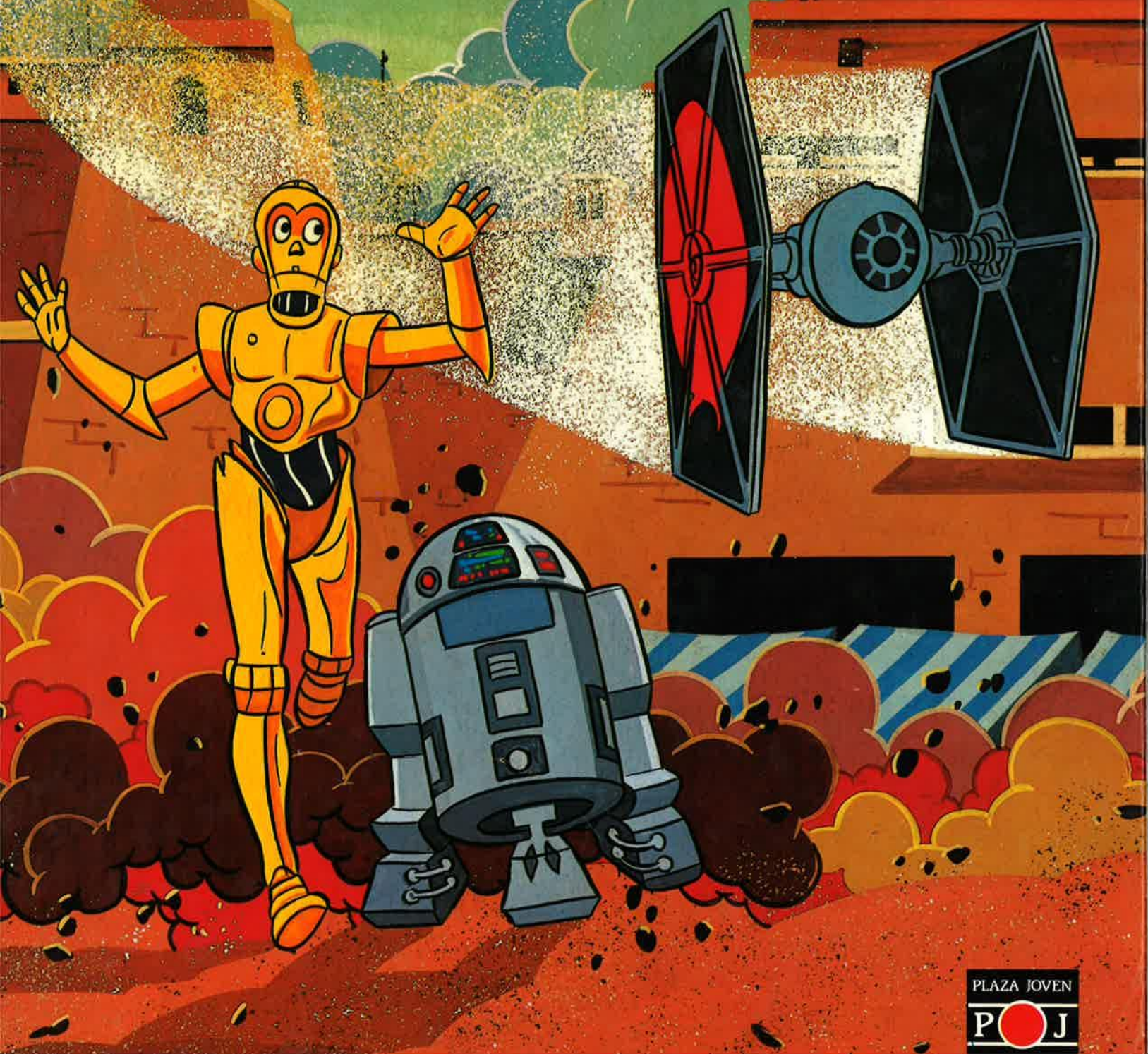


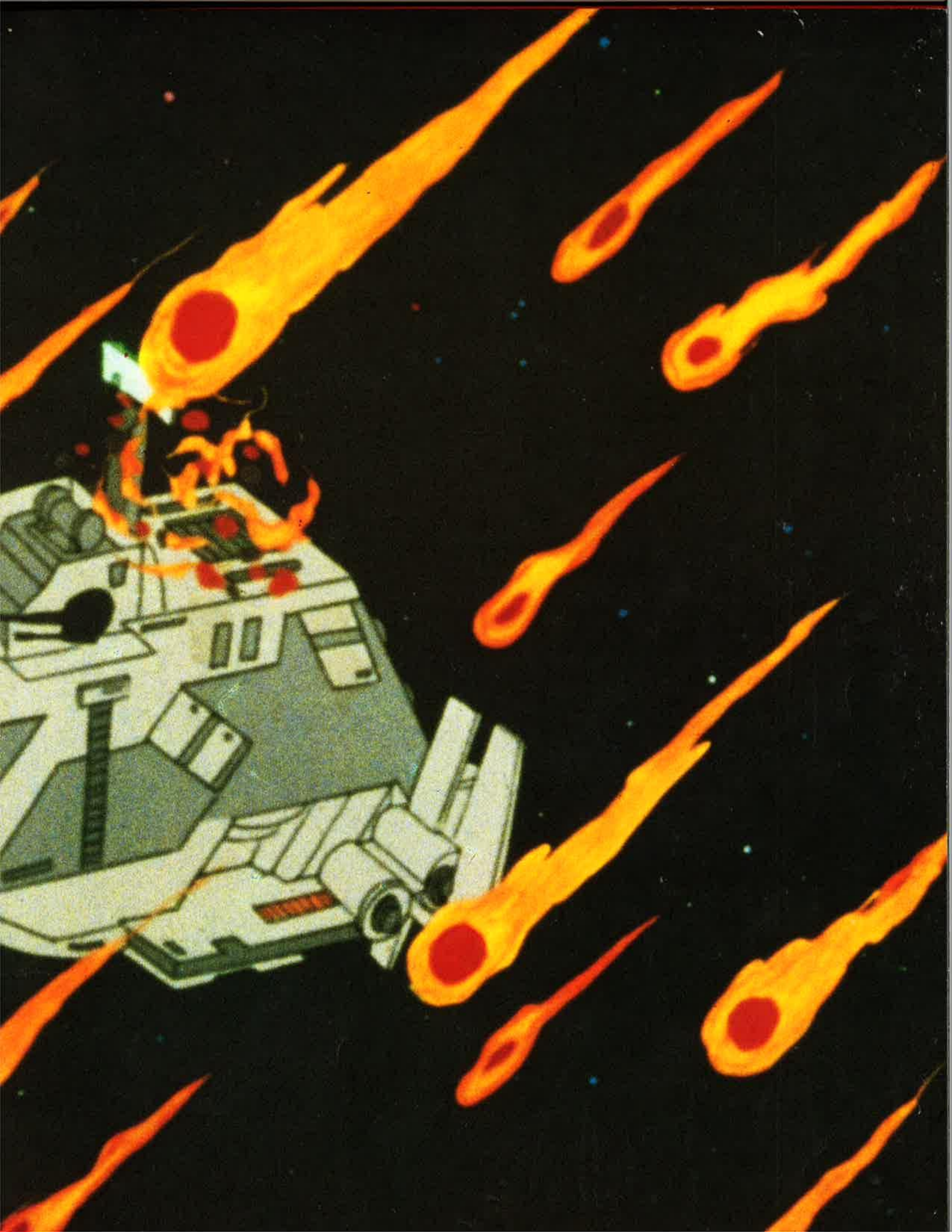
STAR WARS **DROIDS**



PLAZA JOVEN









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DROIDIDS ^{M.R}



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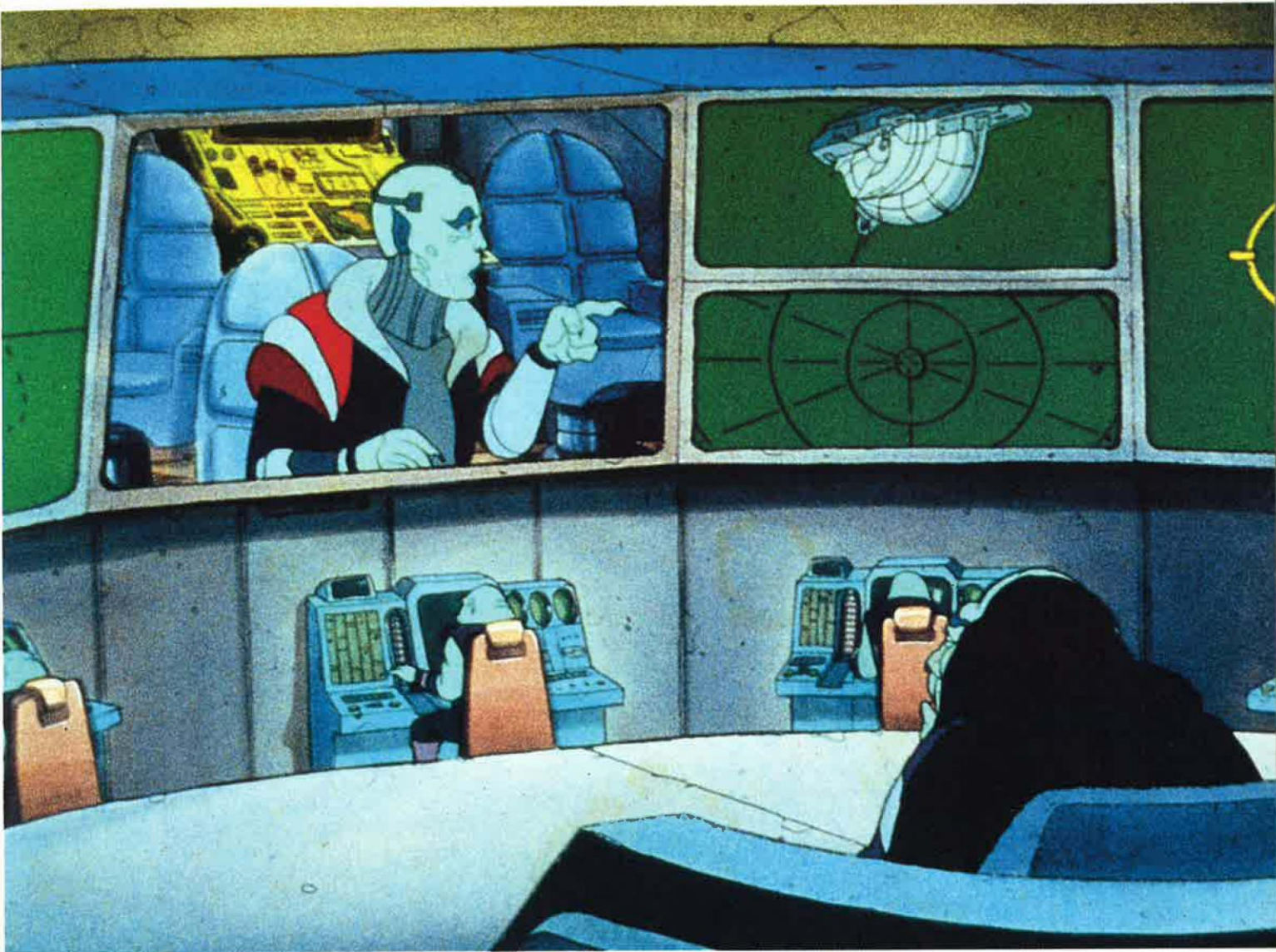


How had Artoo and Threepio come to be on the planet Ingo?

Though Ingo is a small planet, it is dangerous for a droid that is not properly looked after. Tons of galactic trash gathers and floats around Ingo; it's a kind of garbage dump made up of numerous starfighters that usually linger there.

But Ingo was even more dangerous still, and not just for a maintenance droid and an interpreter, such as Artoo and Threepio, but for anyone. It was there that Sise Fromm, one of the worst galactic

gangsters, had set up a secret base. To oversee it he had sent his son Tig Fromm, accompanied by his bodyguard-babysitter Vlix. Sise's power is immense, and his son Tig follows in his footsteps—though at times he doesn't want his father snooping about his business. That's almost impossible because the innumerable droids and androids (and, above all, clones) that faithfully serve Sise must be flawlessly informed. Otherwise... well, Sise's methods aren't exactly friendly.



Ingo is a planet of salt plains and deserts. Its landscape is very desolate. Of course, had Threepio had his pick, he never would have chosen such a place. But neither he nor Artoo had an option: They had been dumped there and left without a master. What to do then? Logically, look for another master because, without one, neither of them could get on very well. And they are vulnerable to every galactic peril—or, at least, that's what Threepio thinks.

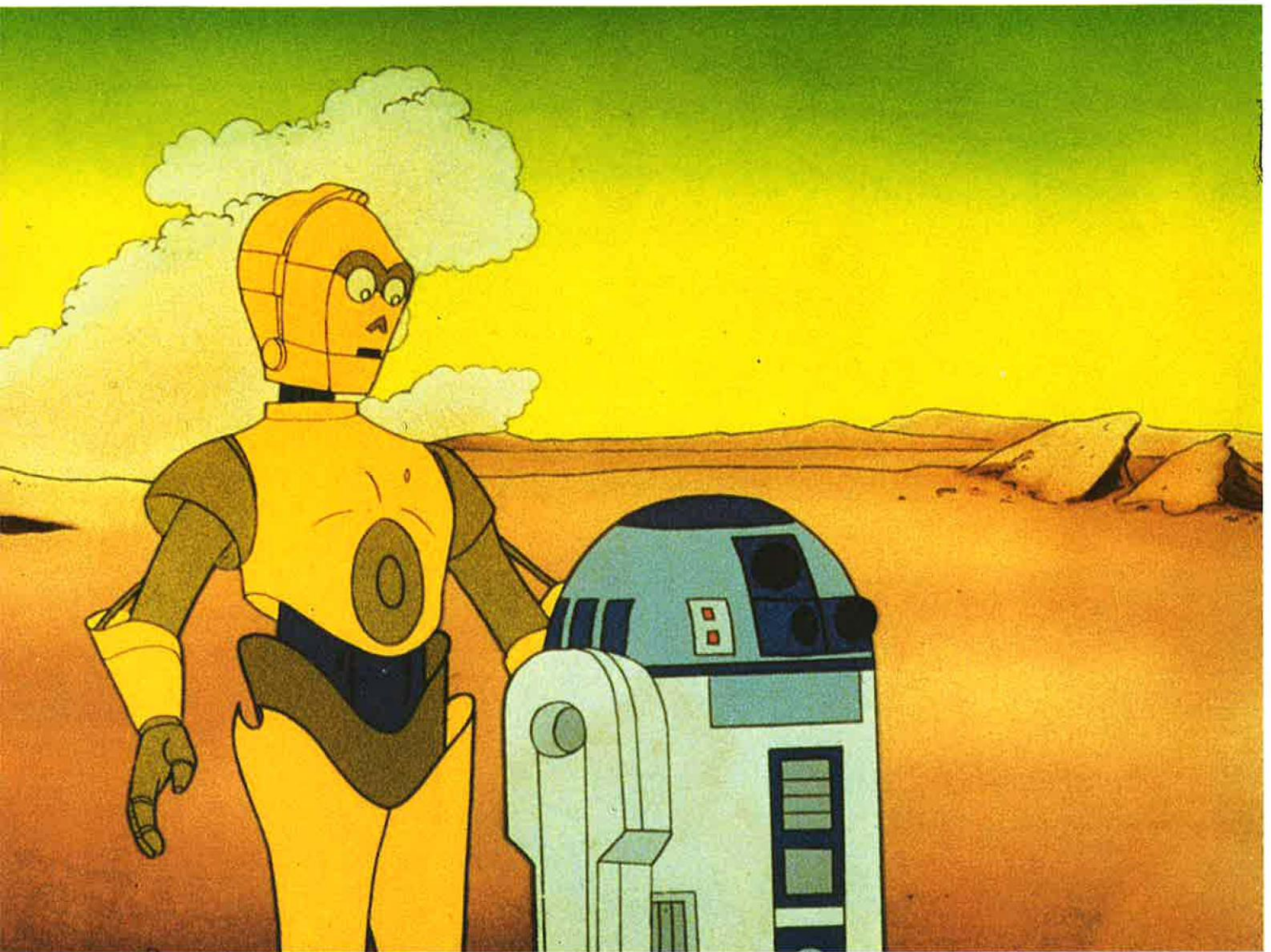
"What a strange chain of events!"

Threepio lamented to himself. "Our last master has turned out to be a smuggler, and the space authorities have arrested him. What a contrast to other masters we've had! Do you remember, Artoo?"

"Wroft... wrip. Pffftt."

"Yes, I know the one you liked most was Mungo Baobab, the merchant. We were not bad off with him. But I much preferred life with Uncle Gundy and with Jann Tosh and Jessica. Because...."

