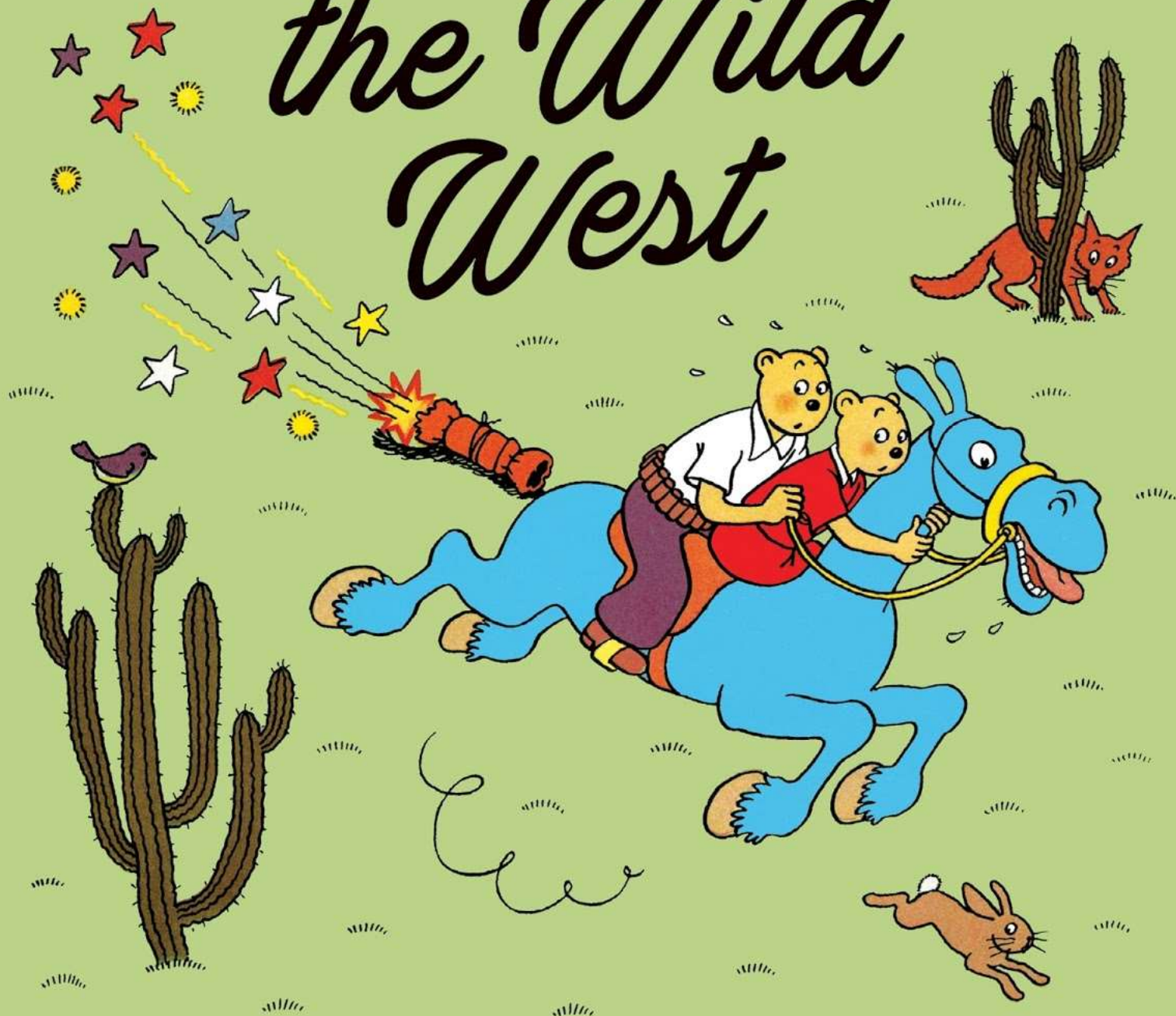


# HERGÉ

## *Peppy in the Wild West*



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**HERGÉ**



*Fantagraphics Books*



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## Introduction

*Peppy in the Wild West* (*Popol et Virginie chez des Lapi-nos*) is that childhood staple, a tale of talking animals. But this time, the story comes from Belgium's Georges Remi—better known as Hergé, the man who created Tintin. It occupies a curious place in his career, for the artist returned more than once to his fable. Each time, it coincided with a watershed in his life.

Hergé's initial scenario dates from 1931. Then, instead of bear cubs, it featured a pair of squirrels. *The Adventures of Tim the Squirrel, a Hero of the Far West* appeared as a series of sixteen color pamphlets. They were a free promotional item for À l'Innovation, a big department store in downtown Brussels. Hergé was twenty-four and editing a children's weekly for the Catholic Association of Belgian Youth. This was *Le Petit Vingtième*, or "The Little Twentieth"—part of the Catholic newspaper *Le Vingtième Siècle* ("The Twentieth Century").

There, one of the comics Hergé had created was Tintin. But the artist saw no future in cartoons; his great dream was to work in graphic design. It was the world of the modern talents he admired: names like René Vincent, A. M. Cassandre, Léo Marfurt, and Francis Delamare. Hergé spent every spare moment on posters, logos, and leaflets, and, for him, À l'Innovation was an important client.

The artist first repurposed Tim the Squirrel in 1932. For a regional supplement called *La Vie heureuse* ("The Happy Life"), he exchanged his squirrels in Stetsons for bears wearing overalls. Their tale became *The Adventures of Tom and Millie*, with speech balloons instead of Tim's narrative captions. One year later, in *Le Petit Vingtième*, Hergé turned the same bears into Peppy and Virginny.

None of these iterations came out of the blue. Five years before, a journalist named Paul Winkler had created the French syndication agency Opera Mundi. Founded specifically to import Disney prod-

uct, it was also soon representing the King Features Syndicate. Introduced through films then brokered in print by Opera Mundi, the likes of Oswald, Felix, and Mickey rapidly colonized Europe. Always up-to-date and always a keen competitor, Hergé had to try some funny animals of his own.

*Le Petit Vingtième* published *The Adventures of Peppy and Virginny Out West* in February 1934, in black and white. Today, the themes Hergé broached may well surprise a reader. *Peppy and Virginny* touches on duplicitous ads, xenophobia, price gouging, protectionism, arms sales, and the seductive lure of gold. With Europe mired in the Great Depression, this was more than mere storytelling. These topics incited fierce debates—as well as growing unrest. While Belgian kids were laughing at *Peppy and Virginny*, their parents were arguing about the gold standard. Their government was struggling to stop political parties from founding paramilitary groups.

In Hergé's case, too, there was another arbiter. With all children's literature, the Catholic Church was Belgium's key player. During the 1930s, it saw American culture as dangerous and morally bankrupt. Hergé shared some of that view, plus he wanted to get ahead. So, he framed *Peppy and Virginny* to suit the moment.

Hergé's childhood, difficult and cheerless, occurred under the German occupation of World War I. Early on, he learned to avoid reality through an immersion in drawing, movies, and the Boy Scouts. Silent films such as *Andy and the Redskins* (1914), Buster Keaton's *The Paleface* (1922) and the serial *Bronco Billy* (1908–1915) thrilled his imagination with their Western fantasies. Because the Belgian Scouts saw their hikes and camping as "Indian," teepees and Tomahawks took on a special significance. Hergé forged his own ideas about "Native America" and, for his whole life, they mattered deeply to him.



Some of Hergé's ideas, of course, have made him one of cartooning's more contentious figures. Racist, fascist, colonialist, and anti-Semitic—there is work by the artist which justifies each of these adjectives. If he eventually policed what he drew and published, Hergé's imagination had already spoken. His prewar bears and bunnies, performing as "Cowboys and Indians," are just as equivocal as they are naïve.

The artist's life changed the year *Peppy and Virginny* was published. He signed a book contract with Casterman, opening up new markets—and an expansive future. Hergé also met the Chinese student Tchang Tchong-jen. Their friendship caused the artist to re-evaluate all his work, change his methods—and take cartooning seriously.

Four years later, the Nazis occupied Belgium. Under their rule, Hergé did more than just survive. Artistically and creatively, the war became his richest era. He worked for a daily paper, *Le Soir*, whose actual owners had been dispossessed by German "proprietors." Never, for the rest of his life, was he forgiven.

The choice brought Hergé enormous visibility. His books were published and he made a great deal of money. But Belgium's Liberation in 1944 turned him into a criminal, unemployed and unemployable. While his friends and colleagues were jailed—and a few executed—Tintin salvaged Hergé's life. A former member of the resistance, Raymond LeBlanc, helped the artist clear his name so they could found a new weekly, *Tintin*.

Despite its success, Hergé's losses and battles piled up. They came to a head in 1948, as *Peppy and Virginny* was prepared for *Tintin*. To modernize the old story, it was being colored. To make it more fairy tale-like, less political, Hergé re-titled it *Peppy and Virginny in the Land of the Lapinos*.

He did something else that week—he wrote Walt Disney. The time had come, noted the artist, to

put Tintin onscreen. He was happy to place them "entirely" in Disney's qualified hands. Two months later, he finally had a reply. Without the slightest interest, the firm's PR returned his books.

Other Belgians were trying to compete with Disney. They created their own talking rabbits, chickens, and foxes—characters like "Niki Lapin," "Snot and Bob Hollywood," "Pouss-Pouss," and "Romauld." One of these, Wrill the Fox, had his own magazine. It was published by Gordinne, a Liège-based house which had no need to consult the church.

Suffering in the face of US syndication, French, as well as Belgian, cartoonists flocked to Gordinne. Hergé, a household name, was eager to join these ranks. But their editor's offer, he always said, was unacceptable. Albert Fromenteau, who drew Wrill, had another memory: "Hergé was enormously keen to work with us. But given his situation, that was impossible."

Except at his own magazine, Hergé was persona non grata. As he supervised *Peppy and Virginny's* third reprise, he was also hyper-exhausted and resentful. So, as always, he sought some way to escape. The day before his animal fable appeared, he found it. Hergé informed his publisher he was moving to Argentina. His work would be done from there, because he wasn't coming back.

In the end, of course, Hergé never packed his bags. He stayed in the town where he was born, had affairs and breakdowns, launched his own studio, divorced and remarried. By the time he died in 1983, he was an icon.

Today there are scores of books and theses on Hergé. Yet the artist remains exactly what he was in life: a hidden, secretive, tortured original. *Peppy and Virginny* presents a true rarity—a candid snapshot of the driven young artist. Its story evokes both the seeker out to dazzle his world and that child within, who dreamt of smoking the peace pipe.



An author, journalist, and broadcaster, Cynthia Rose is a Londoner based in Paris. She started work at Britain's *New Musical Express*, editing the Thrills! section on popular culture, including comics and zines. She has published four books, on creativity, design, and why James Brown screamed. Her most recent book is *RIOT*, co-authored with artist Isaac Julian for New York's Museum of Metropolitan Art. Cynthia is online at [www.muchacreative.paris](http://www.muchacreative.paris) and [www.muchacreative.com](http://www.muchacreative.com).

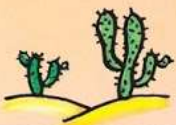


# Peppy IN THE Wild West

Peppy the Hatmaker's business was in a serious slump. The economic crisis, along with the new fashion of going bareheaded, plagued him. So, since he was a resourceful man, he liquidated his business and left--with his sweet virginny--to seek their fortune elsewhere.



They settled in a marvelous place. The grass was lush and green, and it didn't rain too often. It was Heaven on Earth. Except...

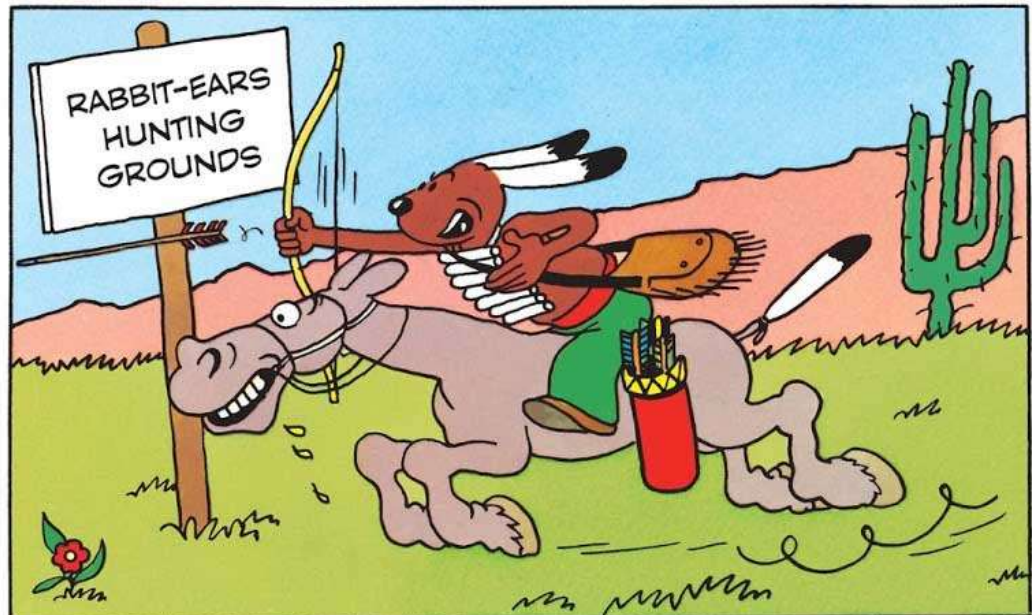




Advertising! I need ads!  
We'll paint some signs.



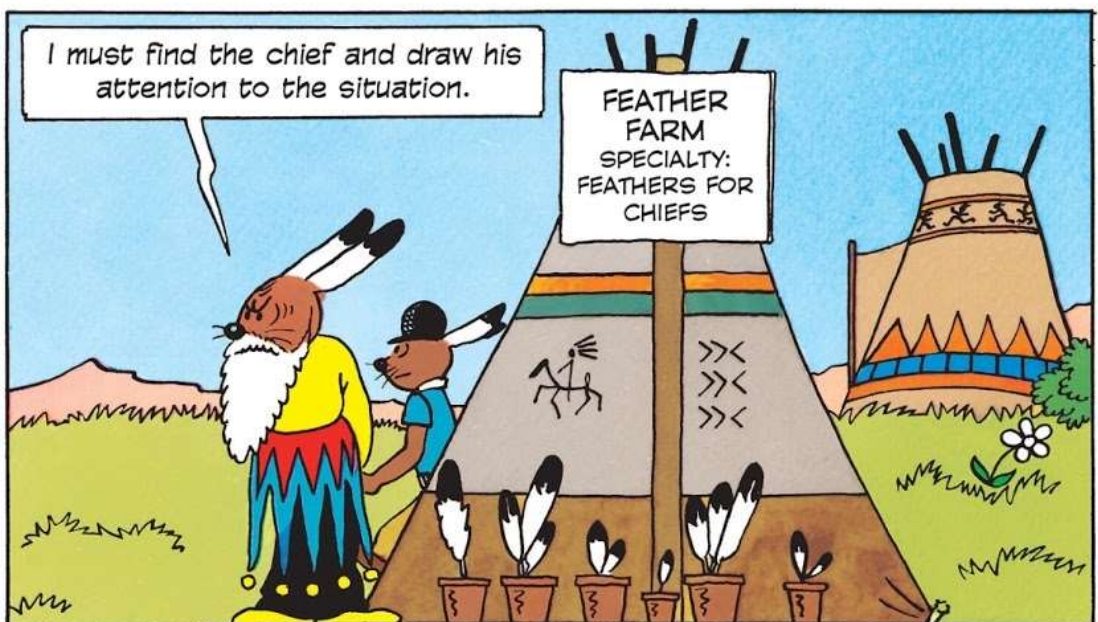
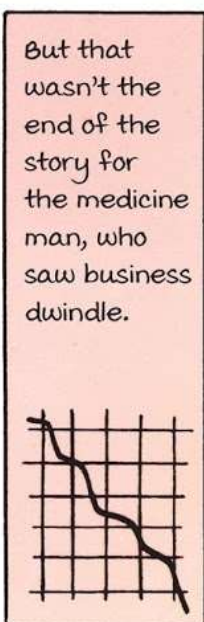
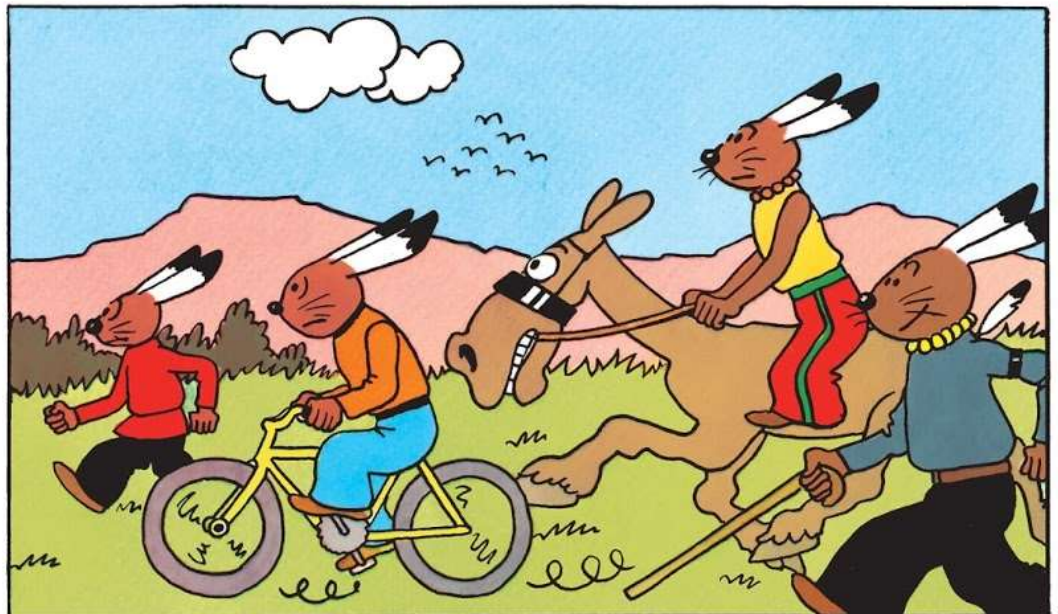
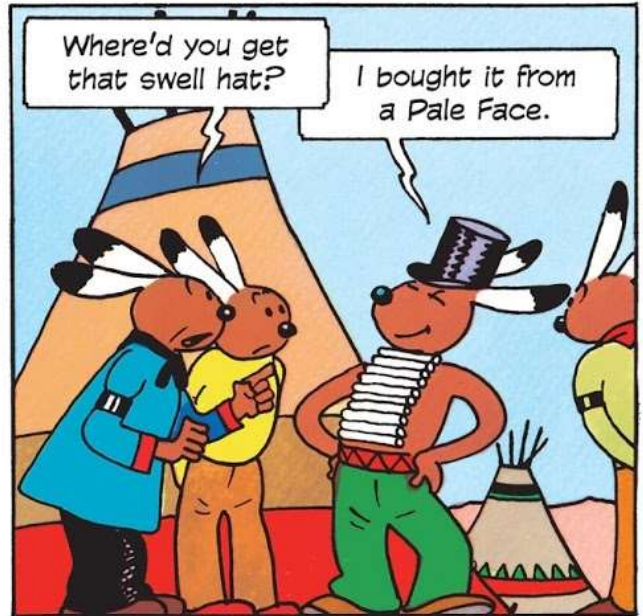
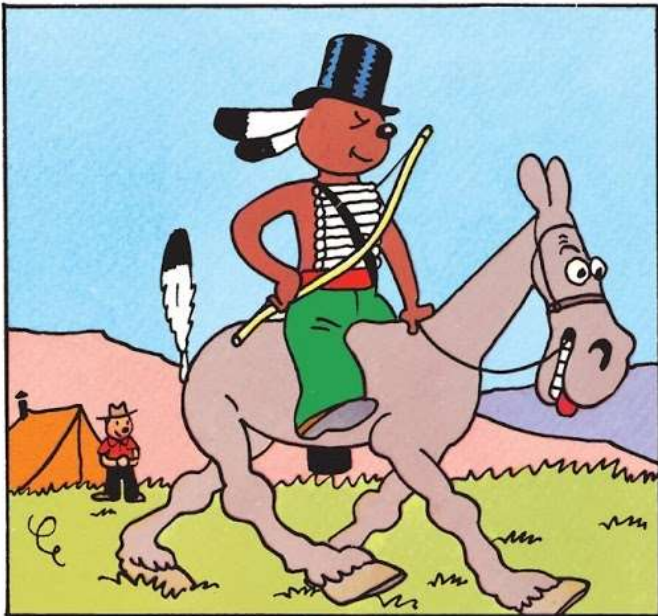
Then, one fine  
day, a young  
warrior from the  
Rabbit-Ears Tribe  
was on the hunt  
for buffalo.



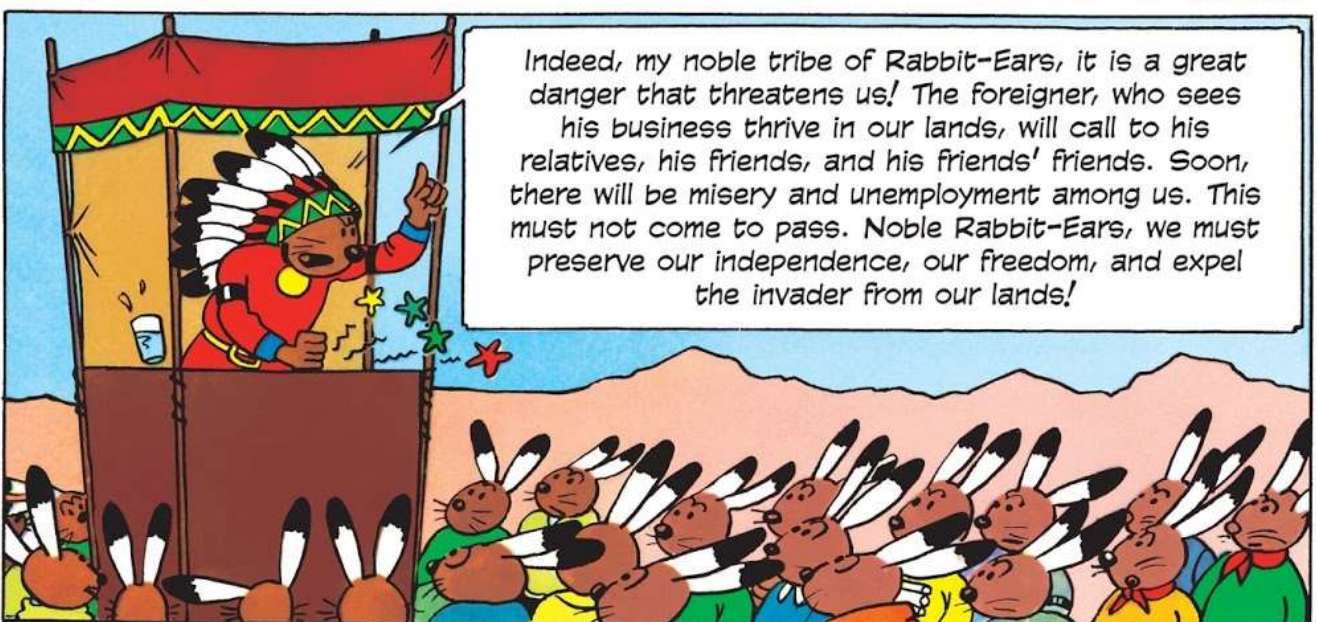
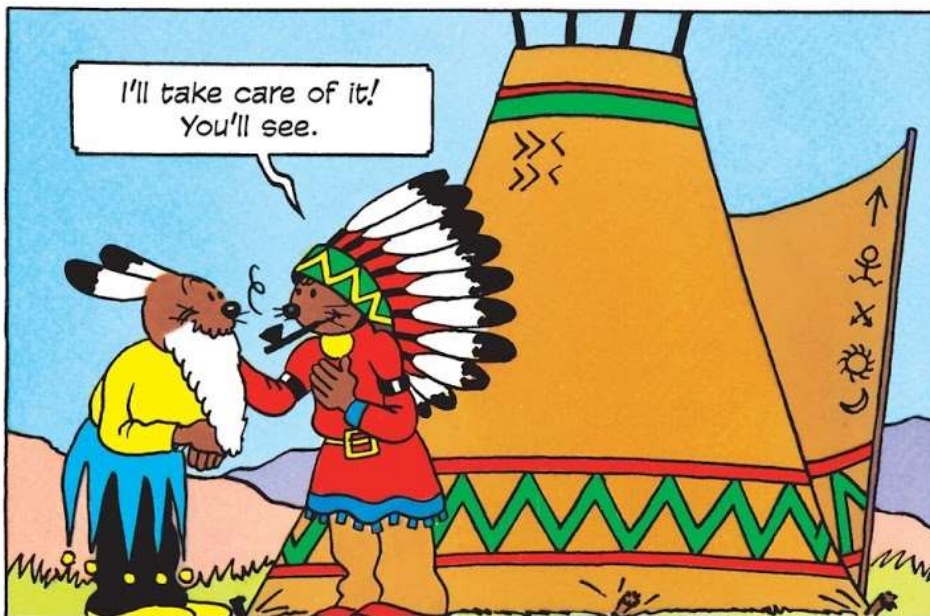
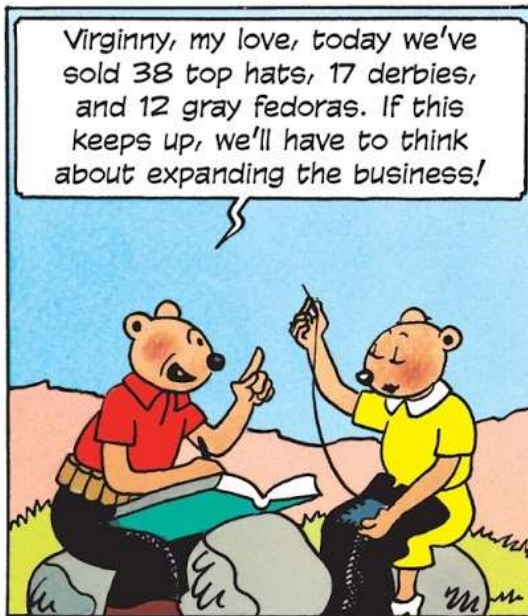
Virginny! A customer!



