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WIN A **TOYS "R" US**
SHOPPING SPREE!
GRAND PRIZE MINIMUM VALUE \$3000! DETAILS INSIDE!



THE
MIGHTY

THOR™



SPECIAL
300TH
ISSUE!



IT BEGAN WHEN ODIN, LORD OF ASGARD, PLUCKED OUT HIS RIGHT EYE IN EXCHANGE FOR KNOWLEDGE OF THE FUTURE...



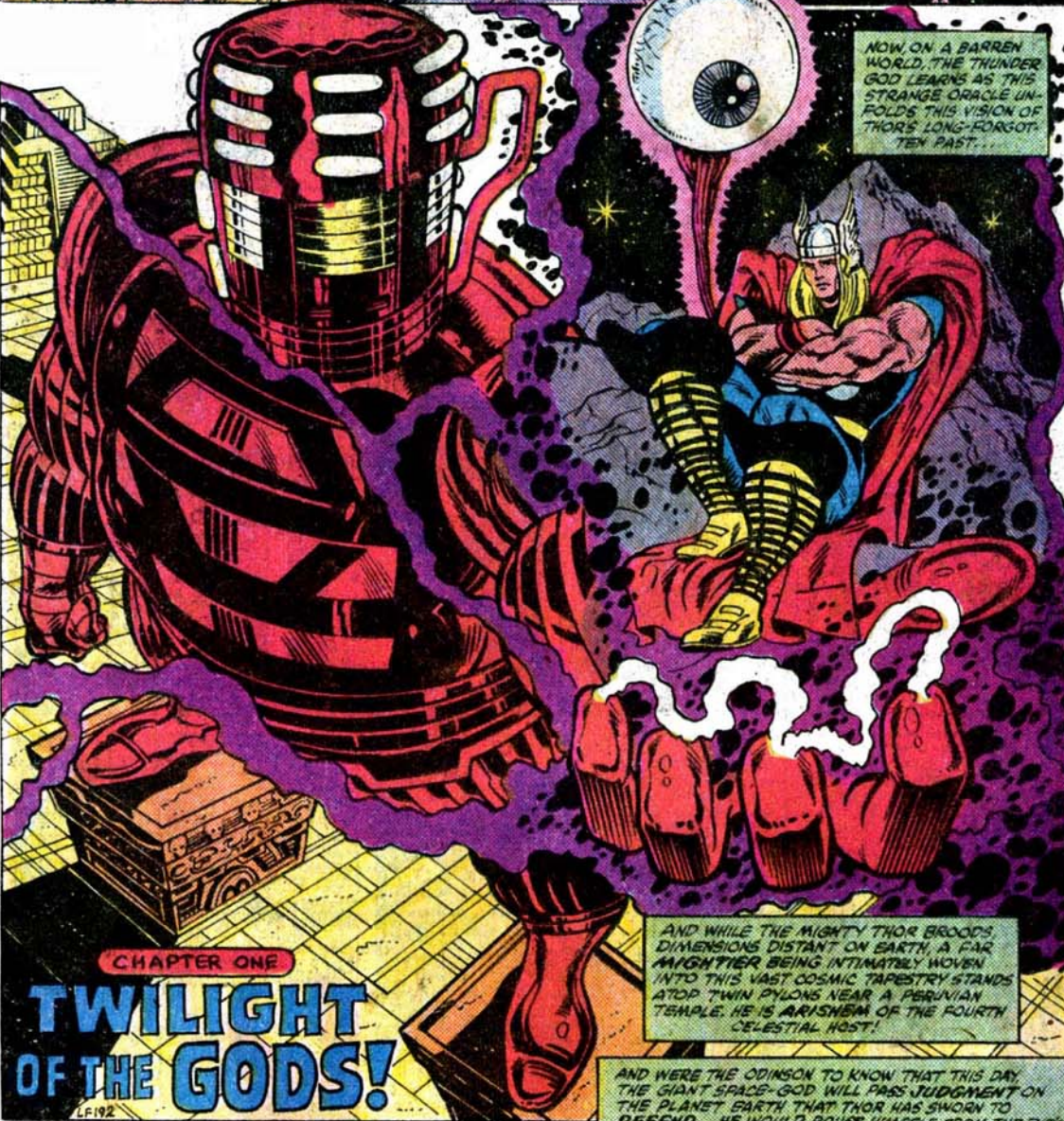
PASSING THROUGH THE FIERY WELL OF WISDOM, THE EYE GREW TO MONSTROUS PROPORTIONS AND TOOK ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN.



MONTHS LATER, THOR, SON OF ODIN, APPROACHED THE EYE FOR HIS OWN ANSWERS WHEN HE SUSPECTED HIS DIVINE FATHER HAD, IN SOME DISTANT PAST, BETRAYED THE EARTH.



NOW, ON A BARREN WORLD, THE THUNDER GOD LEARNS AS THIS STRANGE ORACLE UNFOLDS THIS VISION OF THOR'S LONG-FORGOTTEN PAST...



CHAPTER ONE

TWILIGHT OF THE GODS!

LF192

AND WHILE THE MIGHTY THOR BROODS DIMENSIONS DISTANT ON EARTH, A FAR MIGHTIER BEING INTIMATELY WOVEN INTO THIS VAST COSMIC TAPESTRY STANDS ATOP TWIN PYLONS NEAR A PERUVIAN TEMPLE. HE IS ARISHMEM OF THE FOURTH CELESTIAL HOST!

AND WERE THE ODINSON TO KNOW THAT THIS DAY THE GIANT SPACE-GOD WILL PASS JUDGMENT ON THE PLANET EARTH THAT THOR HAS SWORN TO DEFEND... HE WOULD ROUSE HIMSELF FROM THE EYES' RECOLLECTIONS. BUT ALAS, HE KNOWS NOT.



THE END OF THE TALE IS NEAR, THUNDER GOD...
BEHOLD ONCE MORE YOUR PREVIOUS MORTAL SELF,
SIEGFRIED, ON THE BANKS OF THE
RIVER RHINE...



IT IS THE DAY AFTER THE BOLD
HERO CONTESTED THE NOBLEMAN
GUNTHER FOR THE HAND OF
HIS SISTER GUTRUNA -- A
CONTEST THAT ENDED IN
AN UNEASY TRUCE...

*AS SHOWN LAST ISSUE. -- JIM.

BUT WHILE HE SEARCHES FOR GAME TO
TAKE TO HIS BRIDE-TO-BE, OTHER
MAIDENS CAPTURE HIS ATTENTION...



HO, PRETTY SIEGFRIED!

RHINE-
MAIDENS!

HAS THE
PREY ELUDED
THE GREAT
HUNTER?

FOR SHAME! WE WILL SHOW
YOU WHERE GAME HIDES!

AND WHAT MUST I DO
IN RETURN, PRAY TELL?



WE BUT DESIRE
ONE THING!

THE GOLDEN RING
ON YOUR FINGER!



NO! THIS RING IS
FAR TOO PRECIOUS
TO BE IDLY TRADED!

FOOLISH SIEGFRIED! DOOM
WILL BEFALL ANYONE WHO
WEARS THE ACCURSED RING!



ONLY THE WATERS OF
THIS RIVER CAN
CANCEL
THE CURSE!



I FEAR NO
CURSE! I AM
A DRAGON-
SLAYER! WHAT
THREAT ARE
MERE MOUTH-
INGS?

THEN THERE IS NO HOPE
FOR YOU! FAREWELL,
DOOMED ONE!

FOOLISH WATER-NYMPHS! WHAT
COULD POSSIBLY HARM A MIGHTY
WARRIOR LIKE MYSELF? ALTHOUGH,
IN TRUTH, THEIR WORDS DO RE-
SEMBLE THOSE SPOKEN BY THE
DRAGON FROM WHOM I WON
THE RING...



WHAT--?
A HORN
SOUNDS.

GUNTHER-- AND
DWARFISH HAGEN!
WHAT DO YOU WANT?
I THOUGHT YOU WISHED
NE'ER TO LAY EYES ON
ME AFTER YESTERDAY'S
DISAGREEMENT!



I HAVE COME
TO MAKE AMENDS,
SIEGFRIED! IT IS
UNSEEMLY TO BE
AN ENEMY TO MY
SISTER'S FUTURE
HUSBAND.

YOU HAVE LEARNED THEN,
THAT I WAS UNJUSTLY
ACCUSED OF COMPRO-
MISING YOUR INTENDED
BRIDE?

YES... 'TWOULD
SEEM 'T WAS ALL
A MISUNDER-
STANDING. ANY-
WAY, I NOW
KNOW YOU DID
NAUGHT TO
BREAK YOUR
OATH TO ME.



WOULD YOU
CARE TO DINE
WITH US? I SEE
YOU ARE WITH-
OUT A CATCH.

MY THANKS, GUNTHER.
GAME SEEMS TO HAVE
AVOIDED ME TODAY
AS IF I REEKED OF
DEATH!

EVEN THE GREATEST OF HUNTERS HAVE UNLUCKY SPELLS. NO MATTER, HAGEN SHOULD HAVE OUR BIRD ROASTED ERE LONG.

MAY I INTEREST YOU IN SOME ALE WHILE WE WAIT, GOOD SIEGFRIED?

IN TRUTH, FRUSTRATION MAKES ONE THIRSTY. YES--ALE.

ALTHOUGH MY HALF-BROTHER GUNTHER HAS GONE BACK ON OUR PLAN TO SLAY SIEGFRIED THIS DAY, I HAVE NOT! MY FATHER ALBERICH CRAFTED THE RHINEGOLD RING TO GIVE HIM POWER OVER THE GODS THEMSELVES. AND WHEN IT WAS STOLEN...

...HE PLACED A CURSE UPON IT. NOW IT MUST BE MINE!

SIEGFRIED-- LOOK! TWO EBON BIRDS FLY FROM THE BRUSH--*RAVENS*! 'TWOULD APPEAR! THEY CAW AS IF THEY WOULD SPEAK!

AYE, ONCE, BUT NOW, I FEAR, I AM OUT OF TUNE WITH NATURE. I HEAR NOTHING BUT CROWING.

DID YOU NOT ONCE CLAIM TO UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS?

IN A MOMENT OF DESPAIR, THE MAIDEN BRUNNHILDA REVEALED THAT THIS STRUTTING FOOL WAS INVULNERABLE-- EXCEPT FOR HIS *BACK* WHICH NOW IS TURNED TOWARDS ME!

THEY TURN-- TO FLY AWAY.

IT MUST BE AN OMEN OF SOME SORT--!

DIE, SIEGFRIED! IN THE NAME OF MY FATHER, YOU SHALL PERISH FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!

ARRRRGK!

HAGEN! WE AGREED NOT TO--!

I...AM BETRAYED...BY A DWARF!! THE MAIDENS WERE RIGHT-- THIS RING IS CURSSSSSSSS!

BREAKING THE SPEAR HAFT THAT IMPALES HIM, SIEGFRIED LUNGES FOR HIS MURDERER, ONLY TO DIE IN THE STRIVING...! HE COLLAPSES TO THE MOIST EARTH-- SOAKING IT WITH HIS BLOOD.

YOU SLEW HIM!
WAS IT NOT ENOUGH
THAT WE TRICKED HIM
INTO GIVING UP HIS
TRUE LOVE BRUNN-
HILDA TO ME--?

DID WE ALSO
HAVE TO CHEAT
HIM OF HIS VERY
LIFE? WHY?

MY REASONS
ARE MY OWN,
DEAR BROTHER...
NOT FOR THE
SPEAKING.



FAREWELL,
HERO, THOUGH
YOU DIED
IGNOBLY, I
SHALL SEE
YOU RECEIVE
A VIKING'S
FUNERAL!

FORBIDDING HIS HALF-BROTHER TO
GO NEAR SIEGFRIED'S FALLEN FORM,
GUNTHER HOISTS THE HERO ONTO
HIS STEED AND LEADS HIM BACK
TO THE CASTLE.



HE THEN TRAVELS ON AHEAD
TO BREAK THE NEWS TO
HIS SISTER.

DEAR GUTRUNA, YOUR BE-
LOVED...IS DEAD, SLAIN
BY A WILD BEAST.



A BEAST
NAMED
HAGEN!

BUT AS ALL YOU PRESENT ARE
MY WITNESS, I SHALL NOT
LET SO BASE AN ACT
GO UNAVENGED!



I HEREBY SEVER THE BLOOD-
LINE BETWEEN US, GNOME--
BY YOUR DEATH!

ON THE CONTRARY,
SQUEAMISH OAF--
BY YOURS!

ULK.



G-GUNTHER? NO! NOT A
HUSBAND AND A BROTHER
LOST IN ONE DAY!

GUARDS!
SEIZE THE
LITTLE
MURDERER!



NO, THEY WON'T!
ONCE I HAVE
THE RHINEGOLD
YOU WILL ALL BE
IN MY POWER!

BUT AS THE DWARF REACHES
FOR THE RING, SIEGFRIED'S
LIFELESS FIST CLENCHES
ABOUT IT DEFINITELY...



IT WILL
TAKE MORE
THAN A DWARF
TO WIN IT
THIS DAY.

AND AS THE LATE LORD'S VASSALS OVERPOWER THE SQUEALING HAGEN, ODIN'S ERSTWHILE VALKYRIE BRUNNHILDA ENTERS...

NO--NO! PLEASE--I MUST HAVE THE RING, I DESERVE IT.

SIEGFRIED--?



GUARDS! LET GREAT OAKEN LOGS BE CARRIED TO THE BANK OF THE RHINE AND SET AFIRE.

THIS HERO'S BODY MUST BE CONSECRATED IN A BLAZING FUNERAL PYRE!



AND SO...



WE WERE TO BE WED, MY DARLING, NOW OUR DOWRY IS BUT DEATH. LET THE FLAMES IN WHICH YOU FOUND ME DELIVER US.

HO, MY FAITHFUL STEED-- SEEK YOUR FORMER MASTER!



LET US ALL BECOME AS ONE IN THE GOLDEN HALLS OF VALHALLA!

DEAD! STABBED IN THE BACK-- FOR I LET IT BE KNOWN THIS WAS HIS ONE FATAL FLAW. HIS DEATH IS AS MUCH MY DOING AS THE DWARF'S!



