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SPECIAL
ILLUSTRATED
ISSUE



"ASTRONOMER FEARS HOSTILE ATTACK"



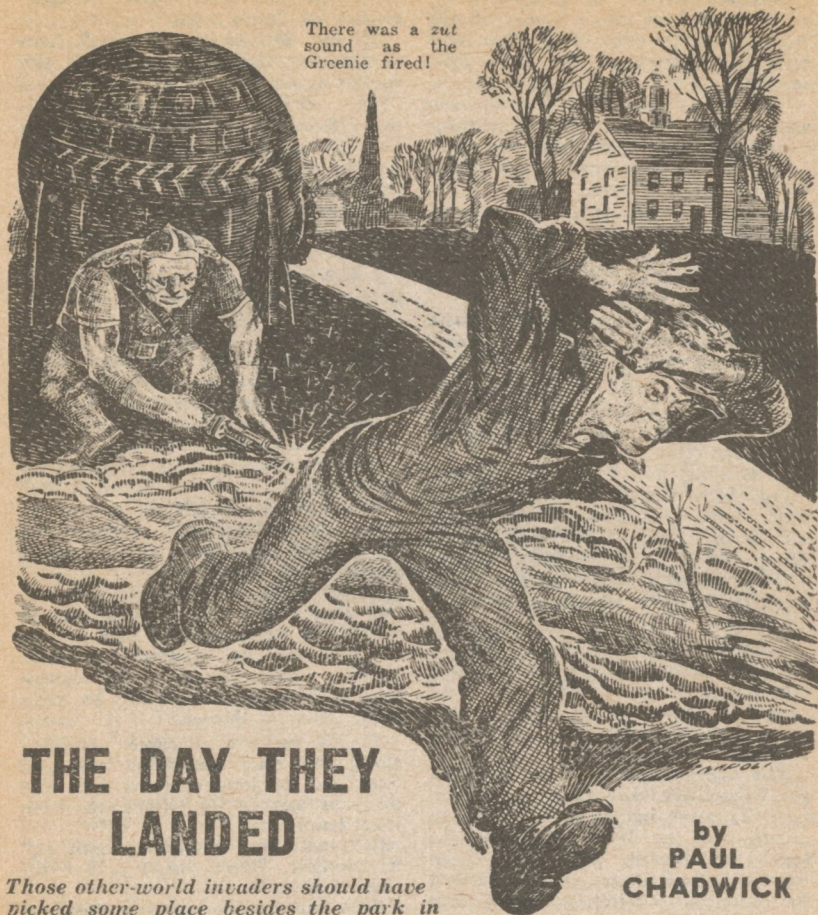
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There was a zut
sound as the
Greenie fired!



THE DAY THEY LANDED

by
**PAUL
CHADWICK**

Those other-world invaders should have picked some place besides the park in Eastboro to land their Flying Perisphere Thirty-seven R. Because the Selectmen of Eastboro would never stand for that kind of funny business

THE FIRST car went by Sam Holt's backwoods filling station at three o'clock. Sam figured the time afterwards because he had just pulled up the sleeve of his coveralls to see when the heck Ed Dennis was coming to spell him. Ed was supposed to have been there at two.

Sam was down in the grease pit giving his own jalopy a going over

because business was slack and because there wasn't anything much else to do. When he stuck his long, horsey face out to look for his sock-et wrench, he saw the car go by.

It was speeding like one of those crazy whippet dogs over at the Eastboro track. A big, dirt-colored sedan, its tires made a whimpering sound as it whizzed along doing at least seventy, barely holding the road.

Sam saw the set face of the driver. Back of him was a bunch of old ladies hanging onto each other and trying to keep their hats from falling over their eyes.

"Whoa!" yelled Sam. But the car was already out of sight, churning on towards Higginsville.

"Must be a fire some place," Sam decided.

He felt sure of it a minute later when three more cars came whooshing up the road. They were all going in the same direction and all were crowding the speed limit.

Sam climbed out of the pit, went down in front of the gas pumps and watched as they passed.

One driver made a queer face at him through a side window. The folks in all three cars looked stared about something.

Scratching his left ear wonderingly, Sam stared down the highway at the rear ends of the speeding autos. They didn't tell him a thing, but he had a queasy feeling in his stomach. Looking the other way, he started whistling through his teeth.

Another bunch of cars was already in sight, lurching and crowding, trying to pass each other. Sam gaped as they sped by with motors roaring, horns screeching and tires whining.

The queasy feeling in his stomach got worse. Walking back to the station, he went inside and pulled the phone off the hook. He tried to reach his friend, Bill Tweeks, in Eastboro, but there wasn't even a line hum. Muttering, he went over to his little plastic radio that never failed him, switched it on and listened. That was dead, too.

Sam said, "Gol dang it!" and spat.

He slouched down to the road again, planted himself in the middle of it, feet wide apart, and waited. When the next car showed up he began flapping his arms and cap.

It was coming fast like the others. The driver started hooting for Sam to get out of the way, but Sam wouldn't. The driver lost his nerve at the very last second and

screeched to a stop with his bumper against Sam's knee.

"Don't like to pester you," Sam said apologetically, "but what's the ruckus about?"

The driver, a paunchy well-dressed man of fifty, a salesman Sam guessed, stared at him with a doughy face.

"Where've you been, son? Don't you know they've landed?"

He jerked a thumb back toward Eastboro. Then, before Sam could ask him another question, he stepped on the gas and sped off.

SAM WAS excited now, though his lean Yankee face didn't show it. It showed no more emotion than his grandfather's face had that day at Gettysburg; no more either than his Great-great-uncle Asa's had when the Redcoats swarmed up Breed's Hill.

Sam got his car off the grease pit track, backed around and turned into the highway. He headed straight for Eastboro.

Other folks might be going south, but Sam Holt was going north. If something or somebody had landed in Eastboro he wanted to know about it. His kinsmen had always been a curious sort, liking to keep sharp tabs on things.

A lot more cars came whizzing along the road ahead of him and Sam had to jounce down into the ditch a couple of times to keep from being hit.

"I'll tell the constable about it," he thought. "He'll make it hot fer these fellers."

One car finally stopped ahead of him and a man thrust a perspiring face through the window.

"Turn around, young feller. You're going the wrong way."

"Why?" demanded Sam.

"Cause they've landed. That's why. You don't want to be jailed or shot dead, do you?"

"Who's landed?" asked Sam.

"The Greenies. They came right down in Eastboro like they said they would. They're roundin' up folks right now."

"Who in heck's the Greenies?" Sam wanted to know.

"Don't you listen to the radio, young feller? That broadcast wasn't no soap opera like people thought. The Greenies are smack dab in Eastboro right this minute."

"I was down in the grease pit," explained Sam. "Been there two hours. I didn't hear nothin'. Who's these Greenies?"

The driver of the other car muttered something profane, shook his head reproachfully and threw in the clutch.

Sam drove on, too. He had a hard time getting into Eastboro, hard, that is, till he had crossed the bridge over Catfish Creek and was close to the head of Main Street. Then all traffic thinned out. There was nobody in sight anywhere. It was just like being in town Sunday afternoon when there was a big church picnic in Gellert's woods. Sam rattled on till he came to the park.

He slammed on the brakes and gawped when he saw the big, funny looking machine that rested on the grass. It must be a flying machine, he guessed, for it didn't have any wheels and he didn't see how else it could have got there except by flying. It was just a big, smooth globe of shiny metal with short fins sticking out. There was a round door close to the ground on the side, sort of like the ash clean-out in a furnace.

Sam's gawping was interrupted by the arrival of two short, squat men in queer green uniforms. They came right up to his jalopy and stuck their heads through the open side windows. Their faces had a greenish cast, too. They had round features like soft biscuit dough with little black raisins for eyes.

"Halt!" said one of them. He had a silver tube in his hand no bigger than a lead pencil and he pointed this at Sam's head.

"Am halted," said Sam. "You fellows from a circus?"

They looked straight at him blankly, their little raisin eyes expressionless.

"What's circus?" asked one in an odd kind of English that Sam had never heard before. The accent

wasn't Polish or Finnish, German, Russian or Italian. The chap didn't look like a Swede either and he wasn't any Jap. He didn't look like much of anything that Sam had ever seen.

"I thought everybody knew what a circus was," Sam said. "Thought all kids went to 'em."

"We do not have it," said the man on the right. He jabbed the silver tube closer to Sam. "You will come see the leader."

"Sure," said Sam. "Mighty glad to talk to him."

He unwound his long legs, climbed down out of his jalopy and walked between the two green men toward the Eastboro postoffice.

WHEN HE got close he saw a group of subdued looking people in front of it being guarded by other green men with funny little tubes. Bert Willis, the grocer was there. So was Jim Howe, who owned the feed store, George Mills, cashier in the People's Savings Bank, and old Mrs. Cora Fink who ran the New Eureka Bakery. They seemed too scared to notice him. Sam took another long look at the big, globe-like flying machine there in the park.

"What'll they think of next!" he thought.

He was taken inside the postoffice and led back behind the racks of letter boxes. A Greenie with especially dull black eyes and some sort of fancy doodad on his uniform sat at the desk where old Hiram Crawford, the postmaster, usually sat. Hiram wasn't anywhere in sight.

The Greenie raised his round face and stared at Sam.

"Who you call you?" he said. "Where you come from? All people are supposed accounted for."

Sam shook his head.

"I heard the Greenies had landed. I just came to see what they was like."

"You did? So!" The leader lowered his small, heavy lids craftily. "You afraid of us, are not?"

"Ain't seen nothin' yet to be afraid of," said Sam.

"Oh, so? If out back of this build-

ing you care to look you will perhaps have a change of mind. People of this town they were. Some liquidation there had to be."

"You mean you've been killin' folks?" said Sam aghast.

"A few for whom quieting was essential," said the Greenie leader.

Sam lifted his grease-smear'd finger and shook it fiercely under the Greenie's nose.

"We don't cotton to lawlessness in Eastboro, mister!"

"Lawlessness!" A smile played around the Greenie's puffy lips. "Lawlessness this is not, my fellow so smart. We are the law—the new law. Everyone to obey it have got."

"There *ain't* no new law," said Sam. "Law's same as always, unless the Selectman change it. Even then it has to go through town meetin' an' be put to a vote. Fellers have give their lives here in New England ever since the time of George Washington to see that the law's kept simple an' straight. Did you git a permit to land in the park with that contraption?"

The Greenie gave a visible start and looked at Sam fixedly.

"To liquidate you I am disconsolate to require," he said. "Necessity of new regime demand extirpation of malcontents."

"I ain't no malcontent," said Sam. "I'm satisfied with the U.S.A. and with this here town. Us Yanks don't like to pay taxes, but we do it just the same—like we obey the law even if we do grumble. It won't do no good to kill me, mister. There's a lot more fellers like me back in these woods. They won't stand fer this kind of ruckus. Neither will the Selectmen. They like it nice an' quiet 'round here."

The Greenie leader leaned forward and his odd voice sounded almost distressed.

"Earth creature please note," he said. "You do not understand. Not merely Eastboro, not just this county, state or country—the whole world, it is ours. This is the New Regime. Advance Unit Four Twenty, we are called. All habitable of the planets soon to be taken over and run by us."

"Nuts!" said Sam. "You talk big, mister, too big for your britches. Wait till the folks in Higginsville hear about this. There'll be a gang come here after you."

"That will be impossible," said the Greenie leader sharply. "Ten miles around this village there is impassable mesotronic neutralizer now created. To get through it nothing can. Military tanks, not even. High-explosive shells, no better. Atomic bombs, futile."

"Golly!" said Sam. He scratched his ear. "What in thunder did that?"

"We did it, so. Flying Perisphere Thirty-seven R. Inverse turbos steadily rotating to cut gravitational lines, create electric field and disturb mesotronic catalysis in orbit of atom. Science of Earth infantile against us. To obey us all must."

"I don't like it," said Sam. "What's more, I don't aim to stand for it."

The Greenie drew his brows together and gave a quick command to one of his men in a strange language formed by chattering monosyllables. The guard, clutching his little silver tube, pulled Sam gently by the arm.

"You will please to come with me a moment, Earth Creature."

Sam allowed himself to be drawn toward the back of the post office till he got opposite the side door where they sometimes took in the mail during the Christmas rush. There he suddenly raised his knee, hit the Greenie guard in the stomach and bolted as the man fell over.

THERE WAS a *zut* sound in the air beside him as he reached the door. The door frame disintegrated in a puff of vapor by his shoulder and a hole a foot round appeared. It was as neat as if Carpenter Bert Forkins had made it with his compass saw.

"Golly!" Sam muttered again as he dashed across the street.

There was another *zut* just then. A hickory tree fourteen inches in diameter melted in its middle and tipped over sidewise with a *swish*. It almost squashed Sam like a bug.

"Judas!" he yelled.

He ducked behind the fallen tree and ran for it then, going right by the big metal flying machine.

The loudest and final *zut* really scared him. It burned one of his trouser legs off at the cuff and cut through the marble column on which the statue of Daniel Webster stood with his hand upraised. Webster took a header into a tulip bed and stayed there with his feet sticking into the air.

Sam got out of sight behind the People's Bank Building, scooted out of town and kept running till he was exhausted.

As soon as he got his breath he was mad at himself for running, but he was even madder at the Greenies. The trousers that had been burned were a new pair of summer tweeds that he had bought at the Broadway Bargain Store in Higginsville a week before. They had set him back six dollars and ninety-eight cents.

He found a hiding spot in a clump of bayberry bushes in the hills on the west side of town and he lay there thinking. Looking over into Eastboro he could just make out the top of the Greenies' flying machine. It looked shiny and pretty with the afternoon sun gleaming on it. But the sight of it kept Sam feeling mad as all get out.

It was then that he remembered the granite quarry that had belonged to old Albert Smith and that Smith had left to his no-good son, Freem, who was too lazy to work at it. There just might be something useful in that quarry.

Sam got up and went scuffling on through the bayberry bushes and into the pines. Ten minutes' walk and he was on top of a hill, staring down into a hole in the ground where granite slabs had been taken out.

There was some greenish water in the bottom of it and a half dozen fat bullfrogs squatting around on the rocks, sunning themselves.

Mad as he was, Sam couldn't resist the temptation to shy a stone down at them. He grinned to see the way they dived under. It was just

one of his weaknesses. He'd never been able to see a fat old bullfrog sitting all comfortable-like without wanting to make him jump.

He walked down a rough road into the quarry and reached a tar-paper shack. There was a rusty padlock on it and Sam looked around for something to bust it open with. He found an old iron spike and a hunk of granite.

WHEN HE reached the door, though, he saw that someone had got there ahead of him. The padlock was split in two like a nutshell.

Sam pulled the door open, looked inside and grinned.

Eddie Whittles, the town idiot, who worked for Mrs. Fink at the bakery, pulling a little cart around, was sitting in the gloomy interior, perched on a red box, shivering. When he saw Sam he raised his arm and pointed toward Eastboro.

"Zoo-o-oo-zut!" he said.

His under lips sagged. He rolled his eyes, rested his hands against his stubby face and rocked gently back and forth like a homesick ape.

"Don't go tippin' over that dynamite!" Sam cautioned. "Get up an' let me look at it. Maybe the mice have ate it up."

Whittles got up obediently and shambled away.

Sam paid no attention to him while he raised the lid and looked the dynamite over. There were a dozen sticks left, wrapped in stained wax paper. He found some percussion caps, too. There was an old detonator and a coil of wire over in a corner of the shack. Sam tested the detonator to make sure it still worked. Whittles watched him, rolling his head and shivering.

"Don't let 'em get you down," said Sam. "How would you like to help me, Eddie?"

"Zoo-o-oo-oot!" said Eddie.

"Sit down," said Sam. "Let's rest a while an' talk this thing over. You got your ideas an' I got mine."

He pulled Eddie Whittles down beside him on the dynamite box and they discussed the matter while the afternoon shadows lengthened. Sam

kept staring at his burned trouser leg while Eddie said:

"Zoo-oo-zut!"

By the time darkness came Sam had it all figured out. Every man, he guessed, even one who wasn't quite all there, had some particular thing he could do better than other folks. He knew what Eddie Whittles could do better than anybody in Eastboro and he thought he could work it in fine.

"We're goin' into town," Sam said. "We'll set off a few big firecrackers where they'll do the most good. Those Greenies didn't get any permit to land their machine. We can't let 'em stay there. It wouldn't be right. Selectmen wouldn't like it. When I pinch you, Eddie, you do that trick of yours like you sometimes do when you're runnin' fast with your little wagon. Understand?"

Eddie rocked his head forward and backward to show that he did. He made motions in the air and a buzzing noise with his lips.

They walked down out of the pine woods, Sam carrying the dynamite, the caps and the detonator while Eddie trailed after him with the wire and a big sack of dry pine cones that Sam had had him collect. Eddie began shivering again when they got close to the outskirts of Eastboro, but he followed Sam like a faithful shadow.

Sam crept in between the buildings, heading for the green. At the last he got down on his hands and knees and crawled between flowerbeds and bushes, right up to the big gleaming globe of metal in the center of the park. He picked the darkest side, away from the door, and he worked silently under the rounded belly of the machine while two Greenie guards on the opposite side carried on a low-voiced conversation in their strange tongue. To Sam it sounded just about the same as the language Eddie Whittles used.

ABOVE HIS head Sam could hear the steady hum of the turbos that were somehow making a defensive wall all around Eastboro

so that no help could get in.

When he got his dynamite placed where he wanted it and his caps on, he trailed the wire back across the park through the shadows and fastened the ends to his detonator that was hidden in a big juniper bush. Eddie crawled faithfully along beside him and crouched at his elbow, peering out at the town.

Only Greenies were in sight now. They were patrolling the streets with their funny little tubes in their hands. There were about a dozen of them altogether, Sam figured. Over in the post office the lights were on and he could see the head of the leader. Sam spat and wiped his mouth on his shirtsleeve. Then he nodded to himself.

"Wait here a minute, Eddie," he whispered. "When I come back an pinch you—like this—you do your stuff."

Eddie bobbed his head again. He was smiling now, pleased that someone at last appreciated his one accomplishment.

Sam crawled back to the flying machine, struck a match and tossed it into the sack of pine cones. He scrambled back to the juniper bush as fast as he could.

By the time he got there flames were beginning to lick up out of the cones, plastering resinous smoke against the underside of the flying machine. Sam waited till they attracted the attention of the Greenie patrol over across the street. He saw the guards start for the park. Then Sam reached out and pinched Eddie Whittles in the seat of his pants.

