

RAMAYANA

ISSUE #1

A WORD, ONCE GIVEN, BINDS US ALL,
EVEN GODS AND KINGS.



THE BOON OF SONS

MEET THE CHARACTERS



DASHARATHA

KING OF AYODHYA. JUST, GENEROUS,
AND WITHOUT A SON.



VASISHTHA

ROYAL PRIEST. THE KING'S
COUNSEL AND
CONSCIENCE.



KAUSALYA

THE KING'S FIRST
QUEEN.



KAIKEYI

THE YOUNGEST
QUEEN, FROM KEKAYA.
MUCH LOVED BY THE
KING.



SUMITRA

THE THIRD QUEEN.
CALM AND DEVOTED.



RAMA



LAKSHMANA



BHARATA



SHATRUGHNA

THE FOUR PRINCES OF AYODHYA.



VISHVAMITRA

ONCE A KING, NOW A
GREAT SAGE.



SUMANTRA

MINISTER AND
CHARIOTEER. KEEPER
OF OLD STORIES.

RAVANA

KING OF THE RAKSHASAS.
NO GOD CAN KILL HIM.

PROLOGUE.

LONG AGO, A RAKSHASA KING WON A BOON THAT NO GOD COULD BREAK.

SUN, WIND AND SEA
HELD STILL FOR HIM.

YEARS LATER, BY THE TAMASA RIVER, THE SAGE NARADA CAME TO VISIT THE POET VALMIKI.

NARADA, IS
THERE ANY MAN
LIVING WHO IS TRUE
TO HIS WORD

AND FIRM
IN HIS VOWS, A
MAN EVEN THE GODS
WOULD FEAR?



NARADA: A QUEEN CLAIMED TWO BOONS
THE KING HAD ONCE GRANTED HER.
BOUND BY HIS WORD, THE KING SENT HIS
SON TO THE FOREST, AND RAMA WENT
WITHOUT A WORD OF PROTEST.

THERE IS. HE
WAS BORN IN THE HOUSE
OF IKSHVAKU, AND HIS
NAME IS RAMA.



NARADA LEFT. VALMIKI WENT DOWN TO THE RIVER, RAMA'S STORY STILL IN HIS MIND.

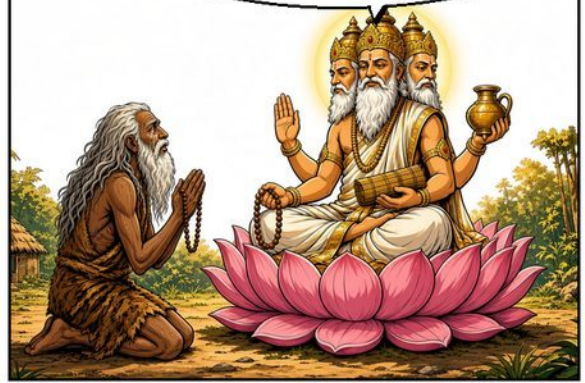
A HUNTER SHOT ONE OF A PAIR OF CRANES. THE POET'S GRIEF CAME OUT AS A VERSE.



VALMIKI WAS SHAKEN. HIS GRIEF HAD COME OUT IN PERFECT RHYTHM, SOMETHING NO ONE HAD SPOKEN BEFORE. THEN BRAHMA, THE CREATOR, CAME TO HIM.

THAT VERSE WAS MY GIFT. SING RAMA'S STORY.

NO WORD OF YOURS IN IT WILL BE UNTRUE, AND IT WILL LAST WHILE MOUNTAINS STAND.



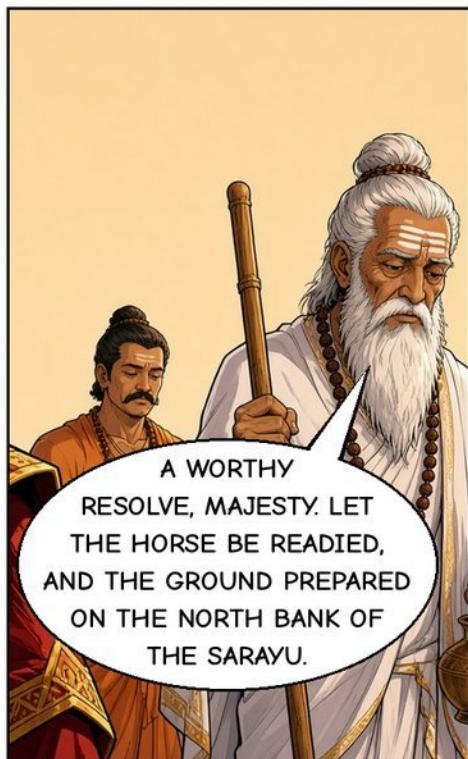
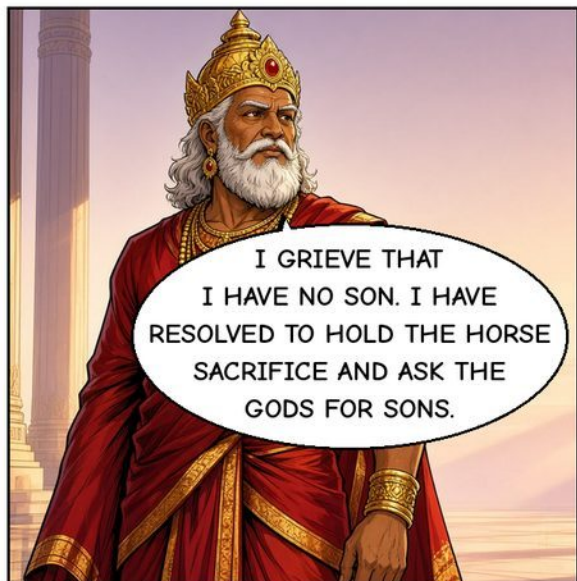
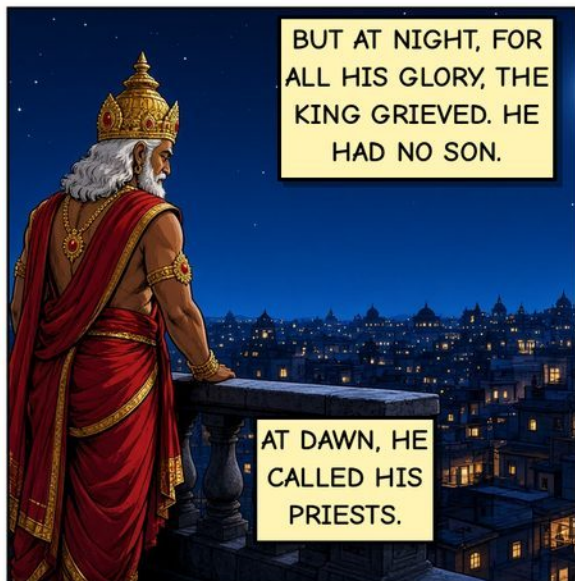
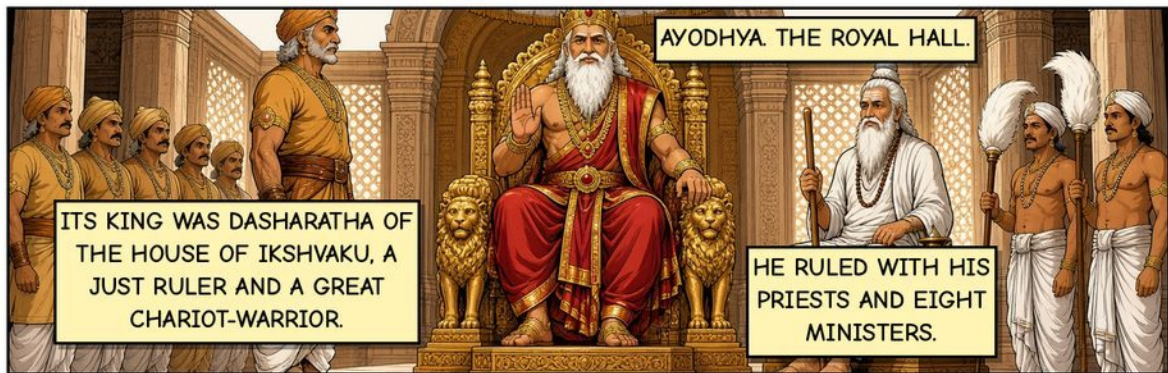
AND SO VALMIKI SANG.

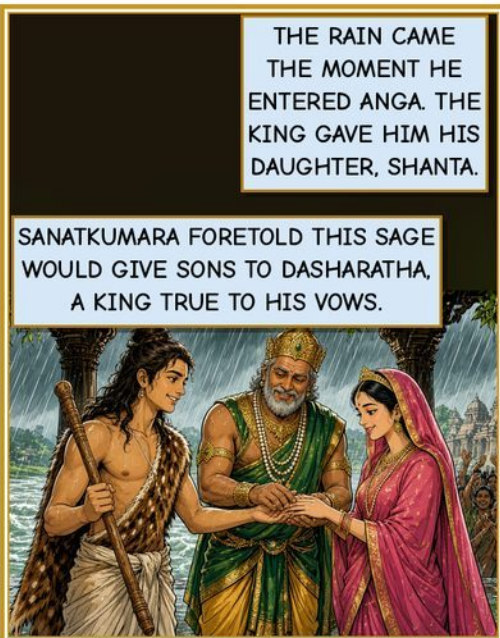
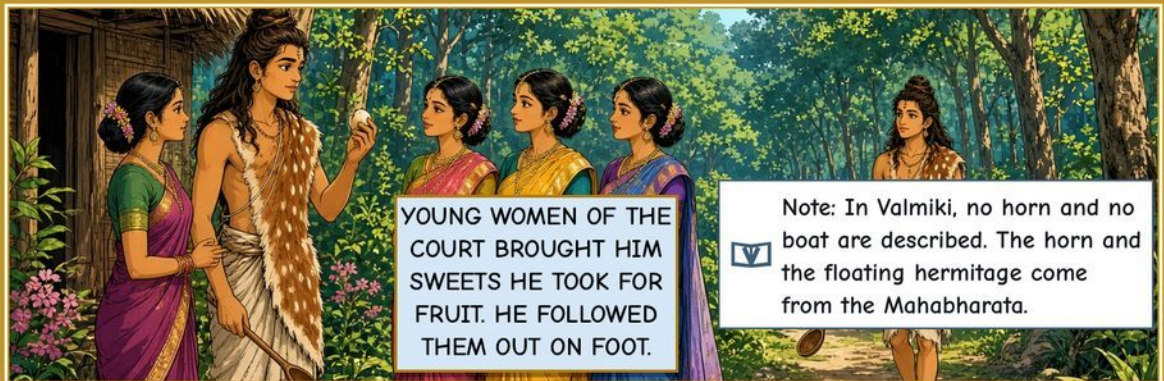
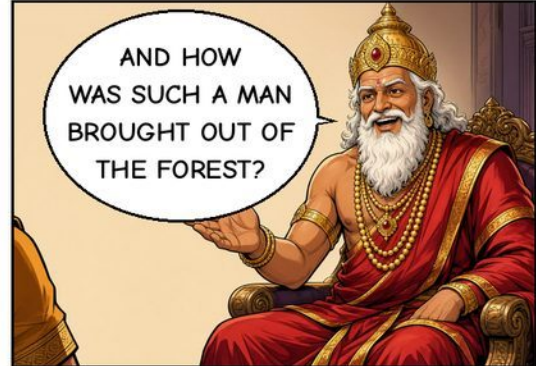
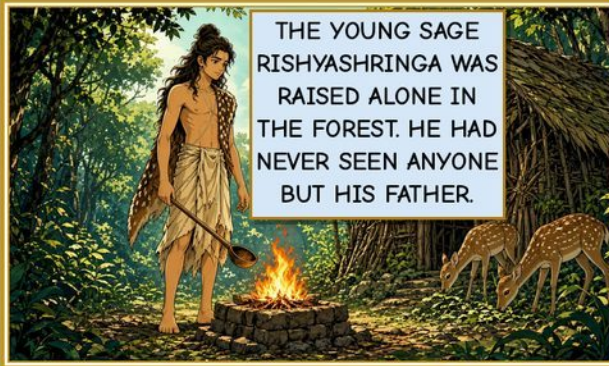
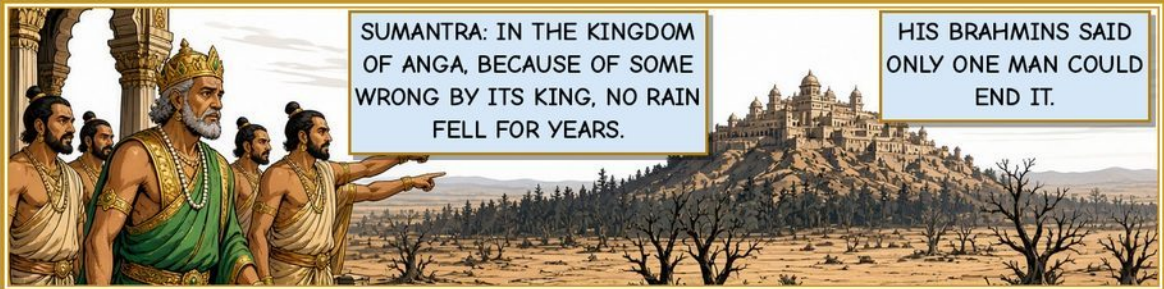
ON THE SARAYU RIVER, IN THE LAND OF KOSALA, STOOD AYODHYA, FOUNDED BY MANU, THE FIRST KING.

