

Merry Nalson's

# BLAKES 7

A MARVEL  
MONTHLY

NO. 11 AUG. 45P



**SPECIAL THIS ISSUE -**  
PAUL DARROW WRITES.....  
BUMPER EDITION!

**SCORPIO** Full COLOUR PIN~UP!

MARY RIDGE Interview continued  
and lots, lots more!

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IN THE WEST END FROM JULY 22ND AND  
ACROSS THE COUNTRY FROM JULY 18TH.

# BLAKES 7

Editor: Bernie Jaye, Art: Floron Florenzo; Neil Diamond.

Consultant Editor and photographs: Ken Armstrong

## FEATURES

SCRAPBOOK..... P.4

A photo feature depicting unusual moments from the making of BLAKE'S 7.

THE DIRECTOR'S EYE.....P.15

Mary Ridge discusses the production and presentation problems which can beset any television director.

PAUL DARROW WRITES.....P.24

Paul Darrow does us proud with a bonanza account of the 3rd series of BLAKE'S 7.

## COMIC STRIP

CRAN PAX CORE!..... P.7

Cran Pax core is a natural block of silicone which holds the history of the universe!! Can Avon stop the Federation stealing it?

## TEXT STORY

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Soolin is marked to die. Avon is marked to be supreme ruler of the galaxy. For better or worse Vila takes it upon himself to intervene!!

## LETTERS

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Do you know what 'Time Distort' means in terms of the speed of a space ship? See what Orac has to say about this and the many other topics presented this month.

POINTS OF VIEW.....P.23

An opportunity to voice your opinions, ask questions and see what fellow readers are thinking and feeling.

## PIN-UPS

Spectacular Centre-fold of Scorpio.....P.20



# SCRAPBOOK

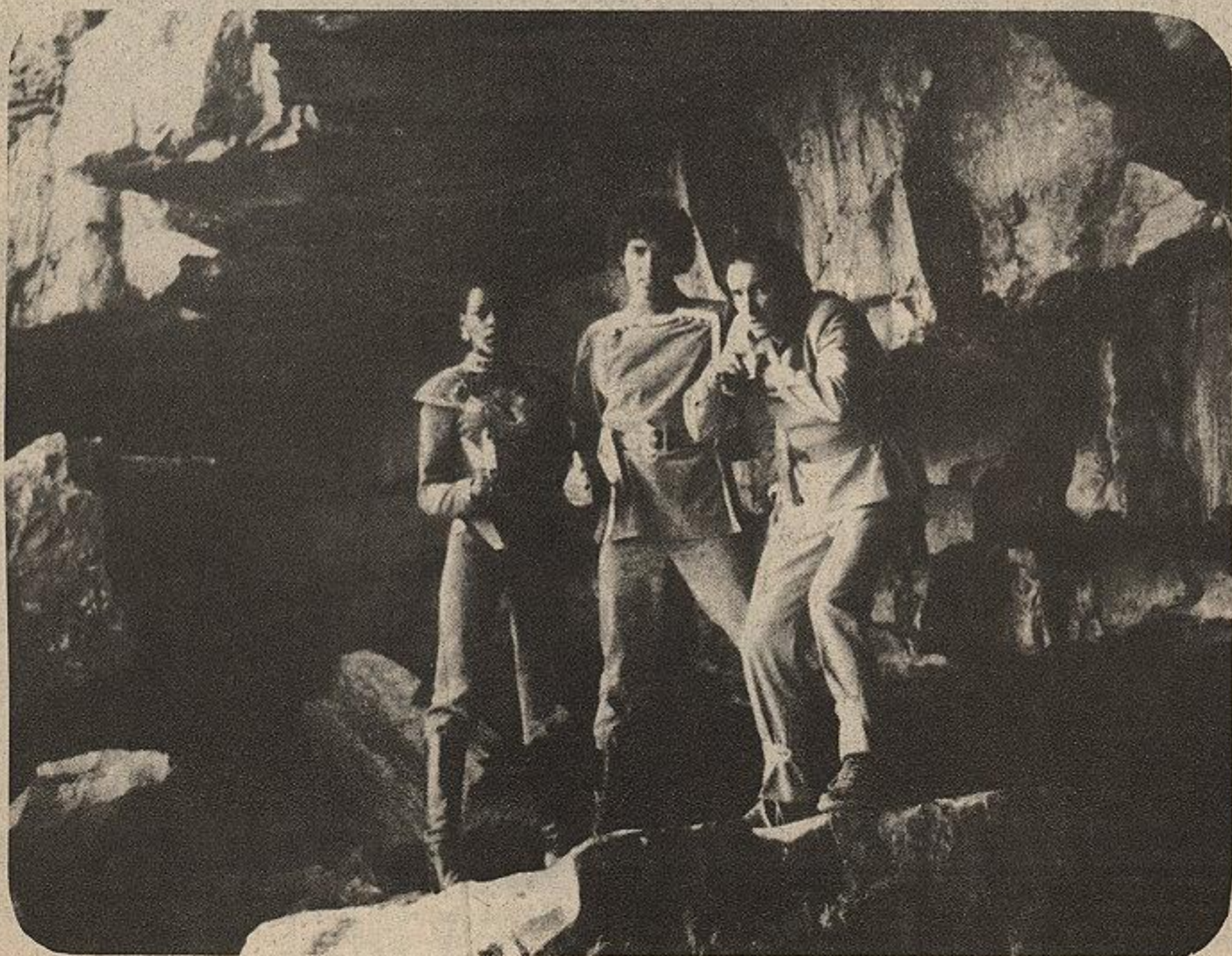
MORE UNUSUAL MOMENTS FROM THE MAKING OF 'BLAKE'S 7'.



Getting to grips with Blake's cooking . . . and looking somewhat worried about it! Arlen (Sasha Mitchell) tries a piece of rabbit, freshly cooked by Blake (Gareth Thomas). Afterwards, she did admit she quite liked it!



'These damned things are growing everywhere! Visual effects have gone mad!'



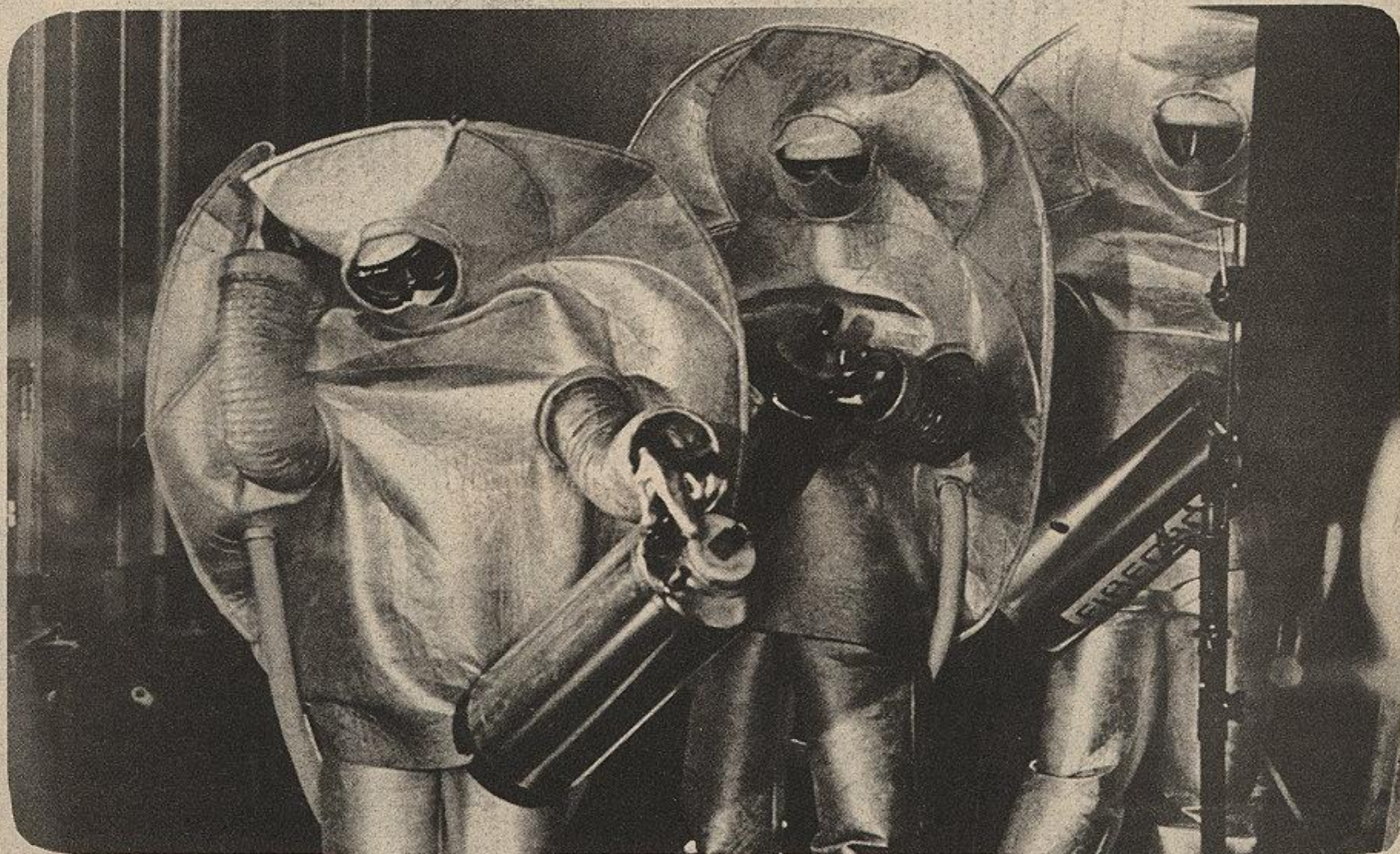
Feeling the pressure? Mike Keating and Steven Pacey confessed to feeling somewhat concerned about filming under the massive rocks on the Dorset coast. 'There didn't seem to be a great deal holding them up', observed Steven Pacey.



**Left:** 'Not having your hair done again?' seems to be the question being asked by Mike Keating as Glynis Barber has her tresses brought under control again during very wet location filming at Box Hill.

**Above:** One costume which never made it to the screen. The 'Angel' centre, had his wings clipped prior to recording. The wings kept knocking over the other actors!

**Below:** Some costumes which did make it. These outlandish creatures made their appearance in the early series of BLAKE'S 7 . . . despite the actors having problems with their halos!





The addition of a few pieces of metal sheeting, some hoses and the odd chimney turned a ruin at a Dorset location into a futuristic crusher machine. The problem of smoke for the chimney was resolved by the visual effects boys sticking the nozzle of a smoke gun in at the bottom of the stack and turning it on full.

Doing a spot of gardening in a forest? No . . . just Jim Francis of the Visual Effects department setting up one of his famous explosions . . . all in the interests of dramatic television!



# CRANPAX CORE



THIS IS MADNESS, AVON!  
TRYING TO CONTROL SCORPIO  
THROUGH THESE NARROW VALLEYS  
IS MURDER. CAN'T I INCREASE  
ALTITUDE EVEN A HUNDRED FEET?

GET ON WITH  
IT, TARRANT! IF YOU  
CAN'T FLY THIS SHIP...  
THEN I WILL!



I CAN MANAGE, AVON...  
BUT THE RISK OF COLLISION  
WITH THE MOUNTAINS  
IS FRIGHTENING.

AND SO ARE THE  
FEDERATION COUNTER MEASURES  
AGAINST ENEMY CRAFT... SUCH  
AS SCORPIO. WE KEEP  
LOW. THAT'S AN  
ORDER!



JUST THEN...

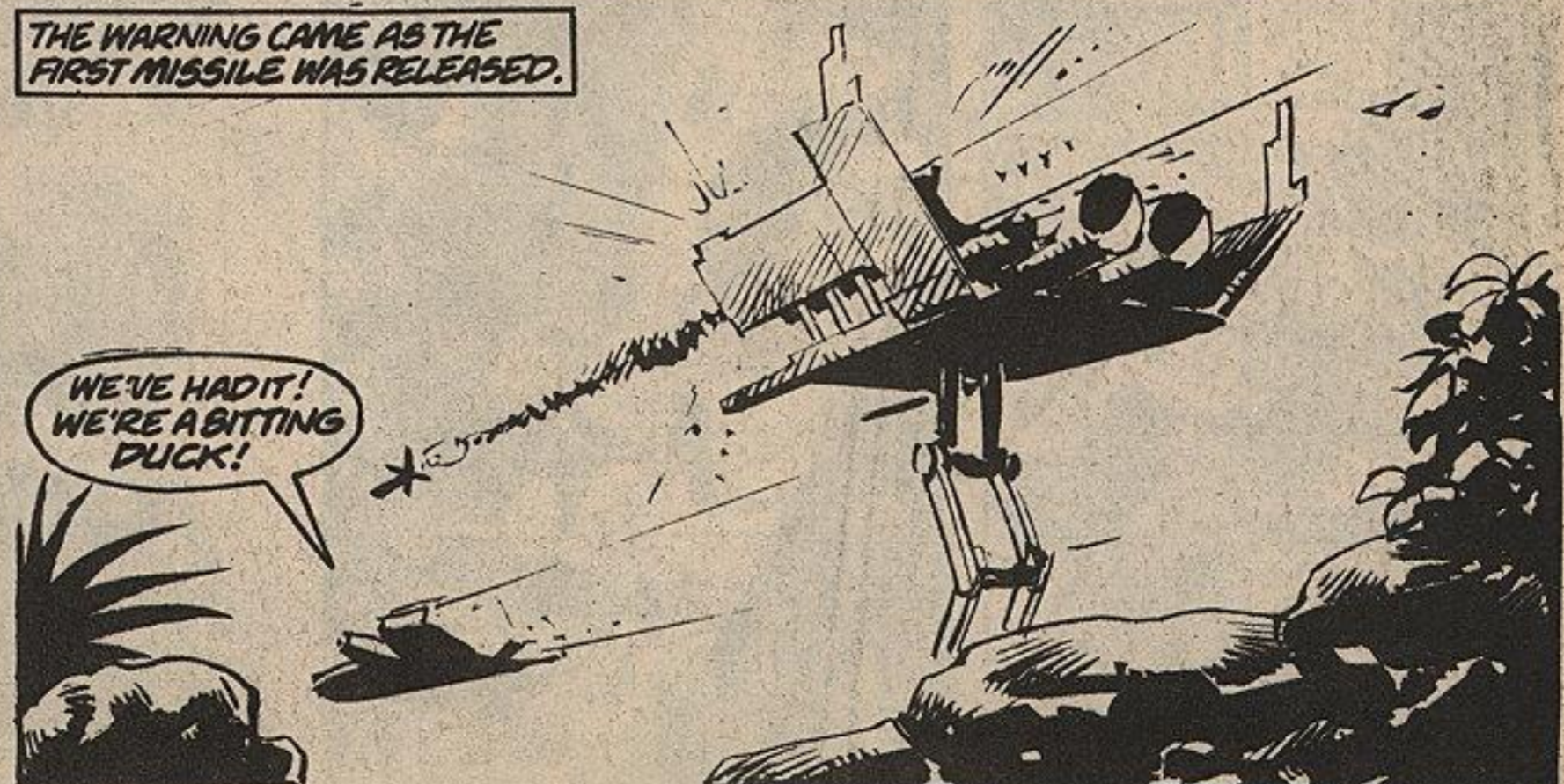
WE'VE BEEN  
SPOTTED!