Eddie raised his head and opened his mouth. His face took on the ecstatic look of a virtuoso about to perform and conscious that he has a sympathetic audience.

A wailing sound came from his lips, faint at first, rising by slow degrees into a shivering, ear-splitting shriek. It held the high peak of its tremolo in perfect imitation of the siren on the Eastboro Fire Department's red truck. This was the golden nugget of Eddie Whittle's particular genius. It was the trick he used to make folks jump and scamper out of his way when he was

pulling his own little cart.

Greenies came running from all over town. The patrols broke up and swarmed toward the park. The door of the post office opened, the leader thrust his head out, saw the burning cones, heard the siren and came running, too.

Sam waited till they were all close to the flying machine, in under its belly, kicking and beating the flaming cones, while others went inside through the metal door. Then he plunged down on the handle of the detonator.

There was a huge explosion out in the park; a deafening roar, a vast sheet of orange flame. It knocked both Sam and Eddie over, sending them headlong in amongst the juniper prickles and making their ears ring.

The big metal globe rose up a few feet, split apart like an over-ripe squash, then disintegrated into fly-

ing shards of metal that scattered in all directions. One of them draped itself in the branches of the fallen hickory that had nearly hit Sam.

When it was over and the flame and the noise had quieted down there wasn't a moving Greenie in sight. There was only the joyful, excited murmur of the townspeople, moving out into the street, free men and women again. It would be a mighty long time before the Greenies tried another invasion, when they never again heard from this advance unit.

Sam sat up, wiped the juniper pricklers from his face and got his breath. Eddie Whittles rose mumbling at his side.

"Hated to do it," Sam muttered, looking apologetically down at the detonator that had fallen over. "But we couldn't have that kind of funny business in Eastboro, Eddie. The Selectmen wouldn't stand for it a minute."

BEHIND THE ATE BALL

A Martian Oddity

The wife of the Mayor of Eastern Canalopolis, Mars, was very nervous. She hopped about like a sand-flea. It was all because of that man who was coming to dinner.

It was not every night that the Mayor's wife entertained an Earthman for supper; this was the first time in Zumbarian (Martian) history that a Karterian (Earthman) was to dine on Mars. Ray Bradford was the first rocketeer to reach our neighbor planet.

Mrs. Aardvark (whose name purely by cosmic coincidence coincided with that of a popular terrestrial crossword puzzle pet) was quite upset at the progress of her preparations. Her ten tentacles twitched and she wished she had as many hands as she tried to manage her pots and pans with only three pairs. Mrs. Aardvark was world famous (Mars-world, that is) for the excellence of her cuisine (a French word, which

did not exist on Mars) and her husband had impressed upon her that on this historic occasion she must reach a culinary pinnacle.

By divine providence, Bradford had landed on the left bank of Canalopolis, ancient home of the green Martians, who were traditional enemies of the purple Martians of the right bank, who were now green with envy. Mayor Aardvark was extremely anxious to make a resounding hit with the hero from Earth by having prepared for him a meal that would, as the Earthmen were fond of saying, "melt in his mouth." Aardvark—in fact all Martians—was fairly familiar with Earthian sayings, for interplanetary radio had been operating on Mars for several years now. Every cultured green Martian was acquainted with Karterian (or English) in addition to Vrest Zumbarian (high Martian) as opposed to the dantizinferno or low Martian mumbled on the wrong side of the Grand Canal.

Mayor Aardvark had heard it said, on the Camel Soup Hour, that "the way to a man's heart is thru his stomach." Certain physiologists, never having seen an Earthman, argued that this meant Earthmen's hearts were located behind their stomachs, but Mayor Aardvark interpreted this saying on a poetic rather than a biological basis.

At last Phobos and Deimos, the double moons on Mars, rose in the evening sky, and Mr. Bradford, the man from the planet with only one satellite, sat at the dinner table of Mrs. Aardvark. Mrs. Aardvark, as women will, mentally appraised Mr. Bradford, and while she found him wanting in certain Martian qualities, she liked him at once because he looked her straight in the eye. Let us be charitable to Mrs. Aardvark's mentality and say that she was unusually upset, otherwise she would have realized Mr. Bradford had no choice: It was rather disconcerting that he should have two eyes rather than the normal one.

Then, too, Mrs. Aardvark noticed, the Earthman suffered a lack of a full set of arms, and had no tentacles at all, which paucity of charms made Mrs. Aardvark feel very sorry for Mr. Bradford's wife. (This was a sympathy she might well have spared the rocketeer as he was in fact a misogynistic bachelor who had fled Earth to escape the tentacles—purely figurative, of course—of a neurotic nymphomaniac.)

Finally, Mr. Bradford was so small (only 6'3") that he had to be accommodated in the baby's high-chair. But aside from his midget proportions, and amazing white color, he looked almost Martian.

The household pets—all 17 of them—were fed first, of course, according to Zubarian custom; and then the guest was invited to eat. As an appetiser Mrs. Aardvark served baloney and applesauce a la banana oil, a combination she had often heard of. As Mr. Bradford consumed her delicacy, Mrs. Aardvark, noted with satisfaction that he lost some of his pallor and began to turn a healthy Martian green.

Then came the entree. With a feeling of triumph Mrs. Aardvark nudged Mr. Aardvark underneath the table with her third leg as she served the roast horse. That is to say, not strictly roast horse, but the Zumbarian equivalent, an animal famous for its tough meat. Mrs. Aardvark was familiar with the Earth saying, "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse," and she felt certain Mr. Bradford had not had a satisfying meal since he left Earth.

After the meal was over the Mayor, excusing himself, rose from the table and hopped on his polite leg to the potted yaccactus plant. Amidst the leaves he belched twice. Mrs. Aardvark, raised one of her 6 hands to her mouth and coughed. Perhaps radio reception from Earth was not all that it could be, but she had plainly heard that, among Earthmen, a burp in the hand was considered to be worth two in the bush.

The last sensation Mr. Bradford had before he died was one of consuming thirst. While the food he had been served had been edible, if weird, oddly no beverage had accompanied the meal. His hosts, themselves, were parched for thirst, but in deference to their guest had refrained from drinking, for the Aardvarks were acquainted with the etiquette of Earth that prohibited the imbibing of liquids with food. A Karterian author by the name of Rudder Coupling had summed it up thus: "Eats is eats and wets is wets, and never the twain shall meet." The Aardvarks had heard it on a broadcast from Earth one night.

Mrs. Aardvark, at the behest of her husband, had done her best to make an impression on Mr. Bradford, and she had succeeded to the extent of her fondest expectations. Mrs. Aardvark's dinner made an undying impression on Mr. Bradford when he dropped dead. You see, Mrs. Aardvark had put into practice an old Earthian proverb: One man's meat is another man's poison.

THE END

THE GUINEA -

PIG

by CEDRIC WALKER

Everything made to measure, that was the idea of the biologist. Even re-creation of the human body was not beyond them now

SELLON looked at his visitor and wished heartily that he were anywhere else in the world. He thought: *This is how the boys must feel when they're hauled up before me for putting jam in someone's football boots.*

He smiled inwardly. It wasn't that he felt he was in the wrong. On the contrary, he *knew* that he was right. His self-analysis had told him the obvious fact that unless he were absolutely convinced that he was acting for the best, he would never have



presumed to question the actions of such a man as this.

Even now, against his will, he couldn't help feeling over-awed. He braced himself and said: "That is my considered opinion." How trite that sounded! "From the very beginning I was opposed to this—experiment, and the results so far appear to have borne me out."

Mostyn eyed him calculatingly. Despite himself, Sellon found himself shifting uneasily under that cold impersonal scrutiny. Hang the man! He looked at him as if he were one of his specimens under the microscope!

Feelingless devils, these biologists! They had to be forever probing and cutting and prying into the innermost secrets of things. Never content to leave well enough alone! It was unnatural, this perpetual, bloody tampering.... Nothing was sacrosanct any more! Not even recreation of the human body itself was beyond them now. They would never rest until they had completely obsoleted nature, and the whole world crept from their ghastly operating-tables!

Everything made to measure. Behold, the latest triumph of science—the human body! Lord knew, it wasn't that he was unprogressive! Sellon knew nobody could accuse *him* of that!

"We realize you've done your best," said Mostyn wearily. Was it imagination, or was there a note of impatience in his voice? "Maybe it hasn't been much of a success up to now. But we must go on, Sellon. We must win! We've created these creatures.....for better or worse they're here to stay. There's no going back now. When they dropped the bomb at Hiroshima that was that. Wasn't any use burling: 'They shouldn't have invented such a horrible thing. Let's outlaw the atom-bomb and then we can all go home and get on with the garden.' The bomb had come. Bend it to fit a man's hand, and you've got the finest tool imaginable. Well, after a bit of a schmozzle we bent it. Now we've got another problem on our

hands, and we'll get round this, too. But we need help, and it's people like you who can give us that help."

"I've done what I could. It's been given a fair trial, and I feel that there is little object in going on. After all, I've got the other boys to think of. God knows what harm this business may have done to them! You know, I suppose, that they've found out?"

The biologist gestured impatiently. "They had to find out sooner or later. So maybe it's for the best."

"Nevertheless—"

"May I remind you that the agreed time-limit has not yet expired."

"Quite so." Sellon nodded reluctantly. He knew he was prejudiced. In all fairness he had no legitimate complaint. The man—hang him!—was asking nothing more than had been agreed. But the pill was nonetheless difficult to swallow.

"Incidentally," said Mostyn, "just how did they find out?"

Sellon shrugged. "You know how boys are. You can't keep anything from them." He smiled. "If you have a row with your wife the little blighters know it the next morning. A school is no place for a man with a past. It wasn't only the trouble he had telling left from right. Lots of humans are ambidextrous—though it isn't quite the same thing, of course.

"When he was batting he'd sometimes take up a left-handed stance and sometimes the normal one. The others couldn't help noticing. Then he had trouble with his knife and fork.... An uncanny sight, that, seeing him using them in opposite hands as easily as we do in the usual manner. We used to correct him every time we saw him do it, and he'd change over as smooth as you please, and hardly miss a mouthful!

"But it wasn't only that. It was the way he looked at times. I've only seen these creatures on one or two occasions, but they had the same expression in their eyes. You know what I mean—the way they have of sometimes appearing to look right through you. It always gave me an

uncanny feeling." Sellon shuddered inwardly. Soulless devils, they were! What was it they called those things?... Zombies! That was it.

"I know." Mostyn passed a hand wearily over his face. "That's the sort of thing we're up against. Foolish prejudice. Superstition. Silly fairy-tales about monsters and such-like. Oh, it's all been exploited to the full by our opponents! They've done their worst, and I must admit they've made a pretty good job of turning peoples minds against the androids for good. But we'll lick 'em." A gleam came into his large black eyes, and his lips tightened. "We must!"

Takes it pretty seriously, Sellon thought. Wasn't as though it were a matter of life and death for him. The world had got on all right before the androids came, and would probably be able to struggle on without their assistance for a few more millennia. Matter of personal pride, he supposed. After all, Mostyn was the man chiefly responsible for the existence of these beings.

"How did the other boys take him?" asked Mostyn.

"Well, at first they were almost too scared to go near him. That's after they knew, of course. They'd heard such weird tales about them—naturally they were wary. But that didn't last very long. Then they began to treat him as something of a curiosity. Like all new boys, of course, he had been subjected to the usual ragging. Normally, that wouldn't have meant a great deal: he would have got it over and been accepted as one of them.

"Unfortunately, he didn't react in the customary manner. In fact, he strongly objected to the whole business of initiation. Said the things he was expected to do were undignified, and that the purpose behind it was—as far as he could see—silly and unnecessary, and entirely unfitting a *human being*!" Sellon spread out his hands at the last words. A human being! The idea of it! He looked expectantly at the other.

Mostyn did not smile.

SELLON snorted impatiently. The idea, apparently, didn't strike him as outrageous at all!

"You see," said Sellon, "that's the one thing the androids haven't got."

"What's that?"

"Why, tradition." Sellon frowned, and looked searchingly at his visitor. Was the man being deliberately obtuse? He made no sign of having heard, but continued gazing out of the window at the distant playing-fields. "Tradition," Sellon repeated, firmly.

Mostyn turned to face him slowly. "Oh," he said, "Tradition." There was no trace of amusement in his eyes, but Sellon felt suddenly a complete fool.

Of course, he knew the bare statement was ridiculous. He had meant it not as a statement of fact but as a comment on the vast gulf that separated the androids from humankind. He had intended—oh the devil!—he knew what he had meant. Not so this cold, unsmiling devil before him! His dislike of the man deepened.

Why didn't these people get out of their stinking laboratories—out into the sun amongst ordinary folk? Get married. Have children. Do the things that everyone else did. Enjoy the bounty of nature—instead of grubbing round in her back alleys. Great Scientist Mostyn with a girl in his arms....whispering sweet nothings....the picture just would not come. He would probably be able to explain it all in terms of glands and secretions and what-not. "Yes, I see what you mean," said Mostyn, surprisingly.

Sellon perked up. Well!....

"But they will have, you know, one day. There will be a time when they will be absorbed into society on equal terms just as the Negro has been, and their very origin will be forgotten. Forgive me. I have no wish to preach."

Sellon made a conventional gesture, at the same time hoping he would *not* continue.

"Don't you understand, man?" Mostyn leaned forward. It was the

first time he had shown any trace of passion. "We can't keep them out there on Venus forever! Daily they grow in numbers and knowledge. They can reproduce themselves in their laboratories. We cannot stop them now—even if we wished to do so. They have been accepted as humans—in theory. But they cannot live here on Earth. We smooth our consciences by granting them equal status, but they must not work with humans, they cannot enter our libraries, our transports, our restaurants—in fact they cannot—except under very rare circumstances—come to Earth at all.

"At last what we had dreamed of has come to pass, and the first child had been born to the androids in the natural way. Can you realize what that means, Sellon? The first android child! Now in truth they are human!" He paused, and searched Sellon's face. "That is why this experiment is so important. If it succeeds there will be no further obstacle: the human race will have to accept the androids!"

Damn him! Sellon thought. The man's right, after all. It was all entirely reasonable. But it didn't make him like the idea any better. Not that he had much choice. He'd got his orders, and he'd carry them out to the best of his ability.

"You'd like to see the—boy, of course?" he said.

Mostyn nodded. The headmaster spoke into the audio on his desk.

IN A FEW moments there was a knock on the door, and a small figure stood before them.

Mostyn rose with outstretched hand, smiling. He was human, after all. Even if his androids weren't.

The boy's face had been glum at first, but it brightened miraculously as his gaze fell on the scientist.

Sellon thought: If you didn't know you could certainly mistake him for a human boy. Nothing at all on the surface—apart from that oddly-penetrating stare at times. Maybe he exaggerated that. Maybe the boy saw things that ordinary boys didn't. Had to admit he was above the average

in classwork. But that wasn't everything.

The two seemed to have forgotten his presence. He coughed.

"If you would prefer it I—"

"Forgive me," said Mostyn, "It's been so long. Naturally, my interest Please stay. I should not dream of turning you out of your own room."

Sellon inclined his head. He listened without a great deal of interest as Mostyn questioned the boy about his work, asked about his friendships, whether he liked being at the school, and so on—in fact, behaved like any father visiting his son. Sellon found the thought amusing.

About the ragging episodes the boy was reticent. Small wonder, Sellon thought, in front of his headmaster! "You see, Andy," said Mostyn, "It may be silly to you. It is silly. But then, it's the sort of silliness that's affected human beings in all ages—everywhere, and you've just got to get used to it and learn to put up with it. In fact—" he smiled—"you've just got to put up with us."

Sellon just barely managed to repress a snort of disgust. What stuff to put into the minds of such creatures!

The scientist was continuing, apparently unaware of the storm he was creating behind him. "By the way, Andy, in your fights. . . . how did you get on?"

For the first time the boy grinned. "I won," he said simply. The headmaster cut in, speaking with heavy sarcasm. "If you like, I can show you some of the results of our young friend's experiments in remolding the features of his fellows."

Mostyn shook his head, but could not restrain a smile. There was a look almost of pride on his face. Certainly, when he had made the androids he had made them strong and free from disease. Physically, they were certainly far superior to the average human being. But, Sellon thought, with repugnance, their perfection was entirely laboratory-made. Mass-production. A thousand perfect human beings,

quickly, please! There you are, sir, call again!

"You won fairly?" said Mostyn.

"Yes, sir. I'm stronger than they are. They all piled into me, but they couldn't lick me!"

Sellon thought: Now he's bragging. They all piled into him! Sellon glanced at Mostyn, hoping for signs of disapproval. But the scientist maintained his calm, detached air, like a student listening to a lecture and occasionally noting some outstanding point.

"Whatever happens, Andy," said Mostyn, "you must never lose your temper. Scrap, by all means, but remember that they don't see things as clearly as you do. What is clear to you may not always be so to the other boys. In many ways they are hampered; their thoughts are often over-clouded by emotions. Their heritage weighs heavily upon them in so much that they do. It is difficult, I know, but try and see things through their eyes, too."

Lay it on! Sellon said to himself. Talk to him as if he were one of your learned biologist friends instead of a child! Tell him that humans are creatures who go chasing around emoting love and hate all over the place! Pity you couldn't have seen him when he was knocking young Martin about! He'd looked pretty emotional himself just then!

"I'll try, sir," said the boy. "But they keep saying things—"

"What sort of things?"

"They joke about my mother and father. They say why don't they come and see me, like theirs do." He looked up wide-eyed at Mostyn.... A strange wash of feeling swept momentarily over Sellon. After all, he was only a child.... "Why don't they come and see me?" he urged.

For the first time Mostyn looked slightly uneasy.

Sellon stirred. Hallo? What was this?

"Listen, son," said the biologist, "maybe one day they'll come. At the moment, I'm afraid...."

Of course, there were rules—everyone knew that. But surely they could stretch a point... Sellon

checked himself—Hey! Remember he wasn't in sympathy with the thing from the beginning!

The boy asked about his mother.

"She's fine, son," Mostyn said, "fine. Last time I saw her."

The boy smiled happily. Then his face clouded. "And my father—why am I never allowed to see him? They keep asking about him."

Mostyn drew a deep breath before he spoke. He seemed to have trouble finding the right words. "Don't bother your head about that for the moment. There's a lot of things you'll find out as you grow older. When the time comes...." He patted the boy's head. "Now don't forget what I've told you. You've got to make a success of this, you know. We'll do it between us, won't we, eh?"

