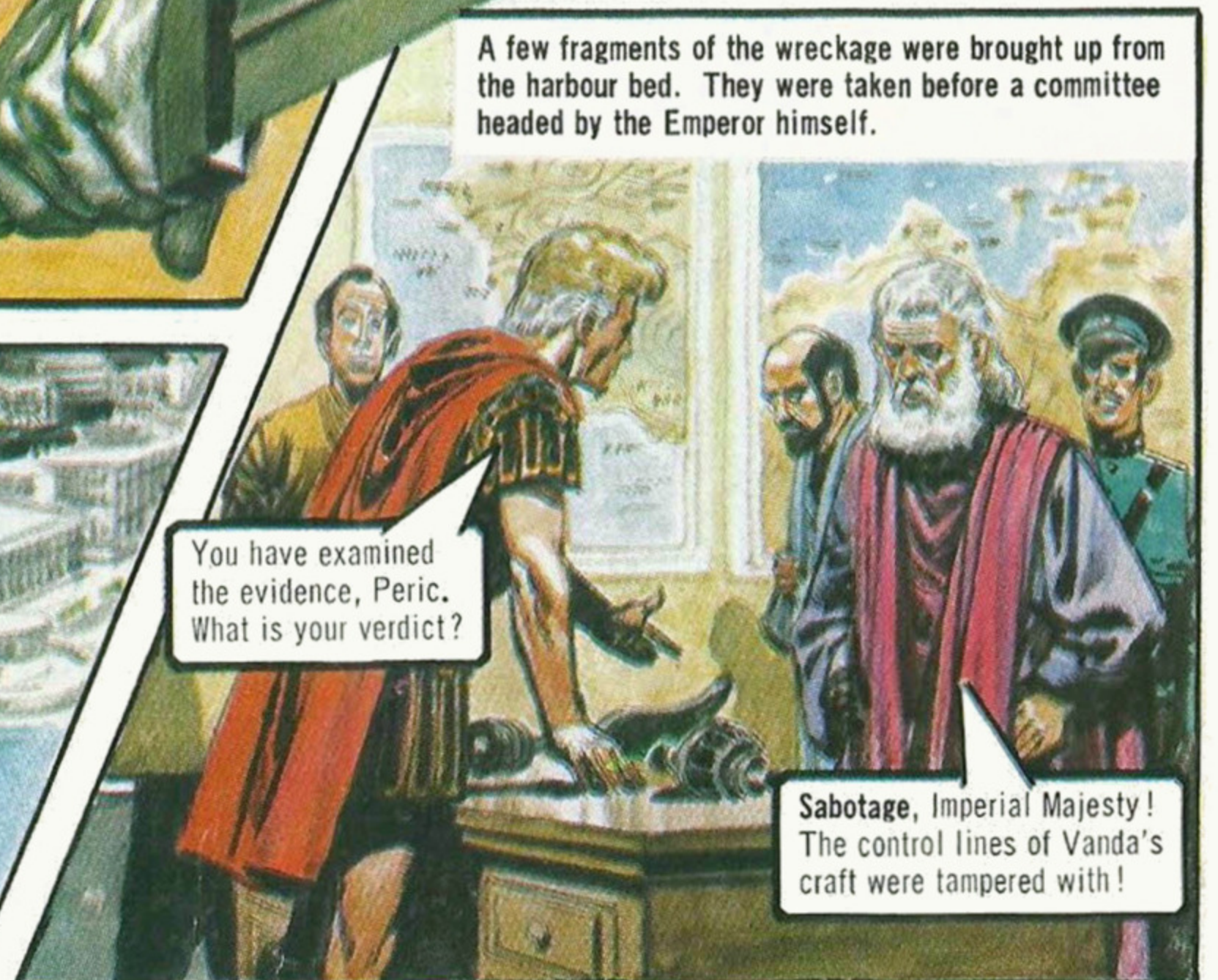
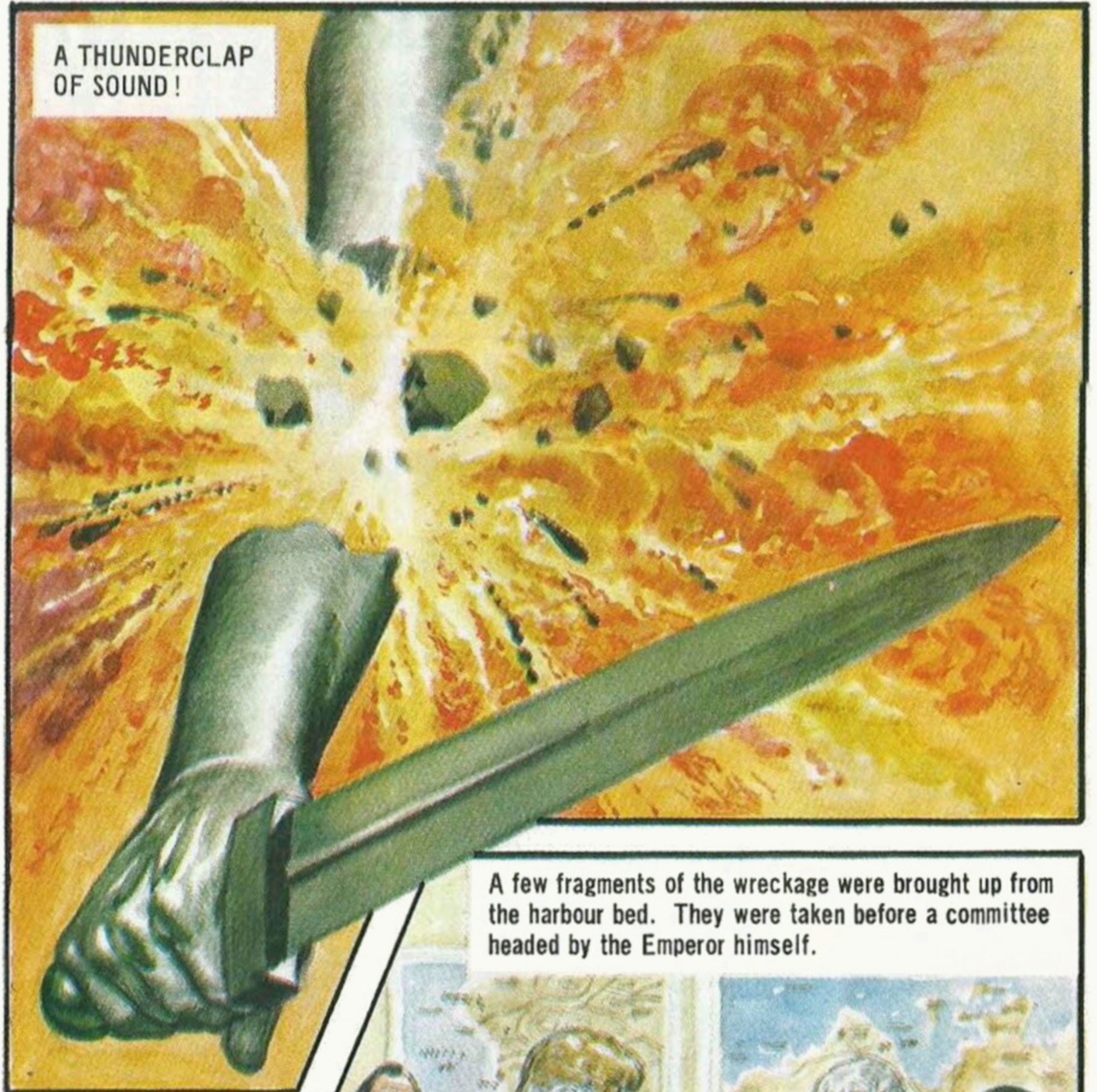
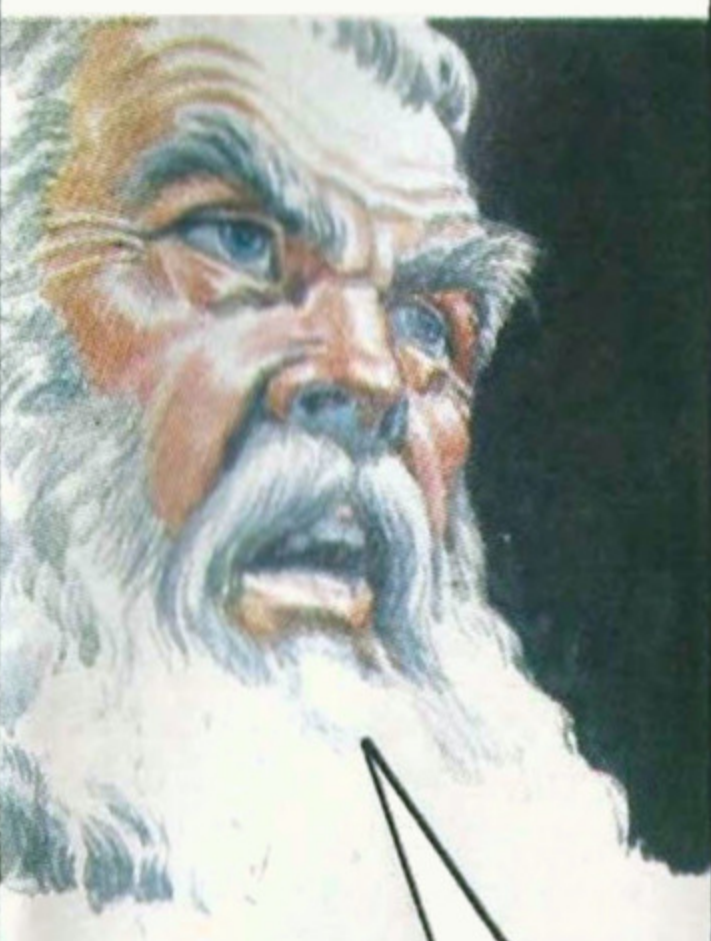


TRIGAN EMPIRE

The planet Elekton lies in the galaxy of Yarna, and the greatest power on Elekton is the Trigan Empire, ruled over by its founder, the Emperor Trigo.

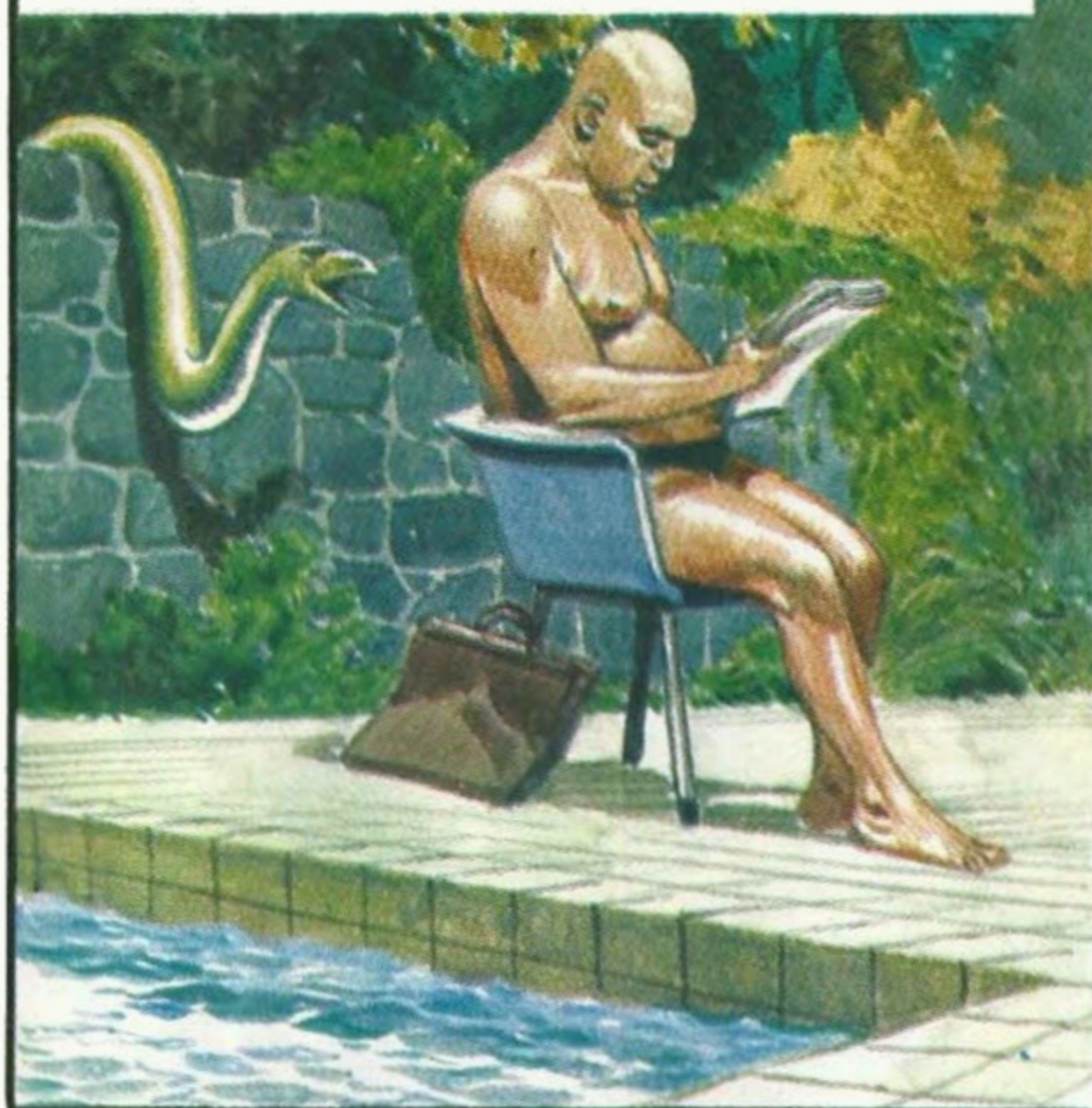


Elekton's top scientist spoke gravely.

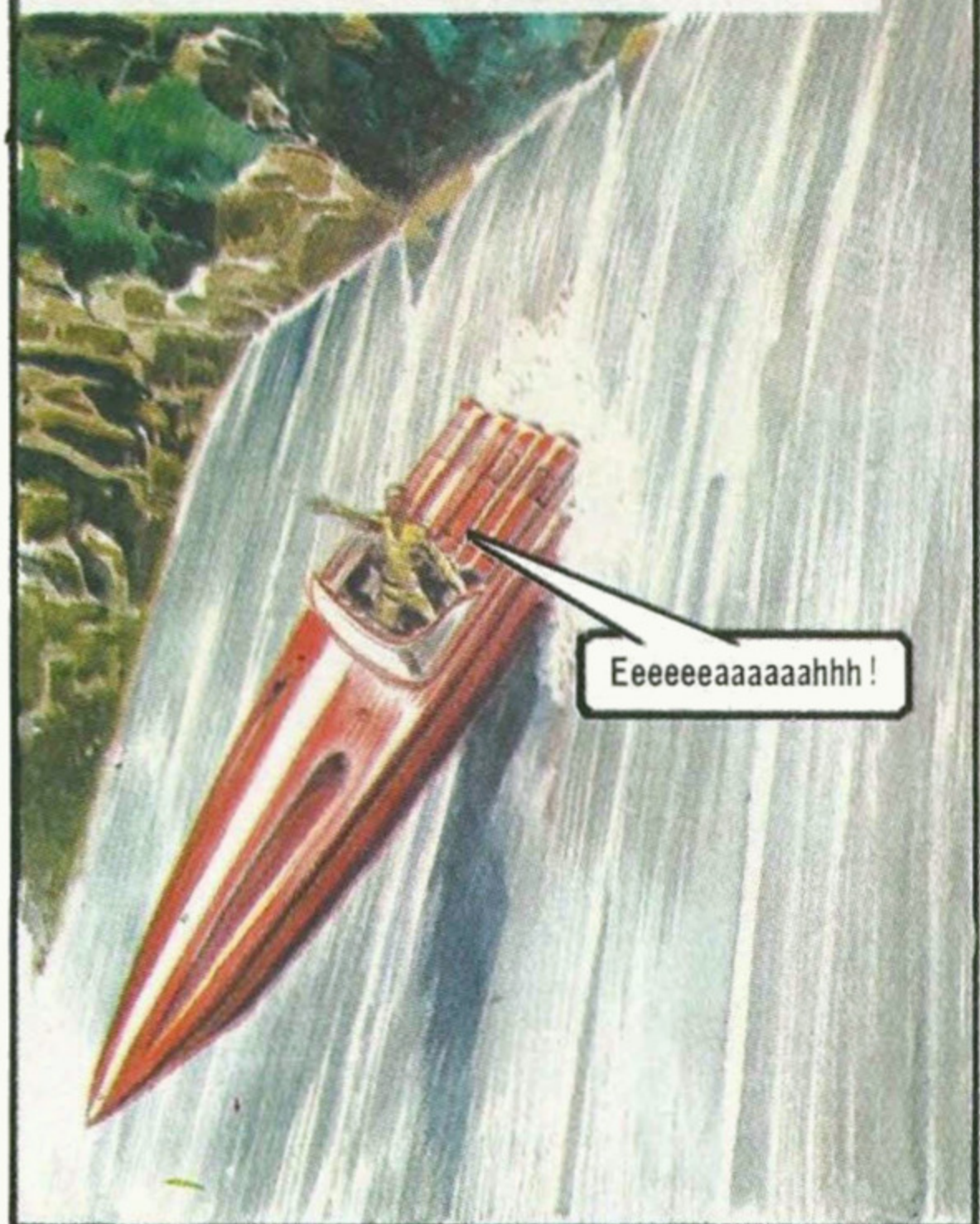


Captain Vanda is not the first to perish by the same agency! There is an evil force at work in our midst that is gnawing at the heart of the Trigan Empire! I will give you further instances . . .

Peric continued: "When the millionaire Hurri Rass refused to hand over his fortune and submit himself to this force, means were found to dispose of him in his own home!"

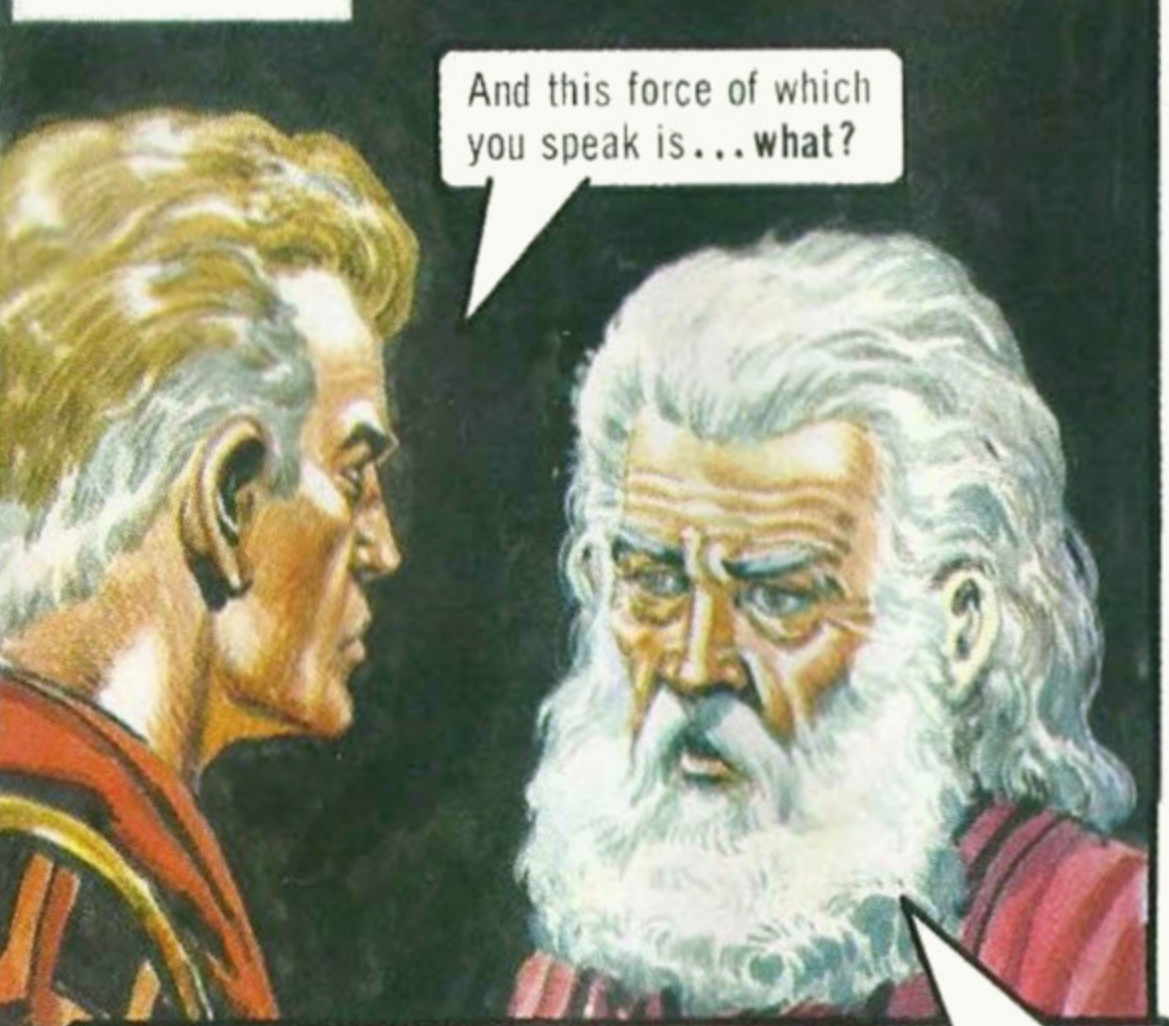


"An influential provincial governor named Hazzor betrayed certain secrets to the police," Peric went on. "And he met with a tragic boating accident!"



Eeeeeaaaaaahhh!

Trigo cut in . . .



And this force of which you speak is . . . what?

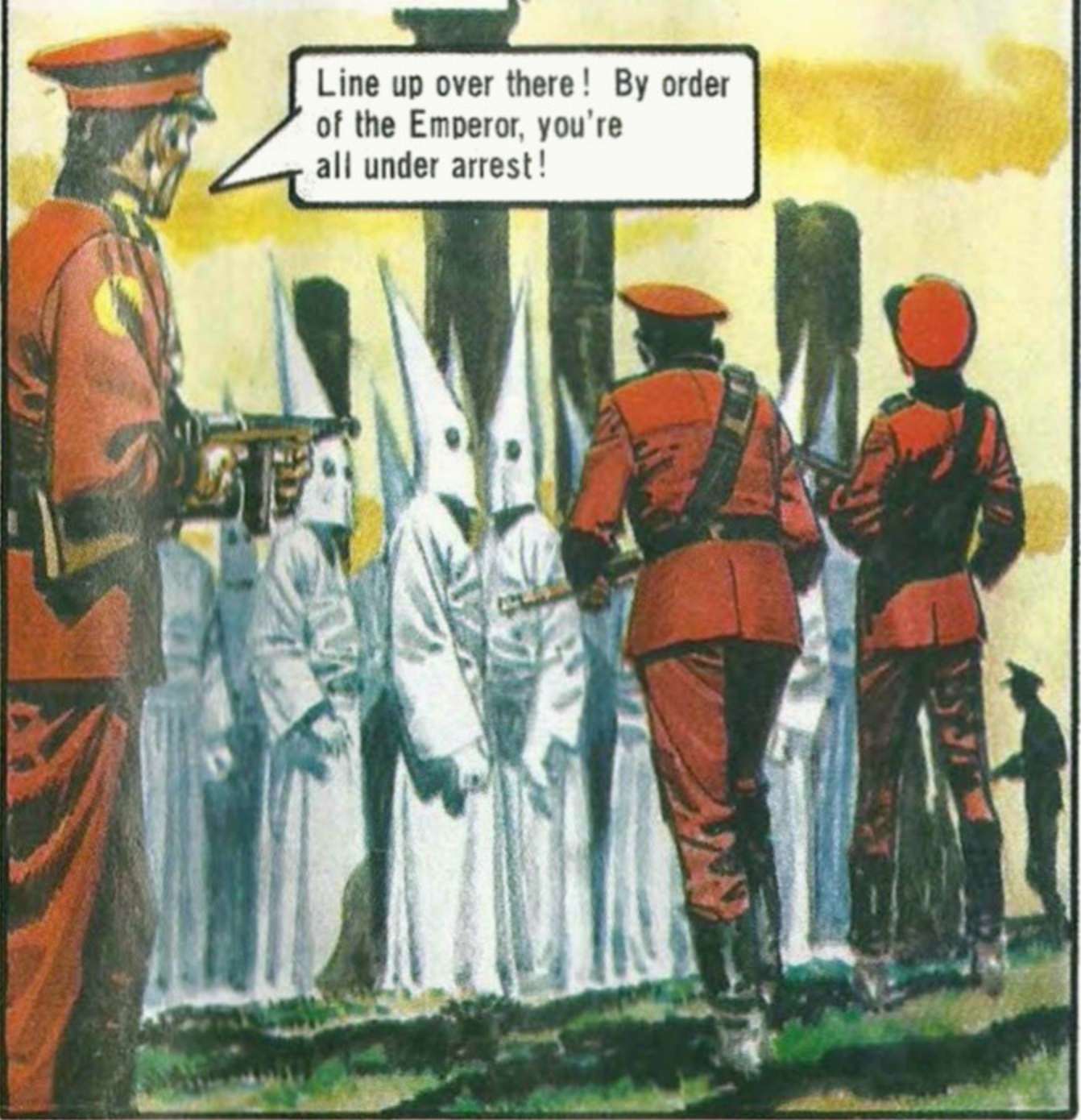
A cult of sun-worshippers, Imperial Majesty! The ancient superstition of sun-worship has not been practised on this planet since pre-historic times, but it has been revived with all its evil! Captain Vanda, who was working as an undercover agent, was able to pass on some vital information before they got him! . . .

Dawn broke over the Vorg hills. The first rays of Elekton's twin suns touched the stones of an ancient, ruined temple.



All-hail, O riders of the sky! Make thy followers mighty! Bring destruction to all unbelievers!

Suddenly - a rude interruption!



Line up over there! By order of the Emperor, you're all under arrest!

The chief priest's voice echoed harshly in the still air . . .

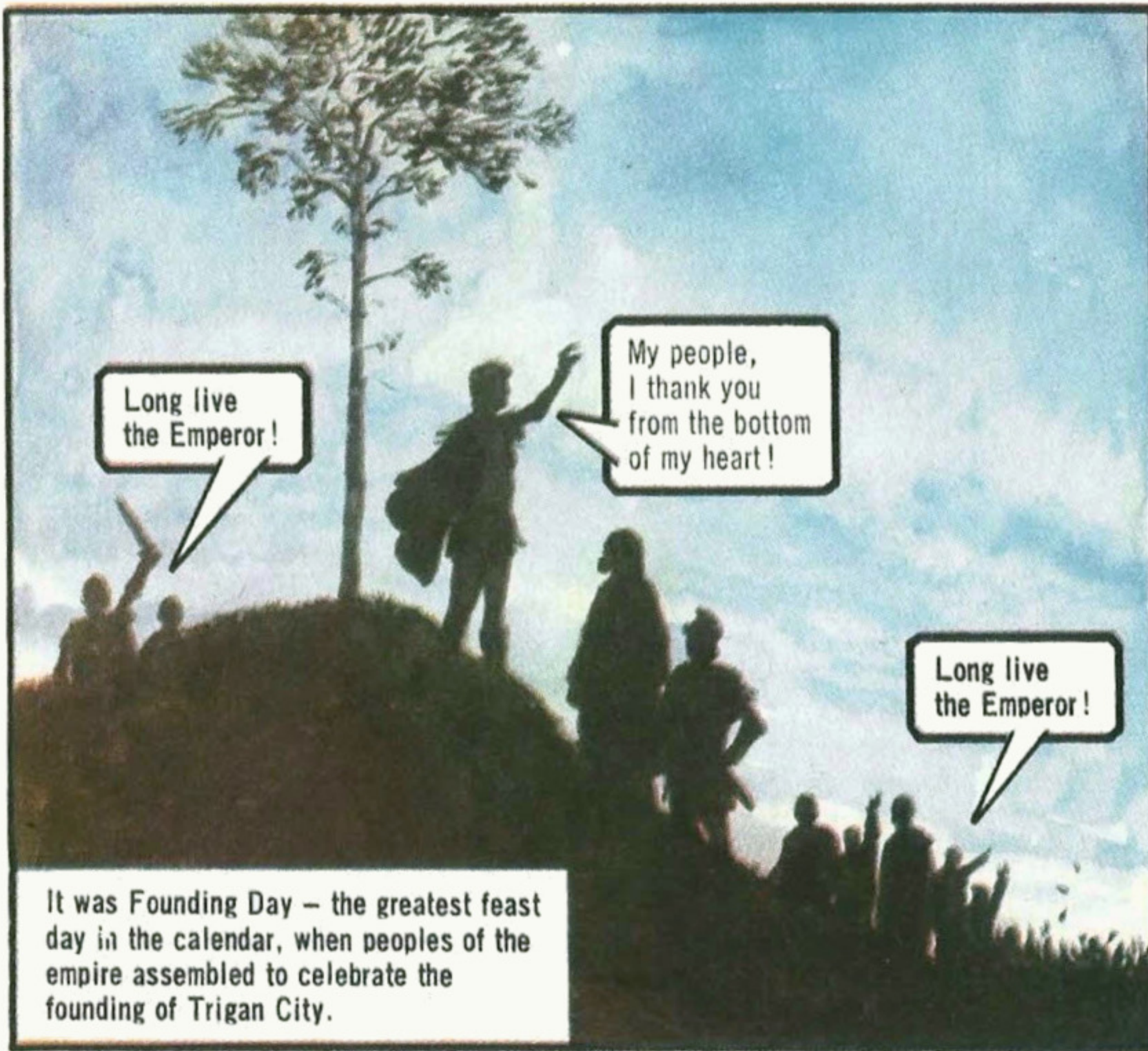


The Emperor! The curse of the suns upon the so-called Emperor of the Trigans! From this day forth, everything he touches shall fall to ruin - and in the end he will be swallowed up!

. . . having delivered the terrible utterance, the chief priest VANISHED!



By all the demons in Daveli! He's disappeared!



Long live the Emperor!

My people, I thank you from the bottom of my heart!

Long live the Emperor!

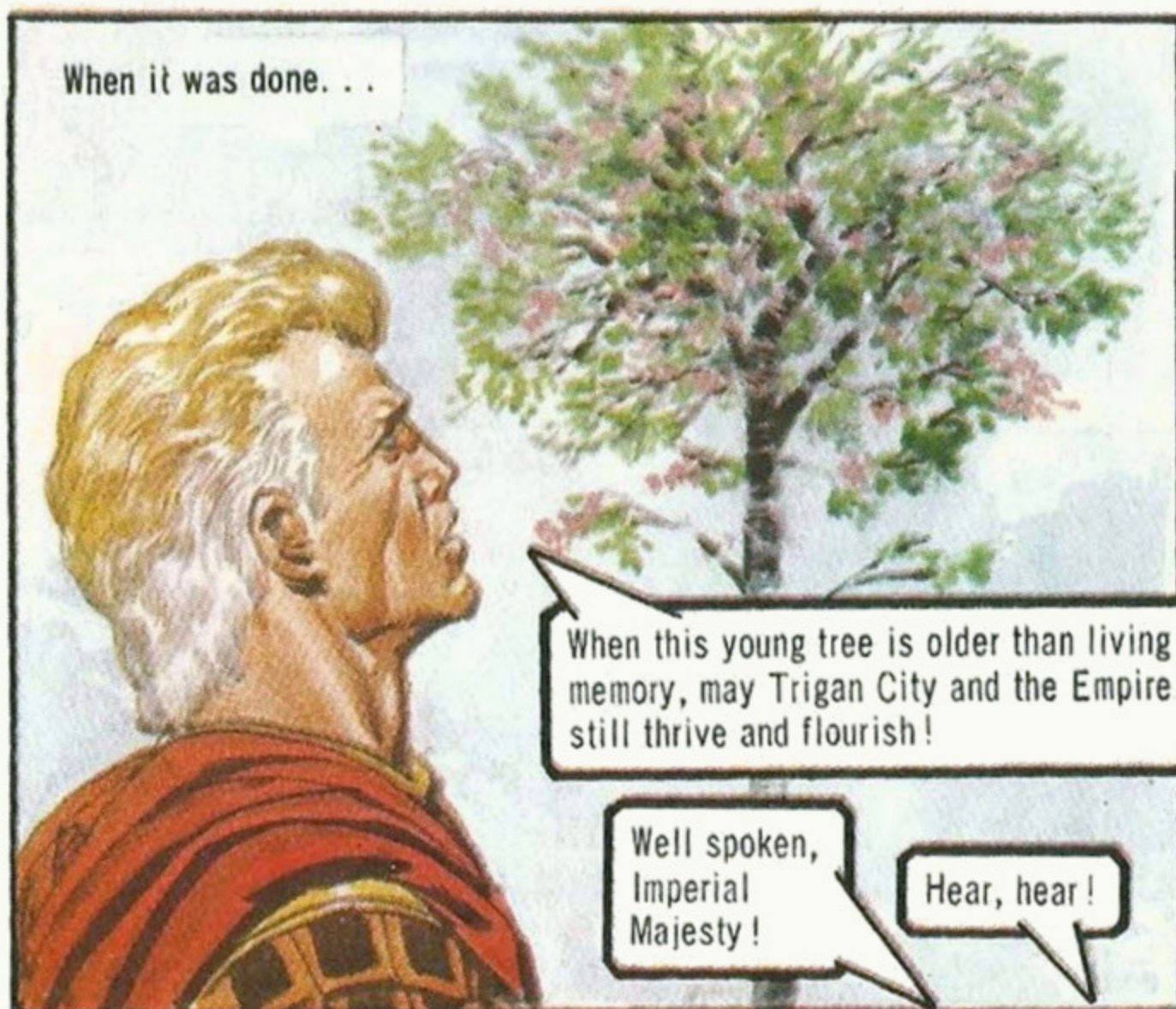
It was Founding Day – the greatest feast day in the calendar, when peoples of the empire assembled to celebrate the founding of Trigan City.



