

I shall dispatch them all to the realm of Yama with my sharp arrows.
 35 Mount Himālaya will shift position, the sun will grow dim, the moon lose its coolness, if my truth should falter; so if, in the fourteenth year from now, Duryodhana does not return the kingdom with due honour, this will all come true!'

When Arjuna had spoken, Mādrī's glorious son Sahadeva of mighty energy brandished a mighty arm; full of longing to achieve the death of Subala's son Śakuni, he spoke these words, hissing like a snake, his eyes red with rage: 'Fool and defiler of the good name of the Gāndhāras! What you suppose to be dice are not dice; they are sharp arrows, and
 40 you have chosen them for yourself in battle! I shall carry out the task Bhīma assigned me regarding you and your kin; you had best complete all your own tasks! I shall attack you and your kin in battle, and swiftly slay you, if, son of Subala, you will stand and fight according to Kṣatriya dharma.'

After Sahadeva had spoken, lord of the peoples, Nakula too, the most handsome of men, spoke these words: 'The wicked Dhārtarāṣṭras who, to remain in Duryodhana's favour, insulted Drupada's daughter in this gambling match, are seeking their own deaths, urged on by fate; I shall
 45 show many of them Yama's realm! At the command of Yudhiṣṭhira lord of dharma, and following Draupadī's path, I shall soon rid the earth of Dhārtarāṣṭra's sons!'

The brothers now go to Dhārtarāṣṭra. [69] Yudhiṣṭhira bids farewell to the Kauravas. Vidura says that Kuntī shall stay in his house while the Pāṇḍavas are away.

[70] Draupadī bids Kuntī farewell and goes forth, weeping, still wearing her menstrual garment, her hair unfastened. Kuntī, lamenting bitterly, bids farewell to her sons, who then leave for the forest. Vidura takes Kuntī to his house; then he receives a summons from Dhārtarāṣṭra, and goes to see him.

[71] Dhārtarāṣṭra asks about the manner of the Pāṇḍavas' departure, and Vidura describes how Yudhiṣṭhira covered his eyes to avoid burning those on whom his gaze fell; Bhīma showed the might of his arms; Arjuna sprinkled sand to indicate the numberless arrows he would shoot at his enemies; Nakula and Sahadeva disguised their appearance with mud and dust; Draupadī went stained and dishevelled, in token that in the fourteenth year the wives of her

enemies would grieve over their slain menfolk; Dhaumya sang the hymns for the dead, in token that the same hymns would later be sung for the Kauravas. There were terrible portents as the Pāṇḍavas left the city. Now Nārada appears, pronounces that in the fourteenth year the Kauravas will perish, and vanishes.

Duryodhana, Karna and Śakuni appeal to Drona for support; he assents, but adds that Drupada's son Dhṛṣṭadyumna, who is to kill him, has sided with the Pāṇḍavas. In the fourteenth year the Kauravas will be slaughtered: better to make peace. Dhārtarāṣṭra is of the same opinion.

[72] Samjaya tells Dhārtarāṣṭra that the coming destruction is his fault. Dhārtarāṣṭra blames fate and the actions of those who insulted Draupadī; Vidura had given him good advice, but, from partiality towards his son, he had not taken it.

THE FOREST

THE FOREST

[1] — Janamejaya asks Vaiśampāyana to tell how the Pāṇḍavas fared after their defeat at dicing, and Vaiśampāyana begins to narrate. — The Pāṇḍavas, together with Draupadī and a small number of attendants, leave Hāstīnapura and head north. The people of the city, reviling the Kauravas, follow them with the intention of sharing their exile, but at Yudhiṣṭhīra's entreaty they agree sadly to return to their homes. The Pāṇḍavas travel on, accompanied by a group of Brahmins; they camp for the night on the bank of the Gāṅgā.

[2] In the morning, Yudhiṣṭhīra attempts to persuade the Brahmins to return: hardships lie ahead, and he will not be able to provide for them. But the Brahmins insist that they wish to remain with him in the forest. One of their number, the wise Śaunaka, instructs Yudhiṣṭhīra: love and the passion it arouses are to be shunned; wealth does not bring happiness; sensual pleasures lead to destruction. He advises Yudhiṣṭhīra to practise austerities. [3] Yudhiṣṭhīra approaches Dhaumya, his priest, and asks how he may provide for the Brahmins; Dhaumya advises him to turn to the Sun, source of all nourishment. Yudhiṣṭhīra now performs austerities and worships the Sun, invoking him under his hundred and eight names. [4] The Sun reveals himself to Yudhiṣṭhīra and promises to provide him with food for twelve years; Yudhiṣṭhīra now feeds the Brahmins and his brothers. Then they all travel on to the Kāmyaka forest.

[5] Meanwhile, Dhṛtarāṣṭra consults Vidura and asks him how the loyalty of the people may be secured. Vidura's advice is to restore the Pāṇḍavas and repudiate Śakuni; otherwise the Kurus will be destroyed. But Dhṛtarāṣṭra rejects this counsel and dismisses Vidura, who sets out to join the Pāṇḍavas.

[6] The Pāṇḍavas have reached the Kāmyaka forest and settled there. Vidura

arrives; Yudhiṣṭhīra is fearful that he brings yet another summons to gamble, but greets him with honour. Vidura explains that Dhṛtarāṣṭra has rejected him for advocating a policy of conciliation; Yudhiṣṭhīra replies that he will himself adhere to that policy.

[7] Dhṛtarāṣṭra is overcome with grief at his treatment of Vidura, and sends Samjaya to find him and bring him back. Samjaya travels to the Kāmyaka forest and finds Vidura there with the Pāṇḍavas. Vidura agrees to his request and returns with him to Hāstīnapura; he forgives Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and the two are reconciled.

[8] When Duryodhana hears the news of the reconciliation between Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Vidura, he is enraged, fearing that the Pāṇḍavas will be restored. Śakuni, Duḥśāsana and Karna all agree that this will not happen; but Karna then proposes that the four of them should go and kill the Pāṇḍavas, and this is joyfully agreed upon. They set forth in their chariots; but Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, perceiving with his divine insight what they are doing, arrives and stops them. Then he goes to see Dhṛtarāṣṭra, [9] and warns him that his son's hatred of the Pāṇḍavas will bring catastrophe. The advice of the elders should be heeded: Dhṛtarāṣṭra should reject Duryodhana and make peace with the Pāṇḍavas.

[10] Dhṛtarāṣṭra ascribes the unfolding disaster to fate and his love for his son. Vyāsa agrees that love for a son overcomes everything else, and tells the story of the cow Surabhi, who cried to Indra when a ploughman beat her son, until Indra sent heavy rain to stop the ploughing. The Pāṇḍavas are Vyāsa's own son's sons; therefore he urges Dhṛtarāṣṭra to make peace with them.

[11] Now the seer Maitreya arrives. He has met the Pāṇḍavas in the forest, and denounces Dhṛtarāṣṭra for conniving at Duryodhana's wrongdoing; then he addresses Duryodhana directly and tells him to make peace. Duryodhana says nothing. Maitreya now curses him: there will be a great war, in which Bhūma will smash his thigh with his club. Dhṛtarāṣṭra pleads; Maitreya replies that the curse will come to pass unless Duryodhana seeks peace. Then he leaves.

THE KILLING OF KIRMĀRA

[12] Maitreya had mentioned that Bhūma had killed the Rākṣasa Kirmāra; Dhṛtarāṣṭra now asks Vidura to tell the story, and he does so. — When the Pāṇḍavas entered the Kāmyaka, they had encountered a dreadful Rākṣasa, the

terror of the forest; he gave his name as Kirmīra, and announced that he would kill and eat Bhīma in revenge for Bhīma's slaying of his brother Baka and his friend Hidimba. Bhīma had uprooted a tree and struck Kirmīra with it, but the Rākṣasa replied in kind. A fierce wrestling match then took place, which concluded with Bhīma strangling Kirmīra to death. Thus the forest had been made safe, and the Pāṇḍavas made their dwelling there.

THE MAN OF THE MOUNTAINS

[13] The Pāṇḍavas are visited in the forest by their allies: the Bhojas, Vṛṣnis and Andhakas with Kṛṣṇa, and the lords of the Pāñcālas, Cedis and Kekayas. Kṛṣṇa reviles the Kauravas; to calm him, Arjuna praises his many great deeds, after which Kṛṣṇa declares that Arjuna and he are Nara and Nārāyaṇa, and are one and the same. Now Draupadī comes to Kṛṣṇa and pays him honour. Then she pours out her woes — the terrible treatment she underwent in the hall while her mighty husbands did nothing to protect her, and all the suffering caused by Duryodhana's previous outrages. Weeping, she upbraids all those who have allowed her to suffer so: her husbands, sons, brothers, father and other kin, as well as Kṛṣṇa himself. In reply, Kṛṣṇa swears that the wives of her enemies will weep; Dhṛṣṭadyumna vows that he will kill Drona, Śikhaṇḍin will kill Bhīṣma, Bhīma will kill Duryodhana, and Arjuna will kill Karna. [14] Kṛṣṇa assures Draupadī that if he had been in Dvārakā when the gambling match took place he would have attended it and prevented the disaster.

THE KILLING OF THE LORD OF SAUBHA

[15] Yudhiṣṭhīra asks Kṛṣṇa why he had been absent from Dvārakā, and Kṛṣṇa replies that he had visited the city of Saubha in order to destroy it. Then he tells the story. — When Śālva the demonic lord of Saubha heard that Kṛṣṇa had killed Śiśupāla, he attacked Dvārakā, slaying many young Vṛṣni warriors and swearing to kill Kṛṣṇa himself. Then he flew off in his aerial city. After his return, Kṛṣṇa learnt what had happened; he found Śālva and challenged him, and after a long battle destroyed him and his demon forces.

[16] — Yudhiṣṭhīra asks to hear this story in detail, and Kṛṣṇa begins to narrate. — Śālva launches a savage onslaught on Dvārakā, where strong defences are prepared. [17] The city is besieged and attacked; the Vṛṣni princes, Kṛṣṇa's own sons, rally to its defence. Sāmba does battle with Ksemavṛddhi, Śālva's general, and forces him back; then he fights and kills the demon Vegavat. Cāruḍeṣa does battle with the great demon warrior Vivindhya and kills him. Pradyumna makes ready to attack Śālva himself, [18] and then attacks him fiercely; Śālva fights back equally fiercely. Śālva is briefly rendered unconscious by one of Pradyumna's arrows, but then recovers; he in turn reduces Pradyumna to unconsciousness, then showers arrows upon him. [19] Pradyumna's charioteer Dāruki carries him off the field, but Pradyumna, coming round, remonstrates with him and orders him to return. [20] Dāruki does as he is bidden, and drives Pradyumna back to the battle against Śālva. Pradyumna wards off Śālva's arrows, and overcomes him with arrows of his own. He is about to kill him when he receives a warning from the gods not to do so, as it is ordained that Kṛṣṇa will bring about his death. Śālva flees.

