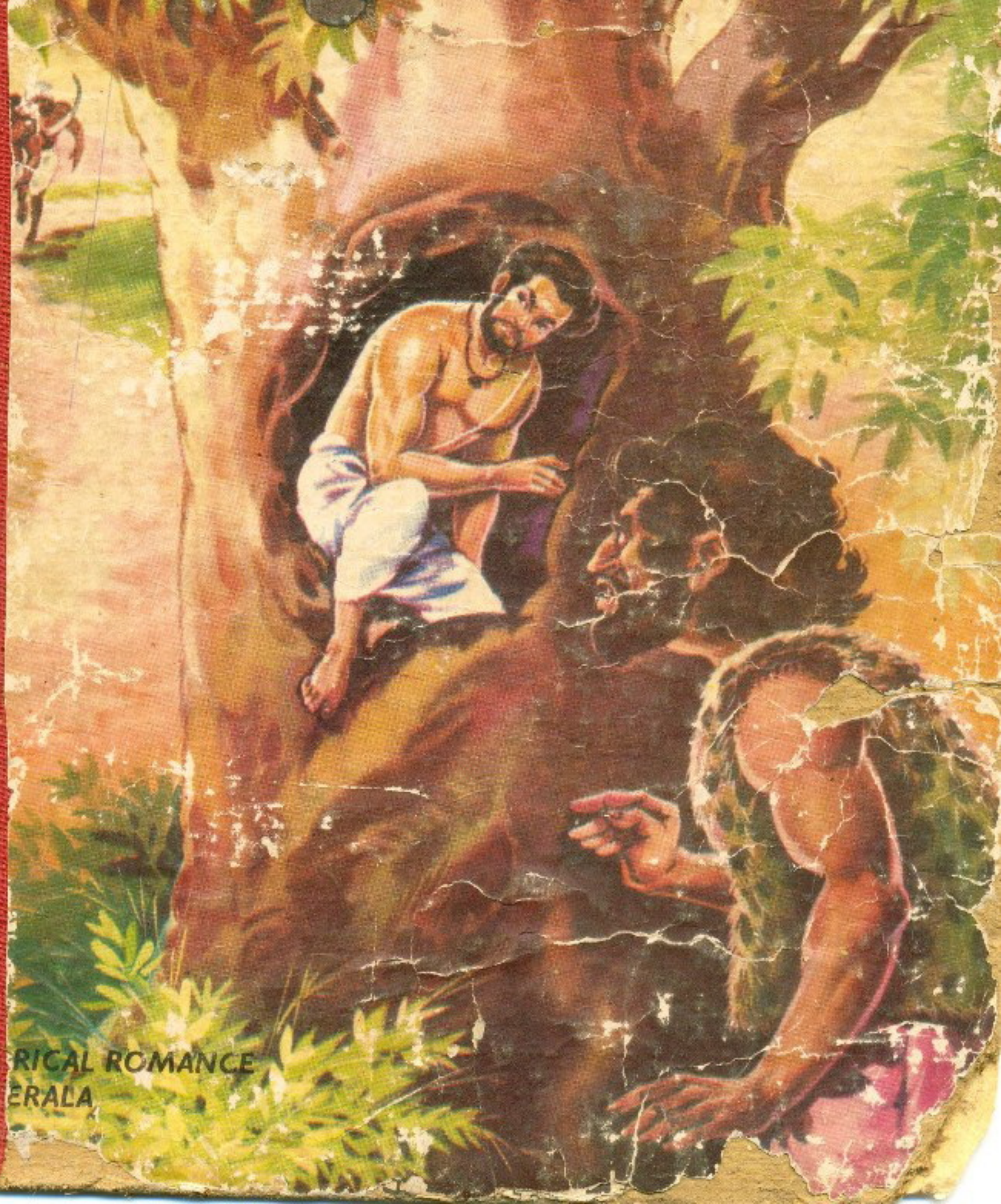




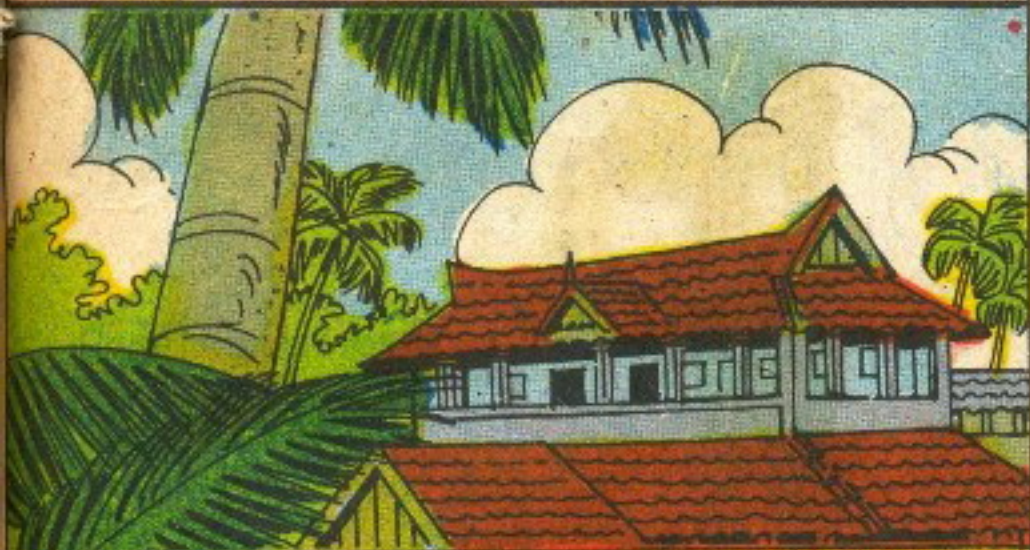
Rs. 4/-

The Legend of **MAARTHA ANDA VARMA**



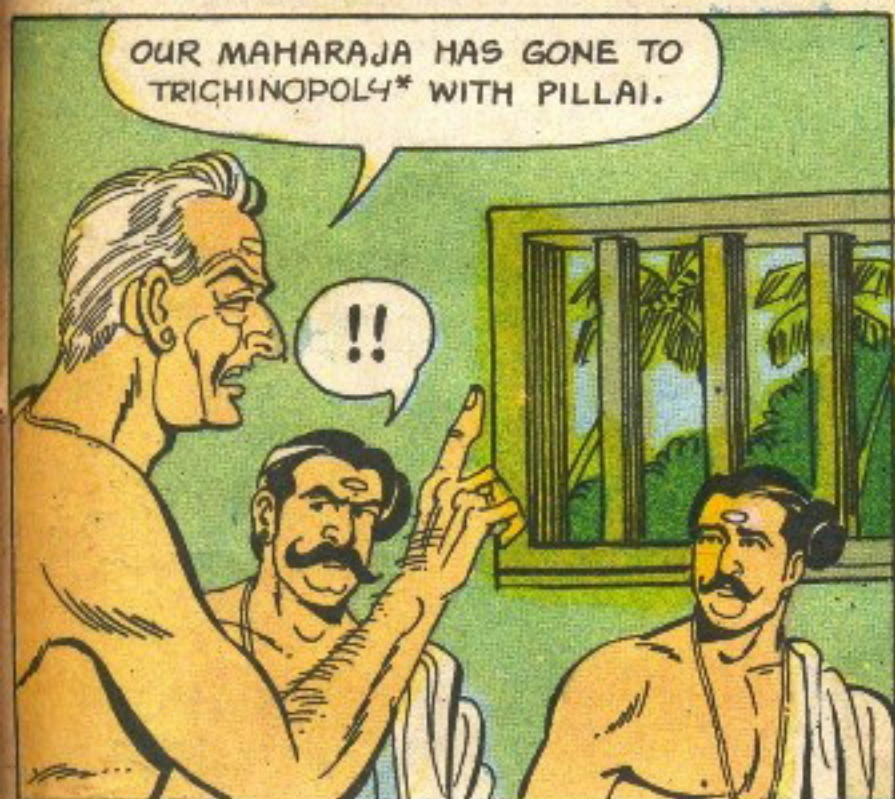
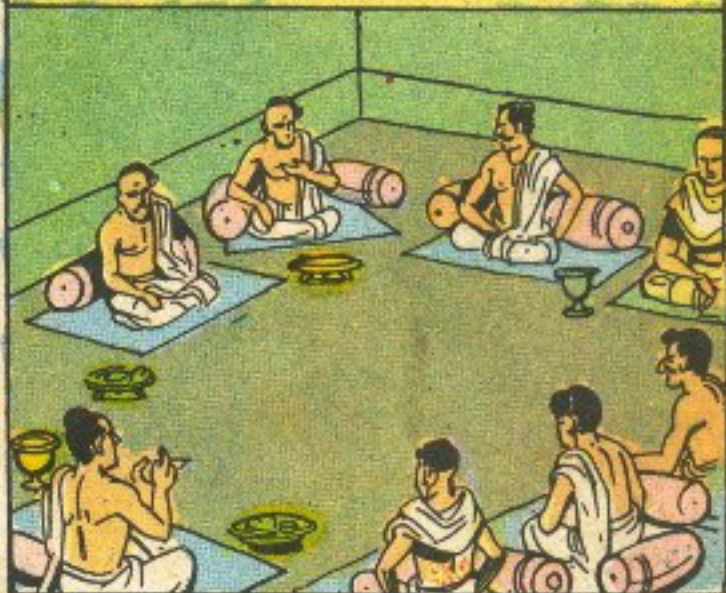
HISTORICAL ROMANCE
KERALA

MAARTHAANDA VARMA



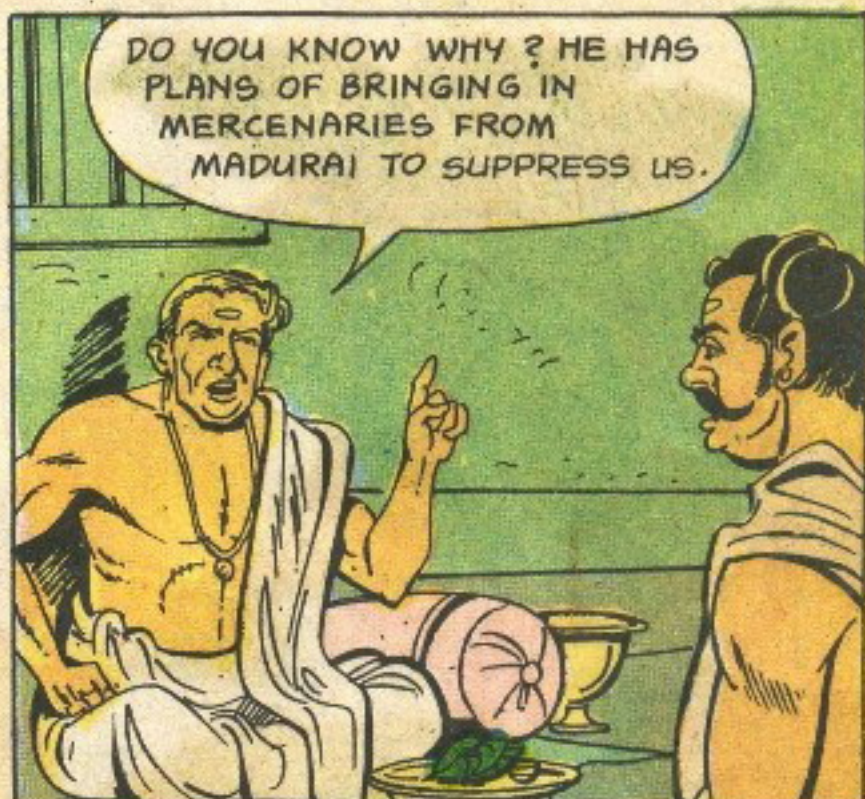
IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, TRAVANCORE WAS A HOTBED OF INTRIGUE. IN TRIVANDRUM, AT THE HOUSE OF KUTAMAN, THEIR LEADER...

...THE GROUP OF EIGHT — POWERFUL, REBELLIOUS, FEUDAL LORDS WHO WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TROUBLE IN THE LAND — WAS PLOTTING AS USUAL.

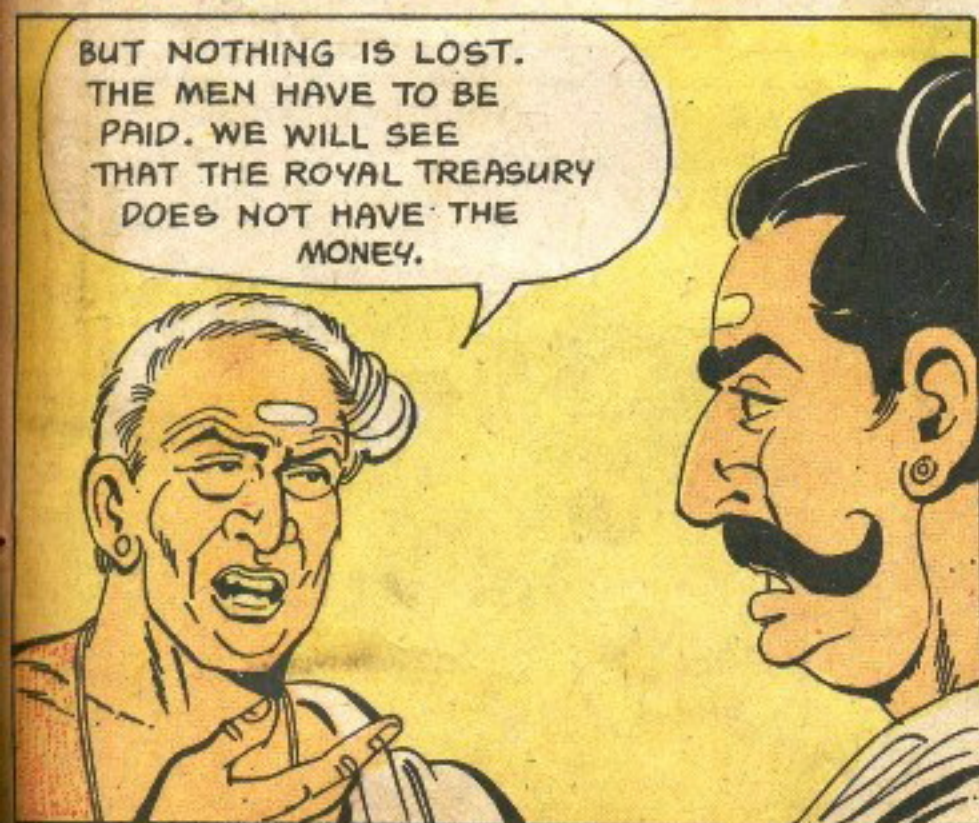


OUR MAHARAJA HAS GONE TO TRICHINOPOLY* WITH PILLAI.

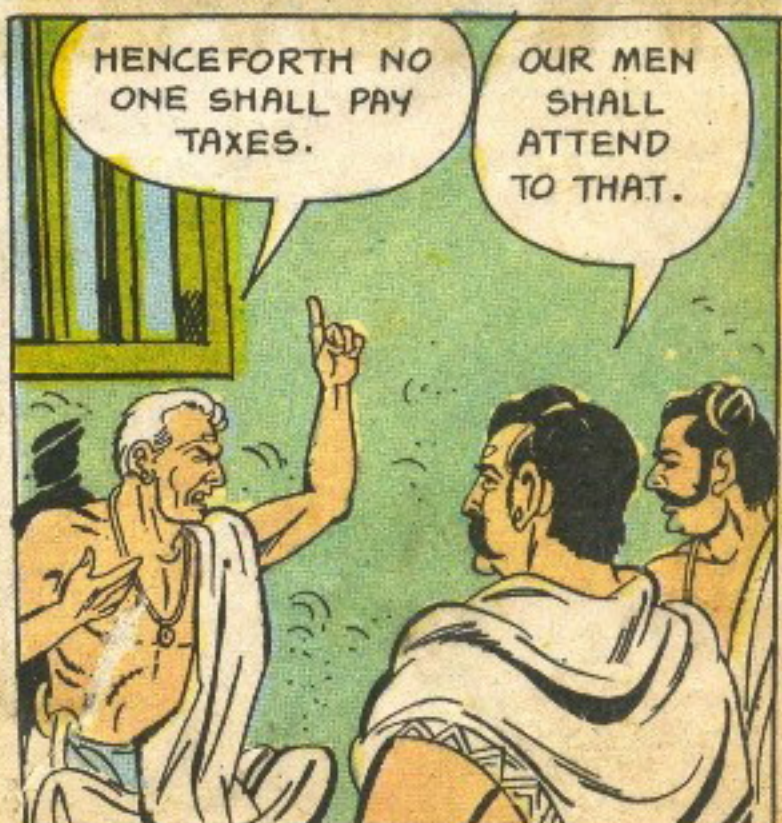
!!



DO YOU KNOW WHY? HE HAS PLANS OF BRINGING IN MERCENARIES FROM MADURAI TO SUPPRESS US.

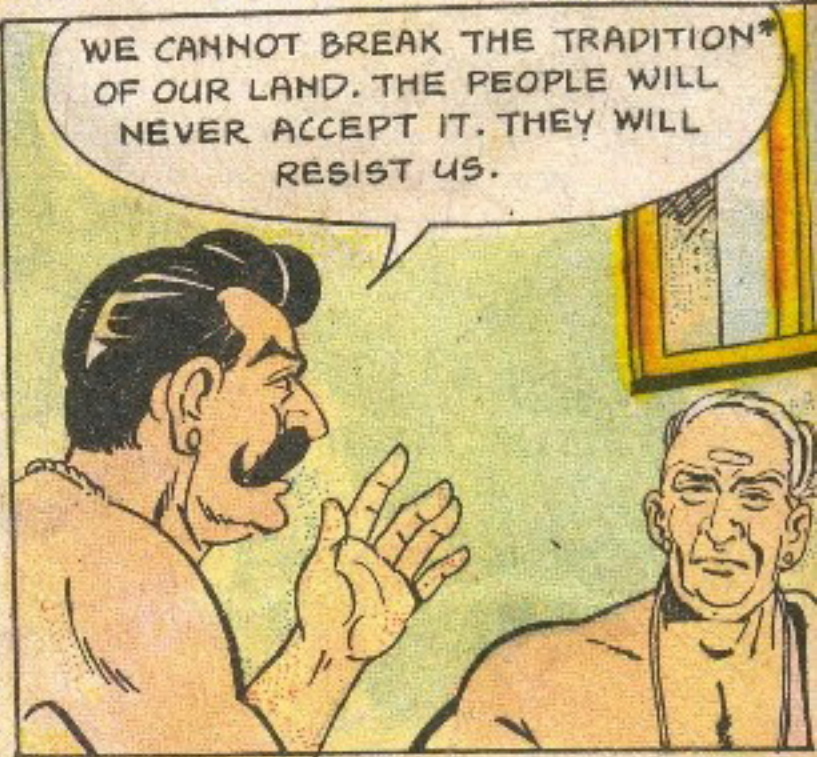
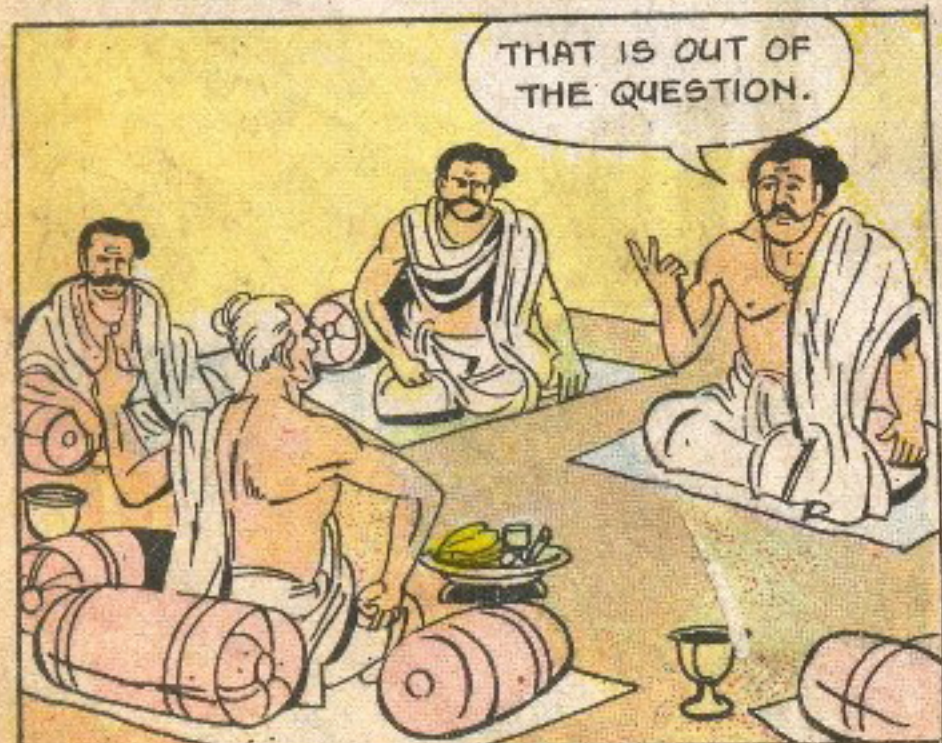
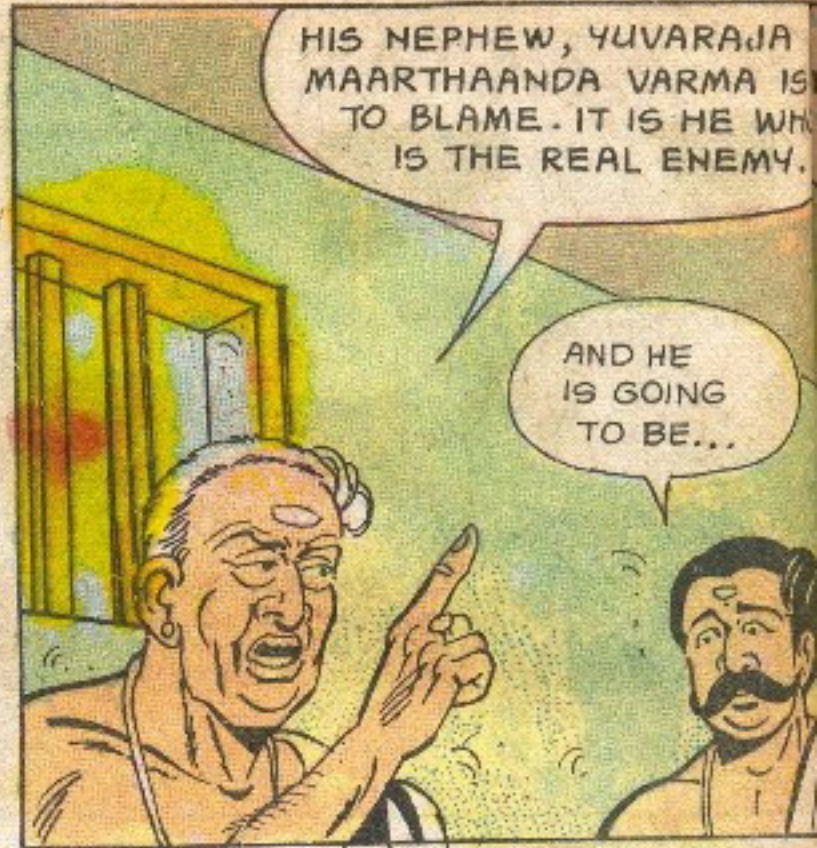
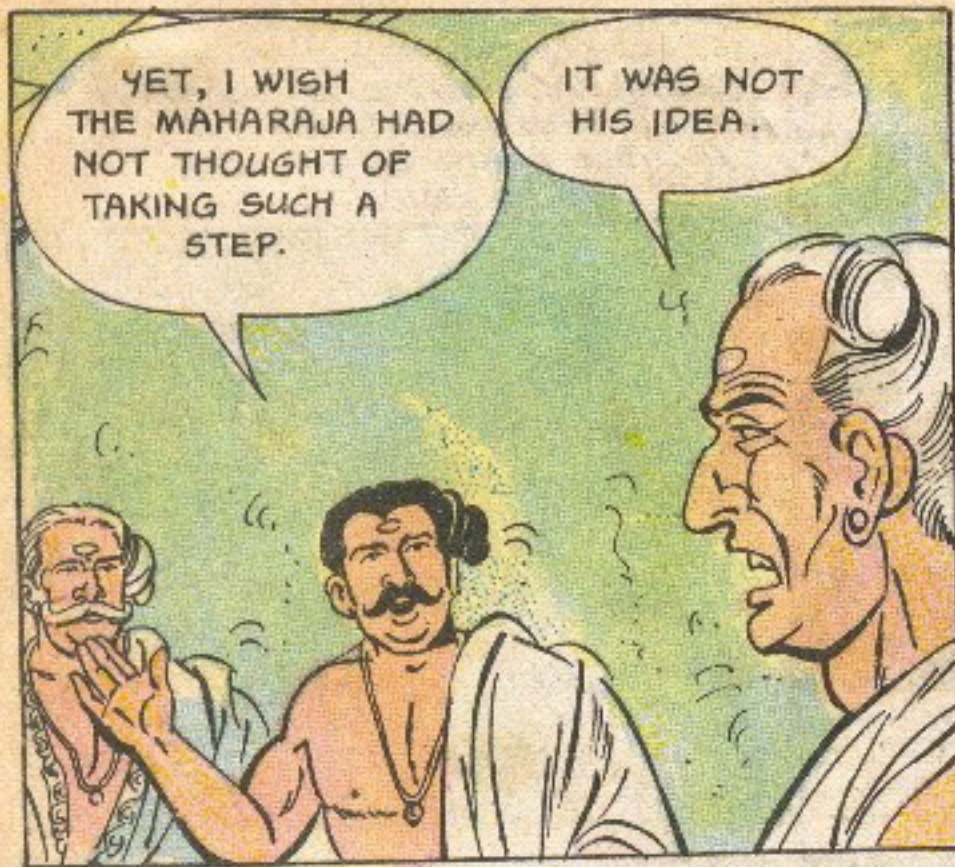


BUT NOTHING IS LOST. THE MEN HAVE TO BE PAID. WE WILL SEE THAT THE ROYAL TREASURY DOES NOT HAVE THE MONEY.