O SIEGFRIED-- IT WAS NOT MEANT TO END THIS WAY. OUR LOVE WAS TO ENDURE... OUR LIVES TO ENDEAVOR, BUT NOW, THROUGH INSIDIOUS ACTS BEYOND OUR TAMING, THE DREAM IS LOST. THERE IS BUT ONE RECOURSE...

SIEGFRIED-- I COME!

ODIN TAKE US!



...SO ENDS YOUR PREVIOUS MORTAL INCARNATION... A VICTIM OF BASE TREACHERY.

THEN I FAILED AT ODIN'S VERY PURPOSE FOR GRANTING ME HUMAN FORM! I FAILED TO DELIVER THE RHINE-GOLD RING UNTO ODIN... THE RING HE WAS BY **CATH** UNABLE TO ACQUIRE HIMSELF!

TRUE, THOUGH YOU NEVER KNEW THAT WAS YOUR DESTINY!

BUT WHAT OF ODIN? HOW DID HE GREET THESE GRIM TIDINGS? AND HOW IS IT I LIVE ON?



SEE FOR YOURSELF, ODINSON... IN HIS CASTLE IN ASGARD, THE BROODING ALL-FATHER WAITS IN SOLITUDE...



HIS RAVENS, HUGIN AND MUNIN, ALIGHT ON HIS STOOPEO SHOULDERS AND RELATE WHAT THEY HAVE WITNESSED...

I AM UNDONE... BY A DWARF!



ALL MY EFFORTS TO FREE THE GODS OF THE NIBELUNG CURSE THAT I, MYSELF, HAVE BROUGHT UPON US-- HAVE MET IN DISMAL DEFEAT.

HOPE IS FLED. IN MY ARROGANCE I HAVE BROUGHT UPON US THE **TWILIGHT OF THE GODS**! AND ALL BECAUSE LONG AGO, I COVETED THE GLEAMING **RHINE-GOLD** FEARING ITS POWER OVER GODS AND MEN!



PASSING TO HIS PALACE WINDOW, THE LORD OF ASGARD LIFTS HIS TROUBLED EYES TO AWAIT THE ARRIVAL OF THE FLAMES FROM THE FUNERAL PYRE BELOW...



HE SPIES IT... ARCING ACROSS THE SKY-- A SENTIENT FIREBALL!

THE SPHERE OF FLAMES DRAWS CLOSER, EVER CLOSER, FINALLY BURSTING UPON HIS BALCONY, STEPPING FORTH, ARE TWO OF ODIN'S VALKYRIES, BEARING THE LIFELESS FORMS OF BRUNNHILDA AND SIEGFRIED!



WORDLESSLY, THE SHIELD-MAIDENS OFFER THE BODIES TO THEIR LORD.


GO NOW, **VALTRAUTA**, **GRIMGERD**... LEAVE A FATHER TO HIS SORROW AND HIS SHAME, THOU SHALT REMEMBER **NOTHING** OF WHAT TRANSPURED THIS DARK DAY!



YES, LORD ODIN.


AND NOW, MY BLOODSON AND GOD-DAUGHTER, BECAUSE THOU BOTH ART DEARER TO ME THAN MY OWN LIFE-- I GRANT IT UNTO THEE. THOU SHALT **LIVE--** E'EN IF ODIN MUST **DIE!**





WITH ALL HIS IMMORTAL HEART AND SOUL, THE ALL-FATHER CHANNELS HIS ODINFORCE INTO THE HOVERING BODIES BEFORE HIM, TRYING TO REKINDLE THE DIVINE SPARK WITHIN THEM.


FINALLY HE STOPS, SWOONING FROM THE EXERTION, LIGHT-HEADED, FEVERISH...




YOU LIVE, MY CHILDREN. WOULD THAT MY HEART COULD REJOICE...

NOW, I SHALL SEND THEE FROM HERE...NEER AGAIN TO THINK UPON ANYTHING THAT HAPPENED IN YOUR MORTAL GUISES! THE KNOWLEDGE OF ODIN'S FOLLY MUST BE HIS ALONE.


IT IS TIME FOR THE FATHER TO ATONE FOR HIS SINS OF AVARICE AND PRIDE.



SLOWLY, DELIBERATELY, ODIN REACHES FOR THE RING OF POWER, RESIGNED AT LAST TO TAKE THE CURSE UPON HIMSELF AS HE KNEW IN HIS HEART OF HEARTS HE ONE DAY WOULD.

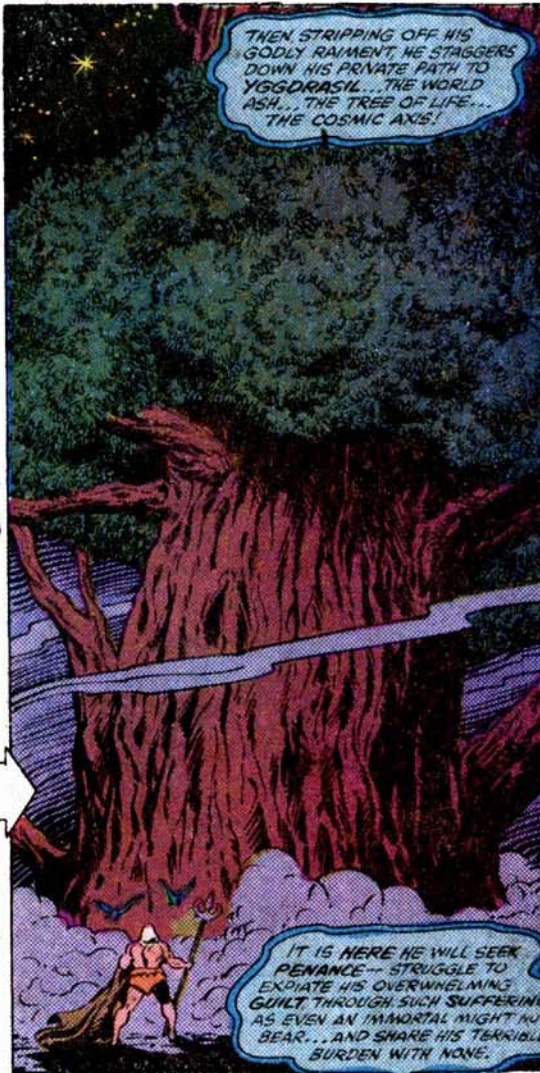


MUSTERING A VESTIGE OF HIS DWINDLING STRENGTH, HE SNAPS THE RHINEGOLD CIRCULET IN HALF...

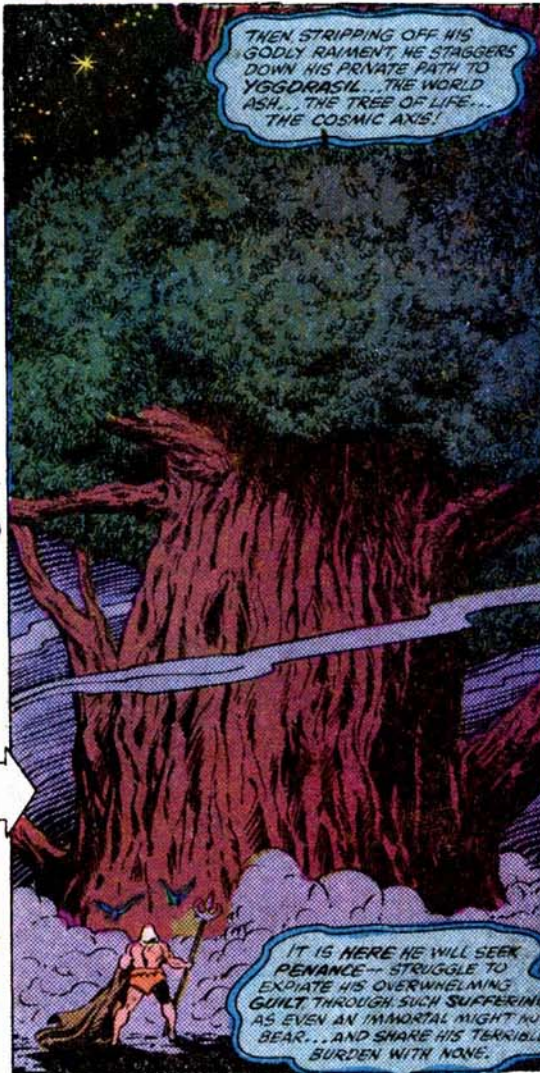


...BUT WHEN NEXT HIS SWEAT-LADEN EYELIDS OPEN HE SEES THOR AND THE VALKYRIE-- ALIVE AGAIN!

AND AT HIS FEET THERE LIES THE ACCURSED RHINEGOLD, LIKEWISE RESTORED TO ITS TRUE FORM.



THEN STRIPPING OFF HIS GODLY RAIMENT, HE STAGGERS DOWN HIS PRIVATE PATH TO YGGDRASIL...THE WORLD ASH...THE TREE OF LIFE...THE COSMIC AXIS!



IT IS HERE HE WILL SEEK PENANCE-- STRUGGLE TO EXPIATE HIS OVERWHELMING GUILT THROUGH SUCH SUFFERING AS EVEN AN IMMORTAL MIGHT NOT BEAR...AND SHARE HIS TERRIBLE BURDEN WITH NONE.

PRESSING
THE COLD
TIP OF HIS
SACRED
SPEAR
GUNGAIR
TO HIS
NAKED
ABDOMEN--

--ODIN THROWS HIM-
SELF AGAINST IT,
PIERCING HIS IMPERIAL
FLESH--IMPALING
HIMSELF.

THE WOUND, NOT UNLIKE THAT
RECENTLY INCURRED BY HIS MORTAL
SON, WILL HASTEN HIS END.

THEN, MUGIN AND
MUNIN TAKE HIS
WRISTS IN THEIR
POWERFUL CLAWS,
BEARING HIM
ALOFT--

--AND
NAIL HIM
BY THE
RHINEGOLD
RING-HALVES
TO A
BRANCH OF
YGGDRASIL!

NOW, MY FAITHFUL RAVENS,
THOU SHALT SIT ON MY SHOULDERS
NEVERMORE! GET THEE GONE, AND
TAKE GUNGAIR FROM MY SIGHT
AS WELL. PERHAPS THOU SHALT
FIND ONE WORTHIER TO WIELD
THE SPEAR OF HEAVEN!
FAREWELL...!

AT THEIR LORD'S
COMMAND, THE RAVENS
TAKE FLIGHT, LEAVING
ODIN TO HIS SELF-DETERMINED
FATE. ODIN HANGS... PINIONED BY
A POWER GREATER THAN HIS OWN...
HIS REMAINING STRENGTH OZZING
FROM HIM IN RIVULETS OF RED,
NOURISHING THE COSMIC TREE.

IN HIS INEFFABLE AGONY, ODIN PRAYS... PRAYS TO THE ELDER GODS WHO
SPAWNED HIM... THAT HIS SACRIFICE WILL BE ENOUGH TO STAVE OFF THE
FINAL DAY OF RECKONING FOR THE GODS... THE DAY OF RAGNAROK!



DESPITE THE AGONY OF HIS CRUCIFIXION--

-- ODIN'S THOUGHTS
TURN TO YOU,
HIS BELOVED
SON...

... WHERE IN THE DEPTHS OF
HIS DELIRIUM, HE VIEWS YOUR
TIME-LOST CLASH WITH
HERCULES, PRINCE OF
FAR-OFF OLYMPUS.

"THOU HAST NEVER BEEN ONE TO
AVOID TROUBLE," THINKS ODIN. BUT
THEN AGAIN, NEITHER HAS HE.



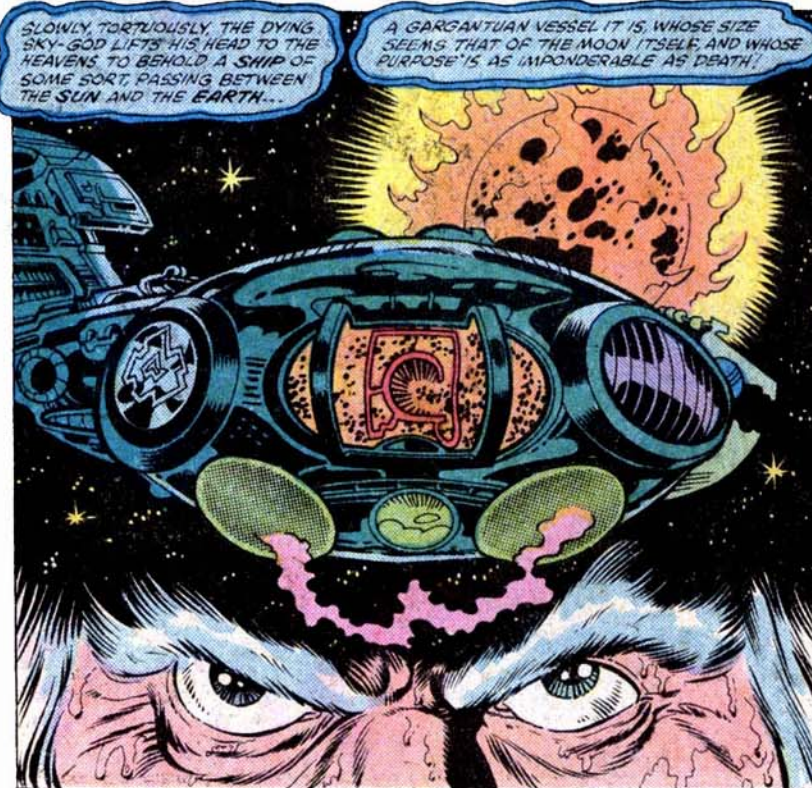
ODIN MY
DEAR--CAN
YOU STILL
RECOGNIZE...
ME?

OVER THE LONG, PAINFUL
DAYS THAT FOLLOW, ODIN
DWELLS ON ALL THOSE
HE HAS EVER LOVED,
SILENTLY BIDDING THEM
FAREWELL. THEN, ON THE
NINTH DAY, WHEN THE ALL-
FATHER HAS BECOME TOO
WEAK TO DO EVEN THAT,
HE IS APPROACHED BY AN
EMERALD-CLOAKED WOMAN.

I HAVE WATCHED WITH SAD-
NESS THIS SORRY STATE OF
AFFAIRS YOUR EGO HAS BROUGHT
UPON YOU. I APPRECIATE YOUR
ATTEMPT AT REDEMPTION
THROUGH SELF-SACRIFICE.

