INTRODUCTION
1. Prologue

Named for the capital city of the monkey kingdom, *Kiśkindhākāṇḍa* is the fourth book of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyana*.¹ In spite of the title, very little of the action takes place in Kiśkindhā itself. Instead, the setting is still largely that introduced in the *Aranyakāṇḍa*: the forest world full of beauty and menace, a place outside human society where extraordinary events can seem commonplace.

What the title does announce is the extension of Rāma’s story to include another dynastic struggle, this time between two monkeys, the brothers Vālin and Sugrīva. Though their battle for control of the monkey kingdom intersects with Rāma’s search for his abducted wife, it is the monkeys’ deeds that come to dominate the kāṇḍa. As their story progresses, Rāma himself gradually recedes from the foreground, making way ultimately for the monkey superhero Hanumān, whose adventures will then occupy the whole of the following *Sundarakāṇḍa*.

In the first three books of the *Rāmāyana*, Prince Rāma was shown first in his promising youth and then beset by a series of calamities: loss of kingship, exile, and finally loss of his beloved wife, Sītā. In the last three books, his fortunes will be reversed: he learns from Hanumān where Sītā is being held captive; he defeats her abductor, Rāvana; he returns with his wife from exile and claims his kingdom, which he then rules with supreme righteousness. Here in the fourth and central book comes the turning point, and what brightens Rāma’s prospects at last is the forging of an all-important alliance with the monkey Sugrīva, which will insure a successful search for Sītā by all the monkey troops. In exchange for this assistance, Rāma must secure

¹ A completed version of this volume was submitted to the General Editor in January 1989. Since the date at which the research was finished, many new studies of the *Rāmāyana* have been published, some of which might have influenced certain arguments contained in this volume. For example, the Introduction to the third volume in this series, had it been available before its publication, would no doubt have required more than passing references in this volume. Under the present circumstances, I can only express here my belief that the content of the critical edition of the *Kiśkindhākāṇḍa* neither supports nor refutes arguments in favor of Rāma’s early divine status. I hope to address that issue at a later date in an appropriate forum. For the rest, I would like to make clear that the opinions expressed in this volume may not be shared by the General Editor.
the kingship for Sugrīva, and so he launches his alliance by killing Vālin, thus ending the rivalry of the monkey brothers.

The manner of Vālin’s death at Rāma’s hands is the chief moral focus of the book, and many verses are devoted to debating it. For in spite of the presence of such folktale elements as animal helpers and informants, and a magical world within a cave, the underlying concerns of the epic remain quite serious: the forward progress of the narrative is often subordinate to the important task of reinforcing the collective moral code of a society.

The narrative is suspended as well to permit the enjoyment of purely poetic verse, or kārya, in which the Kīśkindhākāṇḍa is unusually rich. It is in fact the only book of the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa that, as presently constituted, begins with a very long poetic sarga virtually devoid of narrative content.

Yet even Rāma’s descriptions of spring flowers, and later of the endless rains, and still later of the clear autumn sky, have an important dramatic function. While they set the pervasive moods of sorrow and of longing for the absent beloved that fill this book, they simultaneously reinforce an impression of passing time and help justify Rāma’s urgent desire for an ally and his eventual impatience with that ally, who fails to act quickly.

In the same way, once the monkeys begin looking for Sītā, their many adventures emphasize not only the difficulty of finding her but also the time spent in the endeavor. They set off confidently in groups toward the four corners of the earth, only to return from east, west, and north without success. Attention then shifts to those monkeys in the southern search party who will ultimately bring important news. But for a long while, even their efforts are shown to be fruitless. They stray into and are released from a magic cave, only to find that an inexplicably long time has passed. Deeply discouraged and afraid to return to Kīśkindhā without having accomplished their mission, they resolve on fasting to death. It is then that a vulture appears who can at last tell them where Sītā is to be found. Through all these vicissitudes, we are reminded repeatedly, Rāma and Sugrīva are awaiting their return.

The long years of waiting necessitated by Rāma’s exile from his kingdom find an echo in the sense of lost time that dominates this book. Once the alliance with Sugrīva is confirmed by Vālin’s death, there is nothing Rāma can do on his own to speed the recovery of Sītā. His hopes rise and fall and rise again, but in the Kīśkindhākāṇḍa,
everything finally depends on the prolonged search undertaken by the monkeys.

The story of Rāma’s alliance with the monkeys has often been told, in many languages and in numerous forms, many of them translations of earlier versions of the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa. But because this is the first English translation of the critical edition of the Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, it necessarily presents a text that is new in some important respects. This shorter text resolves some, though by no means all, of the earlier difficulties of narrative coherence. But many of the questions that have troubled both Sanskrit commentators and modern critics alike result from the fact that both groups are dealing with a text that is both ancient and written. When Rāma’s adventures ceased to be an oral epic heard in episodes over days or weeks and were recorded as a single long poem, it became possible for the first time to scrutinize them for a particular kind of accuracy and consistency.

Scholarly readers will find that the editor of the critical edition of the Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, like those of other volumes in the series, is by no means convinced that what he has produced represents a harmonious whole, an identifiable “stage” in the evolution of the text. It will also be seen that much of what the commentators had to say about these problems centuries ago is still applicable or of interest today, even though the text they explicated differed from ours. General readers, on the other hand, may be less concerned about such matters as whether Rāma or Sugriva initially knew the identity or whereabouts of Sītā’s abductor, which in turn determines the logic of the decision to search in four directions. They may instead be more interested in who or what Rāma’s monkey allies were, and why Rāma had to assist Sugriva by killing Vālin as he did. Again, both the old commentaries and more recent scholarship shed light on these perplexing matters. The present Introduction as well as the notes to the translation will address all these issues, but the general reader may prefer to pass over the more technical sections (3, 4, and 5) and begin with sections 2, 6, and 7.