The captain of the Imperial Guard handed Trigo a ceremonial spade, and the Emperor formally "planted" a commemorative tree.

But, of course, it is perfectly obvious to even the most stupid that the tree is already planted!

Quite so, Majesty – but your symbolic spadeful makes all the difference!

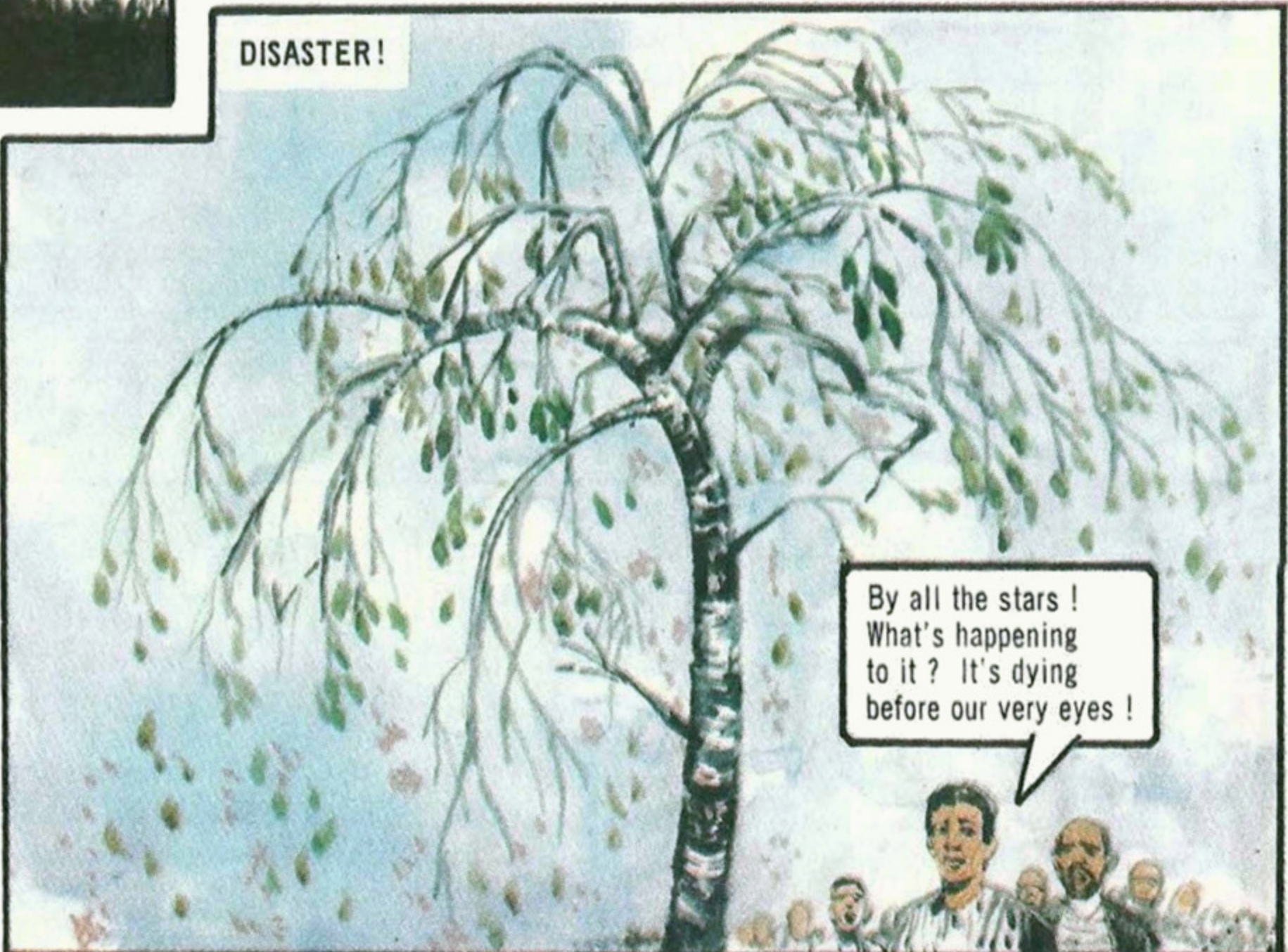


When it was done...

When this young tree is older than living memory, may Trigan City and the Empire still thrive and flourish!

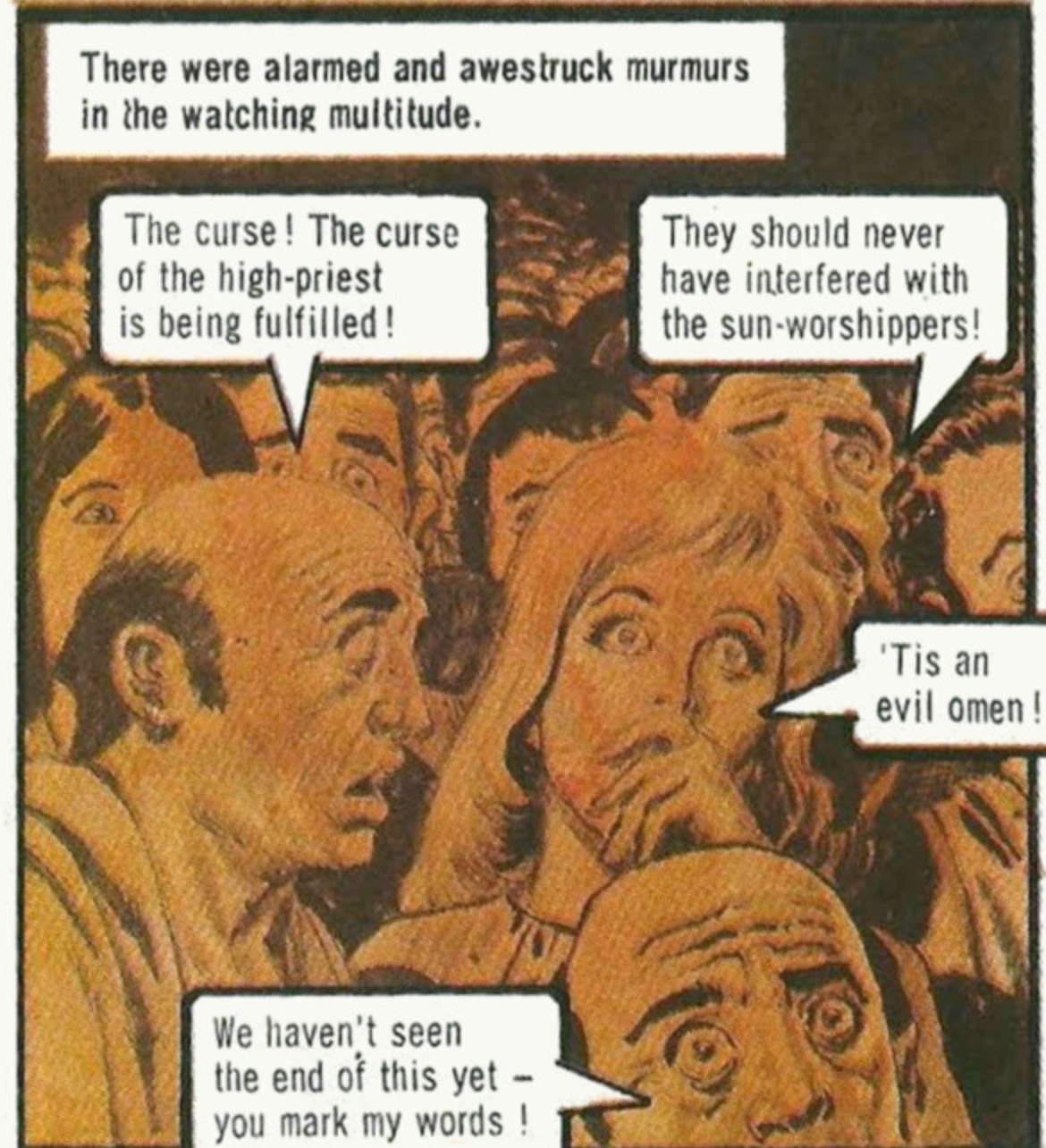
Well spoken, Imperial Majesty!

Hear, hear!



DISASTER!

By all the stars! What's happening to it? It's dying before our very eyes!



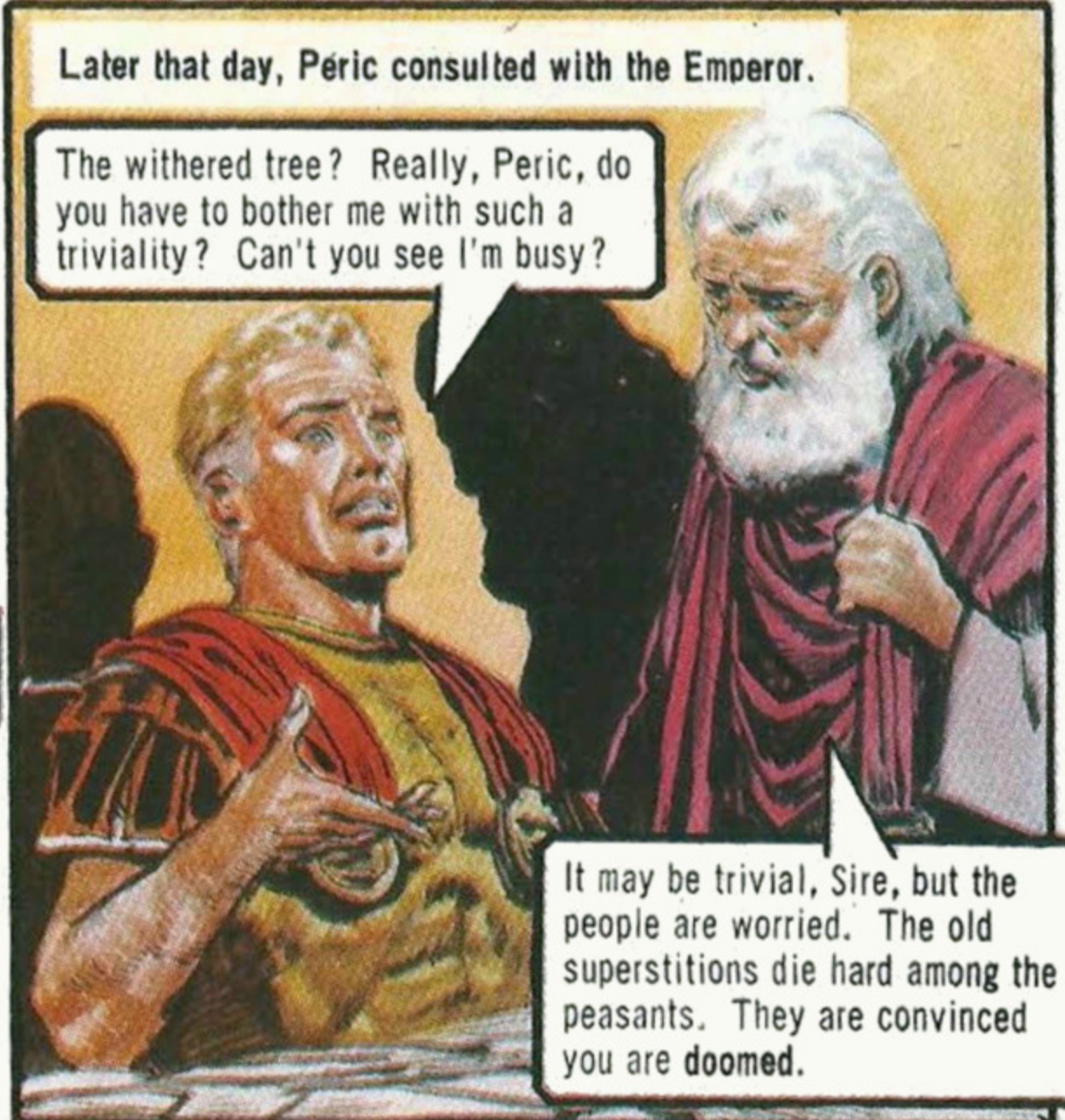
There were alarmed and awestruck murmurs in the watching multitude.

The curse! The curse of the high-priest is being fulfilled!

They should never have interfered with the sun-worshippers!

'Tis an evil omen!

We haven't seen the end of this yet – you mark my words!



Later that day, Peric consulted with the Emperor.

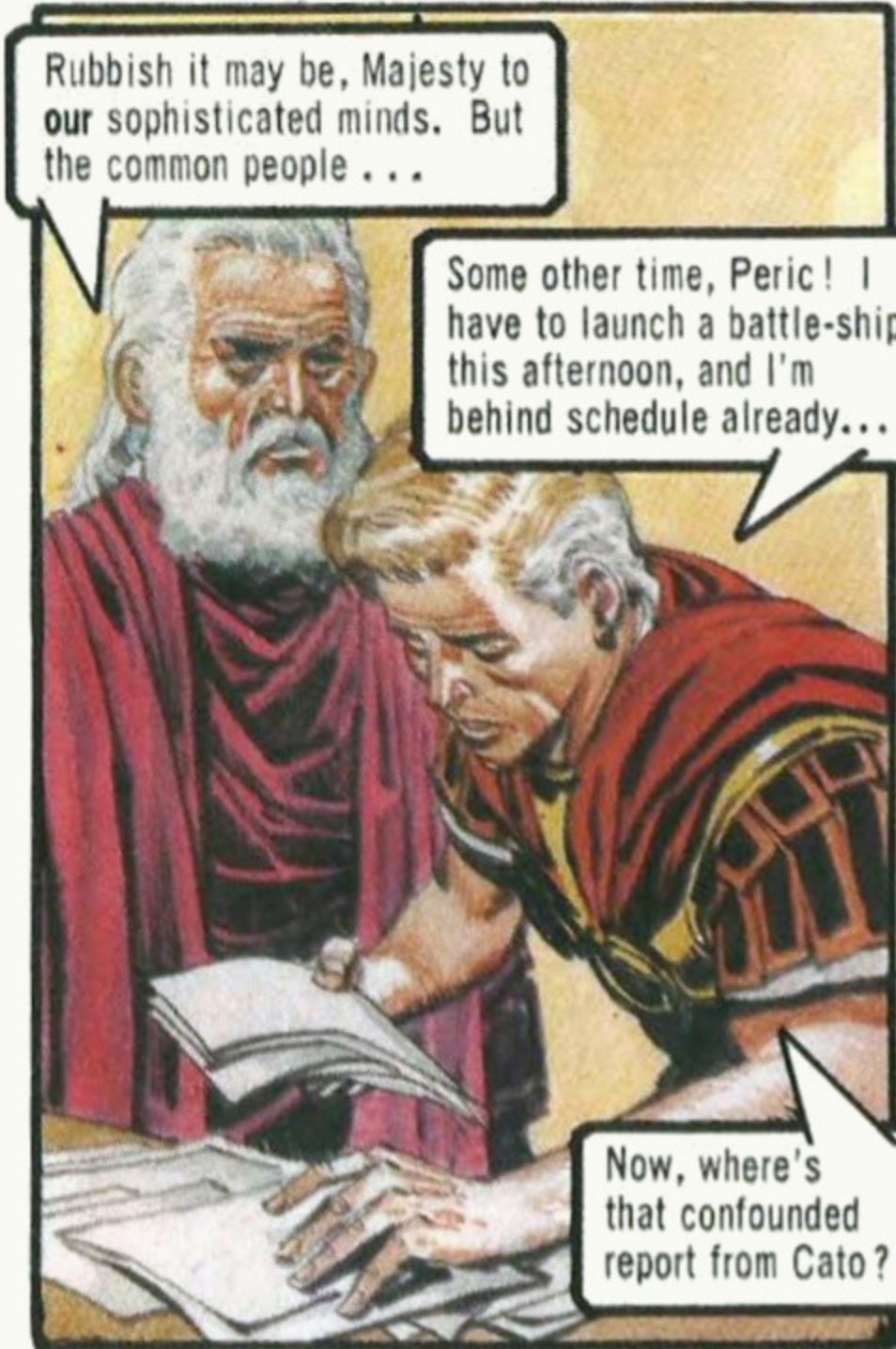
The withered tree? Really, Peric, do you have to bother me with such a triviality? Can't you see I'm busy?

It may be trivial, Sire, but the people are worried. The old superstitions die hard among the peasants. They are convinced you are doomed.



The high-priest's curse, eh? What was it he said? "From this day forth, everything Trigo touches shall fall to ruin – and in the end he will be swallowed up!"

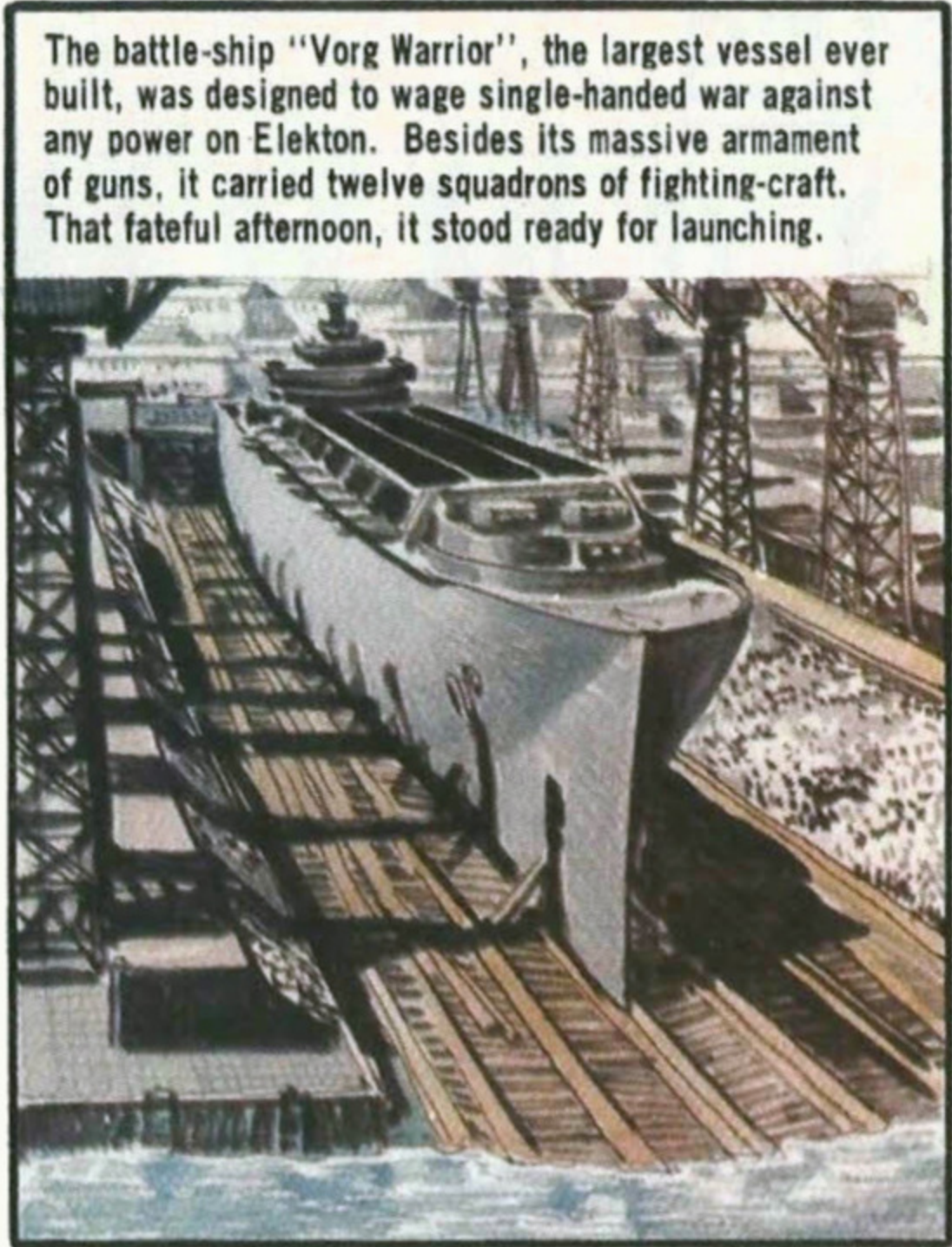
Rubbish!



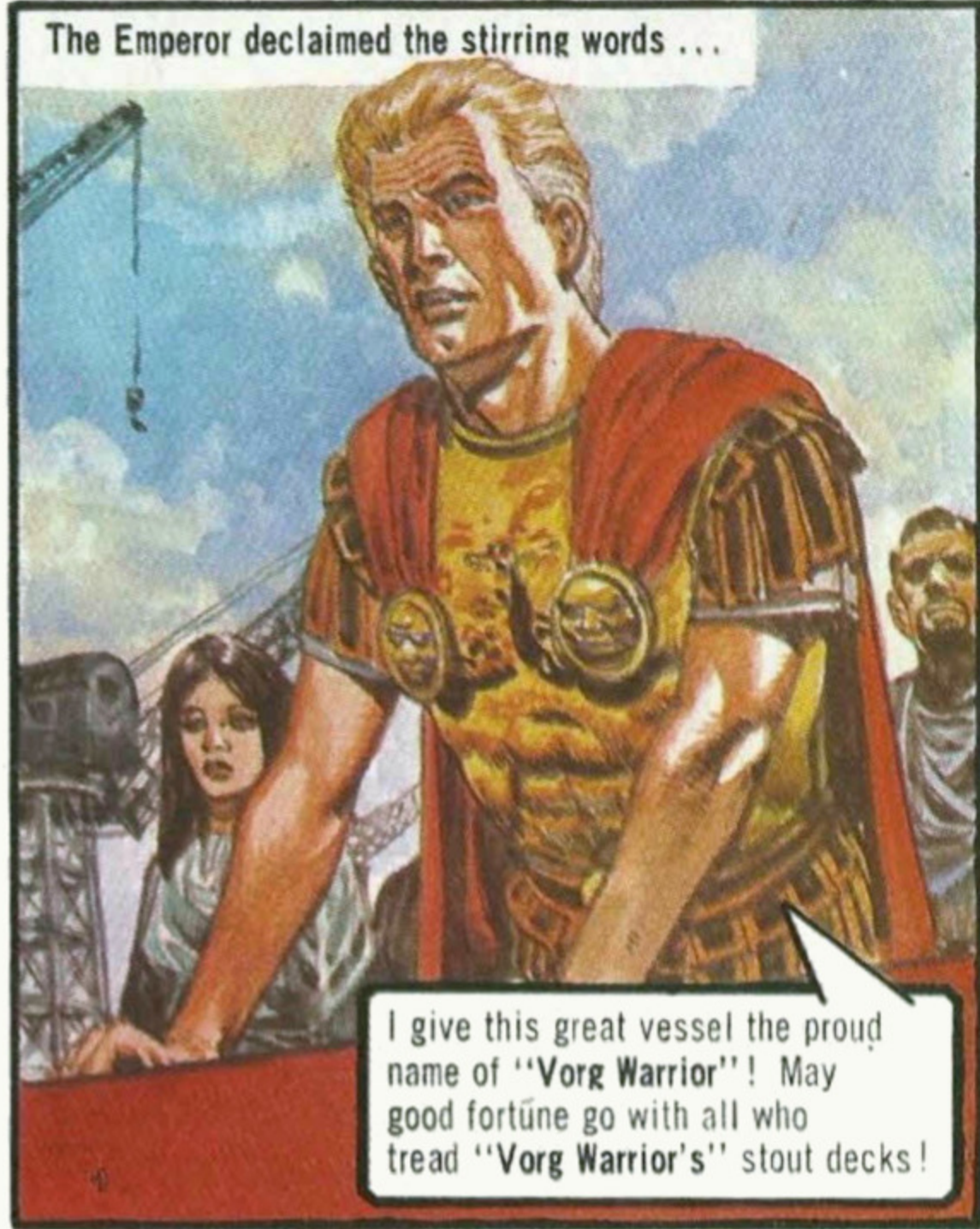
Rubbish it may be, Majesty to our sophisticated minds. But the common people . . .

Some other time, Peric! I have to launch a battle-ship this afternoon, and I'm behind schedule already...

Now, where's that confounded report from Cato?

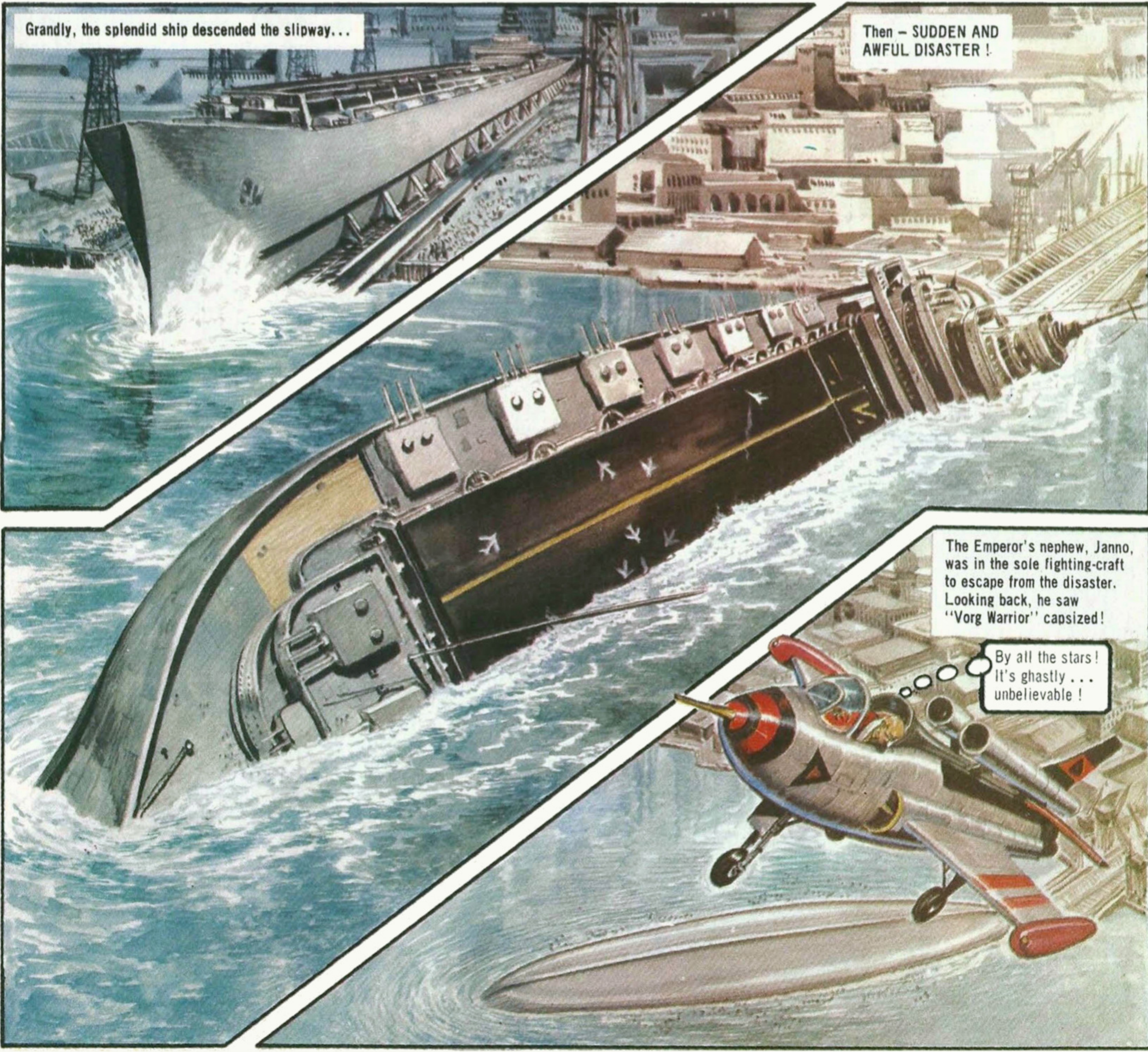


The battle-ship "Vorg Warrior", the largest vessel ever built, was designed to wage single-handed war against any power on Elekton. Besides its massive armament of guns, it carried twelve squadrons of fighting-craft. That fateful afternoon, it stood ready for launching.



The Emperor declaimed the stirring words . . .

I give this great vessel the proud name of "Vorg Warrior"! May good fortune go with all who tread "Vorg Warrior's" stout decks!

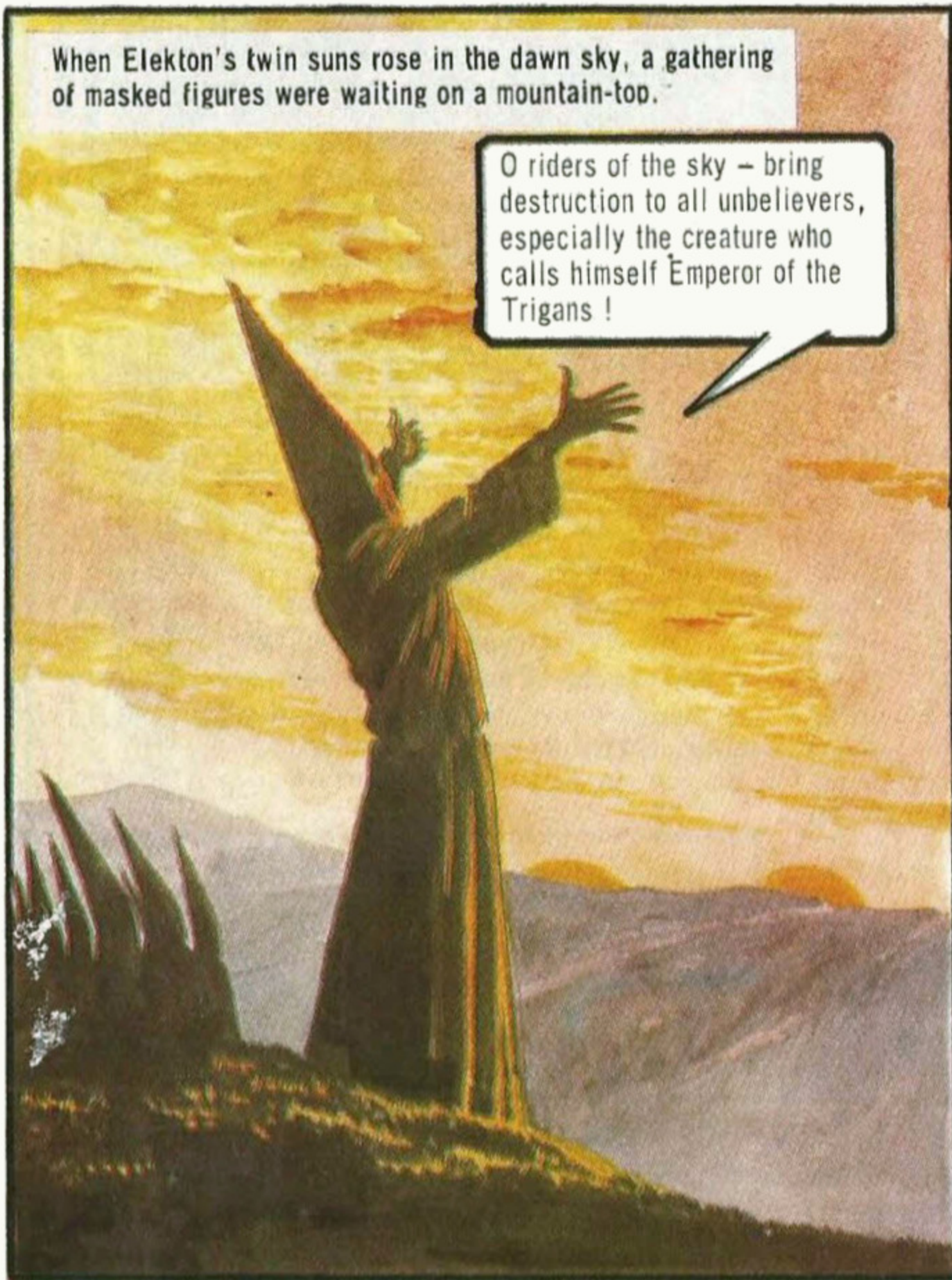


Grandly, the splendid ship descended the slipway . . .

