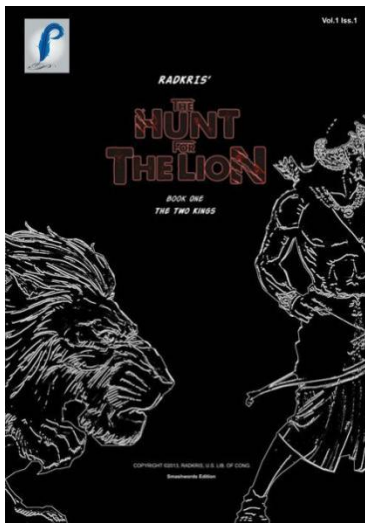


Megalomania Sparkles under The Shadow of Graphite's Strokes : A Review of *The Hunt for the Lion* by Praveen Radhakrishnan

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Never have adults been lured into the world of cartoons, comics, anime, and manga than that of the twenty-first century. This proves that adults like children desire pictorial illustrations to add colour to their dreamy fantasies. Irrespective of age, audiences have accepted the fact that anime and manga dominate digital media these days. This notion has welcomed creative writers to invent their stories through graphic media. Thus, graphic novels have picked up momentum among the members of the reading community recently. Adult readers, who would like to see drawings tell tales, opt for graphic novels. The themes graced through graphic novels vary widely. In fact, it encompasses anything and everything that humans can relate and that has made this sub-genre of novels thrilling. It should be acknowledged that they are underrated in mainstream literature.

Having said that, relishing Praveen Radhakrishnan's *The Hunt for the Lion* (2014) series, transports the readers across centuries and continents in order to reflect on the age-old presence and purpose of power as man has been on the hunt for power since time immemorial. The challenge to wield power and not to be consumed by its lust is closely reflected in the first novel of the series, *The Two Kings*. The two kings from the title correspond to the King of the jungle, the Lion and the King of humans, who long to reign as the sovereign by expanding his geographical territories across the globe. Praveen, being a polyglot who wields various linguistic and cultural identities as per his motive, is amazed by this one common factor that has its trace in all societies despite celebrating deliberate differences.

As an Indian author who has experienced Asia and Europe alike, Praveen revisions the boon of Midas as received from God after going through a sacrificial meditation like a mendicant. So, the tale begins as the sage is granted his wish only after he is made to understand the fact that "But there is something about power man can never comprehend in a lifetime" in a trance. The rest of the pages of this graphic novel are painted to substantiate the implication of "how" of this prophecy. As man's thirst for power is quickly traced through the pages from ancient civilization to the twenty-first century, the tale's reality resumes with the sage taking the throne as King Midas because of his boon of golden touch. When that happens, the story's frame shifts to contemporary times, where a father is supposed to tell a bedtime tale to his young son on a stormy night.

With the dad's enamouring voice echoing "...our story begins", begins the embedded narrative of the hunt. Thus, the brilliant wrapping up of the narrative with the frame of story within stories excites the readers. In the main story, the ship that carries the Prince, his Chief Minister, and other sailors is haunted by a storm. After failing to tackle the storm and losing a few crewmen, the Chief Minister wakes the sleeping Prince from his cabinet and updates him on the trial of the tragic events. Disturbed from a nightmare, in which he begins to chase and hunt a lion only to be hunted back by the lion in the end, with an unexpected turn of events, the Prince wakes up. The Prince steps out of his cabin, wearing his crown, with high hopes to help the stranded and scattered crew. When the situation goes out of control, the

crew demands the Prince to throw his crown overboard and aid them through the crisis as they find the storm as an ill omen caused by his pride. Having no other choice to opt for, he does the same.

After reaching an estranged island, the Prince becomes industrious to earn his due respect from the crew. So, he hunts and provides food for the remaining crew members. Winning some over matters to him the most as a few traitors try to kill him in his sleep. As survival and servitude go together for the Prince, especially on the island, he waits for the wheel of fortune to show him favour. As the nightmare promises to give him the purpose of leadership in the wild, so does it encourage the crew members to stick with the Prince in this quest.

