

Perry Bakion's

BLAKES 7

A MARVEL
MONTHLY

NO. 21 JUNE 1981

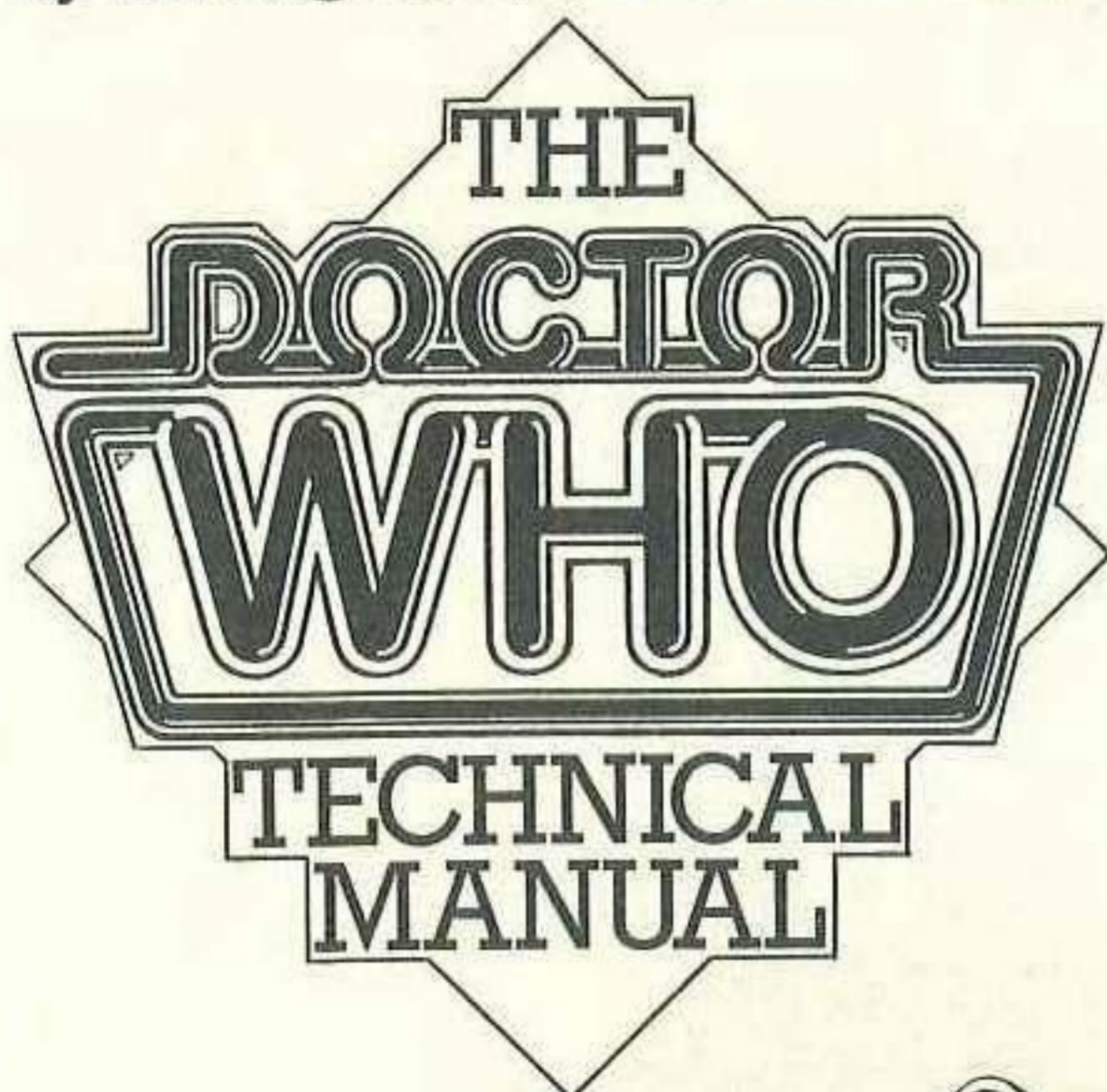


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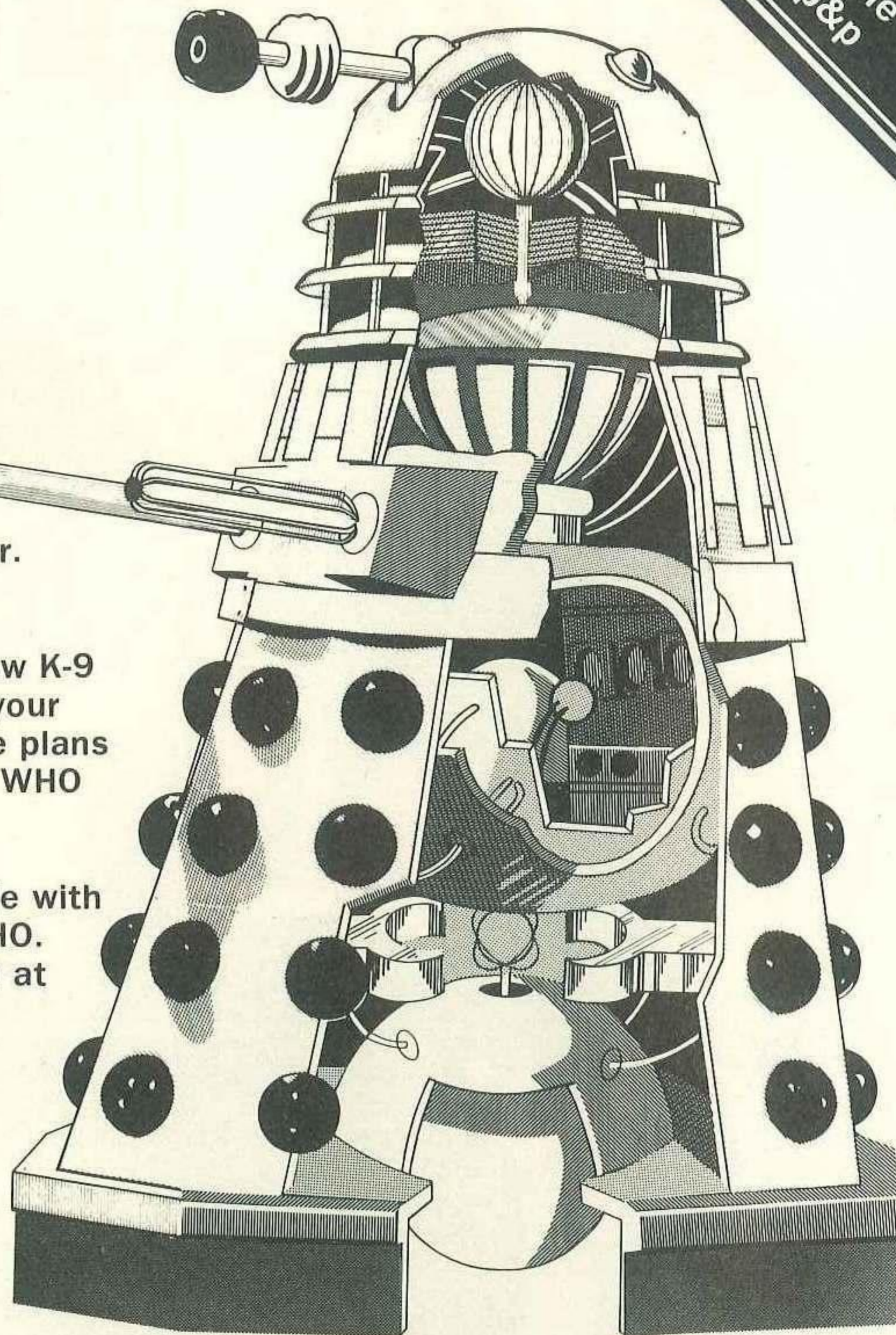
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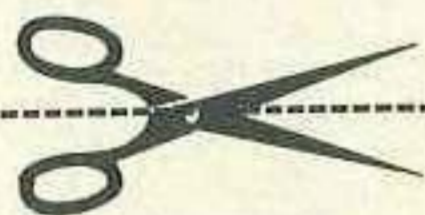
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BLAKES 7

Managing Editor: Bernie Jaye. Design: Floron Florenzo

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SCRAPBOOK



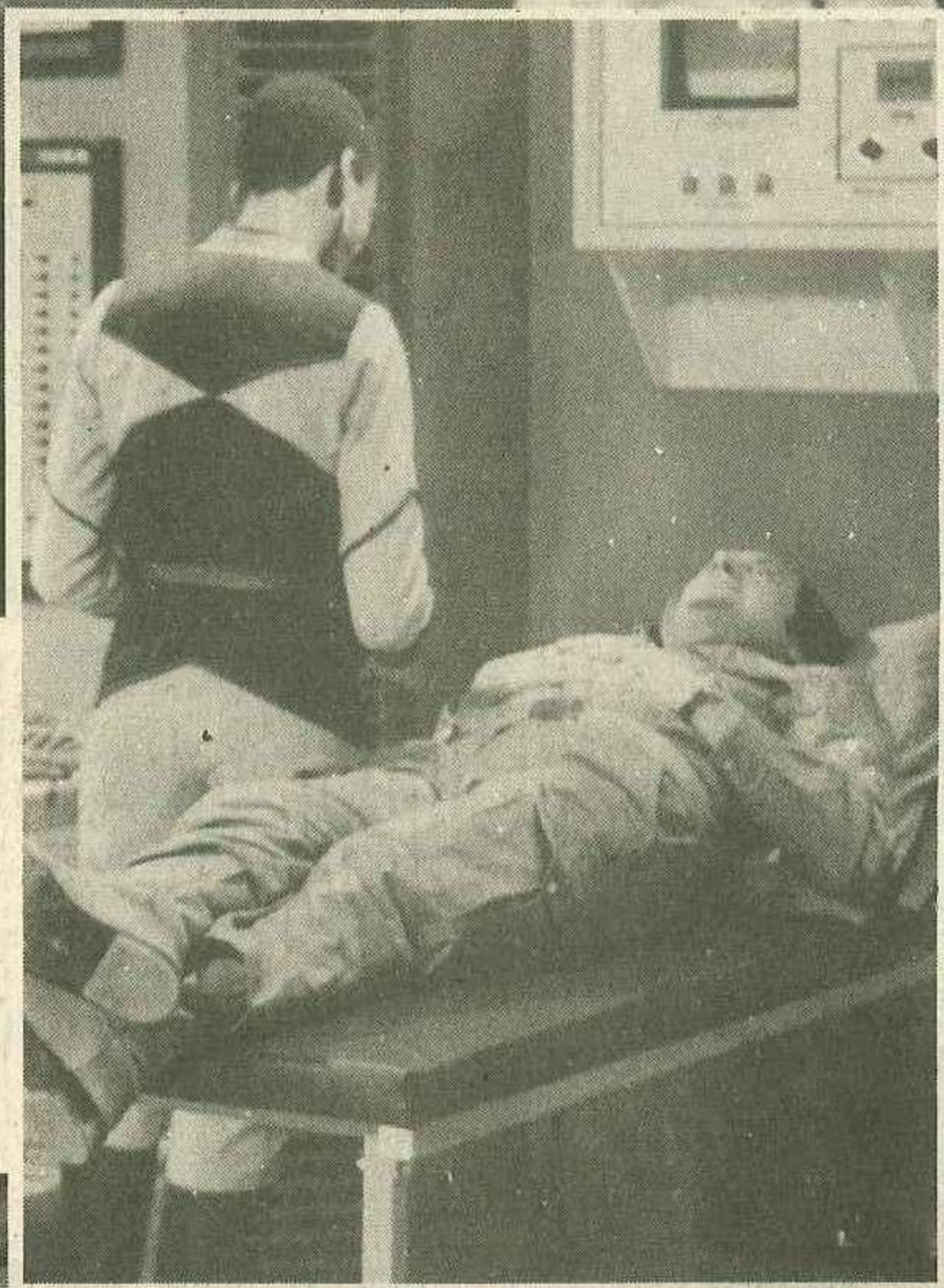
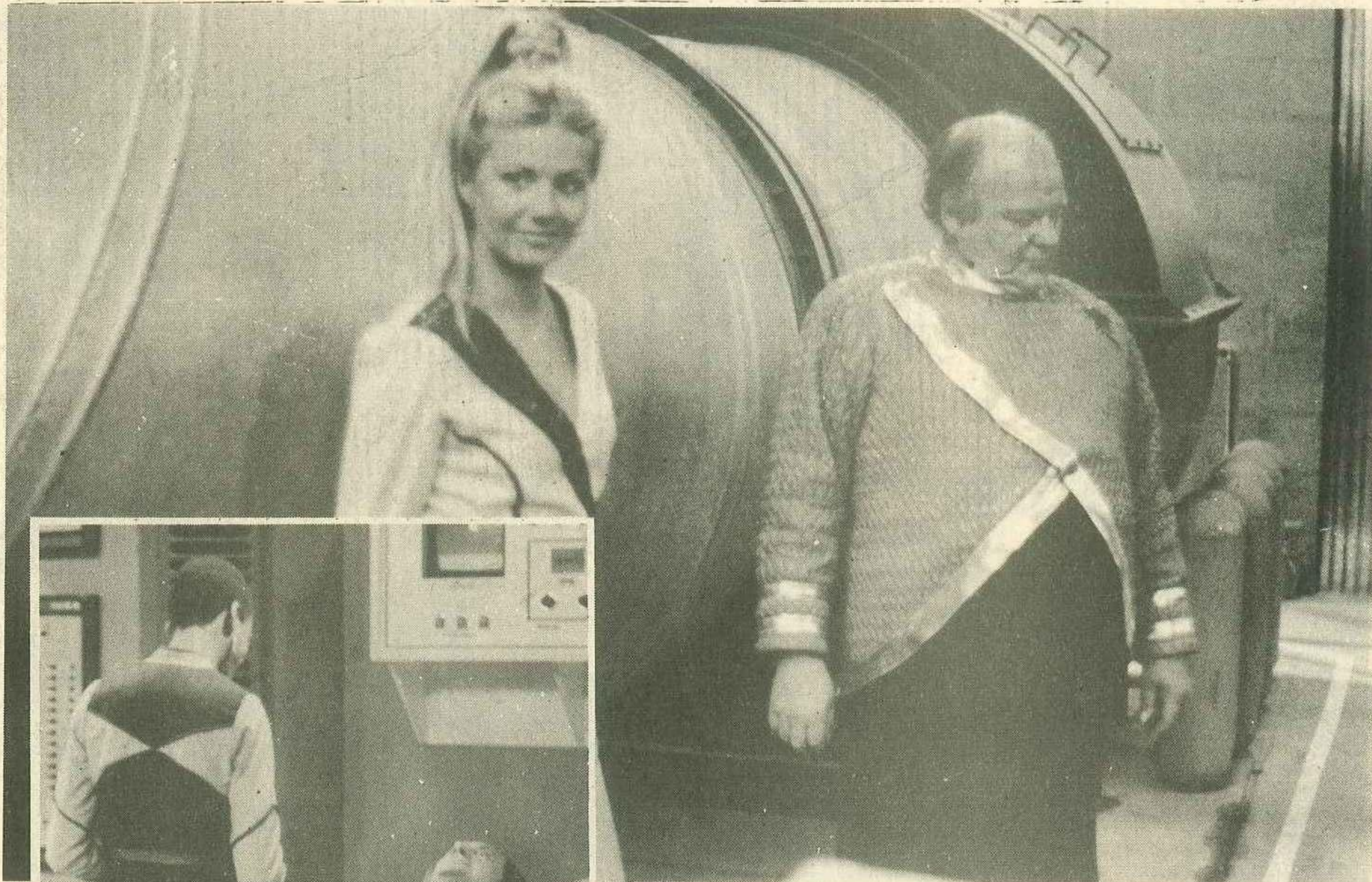
Looking a little bedraggled, Mike Keating stands in the pouring rain rehearsing a 'take'. Poor old Orac sits fizzing with fury in the mud.

Before and after. During the rain Paul Darrow is permitted the use of cardboard to lie on while a scene is set up but. . .

Left:

For the take it's back to the mudbath!





Above:

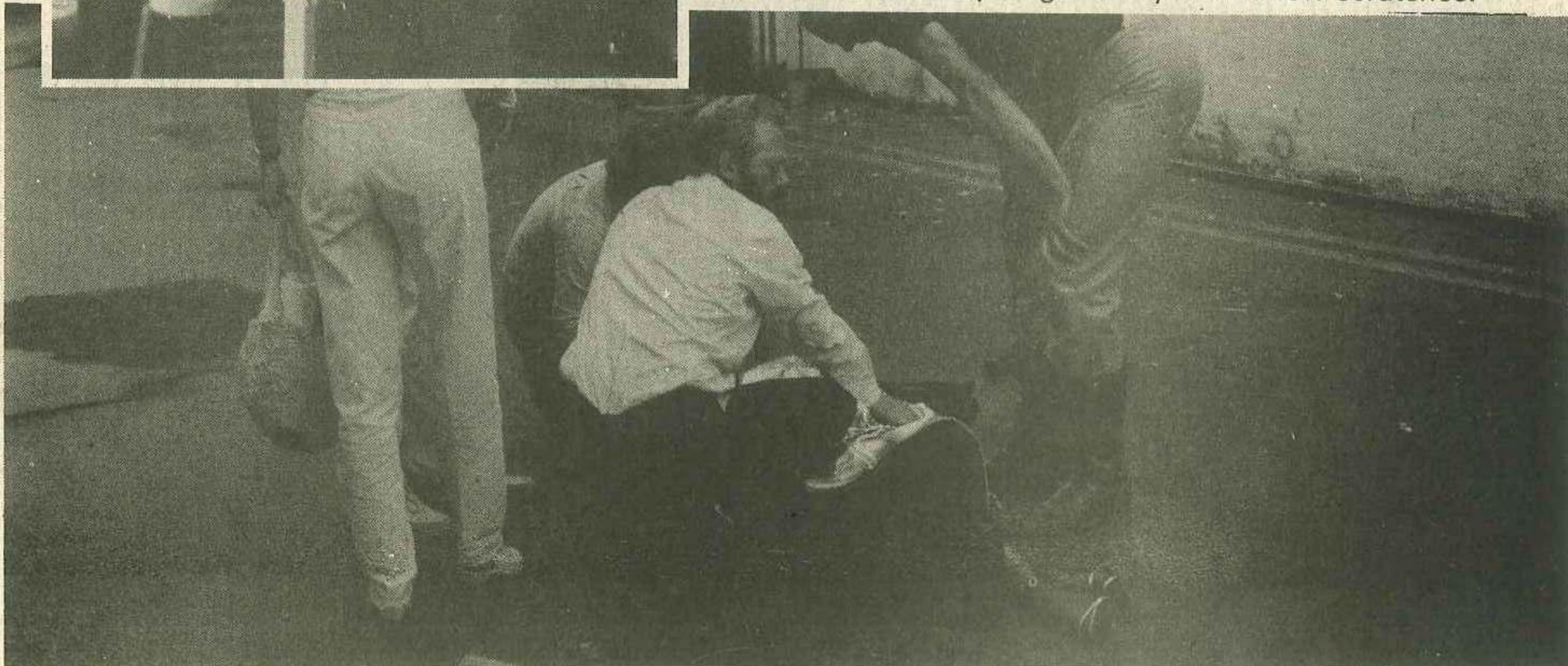
Hardly able to keep a straight face when Roy Kinnear was about, Glynis Barber found she could not look Roy in the eye when saying her lines or she'd dissolve into fits of laughter.

Inset:

Looking as though he's enjoying the rest rather than being on the brink of death, Mike Keating awaits the attention of Josette Simon as they prepare for a 'take'.

Below:

Drama both on and off the set. Exhausted after a strenuous day of filming, Jackie Pearce collapses outside the studio door. She was lucky to get away with a few scratches.