GO TO BATTLE  
STATIONS!

CONFIRMED. WE'VE  
JUST CROSSED A LASER  
TRACKING BEAM.

THE WARNING CAME AS THE  
FIRST MISSILE WAS RELEASED.

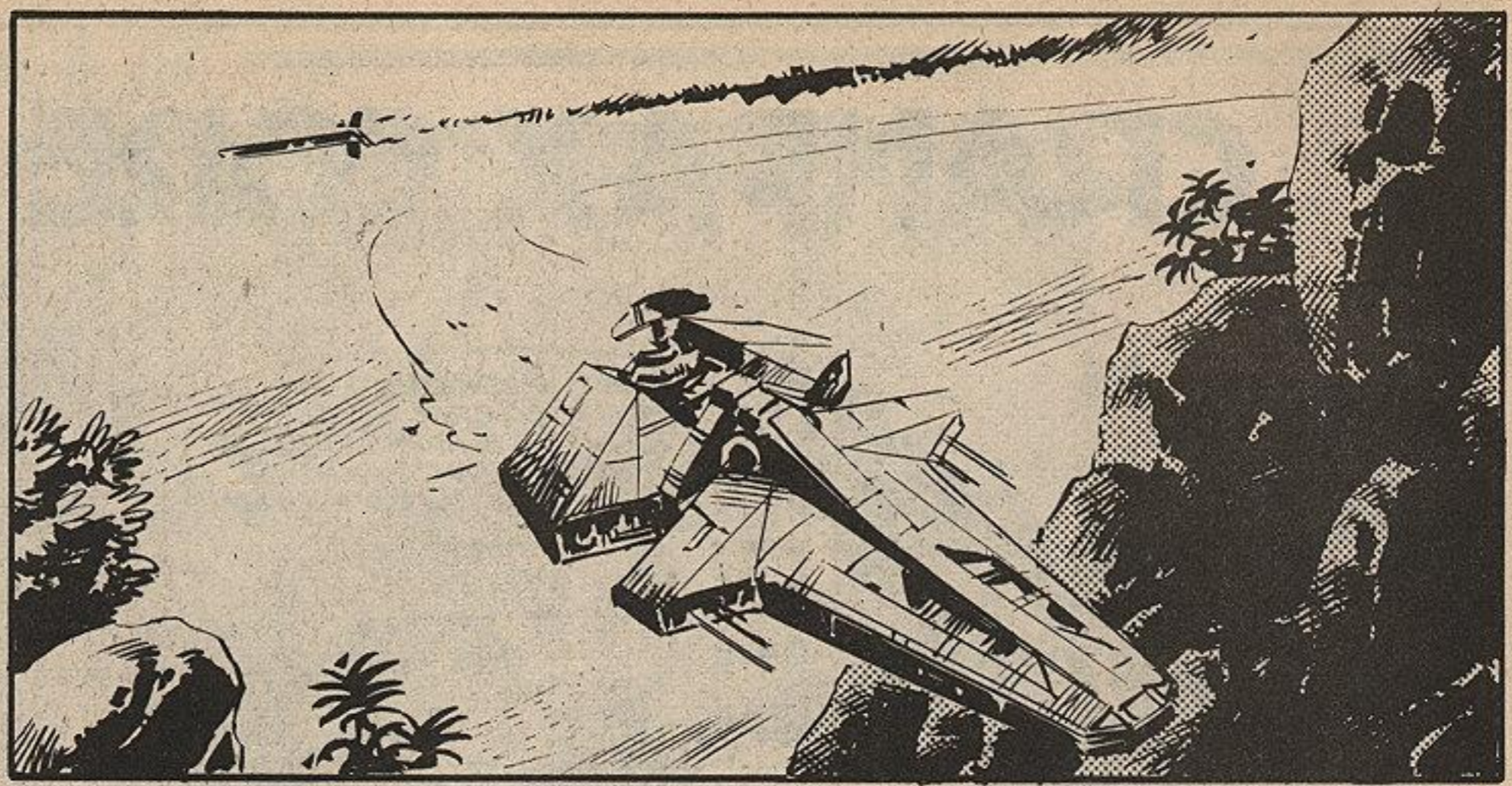
WE'VE HAD IT!  
WE'RE A BITTING  
DUCK!





ONLY ONE CHANCE! GOT TO GAIN HEIGHT!

NO, YOU FOOL!



KRABOOM!



GEEZ! WE JUST MISSED THAT LOT. LUCK MUST BE ON OUR SIDE!

IT WAS NOTHING TO DO WITH LUCK, VILA.



I KNEW PRECISELY HOW LOW THESE FEDERATION MISSILES COULD FLY... THANKS TO ORAC. THAT'S WHY I INSISTED ON HUGGING THE GROUND ALL THE WAY. ISN'T THAT SO, ORAC?

EXACTLY CORRECT. NOTHING WAS LEFT TO CHANCE, DESPITE WHAT TARRANT TRIED TO DO!

I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU LET TARRANT FLY SCORPIO AT ALL. MIGHT AS WELL HAND OVER CONTROL TO ORAC SINCE THE SCABBY, ELECTRONIC RAT SEEMS TO KNOW EVERYTHING.



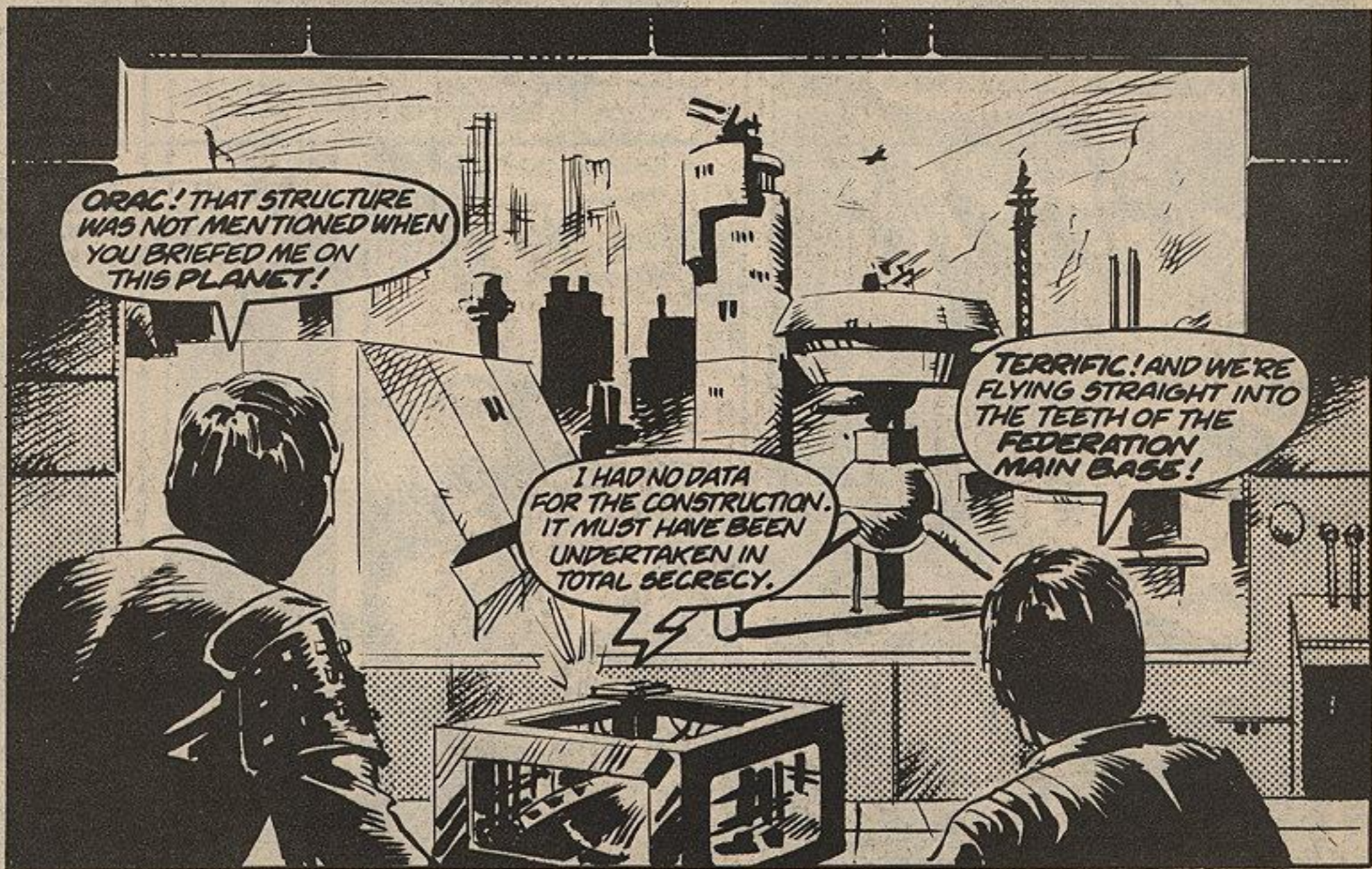
I SOMETIMES WONDER MYSELF, VILA. AT LEAST I KNOW I CAN RELY ON ORAC... UNLIKE SOME I COULD MENTION.



STOP PICKING ON VILA, AVON, AND EXPLAIN TO US AGAIN WHY WE'RE HERE, RISKING OUR NECKS OVER A FEDERATION CONTROLLED PLANET.

YOU WEREN'T LISTENING, WERE YOU, DAYNA? THE FEDERATION DO NOT YET HAVE TOTAL CONTROL OF SAVGARD... DESPITE WHAT WE'VE JUST SEEN.







TARRANT! ARM THE PLASMA BOLTS. WE'RE GOING TO ATTACK!

ARMING NOW!

ATTACK THEM? A WHOLE FEDERATION FORCE? ARE YOU CRAZY!?

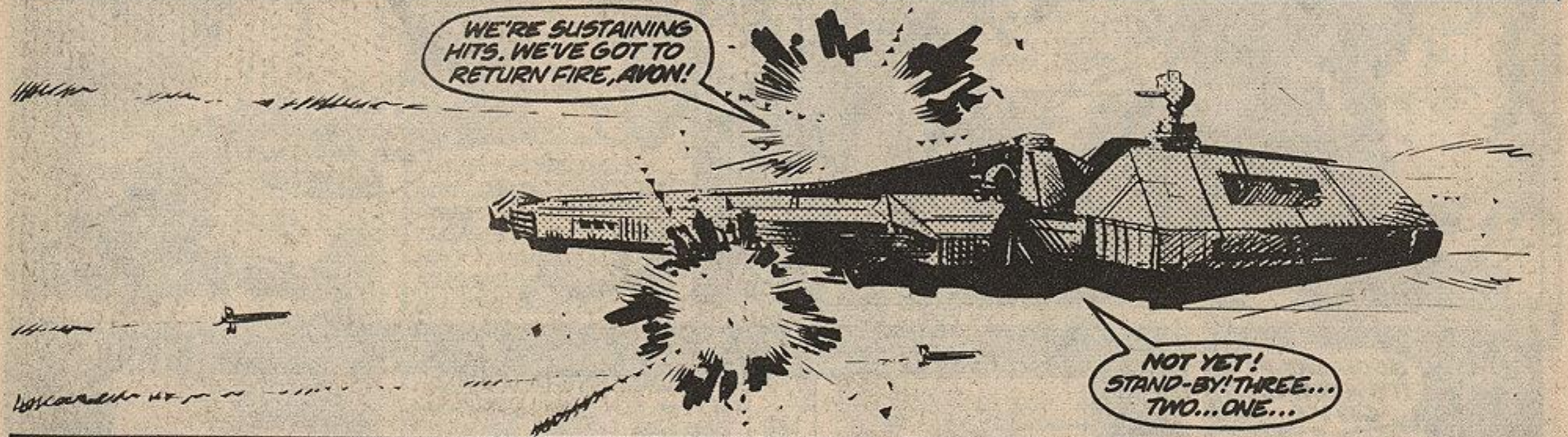


WE CANNOT FLY OVER THE CITY... WE CANNOT TURN ROUND... SO WE'RE GOING TO FLY THROUGH IT. UNDERSTAND?

YOU ARE CRAZY!



RENEGADE SHIP APPROACHING! ALL DEFENCE SYSTEMS RED ALERT. FIRE AT WILL!



WE'RE SUSTAINING HITS. WE'VE GOT TO RETURN FIRE, AVON!

NOT YET! STAND-BY! THREE... TWO... ONE...