ITS NAME MEANT 'THE UNCONQUERABLE'. WITHIN ITS WALLS NO ONE WAS POOR, AND NO ONE WAS MEAN.



Note: In Sanskrit, 'shoka' (grief) became 'shloka' (verse). That first verse was a curse on the hunter.





AN OLD WORD, WAITING
FOR ITS KING.

DASHARATHA WENT TO
ANGA HIMSELF AND
ASKED HIS OLD FRIEND
ROMAPADA FOR THE
SAGE.

FOR YOU,
OLD FRIEND, GLADLY
RISHYASHRINGA, GO
WITH HIM, AND SHANTA
WITH YOU.

AYODHYA WELCOMED
THE SAGE WITH
CONCHES, DRUMS AND
STREETS STREWN WITH
FLOWERS.

IN SPRING, THE SACRED
HORSE WAS SET FREE TO
ROAM FOR A YEAR.

A YEAR LATER, IN SPRING AGAIN,
WORK BEGAN ON THE SACRIFICIAL
GROUND BY THE SARAYU.

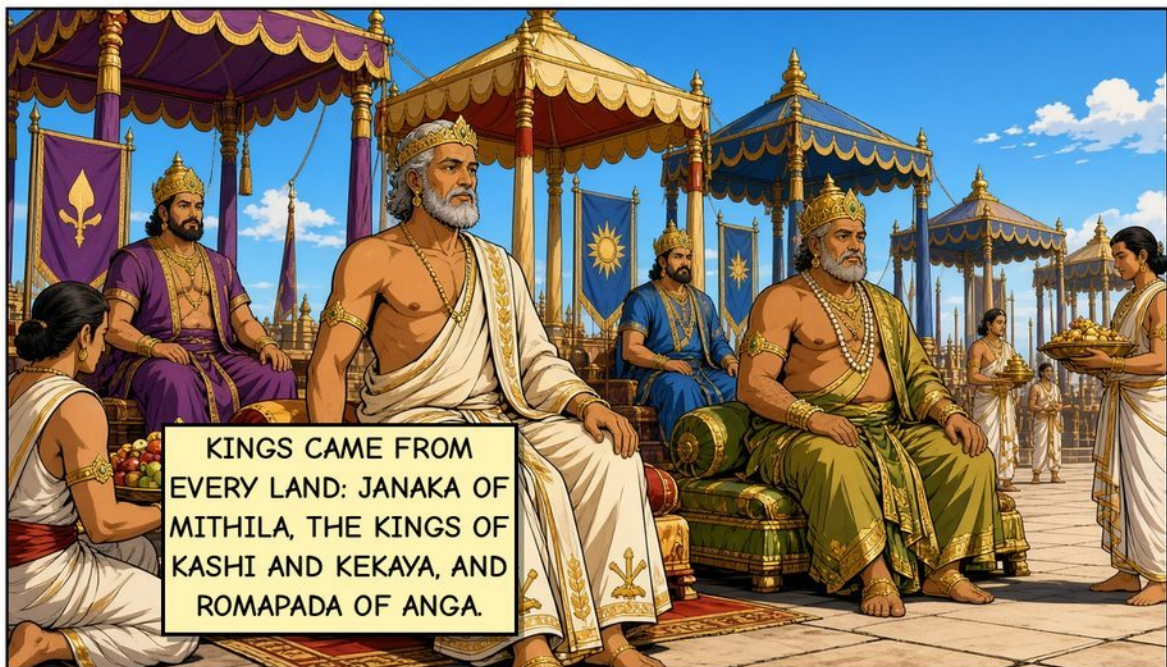
HEAR ME, ALL
OF YOU. LET EVERY GUEST
BE GIVEN FOOD AND GIFTS
WITH RESPECT.

A GIFT
GIVEN WITH
CONTEMPT DESTROYS
THE GIVER.

WHEN THE HORSE CAME
HOME, THE GREAT YAJNA
BEGAN.



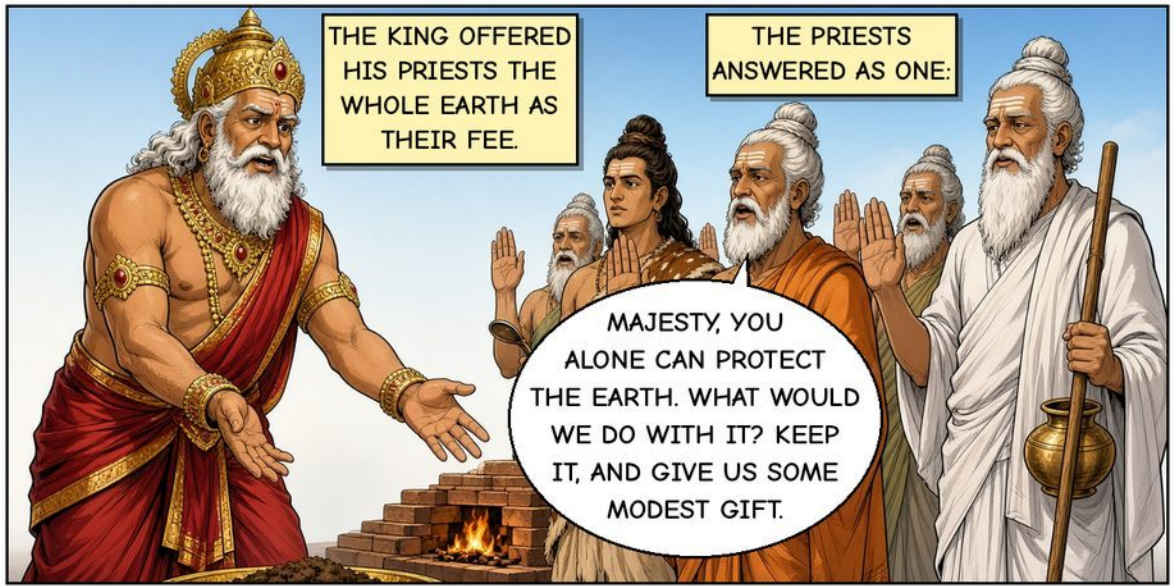
KINGS CAME FROM
EVERY LAND: JANAKA OF
MITHILA, THE KINGS OF
KASHI AND KEKAYA, AND
ROMAPADA OF ANGA.



THE KING OFFERED
HIS PRIESTS THE
WHOLE EARTH AS
THEIR FEE.

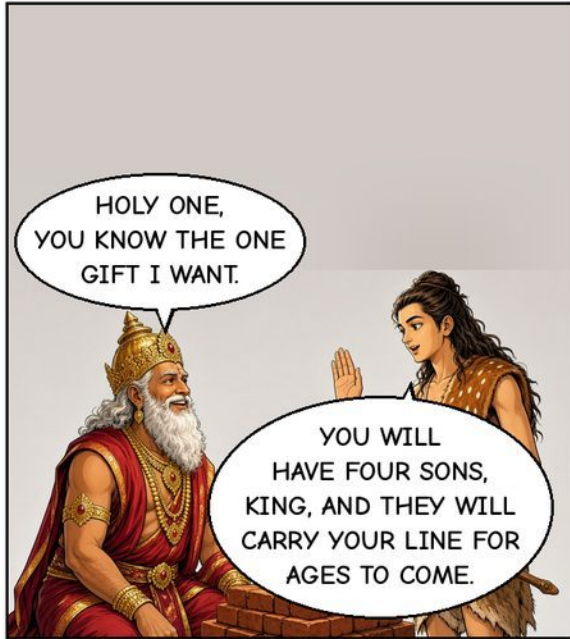
THE PRIESTS
ANSWERED AS ONE:

MAJESTY, YOU
ALONE CAN PROTECT
THE EARTH. WHAT WOULD
WE DO WITH IT? KEEP
IT, AND GIVE US SOME
MODEST GIFT.

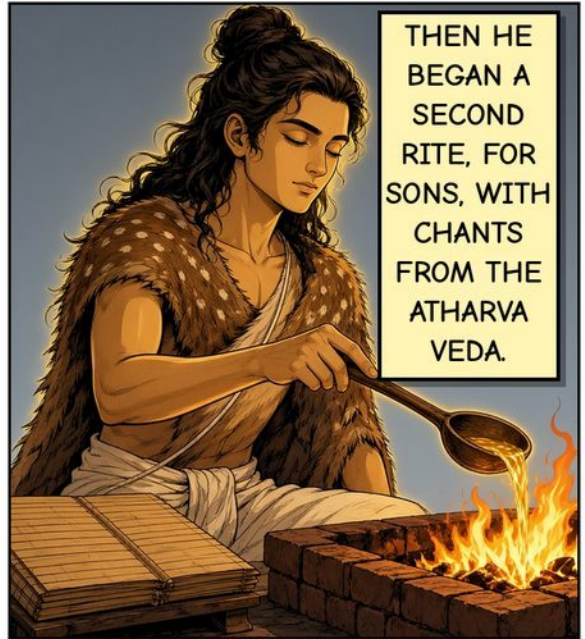


HOLY ONE,
YOU KNOW THE ONE
GIFT I WANT.