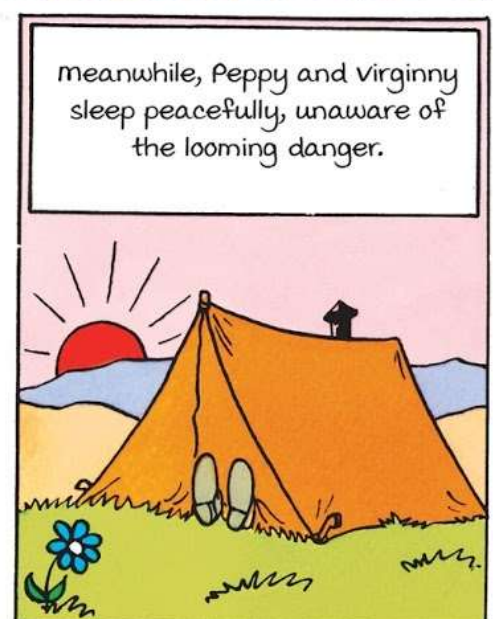
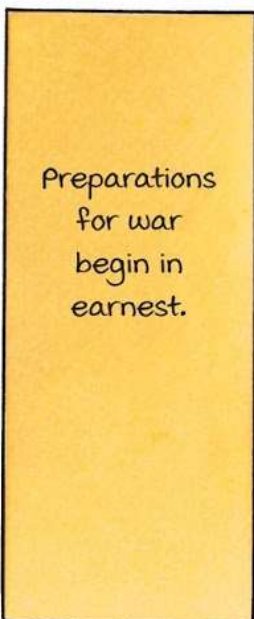
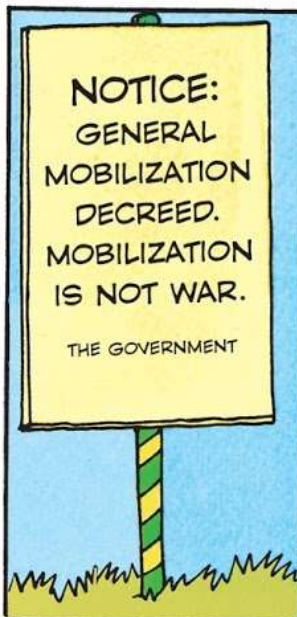






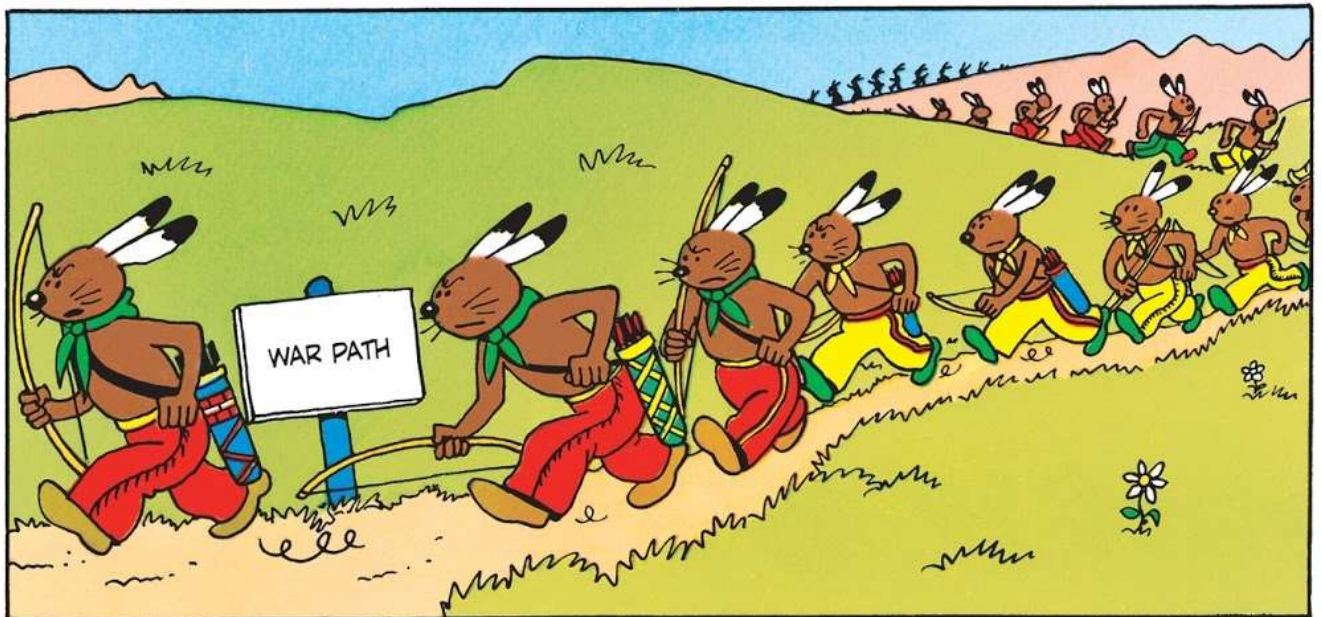




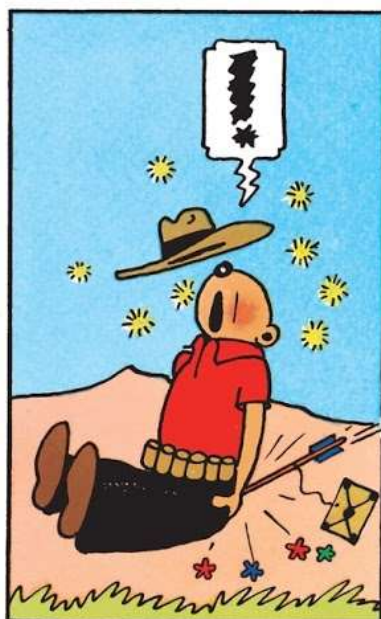
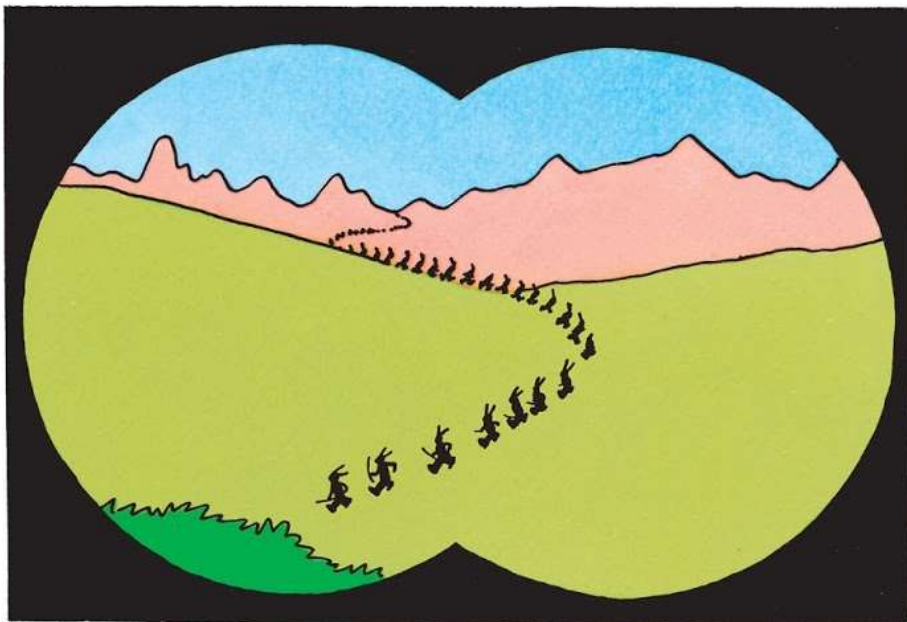




Days pass.  
The entire  
Rabbit-Ears  
Tribe is seized  
by the fever  
of war.

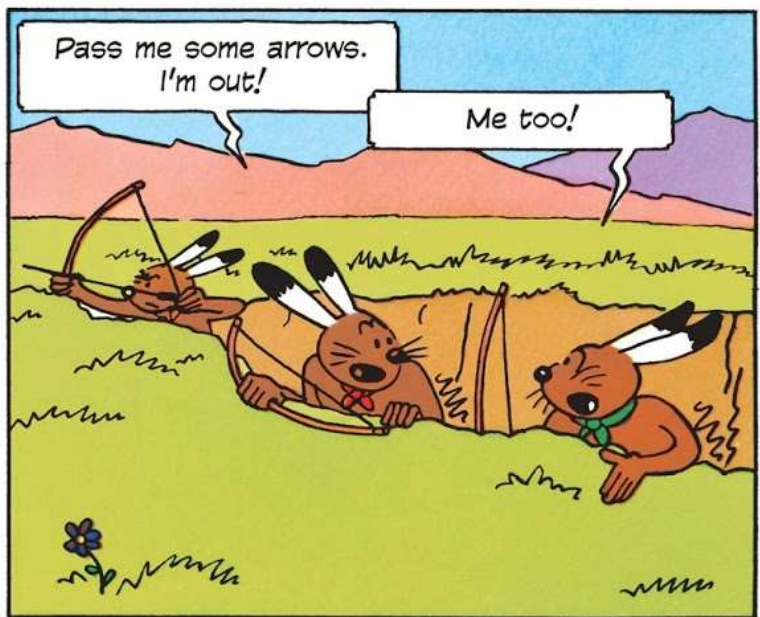




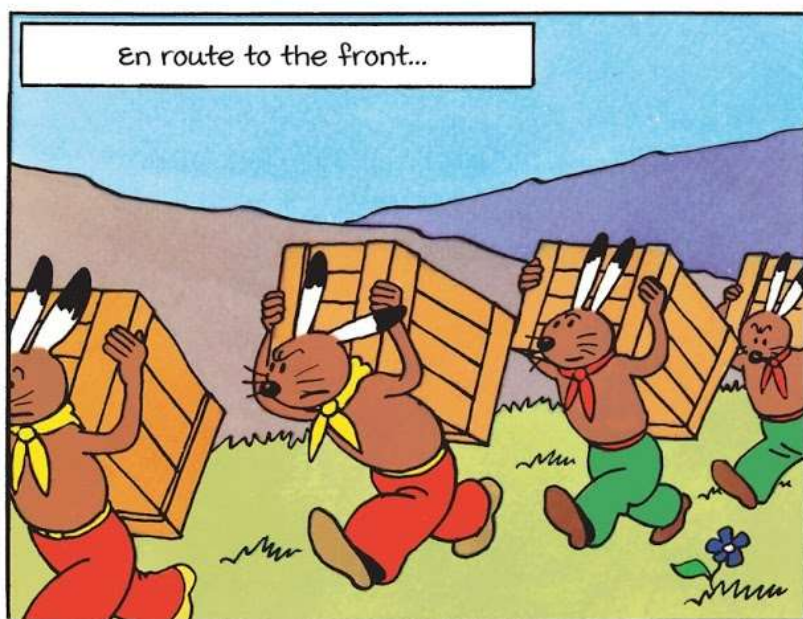
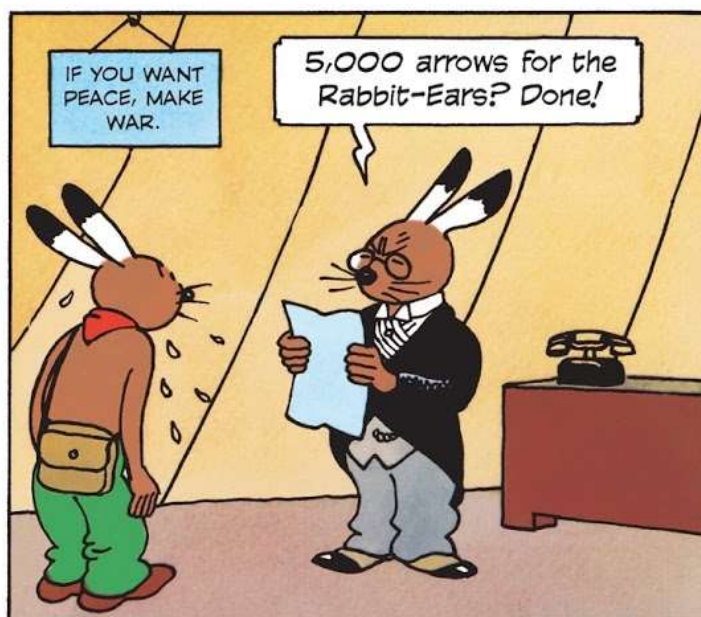
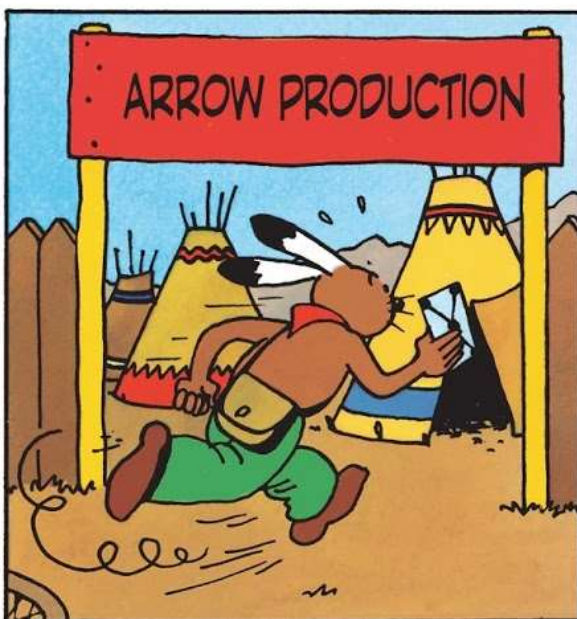
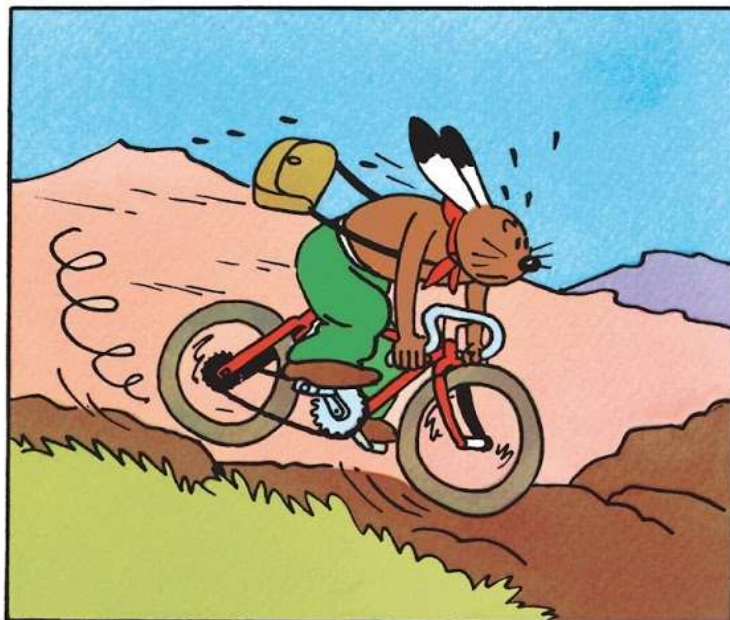
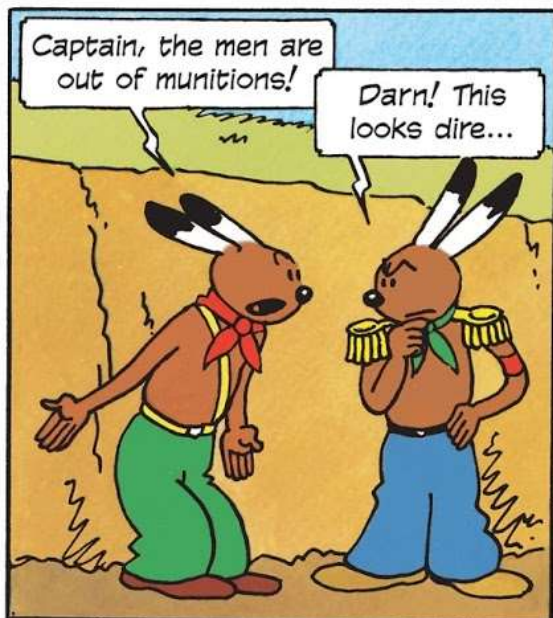




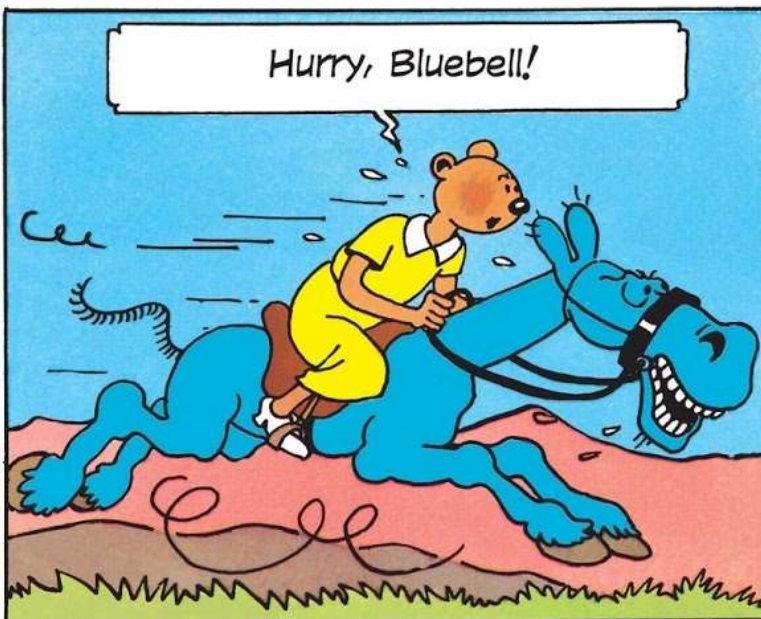
With ferocious war cries, the Rabbit-Ears launch the attack...



