

SHIVA TRILOGY 2

THE SECRET OF THE NAGAS

SEQUEL TO
THE IMMORTALS OF
MELUHA

AMISH



Chapter 1

The Strange Demon

'Sati!' screamed Shiva, as he rapidly drew his sword and started sprinting towards his wife, pulling his shield forward as he ran.

She'll run into a trap!

'Stop!' yelled Shiva, picking up his pace as he saw her dash into a cluster of trees alongside the road leading to the Ramjanmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya.

Sati was totally focused on chasing the retreating hooded Naga, her sword drawn and held far from her body, like a seasoned warrior with her prey in sight.

It took a few moments for Shiva to catch up with Sati, to ascertain that she was safe. As they continued to give chase, Shiva's focus shifted to the Naga. He was shocked.

How did that dog move so far ahead?

The Naga, showing surprising agility, was effortlessly navigating between the trees and undulating ground of the

hillside, picking up pace. Shiva remembered battling with the Naga at the Brahma temple at Meru, when he had met Sati for the first time.

His slow leg movements at the Brahma temple were just a battle strategy.

Shiva flipped his shield, clipping it on to his back, to get room to run faster. Sati was keeping pace to his left. She suddenly made a grunting sound and pointed to the right, to a fork in the path that was coming up. Shiva nodded. They would split up and try to cut off the Naga from opposite ends on the narrow ridge ahead.

Shiva dashed to his right with a renewed burst of speed, sword at the ready. Sati stayed her course behind the Naga, running equally hard. The ground beneath Shiva's feet on the new path had evened out and he managed to cover the distance rapidly. He noticed that the Naga had pulled his shield in his right hand. The wrong hand for defence. Shiva frowned.

Quickly coming up to the Naga's right, with Sati still some distance away, Shiva reached with his left hand, drew a knife and flung it at the Naga's neck. A stunned Shiva then saw a magnificent manoeuvre that he hadn't imagined possible.

Without turning to look at the knife or even breaking a step, the Naga pulled his shield forward in the path of the knife. With the knife safely bouncing off the shield, the Naga effortlessly let the shield clip on to his back, maintaining his pace.

Shiva gaped in awe, his speed slackening.

He blocked the knife without even looking at it! Who the hell is this man?

Sati meanwhile had maintained her pace, edging closer to the Naga as Shiva ran in from the other trail onto the path that the Naga was on.

Seeing Sati cross the narrow ridge, Shiva picked up speed, closing in on his wife. Because of the steep angle of the sloping ridge, he could see the Naga further ahead, reaching the wall at the bottom of the hill. The wall protected the Ramjanmabhoomi temple at the base from animal attacks and trespassers. The height of the wall gave Shiva hope. There was no way the Naga could jump over it. He would have to climb, giving Sati and him the crucial seconds needed to catch up and mount an attack.

The Naga came to the same realisation as well. As he neared the wall, he pirouetted on his heels, hands reaching to his sides, drawing out two swords. The sword in his right hand was a traditional long sword, glinting in the evening sun. The one in his left, a short sword with a strange double blade mounted on a central pivot at the hilt. Shiva pulled his shield forward as he neared the Naga. Sati attacked the Naga from his right.

The Naga swung the long sword hard, forcing Sati to step back. With Sati on the back foot, the Naga swerved with his left hand, making Shiva duck to avoid a strike. As the Naga's sword swept safely away, Shiva jumped high and struck down from his height, a blow almost impossible to defend if the opponent is not holding a shield. The Naga, however, effortlessly stepped back, avoiding the strike,

while thrusting forward with his short sword, putting Shiva on the back foot. The Neelkanth had to quickly swing his shield up to deflect the blow.

Sati again moved forward, her sword forcing the Naga back. Reaching behind with her left hand, she pulled out a knife and threw it. The Naga bent his head at the exact moment, letting the knife sail harmlessly into the wall. Shiva and Sati were yet to get a single strike on the Naga, but he was progressively being forced to retreat. It was a matter of time before he would be pinned against the wall.

By the Holy Lake, I finally have him.

And then, the Naga swung ferociously with his left hand. The sword was too short to reach Shiva and it appeared to be a wasted manoeuvre. Shiva pushed forward, confident he would strike the Naga on his torso. But the Naga swung back, this time his thumb pressing a lever on the pivot of the short sword. One of the twin blades suddenly extended beyond the length of the other, doubling the reach of the sword. The blade cut Shiva on his shoulder. Its poisoned edge sent a jolt of electricity through his body, immobilising him.

'Shiva!' screamed Sati, as she swung down on the sword in the Naga's right hand, hoping to knock the blade out. Moments before the impact, the Naga dropped his long sword, causing Sati to lurch, her sword slipping out of her hand as she struggled to regain her balance.

'No!' screamed Shiva, helpless on his back, unable to move.

He had noticed what Sati had forgotten. The knife Sati had flung at the Naga, when he had been discovered hiding behind a tree at the Ramjanmabhoomi temple, was tied on his