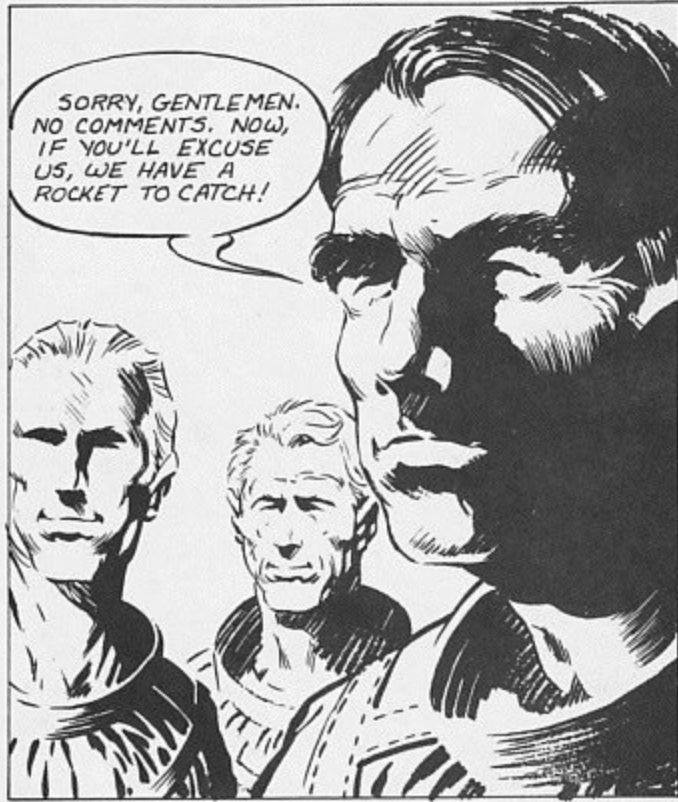


HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT LEAVING ON THE FIRST MANNED MISSION TO ORBIT VENUS, COMMANDER TRACY?

IS THERE ANY TRUTH TO THE RUMOR THAT THERE ARE HARD FEELINGS AMONG THE THREE OF YOU?

ANY HESITATIONS ABOUT PUTTING YOURSELVES INTO SUSPENDED ANIMATION FOR EIGHT MONTHS?

SORRY, GENTLEMEN. NO COMMENTS. NOW, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE US, WE HAVE A ROCKET TO CATCH!



THE SCORPIO IV COUGHS FLAME, SHUDDERS, AND THEN SPRINGS ALOFT LIKE SOME GREAT BEAST, HIGHER AND HIGHER...

FIRST THE MOON. THEN MARS. AND NOW, MAN IS LEAVING ON THE LONG JOURNEY TO A PLANET SO STRANGE AND BEAUTIFUL THAT IT WILL LEAVE HIM, LITERALLY...





THE VIOLENCE OF THE GIANT ENGINES DIES AS SUDDENLY AS IT BEGAN AND SCORPIO IX SLIPS INTO A SILENT ORBIT AROUND THE EARTH...

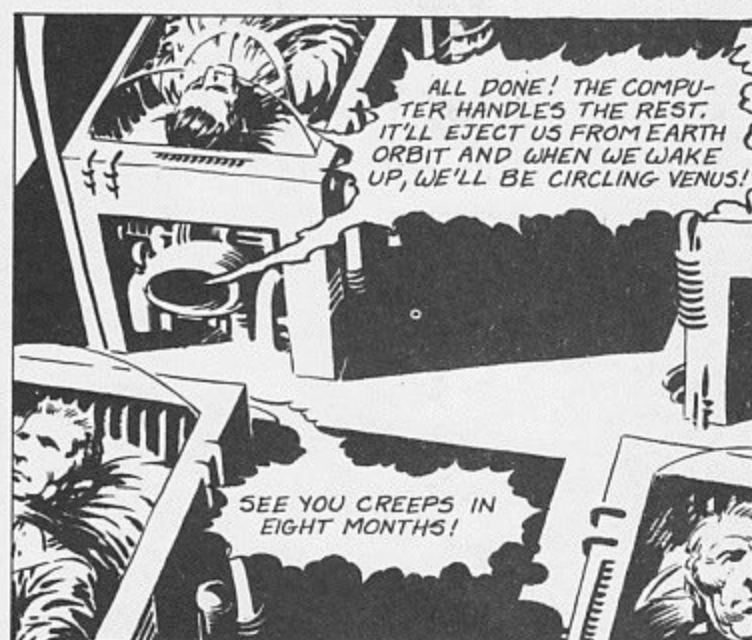


...WHERE THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE LONG TRIP TO VENUS BEGIN!

CAN'T YOU WORK ANY FASTER, WILSON?


OH, SHUT UP, ADAMS! I'M SICK OF LISTENING TO YOUR GRIPING!

STOW IT! BOTH OF YOU! BEFORE I BASH IN YOUR STUPID SKULLS!



ALL DONE! THE COMPUTER HANDLES THE REST. IT'LL EJECT US FROM EARTH ORBIT AND WHEN WE WAKE UP, WE'LL BE CIRCLING VENUS!

SEE YOU CREEPS IN EIGHT MONTHS!