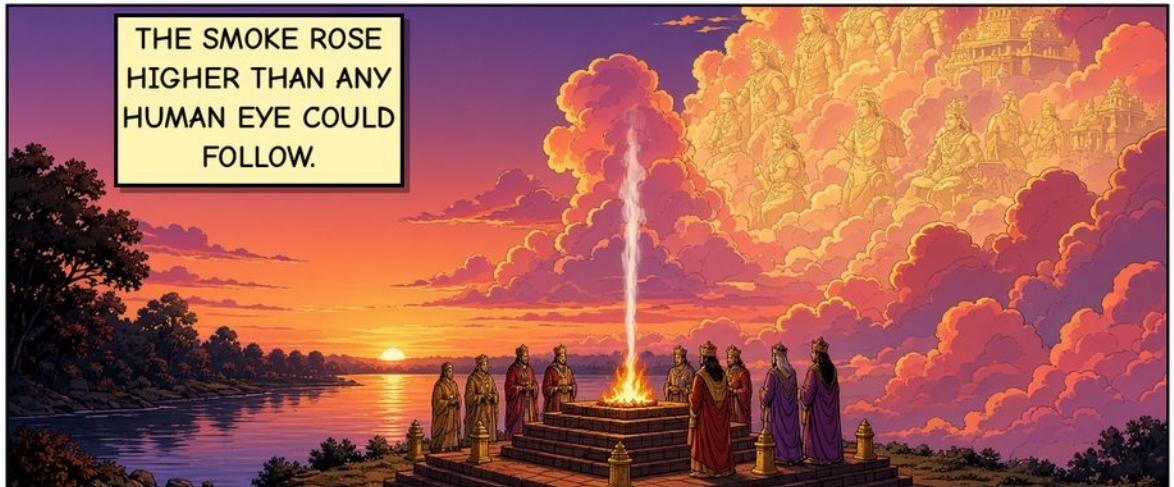
YOU WILL
HAVE FOUR SONS,
KING, AND THEY WILL
CARRY YOUR LINE FOR
AGES TO COME.

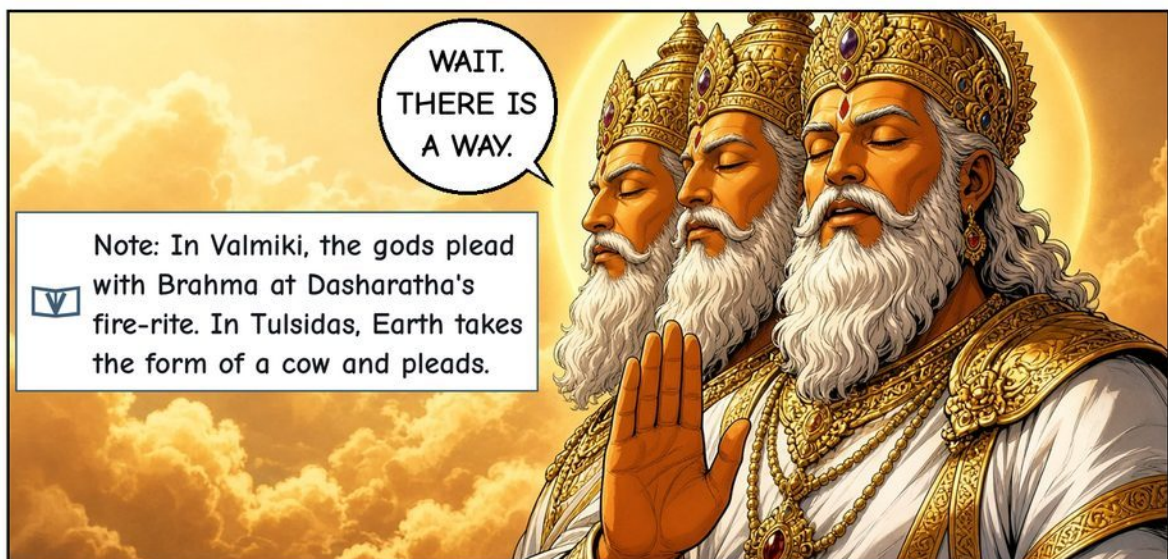
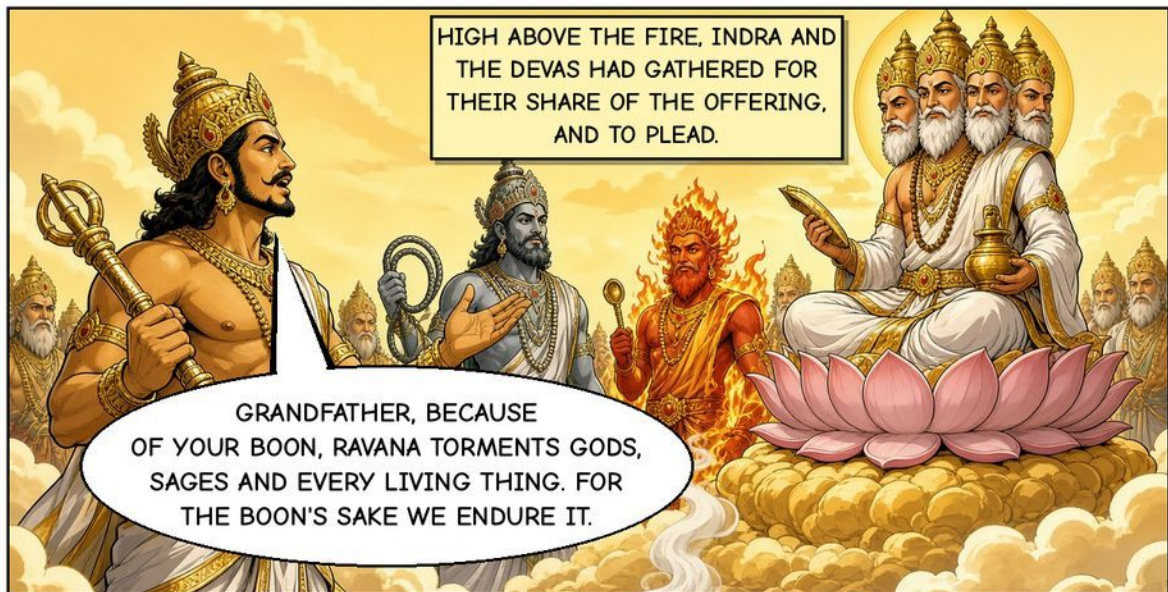


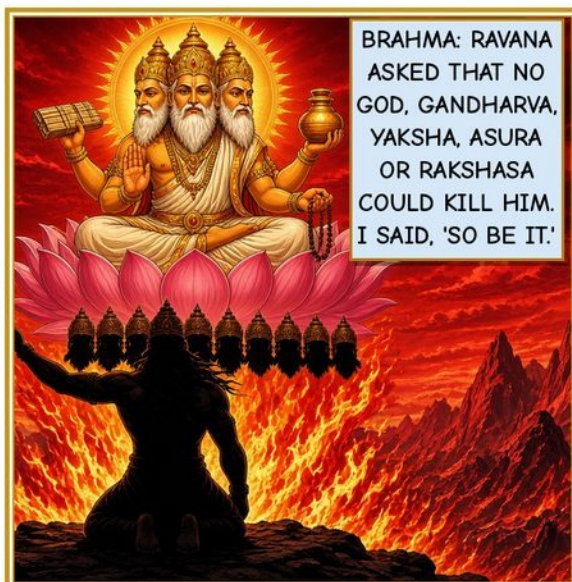
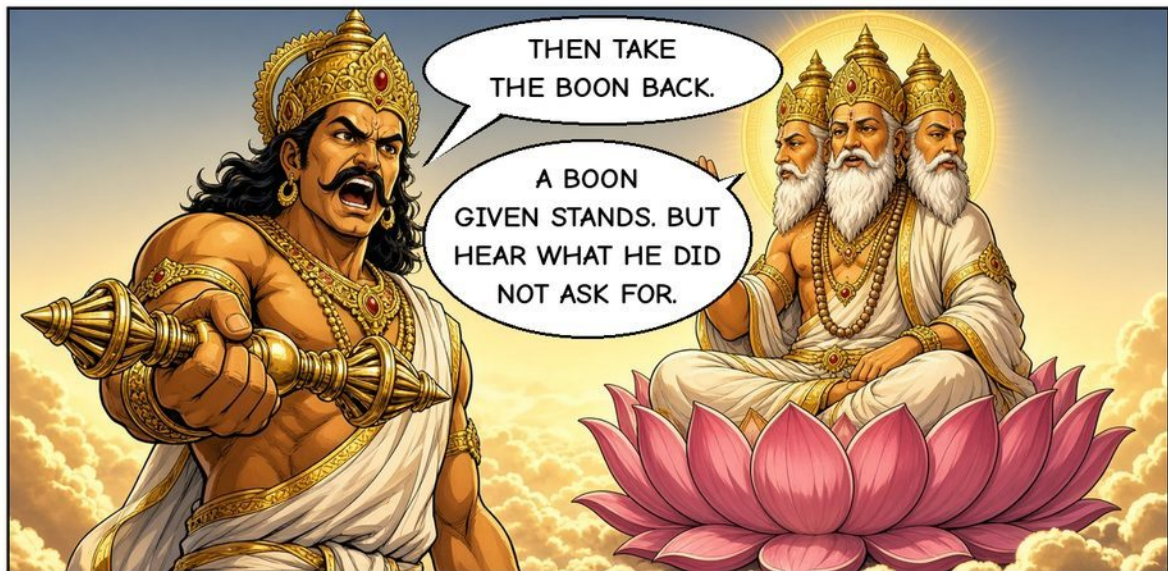
THEN HE
BEGAN A
SECOND
RITE, FOR
SONS, WITH
CHANTS
FROM THE
ATHARVA
VEDA.



THE SMOKE ROSE
HIGHER THAN ANY
HUMAN EYE COULD
FOLLOW.