As the Prince sends cartographers to sketch the island, they march towards the inner lands exploring the jungle. Finding the seashore line in the downhill, the Prince and his men descend. It is then they discover a village by the shore. Indenting to get help from them, they proceed further. Unfortunately, the pirate ships and a few others who plotted to kill the Prince imposed a guerilla attack on the village and the Prince. The Prince choosing to protect the villagers defeats the pirates and chases them off. As the harbor promises a trader's ship to transport the Prince and his team to his country, the Prince is moved by the leaderless villagers. In order to protect them, he decides to stay on the island as their King. As the cartographers come up with a structure of the island that looks like a roaring lion, the dream of the Prince haunted him no more and he names the island "Singapura" loosely translated as the land of the lion.

Peace prevails on the island as the new King protects the island with his might and his able Chief Minister's wisdom. He marries and his wife delivers him a son. The normalcy of the island is perturbed when a poor man brings the King's old crown from the sea after many decades. His hunt for the lion resumes as he renders the kingdom to his son, the new Prince. Bidding adieu to his wife, son, kingdom, and the chief minister for the last time, he vanishes into the forest. This last parley between the King and the chief minister holds significance because the only cargo that was saved from their drowning ship by the chief minister carries a mystery. Refusing to listen to the message of the secret cargo, the King pursues his hunt and loses his life to the lion meaning his traitor, who tried to kill him many years ago. The King is given a proper funeral and the coffin's lid happens to be the secret cargo. With the secret of the secret cargo, the series continues. On the other hand, King Midas calls for a scribe to record his tale while the small boy sleeps listening to his father's bedtime tale of the sleeping Prince on the stormy seas.

Power, the silent lynchpin character of the graphic novel, is represented in the form of a hunt, even from the cover page. The cover brilliantly conveys the hunter-and-hunted philosophy and sums up the tale's title by featuring the two kings who are involved in the hunt. Though the hunter and the hunted see each other as the opponent to be defeated, it must be noted that the hunt in itself is driven by a power play. It is a crafty play that observes who survives the attacks of the other in the

end and emphasizes the truth that power resides with the one that displays the power to possess the position of the survival of the fittest. It is established in a vicious cycle with humanity pronouncing judgment that power will get out of date only when humanity becomes out of date. The prevalence of power in terms of various images is pointed out with subtlety. Megalomania drives humanity but that does not mean that humanity is dry without virtues and values. Several masculine themes and motifs overflow in the novel such as imperialism, expansions of territory, feuds over myriad causes, hunting, determinism to follow one's passion or obsession to the extreme, hierarchical power transmission from father to son, and so on.

Another surprising thing about this graphic novel is that it has less space for women. Even the scarce portrayal is mostly stereotypical. The fear of having a female child to pass on the kingdom is so much evident when the King is assured that his wife has birthed a son with a startling negative sentence, "Don't worry. It's not a girl". Thus, as a retelling that retells a legend of the founding myth of Singapore, this graphic novel earnestly retains its purpose in making the hunt for power a game for men alone.

Having an ancient tale and clothing it in the fashion of new fabric, has enabled the author to toy with words in abundance. For instance, the Prince quotes his father just to hide his insecurity in handling a strenuous situation thus, "It's the cold! It has been difficult to set adrift from the shores of familiarity and crest the waves of dissent"; the talk about the cargo raising his curiosity is reflected thus, "You needn't be riddled by that thought. All lives are riddles". Apart from the colourful frames that tell a tale, the dialogues are so witty that one would want to reread the novel. In fact, it is wordplay which makes the novel unique along with the pristine graphical illustration of the story. Praveen Radhakrishnan's *The Hunt for the Lion* is a perfect choice to start exploring the world of graphic novels. It's just loaded with codes waiting to be decoded.

Reference

Radhakrishnan, Praveen. *The Hunt for the Lion*. Smashwords, 2013.