

LATE ONE EVENING, THE GREAT SCIENTIST PERIC WAS WORKING IN HIS LABORATORY IN TRIGAN CITY. SUDDENLY, HE SAW A SIGN OF IMPENDING DISASTER.

PERIC AND HIS ASSISTANTS FLED IN PANIC...

The mass has become unstable. Flee for your lives!

Evacuate the building!

It's going to explode.

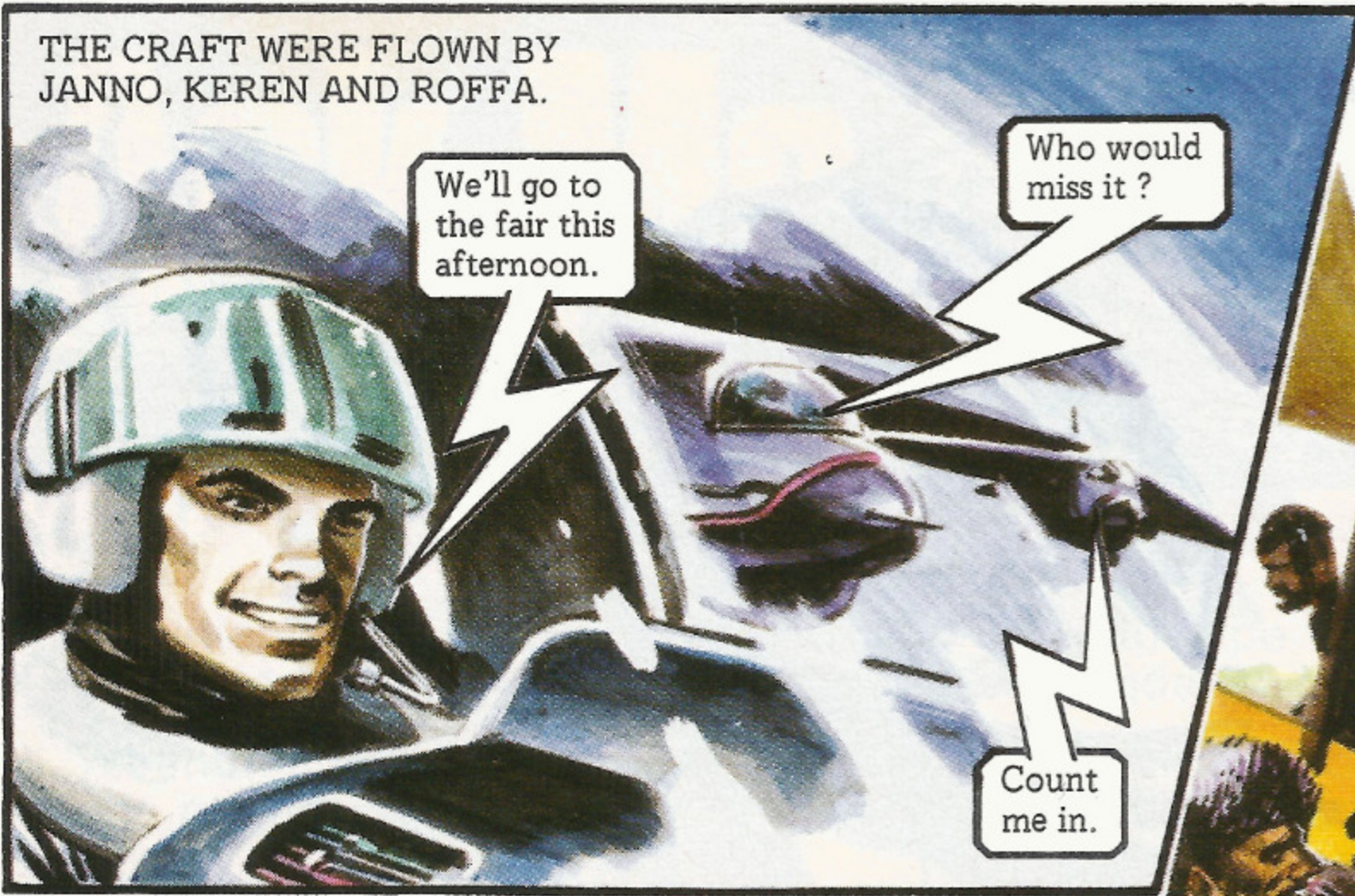
ALL ESCAPED IN THE NICK OF TIME.

SOME TIME LATER, THREE SCOUTS OF THE TRIGAN AIR FLEET WERE RETURNING FROM A MISSION. THEY OBSERVED THE CROWDS OF PEOPLE MILLING TOWARDS THE GATES OF THE CITY FAR BELOW.

A whole life's work - gone in a flash.

They're gathering for the annual fair.

THE CRAFT WERE FLOWN BY JANNO, KEREN AND ROFFA.

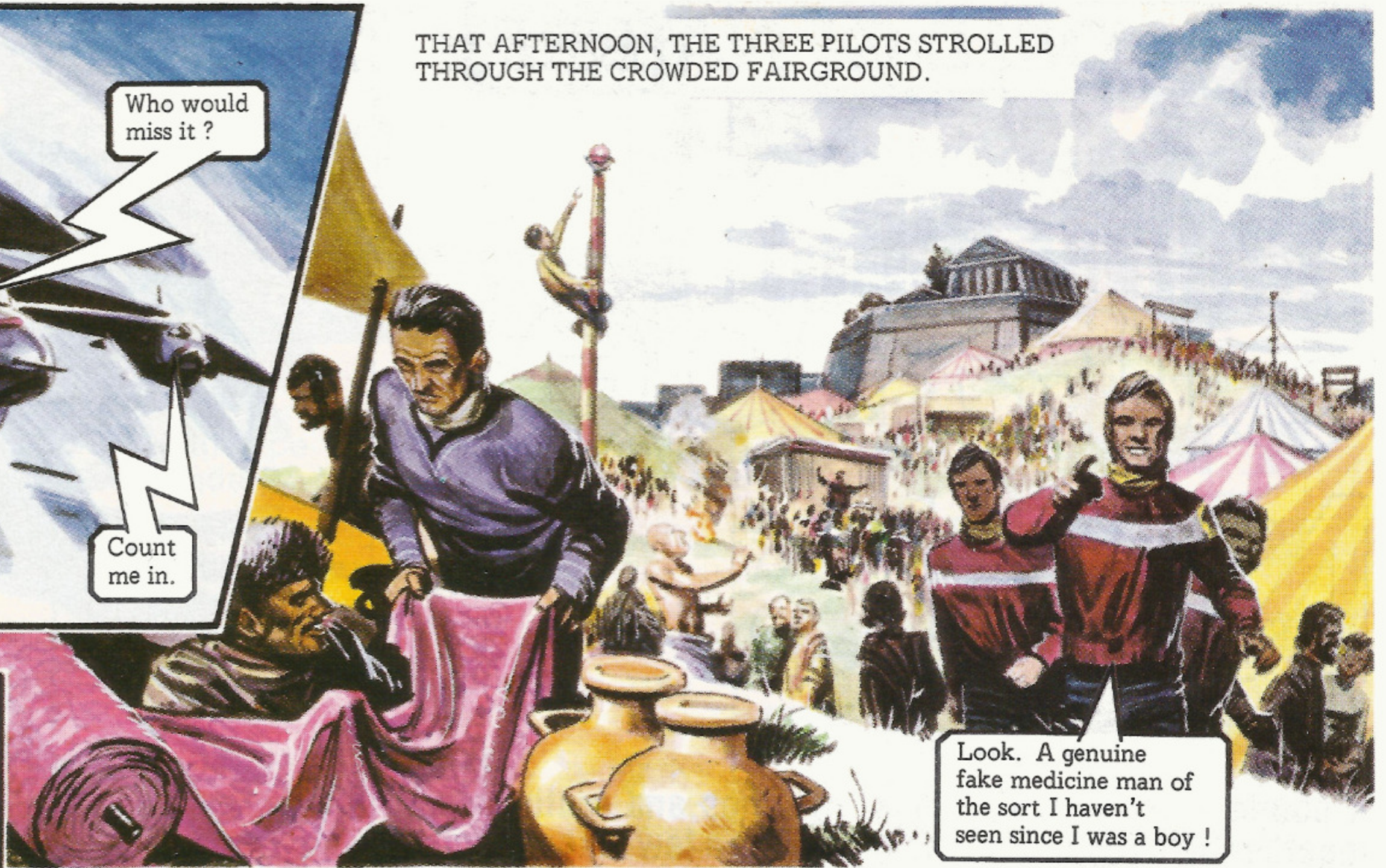


We'll go to the fair this afternoon.

Who would miss it?

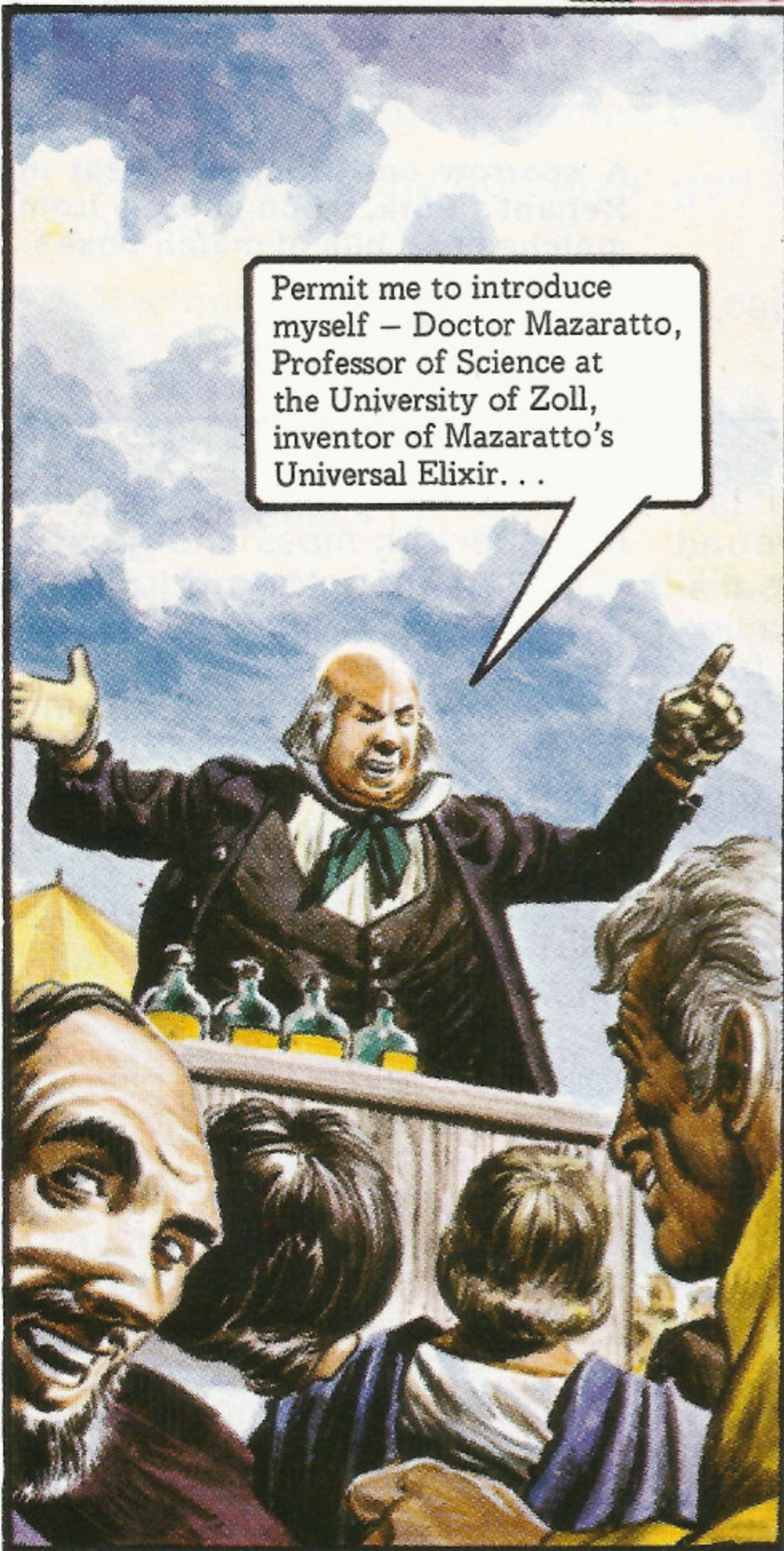
Count me in.

THAT AFTERNOON, THE THREE PILOTS STROLLED THROUGH THE CROWDED FAIRGROUND.



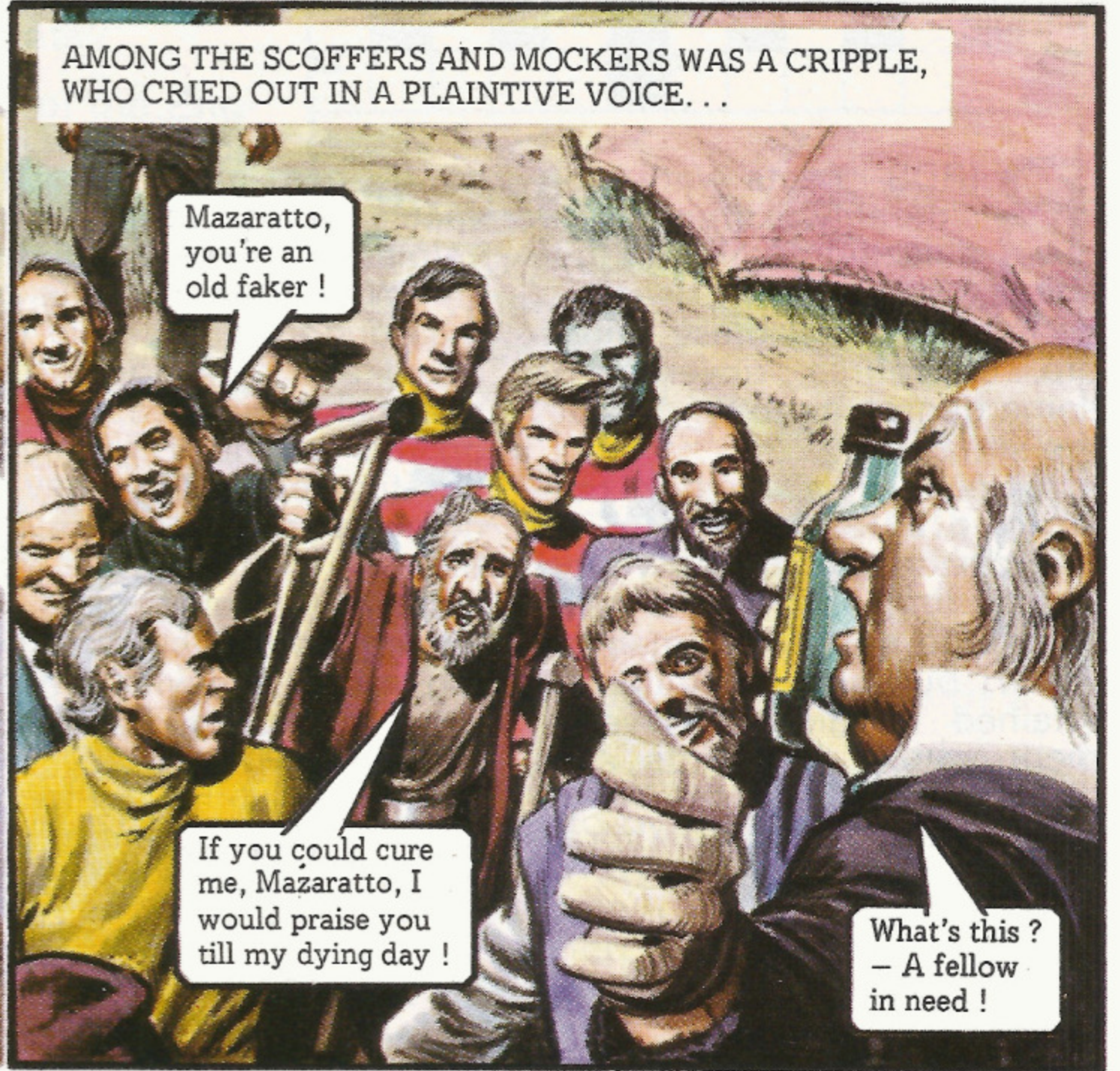
Look. A genuine fake medicine man of the sort I haven't seen since I was a boy!

Permit me to introduce myself - Doctor Mazaratto, Professor of Science at the University of Zoll, inventor of Mazaratto's Universal Elixir...



Mazaratto's Universal Elixir, my friends, is a never-failing remedy for headache, toothache, falling hair, weakness in the joints, disturbances of the digestion...

AMONG THE SCOFFERS AND MOCKERS WAS A CRIPPLE, WHO CRIED OUT IN A PLAINITIVE VOICE...

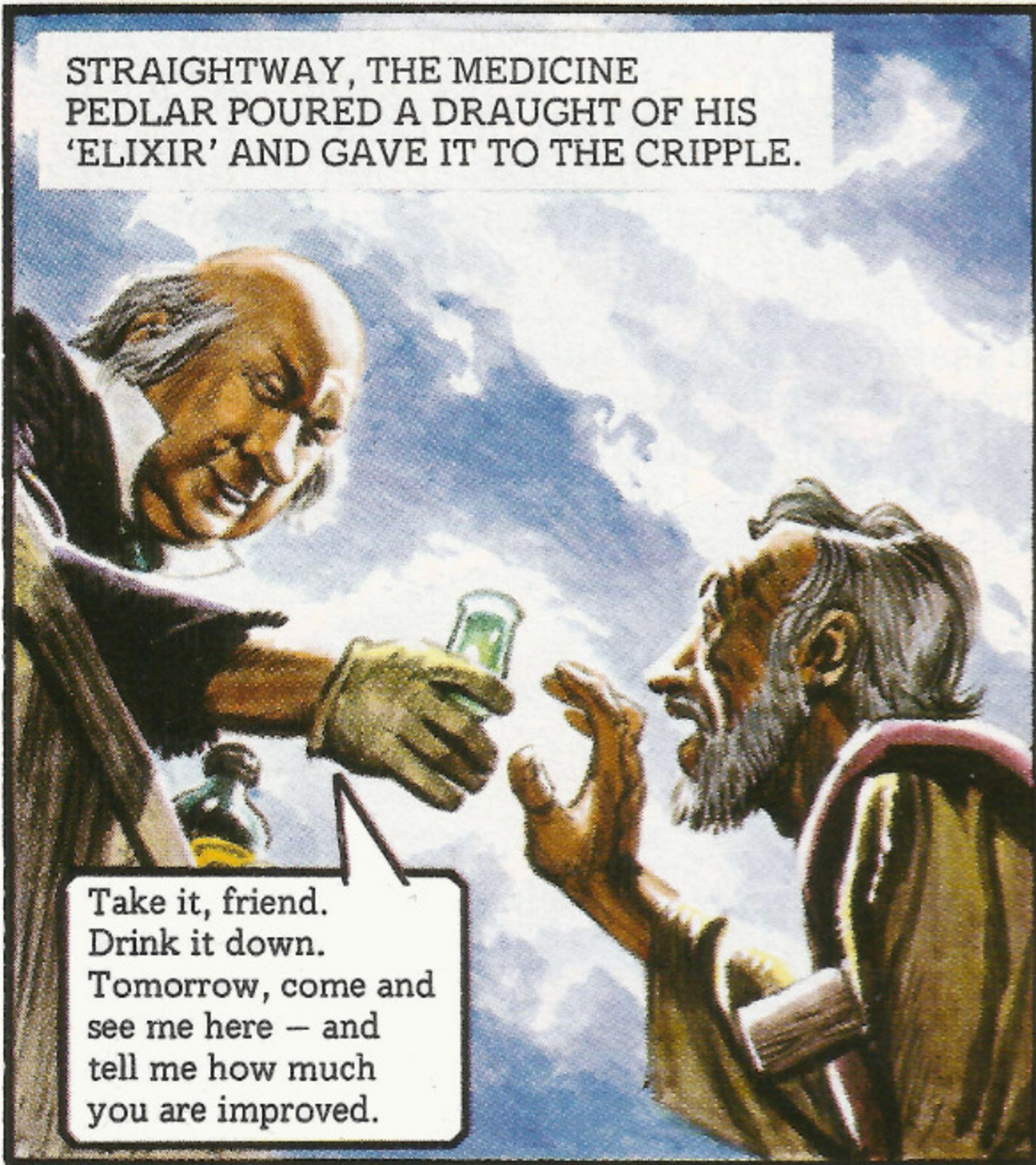


Mazaratto, you're an old faker!

If you could cure me, Mazaratto, I would praise you till my dying day!

What's this? - A fellow in need!

STRAIGHTWAY, THE MEDICINE PEDLAR POURED A DRAUGHT OF HIS 'ELIXIR' AND GAVE IT TO THE CRIPPLE.



Take it, friend. Drink it down. Tomorrow, come and see me here - and tell me how much you are improved.

A FEW PEOPLE BOUGHT THE ELIXIR, BUT NOT MANY. JANNO AND HIS COMPANIONS MOVED AWAY, SMILING. BUT...

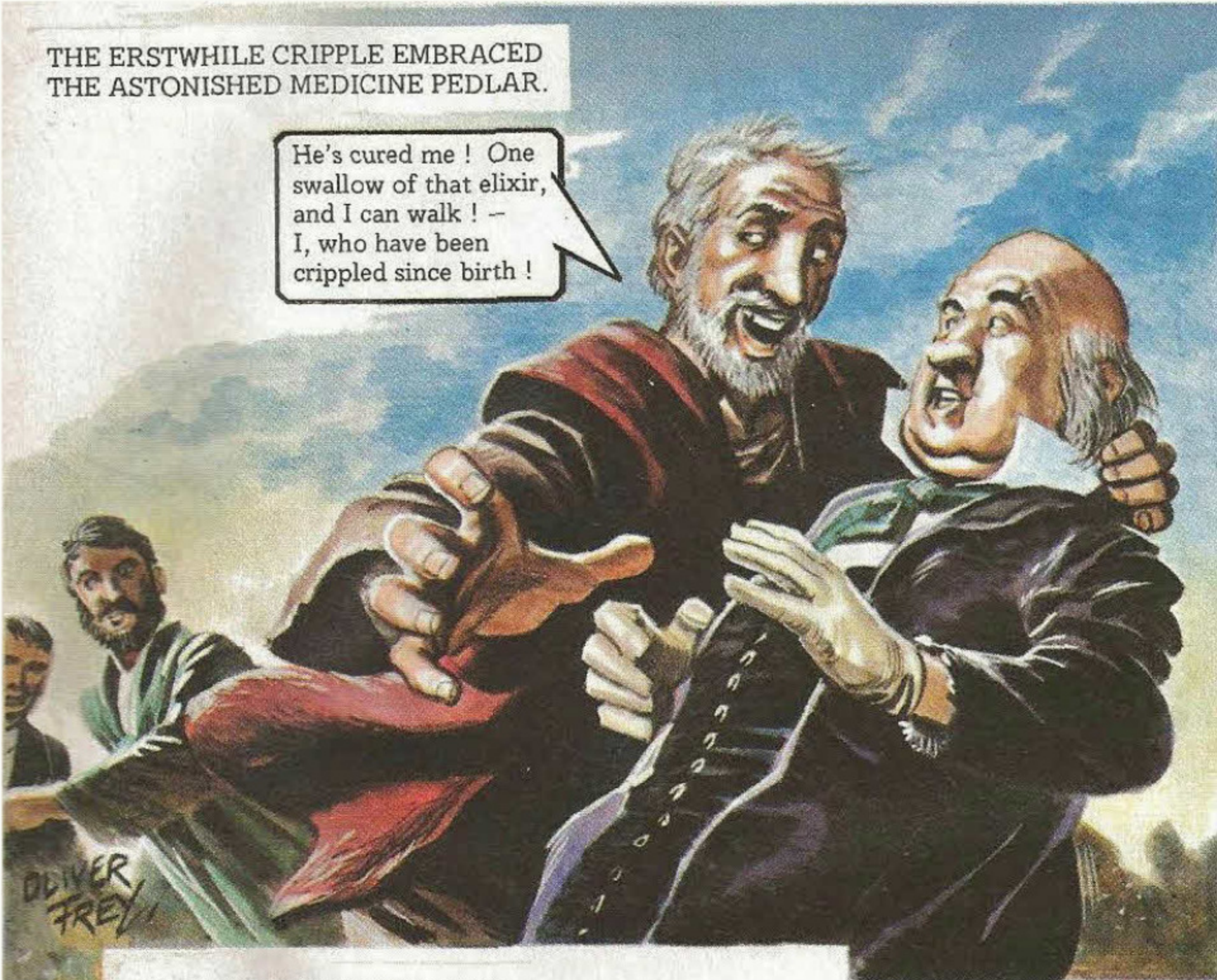
Hey! - Look! - Look what's happened!



Look at me! Look at me!

THE ERSTWHILE CRIPPLE EMBRACED THE ASTONISHED MEDICINE PEDLAR.

He's cured me! One swallow of that elixir, and I can walk! - I, who have been crippled since birth!

