

THOR

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

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20¢ 216 OCT 02450

THE MIGHTY

THOR



THE LIVING GOD-JEWEL MUST BE MINE--
MINE!

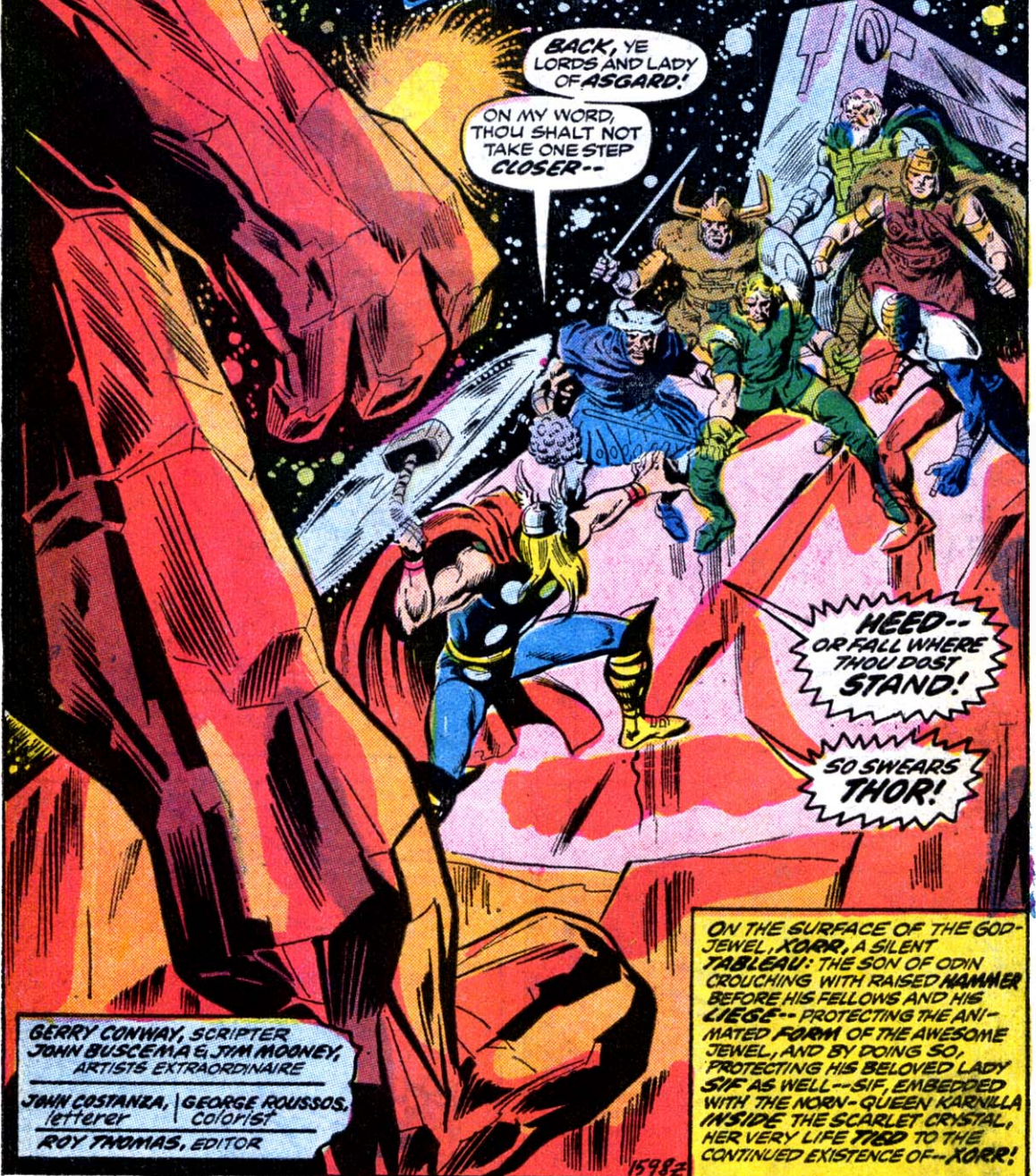
I SAY THEE NAY!

FOR ON THE DAY THOU DOST POSSESS IT-- THAT DAY EARTH DIES!

**THIS IS IT!
THE FINAL BATTLE
WITH
THE 4-D MAN!**



WHERE CHAOS RULES!



BACK, YE LORDS AND LADY OF ASGARD!

ON MY WORD, THOU SHALT NOT TAKE ONE STEP CLOSER--

NEED-- OR FALL WHERE THOU DOST STAND!

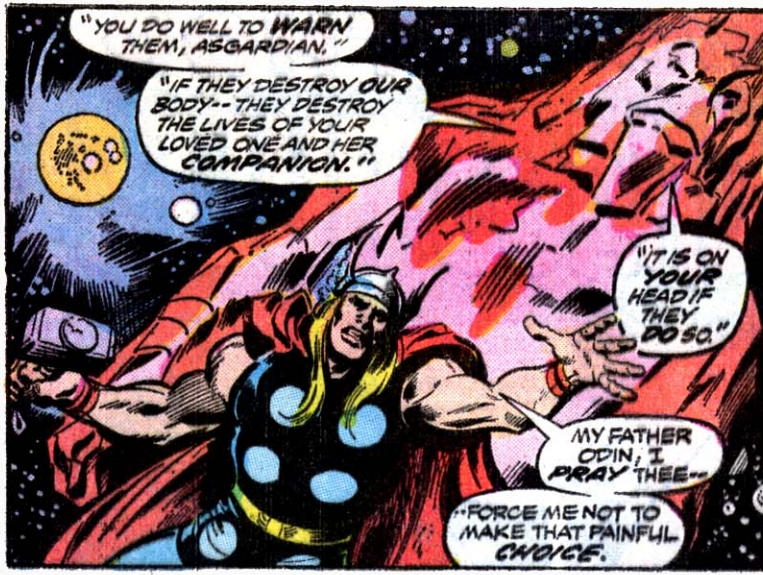
SO SWEARS THOR!

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ON THE SURFACE OF THE GOD-JEWEL, XORR, A SILENT TABLEAU: THE SON OF ODIN CROUCHING WITH RAISED HAMMER BEFORE HIS FELLOWS AND HIS LIEGE-- PROTECTING THE ANIMATED FORM OF THE AWESOME JEWEL, AND BY DOING SO, PROTECTING HIS BELOVED LADY SIF AS WELL-- SIF, EMBEDDED WITH THE NORN-QUEEN KARNILLA INSIDE THE SCARLET CRYSTAL, HER VERY LIFE TIED TO THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF-- XORR!



"YOU DO WELL TO WARN THEM, ASGARDIAN."

"IF THEY DESTROY OUR BODY-- THEY DESTROY THE LIVES OF YOUR LOVED ONE AND HER COMPANION."

"IT IS ON YOUR HEAD IF THEY DO SO."

MY FATHER ODIN, I PRAY THEE--

"FORCE ME NOT TO MAKE THAT PAINFUL CHOICE."



FOR, THOUGH I LOVE THEE AS A TRUE SON--

"IT IS SHE WHO MUST EVER HOLD MY HEART!"



THEN LET THERE BE NO CONFRONTATION.

TOO OFTEN HATH FATHER TURNED AGAINST SON--



--AND I SAY THEE NOW, ENOUGH!

THOU MAYEST DO AS THOU WILT, MY SON. ODIN SHALL NOT HINDER THEE.

WE HAVE REGAINED OUR FRIENDSHIP TOO SHORT A TIME AGO TO SURRENDER IT SO FREELY!

DO AS THOU DOST WISH.

NO MAN OR GOD WILL STAND AGAINST THEE.



SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, ODIN-- NOT FOR MERCURIO, THE FOURTH-DIMENSIONAL MAN!

