

The Legend of Hellas

Trigo the ruler of Trigan looked up one day to see the wise old Peric standing before him. The old man's face was strangely sad . . .

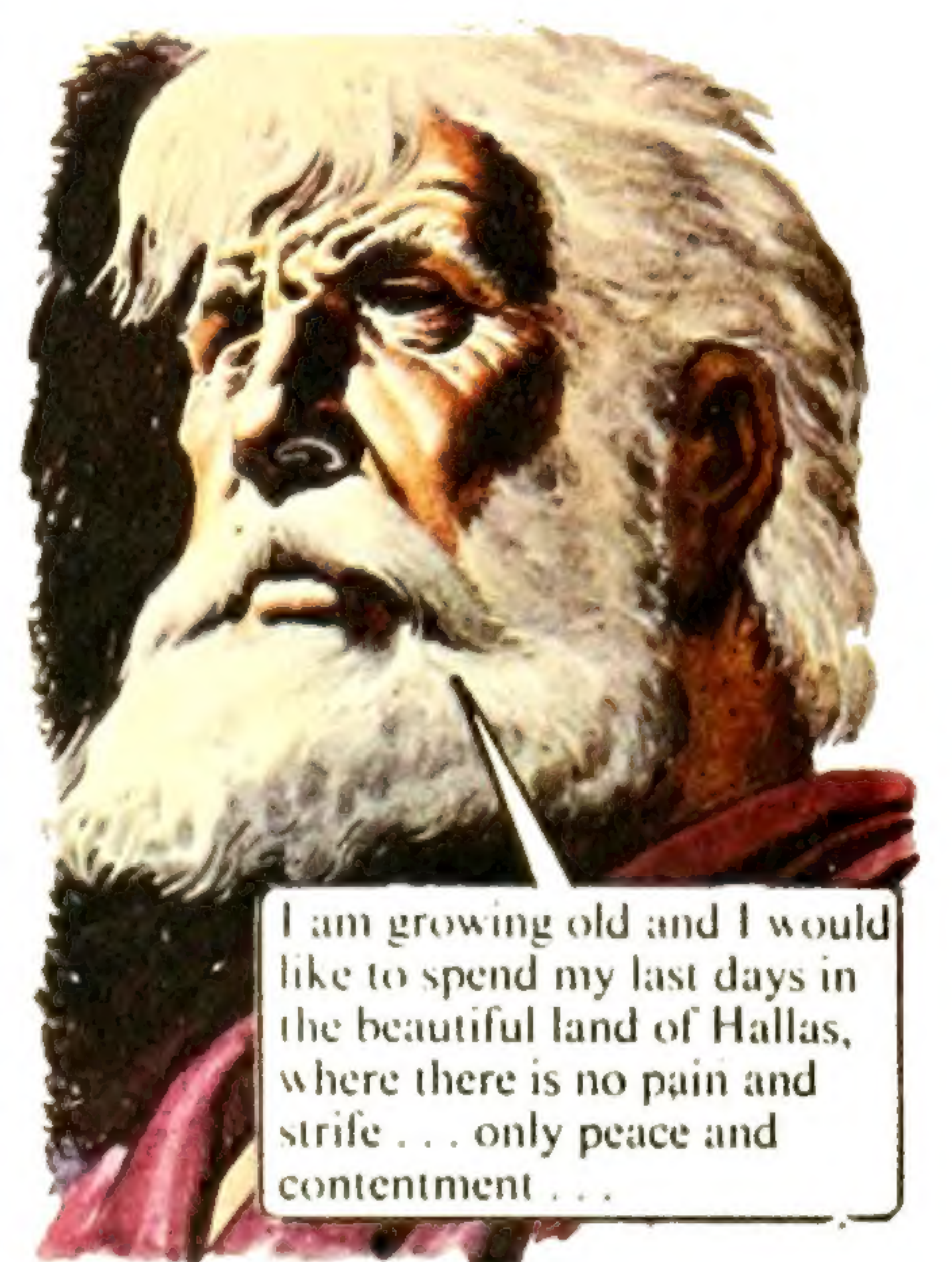
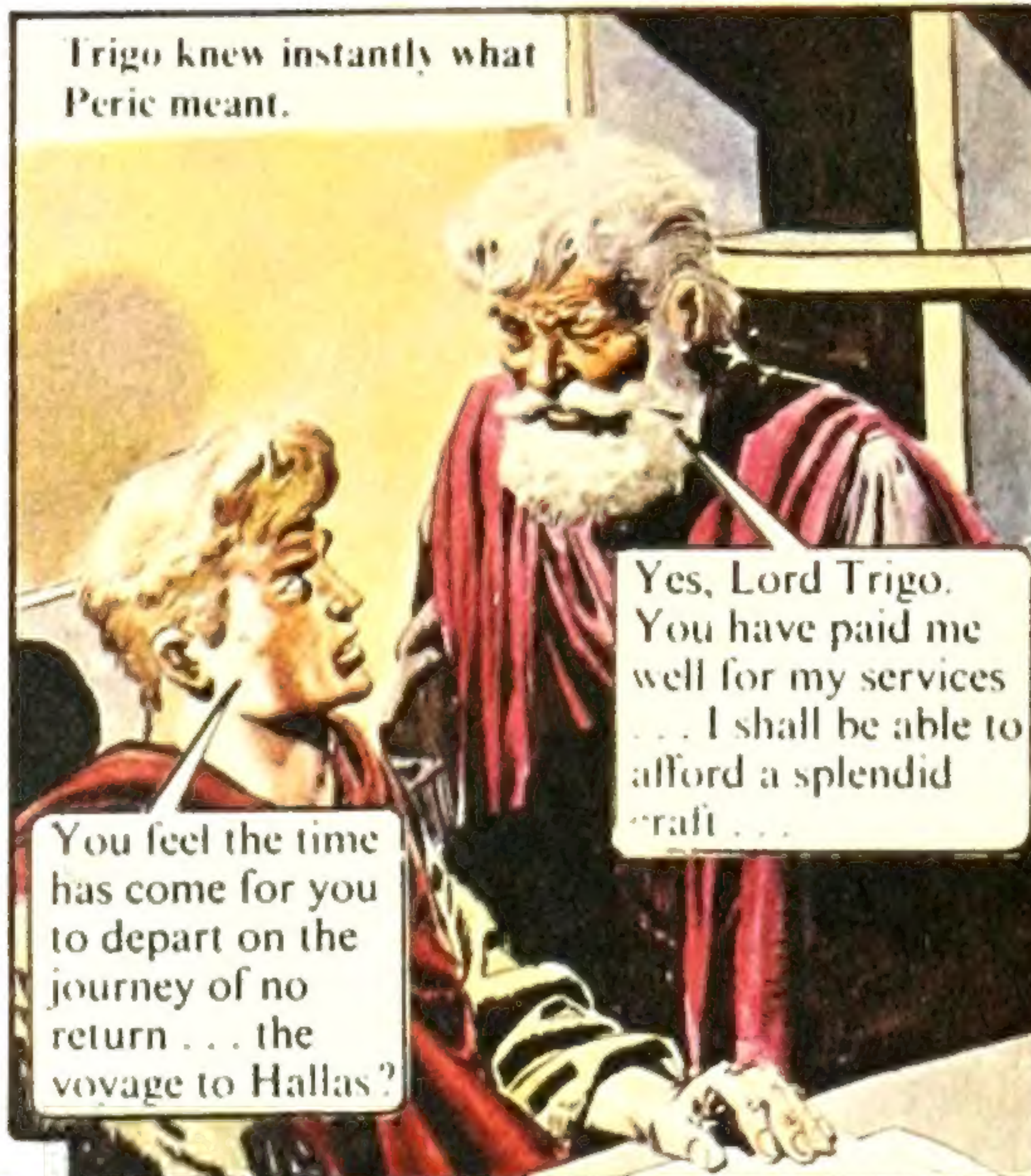
Lord Trigo . . . I regret to say that I shall be leaving you soon.



Trigo knew instantly what Peric meant.

You feel the time has come for you to depart on the journey of no return . . . the voyage to Hellas?

Yes, Lord Trigo. You have paid me well for my services . . . I shall be able to afford a splendid craft . . .

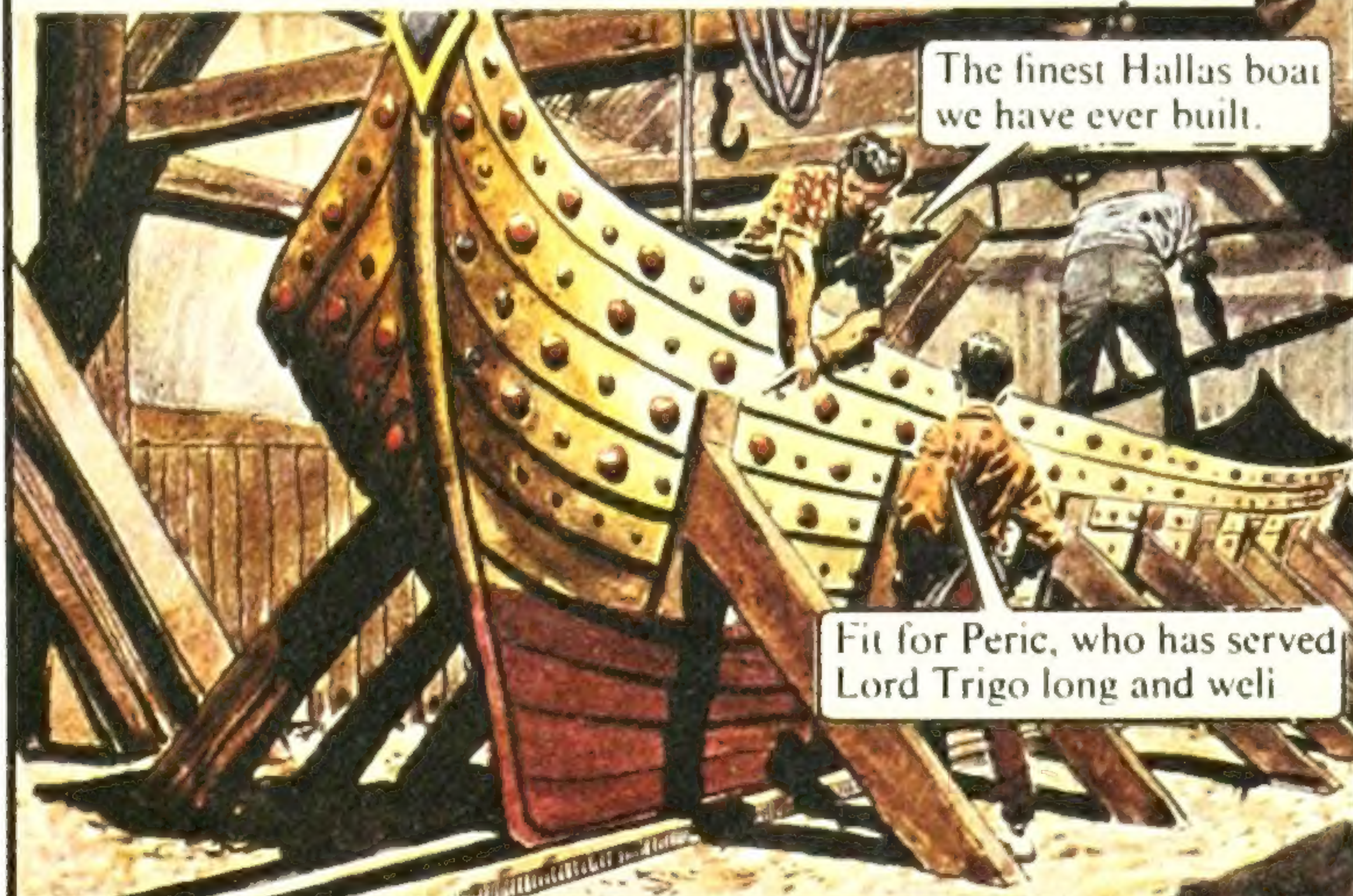


I am growing old and I would like to spend my last days in the beautiful land of Hellas, where there is no pain and strife . . . only peace and contentment . . .

