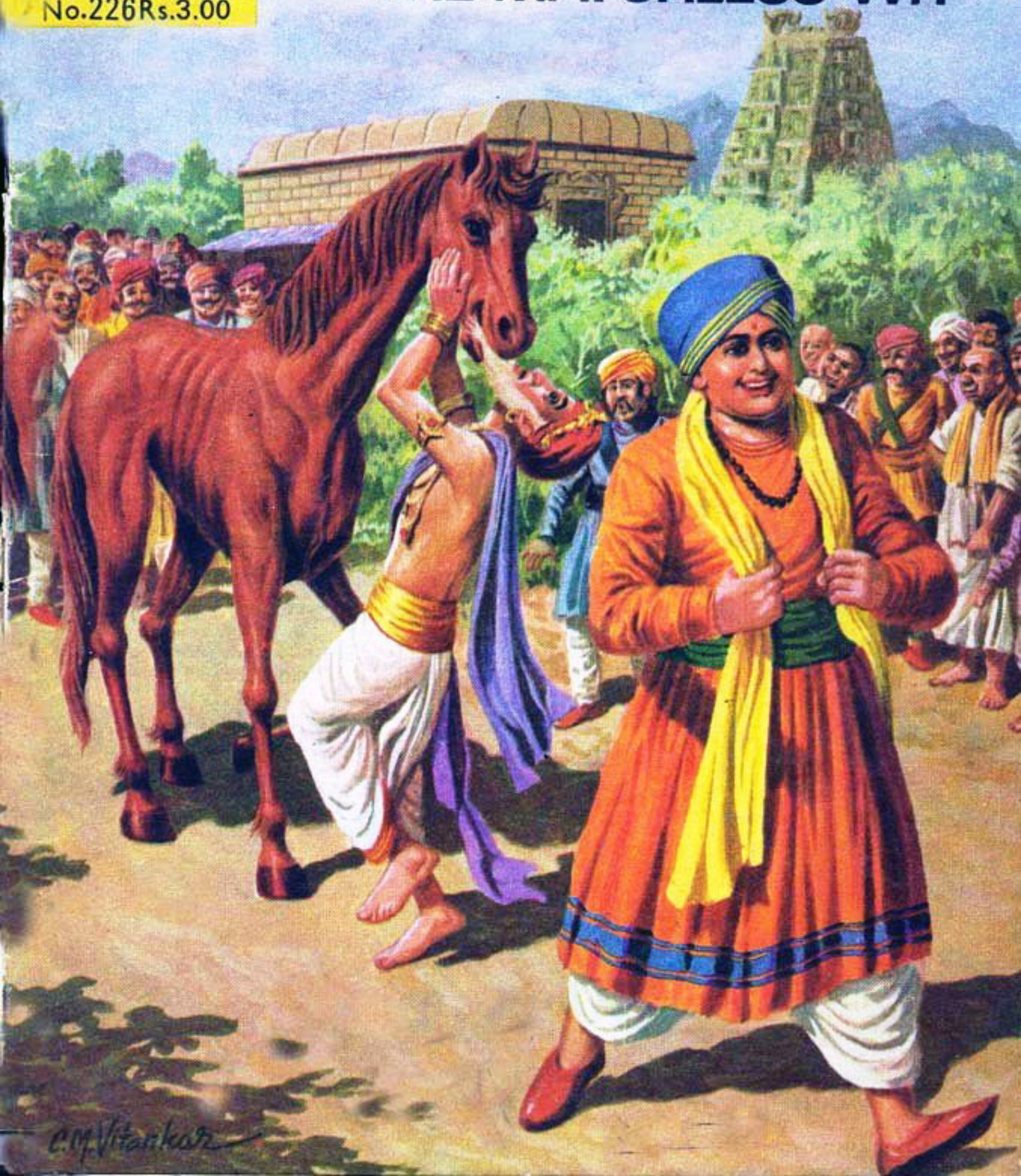




RAMAN

THE MATCHLESS WIT



C.M. Vankar

The triumph of the little man over the mighty is a recurring theme in literature. Sometimes he does it with a sling and stone, but more often, like Tenali Raman, with nimble wit. He was a Telugu poet and the court jester of Krishnadeva Raya (1509-1529), the emperor of Vijayanagara. Tenali Raman was the Birbal of the South and many stories which have passed into folk-lore, are attributed to him. Some of these are obviously invented to show his ready wit.

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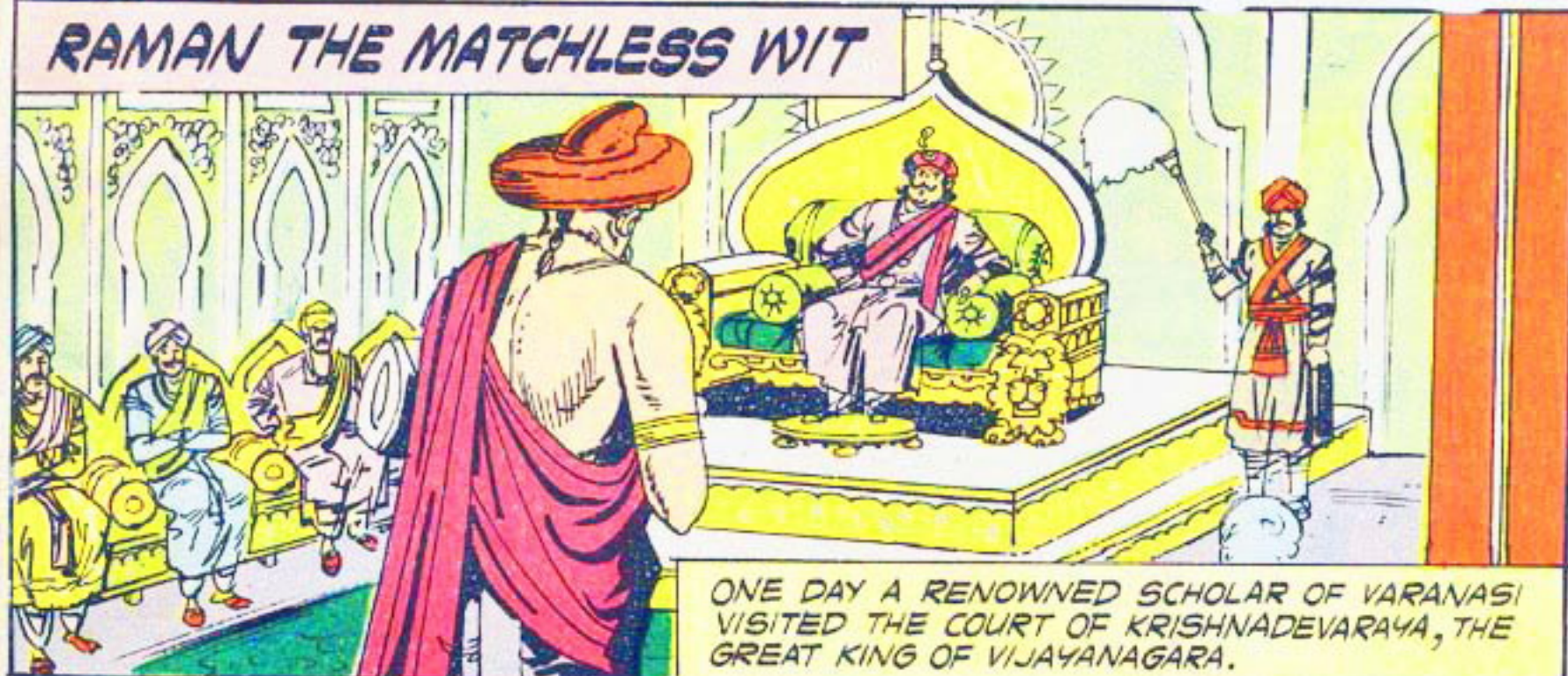
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RAMAN THE MATCHLESS WIT



ONE DAY A RENOWNED SCHOLAR OF VARANASI VISITED THE COURT OF KRISHNADEVARAYA, THE GREAT KING OF VIJAYANAGARA.

MAHARAJ, I CHALLENGE THE SCHOLARS AT YOUR COURT TO A DEBATE IN ANY BRANCH OF KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR CHOICE.

THE COURT WOULD BE HONoured TO TAKE UP THE CHALLENGE.