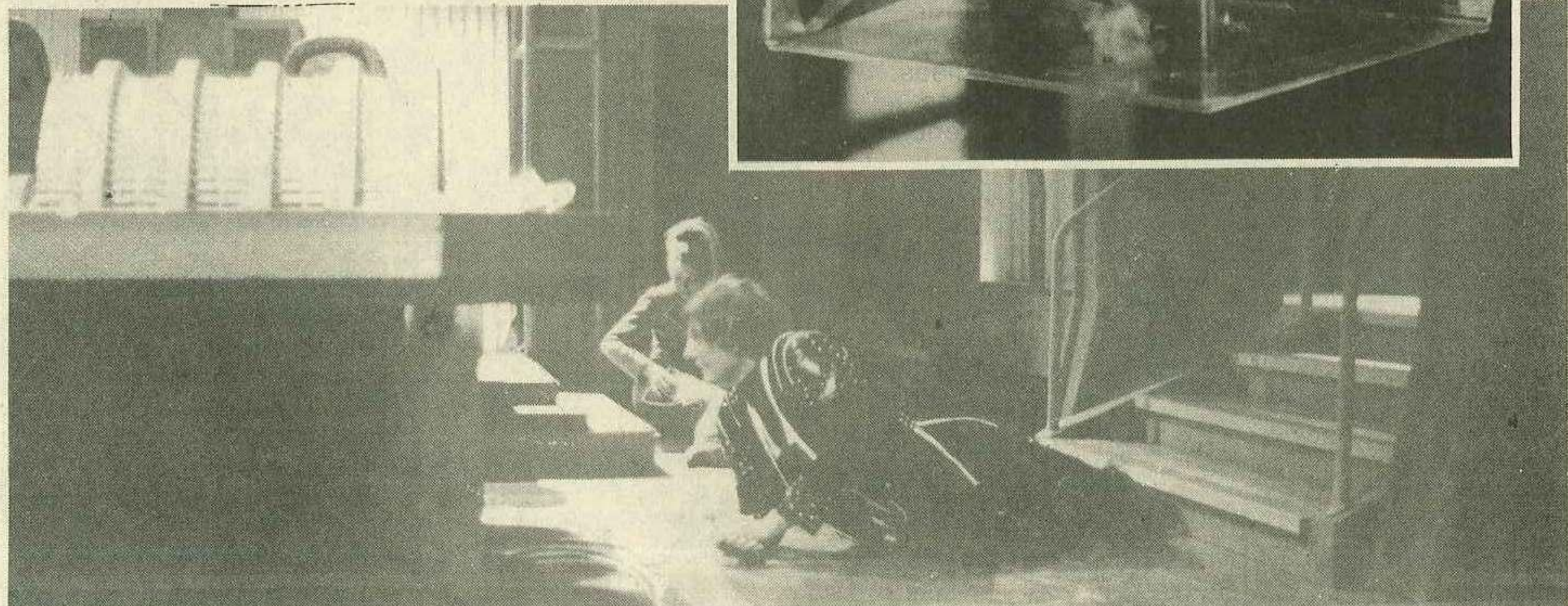
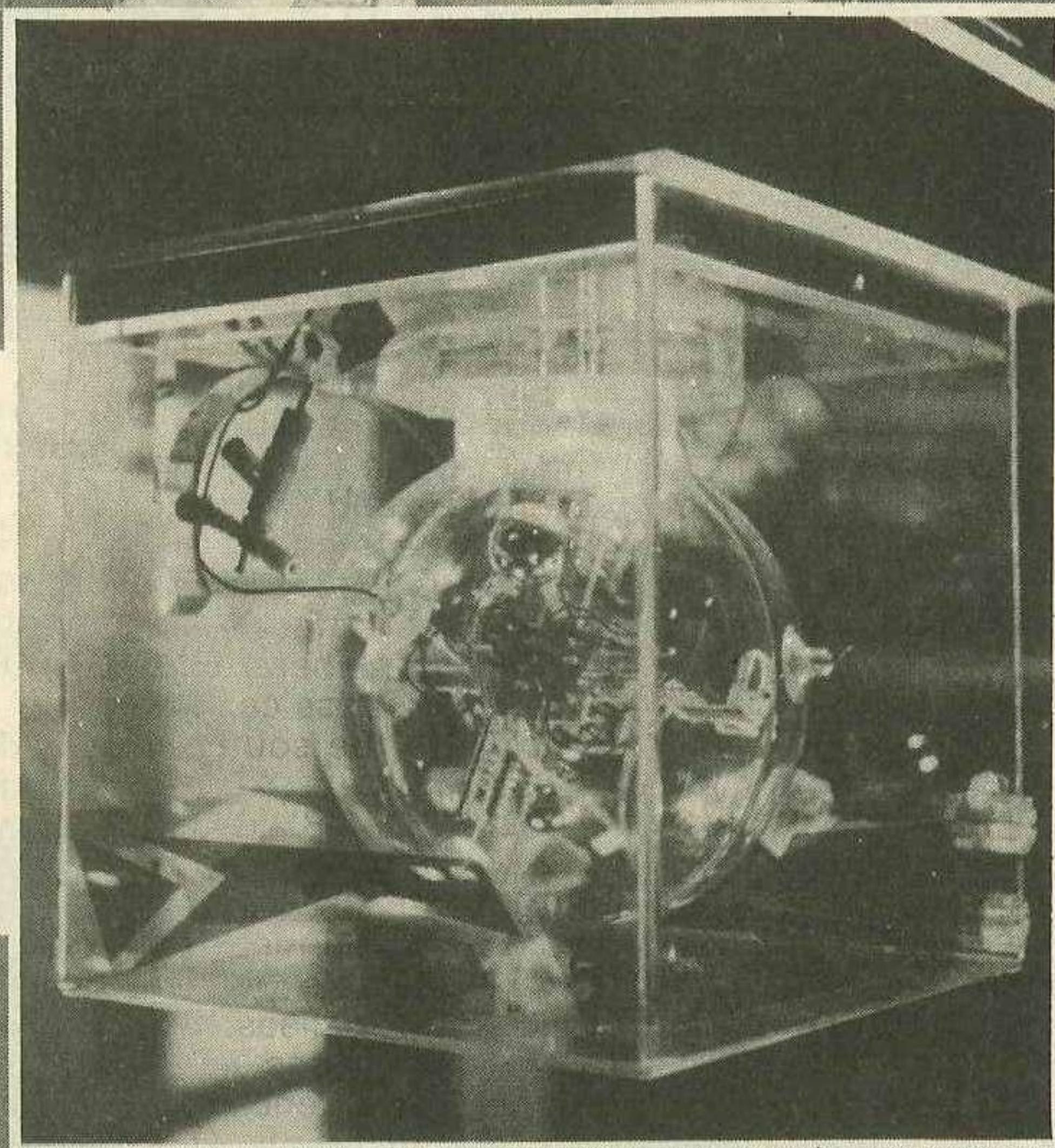




Above:
The directing brains behind much of the 4th series, Mary Ridge is seen taking the cast through their next scene.

Inset:
A new version of Orac? No – just a Visual Effects creation for an episode of the series. But Orac better watch out, this model looks much more streamlined!

Below:
Just lying about again? Avon and Dayna take a tumble as Scorpio runs into trouble. It's fun the first time but by the third or fourth fall there's a good chance of getting hurt on the Studio floor.



EPISODES

Continuing, at your request, the programme details of every episode of
BLAKE'S 7 ever shown on our screens.

EPISODE II BOUNTY

Broadcast:

Monday, 13th March, 1978

Written by:

Terry Nation and Directed by Pennant Roberts.

Cast List:

Regular cast

Sarkoff: T.P. McKenna

Tyce: Carinthia West

Tarvin: Mark Zuber

Cheney: Mark York

Guard: Derrick Branche

Lindor, a planet in which the Federation has a vested interest, is about to hold elections which, through Federation interference, will cause the defeat of President Sarkoff. Being held under open arrest on another planet, Sarkoff seems to be the only man capable of turning his people against the Federation and preventing them controlling the planet.

Blake and the others realise what is going on and travel to the planet where Sarkoff is being held in an effort to persuade him to return to Lindor with the Liberator and fight the Federation. After Blake and Cally teleport to the planet's surface in an attempt to establish contact with Sarkoff, the Liberator receives a distress call and is flown to the source of the signal.

Meanwhile, Blake and Cally meet Sarkoff and his daughter in an ancient house surrounded by Earth artefacts which, Blake soon realises, Sarkoff now values more than his presidency. The ex-President also feels rejected by his people and bitter towards them and is not convinced he should return. Blake and Cally, with the help of Sarkoff's daughter, set about trying to convince him otherwise.

At the same time, the Liberator has tracked down the distress signal which is being transmit-

ted from a ship belonging to the Amagons. The Liberator crew are initially unaware this is a trap set by the Amagons to lure the Liberator into range in order to capture it. Their intention being to sell the ship to the Federation at a tremendous profit. Gan teleports to the ship, is captured and so is the Liberator's crew. When Blake, Cally, Sarkoff and Tyce teleport back to the ship they are also captured.

Initially, the crew believe Jenna is in league with the Amagons since she knew their leader from her smuggling days, but Jenna double-crosses Tarvin, knocks out two guards then Avon breaks free from the room where the crew are imprisoned and deals with the pirates. Sarkoff is then transported back to Lindor at his own request and stable government seems assured.



EPISODE 12 DELIVERANCE

Broadcast:

Monday 20th March, 1978

Written by: Terry Nation and directed by David Maloney and Michael Briant.

Cast List:

Regular cast

Meegat: Suzan Farmer

Ensor: Tony Caunter

Maryatt: James Lister

While travelling close to the planet Cephlon, the Liberator crew witness an explosion on board another craft which then plummets to the planet's surface. Prior to impact, several survival capsules are seen to eject from the doomed ship and it is decided that the Liberator's crew vovors if, indeed, any survive the impact. Cephlon records a very high degree of radioactivity which means the crew can spend only a short time on its surface but, as Avon, Vila, Jenna and Gan teleport down, they discover one of the two crew members is dead and the other badly in-



The power behind the Federation...and the force pledged to destroy the Liberator's crew.



Always risking the lives of himself, his crew and those he came in contact with... Blake plans more resistance to the Federation.

jured. While this man is being teleported back to the Liberator, Jenna is captured by a group of primitive people.

While this drama ensues, Servalan, at Space Command Headquarters, receives information regarding the explosion on board the first ship and takes Travis into her confidence by telling him she was responsible. Her reasons are explained when she tells Travis of Ensor, a brilliant scientist living in isolation on the planet Aristo, having developed the greatest computer ever known. Now in need of urgent medical attention, Ensor's son travelled to Federation Headquarters and bargained for assistance to help his father by offering the computer for 100 million credits. Not having the authority to offer such a sum, Servalan cheats the young man by placing a bomb on board his ship, the result being seen by the Liberator's crew. Unaware of their involvement, Servalan leaves for Aristo with Travis in tow.

Back on Cephlon, in their search for Jenna, Avon, Vila and Gan encounter a priestess guarding the remains of an

abandoned civilisation. It transpires the priestess, Meegat, believes Avon to be a Lord sent, as prophesied by the ancients, to deliver the people into their new life. Avon soon realises what Meegat is guarding is an ancient space headquarters, fully operational, with a spaceship standing on the launching site. Inside the ship are millions of cells representing the race which once inhabited Cephlon but were mostly destroyed during a series of wars.

At the same time on the Liberator, the young Ensor recovers enough to make his way to the flight deck where, after taking Cally hostage, he demands they fly at once to Aristo. The young man, however, is suffering from severe wounds and dies a few hours later. Blake immediately returns with the Liberator of Cephlon where Avon, Vila and Gan rescue Jenna from the primitives and Avon launches the rocket which Meegat was tasked to guard. The crew return to the Liberator where Blake announces he is fascinated by the story of the small all-powerful computer and has made a

pacifist with the young Ensor before he died that they will take the power units to his father on Aristo. The crew learn the computer's name is Orac.



EPISODE 13 OAC

Broadcast:

Monday 27th March, 1978

Written by:

Terry Nation and directed by Vere Lorrimer.

Cast List:

Regular Cast

Ensor: *Derek Farr*

First Phibian: *James Muir*

Second Phibian: *Paul Kidd*

Pursuing the idea of locating the small but powerful computer, Orac, Blake takes his crew in the Liberator to the planet Aristo in order to deliver the life-saving supplies so badly needed by Ensor, Orac's creator. At the same time Servalan and Travis are also bound for Aristo, unaware of Blake's intentions and Blake of theirs. One drawback to Blake's plans manifests itself on the flight. Due to their exposure to radiation on the planet Cephlon, Avon, Gan, Jenna and Vila all display signs of advanced radiation sickness. When it is discovered there is no antidote to the sickness on the Liberator, Blake and Cally, the only two unaffected, decide to teleport to Aristo and seek the necessary drugs from Ensor. The Liberator is pushed to the limit to arrive in time.

During their teleportation to Aristo, Blake and Cally are unaware of the fact that the Liberator's computers have been interfered with and their planned co-ordinates for landing altered. Something on the planet is responsible. Instead of arriving in Ensor's com-

plex, they find themselves on the sea shore where a small, strange flying computer leads them to the underground city in which Ensor is dying.

Travis and Servalan arrive on the planet and, unable to penetrate a force field surrounding the complex, decides to attempt entry using a maze of underground tunnels. It transpires these tunnels now are inhabited by strange reptilian creatures which hamper but do not prevent Servalan and Travis gaining entry to the city.

Meanwhile in Ensor's inner sanctum, Blake and Cally persuade Ensor to come with them to the Liberator where the operation necessary to save his life could be carried out. Teleportation through the force field round Ensor's room is impossible, however, and this forces them to make their way back to the sea shore.

Just then, Servalan and Travis blast through a wall and, seeing Blake and the others ahead of them, take an alternative and quicker route back to the shore to arrive before Blake and Ensor emerge. Ensor, however, suffers a fatal heart attack, and, just before he dies, passes Orac to Blake.

Returning to where they can teleport to the Liberator, Blake and Cally are ambushed by Servalan and Travis in a desperate attempt to snatch Orac but Vila and Avon arrive in the nick of time, rescuing them.

Returning to the Liberator those suffering from radiation sickness are cured by a course of anti-radiation drugs which Blake has been able to secure then all turn their attention to the latest addition to the crew — Orac. They soon discover the machine will not respond until specific ques-

tions are put to it and, with that in mind, Blake orders Orac to make a prediction. The result is Orac projecting a picture of the Liberator on the main screen. As all watch, the Liberator is seen to erupt into flames and explode. Orac is immediately switched off but the prediction has been made and the end of the Liberator displayed. Knowing Orac is virtually infallible, the crew realise the prediction will come to pass one day but they are left guessing when the event will take place and who will be on board when it does.



SERIES TWO

EPISODE 1 (SERIES 2): REDEMPTION

Broadcast:

Tuesday 9th January, 1979

Written by: *Terry Nation, directed by Vere Lorrimer.*

Cast List:

Regular Cast

Alta One: *Sheila Ruskin*

Alta Two: *Harriet Philpin*

Norm One: *Roy Evans*

Worrying about Orac's prediction concerning the destruction of the Liberator, Avon tells Blake he has found a solution to the problem. He tells them to analyse the star pattern behind the explosion of the ship and, once plotted, avoid entering that area of space at all costs. This they do when suddenly the Liberator comes under attack. Two non-Federation vessels are involved but, instead of destroying the ship, the Liberator's weapon system is knocked out and the computer functions taken over. The Liberator is left blind, flying through space towards an unknown destination. As the crew try to effect repairs and regain control of the ship, various cables

detach themselves and start attacking first Blake then Avon. This prevents them switching on the main drive unit, leaving them helpless.

Soon the crew realise the only force capable of creating such a total takeover of the ship is that of the original owners and designers of the vessel and they are intent on reclaiming their property. At certain times members of the crew are removed by those responsible prior to the ship docking. It is made known those beings behind the Liberator's capture work for a massive computer complex in space known as the System. The complex services three planets which, at one time, were at war with each other. This war ended, however, when one of the three developed the all-powerful computer and turned the weapon systems of the planets against themselves. This provided a period of peace and freedom from famine but caused the populations of the planets to be reduced to mere slaves serving the System.

Blake is taken for interrogation and, during its course, it is revealed the System itself is having computer problems. Blake realises it has to be the work of Orac which, until that moment, had

refused to assist the crew by saying it was already fully overloaded with analyses.

When facing death, the crew manage to escape back to the Liberator and fly it into deep space but, as they do, they come under attack from an identical sister ship which fires plasma bolts at them. Destruction seems inevitable and, as they are in the vicinity of the star system seen on Orac's diction of destruction, there seems little hope for them. It is the sister ship, however, which blows up. Orac explains it scrambled the weaponry system of the duplicate Liberator ship in order to make the explosion of a 'Liberator' come true.



EPISODE 2 (SERIES 2): SHADOW

Broadcast:

Tuesday 16th January, 1979

Written by:

Chris Boucher. Directed by Jonathan Wright Miller

Cast List:

Regular Cast

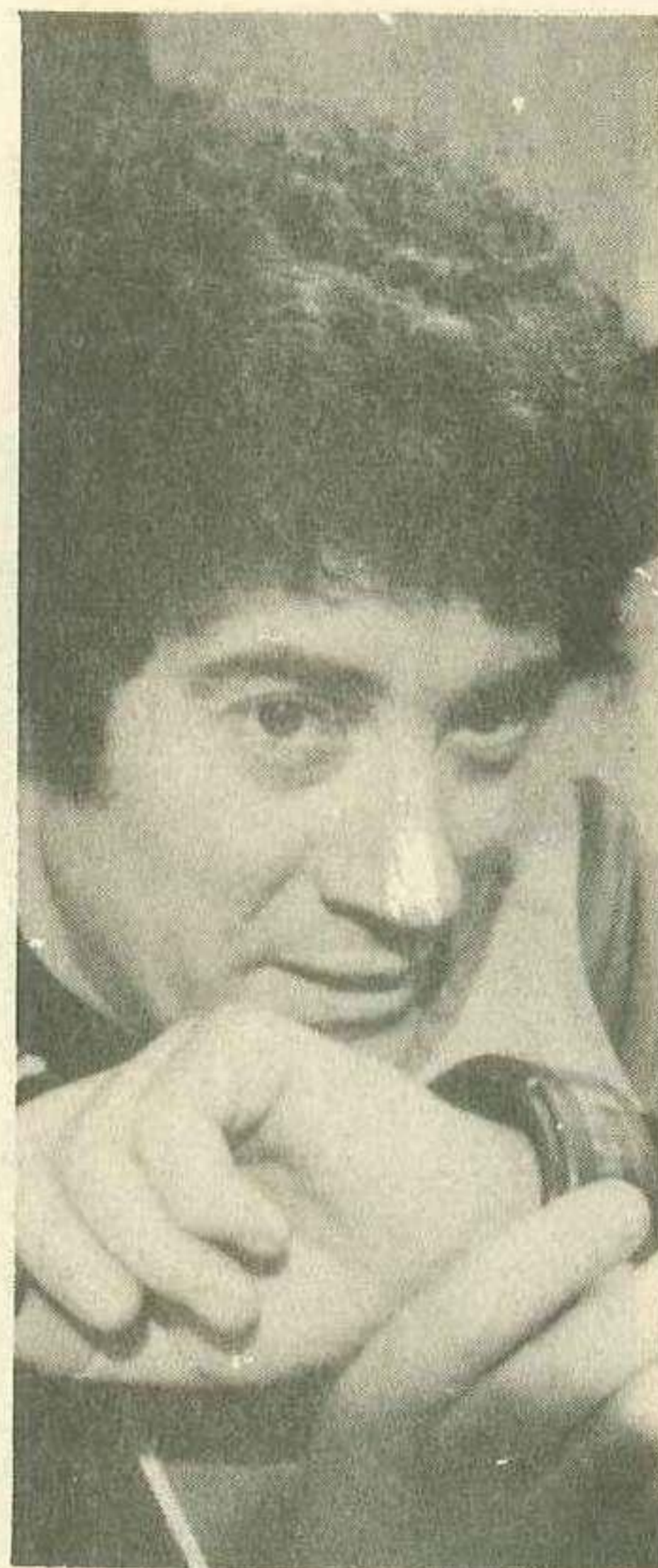
Bek: *Karl Howman*

Hanna: *Adrienne Burgess*

Largo: *Derek Smith*

The Enforcer: *Archie Tew*

The Chairman: *Vernon Dobtcheff*



Blake was gradually losing control over his crew.