From time immemorial the people of the planet Elekton had believed in the existence of the beautiful land of Hellas . . . and it was every Elekton's ambition to be able to afford the traditional jewel-encrusted boat in which to make the journey when he grew old . . .

The finest Hellas boat we have ever built.

Fit for Peric, who has served Lord Trigo long and well.



Came the day when Peric bade a sad farewell to his ruler and his loved ones, and boarded his Hellas boat on the mysterious River Pyx . . .

Farewell, old friend . . . may you still be there to greet me when I, too, make the journey of no return!

Goodbye . . . goodbye . . .

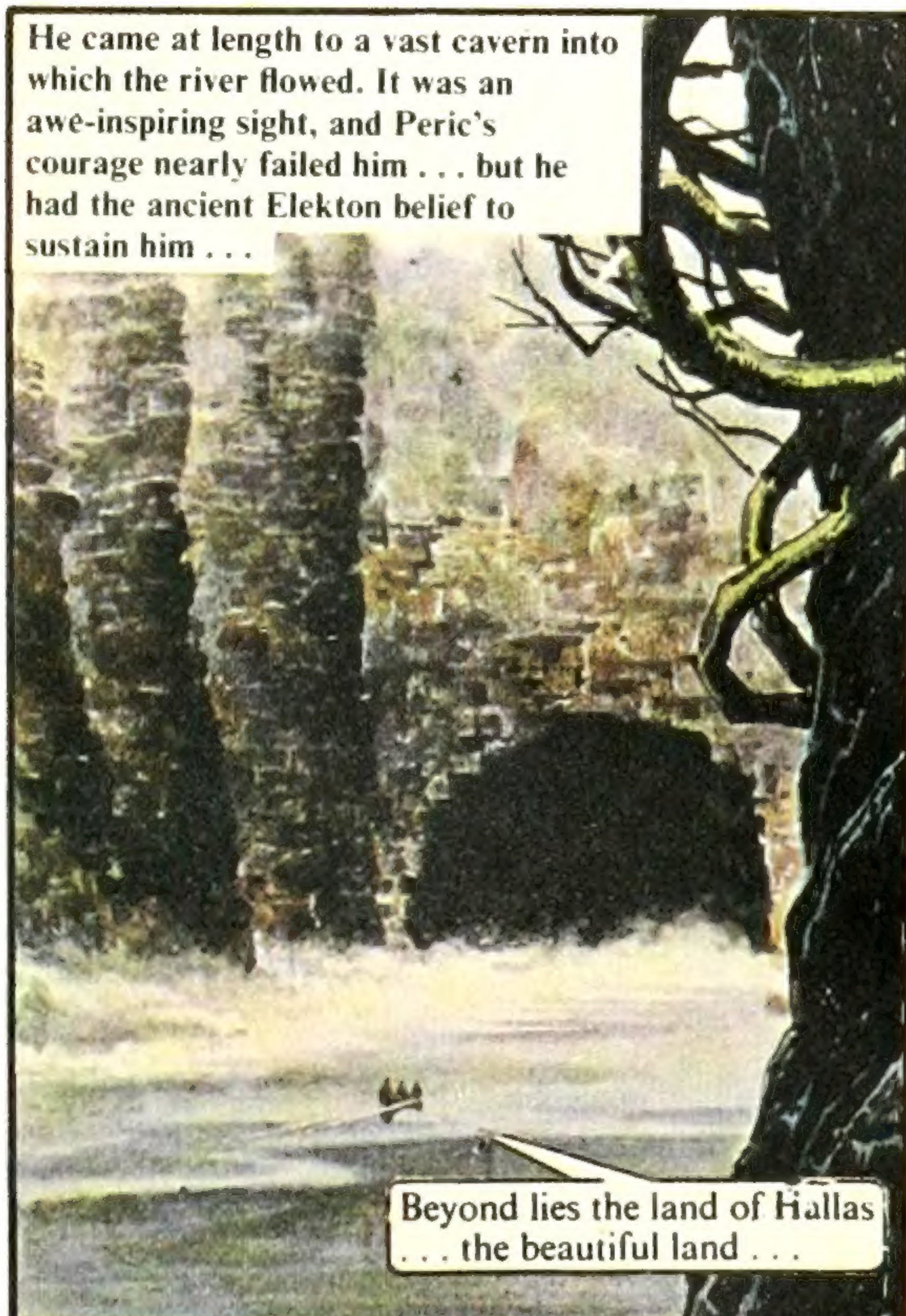


No need for sail or oars . . . the River Pyx carried the Hellas boat containing Peric and all his wealth in its swift-flowing current.



He came at length to a vast cavern into which the river flowed. It was an awe-inspiring sight, and Peric's courage nearly failed him . . . but he had the ancient Elekton belief to sustain him . . .

Beyond lies the land of Hellas . . . the beautiful land . . .



A year passed, and wise old Peric passed into memory. One morning, Trigo's nephew Janno and his friend Keren boarded their atmosphere crafts.

We'll have a mock battle in the sky!

I wager I'll beat you!



Soon the high-spirited lads were soaring far above the plain of Vorg . . . and Janno grinned to himself . . .

He's going to attack me . . . but I'll turn and meet him with a counter-attack!



It was a million-to-one mischance! Both lads saw it coming, and both wrenched at their controls . . . *too late!*



Janno fought with the controls of his rent and blazing craft. He saw a broad river below him and one thought raced through his mind . . .

If the craft doesn't break apart on impact with the water . . . I might have a chance . . .

Then came the stunning plunge into the river . . . and the hull of the craft did not disintegrate. Janno fought his way out of the wreckage . . .

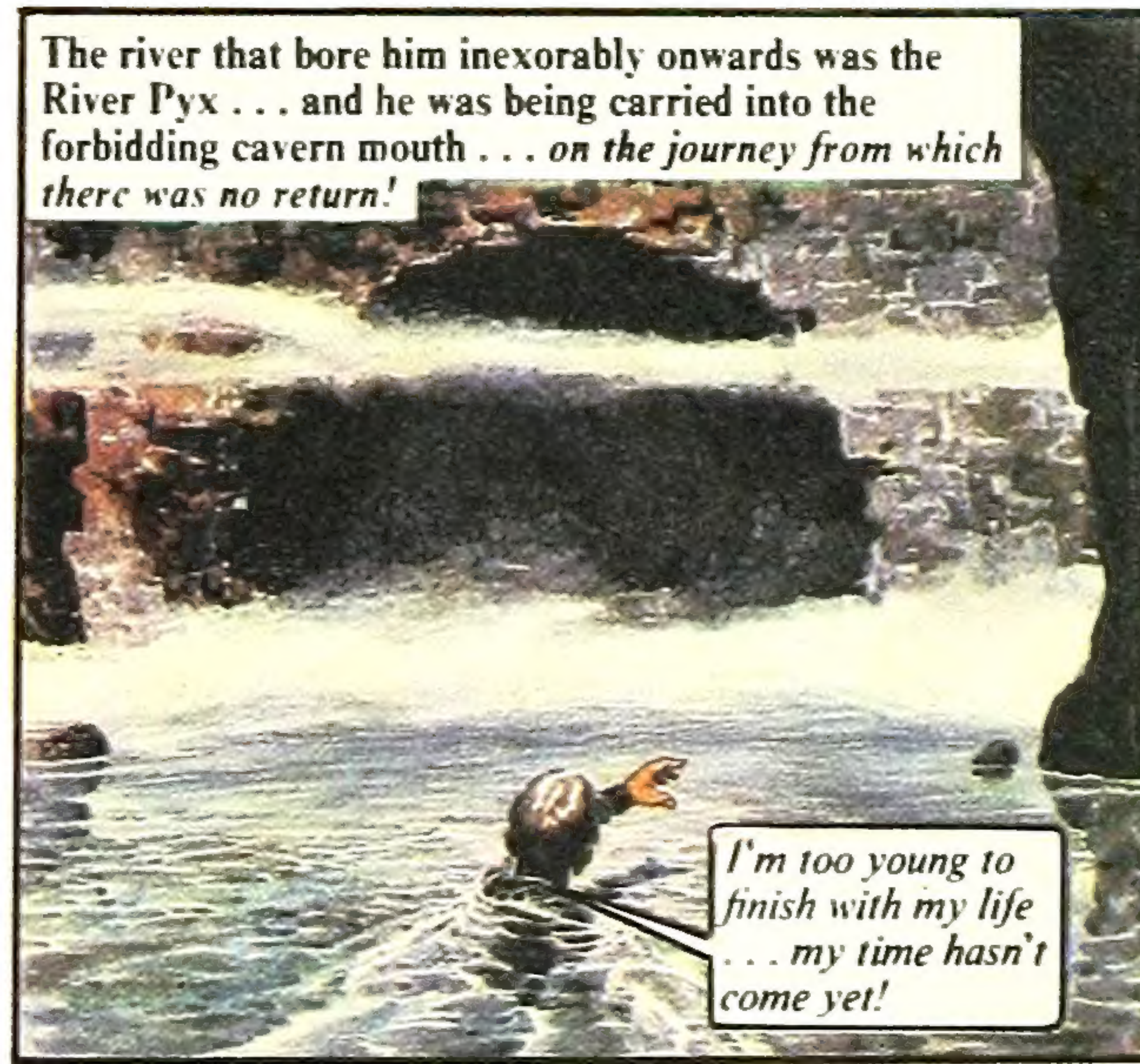


With lungs near to bursting, his head broke the surface . . . and what he saw brought a cry of terror to his lips . . .



No . . . NO!

The river that bore him inexorably onwards was the River Pyx . . . and he was being carried into the forbidding cavern mouth . . . *on the journey from which there was no return!*



I'm too young to finish with my life . . . my time hasn't come yet!

An atmosphere craft swooped low over the main square at Trigan, trailing a plume of smoke.



Be ready to drag him out before the craft goes up in flames!

It's Keren! He's in grave trouble!

The craft tore itself apart on landing, but willing hands dragged the young pilot clear before the flames could engulf him.



No! No! . . . Better that I die!

Later, he fell on his knees before the ruler of Trigan and his brother Brag.



Lord Trigo . . . Lord Brag . . . I have killed Janno, my best friend!

The father and the uncle listened in shocked silence to the boy's halting tale of tragedy.



We were fooling about in the air, making mock attacks on each other. It . . . it all happened so quickly. Suddenly there was a jolt . . . and then . . . I saw him going down.

