

STARGAZER ONE

TRAPPED!

ONE MORE METEOR SHOWER AND WE WON'T NEED VIEWSCREENS TO SEE THE STARS! REPORT, MR. LENNOX?

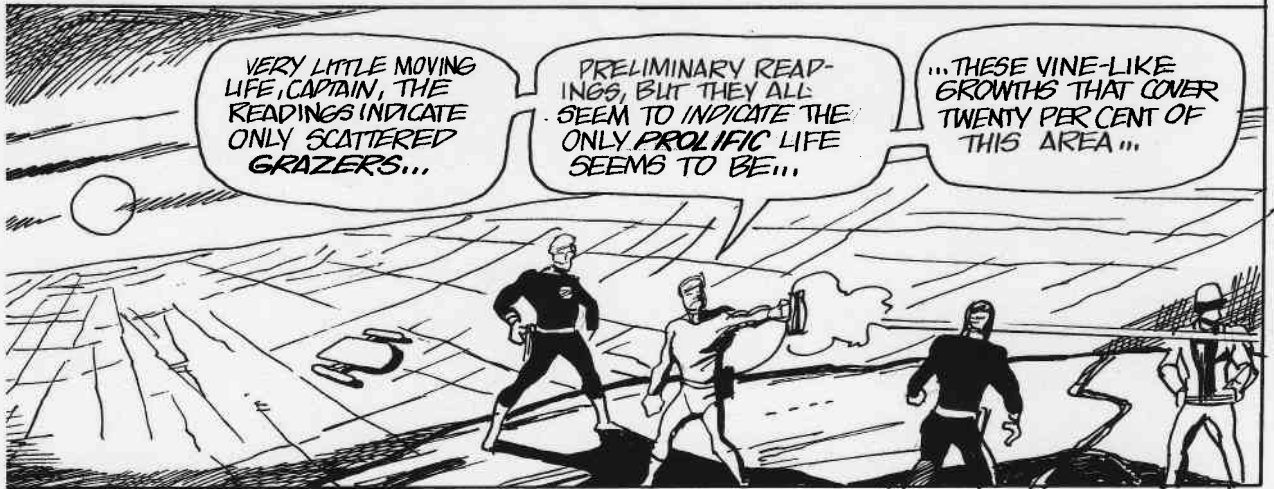
MINIMAL DAMAGE TO OUR SKIN, CAPTAIN! WE'VE GOT ABOUT EIGHTY PER CENT DEFENSE CAPACITY -- SHE'LL STAND UP OKAY, SIR...

BUT I THINK WE SHOULD PLUG THE LEAKS TO BE ABSOLUTELY SURE AS SOON AS WE CAN...

NEXT PLANET'S A PRIMARY GREEN CAPTAIN!

THE CAPTAIN ACKNOWLEDGES WITH A SHORT GRUNT AND I PROP THE NOSE DOWN THREE DEGREES, AIMING FOR A POINT NEAR THE EQUATOR ON A MEDIUM-SIZED CONTINENT-ISLAND.

LANDED ABOUT TEN MINUTES LATER, ON A REAL BARREN-LOOKING SPOT, WITH CAPTAIN WALTERS, ELF, DOC STANTON AND ED HUTCH SELECTED FOR EXTRA VEHICULARS...



VERY LITTLE MOVING LIFE, CAPTAIN, THE READINGS INDICATE ONLY SCATTERED GRAZERS...

PRELIMINARY READINGS, BUT THEY ALL SEEM TO INDICATE THE ONLY PROLIFIC LIFE SEEMS TO BE...

...THESE VINE-LIKE GROWTHS THAT COVER TWENTY PER CENT OF THIS AREA...

THE PLANTS SEEM DISPLAY SOME DEFINITE HOSTILE TENDENCIES...

...AS OUR BONY FRIEND HERE SEEMS TO HAVE FOUND OUT...

YOUR POINT IS WELL TAKEN, DOC -- LET'S KEEP OUR HANDS TO OURSELVES, SHALL WE? ...