Terra Nostra, an underground organisation dealing in many illegal things including the drug, Shadow, is the subject of a plan devised by Blake for striking back at the Federation. To make contact with the organisation, the Liberator is set on a course for the entertainment satellite, Space City, where the character, Largo is found. After initial fruitless negotiations during which Largo, a leading Terra Nostran, denies all contact with the Terra Nostra, but imprisons the crew when they try to leave.

Two addicts of the drug, Shadow, Beck and Hanna, are caught while attempting to steal supplies of the drug from Largo and are imprisoned beside Avon and Gan. Cally soon realises what is happening and threatens to destroy parts of Space City itself unless the crew are released. Thanks to Beck and Hanna, Avon and Gan escape,



Death stalking Avon and Jenna in yet another close encounter with the Federation.



One of the crew had to die... it was to be the gentle giant, Gan.

releasing Blake and Jenna then all six return to the Liberator.

To complicate things, Vila, against all orders from Blake, has enlisted the help of Orac to have himself teleported into Space City to sample its delights. In return, Vila has agreed to hide Orac within the Liberator on the understanding Orac has to concentrate on a special project of its own.

Once back on board the Liberator, Blake and the others soon discover the place of origin of the drug Shadow and set off in search of it. Cally, in transit, discovers Orac hidden away but collapses under the strange influences emanating from the machine. When she recovers she is teleported to the planet's surface where, again, she collapses. Moon Discs, the root of Shadow, eventually come to Cally's rescue and she recovers her senses.

Meanwhile, the Liber-

ator suffers a sudden dramatic loss of power caused by Orac draining the ship's reserves. It appears Orac is now under alien control. While trying to disconnect Orac, Hanna is killed but Cally, with the help of the Moon Discs, fights the aliens.

While in the process of setting explosive devices round the Moon Discs, the crew encounter Federation guards and the truth dawns on them. The Moon Discs and the Terra Nostra are both run by the Federation. The charges are detonated, effectively destroying the Moon Discs.

In order for Orac to be controlled in the future, Avon sets small explosive devices inside the machine. This means that if ever alien telepathic forces attempt to gain control of the computer, the charges will be automatically detonated minimising any damage which could be done to the ship or its crew.



A bond was forming between Vila and Avon. Vila through a desire to be led to riches and security by Avon - Avon needing Vila's talents to secure what he wanted for himself.

EPISODE 3 (SERIES 2): WEAPON

Broadcasts:

Tuesday 23rd January, 1979

Written by:

Chris Boucher and directed by George Spenton-Foster.

Cast List:

Regular Cast

Fen: Kathleen Byron

Coser: John Bennett

Rashel: Candice Glendenning

Cornell: Scott Fredericks

The Officer: Graham Simpson

Development of an impressive new weapon by Coser, a Beta-class technician, leads to him stealing his own invention due to lack of recognition by the Federation. With a slave girl whom he has freed, Rashel, Coser flies to a deserted planet where he destroys his ship and sets up camp in the ruins of an ancient settlement.

The theft of the device gives Servalan the idea of a brilliant plan and, with the assistance of the highly independent Clonemasters who operate a cloning cartel, two Blake clones are developed. The first of these is destroyed by Travis when he mistakes it for the real Blake but the second is sent to the

planet where Coser is hiding.

In addition to the Clonemasters, Servalan also enlists the help of Carnell, a psycho-strategist, a man capable of making extremely accurate predictions concerning the neurotic behaviour of the thief, Coser. Believing Coser will be in a highly disturbed state after a period of enforced loneliness, Carnell suggests Coser will willingly hand over the new weapon — the Impack — to the clone of Blake. On the appearance of the real Blake, Carnell also predicts Coser will go mad.

Meanwhile Blake, having heard of the theft of the Impack, a device which can be fired but the destruction of the subject delayed until the trigger is pressed, decides to track down Coser on his planet. On arrival, it is discovered Coser has already handed over the Impack to Blake's clone then Blake, the crew and the Liberator are shot with the device by Travis. Since the destruction will not be effected until the trigger is pressed (which could be delayed for years if necessary) Servalan lets the crew of the Liberator escape. Servalan also knows Travis has been shot with the weapon and that when the trigger is pressed, he, too, will die. Before this can be effected, however, Travis is forced to hand over the device to Blake's clone. The clone Blake and Rashel vow never to press the trigger and set about preparing a home for themselves on the new planet. Servalan and Travis escape but Carnell, fully understanding the total failure of his part of the venture, leaves a message for Servalan before he takes to his heels and deserts the Federation.



**EPISODE 4 (SERIES 2):
HORIZON**

Broadcast:

*Tuesday 30th January,
1979*

Written by:

*Allan Prior and directed
by Jonathan Wright
Miller.*

Cast List:

Regular Cast

Ro: *Darien Angadi*

Kommissar: *William
Squire*

Selma: *Souad Faress*

Assistant Kommissar:
Brian Miller

Chief Guard: *Paul Haley*

After their many close encounters with the Federation and its forces, the crew of the *Liberator* are suffering from nervous exhaustion and are badly in need of a rest. To this end, the ship is piloted to a distant part of the galaxy where they believe there is no Federation presence. This, however, they find out to be untrue. In transit they locate and follow a Federation freighter which they discover visits the planet, *Horizon*, once a year.

Determined to find out the reason for the Federation interest in the planet, Blake and Jenna teleport to the surface but are quickly captured by Federation guards and primitives with blowpipes. Vila, Gan and Cally who follow shortly are also captured then all put to work mining a highly radioactive mineral by hand.

Prior to being pressed into service in the mine, Blake has an opportunity to speak with Ro, the native chief who is deeply influenced by the Federation and by his former tutor, the now local Federation Kommissar. Despite being shocked by what Blake tells him about the Kommissar being involved in the death of his father, Ro refuses to accept Blake's statements as true. Cally, however, produces the facts which start Ro thinking deeply

about his involvement with the Federation.

Back on the *Liberator*, Avon is pressing Orac for some answers. Avon is anxious to know that if none of the rest of the crew return to the ship could he survive to the end of his natural life. Orac confirms this is possible providing Avon avoids a situation whereby three Federation ships attack simultaneously. Just then while Avon still deliberates, Zen informs Avon of the approach of three Federation Pursuit ships, approaching *Horizon* on the orders of the Kommissar. It transpires the Kommissar is concerned about the loyalty of Ro and the Pursuit Ship are required to apply pressure on the Federation puppet ruler.

Deciding the only course for him to follow is not to take the *Liberator* and strike out on his own but save the rest of the crew, Avon first questions Orac. The computer reveals all known facts about the capture of the others and, by avoiding their mistakes, Avon manages to kill several Federation guards and release the crew. All teleport back to the *Liberator* but Blake returns to the planet where he discovers Ro throwing aside his Federation uniform and reverting to his original rule of the people. Blake kills the assistant Kommissar while Ro kills the Kommissar using his traditional poisoned dart.

Returning to the *Liberator* once again, Blake issues orders for the ship to be positioned exactly in the path of the three Federation Pursuit Ships which, following their course, pass through *Horizon's* activated defence barrier destroying themselves in the process. The *Liberator* leaves as Ro rallies his people on *Horizon* to begin their struggle to free them-

selves from Federation rule.



**EPISODE 5 (SERIES 2)
PRESSURE POINT**

Broadcast:

*Tuesday 6th February,
1979*

Written by:

*Terry Nation and directed
by George Spenton-
Foster*

Cast List:

Regular Cast

Kasabi: *Jane Sherwin*

Veron: *Yolande Palfrey*

Arle: *Alan Halley*

Berg: *Martin Conner*

Mutoid: *Sue Bishop*

Pressure Point by name and by nature. This episode was the first landmark for the *Liberator* and its crew. There was doom in the air and one of them, by all reckoning, had to die — but which would it be?

Returning to the Solar System, the crew are under the impression Blake has chosen this venue to better observe the workings of Federation security. He reveals, however, his intention is to capture Control, the nerve centre of all Federation computer networks. Much discussion ensues but, at length, the crew agree to the venture.

Blake reveals he has already solicited and secured the support of Kasabi, a major resistance leader on Earth. There is one flaw to the plan, however, and that is even before Blake teleports back to earth, Kasabi is captured by Servalan and Travis, and, when Blake arrives, Kasabi's daughter, Veron, is forced to take Blake prisoner outside the Forbidden Zone. The Zone is the supposed centre housing the control complex and is heavily guarded. Blake's capture, along with Gan who has teleported into the crypt with him, is effected by Veron who tells

Blake the resistance has been broken but Blake states the operation will continue. With that Avon and Vila also teleport down but Veron steals their teleport bracelets, locking them in the crypt. Eventually the group escape from the crypt and make their way towards the Forbidden Zone.

the minefield which he only mortal and that, in defeat the defences of the complex but, as they enter the room which is supposed to house the computer, they discover the place empty. Just then Travis and two mutoids appear and break the news that the Control has been moved to some other place 30 years before and that complex in which they stand is kept going merely to attract rebel fanatics like Blake who might seek to destroy it.

Just as Travis is about to kill Blake and the others, Jenna macrhes Servalan into the room accompanied by Veron. Jenna reveals she became concerned when they failed to report in, teleported to the edge of the Forbidden Zone then followed Travis across the minefield which he deactivated in order to cross. Servalan orders Travis to free Blake and his crew and they leave.

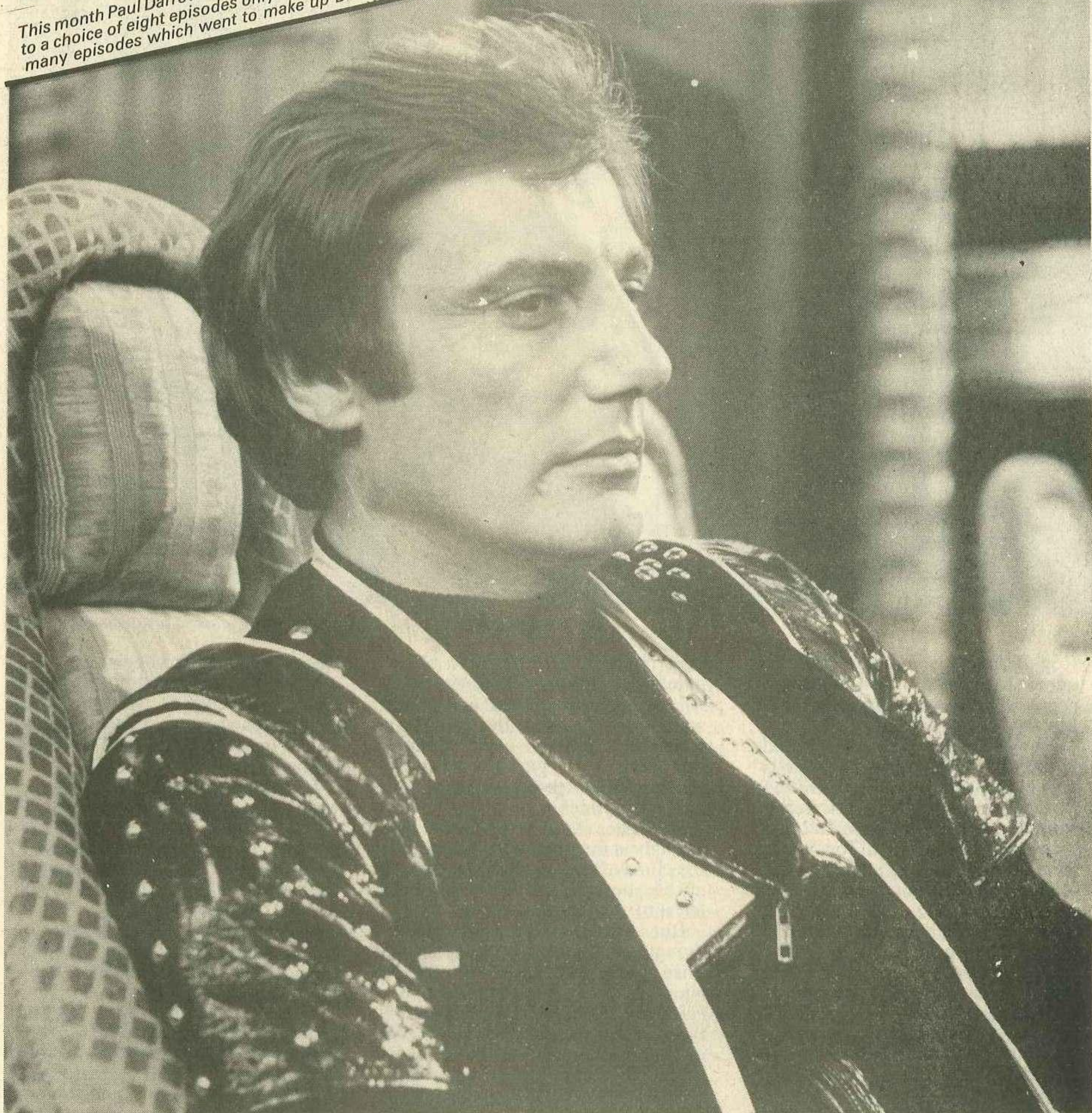
Jenna, although having recovered the teleport bracelets, advises against their use so far underground making the crew return to the surface. As they leave, Travis tosses a grenade after them which causes part of the roof to collapse. Gan, delaying the fall of the roof in order for the others to escape, is eventually crushed under its weight but the others manage a safe return to the *Liberator*. Gan's loss is a hard blow to them making all realise they are only mortal and that, in time, they could all fall victim to the Federation.

AVON



PAUL DARROW writes

This month Paul Darrow explains which episodes from the four series appeals to him most. In asking him to make a selection we limited Paul to a choice of eight episodes only. The task was a difficult one but, as usual, he rose to the challenge. This is his personal preference of the many episodes which went to make up BLAKE'S 7.





Jenna – she loved Blake's words and foolishly ignored his dangerous deeds.

Roy Plomley is a name not often quoted in Science Fiction circles and it is entirely possible that he has never heard of **Blake's Seven**.

However, his radio programme, 'Desert Island Discs', has been justifiably popular for forty years and there is no reason, apart from interference from Armageddon or Servalan, why it should not remain so for another forty.

That gives Mr Plomley a slight edge on all of us.

Having been asked to describe my favourite episodes from the four seasons of our series, I hope he will not mind my appropriating his idea and imagining myself cast away on a desert island or, more aptly, an unpopulated and forgotten planet, with only eight episodes and a copy of Terry Nation's autobiography.

You might think it easy to extract

eight favourite episodes from as low a number as fifty two. Well, it isn't!

Most actors, if they are honest, would tend to select the episodes in which they felt their personal impact was greatest. Or, perhaps, when they felt they looked their best or had some of the best lines.

Because Avon featured quite strongly in most episodes and because the effort of creating him was a part of my life, both on and off the set, I may fall into that trap.

But, with the calm and collected thoughts that a lapse of many months since the series was shown has allowed, I will try to be objective.

It would be interesting to know, through the columns of this magazine, which episodes you out there prefer.

You are still out there, aren't you?

Avon being, if nothing else, a logical person, it would seem to be a good

idea to begin at the beginning.

However, Avon did not appear in the very first episode and my first view of it matched yours. I saw it when it was transmitted and had no other contact with it.

In fact, episode two, *Space Fall*, was the first episode to be filmed and recorded. The purpose being that most of the regulars — only Cally would be absent — could familiarise themselves with the intention and, *feel*, of the programme.

This episode was directed by Pennant Roberts who had earlier given Michael Keating his chance in *Dr Who*.

Therefore, Pennant, in a way, was responsible for the launch of the series and for the first attempts to establish the characters. He directed four episodes in the first series and then, for some unknown reason, did not have



Cally, who would sometimes place her loyalty before her undoubted common sense.

any contact with the show thereafter.

I particularly liked one of his episodes entitled, *Time Squad*, and would select it as the first of my meagre allowance of eight.

Its story was simple. An attack on a Federation communications centre instigated by the impetuous Blake and an attack on us by a number of aliens foolishly awakened from cryogenic suspension. An added bonus was the arrival of Cally on the scene.

The visiting aliens were portrayed by stunt men who, although they said nothing, spoke volumes with their actions. It was a taut, exciting episode, cleanly directed and very well written.

It revealed quite a lot about Gan's background and gave Jenna an opportunity to show initiative as well as heightening the increasing tension between Avon and Blake.

Vila's wit (?) and instinct for self preservation were well to the fore and Cally launched herself into the series, both physically and telepathically, to give the programme considerable edge.

It was the first episode in which all Seven appeared and, as a jumping off point for the rest of the series, it more than fulfilled its obligations.

We would wait some time before all Seven featured as strongly again. That would be no one's fault. It is very difficult to divide a show evenly between so many.

Most 'adventure' series feature two or, at most, three main characters. Any more and you, and we, would be bewildered and unable to identify, favourably or otherwise, with any individual.

Starsky and Hutch, The Sweeney, Minder, Butch Cassidy and the Sund-

ance Kid, all serve to illustrate the point.

Thus, most of our episodes tended to feature Blake and A N Other. Later, Avon and somebody. Or, as in, *Ultraworld*, for example, Dayna and Tarrant.

Sometimes, episodes were dedicated to only one of the Seven. For example, Dayna in *Animals*, Vila in *City at the Edge of the World*.

It was curious that the 'loner' Avon, always had one of the others in tow, whether he liked it or not.

Because the first series was shown in 1978 — five years is a long time — it is difficult to recall anything about it other than odd incidents that were either humorous, exciting or irritating.

It was a time of experiment for all of us, both behind and in front of the cameras.



Vila — the harrassed follower of the man who he believed would lead him to riches. . .

For my second selection, therefore, I will have to jump to the second series, even though it means passing over *Cygnus Alpha*, *Deliverance* and *Orac*, among others.

To ignore the excellent *Redemption*, and the weird, *Shadow*, has proved difficult and may surprise some of you.

Nonetheless, my second choice for my deserted planet is faintly apt. It is *Horizon*, episode four of series two.

Written by the prolific Alan Prior and directed by Jonathan Wright Miller, it seemed to me to be highly illustrative of the chasm that existed between Blake and most of his crew and the 'outsider', Avon.

It also posed one or two moral questions that Blake naively failed to

answer and Avon, an amoral person if ever there was one, chose to ignore.

The story concerned a primitive planet's equally primitive people. Although they were disguised as civilised beings as a result of Federation influence, they would soon return to their primitive origins and be forced to start from scratch, as it were. This under Blake's influence!

'Kill everyone who represents the corrupt present and return to your native roots in search of salvation' being the moral cause that Blake espoused.

Avon thought it presumptuous to interfere with a people's destiny and steered clear of the planet until it became necessary for him to secure his own salvation.

Left alone on *Liberator* — Blake wasn't very bright at times — Avon coolly assessed his chances of survival without the others and, to no one's surprise came to the conclusion that he could manage very well, possibly better.

However, Fate stepped in and launched three Federation cruisers against him.

Avon laughed!

As in the case of Greta Garbo, that was unusual, but Avon frequently laughed at fate. His greatest friend and enemy.

In a dazzling display of ruthless gunplay, he killed many Federation guards, not a small number of innocent bystanders, and rescued the sorry remnants of the planet's inhabitants



Always fleeing from the Federation, the Liberator crew were always being hounded by black-uniformed guards.

and Blake and the others from oblivion.

In the process, he narrowly missed killing Blake. A foretaste of things to come perhaps?

The episode was great fun to film, was well written and carefully directed and achieved popularity with you as well as with us.

In a way, it became representative of the series as a whole because it

illustrated each character's moral stance.

Blake, the crusader, who fought what appeared to be evil, but rarely had anything good to put in its place.

Vila, the harassed follower of the man he imagined would lead him to riches and safety. In that order!