It was Brag who helped Keren to his feet.



Janno may have survived the crash. Come with us, Keren, and show us where it happened.

Don't blame yourself, lad. It was a tragic accident, but I don't hold you responsible. I know your grief is as great as

But later . . . high in the atmosphere . . . it was clear that their quest was hopeless.



He went down in flames . . . towards that river.

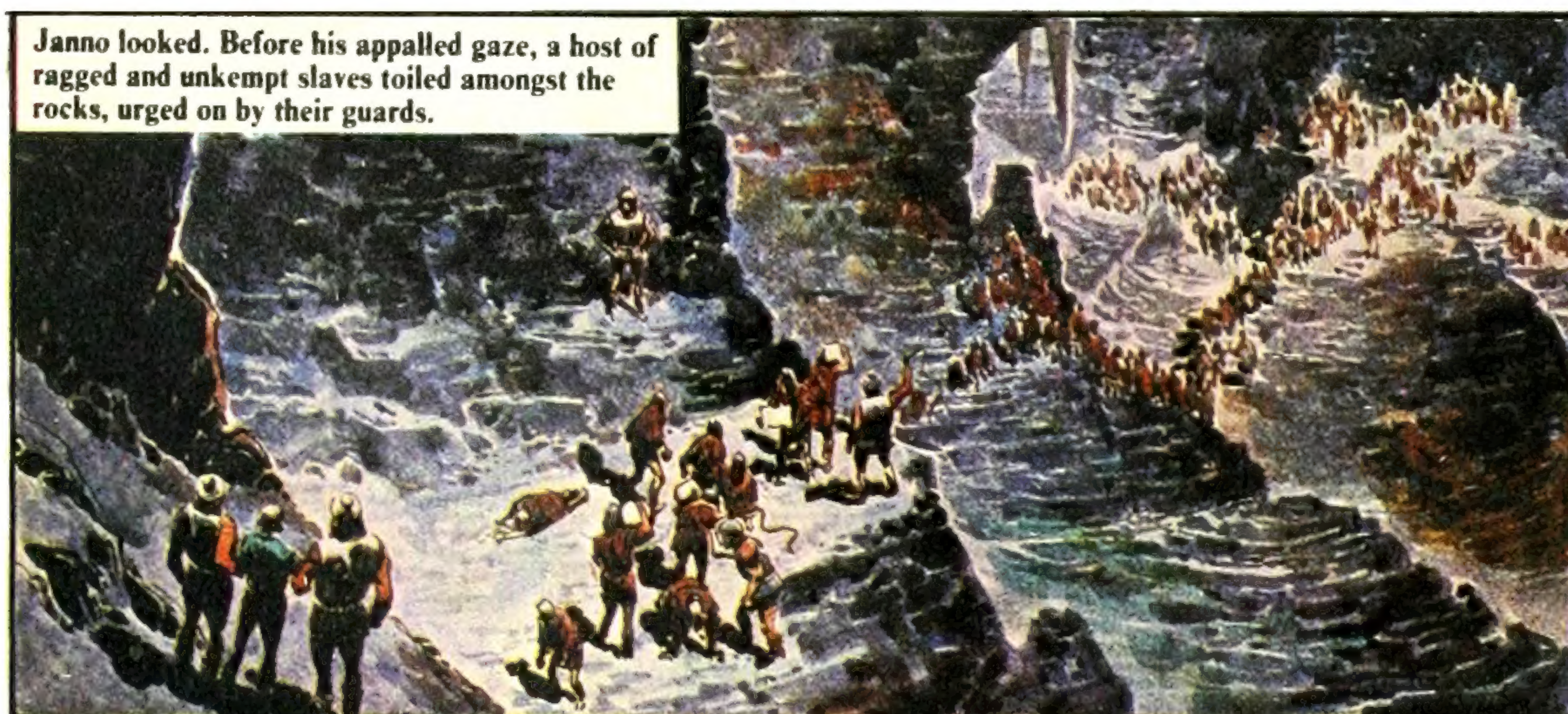
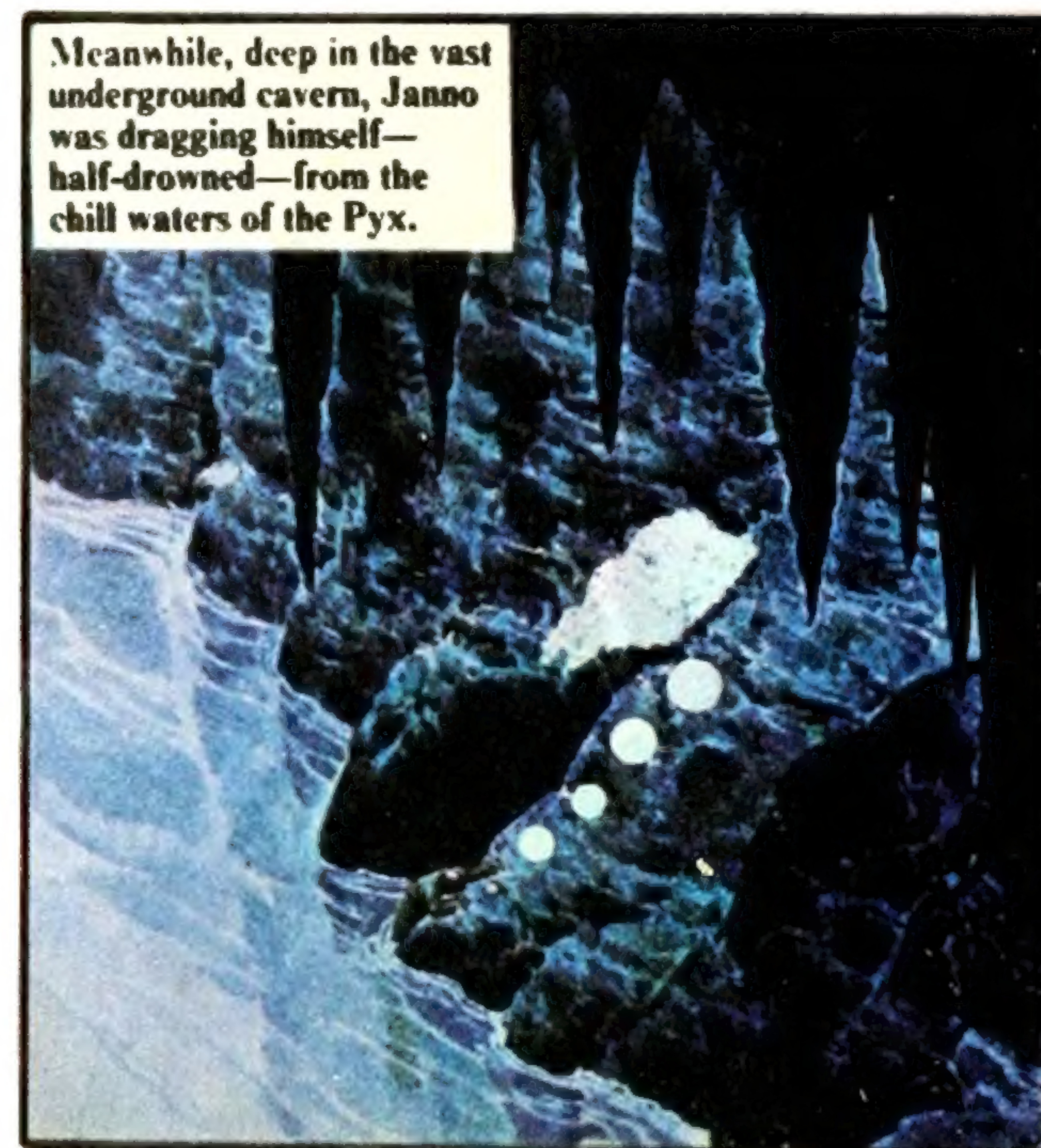
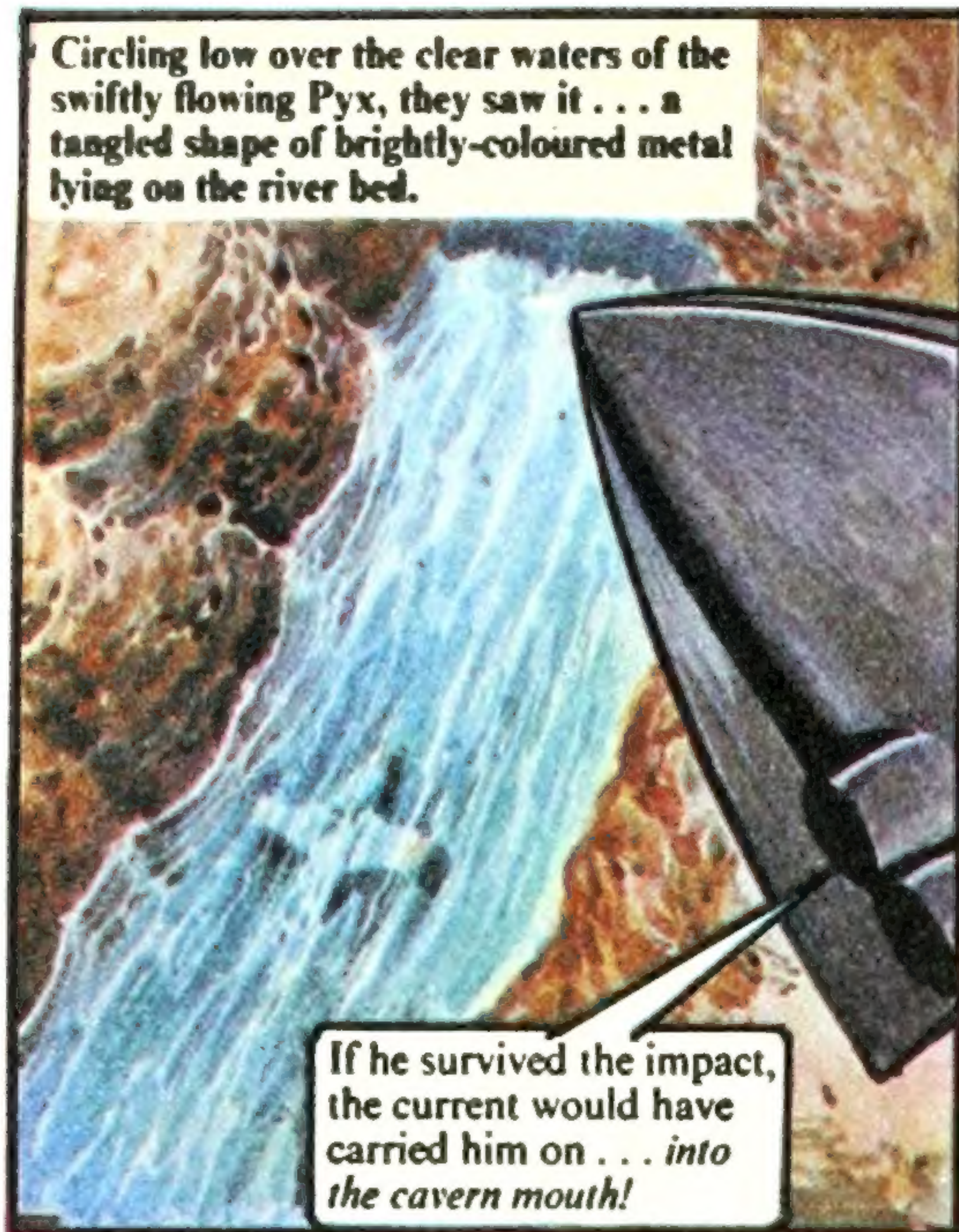
But . . . *that is the River Pyx!*

The two brothers exchanged a grim glance.