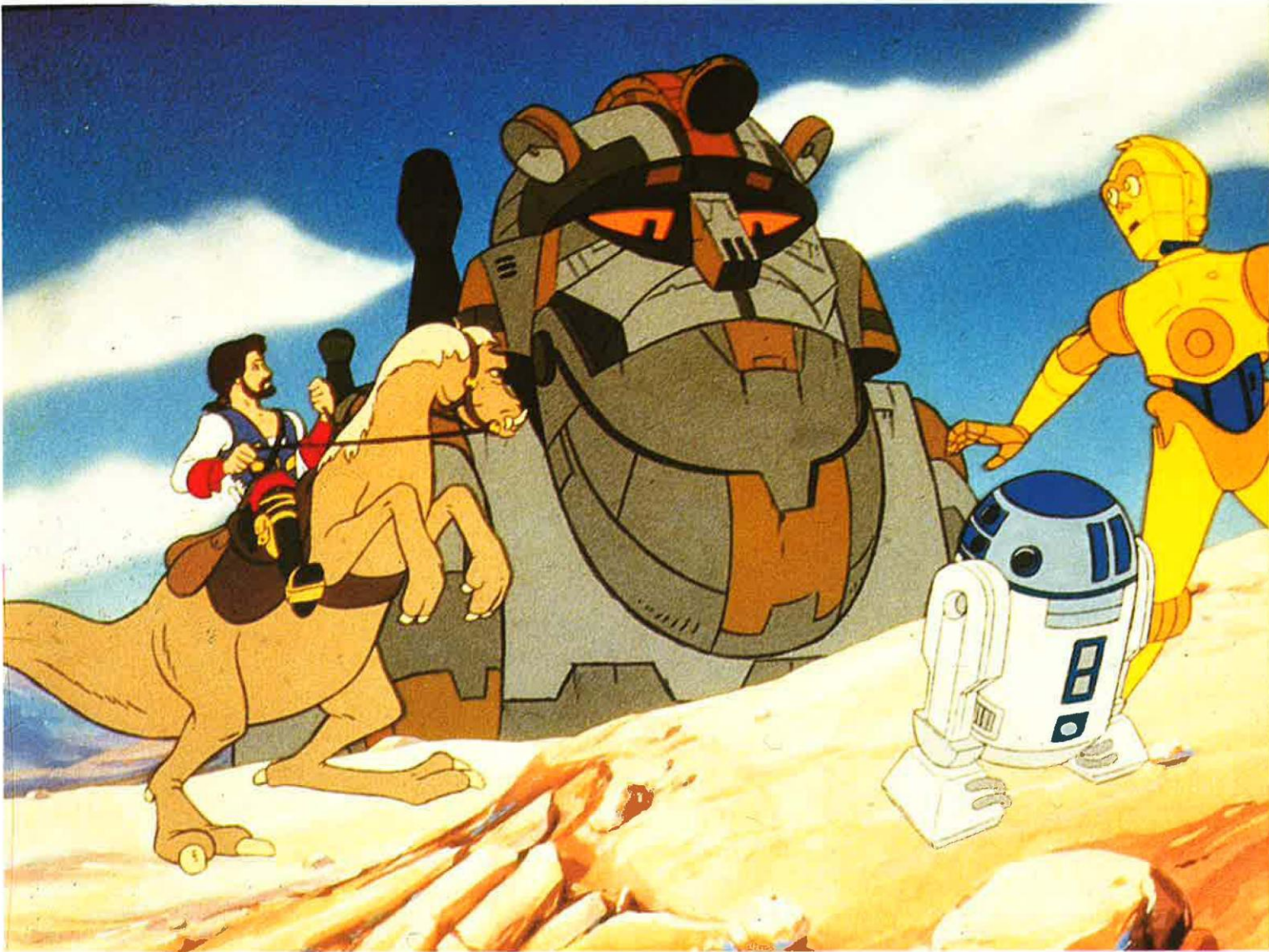
And Threepio went silent, a rare thing for him as he was always talking, even out



through his bolt holes. Yes, the adventures with Mungo Baobab had been fun but very dangerous, thought Threepio. Only Mungo, that intrepid master, would have thought to attempt opening a commercial route to the Roon system. The Baobab corporation, run by his father, was in dire straits and opening new commercial routes was absolutely necessary in order to save it along with the entire planet and economic system that depended upon it. Because Mungo could never sit still, idling in the company offices, he'd been investigating a way to gain access to the

Roon system and establish there a branch of his father's company. Of course, he hadn't counted on the space pirates or on Governor Koong and Admiral Screed, who wanted to control the traffic along the passage and had already closed down the Umboo Lightstation, capturing Noop, the keeper in charge of watching over and maintaining it. Mungo and the droids had run into the same bad luck as Noop and had ended up in Governor Koong's dungeons.

Ultimately, Mungo's courage and Artoo's incalculable help had gotten them



out of there, returning the space lighthouse to its place so that intergalactic traffic would continue flowing without a problem. Noop guided them to Roon, and Mungo obtained his objectives: to establish commercial relations with the system and thus save his father's company.

It had been exciting. Too exciting, as far as Threepio was concerned.

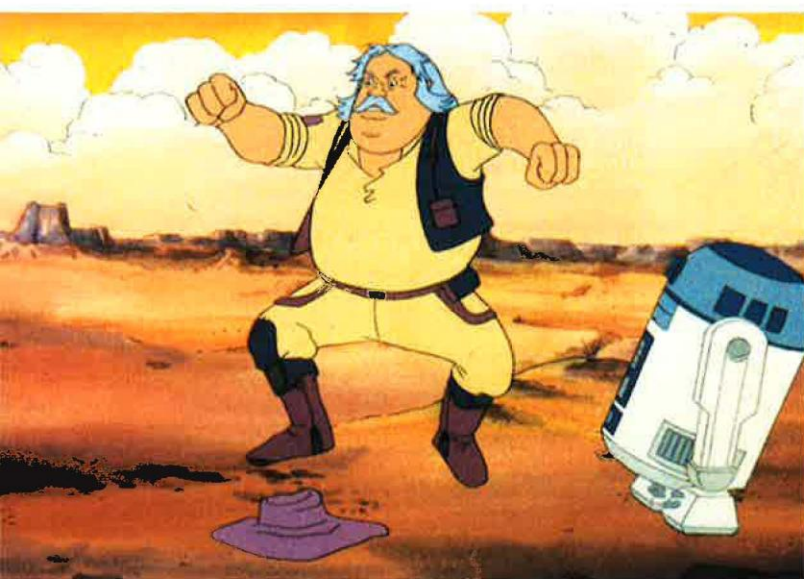
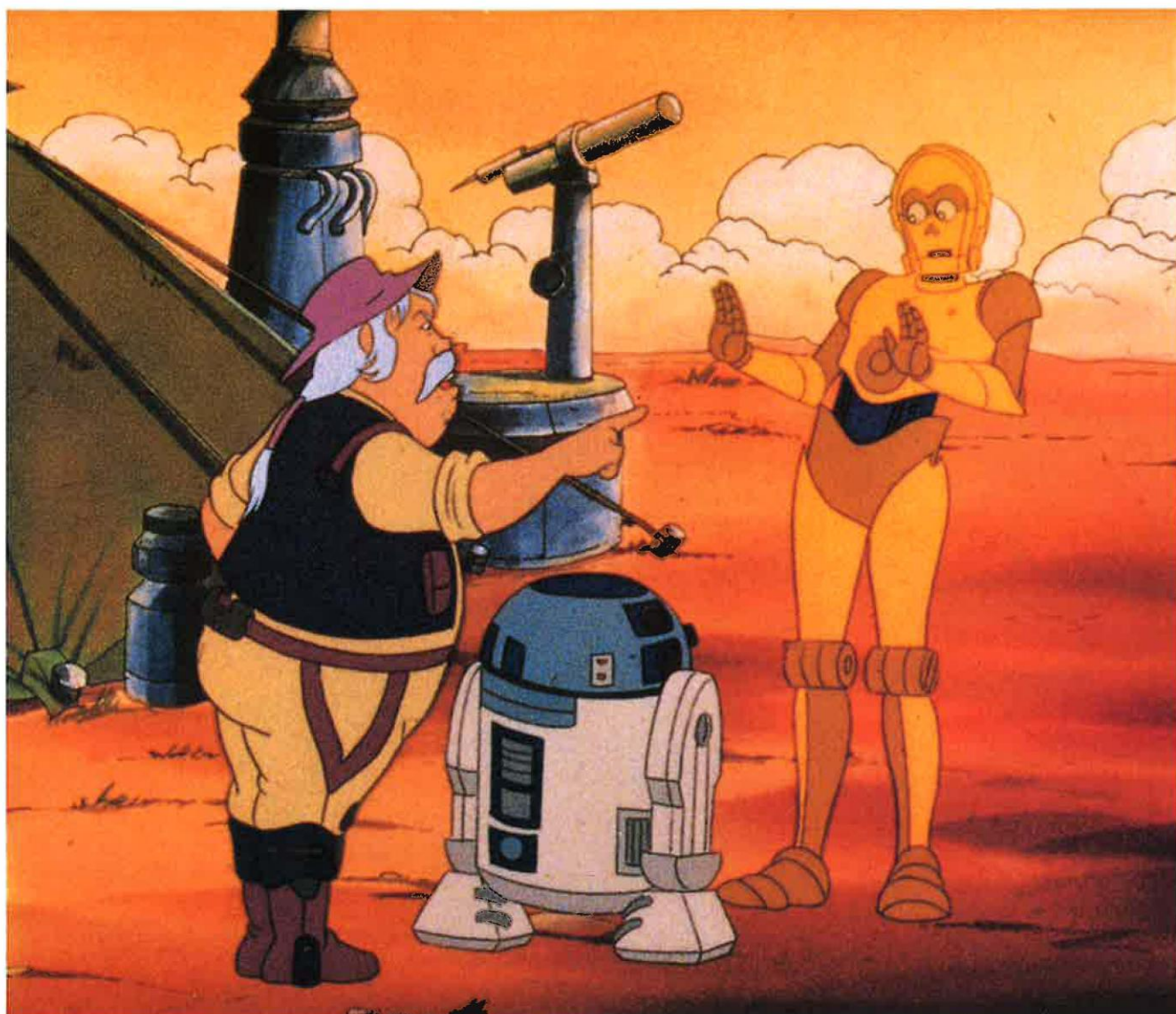
"Wrtf ... bleet-mmm."

"You already told me earlier that Mungo Baobab was, in your opinion, the best master. But you know full well that

my favorite up to now has been Jann Tosh—at least while we stayed at the mine with Uncle Gundy. That was sheer tranquility! Each of us had our occupation, and life went by agreeably without sudden surprises...."

"Pptgafd ... wergg."

"Well, of course, everything became complicated when Kez-Iban turned out to be a prince named Mon Julpa. When everyone began looking for him, things got worse. But don't forget that Jann Tosh saved us from the clutches of Yorpo Mog, who had bought us in that horrid auction

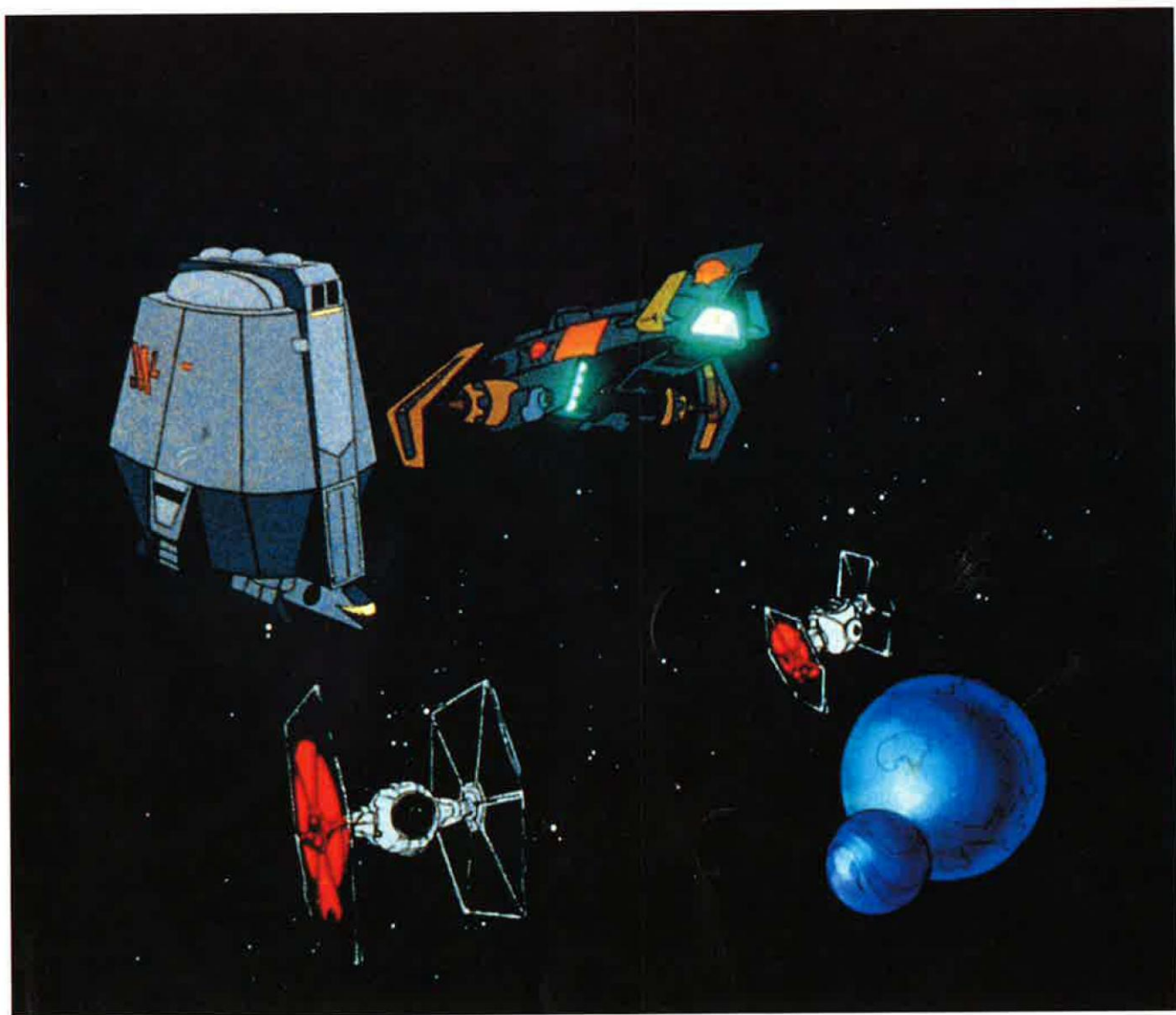
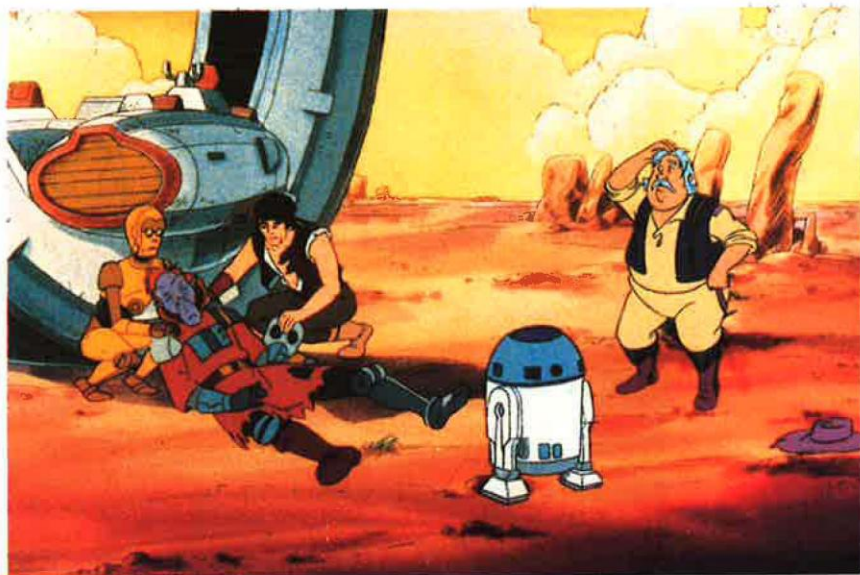


for a few grains of keschel. If it hadn't been for him, God only knows what might have become of us!"

Threepio had certainly relished that life. They had been sent to Tyne's Horky to work in Doodnik's Café. Threepio's professional skills were indisputable: He was a stupendous waiter and a certified chef in intergalactic cuisine. That was true. But his was also the extraordinary capability to get himself into all kinds of messes. He'd had an unfortunate incident in Doodnik's Café in which he dropped a

serving tray on Kleb Zellock, a very dangerous individual. That had left them without employment, and they had had no choice but to put themselves up for bidding in the first slave auction they found. Amongst androids, robots and other shabby sidereal beings, Threepio and Artoo suffered the enormous humiliation of being purchased for the laughably absurd sum of fifty grains of keschel.

Worst of all, though, was the identity of the buyer: Kleb's assistant Yorpo, a nasty individual with the worst intentions

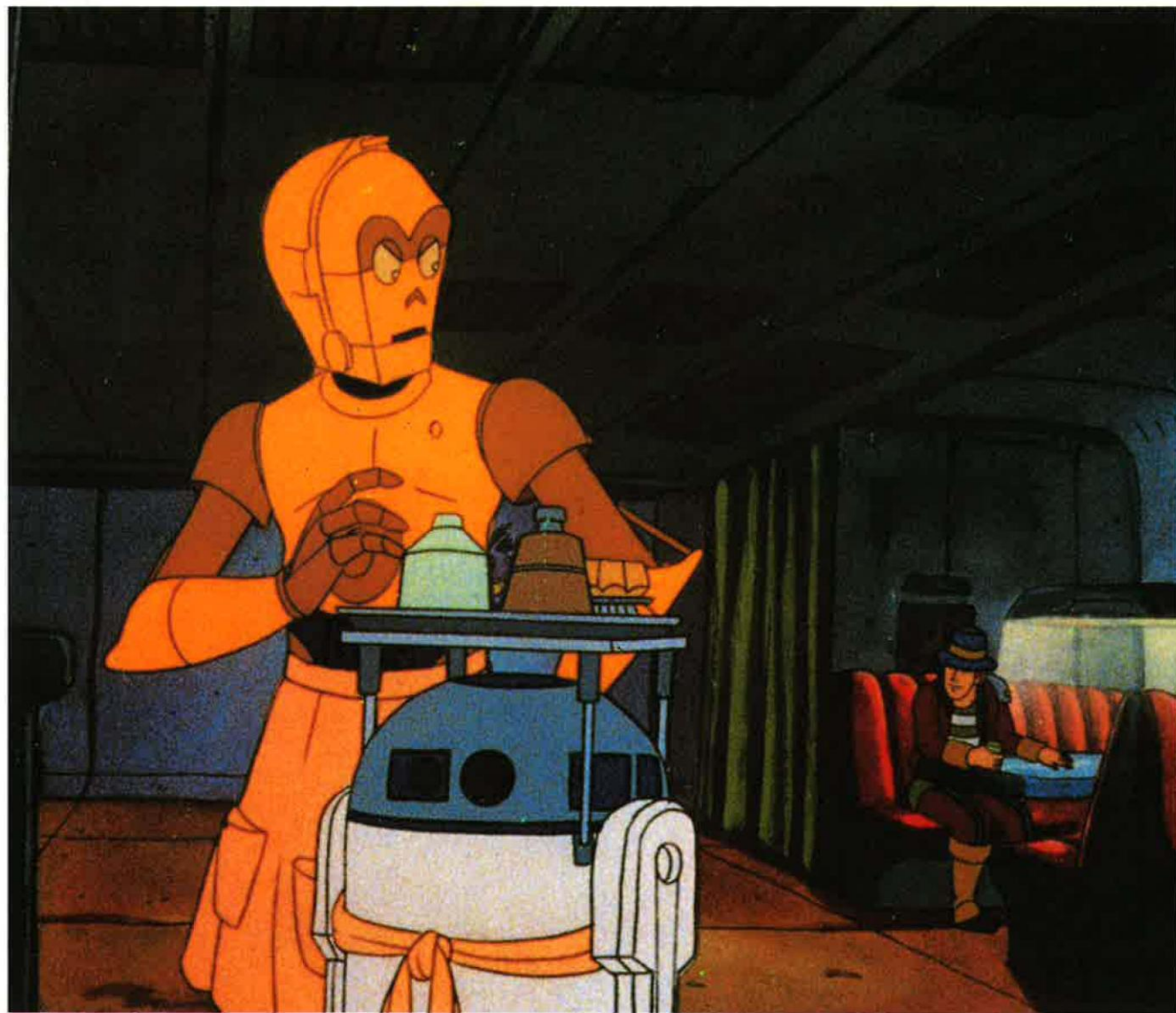


and less brains than an insect. *Genuine space trash!* was the opinion Threepio held of him. Only the good will of Jann Tosh secured their freedom from that wretched character. Upon selling Artoo and Threepio, the seller had added to their lot a strange and exhausted personage, almost dead. Upon seeing him, Jann Tosh could not help taking pity on that pathetic being, so he offered to exchange the three of them for a magnificent mining droid he had just purchased, at three thousand grains of keshel, for his uncle's mine. He

knew that his Uncle Gundy would get upset and protest, but he could not tolerate such injustices. This was Jann's highest trait, in Threepio's opinion.

