

weapons, and covered Bharadvāja's son with his own mighty weapons in that conflict. The Vasatis and Śibis, the Bāhlikas and Kauravas sought to defend Drona in the battle, but invincible Dhṛṣṭadyumna meted out destruction to them; O king, he shone as splendid as the sun with its rays, covering the entire horizon with his torrents of arrows.

Then Drona severed his bow and pierced him with his shafts, and further struck his vital organs, inflicting extreme pain. At this point, the ever-wrathful Bhīma grabbed Drona's chariot, lord of kings, and softly spoke to Drona: 'If self-styled Brahmins, full of learning but dissatisfied with the Brahmin way, stayed out of battle, the Kṣatriyas would not be heading for destruction! Non-violence towards all beings is said to be the most exalted *dharma*, and the Brahmin is its basis. You know the 30 Brahmin way better than anyone else, and yet, Brahmin, for the sake of a single son you have killed many hordes of barbarians and others, who in their foolish ignorance, longing for sons and wives and wealth, abided by their own code, while you broke yours as if *dharma* were unknown to you. As well cook a dog! Are you not ashamed? And that son today lies slain, as Yudhiṣṭhira lord of *dharma* informed you when you asked him. Do not doubt his word!'

When righteous Drona heard Bhīma's words, he laid aside his bow and prepared to cast off all his weapons. And he called out, 'O Karna, mighty Bowman Karna! O Krpa! O Duryodhana! Strive in the battle! I say this, and say it again: may you be safe from the Pāṇḍavas! I am laying aside my weapons.' Then, great king, he cried aloud for his son Aśvatthāman. He laid aside his weapons, placed them within his chariot, and, absorbed in Yoga, conferred freedom from fear upon all.

Dhṛṣṭadyumna saw his opportunity. He arose, leapt, sword in hand, down from his chariot, and rushed towards Drona. All beings, human and non-human, were in uproar to see Drona thus fallen into the power of Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and they made a tumultuous roar of 'Woe!' and 'Alas!', while Drona, weapons laid aside, sat in perfect equanimity. After speaking, he had absorbed himself in Yoga; now, brilliant and rich in ascetic power, the Teacher was reaching a heavenly realm hard for even the virtuous to reach. As he passed thus it seemed to us that two suns were shining, for the sky seemed filled entirely with lights, and two sun-like beings appeared: the sun itself and Bharadvāja's son. Then in

a moment that light disappeared, and there came a shout of joy from joyful heaven-dwellers as Drona arrived at Brahmā's realm. Dhṛṣṭadyumna was dumbfounded. Only five of us mortals then saw noble Drona, absorbed in Yoga, reach his final state: I, and Kuntī's son wealth-winner Arjuna, and the Brahmin Krpa, son of Śaradvat, and Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva the Vṛṣṇi, and the Pāṇḍava Yudhiṣṭhira, lord of *dharma*. None of the others could see the greatness of Bharadvāja's wise son, great king, as he passed, absorbed in Yoga; mortals did not know that he had reached his final state, for they did not see him, Teacher and foe-tamer, absorbed in Yoga, pass with the mighty bull-like seers to Brahmā's realm.

His body lay, pierced by hundreds of arrows, weapons cast aside, flowing with blood. To curses from all beings, Pṛṣṭa's heir Dhṛṣṭadyumna laid hands on it; he seized the head of the lifeless man and without a word severed it from the body with his sword. Then, with great joy at the fall of Bharadvāja's son, he roared a lion-roar, whirling his sword on the battlefield.

Grey-haired to the ears, complexion darkened, eighty-five years old, Drona had ranged over the battlefield like a boy of sixteen for your sake. Strong-armed wealth-winner Arjuna, Kuntī's son, had said, 'Son of Drupada, bring back the Teacher alive! Do not slay him!' Your soldiers too had cried out, 'Do not kill him, do not kill him!' Arjuna had even hurried towards Dhṛṣṭadyumna with the same cry. But while he and all the other princes cried against it, Dhṛṣṭadyumna slew Drona, bull-like warrior, on the seat of his chariot. Then, soaked in blood, the foe-tamer leapt down from his chariot to the ground; red-limbed as the sun, he had become terrible to look upon. Thus the soldiery beheld Drona slain in battle. But, O king, the great Bowman Dhṛṣṭadyumna took the mighty head of Bharadvāja's son and threw it down in front of your warriors; and seeing the head of Bharadvāja's son, your warriors, full of the will to flee, ran in every direction. As for Drona, he came to heaven and entered among the constellations. So it was that at that time I witnessed Drona's death, O king; and through the grace of the seer Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, Satyavati's son, we saw that most radiant hero reaching heaven as he passed, flying like a blazing, smokeless meteor.

After the killing of Drona, the Kurus lost the will to fight. The

Pāṇḍavas and Śrīñjayas rushed against them at great speed, and the army was ripped apart. Most of the horses lay slain by sharp arrows in the battle, and when Drona was killed your warriors became like dead men. 60 They had tasted defeat and, worse, great fear, and they were unmanned by both, and could summon up no fortitude. Their princes tried to reach the body of Bharadvāja's son, but they could not get through the mass of headless bodies.

The Pāṇḍavas, however, had tasted victory and, better, great fame, and they rattled their arrows and roared resounding lion-roars. Bhīma and Dhṛṣṭadyumna heir of Prṣata, O king, danced in the midst of the army, and embraced one another. Then Bhīma spoke to Prṣata's heir, afflicter of his enemies: 'I shall embrace you once more for your victory, heir of Prṣata, when Karṇa the Sūta's son lies slain in battle, and likewise 65 the wicked son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra!' With these words Pāṇḍu's son Bhīma set the earth trembling in his great joy, with the beating of arm on chest; and your warriors, terrified by that sound, ran headlong on the battlefield, abandoning the Kṣatriya way in their haste to flee. But the Pāṇḍavas were full of joy at the victory they had gained, lord of the peoples; and they had the pleasure of having destroyed their enemy in battle.

Only Aśvatthāman, unaware of what has happened, continues to resist. When he hears from Kṛpa of the manner of his father's death he is filled with fury.

THE WEAPON OF NĀRĀYĀNA

[166] — Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Samjaya to tell him how Aśvatthāman reacted when he learnt that his father had been killed by Dhṛṣṭadyumna in violation of dharma, and Samjaya describes the scene. — Aśvatthāman is gripped by rage and grief. That his father, a warrior, should have died in battle, is no cause for sorrow, but that Dhṛṣṭadyumna should have seized him by the hair is intolerable. Aśvatthāman swears that he will slaughter the Pāṇḍava forces and slay Dhṛṣṭadyumna: he will deploy the Weapon which Drona obtained as a boon from Nārāyaṇa. Hearing this the Kauravas rally, and joyfully blow their conches and beat their drums.

[167] When Aśvatthāman deploys the Weapon of Nārāyaṇa, storms break out in a cloudless sky, the earth trembles, the sea heaves, and rivers flow backwards. Yudhiṣṭhira, seeing that the Kauravas have ceased to flee and are now attacking in force, asks Arjuna who has rallied them. Arjuna answers that it is Aśvatthāman, and that it will prove impossible to protect Dhṛṣṭadyumna from him. He upbraids Yudhiṣṭhira for the wickedness he has committed for the sake of a kingdom: after killing Drona in such a fashion, death is preferable to life. [168] When the Pāṇḍavas hear Arjuna's words they are silent, except for Bhīma, who forcefully reminds him of the Kauravas' wrongdoings: it is to wipe out that wrong that the Pāṇḍavas are fighting this war, and if Arjuna will not fight, Bhīma will continue single-handed. Dhṛṣṭadyumna adds that Drona was a false Brahmin and an enemy, and killing of enemies is a Kṣatriya duty: now Drona has been killed, Arjuna should fight and triumph.

[169] The Pāṇḍavas are once again silent when they hear Dhṛṣṭadyumna's words, until Sātyaki bursts out in fury: Dhṛṣṭadyumna deserves death for his wicked deed, and in particular for boasting of it; if he says such a thing again, Sātyaki will strike off his head with his club. Dhṛṣṭadyumna replies that his action in killing Drona was blameless, whereas Sātyaki's own slaying of Bhūriśravas when his arm had been severed by Arjuna was an act of extreme wickedness; if Sātyaki is foolish enough to repeat what he has said, he will kill him with his arrows. In fury, Sātyaki rushes at Dhṛṣṭadyumna. At Kṛṣṇa's prompting Bhīma restrains him, while Sahadeva urges forbearance; but Dhṛṣṭadyumna continues to taunt him, and it is with difficulty that Kṛṣṇa and Yudhiṣṭhira are able to calm both heroes down.

[170] Meanwhile, Aśvatthāman is slaughtering his enemies, piling up a mountain of their bodies. The Weapon of Nārāyaṇa unleashes a torrent of weapons against the Pāṇḍavas: thousands of arrows, iron balls, hundred-slaying weapons and razor-edged discuses fall upon them. Seeing his troops overwhelmed, Yudhiṣṭhira urges them to abandon the battle: now that Drona has been killed, he and his brothers will accept death. But Kṛṣṇa prevents the army from fleeing and explains that if they cast down their weapons and descend from their mounts they will be safe from the Weapon, whereas if they fight against it they will die. Bhīma refuses to act on this advice and engages Aśvatthāman in combat, whereupon he is covered with an ever-increasing mass of blazing arrows. Seeing this, the other Pāṇḍava warriors cast down their weapons and dismount.

[171] Arjuna makes use of the Weapon of Varuṇa to protect Bhīma, and

he and Kṛṣṇa leap down from their chariot and run, weaponless, to rescue him. At first he resists, and the strength of Aśvatthāman's Weapon increases; but when Kṛṣṇa succeeds in persuading him to dismount and cast aside his weapons, the Weapon is stilled. The sky clears, pleasant breezes blow, and the Pāñdava forces revive. Duryodhana asks Aśvatthāman to deploy the Weapon again, but Aśvatthāman explains that it cannot be used more than once. Then he attacks Dhṛṣṭadyumna; after a fierce exchange of arrows he kills his horses and charioteer and puts his followers to flight. Sātyaki attacks Aśvatthāman, but he is overwhelmed; his charioteer bears him away, while Aśvatthāman renews his attack on Dhṛṣṭadyumna. Arjuna and Bhīma counterattack, but Aśvatthāman fends them off and kills their followers. The Pāñcālas flee, while Aśvatthāman showers them with arrows.

[172] Arjuna, in his distress at the turn of events, speaks harshly to Aśvatthāman, who, furious, deploys the Fire Weapon. The sun ceases to shine, clouds rain down blood, and the whole universe is scorched; many warriors are slain. The Kauravas rejoice. Arjuna deploys the Weapon of Brahmā to restore light and calm: an entire Pāñdava division is revealed to have been wiped out, but when Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna himself are seen unharmed and resplendent in their chariot, the remaining Pāñdavas are full of joy, while the Kauravas are dismayed, and Aśvatthāman abandons the fight. Meeting Vyāsa, he asks him why his Weapon failed to kill Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, and Vyāsa tells him that Nārāyāna had once performed great austerities, as a result of which he was able to see the great god Śiva in majesty. He worshipped him and requested boons, and Śiva granted him invincibility and invulnerability. Nara was born as a result of Nārāyāna's austerities and is his equal; he is Arjuna. Aśvatthāman is himself a portion of Śiva, and in a former life gained boons from him for his devotion: he should worship Kṛṣṇa, who is greatly loved by Śiva. Hearing this, Aśvatthāman honours both Śiva and Kṛṣṇa, and calls a halt to the day's fighting.