The river of no return!

Take the craft lower.



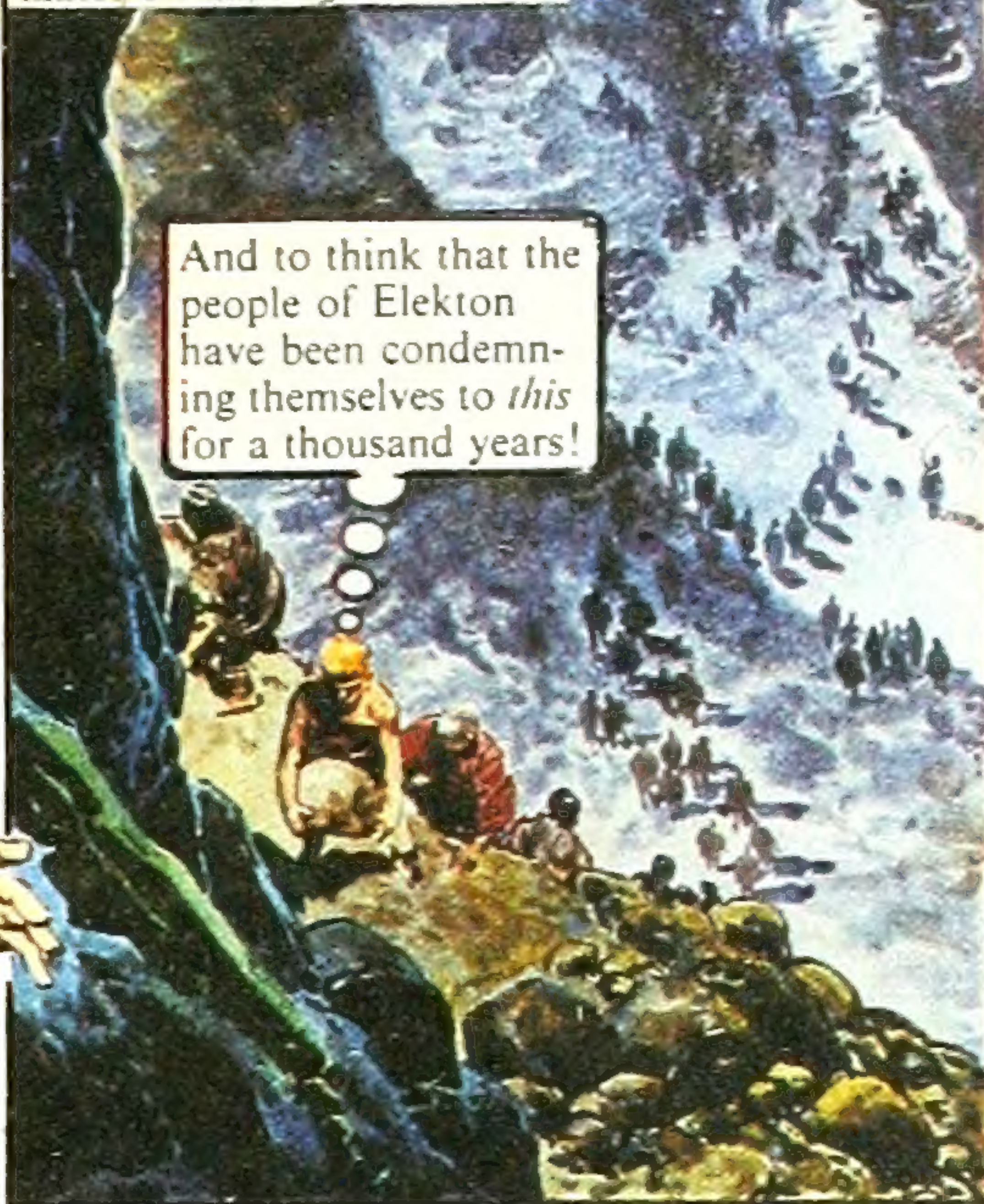
A blow from the shaft of a spear sent Janno reeling towards the toiling slaves.



Get to work . . . and work till you drop!

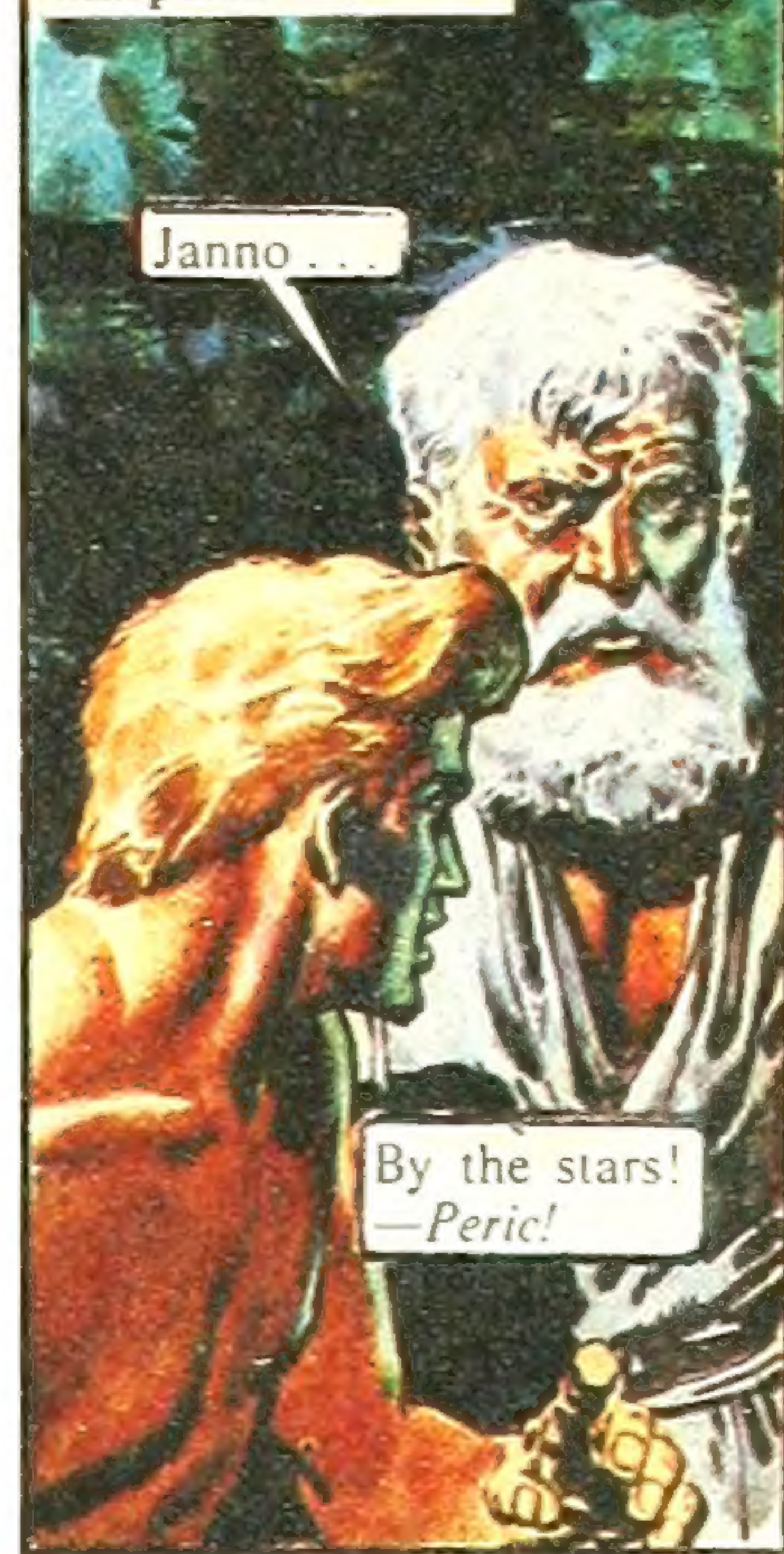
He's the youngest we've had for many a year. He'll last longer than most of them do.

So Janno joined the army of wretched creatures who were driving a tunnel through the massive wall of rock.



And to think that the people of Elekton have been condemning themselves to *this* for a thousand years!

And then—he heard his own name whispered . . .



Janno . . .

By the stars! —Peric!

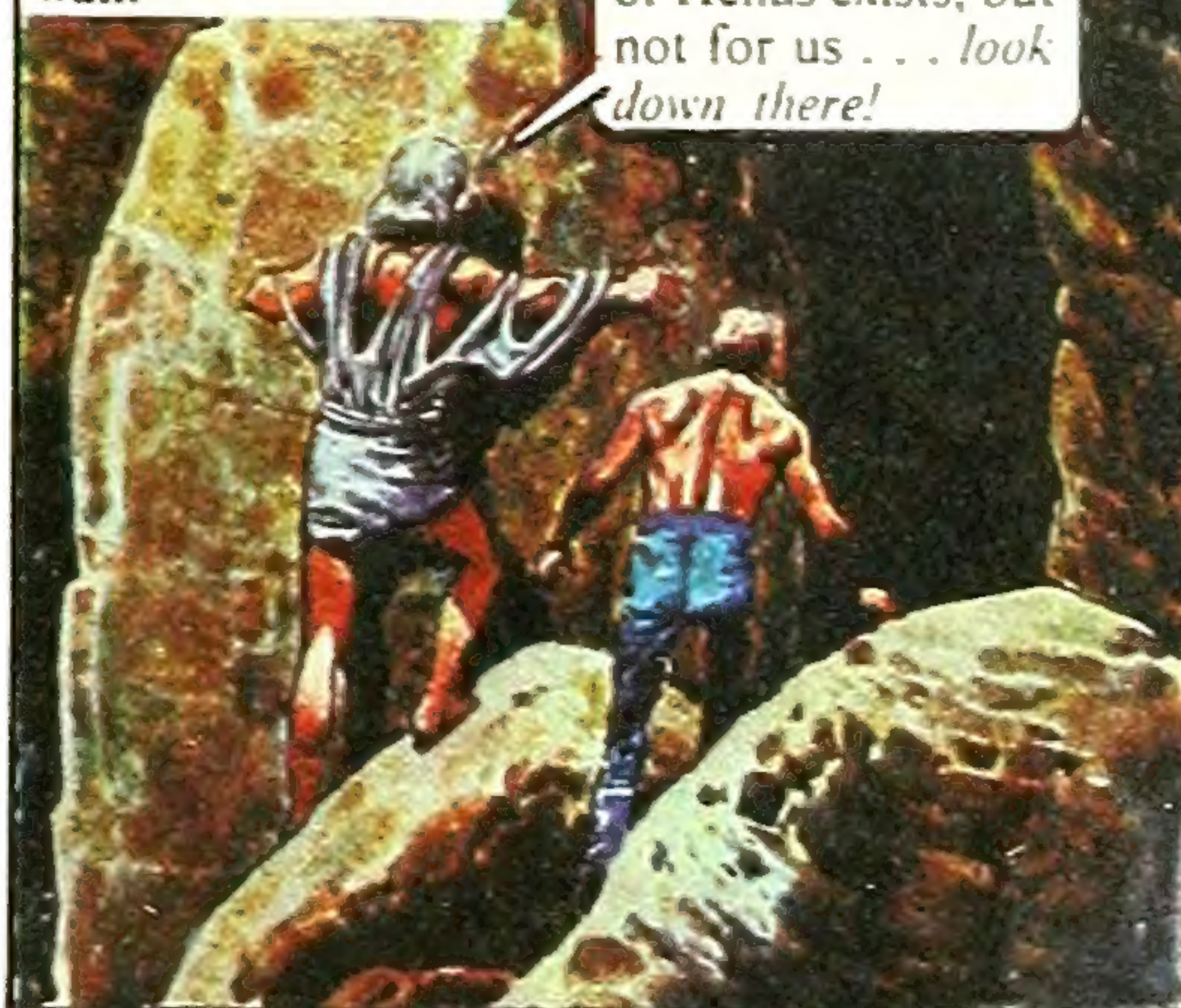
He recognised the wise old Peric who had taken the journey of no return a year previously.