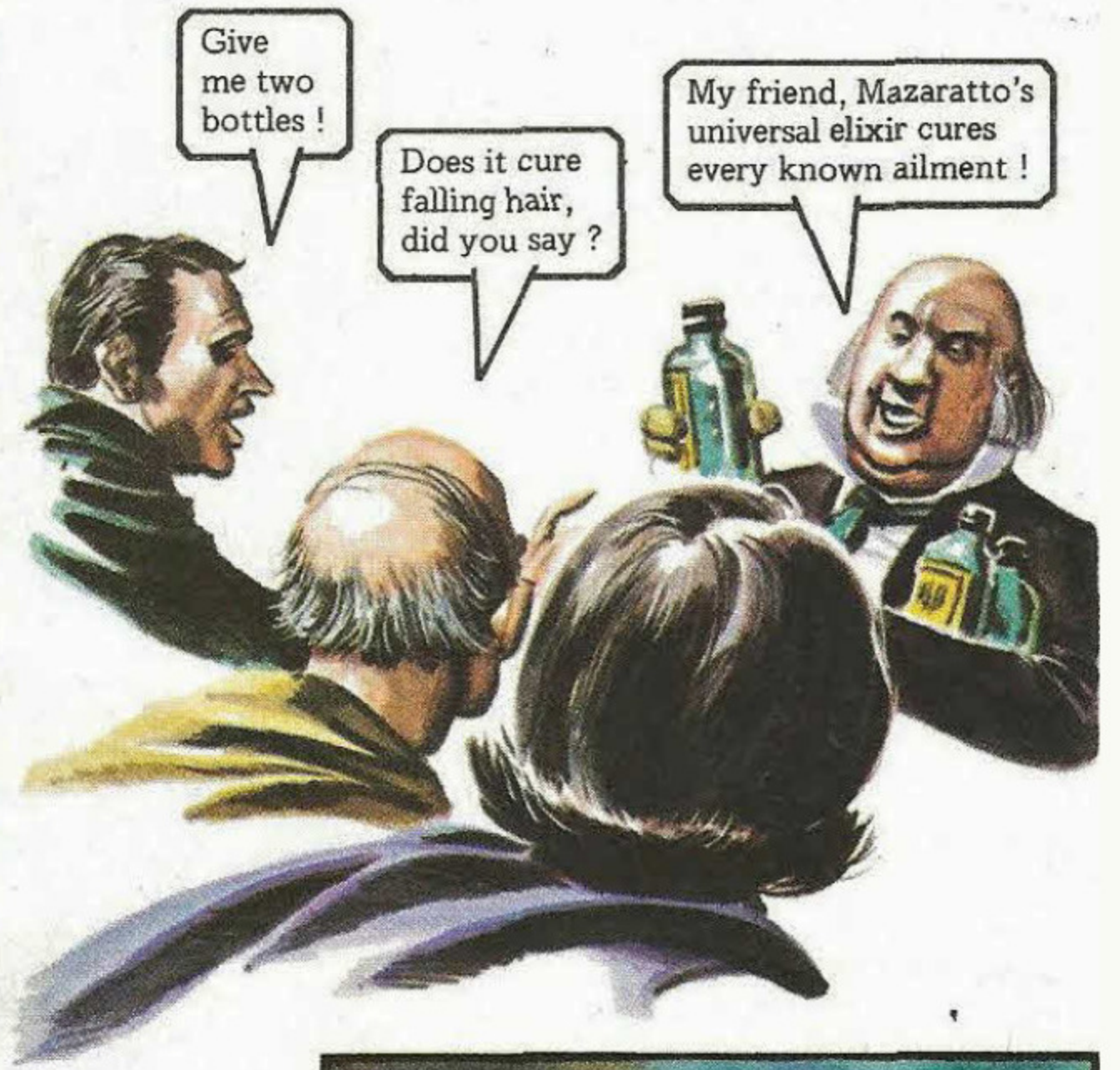


THOSE WHO HAD SCOFFED WERE NOW CROWDING ROUND TO BUY.

Give me two bottles!

Does it cure falling hair, did you say?

My friend, Mazaratto's universal elixir cures every known ailment!



JANNO, KEREN AND ROFFA WATCHED AND WONDERED.



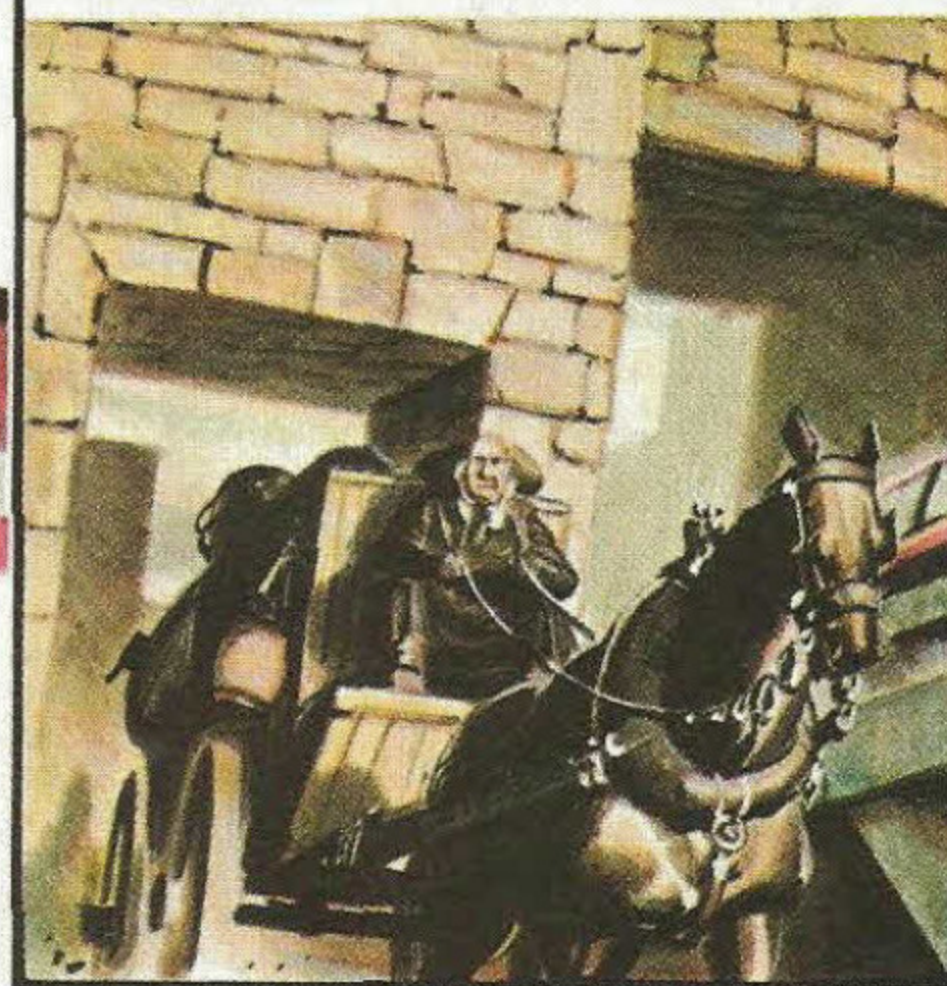
Strange thing, that.

Genuine - or fake?

I wonder?...

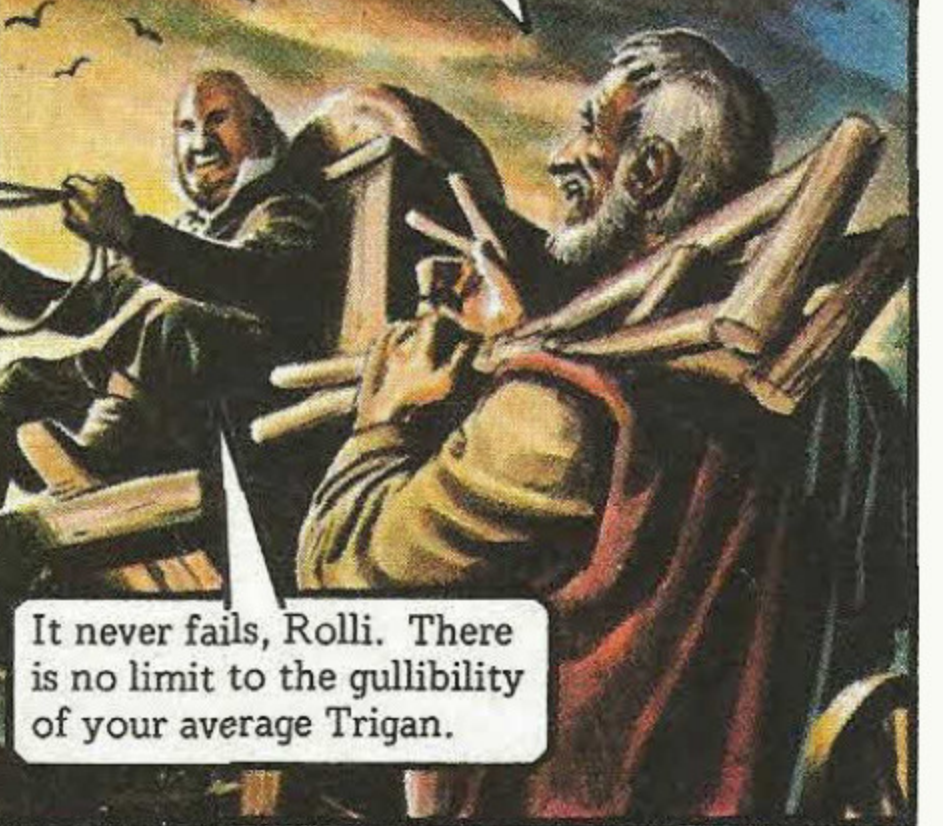
THE TWO ROGUES HAD BEEN WORKING THE FAKE MEDICINE TRICK FOR MANY LUNAR YEARS. THEY MADE CAMP BY THE ROADSIDE.

EVENING CAME, AND DOCTOR MAZARATTO PACKED UP HIS BELONGINGS ON A CART AND LEFT THE CITY FOR ANOTHER FAIR.



SOME DISTANCE FROM THE CITY, HE CAME UPON A FIGURE WAITING BY THE ROADSIDE.

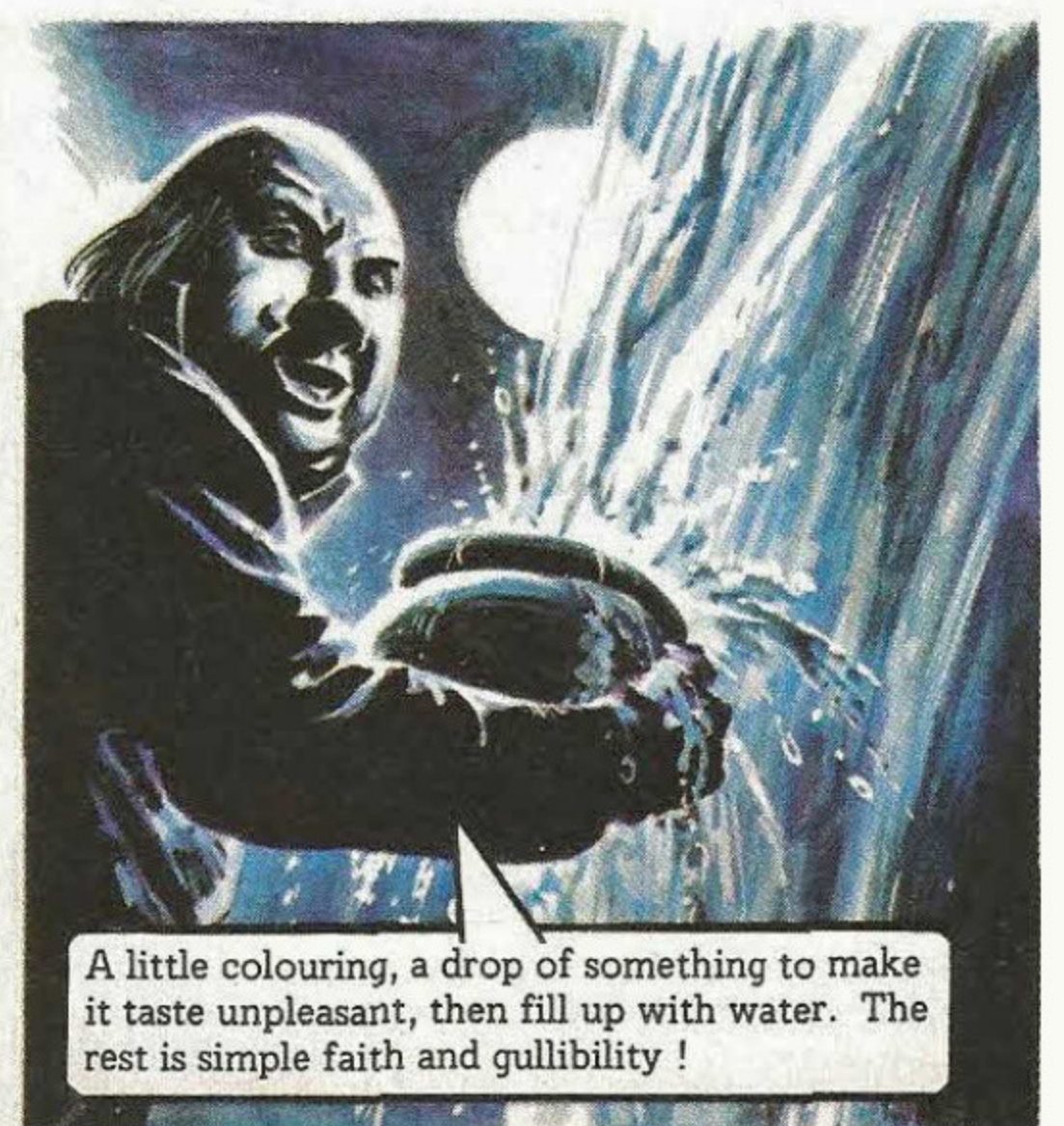
Hello, old friend. We did well in Trigan City.



It never fails, Rolli. There is no limit to the gullibility of your average Trigan.



Better mix up some more of the elixir.



A little colouring, a drop of something to make it taste unpleasant, then fill up with water. The rest is simple faith and gullibility!

TWO LUNAR MONTHS AFTER THE EVENTS JUST RECORDED, A FAST PATROL CRAFT OF THE TRIGAN FLEET WAS ON A PRACTICE RUN IN THE BAY.

Prepare for a simulated attack on the bridge!

Very good, sir!

THE SPEEDY LITTLE CRAFT PACKED A MIGHTY PUNCH.

On course, sir! Ready to fire!

THERE THE SIMULATED ATTACK SHOULD HAVE ENDED - BUT THE CAPTAIN'S FINGER DESCENDED UPON THE FIRING BUTTON!

BLAM!

Have you gone insane?

That projectile's going to hit the support of the bridge!

HARDLY WERE THE HORRIFIED WORDS OUT OF THE SECOND OFFICER'S MOUTH, THAN - WHO-O-O-OMPH!

We're done for! - Aaaaaah!

THE COLLAPSE OF THE BRIDGE AND THE ENSUING TRAIN DISASTER WERE RECORDED IN THE ANNALS OF THE EMPIRE AS ONE OF THE WORST EVER.

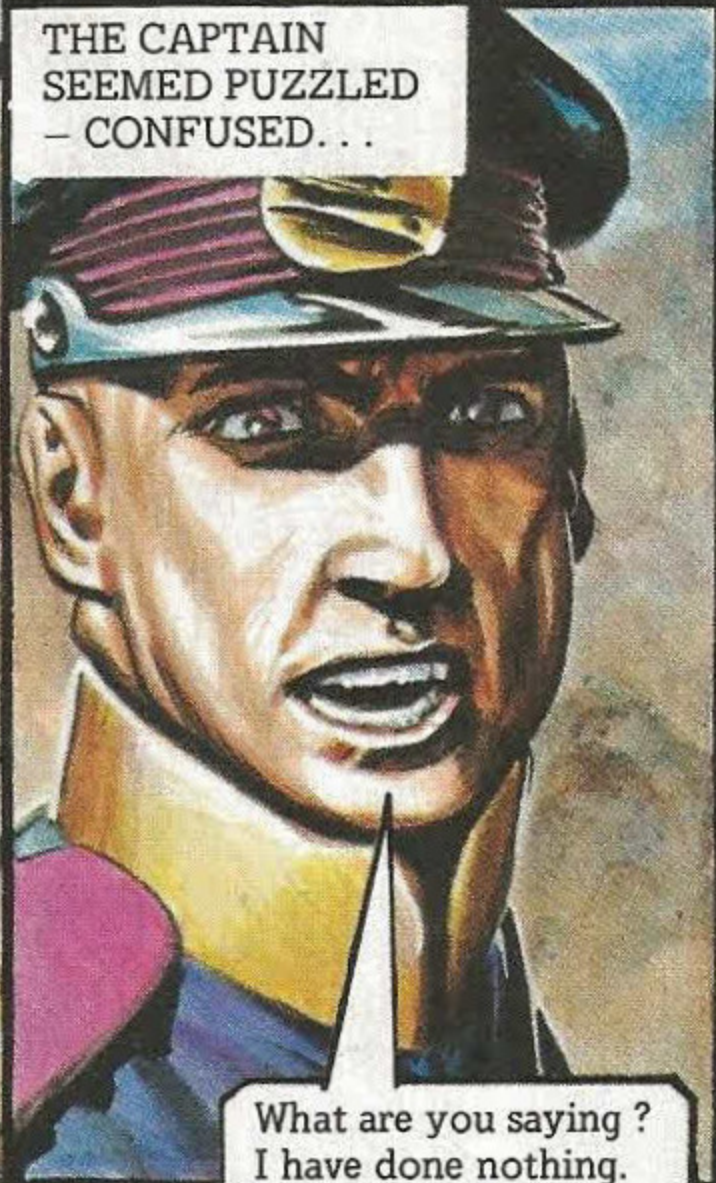


THE CAPTAIN OF THE PATROL CRAFT FACED THE FURY OF HIS FIRST OFFICER.

Look what you've done, you murderous animal! There can't be a single survivor from that train!



What-what are you saying?



THE CAPTAIN SEEMED PUZZLED - CONFUSED...

What are you saying? I have done nothing. I don't understand...

THE PERPETRATOR OF THE DISASTER WAS, NATURALLY, PUT UNDER ARREST. INVESTIGATORS OF THE FEARED SPECIAL BRANCH SEARCHED HIS TRIGAN CITY APARTMENT.



If he's in the pay of a foreign power, he's certainly covered his tracks pretty well.

Don't they all? Isn't that the way with traitors?

THEY FOUND ONE ITEM THAT CAUSED THEM A BRIEF MOMENT OF PUZZLEMENT...



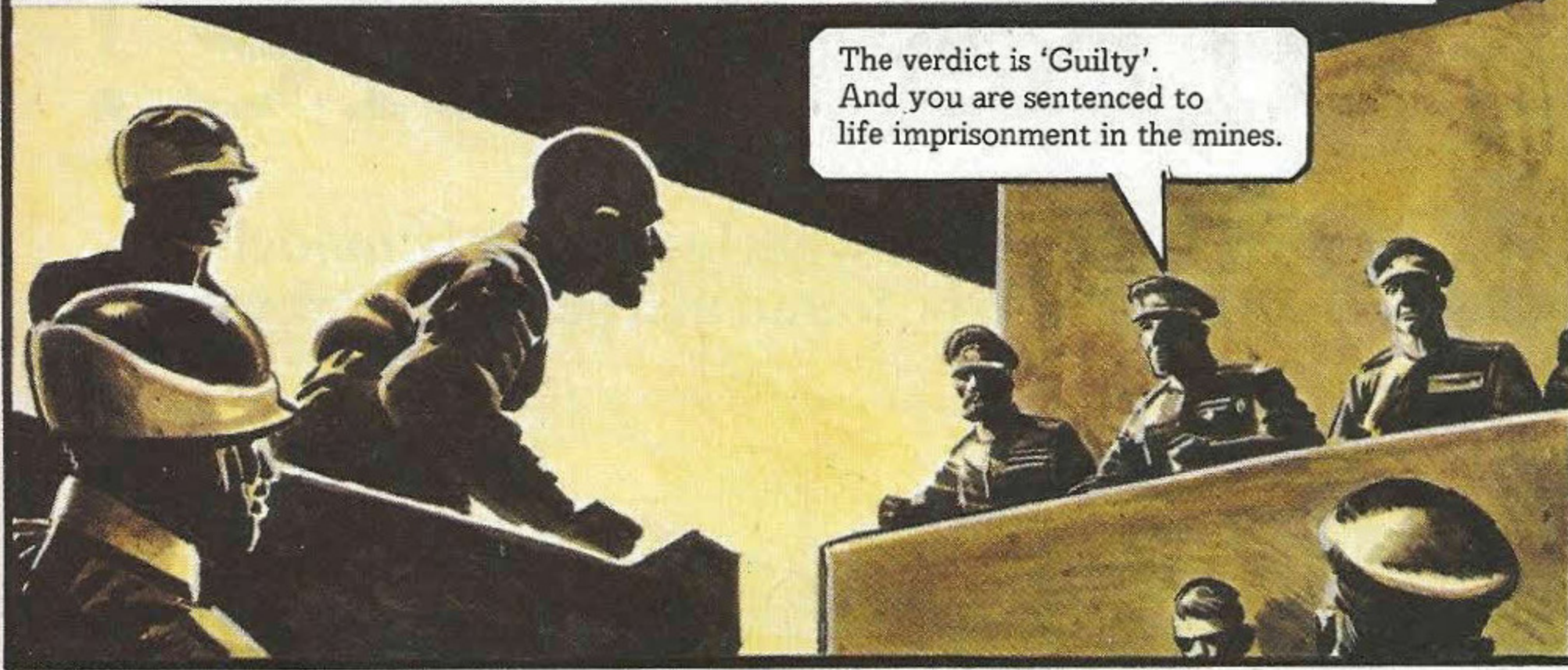
'Dr. Mazaratto's Universal Elixir'.

What did you say?

That's what it says on this bottle!

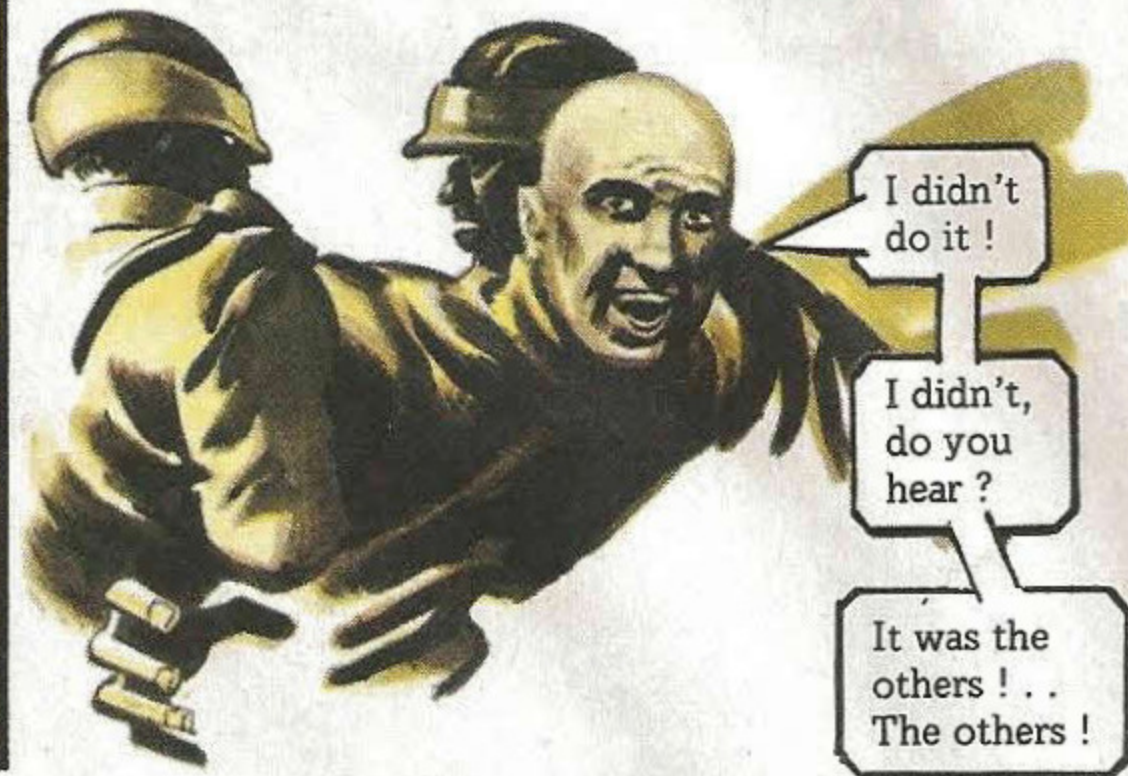
Why don't you get on with your search and stop messing about with trivia?

IN DUE COURSE, THE CAPTAIN OF THE PATROL CRAFT WAS ARRAIGNED BEFORE A TRIGAN NAVY COURT MARTIAL. THE CHARGE WAS: 'CRIMINAL NEGLIGENCE'. THERE WAS NO OTHER CRIME IN THE BOOK THAT FITTED THE CASE.