BUT I BID YOU
RECONSIDER
YOUR PLAN TO
HANG GRO-
TESQUELY TILL
YOUR DEATH-
GODDESS
CLAIMS YOU.

OBSERVE,
IF YOU WILL,
THE SHADOW
THAT PASSES
OVERHEAD!



SLOWLY, TORTUOUSLY, THE DYING
SKY-GOD LIFTS HIS HEAD TO THE
HEAVENS TO BEHOLD A SHIP OF
SOME SORT, PASSING BETWEEN
THE SUN AND THE EARTH...

A GARGANTUAN VESSEL IT IS, WHOSE SIZE
SEEMS THAT OF THE MOON ITSELF, AND WHOSE
PURPOSE IS AS IMPOUNDERABLE AS DEATH!

HE HAS NOT UTTERED A SINGLE
WORD IN THE NINE DAYS AND
NIGHTS HE HAS HUNG, BUT NOW
THROUGH SUN-PARCHED LIPS,
ODIN SPEAKS...

HOLD
VERDANT ONE--
WHAT IS THE
MEANING OF
YON STAR-
CRAFT?

IF YOU WOULD KNOW
OF IT, MY LOVE--YOU
WILL HAVE TO SAVE
YOURSELF.

SHE SLIPS BACK INTO THE BILLOW-
ING MIST THAT BROUGHT HER,
LEAVING THE SPYGLASS FIGURE TO
CONSIDER HER WORDS.

SUDDENLY FILLED WITH VITALITY AND A NEW SENSE OF PURPOSE, BEYOND ANY HE HAS EVER KNOWN, THE ALL-FATHER SUMMONS EVERY VESTIGE OF HIS ALMOST-DEPLETED MIGHT.



...AND WRENCHES HIMSELF FREE OF THE RHINEGOLD RESTRAINTS. HIS ATONEMENT HAS ENDED.

HE FALLS FROM YGGDRASIL LIKE A BROKEN TWIG, THE RING-HALVES DRIPPING BESIDE HIM.



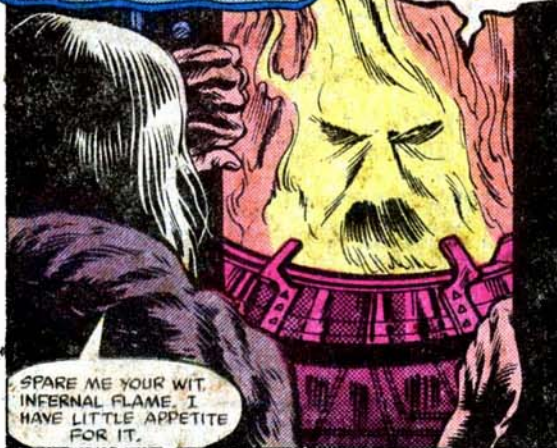
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NUMBLY THE LORD OF ASGARD LAY CHOKING IN THE DIRT, TOO WEAK TO STIR, GATHERING STRENGTH FROM WITHOUT, UNTIL HE IS ABLE TO RISE.



THEN, TUCKING THE RING FRAGMENTS INTO HIS BREACH, HE STAGGERS BACK TO THE GLEAMING CITY HE HAD FORSAKEN.

ARRIVING UNNOTICED IN HIS PALACE, HE SEEKS COUNCIL WITH MIMIR, THE ALL-KNOWING WELL OF FIRE...



AH, ODIN-- YOU ARE LOOKING WELL THIS DAY.

SPARE ME YOUR WIT, INFERNAL FLAME, I HAVE LITTLE APPETITE FOR IT.

I HAVE SEEN THE APPROACH OF AN ENORMOUS SKY-CRAFT, ALIEN IN FORM, UNKNOWN IN PURPOSE. I WOULD KNOW OF ITS SIGNIFICANCE.



WERE I TO TELL THEE WHAT I KNEW OF IT, TWOULD BUT TORTURE THEE. SPARE THYSELF FURTHER TORTURE, ODIN.

TELL ME, MIMIR-- OR I SHALL SMITE THEE WITH MY SACRED SPEAR!

THY RAVENS HAVE HAD GUNGNIR-- I FEAR IT NOT, YET I WILL TELL THEE...



THE CRAFT HOLDS BEINGS FROM BEYOND ALL KNOWN SPACE, WHO FIRST VISITED MIDGARD LONG BEFORE OUR RACE CAME TO BE. THEY COME TO JUDGE THE WORTH OF A WORLD.

ALIENS-- WOULD PRESUME TO JUDGE THE SPHERE THAT SPAWNED BOTH GODS AND MEN???

NEVER-- NOT WHILE BREATH REMAINS WITHIN ME!

FOR A DAY, LORD ODIN DWELLS UPON MIMIR'S WORDS, RECOUPING HIS LOST STRENGTH. THEN HIS DOUR MEDITATIONS ARE INTERRUPTED BY A CERTAIN IMPERTINENT SON...

HAIL, NOBLE SIRE!

FATHER, I HAVE MET AN IMMORTAL NOT OF ASGARD WHO DID TELL ME OF A SECOND REALM FILLED WITH OTHERS OF HIS ILK!

WE HAVE AGREED TO A MATCH-- HIS OLYMPUS AGAINST ASGARD!

BY WHAT RIGHT DIDST THOU COMMIT SUCH AN ACT?

YOU DID NOT NOTICE YOUR FATHER'S FARAWAY COUNTE-NANCE AND WAN COMPLEXION AS HE SAID--

THERE SHALL BE NO BATTLE!

BUT THANKS TO LOKI, GOD OF EVIL, YOU SOON FIND YOURSELF PITTED AGAINST THE SCIONS OF OLYMPUS ON A TIMELESS PLAIN...

AND WHILE THE BATTLE RAGES, YOUR SIRE STEPS THROUGH THE MISTS OF TIME TO MEET WITH ZEUS, LORD OF OLYMPUS...

THE TWO SKY-FATHERS FACE ONE ANOTHER, EXCHANGING WORLDS OF MEANING IN A SINGLE GLANCE...

...THEN THEY PART.

LATER, AT GODWAR'S END, YOU SEEK AUDIENCE WITH YOUR FATHER AGAIN, TO LEARN WHY, DESPITE YOUR SEEMING VICTORY, NAUGHT WAS GAINED BY CONQUEST.

MEN BELIEVE IN GODS-- THEIR OWN GODS. 'T WAS EVER THUS. GREECE CANNOT BE 'WON' BY SUCH AS US. IT DOETH EXIST FOR THE OLYMPIANS.

HAD YOU BUT TAKEN NOTICE OF THE GOLDEN PLAYING PIECES UPON ODIN'S GAMES-TABLE, YOU MIGHT HAVE HAD A NOTION OF THE ALL-FATHER'S TRUE PREOCCUPATIONS...

...I DIDST MEET WITH ZEUS, HIMSELF DURING THY WAR. 'T WAS AGREED THERE WAS A LESSON BOTH OUR LANDS NEED LEARN...

BUT YOU WOULD HAVE NONE OF YOUR FATHER'S WORDS. YOU STALKED AWAY TO SEEK OUT NEWER LANDS TO CONQUER...



THE PLAYING PIECES BEAR THE LIKENESSES OF FOREIGNERS... ONLY LORD ZEUS IS FAMILIAR TO ME WHO MIGHT THESE FIGURES BE?

BEHOLD, ODINSON-- AND SEE FOR YOURSELF WHAT BEINGS THE CHESSMEN REPRESENT...

WHAT GODS ARE THESE?

YOU SEE GATHERED TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS AUSPICIOUS DAY A MILLENNIA AGO, ODIN'S COUNTERPARTS-- THE NUMEROUS CHIEF GODS OF EARTH-- THE GOD-HEADS OF THE OTHER MIGHTY PANTHEONS-- SKY-FATHERS ALL!

FOR WHEN ODIN AND ZEUS HAD MET, THEY MADE PLANS TO ASSEMBLE A COUNCIL OF GOD-HEADS TO DECIDE WHAT ACTION TO TAKE AGAINST THE THREATENING STAR-BEINGS. THEY DISPATCHED THEIR MESSENGERS THROUGHOUT THE MYRIAD MYTH-REALMS TO SUMMON THE EXALTED GOD-FATHERS OF ALL EARTH'S LEGENDS.

AND THERE IN THE CLOUDS 'ROUND THE CELESTIAL AXIS ADJACENT TO EACH OF THEIR REALMS, THE MIGHTIEST ASSEMBLAGE OF MORTAL-WORSHIPPED DEITIES CONVENES...



I SEE OUR SUMMONS WAS WELL RECEIVED, ZEUS. ARE ALL OUR BRETHREN PRESENT?

THOU ART THE LAST TO ARRIVE, ASGARDIAN.

THEN LET US BEGIN.

MY FELLOW SKY-LORDS, THE VERY SPHERE WHICH HAS BORNE US IS IN GRAVE DANGER FROM ENIGMATIC INVADERS FROM BEYOND. WE MUST ACT IN CONJUNCTION TO PRESERVE THAT PRECIOUS ORB WHICH IS BOTH OUR SPIRITUAL SUSTENANCE AND OUR DOMINION.



THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER CELESTIAL VISITATIONS. EXTRA-TERRESTRIALS HAVE ABOUNDED ON OUR WORLD. WHY IS THIS ONE SO DIRE?

THE ALIENS HAVE SERVITORS-- STRANGE HUMANS MASQUERADING AS MY INCA BROTHERS-- WHO HAVE BUILT A TEMPLE IN MY DOMAIN. I HAVE OBSERVED THEM AND SO LEARNED--



--THEIR CELESTIAL MASTERS INTEND TO JUDGE MANKIND-- AND IF THEY DEEM IT UNWORTHY, DESTROY IT.

AND WERE MANKIND TO PERISH, SO WOULD WE ITS GODS-- FOR OUR DESTINIES, AS WE BOTH KNOW, ARE INTERTWINED IN WAYS E'EN BEYOND THE POWERS OF ORACLES TO UNRAVEL.

HENCE, I PROPOSE WE TAKE ACTION.



AYE ACTION, THOUGH CONTENT THESE CENTURIES PAST TO ALLOW MY WORSHIP ON EARTH TO DWINDLE, STILL DO I CARE FOR THOSE SHORT-LIVED BEINGS WHO WALK THE MORTAL PLANE.

WHAT WOULD YOU SUGGEST WE DO, ODIN?



I PROPOSE WE CHOOSE AMONGST OURSELVES A DELEGATION-- TO MEET WITH THE SPACE-CREATURES 'PON THEIR ARRIVAL.

WE WILL MAKE KNOWN TO THEM, THROUGH FORCEFUL MEANS IF NECESSARY, THAT NO OFFWORLDERS SHALL USURP OUR COMMON DOMAIN ELSE THEY INVOKE THE WRATH OF ALL THE GODS OF EARTH! WHAT SAY YE?

THE RESPONSE IS A THUNDEROUS CHORUS OF AYES, WHOSE DEEPENING REVERBERATIONS ECHO THROUGHOUT THE HALLS OF ETERNITY.



I AM ASTOUNDED
THERE BE SO MANY
GODS--SO MANY
PANTHEONS I NEER
KNEW EXISTED!

WHY HAST
ODIN NE'ER
SPOKEN
OF THEM?

KNOWING OF HIS PEOPLE'S WARLIKE NATURE, IT
WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN WISE, ODINSON...



WHILE YOUR FATHER
CONVENED WITH HIS
PEERS, YOU WENT TO
EARTH, SEARCHING FOR
NEW LANDS TO CONQUER.
THIS BROUGHT YOU INTO
CONTACT WITH THE
CELESTIALS' EARTH
AGENTS, THE ETERNALS,
WITH WHOM YOU
SHARED MANY
ADVENTURES.

THEN, YOU LEFT FOR
ASGARD WITH THE
MEMORY OF ALL THAT
OCCURRED TO YOU IN
PERU CLEANS'D BY
THE EVER-CAUTIOUS
ETERNALS.

AND AS YOU LEFT OBLIVIOUS OF YOUR STAY
WITH THE ETERNALS, THE CELESTIALS'
MONSTROUS MOTHERSHIP SILENTLY DESCENDS
TO THE PLANET'S SURFACE.

* THOR ANNUAL #7,
1978. -- JIM.



YOUR DEPARTURE MEANS NOTHING
TO THE STAR-SPANNING CELESTIALS,
WHO STEP FROM THEIR VESSEL
THROUGH SCREENS OF IMMENSE
ENERGY.

THEY STRIDE THE WORLD
IMPERIOUSLY, SEEMINGLY
UNAWARE OF THEIR AWE-
STRUCK SERVITORS... YET
NOT THE SLIGHTEST THOUGHT
OF A SINGLE ETERNAL SLIPS
PAST CELESTIAL PERCEPTIONS.



WORDLESSLY, THEIR LEADER
ARISHEM DIRECTS HIS FELLOWS
TO THEIR APPOINTED TASKS, THE
PURPOSE OF THE THIRD HOST IS
CULTIVATION AND INSPECTION...
AND EACH OF THE TEN CELESTIALS
IN THE EXPEDITION HAS HIS OWN
SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY.



HIS ORDERS GIVEN, ARISHEM MOUNTS THE CEREMONIAL PYLONS,
HIS PURPOSE, SIMPLY TO MONITOR AND OBSERVE.



NO SOONER HAD THE HOST-LEADER
ASSUMED HIS POSITION THAN HIS
HUGE ARMORED HEAD LIFT'S
SLIGHTLY, TO SEE A SUDDEN,
UNNATURAL MASSING OF
STORM CLOUDS ABOVE.

THE THUNDERHEADS PART AS A SURGING CHARIOT DRAWN BY ODIN'S EIGHT-LEGGED STEED, AND CARRYING THE ENVOYS OF THE GODS--VISHNU, ODIN AND ZEUS--DESCENDS TO THE PERUVIAN PLAIN.



BOLDLY THEY TOUCH DOWN UPON THE HOT SAND--DWARFED BY THE TWO THOUSAND FOOT TITAN.



THEY DISMOUNT...

HEAR US, TOWERING ONE... WE THREE REPRESENT ALL THE GODS OF EARTH! WE BEAR THEE THIS MESSAGE:



OUR KIND STANDS UNITED IN ITS DEFIANCE OF YOUR DESIGNS ON OUR WORLD!

