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PAGES

WITH

FULL

COLOUR

IMAGES,

COMICS

The Grand Finale!

Planet AKKOR

... AND MORE!

Felipe Muhr is a visual artist, cartoonist, and researcher. He is also an active drawing teacher and an illustrator for magazines, educational textbooks, and public museums. In 2020 he obtained an advanced master's in artistic research from Sint Lucas Antwerp and graduated recently from the post-academic HISK program in Ghent. Simon Delobel is the director of KIOSK.

ISSUE ZERO PRÉSENTE:

L'INTERVIEW

ENTRE SIMON DELOBEL ET FELIPE MUHR.

Planet Akkor is a monthly online comic by Felipe Muhr for KIOSK, commissioned in collaboration with COMICS Project at UGent. Planet Akkor is based on Akkor, le Roi de la Planète a space-adventure comic strip first featured on Aventures Illustrées, a weekly magazine published in Brussels in 1940 and conceived, edited, written, and drawn by Belgian author Guy Depière. Since October 2021, Felipe Muhr has been scavenging the Van Passen collection, plagiarizing Depière's work, and summoning other styles, authors, and stories found in the archives to create a rendition of Akkor's space adventures for current times. This new version tells the first-person story of Parkson, a space explorer sent by his scientist father to the diamond-brimming world of Planet Akkor. Upon arrival, he calls himself

Akkor, the king of the planet, and befriends local extraterrestrial Olir, with whom he will go through exotic landscapes and mortal dangers to find out—perhaps—the truth about himself.

This exhibition, the final in a seven-chapter display of periodicals, shows the publications that Muhr used as a reference to create Planet Akkor. It features Guy Depière's original Akkor in all its iterations, and highlights changes in drawing style and publication formats in Aventures Illustrées and Bimbo. Other magazines on display include various items from the Van Passen collection that were used as sources for Planet Akkor's page composition, color, title design, and storytelling.

This publication is part of ISSUE ZERO - READING THE VAN PASSEN COLLECTION.
This exhibition is an outcome of the COMICS project, which is funded by the European Research Council's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant no. 758502).

RÉCIT COMPLET

SIMON DELOBEL:

You were born and raised in Chile. When did you come in contact with comics?

FELIPE MUHR:

I learned to read with them. As a child, I had a big collection of European comics—I used to read a lot of Belgian and French comics. *Astérix* and *Tintin* for example, were sold everywhere. I would also go with my dad to flea markets and find magazines published in Spain during the 1980s that had found their way to Chile. Many of these comics I believe my dad got for himself—a lot of adult, science fiction, and crunchy stuff. It was a big deal for me. It gave me a comics education. I see some things in the Van Passen collection that I can trace back to my childhood: they belong to my story but in a way they were not made for me—they were European stories told by European authors for European audiences.

You mention European comics. But were there also US or Japanese comics?

Sure! I'm a big fan of US comic strips thanks to my early readings of *Garfield* and *Calvin and Hobbes*. But I was never so invested in US superheroes, even if I enjoyed the drawings. I only connected as a teenager with the ultra-rendered *Spawn* and other magazines published by Image Comics. Manga was also around, but not in my household. It's odd now that I think about it: my parents were not that happy about me reading manga or watching anime. European violence was okay... but Japanese was not! I still managed to read *Dragon Ball* in its entirety and that really shows in my

drawings from when I was about ten years old. That was and still is my favorite. I didn't watch TV very much when I was a child, or at least not as much as I would've liked. But I was allowed to read anything.

Where there only imported comics during your childhood or was there also a Chilean scene?

There was and is a Chilean comics scene, a big one—especially for humor and children's comics. And that was very influential for me as well. I grew up in the 1990s, and even if the biggest comics periodicals from the 1960s and 1970s hadn't survived the dictatorship's cultural blackout, I could still find issues easily second hand, and their material was being reprinted and sold in kiosks. This meant access to foreign sensibilities as well. Great Chilean authors like Themo Lobos and Mario Igor were heavily inspired by European and US comics. Top-level magazines like *Mampato*, a staple of Chilean culture and education whose quality rivals that of

any European magazine, also included translated European comic strips, adventure comics, and single-panel jokes. Hugely popular stuff. But provenance didn't make a difference to me. I was reading it all.

Were you drawing comics during your childhood, like Alain Van Passen?

Oh yes, non-stop. But I'm not a careful collector like Alain is, so I didn't keep much. With Alain's comics, it's interesting to see how invested he was in creating a cast of characters and stories that would surpass the comics, showing that even

Belgian, was a sociologist. They didn't have specific knowledge of comics, and comics scholarship was then an uncharted land. As we know, they argued that Disney comics were instrumentalized as imperialist propaganda. After finding the original magazines I realized that the reality was far more interesting, as Donald Duck comics were drawn by many people, across many decades, in many different contexts. Those artists' names however were erased in an effort to homogenize the creative work—it's the Disney way of doing things.

I can only imagine what the book could have been if they had known that most of the comics analyzed were drawn by Carl Barks—a candidate for one of the most-read authors in history—who was very critical of the Disney system, which had him working anonymously on a meager payroll for stratospheric gain for the brand.

For another project, you focused on a Chilean cartoonist, Jorge Christie Mouat, who started a local Disney story in 1937, Mickey versus Ratón Pérez...

Yes, living in Chile after studying in the US, I was invited by the artist César Gabler to show the Donald Duck work in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Santiago. But it was only one drawing, so I wanted to complement it with a more local analysis of Disney comics, something like a counterweight. My research had indicated that Disney magazines only started being published during the 1960s in Chile, as part of an internationalization program for including local stories produced by local artists and characters. (This is how you end up with Brazilian Disney comics starring José Carioca, or the very idiosyncratic Italian Disney comics scene.) But

Chile is a small market, so we only got reprints from all over, and there weren't, as far as I knew, Chilean artists drawing Disney comics until Vicar, who was living in Europe, started in 1970. The reprints are what Dorfman and Mattelart included in their analysis.

But I was wrong—Disney characters did have a presence in Chile before the 1960s, in the form of syndicated comic strips for newspapers. Even more to my surprise, I found a Chilean magazine from 1937 called *Álbum Mickey*, filled with Disney characters. It turned out to be almost completely drawn by Jorge Christie Mouat, a young artist who would grab any comic character and include it in his own, local stories without any credit to its original source. And *Album Mickey* was no underground pamphlet—it was a children's magazine

printed by a major publisher.

I became fascinated by this prolific artist and his graphic output, which seems to operate somewhere between stealing and honoring material that was being produced a continent away. I started copying Mouat's drawings in a similar operation and ended up remaking his major work *Mickey versus Ratón Pérez* frame by frame. Instead of retracing his drawings, I tried to learn to draw like him and put together a pirated version of his style. I displayed it on a big wall, laid out to create a serpent-like reading path. It was very interesting to me to

see how an artist working on the outskirts of the international comics industry was still producing highly distinct work using stock characters for his own wild stories, ignoring every law. Disney did the opposite: all the artists working for him signed Walt's name and faded into oblivion.

Jorge Christie Mouat went on to become the creator of the first Chilean newspaper comic strip, *Chu-Man-Fú*, and coincidentally met Walt Disney himself during Disney's visit to Latin America some years later. I don't think they talked about drawing Mickey.

dinosaur exhibition here in Ghent, and they still had representations of dinosaurs dragging their tails, looking like movie monsters. The cool picture always wins.

I started with the text and then made the drawing to go with the dialogue—the opposite of what I had done before, always starting from the drawing. So that was interesting for me, and since the story doesn't have a lot of drama beyond the dialogue, it looks like these are bad actors talking nonstop against a fake background. And then the apocalypse is unfolding but they can't stop talking. Very pandemic.¹

How did you connect with the Van Passen collection?

I knew of Maaheen Ahmed —who is head of the COMICS Group, a team of Ph.D. and post-doc researchers at Ghent University who work on the Van Passen collection at UGent— before I came to Europe. I wanted to do a PhD in Belgium, and while looking for potential advisors I found her name and we started emailing back and forth. The application didn't work out, but I ended up coming to Belgium to study anyway. By chance, Belgian artist Sébastien Conard invited Professor Ahmed to write a text for a show that included *Blindsight*, a comic I self-published in 2015. Prof. Ahmed then invited me to see the Van Passen collection and we looked for ways to collaborate. I proposed a creative, visual collaboration, from an artist's perspective, and she was enthusiastic to find a way for us to get started.

¹ “A Spanish-language version of *The Iguanodon Monologues* has recently been republished in black and white in the Chilean experimental comics magazine *Nachi*.”

When you arrived in Belgium, you created The Iguanodon Monologues (2020). It seems you like to travel through time and space...

I came to Belgium in 2019 for an advanced masters in research in Antwerp, and the focus of my research was on pictures produced with a pedagogical goal—encyclopedia illustrations, museum displays, and diagrams. My research method was to draw. I am a professional illustrator, and among other things I work for museums and educational books, so it's my job to draw things that belong in the same universe as my references. The end of the masters was marked by a special edition of *TYPP*, the journal for artistic research of Sint Lucas Antwerpen School of Arts, titled *Conversation*, and I decided to do a comic strip with talking dinosaurs.

