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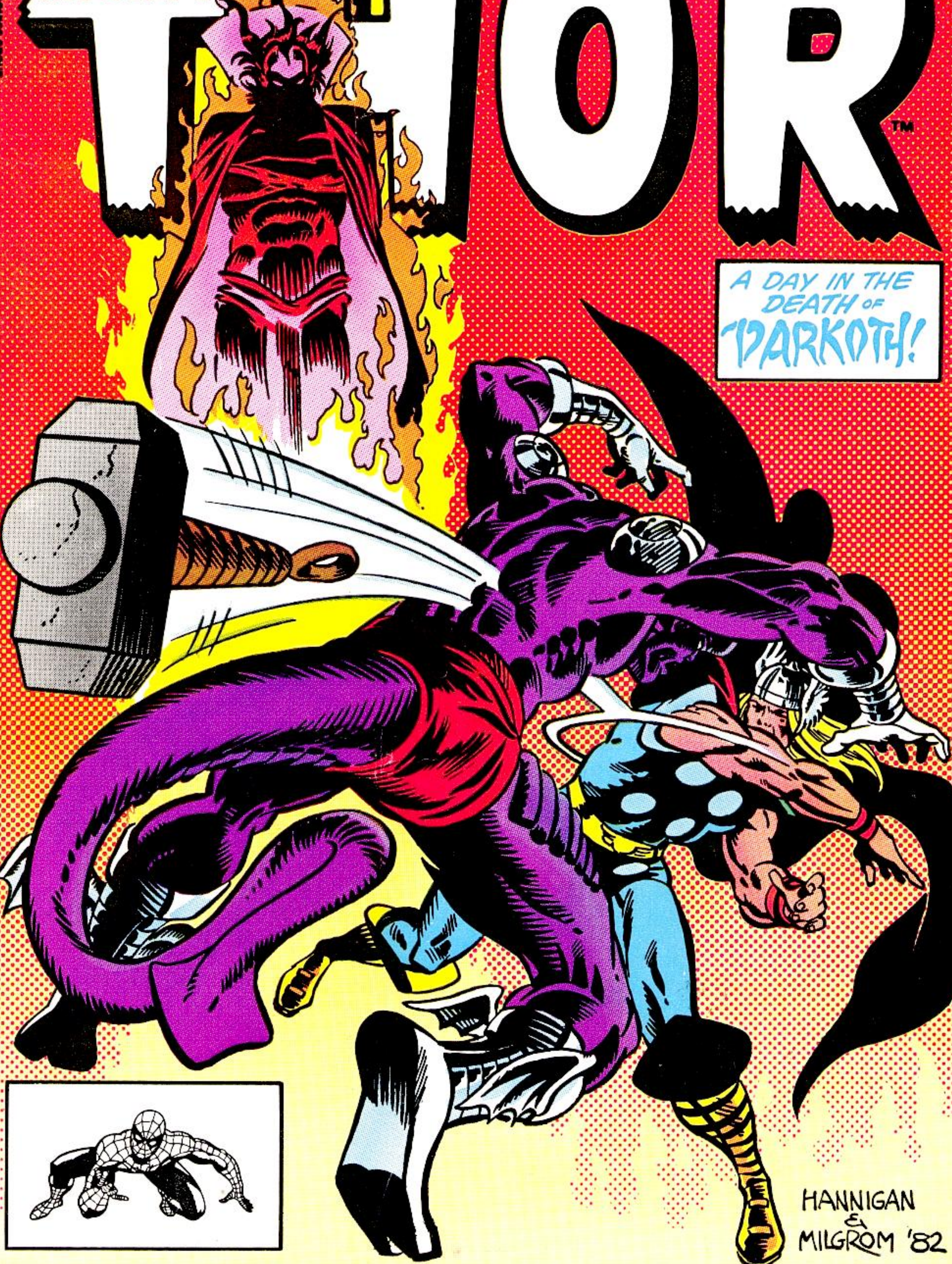
MARVEL® COMICS GROUP

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THE
MIGHTY

TERROR™

A DAY IN THE
DEATH OF
"PARKOTH!"



HANNIGAN
&
MILGROM '82

When DR. DONALD BLAKE strikes his wooden walking-stick upon the ground, it becomes the mystic hammer MJOLNIR—and the lame physician is transformed into the Norse God of Thunder, Master of the Storm, Lord of the Living Lightning—and heir to the throne of eternal Asgard...

Stan Lee PRESENTS: **THE MIGHTY THOR!**

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A DEAL WITH DARKOTH

AS EVER, MY LEGIONS SWELL, ALL PLUCKED FROM THE BENIGHTED WORLD ABOVE CALLED EARTH--THE SPAWNING GROUND FOR SOULS BOTH DOOMED AND DAMNED.

SO LONG AS MAN REMAINS A MERE EDUCATED SAVAGE -- SO LONG AS THE UNTHINKING MASSES OF HUMANITY REMAIN HOSTILE AND CONSUMED WITH GREED AND HATRED, THEN SO LONG SHALL THEIR SOULS BE MINE!

SO IT HAS EVER BEEN AND SO IT SHALL EVER BE--FOR I AM MEPHISTO, LORD OF THE DARK DOMAIN!

AND YET, BECAUSE OF THE RECENT INTERFERENCE BY HE WHO IS CALLED THOR, MY PRIDE STILL SUFFERS GRIEVOUS INJURY!

NEITHER ONE OF US COULD BE CONQUERED OR SLAIN-- BUT EVEN THOUGH OUR STRUGGLE WAS THUS FORCED TO END IN DEADLOCK, THOR NEVERTHELESS PREVAILED... EVEN DARED TO STEAL SOULS FROM MY DOMAIN!



WHAT DOES IT MATTER THAT I CHEATED-- AND CLAIMED THOSE SOULS FAR BEFORE THEIR TIME? THOR MUST STILL BE BROUGHT TO HIS KNEES-- AND FORCED TO PAY!

* SEE THOR # 310.

YET IT IS OBVIOUS THAT I CANNOT HOPE TO EXACT DIRECT REVENGE ON THE THUNDER GOD-- LEST WE MERELY BATTLE TO A STALEMATE, ENDURING FOR ALL ETERNITY, AS THOR SO NOBLY VOWED...

RATHER, I MUST EMPLOY CUNNING AND INDIRECT MEANS, STRIKING THOR AT HIS GREATEST POINT OF VULNERABILITY...



... THAT WHICH IS REVEALED TO ME NOW IN MY MYSTIC VAPORS-- HIS WEAK MORTAL FORM OF DR. DONALD BLAKE.

THE TEST RESULTS CONFIRM OUR FEARS, MRS. BARCLAY.

IT'S ME, ISN'T IT, DR. BLAKE? MY HUSBAND'S ALREADY BEEN TESTED AND THE PROBLEM ISN'T WITH HIM.

YES, I'M AFRAID YOUR TESTS ARE NEGATIVE.

DON'T WORRY, DOCTOR, I'M NOT THAT SENSITIVE-- I'D JUST LIKE TO HAVE A CHILD, THAT'S ALL. SO WHAT NOW? FERTILITY DRUGS?

WELL, THEY COULD BE TRIED... BUT IN YOUR CASE, MRS. BARCLAY, I'M AFRAID I WOULDN'T HOLD MUCH HOPE FOR THEIR EFFICACY...



BUT PLEASE, MRS. BARCLAY, DON'T FEEL THAT THIS MAKES YOU ANY LESS OF A WOMAN. IN EVERY OTHER WAY--

THEN WHAT, DOCTOR?

WELL, THERE ARE OTHER ALTERNATIVES-- FOSTER PARENTHOOD, OUT-RIGHT ADOPTION, AND EVEN SOME MORE... AH, EXOTIC POSSIBILITIES.

WELL... YES, I DON'T PERFORM SUCH PROCEDURES MYSELF, BUT I COULD REFER YOU TO--

YOU MEAN... LIKE A TEST TUBE BABY?

NO, THAT'S ALL RIGHT, DOCTOR.

MAYBE THIS IS A BLESSING IN DISGUISE-- FOR NOW, ANYWAY. WE DID WANT A CHILD, ALMOST DESPERATELY, BUT... WELL, THINGS HAVE CHANGED.

I DON'T MEAN TO PRY, MRS. BARCLAY... BUT IS SOMETHING TROUBLING YOU?

NOTHING THAT A MILLION OTHER PEOPLE AREN'T TROUBLED BY THESE DAYS. I LOST MY JOB, THAT'S ALL.

TOM-- MY HUSBAND-- HE MAKES A GOOD ENOUGH SALARY, BUT THESE DAYS IT'S ALMOST VITAL FOR BOTH THE HUSBAND AND WIFE TO WORK, AND IF THE BABY WERE TO COME--

I SEE. TELL ME... WHAT KIND OF WORK DID YOU DO?

I WAS A RECEPTIONIST-CLERK AT A SMALL BUSINESS ON THE SOUTH SIDE. IT WENT BANKRUPT.

A RECEPTIONIST? HMM... WOULD YOU OBJECT TO WORKING HERE IN THE LOOP AREA?

WOULD I OBJECT TO--? DOCTOR, YOU WOULD JUST HAVE TO BE KIDDING!

WHAT EXACTLY DID YOU HAVE IN MIND?

AT THIS DESK RIGHT OUTSIDE THE DOOR.

YOU MEAN YOU... YOU'RE ASKING ME TO WORK FOR YOU--?

