themselves.*



Finally, Vali asks Rama to explain to others that Sugreeva brought about Vali's salvation, not just his death. He then offers Hanuman to serve Rama, and tells Sugreeva to serve Rama. Vali names Sugreeva his successor. The narrator says that this is the saddest part of the story. Tara and Vali's son, Angada, retrieve Vali's body, but Vali's spirit finds a place in the high heavens.

*Because of Rama's teachings on Vali's deathbed, Vali does attain salvation in death. This is indicative of Rama's power and leadership qualities. By tasking Hanuman and Sugreeva with serving Rama, Vali creates a promise that Hanuman and Sugreeva can't break, which insures that Rama will have support going forward.*



## 7. WHEN THE RAINS CEASE

After Sugreeva's coronation, he approaches Rama and asks him what he should do next. Rama instructs Sugreeva to return to the palace and rule, tells him to follow the codes of conduct, and offers advice on how to rule honorably. Sugreeva asks Rama to stay in the capital as a guest, but Rama refuses. He asks Sugreeva to come to him with an army at the end of the rainy season.

*Once again, Rama gets to teach someone how to properly lead. This practice puts Rama's exile in a slightly different light, as his exile allows him the opportunity to institute governments that align with his own values and beliefs about ruling. Exile allows him to spread his goodness.*



Hanuman insists on staying with Rama, but Rama tells Hanuman to remain with Sugreeva and counsel him. The monkeys leave and Lakshmana constructs another dwelling for himself and Rama. The rains arrive and fall for months. Rama grows depressed and guilty, thinking of himself sitting in relative shelter while Sita surely undergoes torture. Everything reminds him of Sita and makes him upset. Lakshmana comforts Rama and reminds him of their goal.

*Here, Rama shows once again how dedicated he is to Sita. Notably, however, even though he's certainly emotional over losing her, he's not inconsolable or making horrendous decisions as a result of his emotional state like Ravana or Soorpanaka did when they became similarly emotional.*



When the rains end, Rama feels better. However, Sugreeva doesn't arrive with an army as the days pass. Rama wonders if Sugreeva forgot them and suggests that if Sugreeva has deceived them, he should be killed. He sends Lakshmana to go see what happened and to threaten Sugreeva if necessary. Lakshmana leaves immediately. Angada sees Lakshmana coming, recognizes that he's in a temper, and goes to fetch Sugreeva.

*Because he's the perfect hero and is therefore exceptionally loyal, Rama must make sure that those who have pledged loyalty to him behave in a similar fashion. In this way, Rama continues to insist that the monkeys of Kiskinda are held to human standards of conduct and goodness.*



Sugreeva is in his bedroom, which is so lavish and filled with beautiful women and good wine that he never leaves it. Angada tries to rouse Sugreeva, but he's unshakable. Angada fetches Hanuman and Tara and asks them for help. Tara angrily yells that they've all forgotten their responsibilities—she's been telling them that it's time to help Rama, but nobody listens. She accuses her companions of being selfish and ungrateful. Hearing this, the people of Kiskinda barricade the gates of the city.

Lakshmana kicks the gates open and begins the march to the palace. Seeing this, Hanuman asks Tara to go speak to Lakshmana, knowing that Lakshmana won't harm Tara. Tara and an army of women approach and surround Lakshmana, making him uncomfortable. Tara explains that they're frightened and asks why he's here. Lakshmana feels homesick looking at Tara, and says that he wants to know why Sugreeva hasn't arrived. Tara explains that Sugreeva is gathering his armies. Lakshmana feels relieved.

Hanuman hesitantly comes out to join Lakshmana and Tara. Lakshmana asks Hanuman if he forgot his own promise, but Hanuman explains that he always thinks of Rama. Lakshmana explains that Rama is suffering and worried. Hanuman invites Lakshmana into the palace, and Lakshmana accepts.

Angada tells Sugreeva that Lakshmana is at the palace, and tells him about Lakshmana's anger when he arrived. Sugreeva asks why nobody roused him, and Angada delicately says that Sugreeva must've been asleep when he tried to let him know. Sugreeva praises Angada's delicacy but explains that he was drunk. He lists the bad things that happen when one drinks to excess, and vows to give up alcohol. He decides he's then ready to meet Lakshmana.

Sugreeva greets Lakshmana and they enter the palace hall. Lakshmana insists on sitting on the floor rather than a golden chair. The monkeys try to offer Lakshmana luxuries, but Lakshmana says that Rama lives on little and as Rama's companion, Lakshmana will too. He asks Sugreeva to begin a search for Sita immediately. Sugreeva begs forgiveness and instructs Hanuman to bring the armies to Rama's home when they arrive.

Sugreeva leaves to meet with Rama, and Rama greets him with open arms. Sugreeva is self-critical, but Rama brushes this aside. Sugreeva explains that Hanuman will come soon with an army, and Rama sends Sugreeva back to the city. Lakshmana tells Rama after about what happened in Kiskinda.

