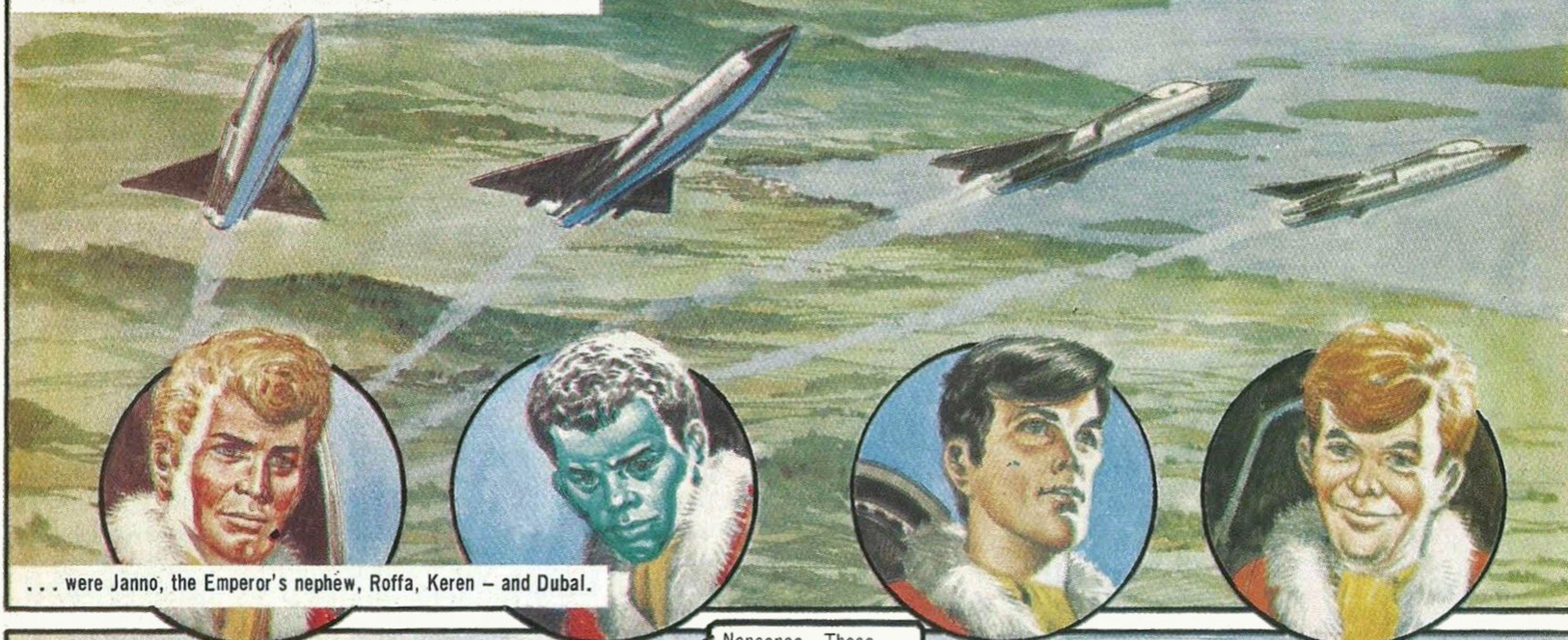


# TRIGAN EMPIRE

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.

By general consent, the four top aces of the Trigan Air Fleet . . .

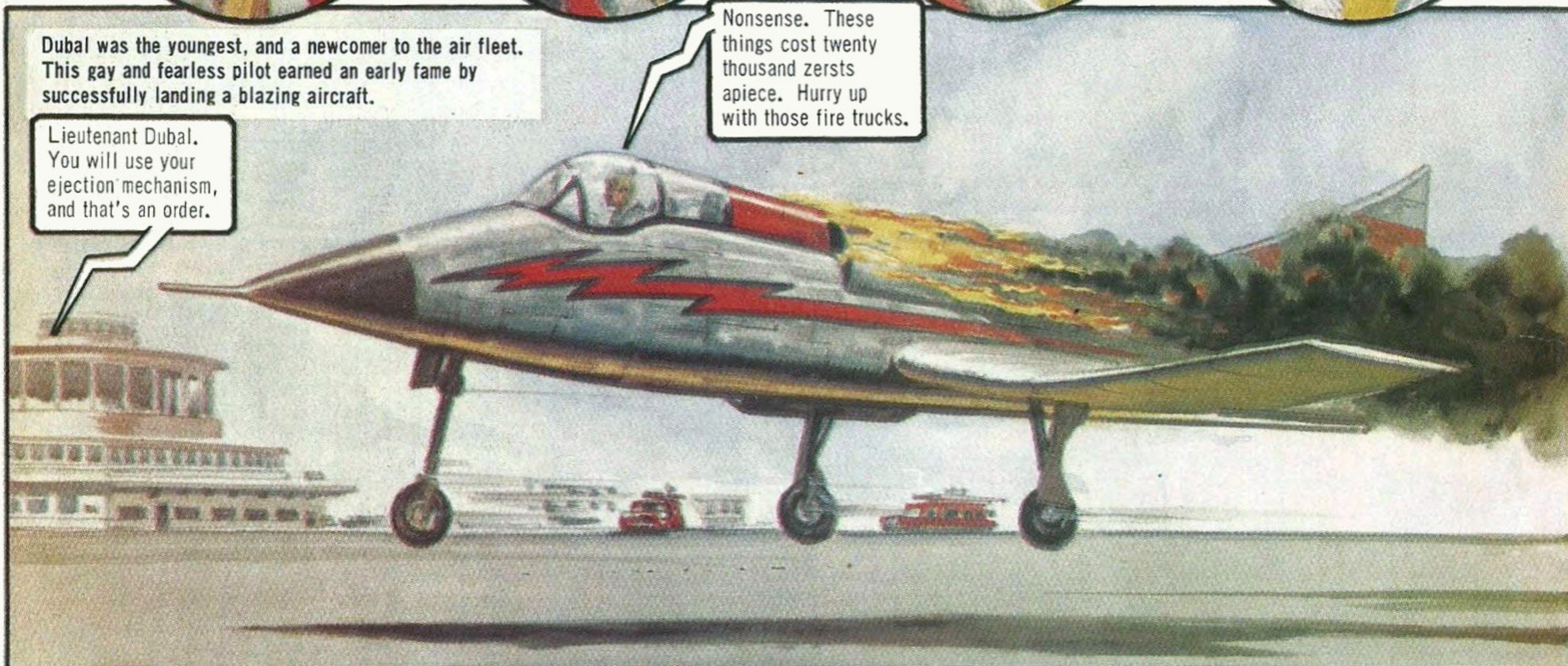


. . . were Janno, the Emperor's nephew, Roffa, Keren — and Dubal.

Dubal was the youngest, and a newcomer to the air fleet. This gay and fearless pilot earned an early fame by successfully landing a blazing aircraft.

Lieutenant Dubal. You will use your ejection mechanism, and that's an order.

Nonsense. These things cost twenty thousand zersts apiece. Hurry up with those fire trucks.



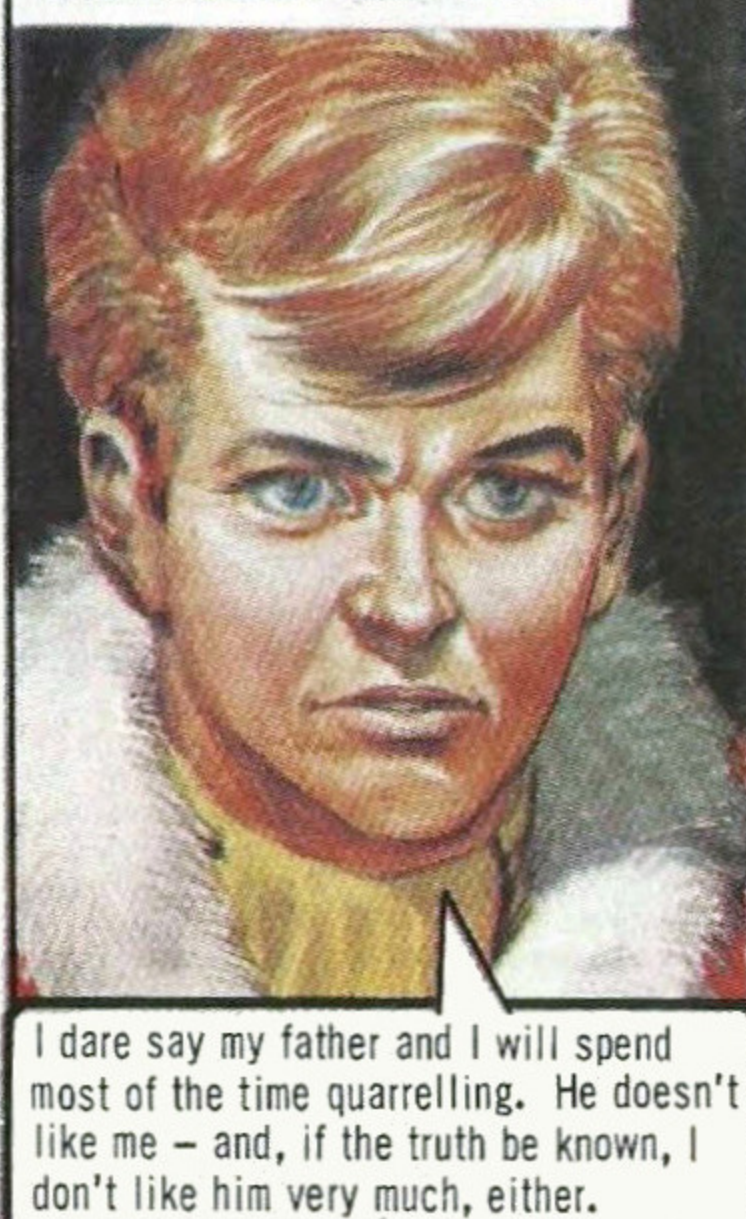
After an arduous spell of duty, the four comrades' squadron was due for leave.



Come and spend your leave with us. I can promise some good zargot hunting.

Thanks. Nothing would please me better, but it's my coming-of-age, you know, and my father's expecting me back at Castle Doum.

Janno was suddenly aware of a bitterness in his friend's voice.

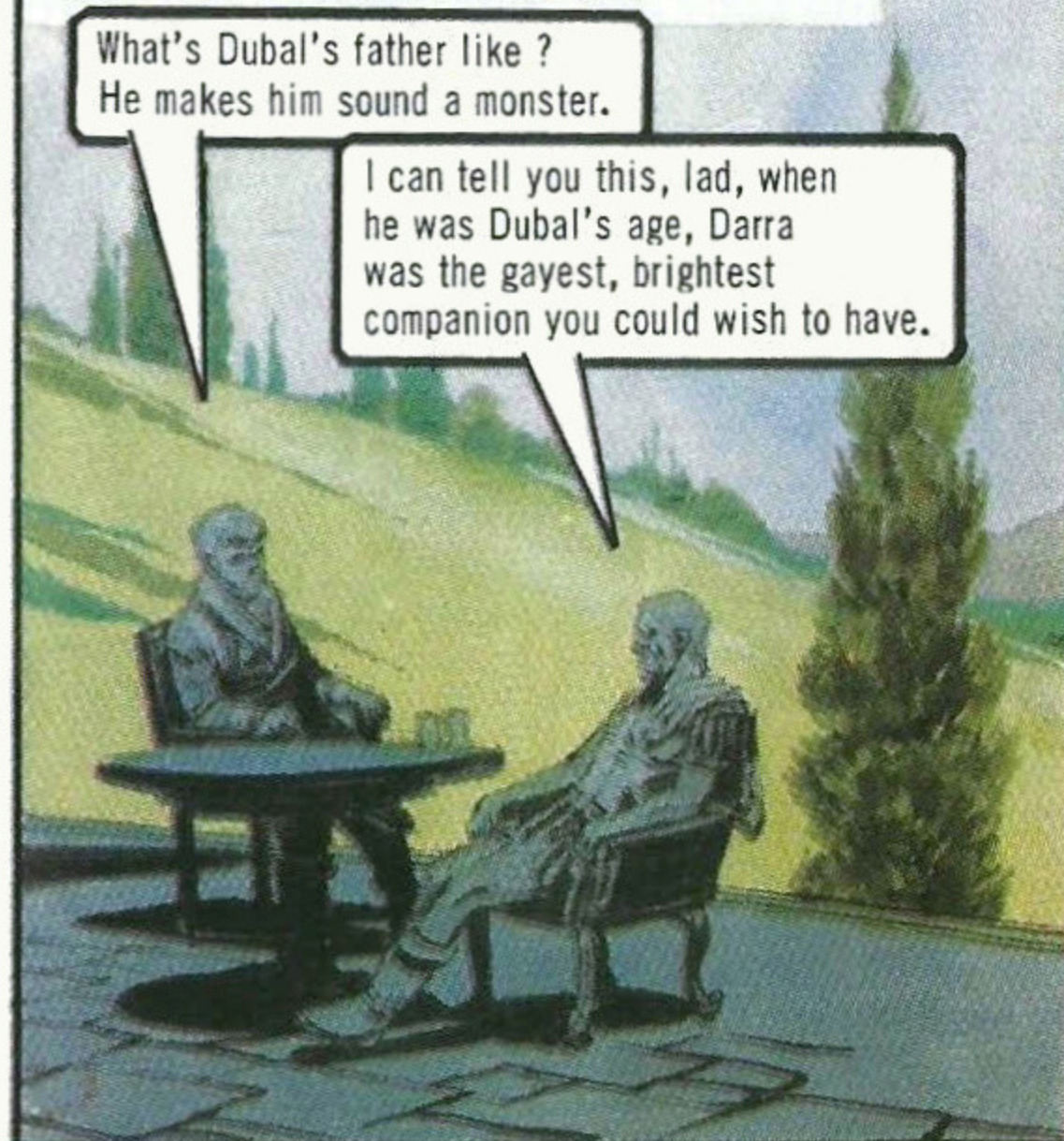


I dare say my father and I will spend most of the time quarrelling. He doesn't like me — and, if the truth be known, I don't like him very much, either.

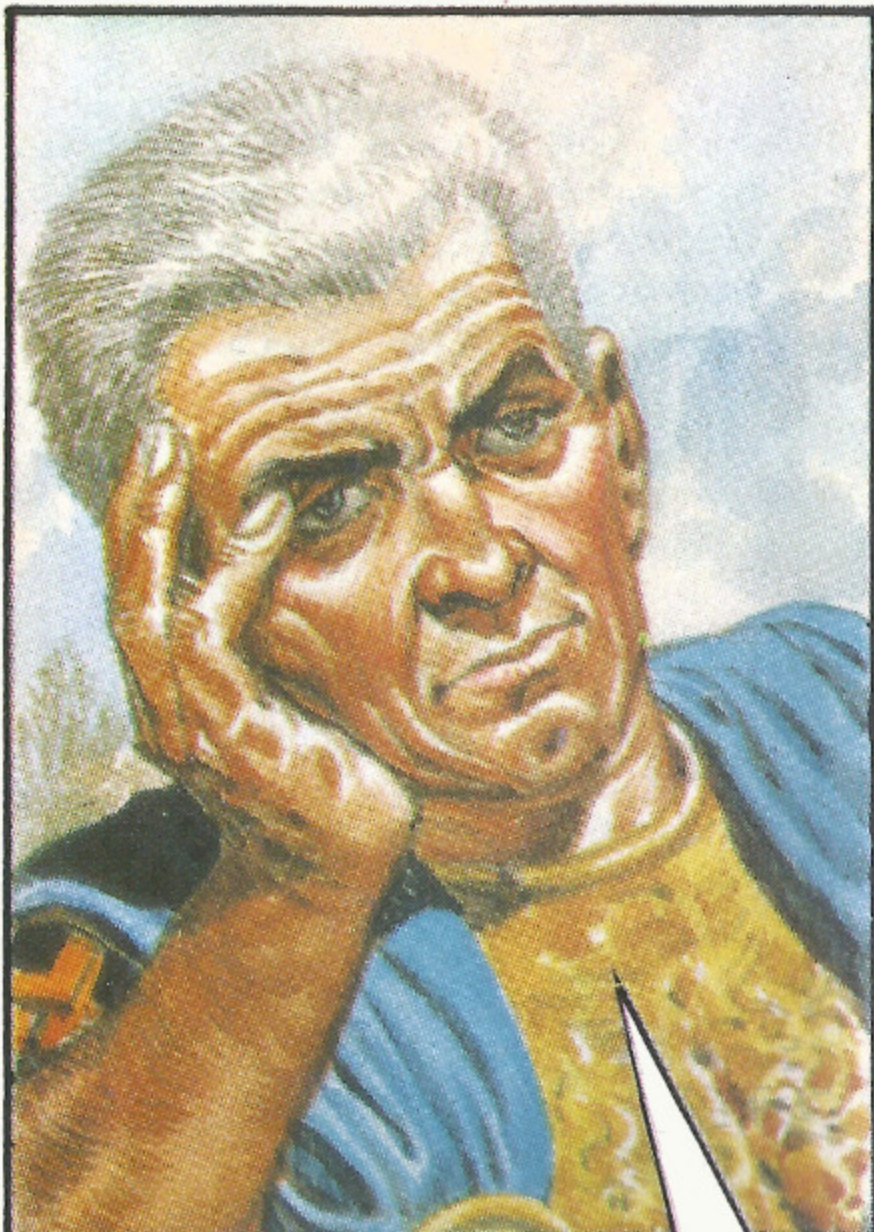
With Dubal's strange comment in his mind, Janno spoke to his own father that evening.

What's Dubal's father like? He makes him sound a monster.

I can tell you this, lad, when he was Dubal's age, Darra was the gayest, brightest companion you could wish to have.







He seemed to change overnight – it would have been around the time of his coming-of-age – and turn from an amusing, fun-loving lad, to a savage and morose man. Very strange.

His father, the Lord Darra, greeted him with his accustomed lack of warmth.

Hello, Father. I hope I find you in good health.



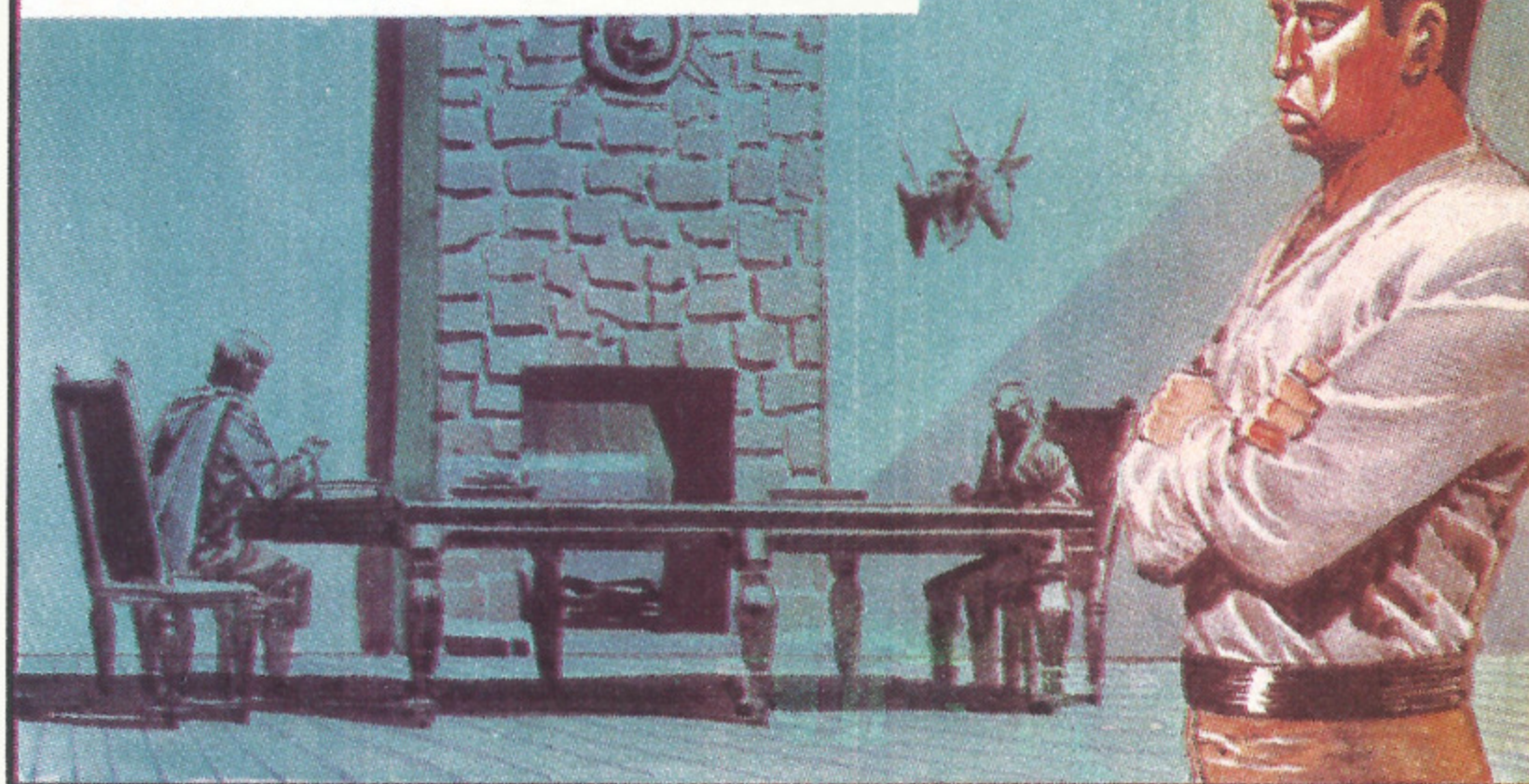
You hope in vain. I am not long for this world.

Dubal's family were of the ancient Vorg nobility. From time immemorial, they had lived at the grim island-fortress of Castle Doum. It was to the castle that Dubal went on his leave.



I hate that place. When it becomes mine, I shall have it pulled down, every stone.

They supped alone and in silence, with the solitary servant, a giant Vorg peasant, to serve them.



Afterwards, the Lord Darra spoke . . .



My son. Tonight, you come-of-age, and it is my unfortunate duty to admit you into the terrible secret of our family. I would give anything, my boy, to spare you the horror and the misery of it. But I am forced to tell you.

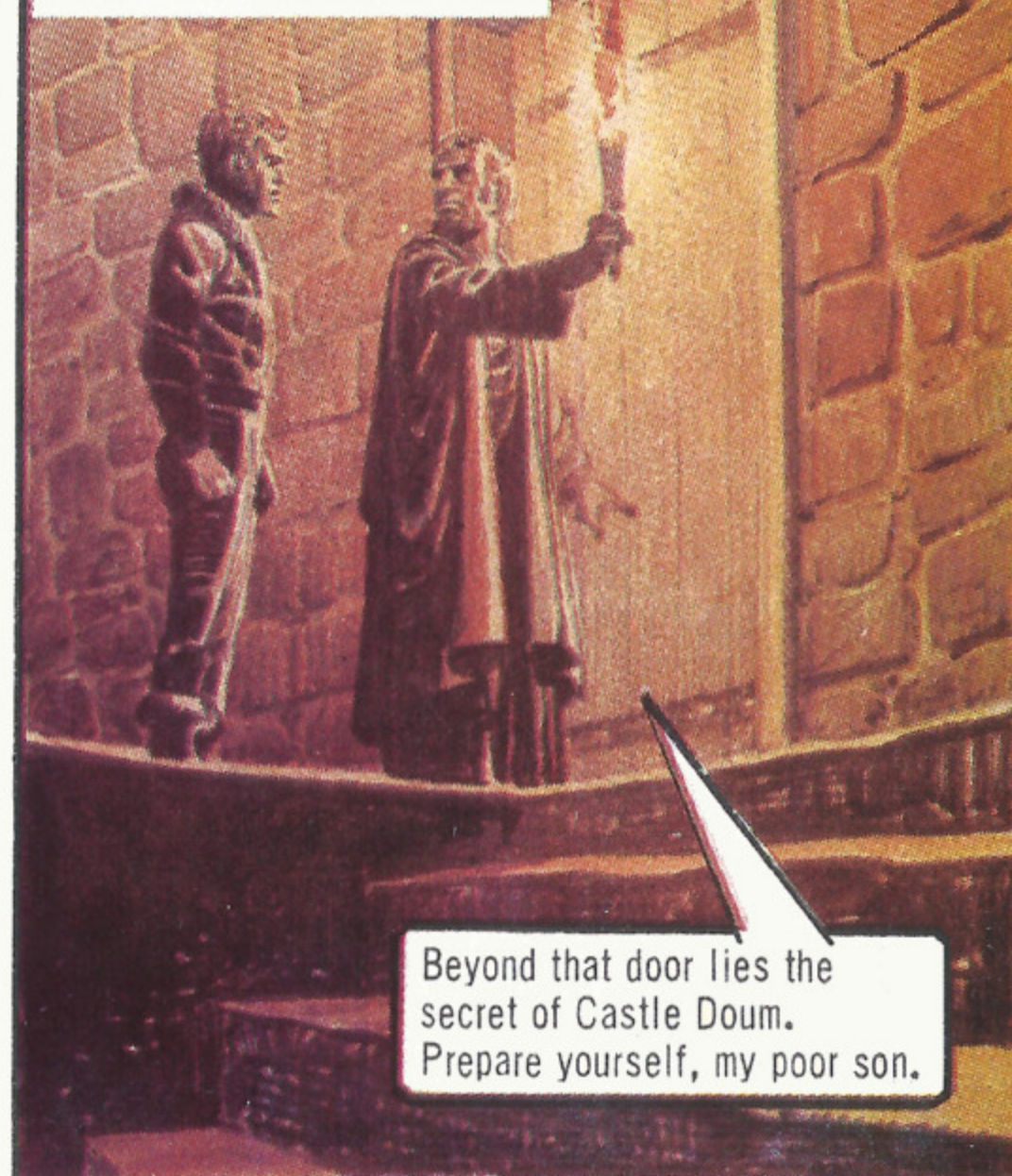
Dubal felt a finger of fear trail coldly down his back.

