



ISBN 930-36644-4

CORBEN
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Introduction by Harlan Ellison



Arabian Nights

by
Richard
Corben
and
Jan
Strnad

Distributed by
Simon & Schuster

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Published by HM Communications, Inc., 635 Madison
Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.

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Nationally distributed by Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1230 Avenue
of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10019.

Distributed in Canada by McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 25
Hollinger Road, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4B 3G2.

ISBN 930-36844-4

Cover Design: **Michael Gross**

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Preface to the scanned edition January 28, 2001

I am Stephen Daniel Bennett, and I have enjoyed reading this illustrated fantasy for many years. I bought this I guess in the dark year in Rochester NY after having read the entire series in monthly installments from Heavy Metal. Over the years the book has been through a lot of abuse, almost as much as myself and I apologize for the tear throughout. If you are of a mind to, you can repair that, and perhaps I shall myself someday, the scans are here in .jpeg and uncompressed bitmaps.

Now, I close this volume, and the brittle pages are in the trash here before me, I bid them a sincere farewell. I too will one day be thus discarded, but I hope someone treasures up my memories with as much care as I treasured up this.

*S. D. Bennett
January 28, 2001
Kansas City KS
The KU Yellowzone
Parking Apartments*

Introduction

to

New Tales of the Arabian Nights

by

Harlan Ellison

If I lucked out, and chanced to find this old dusty Moxie bottle way back up there on the last top cobwebby shelf of an abandoned malt shoppe in some exotic locale like, say, Duque de Caxias or Duluth...and I pulled it down from back up there against the wall where it had been hidden from sight for utter decades...and I blew off the *shmootz* and looked inside...and it looked as if something was going on in that funky old bottle...and I paused for a slice of moment to wonder, marvel, and shyly shudder at the strange, ornate seal in the wax that sealed the bottle...(wax? Where the hell's the bottle cap? This is a crummy old bottle of Moxie soda, fer chrissakes, not Chateau Lafite-Rothschild 1945)...and got out my million-bladed Swiss Army pocketknife with the built-in pineapple corer...and I worked loose the cork...and pried it up between my fat little thumbs, making certain it didn't pop...and allofasudden there's this I-don't-believe-it pillar of thick, nasty smoke pouring out of the Moxie bottle...more smoke than they had at the whole damned Bel Air fire in '61...more smoke than *any* bottle could hold...and there in the dim and smelly dismal back room of that abandoned malt shoppe in Ghana or Gowanus a shape started to take form in the (*kaff!kaff!*) smoke...and jeeezus it's a genie...yoiks yipe and lemme outta here...and that monstrous fuckin' humungus grandpa of all the jinn ~~reached down and lifted me up~~ neatly between bejeweled thumb and forefinger...and held me up in front of one of his two great green baleful eyeballs...and smiled at me, all teeth and gums and bits of unidentifiable stuff clinging to the incisors...and he said, "Okay, little *putz*, you can have one wish, and the one wish is that you can be in the company of any figure out of literature for one full month, which one do you pick?"...if he said that, and I had to pick someone, I don't think I'd go for Hemingway's Nick Adams, or Melville's Ahab, or Kafka's Josef K., or even Emma Bovary.

I'd pick (gulp sigh) Sindbad the Sailor.

Oh, yeah!

Because Sindbad, that canny seafarer, he *really* knew how to live. And I think you will join with me in thanking Rich Corben and Jan Strnad for giving him one more exquisite shot of life in this marvelous illustrated fantasy.

To be perfectly candid, I followed the magazine publication of *New Tales of the Arabian Nights* in *Heavy Metal* from June 1978 through August 1979 with appetent joy. I'm not always rapturous about the material *Heavy Metal* proffers; it has been my observation—no doubt influenced by the fact that I treasure good, solid writing—that the art frequently outshines the plotting. But though I contend, to the dismay of many of my friends who are artists, that too often the visual sensibility in the creator dulls the story-line logic, I have come to know and trust Corben's sense of interior consistency. And that, coupled with the talent of Jan Steven Strnad, promised an unusually unified myth-and-illustration interpretation of the Sindbad legend. Even so, despite my high expectations, despite my pleasure at the first few installments, I found myself actually anticipating the monthly snippets of "Sindbad in the Land of the Jinn" as *Heavy Metal* released them. Then beyond mere anticipation, beyond merely looking forward with a *frisson* of delight that reminded me of the way I had waited for each weekday's radio chapter of *Captain Midnight* back in the forties, beyond all that I found myself lurking around my mailbox, disappointed each day past publication time when the new issue failed to appear.

It gave me pause. It's been a lot longer than I care to dwell on since I've been excited enough about something like a comic book to hunger for more more *more*. But I had to cop to it, finally: Corben and Strnad were doing something rare and excellent. They were creating Art.

Look upon the writer, friends: cautious and down to his bloodied quicks at having used the dreaded unspeakable of all unspeakables—Art.

But I couldn't (and can't) shake off the conviction (though Allah be the wiser!) that this particular chunk of fantasy story and illustration is genuine, card-carrying, certifiable Art. Not *High Art*—we're not talking Bosch's *Garden of Delights* or Tintoretto's *Conversion of Saint Paul* or Wrightson's *Swamp Thing* here—but Art. Good, solid, memorable Art that tugs and pulls and chivvies and demands one's attention.

In short, I am taken with "Sindbad in the Land of the Jinn" as I have not been wooed by this kind of pop art in a very long time. Make no mistake: I am not one of your dying-to-be-hip intellectuals who deify trash on the grounds that anything the mass admires must be valuable. As a righteous elitist, I am swift to dismiss with a yechhh and a poo-poo that which is *kitsch*, *poshlost*, and meretricious flummery. (For those whose dictionaries are not handy, I eschew definitions in lieu of examples: *Star Wars*, *Peanuts*, all Disney films after *Song of the South*, "happy faces," Devo, chewing gum, Richard Brautigan novels, and jogging. All of the foregoing: yechhh and poo-poo.)

Thus, when I sing the praises of this "illustrated fable," be apprised that I view it from the loftiest, as well as the crankiest, of levels from which one views Art.

need hardly extoll the merits of Rich Corben's skill with paintbrush and
; an almost transparent, pellucid vibrancy that throws the work with three-
the long vertical panel in which Sindbad's friend, old Judar, is wrenched
from the sky by one of Ali Ben-Abda's army of living corpses. Look at those
gathers. One can almost feel the quality of the fabric. Or study the close-up
panel of Akissa's face in the sequence where she and Sindbad's group sit smoking the hookah. The fragrant water
smoke swirls around her and one gets a real sense of spatial relationship, of *depth*, without recourse to overlay print-
ing or 3-D double images. This is Corben at his consummate best.

But, no it is not Corben's coloring or precise anatomy or cinematic framing that compell such adoration. Nor is
it even Jan Strnad's judiciously lean plotting and wisdom in selecting what to emphasize and what to omit, his pac-
ing and bizarre sense of tolerable terror (go on back three panels from Judar's fatal ascension and consider what
sort of deranged mentality could conceive that knife in the forehead), or his 'tec writer deviousness in springing unex-
pected plot twists—case in point: Akissa's true nature.

All of this, yet none of this, comprises the congealed smoke of wonder that makes "Sindbad in the Land of the
Jinn" the phenomenon I genuinely believe it to be.

The essence of its ineluctable pull on the senses of the reader is that it manages to capture the mystic, mythic
quality the Sindbad legend has had on dreamers since Burton translated the tales of Sheherazade.

When I said, at the outset of this little tribute, that I'd select a month in the company of Sindbad rather than any
other memorable literary creation, I was responding to the call of the wild-eyed child who still lives deep inside me.
Yes, of course, wouldn't it be wonderful to roam the forests with Natty Bumppo, wouldn't it be grand to sail to Treasure
Island with Long John Silver, or walk the highlands with Lorna Doone, pole down the Mississippi with Huck and
Jim...wouldn't it be fine and wild and sweet?! *But...*!

A month with Sindbad! Ah, God, the marvels I'd see, the danger I'd confront, the action I'd taste, the splendor of
Basara and Baghdad I'd drink in!

But I can't. If he ever really lived, he was probably some poor Middle Eastern fisherman with a gift for self-
aggrandizement. No roc, no jinn, no Cyclopean monsters, no adventures beyond those his need for attention con-
jured up in his fertile imagination. And so I treasure what Corben and Strnad have given me.

They have struck to the burning core of the myth of desire that fires the wild child in all of us. They have added to
the undying body of honest legends that sustain us in our torpid daily lives. Or as Pushkin put it, "Better the illusions that
exalt us than ten thousand truths."

I have known Richard Corben's work for many years now. (In fact, Richard will kill me for taking time out to write
this introduction when I should be going over his rough sketches for the illustrated version of *A Boy and His Dog* that
we've been working on for five years now.) If he has a more admiring devotee, said party has not surfaced. Jan I
know for a decade, since he first wrote asking me for permission to reprint one of my short-short stories in his very
professional fanzine, *Anomaly*. I've watched him come along steadily; a pleasure.

But never before, as good as each was in his chosen medium, have they reached this lofty pinnacle of
excellence. Never before, and perhaps never again will they create something so universal and so rich with the
scent of permanence.

They have given us Sindbad, in all his wonder and wildness. And now, with great honor, I give them and what
they have created to you. The pleasure is all yours.

Harlan Ellison
Los Angeles
4 April 1979



Shahrazad

It is related (but Allah is All-knowing!) that in time long gone before, two brothers turned their backs on Kingship to wander over the earth, searching for one whose calamity overmatched their own. . . .

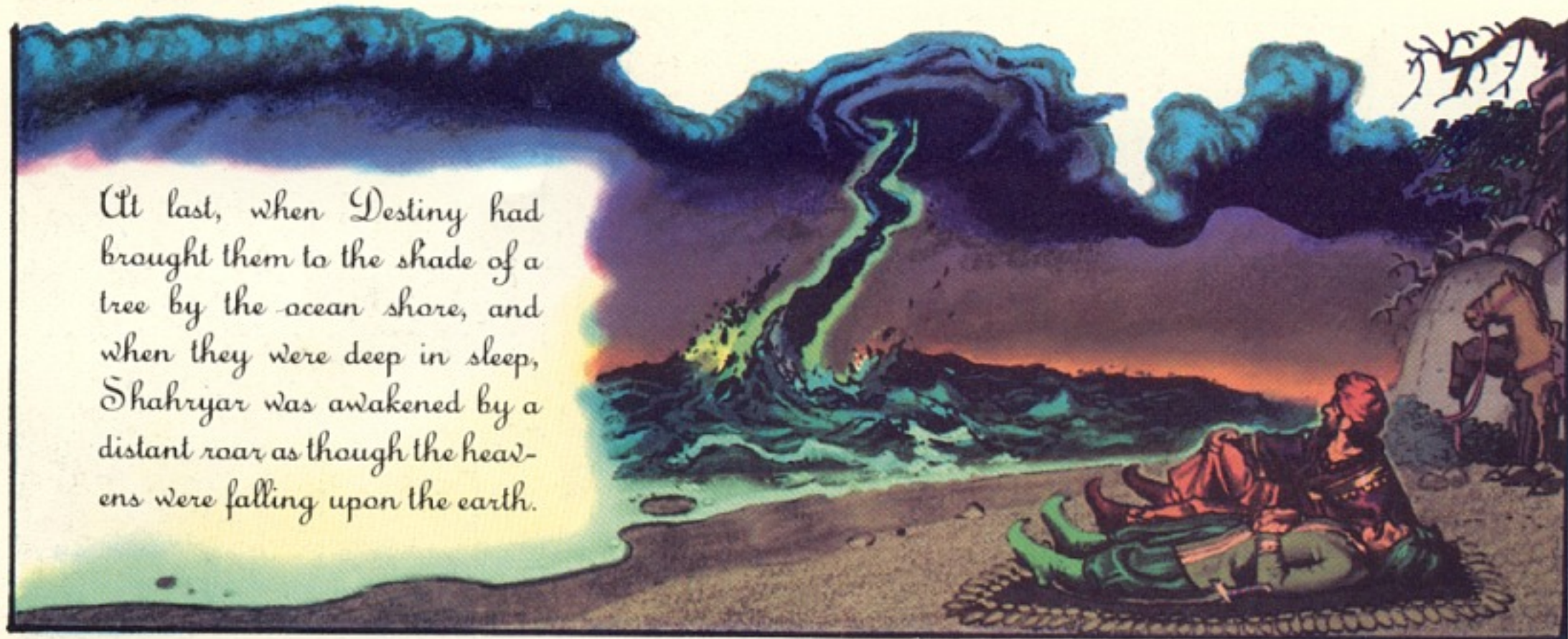
Each a victim of a faithless Queen, their thoughts dwell only upon their wives' evil deeds, and sorrow hung heavily in their hearts. Shahryar spoke to his younger brother, Shah-zaman:

O my brother, if I find none whose wife is more wanton than my own, then death will surely be more welcome to me than life!

By Allah, so it is with me, my brother!

And so the brothers wayfared by day and by night, not knowing when, if ever, they would return to their Kingdoms.

At last, when Destiny had brought them to the shade of a tree by the ocean shore, and when they were deep in sleep, Shahriyar was awakened by a distant roar as though the heavens were falling upon the earth.



Shahzaman! Wake up!
The fury of Allah
is upon us!





Breathe the air and feel of the sea breeze, O my choicest love! I would sleep awhile—but think you not of escape . . .

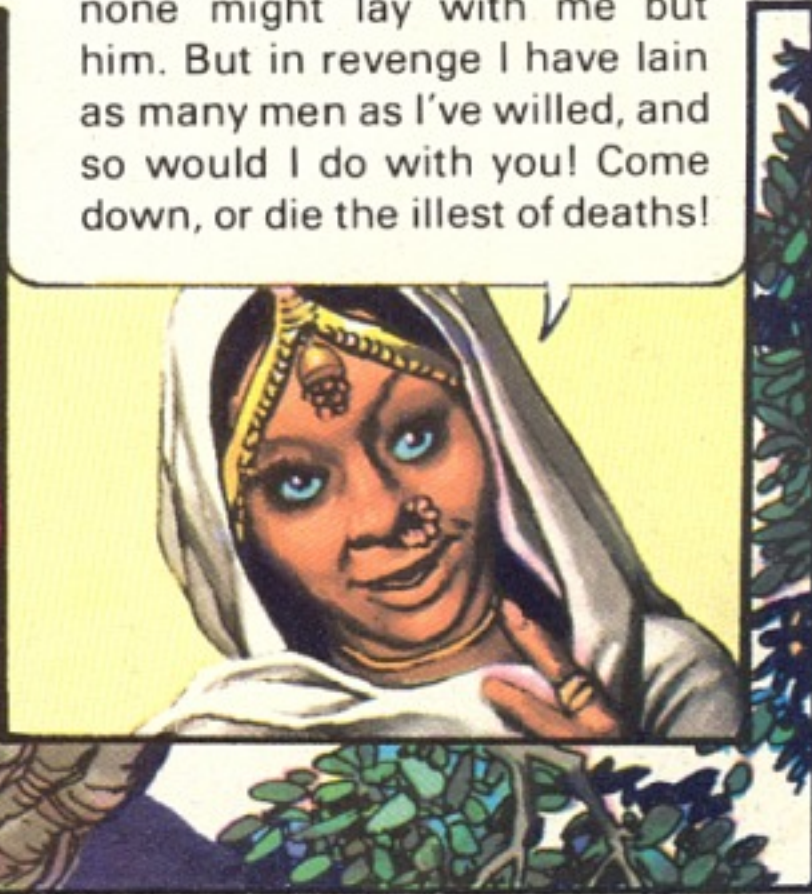
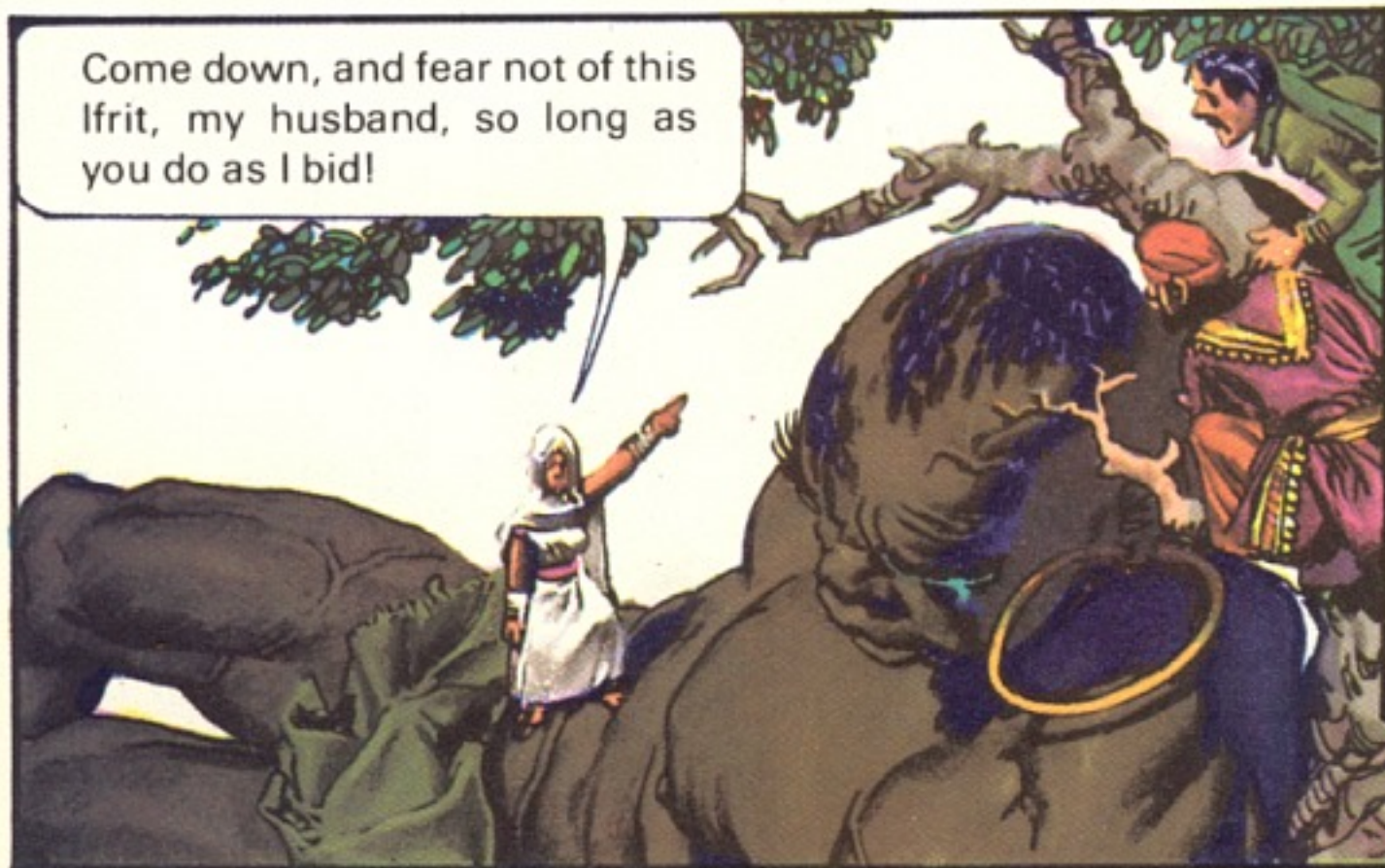


. . . for (yawn) I will seek you out wherever you may hide!



Know that this beast snatched me on my wedding night that none might lay with me but him. But in revenge I have lain as many men as I've willed, and so would I do with you! Come down, or die the illest of deaths!

Come down, and fear not of this Ifrit, my husband, so long as you do as I bid!



Tell me, my lady, before we perform that service which you require—how many others have preceded us in this task?



Since the night of my capture, this filthy Ifrit has carried me to many lands distant and strange, and with every opportunity I have taken vengeance against him.

My lovers have numbered five hundred and seventy, and now I would count two more.



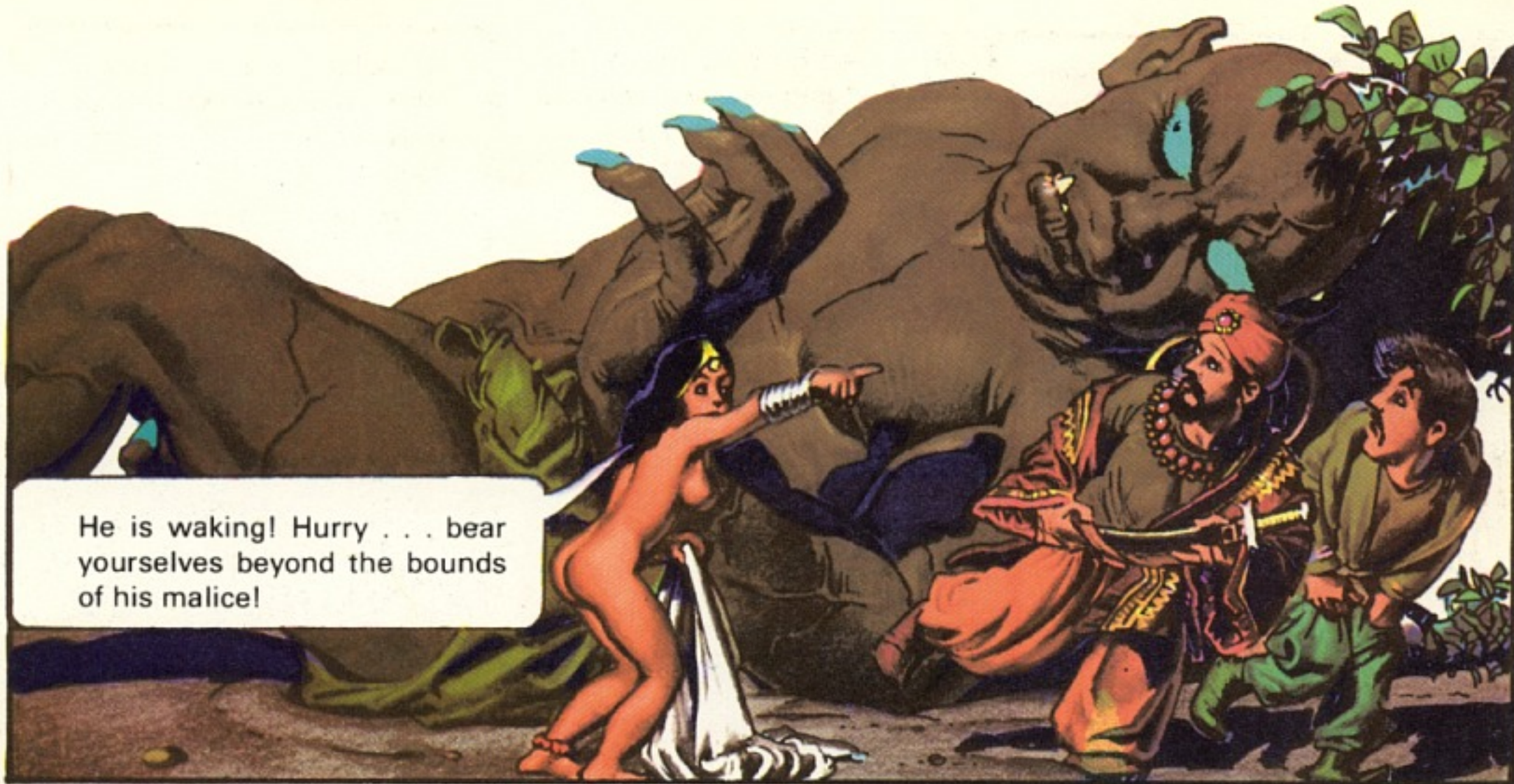
By Allah, such a number is strong precedent indeed! Under pain of death, I shall not thwart you!



Then you are wise, and may live to see the morrow.

So amid the silky layers of the Jinni's loincloth, the brothers did as they were advised.





He is waking! Hurry . . . bear yourselves beyond the bounds of his malice!



Allah! Surely this woman has dealt a greater injustice to this Ifrit—so much more powerful than we—than what has befallen us!

Such is abundant consolation! . . .



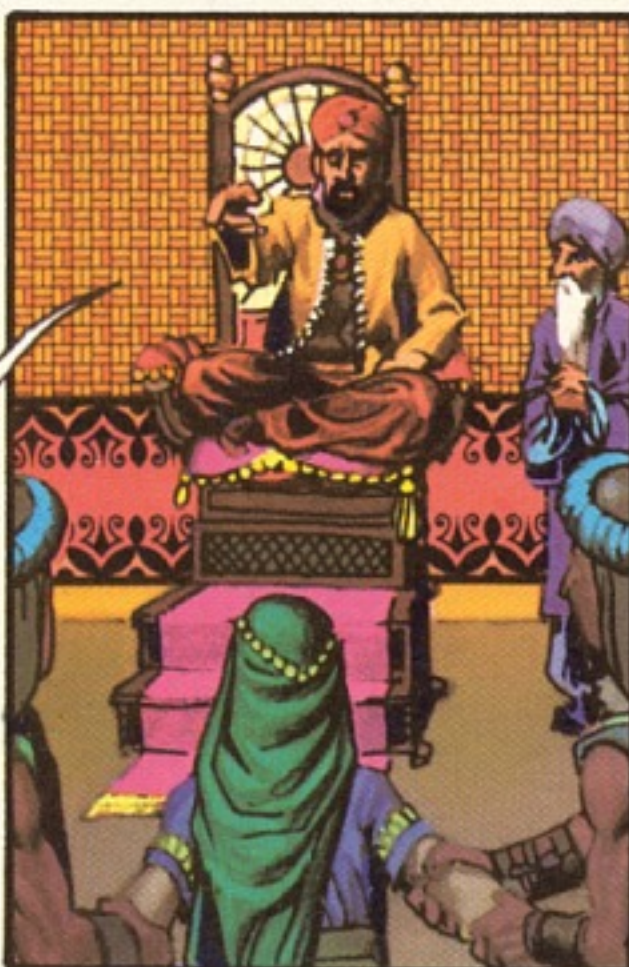
Let us return to our countries and our palaces, and there decide our course of action against all womankind.

Such is also my desire, O my brother.

Returning to his city, Shahr-yar summoned his wife and his Wazir and made a proclamation:

I command my wife, the Queen, to be put to death, for she has broken her marriage vow. Such is her just fate.

Henceforth I shall marry a maiden each night, and I shall slay her the following morning, as there is no woman to be trusted on the face of the earth.



You, my Wazir, I entrust with the duty of obtaining my virgin bride for each night, and of her execution the next morning. To fail me in this respect will be to lose your head.



As you command, O King of the age.

Such was King Shahryar's practice for the space of three years. Mothers wept and parents fled the city with their daughters, until no virgin remained for the King's pleasure. Presently the Wazir went forth and, finding no suitable bride, returned home in sorrow and in fear for his life.

His eldest daughter, Shahrazad, perceived the cause of his anxiety and offered herself as the King's bride, but the Wazir would not hear of such a plan.

My will cannot be changed, Father. If I must, I shall approach the King alone and offer myself against your wishes, and then we shall both die.



O my daughter, must this need be?

Even so.

Allah be merciful, and make me not desolate by your loss!



Do not fear, my father. If my sister Dunyazad will accompany me and do as I instruct, we shall end this slaughter of women for all time.

Allah upon you, O my sister, recite for us a story to wile away the hours of our last night together!

Tell on, for I am sleepless this night and would be pleased to hear a tale.



Gladly will I do so, Dunyazad, providing the King will permit. . . .

That night, when Dunyazad perceived that the King had had his will with Shahrazad, the sister spoke as she had been instructed:

So Shahrazad began the tale of the Merchant and the Jinni, but before she had reached the tale's end she perceived the light of day and ceased her permitted say.

Many nights were passed in like manner, and each morning Shahrazad ceased her story with the first light of dawn and was granted a stay of execution.

But it is impossible to do so forever. Surely there must come an end.



I believe myself pregnant by the King. If such is the case, perhaps that will be of some aid to us.

How fair is your story, Shahrazad, and how delightful!



It is nothing to what I could relate this coming night, were I to live and the King to spare me. . . .

I'm worried, Sister. How long can you continue these tales?



As long as I must.



By Allah, I shall not slay you (yawn) until I've heard the rest of your tale!



For a thousand nights and a night, Shahrazad entertained the King with stories of great adventures and of folk gone before, and during that time she bore him three sons. . . .

. . . whereupon she appeared before Shahryar and asked of him a favor:

O King of the age, these are your children and I ask that you release me from the doom of death—for if you slay me, they will become motherless and you will find none to rear them properly.

. . . for I found you pure, chaste, and pious. We shall marry with regal ceremony and know you that my brother seeks also your sister Dunyazad in wedlock. Will you permit it?



Shahrazad, I pardoned you long ago . . .

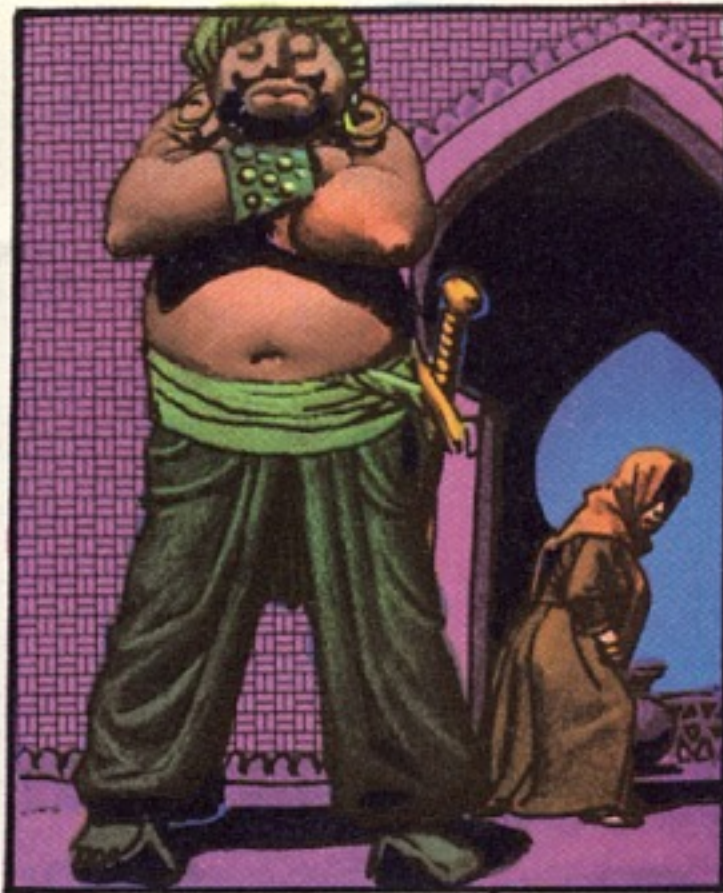
With but one condition—that your brother the King abide with us here, for I and my sister were raised together and cannot endure separation one from the other.



So shall it be!

So the two brothers lived with their wives in all pleasure, for indeed Allah the Most High had changed their sorrow into joy, and in due time all was chronicled and the book was called—

The Stories of the Thousand Nights and a Night.



You have the look of a thief about you, Duniyazad.

Oh!

Shahrazad . . . praise Allah! I thought I was discovered!

And so you are, my sister. Tell me . . . what duty calls you from your chambers at such an hour?

I'm so unhappy here. It's pleasant enough, but . . . so boring! I want **adventure**! I want to make great journeys like those of Sindbad the Seaman!

Would you like to hear the tale of Sindbad's final voyage, an adventure beyond the seven I told the King?

Very much!

In truth, I was practicing an escape from the palace!

Happiness lies in the path of the Prophet, Duniyazad, not in Sindbad's.