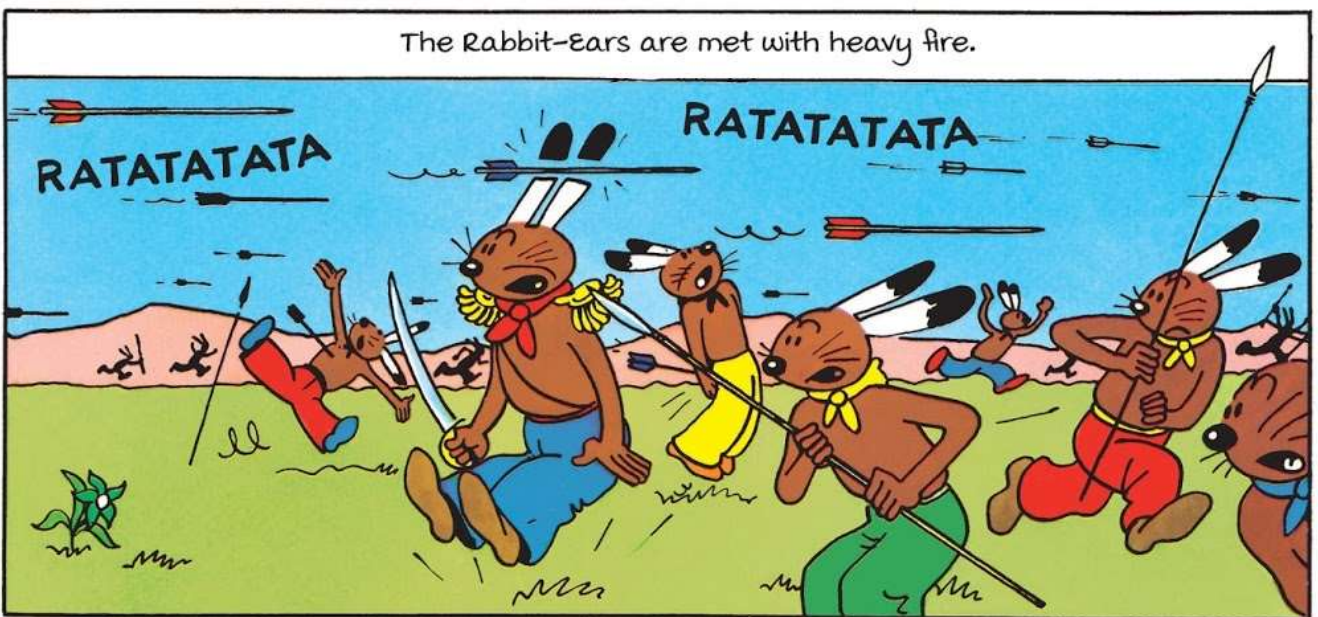




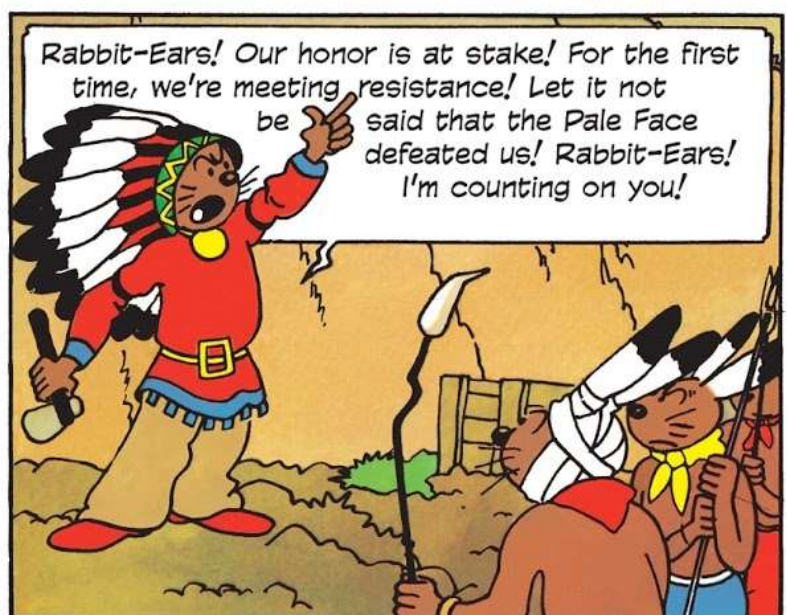
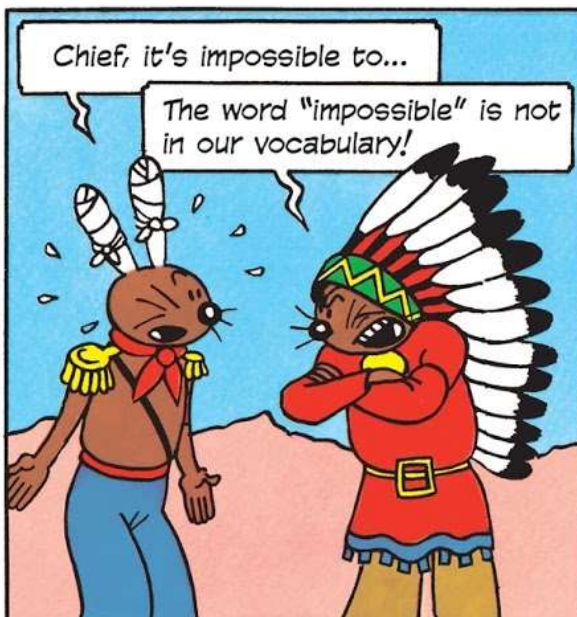
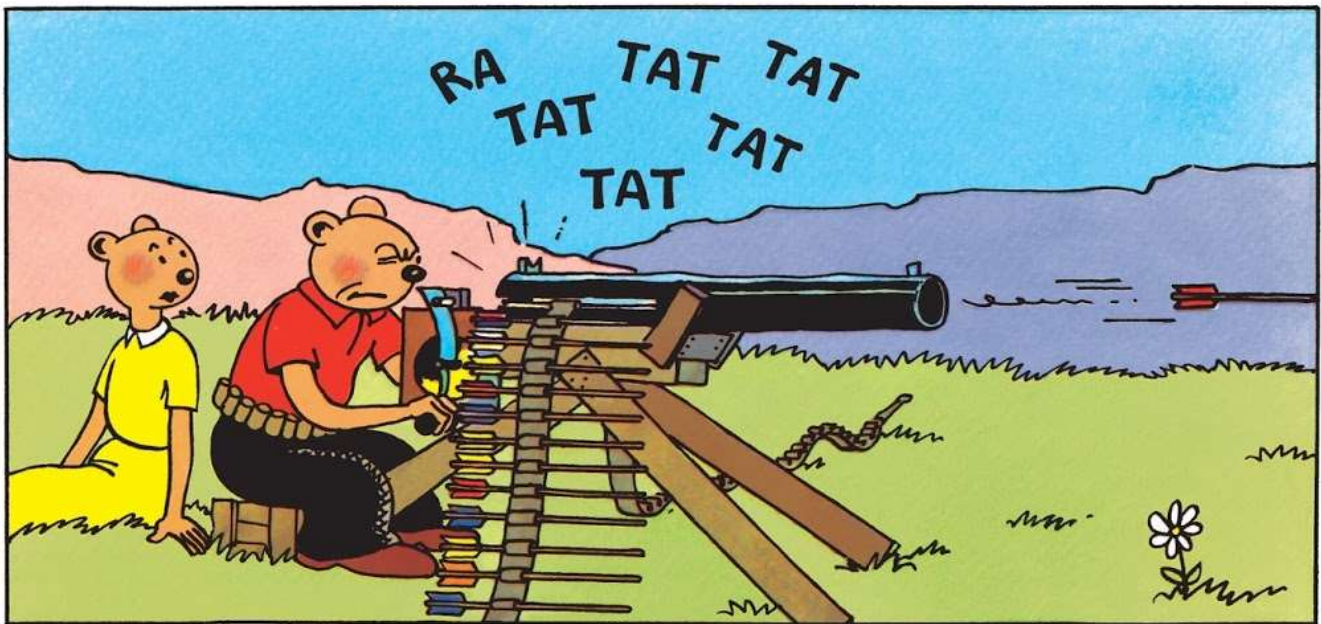




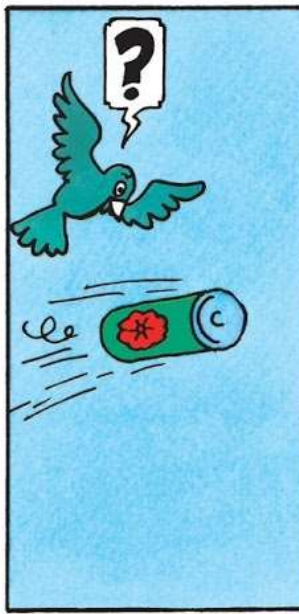




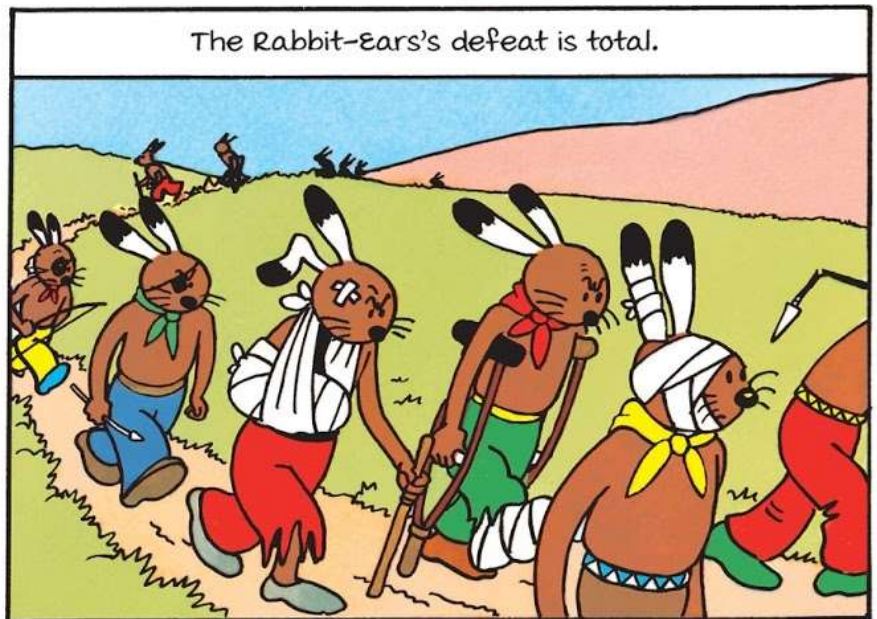




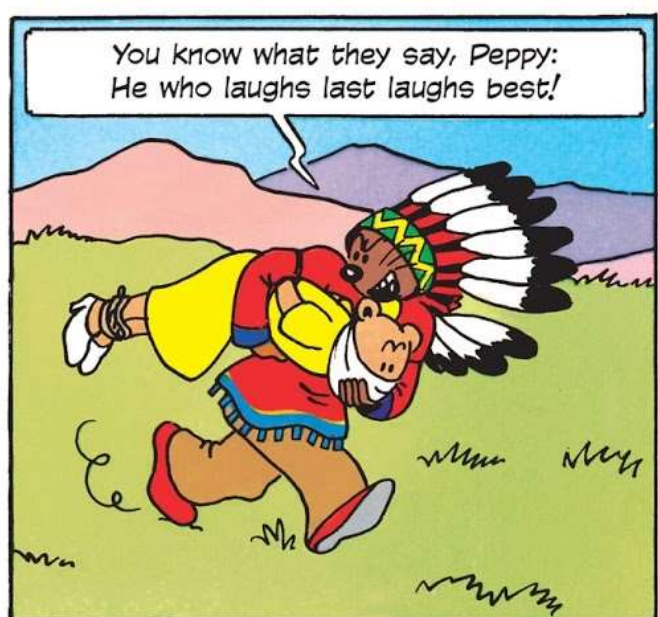
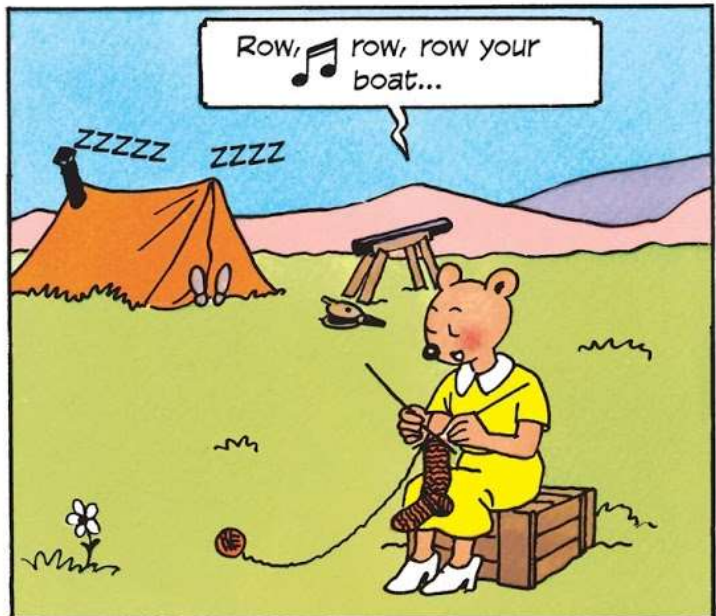








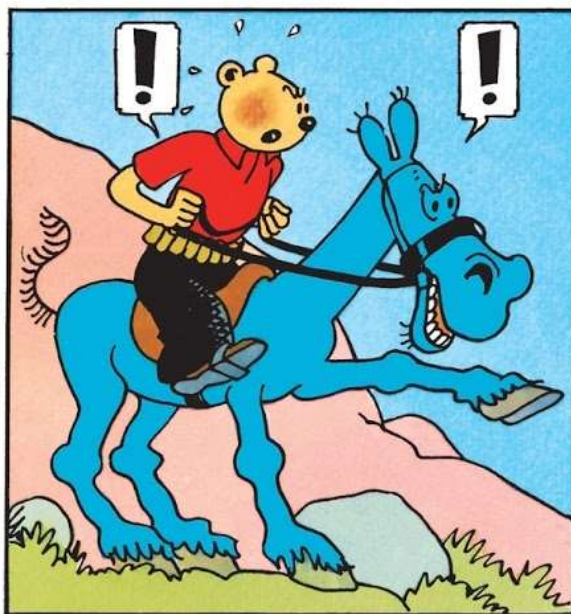
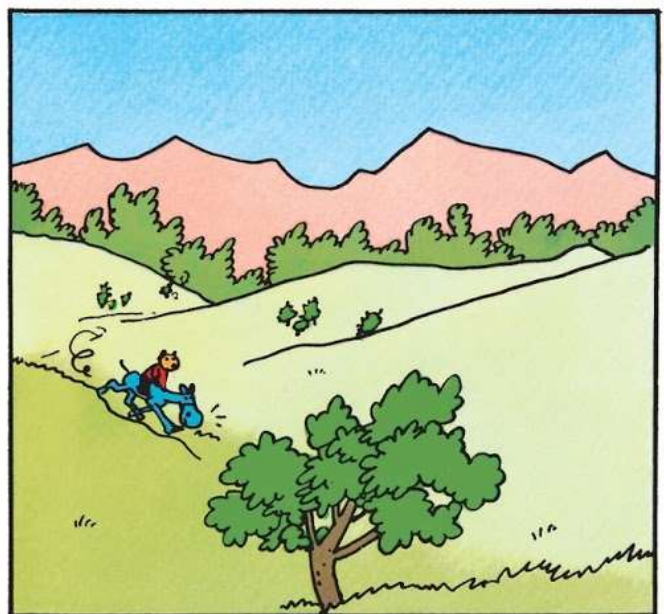
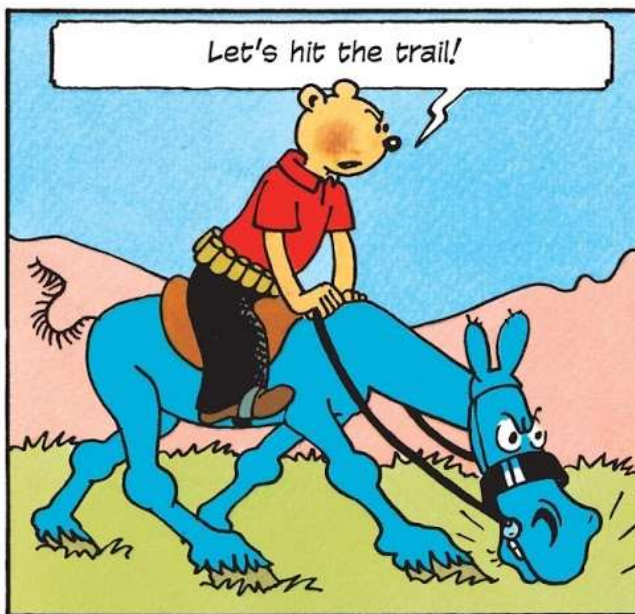
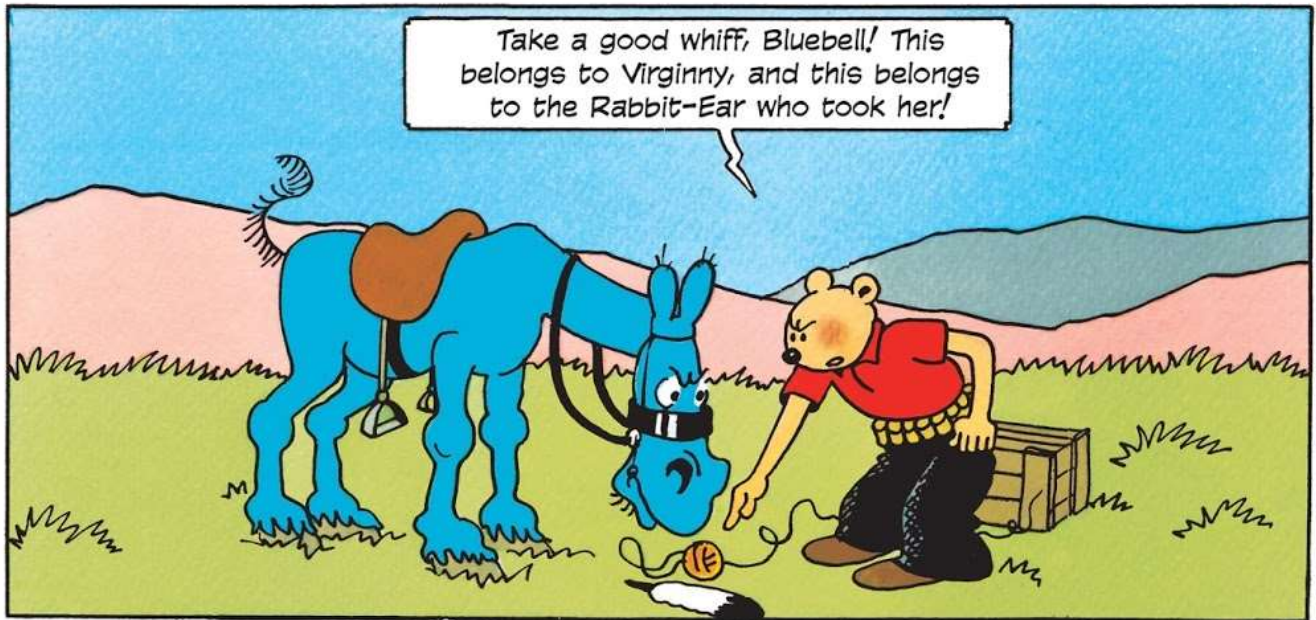




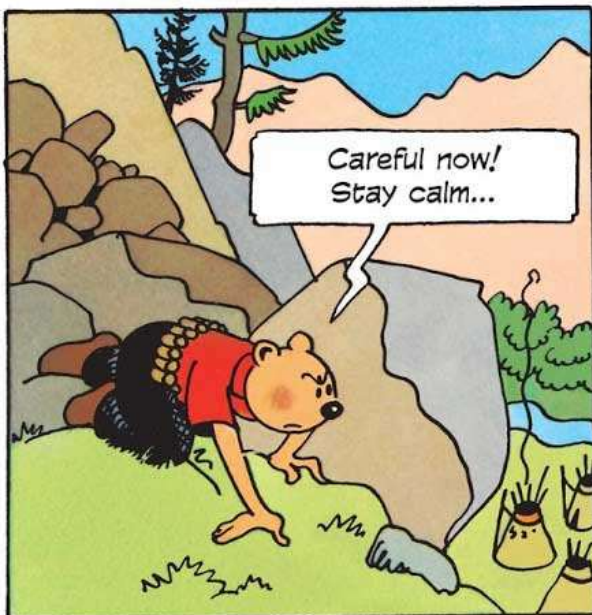
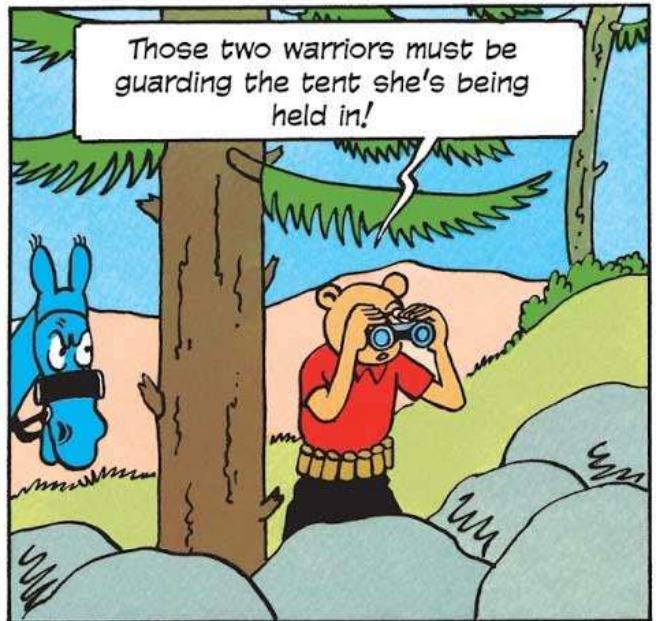
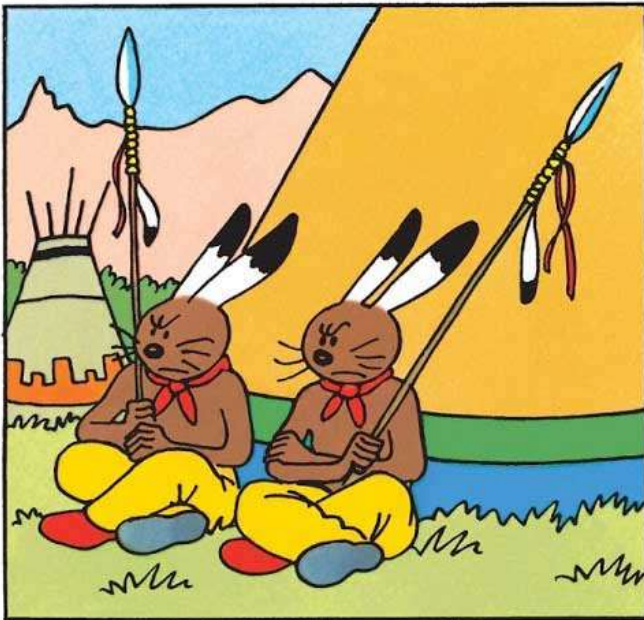




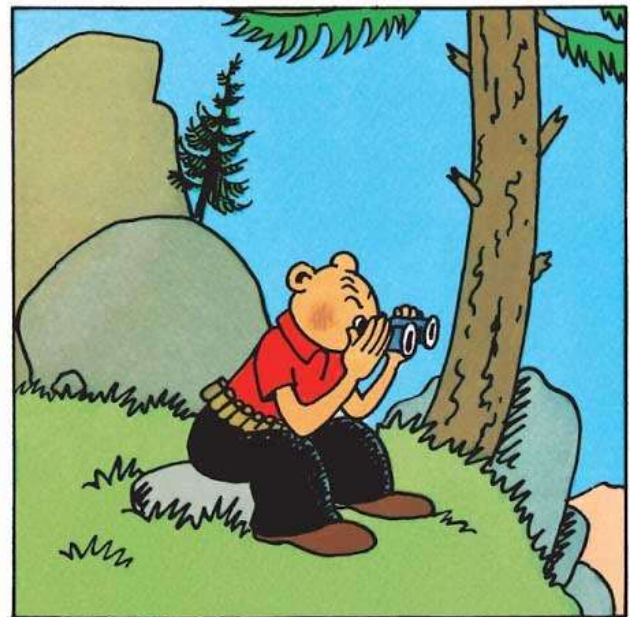
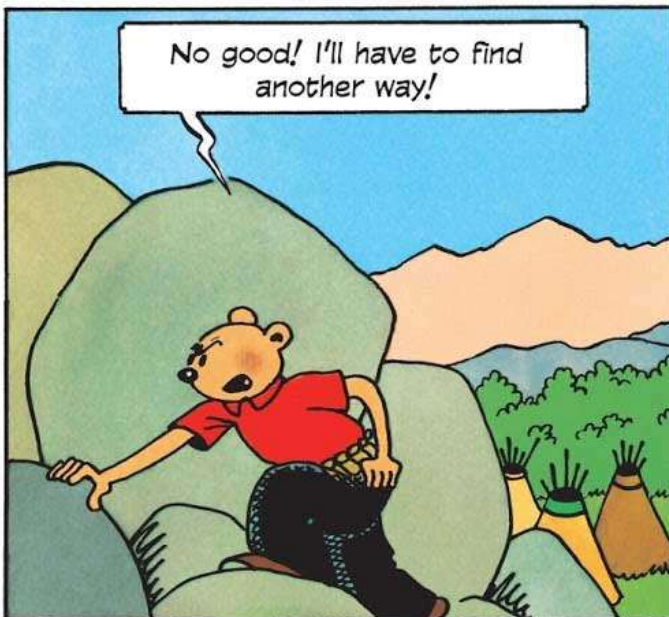








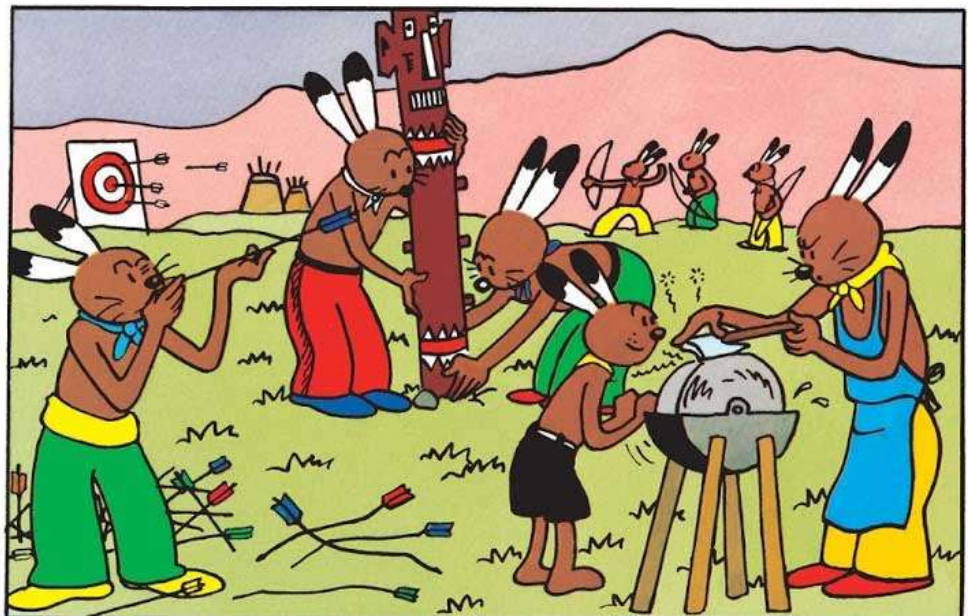
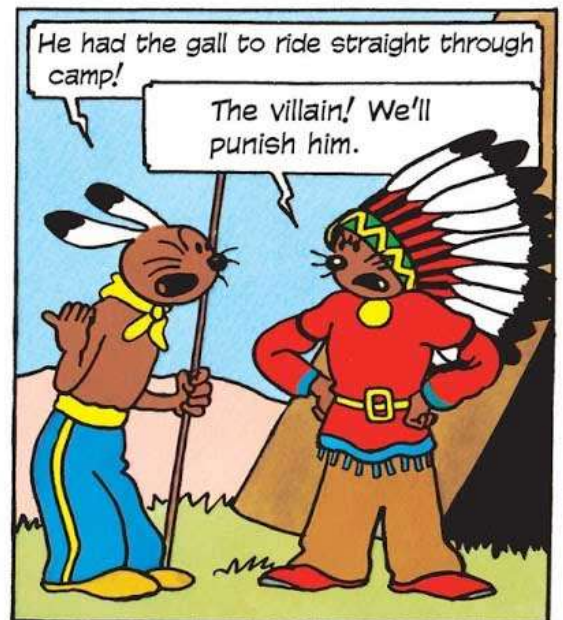
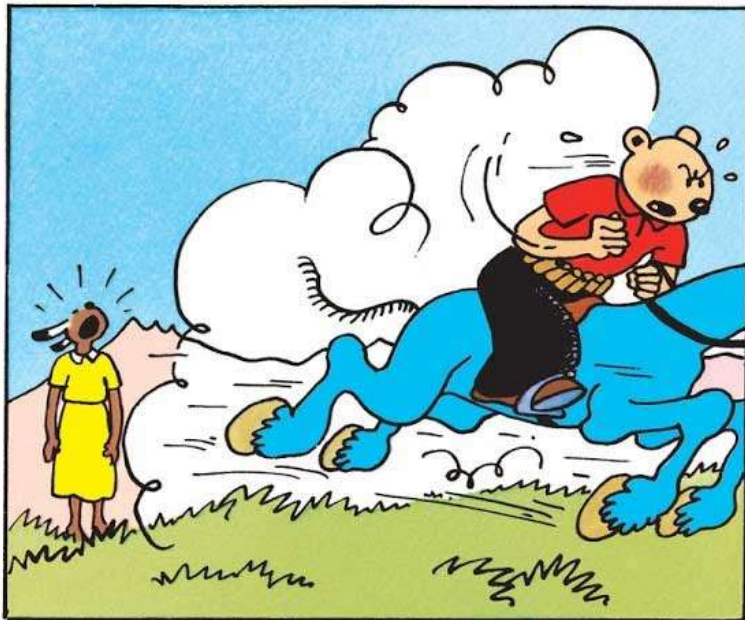
















Night falls and Peppy slips silently toward the Rabbit-Ears's camp...



where he begins his mysterious task.