INCREDIBLE! I'M PICKING UP NEURO-ACTIVITY -- NOT ONLY DO THE VINES THINK, BUT EACH CELL SEEMS CAPABLE OF AUTONOMOUS DECISIONS...

THE ONLY PRECEDENT FOR SUCH A...



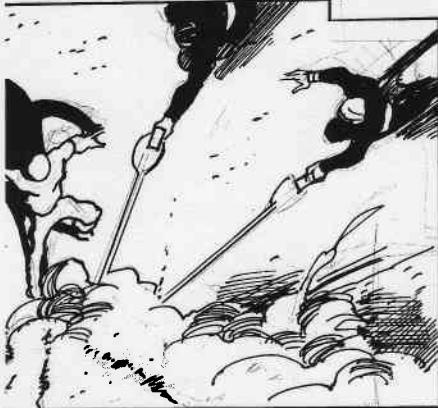
DOC WAS RIGHT -- THERE WAS PROBABLY NO PRECEDENT FOR A PLANT SPECIMEN TAKING OFFENSE AT AN EXAMINATION...



PLANNED TO HAVE A GOOD LAUGH
DOC WHEN I SAW HIM SLAP
THE VINE WITH AN ABSOLUTE
LOOK OF HORROR ON HIS FACE...



A SPLIT SECOND LATER
I DIDN'T FIND DOC'S
PREDICAMENT NEARLY
SO FUNNY...



CAPTAIN WALTERS
AND I DREW OUR
BURSTERS AND
BLASTED THE
VINES WITH A
WIDE-SWEEP DE-
STRUCT SHOT
EACH... THE BURST-
ERS DID THE JOB
AS CAPTAIN
WALTERS SAW...

THEY'RE DEAD
-- BUT THERE
CAN BE NO
DOUBT THEY'RE
HOSTILE BEINGS

LET'S
GET BACK
TO...



HUTCH! STANTON!
BACK TO THE
SHIP ON THE
DOUBLE...

MR. LENNOX-- HIT
THE PLANTS ON THE
LEFT AND BACK UP
AS FAST AS YOU
CAN



THEY DON'T SEEM TO BE ...

THERE'S NO WAY WE CAN STOP THEM-- NOT HERE, ANYWAY--

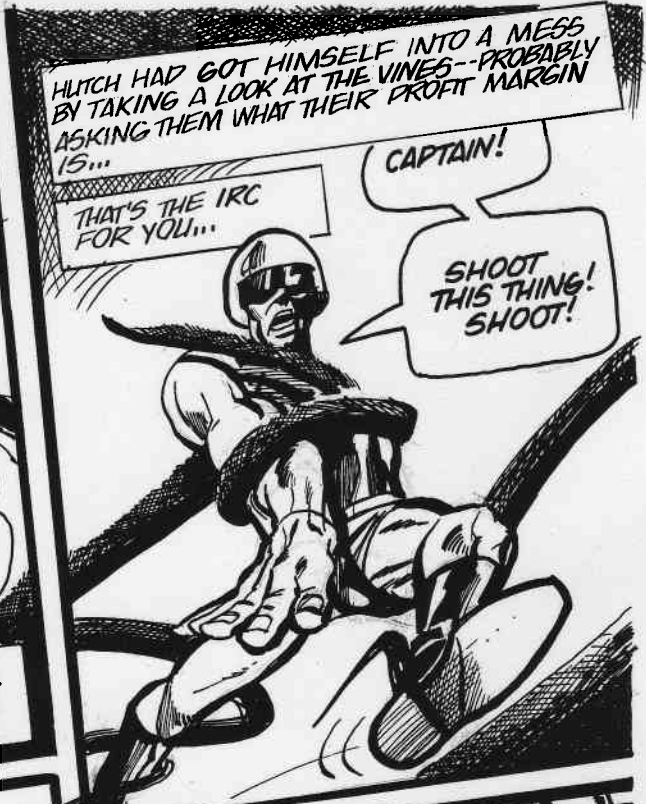
THE CAPTAIN DIDN'T FINISH HIS THOUGHT, BUT, I WAS WONDERING TOO; WHERE THE HELL COULD WE STOP THEM?