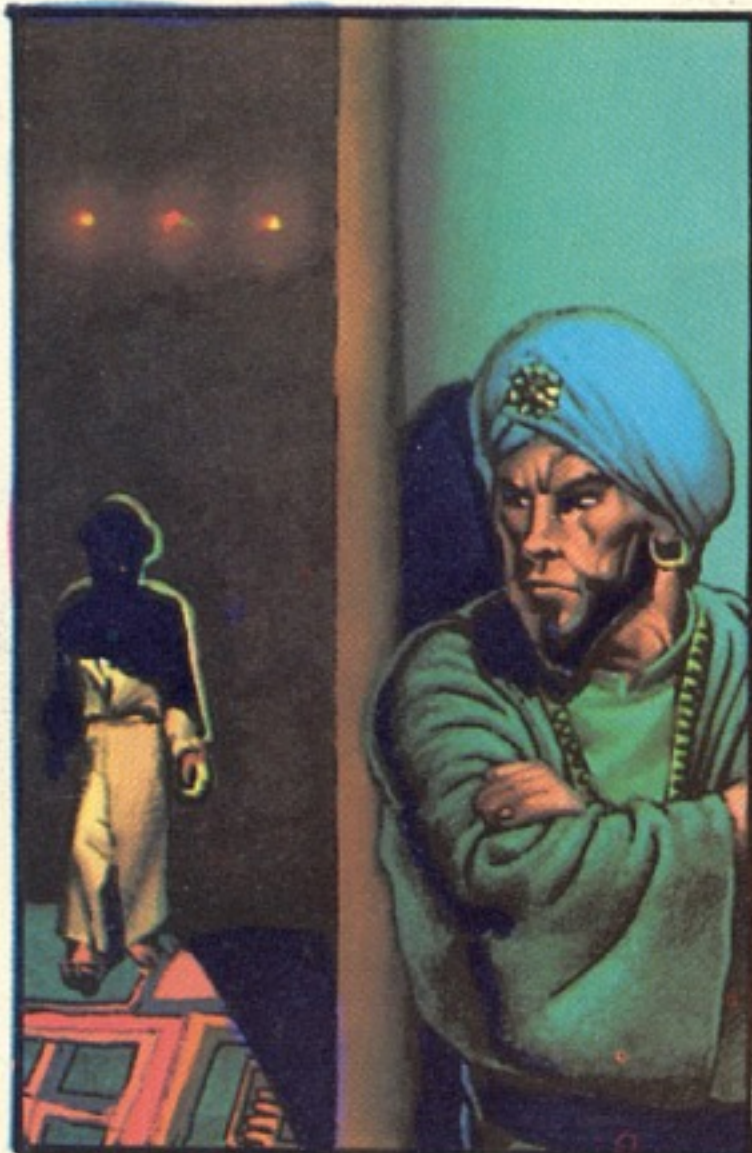
Then stay with me, and I'll begin the story for you tonight.

But Allah is All-Knowing!

It has reached me, my sister, that one day a stranger appeared in Baghdad, seeking after Sindbad the Seaman. . . .

The Last Voyage of Sindbad



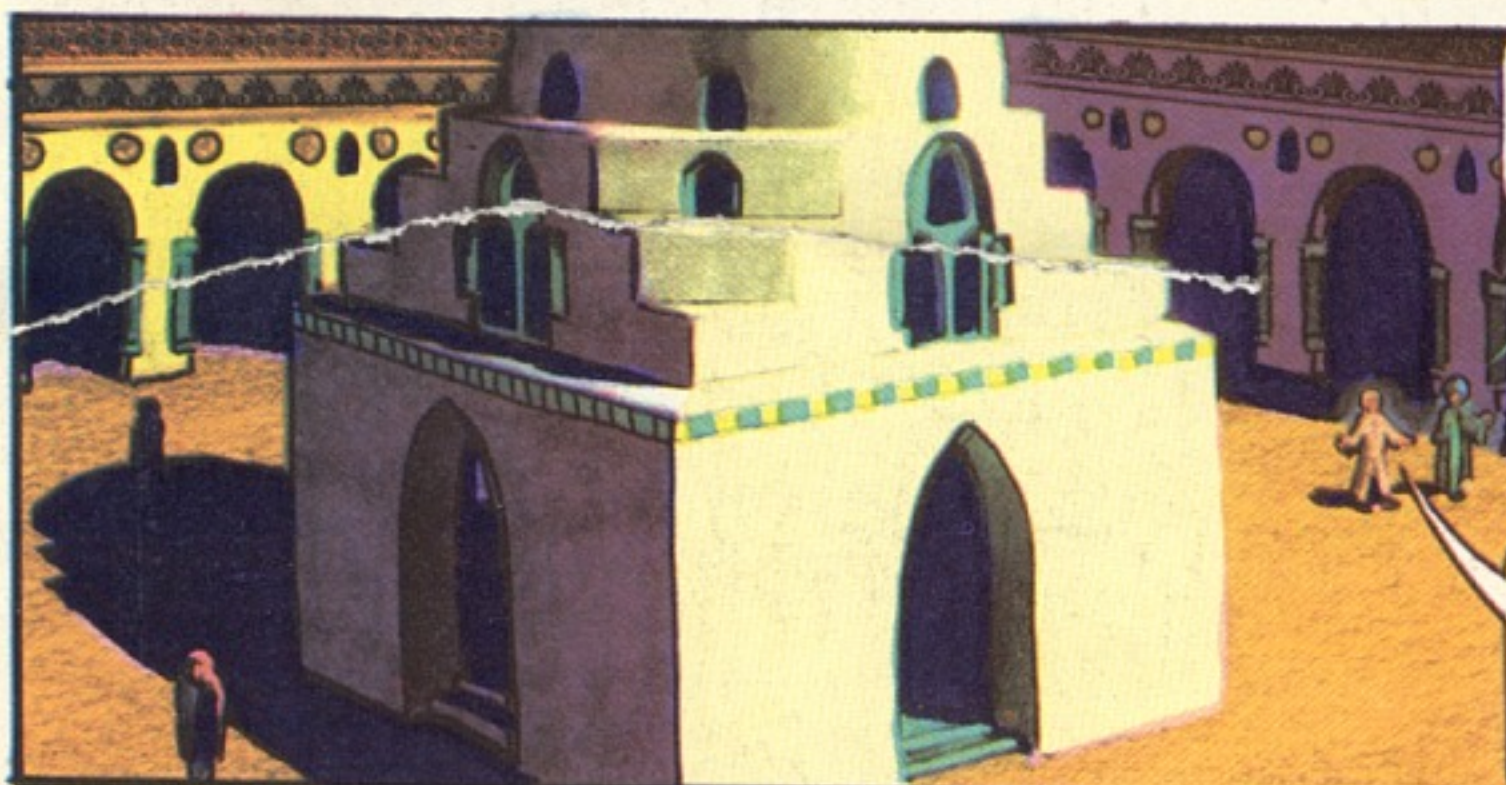


Sindbad!
Sindbad the
Adventurer!



An adventurer no more, my
friend. You see I wear the robes
of the Sufi.

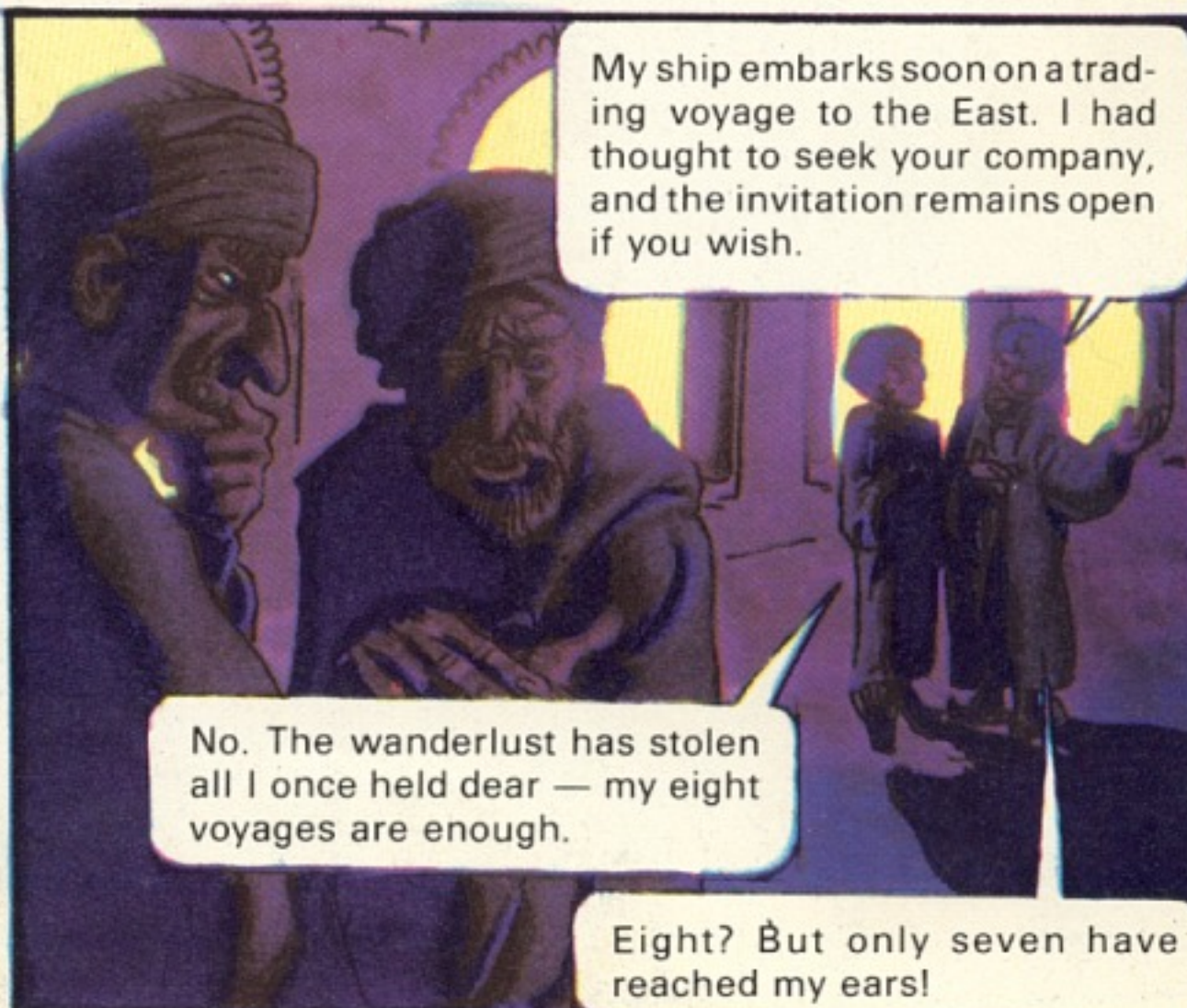
That much
is plain . . .



. . . but can I believe my eyes? Of
all men to renounce wealth and
luxury ! . . .

My last article of worldly value I
presented to the Caliph Harun
al-Rashid, and I was glad to be
rid of it. But tell me . . . have we
met?

Forgive me — I am Badr al-
Bakkar, a merchant as you once
were.



My ship embarks soon on a trad-
ing voyage to the East. I had
thought to seek your company,
and the invitation remains open
if you wish.

No. The wanderlust has stolen
all I once held dear — my eight
voyages are enough.

Eight? But only seven have
reached my ears!

Then you should hear the eighth — it might profit you as it profited me.

I'd like very much to hear it.

It's a long story. . . .

Ah . . . excellent!

Know then that some time after my seventh voyage I again grew restless and bored. My wife no longer excited me — though I loved her still — and I became increasingly hard to live with.

It was the festival of Id al-Fitr, I had already broken the Prophet's injunction against wine, and Satan made it fair in my sight to blame my good wife for my own shortcomings. . . .

Sinbad in The Land of the Jinn

I can't believe it! This has never happened with any other woman!

How old is the **nabidh** you're drinking? Is it greatly fermented? . . .

It is aged! The longer **nabidh** ages, the more exciting it becomes . . . unlike women!

I'm sorry, Zulaykha. It's not your fault. Nothing of my life interests me anymore.

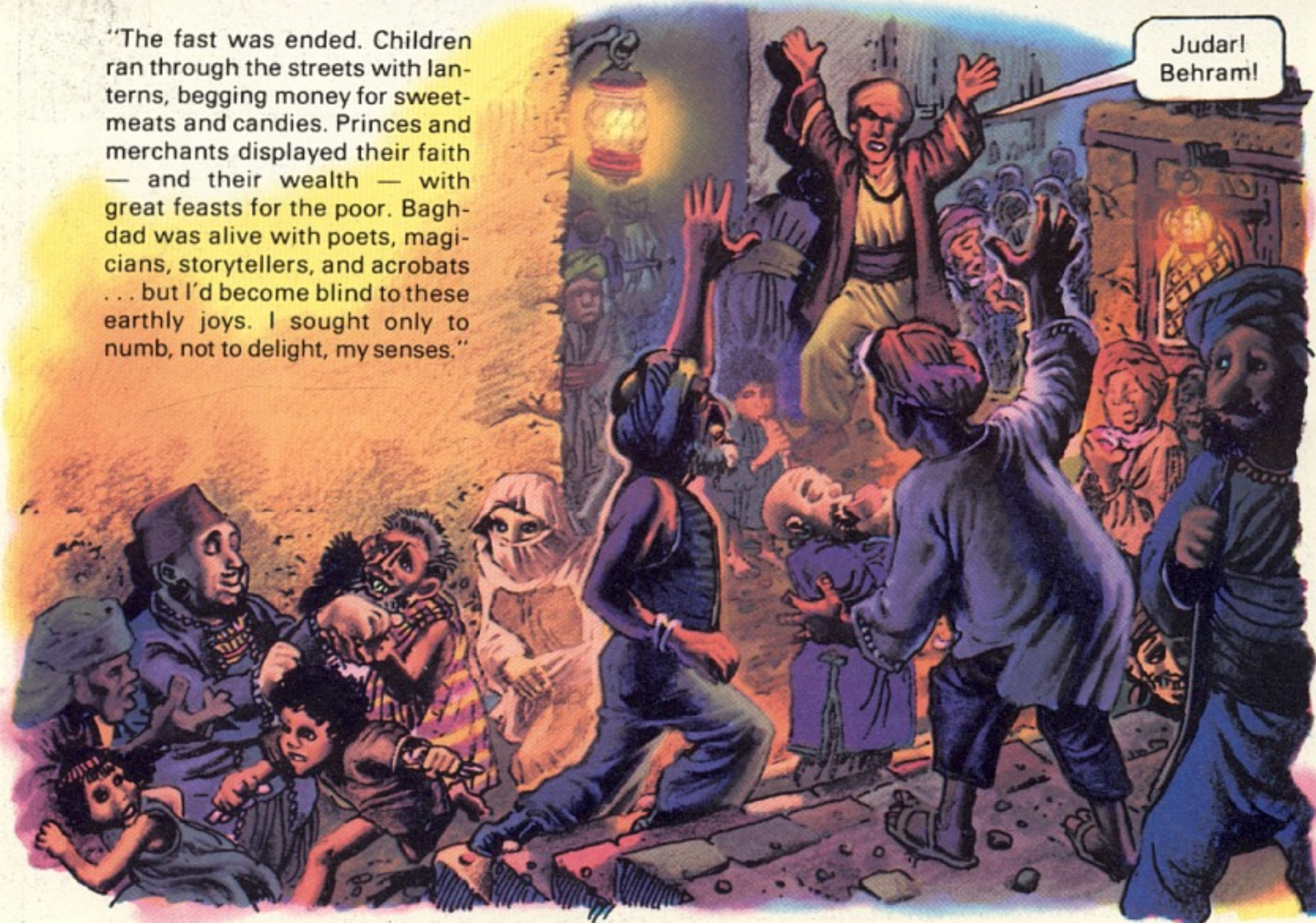
We could do it differently. . . .

No, it's no use . . . where are my clothes? I'm going to the festival.



"The fast was ended. Children ran through the streets with lanterns, begging money for sweetmeats and candies. Princes and merchants displayed their faith — and their wealth — with great feasts for the poor. Baghdad was alive with poets, magicians, storytellers, and acrobats . . . but I'd become blind to these earthly joys. I sought only to numb, not to delight, my senses."

Judar!
Behram!



"For hours we made our way from tavern to tavern until the crowd thinned and the streets grew dark and quiet. I had gotten drunk. . . ."

It's late, Sindbad. Zulaykha will be worried.

Seven voyages . . . and not one to Mecca!

Zulaykha! What's Zulaykha to me? She doesn't care! She doesn't understand! . . .

Now there . . . **there's** a woman worthy of a man's desire!

Her? But Sindbad, old friend! She's just a street whore!

She's a jewel of Allah! Did you see her navel? A man could drown in it! And you talk of Zulaykha! . . .

The festival's over, Sindbad. . . .

I have to have her! Let me go!

Sindbad!

Save your breath, Judar. You can't stop him.

We'll follow at a distance.



Wait . . . please!



Uff!

YELP!



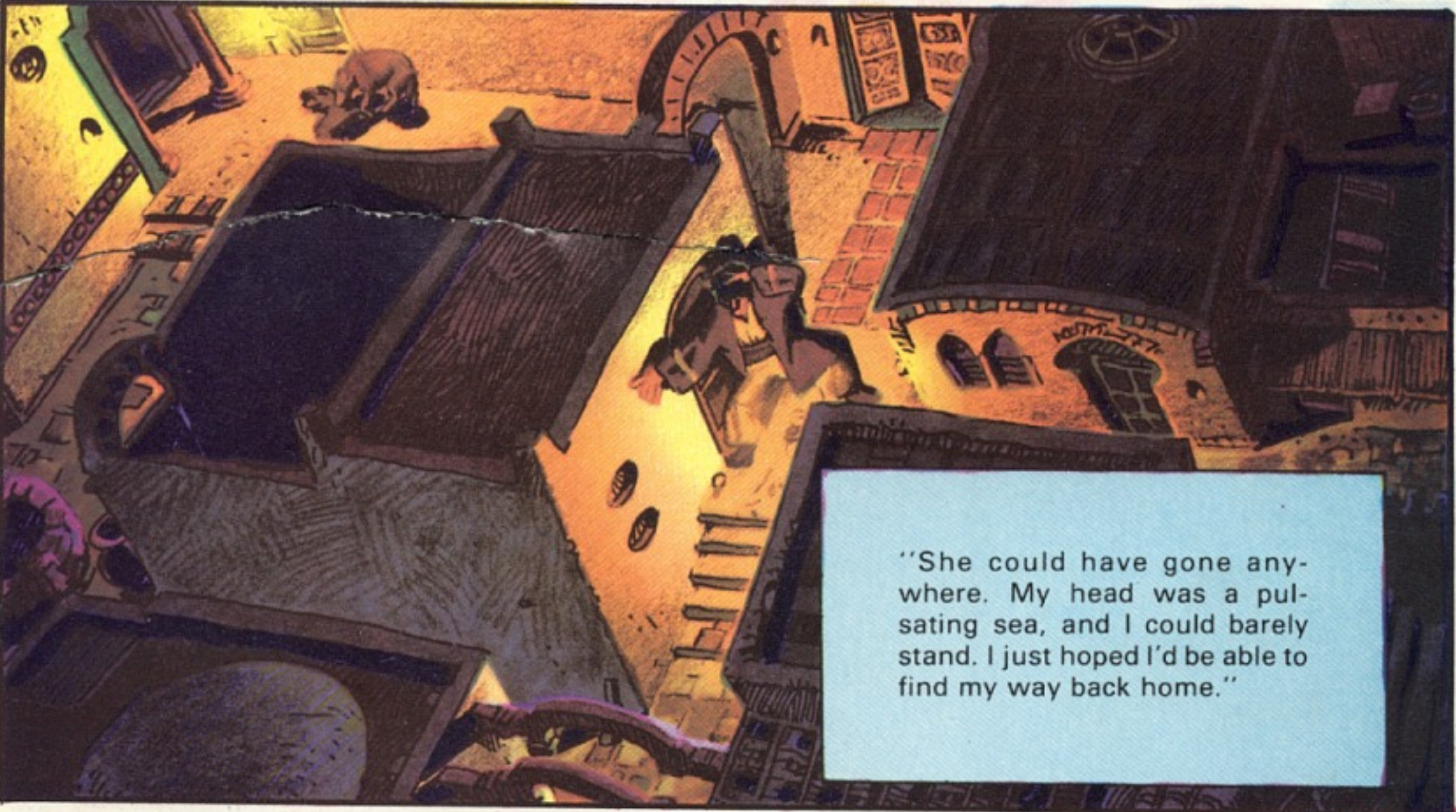
Out of my way, damn you!

KUDD

YAAAR!



SNIFF
SNIFF
WHINE



"She could have gone anywhere. My head was a pulsating sea, and I could barely stand. I just hoped I'd be able to find my way back home."



GRRRR



SINDBAD!




**SHE IS
DEAD!...**

Bismallah
... no!

Know, Sindbad, that you have slain the wife of Al-Ra'ad al-Kasif . . . and by Allah, you shall pay for it!





Please . . . my wife's done you no harm! Kill me if you will, but spare Zulaykha! She's a good, pious woman!

The Word of God is clear — a life for a life, a woman for a woman!

Hah-hah! So noble of you, Sindbad! But no . . . my vow is to **spare** you, and to exact the justice the law demands! You've slain **my** wife . . . and **your** own!

I beg you!
Muhammad teaches the virtue of mercy!



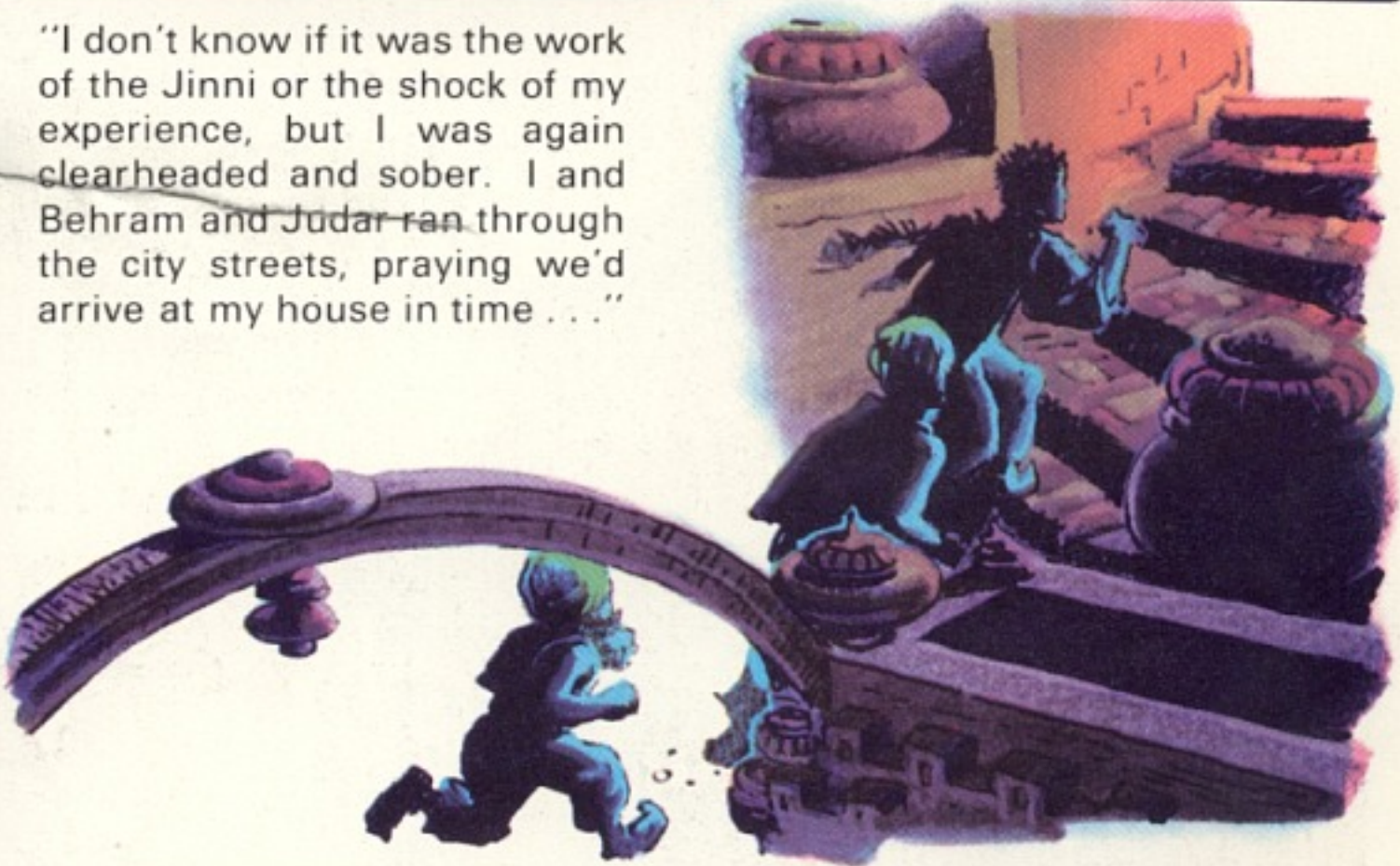
Mercy, Sindbad?
Hah-hah-haah!



Sindbad!
Are you hurt?

No . . . but I have to strike a bargain with that Ifrit or Zulaykha is doomed! Help me!

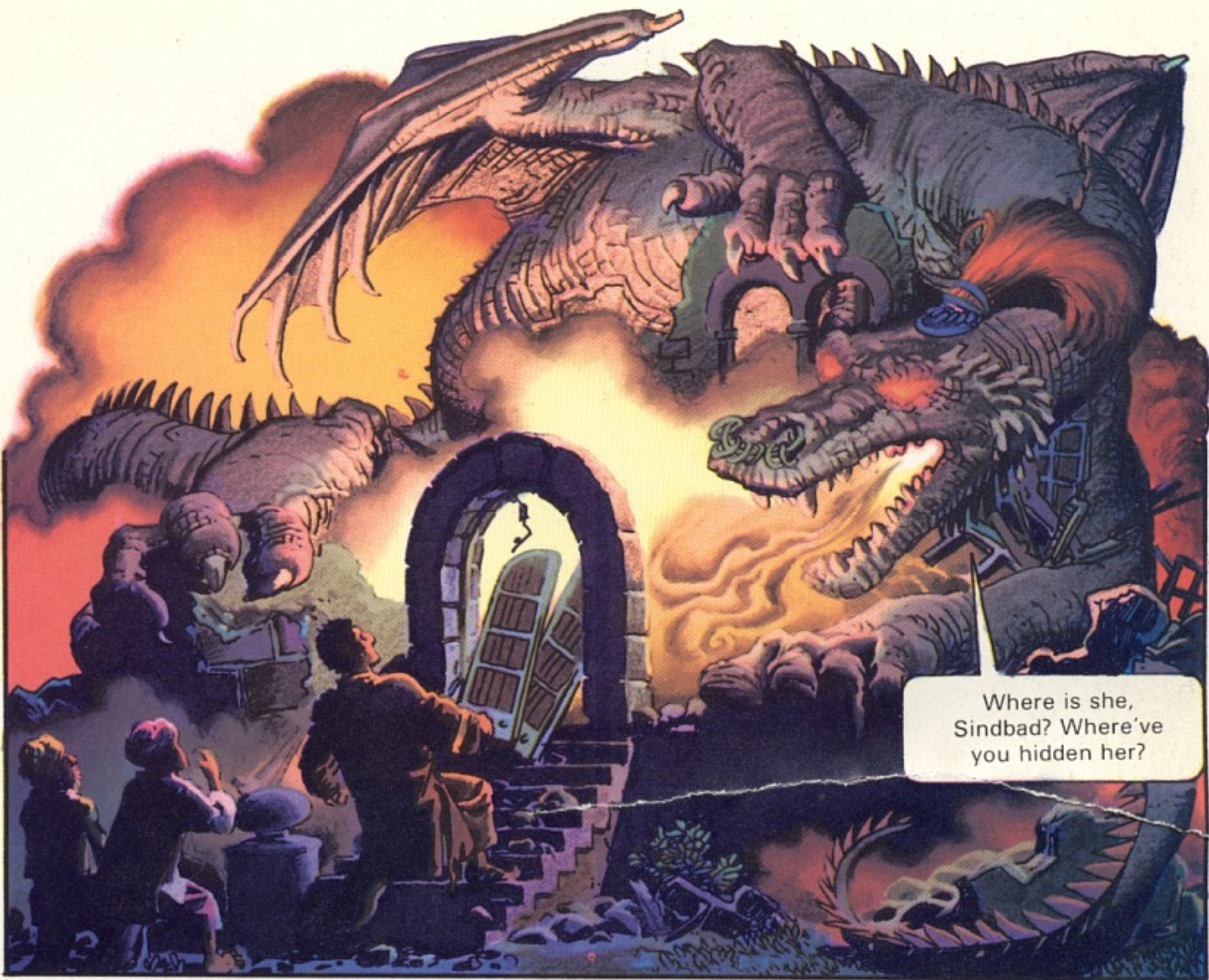
"I don't know if it was the work of the Jinni or the shock of my experience, but I was again clearheaded and sober. I and Behram and Judar ran through the city streets, praying we'd arrive at my house in time . . ."



" . . . but we were too late."

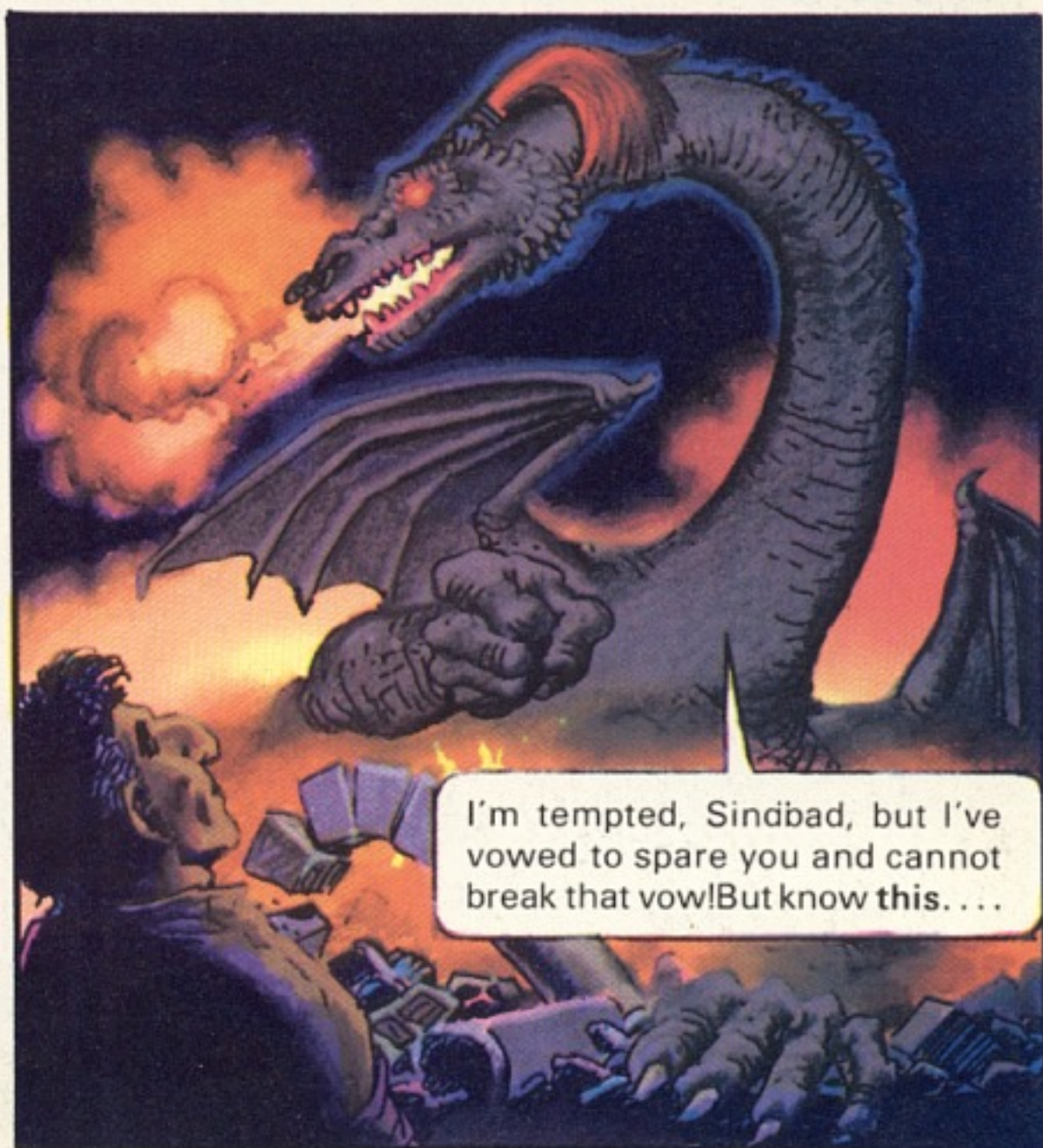


Zulaykha. . . .