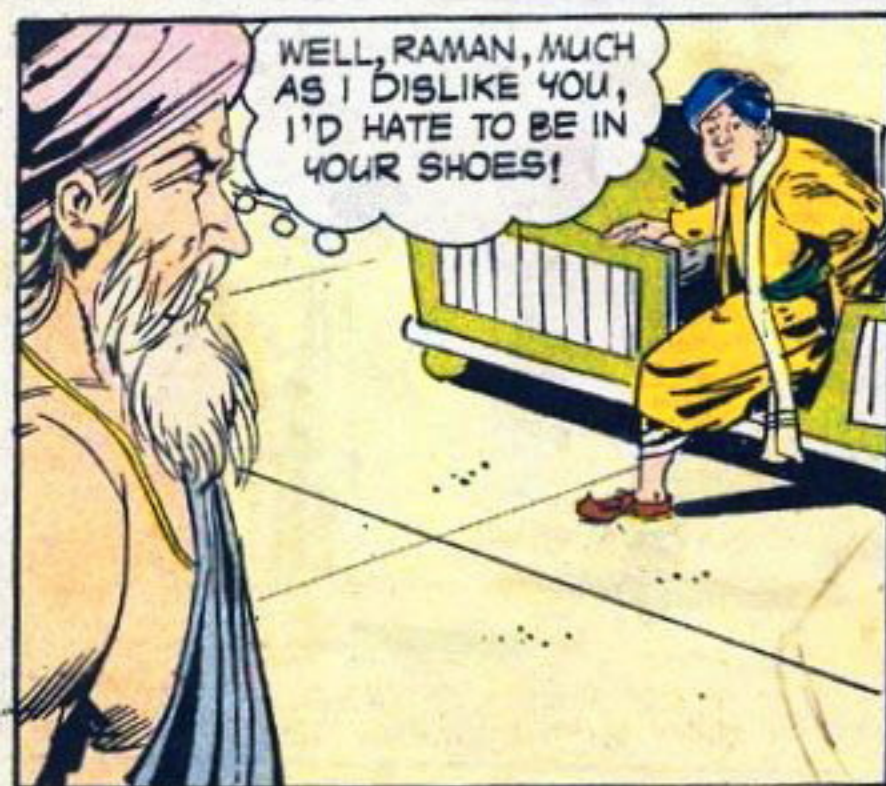
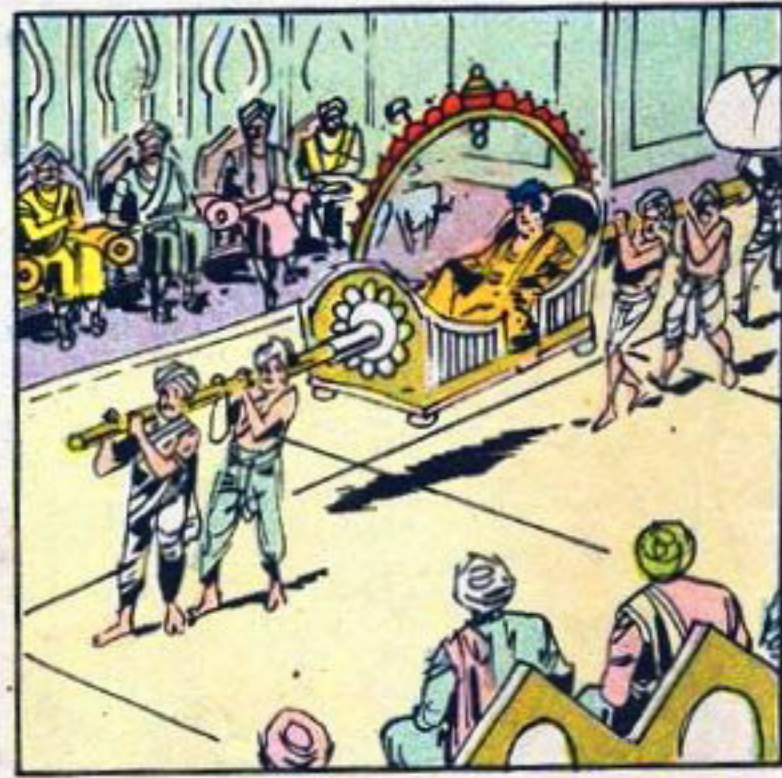
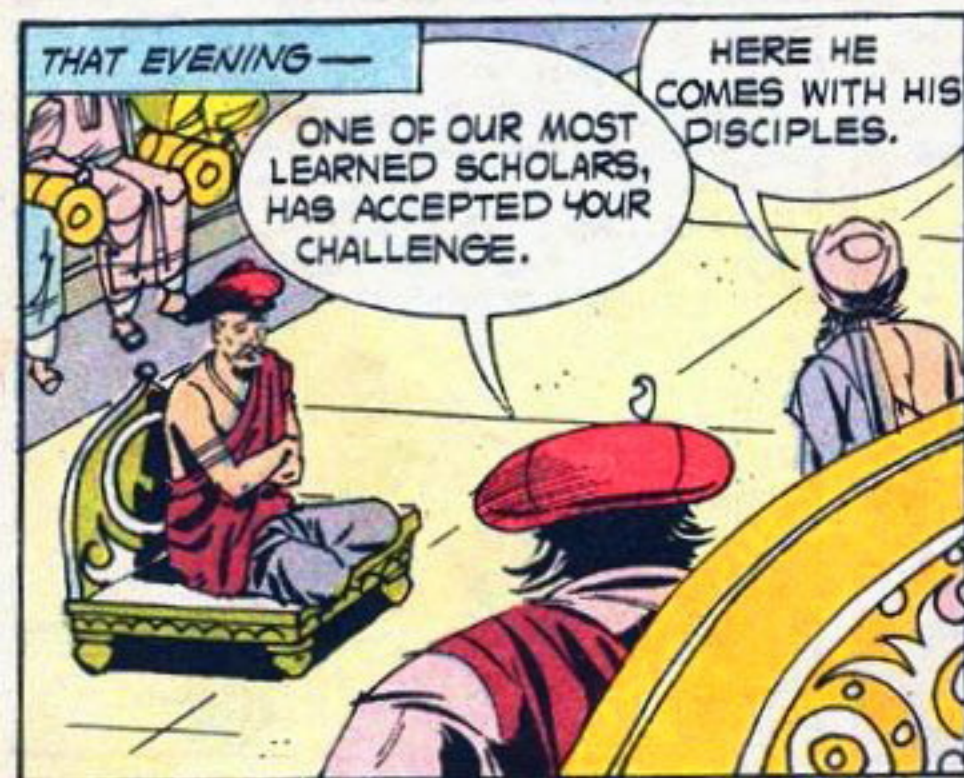
BUT PANDITRAJ, THE LEARNED COURT SCHOLAR, WAS FAR FROM FEELING HONoured. LATER, WHEN THEY WERE ALONE —

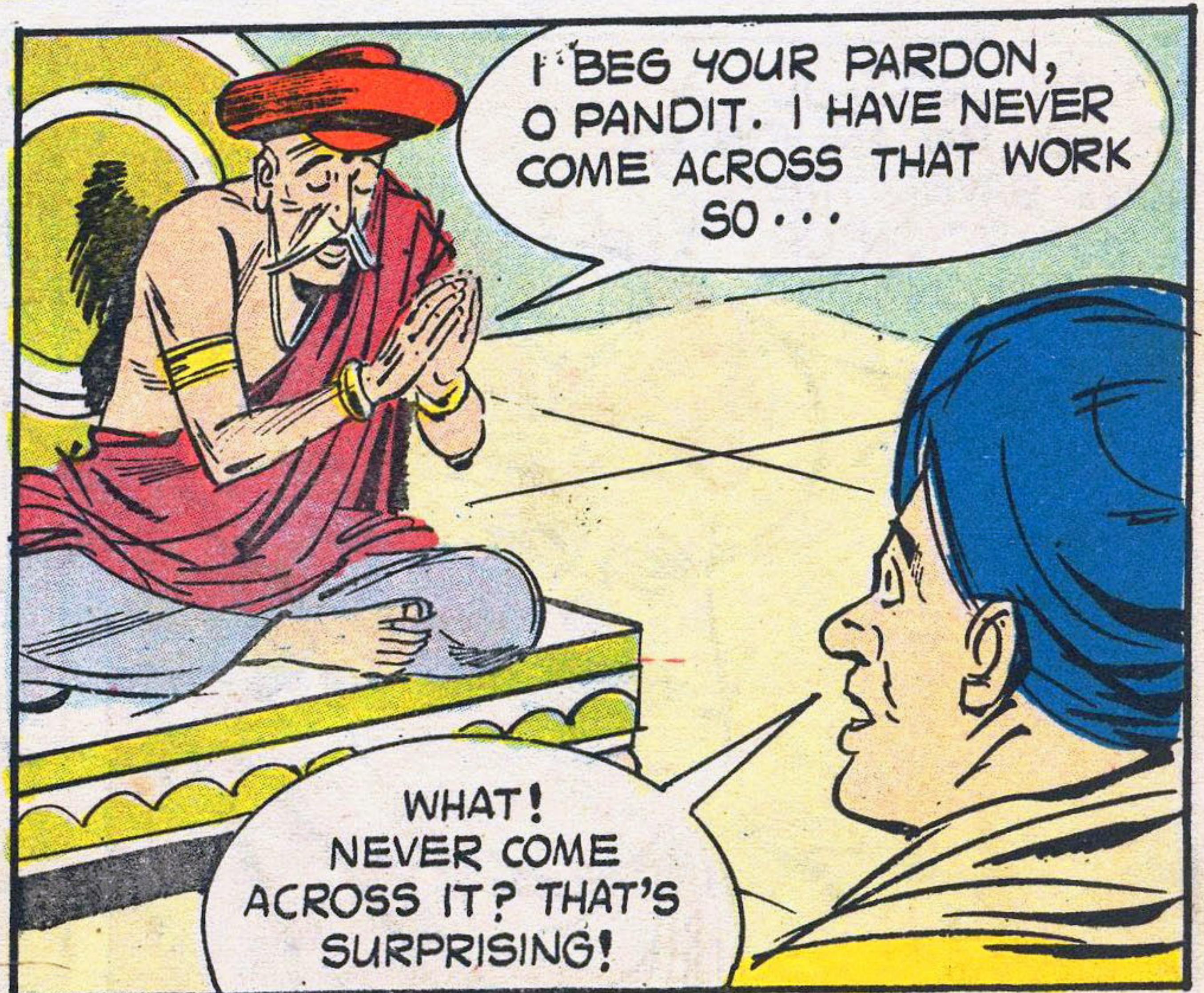
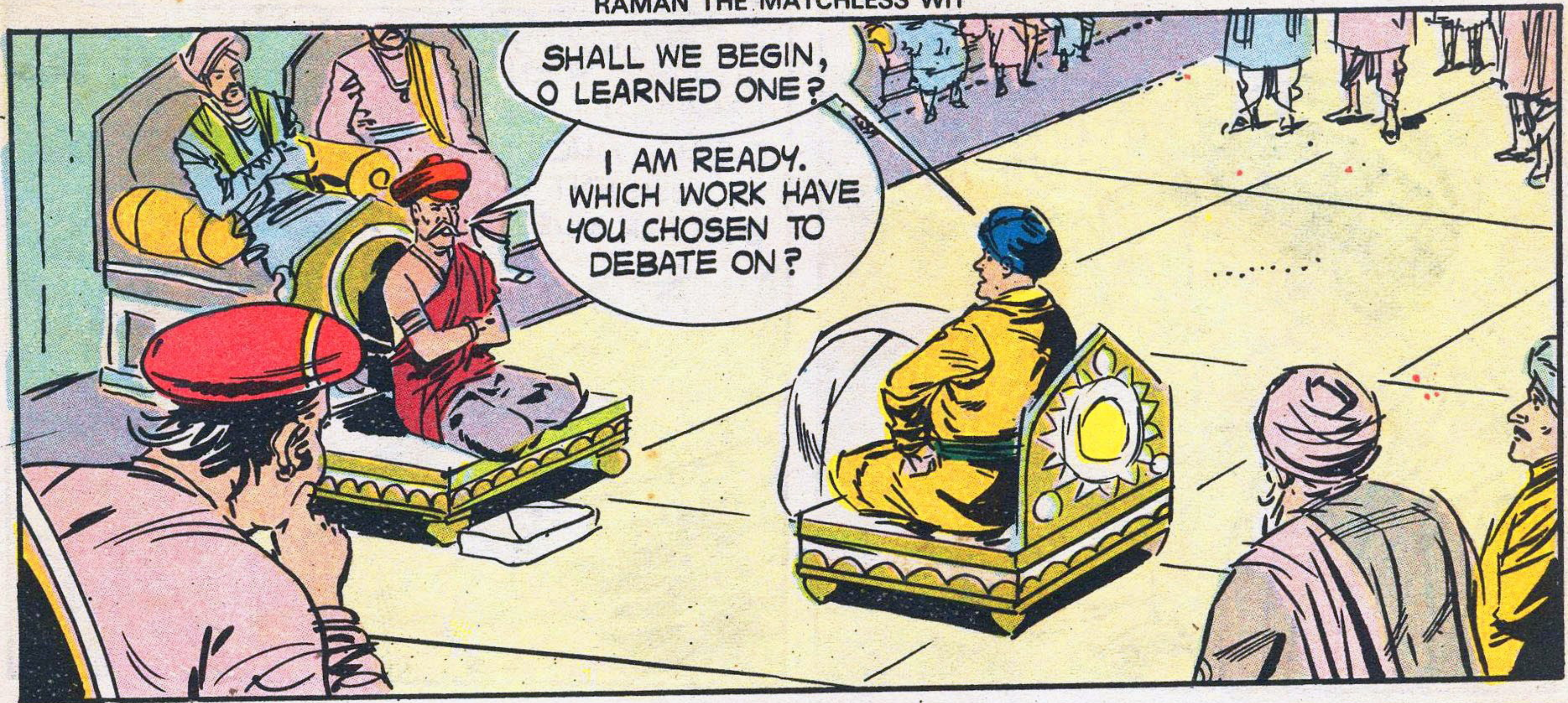
MAHARAJ, WE DARE NOT ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE. I DON'T STAND A CHANCE. NO SCHOLAR IN THE LAND DOES!