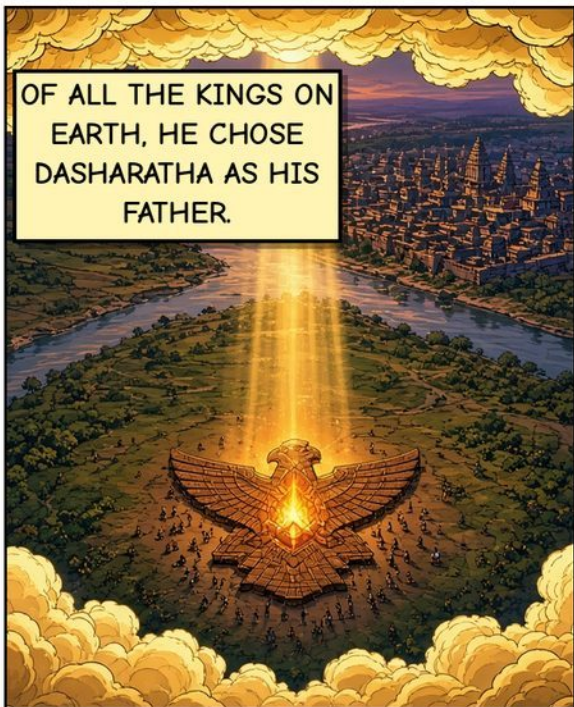
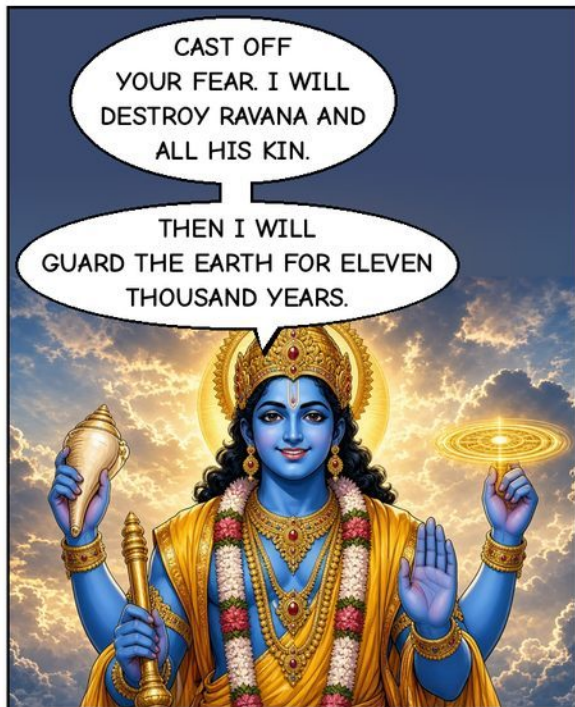
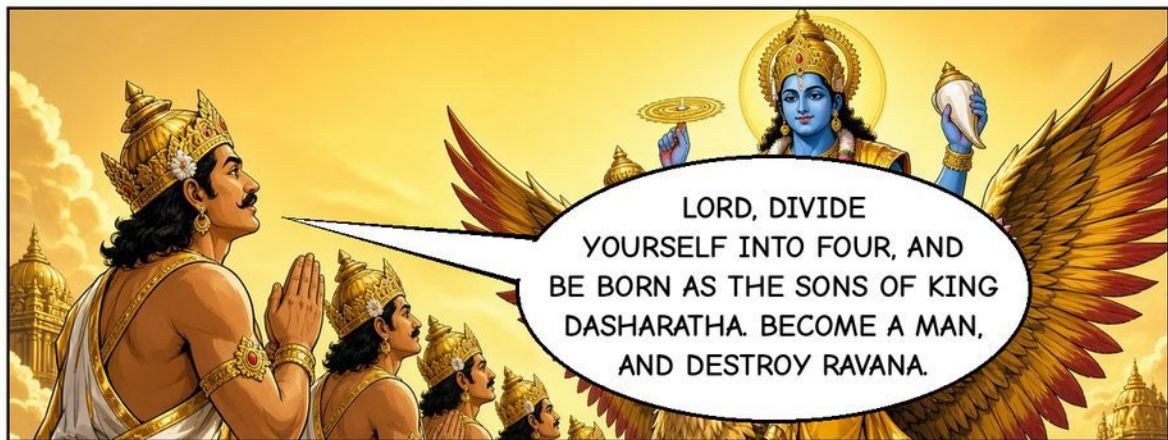


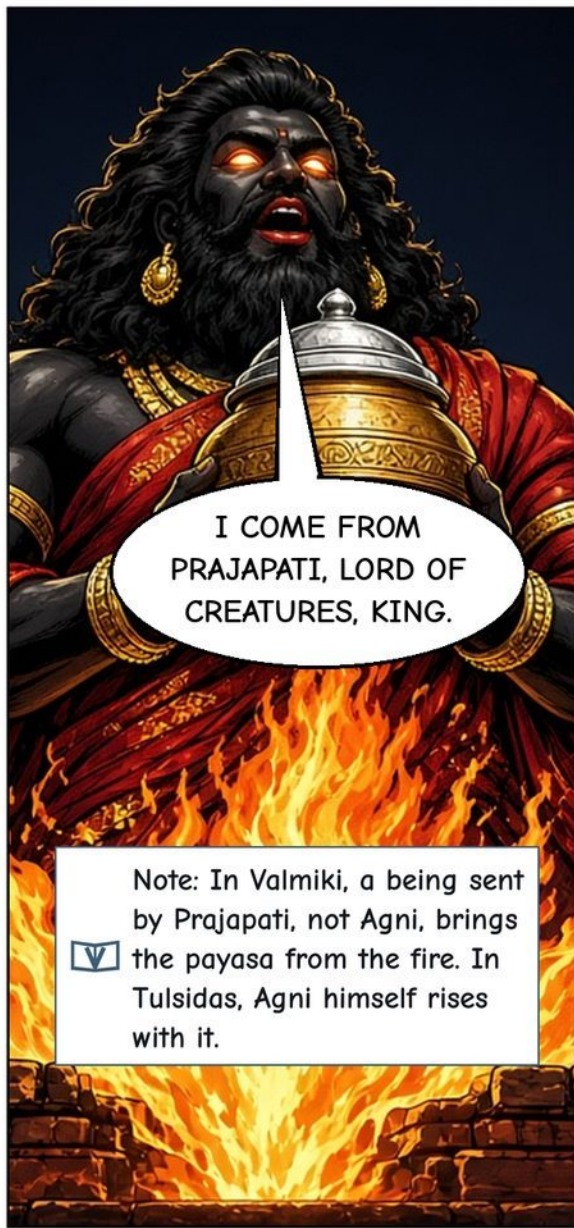


VISHNU, PRESERVER OF THE
WORLDS, CAME RIDING ON
GARUDA, KING OF BIRDS.



Note: In the vulgate text most readers know, Vishnu comes on Garuda with conch, discus and mace. The Critical Edition says only that he came.





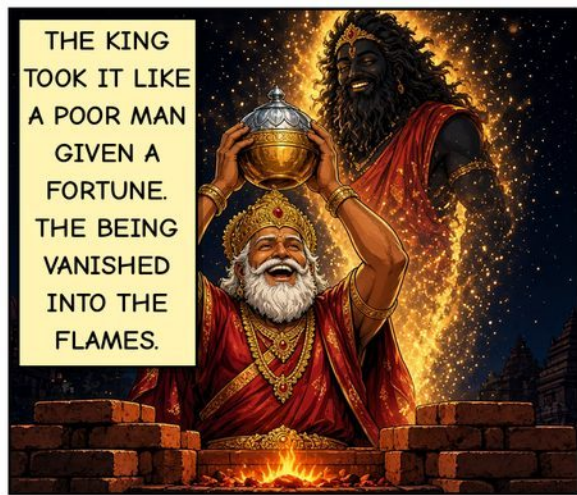
I COME FROM
PRAJAPATI, LORD OF
CREATURES, KING.

Note: In Valmiki, a being sent by Prajapati, not Agni, brings the payasa from the fire. In Tulsidas, Agni himself rises with it.

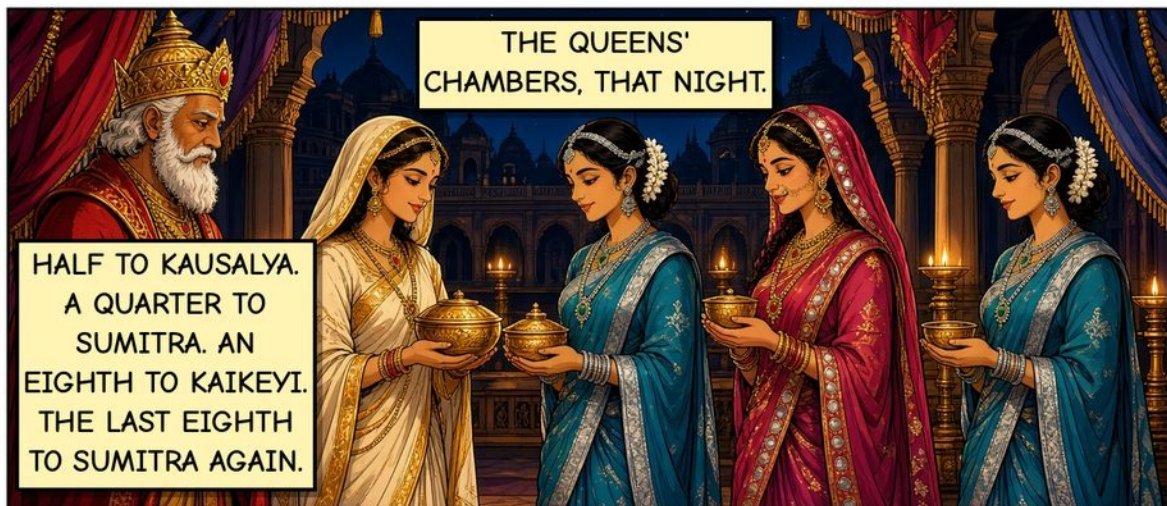


WELCOME,
LORD. HOW
MAY I SERVE
YOU?

TAKE THIS
PAYASA, MADE
BY THE GODS.
SHARE IT AMONG
YOUR QUEENS,
AND THEY WILL
BEAR SONS.

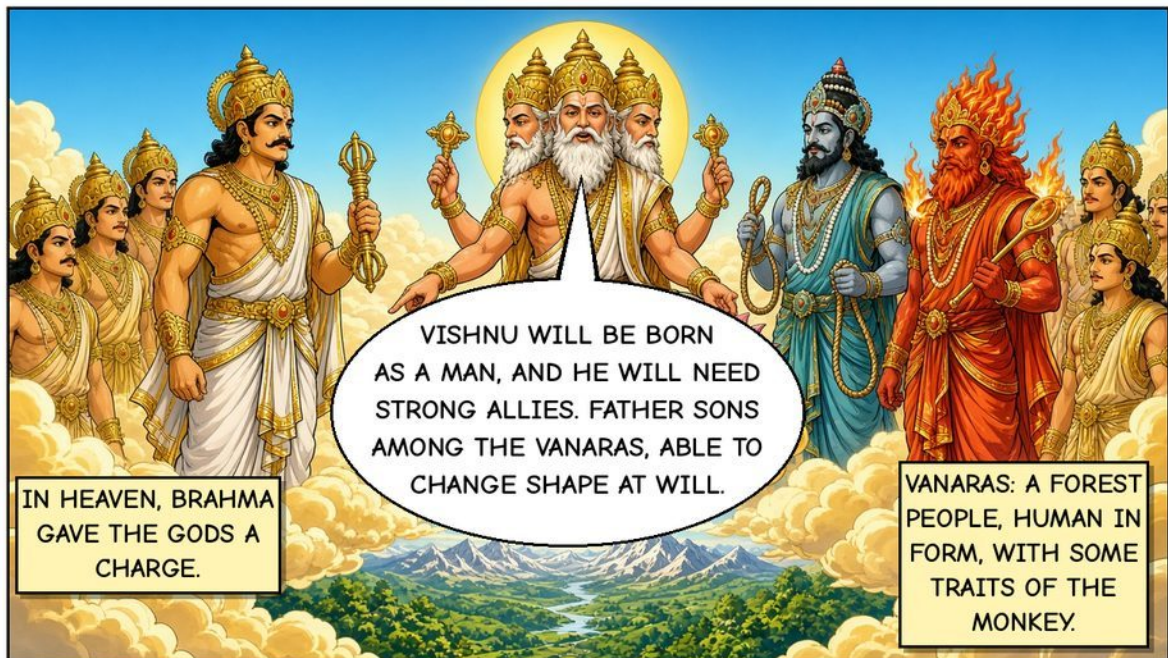


THE KING
TOOK IT LIKE
A POOR MAN
GIVEN A
FORTUNE.
THE BEING
VANISHED
INTO THE
FLAMES.



THE QUEENS'
CHAMBERS, THAT NIGHT.