The boy's answering smile was like a burst of sunlight in the room. "All right," he said. But he didn't sound to Sellon as if he were really convinced.

SELLON sat down heavily in the chair. His face was ashen. My God! he thought. My God! He collected himself and took a deep breath. After a moment he pressed the switch and asked for long-distance.

The dark eyes of Mostyn looked at him from the screen. As he took in the troubled face of the headmaster his eyebrows lifted.

"What is it, man?"

Sellon spoke haltingly: "I—I cannot tell you over this—Mostyn, you must come at once! At once! It is....most urgent!"

Mostyn's face loomed larger as he bent forward. "But what—?"

"At once, Mostyn!" Sellon blanked the screen. He sat staring into space. For the moment there was nothing he could do. Maybe there was nothing anyone could do. The body had been removed. The boys had returned—against their will—to the classrooms. To all appearances the school had returned to normal. He had not yet informed the boy's parents. No—better to wait until Mostyn arrived. It was his responsibility. That and....Don't think about that for the moment! Then

what?.....we regret to inform you that your son is dead. He was killed.....A sudden wave of fury swept over Sellon. He'd told them! Why hadn't they listened to him? What else could be expected? Created...soulless.....

Suddenly Mostyn was before him. His face was gray, and he looked about a thousand years old. "Where is he now?" he bit out, and each word seemed to cost him an agony of effort.

Sellon said not a word. He walked across the room and took a mackinaw from the cupboard. He buttoned it with painful deliberation. Mostyn watched him silently.

Outside a steady drizzle was falling. A few gray clouds trailed disconsolately after each other across the darkling sky.

"It's not far," said Sellon. "On the hill yonder."

He managed the flitter with expert hands. The school dropped away, became a toy and vanished. They sped over the dismal, sodden land towards the distant hills.

Sellon thought: Why the devil doesn't the man say something? Obviously he knew. The janitor must have told him something. "There was a fight," he said, hating the fact that he had to tell him. But he knew he had. "They had been calling him names—one boy in particular."

Mostyn seemed to come to life. He turned to face Sellon. It was as if for the first time he realized the presence of the other. "What sort of names?"

Sellon swallowed. He didn't like this. "The allusion wasn't even correct," he said, wondering why he made the words sound so apologetic.

"What name?"

"Frankenstein."

Mostyn turned away, his lips compressed. Sellon saw his hands clenching and unclenching. He said: "There was a fight. He lost his temper. When it was over the boy who had called him the name was dead. None of the masters learned of the fight until it was too late. The boys who were present said he had a mad look in his eyes, and they gave him

a wide berth. From the beginning they were always a bit afraid of him—even when they ragged him. They say he looked wildly around him and at the body of the boy for a time as if he were lost. When he made for the flitter-park they followed him, keeping at a respectable distance. But he seemed to have forgotten that they were there. Someone went for one of the masters. But by the time he had arrived the.....boy had scrambled into one of the flitters and was careering off madly over the tree-tops.

"But they're difficult things to handle—especially for a boy of his size. We saw the flitter continue its crazy flight for a time, dipping and weaving like a wounded bird, barely managing to keep above ground. The nose seemed to have a tendency to drop. Finally he slipped down below the hill—just there—and he didn't rise again.

"Here we are." Sellon touched the flitter down on the hillside as lightly as a feather.

Mostyn looked around him. About a hundred yards away down the hill was the wreckage of a flitter. Nearby a group of men stood motionless in the rain. Their faces were without expression. One of them had a crude bandage round one arm. Their heads drooped helplessly. They seemed to be waiting for something to happen. They hardly stirred as the two approached.

An icy dread washed over the headmaster. He singled out one of the men.

"He's gone mad," said the man. "Completely. He's got a gun from somewhere. One of the chaps was wounded. We aren't go near him."

"Where is he?" asked Mostyn.

THE MAN glanced at him for a moment, then gestured up the hillside towards a pile of rocks. "Up there somewhere. Can't tell you where exactly. He's been moving around behind them. He warned us, but we thought he was only saying that—like a boy would. Then he shot Wilson, so we've kept back. He keeps

shouting something about 'hope you're satisfied now.'"

Mostyn started walking towards the pile of rocks. Sellon clutched at his arm, but he shook him off. "Come back, you fool! He's mad! He'll kill you!" He hesitated then made to follow him.

A shot broke the silence of the hillside.

Sellon stopped dead in his tracks. Mostyn walked on as if he hadn't heard.

A shrill voice floated down the hill to them. "Go back! Go back or I'll shoot!"

Silence.

Mostyn walked on.

"This is what you wanted, isn't it? Just like in the story! Monster! Kill him! Hound him down! Death to the android-monsters! Death! Death!"

Sellon shuddered. The boy was mad! He watched Mostyn, waiting for the shot and the fall.

Nothing happened.

A score of yards away Mostyn halted.

"Listen, son," he said, "it's me! Mostyn! Come out and let me talk to you!"

"Keep away!"

Mostyn spread his arms wide. "Don't you see who it is? It's me! I want to help you, son. I understand

what happened. Come out and we'll talk it over—just you and me!"

No reply.

Sellon held his breath as Mostyn covered the remaining few yards. There was a sharp pain in his breast.

When the shot came it was almost like a physical impact to Sellon.

Mostyn stopped short. Sellon waited. But Mostyn did not fall. He seemed to have gone suddenly berserk. He scrambled wildly over the rocks and disappeared.

Sellon paused. Only for a second, then he started to run too. The group of men came after him.

When he found Mostyn, the scientist was holding the boy in his arms and muttering "My God" over and over again. The boy was quite dead.

Sellon looked at the face of the man. Somehow it struck a chord in his memory. What was it? Suddenly he knew. He had seen the same expression on the face of one of his masters after the man had received news of his son's death in World War III.

He knew then, and he turned away, his face ashen, motioning the rest to follow him.

They went quietly back down the slope. Behind him he heard Mostyn muttering softly, "My God!" again and again.

Has Communication With Other Planets Been Established?

Until quite recently, any suggestion that there might be life on the other planets of the solar system was likely to be treated with scorn. Almost any discussion on the subject went something like this:

"Mars? My dear fellow, the planet couldn't possibly support life! It possesses only half the diameter, and little more than a tenth of the substance, of the Earth. The surface is of similar composition to the Moon, that is, mostly craters and volcanic lava. There may be a certain amount of atmosphere; but if so, it is probably at the bottom of the craters. There is no direct evidence of water vapour in the atmosphere, although it may be present in small quantities; but there isn't enough of either water or air to support life.

"And anyway, why waste time discuss-

ing the matter? It's not much use trying to communicate if there's nobody there to answer. And as for visiting the place—why, the very idea is ridiculous!

"What about the other planets? Even more unlikely, I should say. Mercury? Don't you know that that planet is so close to the Sun that its surface temperature is always round about 675 degrees? And since it always presents the same face to the sun, the other side of the planet is freezing cold at all time.

"Phew! Not for me, thanks! And I cannot imagine any other form of life existing in such extremes. And the same goes for all the other planets, only more so. Either they are too cold, or too hot, or there is no atmosphere; or their mass is so great that living forms would be crushed to a pulp.

Jupiter, for instance, contains 317 times as much substance as the earth, and the gravitational pull would make it impossible for a man to crawl, let alone stand upright."

That imaginary conversation is of course a synthesis of the kind of arguments which were and are used against the suggestion that there might be life on other planets than our own. Only a few years ago—not so very long before Hiroshima in fact—these statements would have been trundled out as heavy artillery to demolish any belief that there could be life at least on Mars—the most likely planet to support it—or that communication of some sort might be feasible.

Then came the release of atomic energy, and Man's ideas and views altered almost overnight—especially as regards interplanetary travel. Already there are projects in hand which will result in the launching of the first space ships within a few years at the most. Atomic energy will supply the fuel to hurl these vessels through space at several thousands of miles an hour: and what then will prevent them from reaching the moon and planets in course of time? Nothing save the unknown hazards—as yet—of space travel.

But all this lies in the immediate future. What we are concerned with now, is to determine whether any attempts at communication with one or other of the planets have been already made; and if so, with what success?

Research into the matter indicates that a number of persons have actually transmitted alleged messages to Mars or some other extraterrestrial destination: notably a Captain W who was a radio experimenter in Somerset in 1939; and a Dr. M. R., of London, who sent a radio signal to Mars from Rugby in 1924. The latter alleged that he had established communication with a Martian female called Oumaruroo or some similar outlandish name. Captain W was rather more cautious, and contented himself with the statement that—"we have some justification for assuming that we can get Mars now." It is not related whether he got any reply.

These instances are given to show that since the advent of wireless telegraphy, man has been trying unobtrusively but

persistently to establish contact with other worlds. It is worth bearing in mind that in 1924, and again in 1939, the planet Mars was at its closest to Earth—some 36 millions of miles.

An obvious question springs to mind. If wireless messages were transmitted to Mars on these occasions, is there reliable external evidence that any signals were observed in reply, emanating from extraterrestrial sources?

The reply would appear to be in the negative but it is interesting to note that in 1921 the late Marconi received and recorded definite systematic impulses on a wavelength of 150,000 metres, coming out of space from the direction of Sagittarius; and in 1924 the New York newspapers for August of that year reported the following: MYSTERY DOTS AND DASHES WAS MARS SIGNALLING? WHAT THE PHOTOGRAPHIC FILM REVEALED. "The development of the photographic film of the radio signals for the 29 hour period while Mars was close to Earth; deepens the mystery of the dots and dashes heard by widely separated powerful stations. The film disclosed in black and white a regular arrangement of dots and dashes along one side. On the other, at about evenly spacial intervals, are curiously jumbled groups, each taking the form of a crudely drawn face."

Were these signals attempts to reply to messages sent from this Earth? Or were they independent efforts to attract the attention of this planet?

It has been said that had intelligible signals been transmitted from outer space, they would have been detected and decoded by experts long ago. That statement is advanced as proof that no attempts to communicate with this planet have been made. But it ignores at least two possibilities. One, that communication might have been established by means other than radio. The other, that general communication with this world might not be considered desirable, except with specific individuals.

Judging by the state of our world to-day, it is not unreasonable to suppose that other more civilized planets might possess prejudices. . . .

P. E. JONES

Astronomer Fears Hostile Attack; Would Keep Life on Earth a Secret

By WALTER SULLIVAN

Sir Martin Ryle, Nobel laureate in physics and Britain's Astronomer Royal, is trying to persuade the radio astronomers of the world to refrain from making known the existence of intelligent life on this planet, lest the earth be invaded by hostile beings.

He has addressed an appeal to the International Astronomical Union, urging that no attempts to communicate with other civilizations be undertaken, at least until there is international agreement on such a step. Copies of the appeal have been sent to Dr. Margaret Burbidge, President of the American astronomical Society, and others.

So far as is known to radio astronomers here, no attempts to send signals to other worlds are under way or planned to date, and none of a serious nature have been undertaken. However, they point out that normal transmissions from the earth, dating from the development of high-powered radars and other transmitters, have by now reached out at least 20 light years in all directions. One light year is the distance traveled by light in a year.

Runs Counter to View

Sir Martin's concern, as expressed in his appeal to the Astronomical Union and in his correspondence with American colleagues, is that another civilization might see the earth as a tempting place for colonization or for extraction of mineral resources.

His suggestions in this regard run counter to the widely held view that travel across the vast distances separating stars

and their planetary systems would be hard to justify for any conceivable purposes. Travel times in each direction would probably run to centuries.

Proponents of the search for signals from other worlds argue, on the other hand, that to learn that such civilizations exist and how they may have overcome the problems currently besetting this world could help mankind to survive.

Radio astronomers in the United States and the Soviet Union are actively seeking signals of intelligent origin. The emphasis is on listening, with virtually no discussion of transmission, at least until signals from space indicate in what direction and how to communicate.

It is significant, in this regard, that the name of the American effort, under the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, has evolved from CETI to SETI. The former acronym stood for "communication with extraterrestrial intelligence," whereas the title now refers to the "search" for such intelligence.

Sir Martin, who shared the 1974 Nobel Prize for his innovative development of antenna systems, became concerned last July when he saw a report on BBC television indicating that powerful signals were being transmitted at a 21-centimeter wavelength with the giant dish, 1,000 feet in diameter, at Arecibo, Puerto Rico. The alleged purpose was to attract the attention of civilizations far out in space.

The 21-centimeter wavelength (equivalent to a frequency of 1420 megahertz) is the "landmark" frequency of radio astronomy, being emitted by free-drifting clouds of hydrogen throughout the uni-

verse. It and its neighboring wavelengths have long been regarded as the most logical radio-frequency rendezvous for technological societies trying to make contact.

Sir Martin wrote to Dr. Frank Drake at Cornell University, who directs the National Astronomy and Ionosphere Center, which operates the Arecibo observatory, who replied that no signals were being sent at 21 centimeters. That wavelength, by agreement, is protected to allow unimpeded observations.

In 1974, as part of the ceremonies dedicating the resurfaced Arecibo dish, an ingenious pictorial message was transmitted for three minutes at two other frequencies. The power of the transmission, Dr. Drake said in his reply, was "trivial" compared to the radar pulses from Arecibo and Goldstone, Calif., used in investigating and mapping nearby planets.

Other Transmission Sources

Some Military radars also transmit powerful signals and the total energy sent into space by television stations probably

exceeds all other sources. These transmissions, however, are spread out both in frequency and in time.

Sir Martin then proposed a global commitment to refrain from any attempt at signalling. He noted that when pulsars were first detected by his colleagues at Cambridge University they were suspected to be of artificial origin, implying that the next time it might be the real thing.

His appeal for action by the International Astronomical Union, the umbrella organization of world astronomers, was apparently transmitted to the union—but without endorsement—by Sir Bernard Lovell, the British pioneer in radio astronomy. However, no action was taken on it when that organization recently held its General Assembly in Grenoble, France.

Meanwhile Dr. Drake's colleague at Cornell, Dr. Thomas Gold, has proposed that widely separated civilizations may be using clouds of gas in certain regions of the Milky Way Galaxy as masers to achieve enormous amplification of their signals. Such clouds appear to be amplifying emissions of natural origin to great intensity.

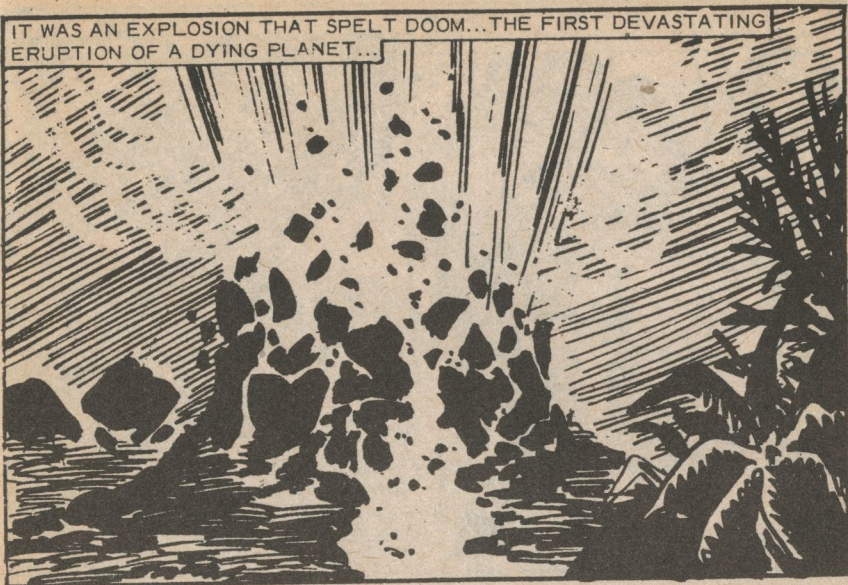
HELL ON ASTRA 6

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THE YEAR 2290...AND ON THE HYPER-SPACE FRINGE OF THE GALAXY KNOWN AS ORIANIC ANDELMO, A GIGANTIC UPHEAVAL WAS TAKING PLACE. FROM THE VERY BOWELS OF THE PLANET RANUS, THERE GUSHED FORTH A SEETHING, WHIRLING FOUNTAIN OF MOLTEN MATTER...

IT WAS AN EXPLOSION THAT SPELT DOOM...THE FIRST DEVASTATING
ERUPTION OF A DYING PLANET...




SLOWLY AT FIRST, THE BUBBLING LAVA SPREAD...ENGULFING THE
LAND AND THEN THE CITIES. FOR THE PEOPLE OF RANUS, DEATH
BECAME A CONSTANT, EVER-PRESENT COMPANION...



AT THE PALACE OF WORLD GOVERNMENT, ZAKOR, GRAND RULER OF ALL RANUS, WAITED ANXIOUSLY FOR NEWS...



gl-3



THEN LET US GO.
I SHALL DIRECT THE
OPERATIONS IN PERSON.

SO BE
IT...

THE MONORAIL TRANSPORTER HUMMED SILENTLY OVER THE STREETS...
AND THE CITIZENS OF CAPITAL CITY LOOKED UP WITH SUDDEN HOPE IN
THEIR EYES...



BEYOND THE WALLS, THE BOILING CARPET OF LAVA STRETCHED FROM HORIZON TO HORIZON...

IT IS CLOSER
THAN I THOUGHT, LISTRA.
WE MUST ACT QUICKLY...

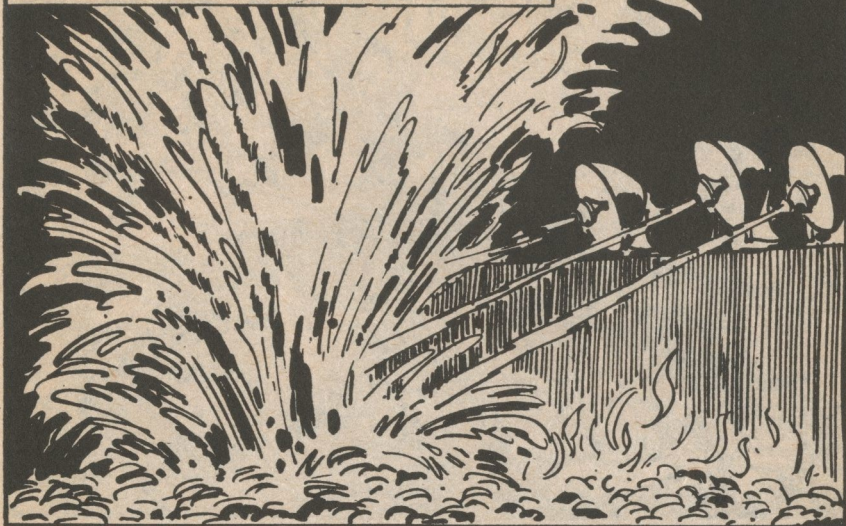
THE
BEAMS ARE READY,
SIRE...

