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Welcome to Devabhumi

A lone hero wanders through the treacherous ice on top of a mountain in order to meet an elusive god. If the hero finds the god, he will receive a powerful boon that will threaten the stability of all nations. A party of young adventurers stumbles across a powerful sage meditating in the jungle. If they disturb the sage's meditation, they will receive a curse that will haunt them for the rest of their lives. A group of explorers cut their way into the jungle in search of a city built of jewels. On their way, they come across unknown ruins that are inhabited by a colony of Vaanars—the legendary talking monkeys that have only been described in stories!

The Land of Devabhumi is a distant place nestled in between the sea and sky-scraping mountains. It is a land where gods and mortals live together, boons and curses change the destiny of its inhabitants, and senses are easily overpowered by the diversity of the landscape. Magic is elusive, but it still dots the land, presenting itself as brief but powerful energy that is tucked away from the grasp of most mortals. Those who are able to channel this magic are rare and are called Jadugars, or spellcasters. These Jadugars use the help of magic to build towering palaces, crystal forests, and magical chariots that ride through the plains.

Heroes come from all regions of the land, seeking something greater than that which was offered to them. They wander the land, seeking gods for their boons, battling rakshasas, aiding powerful Rajas and Ranis, and exploring frozen peaks that may hold the key to immortality.

Devabhumi is a fantasy setting with a focus on exploration and mystery, allowing heroes to stumble upon ancient riches and great power...or stumble into the jaws of death. Shifting powers cause instability throughout the land, which creates opportunity. Elusive gods try to shape the course of events to their benefit, hidden rakshasas seek to spread their corruption, and the greed of mortals places the land in constant threat. Who will come out on top— not even the gods know.

Terms & Definitions

Astra (us-trah): a powerful divine-imbued weapon with the ability to destroy entire settlements at once.

Ashram (ash-rum): a private monastery or school that can teach religion, science, magic, and warfare.

Deva (deh-vah): a male god

Devi (deh-vih): a female goddess

Dharma: the innate duty of all sentient creatures. The dharma of an individual depends on one's age, class, and background in society.

Ghat (ghut): Stone steps leading down into a river or lake for bathing.

Guru: a spiritual teacher that instructs one in dharma, religious texts, and sometimes the knowledge of magic and war.

Kalachakra (ka-lah-chak-rah): the rotating wheel that symbolizes the cyclical nature of time.

Karma: the natural consequences that arise as a result of one's actions. These consequences can be positive or negative.

Moksha: a release from the cycle of birth a that plagues all souls

Puja: an elaborate worship ritual that always requires a fire and a sacrifice. Different gods have different pujas, but these two elements are always present.

Raja: a king or a prince. This word follows the name of the individual. For example, King Bharat would be called Bharat Raja.

Rani: a queen or a princess. This word follows the name of the individual. For example, Queen Radha would be called Radha Rani.

Samsara (sum-sah-rah): the cycle of birth and rebirth. One's accumulated karma can affect the quality of the next life.

Tridevi (tree-deh-vih): three chief goddesses that accompany the Trimurti

Trimurti (tree-mur-tih): three chief gods that are at the head of the Indic pantheon

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The History of Devabhumi

Time in Devabhumi is viewed as cyclical. There is no set beginning or end, there are only cycles. As one stage begins, another stage comes to an end. This is the natural order of all things. There is no omnipotent force that directly controls this cosmological cycle. Even the gods are part of this infinite rotating wheel—the **Kalachakra** (wheel of time).

As a result, there is no creation story for the world. However, there are stories about the current state of the land, its nations, and its people. These stories can explain the emergence of different tribes, the occurrence of cataclysmic events, and the pockets of magic that are scattered throughout the land. In order to understand these stories, we must first understand the Four Ages.

The Four Ages

In the cycle of time, there are four main **yugas** (ages). Each age lasts roughly four million years. Although each age contains the same amount of time, not all ages are equal in quality. As the world moves on from age to age, there is a progressive weakening of life, and a loss of vitality amongst living beings. At the end of the fourth age, there is a cataclysmic event that leads to the destruction of the world and the creation of a new world. This is the dharmic cycle.