Indeed, Jann dared to face one of Uncle Gundy's terrible fits of anger just to save poor Kez-Iban. But his reward came afterward: Kez-Iban turned out to be Mon Julpa, sovereign of the planet Tammuzan.

But Threepio knew it had not been easy.... Upon learning Kez's identity, Kleb Zellock pursued them in order to





collect an enormous reward and, not even happy with that, he had locked them up in a mine for excavating Nergon: a very dangerous and immensely valuable substance the possession of which allowed for dominion of entire galaxies. The bravery of Jann and his friend Jessica, combined with the help of the two droids, got them out of that mine, within which they would have otherwise died.

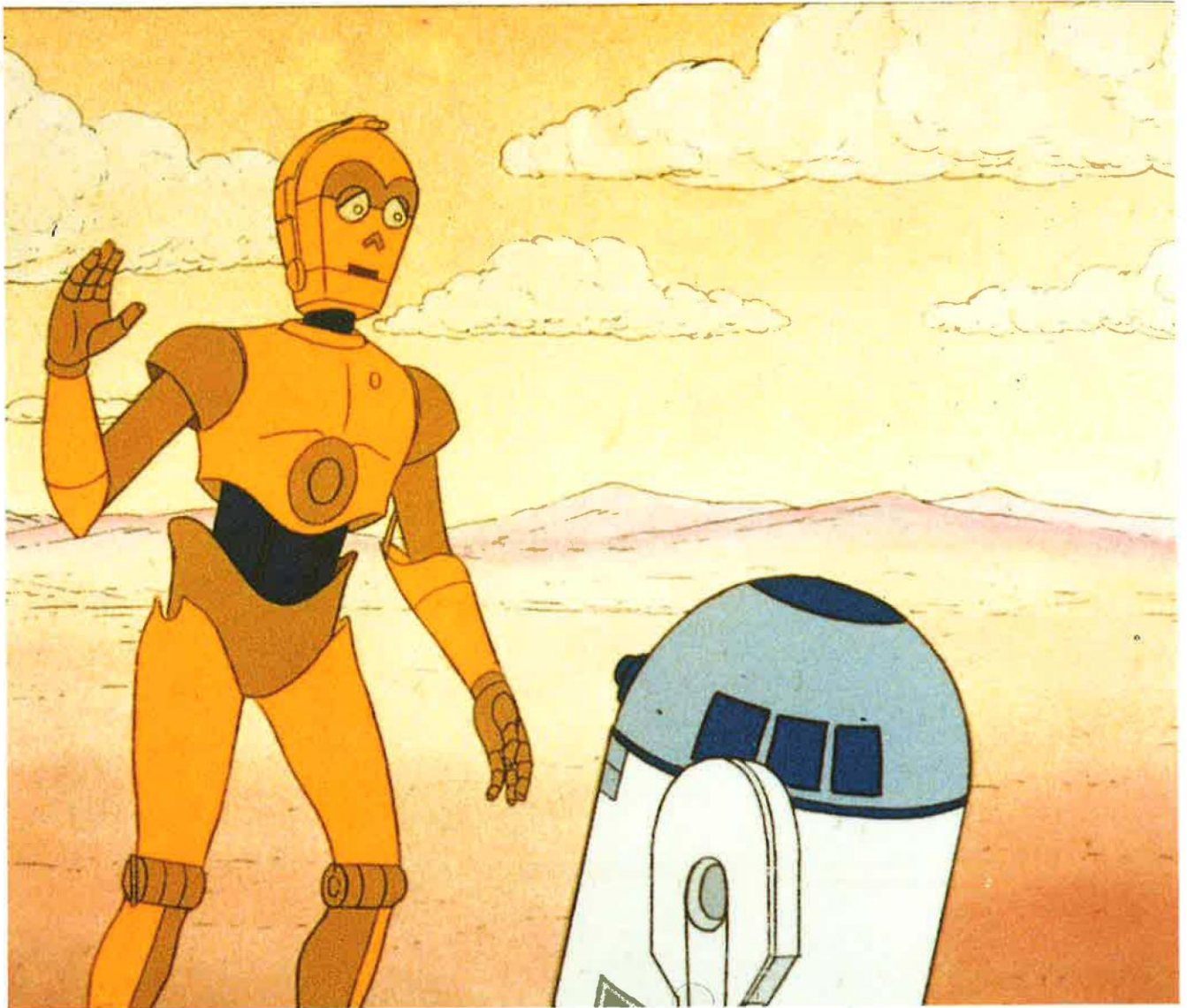
“What times those were! And now we find ourselves here, alone, in search of a new master. Though I very much doubt

we will find a worthwhile one among these salt plains.”

Threepio had sat down in a heap of salt, and Artoo was tumbled over beside him. But while carrying on with his chatter and memories, Threepio did not realize that Artoo was not well.

“This place doesn’t seem wholesome. What’s more, these salt storms seem absolutely interminable. What’s your opinion, Artoo? Artoo? Artoo!!! What’s happened to you, old friend?”

Artoo appeared to have become little



more than the scraps of an R2-D2 unit, smashed and corroded.

“Oh no! It isn’t possible! The salt and acids have finished you!”

Threepio didn’t dare to even touch Artoo, fearing he would fall apart in his very hands. He was deeply sad due to what he considered the end of his companion and friend.

“Farewell, Artoo! You were a miracle of modern technology, a veritable prince of droids. And most importantly ... a friend. A good friend with whom I shared

so many adventures and perils. Farewell, Artoo, farewell!”

At that moment, the soft beeping of Artoo was heard.

“Artoo! Did you say something?”

“Brip-p-p-p.”

“I said that?”

“Wrafff-schuttur-paf.”

“Miracle of modern technology? I think you’re exaggerating. I said no such thing. I believe it for the best that we continue walking to see if we can find a new master at once.”

Threepio had not noticed a landspeeder that approached from behind at great speed. Because of this, he found Artoo's beeping odd.

"Brafft-ptitt-ptitt."

"What's that, Artoo? Come along! We must find a master."

"Braua-vronaup."

"A landspeeder? Where?"

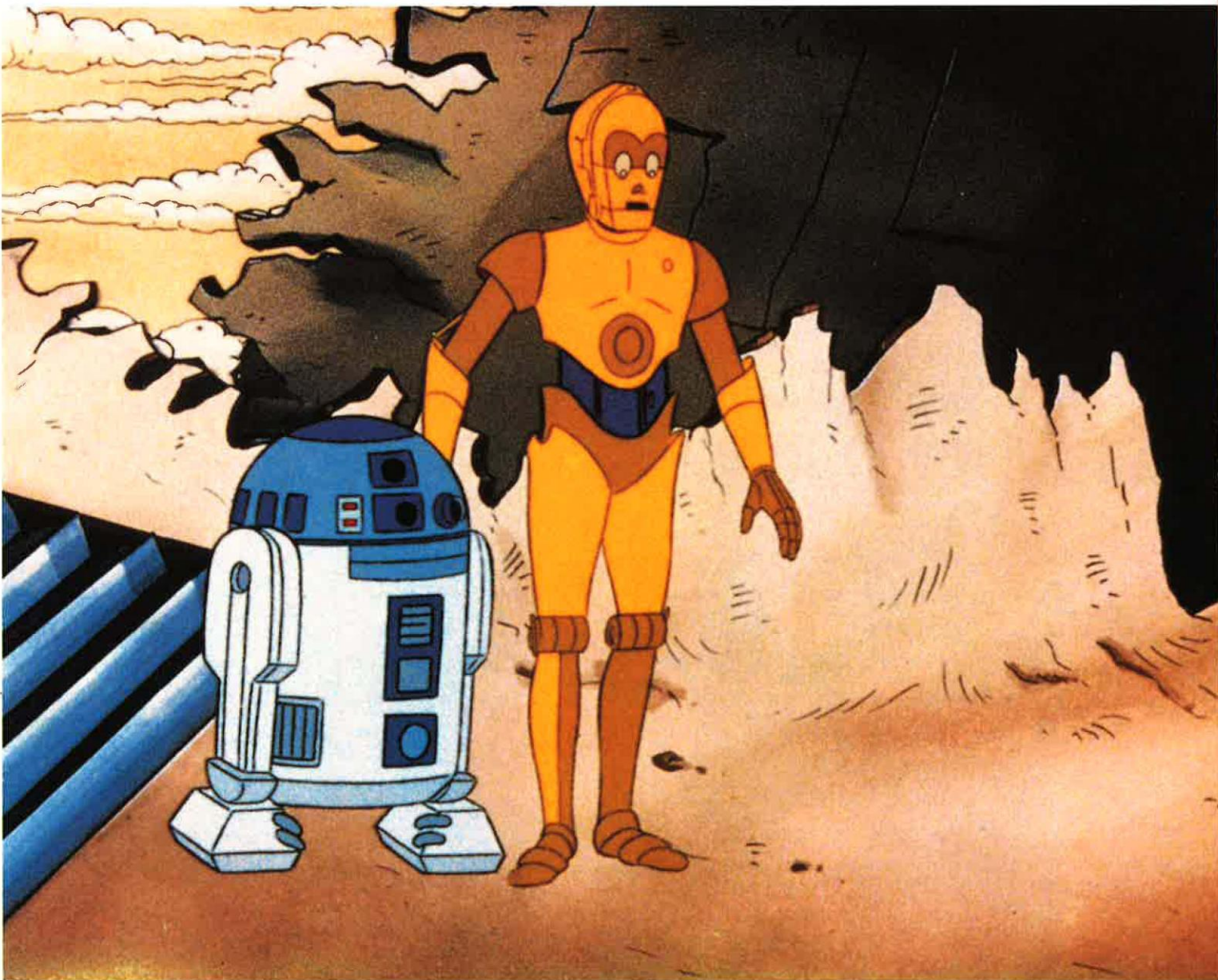
At last, Threepio made out the speeder that was drawing near them.

"We're saved, Artoo! I say! Here, they see us!"

But the speeder passed above them at great speed, without stopping as Threepio had anticipated.

"It overshot us! We'll have to keep searching!"

A second speeder, which neither of them had seen, pulled up beside the droids. A young man with quite a peculiar appearance got out and addressed them.



"Who are you? Where did you two come from?"

Threepio saw the perfect opportunity to show off his powers of eloquence. The young man gave them a smile. He had his hair cut in a curious way: Part of his head was shaved, and down the middle he had a kind of tuft or crest, which flittered in the wind. Threepio stepped forward.

"Allow me to present myself, sir: I am C-3PO, an expert in relations and languages..."

But the newcomer did not pay him any attention. Rather, he seemed interested in

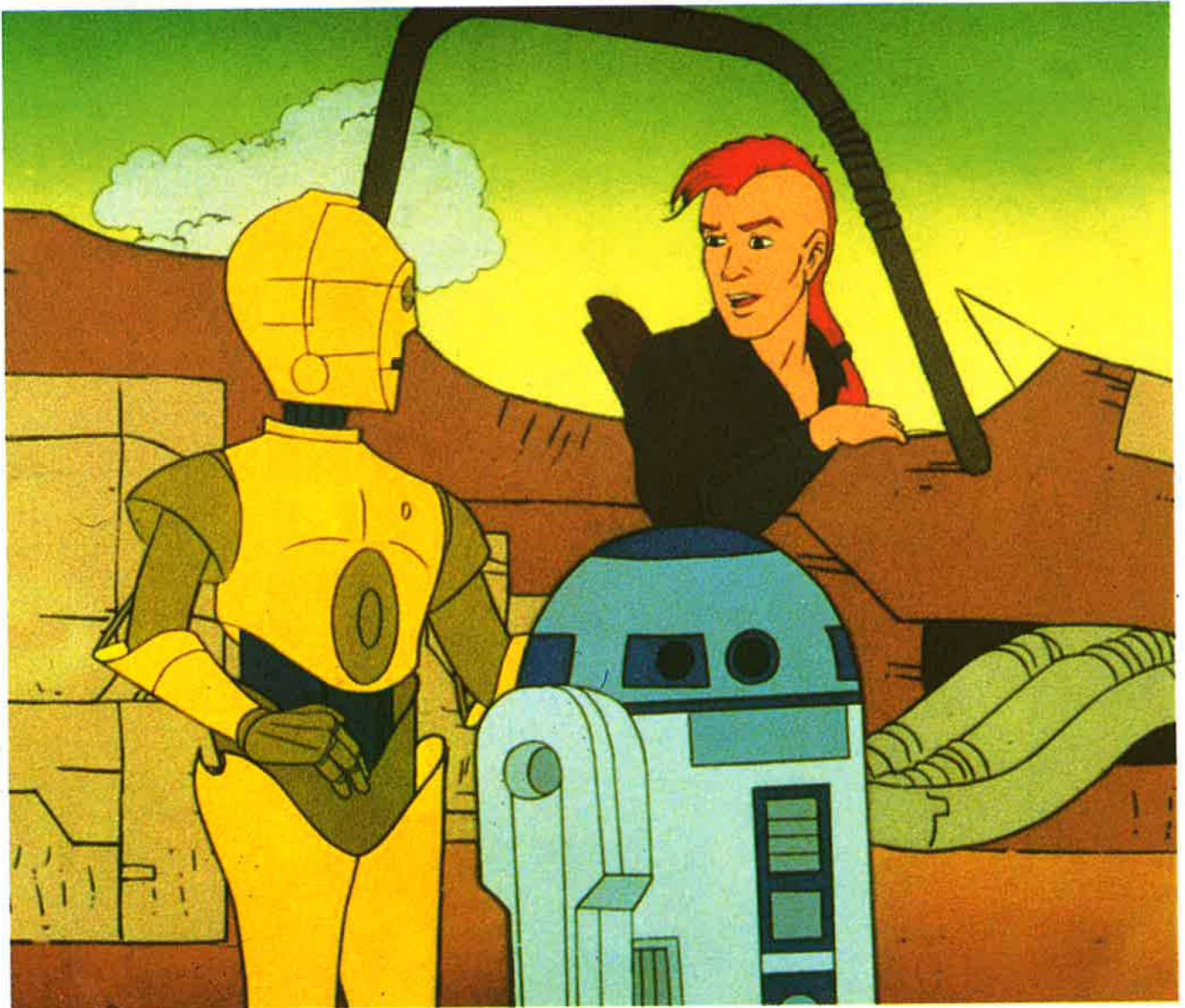
Artoo.

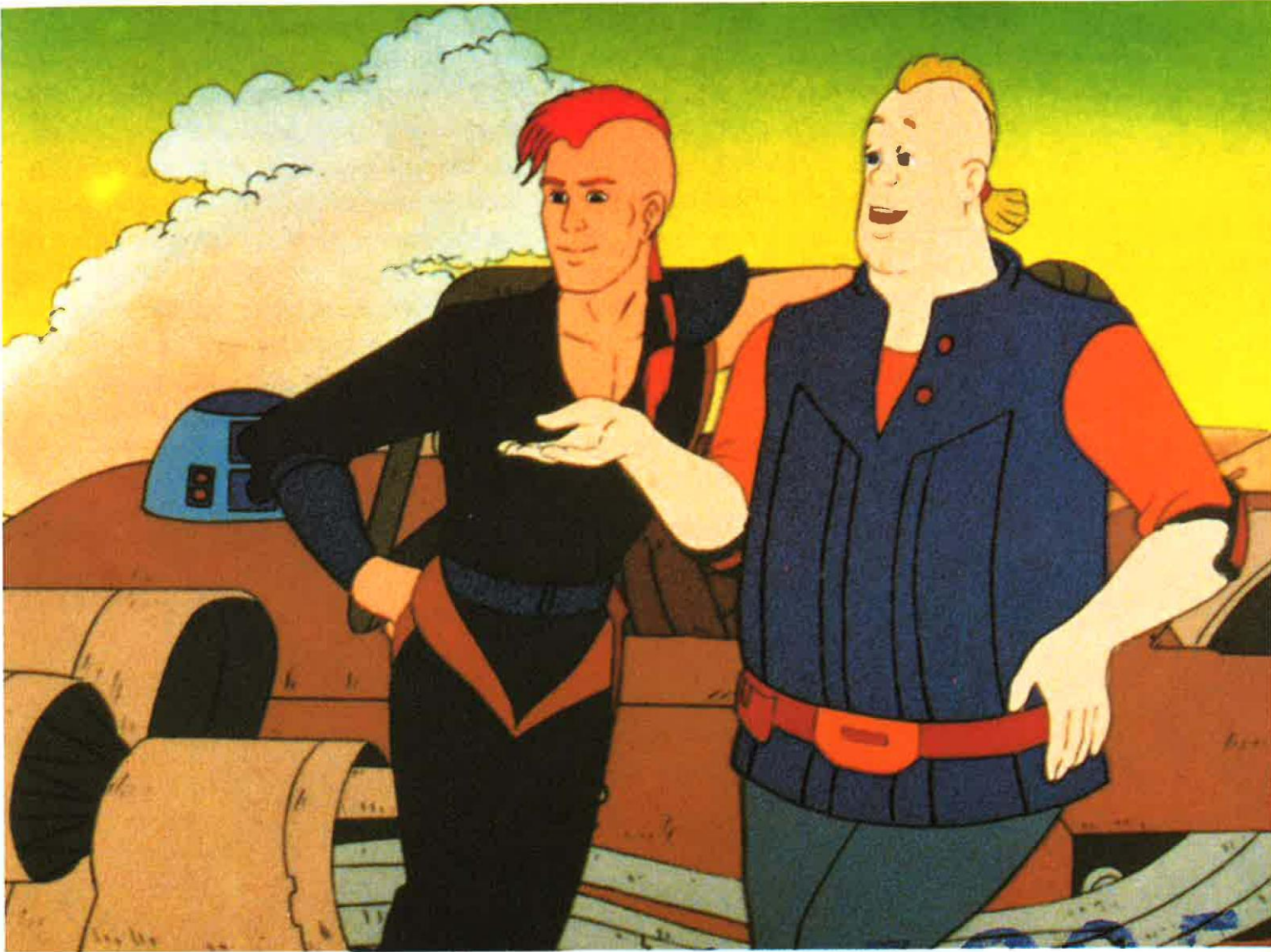
"Hey! An R2 unit!" He exclaimed.