[173] Arjuna also encounters Vyāsa, and tells him that wherever he goes in battle he is preceded by a man looking like fire, whose feet do not touch the ground; he does not throw his spear, but from it issue thousands of spears that slay all the warriors that appear to be slain by Arjuna himself. He asks Vyāsa who this is, and Vyāsa answers that he has seen the great god Śiva, whom he praises at length; then he relates the stories of Śiva's disruption of Dakṣa's sacrifice, his destruction of the triple city, and the gods' acceptance of his pre-eminence. It is Śiva who goes before Arjuna killing his enemies, and who gave him his weapons;

the man devoted to Śiva obtains his desires. Arjuna should go and fight; with Kṛṣṇa for his counsellor and protector he will not suffer defeat.

KARNA

THE KILLING OF KARNA

[1] After Drona's death, Duryodhana and the seniormost Kauravas pass a miserable, sleepless night, full of regret for their offences against Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas. In the morning Karṇa is appointed as commander in place of Drona. A fierce battle takes place against the Pāṇḍavas; it lasts for two days, and then Karṇa is killed by Arjuna.

— Saṃjaya arrives to convey this news to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, first expressing the sardonic hope that all is well with him. Dhṛtarāṣṭra demands to hear all that has happened. [2] Saṃjaya describes how, when the Kaurava troops saw that Drona had been killed, they despaired and their weapons fell from their hands; how Duryodhana extolled Karṇa's valour and appointed him commander; and how Karṇa fought fiercely, causing the Pāṇḍavas much affliction, until he was killed by Arjuna.

[3] — Hearing this, Dhṛtarāṣṭra faints with grief, convinced that Duryodhana too must have been killed, and Gāndhārī and the other ladies likewise weep and faint. When he regains his composure, Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks whether Duryodhana is dead; Saṃjaya answers that Karṇa has been killed together with his sons and brothers, and also that Bhīma has slain Duḥśasana and drunk his blood.

[4] — Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Saṃjaya which warriors on both sides are alive and which dead. Saṃjaya replies that, before his death, Karṇa killed half of the Pāṇḍava forces who had survived the earlier slaughter; then he lists the Kaurava leaders who have met their deaths. He blames this disaster on Dhṛtarāṣṭra himself. Dhṛtarāṣṭra requests the names of the fallen Pāṇḍava warriors, and Saṃjaya supplies them. Finally Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks which of his warriors still survive, and Saṃjaya gives their names. Dhṛtarāṣṭra faints once more. [5] When he recovers,

he extols Karṇa's incomparable prowess as a warrior and expresses amazement and despair that one so mighty should have been slain. He argues that the power of fate alone can be responsible for Duryodhana's foolishness and the disaster to which it has led, and he demands to hear in detail all the circumstances.

[6] — Saṃjaya resumes his narration. — After Drona's death, Duryodhana rallies his troops and continues the battle till nightfall; then he withdraws to his camp and consults with his allies. Aśvathāman proposes that Karṇa be appointed commander. Duryodhana approves this suggestion and asks Karṇa to assume the command; Karṇa accepts, and receives honours and blessings from the assembled Kauravas.

[7] On the sixteenth day of the battle Duryodhana commands the army to be arrayed, and Karṇa comes out to lead it; at the sight of him, the Kauravas forget their woes. He stations his leading warriors in positions of his choosing. Yudhiṣṭhīra now tells Arjuna that Karṇa is the Kauravas' one remaining warrior of true might, and urges him to kill him. Arjuna positions his own chief warriors within the Pāṇḍavas' Half-moon formation, and, with a mighty noise of musical instruments and lion-roars, the two armies prepare to do battle against one another.

[8] Fierce fighting commences. Bhīma, riding an elephant and heading a powerful force, advances against the Kauravas. He is attacked by the Kulūta king Kṣemadhūrti, also mounted on an elephant, and the two men fight with lances and arrows. Kṣemadhūrti pierces Bhīma in the chest with a lance; in return Bhīma wounds his elephant with arrows and pursues it as it flees, but Kṣemadhūrti continues his assault and succeeds in killing Bhīma's elephant. Bhīma, who has leapt clear, now crushes Kṣemadhūrti's elephant with his club; when Kṣemadhūrti attacks him on foot he kills him too, and the Kaurava troops flee in dismay.

[9] Now Karṇa begins to inflict heavy casualties on the Pāṇḍava army with his arrows. Nakula advances to attack him, while Bhīma attacks Aśvathāman, and other warriors from both sides pair up to fight one another. Sātyaki and the two Kekaya brothers, Vinda and Anuvinda,¹ exchange showers of arrows so dense that they cause darkness. Sātyaki's bow is severed, but he takes up another and cuts off Anuvinda's head with a razor-edged arrow. Vinda fights on, and

¹ Not the two princes of Avanti who bore the same names: these have already been killed by Arjuna (see 7.74).

he and Sātyaki continue to exchange great numbers of arrows, and then to fight with swords. Finally Vinda is killed by a blow from Sātyaki, who now mounts another chariot and routs the Kekaya troops.

[10] Arjuna's son Śrutakarman attacks King Citrasena,¹ and the two exchange many arrows. Śrutakarman succeeds in overcoming Citrasena; he cuts off his head and puts his followers to flight. Yudhiṣṭhīra's son Prativindhya likewise does battle against Citrasena's brother Citra; after a fierce fight he slays him and routs the Kaurava forces. Only Aśvatthāman stands firm, and he attacks Bhīma. [11] The two warriors shower great numbers of arrows on each other and wound each other repeatedly: sometimes, concealed by the masses of their own flying arrows, they are like the sun and moon hidden by cloud, but then they blaze forth into sight once again. The clash of their mighty weapons illuminates the horizon like doomsday fire, and the Siddhas applaud the two warriors. Eventually both are rendered unconscious by each other's arrows, and their chariooteers bear them away.

[12] Arjuna battles against a force of warriors sworn to kill him;² warding off their attacks, he slays them in large numbers, winning the praise of the celestials. Seeing this great wonder, Aśvatthāman now challenges Arjuna. Arjuna accepts the challenge, and the two warriors engage in combat. Aśvatthāman's arrows fall on Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in their millions, but Arjuna breaks every one of them into three pieces, destroying them like a wind dispersing mist. Then whilst continuing to do battle with Aśvatthāman, he resumes his deadly onslaught on the sworn warriors, destroying many of their force. Aśvatthāman keeps up his assault, until at Kṛṣṇa's urging Arjuna attacks him with such vehemence that his horses bear him away; realizing that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are invincible, he makes no attempt to resume the fight.

[13] The Magadha chief Dandadhāra, mounted on his terrible elephant, is causing great carnage in the northern section of the Pāṇḍava army, and Kṛṣṇa drives Arjuna there. Arjuna attacks Dandadhāra, and the two warriors engage in battle; after several exchanges, Arjuna slays the elephant and its rider with his arrows. Dandadhāra's brother Dāṇḍa takes up the fight, but Arjuna severs his arms and head, and kills his elephant; then he kills other mighty elephants,

¹ Not the son of Dhṛitarāṣṭra who bore the same name, and who was killed at 7.112 (and then reappeared at 7.143).

² See 7.16.

until the forces of Magadha are destroyed. The Pāṇḍava troops praise Arjuna for saving them; Arjuna returns to his battle against the sworn warriors. [14] They attack him in their thousands, but he smashes their chariots, elephants and horses, and dispatches their fighting men to heaven. Kṛṣṇa accuses him of toying with his enemies, instead of destroying them swiftly in order to take up his task of killing Karna. In response, Arjuna redoubles his assault. Kṛṣṇa describes the scene on the battlefield at length: there has been so much killing on Duryodhana's account, but Arjuna's deeds are worthy of him, or of Indra himself.

Meanwhile the Pāṇḍya king is slaying great numbers of Kaurava warriors. [15] — Dhṛitarāṣṭra asks to hear in detail of Pāṇḍya's deeds, and Sañjaya narrates. — Pāṇḍya regards himself as equal to all the mightiest warriors of the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas. He is causing great slaughter among Karna's forces when Aśvatthāman challenges him. Pāṇḍya accepts the challenge, and a fierce battle gets under way between the two men. In the eighth part of a day, Aśvatthāman shoots as many arrows as would be carried in eight carts, each drawn by eight oxen. He overwhelms Pāṇḍya and destroys his chariot, but refrains from slaying him, wishing to prolong the fight. Pāṇḍya now mounts a riderless elephant and resumes his attack, breaking Aśvatthāman's crown; enraged, Aśvatthāman cuts Pāṇḍya's elephant to pieces and severs his arms and head.

[16] Kṛṣṇa points out to Arjuna that Karna is slaying the Sañjaya forces, and he hastens to protect Yudhiṣṭhīra against this danger. A terrible battle takes place. Karna causes great destruction among the forces of the Pāṇḍavas and their allies; he is attacked by the Pāñcāla leaders together with Draupadī's sons, the twins Nakula and Sahadeva, and Sātyaki. The battlefield is covered with the bodies of the fallen.

[17] Dhṛṣṭadyumna comes under heavy attack, and the Pāṇḍavas and Pāñcālas ride to his rescue. Sātyaki kills the king of Vāṅga, while Sahadeva destroys the elephant of the Pūṇḍra king and Nakula slays the Arīga lord. The elephant-fighters of Arīga attack him, but his Pāṇḍava and Pāñcāla allies join in the fight and slay them, before turning on Karna himself. Meanwhile Duḥśāsana attacks Sahadeva, and the two men join in combat. After a fierce exchange of arrows, Duḥśāsana loses consciousness and is borne away by his charioteer. Now Nakula challenges Karna, threatening to kill him; Karna derides Nakula but accepts the challenge. The two warriors exchange vast numbers of arrows, until Karna kills Nakula's charioteer and horses, and destroys his chariot. Nakula stands brandishing an iron bar, but Karna continues his assault until Nakula

flees in distress. Karna catches up with him, hangs his bow round his neck, and advises him not to fight with his seniors; but, remembering his conversation with Kuntī,¹ he spares his life and lets him go. Then he launches a savage assault on the Pāṇḍava forces.

[18] Ulūka attacks Yuyutsu and overcomes him; Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son Śrutakarman does battle with Nakula's son Śatānīka; Śakuni and Sutasoma fight fiercely. Kṛpa attacks Dhṛṣṭadyumna with such might that he is completely overwhelmed; he orders his charioteer to retreat to a safe position near Arjuna or Bhīma, and the charioteer does so while Kṛpa pursues them, still shooting. Śikhaṇḍin and Kṛtavarman shower each other with arrows until Śikhaṇḍin loses consciousness and is borne away by his charioteer, and the Pāṇḍava forces flee. [19] Arjuna is assailed by a huge Kaurava force, but he kills its leaders and then deploys the Weapon of Indra against the rest, till the mountainous piles of the slain make the earth impassable.