[21] When Kṛṣṇa himself returns to Dvārakā he finds the city in a sorry state. He sets out for Saubha, promising that he will destroy it and slay Śālva. Śālva sees him coming; he keeps Saubha in mid-air and showers down demonic weapons, but Kṛṣṇa counters them all. [22] The battle continues. A messenger comes to tell Kṛṣṇa that Śālva has killed his father Vasudeva; Kṛṣṇa reasons that this must mean that the rest of his family must also be dead, and is overcome by grief. But then he pulls himself together, deciding that the message is a trick. [23] He battles on, while Śālva attacks him with demonic illusions. He is buried under a hail of rocks, but breaks out. Then he launches his discus Sudarśana at Saubha; the city is cut in two, and falls to earth. The discus returns to Kṛṣṇa's hand, and finally he kills Śālva with it. — After telling this story to Yudhiṣṭhīra, Kṛṣṇa leaves for Dvārakā. Dhṛṣṭadyumna and the Cedis and Kekayas also depart.

[24] The Pāṇḍavas continue on their way. The townsfolk accompanying them utter laments and revile Duryodhana; then they return to their homes. [25] Now the Pāṇḍavas consider where they should spend their exile; they agree on Lake Dvaitavāna, and travel there. Reaching the lovely spot, they establish themselves

under a mighty tree. [26] The great seer Mārkandeya visits the Pāṇḍavas in their new home. He warns Yudhiṣṭhīra not to commit adharma by resorting to force: he must serve out the full term of his exile. [27] The Brahmin Dālbhya Baka instructs Yudhiṣṭhīra on the benefits for a Kṣatriya of maintaining close contact with Brahmins.

[28] Draupadī contrasts the Pāṇḍavas' present miserable state with the joy of the Kauravas at their downfall, and with the opulent life they themselves used to live. She censures Yudhiṣṭhīra for his passivity in the face of all the hardships that she and his brothers must now endure, and asks how any true Kṣatriya could fail to be moved to anger at their plight. [29] Now she tells of the mighty demon Prahlāda's conversation with his grandson Bali: Bali had asked whether it was better to exercise forbearance or might, and Prahlāda had answered that different courses of action suit different occasions. In Draupadī's view the time for forbearance is past.

[30] Yudhiṣṭhīra replies that anger leads to evil and should not be indulged; better far is forbearance. [31] Draupadī counters that Yudhiṣṭhīra's adherence to dharma has not prevented catastrophe overtaking him. It is God, the ordainer, who commands all human actions, and humans are powerless to withstand his will; Draupadī censures him for causing Yudhiṣṭhīra's downfall. [32] Yudhiṣṭhīra remonstrates with Draupadī: he adheres to dharma not in hope of gain but because it is right. Proclaimed by wise seers, dharma is the only way to attain heaven. The rewards for practising dharma may be invisible to mortals, but they are assuredly real.

[33] Draupadī continues her plaint. All creatures must act; even what is fated by the ordainer results from a person's previous actions. Everything results from chance, fate and human endeavour; actions may succeed or fail, but one should not refrain from acting.

[34] Now Bhīma joins in the debate, and urges war against the Dhārtarāṣṭras. A dharma which brings nothing but harm is a false dharma; an excessive regard for dharma impedes the acquisition of wealth, and wealth is necessary for the proper practice of dharma itself. Yudhiṣṭhīra should breach a lesser dharma to achieve a greater: he should fight to regain his kingdom. [35] Yudhiṣṭhīra accepts that his actions have done them all great harm, but he insists that, having agreed to the gambling match, he must now accept the consequences. The time for vigorous action is long gone; they must all exercise forbearance.

[36] Bhīma speaks again. It does not befit a king to wait meekly, and all of

Yudhiṣṭhīra's brothers long to do battle against those who have wronged them. Anyway, how can such mighty heroes as they go unrecognized for a year, as required by the wager? Instead they should cut short their exile and fight, as is the Kṣatriya's dharma.

[37] Yudhiṣṭhīra warns that wilful, unplanned actions do not bring success. The Kauravas are armed and ready; to defeat them as things stand is impossible. Bhīma accepts that this is so. Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa now arrives and tells Yudhiṣṭhīra not to fear; he imparts to him special knowledge which will allow Arjuna to overcome their enemies by acquiring celestial weapons. The Pāṇḍavas travel from Dvaitavana to the Kāmyaka forest.

[38] Yudhiṣṭhīra teaches Arjuna the knowledge he received from Vyāsa, and tells him to travel north in search of the god Indra. Bearing his bow Gāndīva, Arjuna receives Draupadī's blessing and sets out. He travels far over the mountains, till an ascetic stops him and attempts to turn him back. Arjuna refuses; the ascetic announces that he is in fact Indra, and grants Arjuna a boon. Arjuna chooses celestial weapons, and Indra replies that he will grant these once Arjuna has met Śiva.

[39] — Janamejaya asks Vaiśampāyana to narrate the story of how Arjuna acquired the celestial weapons in detail, and Vaiśampāyana agrees to do so. — Arjuna travels to the peak of Himālaya; he settles in a beautiful wood there and performs fierce austerities. The seers visit Śiva to warn him of what Arjuna is doing, but Śiva answers that Arjuna's aim is not one that need alarm them, and that he will grant his wish at once.

[40] Śiva now assumes the form of a man of the mountains; bearing a bow, he comes to where Arjuna is. Arjuna is on the point of shooting at Mūka, a demon who has taken on the form of a boar to attack him; the mountain man shoots too. Furious, Arjuna threatens to kill him. The mountain man echoes his threats, and they fight, shooting many arrows at each other. Arjuna is astonished to find that his arrows have no effect on his opponent; when he has exhausted his supply he resorts in turn to the bow Gāndīva itself, a sword, and trees and rocks. Finally they wrestle with each other, and Arjuna is overcome. Śiva now praises Arjuna, who recognizes and propitiates the god. [41] He offers Arjuna a boon, and Arjuna chooses the Pāśupata Weapon, known as the Weapon of Brahma's Head.¹ Śiva agrees, but warns him that, improperly used, the Weapon

¹ Presumably this 'realizes' Drona's gift of this Weapon to Arjuna at the end of 1.123.

will destroy the entire world. After instructing Arjuna in its use, he returns to heaven.

[42] Now the world-guardian gods appear. Yama predicts that Arjuna will kill Karna, and gives him his staff; Varuṇa gives him his noose, and Kubera the Weapon of Disappearance. Indra tells Arjuna that he must visit him in heaven to receive further celestial weapons; he will send his own charioteer, Mātali, to take him there.

THE JOURNEY TO INDRA'S WORLD

[43] Mātali arrives with Indra's magnificent chariot and tells Arjuna to mount. After bathing in the Gaṅgā, Arjuna does so. They fly up, and Arjuna sees the stars, which are really warriors who have attained heaven, seers, and other celestial beings. Then they reach Indra's city. [44] Arjuna looks at the lovely city and the heavenly garden Nandana. He is praised by celestial beings. He meets Indra, who embraces him and shares his throne with him.

[45] Indra gives Arjuna his thunderbolt; Arjuna remains with Indra for five years, and learns music and dancing from the Gandharva king Citrasena. The seer Lomaśa sees him sharing Indra's throne; Indra explains that Arjuna is his son, and that he and Kṛṣṇa, who are Nara and Nārāyaṇa, will defeat the Niwātakavaca demons, who are threatening the gods themselves from their underworld realm. Lomaśa himself should go to Kāmyaka to explain to Yudhiṣṭhīra why Arjuna has been absent for so long, and to guide him on a pilgrimage. Lomaśa agrees to do so, and sets out.

[46] Meanwhile Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who has learnt from Vyāsa of Arjuna's doings, laments to Samjaya: Arjuna is enraged and invincible, and Duryodhana is bound to be defeated. Samjaya agrees with him. Dhṛtarāṣṭra adds that his son is a fool and is guided by fools; he cannot withstand Arjuna, Bhīma and Kṛṣṇa.

[47] — Janamejaya interrupts Vaiśampāyana's narrative to ask what food the Pāṇḍavas had in the forest, and Vaiśampāyana tells him that they and the Brahmins accompanying them lived well on forest produce and the flesh of deer.

[48] — Dhṛtarāṣṭra resumes his lament: the Pāṇḍava twins, Nakula and Sahadeva, are also mighty warriors, and together with Bhīma, Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas' allies they will triumph in any war. Samjaya replies that the fault is Dhṛtarāṣṭra's own, for not restraining Duryodhana. He adds that,

after the Pāṇḍavas' downfall, Kṛṣṇa had vowed to reinstate them by destroying their enemies, but Yudhiṣṭhīra had insisted that he wait for the term of exile to come to an end before doing so. Dhṛṣṭadyumna's Pāñcālas had likewise promised Draupadī that they would avenge the insult she had suffered.

[49] During Arjuna's absence in Indra's world, Bhīma turns on Yudhiṣṭhīra once more: he is to blame for sending into danger the brother on whom the others all depend, and he is to blame for their exile in the forest. Bhīma once again urges an early attack on the Dhārtarāṣṭras. While Yudhiṣṭhīra is attempting to calm him down, the seer Brhadaśva arrives. Yudhiṣṭhīra greets him respectfully, then tells him how he was cheated in the gambling match; he concludes by saying that no one is more unfortunate than himself. Brhadaśva tells him of Nala, who suffered even more as a result of being cheated, and Yudhiṣṭhīra asks to hear the story in full.

[50] Brhadaśva begins to narrate. — Nala, king of Niṣadha, is a man of the highest virtues and accomplishments. King Bhīma of Vidarbha is similarly possessed of excellences, but has no children until the seer Damana grants him three sons and a lovely daughter, Damayantī. Though Nala and Damayantī have never met, they hear such wonderful things about each other that they fall in love. One day, Nala catches a goose; in return for its freedom the bird promises to win Damayantī over for him. When, in turn, it is caught by Damayantī, it urges her to marry Nala.

[51] Damayantī now pines; her father Bhīma decides to hold a svayamvara for her, and invites all the kings to attend. Indra asks the seers Parvata and Nārada, who have come to see him, why no kings are visiting him; they reply that they have all gone to Damayantī's svayamvara. At this, the world-guardian gods Indra, Yama and Varuṇa, and the Fire god Agni, decide to attend it themselves. On the way they see Nala travelling to the ceremony, and ask him to act as their envoy. [52] When he learns their purpose, Nala asks to be excused, since his mission is the same as theirs, but the gods insist. Through their power he is able to enter Damayantī's well-guarded dwelling. When he sees Damayantī his love increases, but he controls himself, informs her that four gods have come to seek her hand,

and tells her to choose one of them. [53] Damayantī assures Nala that her love is for him alone. He remonstrates; she proposes that he should attend the svayamvara together with the gods, and she will then choose him in their presence. Nala returns and tells the gods what has happened.