Keep working! . . . I never thought to see you in this accursed place, Janno. A lad of your age . . .

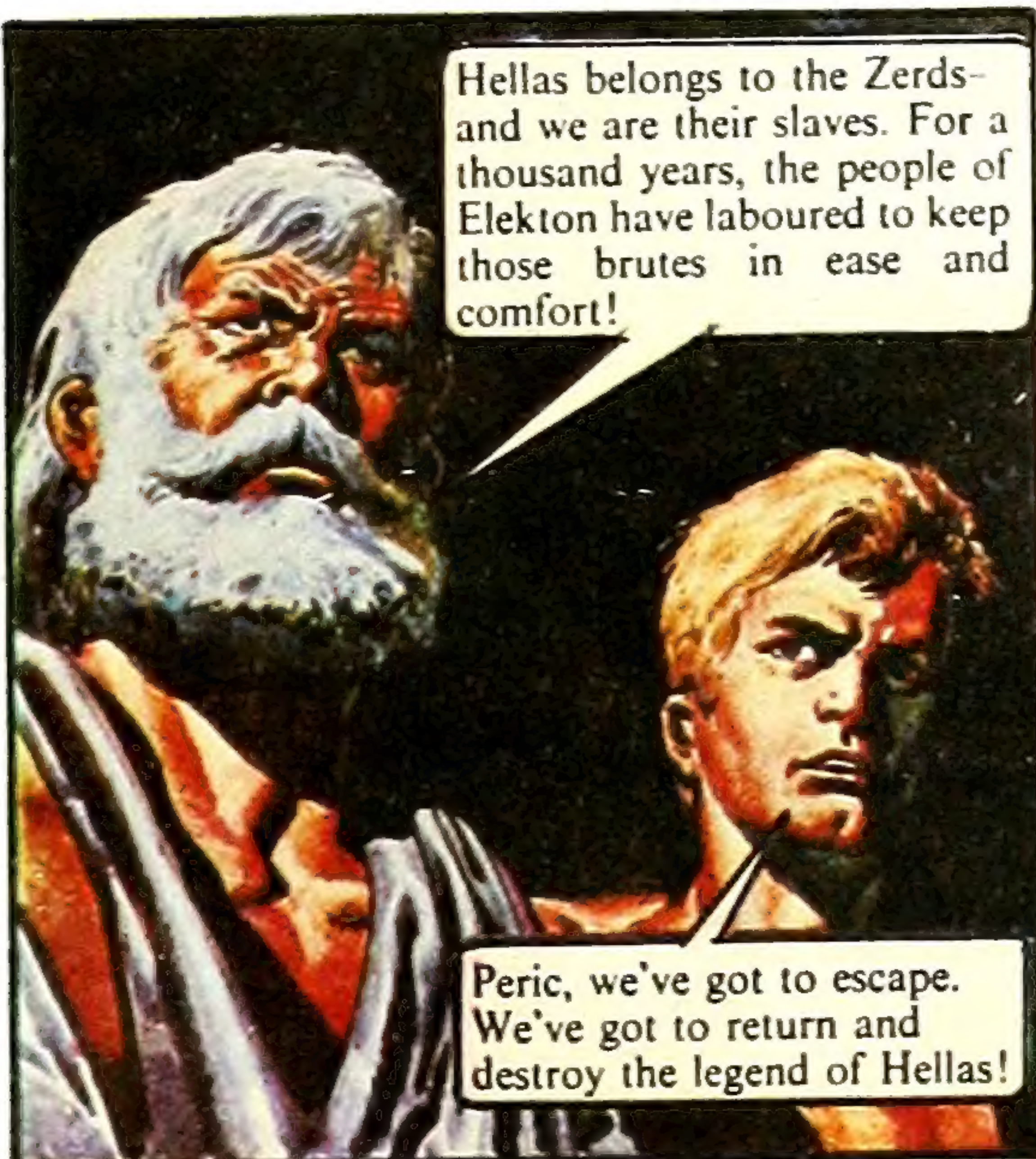
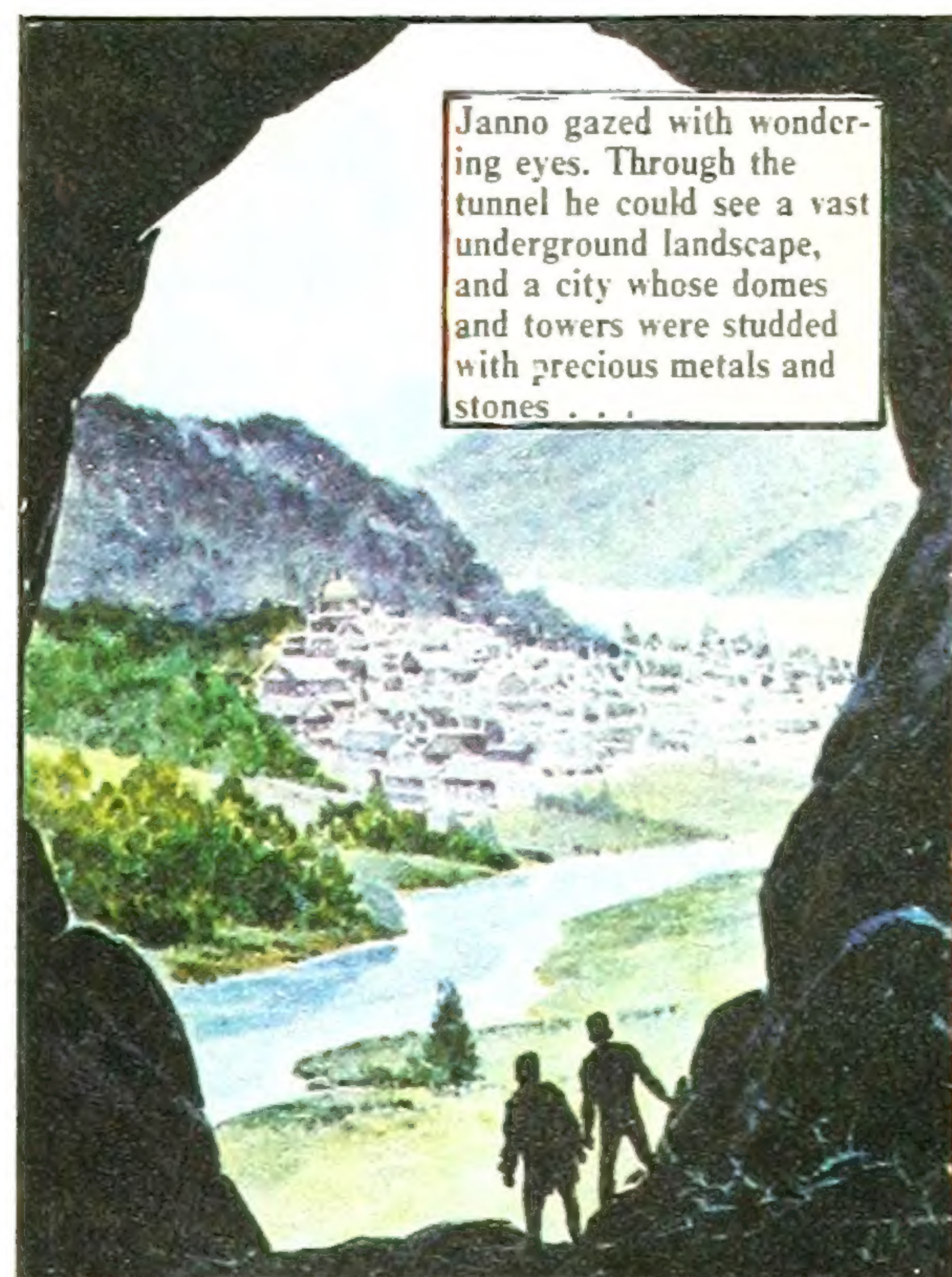
I came here by accident, Peric. But I don't understand . . . can this really be the beautiful land of Hellas?

Moving slowly, and pretending to work all the way, Peric led Janno to where a tunnel had been pierced in the rock wall.



The beautiful land of Hellas exists, but not for us . . . look down there!

Janno gazed with wondering eyes. Through the tunnel he could see a vast underground landscape, and a city whose domes and towers were studded with precious metals and stones . . .