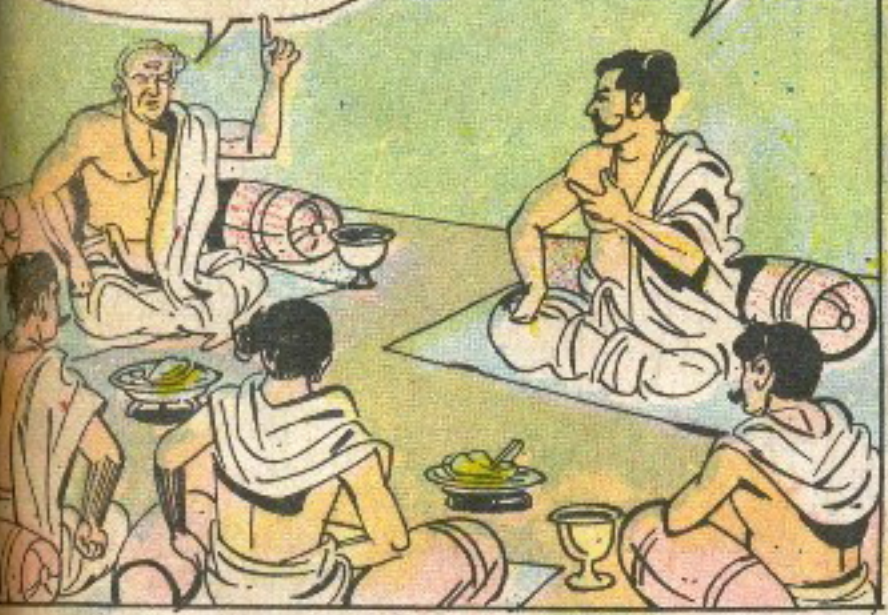
HENCEFORTH NO ONE SHALL PAY TAXES.

OUR MEN SHALL ATTEND TO THAT.



WHICH PEOPLE? WHO HAS RESISTED ANYTHING WE HAVE DONE SO FAR?

THAMPI HIMSELF MAY RESIST THE IDEA.



HE WON'T. IN FACT HE SECRETLY COVETS THE THRONE. I HAVE IT FROM HIS COMPANION AND COUNSELLOR, SUNDARAM.

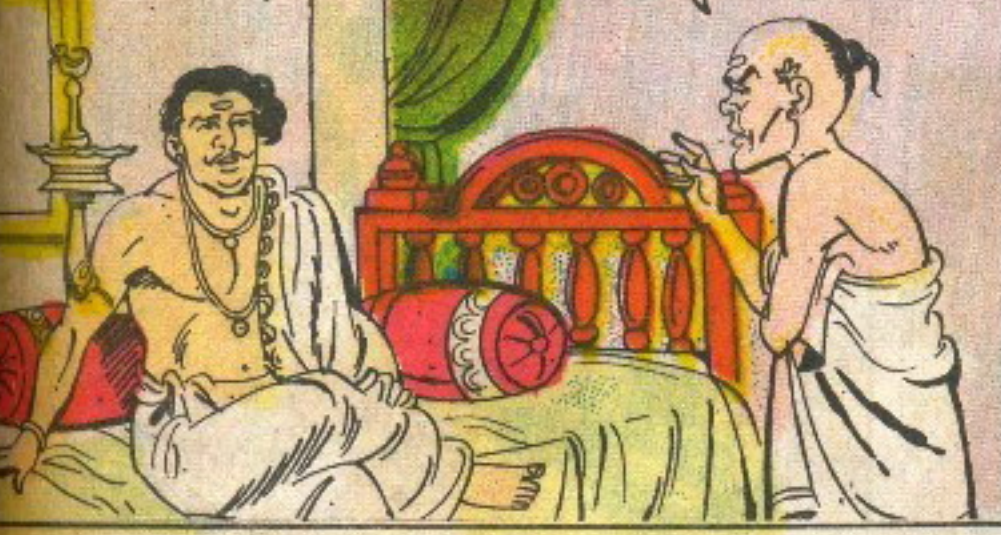


THE MAN WHO SPOKE WAS RAAMANAMADHAM, KUTAMAN'S TRUSTED CRONY. AND HE WAS RIGHT.

THAMPI HAD HIS OWN SCHEMES TO ACHIEVE HIS END. AT HIS PALACE IN PADMANAABHAPURAM —

WHAT'S THE PROGRESS, SUNDARAM? WHEN WILL I...

PATIENCE, SIR. PILLAI'S SON, ANANTA, AND THAT BODYGUARD FOLLOW MAARTHAANDA LIKE A SHADOW.



BUT OUR VELU HAS FOLLOWED THEM TO NAGERCOIL. HE IS WAITING FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT TO STRIKE.

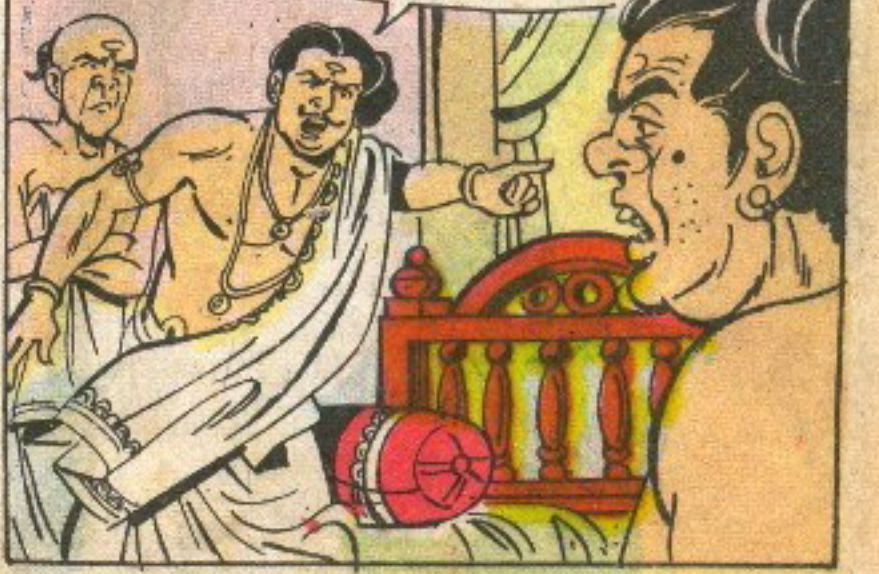


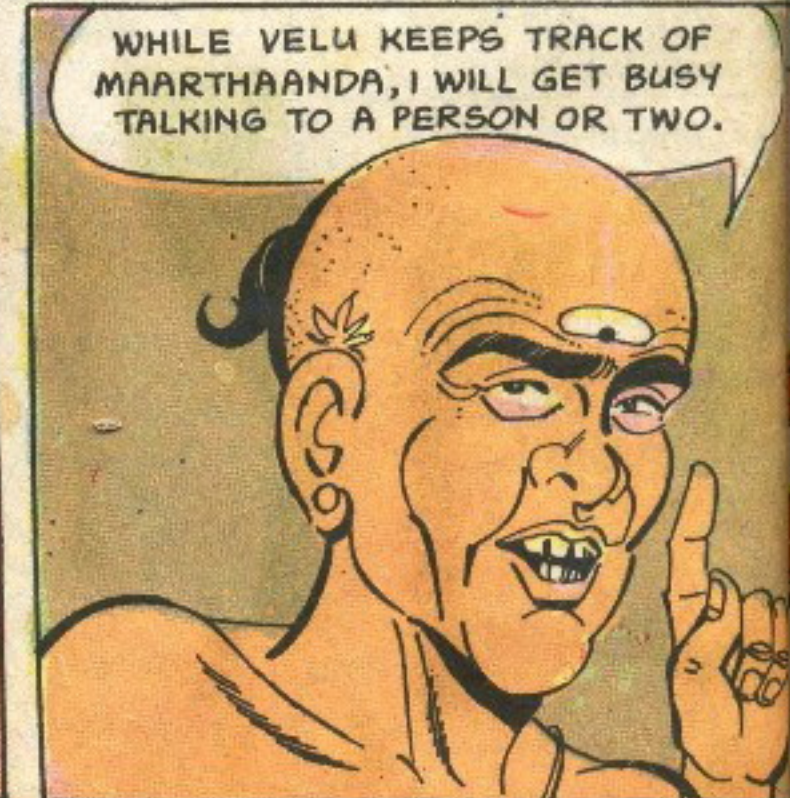
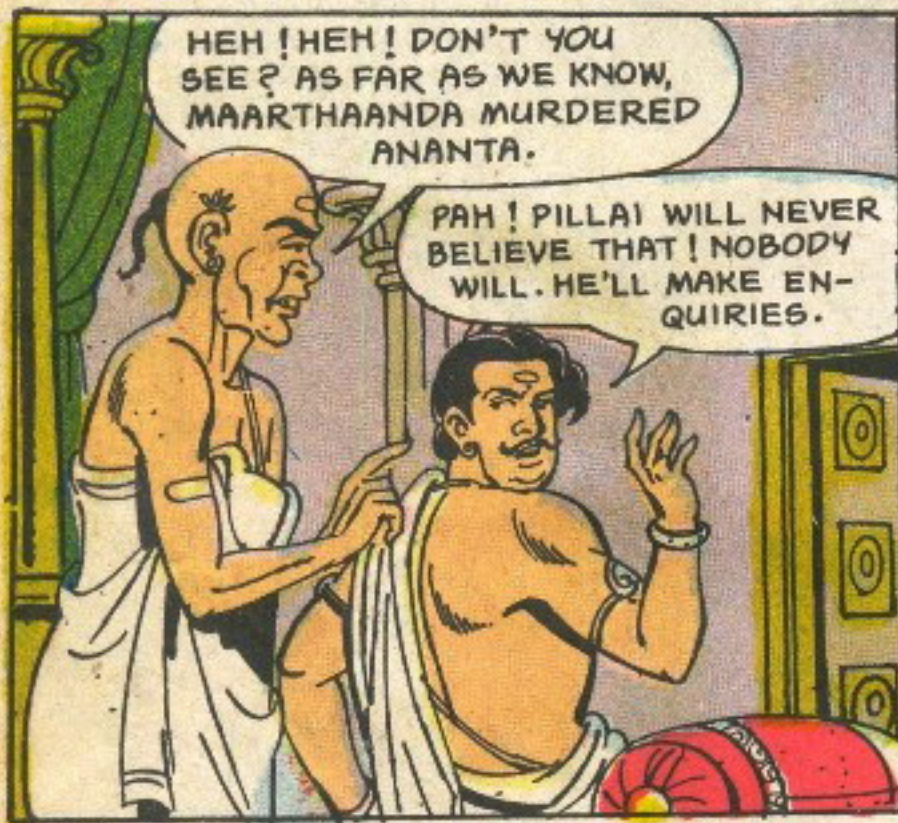
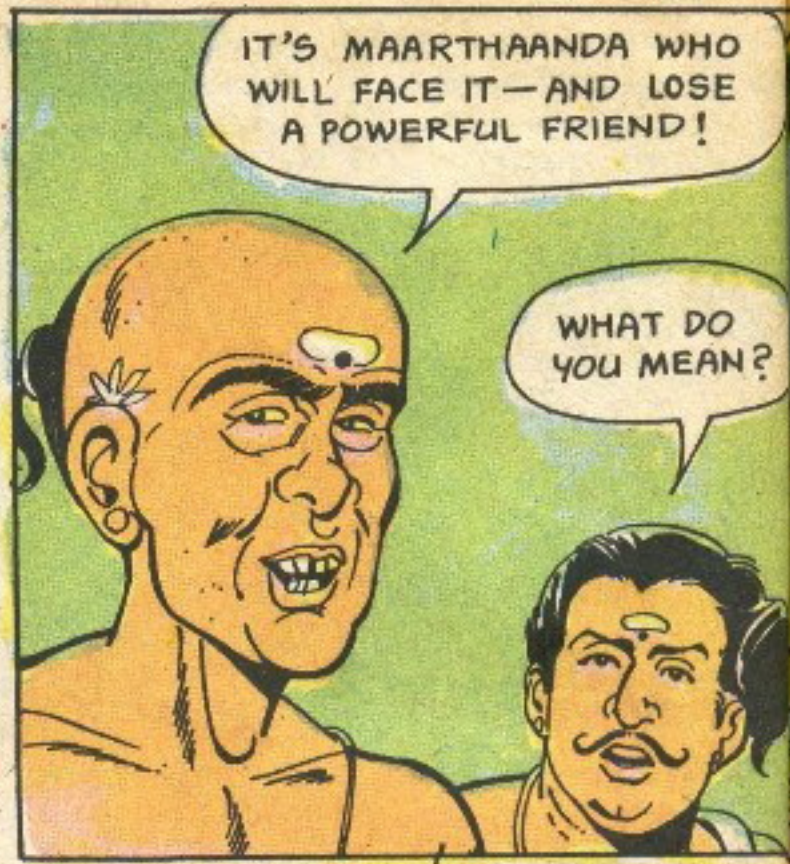
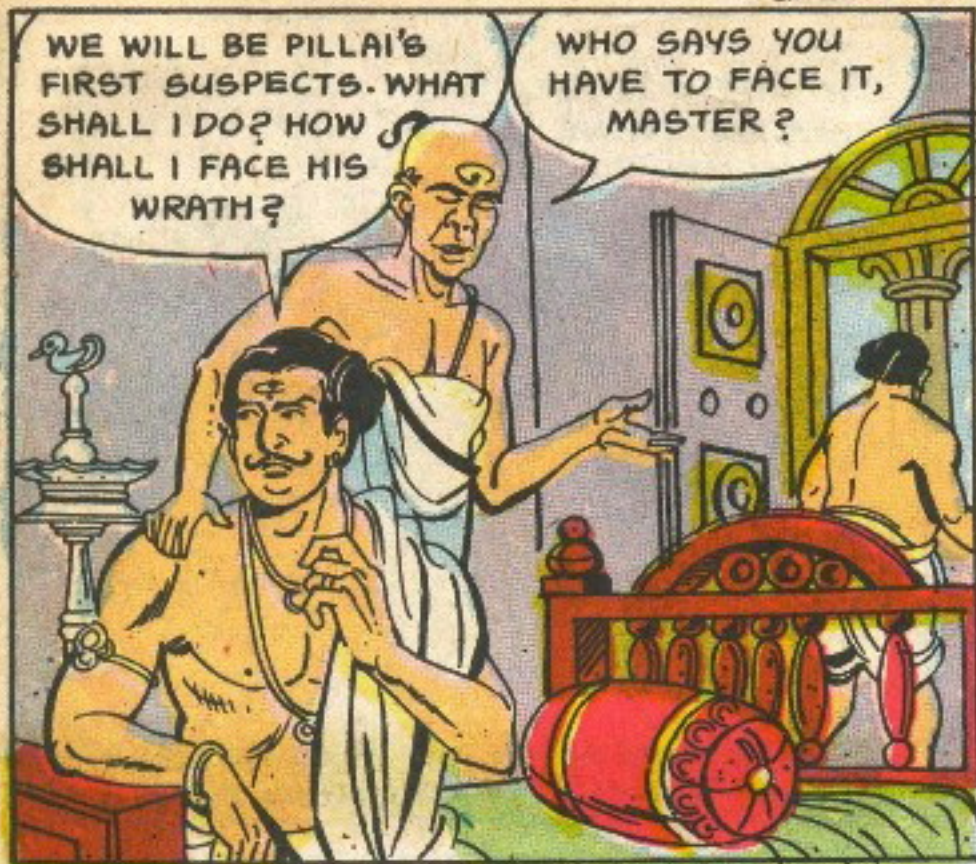
JUST THEN, VELU CAME IN FEELING QUITE PLEASED WITH HIMSELF.

MAARTHAANDA ESCAPED. BUT I FINISHED ANANTA.



YOU BUNGLER! YOU FOOL! YOU LET MAARTHAANDA LIVE AND PROUDLY TELL ME YOU KILLED PILLAI'S SON. GET OUT!



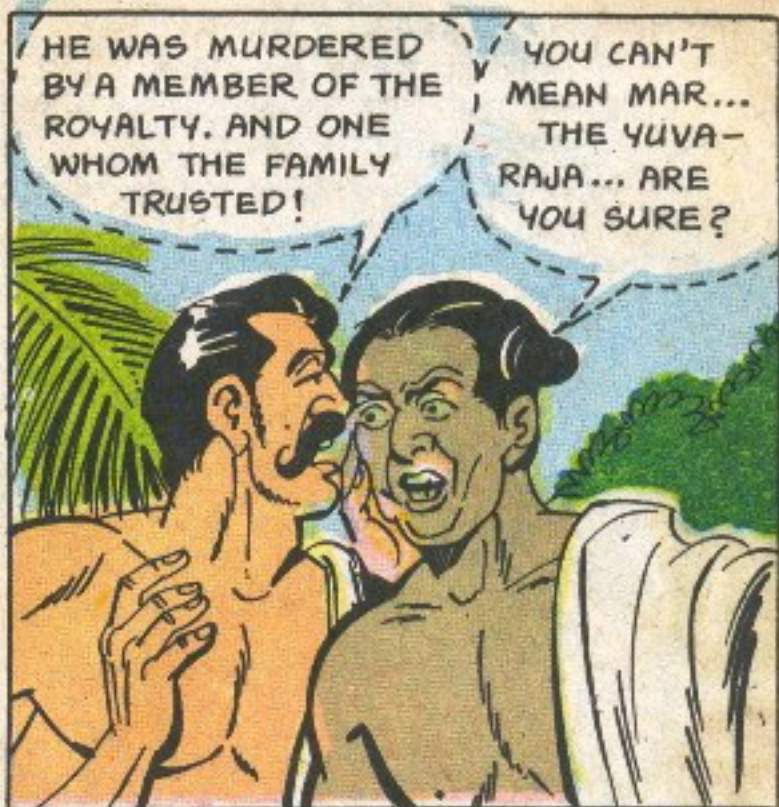


AND SOON —



DID YOU HEAR ABOUT ANANTA? WHAT A NASTY WAY TO DIE — DEVoured BY A NEELEE*!

NEELEE? DON'T YOU KNOW THE TRUTH?



HE WAS MURDERED BY A MEMBER OF THE ROYALTY. AND ONE WHOM THE FAMILY TRUSTED!

YOU CAN'T MEAN MAR... THE YUVA-RAJA... ARE YOU SURE?

THERE WERE MANY WHO REFUSED TO BELIEVE THE RUMOURS. BUT THERE WAS ONE AT TRIVANDRUM WHO REFUSED EVEN TO BELIEVE THAT ANANTA WAS DEAD.



NO, MOTHER. WITHOUT ANY DEFINITE PROOF I WILL NOT BELIEVE THAT HE IS DEAD.

IT WAS PAARUKUTTY, THE NIECE OF ONE OF THE EIGHT, AND ANANTA'S BETROTHED.



YOU YOURSELF HEARD VELU TELLING US...

THAT VELU IS A LIAR.

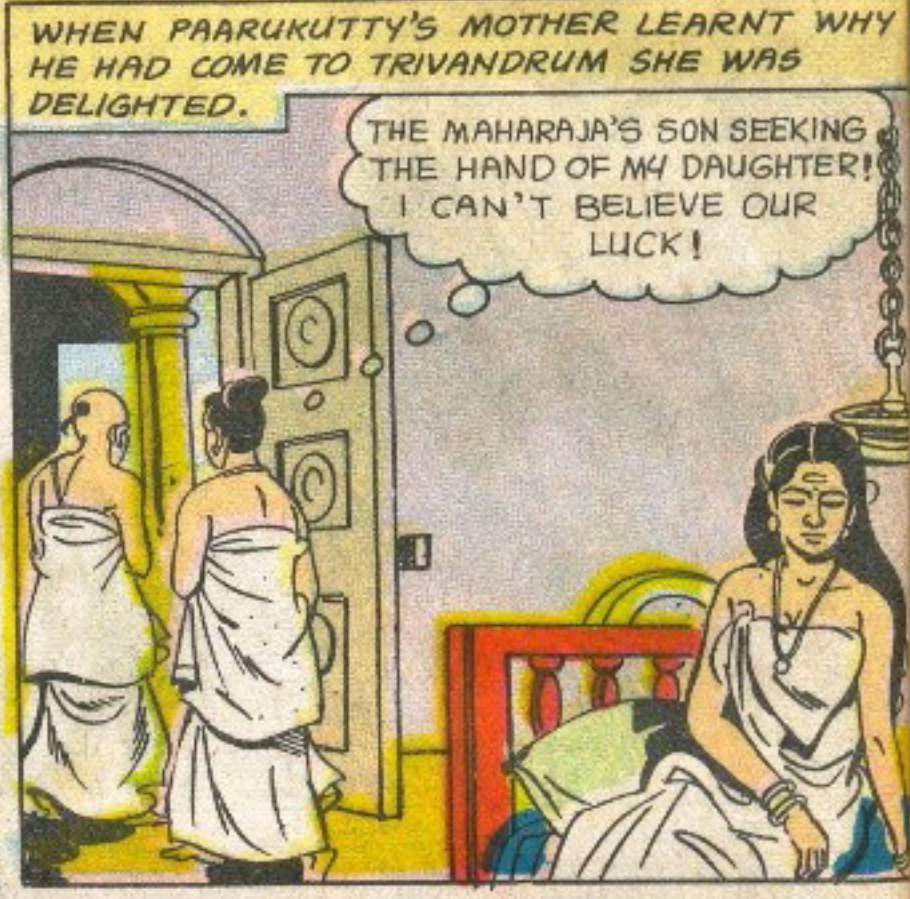
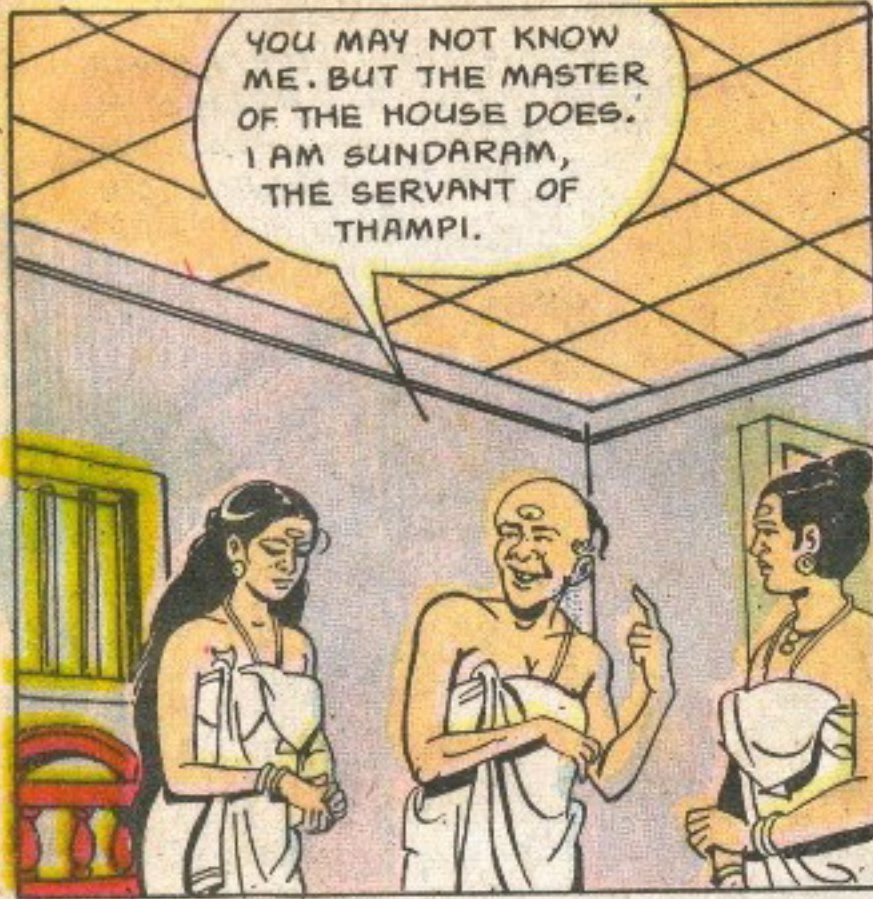


MY POOR CHILD...

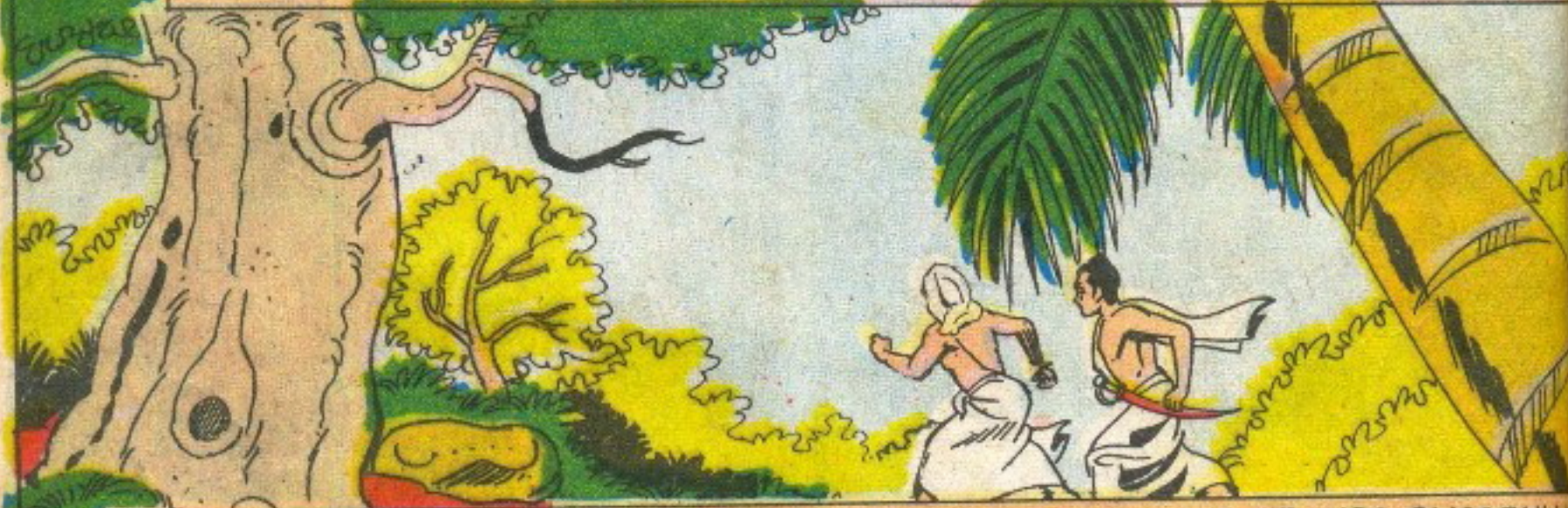
JUST THEN —



A STRANGER? AT THIS HOUR? HERE IN OUR PRIVATE ROOMS?