WELL, AS YOU KNOW, I'VE JUST OPENED MY NEW PRACTICE HERE IN CHICAGO. AND IN ALL THE CONFUSION I'VE BEEN RELYING ON TEMPORARY OFFICE HELP UNTIL I COULD GET AROUND TO--

DOCTOR, YOU HAVE GOT YOURSELF A WOMAN. AND, I ASSURE YOU--

-- ONCE YOU'VE SEEN MY RESUME, YOU WON'T CHANGE YOUR MIND.



FINE. CAN YOU START... LET'S SAY... TOMORROW AT NINE, MRS. BARCLAY?

DOUBLE-FINE. AND THE NAME IS BRENDA.



ENOUGH! EVEN AS THE MORTAL BLAKE, THOR'S NOBILITY IS ENOUGH TO SICKEN ME!

AND YET THERE IS ONE CRUCIAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO. WHERE THOR IS IMMORTAL AND INVULNERABLE, BLAKE IS NOT...



... AND IS THUS SUSCEPTIBLE TO AN ATTACK BY ANOTHER WHOSE SOUL I CLAIMED BOTH FALSELY AND PREMATURELY...

... TO AN ATTACK BY DARKOTH THE DEATH-DEMON!

WHY--?!

I... I DON'T BELONG HERE...! WHY--?



BECAUSE I CLAIMED YOU WHEN THE OTHER SIDE-- THE POWER OF LIGHT-- REFUSED YOU IN YOUR PRESENT FORM.

YOU ARE A MONSTER, DEATH-DEMON, AND THE OTHER SIDE SPARES LITTLE LOVE FOR MONSTERS!

NO! YOU LIE! I REMEMBER NOW!

YOU CHEATED! YOU STOLE ME-- BODY AND SOUL-- IN THE MOMENT JUST BEFORE I DIED IN THAT EXPLOSION! YOU'VE SPOILED THE NORMAL COURSE OF EVENTS-- DEPRIVING ME OF MY RIGHTFUL AFTERLIFE!



YES, DEATH-DEMON--YES!!

AND NOW YOU ARE TRULY DEAD--AND TRULY MINE! NOW BE SILENT WHILE I PONDER YOUR FATE!

AND DARKOTH STIFFENS IN HIS PRIVATE POOL OF AGONY... YET, EVEN IN HIS TRANCE, HE IS GIVEN NO REPRIEVE FROM THE PAIN.

FROOOM



NOW TO USE THE MYSTIC VAPORS TO SHOW ME THE WRETCH'S PAST...

... THAT I MAY FIND THE ONE WEAK SPOT WHICH WILL ENABLE ME TO SQUEEZE HIM UNTIL HIS VERY SOUL BLEEDS...

SHOW ME!

AS YOU WISH, MASTER!

DARKOTH WAS ONCE AN ORDINARY MAN NAMED DESMOND PITT -- WHOSE BEST FRIEND WAS BENJAMIN GRIMM, HE WHO EVENTUALLY BECAME THE THING.

LATER, THE LATVERIAN MONARCH DR. DOOM ALCHEMICALLY TRANSFORMED PITT INTO THE DEATH-DEMON HE CALLED DARKOTH.

"PITT'S WIFE DIED.

"UNFORTUNATELY, WE WERE UNABLE TO CLAIM HER.

"HIS YOUNG SON WAS PLACED IN AN ORPHANAGE, WHERE HE REMAINS EVEN NOW.

ROOSEVELT ORPHANA

"TORMENTED, OUT OF CONTROL, DARKOTH WAS FORCED BY DR. DOOM TO FIGHT THE FANTASTIC FOUR.

"LATER, A BEING CALLED DIABLO ADDED TO DARKOTH'S POWERS, CONFERRING UPON HIM FLIGHT AND THE ABILITY TO PASS THROUGH SOLID OBJECTS.

"AGAIN HE BATTLED THE THING, AND WAS FINALLY ABLE TO REVEAL TO HIS FORMER FRIEND THAT HE WAS ACTUALLY DESMOND PITT.

HE SAVED THE THING'S LIFE FOR A SECOND TIME AND DIED A HERO IN THE EXPLOSION... BUT NOT BEFORE YOU SO CUNNINGLY SEIZED HIM, MASTER.

YOU ARE NOW A DEATH-DEMON IN MORE THAN NAME, DESMOND PITT!

YOU ARE NOW TRULY DEAD!

... UNLESS YOU RETURN TO HIM.

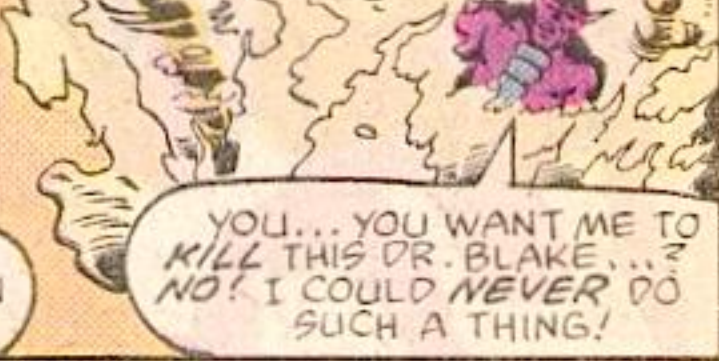
BUT... H-HOW--? THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! I-- I'M DEAD!

ENOUGH! I HAVE WHAT I NEED... THE ONE WEAK SPOT... THE SON.

... BUT YOUR PITIFUL SON LIVES ON, ABANDONED BY HIS FATHER TO A COLD AND CRUEL ORPHANAGE, WITHOUT FUTURE, WITHOUT HOPE...

YOUR BODY IS DEAD, BUT YOUR SOUL LIVES ON--AND I AM WILLING TO RELEASE YOUR SOUL... IF YOU PROCURE FOR ME A DIFFERENT SOUL IN ITS PLACE.

RENDER UNTO ME THE SOUL OF DR. DONALD BLAKE-- AND YOU MAY HAVE BLAKE'S BODY IN WHICH TO RESUME A NEW LIFE.



GOOD NIGHT, NURSE STEVENS--SEE YOU IN THE MORNING.

YOU... YOU WANT ME TO KILL THIS DR. BLAKE...? NO! I COULD NEVER DO SUCH A THING!



TRUST ME! THE MAN IS EVIL! HE BELONGS HERE!

WHY ELSE WOULD I WANT HIM HERE IN MY DOMAIN... IF HE WERE NOT A WICKED MESSENGER OF CORRUPTION... A PURVEYOR OF EVIL?

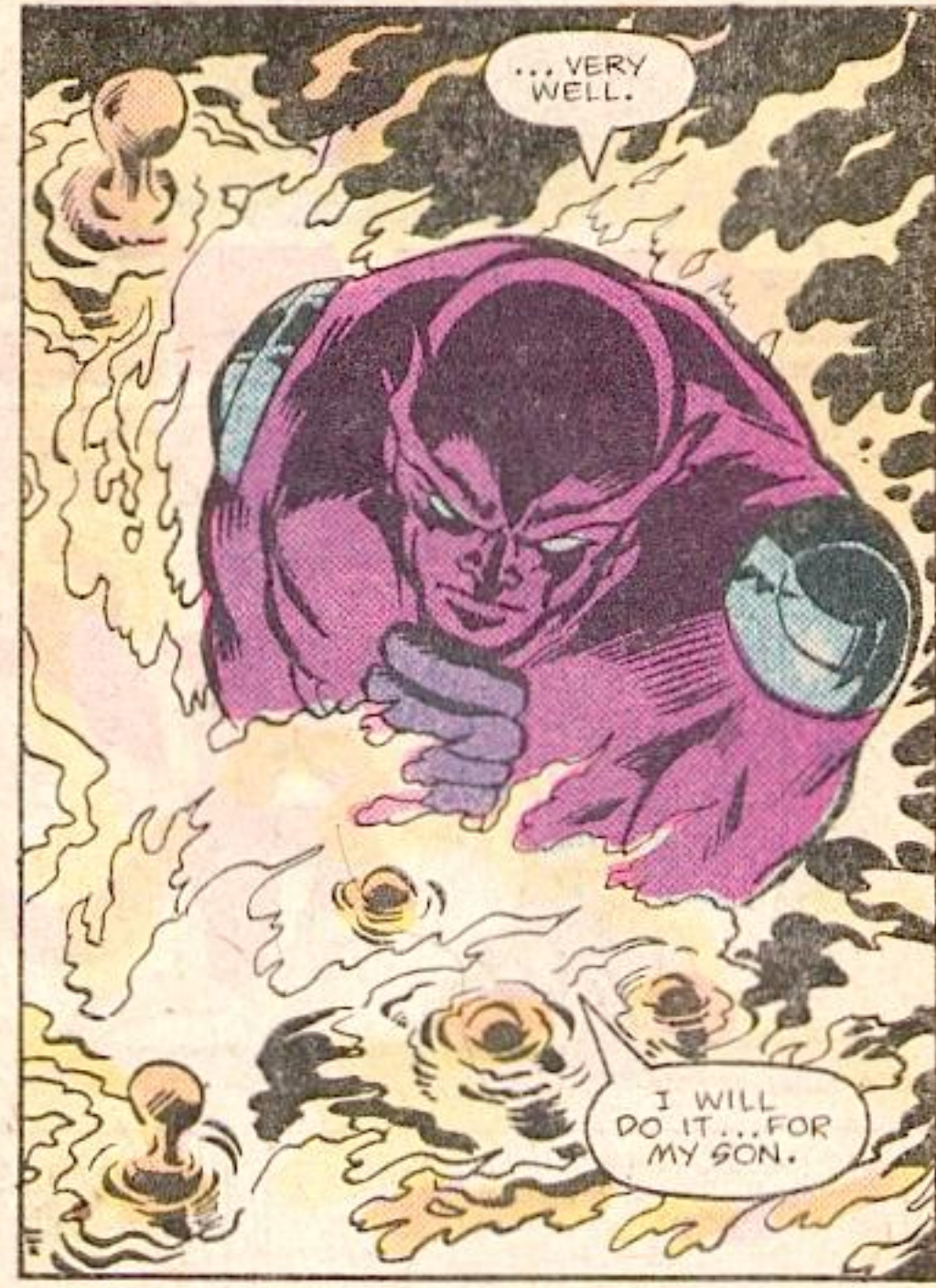


NO! I CAN'T! I WON'T!