"...I am a very useful and very perceptive being, sir..." Threepio continued, hard-pressed. "What's more, I—"

"Stupendous! I'll take a quick peek at him," the young man said, approaching Artoo.

At that moment, the first speeder that had overshot them returned and pulled up next to the other. A young man, bulkier and stronger than the first, got out and headed for Artoo. Threepio wanted to try





his luck with him, since he hadn't had much success with the first one.

"Ah! Perhaps you, sir, may lend me your attention. First of all, allow me to present myself: I am...."

But he also did not seem to have much interest in listening to Threepio. Just like his friend, he directed all his attention toward Artoo.

"An R2 unit! By all that's astral...! Just what we were looking for."

They engrossed themselves inspecting Artoo. Their observations on the droid's condition mingled with the faltering

speech of Threepio, who endeavored to make himself understood and to convince the youths to take the droids with them.

"What do you think's wrong with him?"

"...I have been programmed to translate..." Threepio could be heard to say.

"I think he has a few corroded circuits, but they aren't destroyed."

"...I can understand and speak millions of languages...!" Threepio continued, still straining to be heard.

"We'll take him to the workshop and

repair him. He can be really useful to us.”

Threepio was growing more and more impatient. The two youths headed toward the speeders with Artoo, and they didn't even deign to look at him. At last, he ended up imploring:

“We urgently need a master!”

“Easy, easy, Threepio,” said the young man with the red crest, finally. “Don't worry. I'm Thall Joben, and this is my friend Jord Dusat. You've already found a master!”

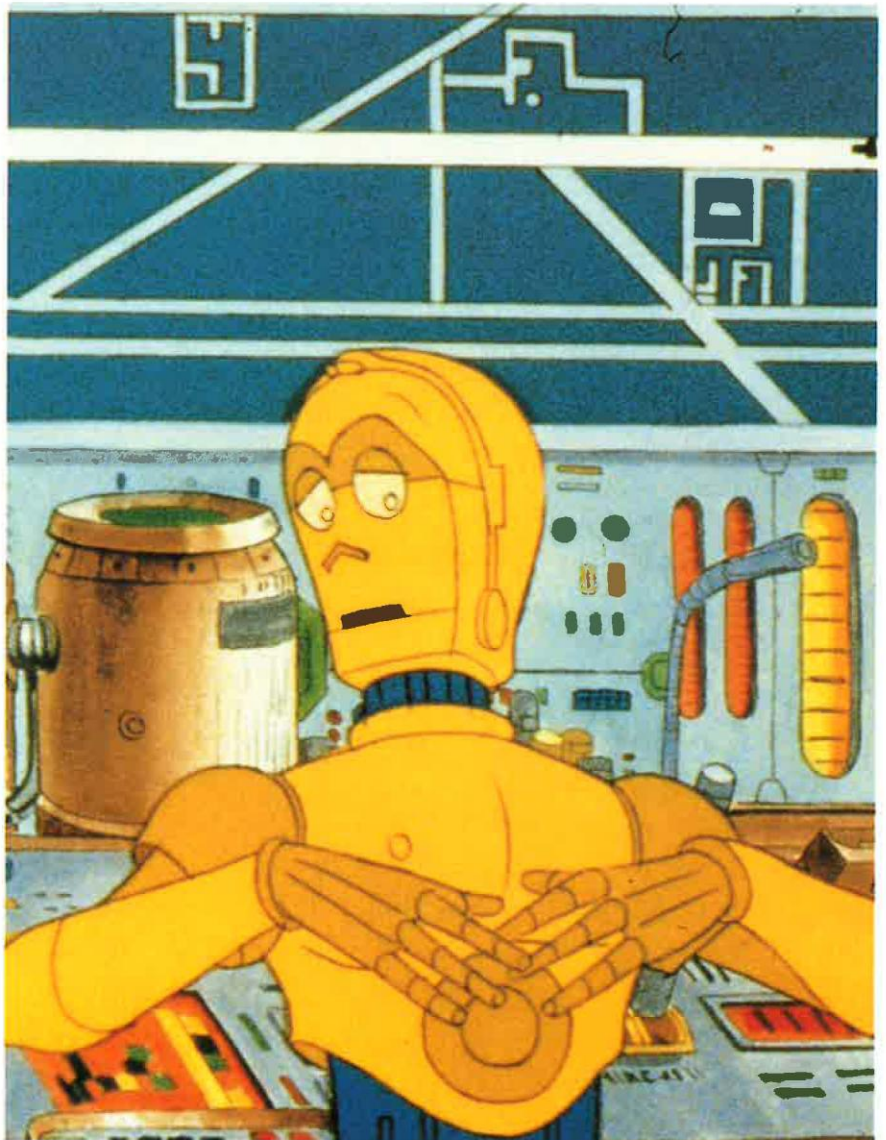
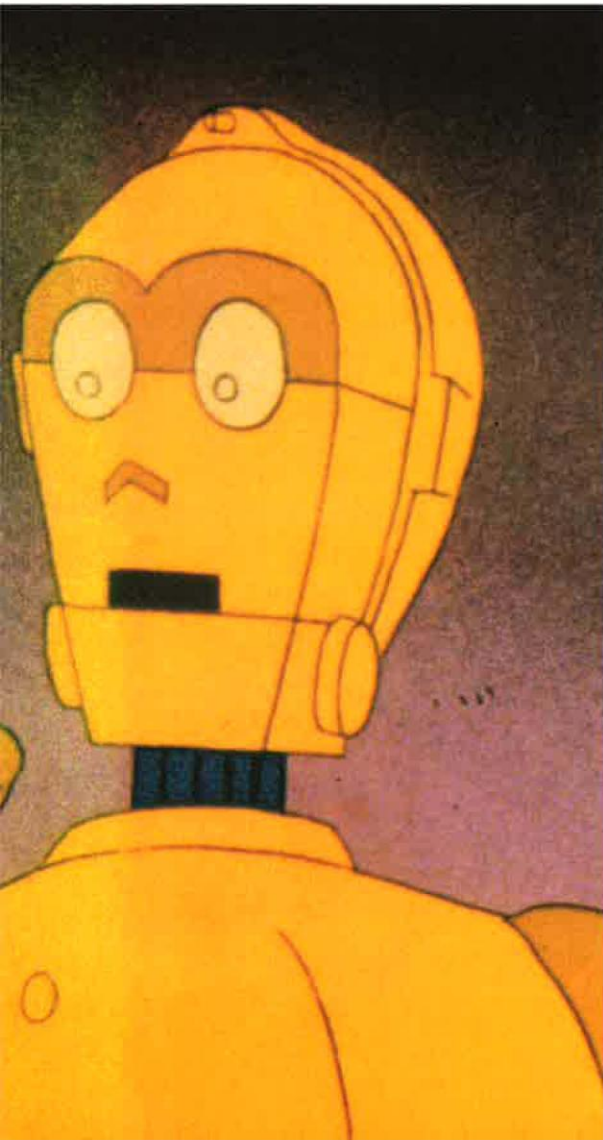
“Two!” Jord said, laughing. “Come, get in. Welcome to the racing team of Thall Joben and Jord Dusat!”

Threepio was thrilled.

“Thank you, thank you very much, sirs!”

In this way, Artoo and Threepio found two new masters. At first glance, they seemed friendly, in Threepio's opinion. The droids would not have to continue traveling through Ingo's salt flats, at risk of being devoured by acids, without anyone looking out for them. *Besides, Threepio said to himself, if they create a racing team, it shouldn't be too dangerous working with the young men. It will be a tranquil life!*

But in recent times, Threepio had



almost never gotten it right in predicting a tranquil life. And apparently, this time he had not gotten it right either: Two spherical objects followed Thall and Jord's speeders, and their intentions did not seem good. Jord warned Thall through the intercom:

"Careful, Thall! They don't look like little balls of sugar, that's for sure!"

The two speeders accelerated to top speed—to Threepio's dread.

"Owoooooohh! Master!"

"Those little remote-controlled balls are coming right at us, Threepio."

"What do you think they are, Master?"

"I'm not going to stay here to find out!" Thall answered, hitting the vehicle's accelerator so hard that Threepio was tossed, rolling onto the floor

"This vehicle doesn't seem very comfortable. Ahhhhh!" Threepio protested.

Thall continued accelerating, and Threepio ended up flying out of the speeder.

"Threepio!" Thall yelled. But he could not slow down: The projectiles were accelerating too, and any distraction could mean ruin. He connected to the intercom and said to Jord: "Jord! Let's give 'em





some precious curls!”

“Good idea, Thall! Now they’re gonna get it!”

Indeed, the two speeders crisscrossed several times until, on one of the passes, the two spherical projectiles crashed into one another. The explosion was like the howl of a thousand demons.

“We did it, Jord!”

From the ground, Threepio had seen everything. And now he also saw a Guardian Droid coming toward him and devoid of good intentions.

“Master! I’m over here! Come get me!” Threepio shouted. But they were still too far away. Threepio would have to fend for himself.

He picked up a big rock and threatened the Guardian Droid:

“Don’t come near! Don’t take another step!”

Logically, the Guardian Droid was not programmed to obey Threepio, nor to back down before a mere rock, however large it might be.

Nevertheless, other people had been

watching what was happening without any of our friends realizing it. From up on a hill not too far away, a mysterious figure had observed the entire scene through binoculars. Upon seeing the situation Threepio found himself in, this stranger adjusted the sight of the light artillery weapon she carried affixed to her body, pointed at the Guardian Droid and fired true ... just as Threepio also hurled his rock at the attacker. The rock and the missile both hit the mark at the same time, disintegrating the droid with a violent clamor.

“Oh, dear God! I alone did that?” Threepio could not shake his sense of surprise. Yet he was proud of having defended himself all *by himself*, and he added, “Well, we had better flee from here. This droid’s master cannot be very far away. Master Thall, over here!”

Thall and Jord were already approaching in their vehicles.

“What an arm, Threepio! You pulverized him!” Jord admired.

“Oh, it was nothing! But if you want to know my opinion, here goes: Someone is determined so as not to be disturbed. First



the spherical projectiles, now this Guardian Droid....”

“Then let’s get out of here,” said Thall.

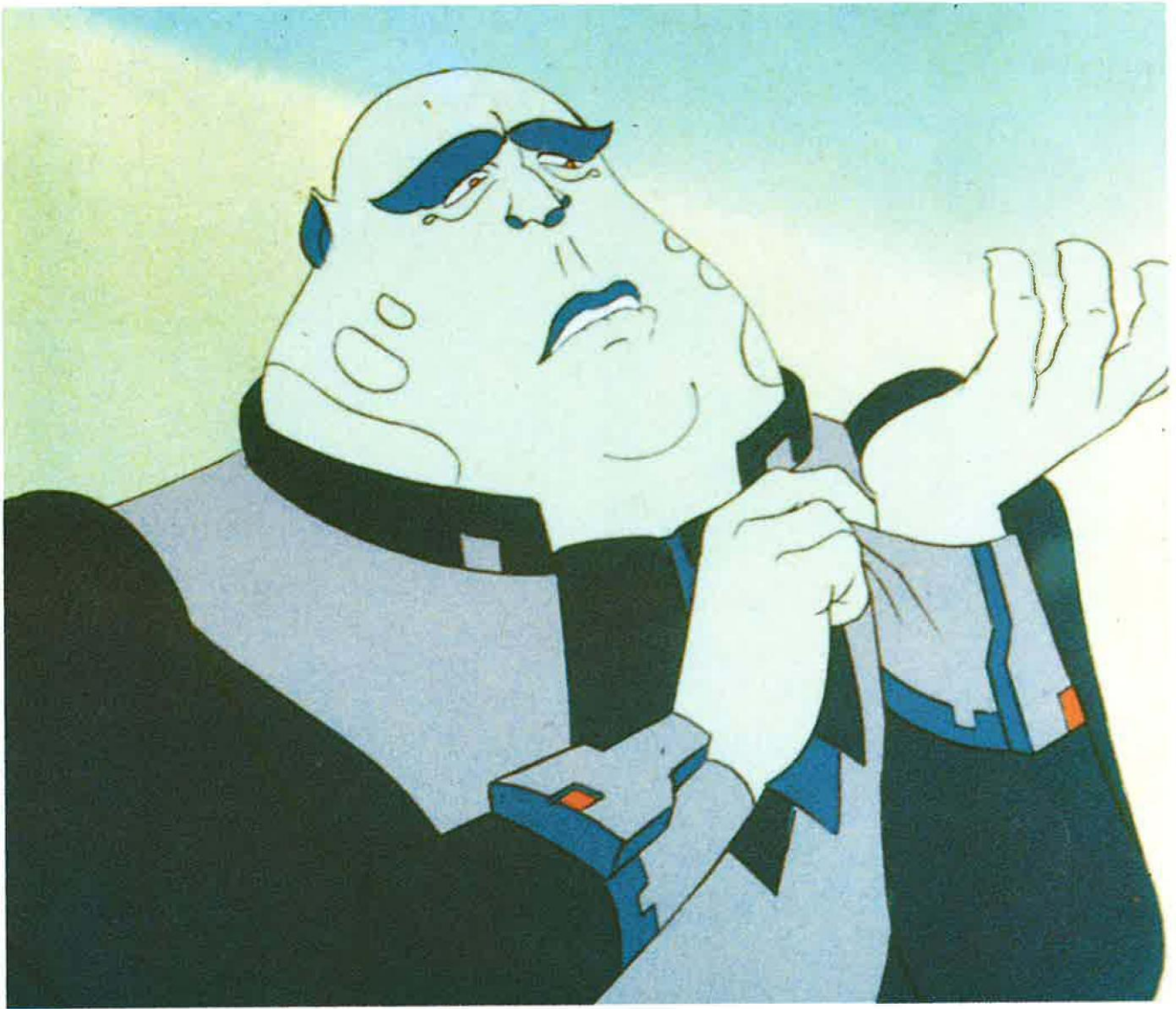
“That seems to me an excellent and prudent idea, Master.”

Indeed, someone did want no one entering that zone, that no one should learn what was being readied there. The mysterious figure that *helped* Threepio eliminate the Guardian Droid had not been the only one to observe the scene, including the destruction of the projectiles and the droid.

Tig Fromm and his bodyguard-caretaker Vlix came from the nearby planet Annoo. They were androids half-human and half-reptiloid in appearance, with pointed eyes, large squashed noses and faces covered in large spots of different colors. Tig’s father had Vlix always watching over him, acting as his guardian, bodyguard, protector, babysitter.... Vlix admired Sise Fromm and considered Tig an inexperienced kid not really sure of what he wanted.

But what Vlix most worried about was





his wardrobe. He was very dapper. His clothing was always impeccable, and he boasted of being the most elegant android.

"They've escaped, Tiny," Vlix mocked.

"Don't call me 'Tiny!'"

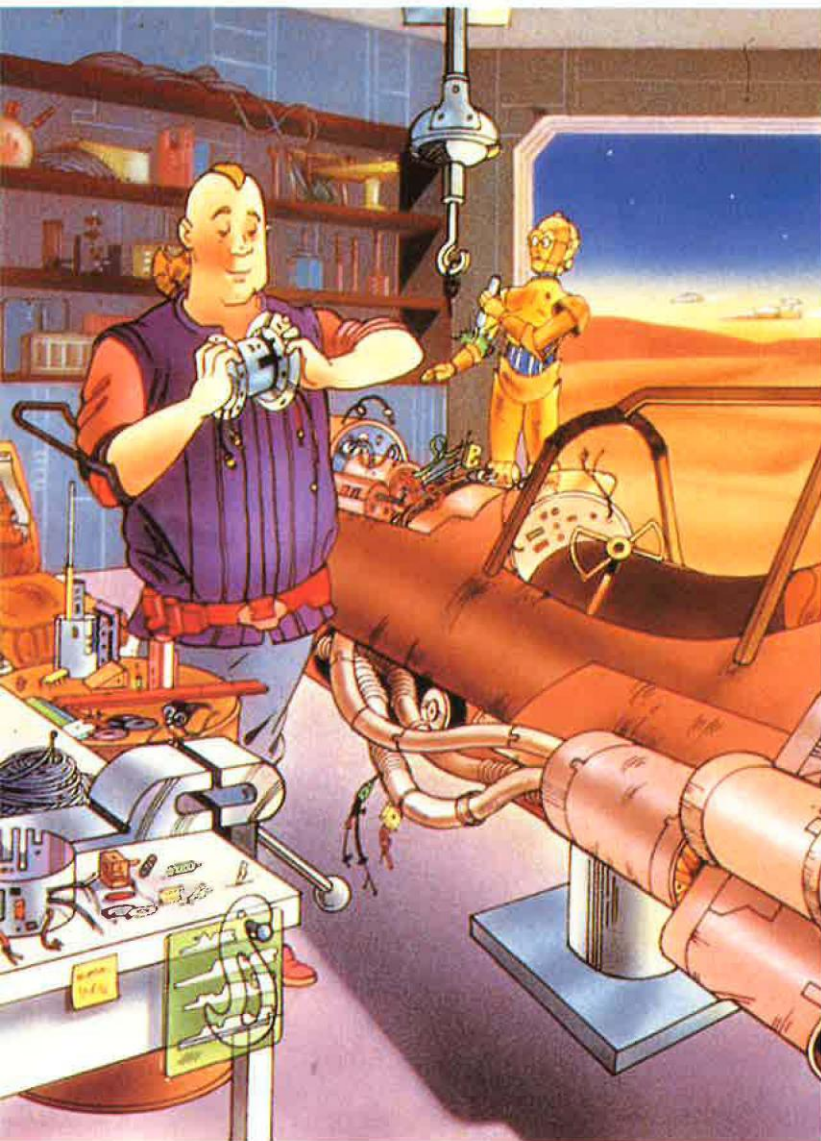
"You prefer I call your father and communicate to him that the plan failed?"

"There's no need for my father to know anything. The plan continues as envisaged. As soon as the *Trigon* is finished, none shall be able to vanquish it."

"But if those two young racers should say something about our new secret base," Vlix said, "the rest of the gangs might try—"

"The other gangs won't know anything until we pounce on them! I'll deal with those two characters."

So, the incident that had put Thall, Jord and the droids in harm's way seemed to have had many spectators. Our friends had no idea about what was being planned within, but the fact they had been in that zone had agitated Tig Fromm terribly.