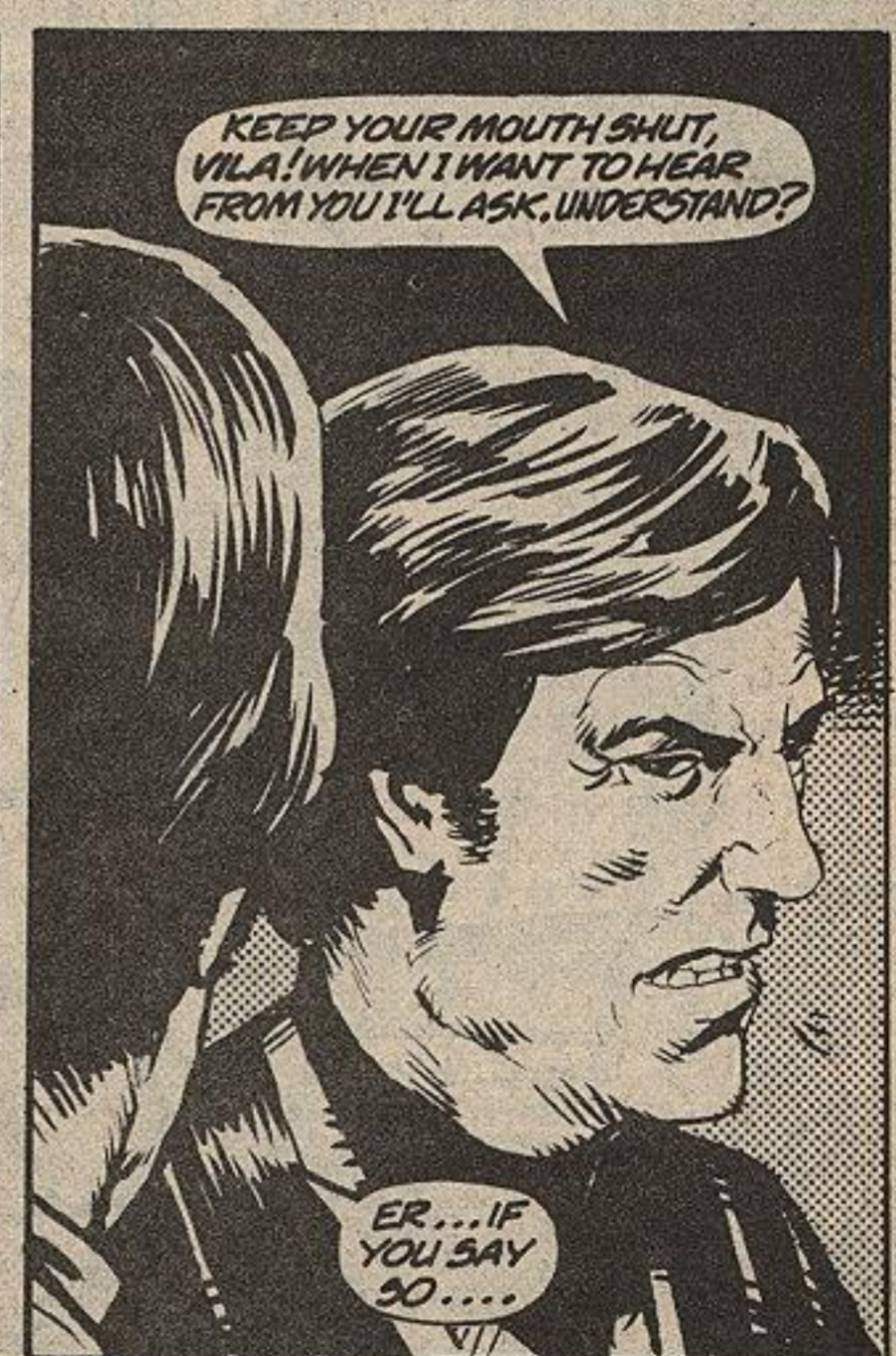
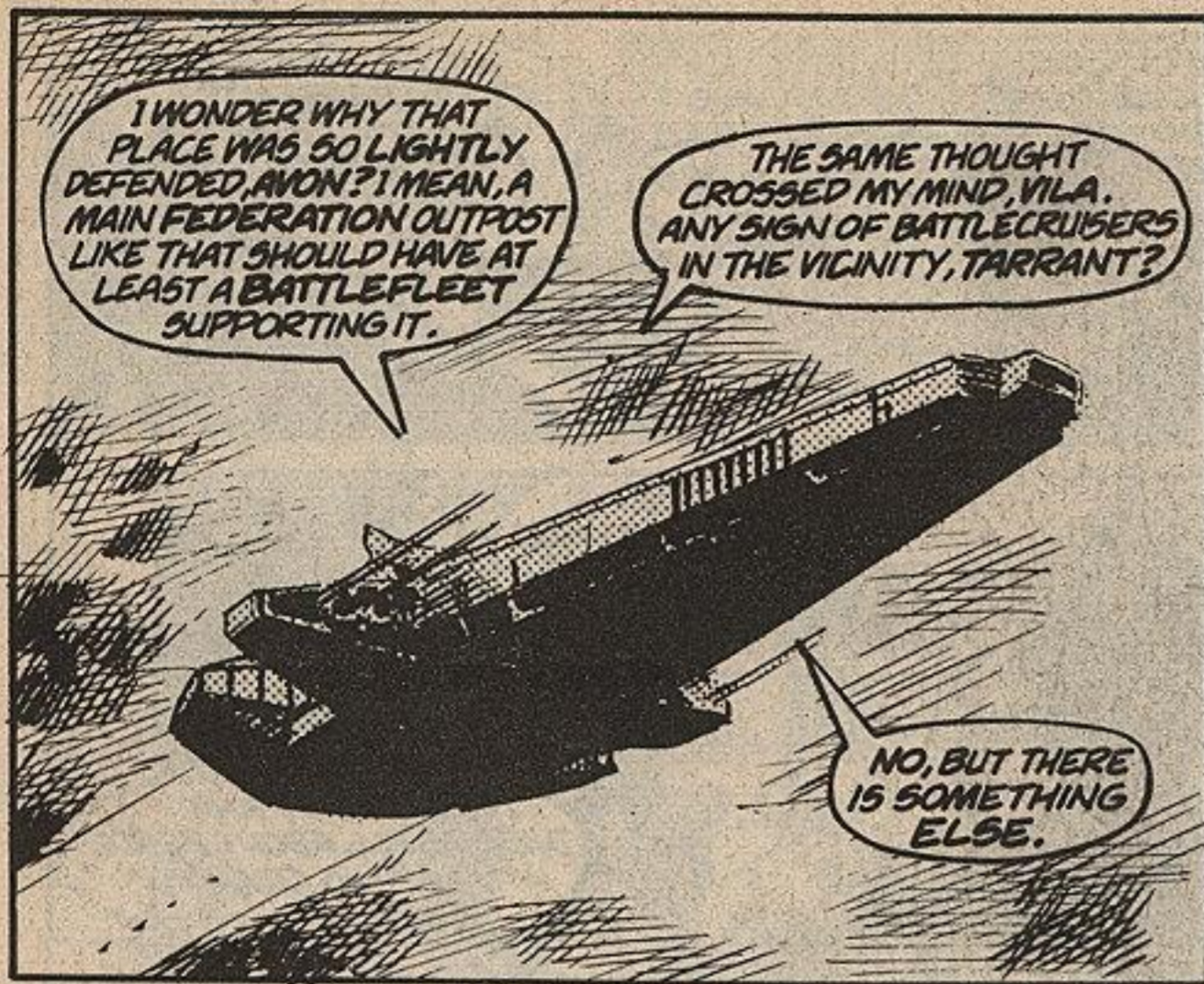
...FIRE!

NNNNGHHHHH...!



WE... WE'RE GOING TO MAKE IT! THE PLASMA BOLTS HAVE CLEARED A PATH FOR US!

YES, VILA, AND ALSO LEFT QUITE AN IMPRESSION ON THE FEDERATION FORCE.





YOU'VE SAID NOTHING OF THE CRANPAX CORE. IS IT STILL INTACT?

COME, AVON... I'LL SHOW YOU. YOU, TOO, FRIEND OF AVON.

THE NAME'S VILA.



THE FEDERATION HAVE LAUNCHED TWO ATTACKS TO TRY AND SECURE THE CRANPAX CORE. WE'VE BEATEN THEM OFF BOTH TIMES... BUT OUR LOSSES HAVE BEEN HEAVY.

YES, I CAN IMAGINE. THE FEDERATION WOULD GIVE ANYTHING TO GET THEIR HANDS ON WHAT LIES BEHIND THAT DOOR.

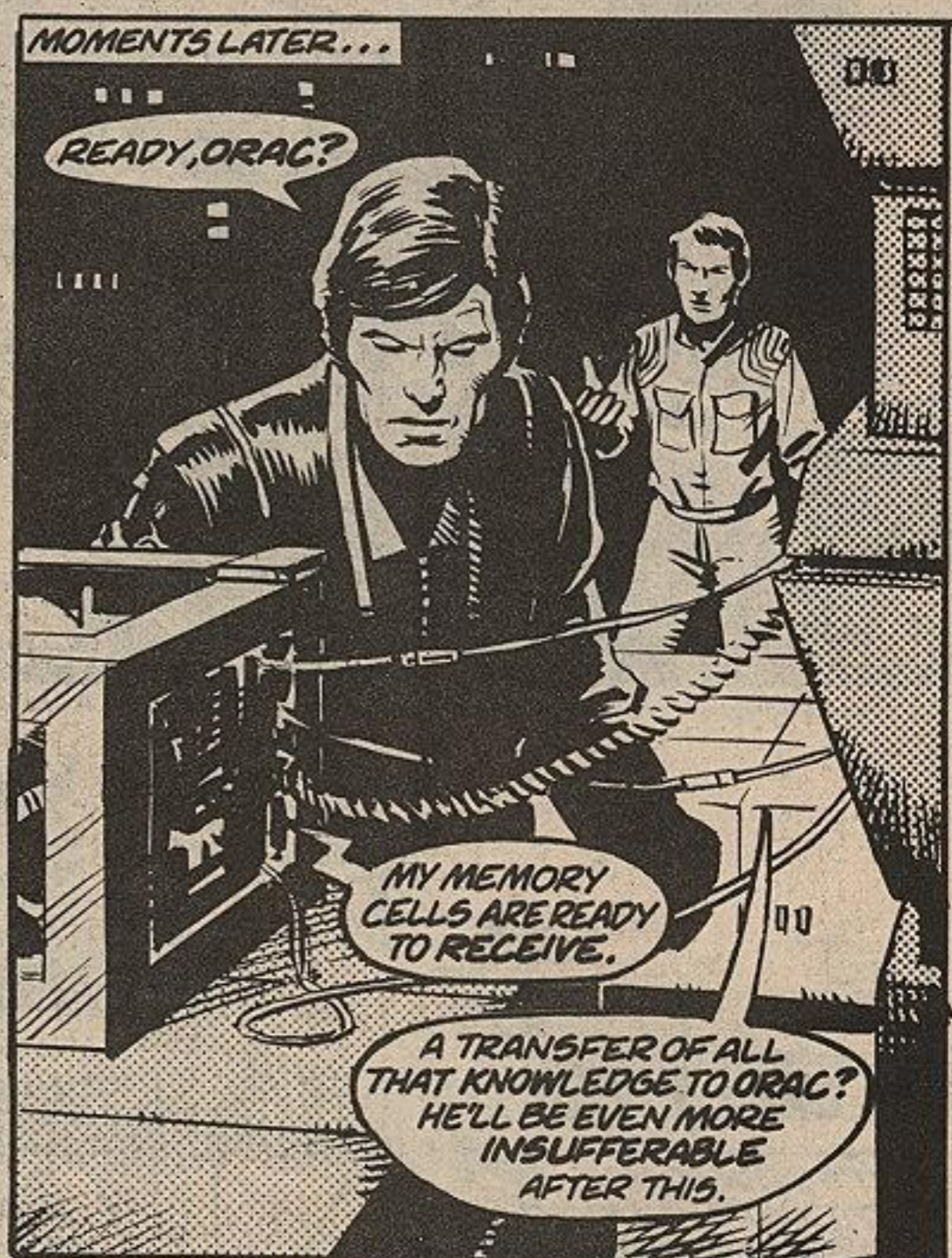
I WISH I KNEW WHAT THIS WAS ALL ABOUT. BESIDES, WHAT'S THIS CRANPAX CORE THING?



THIS NATURAL BLOCK OF SILICONE CONTAINS THE ENTIRE KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNIVERSE... PAST AND PRESENT. IT HAS BEEN OUR LIFE'S WORK TO KEEP IT UPDATED.

THAT'S WHY THE FEDERATION WANT IT SO BADLY..

AND THAT'S WHY IT MUST NOT FALL INTO THEIR HANDS. COME ON, HELP ME CONNECT ORAC TO THE SYSTEM.



MOMENTS LATER...

READY, ORAC?

MY MEMORY CELLS ARE READY TO RECEIVE.

A TRANSFER OF ALL THAT KNOWLEDGE TO ORAC? HE'LL BE EVEN MORE INSUFFERABLE AFTER THIS.



ARE YOU SURE THIS WILL WORK AVON? WILL THE INFORMATION BE SAFE IN ORAC?

AS LONG AS ORAC REMAINS IN MY SAFE KEEPING, THE INFORMATION WILL BE SECURE.

INCANTA! A MESSAGE COMING IN FROM THE FEDERATION GARRISON...!

YOU TERRORIST SCUM!  
I KNEW YOU WERE MANIACS...  
BUT I NEVER THOUGHT YOU  
WOULD STOOP TO THIS! THE  
TIME FOR TALKING AND  
REASON HAS GONE!



WHAT'S  
HE TALKING  
ABOUT?

YOU THINK BY KILLING YOUR  
OWN PEOPLE HELD HOSTAGE  
HERE THAT WE WOULD GIVE  
UP THE FIGHT... WELL YOU'RE  
WRONG! EVEN THAT NEW  
SHIP IN YOUR BATTLE  
FLEET WILL NOT STOP US  
SECURING THE PRECIOUS  
CORE!



IT... IT'S FATHER AND  
THE OTHERS... ALL DEAD!  
HOW... WHO DID IT? IT  
WASN'T US!



IT WAS AN ACCIDENT,  
INCANTA. WE WERE  
NOT TO KNOW....

AT THIS VERY MOMENT  
A NEW POWERFUL  
BATTLE FLEET IS ON ITS  
WAY TO CRUSH YOU! THE  
CORE WILL SOON BE OURS!

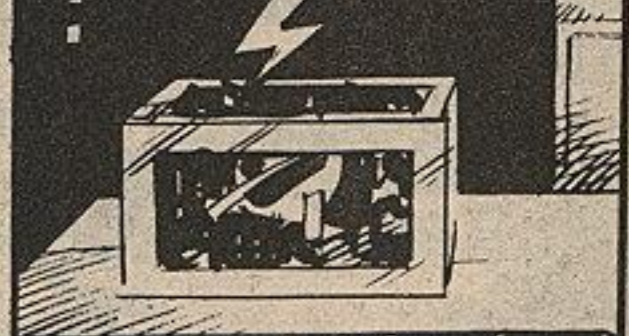


Y.. YOU  
KILLED  
FATHER..?



THIS IS NOT THE  
TIME FOR TEARS, INCANTA.  
WE MUST ACT.

TRANSFER COMPLETED.  
INFORMATION IS NOW  
STORED.



VILA, PREPARE  
THE DEMOLITION  
CHARGE!



UH? RIGHT NOW?  
WHAT ABOUT THE  
PEOPLE HERE?

THAT INSTANT...



AVON! A DOZEN  
FEDERATION SHIPS HEADING  
THIS WAY. WE'VE GOT TO  
GET OUT OF HERE.

PREPARE FOR  
IMMEDIATE TAKE-OFF,  
TARRANT. WE'RE COMING TO  
JOIN YOU NOW. GET  
READY, INCANTA.