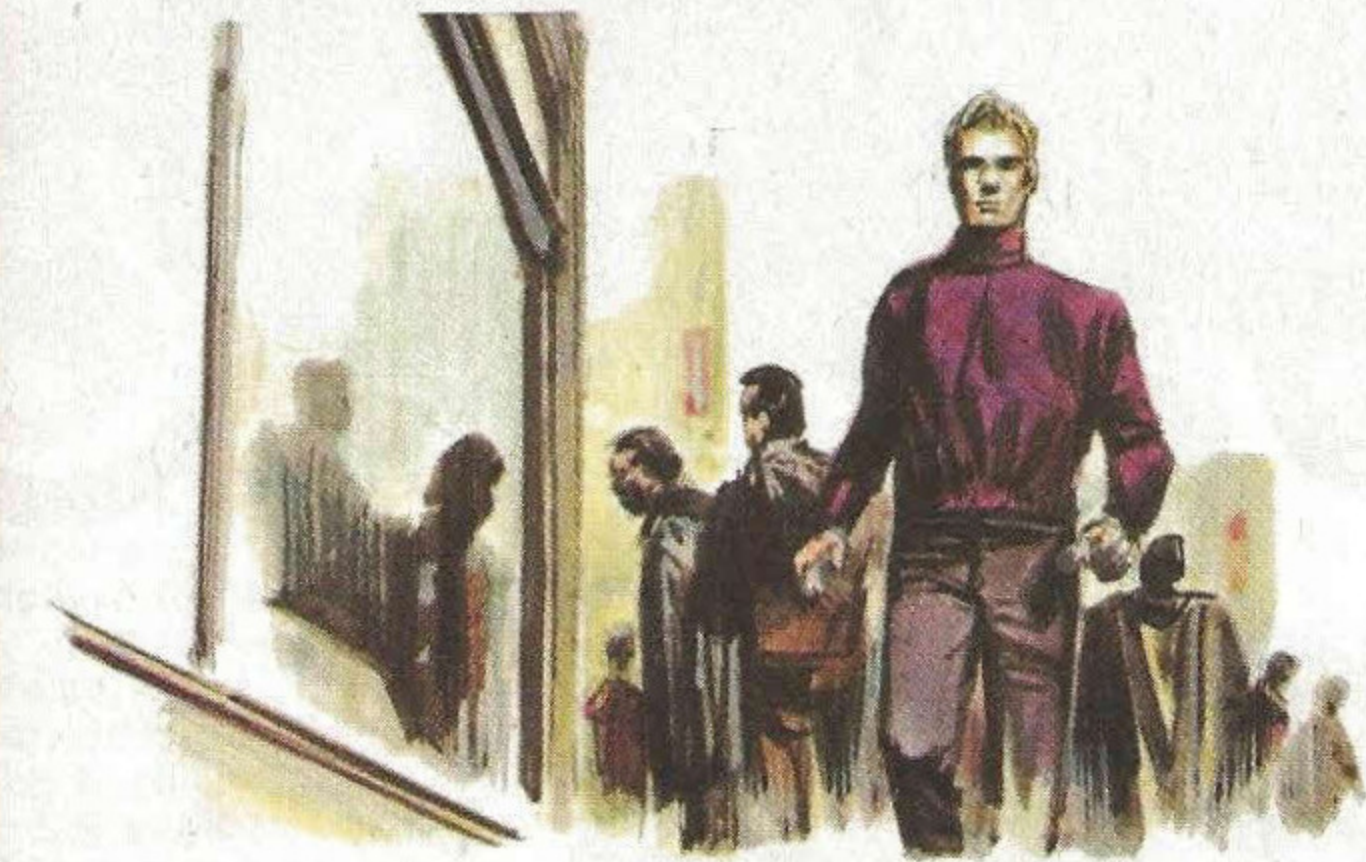
The verdict is 'Guilty'.
And you are sentenced to
life imprisonment in the mines.

THE DREADED MINES SPELT AN EARLY DEATH. THE WRETCHED CREATURE WAS DRAGGED AWAY SCREAMING HIS INNOCENCE.



I didn't
do it !
I didn't,
do you
hear ?
It was the
others ! . .
The others !

A LUNAR MONTH WENT BY. JANNO WAS WALKING ALONG ONE OF THE BROAD BOULEVARDS OF THE CITY . . .



AND THEN - IT HAPPENED !



By all
the stars ! . .

ANOTHER PROJECTILE SCREAMED CLOSE BY THE NEWCOMER. AND JANNO SAW FROM WHENCE IT CAME . . .

JANNO DIVED FOR THE PAVEMENT, SHOUTING A WARNING TO AN APPROACHING PEDESTRIAN.



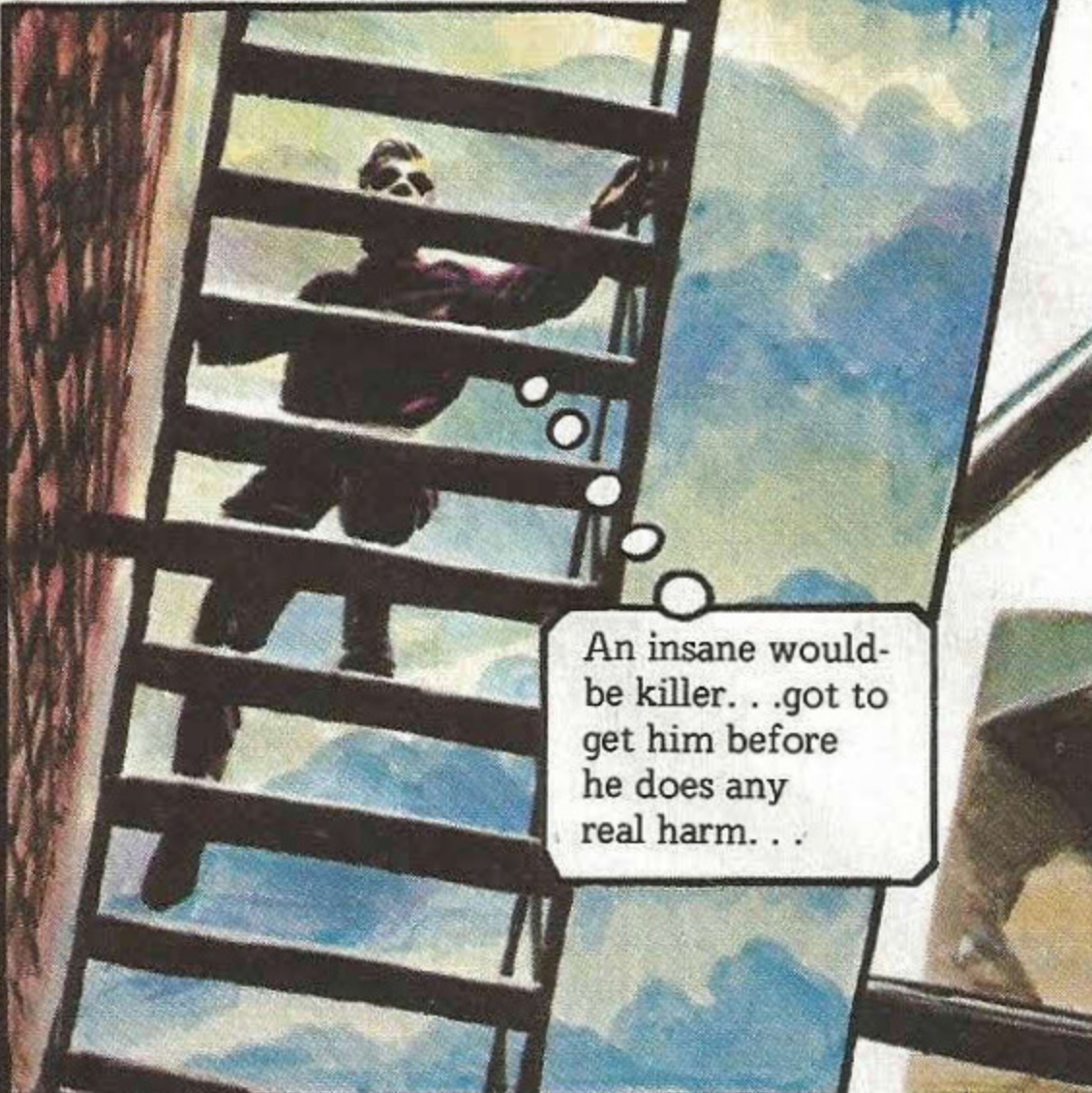
Fall flat on
your face, or
you're dead !

Huh ?

There he is ! -
On that roof-
top opposite !



A BREAKNECK DASH ACROSS THE STREET, AND THE YOUNG AIR FLEET PILOT WAS SWARMING UP A FIRE ESCAPE . . .



An insane would-
be killer . . . got to
get him before
he does any
real harm . . .

OUT ON THE FLAT ROOF, THE MYSTERY SNIPER TURNED AT THE SOUND OF A FOOTFALL. AND JANNO LEAPT . . .



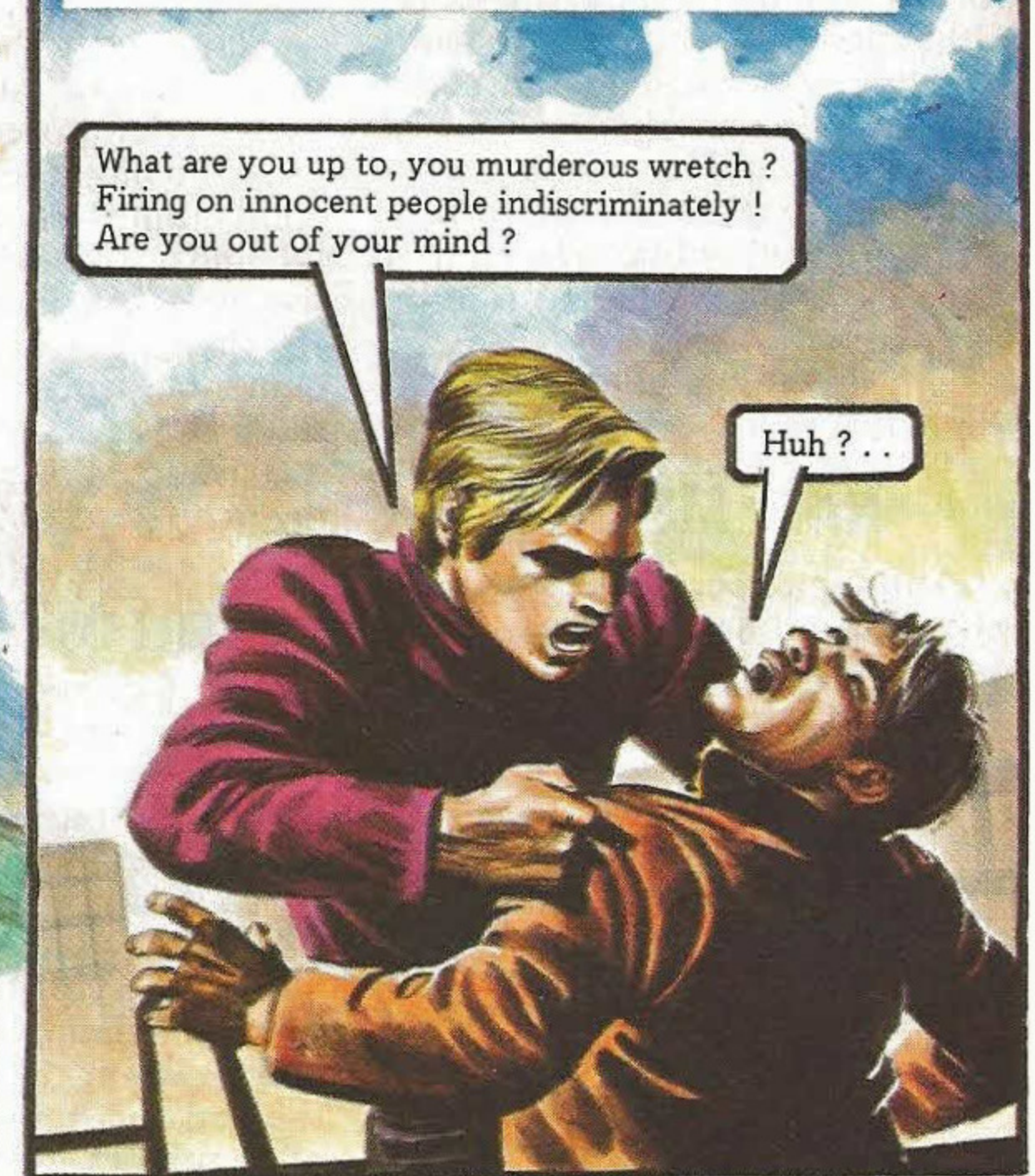
THE PROJECTILE ZAPPED OVER JANNO'S BENT HEAD AS HE CONNECTED WITH HIS QUARRY !



Aaaaaghh !

OLIVER FREY

THE YOUNG AIR FLEET PILOT DRAGGED THE HALF-CONSCIOUS SNIPER TO HIS FEET.



What are you up to, you murderous wretch ? Firing on innocent people indiscriminately ! Are you out of your mind ?

Huh ? ..

THE TEAM OF INVESTIGATORS FROM THE SPECIAL BRANCH VISITED THE HOME OF THE ARRESTED SNIPER, WHO WAS FOUND TO BE A CERTAIN KLOSPOR, A CLERK AT THE MINISTRY OF TAXES, WHO LIVED WITH HIS WIDOWED MOTHER.

THE OTHER'S VOICE ROSE IN A TERRIFIED WAIL. . .



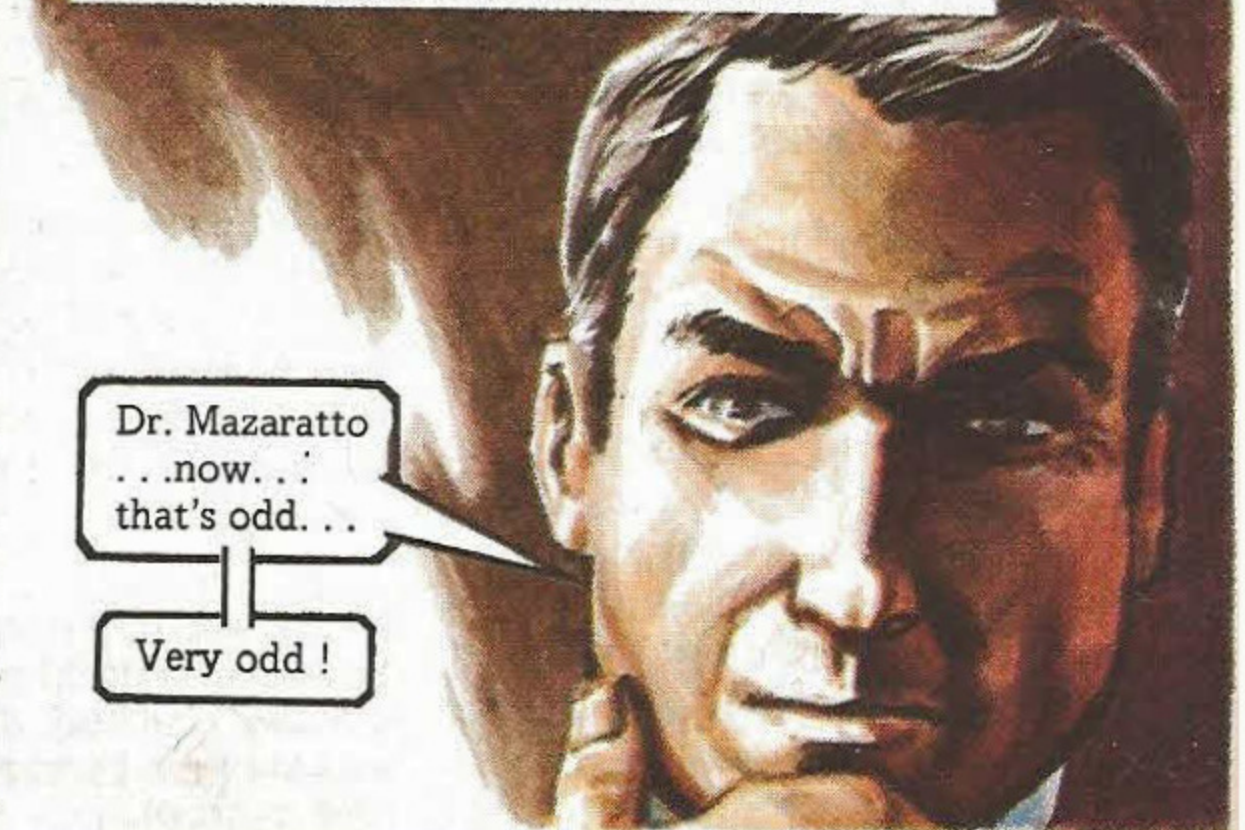
It isn't me. . . it's the others !

I tell you my boy's a good boy. Never hurt anyone in his life !



Did he have any problems ? Money problems ? Work problems ? Health problems ?

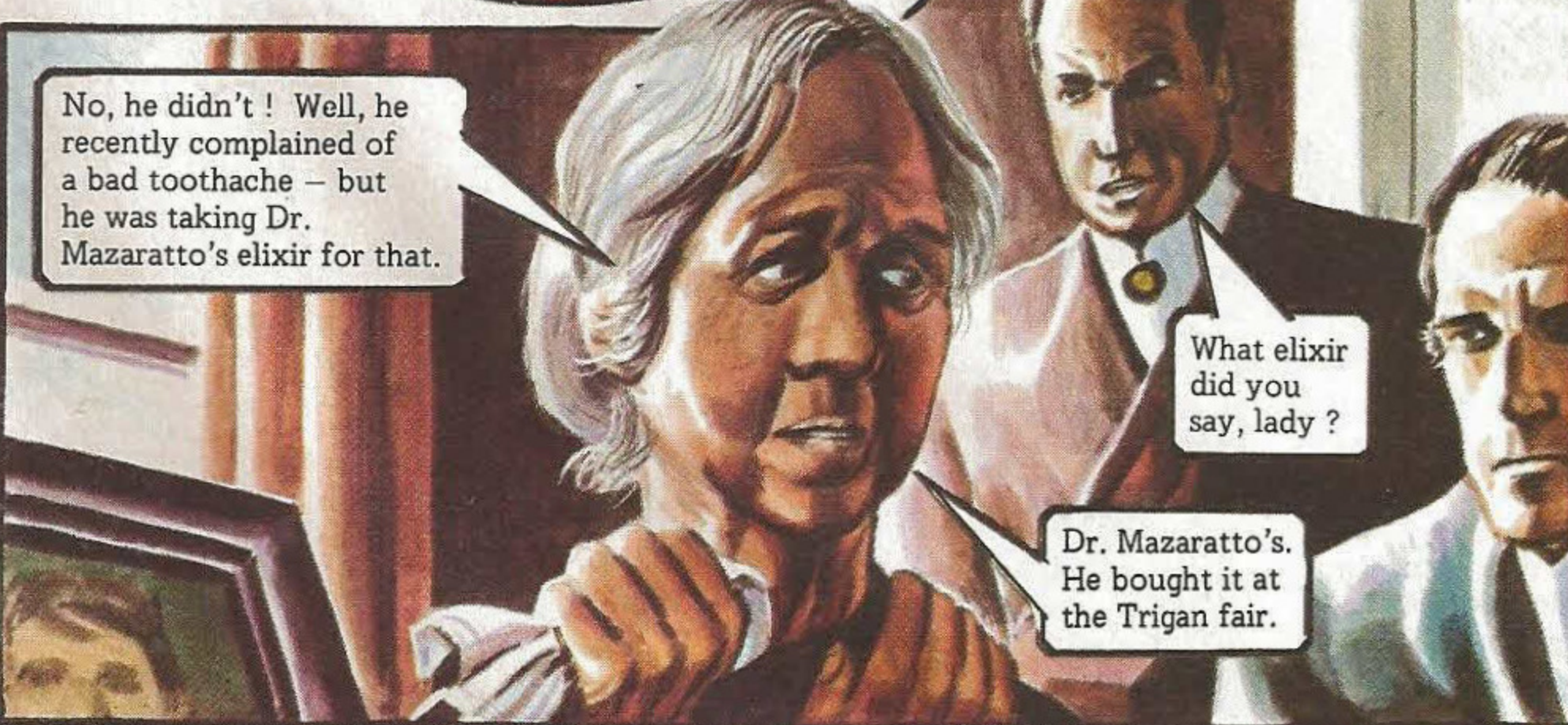
THE NAME STRUCK A CHORD OF MEMORY IN THE HIGHLY TRAINED MIND OF THE SPECIAL INVESTIGATOR. . .



Dr. Mazaratto . . . now . . . that's odd . . .

Very odd !

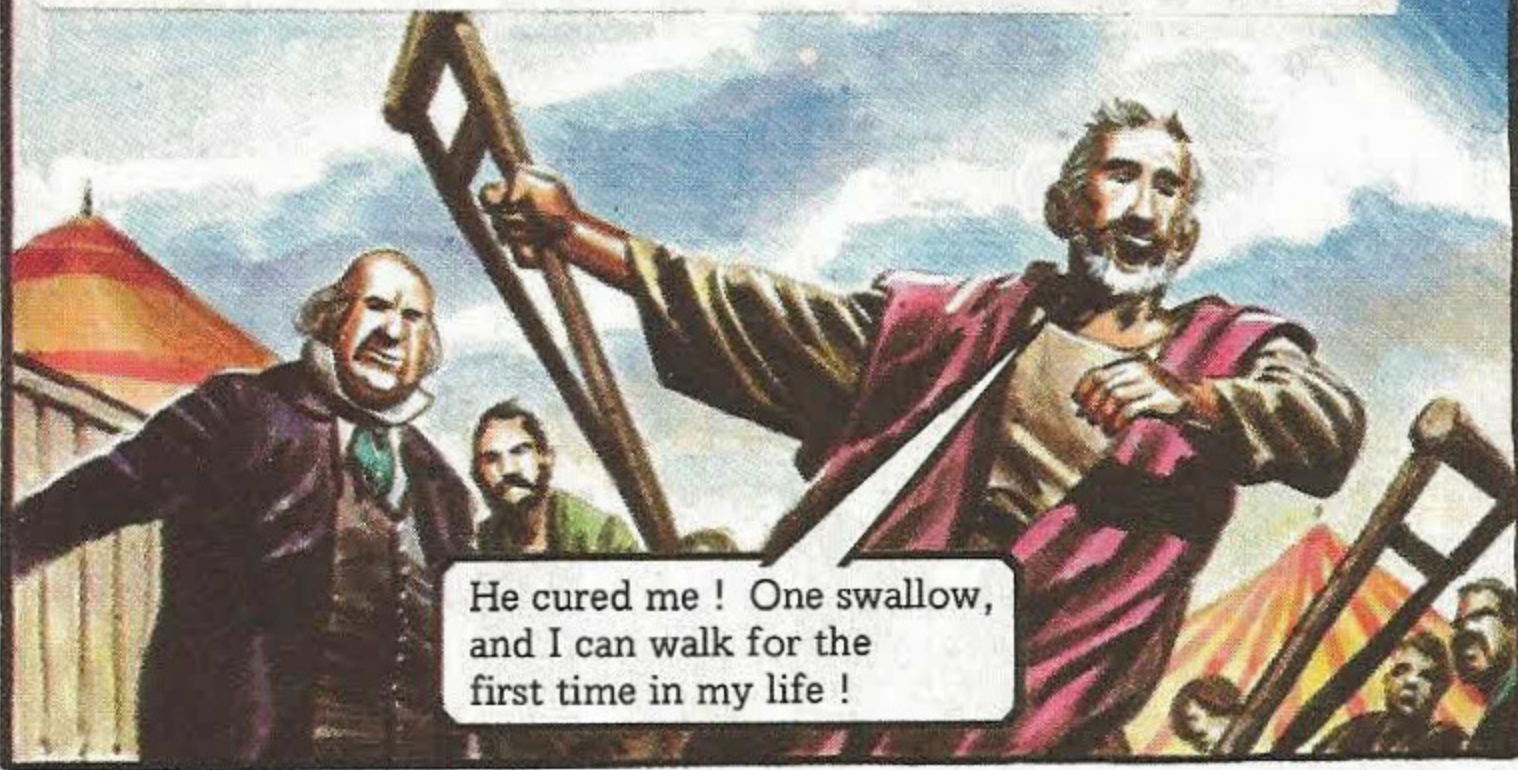
No, he didn't ! Well, he recently complained of a bad toothache - but he was taking Dr. Mazaratto's elixir for that.



What elixir did you say, lady ?

Dr. Mazaratto's. He bought it at the Trigan fair.

MEANWHILE, DR. MAZARATTO THE FAKE MEDICINE MAN WAS DOING GREAT BUSINESS AT A FAIR IN NEARBY CATO - LARGELY THANKS TO THE ACTING OF HIS ACCOMPLICE.



He cured me ! One swallow, and I can walk for the first time in my life !