A CURT COMMAND, AND THE MASSIVE DISINTEGRATOR BEAMS SWIVELLED SMOOTHLY INTO POSITION...

NOW, MY
SOLDIERS...
FIRE!

91-5

THREE DEVASTATING SPURTS OF SONARISED NUCLEAR ENERGY SPRAYED
ACROSS A THREE HUNDRED STRETCH OF LAVA...



THEN IT DISINTEGRATED...

SIRE, IT WORKS!
WHERE THE LIGHT FELL,
THE LAVA IS NO MORE.



GOOD! WE SHALL RING
THE CITY WALLS WITH MACHINES.
HOLD BACK THE FLOOD UNTIL OUR
MEN OF SCIENCE CAN TRACE THE
SOURCE AND DESTROY THIS
EVIL...

g1-6

BUT IT WAS JUST THEN, THAT IT HAPPENED! WITH A ROAR THAT SEEMED TO SPLIT THE YELLOW SKY ASUNDER, THE GROUND OPENED...



WITHIN MINUTES, THE ONCE-PROUD CITY WAS WRITHING IN ITS DEATH-THROES...



g1-7

TREMOR AFTER TREMOR POUNDED AND RIPPED AT THE HEAVING EARTH...

AN EARTHQUAKE!
FLEE, SIRE - TAKE TO
THE MONORAIL...

TOO DANGEROUS, LISTRA.
WE SHALL TAKE THE JET-CAR
FLEET AND MAKE FOR THE
HIGH PLATEAU OF TALKO.



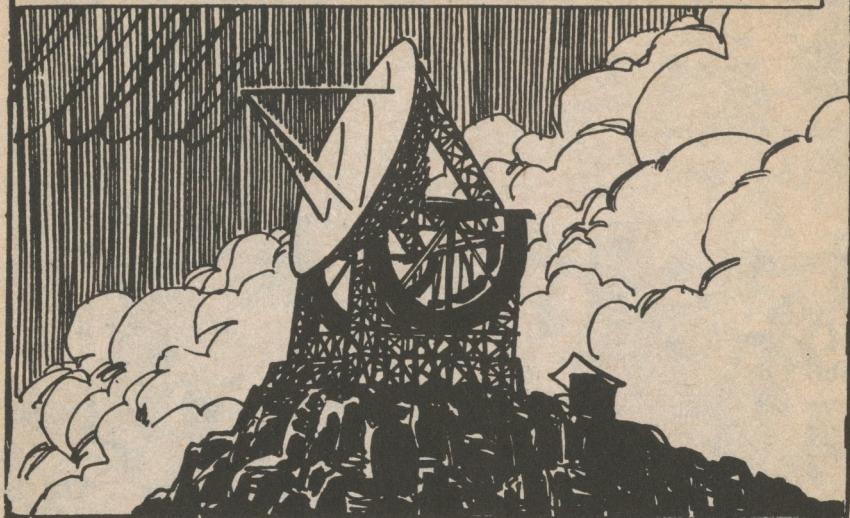
WARN THE PEOPLE THEY
MUST LEAVE AT ONCE AND
FOLLOW US. FLASH THE RED CODE
ALERT TO EVERY REMAINING TOWN
AND HAMLET ON THE PLANET.

IT SHALL BE
AS YOU SAY, O
ZAKOR...



g1-8

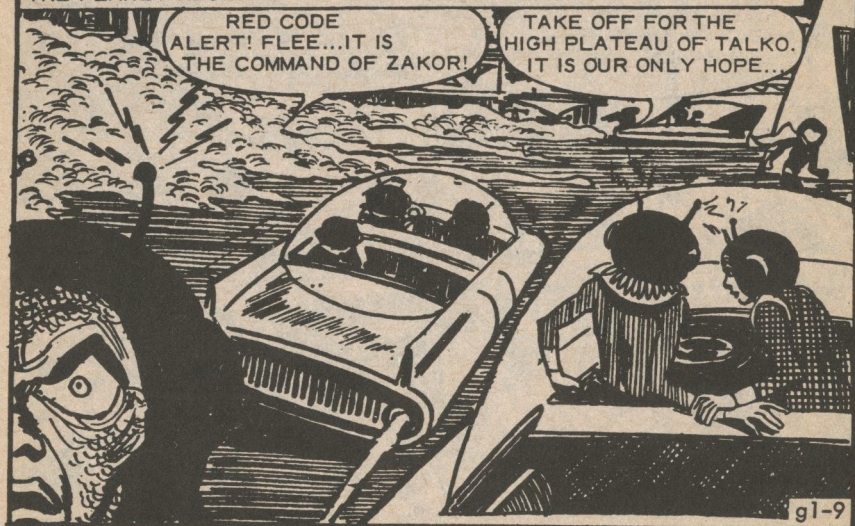
INSTANTLY, THE WARNING WENT OUT...A NON-STOP SERIES OF HIGH-PITCHED RADIO SIGNALS WHICH FLASHED TO EVERY CORNER OF RANUS...



AND THROUGH THEIR BUILT-IN ANTENNAE, EVERY SINGLE PERSON ON THE PLANET RECEIVED THE FATEFUL SIGNAL...

RED CODE
ALERT! FLEE...IT IS
THE COMMAND OF ZAKOR!

TAKE OFF FOR THE
HIGH PLATEAU OF TALKO.
IT IS OUR ONLY HOPE...

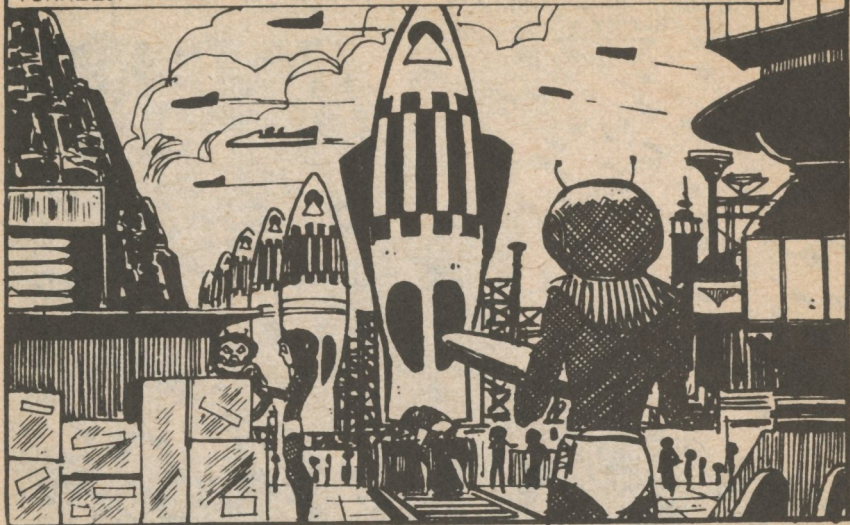


WITHIN A MATTER OF HOURS, THE POPULATION OF AN ENTIRE WORLD WAS CONVERGING ON THE TOWERING MOUNTAIN PLATEAU OF TALKO. FOR THIS WAS THE LAST LINE OF DEFENCE...A FINAL STRONGHOLD AGAINST ADVANCING DOOM...



g1-10

TALKO! A HOLLOWED-OUT MOUNTAIN OF A MILLION LABYRINTHS AND TUNNELS. THE PLANET'S NERVE-CENTRE AND MILITARY SPACE H.Q.



DEEP IN THE MAIN CHAMBER OF SCIENCE. ZAKOR WAS ALREADY IN CONSULTATION WITH HIS CHIEF TECHNICAL ADVISER...



THIS IS GRAVE NEWS
INDEED, MADAR. YOU SAY
THAT OUR PLANET IS DOOMED?
THAT 'ERE LONG IT WILL SIMPLY
EXPLODE AND CEASE TO
EXIST?

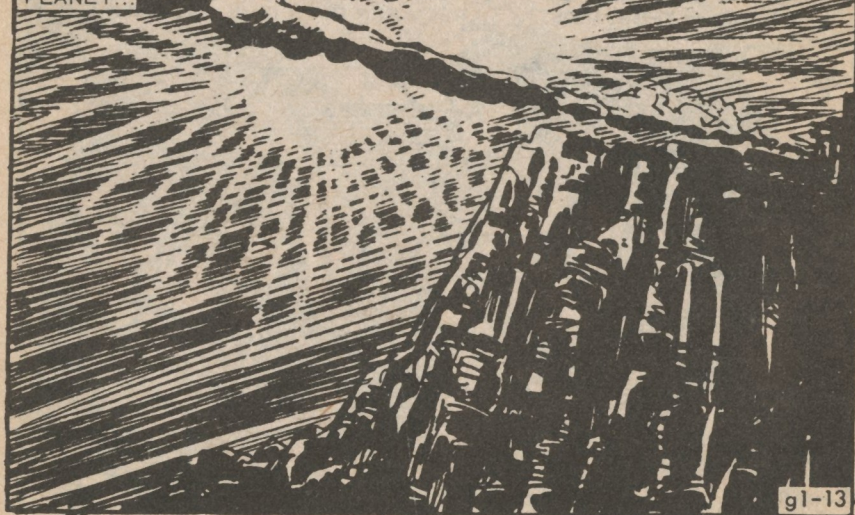
YES, O ZAKOR. THE
ONLY HOPE FOR OUR PEOPLE
IS TO LEAVE RANUS BEFORE THE
DISASTER HAPPENS. TRANSPORT
OURSELVES TO ANOTHER PLANET
AND BEGIN LIFE ANEW...

g1-11





AND SO IT WAS, THAT AS THE TWIN SUNS OF RANUS PLUNGED BELOW THE HORIZON, A MIGHTY SPACE-SHIP THUNDERED FREE FROM THE STRICKEN PLANET...



91-13

THREE WEEKS LATER, IN THE WORLD SPACE RECEPTION CONTROL OF PLANET ASTRA 6, COLONEL PETE SAWYER SUDDENLY TENSED EXCITEDLY.

VISUAL SIGHTING ON UNIDENTIFIED SPACE-SHIP, COMMANDER. SHE'S VEERING INTO AN APPROACH ORBIT OVER SECTION D5.

OKAY, KEEP TRACKING. WARN THE MISSILE RETALIATION STATIONS AND FLASH A YELLOW ALERT. WE DON'T WANT TO TAKE ANY CHANCES...

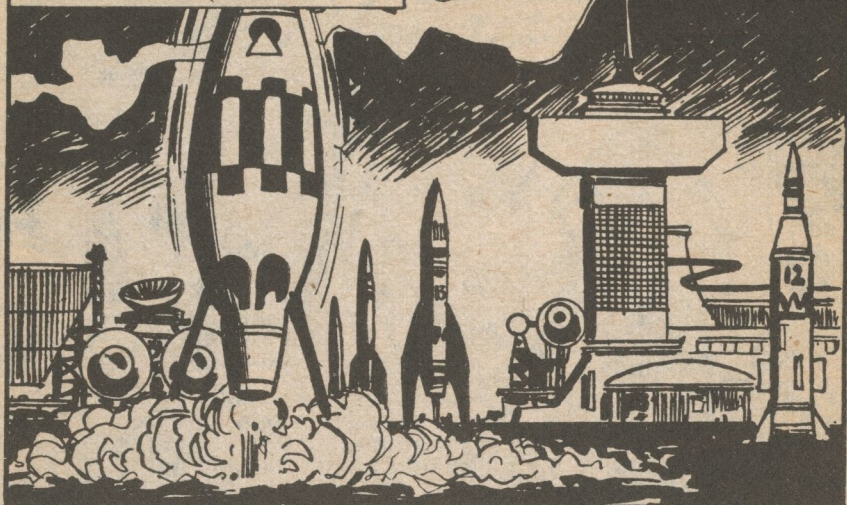
COMMANDER PAUL BARCLAY FROWNED. AS THE MAN IN CHARGE OF THE ASTRA 6 DEFENCE NETWORK, ANY UNIDENTIFIED OBJECT IN SPACE MADE HIM SUSPICIOUS...

INTERNATIONAL REGISTRATION PLX. SHE'S A RANIAN SHIP, SIR - REQUESTING PERMISSION TO LAND...

VERY WELL, CLEAR TOUCHDOWN PAD ZERO-ZERO-NINE. WE'LL GO AND MEET THEM PERSONALLY...

g1-14

TWO HOURS LATER, THE RANIAN SHIP WAS LOWERING GENTLY ON TO THE SURFACE OF ASTRA 6...



BY NIGHTFALL, ZAKOR THE GRAND WAS PLEADING HIS CASE BEFORE A COUNCIL OF MINISTERS...




AND SO I REPEAT, WISE RULERS OF ASTRA. UNLESS YOU ALLOW THE RANIAN PEOPLES TO SHARE YOUR PLANET, WE ARE DOOMED.

WE UNDERSTAND YOUR POSITION, ZAKOR, BUT THIS PLANET IS SMALL. BIG ENOUGH TO ACCOMMODATE ONLY THE SURVIVORS FROM EARTH.

g1-15




THAT NIGHT, ZAKOR THE GRAND BLASTED ONCE AGAIN INTO SPACE...
AND THERE WAS A SEETHING HATE IN HIS HEART...



FIRE LATERAL ROCKETS -
HALF THRUST. COURSE TWO-ONE
ZERO. SWIVEL TO A HOLDING
ORBIT.

A HOLDING ORBIT,
SIRE? YOU MEAN WE ARE
NOT RETURNING TO
RANUS?



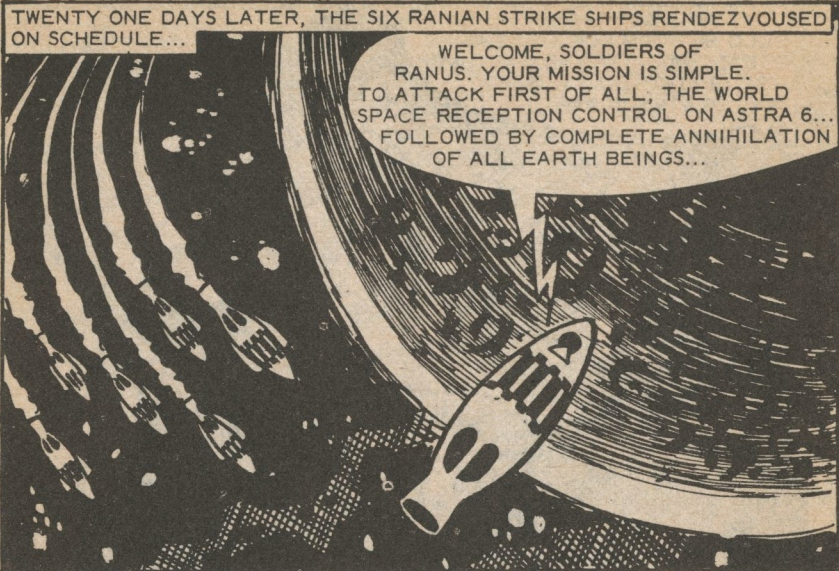
NOT YET, LISTRA,
MY FRIEND. NOT WHILE
THERE IS STILL HOPE FOR
MY PEOPLE...

BUT THE ASTRA
COUNCIL WAS ADAMANT. ONLY
ONE MILLION RANIANs TO BE
ALLOWED IN. THEY HAVE
NO MORE ROOM...

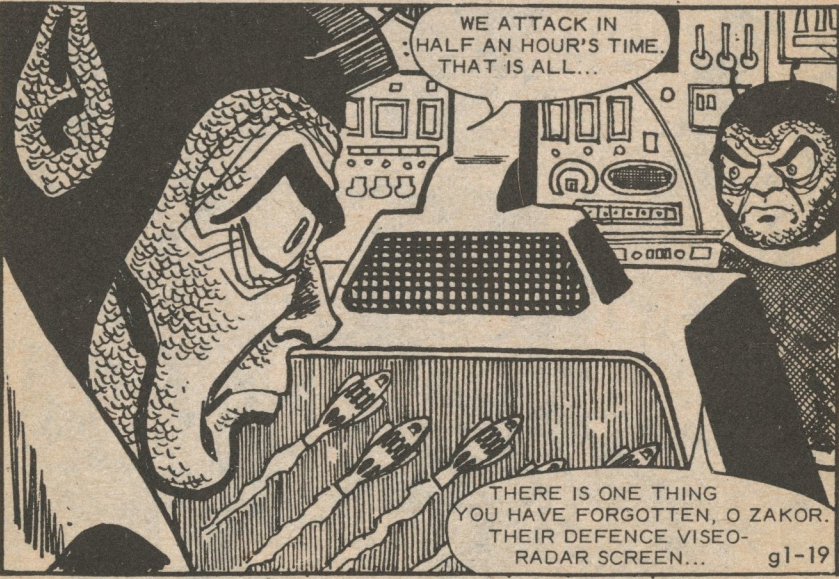
91-17



TWENTY ONE DAYS LATER, THE SIX RANIAN STRIKE SHIPS RENDEZVOUSED ON SCHEDULE...