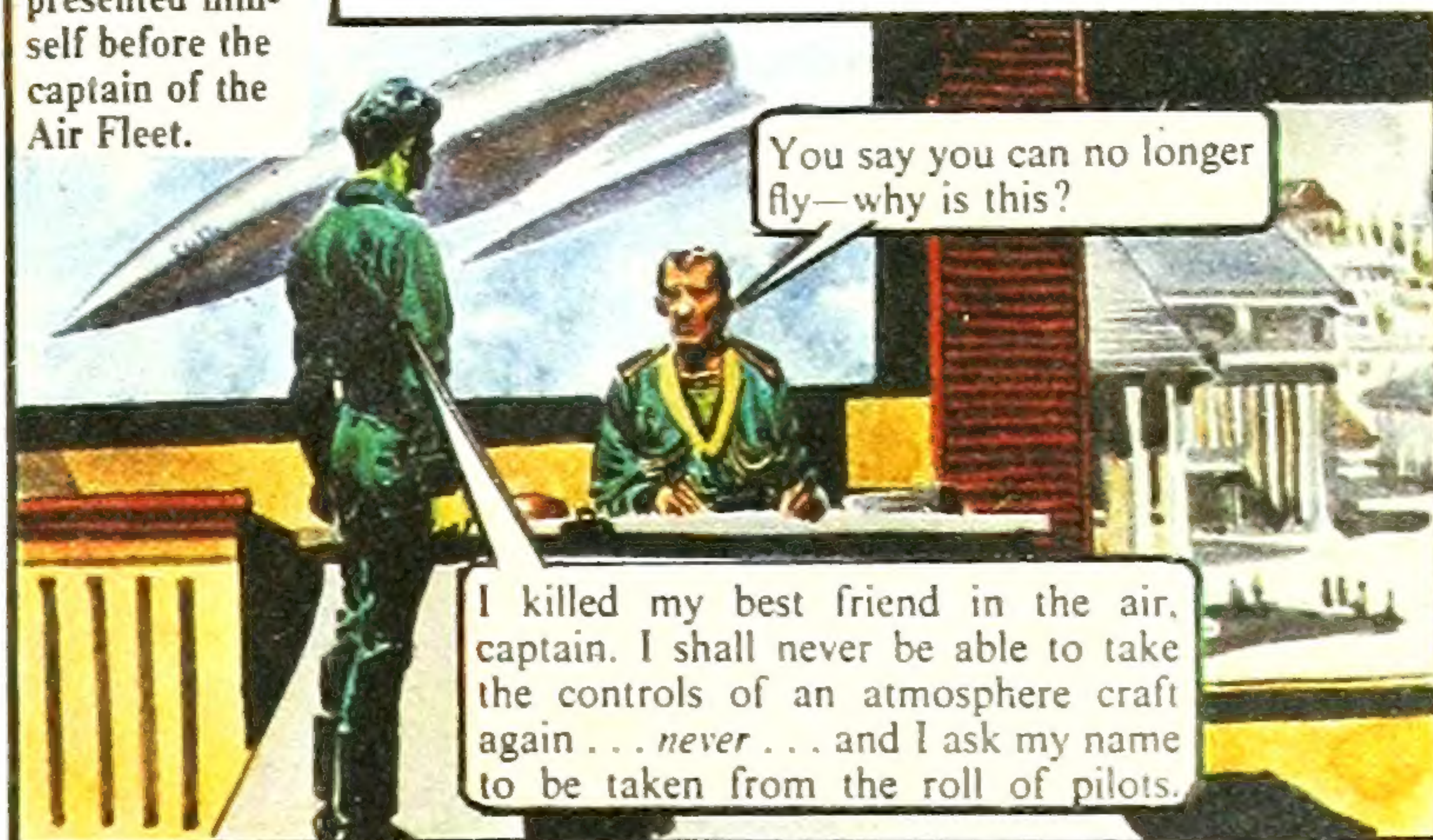
Hellas belongs to the Zerds—and we are their slaves. For a thousand years, the people of Elekton have laboured to keep those brutes in ease and comfort!

Peric, we've got to escape. We've got to return and destroy the legend of Hellas!

This has been going on for a thousand years, and everyone who has come here has had the same idea . . . But there is no escape, Janno . . . you have made the journey of no return!

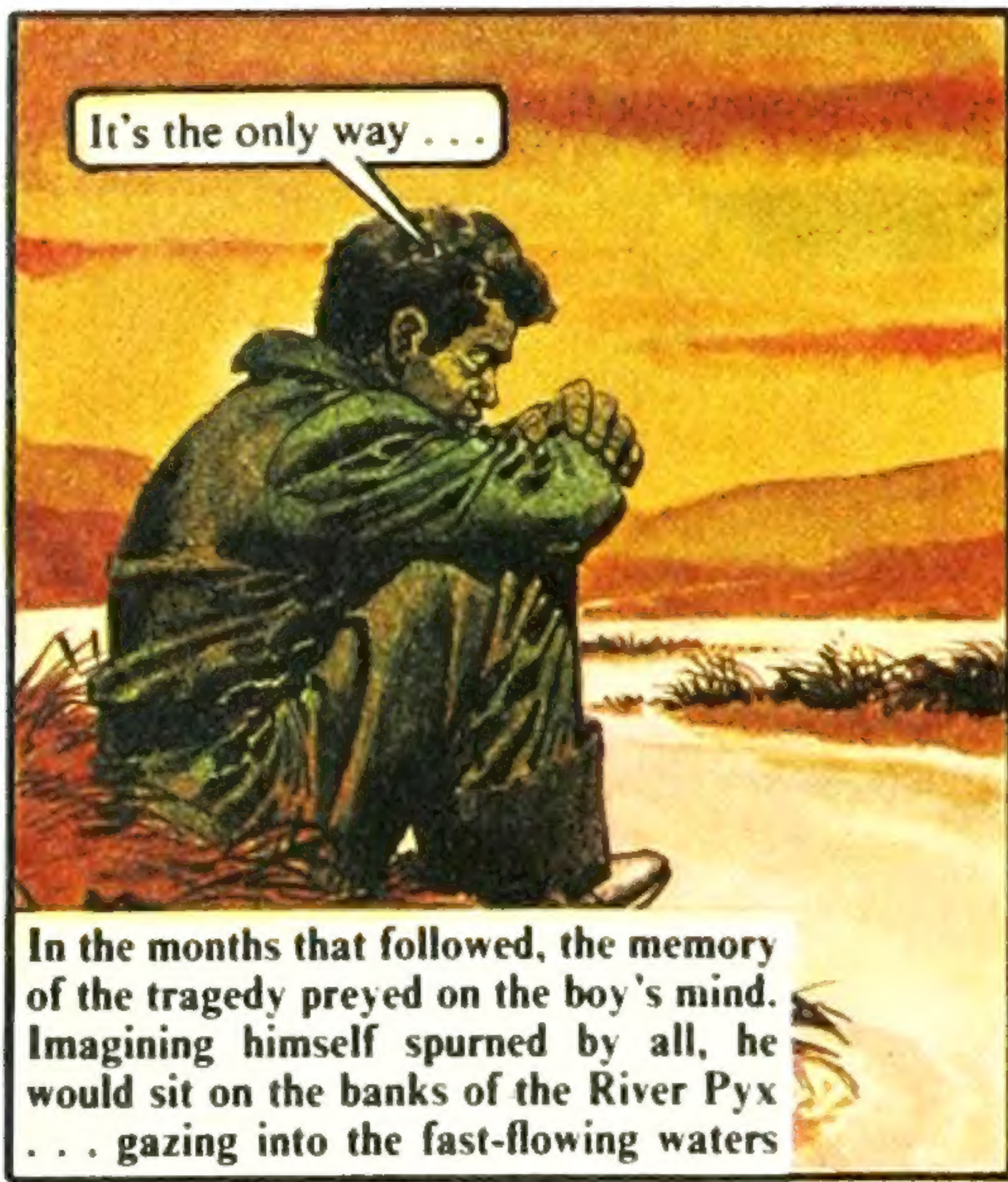


Meanwhile, back in the city of Trigan, Keren came to a decision. He presented himself before the captain of the Air Fleet.



You say you can no longer fly—why is this?

I killed my best friend in the air, captain. I shall never be able to take the controls of an atmosphere craft again . . . never . . . and I ask my name to be taken from the roll of pilots.



It's the only way . . .

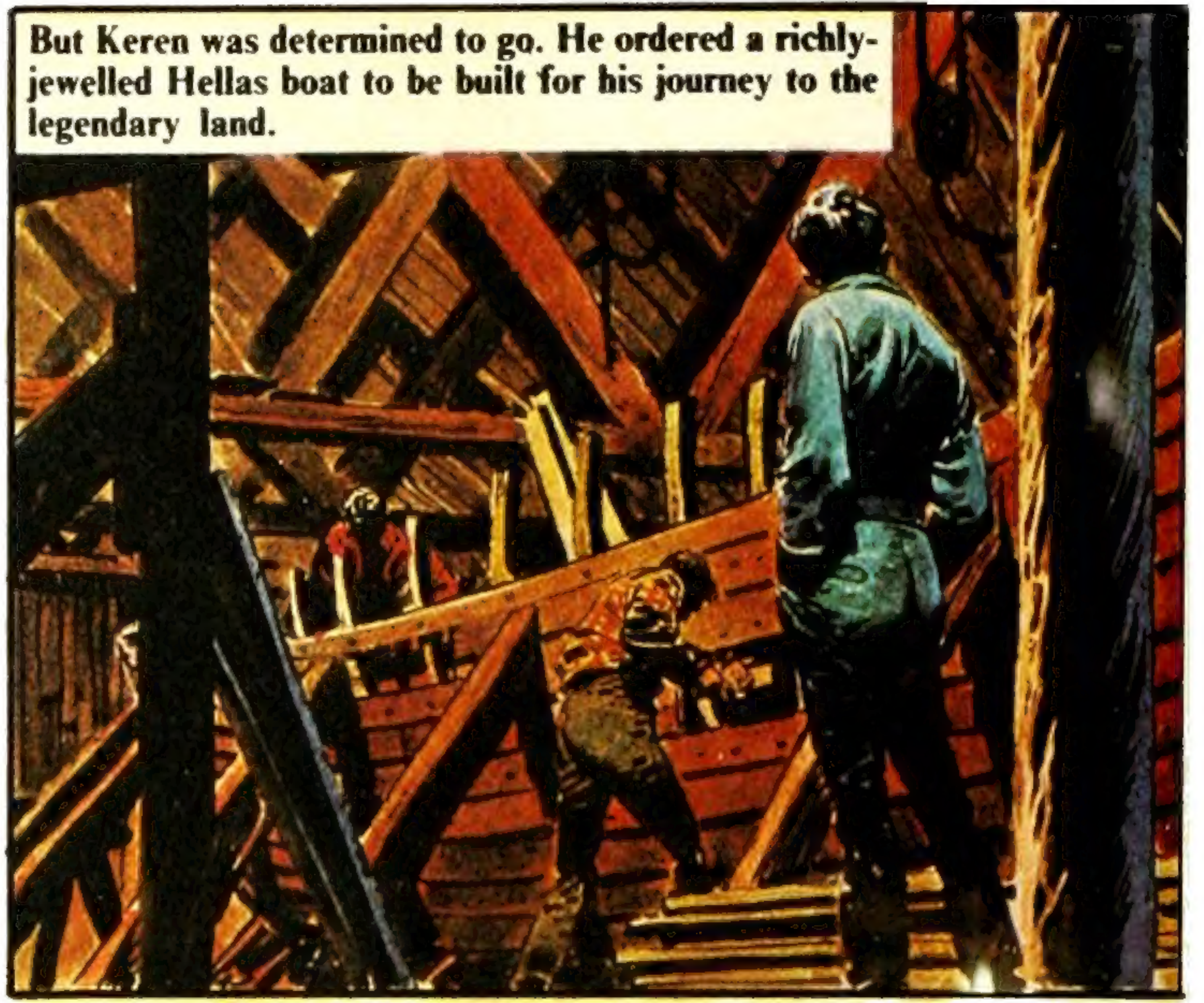
In the months that followed, the memory of the tragedy preyed on the boy's mind. Imagining himself spurned by all, he would sit on the banks of the River Pyx . . . gazing into the fast-flowing waters



Finally, he went to Trigo.

Lord Trigo. It is my wish to take the journey of no return and join Janno if he still lives!