Gan, the physical strength that supported the ideal that was to crush him.

Jenna, who loved Blake's words

and foolishly ignored his dangerous deeds.

Cally, who could sometimes place her loyalty before her undoubted common sense.

Avon, who despised righteous crusades, who never allowed himself to be harassed, who doubted the ideal, who was aware of the danger into which Blake was leading them and who never ever placed loyalty to any-

one or anything before his own interests.

I know whose side I was on!

The natives, of course, had been given the chance to rid themselves of the Federation and forge a new and respectable future. They were never heard of again!

I liked the hint of sadness and the suggestion of cruel finality contained in this episode. It was the first to indicate, however minutely, the final destination of the whole series.

If you, or we, were in any doubt as to that end, my next choice surely trumpeted a pessimistic future.



No list of favourite episodes could possibly exclude *Star One*.

This was one of the most exciting, fast moving and enjoyable episodes of all.

Doubtless you are familiar with its story of the search for the computerised heart of the Federation?

Travis's betrayal of the human race to an alien civilisation?

The wounding and decline of Blake, the loss of Jenna and the assumption of control by the pragmatic Avon?

Let's face it, Avon's ruthless drive was more likely to defeat the Federation than anything else.

To criticize him because it didn't is like denigrating the achievements of Muhammad Ali because he lost a fight or two.

Much has been written about *Star One* and, if you are a real fan of the series, I would be very surprised if you didn't know as much about it as I do.

It was one of two episodes to be directed by our then producer — David Maloney. It is to his great credit that it had such impact. I believe it had one of the highest viewing figures and deservedly so.

If nothing else, it provided a springboard for the next two series.



With twenty six episodes accounts for and only three, out of my paltry allowance of eight, selected for my sojourn on an inhospitable planet, might lead you to suppose that the selection of my remaining allowance of five episodes was made easier.

If anything, it has proved more difficult.

After the dazzle and excitement of *Star One*, it was thought that the first episode of series three would be hard

pushed to rekindle our interest as well as yours.

However, the old master, Terry Nation came up with the 'goods' in no uncertain terms.

Thus, *Aftermath* becomes my fourth selection.

Directed with verve and skill by Vere Lorrimer and served by excellent special effects and one of our best locations, this was an exciting story that married action to intrigue, as well as introducing the exotic Dayna.

It contains, to my mind, one of Jacqueline Pearce's better performances as the sultry Servalan and served up a plausible, violent enemy in the Chel of Alan Lake.

Avon's 'steamy' relationship with Servalan provoked considerable interest.

I enjoyed the episode hugely. After all, I won all the fights, was kissed by two lovely girls and got paid for doing it!

As a bonus, Stuart Fell introduced some of the best stunts and action sequences of the series.

Incidentally, the marvellous location was close by Bamburgh Castle.

Aftermath indicated a slightly new direction for the series, triggered some humour into Avon's character and firmly established Servalan as his chief, and equally ruthless, protagonist.

Vere Lorrimer, later our producer, contributed more than most to the success and enthusiasm surrounding 'Blake's Seven', and 'Aftermath' stands undisputedly as one of the most successful and enthusiastically received episodes.

It set a standard that was difficult to maintain and although *City at the Edge of the World*, *Children of Auron* and *Rumours of Death* came close, I do not think it was matched until Tanith Lee came up with, *Sarcophagus*.

I do not like passing over so many good episodes, but I don't have too many of my allowance left.

Having decided, therefore, that *Sarcophagus* must be my fifth choice, here's why.

For one thing, it provided Jan Chappell with the opportunity of playing the tantalising 'alien invader', and, a rare occurrence, concentrated on the regular crew without introducing any distractions.

All the characterisations and relationships were clarified and, though sombre, the intelligent writing and 'fantasy', 'sword and sorcery', call it what you like, held the interest and promised that the programme would rise above what some critics had said was 'merely an adventure series'.

The plot was simple — the best

always are.

The alien promised a great deal in return for a kind of slavery.

Life under such a benevolent and beautiful ruler might not have been so bad. But it was difficult to 'brainwash' Avon and, with a kiss, he exploded a beautiful dream. Or was it a nightmare?

Of course, Avon had a habit of exploding things — including illusions.

He preferred to live for one day as a lion rather than for a hundred years as a sheep!

Unfortunately, the fascination that was Cally never featured as strongly again. Even her death was treated with disdain. There is no room for sentiment in *Blake's Seven* and rightly so.



Sarcophagus was perhaps her best episode and because of that, and because of the fact that it didn't do Avon any harm either, it remains a favourite.

Fiona Cumming, who directed, gave it an assured woman's touch and it was none the worse for that.

Fiona also directed *Rumours of Death*, an episode I am sorry to ignore as it contained Anna Grant as the frail Lorna Heolbron.

If I could extend my selection to nine episodes I would selfishly add it to my list.

But it's not allowed, it breaks the rules.

Since when did Avon care about rules?

Paul Darrow, on the other hand, must stick to them.

Only three choices remain to me and I must select from seventeen episodes.

I am beginning to regret setting myself this onerous task and, I wouldn't be a bit surprised, you may be infuriated by my manner of performing it.

For my next choice, I have no difficulty in passing over the ludicrously funny *Moloch*, with a piece of fried chicken as its villain, and I don't mind missing out *Ultraworld*, which contained three Yul Brynners.

Curiously, all three episodes that remain on my list were directed by the same person. They are a tribute to that person's unstinting effort in producing only the best from *Blake's Seven*.

You have a month to work out who the director is and to guess the titles of the episodes in question.

Until then you may cheer or gnash your teeth at my selections so far.

JENNA

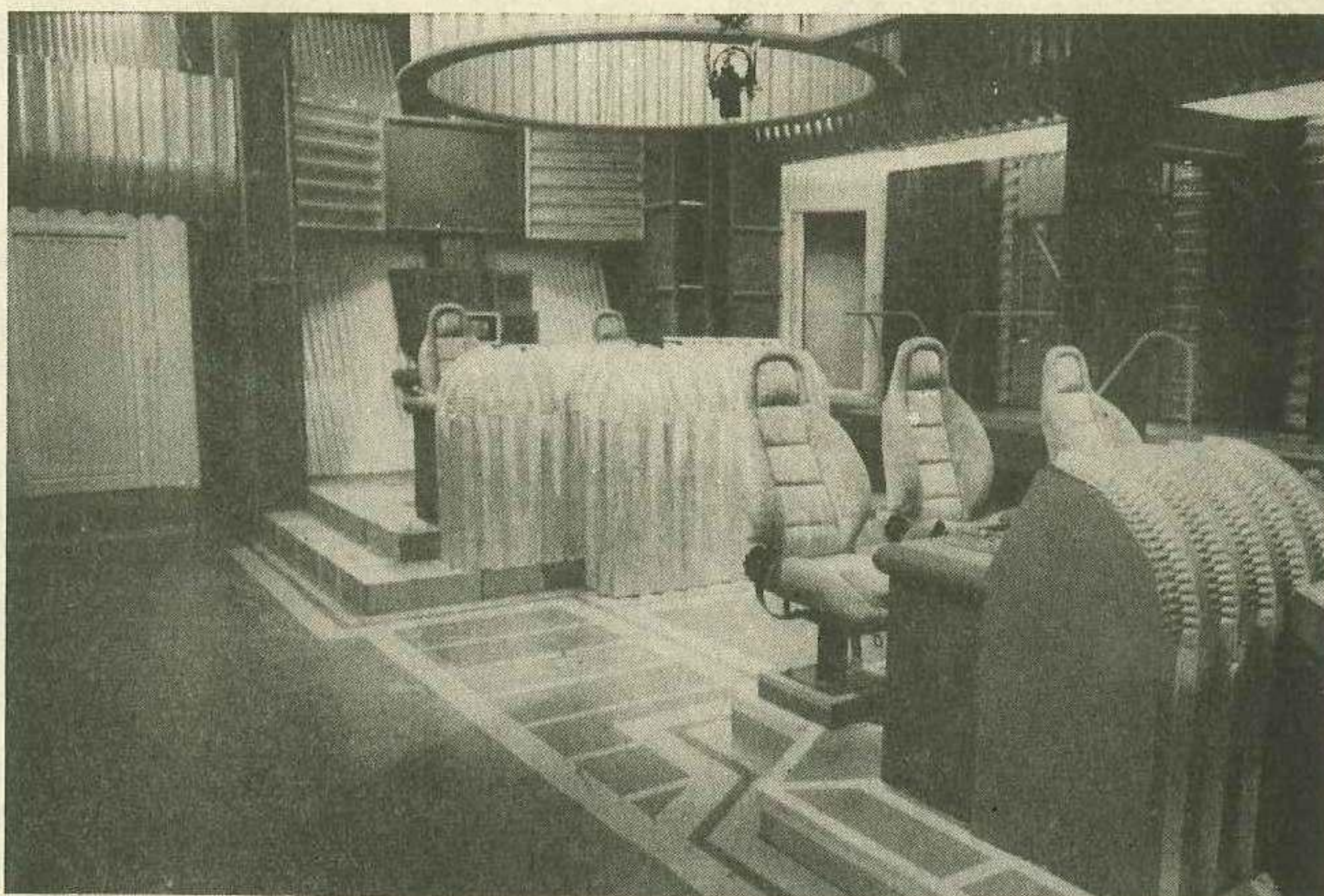


ALL SET...?

THE STUDIO SETS OF BLAKE'S 7, 4th SERIES

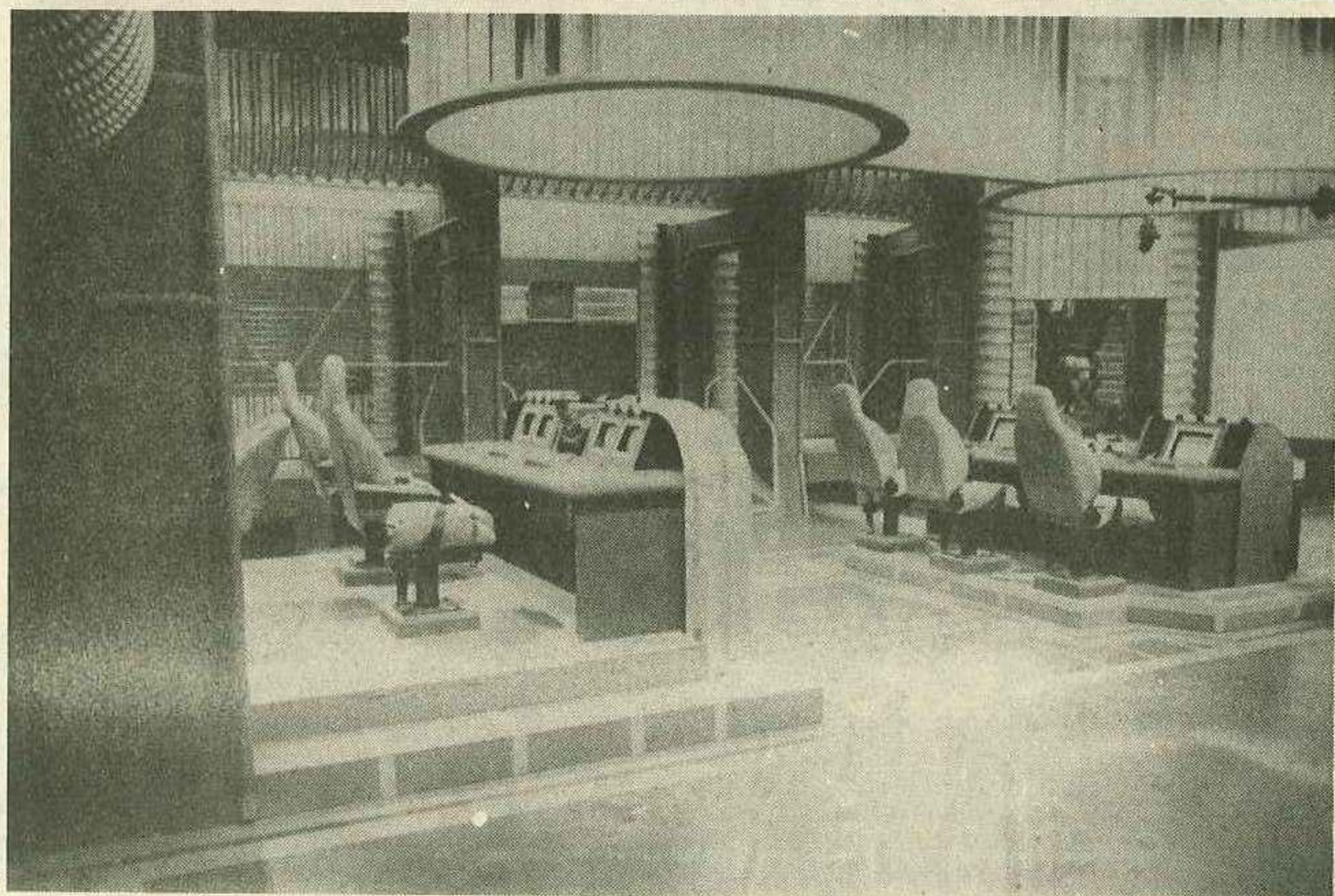
All the world is a stage, so they say, but all players need a stage on which to perform – whether it be a copy of a local shop or something as exciting as a space ship. Nothing could be more out of this world than some of the studio sets constructed for BLAKE'S 7 and, using some of the set photographs, we offer you a little insight into what actually creates the illusion of the future. As you will discover, although seeming to present an image of the future, BLAKE'S 7 and its sets were beset by problems very much of this century.

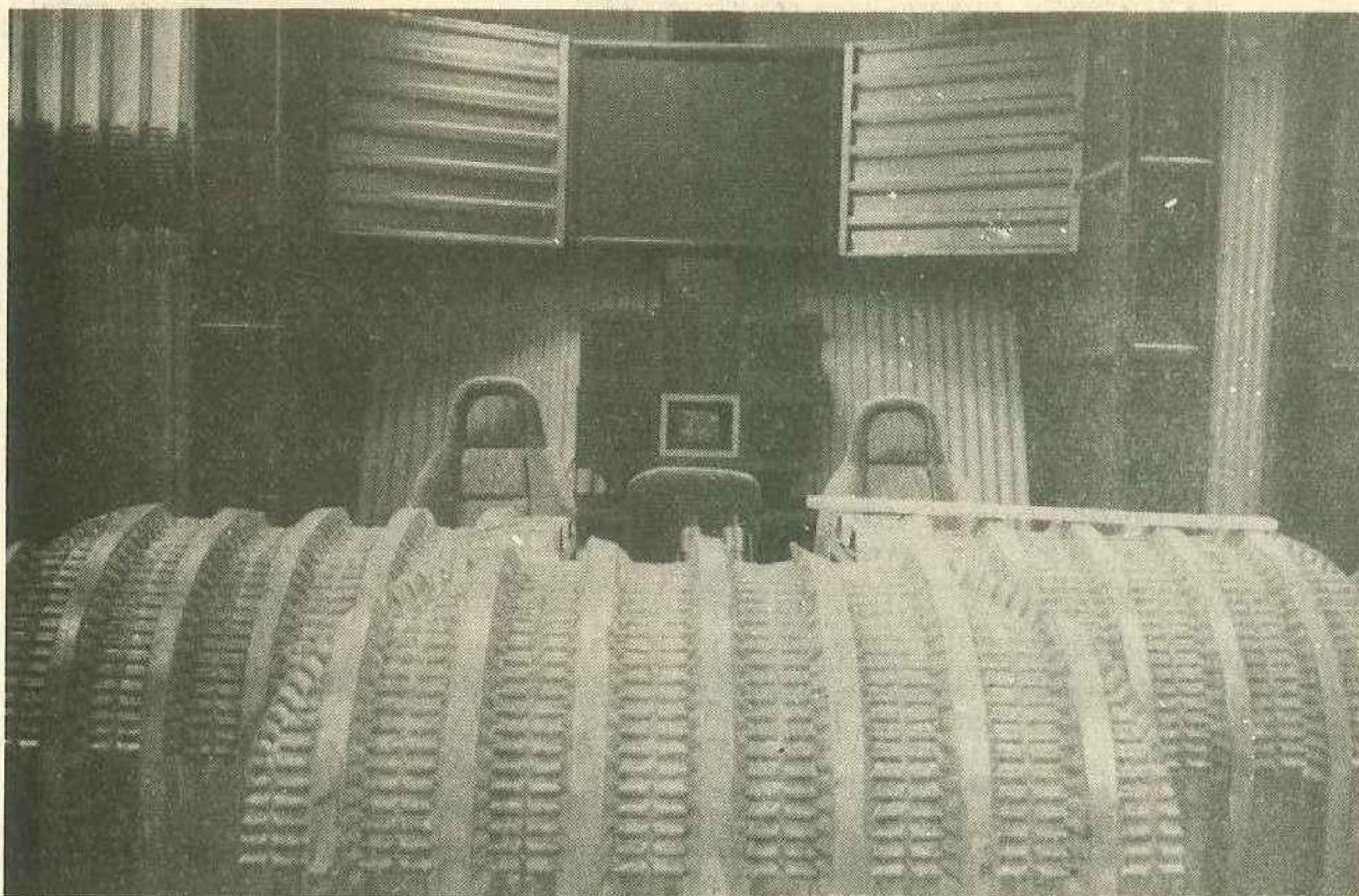
Scorpio's flight deck. Despite the hanging microphone, it all looks very futuristic. If you look closely, however, some of the flaws come to light. The sculpted fronts of the flight consoles were built using corrugated sheeting which, every time the set was taken apart and stowed, gradually became less and less well fitting. Dangerous edges had to be hammered flat and treated by stage hands before actors were allowed near them.



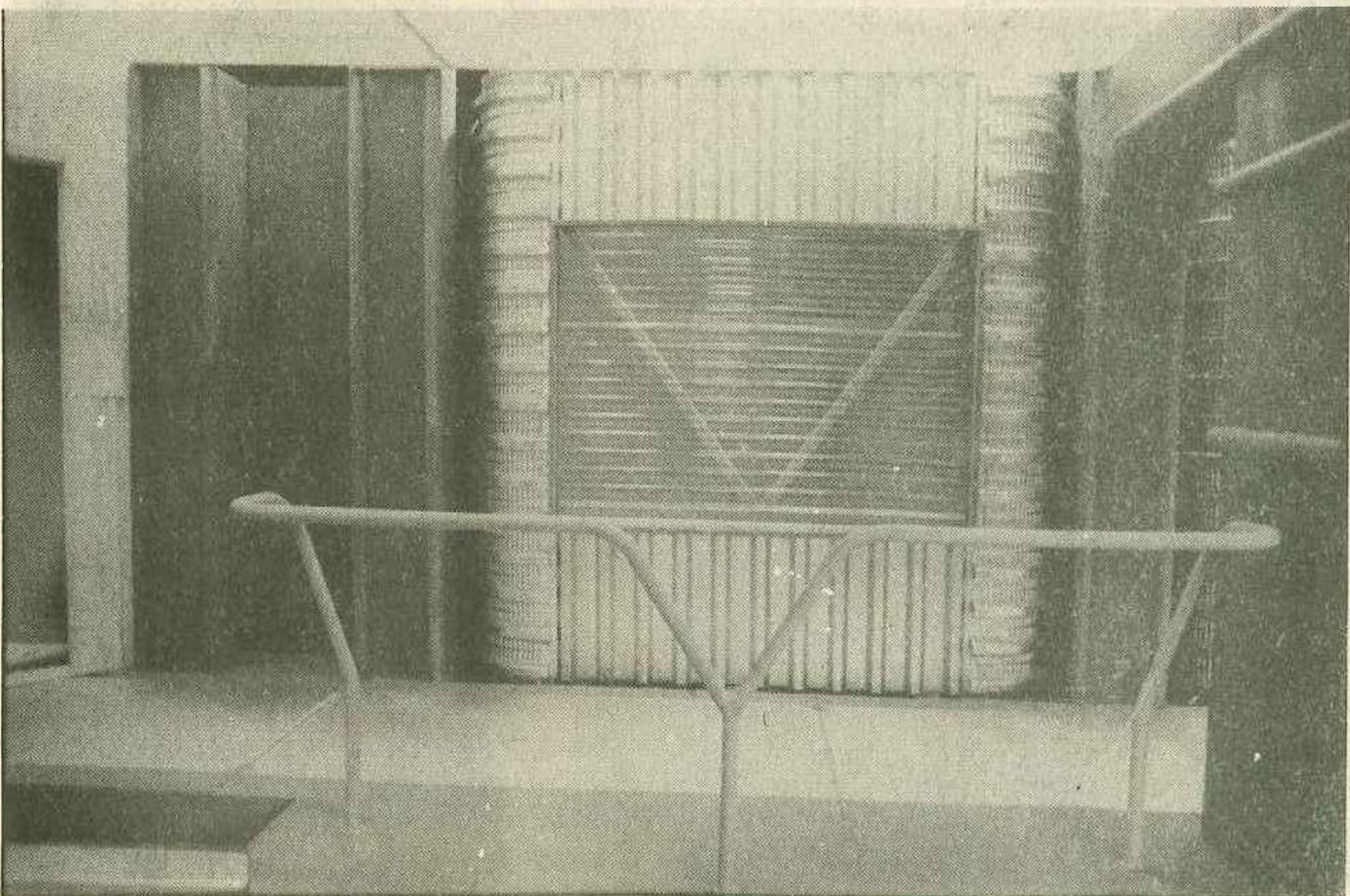
There were certain places on the set where cables had to run if equipment was to work. As a result, camera angles had to be carefully selected to avoid showing these cables, some just behind the rear seats, and actors had to ensure they didn't become entangled in them when dashing about.