MOMENTS PASS AND THE GIANT REMAINS SILENT, OFFERING NO RESPONSE TO ODIN'S STRIDENT PROCLAMATION... AND THEN...



HOLD, IMMORTALS!

'TIS ONE OF THEIR LACKEYS--EMERGING FROM YON TEMPLE.

'TWOULD APPEAR THE CELESTIALS DEIGN NOT TO SPEAK WITH US DIRECTLY!

I BID YOU PEACE, GODS OF EARTH. I AM AJAK OF THE RACE OF MEN CALLED ETERNALS. I SHALL INTERCEDE BETWEEN YOU AND MY MAMMOTH MASTERS.



WE ARE EARTH'S NATIVE GODS, BIRTHED IN THE VERY BIOSPHERE OF THIS WORLD. WE WOULD KNOW OF THY ALIEN MASTERS' PURPOSE--AND IF IT DISPLEASES US, WE ARE HERE TO THWART IT!

I AM AFRAID THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE, THESE 'ALIENS' AS YOU CALL THEM HAVE A RIGHT TO CARRY OUT THEIR MISSION ON EARTH--



--FOR IT WAS THEY WHO EONS AGO SHAPED MANKIND'S GENETIC DESTINY--BEFORE ANY OF YOU HAD COME INTO BEING..

THEY HAVE RETURNED TO CULTIVATE THE SEEDS SOWN MILLENNIA PAST--AND I WOULD ADVISE AGAINST YOUR INTERFERENCE.

THOU DO TAUNT US, ETERNAL! AWAY!

THE WRATH OF THE GODS IS CARRIED IN A SINGLE SEARING BOLT THAT STRIKES WITH POWER ENOUGH TO SEND A WORLD REELING FROM ITS ORBIT.

ARISHEM STANDS IMPASSIVELY... UNMOVING... UNAFFECTED.

WHEN THE FUTILE BOMBARDMENT CEASES, THE MIGHTIEST OF THE CELESTIALS TURNS FROM THE ANGRY, IMMORTAL GIANTS AT HIS FEET AND UNLEASHES HIS OWN IMMENSURABLY MORE POTENT ENERGY THROUGH A DIMENSIONAL RIFT.

THE THREE GODS PALE AS ONE.

ODIN--
VISHNU--
COME...THE
TIME FOR
TALK IS
PAST!

AYE! DIRECT
THY ENERGIES
THROUGH MY SWORD!

FOR IN THEIR MINDS' EYES, THEY BEHOLD THE GATEWAYS TO THEIR HOMES-- ASGARD, NIRVANA, AND OLYMPIUS--CONSUMED BY A CELESTIAL-CREATED CONFLAGRATION.

BUT INSTANTS BEFORE
IRREPARABLE DAMAGE IS
DONE, ARISHEM'S ONSLAUGHT
ENDS, AND HIS HEAD
LOWERS.

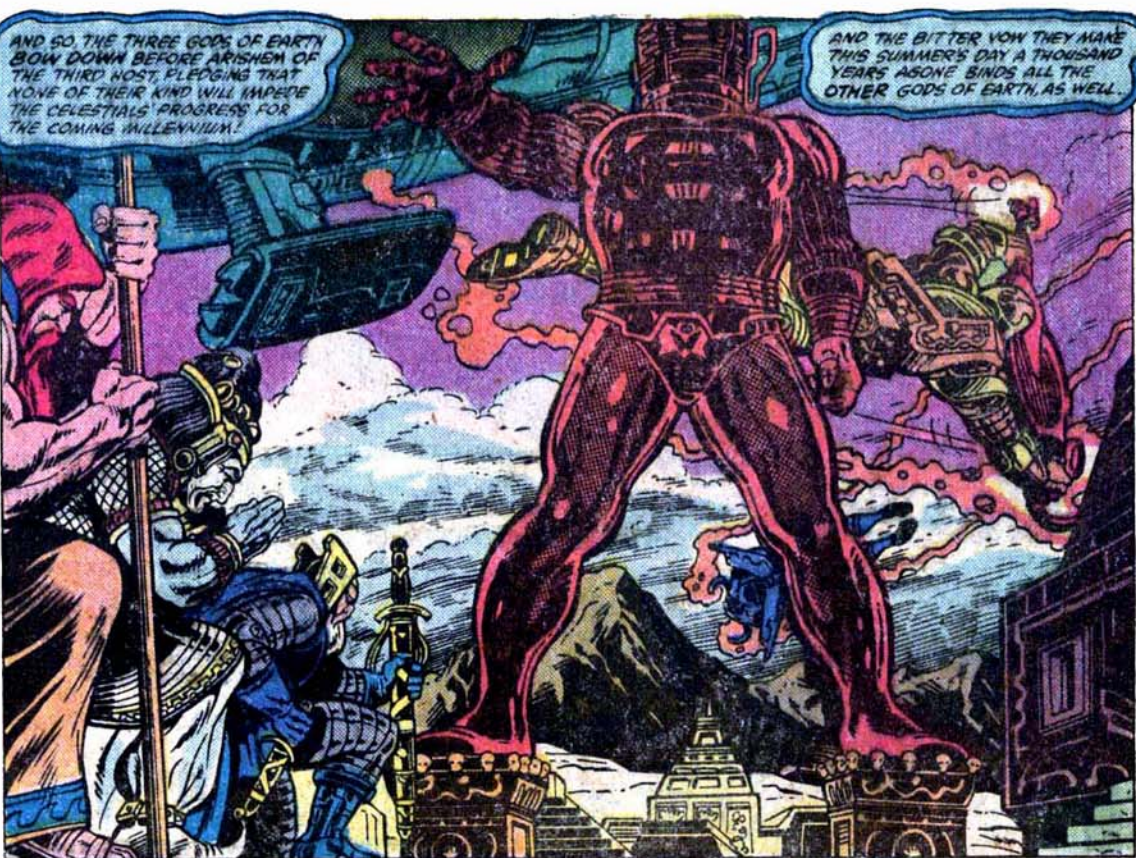
ALMIGHTY ARISHEM COULD HAVE DESTROYED THE PASSAGES BETWEEN THIS SPHERE AND YOUR GOD-REALMS, CUTTING OFF ALL GODS FROM EARTH FOREVER!

THE THREE REPRESENTATIVES EXCHANGE SOLEMN GLANCES OF DEFEAT. THE GIANT SEEMS BEYOND CHALLENGE... HIS TERMS BEYOND QUESTIONING.

AND THIS HE WILL DO-- UNLESS YOU THREE SWEAR ON BEHALF OF ALL YOUR KIND NOT TO INTERFERE IN CELESTIAL AFFAIRS FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM.

AND SO, THE THREE GODS OF EARTH
BOW DOWN BEFORE ARISHEM OF
THE THIRD HOST, PLEDGING THAT
NONE OF THEIR KIND WILL IMPED
THE CELESTIALS' PROGRESS FOR
THE COMING MILLENNIUM!

AND THE BITTER VOW THEY MAKE
THIS SUMMER'S DAY A THOUSAND
YEARS AGONE BINDS ALL THE
OTHER GODS OF EARTH, AS WELL.



THEN ODIN DID NOT
BETRAY THE EARTH
BY BENDING HIS
KNEE TO THE CELESTIALS
AS IT ONCE
DID SEEM... HE
SOUGHT ONLY TO
SAVE IT THROUGH
DELAY.

YES FOR HE KNEW
THAT IF THE GODS
FOUGHT THE CELESTIALS
THAT DAY, IT MIGHT HAVE
MEANT THE END OF
THEIR KIND... BUT AFTER
A THOUSAND YEARS IN
WHICH TO MAKE PREPARA-
TIONS, THE ODDS MAY TIP
TOWARDS EARTH'S
PANTHEONS.

RETURNING TO ASGARD, ODIN BIDS THE
GREATEST CRAFTSMEN OF HIS REALM TO
FORGE FOR HIM AN UNEQUALLED SUIT OF
ARMS, NOT UNLIKE THAT WORN BY THE
CELESTIALS...



UPON ITS COMPLETION, ODIN TAKES THE ARMOR TO HIS FELLOW
SKY-LORDS, EACH OF WHOM BESTOWS ON IT A FRACTION OF THEIR
GODLY MIGHT... MAKING IT
VIRTUALLY ALL-POWERFUL.



BY THE HORN OF
HEIMDALL! THEN
THE CELESTIALS
ARE THE DREAD
FUTURE MENACE
THAT ODIN CON-
STRUCTED THE
DESTROYER TO
COMBAT! SINCE
FIRST I BEHELD
THE ARMOR* I
PONDERED
ITS TRUE
PURPOSE!

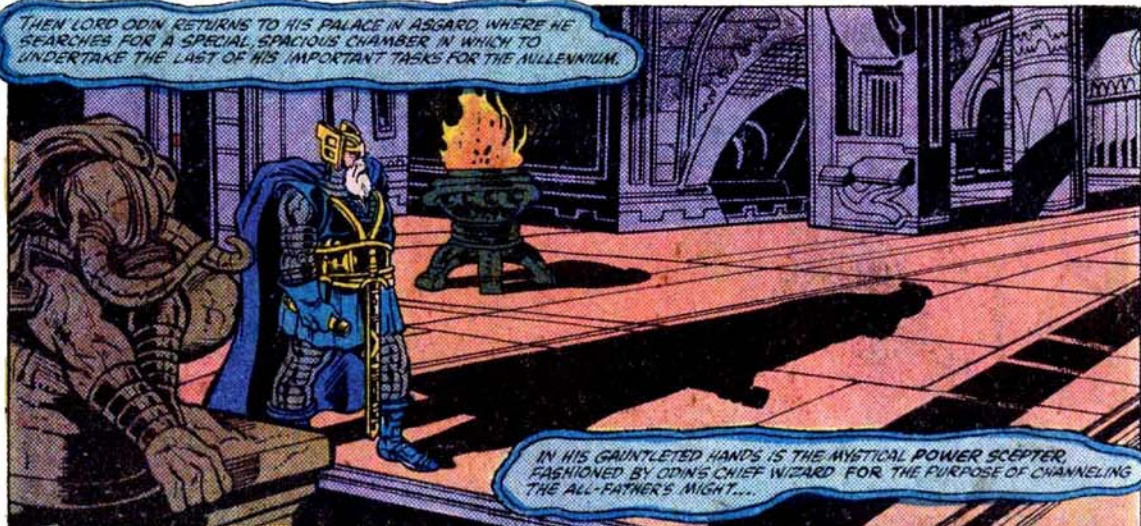
WHEN THE THIRD
HOST HAD FINISHED
THEIR SURVEY AND
LEFT, ODIN DISPATCHED
THE DESTROYER TO
EARTH SEQUESTERING
IT IN A SACRED
TEMPLE OF HIS OWN
CONSTRUCTION, THERE IN
THE LAND CALLED VIET-
NAM, IT WOULD AWAIT
ITS SUMMONS.



WHEN THE CELESTIALS RETURN, THE
GODS WILL HAVE A CHAMPION TO
BATTLE FOR THEM... AN INVINCIBLE
GIANT-SLAYER KNOWN AS...
THE DESTROYER!

*THOR #118... JIM.

THEN LORD ODIN RETURNS TO HIS PALACE IN ASGARD, WHERE HE SEARCHES FOR A SPECIAL, SPACIOUS CHAMBER IN WHICH TO UNDERTAKE THE LAST OF HIS IMPORTANT TASKS FOR THE MILLENNIUM.



IN HIS GAUNTLETED HANDS IS THE MYSTICAL POWER SCEPTER, FASHIONED BY ODIN'S CHIEF WIZARD FOR THE PURPOSE OF CHANNELING THE ALL-FATHER'S MIGHT....

...AND THE DREAD RHINEGOLD RING-HALVES!



PLACING THEM BEFORE HIM, ODIN LOOSES A MAGICAL RAY OF TRANSMUTATION AND WITH A BURST OF BRILLIANCE, HE UNLOCKS THE RING'S VERY ESSENCE.

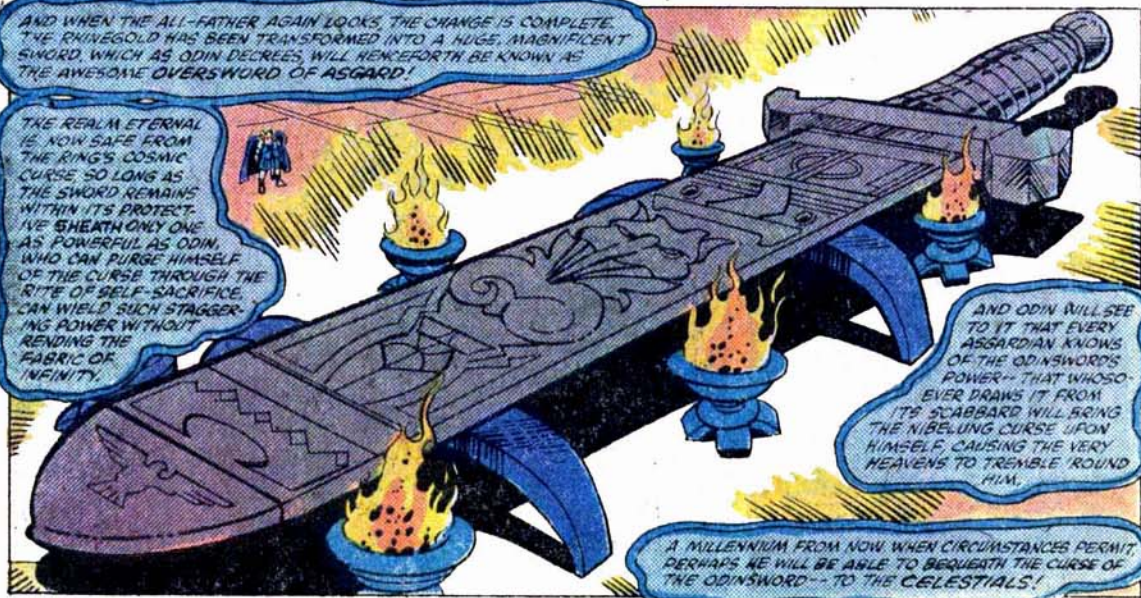


THE REGAL ONE STEPS BACK, SHUTTING HIS AGED EYES AGAINST THE GLARE AS THE SHIMMERING RHINEGOLD ASSUMES NEW FORM... NEW DIMENSIONS-- ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.