The Iguanodon Monologues started from that. It's a talking-head-style comic strip starring a self-absorbed

iguanodon full of dreams about the future and oblivious to the fact that everything seems to be coming to an end around him. The iguanodon as a species is very interesting to me because it was one of the first dinosaurs ever found, which means that its appearance has suffered dramatic changes throughout the decades, absorbing representation conventions along the way. We might have insurmountable evidence for the bones, but the outer visual layer is a void to be filled with speculation and creativity, even following scientific documentation at face value. In my comic, an outdated-looking iguanodon has long conversations with other iguanodons with more accurate looks, and they share the same space just like they still do in some museums. In fact, I recently went to a freshly renovated

You and I met at the HISK program in 2020. During my studio visit, I asked you to think of a comics project for KIOSK's website. A few weeks later you proposed creating Planet Akkor. How did you get that idea?

Your invitation to contribute a monthly comic came at the perfect time: I was already looking at how to start a collaboration with the COMICS Group with all the things I was finding in the Van Passen collection. I opened some boxes and very quickly came across this magazine from 1940 called *Aventures Illustrées* (later on it became *Bimbo*). And there was this straightforward space adventure, *Akkor, le Roi de la Planète*, very similar to other space fantasy comics like Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon: a white guy goes to space, colonizes it, makes friends and enemies—all standard tropes. But what was interesting to me was the way it was drawn: very personal, amateurish, and with an inconsistent quality. I loved it. The signature of the artist was nowhere to be seen though. I eventually found out that the author was Guy Depière, a Belgian illustrator turned publisher who not only wrote and drew *Akkor*, but also directed, edited, and published the whole eight-page *Aventures Illustrées* weekly all by himself, including drawing completely different comic stories. Depière was not too far from Jorge Christie Mouat in that regard.

In an unconscious act of repeating myself, I thought of re-doing the whole *Akkor* story arc for KIOSK's website. Soon I realized that anything I would make about it would be less interesting than the comic itself, which is a problem I find often when working from a reference. But I did finally decide to do a *cover*

version, to play the same song again. I would bring back the action with the same character but take the story somewhere else, to places where it connects with other situations. Similar to the *Iguanodon* idea, I wanted my version to be polluted by everything around it—in this case, the collection itself. So I ended up with *Planet Akkor*. A funny thing about the original is that the character names himself after the planet he visits instead of the imperialist attitude of naming everything after the settler, but it comes as no surprise that on arrival he starts an endless quest for treasure and killing, falling into all the traps of colonial behavior that were almost inescapable in European comics at the time. I retained some of these elements, keeping a critical distance where I could—I hope I succeeded.

Text plays a central role in Planet Akkor. How did you work on it?

Almost all the material in the Van Passen collection is in French. And unfortunately I don't speak French. I use the Google Translate app to understand the texts, but it's not so accurate for comics: it takes a picture and tries to match the original typeface and position of the text, which leads to hilarious results. The dialogues become very generic, Tarzan-like speech with garbled letters. I really like this mechanical translation

problem. I wanted it to be present throughout the whole series. It takes me back to reading translated comics growing up: you could see strange text decisions, redrawn onomatopoeias, and the like. Sometimes the balloon wouldn't even match the text inside!

I also play with the visual translation of the texts, its imprecision and expressiveness. One decision I made early on was to eliminate the balloons. The texts cut through frames, get lost in the background, and don't seem to have any respect for the pictures or the composition of the page. I love taking

it to the extreme of unreadability. Different languages get mixed up too, and it all works towards a sense of falsehood, of self-important but unreliable dialogue. Since I started drawing the comic in 2021, the translation app has gotten much better and now makes fewer mistakes. I had to force the distortions to

Why did you choose digital drawing for Planet Akkor?

Working with Photoshop allows me a lot of technical variety. And some things are way faster. But it is also tricky: digital painting doesn't have memory like paper does, so anything can change at any time. In my case, I have no idea how it will look until I'm about to send the final version. This sometimes contributes to a very baroque and excessive layout, where characters, frames, and texts seem to fight for their space. My process also involves a lot of tracing and improvising. I would have a loose idea of what to do in a script, but it will change

depending on the drawings. In this regard it's an amnesic comic strip—characters get introduced and never show up again, some storylines are never resolved, etc. This mirrors the feeling I had when I was reading the original *Akkor*, but in my work I wanted to accent the complete disregard for visual continuity. I wanted every page to start from a different place, with a pretentious page composition, a promising title card, and a color palette I hadn't used before. A collection of dead ends that I think only digital painting can make work.

You've given a second life to Akkor. Do you plan to work further on this character? Or have you thought about asking another artist to take it over?

I would love for other artists to take over! This character is not my creation anyway, and since it is such a standardized story, Guy Depière was also going over well-traveled roads. When Depière finally hired other artists to draw comics for his magazine, *Akkor* changed hands and was drawn by Fred Funcken, who was a better-trained artist in the classic adventure style. To Funcken's dismay, Depière would often draw his characteristic bold lines on top of Funcken's careful art to make it look like his own.

Comics have always had a dirty relationship with authorship—you often see the same character drawn by many authors and artists copying each other like there's no tomorrow. Practices of swiping, appropriation, collective creation, and

anonymity are embedded in the history of the medium. And this is not even getting into how comics circulate after they are published, with re-colorings, translations, edits, and negotiations for different markets. So I can't think of anything better than letting Akkor survive in all the shapes and forms that comics can offer.



This interview will be published in the newspaper accompanying the last presentation of the ISSUE ZERO exhibition at KIOSK. This section is dedicated to the sources of Planet Akkor, and without Planet Akkor the exhibition would probably never have happened. Could you tell us about the genesis of ISSUE ZERO and the challenges you encountered in organizing it?