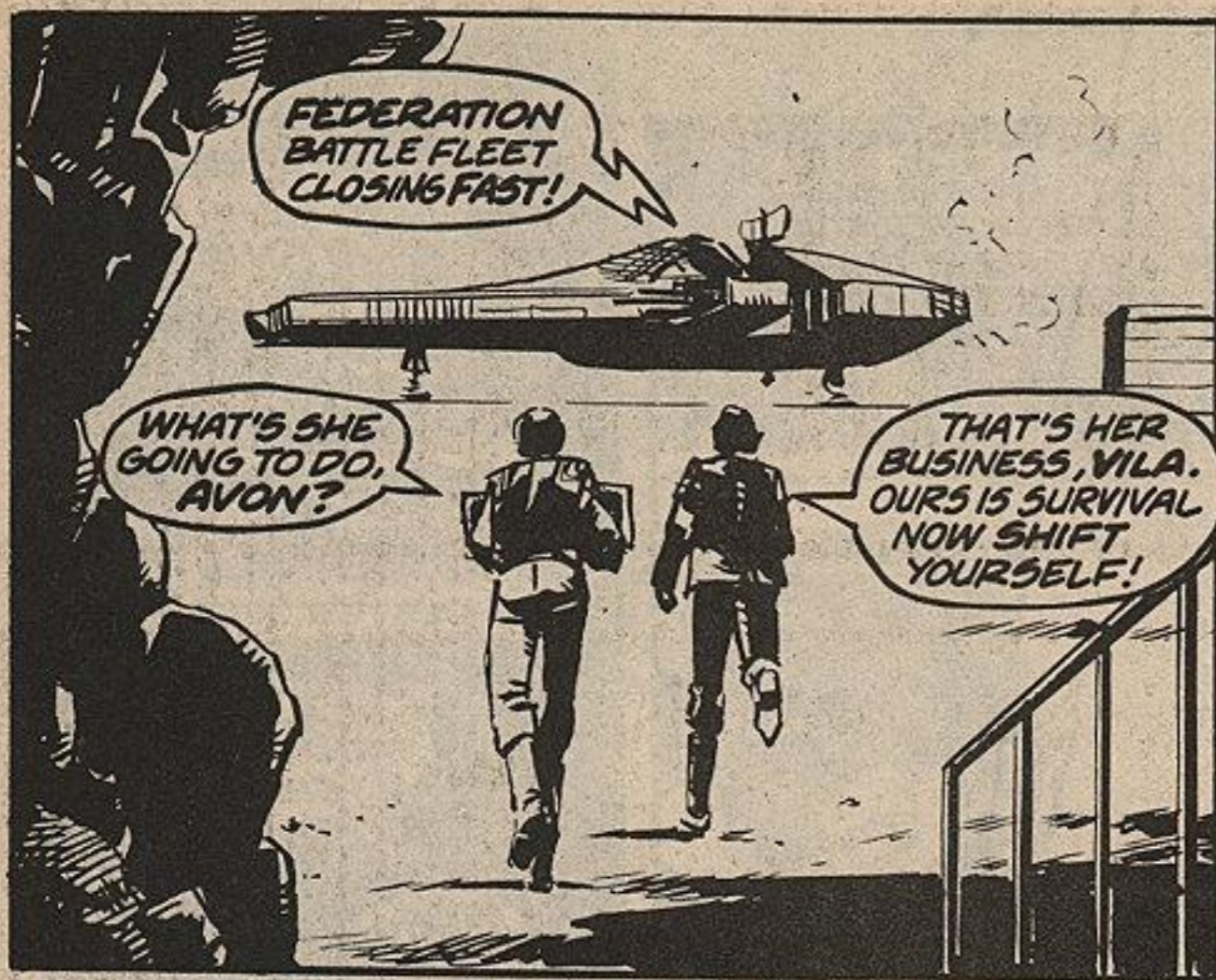
YOU MAY LEAVE...  
BUT I WILL NOT!



IF WE DON'T LEAVE  
NOW IN SCORPIO, THE  
FEDERATION BATTLE FLEET  
WILL BLOW US TO ATOMS.

YOU MEAN AS  
YOU DID MY FATHER?  
NO... MY FATHER IS DEAD,  
THE LIFE'S WORK OF MY  
PEOPLE NOW CONTAINED  
IN ORAC'S BRAIN... THERE  
IS NOTHING LEFT FOR  
ME EXCEPT TO DIE  
WITH HONOUR.

COME ON...  
WE'VE ONLY GOT  
SECONDS TO CLEAR  
THIS PLACE...!



FEDERATION BATTLE FLEET CLOSING FAST!

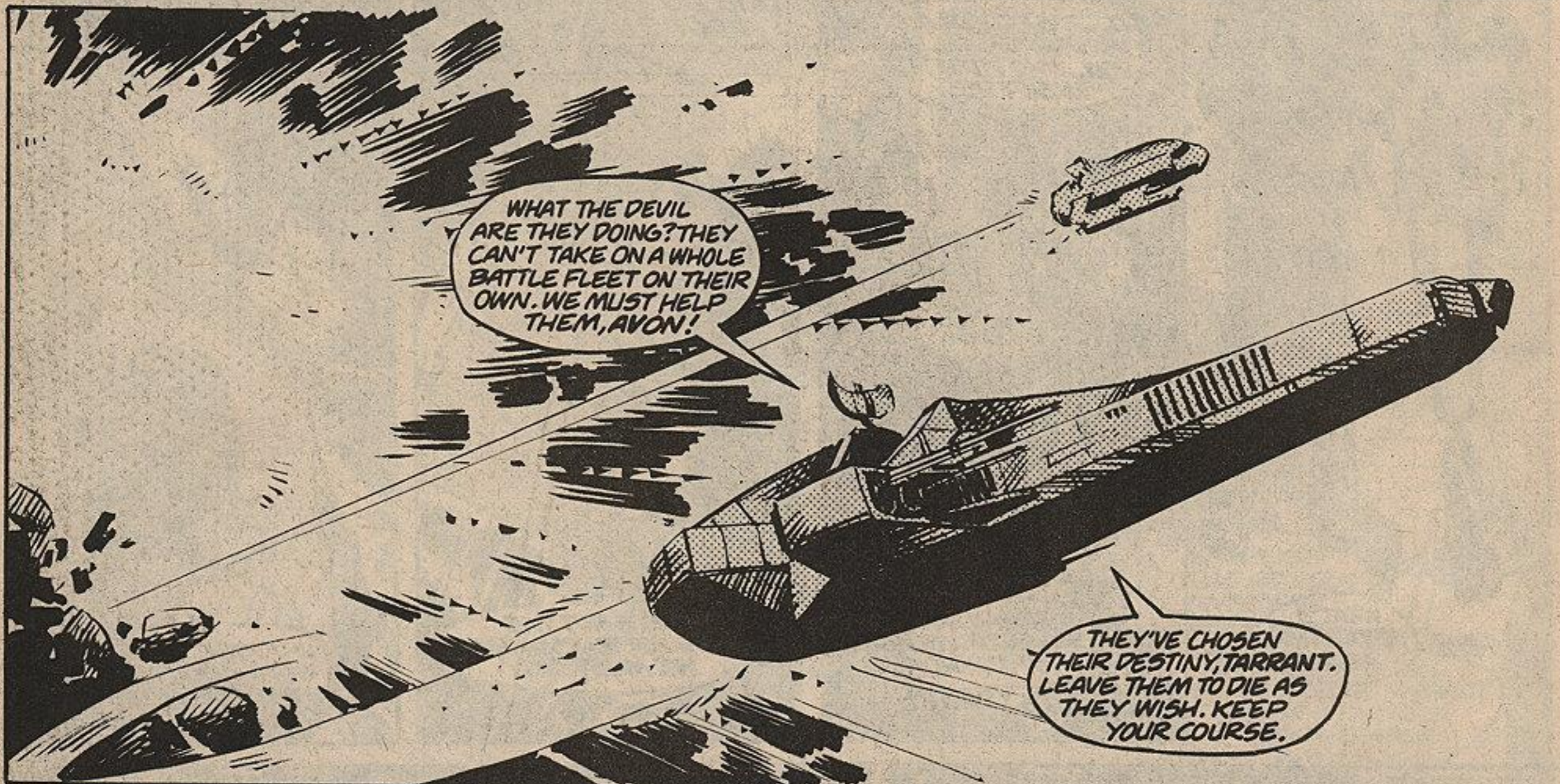
WHAT'S SHE GOING TO DO, AVON?

THAT'S HER BUSINESS, VILA. OURS IS SURVIVAL NOW SHIFT YOURSELF!



FAREWELL KERR AVON. I WILL NEVER KNOW IF IT WAS ME YOU CAME TO RESCUE... OR THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE CRANFAX CORE... BUT I HAVE MY SUSPICIONS...

READY FOR BATTLE, INCANTA.



WHAT THE DEVIL ARE THEY DOING? THEY CAN'T TAKE ON A WHOLE BATTLE FLEET ON THEIR OWN. WE MUST HELP THEM, AVON!

THEY'VE CHOSEN THEIR DESTINY, TARRANT. LEAVE THEM TO DIE AS THEY WISH. KEEP YOUR COURSE.



EVERY WEAPON SYSTEM... FIRE! MAXIMUM THRUST... TOWARDS THE FEDERATION INVADERS!

UH? THEY'RE MANIACS! THEY'RE COMING STRIGHT AT US!



THEY FOUGHT AND DIED FOR THE INFORMATION NOW CONTAINED IN ORAC'S BRAIN. I'LL SEE IT'S PUT TO GOOD USE... AGAINST THE FEDERATION!

# MARY RIDGE

MARY RIDGE DIRECTS HER THOUGHTS ON TELEVISION SERIES PRODUCTION TO KEN ARMSTRONG

*In her previous interview, Mary Ridge, director of the lion's share of the fourth series of BLAKE'S 7 discussed her filming problems. She continues now with a discussion of the production and presentation problems which can beset any television director.*



*The ups — and downs of directing BLAKE'S 7.*

Directors face all kinds of problems when they arrive to direct a few episodes of a long-running show with which they are not entirely familiar. The cast and crew all know more about the storylines than the director and no amount of reading of old scripts, watching video recordings etc. will give the director the true 'feel' of the show. The director, however, is there for a particular reason and that is to place his or her stamp on what the viewing public will actually see when the script is translated into television for transmission.

It is also useful for a well established and long-running show to have a new director come in with a fresh eye and new approach to add to and build on the relationships, character development and presentation of the show in order for the regular cast not to get into ruts as regards their acting. A new director will always suggest other ways of either saying or doing the same thing, providing, of course, these changes are still within the character of the story personality.

There are dangers, of course, when taking over a new show. One which sticks in my mind in particular, was when I was given the job of directing *Terminal*, the last episode of the third series of *Blake's 7*—the one where the

Liberator was blown apart.

As it was my first *Blake's 7* story I did all the right things. I read as many scripts as I could, saw as many videos as I had time for, but when it came to discussing the special effects for the final sequence, I nearly came a cropper. The interior of the *Liberator* was due to explode and the Visual Effects lad suggested girders falling from the roof, pieces of panelling blasting out here and there... and lots of dummy bodies falling from above. When I queried the dummies, saying I thought there was only a small crew on the *Liberator*, I was told the ship was as big as a vast apartment block and there should be others around. I wasn't really in a position to argue, not knowing the programme as well as them... or so I thought.

Fortunately, however, before the shooting took place, I asked David Malloney, the then producer of the series, if indeed there were others apart from the crew on board the *Liberator*. He looked mildly shocked and told me there was not. Although the *Liberator* looked a vast ship, only a small portion of it was used by the crew! I could have really come unstuck if, suddenly, I shot a sequence showing that, after all these years in space, the crew of the *Liberator* had not been

alone on the ship after all!

When Mary was given five scripts for the fourth series of the programme, she was also involved with the design of the replacement ship, having successfully destroyed the *Liberator*. Scorpio was designed bearing in mind all the problems directors had faced with the *Liberator* set.

There were too many places which could not be lit successfully on the *Liberator*. There were also only two main areas where action could happen. I was determined there would be more room, not only for action but for the cameras to move around the new ship. There had to be enough room for cameras to film from almost every angle as well as space for action to take place. The set also had to sound different from that of the *Liberator*. Everything had to be more solid and, when people were running about and banging into things, the sounds had to be quite solid.

One big problem we had with the *Liberator* set was that each time the set was dismantled and placed in storage until the next filming session more and more damage was done to it. The construction was too flimsy. When Scorpio was envisaged, it was decided the construction would be much more



There had to be enough space on Scorpio's flight-deck for all-round action.



solid, thereby limiting the damage. With that in mind, the designer used metal sheeting and plastic panels. The plastic could be easily repaired if damaged and the metal much more resistant to heavy handling.

It wasn't until the set had been moved a few times we realised, however, the metal being heavy, was given even rougher treatment by those responsible for moving it. Dents started appearing in the construction and, once there, were very difficult to make good. If we'd realised what was going to happen to it, we'd have taken a sledgehammer to the set on day one and done it ourselves! After all, Scorpio was supposed to look like an old and battered freighter but that should have been the initial impression—not one created by the scene shifters months after the series started!

*Mary's attention to detail extended right through her episodes and culminated with the final episode, Blake.* Choosing the right location for the final moments of Scorpio's life was fraught with difficulties as Mary explains.

In Chris Boucher's script, he indicated the action should take place in a pine forest and he even suggested a possible area. When we arrived in the forest near

Camberley, it seemed as though wherever we went, the scene looked exactly the same. It was very difficult trying to find locations within the forest that looked quite different although the ground did change under the trees and there were two kinds of pine trees in the area. Each time we arrived at a new spot to start filming the crew looked at me with puzzled expressions when I indicated which way we would shoot. I could see them thinking to themselves that it didn't really matter which way we faced . . . it all looked the same!

Another complication we had was regarding the decision to use smoke in the background. Once the decision was taken, the level and consistency of the smoke had to be maintained. Jim Francis and his Visual Effects team had a hard job trying to keep the smoke going at just the right level so it was neither too thick nor too light so as not to show there was an obvious time gap between shots.

