

Nerry Nation's

BLAKES 7

A MARVEL
MONTHLY

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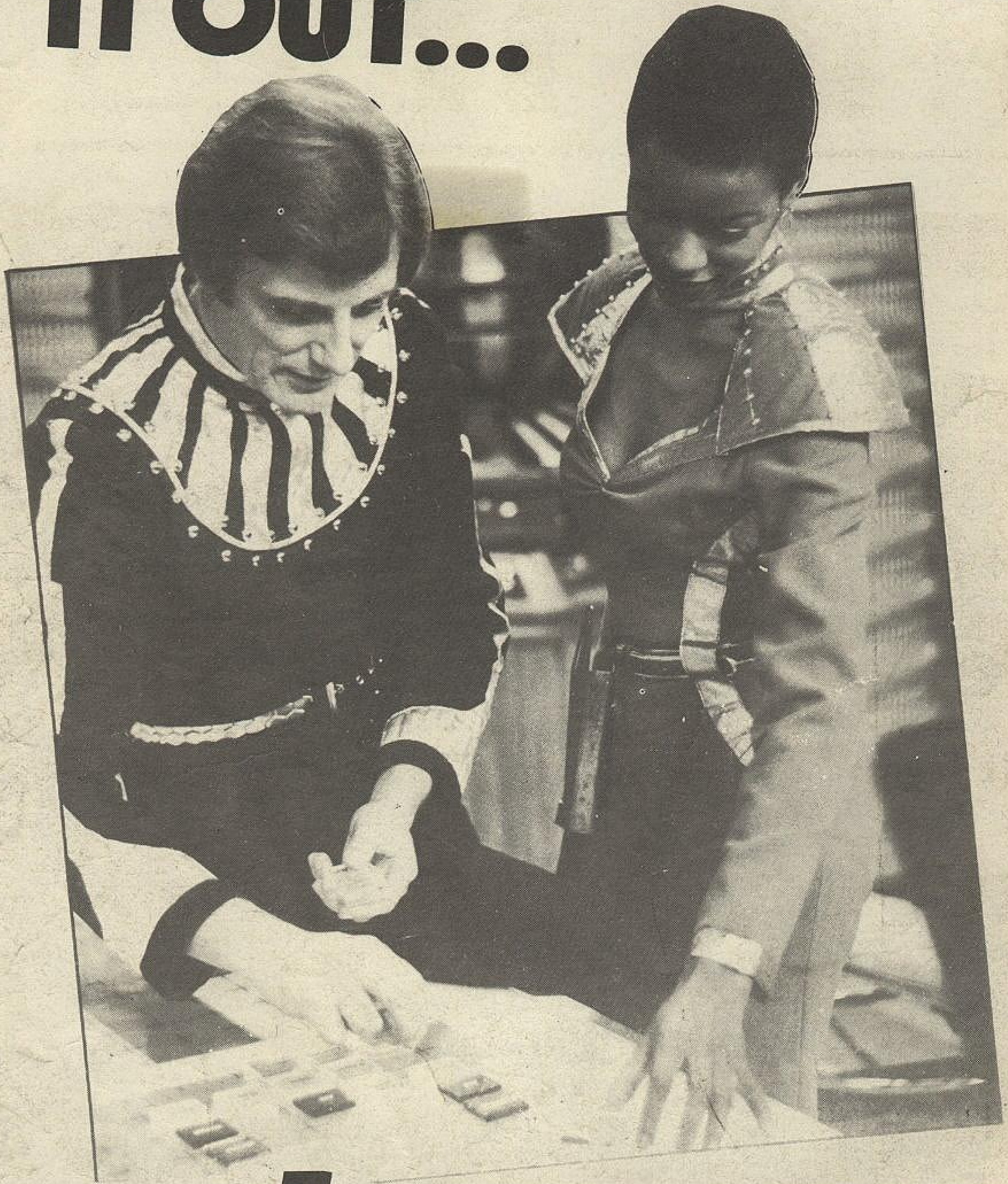
FROM SCREEN TO
MAGAZINE-YOUR
TV HEROES

**LIFE ON
THE LINE**
read
'THE TRAP'
-inside!

GARETH THOMAS-

*Exclusive interview plus pull-out
colour poster!*

AVON SPELLS IT OUT...



BLAKE'S 7 MAGAZINE IS THE BEST!

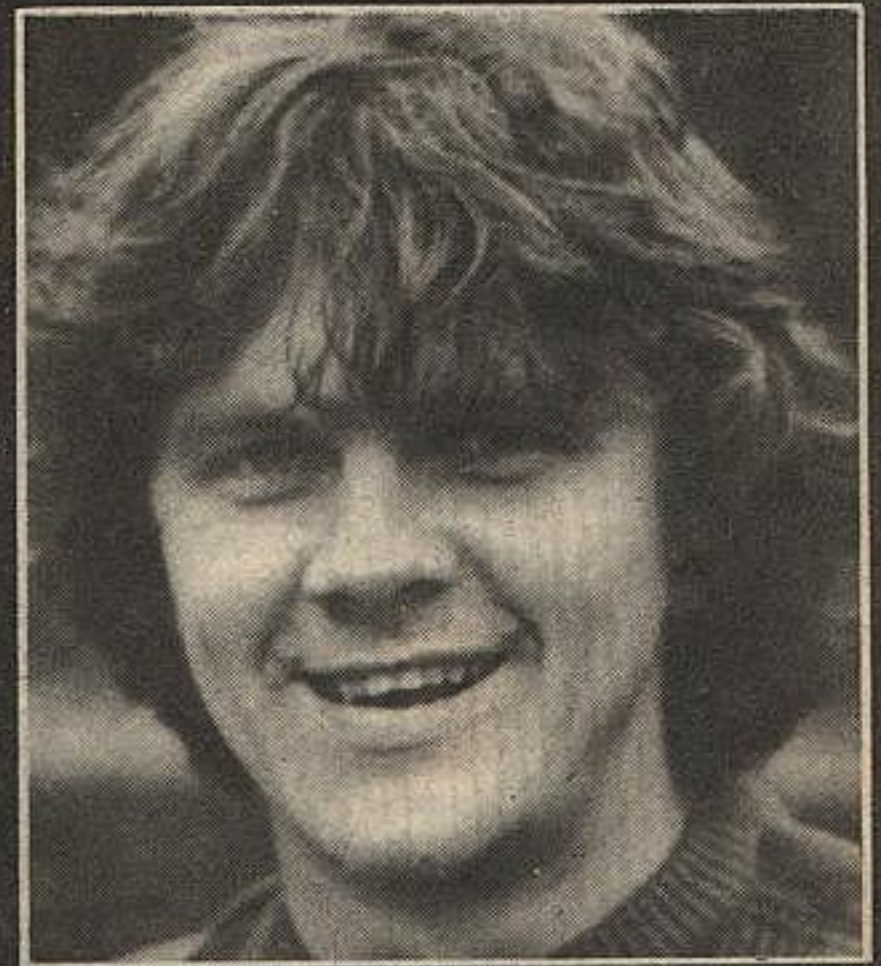
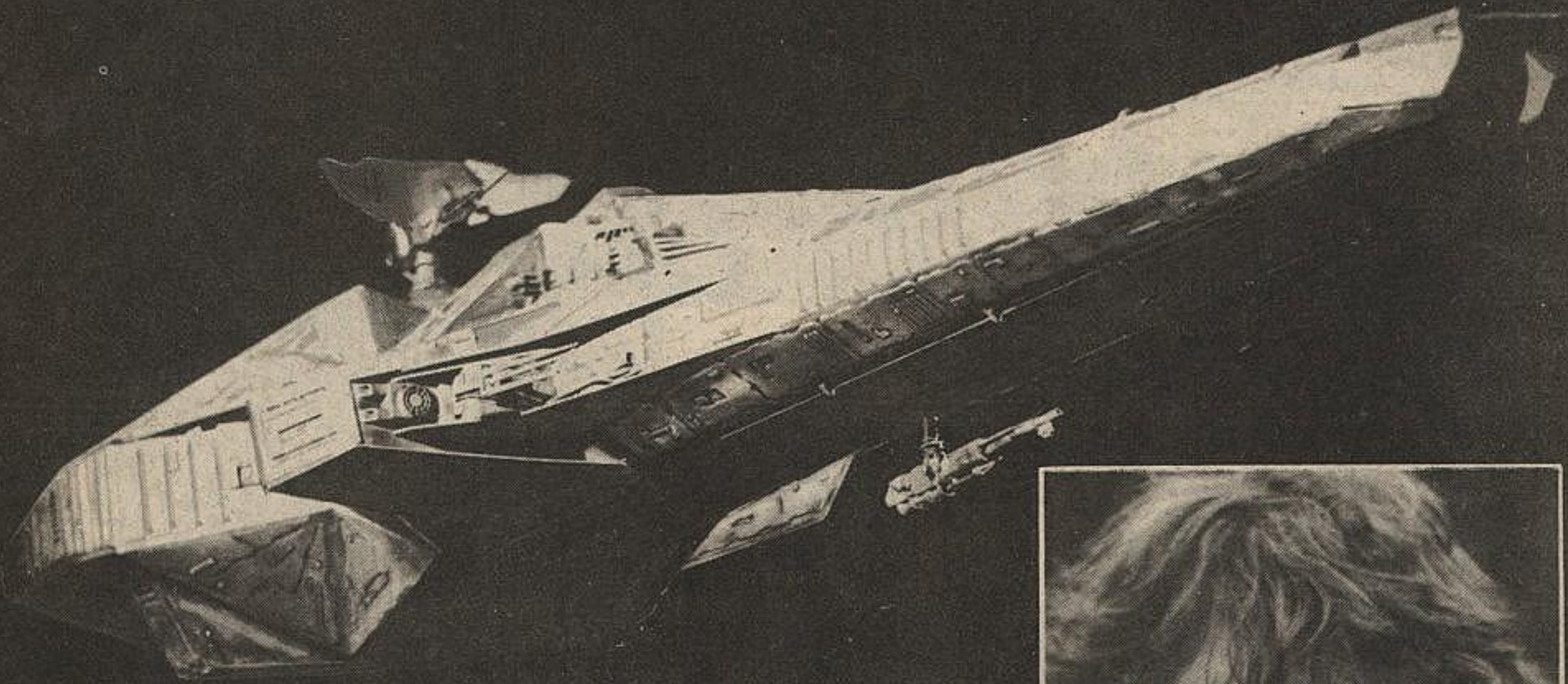
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YES...BUT

© \$1.20

WILL IT FLY?

BLAKE'S 7 Magazine looks at the work of Visual Effects designer, Jim Francis, and his team of dedicated model makers preparing and filming the super models seen in the fourth series of BLAKE'S 7.



The production of futuristic and realistic models for such series as BLAKE'S 7 is the task of the BBC Visual Effects Department. It is not enough, however, to create something unusual and interesting, it must also look to the viewer as though it is a credible image — in other words it must look as though it could really fly!

The team of model craftsmen, headed by Jim Francis, go to great lengths to not only design the right image for the spacecraft used by a particular character but also to cram as much detail on the model as possible. It must look as interesting in close-up as it does when seen flying in the distance.

Once the 'flying' model is completed and approved by the producer of the programme, the work really begins for Jim Francis and his team. Careful filming has to take place, according to script requirements, to bring the space vehicle to life.

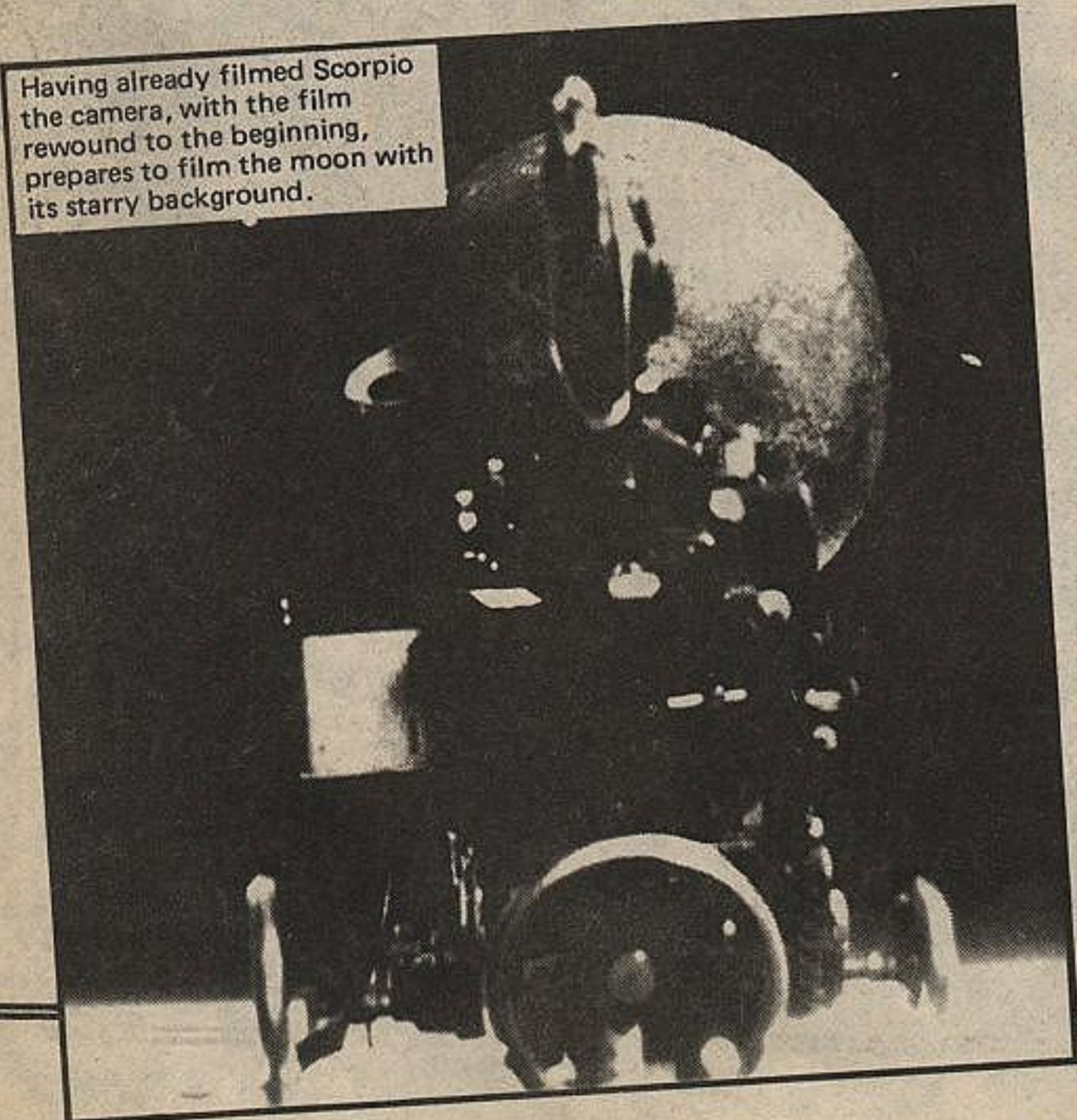


Scorpio being positioned on the black pole prior to filming. The model was so heavy it required at least two people to lift it.

Scorpio was designed with several support points in its structure to enable it to be mounted for filming either from head-on or, as seen here, from above. The supporting pole is covered with black velvet to minimise reflection from the support during filming.



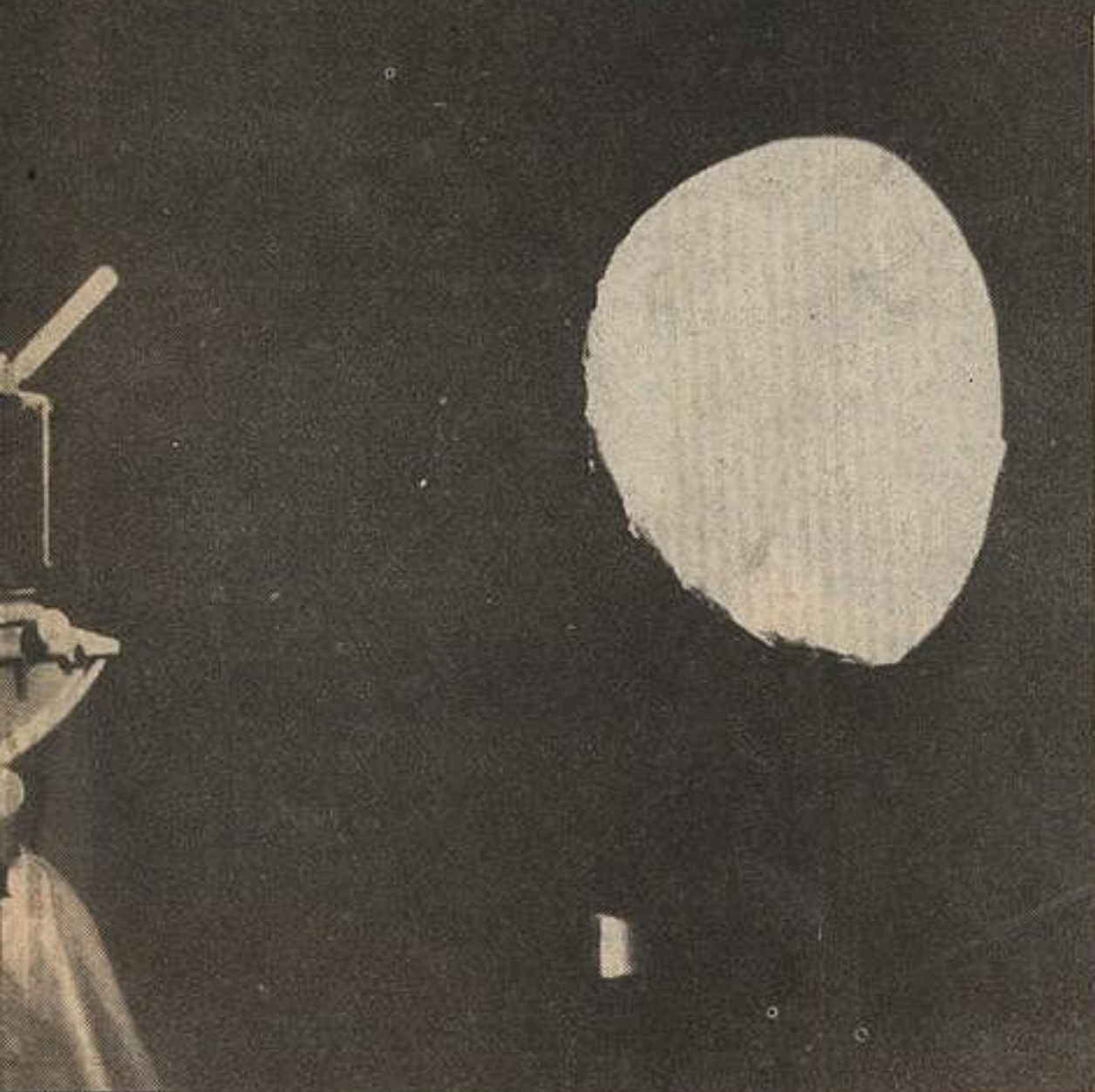
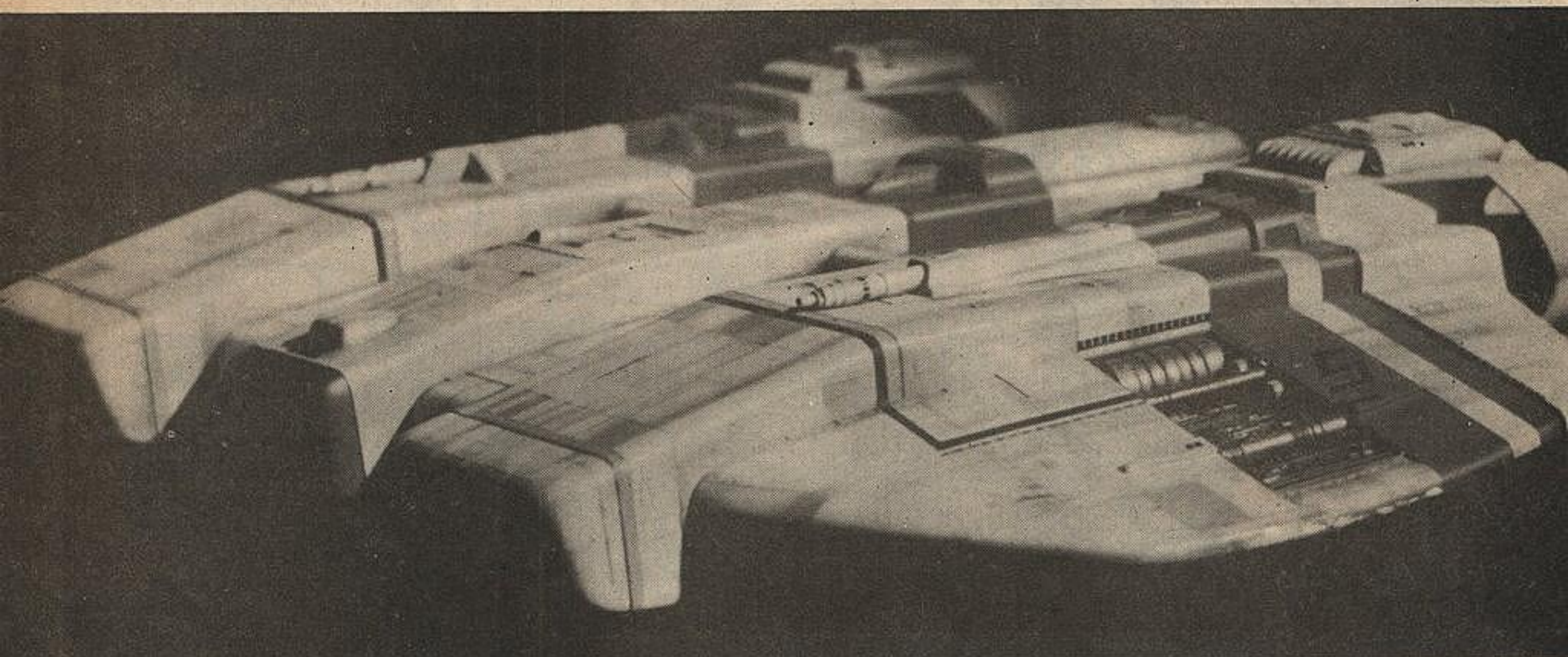
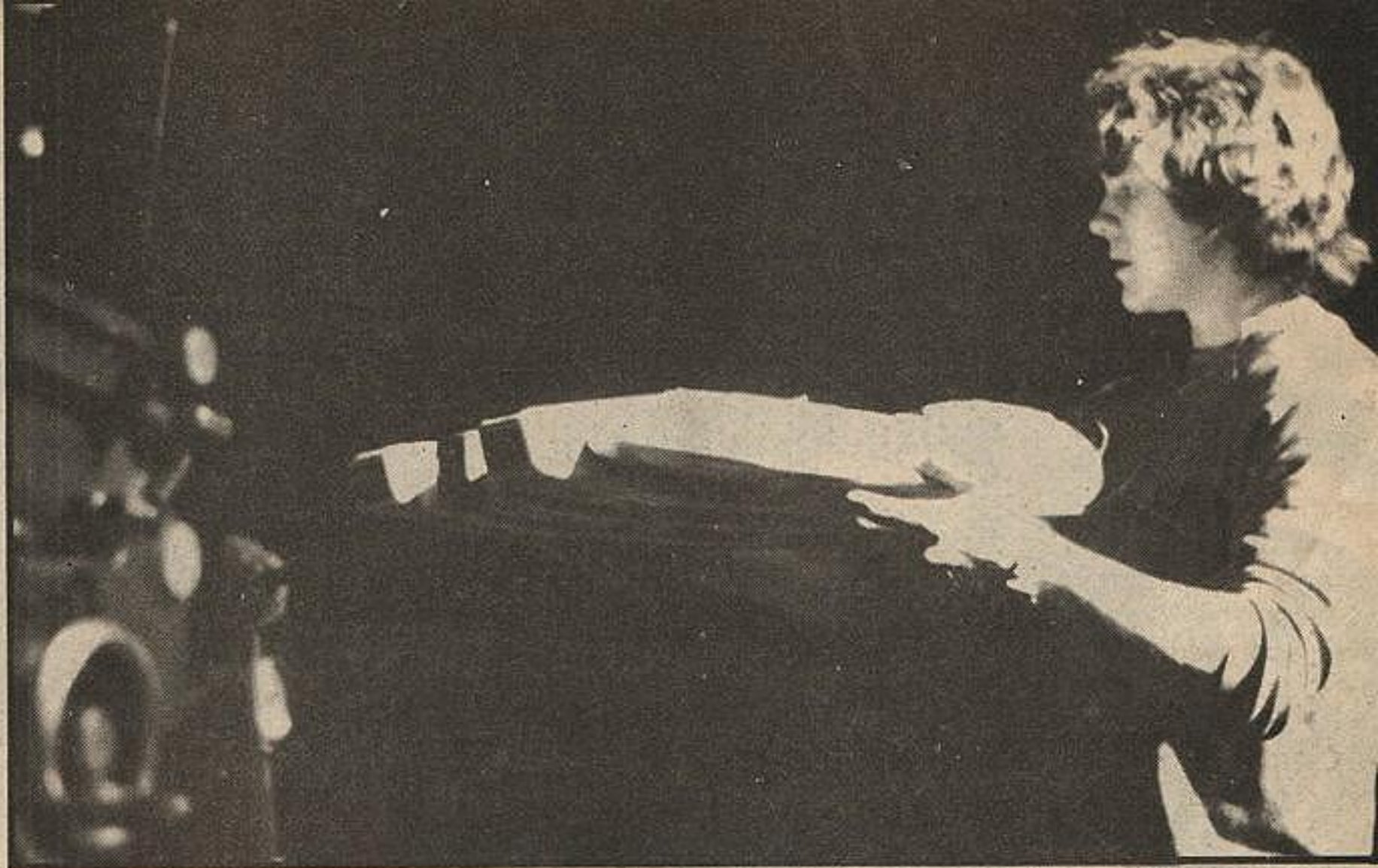
Having already filmed Scorpio the camera, with the film rewound to the beginning, prepares to film the moon with its starry background.