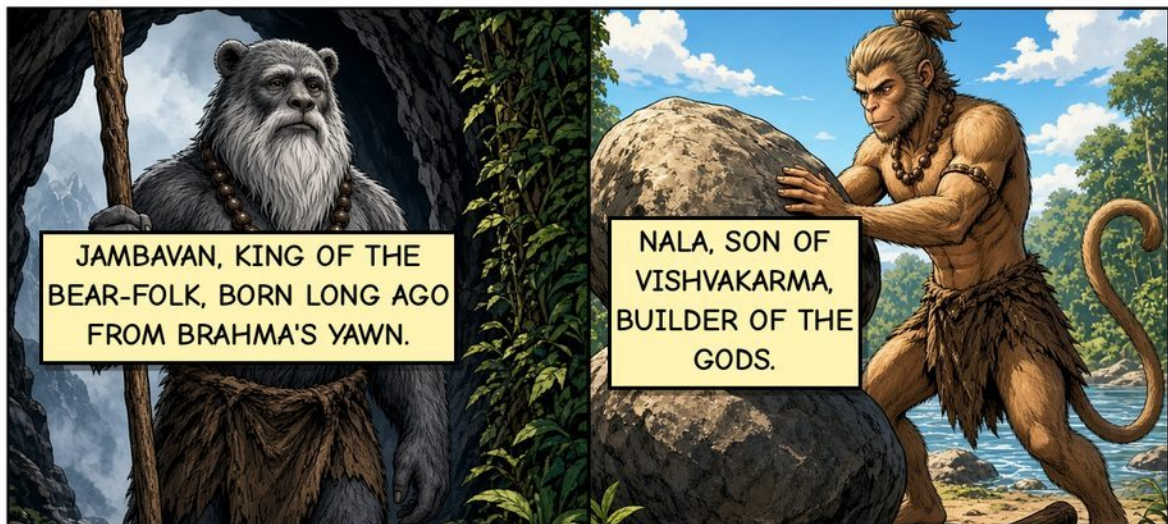
HALF TO KAUSALYA.
A QUARTER TO
SUMITRA. AN
EIGHTH TO KAIKEYI.
THE LAST EIGHTH
TO SUMITRA AGAIN.



VISHNU WILL BE BORN AS A MAN, AND HE WILL NEED STRONG ALLIES. FATHER SONS AMONG THE VANARAS, ABLE TO CHANGE SHAPE AT WILL.

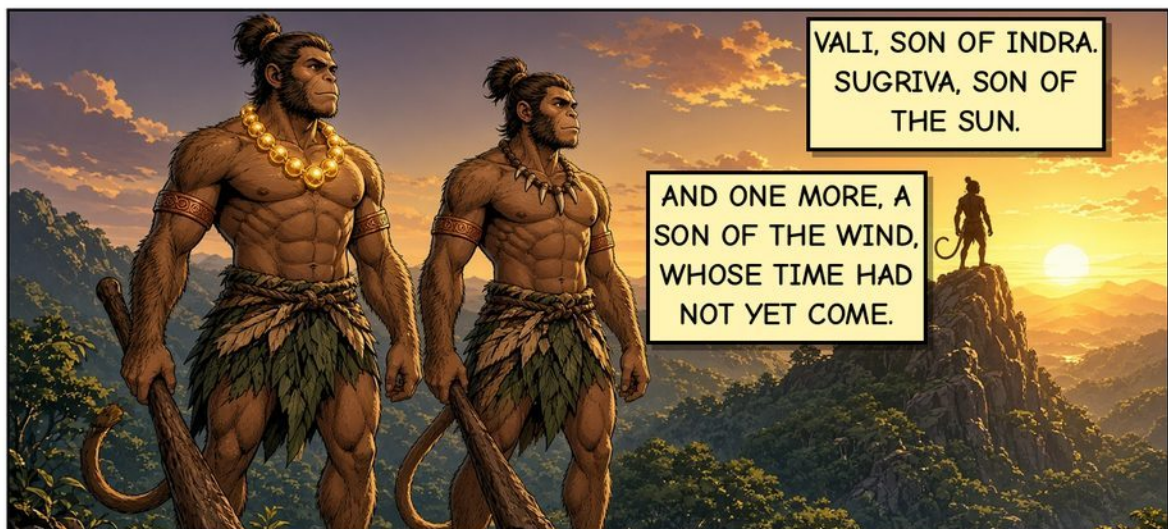
IN HEAVEN, BRAHMA GAVE THE GODS A CHARGE.

VANARAS: A FOREST PEOPLE, HUMAN IN FORM, WITH SOME TRAITS OF THE MONKEY.



JAMBAVAN, KING OF THE BEAR-FOLK, BORN LONG AGO FROM BRAHMA'S YAWN.

NALA, SON OF VISHVAKARMA, BUILDER OF THE GODS.



VALI, SON OF INDRA. SUGRIVA, SON OF THE SUN.

AND ONE MORE, A SON OF THE WIND, WHOSE TIME HAD NOT YET COME.

A YEAR LATER. NOON, ON
THE NINTH DAY OF THE
MONTH OF CHAITRA.

QUEEN KAUSALYA GAVE
BIRTH TO A SON WITH
LOTUS-RED EYES, LONG
ARMS AND RED LIPS.

HIS FIRST CRY WAS
DEEP AS A DRUM.
HE WAS RAMA.



Note: In Valmiki, Kausalya gives birth with no vision. The four-armed vision of Vishnu comes from Tulsidas and the Adhyatma Ramayana.

THEN KAIKEYI GAVE
BIRTH TO BHARATA.



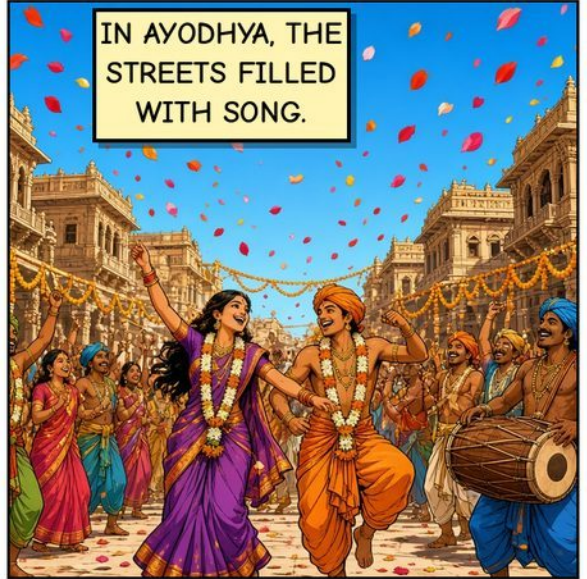
AND SUMITRA TO
TWINS, LAKSHMANA
AND SHATRUGHNA.



IN HEAVEN, MUSICIANS
PLAYED AND FLOWERS
FELL LIKE RAIN.

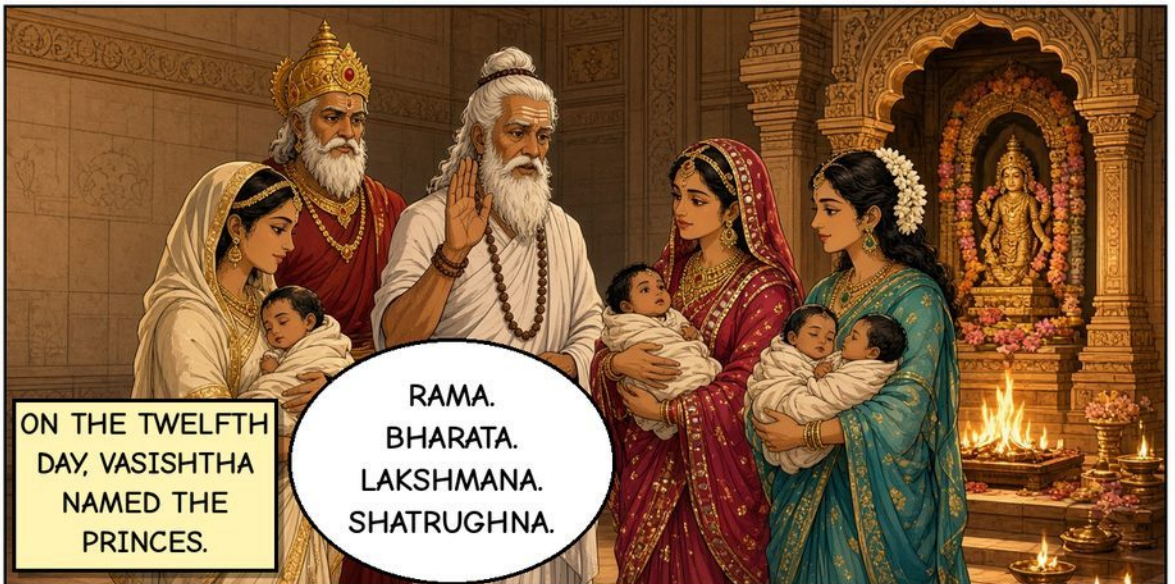


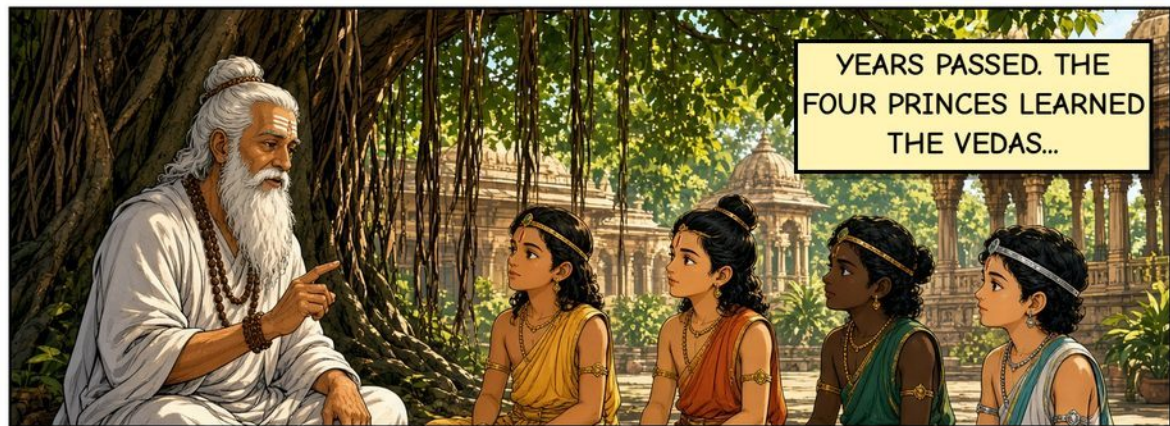
IN AYODHYA, THE
STREETS FILLED
WITH SONG.