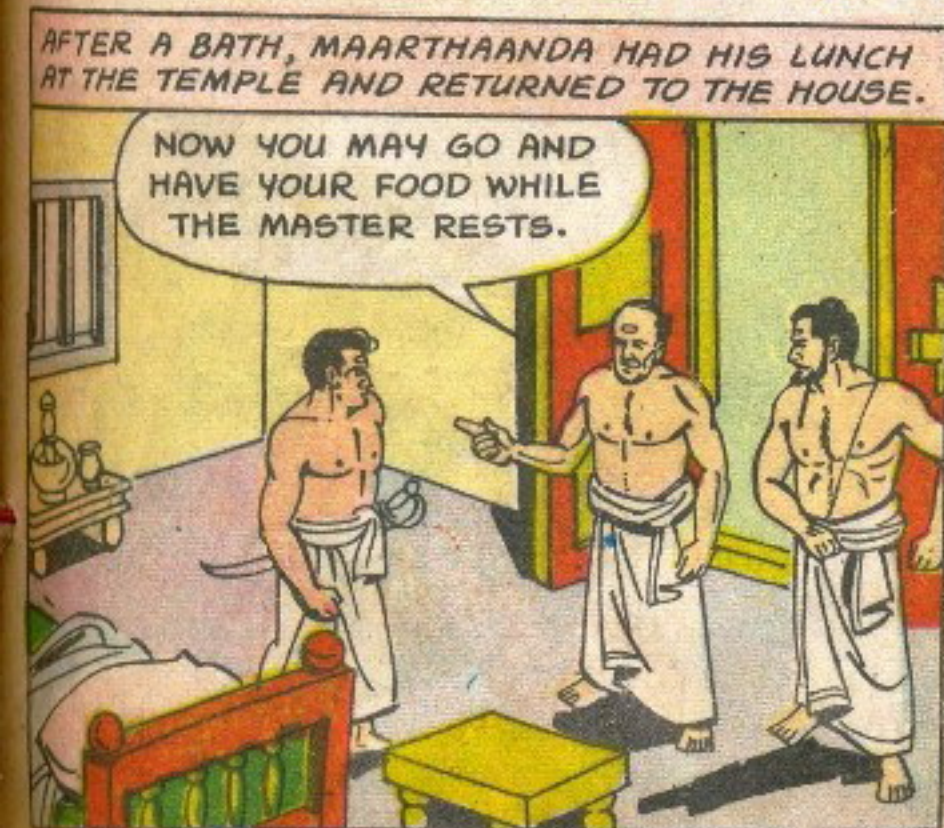
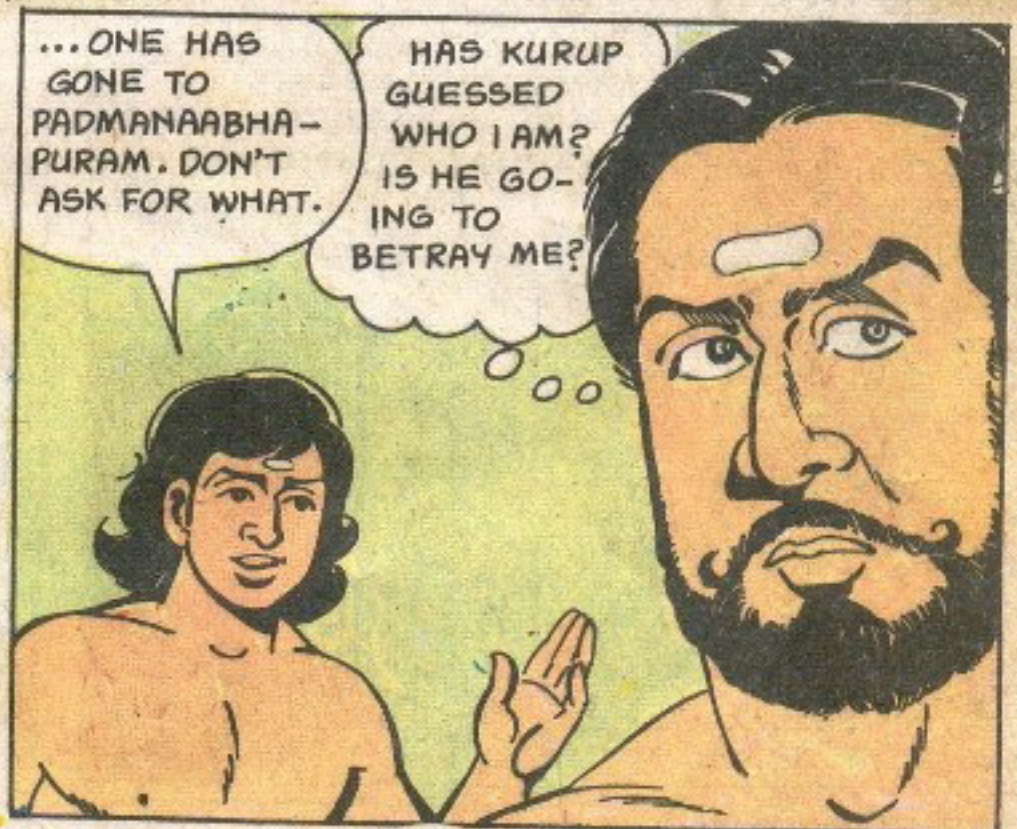
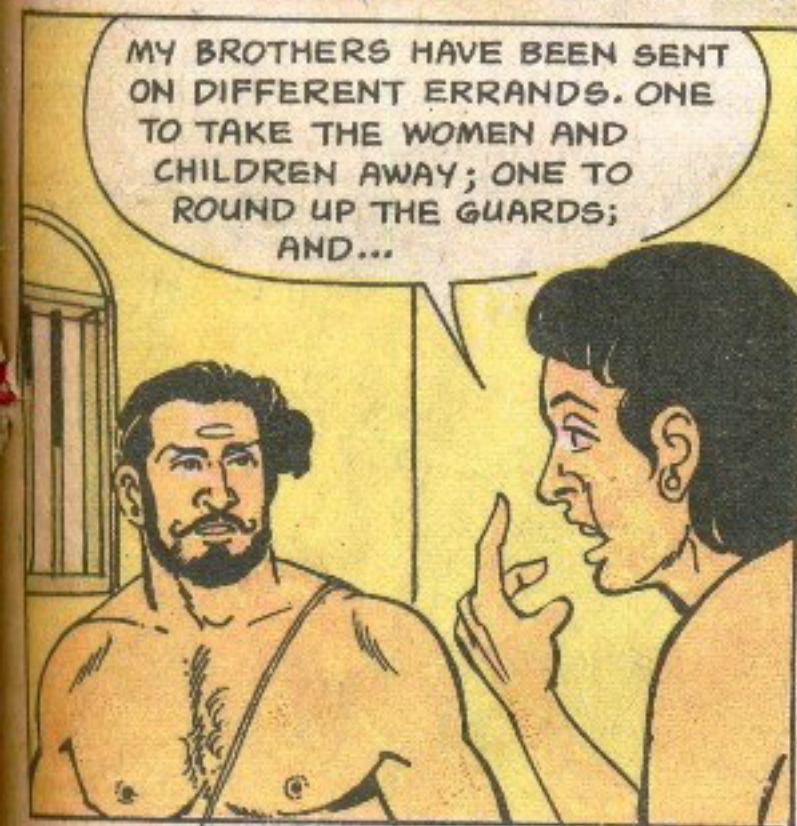
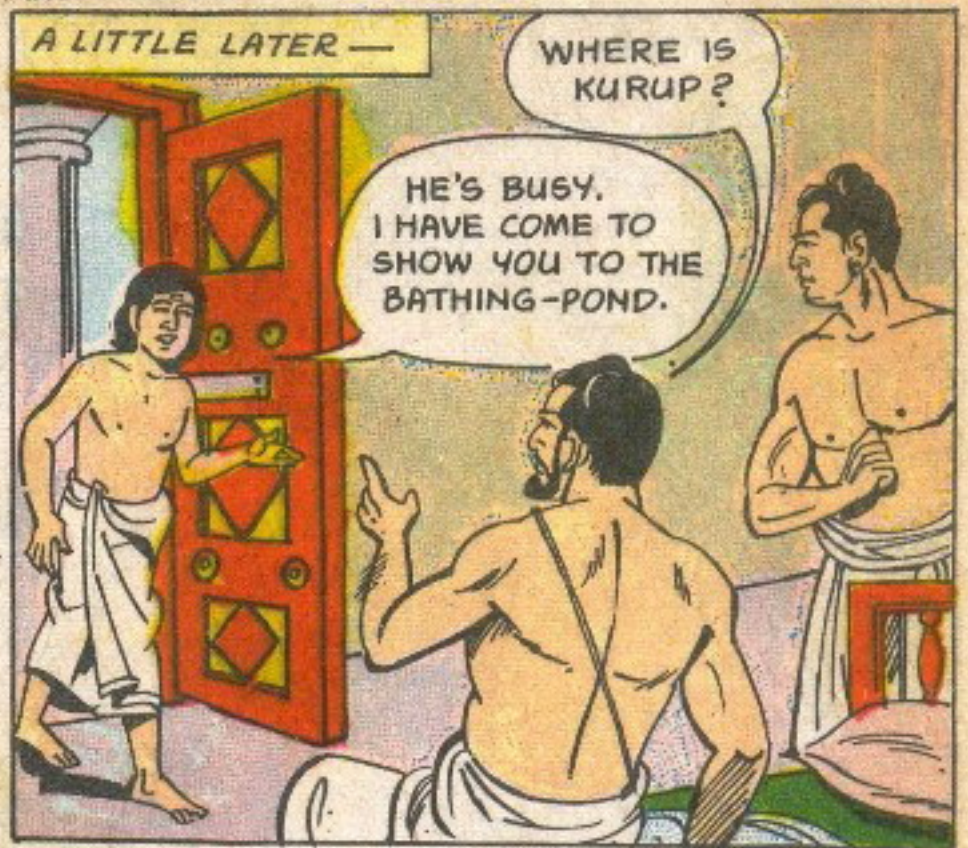
MEANWHILE, VELU HAD KEPT MAARTHAANDA ON HIS TOES. WITHOUT MEN OR MONEY AND ONLY HIS FAITHFUL BODYGUARD FOR COMPANY, HE WAS ALWAYS ON THE RUN.



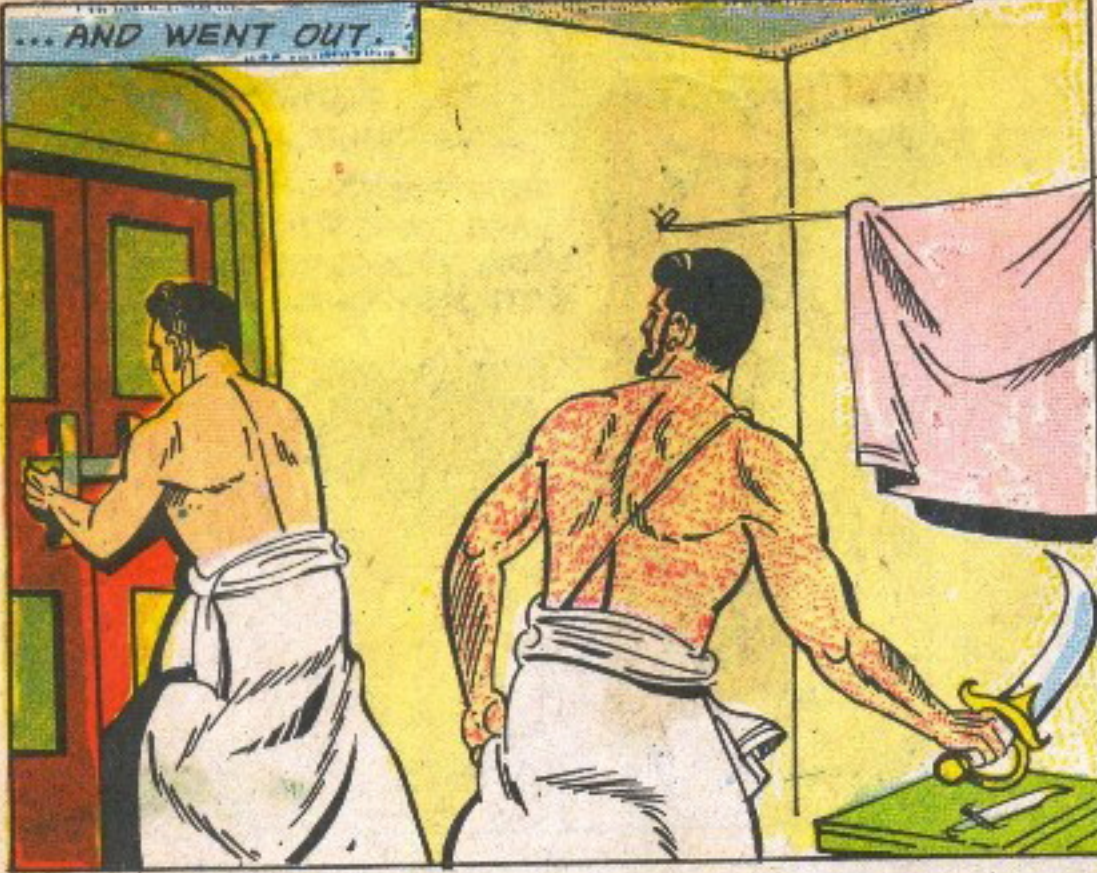
HE HAD NO TIME TO WONDER ABOUT ANANTA'S WHEREABOUTS. AND HE WAS BLISSFULLY UNAWARE OF THE VILE RUMOURS BEING CIRCULATED BY SUNDARAM AND HIS MEN.

AT LAST HE MANAGED TO REACH THE HOUSE OF KURUP, A POWERFUL INDEPENDENT CHIEFTAIN.





... AND WENT OUT.



WHEN KURUP TURNED ROUND AND SAW MAARTHAANDA —

YUVARAJA! I AM PAINED. HOW CAN YOU MISTRUST ONE OF YOUR MOST LOYAL SUBJECTS?



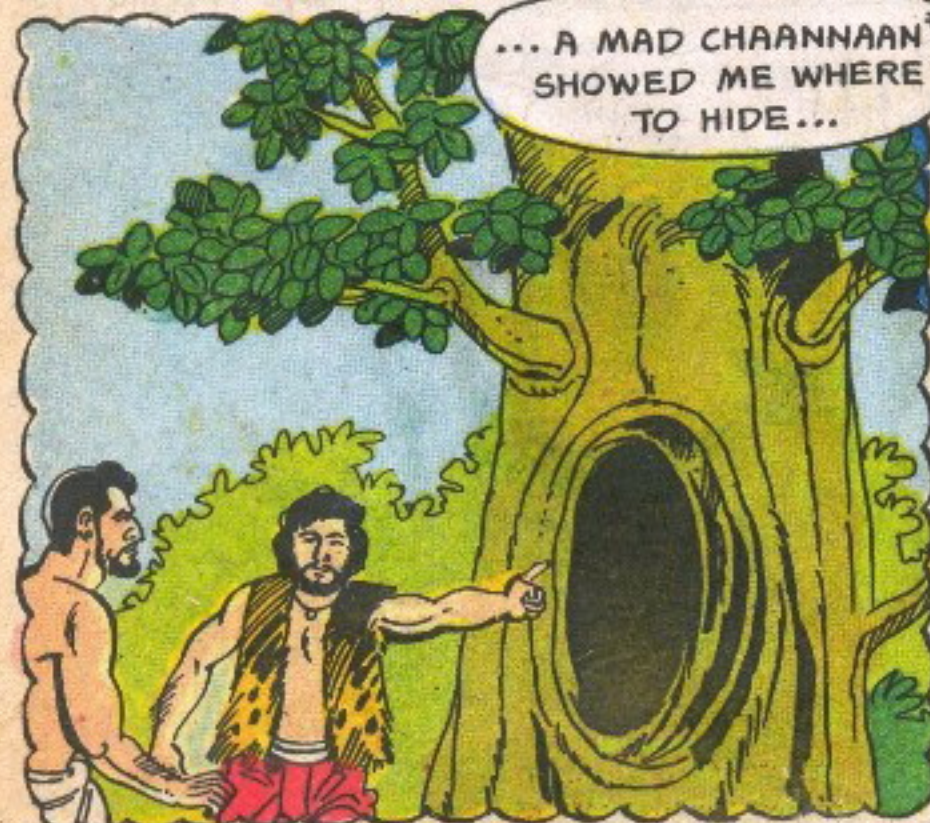
PARDON ME, KURUP. IN MY PRESENT PLIGHT, I CANNOT BE TOO CAREFUL.



AN ATTEMPT WAS MADE ON MY LIFE AT NAGERCOIL. JUST BEFORE I REACHED HERE I HAD ANOTHER NARROW ESCAPE. WHILE MY PERSECUTORS WERE CLOSE UPON ME...



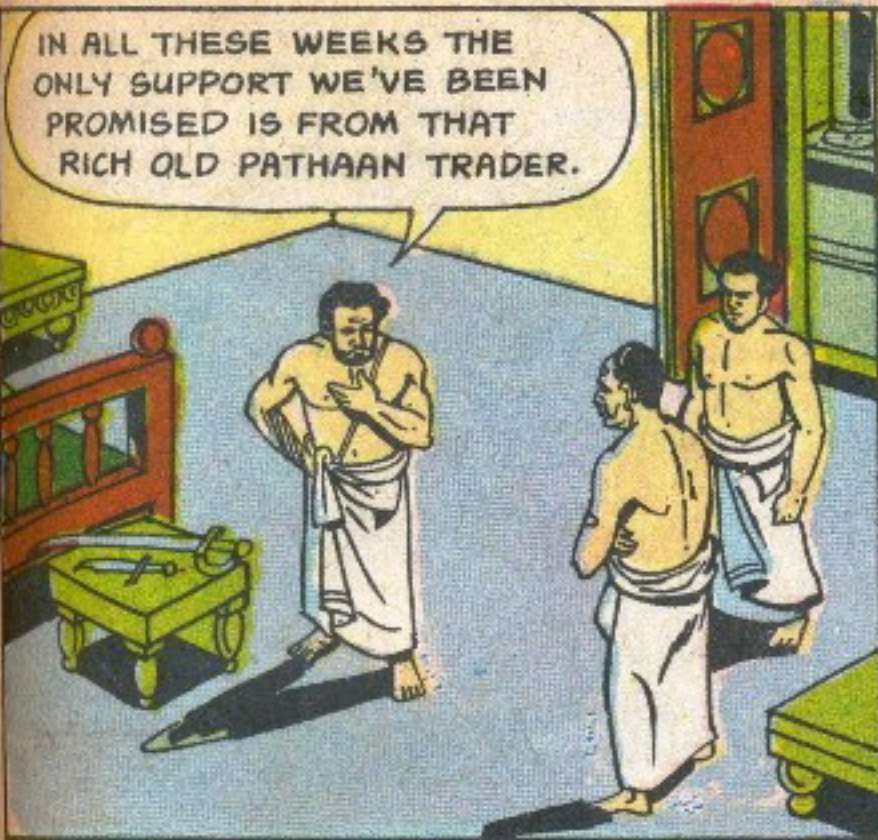
... A MAD CHAANNAAN* SHOWED ME WHERE TO HIDE...



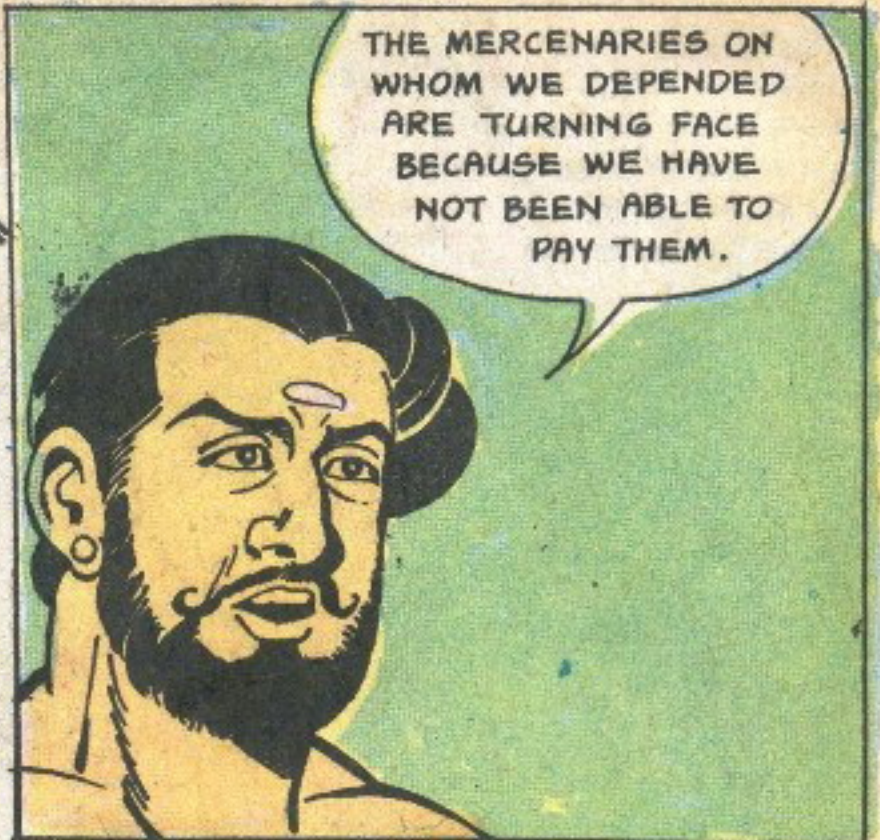
... AND MISDIRECTED THEM.



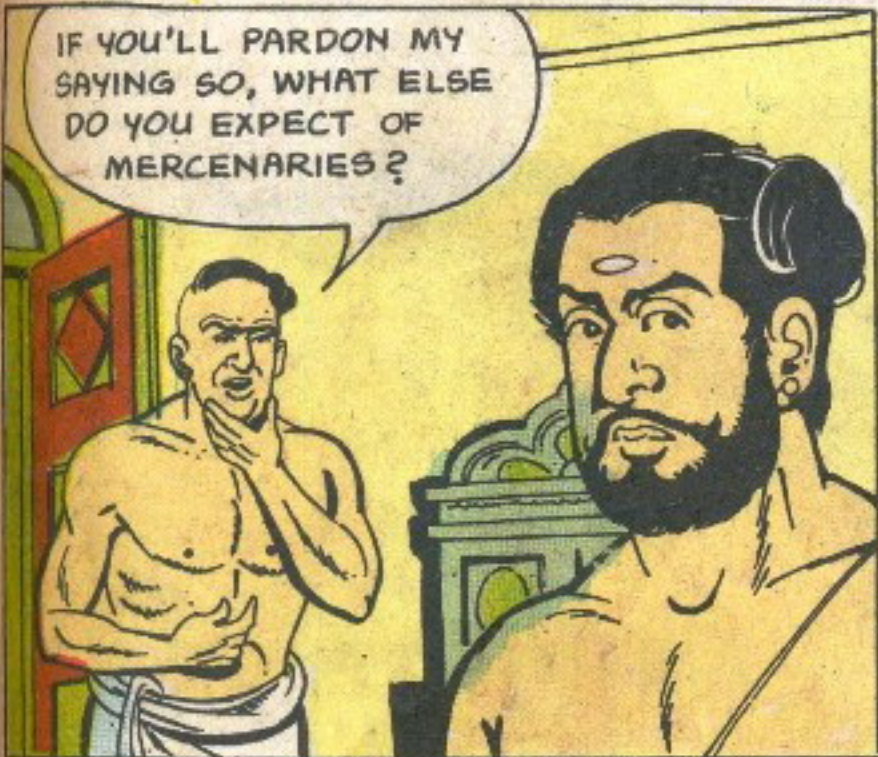
IN ALL THESE WEEKS THE ONLY SUPPORT WE'VE BEEN PROMISED IS FROM THAT RICH OLD PATHAAN TRADER.



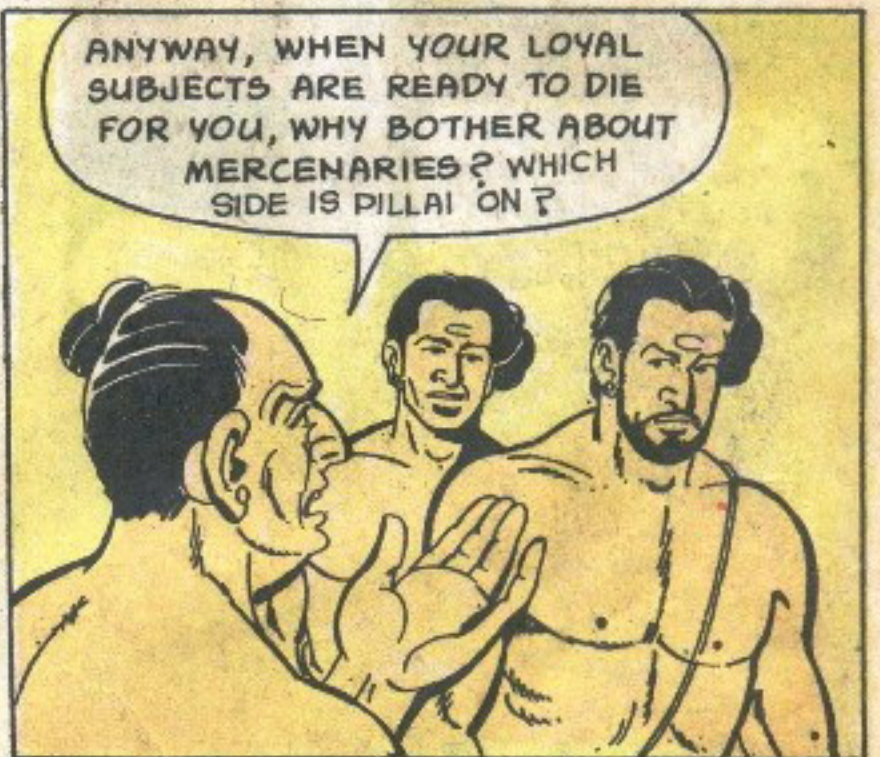
THE MERCENARIES ON WHOM WE DEPENDED ARE TURNING FACE BECAUSE WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO PAY THEM.



IF YOU'LL PARDON MY SAYING SO, WHAT ELSE DO YOU EXPECT OF MERCENARIES?



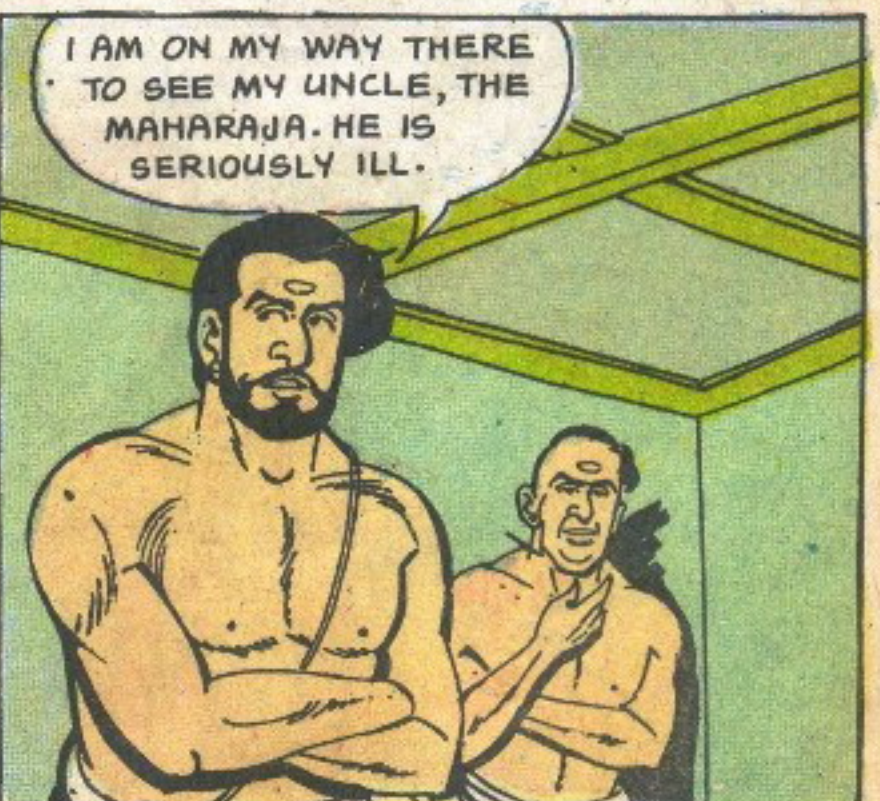
ANYWAY, WHEN YOUR LOYAL SUBJECTS ARE READY TO DIE FOR YOU, WHY BOTHER ABOUT MERCENARIES? WHICH SIDE IS PILLAI ON?