Model filming is an art in itself since models only a few feet in length must appear huge in comparison to the actors destined to use them. For the fourth series of BLAKE'S 7 the film studios at Ealing were used for some of the initial sequences involving Scorpio. But how is Scorpio filmed in flight? Does it whizz round the studio while a camera crew fight to keep it in the viewfinder? No — in fact, the greatest altitude attained by Scorpio was approximately four feet off the ground — but more of that later.

In a virtually black studio, a special camera is set up with a small video monitor linked into the viewfinder. The sequence to be filmed will show Scorpio streaking away from a large red moon. The first stage is to film the ship itself.

Jim Francis positions the much smaller and lighter model of Servalan's spacecraft on a side mount.

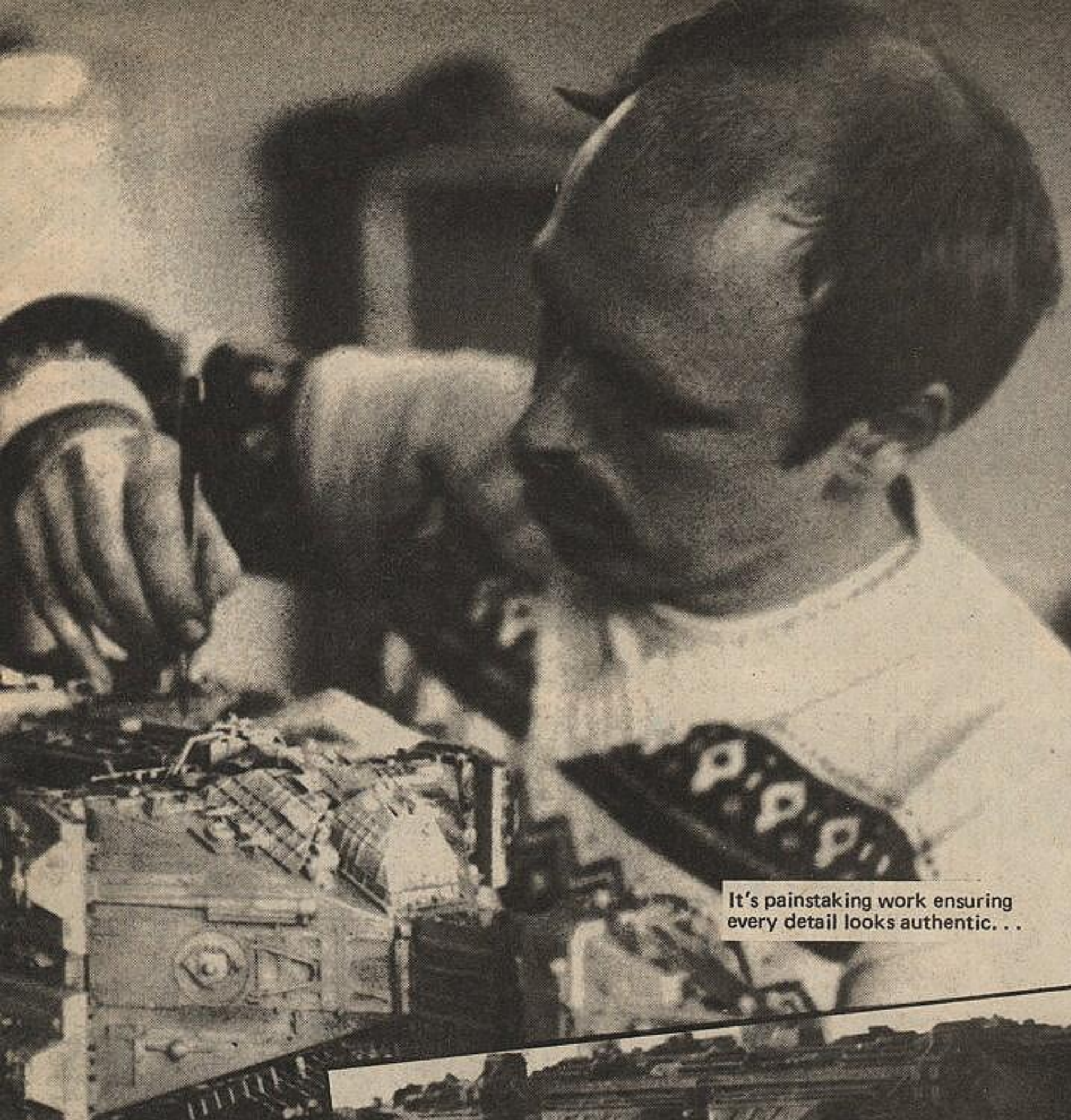


Only half of any planet is made since there is no requirement to film the planet in the 'round'. It is supported on a metal pole protruding from a black backdrop then lit to give the effect of a celestial body in space.



Detail has to be superb as the camera records the image in close-up.

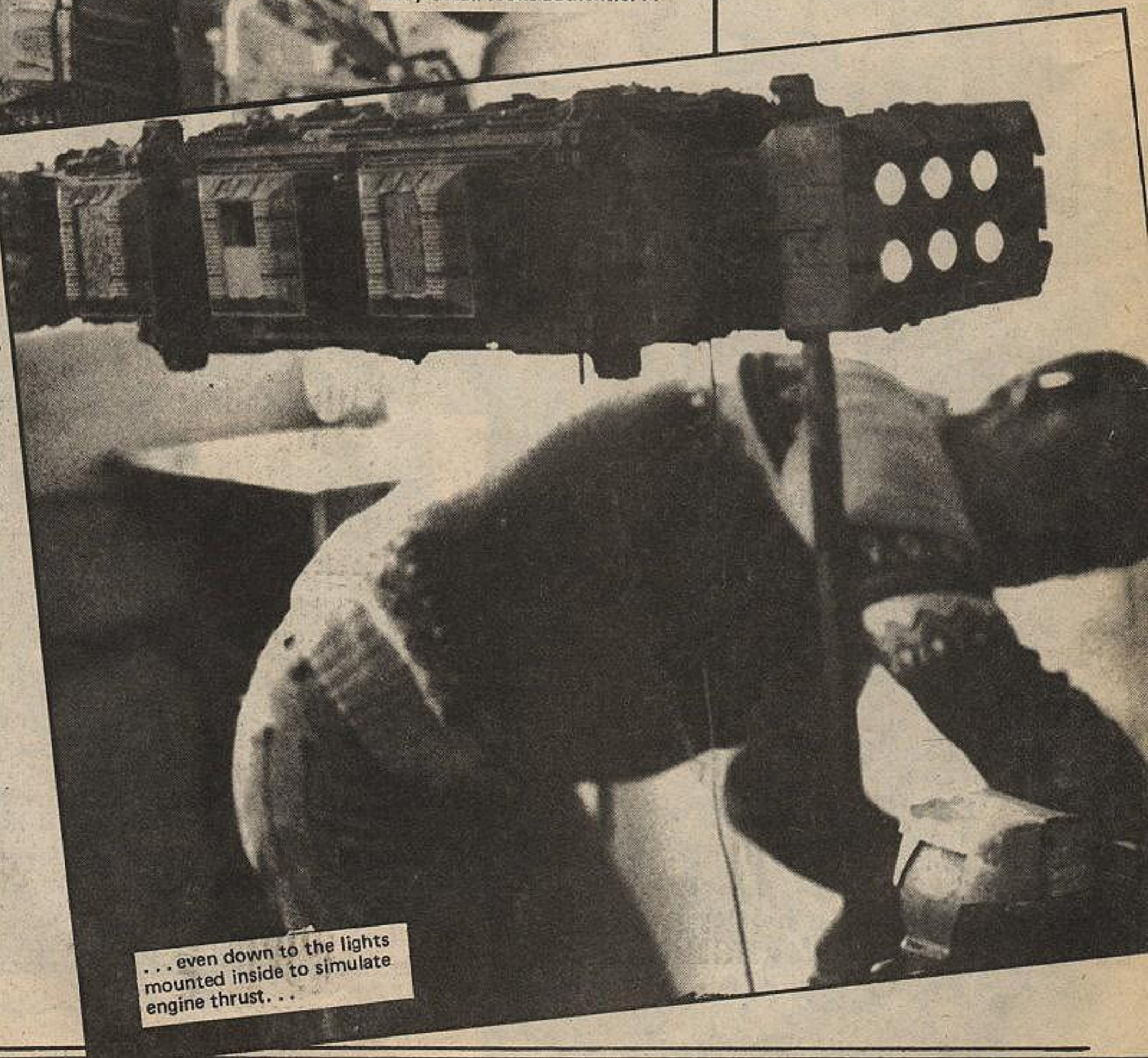
The largest scale model of Scorpio (three of them were made, each smaller than the main ship) is removed from its box and carefully positioned on a black metal arm which runs the full interior of the ship to ensure stability. The team are determined Terry Wogan will never see another "shaky spaceship" again! The camera then moves in on the ship, giving the impression of Scorpio moving towards the viewer and shooting past overhead. The track of the ship is carefully recorded on the monitor screen, ensuring the background is completely black.



It's painstaking work ensuring every detail looks authentic. . .

The next stage of the exercise is to rewind the film in the camera back to the beginning. The camera is then positioned to record the image of the planet and its starry background. As the scene is to show Scorpio moving towards the viewer from the moon, neither the camera nor the moon are required to move. The camera is switched on and runs for the exact length of time previously shot for Scorpio's movement. Care is taken to ensure Scorpio's image never overlaps that of the moon and that no stars are in Scorpio's 'flight path'.

This process of double exposure of two separately filmed images requires great skill on the part of the camera crew as well as split-second timing. The result, however, is the very real image of Scorpio whizzing past in space with the moon behind — something the viewers take for granted — but the result of painstaking work by both camera crew and model makers. Now, having seen the images on your screen, we're sure you will agree that Jim Francis and his team not only design super models . . .but they can also make them fly!



. . . even down to the lights mounted inside to simulate engine thrust. . .

In the seemingly endless wastes of space there are certain planets where no man goes willingly. Kantak was such a place . . .

THE FLYING BOMB

LOOK AT THAT LOT! IT MAKES MY FLESH CREEP JUST FLYING OVER THOSE WRECKS.

THEN PREPARE YOURSELF FOR A REAL SHUDDER, VILA. WE'RE GOING TO LAND. SELECT A SUITABLE SITE, TARRANT.



B . . . I'VE HEARD ALL KIND OF STRANGE STORIES ABOUT THIS PLACE. THERE ARE MONSTERS AND DEMONS SUPPOSED TO HAUNT THE WRECKS DOWN ON THE SURFACE. CAN'T WE JUST LEAVE AND FIND SOMEWHERE ELSE?

PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER, VILA. SCORPIO HAS TO BE REPAIRED. WE HAVE NO CHOICE!

THERE MUST BE SOME OTHER WAY . . . ?

POSSIBLE MATCHING CRAFT LOCATED AT BEARING TWO-SEVEN - FIVE. THERE IS SEMI-OPEN GROUND LOCATED FOUR-HUNDRED METRES WEST OF THAT SITE.

ORAC'S FOUND WHAT WE'RE AFTER, AVON. STARTING APPROACH NOW.

LANDING POSITIONS, EVERYONE. THIS COULD BE ROUGH.

STEADY AS YOU CAN, TARRANT. WE'RE NOT CERTAIN OF DAMAGE TO THE SHIP YET.

COME ON, VILA. WE'LL LOOK AFTER YOU.

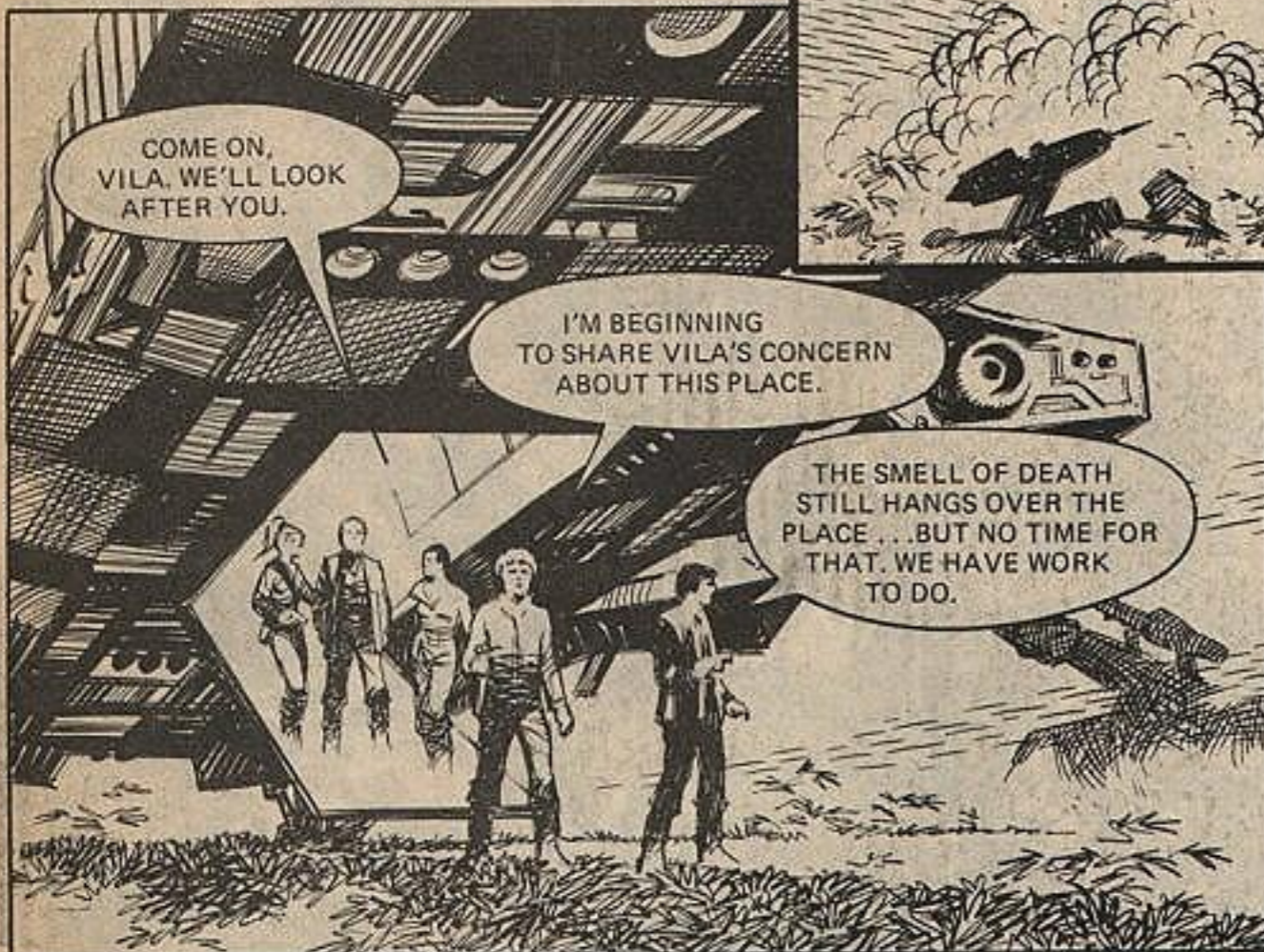
I'M BEGINNING TO SHARE VILA'S CONCERN ABOUT THIS PLACE.

THE SMELL OF DEATH STILL HANGS OVER THE PLACE . . . BUT NO TIME FOR THAT. WE HAVE WORK TO DO.

SO MANY WRECKS. WHAT IS THIS PLACE? A SPACE JUNKYARD?

MORE LIKE A GRAVEYARD. HAVE YOU HEARD OF EARTH'S BERMUDA TRIANGLE? THE PLACE WHERE SHIPS VANISH MYSTERIOUSLY.

Y . . . YOU MEAN WE'LL NEVER LEAVE THIS PLACE?



DON'T BE STUPID. SHIPS ENDED
HERE BECAUSE OF A STRANGE MAGNETIC
ATTRACTION SOMEWHERE IN THE PLANET'S
CORE. AVON RIGGED SOMETHING IN SCORPIO TO
COUNTERACT THE EFFECT. WE'RE OKAY HERE...FOR
A WHILE AT LEAST. DO AS AVON SAID AND KEEP
YOUR BRACELET ON. IT'S LINKED TO THE
SYSTEM.

GREAT! AND WHAT IF
I LOSE MINE? DO I STAY HERE
FOREVER?

A TEMPTING
THOUGHT,
VILA...

That instant...

AHHHHHRRGHHH...!
T...TARRANT...!

GET BACK,
VILA!

BUT I NEED YOU FOR THE
MOMENT. HELP TARRANT LOCATE
THE PIECES WE NEED FOR SCORPIO'S
REPAIR. DAYNA AND SOOLIN...
YOU STAND GUARD.