The overhead circles of light also posed a problem for the sound department. Boom microphones could not be raised any higher than the circles and were forever dropping into shot.

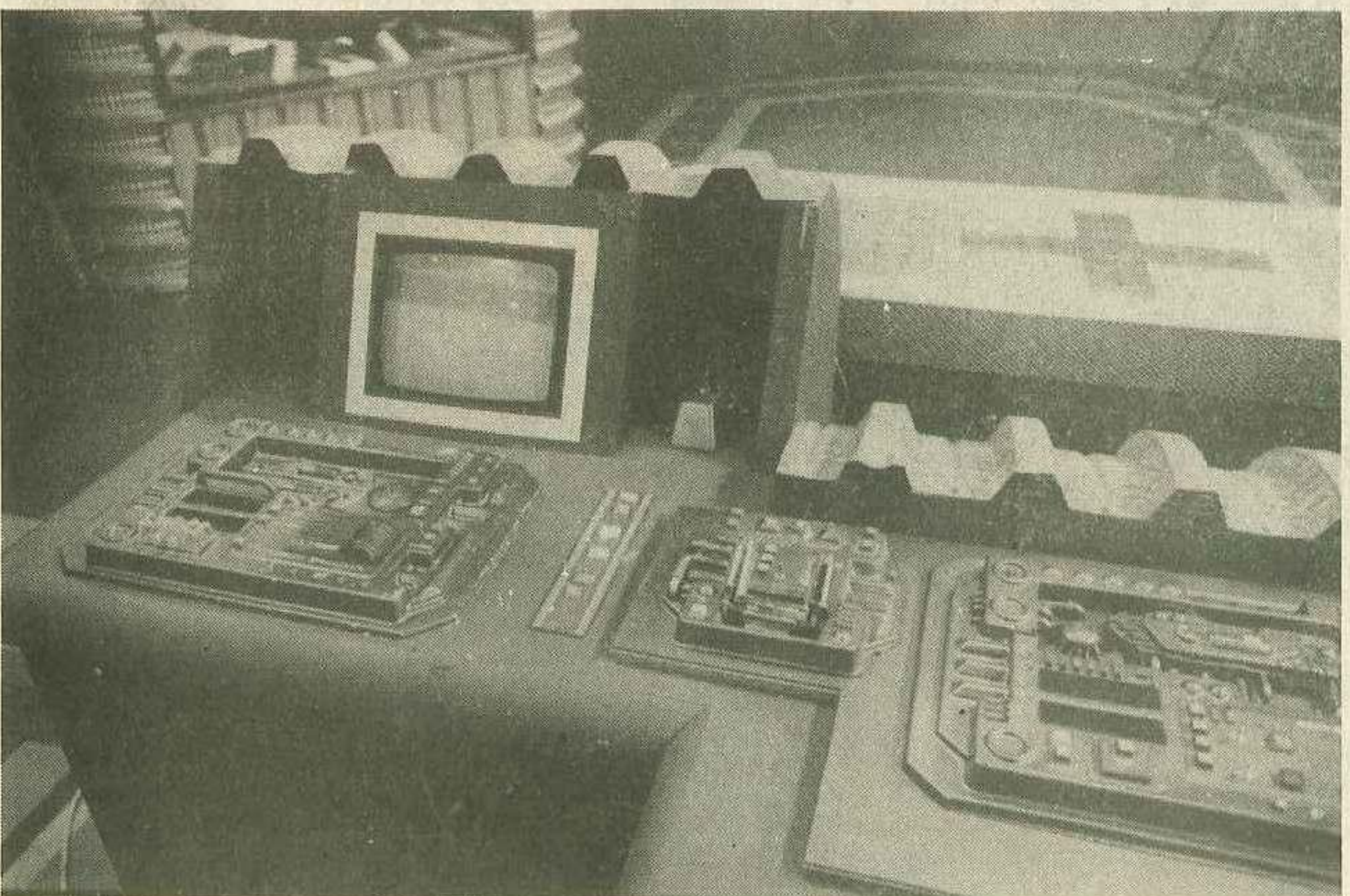




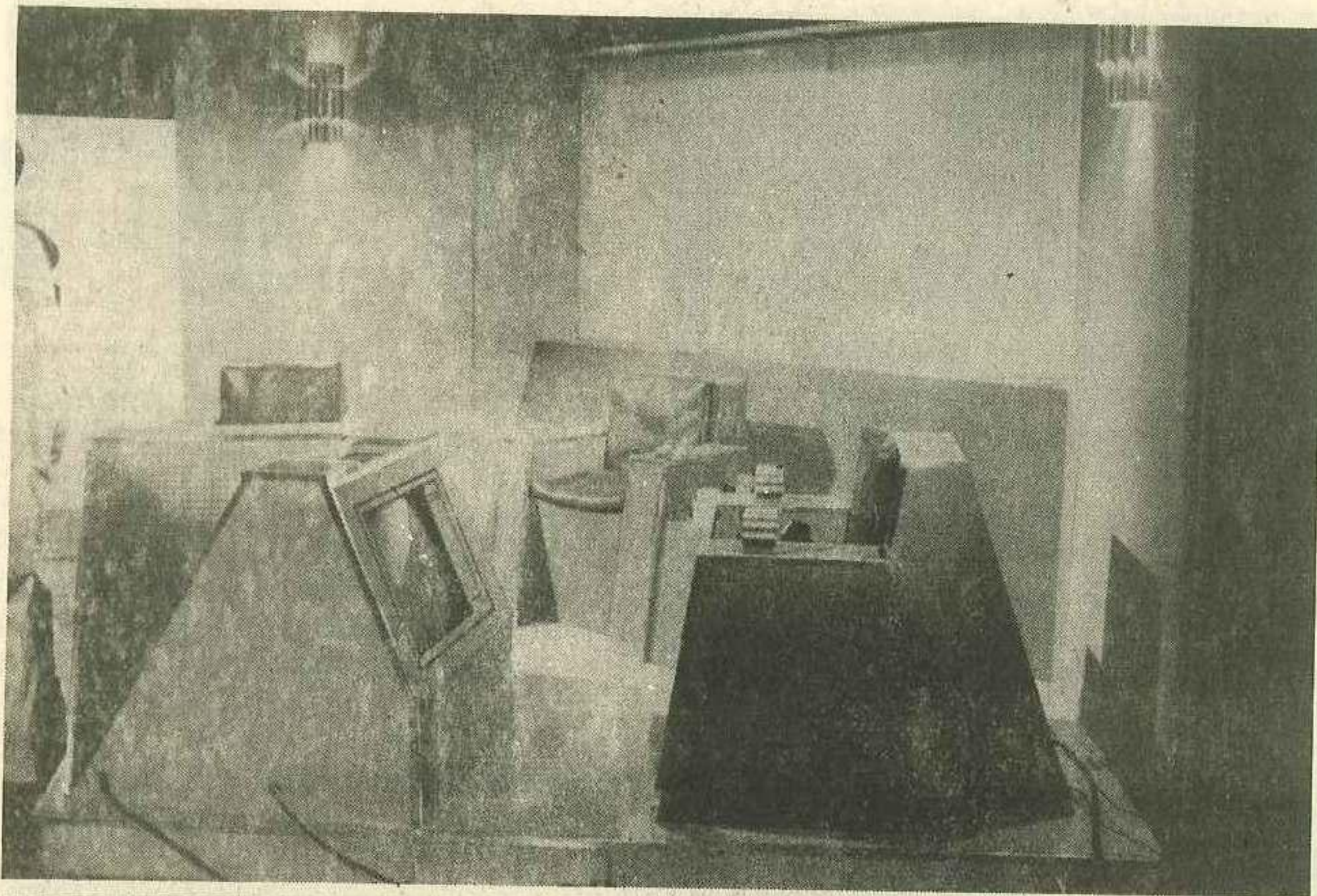
Complex-looking instruments such as those situated behind Tarrant and Soolin's seats look impressive from a distance but the cardboard facings securing these thin, plastic pressings often came adrift during shooting and had to be repaired. The rear display screen, painted blue, was able to be used for colour overlay projection to simulate active electronics but, in reality, was simply a piece of wood.



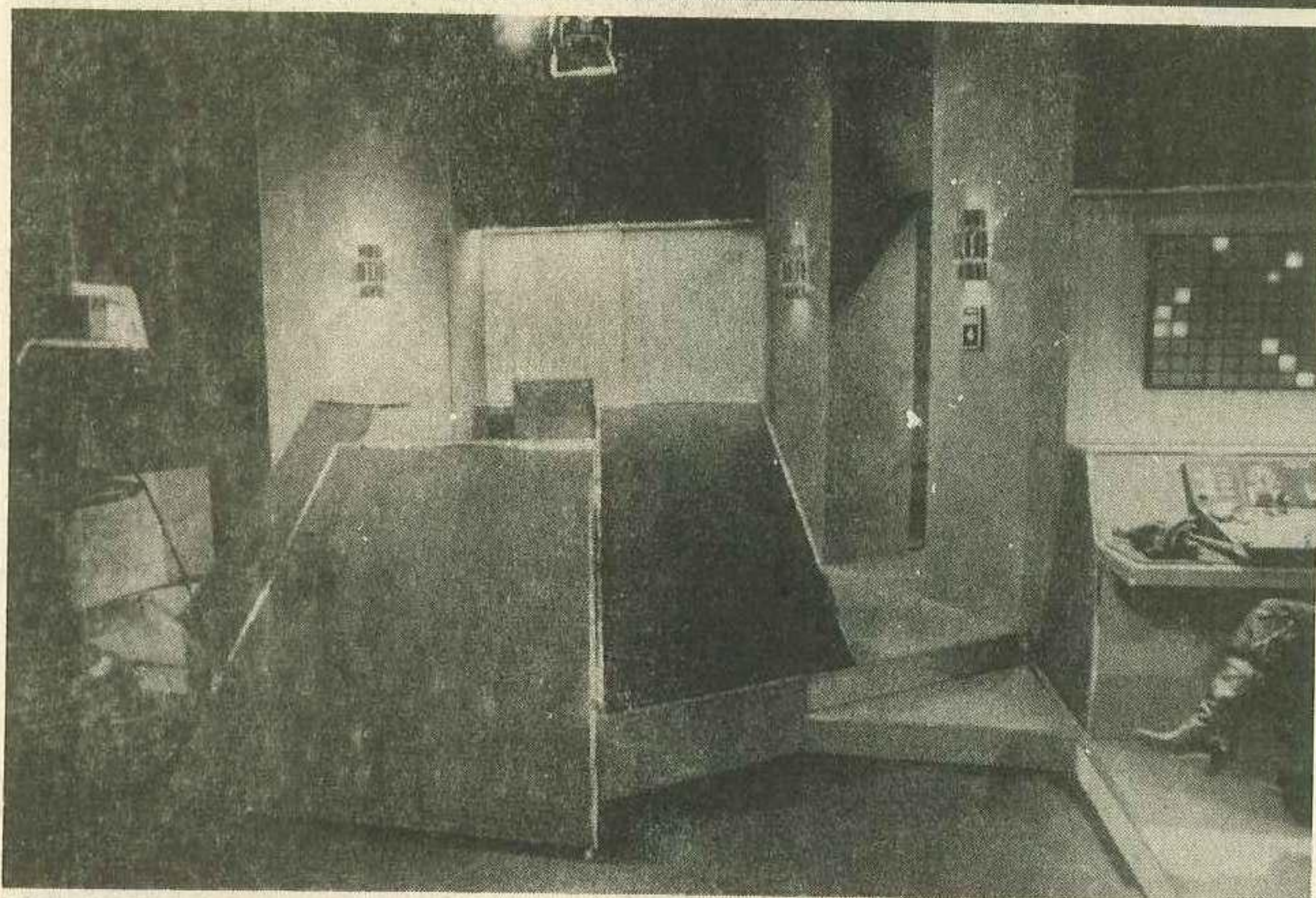
Certain design features, such as the opening off Scorpio's flight deck walkway, were there but seldom used. These bays were constructed to offer the director the chance to have the crew resting in 'bunks' to overcome the problem of where the crew went to sleep but it was rarely done.



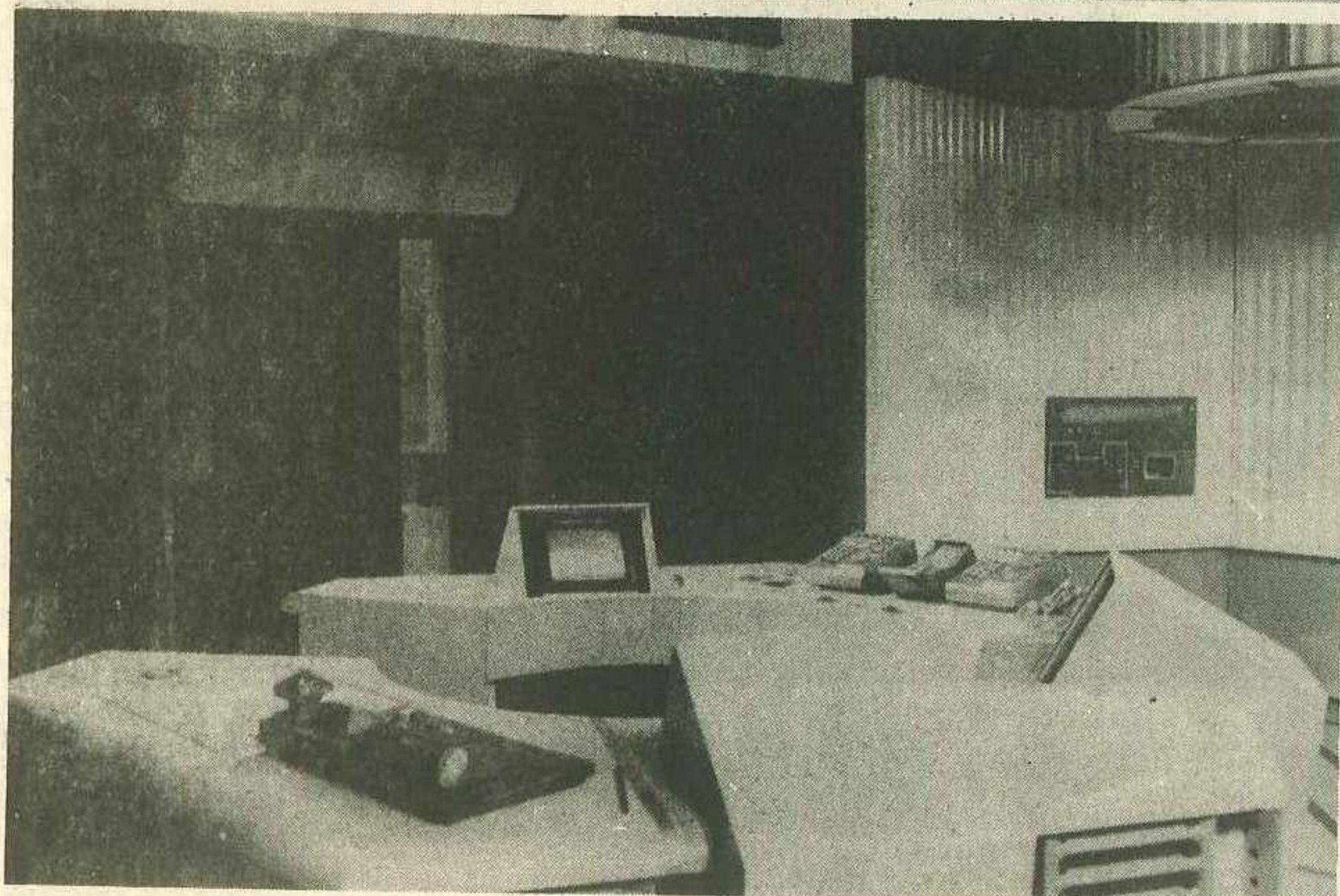
A close-up of the famous flight control machinery and display screen often favoured by Avon. As mentioned earlier, the pressed plastic instruments had perhaps one functioning item – no more – and that was prone to breaking if used with any degree of zeal. The television set was borrowed from a BBC medical programme and still had the label stuck to its side and the desk woodwork needed constant painting to cover up scratches caused in transit. From this angle it is also possible to see just how dangerous those metal edges were surrounding the console. This may explain Tarrant referring to Scorpio as an old 'tub'!



Conditions on Servalan's ship were not much better. Because the ship was seldom seen from the inside, the set was much smaller than that of Scorpio and much less refined.



The sharp, angular construction of the console surrounding Servalan made the lady seem distant – and prevented cameras getting too close to her!



The base Ops. Room followed much the same style as Scorpio with corrugated sheeting cladding the walls. This time, however, the sheets were made of plastic, not metal, and were prone to cracking each time the set was taken apart after a studio session then brought out of storage for the next. Sliding doors, as seen in the rear of the set, were also a problem. Few if any slid as smoothly as one might imagine from watching the series and, when they did, required a stagehand to operate them. So much for advanced technology!

COSTUME CUTS

EVERY SERIES HAS A HALLMARK AS FAR AS A COSTUME STYLE IS CONCERNED AND THE MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR CREATING THE IMAGE IN MATERIAL FOR THE STARS OF THE FOURTH SERIES WAS NICKY ROCKER. HIS CLEAN CUT FASHIONS WITH STARK OUTLINES GAVE THE SERIES A BUSINESS-LIKE IMAGE HINTING AT A NO-NONSENSE APPROACH TO THEIR ADVENTURES BY THE SCORPIO CREW.

IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES, HOWEVER, NICKY WAS PERMITTED TO CREATE SOMETHING SPECIAL AND, REVIEWING HIS CREATIONS, WE SHOW THE WIDE RANGE OF COSTUMES WHICH GRACED THOSE WHO TOOK PART IN THE FOURTH SERIES.



Above: Not too out of place, even strolling across London bridge during a charity walk. The stars of the series show a unity of style – as well as an uncharacteristic joy at being so close to Servalan.