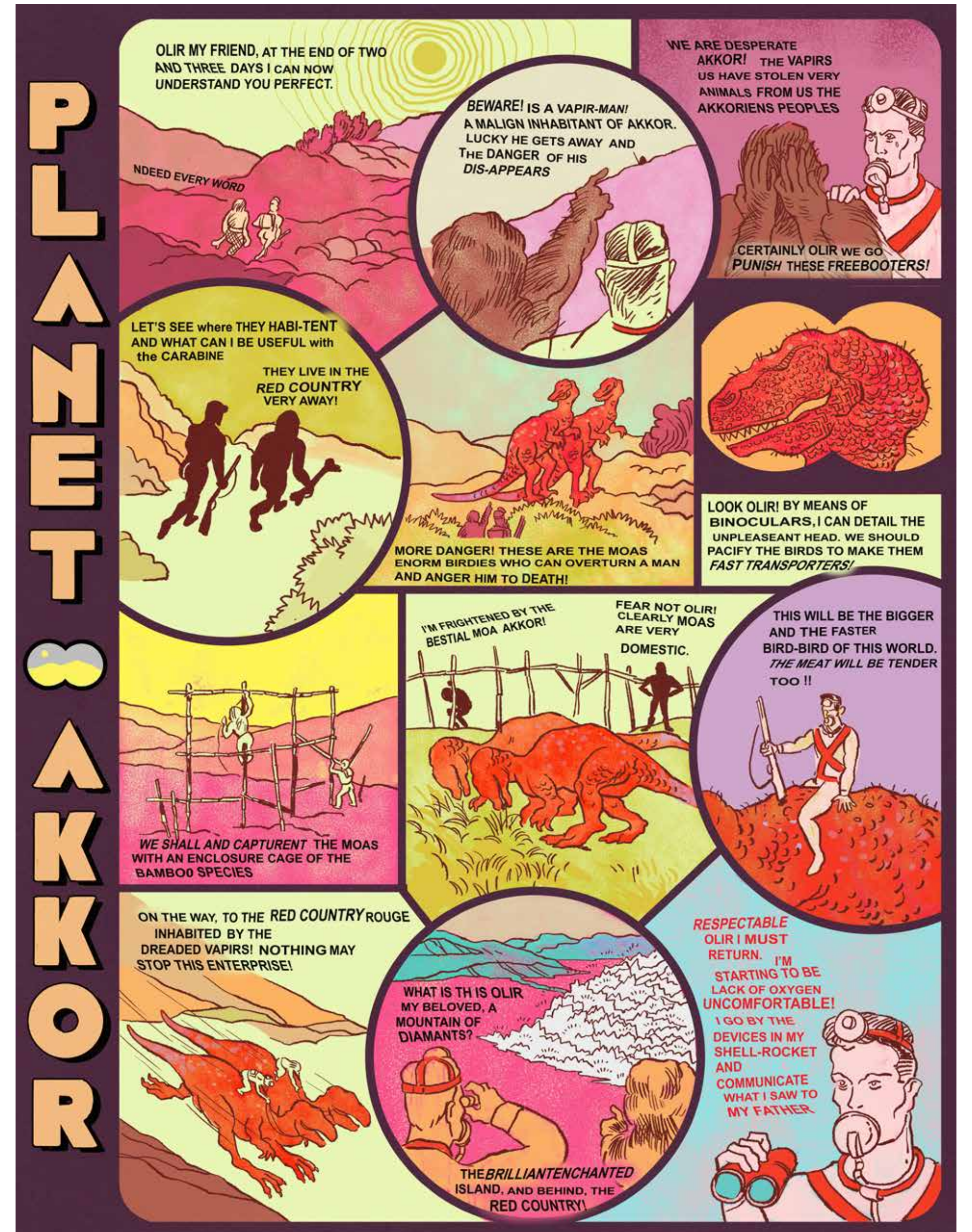
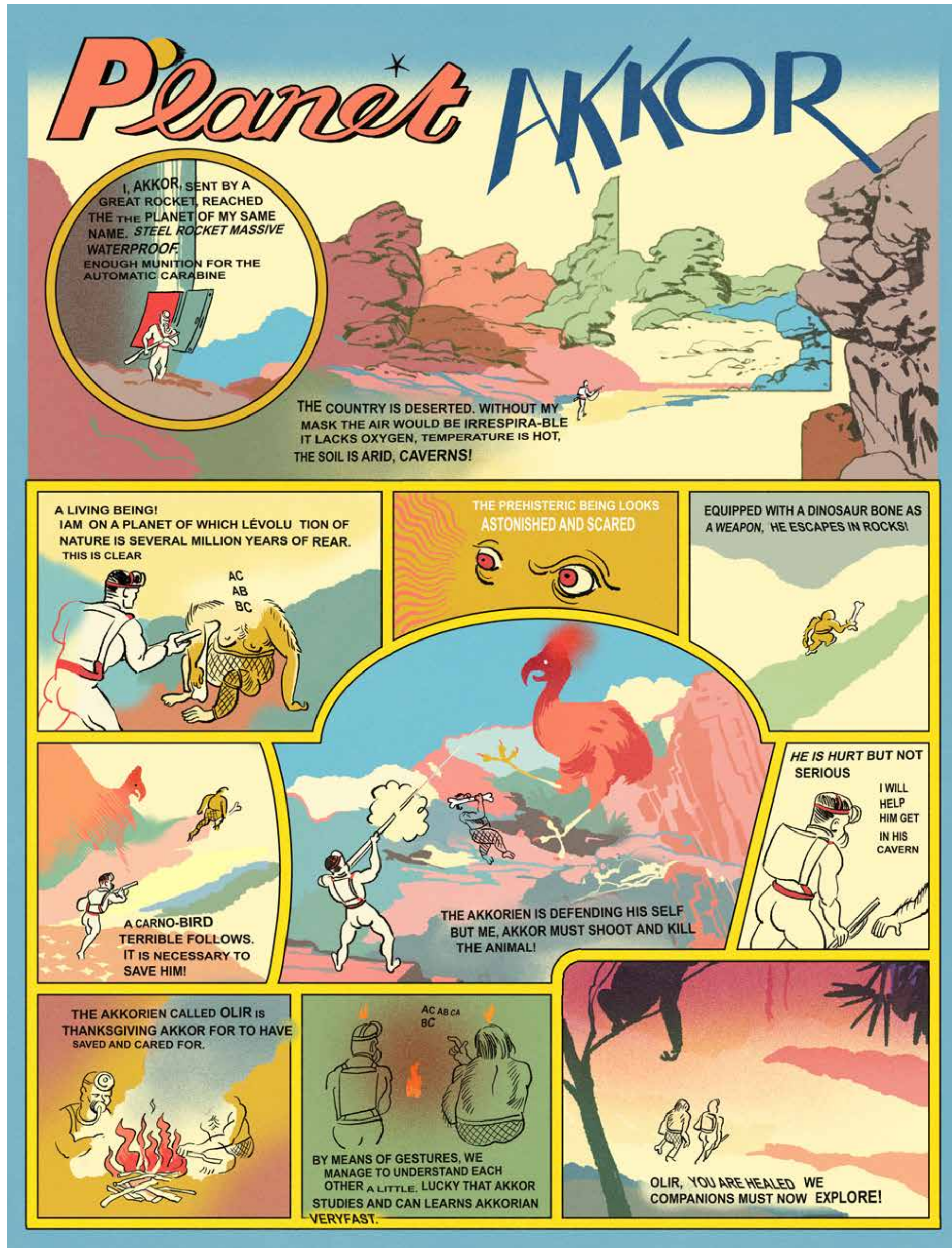
Prof. Ahmed had been wanting to do an exhibition on the Van Passen collection for quite some time. The year 2023 also coincided with a conference closing a four-year research project by the COMICS Group, their main focus being children in comics. I put Prof. Ahmed in contact with you to host the exhibition at KIOSK, and then ended up in the middle, working in the sometimes awkward position of artist-curator.

Showing comics in an exhibition is a challenge in itself. Comics magazines are very dense objects that are meant to be touched and seen from a close distance, and when you display them in an exhibition you hide more than you show. So we relied on other elements that are particular to comics to give a sense of the kind of material we're dealing with. First off, we chose to have a periodical exhibition that would change every two weeks, so we could multiply the space we had available in time.

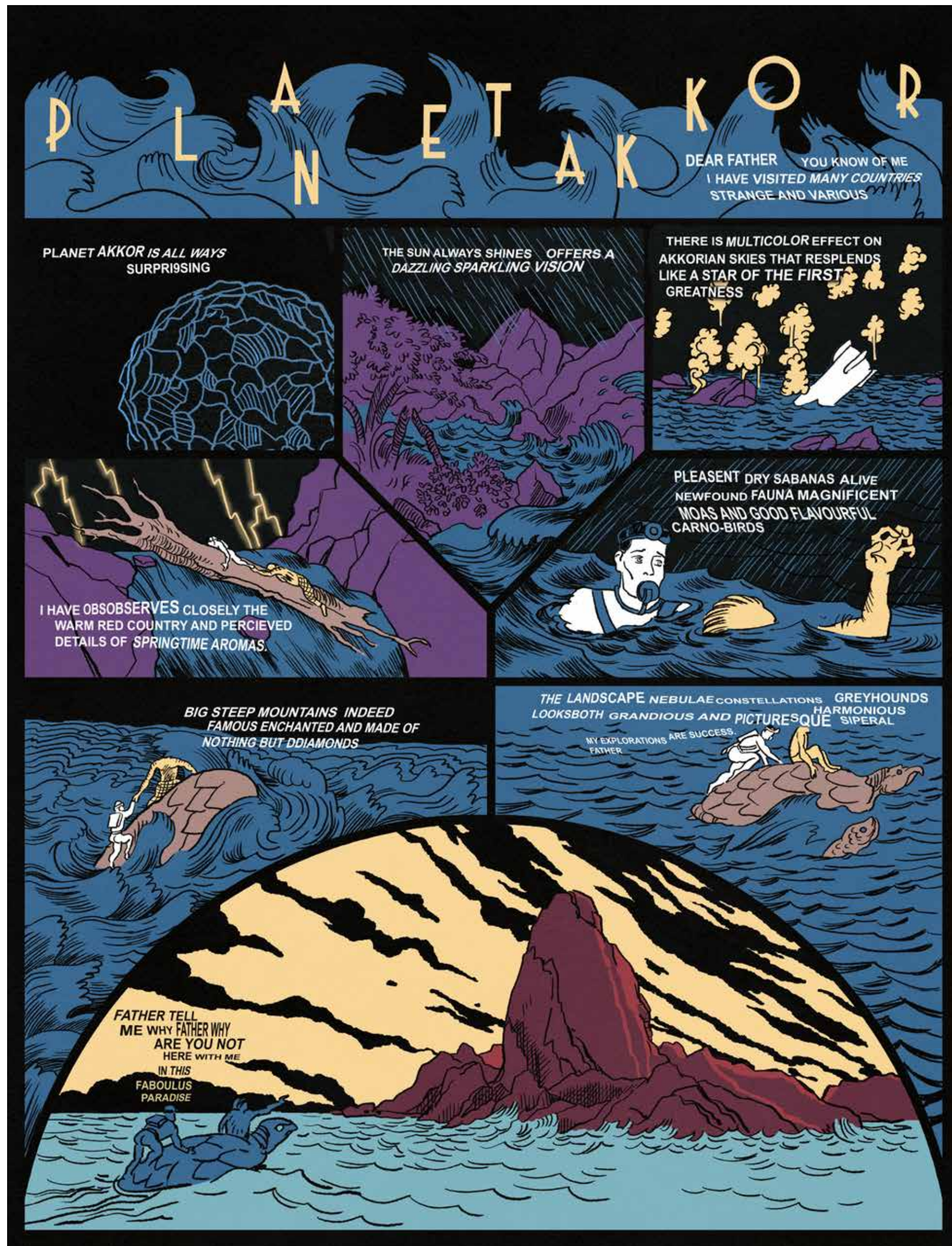
Each iteration would include material selected from the collection by researchers, who had free rein to choose whatever they wanted, arbitrary as it might be. Collections are arbitrary and subjective anyway, and I don't believe you can approach a show like this without being partial and super-focused.

...The interview continues on page 26.