IF THE CAPTAIN AIMED, I DIDN'T NOTICE-- KNOWING HIM, I'M WILLING TO BET HE DID IT WITH HIS EYES SHUT...



HUTCH HIT THE GROUND RUNNING-- CAN'T SAY AS I BLAMED HIM...



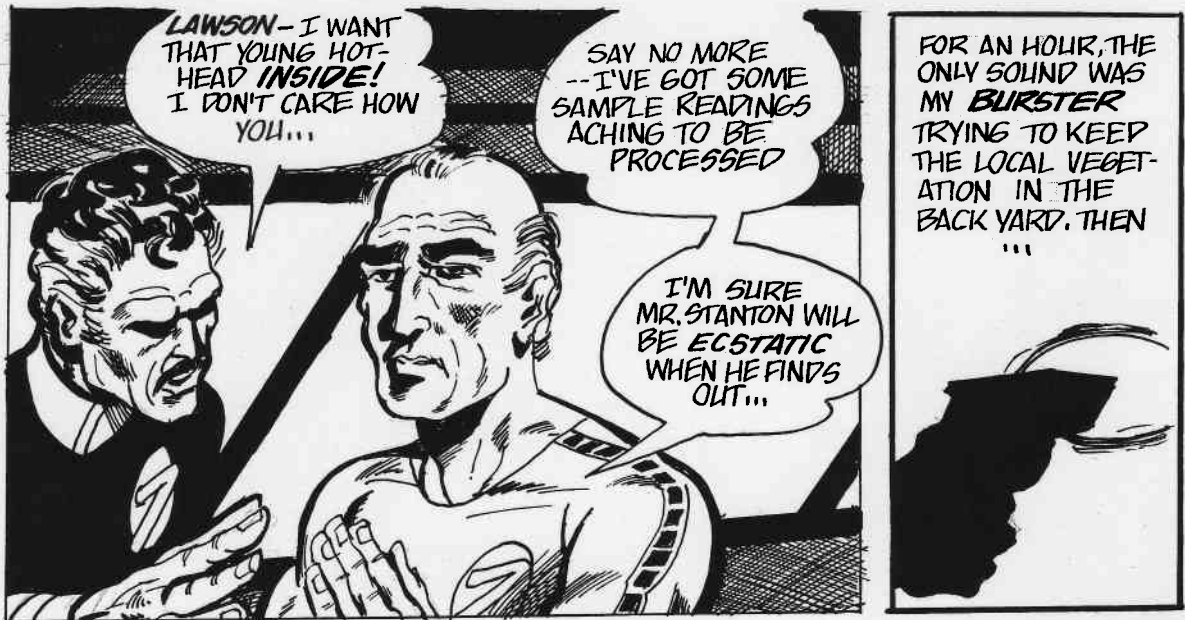
HUTCH HAD GOT HIMSELF INTO A MESS BY TAKING A LOOK AT THE VINES-- PROBABLY ASKING THEM WHAT THEIR PROFIT MARGIN IS...

THAT'S THE IRC FOR YOU...

CAPTAIN!

SHOOT THIS THING! SHOOT!





LAWSON - I WANT THAT YOUNG HOT-HEAD *INSIDE!* I DON'T CARE HOW YOU...

SAY NO MORE -- I'VE GOT SOME SAMPLE READINGS ACHING TO BE PROCESSED

I'M SURE MR. STANTON WILL BE *ECSTATIC* WHEN HE FINDS OUT...

FOR AN HOUR, THE ONLY SOUND WAS MY *BURSTER* TRYING TO KEEP THE LOCAL VEGETATION IN THE BACK YARD. THEN ...



WAAAAAAAKK

I WAS KINDA RUDELY INTERRUPTED...



LAWSON! I THOUGHT I TOLD...