And the mysterious observer that had saved Threepio from the Guardian Droid's attack? Who had that been?

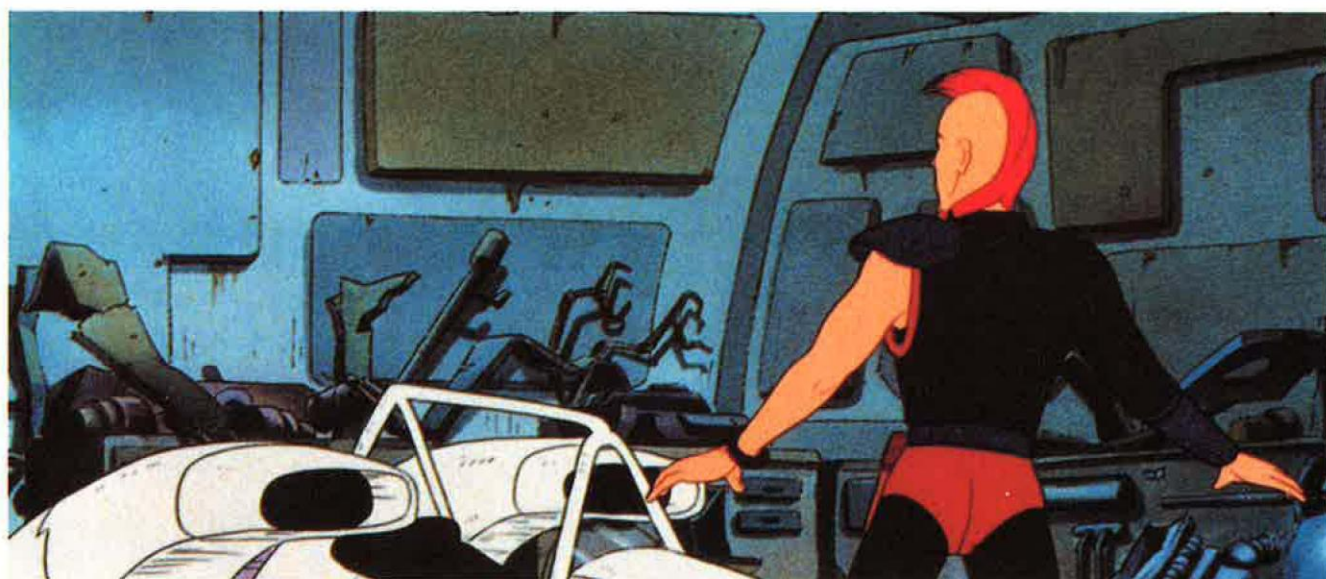
They would soon find out. Thall and Jord had a small repair shop, allowing them to satisfy their chief passion: the races. They had built an ultra-fast speeder (christening it the *White Witch*) that they intended to enter in the next interplanetary race. They were both sure they would win, because the *White Witch* had proved without rival when it came to speed.

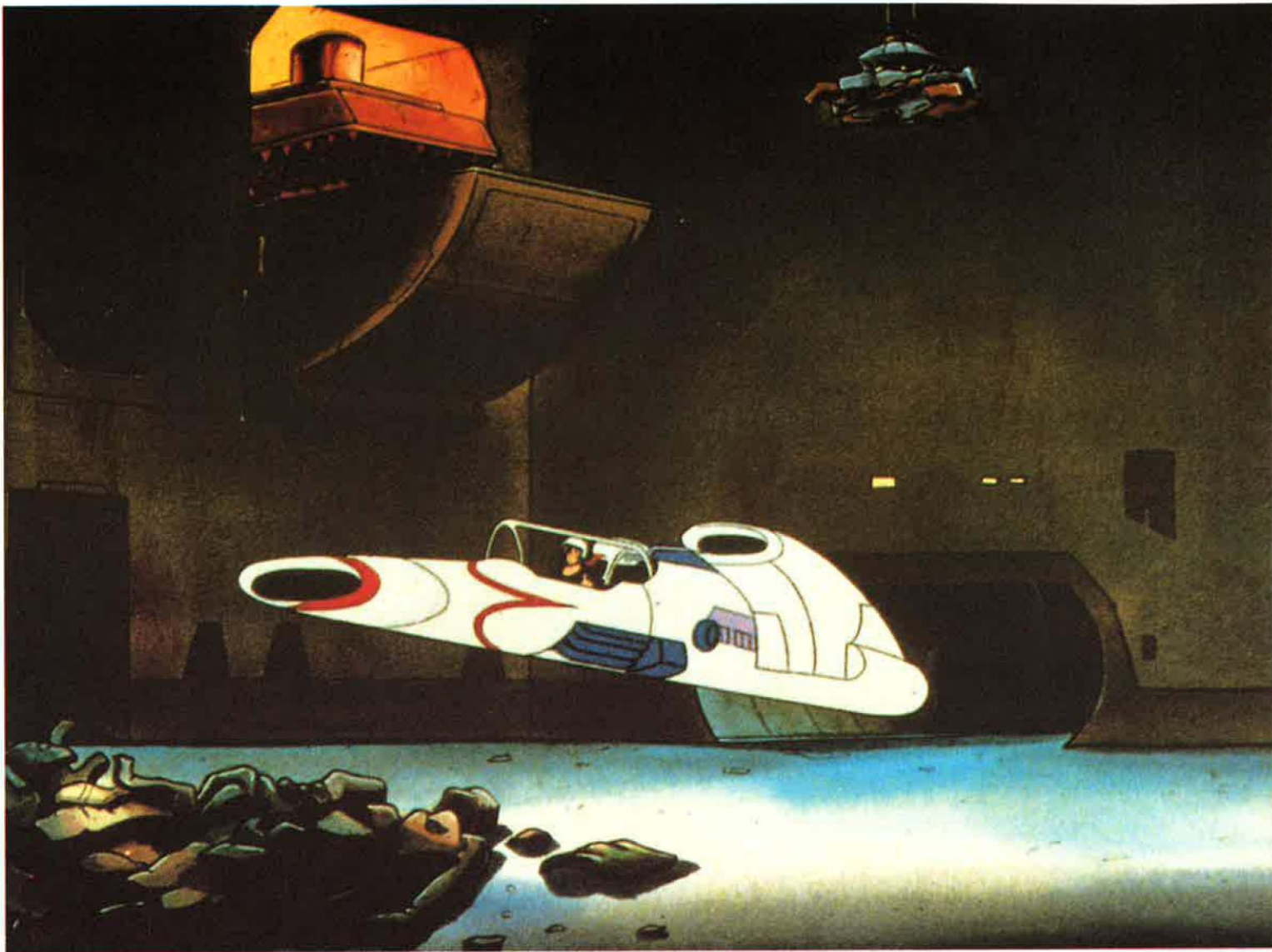
They were both proud of their speeder. Upon arriving at their workshop, they showed her to the droids.

"Threepio, Artoo: I present to you the *White Witch*," said Jord. "Thall has spent over three years building her."

"Come off it, Jord. The two of us built her together."

"You've been the brains. I only helped with the mechanical work ... and the test speeds! We're going to win the race, for sure!"





“Sure,” Thall said, “but first we have to get her off this planet and take her to the site of the competition.”

“Don’t worry, Thall. We’re a complete racing team now. Right, Threepio? What do you say, Artoo?”

“Biiiiiip ... prapt ... bip.”

“Artoo and I are very happy to belong to your racing team,” said Threepio, speaking for them both.

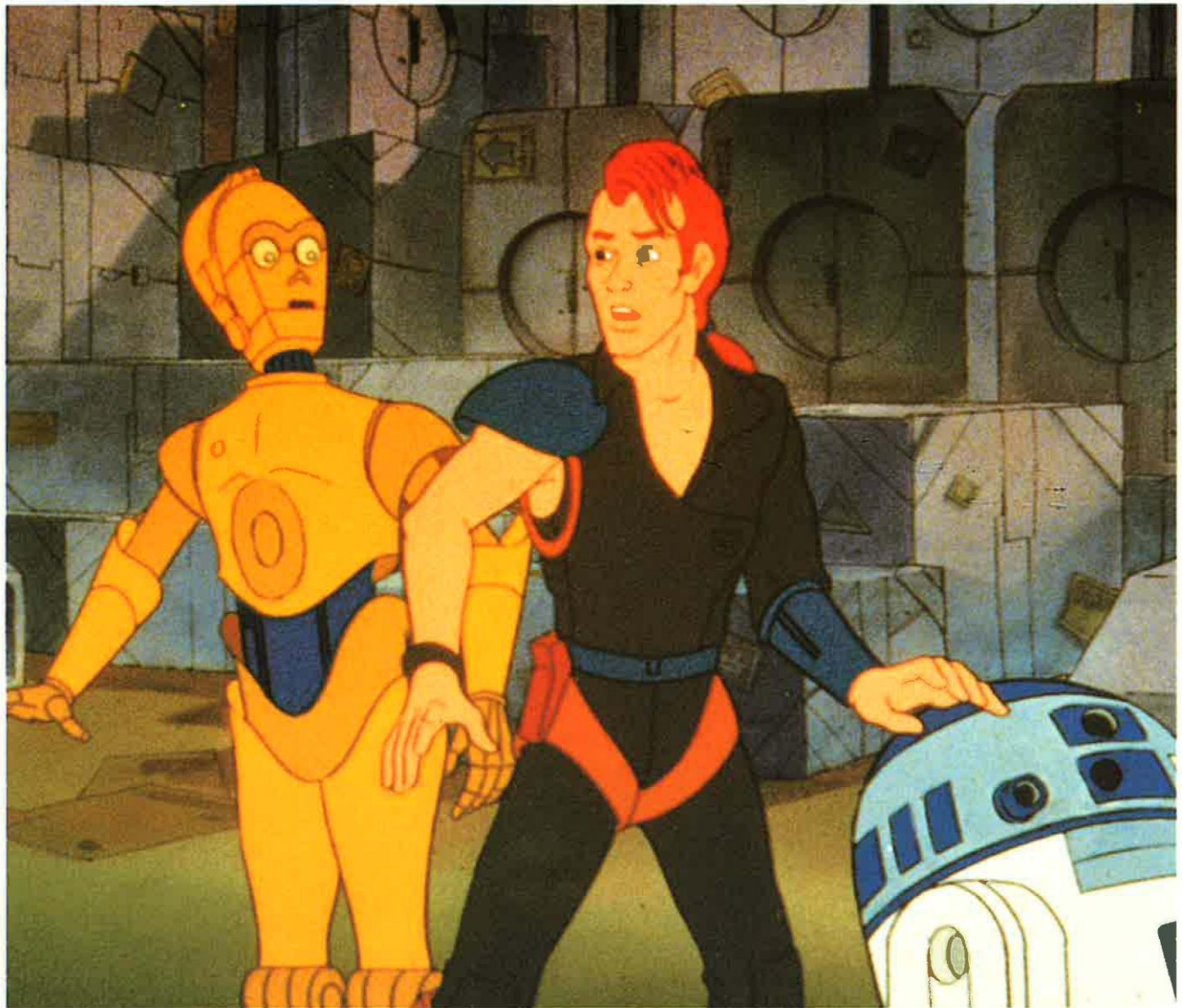
However, it was not going to be so easy. That night, Thall and Jord had agreed to meet in the city to finalize their plan for the race. Jord was the last one in

the workshop and, upon leaving, found his path blocked.

“Huh? What’s this?”

Two enormous Muscle Droids headed right for him. There was no escape for Jord. They grabbed him and disappeared.

There was someone who always seemed to be everywhere: Threepio’s mysterious “accomplice” from up on the hill had hidden in the workshop and witnessed Jord’s abduction. While unable to do anything to stop the droids, this secretive associate had at least been able to make out that they were droids in the



service of the Fromm gang, just like the ones that had attacked in the salt flats.

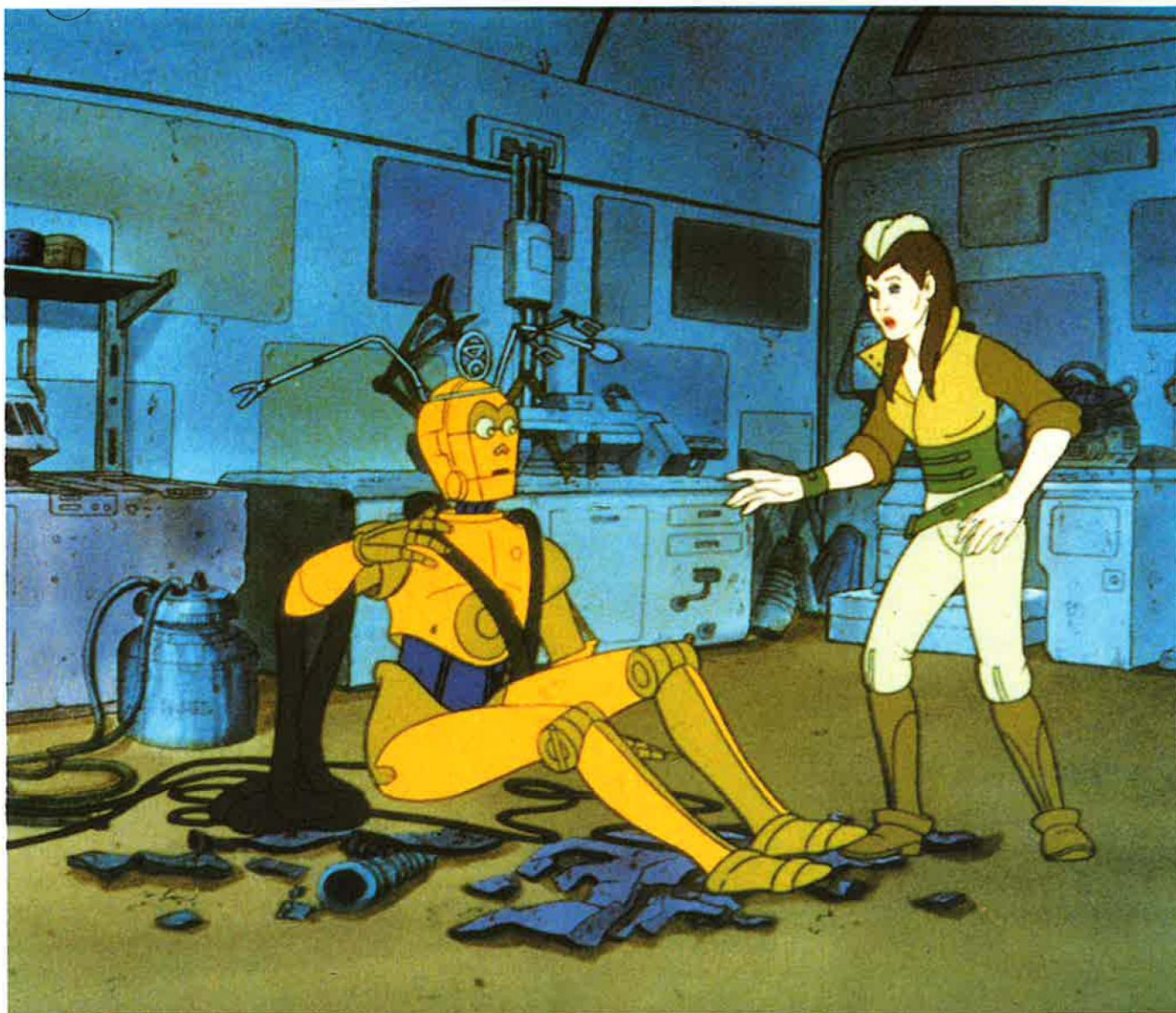
Thall, along with Threepio and Artoo, headed for the rendezvous with Jord. Threepio noticed they were being followed.

"Master, Artoo's sensors indicate that they're monitoring us."

"We have to find Jord! Let's get to the workshop."

The workshop was silent and empty. The only sound that could be heard was the one Threepio made falling into a scrap





pile. When Thall turned the light on, he called out:

“Jord! Are you here?”

“You’re too late,” someone answered him.

“What? Who are you?” asked Thall. “What are you doing here?”

“My name is Kea Moll,” the young woman said while calmly making her way to help Threepio, who was entangled in cables and wires. “My starship had a breakdown, and I landed in the salt flats. I had engine troubles and needed help. I



saw you guys running speed tests and came to see if you can help me.”

“Thank you very much. You’re very kind,” Threepio interrupted when Kea Moll extracted him from that mess of cables he had gotten himself into.

“Then I saw,” Kea Moll continued, “that you guys had your own troubles—and a lot more serious than mine.”

Thall regarded Kea Moll, all his suspicions about her now cast aside. She seemed to want to help them.

“RIIIIIIII!”

“Master! Artoo’s sensors have

detected noises outside!” Threepio warned.

“It’s them again!” Kea Moll exclaimed.

“Them? Quick, to one of the speeders!” Thall ordered.

He attempted to start the engine but something was not working. Two droids approached menacingly.

“Start already! Let’s go!” Thall said, growing impatient.

“Sabotage!” Threepio shouted. “They’ve dismantled the engine so we won’t be able to escape. Do something,

Artoo!”

“Come on, Artoo!” Kea Moll said.

The two menacing droids were about to capture Thall, but at that moment Kea Moll and Artoo came back with the *White Witch*.

“Run, Thall!” Kea Moll yelled.

Thall and Threepio hurled themselves at the *White Witch*, and the four of them escaped from the droids just in the nick of time.

Tig Fromm had failed again! At least in part. He had captured Jord, but Thall had gotten away from him. Vlix did little

more than laugh at Tiggy Fromm.

“Ha, ha, ha! It looks like your droids aren’t very effective.”

“Don’t laugh! Something must have happened to them.”