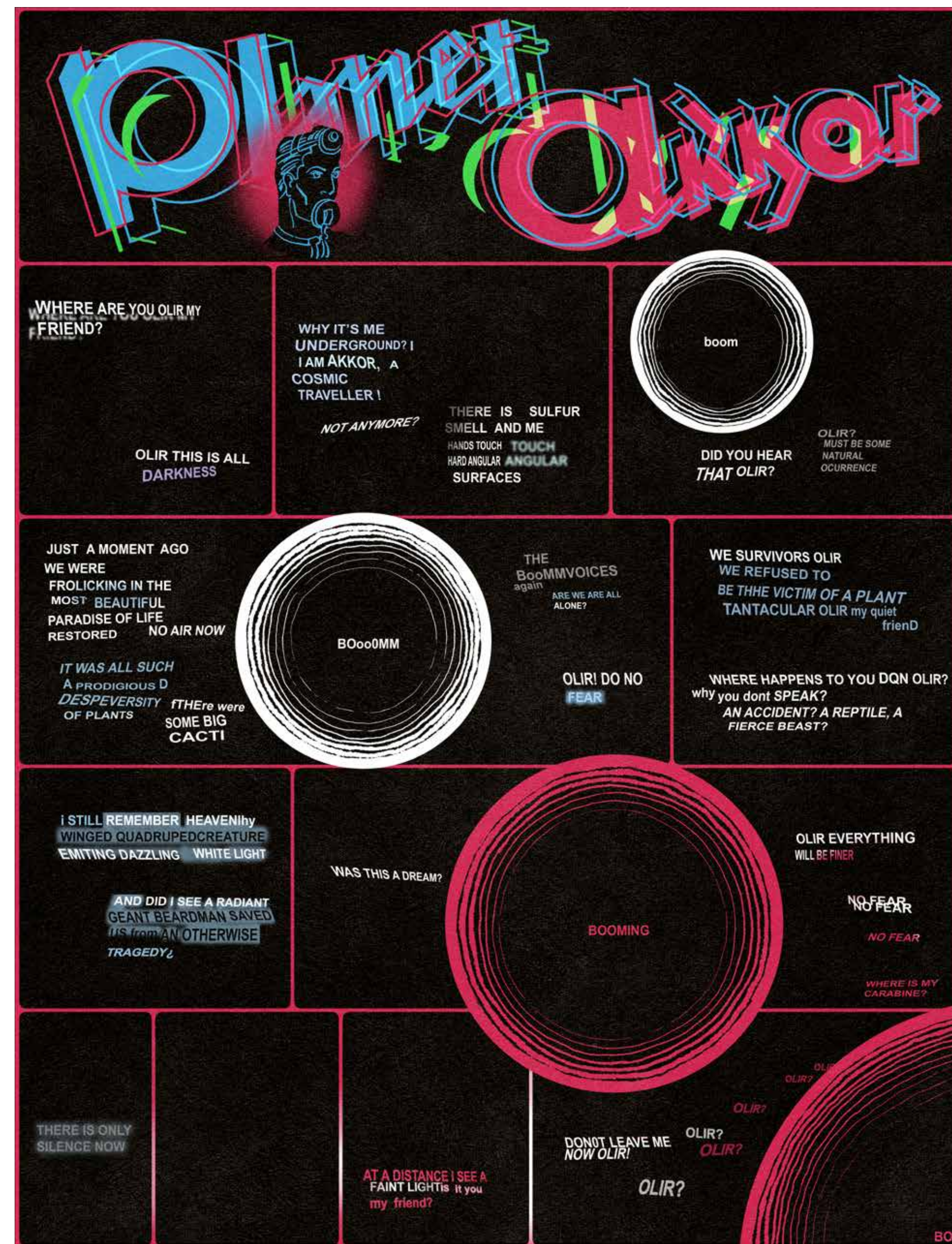


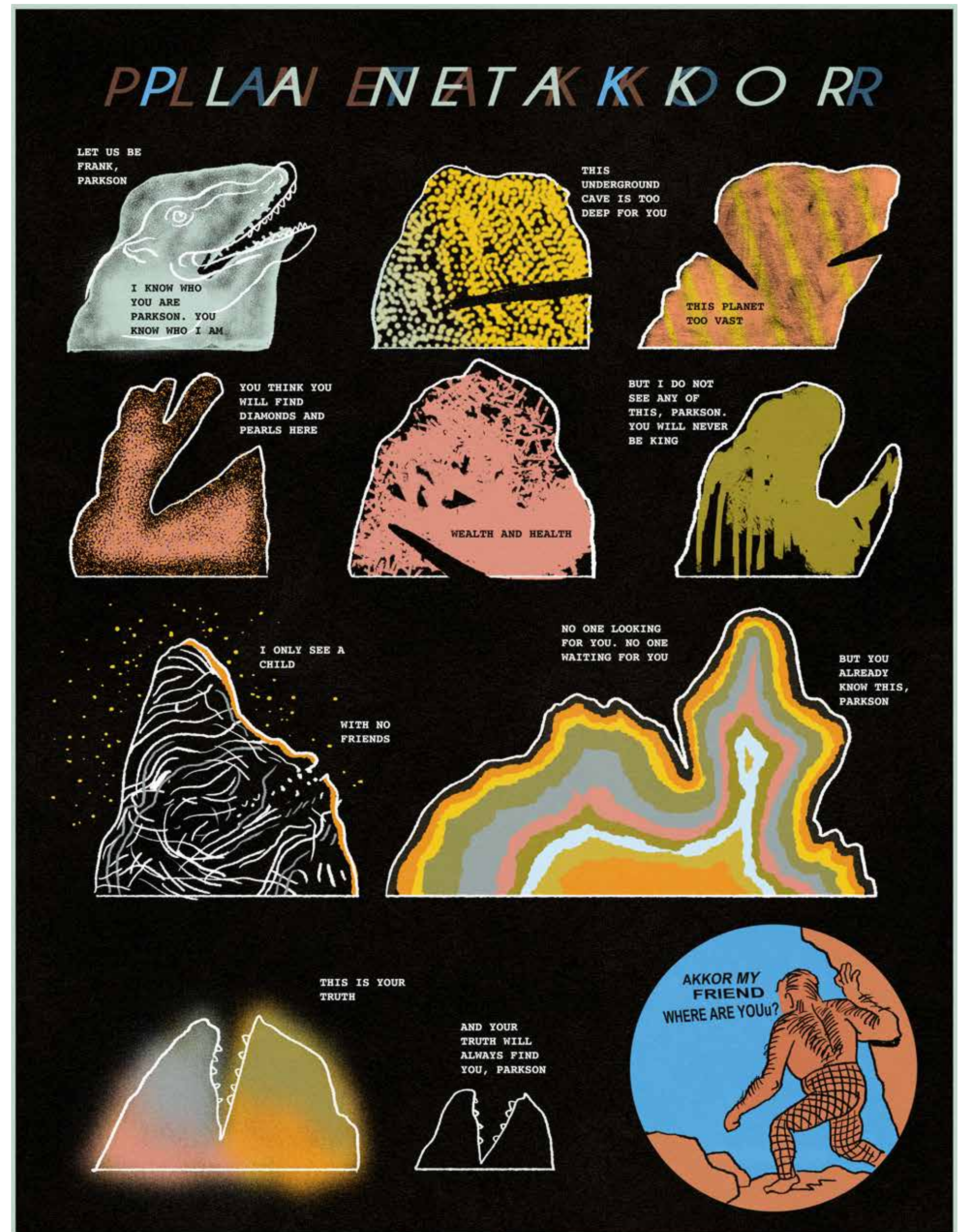




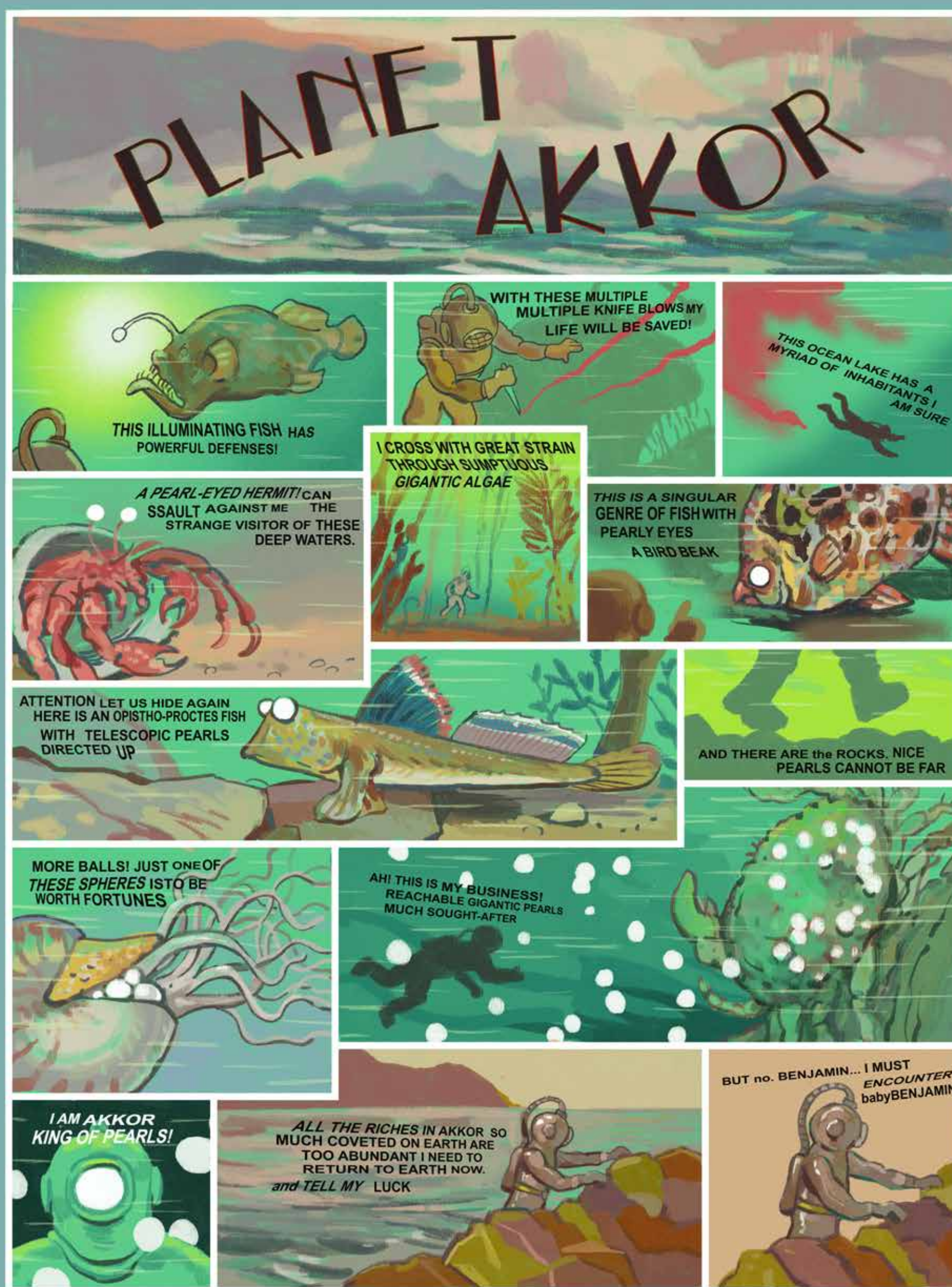
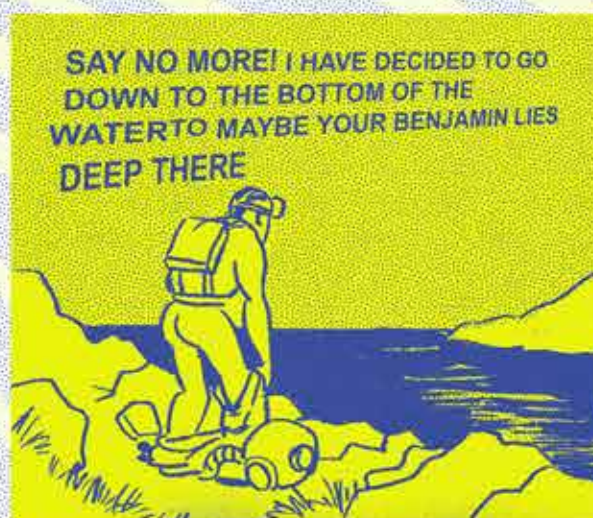
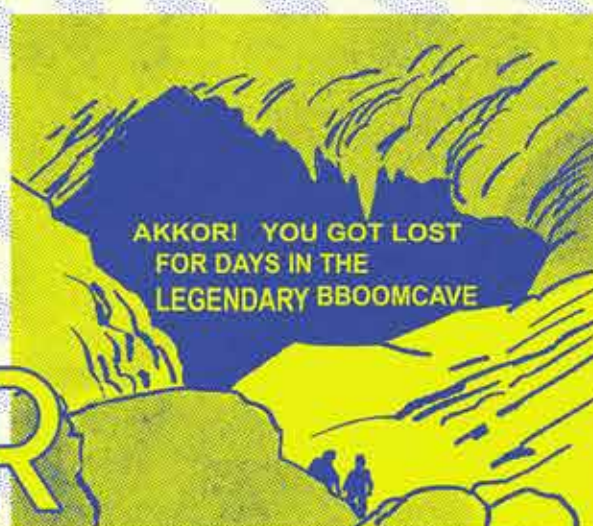


PLANET AKKOR





planet AKKOR



PLANET AKKOR

DEAR BENJAMIN: THIS IS AKKOR, *YOUR KING*. FINALLY SHELTERED IN MY SHELL-ROCKET. I HAVE FOUND THE RICHES AND I MUST RETURN TO EARTH BUT I WILL BE BACK TO THIS PLANET WHO BEARS MY NAME in your rescue.



AKKOR IS WORRIED.
AKKOR WATCHES OVER YOU.

