

*The Matka King* by Anosh Irani

TOP RANI:

Let me tell you a story. Don't worry, everybody likes stories. Thirty years ago, there lived a man named Surya - handsome as the sun itself. Women looked beautiful in his light, baby moons reflecting his own beauty. When they made love to their husbands they cried out *his* name until their throats dried up. The first time I saw Surya, he was tied to a tree, shivering with fear. It was nine o' clock on New Year's Eve and I was ten years old, a servant boy carrying a matka on my head to fetch water from a nearby well. Surya had raped one of the men's wives. He would be set on fire for it. Men gathered round the tree and started to take off his clothes to shame him as he had shamed the woman. Once Surya was naked, his innocence was obvious. He was a eunuch. But the men were not satisfied: "If our wives burn for him, he shall burn too." They poured gasoline over him, lit a match, and fled. I ran to the well, filled this matka with water. and tried to douse the flames. I poured water into his mouth. He drank a little, then touched my matka and blessed it. He said: "A king will make you whole." Thirty years ago, at nine o' clock on New Year's Eve, I witnessed the death of a eunuch. At midnight, I became one. So to honour Surya's death, on New Year's Eve, at the stroke of midnight, this city plays a special game. Raja Kheench: Pull the King. I throw Jacks, Queens, Kings, and Jokers into the matka along with the rest of the cards. For I know that if I pull a king, I will be a man again. Surya said, "A king will make you whole." I am The Matka King. This is how I will make myself whole.