THE CHILLING GAS SEEPS INTO THE CHAMBERS AND THE NUMBING PROCESS BEGINS, WHEN A SHRILL RINGING FILLS THE SHIP...

...THE ALARM...

METEORS...

...TOO LATE...
...PASSING OUT...

THERE IS NO SOUND AS THE METEORS RIP THROUGH SCORPIO IX. NO SOUND IN THE SILENT VACUUM OF SPACE...
... AND NO ONE TO HEAR...

IN SUSPENDED ANIMATION, THERE IS NO TIME. A SECOND, A YEAR, A CENTURY CAN PASS IN A SINGLE SLEEP FOR A MAN. ONLY THE COMPUTER, WITH ITS ELECTRONIC MEMORY, KNOWS WHEN TO RELEASE THE WARMING GASES SO THE BLOOD FLOWS, THE MUSCLES STIR, AND...

GOOD LORD!

THOSE METEORS MUST HAVE PUSHED US OFF COURSE! WE WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO LAND— JUST ORBIT!

IT'S ALMOST WORTH IT, JUST TO SEE THIS! LIFE ON VENUS! WE THOUGHT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE IN A HELIUM-OZONE ATMOSPHERE, BUT THESE PLANTS THRIVE ON IT!

I WISH WE COULD! I'VE GOT BAD NEWS! THE SHIP'S AIR SUPPLY IS GONE! ALL WE'VE GOT IS ON OUR BACKS... AND THAT'LL ONLY LAST TWO HOURS!

WE'VE GOT ONE CHANCE! AN EMERGENCY SUPPLY SATELLITE WAS SENT TO ORBIT VENUS BEFORE WE LEFT, JUST IN CASE SOMETHING LIKE THIS HAPPENED!

WE CAN BRING IT DOWN WITH OUR SUIT RADIOS. IT HAS AIR, WATER, FOOD— ENOUGH TO LAST FOR OVER A YEAR... UNTIL A RESCUE SHIP FROM EARTH GETS HERE!

THERE'S ONLY ONE PROBLEM...

WHAT PROBLEM?

THE EMERGENCY SATELLITE WILL TAKE THREE HOURS TO LAND!

BUT, WE ONLY HAVE TWO HOURS OF OXYGEN EACH!

ONE OF US WILL HAVE TO DIE!





CAN'T RISK A SHOT...
...MIGHT HIT HIS AIR TANKS!

PLEASE! NO!
AAAAAH!



I GOT HIM! RIP OUT HIS
RADIO! —AT LEAST WE
WON'T HAVE TO LISTEN
TO HIM!



NOW, SHUT THE HOSE VALVES
AND GET HIS TANKS!
QUICK!



ADAMS' AGONIZED SCREAMS ARE
SILENT, ECHOING INSIDE HIS SUIT,
WHERE ONLY HE CAN HEAR THEM...

WE'LL STOW THE TANKS
TILL WE NEED THEM!
I'LL BEAM IN THE
SATELLITE!



...UNTIL THE LAST THIN BREATH OF OXYGEN IS GONE, AND THE
SUIT CONTAINS ONLY THE BLEAK VACUUM OF SPACE...

NOW, ALL WE HAVE
TO DO IS WAIT!

EARTH IS SURE TO
SEND A SHIP WHEN THEY
DON'T GET US ON
THE RADIO!

THE MINUTES SEEM LIKE HOURS, LIKE CENTURIES, IN THE UN-EARTHLY JUNGLE, WHERE THE SILENCE IS BROKEN ONLY BY THE SLOW HISSING OF THE LIFE-GIVING OXYGEN AS IT IS BEING USED...

SOON, WE'LL BE HOME FREE!
THE RESCUE SHIPS CAN HOME IN ON
THE SATELLITE'S FREQUENCY
TO FIND US!

BUT WHERE IS IT? WHY
HASN'T IT LANDED? IT'S
BEEN OVER TWO HOURS
ALREADY!

MY AIR'S GETTING BAD!
GIVE ME ONE OF THE
SPARE TANKS!

NOT YET! YOU'LL
GET IT WHEN I SAY
SO AND NOT BEFORE!

I WANT IT NOW! I SEE
YOUR GAME -- YOU PLAN
TO DOUBLE-CROSS ME
AND LET ME DIE! WELL,
I'M TAKING IT ALL!

NO, WILSON!
REALLY, I...

BREATHE DEEP TRACY!
THE POISONOUS AIR OF VENUS
WILL MAKE IT QUICK FOR YOU!

NO...
AAAAHH!

GUESS I'LL HAVE TO FINISH
YOU OFF SO YOU WON'T SUFFER!

WILSON! WAIT!
IT'S... AAARRGH!

NOW, AT LEAST ONE
OF US WILL GET BACK
TO EARTH ALIVE...



THE MINUTES CREEP BY, THE PRECIOUS OXYGEN HISSES AWAY, AS WILSON FRANTICALLY SEARCHES THE SKIES...



...WAITING, WAITING, AS THE MINUTES TURN TO HOURS...



... AND GASPING BREATHLESSLY FOR THE LAST FAINT WHIFF OF OXYGEN...