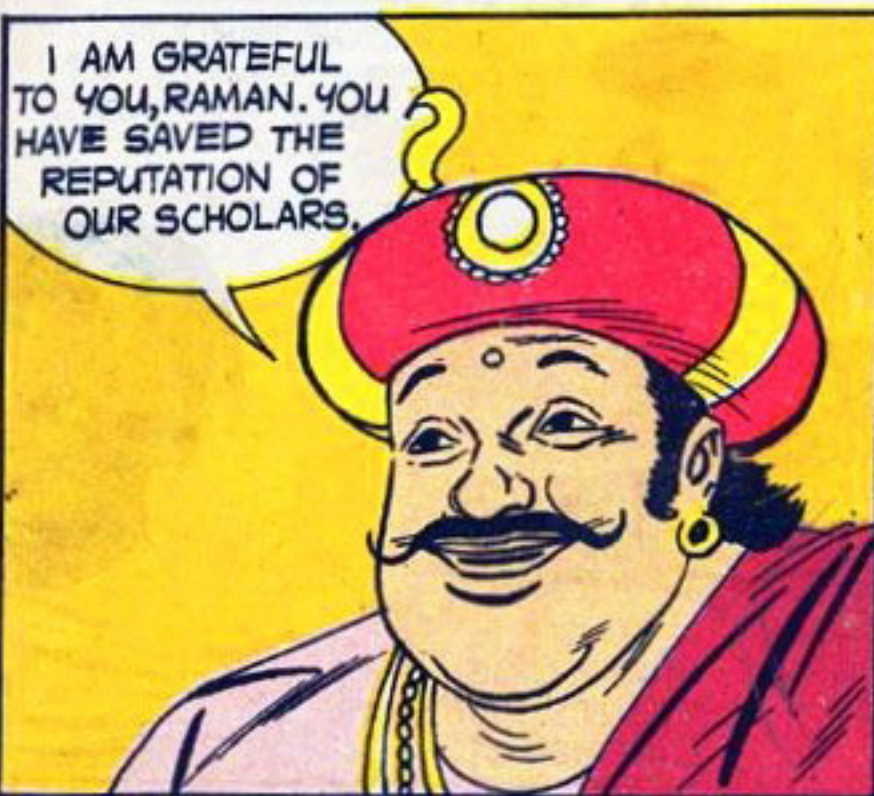
DO YOU MEAN TO SAY THERE IS NO ONE HERE WHO CAN FACE HIM IN A DEBATE?

YOU DO, MAHARAJ. I'LL DO IT—THIS VERY EVENING.

IT WAS RAMAN OF TENALI, THE KING'S FAVOURITE AND PANDITRAJ'S DESPAIR.







RAMAN THEN UNCOVERED HIS BUNDLE.

THESE ARE THE TILAKASHTHAS — STALKS OF THE SESAME PLANT...

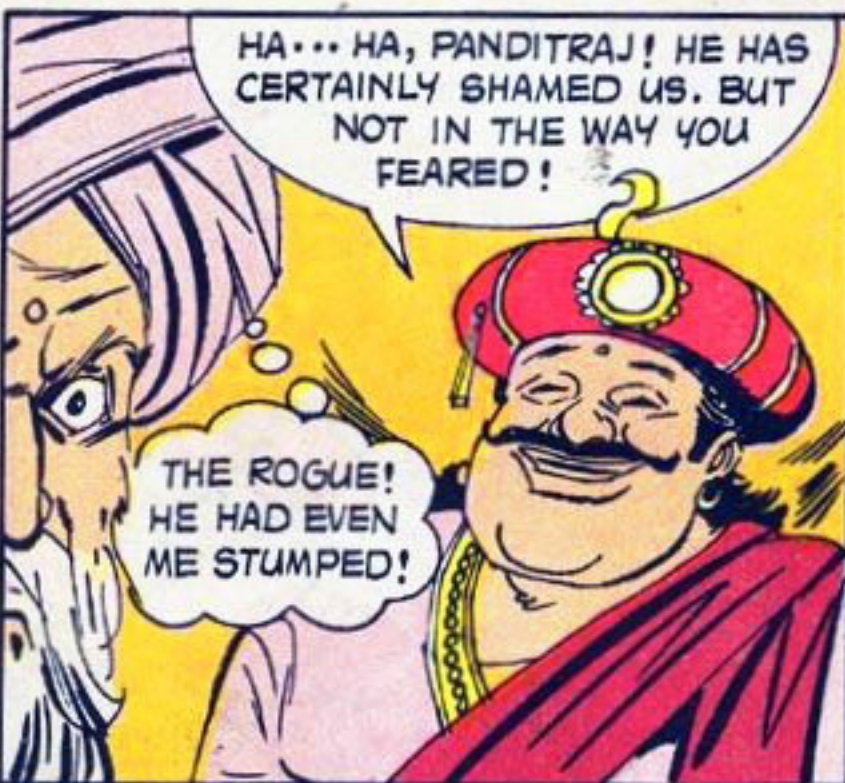


... WHICH I HAVE TIED TOGETHER WITH A MAHISHA BANDHANA — THE ROPE WITH WHICH BUFFALOES ARE TETHERED, SIMPLE ISN'T IT?



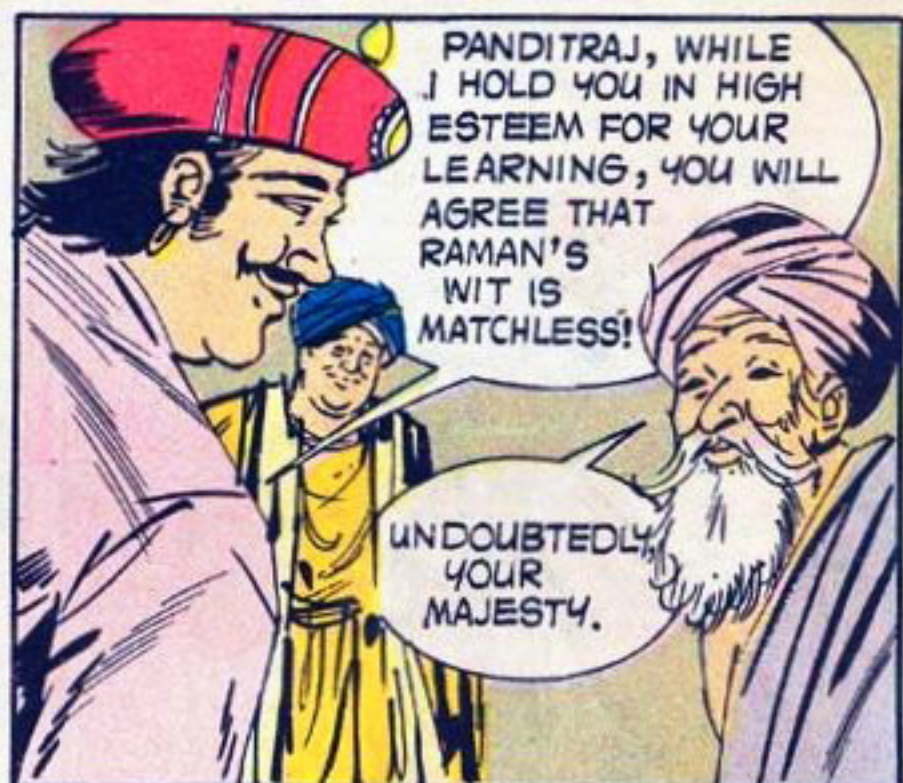
HA... HA, PANDITRAJ! HE HAS CERTAINLY SHAMED US. BUT NOT IN THE WAY YOU FEARED!

THE ROGUE! HE HAD EVEN ME STUMPED!



PANDITRAJ, WHILE I HOLD YOU IN HIGH ESTEEM FOR YOUR LEARNING, YOU WILL AGREE THAT RAMAN'S WIT IS MATCHLESS!

UNDOUBTEDLY YOUR MAJESTY.



AS RAMAN WALKED AWAY THOUGH —

TILAKASHTHA MAHISHA BANDHANA, INDEED! I'LL BIDE MY TIME TO HAVE MY REVENGE.



HE DID NOT HAVE TO WAIT LONG.

PANDITRAJ, TOMORROW IS MY MOTHER'S DEATH ANNIVERSARY. I FEEL SAD WHEN I THINK OF HER.

YOU SHOULDN'T, MAHARAJ. THAT WHICH IS BORN HAS TO DIE.

THAT I HAVE ACCEPTED. I FEEL SAD BECAUSE I COULD NOT FULFIL HER LAST WISH.

WHAT WAS THE WISH A MONARCH COULD NOT FULFIL?

HER CRAVING FOR MANGOES. BUT IT WAS NOT THE MANGO SEASON. NO AMOUNT OF GOLD COULD BUY A MANGO.

MANGOES! GOLD!

MAHARAJ, I AM SORRY TO SAY...

YES? SPEAK UP. PLEASE DON'T HESITATE.

YOUR MOTHER DIED WITH AN UNFULFILLED WISH. HER SOUL WILL REMAIN RESTLESS UNLESS...

UNLESS? UNLESS WHAT?

UNLESS YOU INVITE A FEW VIRTUOUS BRAHMANAS AND...

... PRESENT EACH ONE OF THEM WITH A GOLDEN MANGO.

WHY A FEW? SEND OUT INVITATIONS TO ALL THE BRAHMANAS

HERE'S WHERE I'LL HAVE MY REVENGE. I WON'T SEND AN INVITATION TO THAT ROGUE.

RAMAN HOWEVER, COULD NOT RESIST WATCHING THE WHOLE SHOW.

SO, THE BRAHMANAS WILL OBLIGE THE KING AND ACCEPT THE GOLDEN MANGOES FOR THE SAKE OF THE LATE QUEEN MOTHER'S SOUL! WELL, WELL.