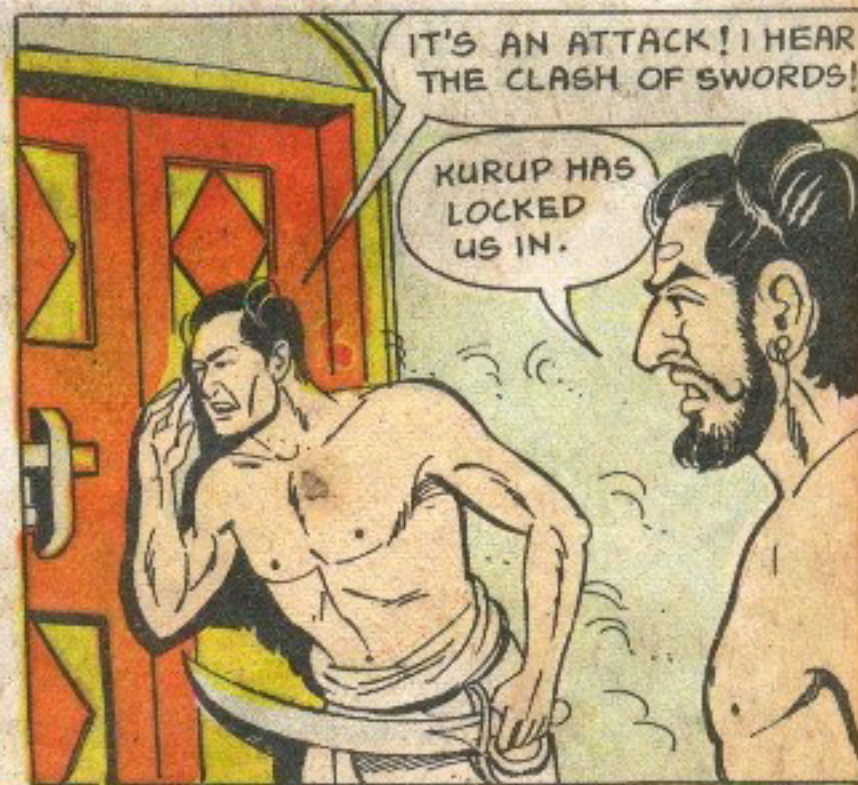
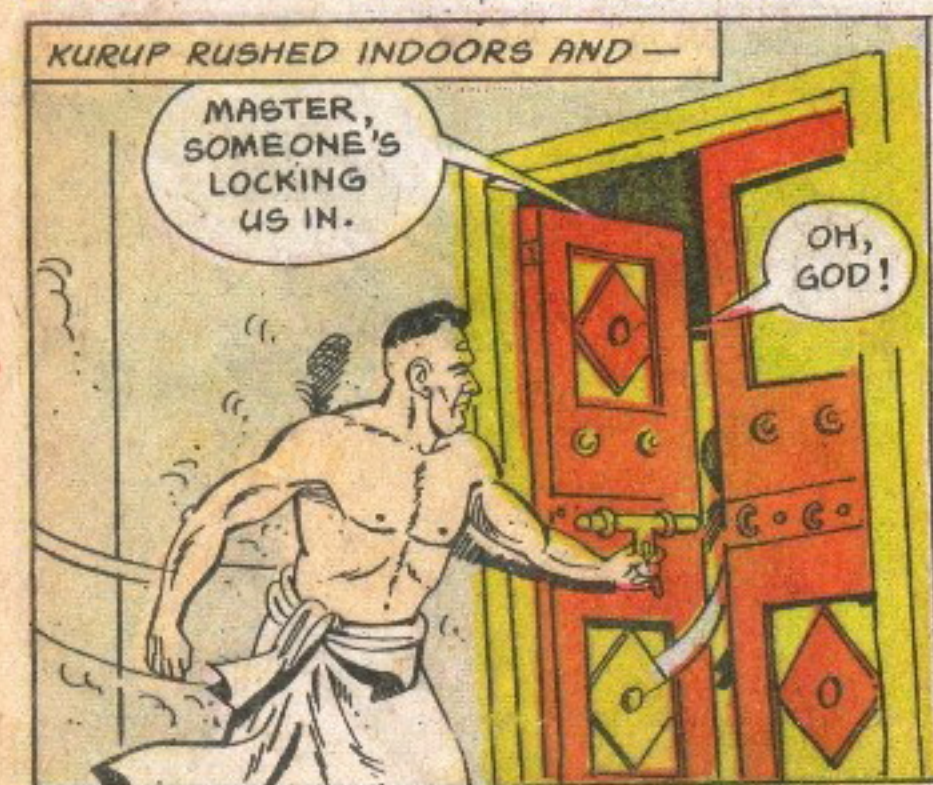
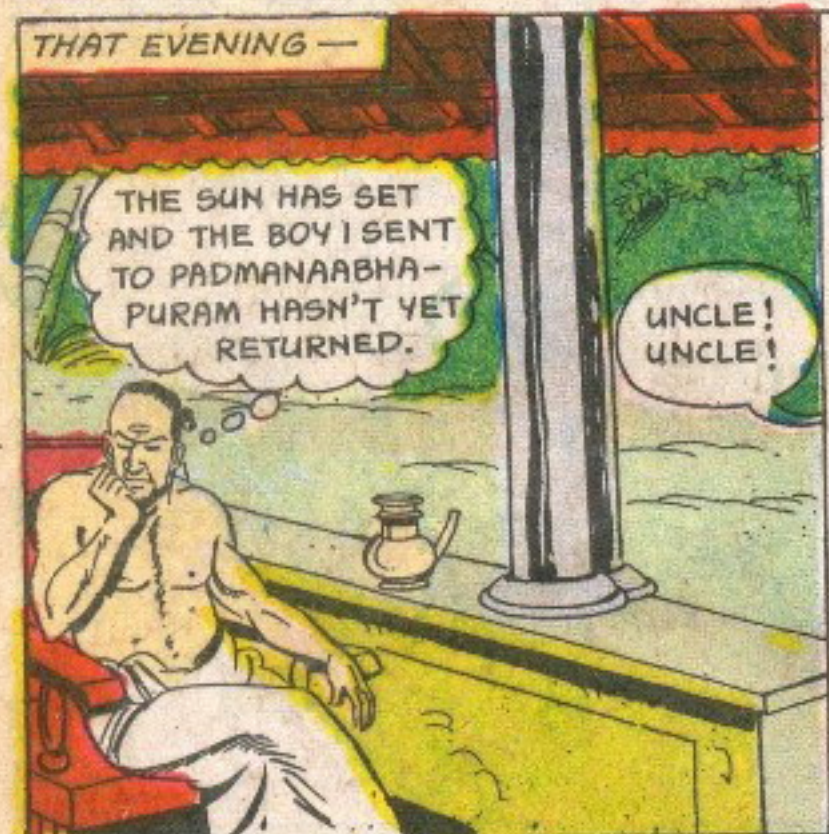
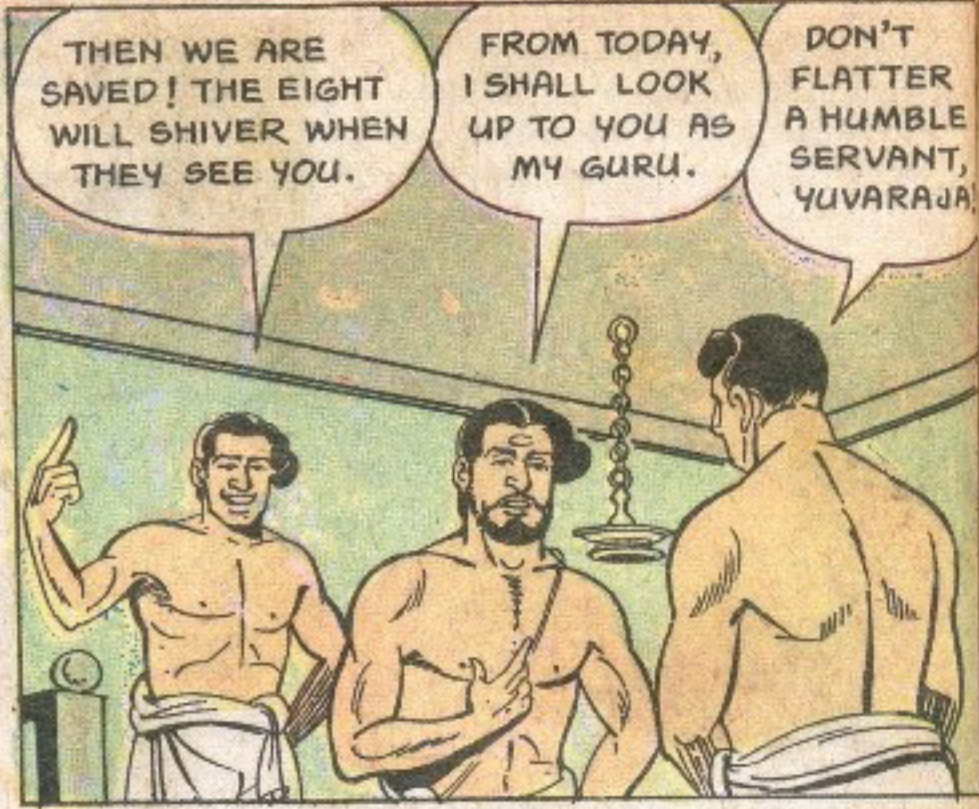


OURS, I PRESUME. I HAVE SENT A LETTER TO HIM TO MEET ME AT TRIVANDRUM.



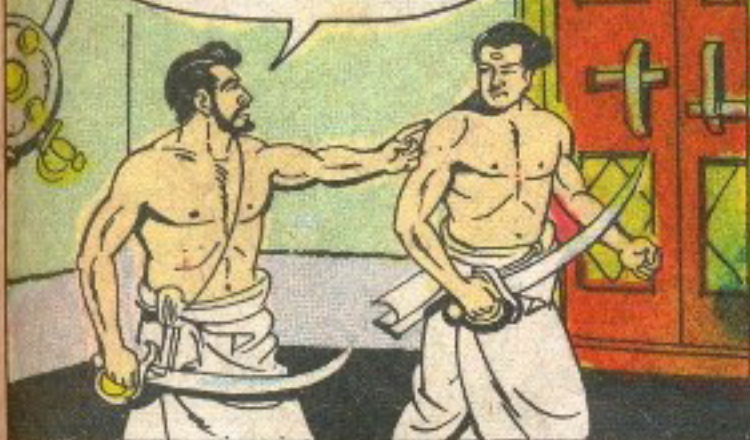
I AM ON MY WAY THERE TO SEE MY UNCLE, THE MAHARAJA. HE IS SERIOUSLY ILL.





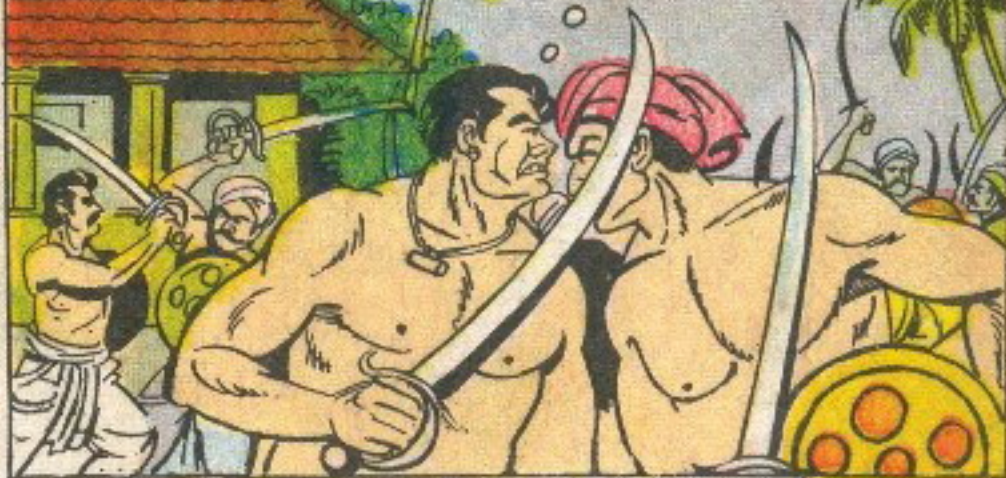
MAARTHAANDA PACED THE ROOM LIKE A CAGED ANIMAL.

HOW COULD HE DENY ME THE PRIVILEGE OF FIGHTING BY HIS SIDE! TRY THE DOOR AGAIN. HACK IT DOWN!



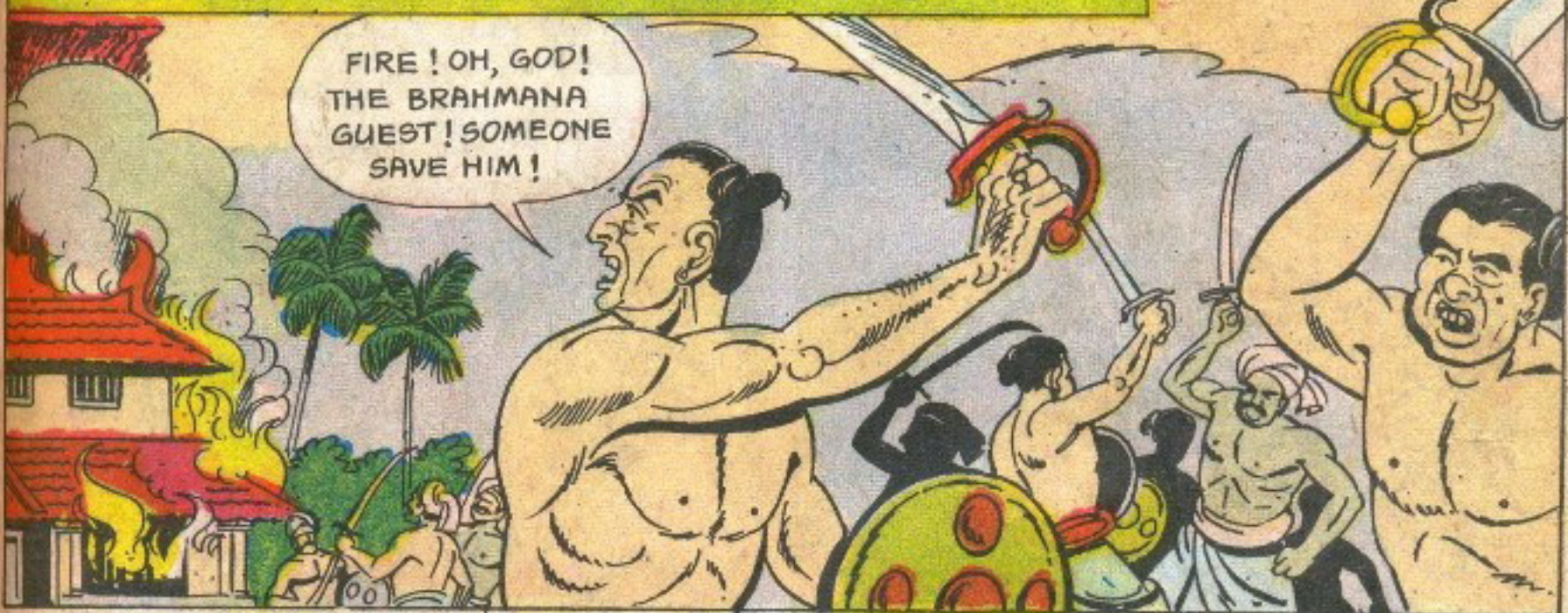
OUTSIDE —

MAARTHAANDA HAS NOT COME OUT TO FIGHT, WHICH MEANS KURUP HAS LOCKED HIM IN. HM-M-M!



VELU WHISPERED SOMETHING INTO THE MAN'S EAR, AND SOON—

FIRE! OH, GOD! THE BRAHMANA GUEST! SOMEONE SAVE HIM!



HIS CRY WAS HEARD. THE MYSTERIOUS CHAANNAAN APPEARED ONCE MORE.

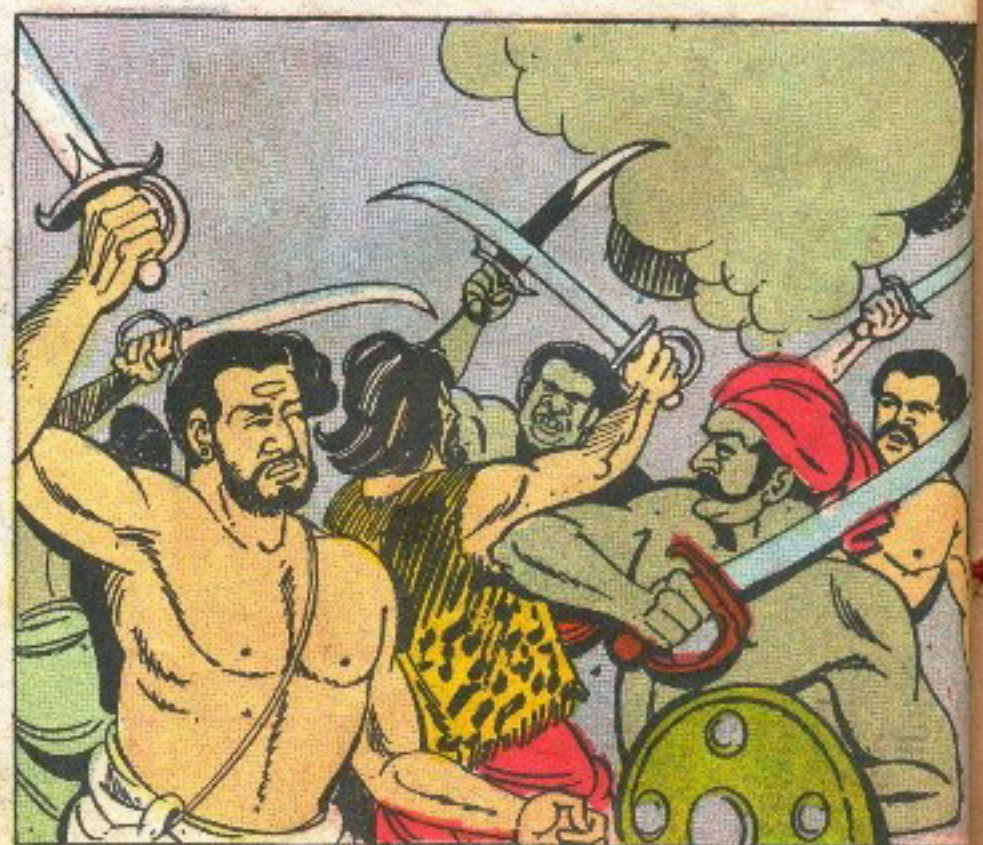
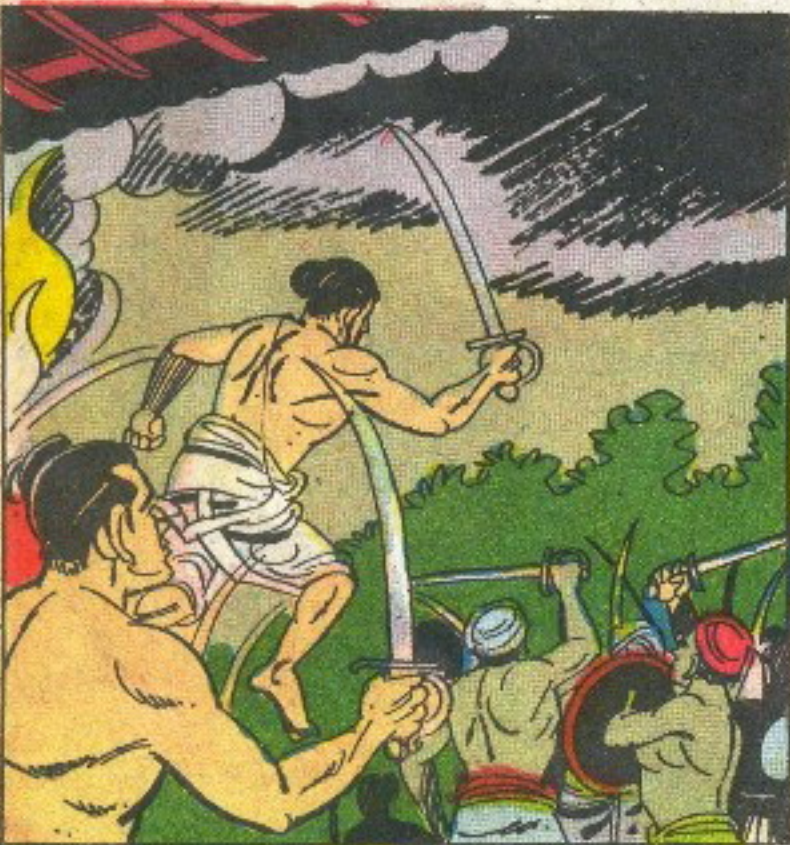


YOU AGAIN? WHERE'S KURUP?

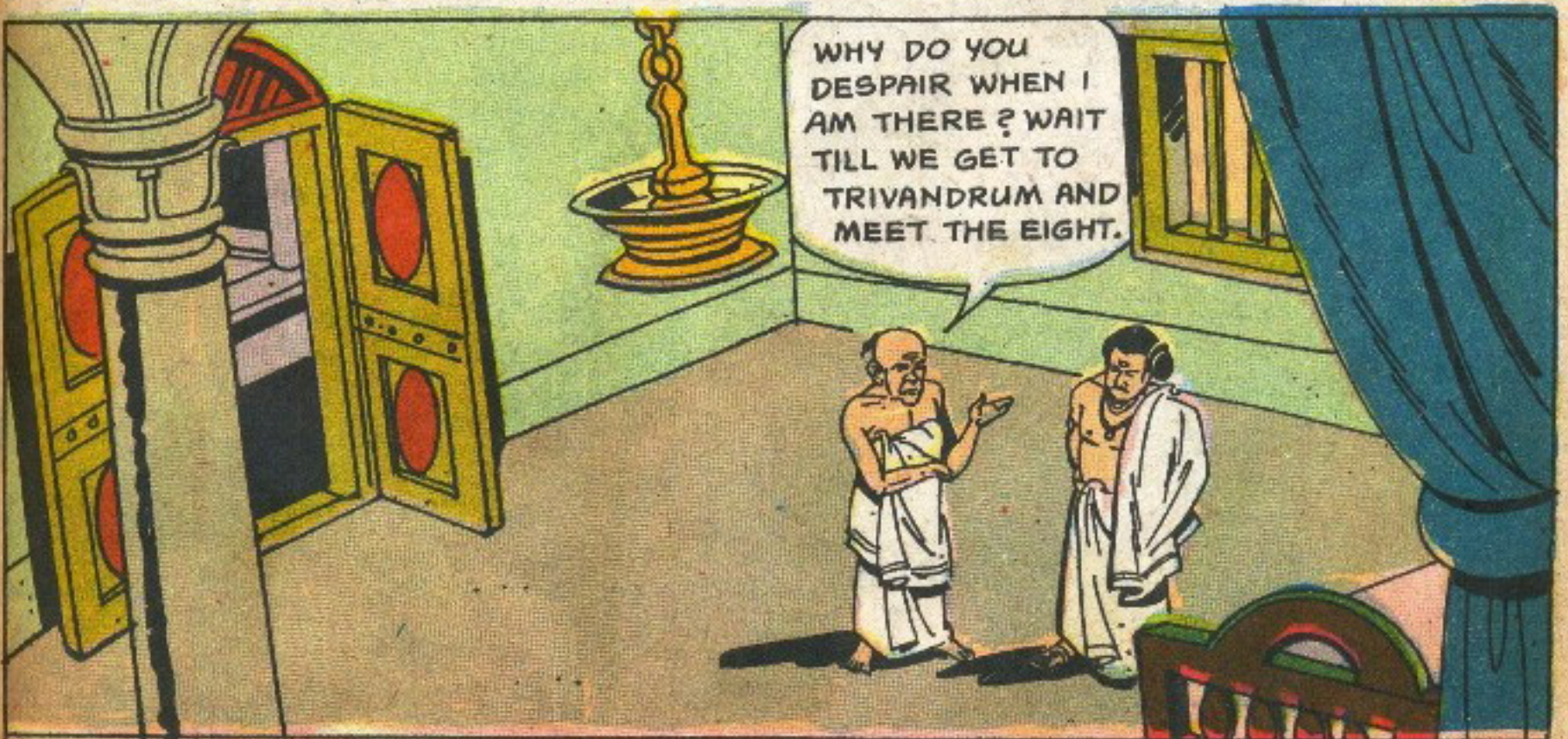
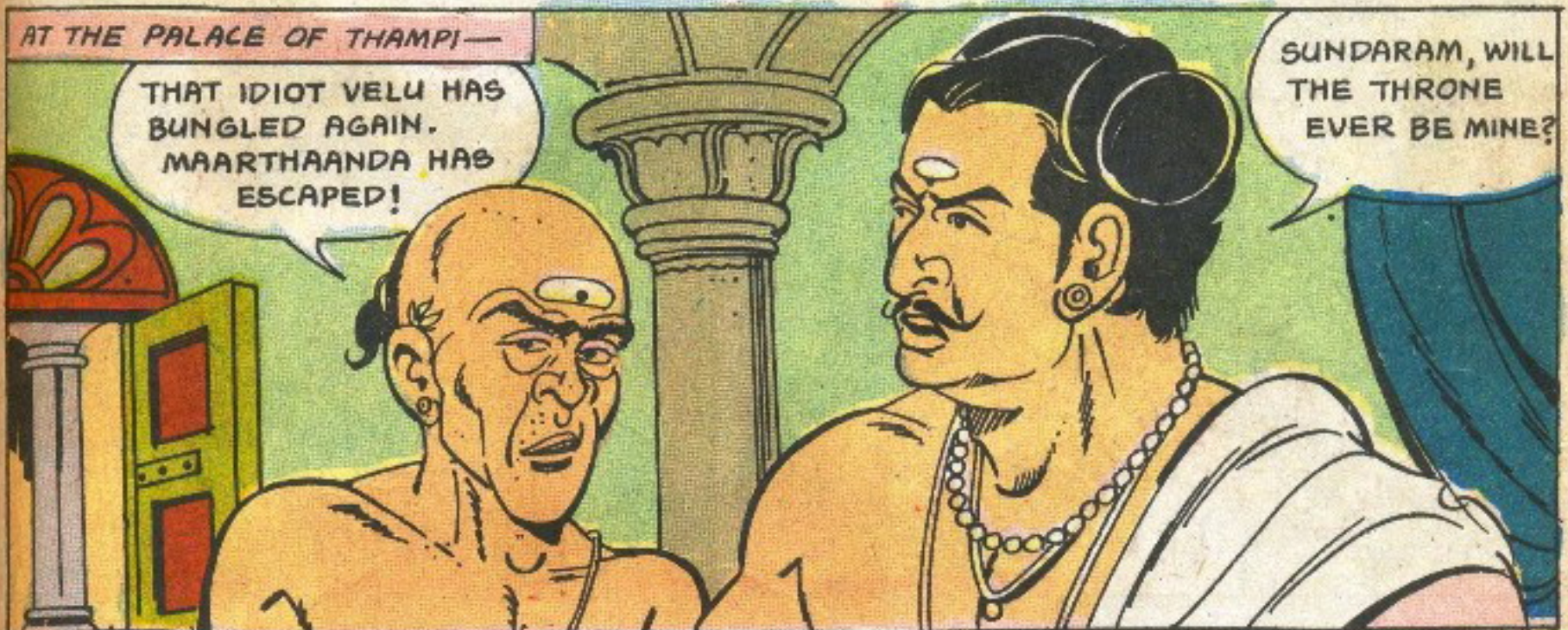
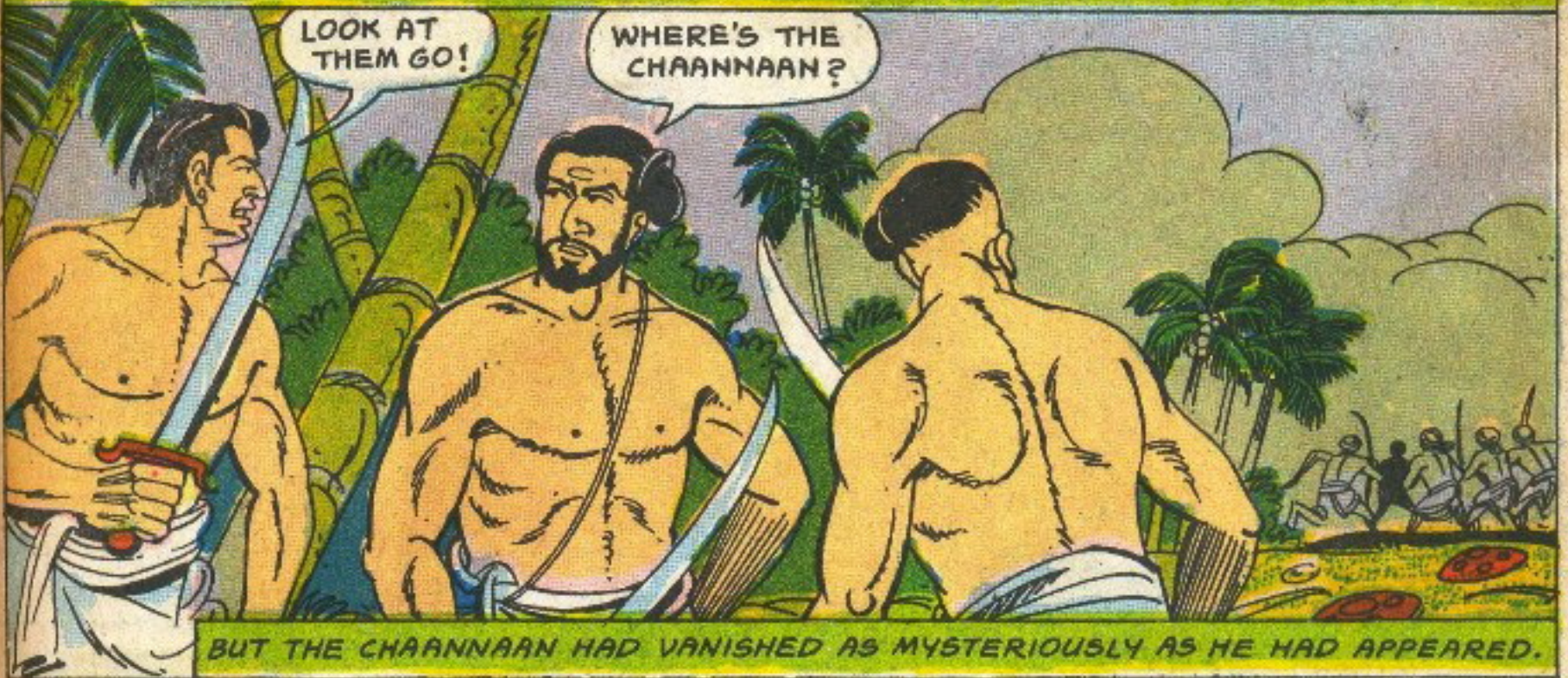