Then - SUDDEN AND AWFUL DISASTER!

The Emperor's nephew, Janno, was in the sole fighting-craft to escape from the disaster. Looking back, he saw "Vorg Warrior" capsized!

By all the stars! It's ghastly . . . unbelievable!



When Elekton's twin suns rose in the dawn sky, a gathering of masked figures were waiting on a mountain-top.

O riders of the sky - bring destruction to all unbelievers, especially the creature who calls himself Emperor of the Trigans!



The chief priest's voice was vibrant with triumph.

My followers! We are indestructible! They will never crush us! Furthermore, the accursed Trigo is already tumbling down the steep slope to annihilation!

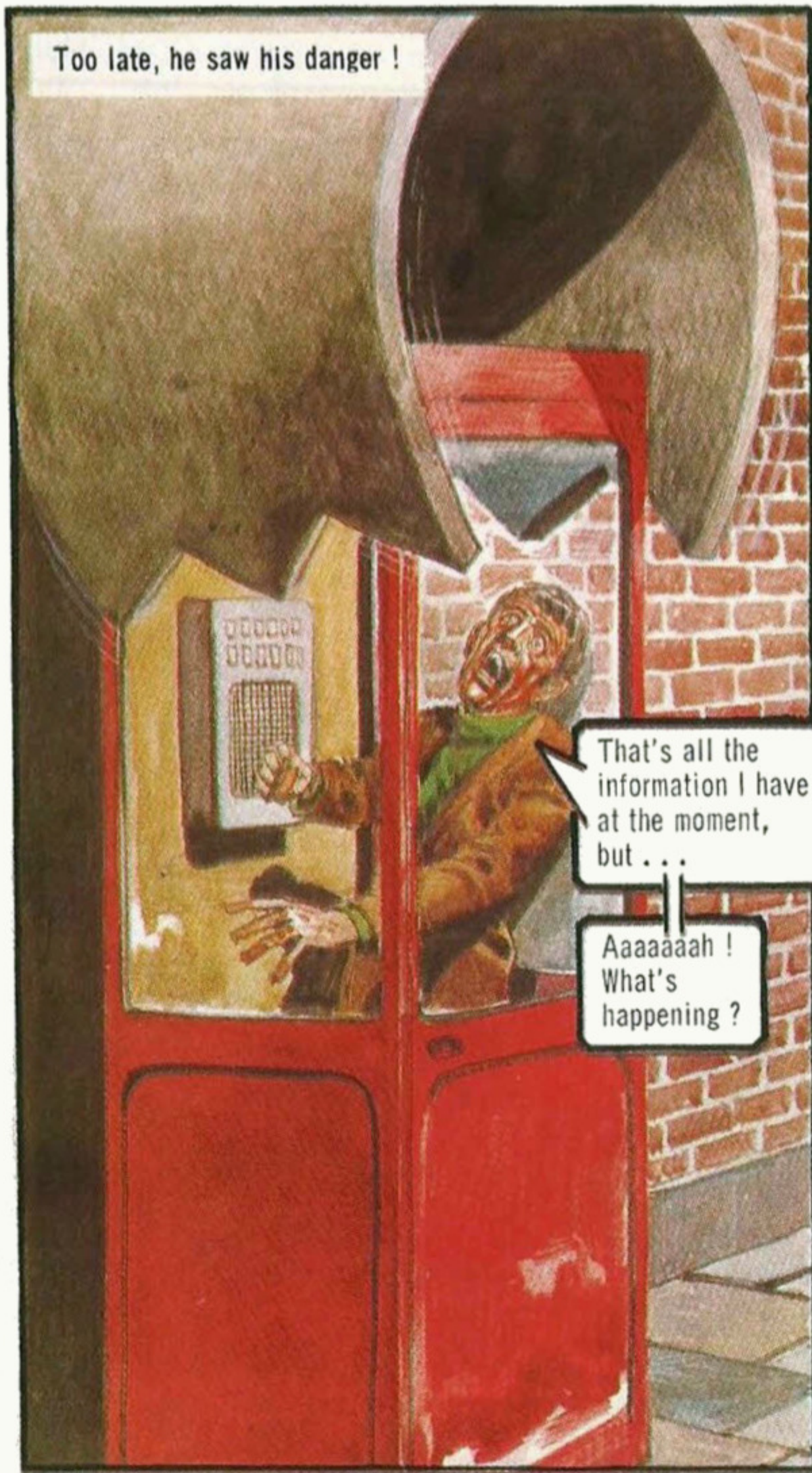
I must report this immediately!

The secret ceremony over, one of the worshippers made haste back in the direction of Trigan City.



He stopped at the first public call box.

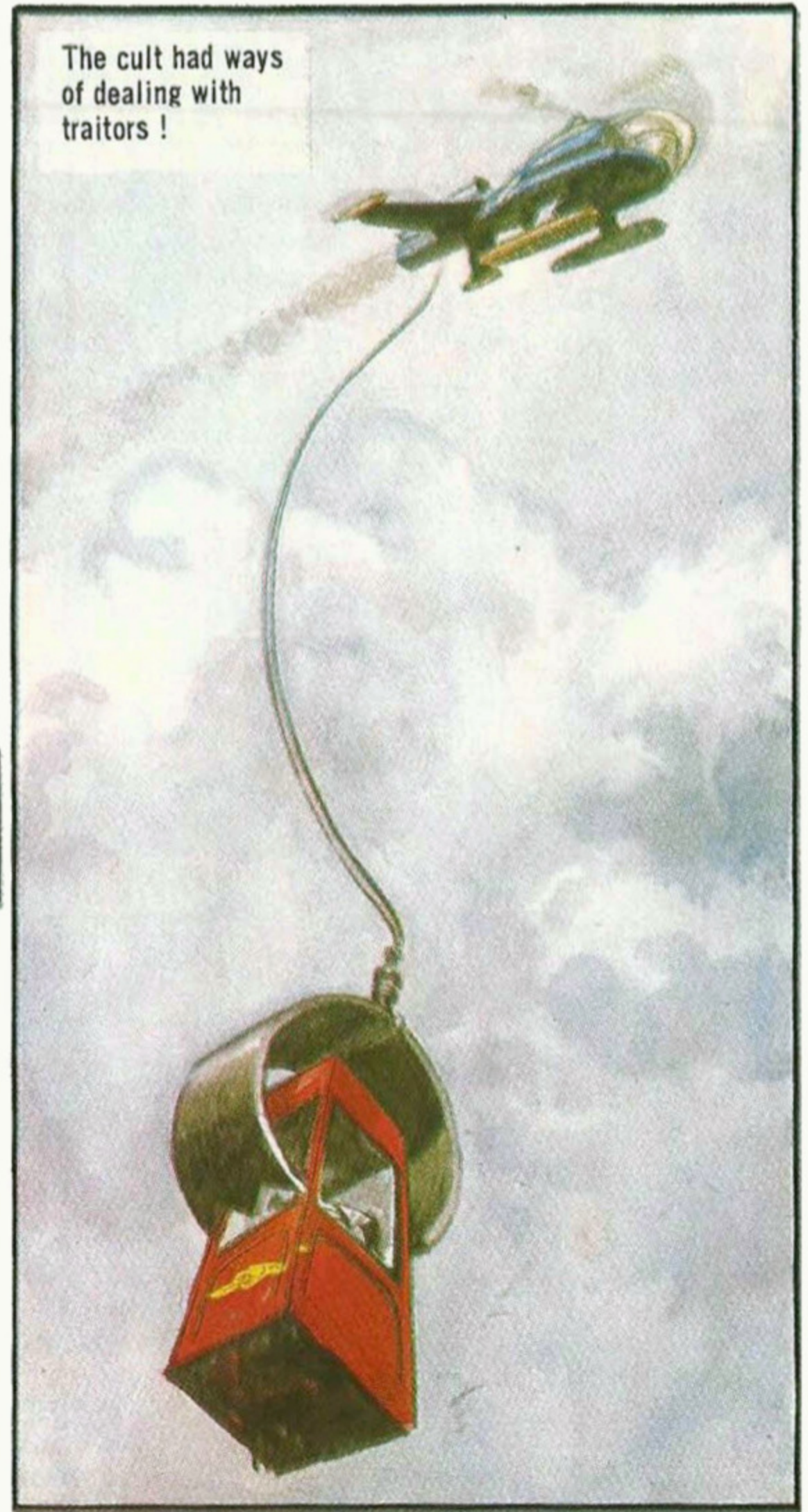
Give me police headquarters ... section Z ...



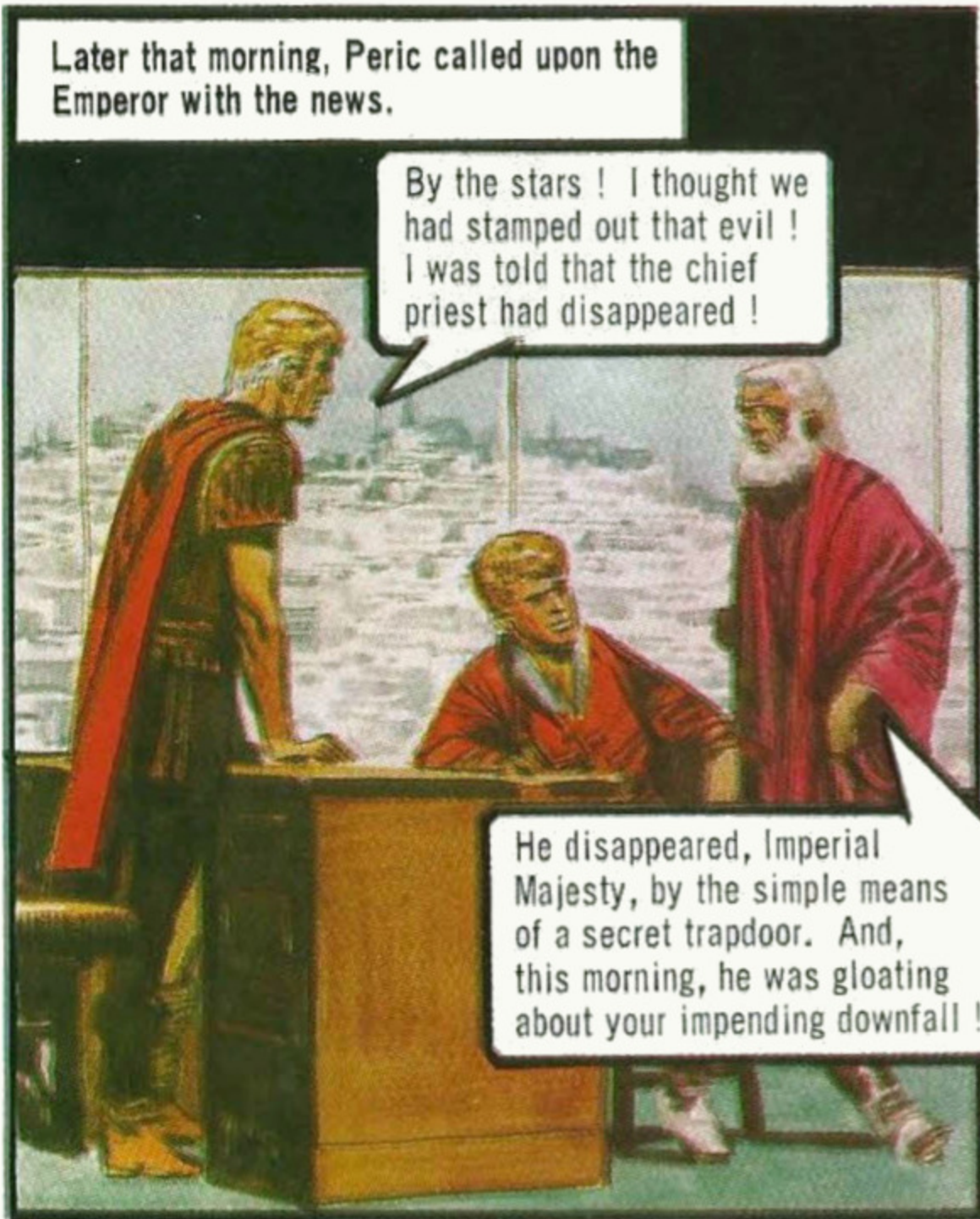
Too late, he saw his danger!

That's all the information I have at the moment, but ...

Aaaaaah! What's happening?



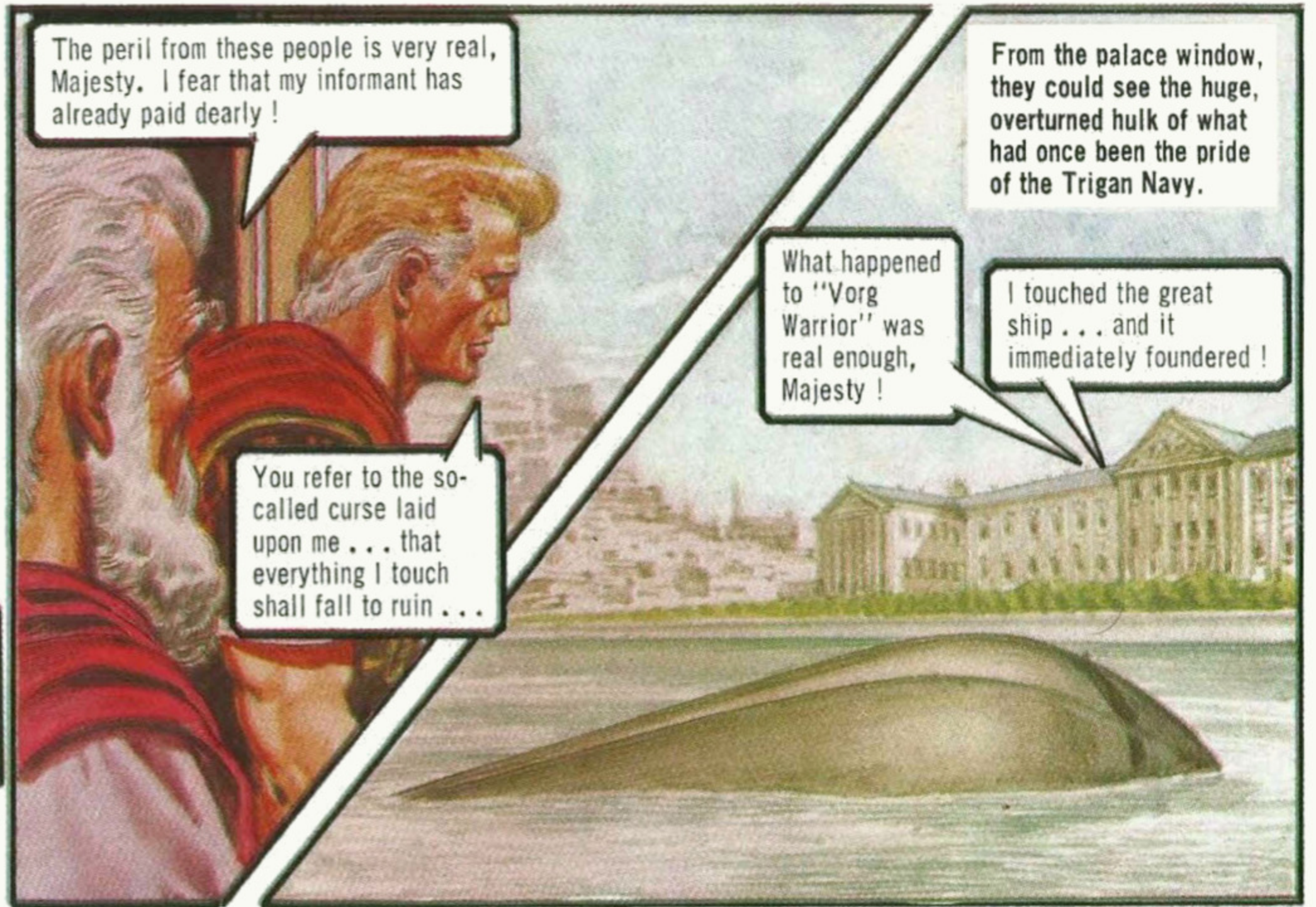
The cult had ways of dealing with traitors!



Later that morning, Peric called upon the Emperor with the news.

By the stars ! I thought we had stamped out that evil ! I was told that the chief priest had disappeared !

He disappeared, Imperial Majesty, by the simple means of a secret trapdoor. And, this morning, he was gloating about your impending downfall !



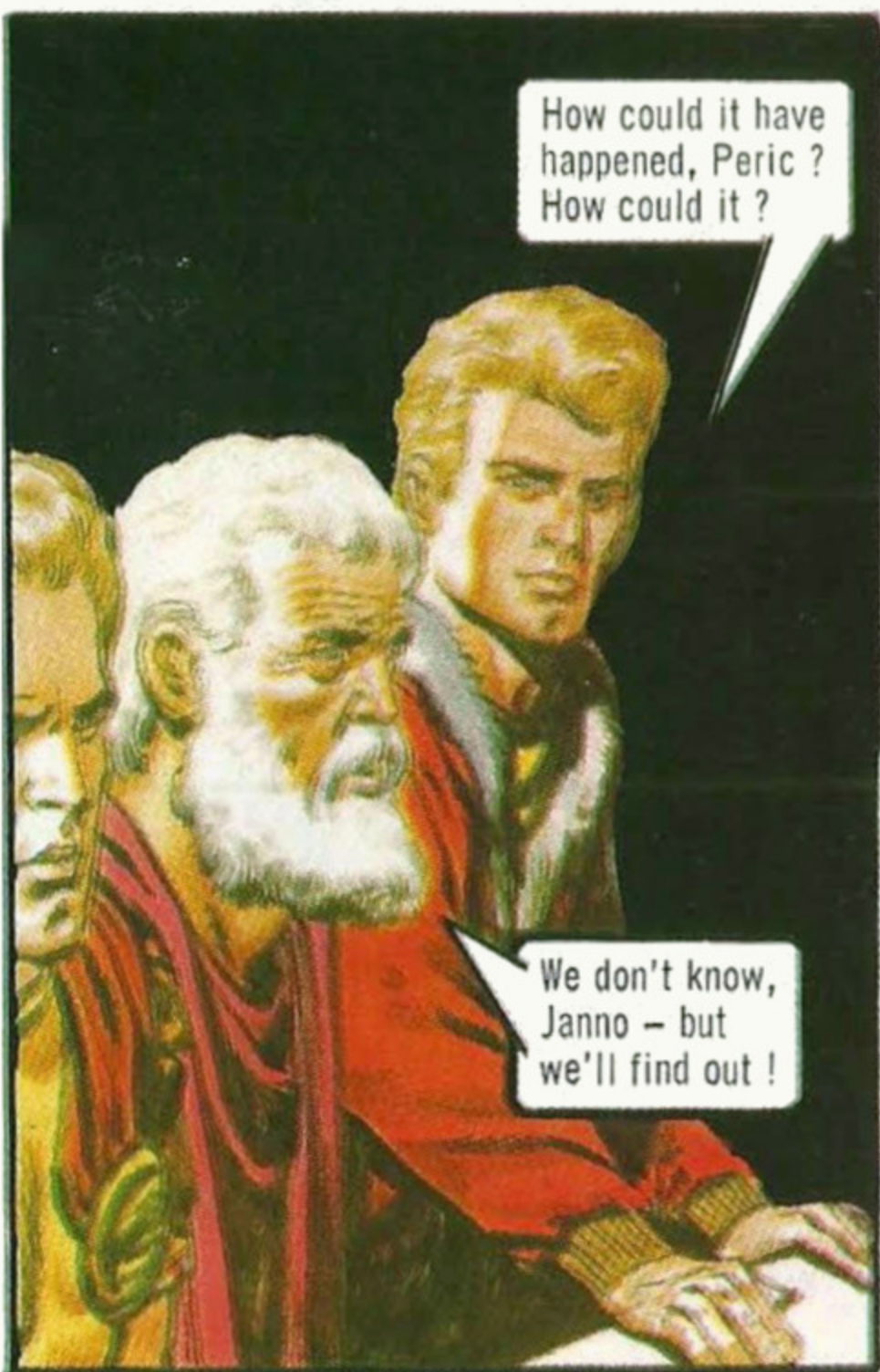
The peril from these people is very real, Majesty. I fear that my informant has already paid dearly !

From the palace window, they could see the huge, overturned hulk of what had once been the pride of the Trigan Navy.

What happened to "Vorg Warrior" was real enough, Majesty !

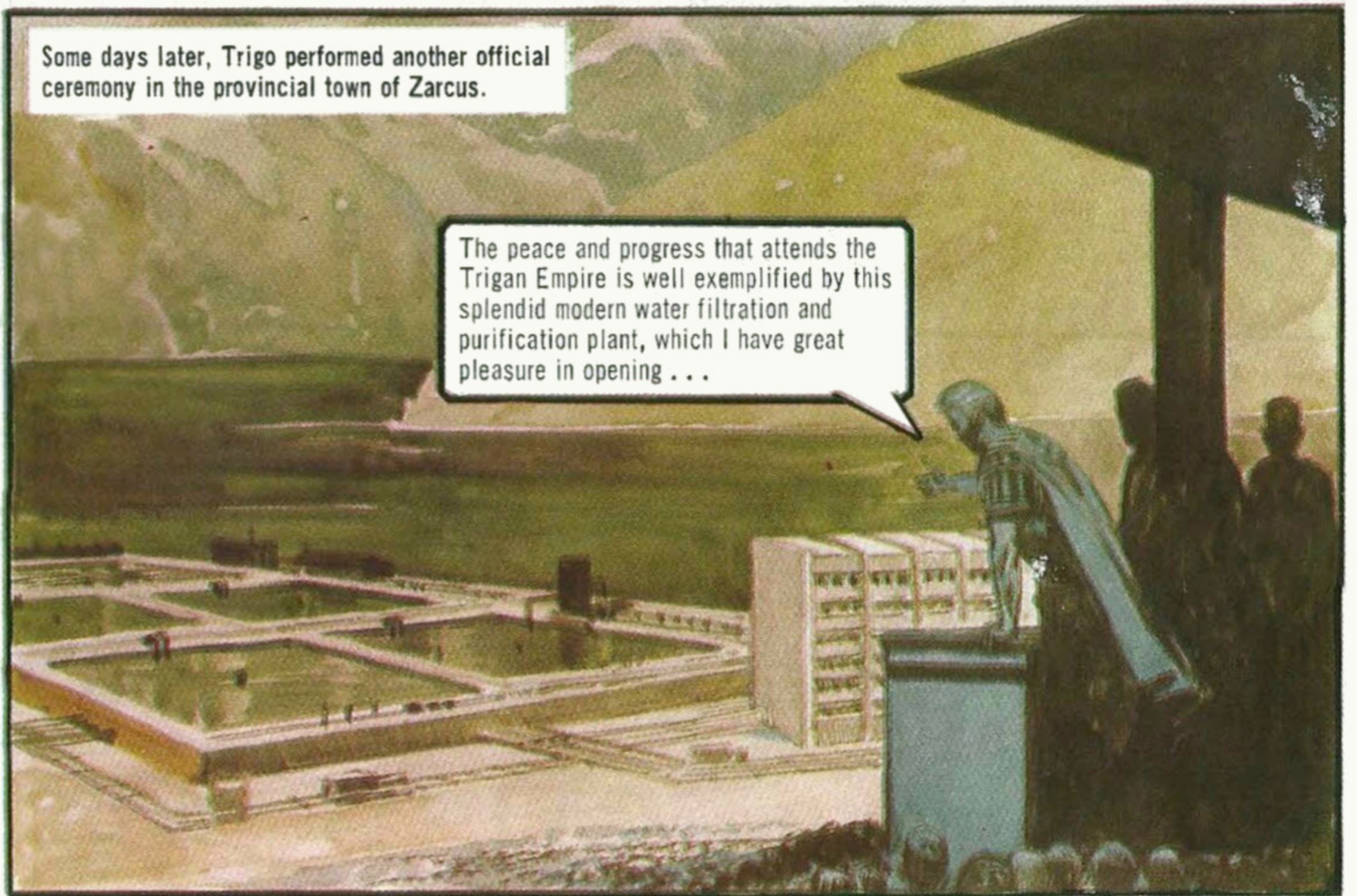
I touched the great ship . . . and it immediately foundered !

You refer to the so-called curse laid upon me . . . that everything I touch shall fall to ruin . . .



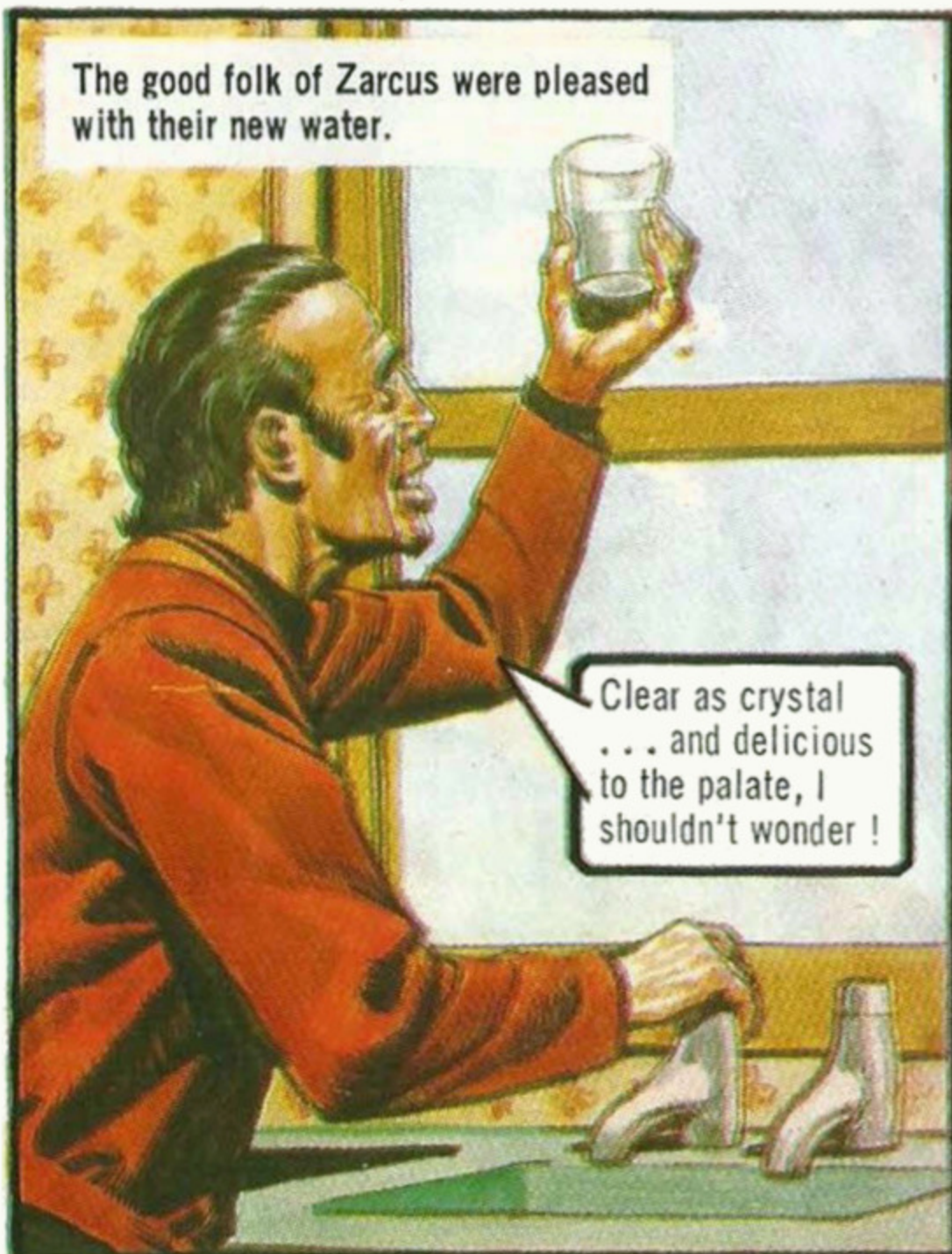
How could it have happened, Peric ? How could it ?

We don't know, Janno - but we'll find out !



Some days later, Trigo performed another official ceremony in the provincial town of Zarcus.

The peace and progress that attends the Trigan Empire is well exemplified by this splendid modern water filtration and purification plant, which I have great pleasure in opening . . .



The good folk of Zarcus were pleased with their new water.