THINK OF YOUR SON! YOUR ABANDONED SON!

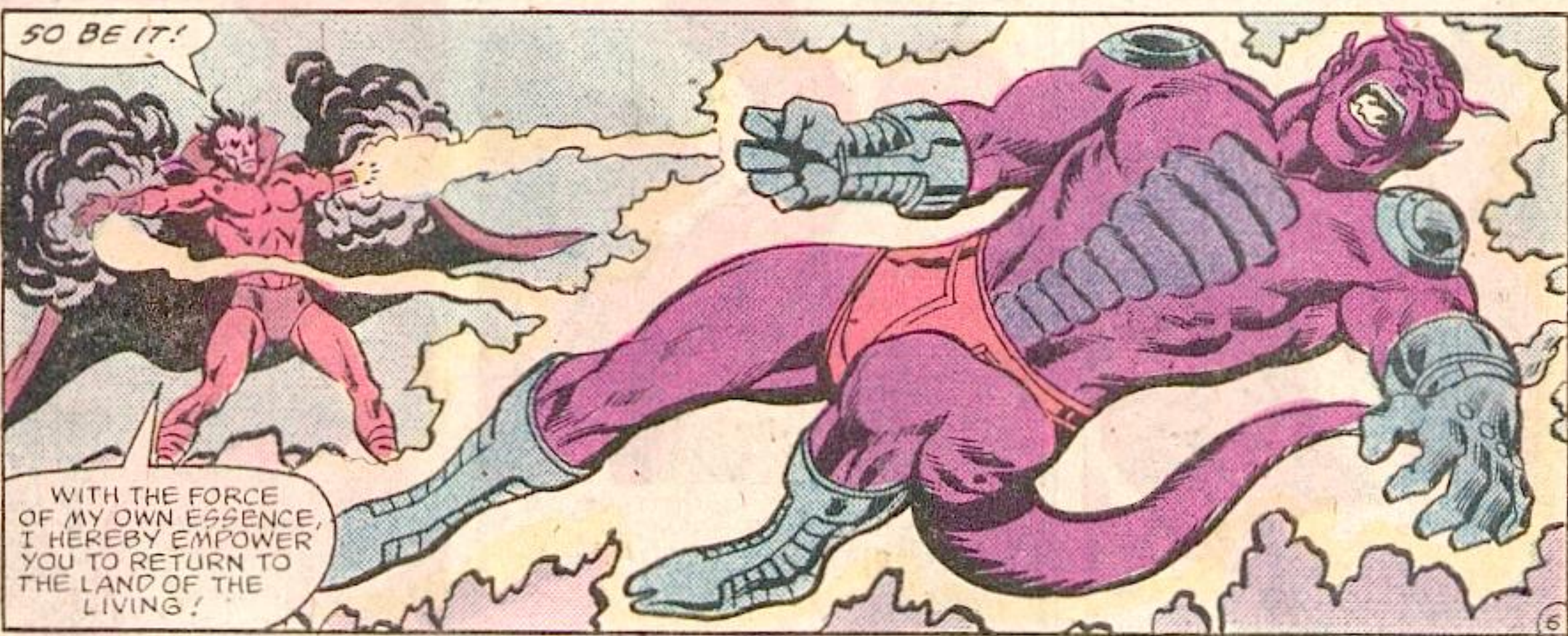
IN OFFERING YOU BLAKE'S BODY, I OFFER YOU NEW LIFE, DESMOND PITT--SO THAT YOU MAY GIVE YOUR SON NEW LIFE!

I... I...



... VERY WELL.

I WILL DO IT... FOR MY SON.



SO BE IT!

WITH THE FORCE OF MY OWN ESSENCE, I HEREBY EMPOWER YOU TO RETURN TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING!

"THOUGH DEAD YOU ARE AND DEAD YOU SHALL FOREVER REMAIN, I GRANT YOU THE POWER TO TRANSCEND YOUR DEATH..."



"...TO VENTURE FORTH FROM THE DOMAIN OF THE DOOMED AND THE DAMNED, TO PIERCE THE VEIL OF ETERNAL DARKNESS--AND TO RISE-- HIGHER AND EVER HIGHER--"

"--UNTIL YOU SHALL BREACH THE CANYONS OF CONCRETE AND STEEL..."



"...CALLED CHICAGO."

AND IN THE APARTMENT ADJOINING DONALD BLAKE'S MICHIGAN AVENUE OFFICES...



A FULL DAY-- THE KIND OF DAY THAT MAKES SLEEP A REWARD--AND THAT'S JUST THE KIND OF DAY I LIKE.

FOR ONCE EVERYTHING IS GOING GOOD FOR DONALD BLAKE--AND SINCE THOR HAS A WAY OF TAKING CARE OF HIMSELF THERE'S NOT MUCH MORE I COULD ASK FOR...

I WAS EVEN BLESSED BY BRENDA BARCLAY'S WARMTH-- AND REMINDED AGAIN THAT HELPING PEOPLE IS WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT...

AND, AS DON BLAKE CLIMBS INTO BED AND DRIFTS ASLEEP...



WH-WHAT THE--?/ SOME GUY WITH A TAIL STANDIN' IN MID-AIR-- WALKIN' RIGHT THROUGH THE WALL OF THAT BUILDING--?!

M-MUST BE TOO MUCH N-NIGHT DRIVIN'-- HEADLIGHTS ALWAYS IN YER EYES-- MAKIN' YA SEE THINGS...

MAYBE I BETTER GET HOME... CATCH SOME S-SLEEP...



INSIDE BLAKE'S BEDROOM, THE DEATH-DEMON HOVERS OVER HIS QUARRY.

FOR LONG MOMENTS, HE STANDS TRANSFIXED BY THE ENORMITY OF HIS DEED, NOT EVEN DARING TO BREATHE...



THEN A VIVID IMAGE FILLS HIS MIND-- HIS YOUNG SON, WEEPING IN A COLD CORNER OF A LONELY ORPHANAGE.

HE REACHES DOWN TO CLAIM THE HELPLESS LIFE BEFORE HIM.

BUT THEN, AT THE LAST MOMENT...



NO! EVEN IF HE IS EVIL-- I CAN'T DO IT! NOT EVEN FOR MY SON!

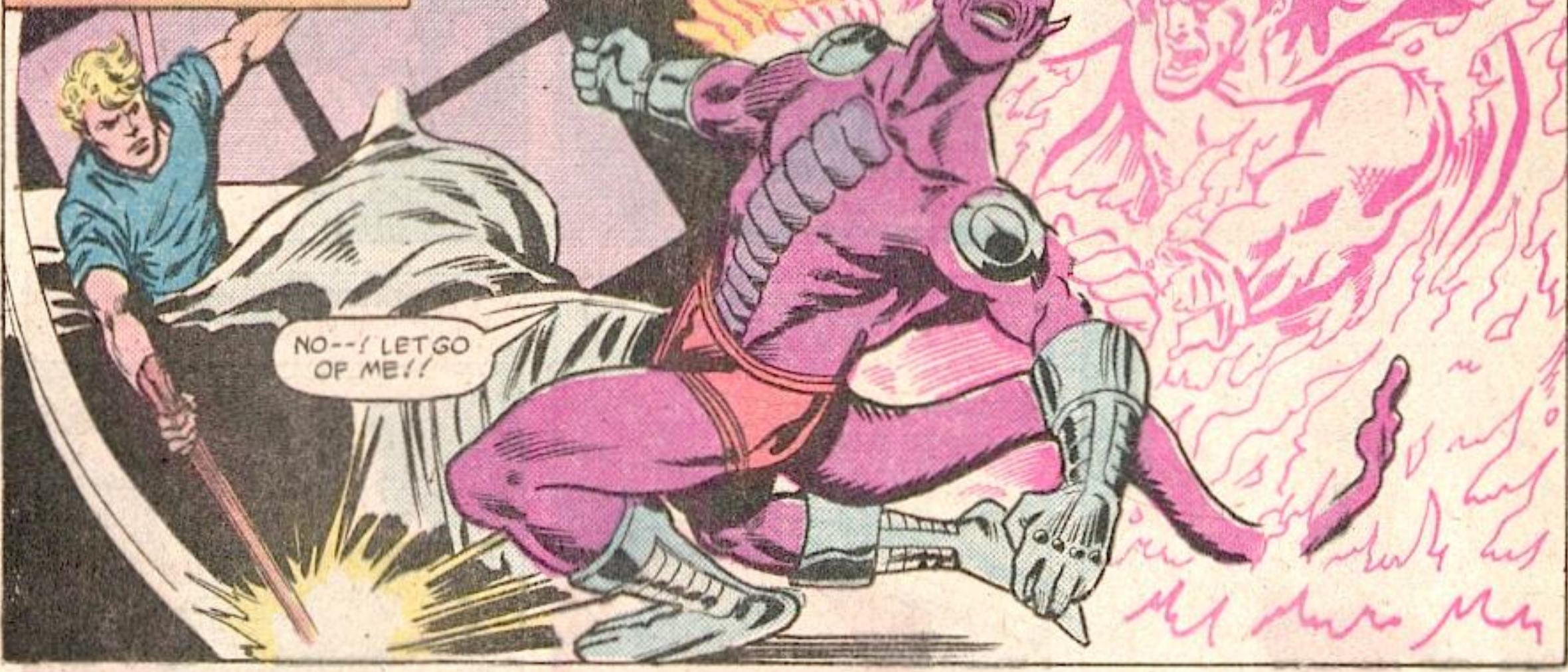
KRASHH!