[54] The ceremony begins, and Damayantī finds herself confronted by five identical kings; she cannot tell which of them is Nala. She now appeals to the gods to show him to her, and they assume their divine forms. Damayantī recognizes Nala, and chooses him for her husband. The gods now give Nala eight boons. Indra grants sight of himself at sacrifices, and the ability to walk anywhere unobstructed; Agni grants the presence of fire wherever wanted, and immunity to fire; Yama grants excellent taste in food, and strict adherence to dharma; Varuṇa grants the presence of water wherever wanted, and a splendid garland. In addition, the gods together bestow on him twin children. They then return to heaven, and Nala lives a life of virtue and happiness with Damayantī.

[55] Indra now encounters Kali and Dvāpara, who are planning to attend the svayamvara. When he learns that it has already taken place, and what the outcome was, Kali is furious; he determines to possess Nala and ruin him, and he instructs Dvāpara to enter the dice.

[56] Kali and Dvāpara await their opportunity. Finally, in the twelfth year, Nala commits a minor ritual fault, and Kali enters him. He also causes Nala's brother Puṣkara to challenge him to a gambling match. Nala gambles obsessively, always losing. Damayantī tries to persuade him to talk to his ministers, but he takes no notice of her. [57] Unable to prevent Nala from losing everything, she takes the charioteer Vāṛṣṇeya into her confidence, and asks him to take her children to her relatives in Vidarbha.

[58] Nala is ruined; Puṣkara taunts him, suggesting he should wager Damayantī. Enraged, Nala leaves with nothing but a single garment. He stays outside the city, where he is joined by Damayantī; she too has only a single garment to wear. The townsfolk, under threat from Puṣkara, offer them no help. After some time the starving Nala sees some gold birds and attempts to catch them with his garment; they fly off with it, for they are the dice, and do not wish him to retain any possessions at all. Nala laments, and suggests that Damayantī should leave him and return to her home in Vidarbha, but she refuses to go without him. [59] Nala cannot bring himself to visit his father-in-law's house in such a condition. The

two of them wander about, each covered with half a garment. They come upon a lodge, where Damayantī falls asleep on the ground. But Nala can find no rest, and after much toing and froing he finally decides to leave her and sets off, out of his mind and possessed by Kali.

[60] When Damayantī awakes to find Nala gone, she is terrified and laments bitterly, cursing the cause of Nala's grief to experience yet greater grief himself. A great constrictor attacks her; she is rescued by a hunter, who then seeks to seduce her. She curses him, and he falls down dead.

[61] Now Damayantī wanders alone through the great forest, calling on Nala to return to her. She sees a tiger and asks it either to give her news of Nala or to eat her, but it ignores her and goes its own way. She appeals to a mountain, but it remains silent. Next she comes upon a hermitage, and tells the ascetics there her story; they foretell that she will regain Nala, and then vanish. She continues on her way, pausing to ask an ásoka tree for news; then she encounters a caravan of merchants bound for Cedi, [62] and travels on with them. One night when encamped at a pool, the caravan is trampled by a herd of elephants that have come to drink. Damayantī blames herself. She continues her journey with Brahmins who have survived the slaughter and arrives in the city of the Cedis. The queen mother sees her and questions her; Damayantī answers truthfully, but without revealing her identity, and the queen mother engages her as a maid-servant.

[63] Meanwhile, Nala sees a great forest fire and hears cries for help. Entering the fire, he finds the serpent king Karkotaka, who promises to help Nala if he rescues him. Karkotaka makes himself small, and Nala bears him out of the fire, but then Karkotaka insists he continue walking, counting his steps, and at the tenth step he bites him.¹ Nala loses his handsome appearance. Karkotaka explains that he has done this so that Nala will not be recognized, and assures him that the poison will harm not him but the being who has possessed him. He tells him to take up employment with King Rūparṇa as a charioteer named Bāhuka; from Rūparṇa he will learn the skill of gambling, which will allow him to regain what he has lost. Finally, he gives Nala a pair of garments which will restore his appearance, and vanishes.

¹ The Sanskrit word *daśa*, 'ten', also means 'bite!'

[64] Nala reaches R̥tuparṇa's city and tells the king that he is a charioteer and cook named Bāhuka; R̥tuparṇa engages him. Every evening Nala recites a verse lamenting his lost love.

[65] Damayanti's father Bhīma sends Brahmins out to search for the missing couple; a Brahmin named Sudeva sees Damayanti, recognizes her and introduces himself. Damayanti weeps, and the queen mother asks Sudeva who she is. [66] Sudeva explains Damayanti's identity; the queen mother realizes that she is her own niece, and arranges for her to return home to Vidarbha.

[67] Now Bhīma sends the Brahmins out to search for Nala; Damayanti tells them verses to recite wherever they go. [68] After some time the Brahmin Parṇāda returns: R̥tuparṇa's charioteer Bāhuka had been greatly moved by the verses, and had replied with verses of his own. Damayanti now sends Sudeva to R̥tuparṇa to announce that she is holding a second svayamvara, which will take place the very next day.

[69] The charioteer Bāhuka is anguished to hear R̥tuparṇa's reason for wishing to reach Vidarbha at speed, but promises to carry him there in time. At first R̥tuparṇa questions his choice of horses, but when they begin their journey he is amazed at Bāhuka's skill, and wonders whether he might not really be King Nala.

[70] As they pass a vibhītaka tree, R̥tuparṇa announces the number of leaves and nuts on it.¹ Bāhuka insists on stopping to count them, and finds that the king is right; he is an expert at gambling and counting. Bāhuka requests to be given this skill in exchange for his own skill with horses, and R̥tuparṇa agrees: at once Kali leaves Nala's body, vomiting Karkotaka's poison. Nala is on the point of cursing him, but Kali placates him and enters the vibhītaka tree.

[71] R̥tuparṇa arrives in Vidarbha; Damayanti hears the noise of the chariot and thinks that it must be driven by Nala. Bhīma welcomes R̥tuparṇa, but he is puzzled over the reason for his visit, and R̥tuparṇa is puzzled at the lack of any sign of a svayamvara. [72] Now Damayanti sends her maid-servant Keśinī to question Bāhuka. Bāhuka denies all knowledge of the present whereabouts of Nala, but when Keśinī repeats the verses that Damayanti had taught the Brahmins whom

she sent out in search of Nala,¹ he weeps and repeats his own verse response.

[73] When Damayanti hears of this, she sends Keśinī once more to watch Bāhuka closely. She returns, and reports that narrow places open to let him pass, water and fire come at his call, and flowers crushed in his hands become fresh and sweet-smelling. Almost certain now, Damayanti asks Keśinī to obtain some meat cooked by Bāhuka; when she tastes it she recognizes Nala's cooking. She sends Keśinī back to Bāhuka with her two children: he weeps to see them.

[74] Damayanti informs her mother of her suspicions, and her parents send for Bāhuka. She confronts him, remonstrating with him for having deserted her. He explains that he had been possessed by Kali; now he is free, and he has returned for her. But then he in turn remonstrates with her: how could she announce a second svayamvara? [75] Damayanti explains her actions, and invokes Wind, Sun and Moon to testify that she is innocent; the Wind god proclaims that this indeed so, and calls upon Nala to take her back. Nala puts on the garment given him by Karkotaka, resumes his own form, and is reunited with Damayanti.

[76] Next morning, Bhīma and Nala pay honour to each other; then Nala asks R̥tuparṇa's forgiveness for deceiving him, to which R̥tuparṇa replies by asking Nala's forgiveness for any offence he may have done him. Nala gives R̥tuparṇa his skill with horses, and R̥tuparṇa leaves for his own city.

[77] After a month, Nala returns to Niṣadha and challenges Puṣkara either to gamble once again or to do battle. Assuming he will win again, Puṣkara is happy to agree to another gambling match, and infuriates Nala by expressing his desire to win Damayanti. However, Nala now reduces him to ruin him in a single throw; but then he forgives him. Puṣkara stays with him as a guest for a month before returning home. [78] Now Nala lives happily in Niṣadha with Damayanti. — After finishing the story of Nala, Brhadaśva tells Yudhiṣṭhira of the good fortune that comes from hearing it, and bestows on him the skill of gambling with dice. After Brhadaśva's departure, Yudhiṣṭhira learns from travelling Brahmins and ascetics that Arjuna is practising fierce austerities.

¹ The nuts of the vibhītaka were used as dice.

¹ See 3.67-8.

[79] Draupadī and the three remaining younger Pāṇḍavas complain to Yudhiṣṭhira that in Arjuna's absence they no longer take pleasure in dwelling in the Kāmyaka forest.

THE PILGRIMAGE

[80] Nārada arrives and is honoured. Yudhiṣṭhira asks him to explain the rewards of pilgrimage, and Nārada replies by telling him of Bhīṣma's encounter with the seer Pulastya. Bhīṣma had asked the same question, and Pulastya had answered that pilgrimage could bring rewards even greater than those of sacrifices. He began to list the sacred bathing-places which a man ought to visit in sequence, starting with Puṣkara, and expounded to Bhīṣma the particular benefits which each of them would confer; [81] among them was Kurukṣetra, which he described as exceptionally holy, [82] as well as many other sacred bathing-places. [83] He had concluded with Prayāga, where the Gaṅgā and Yamunā rivers flow together, and had urged Bhīṣma to undertake the journey; Bhīṣma had done so. Similarly, Nārada tells Yudhiṣṭhira that he should go on a pilgrimage to the bathing-places: the seer Lomaśa will accompany him. After saying this, he vanishes.

[84] Now Yudhiṣṭhira speaks to Dhaumya. He tells him how he has sent Arjuna to acquire weapons powerful enough to overcome the might of the Pāṇḍavas' enemies; however, in his absence the remaining brothers and Draupadī now find the Kāmyaka forest a cheerless place, and they wish to travel elsewhere. [85] In answer, Dhaumya begins his own description of the sacred bathing-places. He starts with those in the East, including the Naimiṣa forest and Prayāga. [86] Next, he speaks of the bathing-places in the South, such as the river Payoṣṇī, Agastya's hermitage, Surāṣṭra and Dvārakā; [87] then he praises the bathing-places of Avanti in the West, among them those on the river Narmadā and Puṣkara. [88] Finally, he describes the bathing-places of the North, in particular the ones situated on the rivers Sarasvatī and Yamunā.