I HEARD THE GROUND SHAKE UNDER ME AND A MUFFLED SOUND OF THUNDER.



AKKOR INSPECTS THE SURROUNDINGS,

DEVIL! A HERD OF BRONTOSAURS STOMPING TOWARDS MY SHIP!

I SHALL DEPLOY HIGH VOLTAGE CURRENT TO THE EXTERIOR OF THE STEEL TO PROTECT FROM ATTACK OF THESE PACHYDERMES



A TERRIBLE SHOCK OCCURS!

PRECIPITATE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE ROCKET.



FUN FIRST HARD SHOCK. I CAN HEAR THE BRONTOSAURS FRYING VAPORIZING AT FULL SPEED!

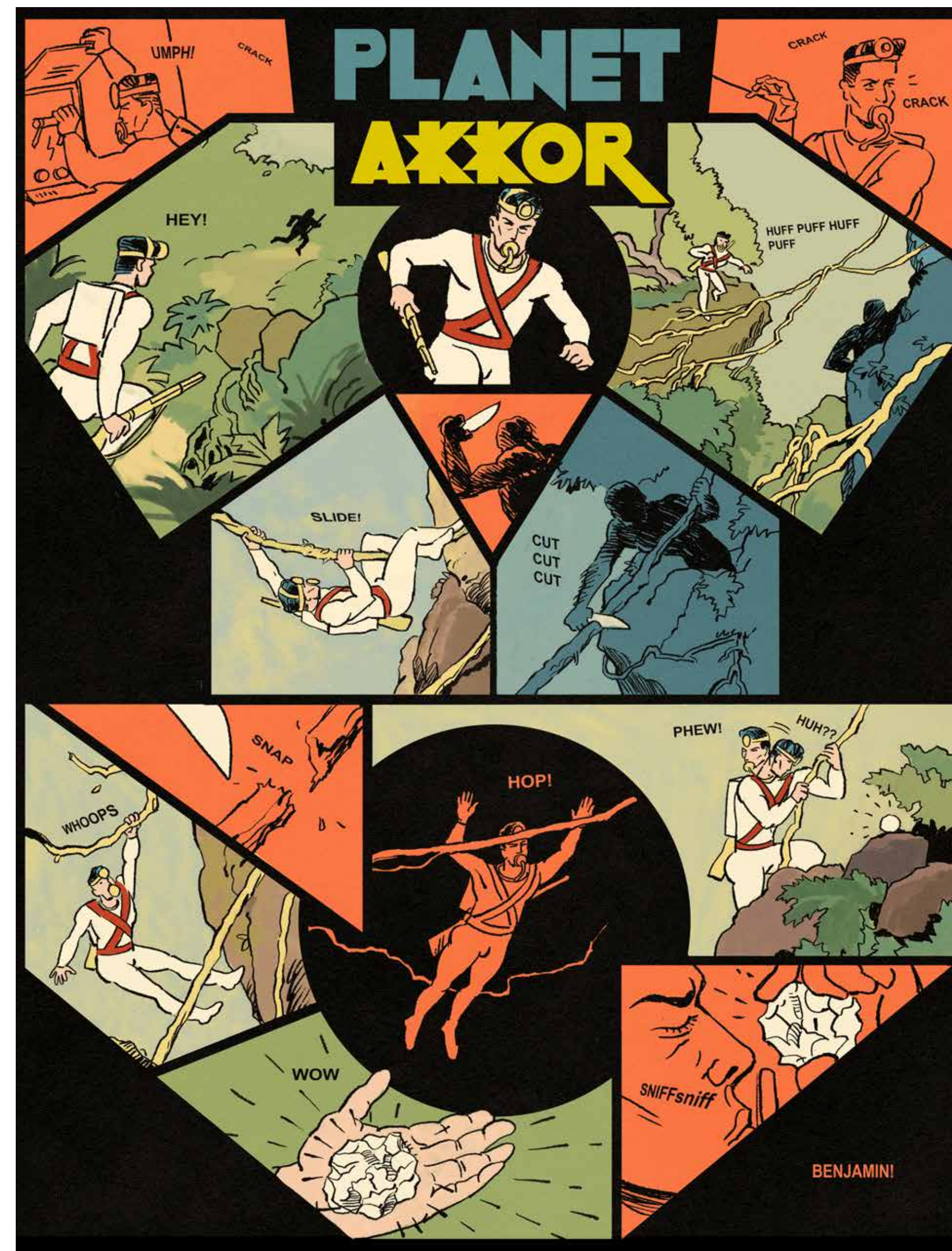
WILL TRY FULL POWER CURRENT BY THE DISCHARGE OF THE rocket BATTERIES!