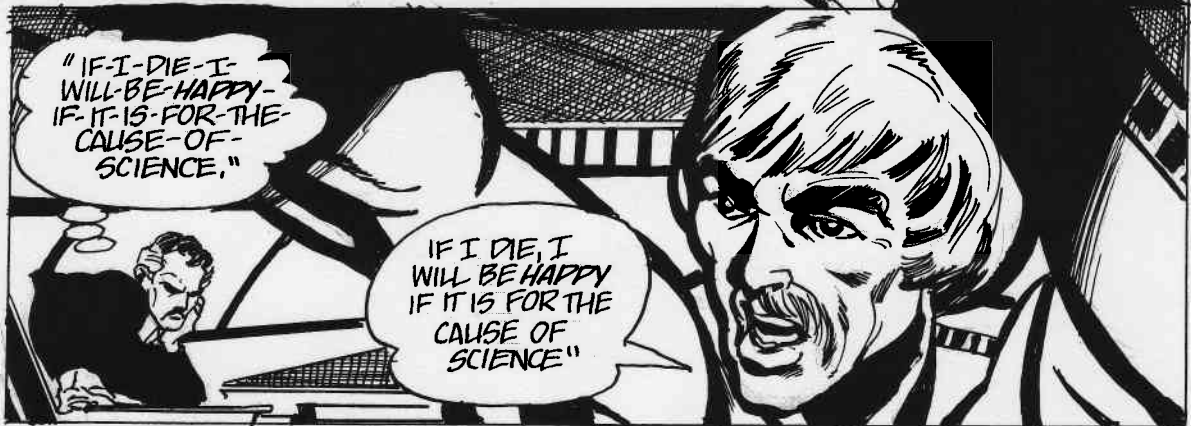
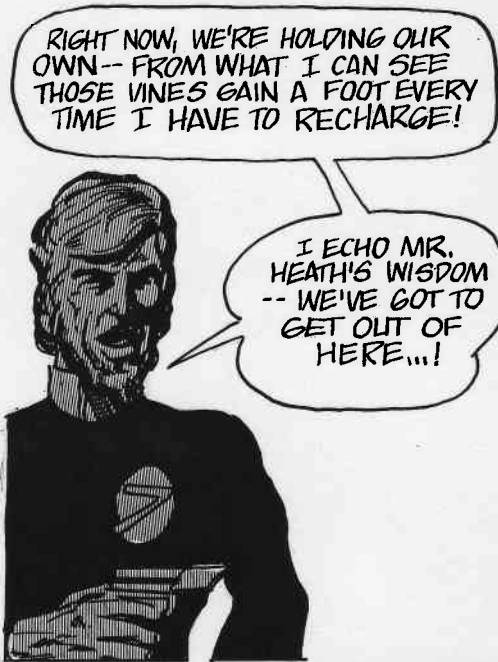
FOR THE LOVE OF...

HE TOLD ME HE WAS JUST GOING TO MAKE COFFEE!