Satya Yuga *(the age of truth, the golden age)*: This is the first and highest of the yugas. During this age, the gods walked among mortals in the world, working together to cultivate life, prosperity, and artistic endeavors.

In this age, there was a focus on knowledge, meditation, and self-fulfillment. There was no need to build grand temples to the gods because they lived in the world with mortals. This age was marked by an elegant simplicity. People lived in simple but beautiful homes adorned with various flowers, vines, and other pleasant-smelling fauna. Divine-imbued magic dominated the landscape, leaving subtle but beautiful effects on the world. For example, the soil was soft, crops were sweet and bountiful, birds chirped beautiful tunes, and flowers gave off euphoric scents.

Despite the predominance of virtue in this age, there was still evil abound. This evil manifested subtly, as whispers. Asuras (demons) took the form of birds, insects, and small mammals. In these forms, they would infiltrate society and influence mortals to commit evil. As mortals chose to go against dharma, these demons would grow in power. If a demon grew too powerful, it would raise the attention of a god, who would subsequently slay the demon. Thus, the cycle of good and evil remained intact, even in the age of truth.

> "Men neither bought nor sold; there were no poor and no rich; there was no need to labor, because all that men required was obtained by the power of will; the chief virtue was the abandonment of all worldly desires. All men were blessed by the gods. - *The Book of the Forest*, on the Satya Yuga.

Treta Yuga *(the silver age)*: This is the second yuga, which is marked by the development of kingdoms, division of labor, and the rise of ambitious kings and queens. People started to build large towns, wealthy cities, and grand temples. In this age, people walked a fine line between worldly desires and spiritual virtues. A determined prince may advance his armies into foreign wars while still honoring the gods with yagnas (sacrifices).

The magic that paints the world started to fade, giving rise to deserts and wastelands. The gods still walked among mortals, but they retreated into the forest and caves, taking their knowledge with them.

Demonic forces gained more power in this age, as they started to resort to outright violence and slaughter to achieve their goals. Despite the general weakening of living creatures, this age still retained many positive attributes from the Satya Yuga. Food was still bountiful, disease and famine were unknown, and the lifespan of mortal creatures was long.

Dvapara Yuga *(the bronze age)*: This is the third age in the dharmic cycle. In this age, there is a marked decrease in piety and a stark increase in chaos and lawlessness. Creatures become much more competitive and start to hoard resources, leading to wars and feuds. Humans continue to develop technology and science, leading to new technologies, unique schools of magic, and the discovery of new lands.

Although destructive tendencies become more common amongst the population, they still retain a desire for spiritual advancement and moksha. The gods still walk the world, but shrink away even farther from human civilization. Only in rare instances do they interact with rulers and warriors, preferring to share their knowledge with learned sages instead.

Disease, famine, and natural disasters emerge in this age, although rare. Inequality becomes common, which leads to envy and selfishness.

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Demonic forces grow bold and reveal their true forms at certain instances. Small groups of humans form cults that worship various demons, hoping for material gain. Asuras begin to work together and form their own kingdoms, warring with humans and other races. The end of the Dvapara Yuga is marked by the gods leaving the world. If the Asuras manage to conquer the land of Devabhumi, it will bring forth the Kali-Yuga.

Kali Yuga *(the Iron Age, the age of darkness)*: This is the fourth and final age of the dharmic cycle, which ends with a cataclysmic event and the destruction of the world. This age will be marked by conflict, unchecked ambition, and the greed of mortals. As a result, technological development and progression will be halted. Many of the discoveries made in the Dvapara Yuga will be forgotten, only known to solitary sages.

War will be constant, famines plentiful, and survival will become difficult. Many cities will be burned down, homes destroyed, and civilizations wiped out. Despite this destruction, mortals will continue to multiply and ruin the land with their greed and ambition.

Demonic forces will be at their strongest in this age. Although outright worship of demons will be rare, demonic influence will be very common. Demonic kingdoms will dominate most, if not all, of the landscape. Large empires will form, leading to draconian rulers and oppressive laws. Pious kings and queens will become rare, as power will inevitably corrupt people in this age.