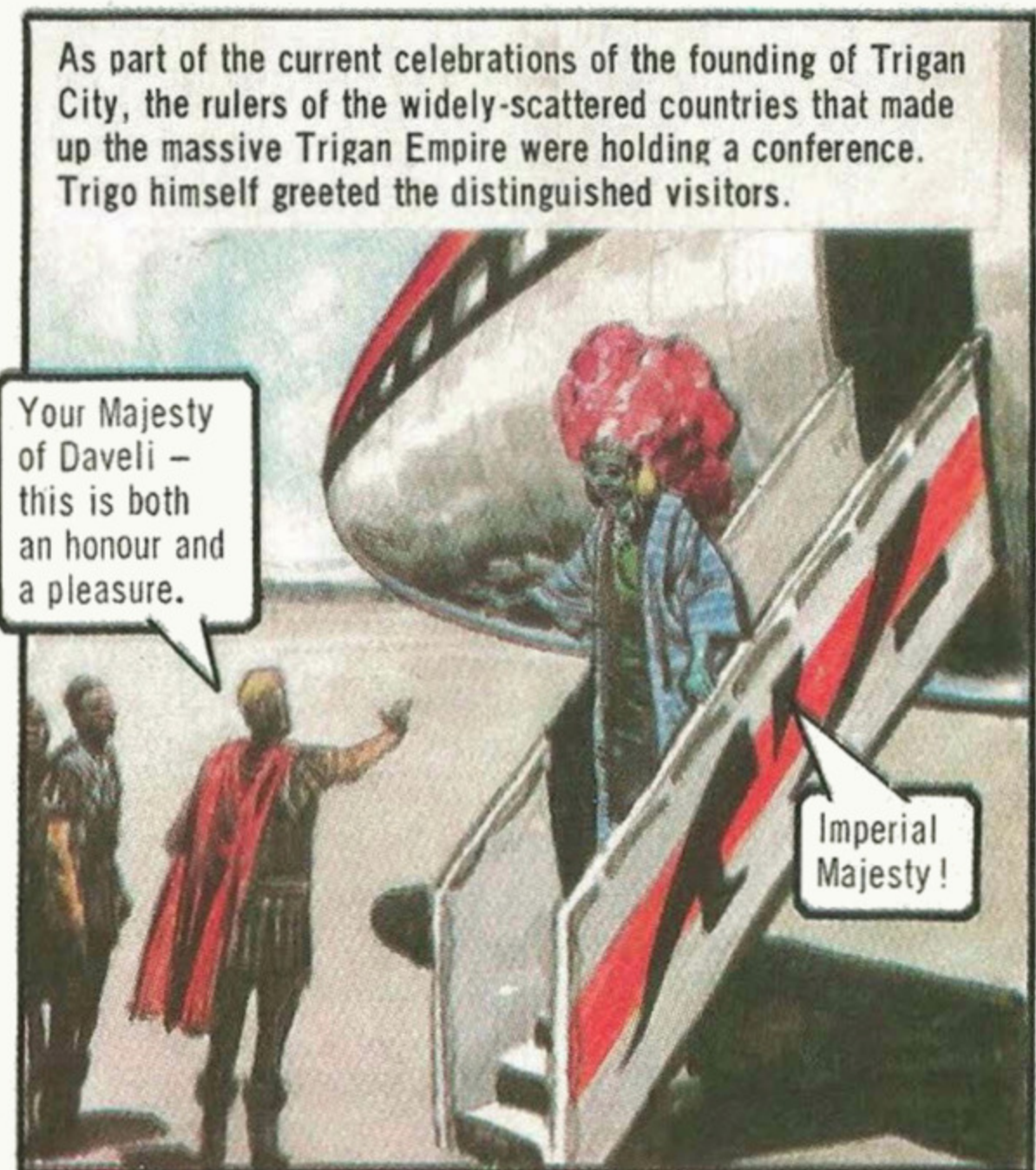
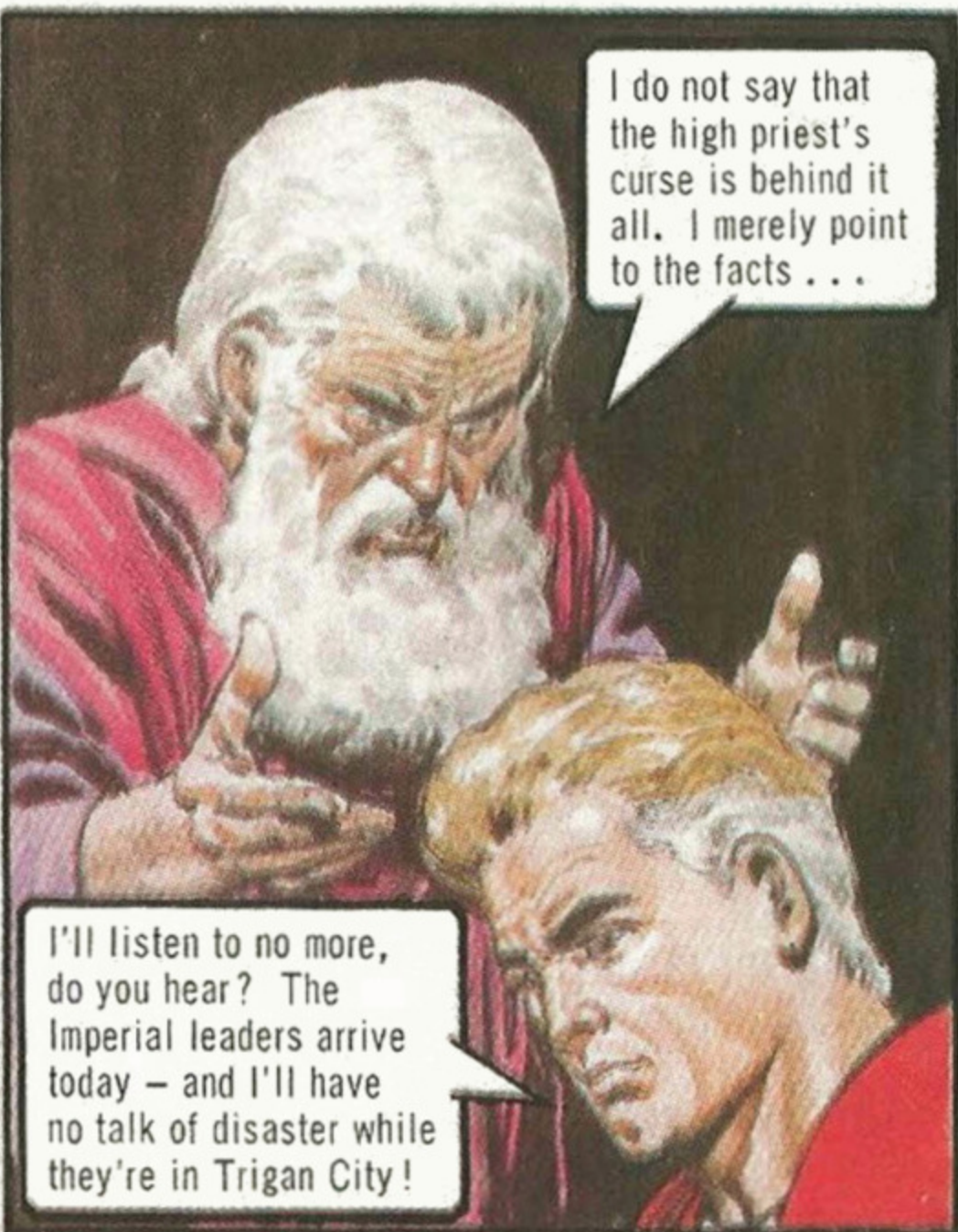
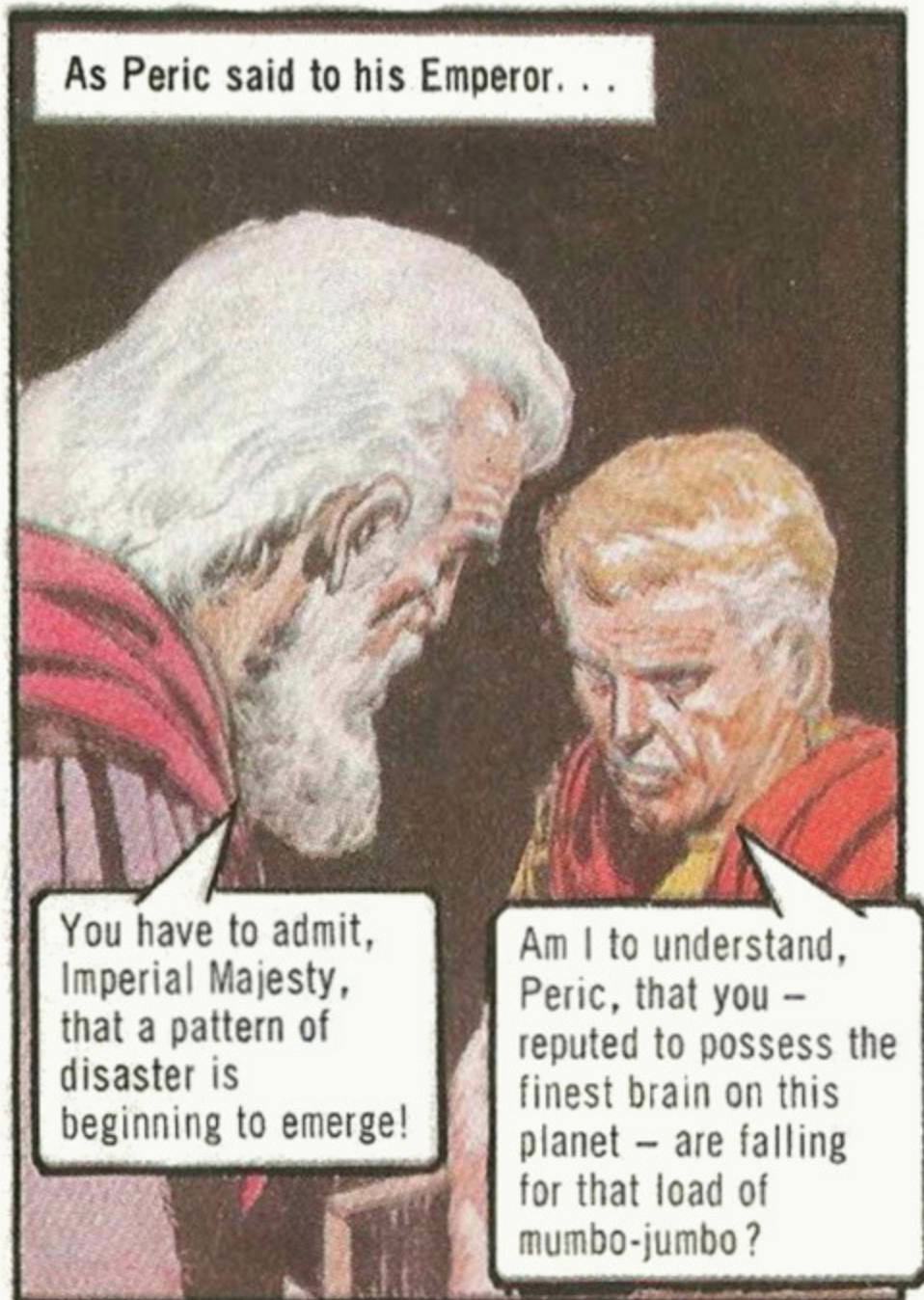
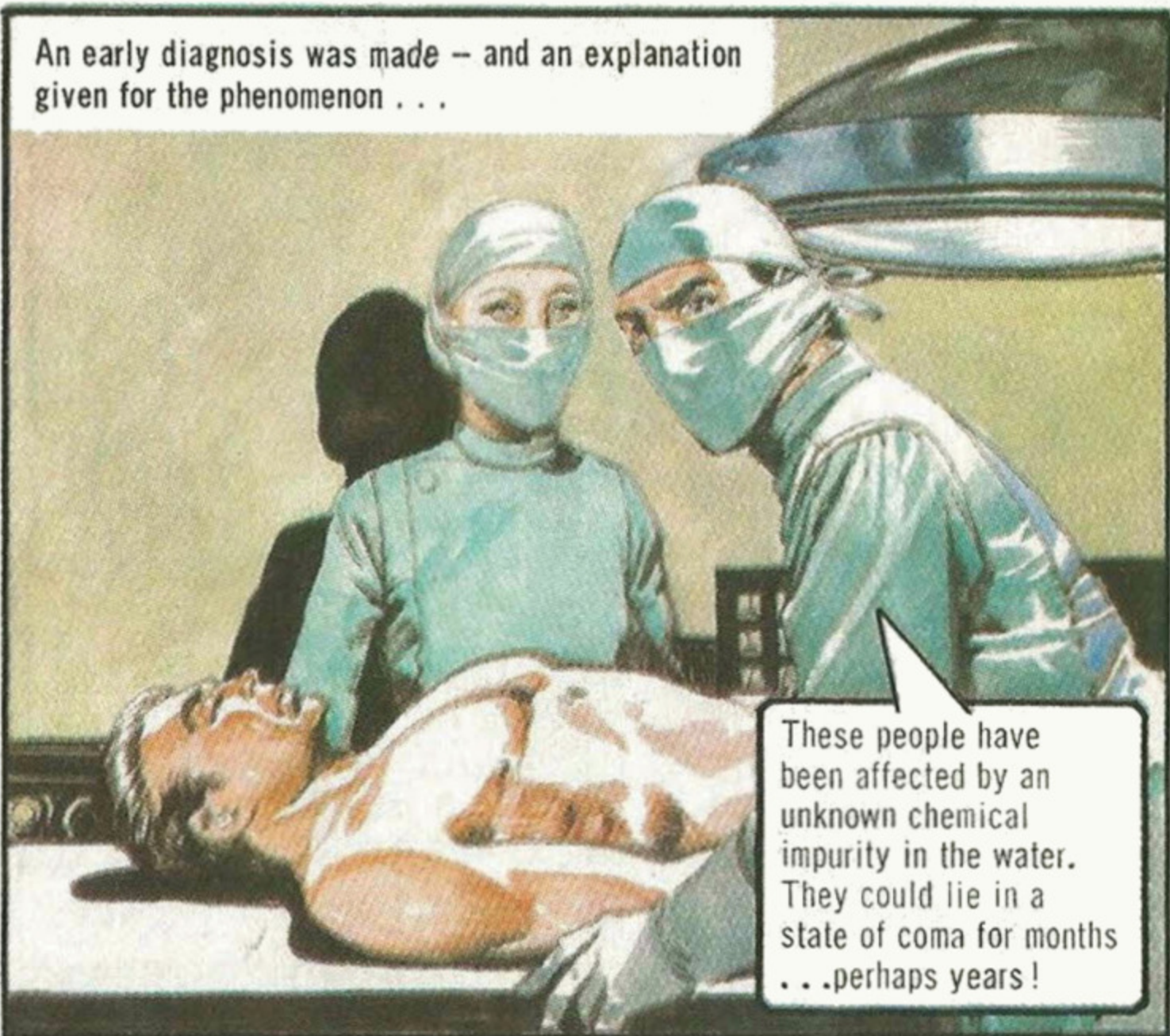
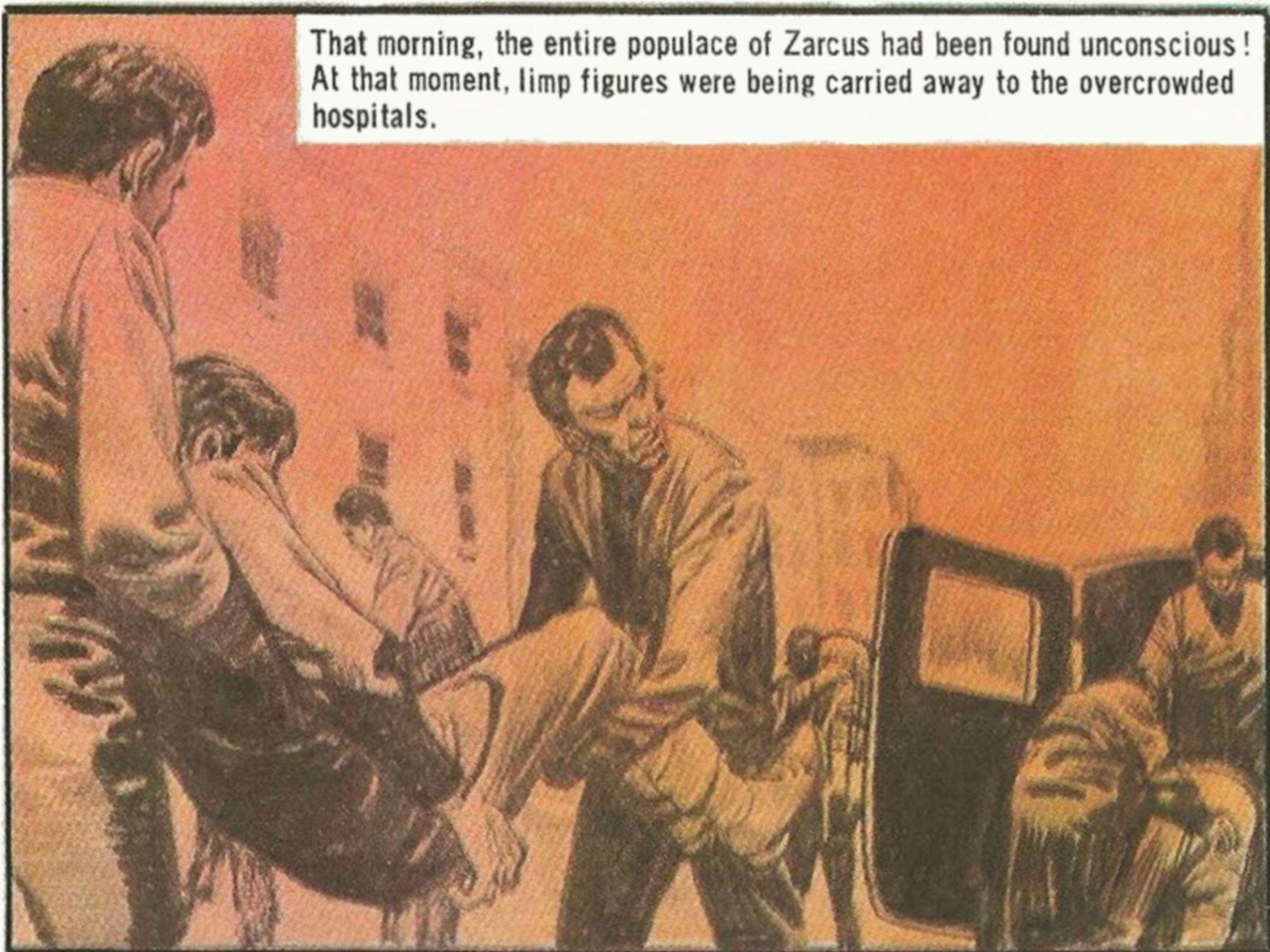
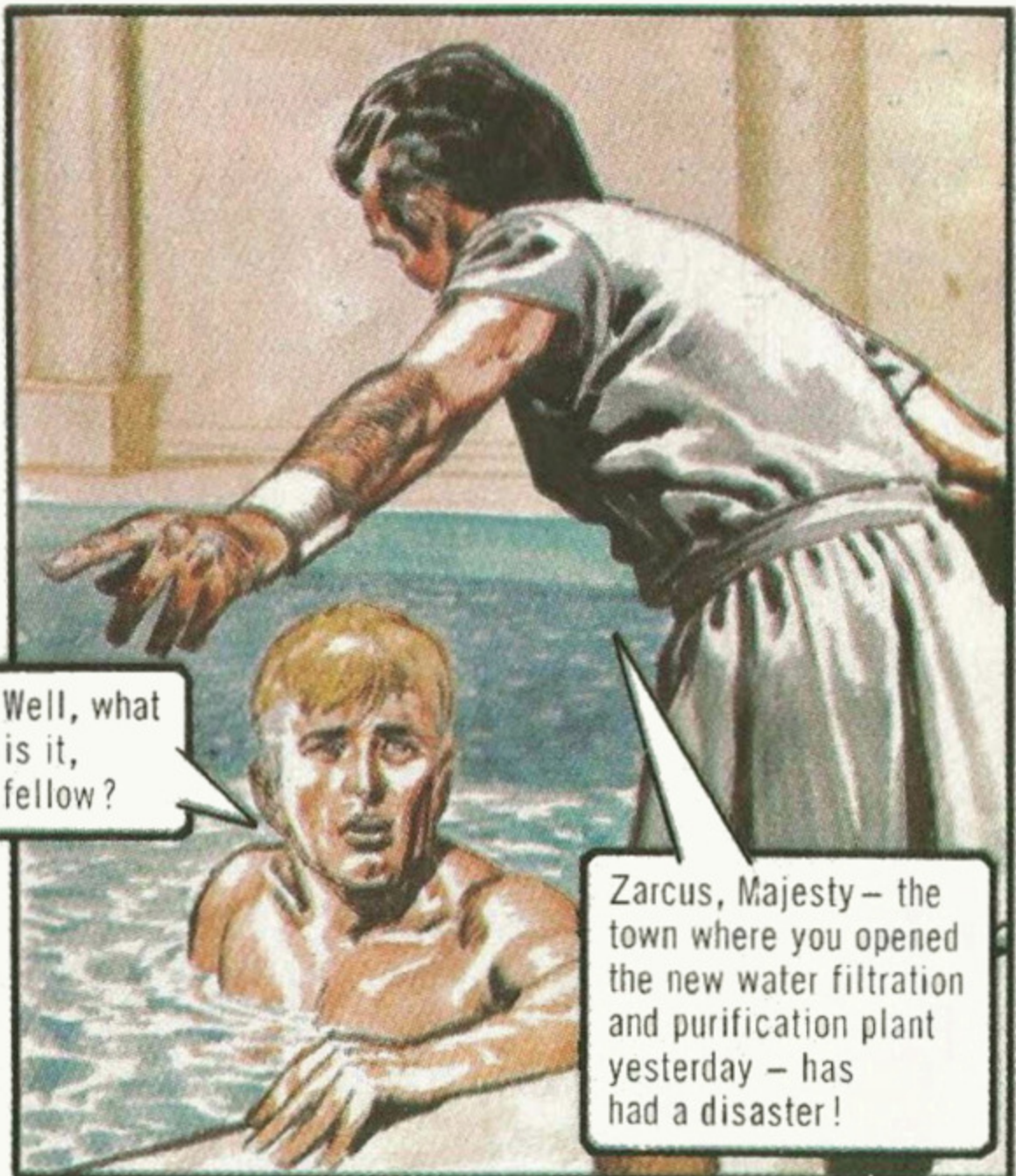
Clear as crystal . . . and delicious to the palate, I shouldn't wonder !

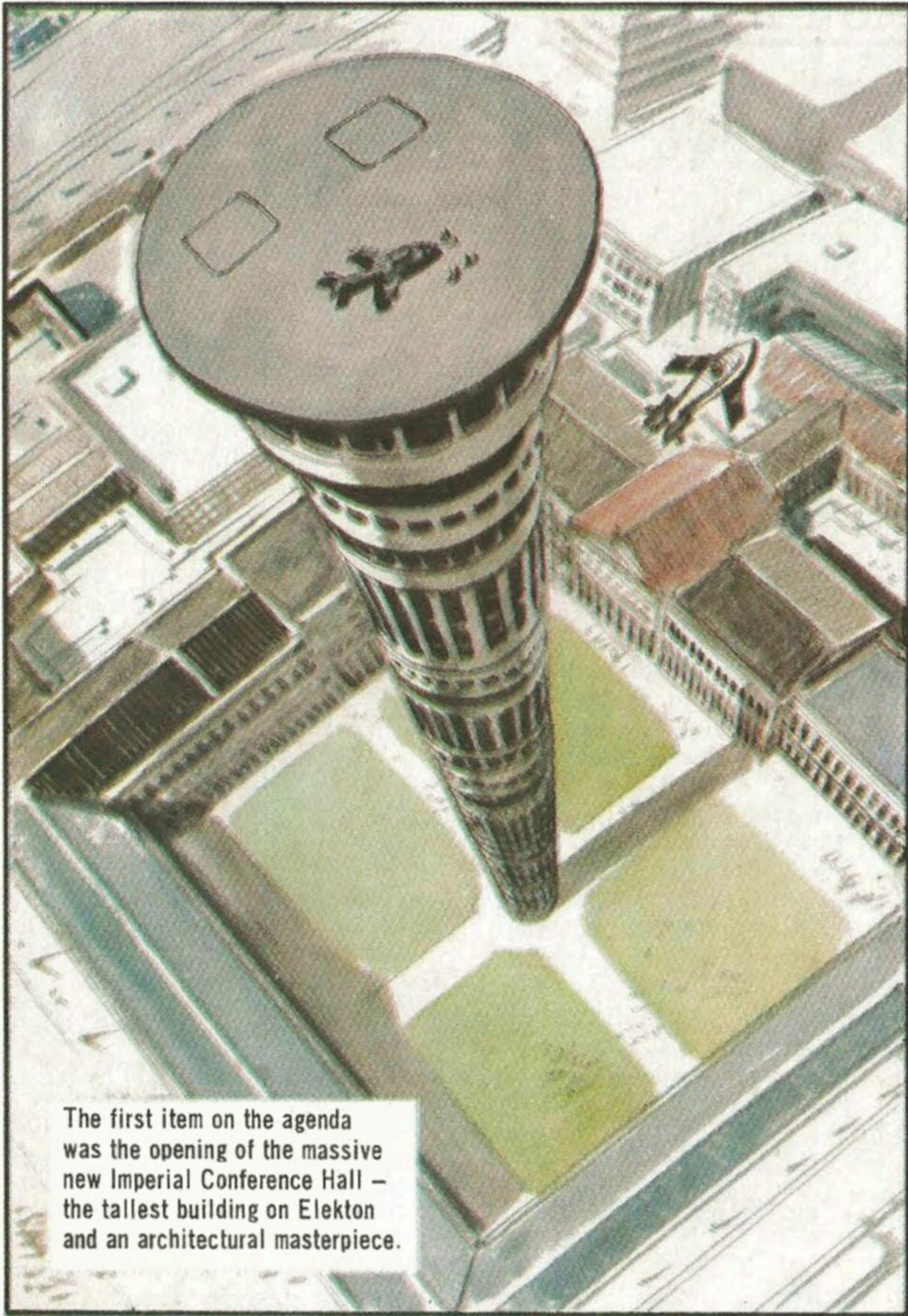


By the following morning, the town was a place of silence. Not a living thing stirred.

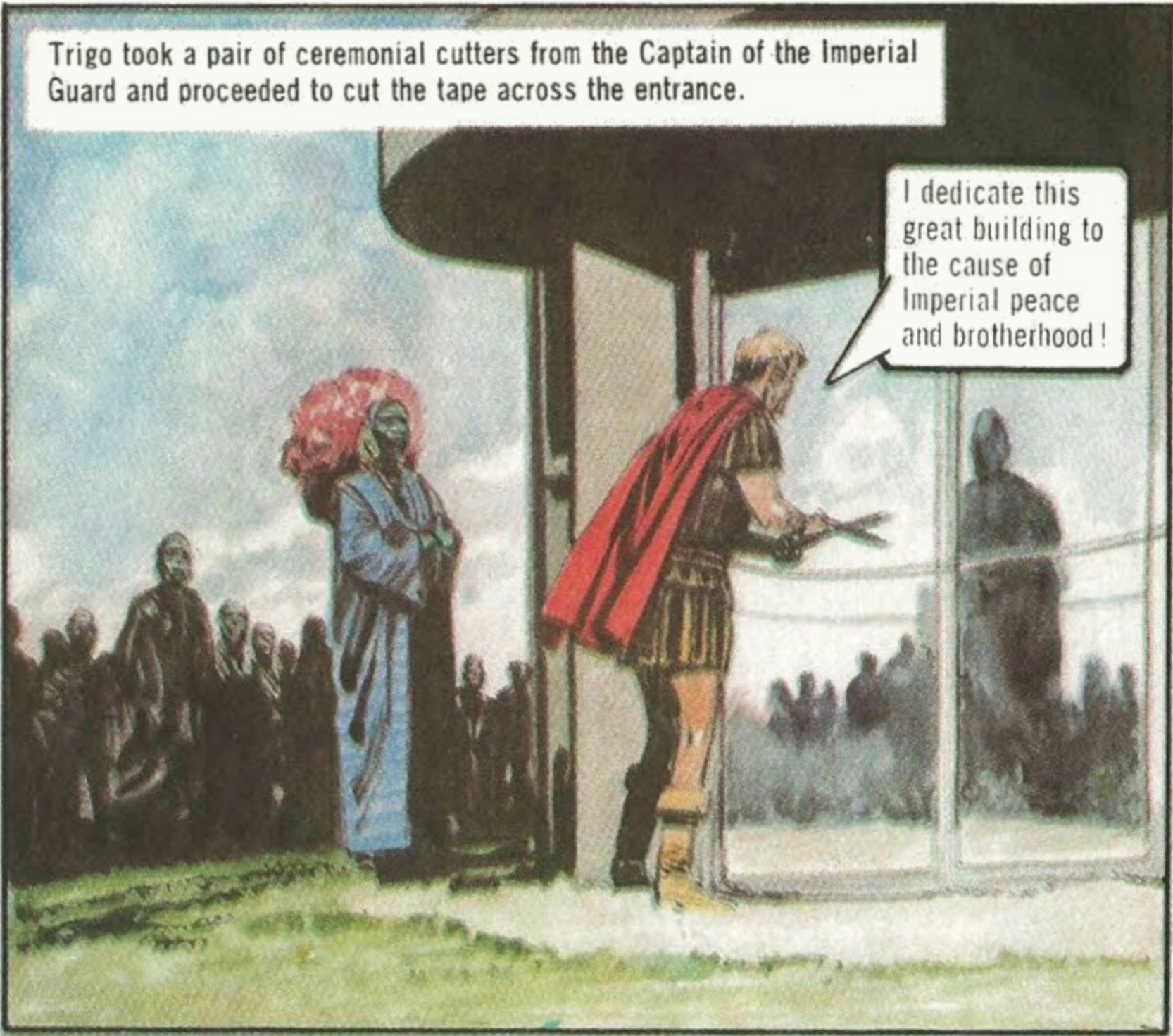
The busiest time of the day, and no one about !

Am I dreaming ?





The first item on the agenda was the opening of the massive new Imperial Conference Hall – the tallest building on Elekton and an architectural masterpiece.



Trigo took a pair of ceremonial cutters from the Captain of the Imperial Guard and proceeded to cut the tape across the entrance.

I dedicate this great building to the cause of Imperial peace and brotherhood!

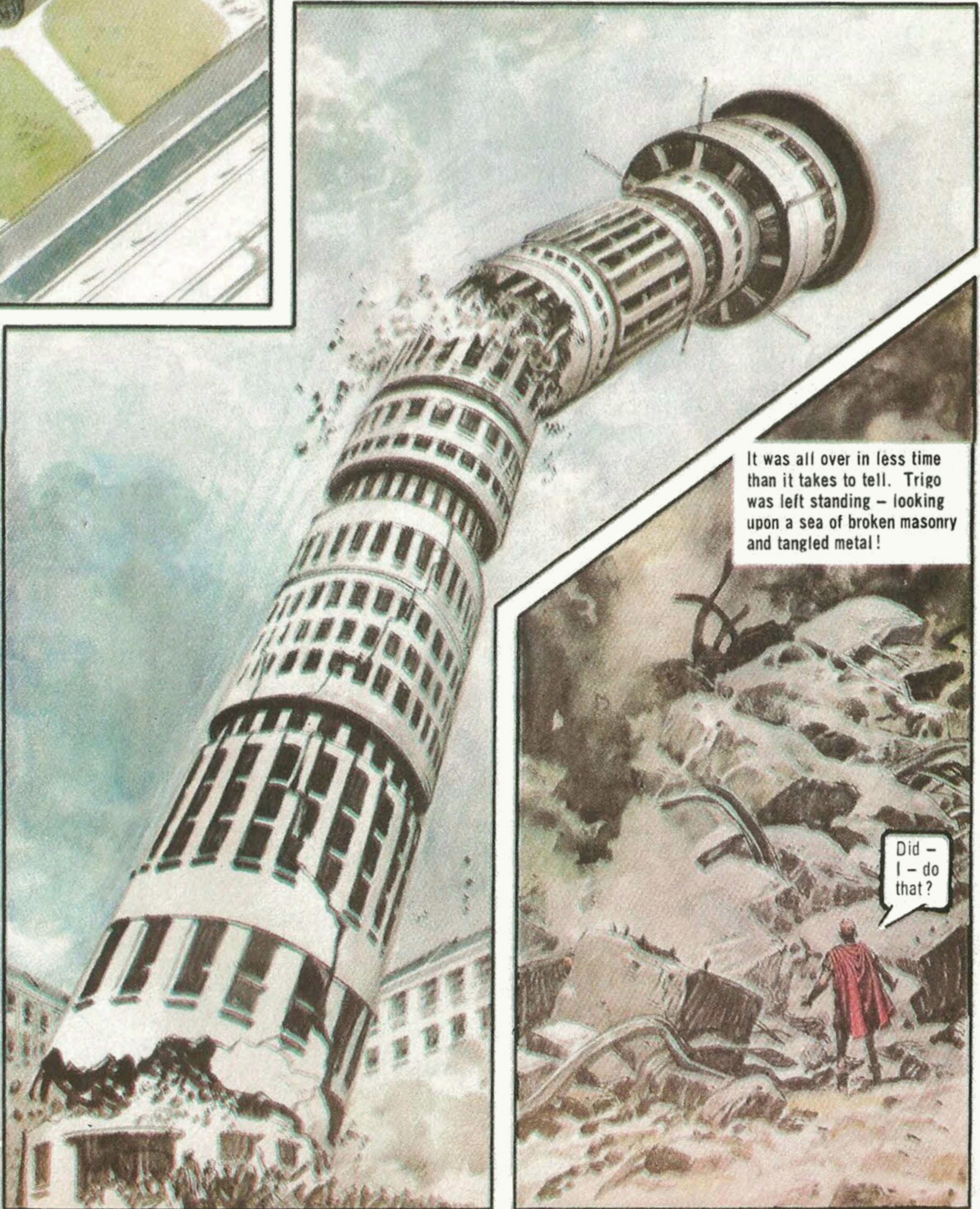


And then . . .

Look!

No!

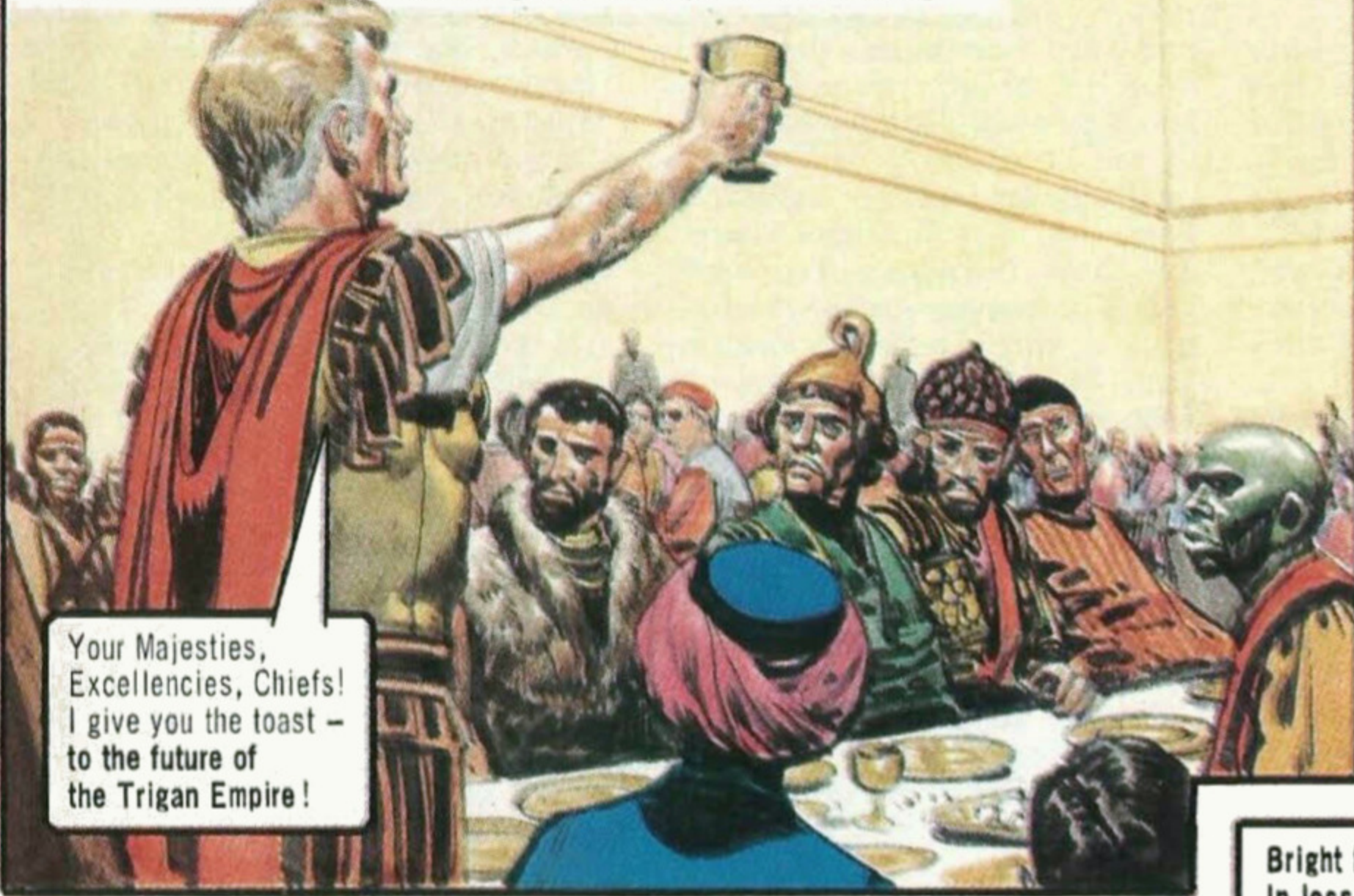
It can't . . .