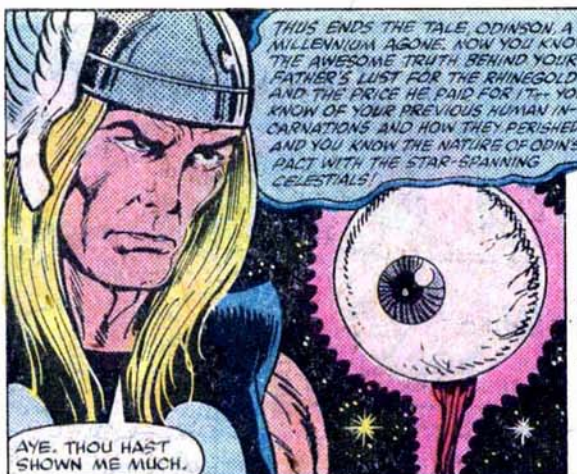
AND WHEN THE ALL-FATHER AGAIN LOOKS, THE CHANGE IS COMPLETE. THE RHINEGOLD HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A HUGE, MAGNIFICENT SWORD, WHICH AS ODIN DECREES, WILL HENCEFORTH BE KNOWN AS THE AWESOME OVERSWORD OF ASGARD!

THE REALM ETERNAL IS NOW SAFE FROM THE RING'S COSMIC CURSE SO LONG AS THE SWORD REMAINS WITHIN ITS PROTECTIVE SHEATH ONLY ONE AS POWERFUL AS ODIN, WHO CAN PURGE HIMSELF OF THE CURSE THROUGH THE RITE OF SELF-SACRIFICE, CAN WIELD SUCH STAGGERING POWER WITHOUT TENDING THE FABRIC OF INFINITY.



AND ODIN WILL SEE TO IT THAT EVERY ASSGARDIAN KNOWS OF THE ODIN SWORD'S POWER-- THAT WHOEVER DRAWS IT FROM ITS SCABBARD WILL BRING THE NIBELUNG CURSE UPON HIMSELF, CAUSING THE VERY HEAVENS TO TREMBLE 'ROUND HIM.

A MILLENNIUM FROM NOW, WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES PERMIT, PERHAPS HE WILL BE ABLE TO BEQUEATH THE CURSE OF THE ODIN SWORD-- TO THE CELESTIALS!



THUS ENDS THE TALE, ODINSON. A MILLENNIUM AGONE, NOW YOU KNOW THE AWESOME TRUTH BEHIND YOUR FATHER'S LUST FOR THE RHINEGOLD AND THE PRICE HE PAID FOR IT-- YOU KNOW OF YOUR PREVIOUS HUMAN INCARNATIONS AND HOW THEY PERISHED-- AND YOU KNOW THE NATURE OF ODIN'S PACT WITH THE STAR-SPANNING CELESTIALS!

AYE, THOU HAST SHOWN ME MUCH.

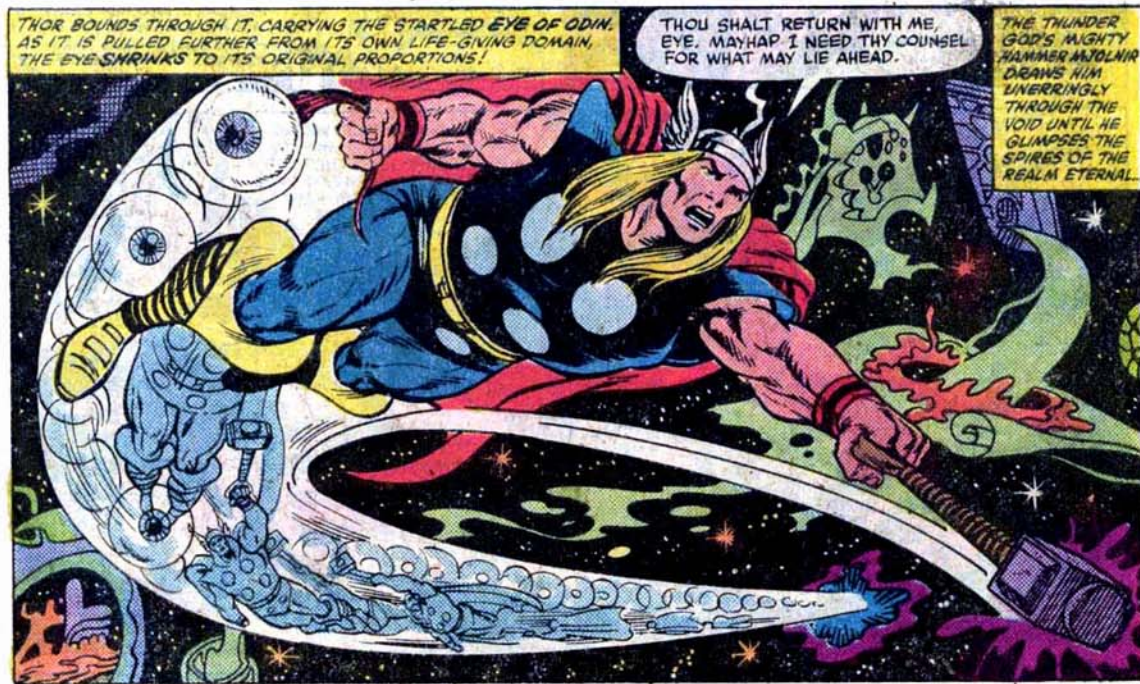


ENOW TO KNOW THAT I HAVE BEEN A FOOL FOR EER ACCUSING ODIN OF BETRAYING EARTH IN THE PAST.

NO, WAIT-- THUNDERER! I DO NOT WISH--!

'TIS TIME I MADE AMENDS. COME!

HIS WHIRLING MALLET SPINS MADLY OPENING A DIMENSIONAL VORTEX...



THOR BOUNDS THROUGH IT, CARRYING THE STARTLED EYE OF ODIN. AS IT IS PULLED FURTHER FROM ITS OWN LIFE-GIVING DOMAIN, THE EYE SHRINKS TO ITS ORIGINAL PROPORTIONS!

THOU SHALT RETURN WITH ME, EYE. MAYHAP I NEED THY COUNSEL FOR WHAT MAY LIE AHEAD.

THE THUNDER GOD'S MIGHTY HAMMER MJOLNIR DRAWS HIM UNERRINGLY THROUGH THE VOID UNTIL HE GLIMPSES THE SPIRES OF THE REALM ETERNAL.



ASSGARD... 'TIS GOOD TO BE HOME, BUT HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN ABSENT IN THE EYE'S MISTY WORLD?

MAYHAP I/T CAN TELL ME.



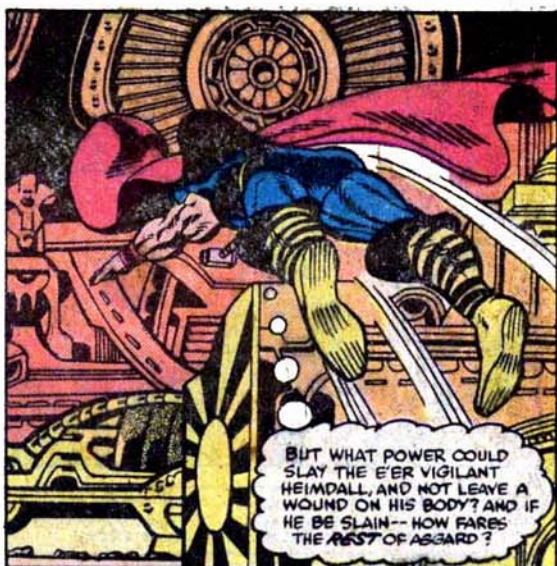
NAY, IT DOTHS BE SHRUNKEN AND LIFELESS. ITS USEFULNESS HATH ENDED. I MUST--



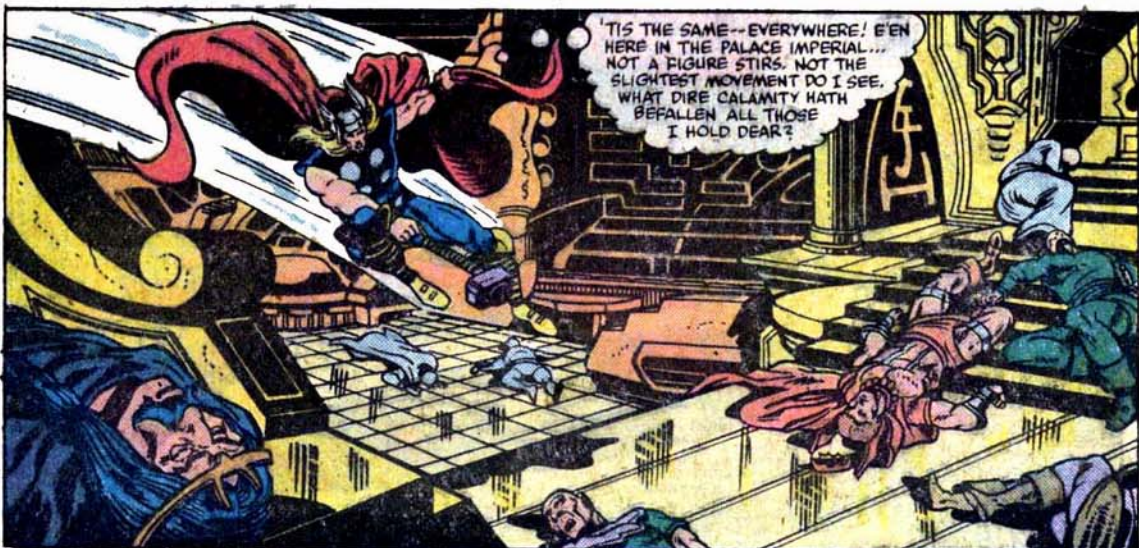
WHAT BE THIS?--HEIMDALL! GUARDIAN OF THE RAINBOW BRIDGE! I DID NOT ESPY HIM COLLAPSED 'PON BIFROST.



HIS BREAST--UNMOVING!
HIS HEART BE STILL...
AS IN DEATH!



BUT WHAT POWER COULD
SLAY THE E'ER VIGILANT
HEIMDALL, AND NOT LEAVE A
WOUND ON HIS BODY? AND IF
HE BE SLAIN--HOW FARES
THE REST OF ASGARD?



'TIS THE SAME--EVERYWHERE! E'EN
HERE IN THE PALACE IMPERIAL...
NOT A FIGURE STIRS, NOT THE
SLIGHTEST MOVEMENT DO I SEE.
WHAT DIRE CALAMITY HATH
BEFALLEN ALL THOSE
I HOLD DEAR?



I MUST SEEK THE
THRONE-ROOM...
IF ANSWERS THERE
BE--'TIS THERE
I SHALL FIND
THEM.



FATHER!

HE ANSWERS NOT, THOUGH HE BE SEATED 'PON
THE THRONE--STILL HE DOT' MAKE NO
SOUND OR MOTION.

AND AT HIS
FEET--



--SIR! MAY...
NOT THEE TOO,
MY BELOVED!
NOT THEE TOO!

STRANGE...WHILE I DETECT NO LIFE IN ODIN, HIS POSTURE DOTH SUGGEST ALERTNESS. HE IS UNLIKE THE OTHERS... RIGID...ERECT.



THAT DOTH ONLY DEEPEN THE MYSTERY, NOT LIGHTEN THE SORROW!

IS'T POSSIBLE, THAT WHILE I COMMUNED WITH THE EYE, THE TRUE RAGNAROK-- THE END OF THE GODS, AT LONG LAST HATH COME?

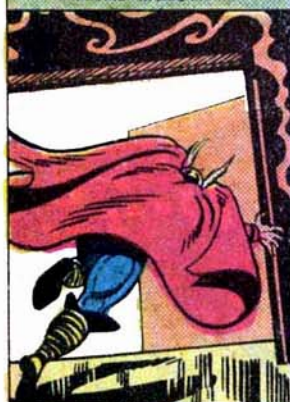


IF SO IT HATH TAKEN FORM IN A MANNER NONE COULD HAVE FORE-TOLD!

BUT--HOLD! THERE BE ONE IN ASGARD WHOSE KNOWLEDGE DOTH SURPASS THAT OF ODIN HIMSELF... MIMIR-- HE OF THE FIERY WELL!



LIKE A GOD POSSESSED, THE DESPERATE THUNDERER HASTENS FROM THE SILENT THRONEROOM, RACING THROUGH THE CASTLE'S Hallowed HALLS...



...PAUSING BUT ONCE IN STARTLED DISBELIEF.

THE ODINSWORD-- GONE...SCABBARD AS WELL! BUT SHOULD THE SWORD BE DRAWN BY ANY SAVE ODIN, THE CURSE OF THE RHINE-GOLD WILL DESCEND 'PON ASGARD.



MORE DEEPLY DISTURBED THAN BEFORE, THOR STORMS INTO THE CHAMBER OF THE WELL OF WISDOM...

THAT MUST BE WHAT HATH TRANSPIRED-- AND MINE EYES BEHELD THE RESULT OF THE DREAD NIBELUNG CURSE WHEN FIRST I SET FOOT 'PON THE RAINBOW BRIDGE! WHAT ENEMY OF ASGARD COULD HAVE DONE THIS?

MIMIR--ATTEND! THE SON OF ODIN DOTH COME SEEKING KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT HATH BEFALLEN ASGARD WHILE I WAS AWAY, MIMIR--?



CLOSER, ASGARDIAN... I CAN BARELY SPEAK.

WHAT-- THY FLAME HATH SHRIVELED 'TIL 'TIS LITTLE MORE THAN A FLICKER.



WITH THE GODS DEAD, MY LIFE CANNOT LONG BE SUSTAINED. THE EYE, ODINSON... I CRAVE ITS IMMORTAL ESSENCE. 'TILL STAVE OFF MINE OWN END.

AHH...NOW HEarken TO THE WORDS OF MIMIR. ODIN HATH TAKEN BACK THE LIFE FORCE HE ONCE GAVE TO ASGARD...ABSORBED IT INTO HIMSELF--AND THEN GONE TO EARTH TO CHALLENGE THE CELESTIALS AS A GOD AMONGST GODS! THE TIME HATH COME!