I'LL TAKE FIRST WATCH
ON THE SHIP. AFTER ALL, THOSE
FEDERATION PATROL CRAFT WHICH
ATTACKED US MAY STILL BE ON
OUR TRAIL.

MIND TELLING
ME WHAT WE'RE LOOKING
FOR, TARRANT?

A BETA CONDENSING PANEL.
ORAC LOCATED ONE SOMEWHERE
ON THIS WRECK. IT SHOULD BE AROUND
HERE SOMEWHERE.

HUH! NOTHING TO WORRY
ABOUT, VILA. JUST THE REMAINS
OF ONE OF THE SHIP'S CREW. HE MUST
BEEN TRAPPED WHEN THE
SHIP CRASHED.

I... I'M GETTING OUT
OF HERE!

YOU'RE GOING NOWHERE
WE'VE A JOB TO DO... NOW NO
MORE NONSENSE! ANOTHER FALSE
ALARM AND I'LL MAKE YOU
REGRET IT!

T...T...TARRANT
...B...BE...BEHIND
YOU!

I WARNED YOU,
VILA...!

N...NO JOKE...!
I MEAN IT, TARRANT!
LOOK OUT...!



UHHH? JEEZ ...!

AVON ...! HELP! FOR PITY'S SAKE ...!



AHHHIEEE ...! V ... VILA ... DO SOMETHING!

I ... I'M TRYING!

Just then ...



NNNFFFF ...!

UHH? DID I DO THAT ...?



NO, VILA. YOU NEVER DO!

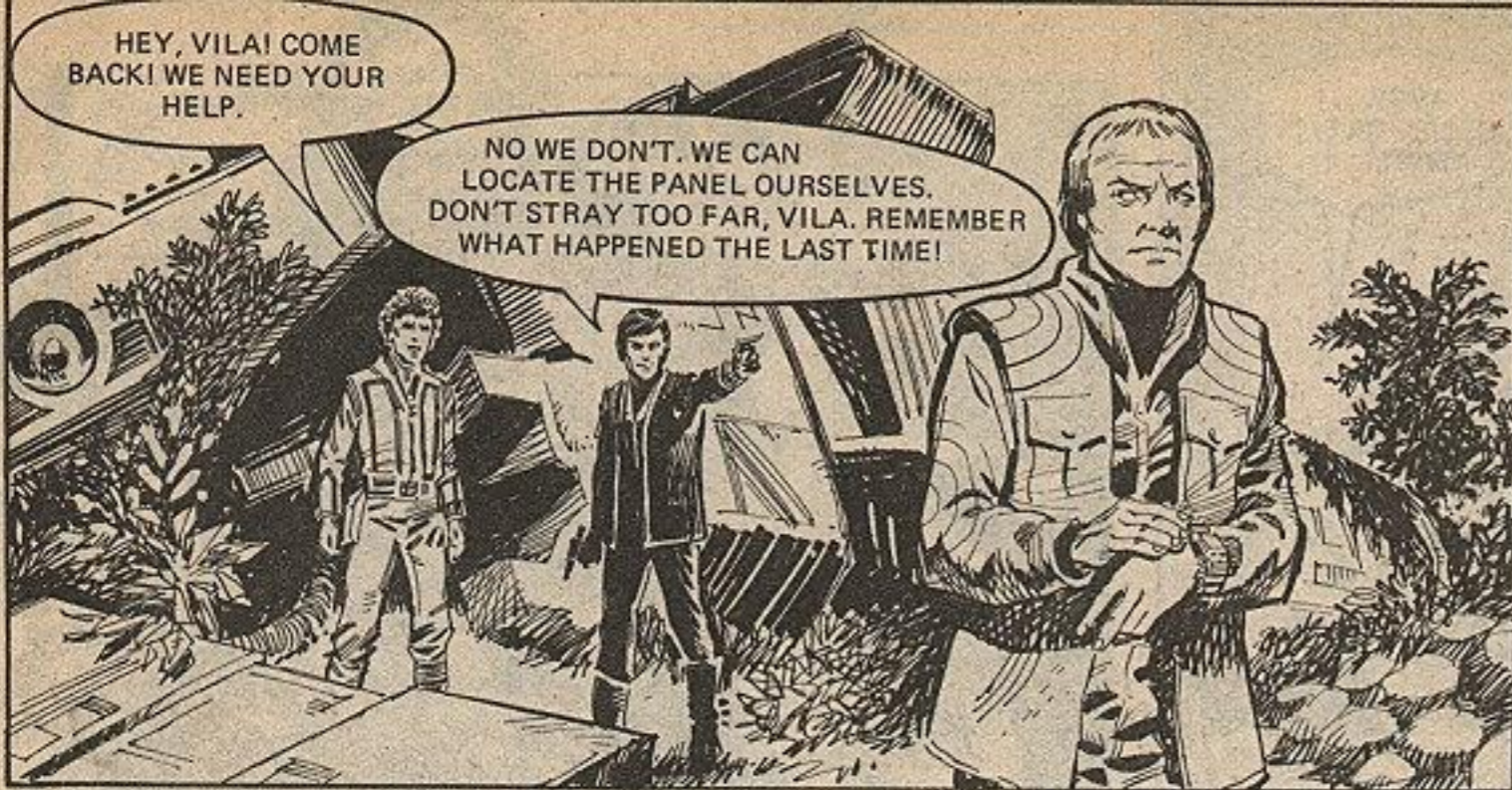
TH ... THANKS, AVON. I WAS NEARLY FINISHED THERE. IF IT HAD BEEN UP TO VILA ...

I ... I DON'T UNDERSTAND. I ... I PRESSED THE TRIGGER ... I THINK ...



PERHAPS YOU DID, VILA ... BUT WITHOUT YOUR BRACELET NOTHING WOULD HAPPEN. DID I NOT TELL YOU TO KEEP IT ON AT ALL TIMES TO COUNTERACT THE NATURAL EFFECTS OF THIS PLANET?

UHH? THIS WHOLE PLACE IS WEIRD! I'M GETTING OUT. YOU CAN FIND THE PANEL YOURSELVES!



HEY, VILA! COME BACK! WE NEED YOUR HELP.

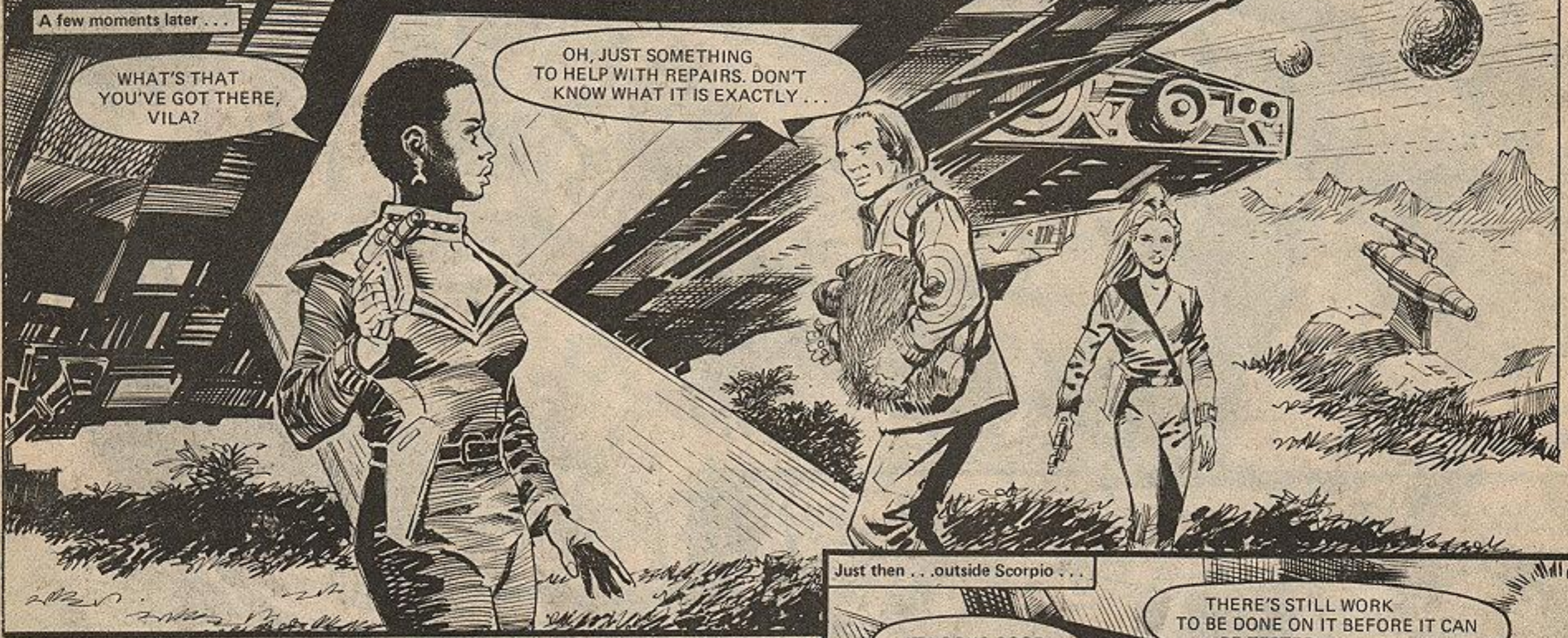
NO WE DON'T. WE CAN LOCATE THE PANEL OURSELVES. DON'T STRAY TOO FAR, VILA. REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED THE LAST TIME!



WHY IS IT ALWAYS ME WHO'S MADE TO LOOK THE FOOL? I'M JUST AS GOOD AS AVON ANY DAY... AND I'M A BETTER CROOK! UH...? WHAT'S THIS I'M SITTING ON?



GOOD GRIEF! KRYTOMITE LIQUID! JUST A TINY PORTION OF THAT IS WORTH OVER FIFTY-THOUSAND CREDITS! THIS LOT IS WORTH MILLIONS! I WONDER...



A few moments later...

WHAT'S THAT YOU'VE GOT THERE, VILA?

OH, JUST SOMETHING TO HELP WITH REPAIRS. DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS EXACTLY...



Deep in the heart of Scorpio...

THERE! THE KRYTOMITE WILL BE SAFE THERE UNTIL I FIND A BUYER RICH ENOUGH TO PAY FOR IT. I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE AVON'S FACE WHEN HE DISCOVERS I'M WORTH MILLIONS!

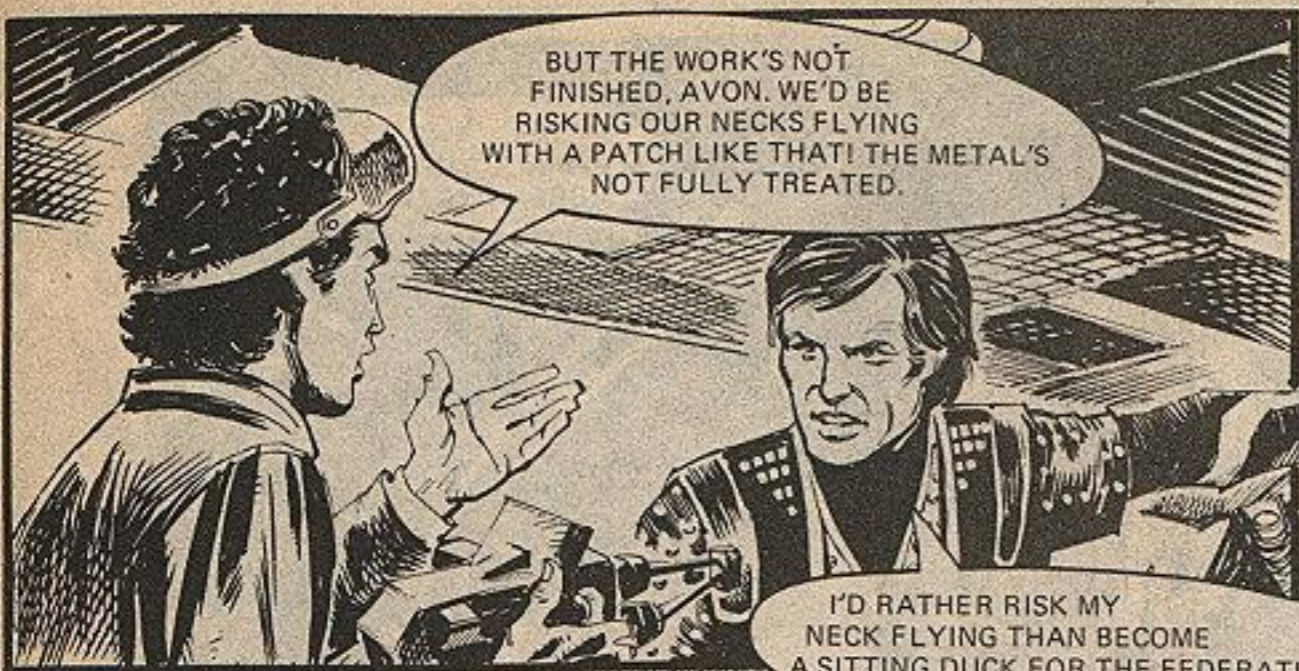


Just then... outside Scorpio...

IT LOOKS GOOD, TARRANT.

THERE'S STILL WORK TO BE DONE ON IT BEFORE IT CAN BE TESTED.

NO TIME FOR THAT! SOOLIN'S SPOTTED TWO FEDERATION PATROL SHIPS HEADING THIS WAY. WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT FAST!



BUT THE WORK'S NOT FINISHED, AVON. WE'D BE RISKING OUR NECKS FLYING WITH A PATCH LIKE THAT! THE METAL'S NOT FULLY TREATED.

I'D RATHER RISK MY NECK FLYING THAN BECOME A SITTING DUCK FOR THE FEDERATION. MOVE IT!



FEDERATION SHIPS BEARING FOUR THOUSAND. RANGE TWO SPACIALS AND CLOSING.

THEIR SENSORS HAVE LOCATED US. FULL POWER, TARRANT!



That instant . . .

IT'S THE REBELS, CAPTAIN! WE'VE GOT THEM!

NO YET, MURTA . . . BUT SOON! INITIATE LASER SEQUENCE WITH THE OTHER PATROL SHIP.



WE'RE UNDER ATTACK! PREPARE TO RETURN FIRE!

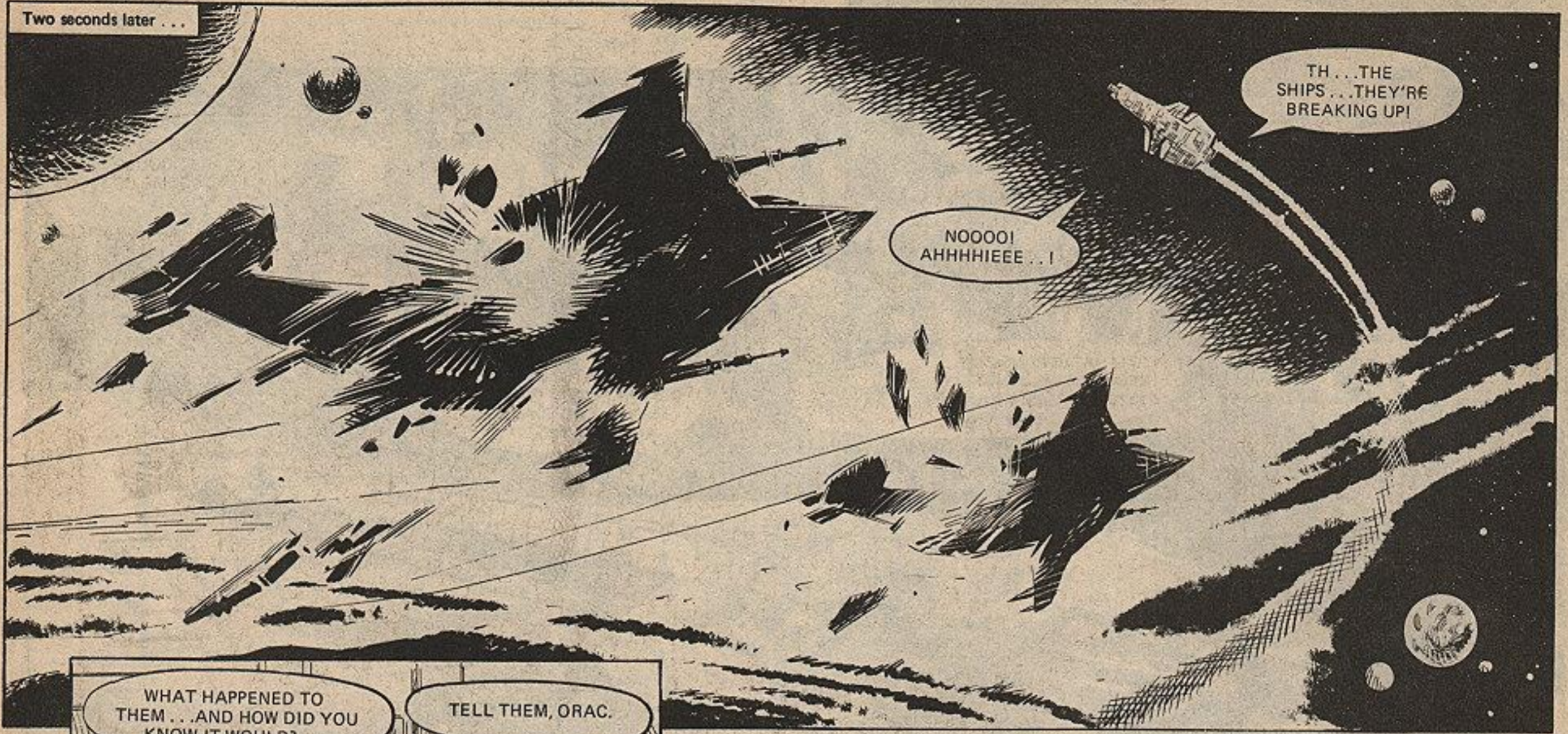
THAT'S MADNESS, AVON! THEY'VE ALREADY DAMAGED US. ANOTHER HIT WILL BE FATAL!

SOMEHOW I DON'T THINK THEY'LL HAVE ANOTHER CHANCE TO FIRE, TARRANT. LET'S WATCH THEM, SHALL WE?

NO, TARRANT! SAVE OUR POWER FOR ENGINE TRUST . . . AND THAT'S AN ORDER!



Two seconds later ...



TH...THE SHIPS...THEY'RE BREAKING UP!

NOOOO! AHHHHIEEE...!



WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM... AND HOW DID YOU KNOW IT WOULD?

TELL THEM, ORAC.

SIMPLE. ALL NORMAL METALS EXPOSED TO THE ATMOSPHERE OF KANTAK DISINTEGRATE AS SOON AS EXPOSED TO THE VACUUM OF SPACE... UNLESS THEY ARE PROTECTED AS WE WERE WITH THE SYSTEM DEVISED BY AVON AND MYSELF.



METALS DISINTEGRATE...?

AN ALARM SOUNDING IN CARGO SECTION KILO. DON'T KNOW WHAT IT CAN BE.

LET'S GO AND CHECK, SHALL WE?



ER, AVON... THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT TO TALK ABOUT...

AVON... HELP! H... HELP...

DAYNA... WHAT IS IT? TELL ME...!



DAYNA AND SOOLIN... THEY'RE UNCONSCIOUS! COME ON... HELP THEM!

AVON... I WAS TRYING TO TELL YOU...

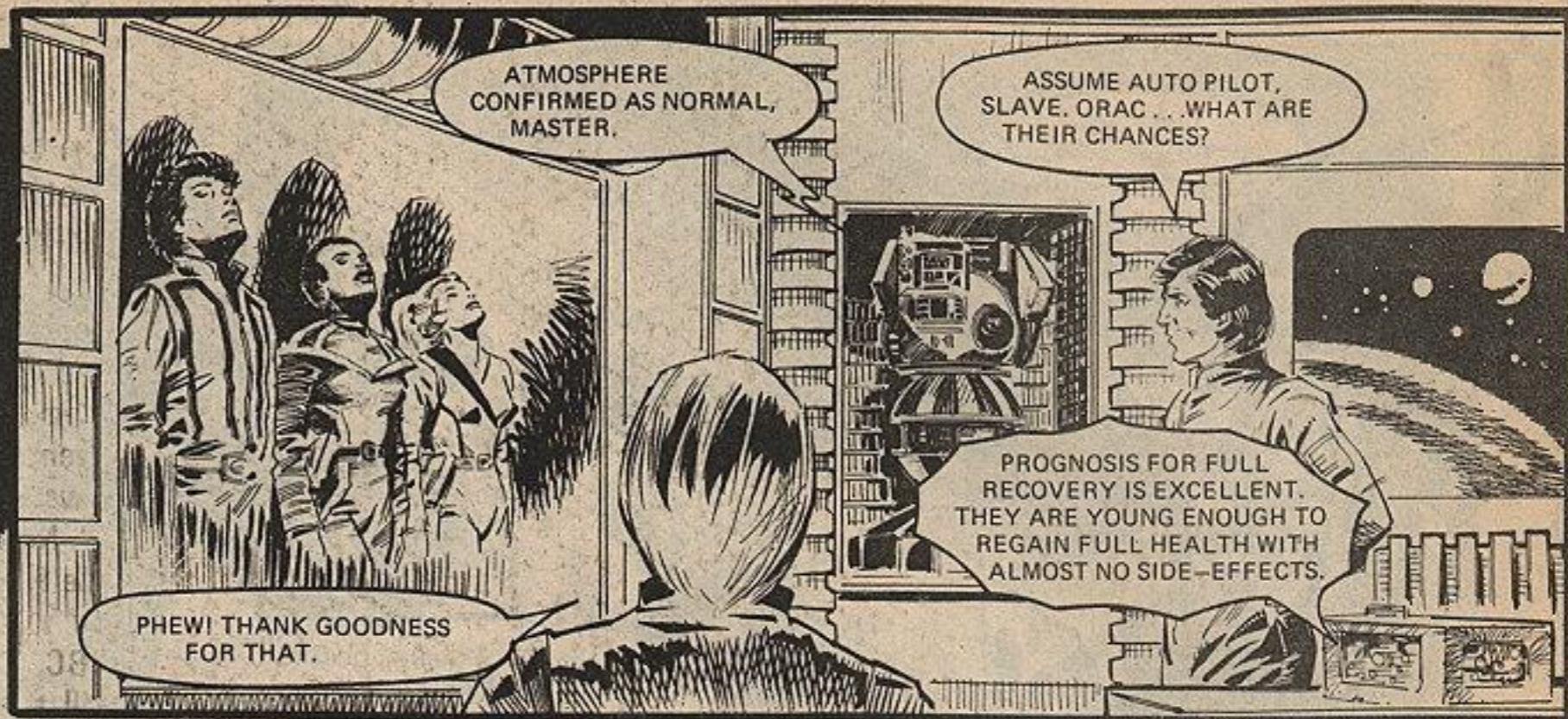
SHUT UP, VILAI!