It was all over in less time than it takes to tell. Trigo was left standing – looking upon a sea of broken masonry and tangled metal!

Did – I – do that?

The inexplicable destruction of the new Imperial Conference Hall lay like a dark shadow across the assembled guests in the palace that evening.



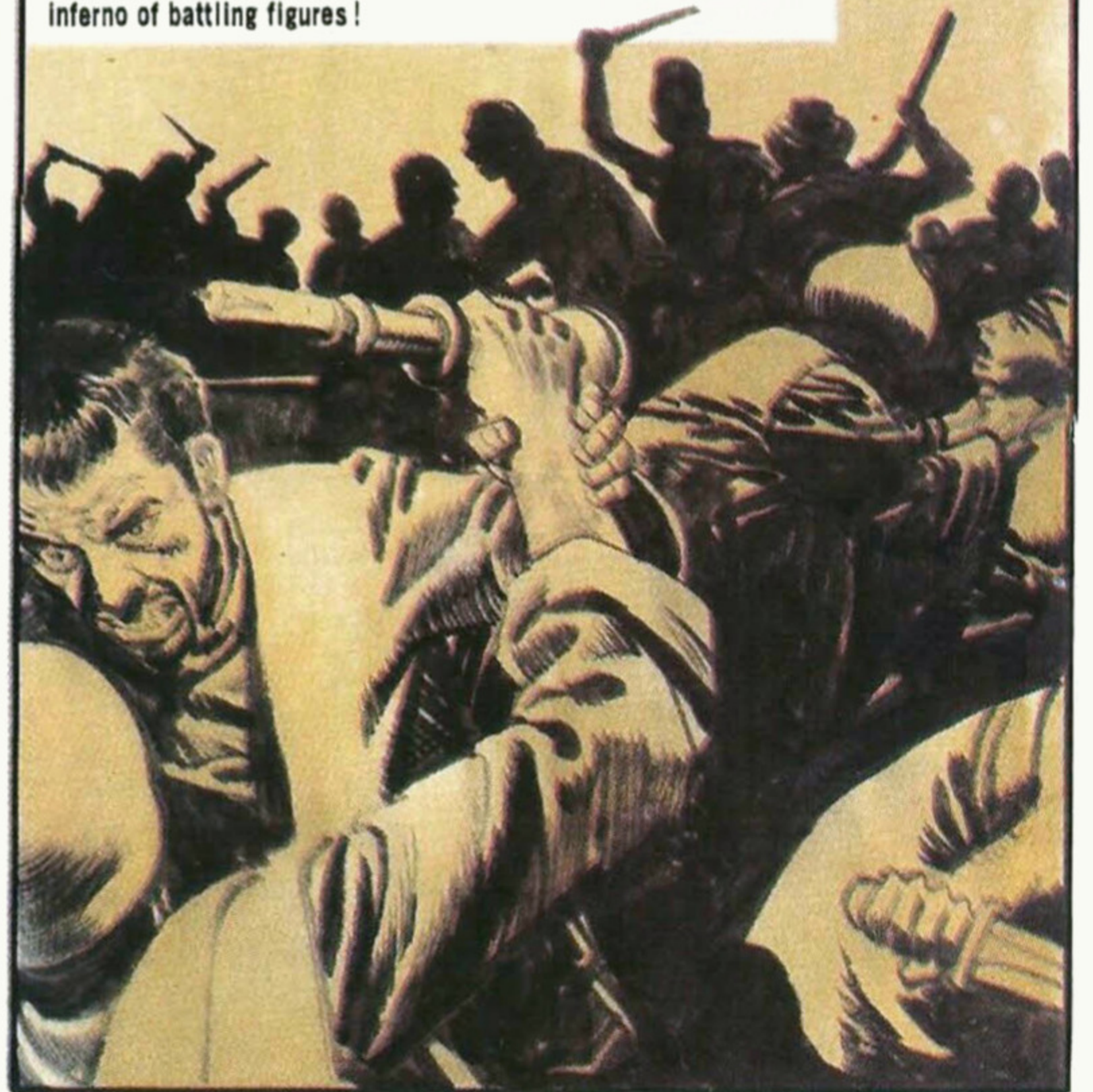
Your Majesties, Excellencies, Chiefs! I give you the toast - to the future of the Trigan Empire!

A sour, thoughtless remark. . .



Does the Trigan Empire have any future?

Bright blades flashed in the lamplight! Tables were overturned! In less time than it takes to tell, the dining hall was an inferno of battling figures!



. . . drew a violent reaction!



Withdraw those treasonable words, animal!

Aaaaaaaaagh!

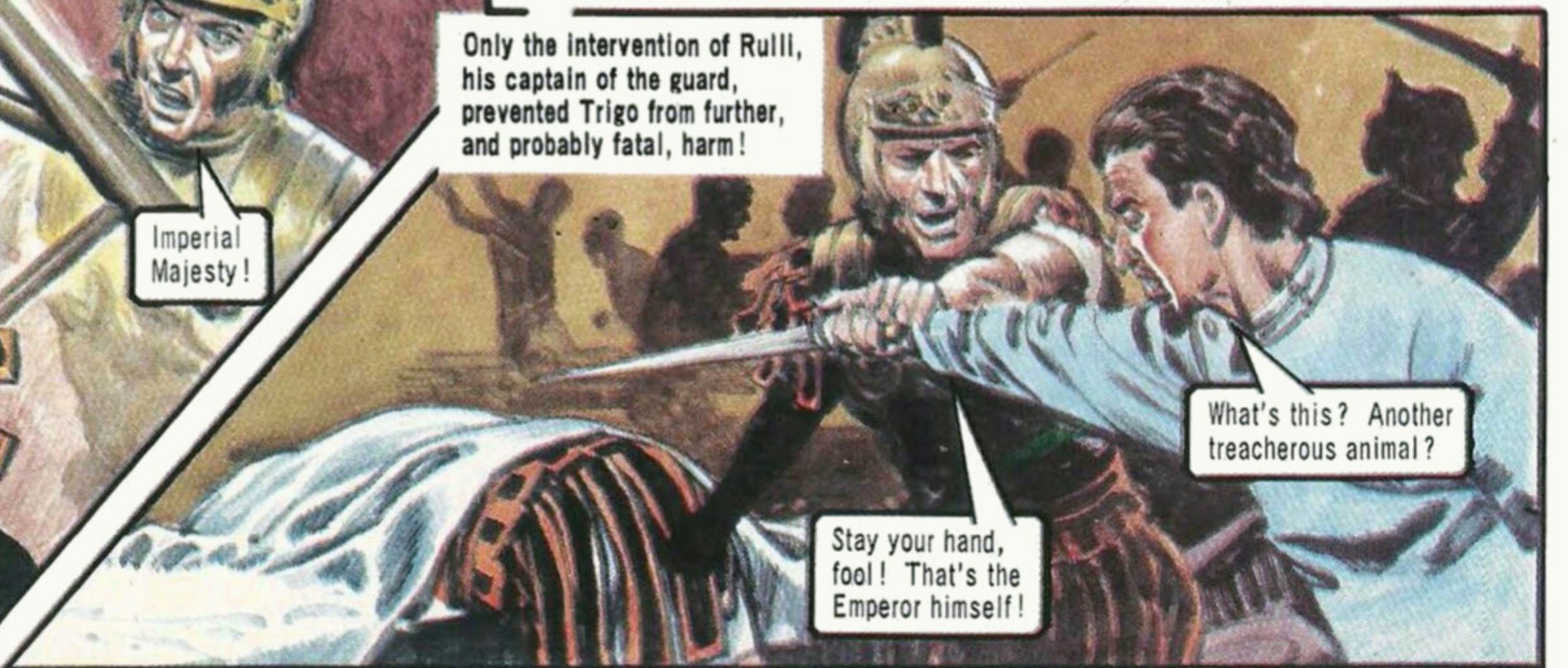
The Emperor himself was struck down from behind by a flying chair!



Uuuuugh!

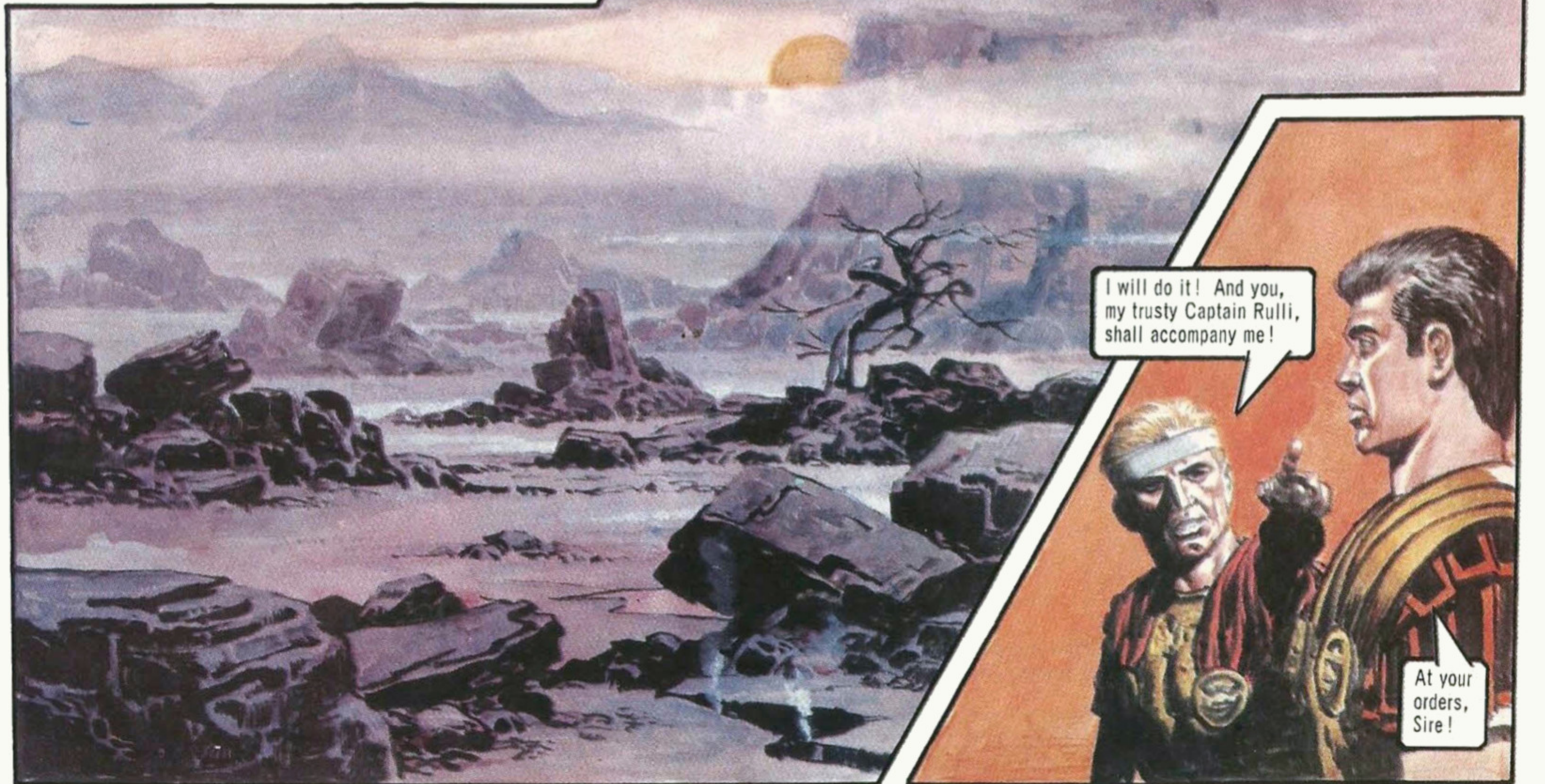
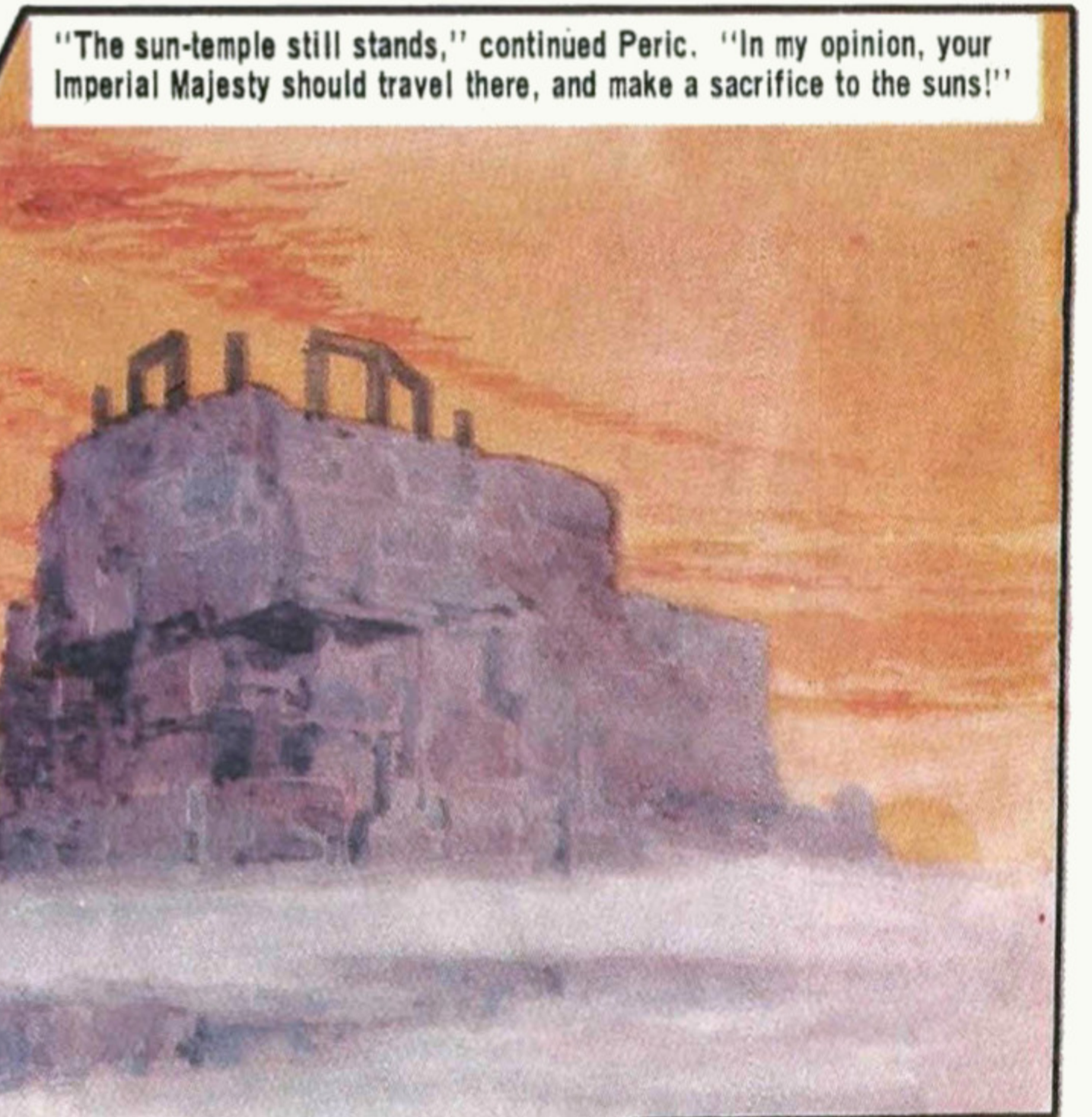
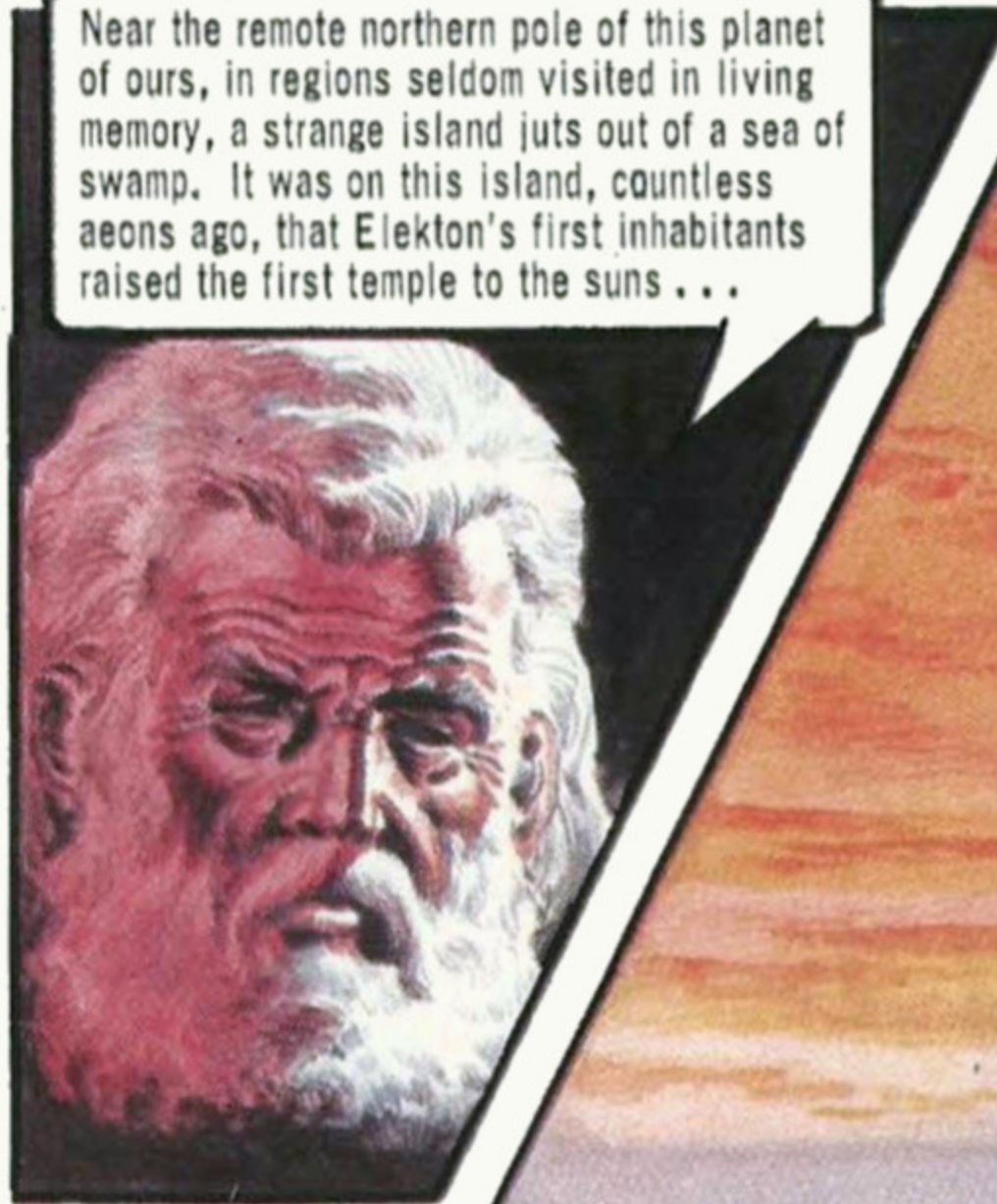
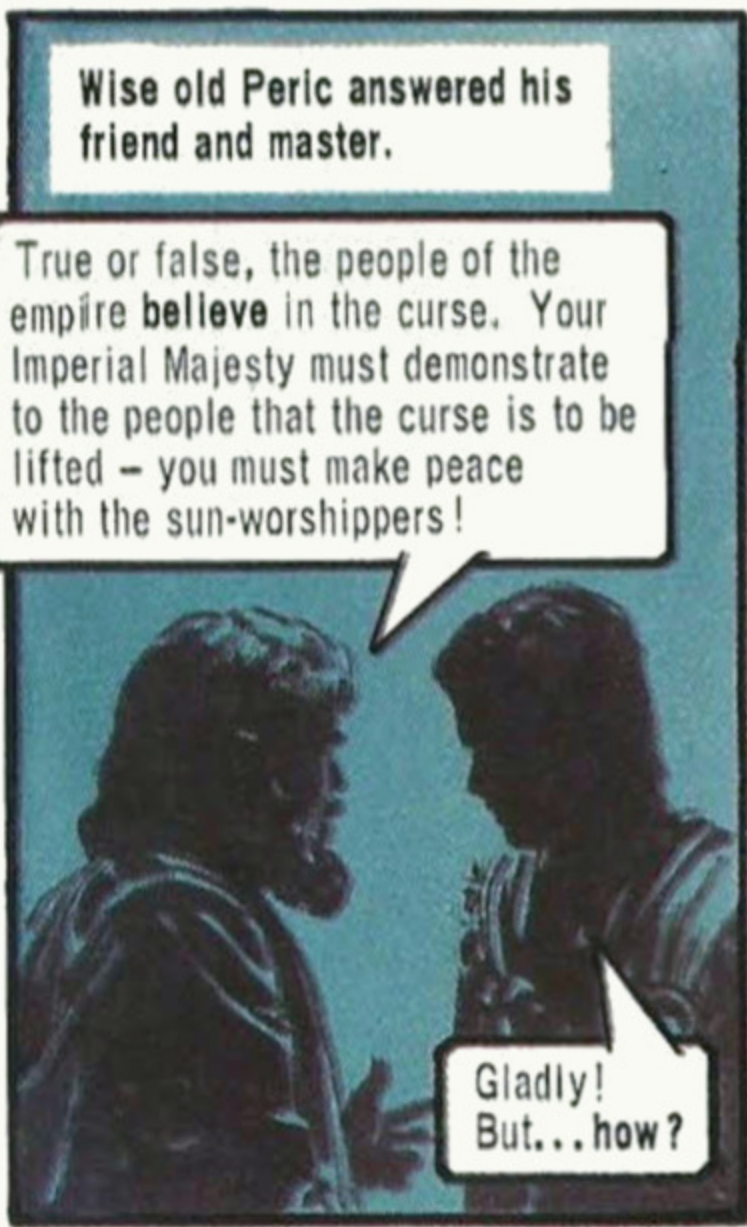
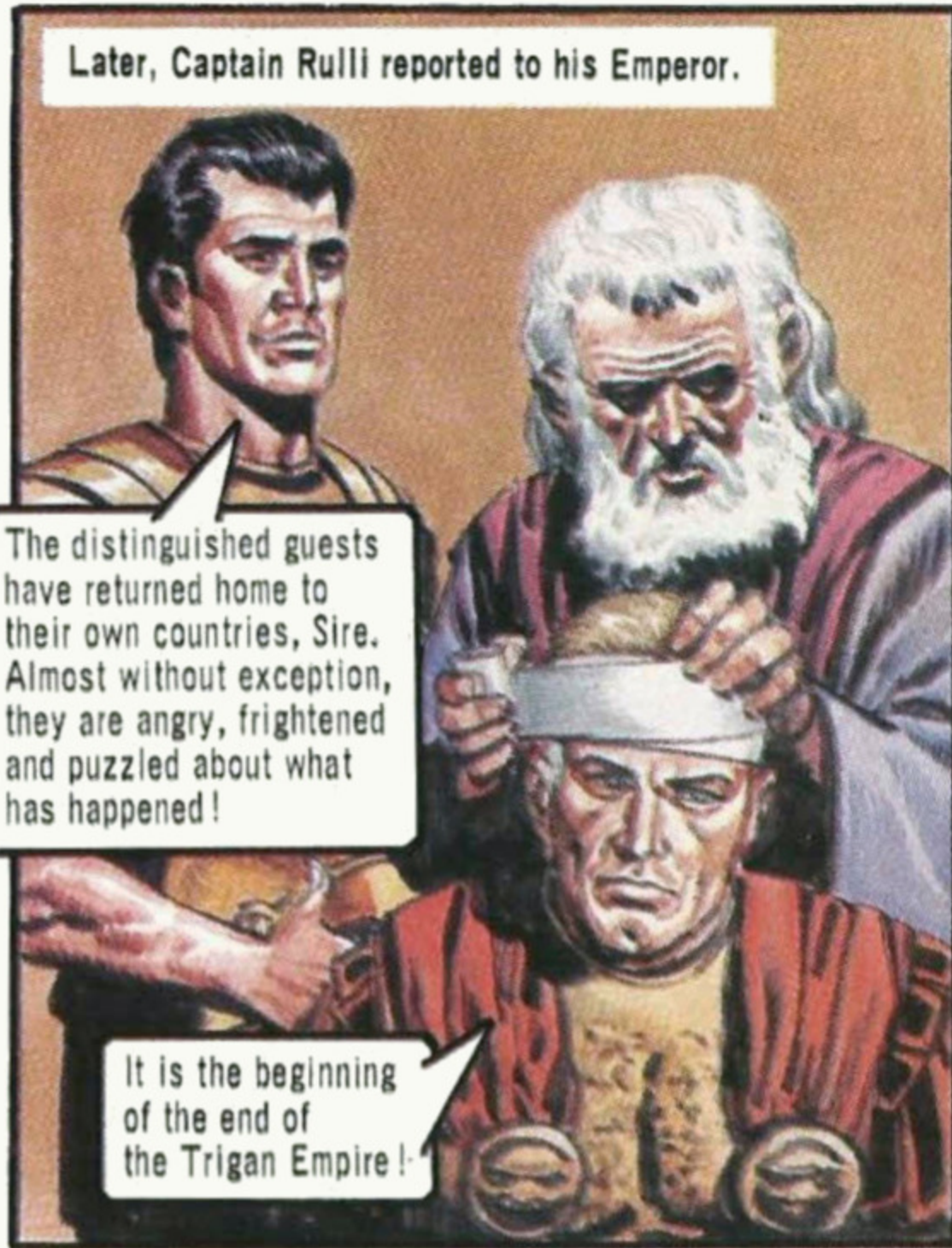
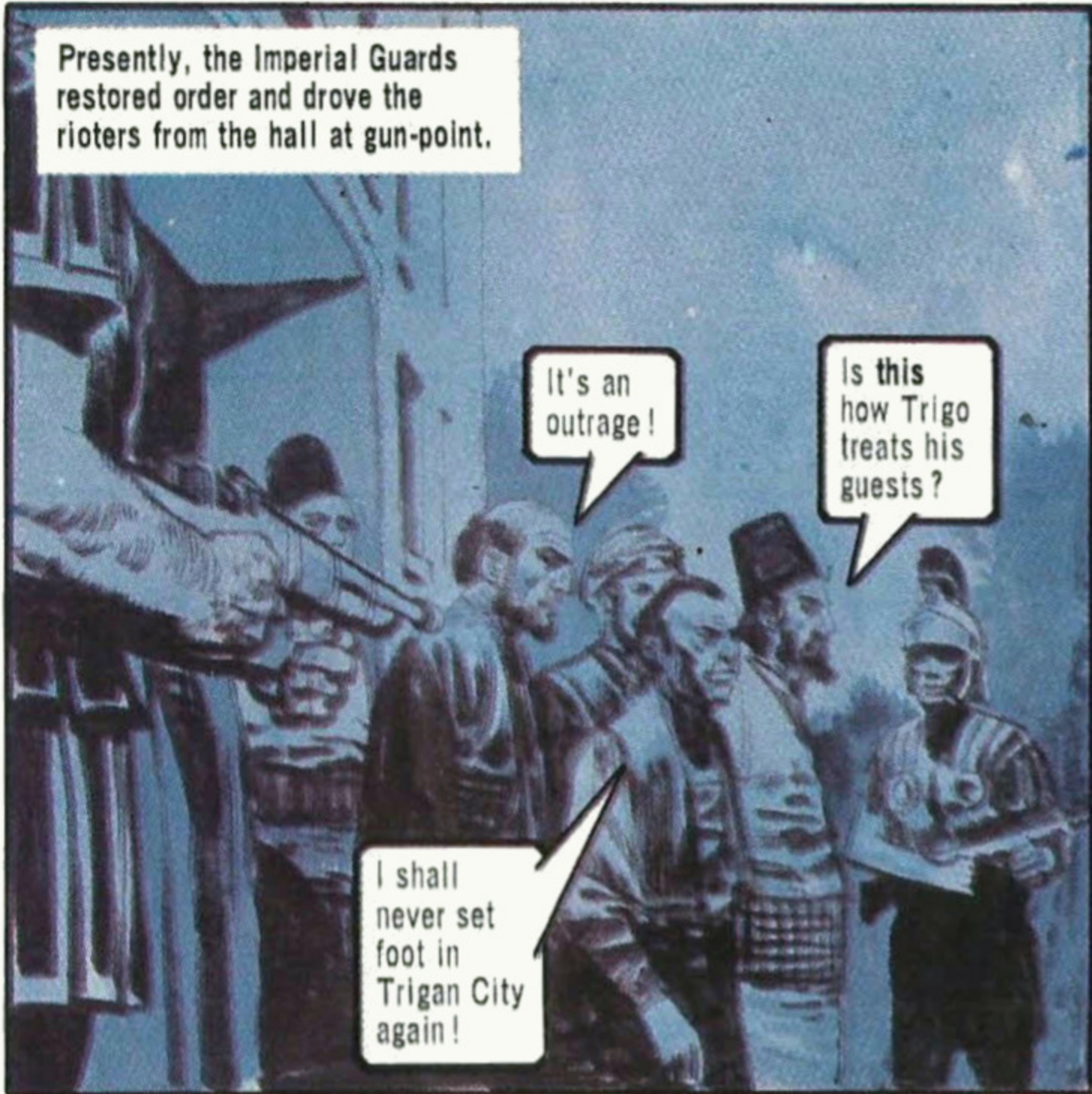
Imperial Majesty!

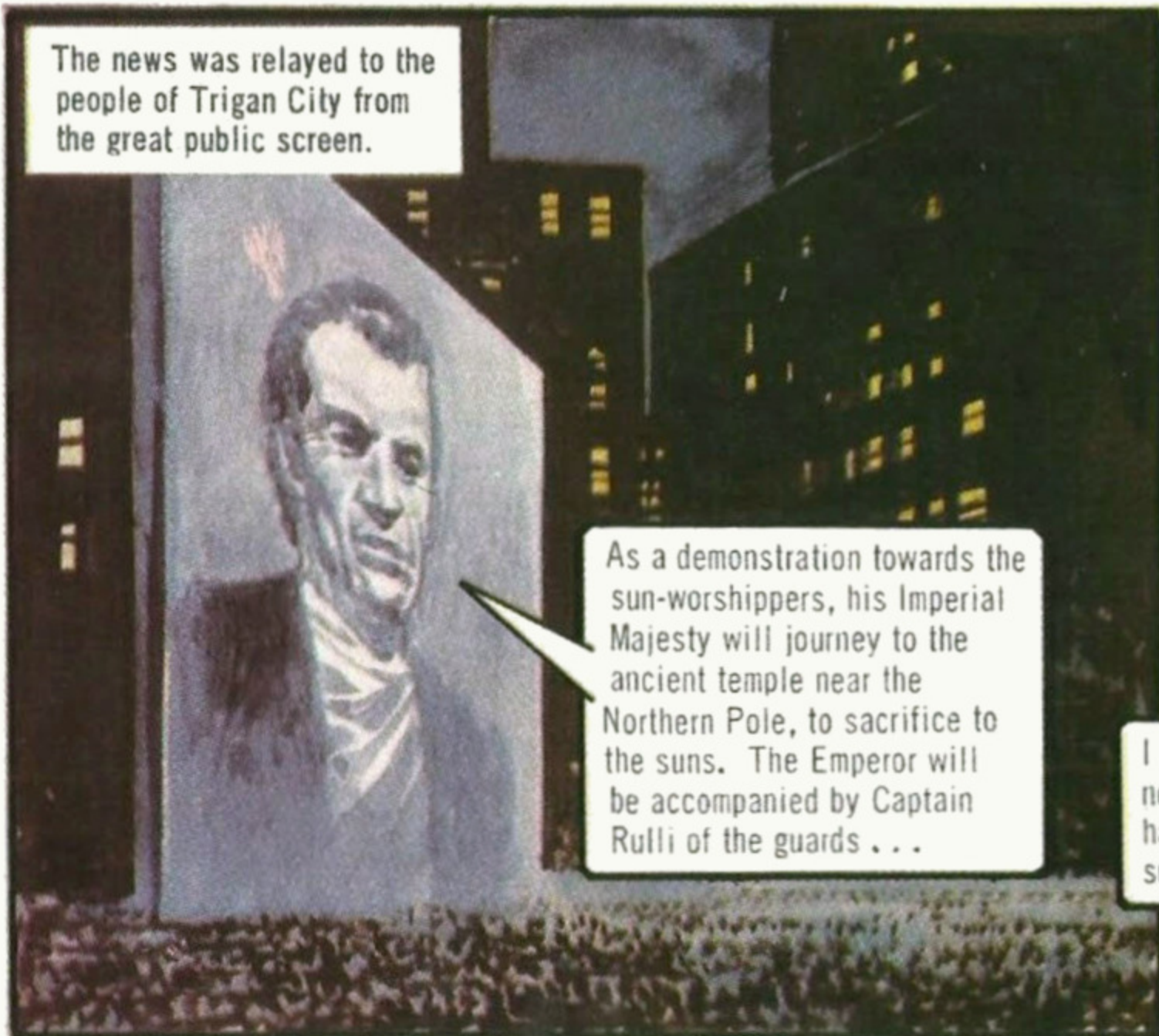
Only the intervention of Rulli, his captain of the guard, prevented Trigo from further, and probably fatal, harm!