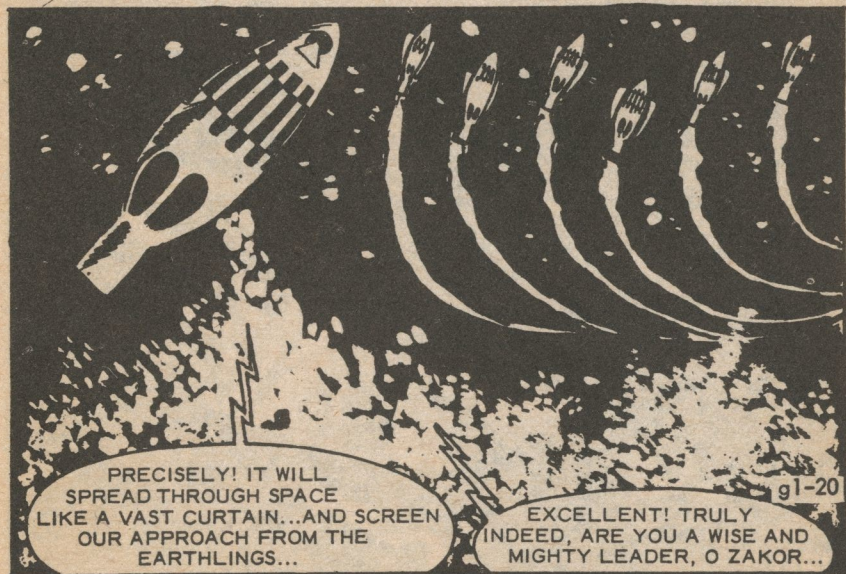
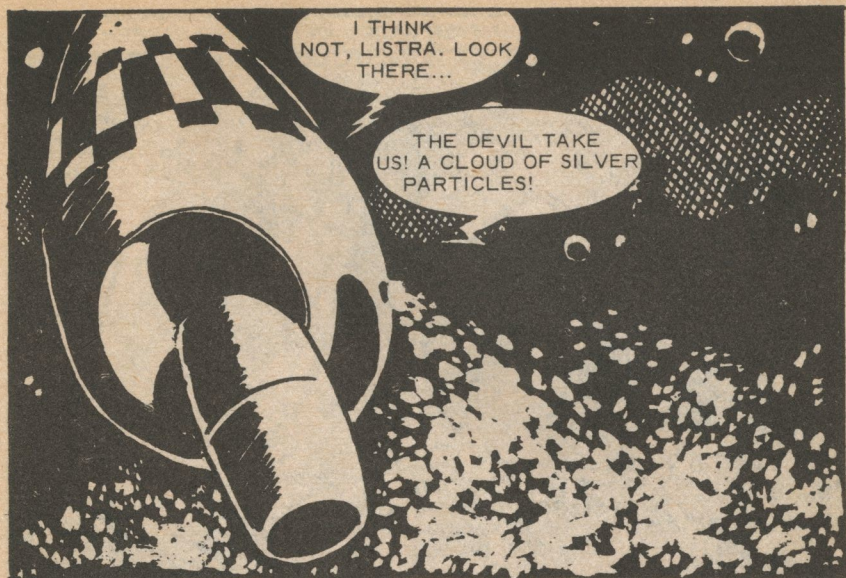
WELCOME, SOLDIERS OF RANUS. YOUR MISSION IS SIMPLE. TO ATTACK FIRST OF ALL, THE WORLD SPACE RECEPTION CONTROL ON ASTRA 6... FOLLOWED BY COMPLETE ANNIHILATION OF ALL EARTH BEINGS...



WE ATTACK IN HALF AN HOUR'S TIME. THAT IS ALL...

THERE IS ONE THING YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN, O ZAKOR. THEIR DEFENCE VISO-RADAR SCREEN...

g1-19



FAR BELOW, COLONEL PETE SAWYER GAZED AT HIS VIDEO SCREEN IN STARTLED SURPRISE...

I DON'T GET IT,
COMMANDER. ONE MOMENT
IT WAS CLEAR, THE NEXT.

IT'S TOO THICK FOR
AN ASTEROID SHOWER, SO WE
MUST ASSUME IT'S MAN-MADE. ALERT
ALL STATIONS. PRIORITY ONE-
ZERO!

PAUL BARCLAY HAD ACTED FAST - BUT NOT QUITE FAST ENOUGH.
FOR AT THAT VERY MOMENT...

FIRST SALVO
ATOMIC ROCKETS...
FIRRE!

gl-21

TWO DOZEN BILLING STREAKS OF DESTRUCTION ZEROED IN FROM
THE STRATOSPHERE OF ASTRA 6...AND THE RANIAN'S AIM WAS DEADLY!

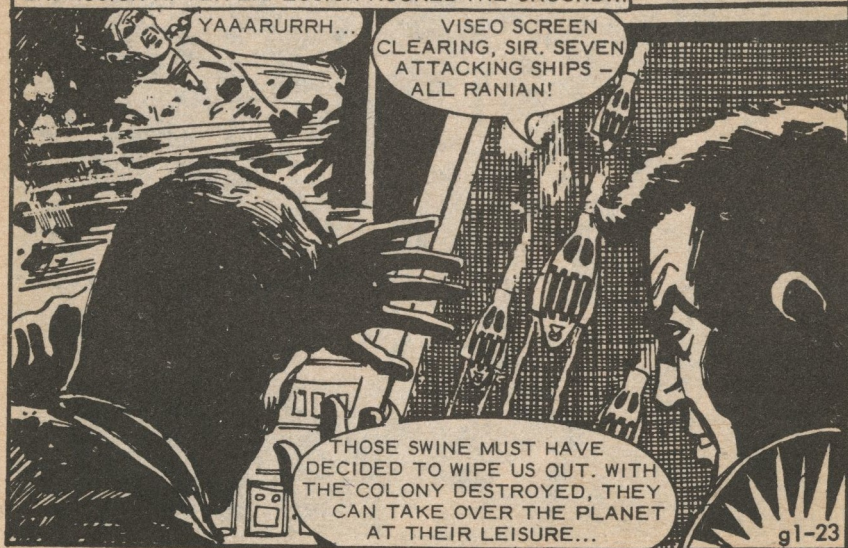


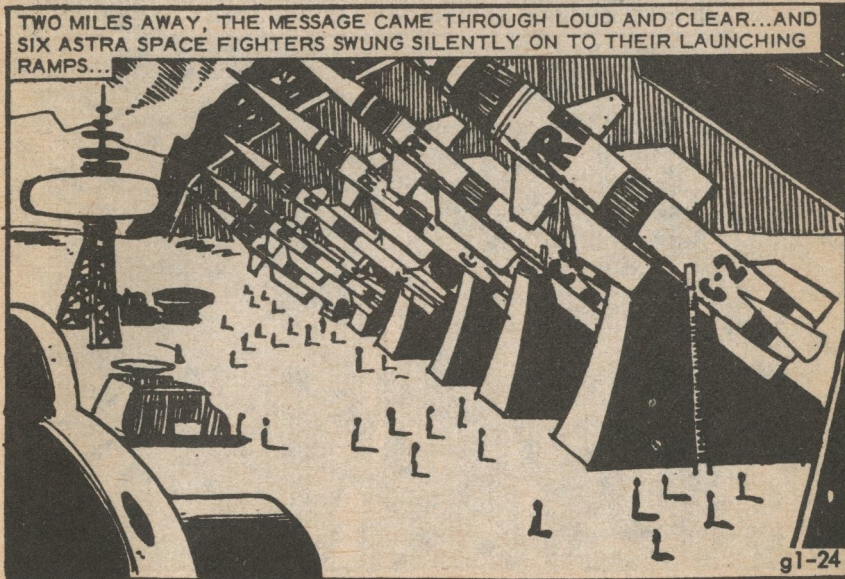
g1-22

CAUGHT BY SURPRISE, THE SPACEPORT WORKERS TRIED IN VAIN TO FLEE FOR THEIR LIVES...



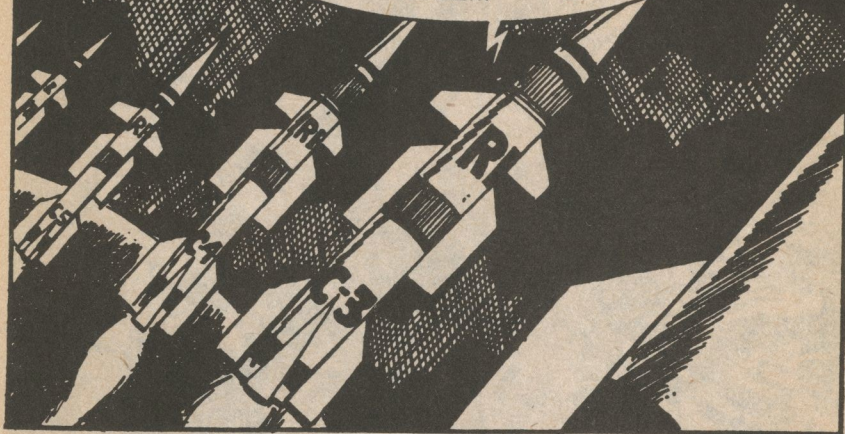
EXPLOSION AFTER EXPLOSION ROCKED THE GROUND...





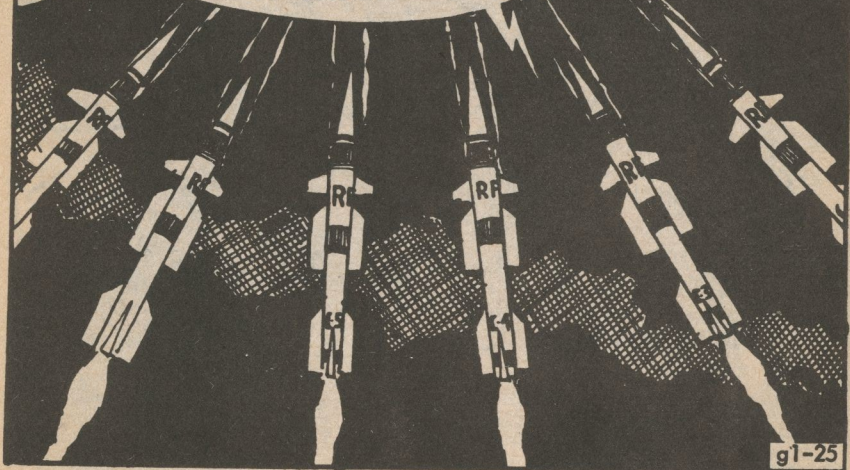
THEN THEY WERE OFF...BLAZING A BLUE EXHAUST TRAIL TOWARDS THE FRINGE OF SPACE...

ASTRA RED TO BASE...
ASTRA RED TO BASE! ENEMY
SHIPS SIGHTED. CLOSING FOR HYDROMIC
ATTACK ON COURSE SUB-YELLOW
THREE...



SWIFTLY, THE INTERCEPTION LEADER ALIGNED HIS SIGHTS...

MISSILES FIRED! HOLDING
COURSE AND CLOSING FOR SECOND
THRUST...



g1-25

BUT ZAKOR THE GRAND WAS NO FOOL...



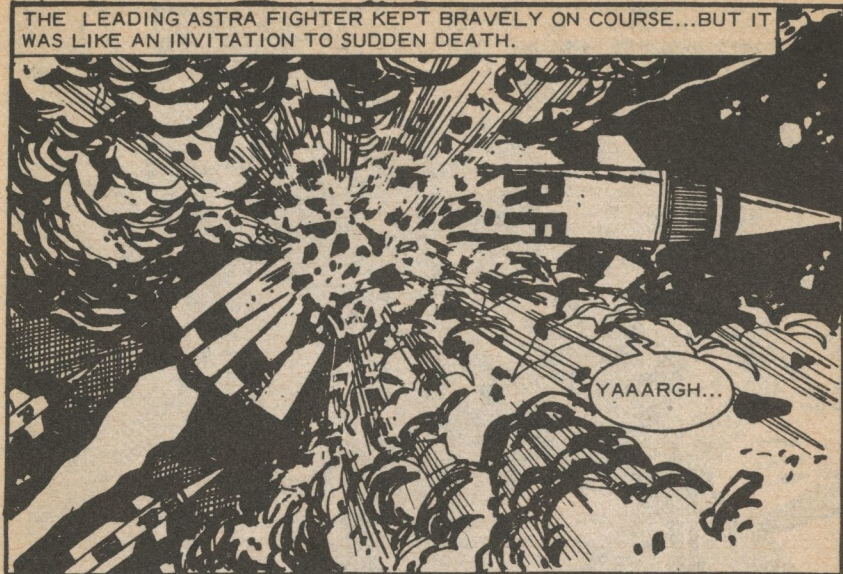
NEXT MOMENT A SHIELD OF DAZZLING LIGHT LANCED THROUGH SPACE
...AND THE ASTRA ROCKETS BOUNCED HARMLESSLY OFF COURSE...

ATTACK TURNED ASIDE,
O ZAKOR. REQUEST PERMISSION
TO WIPE THE EARTHLING
SHIPS FROM THE AREA.

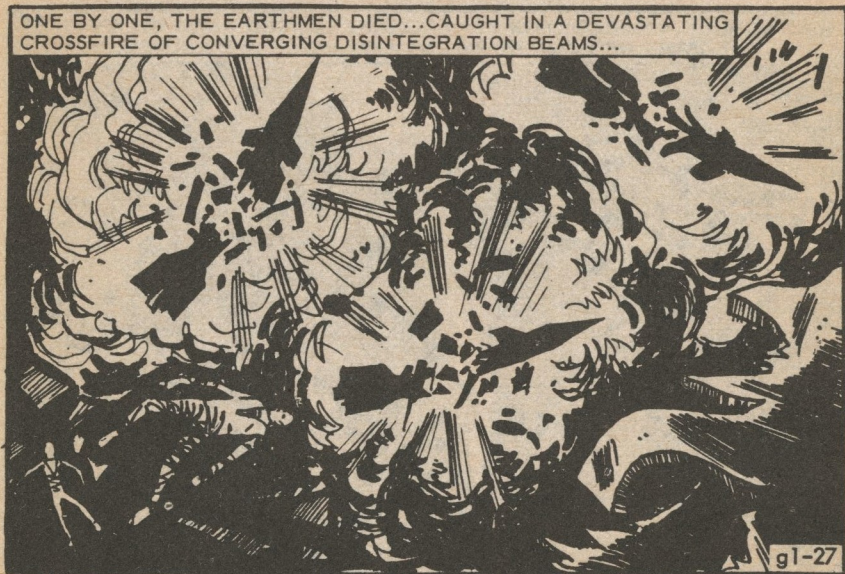
PERMISSION
GRANTED. FIRE DISINTEGRATOR
MISSILES...

g1-26

THE LEADING ASTRA FIGHTER KEPT BRAVELY ON COURSE...BUT IT WAS LIKE AN INVITATION TO SUDDEN DEATH.



ONE BY ONE, THE EARTHMEN DIED...CAUGHT IN A DEVASTATING CROSSFIRE OF CONVERGING DISINTEGRATION BEAMS...



PETE SAWYER AND PAUL BARCLAY GAZED AT THE SCREEN IN BLEAK, ANGRY DESPAIR...

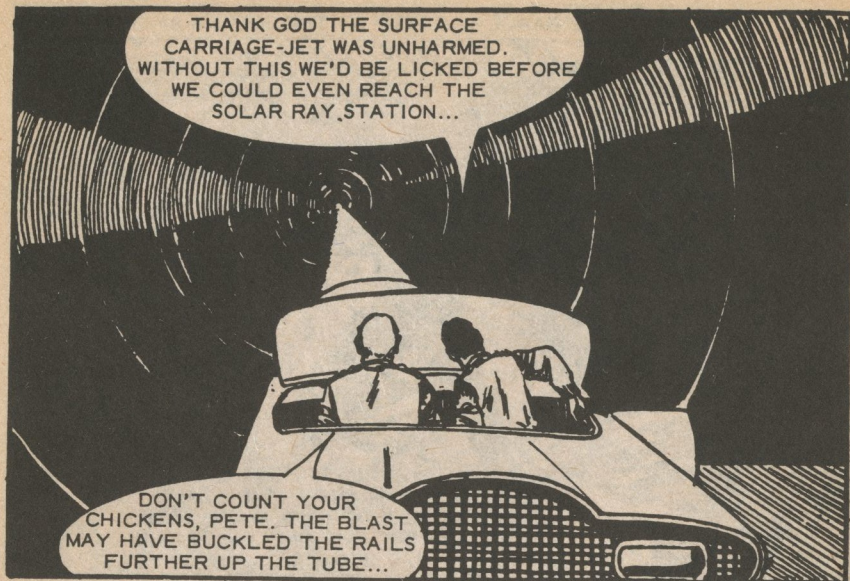
GONE - EVERY ONE!
THEY DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE
AGAINST THOSE RANIAN
BEAMS...

TWO HOURS FROM NOW,
THOSE RANIAN WILL BE LANDING.
WE'VE GOT TO STOP THEM, PETE...
BEFORE THE MAIN EMIGRATION
BEGINS.

ANY IDEAS,
COMMANDER? THERE
ISN'T MUCH TIME...

WE'LL USE THE SOLAR
RAY AS THEY COME IN FOR
TOUCHDOWN. IT'S OUR ONLY
HOPE...

g1-28



THANK GOD THE SURFACE
CARRIAGE-JET WAS UNHARMED.
WITHOUT THIS WE'D BE LICKED BEFORE
WE COULD EVEN REACH THE
SOLAR RAY STATION...

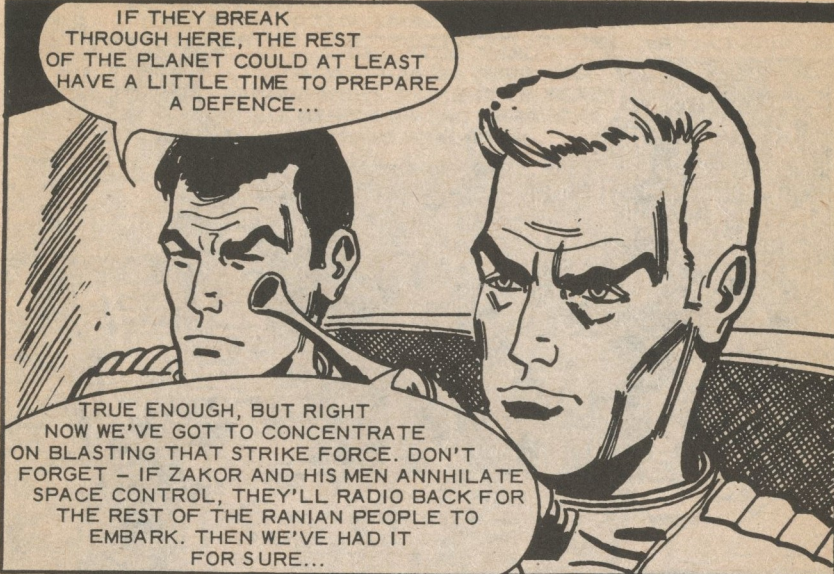
DON'T COUNT YOUR
CHICKENS, PETE. THE BLAST
MAY HAVE BUCKLED THE RAILS
FURTHER UP THE TUBE...

BUT AT THE CLICK OF A CONCEALED RADIO WAVE, THE CARRIAGE
SWISHED EASILY UP THE TUBE...

GOOD, NO BACK-KICK
FROM THE BOOSTERS. I
RECKON WE'RE IN LUCK.

PAUL, I'VE JUST
THOUGHT OF SOMETHING.
SHOULDN'T THE COUNCIL OF
MINISTERS BE TOLD OF
THIS ATTACK...?

g1-29



IF THEY BREAK
THROUGH HERE, THE REST
OF THE PLANET COULD AT LEAST
HAVE A LITTLE TIME TO PREPARE
A DEFENCE...