[89] Lomaśa arrives, and explains that he has been sent by Indra to tell the Pāṇḍavas about Arjuna's doings. Arjuna has succeeded in obtaining celestial weapons, including the awesome Weapon of Brahmā's Head; more than a match for Karṇa, he will soon rejoin his brothers. [90] Lomaśa tells Yudhiṣṭhira that Arjuna wishes him to undertake a pilgrimage; he, Lomaśa, will accompany and protect him. Yudhiṣṭhira is delighted. He sends most of the Brahmins who are

accompanying him back to Hāstīnapura, where Dhṛitarāṣṭra is happy to receive them. [91] The remaining Brahmins ask Yudhiṣṭhira to be allowed to accompany him, and he grants their request. As the Pāṇḍavas prepare to set out, Vyāsa, Nārada and Parvata appear and bless them. Then the journey begins.

[92] Yudhiṣṭhira complains to Lomaśa that he, a virtuous man, has to endure suffering while his wicked enemies thrive. Lomaśa replies that the demons too were wicked, and their wickedness destroyed them; the gods, on the other hand, practised virtue and went on pilgrimage, and so won glory. In the same way Yudhiṣṭhira will triumph and his enemies will fail.

[93] The travellers reach the Naimiṣa forest and travel on to Prayāga, bathing at the sacred bathing-places and distributing great wealth. At Gayā they perform the seasonal sacrifices.

AGASTYA

[94] The Pāṇḍavas travel to Agastya's hermitage, where Yudhiṣṭhira asks Lomaśa to tell him the story of how Agastya killed the demon Vātāpi. Lomaśa begins to narrate. — The demon Ilvala, who is able to bring the dead back to life, is in the habit of feeding his younger brother Vātāpi to Brahmins in the form of goat's meat, and then killing his victims by resuscitating the goat.

At this time Agastya sees his ancestors hanging face-down in a cave: they tell him that he must acquire offspring to secure their release. Unable to find a woman adequate to the purpose, he creates Lopāmudrā, who is raised by the king of Vidarbha as his daughter. [95] When she reaches marriageable age, Agastya takes her for his wife. After their wedding, he demands that she cast away her rich garments and live as an ascetic. This she meekly does, but when he calls her to lie with him she insists on fine linen and ornaments. Agastya goes in search of these. [96] He visits King Śrutarvan and requests wealth from him, but when he hears the state of Śrutarvan's treasury he withdraws his request. The two of them go together to Vadhryaśva; he is in the same situation. All three now go to Trasadasyu, but he too lacks the necessary resources. Agastya, Śrutarvan, Vadhryaśva and Trasadasyu all now decide to request wealth from Ilvala.

[97] Ilvala greets his visitors, and then serves them his brother Vātāpi as

cooked meat. But Agastya consumes and digests *Vātāpi*, and then requests wealth from *Ilvala*; *Ilvala* bestows great riches on Agastya and the three kings. Agastya returns to *Lopāmudrā* and impregnates her, and *Dṛḍhasyu* is born after a seven-year pregnancy.

[98] — Now *Yudhiṣṭhīra* asks to hear more about Agastya, and *Lomaśa* narrates further. — In the first age of the world, the gods are harassed by *Vṛtra* and the demons. They approach *Brahmā* for help, and he tells them to ask the seer *Dadhīca* for his bones; they should make a thunderbolt weapon from these. When the gods visit *Dadhīca* he is happy to grant their wish, and *Tvaṣṭṛ* fashions his bones into a thunderbolt. [99] Armed with the bolt, *Indra* leads the gods into battle against the demons. At first the demons prevail, but then *Viṣṇu* places his own fiery energy in *Indra*, and so do the other gods and the seers; now *Indra* is able to slay *Vṛtra* with the thunderbolt. The demons flee and take refuge in the ocean, where they plot the destruction of the world, starting with its ascetics.

[100] The demons undertake night-time raids and kill many ascetics; the gods seek *Viṣṇu*'s help. [101] *Viṣṇu* answers that they must make the ocean dry, and that only Agastya can achieve this for them. The gods go to Agastya and praise him for the help he gave them once before by stopping the *Vindhya* mountain from growing.

[102] — *Yudhiṣṭhīra* asks to hear this story, and *Lomaśa* relates it. Jealous of Mount *Meru*, which the sun circumambulates at sunrise and sunset, the *Vindhya* mountain had begun to grow to an enormous size. The gods had requested Agastya's aid, and he told the mountain to stop growing until he returned from a visit to the south; but he never returned.

— Now the gods ask Agastya to drink up the ocean, and he agrees to this. [103] He drinks the ocean dry, and the gods kill the demons who were hiding there. Then they request Agastya to restore the water, but he replies that he has already digested it. So the gods approach *Brahmā*. [104] *Brahmā* assures the gods that in time the ocean will return to normal, thanks to King *Bhagīratha*'s kinsmen.

— *Yudhiṣṭhīra* requests this story in full, and *Lomaśa* narrates it. — King *Sagara* is mighty but has no son from his two wives. He performs austerities and approaches *Śiva*, who promises him that one of his wives will bear him sixty thousand sons, but that they will all die together; his other wife will bear him a single son who will succeed him. Both queens

now become pregnant. One of them gives birth to a gourd, and *Sagara* hears a voice from the air telling him to keep each of its seeds in a pot of ghee. [105] From the seeds are born the sixty thousand *Sāgaras*,¹ who are so ferocious that mortals and gods alike seek *Brahmā*'s protection; but *Brahmā* predicts that soon all the *Sāgaras* will perish.

Later, *Sagara* is conducting a horse sacrifice when the horse disappears into the empty ocean. Though the *Sāgaras* search, they cannot find it, but *Sagara* demands that they continue; they dig out the ocean, causing much suffering to the creatures of the underworld, until they find the horse in the company of the seer *Kapila*. [106] The *Sāgaras* take the horse; *Kapila* opens his eyes and burns them all to ashes. *Nārada* sees this happen, and informs *Sagara*.

Sagara has another son, *Asamañjas*, by his second wife, but he had terrorized the people until *Sagara* banished him. *Sagara* now requests *Asamañjas*'s son *Amṛśumat* to retrieve the missing horse. *Amṛśumat* enters the ocean and finds the horse with *Kapila*, to whom he does honour. *Kapila* grants him boons, and *Amṛśumat* chooses first the horse, and then water to purify the dead *Sāgaras*. *Kapila* answers that *Amṛśumat*'s grandson will bring the *Gangā* from heaven to provide the purifying water. *Sagara* concludes his sacrifice, and in time is succeeded by *Amṛśumat*, followed by *Amṛśumat*'s son *Dilīpa* and his son *Bhagīratha*.

[107] *Bhagīratha* performs austerities on Mount *Himālaya* until *Gangā* offers him a boon; he chooses that she should bring her water to purify the *Sāgaras*. She agrees, but warns that *Śiva* will have to bear the force of her fall. *Bhagīratha* approaches *Śiva*, who agrees to this. [108] *Gangā* now leaps from heaven, and *Śiva* breaks her fall on his forehead. She purifies the *Sāgaras* and fills the ocean.

[109] Now *Yudhiṣṭhīra* and his followers travel on to Mount *Hemakūṭa*; here any utterance causes rainfall and a hail of stones, and it is impossible to climb the mountain. *Lomaśa* explains that an ancient ascetic named *Rṣabha*, who hated people talking to him, had caused the rain and the stones; the gods too, seeking privacy for themselves, had made the mountain impassable. The travellers continue to the *Kauśikī* river.

¹ The word *sāgara* means 'ocean'.

RŚYAŚRṄGA

Lomaśa spoke:

[110] Here, bull-like heir of Bharata, is the Kauśikī, the pure river of the gods, and here you may see Viśvāmitra's lovely hermitage; here too is the holy hermitage of Kaśyapa's noble heir Vibhāṇḍaka, whose son Rśyaśrṅga was a disciplined ascetic. He it was who used the power of his austerities to make Indra grant rain; he it was for fear of whom that slayer of Bala and Vṛtra poured down rain in a time of drought. Vibhāṇḍaka's son of mighty ardour was born to a doe; he it was who performed the great miracle in Lomapāda's kingdom, and to whom King Lomapāda gave his daughter Śāntā in thanks for the return of the crops, as the Sun god gave his daughter Sāvitri to Brahmā.

Yudhiṣṭhīra spoke:

How was Vibhāṇḍaka's son Rśyaśrṅga born of a doe, when such a mixed union is forbidden? How did he become an ascetic? And why was Indra so fearful of this wise young man that the slayer of Bala and Vṛtra poured down rain when a drought was in progress? How beautiful was the princess Śāntā, keeper of her word, to arouse desire in the heart of a deer-like ascetic? And how was it, when the royal seer Lomapāda was well known for his virtue, that Indra granted no rain in his kingdom? Blessed sir, please tell me all in full, just as it happened, for I long to hear the story of Rśyaśrṅga.

Lomaśa spoke:

Hear how Rśyaśrṅga of mighty energy, a child whom the elders honoured for his great ardour, was born at the great lake Mahāhrada as the son of Vibhāṇḍaka, a Brahmin seer perfected by austerities, unfailingly potent and resplendent as Prajāpati.

The heir of Kaśyapa came to Mahāhrada and undertook austerities there; that seer exerted himself for so long that he won the honour of the divine seers. As he bathed in the water, O king, his eye fell on the Apsaras Urvaśī, and his seed gushed forth. A doe

then drank it in together with the water, being thirsty; she became pregnant, king, for fate cannot fail and the will of the gods must be. To that doe was born his son, the great seer Rśyaśrṅga, constant in asceticism; he grew up without ever leaving the forest. O king, that noble man bore the horn of a deer on his head, and so he became known as Rśyaśrṅga ('Deer-horn'). He had never seen a human being other than his father, and so, O king, his mind did not swerve from holy celibacy.

At this same time a friend of Daśaratha, a man named Lomapāda, was ruler over Āṅga. That lord of the earth is said to have acted wilfully and falsely towards Brahmins, so the Brahmins then abandoned him; and since it happened that the king had lost his household priest, Indra of a thousand eyes granted no rain, to the affliction of the people. The lord of the earth consulted wise, ascetic Brahmins, experts in the matter of the granting of rain by the lord of the gods. 'How may the god of rain grant rain? Let a way be found,' he urged them, and the wise Brahmins voiced their opinions.

One of their number, a great sage, told the king, 'The Brahmins are angry with you, lord of kings. Perform an expiation, and fetch the sage's son Rśyaśrṅga, O prince! He is a forest-dweller, ignorant of women and devoted to rectitude. If that great ascetic will make an appearance in your kingdom, the god of rain will at once grant rain; of this I have no doubt, O king.'