What's this? Another treacherous animal?

Stay your hand, fool! That's the Emperor himself!





The news was relayed to the people of Trigan City from the great public screen.

As a demonstration towards the sun-worshippers, his Imperial Majesty will journey to the ancient temple near the Northern Pole, to sacrifice to the suns. The Emperor will be accompanied by Captain Rulli of the guards . . .



The superstitious people rejoiced.

First sensible idea Trigo's had for years!

I always said he never should have banned the sun-worship!

Now we'll all be able to sleep peacefully - at last!



Next dawn, an all-purpose craft stood ready for take-off on the roof of the Imperial Palace.

Farewell, Uncle. And a safe voyage!

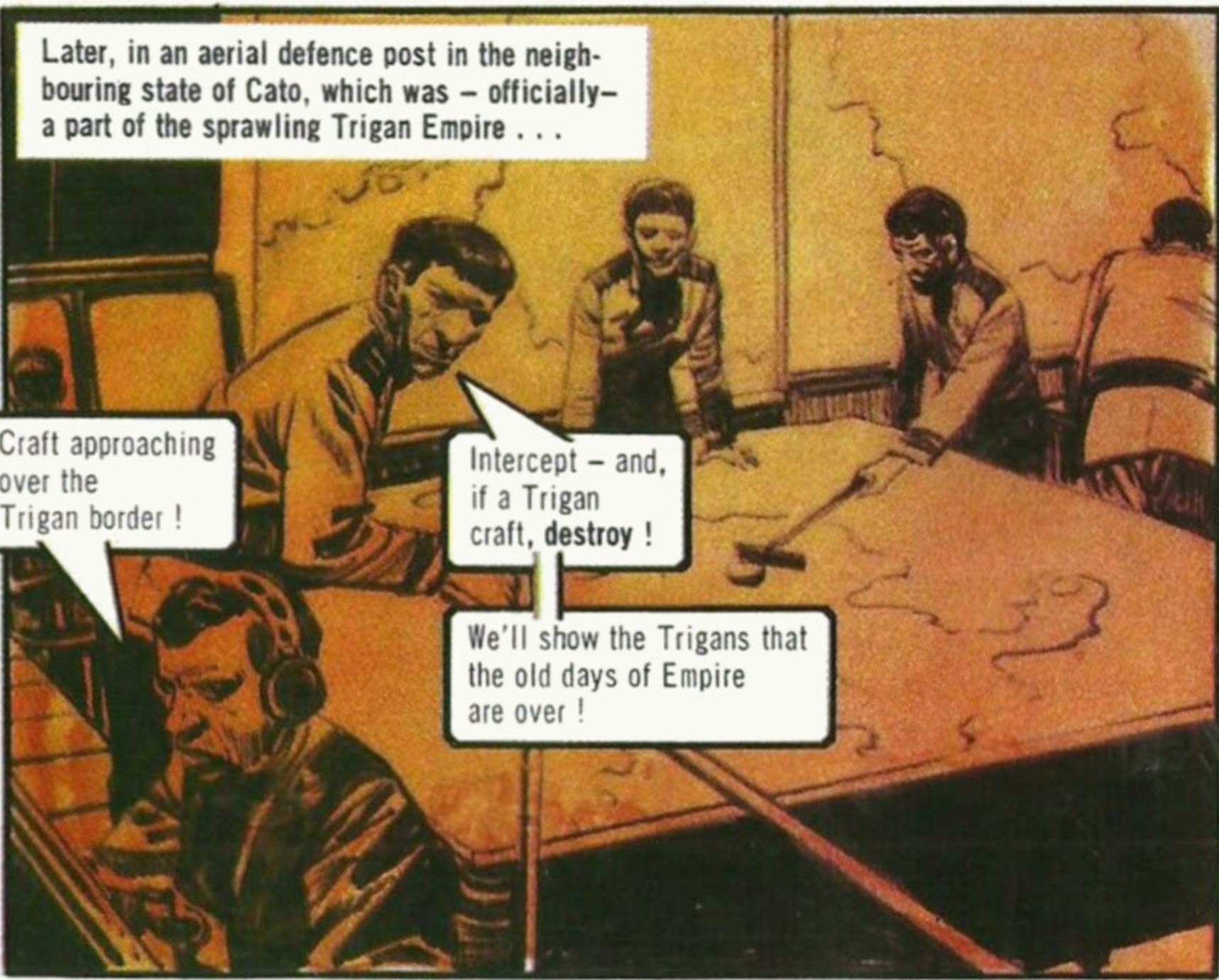
Janno, you speak as if we were going away for years! Why, we shall be back in no time!



The craft zoomed skywards, with Captain Rulli at the controls.

Set course for the Northern Pole, pilot!

The Northern Pole it is, Sire!

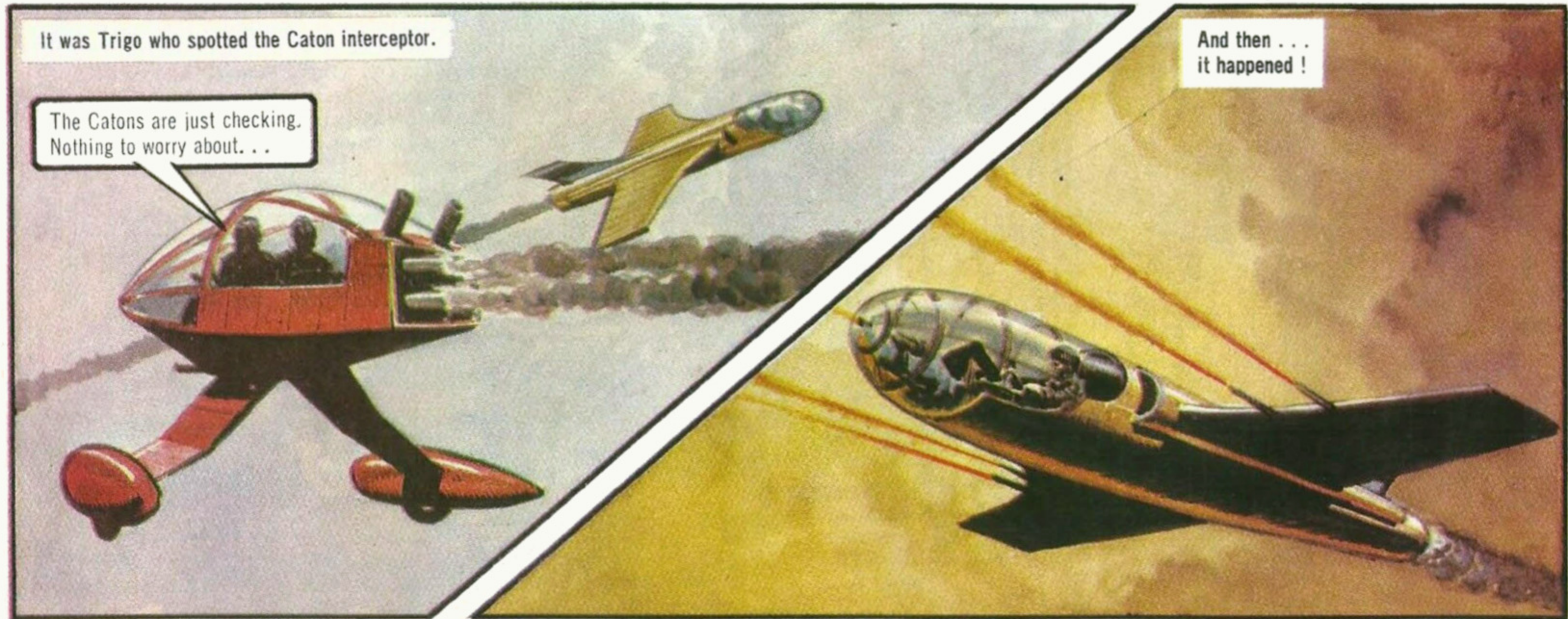


Later, in an aerial defence post in the neighbouring state of Cato, which was - officially - a part of the sprawling Trigan Empire . . .

Craft approaching over the Trigan border!

Intercept - and, if a Trigan craft, **destroy!**

We'll show the Trigans that the old days of Empire are over!

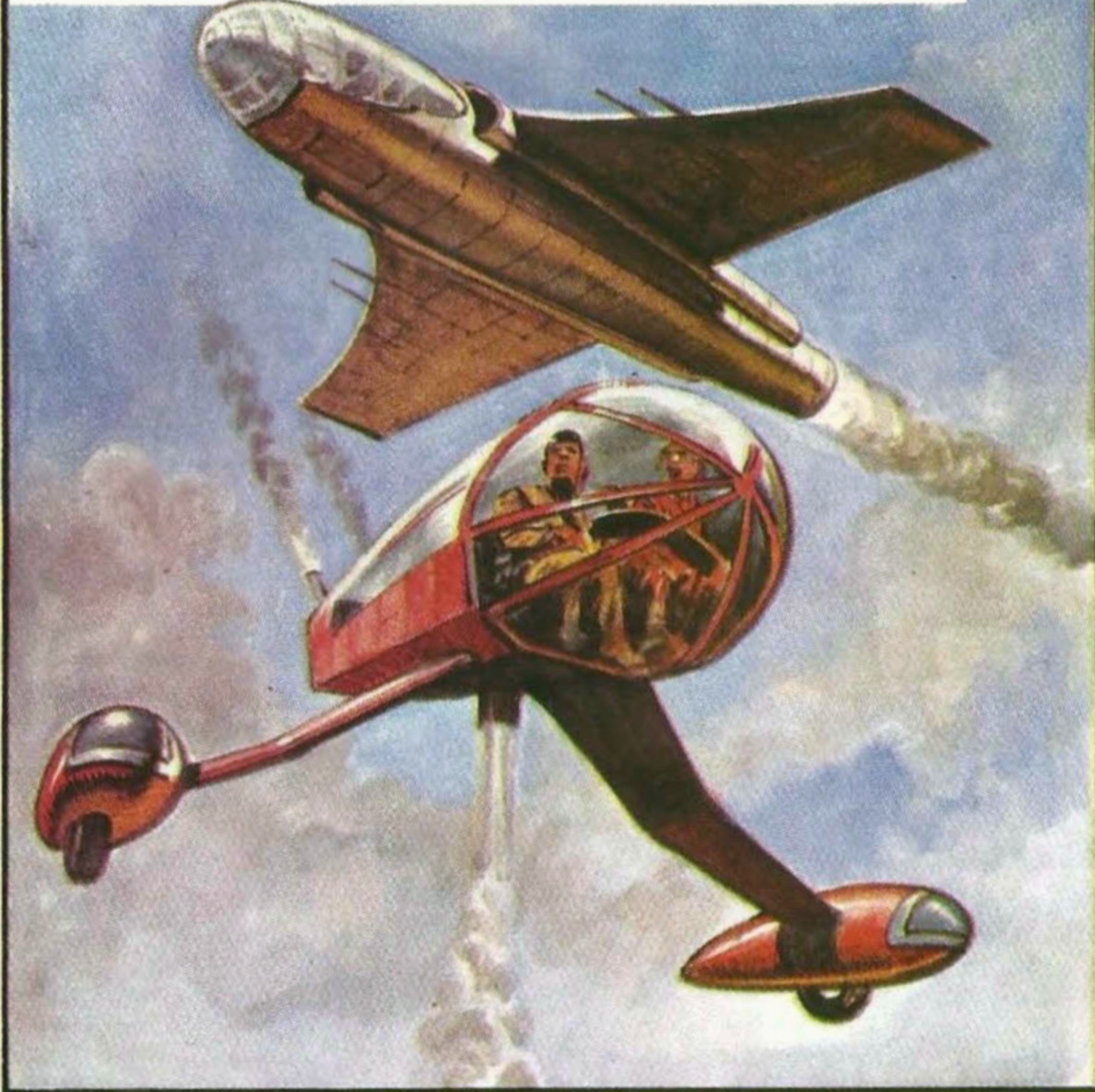


It was Trigo who spotted the Cato interceptor.

The Catons are just checking. Nothing to worry about. . .

And then . . . it happened!

Trigo and his pilot were saved by the all-purpose craft's hover-capability. Rulli brought them to a jarring halt – and the Caton interceptor flashed past.



As the Caton came in for a second run, Rulli spun his craft . . . aimed . . . Fired!

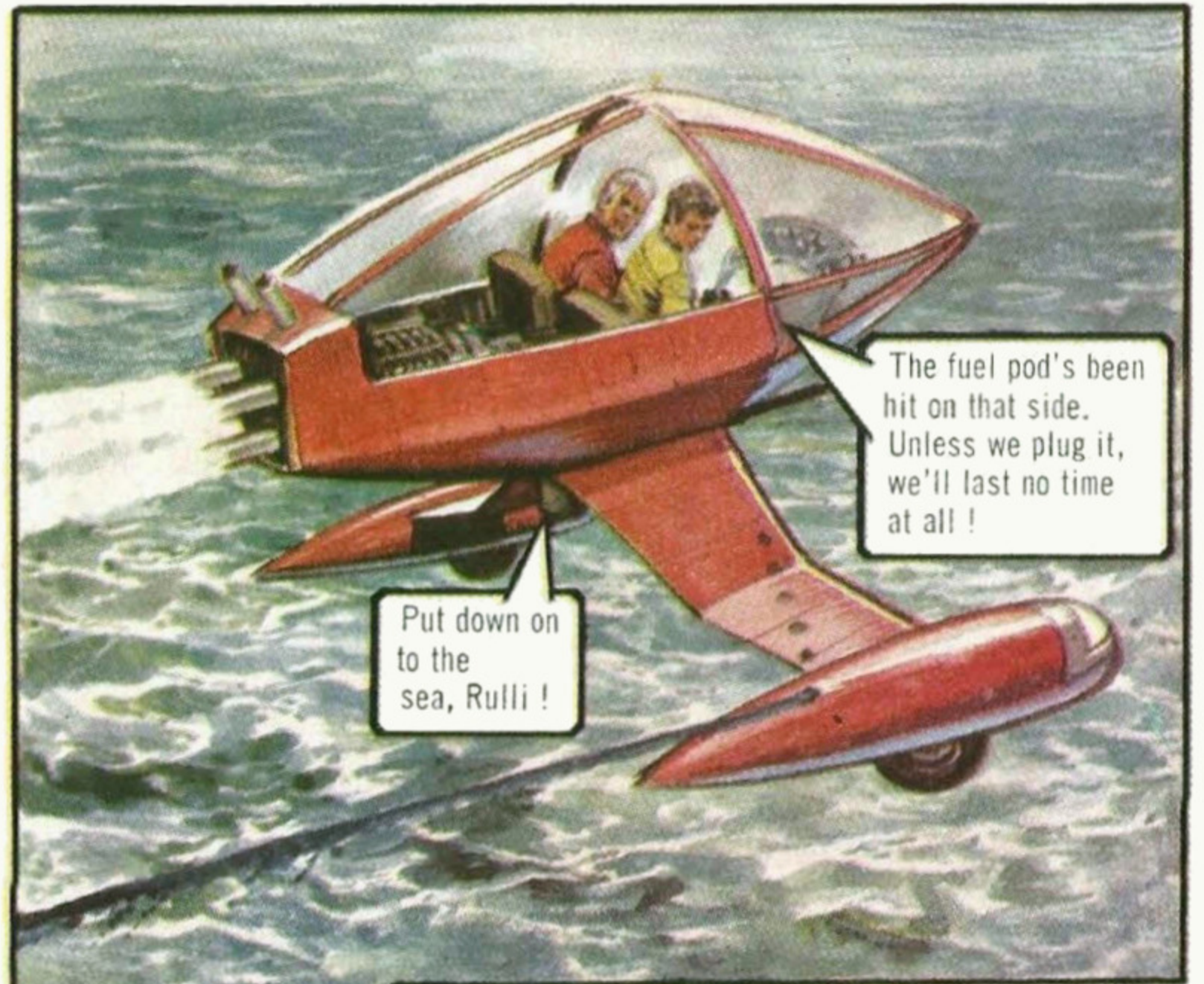


The Trigans resumed their journey. Later, Rulli's warning lamp flashed red.



The fuel pod's been hit on that side. Unless we plug it, we'll last no time at all!

Put down on the sea, Rulli!



Suddenly, a nightmare shape arose from the deep!

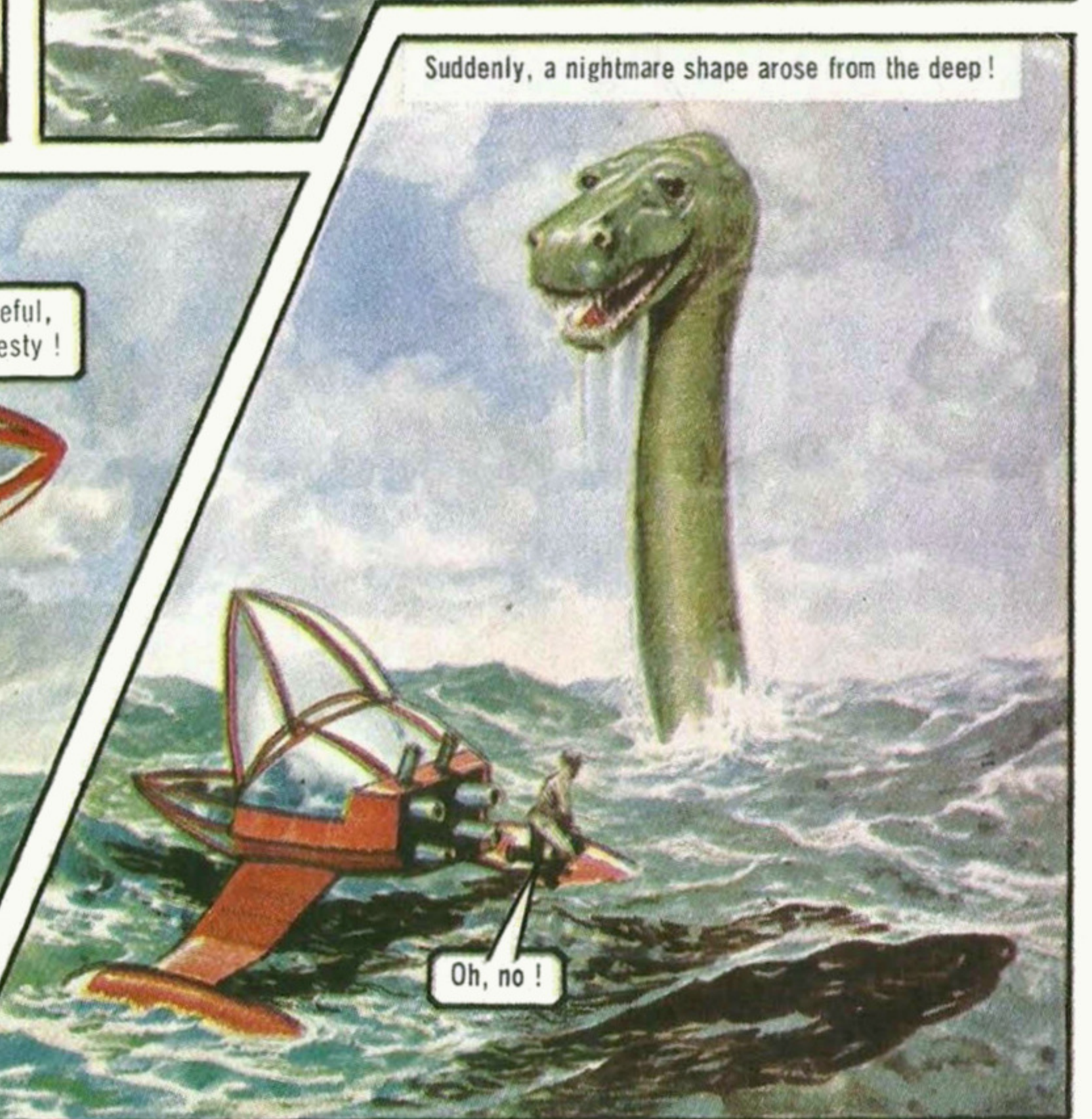
Down on the sea, the Emperor climbed out on to the yawing wing . . .

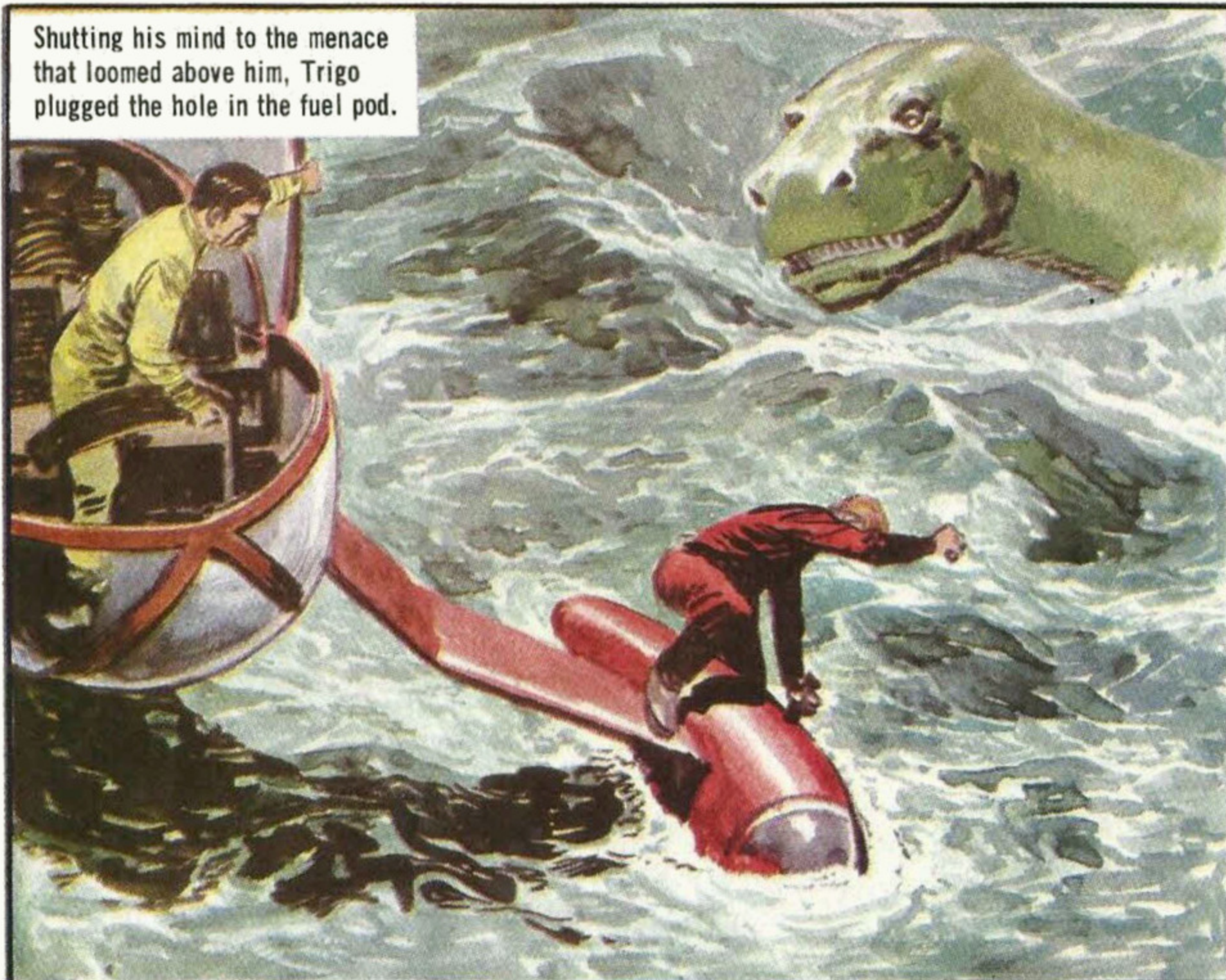
I'll soon have that hole plugged!

Careful, Majesty!

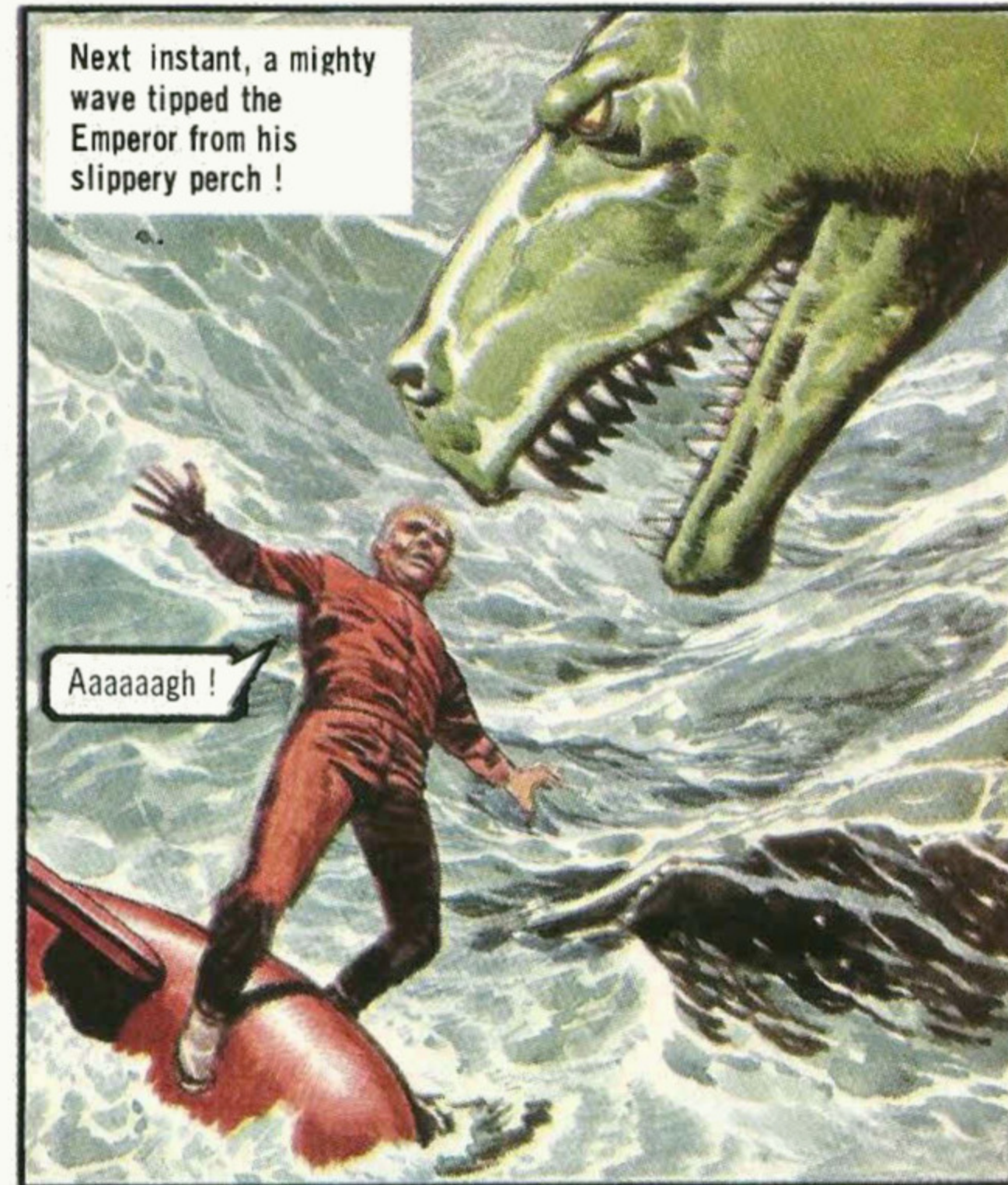


Oh, no!



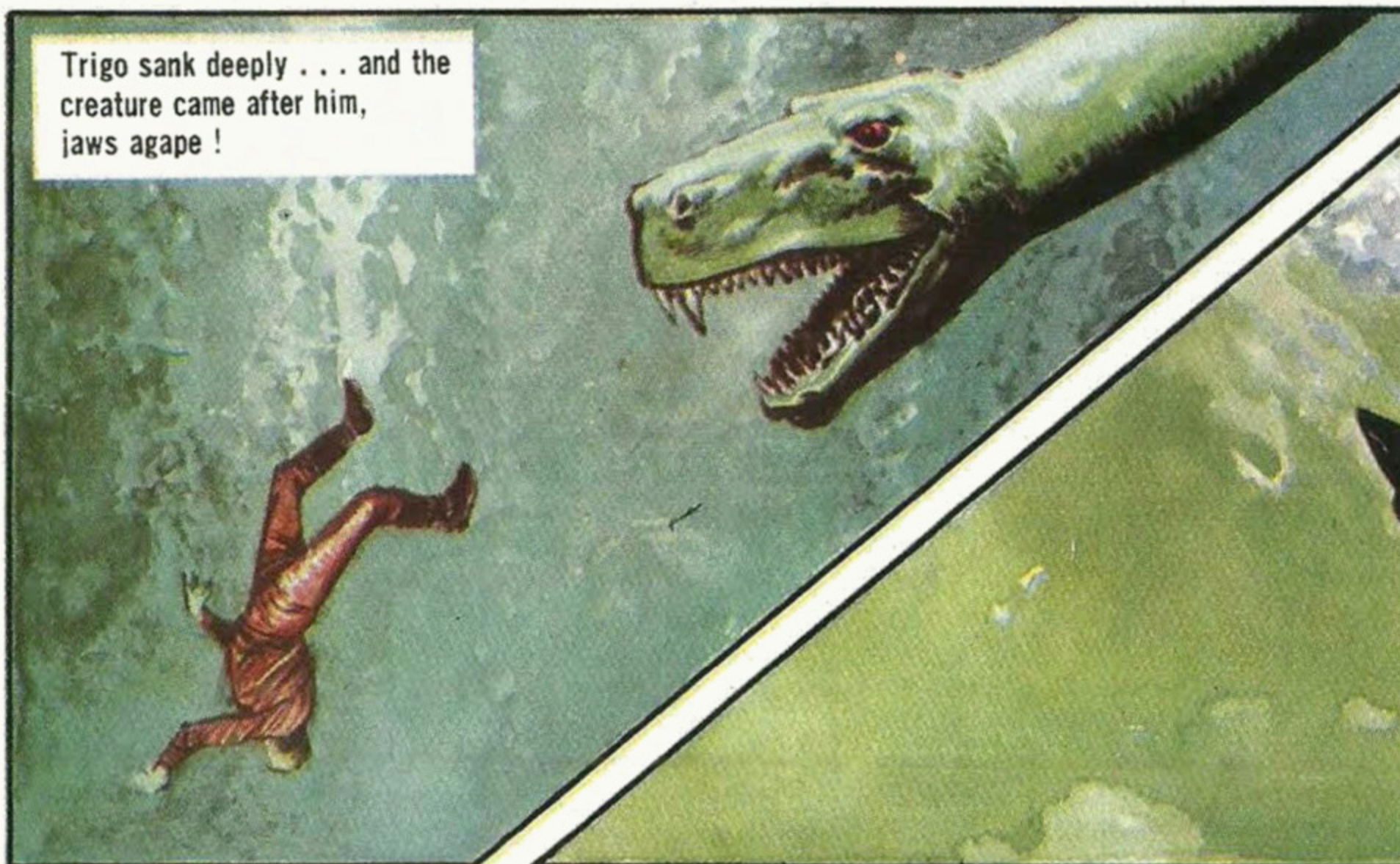


Shutting his mind to the menace that loomed above him, Trigo plugged the hole in the fuel pod.