*Sugreeva has given into his animal instincts and allowed himself to forget his duty to Rama. Tara again acts as the voice of reason, which begins to give her a place in the story as one who is very much like Rama. She never forgot her kingdom's promises; she simply doesn't have the power to make sure the kingdom follows through on them because she's female.*



*Tara has already shown that she's a good and virtuous woman, which means that she's able to utilize the cultural protections that Rama's society affords virtuous women (unlike demonic women such as Thataka or Soorpanaka). Despite his military skills, Lakshmana shows that he doesn't always want to be violent; he simply wants Kiskinda to make good on its promises.*



*The text implies that Hanuman was unable to move Sugreeva to action, yet Hanuman himself remains characteristically loyal to Rama.*



*Here, Sugreeva is given the opportunity to acknowledge his wrongs and choose to right them, which continues to provide evidence for the story's suggestion that one can choose to be good or evil. Making the right and good choice allows Sugreeva the peace of mind to be able to face his mistakes and make them right.*



*Though the monkeys are certainly Lakshmana's allies, he aligns himself much more fully with Rama than the monkeys. This makes it very clear that Lakshmana is first and foremost a representation of the ideal brother. By refusing the offered luxuries, Lakshmana also self-enforces his decision to follow Rama into exile, which functions as an overt display of loyalty.*



*Despite his earlier anger at Sugreeva's lapse, Rama shows that a good leader is forgiving and kind when others make mistakes. Because Lakshmana tells Rama what happened, Rama gets to make a fully informed decision going forward.*



Soon, the armies begin to arrive. Rama stands at a high spot to try to count them, but decides that counting will take too long. Sugreeva calls the commanders to each search in a different direction. Sugreeva gives Hanuman and Angada special directions to go south, explaining the terrain they'll encounter. Rama takes Hanuman aside and gives him an explanation of Sita's beauty so he'll recognize her when he finds her. Finally, Rama takes his ring off and gives it to Hanuman to give to Sita.

Hanuman and Angada travel south with an army. They search and search and eventually find themselves in an underground palace. There they find a woman seated in meditation, who explains that she was once a goddess condemned to meditate underground until Hanuman's arrival. Hanuman finally shatters the underworld and they continue their journey. When they reach the ocean, it seems as though all hope is lost. Angada suggests he commit suicide rather than return empty handed, and Hanuman reminds him of Jatayu's noble death, saying they can't die before searching every world.

Hearing Jatayu's name, a grotesque and massive being approaches the group of monkeys. Hanuman challenges the being, but the being cries and introduces himself as Sampathi, Jatayu's older brother. Sampathi asks why Jatayu died, and Hanuman explains what happened. Sampathi says that when he and Jatayu were younger, the irritated sun god charred Sampathi, who protected Jatayu under his wings. Sampathi was told that he'd be redeemed when he heard Rama's name. At that, the army yells "Victory to Rama," and Sampathi is restored to his majestic form.

Sampathi tells the monkeys that he saw Ravana take Sita over the ocean to Lanka. Sampathi leaves and the monkeys discuss how to cross the ocean. One of the advisors turns to Hanuman and explains that Hanuman has been cursed to forget how powerful he is, and says that Hanuman can grow to a great size if he wants to. The advisors tells Hanuman to grow large enough to cross the ocean with one step, and then make himself small and find Sita. Hanuman does as he's told: he grows larger than the mountain and steps across the ocean to Lanka.

*Sugreeva follows through with his promise to raise armies for Rama, which allows him to gain Rama's favor again. Hanuman, as the ideal devotee, is trusted with the task of recognizing Sita. This shows Rama's faith in Hanuman. It also suggests that Rama has some sense of where Sita is, as he seems fairly certain that Hanuman will find her.*



*The woman's explanation of Hanuman's redemptive powers places Hanuman in a similar position as Rama (as when Rama redeemed Ahalya). It suggests that Hanuman also has divine origins, and further that his path south is already foretold. Hanuman's words to Angada suggest again that the gods and supernatural worlds are closely linked to everyday reality.*



*Rama's redemptive powers work even when Rama himself isn't present. This is suggestive of Rama's power and heroism, and also makes it very clear that others take on some of Rama's positive qualities by aligning themselves with him. Rama's power works within the story just like it is meant to for readers and listeners. Further, Sampathi makes it very clear that Rama's existence was foretold, which suggests his future victory over Ravana.*



*This advisor confirms that Hanuman shares Rama's divine origins. While Rama has his bow to give him power, Hanuman has the power to shift his size. This power allows him to carry out his promises to Rama and insure that good prevails. Notably, Hanuman is able to do this when he obtains knowledge about himself and becomes introspective. This suggests that introspection and self-knowledge are essential to being good and heroic.*



## 8. MEMENTO FROM RAMA

When Hanuman has both feet in Lanka, he shrinks to a small size and begins looking into the windows of every building for Sita. Several streets in the city are lined with buildings that house Ravana's "collection of women," who are lonely now that Ravana's attention has shifted to Sita. Hanuman comes across a lovely woman lounging in bed, surrounded by attendants. As Hanuman studies the woman, he realizes she's not Sita—this woman sleeps in a clumsy position and talks in her sleep. Hanuman realizes this must be Ravana's wife.