ENGINES CLOSED—DOWN AND COLD, MASTER.

THANK YOU, SLAVE. MONITOR VENTING AND CONFIRM WHEN ALL KRYTOMITE HAS BEEN DISCHARGED.



ATMOSPHERE CONFIRMED AS NORMAL, MASTER.

ASSUME AUTO PILOT, SLAVE. ORAC... WHAT ARE THEIR CHANCES?

PROGNOSIS FOR FULL RECOVERY IS EXCELLENT. THEY ARE YOUNG ENOUGH TO REGAIN FULL HEALTH WITH ALMOST NO SIDE-EFFECTS.

PHEW! THANK GOODNESS FOR THAT.



PITY MY SCHEME DIDN'T WORK, THOUGH. I'D HAVE BEEN A VERY RICH MAN. I MIGHT HAVE EVEN SOLD THE STUFF TO THE FEDERATION. THEY'RE DESPERATE FOR KRYTOMITE.



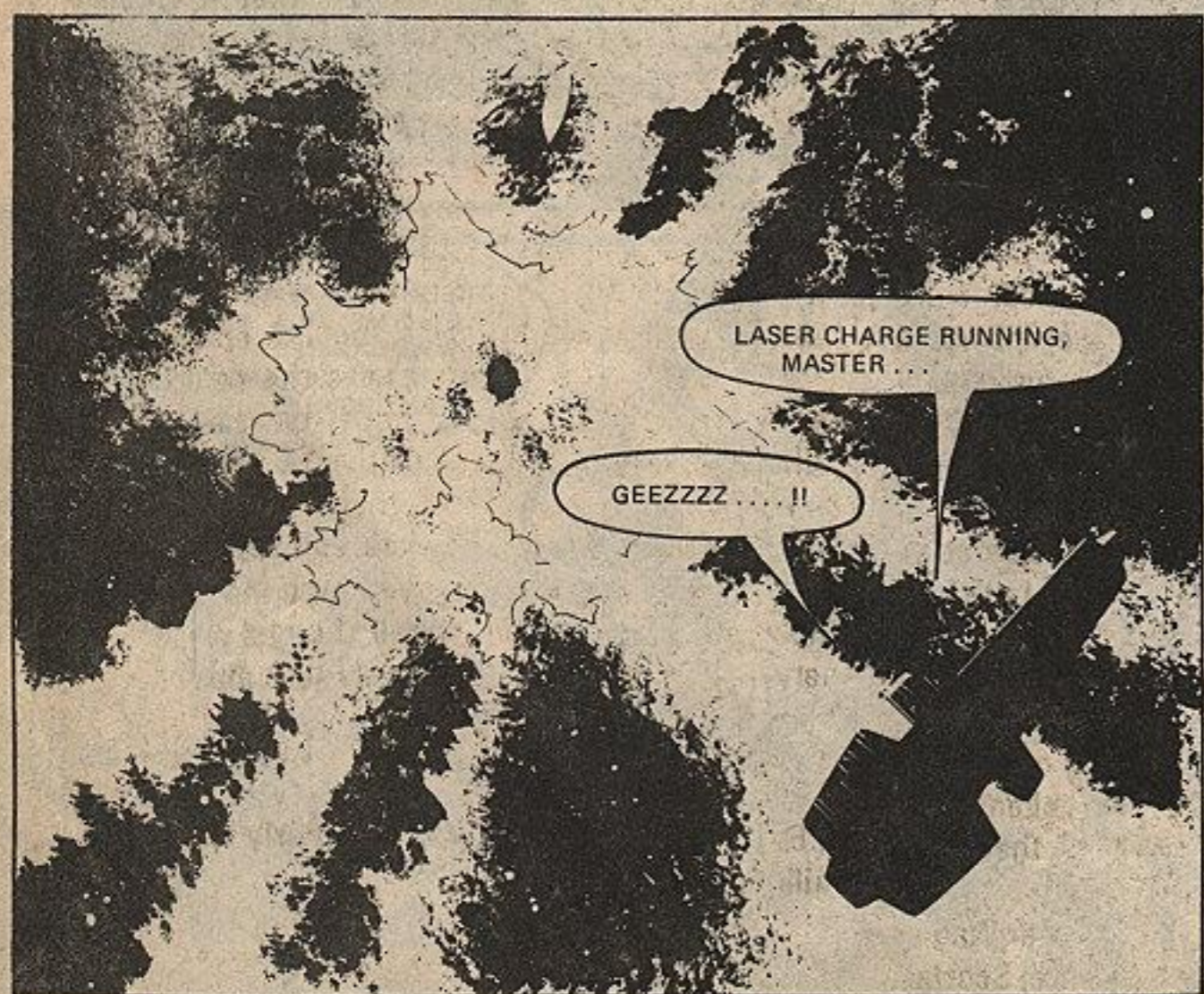
AND DO YOU KNOW WHY, VILA? HAVE YOU EVER SEEN WHAT KRYTOMITE CAN DO?



CAN'T SAY I HAVE... BUT I HEAR IT'S HOT STUFF. SHY? WHY WHAT HAVE YOU IN MIND?

SLAVE, COMPUTE OPTIMUM SAFE DISTANCE THEN LAUNCH SMALL LASER CHARGE TOWARDS KATAK.

When Avon had recovered control of the pitching ship...



LASER CHARGE RUNNING, MASTER...

GEEZZZ...!!



IT... IT'S GONE... THE ENTIRE PLANET! DID THE KRYTOMITE DO THAT?

JUST ONE, TINY SPARK... THAT'S ALL IT NEEDED. AND THAT'S WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO SCORPIO! REMEMBER THAT THE NEXT TIME YOU THINK ABOUT TURNING US INTO A FLYING BOMB!

MORE feedback from all you readers on the magazine. Let's hear from you. . . your views, ideas, reactions to the stories, etc. Here are a few letters from our over-flowing postbag. . .

CONGRATULATIONS on your magazine. . . it really is value for money and contains varied and interesting features. I myself am most interested in the art side of the magazine. At the moment I am studying for O level art, and I hope to go on to A level, and eventually perhaps, a degree at college. I intend to concentrate in the graphic design areas of art. Being a fan of the series and interested in this particular field, I wrote to the graphic designer of the "Blake's Seven" series, who most unfortunately, and totally unknown to myself, had died earlier in the year. I was wondering if Mr. McGowan had any advice or tips he could pass on to me, based on his personal experience. If he could, I would be most grateful.

Miss Joanne Scott,
Poole, Dorset.

*Over to you, Bern. . . what have you got to say?
Bernard McGowan: Practice, practice, practice!*

AM I holding on to the forlorn hope that the Blake's Seven crew were shot with tranquillisers of some sort and may yet be alive? Or must I accept that they are dead and that I can no longer look forward to the best ever TV series produced by the BBC? If the series really is dead, how could anyone commit such an outrageous and criminal act as to axe such a series? I am speaking for many fans in saying I would like to line up whoever is responsible against a wall and shoot them, or worse. Even if there was a just reason for the end of Blake's Seven, what happened to Servalan at the end? If this is the end does it mean that the days of our favourite magazine are also numbered. That would be too much to bear — not even seeing pictures of our beloved heroes!

Chris Bevan,
Basildon, Essex.

I REALISE that you don't have any official letters page in your otherwise highly entertaining magazine (Editor — Eh? What's this, then?) but after the "Blake's Seven" episode in December, questions must be asked, things must be said. Good Heavens! Blake, the almost mythical hero of the series with his guts all over the floor. Dayna shot by another woman! Vila, good old cowardly but wonderful Vila, dead? Even the handsome Tarrant and the beautiful Soolin blasted by the Federation? The questions one must ask are: 1. Is this the end? 2. Where is Servalan? Shouldn't she be in on Avon's demise? 3. Where is the amazing Orac? He suddenly disappeared during the closing stages. 4. Can the writing team really let the Federation win and our gallant seven (six) lose not only the war but their lives. Personally, I hope to see more.

Peter Wadley,
Ayrshire, Scotland

So, the secret is out. After chasing Servalan and the Federation around space for 4 years it seems Avon was tricked — he should have been fighting the Corporation, who seemed to have been aided by Blake himself.

Now that the dust has settled, a little, over the final episode, I and my family are intrigued by what can only be described as 'The Great BBC Mystery'. Why should the BBC want to kill them all, and then keep so quiet about it? Normally the BBC drop various hints about a series ending, but I do not recall any such hint being dropped about this one.

Could it be that Paul Darrow or the rest of the crew has had enough of the programme after 4 years? Or possibly the BBC think the series has waned in popularity? (I hardly think this could be the case). Maybe the series became too expensive to produce? I really can't believe this to be so, otherwise why would the BBC pay out for new ships, costumes etc. and also take on an extra crew member (Soolin) for the last series? Could it be that it was a British production and they do seem to prefer to buy American.

Perhaps, and maybe this could be the answer, someone very high up in the Corporation did not like the programme, and had their own reason for ending it.

Whatever the answer, I should like to know, and was hoping you could throw some light on this mystery. I hope you don't mind me asking you these questions as I have written to the Radio Times, but can only get the standard reply about passing my comments on to the appropriate department.

I am also asking you as you had more contact with the cast than the rest of us. When you interviewed them, did they have any idea this was to have been the last series? The final episode was so out of character, that it was almost as if the decision to kill them came 5 minutes before the end of filming.

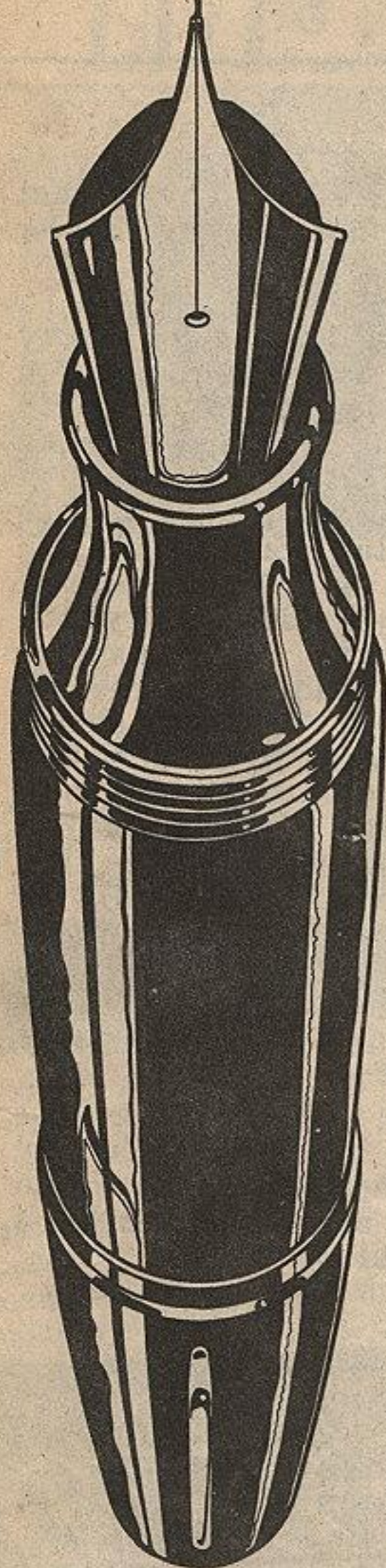
If this is to be the end of the Scorpio crew, surely we could have seen Avon achieve that which he wanted so badly — namely to kill Servalan. Perhaps you could find something out for the Blake's 7 addicts who were left as stunned as my family after the last episode.

If we are to have no new series to look forward to, can we at least hope that the BBC will repeat some, if not all of the old episodes?

I would just like to add, thank you for the Blake's 7 magazines. They are enjoyed by all my family. Especially enjoyed was the story 'Blood on his Hands' — we all thought what a marvellous TV episode this would have made!!!

Ann Bown
Hampshire

N.B. Blake's Seven was viewed regularly by nine million people.



BLAKES 7

POINTS
OF
VIEW

BLAZES 7 BOOK REVIEW



STAR STORMERS 1 and STAR STORMERS 2 "SUNBURST" by Nicholas Fisk. Published by Knight Books, both at 85p.

TWO for the youngest readers, perhaps . . . but none the less good for that. The first of these books is referred to as the first story in the Starstormer Saga, and we gather that the third of these novels is even now on sale, although we haven't seen it. The No. 1 story involves the four kids — Vawn, Ispex, Tsu and Makenzi — making their own spaceship and . . . what's that? Sounds ridiculous? Then you've got a surprise coming! Things have moved on a lot in junior SF stories. There are no cobbled-together dustbins in this one. Their homemade spaceship "Starstormer" is a really original concept and is superbly well thought out. The author even includes a drawing of it. Once in space,

the kids' task is to find their parents, who are working to establish a new settlement on a distant planet. But, just as everything is going smoothly, the Starstormers encounter the Glory Ark, an early emigrant ship whose passengers seem to worship their captain as a god. And there IS something strange about him. . . Is there any connection with the terrifying stories the children have heard about the "Octopus Emperor", a ferocious space pirate who seizes starships for his own sinister ends?

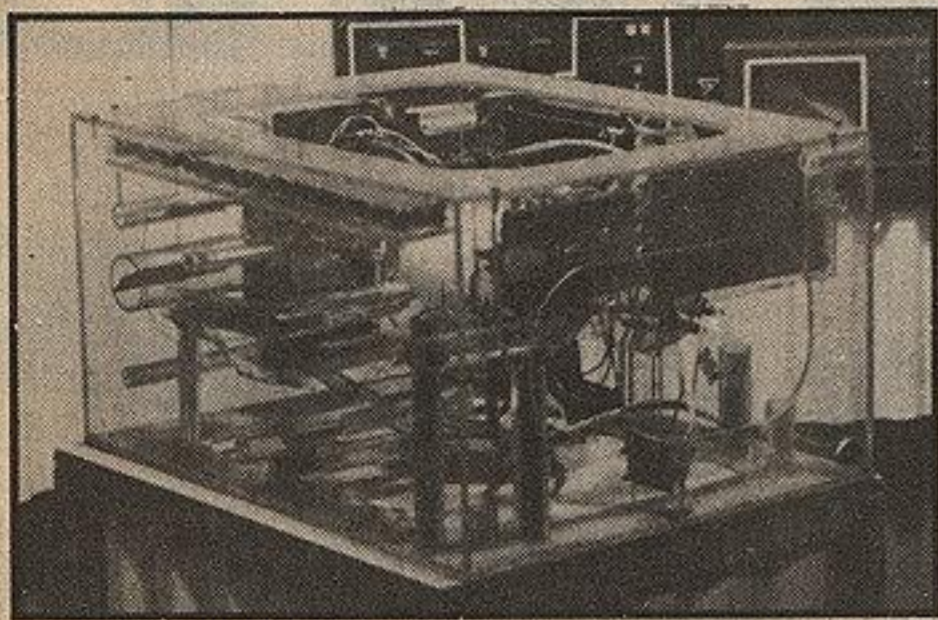
In the second book the same team are threatened by a new danger when they find an abandoned spacecraft bearing the message "Plague ship . . . Keep away!" The twist is that the ship may contain equipment that they vitally need to complete their own journey. Two good ones . . . look forward to reading the third!

SPACE 2 — Edited by Richard Davis. Published by Beaver Books at 85p.

IF you're looking for variety in your SF reading, you can hardly do better than this collection of nine stories, some of them by the biggest names in the genre. . . Brian Aldiss, Ray Bradbury and Ken Bulmer are all represented. Bradbury's story is a wry little joke about what happens when a baby is born into another DIMENSION. Meddling scientists figure in several other stories, too — a fearsome fate awaits the investigator of "The Living Fossil" by Tim Stout, while "Project D" by Frances Stephens describes the ultimate nightmare — the destruction of the universe itself. In "The Harmony Aggro" by Pamela Cleaver, Lemnian teenagers seek a release from 23rd century boredom in a bit of good old 1970's aggro. Definitely a good read.



ASK



ORAC

THIS is your big opportunity to put your question to the super-computer. Ask Orac anything you like . . . and see if he can come up with an answer.

How can you think for yourself if you are a computer? asks Steven Smith of Littleover, Derby.

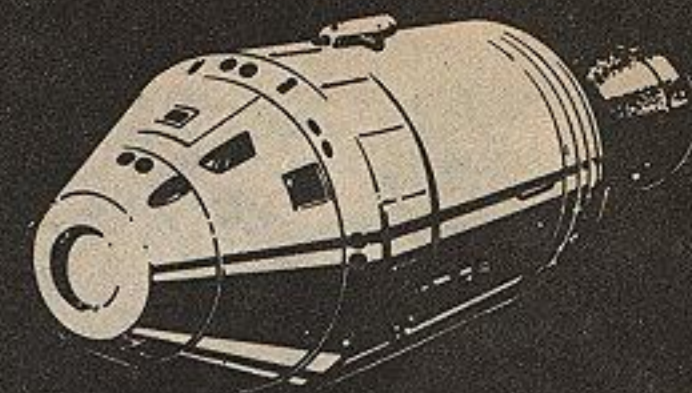
Orac is no ordinary computer. Imagine the most complex computer known to your age and multiply its capacities by the factor of 10 to the power of 6. Orac was designed not only by human ingenuity, but by other super-computers of former ages — magnis Mensas and Multivac being just two of them. At one time (in your own time) no computer could cope with the many random factors that account for a human's motivation or actions. But Orac can.

Who has the book with the most pages in it, and how many pages are in it? Asks Dennis Playford of Wigan.

Books as you know them are antiquities in almost every planet of the system, having long since been replaced by other systems. However, it is on record that Leon Natron of the planet Sirius IV possesses a book composed of 1,764,235 pages of ultra-fine amberweed papyrus. Is this a record?

Could you tell me the name of the designer of the Liberator and also who actually built her? asks Jonathan Taylor of Shirley, Solihull.

The name of the designer of the prototype of the Liberator was Hermanius Rotwang. The prototype was developed from Hyper-Space Troop Carriers developed during the Division Wars by Space Vice-Marshal Tallian. Liberator was a considerable improvement on the original (prototype) version, however. The prototype could reach light speed, but took four hours to build up to this speed.



From Perminder Dharmrait also of Maidenhead, Berks, comes the question: Why don't spaceships bump into stars when they are travelling at super-speeds in space?

The short answer to this, Perminder, is that they CAN! Normally, warning systems not only guide the warpspace-travelling craft on a safe course through any possible obstacles, but also issue a signal if there is any chance of anything going wrong and a collision taking place. In this case, computer/pilot control can take evasive action. But all man-made systems have been known to develop faults from time to time — and deep-space collisions are not unknown.

Tell me about the Scorpio bracelets, says Gary Dawn of Redditch, Worcs, and can I get hold of one?

No, you can't, Gary Dawn. The Scorpio bracelets are made of titanium and are also two-way transmitters with internal aerials. They incorporate sensors which warn of the presence of poison gas or radiation. The bracelets are worn all the time as the personal property of each member of the crew. "Chips" are set in a rack with a "keyboard" so the co-ordinates of a landing site can be programmed into the chips and then inserted into the bracelet.

GARETH THOMAS

interview

by KEN ARMSTRONG



Gareth Thomas, elusive for two years as the character, Blake, and just as elusive in his private life as far as interview-seeking journalists are concerned, relaxed his self-imposed rule of no interviews to speak to readers of BLAKE'S 7 Magazine. The magazine would like to records its thanks to Gareth for the following interview.

In the control room of Gauda Prime the atmosphere is electric. One woman already lies dead on the floor. Avon, Dayna, Tarrant, Soolin and Vila all huddle to one side, Avon with his powerful gun levelled at the figure standing before him.

"Avon! It's me, Blake!"

Blake takes a pace towards Avon, a fleeting expression of hope on his face.

"Stand still!" Avon's finger tightens on the trigger. "Have you betrayed us?" There is a look in Avon's eyes Blake has never seen before. "Have you betrayed ME?"

Blake manages a half smile, extending an arm to Avon. "I've been waiting for you." He takes a pace towards Avon. Avon's finger snatches at the trigger, sending death spurting towards Avon's only real friend.

Blake gasps, clutches at his bleeding stomach, lurches another pace. . . another shot tears at his body. A bloodied hand reaches out, another staggering step. . . a final blast tears through his form as Blake clasps a hand to his friend's shoulder.