The gods will still reward their worshippers in this age, but they will not directly involve themselves in the squabbles of mortals. Near the end of the Kali Yuga, the god Kalki will incarnate in the world and destroy it completely, saving only the pious. Once the world is destroyed, a new world is created and the dharmic cycle is reset, starting with the Satya Yuga.

The events of this book occur in the Dvapara Yuga, but many elements can be adapted to fit the other three yugas as well.

History of this Age

Two and a half million years have passed in the Dvapara Yuga, which marks more than halfway in the progression of this bronze age. The earth is still fresh with wounds from the great war known as the **Mahabharata**, which occurred nearly a thousand years ago. This war began as a succession dispute between two northern ruling dynasties - the Kurus and the Pandavas. This war lasted for only eighteen days, with many powerful Astras being used by both sides, causing regional devastation.

In the end, the Pandavas emerged victorious, but the war claimed the lives of most of their subjects and their kingdom was now crumbling. A total of two million people were killed in the war, leaving behind many ruins of formerly great cities and fortresses.

While much of Northern Devabhumi is in ruins, the Southern settlements are flourishing. Powerful Rajas and Ranis rule over individual city-states, as is the norm in Devabhumi, and their coffers grow large with trade. This instability has allowed scheming Asuras to grow their power and influence in the land, as they now command a handful of human settlements on the western coast.



Maladhari by Allan Damaso

The Rise of the Asura Queen

The end of the Treta Yuga heralded many natural calamities. One of which involved the great Saraswati River, which flowed southwest from the icy peaks of the Aakashparvat Mountains and emptied into the Purvabhaga Gulf on the west coast. Within a few decades of the advent of the Treta Yuga, this great river that sustained millions of lives dried up, leaving behind a vast desert.

Many settlements that were built along the

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river suffered widespread drought and famine, causing the inhabitants to flee to the coastal cities on the west. Gangs of thugs and bandits took advantage of this desperate condition, robbing people and looting homes. With great difficulty, the refugees made their way to the west.

One particular coastal city—**Khara**—swelled with hundreds of thousands of refugees. The resources of Khara dwindled and a great conflict arose. The city descended to a state of rioting for weeks until an opportunistic asura named **Maladhari** brought order to the city. With an army of a few thousand asuras under her command, the sly asura stormed the gates of Khara and ousted the ruling family from their palace. She ruled with an iron fist, bringing an end to the violence, with a cost...This city served as a springboard for a quick succession of annexations of surrounding cities.

Maladhari now commands four major cities on the west coast of Devabhumi. The many rajas and ranis of surrounding areas are worried, rightfully so. Maladhari has gotten a taste of power and will not stop anytime soon. Those that have seen the Asura Queen say that she resembles a terrifying old woman. With wrinkled gray skin, six strong arms, a neck decorated with a garland of skulls, and a head of wiry white hair, it is understandable why Maladhari evokes such strong feelings of terror. It is rumored that she is on a quest to grow in power and assume her rakshasi form.

According to sages, if Maladhari gains complete control over Devabhumi, it will herald the coming of the feared Kali Yuga. This would lead to the loss of life on a grand scale, along with cataclysmic disasters that would surely bring an end to the world.

Notable Characters from the Mahabharata:

With the Mahabharata war fresh on the people's minds, there are constant stories and references to heroes that were present during this conflict. Listed below are the most popular.

Ashwatthama: An infamous warrior who fought on the Kuru side, he was cursed with painful immortality for attempting to kill the grandchild of Arjuna. His curse would only end at the end of the Kali Yuga.

Arjuna: The famed archer who fought on the side of the Pandavas, responsible for slaying many powerful warriors. Arjuna's chariot was piloted by Krishna, who desired to remain neutral during the war.

Bheema: A warrior that fought with the Pandavas that was known for his sheer strength. He was the younger brother of King Yudhistira and slayed Duryodhana by breaking his hips with a gada (two-handed mace).

Bhishma: The powerful general of the Kurus, Bhishma had the power to determine when he would die. After Arjuna trapped him on a bed of arrows, Bhishma voluntarily died after fifty-one days.