A family secret? But, Father, I don't understand.



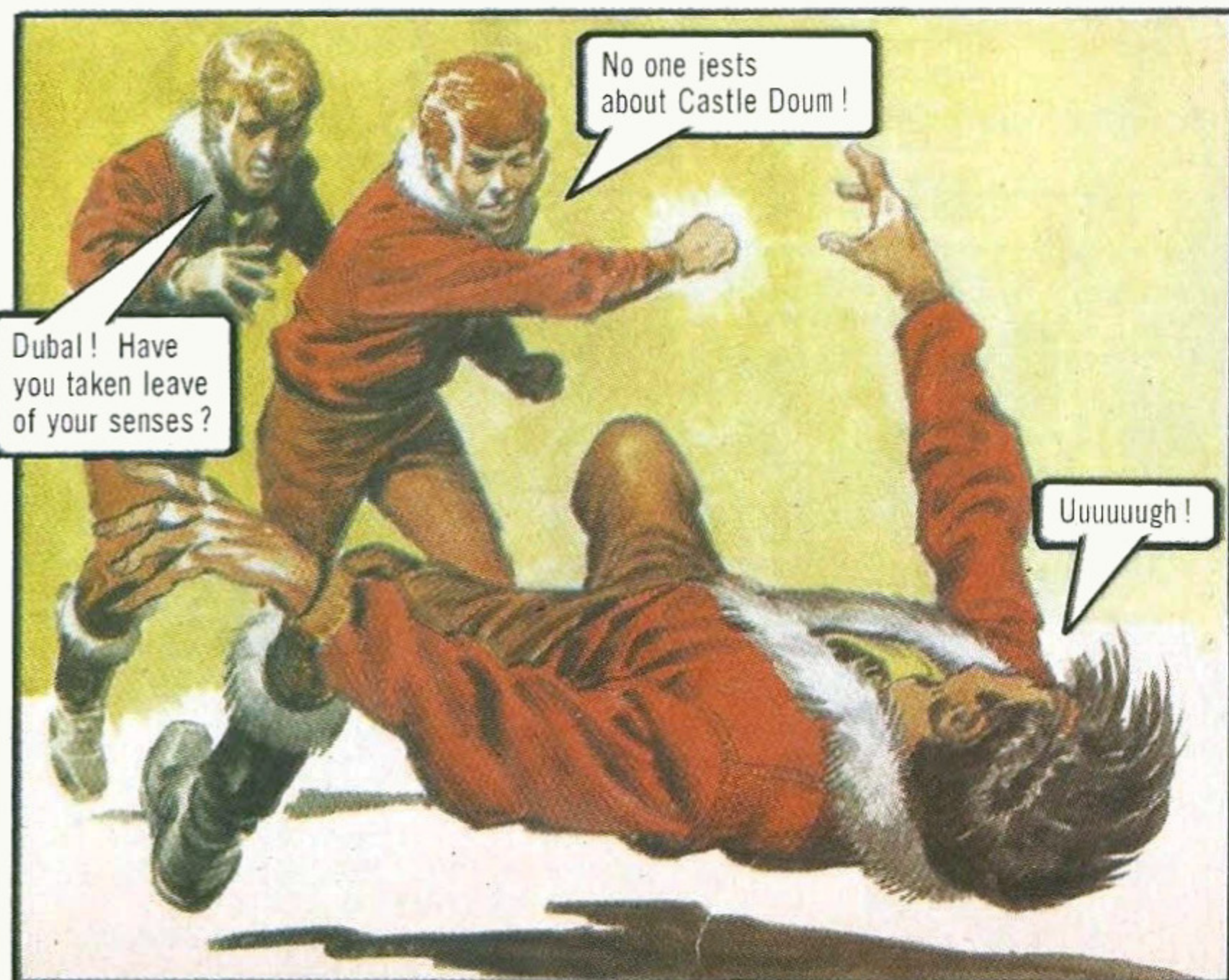
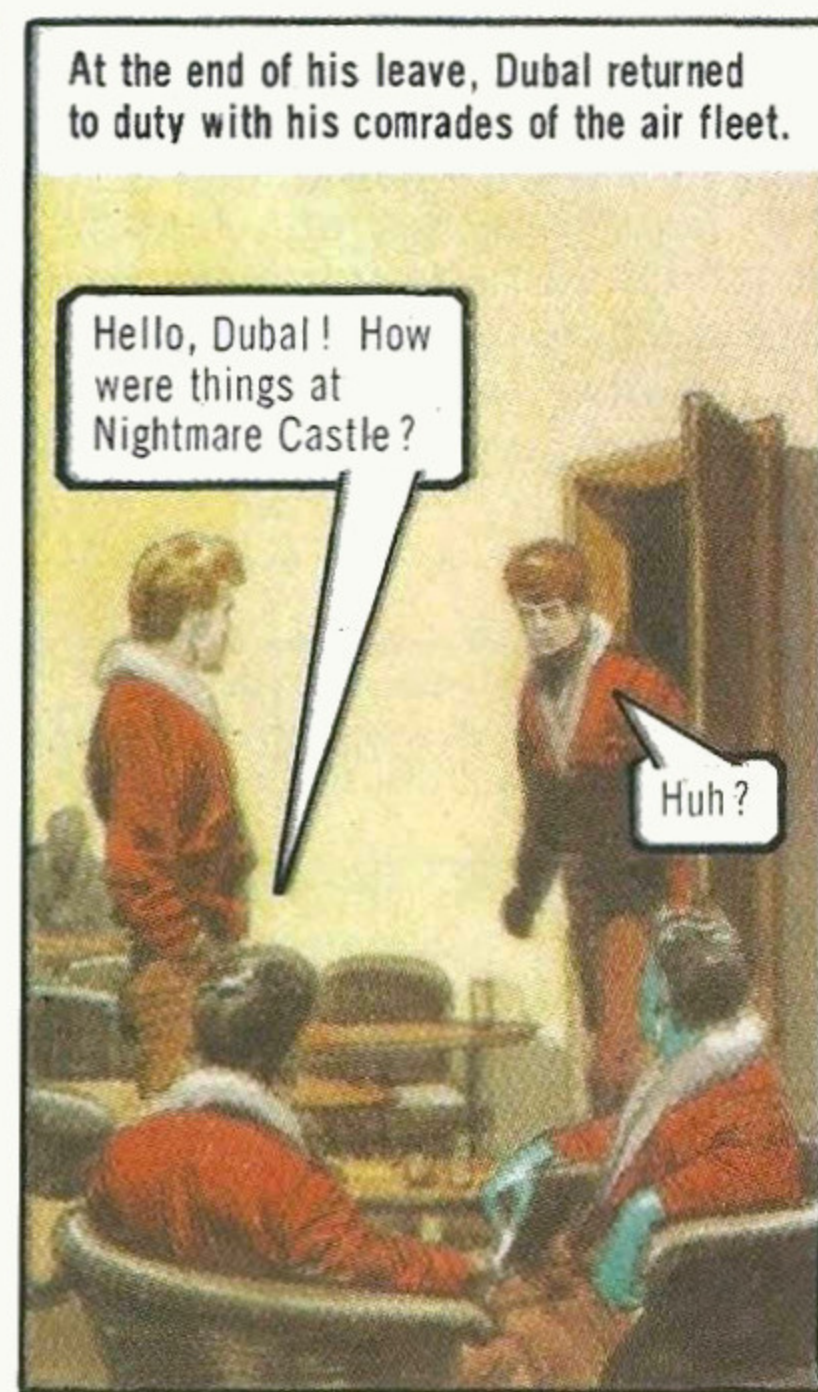
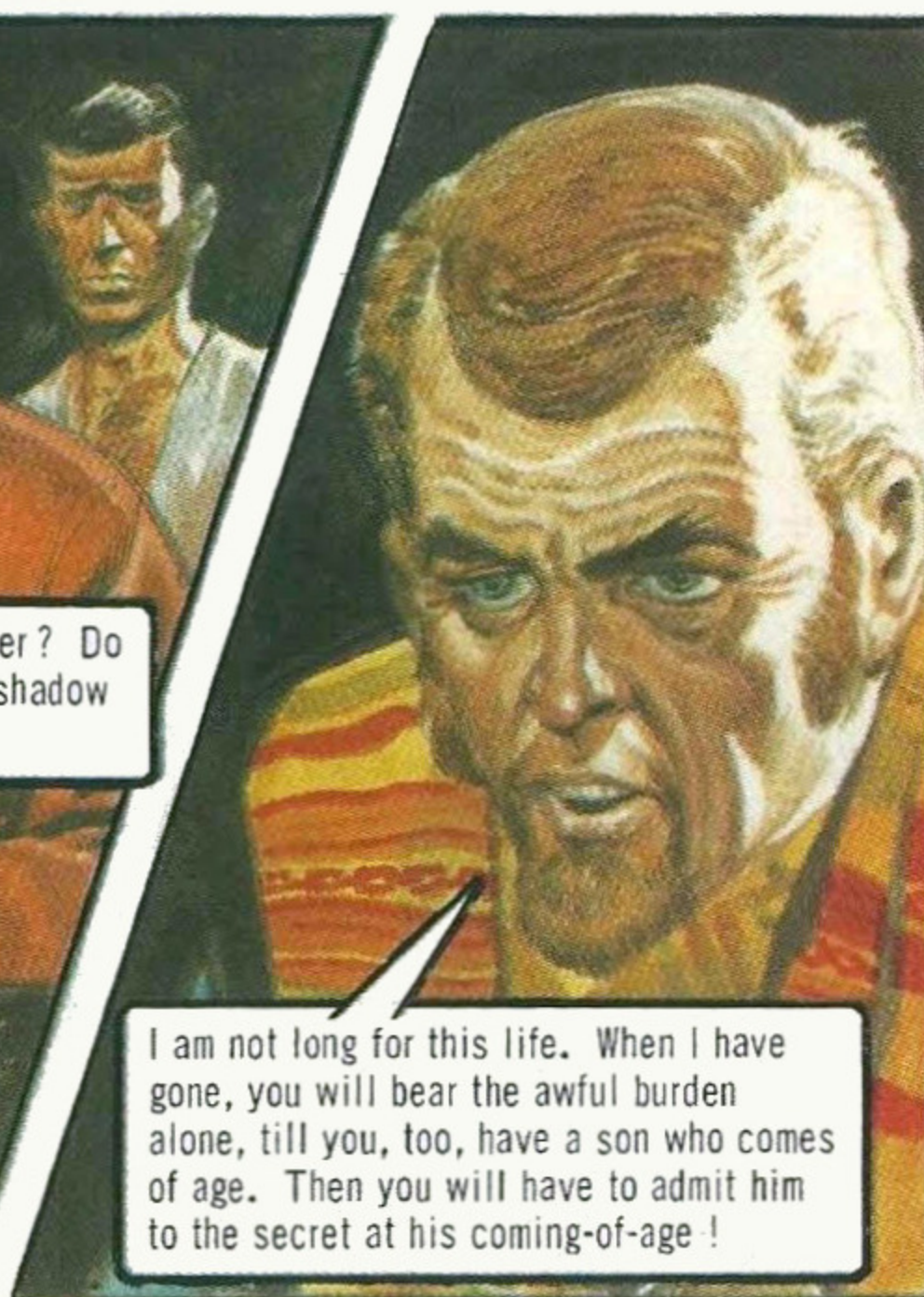
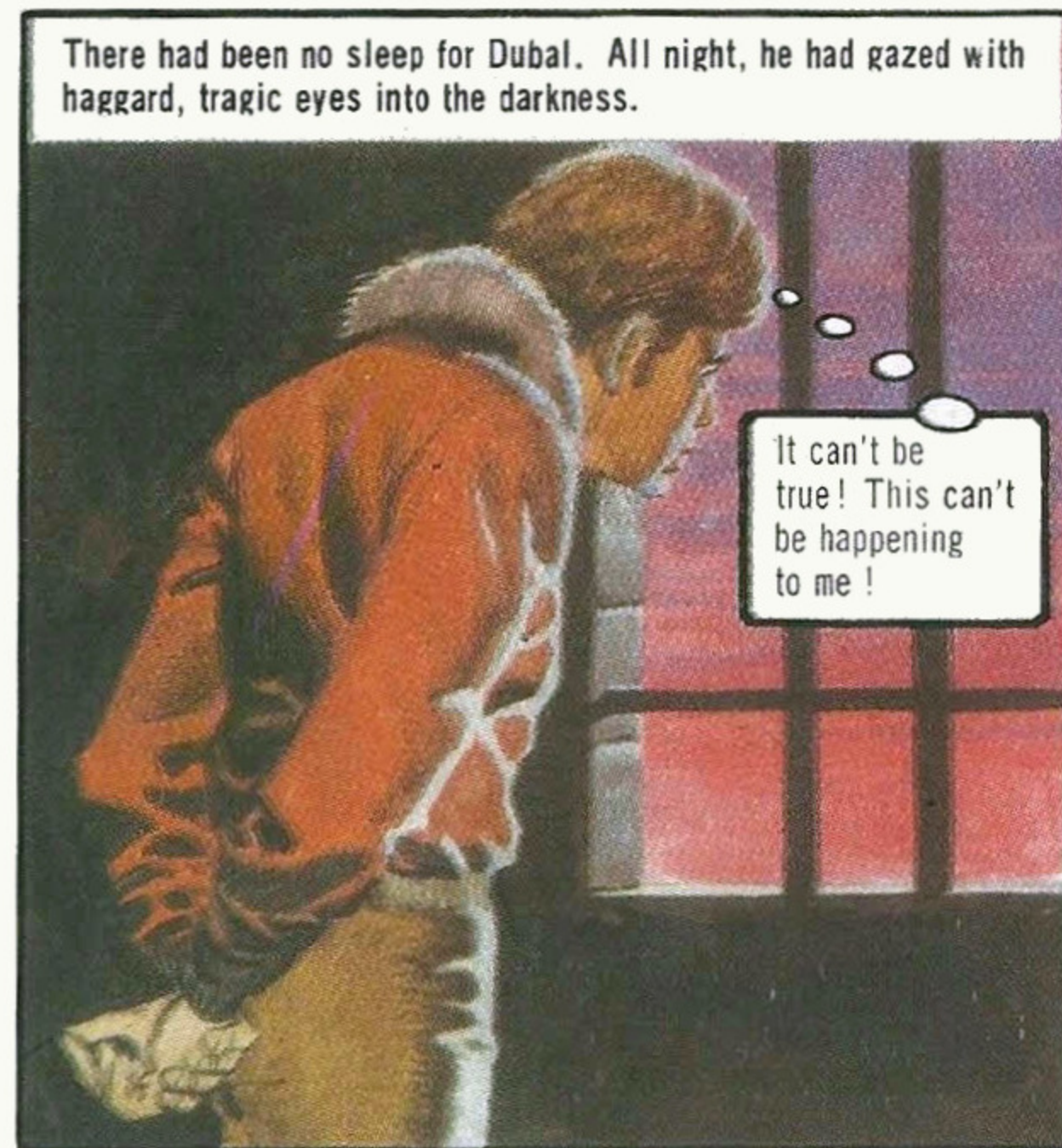
You will understand soon enough. You will know why I am the way I am and why you will shortly be the same. Come.

The Lord of Castle Doum led his son to the uppermost part of that grim pile, to a locked and barred door.

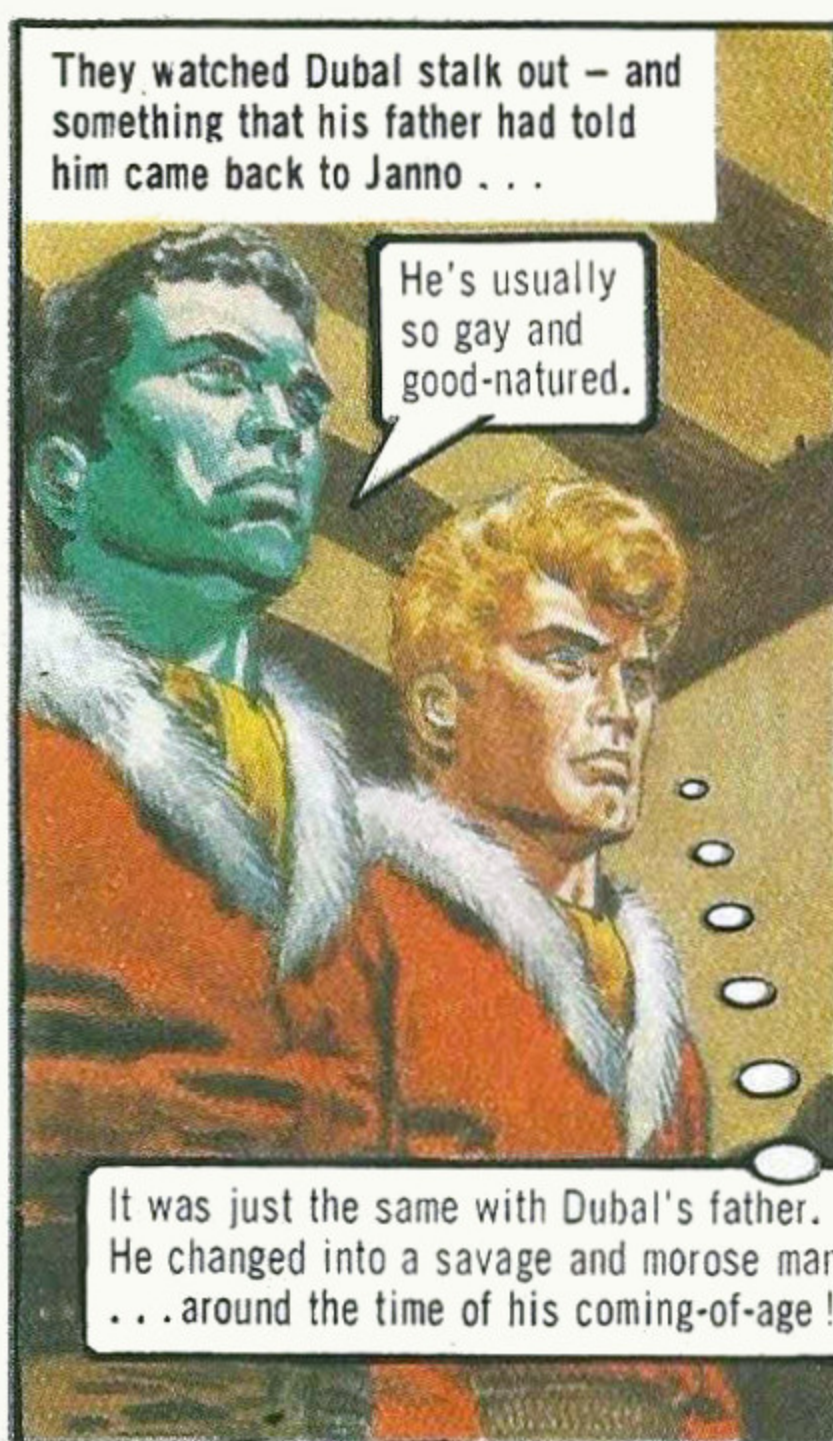


Beyond that door lies the secret of Castle Doum. Prepare yourself, my poor son.