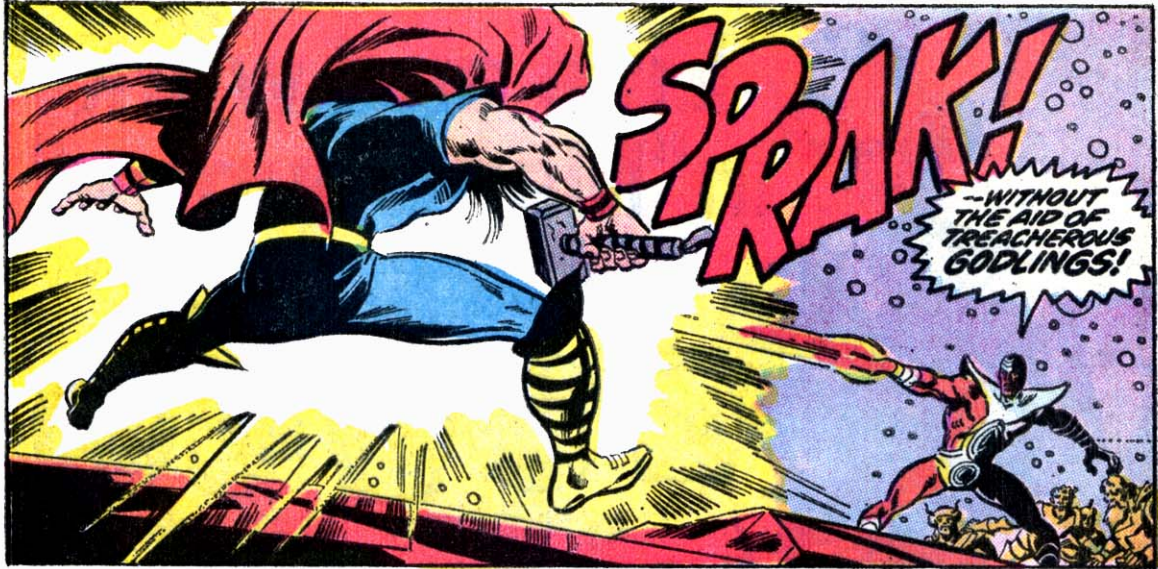
I NEED THIS BLASTED GEM TO SAVE MY PLANET--!



YOU MAY ORDER YOUR WARRIORS AROUND AS YOU WISH--

--BUT UNDERSTAND THIS, MY AGING FRIEND--

--MERCURIO DECIDES HIS OWN FATE--



SPRAK!

--WITHOUT THE AID OF TREACHEROUS GODLINGS!



"TREACHEROUS"? BECAUSE WE REFUSE TO HELP THEE AT THE COST OF OUR LADIES' LIVES?

THOU DOST GIVE A STRANGE MEANING TO THE WORD, ALIEN--!



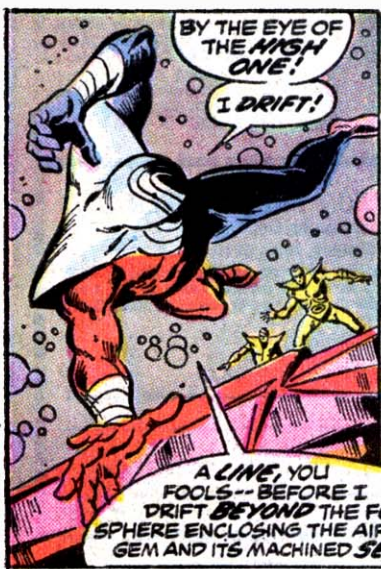
BUT STILL, 'TIS A WORD THOR DOTH KNOW--
--AND DOTH APPLY TO THEE!



SPOINNN!

MASTER, THE EDGE--!

BEWARE THE ACCURSED JEWEL'S EDGE!



BY THE EYE OF THE HIGH ONE!

I DRIFT!

A LIME, YOU FOOLS-- BEFORE I DRIFT BEYOND THE FORCE SPHERE ENCLING THE AIR ON THIS GEM AND ITS MACHINED SETTING!



HERE, MASTER-- TAKE HOLD.

IN A MOMENT, WE WILL BE FREE TO ATTACK ANEW!



NO, MY BROTHER... I THINK NOT.

THE ODDS ARE AGAINST US NOW... WE MUST WAIT TILL THE MOMENT IS RIPE.



"WE APPLAUD THE WISDOM OF YOUR DECISION, HUMANOID."

"YOU HAD LITTLE HOPE TO STRUGGLE SUCCESSFULLY AGAINST XORR-- WHO IS THE EMBODIMENT OF A PLANET ENTIRE!"

"IT IS GOOD YOU SAVED YOURSELVES FROM A SENSELESS BUT CERTAIN DEATH."



PERHAPS SO, CREATURE.

I WOULD WAGER, HOWEVER, THAT WE HAVE ONLY POSTPONED THAT UNTIDY EVENT.

WE SHALL SEE WITHIN THE HOUR.

THAT IS A PROMISE, ASSGARDIAN--



A PROMISE...



COME, MY WARRIORS-- 'TIS TIME WE ALSO DID LEAVE.

THERE IS MUCH WHICH REQUIRES THOUGHT...

...AND YOU MUST BE MY EYES AND EARS.

ESPECIALLY THEE, BRAVE HEIMDALL--

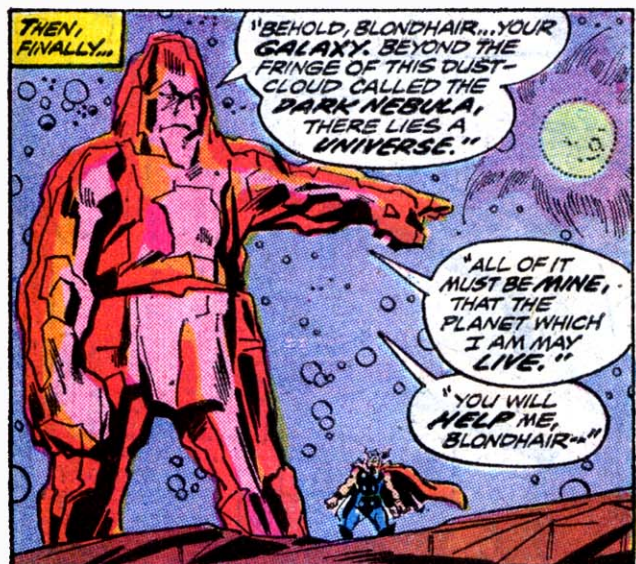
ODIN DOOTH NEED THY GOOD COUNCIL.



WITH A COLD GAZE, THE THUNDER GOD STARES AS THE ASSGARDIANS DISEMBARK THE LIVING CRYSTAL, AND BOARD THE MYSTICAL STARJAMMER ONCE MORE...

HE SAYS NOTHING.

THERE IS NAUGHT WHICH CAN BE SAID.



THEN, FINALLY...

"BEHOLD, BLONDHAIR... YOUR GALAXY. BEYOND THE FRINGE OF THIS DUST-CLOUD CALLED THE DARK NEBULA, THERE LIES A UNIVERSE."

"ALL OF IT MUST BE MINE, THAT THE PLANET WHICH I AM MAY LIVE."

"YOU WILL HELP ME, BLONDHAIR--"



"-- AND WHEN OUR WORK IS DONE, THERE WILL BE A NEW ORDER TO THE STRUCTURE OF LIVING THINGS--"

"-- AN ORDER WHICH WILL FAVOR XORR--"

"-- FOR SUCH IS AS THINGS WERE MEANT TO BE!"

"SUCH IS-- DESTINY!"

ELSEWHERE, IN THE SOON-TO-BE-SUBJUGATED GALAXY, A BLUE-WHITE STAR SHEDS BURNING LIGHT UPON A PLANET OLDER THAN THE SOLAR SYSTEM INHABITED BY MAN.

A PARADOXICALLY SOFT GLOW LIGHTS BUILDINGS WHICH TOWER INTO THE ETERNAL NIGHT; TALLER THAN THE DREAMS OF MANKIND, MORE EXQUISITE THAN THE FINEST CREATIONS OF ASSARD.

AND SWEETLY, IN THE DISTANCE, THERE CAN BE HEARD THE SOUND OF MUSIC... OF A KIND NO HUMAN EAR COULD EVER APPRECIATE, OF A STYLE ALIEN TO BOTH GOD AND MAN...

...THE MUSIC OF A NOMADIC PEOPLE...

...THE MUSIC OF RIGEL...

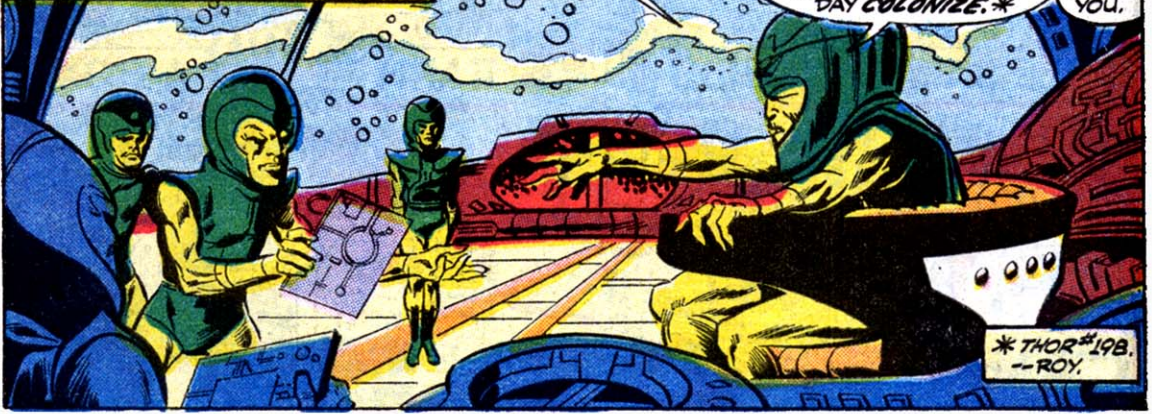
...AND OF THE COLONIZERS' MUSICIANS SUPREME!