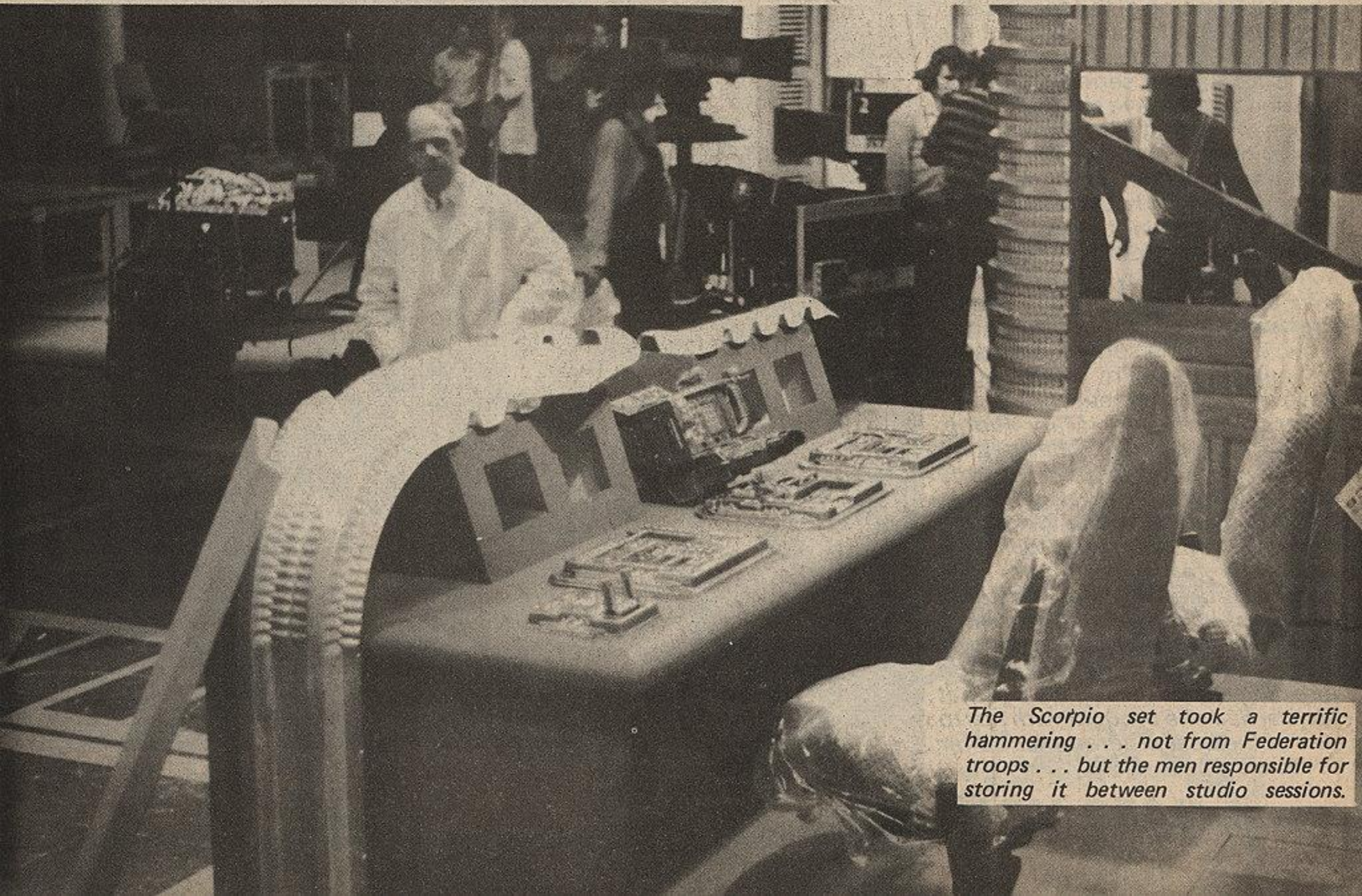
The weather was also against keeping such continuity with the smoke in the background. The first day of filming was bright and sunny with shafts of light filtering through the trees. That was fine until the next day when we had an overcast sky and drizzle! The third

day was also overcast but with no rain. So heavy was the requirement for smoke, since there were large background areas to fill, that the visual effects team ran out of serviceable machines to keep the smoke going. In the end, Jim Francis was reduced to breaking off pieces of a smoke-producing material used in artillery ammunition, lighting it, then running around in the background with smoke trailing from the burning blocks until the smoke was thick enough to look like a heavy mist.

*With the fourth series starting in appalling filming conditions, heavy rain and thick mud turning location sites into quagmires, the series ended on the same note. The rain, however, never dampened the crew's spirit. In fact, it produced two of Mary's most memorable moments of the year.*

When we were filming near Box Hill in early March, I would walk from one location in the woods to the next. I would indicate the area for filming to the senior cameraman then, within minutes, the rest of the unit were there, also having a look at the spot, walking around on it turning a once green and lush area into a muddy puddle.

After this happened a few times, I started to get wise to what was going on. I walked off with Finton



*The Scorpio set took a terrific hammering . . . not from Federation troops . . . but the men responsible for storing it between studio sessions.*

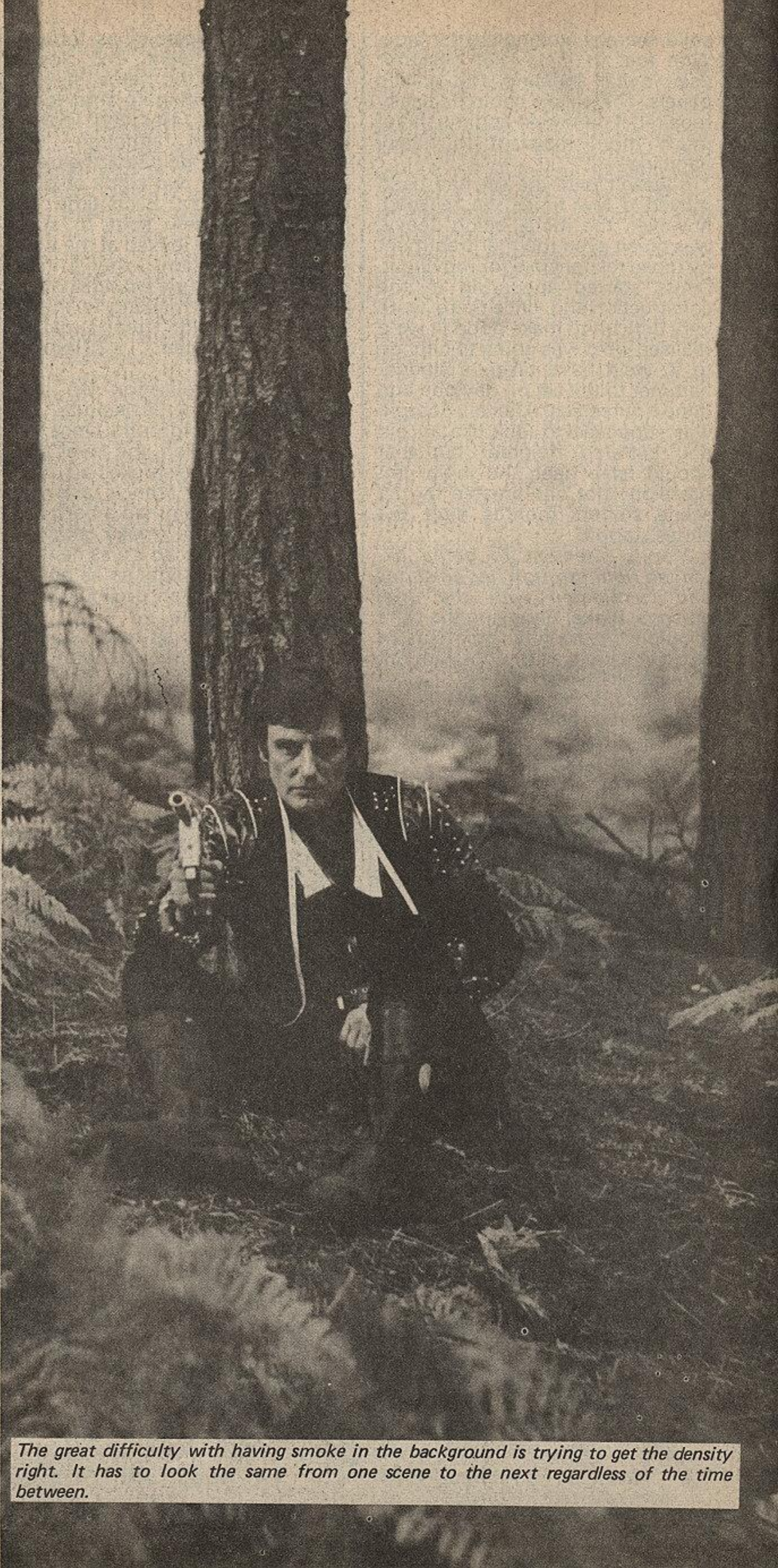
Sheenan, the cameraman, to an area where I indicated a patch of ground. As predicted, the area was swarming with crew moments later. While they were busy tramping the foliage into the mud, I whispered into Finton's ear that the real place we would shoot was just round the corner . . . but not to tell anyone until we were actually about to start! At least one location was preserved until the last moment!

The other occasion when the elements were starting to get the better of us was in the very muddy chalk pits where the series filming began. Wherever we went we were squelching through inches of the most appalling mud imaginable. People were a little tetchy about being caked in the stuff and I was no exception. It seemed the last straw when, as Paul Darrow was making a particular movement, he managed to spray me with the stuff. Instinctively I picked up a handful and tossed it at him. He burst out laughing, grabbed a large pat of the stuff and, in seconds, everyone was indulging in a mud-pie fight on the set.

It just goes to show what a terrific cast and crew we had for the series and I'm sorry it has to come to an end. Like everyone else, I have received letters complaining about the ending of the series. I just hope a spin-off using some of the characters is made. There is a real place for such a series . . . as the viewing public have shown.

One of the best letters I ever read regarding the ending of the show was from a seven-and-a-half year-old who, having had three goes at getting the first word right, wrote; 'Protest at the ending of the series. Why couldn't they have just got into an argue and retire?' I think that was a lovely way of putting it. Now, every time someone gets on my nerves, I say I'm just going to have an argue and retire!

*For busy director Mary Ridge, there is little chance of her getting into an argue and retiring for some time. With her new series of **Angels** underway and a **Doctor Who** to be done later this year, she will have little time for such things. One thing is certain, however, whatever series is lucky enough to have Mary Ridge as a director will benefit from a wealth of television directing experience as well as that special flair she brought with her to one of the best programmes so far . . . Blake's 7.*



*The great difficulty with having smoke in the background is trying to get the density right. It has to look the same from one scene to the next regardless of the time between.*

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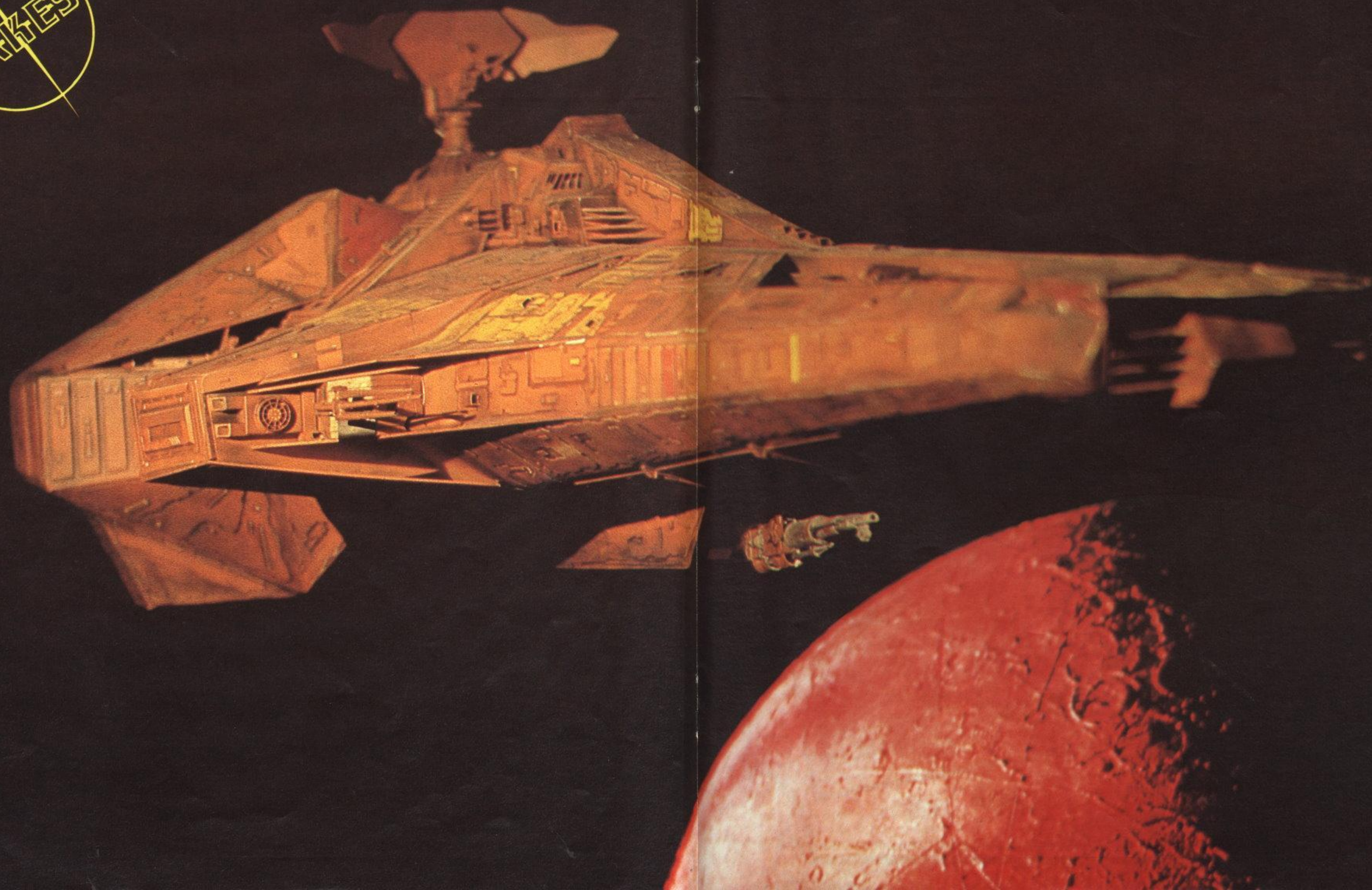
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It's very important you keep us informed of what you would like to see in your magazine, what you think of the features and stories and what your views on the programme are. We want to give you the monthly magazine you want to read. So, keep your letters coming and, remember, each letter receives personal attention.

Here are a selection of the letters we've received so far . . .

I know you have published pin-up poster pictures of all the cast of the superb series, **Blake's 7**, in your early editions of the magazine. I did not get to hear about the magazine until issue No. 4 and have missed out on posters of Paul Darrow, Mike Keating and Steven Pacey. Will you please print them again for all those like me who were not able to collect them the first time?

Kay White,  
Derby.

*We have had a number of requests to repeat some of the poster pictures, Kay, and we are looking into the possibility of reprinting them in colour again. Meanwhile, however, black-and-white prints of those poster pictures are being included in the magazine from this issue onwards.*

Ed.

Congratulations on a fantastic magazine! Ever since the rotten BBC removed the series from our screens your magazine has been the only link with our heroes. Keep up the good work and let's have lots more of your superb stories. Some of the written ones are as good, if not better, than some of the episodes we've seen on the TV. Why don't you sell them to the BBC and get them to make films of them? At least the BBC can't then say the series can't be made again because there are no ideas left. Your magazine is full of them! Keep up the good work!

Sarah White  
West Lothian

I believe there is still room for improvement in your mag., although I see you've already taken my advice and dropped stupid features like Vila's Gags and the Book Review. Now you've started, let's cut the stories out and have more articles. You can't get the stories as exciting as the programme—so don't try!

Vincent Street,  
Birmingham.

*We've had two wildly differing opinions regarding the content of*



*the magazine so I think it's only fair I ask other readers what they would like to see in the magazine. Do you want a change to more articles or do you want the same story content as we carry at the moment? Let's have your views. Write to me at the magazine address given on this page.*

Can you tell me what happened to Orac during Episode Two of the Fourth series? When Vila and Soolin teleported up to Scorpio Orac was not with them. In Episode Three, however, he was back on Scorpio. How did he do that?

Samantha Outten,  
Bathgate.