A black and white comic panel showing two men in a control room. The man on the left is seen in profile, looking towards the right. The man on the right is shown from the chest up, looking forward with a serious expression. Both are wearing uniforms with epaulettes. The background is dark with some horizontal lines suggesting a window or screen.

TRUE ENOUGH, BUT RIGHT
NOW WE'VE GOT TO CONCENTRATE
ON BLASTING THAT STRIKE FORCE. DON'T
FORGET - IF ZAKOR AND HIS MEN ANNIHILATE
SPACE CONTROL, THEY'LL RADIO BACK FOR
THE REST OF THE RANIAN PEOPLE TO
EMBARK. THEN WE'VE HAD IT
FOR SURE...

FOR HALF AN HOUR, THE SECURITY MEN STREAKED ALONG THE TUBE.
AND THEN...

SOLAR RAY
STATION DEAD AHEAD.
STAND BY...

READY WHEN
YOU ARE, COMMANDER...

g1-30

DEEP INSIDE THE MOUNTAIN, THE TRANSPORTER TUBE ENDED IN A SOARING CAVERN...

OKAY, PETE, LET'S GET BUSY. WE WANT TO BE READY BY THE TIME THOSE RANIAN SHIPS ARE LOWERING ON TO THEIR APPROACH ORBIT...

YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN, COMMANDER. YOU CHECK THE ANGLE SYSTEM AND I'LL OPERATE THE FOCUSING SLOT...

QUICKLY, PETE CROSSED TO THE ELECTRONIC CONTROL AND JABBED AT A LEVER...

TOPSIDE FIRING APERTURE OPENING NOW, CHIEF...

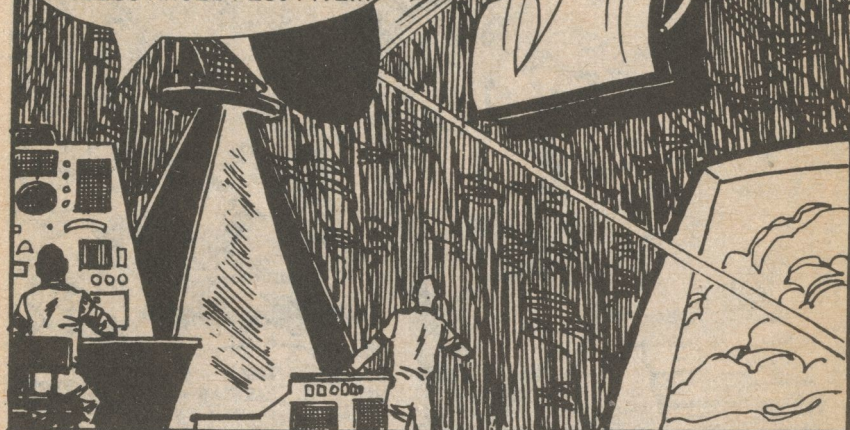
FINE!
LOWER THE MIRROR...

g1-31

MACHINERY WHIRRED...AND THE ROOF OF THE CAVERN SLID BACK. INSTANTLY, THE RAYS OF THE SUN LANCED THROUGH...

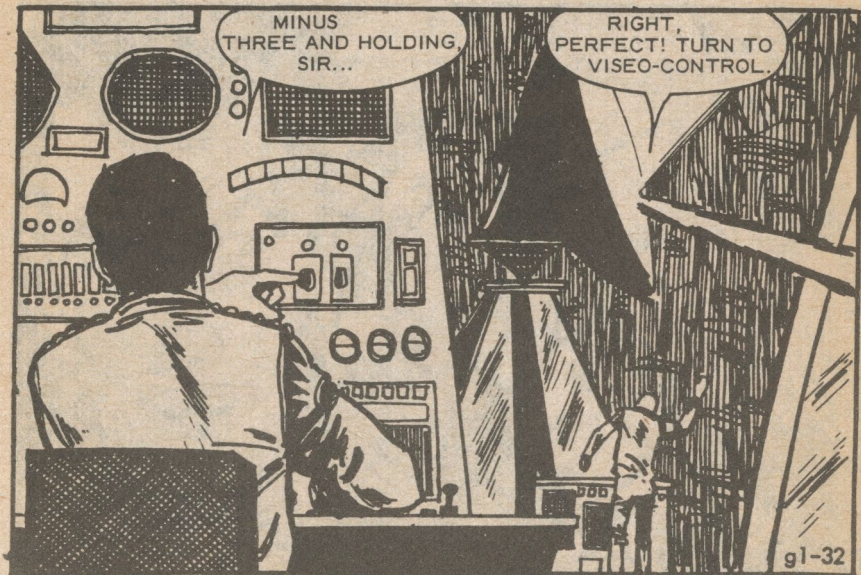
LOOKS GOOD, COMMANDER. SUNLIGHT BOUNCING OFF THE MIRROR ON TO THE ELEMENT AT SELCO ANGLE PLUS FIVE...

OKAY, LOWER IT TO MINUS THREE AND STAND BY...



MINUS THREE AND HOLDING, SIR...

RIGHT, PERFECT! TURN TO VIDEO-CONTROL.




g1-32



THERE THEY ARE!
RETRO ROCKETS FIRED AND
HOVERING INTO TOUCHDOWN!

EARLIER THAN
I THOUGHT. JUST AS WELL
WE MOVED FAST...

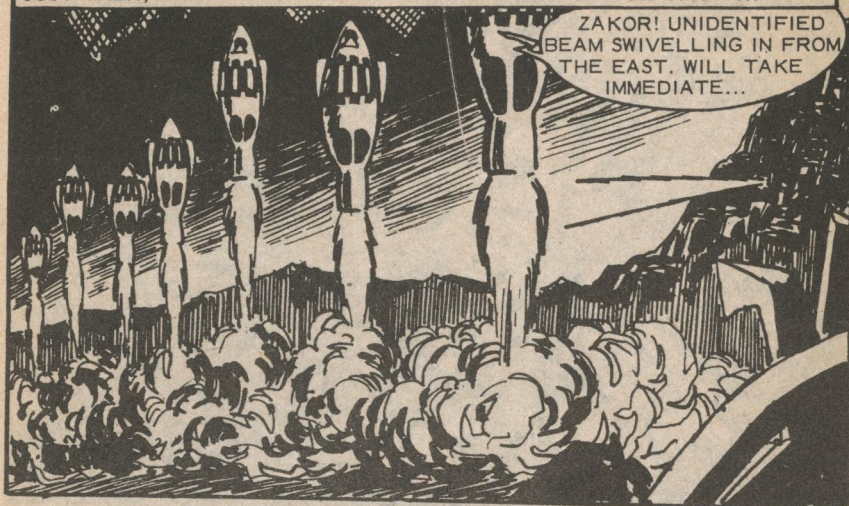


OKAY, PETE, THIS IS
IT. FULL POWER ON THE RAY
AND PAN IT ACROSS THE ENEMY
FLEET FROM EAST TO WEST.

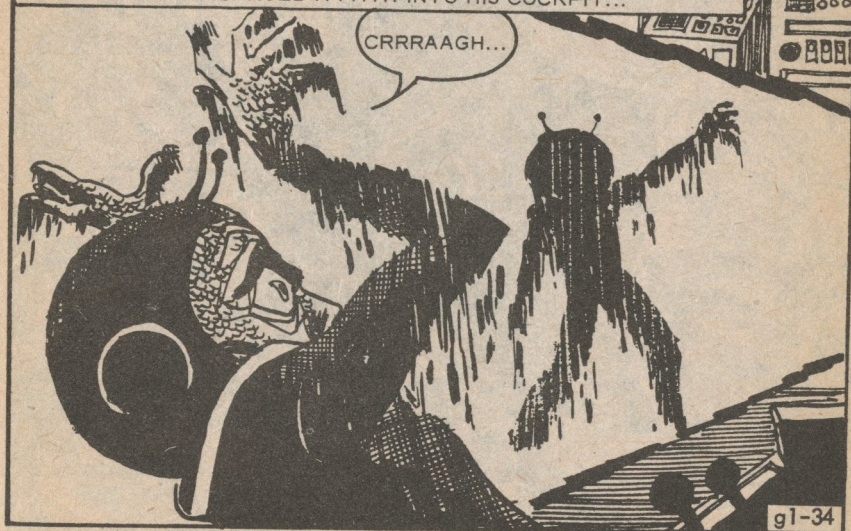
FULL POWER
BUILDING UP NOW,
SIR...

g1-33

FIFTEEN MILES AWAY, THE MEN OF RANUS LOWERED THEIR CRAFTS WITH CONTEMPTUOUS EASE ON TO THE SURFACE OF ASTRA 6...AND IT WAS JUST THEN, THAT PETE SAWYER AIMED THE DEADLY SOLAR RAY...

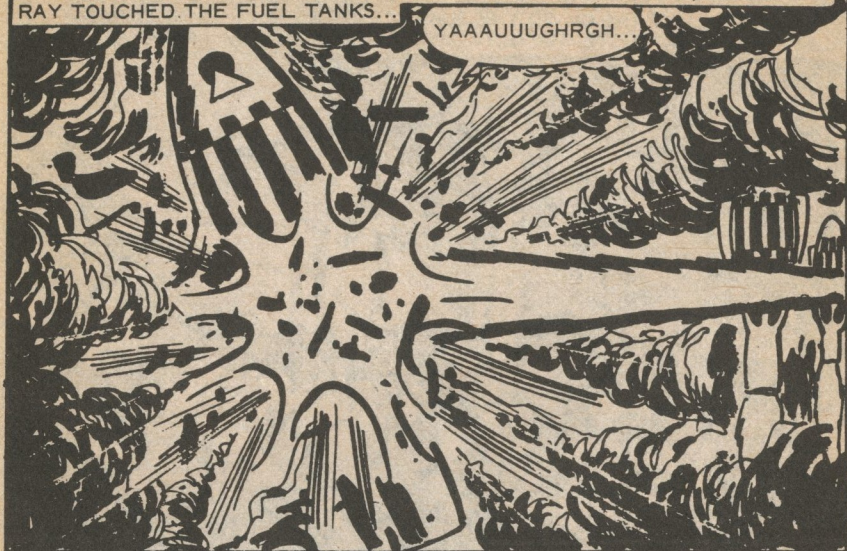


THE RANIAN PILOT SAID NO MORE. NEXT MOMENT THE NUCLEAR-FUSED SUNLIGHT CARVED A PATH INTO HIS COCKPIT...



AT A TEMPERATURE OF ONE MILLION DEGREES CENTIGRADE, THE SOLAR RAY TOUCHED THE FUEL TANKS...

YAAAUUUGHRGH...



LISTRA GLANCED OUT OF THE PORTHOLE...AND HIS HEART FROZE IN SUDDEN TERROR...

BY THE TWIN
SUNS OF ANDELMO! ZAKOR,
LOOK THERE!



ZAKOR TO ALL CREWS!
ZAKOR TO ALL CREWS! ABANDON
YOUR SHIPS. MAKE FOR THE
CONTROL BUILDING...

g1-35

A SECOND RANIAN SHIP ERUPTED IN A ROARING CLOUD OF GAS AND OXIDISED FUEL...

THAT
BEAM - WHAT
IS IT?

BY THE BRILLIANCE,
I WOULD SAY IT WAS A FAIRLY
ADVANCED FORM OF SOLAR ENERGY.
COME...WE MUST DESTROY IT!

BUT HOW, O MIGHTY
ONE? THE RAY MUST BE
LOCATED IN THAT DISTANT
RANGE OF MOUNTAINS...

FOOL, DO YOU NOT
THINK I HAD NOTICED? NOW
CEASE THESE TREMBLINGS AND
FOLLOW YOUR LEADER!

g1-36

FRANTICALLY THEY RAN, THOSE SOLDIERS OF RANUS...WHILE BEHIND THEM, THE DEADLY RAY WREAKED A GHASTLY, AWESOME DESTRUCTION...



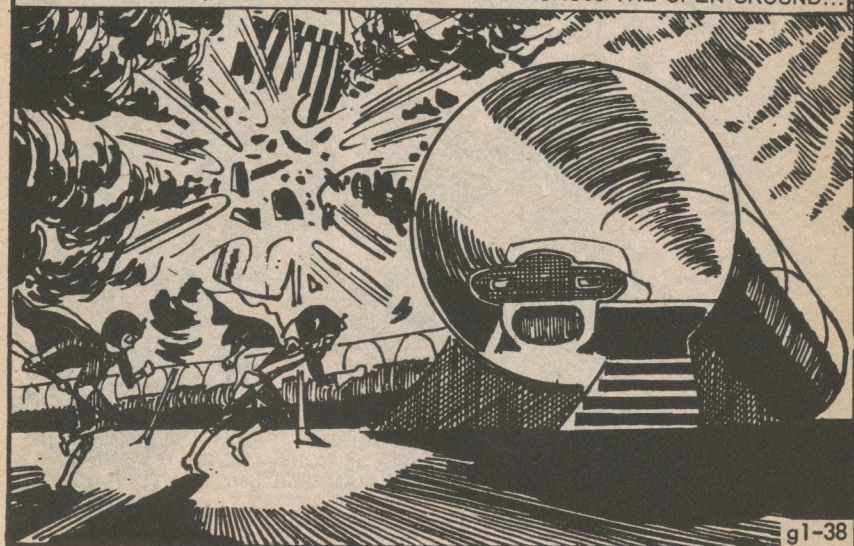
THREE SHIPS GONE -
A DOZEN MEN DEAD. WHAT
CAN WE DO, ZAKOR?

THAT TRANSPORTER
TUNNEL - I HAVE A FEELING
IT LEADS TO THE MOUNTAIN. PERHAPS
EVEN TO THE RAY INSTALLATION
ITSELF...

g1-37



CROUCHING LOW, THE TWO RANIANs WEAIVED ACROSS THE OPEN GROUND...



WHILE FIFTEEN MILES AWAY, PETE SAWYER TENSED WORRIEDLY...

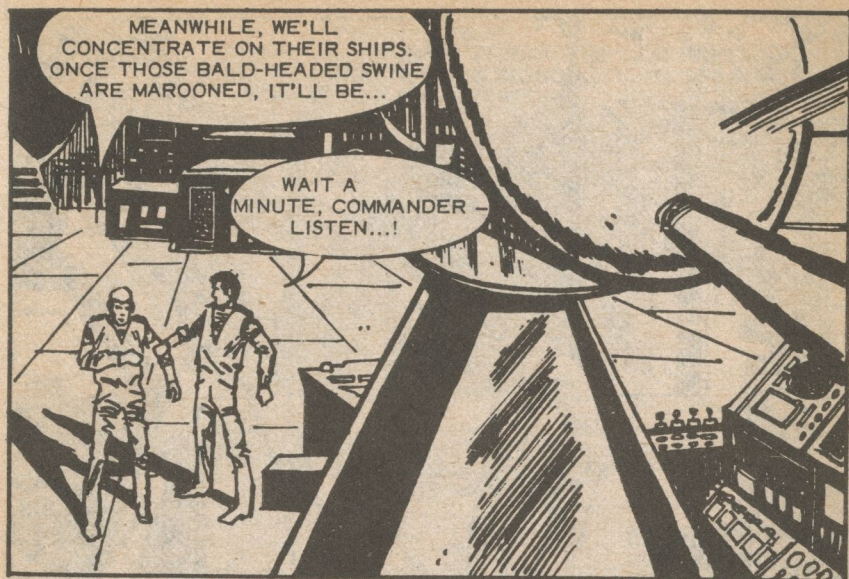
ZAKOR'S UP TO SOMETHING, COMMANDER. HE AND ONE OTHER HAVE JUST MADE A DASH FOR THE TRANSPORTER TUBE...

THEY MAY BE TRYING TO PINCH A CARRIAGE-JET AND BLAST US OUT WITH A FRONTAL ATTACK ON THE RAY POSITION.

NO, SIR - LOOK! THEY'RE HEADING BACK TO THE CONTROL BUILDING AGAIN...

MAYBE IT WAS JUST A DIVERSION, BUT WE WON'T TAKE ANY CHANCES. IF THEY POKE THEIR HEADS OUT AGAIN, TRAVERSE THE RAY AND BLAST THEM OUT OF THAT BUILDING FOR GOOD.

g1-39



MEANWHILE, WE'LL
CONCENTRATE ON THEIR SHIPS.
ONCE THOSE BALD-HEADED SWINE
ARE MAROONED, IT'LL BE...

WAIT A
MINUTE, COMMANDER -
LISTEN...!



FAINT HUMMING NOISE ECHOED DOWN THE TRANSPORTED TUBE...

SOUNDS LIKE A CARRIAGE-
JET. COMING THIS WAY. FOR SOME
REASON ZAKOR MUST HAVE SENT
AN EMPTY ONE UP THE TUBE...

I SMELL A RAT,
PETE. LET'S GET OUT OF
HERE - FAST!

g1-40

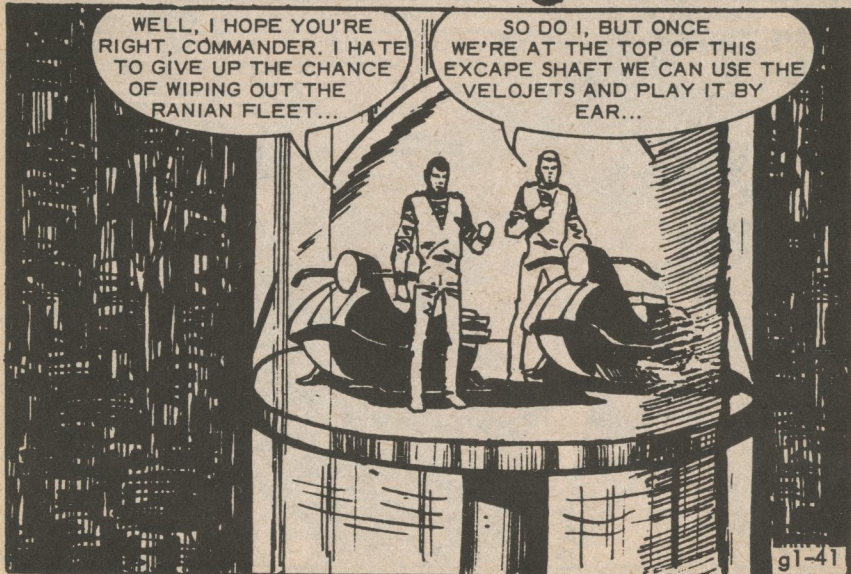
BUT SIR, WHY
CAN'T WE HANG ON
AND SEE WHAT...