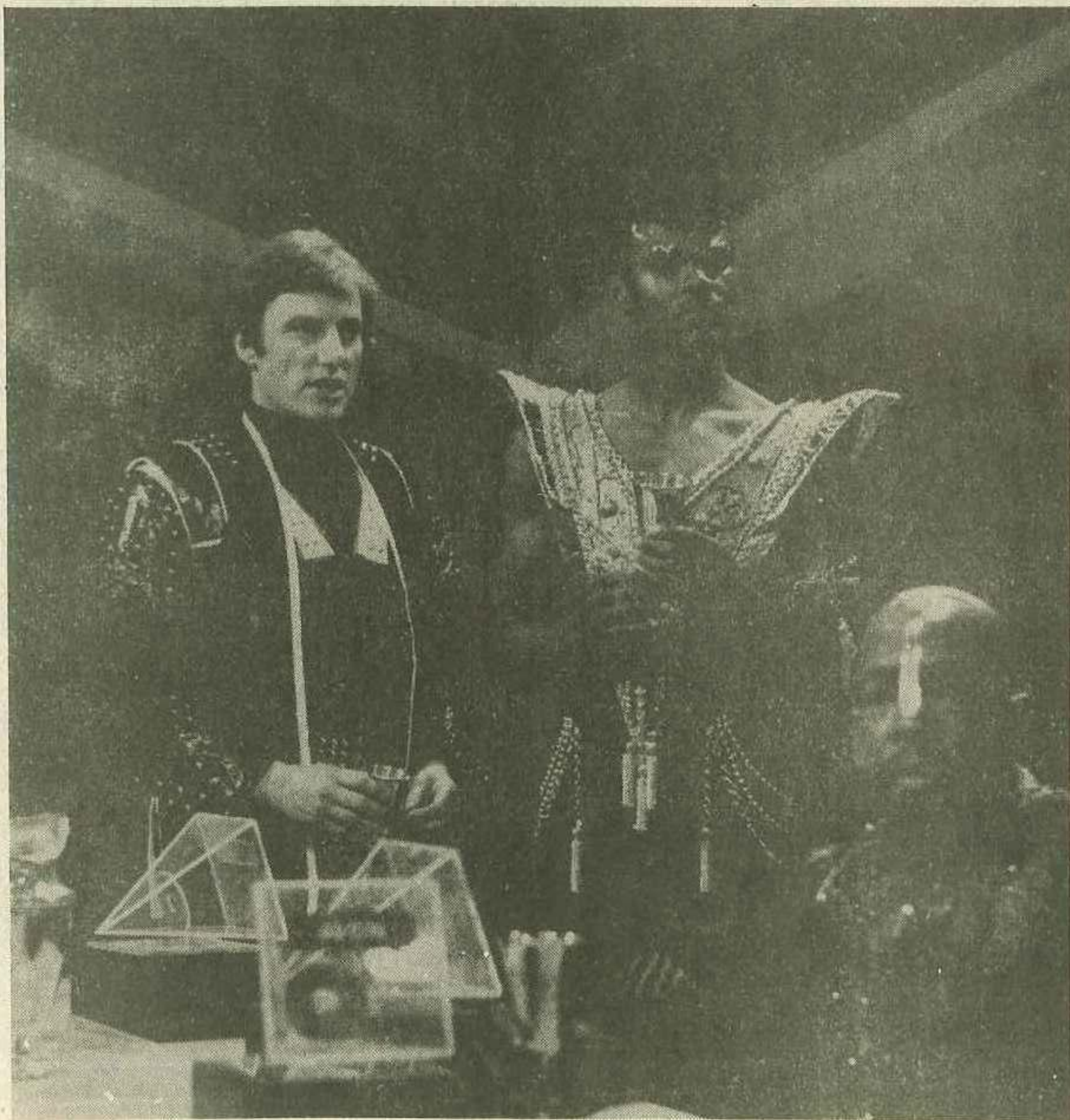
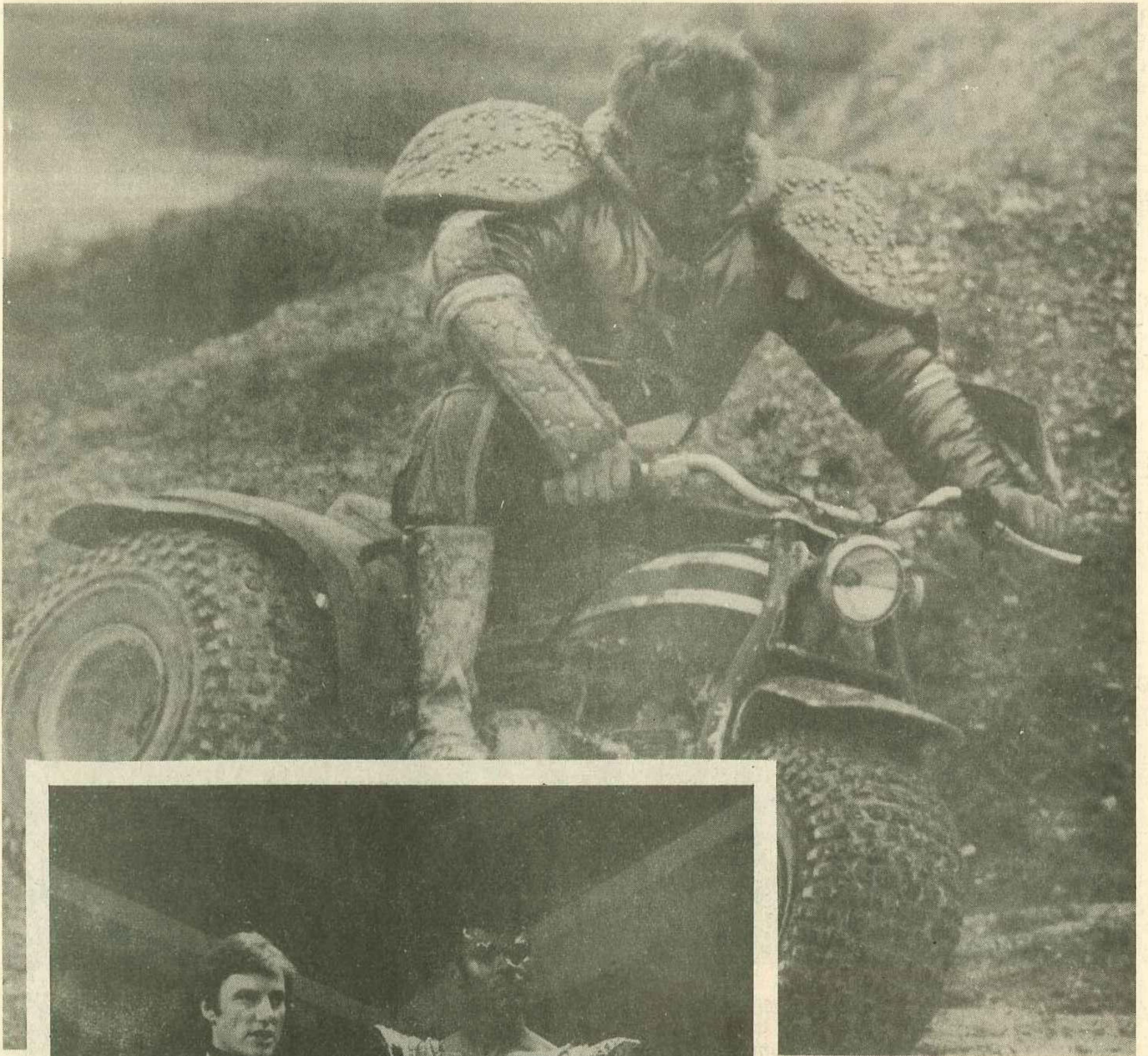
Below:

By complete contrast, the slave traders in 'Assassin' created an aura of Eastern Promise despite being in a vast sand pit in Dorset.



Above:

Betty Marsden also seemed at home in her costume, obviously influenced by Egyptian fashion, which she enjoyed wearing. The grapes on offer, however, were another matter!



Above:

The coming of the Space Rats permitted Nicky to produce costumes close to Hells Angels outfits, heavy on the studs and shoulder pads. With people such as stunt man Mike Potter to dress, the image had to be 'Macho' and Nicky succeeded.

Left:

More Eastern influence was seen in the creations for the warlords – in the episode of that name. Rich decoration helped to heighten the sense of the east although in space there is no such place as The East.

Right:

Even visiting ladies, such as Zeeona, wore functional clothes. There were few dresses seen in the fourth series.

Bottom Left:

The one exception to the 'no dresses' rule was, of course, Servalan. Jackie Pearce had several splendid creations prepared for her but her favourite, as seen here, was the one with the flowing see-through cape. Comments were made about her looking like a butterfly but, more in keeping with her role as Servalan, one should say more like a vampire bat!

Inset:

Each member of the regular cast had at least two uniforms, one summer and one winter. Here Tarrant displays what he was wearing to not only ward off the cold but mad Mullers as well.



'At any other time this many ships on a display screen at the same time would make my hair stand on end,' stated Soolin, watching the fifty blips.

'That's something I'd like to see,' muttered Vila caustically. He was unhappy and it showed.

'What's the matter with you?' asked Dayna, glaring at the morose Vila. 'I would have thought you'd be delighted to have such an escort of ships around us. They're all friendly, you know.'

'Oh, yeah!' sneered Vila. 'I suppose the scrapings of the Mantobac galaxy could be called that. After all, they haven't tried stealing from Scorpio yet, unless you count Avon and Orac, that is.'

'Come on, Vila,' reproached Tarrant. 'Snap out of it. You know how long Avon has been working towards this. The least you can do is get on with the job and stop moaning.'

Vila stood up, his lips set tight. He rounded on Tarrant. 'You call setting off on a suicide mission with hundreds of other lunatics a job? I never wanted any part of this rebel uprising. It was something Avon dreamed up on a bad night — a real nightmare! What the devil do I care if the Federation want to colonise the Mantobac galaxy? I've no friends or relations here! In fact, I'd never even heard of the place until Avon mentioned it. As far as I'm concerned the Federation are welcome to it, every stinking atom of its cosmic dust!' Vila slammed his hand on Tarrant's console then threw himself back into his chair.

'You'd think the way you're talking Scorpio was in grave danger,' retorted Dayna. 'We've been placed at the back of the fleet for maximum safety. Nothing will happen to us here.'

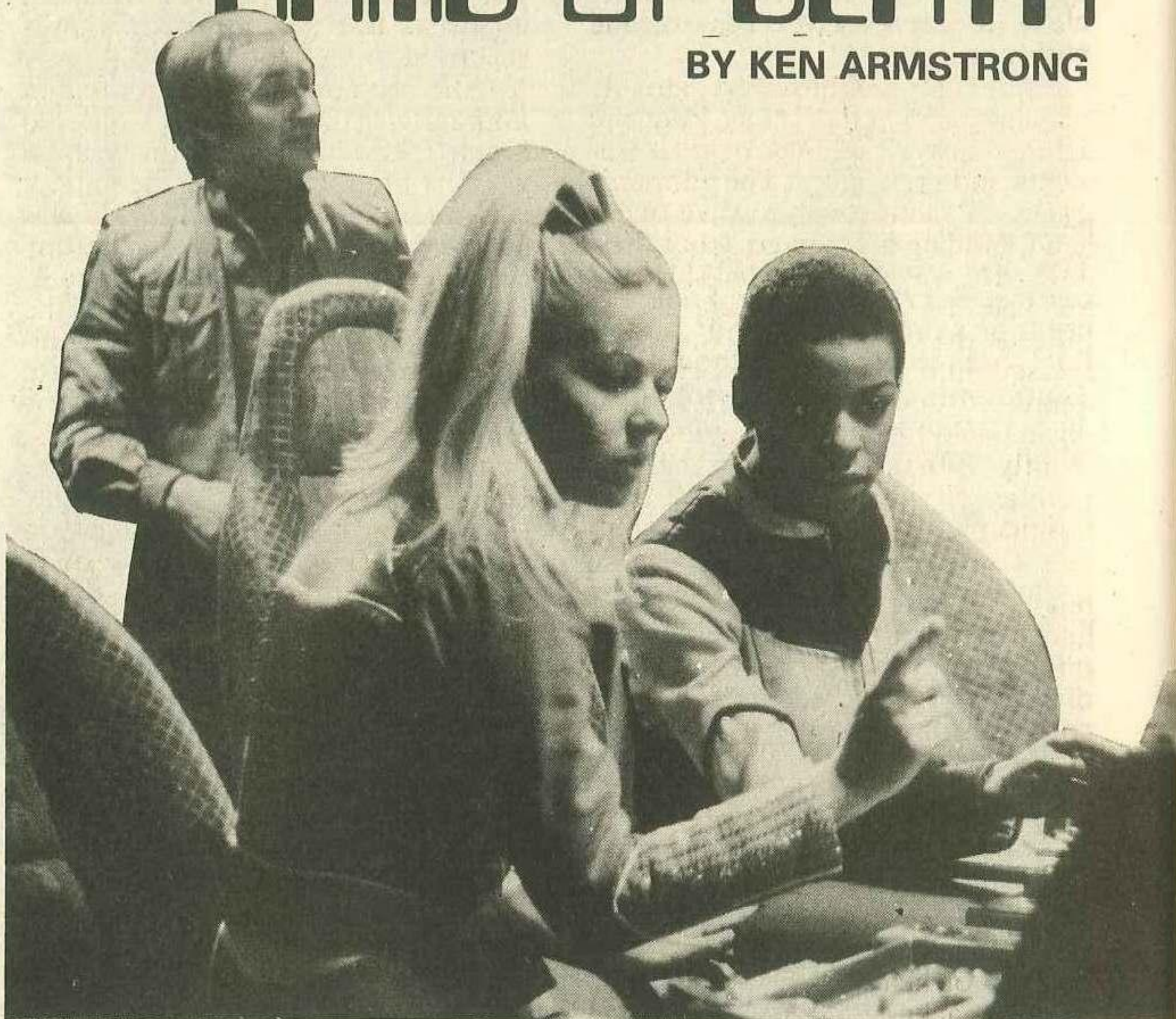
'Can I have that in writing?' snapped Vila, heaving his feet up onto the desk. 'With Avon riding up front in the Emperor's ship we've got no guarantees at all. He could sacrifice us to save his own skin and we'd never know it. He's like that, you know!'

Tarrant appeared immediately behind Vila, causing the small man to start. 'Keep suspicions like that to yourself until you get proof,' he hissed. 'Avon's carrying a bracelet and teleport's permanently locked on to his co-ordinates. He's hardly likely to have taken these kind of precautions if he intends Scorpio to be used as the sacrificial lamb, is he?'

Vila scowled for a moment, his argument disintegrating about him. 'I don't care. I still don't like it!' he said at length. 'In a major battle nothing is certain. Something could go wrong with his master plan. How the blazes does he know the Federation will

HAND OF DEATH

BY KEN ARMSTRONG



This many ships on one screen at the same time would normally make my hair stand on end. . .

attack in that precise way? Has he seen their orders?'

'He probably wrote them,' smiled Tarrant as he returned to his console.

Eight thousand miles in front of Scorpio, the Emperor's flagship, Talon, was bustling with battle preparations. On the small command deck perched high over the vast weapon systems Avon pored over several astro charts. To one side, the comforting flickering lights of Orac were to be seen while the uniformed figures milled around in the background. One man, wearing a brilliant white suit, stood out from the rest. His drawn face and elegantly trimmed beard established him as a leader, his piercing blue eyes seeming to have the wisdom of the universe shining from them. He moved forward to join Avon. He said nothing but watched as Avon made some cryptic notes at the side of one chart.

'There,' said Avon, almost to himself. 'It's done.'

'Would that it were, Avon my old friend,' smiled the Emperor. 'But I fear there is much yet to do.' He gestured round at the busy crew.

'I was referring to the calculations,' said Avon. 'Exact course, corrected speed calculations, spacial distances. Everything. They'll wonder what hit

them.'

'If I doubted you, Avon, my entire battle fleet would not be here now,' stated the Emperor. 'Now pass your calculations to my aide, Dorvant and he will transmit them to the rest of the fleet.'

With that, a smart captain appeared as if from nowhere beside the Emperor. He held out his hand in Avon's direction. There was no expression on the man's sharp features. Avon handed Dorvant the sheet bearing his notes and watched as Dorvant cast his calculating eye over them.

'The figures add up, Dorvant,' said Avon. 'They've been checked by Orac. See the fleet gets them immediately.'

Dorvant flicked his eyes to his Emperor who nodded in silent reply. The aide turned on his heel then disappeared into the throng of bodies. The Emperor noticed Avon watching him go.

'Dorvant's manners leave a lot to be desired, Avon,' began the Emperor 'but I'd trust him with my life. I'm sure you'll get to like and respect him before the battle is over.'

'I'm sure he's extremely capable,' replied, Avon concealing his total dislike of the man.

'That's good,' smiled the Emperor.

'Now come and walk with me for a while. I always feel better having taken some exercise before a battle. We'll inspect the readiness of the vessel, hmmm?'

Battle preparations were already well advanced in the Talon. Reduced lighting cast a blue hue over instruments and crew alike. The Emperor dismissed salutes with a wave of his hand, bidding his men go about their tasks. He was proud of his ship and was keen for Avon to be impressed. Indeed, the machinery of war compressed into this fighting unit was impressive and the crew professional. Avon could feel his pulse quickening slightly. If the other ships in the fleet were as good, he had at last a truly formidable force at his disposal to fight the Federation.

The Emperor had a word for every man under his command, knowing them all by name. Each small battle co-ordination room they passed was visited, data checked and approved, the Emperor patting shoulders in a reassuring, friendly way as they moved on. He was a true leader of men, his reputation meaning little to him but much to those who served him.

Approaching the communications room Avon heard the familiar voice of Tarrant acknowledging change of course orders as Dorvant rattled off azimuth data to all the ships in the fleet. As they entered the cramped room, Dorvant looked up quickly to see Avon and the Emperor in the doorway then, with a smile from his leader, Dorvant resumed his task. Dorvant thought he had reacted quickly enough for nothing suspicious to be noticed but Avon missed nothing. The tiny capsule now clenched in Dorvant's free hand meant little to those aboard the ship — all those except Avon.

Returning to the corridor, Avon caught the Emperor's sleeve.

'Have you a transmitter eject system on board?'

The Emperor look puzzled. 'No, Avon. We've never had the need of one. Why do you ask?'

Avon rubbed his chin in thought. 'Oh, nothing. At least, not yet.'

'If something is troubling you speak your mind,' ordered the warrior.

'I will if I discover what it is,' replied Avon.

The Emperor placed an arm around Avon's shoulder. 'You're getting wound-up about the coming battle, my friend. Everything is under control. Come — watch the weapon test firing before we secure the systems for battle.'

With that, both men returned to the command deck. As they went, Dor-

vant slipped out of the communication room and made his way to the deep belly gun turret. The crewman about to test fire his weapon was surprised to see Dorvant so far away from the command deck but thought nothing of it when Dorvant ordered him to take a break while the weapon was test fired. Only when the gunner was out of sight and the 'all clear' was sounded did Dorvant palm his tiny capsule into a belt of laser charges. His aim was forward of the ship, the weapon spitting the deadly ammunition out far ahead of the powerful machine and the charges self destructing at maximum range. All charges, that is, except the tiny silver capsule. It continued to speed on its way transmitting data more explosive than any laser charge. Avon's battle plan was now less than perfect.

In the dull green glow pervading the Federation Command craft flight deck the vast astro-scan flickered as the computers predicted course and attack plans fed in by General Sarcon. The images formed the classic 'steel fist' formation; the advance guard of twenty ships fanning out ahead with the tight knot of the remaining sixty ships four thousand miles behind. The General smiled. His formation had proved devastating in successive galaxy conquests. He had little doubt it would be successful this time against the Mantobac fleet.

Commander Findal, the General's right-hand man, moved to his leader's side. 'The steel fist again, General?'

'Naturally, Findal,' confirmed the General. 'Have all the captains been briefed?'

'Er, not yet, General,' hesitated Findal. 'I've been waiting for the prearranged signal from Scorpion. It's due any moment now.'

'Pah!' The General rounded on Findal. 'I despise these so-called spies and their stupid names. War is war, fought between great battle fleets, not by those shadowy figures you're so fond of recruiting who'd sell their own mothers if the price was right.'

'They have their uses,' said Findal defensively. 'Scorpion has supplied us with extremely useful information so far. The kind we need if the attack is to be the crushing blow you envisage.'