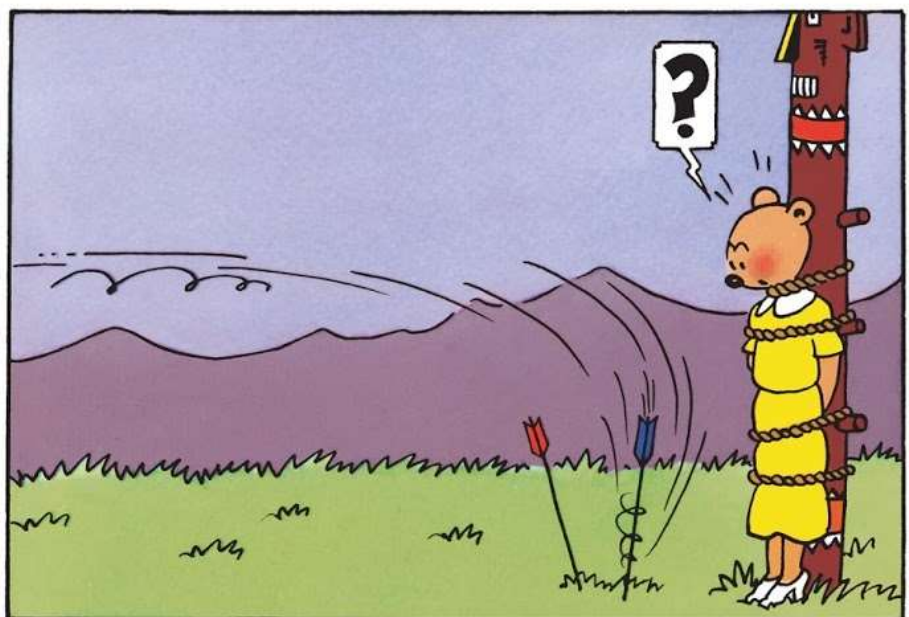
The next day,  
at daybreak...



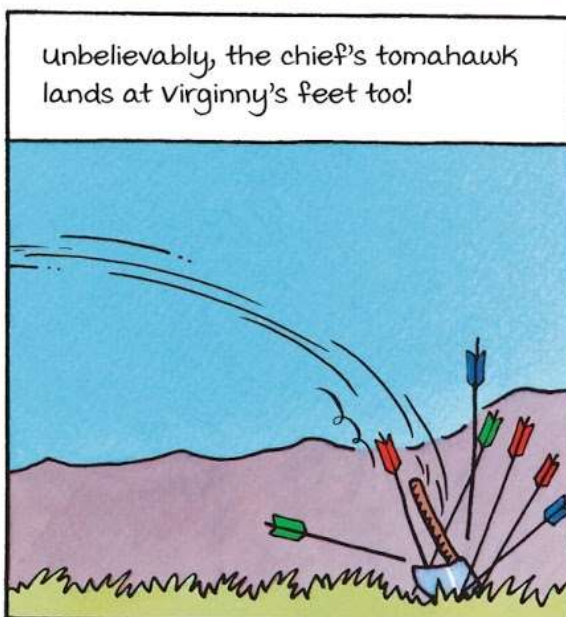
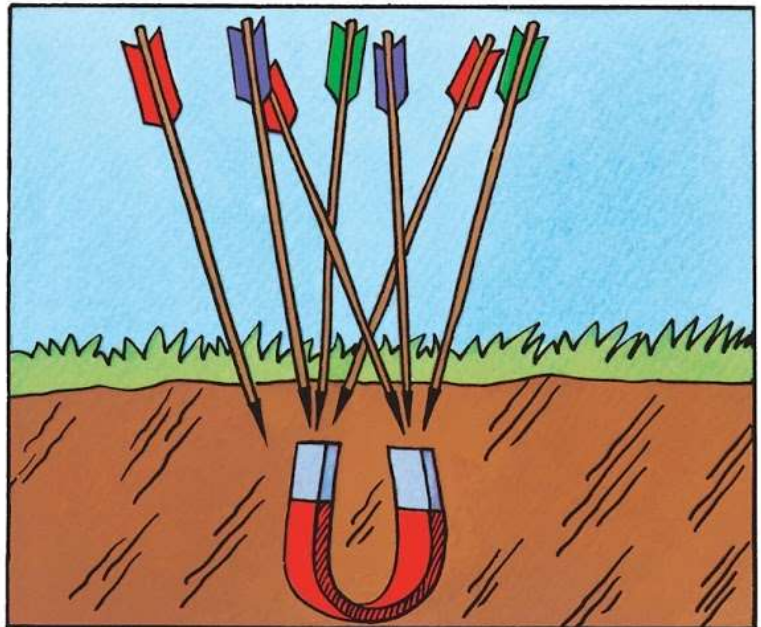
May my young warriors demonstrate their prowess!



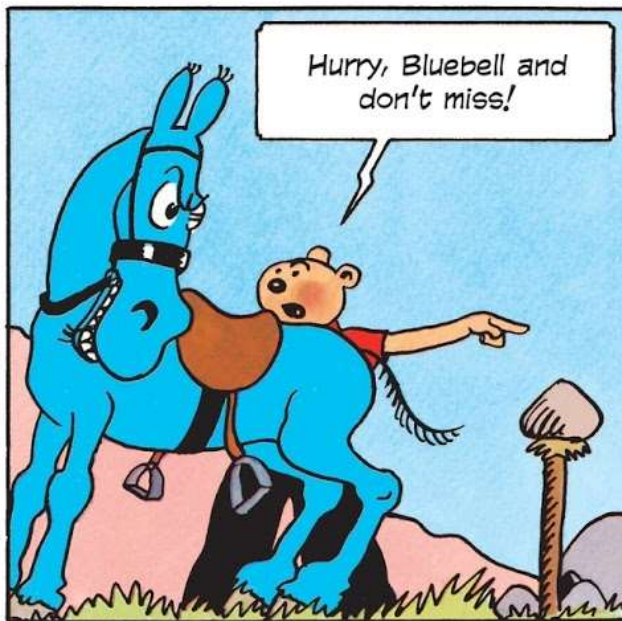
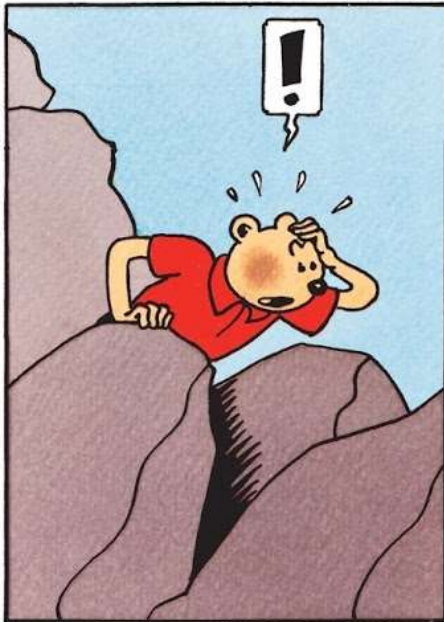
I don't get it!



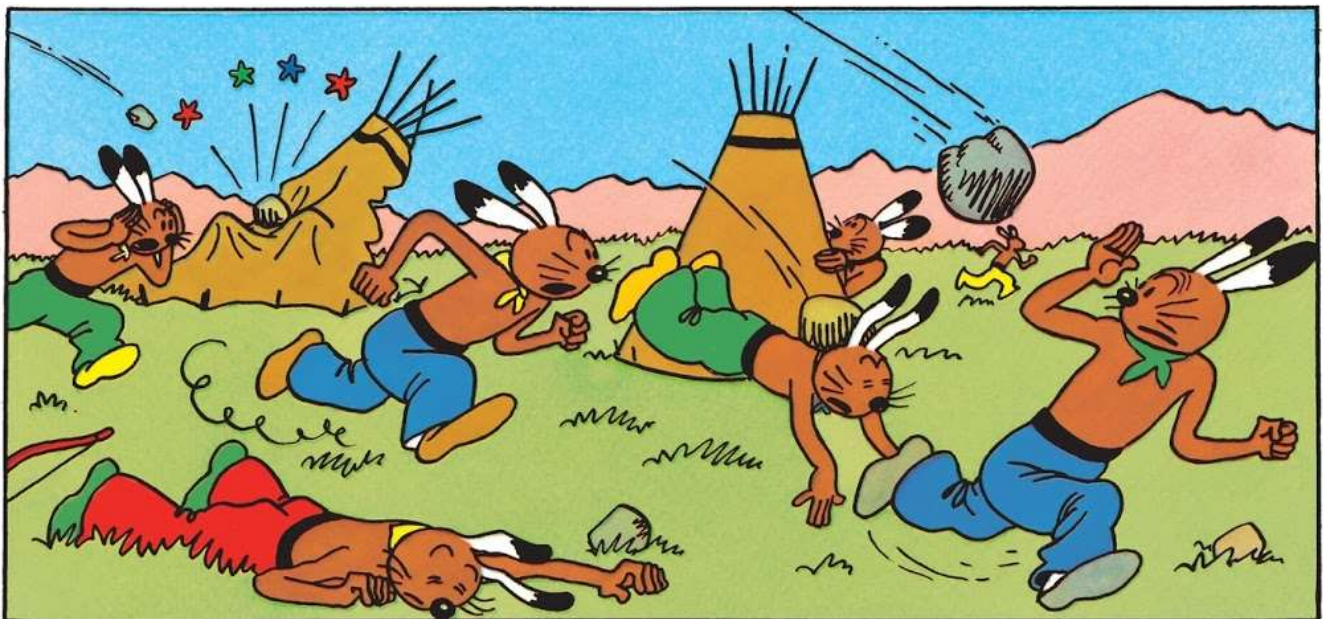
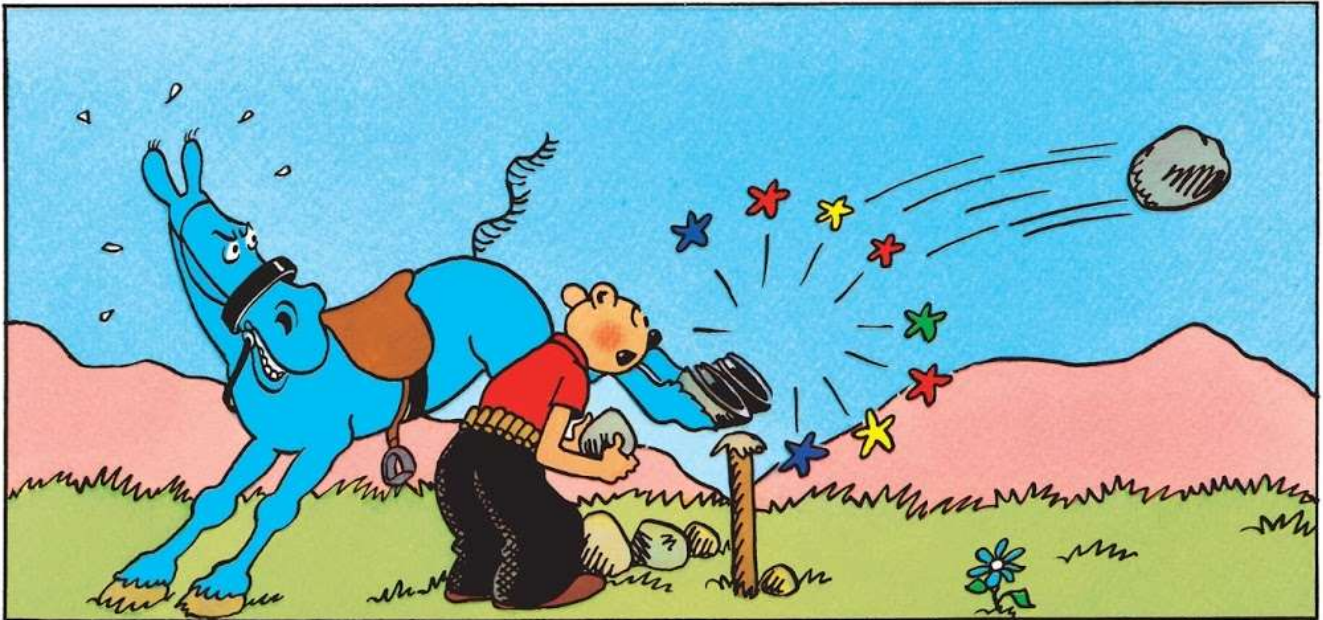




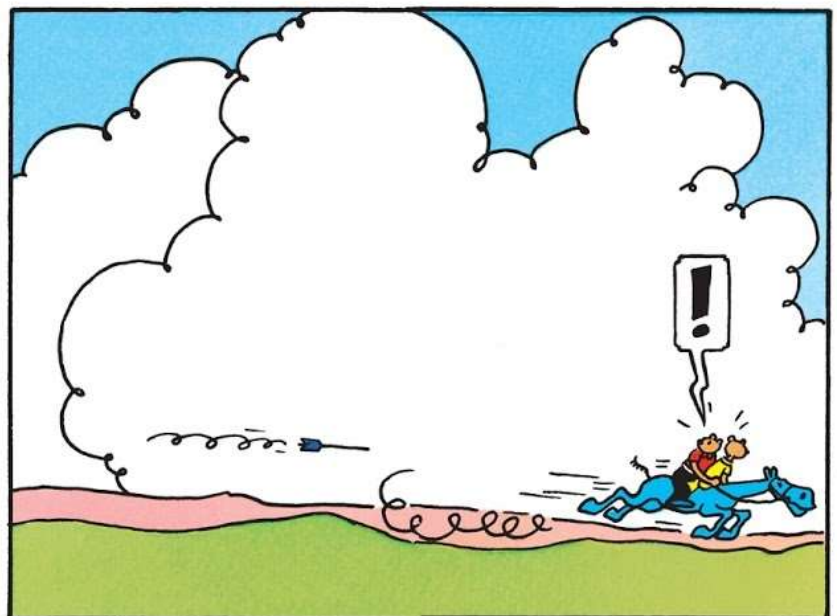




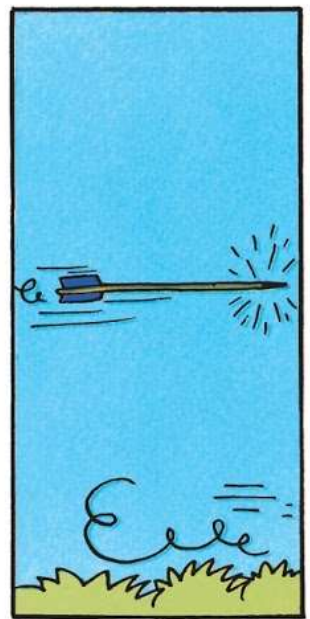
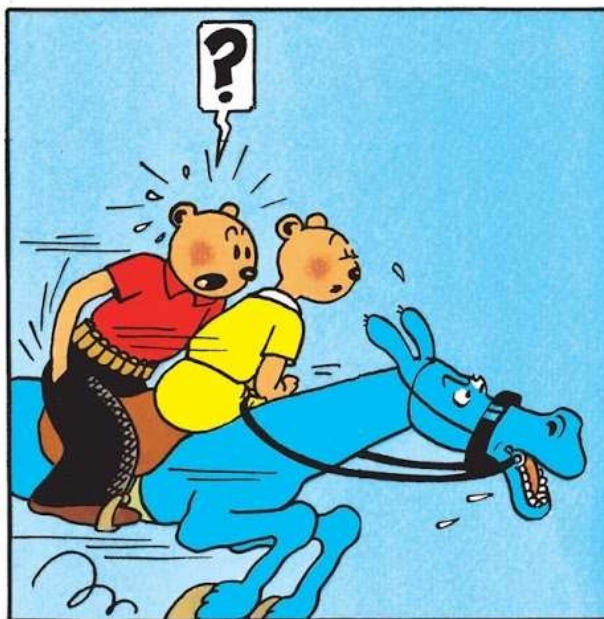








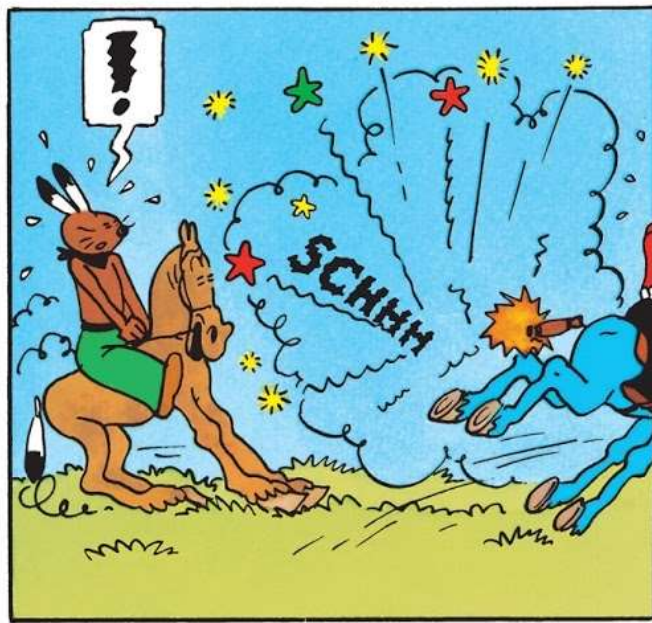
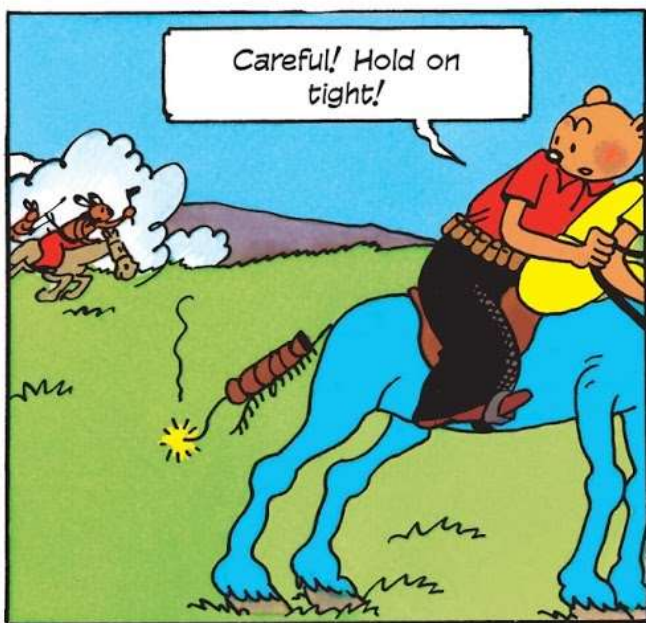