AFTER THE BRAHMANAS WERE FED AND PRESENTED WITH THE GOLDEN MANGOES—

MAY GOD BLESS YOU. YOU NEED NO LONGER FEEL SAD WHEN YOU THINK OF YOUR MOTHER. HER SOUL IS NOW AT PEACE.

I AM GRATEFUL TO YOU FOR HAVING ACCEPTED MY INVITATION.

WHEN THE BRAHMANAS CAME OUT OF THE PALACE —

LEARNED ONES, TODAY IS MY MOTHER'S DEATH ANNIVERSARY, TOO. AND SHE TOO DIED WITH AN UNFULFILLED WISH.



AS YOU KNOW, HER SOUL WILL BE RESTLESS TILL A FEW VIRTUOUS BRAHMANAS AGREE TO...



WE UNDERSTAND, RAMAN. WE'LL COME.

I AM HONoured!



THIS WAY, MY FRIENDS.

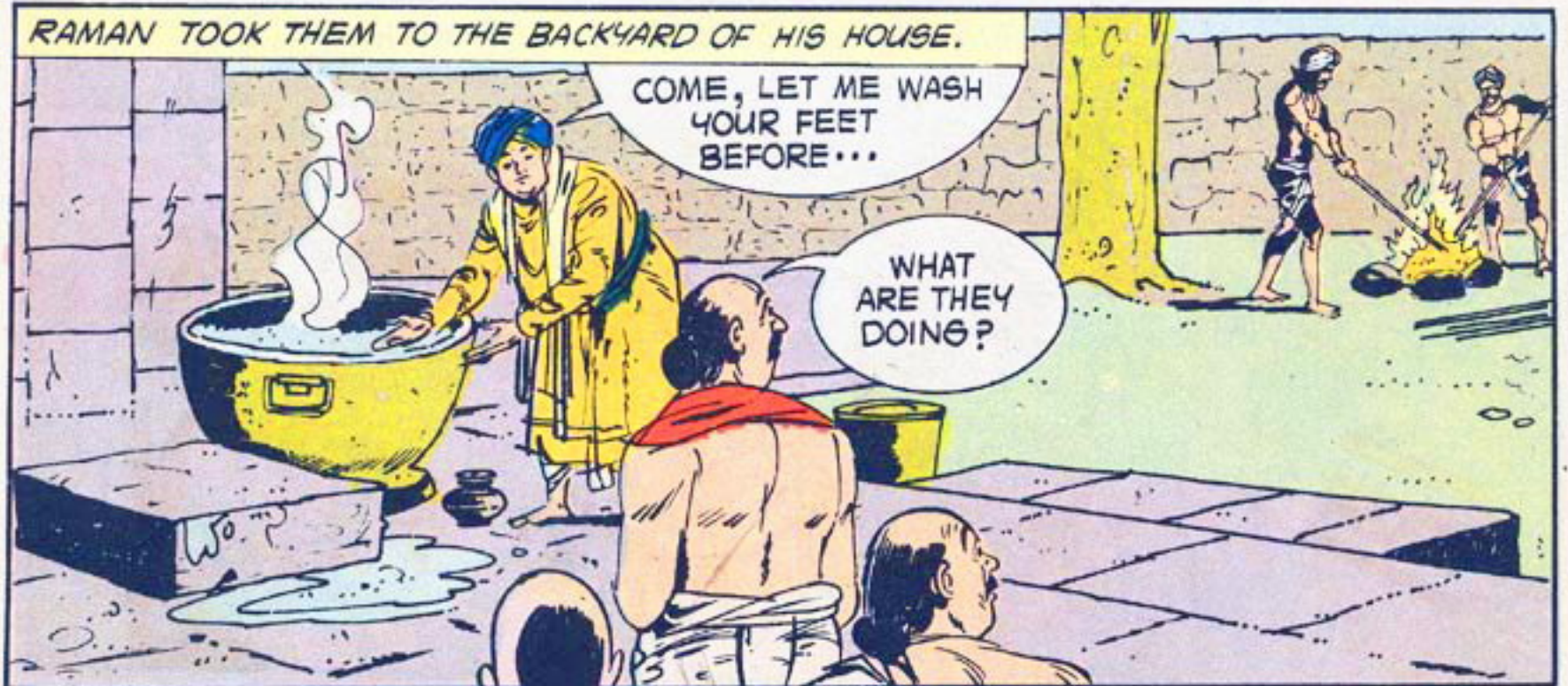
I WONDER WHAT GIFTS RAMAN IS GOING TO OFFER US.



RAMAN TOOK THEM TO THE BACKYARD OF HIS HOUSE.

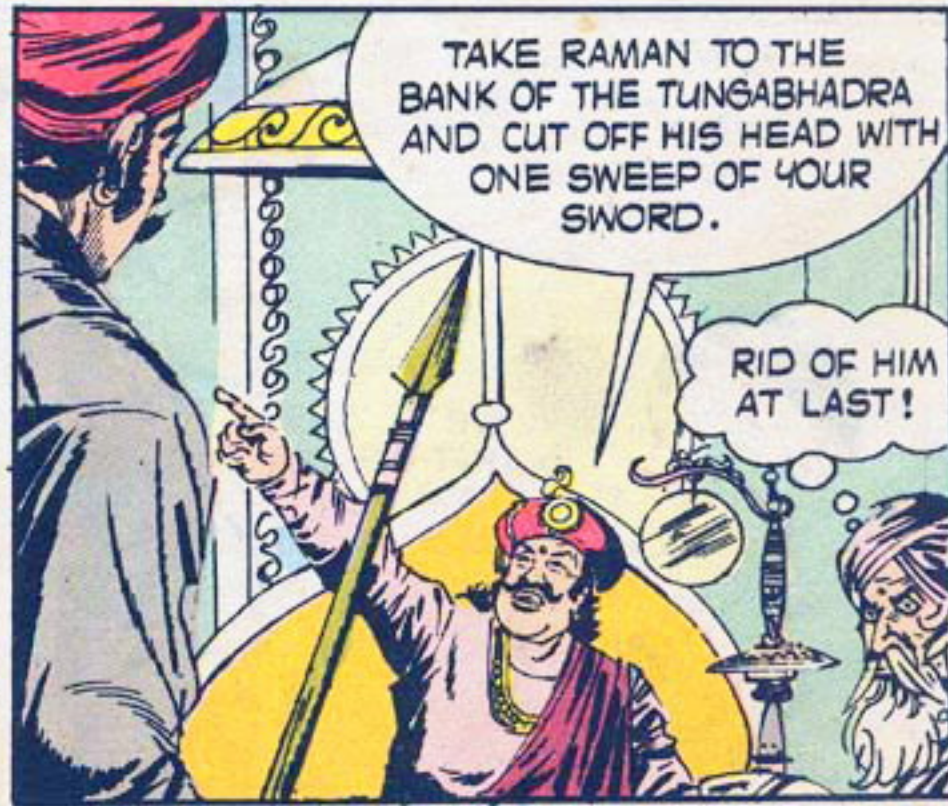
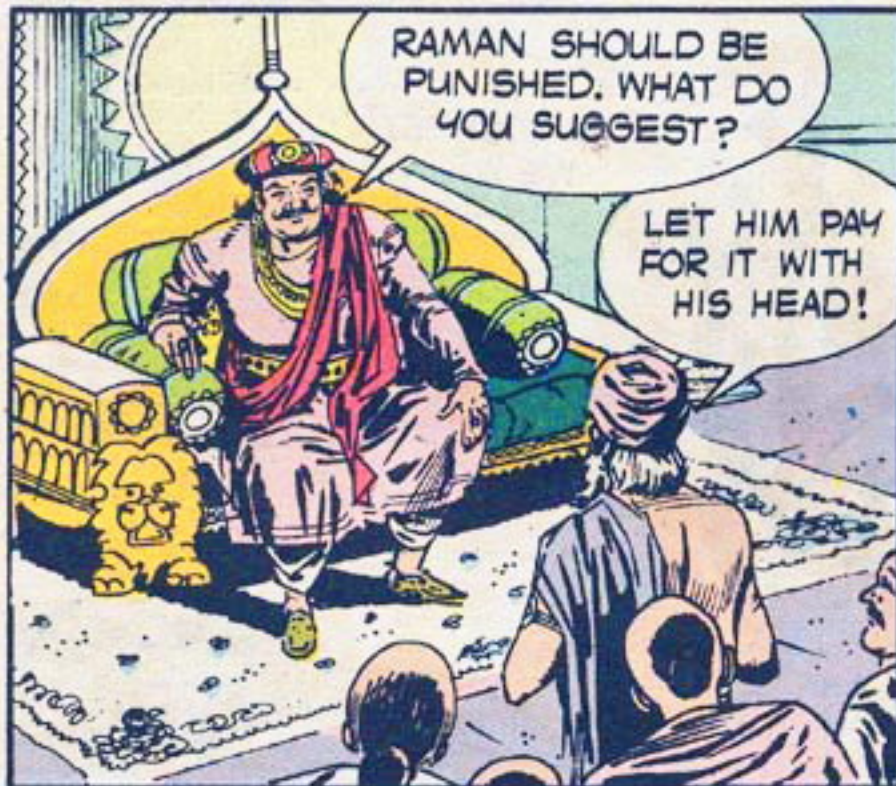
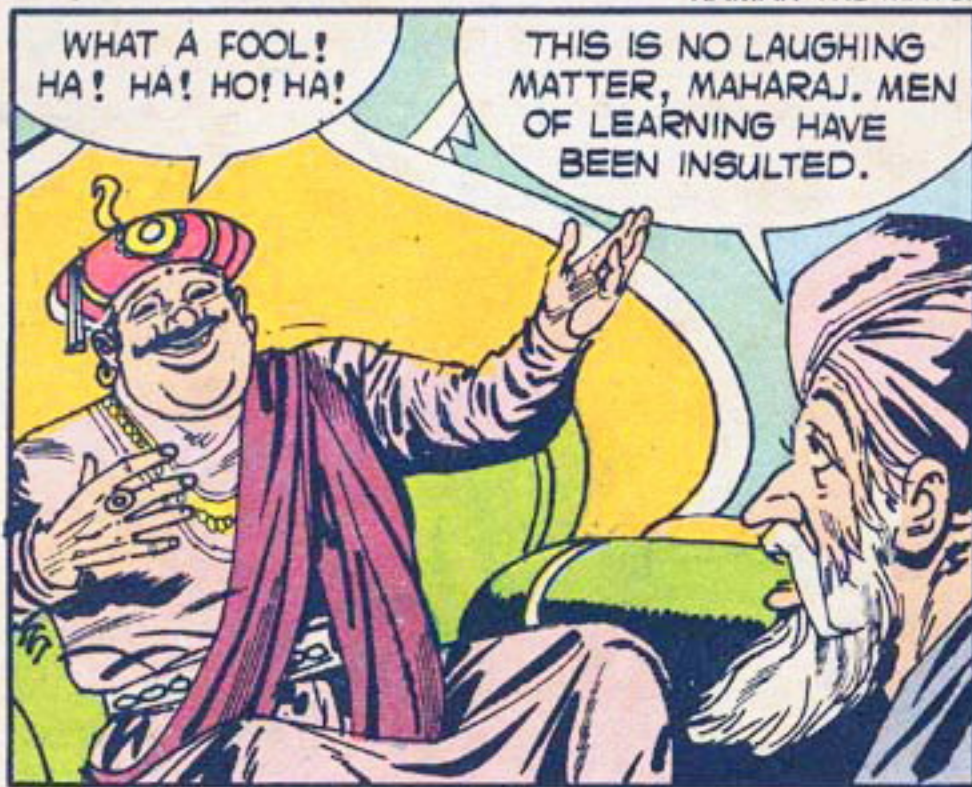
COME, LET ME WASH YOUR FEET BEFORE...