STANTON - ONE

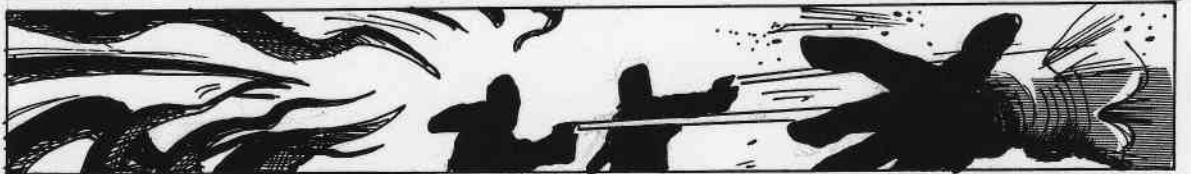
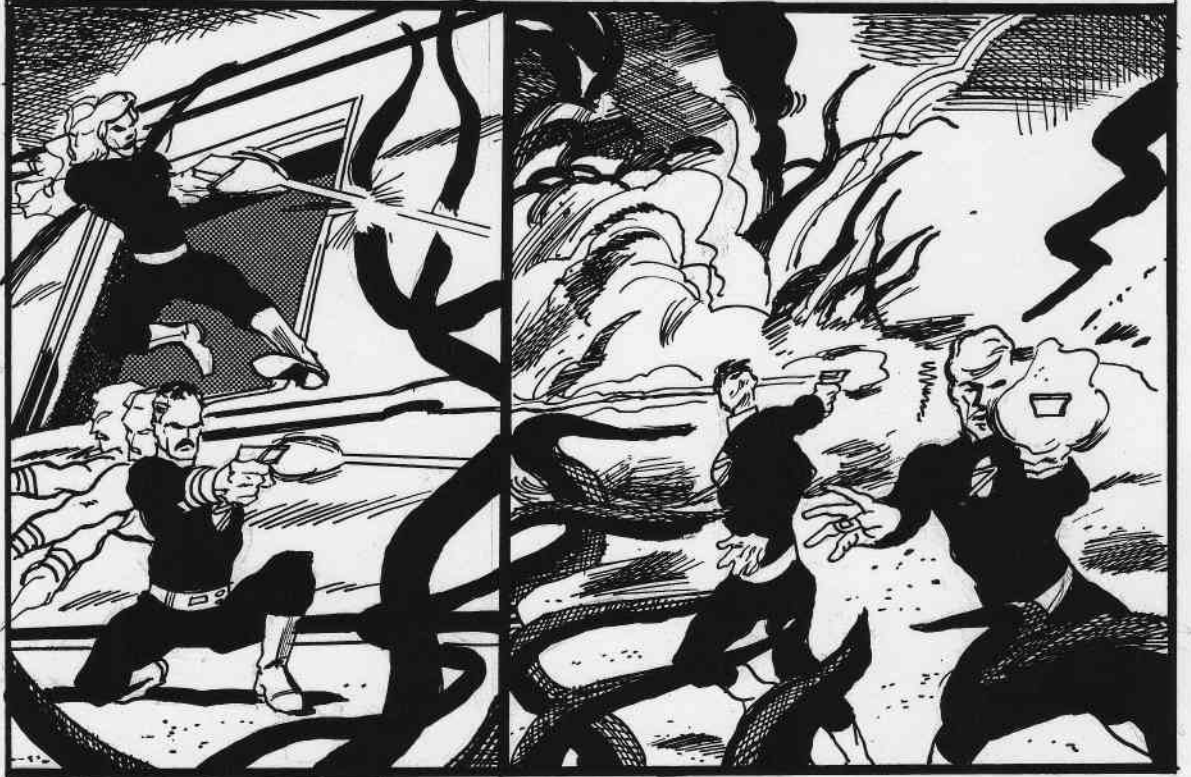
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BACK AT THE SHIP THINGS WENT FROM BAD TO WORSE! THE VINES WERE FINDING THE DAMAGED SECTIONS AND BATTERING THEM OPEN! THE RESULT WAS UNWANTED GUESTS...



I DON'T REMEMBER MUCH OF THE RESCUE! THE CAPTAIN AND I BROKE OUT OF THE AIRLOCK WITH BURSTERS BLAZING-- HE SWITCHED TO A GENERAL SWEEP WHILE I CUT A PATH FOR US...

O
PA
IS



WE BLASTED ONCE EACH AT THE VINES ON DOC, CAPTAIN WALTERS ON THE RUN AND THEY DROPPED HIM-- MAYBE HALF A SECOND -- AND THEN THEY WERE SNAPPING AT US AGAIN!



DOC UNDER ONE ARM, THE CAPTAIN STARTED BACK TO THE SHIP, CUTTING US A NEW PATH...

I BROUGHT UP THE REAR, TRYING TO MAKE EACH SHOT COUNT...



WE HIT THE AIRLOCK DOOR JUST AS IT OPENED -- IT CUT THE ENDS OFF TWO VINES WHEN IT CLOSED



THE CAPTAIN LOOKED SOMETHING LESS THAN PLEASED WHEN HE GOT UP...

YOU MICROBIC BRAT! WHAT DID YOU... DO HAVE ANY... ANY... IN THE NAME OF ...