EH--? WHAT THE--?



LET ME GO! DON'T FORCE ME TO DO IT!!
SOME KIND OF DEMON-- AND IT'S AS IF HE'S WRESTLING SOMETHING INVISIBLE!

INVISIBLE TO BLAKE'S EYES, YES-- BUT TO DARKOTH THE DEATH-DEMON, MEPHISTO'S PRESENCE IS A TANGIBLE REALITY CAST IN NIGHT-MARE!



DO IT! KILL HIM! CLAIM HIS BODY! GIVE ME HIS SOUL! THEN YOU CAN BE WITH YOUR SON FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE!

NO--! LET GO OF ME!!



BLAKE SCRAMBLES FROM THE BED, SLAMMING HIS WALKING STICK TO THE FLOOR...



AND... WHY DOST THOU STRUGGLE SO? WHAT ART THOU--?

ENOUGH! ATTACK HIM! KILL HIM!

AND MEPHISTO HURLS DARKOTH INTO THE FRAY...



THOU WOULDST ATTACK ME, DEMON?

VERY WELL-- THEN LET THE BATTLE BE JOINED!

NO! I WON'T DO IT!!

ODIN'S BLOOD! MINE URU HAMMER PASSES RIGHT THROUGH HIS BODY!



AND NOW HE FLEES-- MELTING THROUGH THE VERY WALL!

BUT WHO IS HE-- AND WHY HATH HE COME HERE... ONLY TO FLEE?

AND THE WAY HE SPOKE TO HIMSELF, SEEMINGLY TORN BY CONFLICTING DESIRES...



'TIS CLEAR THAT ONLY IN THE FACE OF A SECOND CONFRONTATION WILL THESE MYSTERIES BE SOLVED.

THERE-- FAR IN THE DISTANCE.

HE HEADS WEST-- TOWARD THE VERY EDGE OF THE CITY.



AND, MILES AWAY, THE DEATH DEMON COMES TO A HALT IN ONE OF CHICAGO'S OUTLYING FOREST PRESERVES...

IT'S MADNESS-- THIS WHOLE THING IS MADNESS!

WHAT CAN I DO NOW--?



I CAN'T KILL BLAKE-- OR ANYONE ELSE, FOR THAT MATTER-- AND YET I CAN'T RETURN TO THE RANKS OF THE DEAD EITHER...

... NOT SINCE MEPHISTO INFUSED ME WITH THIS FALSE SEMBLANCE OF LIFE.

AM I DOOMED-- IN THIS HALF-LIVING, HALF-DEAD FORM TO WANDER THE EARTH FOREVER?



WHAT CAN I -- WAIT! MY SON! THE ONLY THING I CARE ABOUT!

IF I COULD JUST LOCATE HIM MAYBE, I COULD...

NO-- I COULD NEVER SHOW MYSELF TO HIM, NOT IN THIS FORM, BUT IF I COULD JUST SEE HIM... IF I COULD JUST--!



NEVER, DEATH DEMON! NEVER SHALL YOU SEE YOUR CURSED SON AGAIN! YOU HAVE FAILED IN YOUR CHARGE, REFUSED TO FULFILL YOUR END OF THE BARGAIN--

--AND SO I MUST NOW FORCE YOU TO DO SO!

INFUSING YOU WITH LIFE WAS NOT ENOUGH! NOW I MUST ALSO FILL YOU WITH THE PROPER ATTITUDE-- WITH THE POWER OF SHEER, NAKED EVIL!

AND THE CITY-BOUND FOREST GLOWS CRIMSON UNDER MEPHISTO'S FURY.

AT THE VERY SAME MOMENT, HIS FLIGHT POWERED BY THE MYSTIC URU HAMMER MJOLNIR, THOR ARCS OVER THE CITYSCAPE TOWARD THE FOREST PRESERVE.



THE RED GLOW FROM YON TREES-- IT MUST BE THE DEMON!

YET MAYHAP I SHOULD APPROACH IN STEALTH AND CAUTION...

AND SO HE DOES-- AND THIS TIME, HIS PRESENCE UNSUSPECTED, MEPHISTO'S FORM IS NOT CONCEALED FROM HIS EYES...



NOW THE EARLIER MYSTERIES BE RENDERED CLEAR!

THE DEMON DID NOT STRUGGLE WITH HIMSELF...

'T WAS THE EVIL INFLUENCE OF MEPHISTO HE GRAPPLED--AND STRUGGLES 'GAINST E'EN NOW!

THE DEAL, DARKOTH-- BLAKE'S SOUL FOR YOURS!



NEVER! BURN ME ALL YOU WANT, DEVIL! I WON'T DO IT!!

THEN 'TIS ALL MY FAULT! MEPHISTO SEEKS VENGEANCE UPON ME FOR OUR EARLIER BATTLE-- AND THIS "DARKOTH" IS BEING USED AS A MERE PAWN!

NEVER, YOU SAY?
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN
YOUR SON, DESMOND PITT,
LANGUISHING FATHERLESS IN
A HOMELESS HOME--WEEP-
ING WITHIN THE COLD
GRAY WALLS OF AN
ORPHANAGE--?

AGAIN THE IMAGE--EVEN
MORE VIVIDLY NOW--AND
THIS TIME IT STUNS HIM.

HIS RESISTANCE IS MOMENTARILY
DROPPED-- AND THE MOMENT IS
LONG ENOUGH TO LET MEPHISTO'S
SEETHING INFLUENCE ENTER HIM,
TRANSFORMING HIM INTO A PER-
FECT PAWN.

... A DEATH DEMON
OF TRUE EVIL.

AND IT IS THEN,
TRAGICALLY AFTER THE
FACT, THAT THOR MAKES
HIS PRESENCE KNOWN...

HOLD, MEPHISTO! NO
LONGER WILL I PERMIT
THEE TO TORTURE THIS
INNOCENT CREATURE!

YOU ARE TOO LATE,
THOR! DARKOTH IS NO
LONGER INNOCENT!

EH--?/ BUT
HE... HE WAS
RESISTING
THEE SO
FIERCELY--!

INDEED, HE IS
NOW MINE!

YOU MUST
DIE, BLAKE--
DIE!!

AND, IN PEALS OF LAUGHTER LIKE
THUNDER BLASTING BRIMSTONE,
THE IMAGE OF MEPHISTO FADES... WHILE
THE BATTLE ENSUES.

FOR AN HOUR AND LONGER, THEY FIGHT, FILLING THE FOREST GLADE WITH THE SOUNDS OF FURY AND RAGE.

FROM A DISTANCE, THOR'S OFFENSE IS INEFFECTUAL -- FOR HIS THROWN HAMMER PASSES HARMLESSLY, TIME AND AGAIN, THROUGH THE OTHER'S BODY.

AT CLOSE QUARTERS, HOWEVER, THE STORY IS DIFFERENT! IN DEALING PUNISHMENT TO THOR, DARKOTH IS FORCED TO SOLIDIFY HIS FORM -- AND SO, IN ORDER TO STRIKE BLOWS, HE MUST BE WILLING TO RECEIVE THE SAME.



AND AT THE END OF AN HOUR AND MORE, IT IS CLEAR THAT DARKOTH'S RAGE EQUALS THOR'S FURY...



HEAR ME, DARKOTH! JUST AS I VOWED TO BATTLE THY MASTER THROUGHOUT ALL ETERNITY, SO TOO SHALL I BATTLE THEE TO THE VERY ENDS OF TIME!



YOU SPEAK FAR TOO SOON, THUNDER GOD!

NO STALE-MATE CAN BE ESTABLISHED UNTIL YOU'VE FELT THE POWER OF MY FIREHORNS -- THE ANTENNAE WHICH FEEDS ON MY OPPONENT'S BRAINWAVES...

... AND WHICH TURN THAT FOE'S OWN POWER AND WILL AGAINST HIM!



TIME AND AGAIN, BLASTED BY THE CRIMSON FORCE, HE IS TOSSED AND TUMBLED LIKE A BROKEN RAG DOLL.

ANY OTHER BEING WOULD HAVE FALLEN IN DEFEAT AT THE FIRST BLAST.

BUT NOW, SUMMONING HIS LAST DRESS OF STRENGTH AND COURAGE, THOR RISES TO MAKE A BOLD, FINAL STAND...

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE, AND IN ONE SEARING MOMENT, THOR BEARS THE FULL BRUNT OF HIS OWN AWESOME INDOMITABLE WILL...

VALIANTLY WITHSTANDING THE RAVAGING BLASTS OF CRIMSON, THOR LIFTS MIGHTY MJOLNIR HIGH--CALLING UPON HIS AUTHORITY AS LORD OF STORMS TO SUMMON FORTH BOILING CLOUDS AND CRACKLING BOLTS OF LIGHTNING...

I SAY THEE NAY, DARKOTH! THOU ART NOT TRULY EVIL-- THIS I KNOW--AND I SHALL NOT PERMIT THEE TO ENACT THE EVIL OF ANOTHER!

JUST AS MEPHISTO HATH INFUSED THEE WITH THE ESSENCE OF HIS EVIL, SO WILT I INFUSE THEE WITH THE VERY ESSENCE OF LIGHT--

--AND THUS CANCEL THE CORRUPTION WITHERING THY SOUL!!