Meanwhile Yudhiṣṭhīra and Duryodhana are engaged in combat. Yudhiṣṭhīra kills Duryodhana's horses and his charioteer, but Karna, Aśvatthāman and Kṛpa come to his aid; Yudhiṣṭhīra is likewise joined by the other Pāṇḍavas, and a fierce battle takes place. There is great loss of life on both sides as noon passes. [20] — Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks to hear more about the course of the battle between Yudhiṣṭhīra and Duryodhana, and Saṃjaya narrates. — Duryodhana mounts another chariot and resumes his attack on Yudhiṣṭhīra. The two kings shower each other with arrows, piercing each other repeatedly. Then as Duryodhana stands on his chariot brandishing a club, Yudhiṣṭhīra hurls a terrible spear at him, and he loses consciousness and falls. Kṛtavarman hurries to his rescue, and Bhīma rushes to attack Kṛtavarman.

[21] Karna leads the Kaurava forces in a fierce encounter that leaves many warriors dead. He attacks Sātyaki, but then Arjuna begins an assault on the Kauravas, slaying many. Duryodhana engages him in combat, but Arjuna overwhelms him, Aśvatthāman, Kṛpa, Kṛtavarman and Duḥśāsana, and then attacks Karna. Karna abandons his attack on Sātyaki and devotes his attention to Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, whom he pierces with many arrows; he is assailed by all the greatest Pāṇḍava warriors, but overcomes them. Meanwhile Arjuna, warding off Karna's arrows, is slaughtering the Kaurava forces. The sun sets; the Kauravas retreat from the field, and the Pāṇḍavas return happily to their camp.

¹ See 5.144.

[22] — Dhṛtarāṣṭra remarks that it is only through Arjuna's choice that anyone survived at all; those who fought against him deserve praise, not blame. He asks to hear what the Kauravas did next; Saṃjaya tells him that they placed their hopes on Karna. Dhṛtarāṣṭra replies that Karna would not be able to defeat the Pāṇḍavas, and blames fate for the woeful situation he is in. Saṃjaya answers that the blame lies with Dhṛtarāṣṭra himself, but that there is no point in grieving over what is past. He resumes his narration. — In the morning of the seventeenth day of fighting Karna approaches Duryodhana and tells him that today either he will kill Arjuna or Arjuna will kill him. He no longer has his mighty Spear,¹ so Arjuna will attack him. Karna has the better bow, though Arjuna has a divine bowstring and inexhaustible arrow-cases; but Arjuna's advantage is that Kṛṣṇa is his charioteer. Karna asks to have Śalya as his own charioteer: in this way he will outmatch Arjuna. Duryodhana gives his agreement.

[23] Duryodhana approaches Śalya and asks him to act as Karna's charioteer. Śalya is furious at this insult: he does not consider Karna to be a better warrior, and he will not demean himself, a king, by acting as charioteer to a Sūta. As Śalya prepares to depart for his home, Duryodhana tries to win him round, explaining that he considers neither Karna nor himself to be a better warrior. The reason for asking him to act as charioteer is that, just as the world considers Karna superior to Arjuna, so it considers Śalya superior to Kṛṣṇa. Mollified, Śalya agrees to act, but adds that he will speak to Karna in accordance with a promise he has made.²

[24] Duryodhana now narrates a story to Śalya. — After the defeat of the demons by the gods, the three demons Tārakākṣa, Kamalākṣa and Vidyunmālin perform fierce austerities until Brahmā offers them a boon. They choose invulnerability towards all creatures, but Brahmā replies that that is impossible. They then choose to live separately for a thousand years, each in his own fortress, and for those three fortresses then to be combined into one: whichever god can destroy the triple fortress with a single arrow will kill them. This is granted, and so Tārakākṣa rules a golden fortress in the heavens, Kamalākṣa a silver fortress in the air and Vidyunmālin an iron fortress on the earth. As a reward for his asceticism, Tārakākṣa's son Hari obtains a lake in which fallen demon warriors are returned to life. The demons now lord it over the whole world,

¹ See 7.154-5.

² See 5.8.

and not even Indra can overcome them. On Brahmā's advice the gods appeal to Śiva; they praise him greatly and ask for his help. Śiva advises them that they will defeat the demons by taking half of his own fiery energy, but they answer that they will be unable to bear it. Instead, he takes half of their energy, and thenceforth becomes known as Mahādeva, the great god. At his request the gods create for him a wonderful chariot and bow consisting of the might of the entire universe. Śiva demands a being superior to himself to be the driver, and Brahmā undertakes the task. The three fortresses become one, and Śiva destroys it with a single arrow. — Duryodhana tells Śalya that in the same way he, though superior to both Kṛṣṇa and Karṇa, should drive Karna's chariot in battle. He also reminds Śalya of Rāma son of Jamadagni, who obtained celestial weapons from Śiva as a reward for his devotion and for defeating the demons in battle. Rāma himself taught Karna archery and gave him weapons; he would not have done this for a mere Sūta. Mighty Karṇa, who was born with armour and earrings, must be the son of a god born into a Kṣatriya lineage.

[25] Duryodhana repeats his request to Śalya to act as charioteer to Karṇa, and he agrees to do so, but adds that he must be pardoned for anything he may say to Karṇa out of a desire for what is good. He also assures Karṇa that he is an excellent charioteer. [26] Then he makes ready Karṇa's chariot, and he and Karṇa mount. Duryodhana pronounces a blessing, imploring Karṇa either to kill or capture the Pāṇḍavas, and Karṇa instructs Śalya to drive him into battle so that he may slay Yudhiṣṭhīra and his brothers. In reply Śalya tells him not to underestimate the Pāṇḍavas: they are invincible, and even Indra would be afraid of them. But Karṇa ignores him. When the Kaurava forces see Karṇa preparing for battle, they are overjoyed; terrible portents appear indicating their coming destruction, but they take no notice. Karṇa now boasts to Śalya of his great prowess, and orders him to drive where the Pāṇḍavas and their allies are: he will slay them in battle. In particular, he will kill Arjuna, even if the gods themselves come to protect him. In reply, Śalya tells him to stop bragging: Arjuna is a far greater hero than Karṇa, and if Karṇa fights him he will die. Karṇa is furious, but commands Śalya to drive him into battle. He travels forward, slaying enemies as he goes, seeking for Arjuna.

[27] To every Pāṇḍava warrior whom he meets, Karṇa promises vast wealth if he will show him where Arjuna is.

Samjaya spoke:

The Kaurava army were delighted as the mighty chariot-fighter Karṇa son of Rādhā, the tormentor of his enemies, boasted of how he would plunge into battle. But Śalya king of Madra laughed at him, and retorted, 'Son of a Sūta, do not proudly give away gold or a team of six bull elephants to any man! Today you shall meet wealth-winner Arjuna. Like a silly child you are handing out riches as though you were Kubera the god of wealth, but today, son of Rādhā, you will not need to exert yourself to meet the wealth-winner! Why do you pointlessly give so much away like a fool? In your folly you are forgetting the evils that arise from giving to those who are unworthy. That wealth of which you speak so much could be used by you to perform many kinds of sacrifices; Sūta, perform them! As for your foolish desire to slay Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, that is utterly vain — I have never heard of a jackal killing a pair of lions in battle! You desire that which you should not, for you have no friends to hold you back as you rush headlong into fire. You are ignorant of what should be done at what time, and so time has ripened you for picking, make no doubt! For why would any man who aspires to live speak such utter nonsense, unfit for human ears? Your plan of action is like swimming across the ocean with a boulder tied round your neck, or leaping from a mountain-top! If you want to achieve something good, then do not fight with the wealth-winner until you have all your soldiers with you and are protected by their arrayed ranks. I tell you this to benefit Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son, not from any wish to cause harm. If you want to live, believe what I have said!'

'I put my trust in my own valour as I seek out Arjuna on the battlefield,' answered Karṇa. 'But you are an enemy with the face of a friend, trying to frighten me. No one today shall turn me aside from my resolve — not even Indra brandishing his thunderbolt, much less a mere mortal!'

After Karṇa had spoken, Śalya king of Madra made his reply, hoping once more to enrage Karṇa beyond measure: 'When sharp-pointed stork-feathered arrows pursue you, dexterously shot by Arjuna, impelled by his strength and hastened by his bowstring, then you will regret attacking him! When Kuntī's ambidextrous son takes up his celestial bow, its brightness illuminating the whole army, and torments you with

his sharp arrows, then you will repent, son of a Sūta! As a child might lie in its mother's lap and long to grab the moon, so you in your folly stand eagerly on your chariot and long to defeat Arjuna today. Karna, by seeking to fight today with Arjuna you are clasping a sharp-bladed trident to flail all your own limbs, for his deeds are as sharp as blades.

35 For you to challenge Arjuna today, Sūta's son, is as if a spirited but foolish little fawn should challenge a mighty maned lion standing ready to spring. Son of a Sūta, do not challenge the heroic prince, like a well-fed jackal challenging a maned lion in the forest; do not die in an encounter with Kuntī's son!

'Karna, if you challenge Arjuna to battle, you are a hare challenging a mighty elephant with tusks like plough-shafts, its temporal glands bursting with rut. If you want to fight the son of Kuntī, you are a silly child poking with a stick a deadly poisonous king cobra in its hole, its hood expanded. You are roaring your foolish defiance at Pāṇḍu's lion-like son, Karna, like a jackal roaring defiance at an angry maned lion;

40 you are challenging Kuntī's son the wealth-winner as a sparrow might challenge spirited Garuḍa, best of birds, to compete at flying. You are trying to cross the terrible ocean without a boat, while it swirls at high tide with its waves and its mighty fish. Karna, if you challenge Arjuna to battle, you are a calf challenging a fighting bull with sharp horns and a neck like a drum. Like a frog croaking at a great thundercloud that brings the world all the water it wants, so you croak at Arjuna, who is an Indra in human form. And, Karna, like a dog confined at home, snarling at a tiger in the forest, you snarl at the tiger-like wealth-winner.

45 'The jackal that lives in the forest surrounded by hares considers itself to be a lion, until it sees a lion; and in the same way you too, son of Rādhā, want to think yourself a lion, until you see the foe-taming, tiger-like hero, the wealth-winner Arjuna. You may consider yourself a tiger until you see Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna standing together on a single chariot, looking like sun and moon; until you hear the twang of Arjuna's bow Gāndīva in battle, you may speak as you please, O Karna; but once you see him, roaring like a tiger, filling the horizon with the din of his chariot and the twang of his bow, a jackal is what you will be. You are for ever a jackal, and the wealth-winner for ever a lion; always you seem like a jackal, fool, because you detest heroes so. As a mouse is to a cat

in strength, as a dog is to a tiger, as a jackal is to a lion, as a hare is to an elephant, as untruth is to truth, as poison is to nectar, so are you to Kuntī's son; so your deeds proclaim you both.'

Enraged, Karna retorts that he knows Arjuna's abilities and can match them; he will kill Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, and then Śalya himself. Śalya is a Madra, and the Madras are notorious barbarians, but Karna will hold fast to the Kṣatriya dharma in fighting for his dear friend Duryodhana; a treacherous Madra cannot prevent him. He commands Śalya to drive him onward.