BUT ODIN'S
BODY BE ON
HIS THRONE.
HOW HATH HE
CONFRONTED
THE MENACE
WITHOUT
LEAVING
ASGARD?



'T WAS NOT HIS BODY WHICH HATH
LEFT, FOOL-- 'T WAS HIS SOUL.

BEARD OF
YIMIR! DOST
THOU MEAN--

ODIN HATH
ENTERED THE
DESTROYER?!



AT THAT INSTANT ON EARTH...

...THE ANDES MOUNTAINS
TREMBLES WITH EACH IM-
POSSIBLY LONG STRIDE HE
TAKES, POSSESSED OF THE
SPIRIT OF ODIN AND ALL
THE ASGARDIANS--



--THE AWESOME AVENGER
HAS GROWN ENORMOUS
TO CONTAIN THE GOD-
FORCE WHICH ANIMATES
HIM.



AND OF ALL WHO HAVE
EVER WALKED THE EARTH,
HE ALONE CAN CHALLENGE
THE CELESTIAL INVADERS.



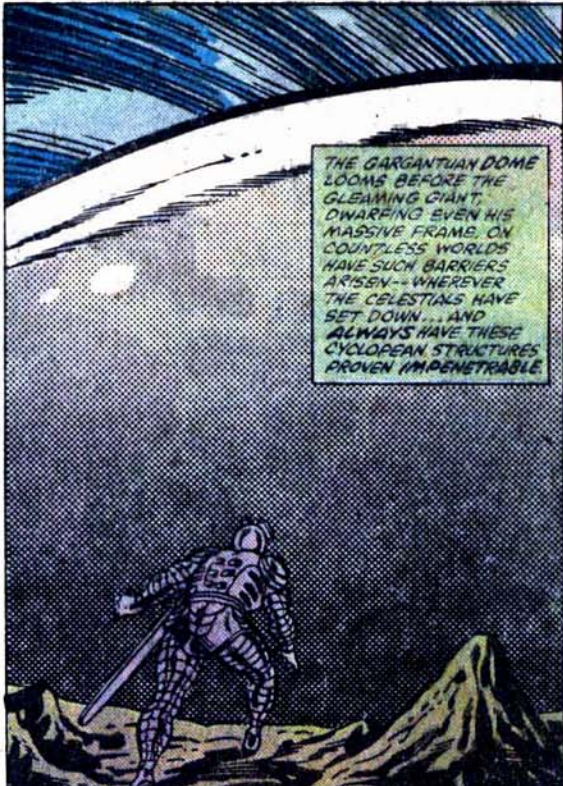
FOR ONLY HE IS--

--THE
DREAD
DESTROYER!



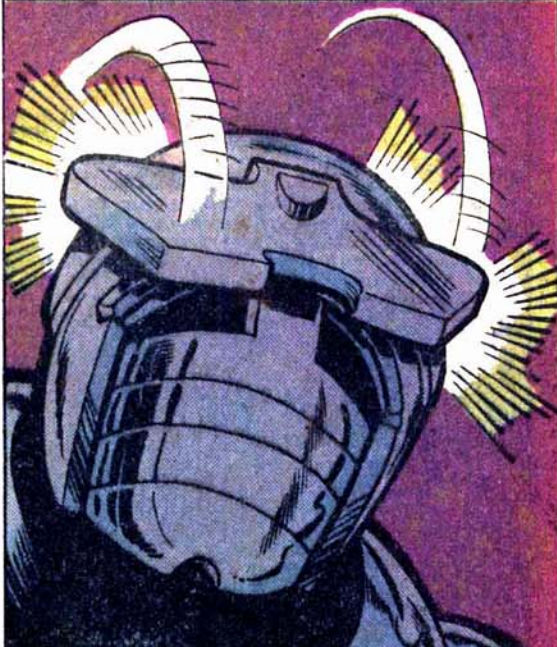
AND HANGING FROM
HIS SIDE--

THE OVERSWORD
OF ASGARD!




THE GARGANTUAN DOME LOOMS BEFORE THE GLEAMING GIANT, DWARFING EVEN HIS MASSIVE FRAME. ON COUNTLESS WORLDS HAVE SUCH BARRIERS ARISEN--WHEREVER THE CELESTIALS HAVE SET DOWN... AND ALWAYS HAVE THESE CYCLOPEAN STRUCTURES PROVEN IMPENETRABLE.

BUT NEVER HAS THIS STRANGE ENCLOSURE FACED THE ONSLAUGHT OF-- THE DESTROYER!




HIS VISOR SNAPS DOWN OVER HIS FOREHEAD AS THROUGH IT THE GOD-LIKE GLADIATOR AMASSES ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF ELEMENTAL ENERGY-- ENOUGH TO BREACH THE OPAQUE OBSTRUCTION THAT WOULD KEEP HIM FROM HIS DESTINY.

THE DESTROYER PREPARES TO UNLEASH HIS MOST MIND-STAGGERING WEAPON, AGAINST WHICH NOTHING HAS EVER PREVAILED... THE POWER OF TOTAL DISINTEGRATION.



LIKE A BLONTORCH PUT TO BUTTER, THE BLAZING RAY VAPORIZES THE ALIEN SUBSTANCE INSTANTLY, LEAVING A GAPING HOLE THROUGH WHICH THE DESTROYER MAY PASS.

AND EVEN AS HE STEPS WITHIN, HE IS UNKNOWNLY FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER GROUP-ENTITY--



--THE UNCANNY UNI-MIND, THE COMBINED CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE CELESTIALS' FORMER SERVITORS-- THE ETERNALS--MANIFEST IN A SINGLE BEING, WHOSE PURPOSE IS TO AID THE DESTROYER IN HIS STRUGGLE.

THE METALLIC GOLIATH DRAWS THE ODINSWORD... HE IS THE ULTIMATE KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOR READY TO DO BATTLE AGAINST THE ULTIMATE THREAT...

...THE ASSEMBLED FOURTH CELESTIAL HOST!

AND PRESIDING OVER THE DRAMATIC TABLEAU--
ARISHEM THE JUDGE, ON WHOSE
HUGE HAND IS IMPRINTED THE FORMULA FOR
EARTH'S ANNIHILATION, SHOULD ITS PEOPLE
BE DEEMED UNWORTHY BY THE CELESTIALS
AT THE COMPLETION OF THEIR FIFTY-YEAR STAY.

FOR HALF A CENTURY SHALL
ARISHEM STAND... HIS UN-
FATHOMABLE MIND REACHING,
GATHERING IMPRESSIONS FROM
AN ENTIRE PLANET OF LIVING
BEINGS... ASSIMILATING THEM...
PONDERING THEM... AND
FINALLY-- PASSING HIS
IRREVOCABLE VERDICT--
LIFE OR DEATH!

GAMMENON THE
GATHERER

JEMIAH THE
ANALYZER

ESON THE
SEARCHER

ONEG THE
PROBER

ZIRAN THE
TESTER

NEZARR THE
CALCULATOR

TEPRAL THE
SURVEYOR

HARGEN THE
MEASURER

YET ON ALL THOSE MANY WORLDS
WHERE THE CELESTIALS HAVE
CONDUCTED THEIR LIFE-EXPERIMENTS--
NEVER HAS A RACE PROVEN ITSELF
DESERVING ENOUGH TO SURVIVE.
THUS, ARISHEM'S DECREE HAS EVER
BEEN-- DEATH!

BUT EARTH HAS TWIN CHAMPIONS UNLIKE
ANY OTHERS CONCEIVED BY THE COSMOS, WHO
WILL NOT WAIT FOR THE DREAD DECISION TO
BE REACHED DECADES HENCE, AND SO, HERE
ON A SAND-SWEPT PERUVIAN PLAIN, THE FATE
OF EARTH WILL IN MOMENTS BE KNOWN.

CHAPTER THREE

DAY OF ALPHA





THE CELESTIALS
FACE THEIR AD-
VERSARY WITH
EQUANIMITY FOR
NEVER HAS THEIR
WILL BEEN
THWARTED...
NEVER THE CHALLEN-
GER NOT BEEN
CRUSHED.



THE ODINSWORD GLOWS GOLDEN
WITH THE ENCHANTED POWER
OF THE LONG-DORMANT RHINE-
GOLD FROM WHICH IT WAS
FORGED.

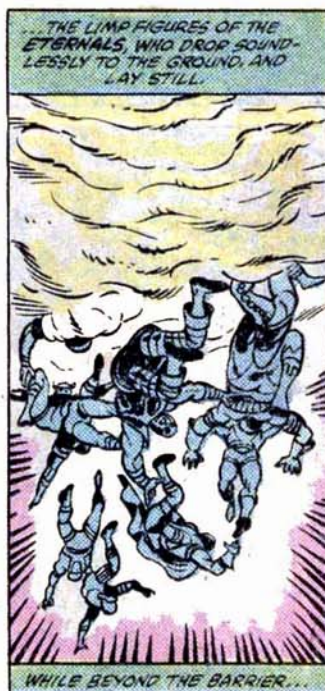
AND NOT IN ALL
LIFE OR LEGEND
HAS THE MERGING
OF WEAPON AND
WIELDER BEEN MORE
PERFECT...THE UNITY
MORE COMPLETE.



GAMMENON AND
JEMIAN RELEASE
THEIR OWN LATENT
ENERGIES-- SEEMING-
LY LASHING OUT AT
THE DESTROYER IN
THE INITIAL TEST
OF STRENGTH.



BUT IT IS THE UNI-MIND TOWARD WHICH THE SPACE GODS
HAVE AIMED. TWIN BLASTS STRIKE AS ONE, AND THE
LEVITATING ENTITY SPLITS INTO ITS COMPONENT ELEMENTS...



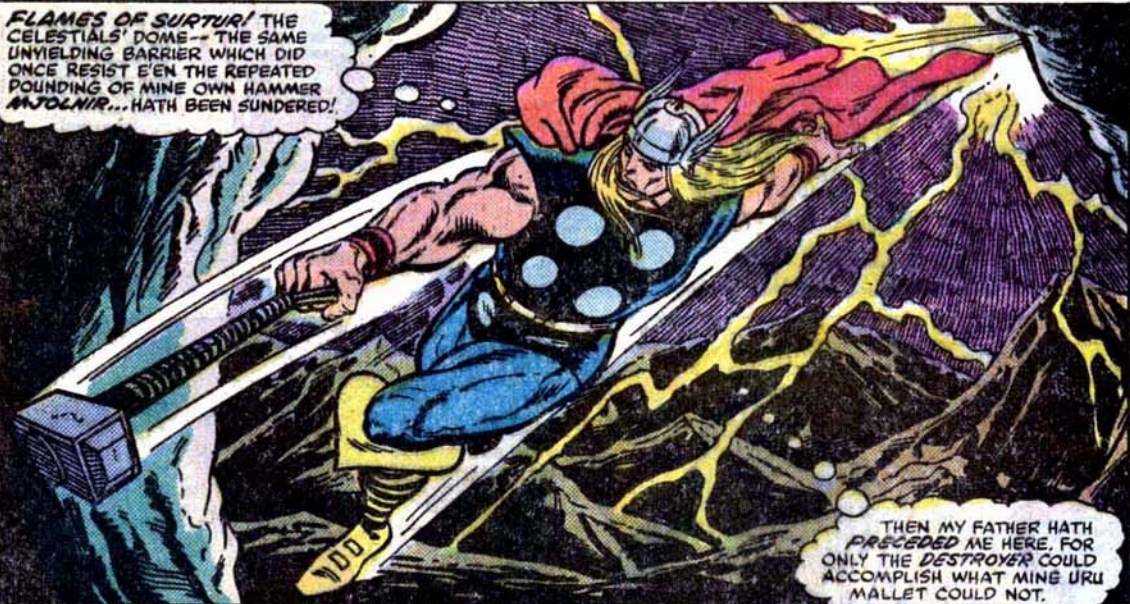
THE LIMP FIGURES OF THE
ETERNALS, WHO DROP SOUND-
LESSLY TO THE GROUND, AND
LAY STILL.



THE MIGHTY THOR
STREAKS EARTHWARD
THROUGH A RENT IN
SPACE FORMED BY HIS
MATCHLESS Mallet...

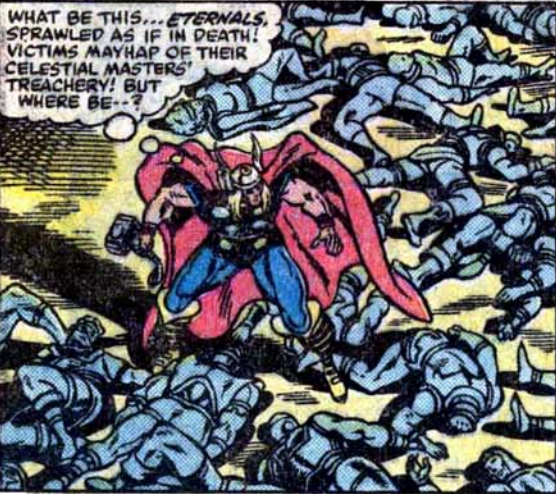
WHILE BEYOND THE BARRIER...

FLAMES OF SURTUR! THE CELESTIALS' DOME-- THE SAME UNYIELDING BARRIER WHICH DID ONCE RESIST E'EN THE REPEATED POUNDING OF MINE OWN HAMMER Mjolnir...HATH BEEN SUNDERED!