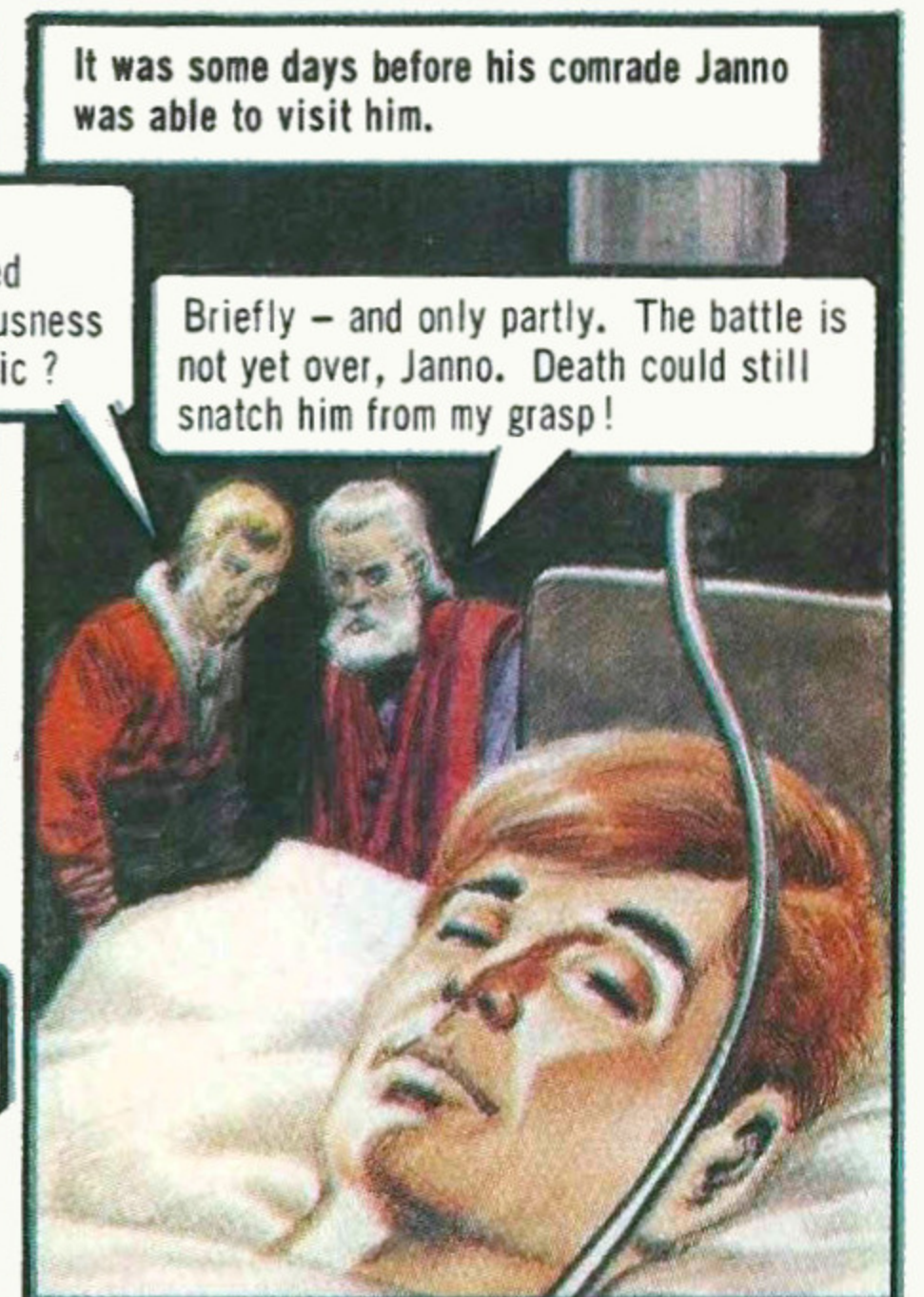
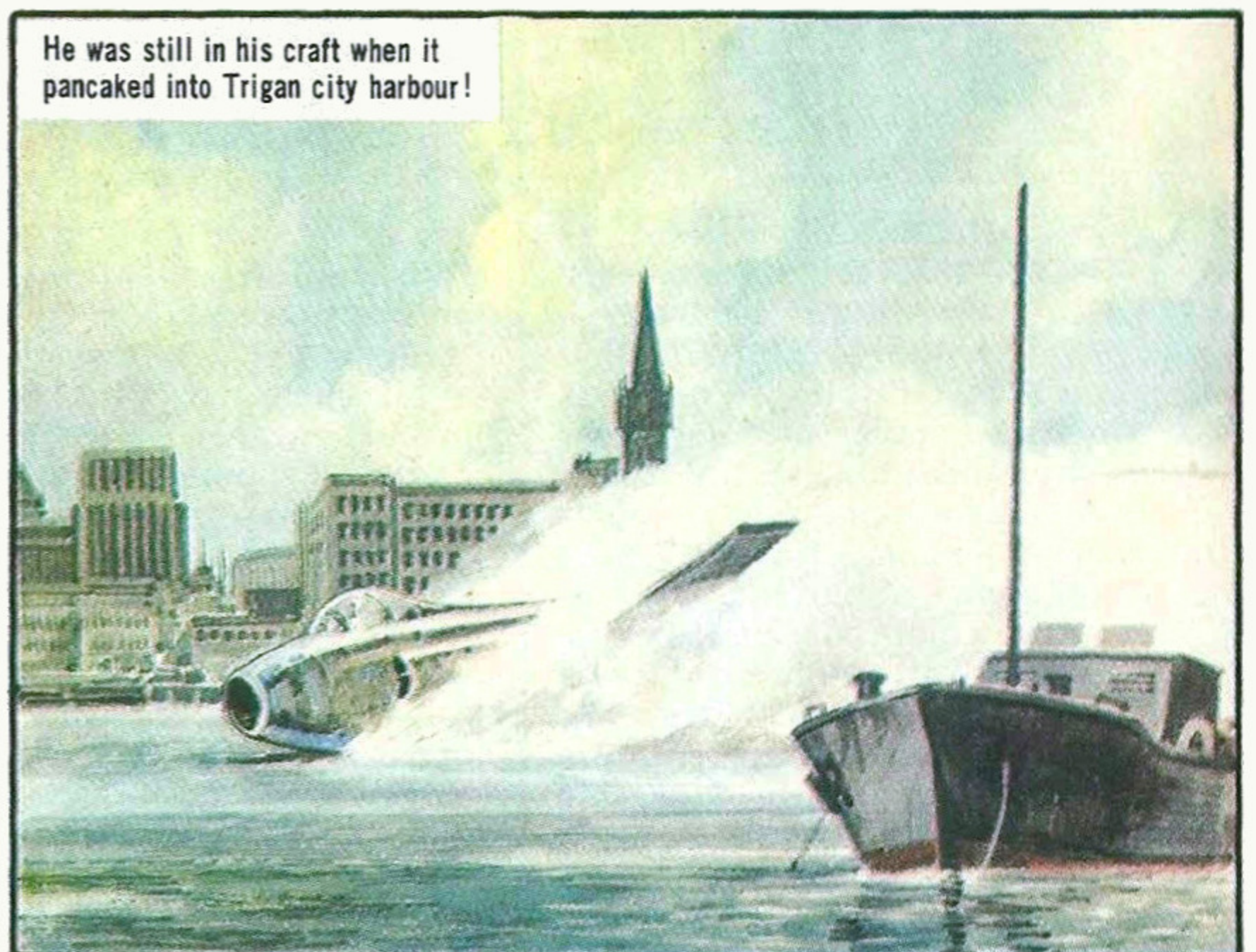




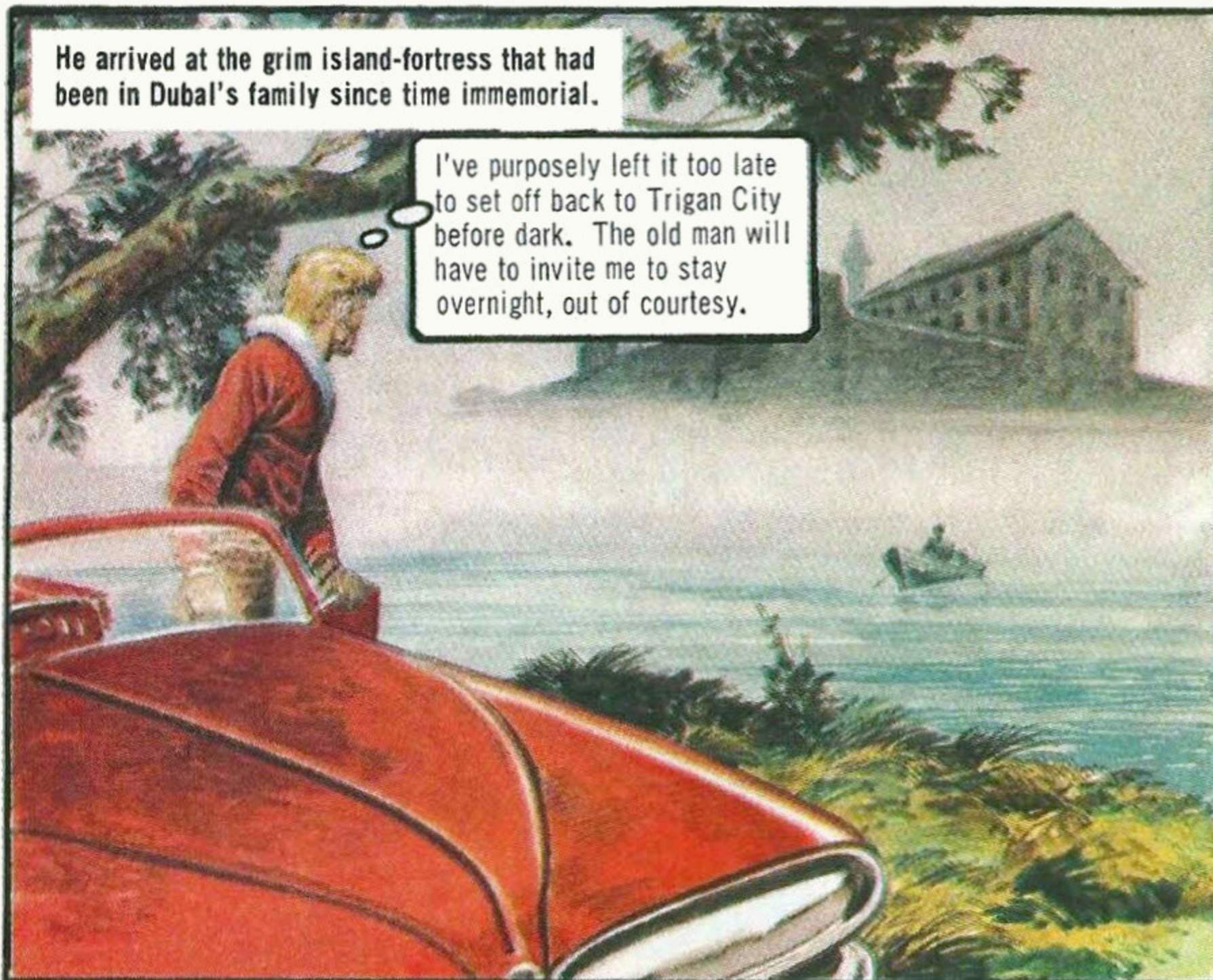
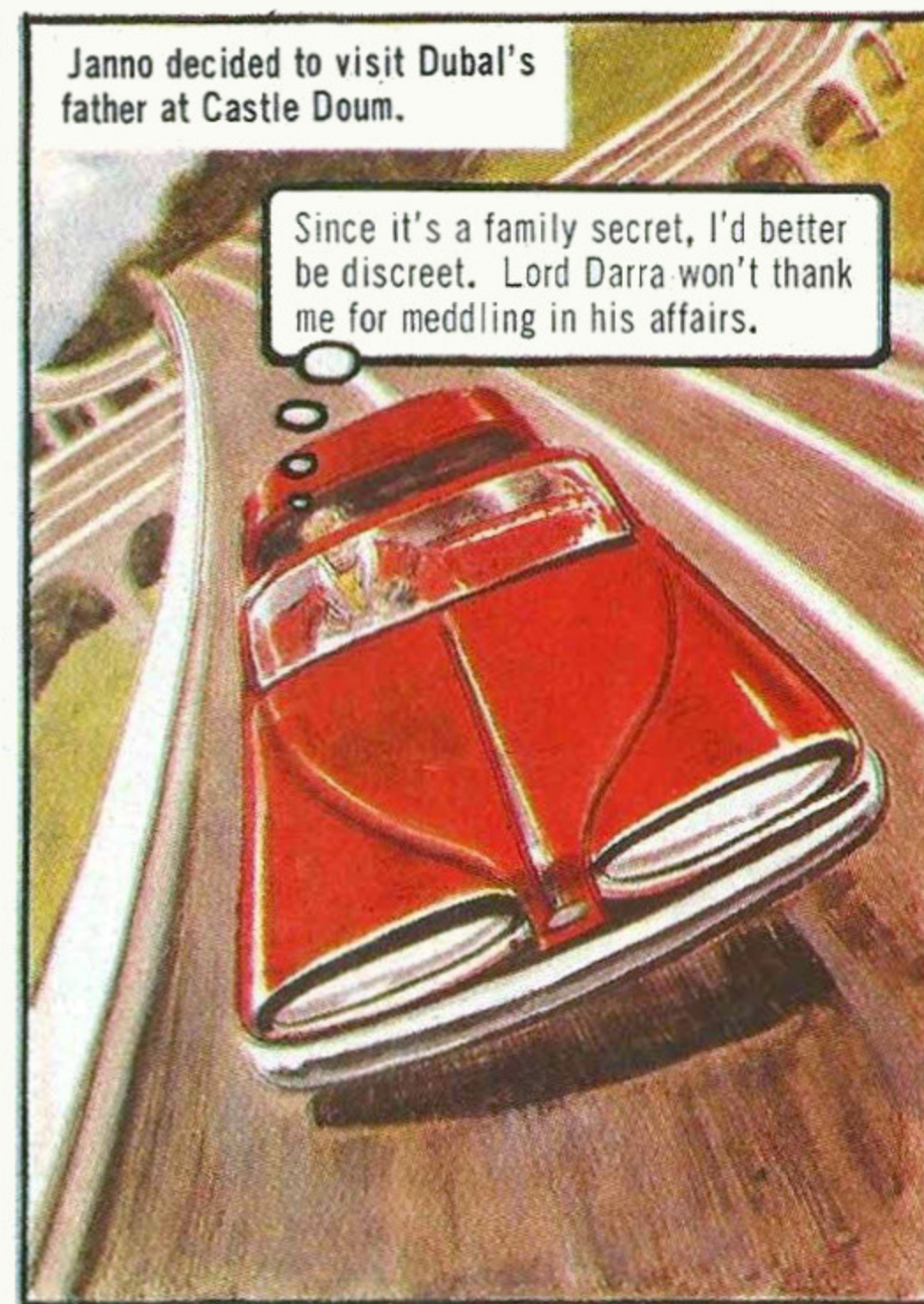




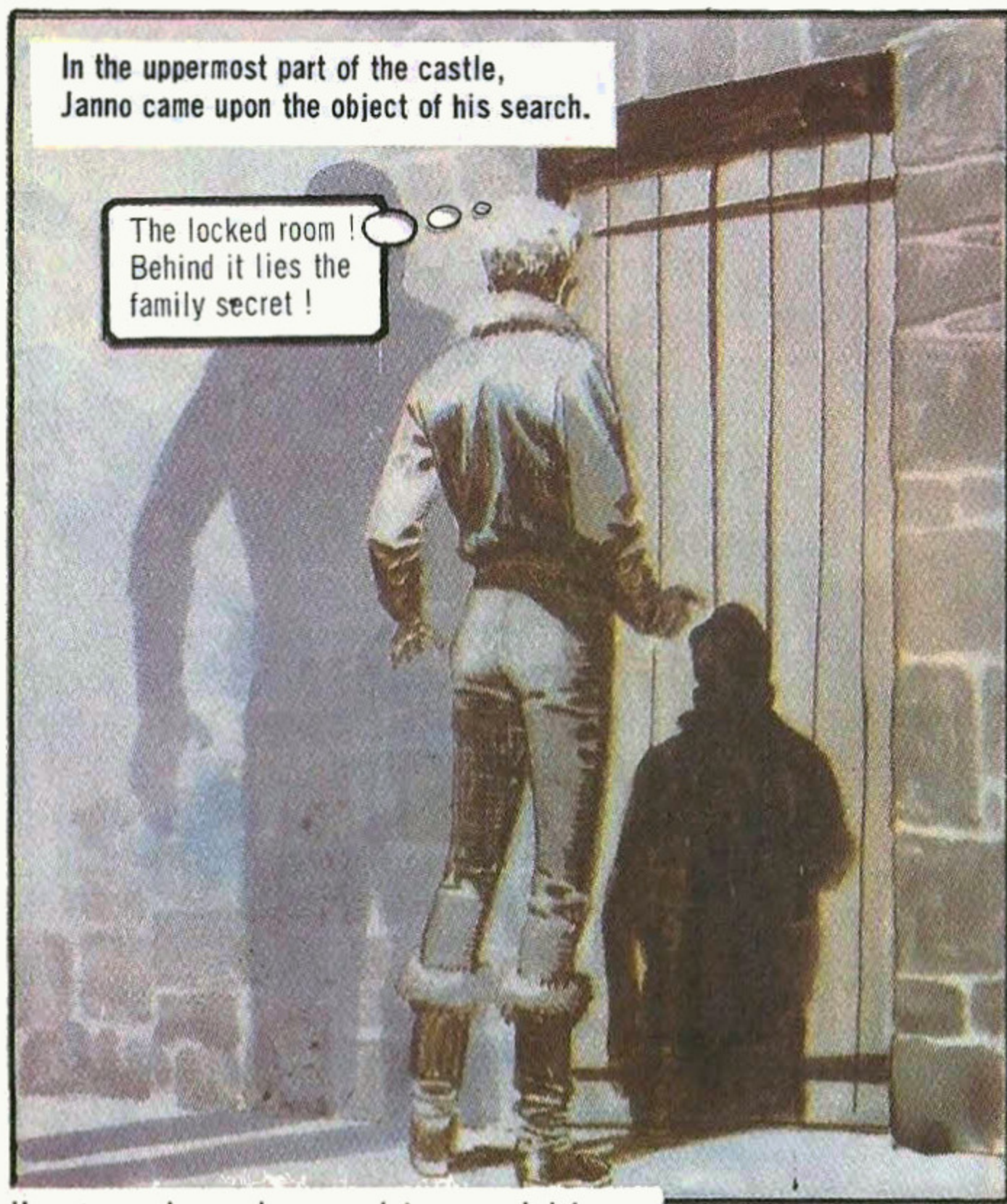












In the uppermost part of the castle, Janno came upon the object of his search.

The locked room !  
Behind it lies the family secret !

He recovered consciousness later – much later – in a dank and airless dungeon. The owner of Castle Doum stood before him . . .



How dare you betray my hospitality ? What do you know ? Answer, or I will destroy you with my own hands !

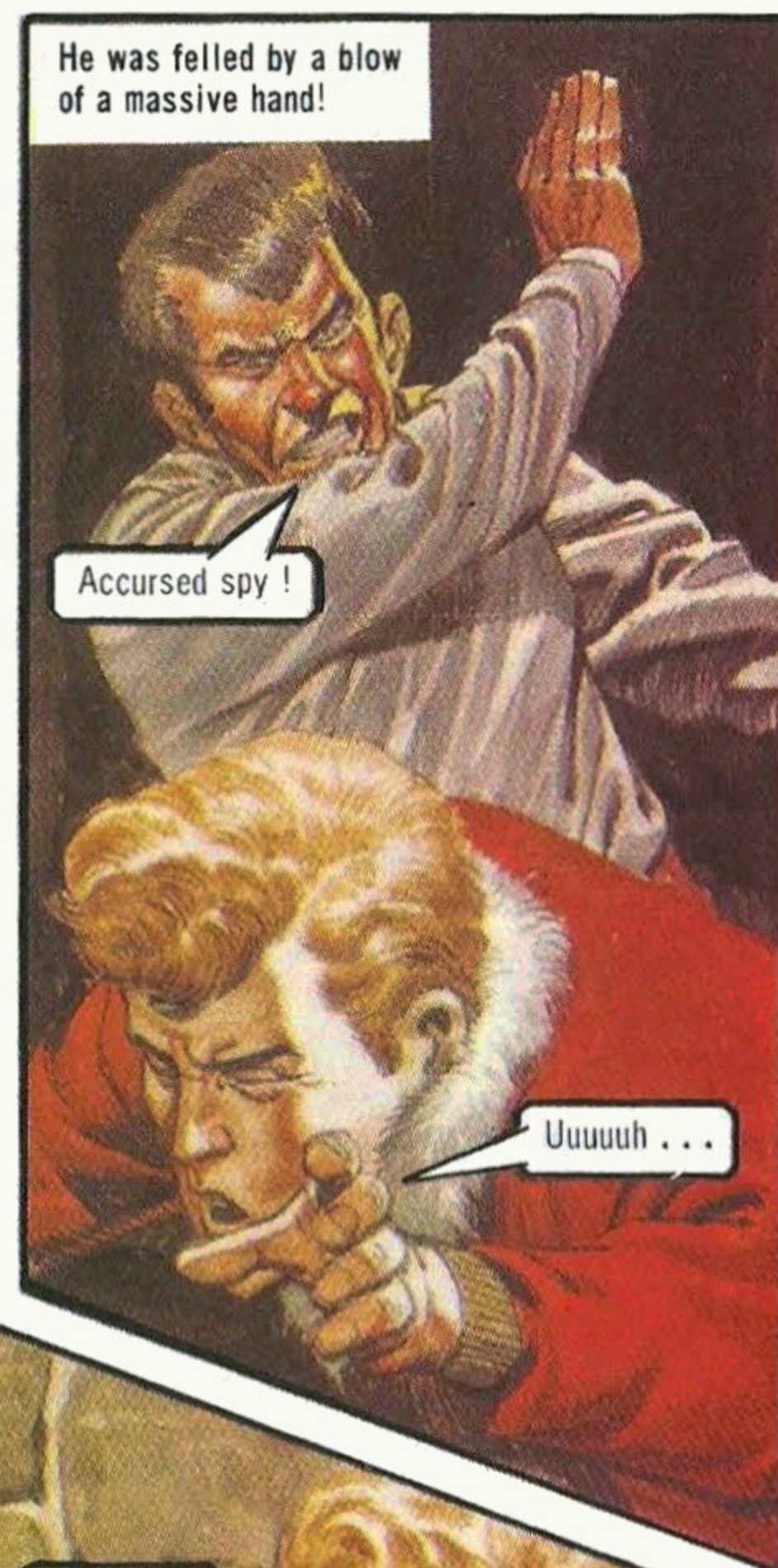
I know nothing – save that you have a family secret !



And then . . .

Who's that ?  
Aaaaaaaagh !

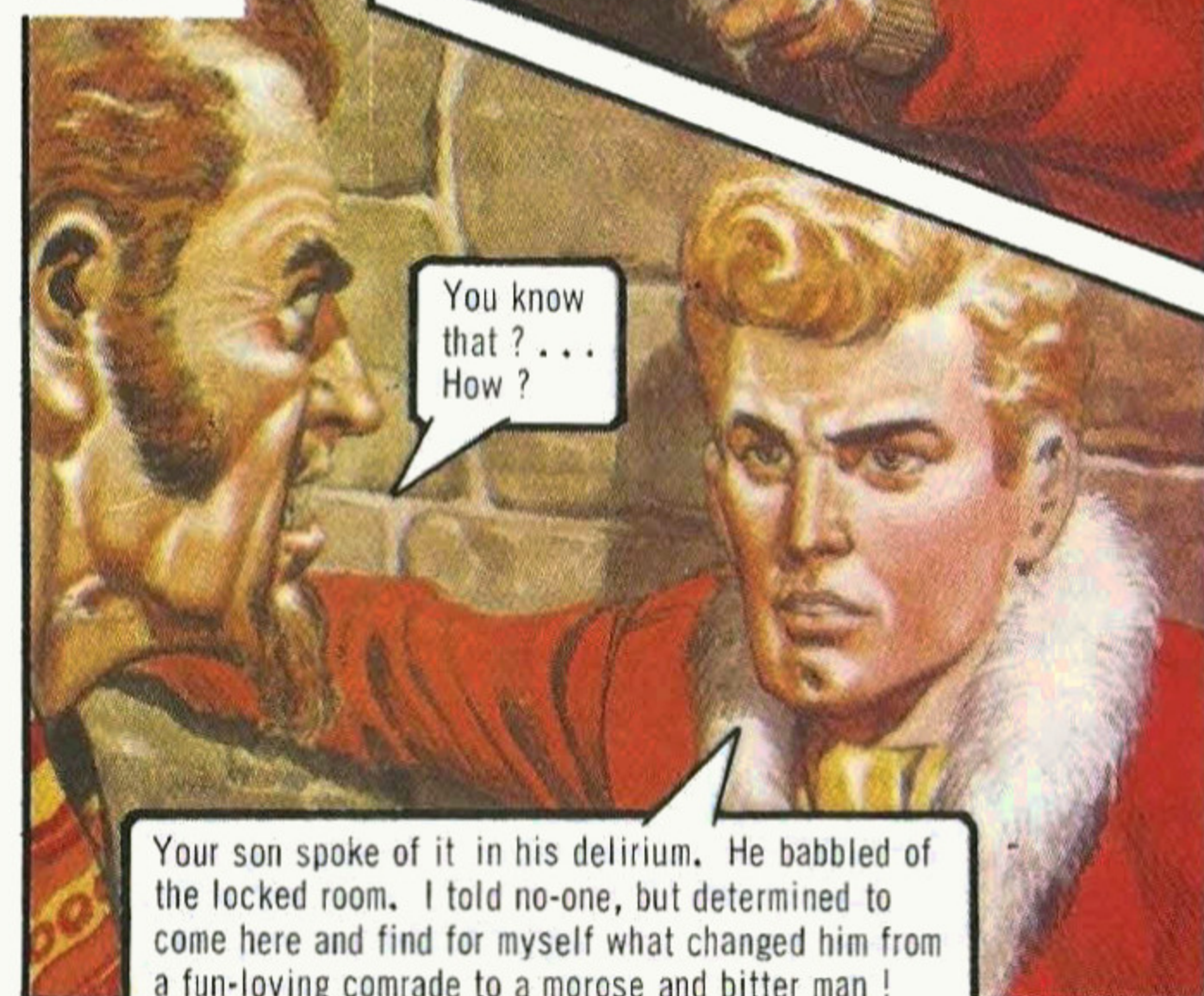
Lord Darra's haggard eyes blazed with fury . . .



He was felled by a blow of a massive hand!