LIGHTNING FLARES DOWN TO SHEATHE MJOLNIR IN SEETHING WHITE FIRE-- THEN LEAPS FORTH FROM THE HAMMER TOWARD DARKOTH...

IT IS MET, HALFWAY BETWEEN THE TWO COMBATANTS, BY A CRIMSON BOLT FROM THE DEATH DEMON'S FIREHORNS...



A SIZZLING, TREMBLING STASIS OF WHITE AND RED STRETCHES BETWEEN THE TWO FOR LONG MOMENTS...

THEN, SLOWLY, INEXORABLY, THE LIGHTNING BEGINS TO PREVAIL -- PUSHING BACK THE CRIMSON...

... FARTHER...

... AND YET FARTHER...



... UNTIL --

AGH-H!!

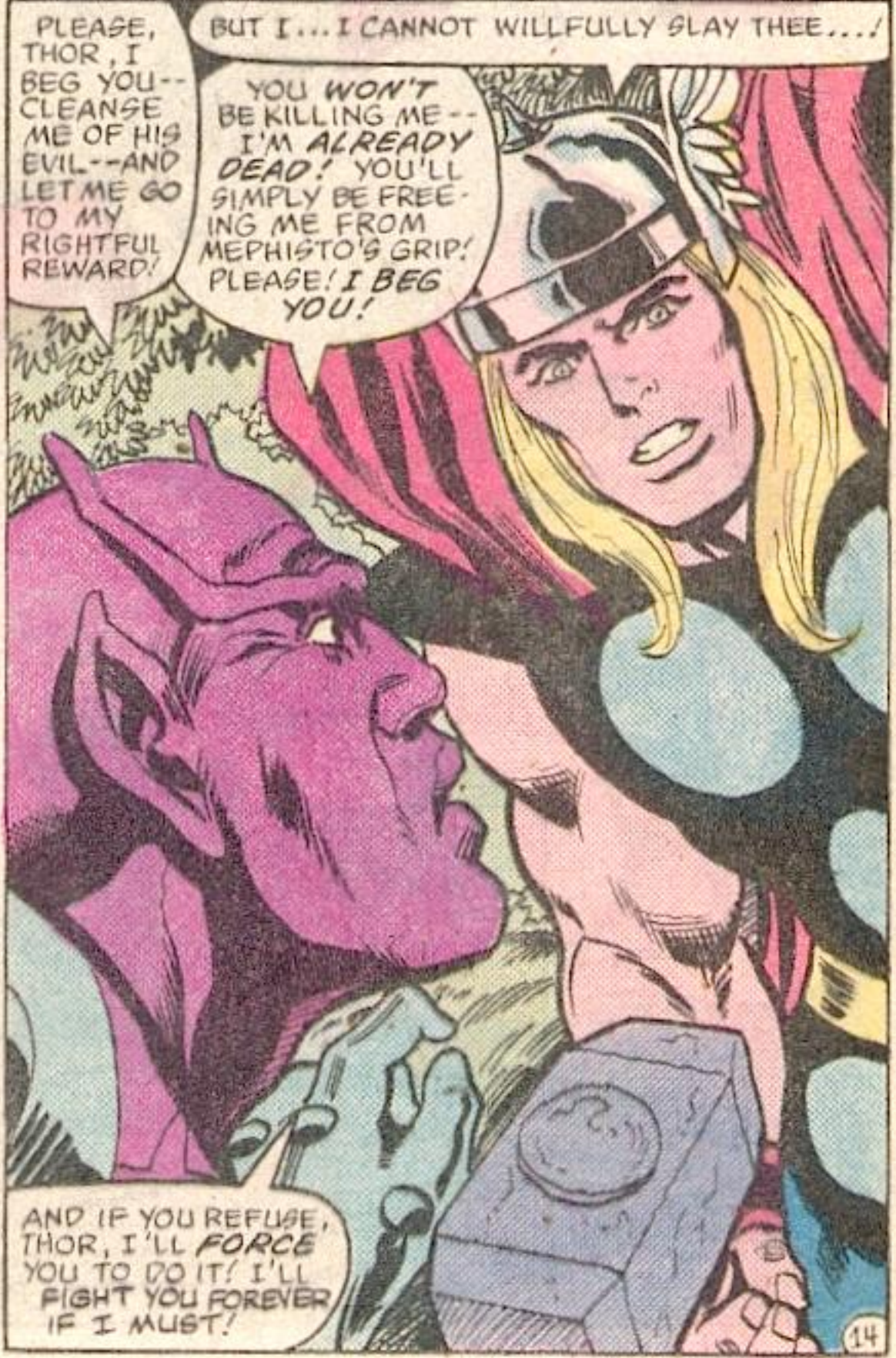
THOR-- FORGIVE ME! I DIDN'T MEAN TO--!



SAY NO MORE, DARKOTH! WELL DID I KNOW THAT THY TRUE INTENTIONS WERE PERVERTED BY MEPHISTO-- AND NOW, LEST TOO MUCH OF THE LIGHT OVERCOME THEE

NO! DON'T STOP, THOR! RELEASE--! THE LIFE I HAVE NOW IS FALSE-- AND THE PRODUCT OF EVIL!

I I AM RIGHTFULLY DEAD-- THOUGH WRONGFULLY CLAIMED BY MEPHISTO!



PLEASE, THOR, I BEG YOU-- CLEANSE ME OF HIS EVIL-- AND LET ME GO TO MY RIGHTFUL REWARD!

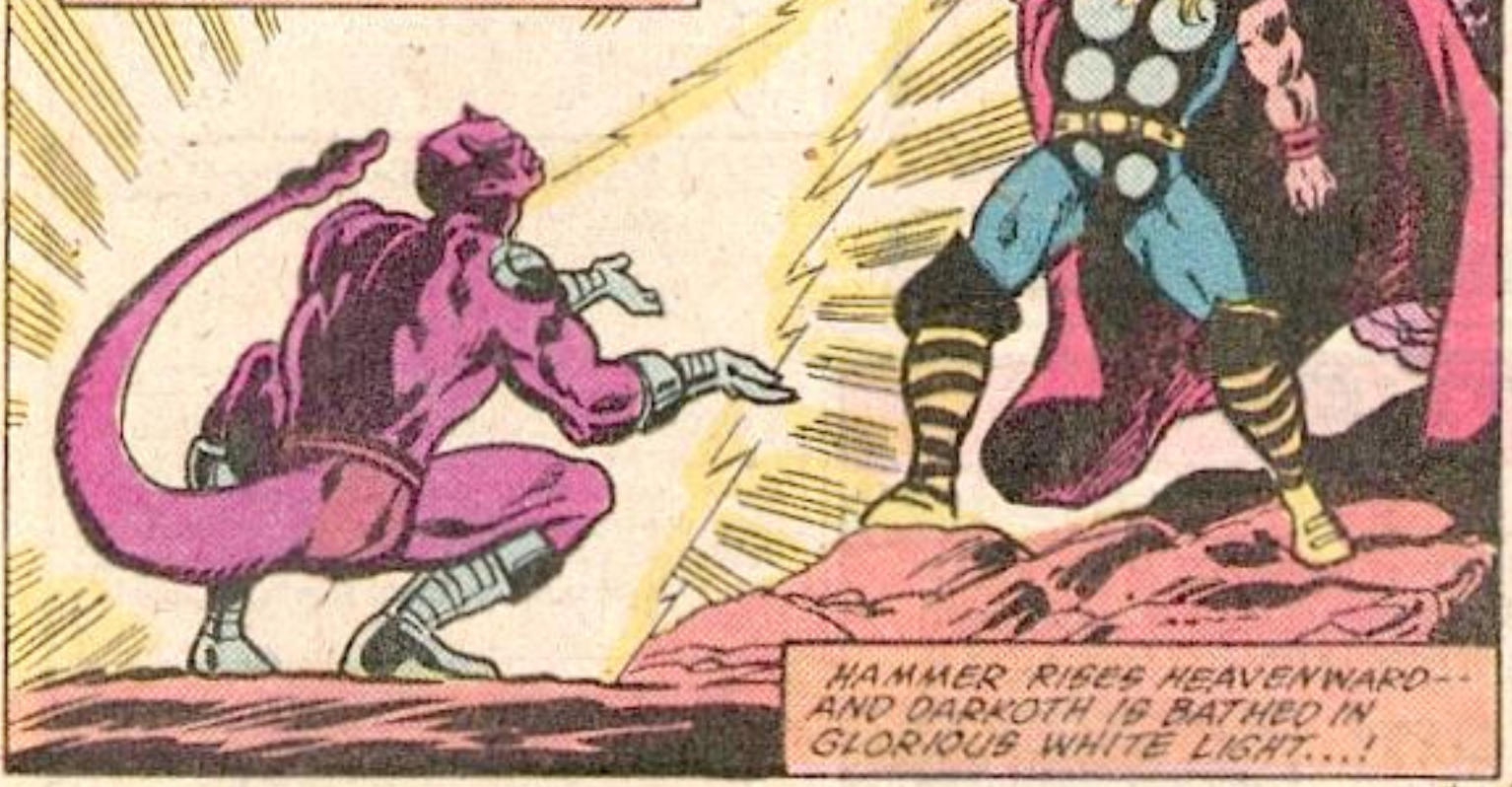
BUT I... I CANNOT WILLFULLY SLAY THEE...!

YOU WON'T BE KILLING ME-- I'M ALREADY DEAD! YOU'LL SIMPLY BE FREEING ME FROM MEPHISTO'S GRIP! PLEASE! I BEG YOU!

AND IF YOU REFUSE, THOR, I'LL FORCE YOU TO DO IT! I'LL FIGHT YOU FOREVER IF I MUST!