When Lomapāda heard these words he went and performed an expiation for himself, returning once the Brahmins were conciliated, and the people, seeing their king returned, welcomed him back. Then the lord of Āṅga summoned his aides, men skilled in counsel, and did his best to settle on a plan that would lead to a visit by Rśyaśrṅga. His ministers were learned, well acquainted with worldly affairs, and expert at governance; with their help the invincible Lomapāda arrived at a plan. Then the lord of the earth had brought before him leading courtesans, women with every sort of skill, and he addressed them thus: 'Fair ladies, find some means to bring the seer's son Rśyaśrṅga to my kingdom by arousing his desire and winning his trust!' But those women feared

the seer's curse as much as they feared the king; pale and listless, they answered that the task was impossible.

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One of them, however, an old woman, spoke to Lomapāda: 'Great king, I shall do my best to bring that ascetic here. Please give your approval to the purposes I wish to pursue; then I shall be able to arouse the desire of the seer's son Rśyaśṛṅga!' The prince approved her every purpose: he gave her much wealth and jewels of every kind. Then, lord of the earth, she set straight out for the forest, taking with her certain supremely lovely young women.

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[III] O heir of Bharata, to achieve the king's aims she created a floating hermitage, acting both at the king's command and according to her own intelligence. She decked it with artificial trees bearing flowers and fruit of many kinds, together with bushes and creepers of every sort; the fruit they yielded was as delicious as one could wish. She made that floating hermitage to be utterly beautiful, utterly captivating; it was so lovely that it seemed a miracle. Mooring the vessel not far from Vibhāndaka's hermitage, she sent men to spy out where the sage passed his time. Then that courtesan, thinking of nothing but the task at hand, saw her chance against Kaśyapa's heir and sent out her daughter, a girl admired for her intelligence. The clever girl approached the young man who was constant in asceticism; reaching the hermitage, she saw the seer's son.

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The courtesan said, 'O sage, I trust that the ascetics are well? and that you all have plenty of roots and fruit to eat? and that you yourself, sir, are happy in this hermitage? It is to visit you that I have come here today.¹ I trust that the ascetics' austerities are prospering, and that your father's ardour remains undimmed? I trust, O priest, that he is pleased with you, and that your Vedic studies are progressing, Rśyaśṛṅga?'

Rśyaśṛṅga replied, 'Sir, clearly you yourself prosper, for you are radiant as the sunlight, and I am sure that you merit my respectful greeting! I shall be happy to give you the water for washing your feet and the fruit and roots, as *dharma* prescribes! Sit at your ease on

¹ The courtesan here deliberately refers to herself in the masculine.

this comfortable mat of *kuśa* grass covered with a black antelope-skin. Where is your hermitage? And what is the name of the vow that you observe? You seem like a god, O Brahmin!'

The courtesan said, 'My hermitage, son of Vibhāndaka, is lovely; it lies beyond this three-league mountain range. Our *dharma* there forbids respectful greeting, nor do we use water for washing our feet.'

Rśyaśṛṅga replied, 'Then let me give you ripe fruits, cashews and myrobalans, and nuts and berries of various sorts! Here are *priyāla* fruit for you to enjoy!'

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But she put them all aside and gave him costly foods; rich-tasting and well presented, they gave Rśyaśṛṅga much delight. And she gave him fragrant garlands, bright, many-coloured clothes, and the finest drinks. Then she made merry, and played, and laughed aloud. She amused herself with a ball at his side, bending low like a vine breaking under the weight of its fruit; and, bringing her body up close to his body, she embraced Rśyaśṛṅga repeatedly. She pulled down and broke off blossoming sprays of *sarja*, *asōka* and *tilaka* trees; her intoxication and feigned modesty aroused the desire of the great seer's son. Then, when she saw that Rśyaśṛṅga was changed, she pressed his body with her own again and again before slowly departing, still gazing at him, under the pretext of attending an *agnihotra* ritual. She left Rśyaśṛṅga mad, out of his mind with love; distracted, unable to think of anything but her, sighing, he was the very picture of affliction.

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Not long afterwards there appeared Vibhāndaka, Kaśyapa's heir, his eyes orange as a lion's, his body covered by hair to the tips of his fingers, a Vedic scholar leading a life of virtue and meditation. As he approached, he saw his son seated there alone, plunged in thought and depressed, sighing again and again as he stared into the air. So Vibhāndaka spoke to the downcast boy: 'Son, why are you not piling up logs for fuel? I trust you have offered today's *agnihotra*, and washed the two ritual ladies? I trust you have brought the calf to the oblation cow? You seem different, son, full of care and distraught. Today why are you so sad? I ask you: who was it that came here today?'

[112] Rśyaśrṅga answered his father, 'A religious student with braided hair came here, neither short nor tall, a spirited boy with a golden complexion and long lotus-eyes, as radiant as the son of a god. Most beautiful to look on, he blazed like the sun, with black-and-white eyes fairer than those of *cakora* birds. His braids were dark, well combed and perfumed; they were fastened with threads of gold, and very long. Round his throat, like the water-trough round the base of a tree, was something that shone like lightning in the sky, and below the throat he had two hairless swellings that I found most alluring. The waist around his navel was slender, but he had the fullest hips, and under his garment, as I have this belt, he had one of gleaming gold. On each of his feet shone another amazingly lovely thing that jingled, and, fastened to his hands, as I have this rosary, he had bands that also made sounds; when he moved his limbs, these things resounded like geese making merry on a lake.'

'His clothes were wonderfully beautiful — these ones of mine are nothing like so fair. His face, too, was amazingly lovely, and his voice seemed to gladden my heart; when he spoke, he sounded like the song of the cuckoo, and it perturbed my very soul to hear him. As a forest in the midst of spring exudes a sweet smell when the breeze stirs it, so he too sent forth the most excellent fragrance as the wind played upon him. His braids, which were neatly tied, were parted evenly in two upon his brow, and on his ears he seemed to have pretty circles of many colours. With his right hand he kept striking a strange round fruit: over and over again it would reach the ground and then spring up high in the most marvellous way; and when he had struck it, he would whirl round, quivering like a tree caught by the wind. He looked like the son of a god, and when I saw him, father, I felt the deepest joy; father, I felt love.'

'He kept embracing my body, taking hold of my hair, lowering my face to his own, placing his mouth on mine, murmuring to me. It filled me with rapture. He did not think highly of water for washing the feet, or of these fruits which I had fetched for him; "This is my observance!" he said, and gave me other fruits that were new to me. I ate those fruits; these ones of ours do not match

them in taste. Unlike these, they had no rind; unlike these, they had no pith. This noble youth also gave to me to drink the most delicious liquids; as soon as I drank them I felt the highest delight, and the very earth seemed to shift beneath me.'

'These fragrant and many-coloured garlands, strung with silk, are his: radiant with his austerities, he scattered them here when he left for his own hermitage. Now he has gone, I have become distracted, and my body seems on fire. I want to go straight to him; I want him to come round here every day. I will go to him, father! What is the name of the observance be that he practises? I want to practise it with him, to practise the same austerities as that boy with his fierce discipline!'

[113] Vibhāṇḍaka said, 'Son, these are Rākṣasas! They assume that amazingly lovely form to go about, but though matchlessly fair they are utterly terrible, for they think of nothing but obstructing asceticism. Yes, they are beautiful, son, but they are cruel: they use every means to arouse the desire of sages in the forests, and so banish them from both happiness and the heavenly realms. The disciplined sage will have nothing whatever to do with them in his quest for the realms of the virtuous. My innocent child, they are evildoers who delight in obstructing the austerities of ascetics. Those were liquors, son, wicked and not to be drunk; only base men resort to them. As for these garlands, with their bright colours and perfumes, they are not considered fitting for ascetics!'

Vibhāṇḍaka told his son that women were Rākṣasas in order to hold him back; then he went to track the woman down. When, after three days, he failed to find her, he returned to the hermitage. But meanwhile, Rśyaśrṅga had set out to gather fruit, as is the way of ascetics; and that courtesan too set out to arouse the desire of Kaśyapa's ascetic heir. The moment Rśyaśrṅga saw her he became enraptured. Then he hurriedly rushed up to her and said, 'Good sir, let us both leave for your hermitage before my father returns!'

So, O king, they tricked Vibhāṇḍaka's only son into boarding the boat, and they dropped the mooring. Then, using every means to keep his desire aroused, they arrived close to where the king of Aṅga lived. Once that most splendid boat had been brought to

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shore, the king had it moored within sight of a hermitage; and when he fetched the boy from the wharf he likewise had a lovely grove constructed named 'Hermitage of the King'. But then he had Vibhāndaka's only son settled in the women's quarters; and at once he saw Indra pour down rain, while the earth filled with water.

Now Lomapāda, his desires fulfilled, gave his daughter Śāntā to Rṣyaśrīga. The king also acted to counter Vibhāndaka's anger: he had oxen plough close by the roads on which the ascetic was approaching, and stationed numerous cattle and brave herdsmen there, commanding them, 'When Vibhāndaka questions you in his fervour to regain his son, you must join your hands together and answer him, "These beasts are your son's, and so is this ploughing. What favour may we do you, mighty seer? We are all your slaves, yours to command!"'

15

Meanwhile the sage, a man of fierce anger, came with roots and fruits to his hermitage. He searched there for his son, but could not find him, and became deeply enraged. Bursting with anger and suspecting that this was the king's doing, he set out for Campā, intending to put to the torch the king of Arīga and his realm. Kaśyapa's heir was weary and hungry when he came upon those well-stocked cattle-stations; the herdsmen greeted him with all proper respect, and he spent the night there like a king. He received such honour from them that he asked them, 'Good sirs, who is your master?' Then they all approached and answered, 'This wealth is at your son's disposal.'

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Wherever he went he was treated respectfully, and, as he listened to the pleasant words addressed to him, his fury died down and he grew joyful. Then he went to meet the king in his city. He was greeted with honour by that bull-like hero, and he saw his son living there like the god Indra in heaven; there, too, he saw Śāntā, his daughter-in-law, radiant as a flash of lightning. After seeing the villages and cattle-stations, and his son, and Śāntā, his mighty anger was stilled; indeed, lord of men, Vibhāndaka was most gracious towards King Lomapāda. The great seer entrusted his son to him, and told that boy, whose power was like that of Sun or Fire, 'Once

a son is born to you, you must return to the forest after showing this king every favour.'

Rṣyaśrīga obeyed his words and went back to his father's place; and Śāntā served him properly, as Rohinī faithfully serves the Moon in the sky,¹ as lovely Arundhatī serves Vasiṣṭha, as Lopāmudrā serves Agastya. And just as Damayantī was obedient to Nala, and Śāci obeys thunderbolt-wielding Indra, and Indrasenā Nādāyanī is always obedient to Mudgala, O Yudhiṣṭhīra, so Śāntā always obeyed Rṣyaśrīga, and served him lovingly in the forest. Here you can see the holy hermitage of that celebrated seer, adding to the beauty of Mahāhrada. Bathe here to attain your wishes, king; then, purified, continue your tour of the sacred bathing-places.