SHUT UP! THAT
RANIAN IS NO FOOL - IF MY
GUESS IS RIGHT, WE'VE GOT ABOUT
TWENTY MINUTES TO GET
CLEAR...



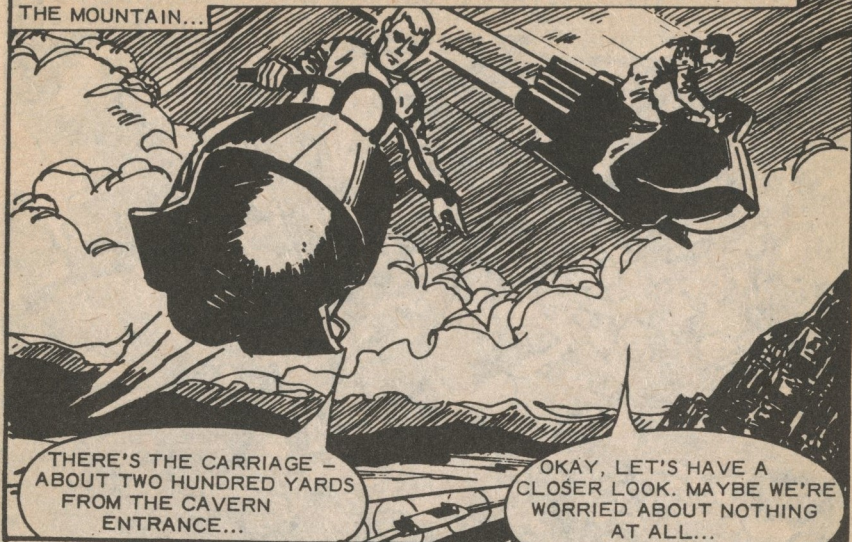
WELL, I HOPE YOU'RE
RIGHT, COMMANDER. I HATE
TO GIVE UP THE CHANCE
OF WIPING OUT THE
RANIAN FLEET...

SO DO I, BUT ONCE
WE'RE AT THE TOP OF THIS
ESCAPE SHAFT WE CAN USE THE
VELOJETS AND PLAY IT BY
EAR...



91-41

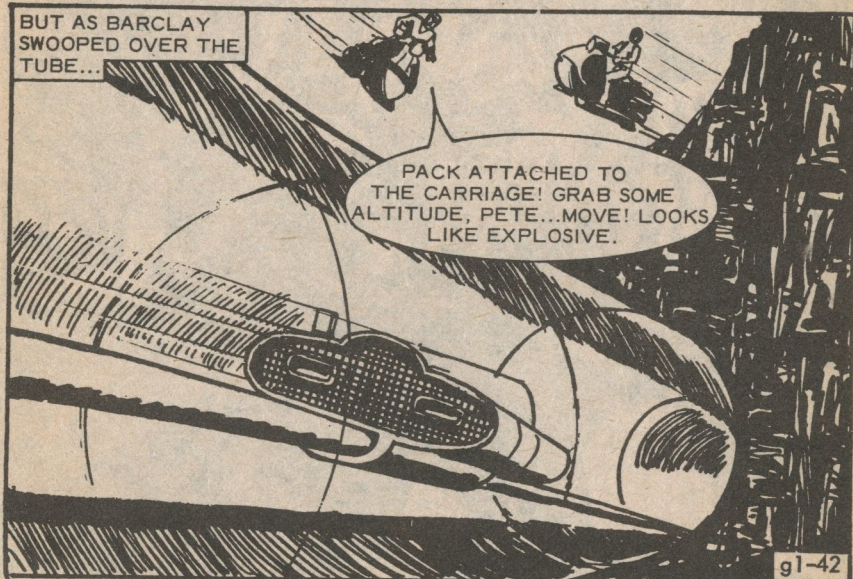
MINUTES LATER, THE TWO MEN WERE HOVERING NEAR THE SUMMIT OF THE MOUNTAIN...



THERE'S THE CARRIAGE -
ABOUT TWO HUNDRED YARDS
FROM THE CAVERN
ENTRANCE...

OKAY, LET'S HAVE A
CLOSER LOOK. MAYBE WE'RE
WORRIED ABOUT NOTHING
AT ALL...

BUT AS BARCLAY
SWOOPED OVER THE
TUBE...



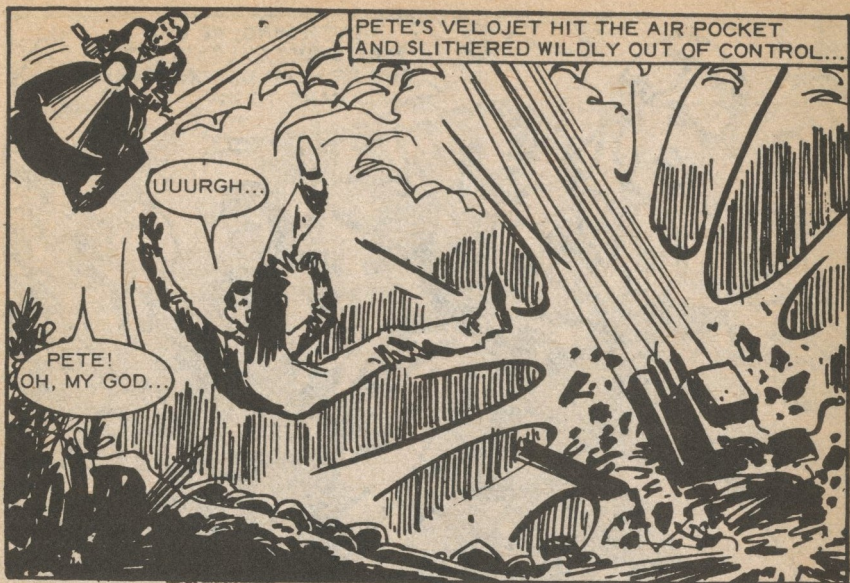
PACK ATTACHED TO
THE CARRIAGE! GRAB SOME
ALTITUDE, PETE...MOVE! LOOKS
LIKE EXPLOSIVE.

91-42

TWO SECONDS LATER, THE PACK OF ULTRA-MEGATONIC GELIGNITE
EXPLODED ON IMPACT...AND THE ENTIRE MOUNTAIN SEEMED TO HEAVE
UPWARDS AND OUTWARDS...



g1-43





NEVER MIND, WE CAN
RIDE DOUBLE. LET'S GET
OUT OF HERE BEFORE ZAKOR'S
MOB CAME TO INVESTIGATE...

WE'D BETTER HEAD
FOR CENTRAL CITY. THE
COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MUST
BE WARNED IN TIME...



OKAY, I'LL RADIO
AHEAD NOW. THIS SET
AIN'T ALL THAT POWERFUL,
BUT WE'LL BE IN RANGE
WITHIN TEN MINUTES...

I ONLY HOPE ZAKOR'S
MEN HAVEN'T SPOTTED US.
IT'S GOING TO MAKE THINGS JUST
ALL THAT MORE DIFFICULT...

g1-45

BUT THE RANIAN LEADER WAS NO FOOL. EVERY SINGLE DETAIL OF THE EXPLOSION HAD BEEN NOTED AND REPORTED TO HIM...

YES, ONLY TWO EARTHLINGS, SIRE. THEY ARE ESCAPING BY JET-CRAFT TO THE NORTH...

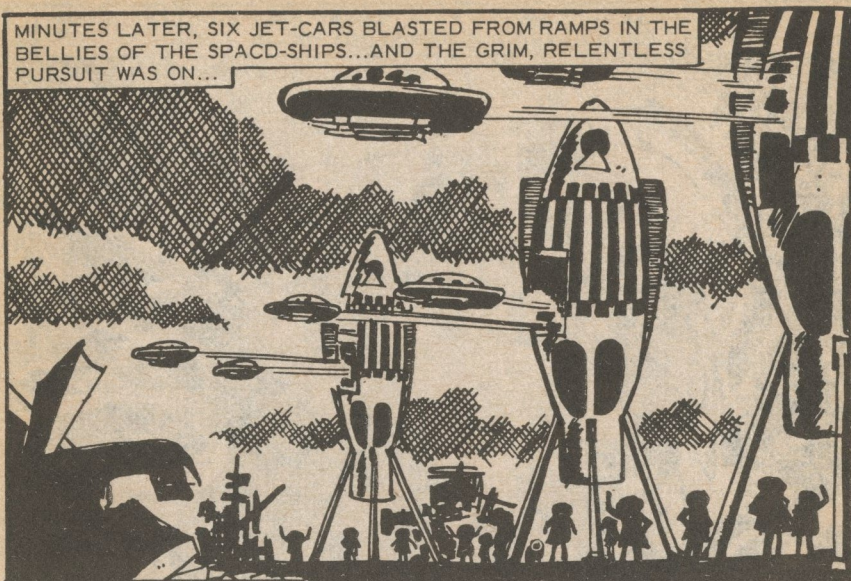
TOWARDS THEIR CAPITAL, NO DOUBT - IN A LAST ATTEMPT TO WARN THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS...

THEY MUST BE STOPPED! LISTRA, ORDER EVERY AVAILABLE JET-CAR IN THE REMAINING SHIPS TO BE PREPARED FOR ARMED PURSUIT...

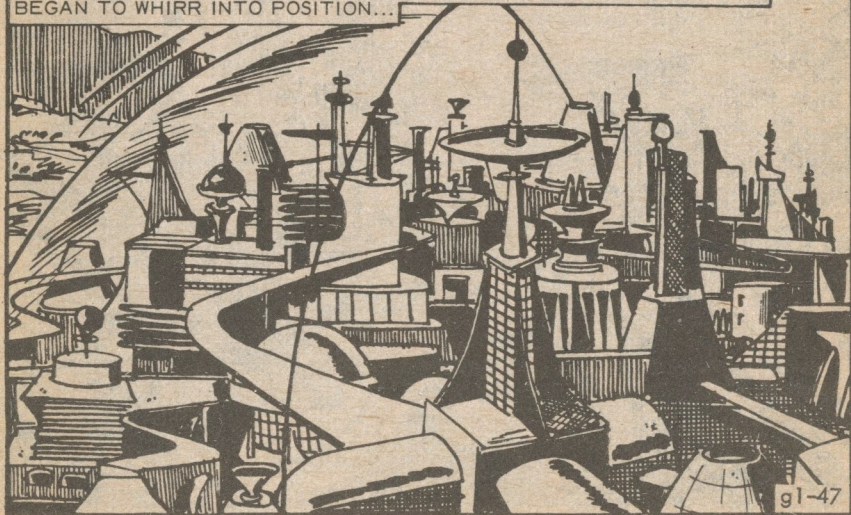
AT ONCE, SIRE...

g1-46

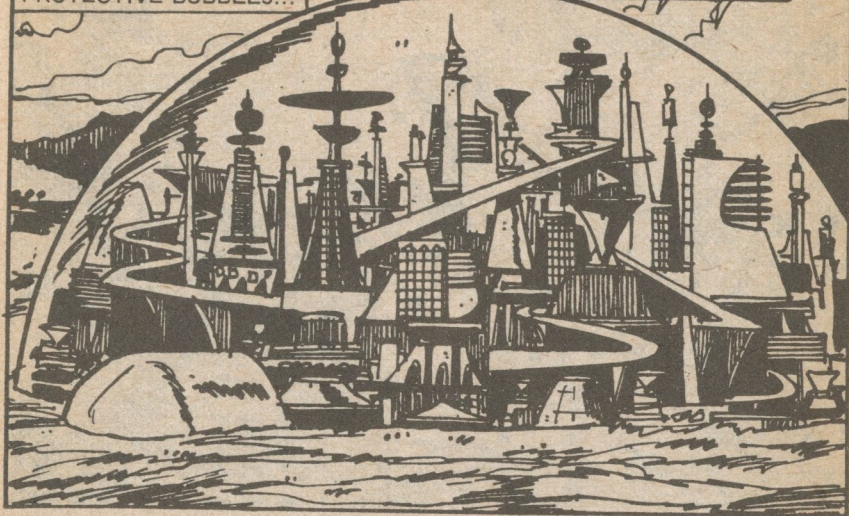
MINUTES LATER, SIX JET-CARS BLASTED FROM RAMPS IN THE BELLIES OF THE SPACD-SHIPS...AND THE GRIM, RELENTLESS PURSUIT WAS ON...



BUT PAUL BARCLAY'S RADIOED MESSAGE HAD GOT THROUGH...AND OVER THE PLANET'S FIVE MAJOR CITIES, GIGANTIC PLASTIC DOMES BEGAN TO WHIRR INTO POSITION...



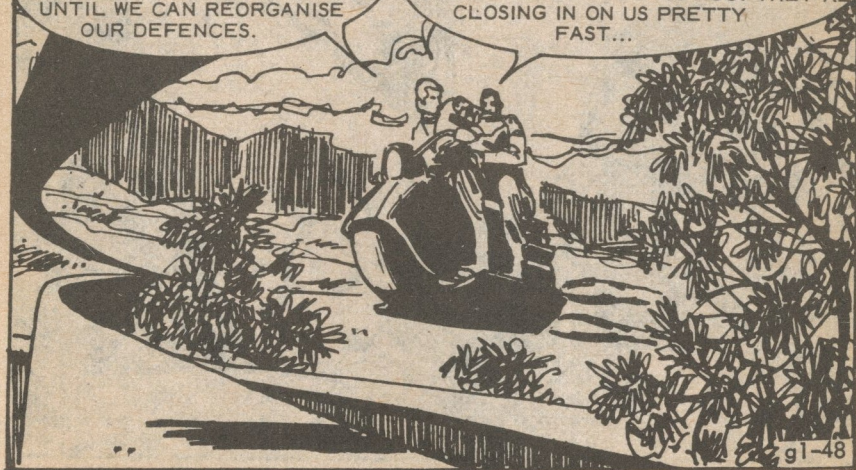
COMPLETELY SAFE AGAINST ALL KNOWN FORMS OF MISSILE ATTACK, THEY SEALED THE TOWNS OF ASTRA 6 IN A SERIES OF VAST, PROTECTIVE BUBBLES...



COMMANDER BARCLAY HEARD THE NEWS AND GRINNED IN RELIEF...

ALL DOMES IN POSITION, PETE. NOW WE'VE GOT A CHANCE OF HOLDING OUT UNTIL WE CAN REORGANISE OUR DEFENCES.

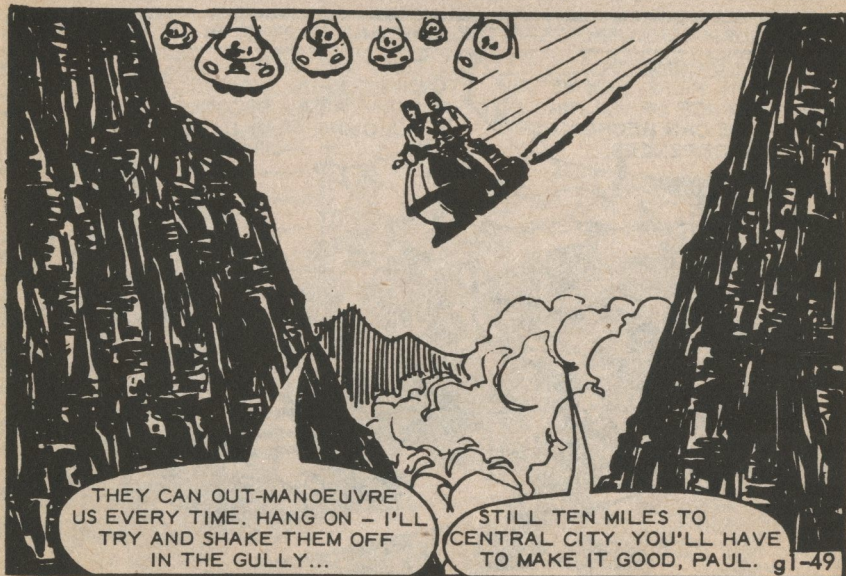
THAT'S IF WE'RE ALIVE TO DO IT, PAUL. I SPOTTED THE RANIANs A FEW SECONDS AGO. THEY'RE CLOSING IN ON US PRETTY FAST...



91-48

EVEN AS PETE SPOKE, THE GUSHING FOUNTAIN OF AN EXPLODING INTERCEPTOR MISSILE ROCKED THE VELOJET SIDEWAYS...

THEY'RE CLOSING ALL RIGHT. THAT WAS A MITE TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT...

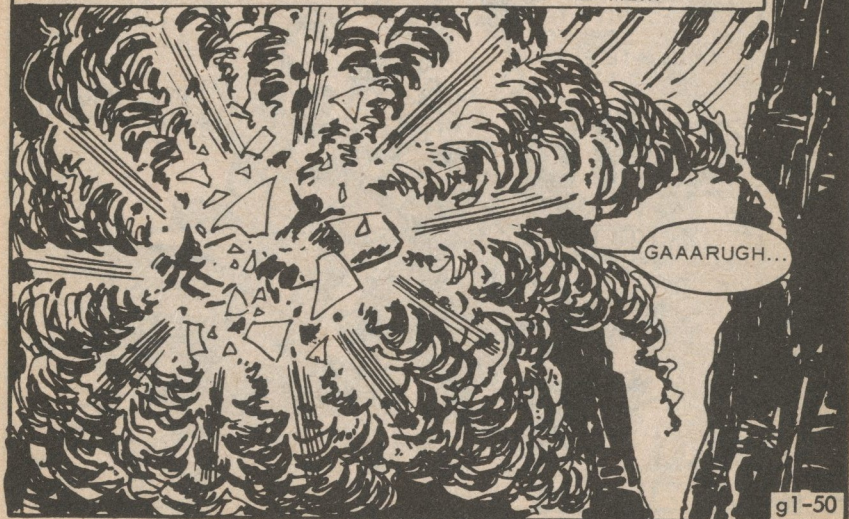


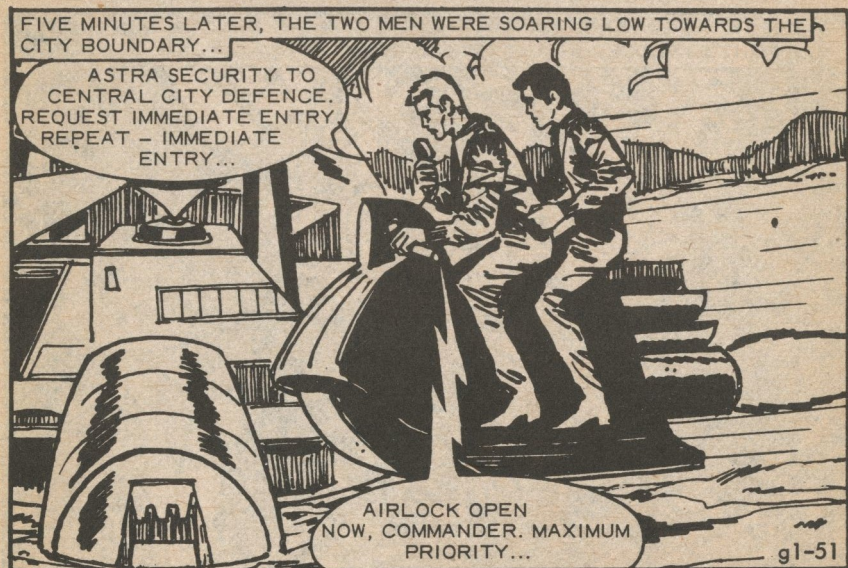
THEY CAN OUT-MANOEUVRE US EVERY TIME. HANG ON - I'LL TRY AND SHAKE THEM OFF IN THE GULLY...