"Oh . . . Avon. . ." Involuntarily, Avon reaches also to steady Blake, even at his moment of dying. The pair stare into each others eyes. Avon stunned and confused. . . Blake's eyes trying to tell Avon he was wrong. . . so wrong. As his life blood drains from him, Blake feels his grip slackening on both Avon. . . and life itself. He slides to the floor, lying dead at the feet of the one person he really trusted. Never again would he lead that band of criminals against the Feder-

ation. It was all over — in more ways than one!

Gareth Thomas, the talented actor who thrilled so many ardent fans of BLAKE'S 7 for many years with his performance as Blake, was finally dead. . . or out of the series never to return. . . at his own request. He agreed to perform his role as Blake in the final episode of the series so long as he was killed.

"Chris Boucher, script editor of the series and also author of the final episode, understood exactly why I wanted my first appearance to be final and conclusive. I had been out of the series for a long time yet I was still haunted by the character. . . as were the others in the series. I didn't specify that Avon should kill Blake. That was a twist Chris created himself and it was extremely effective. In fact, I believe the final script of the last series was the best I've ever read," comments Gareth. "I'm sorry the series has come to an end. I've made a number of good friends while involved with the production but my part as Blake had to be finalised. You see, even after being out of the series for nearly two years, I was still being associated with it and no actor likes to be thought of as type-cast in one role."

Gareth Thomas took his first step towards an acting career when, as a young student in Wales, he decided there was little else he was good at.

"Many of the things I did as a youngster are not the sort of things young people should do and although I was interested in many subjects at school, I suppose I didn't really have a goal in life until deciding I would be an actor. Why acting? I suppose I wanted excitement because, even as a lad, I realised the theatre offered an escape from the mundane, a chance to do things one would find impossible other than in the world of theatre.

"It wasn't until later I realised that with that form of escapism also comes a terrific responsibility. The moment you set foot on stage you have a unique duty to create enjoyment. . . and not many jobs offer you that!

"I'm not certain how I arrived at my decision to become an actor because the area where I lived was not well served with theatres and we did not have a television set in our house until I was in my teens. There were no great influences on me then and, although I had taken part in one or two school plays, I had never seriously considered acting until, one day, I suddenly thought . . . that's for me!"

Following his instincts, Gareth secured a place at RADA (Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts) and set to studying his chosen profession with a will. His first recollection of actually getting an audience involved with his performance happened while acting in a play while still at RADA — and brought about one of his most dramatic audience reactions.

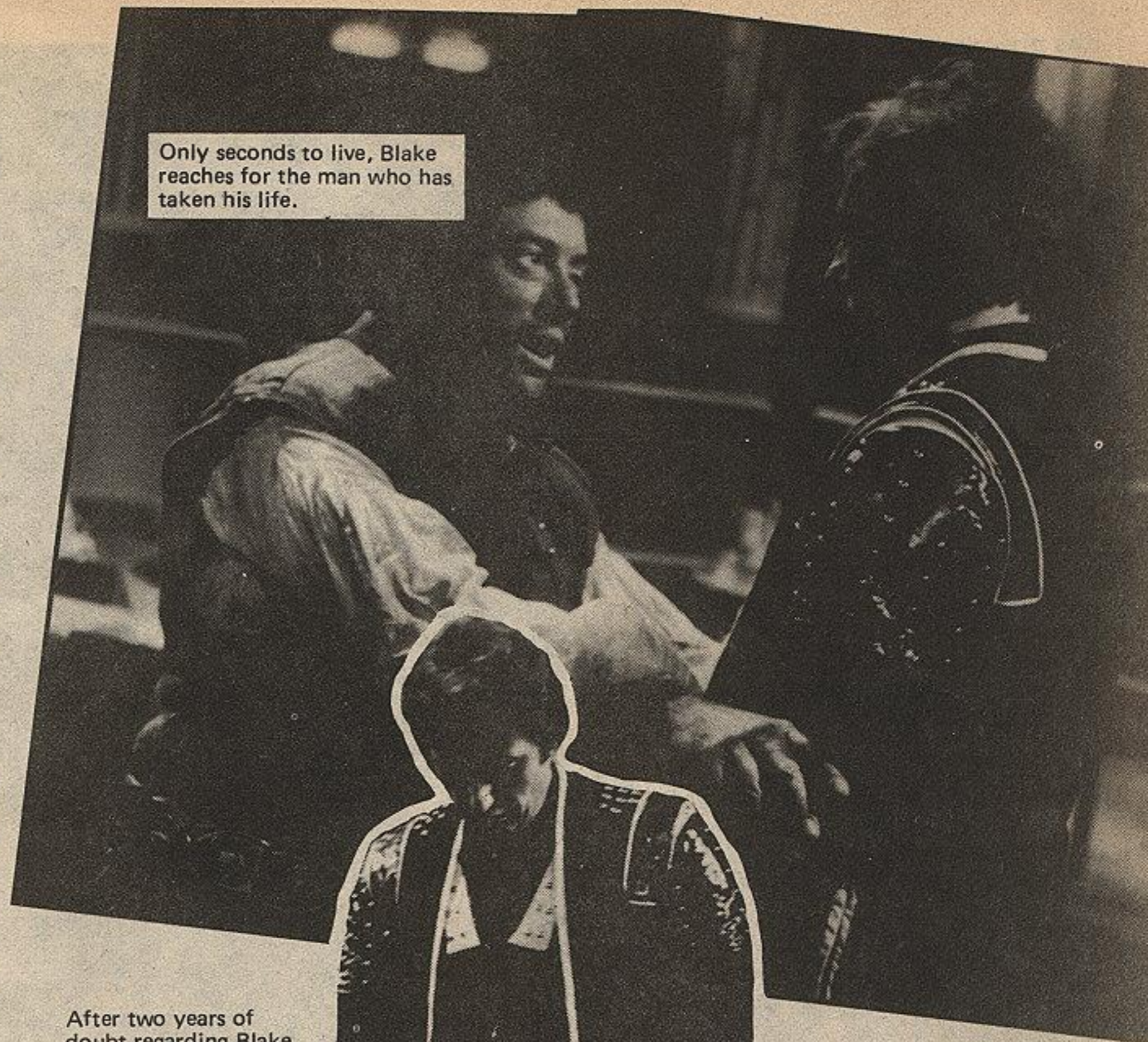
"I was playing the part of Laertes, working up to the big sword-fight where Laertes dies. The actor duelling with me lost part of the end of his blade, meaning the sword was six inches shorter than normal. . . and the rubber bung placed on the tip for safety was also missing. As this happened in a flurry of sword blades, the audience did not actually know a piece had broken off. By accident the now sharp blade grazed me and caused just a little bleeding.

The dramatic part happened, though, when I fell back on stage with the sword apparently in me. A woman in the front row stared at me, saw the sword was shorter than normal and that I was actually bleeding a little. She obviously thought the sword had really gone through me. . . and had a fit of hysterics! There, I thought to myself . . . I'm really getting through to the audience. . . !"

After his studies were complete at RADA Gareth found his new career somewhat slow in starting despite securing an Agent while still at the Academy. A variety of jobs eventually came his way, progressing from Assistant Stage Manager with small companies to playing minor parts to eventually joining the Royal Shakespeare Company. A tour with a Repertory company at Derby followed, some television work, then came a break. It was during that break the finger of fortune pointed Gareth's way.

"I was telephoned by my agent who asked me how long it would take me to get to the BBC TV Centre. I replied I could be there in half-an-hour. Fine, he said. 'Get there as fast as you can and meet a chap called Jack Gold. There could be something there for you.'

'When I arrived at the BBC, Jack Gold met me, gave me a pint of beer, took me to a locked office. He handed me a massive tome of a script and told me to lock myself in the office, read the script then call in at his office when I was finished. I followed his instructions, then took the script back to him. He told me to wait a few minutes as the producer of



Only seconds to live, Blake reaches for the man who has taken his life.

After two years of doubt regarding Blake, the character is erased from the series once and for all. Not even Terry Wogan can bring him back to life!



the play was coming over. I was asked to read some parts from the script then told that it was all settled. 'You'd better take the script with you,' he said. 'We start rehearsing at the end of September and begin shooting a week later.' As you can guess, I walked out of there in a daze. When I arrived home, my agent rang me and said, 'Well done. You've got it.' Got what, I asked. 'The leading part, of course!'

"The play was entitled STOCKER'S COPPER and was the story of the Cornish Clay Miner's strike of 1913. I believe I'm right in saying it won an award. . . and took me into ten solid years of TV work!"

Many excellent roles came Gareth's way after making a powerful mark in STOCKER'S COPPER, including series such as SUTHERLAND'S LAW and COUNTRY MATTERS as well as many other marvellous parts, followed shortly by an approach to play the part of a leader of criminals in space . . . in a series called BLAKE'S 7!

"When I was told the outline of the series I liked the idea very much. A bunch of criminals in space really appealed to me and, in the beginning, there was terrific scope for us to behave as criminals with a common bond uniting us against the Federation.

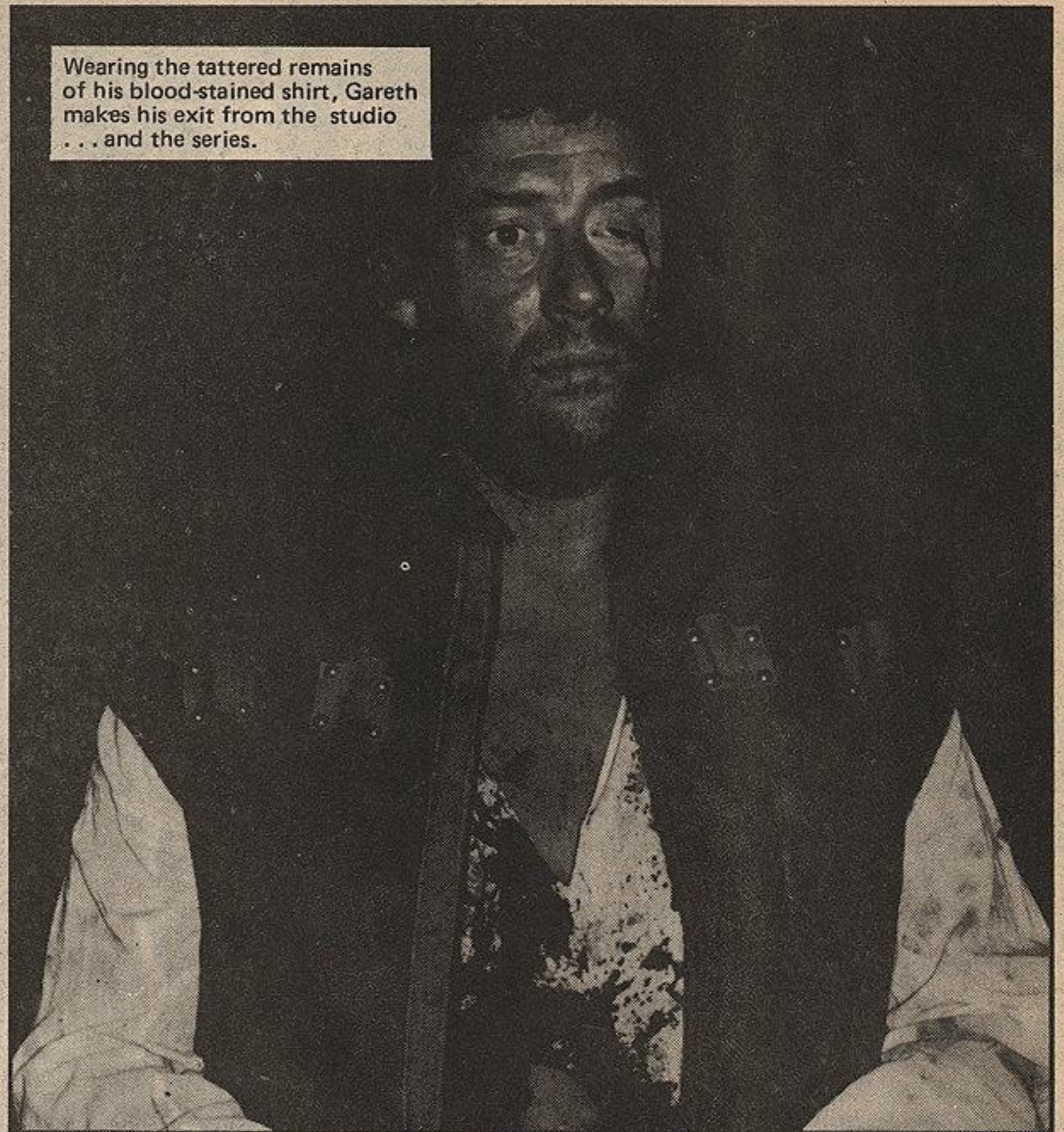
"There was also a wider base to the programme in the early days. I mean, I was even permitted to break someone's neck because the series was designed to appeal to adults as well as youngsters. Now, I'm afraid, the series has drifted from its original concept and everything is taken at too much of a superficial level with violence reduced to a minimum.

"I don't advocate the use of violence for its own sake in programmes like BLAKE'S 7, but it does have its place and can make for more realism and stronger audience identification if used wisely."

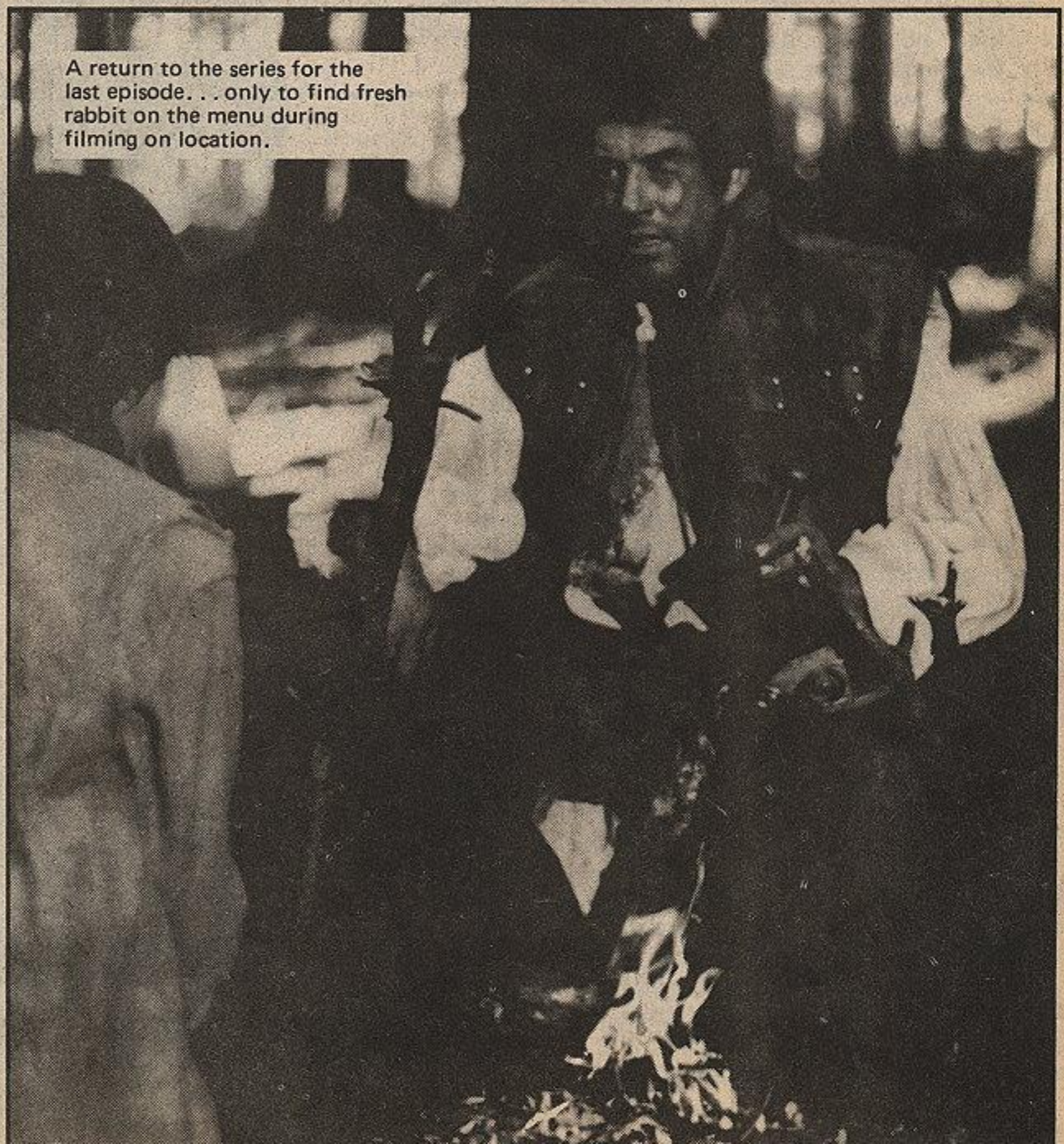
Certainly, as far as Gareth's last appearance in the programme was concerned, there was enough violence to make up for all those 'bland' episodes he mentions. Gareth decided he had to go once and for all . . . and he really went in a big way.

To stage his death in the series and simulate the shots ripping into his stomach, a metal plate was strapped to his torso with small explosive charges rigged under some sachets of stage 'blood'. His shirt was then donned and the electric firing cable run from the charges up to his armpit and down his left sleeve with the firing button concealed in his left hand. When the moment of his death came, Gareth had to watch Paul Darrow's finger tightening on the trigger of the gun, then initiate each separate mini-explosion. The force of the charge caused Gareth to stagger for an

Wearing the tattered remains of his blood-stained shirt, Gareth makes his exit from the studio . . . and the series.



A return to the series for the last episode. . . only to find fresh rabbit on the menu during filming on location.



instant, making the impacts look even more realistic. . . but also leaving him with a bruise to remind him of his demise. Covered in 'blood' and with his shirt front ripped open by the charges, Gareth had then to lie completely still while the final drama happened over his dead body. He was out of the series at long last and even Terry Wogan would not be able to bring him back again.

"Terry has done a fantastic job for the programme. . . and me in particular," smiles Gareth. "I don't know why he latched on to us but he certainly generated a great deal of interest in the series, especially when he started his 'Bring Back Blake' campaign.

"When Terry first mentioned BLAKE'S 7 on his morning radio show I had been out of the series for some time and was touring with the Royal Shakespeare Company in Newcastle. I was playing the part of Orsini which involved wearing a wig with pigtails and dressing in a long white robe. Terry read out a letter saying 'Blake is alive and well. He's been seen in Newcastle wearing pigtails and a long white dress!' I thought, I like this!

"I was sorely tempted to dress up as Blake and arrive at his studio one day when he was on the air. . . just to see his face. I resisted the temptation, however, and regret it now."

After all that Terry did for the series has Gareth ever met him?

"I actually did very briefly one time at the TV centre. Terry was just about to go on to do BLANKETY — BLANK but, I'm sorry to say, I don't think he recognised me out of costume! I would love to meet him properly one day because someone who can do what he does with a show like BLANKETY — BLANK and get away with it must be good news. I did write to him during the height of his BRING BACK BLAKE campaign and I believe he read the letter saying that Blake was receiving the programme on his intergalactic tranny but perhaps I will get a chance to speak to him one day."

It was Gareth's love of stage acting and his desire to stretch his performing ability that lured him from the series just when it was becoming a firm favourite with the viewing public.

"After ten years of television acting I felt I had to get back to the stage or risk ending my days known only as Blake. So, when I was relaxing after completing an episode and Trevor Nunn of the Royal Shakespeare Company tapped me on the shoulder to ask what I was doing after the current series, I was quite adamant I would not do another. There and then I was offered the part of Cassio in Othello and the die was cast. Roj Blake was to be no more. . . or so I thought. Terry Wogan has a lot to answer for!"

With his stage career firmly underway



Gareth prepares to make his entrance as Blake once more as director, Mary Ridge (right), makes final arrangements with her cameraman.

once more and a wide variety of roles coming his way, such as his performance as King Rat in the pantomime, Dick Whittington, in Newcastle, Gareth is a very busy man. He is also a very private man.

"I give so much to every performance that when I'm off-stage, I like to relax and just be me. There are many things which take up what free time I have. My two children deserve as much time as I can give them and I also like to write and enjoy reading. Whenever I have the opportunity I watch rugby and also love to travel.

"I'm an Aquarian by birth but star signs and influences hold little interest for me. I don't believe one can generalise about a particular star sign reflecting a typical personality. By the same token, I'm also not very superstitious. I would never upset a fellow actor by doing any of the things one is supposed not to do in the theatre such as whistling in the dressing rooms or mentioning the 'Scottish Play' but it's not something I hold any great store by. There was one

occasion, however, when I did actually mention Macbeth without thinking in the dressing room, then ended up going on stage without my gaiters and wearing odd socks. I suppose it would be easy enough to put that down to having mentioned the 'Scottish Play' . . . but who knows?

"Actually, most theatrical superstition is founded on some practical aspect of history. The whistling in the dressing room part comes from the days when all communication with the chap in the gallery dropping in the scenery was done with whistles in the days before such things as tannoys. If a performance was not going well, a whistle would call down the next piece of scenery to try and recapture the attention of the audience . . . and if that was done accidentally, it could ruin a perfectly good production. Likewise, if a play was not going well and the audiences would not turn up for the show, the play would most likely be taken off and a guaranteed crowd-puller like Macbeth put on in its place. So, you see, there are practical grounds behind virtually all those superstitions."

