

NOW FOR A REALLY *FAR OUT* TALE... LIKE, *FOUR LIGHT YEARS* OUT, AS SOME *SPACED-OUT* SPACEMEN ON A WILD TRIP DISCOVER SOME MIND-BENDING FACTS ABOUT THE UNIVERSE, LIFE, AND...

THE COSMIC ALL

THE FIRST INTERSTELLAR SHIP "ALDREN" SLOWED DOWN TO "ONE LIGHT" (OR, TO PUT IT CORRECTLY, RE-ENTERED NORMAL SPACE AND TIME) JUST A MILLION MILES AWAY FROM THEIR AIMING POINT ON THE RIM OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM SURROUNDING THE NEAREST STAR, ALPHA CENTAURI...

YES SIR!
COURSE FOR
ALPHA III IS
BEING FED IN
NOW, SIR!

THE READINGS INDICATE
WE'LL NEED FULL EQUIP-
MENT... BETTER SUIT
UP, KIDS!

YES
SIR!

ENTERING
THE PLANET'S
ATMOSPHERE
NOW... FIRE
RETROS!

LANDING PARTY
READY TO DIS-
EMBARK, SIR!

STRANGE...
THERE'S LOTS
OF PLANT
LIFE, SO
THERE *MUST* BE
ANIMAL LIFE
AS WELL...

BUT SO
FAR WE'VE
SEEN NO SIGN
OF IT!

LOOK!
SKELETONS!

THIS ONE
LOOKS ALMOST
HUMANOID... WE
MAY RUN INTO
INTELLIGENT
LIFE...

NOTHING BUT
BONES... THIS
WHOLE WORLD
IS A GRAVE-
YARD!

SIR, COME
HERE!
QUICK!

A SPACE
SHIP!

AND MORE
BONES... WELL,
THAT'S ENOUGH
FOR TODAY!

WE'LL CAMP
HERE BY THIS
LAKE...

DON, YOU'LL
STAND THE
FIRST WATCH!

THE CREW WAS SOON ASLEEP, AND EVEN THE GUARD NODDED, WHEN...

EEEEEE!
WHAT?



SUE!

**DON!
HELP!**



**GET TO
THE
SHIP!
EVERY-
BODY!**

ZZZZOT!



**THERE'S YOUR
ANIMAL LIFE, SIR!
WHAT WE THOUGHT
WAS A LAKE...**



**...ONE BIG
SLIMY BLOB
OF PROTO-
PLASM!**

**WELL, THAT'S
ENOUGH OF
THAT WORLD!
SET COURSE
FOR THE
NEXT...**



THEY LANDED ON
THE SECOND PLANET,
ONLY TO FIND...

**BONES...
JUST
BONES...**



**AND
LOOK!
THE
SLIME!**

**IT'S COMING
THIS WAY!
EVERYBODY
ABOARD!**



AND THEN, AS THEY
APPROACHED THE
NEXT WORLD...

**WE WON'T
NEED HELMETS
THIS TIME...
IT HAS AN
ATMOSPHERE
JUST LIKE
EARTH!**

**CAP-
TAIN!
LOOK!
...A
CITY!**

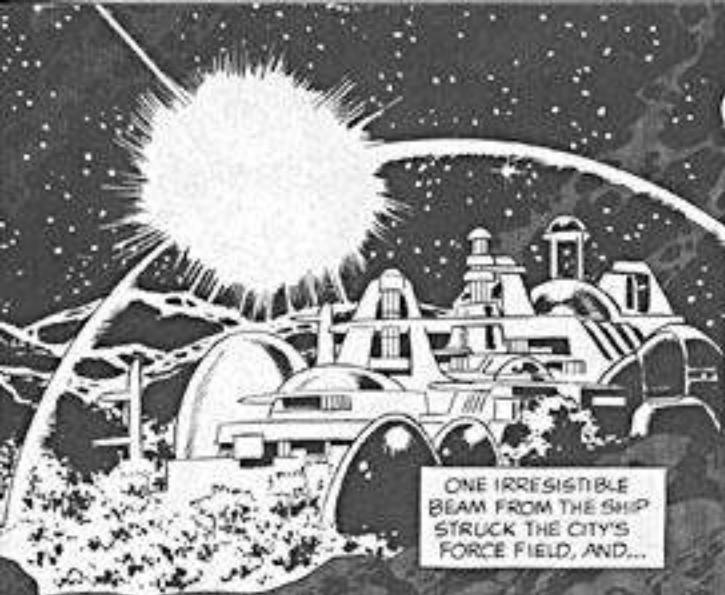


SUDDENLY...



**WE'RE
BEING
ATTACKED!
BUT OUR
SCREEN IS
HOLDING!**

**RETURN
FIRE!**



ONE IRRESISTIBLE BEAM FROM THE SHIP STRUCK THE CITY'S FORCE FIELD, AND...



GETTING A SIGNAL, SIR! SEEMS TO BE FROM THE CITY...

FEED IT INTO THE TRANSLATOR! MAYBE WE CAN SETTLE THIS PEACEFULLY...



THE MESSAGE IS COMING THROUGH NOW, CAPTAIN... LISTEN...

SPACE SHIP... IF... YOU MAY TRANSMIT... WE HAVE... TRANSLATING MACHINE...



WHY DID YOU FIRE AT US? WE COME IN PEACE...

YOU ARE... THREAT TO US... YOU CAME FROM... PLANET OF... THE SLIME...



...AND NOW... IT NO LONGER MATTERS... YOU MAY LAND... FOR WE ARE... DOOMED... AS YOU ARE...