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[114] Yudhiṣṭhīra and his brothers travel from the Kauśikī to Kaliṅga and the Vaitarāṇī river, which Lomaśa tells them is the holy place where Rudra won the best share in the sacrifice from the other gods. They bathe in the river, and Yudhiṣṭhīra receives the ability to see and hear all things throughout the world. Then Lomaśa shows him a forest: here Viśvakarman had performed a sacrifice and had paid his priest, Kaśyapa, by giving him the Earth. Earth threatened to descend to the underworld until Kaśyapa conciliated her, when she reappeared in the form of an altar. Yudhiṣṭhīra ascends the altar while Lomaśa pronounces a blessing upon him.

[115] Yudhiṣṭhīra learns from the ascetic Akṛtavrāṇa that Rāma Jāmadagnya is due to arrive next day. At Yudhiṣṭhīra's request, Akṛtavrāṇa relates Rāma's story. — The Bhārgava Brahmin R̄cīka marries Satyavatī, daughter of King Gādhi of Kānyakubja. Bhṛgu visits the couple and offers Satyavatī a boon; she chooses for herself and her mother each to bear a son.

¹ The Rohinī constellation is said to be the Moon's favourite wife. The other figures mentioned (apart from Nala and Damayantī and the deities Indra and Śāci) are seers and their wives.

Bṛghu gives instructions: each woman is to embrace a particular tree. But when they do so, they mix the trees up, and Bṛghu tells Satyavatī that her son will be a Brahmin who behaves like a Kṣatriya, while her mother's son will be a Kṣatriya who behaves like a Brahmin. At her entreaty, however, he agrees to allow the effect of the error to fall upon her grandson, not her son. She gives birth to Jamadagni, who excels at both Vedic learning and archery.

[116] Jamadagni marries Renukā, daughter of King Prasenajit. She bears him five sons, Rāma being the last but greatest of these. One day she sees King Citraratha and is overcome with desire for him. Jamadagni understands her thought and commands his four eldest sons to kill her; when, dumbfounded, they fail to do so, he curses them to lose their human reason and live like animals. Rāma, on the other hand, unquestioningly beheads his mother; but when his father grants him a boon he chooses that she should return to life, that he himself should be free of the taint of killing, and that his brothers should regain their own natures. Some time afterwards, Jamadagni's hermitage is laid waste by King Kārtavīrya. When Rāma learns of this he attacks and kills Kārtavīrya; Kārtavīrya's sons respond by killing Jamadagni.

[117] The grieving Rāma performs his father's funeral rites and swears to wipe out the Kṣatriya race; he does so twenty-one times until stopped by Rāma. — The next day, Rāma arrives in person, and Yudhiṣṭhīra pays him honour.

[118] Yudhiṣṭhīra resumes his travels, visiting the bathing-places of the river Godāvarī. He reaches Śūrpāraka and then travels on to Prabhāsa, where he performs great austerities. There the Pāṇḍavas are visited by Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and Sātyaki. [119] Balarāma laments to see the mighty Pāṇḍavas reduced to such a state while their enemies prosper. [120] Sātyaki proposes an alliance to overthrow the Kauravas; when they lie slain, Abhimanyu can rule until Yudhiṣṭhīra has completed his term in exile. But Kṛṣṇa replies that neither Yudhiṣṭhīra nor his brothers will forsake dharma in this way, and Yudhiṣṭhīra confirms this: one day they will defeat Duryodhana, but not yet. The visitors leave, and Yudhiṣṭhīra continues on his way. He reaches the river Payoṣṇī.

[121] After bathing in the Payoṣṇī, the Pāṇḍavas travel on to the Narmadā. Lomaśa tells them that this is the site where the story of Cyavana took place, and Yudhiṣṭhīra asks to hear about the great Bhārgava ascetic.

[122] Lomaśa narrates. — Bṛghu's son Cyavana performs austerities for so long that he becomes an anthill. When Sukanyā, the lovely daughter of King Śāryāti, comes to bathe in the nearby lake, he sees her and desires her; but she, seeing only eyes in an anthill, pricks them with a thorn. Cyavana responds by blocking the bowels and bladders of Śāryāti's men. Śāryāti investigates, learns the truth, and seeks Cyavana's pardon; Cyavana agrees on condition that he marry Sukanyā, and Śāryāti assents gladly.

[123] One day the twin Aśvins see Sukanyā undressed after her bath, and they seek to persuade her to abandon her decrepit husband in favour of one of them. She refuses, and they suggest instead that they use their healing powers to restore Cyavana's youth, and that she then choose between the three of them. Cyavana agrees to this, and all three bathe in the lake. They emerge youthful, handsome, and identical in appearance; but Sukanyā chooses Cyavana, who is so delighted that he awards the Aśvins the right to drink Soma.

[124] Śāryāti pays a visit, and Cyavana performs a sacrifice for him. He draws a cup of Soma for the Aśvins, but Indra appears and commands him not to offer it to them, since as healers they do not merit it; if Cyavana disobeys, Indra will strike him with his thunderbolt. Cyavana ignores him and pours the Soma; Indra makes to hurl his bolt; Cyavana paralyses his arm and creates a fearsome demon named Intoxication to attack him. [125] Terrified, Indra concedes. Cyavana releases him and divides Intoxication up amongst liquor, women, dicing and hunting. — Now Lomaśa continues to describe to Yudhiṣṭhīra the sacred bathing-places on their route. They reach the river Yamunā, where Māndhātr and Somaka worshipped.

[126] At Yudhiṣṭhīra's request, Lomaśa tells the story of Māndhātr. — King Yuvanāśva is childless; he entrusts his kingdom to his ministers and takes up residence in the forest. One day he enters Bṛghu's hermitage and,

being thirsty, drinks a jar of water that he finds there. In the morning he learns that the water had been consecrated with mantras to allow his own wife to give birth to a mighty son; now he is himself pregnant with that child. A hundred years pass, and Yuvanāśva's side splits open; a boy emerges, and Indra himself suckles him with his forefinger, hence he is named Māndhāṭṛ (mām dhāṭā, 'he shall suck me'). He becomes a great ruler and sacrificer.

JANTU

[127] Now Yudhiṣṭhira asks to hear about Somaka, and Lomaśa narrates. — King Somaka has a hundred wives, but only one son, Jantu by name. He seeks for a way to obtain a hundred sons, and his priest tells him that this can be achieved by sacrificing Jantu, who will be reborn to his own mother.

[128] Somaka's wives try to prevent the sacrifice, but it goes ahead, and all of them become pregnant. After ten months Jantu is reborn, along with ninety-nine brothers. Later Somaka dies, and discovers his priest burning in hell for performing the sacrifice. Somaka insists on sharing his punishment, and after the term is served they both attain the heavenly realms.

[129] Now Lomaśa resumes his description of the bathing-places. Yudhiṣṭhira bathes at Plaksāvatarana; he is freed from sin and receives the ability to see all the worlds. The Pāṇḍavas travel on to the river Sarasvatī. [130] Next their journey takes them to Kashmir, Lake Mānasa and Mount Bhṛgutunga. Here Lomaśa tells how Indra and Agni once assumed the forms of a hawk and a dove to test King Uśinara. — The dove seeks refuge with the king.

THE HAWK AND THE DOVE

[131] The hawk remonstrates: Uśinara is depriving him of his rightful food. The king offers him other food, but the hawk refuses and requests instead a piece of Uśinara's own flesh equal in weight to the dove. Uśinara is happy to comply, but however much of his flesh he cuts off it never

balances the dove's weight; finally he places his entire maimed body on the scale. Indra praises him highly.

AŚTĀVAKRA

[132] Lomaśa points out the hermitage of Śvetaketu, and narrates his story. — The sage Uddālaka has a favoured pupil, Kahoda, to whom he gives his daughter Sujatā in marriage. She becomes pregnant; her child, while still in the womb, slights Kahoda's learning and is cursed by his angry father to be crooked in all eight limbs (aśtāvakra). When the birth is imminent, Kahoda goes to King Janaka to seek wealth, but he is worsted in debate by the Sūta Bandin, and is put to death by drowning. Aśtāvakra grows up knowing nothing of this: he regards Uddālaka as his father and Uddālaka's son Śvetaketu as his brother, until, at the age of twelve, he learns the truth. Then he and Śvetaketu go to Janaka's court.

[133] Aśtāvakra's eloquence persuades the gatekeeper to admit him to the sacrificial ground, and his skill with riddles persuades the king to allow him to challenge Bandin. [134] Bandin names things that are unique, and Aśtāvakra replies with things that exist in twos; next Bandin lists things in threes, and Aśtāvakra answers with things in fours; they proceed in this way until Bandin fails at the number thirteen and Aśtāvakra completes his verse for him. Applauded for his feat, he calls for Bandin to be drowned, at which point Bandin reveals that he is the son of Varuna, and that he has been sending the Brahmins he drowns to officiate at his father's sacrifice. The lost Brahmins now reappear, among them Kahoda, who honours his son for his achievement.

YAVAKRĪTA

[135] Lomaśa points out the hermitage of Raibhya, where Yavakrīta died. Yudhiṣṭhira asks to hear this story, and Lomaśa narrates. — The scholar Raibhya and the ascetic Bharadvāja are friends, but Bharadvāja's son Yavakrīta is vexed to see that his father receives less honour than Raibhya, and he undertakes terrible austerities to attain knowledge of the Veda.

Repeatedly Indra tries to dissuade him from this course, but in the end he grants him his desire.

[136] When Yavakṛīta tells his father of his achievement, Bharadvāja warns him not to be proud, and tells him the story of Bāladhi and Medhāvin. Bāladhi performed great austerities and gained a son Medhāvin, who was to live as long as the mountains stood; but in his pride Medhāvin insulted the seer Dhanuṣāksa, who responded by breaking down the mountains, prompting Medhāvin's death. Yavakṛīta promises his father that he will treat Raibhya with respect, but in fact he begins to take delight in offending other seers.

[137] Yavakṛīta dishonours Raibhya's daughter-in-law. Raibhya creates a sorceress who exactly resembles her, and also a Rāksasa, and tells them to kill Yavakṛīta. The sorceress seduces Yavakṛīta, and then steals his water-pot so that he cannot cleanse himself. Now the Rāksasa attacks him; he flees, seeking a pool or a river in which to bathe and restore his purity, but all are dry. Finally Yavakṛīta tries to enter the room in which his father's sacred fire is kept, but the blind Śūdra guard prevents him, and he is killed by the Rāksasa.

