

## **Vasu (Narayan's novel *The Man-eater of Malgudi*)      Demonic**

**Character**      Vasu is a taxidermist who comes to reside in Nataraj's house. On first reading, he appears to represent brute force, in contrast with Nataraj's cultured sensitivity. He kills and stuffs animals; Nataraj discusses poetry and publishes religious books. Vasu is physically strong, with a thick-neck and powerful arms. It is suggested that he is a demonic force (*rakshasa* in Hindu mythology). In other words, Vasu is brutal, menacing and self-centred. However, just as with the seemingly one-dimensional Nataraj, Vasu's character is actually more complex. Compared to the kind yet cunning Nataraj, Vasu has a refreshing spontaneity and an instinctive passion for life and pleasure. It is true that his chosen profession may involve pain to animals, but Vasu is a dedicated craftsman. He is hardworking, holds high standards and appreciates excellence in other professions, as well. He is well-travelled, good humoured and capable of loyal friendship. And yet, his brute force is what destroys him in the (humorous) conclusion: when he smacks a mosquito on his temple, he gets a brain tumour and dies. As Narayan reminds us, evil is self-destructive.

**Activities**      Vasu is a dedicated taxidermist. He spends hour upon hour meticulously reconstructing animal bodies and displaying them. He also hunts and kills animals, for his work. He is unmarried but has a mistress, a local dancer.

### **Illustrative moments**

**Cruel**      Vasu's cruelty, especially to animals, is expressed when he shoots dead a neighbour's dog. There is no provocation, no reason, for the shooting, except that the dog seemed to dislike Vasu.

**Strong**      Vasu is questioned by the police about his possibly illegal hunting in the national forest. When a policeman slaps him, Vasu grabs his wrist and dislocates it with a mere twist of his hand.

**Spontaneous**      Vasu's spontaneous good-nature is shown when he first meets Nataraj in the printing shop. He immediately befriends him, joke with him and gives him an order for business cards. What a jovial, good-natured person this is, we say to ourselves.

**Craftsman**      Vasu is a dedicated craftsman, who takes pride in the quality of his work. When Nataraj praises the eyes of a stuffed eagle, Vasu replies, 'So you are taken in! You poor fool. Those eyes were given it by me, not by God. That's why I call my work an Art.'