THERE IS A LONG SILENCE IN WHICH DARKOTH PLEADS ONLY WITH HIS EYES -- EYES WHICH HAVE STARED FULL UPON HELL'S RELENTLESS TORMENT, AND WHICH NOW PASS THE HIDEOUS SIGHT ONTO THOR.

IT IS MORE THAN ENOUGH TO SWAY THE DECISION.



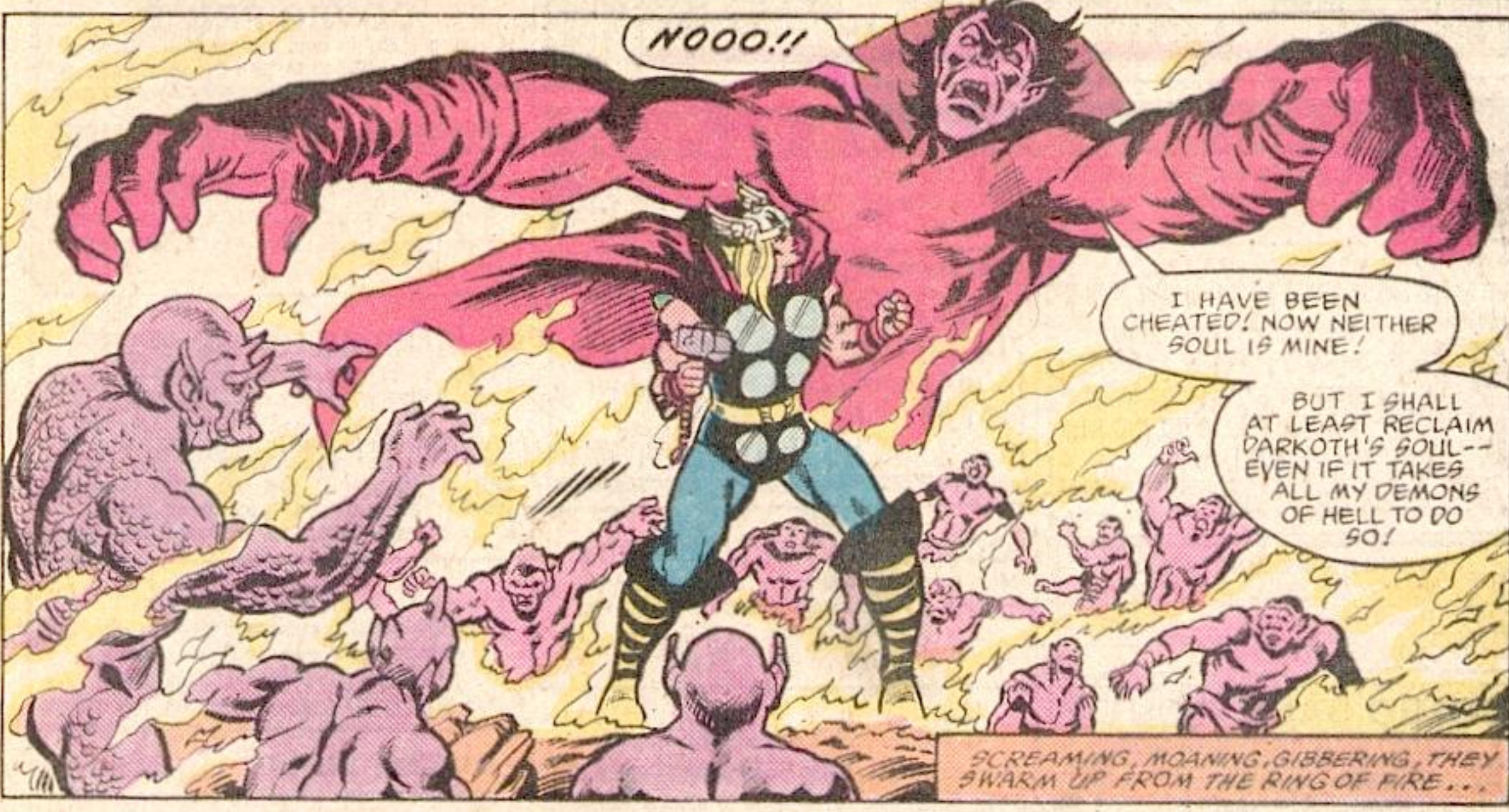
HAMMER RISES HEAVENWARD-- AND DARKOTH IS BATHED IN GLORIOUS WHITE LIGHT...!

HE CRUMPLES, SPENDING HIS LAST BREATH ON THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS TO HIM...



MY... MY... SON.

AND THEN HE SLIPS, WITHOUT PAIN, INTO THE TRUE DEATH WHICH IS HIS REWARD...

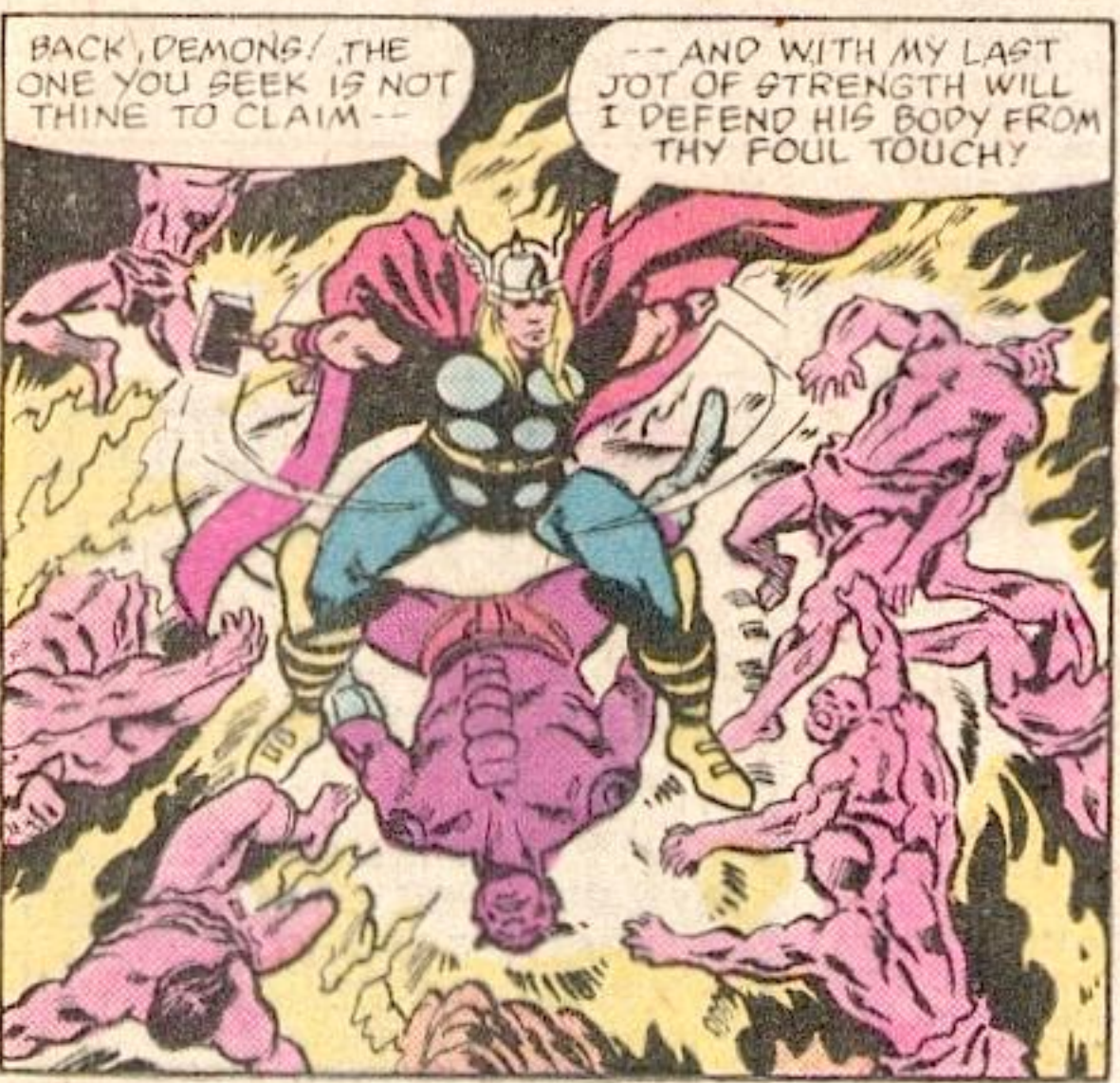


NOOO!!

I HAVE BEEN CHEATED! NOW NEITHER SOUL IS MINE!

BUT I SHALL AT LEAST RECLAIM DARKOTH'S SOUL-- EVEN IF IT TAKES ALL MY DEMONS OF HELL TO DO SO!

SCREAMING, MOANING, GIBBERING, THEY SWARM UP FROM THE RING OF FIRE...



BACK, DEMONS! THE ONE YOU SEEK IS NOT THINE TO CLAIM--

-- AND WITH MY LAST JOE OF STRENGTH WILL I DEFEND HIS BODY FROM THY FOUL TOUCH!



DO YE HEAR ME?! NEVER WILL I SURRENDER THE SOUL OF ONE SO NOBLE!

NEVER!!



BACK, DEMONS! BACK INTO THE FLAMES WHICH SPAWNED THEE!



THEN, AS THE RING OF FIRE DIES TO A FLICKER...

WELL, MEPHISTO? WELL, EVIL ONE? IS THAT "ALL YOUR DEMONS OF HELL" --?!

I AWAIT THEE, MEPHISTO! I AWAIT THEE!



WELL, MASTER --? SHALL I SUMMON THE OTHERS?