Duryodhana: The crown prince of the Kurus, Duryodhana was exceptionally cunning and powerful. He was immortal from the waist up, and as a result was slayed by a strike to the hips.

Karna: A warrior that fought on the side of the Kurus, Karna was the scion of the sun god Surya. He was the only one able to match the prowess of Arjuna with the bow. He was killed by Arjuna through trickery.

Krishna: An incarnation of Vishnu, Krishna was the charioteer of Arjuna, and promised to remain neutral during the war. At one point, after being aroused to anger, Krishna almost killed Bhishma with a chariot wheel. But Arjuna stepped in and reminded Krishna of his promise to remain neutral.

Calendar

The calendar of Devabhumi is measured with reference to the Mahabharata. It has been 1,044 years since the great war ended, so the current year is marked as 1,044 N.S. This acronym stands for Nave Sal, which means new year.

If one wishes to refer to a time period that occurred before the Mahabharata, it is marked as Pehle Sal, P.S., which means previous years. An event that occurred 1,000 years before the Mahabharara is marked as 1,000 P.S.

There are 12 total months in the Indic calendar, and much like the Gregorian calendar, each month has 30 or 31 days. The Indic calendar is a lunar calendar, with each month starting on a full moon. The names for the months are below.

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1. Chaitra	2. Vaisakha
3. Jyaistha	4. Asadha
5. Sravana	6. Bhadrapana
7. Asvina	8. Kartikka
9. Margasirsa	10. Pausa
11. Magha	12. Phalguna

Seasons

Devabhumi is a hot subcontinent with searing summers and long days. The only exception is the Aakashparvat Mountains, which are covered with a thick layer of ice. In general, there are three main seasons in Devabhumi— winter, summer, and the monsoon season. Winter is relatively short, lasting from Magha (11th month) to Vaisakha (2nd month). Summer lasts from Jyaistha (3rd month) to Asvina (7th month). The monsoon season starts in mid-Asvina and lasts until Pausa (10th month).

Since Devabhumi is a subcontinent spanning tens of thousands of miles, there is plenty of variation in the climate of different regions. Northwest Devabhumi is hot and arid, owing to the vast Kavacha Desert. Eastern and Southern Devabhumi is quite humid, allowing for a luscious growth of jungles. The central heartlands are flat and temperate, bearing no great extreme of either temperature. However, all regions of Devabhumi must bear the dreaded monsoon season, during which torrential rain and thunderstorms cause flash floods that wash away entire villages. Coastal settlements must contend with tropical cyclones that can drown a whole city. Northern towns must also deal with massive landslides that have been known to kill hundreds at a time.

Realms

There are three realms (or lokas), which are separate from the planes of existence, that are home to magical beings and strange landscapes. These realms can be better understood as planets, where there is a physical means of entry and exit. Some planets lie above ours, some are below. The most common way to enter a realm is to be reborn as a creature in that realm, but occasionally a powerful mortal may breach the gates and enter a realm. The realm in which the events of this book take place is **Bhuloka**, which contains the subcontinent of Devabhumi along with all of its kingdoms, ruins, and history.

Svargaloka, or Svarga, contains the heavens with all the gods, their heavenly consorts, and the souls of people who were immensely devoted and pious. Each god has their own kingdom within Svarga, which is adorned with palaces, gardens, and landscapes of the god's taste. The name of these kingdoms is usually the god's name plus the suffix "loka." For example, Indra's kingdom would be called Indraloka.

Patala is a realm immersed in darkness. It is described as more beautiful than Svarga, but since it is shrouded in darkness, much of the beauty is not seen. It is a home of Asuras, Nagas, and the souls of people who committed grave and evil deeds in their lives. Patala is further divided into regions for each creature. Asuraloka is home to tribes of fragmented Asuras, plotting their entry into Bhuloka. Nagaloka is home to a large kingdom of Nagas, ruled by King Vasuki. Naraka is home to countless suffering souls, overseen by Yamaraj and released back into Bhuloka once their suffering is complete.

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