[28] In reply, Śalya tells Karna a story. A certain crow, grown proud as a result of the indulgence shown to it by the children of a Vaiśya, challenged the leader of a group of geese to a flying contest. When the geese mocked it, the crow insisted that it would demonstrate 101 different ways of flying; the chief goose answered that it knew only one way. The two birds set off, and at first the crow's agility allowed it to outdo the steady flight of the goose. But then the goose began to fly over the ocean, and the crow, finding nowhere to alight, became exhausted and fell into the water; it confessed its error and begged the goose to rescue it, and the goose did so. Śalya tells Karna that he is like the crow, looking down on his betters in his pride at Duryodhana's indulgence towards him: he has shown no heroism in the past, and he should realize that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are men like lions, whereas he is a man like a dog.

Sanjaya spoke:

[29] When Adhiratha's son Karna heard these unpleasant words spoken by the king of Madra, he was displeased, and he answered Śalya, 'I know what kind of men Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva are. The might and the great weapons of Kṛṣṇa, who drives the chariot, and of Arjuna son of Pāṇḍu, are known exactly to me here and now, whereas you, Śalya, have no direct knowledge of them. I shall fearlessly engage Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in battle, though they are unassailable, the best of all who bear arms. But what causes me greater anguish today is the curse laid on me by Rāma Jāmadagnya, and by a noble Brahmin.

'Long ago, disguised as a Brahmin, I lived with Rāma, seeking celestial weapons; it was there, Śalya, that Indra king of the gods frustrated me in order to favour this very Arjuna. Having taken the hideous form of an insect, he came up to my thigh and bored into it, while I,

for fear of disturbing my teacher, remained motionless. But when he awoke, that Brahmin saw what had happened, and questioned me. I replied, "Great seer, I am a Sūta," and then he cursed me: "Sūta, since you have obtained this weapon by fraud, it will fail to appear for you when you need it. It will appear save at the time of your death, for *brahman* cannot remain permanently with one who is not a Brahmin."

'The measureless, turbulent mass of water covers the ocean with mountainous waves, seeking to overwhelm all the multitudes of creatures; it is the shore that holds it back. Kuntī's son is the best of all who bend the bow in the world today, shooting volleys of unfailing feathered arrows that pierce the vital organs of heroes and slay them; I am the one who will combat him in battle. So, as the shore resists the ocean, I will forcibly withstand the fierce, unassailable son of Kuntī with his enormous strength and his mighty weapons, as he overwhelms the princes with the torrents of his arrows. No other man who bears a bow may be reckoned his equal in warfare, for he could defeat the very gods and demons. See me do battle against him today! Pāṇḍu's son is exceedingly proud and bellicose, and he will assail me with mighty celestial weapons; but on the battlefield I shall destroy his weapons with my own, and lay low the son of Kuntī with my excellent arrows!

'Though he shines like the sun, blazing in glory with all his rays and driving out darkness, I, like a huge cloud, shall overshadow wealth-winner Arjuna with my arrows! Though he burns like a smoke-crested flame, scorching this world with his fiery energy, I, becoming a cloud, shall extinguish Kuntī's son in battle with the showers of my arrows! Though he buffets and beats like a mighty wind, fierce and shattering, I, like Mount Himālaya, shall bear in battle the force of the furious, merciless wealth-winner!

'He may have great skill in the coursing of chariots; he may always fight in the van, heroic in combat yet detached; he may be the best of all bowmen in the world; but I shall withstand the wealth-winner in battle! No other among men who bear bows is his equal in warfare today; he could vanquish this entire world. I know this, and I am going to fight him! In Khāṇḍavaprastha the ambidextrous warrior defeated all

creatures, including the gods.¹ What other man but me, hoping to save his own life, would seek to do battle with him?

'I would gladly speak out in an assembly of Kṣatriyas of the manliness of Arjuna son of Pāṇḍu; but by what right did you, a snarling, dimwitted fool, speak of it to me? For you are disagreeable, cruel and hard-hearted; an unforgiving man yourself, you utter base slander of those who forgive. I could slay hundreds like you – but compassion and fate prompt me to forgive you. You have spoken unpleasant words to me to wound me and benefit the Pāṇḍava, you wicked fool; but I retain my honesty while you, with your crooked ways, are cursed as a betrayer of your friends – for he is a friend who walks with one for seven steps.² This is a time of death, a most terrible time, now that Duryodhana has gone to war. But because I desire to see him succeed in his aims, I shall always follow him, whereas you bear him no friendship. What makes a friend a friend, O bestower of honour, is affection, delight, pleasure, helpfulness, joy; and all of these I feel towards Duryodhana. What makes an enemy an enemy is aggression, retribution, sharpness, injuriousness; and all of these I generally feel towards you. So to please Duryodhana and displease you, and for the sake of glory, and myself, and my god, I shall do battle with all my effort against Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva and the son of Pāṇḍu: see me perform this feat today!

'See today my excellent weapons, both human and celestial, including Weapons of Brahmā! I shall attack Arjuna of fierce valour, like one rutting elephant attacking another. Concentrating my mind, I shall hurl my matchless, invincible Weapon of Brahmā at the son of Kuntī to defeat him. He will not escape from that, so long as the wheel of my chariot does not become stuck in rough ground in the course of battle.

'I have no fear of Yama with his staff, Varuṇa with his noose, Kubera with his club, Indra with his thunderbolt, or any other being bent on killing me; so understand, Śalya, that I do not fear, that I am fearless. Thus I am not afraid of Kuntī's son or of Kṛṣṇa the stirrer of men, and in this conflict I shall do battle against them. But a Brahmin once cursed me: "When you are fighting in battle, and encounter danger

¹ See 1.214 ff.

² Cf. 3.281.22.

in a hard place, may your wheel fall into a fissure in the ground!" Of those words of a Brahmin I am mightily afraid, for they are the lords of Soma, who rule over happiness and unhappiness. By accident I had killed the calf of his oblation cow¹ as it grazed in the wild, Śalya, far from that ascetic Brahmin. I presented him 700 elephants with tusks like plough-shafts, and hundreds of slaves and slave-girls, but that lord of the twice-born did not pardon me. I brought him 14,000 black cows, each with a white calf, but I did not obtain pardon from the most excellent Brahmin. A rich dwelling filled with everything he could desire, and whatever wealth I have: all this I offered to him with due honour, but he did not want it. Then as I continued to beg forgiveness for my crime, he spoke again: "Sūta, what I have said will come to be; it cannot happen otherwise. An untrue speech would kill creatures and so incur sin; therefore to preserve my *dharma* I dare not speak untruth. You must not harm my position as a Brahmin. As for the atonement you have performed, no one in this world can make my words false, so you must stop it now."

40 'I have told you this out of friendship, Śalya, though you have insulted me, and I know you still blame me. Now remain silent, and hear my answer to you.'

[30] Karna now insists that Śalya will not succeed in frightening him. He goes on to discourse at length on the immorality of the Madra and Bāhlika peoples; Śalya replies that there are good and bad people everywhere. Karna orders him to drive forward. [31] Then he arrays his forces against Dhṛṣṭadyumna's army, and attacks Yudhiṣṭhira. — Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Saṃjaya to tell him more about Karna's array and how the battle proceeded, and Saṃjaya proceeds to do so. — The Kaurava army is vast; Karna is in the centre at its head. Seeing it, Yudhiṣṭhira assigns to each of his closest supporters a particular enemy to fight: Arjuna is to take on Karna. Seeing his chariot advancing towards them, Śalya points out to Karna the many portents of destruction and warns him that his men will die in their thousands. All the Pāṇḍavas are as mighty as Arjuna, and all are ready to fight.

[32] Arjuna does battle with a force of warriors sworn to kill him, slaying them

¹ A cow kept by Brahmins to give milk for their oblations.

in huge numbers. Other encounters take place between Kaurava and Pāṇḍava heroes. Karna attacks the Pāñcālas, killing many of them; his two younger sons, Suṣeṇa and Satyasena, act as guardians of his wheels, and his eldest son Viṣasena protects his rear. He is attacked in turn by Dhṛṣṭadyumna and many of the foremost Pāṇḍava warriors. Bhīma slays Satyasena, and he and Nakula and Sātyaki attack Karna and his remaining sons, but Viṣasena fights them off fiercely. Karna comes under attack from a number of Pāṇḍava warriors; in response, he shoots arrows so fast that they appear to cover earth, air and sky in all directions. Forcing his enemies to give way, he then penetrates Yudhiṣṭhira's force and attacks him.

[33] Karna slays many thousands of Pāṇḍava warriors as he seeks to reach Yudhiṣṭhira; finally he is checked by the Pāñdavas, Pāñcālas and Kekayas, and he and Yudhiṣṭhira fight. There is a fierce exchange of arrows, and then a group of leading Pāṇḍava warriors joins in to protect Yudhiṣṭhira. Karna deploys the Weapon of Brahmā against them and continues his assault on Yudhiṣṭhira, severing his bow, cutting off his armour and reducing his chariot to fragments. When Yudhiṣṭhira flees, Karna mocks him for his failure to behave like a Kṣatriya, but lets him go. Karna attacks Yudhiṣṭhira's supporters, and they retreat with him; but Yudhiṣṭhira mounts another chariot and urges them back into the fray. There is a violent battle, and the Kaurava forces flee before the Pāṇḍava onslaught.

[34] Karna rides to attack Bhīma. Seeing Karna coming, Bhīma tells Sātyaki and Dhṛṣṭadyumna to protect Yudhiṣṭhira while he engages with him: one of them will kill the other. Śalya tells Karna that Bhīma appears even more furious than when Abhimanyu and Ghāṭotkaca were killed, but Karna laughs. He says that Śalya is right, but that if he succeeds in battle against Bhīma he will find himself facing Arjuna, which is his great desire. Śalya now drives him to where Bhīma is attacking the Kaurava forces, and the two warriors exchange many arrows. Eventually one of Bhīma's arrows renders Karna unconscious, and Śalya bears him away.

[35] — Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Saṃjaya how Duryodhana reacted to Karna's defeat, and Saṃjaya narrates. — Duryodhana commands various of his brothers to go to Karna's aid, and they rush towards Bhīma like moths towards a flame. They surround him and shower him with arrows, but he slays one after another, till the rest flee. Seeing this, Karna returns to attack Bhīma a second time, and soon deprives him of his chariot; Bhīma leaps down club in hand, and

destroys hundreds of elephants, chariots, footsoldiers, chariot-fighters and horses. Then he mounts another chariot to resume his battle with Karna. Karna attacks first Yudhiṣṭhīra, then Bhīma once again. Seeing Karna and their other leaders engaging with the enemy, the Kaurava forces rally, and the terrible battle between the two sides resumes.

[36] The battle rages on. Elephants tear at each other with their tusks; others lie slain on the battlefield, and yet others run amok. Horses too run hither and thither, or lie writhing in pain. Fallen men cry out, and running men call to each other; severed arms twist on the ground like snakes. Rivers of blood flow, and carrion creatures come to feed on the dead. Meanwhile great warriors fight on, and the Kaurava army begins to sink like a holed ship.