AT THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, MUSIC IS NOT WHAT CONCERNS US-- NOR DOES IT CONCERN HIM WHO IS KNOWN AS THE GRAND COMMISSIONER, WHOSE DUTY IT IS TO DECIDE THE LIVES OF HIS PLANET'S NINE BILLION INHABITANTS.

YOU HAVE WORD OF COLONIZER NILE? DON'T DAWDLE, MAN... LET ME SEE.

I WISH TO KNOW THE REASON SHE HAS NOT REPORTED TO US THESE MANY MONTHS-- SINCE WE SENT HER TO THE PLANET BLACKWORLD, TO BUILD A LAND WE MIGHT SOMEDAY COLONIZE.*

BRING IT HERE, FOOL. I'LL NOT BITE YOU.



* THOR #198. --ROY.

SHE AND SEVERAL ASSGARDIANS ARE INVOLVED WITH THE GOD JEWEL XORR. EXCELLENCY.



THEN THE JEWEL HAS AT LAST AWAKENED? INTERESTING.

WE MUST OBSERVE THE SITUATION THERE MOST CAREFULLY.



IF XORR BECOMES A THREAT-- EH?

WELL, MAN-- WHAT EXCITES YOU SO? BRING IT HERE.



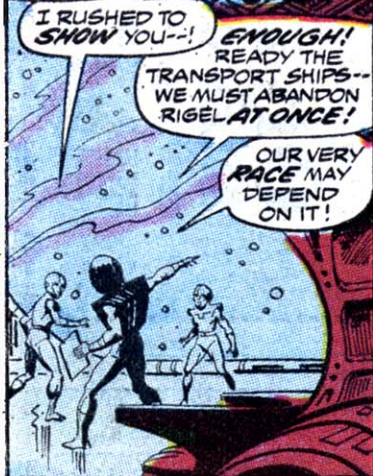
PRAYERS OF MY FATHERS! THIS IMAGE--

DOES THE COMMUNICATIONS SHOW THE TRUTH, MONITOR 12?

IS THIS REAL-- OR DO MY EYES PLAY TRICKS?

IT IS REAL, EXCELLENCY.

WE RECEIVED THE IMAGE ON THE VISO-SCANNERS BUT SCANT SECONDS AGO.



I RUSHED TO SHOW YOU--!

ENOUGH! READY THE TRANSPORT SHIPS-- WE MUST ABANDON RIGEL AT ONCE!

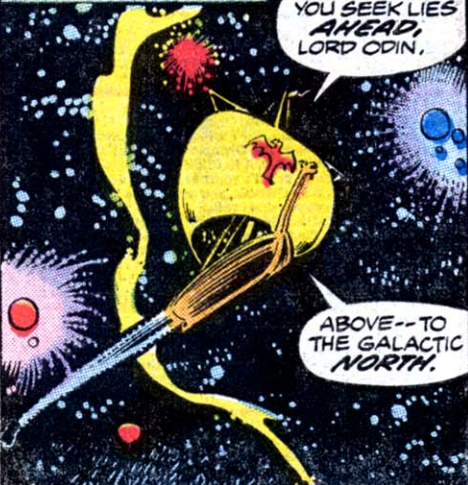
OUR VERY RACE MAY DEPEND ON IT!

NEVER HAS THE WORLD OF RIGEL BEEN FACED WITH SUCH CALAMITY!



IN TRUTH-- NEVER HAS THE FUTURE SEEMED SO GRAVE!

MEANWHILE, NEAR THE RIM OF THE GALACTIC SPIRAL...



THAT WHICH YOU SEEK LIES AHEAD, LORD ODIN.

ABOVE-- TO THE GALACTIC NORTH.



THY VISION DOES **SERVICE**, HEIMDALL..

NOW, IT BUT REMAINS TO GIVE **REALITY** TO MY PLAN... IN A WAY TOO **SUBTLE** FOR THIS MONSTER **XORR** TO E'ER **SUSPECT**.

BUT, MILORD-- WHY CANNOT WE ATTACK **NOW?**

EVERY MOMENT, OUR SHIP DRIFTS **FURTHER** FROM THAT ROCKET-BORNE **JEWEL!**



NOT **SO**, FANDRAL.

LOOK THEE **AHEAD--**



THOU WILT SEE WE DOTH **PAGE** YON **SPEEDING** GEM.

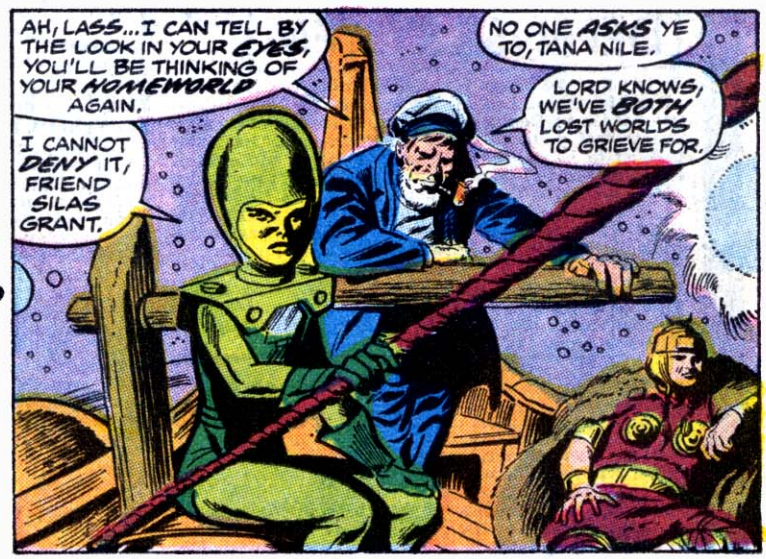
DOUBT NOT THE **WISDOM** OF **ODIN--**



--FOR I PROMISE THEE, THOUGH HIS WAYS MAY SEEM **STRANGE**, HIS METHODS **CIRCUM-SPECT**... HE HAS ONLY THE WELFARE OF HIS **SUBJECTS** IN HIS HEART, AND THIS TRUST HE SHALL NE'ER **BETRAY!**

FOR-GIVE US, MILORD, WE BUT YEARN FOR **BATTLE**.

NAY, MY SON-- NO BATTLE SHALL THERE BE **THIS** DAY. 'TIS A CHANCE WE **DARE** NOT TAKE!



AH, LASS... I CAN TELL BY THE LOOK IN YOUR **EYES**, YOU'LL BE THINKING OF YOUR **HOMELAND** AGAIN.

I CANNOT **DENY** IT, FRIEND **SILAS** GRANT.

NO ONE **ASKS** YE TO, TANA NILE.

LORD KNOWS, WE'VE **BOTH** LOST WORLDS TO GRIEVE FOR.



YOU FOR YOUR **BLACKWORLD**, DESTROYED BY THE MONSTER **EGO PRIME--**

--I, FOR **RIGEL**, WHICH I HAVE NOT **SEEN** THESE MANY MONTHS, BECAUSE I HAVE NO **SPACE-SHIP** TO BRING ME HOME.

AYE, IT'S A **FINE** MESS WE'RE IN. BUT THE WAY I SEE IT-- IF WE CANNOT HELP OURSELVES, WE MIGHT AS WELL **ACCEPT** WHAT WE'VE GOT TO **LIVE** WITH.



I **WOULD**, SILAS GRANT... AND YET, SOME UNIDENTIFIABLE FEAR **GNAWS** AT ME.

DANGER THREATENS **RIGEL**, FRIEND **SILAS--** A DANGER I HAVE NO **NAME** FOR--

--YET WHICH I **DREAD** IN MY BONES, AS I **DREAD** THE DISTANT DAY OF MY **DEATH!**

AT THAT MOMENT, SEVERAL LIGHT HOURS AHEAD OF THE SPACE-GOING STAR-JAMMER...