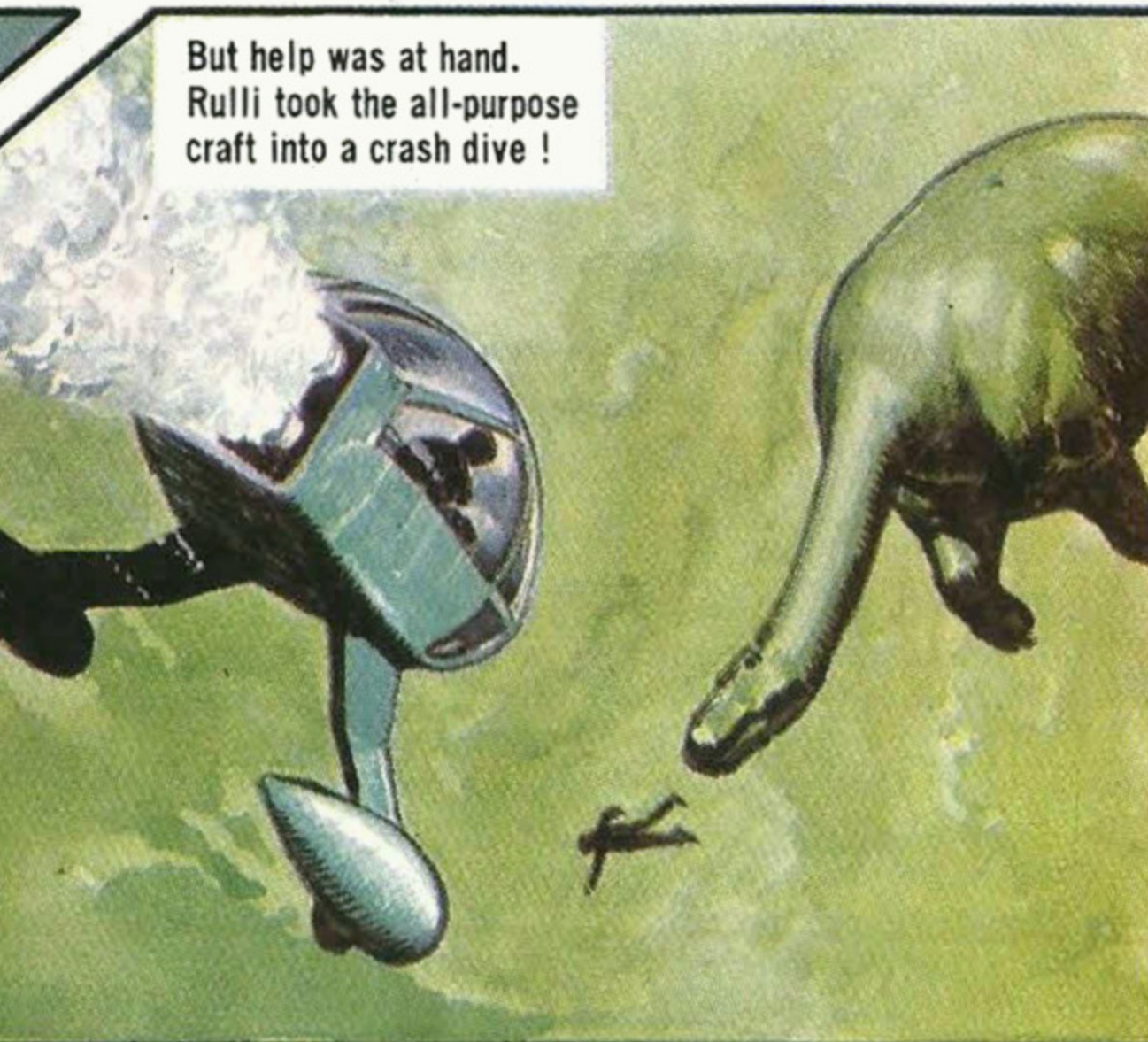


Next instant, a mighty wave tipped the Emperor from his slippery perch!

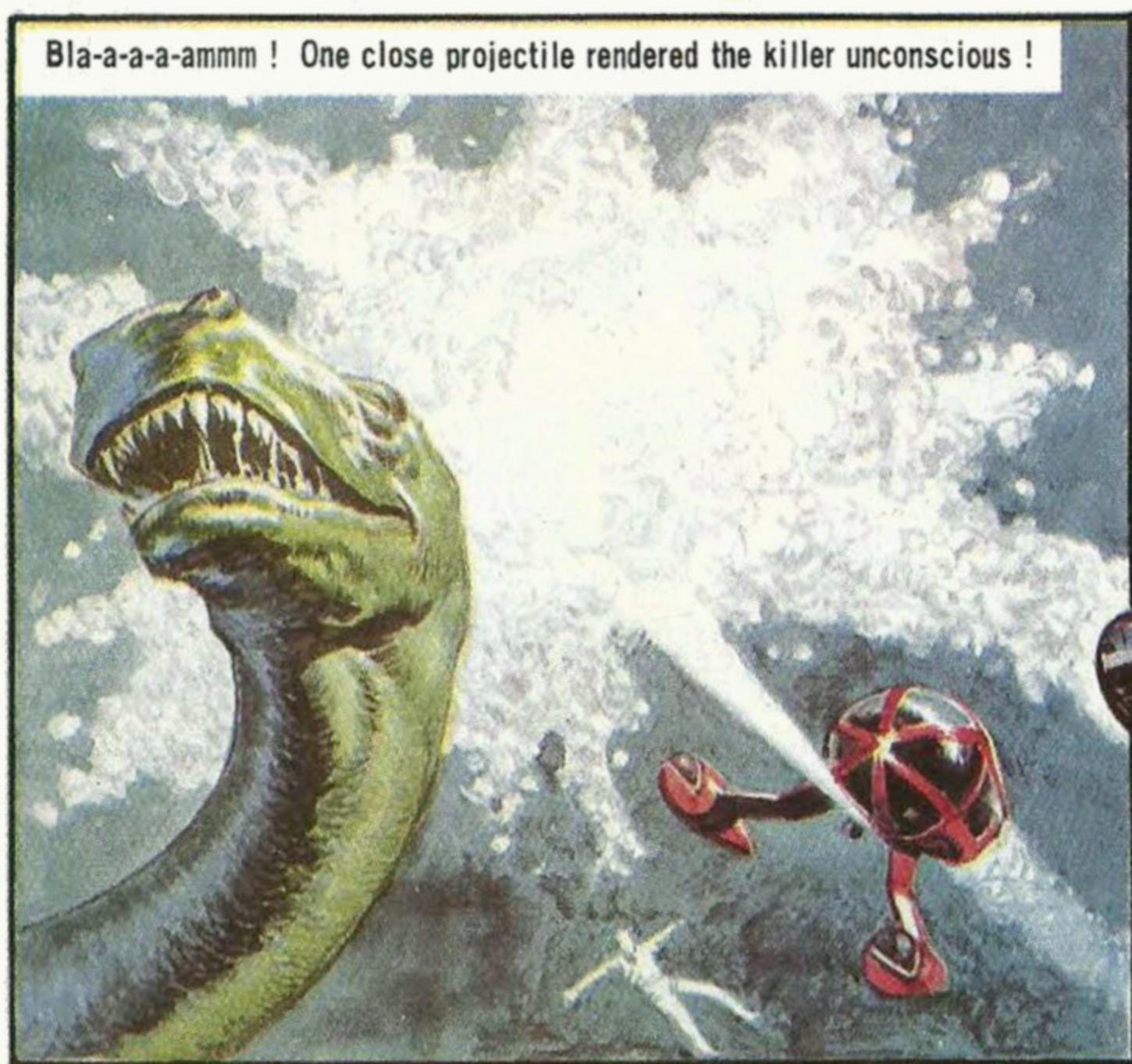
Aaaaaagh!



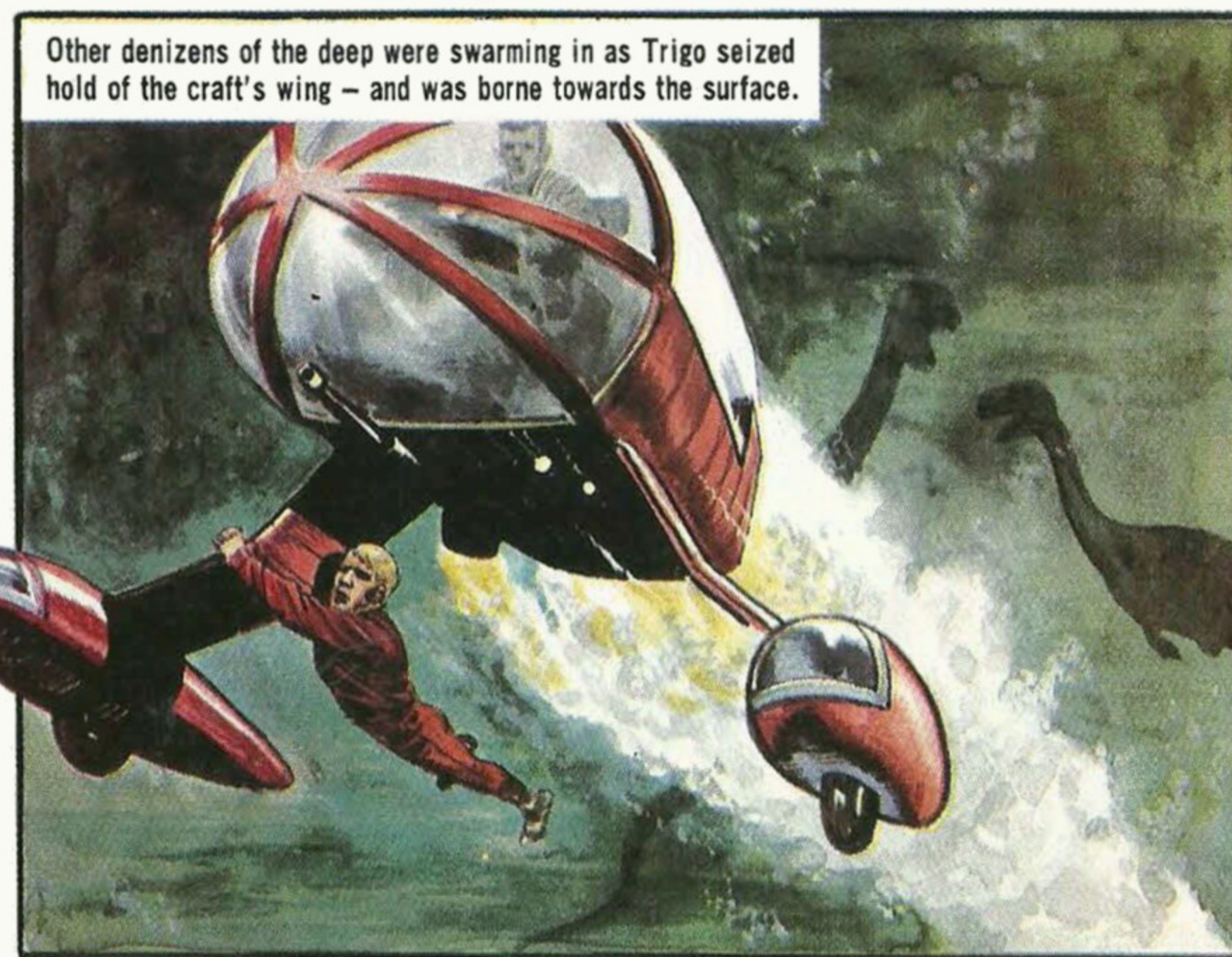
Trigo sank deeply . . . and the creature came after him, jaws agape!



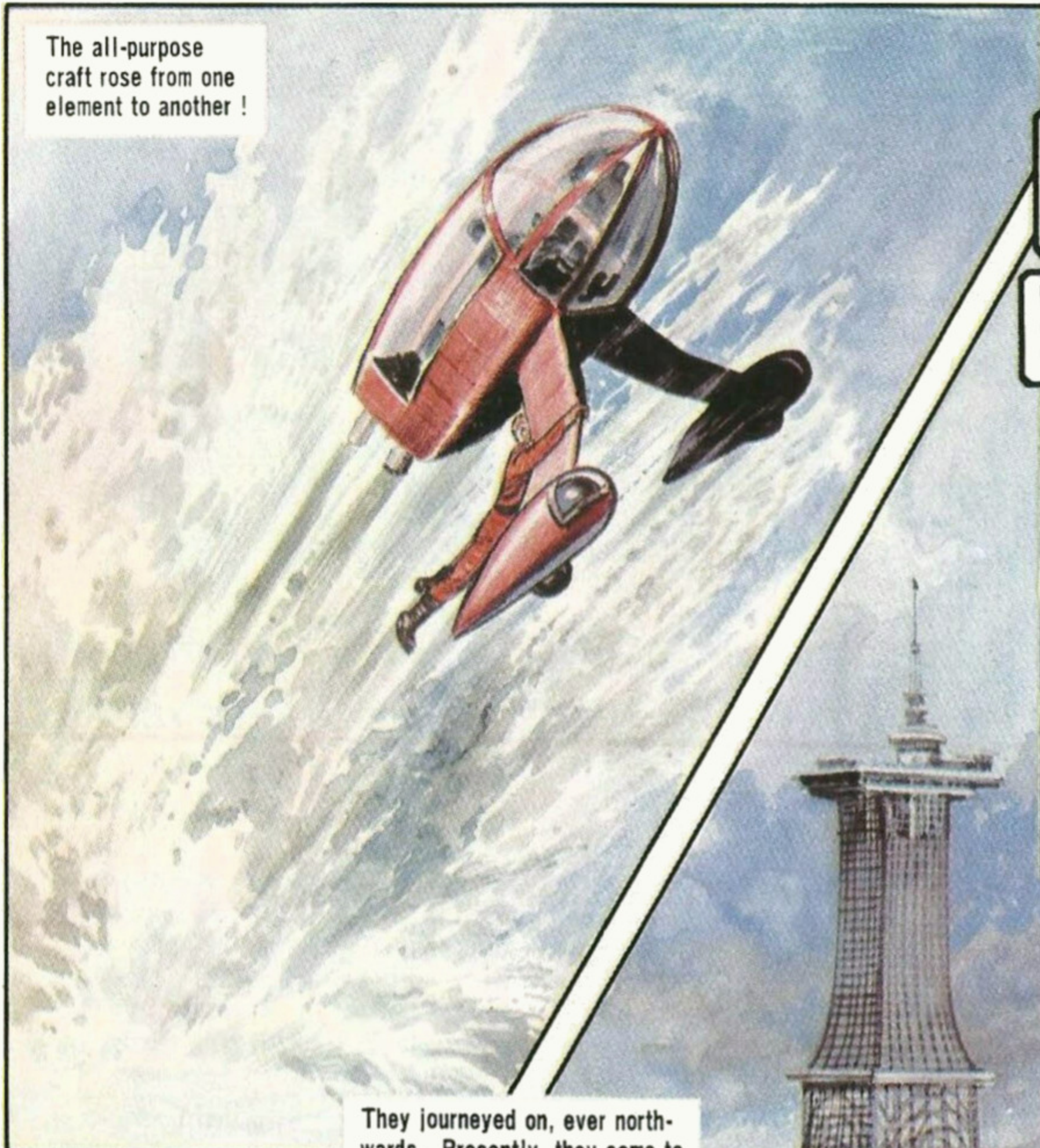
But help was at hand. Rulli took the all-purpose craft into a crash dive!



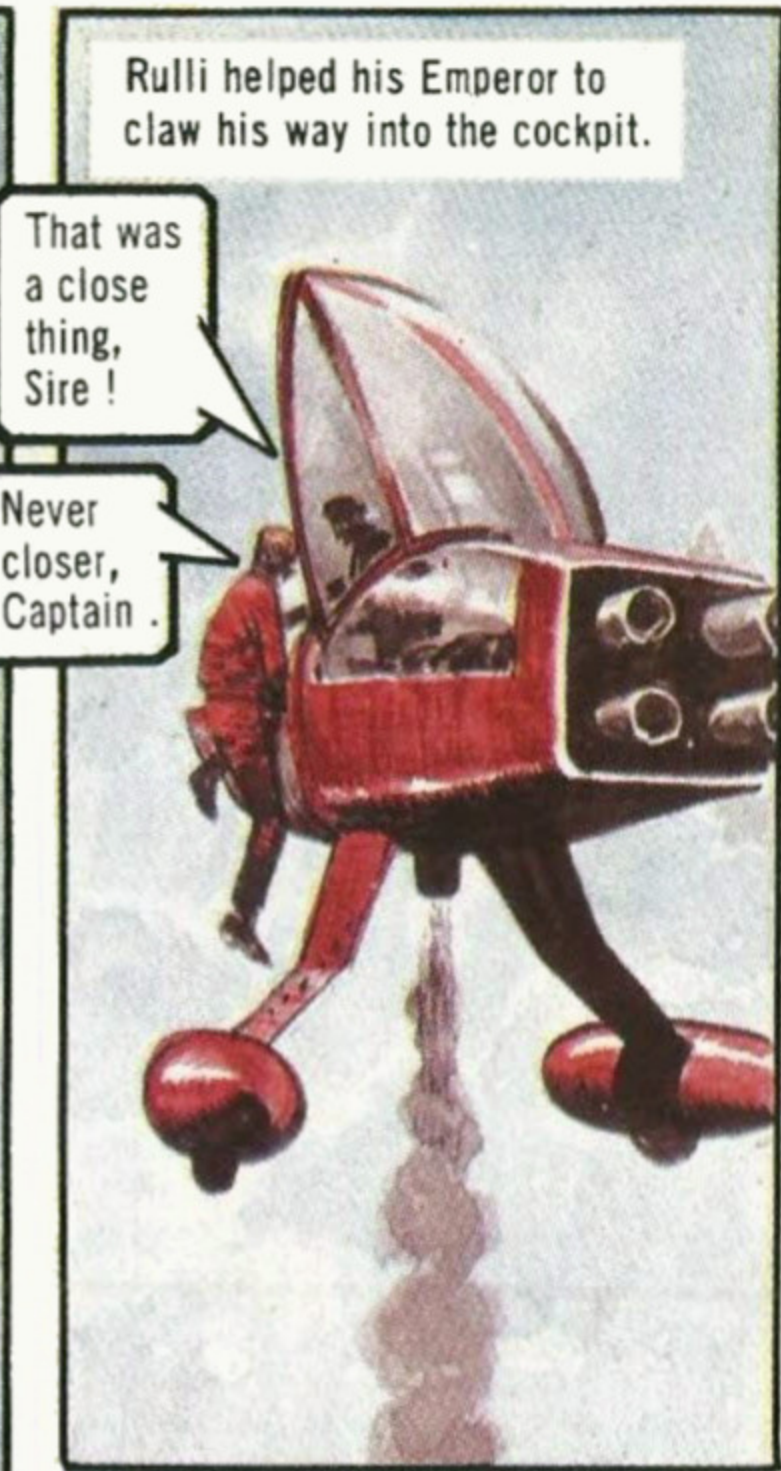
Bla-a-a-amm! One close projectile rendered the killer unconscious!



Other denizens of the deep were swarming in as Trigo seized hold of the craft's wing – and was borne towards the surface.



The all-purpose craft rose from one element to another !



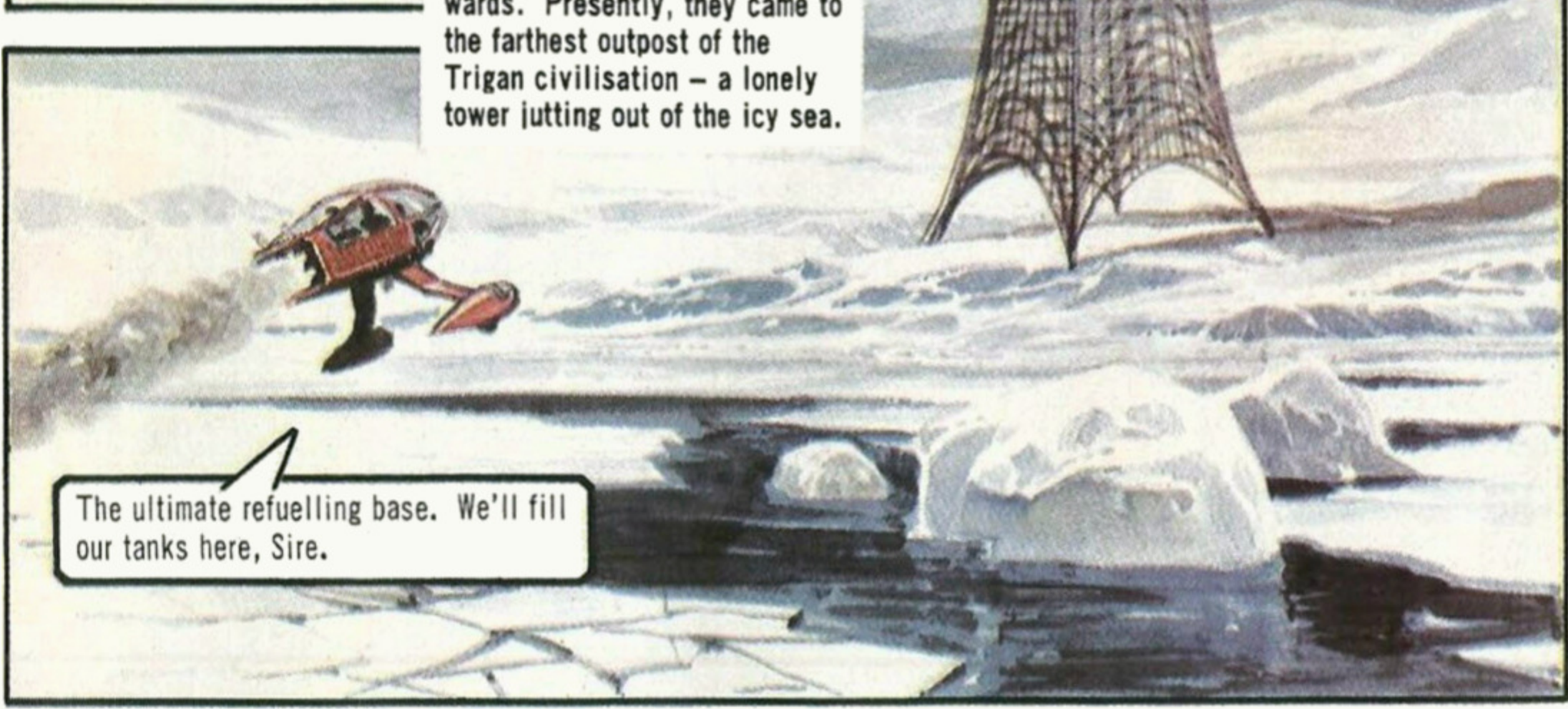
Rulli helped his Emperor to claw his way into the cockpit.

That was a close thing, Sire !

Never closer, Captain .

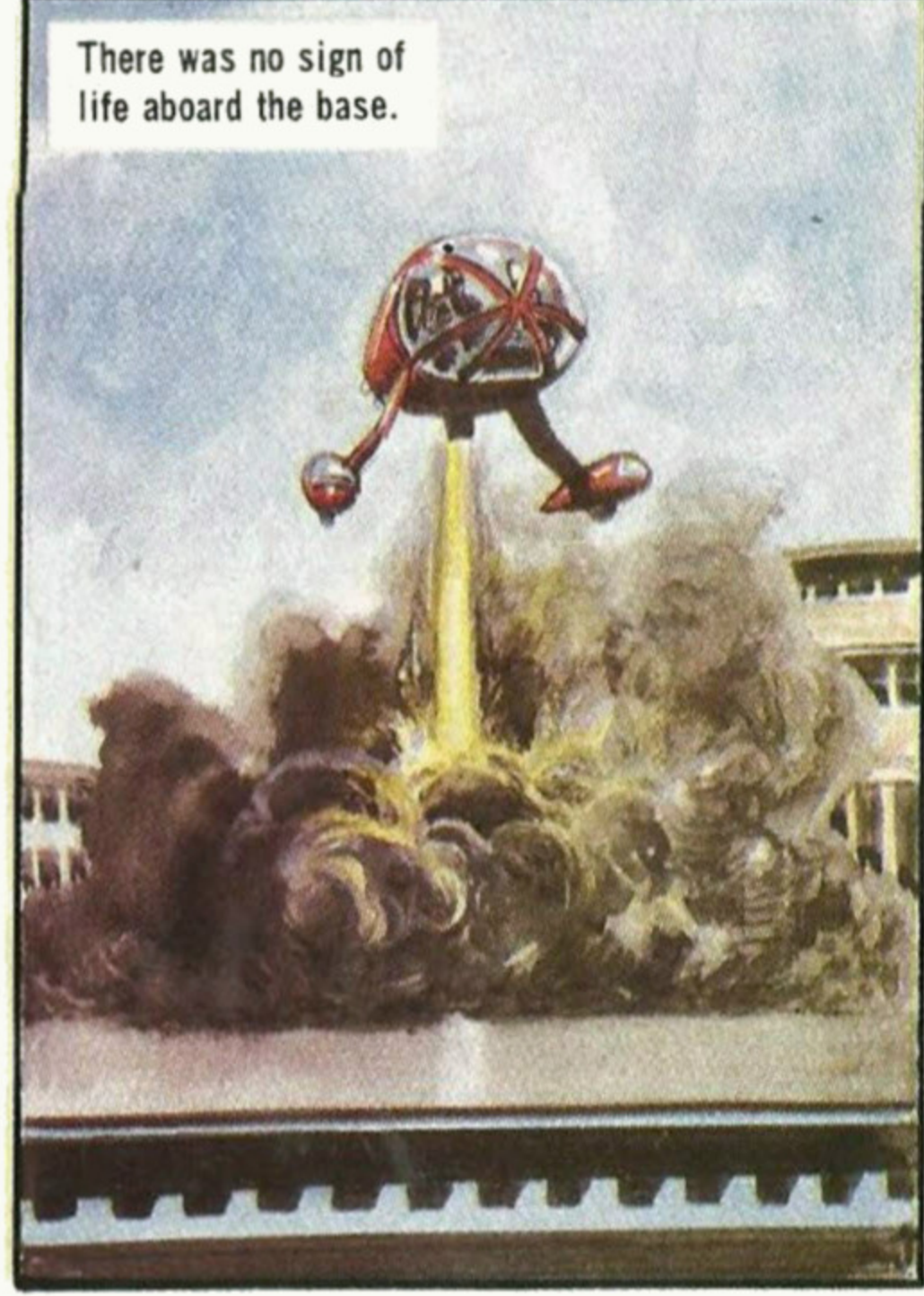


I shall never forget that you saved my life !

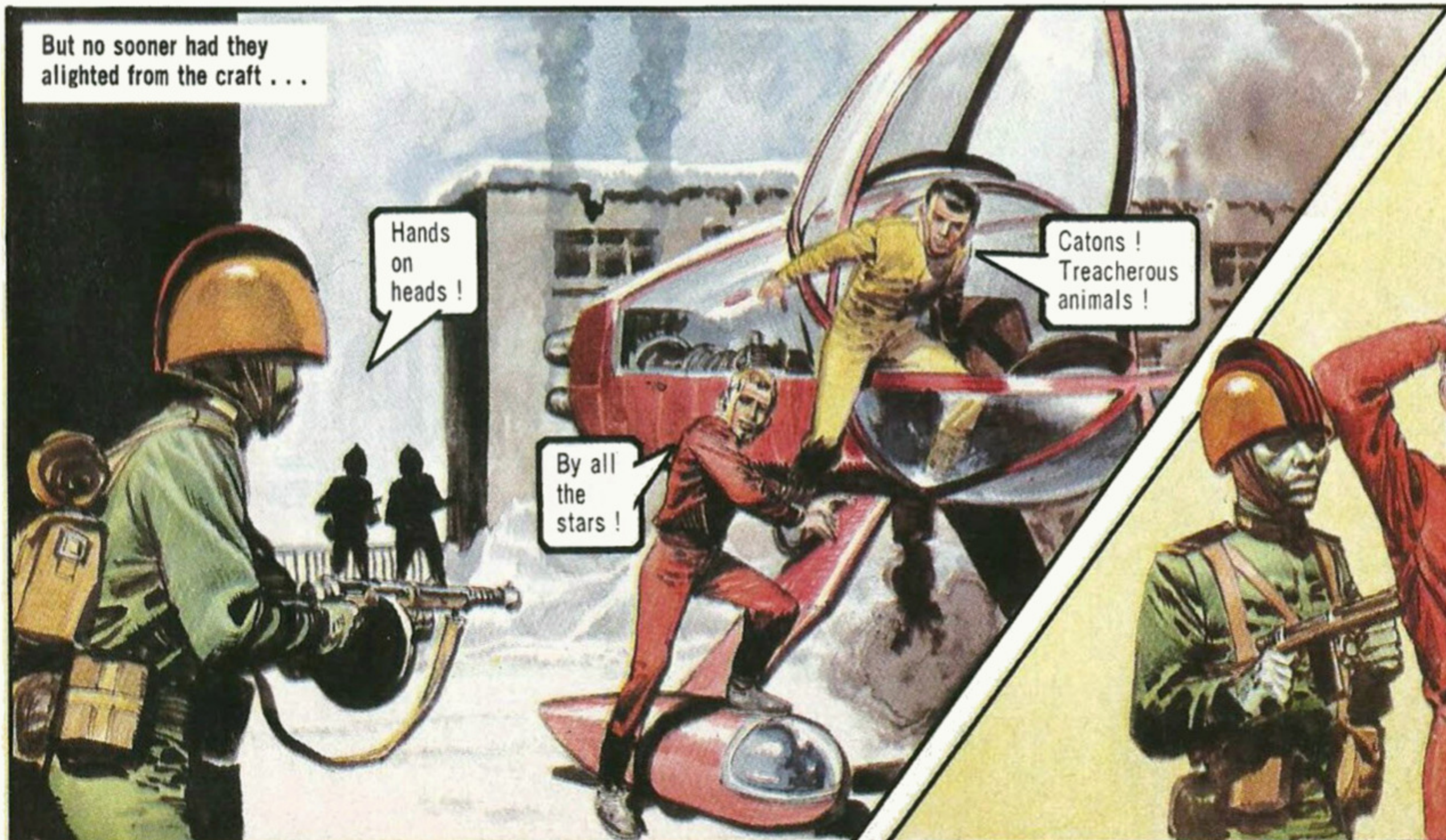


They journeyed on, ever northwards. Presently, they came to the farthest outpost of the Trigan civilisation – a lonely tower jutting out of the icy sea.

The ultimate refuelling base. We'll fill our tanks here, Sire.



There was no sign of life aboard the base.



But no sooner had they alighted from the craft . . .

Hands on heads !

Cato's ! Treacherous animals !

By all the stars !

The menacing presence of these soldiers – his subjects – was a bitter reminder to Trigo that his proud Empire was falling apart !

We have been waiting for you – Imperial Majesty – to take you back to Cato in chains !



The Caton leader rasped a harsh order.

Manacle the prisoners!

Rulli saw his chance – and acted.



Hah!