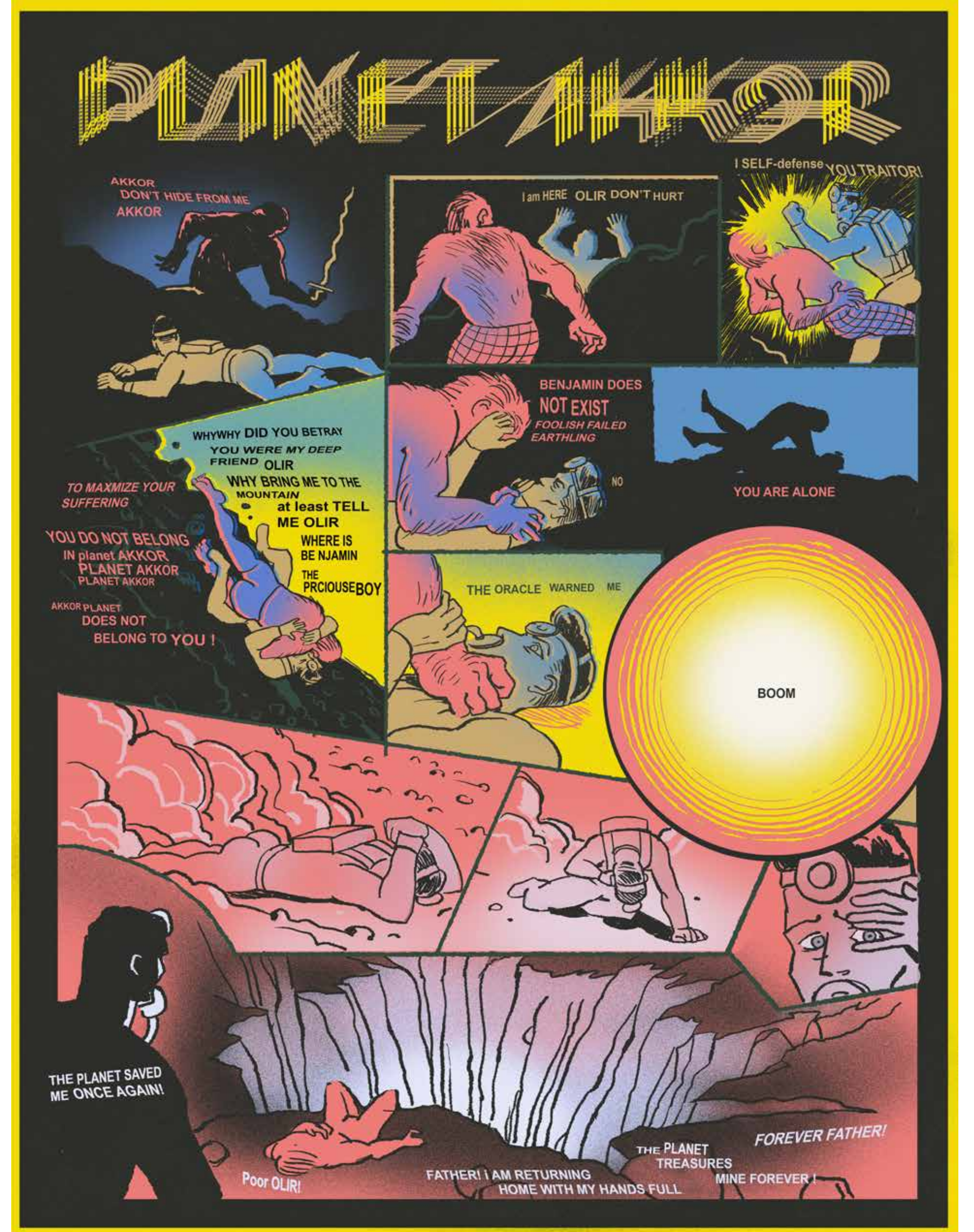
I MUST ACHIEVE DEVASTATING EFFECT!

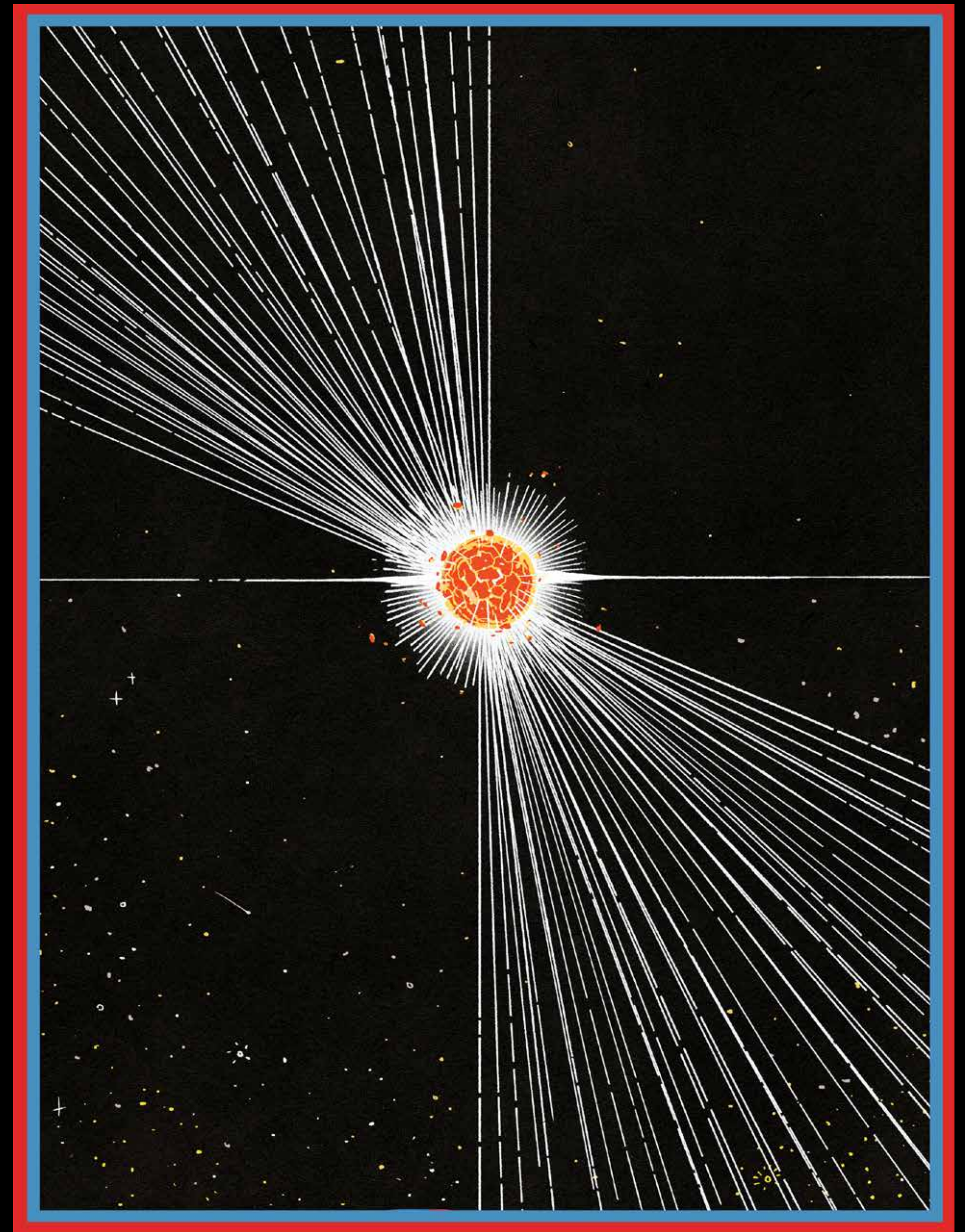
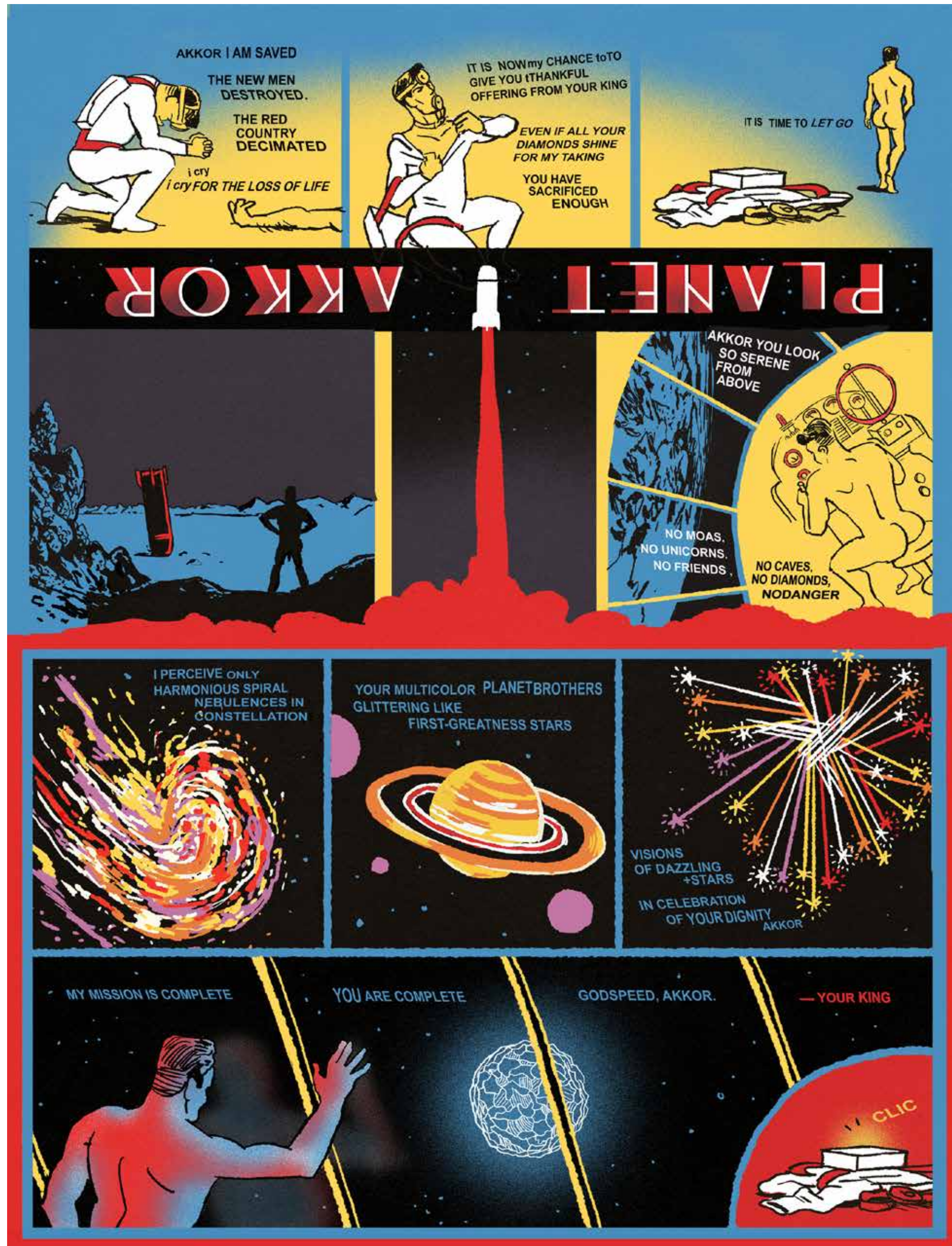
SUPERB! THE ROCKET IS NOT MORE THAN A HUGE ELECTRIC BODY ON CRAZY AC DC RELEASES! THE GARGANTUAN ANIMALS COLLAPSE WITH HIGH VOLTAGE LIGHTNING!