Having accomplished so much in his career so far, does Gareth have a particular goal to aim for now?

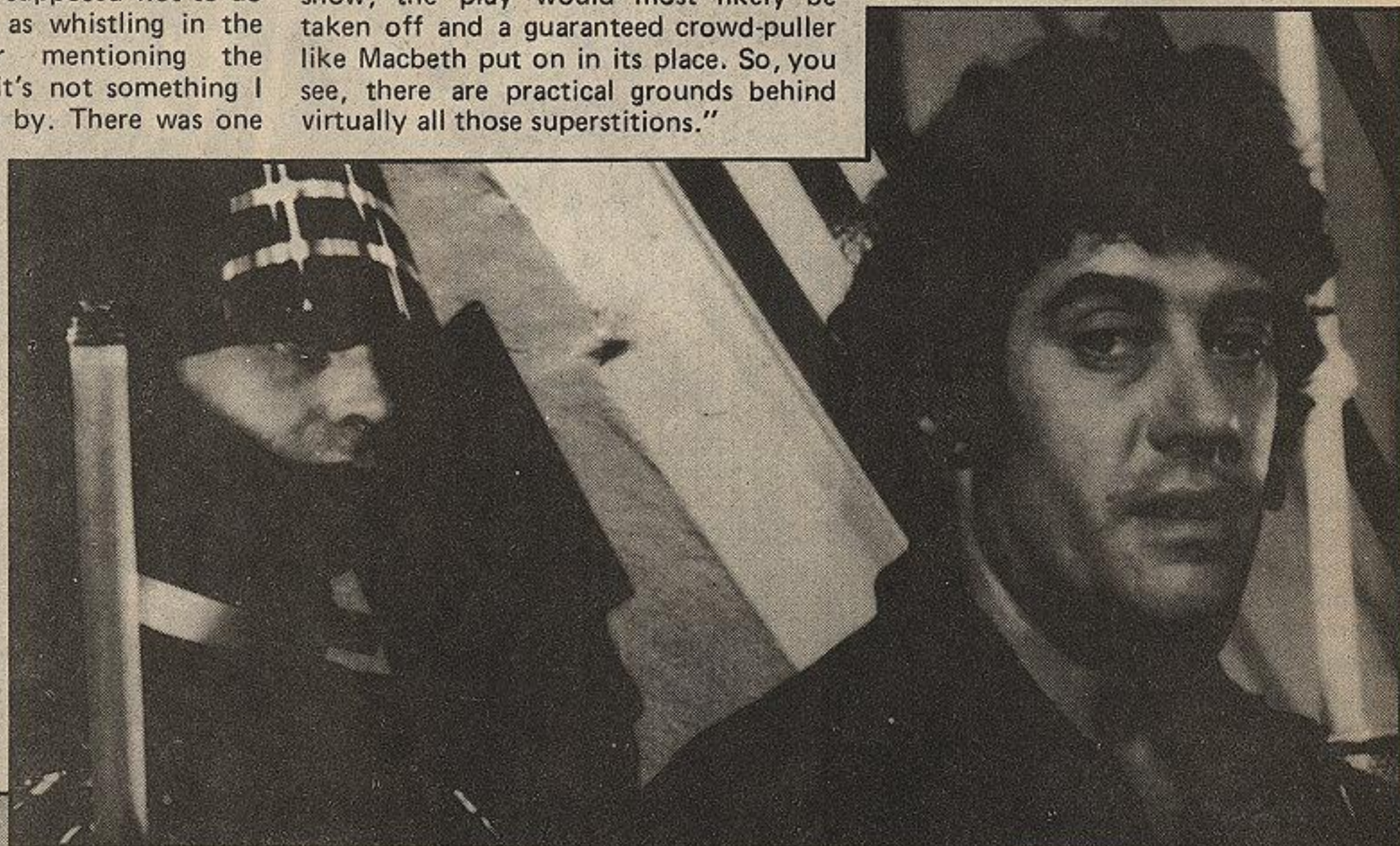
"I'm not someone who really plans ahead. After all, I don't know if a year from now I will be fit and able to work or what will be happening for me. No, I live very much for the day and enjoy what I'm doing when I'm doing it. I must confess there is one ambition I have. One day I will play Othello. I would also like to have a crack at comedy. I've been involved in some comical situations on stage. None of them, though, were intentional so comedy proper would not be as far removed from what I'm doing now as you might think!"

There is one ultimate aim Gareth would like to achieve before he ends his acting days. "My ultimate aim is to have my fellow professionals say of me . . . that is a good actor."

There was more scope for powerful action during the earlier series. . .



The idea of a bunch of criminals in space appealed to me very much. . . but the series has changed a lot since those early days.



PAUL DARRROW WRITES

The thirteen episodes that constituted the first ever series of, "Blake's Seven", were bred in confusion and born in chaos.

Public reaction — your reaction — took everybody by surprise. Viewing figures tripled in a very short time and it appeared that you really liked the show and the seven of us very much.

It's nice to know that you are still with us!

However, it wasn't exactly easy getting ourselves on the screen. Bad weather dogged our filming, occasional strikes put paid to a number of studio days and all of us were plagued by colds, chills and, on one occasion, a leg injury to

Blake sustained during a fight sequence. But Blake limped on and so did the rest of us.

Our confusion stemmed from the fact that we didn't know what was going on. For example, it wasn't until episode six — 'Seek, Locate and Destroy', — that we found out who the baddies were.

Tricky Travis and Sultry Servalan were to prove deadly opposition. Even though we all felt we had enough on our plates with our other enemies.

A disembodied brain suspended in water and a woman who could create a storm in the Galaxy just by thinking about it, to name but two!

Gradually we sorted everything out and the series settled into a

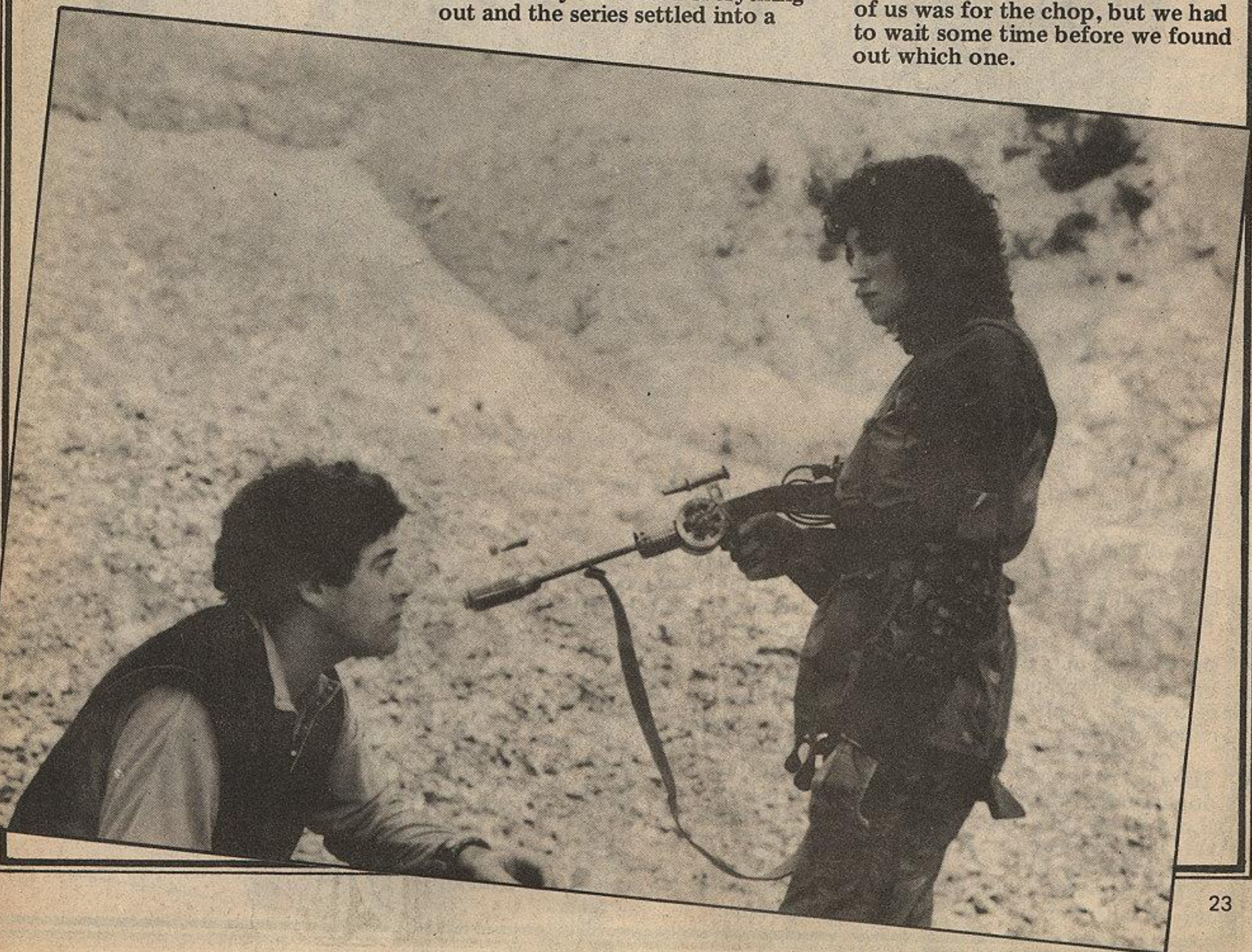
recognisable format.

It was quite simple really. Blake and his Seven were against everybody in the known Universe and quite a few aliens from outside it!

The odds were frightening, but nothing ever frightened Blake. He would rush in where angels fear to tread whenever the opportunity arose. Perhaps his confidence was boosted by the fact that he had a devil on his side? I'll leave you to work out who that might be!

Suddenly — we approached the last two episodes. Except that they wouldn't be the last — you had seen to that!

There was to be a second series, but not all of the Seven would survive it. Rumour had it that one of us was for the chop, but we had to wait some time before we found out which one.





Meanwhile, we gained a new recruit — 'Orac'.

It all started when the son of a computer expert called Ensor crash landed on a nasty planet and Avon, Vila and Gan rescued him.

While Blake tried to find out the whereabouts of Ensor and his brainchild computer, Avon was distracted by a beautiful woman called Meegat.

You couldn't really blame him. The first time they met, she went down on her knees and called him, 'Lord Avon'. She also wore a revealing dress and was, to say the least, affectionate.

I think Avon would have gladly stayed with her, but the Script

Editor wouldn't even let me kiss her!

So much for the, 'glamour', of show business!

In the end, Avon was obliged to do the decent thing.

After rescuing Jenna from a bunch of primitive tribesmen — smelly tribesmen often took a fancy to Jenna — he reactivated Meegat's computer, if you will pardon the expression, so that her space ship could take off and, rather solemnly, returned to Blake and the others to set off after the most wonderful computer ever conceived. So wonderful, it was clairvoyant!

With it, we might be invincible — without it, we could be in a lot of trouble.



All we had to do was persuade the irritable Ensor to part with his invention, wade through any number of Federation guards, avoid some beastly bat-like monsters and outwit Servalan and Travis!

Oh yes — to top it all — while down on Meegat's planet, we had all contracted radiation poisoning and weren't feeling at all well!

Blake and Cally teleported on to the planet Aristo — in reality a chalk pit in Rickmansworth — and found Ensor in his laboratory.

Not surprisingly, Ensor was reluctant to part with the marvel called, 'Orac', until Blake told him that the Federation were after him. That changed his mind.

Unfortunately for him, and for others in later episodes, Blake was always very brave and poor old Ensor couldn't stand the pace.

Perhaps it was just as well. If Ensor had survived, Vila would have had to give up his room on the Liberator!

Anyway, Blake had Orac and that could mean only one thing. He was bound to stumble across Travis and end up in a lot of trouble! Which is exactly what happened.

On a cold day in Rickmansworth, it seemed that the series might come to a premature end. As Servalan, dressed in an improbable mink coat, looked on, Travis raised his deadly gun hand and prepared to kill Blake and Cally.

But, if you will pardon the pun, help was at hand!

Avon hadn't much time for Blake, but he had even less for Travis and, 'bang', Travis's arm was gone! A mistake really as Avon had been aiming for his head.

As always, Blake wouldn't let Avon finish the job and, with Blake's eighth, "Orac", we teleported back to the Liberator to find out what the future held in store for us.

First — the good news. Orac cured our radiation sickness.

Now, the bad news. Orac projected a picture of Liberator on the screen and predicted that it would be atomized! The Liberator was to be destroyed and Blake's Seven with it.

So ended the first series.

Of course, the BBC gave the game away when it was announced that there was to be a second series and you were left, hopefully with

bated breath, waiting to see how we were going to get out of that one!

In the meantime, you could savour what you had seen so far.

Judging by the thousands of letters I received, that's exactly what you did.

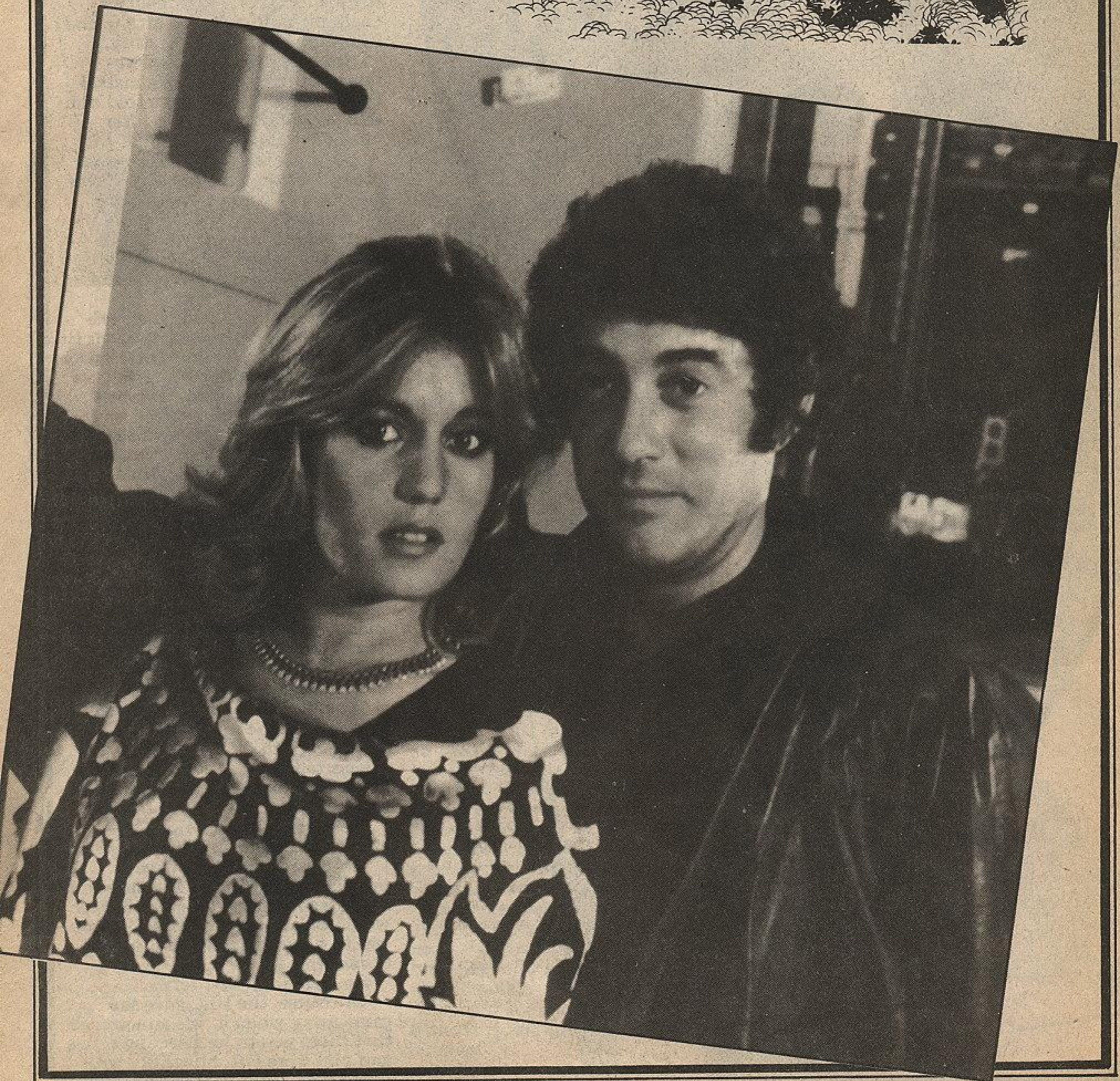
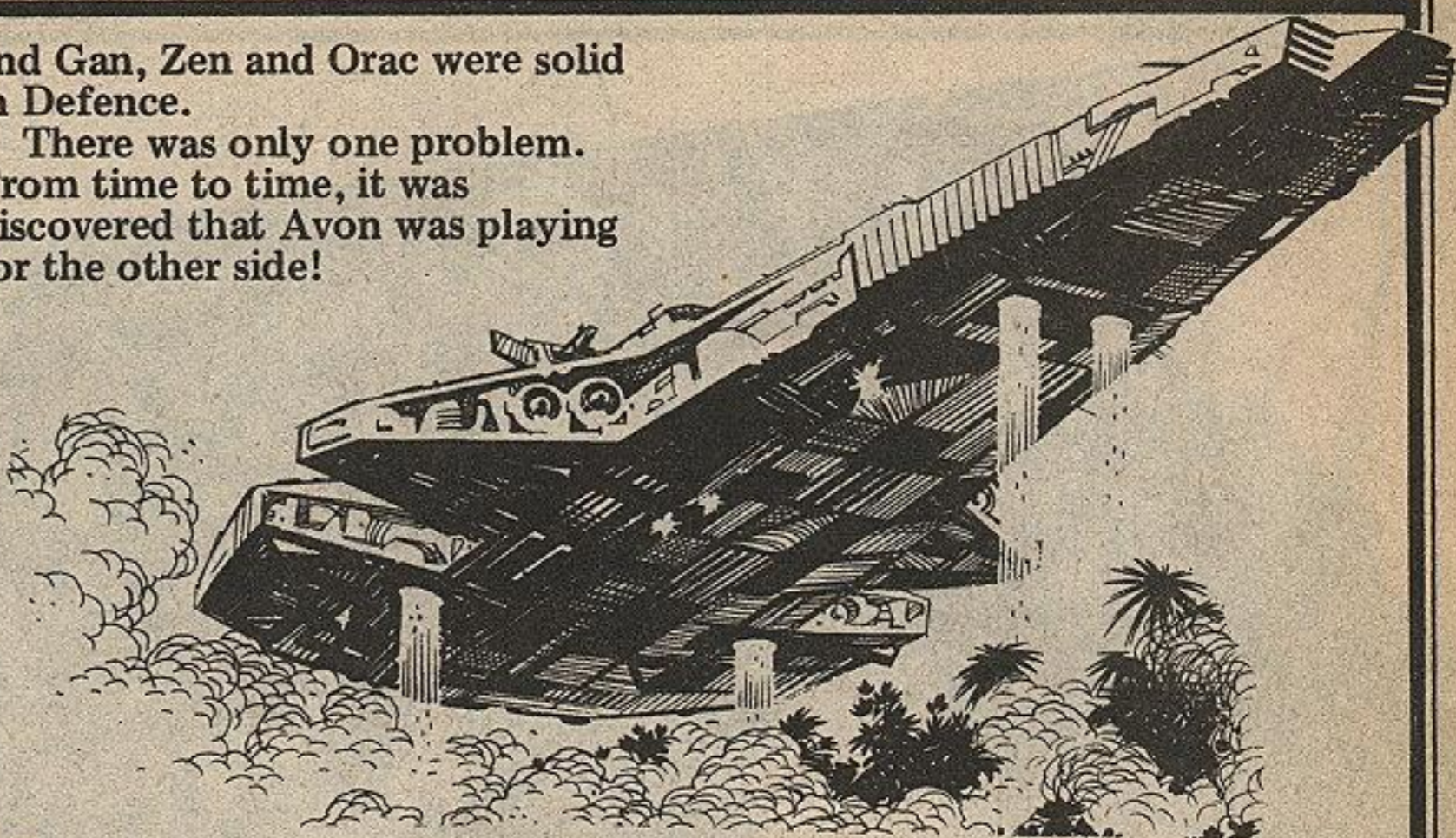
One letter writer thought of us as a football team trying to win the World Cup against enormous odds. In this case, of course, it would have to be called the Galaxy Cup!