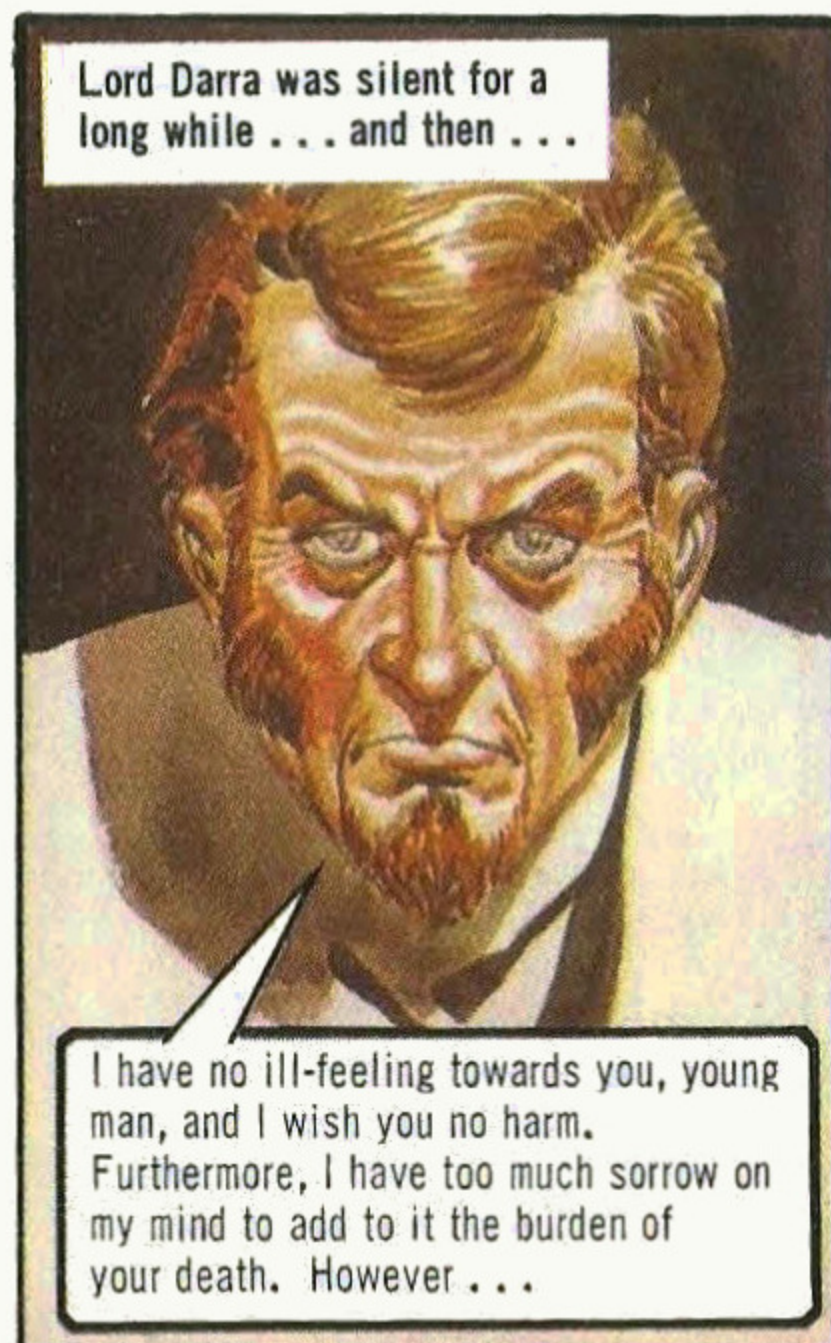
Accursed spy !

Uuuuuh . . .



You know that ? . . . How ?

Your son spoke of it in his delirium. He babbled of the locked room. I told no-one, but determined to come here and find for myself what changed him from a fun-loving comrade to a morose and bitter man !

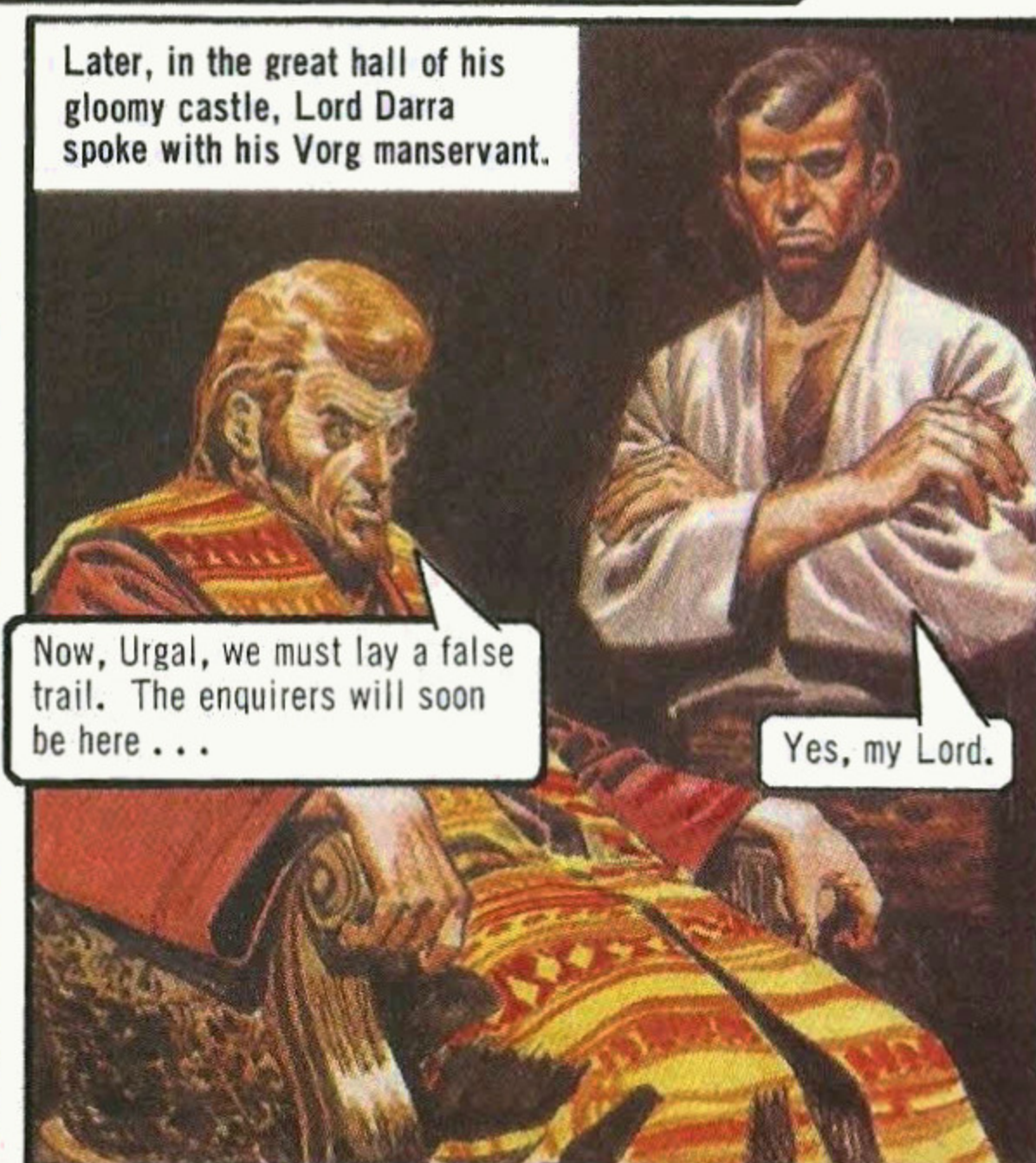


Lord Darra was silent for a long while . . . and then . . .

I have no ill-feeling towards you, young man, and I wish you no harm. Furthermore, I have too much sorrow on my mind to add to it the burden of your death. However . . .



. . . The secret must be kept at any price. You must, therefore, stay here in this dungeon till your dying day !

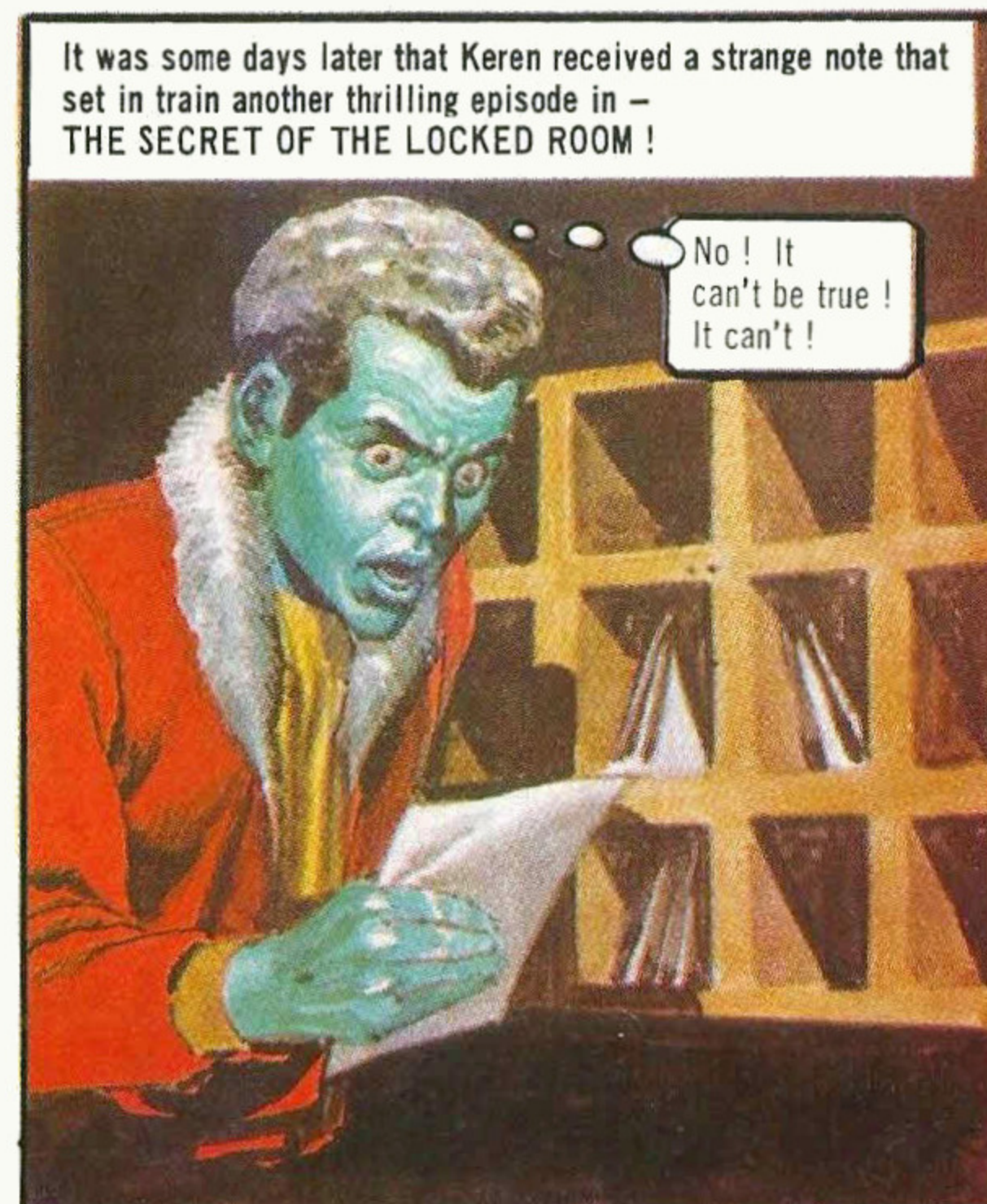
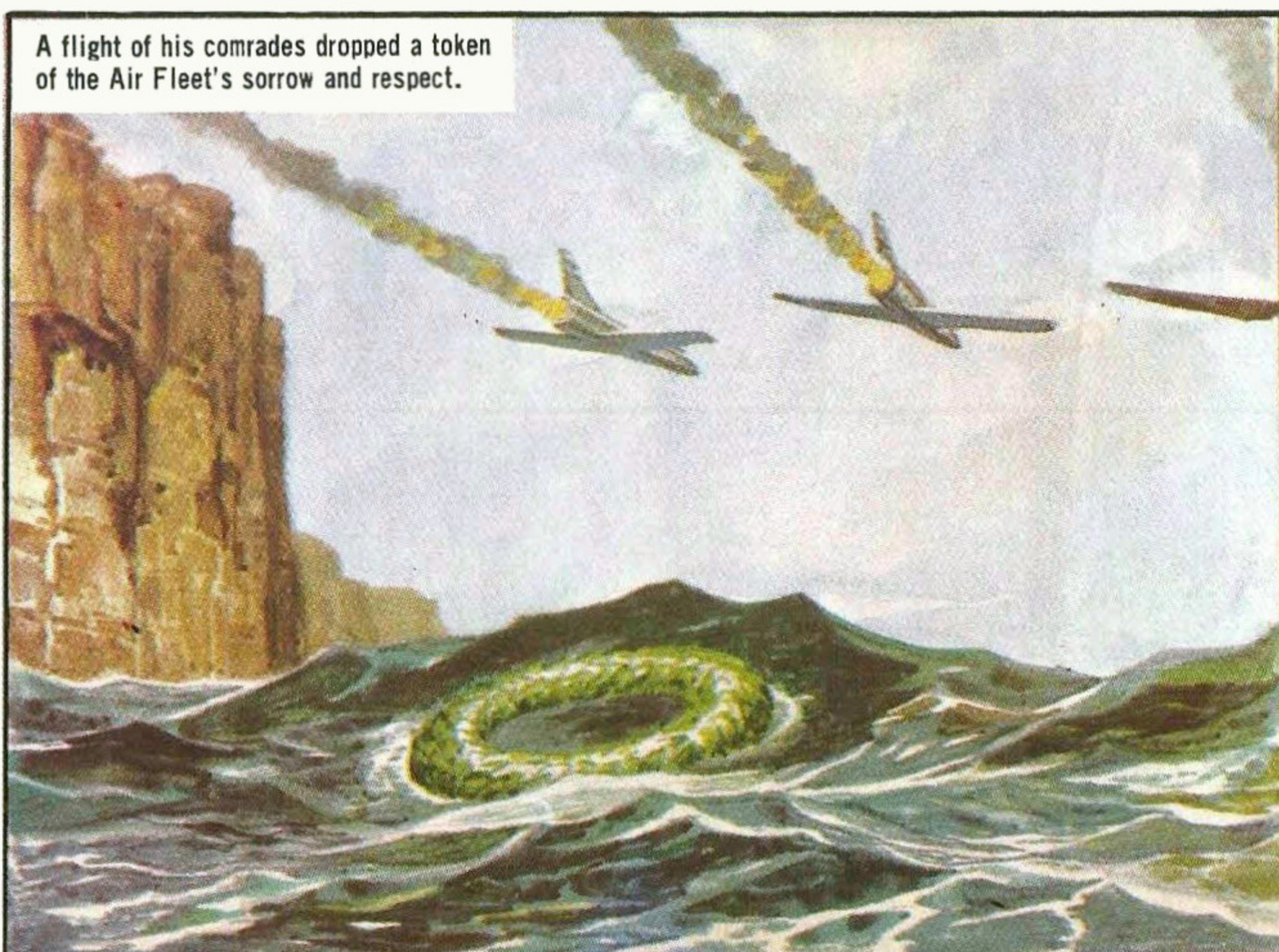
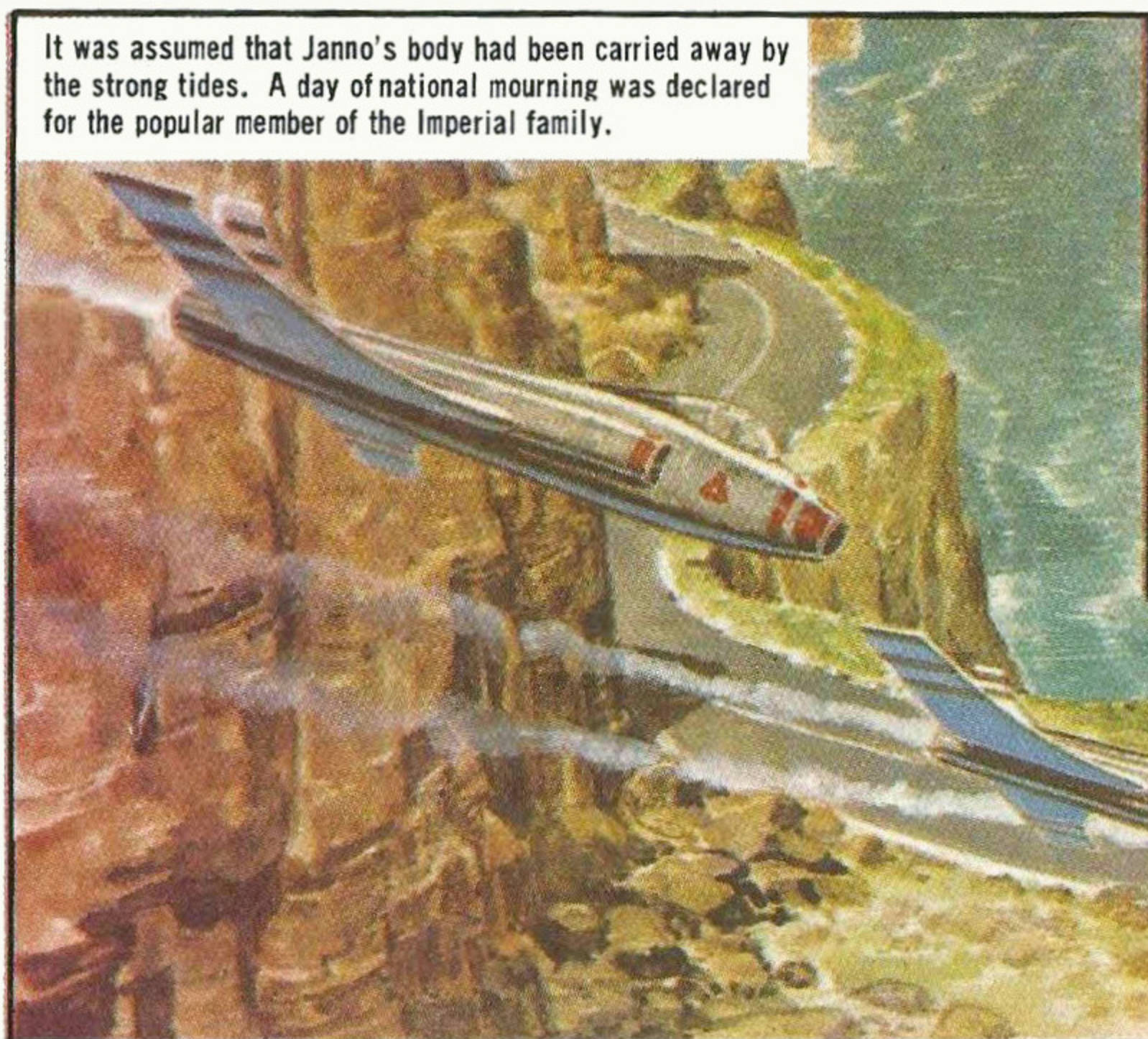


Later, in the great hall of his gloomy castle, Lord Darra spoke with his Vorg manservant.

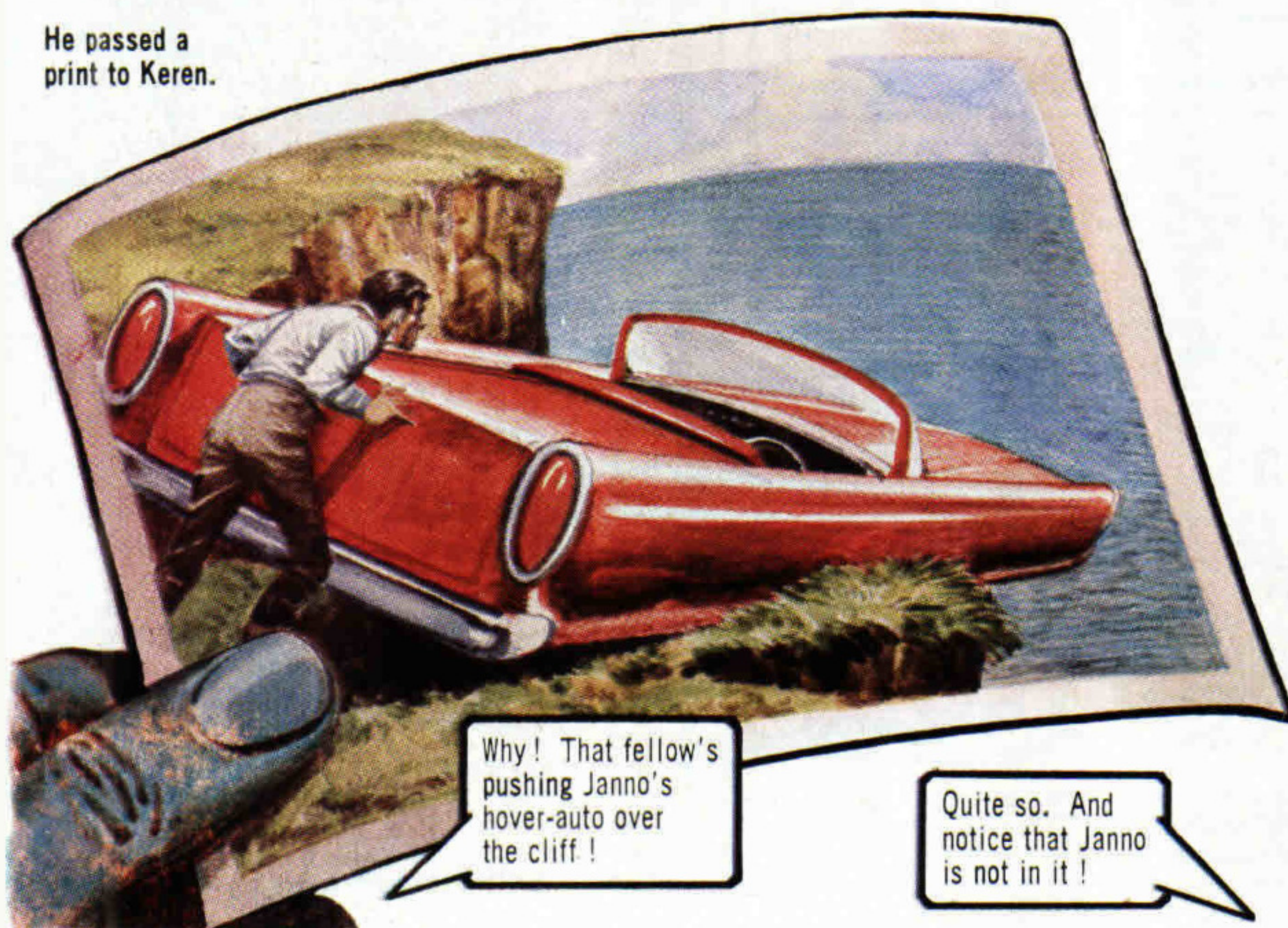
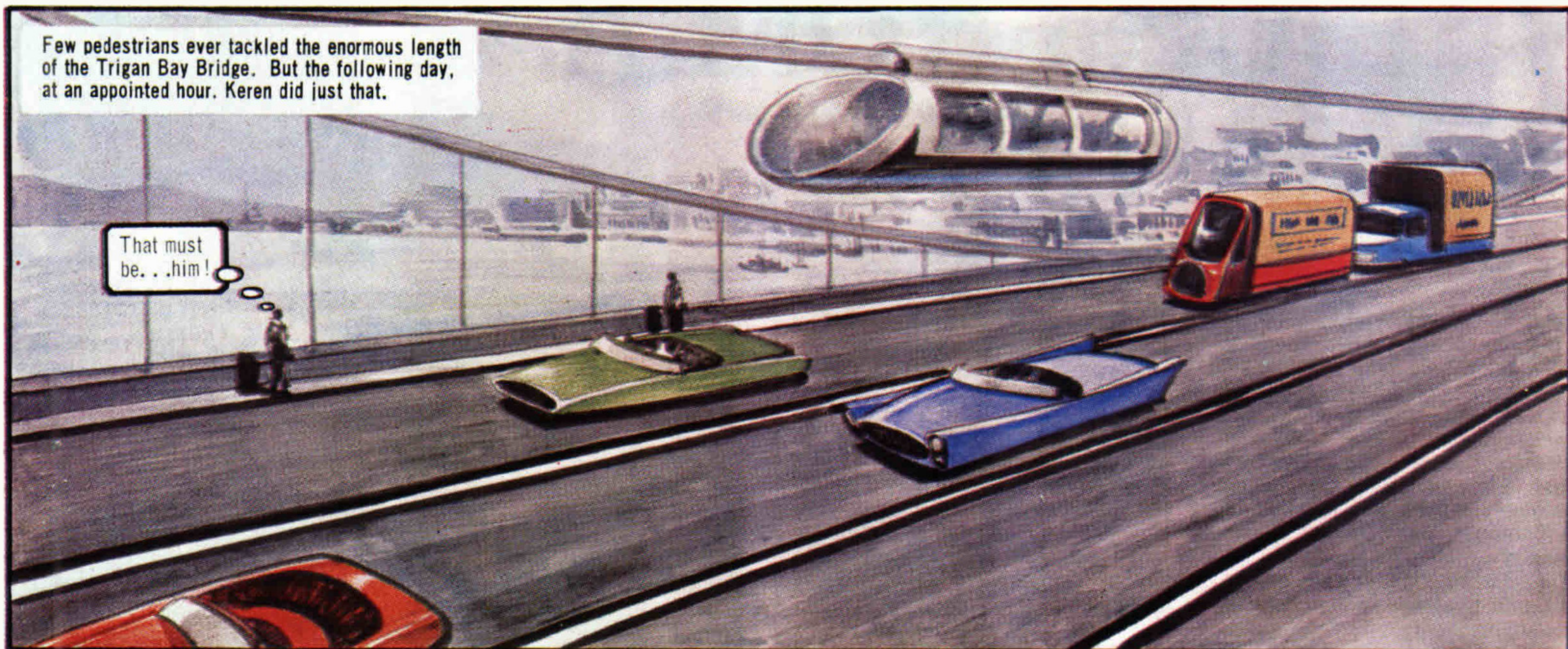
Now, Urgan, we must lay a false trail. The enquirers will soon be here . . .

