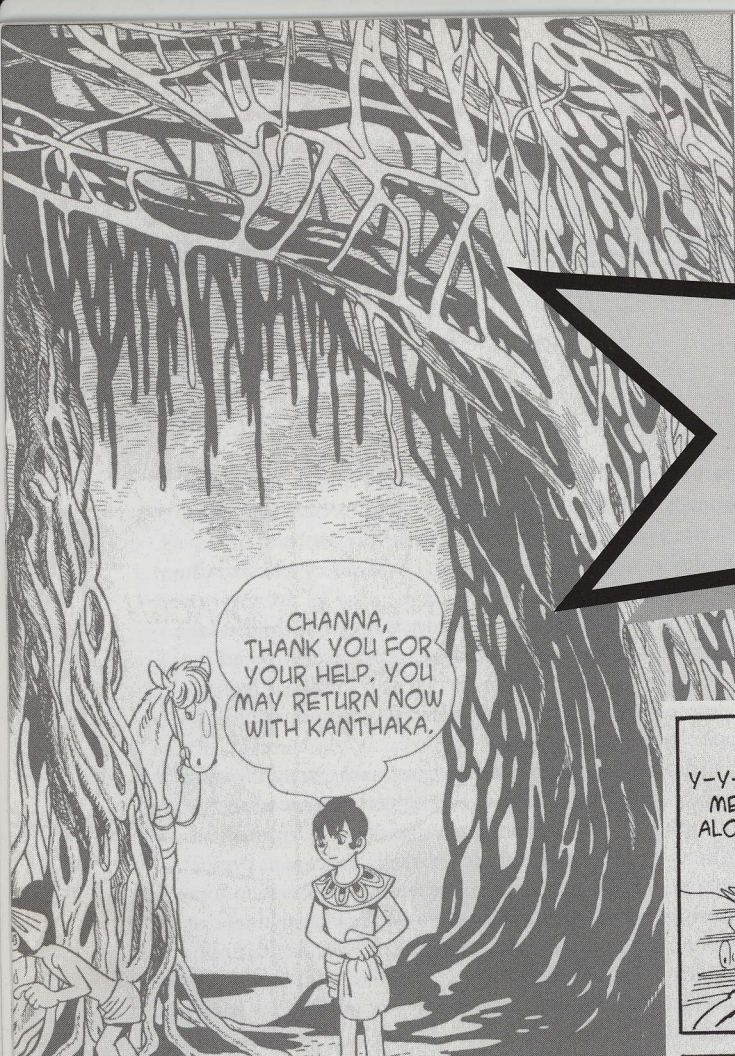


whizz-bang Buddha



CHANNA,
THANK YOU FOR
YOUR HELP. YOU
MAY RETURN NOW
WITH KANTHAKA.



Y-Y-YOU
MEAN
ALONE?

WHEN YOU
RETURN, GIVE
ALL MY
THINGS...

TO MY
MO-
THER.



NO SIR! AT THIS
POINT, EVEN IF I
MUST LEAVE MY
WIFE AND KIDS,

I AM
CONTINUING
ON WITH YOU!



RIGHT,
KAN-
THAKA?

DON'T
GET SMART.
YOU DON'T
EVEN HAVE
A WIFE.



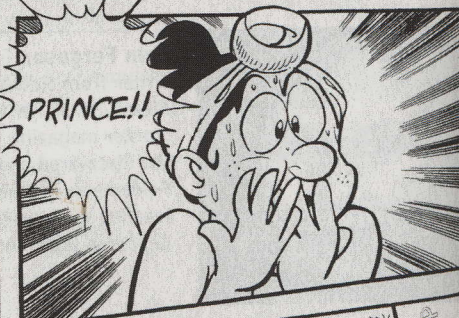
YOU
NEED TO
DO ME
A BIG
FAVOR
AND...

TELL
EVERY-
ONE
WHAT
I'VE
DONE.