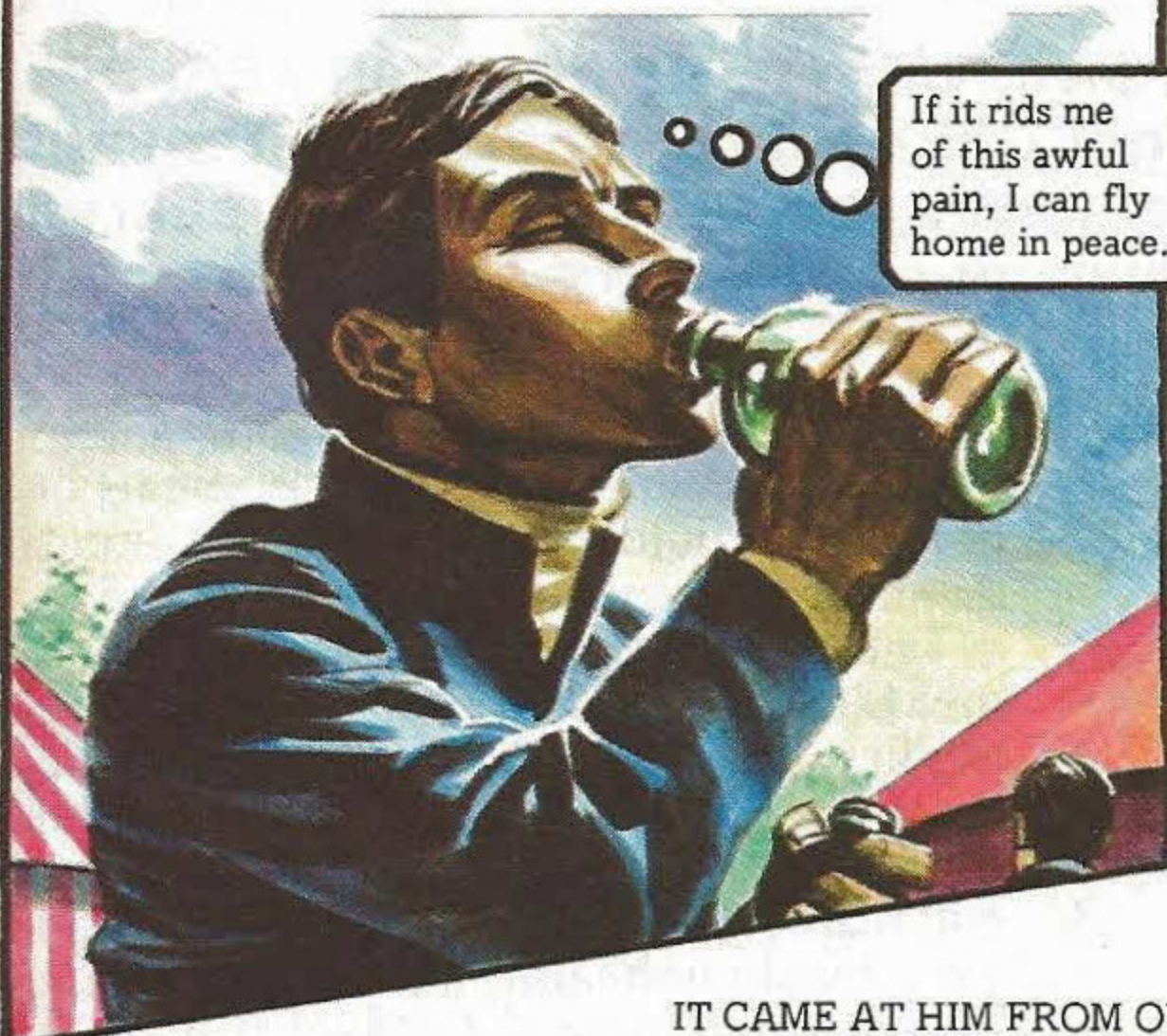
I'll take one !

Two for me !

One at a time, folks. Plenty for all.



ONE OF THE PURCHASERS WAS A PROSPEROUS YOUNG LAWYER NAMED ZELLI. HE SUFFERED AGONIES FROM HEADACHES, AND DID NOT WAIT TO LEAVE THE FAIR BEFORE HE PARTOOK OF THE ELIXIR.



If it rids me of this awful pain, I can fly home in peace.

BY THE TIME ZELLI REACHED HIS PRIVATE CRAFT, IT SEEMED TO HIM THAT THE PAIN HAD SOMEWHAT ABATED.



It may be my imagination, but I seem to feel a bit better. . .

IN THE AIR AND HEADING FOR HIS LUXURY VILLA OUT OF TOWN, HE SENSED - DANGER !



There's a craft following me ! . .

IT CAME AT HIM FROM OUT OF THE SUNS - SPITTING FLAME AND DESTRUCTION !



NEXT INSTANT, HIS COCKPIT WAS A SHAMBLES OF RIDDLED WRECKAGE !



ZELLI HAD TWO COURSES OPEN TO HIM: TO FLEE, OR TO TURN. HE TURNED...

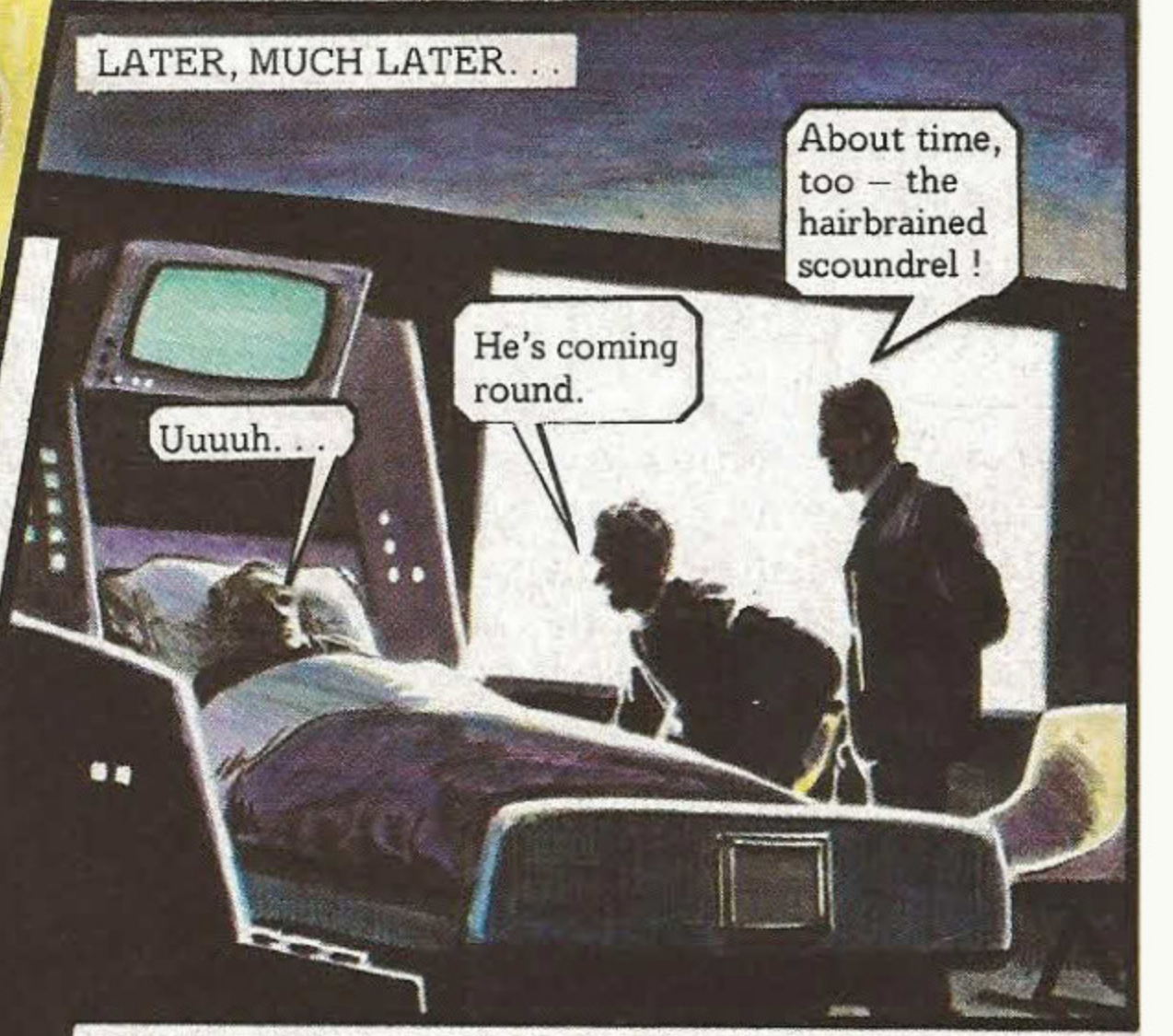


By the stars, I'll take you with me, you murderous animal!

THE INSTANT THAT HIS CRAFT STRUCK, ZELLI PULLED THE ESCAPE LEVER - AND KNEW NO MORE.



LATER, MUCH LATER...

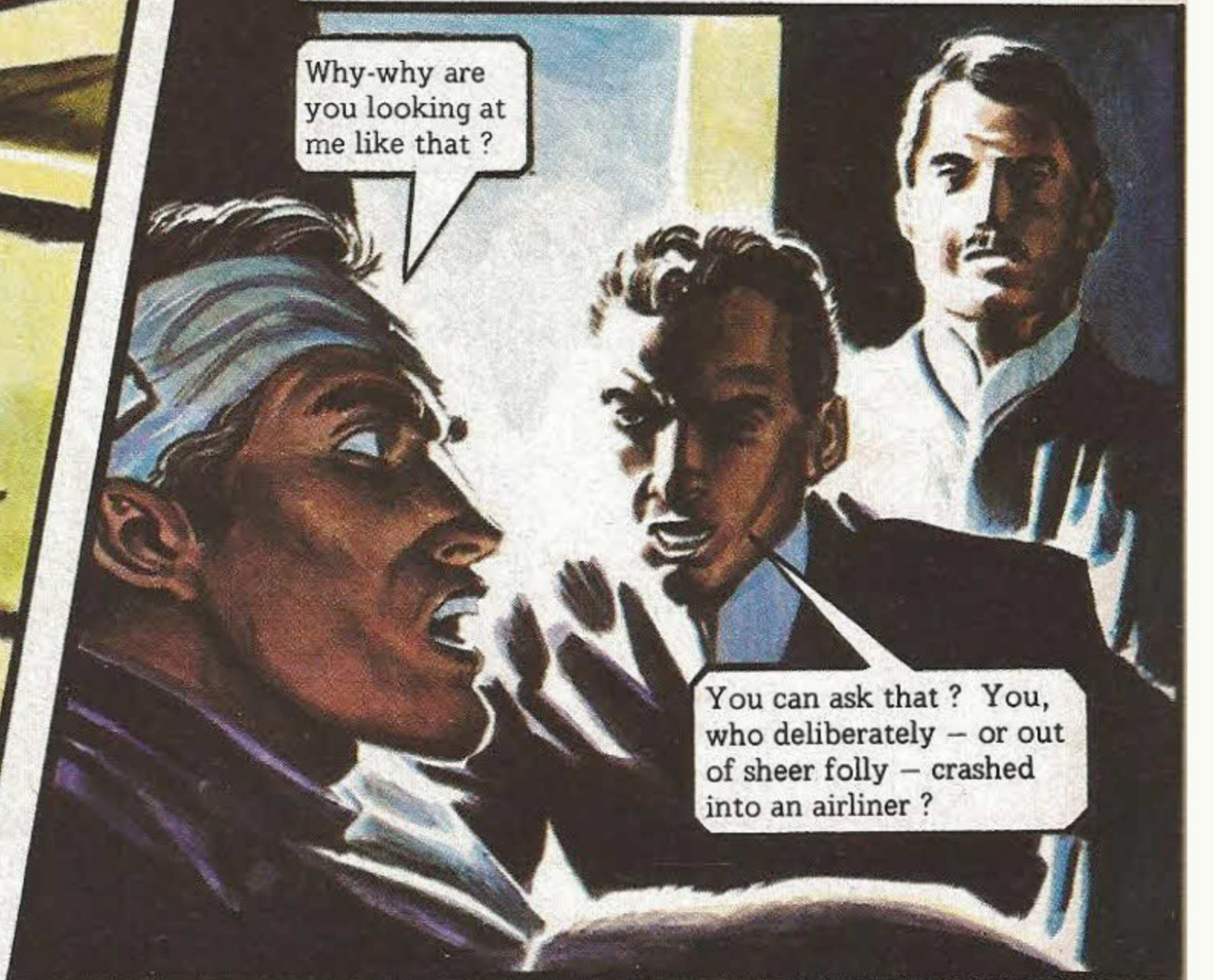


About time, too - the hairbrained scoundrel!

He's coming round.

Uuuuh...

Why-why are you looking at me like that?



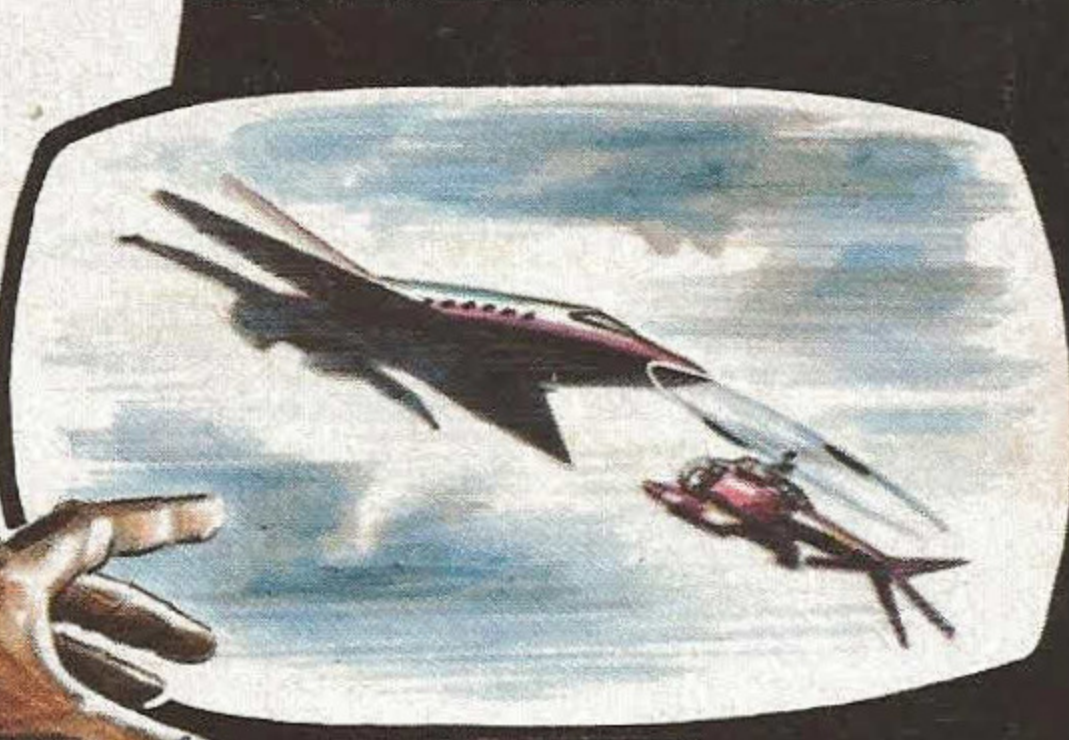
You can ask that? You, who deliberately - or out of sheer folly - crashed into an airliner?



An airliner? But – it was a fighter craft! And it attacked me first! Shot my cockpit to pieces!

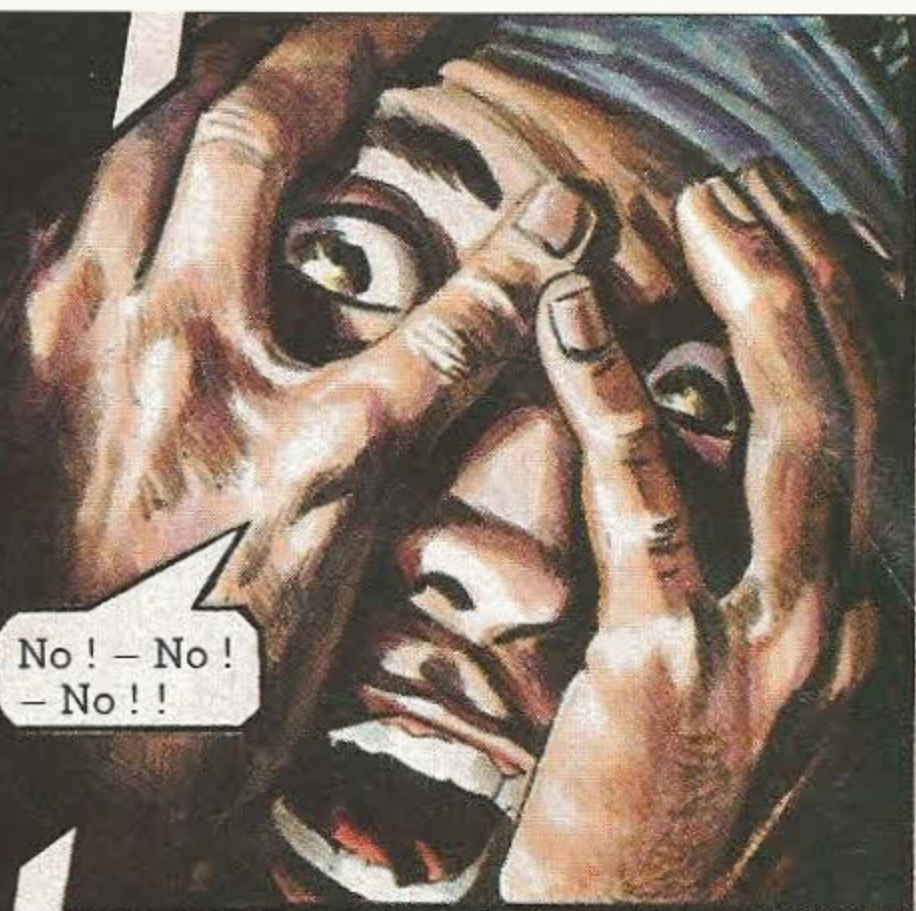
Save your lies, Zelli. We've got a telerecord of the whole thing, shot from the ground. Let him see it!

THE PICTURE SHOWED ZELLI'S UNDAMAGED CRAFT DIVING STRAIGHT FOR...

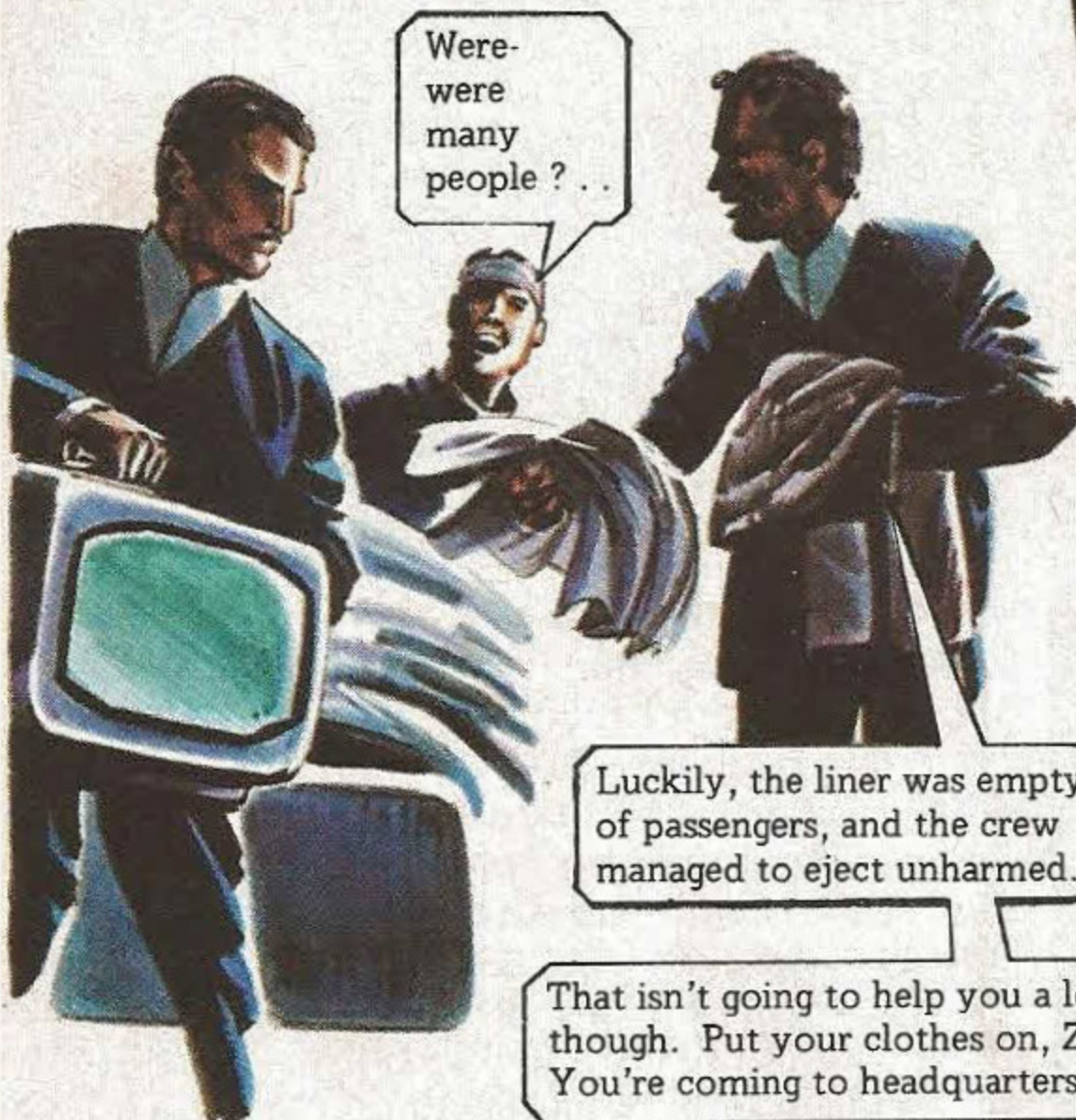


An unarmed airliner!

No! – No!
– No!!



IT WAS A BOTTLE – MIRACULOUSLY UNBROKEN.



Were there many people? ..

Luckily, the liner was empty of passengers, and the crew managed to eject unharmed.

That isn't going to help you a lot, though. Put your clothes on, Zelli. You're coming to headquarters!

LATER THAT DAY, INVESTIGATORS PICKING OVER THE WRECKAGE OF ZELLI'S CRAFT IN SEARCH OF CLUES, FOUND...



What's this in here?



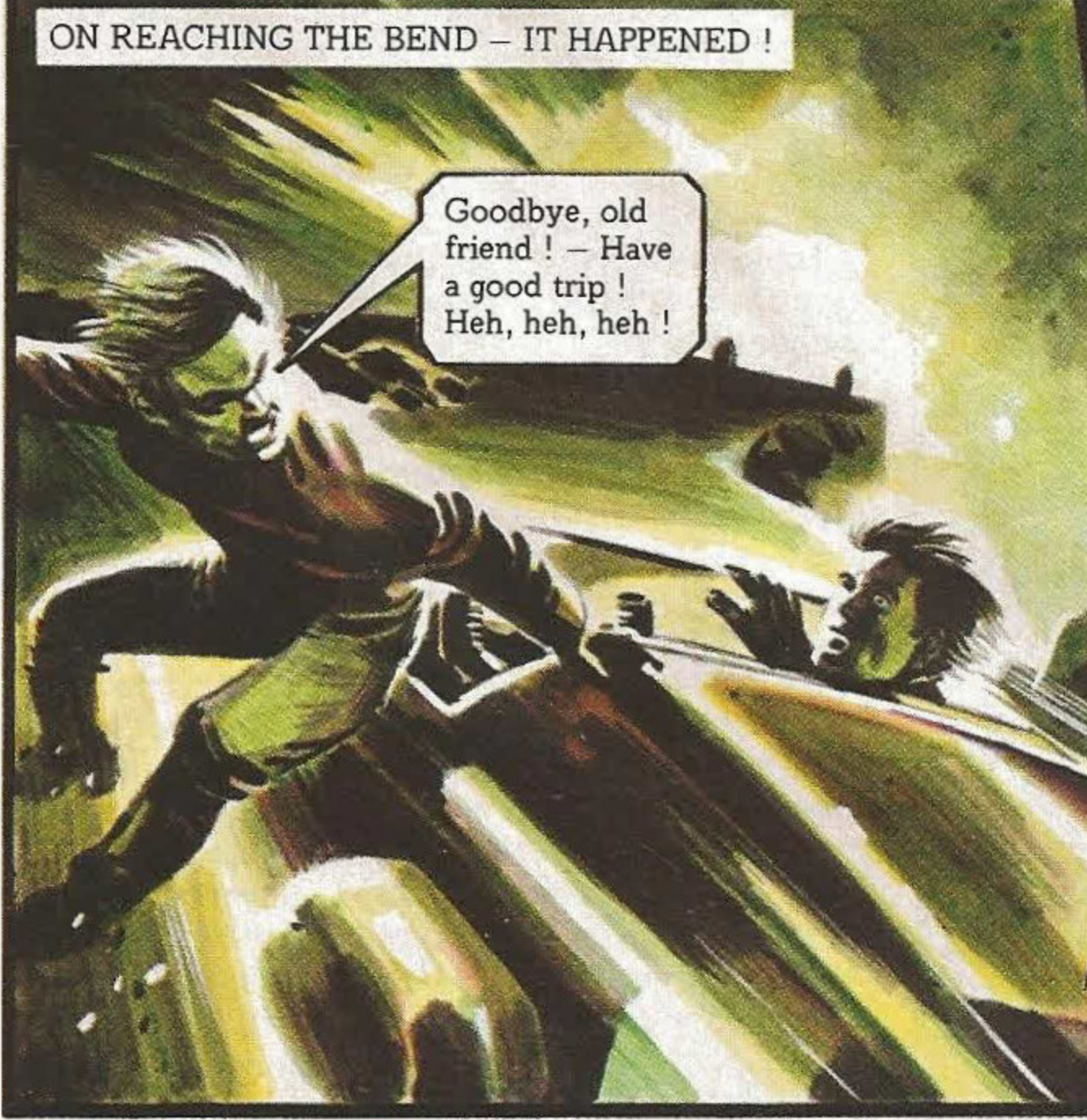
'Dr. Mazaratto's Universal Elixir'...