SHALL WE SEND MORE UP TO ATTACK HIM? SHALL WE --



SILENCE, YOU FOOL!



NO, WE SHALL NOT ATTACK HIM FURTHER! CAN'T YOU SEE WHAT HE'S DONE, YOU FOOL?!

HE'S WON! HE'S WON AGAIN!



ABOVE, A HARSH GRATING FILLS THE GLADE -- AS RIVEN ROCK HEALS ITSELF...

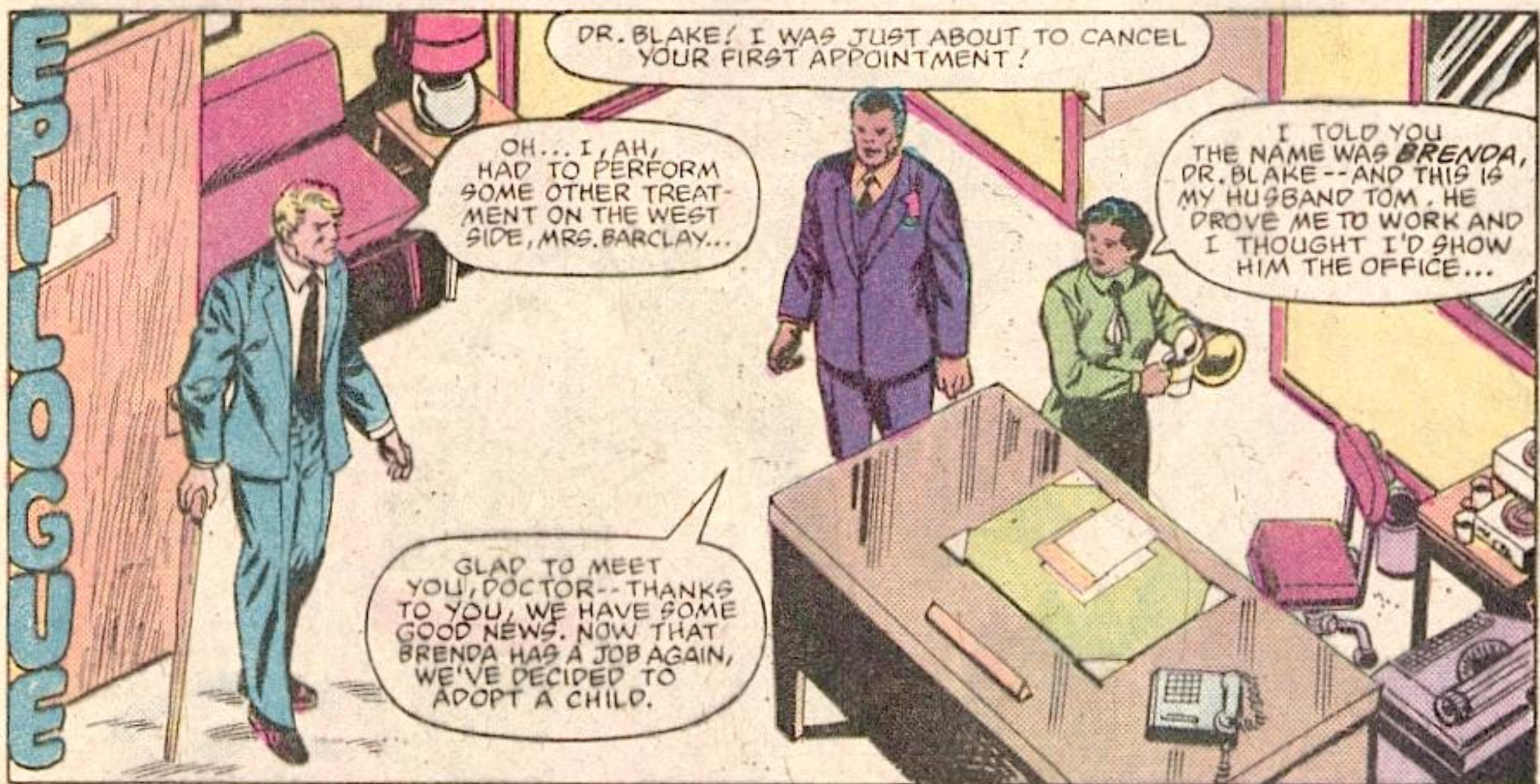
I THANK THEE, FATHER... I THANK THEE FOR THE STRENGTH WHICH THOU HAST GRANTED ME IN MY EFFORT TO PRESERVE THIS MORTAL'S SOUL...

'T WAS HIS RIGHT, AND HIS REWARD... FOR SELDOM HAS ANY MORTAL SO FIERCELY OPPOSED SUCH EVIL.

FAREWELL, DARKOTH...
FAREWELL, DEATH-
DEMON...

FAREWELL,
DESMOND
PITT.

LET
PEACE BE
THINE.



DR. BLAKE! I WAS JUST ABOUT TO CANCEL
YOUR FIRST APPOINTMENT!

OH... I, AH,
HAD TO PERFORM
SOME OTHER TREAT-
MENT ON THE WEST
SIDE, MRS. BARCLAY...

I TOLD YOU
THE NAME WAS **BRENDA**,
DR. BLAKE-- AND THIS IS
MY HUSBAND TOM. HE
DROVE ME TO WORK AND
I THOUGHT I'D SHOW
HIM THE OFFICE...

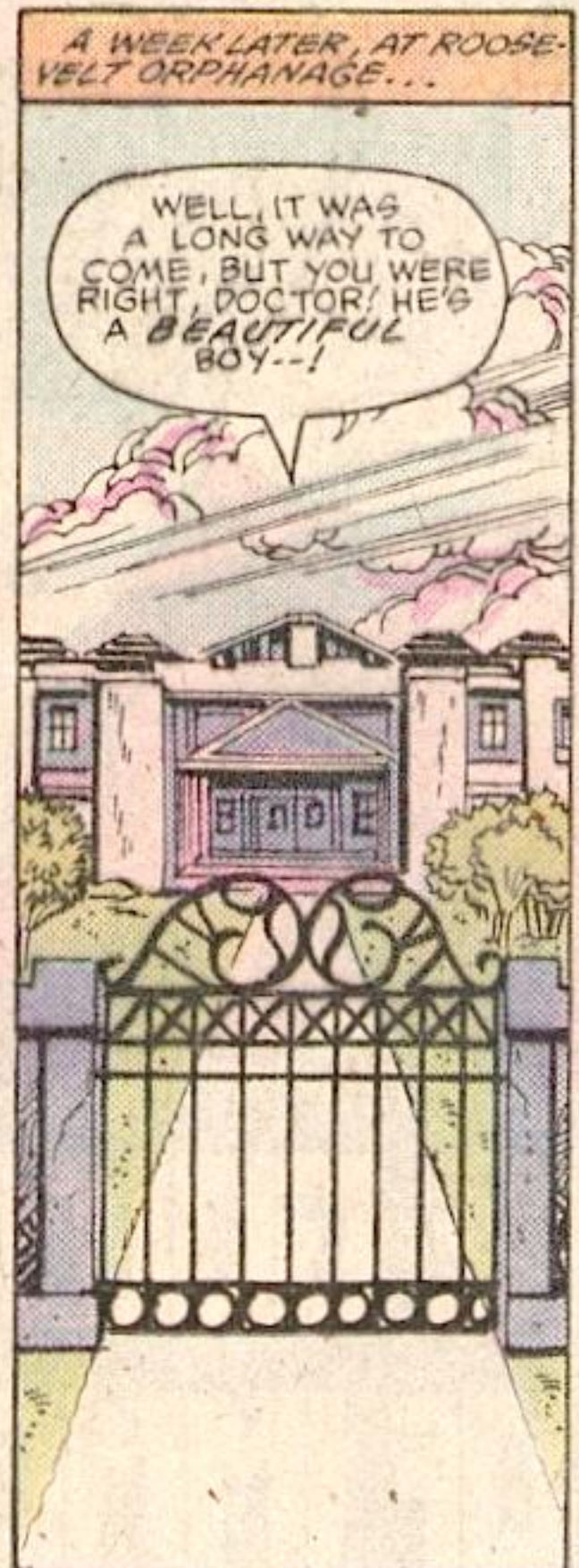
GLAD TO MEET
YOU, DOCTOR-- THANKS
TO YOU, WE HAVE SOME
GOOD NEWS. NOW THAT
BRENDA HAS A JOB AGAIN,
WE'VE DECIDED TO
ADOPT A CHILD.



REALLY? WELL,
CONGRATULATIONS!

YES,
WE'D LIKE
A SON.

A SON, EH...?
A SON! OF COURSE!
AND I KNOW JUST THE
CHILD FOR YOU! HE'LL
BE PERFECT!



A WEEK LATER, AT ROOSE-
VELT ORPHANAGE...

WELL, IT WAS
A LONG WAY TO
COME, BUT YOU WERE
RIGHT, DOCTOR! HE'S
A BEAUTIFUL
BOY--!



AND I'M SURE HE'S
GOING TO BE VERY HAPPY
WITH US IN HIS NEW
HOME...

SMILING FROM FAR, FAR AWAY,
DESMOND PITT AGREES...

NEXT THE SCARAB
STRIKES!

TALES OF ASGARD, HOME OF THE MIGHTY NORSE GODS™

ON A BROKEN, BLACK ROCKED CRAG DEEP IN ASSGARD, THE FORCES OF EVIL HAVE GATHERED... LED BY LOKI, GOD OF DARK MISCHIEF, AND BY TYR, GOD OF WAR...

BELOW LIES THE HOME OF THE GODDESS IDUNN, KEEPER OF THE LIFE-APPLES!