Hanuman peeks into Ravana's palace and doesn't see Sita there, so he continues his search. He finds himself in one of Ravana's parks, where he sees several rakshasa women with weapons, sleeping around an unkempt Sita. Suddenly, the rakshasa women get up and begin to intimidate her. Ravana arrives and attempts to speak to Sita, alternating between scaring her and offering her luxuries. Through all this, Sita rejects the rakshasas' advances, which fills Hanuman with pride and respect for her.

Angry that Sita won't give in, Ravana leaves the garden after instructing the rakshasa women to break Sita's will to resist him. The rakshasa women torment Sita for a while longer and then leave her alone. Sita, distraught, prepares to hang herself from a tree, but Hanuman cautiously approaches her and tells her who he is and what Rama's been doing. He shows her Rama's ring, and Sita offers Hanuman a piece of jewelry that she managed to save to pass along to Rama.

Before leaving Lanka, Hanuman makes himself monstrously large and destroys parts of Lanka. Hanuman then allows Ravana's son, Indrajit, to capture him and bring him before Ravana. Hanuman tells Ravana that Rama will destroy Lanka and Ravana with it if he doesn't give in, but Ravana orders his army to kill Hanuman. Ravana's brother Vibishana insists that it's wrong to kill a messenger, so they settle for setting Hanuman's tail on fire. Hanuman, however, uses this to his advantage. He escapes and lights parts of Ravana's city on fire, and then returns to Rama.

*Hanuman's realization suggests an exceptionally high standard of beauty for Sita; in order to be recognizable as Sita, she has to even sleep elegantly. Ravana's collection of women is another way for him to demonstrate his power. He's evidently a convincing figure, as his curse means that all of these women consented to join his harem. This forced morality creates the sense that Ravana isn't all bad, if only because he's sometimes forced to be good.*



*Even when she's unkempt and attacked, Sita manages to maintain her composure and remains loyal to Rama. A perfect woman (according to the story) is thus supposed to be unwaveringly loyal to her husband, even in the face of death or torture. Sita's loyalty then inspires further loyalty in Hanuman—she leads by example, like Rama does.*



*Sita's loyalty is rewarded as Hanuman reveals himself to her. He behaves heroically himself, while also showing Sita that Rama has been acting loyally and honorably the entire time. Sita's brief contemplation of suicide is indicative of the fact that she's literally been created to be Rama's companion; life without him is simply not worth living for her.*



*From his first mention, Vibishana shows that he's surprisingly honorable and good for being related to the evil Ravana. This suggests that good and evil can exist anywhere; good (or evil) is a decision rather than a set state of being. Hanuman then punishes Ravana's vanity and pride in material wealth by setting the city on fire.*



## 9. RAVANA IN COUNCIL

A divine architect rebuilds Ravana's city, which greatly pleases Ravana. He admires his new city in his council hall for a while, and then orders everyone but his brothers to leave. Ravana addresses his brothers and asks for their advice as to what to do next. Ravana's commander-in-chief says that it's not heroic to abduct a woman while her husband is gone. He goes on to list Rama and Lakshmana's military victories and says that dealing with Rama and Lakshmana first would've been the best plan, but at this point the only thing to do is to go out and kill Rama and Lakshmana before Lanka suffers more destruction.

*Even though it's obvious that Ravana will soon face a great battle, he remains focused on maintaining the material aspects of his power. Interestingly, Ravana's commander-in-chief is willing to suggest that Ravana isn't behaving honorably. This act of introspection creates the sense that even though these characters are aligned with an evil character, that doesn't mean that they themselves are fully evil. They have a sense of right and wrong; they're just aligned with the wrong leader.*



Other commanders rise and say that because Ravana is so powerful, they should ignore the monkeys and instead wait for Rama to bring the fight to Lanka. Ravana's brother Kumbakarna gets up and says again that Ravana has done horrible deeds by taking another man's wife, and the only thing to do now, since they're so deep in this conflict, is to either win or die trying to win. At this, Ravana seems pleased and calls for the armies.