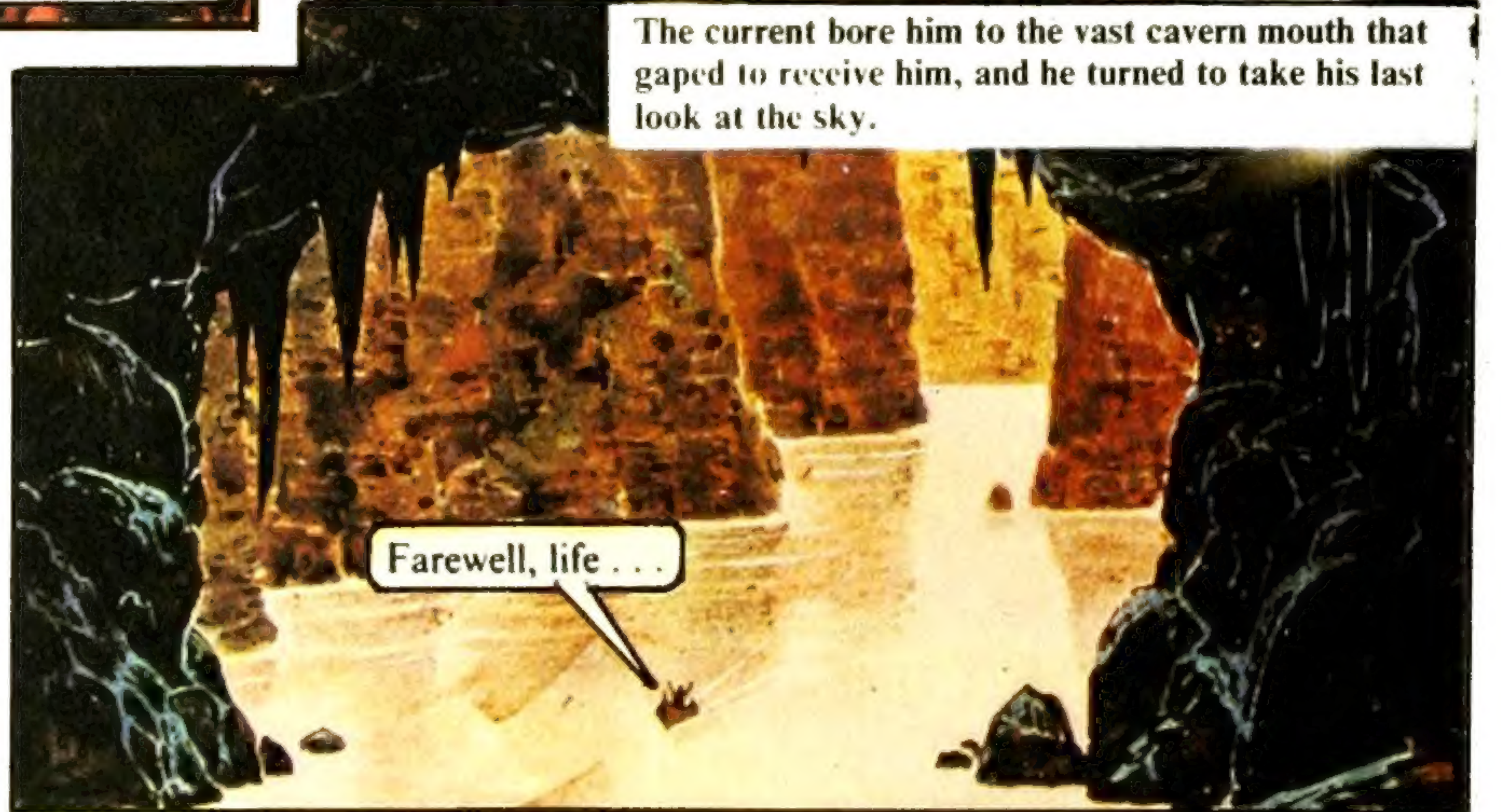
You are young, Keren . . . the land of Hellas is a place for men who have lived the best part of their lives.



But Keren was determined to go. He ordered a richly-jewelled Hellas boat to be built for his journey to the legendary land.



. . . And when it was ready, he set out on the journey of no return, down the mysterious river.



The current bore him to the vast cavern mouth that gaped to receive him, and he turned to take his last look at the sky.

Farewell, life . . .



After many hours of back-breaking labour, Janno and Peric saw two of the guards dragging a limp figure towards them.

Here comes another unfortunate to join us!



The Zerds threw the newcomer to the rocky ground.

Ha! This one showed the usual fight when he found that Hellas was not all he'd hoped for.

He'll soon recover. He's a strong one . . . years of work in him!



When the guards were out of sight, Janno and Peric knelt beside the prostrate figure and turned him over . . .

Keren!

By the stars!

Janno . . . Can this be Hellas?

Later, when Keren had recovered, they told him the truth about the legendary land . . .

Then we must escape!

Aaah! That's what they all say when they first come here!

Peric believes escape's impossible . . . but *nothing's* impossible!

There was no night or day in Hellas. Only when they were dropping with fatigue were they led off for a few hours' sleep . . .

There go another party of slaves to take our place. Work never ceases in Hellas!

They passed the luxurious palaces of the city, where the Zerds lived in splendour . . .

They came to the far end of the vast underground cavern, where the River Pyx continued on its way through a tunnel mouth.

That's where the Pyx flows on to the underground sea.

The slaves fell down and slept with sheer exhaustion . . . but Janno stared at the tunnel mouth, with thoughts of escape teeming in his mind.

If some way could be found to block the tunnel mouth, the river would flood . . . and fill the cavern!

Yes . . . but how to do it?

And then the wise old Peric spoke . . .

The Zerds' Gravity-cars are driven by atomic power . . . If one of them could be crashed against the rock wall, it could create a big enough explosion to dam the river . . .

It was in that moment that they knew what must be done!

I was wrong, Janno! With youth and strength and courage, a man might escape from Hellas!

The guards will have to be dealt with . . .

We'll do it straight away

A short while later, one of the Zerd guards felt Keren's powerful arm encircle his neck.

Uunugh!

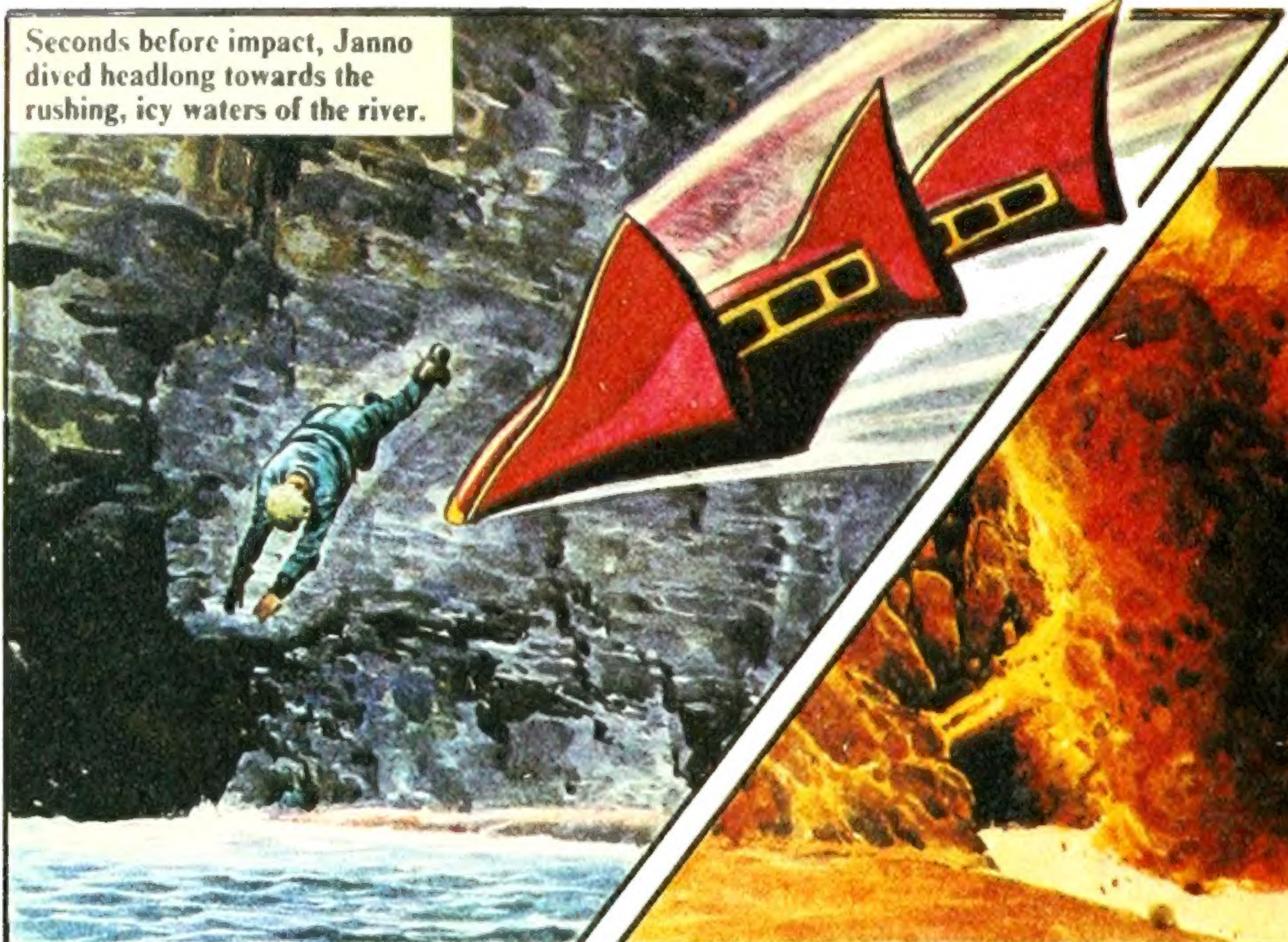
And then Janno was running towards one of the Gravity-cars that lay nearby . . . with furious shouts ringing in his ears!

One of the slaves is trying to escape! After him!

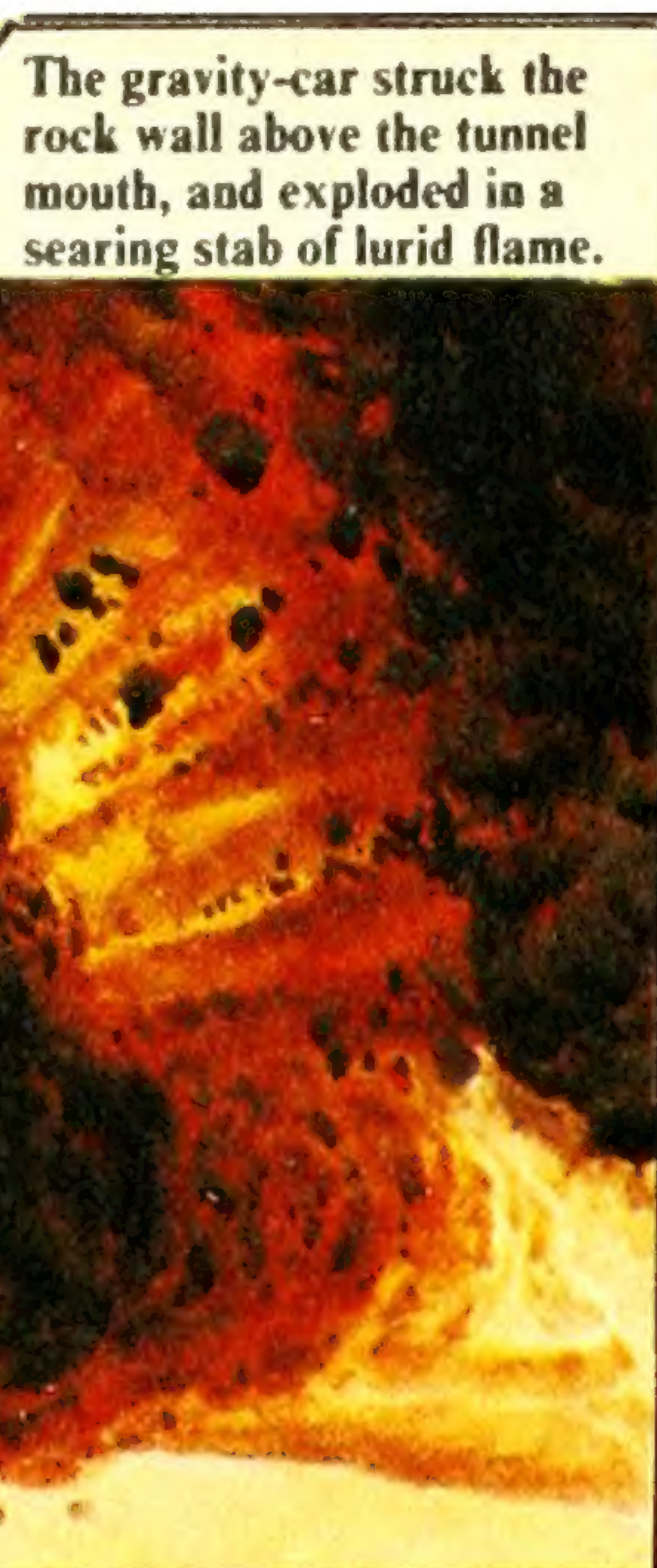
There was only one control lever on the Gravity-car. Janno jerked it towards him, and the craft zoomed into the air . . .