Yes, my Lord.







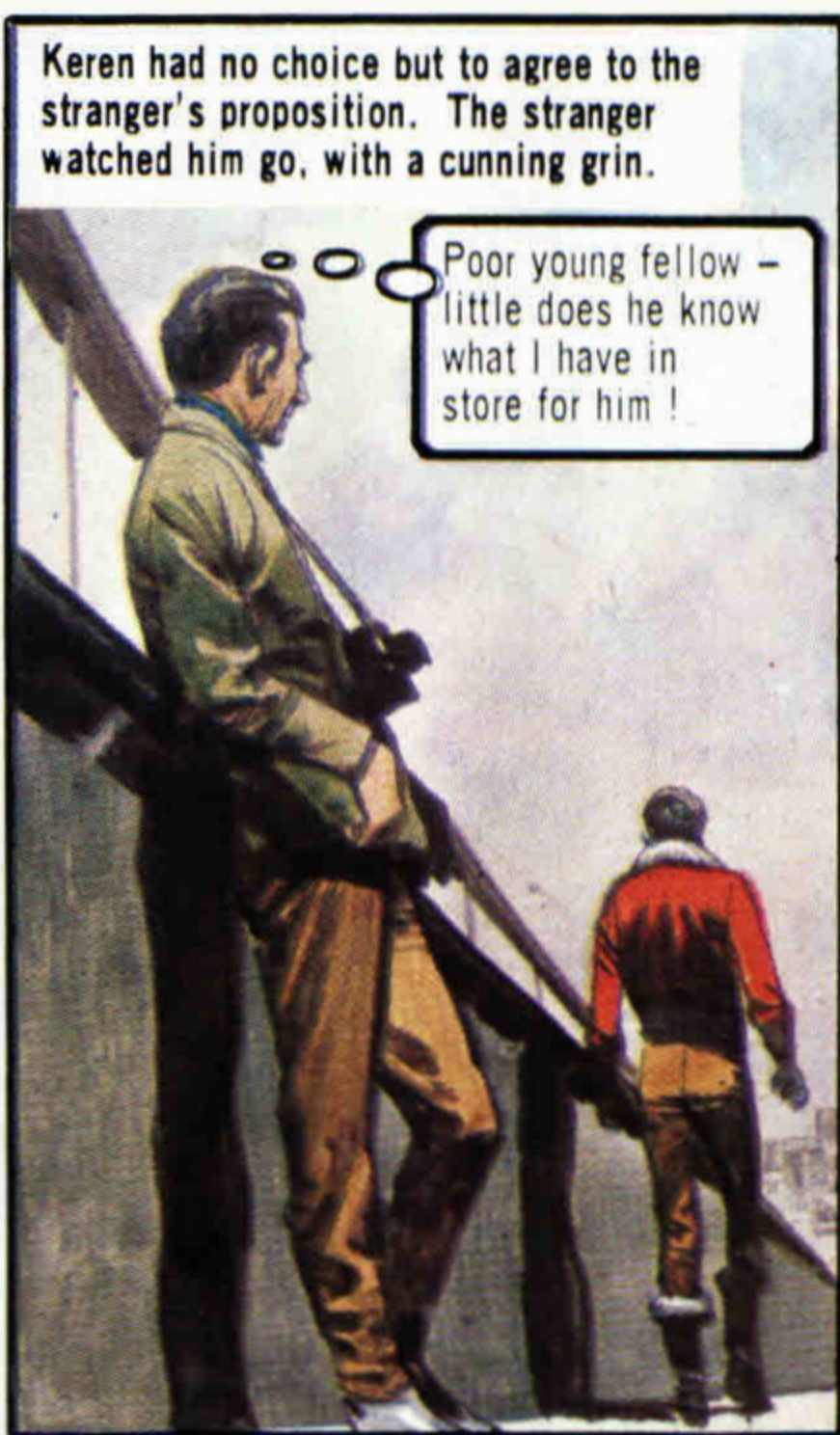






You mean?...

Say nothing to anyone, or the deal is off. Bring me a thousand thullars to this spot in two days from now, and I will lead you to the man who faked your comrade's death!



Keren had no choice but to agree to the stranger's proposition. The stranger watched him go, with a cunning grin.

Poor young fellow - little does he know what I have in store for him!



That same evening, the stranger journeyed to Castle Doum.

And now - the second part of my foolproof little scheme to make a double fortune!



The Vorg servant Urgal answered his knock.

Just ask your master if he wants to buy a picture - this picture!

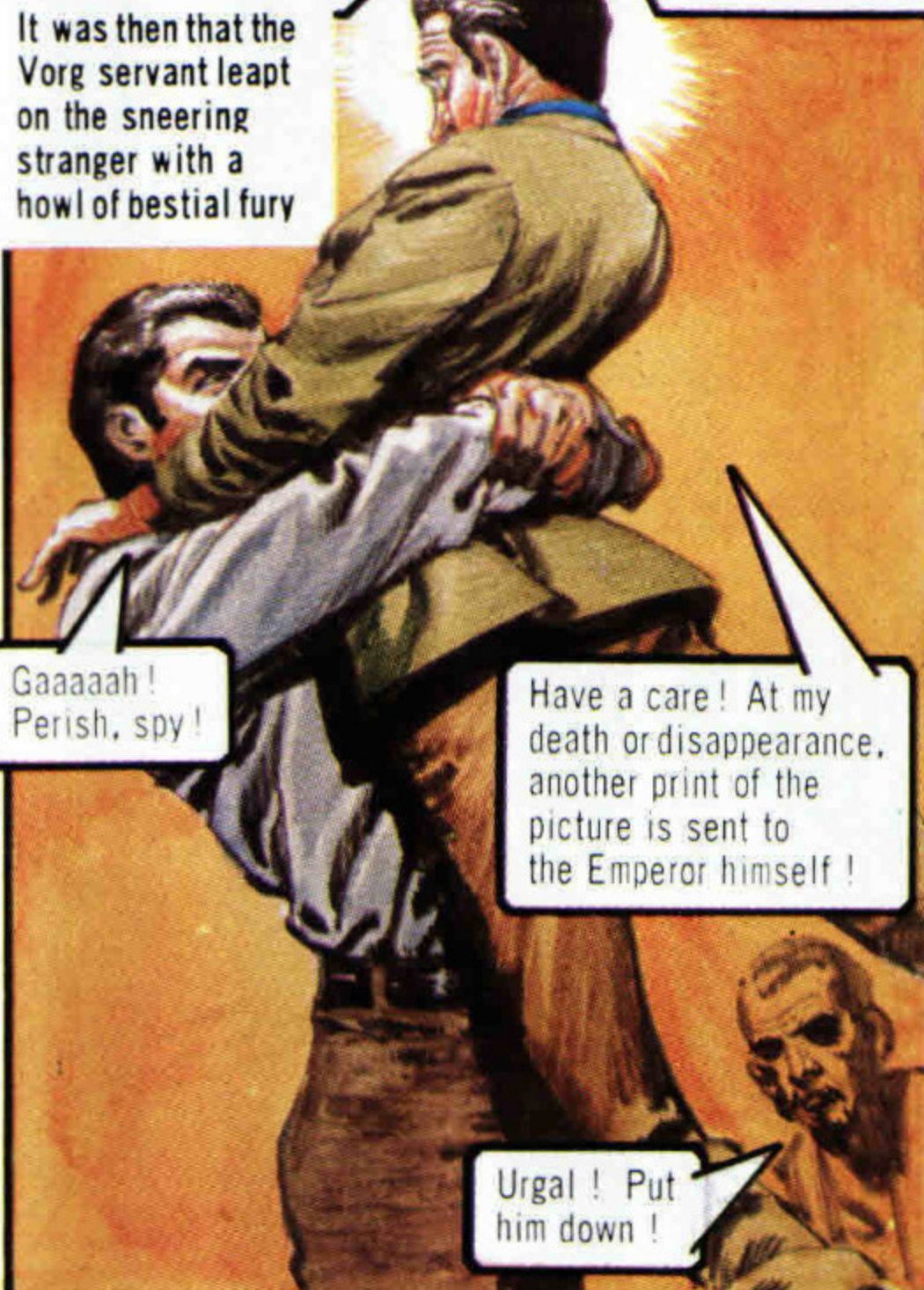
Aaaaaah! Where did you get that?



Soon, the stranger was standing before Lord Darra.

Does... does anyone else know of this?

Yes, my Lord. One person - a comrade of the unfortunate young man who owned the car.



It was then that the Vorg servant leapt on the sneering stranger with a howl of bestial fury

Gaaaaah! Perish, spy!

Have a care! At my death or disappearance, another print of the picture is sent to the Emperor himself!

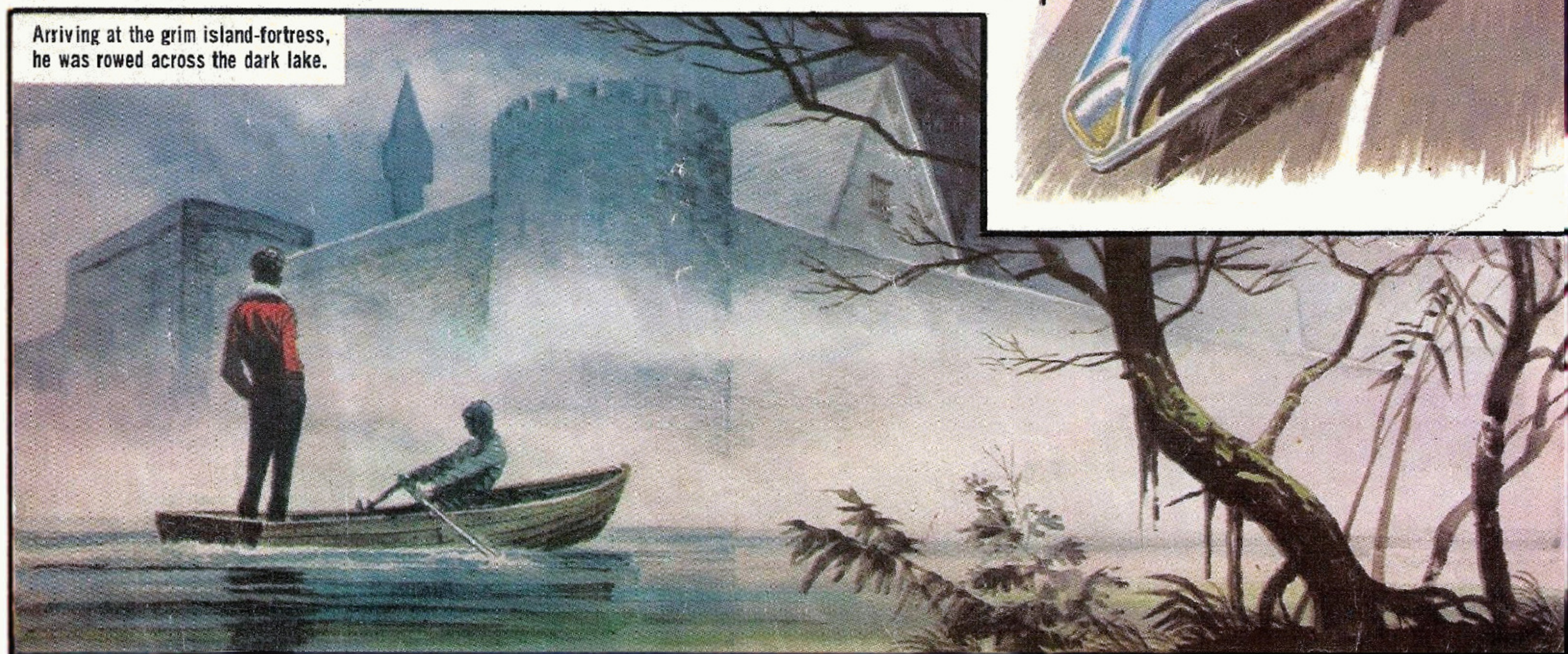
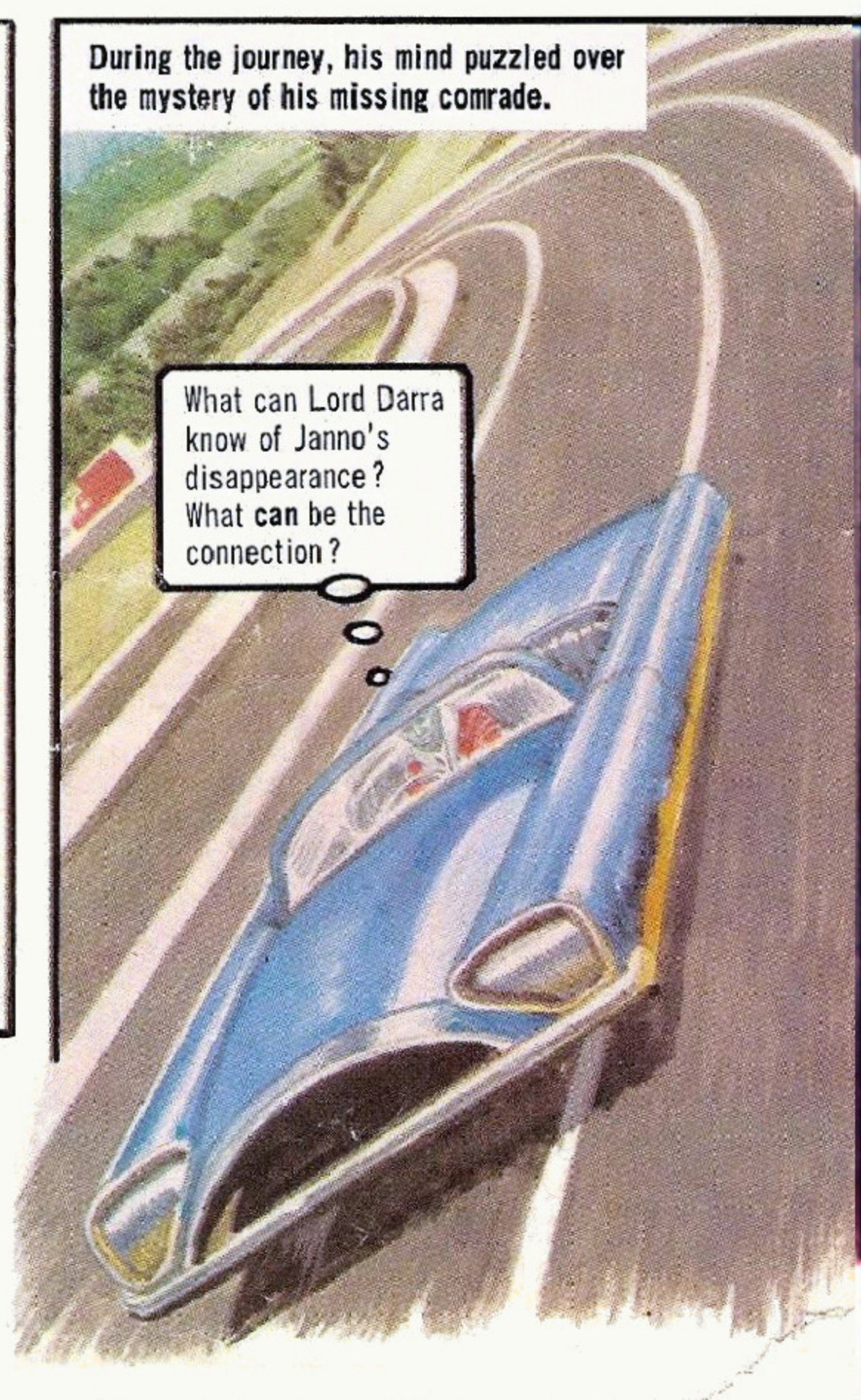
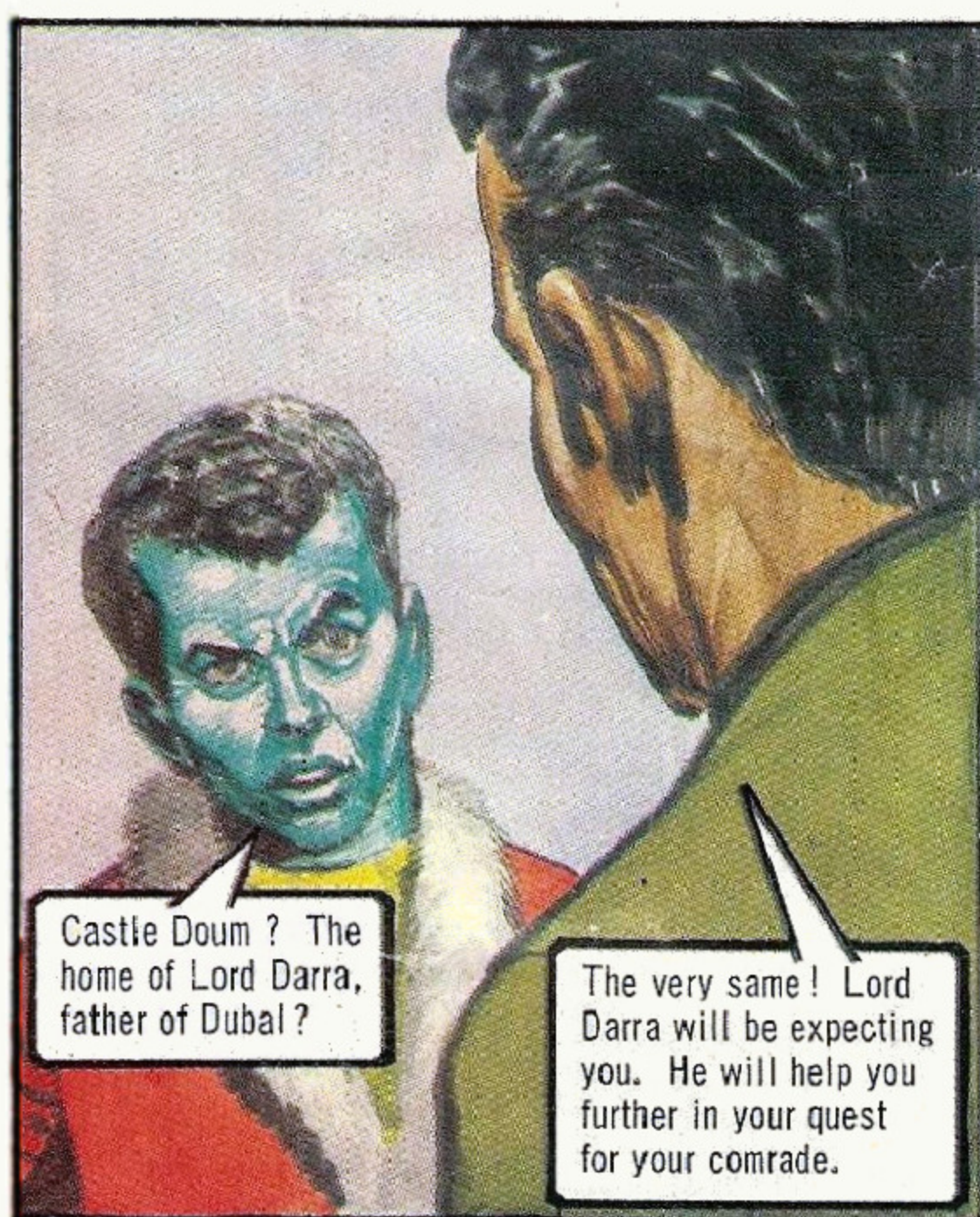
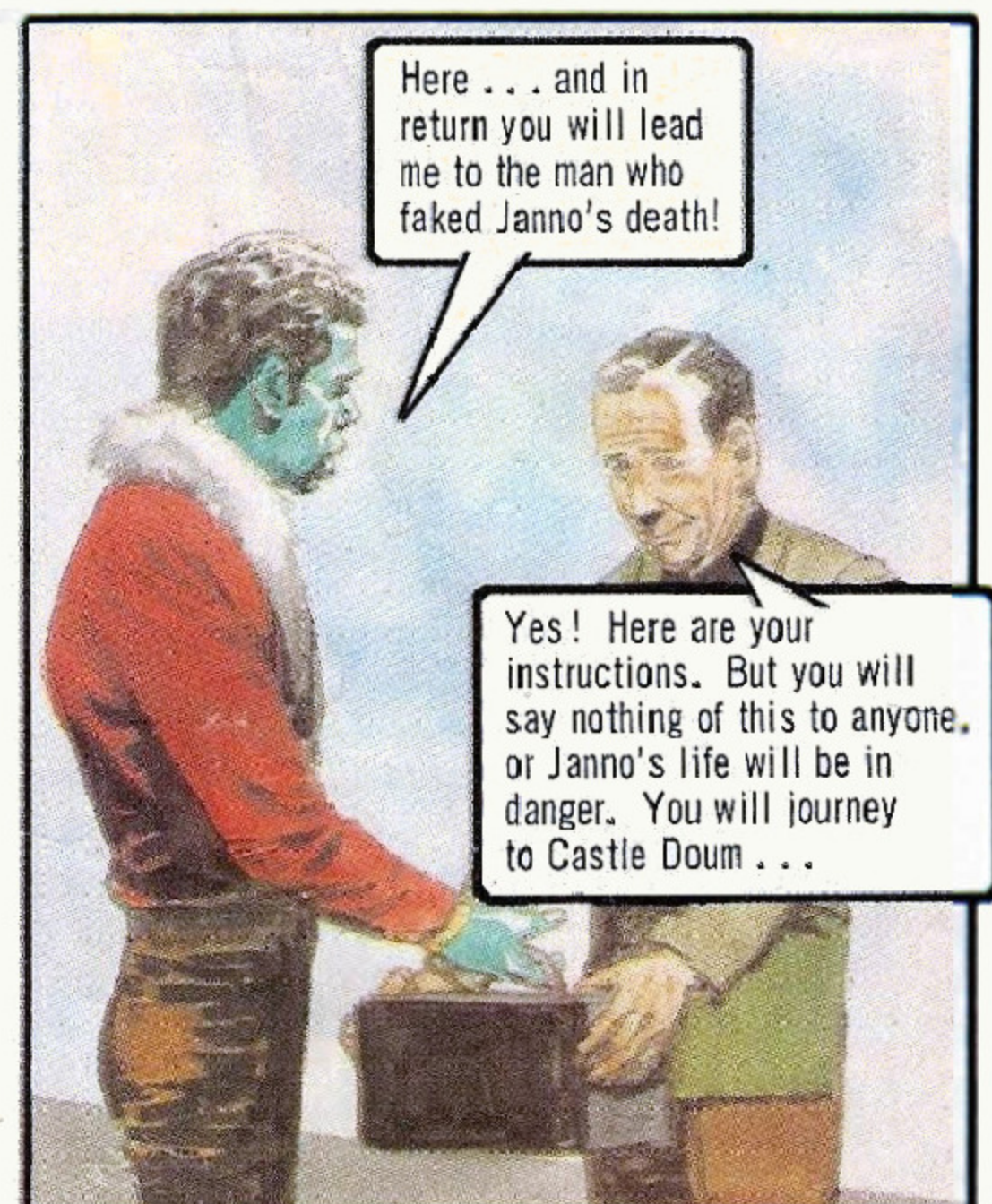
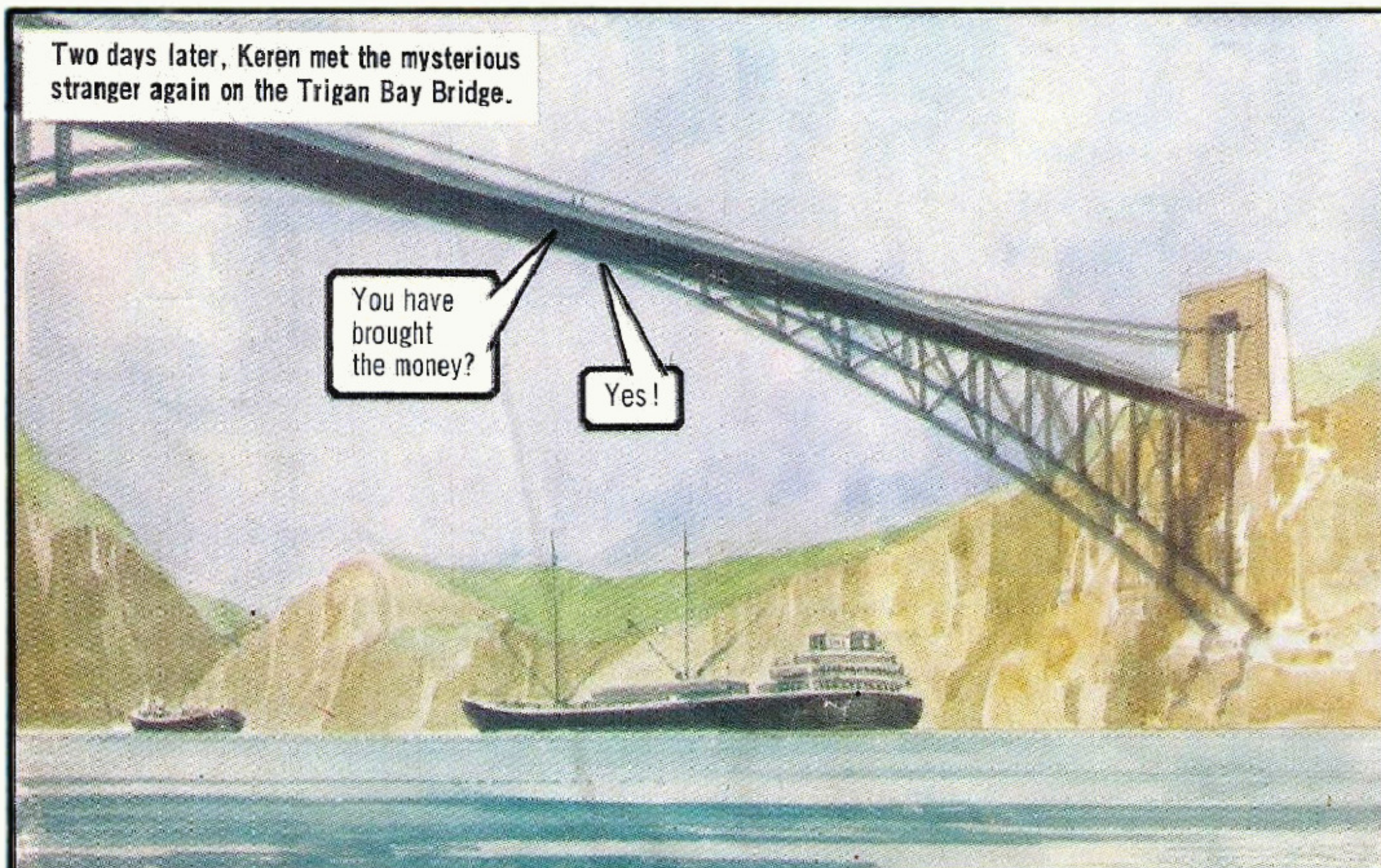
Urgal! Put him down!