Where is she,
Sindbad? Where've
you hidden her?

Far beyond **your** evil reach, Ifrit!
Now will you take my life for
hers?!



I'm tempted, Sindbad, but I've
vowed to spare you and cannot
break that vow! But know **this**. . .

There's nowhere she can go that I cannot follow! I'll be watching you . . . and waiting! You'll not enjoy the pleasures of the flesh until my vengeance has been taken!



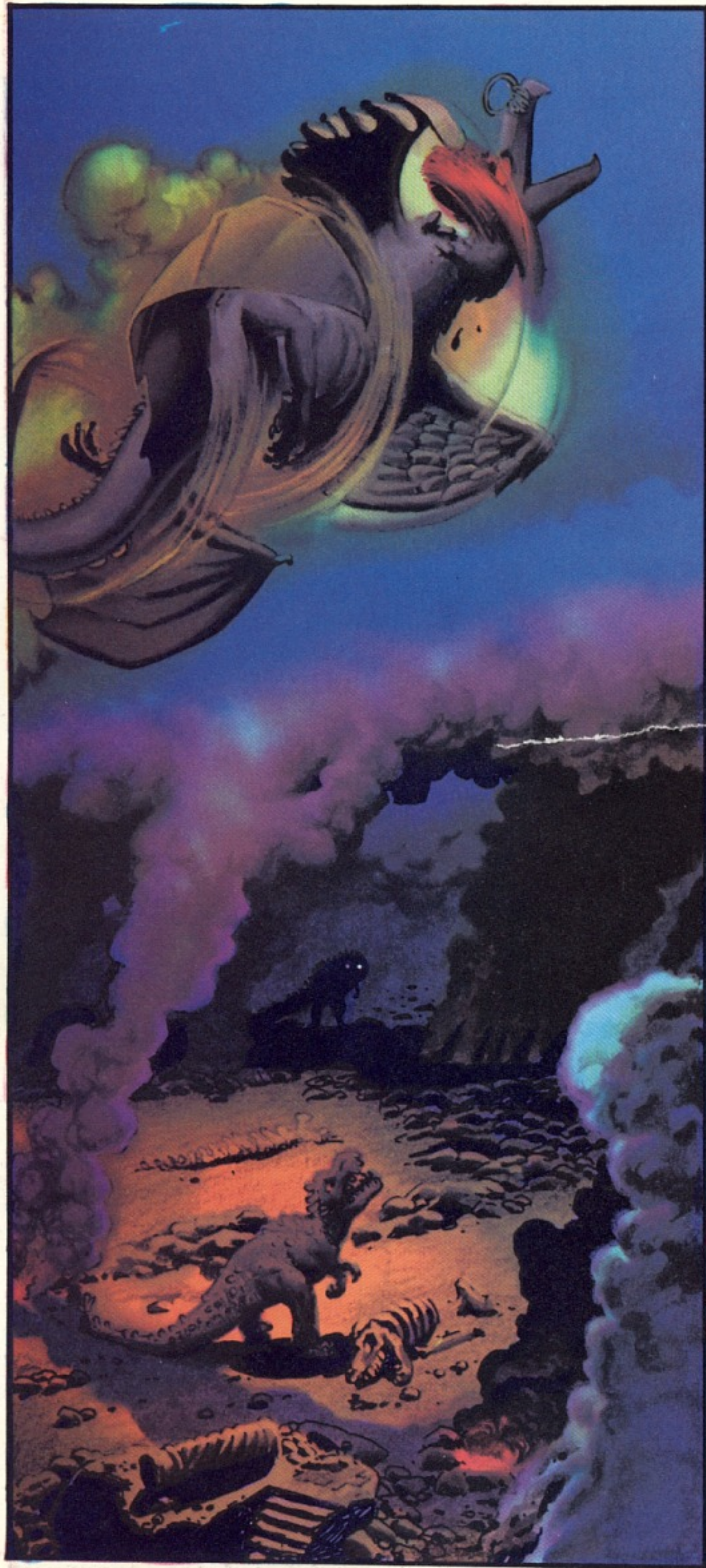
I'll find her, Sindbad! I'll find her!



Praise Allah, Zulaykha's escaped! But how, Sindbad? Where is she?



. . . I don't know.







Well? Is it ready?


Yes, it's done. You're lucky you came to me (damn you!)...

...your situation is most precarious! Great forces are in conflict, here and in the mortal sphere. Life and death hang in a delicate balance. You've made a new enemy who could be your undoing....




Sindbad! I should've broken my vow and killed him on the spot!

Perhaps. But a broken vow is an insult to Allah. Any attempt on Sindbad's life could tip the balance in his favor!




Then what can I do...if I can't slay my enemies but they may slay me?!

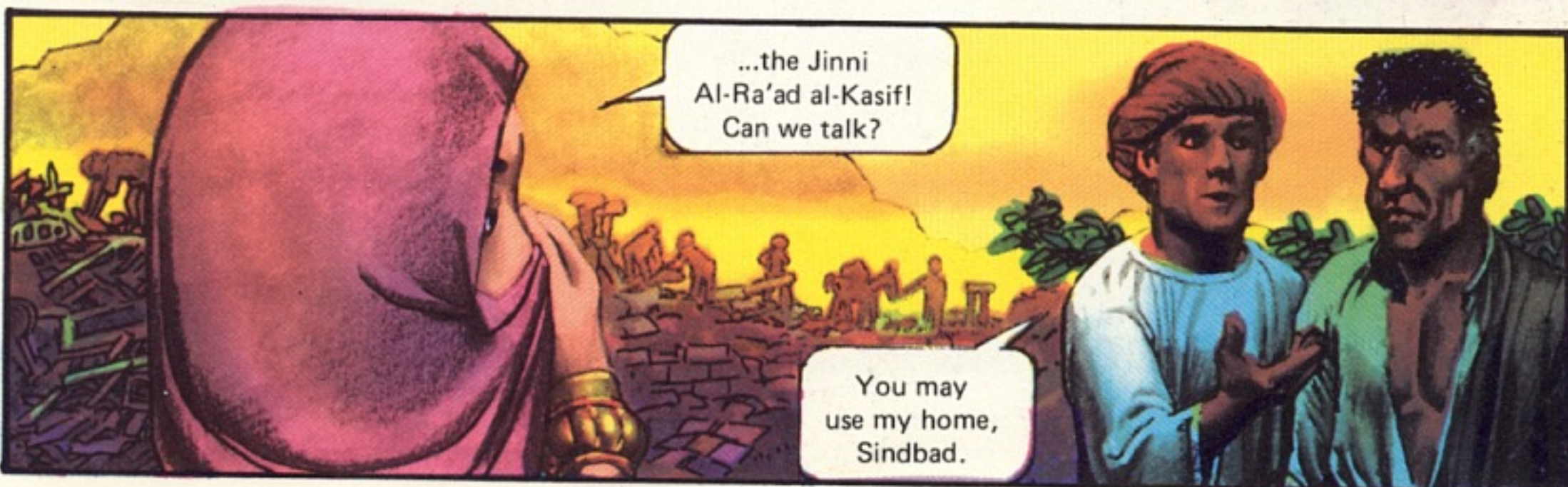
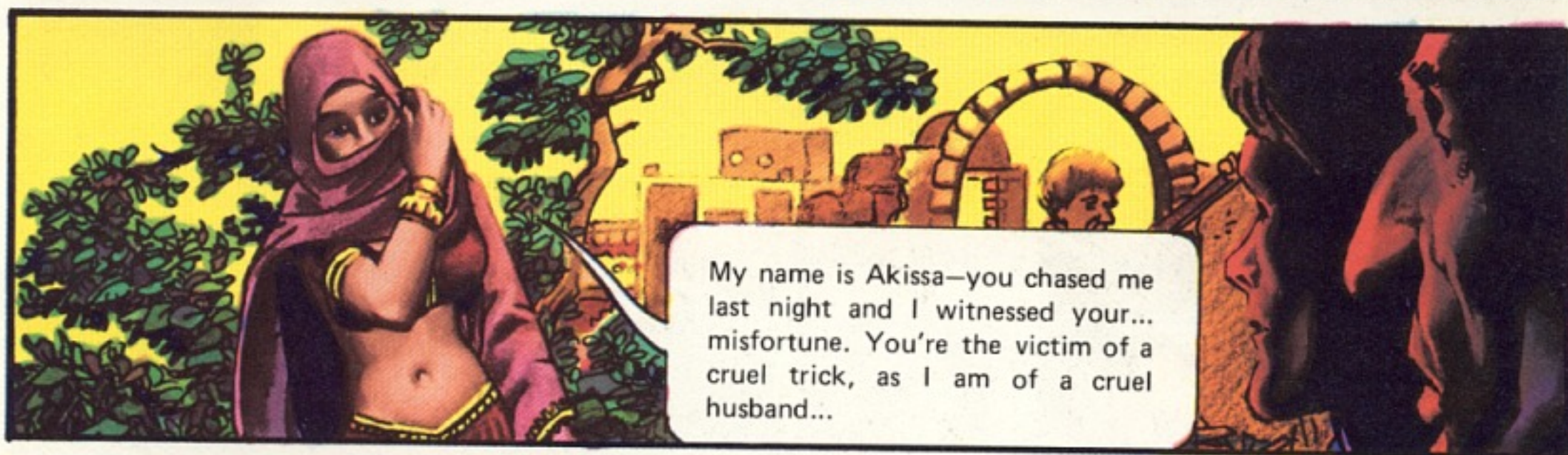
Be patient...and watchful! Sindbad's a reckless man—you can help him author his own defeat!



Easier said than done! I'll consider your advice—but I, too, am reckless!



So they say, Al-Ra'ad al-Kasif....



I can't endure my husband's malicious nature any longer, Sindbad! I'll do whatever I must to obtain a divorce.

Divorce from an Ifrit? Who has the authority to grant such a thing?

Zu'l Janahayn...
King of all Kings
of the Jinn!

Akissa...

You say my friend's being tricked... if you're the Jinni's wife, then the dog that was killed...?

Just an alley mongrel Al-Ra'ad would have used for his own sick pleasure, and as an excuse to torment Sindbad!

You see, Sindbad, you too have cause to seek justice from Zu'l Janahayn....

Will you help me lead a caravan into the land of the Jinn?

It seems my only hope.



"So with Akissa leading and with my remaining fortune as a gift for Zu'l Janahayn, we began our laborious journey...."





"Weeks passed and we entered the nexus between our world and that of the Jinn. As the desert became less hospitable to human travelers, wells and water became luxuries of the past. . . ."

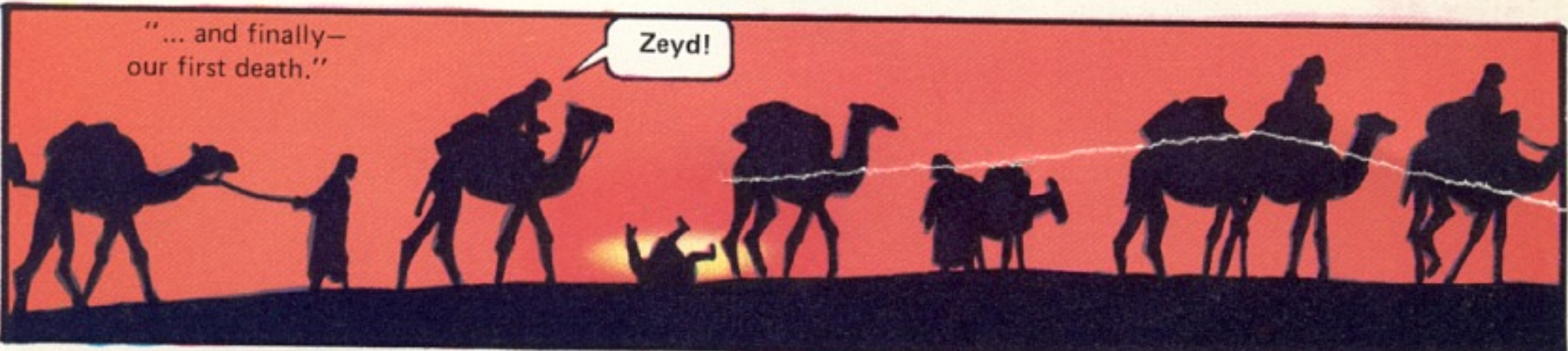
At this rate we'll be slaughtering the camels to water the horses.



Probably.



"...annoyances proliferated..."



"... and finally—our first death."

Zeyd!

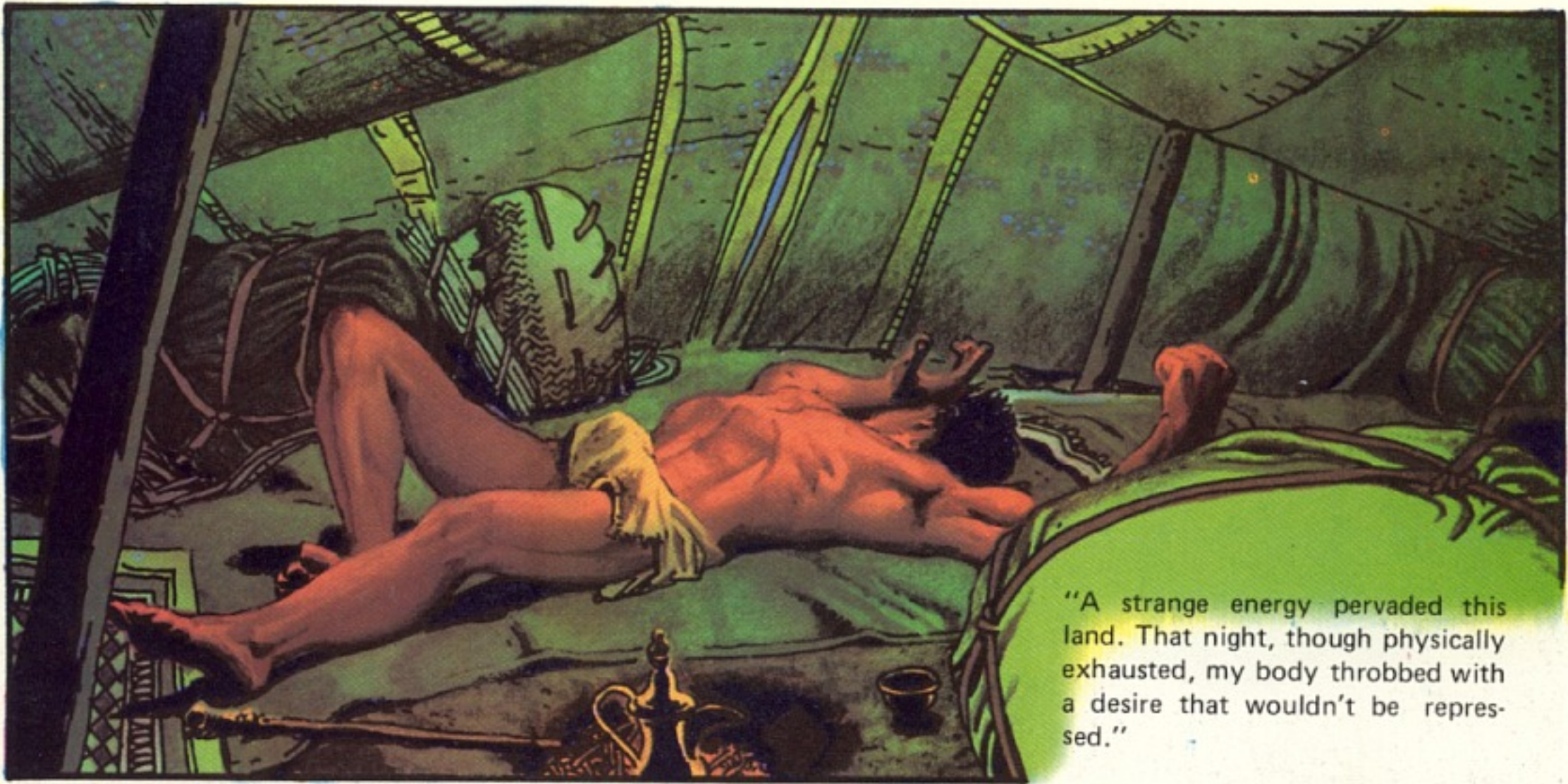


We'll all die if we don't find water, Akissa.

That means a detour through Ketra...a delay.

Make camp. We'll head for Ketra in the morning.





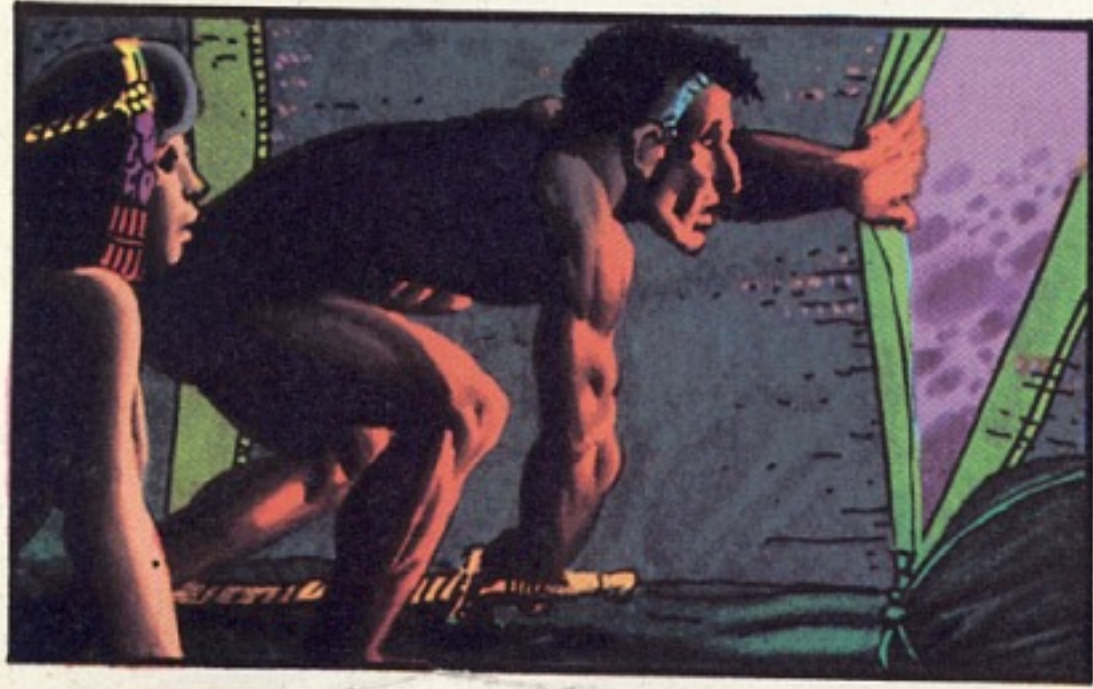
"A strange energy pervaded this land. That night, though physically exhausted, my body throbbed with a desire that wouldn't be repressed."



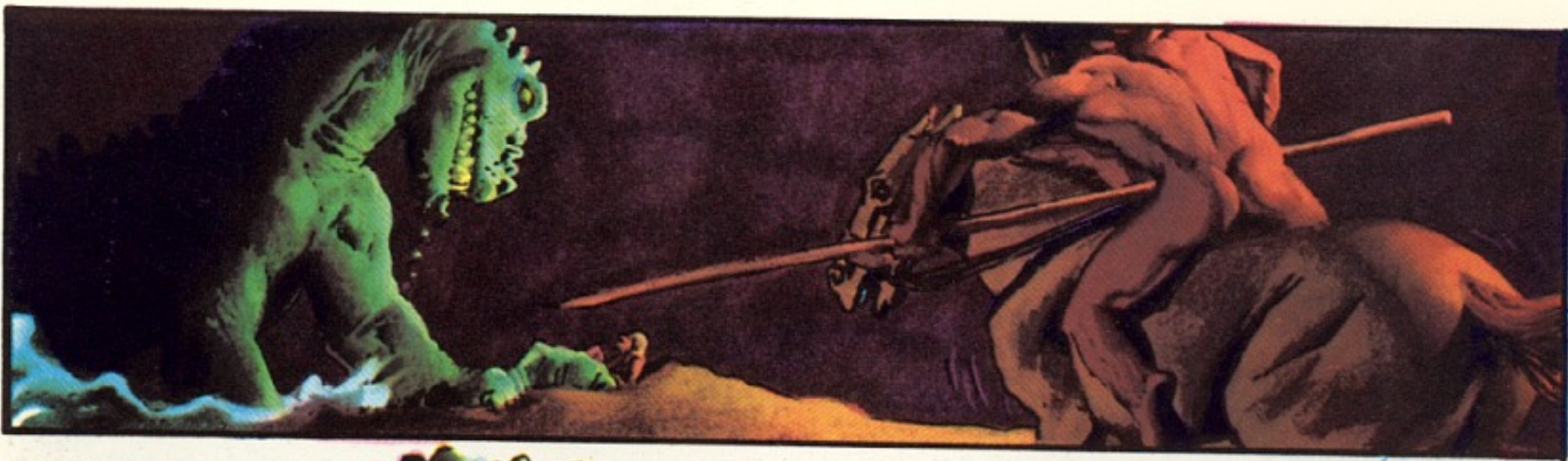
So...you feel it too.

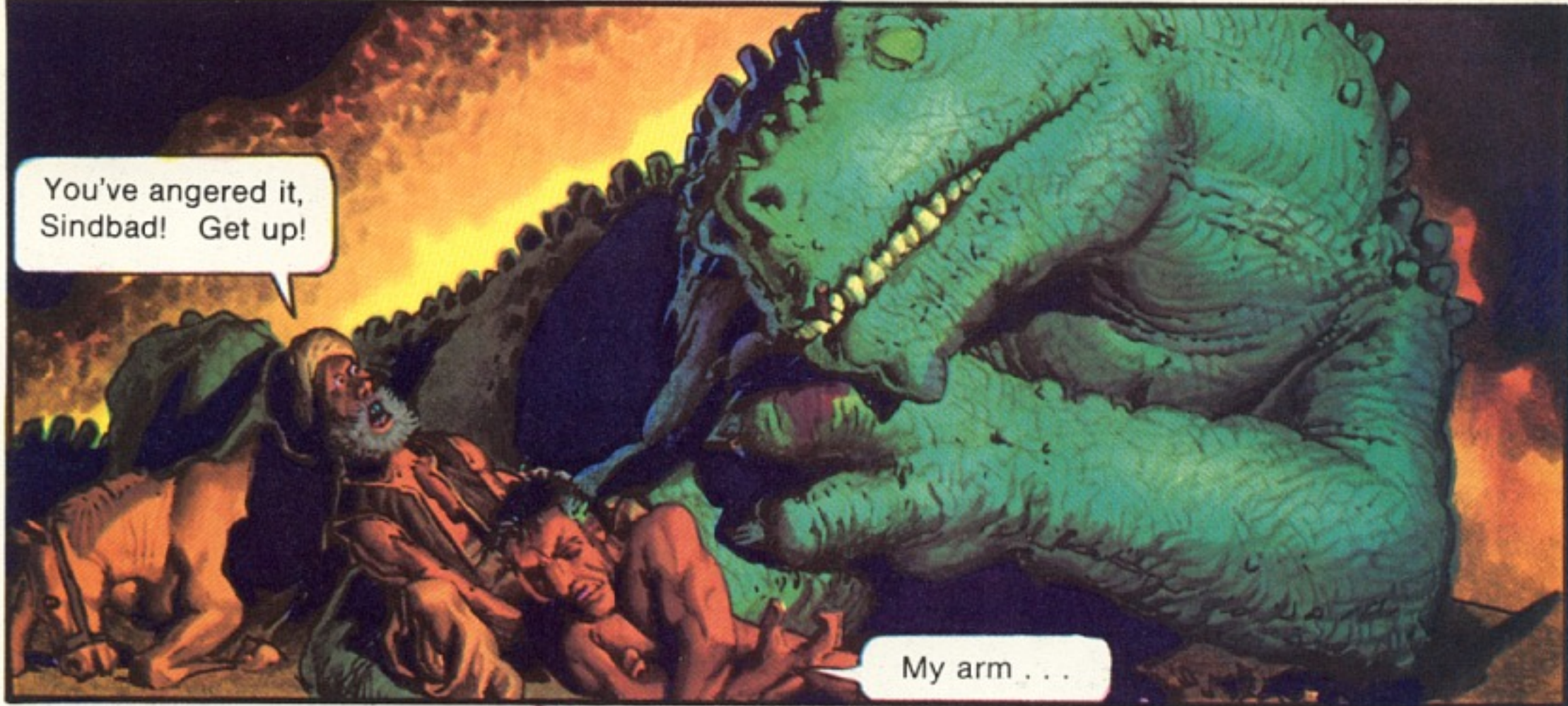


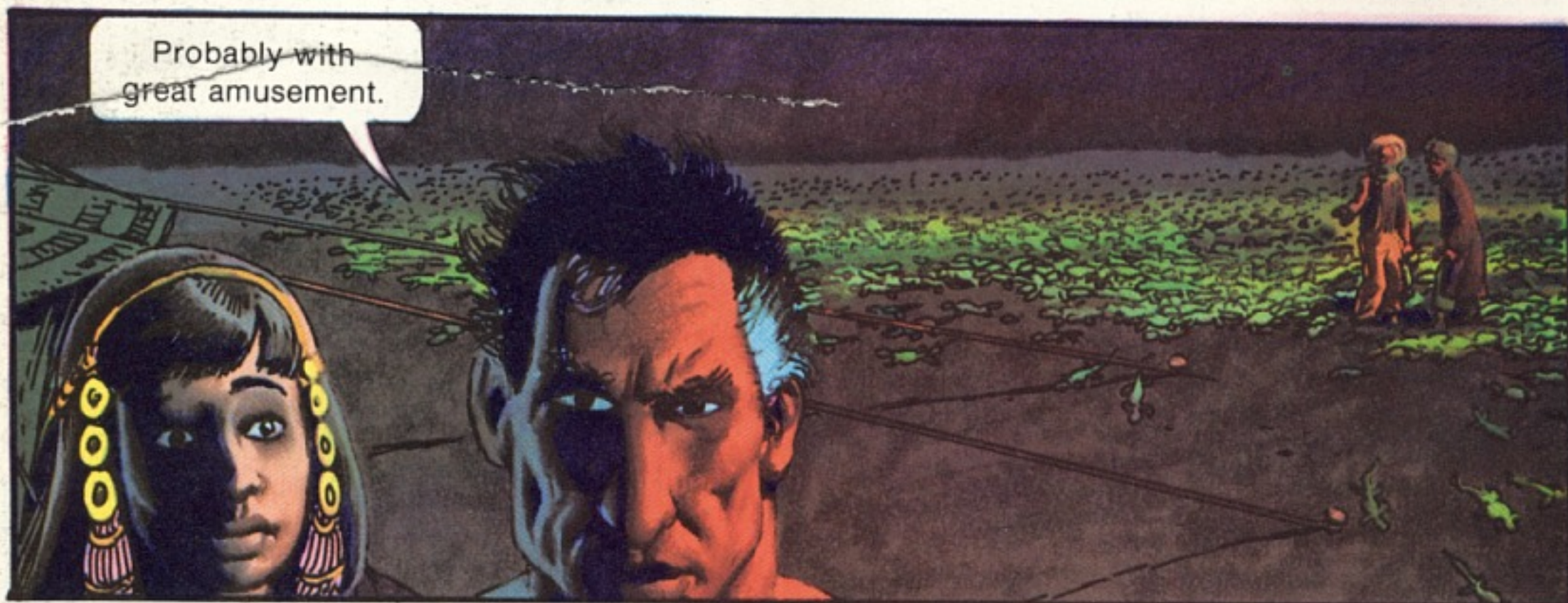
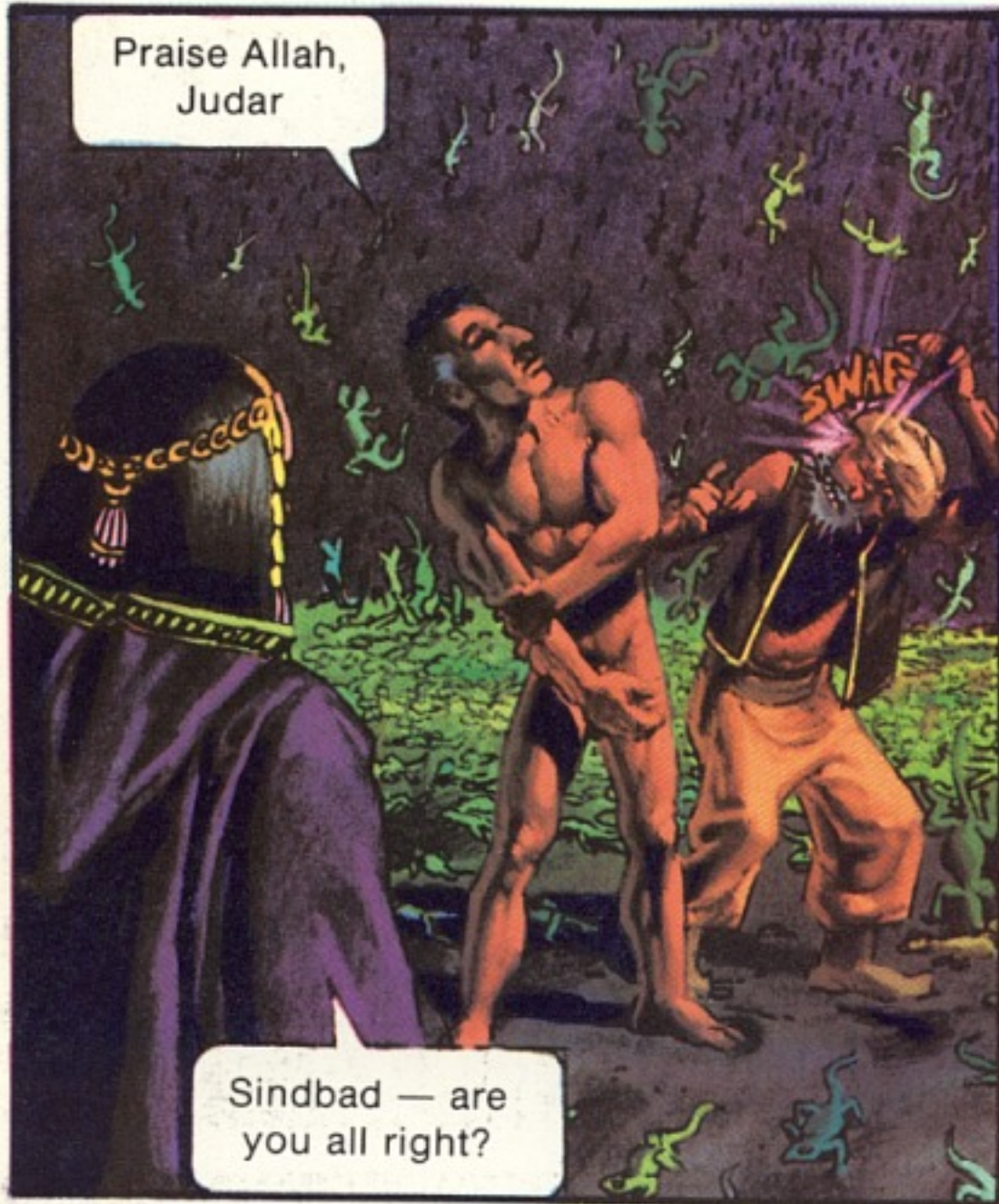
Yes.