Findal saw the General squaring up, ready to expand the argument. Then, at the crucial moment, a communications trooper entered.

'Scorpion's report, Commander Findal. It's just been received. It could change everything.'

Findal couldn't help smiling to himself as he snatched the report from his man. His eyes widened as he read.

'Well?' demanded the General testily.

'As I thought,' began Findal. 'The terrorist known as Avon is acting as battle advisor to the Emperor. It would seem he knows your usual tactics only too well, General. He's aiming to strike us between the two elements of the force, target priority being this ship.'

'What?' exploded the General, grabbing the report. 'Let me see!'

The General studied the text for a few moments, stabbed a few keys on his battle predictor then scowled as the images on the screen changed formation. If the rebels were permitted to strike in that manner the General's victory would be turned into a resounding defeat. He fixed his eyes on Findal.

'I never apologise, Findal, but this time I'll admit the clenched fist has its limitations.' His hands played with the predictor keys for a few moments, the images changed and Findal could not help but grin. 'That is our new formation,' indicated the General. 'Let's see how Avon and his Emperor cope with that!'

'It will be a slaughter,' beamed Findal. 'And all thanks to Scorpion, eh, General?'

'Are you sure it said Scorpion and not Scorpio?' asked Tarrant.

'Look, mate, I know what it said,' retorted Vila. 'It's not the sort of mistake I'd make.'

'And the point of origin?'

'About twenty thousand spacial in front of the fleet,' said Vila reading off the figures from his display screen.

'But there's nothing there,' said Soolin, peering at her display. 'You must have been mistaken, Vila.'

'Think what you like but I'm contacting Avon with the news,' snapped Vila, about to open his communication channel to the Emperor's ship. 'I'd rather make a damned fool of myself than risk this little enterprise going up in smoke!'

Soolin turned to Tarrant. 'If Vila's right then someone in this battle fleet could be trying to warn the Federation of our attack plans.'

Tarrant fingered his chin. 'Vila has a kind of sixth sense when it comes to underhand things. He could be right, in which case the fleet could be flying into a trap.'

'I'm afraid Avon cannot be reached at the moment, came the reply, but I'll see he gets your message.'

'You'd better, mate, or this little expedition could be the biggest disaster since the atomic wars.' Vila snapped off his communication switch.

In the communication room of the Emperor's flagship, Dorvant tore the top copy of the message from his pad. He grinned then destroyed it. Avon would never receive his crew's warn-

ing. Not if he could help it.

'Twenty minutes and we still haven't changed course,' said Tarrant, feeling a little nervous. 'Are you sure Avon hasn't replied?'

'Not a bleep,' said Vila. 'You think maybe this Scorpion thing was something he dreamed up to throw the Federation fleet off our scent?'

'I'm not so sure,' said Tarrant, flicking a series of switches. 'I'm going to try and reach him direct via his bracelet communicator.' There came a pause then the crackle of static.

'No use?' asked Dayna.

'There's something interfering with the signal.'

'An interruptor,' stated Vila. 'Standard practice when a fleet's preparing for battle. It's supposed to blot out our radar images on enemy screens but it also prevents communication between ships.'

'Great,' hissed Tarrant. Then he thought for a moment. 'If that stays on during the battle then not only can't we communicate with Avon but he can't use the teleport to get back here.'

Vila leaned back in his seat and smiled. 'Now there's a happy prospect. Life without Avon! I could get to like that.'

'All ships committed to battle course,' confirmed a technician. 'our interruptor is set and radar images diffused.'

'Estimate time to contact,' ordered Avon.

'Eighteen earth-standard minutes to penetration of first and second waves,' came the reply.

Avon looked tense as the Emperor moved to join him.

'And so to battle. Eh, Avon? The moment we've all been waiting for. Now we put your brilliant plan into action. The Federation will wonder what hit them.'

'Unless they already know,' said Avon in a low voice.

'What do you mean?' The Emperor was genuinely astonished.

Avon turned to Orac. 'Repeat the message you intercepted.'

'You refer,' of course,' began the computer, 'to the signal from Scorpion to the Federation battle fleet?'

'Yes,' snapped Avon. 'Get on with it.'

'The message, transmitted by a stellar mini-relay, identified the originator as Scorpion and the recipient as Commander Findal of the Federation battle fleet . . .' Orac proceeded to rattle off course, formation and intercept time of the Mantobac fleet.

'B . . . but how?' The Emperor was stunned.

'A spy,' confirmed Avon. 'And one on board this ship.'

The Emperor's eyes narrowed.

'Who?' His voice was low and threatening.

'The only man with complete access to the communications system and full knowledge of our plans.' Avon looked into the Emperor's steely eyes. It was time for the truth. 'It could only have been Dorvant.'

The Emperor caught his breath. 'Bring him,' he hissed.

'It's a lie! I'd never betray you!' screeched Dorvant, standing between two guards.

'Someone has,' rumbled Avon. 'The Federation know of our plans.'

Dorvant took a pace towards the Emperor standing beside Avon. There was alarm on his face. 'My loyalty has never been in doubt until now — until this man,' he gestured towards Avon, 'came to us. Why can't he be the spy? After all, he has his teleport bracelet tuned to his own ship's system, ready to disappear from here at any second leaving us to face the consequences of his action.'

Avon snatched the bracelet from his arm, holding it out towards the Emperor. 'This was merely a precaution,' he snapped. 'Here, take it. Now let Dorvant try to prove his innocence!'

As the Emperor reached to take the bracelet, Dorvant lunged, snatched it from Avon's fingers then barged his way through the escort.

'Stop him,' yelled the Emperor. 'Shoot down the wretch!' But Dorvant was already barging his way towards one of the narrow passageways. There were too many crewmen in the way.

'He won't get far,' snarled the Emperor.

'Not with the interrupter in action,' replied Avon, then his skin began to tingle. 'The interrupter,' he hissed, gripping the Emperor's arm. 'Where is it located?'

'In that passageway,' replied the Emperor, beginning to realise the enormity of the situation. 'By the stars! If he disconnects it . . .'

'The whole battle fleet will be seen by the Federation force,' said Avon finishing the statement. 'He's got to be stopped!'

'I don't like it,' muttered Vila, still ill at ease. 'He's still not altered course and the Federation force are just ahead!'

'He's doing it for a reason,' replied Dayna. 'He always does. We'll find out what his plans are soon enough.'

Vila stood up, a cold sweat trickling down his back. 'If only he'd say something!'

'How can he,' snapped Tarrant, 'with the interrupter thing still switched on. Get back to your battle position, Vila, and prepare for action.'

This will be the biggest battle of our lives.'

'Or the biggest fiasco,' retorted the other.

Just then, all screens cleared of interference. Dayna sat forward staring at hers. 'This is it,' she called. 'The interruptor's off!'

'Teleport now,' came the command from Dayna's communications speaker. She didn't even stop to think. Her hands eased the levers back as the machinery hummed into life.

'He's chickened out,' cried Vila much relieved. 'Avon's coming back to join us!'

The image shimmering into life before them, however, looked nothing like Avon, especially when the powerful laser gun swung towards them.

'Uh?' gasped Vila. 'Wh . . . where's Avon?'

'Do as I say or I'll blow you all to kingdom come,' snarled Dorvant. 'Turn this ship around and set maximum speed!'

'The devil I will,' protested Tarrant, rising from his seat.

A shot aimed just over Tarrant's head made him change his mind.

'The next will kill,' hissed Dorvant, moving closer to the crew. 'Now do as I say or . . .' he pressed the gun against Dayna's temple, 'she gets it first!'

Tarrant's hand reluctantly eased back on the flight control levers. 'You realise you're as good as dead,' he muttered. 'Avon will kill you for this!'

Dorvant's high-pitched laughter echoed round the flight deck. 'Him kill me? That's a joke!' His eyes narrowed. 'It's me who's killed your precious Avon, at least the Federation battle fleet will do it for me. Avon and the rest of those fools are doomed. Now open the throttle on this junk heap before this ship is destroyed as well!'

On the flight deck of the Federation command ship shouts of delight brought the General quickly to the planning table.

'Look, sir,' beamed a technician. 'The whole damned Mantobac fleet on the screen as clear as day! They're making a present of themselves.'

'Then it would be churlish to refuse such a gift,' grinned the General. 'They're on the predicted attack course, still in tight formation just as planned. Our man has done well. Signal all formation — immediate attack!' The General felt his pulse racing with excitement. 'Wipe them from the galaxy!'

What happened next would remain a blur for the many thousand human beings caught in that dreadful battle. Only the computers would have total recall of the number of first time

Are you sure it said Scorpion and not Scorpio...?



strikes; pierced pressurised hulls which burst open, spewing their human contents into the harshly hostile environment of deep space never to be seen again. Critically damaged ships limped away only to be hounded relentlessly by the ever blood-thirsty Federation ships seeking confirmed kills to add to the already impressive scores they had to their credit.

General Sarcon pushed his pursuit ships to the limits of their endurance in order that not one single Mantobac vessel would escape his deadly ambush. This was going to be his greatest victory ever. The entire universe would hear of this day and quail at the utterance of his name. He would be the most feared General of all time thanks to his brilliant plan. The General smiled to himself. History would record his name, not that of the misguided Federation spy who betrayed his own people for a reason few would understand. And what of that man? The General rounded on his fleet captain, Commander Findal.

'The Emperor's ship. Where is it?'

Findal consulted his hand-held micro display board. Every kill detail was logged there. 'Three Flight report a successful attack on it, General.'

'Destroyed?'

'Er, not specified here, sir. By the looks of it they disabled the vessel then attacked its escorts.'

'I want that ship verified as annihilated,' hissed the General. 'I want nothing left of it!'

Findal was taken aback. 'I thought your orders were for the ship to be disabled ready for boarding later. Surely you want the Emperor alive to sign the articles of surrender?'

'Who needs such things,' rumbled the General, 'when one has the Mantobac galaxy at one's mercy? No — destroy it and everyone on board!'

Thick acrid fumes filled the Emperor's ship. Systems either burned-out due to overloading or were already out of action. Medical teams struggled to and fro trying to save those whose chances of survival looked reasonable

but occasional screams still rent the air. The most pervasive noise was that of groaning despair. The crew knew the ship was dead and that only death awaited them. It was simply a matter of time. The Emperor sat on the warm decking, his face soot blackened, tears of despair cutting flesh-coloured streaks on his sunken cheeks. He had gambled and lost everything, thanks to someone he trusted. The Emperor gave an ironic smile, wiping his face with his soiled sleeve. Wasn't it Avon he was most concerned about betraying them to the Federation and yet, at this crucial time, Avon was the one still trying to coax the shattered craft into life.

A broken door was pushed from its hinges as Avon staggered back to the ruined command deck.

'Where can we reach with an eight second single engine burn,' he demanded.

'It's no use, Avon,' sighed the Emperor. 'I've already told the technicians to prepare a surrender message.'

'Snap out of it!' yelled Avon, gripping the Emperor by his tunic. 'I need the information, fast!'

'You're wasting your time,' countered the Emperor. The whole fleet's gone. Not one fighting ship intact. It's all my fault. I shouldn't have trusted Dorvant as I did. I see the folly of my ways now.'

'Pah!' Avon released the Emperor, the shattered man sinking to the floor sobbing for his lost crews. 'Where the devil is Orac?' Avon found the small computer lodged beneath some fallen debris. He quickly attached the key and sighed as the machine flickered into life.

'I need answers, Orac. Where do we head with eight seconds of thrust from one damaged engine?'

'I'm impressed,' began the computer. 'All indications were the drive systems were non-operational.'

'Cut the complements,' snarled Avon. 'Give me the information.'

'Very well,' retorted the machine. 'At azimuth three-zero eight on a heading of red three, I calculate the planet Mantax II could be reached, always assuming the Federation pursuit ships permitted a free passage.'

'Why do you list them? They should be thousands of spicals from here by now mopping up the fleet stragglers.'

'They were. The General, however, has decided this craft should be destroyed. That's why he sent a signal to a wing of fighters to return here immediately.'

'How far are they?'

'Arrival in weapon range in approximately eight seconds.'

Avon dived from the control room,

ignoring the cries of the wounded on whom he trod. In five seconds he could reach the emergency manual navigation controls. It would take a further ten seconds to set the course plus another minute at least to reach the engine room to fire the remaining thruster fuel. Somehow, he had to buy time.

If Vila had been on edge before, now he qualified for the nervous wreck category. The man who had identified himself as Dorvant was now between Tarrant and Soolin at the rear of the flight deck. Dayna had been released to resume her duties but, for all her steely nerve, she was visibly shaken. She was also suffering from pangs of guilt having been responsible for bringing Dorvant on board in mistake for Avon. She kept cursing herself under her breath.

'What lies ahead?' asked Tarrant. 'I mean where are the course coordinates taking us?'

Dorvant, sweating profusely, jabbed the muzzle of his gun between Tarrant's shoulder blades. 'Shut up! You'll know soon enough!'

'If I may venture an answer, sir,' droned the flight computer, Slave, 'we are bound for a new Federation battle base established on the edge of the Mantobac system. I do hope the new does not distress you too much.'

'Ha! A snivelling computer,' laughed Dorvant. 'how appropriate! I may keep that programme in him once I take over this ship.'

'Take over?' There was a note of caution in Soolin's voice.

'Yes, my dear,' sneered the uninvited guest. 'You see, when we reach Conqueror base, I'm sure General Sarcon will grant me anything I wish in return for the glorious victory I have given him. This ship will be part of the reward. As for yourselves, of course, I'm sure you will enjoy the hospitality of the Federation and will have other things on your mind than what is happening to your ship.' Dorvant let out another high-pitched cackle. Images of a rapturous reception at Conqueror base already clear in his mind.

Tarrant gave Soolin a sidelong look then turned to Dorvant. 'Ah, the dreams we all have.'

'What are you insinuating?' snapped Dorvant.

'It's not a suggestion, my friend. It's fact. You see you'll never reach that base. You didn't think the Federation would ever let a ship like Scorpio escape their carefully prepared ambush. Did you? After all, they don't even know you're on board. Do they?'

It was a calculated guess on Tarrant's part, but it worked. Dorvant



Life without Avon — I could get to like that!

grabbed him by the shoulder. 'What are you trying to tell me. Eh?'

'Just that there's at least three Federation pursuit ships on our tail and they'll be within range in about a minute.'

'Show me!' demanded Dorvant.

'You'll see them better on Dayna's screen up front.'

Dorvant leaped forward, his mind racing. He failed to notice Tarrant springing out of his chair to follow. The pair were level with the forward console before Vila realised what was going on. It was Vila's face which gave the game away. Before Dorvant even studied Dayna's console, he saw Vila's horrified face, spun round and was hit by Tarrant's full weight. They rebounded off the machinery, Dorvant cursing loudly. He tried to bring the gun to fire but the shot went wide, slamming into the back of Vila's chair but Vila was already hugging the floor.

'For pity's sake help me,' yelled Tarrant as he and Dorvant thudded to the deck. Dorvant would normally have been no match for Tarrant's strength but he was desperate. He lashed out with a foot, catching Tarrant under the chin. The young pilot was sent reeling.

Dayna sprang into action, seizing her chance. She kicked out with her foot, caught Dorvant's gun and sent it flying to the far end of the flight deck, under the teleport section. Dorvant, without hesitation, dived for it. He

expected Dayna to be following, but, as he reached the weapon, another strange and tingling sensation filled his body. He half turned, his face a mask of shock and horror. Dayna was slamming the teleport controls hard forward.

'Damn you all!' screeched the shimmering figure, then he was no more.

'Good thinking,' said Tarrant, fingering his tender jaw. 'Where did you send him, Dayna?'

'Oh, nowhere special. But one thing is certain. He won't be taking over any more ships again.'

'It's all over, Vila,' grinned Tarrant. 'You can get up now.' He looked over to where Vila's terrified face peered over the edge of his chair.

'He . . . he's really gone?'

'Yes, Vila,' said Dayna resuming her seat. 'We're back under control and safe and sound.'

'Sorry to disappoint you,' cut in Soolin. 'But if you take a look at your screens, we're a long way from being safe.'

Tarrant swung to look at the display screen. Clear images of three Federation pursuit craft plus a damaged Mantobac cruiser sprang to life.

'The poor beggars,' he muttered. 'They look as though they've been through hell and still the Federation hound them. Think we can help out?'

'We'd better,' said Dayna, looking closely at the screen. 'See the name on the ship?'

Tarrant focused his eyes. Despite

the scars of battle the name Talon stood out clearly. 'It's the Emperor's ship. I don't see how it can still be flying.'

'There can be only one reason,' cut in Dayna. 'Avon must still be alive!'

'Action stations,' yelled Tarrant. 'Prepare to open fire with everything we've got!'

'Oh damn,' muttered Vila. 'It's the U.S. Cavalry time again!'

'Hostile ship on attack course,' yelled a Federation co-pilot.

The words were barely out of his mouth before the first wave of plasma bolts tore through his ship, shattering it in the emptiness of space. The craft's wing support ship suffered the same fate seconds later but, before Tarrant could swing Scorpio to bear on the third, its weapons spat into life, laser charges hammering Scorpio's forward screen.

'Another hit like that and we'll be holed,' yelled Vila.

'Stay with it,' hissed Tarrant through clenched teeth, his fingers flying about the control panel.

'Approaching minimum range,' warned Dayna. 'We can't get him in the sights!'

Scorpio's crew watched as the target machine dodged another volley of shots, then both craft flashed past at frightening speed.

'Hold tight,' shouted Tarrant. 'I'm bringing her round for another run!'

Everyone braced themselves as the crushing 'G' force squashed them back and down into their seats. The Federation pilot had taken the same decision, breaking off his attack on the crippled Talon. His manoeuvre, however, exposed his entire upper hull surface for a few brief seconds. It was all Tarrant needed. Scorpio's superior mobility had already brought the ship into an attack attitude. Tarrant grinned as he pressed the firing button. All eyes watched as the plasma bolts flew towards the target. Orange flame seemed to blossom from the area of the flight deck then dazzling fragments of the machine exploded in front of them.

'Poor beggars,' said Vila. 'They never stood a chance.'

'Oh, so now you're on their side?' snapped Dayna. 'Have you forgotten they were trying to kill us?'

Vila turned away, a sick expression on his face. He knew only too well the fate of the Federation crew could be his one day.

Dayna recognised Vila's expression, took a deep breath then turned to Tarrant. 'What now?'

'We try to make contact with the Talon,' he said. 'And if they don't respond, we'll have to teleport on board.'

'You'll be lucky,' cut in Vila. 'Take a look at that.'

As everyone gazed at their screens the Talon shot off into deep space under full emergency power.

'We'll have to catch them first!'

Until Avon staggered back to the Talon's flight deck, he had no idea why the Federation ships had not opened fire on his ship. Not until he questioned Orac.

'Instead of saving the remaining crew of this ship from disaster you have placed everyone on board in the utmost jeopardy, announced the small computer.

'Explain that remark,' demanded Avon angrily.

'It is quite simple. It was Scorpio, back under Tarrant's command, which destroyed the Federation vessels. The ship was closing in on this vessel until you activated emergency drive thrust.'

Avon contemplated Orac's statement for a moment. 'Then all we have to do is wait for Scorpio to catch us up then have them teleport us back. I don't agree with your reasoning.'

'That is because you are not in possession of all the facts,' retorted Orac. 'By the time Scorpio is within teleport range this vessel will have entered the atmosphere of Mantax II in an uncontrolled dive. There is insufficient power remaining to prevent the ship from crashing on that planet.'

There was a long silence then Avon spoke. When he did so, his voice was soft and low. 'Is there nothing we can do to prevent the crash?'

'Nothing,' came the reply. 'This ship is now out of control.'

'Special flight Alpha One arriving in five minutes, General. Docking parties standing by.'

General Sarcon paced his command room on Conqueror Battle Base. This should have been a time of celebration but instead there were still some nagging doubts in his mind.

'Try to detain the lady until I have dealt with this final problem,' he snapped to an aide.

'It won't be easy, General. You know how she likes to be kept informed. It's impossible to hide anything from Commissioner Sleer.'