IGNORING THE QUESTION, THE CHAANNAAN GRABBED A SWORD FROM THE ROOM...

... AND CHARGED OUT. MAARTHAANDA AND HIS BODYGUARD FOLLOWED HIM.

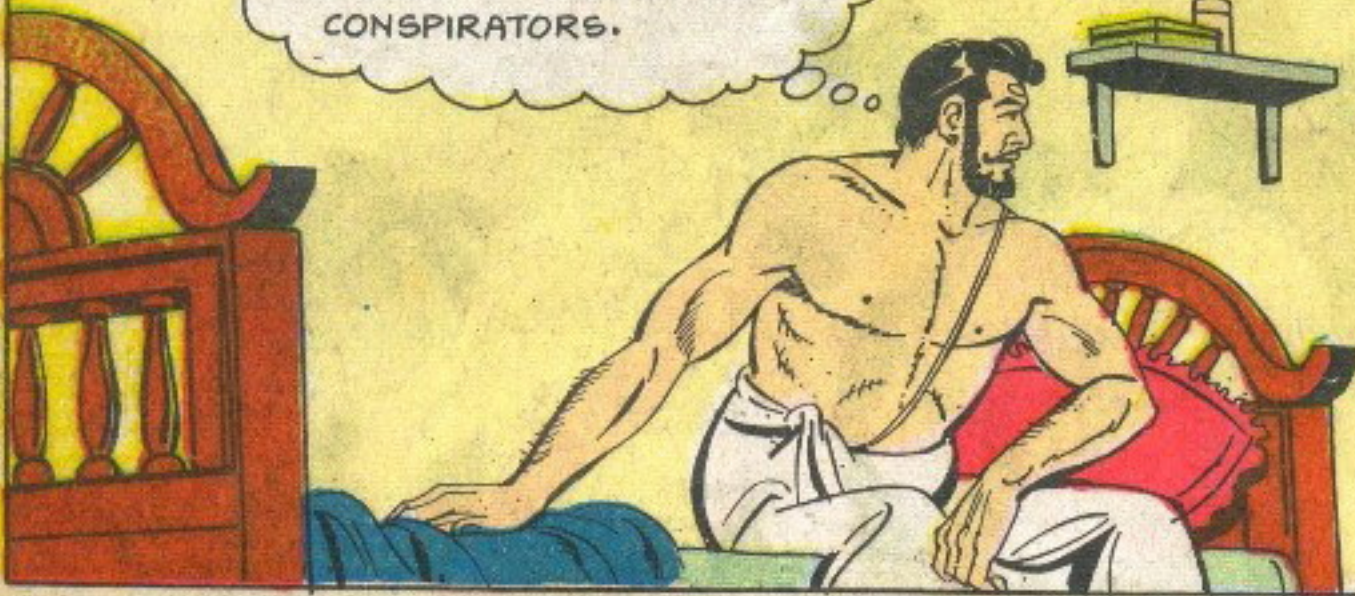


VELU'S MEN WERE NO MATCH FOR THE COMBINED STRENGTH OF KURUP, MAARTHAANDA, HIS BODYGUARD, AND THE CHAANNAAN AND THEY HAD TO BEAT A HASTY RETREAT.

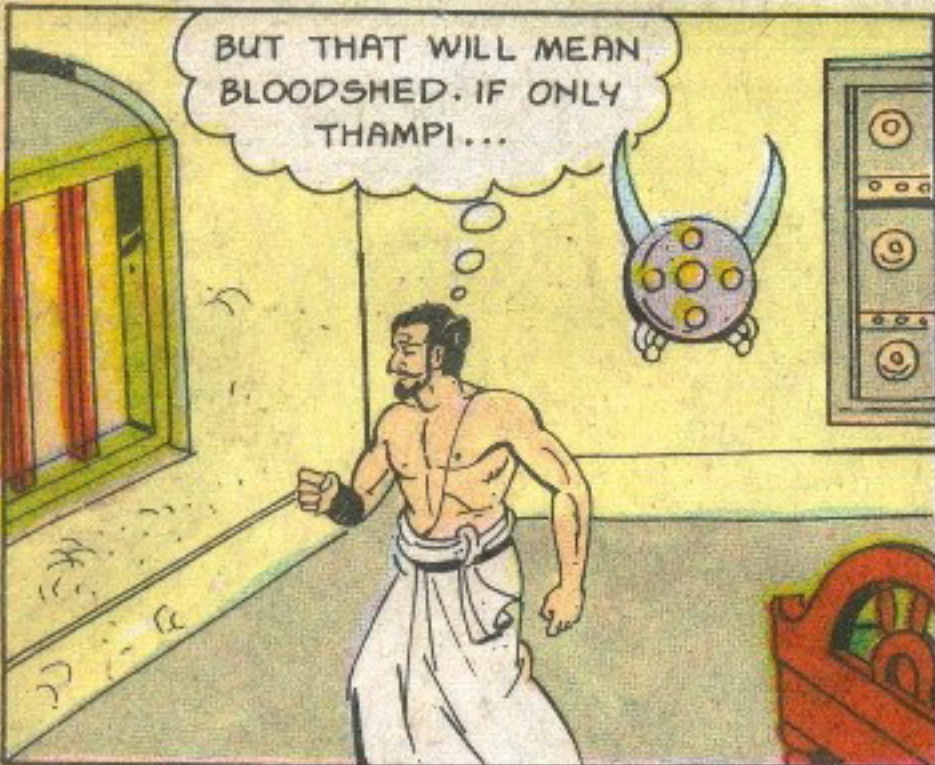


A WEEK LATER AT TRIVANDRUM —

WITH THE SKILL AND VALOUR
OF KURUP'S MEN I SHOULD
BE ABLE TO SUBDUED THE
CONSPIRATORS.



BUT THAT WILL MEAN
BLOODSHED. IF ONLY
THAMPI...

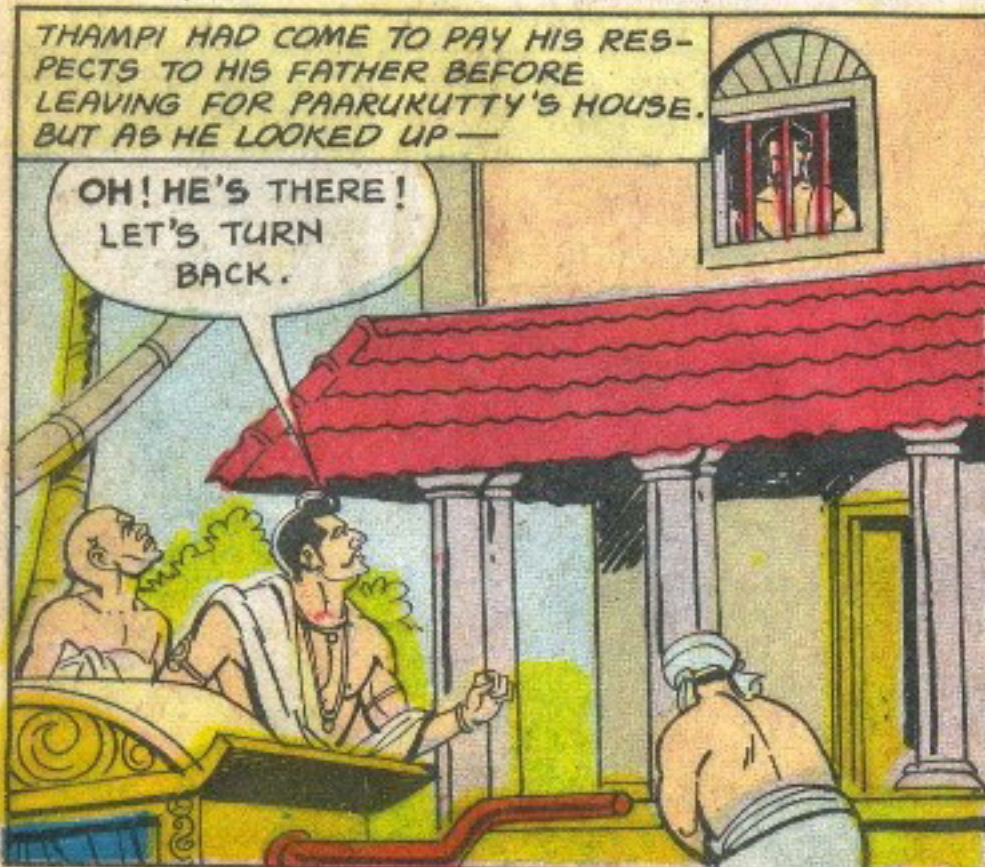


AH! HERE HE COMES, IF
ONLY HE ACCEPTS MY
OFFER OF FRIENDSHIP
AND GOOD WILL...

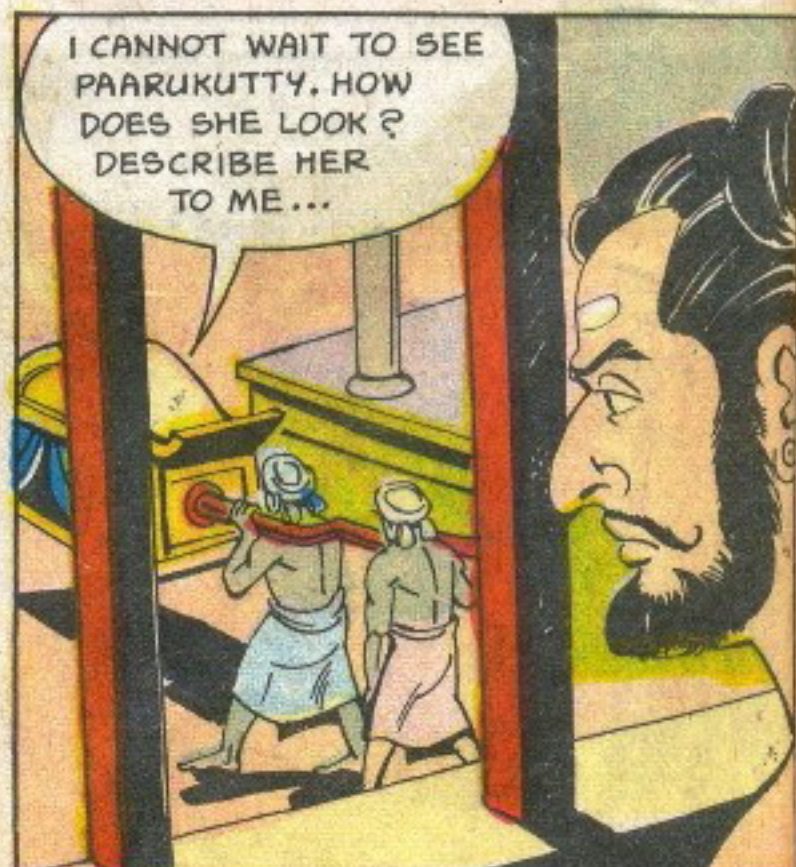


THAMPI HAD COME TO PAY HIS RESPECTS
TO HIS FATHER BEFORE
LEAVING FOR PAARUKUTTY'S HOUSE.
BUT AS HE LOOKED UP —

OH! HE'S THERE!
LET'S TURN
BACK.



I CANNOT WAIT TO SEE
PAARUKUTTY. HOW
DOES SHE LOOK?
DESCRIBE HER
TO ME...



THAMPI HOWEVER RETURNED FROM PAARUKUTTY'S HOUSE BEFORE DAWN THE NEXT MORNING, LOOKING PALE AND DRAWN. THAT EVENING —

MASTER, THE CRUCIAL MEETING WITH THE EIGHT IS AT 7 O'CLOCK. SHOULDN'T WE LEAVE?

NOT "WE". YOU GO. I AM NOT FEELING WELL.

SO SUNDARAM LEFT FOR THE MEETING ALONE.

THAT NIGHT AFTER THE COUNCIL —

HERE. THIS COPY OF THE RESOLUTIONS IS FOR YOUR MASTER.

WHEN THE EIGHT HAD DISPERSED AND KUTAMAN WAS ASLEEP, RAAMANAAMADHAM STOLE INTO AN INNER CHAMBER OF THE HOUSE.

SUBHADRAA! ARE YOU AWAKE.

IS YOUR MEETING OVER? IT'S ALMOST MIDNIGHT.

SUBHADRAA WAS KUTAMAN'S UNFORTUNATE NIECE, WHOSE MOTHER HAD DIED SOON AFTER HER BIRTH, WHOSE FATHER REMAINED UNKNOWN AND WHOSE HUSBAND HAD DESERTED HER.

YOU OUGHT TO HAVE BEEN THERE.

WHAT DID YOU DISCUSS?

WHEN HE DID NOT REPLY...

...SHE PRETENDED NOT TO BE INTERESTED.

OH! YOU'VE TAKEN THE OATH OF SECRECY! NEVER MIND. GOOD NIGHT!

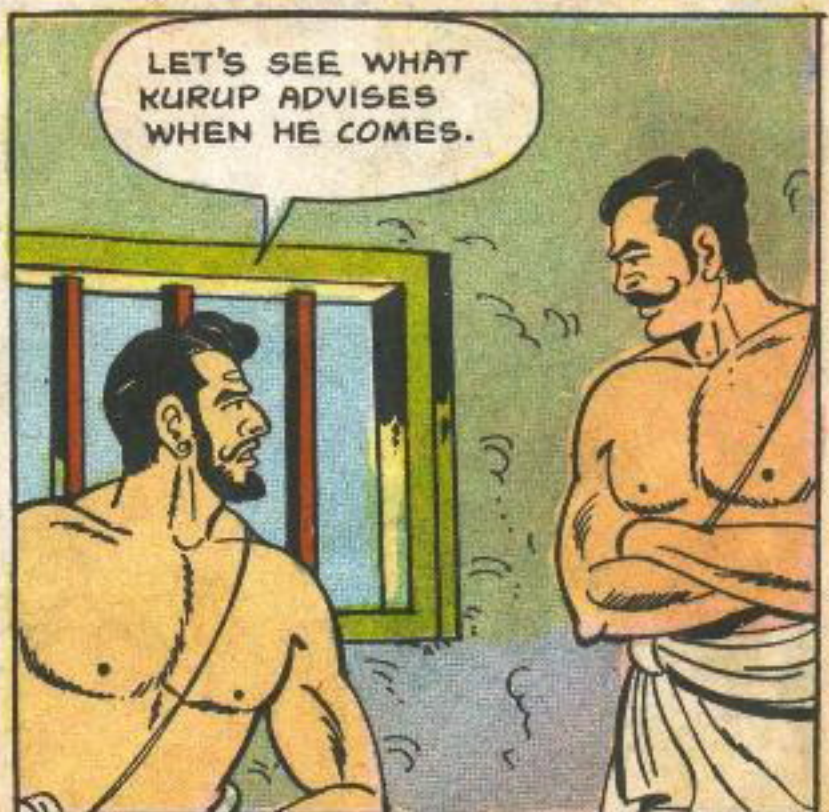
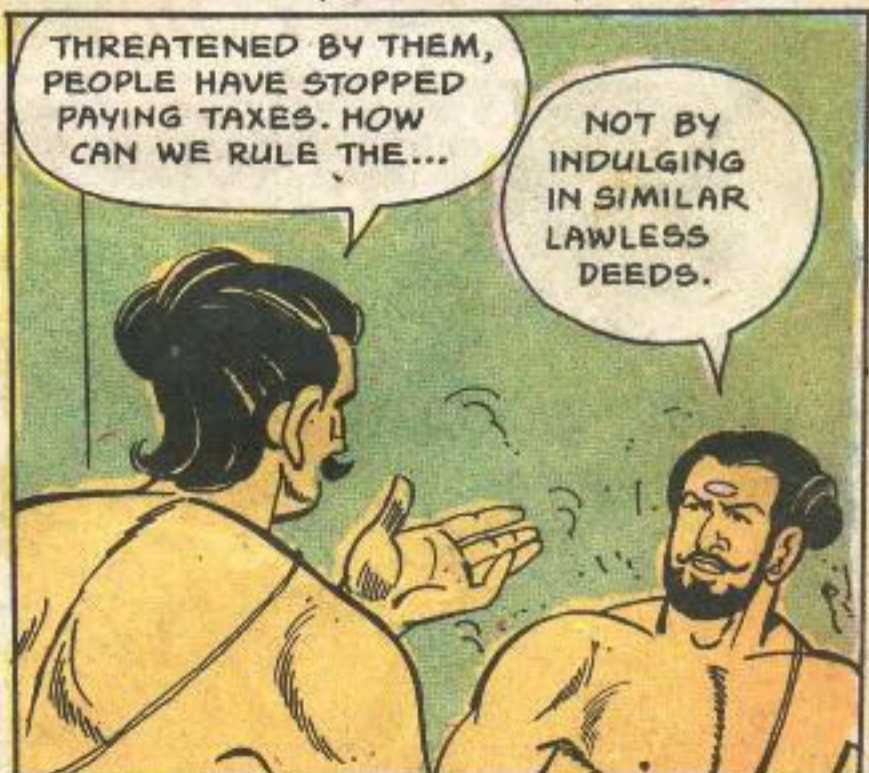
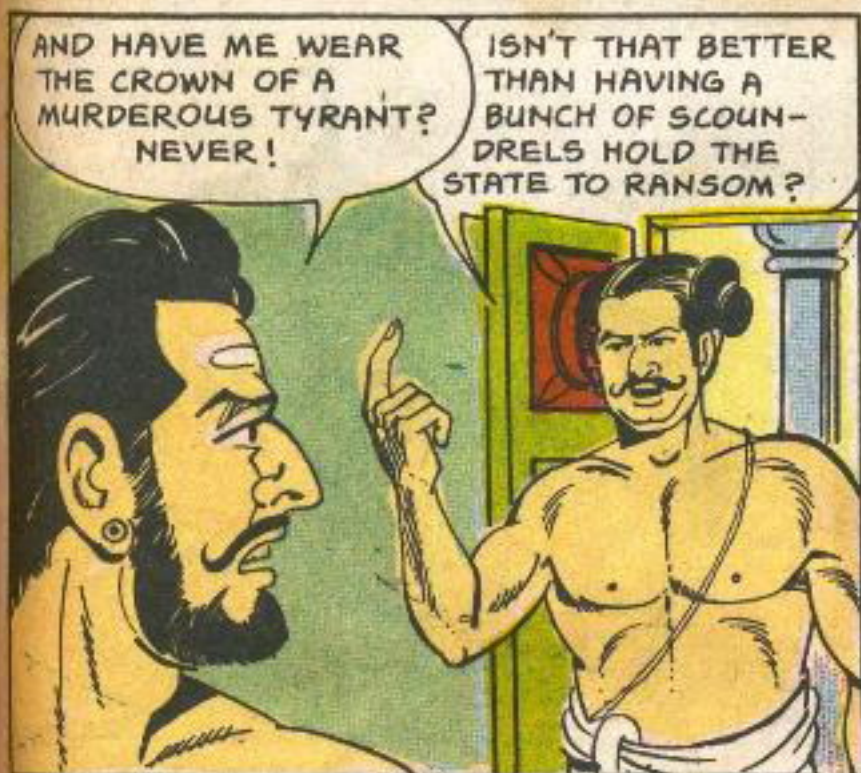
NO! NO! THE OATH IS FOR OUR ENEMIES. YOU ARE ONE OF US.

THOUGH SHE WAS KUTAMAN'S NIECE SHE HATED THAMPI AND SUNDARAM BECAUSE YEARS AGO THEY HAD BY THEIR EVIL SCHEMES DRIVEN HER HUSBAND AWAY FROM HER. HER LOYALTIES WERE WITH MAARTHAANDA AND SHE LOVED PAARUKUTTY AS A SISTER.



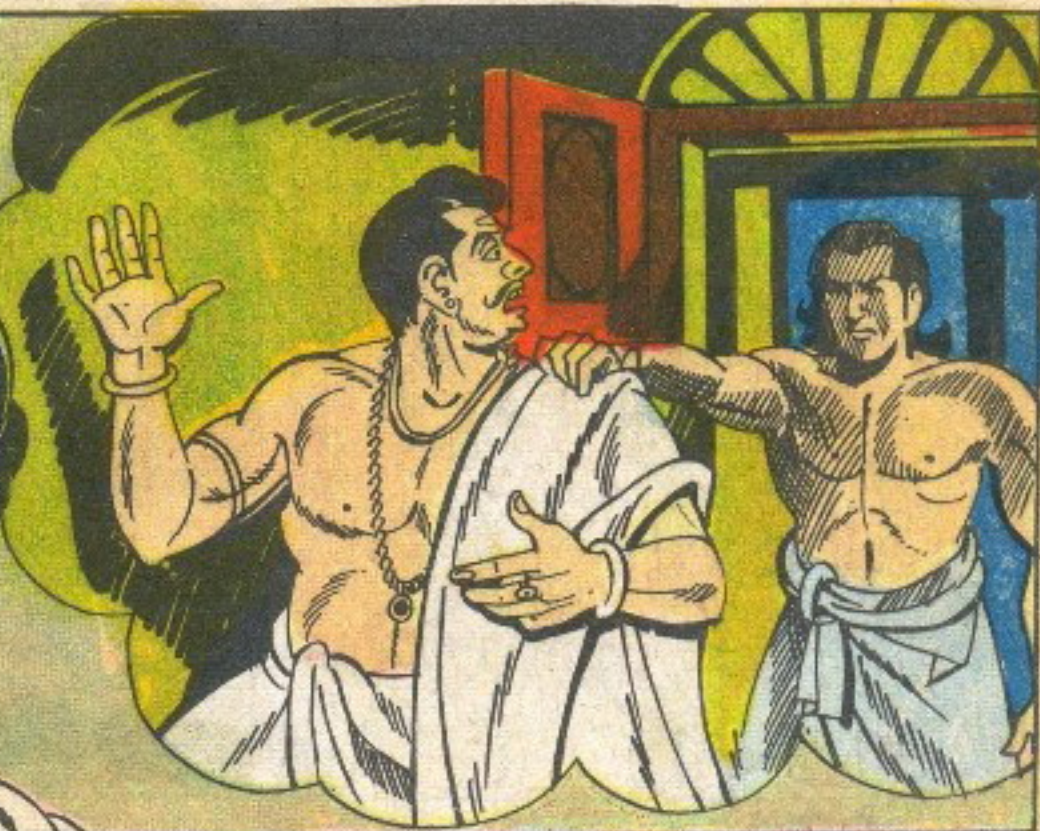
SUBHADRAA LOATHED THE MAN AND HUMOURED HIM ONLY TO GET VALUABLE INFORMATION FROM HIM.