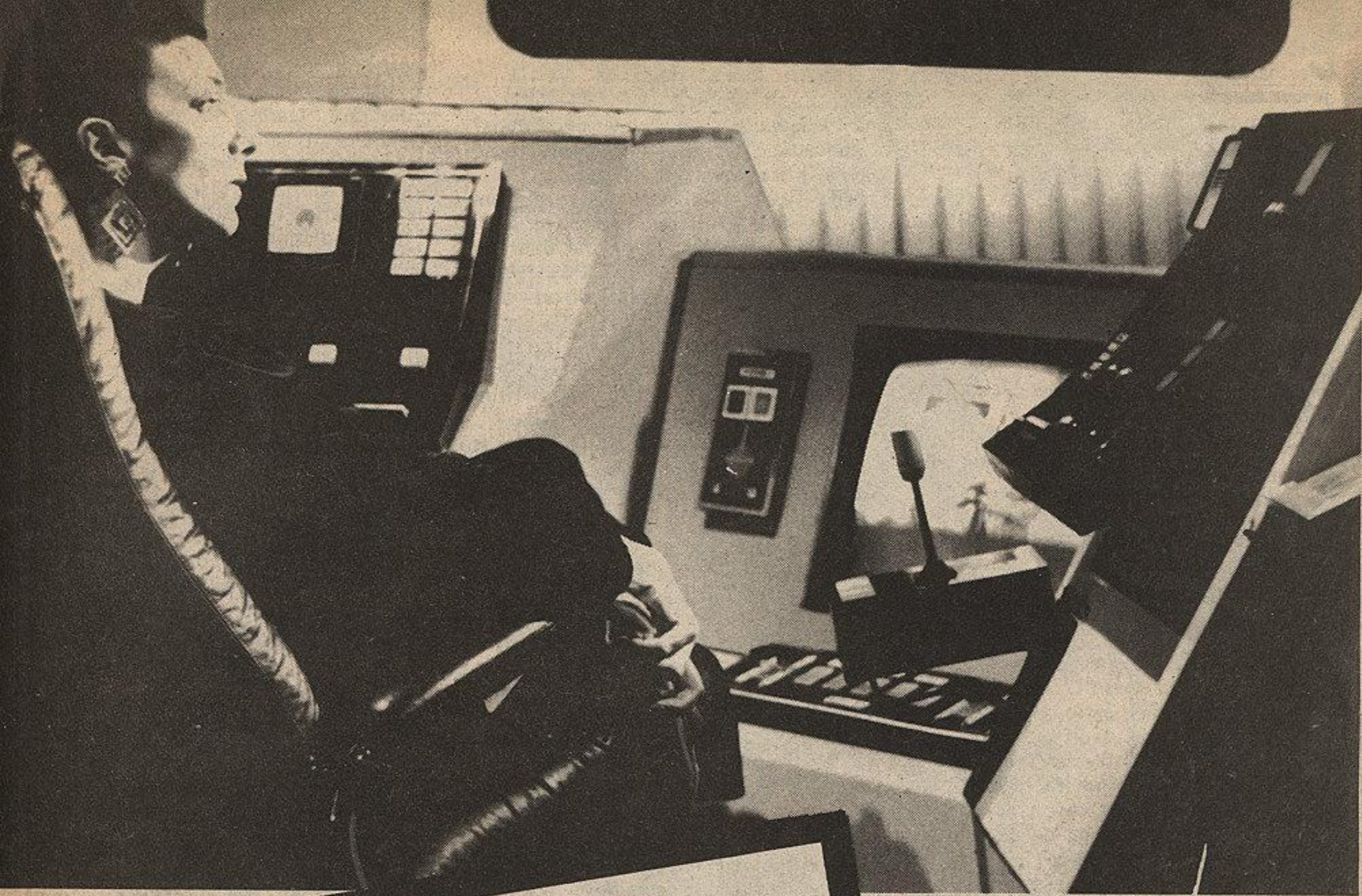
Blake was our gallant Centre Forward with Jenna and Cally supporting him from the wings.

Vila was the nippy goal scorer

and Gan, Zen and Orac were solid in Defence.

There was only one problem. From time to time, it was discovered that Avon was playing for the other side!





A SIMPLE MESSAGE...
A CUNNING PLAN.
ONCE AGAIN SERVALAN HAS SET...

'THE TRAP

'What's so fascinating about those old records?' enquired Tarrant, leaning across the console, trying to distract Dayna from her task.

'Nothing much,' muttered Dayna, her eyes still glued to the display screen. There was a wistful note in her distant voice.

'Not like you to be so preoccupied,' commented Tarrant trying to see what information was proving so absorbing for his companion. 'I agree it's boring waiting up here in orbit while Avon and the

others wheel and deal below. . . but you might spare me some of your time.'

Dayna sighed, her wide eyes misting slightly as she slumped back in her seat, her gaze still fixed on the screen in front of her. Tarrant moved to one side to see the image. The man's smiling face told Tarrant nothing. He was dark-skinned, in his early fifties but with a youthful, timeless face. The sparkling eyes should have given Tarrant a clue but he was not at his tactful best.

'Who's he? An old flame?' he ventured.

Dayna shot him a hurt glance, her eyes quickly turning back to the screen. Tears

welled up from inside her. She sank forward, burying her face in her hands as uncontrollable sobbing overcame her. 'He. . . he's my father.' Large tears ran down Dayna's face as her whole frame shook with the grief of his memory. 'It would have been his birthday today.'

'Look . . .' Tarrant moved to place a comforting arm round Dayna's shoulder. 'I didn't realise. I'm sorry. Can you forgive me?'

Dayna lifted her head, wiping the tears from her cheek. 'Yes, I can forgive you Tarrant. . . but I'll never forgive the person who killed him. Never!'

'I'm deeply sorry to disturb you,' droned the flight computer from the far end of the flight deck, 'but I'm picking up signals from a Federation control ship. Would you like to hear them?'

'At once, Slave,' called Tarrant leaping to his feet. 'Put them up on the main communications screen.'

As the display flashed into life, Dayna wiped the remaining tears from her face with the back of her hand and moved to join Tarrant.

'Message reads: Secret rendezvous arranged. Red quadrant five, 77659, within orbit of JULGAC. Will remain on station for ten Earth-standard minutes. Pass information to person from ship crewed by yourself. No-one else must be involved. I shall be in my own ship with just my captain as crew. Failure to meet agreed rendezvous will necessitate further transmission originated by me. Destroy

message on receipt and communicate information to no other person, trusted or not. Message ends.'

'Hmmm,' mused Tarrant. 'Very interesting but since we don't know who sent the message and to whom it was sent it doesn't make a lot of sense, Slave.'

'Oh, I do have that information, Sir,' ventured Slave.

'Then spit it out,' retorted Tarrant.

'It was received by the Battle Fleet Commander of fleet four, the fleet covering this sector, Sir . . . and was transmitted direct and in secret from the headquarters of Commissioner Smeer. The one you call Servalan.'

'Servalan!' exclaimed Dayna. 'You mean we know where and when she will be with no escort?'

'That is correct,' confirmed Slave. 'The rendezvous is exactly forty-six minutes flying time from here at full power and will take place one hour from now.'

Dayna took a deep breath then turned to confront Tarrant. 'We're going to keep that appointment . . . even if her Fleet Commander doesn't.'

'You can't be serious,' protested Tarrant. 'What about Avon and the others down on the planet? We can't just fly off without telling them what's happening.'

'Why not? After all, Avon never told us what he was planning by coming to this place. Another mad-cap scheme of organising a full-scale revolt against the Federation, no doubt. But one that will never come off. . . like all the others! No. . . I say we go now. We could be there and back before he even misses us. Please say you'll do it, Tarrant.'



You mean we know where and when she will be with no escort. . . ?

Please. . . just for me.'

Tarrant looked hard at Dayna. 'I know it's the ambition of us all to put an end to Servalan. . . but why now, Dayna?'

'Because SHE killed my father,' hissed Dayna, a fire glowing in her eyes.

The young pilot tore his gaze from Dayna's face, his mind buzzing with doubts. 'You're certain of the data we just saw, Slave?'

'Data correct in every detail, Sir,' replied the computer.

'Then you're on, Dayna. I'll probably regret it later. . . but let's go. I can't wait to see Avon's face when we tell him Servalan's dead!'

As Scorpio powered away from its geostationary orbit over Muntal Minor, Avon may not have been aware of the ship's departure. . . but someone else was.

'Have they taken the bait, Captain?'

'I believe so.' The young man punched a few more flashing buttons on the display in front of him. 'Yes, Scorpio is committed to a course which will bring it to JULGAC. It seems the rebels are flying straight into your trap, Commissioner Smeer!'

* * * * *

'We are agreed, then?' Avon coldly surveyed the assembled representatives of Muntal Minor. There came more murmurs as the Fleet Captains and their political leaders talked in low, animated tones, some nodding vigorously to each other, some looking grave. Avon was becoming irritated. He sprang to his feet, causing the startled faces of the leaders to turn towards him. With an expansive gesture, Avon indicated the six remaining battle craft lined in front of their silos.

'What are you waiting for? You still have the capability to strike back at the Federation and — if the targets are chosen wisely — the effect will be devastating. Once again the power of Muntal Minor will be felt throughout the galaxy, a focal point for all those against the Federation!'

Vila smiled with admiration as Avon's voice echoed across the vast assembly area, clearly impressing all those who heard his word. Avon was in his element, thought Vila. Very impressive. But would he be able to persuade these poor fools to follow him into battle? Had they not suffered enough at the hands of the Federation already? They had lost two-thirds of their battle fleet several years before in a valiant attempt to stem the growth of the Federation — but had failed. Would they really leap into battle again just because a psychopath with a hatred of their common enemy urged them to do so? The answer would come soon. Halron, Grand Caslan of the Muntal people was rising from his seat, his sad eyes fixed on Avon.

'Your words have impressed us greatly,

Ker Avon,' began the old man in a deep resonating voice, 'but you ask much of my people. Once we were a proud and noble race, fearless in battle yet compassionate towards those we defeated. Ah,' sighed the old man, 'but that was a long time ago. Now there is the might of the Federation to reckon with. An enemy a thousand times more powerful and resourceful than any we ever faced even at the height of our supremacy.' The old man cast down his eyes and his form seemed to crumple with all the cares of his people on his frail shoulders.

'This is not a decision I can take for any of those who survived the last great onslaught.' Halron turned to face the assembly. 'I put it to you, my people. Who will follow Avon to strike a blow for freedom — risking his own life and those of his crew. . . ?'

A heavy silence fell over the gathering, no-one daring to speak first. Then, from near the back, a tall, dark and swarthy individual, every inch a warrior, stood up.

'Count me as one!' he called in a powerful voice. 'Palvern pledges his life to fight for the freedom of Muntal and to avenge those who died in the last great and glorious battle!'

'I'm proud to have you with me, Palvern,' returned Avon with a smile, waiting for others to pledge their support . . . but none did. There was much muttering as Palvern strode to join Avon but no more volunteers.

'What are you waiting for?' snapped Palvern at length as he gazed coldly at his fellow Muntals. 'Has the courage of our forefathers finally been purged from your souls by the Federation? Will you not fight as men beside Avon and his brave crew?'

Vila tried to hide his wry smile as he flashed a quick glance at Soolin but she was giving Vila none of her attention. She was staring hard, scowling at the ranks of worried Muntals who continued to whisper to each other. Then, as all seemed lost, a figure rose from close to Halron. The man's thin and pinched expression matched his voice as he called to Avon.

'We have heard much of Ker Avon's powerful ship and what it can do and how it will spearhead any attack against Federation forces . . . but we have yet to see this craft. He says he 'teleported' here from it . . . but we have only his word for that. Show us the Scorpio and display its armament. . . then we will decide to follow Avon or not!'

A chorus of agreement rose from those in the assembly as Avon, his eyebrows raised and a smile on his lips, reached for his bracelet.

'Nothing simpler, my friends.' He pressed the communications button. 'Tarrant, I want you to pull out of orbit, make a fast run over the assembly, then fire two plasma bolts into the mountain

to our rear. Do you understand?’

A buzzing noise was all Avon received in reply. He frowned. ‘Strange. He’s in geostationary orbit above us. There should be no communications problems. Vila, try your bracelet.’ Vila complied but with the same result. Soolin followed without having to be told. Still nothing. Palvern, wanting to be proved right in front of his fellow Muntals, looked at Avon with a pained expression.

‘This could be a communications black area — making it impossible to talk to the ship by voice — but one system of communication never fails.’

Avon reached inside his tunic and withdrew a small plastic key with a red indication light on it. He took a pace towards Soolin who crossed over to where Orac lay dormant on the ground.

‘Allow me,’ she smiled, taking the key and inserting it in the appropriate slot. Immediately Orac flashed into life.

‘Make contact with the Scorpio and relay the following message, Orac,’ began Avon, keeping one eye on his very attentive audience.

‘That is impossible. ‘Scorpio left orbit twenty minutes ago and is now in deep space. My signals would not reach it unless boosted eight times.’

Orac’s voice was only too clear to those listening in the audience. The muttering grew louder. ‘I don’t believe any of this!’ It was the same pinched-faced doubter who called out. ‘He is trying to trick us with his box of flashing lights and promises of great victories. This man,’ he pointed an accusing finger at Avon, ‘could be an agent of the Federation sent to spy on us!’

A further roar of agreement burst from the assembly then, to a man, all rose to their feet to make their way from that place. Avon knew there was little point in trying to stop them. Old Halron, a sad expression on his face, looked hard at Avon before he, too, turned on his heel to follow the others back to their dwellings.

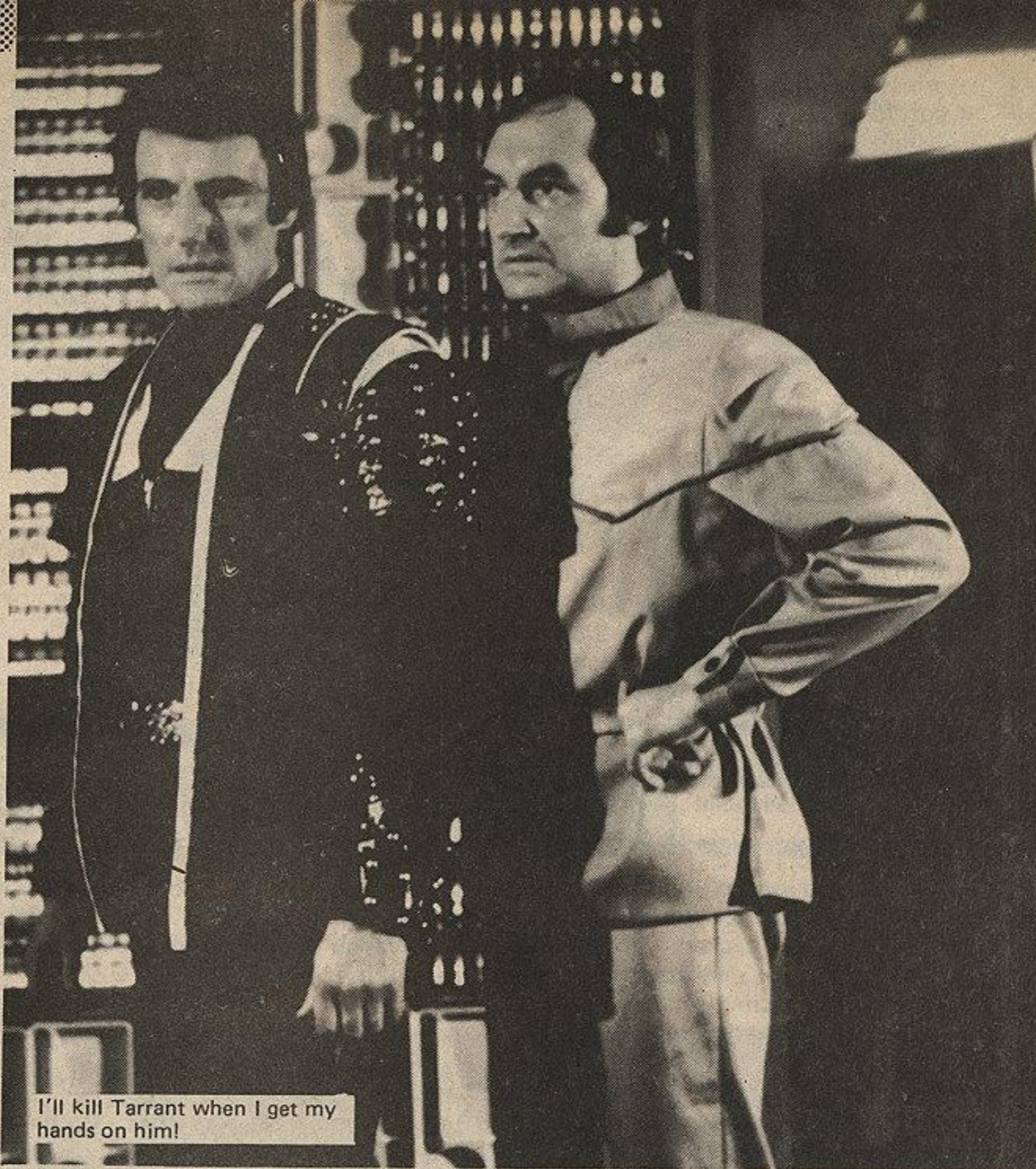
‘I’ll kill Tarrant when I get my hands on him,’ seethed Avon as he stared at Orac. ‘What the devil does he think he’s playing at?’

‘If that is a question,’ snapped Orac, ‘I can tell you he is responding to a secret Federation signal intercepted by that inferior machine, Slave.’

Avon listened intently as Orac described word-for-word the message received some minutes before. ‘The fool! How could he be so stupid? The whole thing smells of a trap. . . a trap to destroy Scorpio!’

‘That is my conclusion as well,’ joined Orac. He spoke for Soolin and Vila who stared at Avon, waiting for guidance as to their next move.

‘Tarrant and Dayna have left us stranded here while they happily fly off to their deaths. . . like lambs to the



I'll kill Tarrant when I get my hands on him!

slaughter. We can’t even warn them of the danger.’ Avon glared at Orac as if seeking an answer from that source.

‘If it’s a ship you need, use mine.’ The firm voice made Avon spin round. Avon had quite forgotten about Palvern but the man’s earnest face told him he had not lost faith with Avon.

‘You mean it?’

‘Of course. It is old but in good working order. . . and she’s fully armed with laser charges and percussion torpedos.’

‘Will you fly her for us?’

Palvern’s face lit up with delight. ‘A pleasure! Come, it’s over here.’

Avon turned with a grim expression to Soolin and Vila. ‘Bring Orac. We’re going to try to save Tarrant and Dayna from themselves. . . and the Federation.’

‘Always assuming we arrive in time to save more than just the remains of the ship,’ said Vila as he heaved Orac into his arms. Vila was always a realist.

* * * * *

‘Well?’ demanded Tarrant. ‘Any sign of a ship?’

‘Nothing is showing on the sensors, Sir,’ droned Slave.

‘Are you sure this is the right planet?’

said Dayna edgily.

‘I can confirm this is the correct location and time,’ continued Slave. ‘In fact, we have thirty seconds before rendezvous.’

Tarrant adjusted his position as his fingers flitted across the flight systems of Scorpio, checking and re-checking all data. Everything was in order. ‘Weapons systems check?’

‘All primed and ready to fire.’ Dayna’s voice was taut with emotion. Just then she lifted her eyes to Tarrant, permitting him to see a flash of doubt cross her once determined expression. ‘Do we fire as soon as we see her ship?’ Tarrant nodded.

‘We’re taking no chances with her. Besides, there is the Battle Fleet Commander to think of. Even though he should be flying alone, he could still try to return fire. With just two of us we’re in no position to get involved in a major dog-fight. No . . . we sit and wait . . . then blast off everything as soon as Servalan’s ship comes into range.’

‘Scorpio should now be on station, Commissioner.’

‘Will the ship’s sensors be able to locate us?’

‘Not as long as we hold station on the dark side of the planet and keep tight formation.’



And you're sure this plan will work...?

Servalan moved to a window and looked out on the five Federation Battle Cruisers tightly packed round her command ship. She permitted herself a smile. The old excitement was rising in her throat. She rounded on her captian. 'Are you sure Avon is on board the Scorpio?'

'There's no way of telling, Commissioner. . . but he would hardly permit his ship to fly off on an intercept mission without him being in command. Would he?'

'I suppose not,' murmured Servalan as she pressed her hands together. 'And you're sure this attack plan will work?'

'It cannot fail,' smiled the captain. 'When this fleet pounces, we will be striking on independent courses, not in normal attack formation. All captains have been ordered to ignore safety distances when attacking, even if it means their craft being damaged by another Federation ship. The Scorpio is the prime target . . . and everyone wants to see it blown to a million pieces.'

'Good!' Servalan eased herself into her seat and buckled her straps. 'Then there is no time to be lost.' She reached forward to press a red flashing key. She gave only one word of command. 'ATTACK!'

'Er, sir, I beg to report there is a ship approaching from the other side of the planet Julgac. It is approaching head-on.'

'Thank you, Slave! That's just what we've been waiting for. Dayna, lock all systems to that target and fire as soon as in range.'

'I've got on visual,' exclaimed Dayna, 'and it IS Servalan's ship!'

'Stand-by,' called Tarrant as he steadied Scorpio's orbit. 'Ten. . . nine. . .'

'Er, sir. . .?' Slave flashed more

brightly than usual from his corner.

'What is it?' snapped Tarrant keeping one eye on the target blip displayed in front of him.

'There is another craft approaching at maximum speed from the port side.'

'That will be the Battle Fleet Commander,' offered Dayna. 'We still have time to blast Servalan's ship before we have to worry about him.'

'I beg to differ,' countered the flight computer, 'because there are a further three battle craft all homing-in on Scorpio . . . all from different quarters. I am obliged to tell you. . . Scorpio is under attack.'

Tarrant and Dayna shot each other alarmed looks an instant before the first laser charge slammed into Scorpio's unprotected flank, the impact throwing Dayna from her seat. Tarrant fought with the systems, as his fingers scrabbled for the power controls. Another charge hit somewhere to the rear. Smoke and debris swirled round the flight deck as Dayna scrambled back to her seat.

'It. . . it's a trap,' screamed Dayna at the top of her voice. 'And we've fallen for it! Get us out of here fast!'

'I wish I could,' yelled Tarrant as he heaved on the throttle controls but with little effect. 'Two engines out . . . and the main drive's been damaged!'