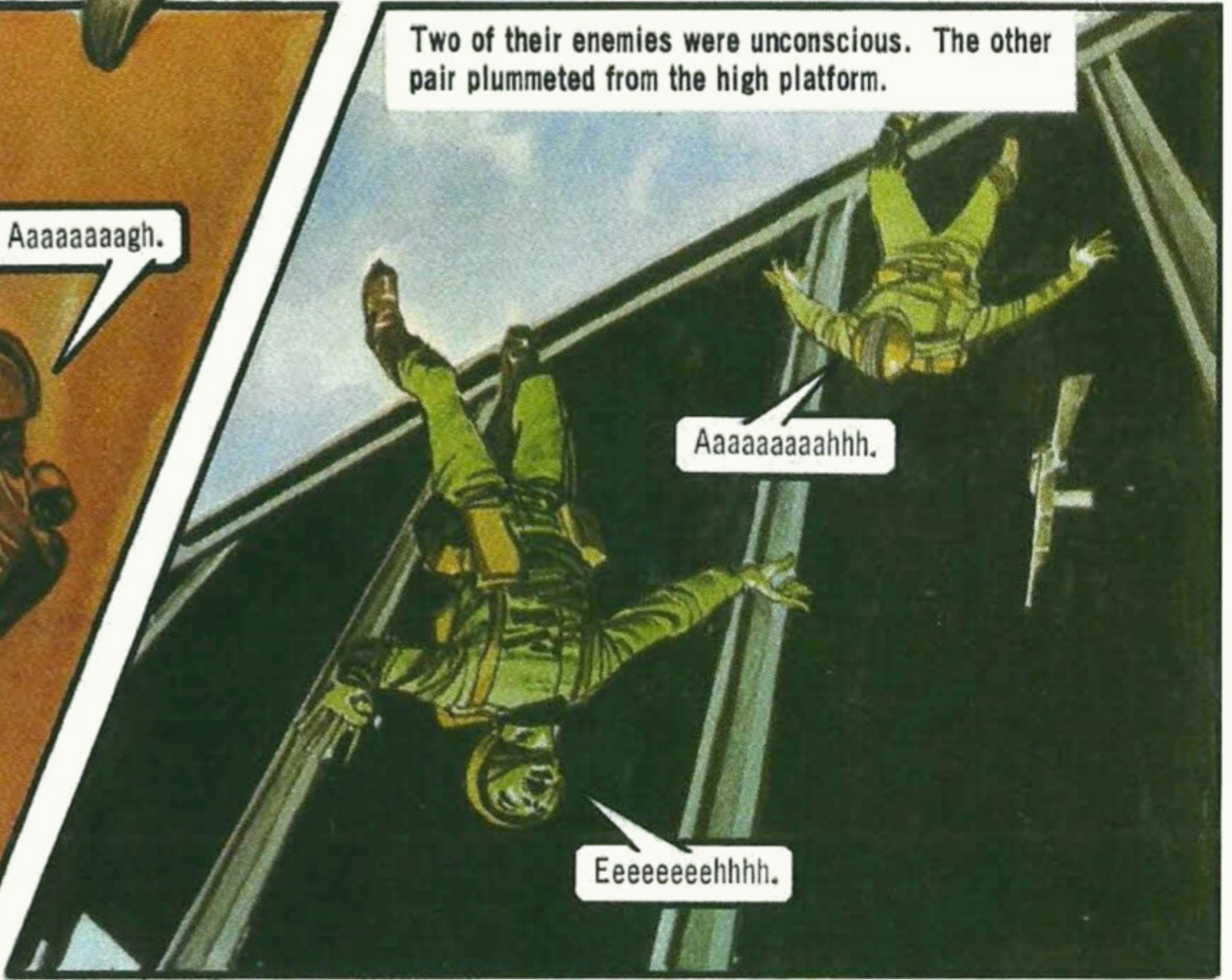
Uuuuuuh!



Trigo swiftly followed his companion's example.

Aaaaaaagh.

Two of their enemies were unconscious. The other pair plummeted from the high platform.



Aaaaaaaaahh.

Eeeeeeehhhh.



Never mind the refuelling, Rulli. We can do that on the journey back from the temple. The craft that brought those Catons here will shortly return!

The Emperor guessed correctly. Even as they rose skywards, a big Caton battle-craft came into sight, cannons blazing.



Dive, Rulli! ... Dive for our lives.

The all-purpose craft plunged beneath the surface of the icy ocean. With projectiles bursting all round it.



Trigo and Rulli continued the rest of their voyage to the northern pole in the same submerged state, and suffered no further attacks.

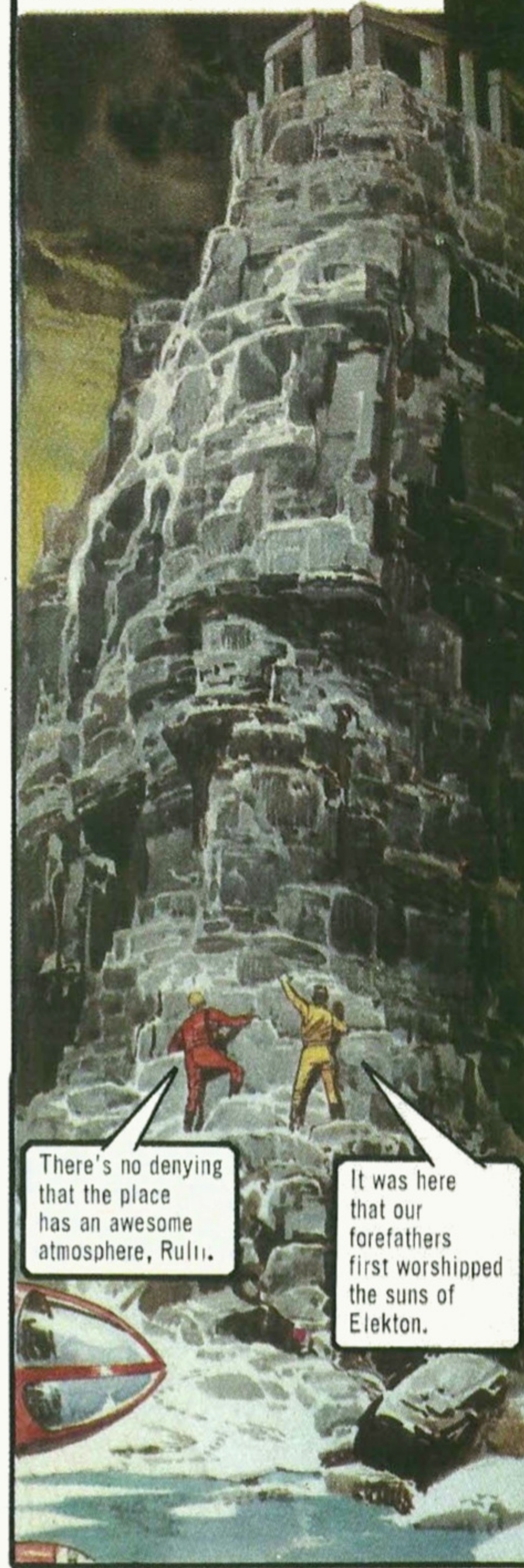


They surfaced at the edge of the icy swamp that marked the northernmost land on the planet Elekton.



According to the chart, Sire, the temple stands on an island in that direction.

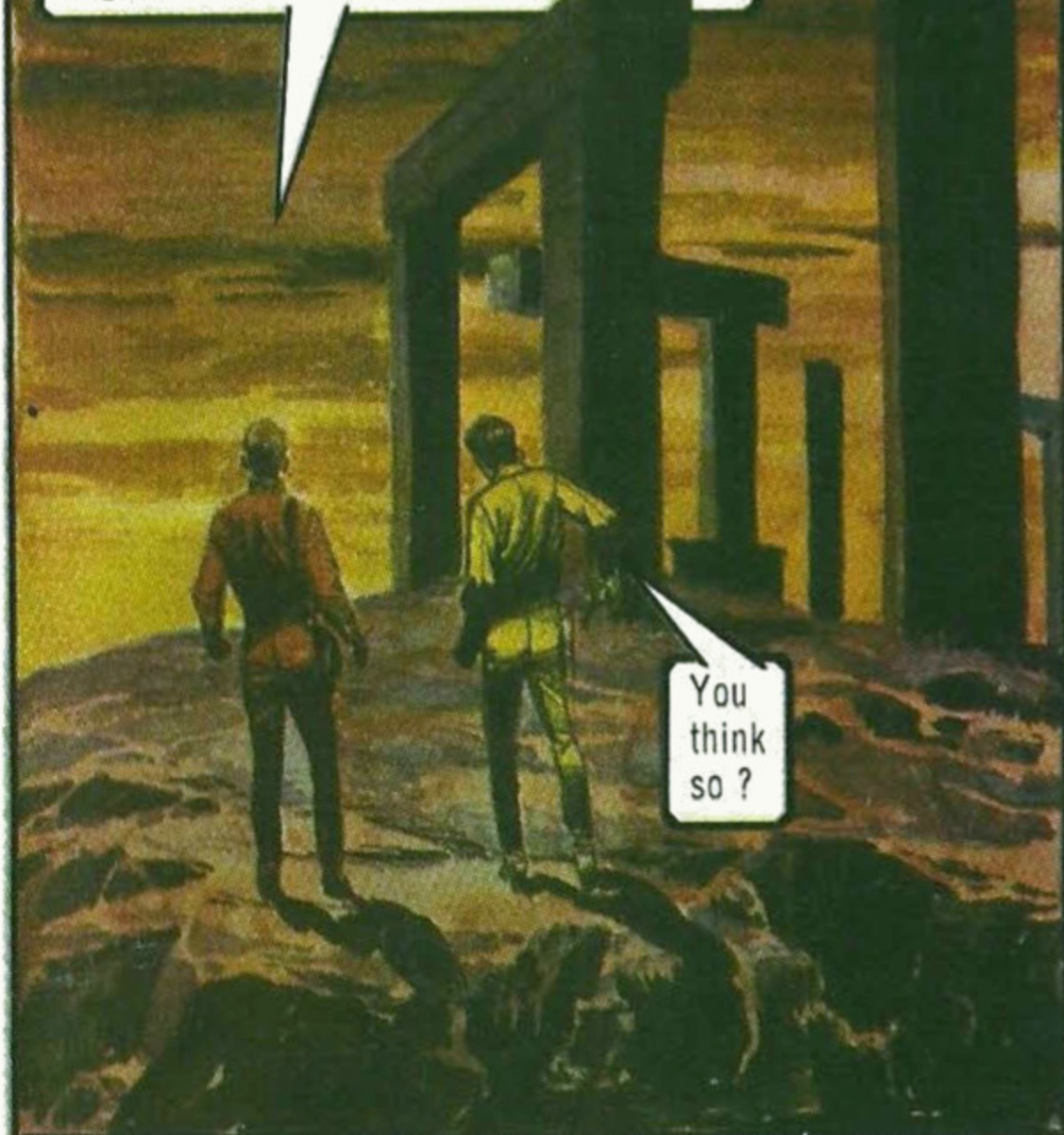
Arctic night was falling when they came to the forbidding Temple of the Suns.



There's no denying that the place has an awesome atmosphere, Rulli.

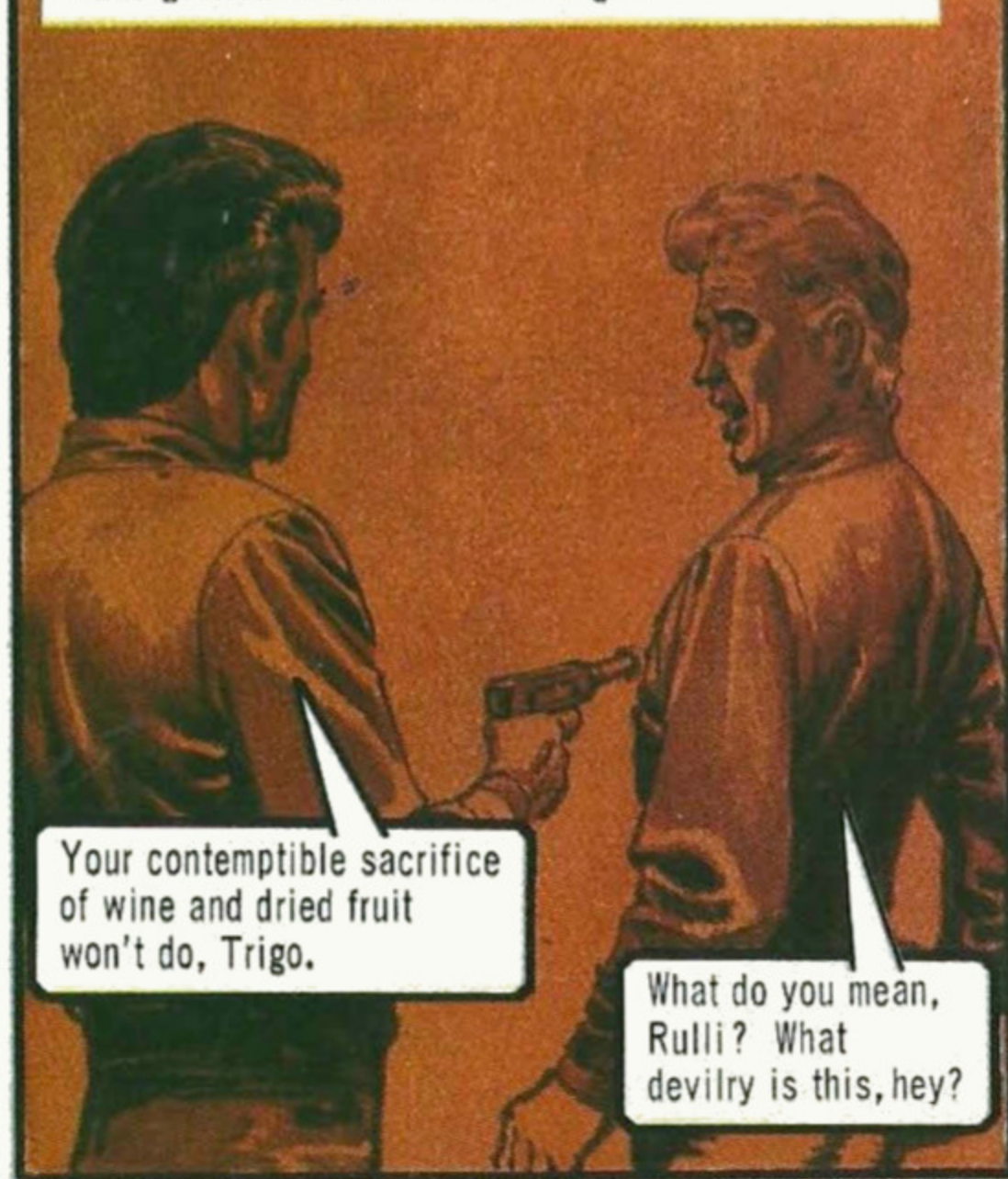
It was here that our forefathers first worshipped the suns of Elekton.

I have brought wine and dried fruit to make a symbolic sacrifice to the suns. A load of mumbo-jumbo, Rulli. But it might - just might - save the Trigan Empire.



You think so?

Trigo turned in surprise at the strange tone of his companion's voice. The blood-red rays of the dying suns glinted on the muzzle of a gun.



Your contemptible sacrifice of wine and dried fruit won't do, Trigo.

What do you mean, Rulli? What devilry is this, hey?

Fool! Why do you think I preserved your life, at the risk of my own?



It is you, mighty Emperor, who will be sacrificed to the riders of the sky.



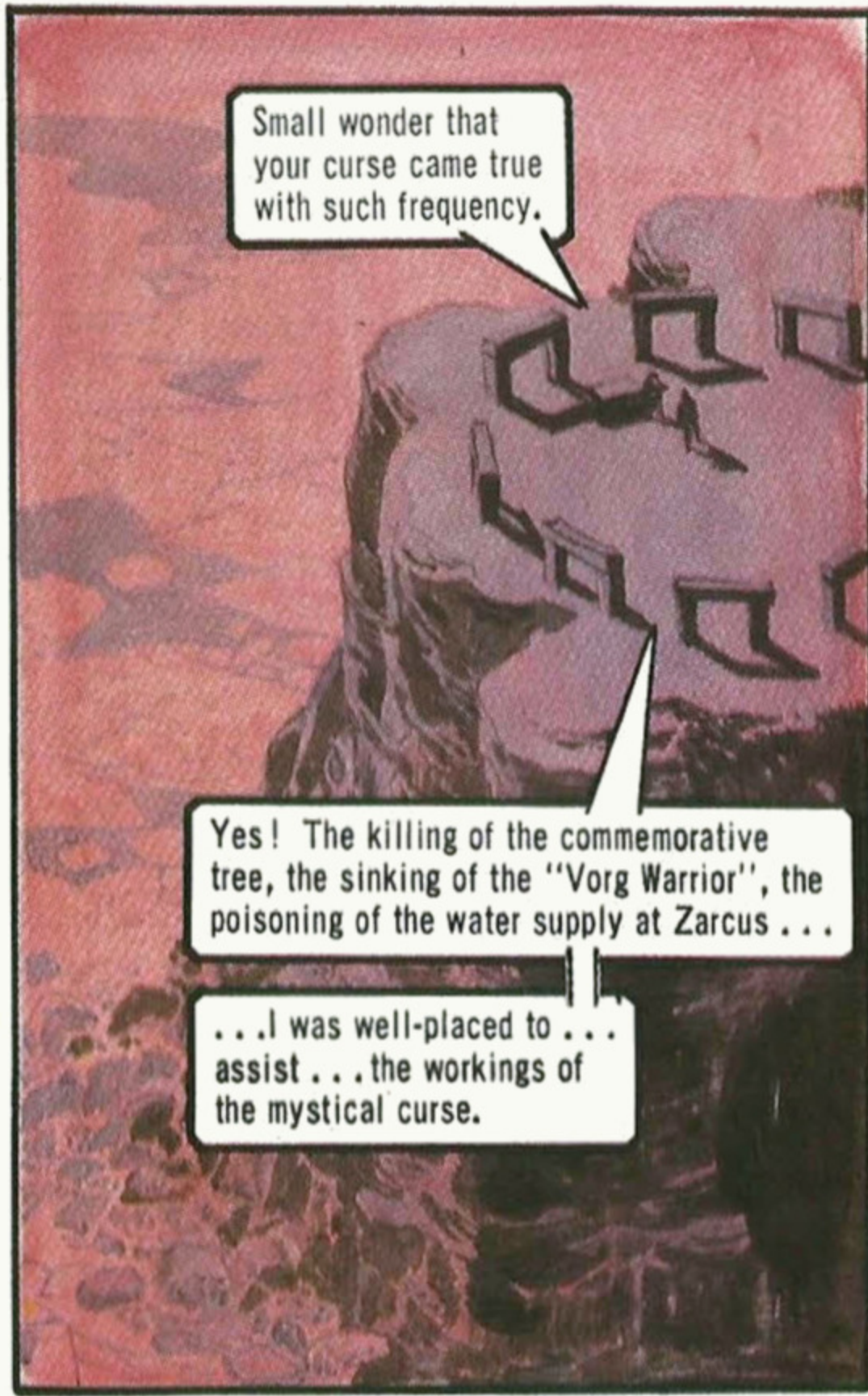
Trigo judged his distance from Rulli's gun muzzle and took a deep breath . . .

Who are you?

Not merely the Captain of your Imperial Guard, I assure you.



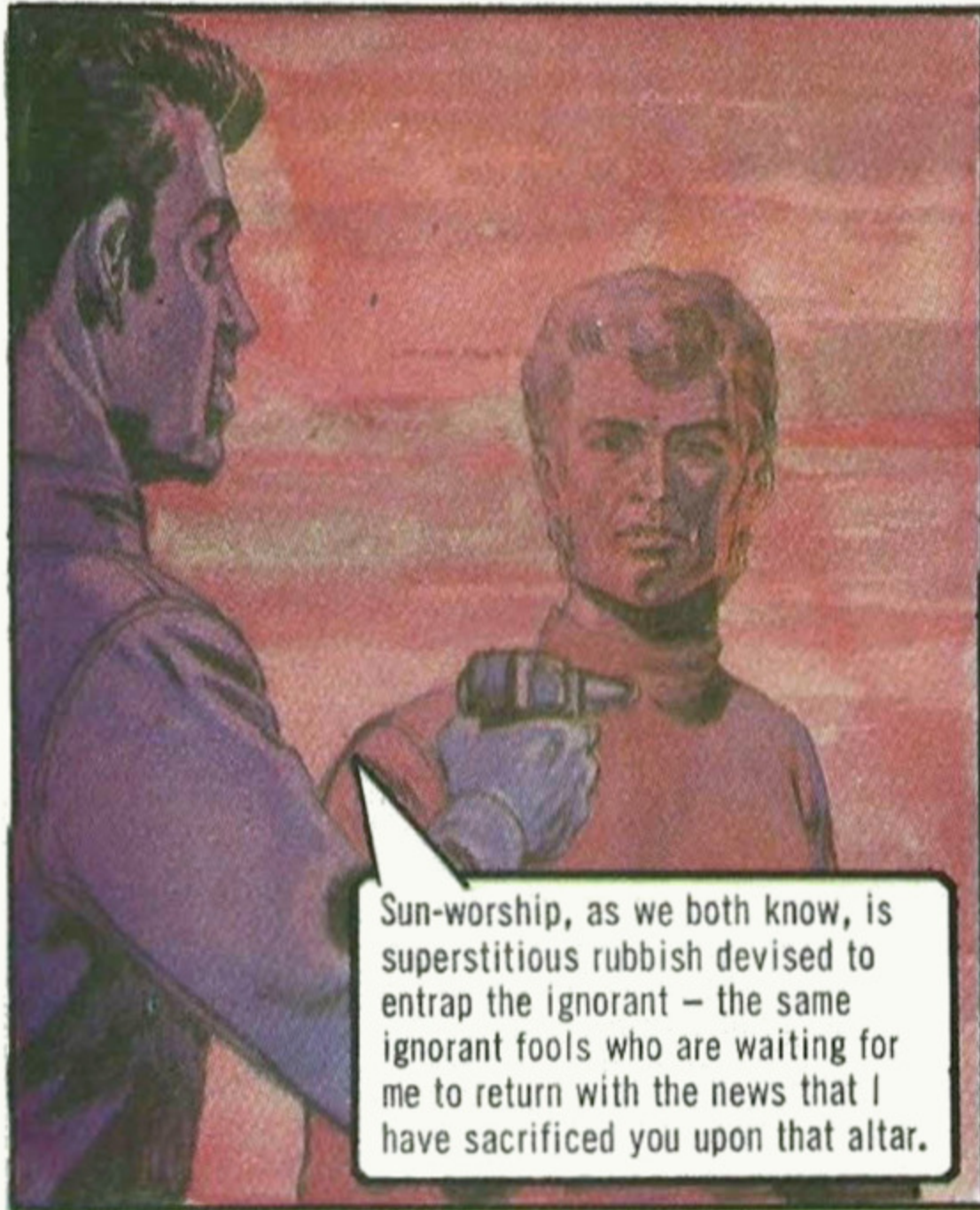
I am also the hereditary chief priest of the sun-worshippers!



Small wonder that your curse came true with such frequency.

Yes! The killing of the commemorative tree, the sinking of the "Vorg Warrior", the poisoning of the water supply at Zarcus . . .

. . . I was well-placed to . . . assist . . . the workings of the mystical curse.



Sun-worship, as we both know, is superstitious rubbish devised to entrap the ignorant - the same ignorant fools who are waiting for me to return with the news that I have sacrificed you upon that altar.



Farewell, Emperor. Before the lunar year is out, I expect the sun-worshippers to place your crown upon my head.



Rulli's gun blazed, Trigo ducked and the disintegrating charge smashed into the ancient altar.



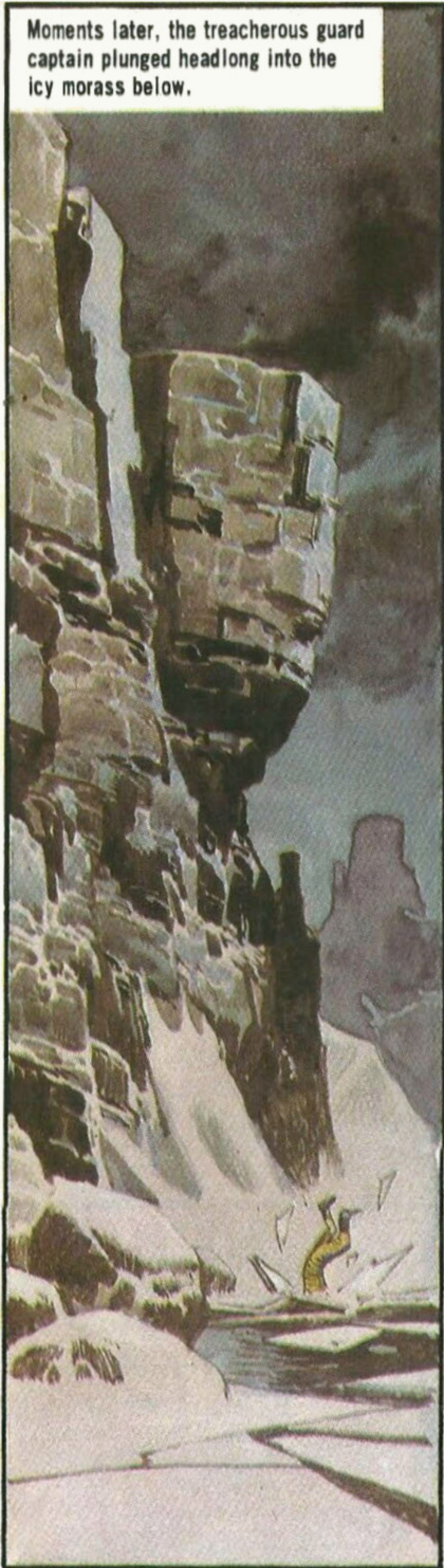
The Emperor dived

Aaaaagh!



Rulli writhed free of Trigo's grasp, turned and . . .

Eeeeeeeigh!



Moments later, the treacherous guard captain plunged headlong into the icy morass below.



Trigo scrambled down to the rescue, but Rulli never reappeared.

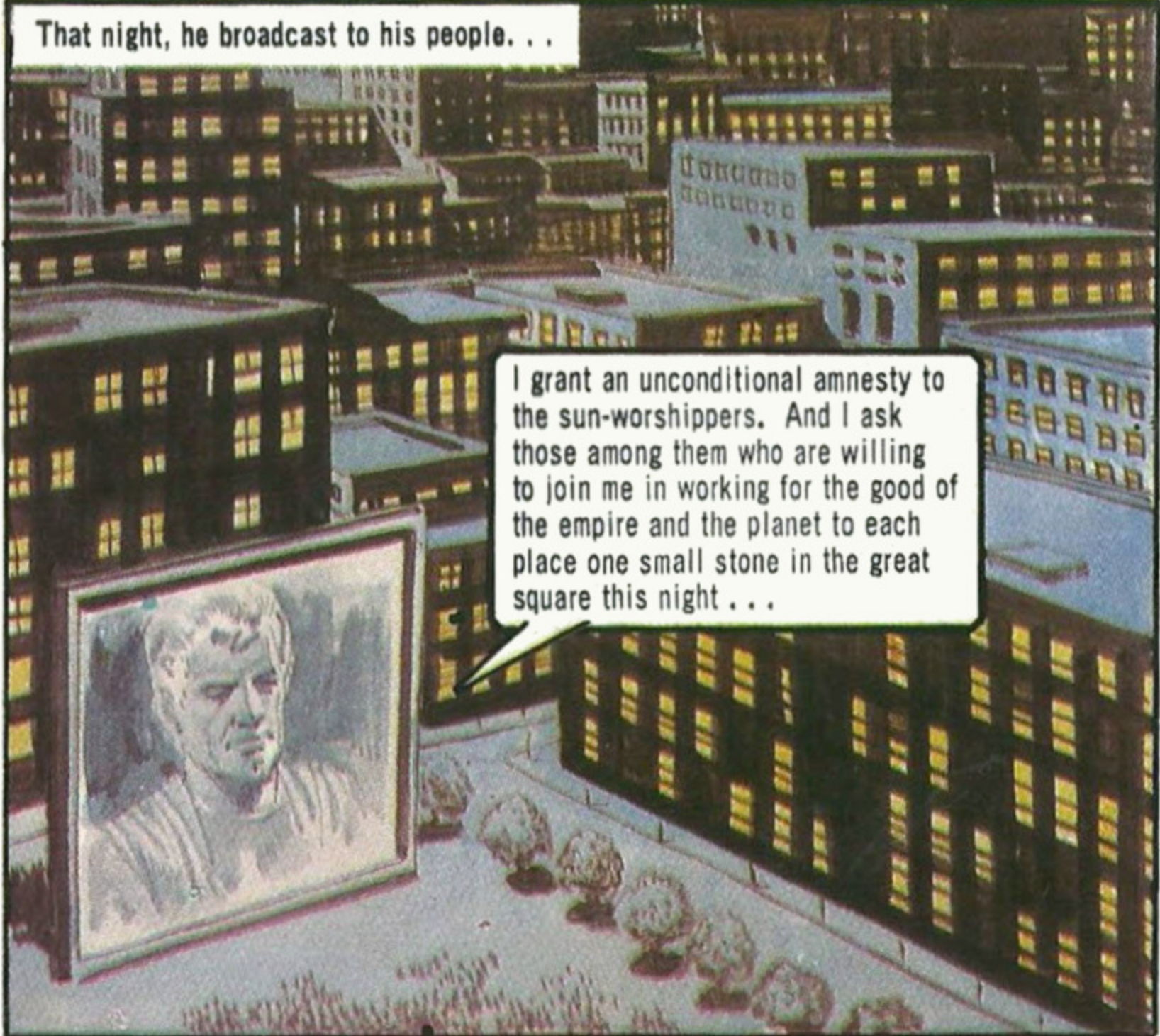
The Trigan Empire – and all Elekton – is safe again!



The Emperor landed in the great square of Trigan City some days later.

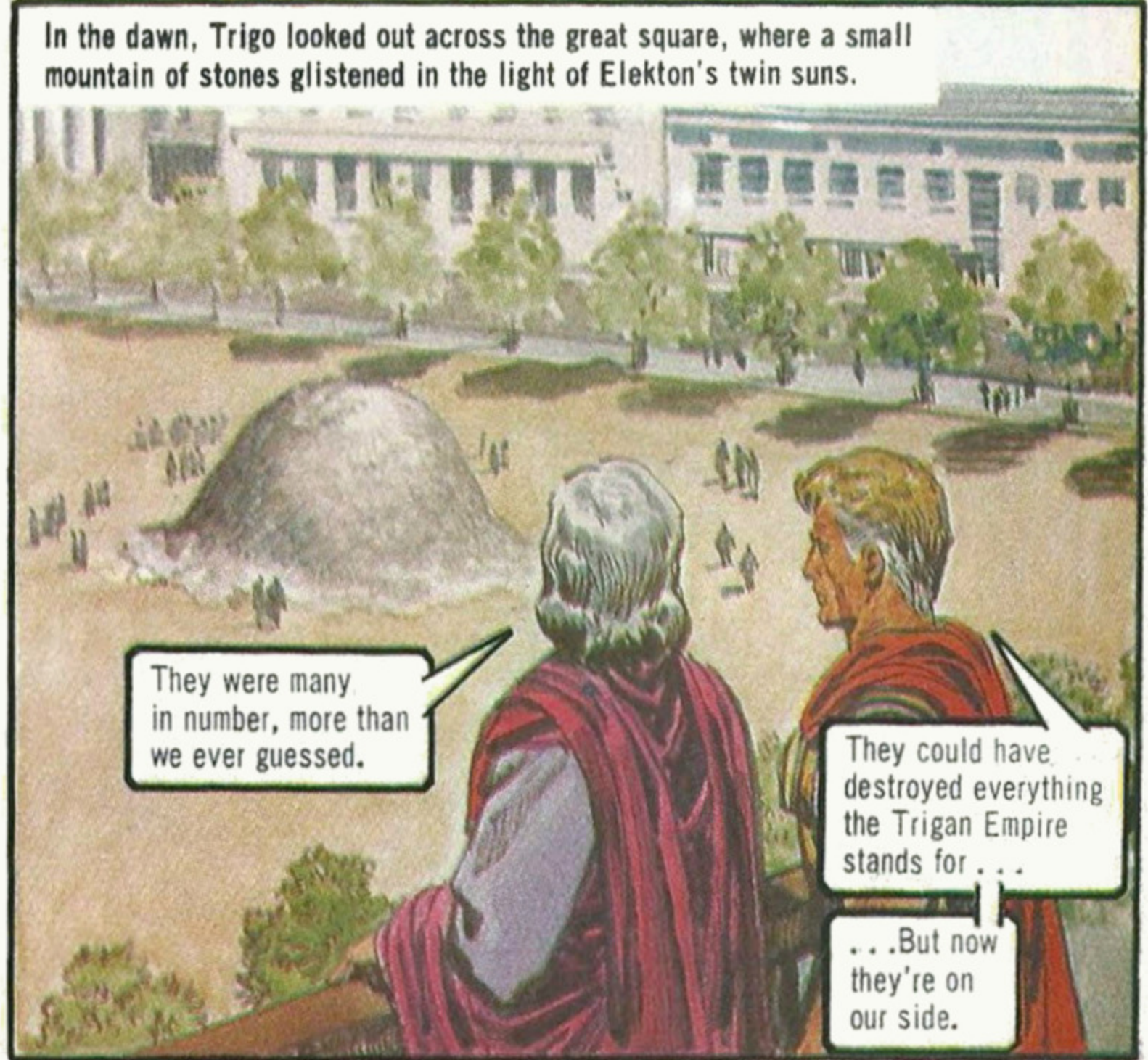
You have made a sacrifice, Imperial Majesty?

The hereditary chief priest has himself fallen victim to his own evil plot to enslave our planet.



That night, he broadcast to his people. . .

I grant an unconditional amnesty to the sun-worshippers. And I ask those among them who are willing to join me in working for the good of the empire and the planet to each place one small stone in the great square this night . . .



In the dawn, Trigo looked out across the great square, where a small mountain of stones glistened in the light of Elekton's twin suns.

They were many in number, more than we ever guessed.

They could have destroyed everything the Trigan Empire stands for . . .

. . . But now they're on our side.