Your terms?

The young officer who has seen the print - give me a thousand thullars, and I will deliver him into your hands, so that you can dispose of him yourself!









Keren entered the dark portals.

Ho, there!  
Anyone about?

And then... it happened!...



Aaaaaaagh!



He still lives,  
My Lord!

Good! I do not  
want his death on  
my conscience. Take  
him and put him  
with the other!



Later - much later - Keren  
recovered consciousness, to  
find himself looking up into  
the face of his comrade Janno.

By all  
the stars!  
Janno!

I'm sorry  
to see you  
in this hole,  
Keren!

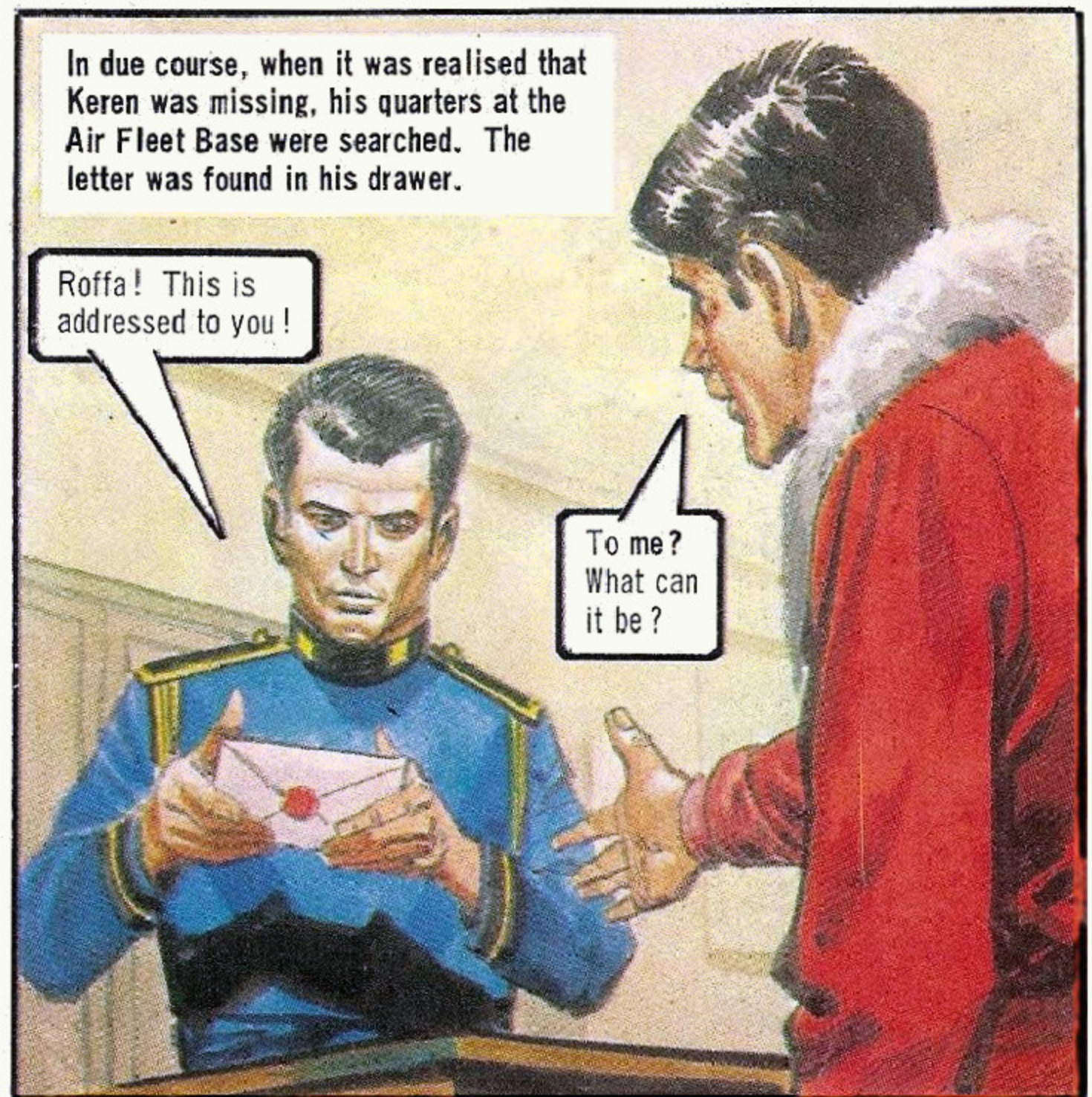


What's  
it all  
about?  
Who's  
behind  
it all?

Lord Darra! There's a  
family secret - a locked  
room - I don't know much  
about it. I only know this...



Whatever lies behind the door of that  
locked room, Lord Darra will do anything  
to hide - anything! To start with, he will  
keep us here for the rest of our days!



In due course, when it was realised that  
Keren was missing, his quarters at the  
Air Fleet Base were searched. The  
letter was found in his drawer.

Roffa! This is  
addressed to you!

To me?  
What can  
it be?





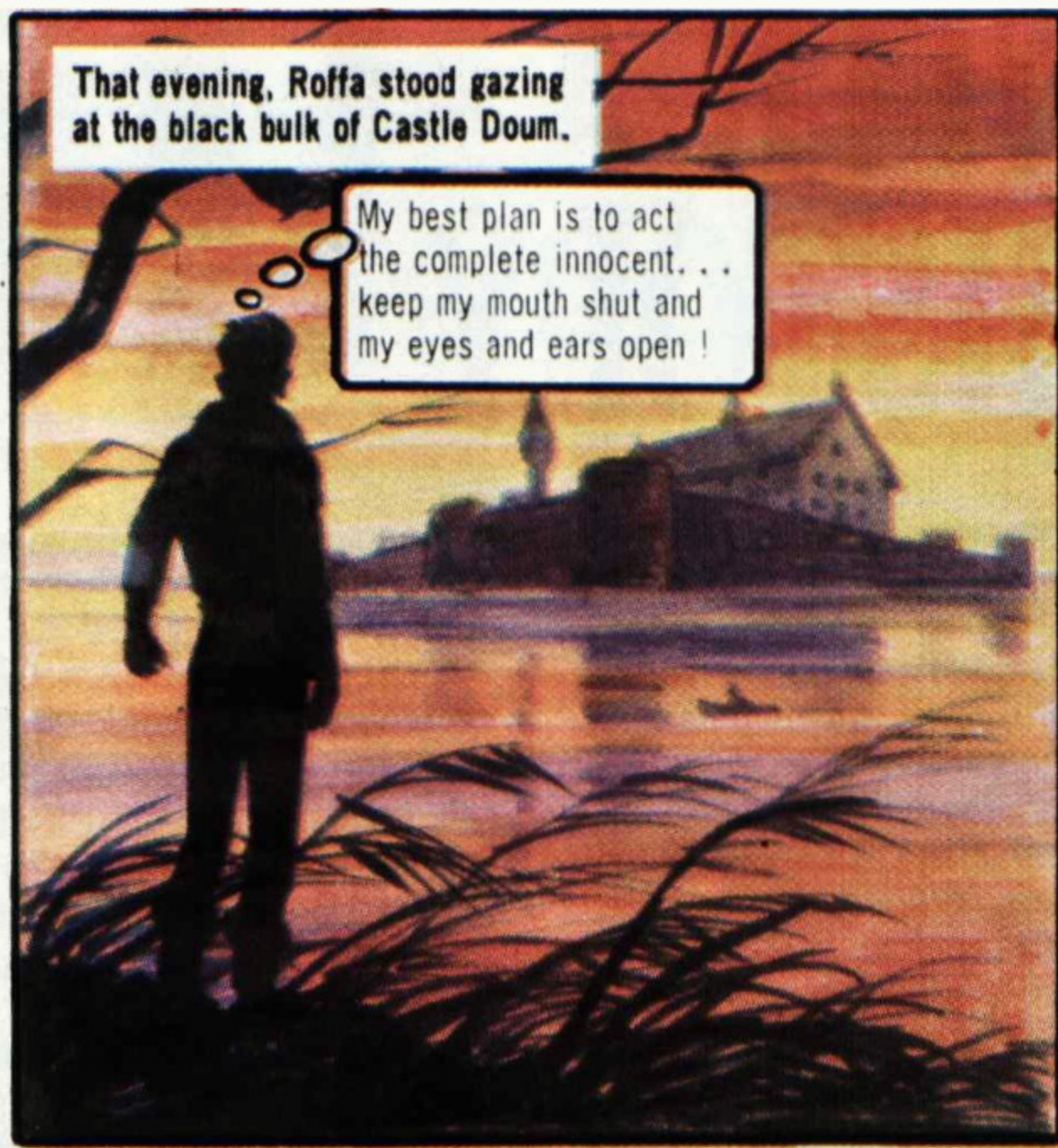
Roffa opened the letter and read it.

What does it say, Roffa?

Er - it's nothing. Just a note from Keren thanking me for something. He - hmm - he must have forgotten to have it delivered.

As he stumbled over the awkward lie, the true contents of Keren's message burnt in his mind . . .

"Janno still alive - follow me to Castle Doum - trust no-one - tell no-one !"



That evening, Roffa stood gazing at the black bulk of Castle Doum.

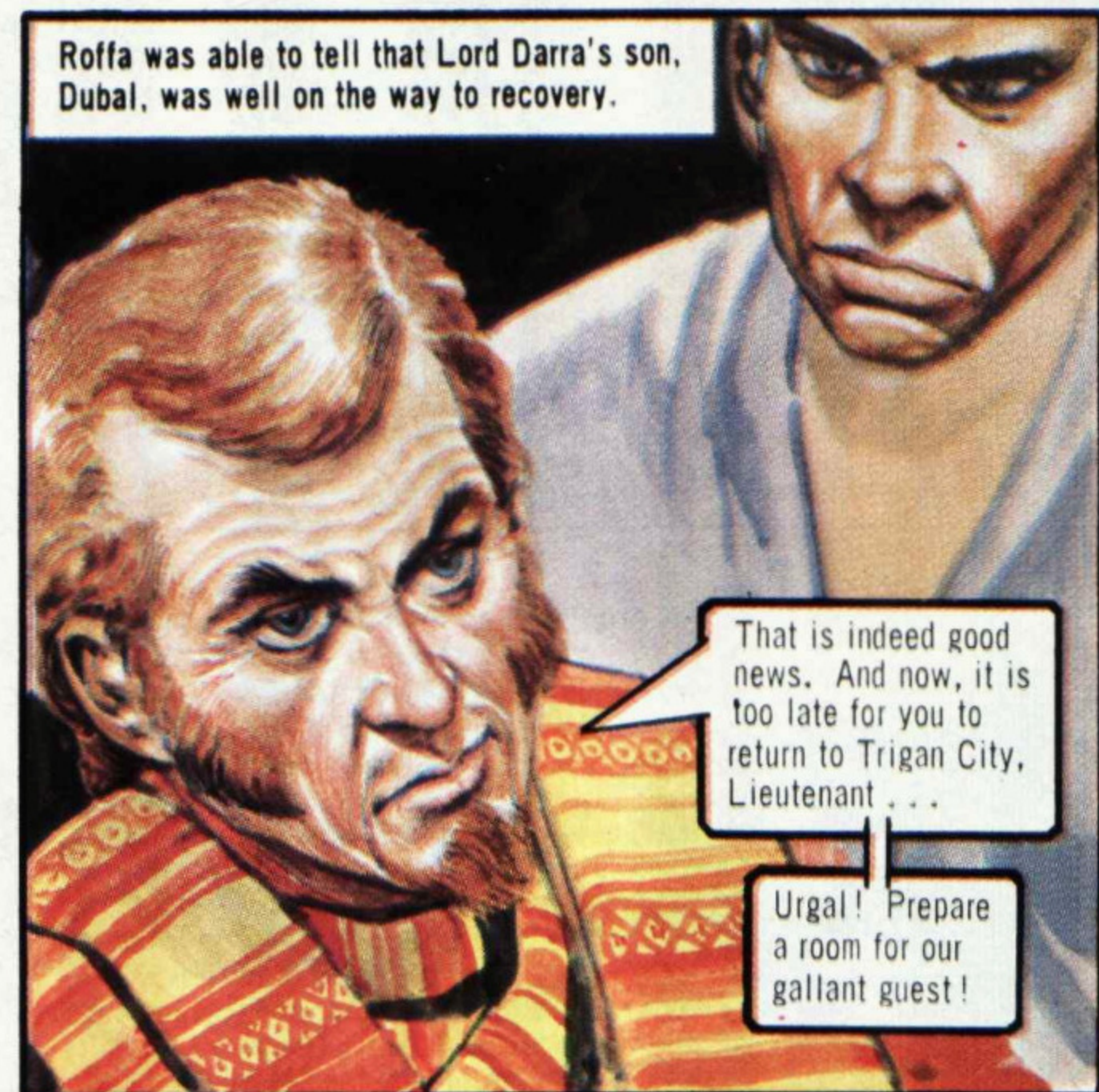
My best plan is to act the complete innocent . . . keep my mouth shut and my eyes and ears open !



Presently, the young Air Fleet pilot was introducing himself to the grim-faced owner of the island-fortress

And to what do I owe the honour of this visit, Lieutenant Roffa?

Well, Lord Darra, your son was a member of my squadron and I thought you'd like to hear the latest news of him...



Roffa was able to tell that Lord Darra's son, Dubal, was well on the way to recovery.

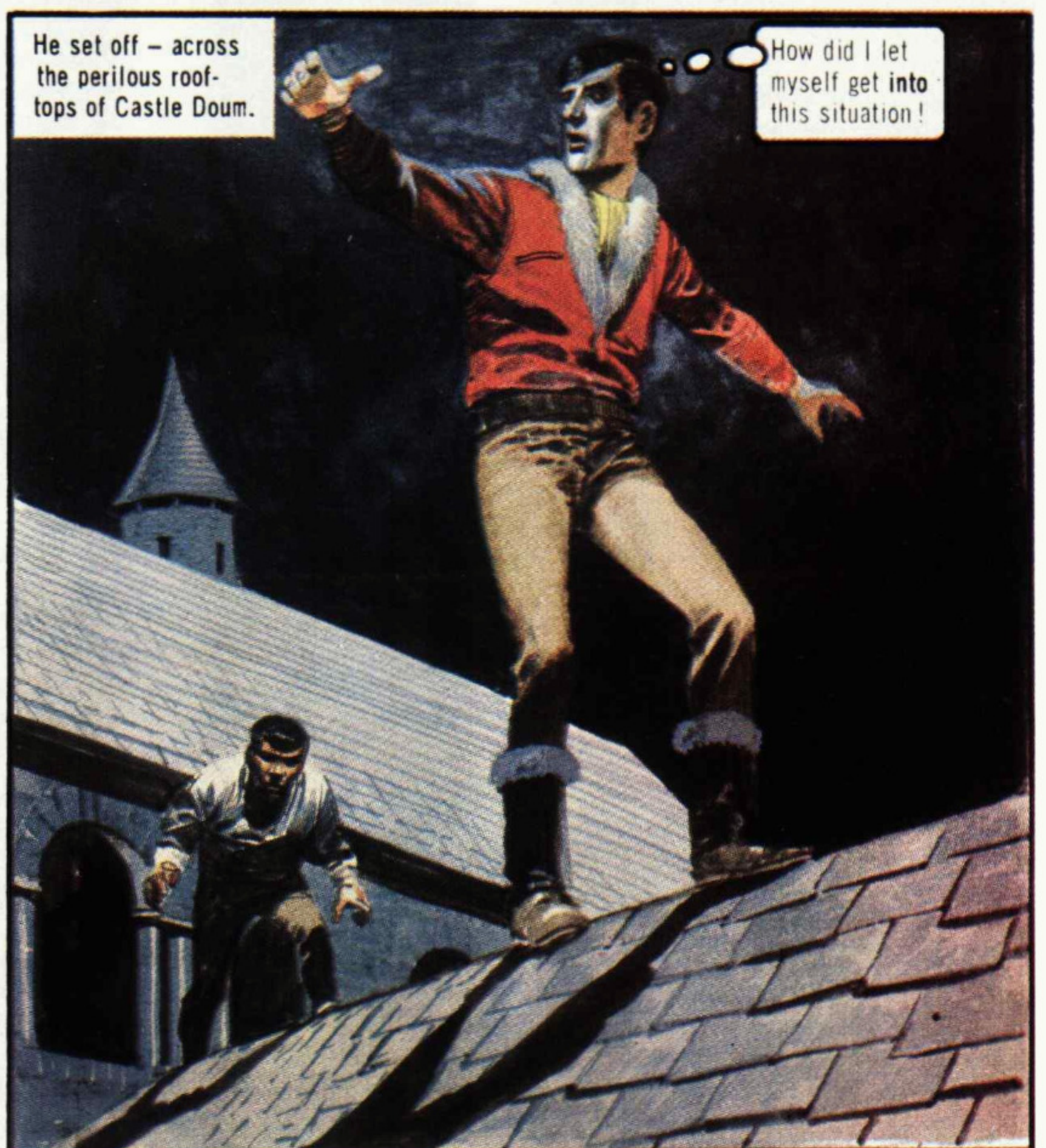
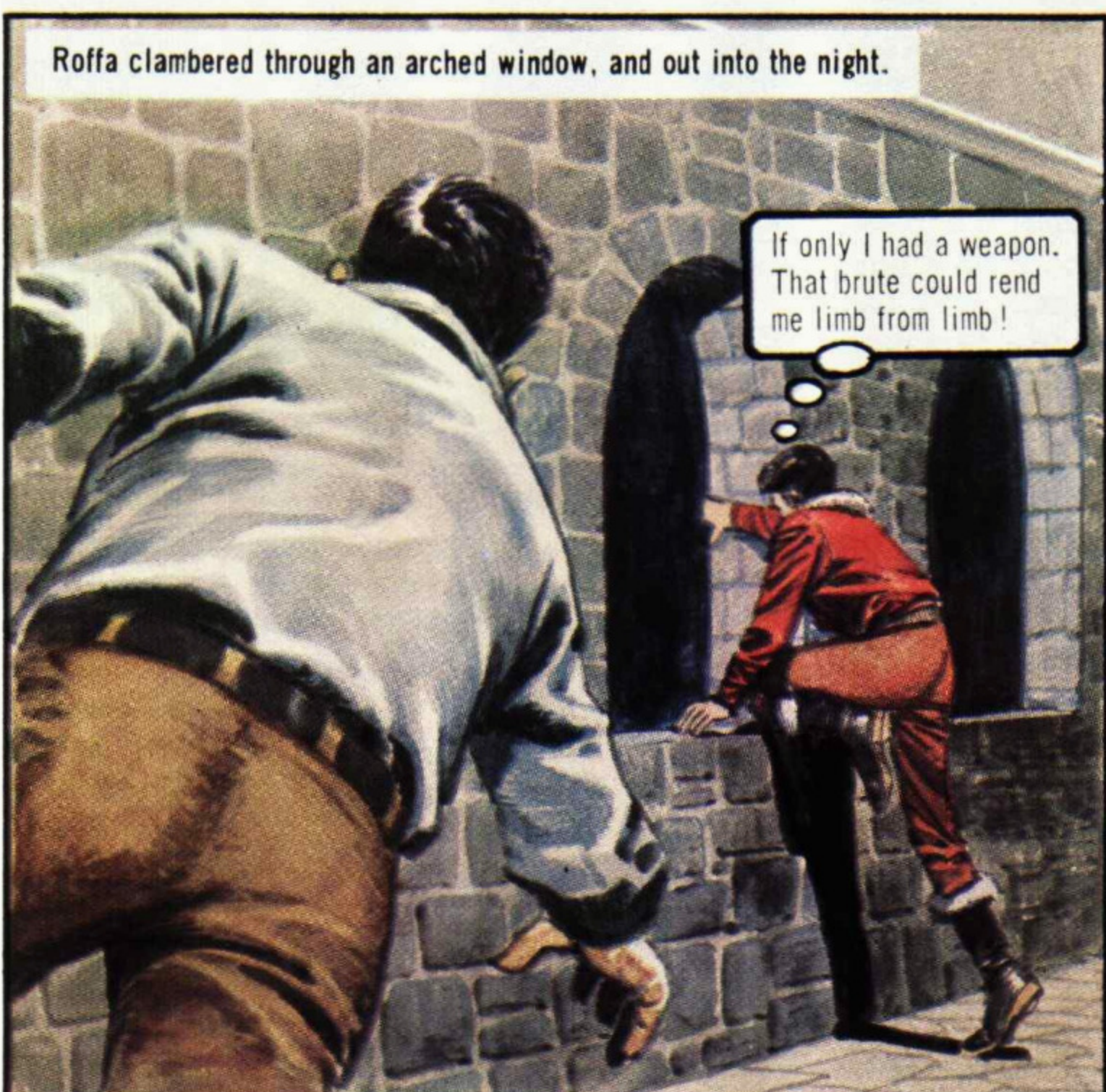
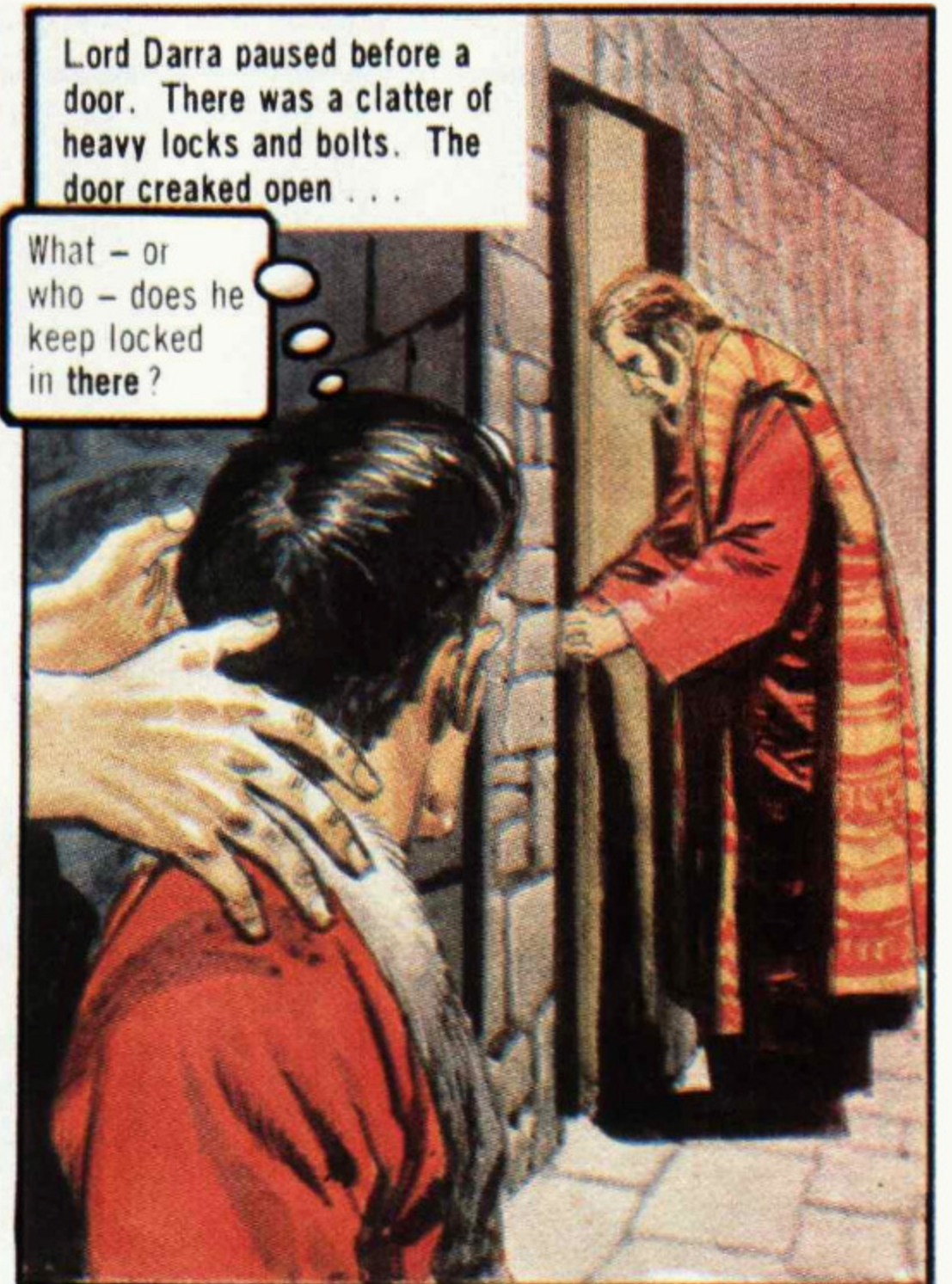
That is indeed good news. And now, it is too late for you to return to Trigan City, Lieutenant . . .