STILL TEN MILES TO CENTRAL CITY. YOU'LL HAVE TO MAKE IT GOOD, PAUL. g1-49



TOO LATE, A FLANKING RANIAN MACHINE SAW THE DANGER. NEXT MOMENT IT EXPLODED IN A GLITTERING ARC OF FLAME...





AT FULL THRUST, THE VELOJET SWEEPED THROUGH THE NARROW TUNNEL...

WELL, SO FAR,
SO GOOD. WHAT NOW,
SIR?

WE'LL MAKE OUR
REPORT TO THE COUNCIL
OF MINISTERS...

THOSE RANIANs ARE SEALED
OFF FOR A MOMENT, BUT I'VE A
FUNNY FEELING ZAKOR MIGHT HAVE
SOMETHING ELSE UP HIS SLEEVE.

HE'S DETERMINED,
ALL RIGHT. I ONLY WISH WE'D
MANAGED TO DESTROY THOSE TWO
REMAINING SHIPS OF HIS...

91-52

THAT EVENING, IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, PAUL BARCLAY'S WORST FEARS WERE REALISED...

COMMANDER, SOMETHING'S HAPPENING. I THINK YOU'D BETTER COME - QUICKLY!

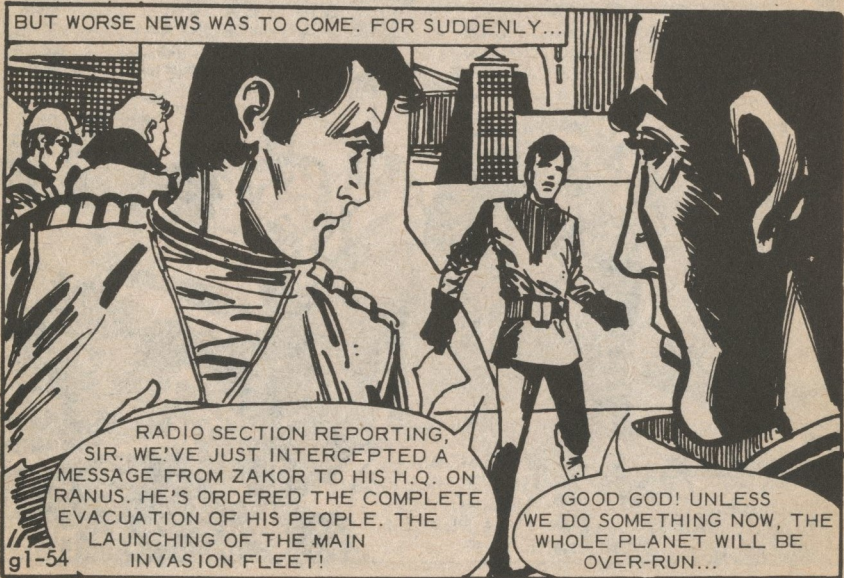
ALL RIGHT, IF IT'S SERIOUS, PERHAPS TWO OF THE MINISTERS SHOULD COME TOO...

IN A TIGHT GROUP, THE MEN HURRIED OUTSIDE...

YE GODS, THE DOME. WHAT'S GOING ON...?

THE RANIAN HAVE BEEN SPRAYING A THICK CARPET OF DUST ALL OVER IT. COME TO THE EDGE OF THE CITY AND YOU'LL BE ABLE TO SEE MORE CLEARLY...

91-53



ALL AT ONCE, A DESPERATE PLAN FOR SURVIVAL WAS BORN IN THE MIND OF COMMANDER PAUL BARCLAY...

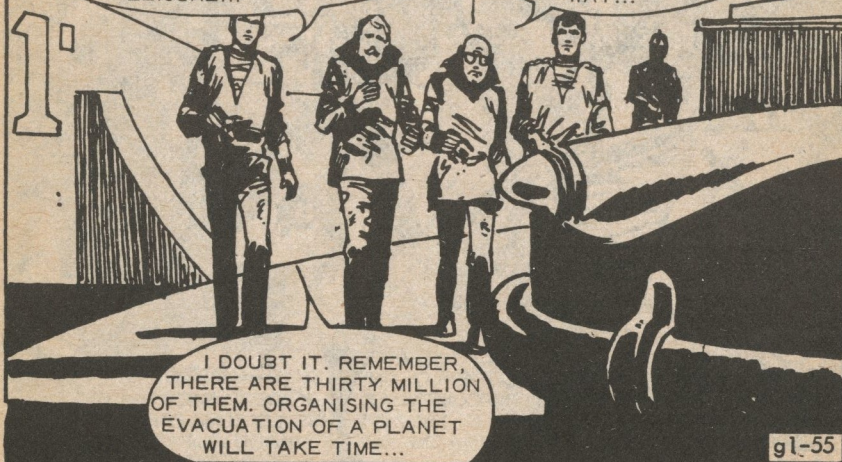
MINISTER - HOW LONG DO YOU THINK IT WILL TAKE THE ACID TO EAT THROUGH THE DOME?

WITH ANTI-CORROSIVE TREATMENT ANYTHING UP TO THREE MONTHS. AGAINST THE PRESENT STRIKE FORCE, WE CAN EASILY HOLD OUR OWN...BUT WITH THE MAIN RANIAN FLEET COMING...



THAT'S WHAT I MEAN. IF COLONEL SAWYER AND I CAN SOMEHOW DESTROY THE RANIAN H.Q., WE CAN TACKLE ZAKOR AT OUR LEISURE...

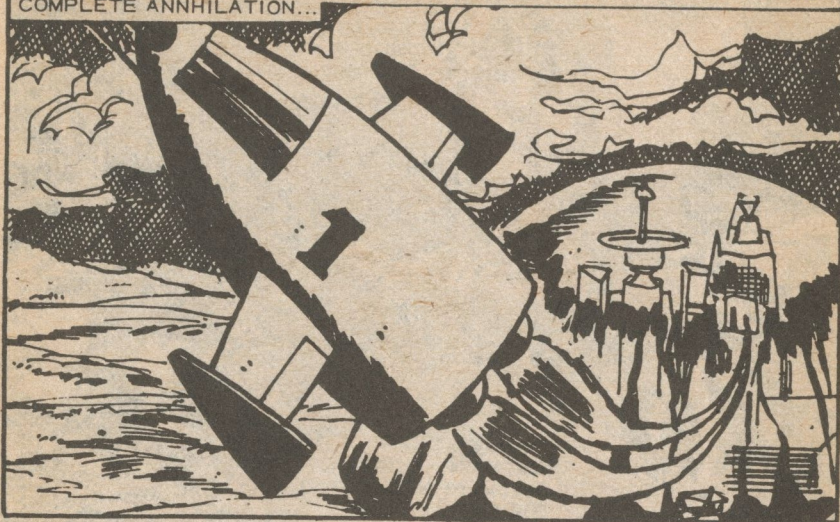
BUT IT'S A THREE-WEEK VOYAGE TO RANUS. BY THEN, THE ENTIRE RACE WILL BE ON THEIR WAY...



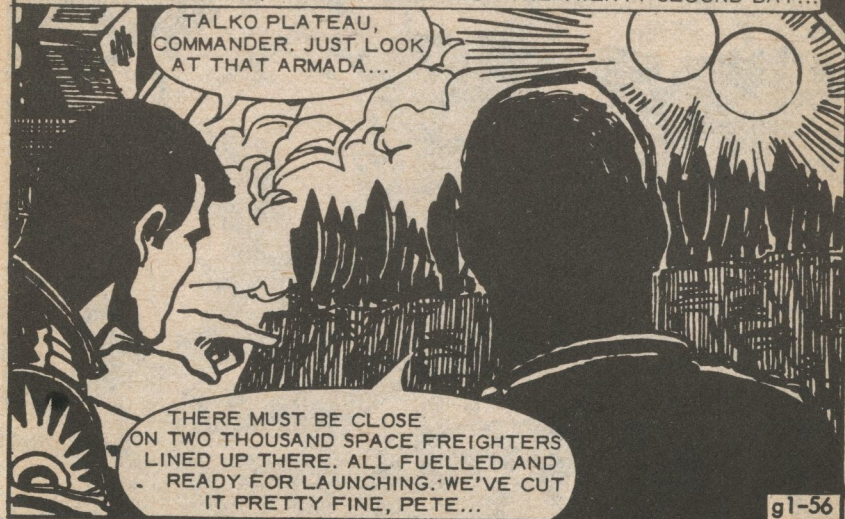
I DOUBT IT. REMEMBER, THERE ARE THIRTY MILLION OF THEM. ORGANISING THE EVACUATION OF A PLANET WILL TAKE TIME...

gl-55

AND SO IT WAS, THAT THREE HOURS LATER, PAUL BARCLAY AND PETE SAWYER BLASTED OFF IN A LAST DESPERATE BID TO SAVE ASTRA 6 FROM COMPLETE ANNIHILATION...



FOR THREE WEEKS THEY JOURNEYED THROUGH THE ENDLESS VAULT OF SPACE. AND THEN, ON THE MORNING OF THE TWENTY SECOND DAY...



SWIFTLY, PAUL LOWERED HIS SHIP INTO A TOUCHDOWN POSITION...

WE'LL LAND ON
THAT FLAT STRETCH AND
WORK OUR WAY INSIDE
THE MOUNTAIN.

CHECK! IF WE CAN
BLAST THEIR MAIN NAVIGATION
CONTROL ROOM, WE MIGHT STILL
STOP THE EVACUATION...

SENTRY ON THE
TUNNEL ENTRANCE. TAKE
HIM, PETE...

MY PLEASURE,
COMMANDER...

g1-57

RAY-GUN BLASTING HIGH-PRESSURE NUCLEAR POWER, PETE STEPPED FORWARD...



BUT AS THEY CROSSED THE THRESHOLD OF THE TUNNEL...

RED LIGHT! WE'VE
TRIPPED SOME KIND OF SHIELD-
FORCE BARRIER. IT'S A
GENERAL ALARM
SYSTEM...

NO TIME TO WORRY
ABOUT THAT NOW. WE'VE
GOT TO REACH THE
CONTROL CHAMBER...



g1-58

HALF A MILE UP THE TUNNEL, DANGER MATERIALISED WITH THE SUDDENNESS OF A COMET FLASH...

LOOK OUT,
PETE - THREE OF THEM
DEAD AHEAD.

CCCRUGH...

DOOR BEHIND US,
PAUL. LET'S TRY
THAT WAY...

AND SO IT WAS, THAT FATE GUIDED THE EARTHMEN'S STEPS INTO THE RANIAN CHAMBER OF SCIENCE...

OKAY,
BACK OFF - WHO
ARE YOU?

MY NAME IS MADAR...
CHIEF TECHNICAL ADVISER
TO ZAKOR THE GRAND.

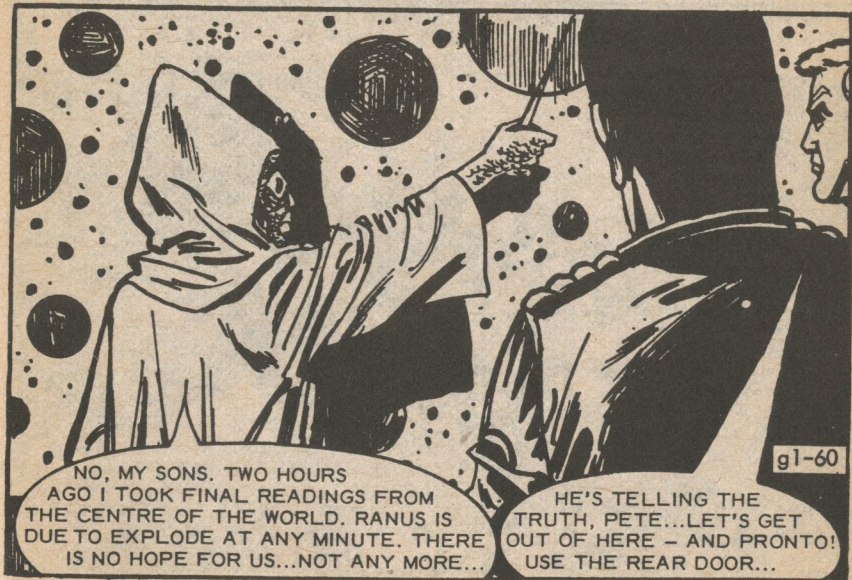
OKAY, SHOW US WHERE
THE MAIN NAVIGATION CONTROL
ROOM IS - AND FAST!

g1-59



Y-YOU ARE TOO LATE,
EARTHMEN. SAVE YOURSELVES,
IT IS THE ONLY WAY. ANY MINUTE NOW,
THE PLANET OF RANUS WILL
BE NO MORE...

YOU'RE LYING!
SIMPLY STALLING FOR
TIME...



NO, MY SONS. TWO HOURS
AGO I TOOK FINAL READINGS FROM
THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD. RANUS IS
DUE TO EXPLODE AT ANY MINUTE. THERE
IS NO HOPE FOR US...NOT ANY MORE...

HE'S TELLING THE
TRUTH, PETE...LET'S GET
OUT OF HERE - AND PRONTO!
USE THE REAR DOOR...

g1-60


MINUTES LATER, THE EARTHMEN WERE BACK ON BOARD...AND FEAR CURLED LIKE A LIVING THING ROUND THEIR HEARTS...



FULL THRUST, PETE.
WE WANT EVERY INCH OF
POWER WE'VE GOT.

BOOSTERS SCREAMING
AT MAX G PLUS NINETEEN, COMMANDER.
THAT'S AS MUCH AS WE CAN RISK...

THEY WERE FIFTEEN MILES IN SPACE WHEN THE EXPLOSION CAME...AND THE PLANET RANUS BECAME NO MORE THAN A MILLION PIECES OF WHIRLING, RED-HOT MATTER ON THE FRINGE OF HYPER-SPACE...



OH, MY GOD! THIRTY
MILLION PEOPLE...WIPED OUT
LIKE ANTS AT THE TOUCH OF SOME
UNSEEN HAND. WHY THE HELL DIDN'T
MADAR TELL THEM, PAUL?

HE PROBABLY DID,
PETE...BUT THE POWER OF THE
UNIVERSE IS GREATER THAN ANY
MAN. THAT RACE WAS DOOMED FROM THE
START. THEY JUST DIDN'T HAVE
TIME TO LAUNCH...

BUT AT LEAST OUR
PLANET IS SAFE NOW. ALL WE
HAVE TO DO IS GET BACK TO ASTRA 6
AND TELL ZAKOR WHAT'S HAPPENED...

SURE. WITH HIS PEOPLE
DEAD. I GUESS THE ONLY THING
HE CAN DO IS SURRENDER...

THREE WEEKS LATER, THE EARTHMEN WERE LOWERING ONCE AGAIN ON
TO THE SURFACE OF THEIR ADOPTED PLANET...

THERE THEY ARE!
ALL FIVE RANIAN JET-CARS -
IN THAT HOLLOW.

I DON'T LIKE IT,
COMMANDER... TOO QUIET...
WE'D BETTER WATCH
OUR STEP...

g1-62

BUT THIS TIME THERE COULD BE NO DANGER...NO PERIL FROM THE INVADING ENEMY...

D-DEAD! EVERY
LAST ONE OF THEM IS
DEAD!

MY GOD...LOOK AT THEIR
FACES, COMMANDER. PITTED
AS THOUGH SOME SOME BEAST
H-HAD BEEN CHEWING
AT THEM.

NO...NOT SOME BEAST,
PETE, DISEASE, THAT'S WHAT
KILLED THEM. SOME VIRUS THEY
PICKED UP ON OUR PLANET. A GERM
THAT WE, FORTUNATELY, ARE
IMMUNE TO...

IRONICAL, ISN'T IT,
COMMANDER? THAT AFTER
ALL OUR ATTEMPTS TO STOP THE
INVASION, AN UNSEEN FRIEND
WAS ON HAND TO SAVE US...

g1-63



PETE SAWYER HAD SPOKEN WITH FERVENT HOPE IN HIS HEART...BUT THE UNIVERSE IS A PLACE UNKNOWN, A LIMITLESS EXISTENCE OF HATE, FEAR AND PRIMEVAL JUSTICE. PERHAPS ONCE AGAIN - SOME DAY - OTHER ENEMIES WILL SEEK TO CONQUER THE COLONY DEEP IN ORIANIC ANDELMO. AND IF THAT DAY COMES, LET THE EARTH EXILES BEWARE...FOR EVEN BY THE LAWS OF SPACE, ONLY THE STRONGEST SURVIVE!

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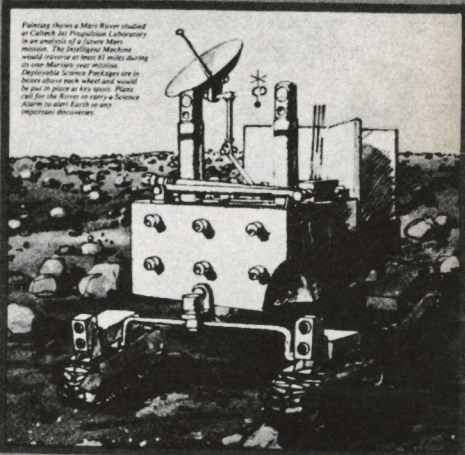
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