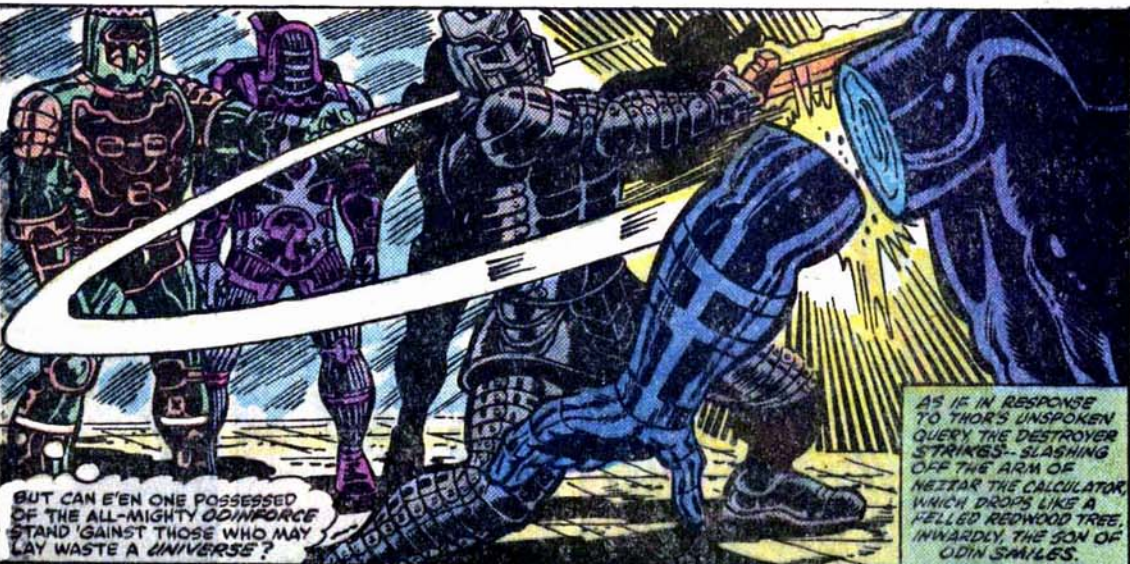
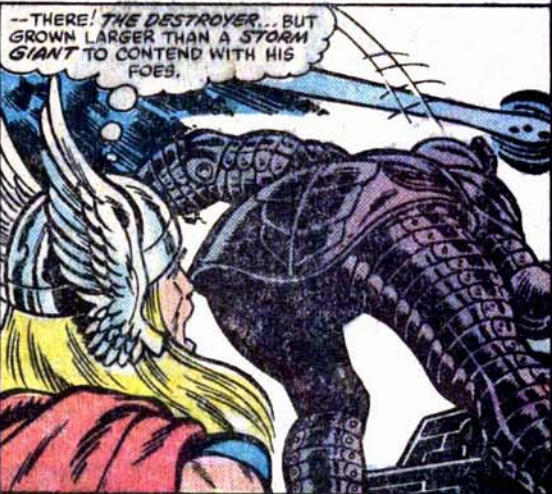


THEN MY FATHER HATH PRECEDED ME HERE, FOR ONLY THE DESTROYER COULD ACCOMPLISH WHAT MINE URU Mallet COULD NOT.

WHAT BE THIS... ETERNALS, SPRAWLED AS IF IN DEATH! VICTIMS MAYHAP OF THEIR CELESTIAL MASTERS' TREACHERY! BUT WHERE BE--?



--THERE! THE DESTROYER... BUT GROWN LARGER THAN A STORM GIANT TO CONTEND WITH HIS FOES.



BUT CAN E'EN ONE POSSESSED OF THE ALL-MIGHTY ODINFORCE STAND 'GAINST THOSE WHO MAY LAY WASTE A UNIVERSE?

AS IF IN RESPONSE TO THOR'S UNSPOKEN QUERY THE DESTROYER STRIKES-- SLASHING OFF THE ARM OF HETZAR THE CALCULATOR, WHICH DROPS LIKE A Felled REDWOOD TREE, INWARDLY, THE SON OF ODIN SMILES.

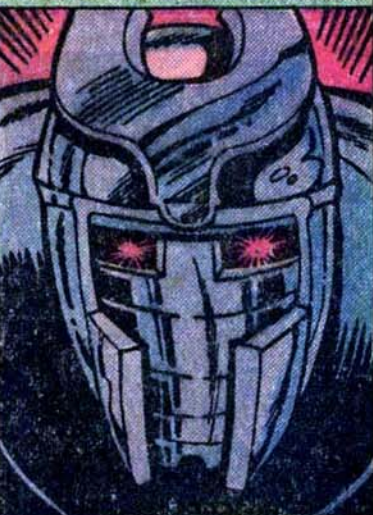
THE LOSS OF A LIMB MEANS NOTHING TO NEZZAR. ALREADY THE AIR CRACKLES WITH THE SOUND OF THE ARM'S REGENERATION.



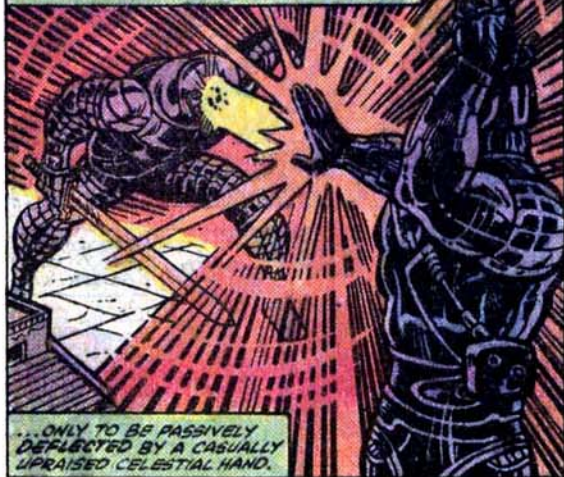
THE DESTROYER PAUSES, WEIGHING HIS NEXT MOVE... THEN AGAIN DRAWS UPON THE UNSEEN ELEMENTAL ENERGIES AS ONLY HE IS ABLE.



HIS EYES ARE LIT BY INNER FIRES WHOSE ORIGINS WE MAY ONLY GUESS AT.



THE POWER OF ULTIMATE DISINTEGRATION IS AGAIN UNLEASHED IN A SINGLE WITHERING BEAM...

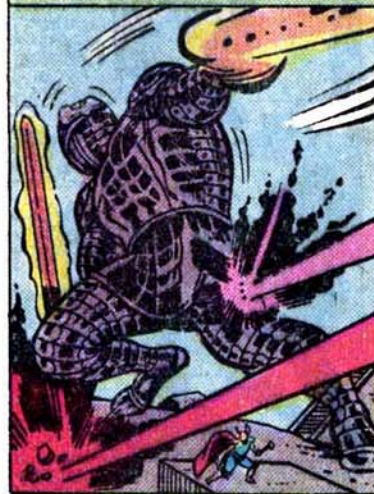


... ONLY TO BE PASSIVELY DEFLECTED BY A CASUALTY UPRaised CELESTIAL HAND.

THE MAMMOTH WARRIOR IS BUFFETED BY A CELESTIAL BARRAGE WHICH DISBURBS HIS ALLEGEDLY INDestructIBLE ARMOR...



... AND SENDS HIM REELING BACK-- EVER BACK, WEAKENED... FORCED TO FIGHT LIKE A WOUNDED BEAST.



THE BATTLE GOES BADLY. AND SHOULD THE DESTROYER PERISH-- SO TOO MIGHT ODIN AND ALL OF ASGARD WHO HAVE GIVEN HIM LIFE.



THIS MUST NOT BE!

THOR MUST ENTER THE PRAY HIMSELF-- BRINGING DOWN 'PON THE CELESTIALS THE RAGING STORM--



--BEFORE WHICH THEY SHALL BE SWEEPED LIKE FALLEN LEAVES.



THE DARK CLOUDS LOWER OVER THE GLADIATORS AS MIGHTY THOR DIRECTS HIS FURY THROUGH THE EVER-INCREASING TEMPEST... WITH NO MORE EFFECT ON THE CELESTIALS THAN A MILD SPRING RAIN.



ZIRAN GRASPS THE DESTROYER'S SWORD, FREEZING IT IN MID-ARC.

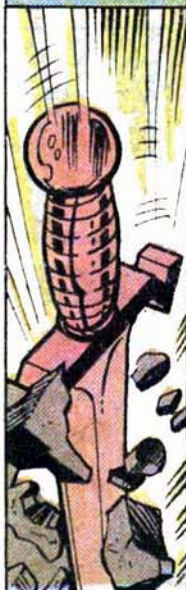


...AS BLOWS WHICH COULD PULVERIZE A PLANET GLANCE HARMLESSLY OFF HIM.



TEFRAL ENTERS THE COMBAT, BLASTING THE ODIN-SWORD FROM THE DESTROYER'S GRASP... SEVERING A BOND THOUGHT TO BE UNBREAKABLE.

THE OVERSWORD SNATTERS A PERUVIAN TEMPLE BEFORE COMING TO REST WHILE ITS AWESOME WIELDER AT LAST SINKS TO ONE KNEE, HEAD BOWED IN DEFEAT... PREY TO POWERS THAT KNOW NO EQUAL.



THEY GATHER ABOUT THE FALLEN FOE...

...AWAITING ONLY A GESTURE FROM ARISHEN.

HE LOOKS DOWN AT THE RAVAGED HULK BEFORE HIM, THEN SLOWLY NODS HIS HEAD...

...AND THE
DESTROYER
DIES!

HAIRLINE SEAMS BURST INTO HUGE CRACKS AS HIS VERY SUBSTANCE DISSIPATES. FOR EVEN THIS SUPREME CREATION OF THE ALL-FATHER, WHOSE MOUNTAINOUS FRAME COULD PLACIDLY WITHSTAND THE EXPLOSION OF A SUPER-NOVA—

—CAN BUT FOR
MERE SECONDS
ENDURE THE
INCALCULABLE
IMPACT OF A
COMBINED
CELESTIAL
ASSAULT.

ODIN'S SPIRIT AND THAT OF ALL THE ASGARDIANS IS WRENCHED HORRIBLY FROM THE DYING GIANT... SET HELP-LESSLY ADRIFT LACKING A PHYSICAL CAGING TO CONTAIN IT.



'TIS PAST ALL BELIEVING!
THE DESTROYER-
OF WHOM ODIN
BOASTED WAS
BEYOND HARM-
ING BY ANY
FORCE--HATH
BEEN REDUCED
TO A SLAG
OF MOLTEN
METAL!

THROUGHOUT REALITY, THE DEATH THROES OF THE DE-
STROYER REVERBERATE. ODIN'S PEERS TREMBLE. THEY AGREE
TO LET ODIN REPRESENT THEIR KIND, AND WITH HIS PASSING,
THEY TOO SHALL SOON FALL.



IF THE DESTROYER
BE DESTROYED,
WHAT OF HE WHO
DID MAKE IT LIVE?
WHAT OF THE ALL-
FATHER?? HE MUST
HAVE DIED!!!



YE SPACE-BORN KILLERS!
YE WHO MASQUERADE AS
CELESTIAL DEITIES WHEN
YE ARE NAUGHT BUT
MURDERERS!

MURDERERS!



BUT SO LONG AS THOR DOTTH
PREVAIL, THOSE WHO PERISHED
HAVE A LIVING VESSEL TO
CARRY OUT THEIR VENGEANCE!

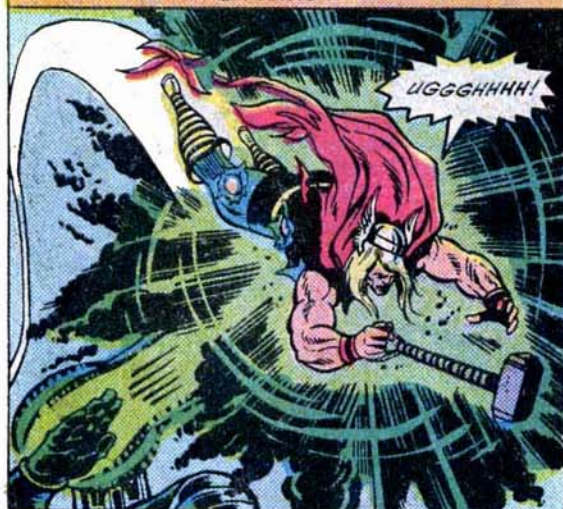
AND SO LONG AS I
HOLD THE MALLET MJOLNIR--
THAT VENGEANCE WILL BE
MOST TERRIBLE! **FOR ODIN!**
FOR HONOR!



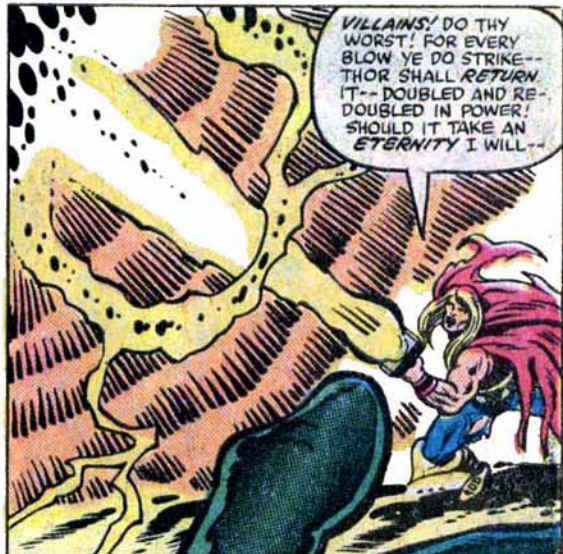
FOR ASSSSGAAAAARRRD!

SPASHH!

THE CELESTIALS' REPLY IS SWIFT AND MERCILESSLY EFFECTIVE...



UGGGHHH!



VILLAINS! DO THY WORST! FOR EVERY BLOW YE DO STRIKE-- THOR SHALL RETURN IT-- DOUBLED AND REDOUBLED IN POWER! SHOULD IT TAKE AN ETERNITY I WILL--



--ARRRGHHH!



I'LL NOT DIE, CELESTIAL, THOUGH IT BE THY FONDEST WISH! THY ATTACK BUT STRENGTHENS MY WILL... FEEDS MY RESOLVE... STOKES THE FI--



--RAAGHH!

ODIN-- FORGIVE ME... I HAVE FAILED THEE...