And then he was heading straight for the rock wall above the River Pyx!

Seconds before impact, Janno dived headlong towards the rushing, icy waters of the river.



The gravity-car struck the rock wall above the tunnel mouth, and exploded in a searing stab of lurid flame.



The shock wave penetrated the water . . . Janno was driven deep, and a black wave of unconsciousness closed in on him.



With a rending groan, the mighty mass of rock above the tunnel mouth sagged and came crashing down . . . and the Zerd guards panicked.



The whole mountain is falling apart!

Above the frantic cries of the guards rose the voice of Keren rallying the slaves . . .

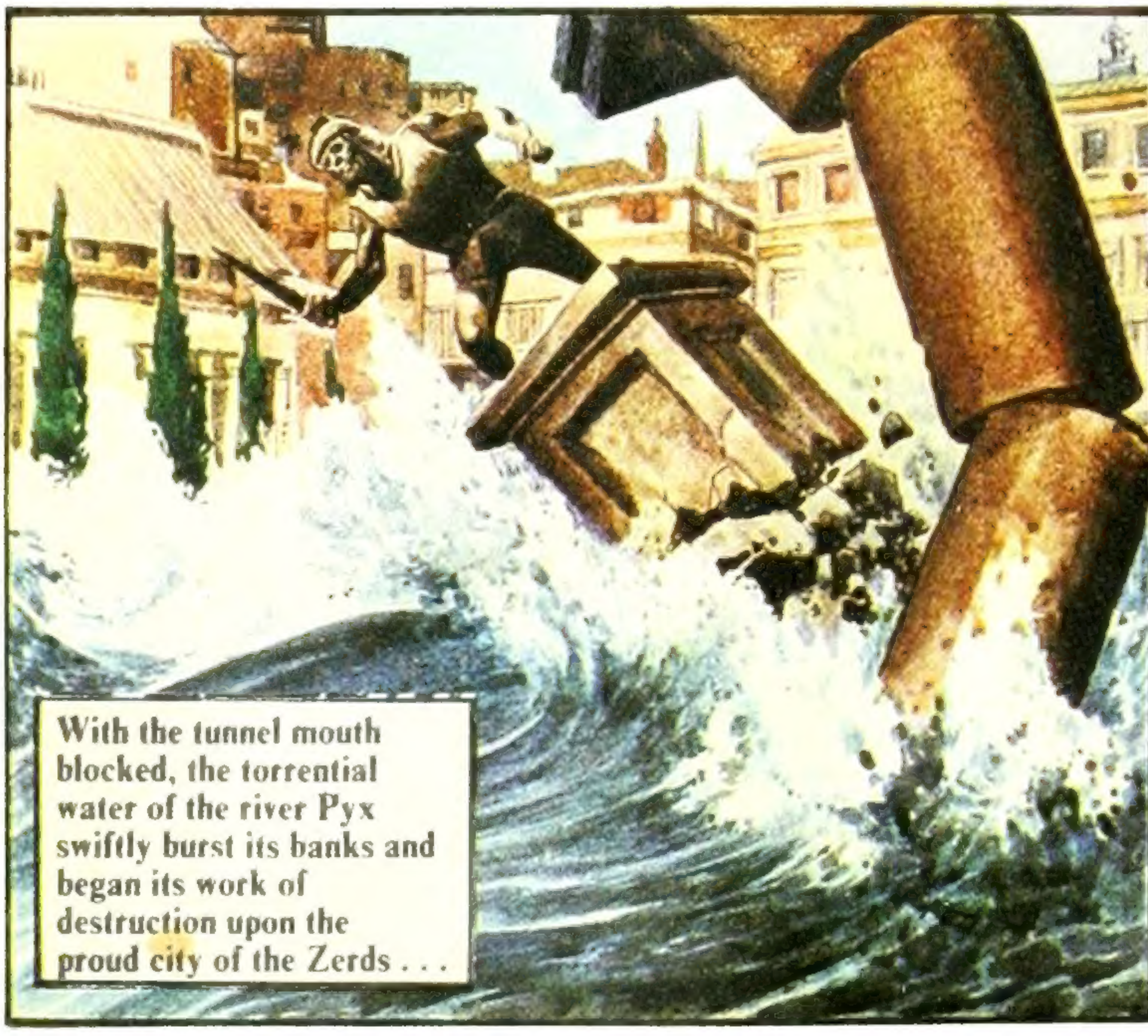
Slaves! . . . are you going to cower there and drown . . . or fight like men?



The river is blocked . . . we shall all be drowned!

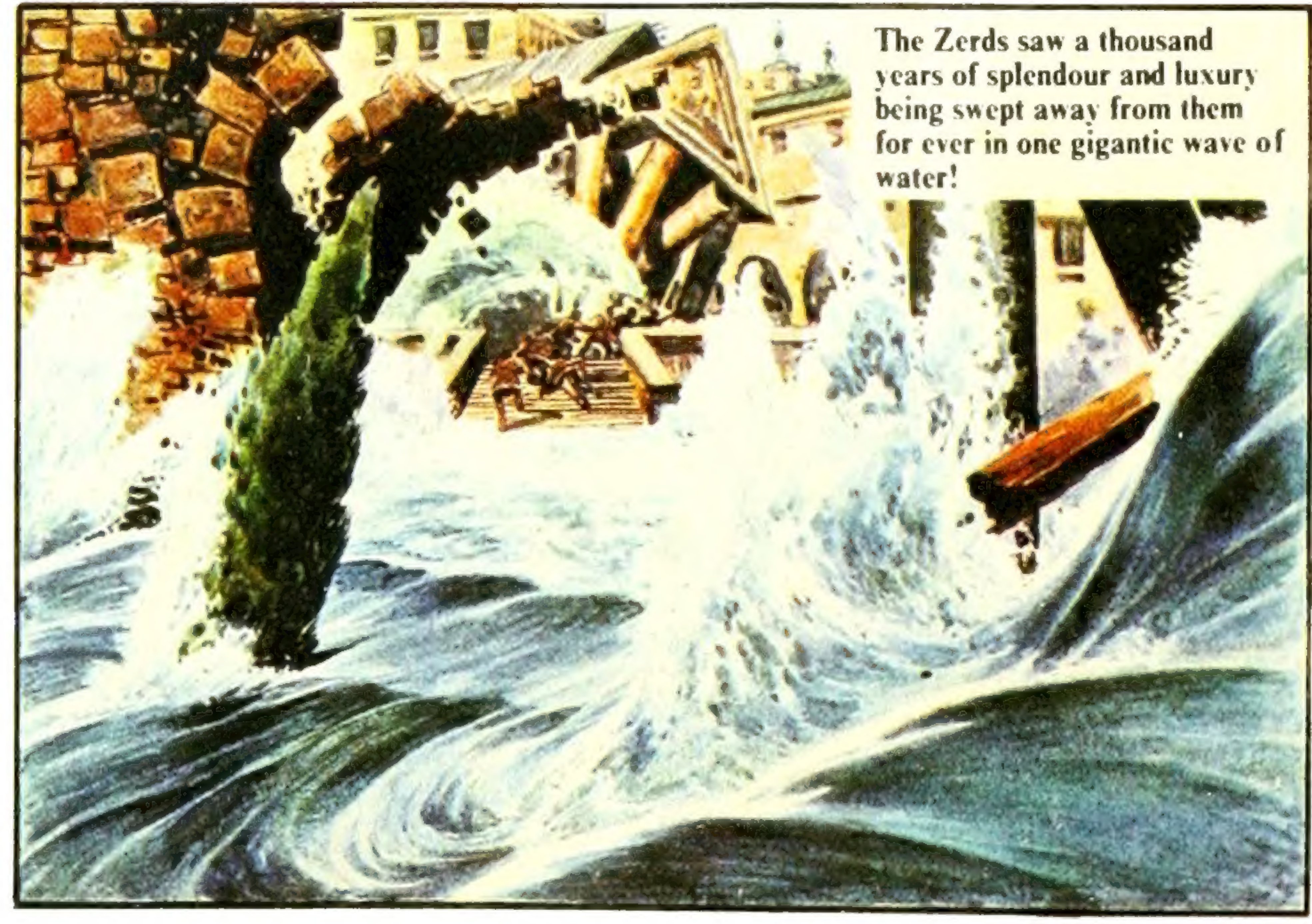
Long years of captivity had numbed the minds of the slaves, but when they saw the chance of striking back, they fell upon the guards and wrenched their weapons from them.

Hellas is about to be destroyed . . . fight your way to freedom!



With the tunnel mouth blocked, the torrential water of the river Pyx swiftly burst its banks and began its work of destruction upon the proud city of the Zerds . . .

The Zerds saw a thousand years of splendour and luxury being swept away from them for ever in one gigantic wave of water!



Leading the slaves, Keren and old Peric fought their way through the city till they reached a flight of stone steps that led up to the vast vault high above . . .

This leads to the very heart of the mountain under which we stand . . . and it is there we must journey!

They toiled up the towering stairway . . . and Keren looked back with agony to see the waters rising below them.

Janno . . . Janno . . .

I feel in my heart that we shall never see the gallant lad again, Keren!

The top of the vast stairway led into the heart of the mountain, and far above them they could see a circle of daylight. . .

Slaves . . . there is the world outside . . . and freedom!

Freedom!

Disregarding their weariness, they climbed the rest of the way in frantic haste . . . and came out into the sunlight of Elekton.

Free . . . Free!

After twenty long years!

And then Keren heard it . . . a voice calling his name! And looking down into the dark abyss, he saw a familiar figure climbing towards him!

Keren!

Janno! . . . thank the stars . . . you're safe!

And so, by their valour and courage, they had destroyed for ever the evil, false legend of Hellas.

We have come back from the Land of No-Return!

Where no one will ever journey to . . . ever again!