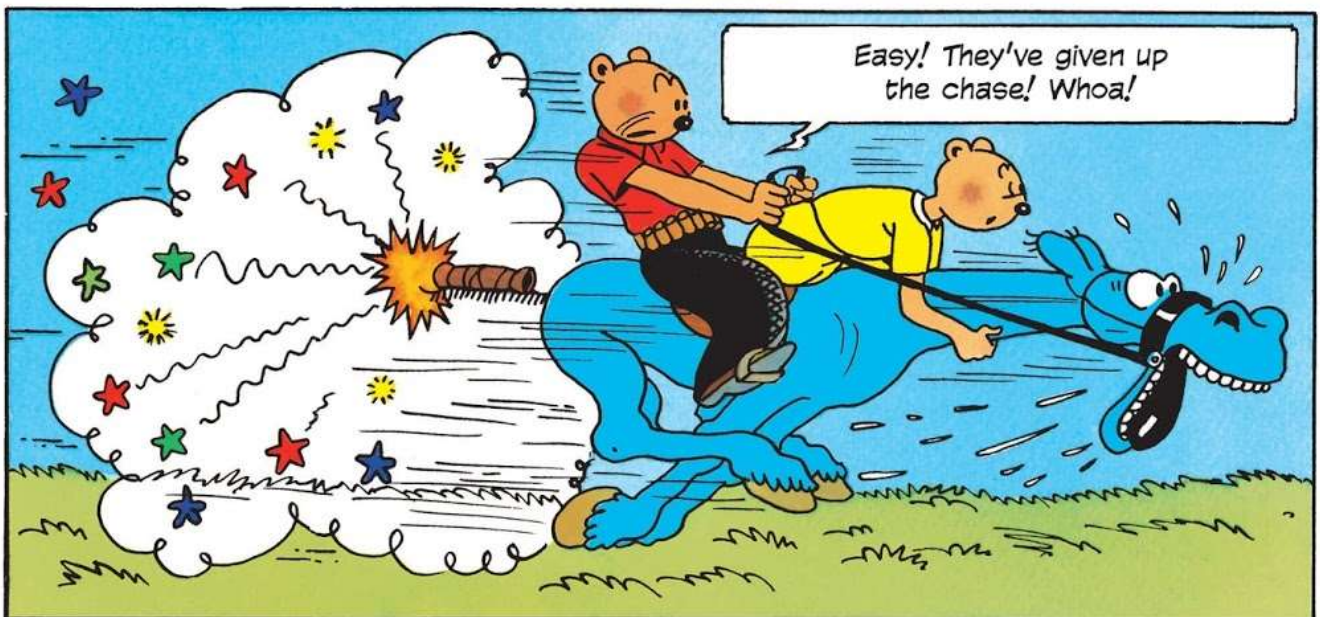
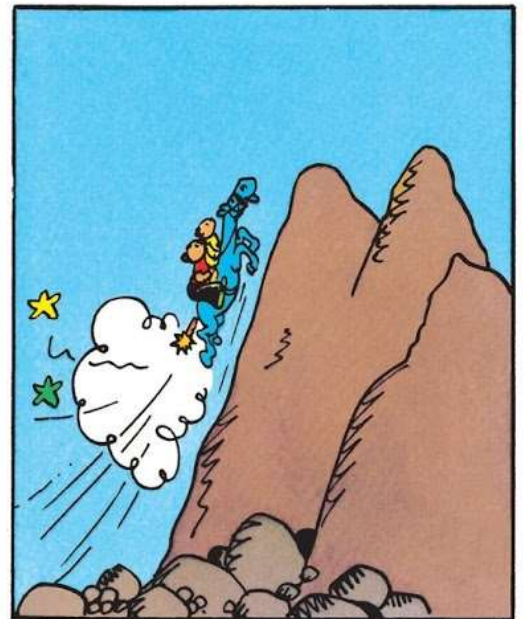
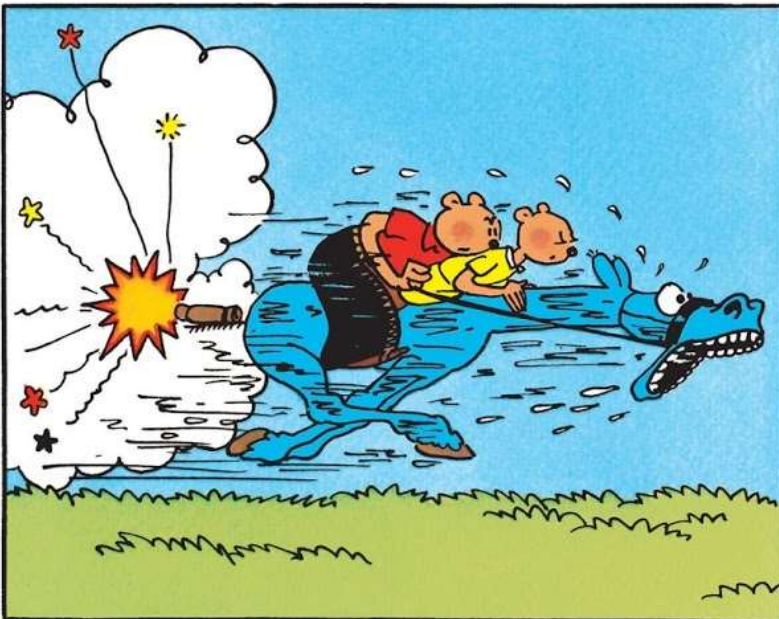
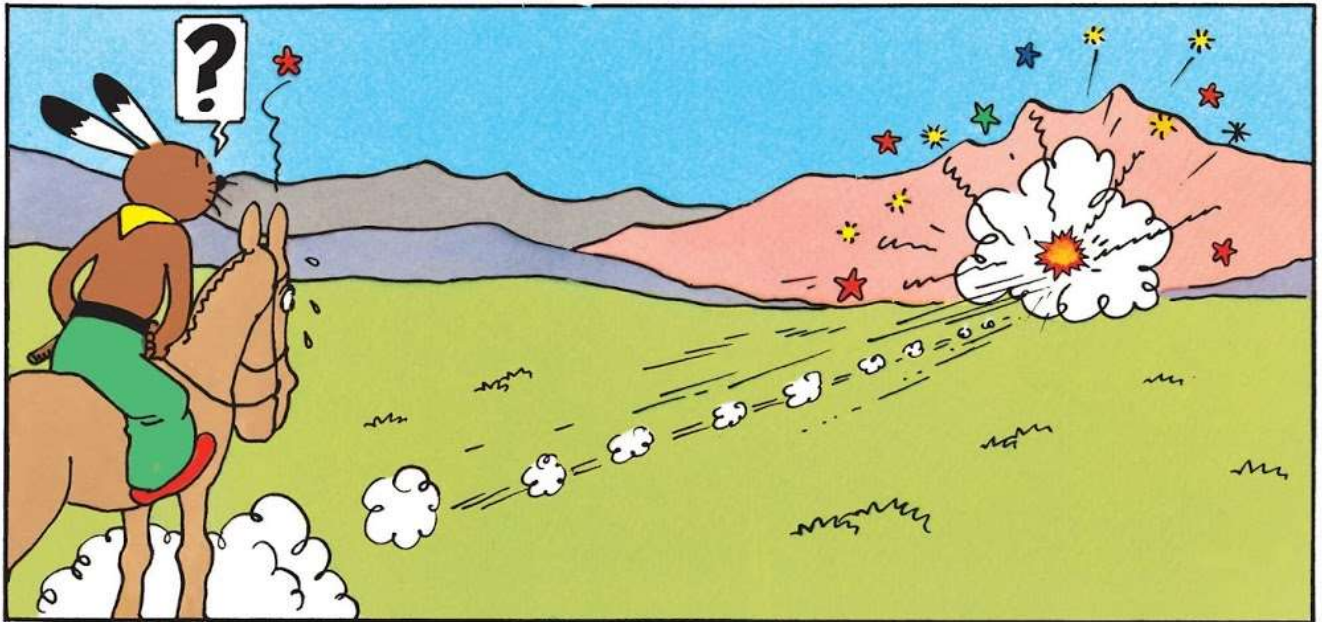




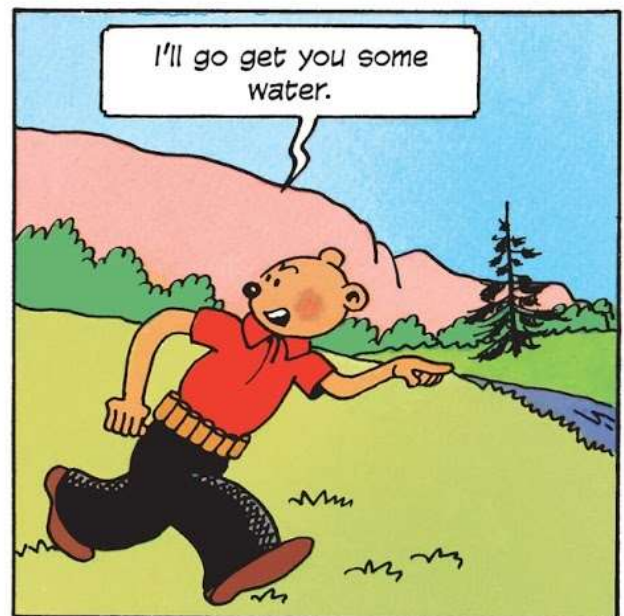
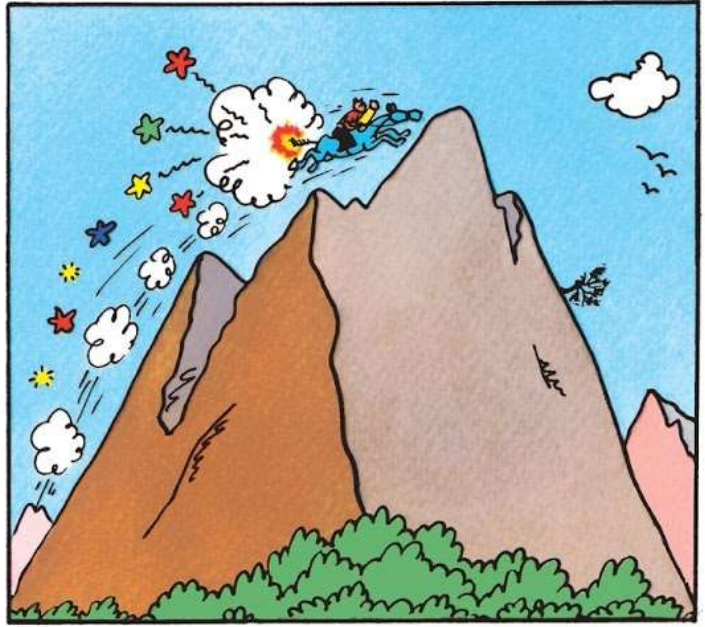
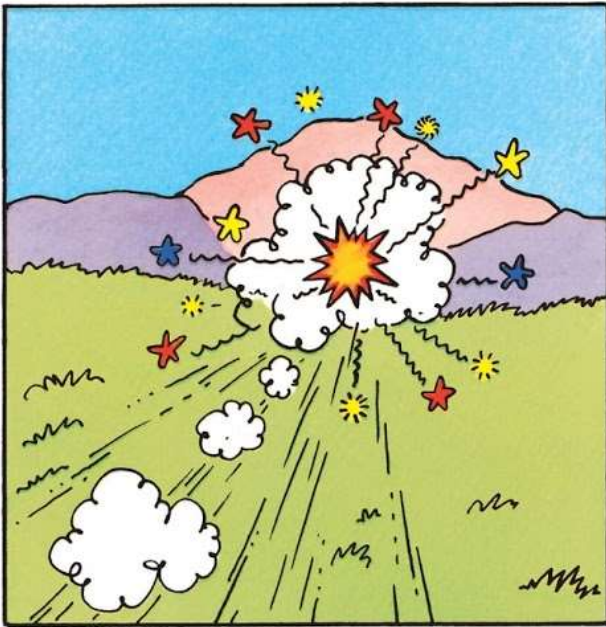








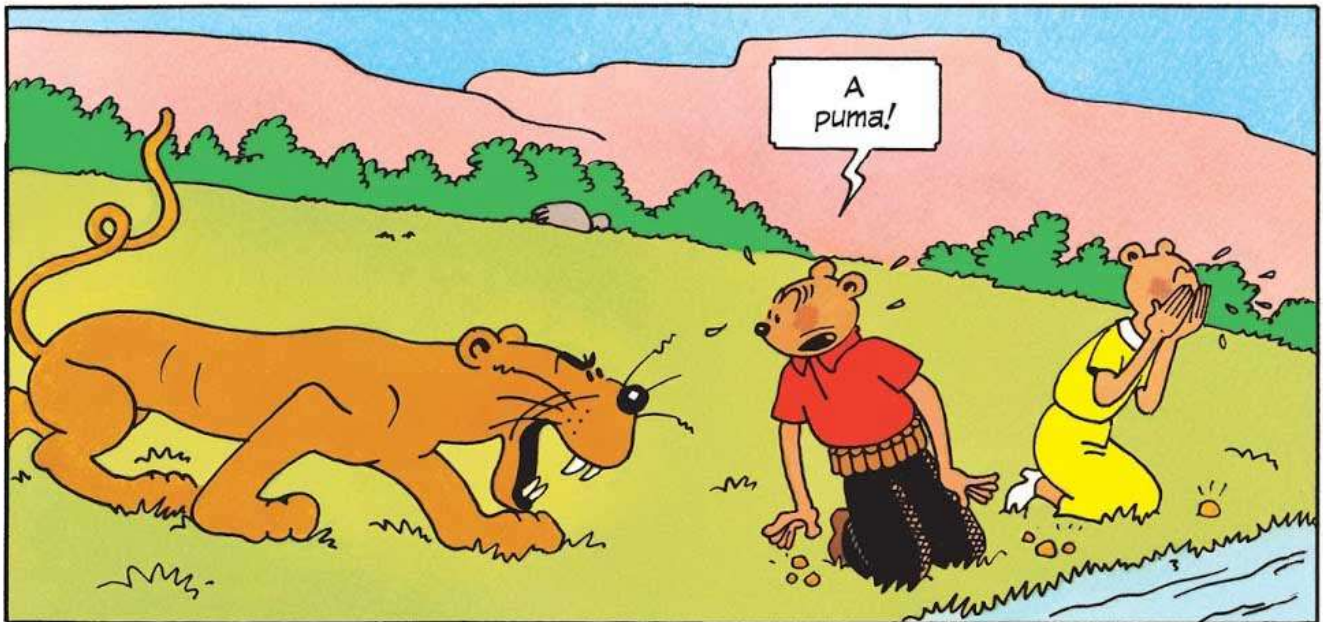




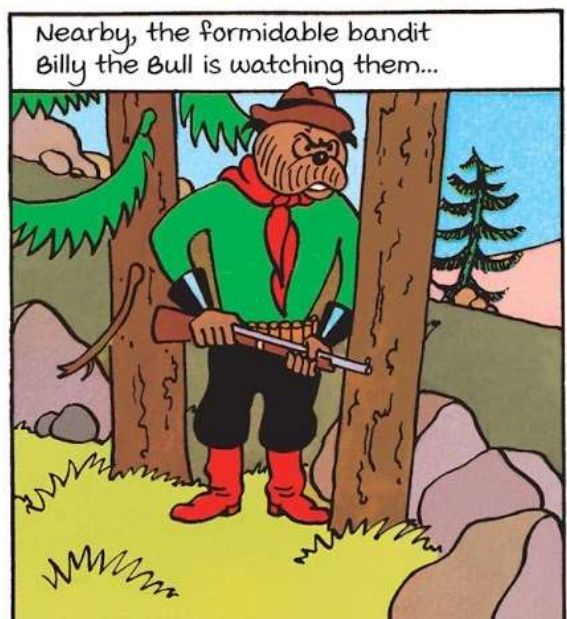














Loaded with gold,  
Peppy and Virginny  
happily get back on  
the road home.



Tra la la la la la la la la



There they are!  
Easy, now!



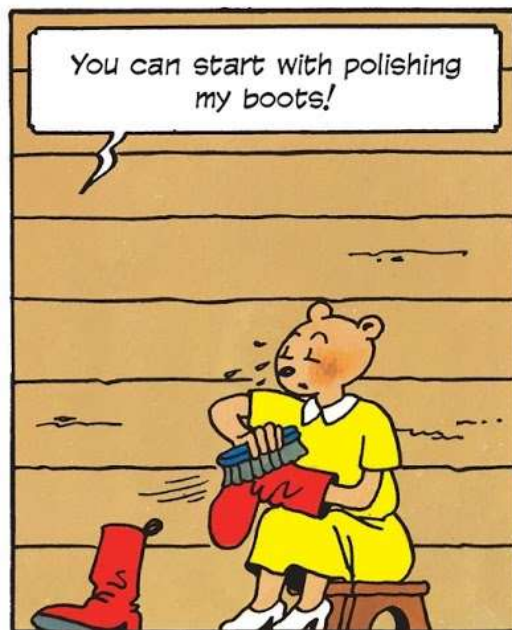
Hands up!



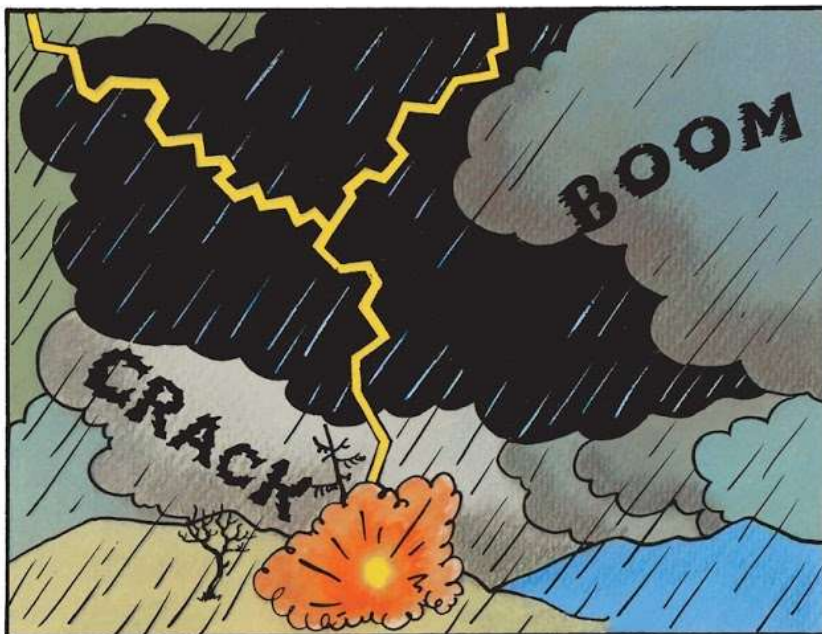
Let's go.



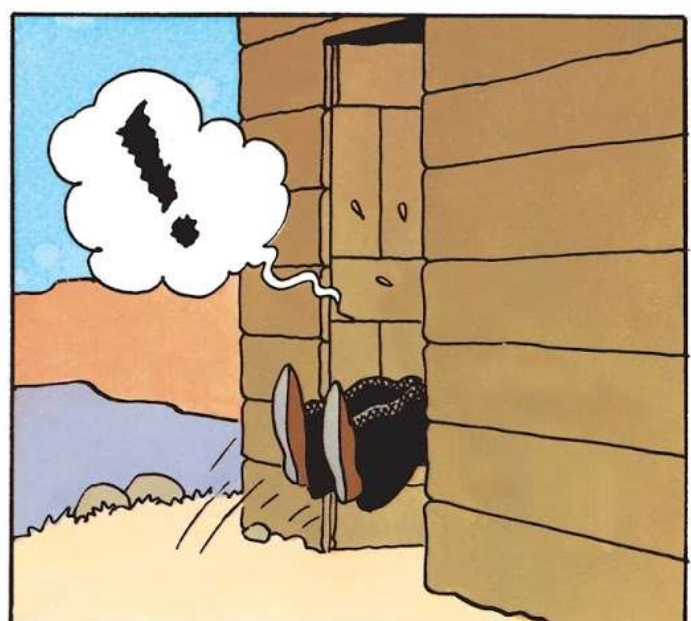
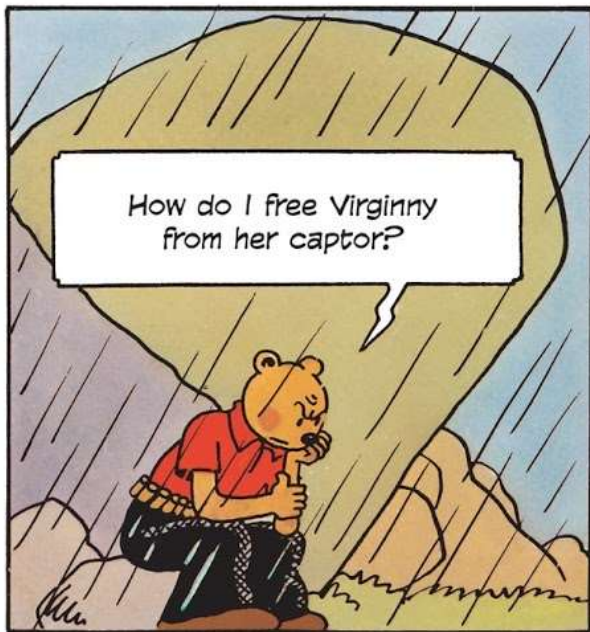




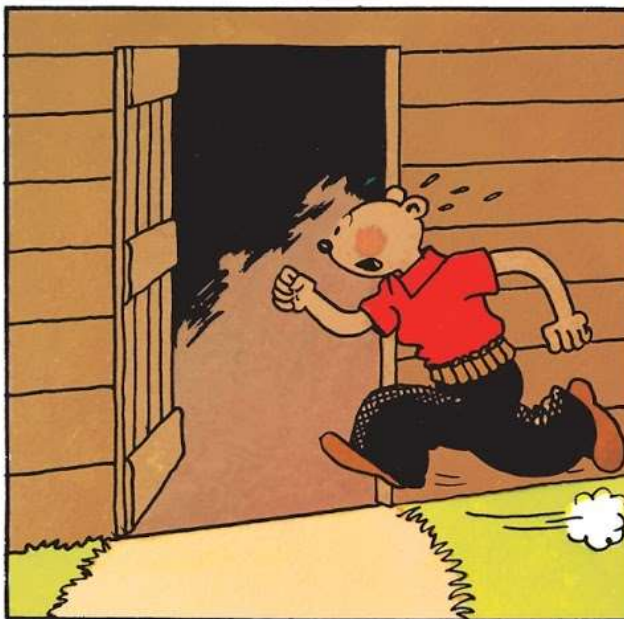
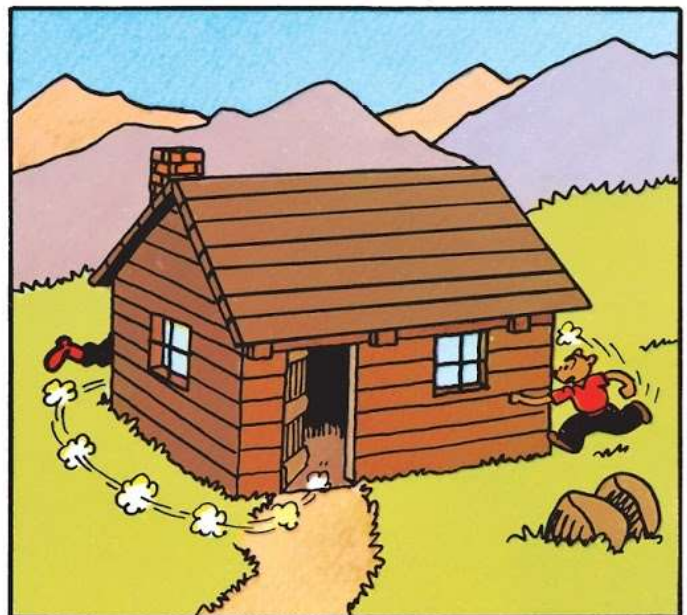
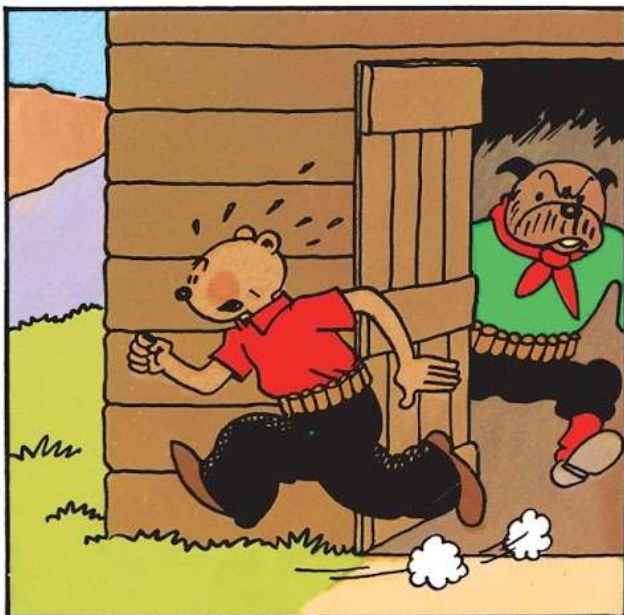