*Even Ravana's own brother shows that he's not entirely unfeeling or amoral; he recognizes that Ravana has violated codes of conduct by abducting Sita. He, however, feels that now they've begun this fight, they're duty-bound to finish it. Because it fits in with his own desires, Ravana appreciates this line of reasoning.*



Indrajit insists that Ravana not take the trouble of using armies, and should instead let him singlehandedly kill Rama and Lakshmana. Finally, Vibishana stands up and sadly asks Ravana to listen to him. He reminds Ravana that Ravana acquired his power through spiritual sacrifices, but says that Ravana has since misused his power. He asks if anyone has been able to subjugate the gods forever, and insists that Ravana should worry about Rama and Hanuman, since Ravana's downfall is supposed to come from a monkey. Finally, Vibishana implores Ravana to understand that Rama is an incarnation of a god and asks him to release Sita.

*Again, Vibishana shows the reader that pure good can exist among evil. Vibishana crystallizes the idea that good and evil are choices, and he suggests that Ravana not only has had the choice to do good in the past, but can still make the choice to do the right thing. Vibishana understands that Ravana should expect his downfall if he continues on this path of evil. When he asks Ravana to consider the consequences, it recalls Rama talking Lakshmana out of acting rashly and aligns Vibishana with Rama.*



Ravana berates Vibishana for saying that Rama is powerful, and insists that the gods can't curse him. Ravana insists that he's not afraid of an incarnation of Vishnu since Vishnu has been defeated many times, and Ravana calls for his armies. When Vibishana again tries to convince Ravana to abandon his cause, Ravana asks where Vishnu was when Ravana was subjugating the other gods and claiming the worlds as his own.

*Ravana is beyond reason; he is unable to see anything but his own power, and he's unwilling to accept how he got that power in the first place. This suggests that Ravana's power is corrupting him and making him blind to the truth of the situation. It also blinds him to the story's logic, which says he'll be punished for this.*



Vibishana argues with Ravana again the next day, and Ravana finally banishes Vibishana. Ravana insists that Vibishana wants Lanka to be destroyed. Vibishana agrees to leave and apologizes to Ravana for hurting his feelings before he crosses the ocean to Rama's camp.

*Even when Ravana is treating Vibishana horribly, Vibishana behaves honorably and kindly by apologizing for any hurt feelings. This continues to develop Vibishana's character as an overwhelmingly good and dutiful one.*



## 10. ACROSS THE OCEAN

Vibishana attempts to remain in the background of Rama's camp, but eventually Rama's army chiefs notice him and bring him before Rama. Vibishana asks Rama for asylum, and a messenger interrogates Vibishana. With the messenger's information, Rama meets with Sugreeva, Hanuman, and other advisors to decide what to do with Vibishana. Sugreeva insists that they shouldn't trust him, since he betrayed his brother. Rama's commander-in-chief echoes these sentiments, but Hanuman insists that Vibishana has a pure soul and a good heart. Hanuman notes that Vibishana saved his life when Ravana's men had captured him, which he sees as proof of a good heart.

Rama decides to trust Hanuman's assessment of Vibishana's character. Rama says that his duty is to offer protection to those who seek asylum, and even if Vibishana betrays them, Rama will feel as though he's done the right thing. Sugreeva brings Vibishana to meet Rama, and Rama instructs Lakshmana to treat Vibishana as the king of Lanka. Vibishana spends the next several days telling Rama all about Ravana's armies and weapons.

When the plan of attack is prepared, Rama stands at the seashore and wonders how to cross the sea. Rama prays and fasts for seven days and finally asks the sea god directly to allow him to pass. The sea god refuses to help until Rama threatens to shoot his **arrows** into the sea and dry it up. The sea god then agrees to use whatever Rama brings to build a bridge. Rama's army and the animals in the surrounding area bring mud, rocks, and mountains, and they build a massive path across the sea to Lanka.

*Sugreeva's counsel is particularly hypocritical given his role in killing his own brother, but the fact that Rama brushes over this logic asserts again that the story fully believes that Rama did the right thing in helping Sugreeva kill Vali. As the character who's supposed to most fully embody loyalty and honor, Hanuman's assessment is given preference. This cements his position as the ideal, loyal companion.*



*Rama insists that Hanuman is correct, if only because it's more important to do the right thing than be correct. This decision implies that the perfect hero must be willing to accept the possibility of defeat if doing the right thing leads to a bad outcome.*



*The army and the animals show their loyalty to Rama and his cause by assisting in building the bridge. Rama's unwillingness to take the sea god's initial answer is indicative of his belief in his righteousness; he won't allow a relatively minor god to get in the way of his destiny. Threatening the sea god with arrows suggests the major power that Rama's bow and arrows have.*



## 11. THE SIEGE OF LANKA

Ravana sends skilled soldiers and family members to try to protect Lanka, but nobody returns. He tries to infiltrate Rama's ranks with spies, but this proves ineffective. Finally, he tries to convince Sita that Rama is dead by showing her a decapitated head that looks like Rama's, but Sita refuses to believe the head actually belonged to her husband.