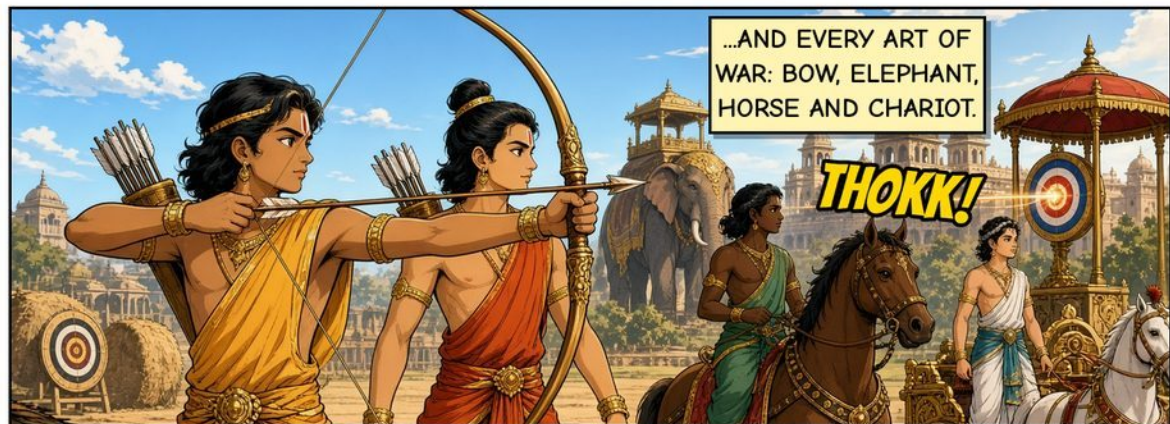
ON THE TWELFTH
DAY, VASISHTHA
NAMED THE
PRINCES.

RAMA.
BHARATA.
LAKSHMANA.
SHATRUGHNA.





YEARS PASSED. THE
FOUR PRINCESSES LEARNED
THE VEDAS...



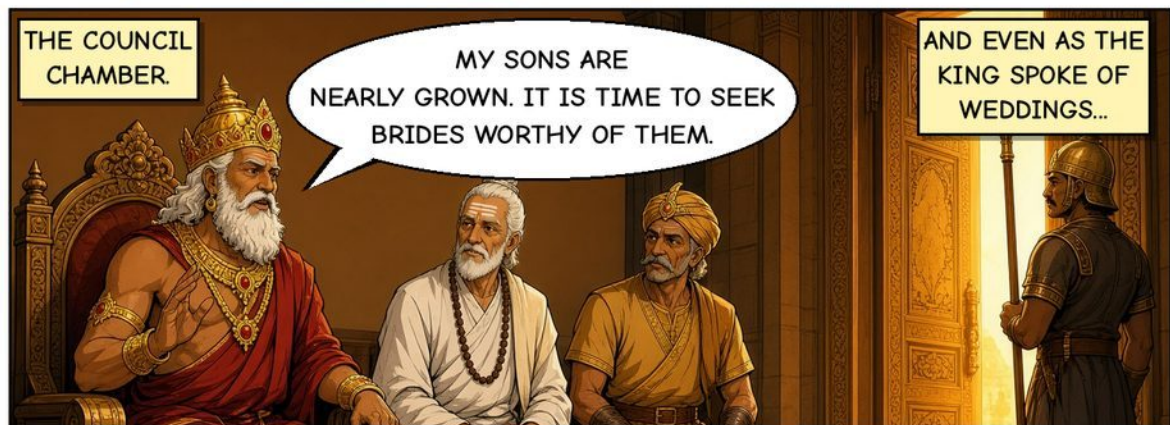
...AND EVERY ART OF
WAR: BOW, ELEPHANT,
HORSE AND CHARIOT.

THOKK!



LAKSHMANA WAS LIKE
RAMA'S SECOND SELF.
RAMA WOULD NOT SLEEP
OR EAT WITHOUT HIM.

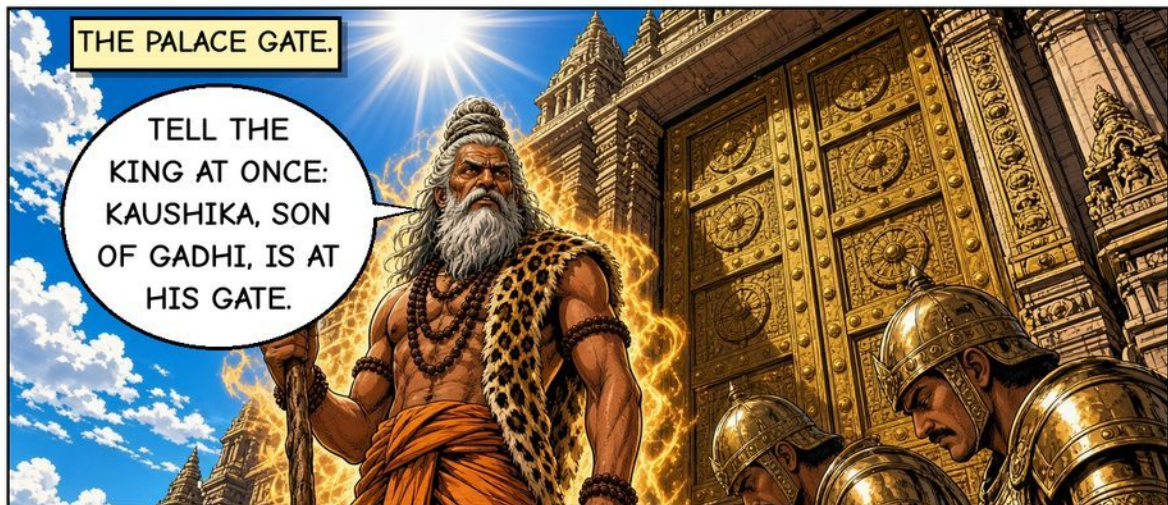
BHARATA AND
SHATRUGHNA WERE
JUST AS CLOSE.



THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER.

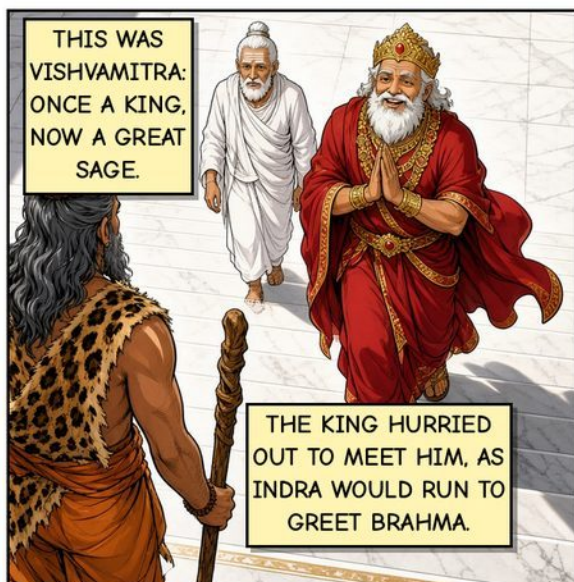
MY SONS ARE
NEARLY GROWN. IT IS TIME TO SEEK
BRIDES WORTHY OF THEM.

AND EVEN AS THE
KING SPOKE OF
WEDDINGS...



THE PALACE GATE.

TELL THE
KING AT ONCE:
KAUSHIKA, SON
OF GADHI, IS AT
HIS GATE.



THIS WAS
VISHVAMITRA:
ONCE A KING,
NOW A GREAT
SAGE.

THE KING HURRIED
OUT TO MEET HIM, AS
INDRA WOULD RUN TO
GREET BRAHMA.



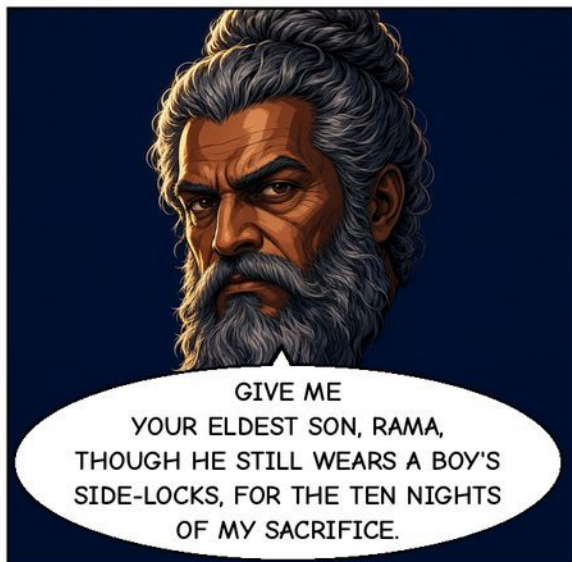
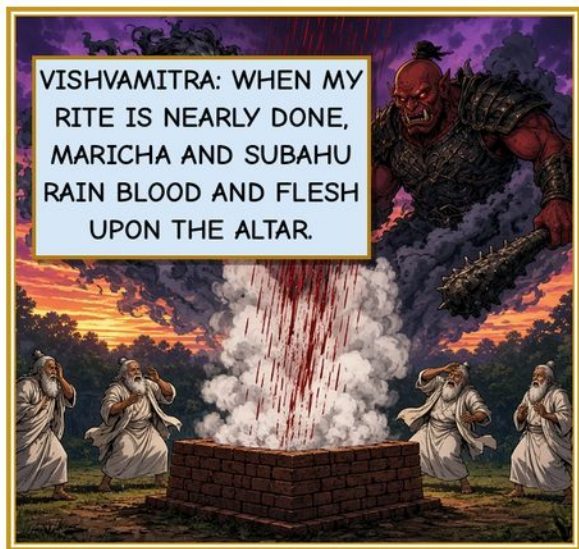
YOUR COMING
IS LIKE NECTAR FOUND,
LIKE RAIN ON A DESERT,
LIKE A SON BORN TO
THE CHILDLESS.

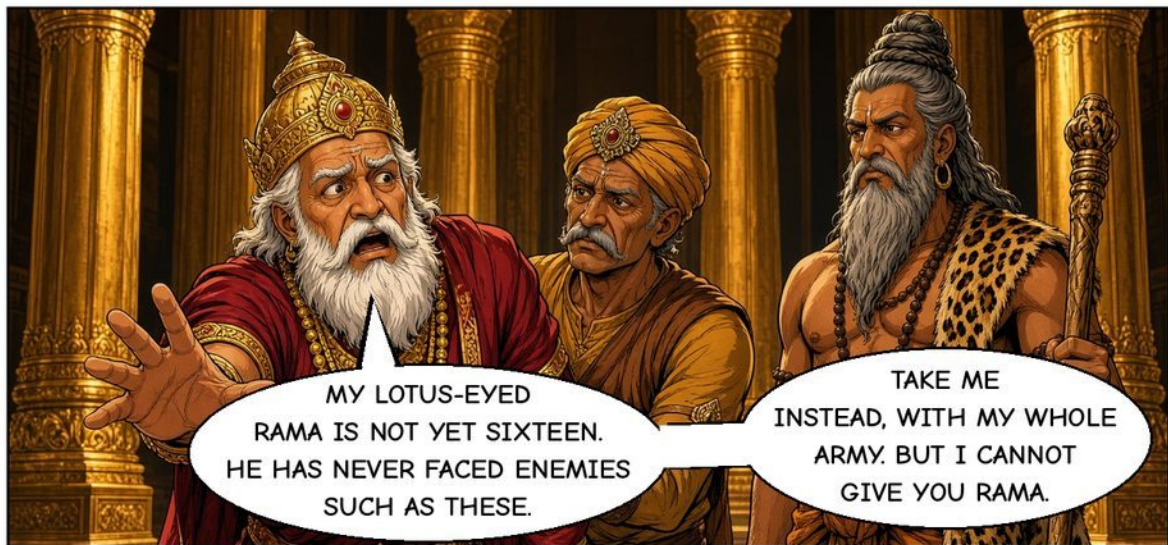


TELL ME
WHAT YOU
WISH, AND I
WILL DO IT,
ALL OF IT,
WITHOUT A
SECOND
THOUGHT.