*I've had a word with our electronic friend, Samantha, and he assures me he has the ability to teleport himself at will. There is a small device located close to his key which, when activated either by himself or on command, links into the teleport system and transfers him wherever he wants to go. It's the same device as used in the teleport bracelets. Maybe that's why he was well out of the way during the fateful moments of Episode Thirteen of the Fourth series? If that is how he got out of it . . . he's not telling.*

Ed.

I am writing to congratulate you on the magazine. I think it is very good value for money and provides the necessary background to the television series which we all miss so much. Will the BBC ever listen to the viewers and, if they will not make another series, at least show repeats of the previous ones?

Elizabeth Manning,  
Colchester.

*At the time of going to press the BBC made no announcement regarding the showing of repeats of the series, Elizabeth, but I'm certain, with some pressure from readers of this magazine, the BBC could just change their mind. Why not write to the Director General and complain?*



IN THIS BUMPER EDITION OF PAUL DARRROW'S RECOLLECTIONS, HE RECOUNTS HAPPENINGS DURING THE THIRD SERIES OF THE PROGRAMME.

**PAUL DARRROW** writes....

Once the third series of **Blake's Seven**, was under way, it became clear that it was likely to prove as popular as the series that had preceded it.

This was somewhat surprising as the group was now led by Avon, a ruthless opportunist who ran a close second in the public's disaffection to a certain J R Ewing of Dallas! Dead men may tell no tales, but Bad men seem to hold almost everyone in thrall.

Blake, it was assumed, was dead. But no one saw him die and his legend, like that of the Lone Ranger, lived on.

What legend? If you think about it, he had bungled every attempt to bring down the Federation, succeeded in getting Gan killed, and was hors de combat when the Liberator faced its greatest challenge—an Alien assault from beyond Andromeda!

Avon and the Aliens might sound like a rock group but, as you all know, was a deadly struggle that resulted in the temporary loss of the Liberator and the permanent loss of Jenna and our erstwhile leader.

However, no one can keep a bad man down and Avon had succeeded in restoring the status quo. What, apart from the Liberator, was to be his reward? The simple answer to that question is—very little!

For the first few episodes of the new series, the wilful, and sometimes obnoxious, Tarrant appeared to be trying to take over the ship and the allegiance of the crew.

He had a funny way of going about it! He seemed to forget that, without Avon, neither Zen nor Orac would be able to maintain proper function, that his skill as a pilot was irrelevant, because Avon had already proved that he could fly the ship and, to cap it all, poor Vila, our longest serving member, had become the butt of his antagonism.

Of course, this was an attempt to establish the new character in the series as quickly as possible. Provocation was the name of the game. Unfortunately, that didn't quite work out because, as everyone knows, it is Avon's prerogative to be beastly to Vila and, unless Tarrant was to prove himself against a formidable opponent, he was unlikely to leap in to the affections of the rest of the crew.

This brings us to, 'Harvest of Kairos', episode five of the new series. Here it transpired that Tarrant had been at school—pos-

sibly, 'approved',—with a certain macho type called Jarvik who was now in close cahoots with the high, mighty and well built Servalan.

The Liberator was running out of crystals. It had a habit of doing this. Rather like someone suffering from indigestion forgetting to buy in a stock of bicarbonate of soda. Tarrant, in spite of his youth, had been around a bit and knew where to find some.

This resulted in our ending up on a very bleak planet just in time to be chased by a huge creature that strongly resembled a cross between an octopus and a spider and which took a keen interest in

Dayna.

Fortunately, the creature appeared to be a friend of Jarvik's and, arriving in the nick of time, he saved Dayna from its clutches by feeding it the very stuff we had come to collect.

Jarvik had told Servalan that, as far as he remembered, Tarrant was, 'all man', and might turn out to be tough opposition. He now proceeded to disprove this theory by kicking Tarrant all over the planet and leaving the rest of us stranded while he and Servalan took over the Liberator. Tarrant didn't even say he was sorry! By this time, you could be excused for



Author (later script editor) Chris Boucher who wrote the immortal words . . .  
"What is it?"  
"I don't know but it would be difficult to love!"





feeling sympathetic towards poor Avon.

It seemed to be a series cliché that he would be led into trouble by one or other member of the crew and then be obliged to save the day.

In this instance he managed it with a mysterious piece of rock called, 'Sopron'.

Apparently, the rock contained more intelligence than many mere mortals. That it outshone Tarrant in the intelligence stakes had been made all too clear! It now proved to be even better than expected and succeeded in outwitting Servalan and the Federation by convincing them what a rotten old hulk of a space hopper was in fact a mighty Star Battleship!

The Liberator was restored to its rightful(?) owners and Jarvik, who had apparently had a change of heart and had tried to protect Dayna from Servalan's wrath, was dead. "What a pity", said Tarrant. "The thug was asking for it", replied Avon, who could never be described as a sentimentalist.

This episode was reviewed by Clive James of 'The Observer', who pronounced it—ludicrous! It also provoked the thought, in those of us who had been in the series the longest, that it might prove to be the beginning of the end of, **Blake's Seven**.

Indeed, it was at about this time that we were told that the third series would be the last series, that your interest was waning, and that the show was in a, *Terminal*, condition. Of course, the third series was not the last series, your interest, if anything, was increasing and, *Terminal*, would not be the final episode.

Thankfully, the next four episodes revitalised us all. Vila was to fall in love in a, *City at the Edge of the World*, Servalan was to lose her, *Children of Auron*, the Rumours of Avon's death were to prove exaggerated and all of us were to be nearly entombed in a, *Sarcophagus*.

In addition, Avon's long lost love, Anna Grant, was to appear. It might be surprising to learn that somebody actually loved Avon!

However, love isn't always what it is cracked up to be and, it was hinted, Avon's love might turn out to be fatal!

It was one of the saddest aspects of the series that, if Avon showed the slightest affection towards anyone, they generally ended up dead. Would Anna Grant prove to be the exception to this rule? The

answer was to come later.

One of my favourite lines in, 'Blake's Seven', was written by Chris Boucher in the episode, 'Star One'. A character remarked upon an alien that had turned into a nasty blob on the floor. "What is it?" "I don't know, but it would be difficult to love," Avon replied.

He might have been referring to a certain member of the crew. An awful coward who spouted equally awful jokes and reminded many people of a cross between Benny Hill and Kermit the Frog! By the way, I wouldn't advise anyone to refer to Servalan as Miss Piggy!

However, somebody did love Vila Restal and not only because he opened an incredible door in a, *City at the edge of the World*. That was the title of the first of the four episodes that revealed a great deal about the characters of Servalan, Vila, Avon and Cally.

Up to now, you might have been excused for wondering why Vila was acceptable to Avon, and to anyone else for that matter. That he could unlock the ununlockable was understood, but any later would blast open any door that proved obstinate. It is extraordinary to think that the cold Avon and the strange Cally were the only ones to recognise Vila's other qualities. In this episode, you recognised them too.

Vila went to a planet to open a door that led to some kind of Galactic Shangri La. He passed through that door with a pretty blonde called Kerril, but something called him back.

It might be said that Vila sacrificed love and happiness for himself in order to provide it for others, for he returned from Paradise to face the cruelly funny Bayban. Bayban was an overgrown schoolboy with homicidal tendencies who might easily have been renamed Baboon. By overcoming Bayban the Butcher, Vila lost Kerril.

Much later he was to lose another friend. A friend who would try to kill him in order to lighten the load on a nose diving space ship. But that's another story.

It was characteristic of a Chris Boucher script—Chris was our Script Editor and oversaw every script, even if he didn't write them—that one of our heroes would be disappointed in love.

In, *Rumours of Death*, it was Avon's turn. The first rumour was that Anna Grant, a name you had all heard if you had stayed with the series, the only woman our stone hearted friend had ever loved, was

alive.

Avon was prepared to sacrifice everything and everybody to find her. As Cally pointed out, he even sacrificed his conscience, his humanity. As it happened, as it always happens, the course of true love is crooked and Anna Grant turned out to be almost as big a crook as Servalan.

Suddenly, in a dirty cellar, Avon was surrounded by the three women in his life. One of them, his implacable enemy, was chained to a wall, the second, a telepathic alien, stood to one side, the third, the only person for whom his rare smile was genuine, tried to kill him!

Fortunately for him—or, if you think about it, unfortunately—he was allowed to kill her instead and escape to rejoin Tarrant and the others. Not exactly an ideal alternative to the glamorous Anna! But then, in Outer Space, nobody loves you!

In *Children of Auron*, Servalan tried to justify herself by breeding a race of little Servalans. Her great love, of course, was herself! But, as you will remember, Cally's twin sister foiled her by destroying the breeding stock.

In, *Sarcophagus*, a strange episode that some of you hated, but most of you loved—there was no in between—the love of self was again the subject. Cally became a lost, beautiful, alien soul attempting to subjugate everyone aboard the Liberator by exploiting their weaknesses. Vila became her Court Jester, Dayna her Court Musician, Tarrant her headstrong Champion.

Avon, however, had not forgotten that love did not make the Universe go round, and remembered that, although it had struck him like a thunderbolt, he had survived.

In this episode, he faced real thunderballs and lightning flashes but, ignoring them, he destroyed Cally's other self with a kiss. The kiss of death.

This gave rise to another of my favourite lines. As Avon brushed aside the thunder and lightning she was producing and took the alien in his arms, he remarked;—"You're very beautiful when you're angry!"

The cast's pleasure in these episodes was enhanced by the fact that our guest stars included Valentine Dyall, Colin Baker, Carol Hawkins and, especially for me, Lorna Heilbron who was Anna. I first met Lorna when she was fif-

teen and she came to see her sister with whom I was appearing in pantomime in, of all places, Rotherham.

It was quite extraordinary to discover that the little girl with braces on her teeth who stood in the wings and watched, *Dick Whittington*, was to be Avon's femme fatale.

So—the City was destroyed, the Children and Auron were lost, the Rumours were dispelled and we all climbed out of the Sarcophagus. Just as well, because it was getting to be a little sad in Space.

We flew on to more adventures, but you knew a little more about us and, we liked to think, it was from these four episodes that your fiercer loyalty to, *Blake's Seven*, sprang. It was a loyalty we all felt in need of as we proceeded to, *Terminal*, and the conclusion of series three!

The last episode of, **Blake's Seven**, ever to be written by its creator, Terry Nation, was fittingly entitled, *Terminal*.

Here was revealed Avon's purpose—indeed, the purpose of the entire third series. Blake was back!

Avon alone knew that Orac and Zen had picked up a distress signal, purporting to come from Blake, on an artificial planet created by the Federation. As he had revealed when he had gone in search of Anna Grant, nobody was going to stop Avon once he had made up his mind to do something. He made this crystal clear when he pulled a gun on Tarrant. "He really would have killed you," said Cally. She was quite right, and Vila would have applauded! "I don't need any of you and, if you follow me, I'll kill you," was the gist of Avon's last speech aboard the *Liberator*. Of course, this instruction was ignored and, as a result, the *Liberator* was lost, Zen was to be no more and, later, Cally was to die.

Only one person could have been insensitive enough to ignore Avon's warning. Do I really need to tell you who it was? Avon came down to *Terminal* and, like a baby searching for dolly mixtures, entered an underground cavern.

At last, and to Terry Wogan's relief, Blake was found! He was very ill, almost dying, but Avon was prepared to sacrifice everything to save him. There had only been one other person for whom he was prepared to do that—Anna Grant.

Everybody must have a purpose in life—Avon had two. He had lost

one when he killed Anna. Now he was confronting the other—would he kill Blake? If you have followed the series, and I assume you have, I hear you murmur, 'not yet'!

As it happened before, the discovery of Blake was a trick, an hallucination induced by Servalan. Avon had been beguiled and drugged and his conversation with Blake was an illusion. **Blake's Seven**, seemed almost always to be concerned with shattered illusions.

By this time, you had turned our series into a cult success. Not

everyone can accept the success of something they don't like or cannot understand, and the show had its share of detractors. However, throughout the three years of our space adventures, we had got to know a little more about you—the viewer.

Through your thousands of letters, it was revealed that you come from all walks of life and backgrounds, but you can hardly be called Mr, Mrs or Miss Average! You have to be a bit different to admire a mean space pilot, two steel willed women, a comical thief



and a man, 'beneath whose cold exterior, beats a heart of pure stone.'

*Terminal*, was to be the termination of us all and we were determined to make it a fitting end. The episode was directed by Mary Ridge, a lady who understood that determination and matched it with her own. Through her efforts, through those of the cast and, in a way, through yours as well, *Terminal*, became one of the best admired episodes and was not an ending after all, but a new beginning.

Avon was Servalan's prisoner and she soon captured the impetuous Tarrant and the unwilling Cally. The Liberator was stricken and immobilised, being destroyed by a creeping fungus. Zen was dying.

Vila and Dayna were given no alternative but to surrender the ship, at long last, to the Federation. It was to be a pyrrhic victory for Servalan. She had her, 'absolute power', and it blew up in her face!

Avon, somewhat uncharacteristically, blamed himself for the apparent defeat and, even more

uncharacteristically, it was Tarrant who took the sensible course and left the stage to find a way off the dying planet.

One by one the others followed. The last to leave was Avon and, just before that now famous theme tune exploded onto the soundtrack, he smiled a last rare smile.

I have often been asked what that smile signified. Well—when everything you have ever wanted has just been blown to smithereens, when you've lost the only woman you ever loved and when you have been led to believe that your only friend is dead, the alternative would seem to be to burst into tears. Strong men don't cry, at least—not in public!

*Blake's Seven*, was over.