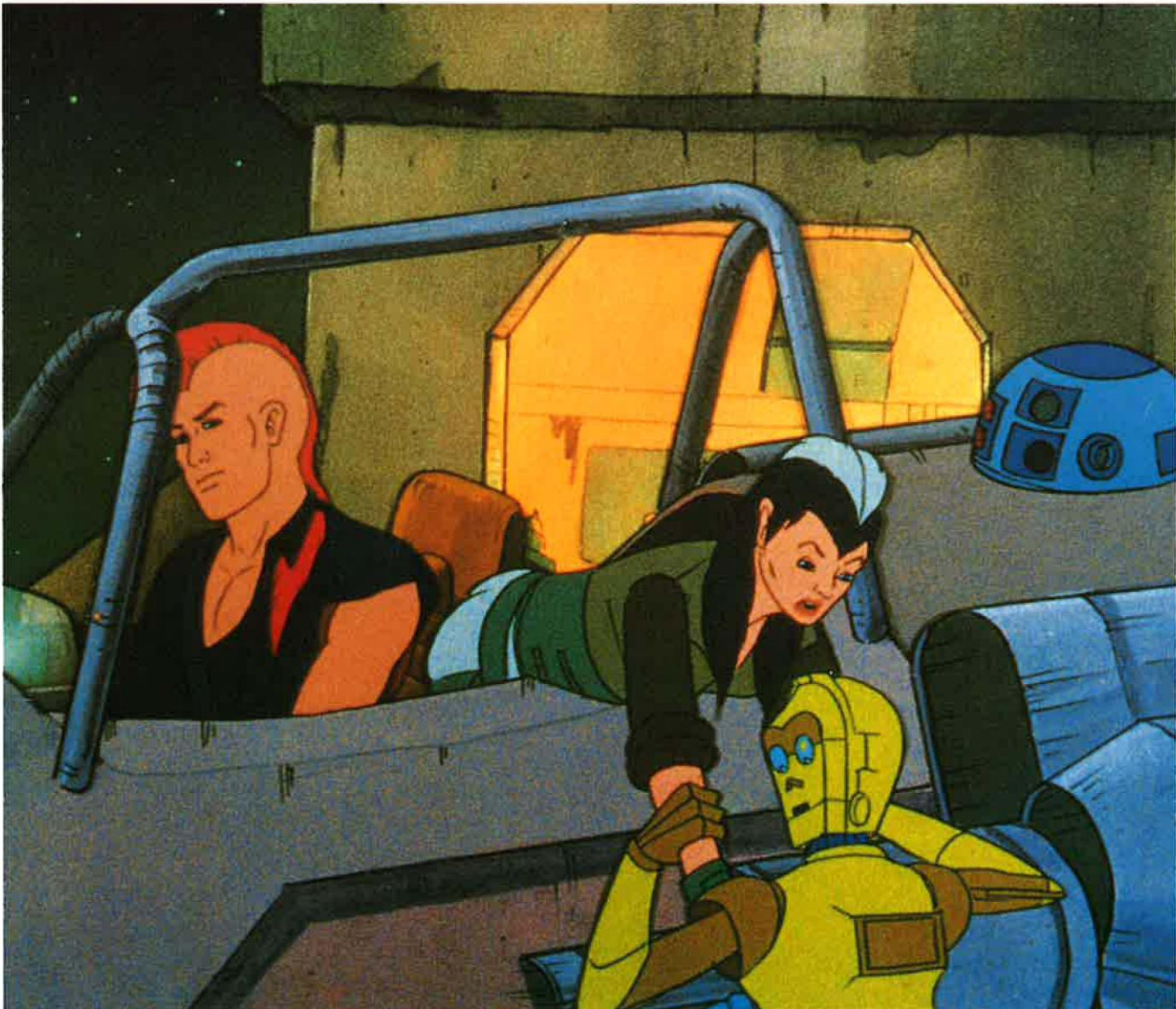
“Want me to tell your father, Tiny?” Vlix mocked him.

“Leave my father be! And don’t call me ‘Tiny!’”

“Your father Sise would have handled this differently: He wouldn’t have failed.”

“I have my own way of doing things! I don’t need your advice.”

“But if the other gangs find out....”



Vlix hinted.

"There's no reason they'll find out what we're up to at our secret base."

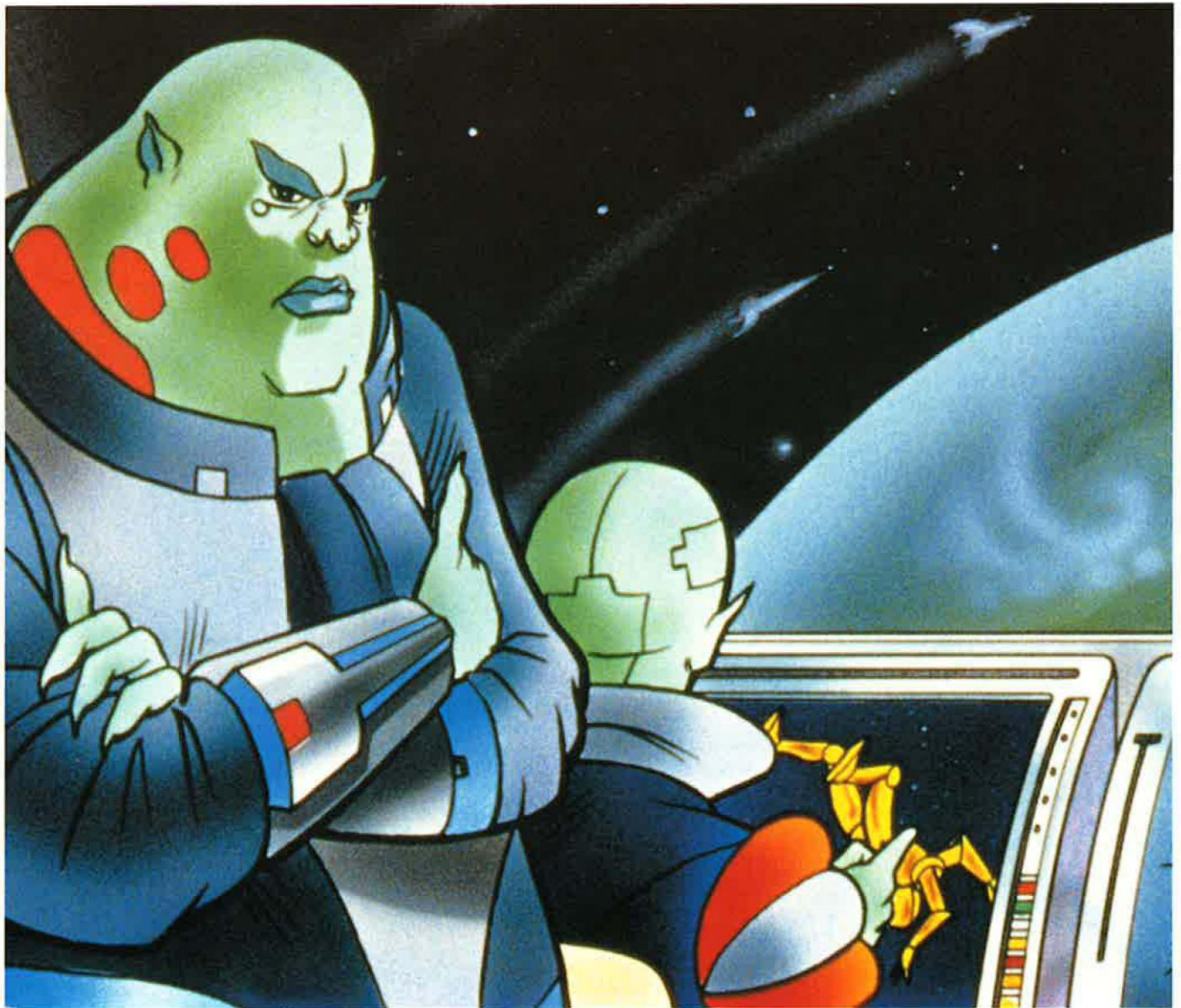
"If the other gangs find out," Vlix continued, ignoring him, "we'll all come to a bad end. And your father won't like it."

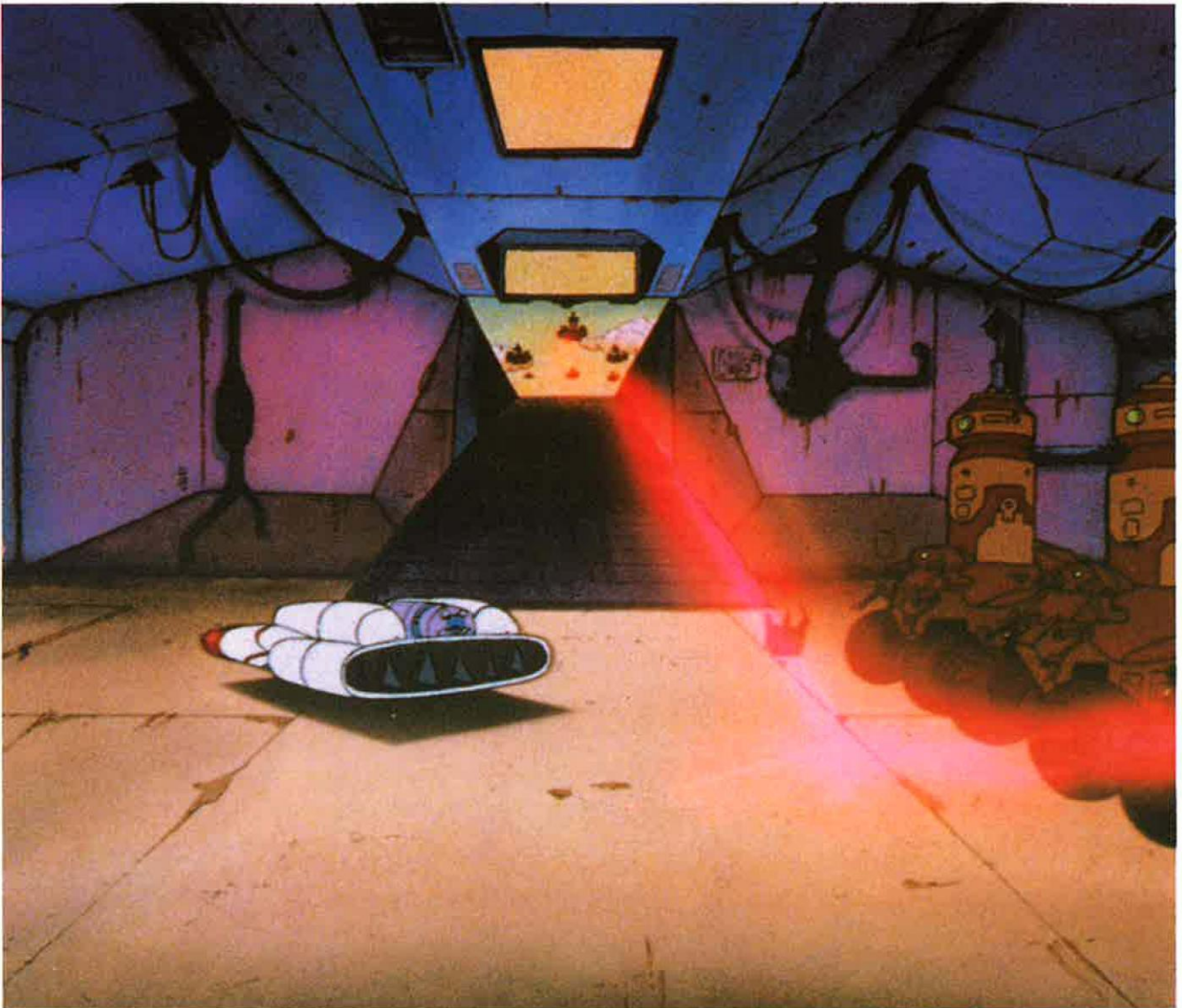
Kea Moll knew of the secret base's existence, even though she knew nothing of the *Trigon*. But nothing good could be expected with the Fromms involved. She surmised that Jord was locked up inside the base and therefore guided Thall and the *White Witch* toward the entrance.

"This is Tig Fromm's secret base. They most likely brought Jord here," Kea said.

"If that's true, Artoo will locate him with his sensors."

Artoo managed to infiltrate the base and searched for Jord, blending in with the confusion of maintenance droids. Thall had the intercoms connected in order to receive his signals. Artoo successfully activated the command codes to open the doors. Thall, Kea and Threepio entered, but the guardhouse sounded the alarm.





It was already too late: The *White Witch* had slipped into the base, settling at the bottom of the crater within which the base had been constructed.

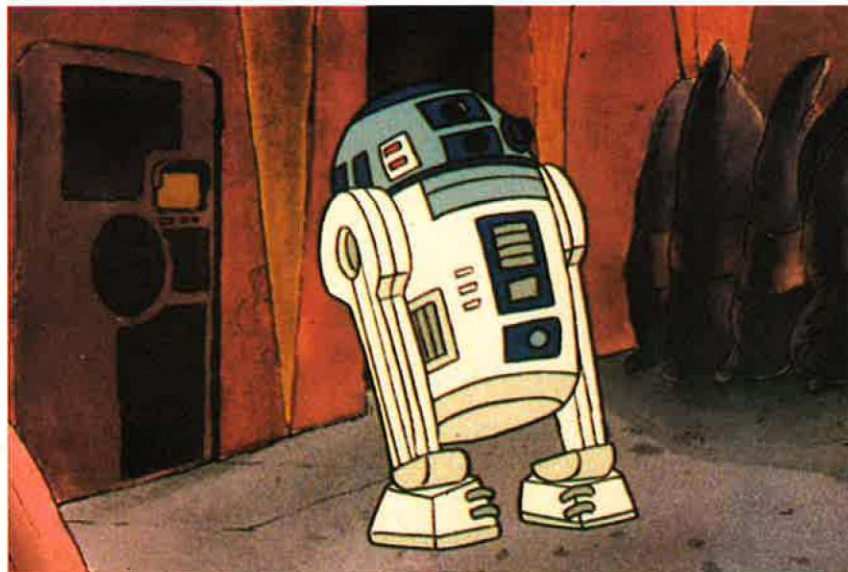
Thall, Kea and Threepio ran and hid themselves before the Guardian Droids could arrive. Loyal little Artoo was waiting for them.

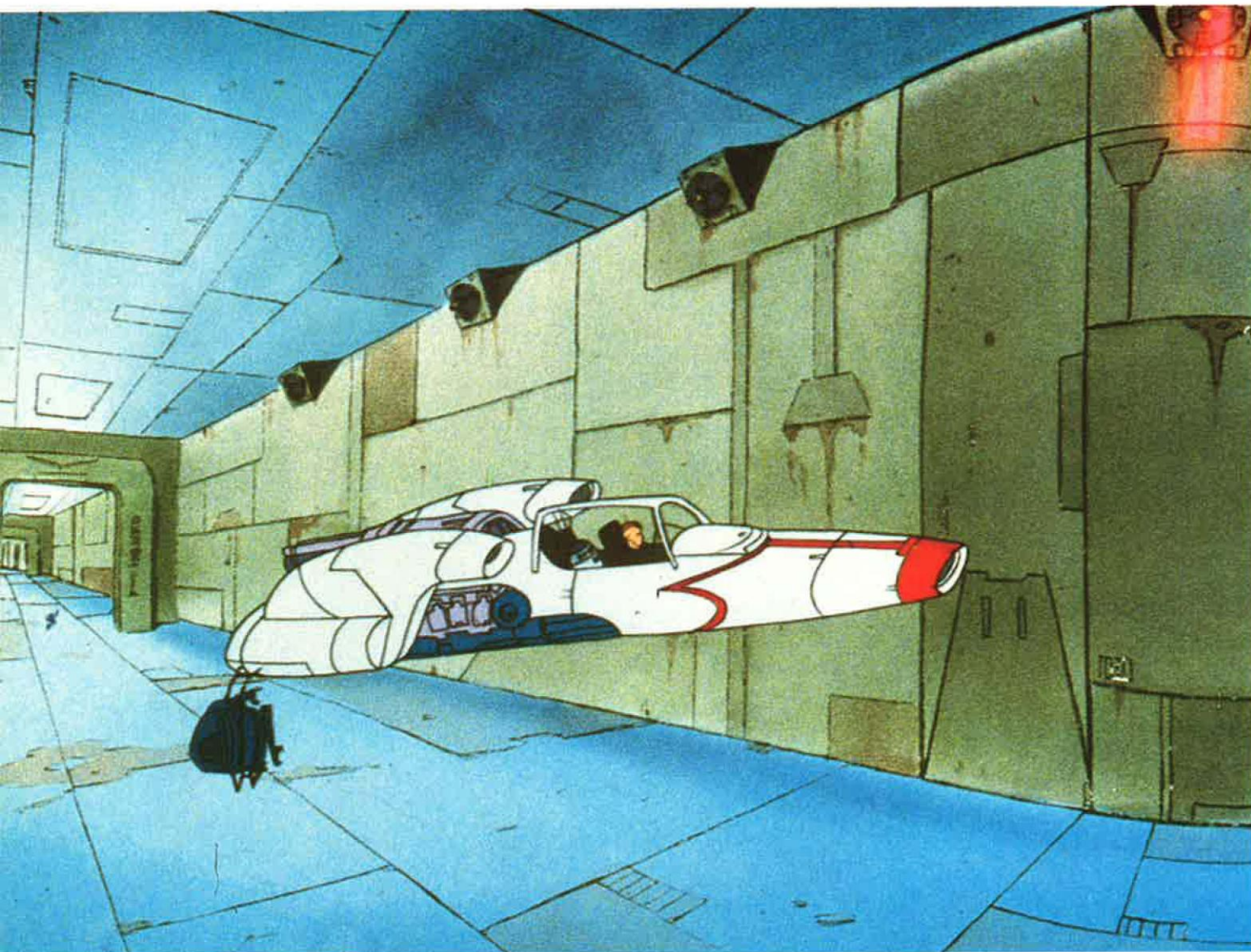
“So we can reach the service tunnels through here,” Thall said.

Artoo gave an affirmative whistle.

“Good job, Artoo!”

They continued on with caution until arriving at a control monitor. In it, Kea





could make out what looked like a detention area—where Jord should be.

“Threepio,” Thall asked, “what are the chances of me entering through the tunnels with the *White Witch*, getting to Jord, and coming back with him without them discovering or catching me?”

“Exactly 750,000 to 1.”

“Not bad. It could be worse,” Thall joked.

“You think?” Kea said, worried.

But Thall was already heading for the *White Witch* to attempt what, by any

reckoning, seemed an act of madness. From the control room, Kea and Threepio would do their best to remove obstacles and open access hatches to the various levels of tunnels.

Meanwhile, Jord was being interrogated by Vlix and Tig Fromm. Jord’s humor was exasperating them.

“That’s a really nice suit!” He mocked Vlix.

“Sit down and shut up!” Vlix ordered.

“So you’re Sise Fromm’s son.... Your father’s very famous. I’ve heard a lot

about him," Jord went on.

"My father is very old. I am the future, the one who will take charge of everything very soon."

"I see that you're interested in cybernetics," said Jord.

"Not me," Vlix said dryly.

"Technology is the future, the key to the Fromms' power. The old and gory ways are typical of my father."

"Yeah, I know: kidnapping, extortion, theft.... Is everything they say true?"

"Watch what you say, Jord!" Tig

warned while pushing a button. Immediately, a spring gave way to a jointed hand that struck Jord and knocked him to the floor.

"Don't laugh at me!" Tig continued. "I am ambitious ... and dangerous."