OH-- FORGET IT...

DOC WENT SOMEWHERE TO PLAY FOR A WHILE, AND HIS ADULTS STARTED THROWING IDEAS AROUND -- THE CONSENSUS SEEMED TO FAVOR AN ALL-OUT ATTACK...



THE IRC FAVOURS POSITIVE ACTION! WITH OUR EYE TO THE FUTURE, WE WANT THIS PLANET SAFE FOR US -- IF ALIEN LIFE SUFFERS ... WELL, THAT'S LIFE!



... IF I'M RIGHT, THOSE THINGS DON'T INTEND TO GO AWAY -- I SAY TAKE THE BULL BY THE BRANCHES AND BLAST OUR WAY OUT...



THE SITUATION IS DESPERATE, YES! ... BUT I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL THAT WE WILL MAKE A MISTAKE IF WE OVER-REACT!...

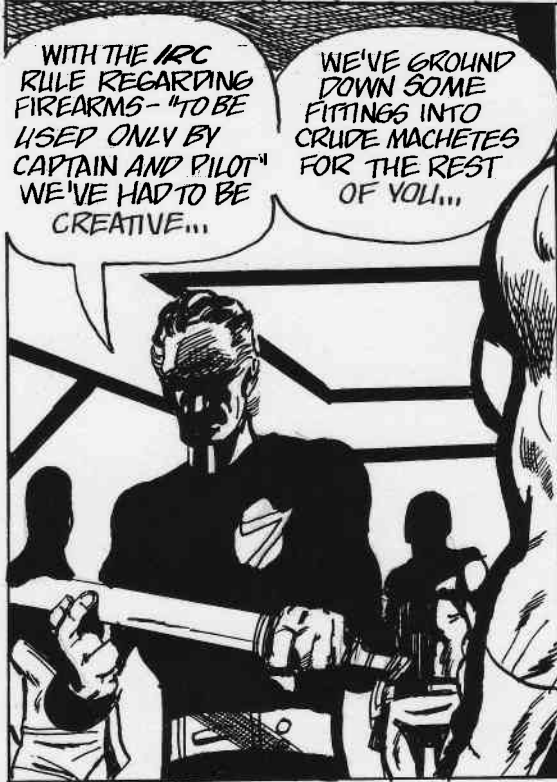


SORRY, DR. LAWSON ... I'M GOING WITH THE MAJORITY ON THIS ONE -- WE NEED TO ACT NOW IF WE HOPE TO GET OUT AT ALL!

3/20/88

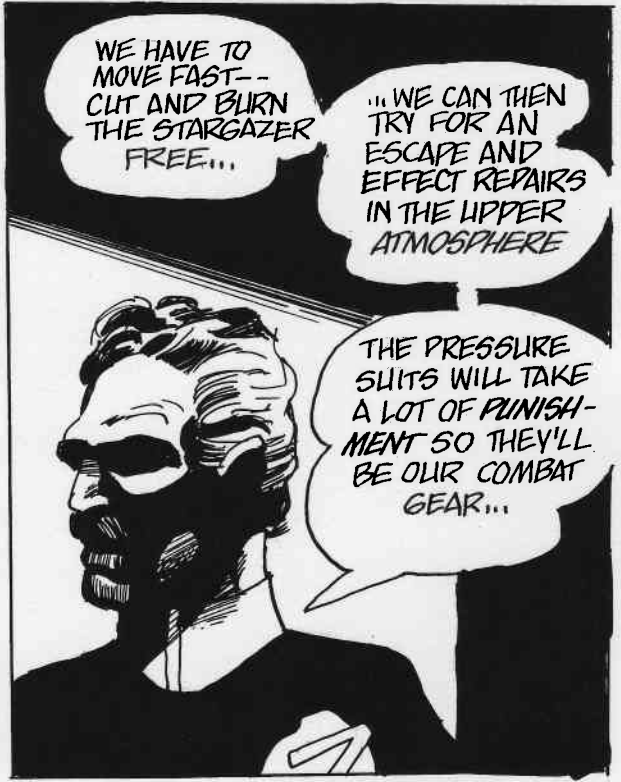
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IT WAS A CURIOUS THING, THAT MEETING -- I HAD A SUDDEN VISION OF LIS ALL STARRING IN A MOVIE "SPACEMEN VS. THE KILLER RUTABAGAS FROM BEYOND THE STARS." IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FUNNY IF IT WASN'T ABOUT TO BECOME OUR EPIGRAPH...