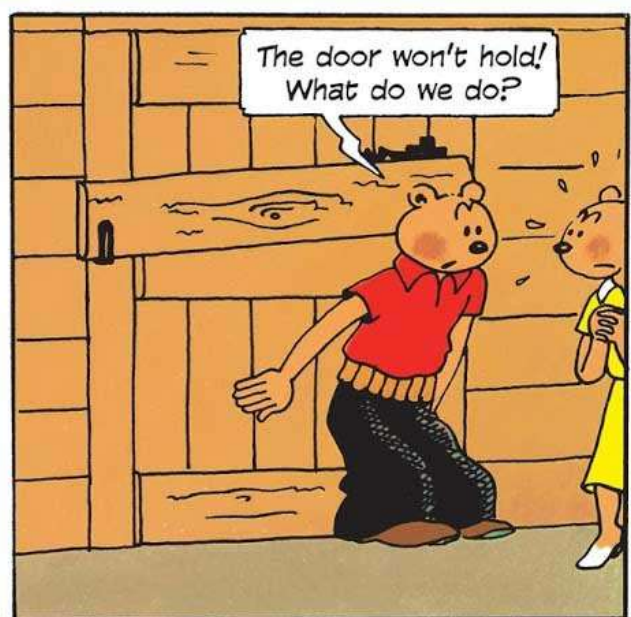
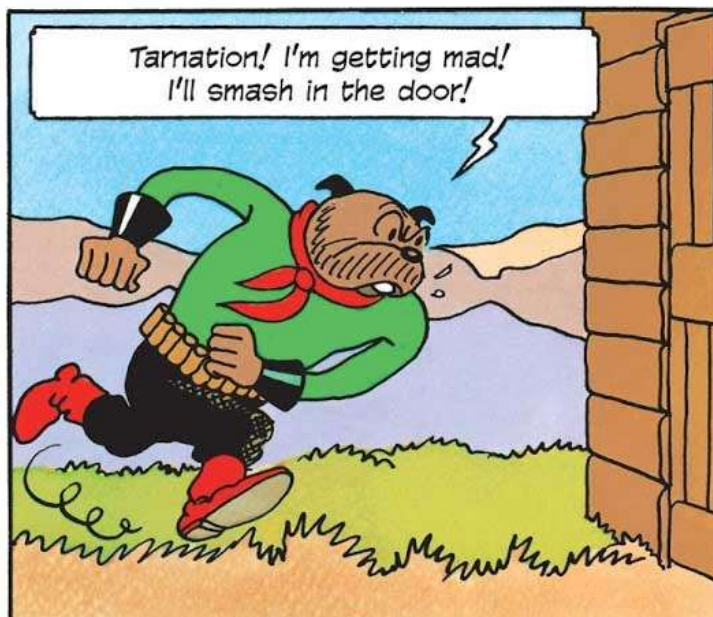
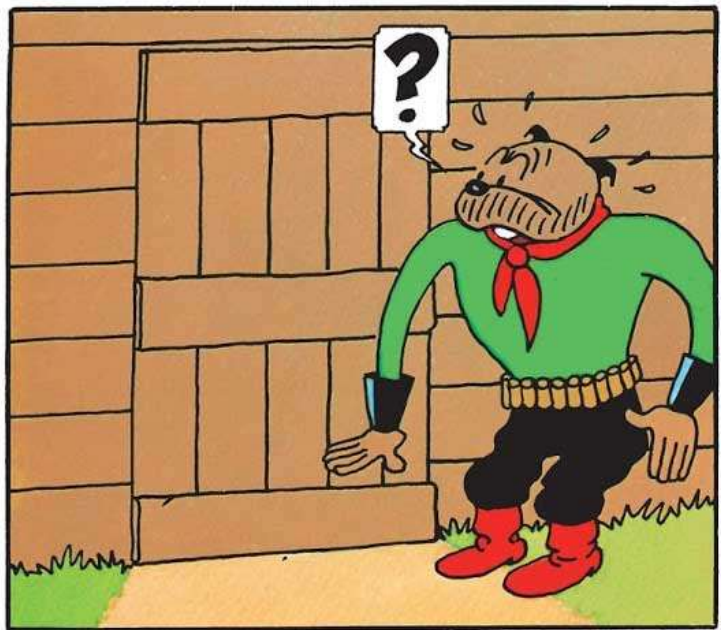








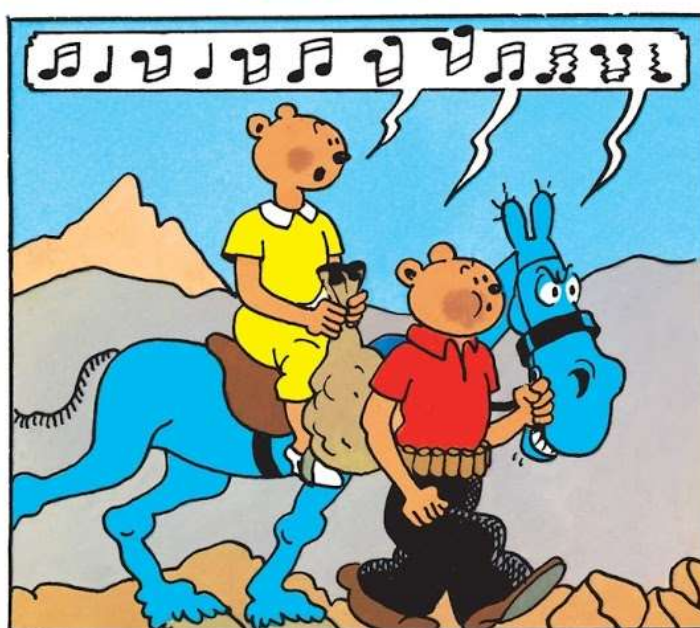




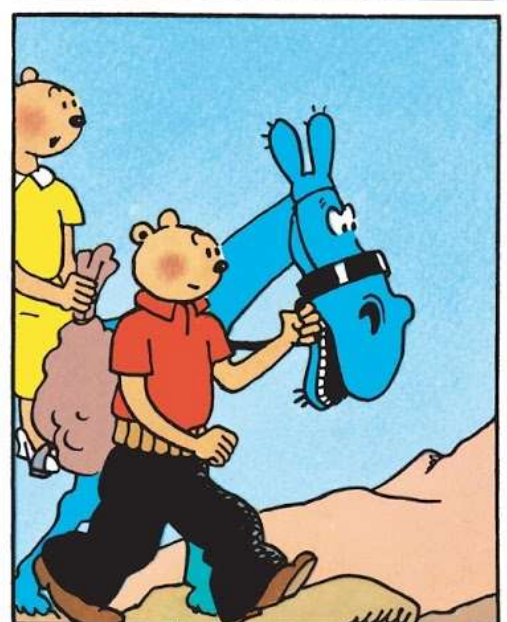
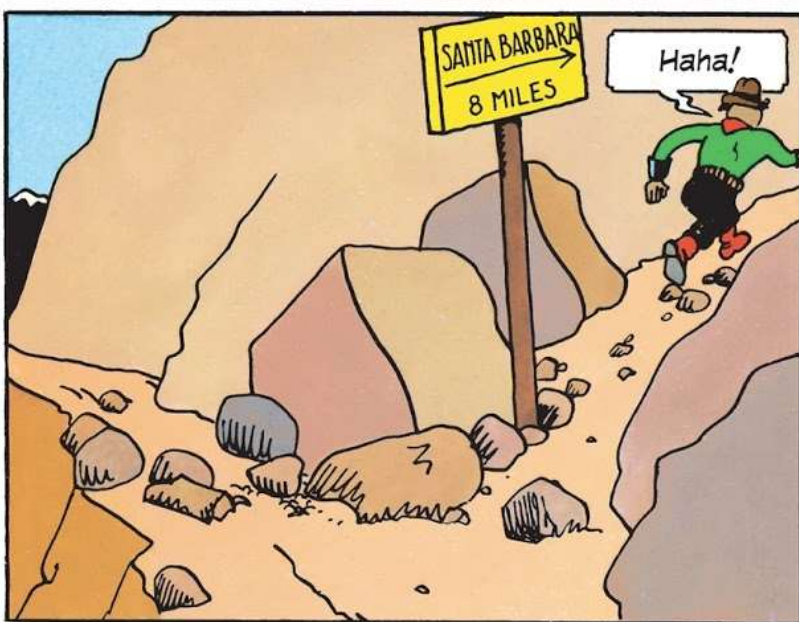
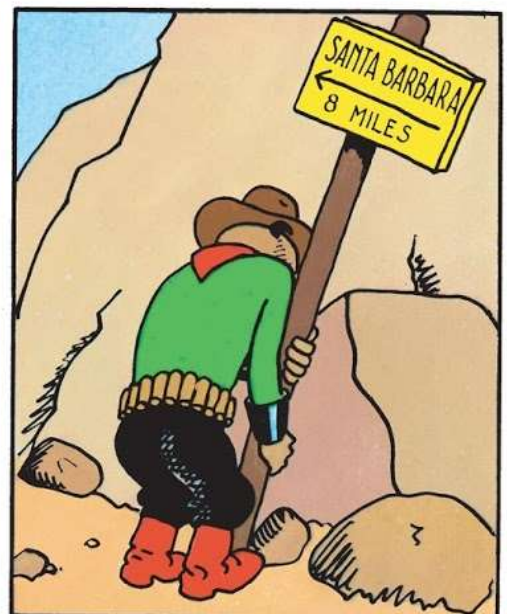
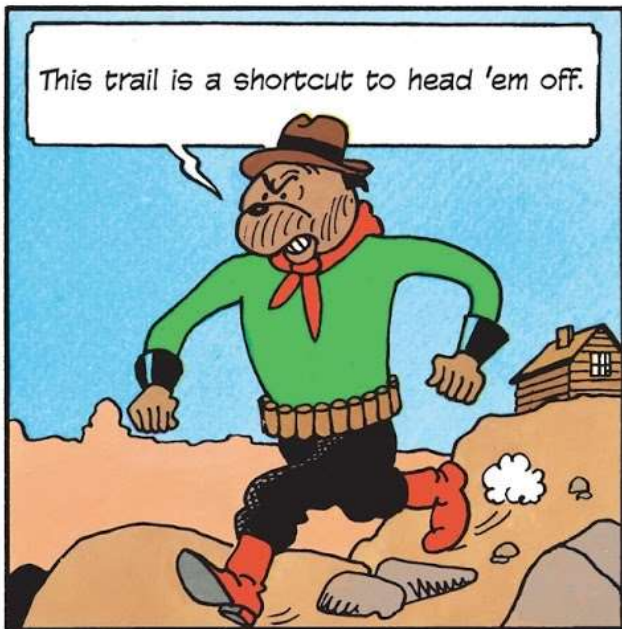




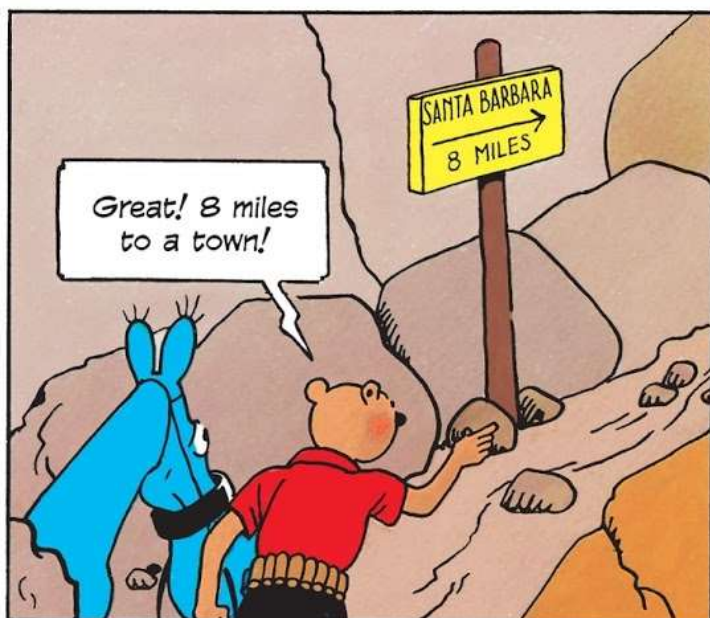




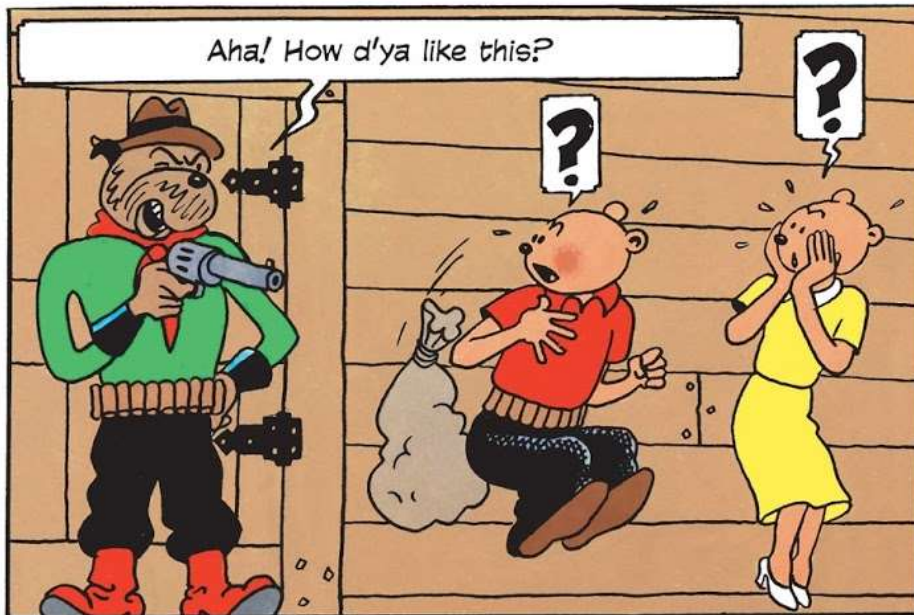




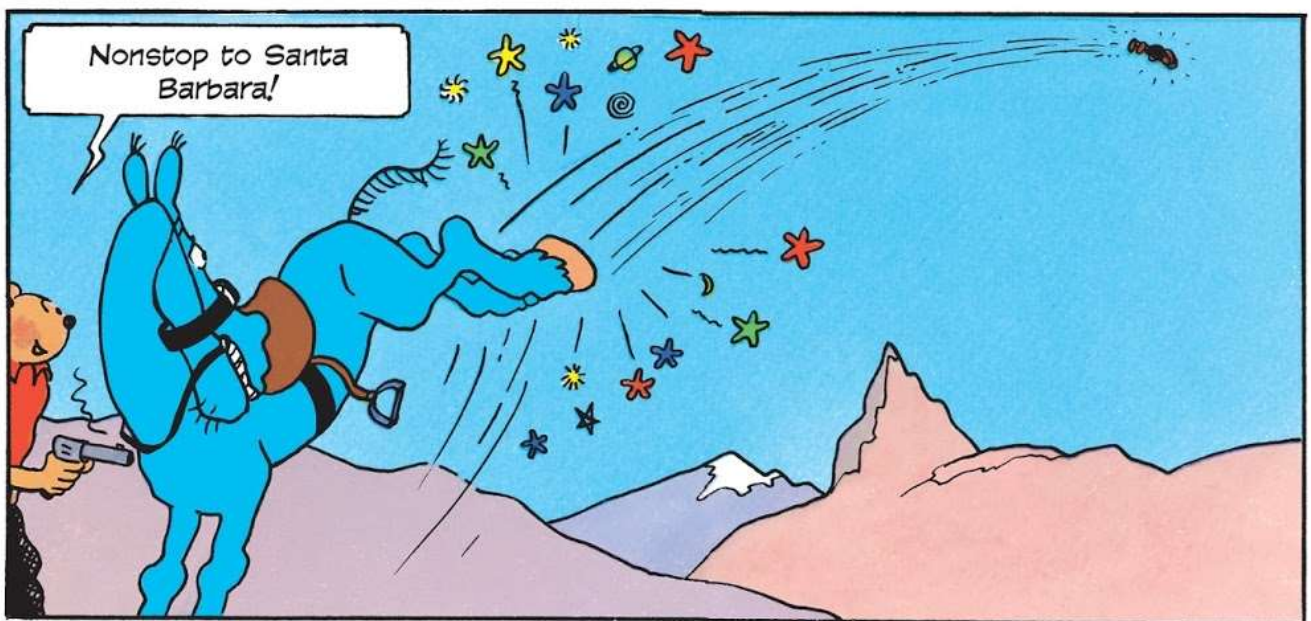
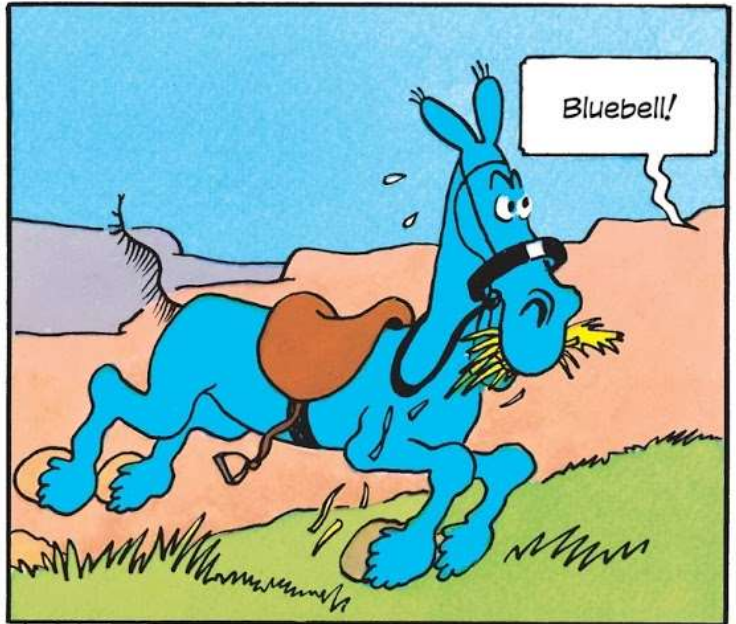




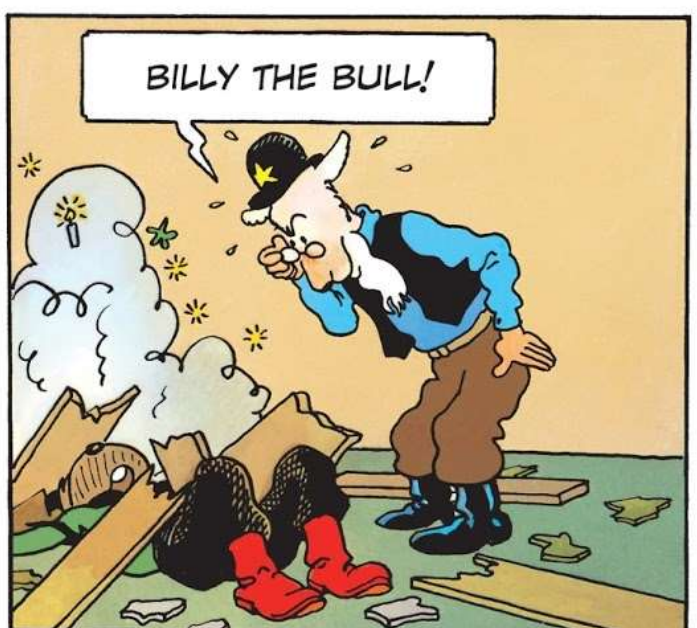
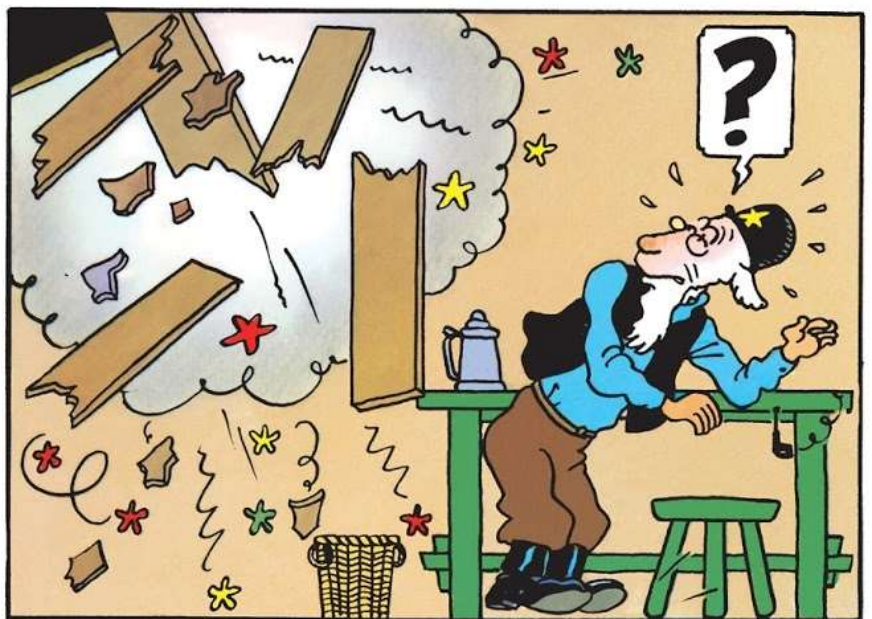
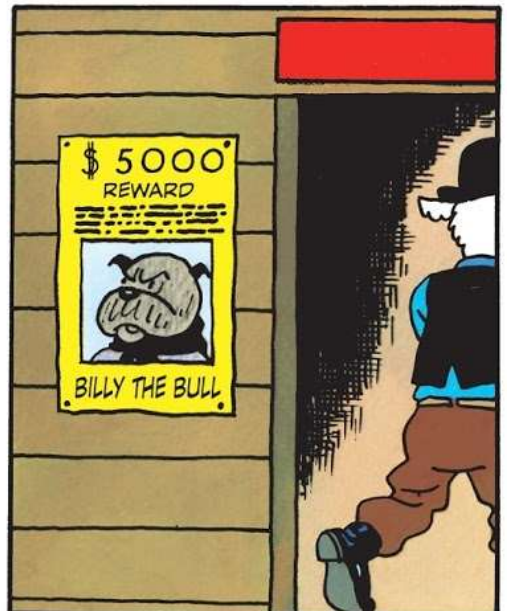
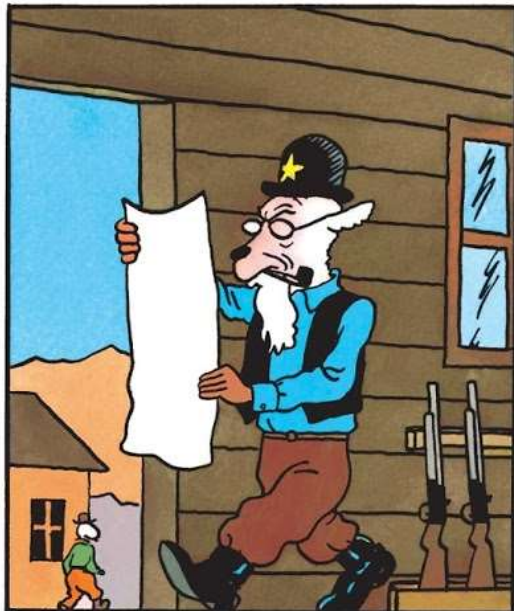