'TIS MY MY LOVE, CANST THOU EVER FORGIVE ME? FAULT THAT THOU DOST LIE HELPLESS AND UNMOVING WITHIN THIS SCARLET CRYSTAL..



'TIS THOR'S DOING ALONE!

PRAY, MILORD... DO NOT SAY SUCH THINGS!

THE FAULT CANNOT BE THINE... FOR HOW WAS IT THY DOING THAT KARNILLA BEGGED ME TO HELP HER FIND HER BELOVED BALDER...



...AND THAT OUR QUEST BROUGHT US FINALLY... TO THIS!

MINE IS THE GUILT... BECAUSE I DID NEED KARNILLA'S AID TO DEFEAT MY HALF-BROTHER LOKI...



...AN AID SHE WOULD GIVE, ONLY IF THREE WOULD ACCOMPANY HER! HAD I KNOWN OF THE FACT--

"SILENT, THUNDER GOD, YOUR CONFESSIONS SURE US."



"IT IS TIME FOR MORE IMPORTANT THINGS..."

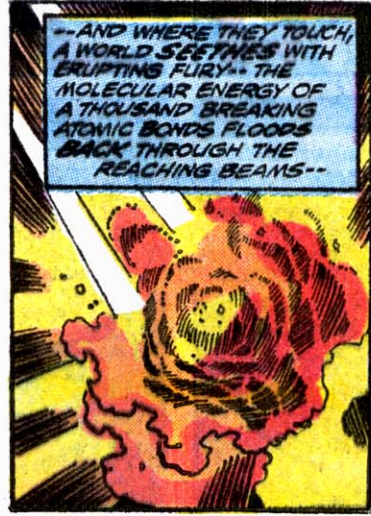


"IT IS TIME KORR SLIMMONED THE ENERGY HE WILL NEED TO RESTRUCTURE THE PLANET WE ONCE WERE."

"THAT PROCESS MUST BEGIN NOW-- WITH YONDER PLANET AND ITS STAR!"



TWIN BEAMS OF BRILLIANT LIGHT LANCE ACROSS THE ACHING VOID-- LANCE AND TOUCH--



-- AND WHERE THEY TOUCH, A WORLD SEETHES WITH ERUPTING FLURY-- THE MOLECULAR ENERGY OF A THOUSAND BREAKING ATOMIC BONDS FLOODS BACK THROUGH THE REACHING BEAMS--



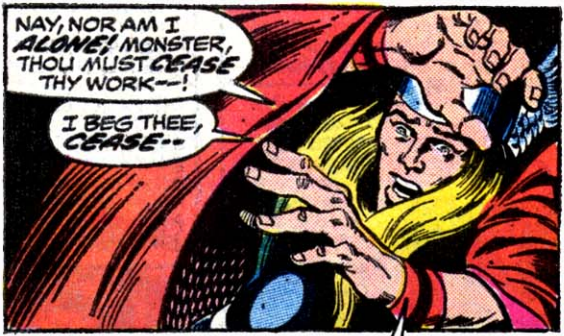
-- BACK, INTO KORR--

BACK, INTO THE GOD JEWEL!



"PROTECT YOUR EYES, ASGARDIAN!"

"NOT EVEN YOU CAN WITHSTAND THE GLORY OF XORR!"

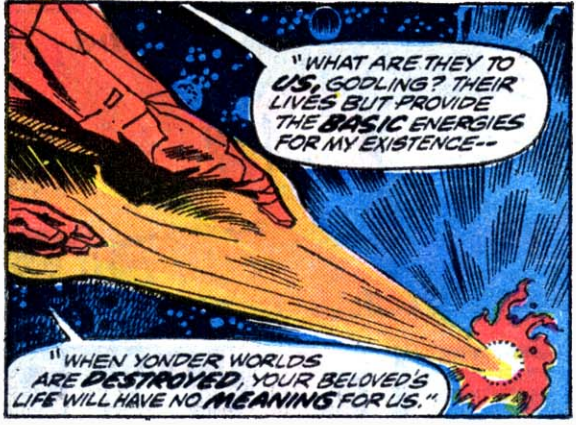


NAY, NOR AM I ALONE! MONSTER, THOU MUST CEASE THY WORK--!

I BEG THEE, CEASE--

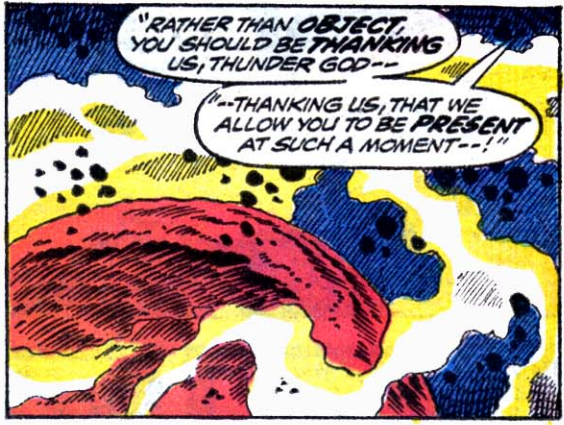


--LEST THOU DOST DRIVE THE LADIES SIF AND KARNILLA MAD!



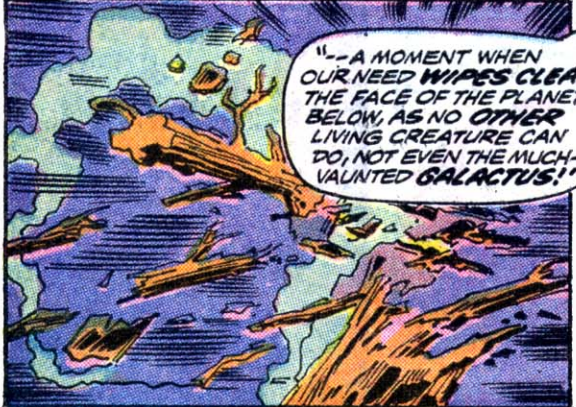
"WHAT ARE THEY TO US, GODLING? THEIR LIVES BUT PROVIDE THE BASIC ENERGIES FOR MY EXISTENCE--"

"WHEN YONDER WORLDS ARE DESTROYED, YOUR BELOVED'S LIFE WILL HAVE NO MEANING FOR US."



"RATHER THAN OBJECT, YOU SHOULD BE THANKING US, THUNDER GOD--"

"--THANKING US, THAT WE ALLOW YOU TO BE PRESENT AT SUCH A MOMENT--!"



"--A MOMENT WHEN OUR NEED WIPES CLEAN THE FACE OF THE PLANET BELOW, AS NO OTHER LIVING CREATURE CAN DO, NOT EVEN THE MUCH-VAUNTED GALACTUS!"



"YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL WE HAVE ALLOWED YOU TO LIVE TILL THIS INSTANT, THUNDER GOD... WE, WHOSE POWER IS THAT OF A PEOPLED WORLD!"

LIKE SOME VAST, INTRA-GALACTIC MAELSTRUM, THE CREATURE-WORLD CALLED KORR SUCKS IN THE UNINHABITED PLANETS AND DYING STARS OF THE GALACTIC RIM.

FOR SOME, THE SCENE WOULD BE ONE OF GLORY INCARNATE--

-- BUT FOR THE GOD OF THUNDER, IT IS ONLY A VISION OF SHAME!



AND THEN, AS THOUGH TO PUNCTUATE THAT SHAME--

BY BIFROST'S GOLDEN SPAN!

SPACE-BUBBLES-- APPEARING FROM NOWHERE!

AND, BEFORE THE SCION OF ASGARD CAN EVEN REACT WITH MORE THAN BLANK ASTONISHMENT--

-- THE BUBBLES ATTACK!

SSSSST!

WHAT MADNESS IS THIS? SOME NEW ENEMY, ADDING HIS SWORD TO THOSE ALREADY TURNED AGAINST ME?

AM I DOOMED TO ALWAYS DEFEND THIS DEMON-SPAWNED JEWEL-- AGAINST MEN WITH WHOM I HAVE NO QUARREL?

HAVE NOT FEAR, MY BLONDBAIRED FOE. YOU'VE QUARREL ENOUGH WITH ME, I THINK--

-- OR I WITH YOU!

MERCURIO! MAN, ART THOU MAD? HAVE I NOT ALREADY FOUGHT THEE?

MUST WE FACE OFF ANEW?

YES, ASGARDIAN... TODAY, TOMORROW... FOREVER, IF NECESSARY!