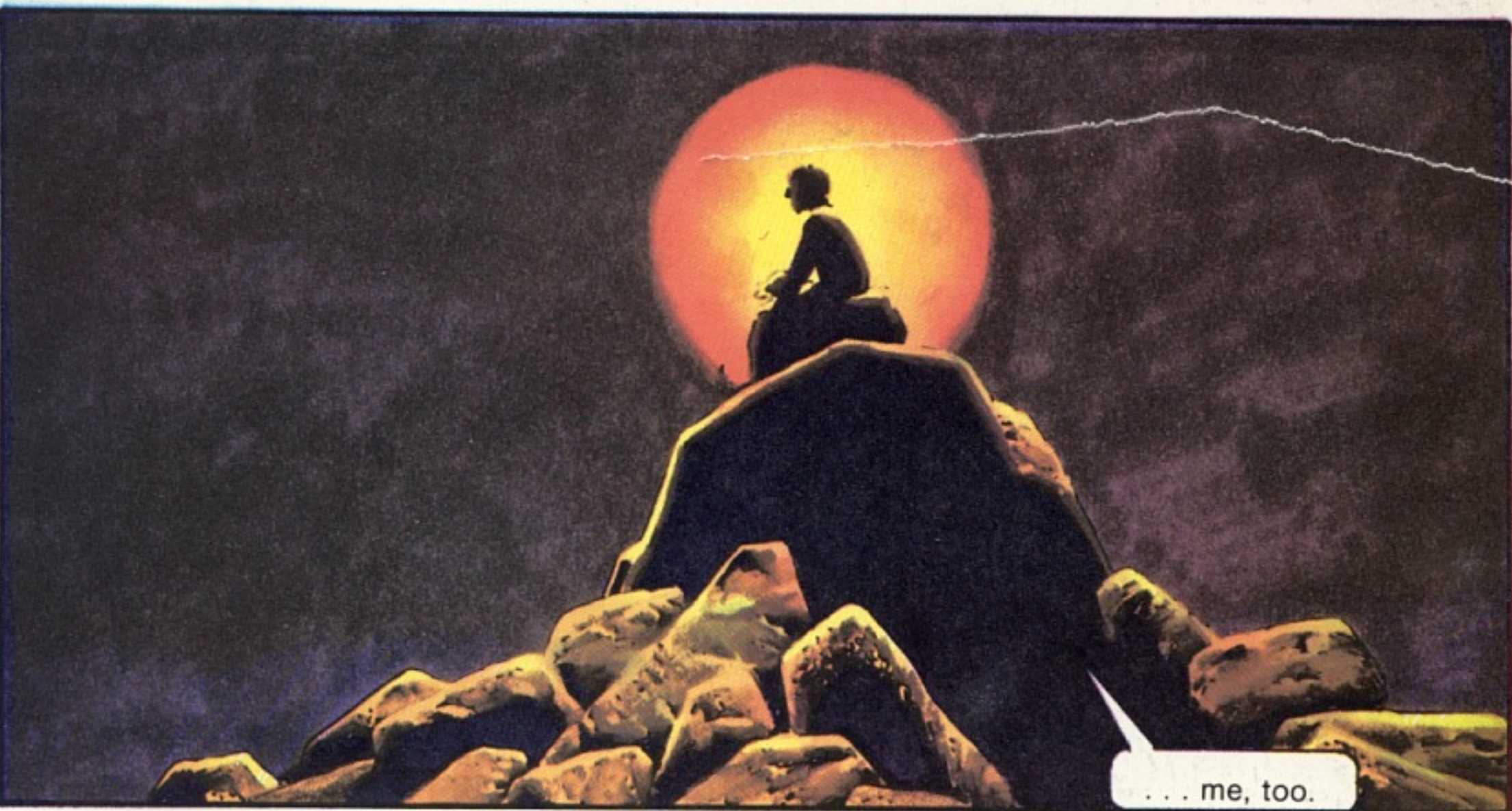
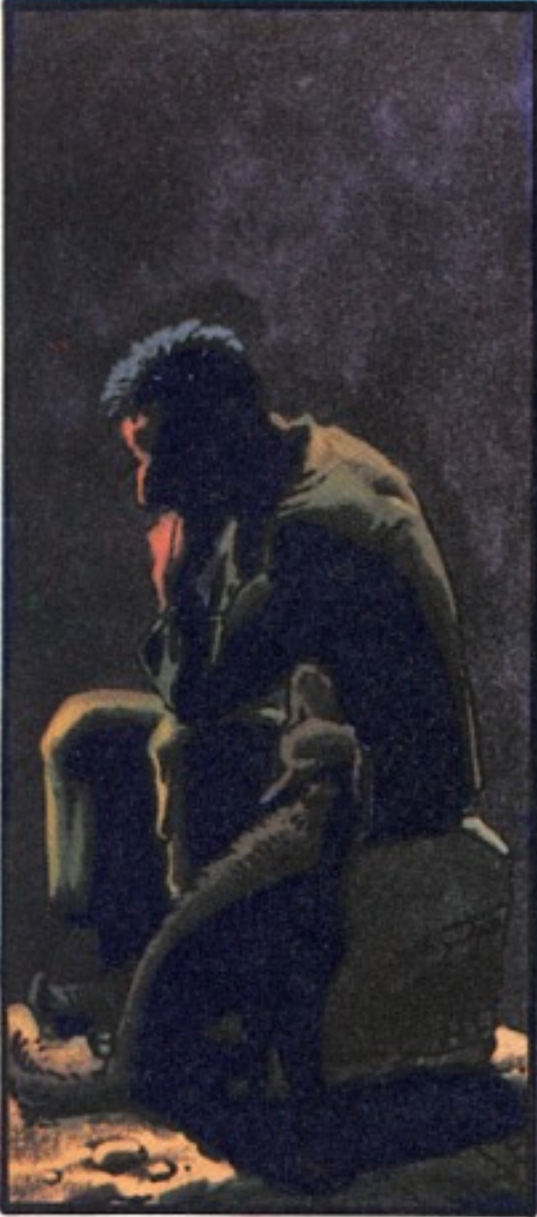


















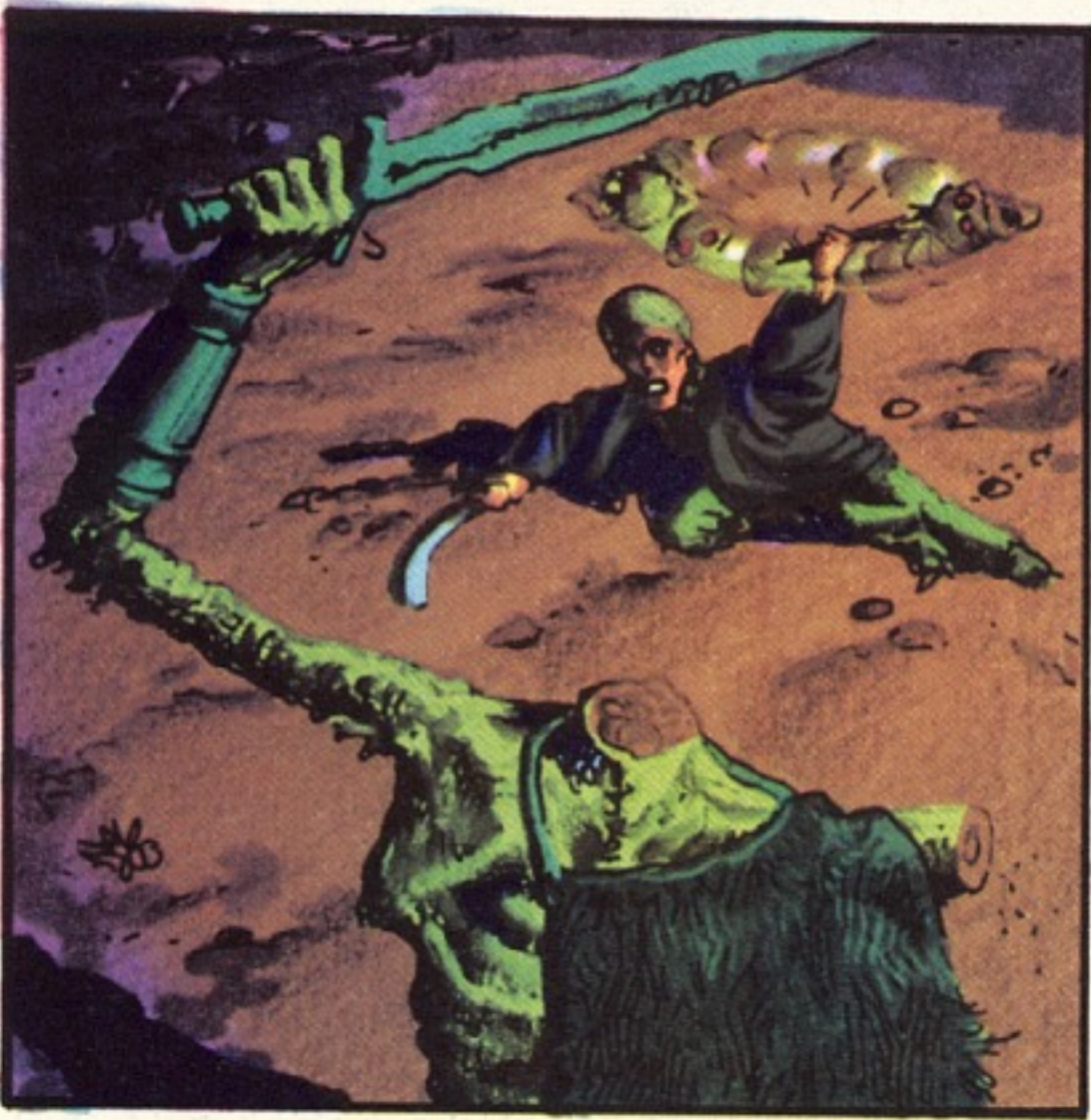


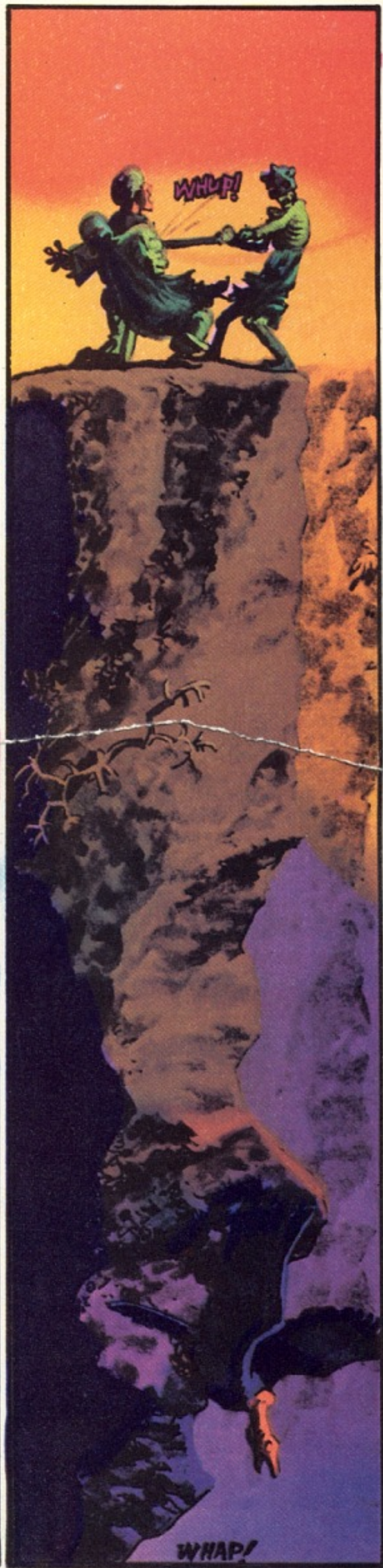




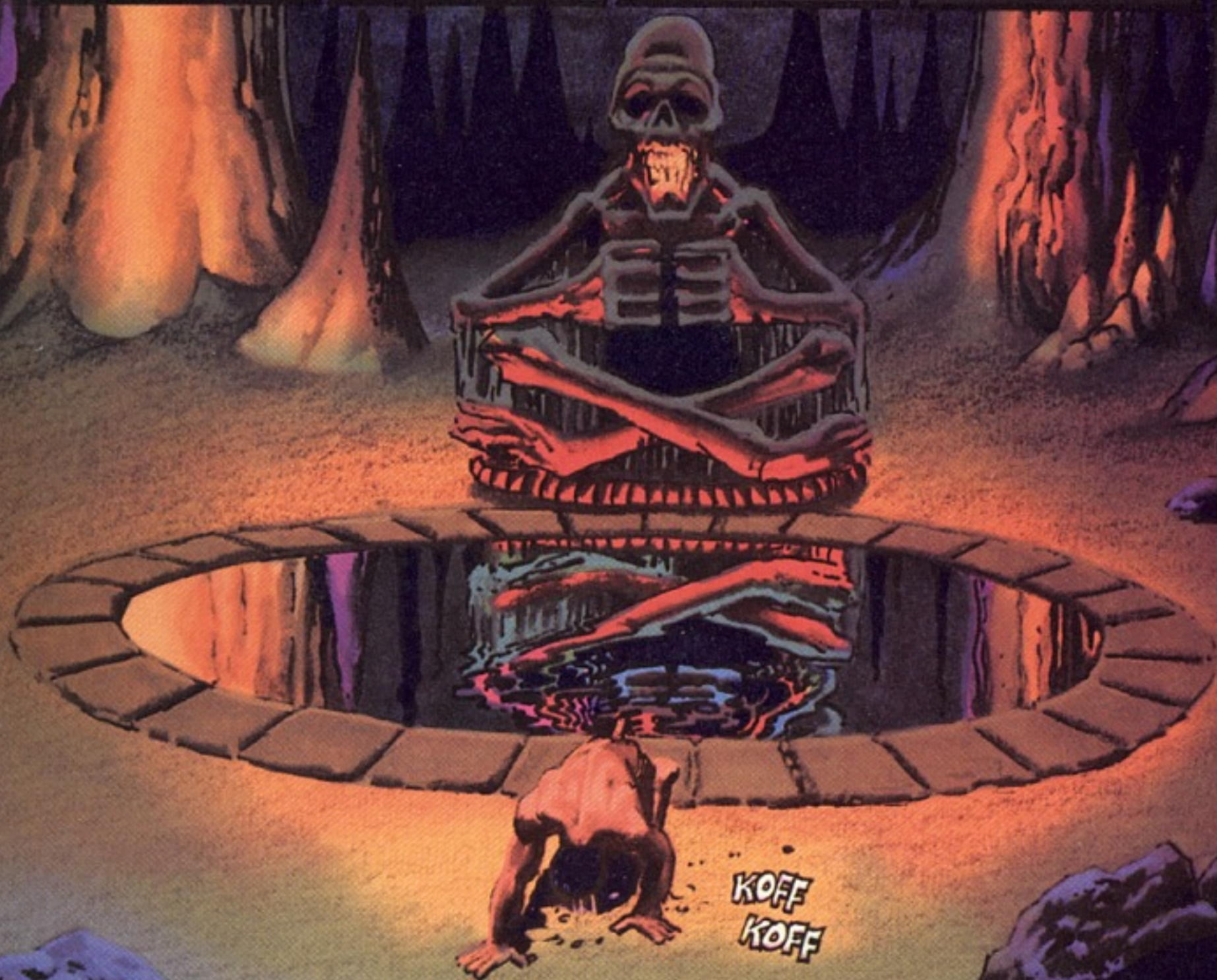














So ...
you've come.



Zulaykha!

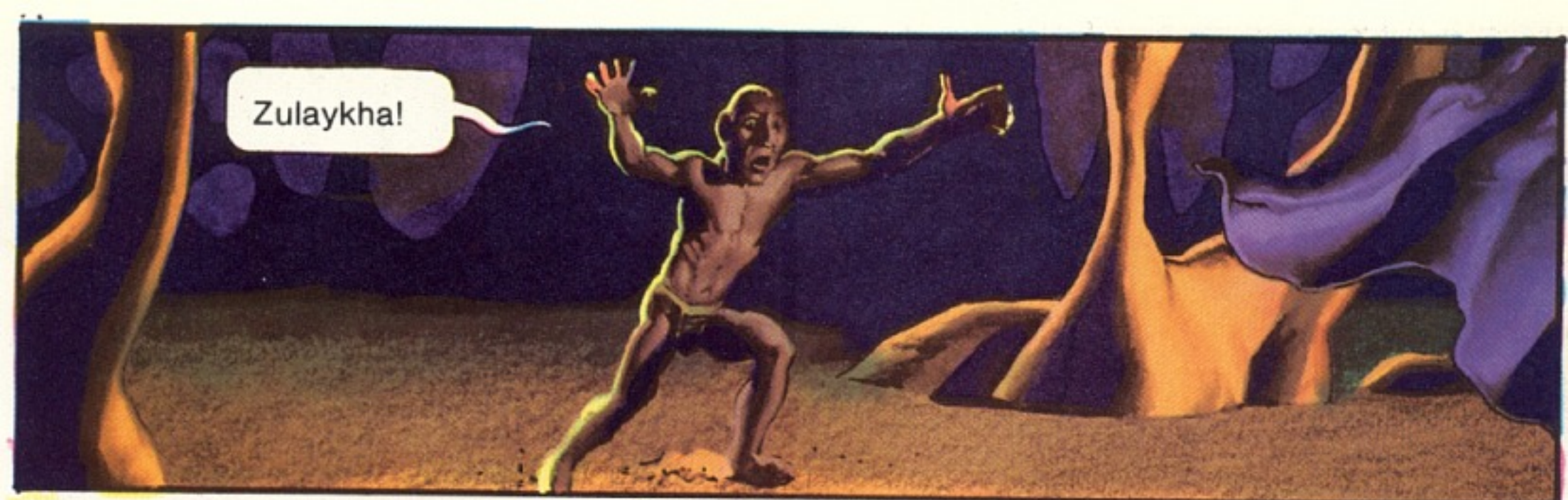


Praise Allah ... I
thought you were
lost to me forever!


I'll tell
them you're here.




Zulaykha!
Wait! What is
this place?




Zulaykha!



What?!...

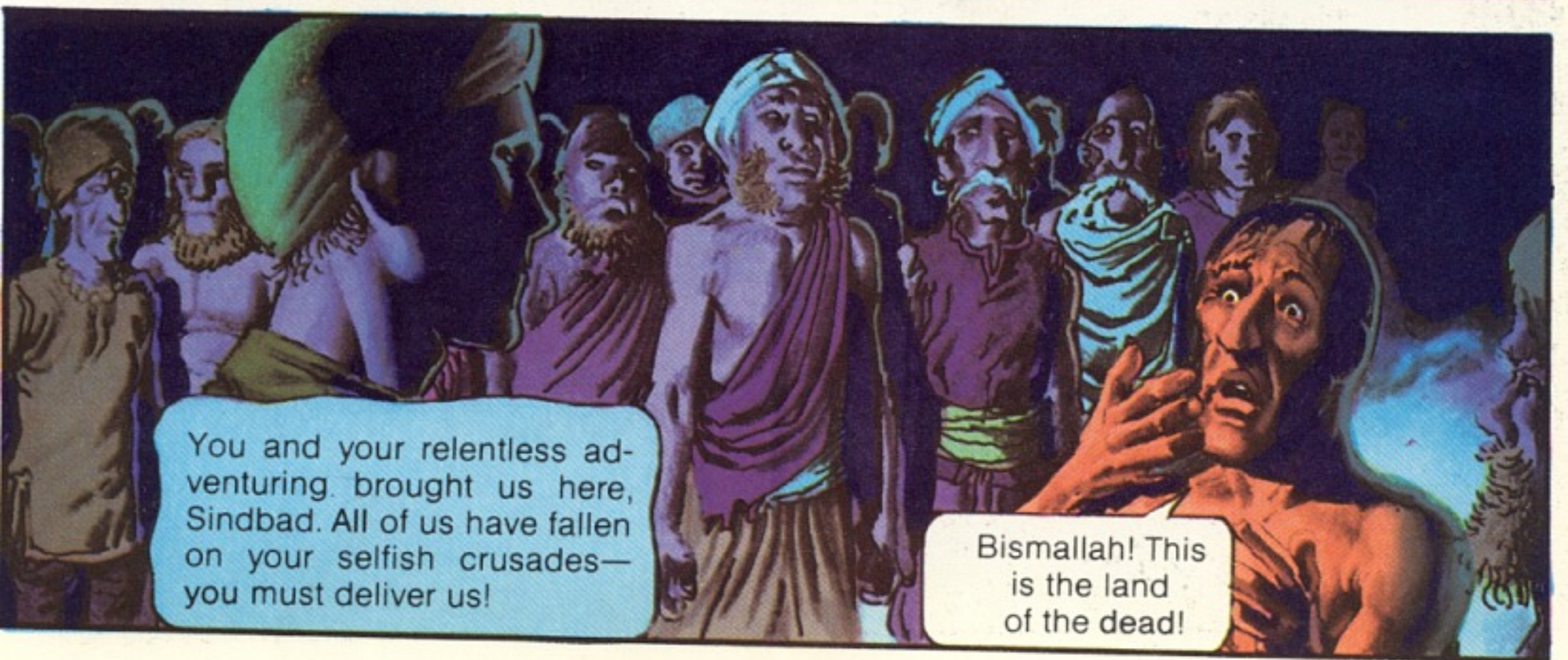


Judar! Allah is indeed merciful! Where are we, my friend?



He won't talk to you, Sindbad. He bears a grudge.

Behram!



You and your relentless adventuring brought us here, Sindbad. All of us have fallen on your selfish crusades—you must deliver us!

Bismallah! This is the land of the dead!

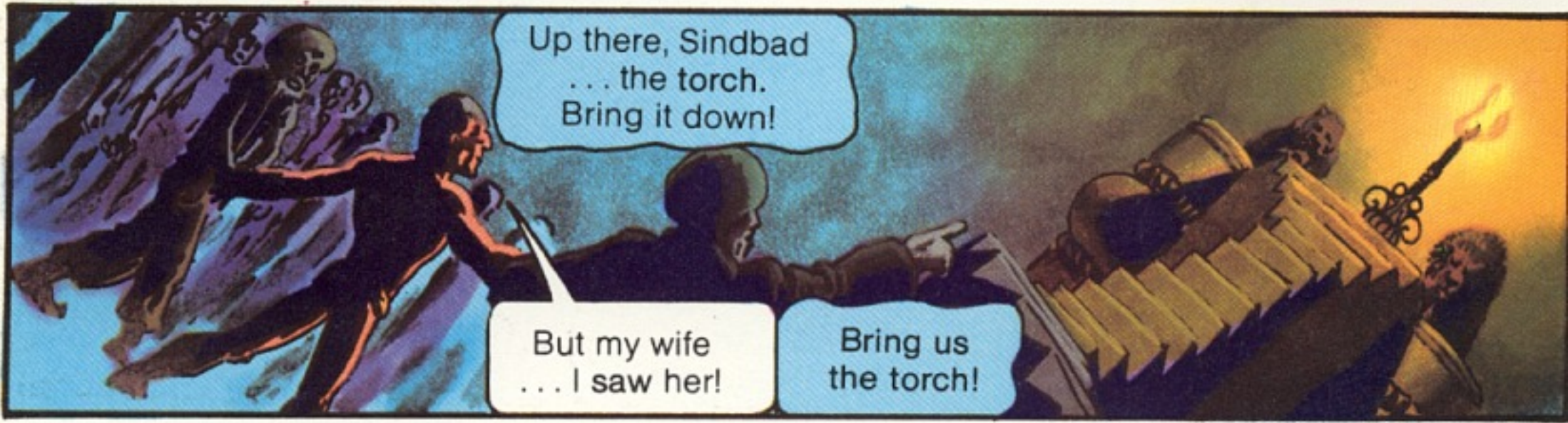


Let me go!
I have to
find Zulaykha!

The torch!

She doesn't need you
anymore . . . you've
destroyed her. Come
with us!

The torch!



Up there, Sindbad
. . . the torch.
Bring it down!

But my wife
. . . I saw her!

Bring us
the torch!



The torch!
The torch!
The torch!

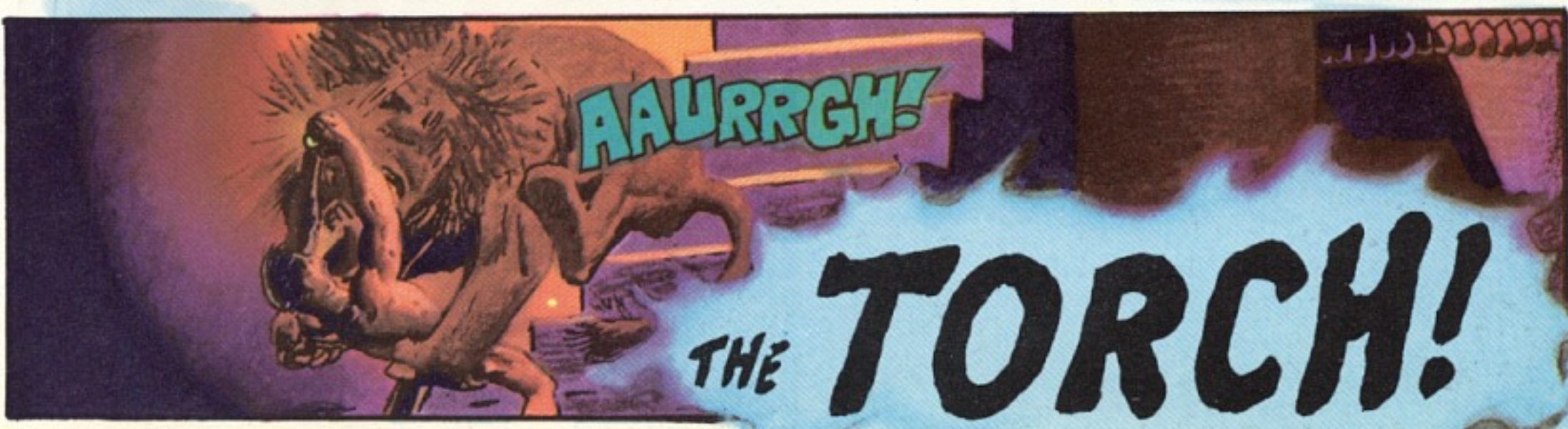
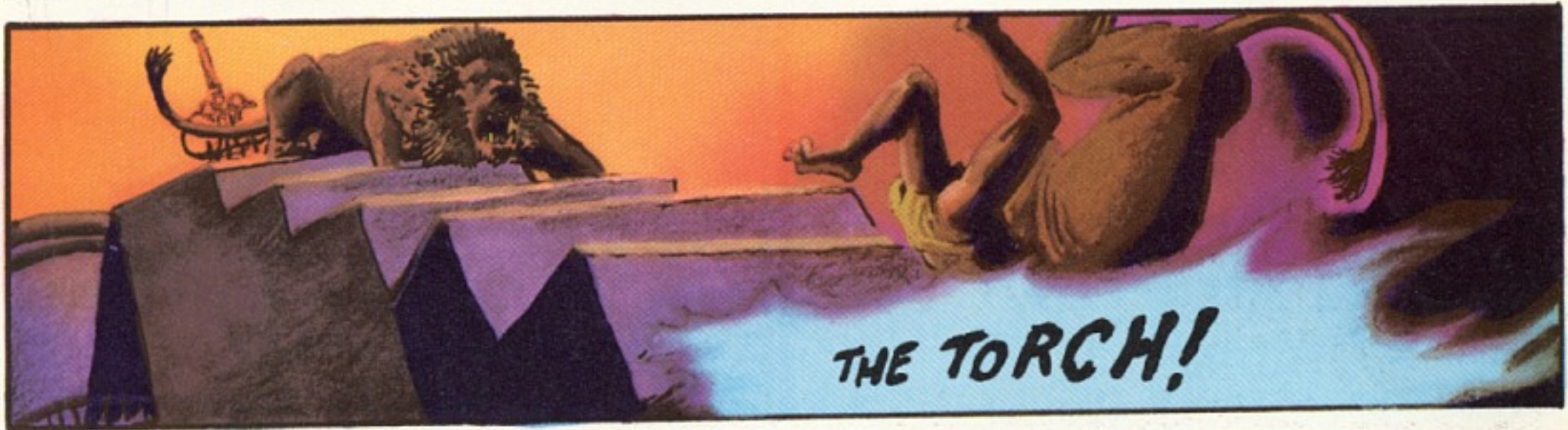
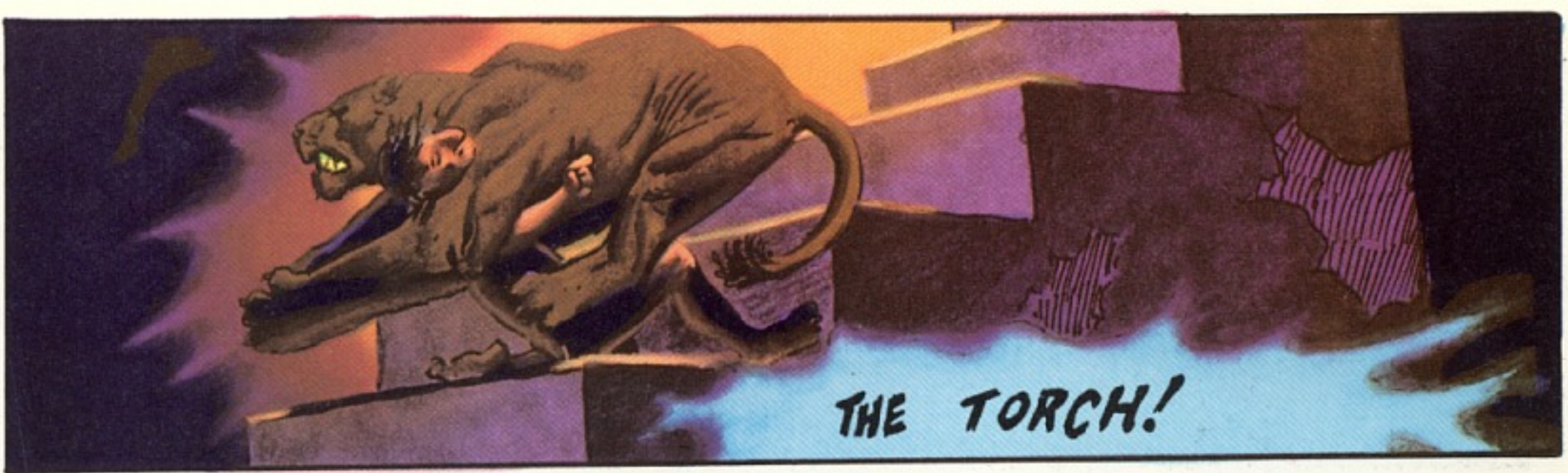