Urgal ! Prepare a room for our gallant guest !



Night fell over Castle Doum. As Elekton's twin moons rose, three dark figures slipped into the water.







Roffa edged forward along the perilous rooftop until he could go no further. Then he turned to face his huge pursuer.

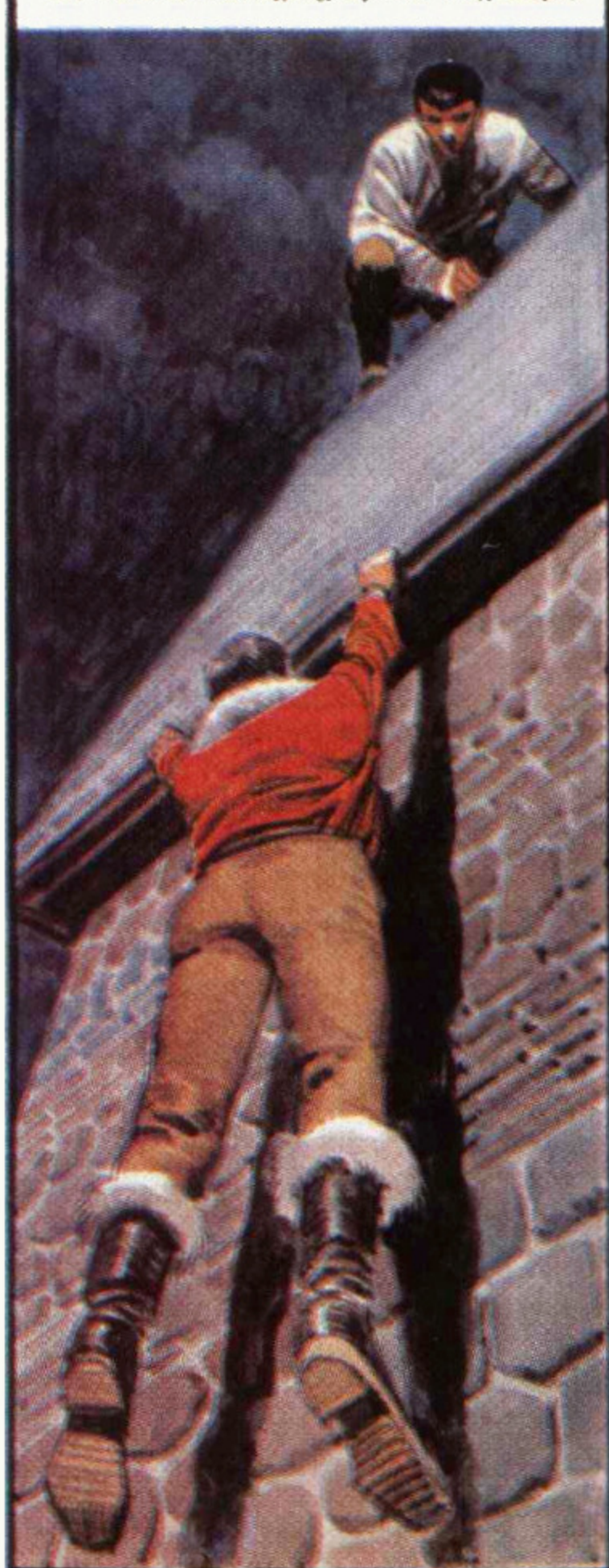


Roffa ducked to avoid the clutching hands – slipped – and fell!



And so, at the peril of his own life, the big servant rescued Roffa.

He scrabbled, clutched at something and was left hanging by his fingertips!



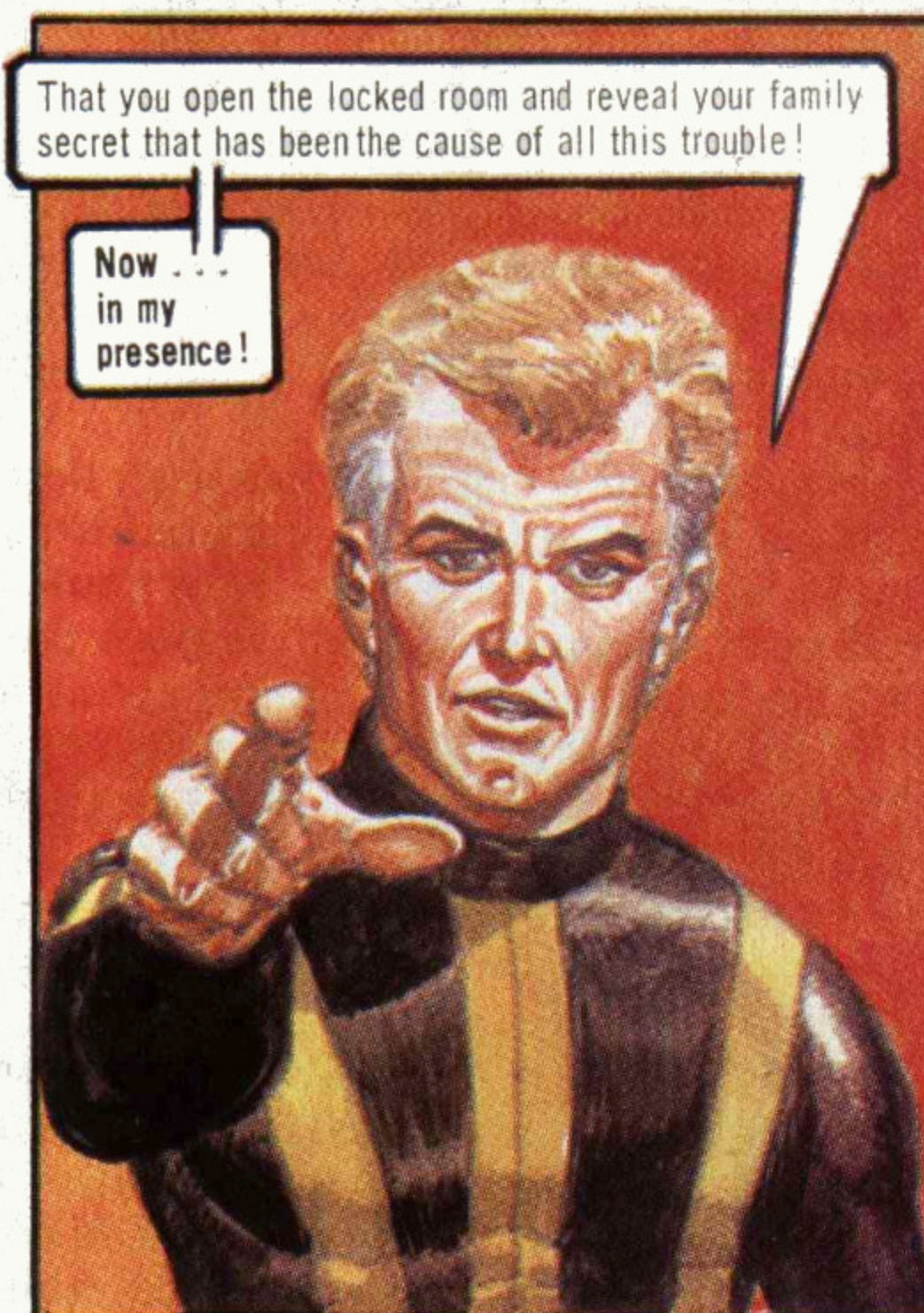
The giant Vorg broke off a piece of masonry and raised it aloft.



But the urgent cry of Lord Darra echoed across the void . . .





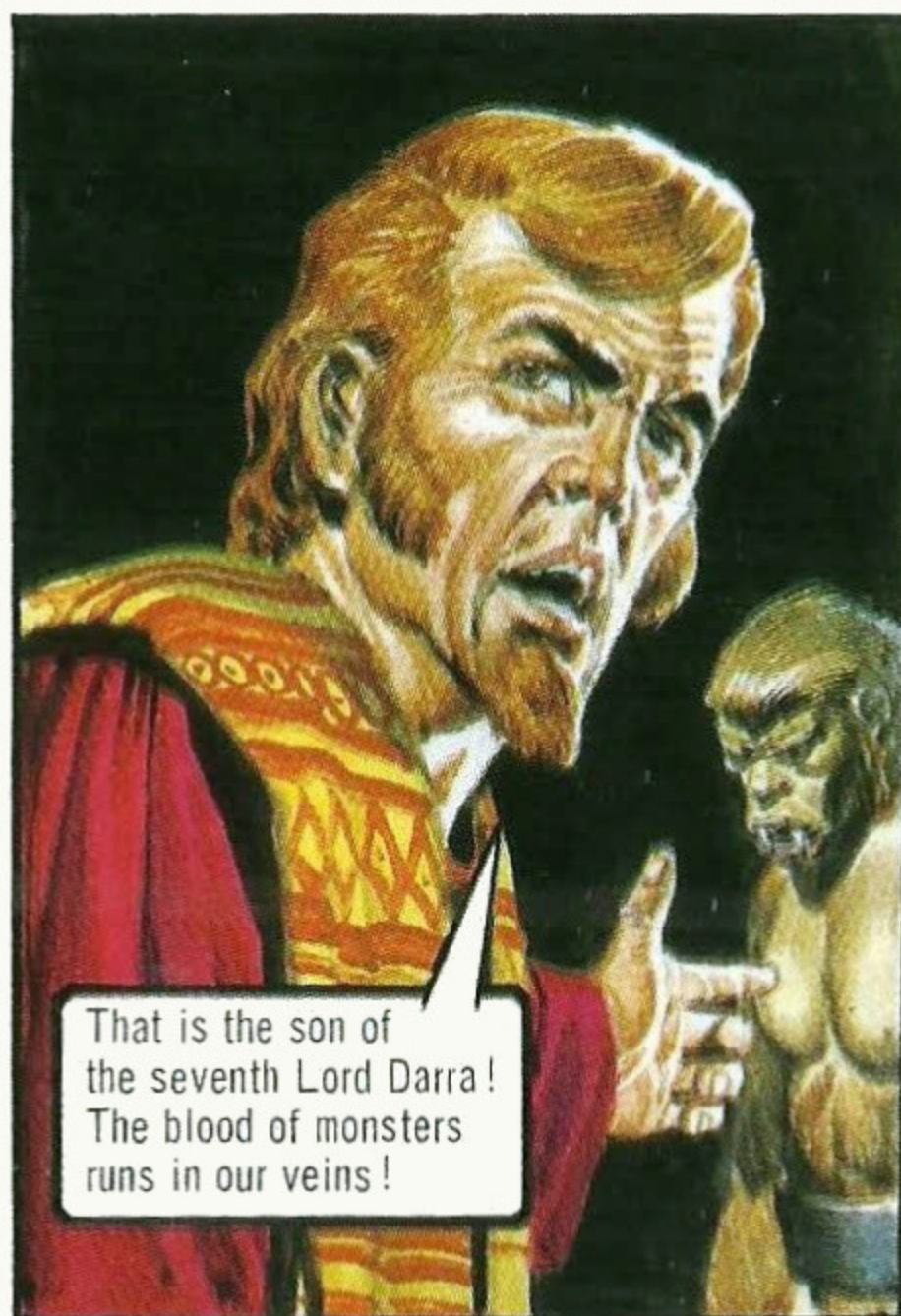




Bolts and locks were opened, and the inmate of the locked room was revealed to the Emperor of the Trigans!

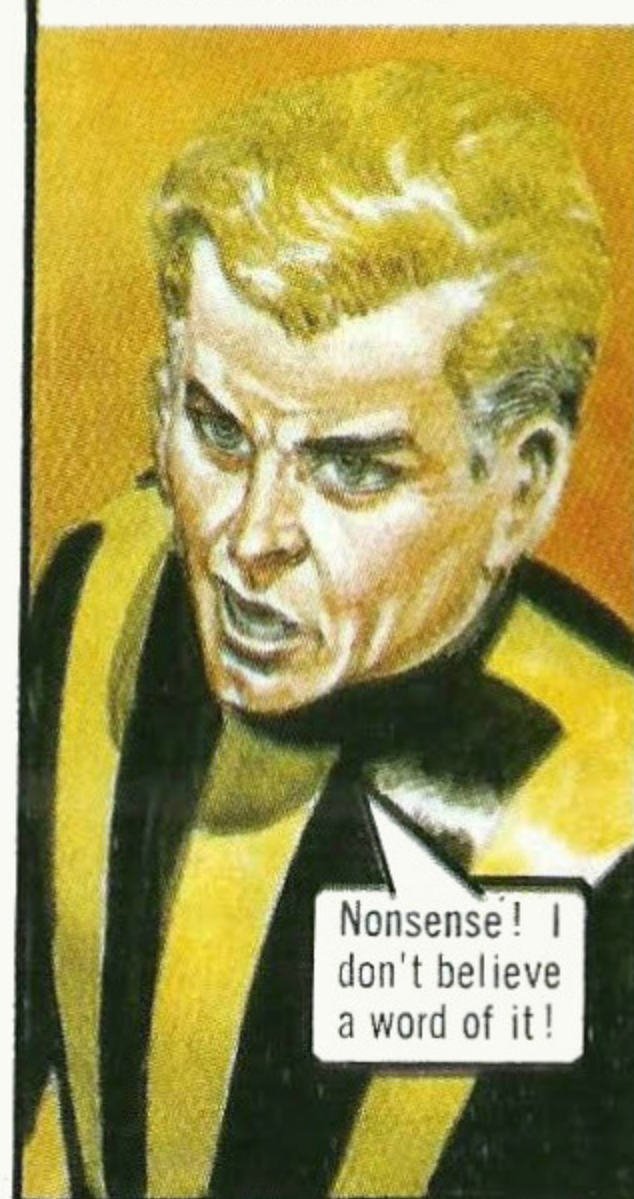


There, Imperial Majesty, is our dreadful family secret!



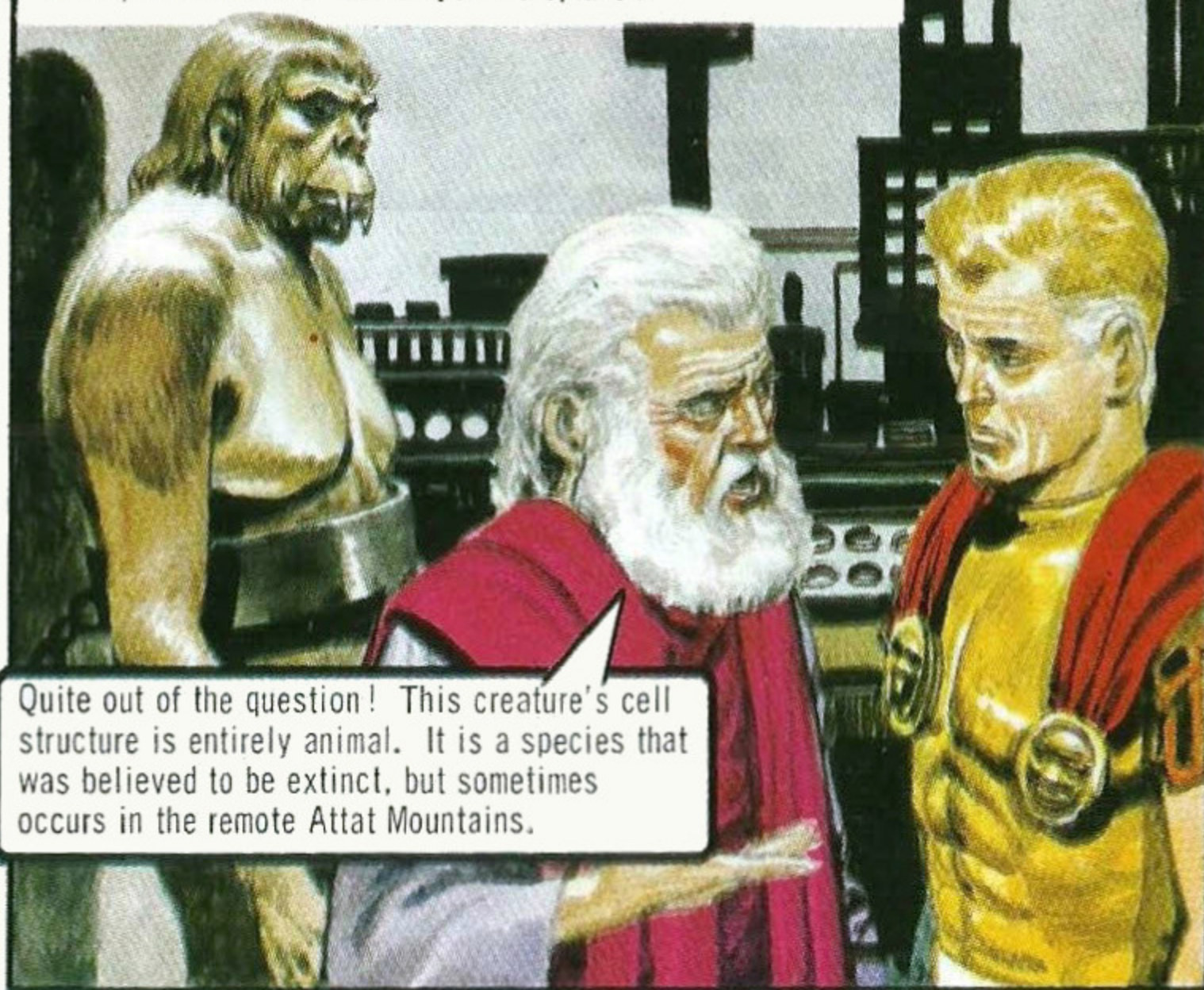
That is the son of the seventh Lord Darra! The blood of monsters runs in our veins!

Trigo's reply was immediate – and typically blunt . . .

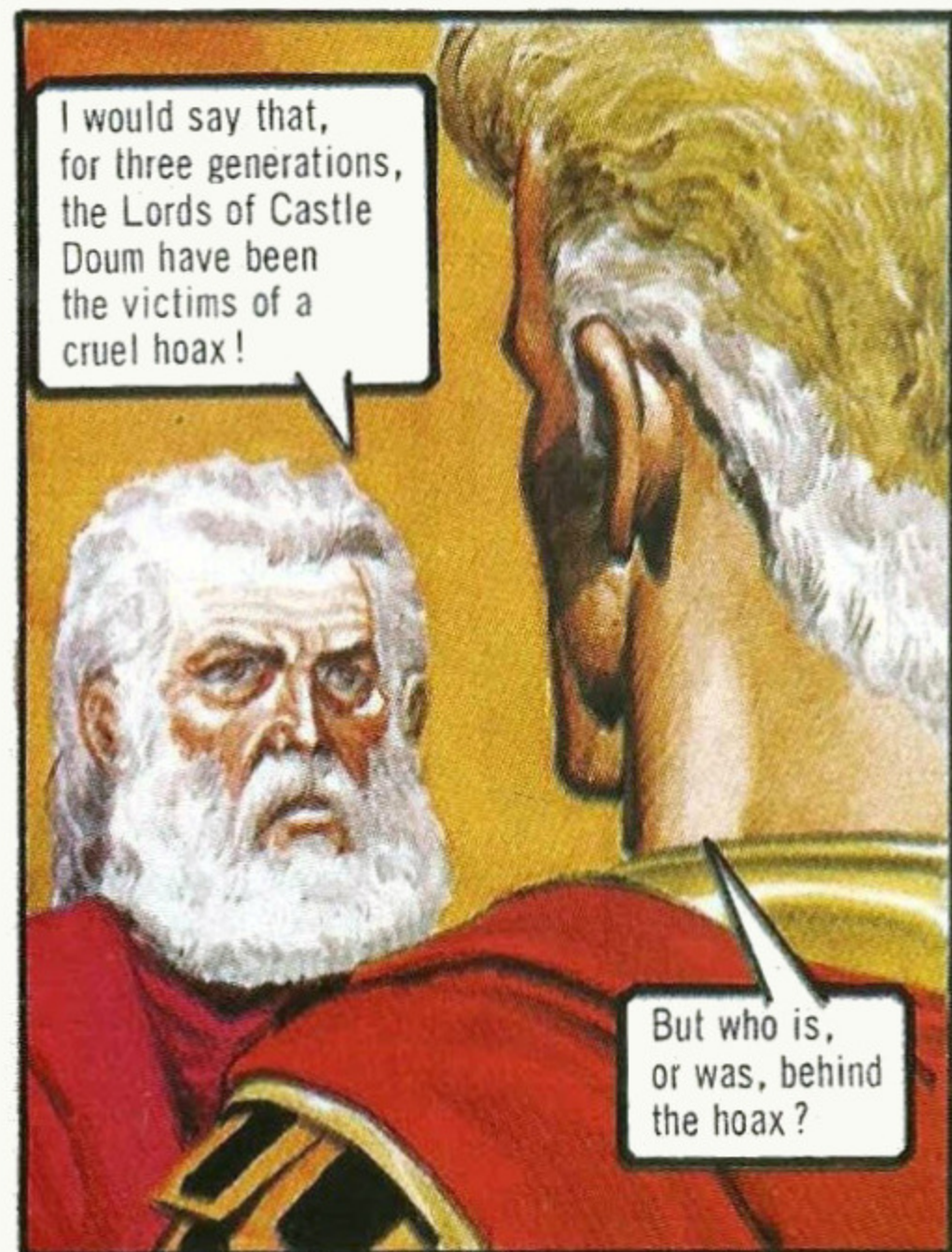


Nonsense! I don't believe a word of it!