WHAT SHALL WE DO, SIR? THEY **SEEM** TO BE TRYING TO SCARE US!

WE'VE COME FOUR LIGHT YEARS TO GET DATA! WE'RE NOT GOING TO CHICKEN OUT NOW! PREPARE TO LAND!

AS THEY NEARED THE ALIEN CITY...



KEEP YOUR GUNS READY! BRING UP THE TRANSLATOR!

HERE THEY COME!



THEY'RE ATTACKING! FIRE!

WE'RE NEARLY HOME!
OH, DON... WE MADE IT!

THERE'S JUST ONE
THING I DON'T
UNDERSTAND...

YES... I
KNOW... WHY
DIDN'T IT
HAPPEN
TO US...?

WHY WERE
WE SPARED?

LATER...

SUE! WHAT
ARE YOU **DOING?**
WE ARE **OFF**
COURSE!

YES... I... I DON'T KNOW
WHY I... **SOMETHING** CAME
OVER ME... A VOICE... NO!
A **THOUGHT...**

MAYBE I
CAN STILL
CORRECT...

NO! YOU
MUSTN'T!
WE MUST
NOT BE
EXAMINED!

THEY
WILL
FIND
OUT...

...AND
KILL
US!

YOU'RE
INSANE!
GET OUT
OF MY
WAY!

AND AS THEY
STRUGGLED,
THE GREAT
STAR SHIP
WENT INTO
FINAL ORBIT,
AND THEN
IT WAS TOO
LATE... THEY
RE-ENTERED
THE EARTH'S
ATMOSPHERE
AND SPLASHED
DOWN IN
THE ATLANTIC
OCEAN, A
THOUSAND
MILES FROM
THE COAST...

AND THEN, AS THEY SANK INTO THE
DEPTHS, HE BECAME AWARE OF IT...
OF IT GROWING IN HIM!

WHAT... WHAT'S
HAPPENING TO
ME...? I
FEEL...

YOU TOO! OH,
DARLING! I'M SO
GLAD... NOW YOU
KNOW **WHY!**

YES... I KNOW WHY YOU CHANGED COURSE... I KNOW WHY IT DIDN'T HAPPEN TO US BEFORE... LIKE THE OTHERS...

YES! IT WANTED US TO RETURN TO EARTH, TO BRING PEACE AND LOVE TO ANOTHER SYSTEM...

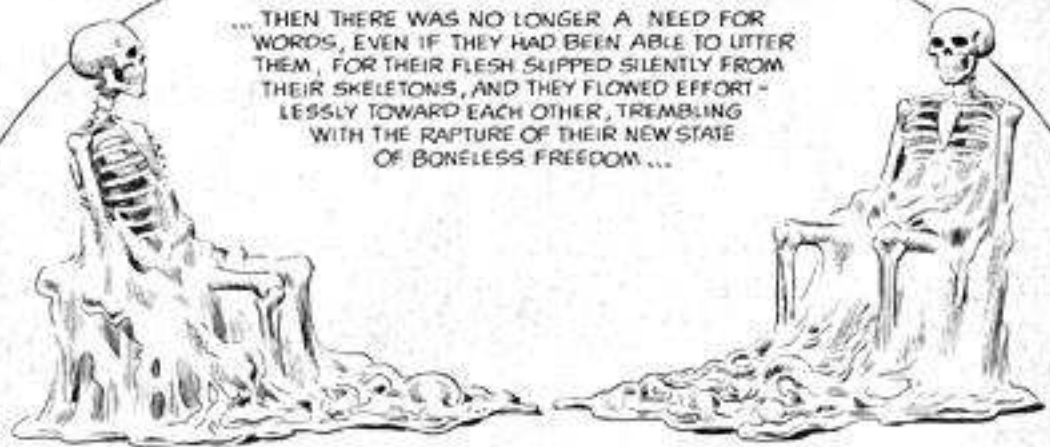


FOR IT IS INTELLIGENT, IN FACT OMNISCIENT! IT HAS BEEN IN US ALL THE TIME, WAITING... AND NOW IT IS TIME...

YES! THERE WILL BE A NEW LIFE, A BETTER ONE, FOR THIS WHOLE PLANET OF UNHAPPY SICK, MURDEROUS VERTEBRATES!



... THEN THERE WAS NO LONGER A NEED FOR WORDS, EVEN IF THEY HAD BEEN ABLE TO UTTER THEM, FOR THEIR FLESH SLIPPED SILENTLY FROM THEIR SKELETONS, AND THEY FLOWED EFFORTLESSLY TOWARD EACH OTHER, TREMBLING WITH THE RAPTURE OF THEIR NEW STATE OF BONELESS FREEDOM...



... AND MERGED, AND THEN IT WAS COMPLETE AND IN TOUCH WITH THE COSMIC ALL... SEPARATE, YET *ONE* WITH ITS MILLIONS OF COMPONENTS ON MILLIONS OF WORLDS...



IT PAUSED A MOMENT, REALIZING AND INTEGRATING ITS POWER, AND THEN, IMMORTAL AND ALL-KNOWING, IT SLITHERED HAPPILY TO THE LOCK AND WAS GONE TO DO GOOD, TO BRING OTHERS INTO THE HARMONY...



WELL! BUT YOU DIDN'T EXPECT A *HAPPY ENDING*... *WHAT?!* YOU DON'T THINK THAT'S A *HAPPY ENDING*? JUST *WAIT...* WAIT UNTIL YOU JOIN IN THE BUSS OF *TOTAL TOGETHERNESS*... FOR *THE COSMIC ALL IS COMING!*