... Not again!

THAT EVENING, JANNO WAS GIVING HIS COMRADE ROFFA A LIFT TO THE AIR FLEET BASE. ROFFA WAS STRANGELY RESTLESS – NERVOUS...

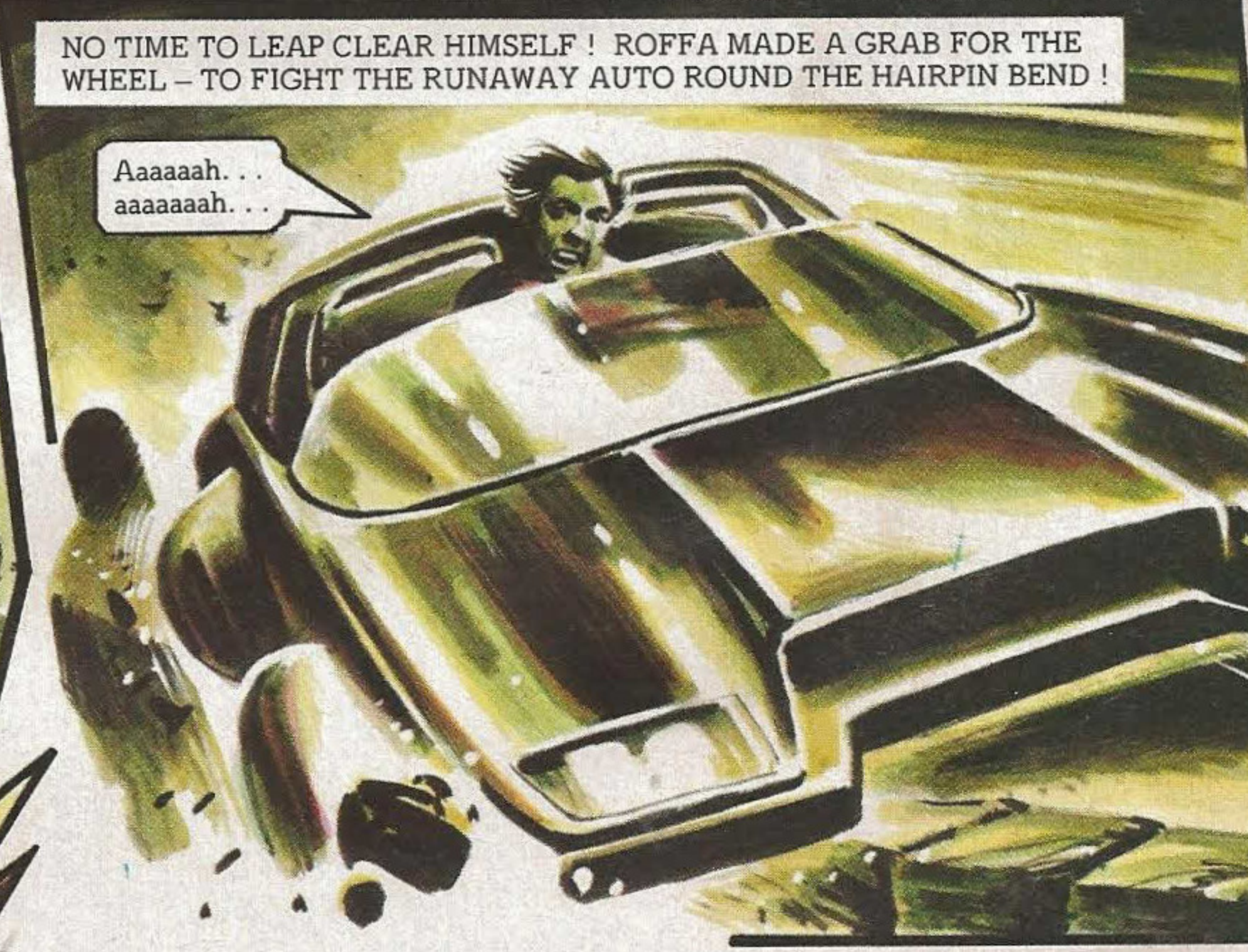


Careful on the next bend, Janno. Better brake now...



ON REACHING THE BEND – IT HAPPENED!

Goodbye, old friend! – Have a good trip! Heh, heh, heh!



NO TIME TO LEAP CLEAR HIMSELF! ROFFA MADE A GRAB FOR THE WHEEL – TO FIGHT THE RUNAWAY AUTO ROUND THE HAIRPIN BEND!

Aaaaaah...
aaaaaaah...

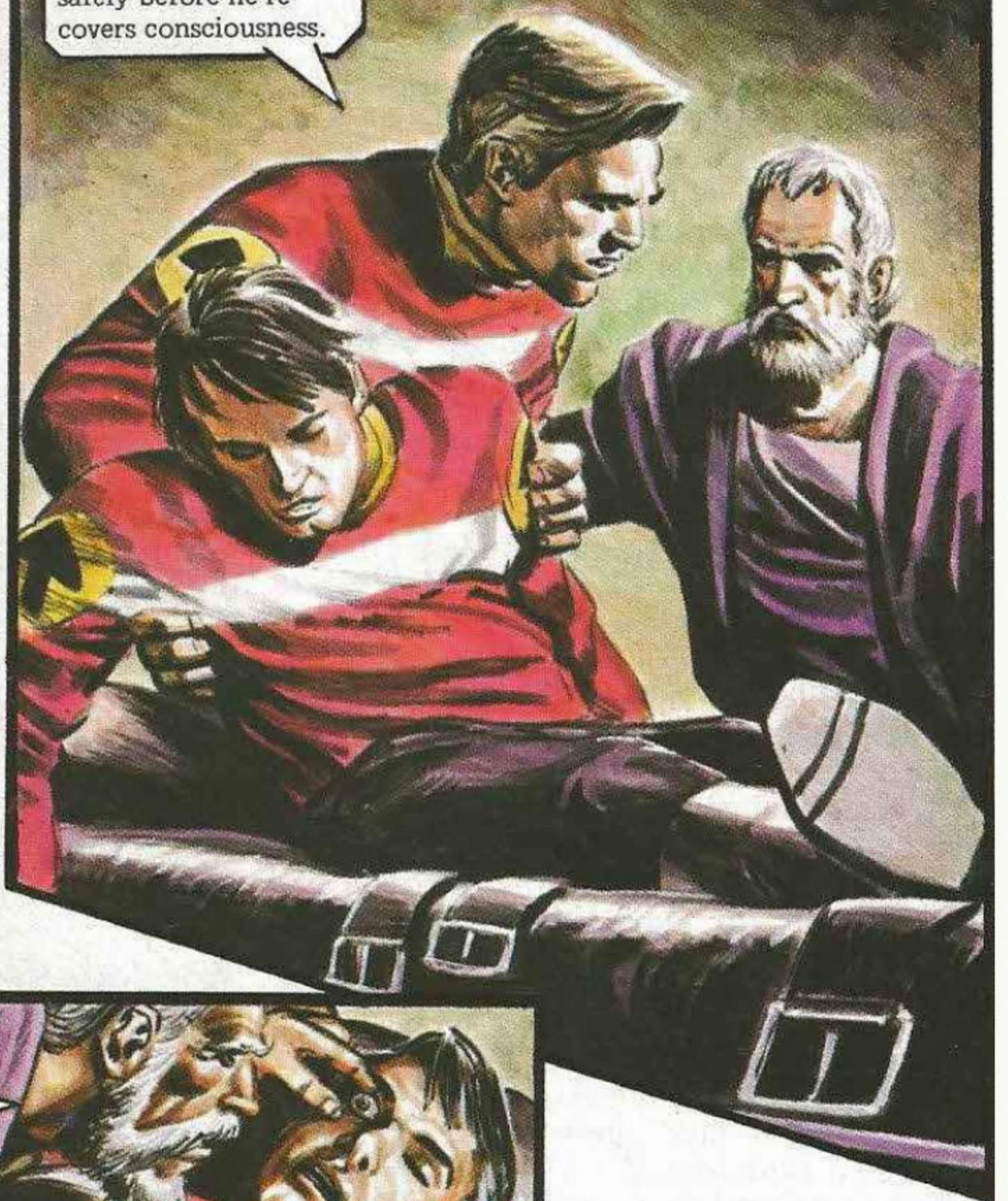
LATER THAT DAY, PERIC LOOKED UP FROM HIS LABORATORY BENCH, TO SEE JANNO – AND A STRANGE BURDEN.



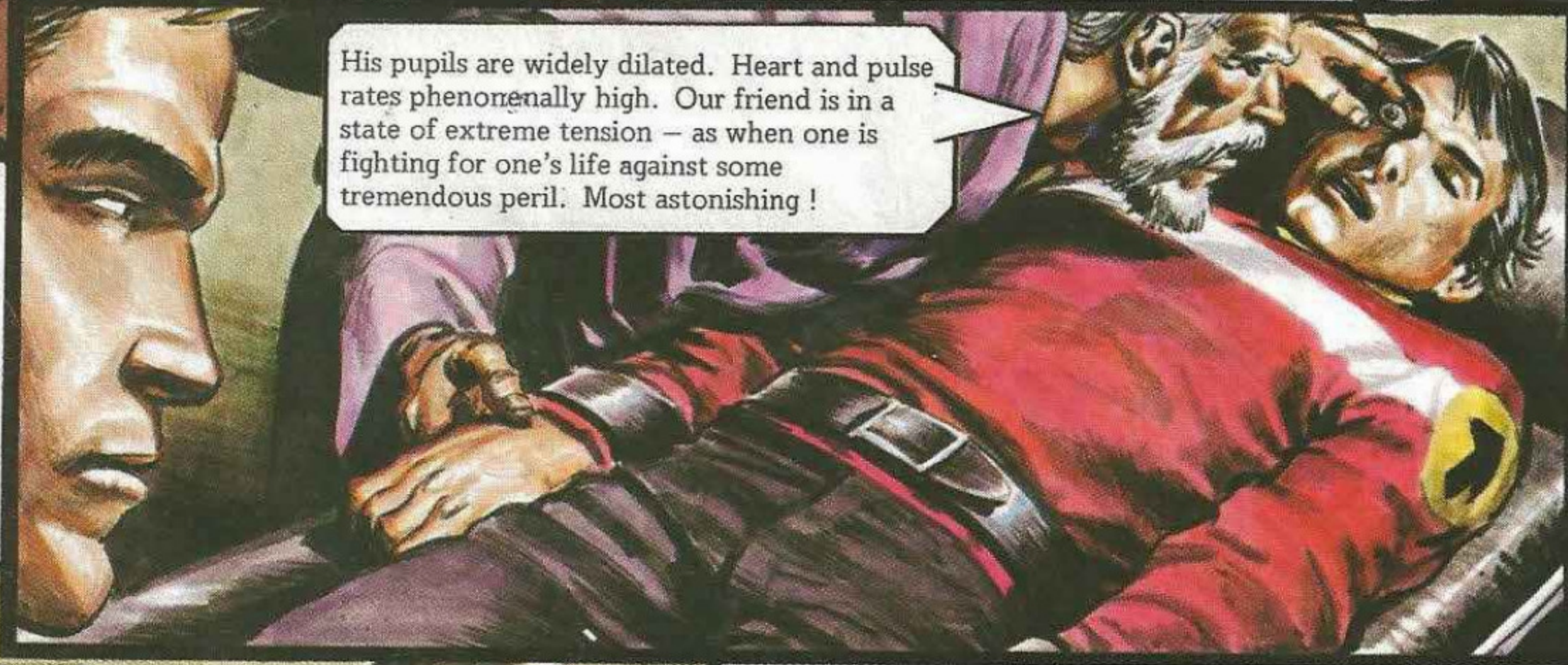
Janno!
Whatever? . . .

Who have
you got
there?

It's Roffa. I think he's
gone insane, Peric.
We'd better secure him
safely before he re-
covers consciousness.

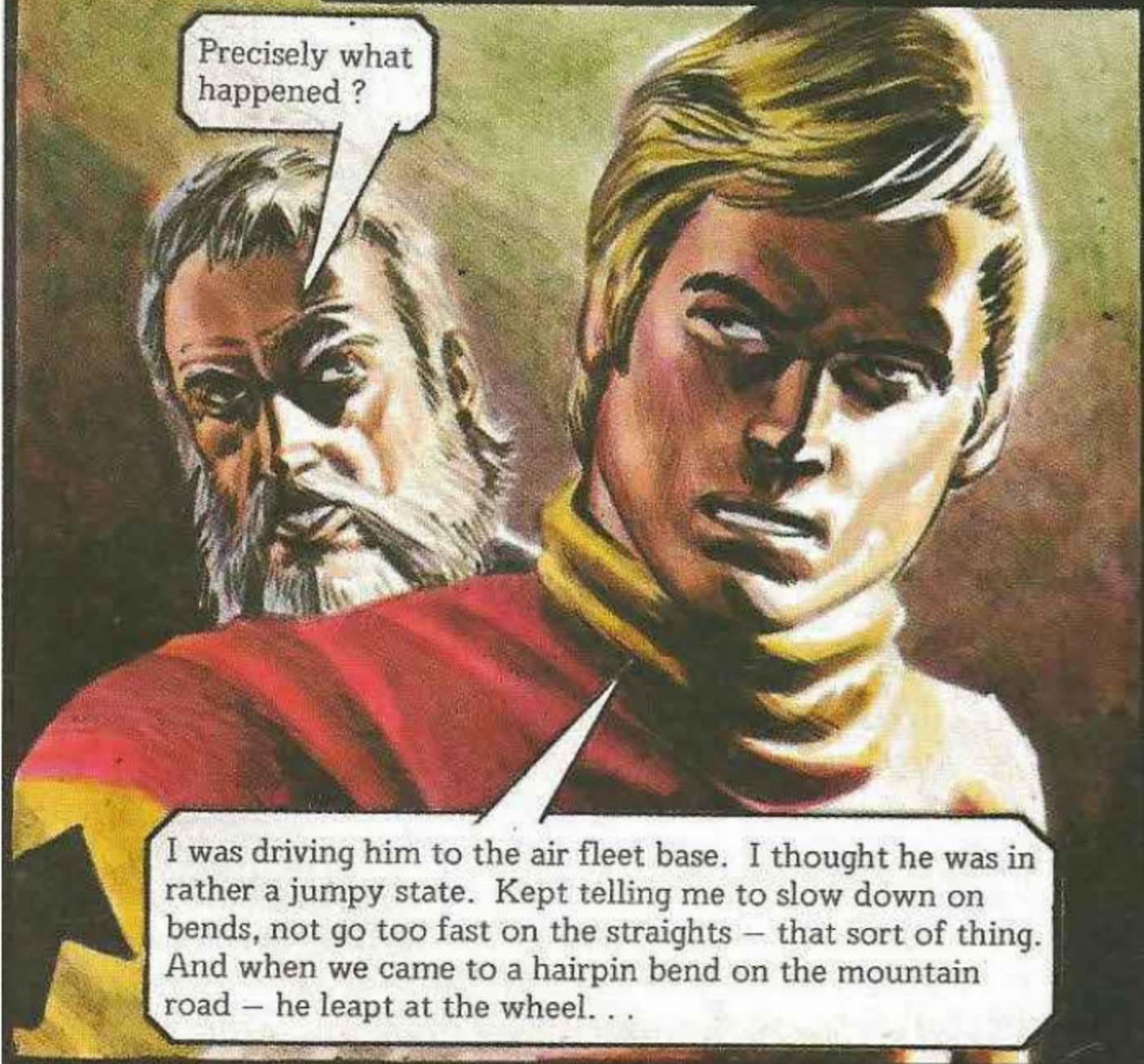


His pupils are widely dilated. Heart and pulse
rates phenomenally high. Our friend is in a
state of extreme tension – as when one is
fighting for one's life against some
tremendous peril. Most astonishing!



OLIVER
TREY

Precisely what
happened?



I was driving him to the air fleet base. I thought he was in
rather a jumpy state. Kept telling me to slow down on
bends, not go too fast on the straights – that sort of thing.
And when we came to a hairpin bend on the mountain
road – he leapt at the wheel. . .

JANNO CONTINUED: "HOWLING
LIKE A MANIAC, HE FOUGHT
TO GET THE WHEEL FROM ME!"



No! No! – He
shan't kill me
– he shan't!



"ONLY ONE THING SAVED US BOTH FROM DESTRUCTION..."

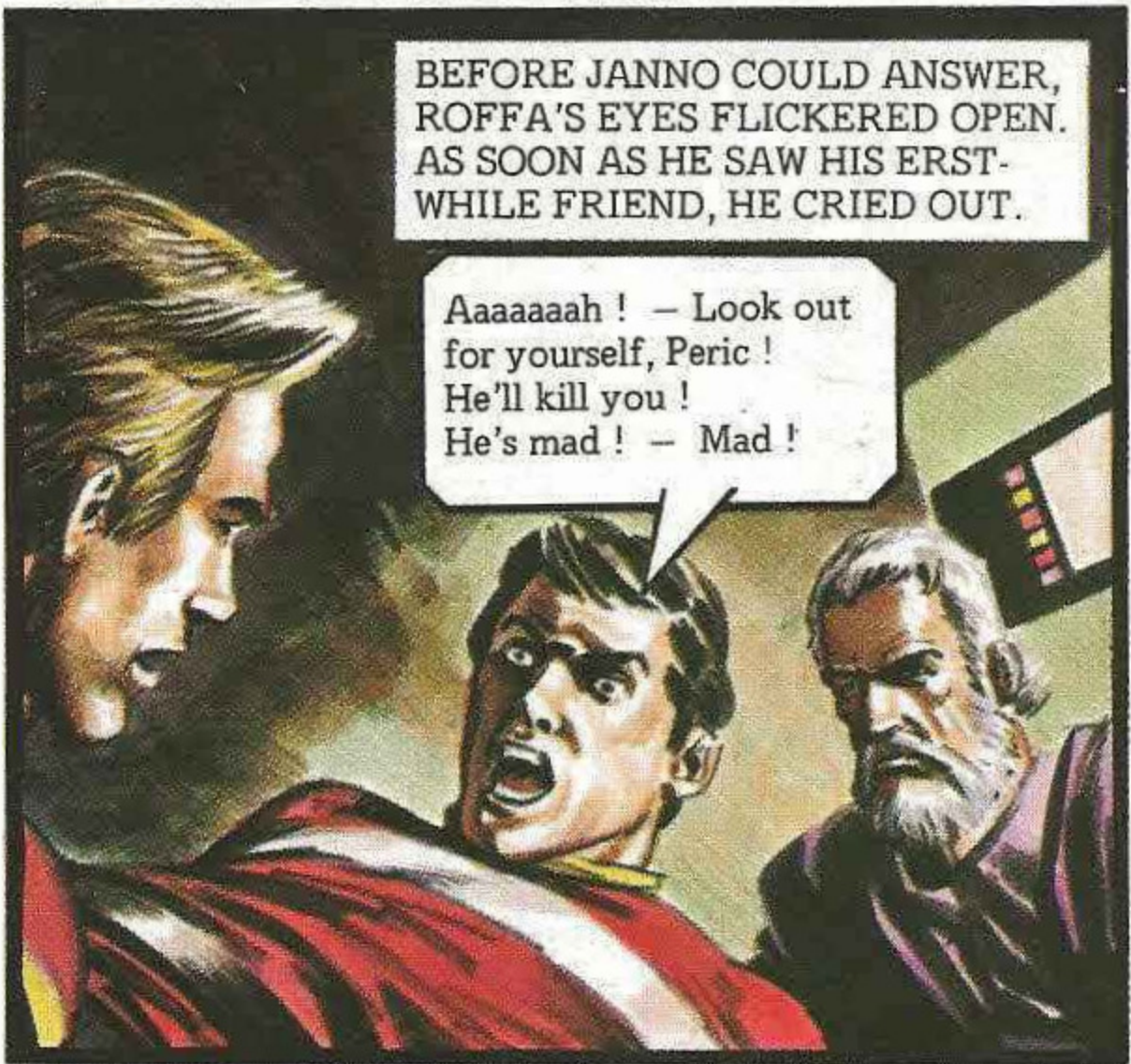
Uuuugh!

Sorry, old friend, but...



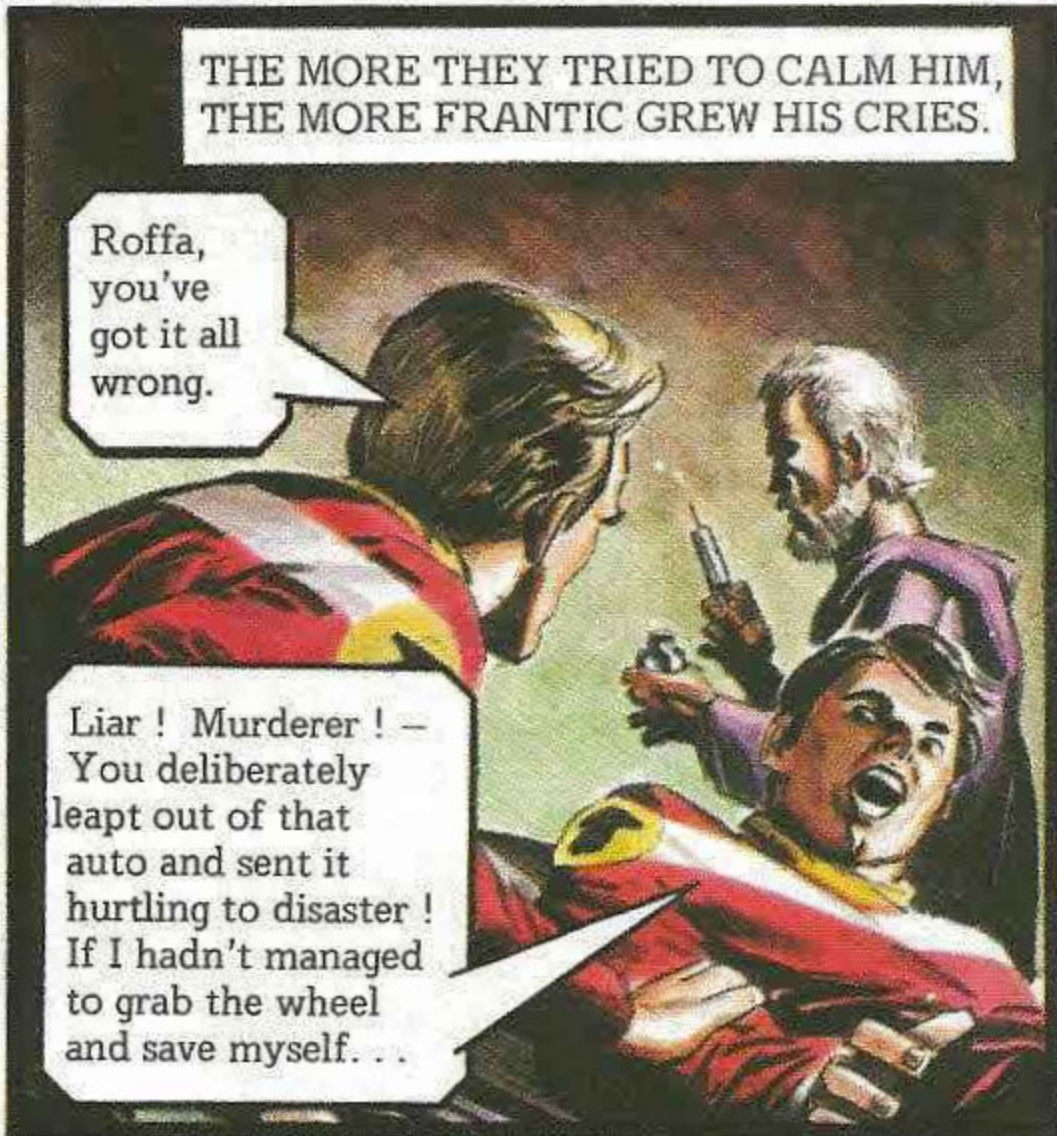
And you say that he was fighting to get the wheel - to save himself?

Yes, if I hadn't managed to knock him out with one lucky blow, the both of us would have ended up in the wreckage of the auto at the foot of the cliff!



BEFORE JANNO COULD ANSWER, ROFFA'S EYES FLICKERED OPEN. AS SOON AS HE SAW HIS ERST-WHILE FRIEND, HE CRIED OUT.