The great scientist Peric examined the creature from Castle Doum, and confirmed the Emperor's opinion!



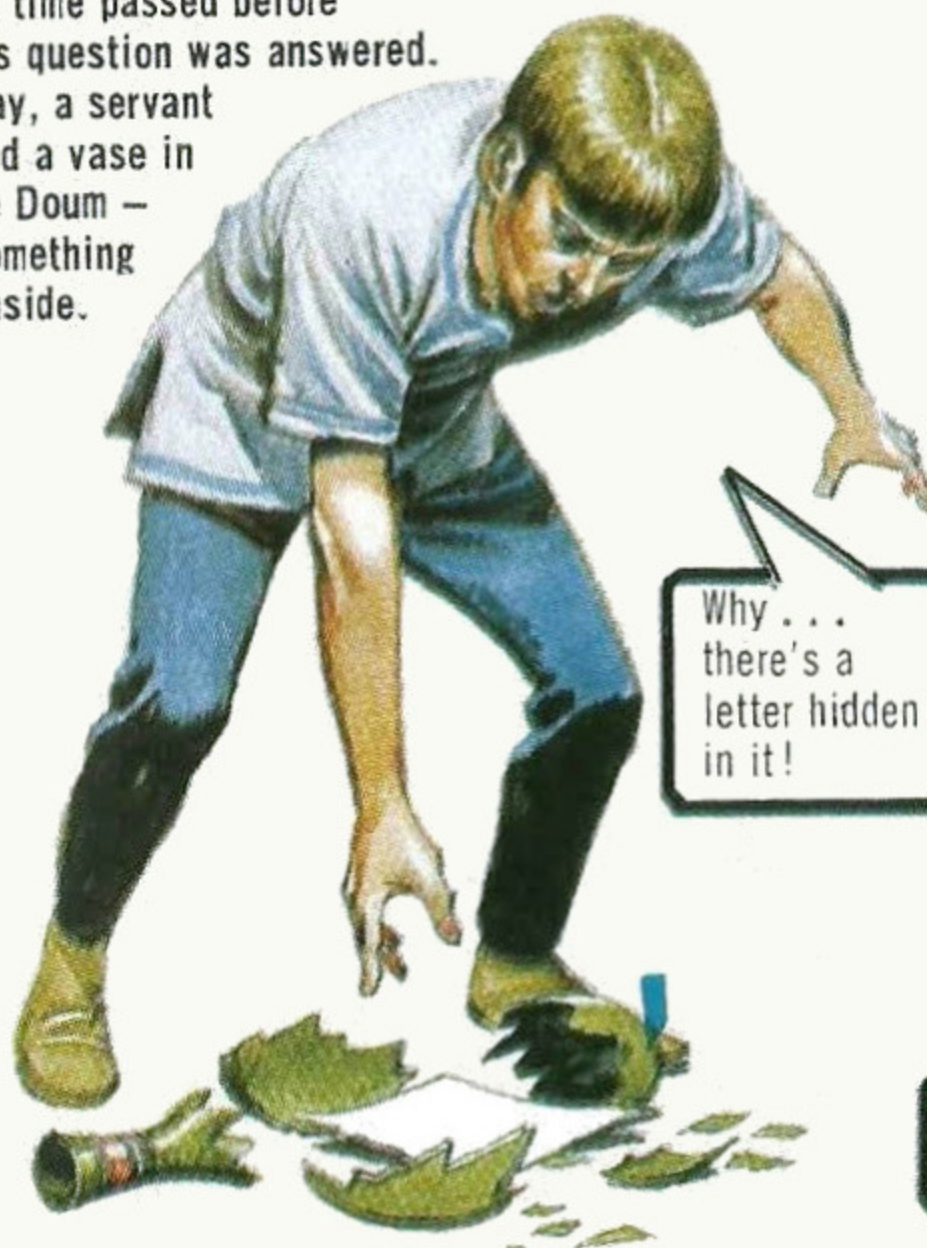
Quite out of the question! This creature's cell structure is entirely animal. It is a species that was believed to be extinct, but sometimes occurs in the remote Attat Mountains.



I would say that, for three generations, the Lords of Castle Doum have been the victims of a cruel hoax!

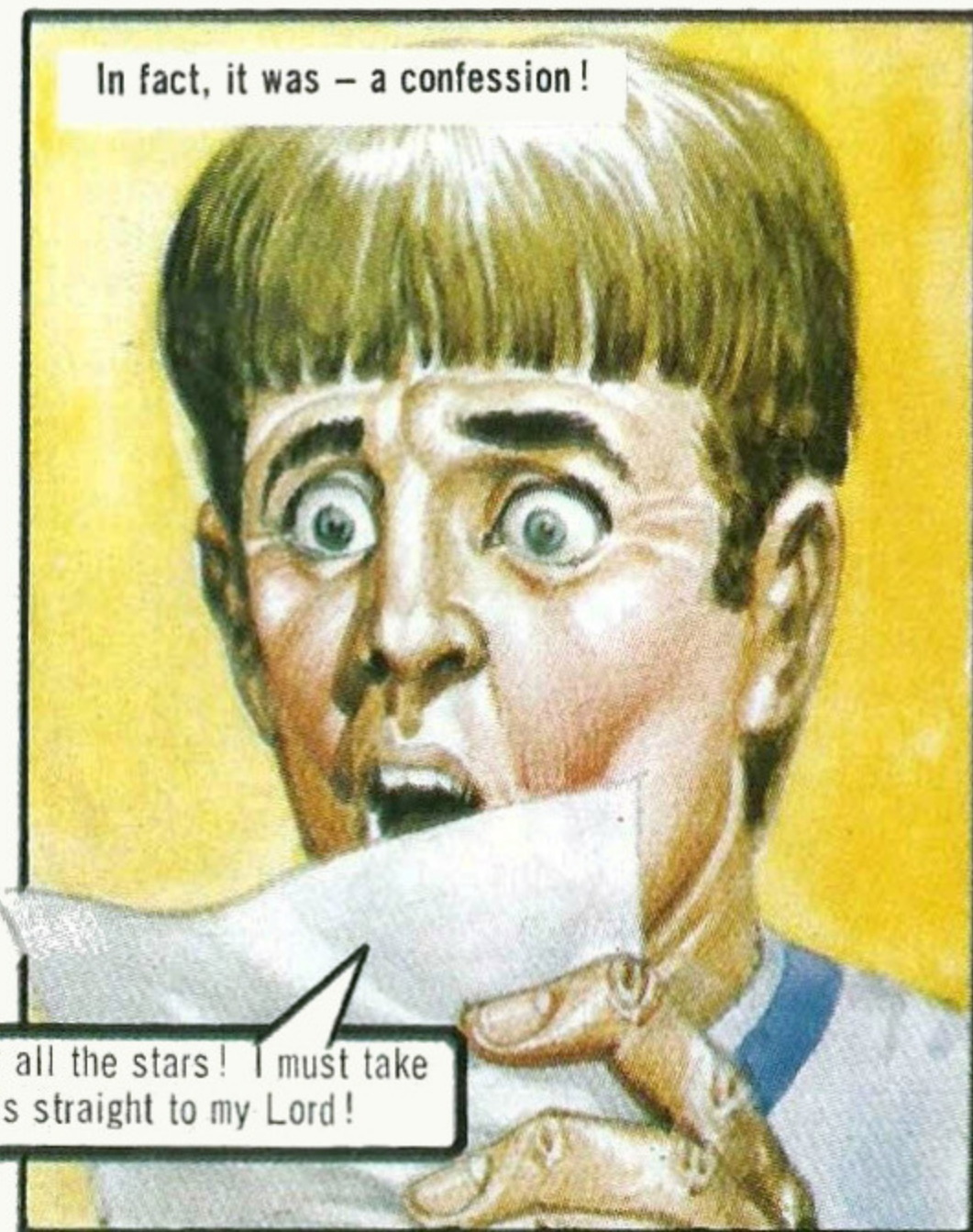
But who is, or was, behind the hoax?

A long time passed before Trigo's question was answered. One day, a servant dropped a vase in Castle Doum – and something was inside.



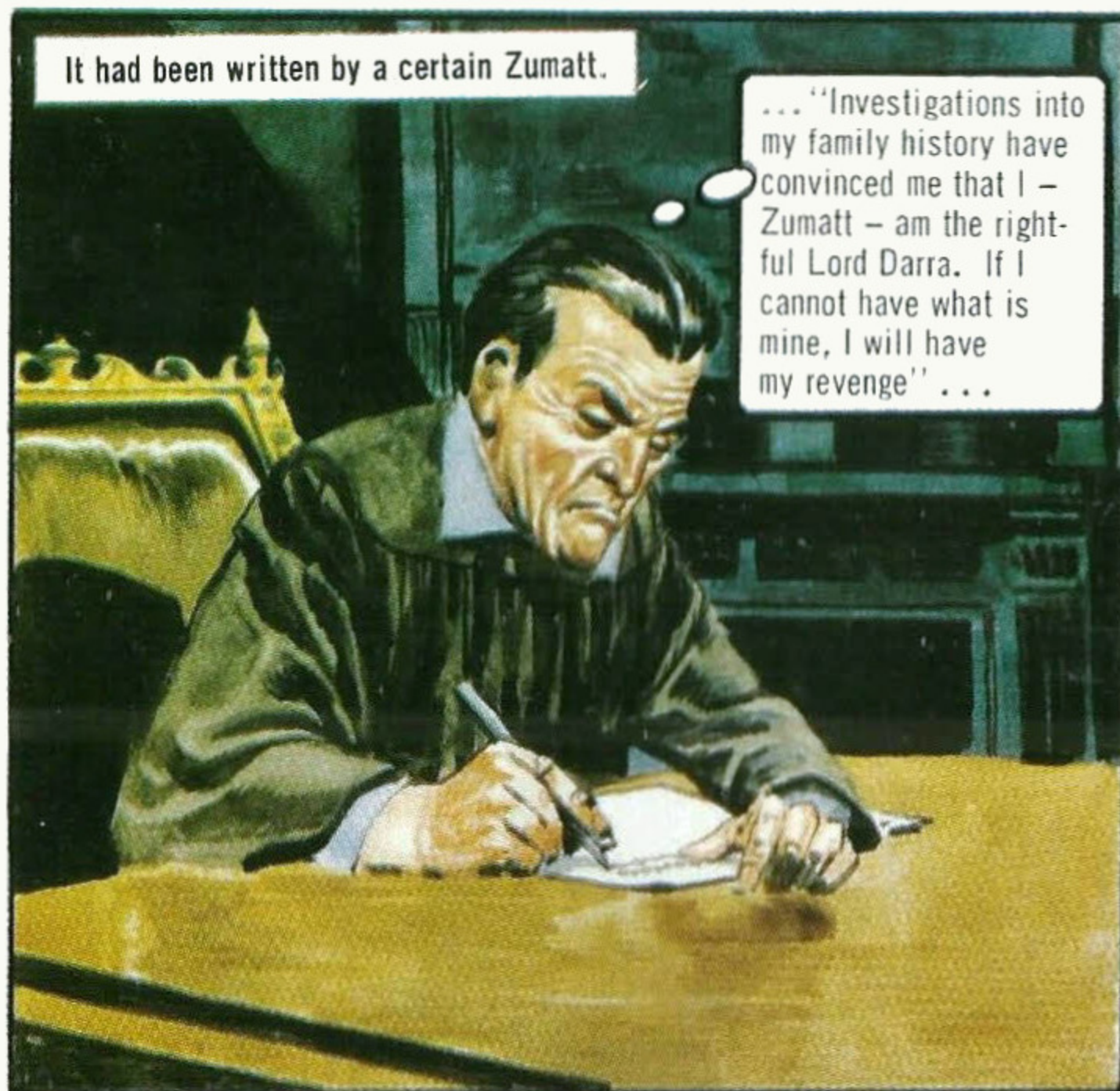
Why . . . there's a letter hidden in it!

In fact, it was – a confession!



By all the stars! I must take this straight to my Lord!





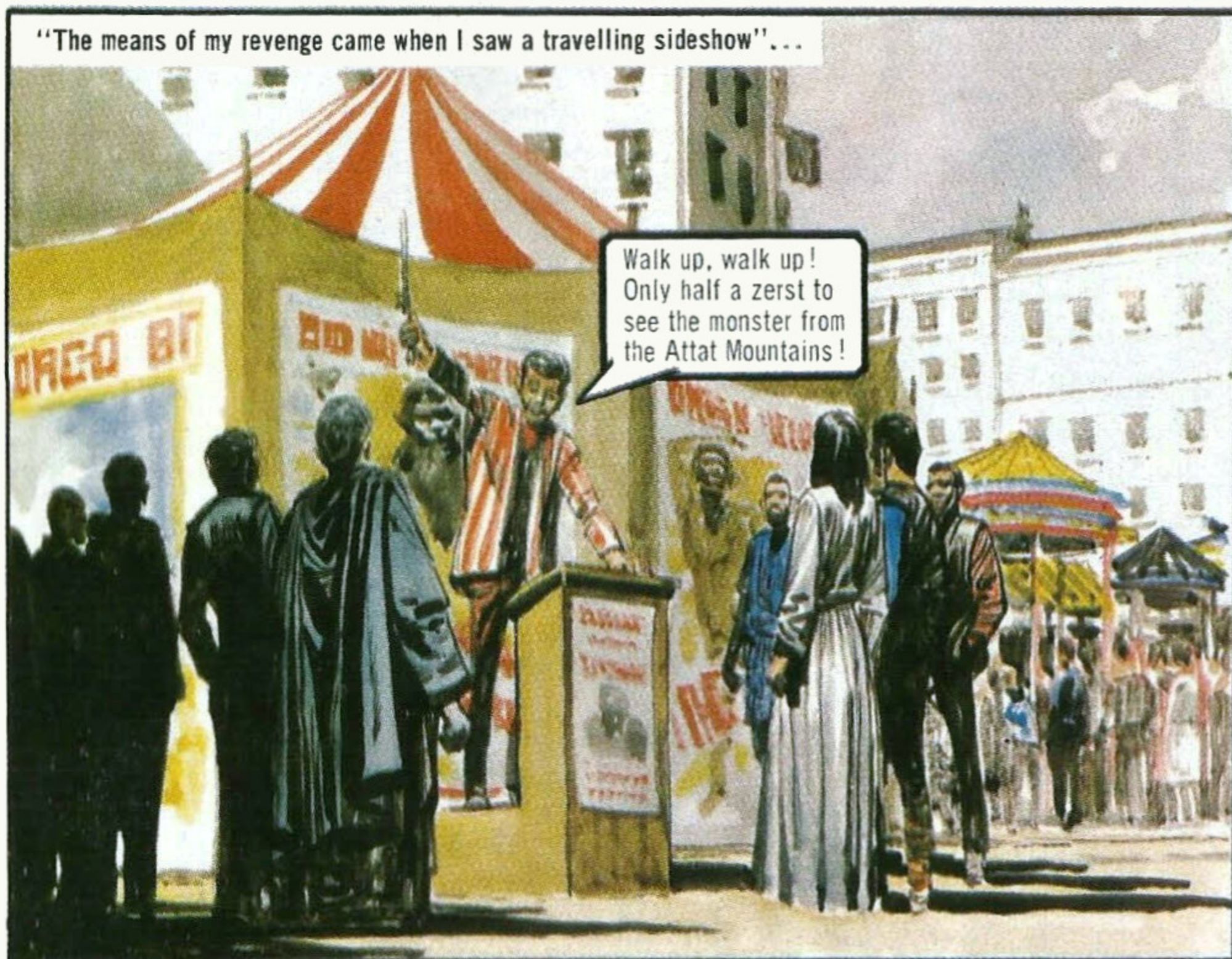
It had been written by a certain Zumatt.

... "Investigations into my family history have convinced me that I - Zumatt - am the rightful Lord Darra. If I cannot have what is mine, I will have my revenge" ...



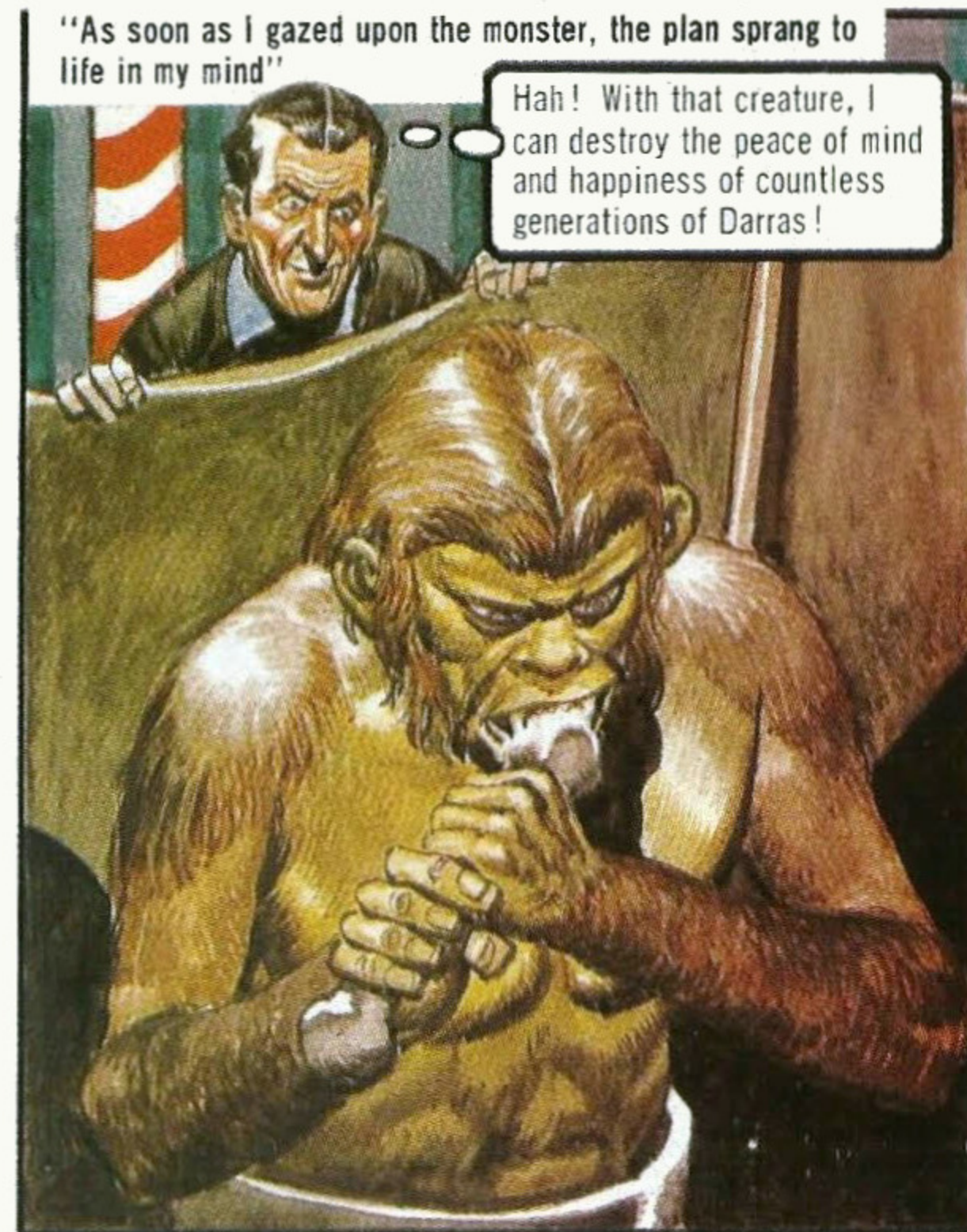
"My great opportunity came (continued Zumatt) when I was appointed tutor and guardian to the infant eighth Lord" ...

I will be like a father to you, my Lord.



"The means of my revenge came when I saw a travelling sideshow" ...

Walk up, walk up! Only half a zerst to see the monster from the Attat Mountains!



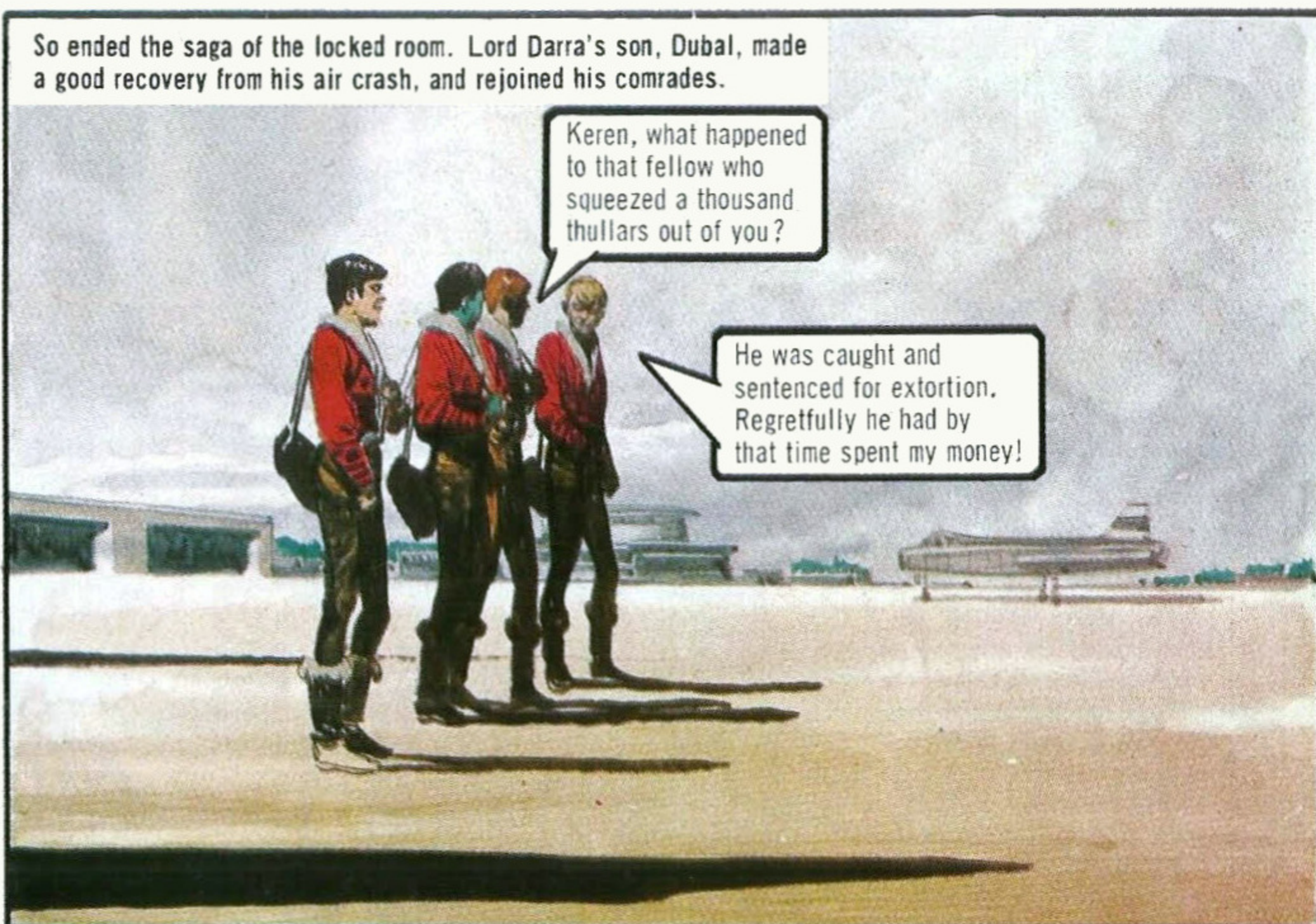
"As soon as I gazed upon the monster, the plan sprang to life in my mind"

Hah! With that creature, I can destroy the peace of mind and happiness of countless generations of Darras!



The strange and dreadful confession concluded - "The moment of my triumph came on the day that my young charge came of age!"

My Lord, you must prepare yourself for a shock ...



So ended the saga of the locked room. Lord Darra's son, Dubal, made a good recovery from his air crash, and rejoined his comrades.

Keren, what happened to that fellow who squeezed a thousand thullars out of you?

He was caught and sentenced for extortion. Regretfully he had by that time spent my money!