I CAN NEVER SURRENDER--



TO DO SO, WOULD BE TO DOOM MY WORLD!

SO THOU HAST CLAIMED, MERCURIO!

AND SUCH IS THE TRUTH, THUNDER GOD-- WERE YOU NOT BLIND TO THOSE AROUND YOU, YOU'D SEE THAT.

LISTEN WELL, THOR... PERHAPS THIS TIME, YOU'LL UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU HEAR!



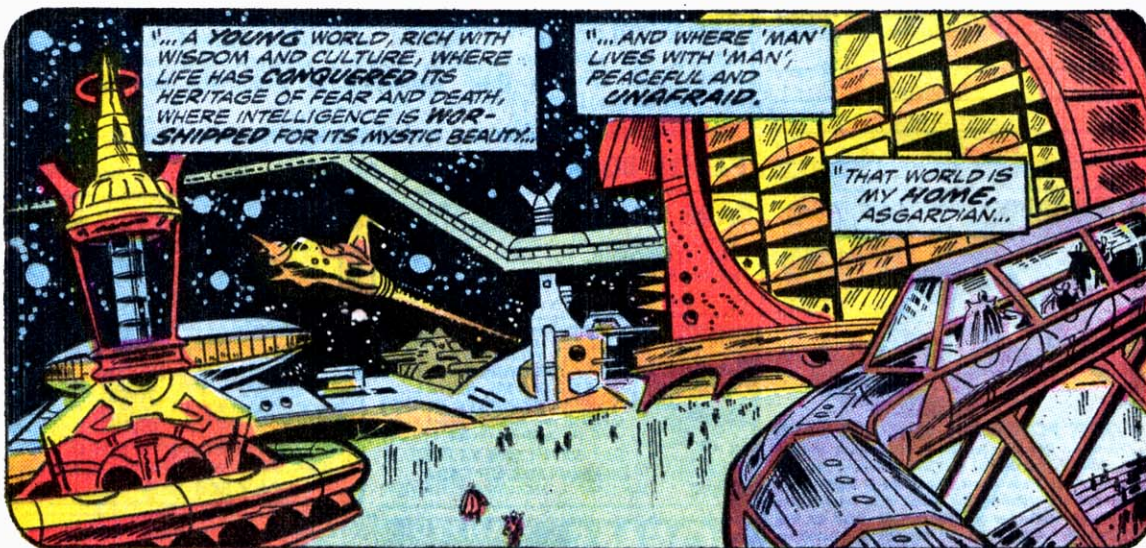
"LIGHT CENTURIES FROM THIS FORSAKEN NEBULA, THERE LIES A WORLD NEAR THE CENTER OF THE GALAXY..."



"... A YOUNG WORLD, RICH WITH WISDOM AND CULTURE, WHERE LIFE HAS CONQUERED ITS HERITAGE OF FEAR AND DEATH, WHERE INTELLIGENCE IS WORSHIPPED FOR ITS MYSTIC BEAUTY..."

"... AND WHERE 'MAN' LIVES WITH 'MAN', PEACEFUL AND UNAFRAID.

"THAT WORLD IS MY HOME, ASGARDIAN..."



"... AND SIX OF YOUR EARTH YEARS AGO, THAT WORLD BECAME THREATENED!

THE SKY-- LOOK AT THE SKY!

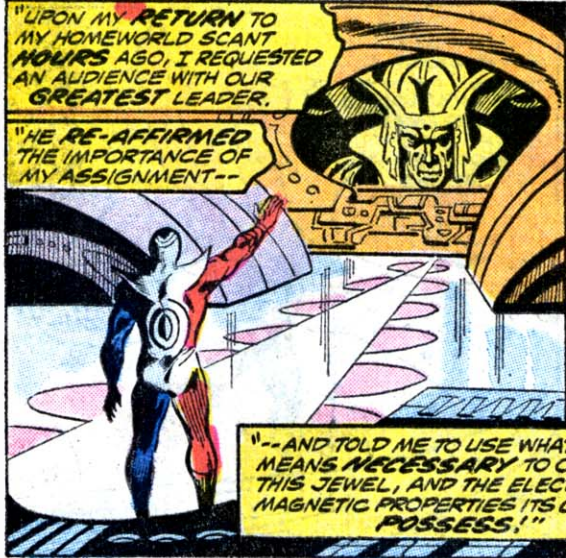
THE STARS-- CHANGING, TURNING BLACK-- AND THE SKY--!



"WHAT CAUSED THE CHANGE, WE DO NOT KNOW-- BUT WITHIN A YEAR, THE MAGNETIC POLARITY OF OUR PLANET HAD ALTERED IN SUCH A WAY THAT OUR ATMOSPHERE TRANSFORMED-- ADMITTING NOW ONLY THE EXTREMES OF THE ELECTRO-MAGNETIC WAVE-LENGTH--

"-- CAUSING OUR PEOPLE FIRST TO GO MAD-- AND THEN DIE!





"UPON MY RETURN TO MY HOMEWORLD SCANT HOURS AGO, I REQUESTED AN AUDIENCE WITH OUR GREATEST LEADER.

"HE RE-AFFIRMED THE IMPORTANCE OF MY ASSIGNMENT--

-- AND TOLD ME TO USE WHATEVER MEANS NECESSARY TO OBTAIN THIS JEWEL, AND THE ELECTRO-MAGNETIC PROPERTIES ITS CRYSTALS POSSESS!"

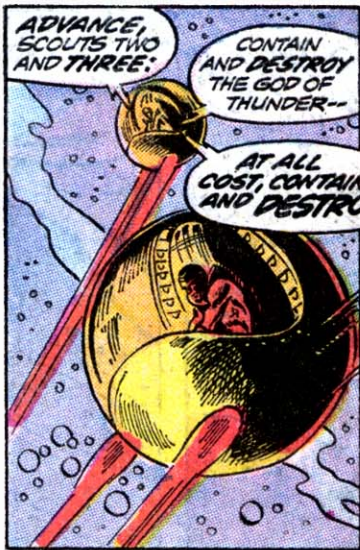


I INTEND TO DO JUST THAT, ASSGARDIAN ... TO USE WHATEVER MEANS I MUST...



... TO GAIN WHAT I MUST GAIN!

ZAK!



ADVANCE, SCOUTS TWO AND THREE:

CONTAIN AND DESTROY THE GOD OF THUNDER--

AT ALL COST, CONTAIN AND DESTROY!



METHINKS THOU SHALT FIND THAT MORE DIFFICULT THAN THOU DOST SUPPOSE.

THOR IS NOT ONE TO FALL EASILY--!



YEA! FOR THEE, VICTORY WILL COME MOST DEARLY--

IF AT ALL!



FOOM!

SIR--SCOUT TWO HAS BEEN DEMOLISHED!



NOR WILL HE REMAIN ALONE, PUPPET!

HE SHALL HAVE THEE FOR COMPANY!



'TIS GOOD FOR THY MEN
THOU DIDST FIT THEM WITH
AIR MASKS, MERCURIO.

ELSE THOU WOULDST
HAVE HAD **THEIR**
DEATHS ON THY
CONSCIENCE--AS
WELL AS THE
KNOWLEDGE THAT
THOU HAST SOUGHT
THE END OF **TWO**
WOMEN!

THINK
ON IT,
DEMON--



--AND WHEN THOU HAST
THOUGHT **LONG** ENOUGH,
GIRD THYSELF FOR
BATTLE--

--WITH
THOR,
GOD OF
THUNDER--



--**PRINCE**
OF THE
ETERNAL
REALM!

YOU
HERALD
YOURSELF
WELL,
ASSGARDIAN--

--WELL--
AND **700**
OFTEN!

THY LAST
WORDS, MERCURIO
THIS, I PROMISE--



THIS, I
SWEAR!

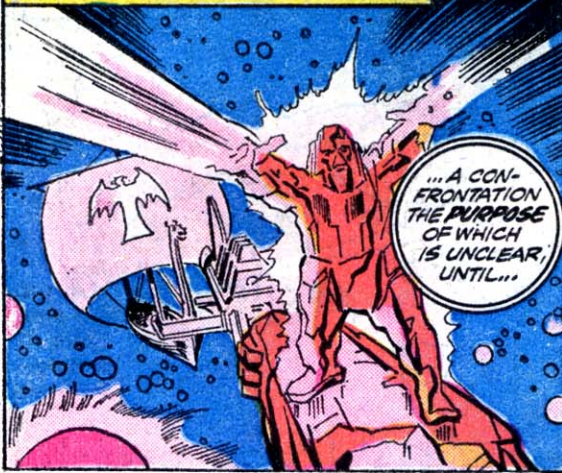
CRASH!