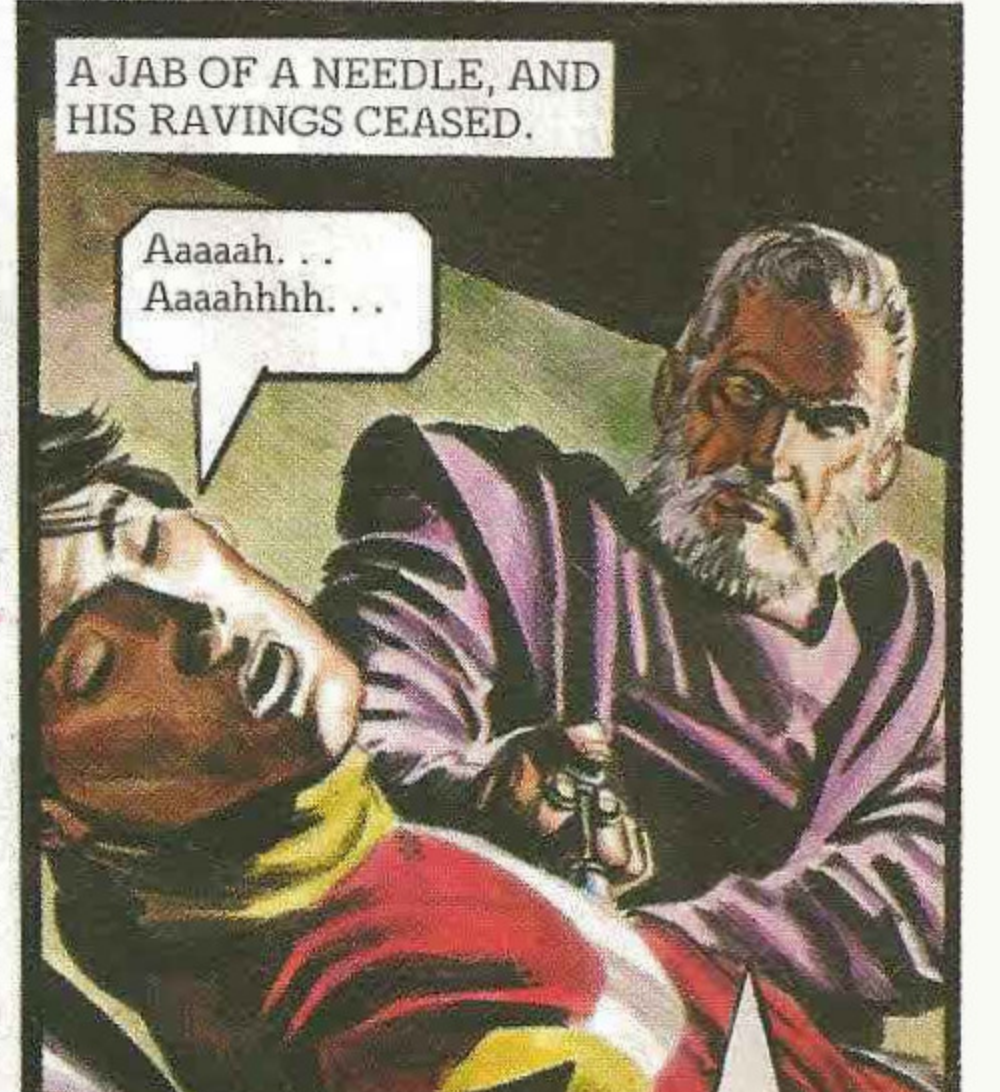
Aaaaaah! - Look out for yourself, Peric! He'll kill you! He's mad! - Mad!



THE MORE THEY TRIED TO CALM HIM, THE MORE FRANTIC GREW HIS CRIES.

Roffa, you've got it all wrong.

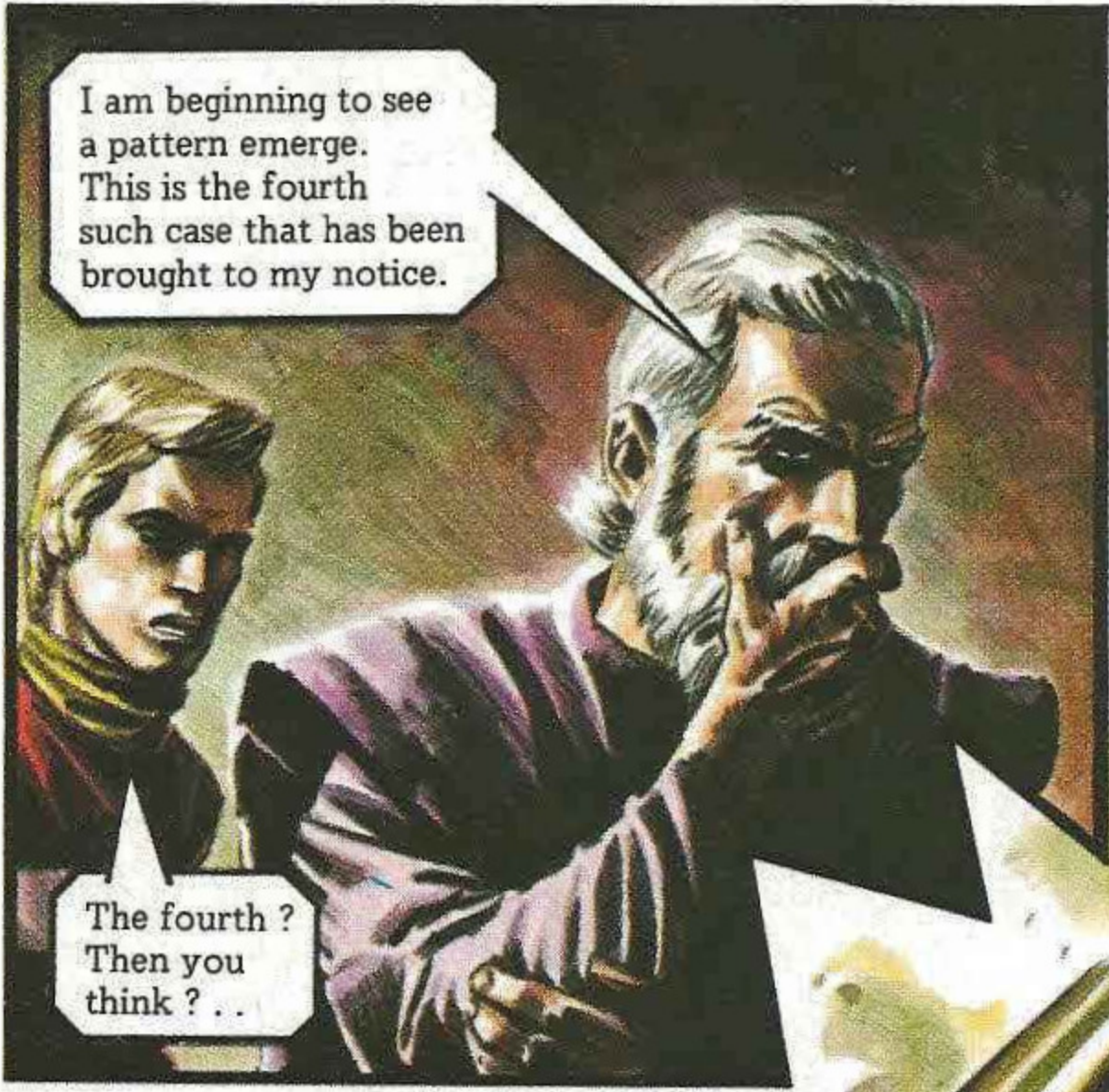
Liar! Murderer! - You deliberately leapt out of that auto and sent it hurtling to disaster! If I hadn't managed to grab the wheel and save myself...



A JAB OF A NEEDLE, AND HIS RAVINGS CEASED.

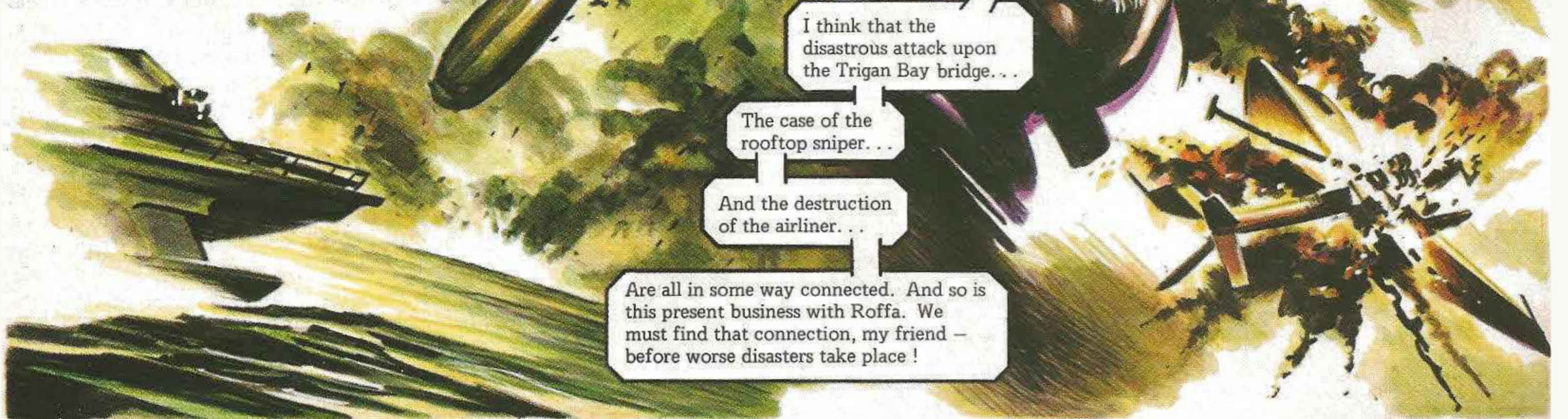
Aaaaah... Aaaaahhh...

There. He'll sleep for the rest of the day and wake up with a bad headache. And then we'll try to get to the bottom of this business.



I am beginning to see a pattern emerge. This is the fourth such case that has been brought to my notice.

The fourth? Then you think?...



I think that the disastrous attack upon the Trigan Bay bridge...

The case of the rooftop sniper...

And the destruction of the airliner...

Are all in some way connected. And so is this present business with Roffa. We must find that connection, my friend - before worse disasters take place!

OVER AND OVER AGAIN THAT NIGHT, PERIC PLAYED TELERECORDS OF THE VICTIMS GIVING EVIDENCE . . .

It was essential to destroy the bridge ! The enemy was advancing across it to take the city !

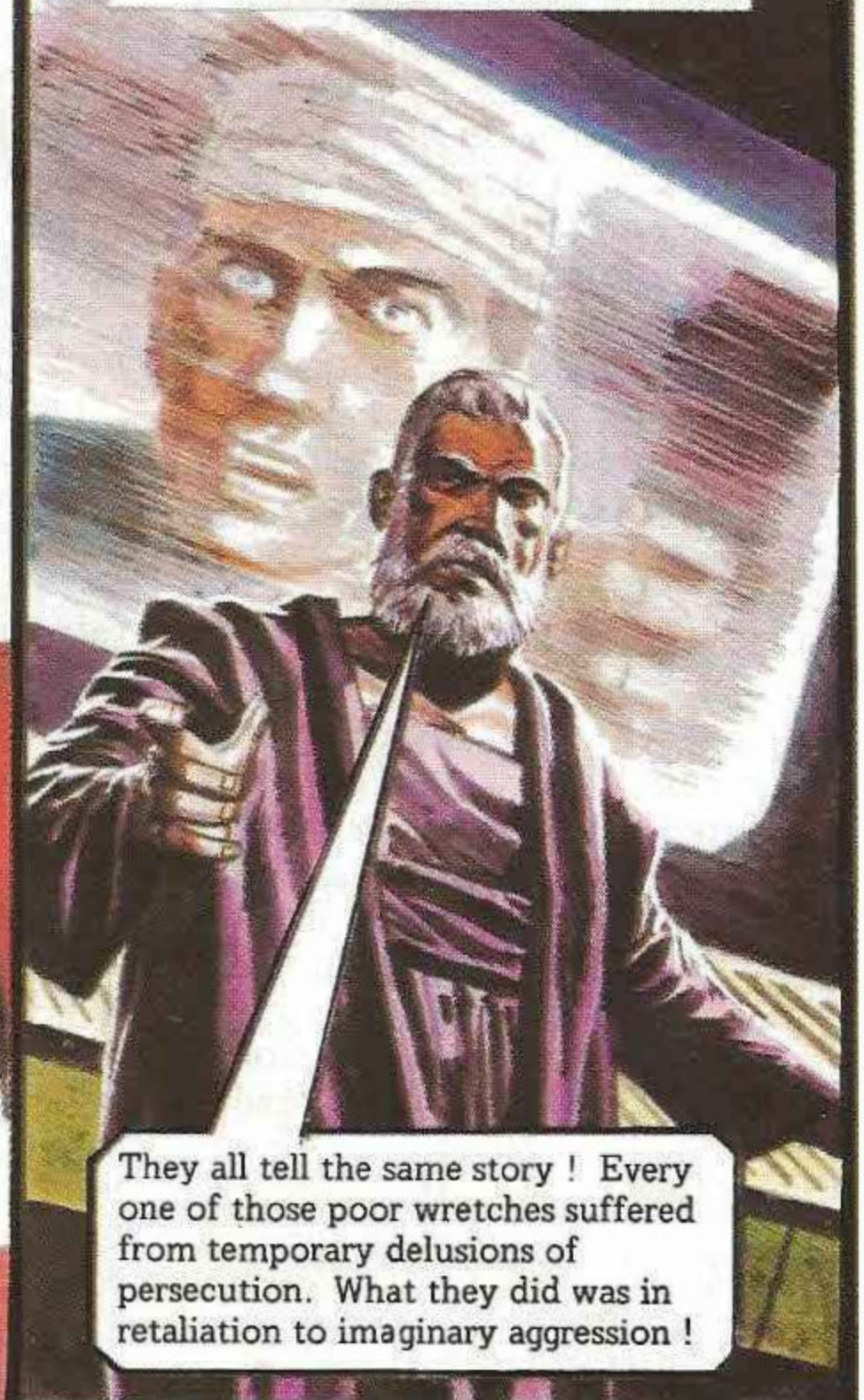


Everyone's trying to destroy me ! I have to protect myself !

The fighter craft attacked me first ! Shot my cockpit to pieces !



THE GREAT SCIENTIST MADE HIS ASSESSMENT OF THE EVIDENCE.

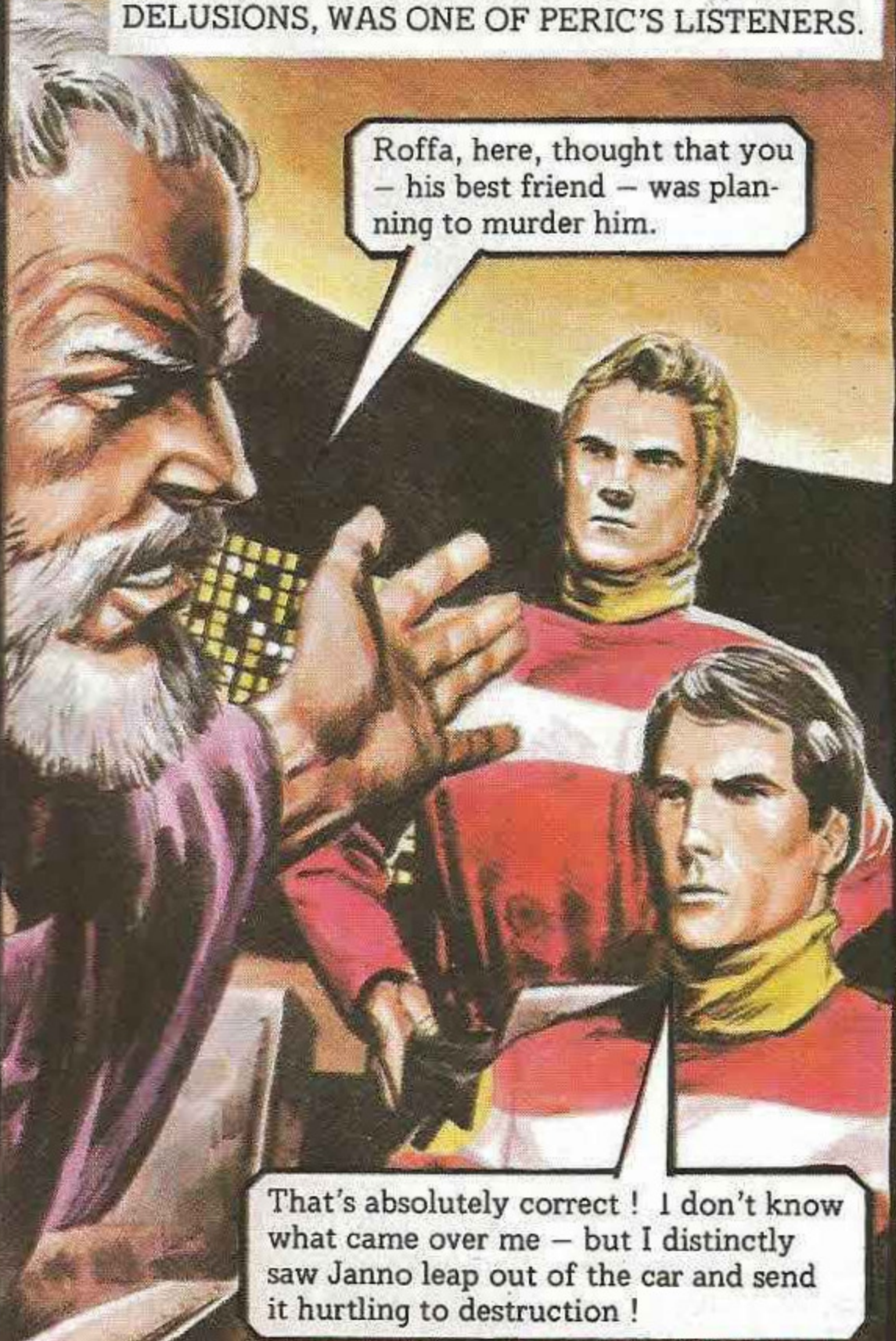


They all tell the same story ! Every one of those poor wretches suffered from temporary delusions of persecution. What they did was in retaliation to imaginary aggression !

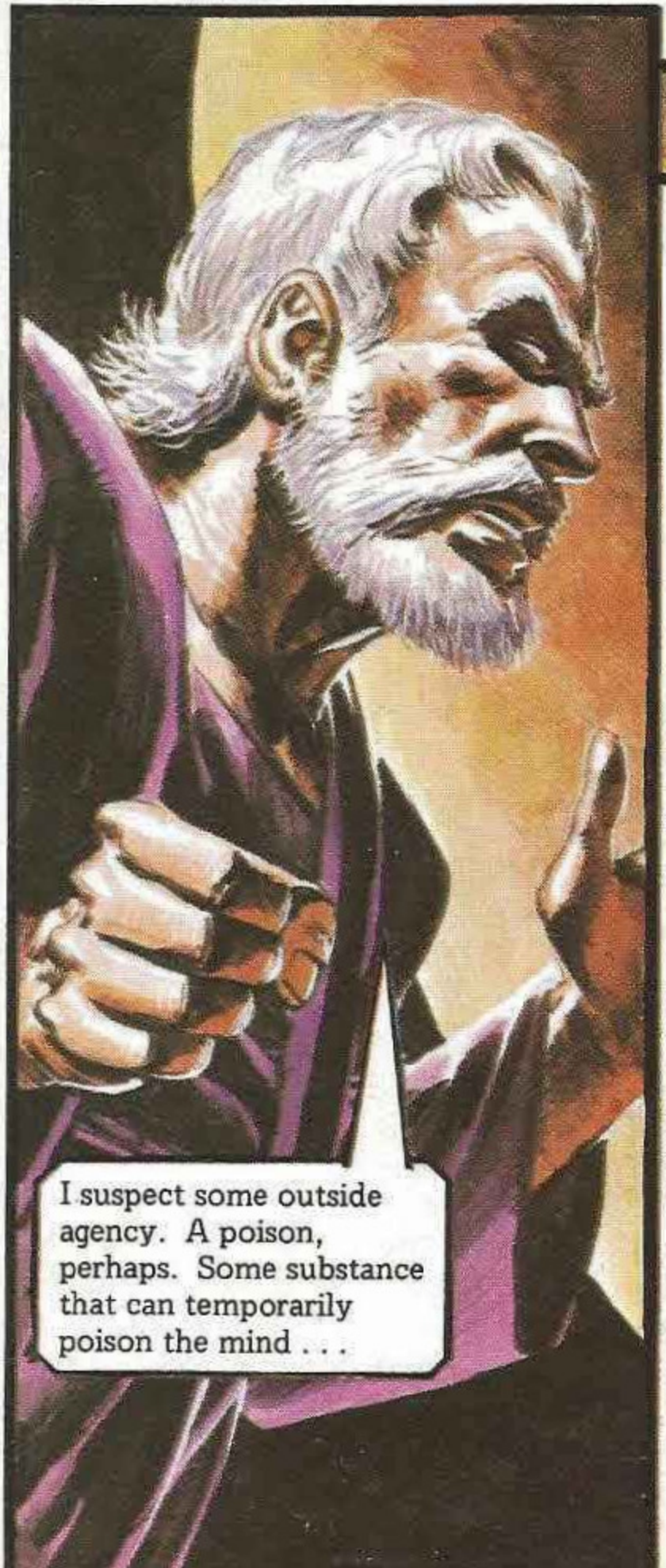
OLIVER FREY

ROFFA, NOW RECOVERED FROM HIS OWN DELUSIONS, WAS ONE OF PERIC'S LISTENERS.

Roffa, here, thought that you - his best friend - was planning to murder him.



That's absolutely correct ! I don't know what came over me - but I distinctly saw Janno leap out of the car and send it hurtling to destruction !

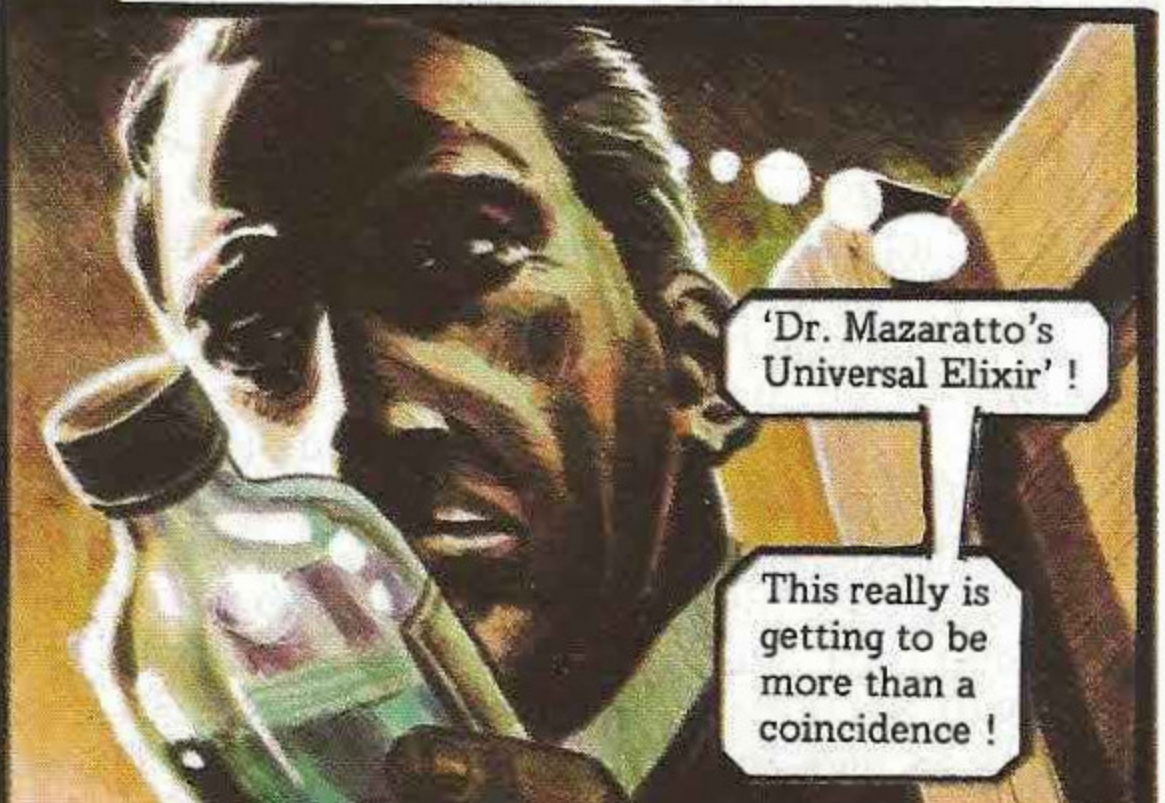


I suspect some outside agency. A poison, perhaps. Some substance that can temporarily poison the mind . . .

MEANWHILE, SPECIAL INVESTIGATORS WHO WERE WORKING ON THE CASE MADE A ROUTINE SEARCH OF ROFFA'S APARTMENT.