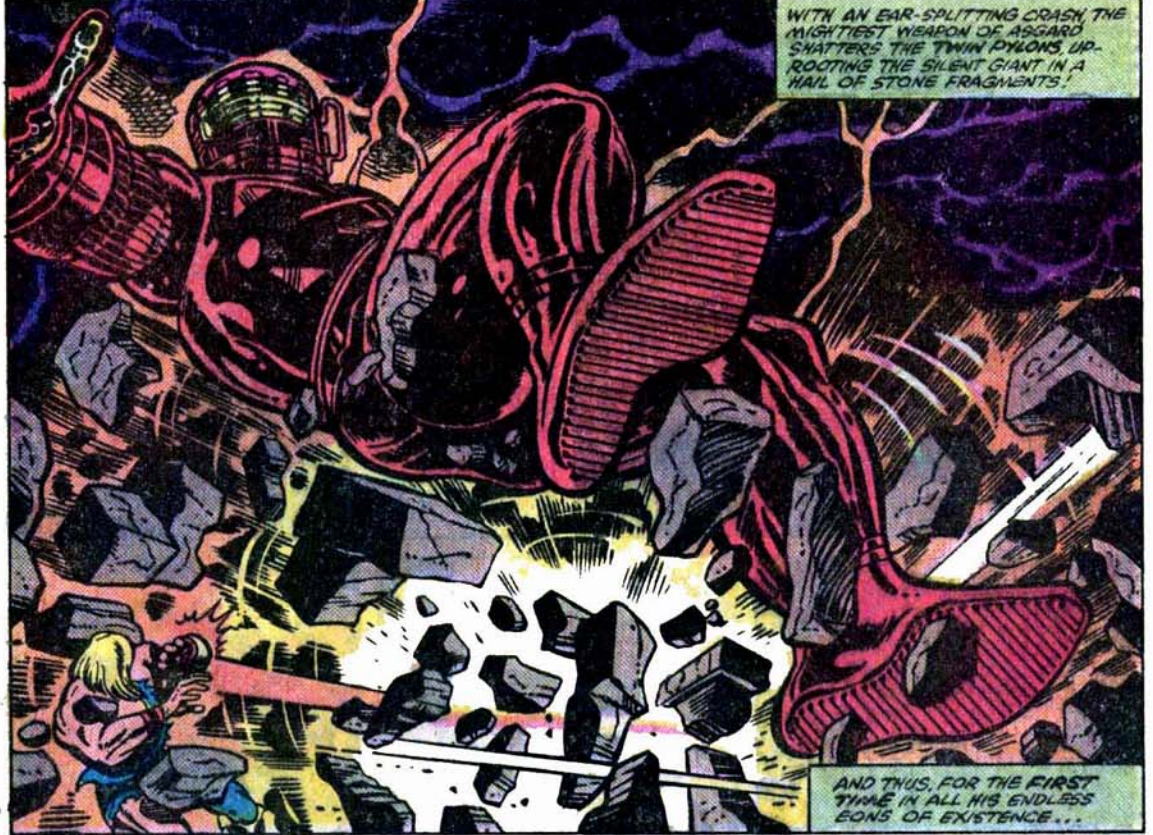


TRULY THEIR POWER IS BEYOND RECKONING. BUT IF I DIE, 'T WILL NOT BE UNDER THE MOCKING SHADOW OF ARISHEM.



HEAR ME, CELESTIAL! FOR TOO LONG HAST THOU STOOD ABOVE ALL LIFE IN THY ARROGANCE! 'TIS TIME THOU WERT REDUCED IN STATURE!

AND 'TIS THOR WHO SHALL SEE TO THE TASK!



WITH AN EAR-SPLITTING CRASH, THE MIGHTIEST WEAPON OF ASGARD SHATTERS THE TWIN PYLONS, UP-ROOTING THE SILENT GIANT IN A HAIL OF STONE FRAGMENTS!

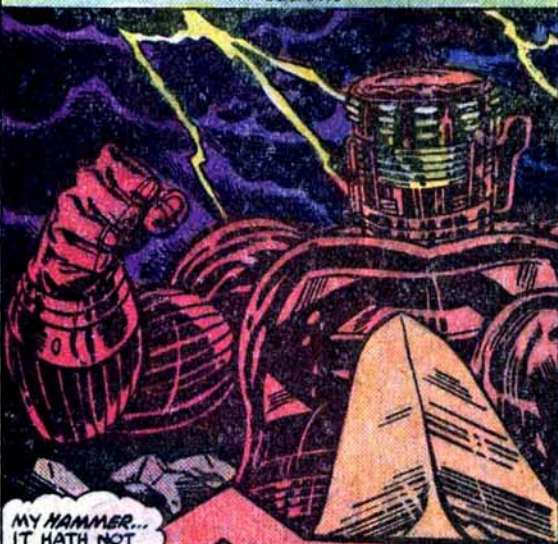
AND THUS, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ALL HIS ENDLESS EONS OF EXISTENCE...



...MIGHTY ARISHEM IS TOPPLED!

WHOOOM!

ARISHEM RISES FROM THE RUBBLE--A LEVIATHAN BEYOND CONFLICT. THE FALL WAS UTTERLY INCONSEQUENTIAL TO THE SUPREME CELESTIAL... NOT EVEN WORTH THE EFFORT TO PREVENT, FOR ARISHEM ACTS ONLY WHEN HE DEEMS IT NECESSARY.



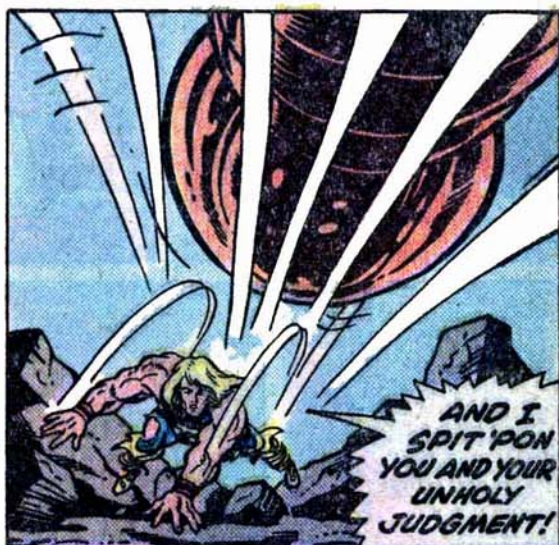
MY HAMMER... IT HATH NOT RETURNED TO MY HAND--BE-REFT OF THE ENCHANTMENT ODIN DID INFUSE IT WITH SO LONG AS HE LIVED. THEN THERE BE NO DOUBT... HE BE DEAD.



YET, STILL DOTH HOPE LINGER, FOR THE AWESOME OVERSWORD DOTH LIE IN REACH--AWAITING THE STRENGTH OF THOR TO HELP FULFILL ITS DIVINE PURPOSE.

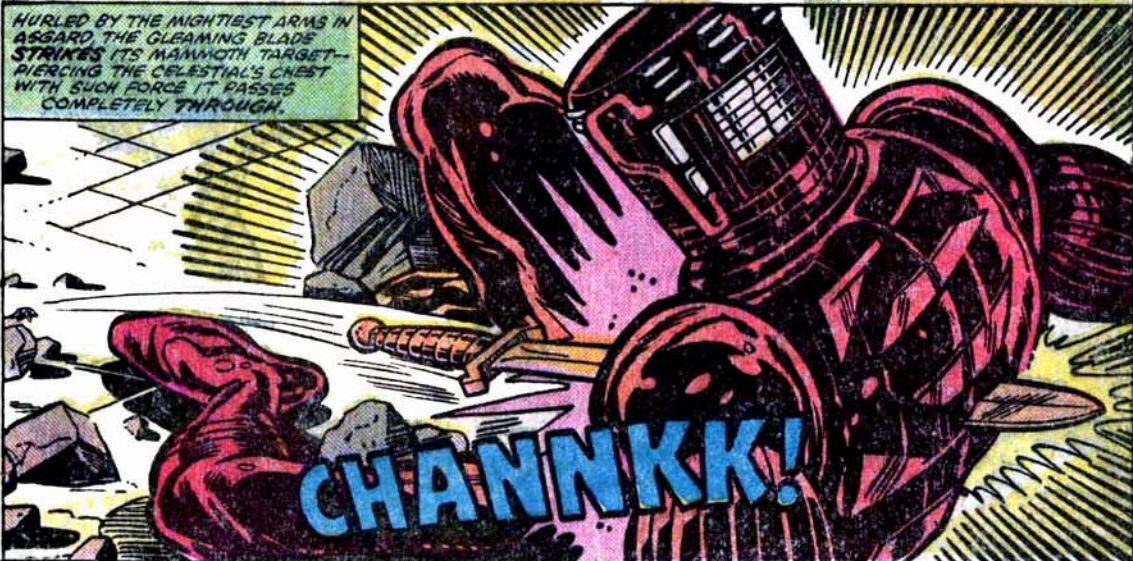
THOU ART NOT RID OF ME, ARISHEM... FOR I DO CARRY FORTH THE FIGHT IN WHICH MY BELOVED FATHER AND ALL MY FELLOWS PERISHED, AND ON MY WORD AS THE LAST ASGARDIAN, THEIR DEATHS SHALL **NOT** HAVE BEEN IN VAIN.

I WILL SMITE THEE AND SEE THEE DEAD! FOR I DO BEAR THEE HATRED, CELESTIAL... **HATRED** BEYOND ALL EXPRESSION!



AND I SPIT 'PON YOU AND YOUR UNHOLY JUDGMENT!

HURLED BY THE MIGHTIEST ARMS IN ASGARD, THE GLEAMING BLADE STRIKES ITS MAMMOTH TARGET--PIERCING THE CELESTIAL'S CHEST WITH SUCH FORCE IT PASSES COMPLETELY THROUGH.



CHANNKK!

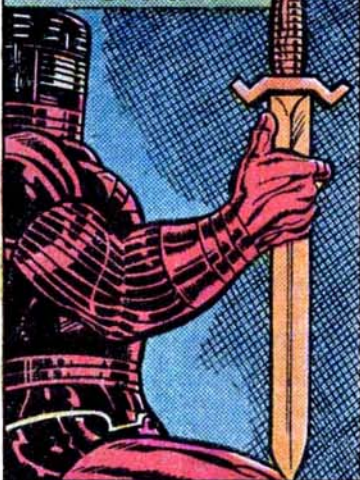


THE EFFORT HATH STOLEN THE LAST OF MY STRENGTH, BUT 'T WAS NOT ENOUGH! THOUGH THE OVERSWORD HATH IMBEDDED ITSELF IN THE CELESTIAL... THE GIANT SEEMS UNAFFECTED.

ARISHEM DRAWS THE SWORD FROM HIMSELF... HAVING ALLOWED ITS ENTRY MERELY TO BETTER ANALYZE ITS ALIEN STRUCTURE AND MYSTIC PROPERTIES.



THE PROCESS IS COMPLETED-- AND HE CONSIDERS THE OBJECT'S DISPOSAL.



SUDDENLY THE SUBSTANCE OF THE OVERSWORD Melts AS CELESTIAL ENERGY COURSES THROUGH IT...



...AND EVEN THE HEINOUS CURSE OF THE NIBELUNG IS EXORCISED IN ARISHEM'S INCOMPREHENSIBLE WAY.

THEN HE SLOWLY WHEELS UPON THE DEFIANT FLEA BEFORE HIM-- REACHING DOWN.



THE BATTLE BE OVER, AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH O'ERTAKES ME, FATHER... I COME TO JOIN THEE IN VALHALLA!



EH? A PINPRICK OF LIGHT DOTH APPEAR. IS'T AN ILLUSION I SEE OR--?



HOLD, MIGHTY ONE! STAY YOUR HAND AND SPARE THIS-- MY BLOODSON!

NOW A FIGURE HATH APPEARED FROM THE GLOWING LIGHT-- WITH THE VOICE OF A WOMAN.

I AM THE ELDER GODDESS
KNOWN IN ALL LEGENDS AS
MOTHER EARTH. AND I
HAVE COME WITH AN
OFFERING...



SHE
GESTURES
AND...



...TWELVE OF
MY CHILDREN,
SELECTED BY THE
GODS OF THIS
SPHERE FROM AMONG
MANKIND'S BILLIONS.*
EACH REPRESENTS
THE NOBLEST
ACHIEVEMENTS--
THE HIGHEST IDEALS
TOWARD WHICH THE
HUMAN RACE MAY ASPIRE.

AND THESE I OFFER TO
YOU, CELESTIALS, IN EX-
CHANGE FOR THE LIFE
OF THIS WORLD. THOUGH
I LOVE EACH AS A CHILD,
I AM WILLING TO PART
WITH THEM.

*ODIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE
THE TWELVE WAS GATHERED BY
THE WARRIORS THREE IN ISSUE
#29!
--J.S.

I AM THE SPIRIT OF ALL LIFE ON EARTH.
THROUGHOUT TIME, I HAVE WATCHED IT
GROW AND NURTURED ITS STUMBLING
PROGRESS. AND I WILL NOT SEE THE
FRUITS OF MY LABORS DESTROYED
BY ANY FORCE! WITH ALL MY POWER
WILL I AID MY SONS AND DAUGHTERS.



I BESECH YOU--TAKE MY
LOVED ONES AND LEAVE THIS
WORLD IN PEACE. CONSIDER THEM
YOUR CHILDREN AS WELL, FOR THEY
ARE CAST IN YOUR IMAGE AS
MUCH AS IN MY OWN.

LET THEM LEARN THE MYSTERIES
OF THE COSMOS AT YOUR FEET.
LET THEM BE AS ONE WITH YOU...
AND DISCOVER HOW MUCH YOU
HAVE TO LEARN FROM THEM--AND
THOSE LIKE THEM ON COUNTLESS
EARTHS.

FOR WHAT SEEMS AN ETERNITY,
THE CELESTIALS CONFER. THEN
ARISHEM STEPS FORWARD...



...AND
OUT-
STRETCHES
HIS ARM
DRAMATI-
CALLY.



THE FINAL JUDGMENT HAS BEEN
REACHED.



EARTH
WILL
LIVE!



THE CELESTIALS SURROUND THE TYNLUC WAITING MORTALS, EFFORTLESSLY WITH NOT THE SLIGHTEST DISPLAY OF OUTWARD POWER. THEY RISE AND ARE SOON LOST TO THE HEAVENS ABOVE...

...LEAVING ONLY TWO BEHIND TO WATCH THE FINAL DEPARTURE.



THOU DIDST CALL ME-- THY BLOOD--SON?

YES, I AM SHE WHO BIRTHED YOU, THOR. FOR I WAS ODIN'S OTHER WIFE.



WE AGREED NOT TO **SPEAK** OF OUR UNION WHEN WE PARTED AGES AGO... AND SO YOU HAVE NEVER KNOWN YOUR **TRUE** MOTHER.

MOTHER--
JUHHEE



SLEEP NOW, MY SON. THERE WILL BE NO REJOICING FOR US THIS DAY-- ONLY MOURNING, I-- THE LOSS OF A **HUSBAND**... AND YOU... THE PASSING OF A **FATHER**.

END