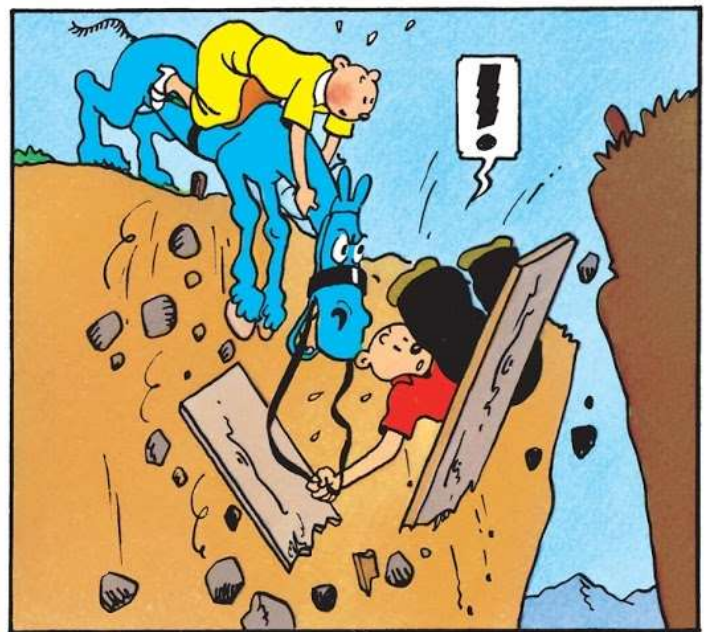
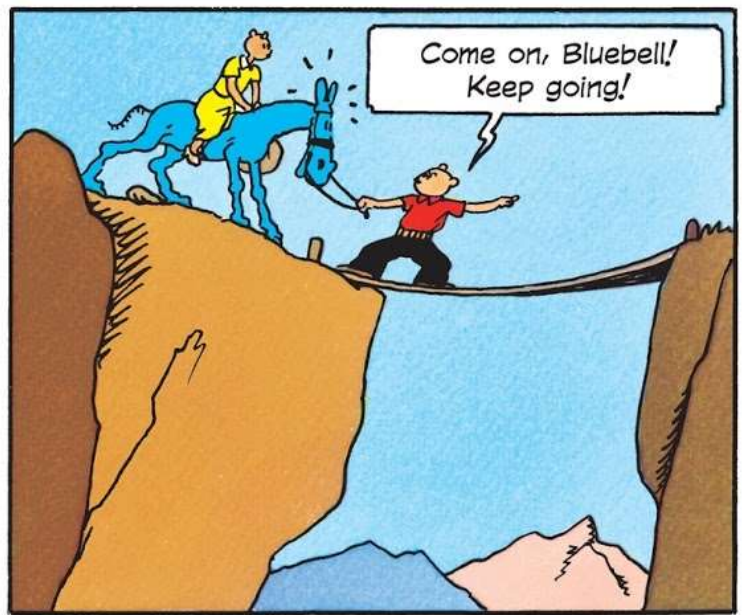
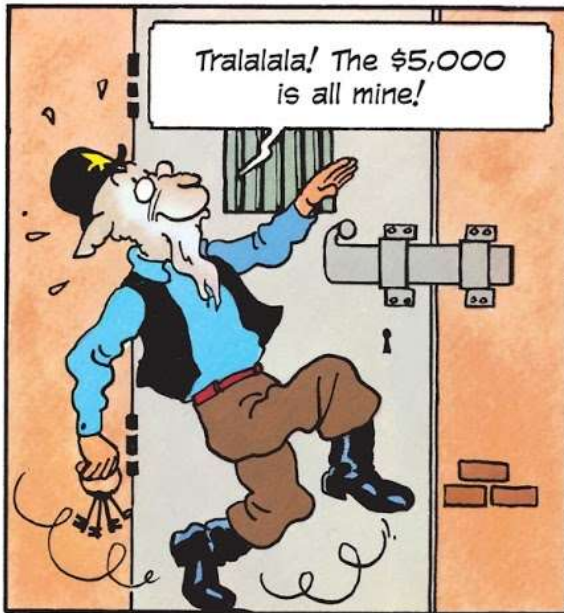




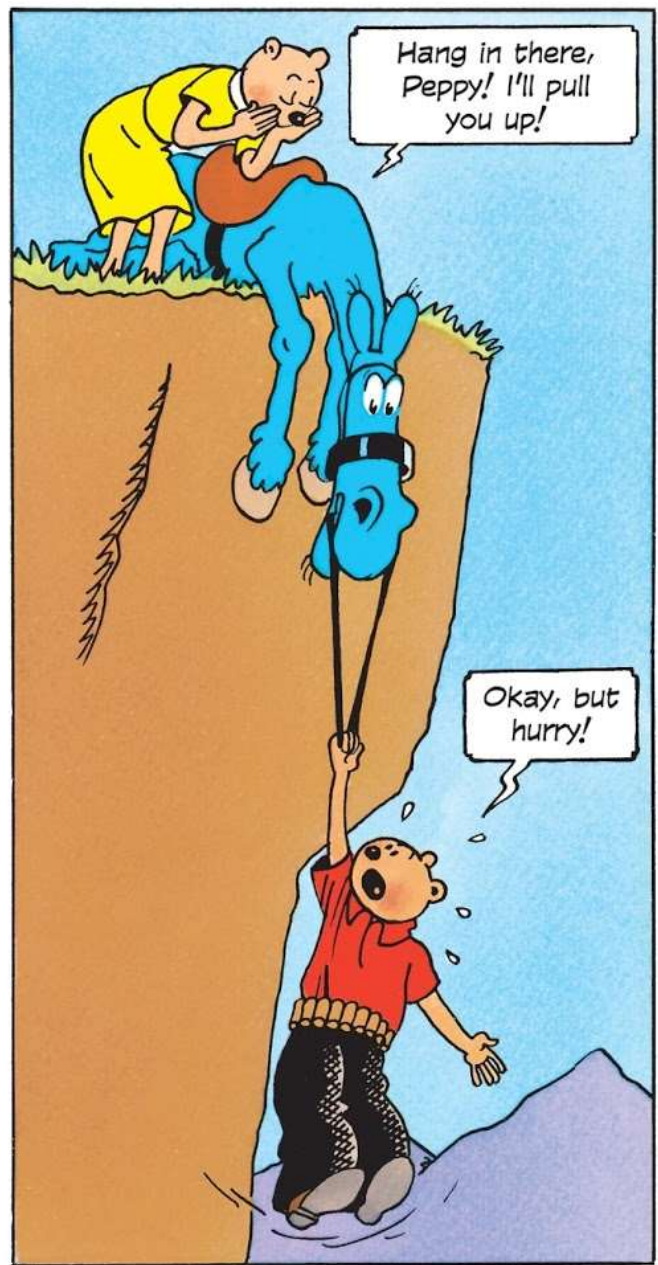
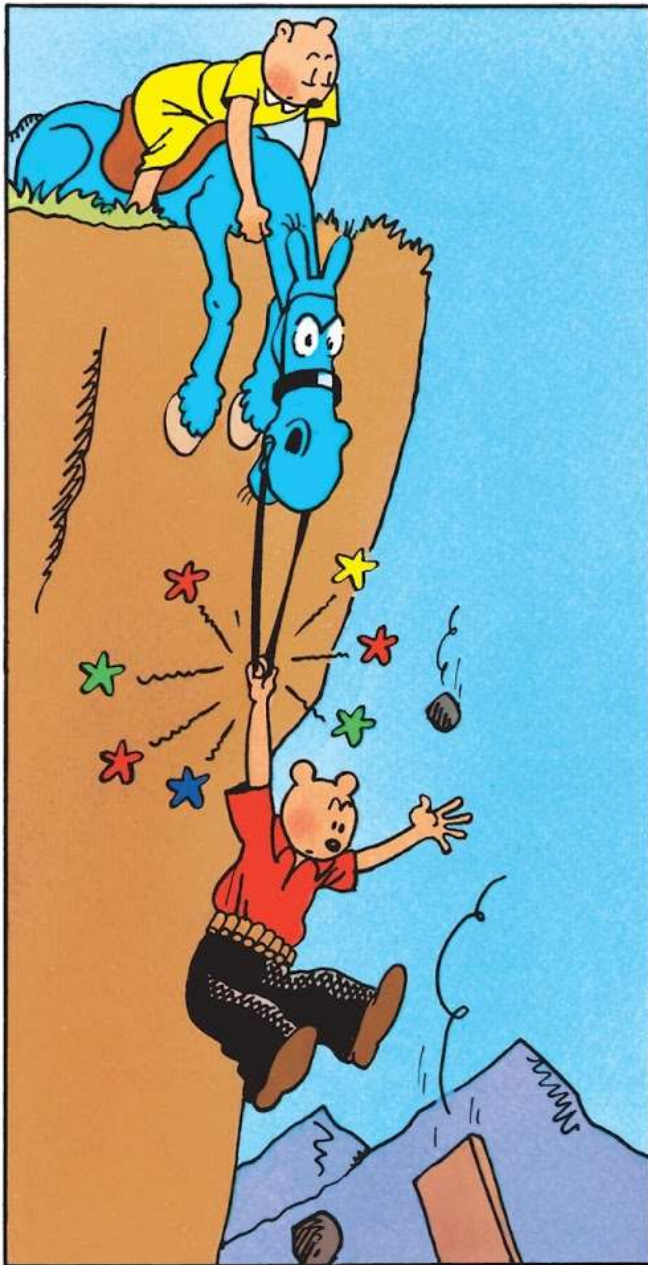




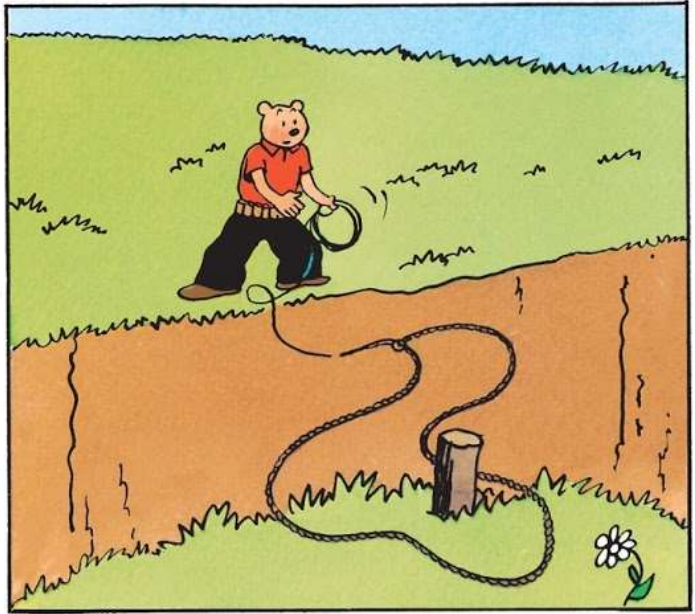
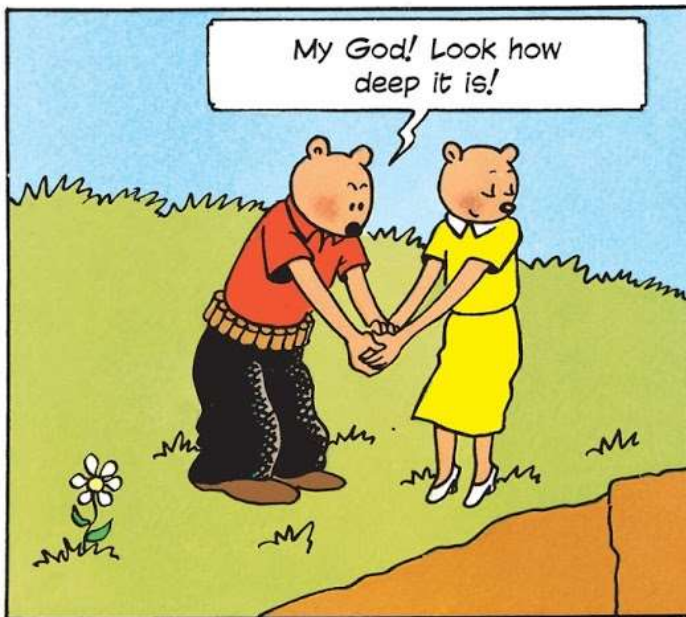
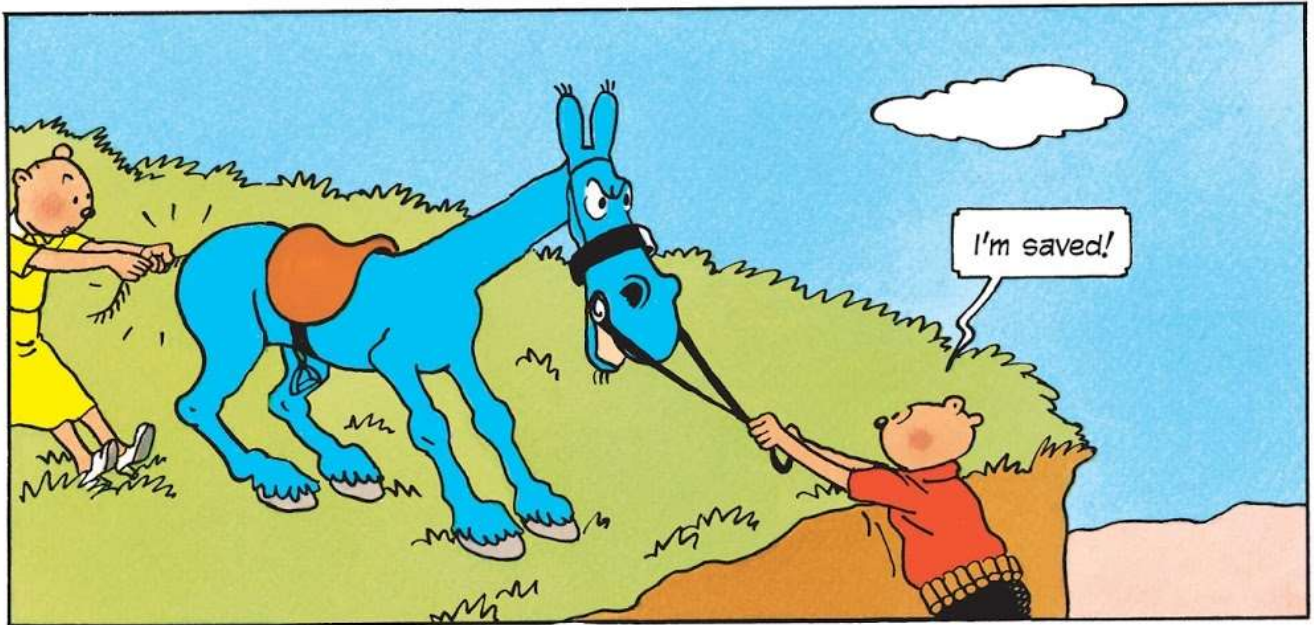




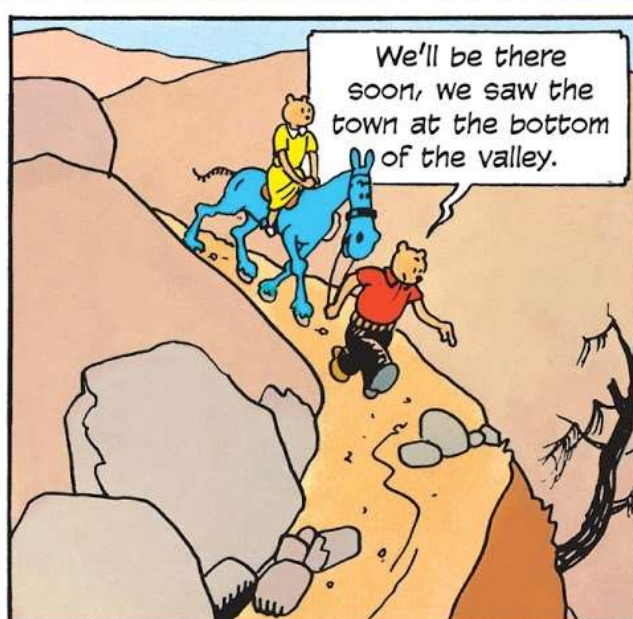




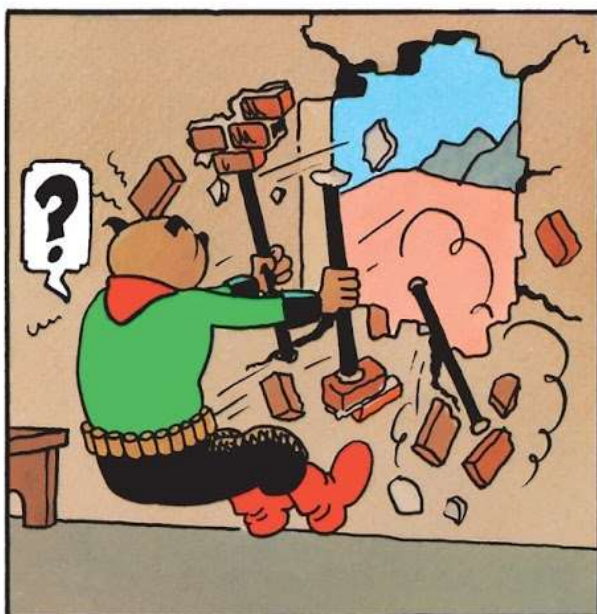
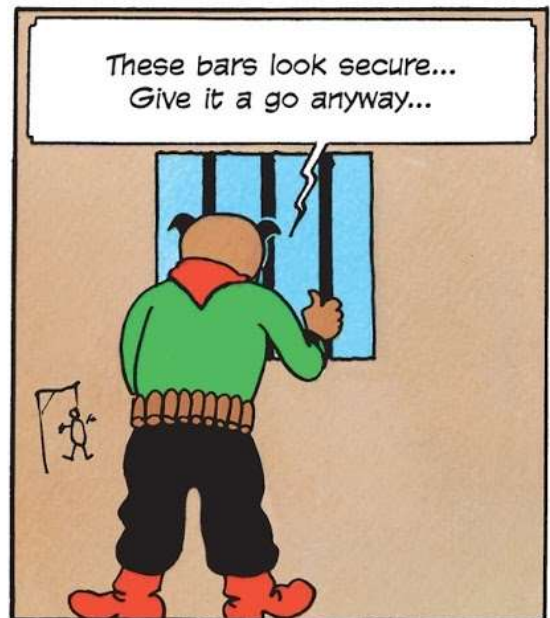




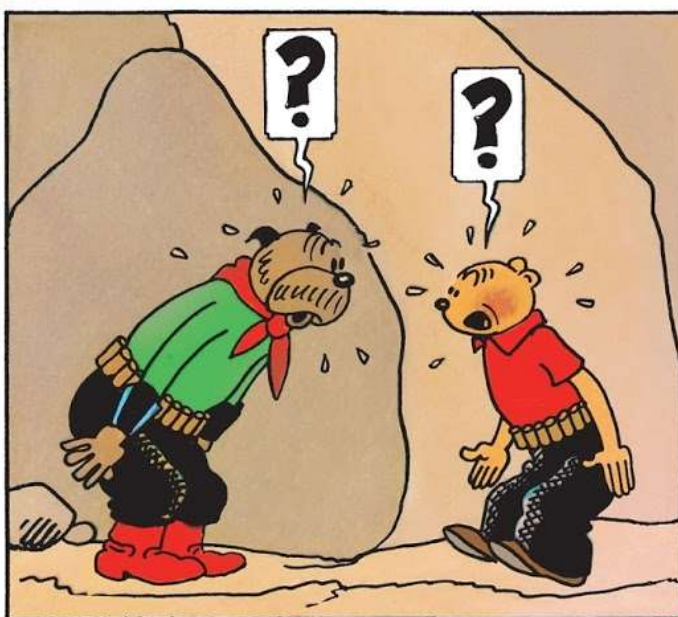
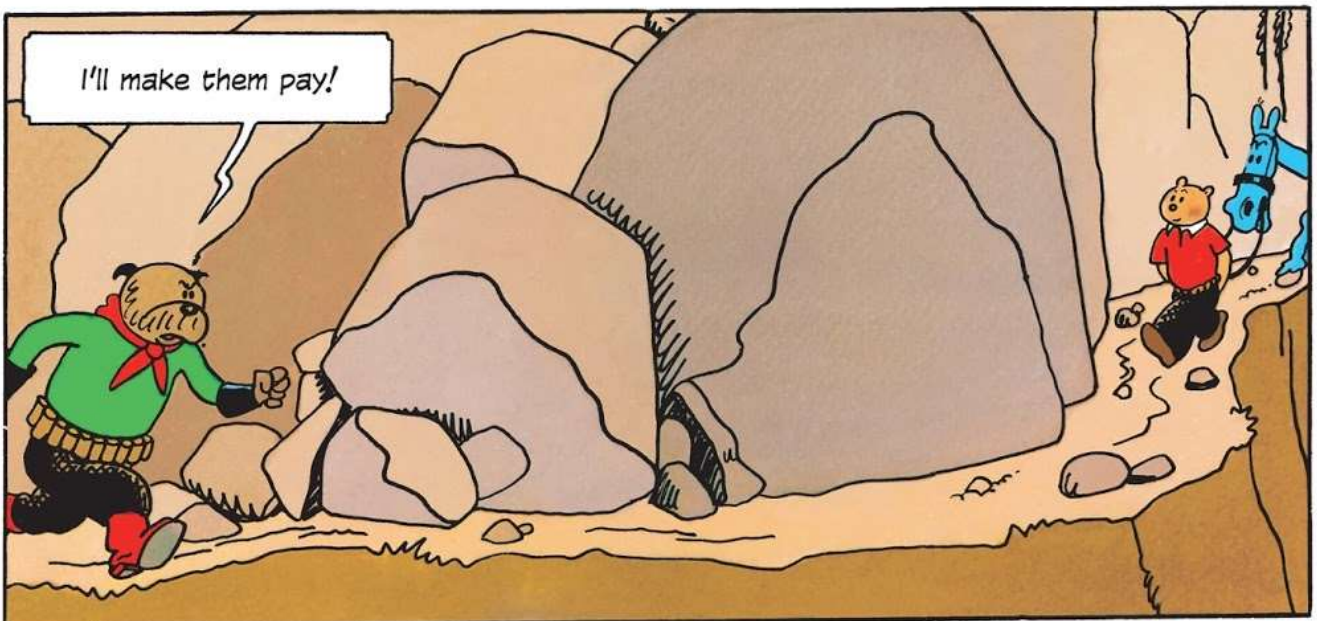
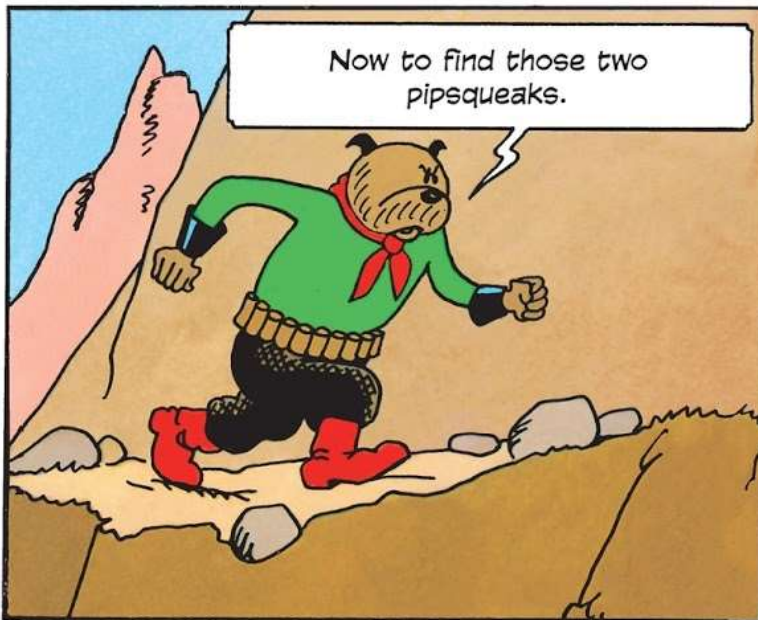