FACE ME,
MAN OF FOUR
DIMENSIONS--
FACE ME, AND
SPEAK THY
MOCKERY!

'T WILL BE THE **END** OF
THY TAUNTING--
FOR ALL TIME!

YET, AS THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN ASGARDIAN AND ALIEN BECOMES MORE TENSE, QUITE A DIFFERENT SORT OF CONFRONTATION TAKES FORM A SHORT DISTANCE BELOW...



...A CONFRONTATION THE PURPOSE OF WHICH IS UNCLEAR, UNTIL...

PLUTO'S FIRE! ARE WE TO PACE THE JEWEL FOREVER?



WILL WE NE'ER TRADE BLOW FOR BLOODY BLOW?

PATIENCE, MY FRIEND ...METHINKS I BEGIN TO SEE.

WE DO NOT PACE YON CRYSTAL...

...WE GUIDE, AYE, FANDRAL... THOU HAST PERCEIVED AND, IN THE METHOD, TRUTH, IN



THE GOAL SHALL SOON BECOME APPARENT!

SO SPEAKS ODIN. SO SHALL IT BE!

AND, AT THAT VERY INSTANT, ABOARD A BREACHED SPACE BUBBLE DRIFTING ABOVE THE RACING XORR...



WAIT, THUNDER GOD-- THERE MUST BE A MORE USEFUL ENDING TO OUR CONFLICT!

I COULD FREEZE YOU IN A SECOND WITH MY LEFT HAND-- OR YOU COULD CRUSH ME--

-- BUT WHAT GOOD WOULD THAT DO MY WORLD, OR YOUR WOMEN? I'D STILL HAVE TO PASS THE MONSTER XORR--



-- AND YOU STILL MUST THINK OF A WAY TO ULTIMATELY FREE YOUR ENTRAPPED LOVE!

PERHAPS WE CAN BOTH WIN... IF YOU'RE WILLING!

I'VE NO HEART FOR SENSELESS STRUGGLE, MERCURIO... THOU KNOWEST THAT.



IF THOU CAN OFFER AN ALTERNATIVE...?

I CAN, THOR... AN OBVIOUS ONE, ONE I SUGGESTED BEFORE.*

WE MUST POOL OUR RESOURCES-- OR NEITHER OF US CAN SUCCEED!

*LAST 154. --RT.

BUT THEN, AS THE SON OF ODIN PONDERES THE WORDS OF THE FOURTH-DIMENSIONAL MAN, HIS THOUGHTS ARE RUDELY INTERRUPTED BY--



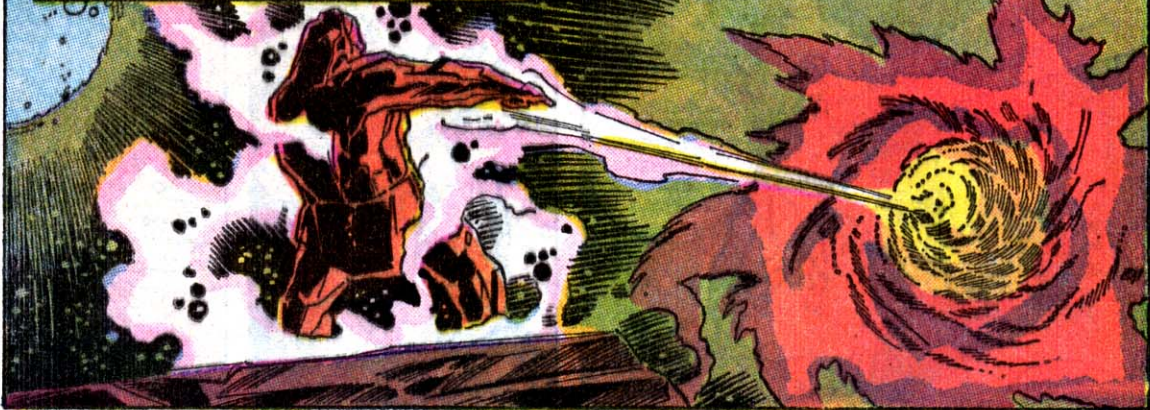
MASTER MERCURIO! THIS IS INSANITY!

THE CREATURE XORR--

"HE APPROACHES A GIANT STAR, AN EXPLODING MASS OF HYDROGEN AND HELIUM A BILLION TIMES THE SIZE OF OUR OWN SUN-- AND MASTER MERCURIO...HE ATTEMPTS TO DRAIN ITS POWER, ITS FATHOMLESS ENERGY!"

"THE CRYSTAL CREATURE IS MAD, MASTER-- IT WILL DESTROY ITSELF--"

--"AND ALL OF US WITH IT!"



DROPPING TO THE JEWEL'S SURFACE TO CONFIRM THE SCOUT'S OBSERVATION, THE UNLIKELY ALLIES NOTE SOMETHING ELSE OF PASSING INTEREST...



LOOK, MERCURIO.

DOST THOU SEE?

"SEE?" THE LIGHT BLINDS ME!



THEN I SHALL BE THINE EYES, ALIEN--

-- AND TELL THEE THIS: THE STARJAMMER PRODS THIS JEWEL TOWARD YONDER STAR--



-- AND WHAT MEANING THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE REASON!

THEN PERHAPS WE'D BETTER BEGIN, THOR.

THERE ISN'T MUCH TIME AT ALL!

ELSEWHERE IN THE COSMOS, ON THE MOLD-COVERED CHUNK OF ROCK AND WATER KNOWN AS EARTH, A SOMEWHAT LESS DRAMATIC SCENE OCCURS... BEGINNING A SEQUENCE OF EVENTS WHICH WILL SOON SURPASS ITS HUMBLE ORIGINS, PLUNGING INTO RAGING CHAOS!



MORE OF THIS TEA LEAF BREW, BRAVE BALDER?

'TIS STRONGER THAN 'T WAS WHEN LAST WE DRANK IT.

I'M AFRAID IT WOULDN'T BE MUCH OF A TRICK, VALIANT ONE.



NOW THAT MY STRENGTH AND SANITY HAVE RETURNED, EVERYTHING ABOUT THIS PLANET BORES ME... EVEN THIS TEA, WHICH ONCE I LOVED.

THOU DOST KNOW WHY, DOST THOU NOT, VOLSTAGG?

I YEARN TO RETURN TO ASGARD-- TO FACE THOSE DEMONS WHICH NEAR DROVE ME MAD, *

'TIS A CALL I CANNOT IGNORE, AND THOUGH THOU HAST BEEN GIVEN TO GUARD ME, I CANNOT EXPECT THEE TO--



*THOR #212.--RT.

SAY NO MORE! VALIANT VOLSTAGG WILL ACCOMPANY THEE TO ANY DANGER--

--AND EVER SHALL HE GUARD THY UNPROTECTED REAR!

TO THE ROOF, THEN!



THE ROOF? THOU MEANEST TO LEAVE SO--SO QUICKLY? WHY SHOULD TIME BE FURTHER LOST?

WE MUST ACT, IF E'ER WE ARE TO REACH OUR NATIVE LAND!



WITH A SWIRL OF RELEASED POWER, BALDER'S BLADE SINGS THROUGH THE DUSKY TWILIGHT, AND WHEN ITS SONG ENDS--

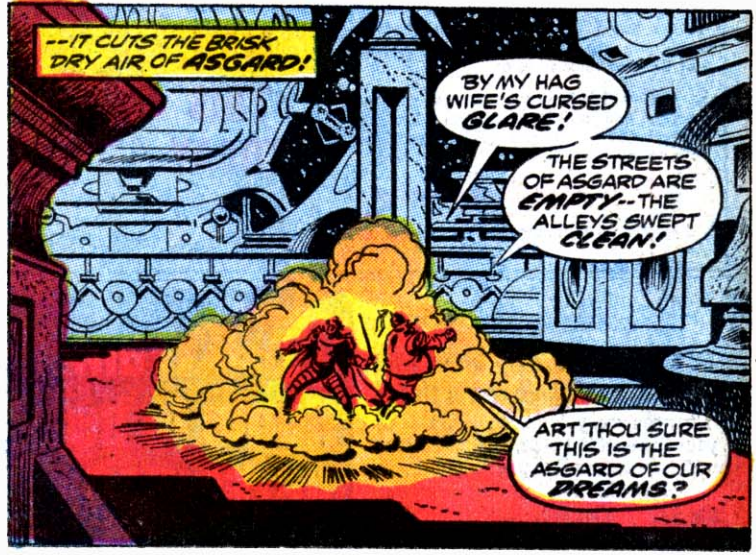


--IT CUTS THE BRISK DRY AIR OF ASGARD!