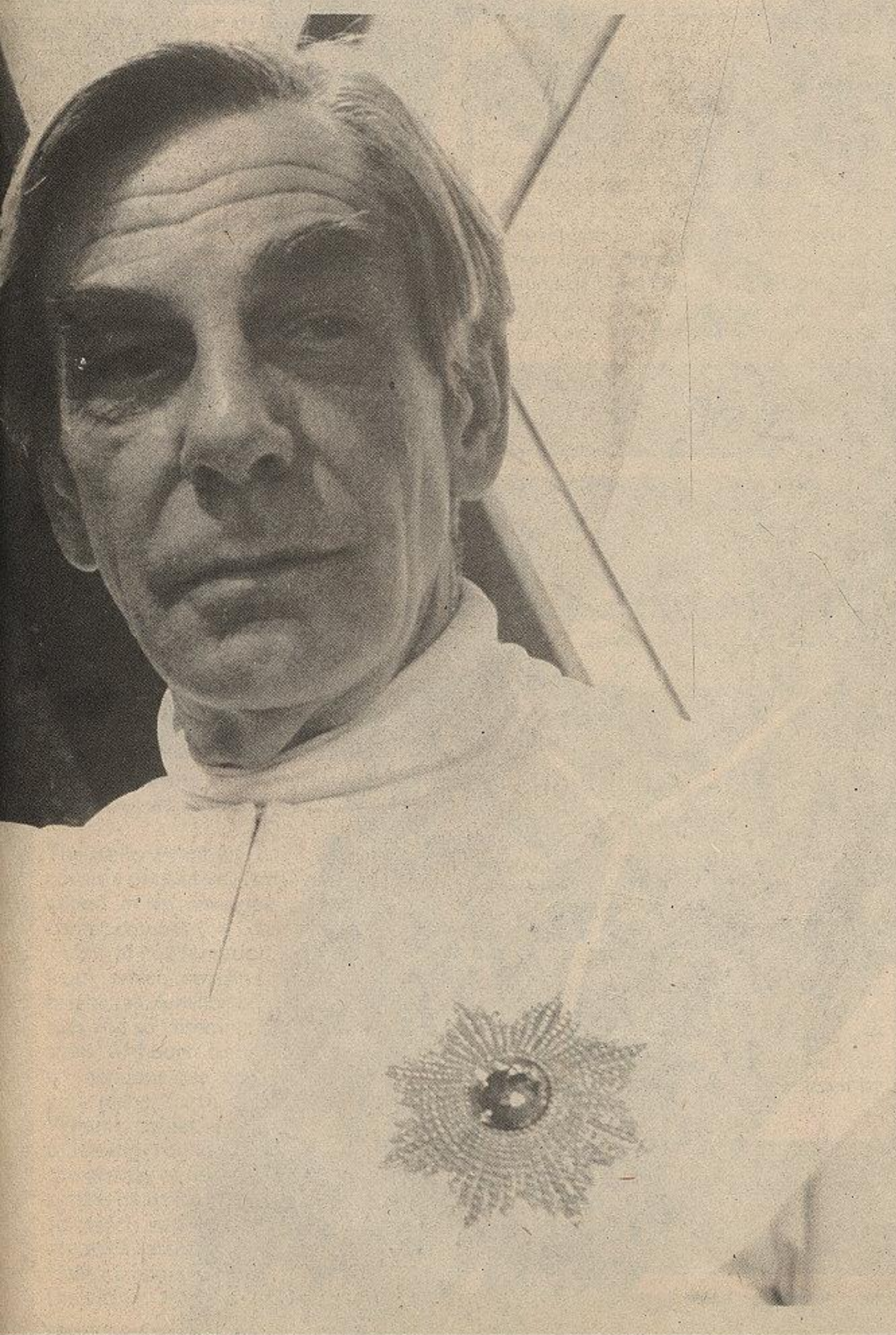
Then, as Alice would have said, it got, 'Curiouser and curiouser,' because, to everyone's surprise, it was announced that there was to be a new series the following year!

We wondered how on earth we could possibly be resurrected. But we weren't on earth, were we? We were out there in the Great Unknown where anything is possible.

Twelve months later we would be back in business, eight episodes of series three would have been repeated and Terry Wogan would still have something to talk about! Perhaps we should have created Terry an honorary Blake's eighth? But then, on the Liberator, we always tuned in to Jimmy Young!

For better or for worse, Avon would be back—tougher and meaner than ever. Dayna, Vila, Tarrant and the majestic Servalan would still be alive and well and kicking each other all over the Universe. Blake would face the final confrontation. Sadly, though, Cally would not return to haunt our consciences.

Don't despair! Because, next month, I'll tell you about the last, 'last series'.



Left: It was to be a pyrrhic victory for Servalan . . .

Overleaf: Sadly, Cally would not return . . .



# ASH ORAC.....

Your chance to put any question you like to the super-computer. If you're lucky enough to have your question printed here, then we'll send you an autographed photo of the **BLAKE'S 7** cast!

**Susan Gardner of Maidstone wonders if it will ever be possible for man to create an atmosphere in which man can live on the moon?**

Several attempts were made in the early twenty-first century to colonise the moon of Earth, some more successful than others, but all attempts were confined to enclosed dwelling environments. Due to the weak gravitational force, the moon is incapable of holding any kind of atmosphere and an attempt to speed up the rotation of the mass by nuclear drive, thereby increasing its gravity, failed when it was discovered the mass of the body was too fragile to withstand greater pressure. The moon became a strategic base during the early days of the Federation but, during the last great war, suffered heavy nuclear bombardment and is now an uninhabited and contaminated place.

**Paul Canning of Winchester wants to know what a comet is?**

The stellar event you humans call a comet consists of relatively small particules contained in an envelope of gas. A large comet consists of a head, sometimes with a central condensation, or nucleus, away from which streams a long and very bright tail. Smaller comets may not have tails and so resemble hazy and ill-defined stars. Although some comets may be of tremendous size, some even larger than your planet Earth, they are of small mass. When a comet approaches you Sun, the tail swings round as the body is caught by the gravity of the star, making the comet return on its journey tail-first. The comet to which you people of Earth have the greatest attraction is the one called Halley's comet which is due to return to the vicinity of the Earth during 1986.

**Barry Maclean of Sunderland asks what 'Time Distort' means in terms of the speed of a space ship?**

Time Distort is a unit used to calculate speed through the vast empty areas of space and may only be used when it is known no celestial bodies exist between the point of initiation and the destination. It is a complex process which only a computer as sophisticated as myself can comprehend but, in rough terms which a human like yourself might understand, one unit of Time Distort equals one year, travelling at the speed of light, compressed into one Earth-Standard minute.

**Corina Brooks from Waverly, Australia, wonders how long it would take Scorpio to travel from Xenon base to Earth if it maintained medium speed.**

Should it ever be necessary for Scorpio to visit Earth, which I doubt very much, medium speed would never be ordered by Avon. Medium speed would roughly equate to half of Time Distort (see my reply to Barry Maclean of Sunderland) and would take far too long. Even travelling at full Time Distort, Scorpio would be in transit for in excess of one month. Since the Federation, however, maintain a tight security ring round Earth and its near planets, there would be little reason for the ship to endanger itself by flying there.

**Warren Fielding of Hull is interested to know how long it takes for the light from the Sun to reach Earth.**

Light from your Sun, travelling at 186,000 Earth Standard miles a second, takes little more than eight minutes to reach Earth. The Sun, in diameter, is 864,000 miles and, in terms of volume, it means more than one million Earths could be packed into the Sun. It is the largest body in your Solar System and also the most massive—99.87 per-cent of all matter in the system is contained in the Sun.

**Janet Maher from Merrow, Guildford, writes:-**

I hate to correct one of a far superior intelligence but I'd like to, respectfully, point out that your answer to Robert Cashin from Birmingham (BLAKE'S 7 No. 8) about the Red Shift and the Doppler Effect was not totally correct. The Red Shift and the Doppler Effect are not simply different terms for the same phenomena; the Doppler Effect applies to *all* wave motion whereas the Red Shift is the Doppler Effect only as it applies to the light from stars moving away from us.

The Doppler Effect can be explained as follows:- To a stationary observer watching a moving object the wavelength of the radiation coming from that object will appear to *decrease* as the object moves *towards* the observer and will appear to *increase* as the object *moves away* from the observer. It is because the wavelengths of light coming from distant stars are shifted towards the red end of the visible spectrum that we can tell that they are moving away from us—this is the Red Shift.

Now, Orac, there's no need to sulk, I'm sure you really knew the answer all the time and just didn't have the room to answer the question properly!

*You're no relation to Avon, are you? 'Orac'.*



# DUNGEON!

FROM



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IN THE QUEST FOR THE FABULOUS JADE IDOL, HERO AND ELF DESCEND DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE DUNGEON. BUT MANY ABOMINATIONS AWAIT THEM.



TAKE A BIG BREATH, ELF, IT'S GOING TO BE YOUR LAST!

LOOK OUT!



FOOL! I CUT MY MILK TEETH ON TROLLS LIKE YOU!

AARGH!

BUT ELF'S LUCK IS RUNNING OUT...



AIEE!



HELP! OH... GASP... PLEASE... GASP... HELP!

I CAN'T!

AS A GIANT SNAKE VICIOUSLY ATTACKS ELF, HERO CAN ONLY WATCH HELPLESSLY SINCE THE HARSH RULES OF THE DUNGEON FORBID RESCUE.



BUT HERO IS IN TERRIBLE DANGER HIMSELF.

WEAKLING! CARING ABOUT AN INSIGNIFICANT ELF, AND YOU HAVE THE ARROGANCE TO THINK YOU CAN STEAL MY TREASURE.



ME! I'M EVIL SUPERHERO, KEEPER OF THE JADE IDOL. KILLER OF ALL WHO DARE. AND NOW YOU ARE GOING TO DIE!



I NEED ALL THE POWER OF MY MAGIC SWORD TO SAVE ME FROM HIS EVIL!

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# the GOLDEN BOOK part II

*The Invecta's are making a serious effort to draw all freedom fighters together for a co-ordinated effort against the federation. Upon success Avon is to be the supreme ruler of the galaxy. All the crew are invited to a banquet to celebrate this new alliance.*

*However, unbeknown to them, Soolins name is written in the Golden Book. By law she is to be subject to a ritual death!*

'I can hardly believe it,' remarked Tarrant in amazement. 'You selected ruler of the galaxy!'

'The other leaders have at last seen sense,' retorted Avon, permitting himself a quiet smile.

'Yeah, but first we have to take on the Federation and blow them to smithereens before our hero here gets the job!' Vila was as blunt as ever. He seemed to have little recollection of what had happened on board Scorpio a few hours before.

'With the combined resources of all these people,' Avon gestured to the assembled gathering in the banqueting hall, 'how can we fail? We are all united in a common sense and can match the Federation ship for ship. The day of Servalan and her minions is nearly over.'

'I'll believe that when I see it,' muttered Vila. 'I need a drink.'

Vila took one pace towards the drinks table before Avon's iron grip was felt on his arm. Avon's voice matched his grip.

'Touch one potent drink, make one wrong move or one loose remark and you'll never see the morning. Understand?'

'Look, Avon,' Vila was less certain of himself, 'I've already apologised for what happened with Soolin. I was drunk, didn't know what I was doing. I've said I'm sorry. Let's leave it at that. Besides,' he placed a hand to his jaw, 'I don't think the old bones could take another treatment session from Tarrant . . . or you. I've learned my lesson.'

'Just make sure you remember that,' growled Avon as he lead his small party to join the gathering. Soolin glanced at Dayna as they made to follow Avon, Vila and Tarrant. She was clearly unhappy about being back on the planet and



*"Touch one potent drink, make one wrong move or one loose remark and you'll never see the morning. Understand?"*

having Vila in her company. Dayna understood. She placed an arm round Soolin's shoulder as they made their way to the piles of waiting food.

'Don't worry,' said Dayna in a soothing voice. 'I'll look after you, never fear.'

'Is she the one?'

A curtain was pulled aside as the shadowy figures peered into the throng round the banqueting table.

'Affirmed.'

'But how do we secure her without causing a disturbance?'

'Simple,' replied the other,

removing a small pouch from a deep pocket. 'We sprinkle this over her food and she will do as we bid. Come, we must act swiftly.'

'It's rather nice having a spread like this put on for you, isn't it?' Dayna was enjoying herself. 'All this food and drink . . . and the Invectas are so attentive.'

Just then, a plate brimming with delicious food was pressed into Soolin's hand by a servant. She smiled at the man in an uncertain way and, as she sampled the tastes, whispered to Dayna.

'They may seem extremely civilized,' she began, 'but they



haven't changed their religious ways since I was here. See . . . she indicated to several cloaked figures standing in one corner of the vast room. They are the priests, the ones who do the killing . . . all in the name of their so-called gods.'

'It makes my flesh creep just thinking about it,' replied Dayna, taking a bite from a well cooked piece of meat, 'but let's not allow it to spoil the evening. Come on, I'll get you a drink.'

At the far end of the room, Avon was in deep conversation with the leader of Invecta's grand council. Tarrant and Vila watched from a respectful distance, unable to hear more than the odd few words. It was clear, however, from the tone of the conversation that Avon was discussing matters sensitive to the leader's heart. Vila edged closer to hear more.

. . . and she mentioned certain religious rites which seem out of keeping with what I see here today, Excellency.'

'My people are deeply rooted in their ways, Avon,' replied the leader. 'I choose not to seek change and disturb the order of things. I leave matters of religion to the priests and they leave politics to me. It is a compromise but one which has worked very well so far.'

'You mean there is such a thing as the Golden Book?'

'Indeed there is,' continued the leader. 'We keep it secure from prying eyes in a cave below this hall. Only the high priests have access to it and they guard it jealously. It is their symbol of authority for they know, without it, their hold over the people would be broken.'

'Well?' asked Tarrant. 'Hear anything of interest?'

Vila looked his normal, shifty self. 'It's diabolical,' he muttered. 'The priests rule here by fear. Something to do with a golden book.'

'You mean their death list,' stated Tarrant. 'Because that's what it is. For all their outward signs of civility, these people are barbarians.'

The pair looked across the thronging hall, trying to locate Dayna and Soolin. As they did so, two cloaked figures were seen to approach the girls. Soolin seemed distant but Dayna was looking worried, her voice becoming raised. Tarrant nodded to Vila to join him as he made his way towards the girls.

'She's going nowhere,' shouted Dayna, trying to break the grip one of the cloaked figures had on Soolin's arm.

'Tell your friend there is no need to worry,' ordered the figure.

'Th . . . there . . . is no need to worry.' Soolin's voice was unnaturally quiet.

'She has an appointment which she is anxious to keep. Is that not so?'

'I . . . I have an appointment . . .'  
'Soolin!' exclaimed Dayna. 'What's the matter with you? after what you said about these people . . . you can't be serious?'

'I . . . must go.'

Just then, Tarrant and Vila arrived on the scene.

'Let go of her,' commanded Tarrant, looking threatening.

'You heard him,' chipped in Vila. 'She's not going anywhere!'

The commotion caused Avon to excuse himself from the leader of the grand council, but he followed Avon to where Soolin was held by the two cloaked figures.

'What's going on?'

'These creeps are trying to abduct Soolin,' protested Vila. Avon was about to intervene when the voice of the leader stopped him. 'Do not interfere, Avon,' warned the booming voice. 'Soolin is no stranger to this planet or our ways. She knows that since it is her time, she must go with the priests.'

'Must go with the priests,' stated Soolin in a soft, distant voice.

'She's been drugged,' shouted Tarrant.

'It is our law,' boomed the voice as the grand council leader placed a restraining hand on Avon. Remember what I said. No-one interferes with the duties of our priests.'

'You also said they exercised their authority through the Golden Book,' said Avon in a low tone. 'How can it be that Soolin's name appears on that book?'

'She was here as a child, therefore eligible for entry in the Book,' stated one of the priests. 'It is mere coincidence she has arrived back here at the time when her name appears on the appropriate page. She goes to meet the gods tomorrow.'

'Over my dead body!' exclaimed Tarrant, making a move to release the girl.

'Stand still,' ordered Avon. He turned to face the council leader. The sad expression on the man's face said it all . . . but Avon wanted

it said.

'What you mean is that if I prevent Soolin being sacrificed the alliance will come to an end and all our plans for attacking the Federation will be destroyed?'