Rama sends Angada as a messenger to Ravana to ask him to concede, and share that Rama supports Vibishana's claim as king of Lanka. Ravana orders his rakshasas to kill Angada, but Angada picks up two of them, rises into the sky, and throws them down. On his way out of the city, Angada also breaks off the tower of Ravana's palace. When Angada returns to Rama with an account of what happened, Rama orders his armies to attack Lanka.

*Notice that two of Ravana's three tactics utilize manipulation or deceit. This continues to paint Ravana as a deceitful and evil character, while suggesting that honesty and loyalty (as Sita demonstrates here) are more powerful than manipulation.*



*Like Hanuman did during the first infiltration of Lanka, Angada attacks Ravana's love of demonstrating his power through material goods. Angada sends a clear message to Ravana that his unlawful actions have consequences, and notably, he and Rama give Ravana the chance to decide to concede this fight.*



The battle rages for days. Indrajit at one point attacks Rama and Lakshmana with arrows that make them faint. This pleases Ravana, as he thinks they're dead. He sends Sita into the sky in a chariot to observe her "dead" husband, and Sita cries and wants to die. One of Ravana's women, however, whispers in Sita's ear that Rama and Lakshmana aren't actually dead. Soon, an eagle appears to neutralize Indrajit's arrows and Rama and Lakshmana rise to rejoin the fight.

Ravana sends his commander-in-chief onto the battlefield, but the commander doesn't return. Ravana then decides to join the battle himself. Lakshmana faints at the sight of Ravana, but Hanuman lifts Rama onto his shoulders and they attack Ravana. Rama severely wounds Ravana and breaks his crown. Rama then sends Ravana back to his palace to recoup and fight again the next day, and Ravana agrees, humiliated.

Ravana orders a small army to wake Kumbakarna, who is famous for his deep sleep. They offer him food and water when he finally wakes up, and then Ravana's minister gives him an account of the battle raging outside. Kumbakarna is angry that he wasn't told of the battle earlier, and he rushes to Ravana to assure him that he'll take care of Rama. Kumbakarna is surprised to see Ravana look so anxious. Kumbakarna says that Ravana should've never gone about stealing Sita in this way, driven by lust. He promises to bring Rama's head on a platter.

Though Kumbakarna's presence on the battlefield causes mayhem, Rama manages to use his **bow** and kill him. When Ravana hears of this development, he cries that his "right hand is cut off." Indrajit, meanwhile, creates a fake figure of Sita, carries the figure onto the battlefield, and kills her in front of Rama's army. The monkeys grieve until Vibishana tells them it's a hoax.

Later, Lakshmana kills Indrajit. Ravana cries and decides to kill Sita. Some of Ravana's advisors think this is a good idea, but others instruct Ravana to use his anger to kill Rama, which will then give him the right to take Sita as his own.

## 12. RAMA AND RAVANA IN BATTLE

The narrator says again that every person who Ravana sent into battle didn't return. Ravana stands in a tower and watches the battle for a while. The carnage makes him exceptionally angry. He performs ritual prayers, dresses in his armor, and when he's dressed, he looks very heroic. Ravana summons his chariot and vows that at the end of the day, either Sita or Ravana's own wife will be a widow.

*This intelligence from Ravana's woman shows that his subjects might not be as loyal as Ravana thought they were. This creates the sense that Ravana is unable to cultivate a loyal following like Rama has been able to, which works to elevate Rama as the ideal hero and show that Ravana's evil has more negative consequences.*



*Breaking Ravana's crown is another symbolic attack of Ravana's overt displays of power. Rama shows that he's honorable and kind by allowing Ravana the time to recoup. Though it'd be faster to kill Ravana at this point, Rama places too much importance on insuring that this fight proceeds honorably.*



*Kumbakarna doesn't present himself as a wholly evil character; he's fully able to admit that Ravana isn't a beacon of heroism like Rama is. Kumbakarna is, however, bound by loyalty to his brother. Even if he thinks that Ravana is in the wrong, he must serve him until he can serve him no longer. Ravana does seem to be cracking under the pressure of this battle.*



*Rama's bow is powerful enough to kill even the massive and dangerous Kumbakarna, which is indicative again of Rama's power and predestined heroism. Vibishana continues to show Rama that he's loyal to Rama's cause by shattering the illusions created by Ravana's brothers.*



*Some of Ravana's advisors appear to believe that he can still win Sita honorably and encourage him to take that path. Again, this suggests that not all who serve Ravana are evil.*



*The narration creates a sense of dread by making it extremely clear that Ravana is fighting a losing battle. Though Ravana is described as looking heroic, the story has already shown that looking heroic isn't at all the same as acting heroic. This connects to Ravana's love of show and display, however.*



Ravana's resolve attracts the attention of the gods, and they send down Indra's chariot to help Rama. The charioteer introduces himself as Matali, and explains that the gods Indra, Brahma, and Shiva sent him to help Rama, and he lists the chariot's special powers. Rama wonders aloud if the rakshasas sent Matali as a trap, but both Hanuman and Lakshmana insist that the chariot is real. Rama gathers his weapons and climbs into the chariot.