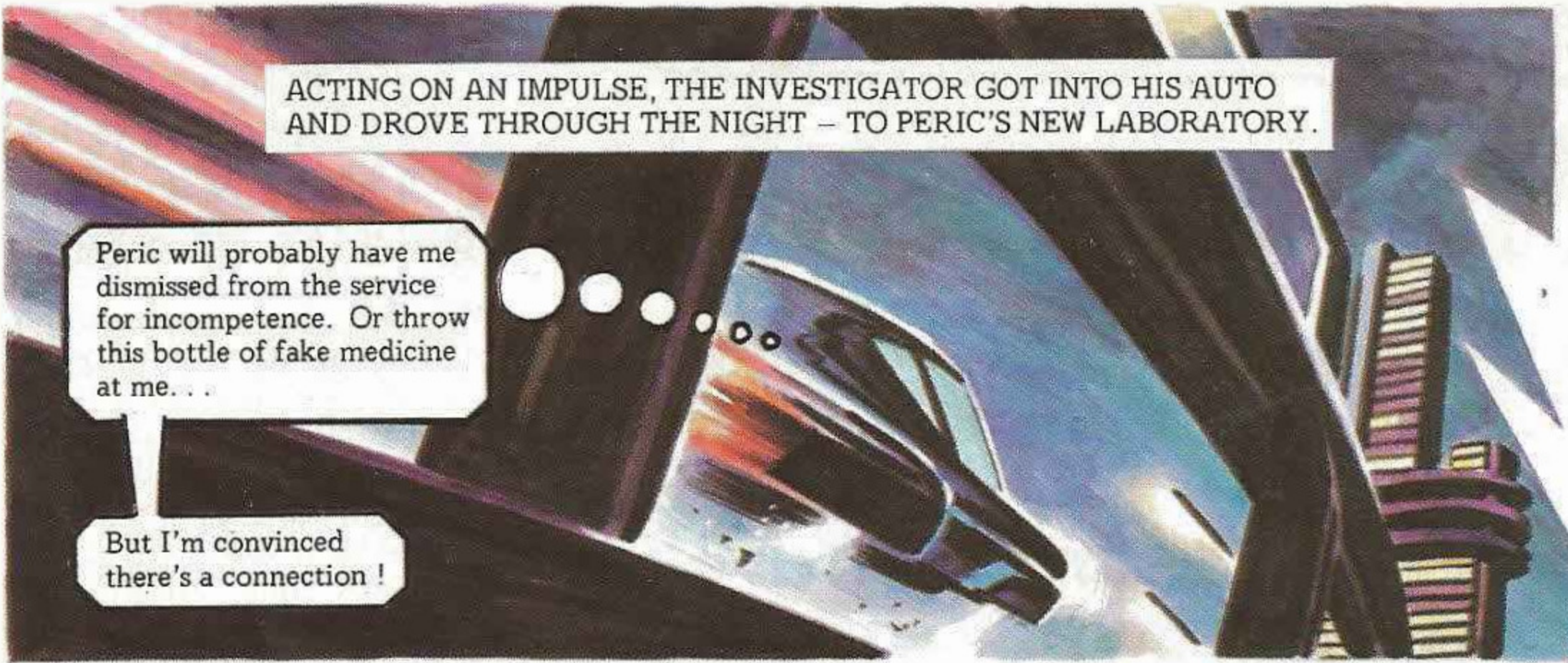


Not again !



'Dr. Mazaratto's Universal Elixir' !

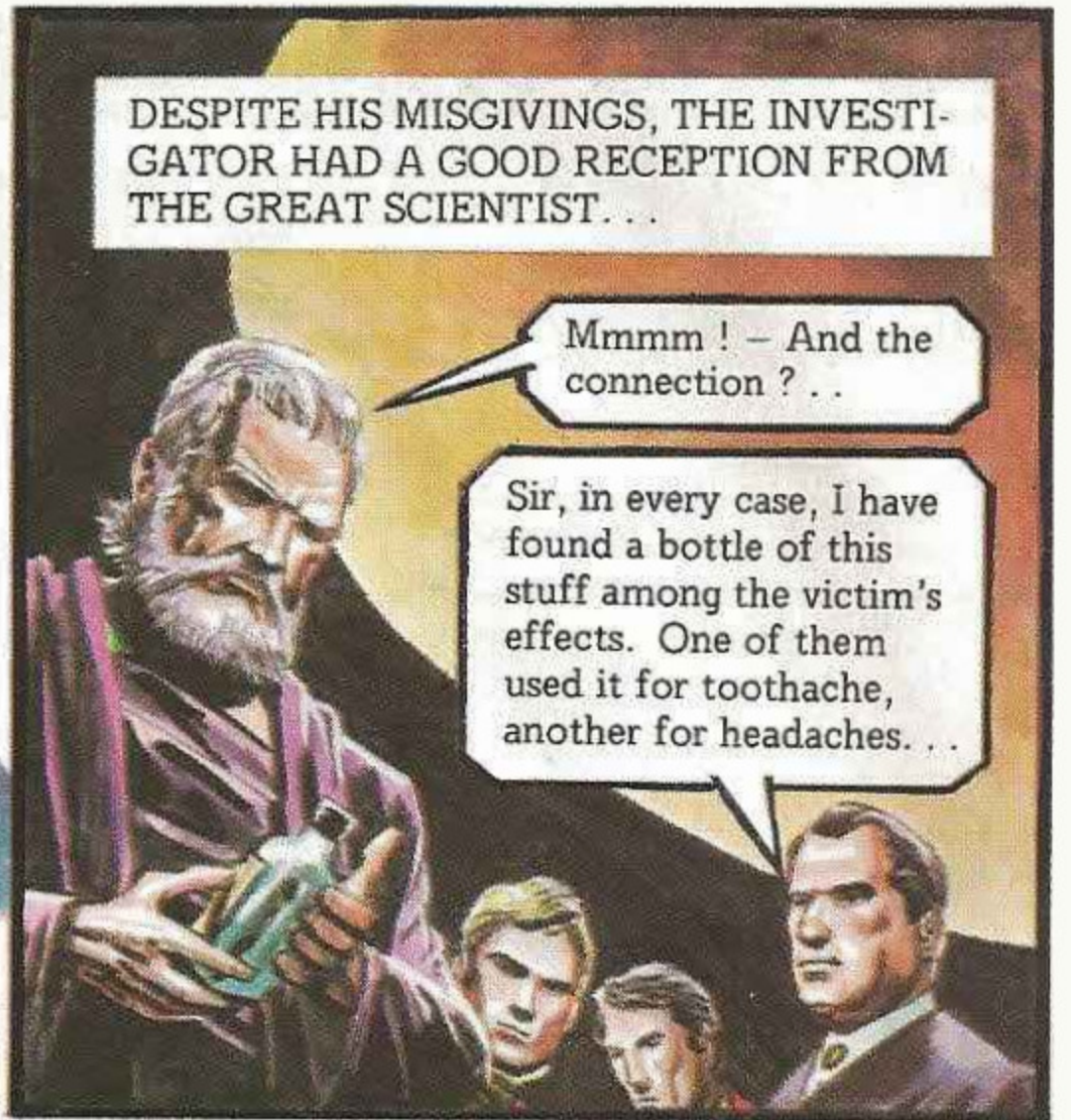
This really is getting to be more than a coincidence !



ACTING ON AN IMPULSE, THE INVESTIGATOR GOT INTO HIS AUTO AND DROVE THROUGH THE NIGHT – TO PERIC'S NEW LABORATORY.

Peric will probably have me dismissed from the service for incompetence. Or throw this bottle of fake medicine at me...

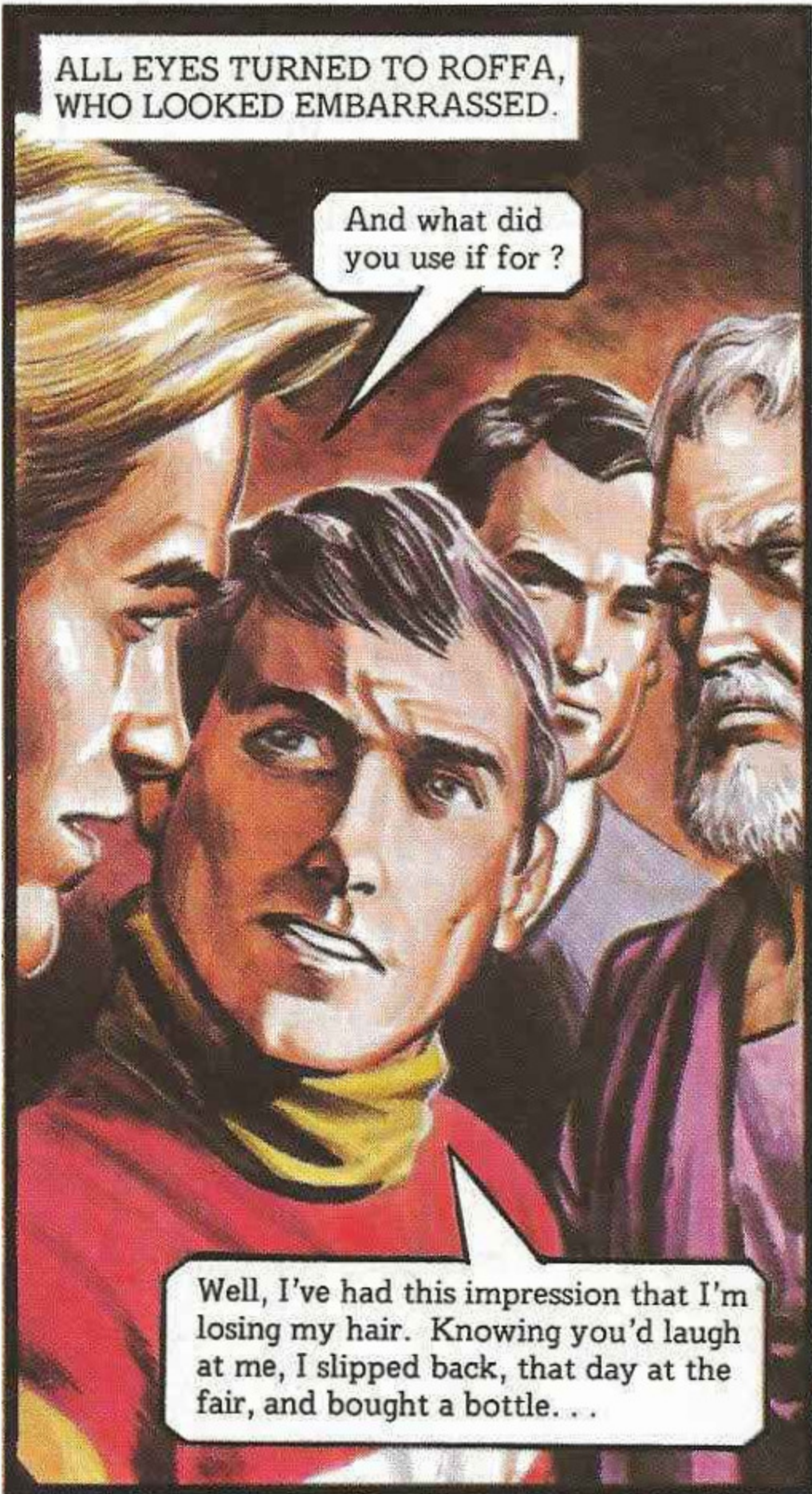
But I'm convinced there's a connection!



DESPITE HIS MISGIVINGS, THE INVESTIGATOR HAD A GOOD RECEPTION FROM THE GREAT SCIENTIST...

Mmmm! – And the connection?...

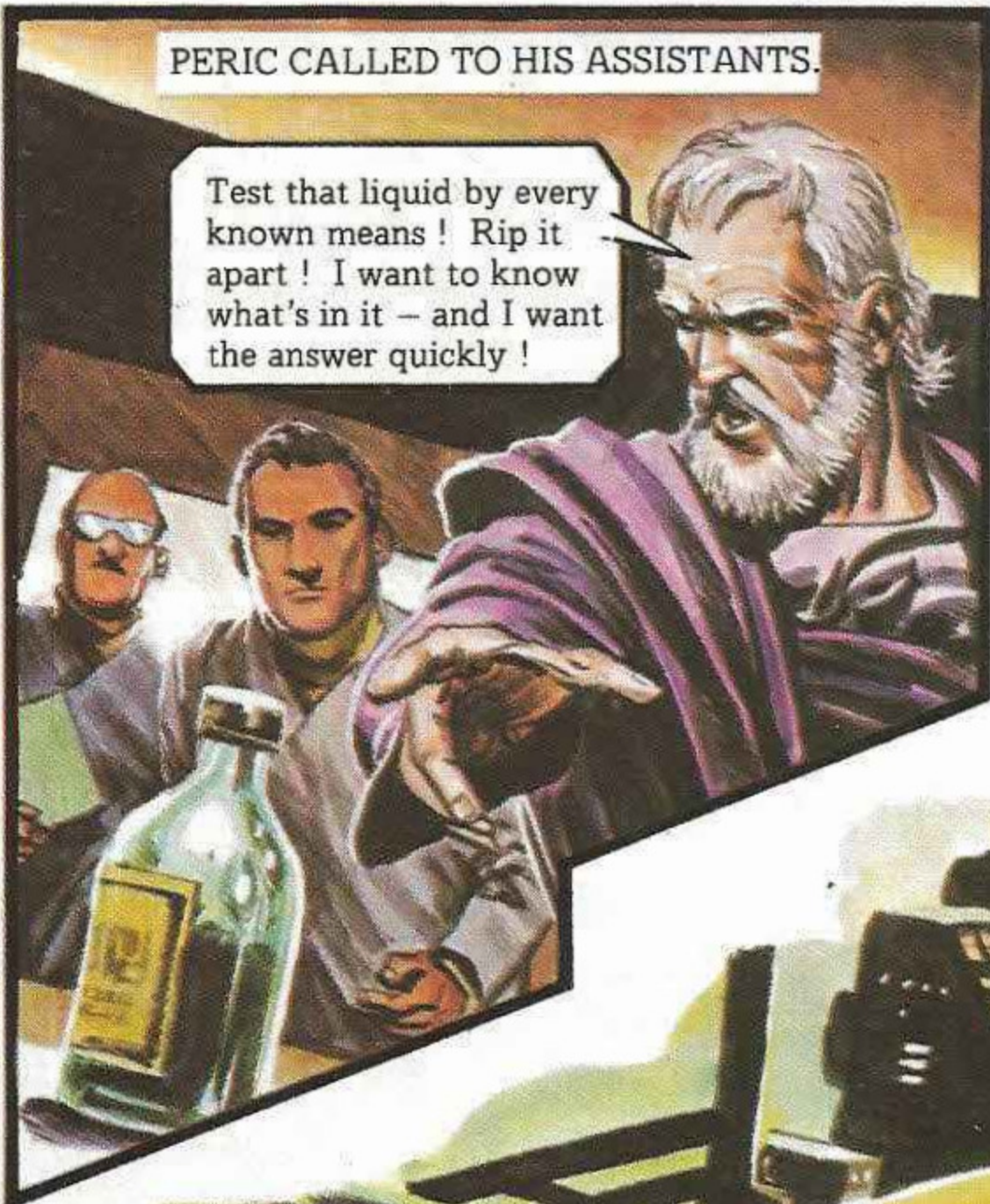
Sir, in every case, I have found a bottle of this stuff among the victim's effects. One of them used it for toothache, another for headaches...



ALL EYES TURNED TO ROFFA, WHO LOOKED EMBARRASSED.

And what did you use if for?

Well, I've had this impression that I'm losing my hair. Knowing you'd laugh at me, I slipped back, that day at the fair, and bought a bottle...

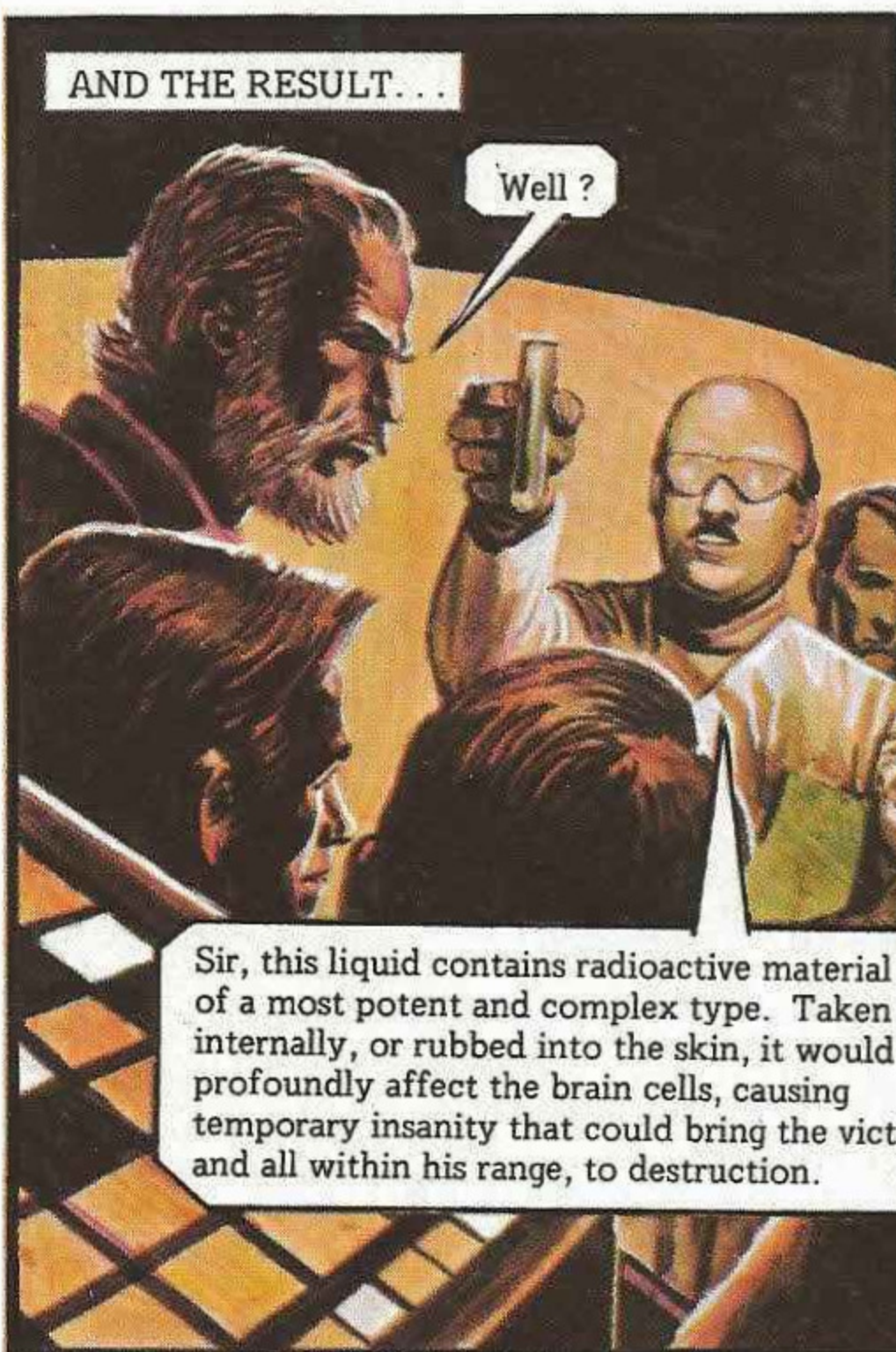


PERIC CALLED TO HIS ASSISTANTS.

Test that liquid by every known means! Rip it apart! I want to know what's in it – and I want the answer quickly!



BEFORE THE AWESTRUCK EYES OF THE ONLOOKERS, THE SAMPLE OF ELIXIR WAS SUBJECT TO DEVASTATING SCIENTIFIC TESTING OF THE MOST SPECTACULAR KIND.



AND THE RESULT...

Well?

Sir, this liquid contains radioactive material of a most potent and complex type. Taken internally, or rubbed into the skin, it would profoundly affect the brain cells, causing temporary insanity that could bring the victim, and all within his range, to destruction.

WITHIN A SHORT SPACE OF TIME, THE WORD WENT OUT FROM EVERY LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY, EVERY MILITARY UNIT ON THE PLANET ELEKTON...



Aged about sixty lunar years – height, seven rubits – weight, thirty zens – bald-headed on top, grey at the sides – last seen wearing black coat and gown. Goes by the alias of Doctor Mazaratto, Professor of Science...

The subject must be found at all costs!

Immediately!

THE SEARCH WAS ON. UNITS OF EVERY AIR FLEET ON THE PLANET FLEW ROUND-THE-CLOCK, LOW-LEVEL PROBE SORTIES.

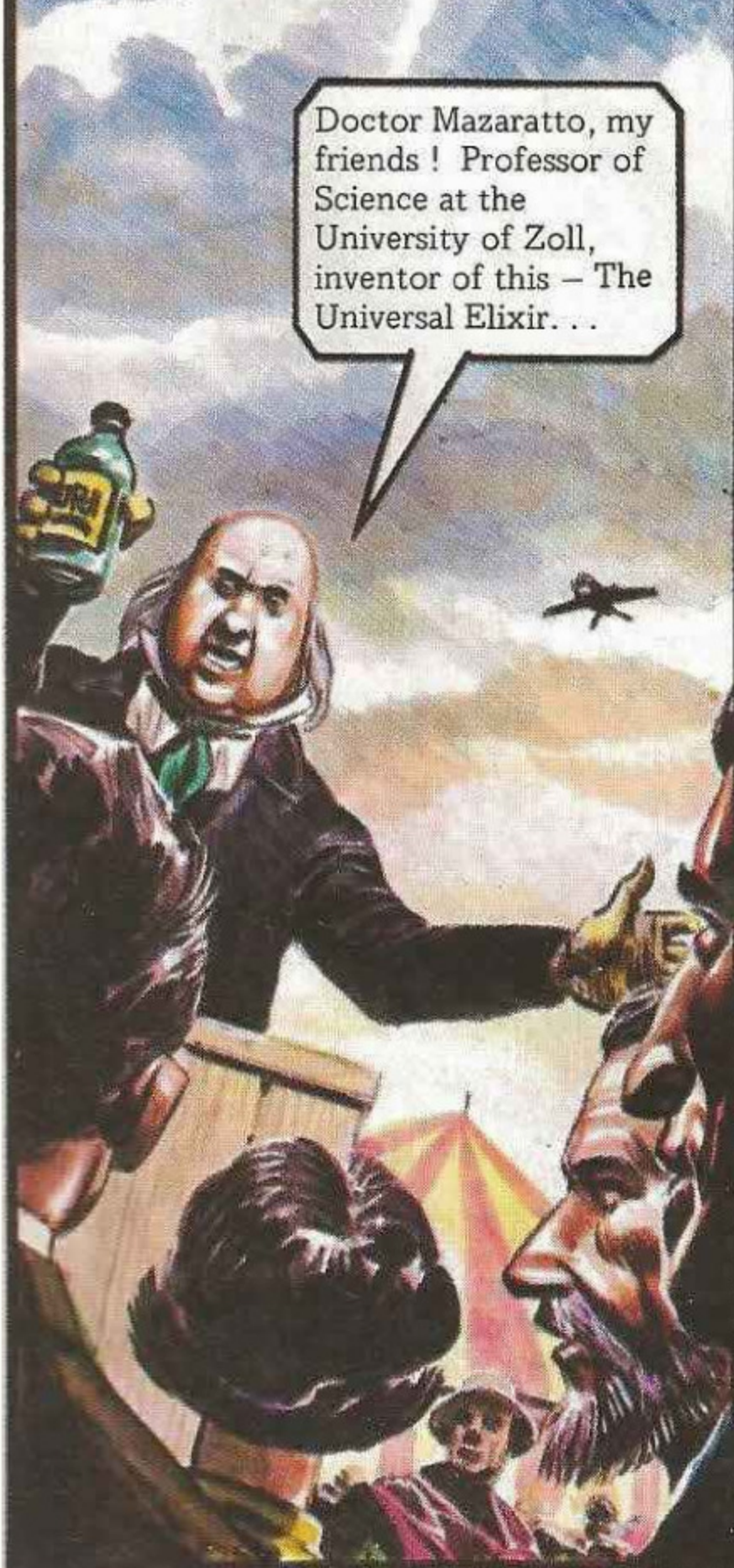


Habitations ahead, skipper.

A gathering of people outside that small town ahead. Looks like some kind of fairground.

BELOW, A SMALL-TOWN FAIR WAS IN PROGRESS. THE LARGEST CROWD WAS GATHERED AROUND...