'Since you put it so bluntly, Avon, I have to say yes.'

'Then it has to be.' There was little sign of emotion in Avon's voice. 'There will be many more sacrifices made before the federation are driven from this universe. Do with her as you wish.'

'WHAT?' Both Tarrant and Vila could hardly believe their ears.

'I said let the priests have her,' retorted Avon. 'There are many more important things at stake.'

With that, Avon turned on his heel and walked into the silent mass of people watching the bizarre scene unfolding. As Soolin was led quietly away by the priests,

the grand council leader was heard to mutter under his breath, 'The decision of a true leader. We have chosen well in Avon.'

\* \* \* \* \*

'The ritual killing will take place as the first sun rises over the city. The sacrifice feels little or no pain since drugs are administered prior to the event.'

'Thank you, Orac,' rumbled Avon. 'And where will it take place?'

'You really are a ghoul,' accused Dayna. 'Is it not bad enough you've sacrificed Soolin's life to gain control of the galaxy without knowing all the gory details?'

'Perhaps you're right,' he replied, removing Orac's key.

'You mean you're really going to let her die and do nothing about it?'

Tarrant was really angry.

'There is nothing we can do,' snarled Avon. 'Besides, what is one life sacrificed at this stage when the whole future of the galaxy hinges on a loose alliance of independent states. One stupid and selfish act at this stage could tear the alliance apart with little chance of it ever reforming to fight the federation.'

'Well I'm not standing by and watching Soolin die!' Tarrant was reaching for his gun. Avon anticipated the move well.

'Quite right, Tarrant.' Avon's clip gun sputtered flame a second before Tarrant's finger engaged his trigger. Tarrant reeled, his gun sailing across Scorpio's flight deck seconds before he hit the same deck.

'Y . . . you've killed him!' screamed Dayna.

'No, merely stunned him,' murmured Avon, replacing his gun. 'Now take him away until this whole messy business is over.'

With that, Avon strode from the flight deck leaving Dayna and Vila to drag Tarrant to one side.

'He's finally flipped,' growled Vila. 'I knew it would happen one day.'

Dayna looked into Vila's face, tears running down her cheeks. 'What are we going to do?'

Vila stood up, a grim expression on his face. 'We do nothing . . . but I do something. Prepare to teleport me back to the planet. I owe it to Soolin. It's the least I can do.'

Dayna reached across to give Vila a big hug. 'Vila . . . I . . .'

'Don't say anything, not yet. Let's see if my crazy idea works. But, for heaven's sake, don't let Avon discover what's going on. The mood he's in he'd probably shop me as well.'

The cold gloomy surroundings were at first alarming, then reassuring. Vila knew he was supposed to be in the cave below the banqueting hall and that was where he seemed to be. Gun held in his clammy hand, Vila felt his way along the wall. He was not sure in which direction to go but, some way off, a glimmer of light seemed to beckon him.

Vila heard it before it came into vision. The low hum of machinery indicated a major complex; the low drone of voices came next. Vila pressed himself closer to the dripping vegetation trailing from the damp walls. He was not a moment too soon. From round the corner came two hooded figures. They talked in low tones as they passed within a few feet of the hidden man. Vila's heart was in his mouth. Not even the cold metal of his gun gave him confidence.

Only when the figures were round the next corner did Vila venture out of cover. Peering round the next bend he blinked. Could he really believe his eyes?

A massive computer complex lay before him, occupying the entire end of the cave. It formed a semi-circle round a raised podium on which was constructed a glass cage in which lay a large golden book. The book was open and its metallic pages exposed to a laser trace beam suspended above. The laser was appearing to write something on the exposed metal pages. To one side, the entire operation was controlled by one, hooded figure hunched over the computer's central control. Vila



'We do nothing . . . but I do something. I owe it to Soolin.'

realised this was his only chance. Slowly, trying not to breathe, he edged forward.

The hooded man never knew what hit him. The power of the blow surprised even Vila.

'What's happening?' The voice made Vila jump. Then he realised it was Dayna's voice coming from his bracelet.

'D... don't call me ... I'll call you.' Vila released his communications button, permitting his pulse to return to something like normal. He wiped his hand across his dry lips then proceeded to don the unconscious man's cloak. He studied the array of unfamiliar equipment in front of him. He had to remove the book from the case but he had no idea how to go about it.

'Think, man ... think!' he muttered to himself. In desperation he pressed a few control buttons. Nothing happened. He turned to the glass cage itself. It took him a few seconds to try opening the obvious door. Would it be security sealed? There was only one way to find out. He gingerly eased the catch back. The door swung open. That instant the laser sprang into life once more. It was burning another name into the metal foil

pages. The brilliance of the light was too much to bear.

With sweat pouring down his face he tried to touch the book only to receive a powerful shock.

'Force field,' he growled. Just then, a small digital read-out in the corner of the cage caught his eye. He reached for his teleport bracelet.

'Dayna, I want Orac to do a calculation for me ... and fast.

'Standing by. What is it?

Vila read out a sequence of numbers. 'Get the computation done and call me back.'

'Will do.' Dayna's voice was reassuring as it clicked off.

Above the hum of machinery Vila heard another sound. It was the sound of feet. The men he saw moments ago were returning!

'Dayna ... hurry,' he called into his bracelet.

'Answers coming up now. Just a few more seconds.'

'I haven't got seconds! I need it now!

'Hey! A strange and hostile voice was shouting from further down the corridor.

'I've been rumbled,' exclaimed Vila. 'The answer, Dayna ... what is it?'

'Three seconds from now,'

called Dayna back excitedly.

'One ... two ...,' Vila edged his hands closer to the book, 'three ...' He made a snatch, expecting another shock wave to hit him. None came. The book was in his hands.

'Stop! Put that back immediately!'

The figures were running now. Vila stuffed the heavy book under one arm while feeling for his gun with the other. He turned to one side, the hood of his cloak falling over his eyes. The running feet were very close now. The gun was in his hand, the book in the other, the hood over his eyes. He levelled the gun in the approximate direction of the running noises ... and fired. He was not certain how many shots he fired before the explosion but the blast sent him flying into the wall of the cave, dashing his head against stone. When he felt his senses returning, the smell of burning was everywhere, the air thick with smoke. Gingerly he flexed his muscles. Everything seemed to be working. As he moved, the weight of the book against his side reminded him of why he was in that situation. Easing back the hood of his singed cloak he saw the devastation



*"You raving idiot! I should kill you for this!"*

before him. Hardly an instrument in the complex had escaped ... and the shapes of two dead priests lay not far from where he had fallen.

'Phew,' he whistled. 'Did I do that?'

'Vila ... Vila ...' The distant voice sounded urgent. It took Vila a few moments to recognise Dayna's voice coming from the bracelet.

'Uh? Yeah, what is it?'

'You're running out of time. The ceremony is starting and Avon's due on the flight deck any second. I'll wait by the teleport controls but I can't promise anything.' With that the air went dead.

'Great. She didn't tell me where the ceremony was taking place or how the devil I get out of here. I don't even know how long I've been unconscious!'

Still grumbling, Vila made his way down the dank corridor. The weight of the book in his hand was of little comfort, not if Soolin was about to die anyway.

'Do you have to watch it,' hissed Dayna as Avon tuned the display screen to the Invecta channel.

'If you can't stomach it you can leave the flight deck,' retorted Avon as the picture came to life.

'I'll stay,' sighed Dayna, trying to hide her concern as she fingered the teleport controls.

'You're late! The ceremony's starting.'

The commanding voice boomed in Vila's ear as he emerged into the banqueting hall from the cave door entrance.

'Uh?'

'The book ... take it to the high priest immediately!' The figure took Vila's arm and propelled him through the crowd towards a raised dias on which had been erected an altar. On the altar lay Soolin. She had an air of serenity about her, the kind of serenity possessed by those whose senses are far removed from reality. Beside her, a large silver dagger in his hand, stood the high priest. His stern gaze was fixed on Soolin. He paid little attention to Vila's shambling approach. To the left of the altar stood the leader of the grand council. To the right burned the sacred flame.

'Bring forward the Golden Book and read the name of the chosen one to be sent to the gods this day.'

The command came from the high priest. Vila felt a hand in his back as he was pushed up to the dias. It seemed as though he would be discovered at any second, but,

so far, his luck was holding. He lowered his head permitting the hood to obscure his features. The name which leapt out of the page at him was that of Soolin, her date of birth ... and date of death. He reached out a hand to place it on one of Soolin's folded arms. As he did so, his bracelet became exposed, glinting under the harsh lights trained on the macabre scene.

'The name is ...,' stammered Vila. 'The name is ...'

'Hold!' The command came from immediately behind Vila. It made him spin round. The high priest was advancing towards him, blade raised as if to strike. His face was a mask of hatred and venom.

'You are not of the brotherhood. You're no priest of mine ...!'

'Dayna, yelled Vila, grasping Soolin's hand, 'teleport now, for pity's sake!'

The blade scythed through the air, tearing at the vanishing shapes of Vila and Soolin to the accompaniment of howls of disbelief from the assembled company.

'You did it,' squealed Dayna with delight as she raced across the flight deck to help Vila with the dead weight of the drugged Soolin.

'Only just,' gasped Vila, tossing the Golden Book to one side. It was only then he saw the threatening shape of Avon, his face like thunder, storming across towards him.

'You raving idiot!' he snarled. 'What have you done?'

'Saved a life, that's what,' retorted Vila with indignation, tossing off his cloak. The next instant, Avon's fist slammed into his stomach.

'I ought to kill you for this!'

'Uh ... W ... why?' gasped Vila. 'Soolin's alive, isn't she?'

Avon turned to the screen, the image of the grand council leader looming large. 'That's why!'

'You have proved yourself unworthy of the trust placed in you by my people,' began the leader, his voice booming and stern. 'That childish rescue performed by one of your crew only serves to prove you were the wrong choice of leader for the new alliance. If our judgement could be so wrong about one man, what might it be like regarding battle decisions against the federation.'

'As of now the alliance is at an end until we secure a trusted leader. You could have had everything, Ker Avon. Now you have nothing. Never enter this sector again or you will be killed on sight.'

With that, the screen went blank. 'He can keep his alliance,' stated Vila, 'if it's to be based on blood sacrifice and fear ... he can keep it. Anyway,' Vila held up the golden book, 'without this their whole system of sacrifice will have to end. No book ... no more killings.'

'You are a short-sighted fool,' hissed Avon. 'You have just robbed us of the chance to destroy the Federation. You may have saved one life ... but you have condemned many more to death at the hands of the Federation while they rule. When will you ever learn?'

With that, Avon turned on his heel and strode from the deck.

'He's only sore because he's not going to be leader of the galaxy now,' sneered Vila.

'I don't think so,' cautioned Dayna. 'I think he really believed in what he was trying to do, even if it meant sacrificing the life of one of us. He's a dangerous man in a dangerous mood. You'd better keep out of his way for a while.'

'Not for the first time,' grinned Vila. 'At least I've made up for the, er, misunderstanding between Soolin and me. Let's hope she's more forgiving than our friend in the black suit.'

*"You've just robbed us of the chance to destroy the Federation ...!"*



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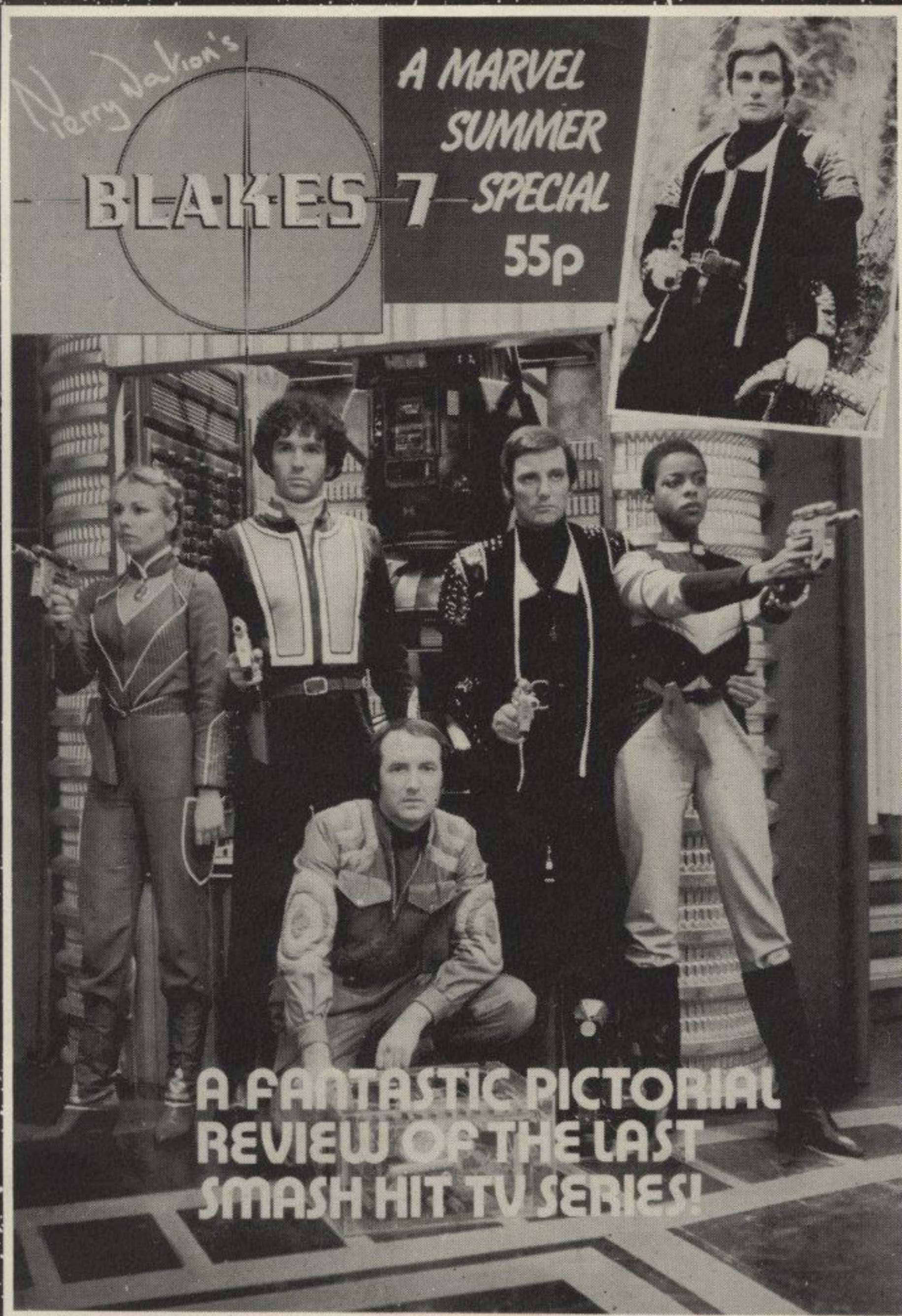
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