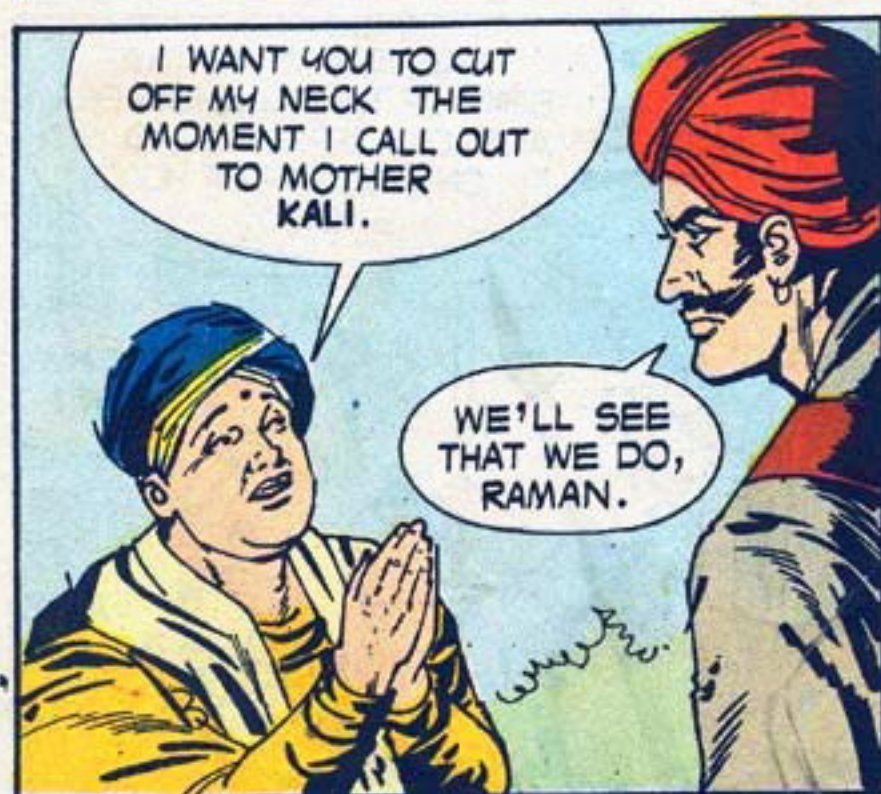
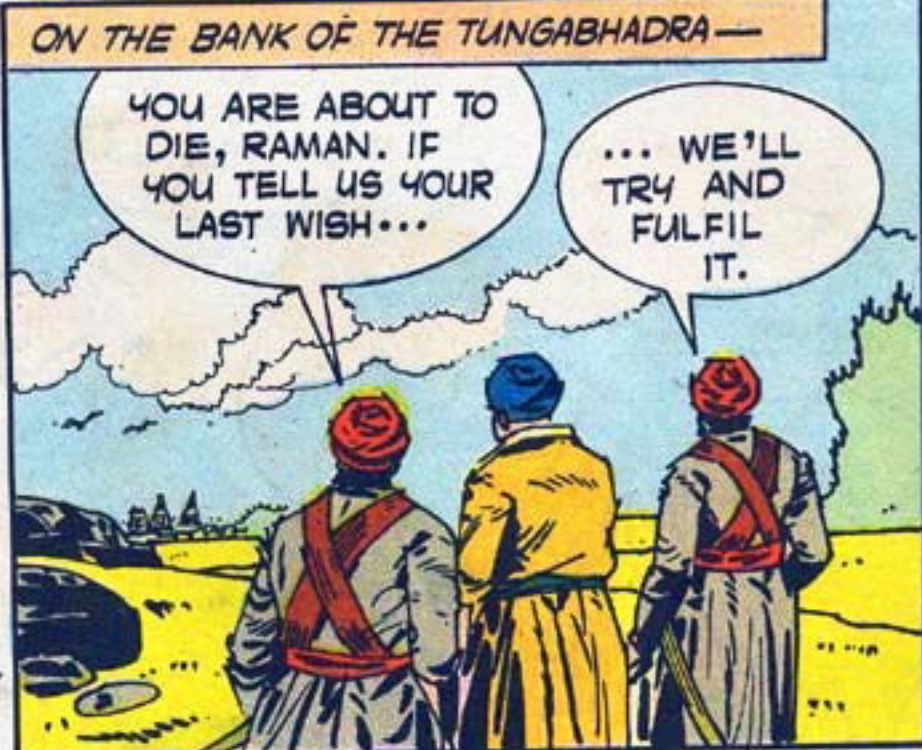
WHAT ARE THEY DOING?







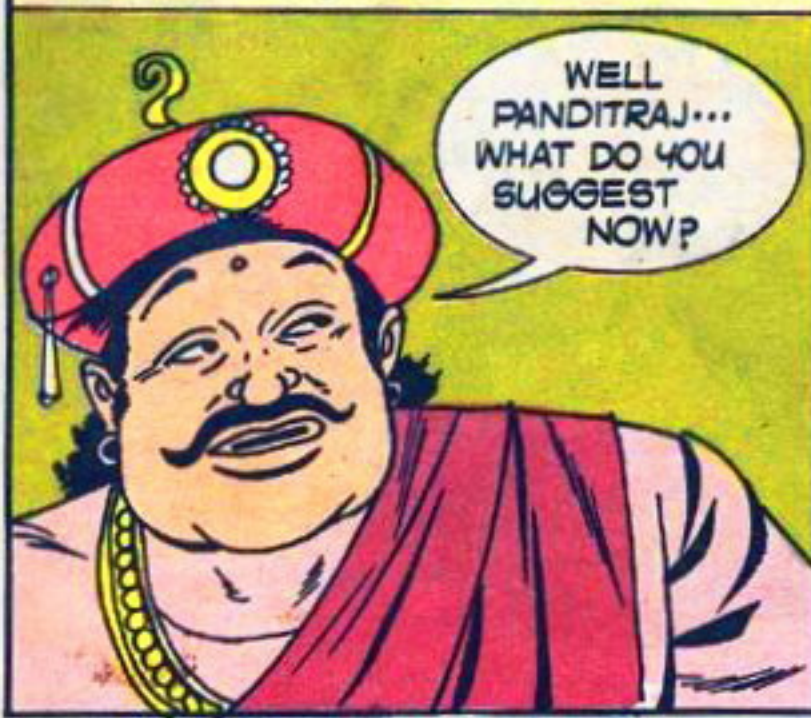








WHEN THE KING WAS TOLD WHY—



THE GUARDS TOOK RAMAN TO THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY AND BEGAN TO DIG THE GROUND.



AT LAST THE PIT WAS READY.



RAMAN ENTERED THE PIT AND THE GUARDS SEALED HIM IN WITH MUD.

NOW, LET'S HAVE LUNCH AND COME BACK WITH THE ELEPHANT.



AREN'T ONE OF YOU GOING TO STAY BACK AND STAND GUARD?

THERE'S NO NEED TO. YOU CAN'T RUN AWAY.



I WON'T. BUT I MAY BE RUN OVER BY A CHARIOT OR...

HE! HE! HE! HE'S WORRIED ABOUT BEING RUN OVER!



WE WILL SOON PUT AN END TO ALL YOUR WORRIES.

MOTHER KALI, ONLY YOU CAN SAVE ME NOW. IF ONLY SOME ONE WOULD PASS THIS WAY....



AS IF IN ANSWER TO HIS PRAYER, A WASHHERMAN CAME BY.

AM I SEEING THINGS? OR IS THAT THE HEAD OF A MAN?



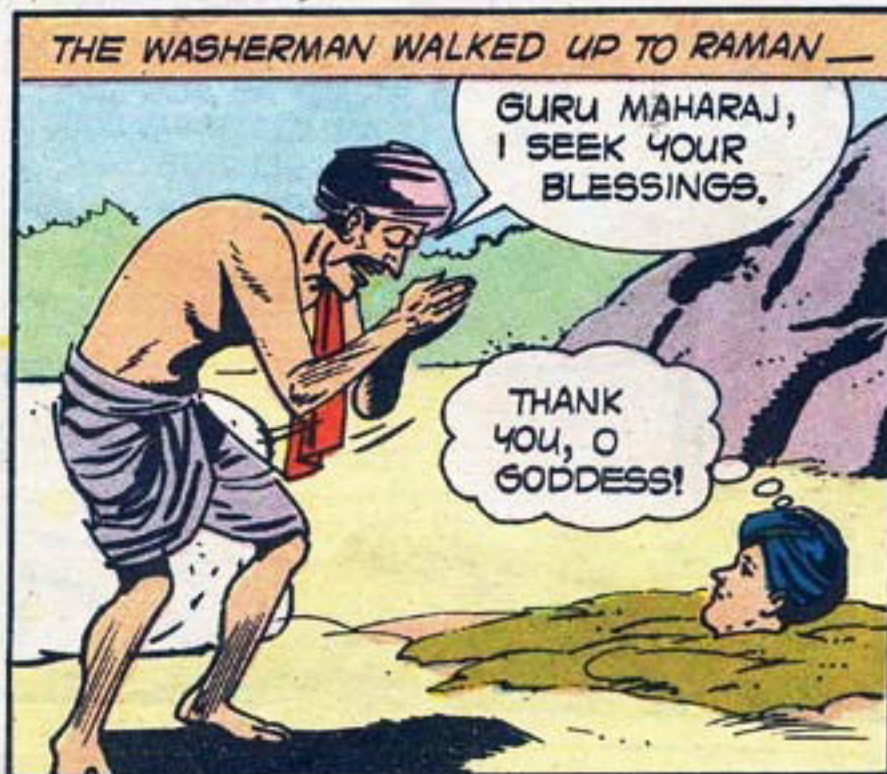
IT IS! HE MUST BE A YOGI.