THE NEXT MORNING, AT THE PALACE, MAARTHAANDA WHO HAD LEARNT OF THE COUNCIL, WAS DISCUSSING THE SITUATION WITH HIS COUNSELLOR.





ANOTHER ENTERED THE ROOM... AND DRAGGED ME AWAY.



HER UNCLE ?

NO!

HER COUSIN ?

NO!

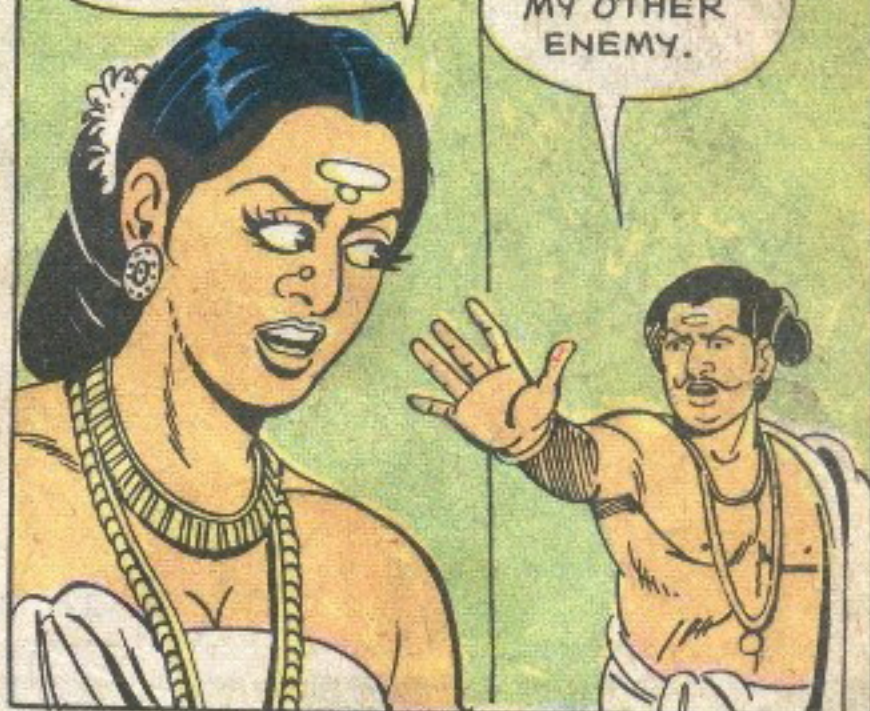
WAS IT YOUR ENEMY ?

WHOM DO YOU MEAN ?



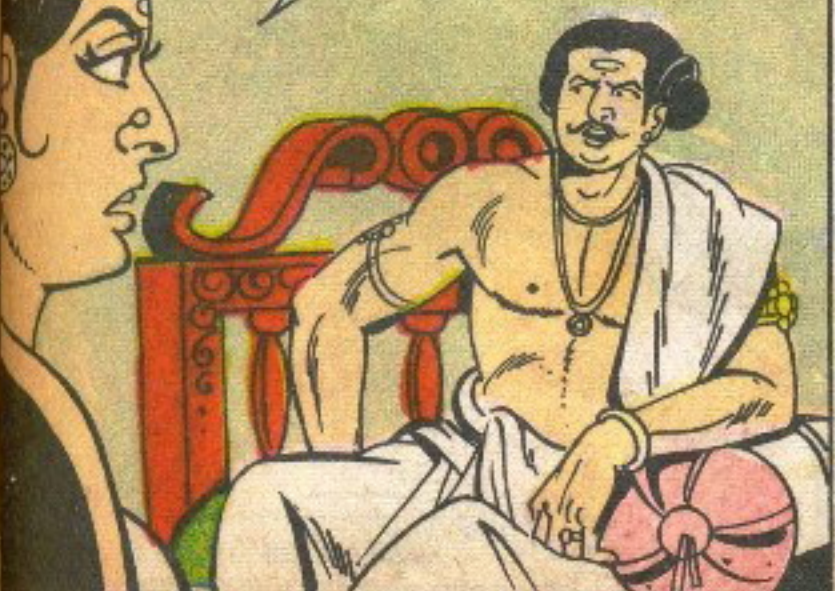
THE YUVARAJA ?

NO! IT WAS MY OTHER ENEMY.



WHO ? WHICH ENEMY ? DON'T SPEAK IN RIDDLES.

FORGET IT! IT FRIGHTENS ME!

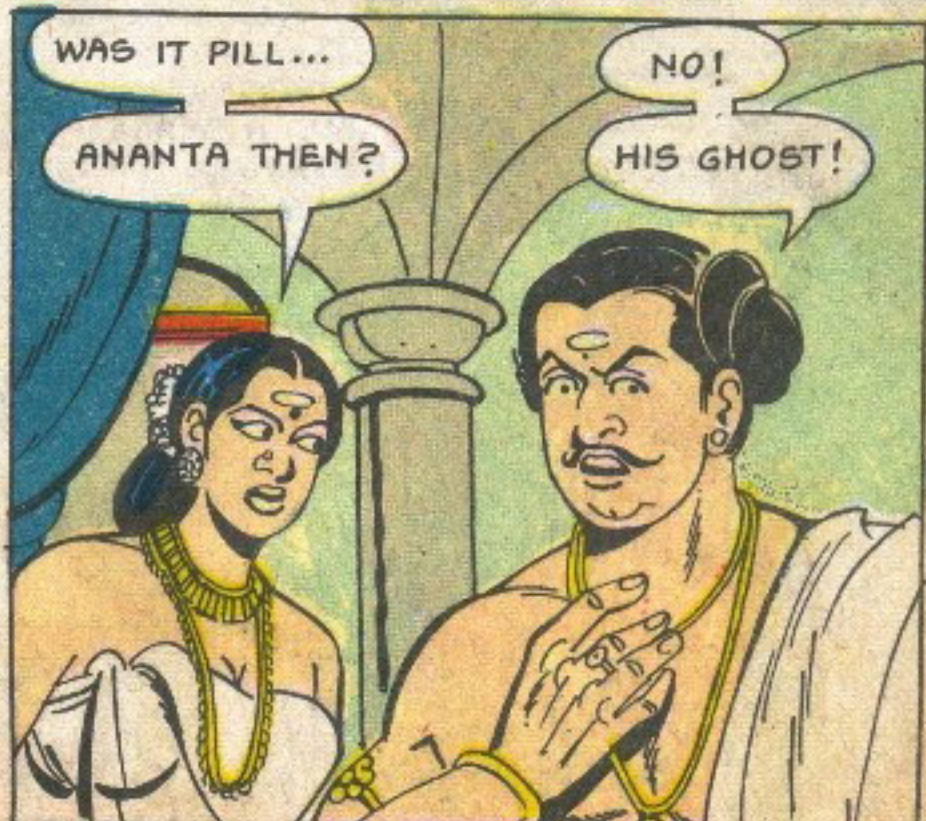


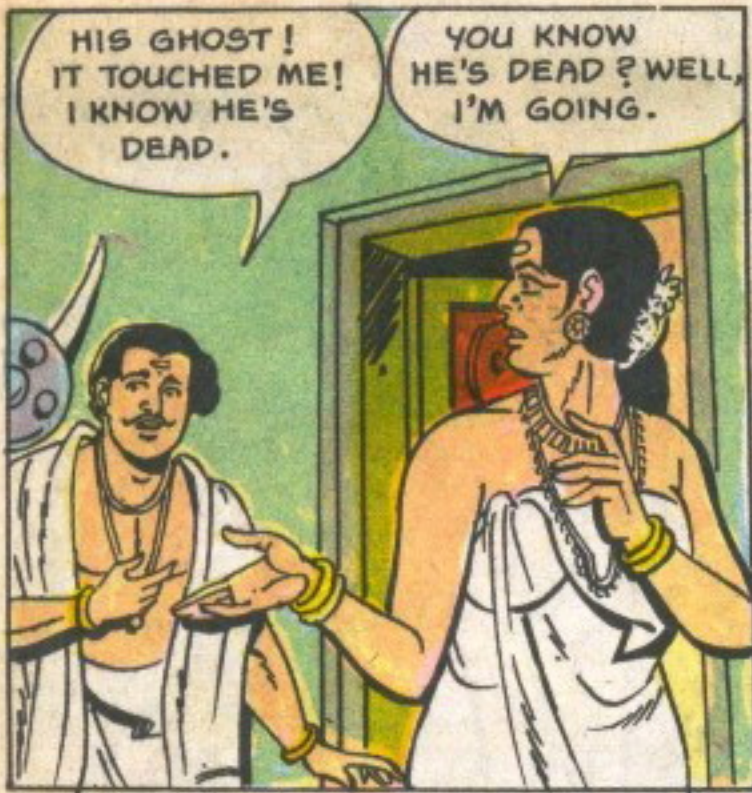
WAS IT PILL...

ANANTA THEN ?

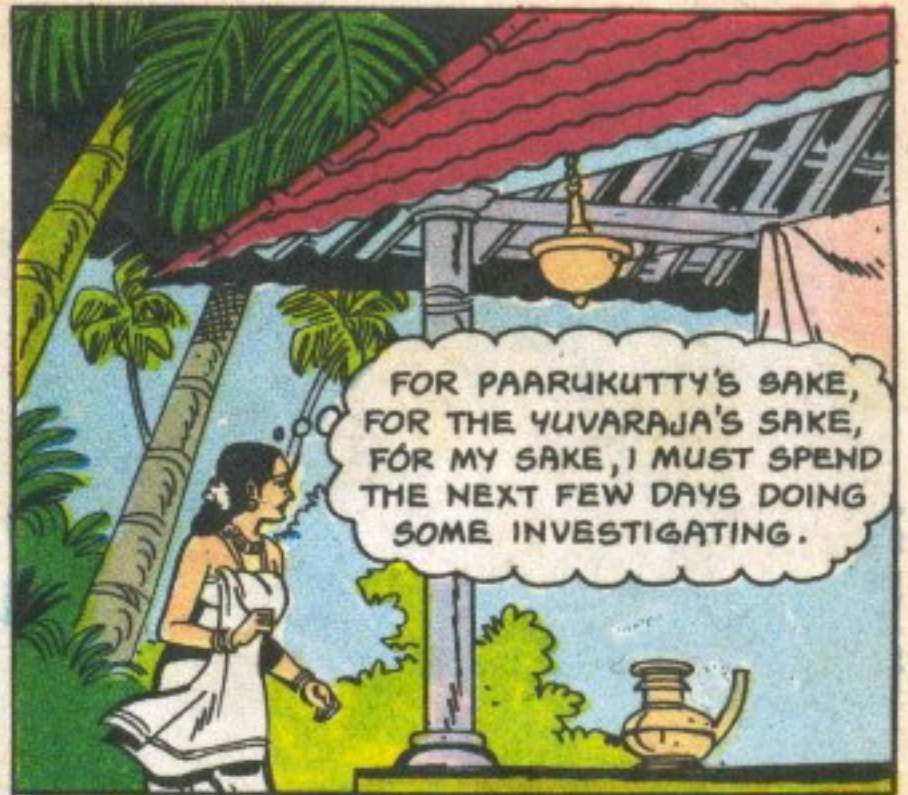
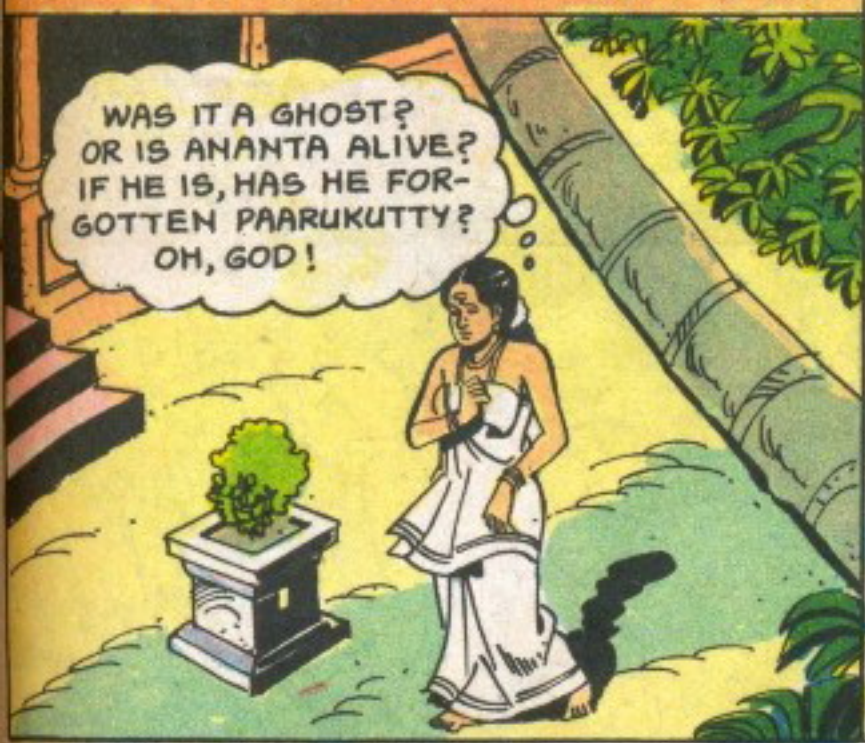
NO!

HIS GHOST!





THE NEXT DAY WAS A RESTLESS ONE FOR HER.



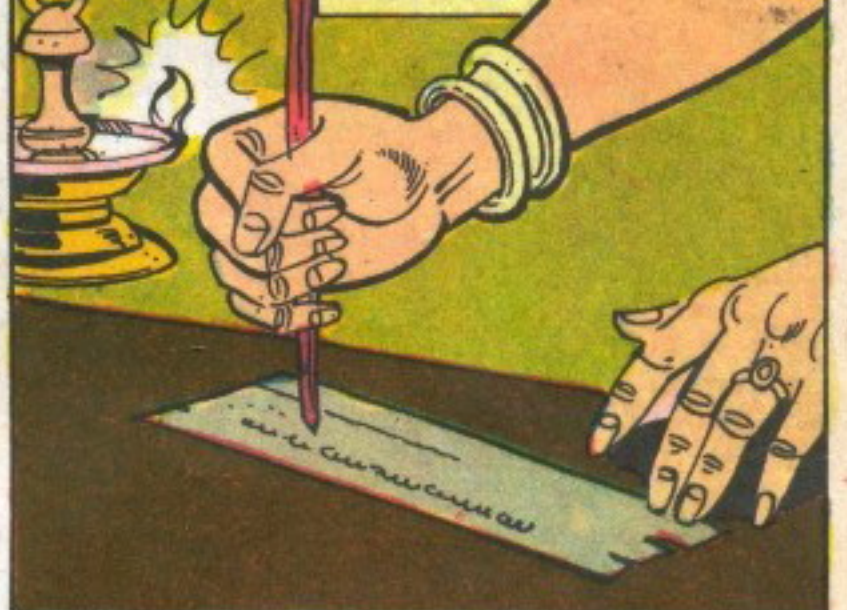
THAT EVENING —

WHAT'S THE
LATEST?

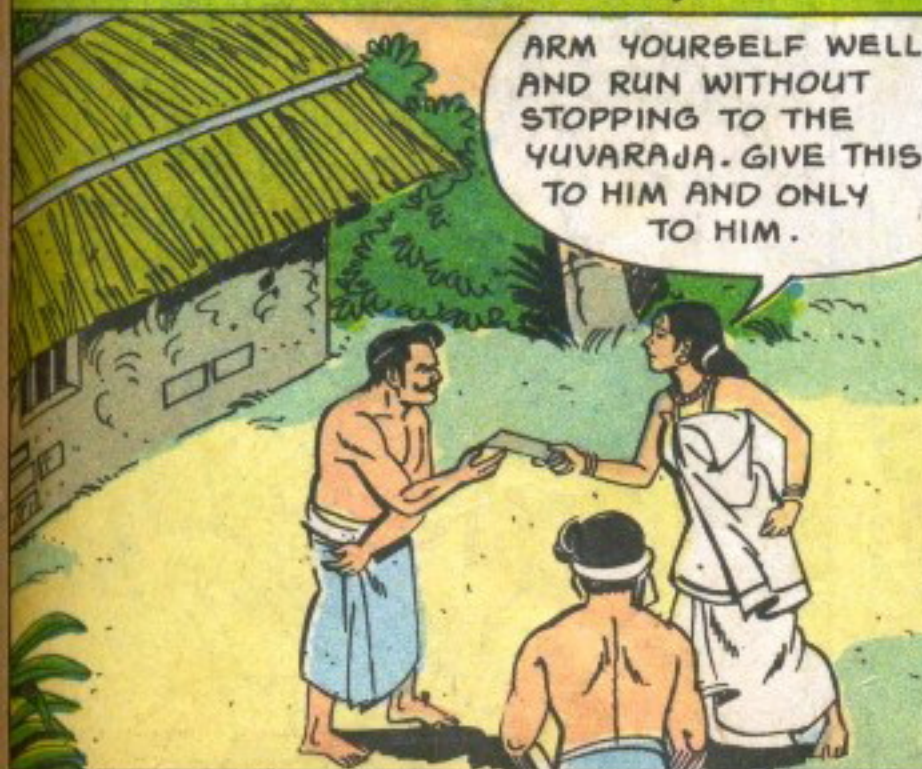
THAMPI HAS ORDERED VELU
TO ASSASSINATE MAARTHAAN-
DA THIS VERY NIGHT. AND NOT
AFTER THE MAHARAJA'S
DEATH AS WE HAD RESOLVED.



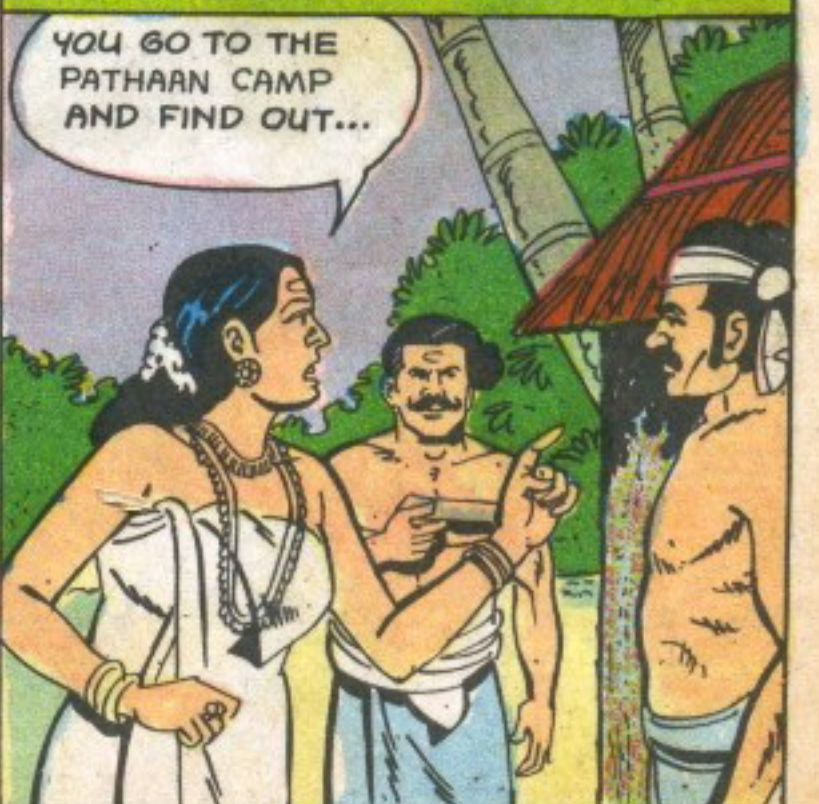
SUBHADRAA HURRIED INTO HER
ROOM, CUT A STRIP OF PALM
LEAF AND SCRATCHED OUT A
MESSAGE.



THEN SHE WENT TO A SMALL THATCHED HOUSE,
A FEW YARDS AWAY FROM HER OWN, AND —



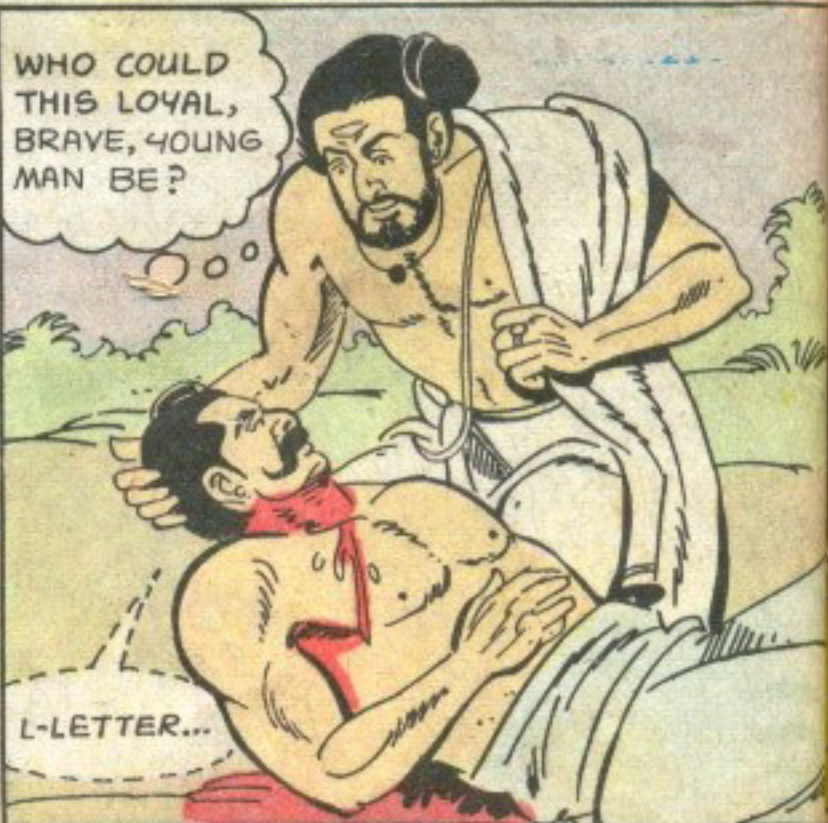
THEN SHE TURNED TO THE OTHER —



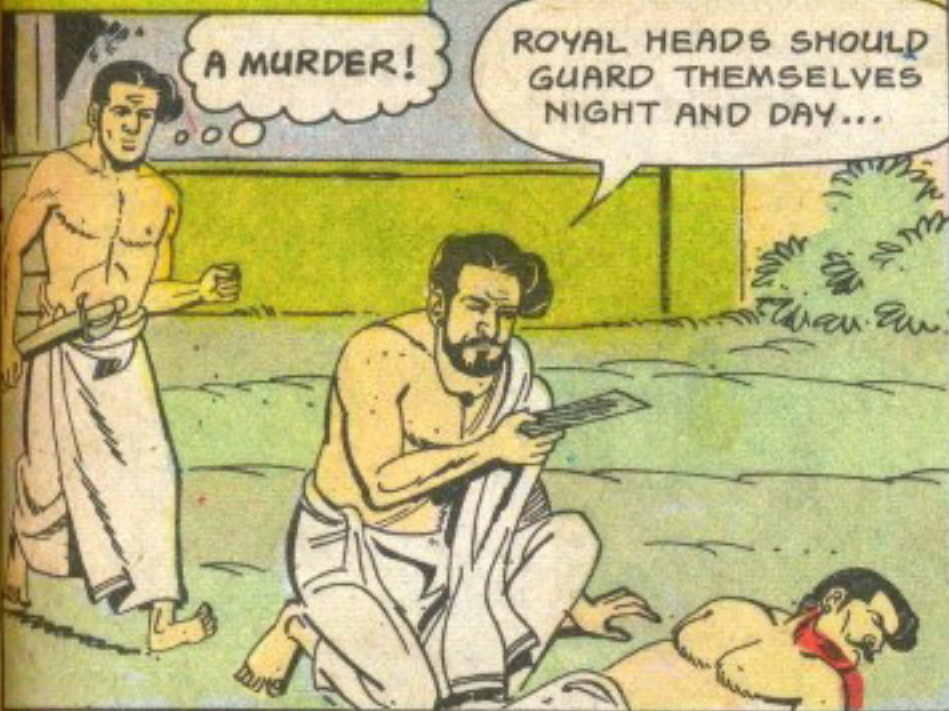
MEANWHILE AT THE PALACE, MAARTHAANDA WAS ALONE. HIS COUNSELLOR, LEARNING THAT KURUP HAD BEEN KIDNAPPED BY THE CONSPIRATORS, HAD GONE OUT TO INVESTIGATE. AND HIS BODY-GUARD HAD GONE OUT ON AN ERRAND.



SUBHADRAA'S MESSENGER HAD REACHED THERE IN THE NICK OF TIME.



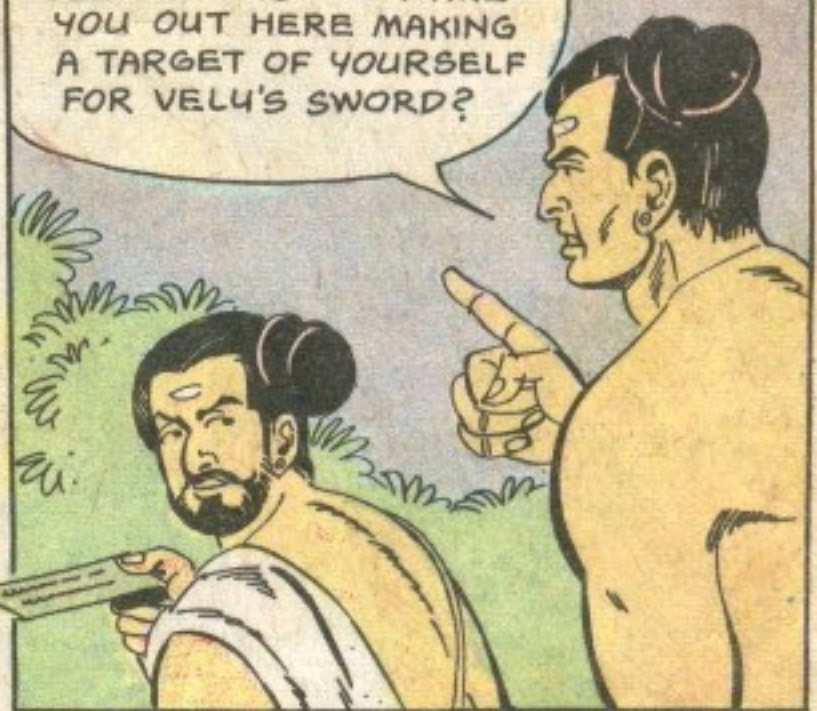
MAARTHAANDA SEARCHED THE SERVANT AND FOUND THE LETTER.



A MURDER!

ROYAL HEADS SHOULD GUARD THEMSELVES NIGHT AND DAY...

THAT'S JUST WHAT I'VE BEEN SAYING. WHY ARE YOU OUT HERE MAKING A TARGET OF YOURSELF FOR VELU'S SWORD?