[37] Arjuna is attacked by a force of warriors sworn to kill him, and by Suśarman, king of Trigarta. One of Suśarman's arrows pierces Arjuna's banner with its emblem of a great monkey; the monkey roars, and the Kaurava army swoons at the sound. When they recover, they surround Arjuna's chariot and attempt to seize him and Kṛṣṇa, but Arjuna hurls them down and slays many of them with short-range arrows. He and Kṛṣṇa both blow their conches, terrifying their attackers. Then he deploys the Serpent Weapon, which binds his enemies' legs, allowing him to kill many more of them. Suśarman replies with the Eagle Weapon, causing eagles to devour the snakes binding the legs of his men. He also shoots an arrow which renders Arjuna briefly unconscious; however, Arjuna recovers and deploys the Weapon of Indra, releasing arrows which slay the Kaurava forces in thousands.

[38] Duryodhana and his leading allies attempt to rally their forces. Kṛpa does battle with Śikhaṇḍīn, while other Kauravas engage in combat with the chief Pāṇḍava warriors. Suketu observes that Śikhaṇḍīn is being overcome by Kṛpa, and attacks the latter himself, allowing Śikhaṇḍīn to withdraw from the fight. After a brief but fierce exchange of arrows, Kṛpa beheads Suketu with a single broad shaft. Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Kṛtavarmīn likewise shower arrows upon each other, till Dhṛṣṭadyumna kills Kṛtavarmīn's charioteer. [39] Aśvatthāman attacks Yudhiṣṭhīra, performing amazing feats of archery. Sātyaki and the sons of Draupadī, who are guarding Yudhiṣṭhīra, counterattack. Aśvatthāman continues to battle against them and against Yudhiṣṭhīra himself; he slays Sātyaki's charioteer, and inflicts great casualties on the Pāṇḍava forces. Yudhiṣṭhīra reviles him for his behaviour, which resembles that of a Kṣatriya rather than a Brahmin, but Aśvatthāman does not answer him.

[40] Karna and Bhīma fight, then separate to attack the Pāñcālas and Kauravas respectively. Duryodhana does battle with Nakula and Sahadeva; Dhṛṣṭadyumna sees that the twins are in imminent danger of death, and intervenes. He and Duryodhana exchange many arrows, till Dhṛṣṭadyumna destroys Duryodhana's horses, charioteer, weapons and chariot. His brothers bear him away from the battle. Meanwhile Karna causes great carnage among the Pāñcālas; he attacks Yudhiṣṭhīra, and is then counterattacked by Dhṛṣṭadyumna with other leading Pāṇḍavas, but he continues to fight fiercely. Bhīma too continues to battle against the Kauravas, killing thousands of warriors. Arjuna, seeing Karna's activities, asks Kṛṣṇa to drive him towards him, and begins to slaughter the Kauravas. In response, Duryodhana once again sends thousands of sworn warriors against him, but Arjuna destroys them. Now Aśvatthāman attacks Arjuna with such vehemence that Arjuna is overwhelmed; furious, Kṛṣṇa urges him back into action, and Arjuna shoots fourteen broad arrows at Aśvatthāman, destroying his weapons and rendering him unconscious; his charioteer bears him away.

[41] Kṛṣṇa describes the battle scene to Arjuna: Karna is rallying the fleeing Kauravas, while Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Aśvatthāman do battle. [42] Now Dhṛṣṭadyumna leads an attack on Karna, and he and Karna exchange many arrows; then Drona's son Aśvatthāman attacks Dhṛṣṭadyumna, swearing to kill him in revenge for the death of Drona. He showers Dhṛṣṭadyumna with enormous numbers of arrows, and Dhṛṣṭadyumna replies in kind, severing Aśvatthāman's bow. Aśvatthāman takes up another bow and destroys Dhṛṣṭadyumna's weapons, horses, charioteer and chariot; Dhṛṣṭadyumna seizes a sword and shield, but Aśvatthāman destroys these also. Then he rushes at Dhṛṣṭadyumna. Kṛṣṇa sees Dhṛṣṭadyumna's danger and drives the chariot towards him, urging Arjuna to rescue him; Arjuna pierces Aśvatthāman with many arrows while Sahadeva bears Dhṛṣṭadyumna away. Aśvatthāman too is rendered unconscious by one of Arjuna's shafts, and is borne away by his charioteer, to the joy of the Pāṇḍavas' allies.

[43] Again Kṛṣṇa describes the events of the battle to Arjuna. Yudhiṣṭhīra is in mortal danger from Duryodhana and Karna. Karna is causing great carnage among the Pāṇḍava forces; he is eyeing Arjuna and will soon attack him, like a moth flying into a flame. Meanwhile Bhīma is slaughtering the Kaurava forces. Seeing Bhīma's deeds, Arjuna too slays the Kauravas with his arrows. [44] Karna and Śikhaṇḍīn do battle, till Śikhaṇḍīn is overwhelmed

by Karna's arrows and has to retreat. Duhśasana withstands Dhṛṣṭadyumna's attack; Nakula gets the better of Viśasena; Sahadeva overcomes Uluka. Sātyaki kills Śakuni's horses and his charioteer, and Śakuni is borne away from the battle by Uluka. Duryodhana has to retreat from Bhīma, Yudhāmanyu from Kṛpa, and Uttamaujas from Kṛtavarma.

[45] Arjuna and Aśvatthāman battle fiercely against each other, till Arjuna strikes down Aśvatthāman's charioteer with a broad arrow. Aśvatthāman now drives and fights simultaneously, but Arjuna severs his reins, and his horses bolt. Seeing this, the joyful Pāṇḍavas put the Kaurava army to rout. Duryodhana appeals to Karna to rally the troops, and Karna deploys the Weapon of Bhṛgu, which causes millions of arrows to descend on the Pāṇḍava army. So many slain warriors fall to the ground that the earth shakes, while others flee. Kṛṣṇa takes Arjuna in search of Yudhiṣṭhira, who has been wounded, but they cannot find him. Arjuna asks Bhīma for news of Yudhiṣṭhira, and Bhīma answers that he has left the battlefield after being badly wounded by Karna's arrows. Leaving Bhīma to do battle against the sworn warriors, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa go to see Yudhiṣṭhira. Seeing them approach, Yudhiṣṭhira concludes that they must have killed Karna, and he is filled with joy.

[46] Yudhiṣṭhira congratulates Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on having slain so mighty a warrior as Karna, and he describes how Karna had earlier defeated and humiliated him. Again and again he asks Arjuna whether he has indeed killed the enemy whom he fears and hates so much. [47] In reply, Arjuna describes how he had battled fiercely with Aśvatthāman, who finally took refuge among Karna's army. Then, though challenged by Karna himself, he had come to see Yudhiṣṭhira. Now he will do battle against Karna, who is slaying so many of the Pāṇḍava forces; if he does not kill him, may he suffer the fate of those who break their word. [48] Yudhiṣṭhira is furious to learn that Karna is still unharmed. He upbraids Arjuna fiercely, telling him that it would have been better if he had given his bow Gāndīva to Kṛṣṇa and served as his driver, or if Kuntī had aborted him.

[49] Arjuna is so enraged by Yudhiṣṭhira's words that he draws his sword to kill him, for he has vowed to slay anyone who tells him to give Gāndīva to another person. But Kṛṣṇa rebukes Arjuna for his lack of wisdom, adding that a wise person may acquire merit even through violence, as did Balāka, whilst a foolish and ignorant person may incur sin even when striving for dharma, as did Kauśika.

At Arjuna's request, Kṛṣṇa relates these stories.¹ Balāka was a hunter who used to hunt, not from desire, but to support his wife and sons and blind parents. One day he had come upon a sightless creature unlike any he had seen before. He slew it, and was carried straight to heaven, for the creature had been an ascetic planning the death of all beings. Kauśika, on the other hand, was a priest who had sworn a vow of truthfulness. Some men had fled from robbers into the forest; when the robbers approached Kauśika and demanded to know where they had gone, he told them, and they found and killed the men. For this, Kauśika entered a terrible hell.

Kṛṣṇa now asks Arjuna whether he still believes that he should kill Yudhiṣṭhira. Arjuna reminds him of his vow, and asks Kṛṣṇa to advise him: how may he preserve the vow without killing his brother? Kṛṣṇa's advice is that Yudhiṣṭhira spoke when weary and wounded, and so does not deserve to die: instead, Arjuna should address him without using the normal forms of respect,² for to an elder lack of respect is tantamount to death. Arjuna does so, rebuking Yudhiṣṭhira for scolding him when far from the battle himself. Bhīma, who is fighting so valiantly, has the right to scold him, but not Yudhiṣṭhira, for whose sake the battle is being fought, yet who has brought about the family's disaster himself. After speaking in this manner, Arjuna is filled with remorse and proposes to take his own life; Kṛṣṇa tells him instead to proclaim his own virtues to Yudhiṣṭhira. Arjuna does so, then takes leave of Yudhiṣṭhira so that he may go to do battle against Karna. But now Yudhiṣṭhira announces that he has done wrong: he cannot bear the harsh words that Arjuna has spoken, and will go into exile in the forest, leaving Bhīma to become king. Kṛṣṇa explains why Arjuna spoke as he did, and promises that Karna will die today. Yudhiṣṭhira thanks Kṛṣṇa for saving them from calamity.

[50] Arjuna is distressed to have addressed Yudhiṣṭhira in such a way, and at Kṛṣṇa's suggestion he asks for forgiveness. The two brothers are reconciled, and Arjuna vows to kill Karna that very day. His chariot is prepared, and he sets out towards Karna amongst auspicious portents. Kṛṣṇa, observing that he is anxious, praises him highly; he says that Karna is a great warrior whom no one but Arjuna can slay, and urges him to his task.

[51] Kṛṣṇa points out to Arjuna that today, on the seventeenth day of the

¹ The stories seem to be variants of those told at 3.197–206.

² Using 'thou' instead of 'your honour'.

battle, the Kaurava forces are greatly reduced from their original vast numbers. Arjuna himself has killed great numbers of enemies. The deaths of the mighty Kaurava leaders Bhīṣma and Drona were due to Arjuna, and now they are gone the Kauravas are reduced to only five great warriors: Aśvatthāman, Kṛtavarmā, Karna, Śalya and Kṛpa. Arjuna may have reservations about killing four of these, but he should not hesitate to slay Karna. Karna has always been the Pāṇḍavas' bitterest enemy, and Arjuna should take joy in killing him. [52] Encouraged by Kṛṣṇa's words, Arjuna vows to slay Karna that very day, destroying the Kauravas' hopes and avenging the insults suffered by the Pāṇḍavas.

[53] The battle is raging, and heroes on both sides are engaged in combat against one another. Uttamaujas beheads Karna's son Suṣeṇa and destroys Kṛpa's horses and chariot; Śikhaṇḍīn sees Kṛpa chariotless, but declines to attack him. [54] Meanwhile Bhīma continues to fight alone. He is attacked by a large Kaurava force, but routs it; however, he remains deeply concerned at Arjuna's continued absence. At this point he observes the ranks of the enemy fleeing in panic, and realizes that Arjuna has returned to the battle. Viśoka, his charioteer, confirms this, and Bhīma rewards him richly for announcing such welcome news.