THE WASHHERMAN WALKED UP TO RAMAN —

GURU MAHARAJ, I SEEK YOUR BLESSINGS.

THANK YOU, O GODDESS!



MY FRIEND, WHO AM I TO BLESS YOU? I AM AN ORDINARY WASHHERMAN LIKE YOU.

A WASHHERMAN! THEN WHY HAVE YOU BURIED YOURSELF LIKE THIS?



I AM UNDER TREATMENT. I AM A HUNCHBACK.

BUT SURELY, THERE'S NO REMEDY FOR THAT!



THERE IS, MY FRIEND — A SIMPLE ONE. BURY YOURSELF LIKE THIS FOR AN HOUR; AND YOU WILL WALK ERECT.

I DON'T BELIEVE YOU.







ON HIS WAY TO THE PALACE,
RAMAN PASSED THE GUARDS
WHO WERE RETURNING WITH
THE ELEPHANT.

HURRY UP,
THE QUEEN IS
WAITING FOR THE
CLOTHES.

THANK GOD!
THEY HAVEN'T
RECOGNISED
ME!

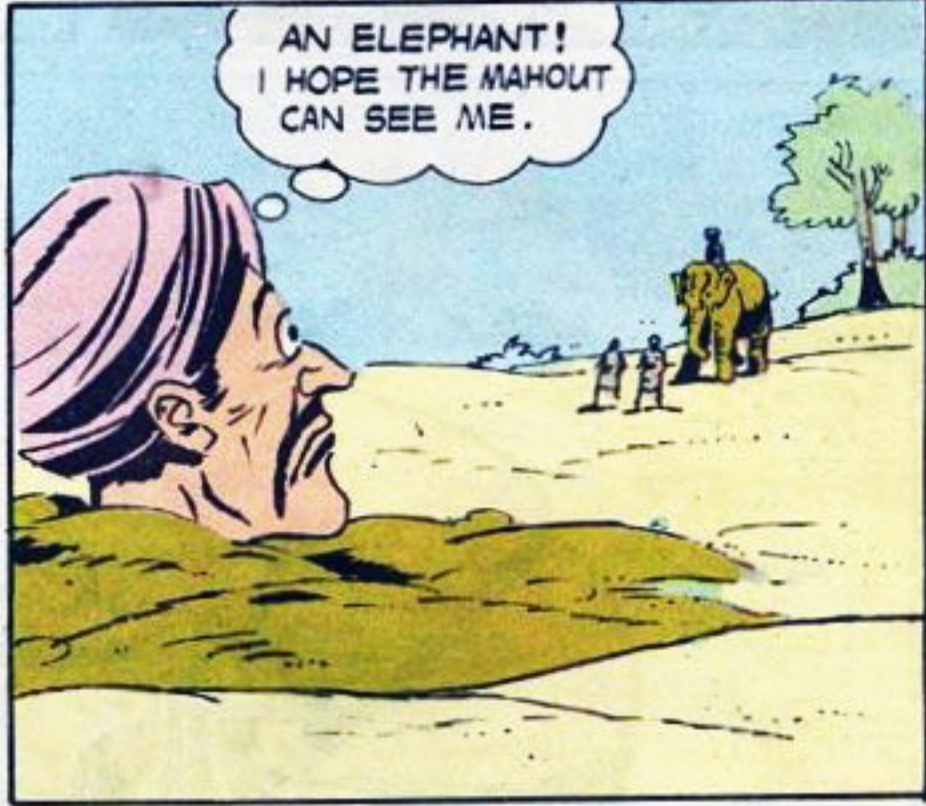
I AM WALKING
AS FAST AS I CAN,
SIR.



LATER, AT THE PIT—



AN ELEPHANT!
I HOPE THE MAHOUT
CAN SEE ME.



THERE HE IS. SEE
THAT THE ELEPHANT
DOES NOT MISS
HIM.

HE
WON'T!



MY GOD!
HE'S HEADING
FOR ME.



HELP!
HELP!

HEY! THAT
ISN'T RAMAN.
I KNOW HIS
VOICE.

THE GUARDS RAN FORWARD —

HELP!
HELP!

WHO ARE
YOU? WHAT ARE
YOU DOING
HERE?

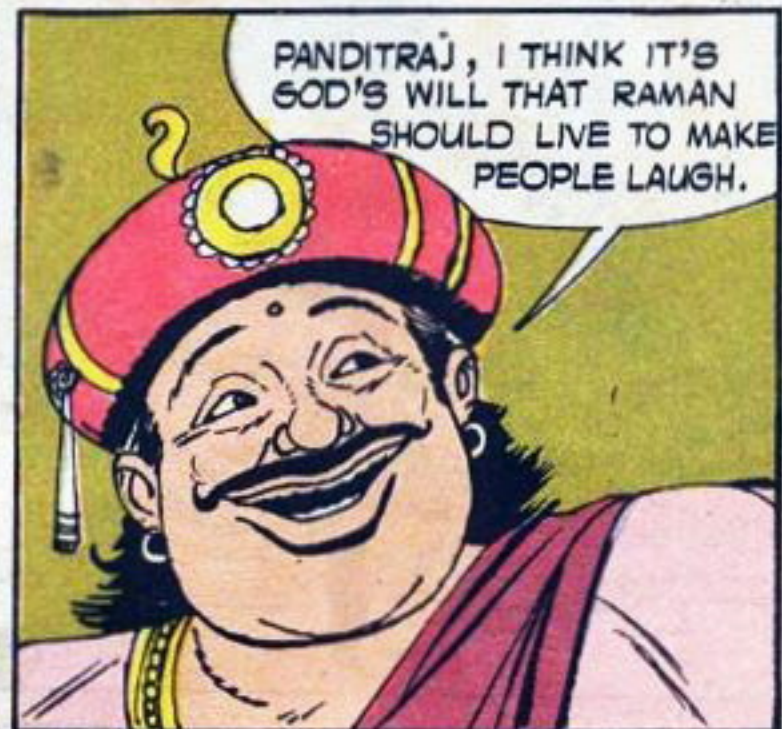
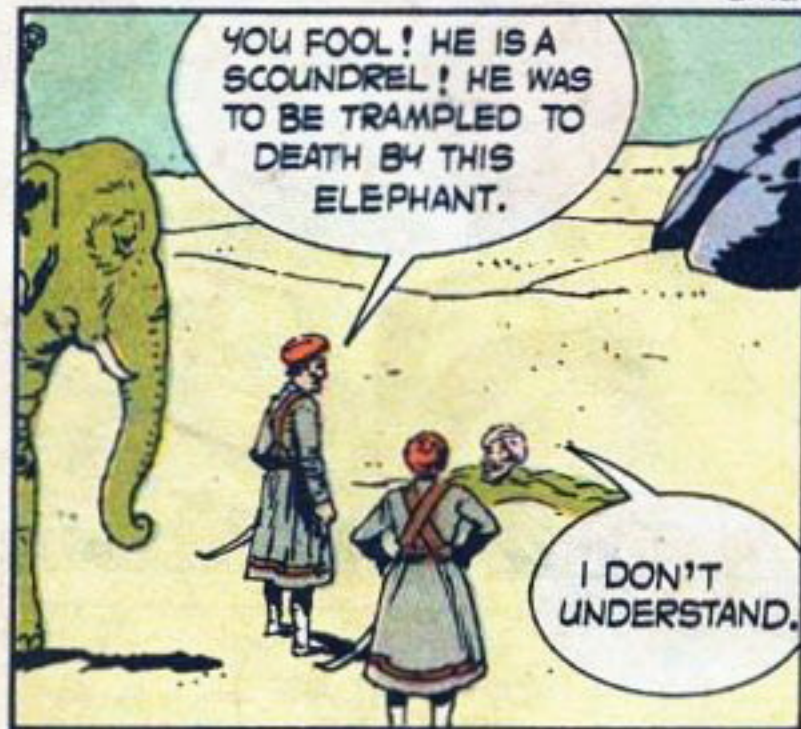
I AM
UNDER
TREATMENT.
A LEARNED
PHYSICIAN SUGGESTED
IT TO MY FRIEND. ALL
ONE HAS TO DO
IS....

YES, YES. BUT
WHERE IS RAMAN?