'I'm aware of that,' he retorted. 'just do your best.'

The General moved to his communications desk. 'What news, Findal?'

'Still nothing more from Three Flight, sir. A full squadron is closing to investigate but, beyond the last report of a hostile craft attacking Three Flight, nothing.'

'Do we assume Three Flight is non-operational?'

'I'm afraid we must, General,' replied the voice from the communication box. 'But what sort of craft attacked them we have no idea.'

'And the Emperor's ship?'

'Not at the co-ordinates where it was reported as being disabled. It seems they may have managed to start the engines again.'

The General exploded with rage, banging his fist on the desk. 'The fools! They've plucked fiasco from the jaws of triumph! How the devil am I to explain this to the Commissioner?' The General began pacing his command room once more then, his face showing grim resolve, he returned to the communicator.

'Findal,' he barked. 'Order every ship in the battle fleet, less one squadron on guard duty, to follow up on that last contact report. I want the Talon found and destroyed and the first captain to report the position of that mystery ship earns himself a month's leave!'

'Er,' hesitated Findal. 'It's something of an overkill having so many ships against one, General.'

'I don't care,' snapped the General. 'If I didn't order it, I'm sure Commissioner Sleer would. This is no longer a battle, Findal. This is politics!'

'If only we had Orac,' said Dayna in despair. 'He'd have been able to think of something!'

'Well we don't,' replied Vila. 'And by the looks of it, we won't have Orac or Avon ever again.'

Everyone looked to the main display screen, their eyes squinting at the glare of the shining planet pictured there. Just visible above the bright orb the red trail of a spaceship could be seen. It was still a long way ahead of Scorpio. All the indications were the ship would enter the planet's atmosphere long before Scorpio came within range.

'Can't you give me any more power, Slave?' demanded Tarrant.

'I'm deeply sorry, sir, but if I activate any more thrust we will not be able to decelerate in time before entering Mantac II's atmosphere. We're at maximum safe speed now.'

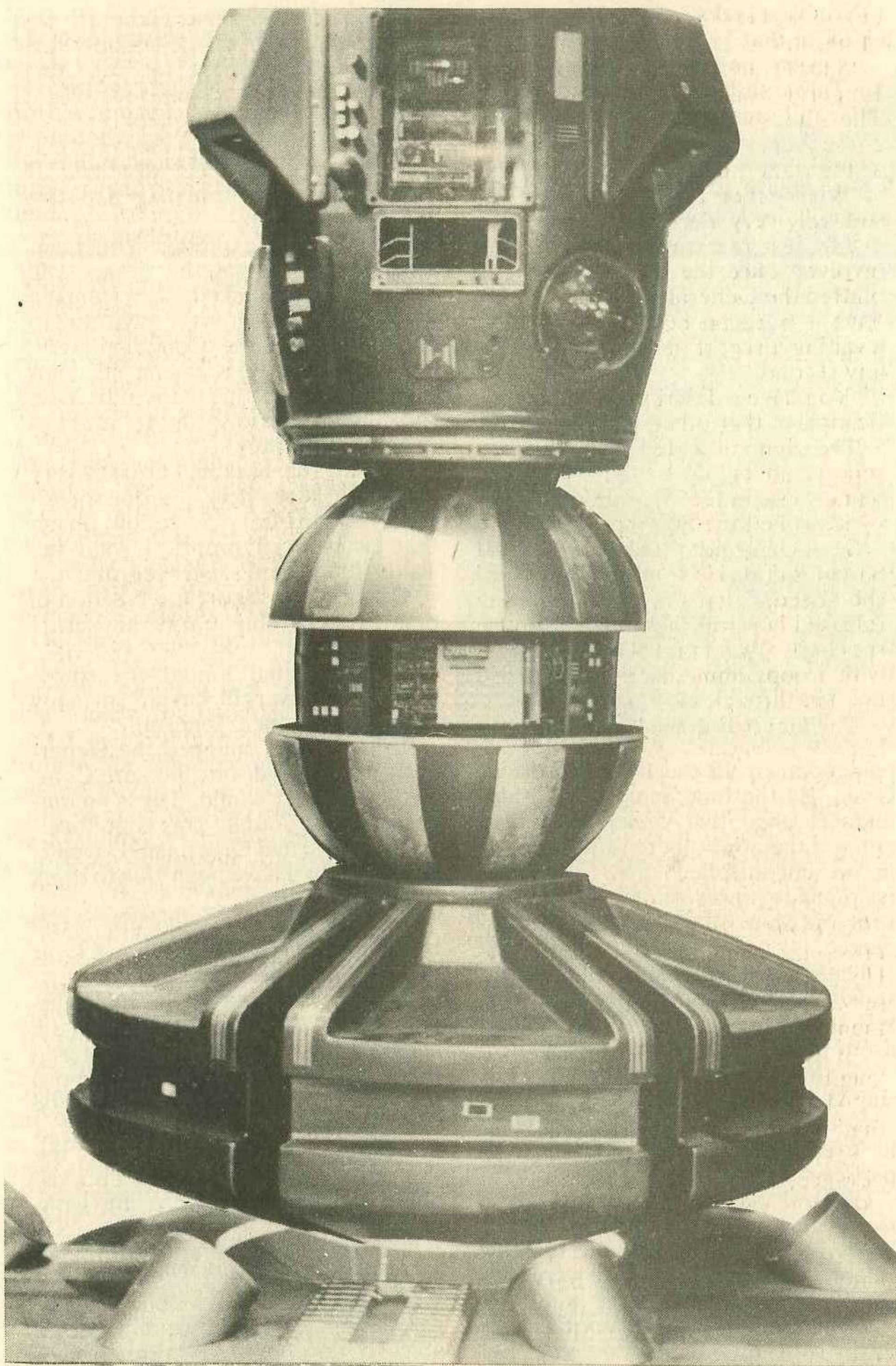
'So we just sit here and watch the ship burn up?' asked Soolin.

'Looks like it,' said Tarrant gloomily.

'Do you think the ship could survive an atmosphere penetration,' asked Dayna.

'Dunno,' murmured Vila. 'I suppose a big battle craft like Talon was designed to withstand a lot but it's been damaged badly already. Who knows what kind of stress it can take.'

Tarrant glanced round the rest of the crew. 'Decision time,' he announced. 'I'm throttling back.'



We are bound for a Federation Battle Base. . .

We've got our own lives to worry about.'

'If I may venture to say so,' said Slave,' it is a wise decision, sir. You see, with Federation ships closing on us, we'll need all our available power.'

'What?' screeched Vila. 'Where are they?'

'Er, as far as the sensors indicate, they're closing in from three sectors.'

'They've come after us with the whole damned battle fleet,' shouted Vila. 'We've got to get out of here!'

'I'd welcome any suggestions,' said Tarrant grimly. 'As far as I can see

they've covered every exit. We've only one choice.'

'Oh, yeah? Where's that?'

'Down,' announced Tarrant. 'We'll try to lose them on that planet. Brace yourselves. This could be rough!'

Even as Tarrant spoke, the display screen showed a bright glow emanating from near the top of the onrushing planet.

'There goes the Talon,' announced Dayna with a catch in her voice. 'I pray they make it.'

'Save your prayers for us,' snapped Vila. 'We're going to need all the help

we can get!'

For the survivors on board the Talon, hitting the atmosphere of Mantax II without the assistance of retro thrust was like jumping off a high wall and hitting the ground face first. Those in a critical state before the impact never survived it. Others less severely injured were able to brace themselves but further injury was inevitable. The worst, however, was yet to come. Plunging through the upper atmosphere the Talon's hull glowed bright red and, where exterior plates had been damaged in battle, soft inner shields melted turning the interior into a furnace.

Leaving a fiery trail, Talon carved a spectacular course across the planet's sky, the hull cooling in the water-laden atmosphere to appear dull grey with blackened nose and belly. Although graceful in appearance Talon gave no indication of any kind of control being exercised over its descent. In the doomed hull, the situation was far from controlled.

Blood trickling from nose and eyes, Avon dragged himself through debris littering the flight deck, making for a small control panel. It was a faint hope the controls would still function but Avon was in a gambling mood. He had little to lose.

Charred wires festooned the instruments as he brushed them aside, feeling in the gloom for the two levers he knew must still be there. An eerie light flooded the flight deck through the observation slits, Avon's only reference to Talon's flight altitude and destination. Heaving himself to his knees Avon felt the control levers in his hands. He wiped sweat and grime from his eyes, tried hard to focus, then gingerly eased one of the controls back. Almost imperceptibly, the horizon altered. He felt his pulse quicken. There was some vertical control.

Applying the same pressure to the other, he waited. Nothing. He tried again, this time more forcibly. Still nothing. Avon cursed. Talon could be raised and lowered in flight but not moved from side to side. Avon adjusted his position, seeing swathes of brilliant green then blue flash before him through the observation slits. It was a question of guessing when the impact would come and his strength was failing him. He would only have time to pull back on the controls at the last moment before impact and if his judgement was not precise the ship would nose-dive into the surface.

Strangely, Avon's mind cleared. Everything became crystal clear. Ahead he saw a wide stretch of blue. It could only be water. He counted to himself, easing the nose down then, at the last moment, pulled back hard on

the controls. A shuddering vibration shook the Talon's tortured frame. Contact had been made. They were down. Spray showered the observation slits obscuring Avon's vision. He didn't care. At least he thought he didn't. The kaleidoscope of colours in front of him seemed to change at alarming speed from shades of blue to green.

'Oh, no,' he gasped, throwing himself flat. The sudden impact flung him against the bulkhead, mercifully, rendering him unconscious. Others on board were not so lucky.

Scorpio's crew lost contact with Talon at its point of entry but they were more concerned with the closing waves of fighters now showing clearly on their display screens. The sector seemed full of them. Tarrant quickly ran through his check-list for entry into Mantax II's atmosphere then, ordering everyone to strap in, he dived towards the planet.

'If they haven't spotted us before they will now,' he said, feeling the tell-tale bumps as the ship ploughed into the upper atmosphere. 'Our trail will look like a neon sign.'

'There's a range of mountains close to an inland sea near the planet's equator,' announced Soolin. 'We should find some cover there.'

'I'll try anything once,' confirmed Tarrant, increasing his angle of dive. 'Those fighters should be on our tail any second.'

'Right again,' muttered Vila. 'They're entering the atmosphere now.'

'This could get a little hairy,' announced Tarrant. 'Remain strapped in until I get this ship out of sight.'

Vila squirmed in his seat as mountains and suddenly trees loomed large on the forward display screen.

'Geez,' he gasped. 'Any lower and we'll be pickin' daisies!'

'Better than pushing them up,' snapped Tarrant, his eyes glued to the screen.

'Much though I enjoy the company of your aide, General, I think I've been kept waiting long enough,' announced Servalan, swishing into the general's command room.

'Er, it was not my intention to keep you waiting so long, Commissioner, but I've been tying up loose ends from the glorious battle.'

Servalan drifted towards the main astro map showing the Mantobac galaxy. She scrutinised the position of the battle fleet.

'I was informed you had effected a major victory, General, destroying all the Mantobac fleet in one battle.'

'That is so, Commissioner,' beamed the General.

'Then why is the fleet concentrated

on this planet?' Servalan stabbed one of her talons at the chart.

'Simply a matter of running the Emperor's disabled craft to ground. The other ship, of course, is of no real consequence but it will be dealt with at the same time.'

'What other craft?' Servalan was suddenly very alert.

'Oh, just an intruder which became involved once the battle was over,' bluffed the General. 'But the fighters have a trace on both craft and I'm awaiting a report of their destruction any second.'

'You have a description and identification of that other ship?'

The General leafed through some reports on his desk. 'Ah, yes. The name was spotted. Let me see — yes — it's called the Scorpio.'

Servalan's talons sank into General Sarcon's arm. He winced. 'You fool,' she hissed. 'That's Avon's ship!' She released her grip then turned to face the chart. 'I want that planet saturated with troops immediately! Avon will not slip through my fingers again!'

The General moved to join Servalan. 'I'm afraid my men would be reluctant to set foot on that planet, Commissioner. Remaining in their ships is no problem but that is as far as I am prepared to order them.'

'You would defy me?' screeched Servalan, rounding to face Sarcon.

'For one very good reason, Commissioner,' stated the General flatly. He passed a computer print-out to Servalan. She snatched it from him then read its content.

'Is this confirmed?' she asked at length.

'Absolutely. As you will see from that, Mantax II is a terrible place.'

Servalan turned to look into the distance, her eyes misting over. 'I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy, not even Avon.'

'He wished it on himself,' replied Sarcon. 'All we can do now is put him out of his misery. After all, there's no way he's going to leave Mantax II alive.'

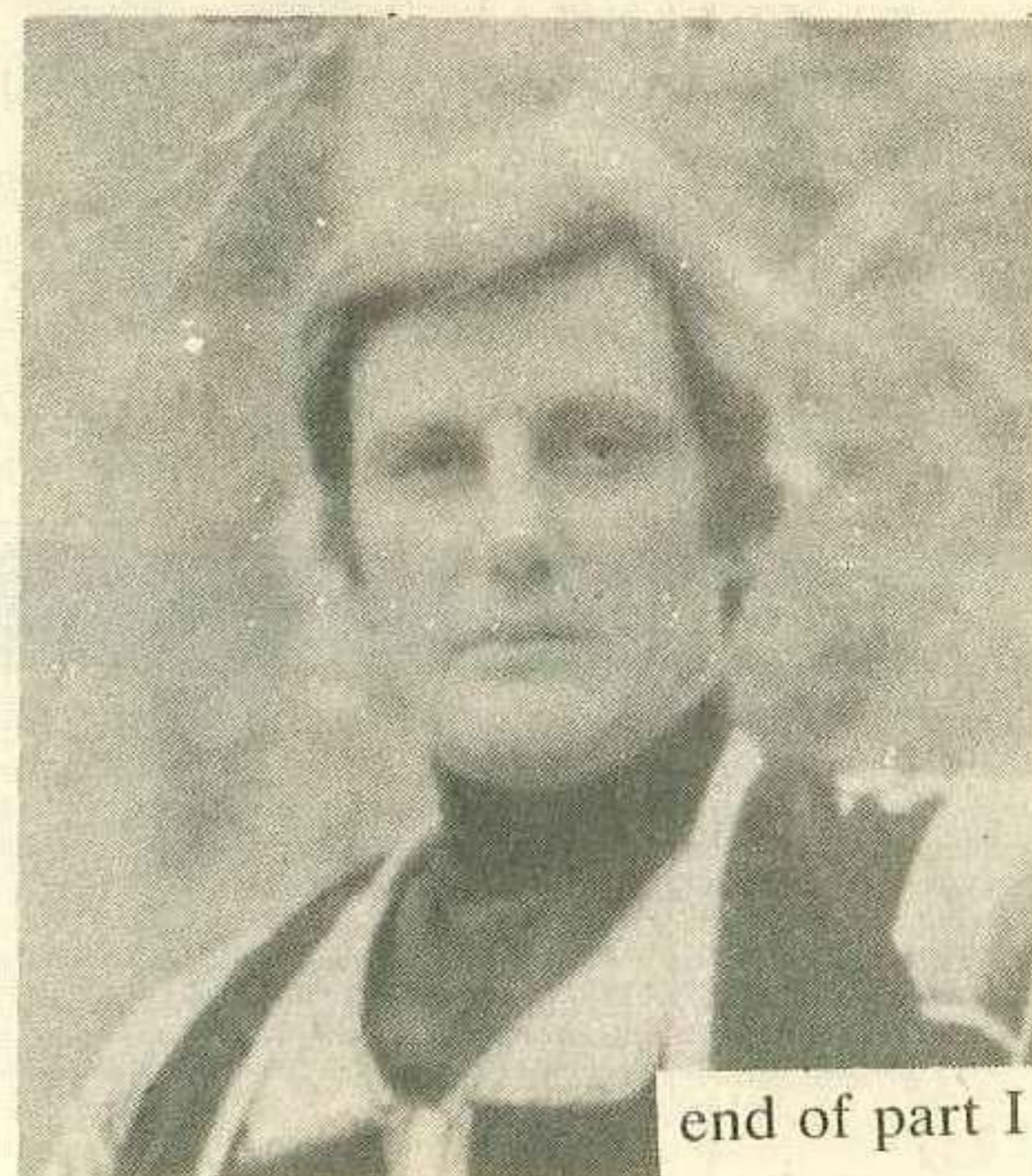
It seemed at first to Avon he was floating. Then, as he forced his eyes open, the full enormity of his situation slowly dawned on him. His right arm ached terribly and his left leg lay at a crazy angle. The pain of the break came next, producing an instant wave of nausea. In the gloom of the flight deck other disembodied voices groaned or moaned. The ship was lying at an angle with little light penetrating through the observation slits. Avon had to move. He had to find out where they were. Slowly, agonisingly, he dragged himself towards one of the slits. As he did so, a scraping sound came to his ears. It was coming from



You would defy me...?

outside the hull. Could help be at hand? After all, this planet was in the Mantobac system. The inhabitants must be friendly to the crew of their Emperor's ship.

With hope rising in him, Avon gritted his teeth and edged painfully the last few feet to the window. Yes, there was a definite movement outside. Avon rubbed his left sleeve against the glass, clearing the condensation then his expression changed. Something rested against the glass on the outside. Was it a hand? It looked like it should have been one but there was something strange about it. Before Avon could organise his thoughts a face appeared next to the hand. Avon gagged. It all fell into place. The hand had fingers missing and the face bore little relation to a normal human face. Avon sank back, suddenly very, very tired. He had just exchanged one hell for another.



end of part I

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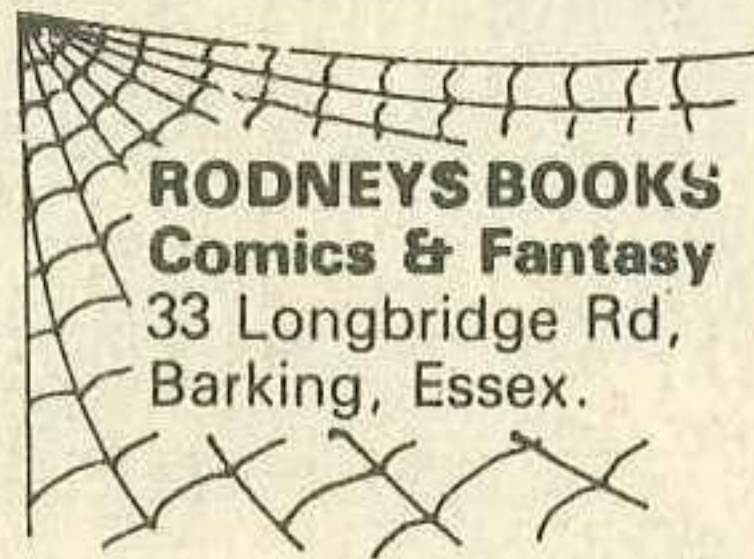
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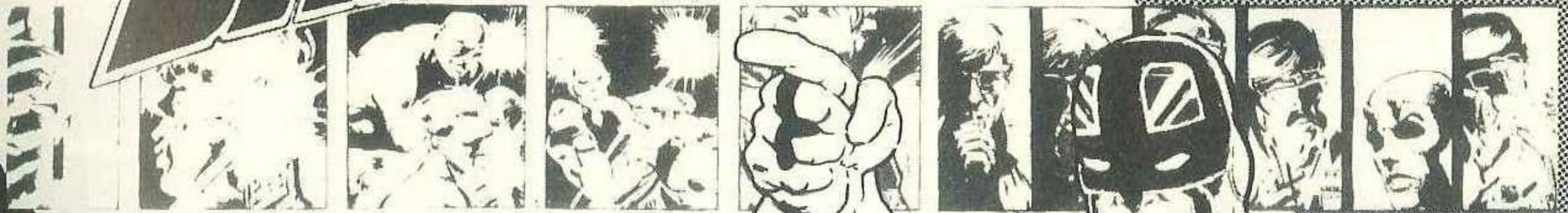
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