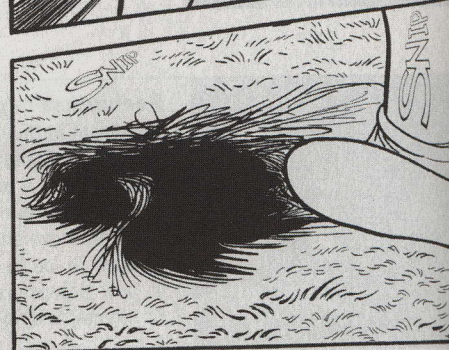


W-W-WHAT
ARE YOU
DOING?

MONKS
DON'T
NEED HAIR.



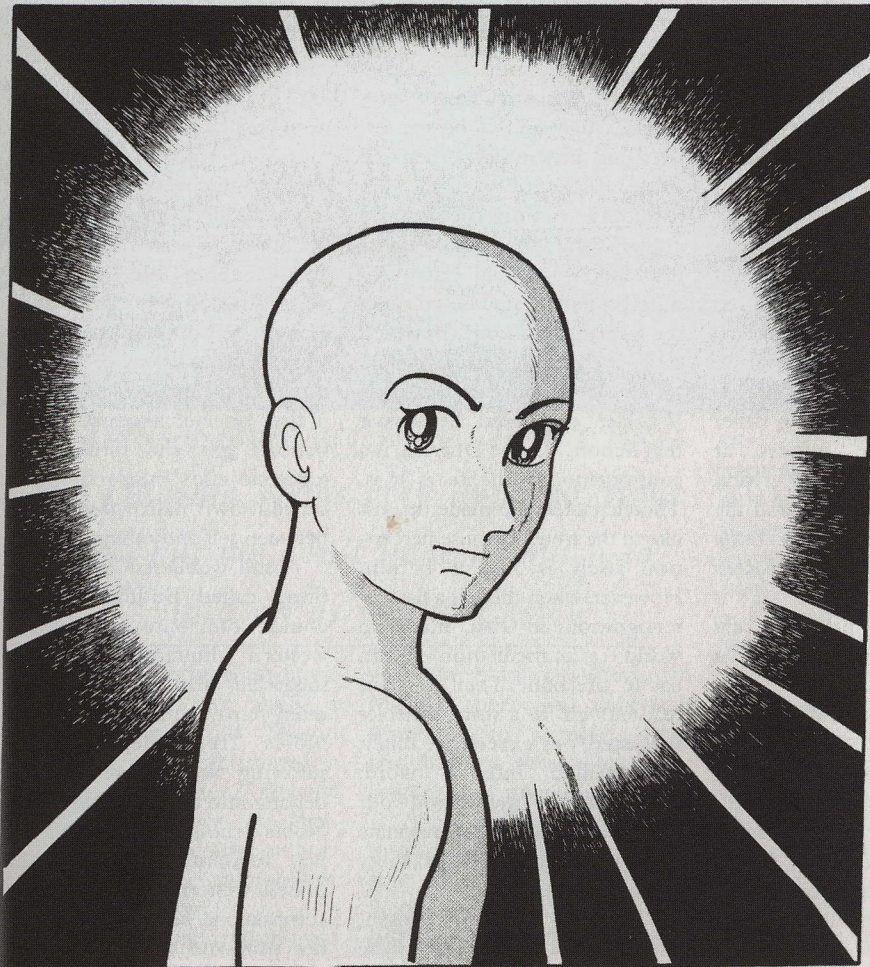
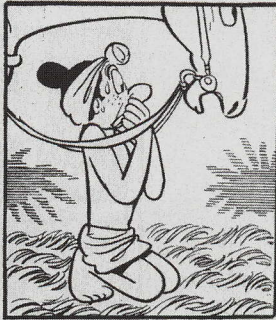
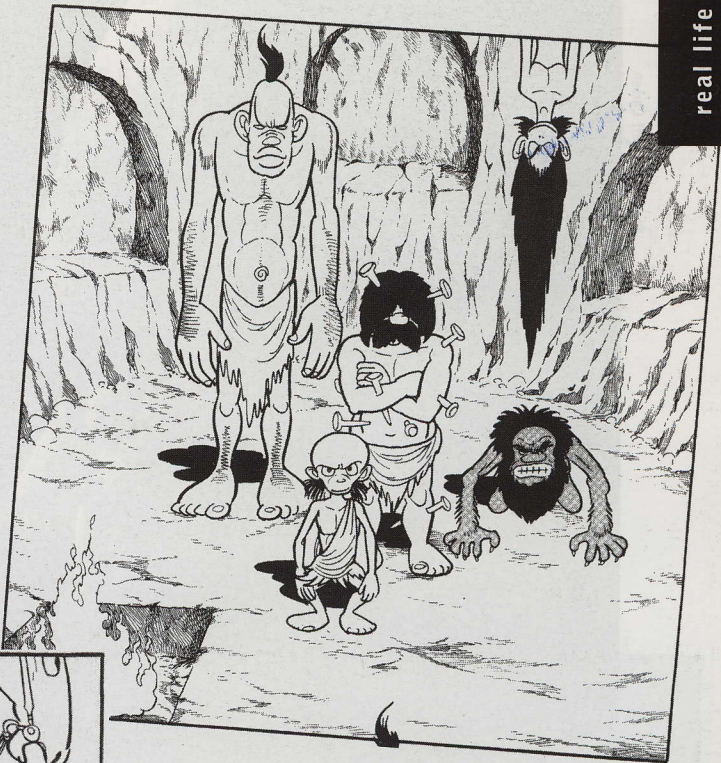
PRINCE!!