AND BEFORE US LIES THE MEANS TO OUR FINAL VICTORY-- THROUGH THE DOWN-FALL OF ODIN AND ALL HE DOTH HOLD DEAR!

DOUG MOENCH
Scripter
ALAN KUPPERBERG
Penciler
JACK ABEL
Inker
JANICE CHIANG
Letterer
CHRISTIE SCHEELE
Colorist

THE GOLDEN APPLES OF IMMORTALITY

BURN IT, FIRE DEMON! BURN THOU IDUNN'S HOME WITH THE BLAZING TOUCH OF THINE OWN BODY!

AYE, FRIEND LOKI-- AND 'TIS MINE TO TAKE THE GODDESS HERSELF CAPTIVE!

SOON...

STRUGGLE, IDUNN-- WRITHE AND SQUIRM LIKE A PINNED BEAST! 'T WILL ONLY ADD MORE SPICE TO OUR TRIUMPH!

THOU HAST GONE MAD, LOKI! THE GOLDEN APPLES CHARGED TO MY CARE BY ALL-FATHER ODIN HIMSELF ARE SACRED-- THE VERY SOURCE OF THE GODS' LIFE AND IMMORTALITY!

AYE-- WHICH MAKES THEM ALL THE MORE PRECIOUS AS A PRIZE!

BUT THOU CAN NOT STEAL THEM--!

WE ALREADY HAVE, FAIR GODDESS, WE ALREADY HAVE.

LEAVING THEIR NEWLY FORGED ALLIES TO PREPARE FOR THE COMING CONFLICT, LOKI AND TYR VENTURE ALONE WITH THE STORE OF STOLEN APPLES TO THE GIANT WORLD ASH YGGDRASIL...

CACHE ENOUGH OF THE APPLES FOR OUR OWN USE IN THE HOLLOW BOLE OF YGGDRASIL ITSELF, FRIEND TYR.

AYE, LOKI-- AND THEN MAY WE TEMPT THE SERPENT WITH THE REMAINING GOLDEN FRUIT...

CIRCLING THE TREE'S VAST GIRTH, THEY FIND THE AWESOME SERPENT OF MIDGARD TOILING AT ITS FAVORED TASK, AS IS ITS WONT WHEN NOT HARRING MIDGARD...

STILL GNAWING AT YGGDRASIL'S THIRD ROOT, SERPENT?

AYE, GOD OF MISCHIEF -- 'TIS THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE BE ODIN'S MOST POWERFUL WEAPON, THUS, BY UNDERMINING THE TREE DO I UNDERMINE ODIN -- BUT AS MUCH AS I DO GNAW, THE ROOT DOOTH EVER SEEM TO RESIST ME.

THEN LISTEN THOU TO A BETTER PLAN, A WAY OF DIRECTLY UNDERMINING ODIN -- YEA, OF DESTROYING HIM...

THE GOLDEN APPLES OF IDUNN -- THOSE WHICH PRESERVE THE YOUTH AND LIFE OF ALL THE GODS... INCLUDING ODIN.

IF THOU WERT TO GORGE THYSELF ON THEM... RATHER THAN GNAWING ETERNALLY AT VON BITTER ROOT...

THE SERPENT IS SWIFT TO GLEAN THE POINT -- AND TO DEVOUR EVERY LAST APPLE IN A SINGLE SWALLOW.

NOW, FRIEND TYR... NOW WE WAIT!

AT LAST COMES THE TIME--

-- WHEN ODIN BIDS THE WARRIORS THREE TO FETCH MORE APPLES FROM THE GODDESS IDUNN...

AND NONE TOO SOON, SAYETH MY GRUMBLING STOMACH.

PATIENCE, VAST VOLSTAGG-- THE APPLES WILL BE OURS SOON ENOW.

BUT...

IDUNN'S HOUSE-- 'TIS BURNED, HOGUN!

AYE, FANDRAL-- AND THE STENCH OF EVIL WILL LINGER LONG AFTER THE SMOKE HATH CLEARED.

ALREADY I FEEL OLDER BY YEARS-- AND EMPTIER BY BUSHELS!

SO IT COMES TO PASS, ON THIS GRIM DAY FOR ASGARD, THAT THE DIRE NEWS IS CARRIED TO ALL-FATHER ODIN...

SHORN FOR ONCE OF POMP AND CEREMONY, THE FAITHFUL GATHER IN THE GREAT SQUARE. MISSING ONLY ARE ODIN'S SON, THOR, WHO RESIDES ON MIDGARD AND JOLENA, SHE WHO IS ODIN'S FORMER LOVE AND NOW QUEEN OF THE HINTERLANDS...

ODIN'S PRESENT WIFE FRIGGA SILENTLY NOTES THE LATTER'S ABSENCE...

OUR VERY LIVES STAND THREATENED BY THIS CRAVEN ACT! WITHOUT THE GOLDEN APPLES WE SHALL ALL SOON AGE AND DIE!

MORE APPLES WILL GROW IN TIME, MY LIEGE...

IN TOO MUCH TIME, FANDRAL-- AND BY THEN WE WILL HAVE BEEN WEAKENED NIGH UNTO THE POINT OF DEFEAT!

CALL ALL THE FAITHFUL TO GATHER HERE IN THE PALACE-- YEA, EVEN HEIMDALL. FOR WE FACE A THREAT FROM WITHIN FAR GREATER THAN ANY INVASION WHICH MIGHT BE MOUNTED ACROSS THE RAINBOW BRIDGE BIFROST FROM WITHOUT.

AS IF TO REINFORCE ODIN'S OMINOUS PRONOUNCEMENT, THE FORCES OF LOKI AND TYR MOVE EN MASSE TO SURROUND THE PALACE, BESIEGING ALL WITHIN...

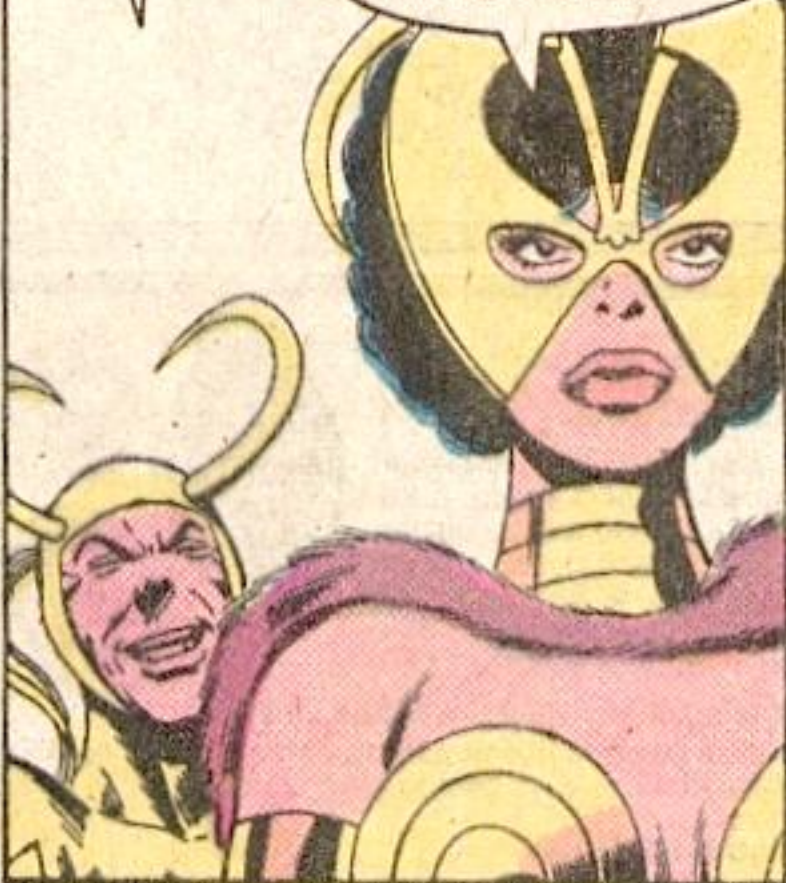


EH--?'TIS QUEEN JOLENA-- SHE WHOM I SAW SHARING LOVE WITH MY FATHER ODIN...

BUT OF ALL THOSE TO REMAIN OUTSIDE THE SECURITY OF THE PALACE... WHY JOLENA?

HAST THOU NOT BEEN CALLED INSIDE WITH THE OTHERS, FAIR QUEEN?

ODIN HATH FORSAKEN ME FOR THE GOOD OF ASGARD... AND, TOO, FOR THE GOOD OF HIS WIFE FRIGGA. HE RECENTLY CAME TO ME, FOR A FINAL TIME, TO GIVE ME THE NEWS OF HIS DECISION.



BUT EVEN AS LOKI BROODS IN STUNNED SILENCE, THE WAR-GOD TYR CALLS SNEERINGLY TO ODIN...

OUR RANKS STAND OPPOSED TO THEE, ODIN! THE GODDESS' IDUNN ALREADY LANGUISHES AS OUR CAPTIVE--

-- AS SOON YE SHALL ALL BE OUR CAPTIVES... LEST YE CHOOSE INSTEAD A LONG SIEGE IN WHICH YE STEADILY WEAKEN AND DIE!



I ONLY LOVE AND RESPECT HIM FOR IT ALL THE MORE... AND, TOO, I AGREE IT MUST BE SO.



FORSAKEN HER--?' THEN I WAS WRONG ABOUT MY FATHER! AND AND AS A RESULT... WHAT HAVE I WROUGHT?

AND TYR'S LAUGHTER IS DARK, AND CRUELLY BARBED, ON THE STILLED AIR.

NEXT: TO RESCUE A GODDESS!