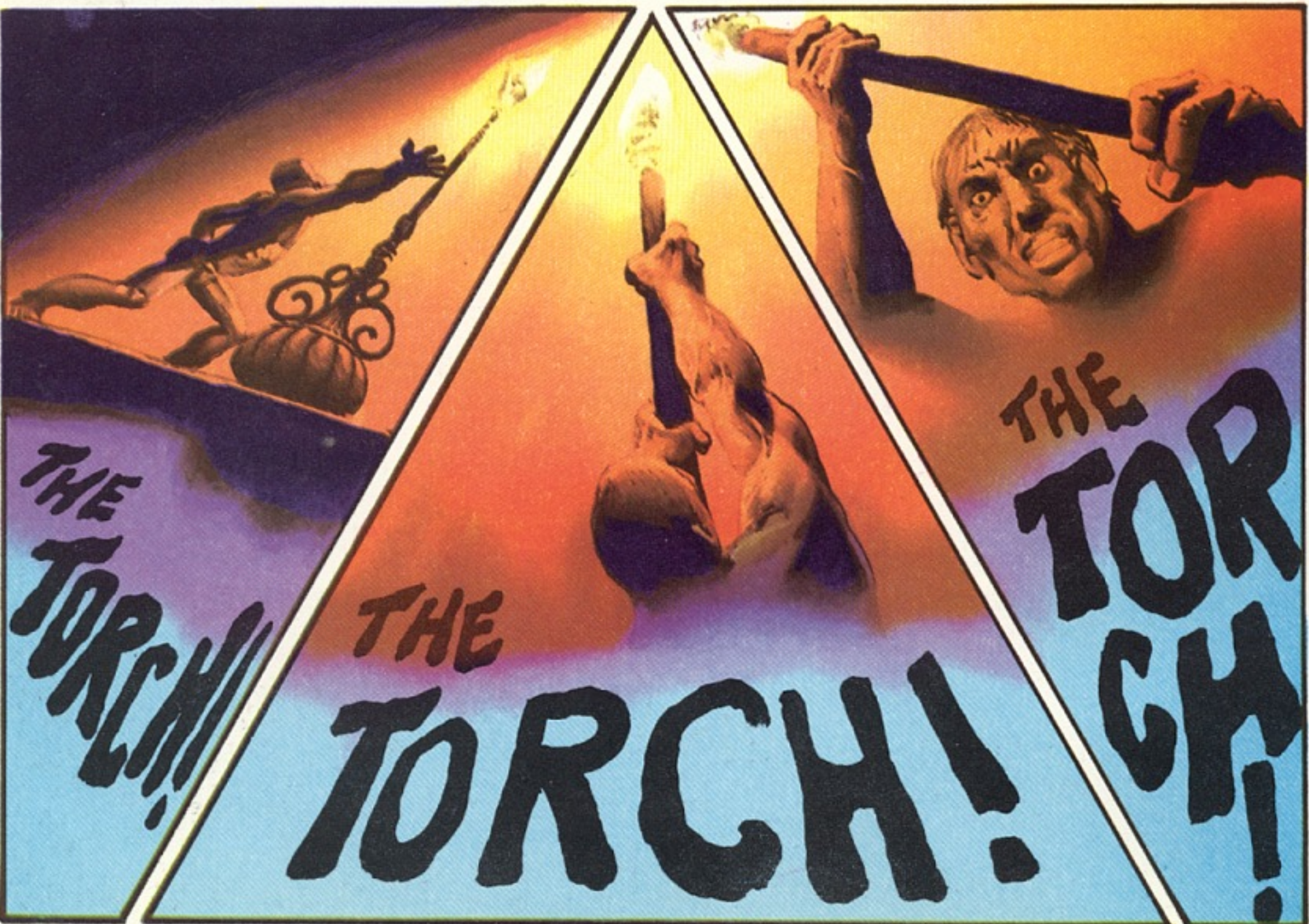
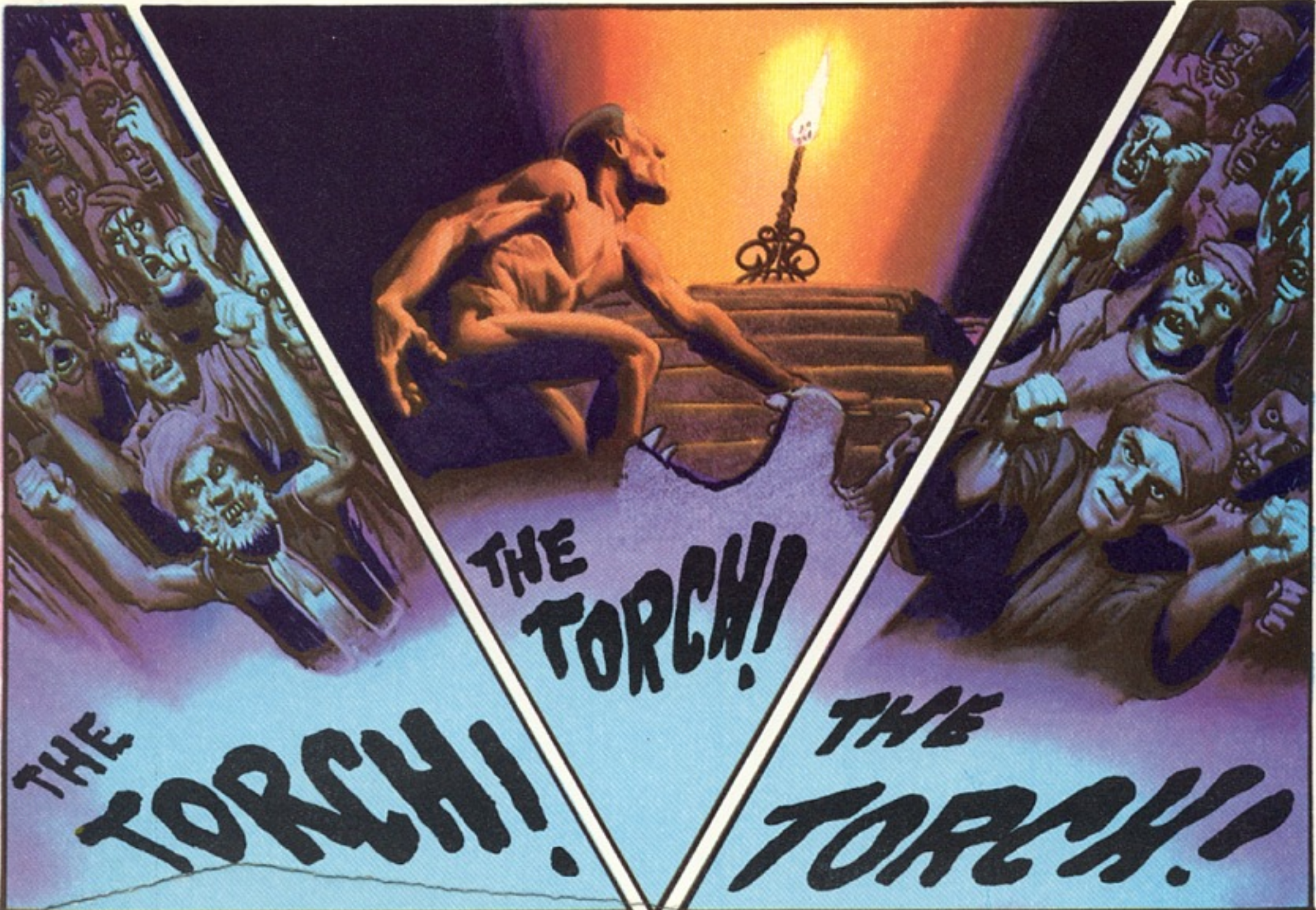
THE
TORCH!

THE
TORCH!



RAAREGH!







Uuhhnn ...

He's waking.



Sindbad ... wake up.
You've been unconscious
a long time

Behram! Praise
Allah ... you're
still alive!

Judar! I dreamed you were dead! But tell me...where are we? Is this Ketra?

Talk, damn it! Say you hate and revile me for leading you to this doom...but speak!

It's no use, Sindbad. He won't answer you.

Judar was impudent to the guards ...

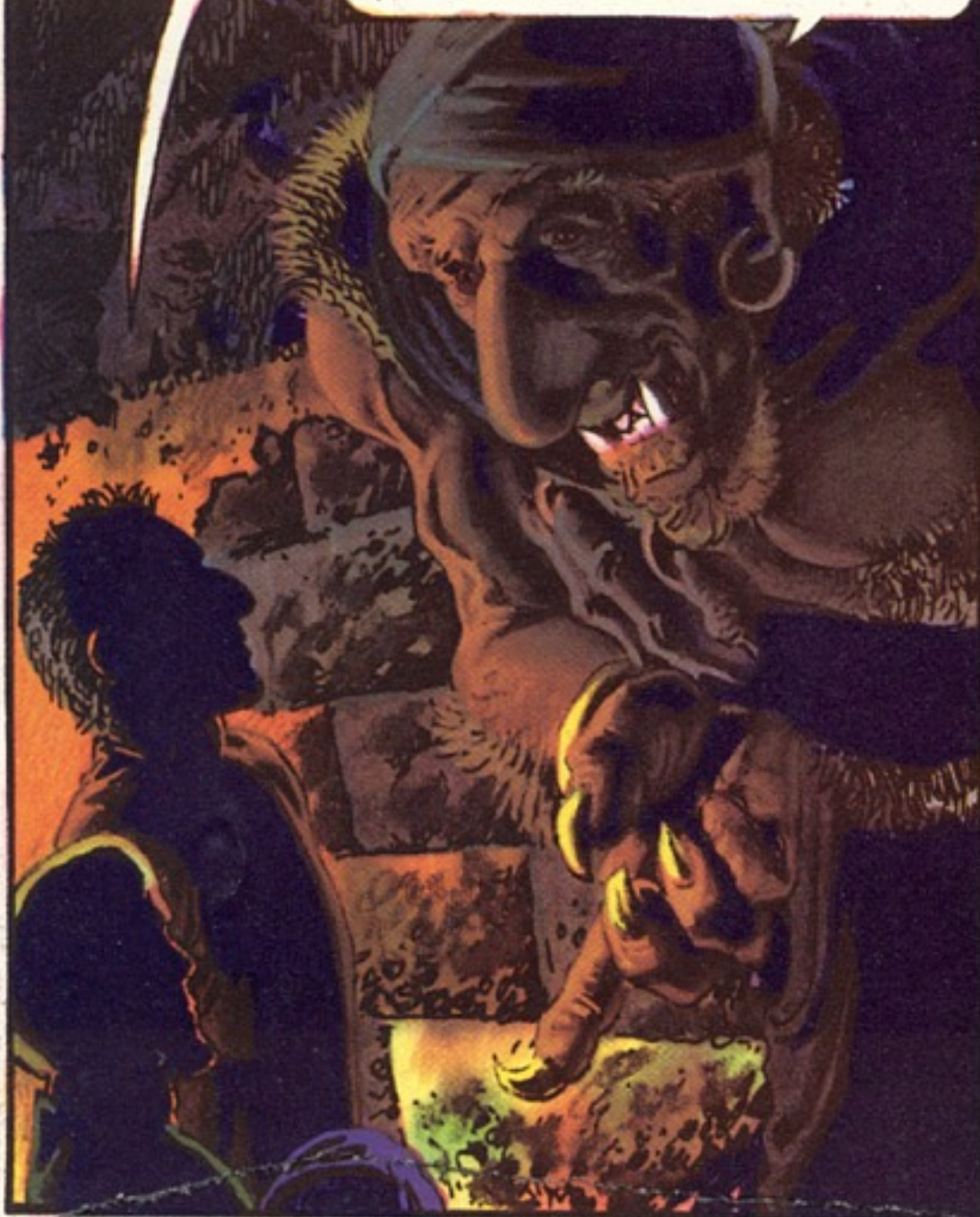
... they cut out his tongue.

Someone's coming.

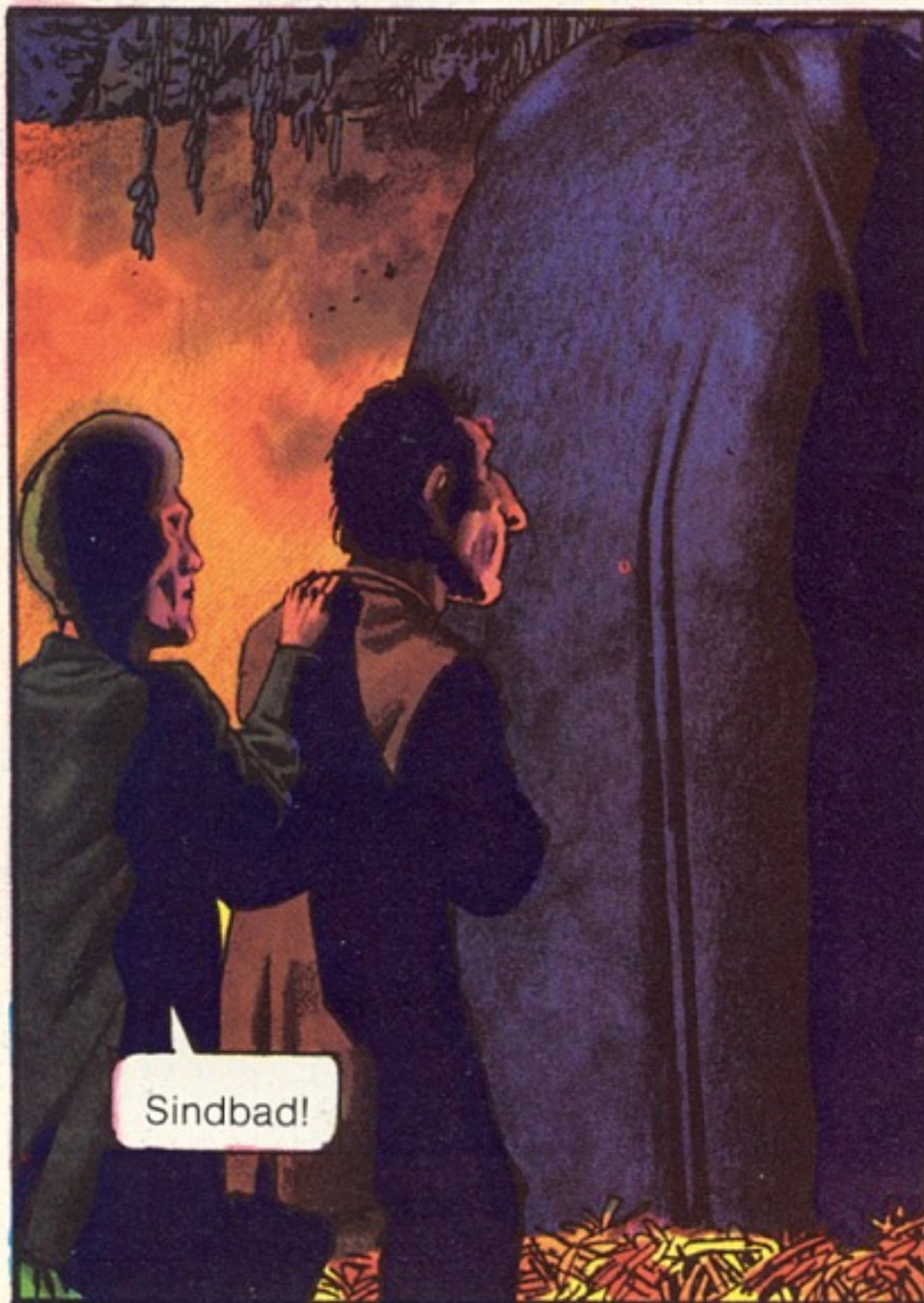


I'm
Sindbad . . .

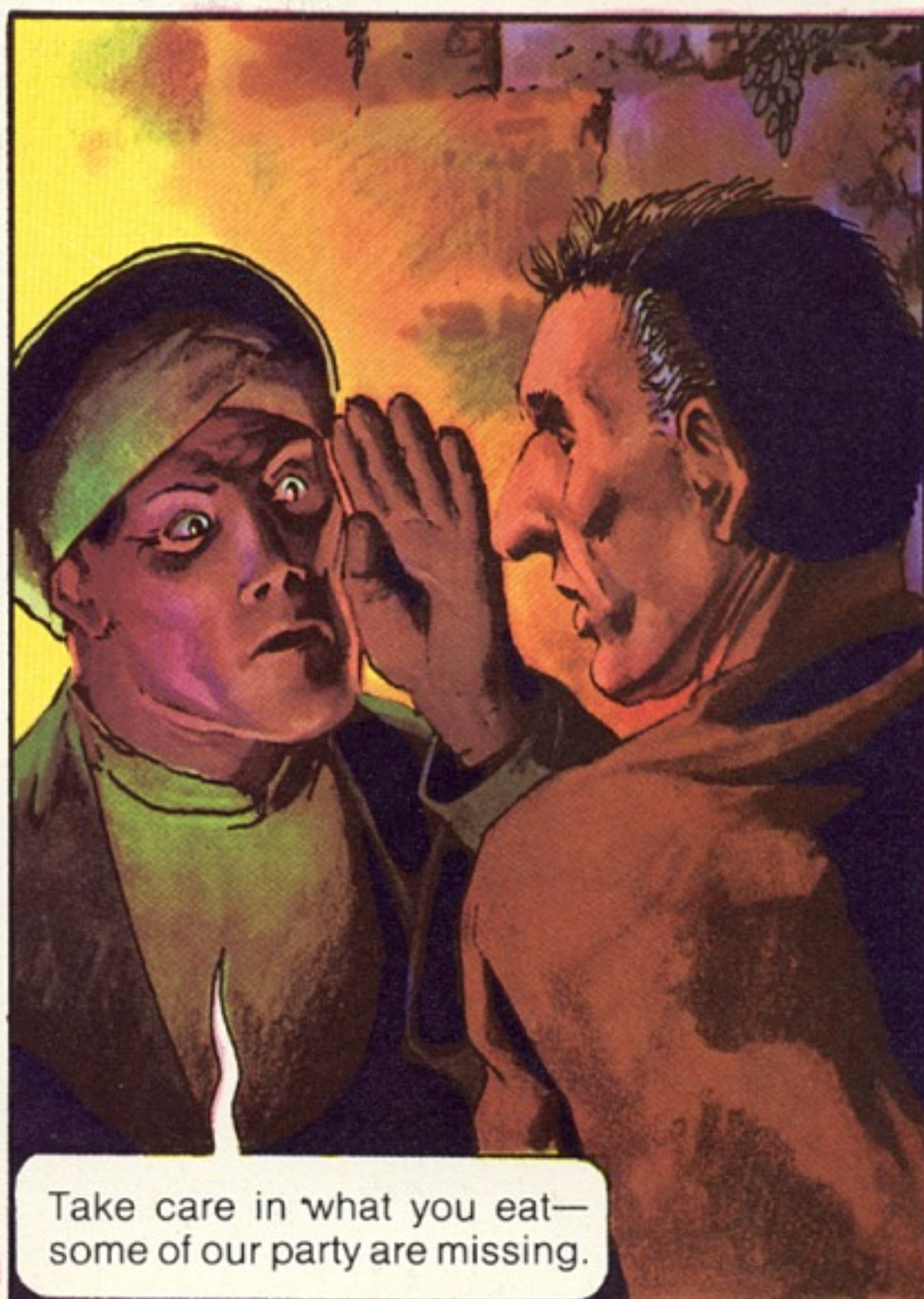
And I am Ali Ben-Abda, your
host. Ketra is honored by your
presence.



Now if you'll follow me, we
shall discuss your situation . . .
over **dinner**.



Sindbad!



Take care in what you eat—
some of our party are missing.



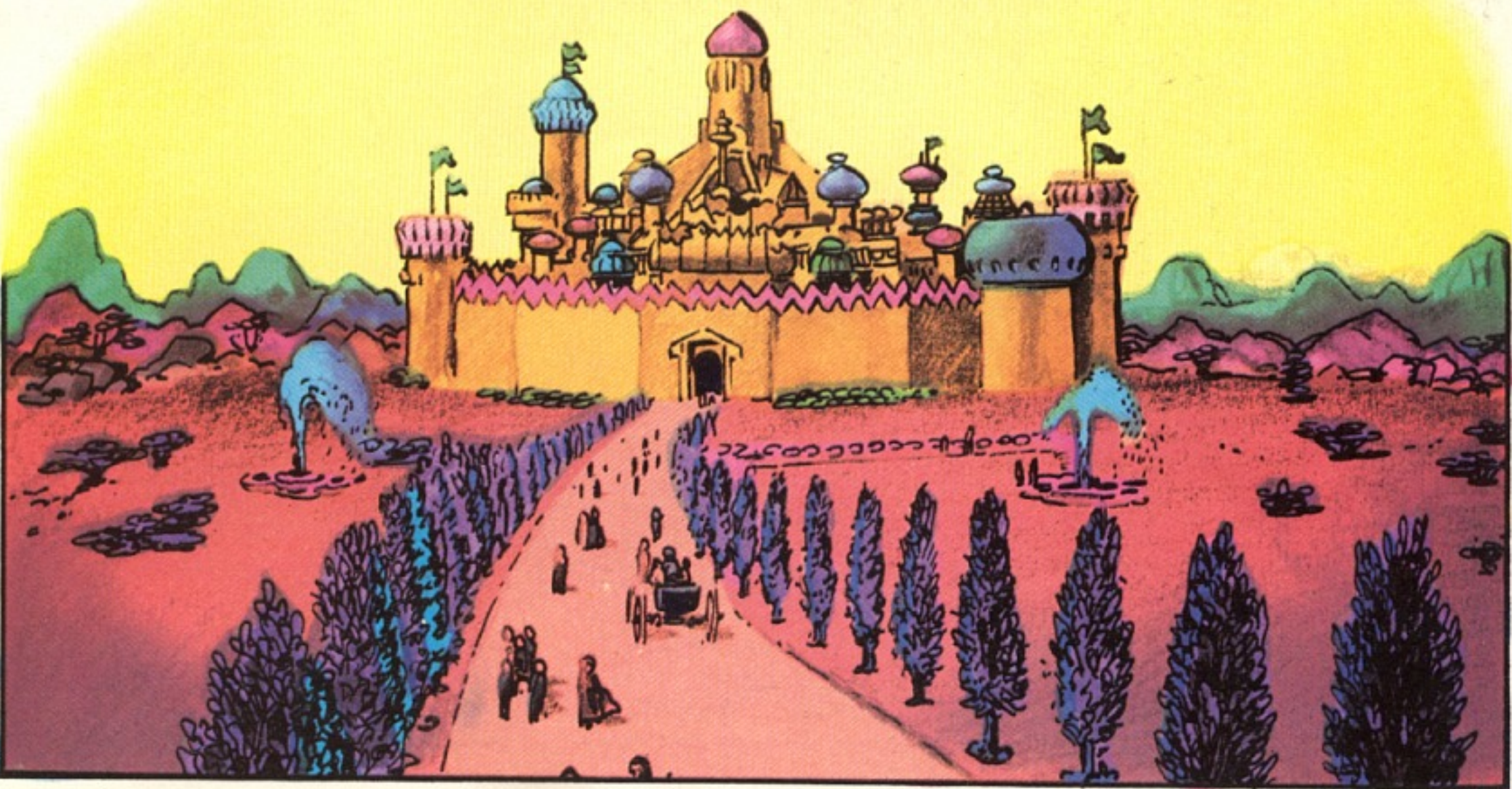
You've told me a fascinating tale, Sindbad. I'm sorry about your wife. Are you certain you'll not taste the meat?

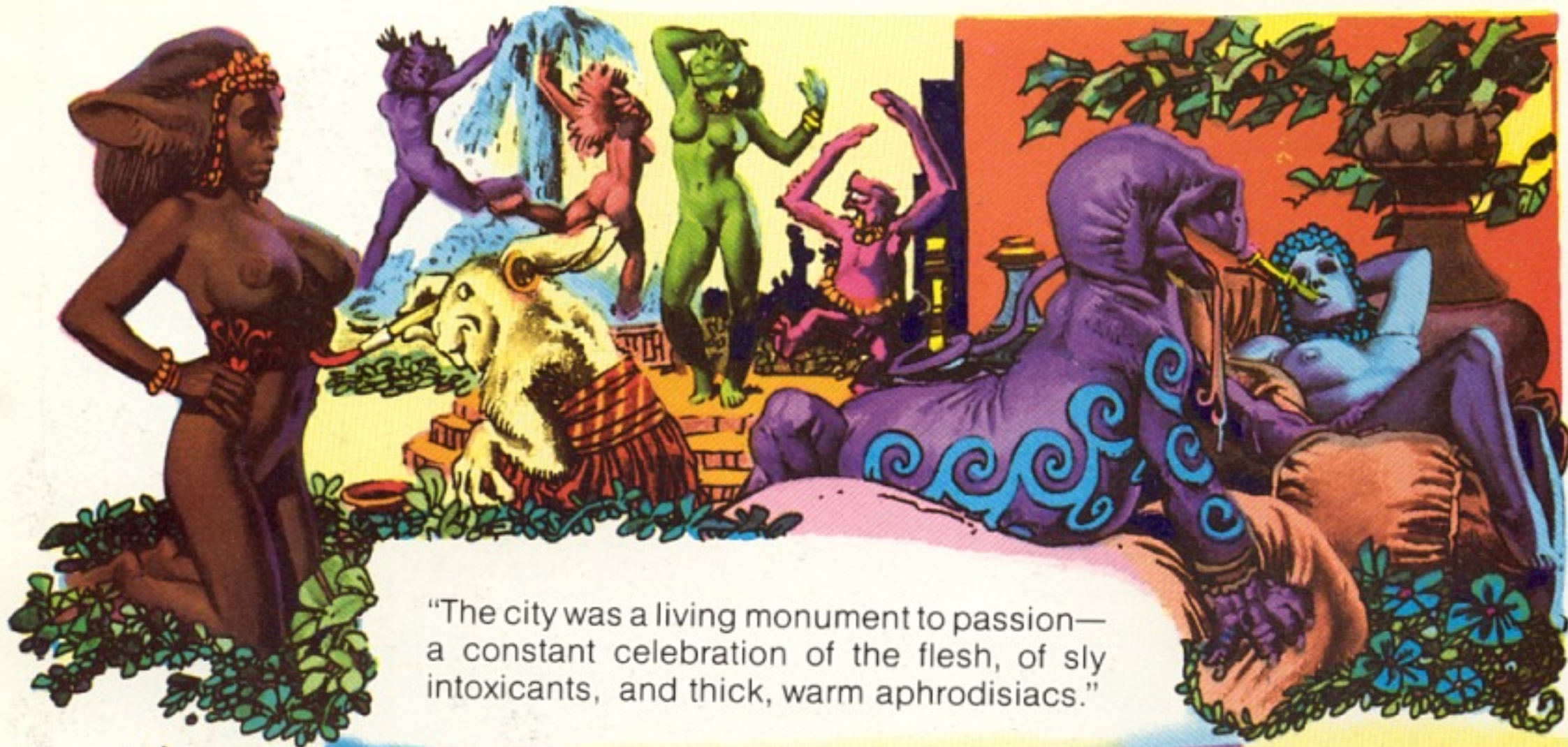
Where are Akissa and the others? What do you want with me?



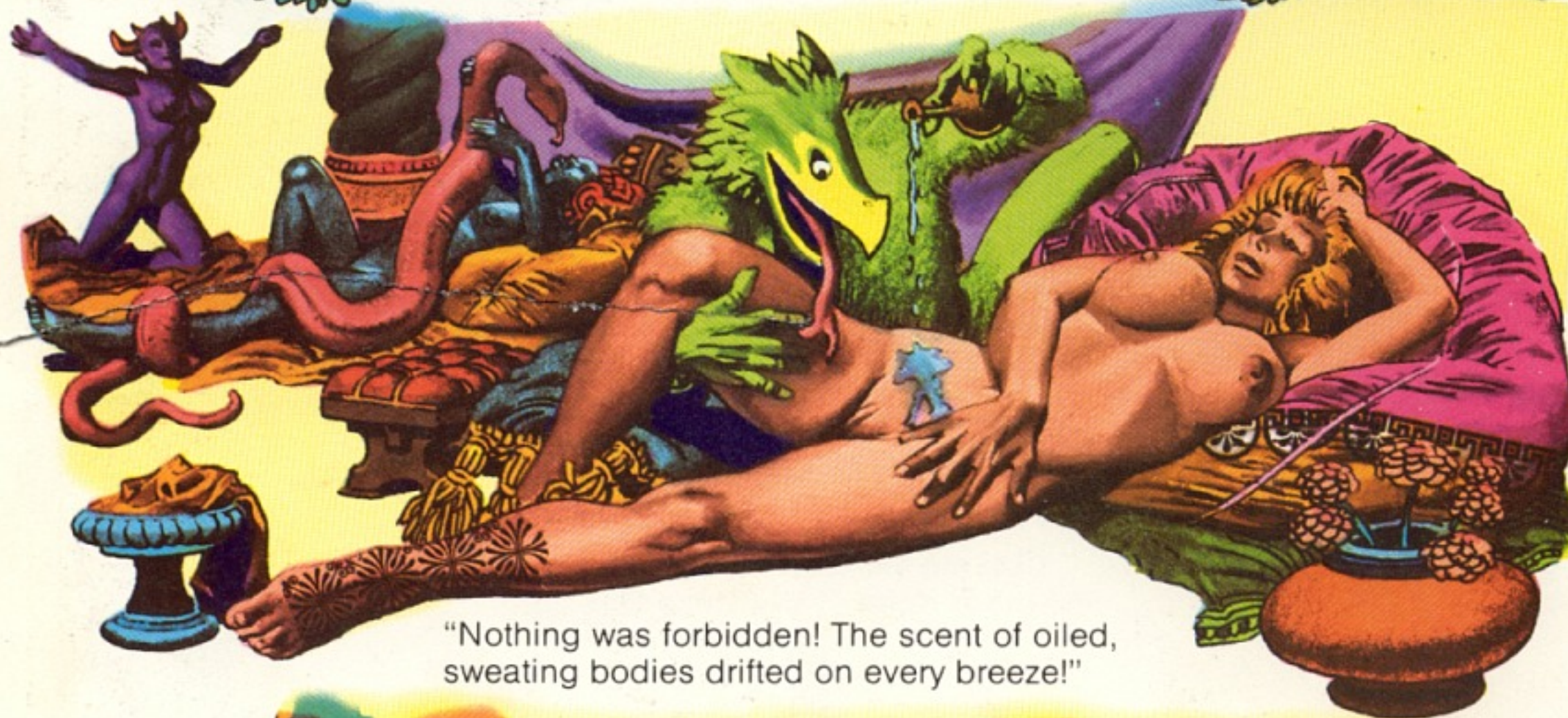
You may see them again. But first, I, too, have a story to relate.

"Let me tell you of the **old** Ketra,
the **great** Ketra of so short a time ago!"

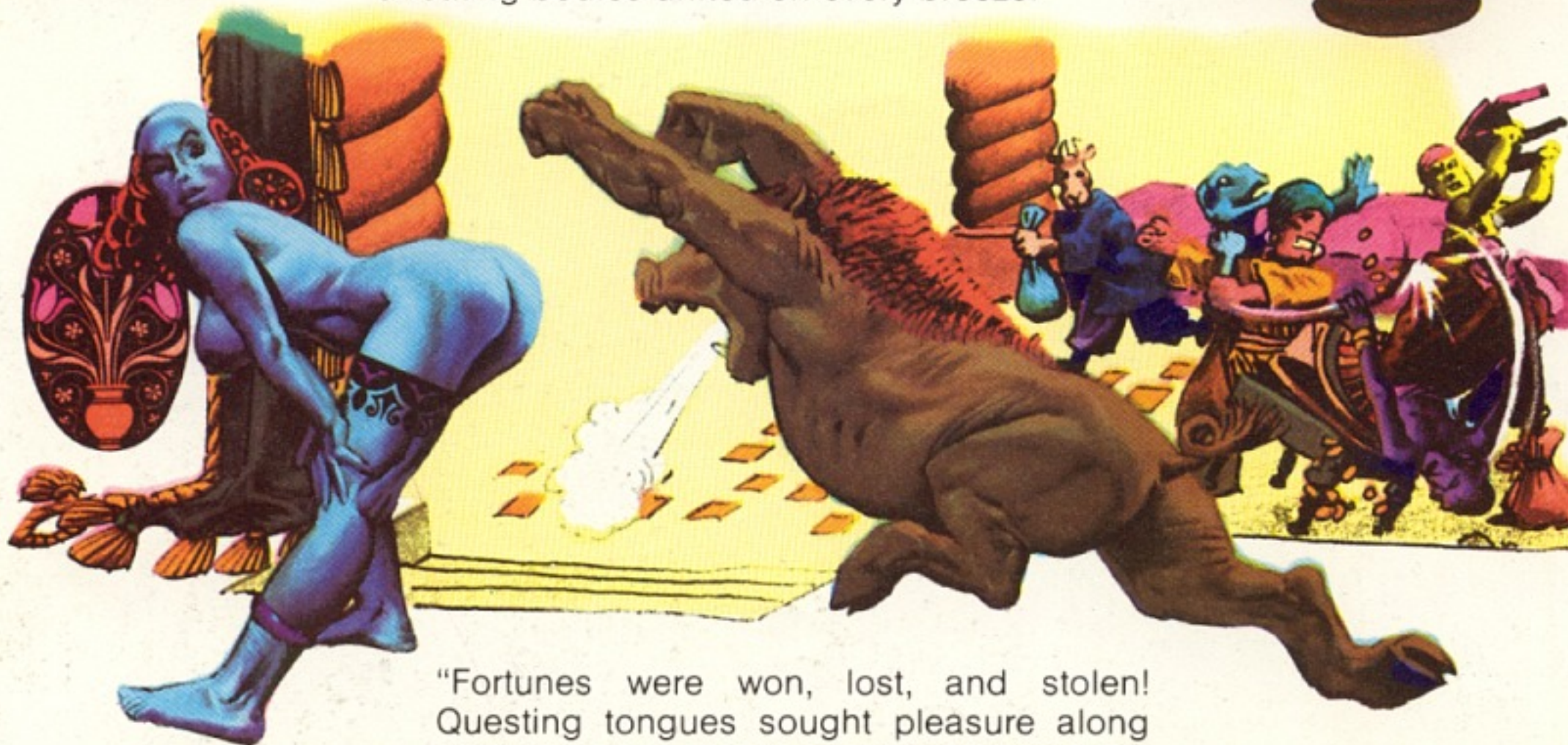




"The city was a living monument to passion—a constant celebration of the flesh, of sly intoxicants, and thick, warm aphrodisiacs."