[55] At Arjuna's command, Kṛṣṇa drives towards Bhīma. Arjuna is attacked by many Kaurava warriors, but he overwhelms them single-handed; then he penetrates the enemy army. Again he comes under attack, but he scatters his attackers like a wind dispersing clouds, and kills them in their thousands. The survivors flee, and Arjuna faces Karna's array. Bhīma is delighted to hear the sound of his approach, and renews his assault on the Kauravas. Duryodhana commands his men to kill him, and they strive to do so, but Bhīma slaughters them in vast numbers, causing a river of blood to flow. Now Duryodhana urges Śakuni to overcome Bhīma, and the two men engage in combat. After a fierce exchange, Bhīma succeeds in killing Śakuni's horses and charioteer and leaves him almost lifeless on the ground. Bhīma continues his rout of the demoralized Kaurava warriors, who flee; but then their retreat brings them to where Karna stands, and the sight of him restores their spirits.

[56] — Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks to hear how Karna and the other Kaurava leaders responded to Bhīma's onslaught against the Kaurava army, and Saṃjaya narrates. — Seeing Bhīma crushing the Dhṛtarāṣṭra forces, Karna commands Śalya to drive him to the Pāñcālas, where he proceeds to slay great numbers of the Pāṇḍava troops. He is surrounded and attacked by Śikhaṇḍīn, Bhīma, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Nakula, Sahadeva, Saṃyaki and the sons of Draupadī, but he overcomes them

all and forces them to retreat; then he returns to his assault on the Pāṇḍava army, which he ravages like a lion attacking a herd of deer. The other senior Kauravas likewise slaughter the Pāṇḍavas in great numbers, while the Pāṇḍava heroes slaughter the Kauravas.

[57] Arjuna sees the various heroes fighting one another, and asks Kṛṣṇa to drive him towards Karna; Kṛṣṇa does so. Śalya sees him approaching and urges Karna to do battle against him, assuring him that he is the only warrior capable of matching Arjuna. Karna notes that Śalya is once again behaving agreeably towards him. Next he discourses at length on Arjuna's might and his heroic achievements; either he will kill Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa today, or they will kill him. He then asks a number of leading Kauravas to engage Arjuna in combat so as to weary him. They do so, but Arjuna is too much for them, and he overcomes them all.

[58] Now Arjuna sets about rescuing Bhīma, who is beginning to sink under the Kaurava attack. The earth is soon covered with the bodies of warriors, horses and elephants, and with broken chariots. The Kauravas flee, and Arjuna meets Bhīma and tells him that the arrows have now been removed from Yudhiṣṭhīra's body. Then he does battle with ten of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons, and slays them.

[59] As Kṛṣṇa drives him towards Karna's chariot, Arjuna is attacked by ninety sworn warriors; he kills them all. Then another large body of Kauravas assails him with a great shower of arrows, but he disperses them with his own arrows. Next comes a barbarian force riding elephants; these too are slain. Bhīma observes that Arjuna is surrounded, and comes to his rescue, killing with his club those who have survived Arjuna's own attack. The two Pāṇḍava brothers continue to afflict the Kaurava forces, who flee from them. The despairing Dhṛtarāṣṭras approach Karna; he tells them not to fear, and continues his deadly attack on the Pāñcālas.

Samjaya spoke:

[60] Then, O king, as the Kurus were routed by the chariot-fighter Arjuna with his white horses, Karna the Sūta's son slaughtered the sons of the Pāñcālas with his mighty arrows, like a wind dispersing a mass of clouds. With his añjalika weapon he struck Janamejaya's¹ driver down

¹ This refers to a Pāñcāla prince, not the Janamejaya to whom Vaiśampāyana relates the Mahābhārata.

from his chariot and slew his horses; then he poured showers of broad arrows upon Śatānika and Sutasoma, severing their bows. Next in that battle the Sūta's son pierced Dhrṣṭadyumna with six arrows, and slew his rightmost horse; slaying Sātyaki's horses too, he then killed Viśoka, son of the Kekaya king. Upon the death of the prince, the Kekaya general Ugradhanvan attacked Karna and struck his son Suṣeṇa,¹ piercing him deeply with his fiercely speeding arrows. But with three half-moon arrows Karna violently severed his arms and his head, and he fell lifeless from his chariot to the earth like a *śāla* tree felled with axes. Now that Sātyaki, the heroic heir of Śini, was horseless, Karna's son Suṣeṇa covered him with sharp, speeding arrows, seeming to dance as he did so; then he himself fell, slain by Sātyaki's arrows.

Seeing his son killed, Karna, his mind full of fury, longed to slay the bull of the Śinis; crying, 'Sātyaki, you are dead!' he shot at him an enemy-vanquishing arrow. But Śikhaṇḍin cut off Karna's arrow with three arrows, and with three more he struck Karna himself. Fierce Karna severed Śikhaṇḍin's bow and his standard with two arrows, and struck noble Śikhaṇḍin himself, piercing him with six; then, full of self-control, the noble son of Adhiratha severed the head of Dhrṣṭadyumna's son, and pierced Sutasoma with a sharp arrow.

Now as the tumultuous battle proceeded, Kṛṣṇa, observing that the son of Dhrṣṭadyumna had been killed, addressed Arjuna, O lion-like king: 'The Pāñcālas are being wiped out! Advance, son of Kuntī! Slay Karna!' Then with a laugh that strong-armed hero travelled in his chariot towards the chariot of Karna, hoping to rescue the Pāñcālas in the danger they faced from that leading chariot-fighter, who was slaughtering them. He stretched his fierce-roaring bow Gāṇḍīva, and snapped the bowstring hard against his palm. Then in an instant he created darkness with his arrows as he destroyed chariots and slew elephants, horses and men. Bhīma followed him in his chariot to protect the solitary Pāṇḍava hero from the rear; the two princes hastened in their chariots towards Karna, while their enemies kept out of their way.

Meanwhile the Sūta's son was fighting a great battle and crushing the Somakas. He destroyed chariots, horses and elephants in throngs and

¹ Suṣeṇa was earlier said to have been killed by Uttamaujas: see 8.53.

covered the horizon with his arrows. Uttamaujas, Janamejaya and the furious Yudhāmanyu and Śikhaṇḍin, together with Dhrṣṭadyumna heir of Prṣata, roared loudly as together they attacked him with their arrows. The five heroic Pāñcāla chariot-fighters rushed at Karna the Cutter, but they could no more tip him from his chariot than sensual temptations can cause a disciplined man to fall from steadfastness. Karna roared like a lion as he destroyed with his shafts their bows, standards, horses, drivers, arrow-cases and banners, and struck each of them with five arrows. As he shot and slew, his hand busy with arrows and bowstring, people began to fear that the earth itself, with all its mountains and trees, was being split open by the sound of his bow. Shooting arrows with a fully stretched bow that looked like the bow of Indra,¹ the son of Adhiratha shone in battle like the sun with its corona, encircled by blazing rays.

He pierced Śikhaṇḍin with twelve sharp shafts, and Uttamaujas with six; he wounded Yudhāmanyu with three swift arrows, and the Somaka prince Janamejaya and Prṣata's heir with three each. Sir, those five mighty foe-crushing chariot-fighters, defeated in that great battle by the Sūta's son, stood enfeebled like sensual temptations overcome by a self-possessed man. Then as they all floundered, like shipwrecked merchants, in the ocean that was Karna, the sons of Draupadī rescued their uncles with their well-equipped chariots like ships.

Now Sātyaki, bull of the Śinis, cut down with his sharp shafts the many arrows discharged by Karna; he wounded Karna with his iron shafts and pierced your eldest son with eight of them. Then Kṛpa, the Bhoja king Kṛtavarman and your son Duryodhana, together with Karna himself, struck Sātyaki with their own sharp arrows. He, the best of the Yadus, fought with all four of them like a demon lord fighting with the four world-guardian gods; bending his roaring bow and stretching it fiercely to shower numberless arrows on his enemies, Sātyaki was as unassailable as the sun in the middle of the autumn sky. The enemy-afflicting Pāñcāla chariot-fighters, once more armed and mounted, combined in that great battle to protect the heroic heir of Śini, as the hosts of the Maruts protect Indra when he subjugates his enemies. Then a most terrible battle took place between your opponents and your

¹ The rainbow.

soldiers, resulting in the destruction of chariots, horses and elephants, like the battle of the gods and demons long ago. Chariots, elephants, horses and footsoldiers reeled hither and thither, covered with weapons of every kind; struck by one another, they stumbled, moaned in distress, and fell lifeless.

At this point your son Duhśāsana, younger brother of the king, advanced fearlessly against Bhīma, showering him with arrows. Wolf-belly Bhīma rushed straight at him like a lion falling upon a large *nuru* deer; then the two of them engaged in a superhuman battle as they gambled with one another in a wager for life, each enraged with the other, like mighty Indra and Śambara.¹ They struck each other fiercely with well-pointed, death-dealing arrows, like two mighty elephants, both in rut and both lusting for the same female. The wolf-belly rapidly cut off your son's bow and his standard with two razor-edged arrows, and pierced his forehead with a feathered shaft; then he severed his driver's head from his body. Prince Duhśāsana took up another bow and pierced the wolf-belly with twelve arrows. Then, driving the chariot himself, he covered Bhīma with shower upon shower of straight-flying shafts.

[61] Then, as he fought in that tumultuous battle, the prince Duhśāsana did a hard deed: he severed Bhīma's bow with a razor-edged arrow, and further pierced his charioteer with six shafts; then the noble hero swiftly wounded Bhīma with many excellent arrows. At this Bhīma, like an elephant flowing with rut, hurled his club at him in the midst of the tumult. The force of Bhīma's blow carried Duhśāsana ten bow-lengths from his chariot; struck down by that speeding club, the prince fell, quivering. Lord of men, his horses and driver were killed and his chariot reduced to dust by that club as it fell; he writhed in a torment of agony, his armour and ornaments, his garments and garlands in ruins.

5 Then the spirited Bhīma, calling to mind the enmity enacted by your sons, leapt down from his chariot on to the ground, fixing his eye eagerly upon him. Drawing his sharp sword with its excellent blade, and treading upon the throat of the writhing man, he cut open his breast as he lay on the ground, and drank his warm blood. Then, having quaffed

1 Śambara was a demon killed by Indra.

and quaffed again, he looked about him, and in his rage spoke these extravagant words: 'Better than mother's milk, or honey with ghee, better than well-prepared mead, better than a draught of the water of heaven, or milk or curd, or the finest buttermilk, today I consider this draught of the blood of my enemy better than all of these!' With these words he rushed forward once more, bounding on in exhilaration after his drink; and those who saw him then, they too fell down, confounded with fear. And even those men who did not themselves fall, their weapons dropped from their hands, and they howled loudly in their fear, and closed their eyes so as not to see the scene. Those on all sides who saw Bhīma there, drinking that blood of Duhśāsana, all fled, overpowered by fear, and they said, 'This is no mortal man!'

10 Then as the world's heroes stood listening, Bhīma spoke again. 'Here I drink the blood from your throat, basest of men! Now work yourself once more into a frenzy and call out "Cow! Cow!"¹ We were attacked as we slept at Pramāṇakotī; we were fed deadly poison; we were horribly bitten by snakes; our house of lac was set on fire;² our kingdom was stolen in a wager; we were exiled to the forest; we have suffered arrows and spears in battle, and many griefs at home. Thanks to the wickedness of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his son, these woes are all we know – we have never known happiness!'