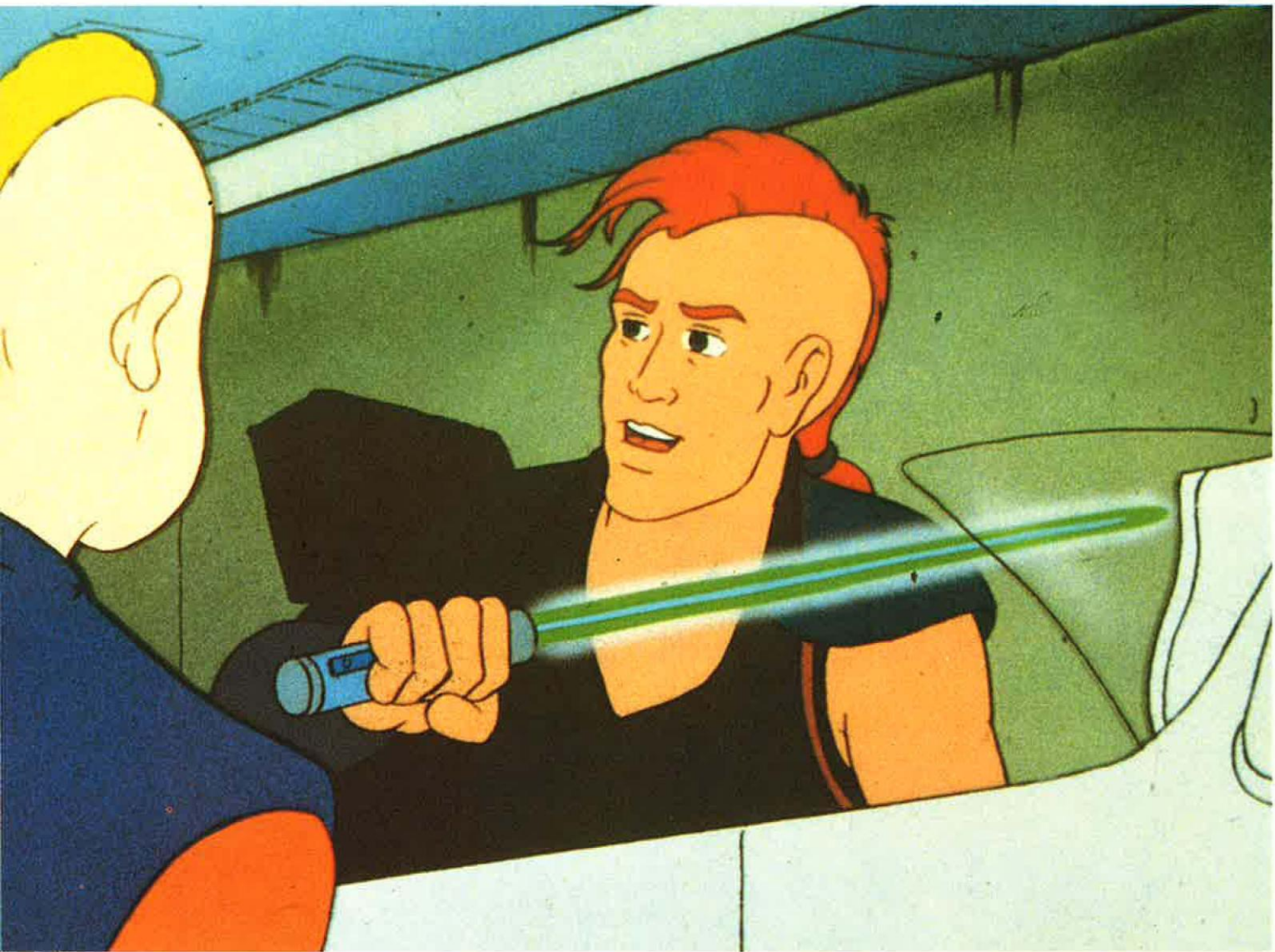
"I was only trying to be friendly," Jord said, sitting up again.

"The only thing I want is for you to keep silent."

"Silent? But I don't know anything about anything."

"Needless to say, you know very little.





But in the hands of Arnat, Jabba or the other gang chiefs, the little you do know would wreak havoc on my plans.”

“That sounds like you want to pull a hit on all those others guys,” Jord said playfully.

“Whaaaaat??”

Tig Fromm turned to Vlix. His eyes looked accusingly at the elegant android. Vlix lost his composure and began excusing himself:

“I didn’t say anything!”

“It was only a joke!” Jord defended himself.

“I don’t like your jokes. Now we have no choice but to—”

“You want me to rearrange his molecules?” suggested Vlix, hoping to make his master’s suspicions disappear.

“That’s not necessary. We’ll send him to my father on Annoo. He’ll know very well what to do with him.”

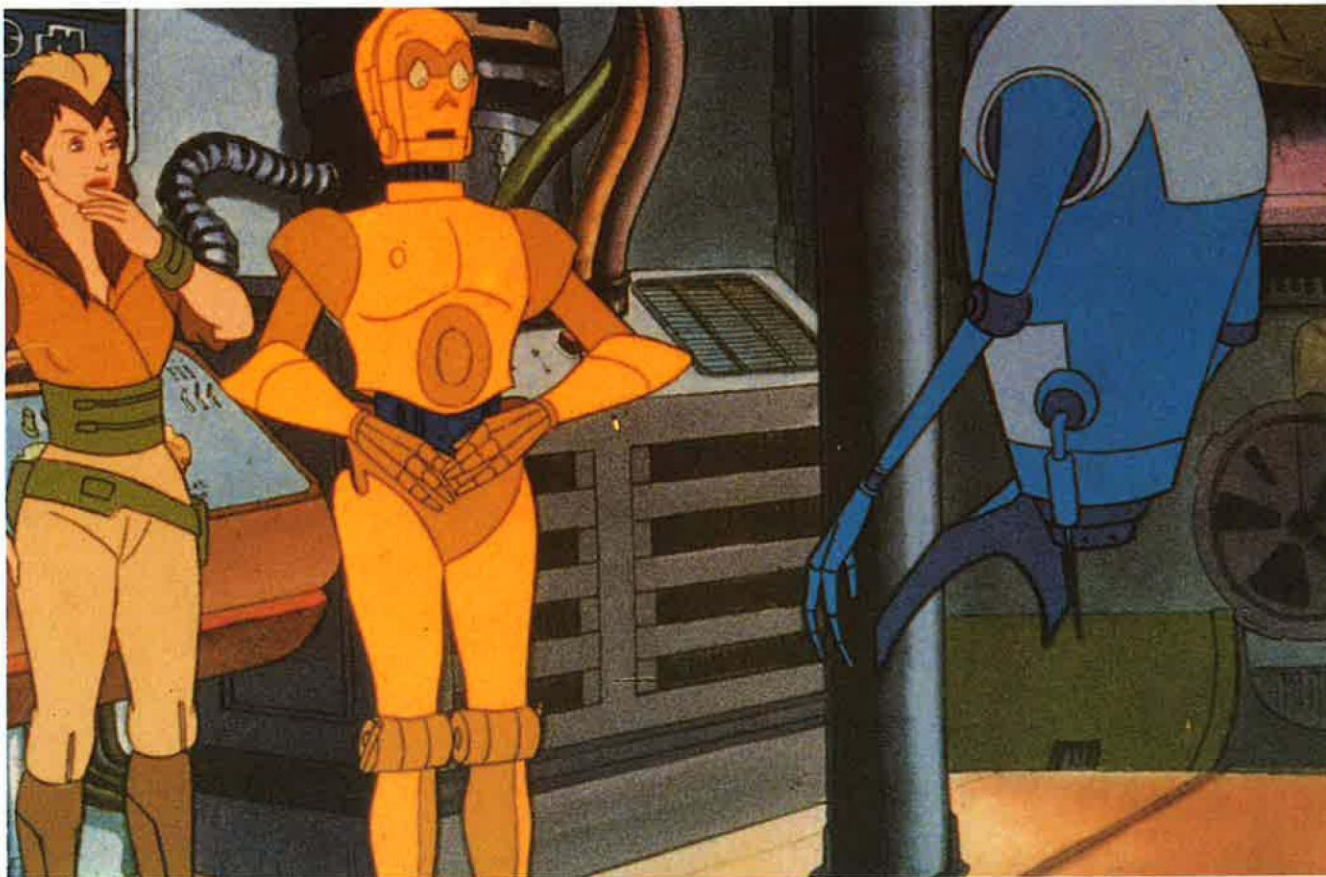
Vlix and Tig looked at one another. They both knew that there was no worse punishment for anyone than to be turned over to Sise Fromm. His bloodthirsty ways were known only too well throughout the galactic sector.

Vlix remembered the case of Sonko, who had been Sise Fromm's right-hand man for so many years. Sise entrusted him with a job: to steal a space transport hauling 50 metric tons of keschel grains. Sonko prepared the boarding of the transport with utmost care. He used a trick of calling for assistance, pretending that his ship's engines had broken down.

The space transport came near to lend aid and was assaulted and robbed. Sonko eliminated all the crew members, but he did not notice that the ship's computer was recording everything happening within its interior via video cameras.

The space carrier, once despoiled of its valuable merchandise, was abandoned in the cold and darkness of deep space.

Thanks to that detail, the space





authorities were able to identify and detain the cruel Sonko. Learning the fate of his right-hand man, Sise Fromm organized an assault on the prison of the planet Umax, where Sonko was held, managing to rescue him. And once in his power, Sise locked him up in the deepest dungeons of his palace on Annoo, where no one has seen Sonko again, though his moans can still be heard.

Casting aside these morbid thoughts, Vlix addressed Jord with his most menacing tone of voice.

"You can save yourself from the worst

if you help us find your friend Thall."

"You think that we're all like you. I'll never betray Thall!" Jord responded, tilting his head in proud defiance.

"I warn you, my droids are capable of making even the most stubborn fools talk," Tig said. "Better that you take advantage of the opportunity we're giving you."

A noise drawing near interrupted Tig. Suddenly it became a roar.

At that precise moment, the *White Witch* was coming closer. From the control monitor, Kea Moll and Threepio

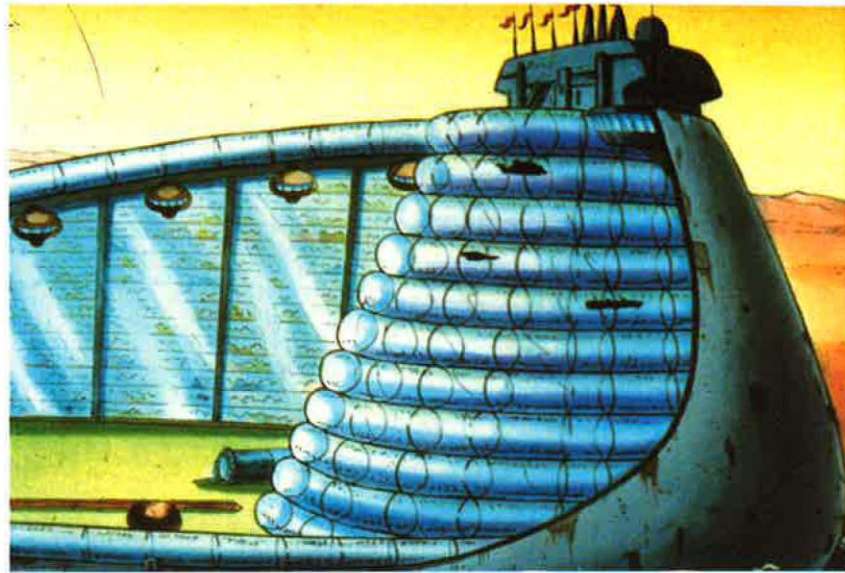
had succeeded—for the moment—in freeing Thall and Artoo's path of obstacles. But the greater difficulty remained: freeing Jord and escaping the crater.

The *White Witch* knocked down the door and entered the room where Jord was being kept.

"Hey, boys!" Jord greeted. "I knew you would come looking for me."

"Are you alright, Jord?"

But Vlix and Tig took the opportunity to flee and take refuge in another area from which they sounded the alarm.



“Attention all units! Attention all units!”

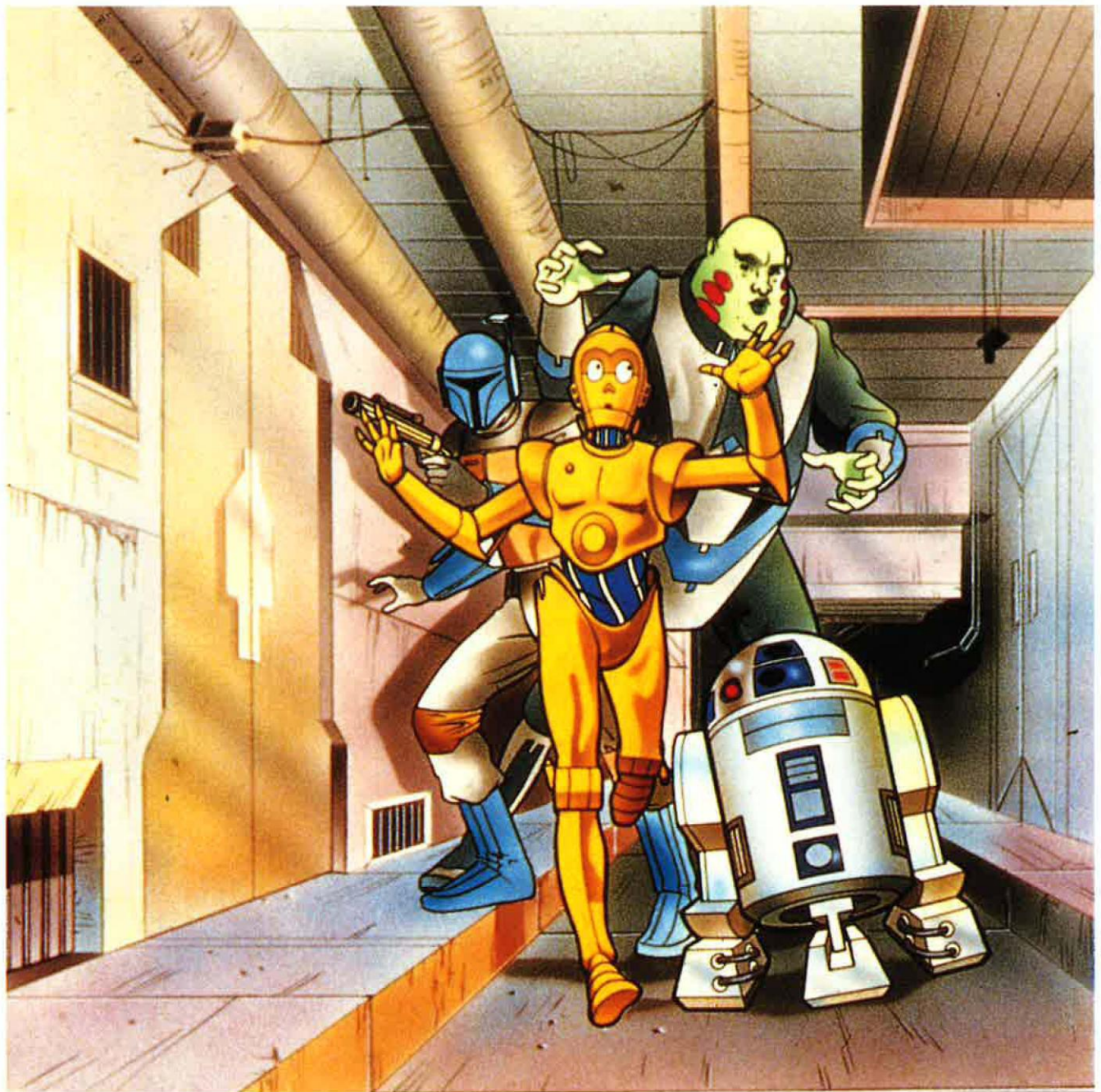
“Activate combat droids! Alert! Alert!”

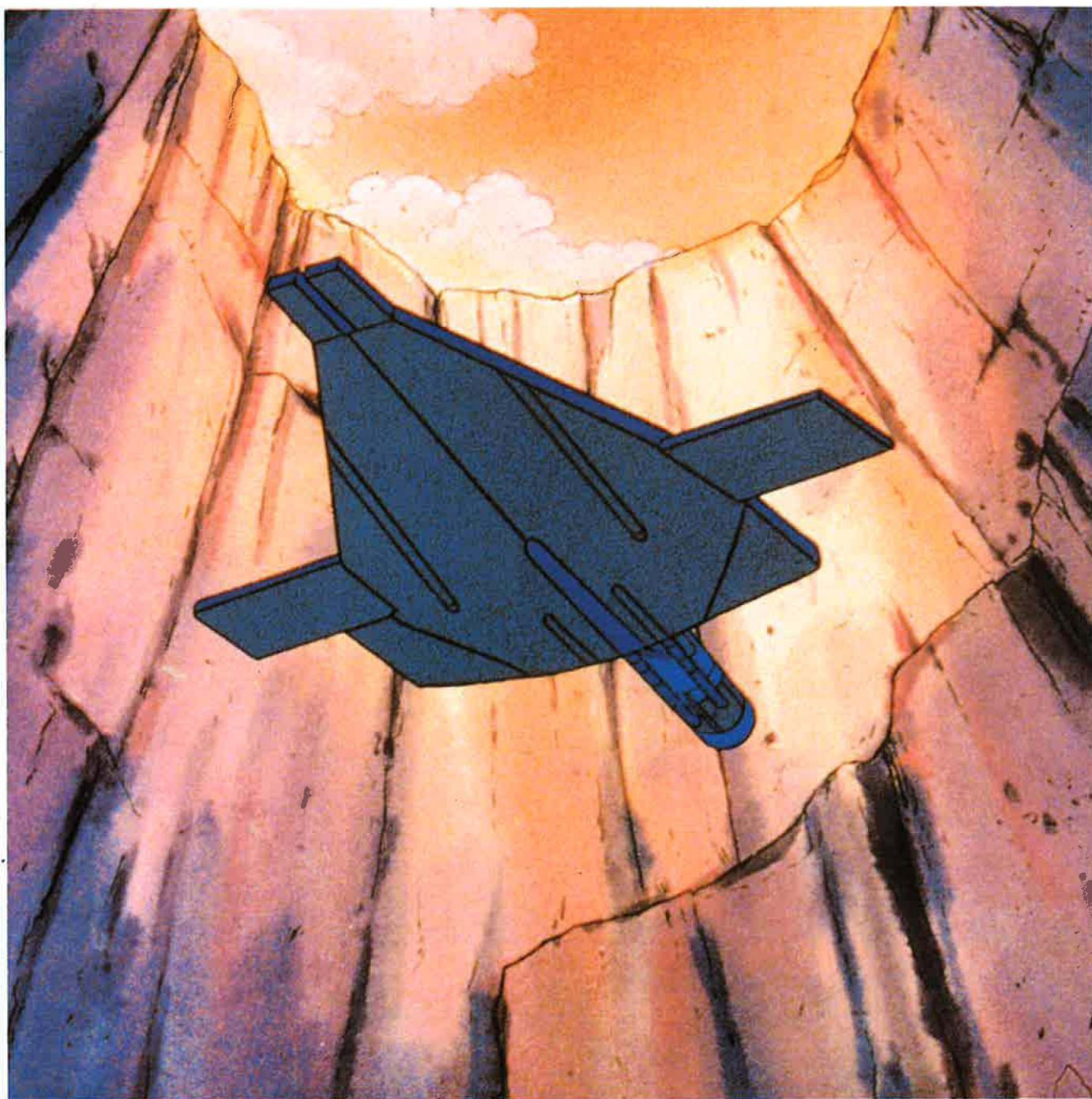
“Quick, Thall! In a few seconds you’ll have the entire base after you guys. Get out of there!” Thall heard Kea Moll say over the *White Witch*’s intercom, which connected them.