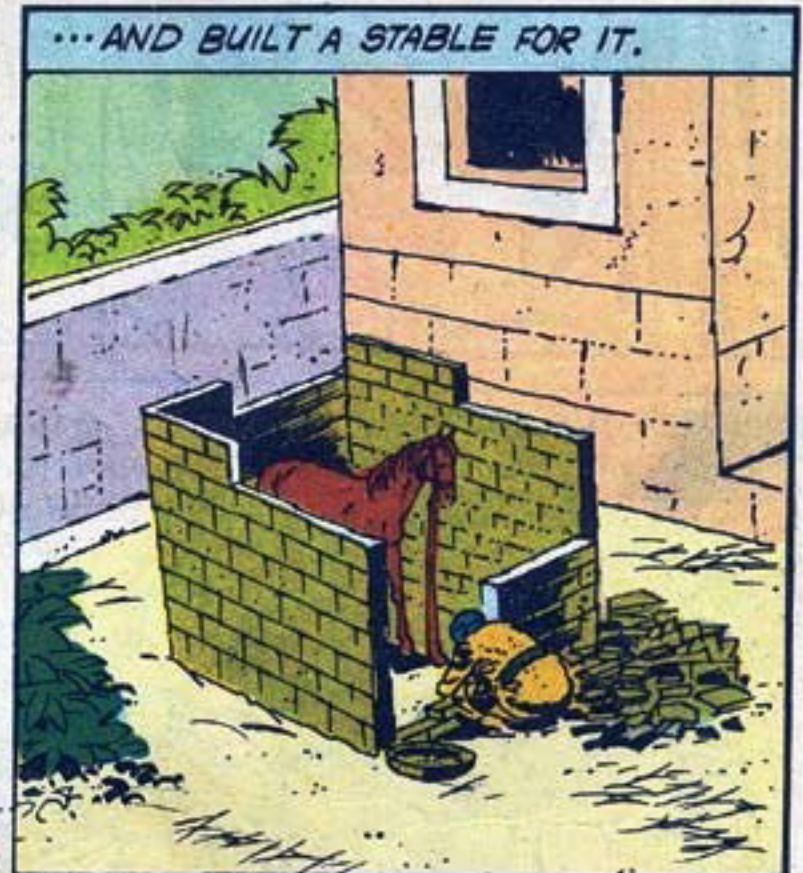
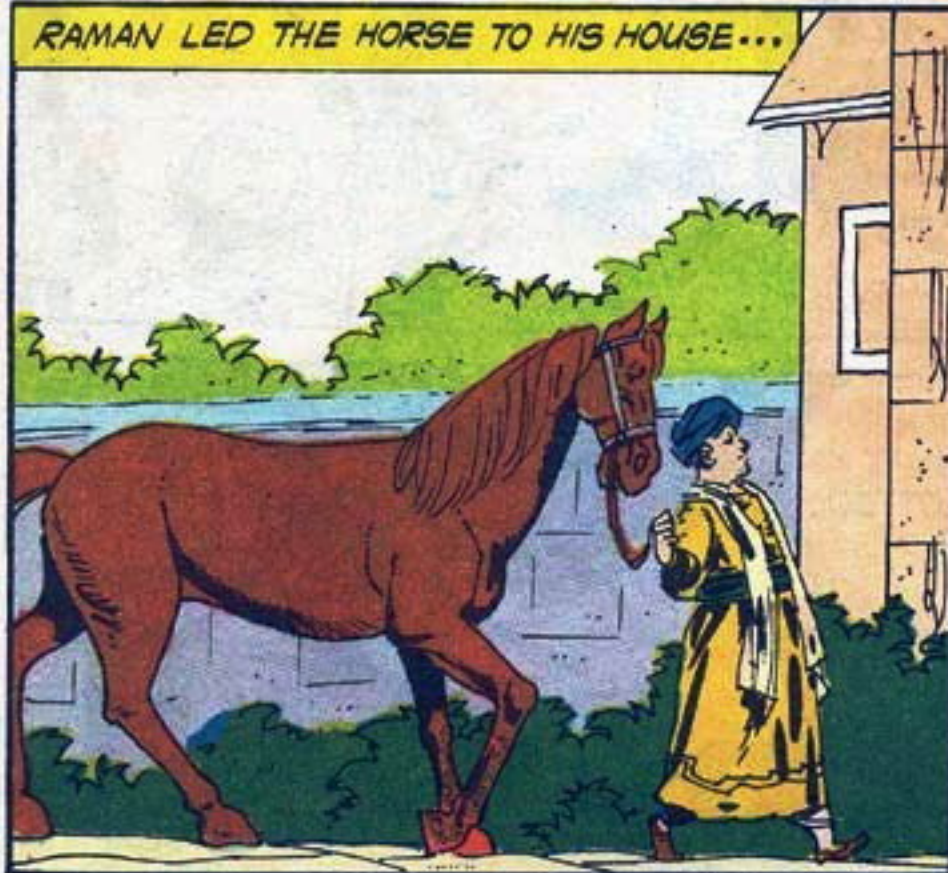
YOU MEAN, THE
KIND YOUNG WASHER-
MAN WHO LET ME USE
THIS PIT? HE HAS
TAKEN THE LAUNDRY
TO THE PALACE
FOR ME.

YOU MEAN... NO!
THE SCOUNDREL
HAS TRICKED
US AGAIN!

MY FRIEND?
A SCOUNDREL?
IMPOSSIBLE.
HE IS A GOOD
MAN...







A MONTH LATER, THE COURTIER'S CAME WITH THEIR HORSES, ALL SET FOR THE RACE.

ARE ALL THE HORSES HERE?

ALL BUT RAMAN'S, MAHARAJ. I KNEW HE...

RAMAN, WHERE IS THE HORSE?

MAHARAJ, IT'S SUCH A FIERCE BEAST, THAT I DARE NOT GO NEAR IT.

I DON'T BELIEVE HIM, MAHARAJ. HE'S ASHAMED OF HIS HORSE. THAT'S WHY HE HASN'T BROUGHT IT.

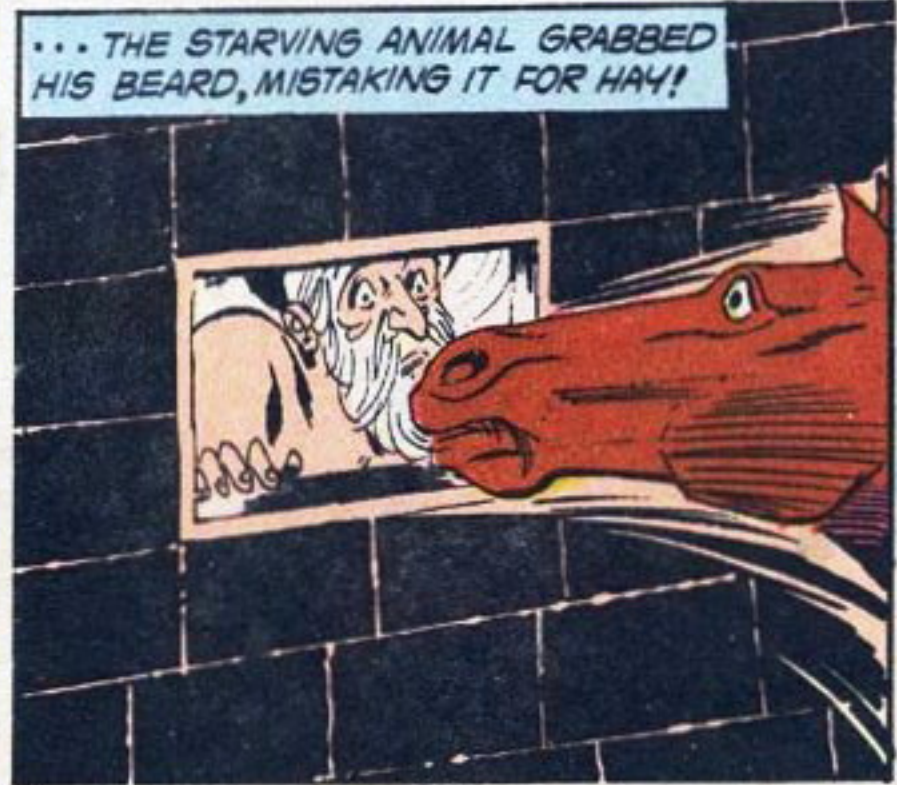
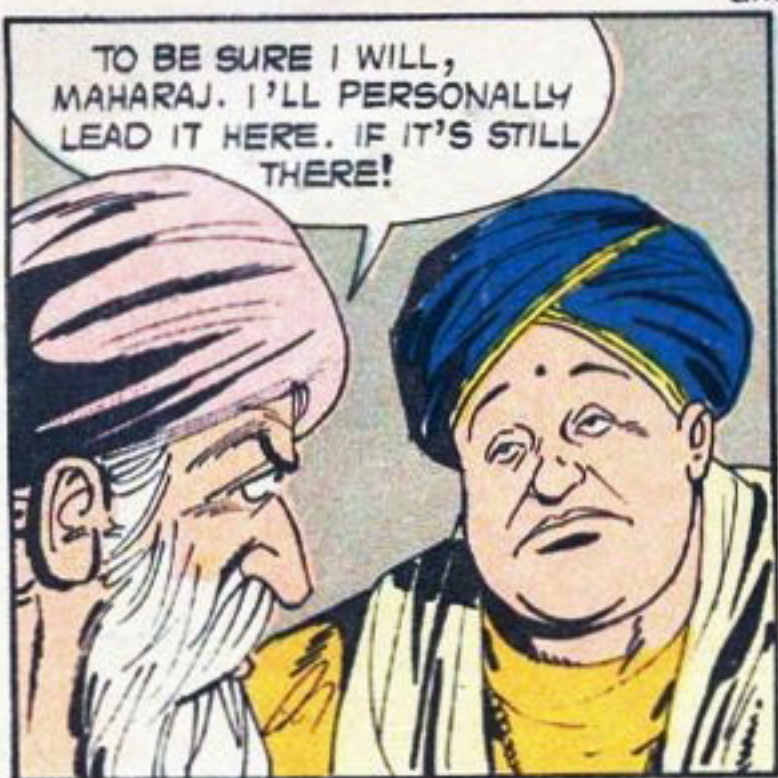
IS THAT SO?

MAHARAJ, I DON'T LIE. PLEASE BELIEVE ME. I DARE NOT GO NEAR IT.

THAT'S JUST AN EXCUSE, MAHARAJ. FOR ALL WE KNOW HE MIGHT HAVE SOLD IT.

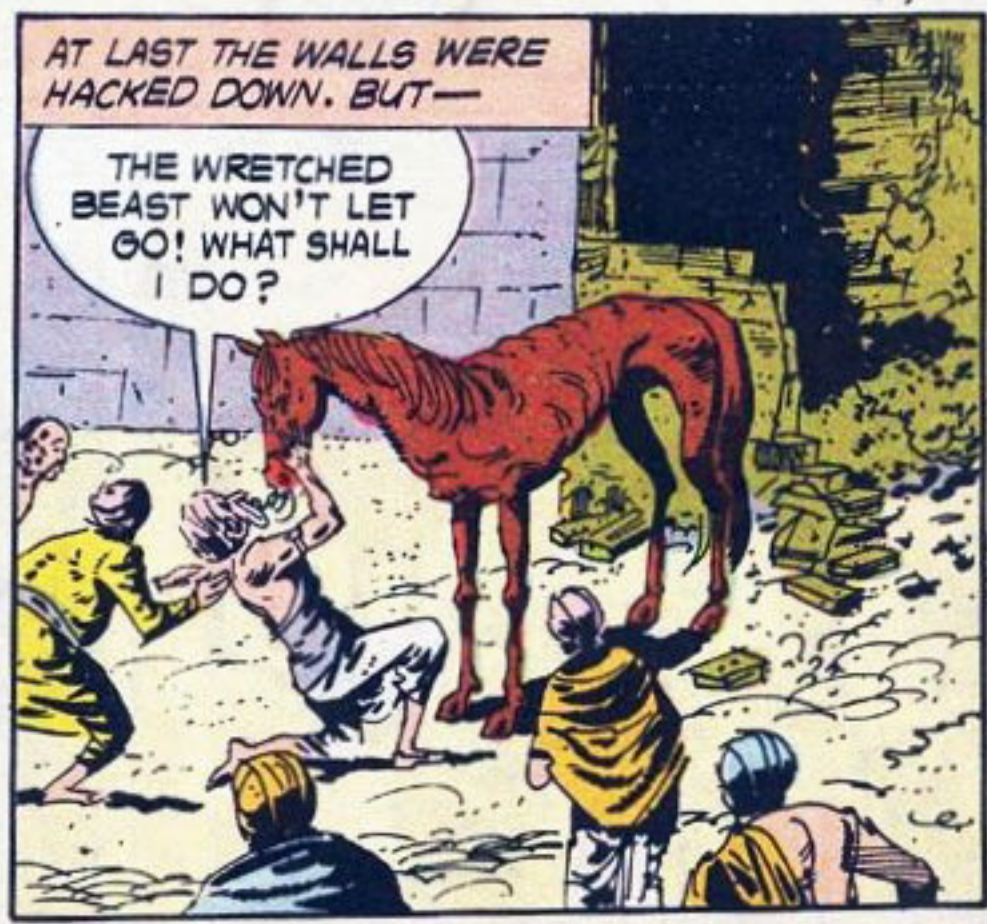
MAHARAJ, I AM HURT. IF PANDITRAJ DOES NOT BELIEVE ME, LET HIM COME AND SEE FOR HIMSELF.