Dayna, her heart in her mouth, stared at the flickering display screen above her. 'G. . . good grief,' she mouthed as a Federation Battle cruiser was seen to dive towards them. 'They don't care what they do . . . just as long as they get us! Isn't there anything we can do?'

'Only one,' hissed Tarrant through gritted teeth. That instant, the nose of Scorpio dropped towards the bright orb

of Julgac. 'Get strapped-in. . . we're paying Julgac a visit. . . whether we like it or not. Prepare for crash-landing!'

'Scorpio's on fire, Commissioner,' called the captain excitedly. 'The plan's worked!'

'Order the Battle Cruisers to follow Scorpio all the way,' purred Servalan. 'I want to see that ship torn apart. There must be no survivors!'

A bright streak crossed the sky of Julgac as Scorpio burned through its atmosphere. Inside the doomed craft, Tarrant fought with the bucking ship, trying desperately to regain some kind of control . . . but with little success.

'The teleport,' bellowed Tarrant. 'Get to the teleport, Dayna! Try to save yourself!'

'I'm not leaving you!' screamed Dayna as she lurched towards Tarrant's console. 'Maybe the pair of us can get her back on course.'

'What course?' growled Tarrant, sweat streaking his straining face. 'We're out of control and there's not a damned thing we can do about it!'

Dayna, in desperation, pressed all the flashing lights on the flight panel. From somewhere deep in Scorpio's powerful heart, there came a deep rumble, the ship bucked, juddered, then lurched to one side.

'What was that?'

'A power reversal,' grimaced Tarrant, still heaving at the controls.

'What does it mean?'

'Our rate of descent has been halved . . . there's some power control . . . but



Get strapped-in! We're paying Julgac a visit. . . whether we like it or not!

we're still flying like a flaming brick. We're going to crash-land Dayna. . . there's no other way. . . but at least the impact won't be quite as bad. Strap yourself in. . . here we go!

The ground ahead was a blur. Tarrant could make out little in the way of features. There were some ridges. If Scorpio hit one of those the ship would detonate on impact, becoming a giant fireball. Was there any clear area ahead? He could see nothing through the swirling smoke-filled interior of the ship. He closed his eyes, threw forward the controls. . . and prayed.

Tarrant remembered nothing, save the bright flashes and harsh, choking smoke which filled the air about him. Struggling to regain his senses he tried moving a hand. It would not respond. . . at least not at first. Then, from somewhere in the recesses of his mind, he thought he heard a groan.

'D. . . Dayna. . . ? Is. . . is that you? A. . . are you hurt. . . ?

'Congratulations, Commissioner. Your trap worked perfectly. The cruisers report seeing Scorpio crash-land in flames. They are returning to orbit.'

'No!' Servalan sprang to her feet. 'Order them to return to the planet and pound the wreckage with laser charges until nothing remains!'

'Very well, Commissioner,' replied the captain in a puzzled voice.

'On second thoughts,' cut in Servalan, 'I shall assume that task. It will give me a great deal of satisfaction to finish off those rebels on my own. Order the other ships to return to Federation command base. . . and send them my congratulations.'

As the message was flashed across the emptiness of space, Servalan's ship dipped towards Julgac. The Battle Cruisers signalled their acknowledgement then powered off into the blackness. . . unaware their communications channel was being monitored.

* * * * *

'They've finally done it.' Avon's voice was a low rumble.

'You mean the Federation have finally blasted the Scorpio out of existence and killed Tarrant and Dayna?' Vila's voice was subdued, sad.

'No. I mean Tarrant and Dayna have finally sacrificed the most advanced ship in the galaxy to their own stupidity.' Avon's eyes blazed with contempt. Soolin and Vila stared hard at Avon in disbelief. At last Avon had shown his true colours. The ship meant more to him than the lives of his companions.

'Shall I set a course back to Muntal, Avon?' Palvern had failed to notice the tension between Avon and the others.

'You say this ship is fully armed,' demanded Avon.

'Confirmed,' said Palvern, puzzled.

'Then I want to see what's left of Scorpio for myself. . . see if there's anything worth salvaging.'

'Or anyone alive,' interjected Soolin with a note of defiance in her voice.

'That too,' agreed Avon half-heartedly. 'But Servalan's ship will be down there as well. . . and I'd like to give her a little surprise.'

Palvern smiled knowingly. 'I understand. Take your places for entry to Julgac's atmosphere. I'm going straight in.'

'There's the wreck,' smiled Servalan's captain as he banked the ship over a shallow valley. The deep swathe cut by Scorpio's hull through the vegetation was still clear.

'Apart from some superficial damage to the engines area the ship looks intact,' snarled Servalan. 'Those cruiser captains should be shot for leaving it in such a state! However, I shall finish the job myself. Prepare all weapons! I'm looking forward to destroying Avon and his rabble.'

Servalan's ship reduced power as it swung wide to adopt an attacking approach. The deep roar of the engines reverberated across the landscape, even penetrating Scorpio's hull.

'Dayna! Dayna . . . Come on! W. . . we've got to get out of here!' Some sixth sense told the dazed and bleeding Tarrant that danger was close at hand.

'I. . . I can't move,' gasped the girl as she tried to lever the broken flight seat from across her body.

'Here!' Tarrant lurched towards her, tearing the heavy obstacle from her, the din of approaching engines growing ever louder. 'Now come on. It sounds like the Federation haven't finished with us yet!'

Giving each other support, Tarrant and Dayna made it to an escape hatch, blew the explosive bolts and tasted the acrid atmosphere of Julgac for the first time. The terrain looked inhospitable. . . but more alarming was the awesome shape of Servalan's ship cruising in for the kill. Tarrant called something inaudible above the din of the incoming ship then threw himself and Dayna towards the ground.

'Someone still lives!' exclaimed Servalan as she stared with disbelief at the monitor. 'Open fire immediately,' she screeched. Her hand was reaching for her own weapons system control lever when the first blast rocked her ship.

'We're under attack,' yelled the captain. 'Another ship coming in fast behind us!'

'Evasive action!'





Order the ships to return... I shall finish the task myself...!

A further blast wave threw the ship across the skies, plunging the flight-deck into darkness.

'Emergency power. Full thrust.' Servalan gripped hard at the arms of her seat. Her voice dropped to a whisper. 'Get us out of here before they kill us!' Servalan did not need to be told who was on board the other craft. Instinct made it clear. 'I should have known better,' she muttered. 'Avon would never have fallen so easily for such a trap.'

'I never thought I'd be so glad to see you,' grinned Tarrant as he helped Dayna to his feet, turning to greet Avon and the others making their way from Palvern's ship. Avon said nothing, his eyes constantly sweeping Scorpio's hull, examining every sign of damage. At length he turned to speak to Tarrant.

'Are you hurt?'

'Only a few cuts and bruises. We were lucky.'

'Quite so,' hissed Avon, his right fist flashing towards Tarrant's jaw. The fierce impact sent the young pilot sprawling, startled. 'And by now you would have been dead if I had not come after you!'

'L... look, Avon,' began Tarrant in an apologetic voice, 'it was all a misunderstanding. The message seemed so

authentic. How were we to know...'

'By asking me,' snarled Avon. 'Then this... ' he gestured to the crashed ship, 'would not have happened. Vila, get inside and check the damage. I want to know if it can be repaired.'

Vila shrugged his shoulders as he clambered inside the hull. Tarrant, feeling his tender jaw, turned to Dayna and managed a faint smile. 'It was a good try, Dayna, but we've made real fools of ourselves.'

Dayna dropped her eyes. 'Yes, it was all my fault. I won't let my hatred of Servalan get the better of me again.'

'We need a new power transfer unit to get the ship flying again,' said Vila emerging from Scorpio's hull. 'There's lots of other damage but it can wait until the ship's back on Xenon. With a new transfer until we could limp home but where are we going to get such a thing on this God-forsaken planet?'

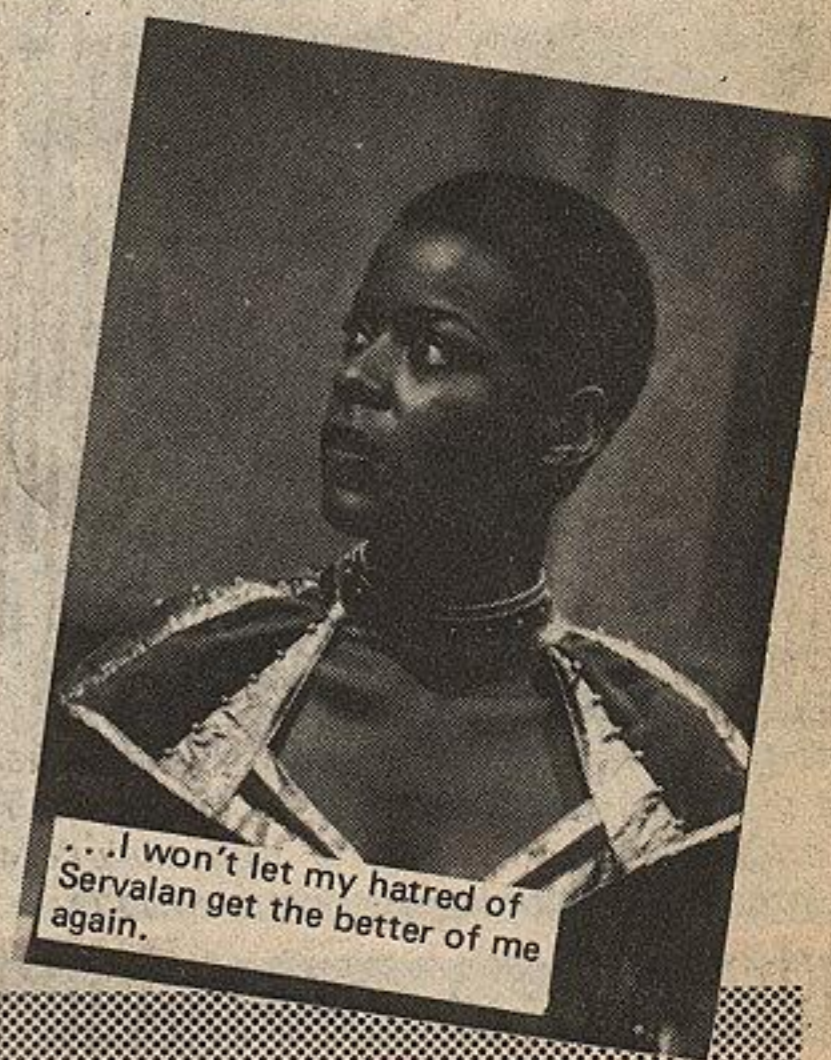
'Use mine,' offered Palvern.

'But that would mean your ship being immobilised,' offered Vila.

'Quite right but I can see your Scorpio would be more of an asset in the fight against the Federation than my old tub.' Palvern smiled. 'You can return me to Muntal on your way home then, when

Scorpio is fit for battle again, collect me and the others from my planet. I'm certain I can persuade more captains to join in an uprising.'

'We don't deserve your support,' said Avon turning to take Palvern's hand, 'but I'm grateful. I promise you Scorpio will lead your people against the Federation soon... as long as I can stop Tarrant and Dayna falling into any more of Servalan's traps!'



...I won't let my hatred of Servalan get the better of me again.

They are never seen on your screens yet it is their efforts and artistry that create the pictures you see on your screens. They are also some of the most important people as far as performers are concerned and usually known by their first names by all the best stars. They are the cameramen involved with the series either on location or in the studio. They are. . .

THE CAMERAMEN

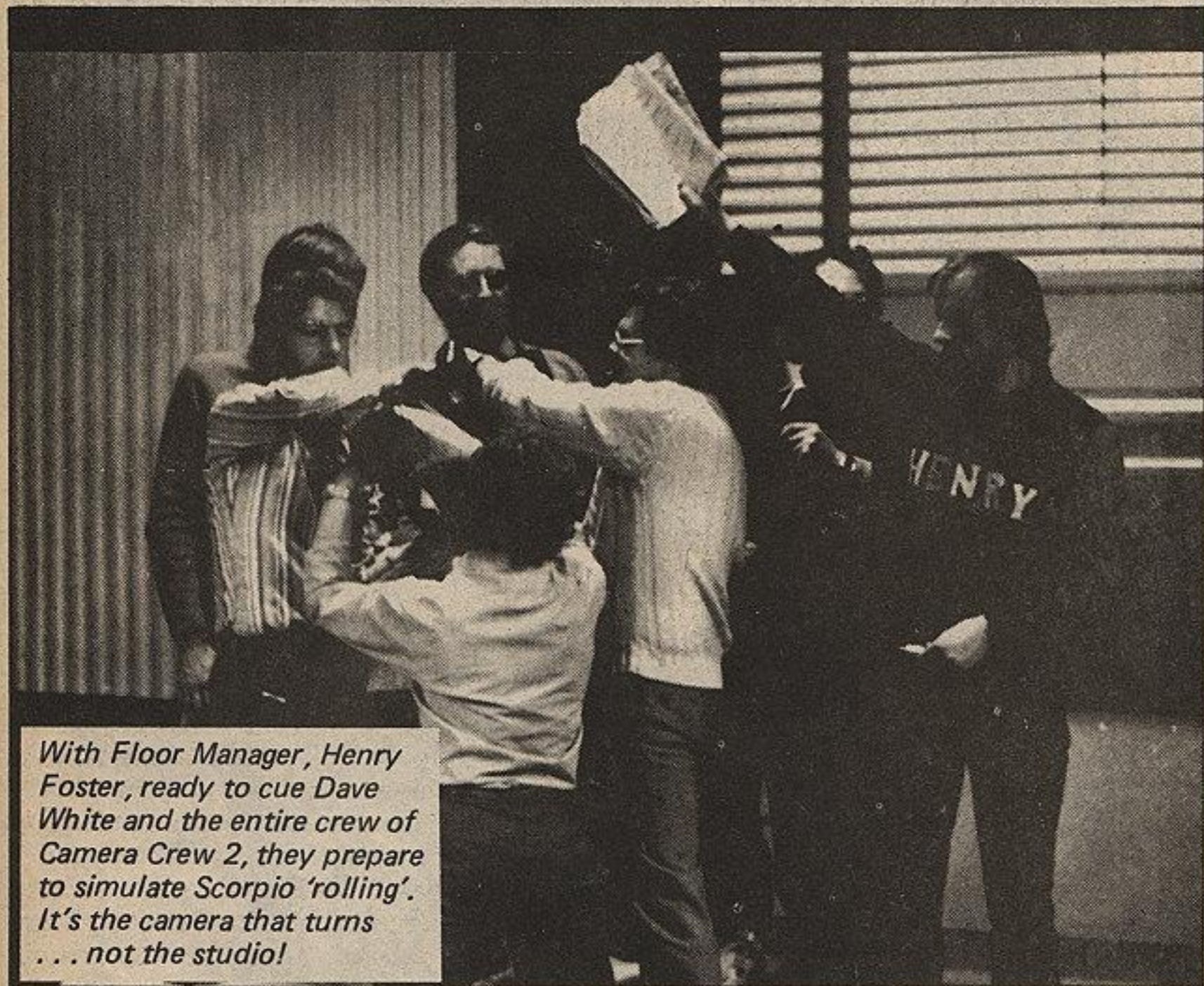
To film a series such as BLAKE'S 7 requires skill, dedication. . . and sturdy footwear. Either on location or in the studio a seat is the last thing you are likely to see during 'shooting'. In the studio, the day starts at nine-thirty in the morning and continues with few breaks until ten o'clock at night. For the majority of that time the men of Camera Crew 2, headed by Dave White, are expected to be on their feet following the action of both rehearsal and 'takes' during the recording session. Studio time is expensive and mistakes must be kept to a minimum.

To follow the action exactly as the director desires, each cameraman is linked into an audio system controlled from the main control room high above. Each man also has a 'shooting script' of the episode in progress and must know where he is expected to be and what image he is supposed to show from his position every second of the production.

For those not familiar with television studio work, the sight of several cameras moving about on the set during a 'take' looks alarming — yet collisions are few even when there is very little space between cameras.

When a large set is used, such as the flight deck of Scorpio, five cameras are in constant motion as the director repositions each one according to the action required.

The studio crew, however, have less hardships to contend with than the film crew whose responsibility is to cover location work regardless of the weather.



With Floor Manager, Henry Foster, ready to cue Dave White and the entire crew of Camera Crew 2, they prepare to simulate Scorpio 'rolling'. It's the camera that turns . . . not the studio!



During a short break in recording, Dave White, second left, discusses the next sequence of shots with one of his crew. . . while Paul Darrow enjoys a joke with Jacinta Peel, Floor Manager of the episode.



When it is difficult to manoeuvre a normal camera into position in the studio, a special video camera can be used.

Finton Sheehan and his assistant, Colin Case, were tasked to commit all the location work of the fourth series to film and, in the period of production, somehow managed to achieve excellent results. Despite starting the year in the mud of Dunstable, then by contrast the searing heat of high summer in Dorset and ending again in the rain and mud of Camberley, their films were always of the highest quality.

Faced with such problems as one day's filming being done in bright sunshine then continuation shots the following day having to be done in drizzle under looming skies the old maxim held true — you could hardly see the join!

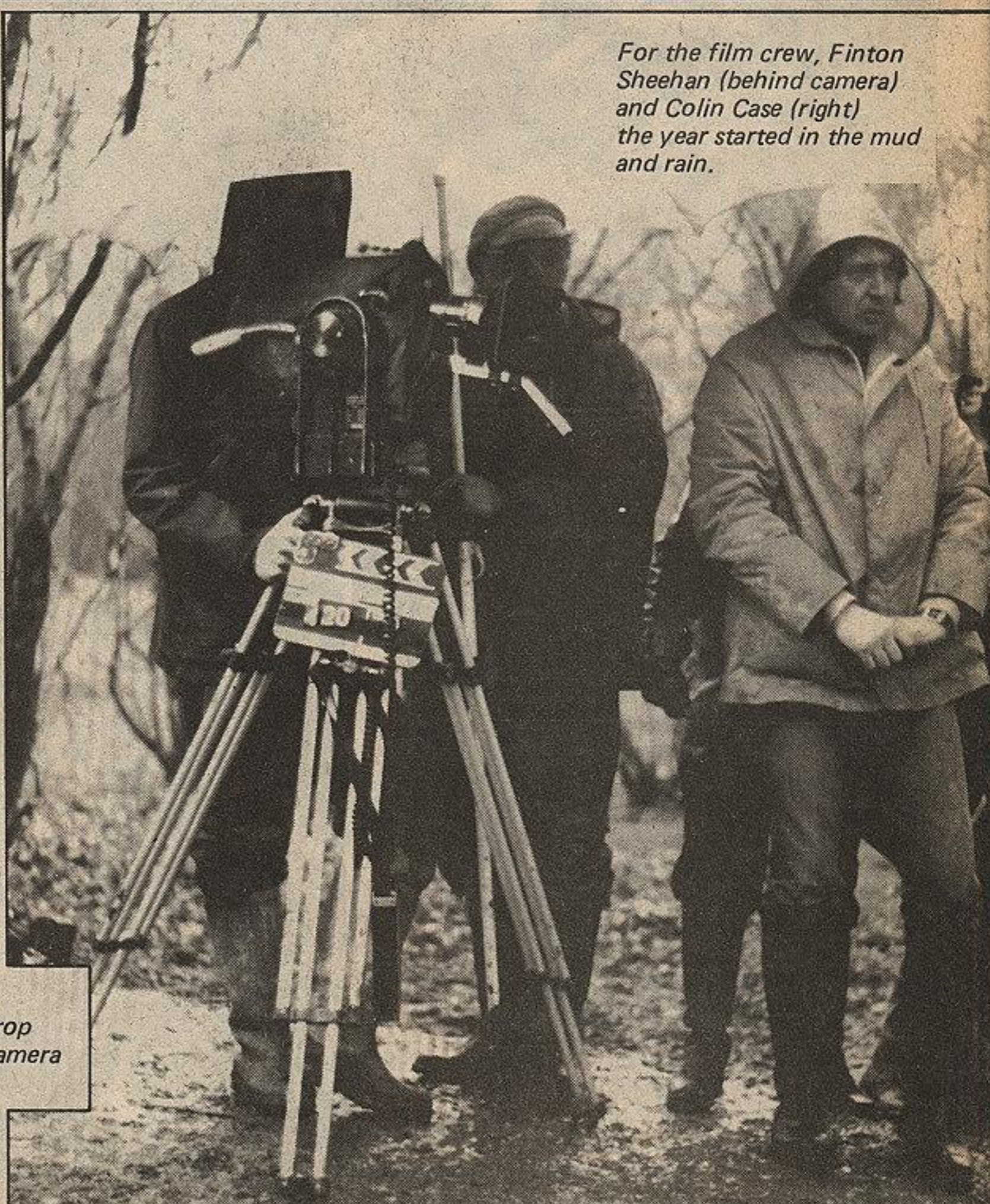
No matter what conditions the crews faced, either on location or in a smoke-filled studio, their technical and artistic abilities were always of the highest. They had indeed lived up to their name again. . . the image makers!



Always on first name terms with all the stars. Dave White and Paul Darrow discuss the next sequence to be recorded.



Perched high on the 'sound' trolley, the boom microphone operator has to take care not to drop the microphone into the area covered by the camera below.



For the film crew, Finton Sheehan (behind camera) and Colin Case (right) the year started in the mud and rain.

GUNNING FOR TROUBLE!
AVON GOES LOOKING
FOR TROUBLE... BEFORE IT
FINDS HIM!



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