THESE WORDS
BEFIT YOU ALONE,
KING, BORN OF A GREAT
LINE AND TAUGHT
BY VASISHTHA.

NOW
HEAR WHAT
I ASK.



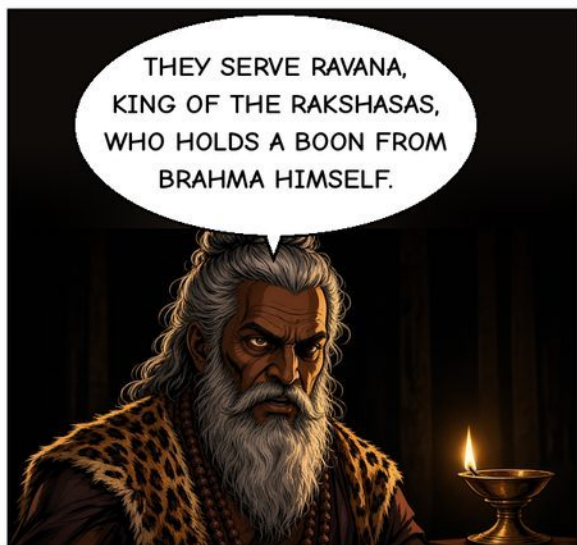


MY LOTUS-EYED
RAMA IS NOT YET SIXTEEN.
HE HAS NEVER FACED ENEMIES
SUCH AS THESE.

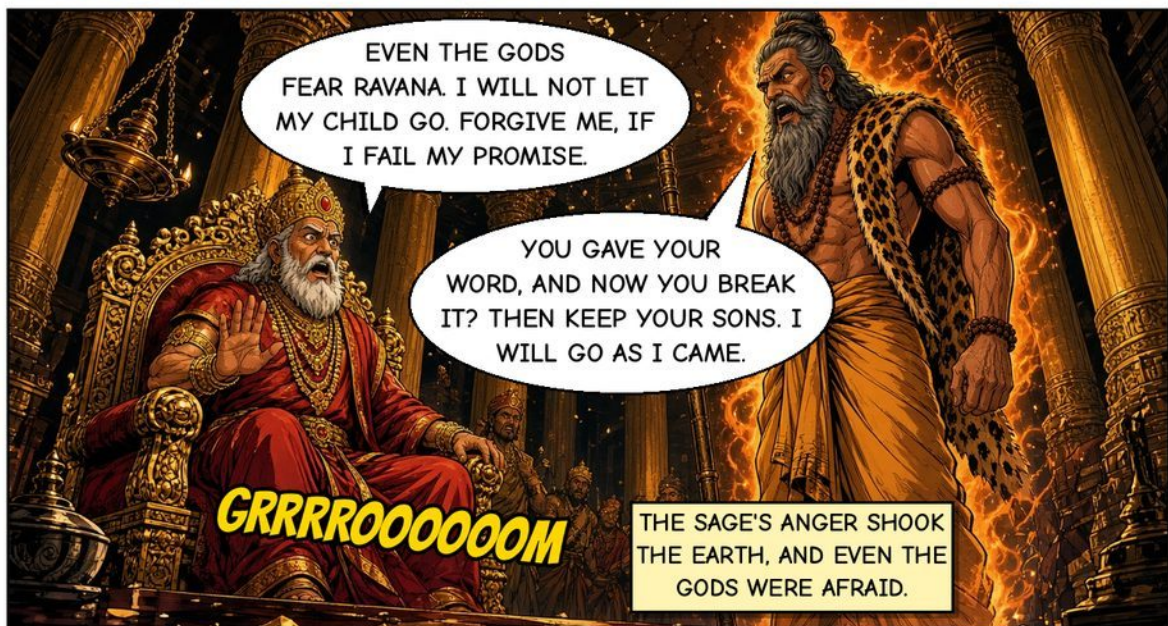
TAKE ME
INSTEAD, WITH MY WHOLE
ARMY. BUT I CANNOT
GIVE YOU RAMA.



WHO ARE
THESE RAKSHASAS? WHOSE
SONS ARE THEY, AND WHO
PROTECTS THEM?



THEY SERVE RAVANA,
KING OF THE RAKSHASAS,
WHO HOLDS A BOON FROM
BRAHMA HIMSELF.

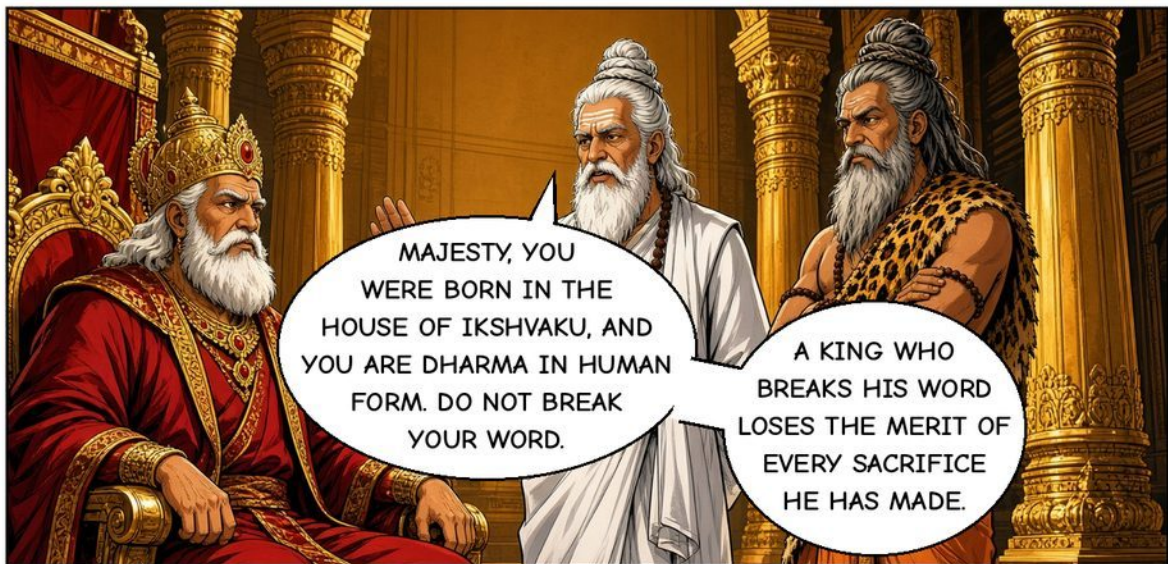


EVEN THE GODS
FEAR RAVANA. I WILL NOT LET
MY CHILD GO. FORGIVE ME, IF
I FAIL MY PROMISE.

YOU GAVE YOUR
WORD, AND NOW YOU BREAK
IT? THEN KEEP YOUR SONS. I
WILL GO AS I CAME.

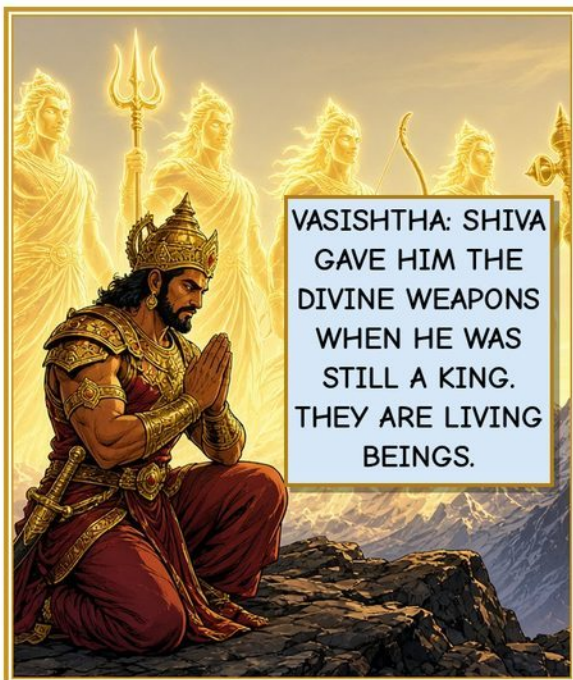
GRRRRROOOOOOM

THE SAGE'S ANGER SHOOK
THE EARTH, AND EVEN THE
GODS WERE AFRAID.

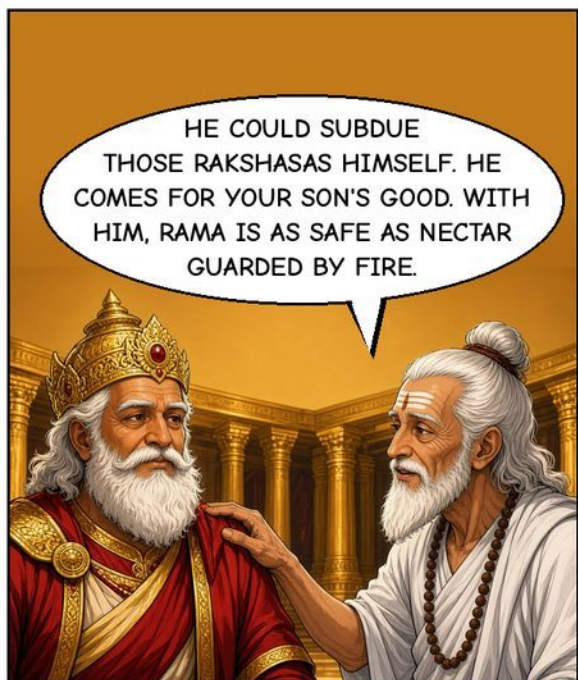


MAJESTY, YOU WERE BORN IN THE HOUSE OF IKSHVAKU, AND YOU ARE DHARMA IN HUMAN FORM. DO NOT BREAK YOUR WORD.

A KING WHO BREAKS HIS WORD LOSES THE MERIT OF EVERY SACRIFICE HE HAS MADE.



VASISHTHA: SHIVA GAVE HIM THE DIVINE WEAPONS WHEN HE WAS STILL A KING. THEY ARE LIVING BEINGS.

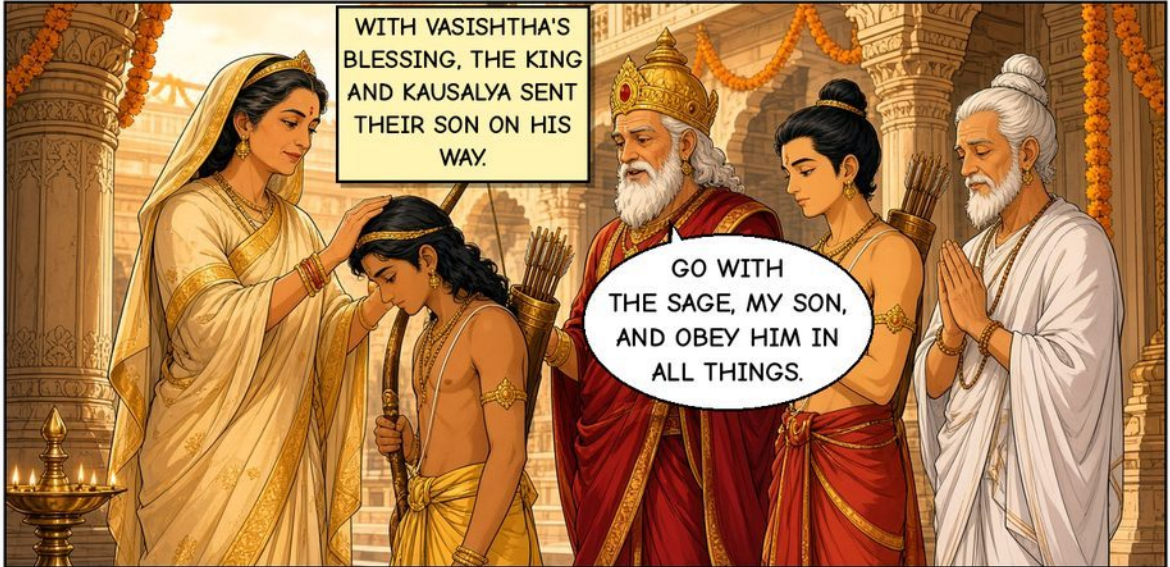


HE COULD SUBDUE THOSE RAKSHASAS HIMSELF. HE COMES FOR YOUR SON'S GOOD. WITH HIM, RAMA IS AS SAFE AS NECTAR GUARDED BY FIRE.