[138] When Bharadvāja learns what has happened, he grieves bitterly and announces that he himself will also die, and that Raibhya too will be killed by his eldest son. He burns Yavakṛīta's body and enters the flames.

[139] During a sacrificial session, Raibhya's eldest son, Parāvasu, encounters his father dressed in an antelope-skin at night and kills him, thinking that he is an animal. Arvāvasu, his younger brother, agrees to perform an expiation on Parāvasu's behalf to allow him to complete the ritual. But when Arvāvasu returns after completing the expiation, Parāvasu has him thrown out as a Brahmin-killer. At this point the gods step in and grant Arvāvasu a boon: he chooses that Raibhya, Bharadvāja and Yavakṛīta should all return to life, and that Parāvasu should be free from his sin. When Yavakṛīta asks how Raibhya had been able to kill him despite his Vedic learning and asceticism, the gods reply that Yavakṛīta's learning had been easily acquired, while Raibhya's had been gained with great effort.

[140] The Pāñdavas pursue their journey northwards. Lomaśa warns them that soon they will encounter dangerous Yaksas and other supernatural beings;

Yudhiṣṭhīra cautions Bhīma to guard Draupadī carefully. [141] Then he proposes that he and Nakula should go on with Lomaśa, while Bhīma leads the remainder of the party down to safety, but Bhīma refuses, vowing that he will carry Draupadī if the need arises. Draupadī too insists that she will go on. They arrive in the realm of King Subāhu, who welcomes them. Then after resting for the night they proceed on foot towards Mount Himālaya, longing to see Arjuna.

[142] Yudhiṣṭhīra addresses his wife and brothers: he speaks of his grief at their five years of separation from Arjuna, whose merits he praises highly. Now they will all travel on to Mount Gandhamādana to find him. [143] They set off for the mountain, but are halted by a violent gale and a dust storm which brings complete darkness. The Pāñdavas cling to trees or huddle on the ground. The gale is followed by torrential rain, causing the mountain rivers to overflow.

[144] When the storm has abated, Nakula observes that Draupadī is fainting from exhaustion. Dismayed, Yudhiṣṭhīra blames himself for her plight; Brahmins comfort him while his brothers tend Draupadī. When she has revived, Yudhiṣṭhīra raises the question of how she will be able to continue the journey through the mountains. Bhīma suggests enlisting the help of his Rāksasa son Ghāotkaca, and when Yudhiṣṭhīra agrees to this he summons him by the power of thought.

[145] Ghāotkaca flies through the air carrying Draupadī, and other Rāksasas similarly carry the Pāñdavas: in this way they are swiftly borne along. They see Mount Kailāsa and soon reach the lovely hermitage of Nara and Nārāyaṇa with its wonderful jujube tree. Welcomed by the seers, they stay here in great delight [146] for six days. Then Draupadī sees a beautiful, fragrant flower that has been carried in on the breeze, and she implores Bhīma to go in search of more such flowers. He sets off along the mountain paths, enjoying the beauty of the scenery but fearful for Yudhiṣṭhīra's welfare in his absence. Attacked by wild animals, he kills them with his bare hands and travels on, roaring, blowing his conch and beating his chest. The great monkey Hanumān hears these sounds and responds by striking the ground thunderously with his tail. Bhīma seeks out the monkey and roars at him, but Hanumān languidly complains at the noise he is making and tells him he can go no further.

[147] Bhīma demands that the great monkey let him past; Hanumān refuses and invites him to jump over him. Bhīma replies that to do so would be to dishonour the supreme being who resides within him – otherwise he would

leap over him as Hanumān, Bhīma's brother,¹ once leapt over the ocean. Now Hanumān tells Bhīma to lift his tail and pass under it, but Bhīma finds he does not have the strength to do so. At Bhīma's request Hanumān now identifies himself, and briefly relates the story of Rāma and Sītā in which he had played such an important part long before.

[148] Delighted, Bhīma bows low and begs to be allowed to see Hanumān in his mighty form, but Hanumān refuses: this is the wrong age of the world for that. At Bhīma's request he describes the four ages: the Kṛta Age in which dharma is perfect, and the Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali ages, in each of which it is successively reduced by a quarter.

[149] Bhīma once again asks to see Hanumān's old form; Hanumān assumes the colossal shape he took on to leap over the ocean. Seeing this, Bhīma praises Hanumān, saying that no one, not even Rāvaṇa, could match him; Hanumān assents to this, but explains that if he had killed Rāvaṇa, Rāma's glory would have been tarnished. Then he tells Bhīma the route to travel to reach the place of fragrant flowers, and urges him to abide by the dharma of the Kṣatriyas. [150] Then he resumes his normal form. The brothers embrace, and Hanumān promises to help the Pāṇḍavas in battle by entering Arjuna's standard² and roaring terribly; then he disappears. Bhīma continues on his way, and reaches the place of fragrant flowers.

[151] Bhīma approaches the pool where fragrant lotuses bloom. The Rākṣasas guarding it demand to know who he is. [152] Bhīma explains who he is and why he has come. The Rākṣasas reply that the pool belongs to Kubera, lord of the Yaksas; Bhīma must seek his permission to enter. Bhīma ignores them and continues towards the pool, and they attack him; but he overcomes them, killing many of their number. Bhīma now drinks from the pool and plucks its fragrant flowers, while the Rākṣasas flee to Kubera and tell him what has happened. He laughs, and tells them that Bhīma may take as many flowers as he wishes.

[153] While Bhīma gathers flowers, another mighty gale blows up. Seeing it, Yudhiṣṭhīra looks about for his brothers and realizes that Bhīma is missing. When Draupadī explains where he has gone, Yudhiṣṭhīra insists that they must go and join him. With the help of Ghatotkaca and his Rākṣasa comrades the

entire Pāṇḍava party travels to Kubera's pool, where Yudhiṣṭhīra reproaches Bhīma for killing the guards. Then they settle there for a while.

THE KILLING OF JĀTĀSURA

[154] A Rākṣasa named Jātāsura abducts the Pāṇḍavas one day while Bhīma is absent. Sahadeva manages to escape; Yudhiṣṭhīra remonstrates with the Rākṣasa and weighs him down so that he cannot travel fast. Sahadeva challenges Jātāsura, and then Bhīma arrives and also challenges him. Jātāsura drops the other Pāṇḍavas and closes with Bhīma; the two fight with trees and rocks, then wrestle each other. Eventually, seeing the Rākṣasa tiring, Bhīma hurls him to the ground, breaking all his limbs, and severs his head with a blow from his elbow.

THE BATTLE AGAINST THE YAKṢAS

[155] Now Yudhiṣṭhīra and the other Pāṇḍavas return to the hermitage of Nārāyaṇa and settle there. One day Yudhiṣṭhīra explains that, at the end of his five-year absence, Arjuna will meet them at Mount Śveta, and so they set off there. On the way they stay for some days in the hermitage of the seer Viṣaparvan; then they travel on, and reach Mount Śveta and the lovely Mount Gandhamādana. They visit the seer Āṛṣṭiṣeṇa in his hermitage. [156] Āṛṣṭiṣeṇa greets the Pāṇḍavas. He expresses the hope that Yudhiṣṭhīra is maintaining dharma, and warns him of the danger from the supernatural beings who frequent the mountain. Finally, he invites them all to stay with him.

[157] — Janamejaya asks to hear in detail about the Pāṇḍavas' life on Mount Gandhamādana, and Vaiśampāyana obliges. — The Pāṇḍavas pass the remainder of the fifth year of Arjuna's absence in Āṛṣṭiṣeṇa's hermitage, where they see many wonderful things. One day beautiful, fragrant flowers are carried in by the breeze, and Draupadī implores Bhīma to rid the mountain of its Rākṣasas so that she may deck herself in flowers and visit its summit. Bhīma climbs to the top of the mountain and does battle single-handed against the Yaksas and Rākṣasas; many are slain and the rest flee. The Rākṣasa Manimat attempts to rally them and engages Bhīma in combat, but Bhīma kills him with his club, and the rout is complete.

¹ Bhīma and Hanumān are both sons of the Wind god.

² Arjuna has the emblem of a monkey on his standard.

[158] Alarmed at Bhīma's absence, the other Pāṇḍavas seek him out; when Yudhiṣṭhīra sees what he has done he castigates him for the slaughter. Meanwhile the surviving Rākṣasas tell the Yaksā lord Kubera what has happened, and Kubera at once leads a mighty Yaksā army against the Pāṇḍavas. But when he sees what fine warriors they are he is pleased. He tells Bhīma that his actions have released him from the curse of Agastya: once Maṇimat had spat on Agastya, who had cursed him to die with his troops at the hands of a mortal man; Kubera himself would be freed from his sin on seeing that man.

[159] Now Kubera warns Yudhiṣṭhīra that he should keep Bhīma in check, and adds that Arjuna, who is learning to use celestial weapons in Indra's heaven, will soon rejoin his brothers. Then he returns to his home.

[160] The next morning, Dhaumya points out the great mountains to Yudhiṣṭhīra: Mandara, Asta the western mountain, and Meru, round which sun and moon circle. [161] In their lovely mountain dwelling the Pāṇḍavas now await Arjuna's arrival. One day they see Indra's chariot approach, driven by Mātali: Arjuna is within it. They greet him with joy, and he tells them that he has mastered the use of the celestial weapons. [162] Now Indra himself arrives. Yudhiṣṭhīra pays him honour and receives his blessing.

[163] After Indra's departure, Yudhiṣṭhīra asks Arjuna to describe his time in heaven, and Arjuna relates his story. — While performing austerities, he is attacked by a man of the mountains who proves to be invulnerable to every weapon. This is in fact Śiva, who now resumes his own form and grants Arjuna a boon. Arjuna chooses the celestial weapons, and Śiva gives him the Pāśupata Weapon.

[164] The next day, Arjuna is visited by Indra and the other gods, who present him with their weapons. Indra tells him that he is to come and stay with him in heaven to learn the use of the weapons, and vanishes; then Mātali arrives with Indra's chariot and takes him there. There Arjuna stays, sharing Indra's throne and studying the weapons.

[165] When Arjuna has mastered the celestial weapons, Indra demands his fee: he must kill the Nivātakavaca demons. Arjuna sets out with Mātali in Indra's chariot. The gods bless him and give him the conch Devadatta.¹ [166] He reaches the ocean and sees the city of the Nivātakavacas. When the

¹ This conch, which Indra gives to Arjuna again in chapter 171 below, had in fact already been presented to him by the demon Maya: see 2.3.18.

demons hear the sound of the chariot, they arm themselves and close the gates of the city. Arjuna blows his conch Devadatta, and the Nivātakavacas attack him.