On the battlefield, Ravana aims his chariot to charge Rama at full speed, while Rama tells Matali to drive calmly. One of Ravana's supporters tries to attack Lakshmana, but Rama blocks his way and quickly kills him. This makes Ravana even angrier and he urges his charioteer to go faster towards Rama. Though Ravana notices the "ominous signs" (snapping **bows**, thunder, crying horses), he decides he doesn't care about anything but killing Rama.

Rama pauses and decides that if he kills Ravana's army, Ravana himself might experience a change of heart. This strategy proves unsuccessful, however, as Ravana continues to chase Rama. Ravana blows a conch shell as a challenge, and out of the universe Vishnu's conch answers with its own call. Matali follows this by blowing Indra's conch, and the battle begins. Ravana shoots arrows at Rama, but Rama's **arrows** stop Ravana's from hitting him.

Ravana notices that Rama is riding in Indra's chariot, which makes him angry that the gods are supporting Rama. He shoots more arrows at Rama and again, Rama's **arrows** neutralize Ravana's attack. Even when Ravana uses all 20 arms to shoot arrows, none of them reach Rama.

Ravana orders his charioteer to fly into the sky and Rama pursues him. Ravana destroys some of Rama's army from there, but Rama's **arrows** deflect most of Ravana's advances. Ravana shoots Rama's horses and Matali, and Rama pauses in grief and indecision. When he recovers, a divine eagle perches on his chariot's flagpost, which the gods take as an auspicious sign. The two chariots circle the world several times and finally return to the sky above Lanka. Rama's arrows begin to pierce Ravana's armor.

*Finally, the gods involve themselves in this fight to make sure that their champion wins. In doing so, the gods cement the idea that Rama is destined to win, but also suggest that destiny doesn't mean it isn't going to be a close call. Rama is quick to spot potential ill will, but Hanuman is again able to convince him to accept help.*



*Now that the hero and the villain are both on the battlefield, the narrator asks the reader to compare the two: Rama appears composed and self-assured, while Ravana is driven by anger. Further, Ravana ignores fate and allows his emotions to govern his actions. This suggests that he's not going to make it out of this battle alive.*



*Rama approaches the battle from a logical standpoint and seeks to give Ravana every possible opportunity to make the decision to concede (and live). Rama seeks to spread goodness whenever possible, even to those who wish to kill him. Rama's bow and arrows are again his weapon of choice, and their power enforces Rama's own heroism.*



*Notably, Ravana hypocritically believes that the gods don't have a right to help Rama, when he himself used the gods' boons for his own evil gains. Ravana's strength is no match for Rama's divinely supported goodness and morality.*



*Because of Rama's goodness and willingness to reflect on his actions, he's afforded the time here to consider what to do after Ravana shoots Matali. He's rewarded for being introspective and considerate with the auspicious arrival of the divine eagle, and then is rewarded even more by beginning to truly succeed in taking out Ravana.*



Ravana begins using asthras in addition to his arrows, turning the fight into a battle of supernatural powers rather than simple military strength. Rama's **arrows** neutralize Ravana's first attempt, and Ravana decides to use an asthra that causes confusing illusions. It creates the illusion that Ravana's soldiers rise from the dead, making it look as though Ravana's army is once again huge. Matali, who is now revived after his injury, explains to Rama how to counter this, and Rama invokes a weapon that grants him wisdom and perception. The phantom armies disappear.

Ravana uses an asthra that creates darkness and horrible weather, but Rama again counters Ravana's attack with the appropriate asthra. Finally, Ravana shoots his deadliest asthra towards Rama. Rama's **arrows** are useless against this weapon, but Rama mutters a mantra and the weapon collapses. This stuns Ravana, who begins to wonder if Rama is actually divine and not just human. He thinks that Rama can't possibly be Vishnu, but resolves again to kill Rama regardless. Ravana sends more flaming weapons at Rama, but Rama stops them in midair and sends them back towards Ravana.

Facing all this destruction, Ravana begins to feel hopeless. Rama, however, feels better and better, and begins to send arrows to cut off Ravana's many heads. Ravana's heads, however, begin to regenerate, as do his arms. Devils and demons eat Ravana's severed heads and arms. Finally, Ravana faints. Instead of attacking Ravana in this moment of weakness, Rama pulls aside to let Ravana recover.

When Ravana comes to he berates his charioteer, and the charioteer explains that Rama backed off while Ravana was unconscious. Ravana accepts this explanation and begins hurling all sorts of heavy things in Rama's direction. Rama pauses for a moment and then decides to end the fight with a special asthra. Rama prays and invokes the power of the asthra and sends it at Ravana's heart—Ravana had only prayed for his heads and arms to be indestructible, not his heart. The asthra kills Ravana, and Rama watches his adversary fall from the sky.