WITH THE IRC RULE REGARDING FIREARMS-- "TO BE USED ONLY BY CAPTAIN AND PILOT" WE'VE HAD TO BE CREATIVE...

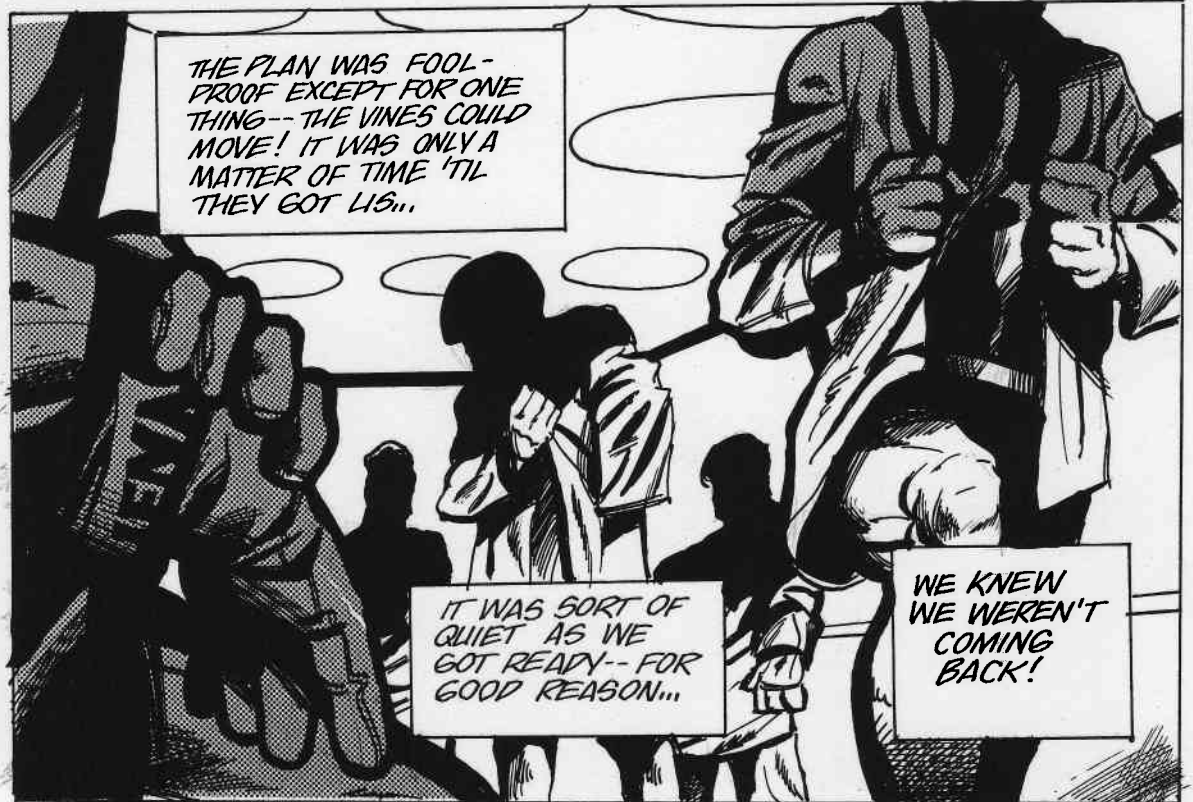
WE'VE GROUND DOWN SOME FITTINGS INTO CRUDE MACHETES FOR THE REST OF YOU...



WE HAVE TO MOVE FAST-- CUT AND BURN THE STARGAZER FREE...