HM-M-M. THE UNKNOWN FRIEND WHO SENT THAT LETTER SEEMS TO KNOW THE MOVES OF THE CONSPIRATORS.



IF ONLY I KNEW WHAT THEY'VE DONE WITH KURUP.



THERE WAS ONE WHO DID KNOW, THE CHAANNAAN.

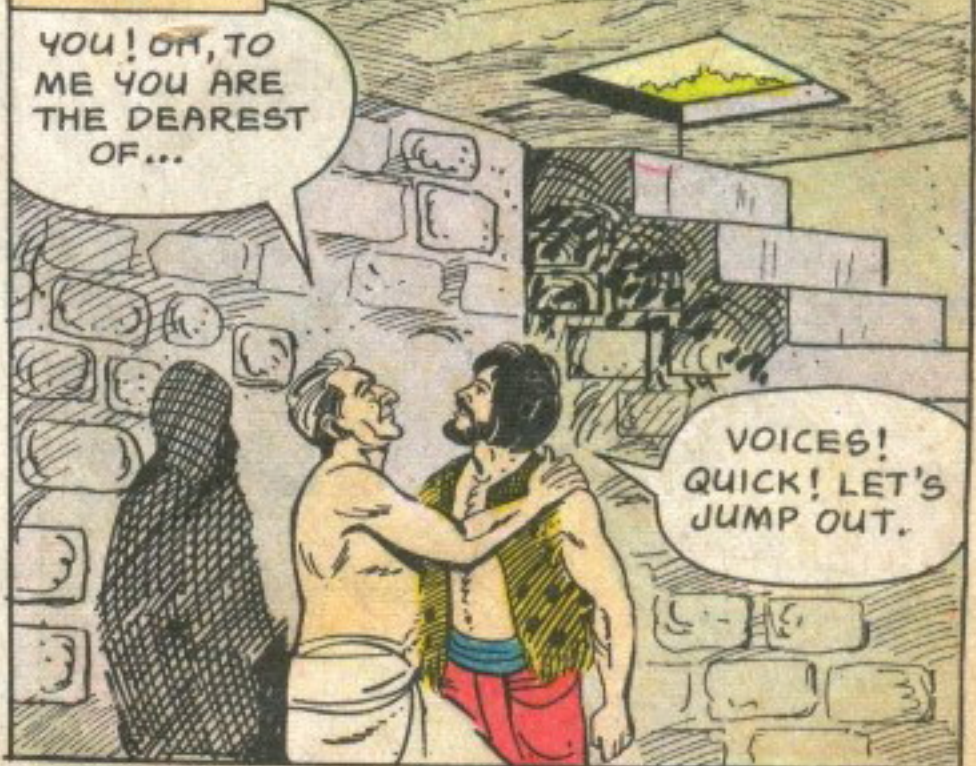


COME DOWN YOU ROGUE AND FACE THE WRATH OF KURUP.

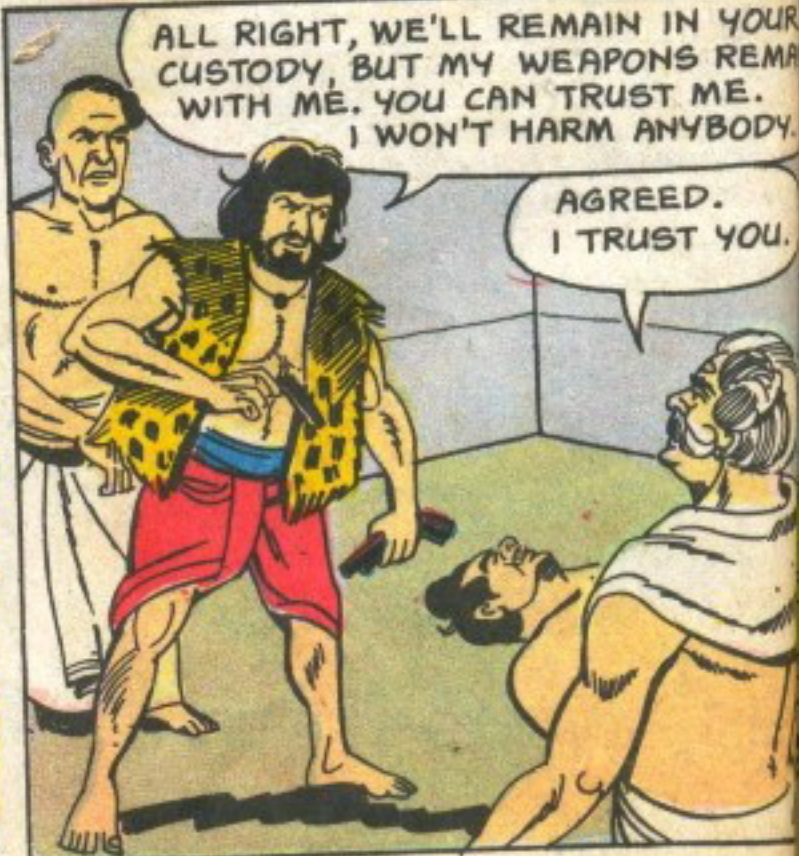
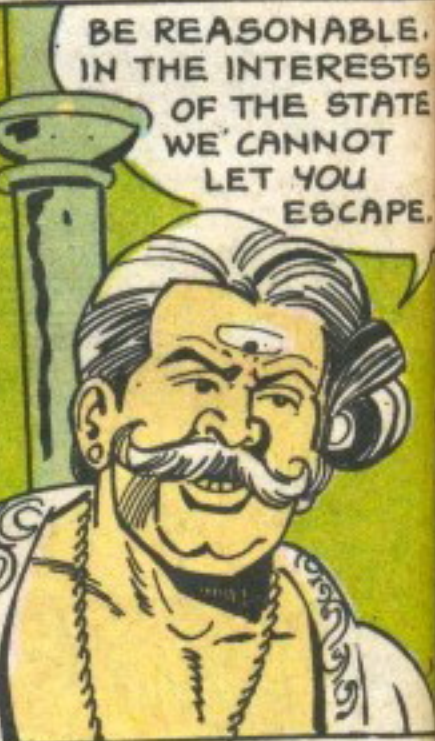
SH! IT'S A FRIEND!

SOON —

YOU! OH, TO ME YOU ARE THE DEAREST OF...



VOICES! QUICK! LET'S JUMP OUT.



SUNDARAM WAS UP BEFORE DAWN THE NEXT DAY AND ALONG WITH HIS MEN WALKED AMONGST PEOPLE, WHISPERING INTO THEIR EARS. AND BY MIDDAY —

DID YOU HEAR? THE YUVARAJA AND HIS SOLDIERS MURDERED VELU.

OH, YES! AND I BELIEVE RAAMANAAMADHAM TOO WAS ATTACKED.

HE ESCAPED BUT HIS SERVANT WAS KILLED.

IT SEEMS ANANTA'S FATHER HAS FOUND EVIDENCE TO PROVE THAT THE NEELEE WHO ATE HIS SON WAS NONE OTHER THAN THE YUVARAJA!

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE MAHARAJA'S ILLNESS, THE YUVARAJA HAS BROUGHT IN DACOITS WITH FIRE-SPITTING WEAPONS TO KILL THE MAHARAJA'S SON!

OH! HAS HE? WE'LL KILL HIM FIRST.

DOWN WITH THE MURDERER!

TO THE PALACE!

THE BUTCHER!

CAPTURE THE COMMON THIEF!

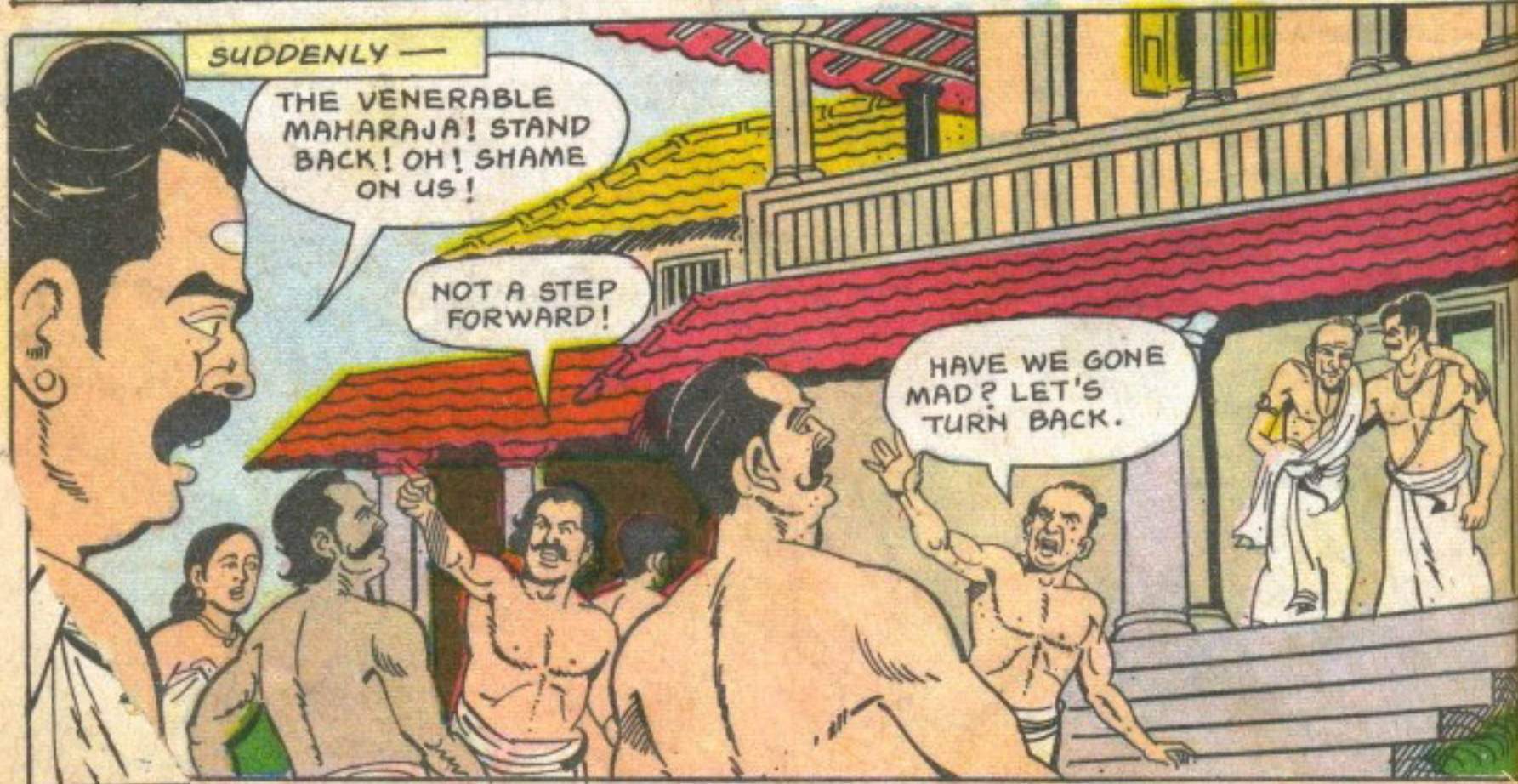
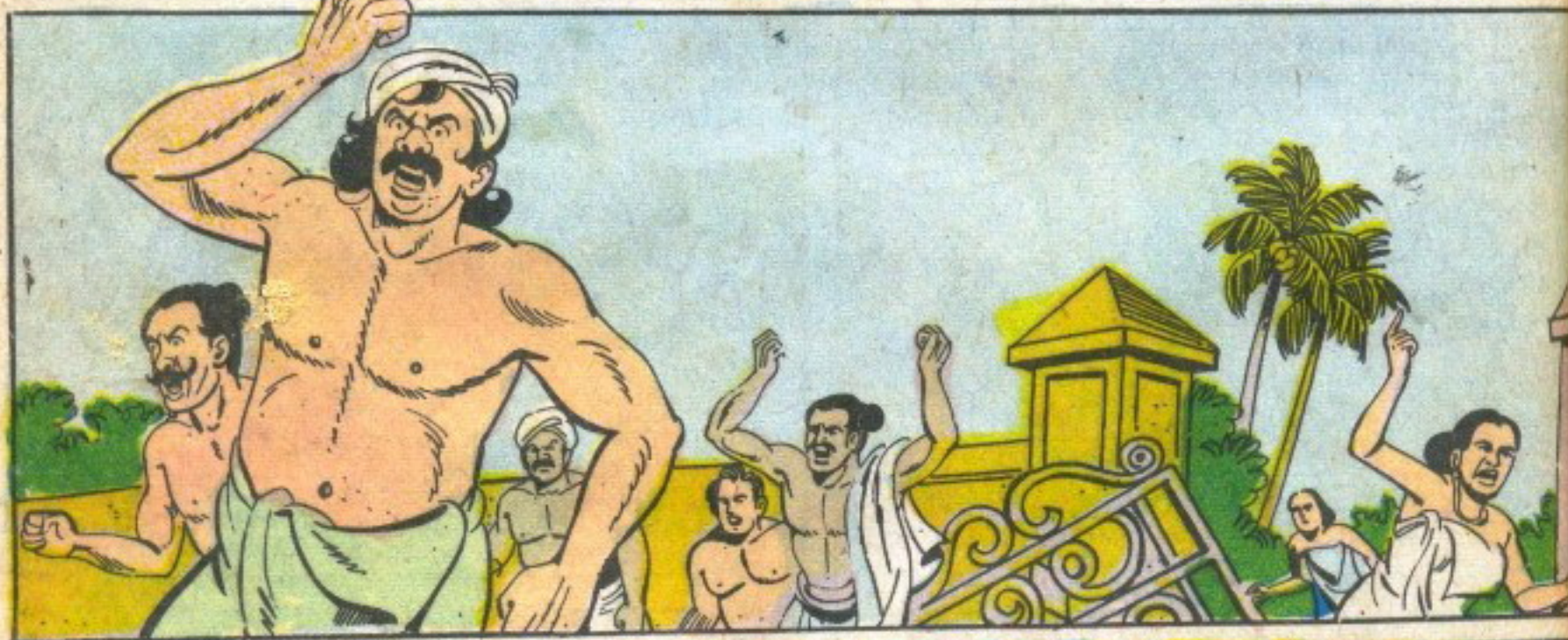
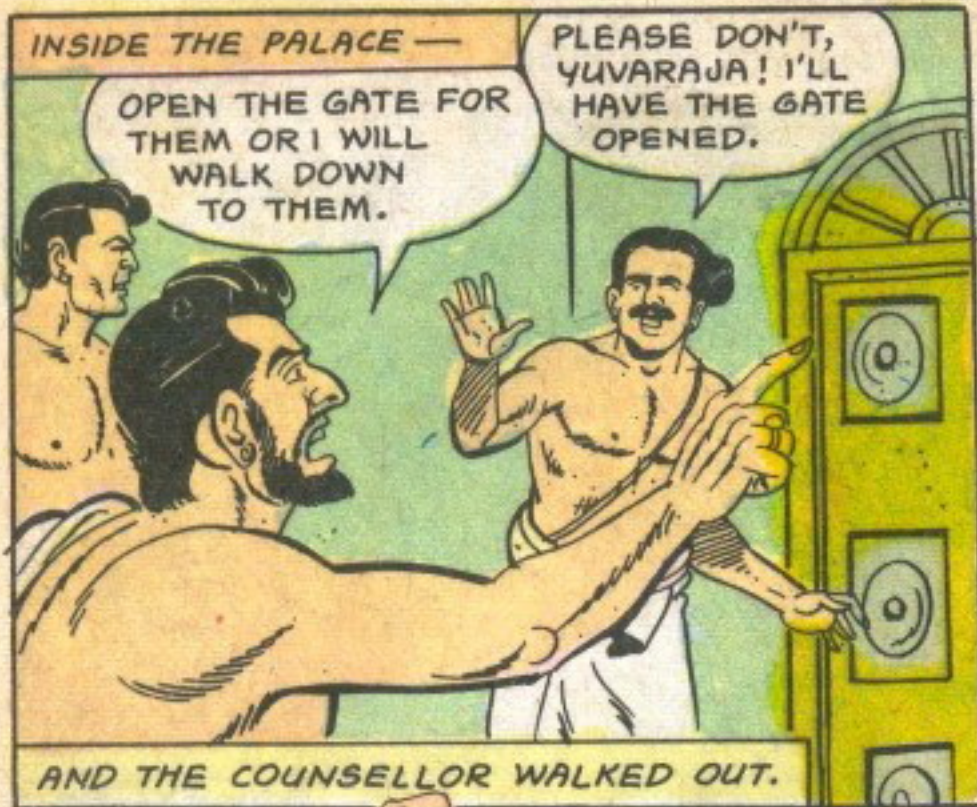
OPEN THE GATE OR WE'LL STORM THE PALACE.

I CANNOT HIDE BEHIND BOLTED DOORS. I WILL SPEAK TO THEM.

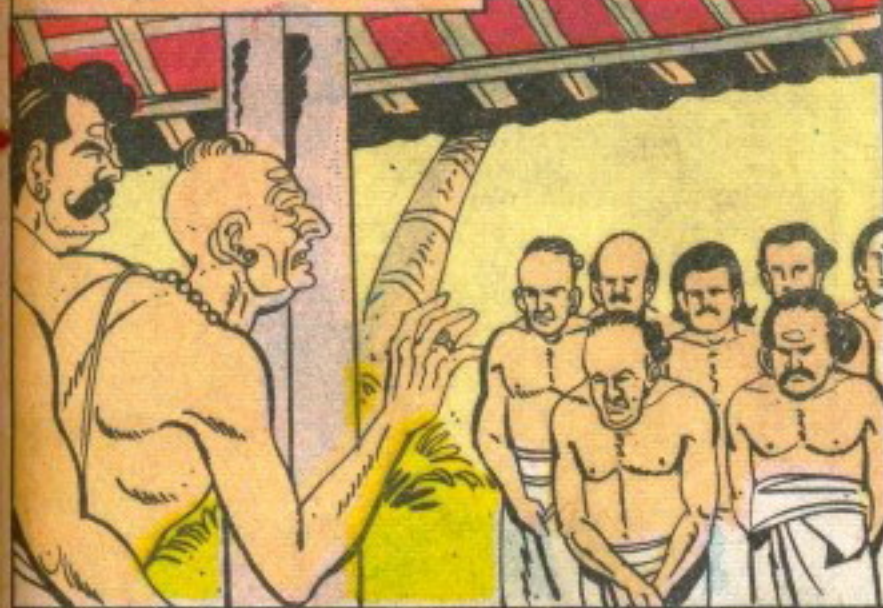
NO, YUVARAJA. YOU WILL NOT STIR OUT!

KILL HIM!

UED
ED HIS

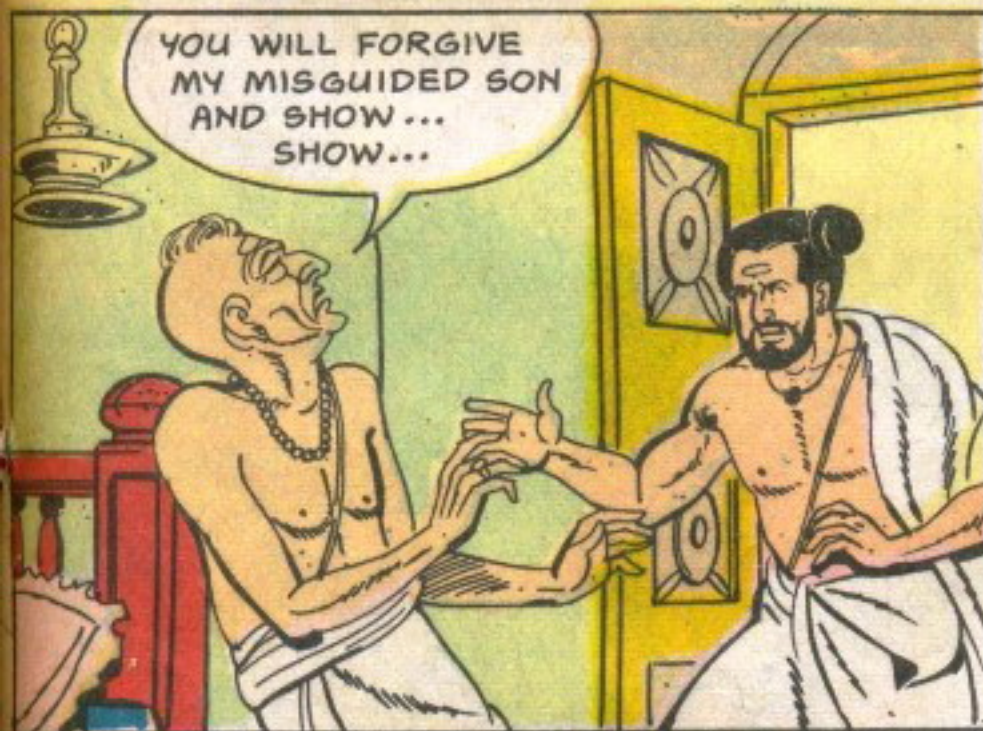
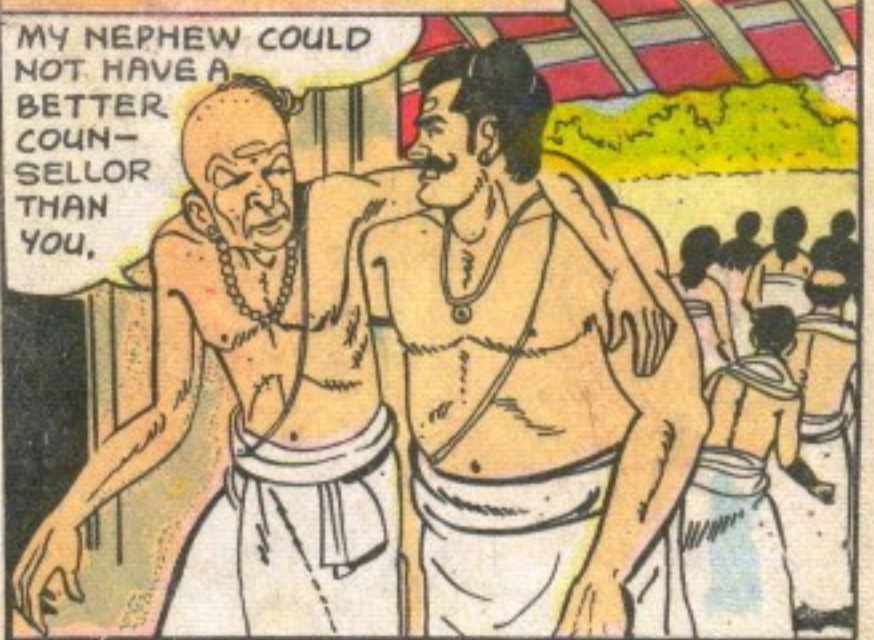


TOO WEAK TO SPEAK, THE AILING MAHARAJA BID THE PEOPLE TO DISPERSE WITH A GESTURE OF HIS HAND.

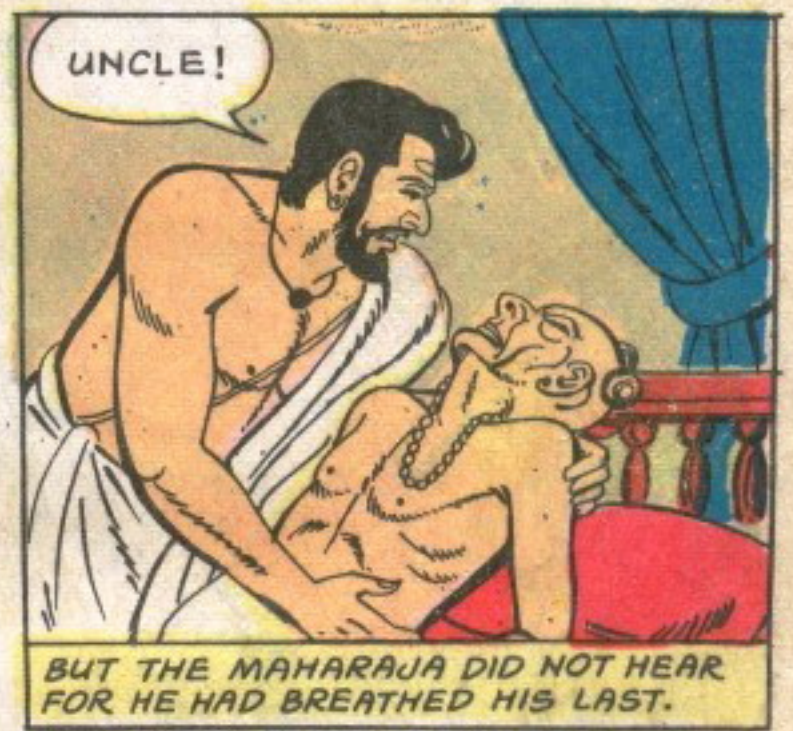


AND AS SUDDENLY AS IT HAD EVOLVED, THE CROWD MELTED AWAY.

MY NEPHEW COULD NOT HAVE A BETTER COUNSELLOR THAN YOU.



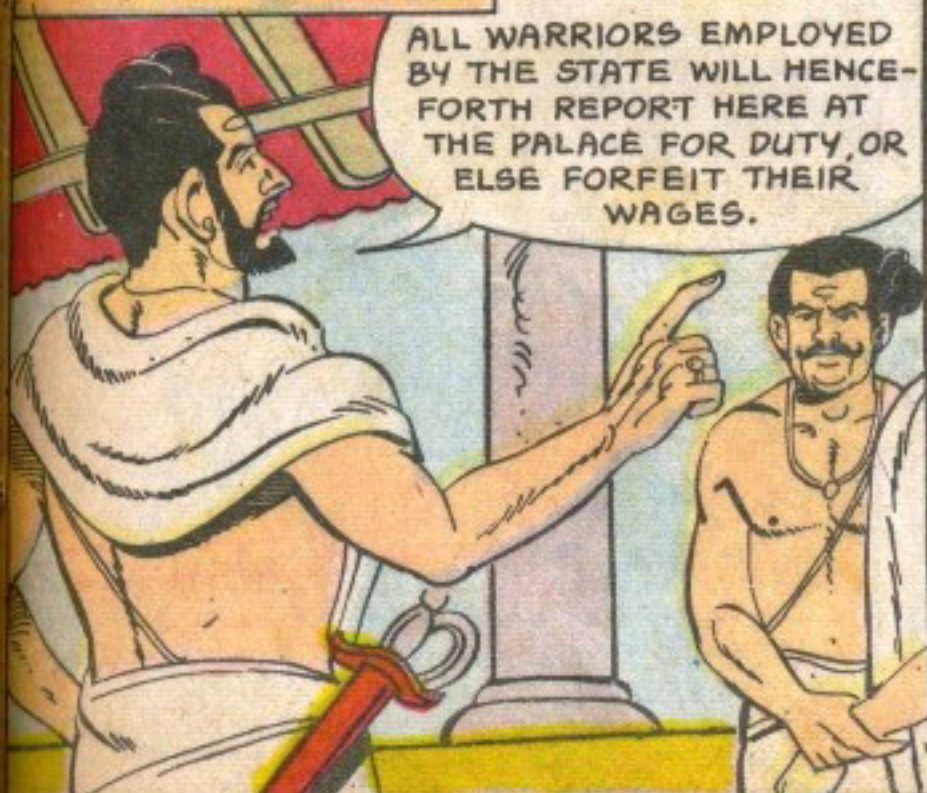
YOU WILL FORGIVE MY MISGUIDED SON AND SHOW... SHOW...



