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Ramayana of Valmiki, Synopsis By John P. Clay

Boyhood (Book One)

Rama, the crown prince of the City of Ayodhya is a model son and warrior. He is sent by his father the king to rescue a sage from persecution by demons, but must first kill a fearsome ogress. That done, he drives out the demons, restores peace, and attends a tournament in the neighboring city of Mithila; here he bends the bow that no other warrior can handle, winning the prize and the hand of Sita, the princess of Mithila. He and Sita and his brothers and their wives return in triumph to Ayodhya, and are fêted.

Ayodhya (Book Two)

The king decides to abdicate in favor of Rama; but just as the celebrations reach their climax, a court intrigue forces Rama and Sita into fourteen years banishment; they dutifully accept their fate, and go off to the jungle. The other brothers refuse to benefit from his misfortune, which leaves nobody to run the city; eventually one of them is persuaded to act as regent, but only consents to do so on condition that he lives outside the city and acts in Rama's name.

The Forest (Book Three)

The skies darken for the exiles. First one demon, then another, attempts to harm or corrupt them. When these efforts fail, an army of demons is sent, and then a bigger one, but each time Rama again defeats them. Finally Ravana, the supreme lord of the demons, decides to cripple Rama by capturing Sita; he traps her, and carries her off under heavy guard to the island fortress of Lanka. Rama is distraught by grief, and searches everywhere without success.

Kishkindha (Book Four)

Rama goes to the monkey capital of Kishkindha to seek help in finding Sita, and meets Hanuman, the greatest of the monkey heroes. There are two claimants for the monkey throne, Valin and Sugriva; Rama helps Sugriva win the throne, and in return Sugriva promises to help in the search for Sita. The monkey hordes set out in every direction to scour the world, but without success until an old vulture tells them she is in Lanka. Hanuman promises to leap over the ocean to Lanka to pursue the search.

Sundara (Book Five)

After his leap, Hanuman finds and explores the demons' city, and spies on Ravana; next he seeks out Sita, shows her Rama's signet ring as proof of identity, and offers to carry her back to Rama. She nevertheless insists that Rama must come himself to avenge the abduction. Hanuman creates havoc and destruction in the demons' city, before returning to Kishkindha to tell Rama what has happened.

War (Book Six)

Rama and his armies gather on the seashore facing Lanka, and the monkeys construct a bridge across the ocean, over which the armies pass. A great battle ensues, with the fortunes of war swinging wildly, until at last Rama kills Ravana in single combat. This however does not clear Sita, who must now go through an ordeal by fire to prove that she remained faithful during the time she was kidnapped . The new king of the demons provides a flying palace, in which Rama returns to Ayodhya; with the period of exile at last over, his long-deferred coronation goes ahead.

The Final Chapter (Book Seven)

This should be the happy ending, as Rama and Sita live in peace and happiness; but the rumors about Sita are persistent. Rama knows they're false, but sends away the pregnant Sita. Twenty years later he hears twins reciting the Ramayana, and realizes they must be Sita's and his sons. He tries to get Sita back, but she asks for the earth to swallow her; he gives his kingdom to his two sons, and walks into the sea.