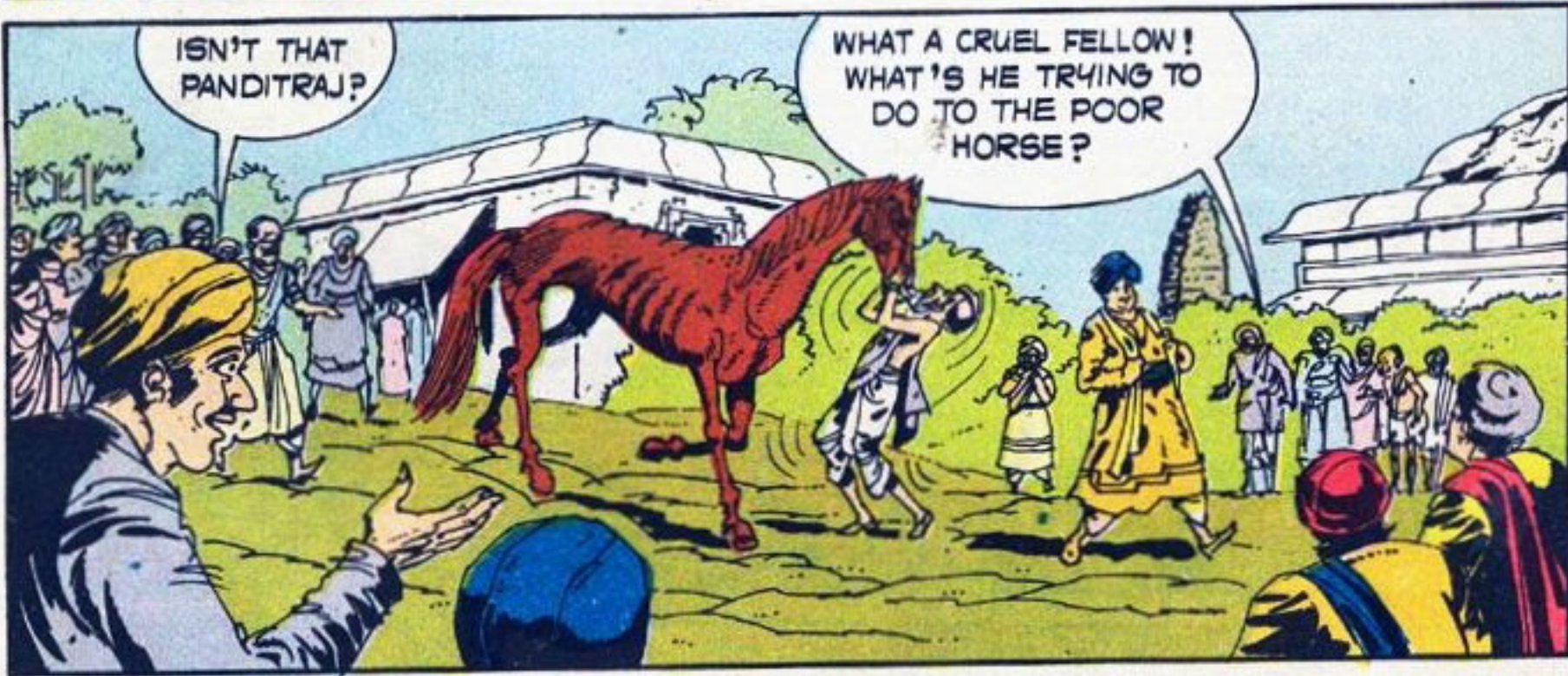
GO, PANDITRAJ, AND BRING THE HORSE HERE.



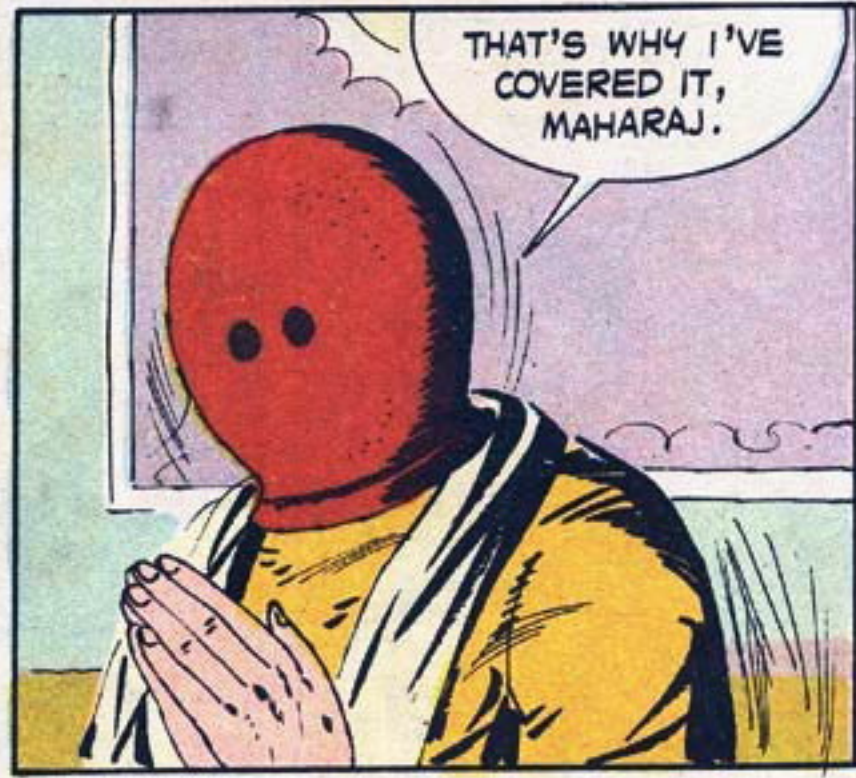
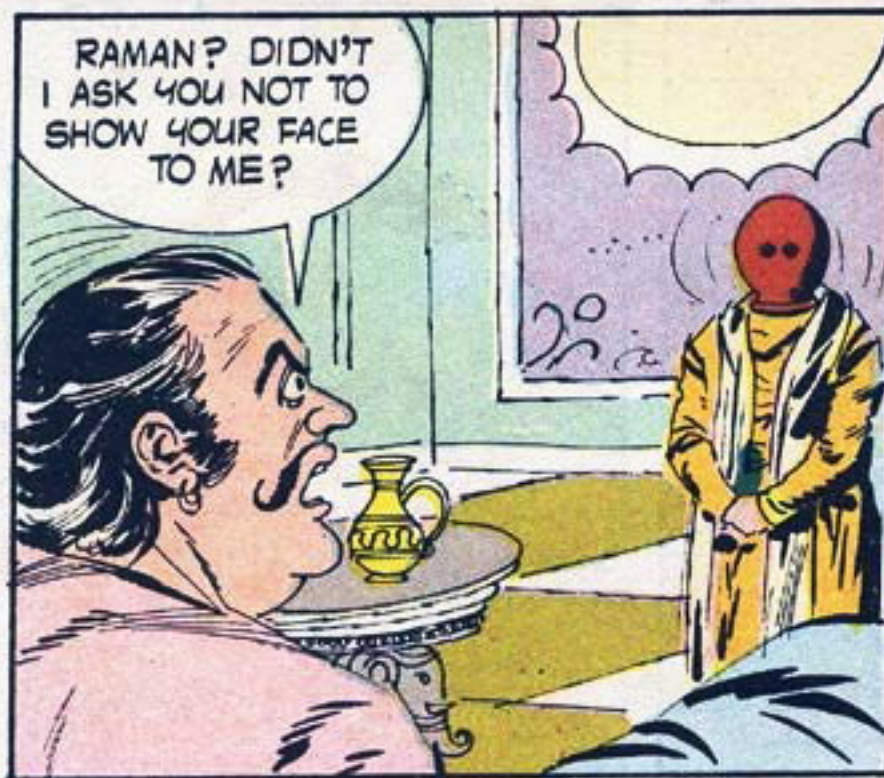
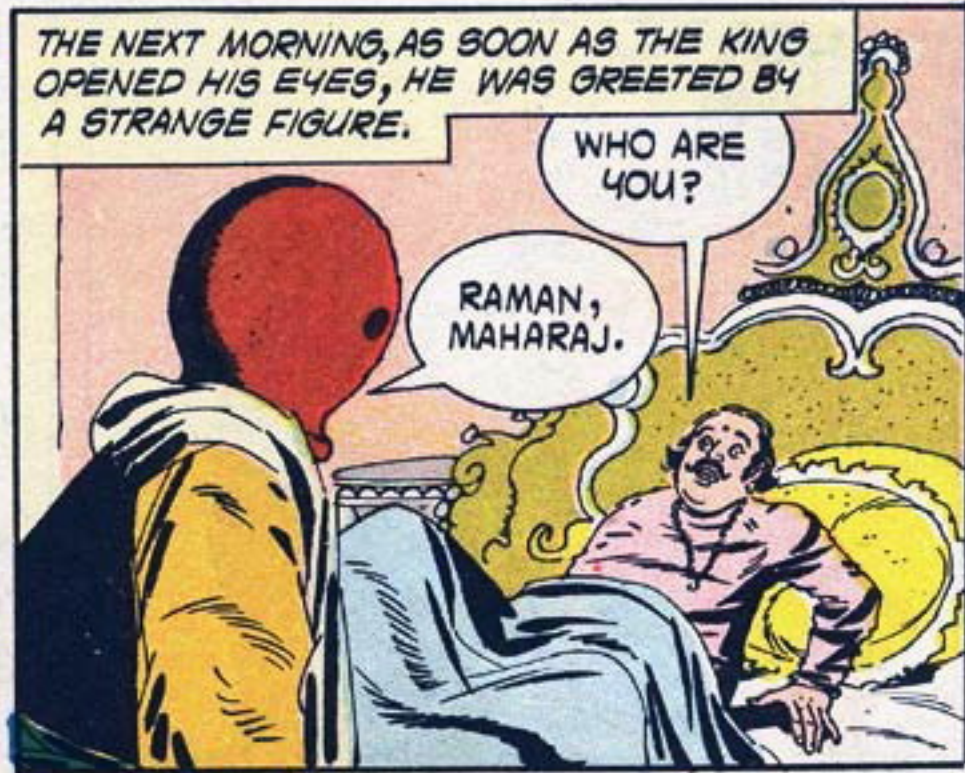


ATTRACTED BY THE COMMOTION, A CROWD SOON COLLECTED.









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