In death, Ravana's face is cleansed of evil and instead looks devout and capable, as though his meditation on Rama had given him some peace. Rama instructs Matali to land the chariot. After Rama exits the chariot, he thanks Matali and sends him back to the heavens.

*Ravana continues to utilize manipulation and deception, while Rama conquers Ravana's attempts by asking for wisdom and self-knowledge. This continues to develop the idea that the ideal hero is willing to better himself and use his knowledge to win battles; the ideal hero isn't entirely dependent on his physical means of fighting.*



*The mantra that Rama uses again shows that Rama possesses knowledge, and particularly divine knowledge. Ravana still remains driven by emotions and rage and refuses to accept the logical conclusion that Rama is divine and he himself is going to die. The fact that Ravana does ask these questions, however, shows that he's capable of choosing to do the right thing, even though he doesn't end up making that decision.*



*Here, Rama shows how honorable he is. This is again a time that Rama could choose to take the quick route of killing Ravana while he's an easy target, but because he's the perfect hero, Rama must remain moral and honorable to a fault.*



*The people that surround Ravana continue to demonstrate that they're not all as bad as Ravana is. This charioteer is fully aware of what's going on and is able to make Ravana see that Rama is acting honorably. The way that Rama kills Ravana shows that being honorable, loving others, and being devout to the gods can allow one to overcome incredible challenges. Though Ravana was at an advantage physically, Rama's goodness allowed him to triumph.*



*Rama's goodness allows him to create positive change even in his worse adversaries. The narration implies that Ravana will possibly have a more peaceful death because of his meditation on Rama.*



Rama, Lakshmana, and Hanuman gather around Ravana's body. Rama notices a huge scar on Ravana's back and begins to worry that he dishonorably killed Ravana as he was trying to escape. Vibishana explains that Ravana acquired the scar years ago trying to attack divine elephants. Rama instructs Vibishana to bury Ravana properly.

*Rama's honorable nature is very nearly a fault here, as Rama would surely insist that he give up whatever he might gain from this win if he won it improperly. However, Vibishana again proves himself loyal and a good addition to Rama's advisors.*



### 13. INTERLUDE

Rama sends Hanuman to fetch an overjoyed Sita. Hanuman instructs Sita to dress herself beautifully before meeting Rama, and she does so. Sita finally sees Rama, surrounded by a great crowd. She feels awkward, but doesn't understand why Rama seems cold and distant. She bows at his feet and waits for him to address her. Rama finally says that he's accomplished his goal by freeing her, but it would be improper to accept her back as his wife after her time in Ravana's house. He tells her that she's free to go wherever she'd like.

*This is another strange and disturbing moment in Rama's story. The reader knows that Sita has remained true to her husband, but Rama seems to fear that Ravana's attempts at manipulation were too much for his wife to resist. He's taken Viswamithra's initial warning to heart, and this shows that Rama fully believes that women are more inclined to behave in evil and dishonorable ways.*



Sita breaks down crying and orders Lakshmana to light a fire. Lakshmana hesitates, but finally does as she asks. Rama does nothing as Sita bows before the fire and jumps into it. Moments later, the god of fire steps out of the fire with Sita. He presents Sita to Rama with a blessing, and Rama is happy that Sita passed this test of fidelity. He accepts Sita as his wife.

*Sita's goodness is too much for the fire god and her own loyalty insures that she makes it out of the fire alive. Now that she's proven that she remained true to Rama, Rama can move forward and continue to be the ideal husband. The deadly nature of this "test," however, cannot help but call into question just how ideal Rama really is.*



### 14. THE CORONATION

Rama explains that he had to test Sita's purity, which the narrator points out is very inconsistent with Rama's character and past actions. The narrator lists instances in which Rama dealt kindly with disgraced wives, but explains that Sita wasn't even disgraced, since she spurned all of Ravana's advances. Though the gods are relieved that Rama was victorious, after watching Rama test Sita they're also concerned that Rama is losing sight of his identity. They decide to remind him that he's divine. Brahma addresses Rama and reminds him of the Trinity (Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu), and tells Rama that he's an incarnation of Vishnu. Brahma adds that Sita is also divine, and asks Rama to remember his identity.

*The gods are concerned that Rama has become too human-like, as evidenced by his possessive and jealous nature. The jealous streak shows that though Rama is indeed divine, he is first and foremost human and therefore at risk of experiencing these very human negative emotions. By reminding Rama of his divine roots, the gods insure that Rama remembers that he still has work to do on earth and he must be good, honorable, and loyal in order to finish spreading goodness on earth.*



In the heavens, Shiva asks Dasaratha to visit Earth and meet Rama. Dasaratha agrees, and Rama is struck with joy to see his father. Dasaratha says that he's spent many years dwelling on Kaikeyi's betrayal, but he can let it go now. He says that he's blessed to be Rama's father, and asks Rama to ask anything of him. Rama insists he needs nothing, but at Dasaratha's urging, asks his father to forgive and recant disowning Bharatha and Kaikeyi.