[167] Assailed on all sides, Arjuna slays numerous demons with his arrows, while Mātali steers the chariot so that many others are trampled by the horses. Now Arjuna deploys the Mādhava Weapon. The desperate demons resort to their illusory power. [168] They produce a hail of rocks, a torrent of water, fire and fierce wind; one after the other, Arjuna uses his knowledge of celestial weapons to overcome them. Now a terrible darkness falls, and even Mātali is afraid; Arjuna pits his own illusory power against it, and for a while darkness and light follow each other in quick succession.

[169] Though he cannot see them, Arjuna continues to battle fiercely against the Nivātakavacas, till they flee for the safety of their city. Light returns and reveals the massive scale of their losses. But now they take to the air and pile rocks and mountains on Arjuna. Arjuna deploys Indra's Thunderbolt Weapon; it kills the demons and destroys their illusions. Mātali drives Arjuna into the lovely city and explains that it had originally belonged to the gods. The Nivātakavacas had performed fierce austerities and won a boon from Brahmā, and they had chosen to live there and to be invulnerable to the gods; this is why Indra had taught Arjuna the use of the celestial weapons.

[170] Returning to Indra's heaven, Arjuna observes another splendid city. Mātali tells him of Pulomā and Kālakā, two demon women who won from Brahmā the boon that their descendants should be invulnerable to the gods: this city of Hiranyapura is where those descendants live. Arjuna attacks the demons and kills many of them; they make their city fly through the air, but Arjuna shoots it down in ruin. He continues to battle against them single-handed, but cannot overcome them, and so deploys the Weapon of Rudra. Immediately the battlefield is filled with the forms of fierce creatures that set upon the demons and destroy them. Mātali praises Arjuna's feat and drives him back to Indra's heaven, where the gods also heap praise upon him.

[171] Indra rewards Arjuna with impregnable armour, the conch Devadatta, and a diadem. Arjuna spends five years in Indra's heaven and then returns to his brothers. — After hearing Arjuna's account of his adventures, Yudhiṣṭhīra asks to see the celestial weapons, and Arjuna promises to show them the following day. [172] The next morning, he shows his brothers the celestial weapons. As he is about to use them, the earth trembles, mountains are torn apart and the

sun ceases to shine. The immortals appear, and Nārada warns Arjuna never to use the weapons unless there is real need.

THE CONSTRICTOR

[173] Reunited, the Pāṇḍavas spend a further four years in the forest: ten years of their term of exile have now passed. As the eleventh year passes, Bhīma persuades Yudhiṣṭhira to mount an attack on Duryodhana, and Ghaṭotkaca bears them down from the mountain.

[174] The Pāṇḍavas return to Viṣaparvan's hermitage, where they spend the night before setting out once again for the realm of King Subāhu. Here they are rejoined by their retinue, and Ghaṭotkaca leaves them. They proceed to Mount Yāmuna, where they settle. It is here that Bhīma is rescued from a snake by Yudhiṣṭhira, and it is here that the Pāṇḍavas pass their twelfth year, before moving on to the lake Dvaitavana.

[175] — Janamejaya asks Vaiśampāyana how it could be that the mighty Bhīma was overcome by a snake, and Vaiśampāyana tells him the story. — As Bhīma roams through the forest hunting deer, he sees an enormous constrictor in a mountain cave. It seizes him, and despite his strength he cannot free himself. [176] Bhīma wants to know how the snake was able to overcome his might, and the snake agrees to tell him before eating him. Formerly he was King Nahuṣa, but he treated Brahmins with dishonour and Agastya cursed him to become a snake. However, Indra specified that the curse would be lifted when someone gave correct answers to his questions, and sympathetic Brahmins added that he would be able to outmatch the strength of any creature. Bhīma now laments his fate, not for himself but for his family.

Meanwhile, Yudhiṣṭhira has seen terrible portents. Discovering that Bhīma is missing, he tracks him down. [177] When he learns the situation he offers to answer the snake's questions. The snake asks him, 'Who is a Brahmin?', to which Yudhiṣṭhira replies that a Brahmin is someone who lives a virtuous life, rather than someone born in a particular line. At this, the snake releases Bhīma. [178] Now Yudhiṣṭhira questions the snake about human conduct and its consequences in the afterlife, and about the nature of consciousness. The snake answers wisely, concluding with an account of his own fall; then, freed from his curse, he returns to heaven.

THE MEETING WITH MĀRKANDEYA

[179] The rainy season comes and passes, while the Pāṇḍavas travel along the river Sarasvatī; then they return to the Kāmyaka forest. [180] Kṛṣṇa arrives with his wife Satyabhāmā, and greets them warmly. He brings news of Draupadī's family, and of her children and Abhimanyu. Then he promises Yudhiṣṭhira the support of his people in reclaiming his kingdom. At this point the mighty ascetic Mārkandeya arrives, as does Nārada.

[181] Yudhiṣṭhira asks Mārkandeya about the consequences of human actions: do they pursue a man into the next world? Mārkandeya replies that men were first created pure and good; they were friends with the gods and lived for thousands of years. But they became corrupted, wicked and short-lived. When a man dies he is reborn instantly, and his former deeds determine his lot. [182] Now the Pāṇḍavas ask Mārkandeya about the greatness of Brahmins, and he replies by telling them the story of a Haihaya king who accidentally killed an ascetic while hunting. With his companions he visited Tārkṣya Arīṣṭanemi, the ascetic's father, and confessed what he had done; but then Tārkṣya showed them his son, who had been restored to life through the power of asceticism.

[183] Next Mārkandeya tells the story of Atri. Atri planned to retire to the forest, and went to see King Vāinya in hopes of receiving wealth to pass on to his sons. But when he offered praise to Vāinya he was contradicted by another ascetic, Gautama, and a dispute arose as to whether kings hold supreme power. Sanatkumāra, asked to resolve it, agreed with Atri and declared that kings have been granted supremacy by Brahmins in order to maintain dharma. Pleased with this outcome, Vāinya rewarded Atri generously.

[184] Now Mārkandeya speaks again of Tārkṣya. He asked Sarasvatī for instruction; she told him that the man who knows brahman attains heaven, as does the one who gives gifts of cattle. She also gave rules for the performance of the agnihotra ritual, from which she herself first arose.

THE FISH

[185] Yudhiṣṭhira asks to hear the story of Manu Vaivasvata, and Mārkandeya narrates. — Manu is engaged in performing austerities when he

is addressed by a little fish, which asks him to save it from being eaten by bigger fishes. He takes it and keeps it in a jar. When it outgrows the jar, he transfers it to a pond; when it outgrows the pond he transfers it to the Gaṅgā; when it outgrows even the Gaṅgā he releases it into the ocean. The fish warns him that soon a terrible flood will destroy everything on earth: Manu should build a boat and place in it the seeds of all creatures, and then await the fish. Manu does as he has been told, and the fish comes. It tows his boat to the Himālaya and tells him to moor it there. Then it reveals that it is in fact Brahmā, and instructs Manu to create all creatures.

[186] Yudhiṣṭhīra now remarks that Mārkaṇḍeya has, uniquely, experienced the repeated dissolution and re-creation of the world, and asks him to describe it. — Mārkaṇḍeya begins by reverencing Kṛṣṇa, whom he identifies as the creator of all. He then describes the succession of the ages. The Kṛta Age lasts for a total of 4,800 years; it is followed in turn by the Tretā Age (3,600 years), the Dvāpara Age (2,400 years) and the Kali Age (1,200 years), after which comes a new Kṛta Age. A thousand such cycles constitute one day of Brahmā. As each cycle nears its end men become degenerate and nature begins to fail; at the end of the thousandth cycle the world is devastated by famine, fire and flood, till nothing is left but a raging ocean. Mārkaṇḍeya wanders alone through this desolation till he sees a child sitting beneath a banyan tree. The child, who is Kṛṣṇa, bids him enter his mouth; Mārkaṇḍeya does so, and finds within the whole world. Mārkaṇḍeya remains there for a hundred and one years, till a breeze wafts him back through Kṛṣṇa's mouth.

Mārkaṇḍeya asks Kṛṣṇa for an explanation of what he has seen. [187] Kṛṣṇa answers: he is Nārāyaṇa and all the gods, he is the source of all that is sacred. He takes on human form to overcome evil; he is the creator and destroyer of all. He has shown Mārkaṇḍeya the world hidden within himself during the dissolution; when Brahmā awakes he will re-create it. — Mārkaṇḍeya assures Yudhiṣṭhīra that the Kṛṣṇa sitting before him is this same greatest of gods; Yudhiṣṭhīra should place his trust in him.

[188] The Pāṇḍavas pay honour to Kṛṣṇa; then Yudhiṣṭhīra asks Mārkaṇḍeya to tell him more about the characteristics of the Kali Age. Mārkaṇḍeya describes how the whole world will degenerate into barbarism and ruin; then, at the end

of the Kali Age, a new Kṛta Age will begin, and a Brahmin named Kalki Viṣṇuyaśas will destroy the barbarians and bring peace. [189] He will give the world to the twice-born at a great horse sacrifice, and then dharma will prosper once more. Mārkaṇḍeya urges Yudhiṣṭhīra to observe dharma, and Yudhiṣṭhīra promises to do so.

THE FROG

[190] Again Yudhiṣṭhīra asks Mārkaṇḍeya about the greatness of Brahmins, and Mārkaṇḍeya narrates. — The Ikṣvāku king Parīkṣit is out hunting when he comes upon a lovely pond. Resting there, he sees an exceedingly beautiful girl and desires her; she agrees to be his on condition that he never lets her see water. He agrees and takes her home, and they live together. One day, tired and thirsty, he comes upon a hidden pond, and suggests she dive in; she does so, and does not reappear. When he has the pond drained he finds nothing but a frog. He now gives orders for all frogs to be killed, until the frog king comes to beg him to stop, and reveals that the 'girl' was in fact a frog: she is his own daughter, who has deceived many kings in this way. Parīkṣit still wants her back, and her father hands her over with the pronouncement that her children will be hostile to Brahmins. In time three sons are born to her, named Śala, Dala and Bala. Parīkṣit hands the kingdom over to Śala and retires to the forest. Śala learns that the horses of the seer Vāmadeva are exceptionally swift; he borrows them, then refuses to return them, and Vāmadeva has him killed by Rākṣasas. Dala succeeds him; he attempts to shoot Vāmadeva with his arrows, and Vāmadeva first makes him shoot his own son and then paralyses him. Dala's wife intercedes for him, and Vāmadeva frees Dala from his sin.

[191] — Now Mārkaṇḍeya is asked whether there is anyone older than himself, and he replies with the story of Indradyumna, who had fallen from heaven when his fame ran out. Looking for someone who