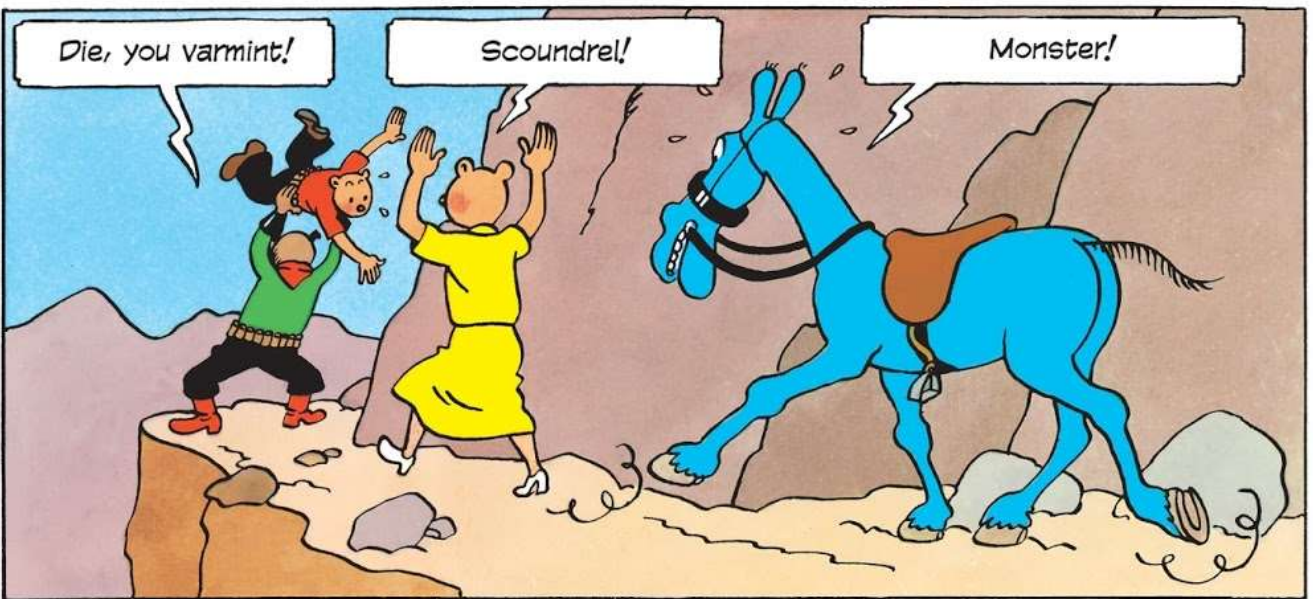
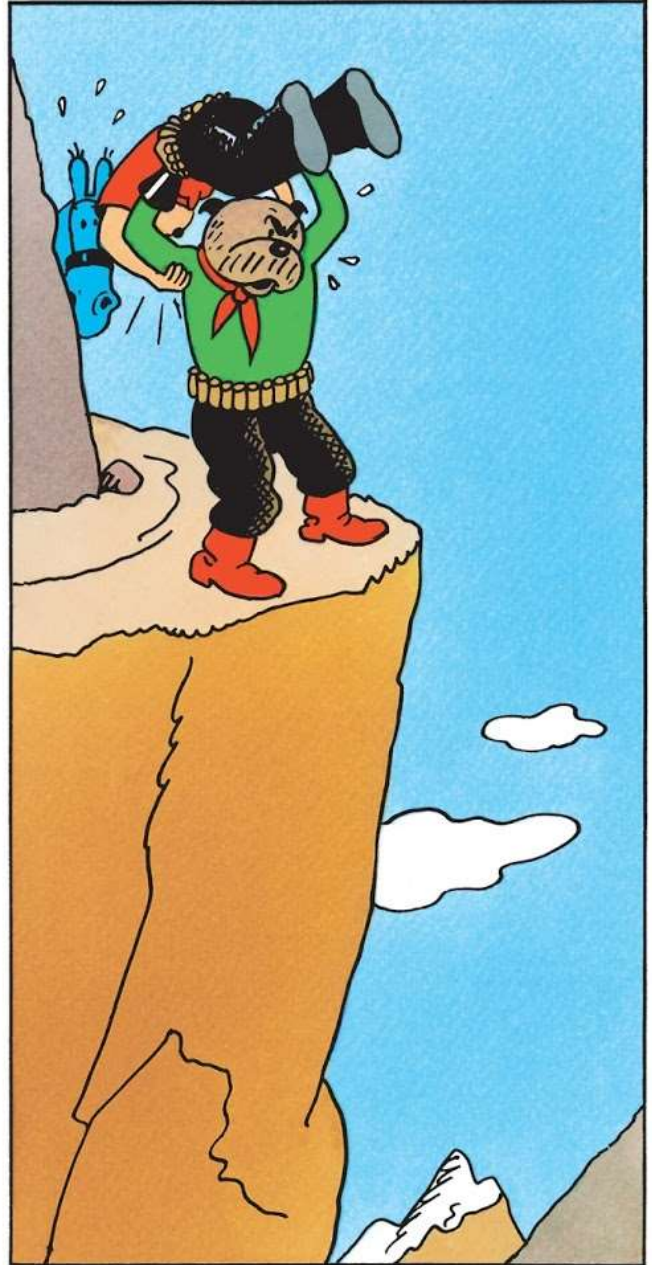
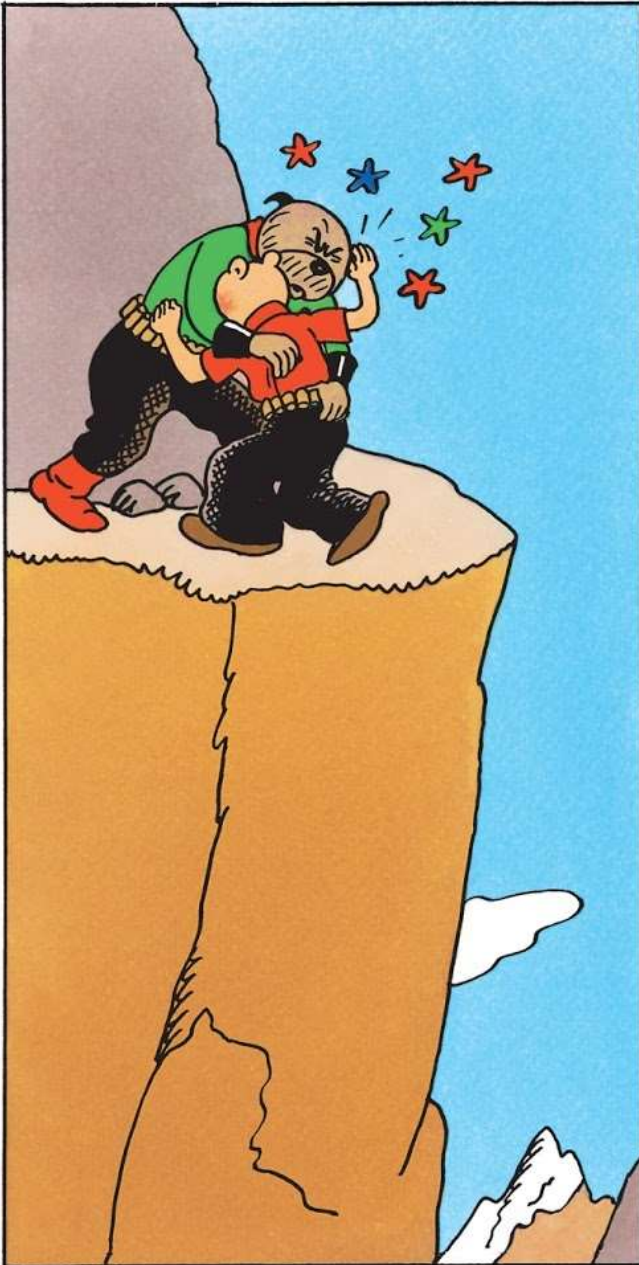




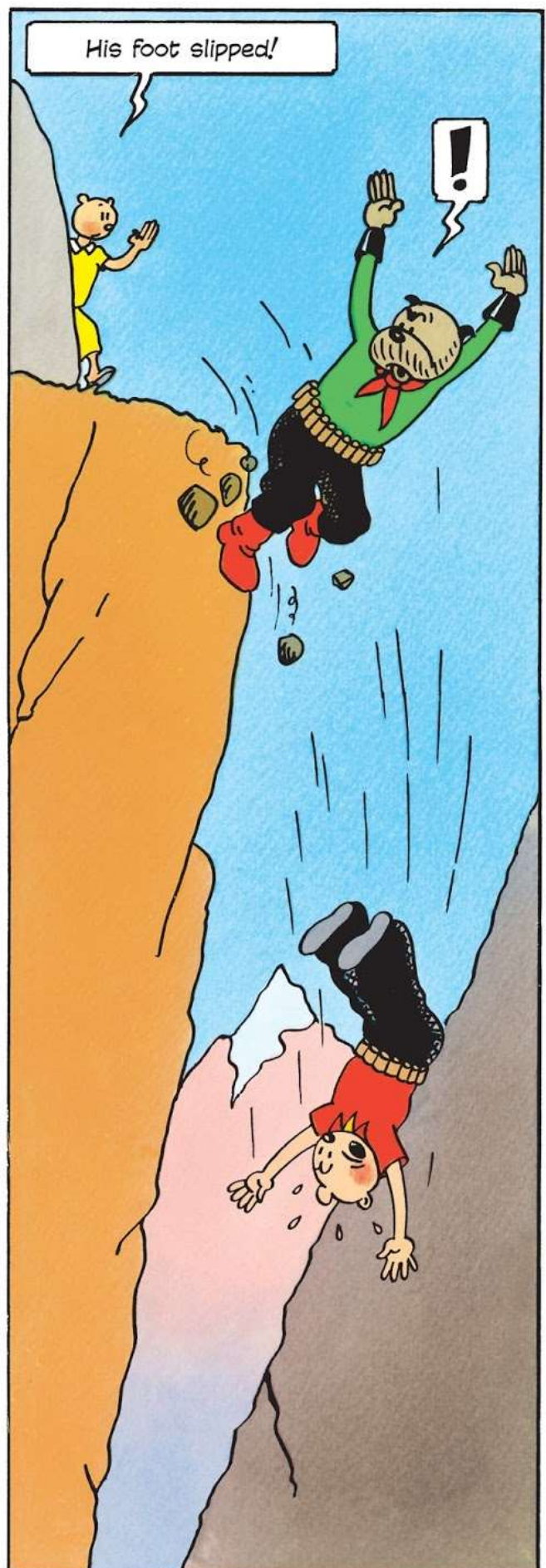








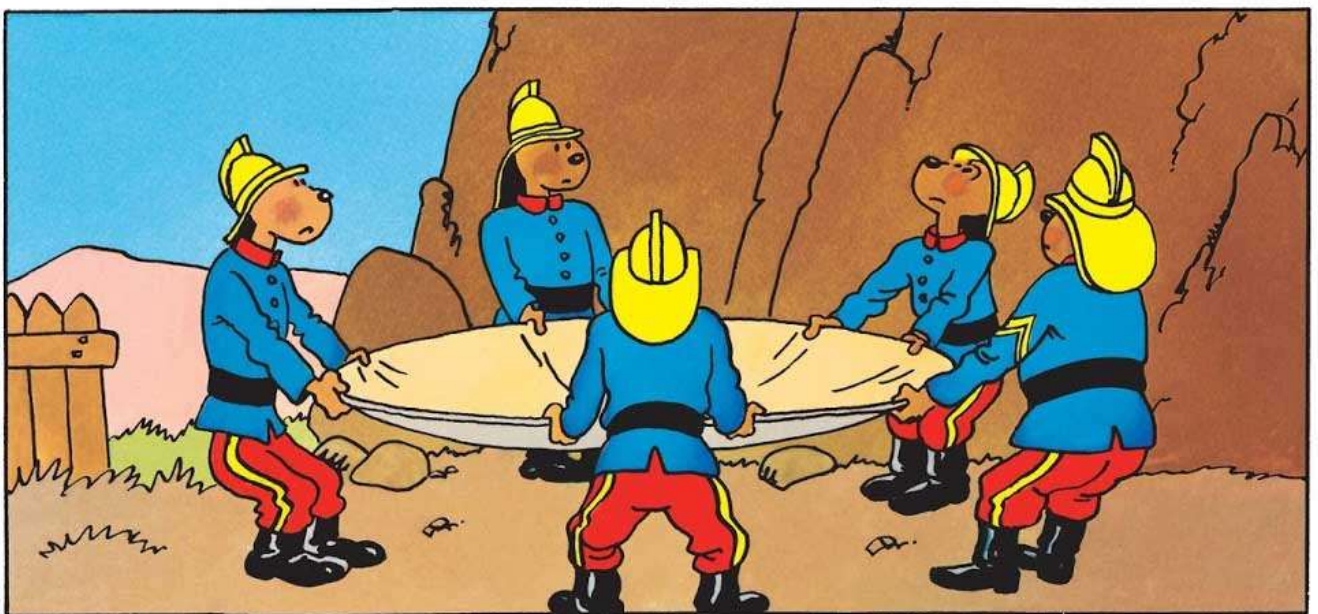
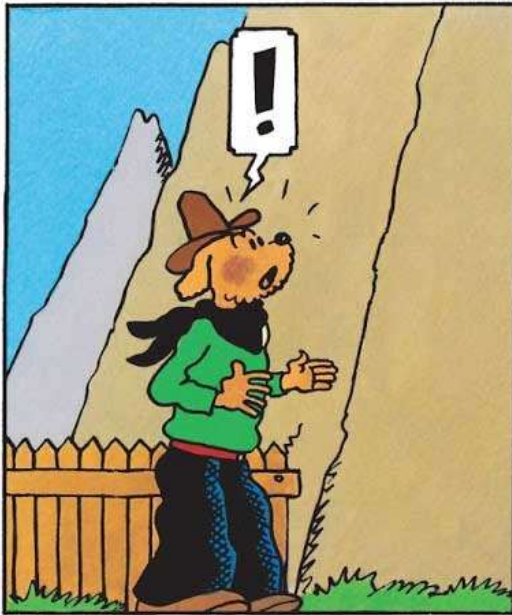




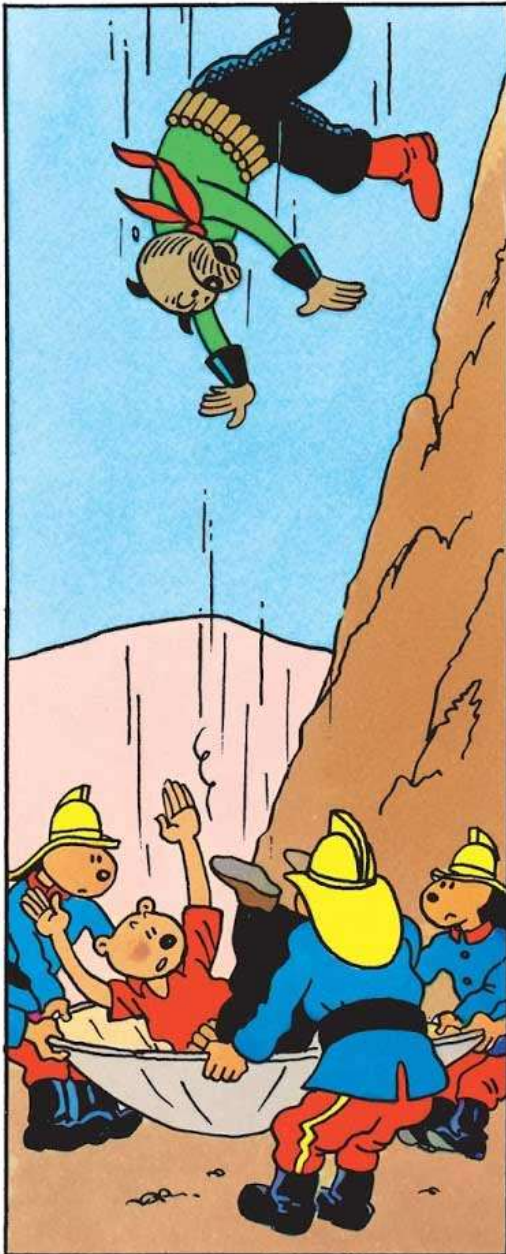




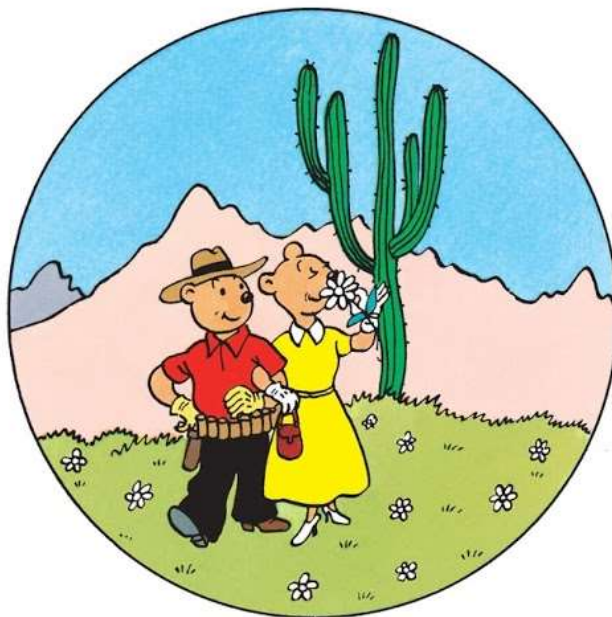
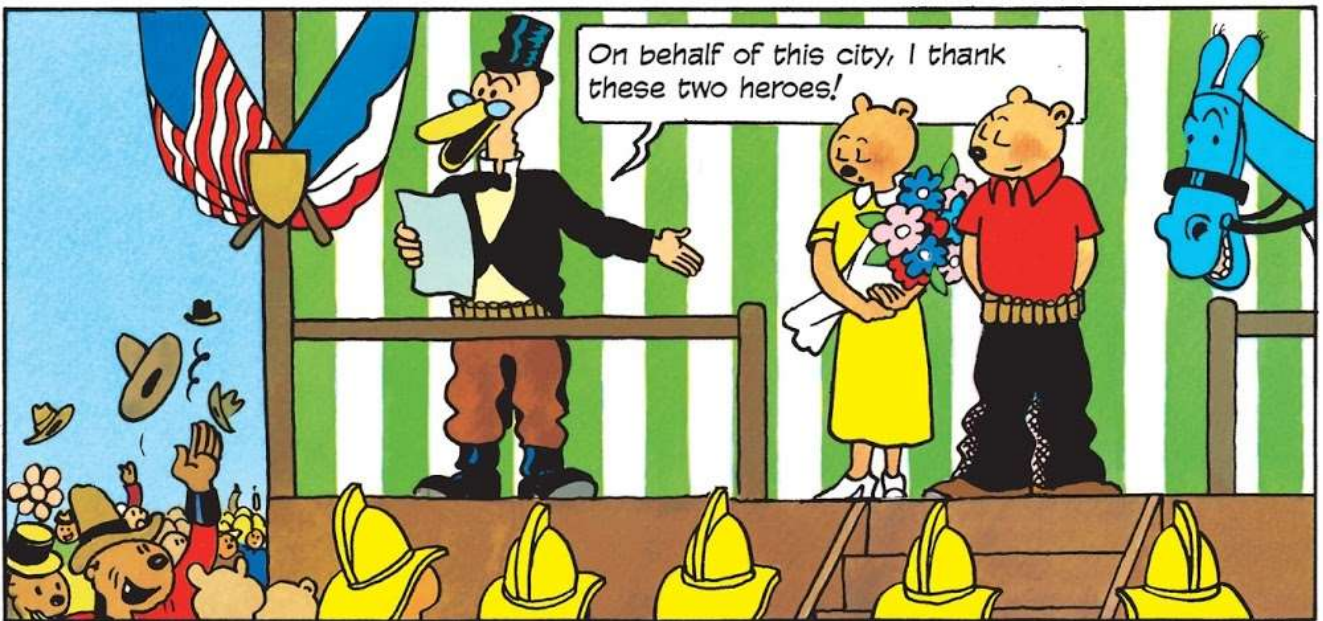
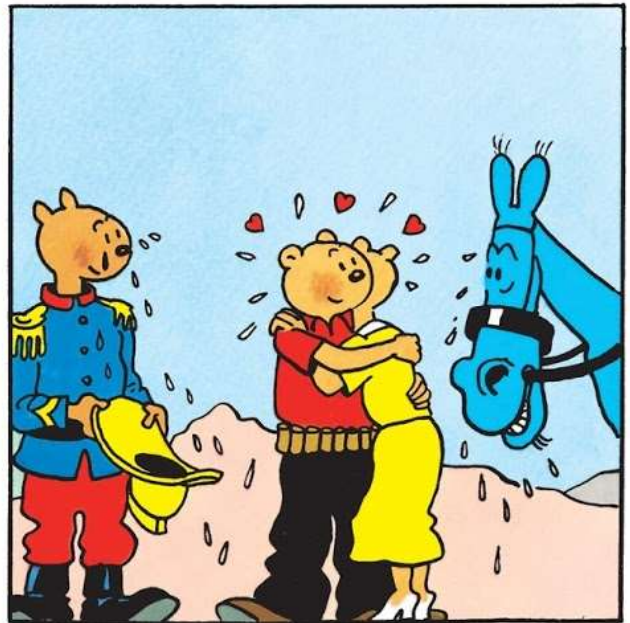




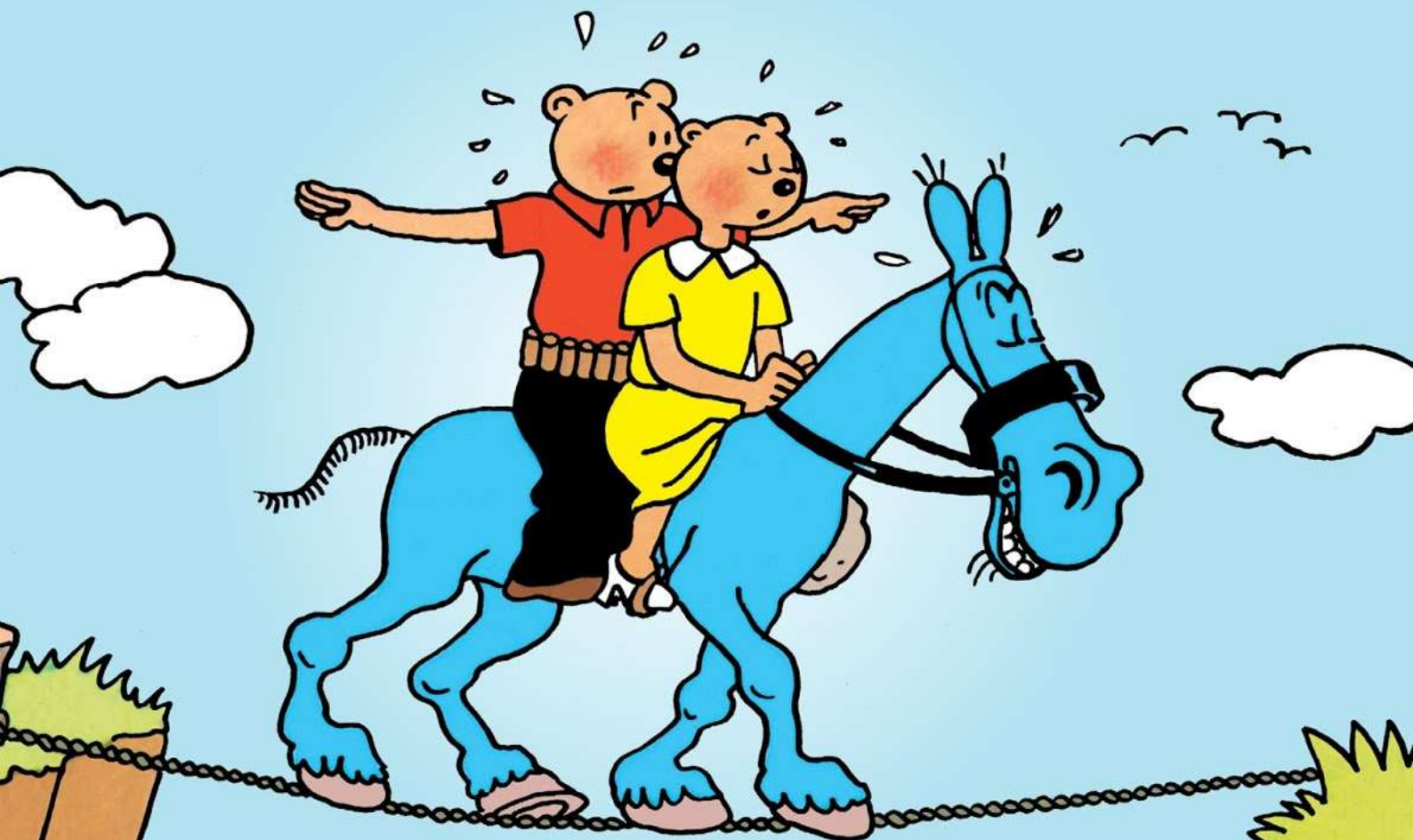












## *A Fearless Frontier Adventure from the Creator of Tintin*

"I was struck by [Hergé's] illustrations. They were so evocative of storytelling, plot, and character relationships, that, by the end, without knowing one word of French, I understood what the whole story was about."—Steven Spielberg

First serialized in 1934, this is the first time *Peppy in the Wild West* has been published in the US! When his hat business fails, Peppy, accompanied by his sweet wife, Virginny, and his faithful steed, Bluebell, find an idyllic patch of grass somewhere in California, where Peppy's wares start a craze among the local Rabbit-Ears tribe. What follows is a rollicking, gag-filled tall tale of one darned thing after another—not one, but two kidnappings, a bulldog outlaw, and a river full of gold!