Japan's hugely popular manga comics usually feature vampire hunters, schoolgirls, racers and fantasy characters – not to mention acres of pornography. But manga's latest hero in English translation is none other than Prince Siddhartha – aka Buddha. Published in no fewer than eight handsome 400-page volumes by Vertical Inc, *Buddha* is the masterpiece of Osamu Tezuka (1928-89), the doyen of manga makers, and creator of cult characters like Astro Boy the robot, and literary ventures such as an adaptation of *Crime And Punishment*. The work was serialised as a comic strip in the 1970s, running for 10 years, and this is the first time it has appeared in English. Tezuka is very free with the traditional stories and adds many characters and events. Volume 1 *Kapilavastu* features the slave child Chapra who has astonishing shamanic powers, his friend Tatta, who has amazing fighting powers, and the young monk Naradatta who has ... well, you get the idea. In later volumes these characters –

Summer/2004
dharma life

Cartoon cast: Siddhartha bidding farewell to his servant and horse, and chopping off his hair. Right: the famous five ascetics putting themselves through it



or their next reincarnations – become Siddhartha’s sidekicks and helpers. ‘It’s kinda like Herman Hesse’s book with pictures and a lot more laughs,’ says Vertical’s Micah Burch.

But there’s more to *Buddha* than Pali Canon-meets-Spiderman. Tezuka wasn’t a Buddhist, but he is revered in Japan as a hugely imaginative – and influential – humanistic artist. A major theme of *Buddha* is the injustice of India’s caste system, and Tezuka’s Siddhartha is a rebel against the pride of kings and brahmins. Amid the whizz-bang treatment, many familiar Buddhist stories, characters and themes are retold.

The principal bad-guy in the first two volumes is Bandaka, a typically arrogant Aryan. The second volume, *The Four Encounters*, ends with the Buddha’s going forth from the palace to follow a life of meditation. Meanwhile, Bandaka is reborn as a baby called Devadatta (the Buddha’s cousin and rival). The next thrilling installment is out this spring; and the whole *Buddha* set is being published over two years up to spring 2005. But you might want to think twice before getting hooked on the hardback series: altogether the eight books will set you back \$200. ■