15 After uttering these words, great king, the wolf-belly spoke further to Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, smiling for the victory he had won: 'O heroes, today I have accomplished here all that I swore to do with Duhśāsana in battle; and today I shall also fulfil my second vow by slaughtering Duryodhana like a sacrificial beast! I shall not find peace until I have trampled his head with my foot before all the Kauravas!' With these words he roared aloud in delight, his limbs all drenched with blood; noble Bhīma of mighty strength danced like thousand-eyed Indra after slaying Vṛtra.

[62] Ten of Duhśāsana's brothers attack Bhīma; Arjuna kills all of them, and the Kaurava army takes flight. Śalya urges Karṇa to do battle with Arjuna,

1 Bhīma is referring to Duhśāsana's jeering words at 2.68.19.

2 See 1.119.29–35, 39–41, 36–8; 1.132–6.

reminding him that Duryodhana had given him full responsibility for the conduct of the war. Meanwhile, Karna's son Vṛṣasena attacks Bhīma, and is then attacked in turn by Nakula. The two heroes fight fiercely. Vṛṣasena kills Nakula's horses, but Nakula continues to fight on foot, leaping about so nimbly that he seems to fly like a bird; then he mounts Bhīma's chariot. The battle rages on. Vṛṣasena attacks the Pāṇḍavas, and Arjuna faces him; Vṛṣasena pierces him with many arrows, but in response Arjuna shoots arrows that penetrate Vṛṣasena's vital organs and sever his bow, his arms and his head. Seeing his son slain, Karna immediately advances against Arjuna.

[63] Arjuna and Karna face each other ready to do battle, two glorious, evenly matched warriors. The Dhārtarāṣṭras support Karna, the Pāṇḍavas Arjuna; all mortal and immortal beings likewise take sides. Indra requests Brahmā and Śiva to grant victory to Arjuna; they answer that Karna will attain heaven, but Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa will attain victory. The two heroes prepare to fight one another. In response to a question from Karna, Śalya promises that in the event of Karna's death he will kill both Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna; but when Arjuna puts a similar question to Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa assures him that Karna will not be able to slay him. Arjuna vows that soon he will avenge the insult to Draupadī and the death of Abhimanyu by killing Karna.

[64] Arjuna and Karna, each surrounded by troops of their supporters, begin to assail one another's forces. Arjuna is attacked by a group of Kauravas led by Duryodhana which he defeats easily, and then by a much larger enemy force which he slaughters, prompting celestial cries of 'Bravo!' and a shower of flowers. Aśvatthāman attempts to persuade Duryodhana to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas, but Duryodhana insists on continuing hostilities, assuring him that Karna will kill Arjuna. Then he orders his warriors to fight.

Samjaya spoke:

[65] As the din of conches and kettledrums increased, Arjuna and Karna the Cutter, the Sūta's son, both foremost of heroes, both with white horses, met in battle, thanks to the evil policy of your son, O king. Like two rutting Himālayan elephants brandishing tusks against each other for a female, the two heroes, wealth-winner Arjuna and the son of Adhiratha, attacked each other with fierce speed. Their meeting, as both poured forth showers of arrows while their bows and chariot-wheels thundered and the bowstrings roared against their palms, was like the

chance collision of two storm-clouds, or two mountains; like the clash of two mighty mountains, teeming with peaks and trees, creepers and herbs, and with the various creatures that dwell on mountains, they struck each other with their mighty weapons. Their encounter was as fierce as that of Indra king of the gods with Virocana's son Bali long ago;¹ the bodies of their charioteers and steeds were mangled with arrows, till a river of acrid blood began to flow. No other warriors could possibly have borne it.

As their two chariots approached one another, each bearing its standard, they seemed like two great lakes lying close together, stirred by the wind, full of red and blue lotuses, fish and turtles, and resounding with the cries of flocks of birds. Both those mighty chariot-fighters resembled great Indra; both were equal to great Indra in valour; they fought each other like great Indra fighting Vṛtra, using arrows like great Indra's thunderbolts. Both armies, with their elephants, footsoldiers, horses and chariots, adorned with ornaments, garments and garlands of wonderful colours, trembled with amazement as they craned to see the battle of Arjuna and Karna, and so did the celestials. Passionate onlookers raised their arms and roared like lions when the son of Adhiratha advanced on Arjuna to slay him, like one rutting elephant advancing on another. Then the Somakas cried out to Kuntī's son, 'Make haste, Arjuna, go and pierce Karna! Do not delay! Cut off his head and Duryodhana's hopes of kingship!' And in the same way many of our fighters then called out to Karna, 'Go, Karna, go! Kill Arjuna, Karna, and then let Kuntī's sons return in rags for another long stay in the forest!'

It was Karna who now first pierced Arjuna with ten great arrows. In return, Arjuna, enraged beyond measure, pierced him in the armpit with ten sharp-pointed shafts. Then the Sūta's son and Arjuna hewed at each other with the keenest of arrows; filled with a dreadful joy, they advanced to seek out each other's weak spots in the battle. As the mighty conflict wore on, noble Bhīma lost patience; angrily beating one hand against the other and biting his lower lip, he looked as though he was dancing to the sound of an instrument. 'How can it be,' he demanded,

¹ See 5.128.5 and note.

15 'that the son of a Sūta was first to pierce you with ten arrows, O wearer of the diadem? You showed great fortitude when you vanquished all beings at Khāṇḍavaprastha to feed the god of Fire; now slay the Sūta's son with that same fortitude, or I shall smash him with my club!'

Then Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva also addressed Kuntī's son, when he saw that warrior's arrows being struck down by his enemy: 'What is this, wearer of the diadem? Today Karna has utterly crushed your weapons with his own! Why are you daydreaming, hero? Are you not aware of these Kurus all roaring with joy for Karna, because they have seen your weapons brought down by his? You have shown great fortitude in age after age by destroying the weapons of darkness, and by slaying terrible Rākṣasas and demons in battle, as well as Dambhodbhava and his followers;¹ now slay the Sūta's son with that same fortitude! Violently sever the head of your enemy now with Sudarśana, this razor-edged discus of mine – I give it to you – like Indra beheading his enemy Namuci with his 20 thunderbolt! You showed great fortitude when you satisfied Lord Śiva in his form as a mountain man;² now take up that fortitude once again, hero, and slay the Sūta's son and his followers! Then, when all the hosts of your enemies lie dead, present the sea-girdled earth with all its cities and villages and wealth to King Yudhiṣṭhīra, and attain matchless glory, son of Kuntī!'

When both Bhīma and Kṛṣṇa the stirrer of men urged him so, Arjuna recalled himself and considered his mettle; and, knowing as he did the reason for noble Kṛṣṇa's presence on earth, he answered him thus: 'For the good of the world and the death of the Sūta's son I shall now bring forth a mighty and fierce Weapon. Let me have your permission, sir, and also that of the gods, and Brahmā and Śiva, and those who know *brahman*.' With these words he brought forth the unbearable Weapon of Brahmā, which has to be deployed with the mind, and with it that hero of mighty ardour covered the entire horizon with arrows, both the cardinal and intermediate points; Bharata's bull-like heir shot swift-flying arrows in hundreds as though shooting a single shaft.

¹ Kṛṣṇa (Nārāyaṇa) is here referring to Arjuna's deeds as his companion Nara. For Dambhodbhava, see 5.94.

² See 3.40.

25 But Karna the Cutter likewise let fly hosts of arrows by the thousand in the middle of the battlefield, and these thundered down on Pāṇḍu's son like torrents of water released by a storm-cloud. Fearful in strength and more than mortal in deed, Karna struck Bhīma and Kṛṣṇa and the wearer of the diadem with three arrows each; then he roared a terrible roar. When Kuntī's son was struck by Karna's shafts and saw that Bhīma and the stirrer of men were wounded too, he could not bear it, and he once again took up eighteen arrows. With one he pierced Suṣeṇa,¹ with four, Śalya, and with three, Karna. Then with ten well-shot shafts he slew Sabhāpati in his armour of gold, and that prince fell from the front of his chariot, headless, armless, steedless, driverless, bowless, bannerless, broken like a śāla tree felled with axes. Next he pierced Karna with three arrows, then with eight, with two, with four, with ten. He slew 400 elephants with the warriors who rode them; he slew 800 chariot-fighters, a thousand horses with their drivers, and 8,000 brave footsoldiers.

30 Onlookers reined in their steeds and remained where they were on earth or in heaven, watching the fight between those two foremost foeslaying heroes, the lords of battle, Karna and Kuntī's son. Then the string of the Pāṇḍava's bow, which he had drawn exceedingly tight, broke suddenly with a very loud noise. Immediately the Sūta's son covered the son of Kuntī with a hundred small arrows, and pierced Vāsudeva with sixty iron arrows like snakes that have sloughed their skins, sharp, well oiled and speeded by the feathers of birds. At this the Somakas fled headlong. Swiftly Kuntī's son restrung his bow and scattered the arrows shot by the son of Adhiratha, enraged as he was at the wounds to his body from Karna's shafts. He joined the Somakas on the battlefield, where his swift-flying weapons brought a darkness so dense that no birds flew in the sky. Laughing aloud, Arjuna violently pierced Śalya's armour with ten arrows; then he struck Karna with twelve well-shot shafts, and again with seven more. Wounded badly by the fiercely speeding feathered arrows swiftly propelled from the bow of Kuntī's son, Karna, his limbs torn, his body doused in blood, appeared like the fierce god

¹ See 8.60.4 and note; however, the reference here is probably to a son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra with the same name.

Rudra bending his bow. Then the son of Adhiratha pierced with three arrows wealth-winner Arjuna, who resembled Indra king of the gods. And in an effort to slay invincible Kṛṣṇa, he directed at him five blazing arrows like snakes. Well shot, they penetrated the bright golden armour of the highest lord; then, falling from his body, they swiftly entered the earth, where they bathed in the water of the underworld river before returning to Karṇa. But with five broad arrows, swift and well shot, the wealth-winner cut each one of them into three pieces, and they fell to the ground: they were five mighty snakes that had sided with Taksaka's son.¹

40 Then the wearer of the diadem blazed with anger, like fire consuming a dry thicket, and he drew his bow back to the ear to pierce Karṇa's vital organs with blazing, death-dealing arrows. Karṇa staggered with pain, but he stood steadfast, for he was a man of extreme steadfastness. Thanks to the anger of the wealth-winner, the cardinal and intermediate points of the horizon became invisible through his torrents of arrows, and so did the brightness of the sun, and Karṇa's chariot, O king, as if the sky were filled with winter fog. There were 2,000 foe-slaying chariot-fighters, excellent men picked at Duryodhana's own choice to protect the wheels of his chariots and the feet of his elephants, and to serve as his vanguard and rearguard; all these Kuru heroes, together with their chariots and horses and drivers, were dispatched in that battle in a moment, O king, by the solitary hero Arjuna, the ambidextrous bull of the Kurus. At that your sons and the surviving Kurus abandoned Karna and fled, leaving scattered behind them the slain and the wounded, 45 and their grieving sons and fathers. Karṇa looked all about him, and saw he was alone, deserted by the fear-ravaged Kurus. But he was unperturbed, heir of Bharata, and he rushed straight at Arjuna to attack him.