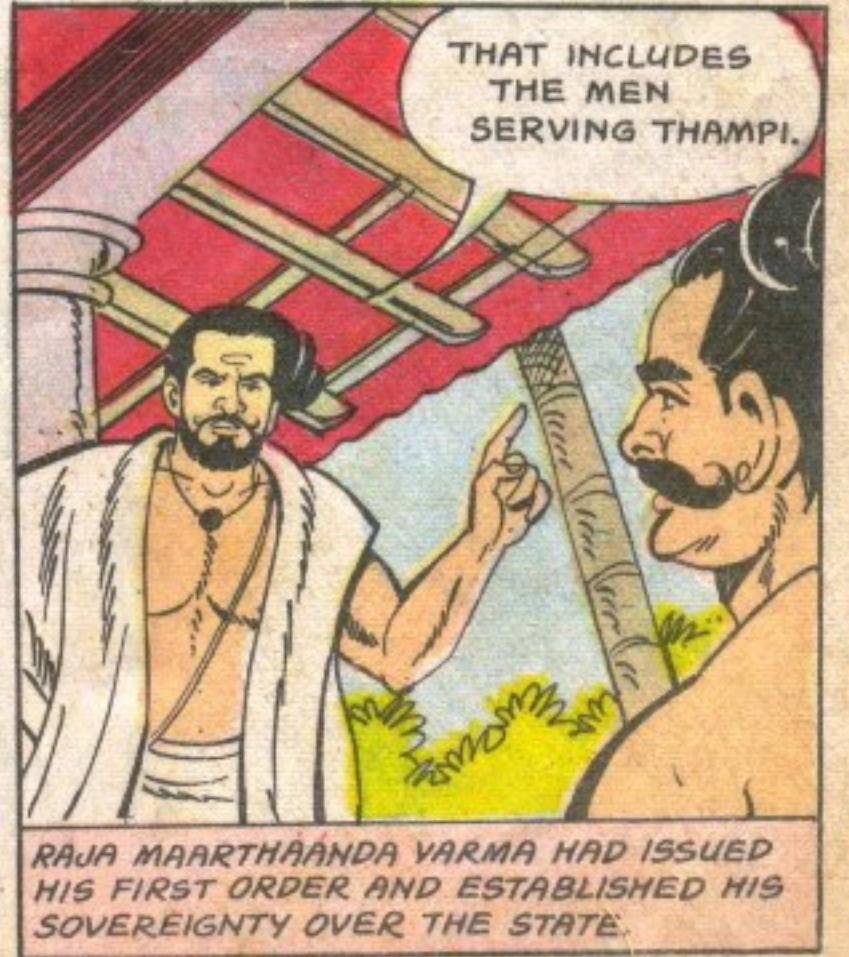
UNCLE!

BUT THE MAHARAJA DID NOT HEAR FOR HE HAD BREATHED HIS LAST.

MAARTHAANDA VARMA COULD NOT HAVE THE LUXURY OF INDULGING IN PERSONAL GRIEF. HE WAS NOW THE HEAD OF THE STATE, THE PROTECTOR OF THE PEOPLE.



ALL WARRIORS EMPLOYED BY THE STATE WILL HENCEFORTH REPORT HERE AT THE PALACE FOR DUTY, OR ELSE FORFEIT THEIR WAGES.



THAT INCLUDES THE MEN SERVING THAMPI.

RAJA MAARTHAANDA VARMA HAD ISSUED HIS FIRST ORDER AND ESTABLISHED HIS SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE STATE.

BUT THE CONSPIRATORS WERE NOT GOING TO TAKE IT LYING DOWN.

THE NERVE! HE HAD THE AUDACITY TO WITHDRAW MY MEN!

THE DESPOT! IN THE INTERESTS OF THE STATE WE MUST DO WHAT IS TO BE DONE, THIS VERY NIGHT.

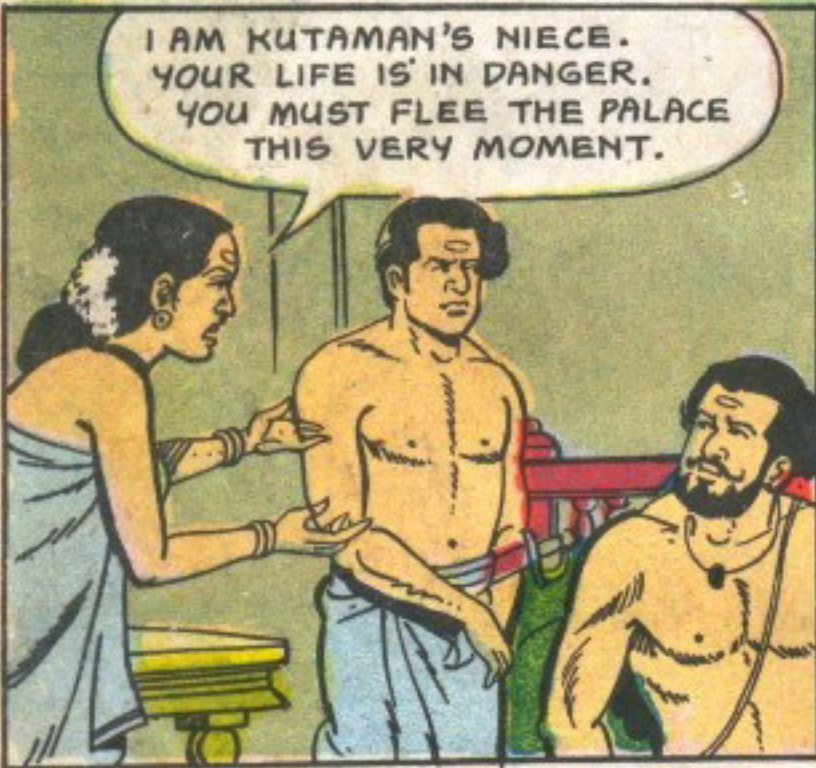


THAT NIGHT —

MAHARAJA! MAHARAJA! WAKE UP!



I AM KUTAMAN'S NIECE. YOUR LIFE IS IN DANGER. YOU MUST FLEE THE PALACE THIS VERY MOMENT.



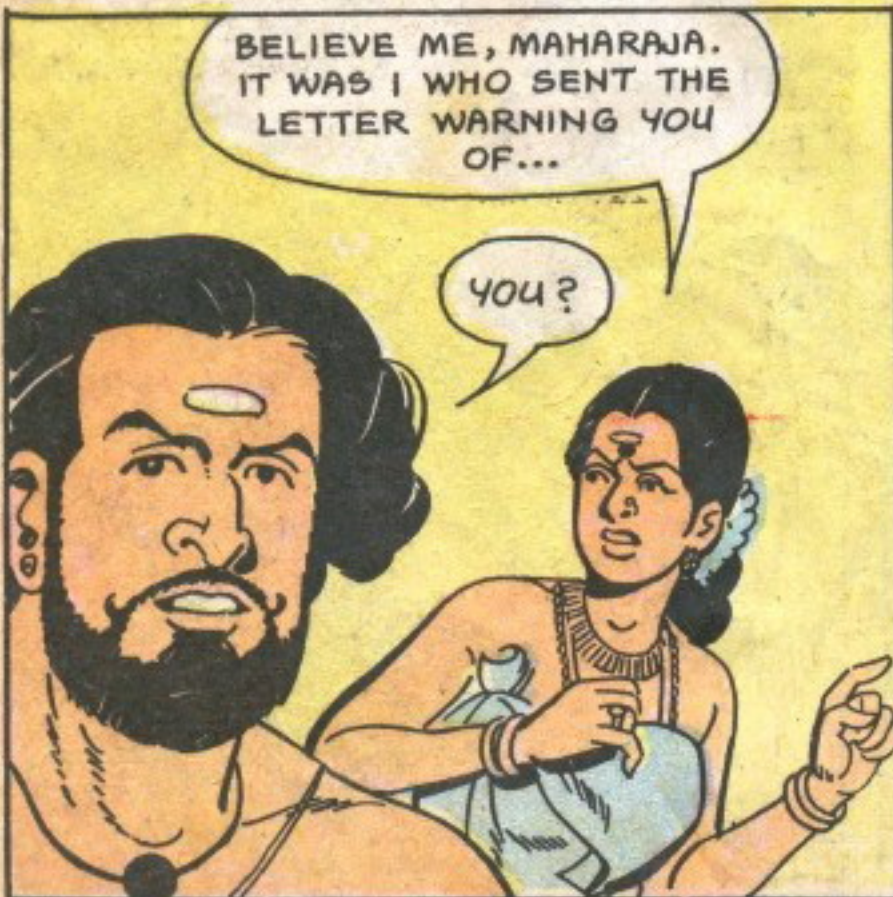
THAMPI AND MY UNCLE ARE ALREADY ON THEIR WAY HERE WITH A THOUSAND SOLDIERS. YOU MUST ESCAPE FROM TRIVANDRUM.

YOU ARE THE NIECE OF MY SWORN ENEMY. THIS IS JUST ANOTHER TRAP.



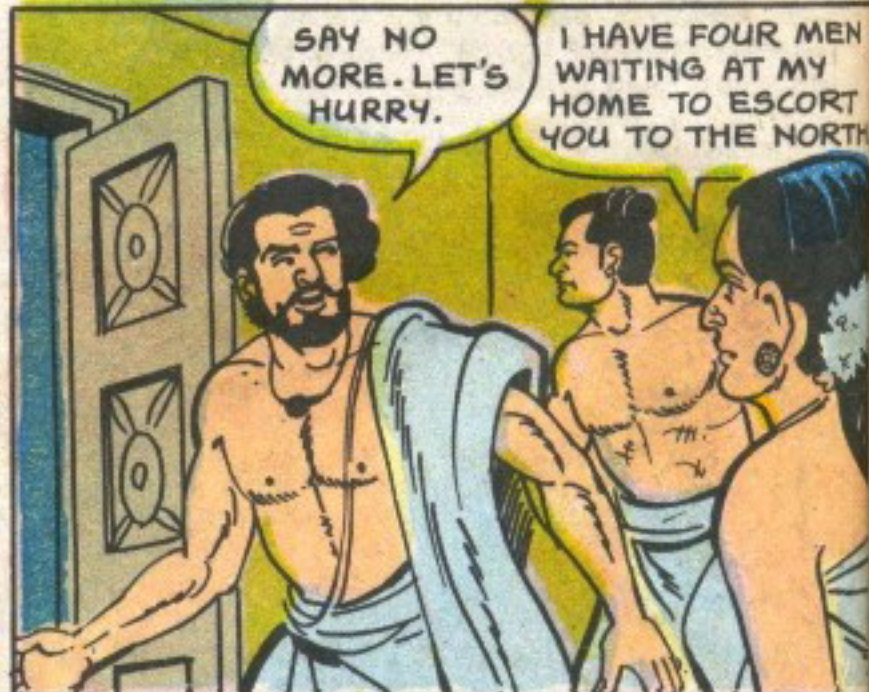
BELIEVE ME, MAHARAJA. IT WAS I WHO SENT THE LETTER WARNING YOU OF...

YOU?



SAY NO MORE. LET'S HURRY.

I HAVE FOUR MEN WAITING AT MY HOME TO ESCORT YOU TO THE NORTH



RAJA MAARTHAANDA VARMA, HIS BODYGUARD AND HIS COUNSELLOR, DRESSED AS PAID LABOURERS LEFT THE PALACE WITH SUBHADRAA. NONE WOULD SUSPECT THE SERVANTS OF KUTAMAN'S NIECE.

AS THE FOUR NEARED SUBHADRAA'S HOUSE, SOMEONE STEPPED OUT OF THE SHADOWS.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH THESE MEN IN THE STREETS AT THIS HOUR?

WHO ARE YOU TO QUESTION ME?

PILLAI!

PILLAI! ANANTA'S FATHER!

HOW GLAD I AM TO SEE YOU!

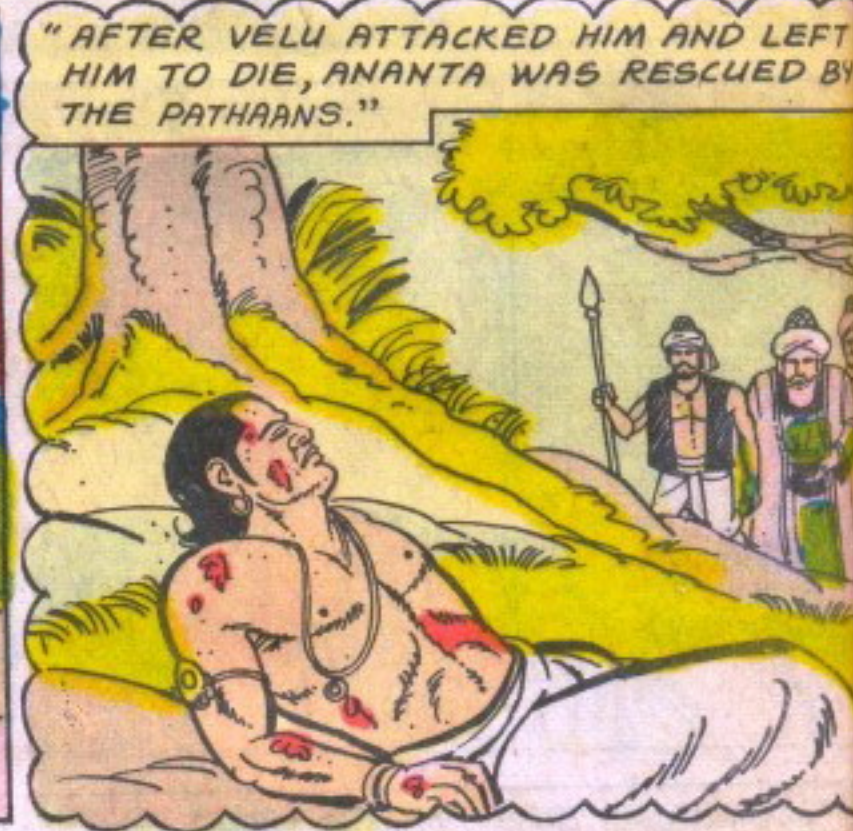
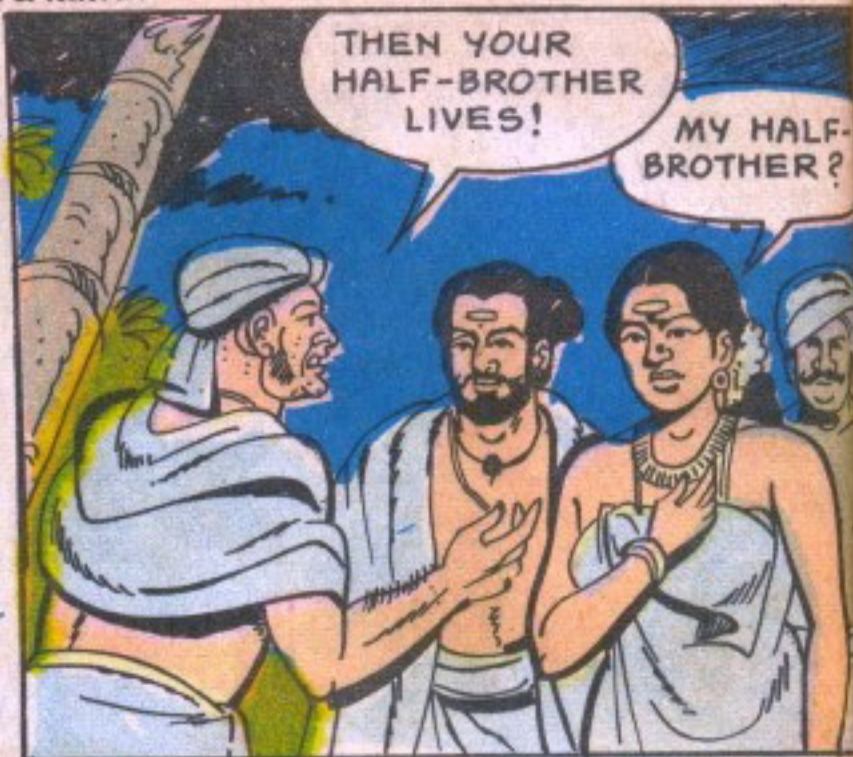
YOU... AND... HER? DID I HAVE TO SEE THIS TOO? THEN WHAT SUNDARAM!... THE DANCING-GIRL... SAID WAS TRUE.

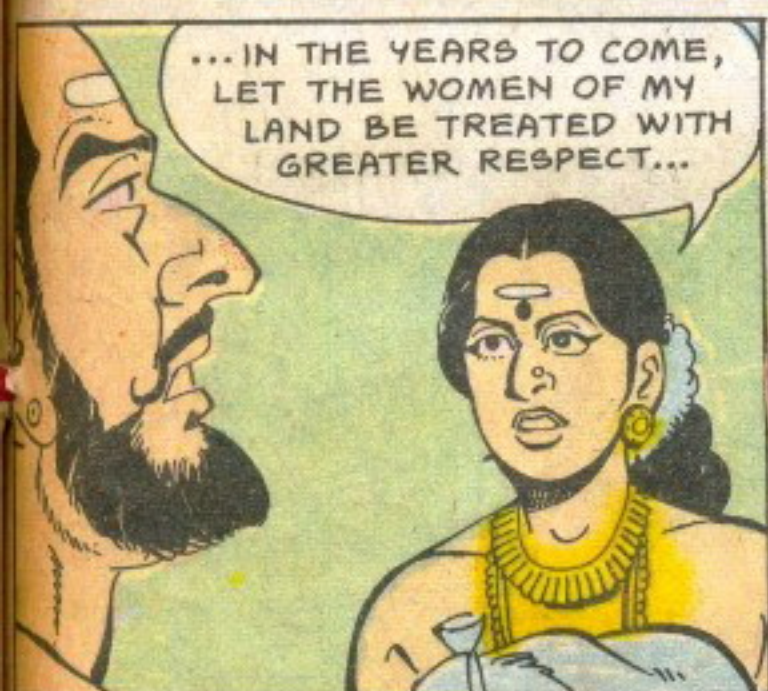
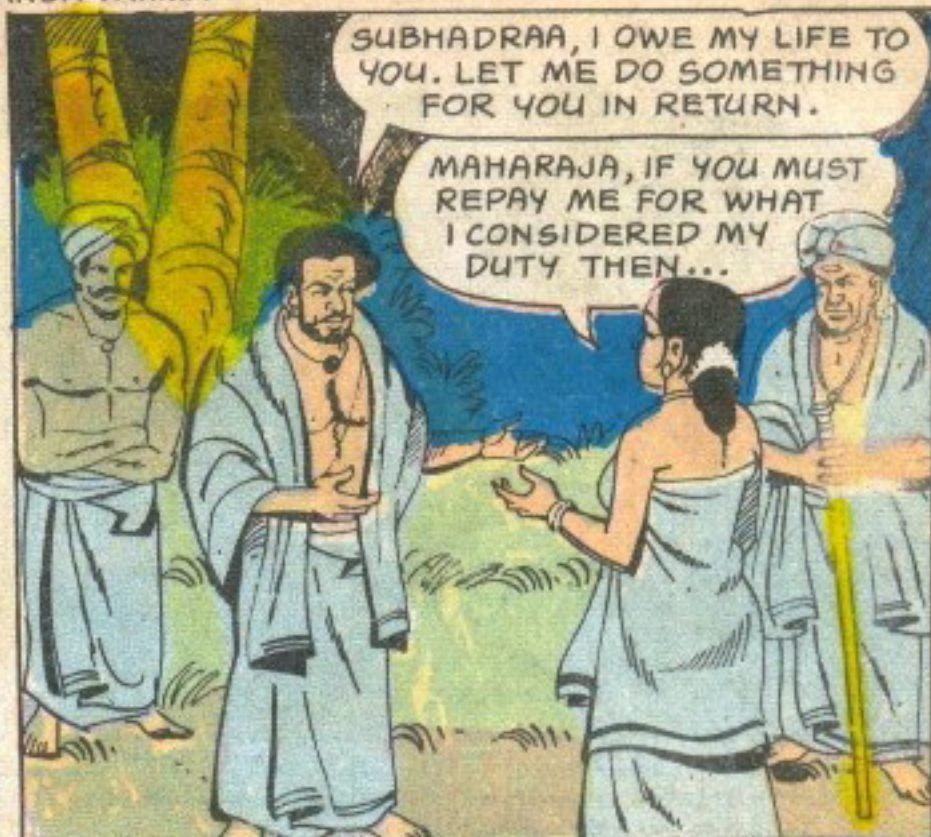
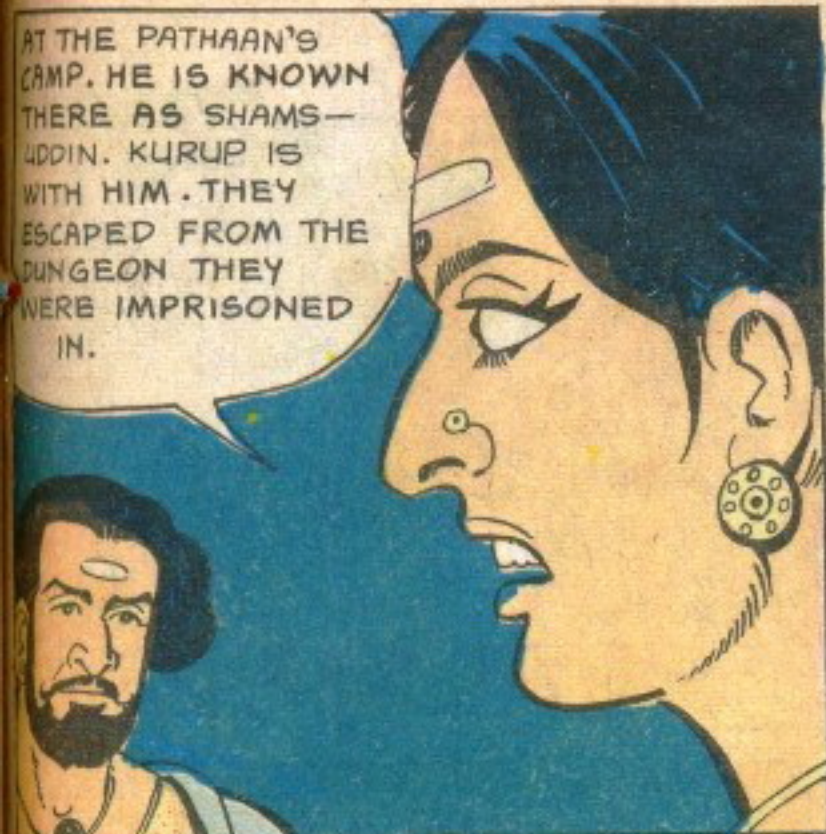
WELL I HAVE SEEN YOU. I NEED NO FURTHER PROOF. I WILL DEPART.

WAIT! WE HAVE SO MUCH TO TALK ABOUT.

WHAT IS THERE TO TALK WITH A MAN WHO MURDERED MY SON FOR A WOMAN?

HE DID NOT MURDER YOUR SON!





AS THE FORCES OF THAMPI AND MAARTHAANDA CLASHED...

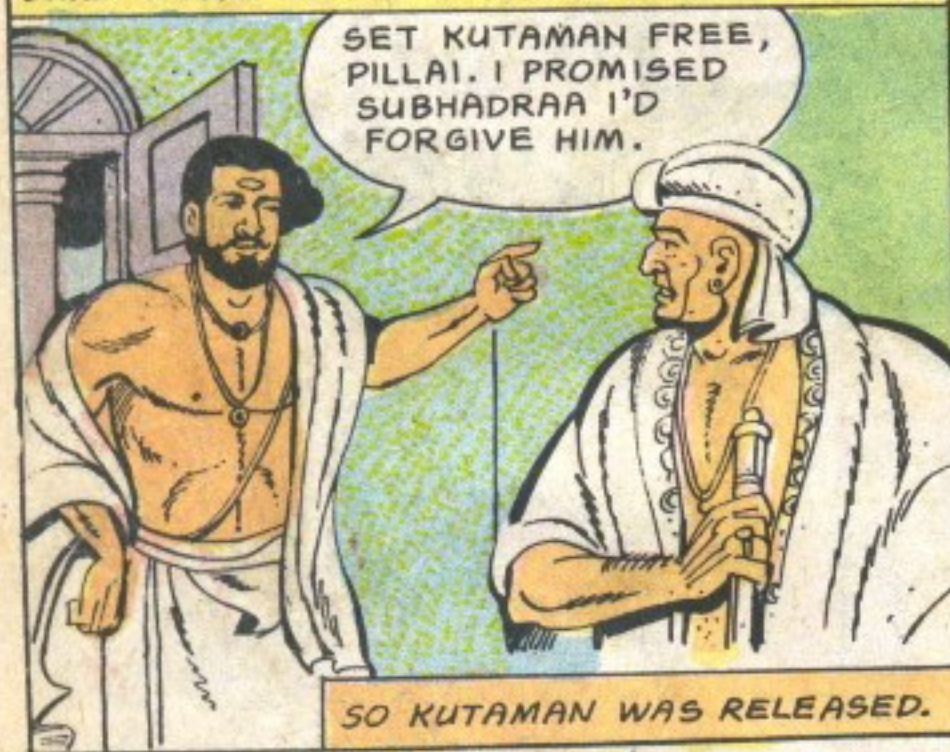


... THE PATHAANS LED BY ANANTA AND KURUP ENTERED THE FRAY.



SUNDARAM LOST HIS LIFE IN THE BATTLE.

THAMPI AND THE EIGHT AND RAAMANAAMA-DHAM WERE TAKEN CAPTIVE. BUT—



SET KUTAMAN FREE, PILLAI. I PROMISED SUBHADRAA I'D FORGIVE HIM.

SO KUTAMAN WAS RELEASED.

AT PAARUKUTTY'S HOUSE —

MAY YOU NEVER BE PARTED AGAIN. I HAVE SENT A MAN TO BRING YOUR MOTHER HERE, ANANTA.

DEAR SUBHADRA I OWE THIS HAPPINESS TO YOU.



WHEN MAARTHAANDA HEARD THE SHOCKING NEWS —

BUT AT SUBHADRAA'S HOUSE —



YOU TRAITOR!

AND KUTAMAN BROUGHT THE SWORD DOWN ON HER NECK.



NO LOYAL SUBJECT OF MINE SHALL EVER SUFFER YOUR CRUEL UNJUST FATE IN MY REIGN, SUBHADRAA.

TRUE ENOUGH MAARTHAANDA VARMA PROVED TO BE A JUST, BENEVOLENT RULER.