

DHARMA

HYDROGEN | H.1 | ISSUE ZERO

At 05:03, Ehlana Ramdass's alarm clock began making unreasonable demands.

BEEP BEEP BEEP

EHLANA

We can build rocket ships to Mars, but apparently a foolproof alarm clock remains beyond the reach of human civilisation.

The appliance continued with the grave persistence of something performing a public duty.

She had set it for seven. More importantly, she remembered checking.

BEEP BEEP

05:03

CLICK

07:00



EHLANA
No.



Her first class began in twenty-three minutes.



She had planned for a failed tablet, getting lost and an unexpected change of classroom. An alarm clock with independent ambitions had not appeared on the risk register.



Her hair had expanded overnight. She left the rest to enjoy its independence.



Hydrogen remained hydrogen wherever the bookcase went. Carbon did not revise its bonds because Douglas changed universities.



One bite now, the rest on the way.



EHLANA
No.

SPLAT

She ran.



STUDENT ONE

Jones moved the lab report to Friday.

STUDENT TWO

Friday if nobody set anything on fire.

STUDENT THREE

Those are not the same condition.



Everyone appeared to know where they were going.
And everyone appeared to have brushed their hair.



PROFESSOR STEWART (PA)

Good morning. And a welcome to Ehlana Lalita Ramdass, who arrived last night from Canada.



PROFESSOR STEWART (PA)

Ehlana, locker one hundred and twenty is on the ground floor. My classroom is upstairs. We look forward to seeing you.



EHLANA LALITA RAMDASS

So much for blending in.



KRIS

Apricot?

EHLANA

Yes.



KIRA

I suppose raspberry would have been worse. It might have looked intentional.

EHLANA

I'll keep that in mind for the next catastrophe.



KIRA

NASA?

EHLANA

The Pillars of Creation.

KIRA

Yes. I know. Vintage.



KIRA

Ow!

EHLANA

I'm sorry. I didn't realise you were still there.



KIRA

You didn't realise I was standing beside you?

EHLANA

I was looking at the lock.

KIRA

Clearly.



QUINN

Kira?

KIRA

I'm fine. Apparently spatial awareness is optional for exceptional students.



QUINN

You're Ehilana.

EHLANA

Apparently the announcement was effective.

QUINN

Quinn Page.

KIRA

Class.





We were discussing endings. Specifically, the one Vishnu has scheduled, Miss Ramdass?

Kalki is the tenth and final avatar of Vishnu. He appears at the end of the Kali Yuga, defeats Kali and restores righteousness.

With?

A sword, a white horse and, in some accounts, a parrot. You have left out the parrot.

An oversight.

Is it armed?

Not in any source I have read.

Then I am not sure what it contributes to the battle.

Kali's the one with all the arms, right? With the tongue?



That's KALKI. Long A. She's a goddess. Kalki, short a, is the demon of the age. Different word. Different apocalypse.



The goddess thanks you. The demon, I expect, is indifferent.

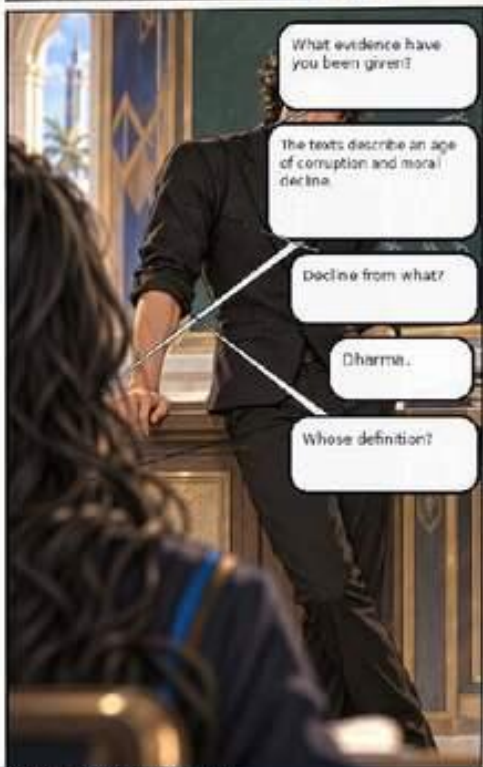


Why are we confident Kalki will win?

That describes outcome.

Because the prophecy says he wins.

Evil loses. Presumably order is restored.



What evidence have you been given?

The texts describe an age of corruption and moral decline.

Decline from what?

Dharma.

Whose definition?



People marry for love instead of arrangement. Women act independently. They choose their own partners.

And that's on the list. With the corruption.

A man with dark curly hair, wearing a black suit and a necklace, stands in a classroom. He is gesturing with his right hand. On the chalkboard behind him, the name "KALKI" is written at the top. Below it, there are chalk drawings of a sword, a bird, and a horse. The classroom has large windows with blue and gold patterns, and palm trees are visible outside.

KALKI

Suppose a history tells you the winner was righteous and the loser corrupt. What do you actually know?

That the winner kept the records.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white shirt, is in a classroom. She has her right hand raised. A man with dark curly hair is looking at her. On the chalkboard behind them, the name "KALI" is written at the top. Below it, there are chalk drawings of a sword, a bird, and a horse. The classroom has large windows with blue and gold patterns, and palm trees are visible outside.

KALI

We also know the record survived. That doesn't make it false.

Quite right. But it does not make the outcome fair.

The man from the first panel is now sitting on the edge of a wooden desk in the classroom. He is gesturing with his right hand. On the chalkboard behind him, the name "KALI" is written at the top. Below it, there are chalk drawings of a sword, a bird, and a horse. The classroom has large windows with blue and gold patterns, and palm trees are visible outside.

KALI

Suppose you had to be one of the people in this prophecy, without knowing which one. Would you agree to its terms?

Some of that might look like corruption if stability matters more than freedom.

And to you?

Then the story calls progress evil.

It looks like progress.

Parts of the story do.

The man is standing in the classroom, facing the students. On the chalkboard behind him, the name "KALKI" is written at the top. Below it, there are chalk drawings of a sword, a bird, and a horse. The classroom has large windows with blue and gold patterns, and palm trees are visible outside.

KALKI

The woman is standing in the classroom, facing the students. On the chalkboard behind her, the name "KALI" is written at the top. Below it, there are chalk drawings of a sword, a bird, and a horse. The classroom has large windows with blue and gold patterns, and palm trees are visible outside.

KALI

So, let's start again. How do we know that Kali is evil?

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