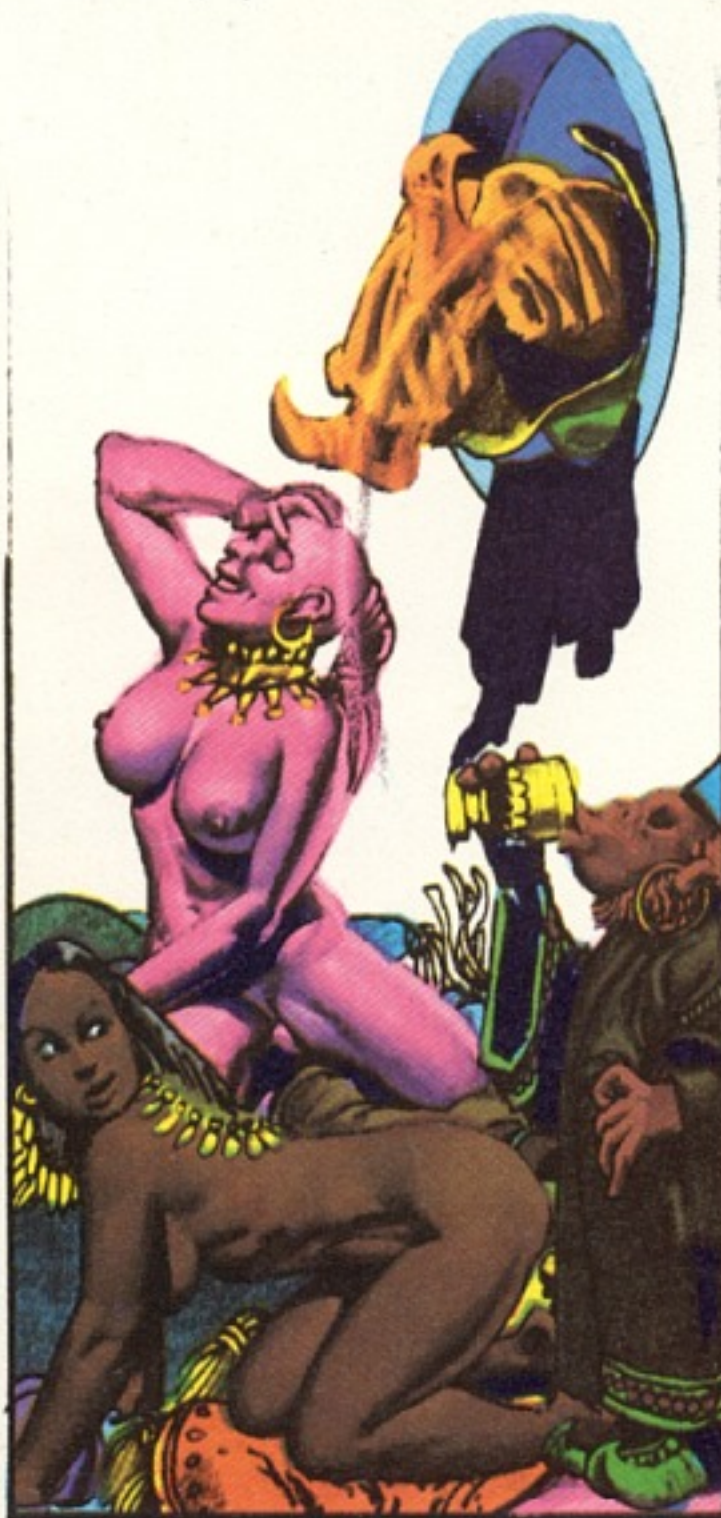
"Nothing was forbidden! The scent of oiled, sweating bodies drifted on every breeze!"



"Fortunes were won, lost, and stolen! Questing tongues sought pleasure along every expanse of skin, at every fold, in every crevice! Ketra was **alive!**"

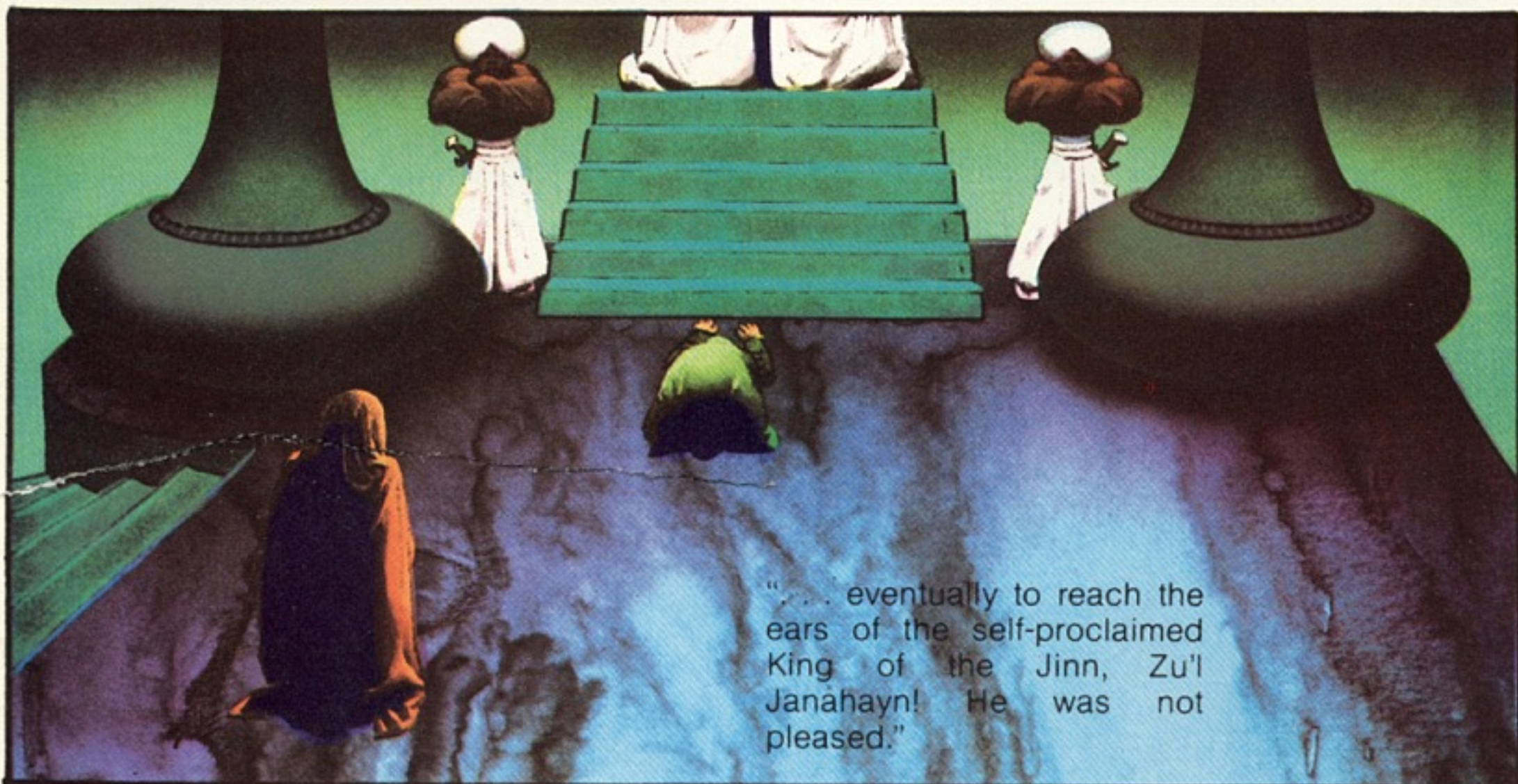
"Know, Sindbad, that above and below this seething orgy of life, I ruled. But I led my people quietly, with the hand of a father. My very presence was hardly felt . . ."

". . . except, of course, by the unfortunate traveler who arrived when my belly and larders were empty."





"But a few of Ketra's visitors were jealous of my city's happy state, and vile rumors were spread . . ."



"... eventually to reach the ears of the self-proclaimed King of the Jinn, Zu'l Janāhayn! He was not pleased."



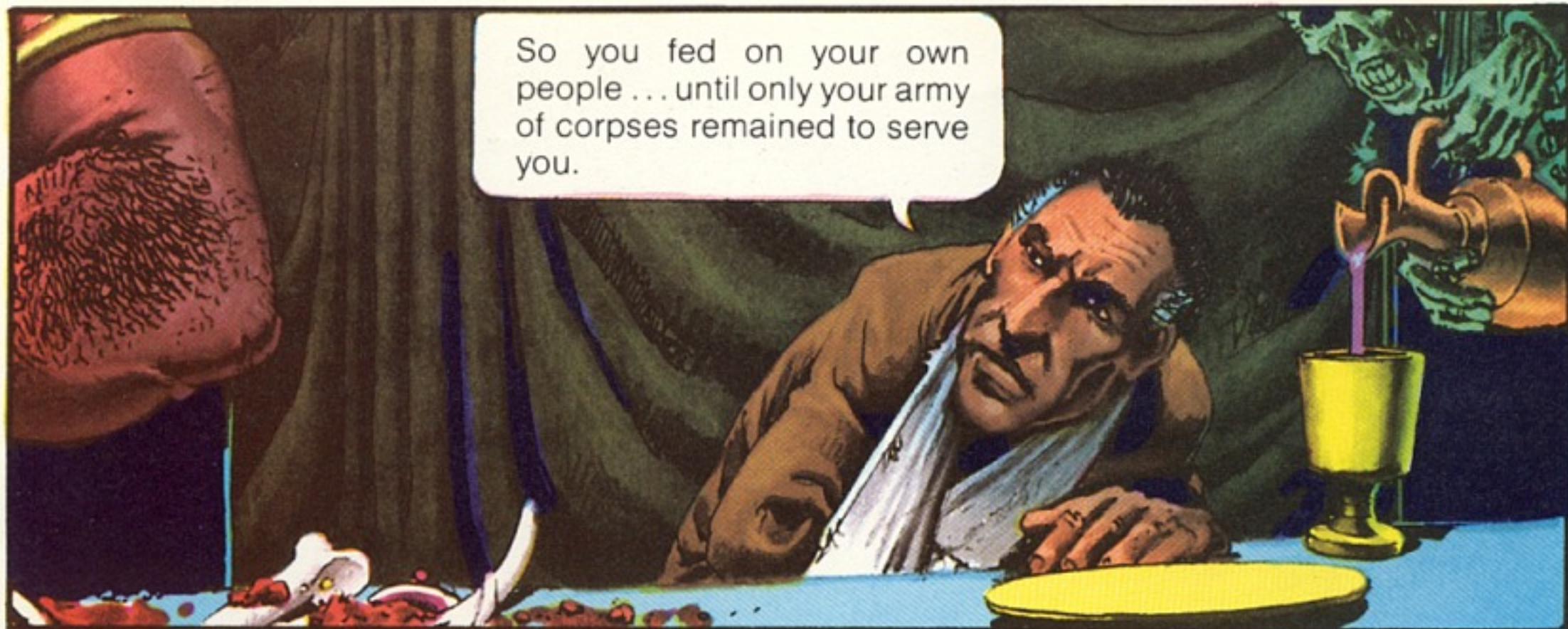
"Swollen with righteous anger, he showered his wrath upon us; and Ketra's doom was at hand."



"In the space of a heartbeat,
Ketra was smitten and uprooted . . ."



"... and the floating statues were left
as an admonition to unwary travelers."



So you fed on your own people ... until only your army of corpses remained to serve you.



Correct. Of course I could leave at any time—but there's so much **packing** to do ... arrangements to be made ... you understand.

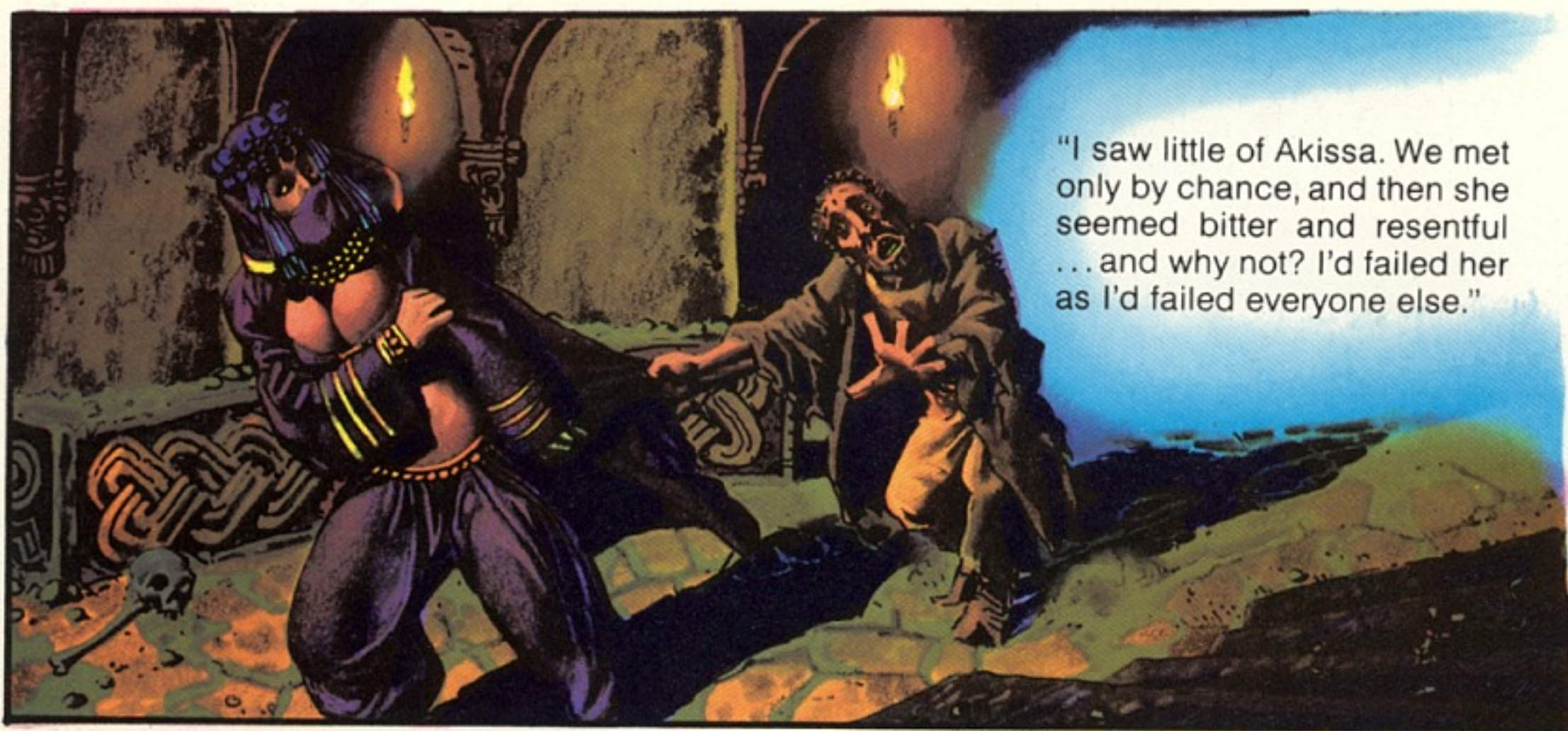
Meanwhile, I want to hear about all your adventures. And then ...



... then you and I declare **war** on Zu'l Janahayn!

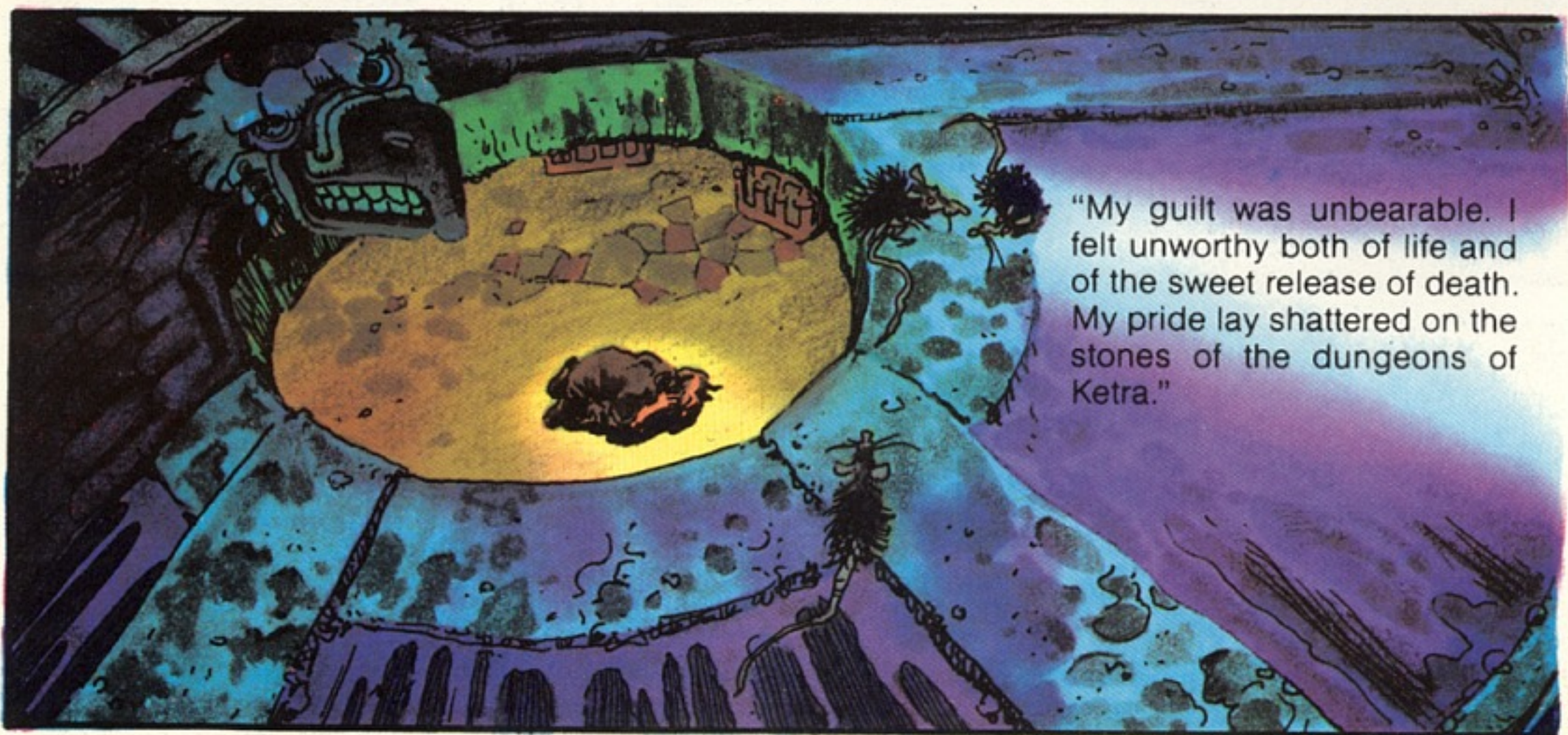
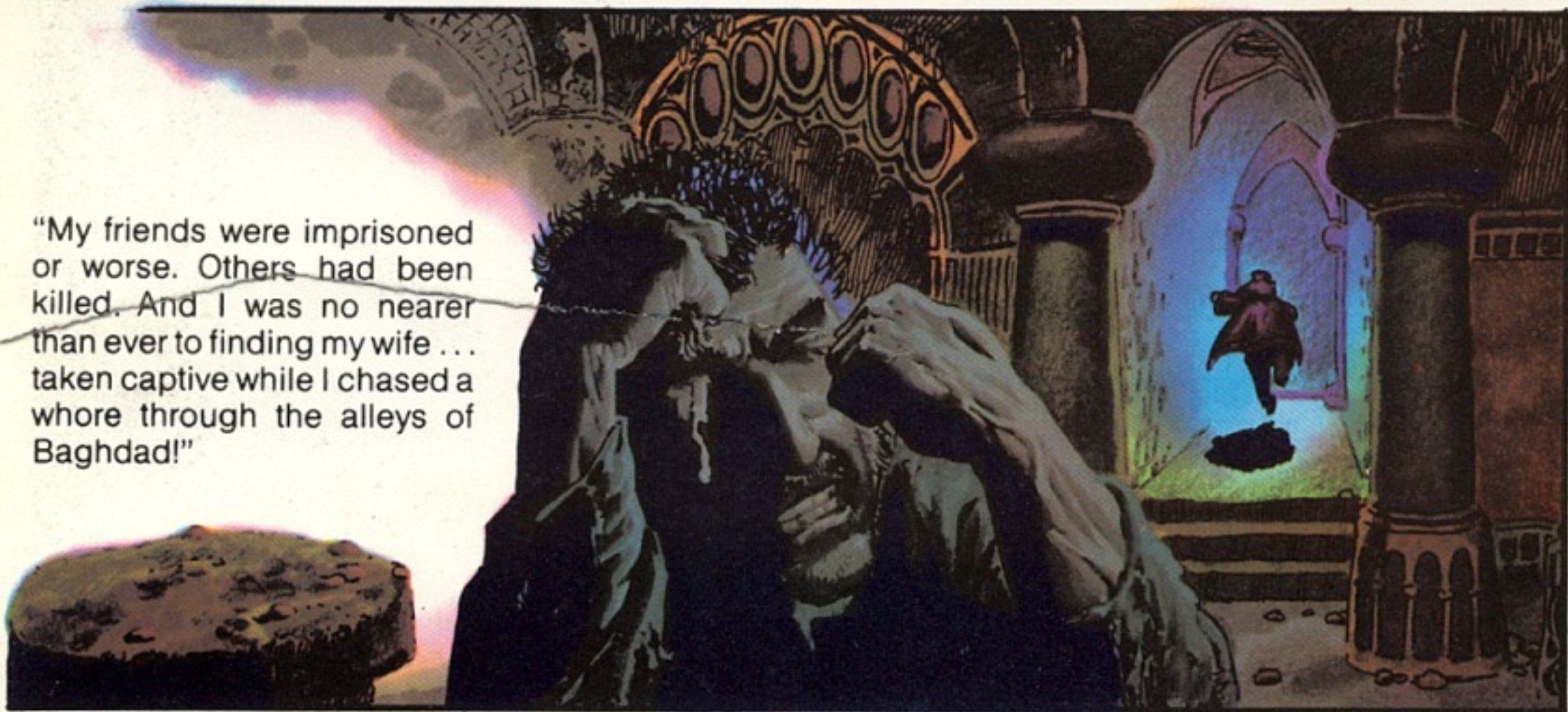
to be continued



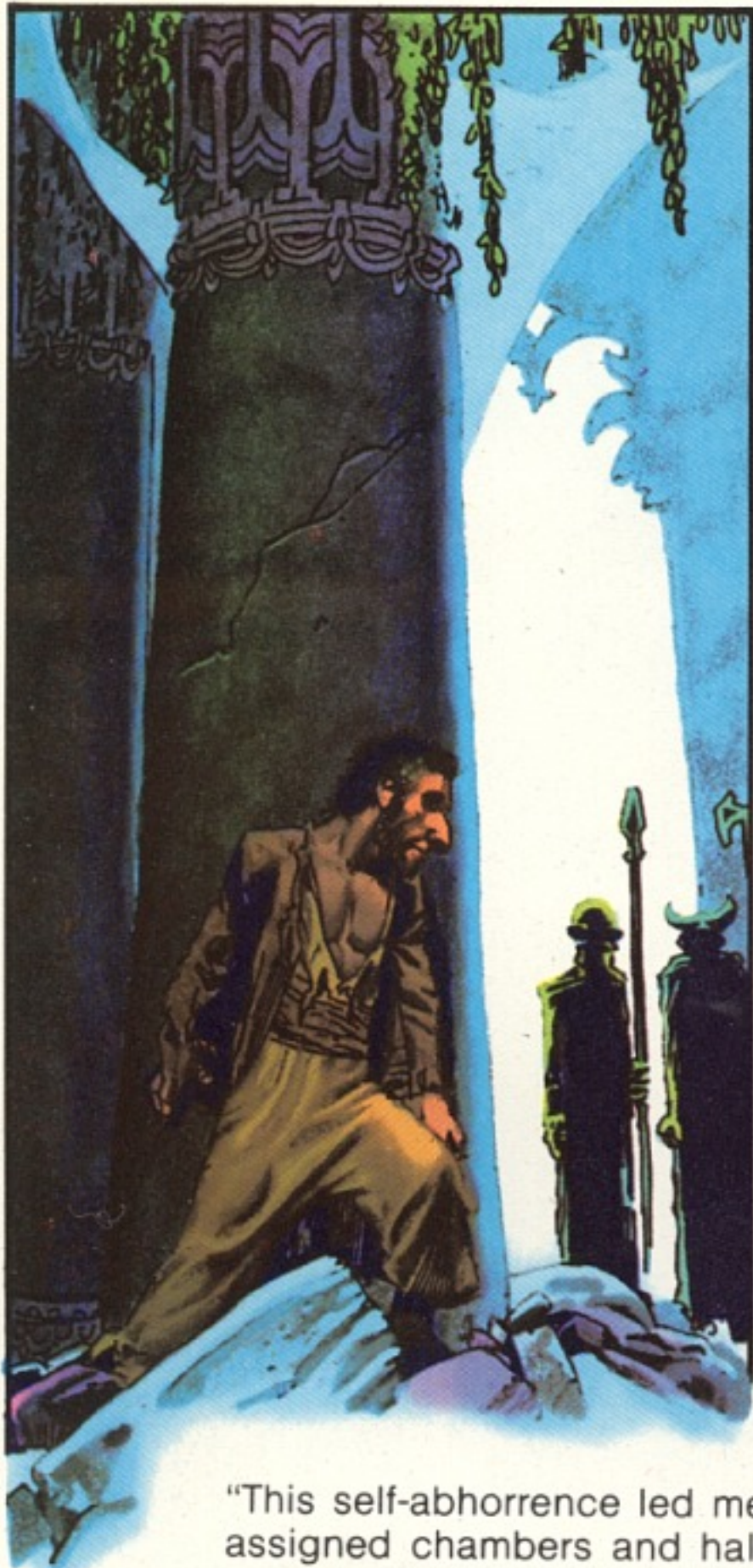


"I saw little of Akissa. We met only by chance, and then she seemed bitter and resentful ... and why not? I'd failed her as I'd failed everyone else."

"My friends were imprisoned or worse. Others had been killed. And I was no nearer than ever to finding my wife ... taken captive while I chased a whore through the alleys of Baghdad!"



"My guilt was unbearable. I felt unworthy both of life and of the sweet release of death. My pride lay shattered on the stones of the dungeons of Ketra."



"This self-aborrence led me further and further from my assigned chambers and halls. I ventured recklessly into many forbidden, dangerous areas . . ."





"... until I came upon the deadliest room of all."



Gold . . . jewels . . . a vast treasure, but not **uncommon** as treasures go. This ogre may be more ordinary than I'd supposed!



This is the last treasure vault. As soon as this is loaded on the ship, we sail.

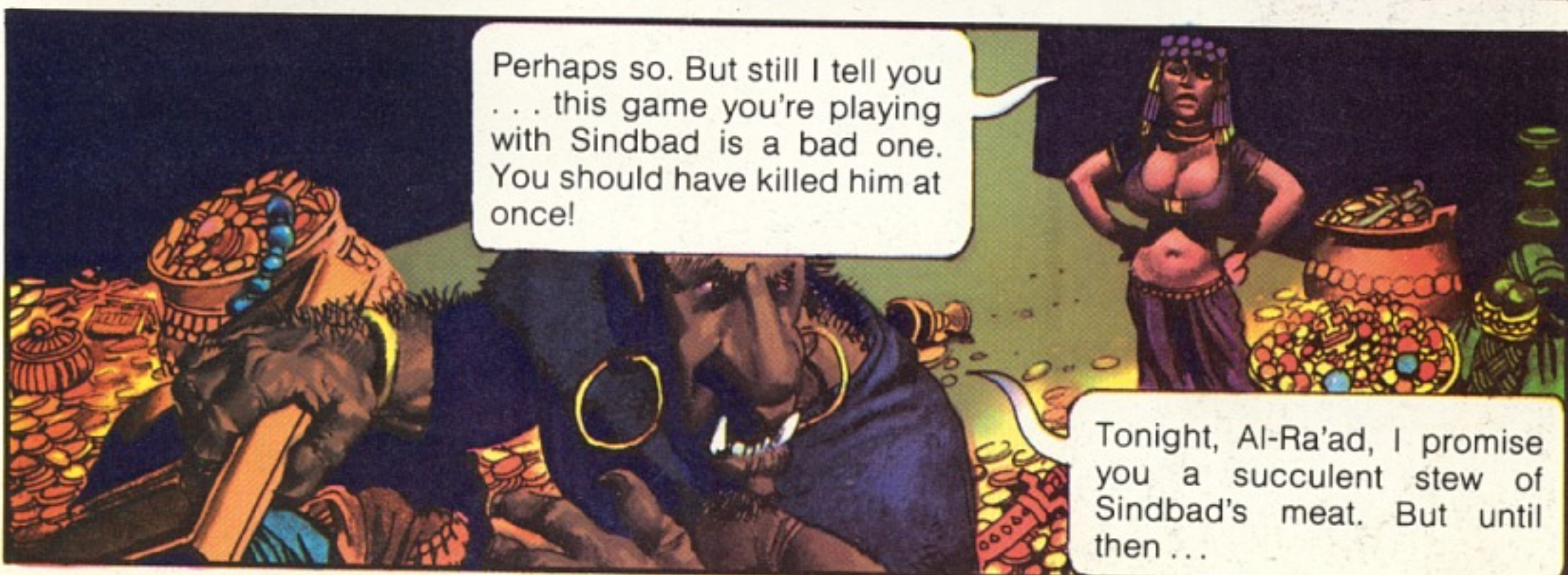


You're slow as a tortoise, Ali, and for the same reason—you carry your home with you. It's no way to live.




And you are like the fly, Al-Ra'ad, flitting from place to place. You're too easily moved, too impatient!

Al-Ra'ad
al-Kasif!




Perhaps so. But still I tell you . . . this game you're playing with Sindbad is a bad one. You should have killed him at once!