[66] The Kurus, fleeing the fall of Arjuna's arrows, their ranks broken, now halted, and they saw the wealth-winner's weapon darting all over the battlefield, like a lightning-flash. That weapon of Arjuna, swiftly released by Kuntī's furious son to slay Karṇa in the great battle, consumed the Kaurava heroes as the ever-resounding ether consumes all empty

¹ At the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest: see 1.218.

space.¹ But Karna blew Arjuna's flaming weapon apart with the foe-destroying magic weapon of mighty power that he had obtained from Rāma Jāmadagnya, and he struck Kuntī's son with many sharp arrows. Tremendous then was the battle between Arjuna and Adhiratha's son, O king, as they attacked each other with arrows like two elephants fighting with fierce blows of their tusks. In that battle Karṇa fixed a dreadful foe-slaying arrow to his bow, keenly sharpened, snake-headed, blazing, well oiled and deadly as venom, for it was descended from the serpent Airāvata. For long years he had saved it for Kuntī's son, always treating it with honour, keeping it in a golden cylinder amid sandalwood dust; now he planned to sever Arjuna's head with that blazing arrow in battle.

At this point noble Śalya king of Madra, seeing the Cutter with that arrow fixed to his bow, said to him, 'Karṇa, this arrow of yours will never cut through a neck! Choose some head-severing arrow to fix to your bow!'

10 Karṇa, his eyes red with rage, answered Śalya as he obstinately aimed the arrow, 'Śalya, Karṇa does not aim his arrow twice; warriors like me are never devious!' With these words he released that arrow Balāhaka that he had honoured for so many years,² crying, 'Arjuna, you are dead!' as he swiftly shot the powerful shaft. But Madhu's heir Kṛṣṇa, mightiest of the mighty, seeing Karṇa aim that serpent-weapon, used all his might to tread down on the chariot with both feet; the chariot sank into the ground, till the horses were on their knees, and so that arrow struck wise Arjuna's diadem. Thus the Sūta's son, for all the furious effort with which he discharged that powerful weapon, severed with his arrow only the ornament worn by Arjuna on his head, famous throughout earth, air, sky and water.

Brilliant as sun, moon or stars, adorned with gold and with clusters of pearls, it had been fashioned with care and austerity for Indra by the self-born Brahmā himself; very costly in appearance, yet an object of

¹ The ether (*ākāśa*) is an non-perceptible but all-permeating element, the location of sound.

² The name Balāhaka is applied to a particular race of serpents, and I take it to be used here as the name of Karṇa's serpent-weapon, identified with Taksaka's son Aśvasena (see 1.218). Curiously, the word can also mean 'storm-cloud', and the whole phrase could mean 'a storm-cloud honoured by rain-clouds'.

fear to enemies, it was exceedingly lovely to look upon and sweet to smell, and the lord of the gods, pleased with Arjuna's slaughter of the enemies of the gods, had given it to him with his own hand for him to become the diadem-wearer.¹ Not Śiva with his weapon Pināka, not Varuna lord of the waters with his noose, not Indra with his thunderbolt, not Kubera the protector of wealth with the finest arrow, not even the greatest gods could harm it, but Karṇa now violently severed it with his serpent-weapon. Destroyed by that excellent arrow with the fire of its venom, blazing with flames, Arjuna's glorious, much-loved diadem fell to the ground as the burning sun falls behind the western mountain at sunset.

So Karṇa's serpent-weapon forcibly struck off from Arjuna's head his gem-studded diadem, like great Indra's thunderbolt striking off a mountain's highest peak, covered with trees bearing blossom and lovely shoots. And just as happens when earth, air, sky and water are rent by storm and wind, heir of Bharata, a mighty noise arose then in all the worlds, while people resolved to stand firm, yet still staggered in distress. But Arjuna stood unperturbed, and tied up his hair with a white cloth, till he resembled the eastern mountain crowned by the rising sun blazing with all its rays. As for that mighty serpent Balāhaka himself, Arjuna's sworn enemy, hurled by the arm of Karṇa and blazing bright as fire or sun, after striking Arjuna's diadem to the ground he rose up high once more and said, 'Kṛṣṇa, you should know that I have been wronged! My enmity arises from the slaying of my mother!'

Then Kṛṣṇa spoke to Kuntī's son on the field of battle, and told him to kill that mighty serpent, his sworn enemy. Hearing the words of Madhu's slayer, Arjuna, bearer of the bow Gāndīva, fierce Bowman against his enemies, said, 'Who is this serpent who has chosen to approach me today, as if approaching the mouth of Garuḍa himself?'

'He is one', replied Kṛṣṇa, 'whose body you pierced with your arrows as, bow in hand, you sought to satisfy the god of Fire at Khāṇḍavaprastha. Assuming a different form he took to the air, but you slew his mother.'²

Then victorious Arjuna, ignoring everyone else, shot six sharp arrows

¹ See 3.170-71.

² See 1.218.

with excellent blades, and cut down that serpent as it rose slantwise into the air; its body cut to pieces, it fell to earth. At that instant, Karṇa, glaring at Arjuna, pierced the heroic wealth-winner with ten stone-whetted, peacock-feathered arrows. Arjuna, striking him with twelve sharp arrows shot from a well-stretched bowstring, now released an excellent iron shaft that sped like a venomous snake as he drew it all the way back to his ear. The well-shot shaft tore through Karṇa's bright shield as if to dispel his vital breath. It drank his blood, and then entered the earth, its feathers smeared with his gore. Enraged at the wound from this arrow like a snake that is struck with a stick, he rapidly shot back many deadly shafts, as a poisonous snake would spit deadly venom. He pierced Kṛṣṇa the stirrer of men with twelve shafts, and Arjuna with ninety-nine; then, wounding Pāṇḍu's son with one more terrible arrow, he roared and laughed aloud.

The Pāṇḍava could not tolerate Karṇa's joy; with his expertise in the vital organs of the body and his Indra-like valour, he powerfully pierced Karṇa's vital organs with his feathered arrows, just as Indra used his might to slay Bala. Then Arjuna shot at Karṇa ninety-nine arrows like the staff of Yama, till Karṇa was shaken by intense physical pain, as a mountain is shaken when struck by a thunderbolt; his crown, adorned as it was with wonderful jewels and the finest gold and diamonds, fell to the ground, severed by Arjuna's feathered shafts, and so too did his lovely earrings. His costly, shining armour, lovingly crafted for him over years by the best artisans, was smashed to pieces in a moment by the Pāṇḍava's arrows. Now that he was without armour, the furious Arjuna pierced him with four excellent shafts, till Karṇa, deeply afflicted by his enemy's blows, seemed like a diseased man, suffering from wounds caused by phlegm, bile and wind.¹

Now Arjuna made haste to hew at Karṇa and pierce his vital organs with all his deadly, sharp arrows, shooting them with care and power, his great bow drawn tight in a circle. Wounded badly by the Pāṇḍava's many fiercely speeding, sharp-bladed shafts, Karṇa looked like a mountain dyed red by its mineral ores, its cliffs flowing with reddened water. Then, heir of Bharata, the wearer of the diadem covered Karṇa, his

¹ The three bodily humours of Indian medicine.

horse and his chariot with calves-tooth arrows, exerting himself to envelop the very horizon with his gold-shafted bolts. Covered with those calves-tooth arrows, the broad-chested son of Adhiratha appeared like a mountain covered with blooming *āsoka*, *palāśa* and kapok trees¹ and quivering sandal trees; struck on the body by so many arrows in battle, lord of the peoples, he seemed like a mighty mountain with tree-lined summits and caves, covered with lovely *Karnikāra* trees. Bloodied, but still shooting volleys of arrows like beams of light from his bow, he looked like the disc of the sun with its red rays approaching the western mountain at sunset; but the blazing shafts like mighty snakes shot from the arm of Adhiratha's son were attacked and destroyed wherever they were by sharp-bladed arrows shot from Arjuna's arm.

Then Karṇa's wheel sank into the ground. In the thick of battle the Sūta's son was distraught to see his chariot keel over through the Brahmin's curse, and the weapon of Rāma Jāmadagnya lose its lustre.² He could not bear these disasters; he shook his fists and railed at *dharma*. 'Always experts in *dharma* have proclaimed that *dharma* protects those who honour *dharma*. But my base *dharma* is not protecting me today, despite my devotion to it. It does not appear to me that *dharma* always protects!' Even as he spoke, while his horses and charioteer stumbled, Arjuna's weapons continued to fall and set him reeling. Deluded in his actions by the wounds to his vital organs, he railed against *dharma* again and again on the battlefield.³ He pierced Kuntī's son with three terrible shafts, then pierced him in the hand with seven more; but Arjuna shot at him seventeen straight-flying arrows, full of fiery energy, dreadful as Indra's thunderbolt, burning like fire, and these pierced through him with terrible speed before falling to the surface of the earth.

Though shaken to his very soul, Karṇa displayed his determination: he composed himself with all his strength, and then released the Weapon of Brahmā. But when Arjuna saw it, he countered by invoking the

¹ The blossom of all these trees is red.

² See 8.29.

³ At this point, unexpectedly, the narrative of the battle resumes (in *anuṣṭubh* metre, rather than the *trīṣṭubhs* that have been used till now), and we do not return to Karṇa's predicament for another fifteen stanzas. This is presumably the result of two versions of the story being patched together at an early period.

Weapon of Indra; the wealth-winner consecrated with *mantras* his bow Gāndīva, his bowstring and arrows, and then shot shafts in torrents, like Indra pouring forth rain. Those shafts issued forth from the chariot of Kuntī's son and appeared, in all their fiery energy and power, in front of Karṇa's chariot; but Karṇa, mighty chariot-fighter that he was, thwarted them as they multiplied before him.

Then Kṛṣṇa, hero of the Vṛṣnis, seeing that Arjuna's weapon had been destroyed, said, 'Shoot a better weapon, son of Kuntī! Rādhā's son is consuming all your arrows!' So Arjuna consecrated the Weapon of Brahmā, and deployed it: he covered Karṇa with arrows, sending him reeling. But Karṇa, enraged, severed Arjuna's bowstring with his own well-pointed shafts. Pāṇḍu's son fitted a new string and rubbed it down before showering Karṇa with blazing arrows in their thousands; so swift was he that Karṇa could not tell when the string broke and when it was refitted, which was a great wonder. But the son of Rādhā countered the weapons of the ambidextrous Arjuna with his own, showing even greater valour than Kuntī's son.

Kṛṣṇa saw that Arjuna was suffering greatly from Karṇa's shafts, and he told him, 'Keep trying! Use your best weapon!' Then the wealth-winner consecrated another celestial arrow: forged of iron, it was as deadly as fire or snake-venom. The wearer of the diadem had taken up this terrible weapon to shoot, when, in the midst of that mighty battle, the earth swallowed up the chariot-wheel of Rādhā's son.

Karṇa shed tears of rage to see his wheel stuck, and he said to Arjuna, 'Forbear for a moment, O Pāṇḍava! You can see that fate has caused my wheel to sink up to the axle; abandon your intention to act as only a coward would do, son of Kuntī! One whose hair is dishevelled¹ or who has turned away from battle, a Brahmin, one who has joined his hands together; one who seeks refuge, or who has cast aside his weapons, or been overtaken by disaster; one whose arrows are spent, or who has lost his armour, or whose weapons are lost or broken – no hero strikes at such a man on the battlefield, O Arjuna, nor does any prince do so to serve his king. And you are a hero, son of Kuntī; therefore forbear for a moment while I raise this wheel out of the earth! You should not

¹ In token of supplication.