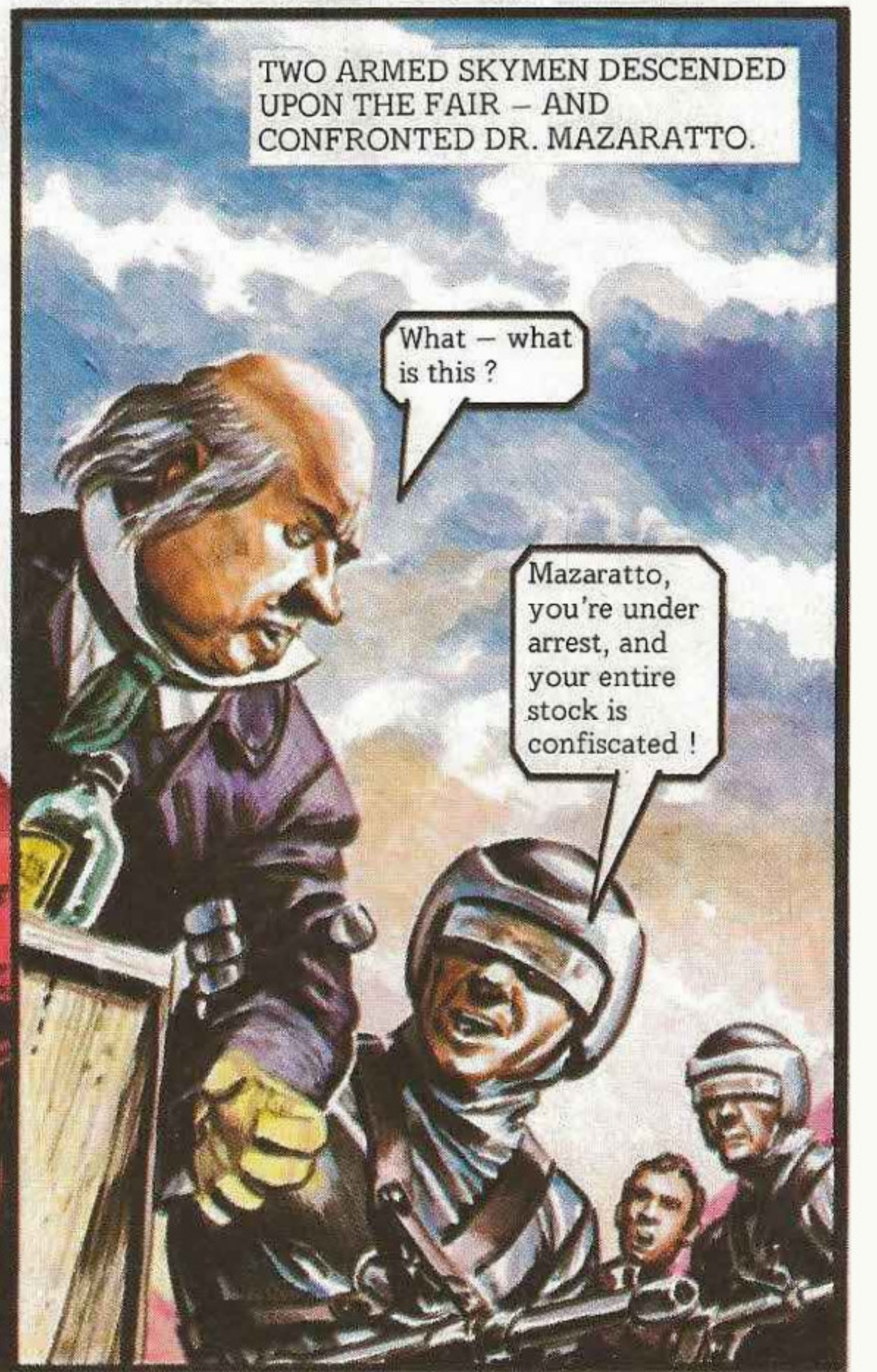
ALL EYES SWEEPED UPWARDS AT THE ROAR OF ENGINES. AND THEN, IT HAPPENED...



Doctor Mazaratto, my friends! Professor of Science at the University of Zoll, inventor of this - The Universal Elixir...



Hey! - Look!

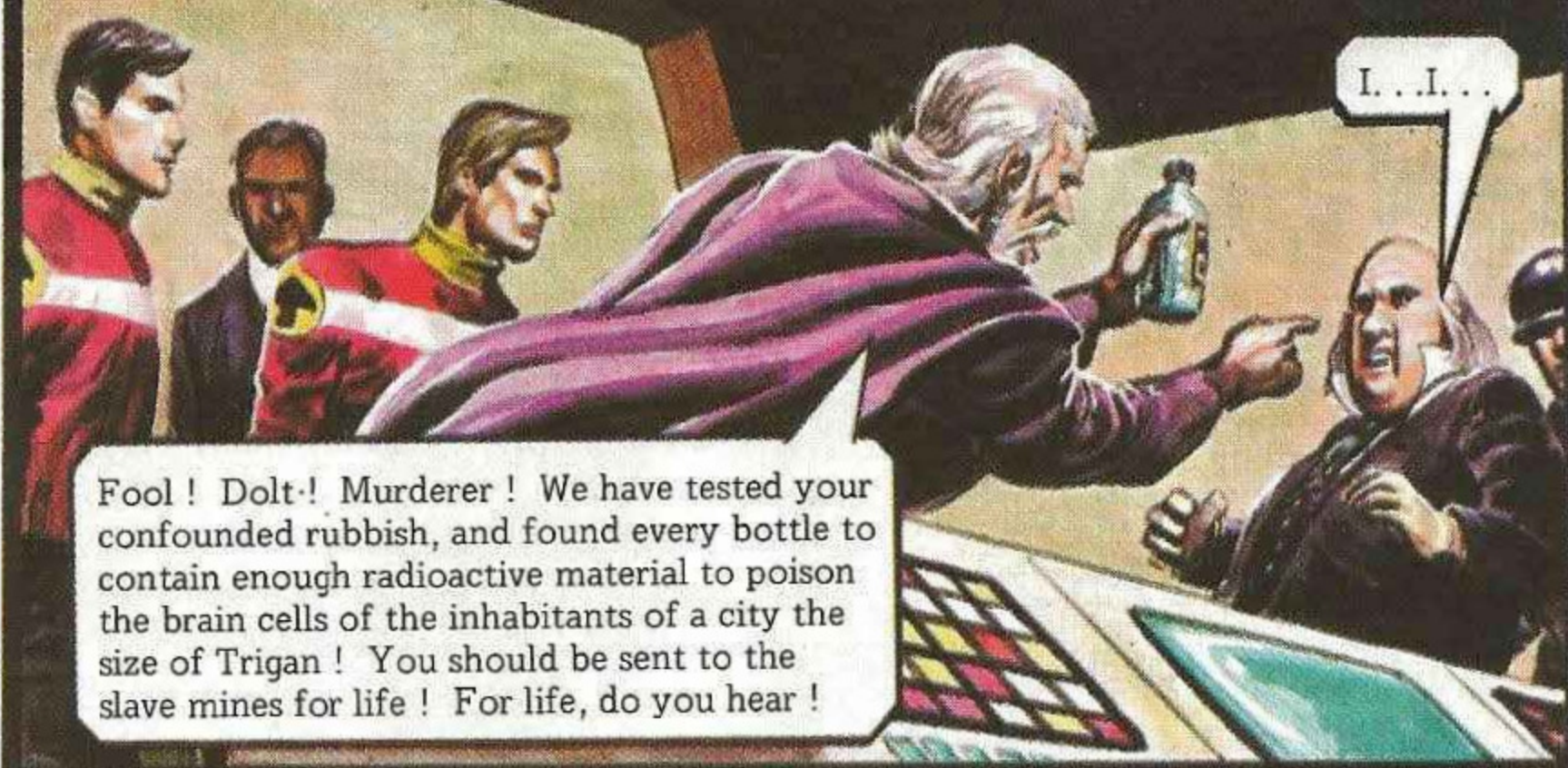


TWO ARMED SKYMEN DESCENDED UPON THE FAIR - AND CONFRONTED DR. MAZARATTO.

What - what is this?

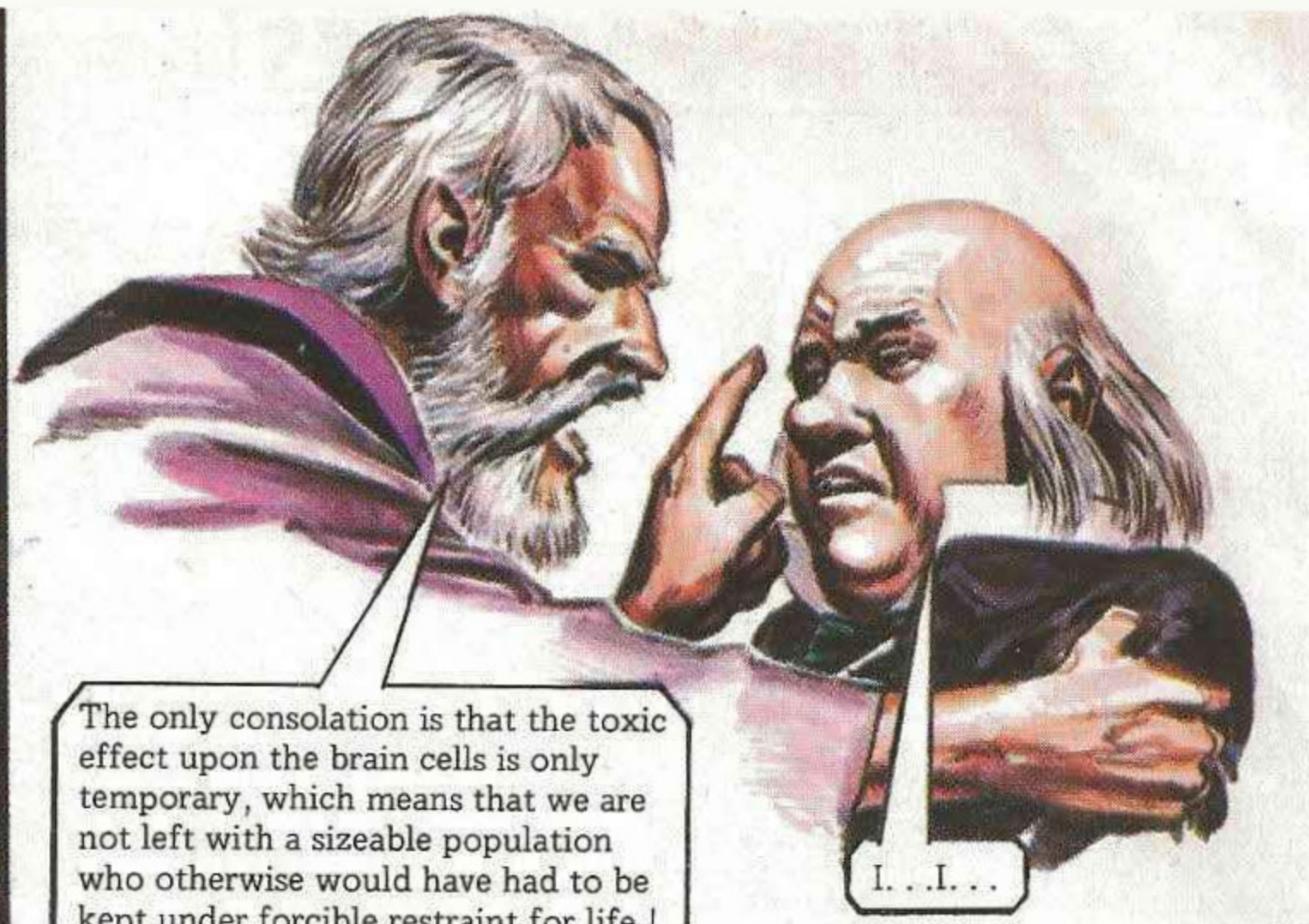
Mazaratto, you're under arrest, and your entire stock is confiscated!

THE PEDLAR OF CURE-ALL MEDICINE WAS BROUGHT FACE-TO-FACE WITH ELEKTON'S TOP SCIENTIST, AND PERIC GAVE THE CHARLATAN THE TONGUE-LASHING OF A LIFETIME.



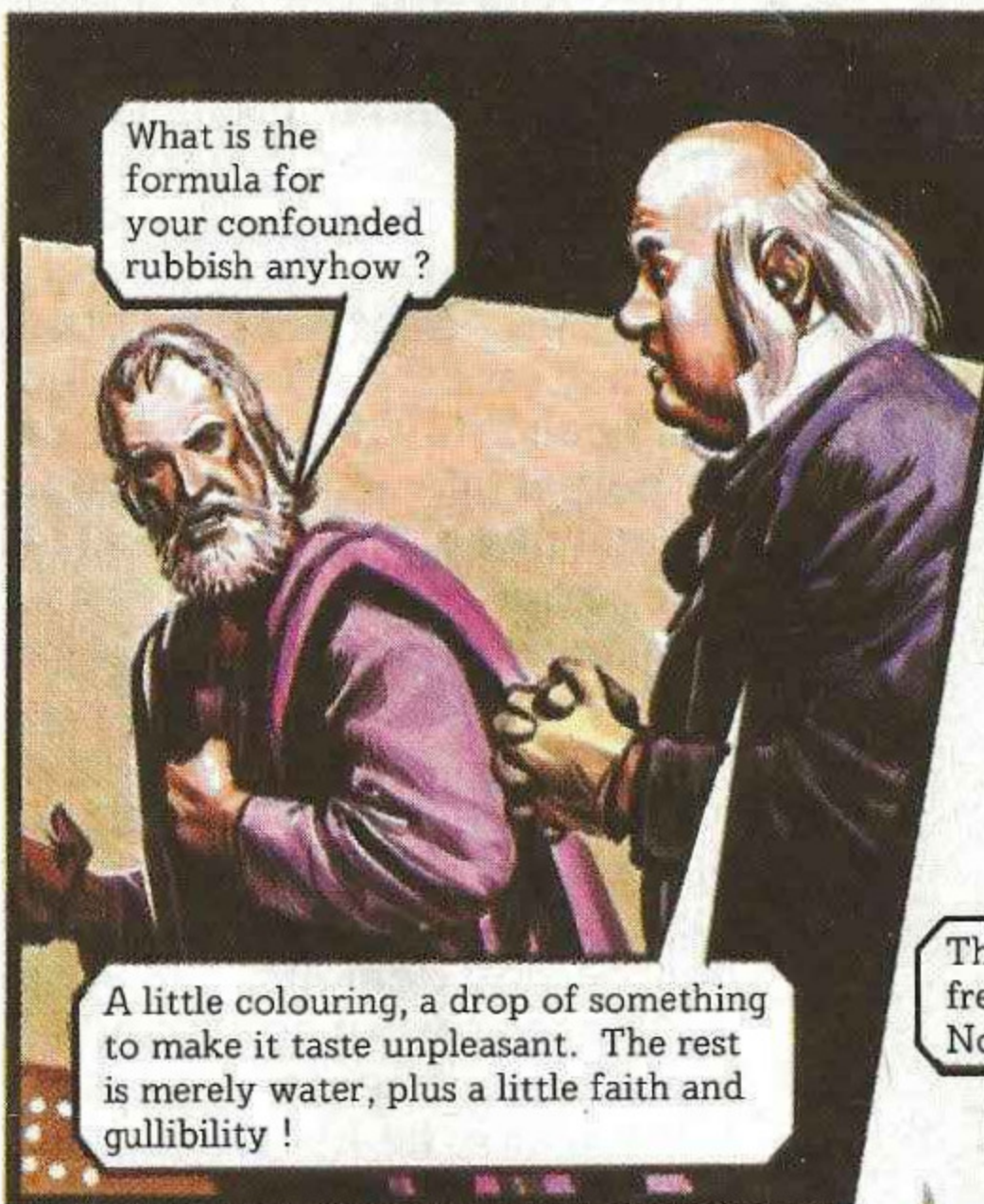
Fool! Dolt! Murderer! We have tested your confounded rubbish, and found every bottle to contain enough radioactive material to poison the brain cells of the inhabitants of a city the size of Trigan! You should be sent to the slave mines for life! For life, do you hear!

I...I...



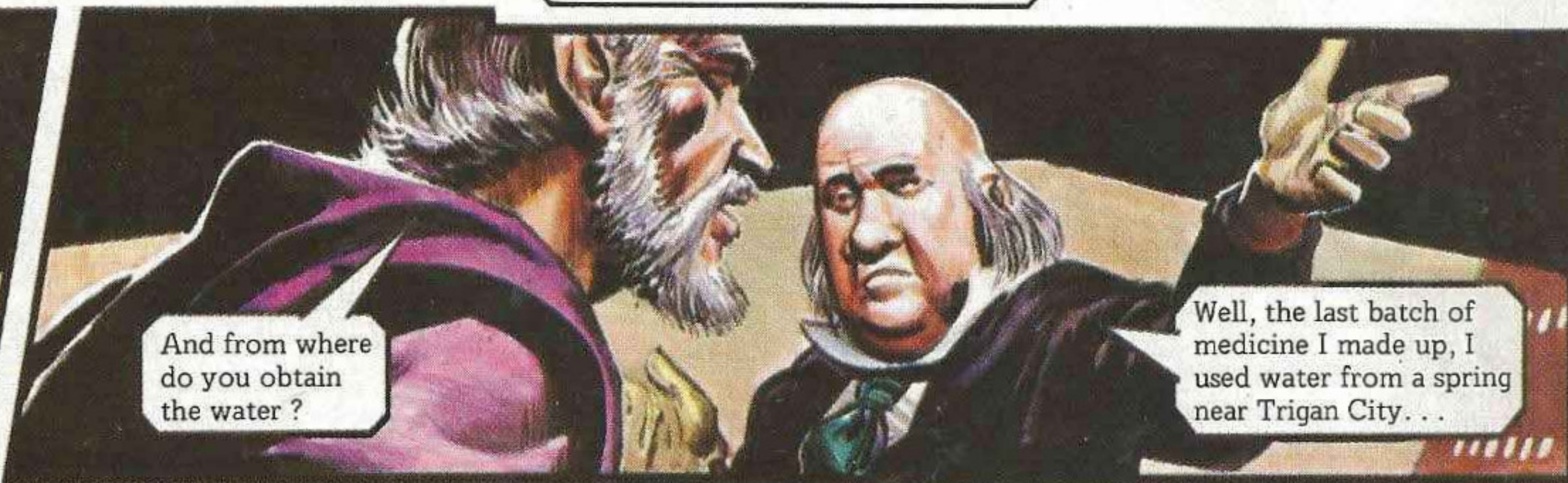
The only consolation is that the toxic effect upon the brain cells is only temporary, which means that we are not left with a sizeable population who otherwise would have had to be kept under forcible restraint for life!

I...I...



What is the formula for your confounded rubbish anyhow?

A little colouring, a drop of something to make it taste unpleasant. The rest is merely water, plus a little faith and gullibility!



And from where do you obtain the water?

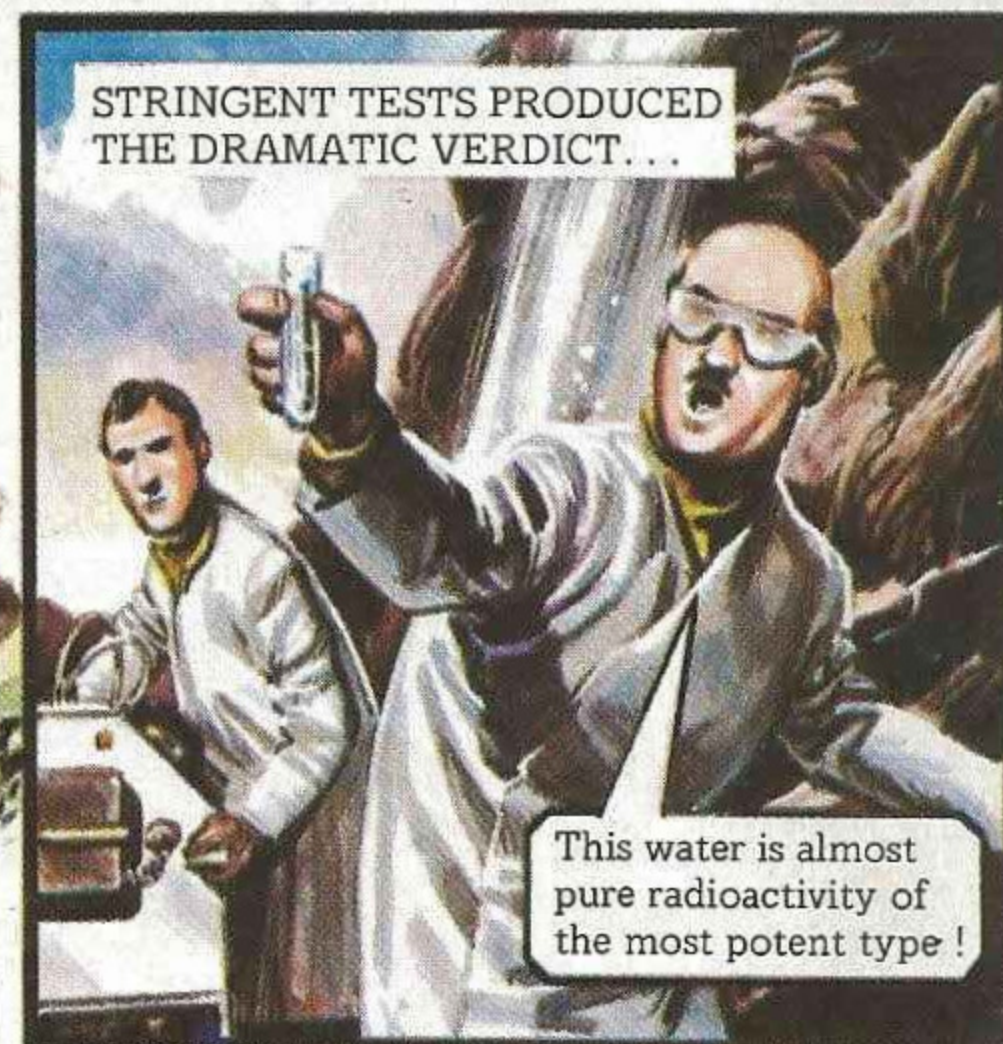
Well, the last batch of medicine I made up, I used water from a spring near Trigan City...

DR. MAZARATTO GUIDED THEM TO THE SOURCE OF HIS LAST WATER SUPPLY.



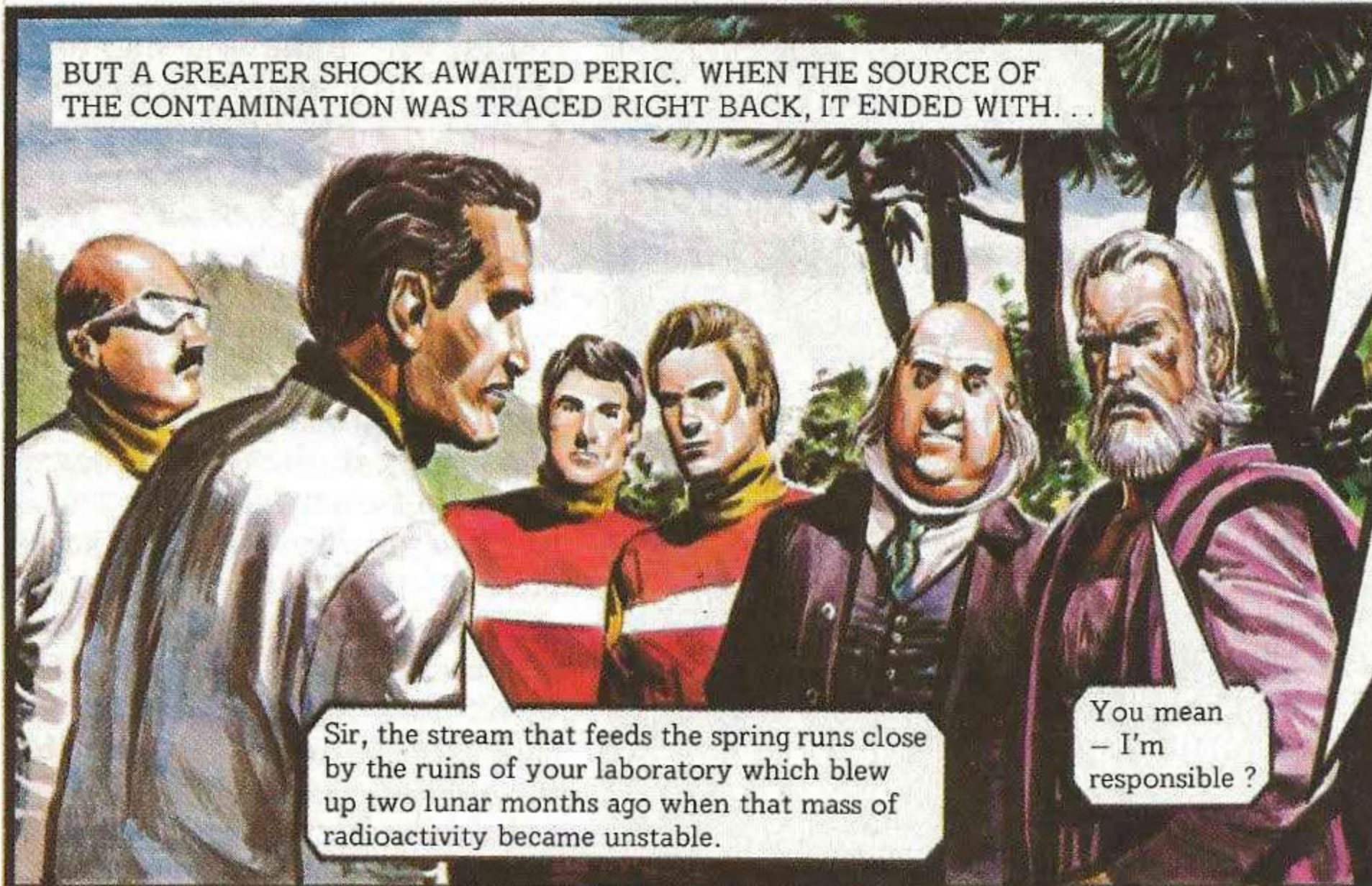
That's it - lovely fresh spring water. No harm in that.

Take a sample and analyse it!



STRINGENT TESTS PRODUCED THE DRAMATIC VERDICT...

This water is almost pure radioactivity of the most potent type!



BUT A GREATER SHOCK AWAITED PERIC. WHEN THE SOURCE OF THE CONTAMINATION WAS TRACED RIGHT BACK, IT ENDED WITH...

Sir, the stream that feeds the spring runs close by the ruins of your laboratory which blew up two lunar months ago when that mass of radioactivity became unstable.

You mean - I'm responsible?



THE IRONY OF THE SITUATION WAS NOT LOST UPON ELEKTON'S GREATEST SCIENTIST.

I failed to anticipate the danger. How then can I blame a fake medicine man?

I shall recommend that Mazaratto be set free.