...WE CAN THEN TRY FOR AN ESCAPE AND EFFECT REPAIRS IN THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE

THE PRESSURE SUITS WILL TAKE A LOT OF PUNISHMENT SO THEY'LL BE OUR COMBAT GEAR...



THE PLAN WAS FOOL-PROOF EXCEPT FOR ONE THING-- THE VINES COULD MOVE! IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME 'TIL THEY GOT LIS...

IT WAS SORT OF QUIET AS WE GOT READY-- FOR GOOD REASON...

WE KNEW WE WEREN'T COMING BACK!

IT WAS LIKE A DREAM, CAPTAIN WALTERS ABOUT TO BLOW THE AIRLOCK DOOR, THE REST OF THE CREW LIKE ZOMBIES -- "HERE LIES JASON LENNOX, CASUALTY IN THE NEVER-ENDING BATTLE AGAINST ROOT ROT." A TEDDY BEAR WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN OUT OF ORDER...

... MA! I WANNA GO HOME!



WAIT!
WAIT!
I HAVE THE ANSWER!

LAWSON!
THE CAPTAIN
ALREADY
TOLD YOU...

NO!
I WANT
TO HEAR
THIS...

GOD--WHEN I
THINK HOW
CLOSE I
CAME...

... HOW CLOSE
WE ALL
CAME...



AT THAT POINT, I WAS WILLING TO LISTEN EVEN IF "THE ANSWER" WAS "THE WIZARD OF OZ"



NORMALLY, LAWSON'S LECTURES BORE ME SILLY-- AS LONG AS THE AIRLOCK DOOR WAS SHUT, THOUGH, HE HAD MY UNDIVIDED ATTENTION...

OKAY,
DR. LAWSON...

IT'S QUITE
SIMPLE,
REALLY...

"THE VINES NEVER ACTUALLY ATTACKED US, THEY REACHED FOR DOG, WHICH WE CONSTRIED AS HOSTILITY! IN FACT, THE VINES ARE COMPLETELY DEFENSIVE BY NATURE! THEY IMMOBILIZE ANYTHING WHICH WANDERS NEAR, MEETING FORCE WITH FORCE! ONCE STRUGGLING CEASES, THE CAPTIVE IS RELEASED! IF IT CONTINUES TO STRUGGLE, (LIKE OUR BONY FRIEND) IT SMOTHERS AND IS INGESTED BY THE VINES, ONCE IT DIES..."

"THEN, HAD WE WAGED AN ALL-OUT ATTACK..."
"...WE WOULD HAVE BEEN SWAMPED IN SECONDS! THE SOLUTION IS EASY-- LET THE VINES EXAMINE US TO THEIR HEART'S CONTENT-- LET THEM DECIDE WE POSE NO THREAT..."
"...AND STARGAZER CAN BE AIRBORNE IN A FEW HOURS..."

...EXACTLY...!

"...OF COURSE, THERE IS THE MATTER OF EXTREME FORCE USED BY CAPTAIN WALTERS AND MR. LENNOX... IF THEY HOLD STILL, THEY'LL ESCAPE WITH A FEW BRUISES FROM THESE VINES..."



GET **≡UMP≡** THAT SILLY **≡OOF≡** SMIRK OFF YOUR **≡MMF≡** FACE, STANTON... OR... **≡MPH≡**

I'LL DO IT FOR YOU!



THE REPAIRS WERE EASY ONCE THE PLANTS LOST INTEREST— WE WERE AIRBORNE WITHIN HOURS...

FRICK AND FRACK RETIRED TO THEIR QUARTERS TO RECORD THEIR REPORT— HOPING THE VINES MIGHT SOMEDAY BE CULTIVATED BY THE IRC AS A LOW-COST FOOD STUFF...



THE REST OF US WERE TURNING OUR ATTENTION TO THE FORWARD SCREENS... READINGS SHOWED SOME FORM OF LIFE ON THE PLANET UP AHEAD...

NEXT: BLUE GIANT!