NEW MISSION ACCOMPLISHED BUT MY SHIP IS ON HEAT ALERT NO ENERGY LEFT FOR IGNITION! what now?









Second, we would print a newspaper every two weeks, as a memory of the show and to host the written version of the different research approaches, with reference images and sometimes reprints of comics that were not part of the collection, as if we were completing the archive. Third, we would work with recently graduated designers from KASK, who would make a poster promoting the segment to come, adding a new and creative approach to material often regarded as vintage, nostalgic, and stagnant. We also included a selection of comics-store bags that Alain Van Passen kept from his comics-shopping days, which we have displayed filled with one-euro comics found secondhand. The bags are a valuable non-official element of the collection, showing how comics used to circulate in Brussels and highlighting Van Passen's collecting compulsion, without which we wouldn't be having this conversation.

Are any aspects of the Van Passen collection that you discovered during the curation process of interest for future projects? It seems you like to travel through time and space...

I received quite a schooling through this experience. I've been very lucky to have such an overview of the Belgian comics scene from the actual sources. Who knows what kind of projects could stem from this, but it has been refreshing to find ways to do a crossover between the world of comics research and strategies of display in a venue for contemporary art.

The most important thing for me has been the collaborative aspect, being able to work with researchers and designers, and the shared curatorial experience.

"reanimated," since they are not waiting for us to make sense of them. They should be left to their own devices; we should acknowledge that we're in permanent entanglement with them and participate in their dynamics and instabilities, while assuring their unfolding wherever it may take us.

I contradict my own accumulation and cataloging impulses and ask myself if we should keep everything. The quest for preserving knowledge has destroyed so many ecosystems and their people, and the premise of scientific progress has been a staple of colonial exploits, so is it worth it? And for whom? Is it possible to integrate decay and mourn the object's loss yet avoid neglect and cultural erasure? It's difficult to have the vision and historical

Extinction is a central trope in your artistic practice. How does it feel to see cultural artifacts such as the items in this collection so well preserved and studied at a time when biological diversity and ecosystems are disappearing?

I do come back to extinction a lot. I like the idea that extinction propels thinking into the future, of the possibility of something after the end of it all. And especially what that might look like. It comes primarily from thinking about images as a ghostly survival of an object or being that is not there anymore. I'm fascinated by time travel and how difficult it is

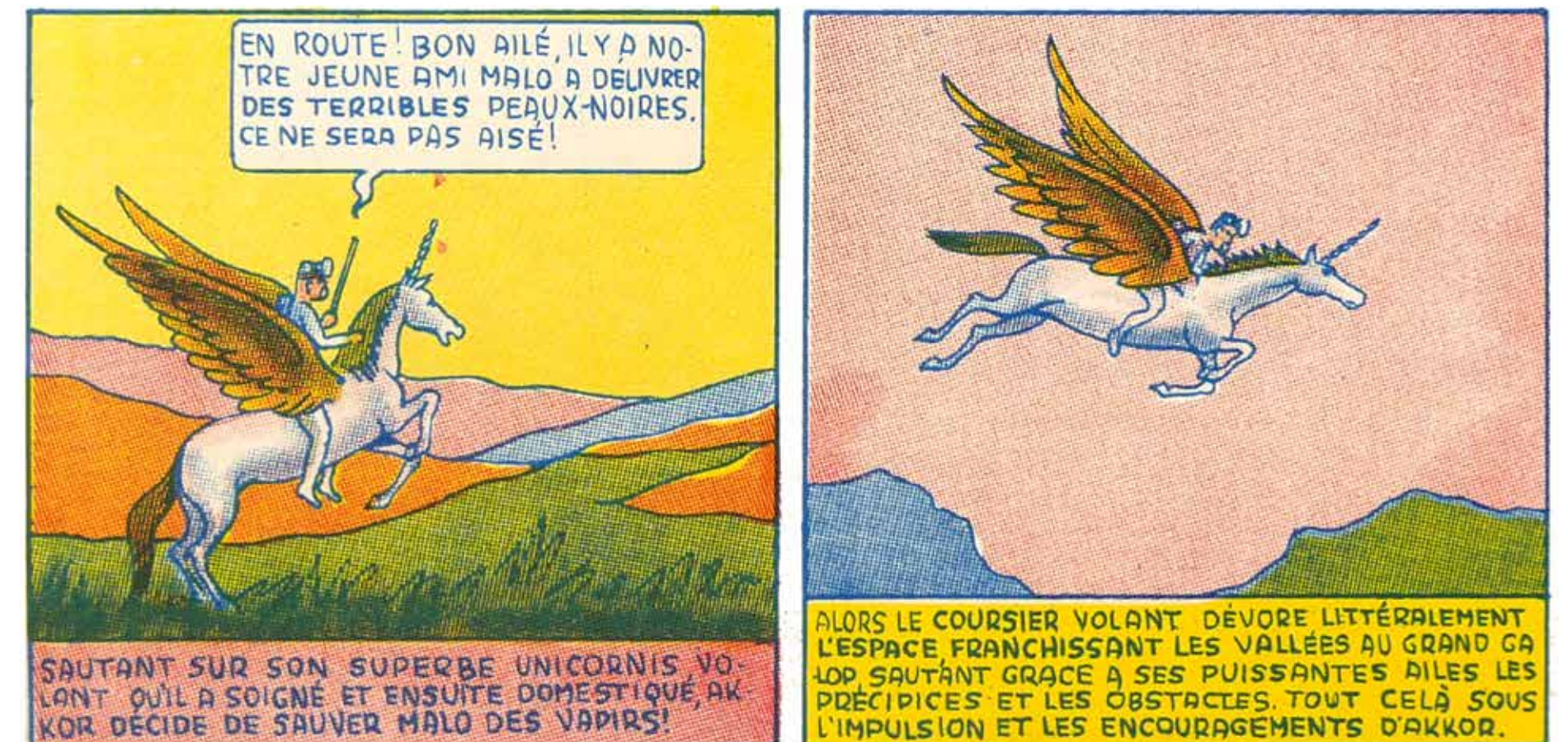
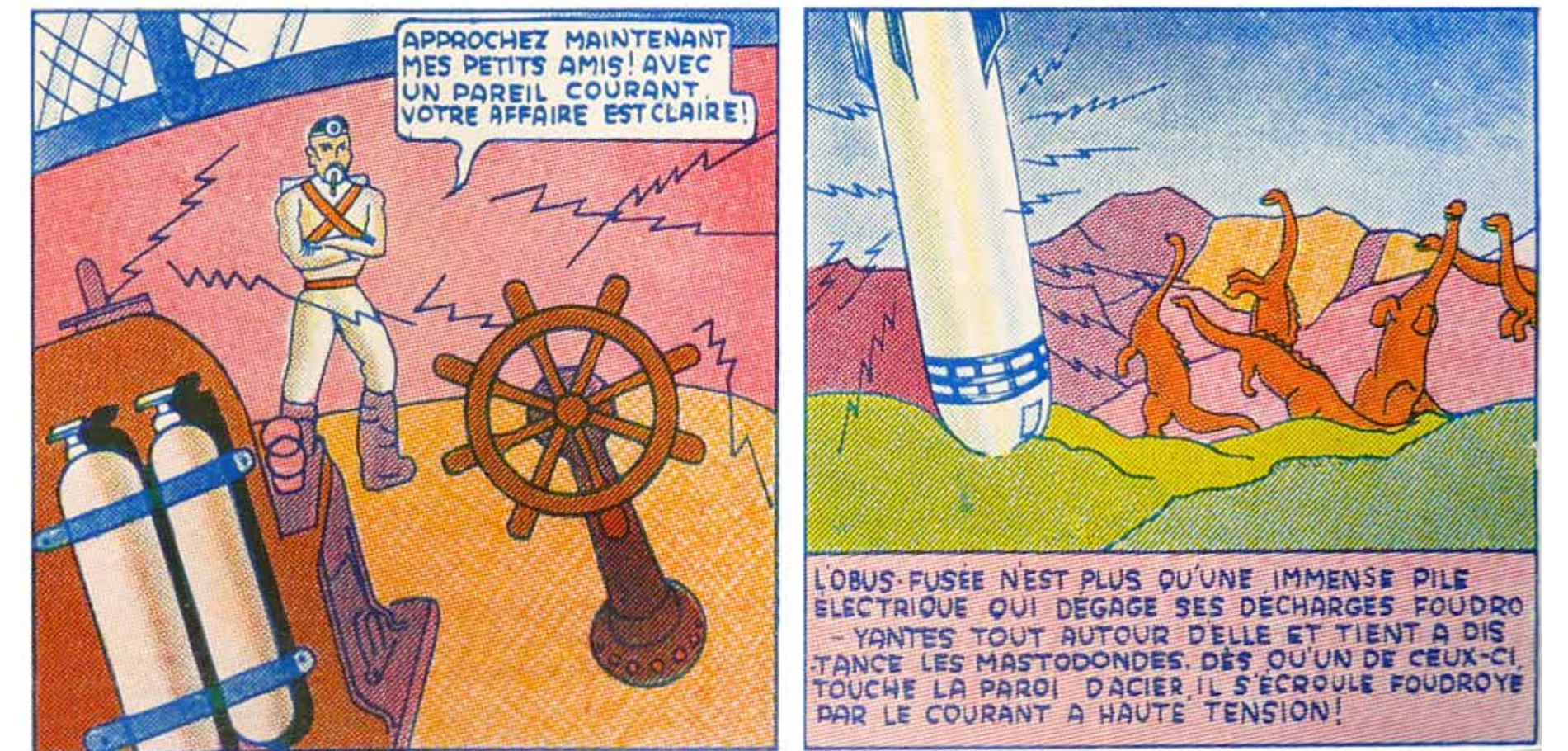
to imagine realities beyond the present.