BRING MY SONS. BRING RAMA AND LAKSHMANA.

IT WOULD NOT BE THE LAST TIME THIS KING WAS HELD TO HIS OWN WORD.

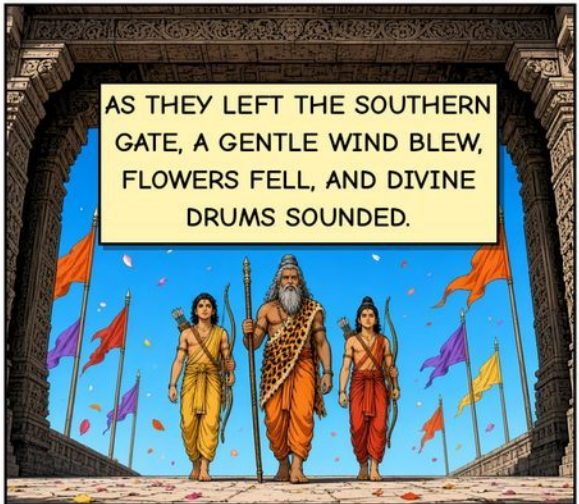


WITH VASISHTHA'S
BLESSING, THE KING
AND KAUSALYA SENT
THEIR SON ON HIS
WAY.

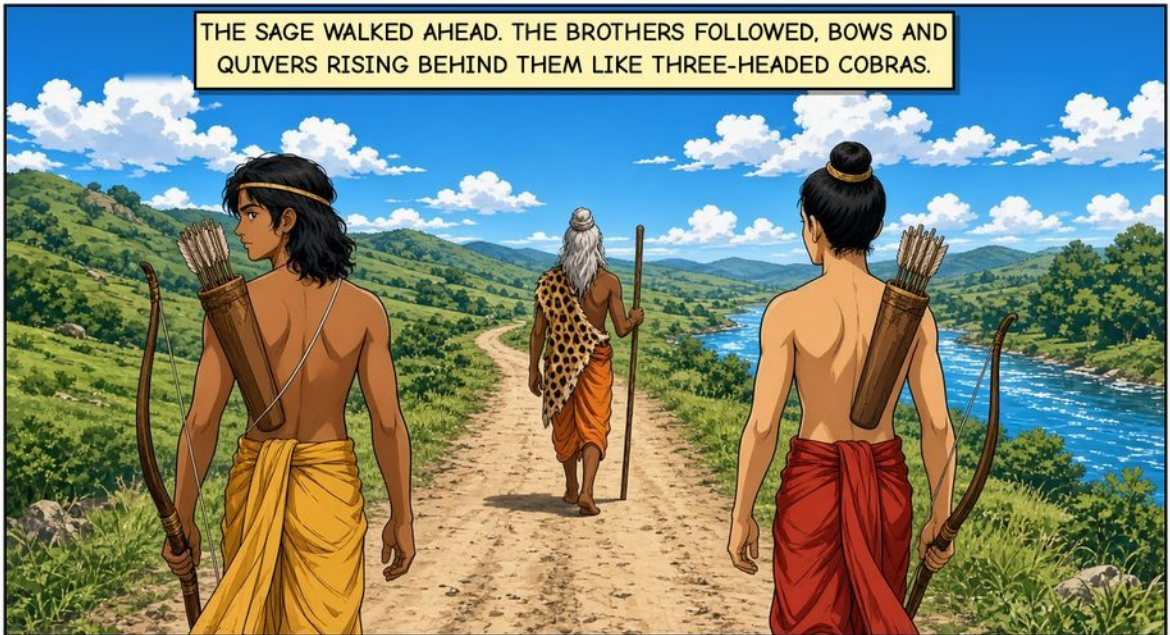
GO WITH
THE SAGE, MY SON,
AND OBEY HIM IN
ALL THINGS.



I WILL,
FATHER.



AS THEY LEFT THE SOUTHERN
GATE, A GENTLE WIND BLEW,
FLOWERS FELL, AND DIVINE
DRUMS SOUNDED.

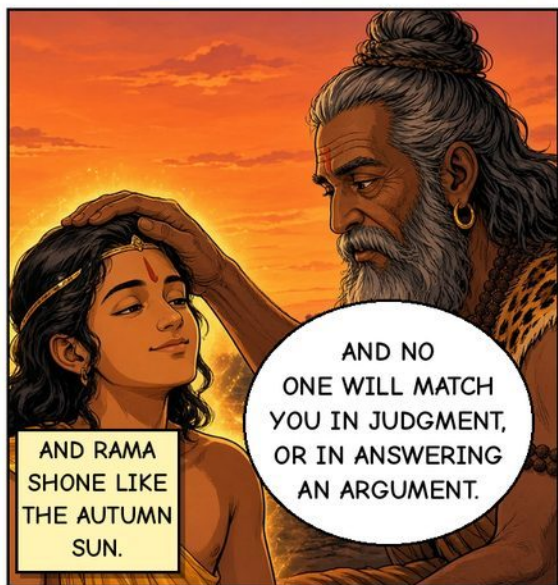
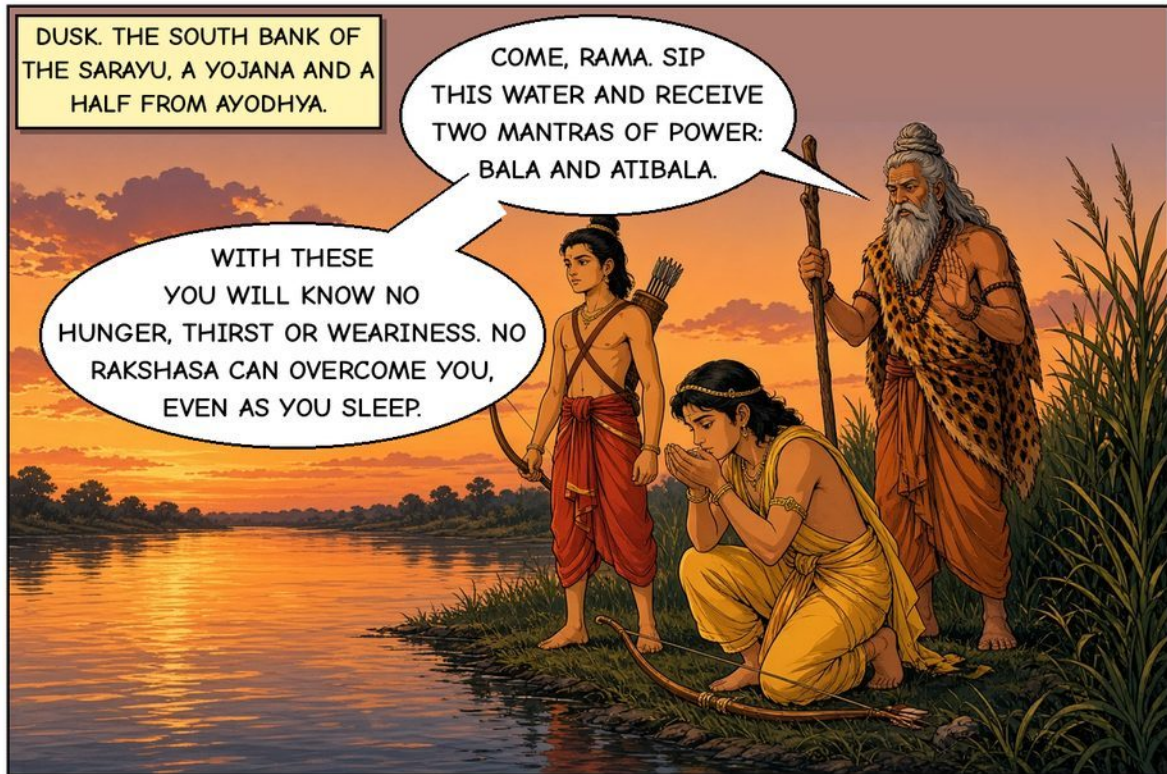


THE SAGE WALKED AHEAD. THE BROTHERS FOLLOWED, BOWS AND
QUIVERS RISING BEHIND THEM LIKE THREE-HEADED COBRAS.

DUSK. THE SOUTH BANK OF THE SARAYU, A YOJANA AND A HALF FROM AYODHYA.

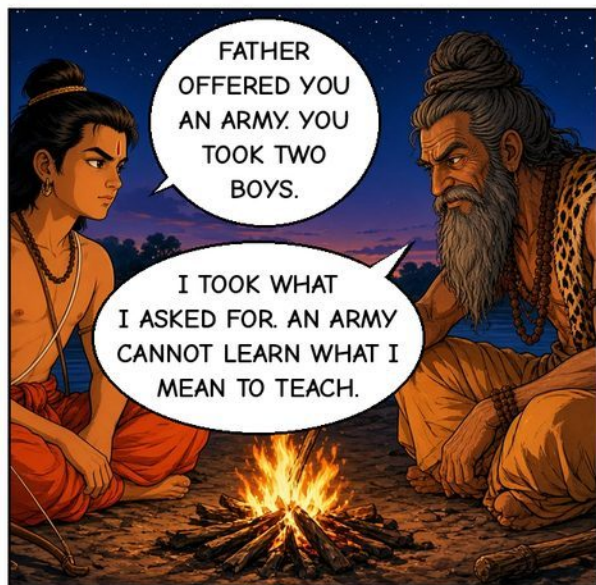
COME, RAMA. SIP THIS WATER AND RECEIVE TWO MANTRAS OF POWER: BALA AND ATIBALA.

WITH THESE YOU WILL KNOW NO HUNGER, THIRST OR WEARINESS. NO RAKSHASA CAN OVERCOME YOU, EVEN AS YOU SLEEP.



AND NO ONE WILL MATCH YOU IN JUDGMENT, OR IN ANSWERING AN ARGUMENT.

AND RAMA SHONE LIKE THE AUTUMN SUN.



FATHER OFFERED YOU AN ARMY. YOU TOOK TWO BOYS.

I TOOK WHAT I ASKED FOR. AN ARMY CANNOT LEARN WHAT I MEAN TO TEACH.

SO THE PRINCES SPENT THEIR FIRST NIGHT AWAY FROM HOME, ON BEDS OF GRASS UNDER THE STARS.

AHEAD, BEYOND THE GANGA, LAY A FOREST NO ONE ENTERED.

NEXT: THE SAGE'S ROAD