Dasaratha insists that Bharatha has already been forgiven, but says he can't forgive Kaikeyi. Rama lists all the reasons why Dasaratha should forgive Kaikeyi, and finally Dasaratha agrees. He blesses Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana, and then returns to the heavens.

The gods remind Rama that the following day is the final day of his 14-year exile. They tell him that if he doesn't return to Ayodhya at once, Bharatha might hurt himself. Rama asks Vibishana for help, and Vibishana summons a magical vehicle. All of Rama's supporters board and fly towards Ayodhya. They make several stops along the way and finally, Rama sends Hanuman to go ahead and tell Bharatha that he's coming.

Outside Ayodhya, Bharatha had been counting the days until Rama's return. He thinks that Rama isn't going to come, tries to pass ruling responsibilities on to Sathrugna, and prepares to step into a fire like Sita did. Sathrugna tries to dissuade his brother, but Hanuman arrives just in time to tell Bharatha that Rama is on his way. Hanuman explains to Bharatha what happened over the last 14 years, and asks Bharatha to make an announcement and decorate the streets.

When Rama arrives, he greets his mother and stepmothers. He quickly dresses himself like a king, and Sita dresses like a queen. An attendant sets the time for their coronation.

## EPILOGUE

The narrator says that Rama entered Ayodhya and picked up right where he left off 14 years earlier. Hanuman and Sugreeva took on human forms and were treated as honored guests. Even Kaikeyi had taken the 14 years to think about what she did and accepted Rama with open arms. When Rama was crowned, Sita sat next to him, Rama held his **bow** in his right hand, and Lakshmana stood watchfully below the throne. Hanuman knelt at Rama's feet, ready to do his bidding.

*Dasaratha speaks as though he was initially unsure that Rama was going to be able to fulfill his destiny. This continues to suggest that though destiny is certainly a force to be reckoned with, the characters can't always be sure that one path is truly the right or predetermined one. Notice that Rama insists that Dasaratha truly cleanse his soul by honoring his wife, rather than holding onto his grudge.*



*Rama again uses reasoning and debate to persuade someone to become more moral. Dasaratha can learn from his son and become truly righteous in death.*



*Remember that Rama promised Bharatha to return; he must keep this promise or he won't be able to fulfill the rest of his destiny. Bharatha shows that he's still extremely loyal to Rama's claim to the throne. Rama is going to return to Ayodhya a true hero, with even more power to spread goodness and morality.*



*Bharatha has spent the last 14 years meditating on Rama and Rama's return to Ayodhya, which means that he's spent that time taking on some of Rama's positive qualities, just as Ravana did. This continues to show that Rama is capable of inspiring positive change even when he's not around. Even the thought of Rama is enough to help someone be a better person.*



*All is well, and finally Rama will be rewarded for following Dasaratha's orders and acting as a loyal and dutiful son.*



*All is truly well when Rama is crowned: Hanuman will get to spend his life serving Rama, as he was destined to do; Lakshmana will continue to be the ideal brother and companion; Sita will be the ideal queen and wife; and Rama's bow remains an indicator of his power and his heroism.*



The narrator reminds the reader that when he was young, Hanuman had been told to dedicate his life to Vishnu, which he did. The narrator says that the story goes that wherever you hear Rama's name, the spirit of Hanuman is there. He says that Hanuman is one of the most important and faithful characters of the story.

The narrator explains that storytellers today often change the story or add embellishments to make *The Ramayana* seem contemporary: Rama's vehicle at the end of the story is often cast as an airplane. However, the narrator says that storytellers all know the traditional poem by heart, which takes 40 days to recite. At special points during the retelling, an audience often gifts the storyteller clothes, money, sweets, and rings.

Finally, the narrator admits that he's leaving out the "sequel," which tells the story of Rama and Sita's second parting. Sita gives birth to twin boys in the forest, and the couple decides to return together to the heavens. He says that this ending isn't popular or considered authentic, and he prefers to end the tale with Rama happily enthroned as the ruler of Ayodhya.

*Though readers and listeners are encouraged to identify with Rama and be like Rama, the strength of Hanuman's faithfulness suggests that it is also one of the most important of Rama's virtues.*



*The Ramayana has stood the test of time and is continually altered to appeal to ever-changing contemporary audiences. However, the original Valmiki poem remains the heart of the story, and is essential for it to continue functioning as a teaching tool and part of a cultural heritage.*



*To end, the narrator makes it clear that the Ramayana has many iterations, and that not all of them cast Rama in the best light. He insists that the reader keep this in mind and remember that Rama is very much the product of the many individuals who have had a hand in writing his story and that, while Rama is overwhelmingly good, he's not infallible.*





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