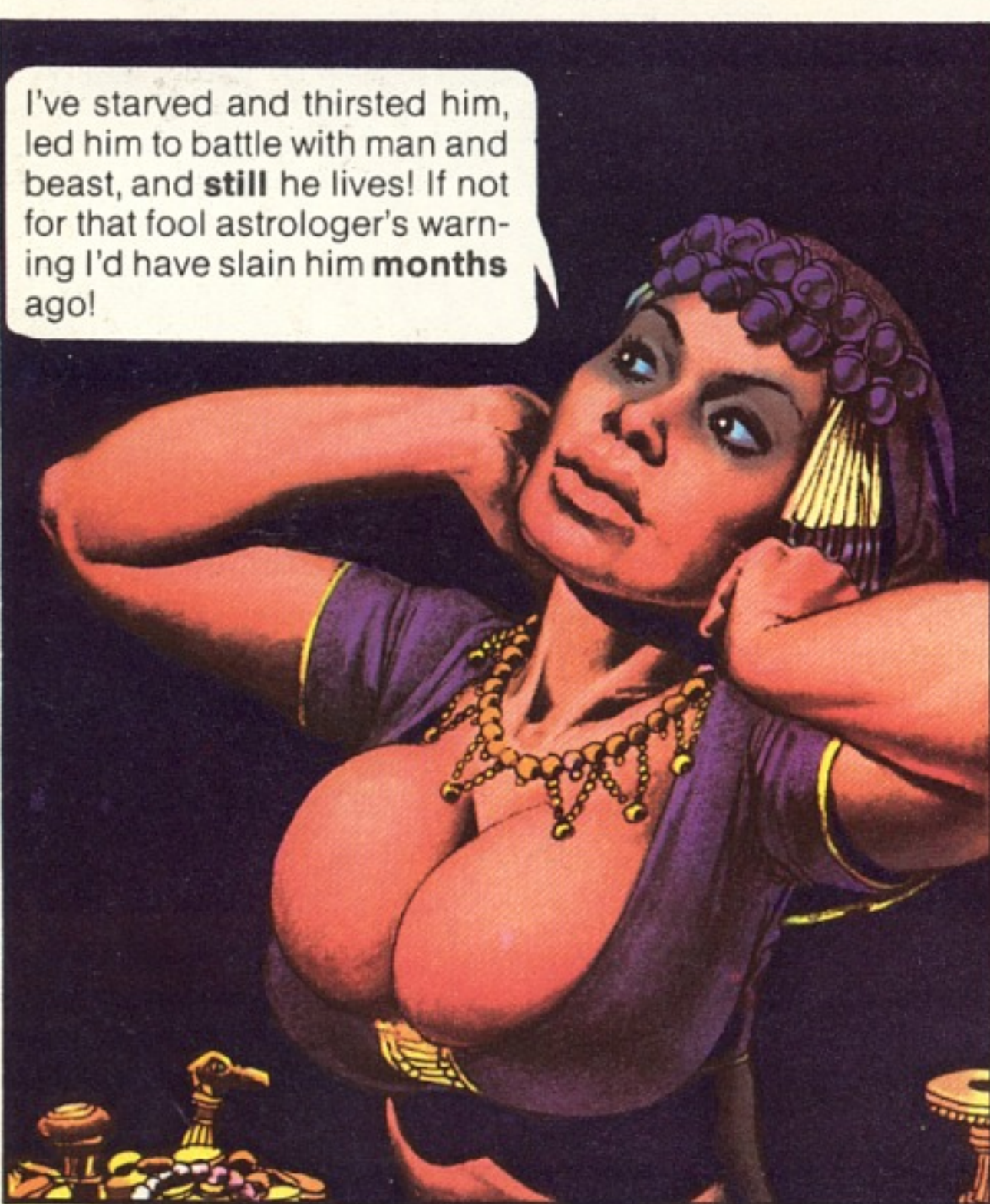
Tonight, Al-Ra'ad, I promise you a succulent stew of Sindbad's meat. But until then . . .



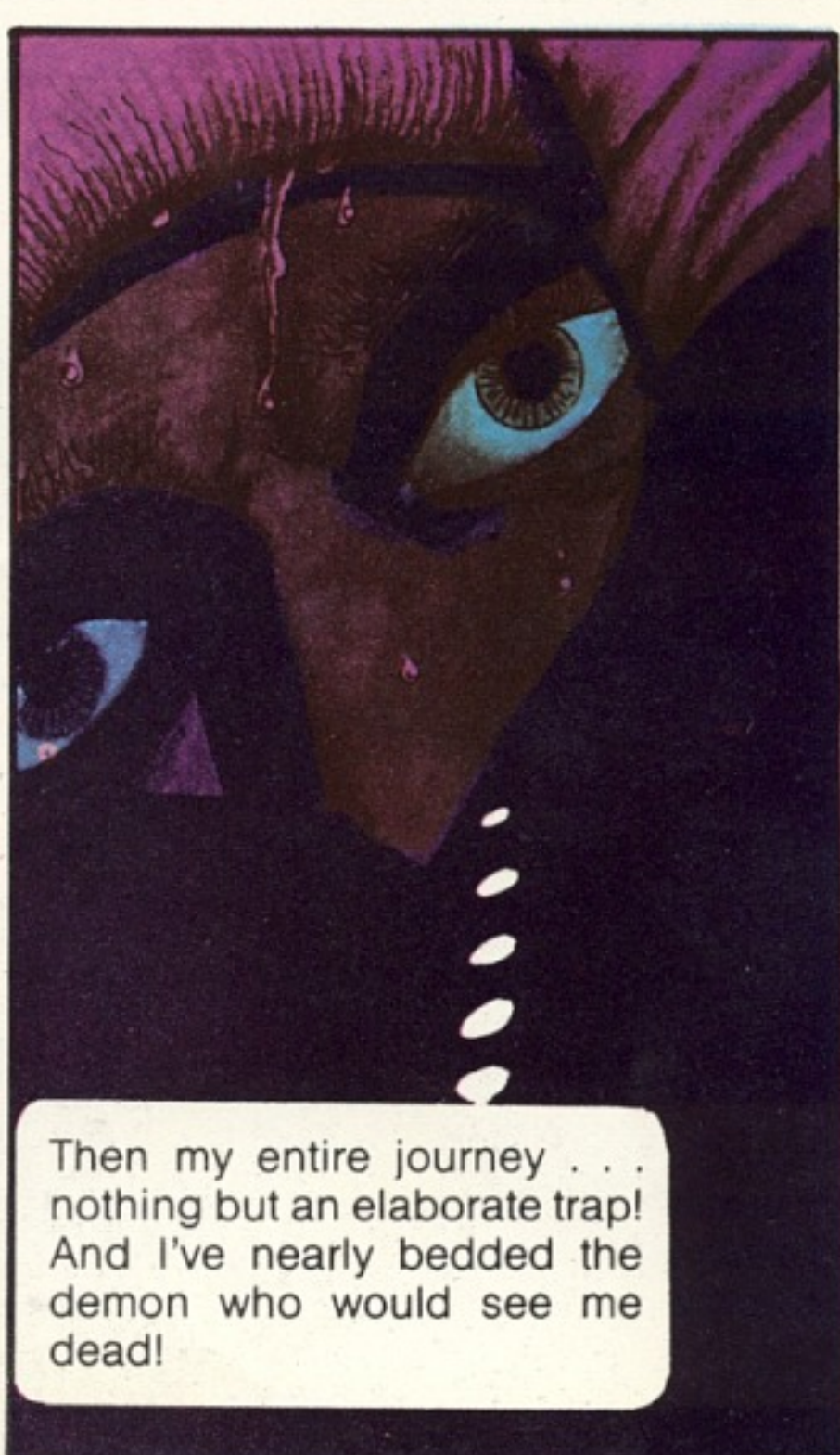
... his stories have amused me, and he thinks I want him alive! Don't worry!



Sindbad will worry me until his **death**, Ali ...

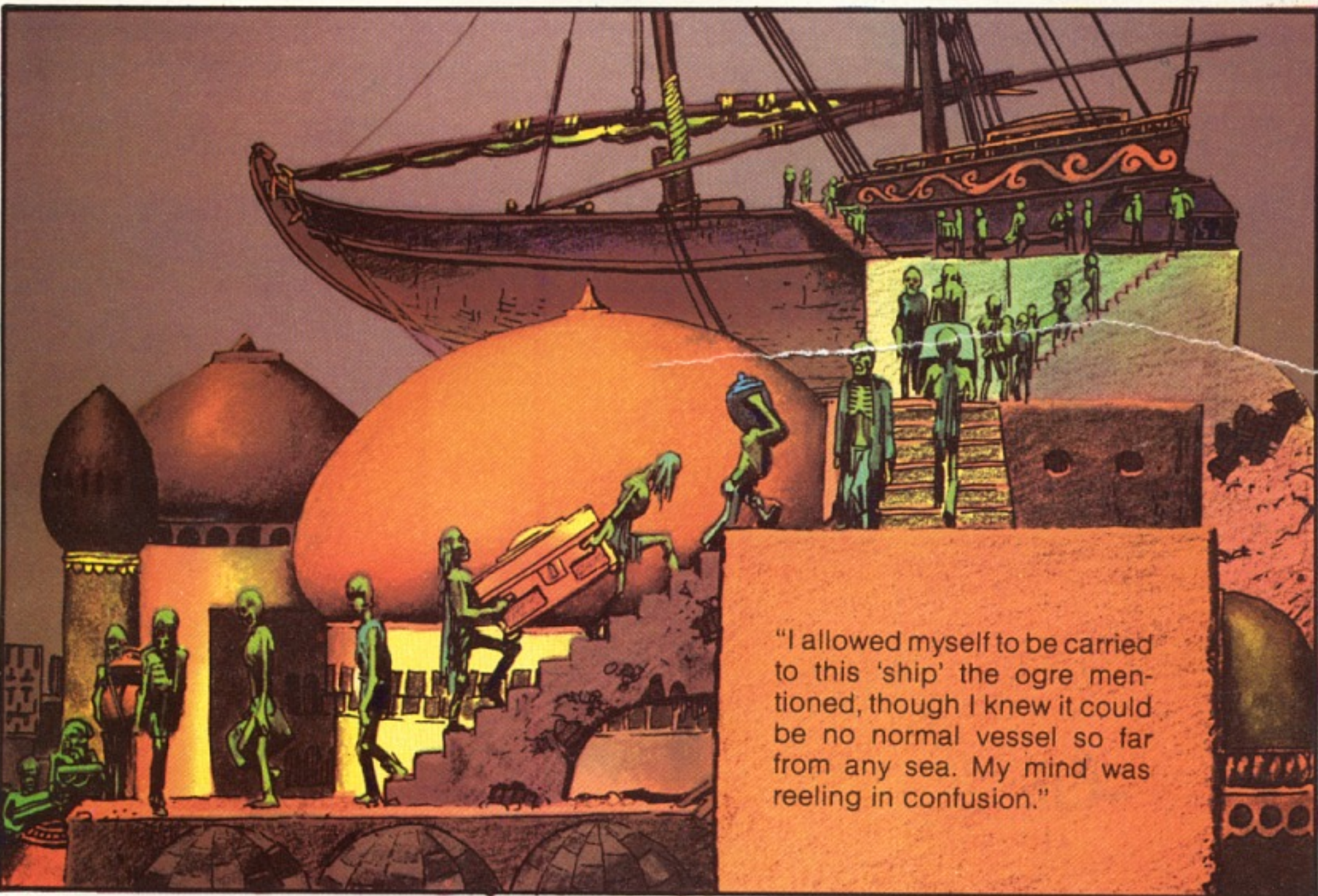


I've starved and thirsted him, led him to battle with man and beast, and **still** he lives! If not for that fool astrologer's warning I'd have slain him **months** ago!



Then my entire journey ... nothing but an elaborate trap! And I've nearly bedded the demon who would see me dead!

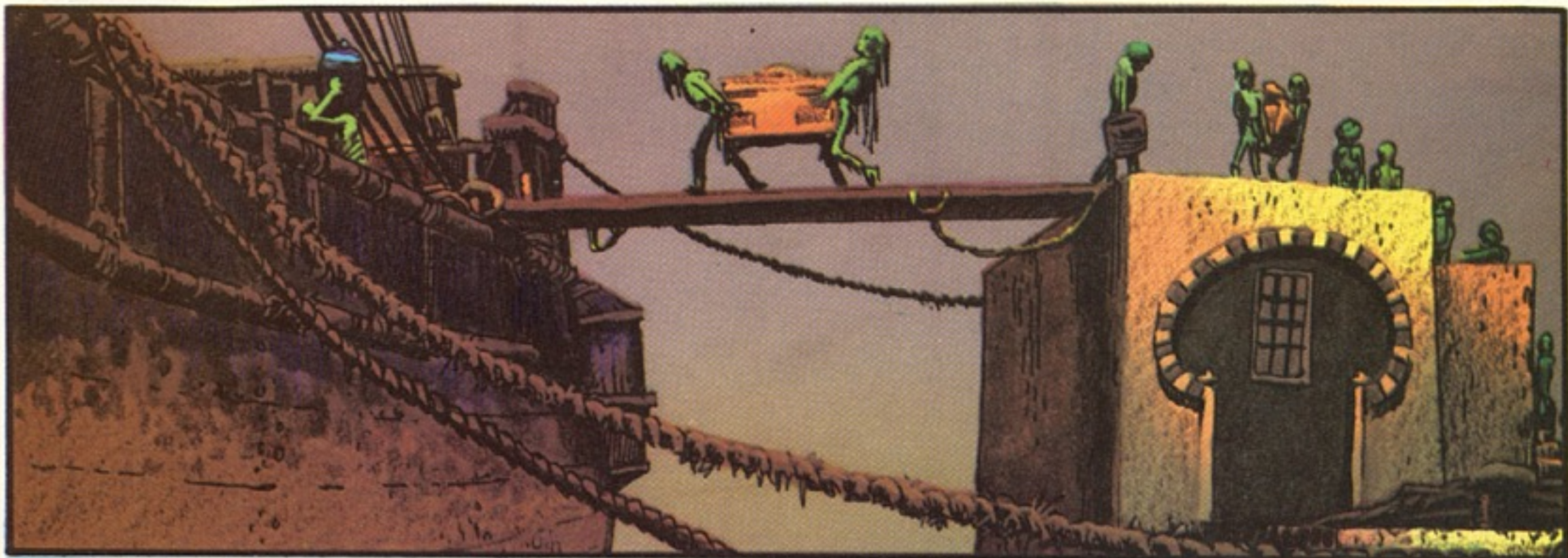
Load the treasure on the ship.
And tell the cook to begin a
stew—I'll bring the meat
myself.



"I allowed myself to be carried
to this 'ship' the ogre men-
tioned, though I knew it could
be no normal vessel so far
from any sea. My mind was
reeling in confusion."



"Akissa . . . another form of the
jinni Al-Ra'ad al-Kasif! My
pilgrimage . . . just a ruse to
lure me into death! For all I
knew, there **was** no 'King of
Kings of the Jinn', no Zu'l
Janahayn at all! And my wife,
Zulaykha—would I ever be
with her again?"





"I came to my senses, darkly aware that several hours could have passed while I lay unconscious. What little time I had to free my friends was certainly drawing to a close."



"I dug through the mounds of treasure, frantic and fearful as a rat, in search of a weapon for my final confrontation with Al-Ra'ad al-Kasif. I scorned many a fine-trimmed but fragile blade . . ."



"... selecting, finally, a common sword with centuries of hard use apparent in its sturdy features."

"To my amazement the edge was still keen."

Praise Allah! At my life's very end . . . a friend strong and true in which to place my trust!



"I climbed cautiously to the upper deck, and . . . I was certain . . . to my death."





"At the sound of his name, the devil that was Judar hesitated and loosened his grip. So this was the fate of my caravan and former friends . . . the fate I'd brought upon them!"

By the love of Allah, what have I done to you, my friend . . . ?

"For a moment, recognition seemed to glimmer in Judar's eyes . . ."

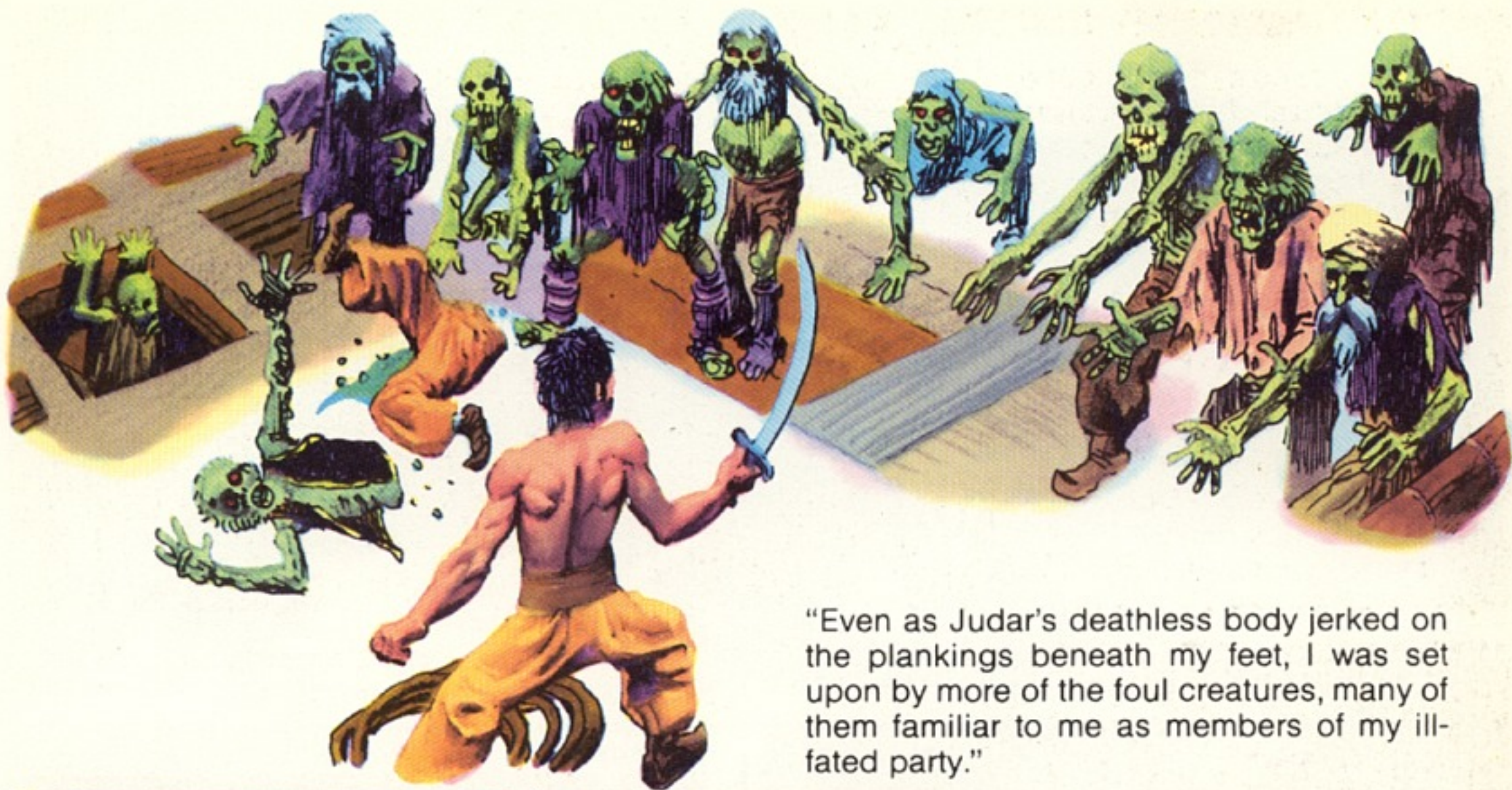
"... and then was gone."

RAARGH!

Allah have mercy on my soul . . .

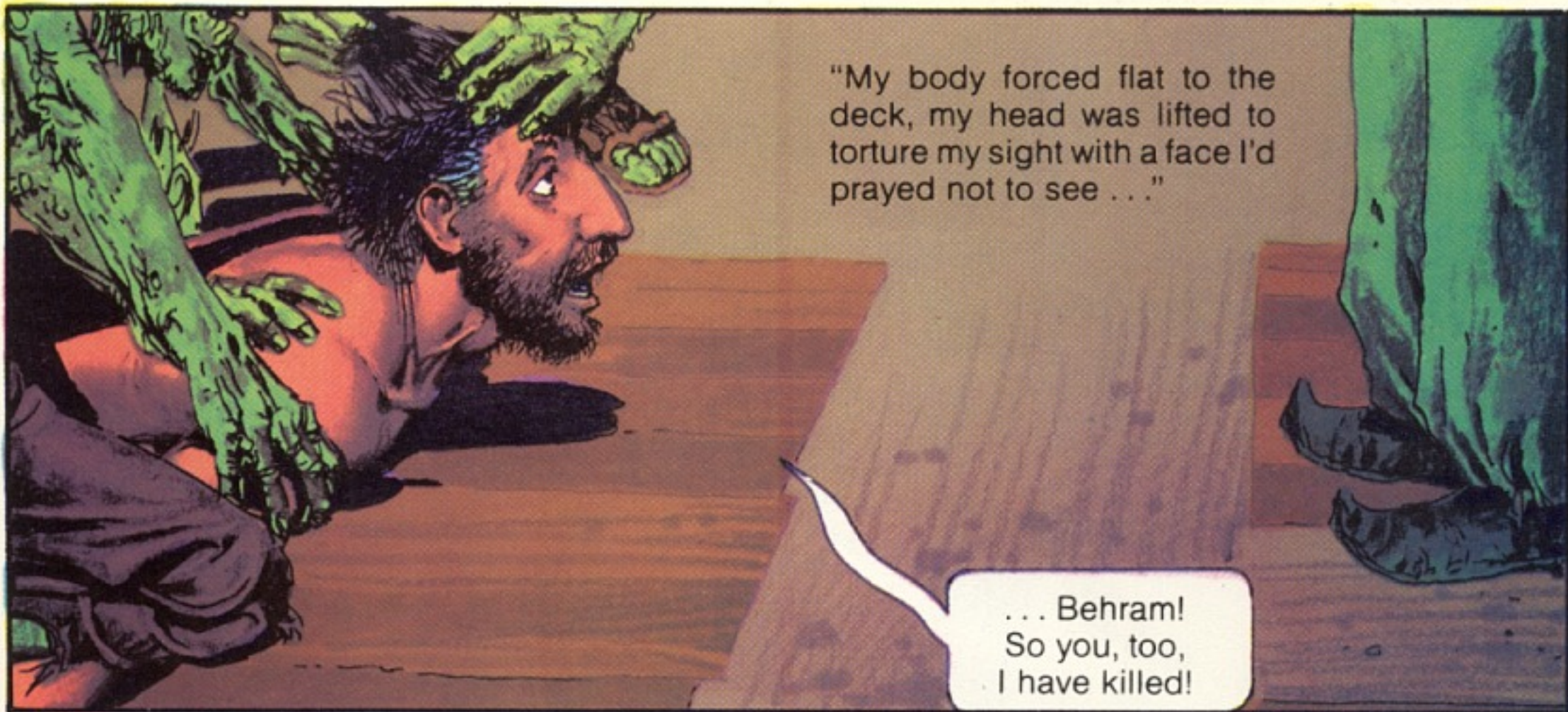
AAAAGG!

CRIN-CHLUK!



"Even as Judar's deathless body jerked on the plankings beneath my feet, I was set upon by more of the foul creatures, many of them familiar to me as members of my ill-fated party."



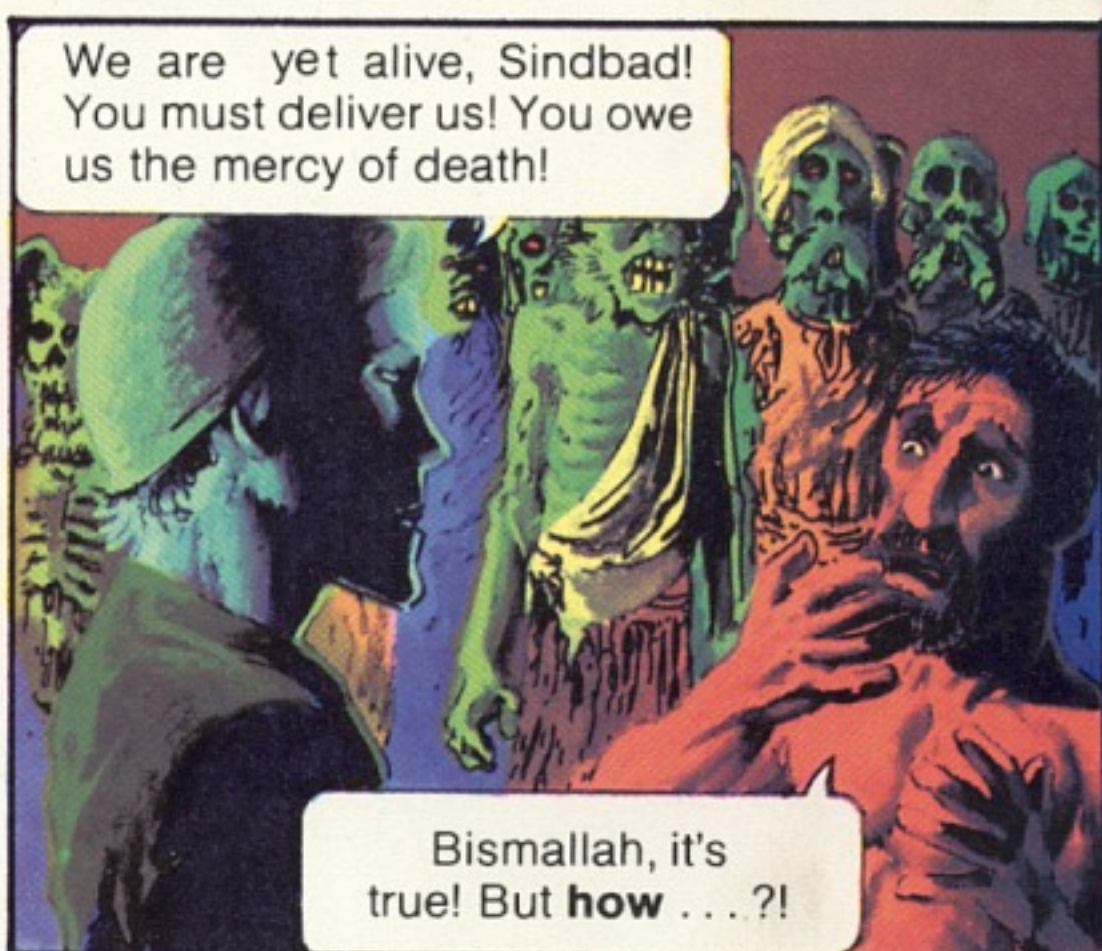


"My body forced flat to the deck, my head was lifted to torture my sight with a face I'd prayed not to see . . ."

... Behram!
So you, too,
I have killed!



No, Sindbad,
not killed . . .



We are yet alive, Sindbad!
You must deliver us! You owe
us the mercy of death!

Bismallah, it's
true! But **how** . . . ?!



How indeed,
Sindbad?

You see, Ali—
I told you we'd
find him here.

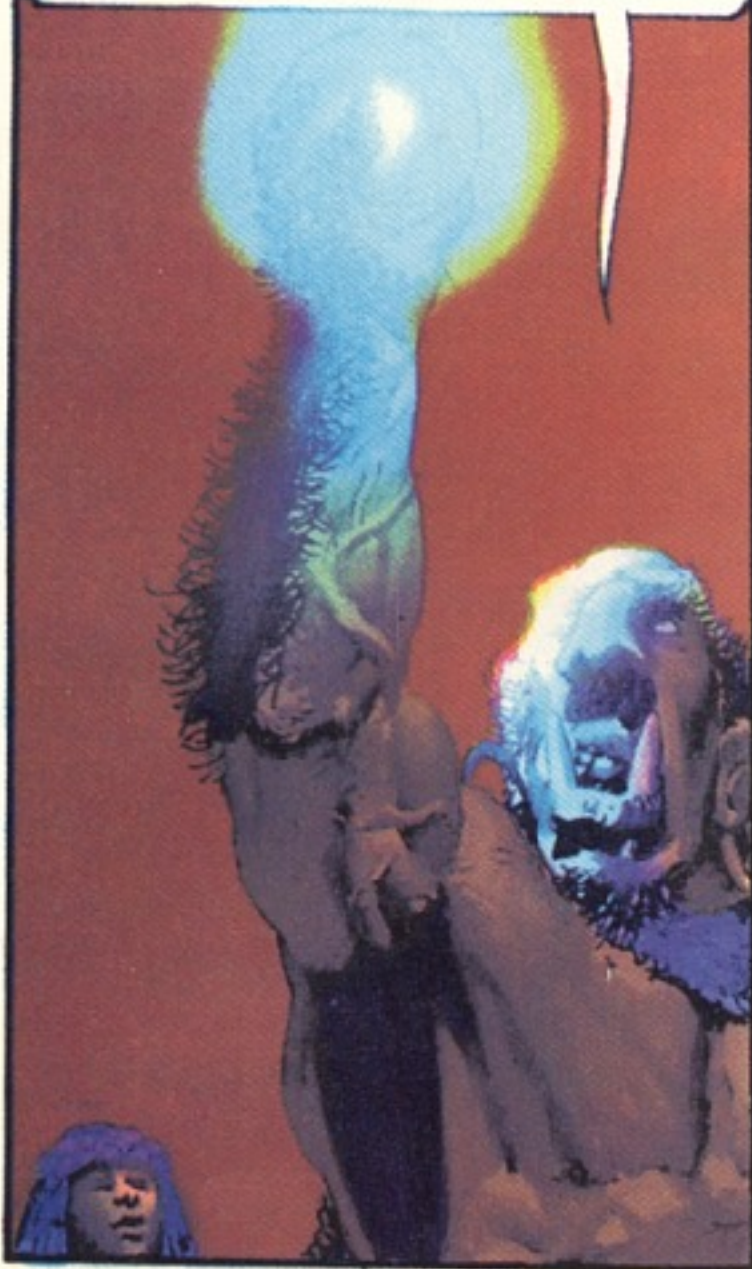
You're a rabbit before the lions, Sindbad! Allah hears not your prayers! Your eternal damnation is at hand!



You pathetic wriggling worm! You do well to hide your eyes!



Within this globe lies the legacy of Solomon himself... the power of the Jinn, stolen from them as he sealed the rebellious in bottles of lead and buried them in the deepest seas! Within is power to bring even **Zu'l Janahayn** beneath my dominion!



The torch ...!



Huh?







"There was a muffled explosion as Behram shattered the globe. His death was instantaneous, I'm sure."



"For a few moments my ears rang and patterns danced before my eyes. I was aware of great turmoil and, from somewhere, a coarse, frantic screaming."

AAARRRGHK!

SMASH!

"It was Ali Ben-Abda, the Ogre, his body a living torch. For these were no earthly flames, but an all-consuming force that struck fear even in the cold heart of Al-Ra'ad al-Kasif."

AAARRRR

CRASH!

"Ali's undead minions appeared like black insects from every cranny, running crookedly toward self-immolation. I had brought them salvation."



"I sought to flee the ship, but found my way blocked."

No, Sindbad.
Your time has come.





There's nowhere to go, Sindbad! Your life is forfeit!



Run your legs off, then, little man! If I can't slice you up, then by Allah I'll swallow you whole!

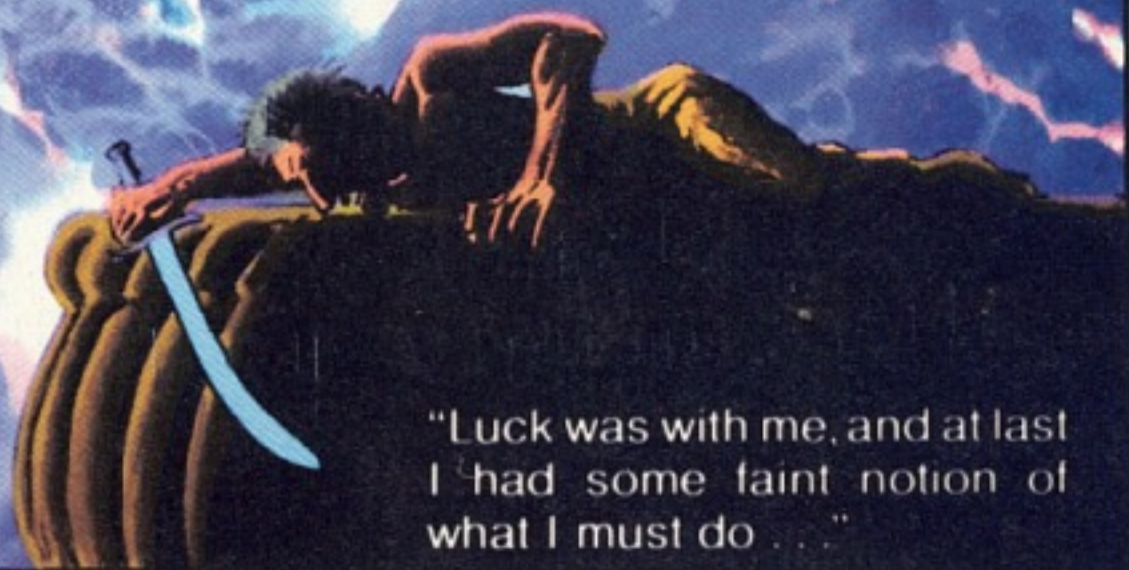


"My mind was in chaos! I needed a plan, but what? **What?**"



"I lashed out viciously at the bird's foot, not minding that, should the grip be released, I would fall to my death."