BY MY HAG WIFE'S CURSED GLARE!

THE STREETS OF ASGARD ARE EMPTY--THE ALLEYS SWEPT CLEAN!

ART THOU SURE THIS IS THE ASGARD OF OUR DREAMS?



QUITE, FAT ONE. HOWEVER, IT DOTH SEEM WE--EH?

LISTEN, VOLSTAGG: FOOTSTEPS, MARCHING-- THE MUTTER OF VOICES!

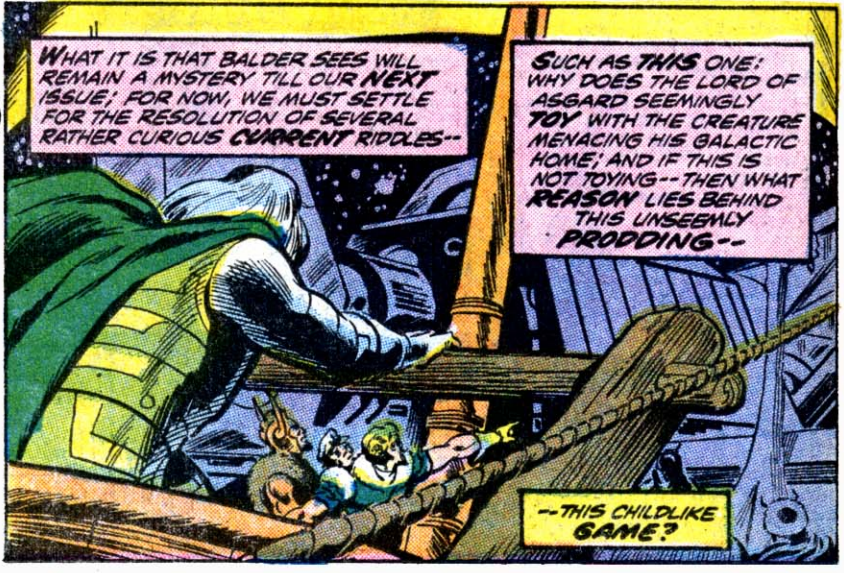
STARS! LOOK THEE, VOLSTAGG-- LOOK!



WHAT IT IS THAT BALDER SEES WILL REMAIN A MYSTERY TILL OUR NEXT ISSUE! FOR NOW, WE MUST SETTLE FOR THE RESOLUTION OF SEVERAL RATHER CURIOUS CURRENT RIDDLES--

SUCH AS THIS ONE: WHY DOES THE LORD OF ASGARD SEEMINGLY TOY WITH THE CREATURE MENACING HIS GALACTIC HOME; AND IF THIS IS NOT TOYING-- THEN WHAT REASON LIES BEHIND THIS UNSEEMLY PRODDING--

--THIS CHILDLIKE GAME?



PERHAPS THE ANSWER LIES HERE, IN THE SEETHING SUN TOWARD WHICH XORR IS BEING GUIDED:

PERHAPS THE ANSWER DEALS WITH GREED, A CONSUMING DESIRE FOR POWER WHICH ALL LIVING BEINGS ARE HEIR TO:

AND PERHAPS THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE STUPIDITY; PERHAPS XORR, THE LIVING, PEOPLED PLANET, IS NOT AWARE OF THE DANGER HE APPROACHES--

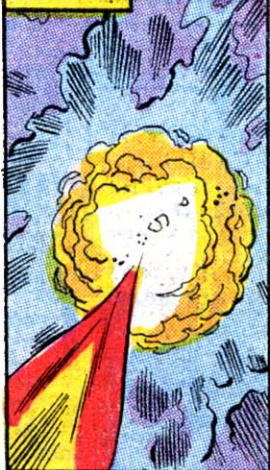


--IS NOT AWARE THAT THE SUN WHOSE ENERGY HE SEEKS TO DRAIN--

--IS IN FACT A STAR ON THE VERGE OF GOING NOVA--

--A BALL OF HEAT AND GAS ABOUT TO EXPLODE--

--AND BEING PUSHED TO THAT EXPLOSION-- BY XORR'S INSATIABLE NEED!

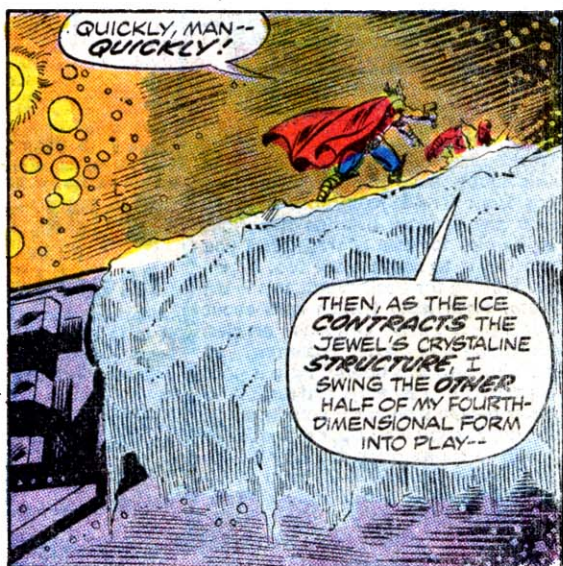


THOU MUST MOVE QUICKLY, MERCURIO. 'TIS APPARENT MY FATHER DID NOT ABANDON US--

--BUT HATH BEEN WORKING HIS OWN SUBTLE PLAN THESE HOURS PAST!

I'VE MATTERS WELL IN HAND, ASGARDIAN.

FIRST, A BLAST OF ICE-- TO FREEZE THE SURFACE OF THIS CURSED GEM.



QUICKLY, MAN-- QUICKLY!

THEN, AS THE ICE CONTRACTS THE JEWEL'S CRYSTALLINE STRUCTURE, I SWING THE OTHER HALF OF MY FOURTH-DIMENSIONAL FORM INTO PLAY--



"-- AND BLAST THE ICE WITH IRRESISTIBLE HEAT!"



"THOU HAST SUCCEEDED, MERCURIO! THE COMBINED ENERGIES-- THE CONTRACTING COLD AND EXPANDING HEAT--"

"--THEY HAVE SHATTERED THE JEWEL-- AND MY LADY IS FREE!"

"QUIT THIS PLACE WHILST THOU CAN, MERCURIO!"

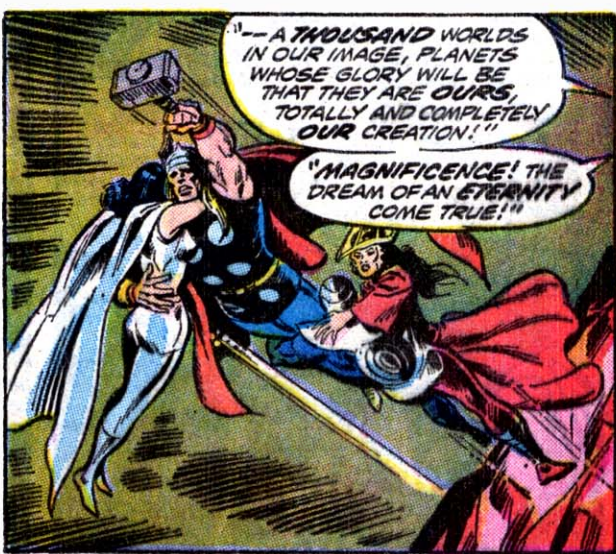
"WE SHALL FOLLOW THEE AT ONCE!"



WHILE, ABOVE THE ASGARDIANS, OBLIVIOUS TO ALL THAT SURROUNDS HIM...