Concerning objects like the magazines in the Van Passen collection, I have more questions than answers. I believe for sure that we should find a way to take care of both cultural artifacts and ecosystems; I don't see why we can't have one without the other. I'm all for keeping collections cataloged, preserved, and most

importantly fully accessible. It is crucial to keep the archive alive somehow, finding ways to engage with it responsibly, even at the risk of inevitably accelerating its decay. If not, what are we saving them for anyway? An archive makes sense to me as long as it's frequently reanimated, like we've been doing with the *ISSUE ZERO* project.

I'm not sure the same can be said about ecosystems, which are already animated in full force. I'm reading Anna L. Tsing's book on mushrooms, and she explains it very well: "Landscapes are not backdrops for historical action: they are themselves active." So the main difference is that ecosystems and their living and non-living inhabitants should not be "preserved" like in a glass jar or

responsibility to make this right. Maybe cultural artifacts should be taken care of as long as they allow us to have access to ways of being in the world that are, for lack of a better term, extinct. I hope this project has contributed in that way.





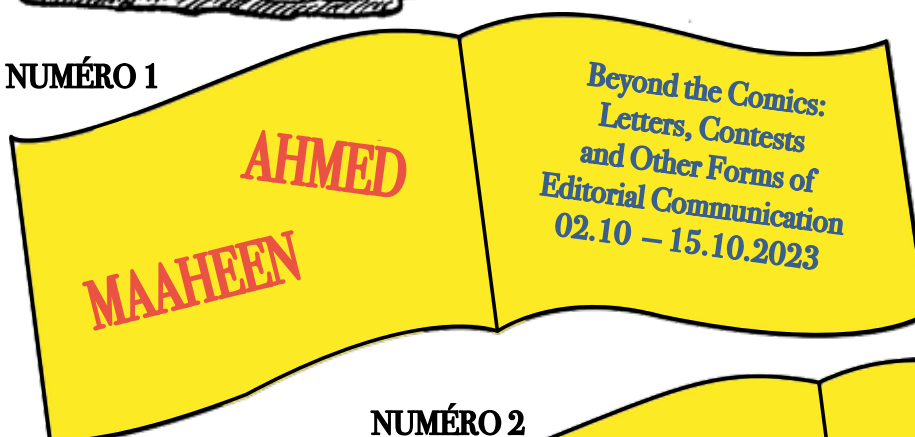
In 2018 the Ghent University library acquired a large collection of illustrated children's periodicals from Belgian comics collector Alain Van Passen.

In collaboration with Ghent University's COMICS research group, KIOSK offers a first-ever glimpse of this extensive collection. The exhibition spans three months and unfolds across seven two-week chapters, each chapter curated by a researcher from the COMICS research group or a specialist on the history of comics.

Accompanying each chapter are a publication and a poster designed by former masters students from KASK Graphic Design department.

The exhibition is curated by Simon Delobel & Felipe Muhr.

NUMÉRO 1



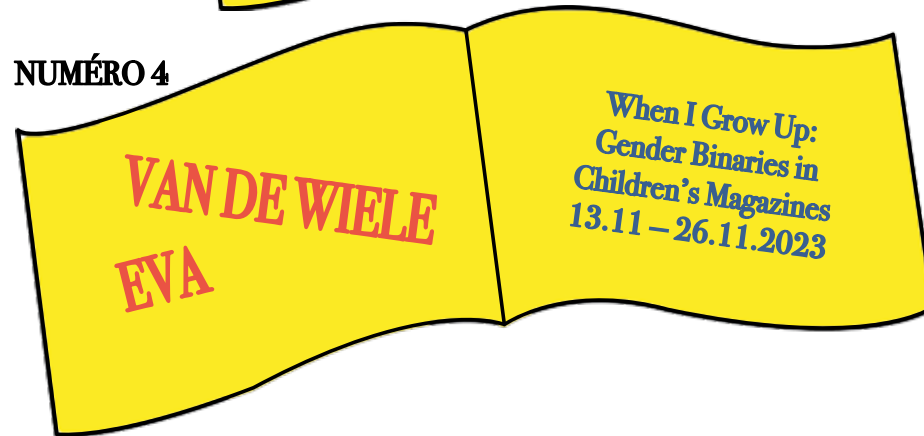
NUMÉRO 2



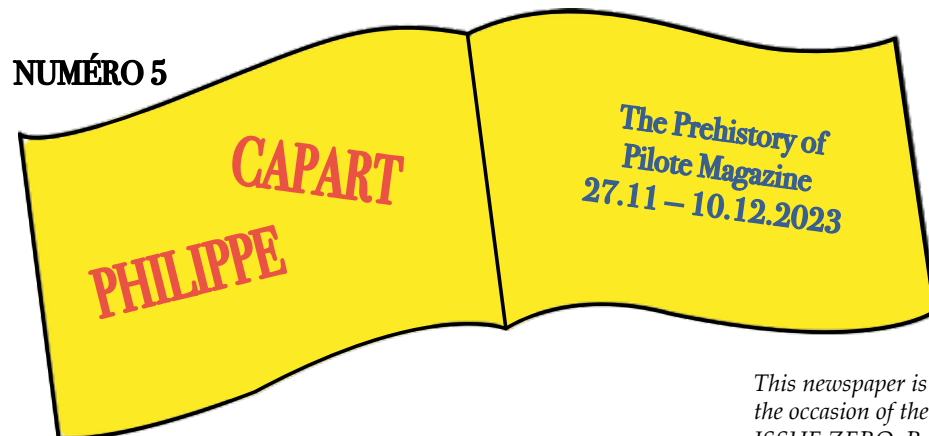
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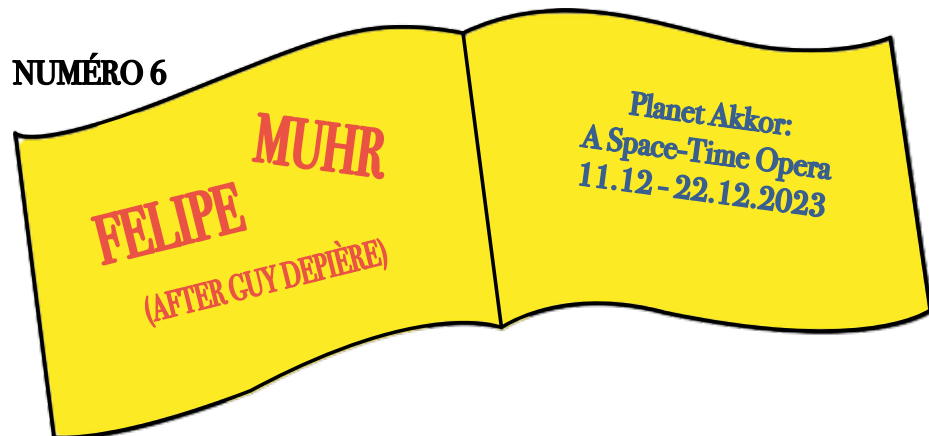
NUMÉRO 4



NUMÉRO 5



NUMÉRO 6



This newspaper is published on the occasion of the exhibition **ISSUE ZERO: Reading the Van Passen Collection** at KIOSK, Ghent. September 16 – December 22, 2023

Text of this issue by Felipe Muhr
Design by Enid Stassyns
Show curated by Simon Delobel & Felipe Muhr

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La Crypte Tonique is run by Philippe Capart.

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Researchers:
Maaheen Ahmed
Benoît Glaude
Benoît Crucifix
Eva Van de Wiele
Philippe Capart
Felipe Muhr

Poster design by:
Mieke Schelstraete
Veronika Akopyan
Enid Stassyns
Annelie Vaes

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KIOSK
L. Pasteurlaan 2, 9000 Ghent
kiosk.art