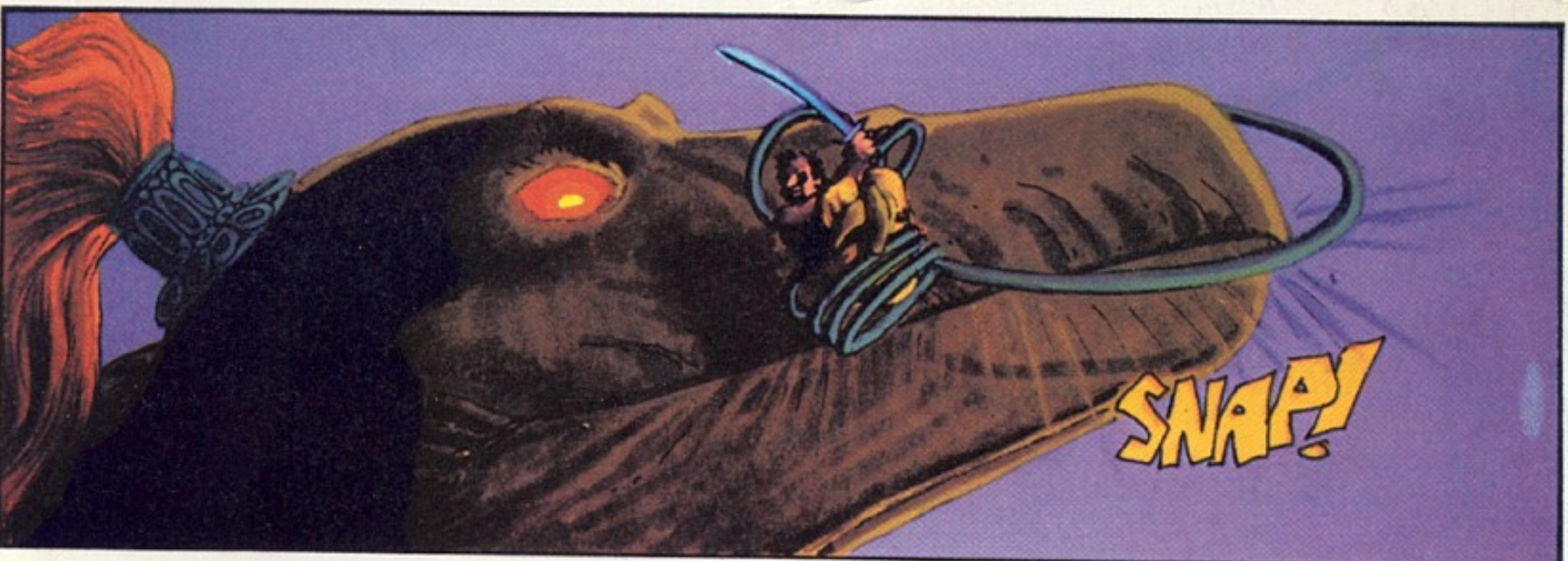
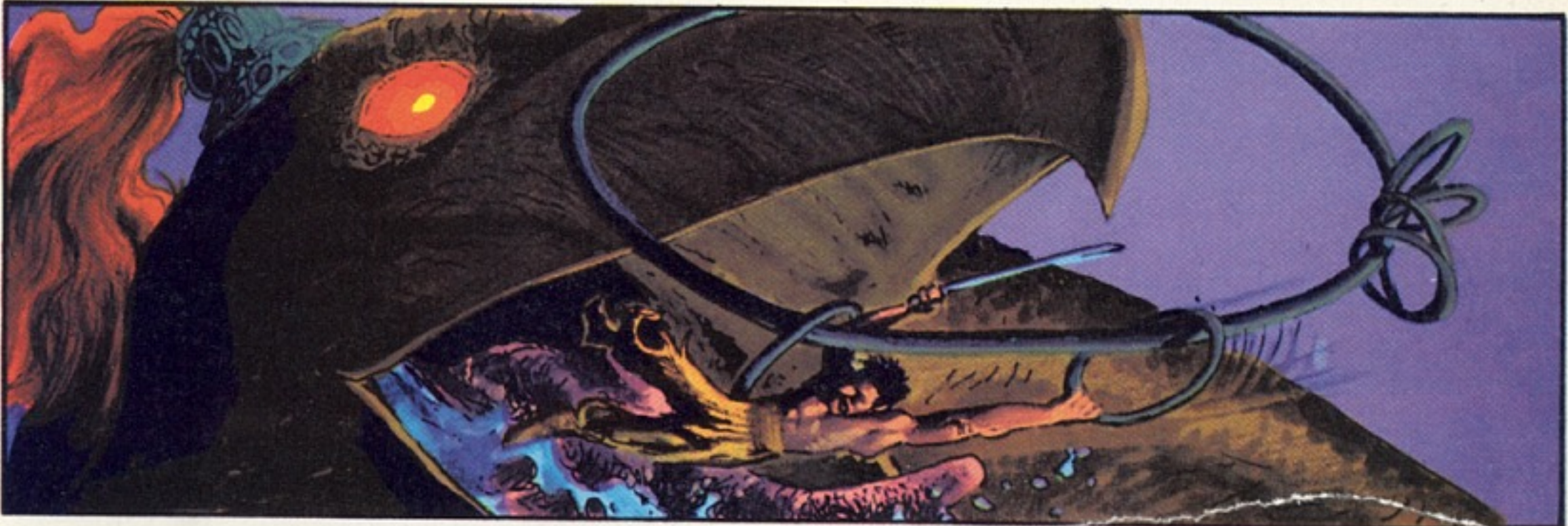


"Luck was with me, and at last I had some faint notion of what I must do . . ."



" . . . if only I had time, the strength . . . and the grace of Allah!"



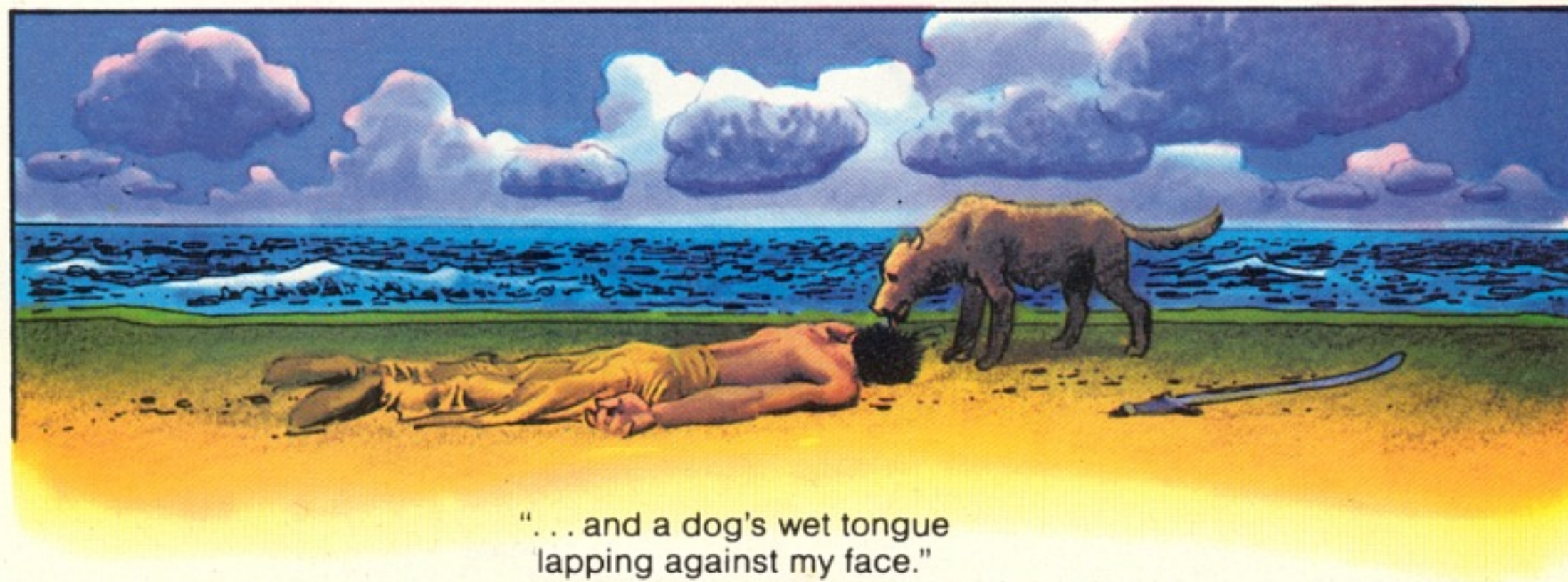




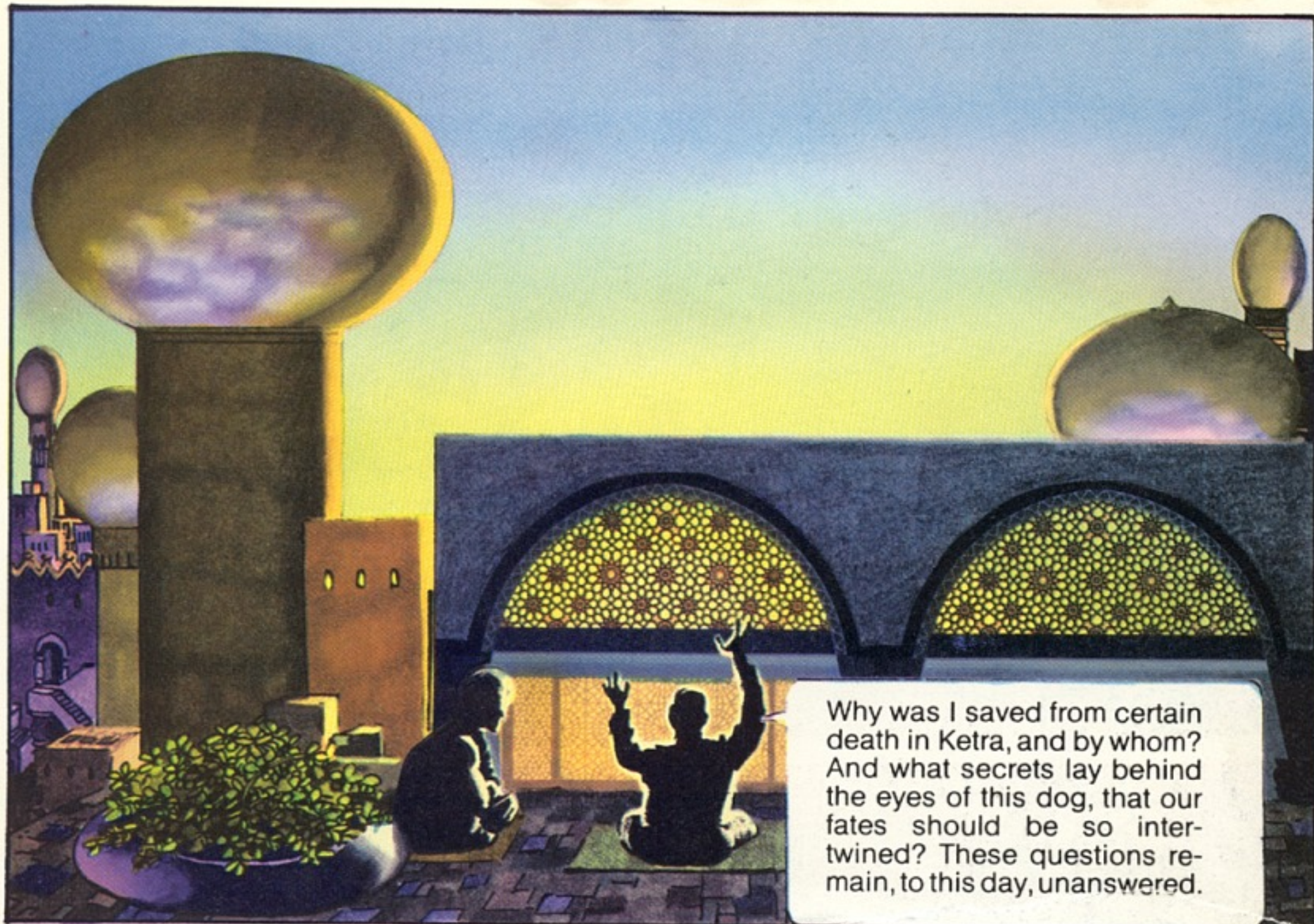
"I clung to Al-Ra'ad's body as it spiraled down and down. Sight and feeling left me. In darkness, my tortured mind at last found peace."



"The next thing I perceived was warm sand and the scent of the ocean . . ."



"... and a dog's wet tongue lapping against my face."

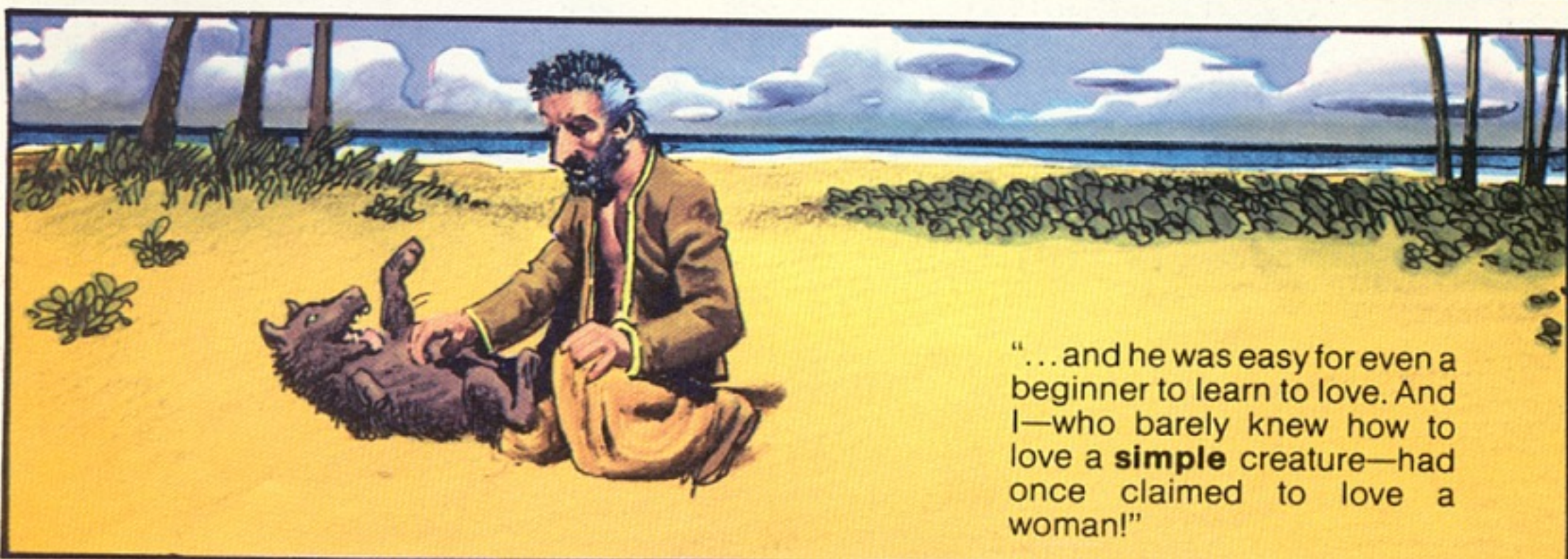


Why was I saved from certain death in Ketra, and by whom? And what secrets lay behind the eyes of this dog, that our fates should be so intertwined? These questions remain, to this day, unanswered.



"But I do know this—the dog taught me many things. From him I learned the simple pleasures, to accept gracefully my place in the world . . ."

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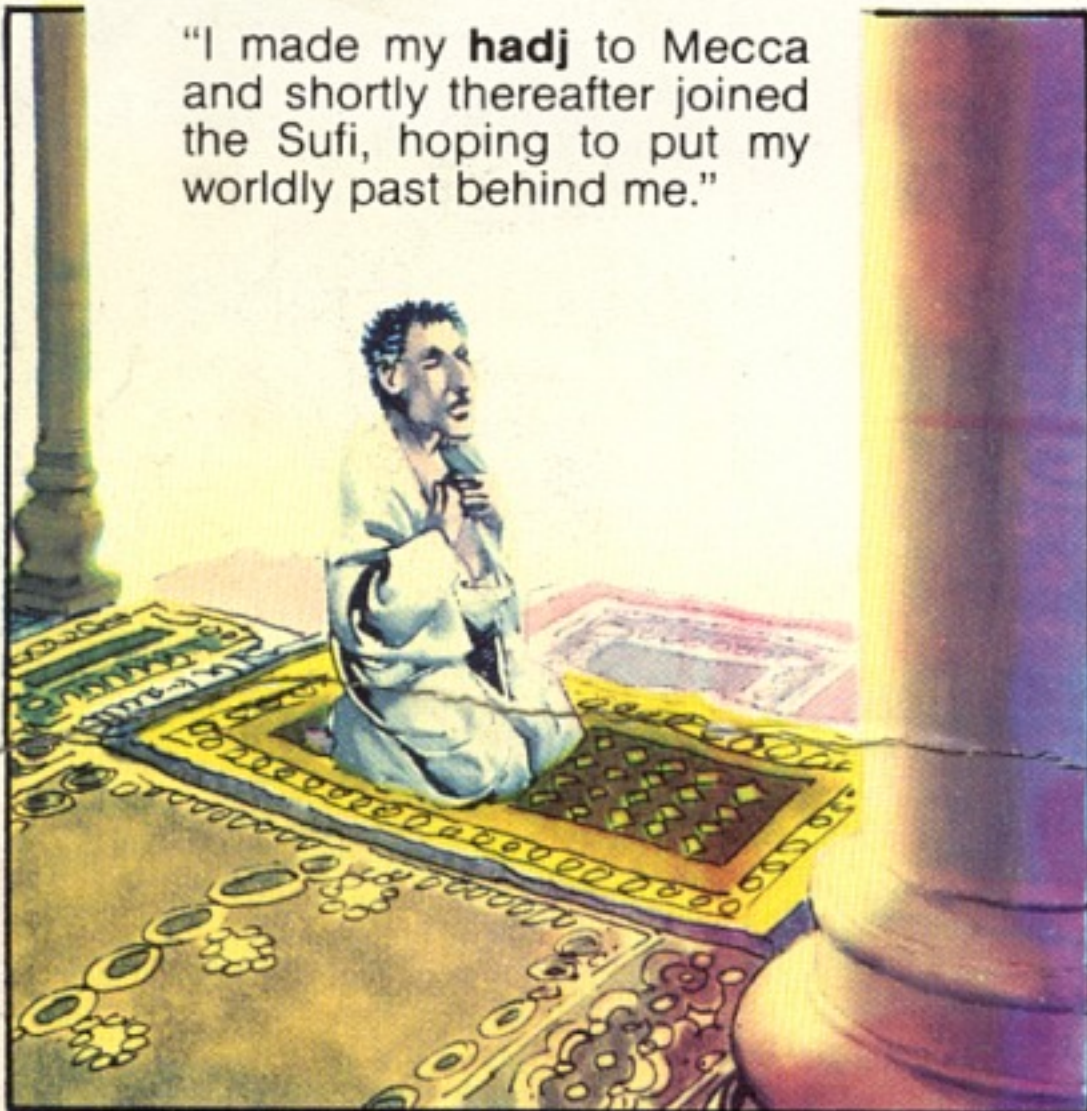


"...and he was easy for even a beginner to learn to love. And I—who barely knew how to love a **simple** creature—had once claimed to love a woman!"

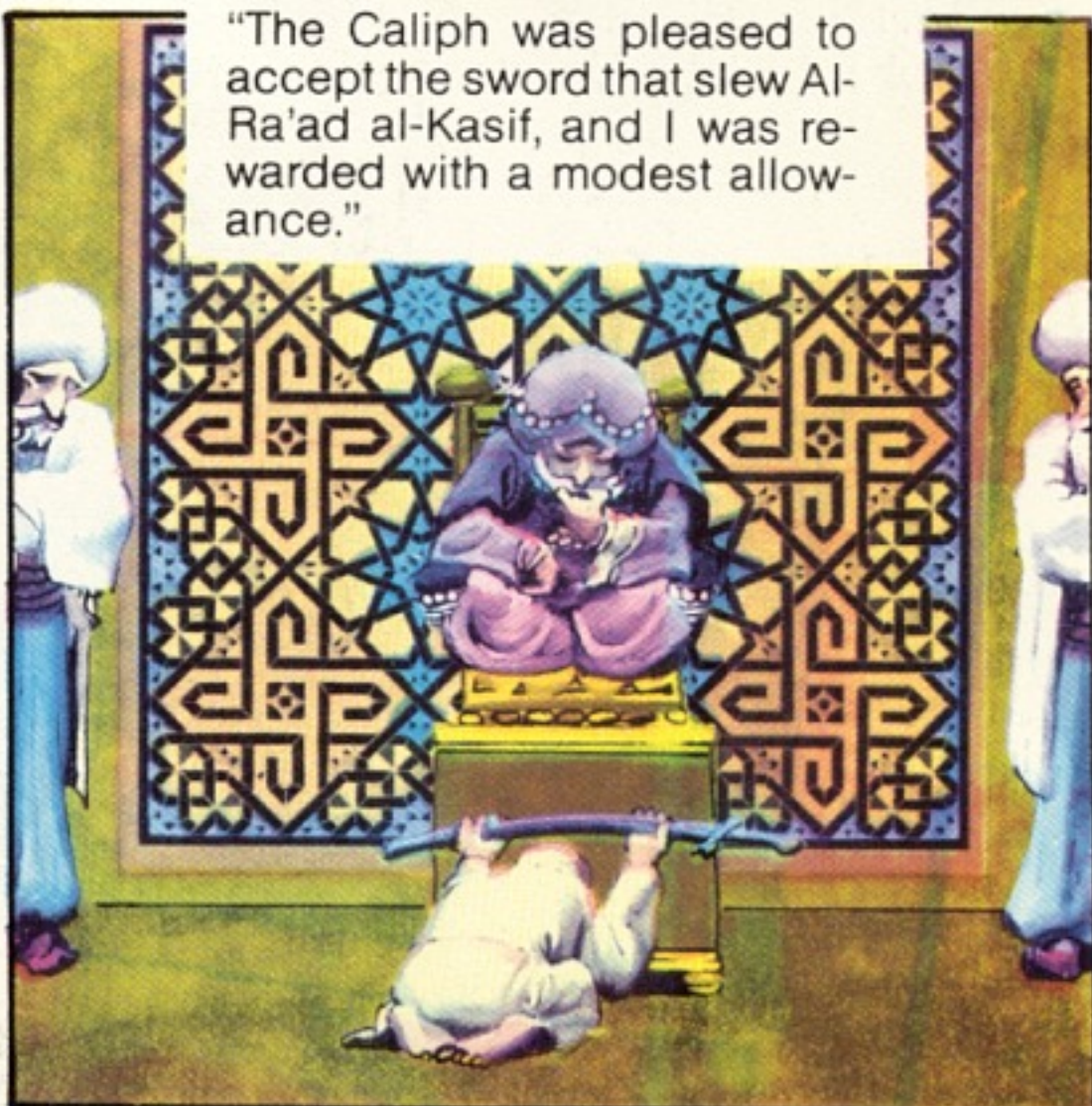
"In the months that followed I came to trust in the wisdom of Allah. I realized that Zulaykha had been taken from me for a reason . . . and though I might never know that reason, still I accepted it and vowed to make myself worthy of her safe return."



"I made my **hadj** to Mecca and shortly thereafter joined the Sufi, hoping to put my worldly past behind me."



"The Caliph was pleased to accept the sword that slew Al-Ra'ad al-Kasif, and I was rewarded with a modest allowance."

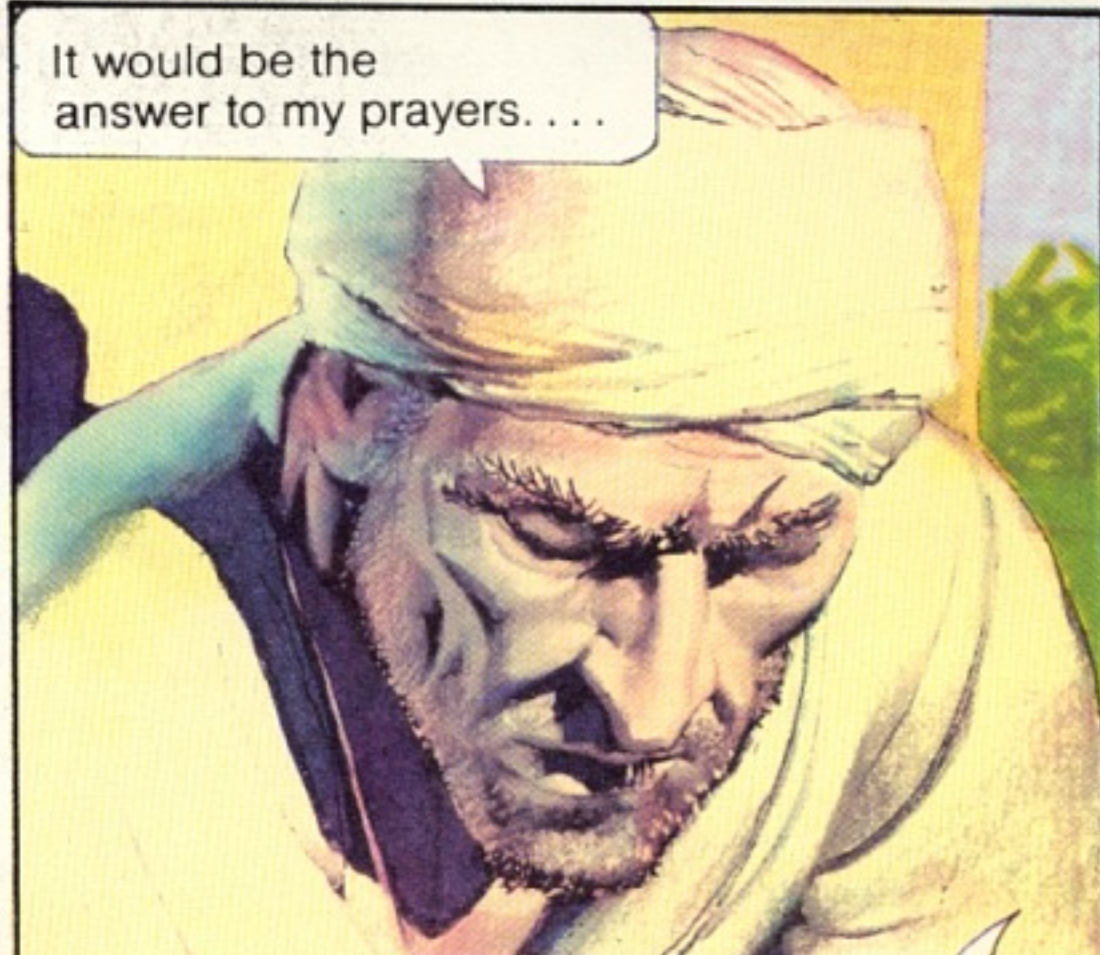


A year ago the dog died a natural death—a fate I would gladly share. Perhaps in Paradise I'll be reunited with my dear Zulaykha—if such is the Will of Allah.



And if a stranger should offer you that gift now, though it meant a lengthy voyage, would you make the journey?

It would be the answer to my prayers. . . .



Then look at me, Sindbad the Sufi, and know that your quest approaches its end. . . .

My true name is **Zu'l Janahayn**, King of All Kings of the Jinn, Servant of Allah, and great-uncle to the woman you seek—your wife, Zulaykha!



Bismallah!

In the guise of a bird I watched you the night of Id al-Fitr! Your childish actions enraged me, Sindbad . . .



. . . and I acted to protect my niece from your rash and selfish behavior! That very night you ran afoul of the Jinni Al-Ra'ad al-Kasif!



I stole Zulaykha from you, and though she begged for you and pleaded your case, I refused to return her to a man who placed **himself** above all others!



I've watched over your journey from its beginning, Sindbad, guiding you with dreams and finally—at Zulaykha's insistence—saving you from your just doom in Ketra! Since then you've learned a great deal!



I've never trusted prodigal sons, Sindbad, and I am far too wise to expect these changes to last! But while they do . . .

... let you be reunited!

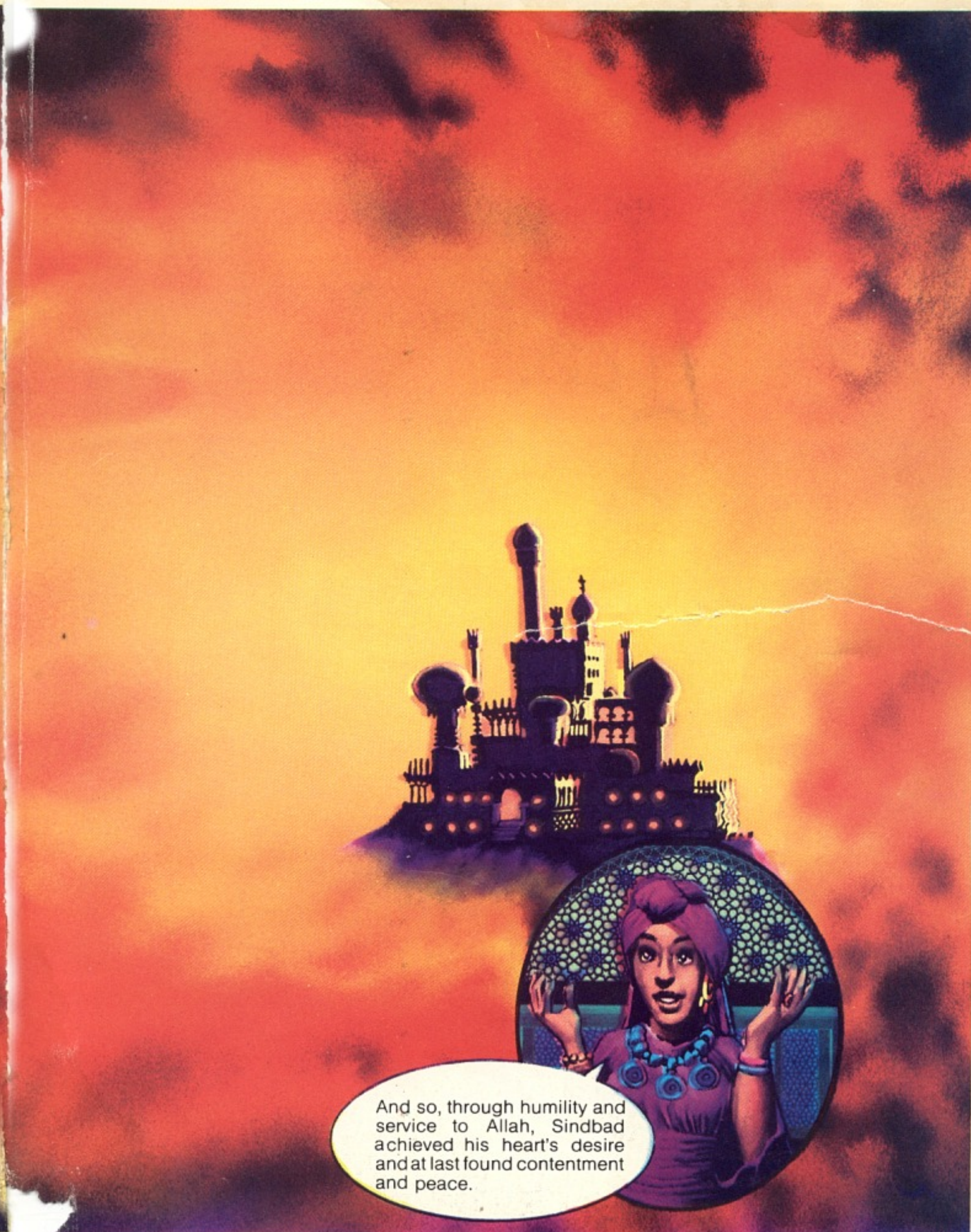


Zulaykha!



Old ways die hard, Sindbad!
Watch yourself!





And so, through humility and service to Allah, Sindbad achieved his heart's desire and at last found contentment and peace.

Shahrazad

Dunyazad?
Are you here,
my sister?

I hope these many nights have taught you something, Dunyazad, and that you'll give up your thoughts of adventure. They will, after all, avail you nothing.

Dunyazad?

The End