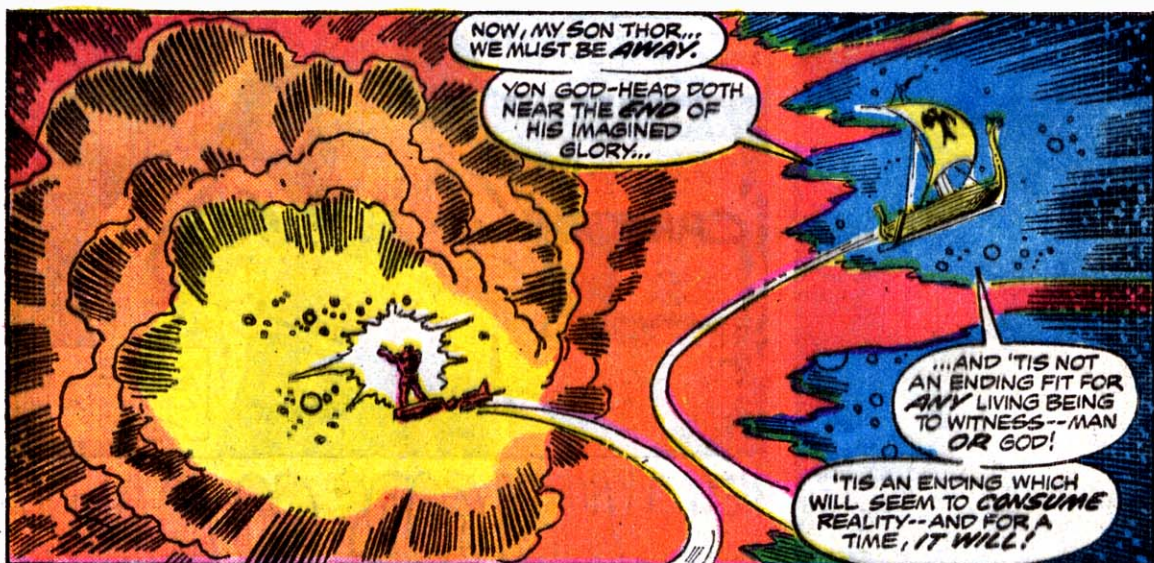
"POWER... POWER! MORE ENERGY THAN EVER WE DREAMED!"

"IN AN INSTANT-- WE DRAW ENOUGH STRENGTH TO REBUILD A HUNDRED UNIVERSES--"



"-- A THOUSAND WORLDS IN OUR IMAGE, PLANETS WHOSE GLORY WILL BE THAT THEY ARE OURS, TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY OUR CREATION!"

"MAGNIFICENCE! THE DREAM OF AN ETERNITY COME TRUE!"



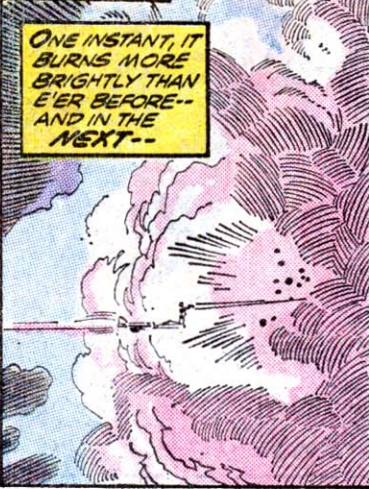
"NOW, MY SON THOR... WE MUST BE AWAY."

"YON GOD-HEAD DOETH NEAR THE END OF HIS IMAGINED GLORY..."

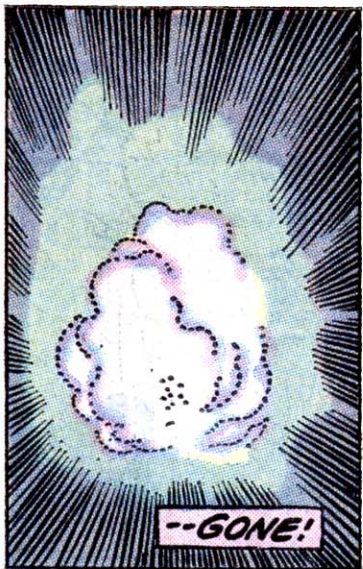
"... AND 'TIS NOT AN ENDING FIT FOR ANY LIVING BEING TO WITNESS-- MAN OR GOD!"

"'TIS AN ENDING WHICH WILL SEEM TO CONSUME REALITY-- AND FOR A TIME, IT WILL!"

SUPER-NOVA: WHEN A STAR GROWS TOO HOT TO CONTAIN ITS OWN POWER.

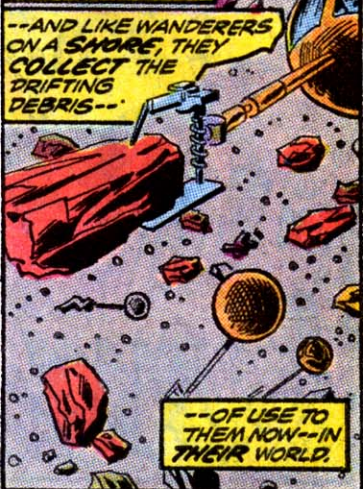


ONE INSTANT, IT BURNS MORE BRIGHTLY THAN E'ER BEFORE-- AND IN THE NEXT--



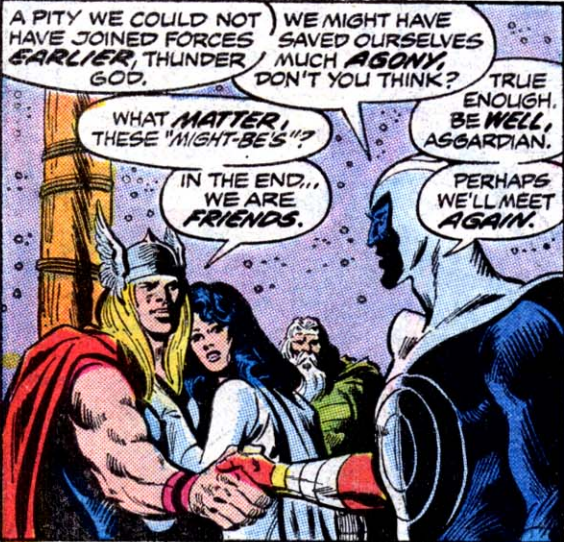
--GONE!

THEN, FROM THE DARKNESS COME SHIPS--



--AND LIKE WANDERERS ON A SHORE, THEY COLLECT THE DRIFTING DEBRIS--

--OF USE TO THEM NOW--IN THEIR WORLD.



A PITY WE COULD NOT HAVE JOINED FORCES EARLIER, THUNDER GOD.

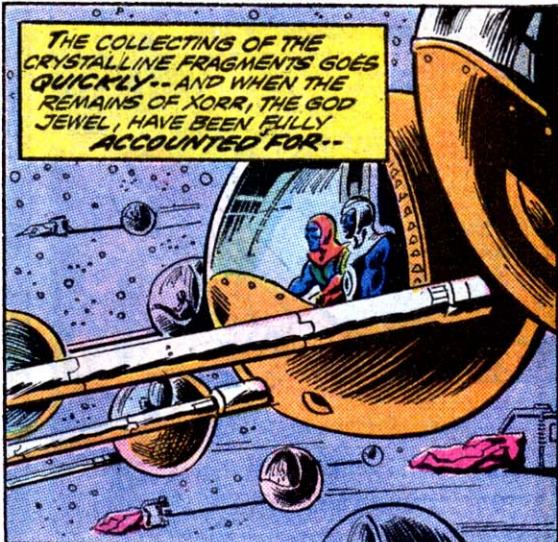
WE MIGHT HAVE SAVED OURSELVES MUCH AGONY, DON'T YOU THINK?

TRUE ENOUGH. BE WELL, ASGARDIAN.

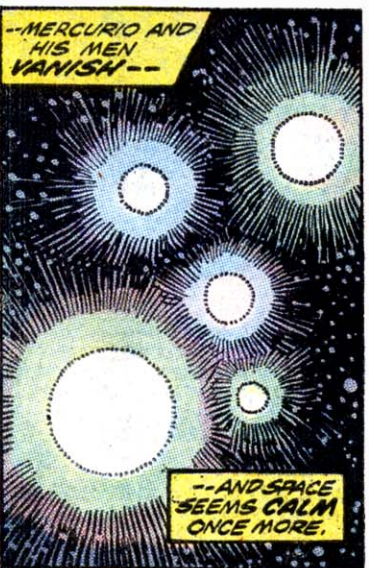
WHAT MATTER, THESE "MIGHT-BES"?

IN THE END,, WE ARE FRIENDS.

PERHAPS WE'LL MEET AGAIN.



THE COLLECTING OF THE CRYSTALLINE FRAGMENTS GOES QUICKLY-- AND WHEN THE REMAINS OF XORR, THE GOD JEWEL, HAVE BEEN FULLY ACCOUNTED FOR--



--MERCURIO AND HIS MEN VANISH--

--AND SPACE SEEMS CALM ONCE MORE.



AND THOUGH, AT OTHER TIMES, THESE LOVERS MIGHT SPEAK...

...THIS TIME THEY NEED NO WORDS...

...ONLY EACH OTHER...

...AND THE PEACE OF A LONG VOYAGE HOME.

NEXT ISSUE: WHEN GODS GO MAD!