“Get on, Jord! We’ve got to escape! Kea Moll and Threepio will open the doors for us as we go.”

“Let’s go!”

With all haste, they got into the *White Witch*. Jord and Thall had to escape, but in both their minds was yet another thought: This was an excellent occasion to perform a speed test with the *Witch*. And it





wouldn't be just any old test, what with combat droids hot on their heels.

The *White Witch* shot through the tunnels like an arrow. The combat droids had sprung into action, but they were still far away, in a different level of the tunnels. Three levels remained for them to be able to reach Thall. The *White Witch* was proving that she was effectively the

faster! They had just enough time to pick up Kea Moll and Threepio and to get out of the secret base before the combat droids could reach them.

"Retreat! Return to your posts!" Tig ordered, furious.

"I'm sure that your father..." Vlix said.

"I'm not my father! If we pursue them,



everyone will find out that we're preparing something and—"

"—and your father will get mad at you again, right Tiny?"

"I've told you millions of times, don't call me 'Tiny!' My father isn't going to find out anything!"

"Are you sure?"

Of course, with Vlix in the way, Tig could not be sure of anything. Vlix himself was in charge of informing Sise Fromm what happened.

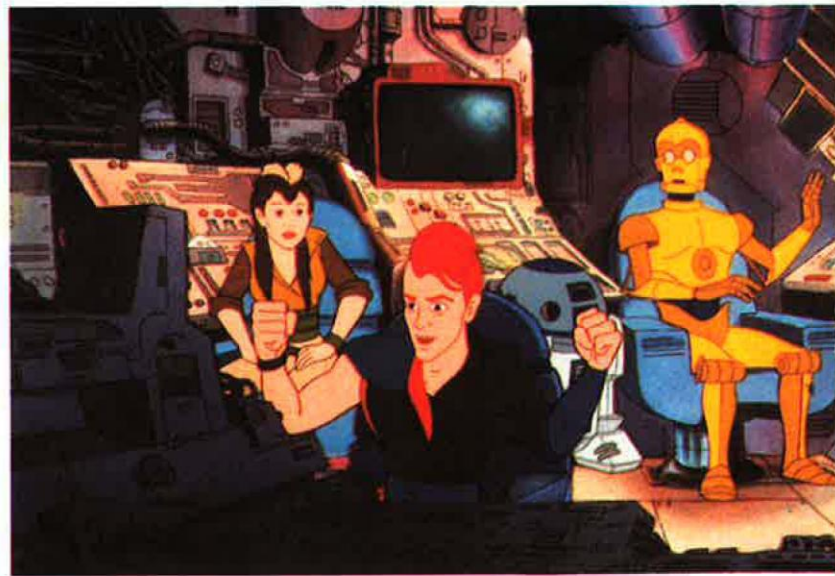
He always took Sise's side, which is

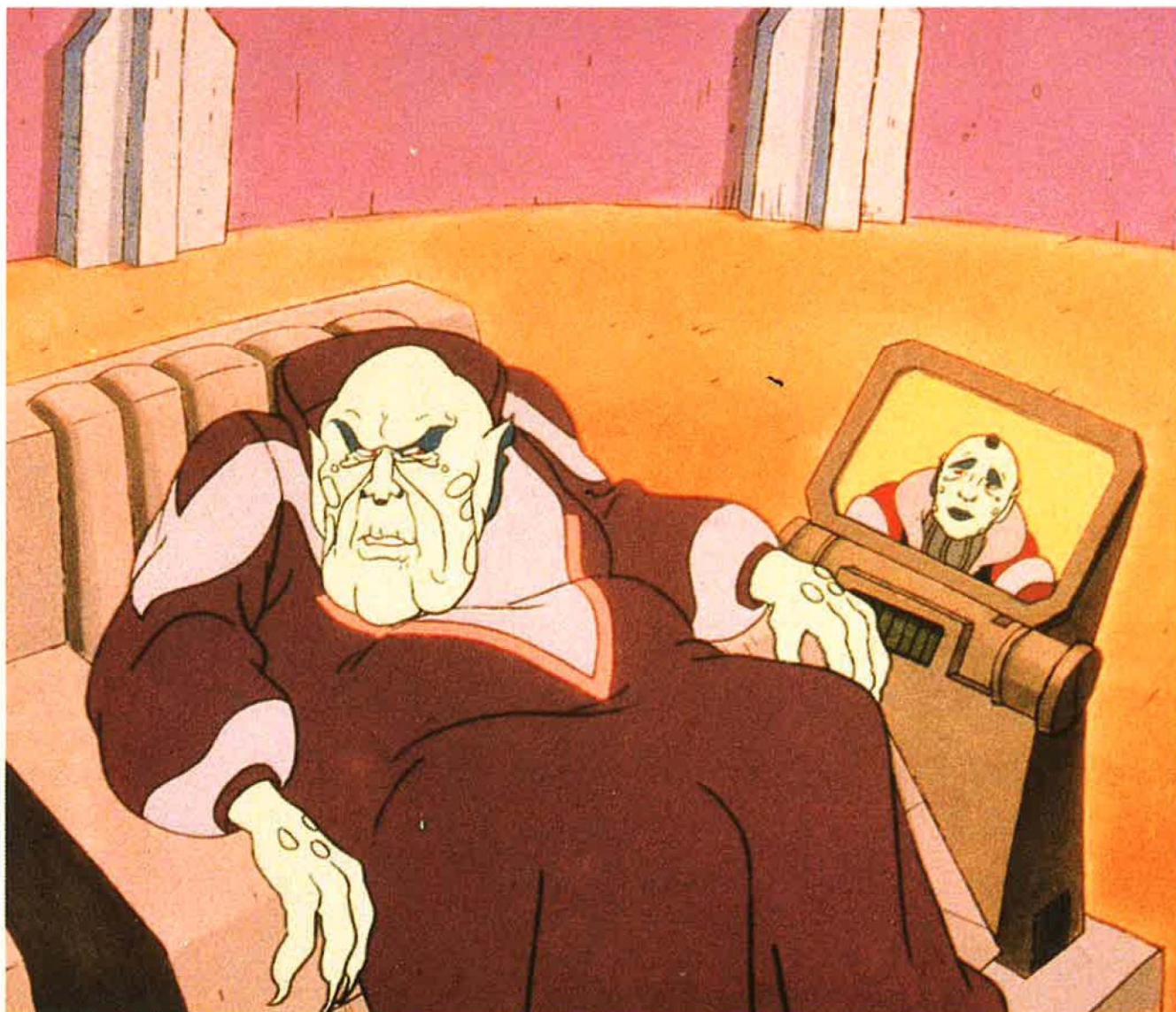


why Vlix had been left in charge of Tig's safety and observation. And Tig could not get rid of him, because his father still called the shots. When *he* became boss, though ... then Vlix would find out what he was capable of. And he would never again dare to call him "Tiny!"

But now the moment had arrived to give an account to his father of the mission outcome. He would not be very happy. The intercom monitor would soon light up.

In his hideout on Annoo, Sise Fromm





was attending one of his disgusting banquets, surrounded by clones. He spoke to his son through the monitors.

"I don't know what you're up to, but I warn you: I'm not going to allow you to play me for a fool," Sise warned.

"Are you still angry at me?" asked Tig.

"How poorly you know me! Did I get angry when your accursed droids reported me to the police?"

"It was a programming error, Dad."

Even though he was far away from his father, Tig trembled at the mere sound of

his voice. He knew his father was still the boss, and all his attempts to take his place had failed. All he could do was babble excuses and try not to irritate him. Sise Fromm was smiling, but Tig knew that smile well. It was always the prelude to an explosion of rage. Sise continued:

"Or when you went to rescue me from prison and left with somebody else?"

"We do all make mistakes, Dad."

"So many times?" Sise paused. "And now, due to your accursed bungling, you've nearly allowed our secret base on

Ingo to be discovered. And everyone could then band together and destroy me—but, of course, they would never even touch you.”

“Why do you say that?”

Tig did not understand his father’s reasoning. If all the gangs were to unite, no member of the Fromm gang would be safe. Why was his father saying that? Tig knew neither what to say nor whether to continue asking his father. Finally, he made up his mind and asked:

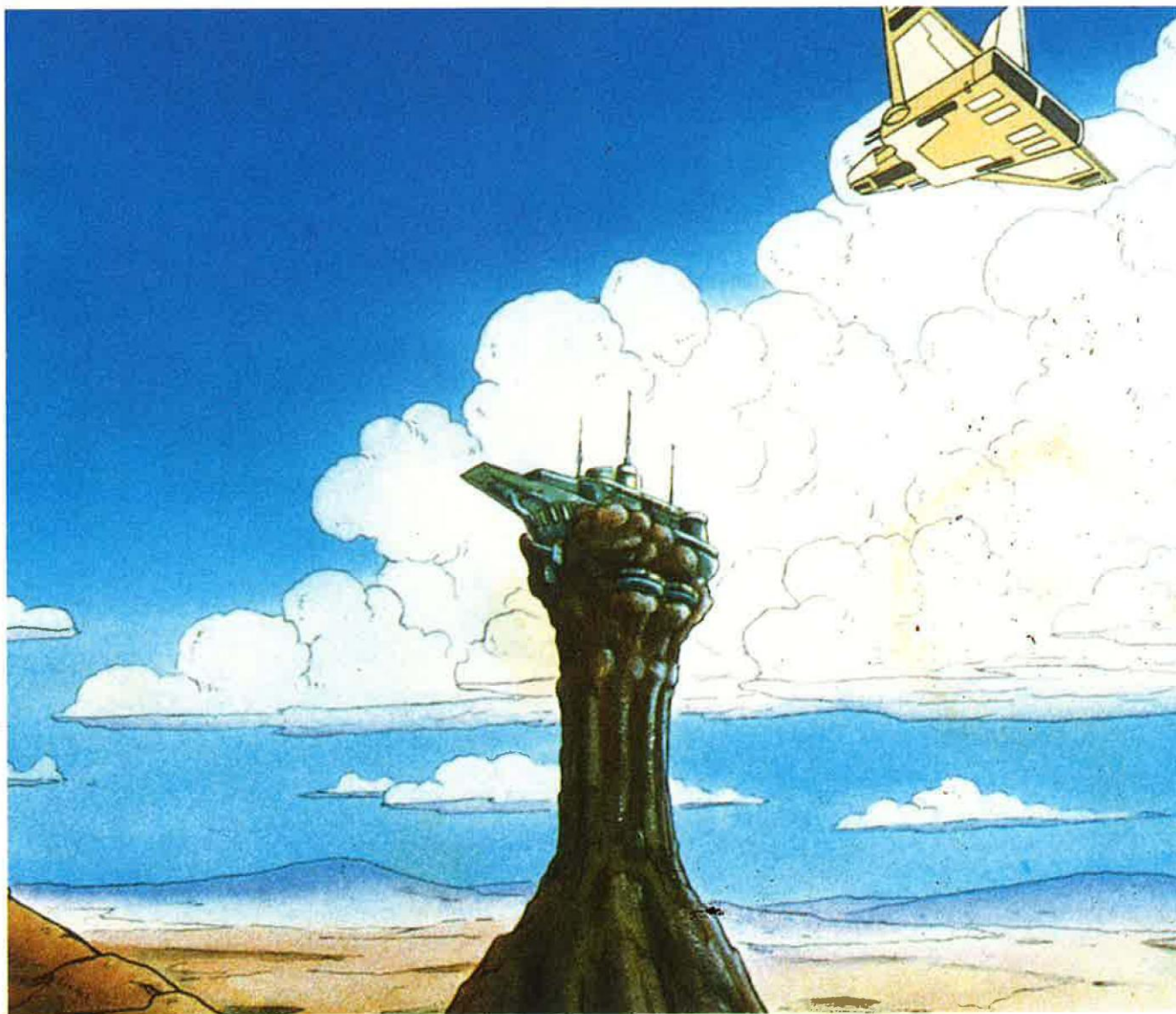
“Why wouldn’t they do anything to

me?”

“Because I would rip you to pieces myself, stupid! Because I would strangle you! I would grind you up! I would smash you!”

“Take it easy, Dad. Remember you’re 900 years old, and this is not good for your health....”

But Sise’s rage had already erupted. From now on, his son could no longer do or say anything. Decisions would be made solely by Sise, and any opposition was punishable by death. Tig was very careful

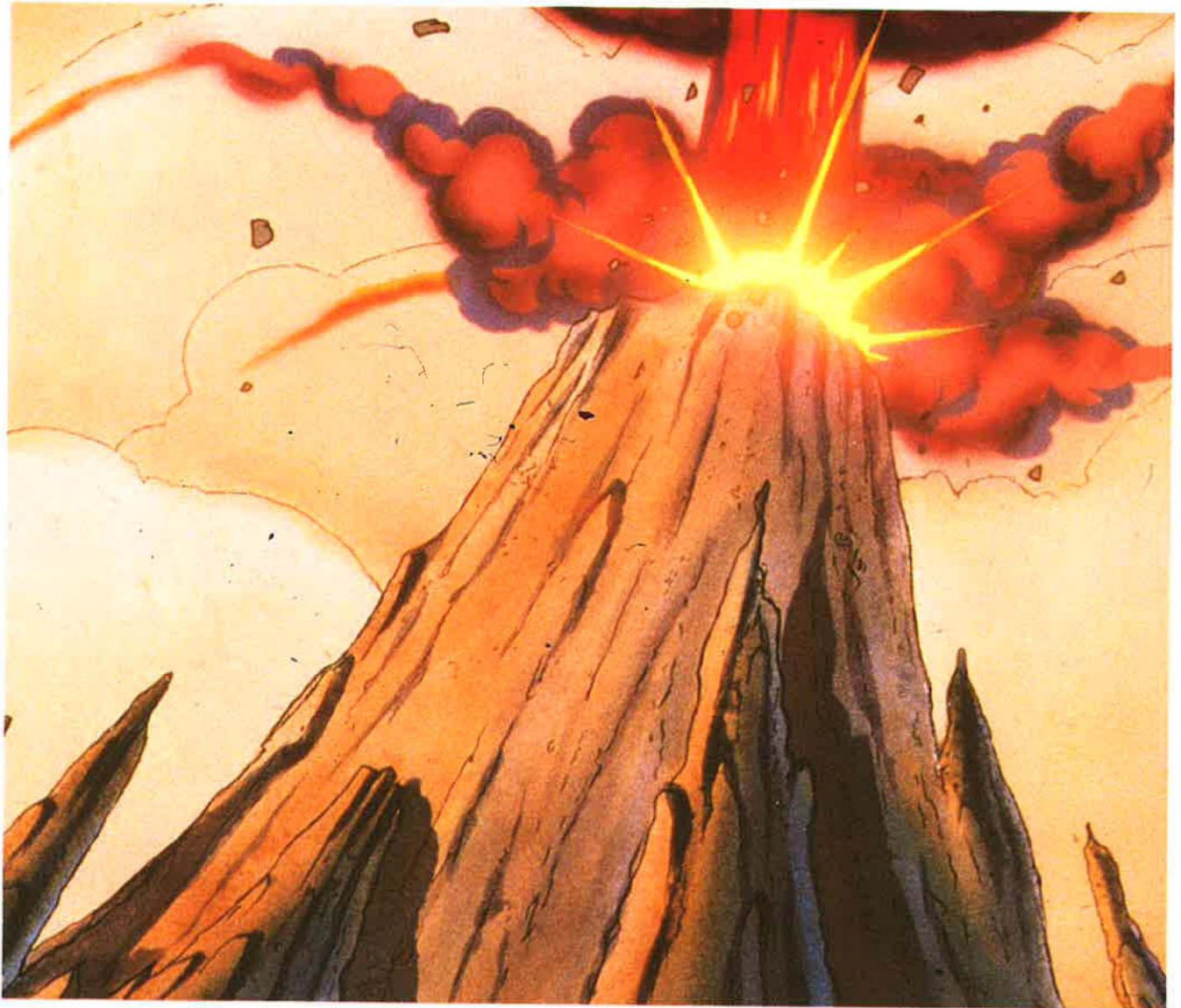


not to interfere with or interrupt his father.

"You're the one that's going to be the death of me! Hear me well: Those two spies, the girl and the two droids have discovered the secret base and will want to report us to the Annoo authorities. They're probably already on their way here. Thus, all plans relating to the secret base are cancelled. No activity is ever to be seen again in the area surrounding the base. Dismantle the essential components, and transfer them in secret to another planet. Next blow up the base, so that everyone will believe that our schemes

have failed. That way, the rumors and suspicions awakened by your bungling will be silenced. And we will continue with the *Trigon* later. Only this time I will take charge personally in supervising the work. I don't want any more mistakes! Understand? And remember: The transfer must be done in absolute secret. If you have to sacrifice some droids or androids in the explosion, don't worry: We'll replace them. Is all that clear?"

Yes, everything was clear: Tig had failed once again. And his father's confidence in him, which was already



scarce, had diminished even further. In Tig's mind, the thought that he would never be able to escape the dominion that his father wielded over him began to grow. Only Sise's disappearance would enable Tig to act with freedom.

In this manner did the dreams of grandeur of Tig Fromm come to an end: with a reprimand from his father, who kept an eye on everything his son did

from his impregnable fortress on Annoo.

As for our friends Artoo and Threepio, they continued making up part of Thall and Jord's racing team, which now counted on a new member: the brave Kea Moll, who had lent them so much help.

The members of the *White Witch's* crew now numbered five, and all of them were prepared to prove that she was the best and fastest speeder in all the galaxies.



