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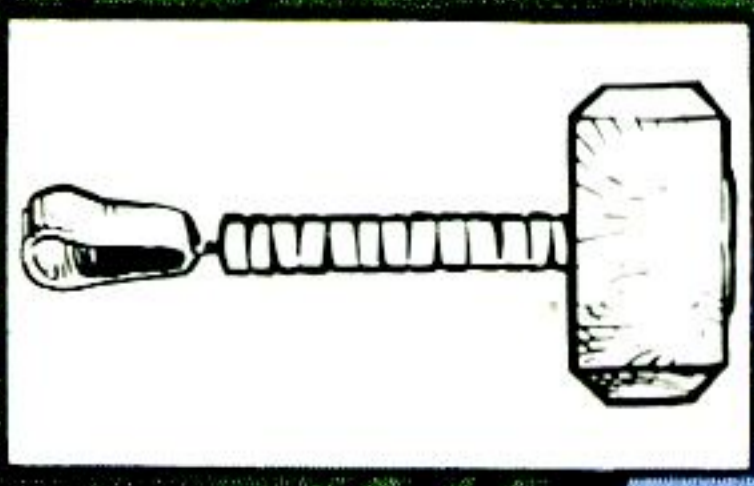
TM

65¢
U.K. 30p
CAN. 75c

360
OCT

the mighty

THOR



STAN LEE PRESENTS **the MIGHTY THOR**

INTO THE VALLEY OF DEATH!

WHEN THE FIGHTING IS OVER, THE WARRIORS COME HOME.

SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL, THE VICTORIOUS SURVIVORS HAVE TAKEN THEIR TROPHYS AND THEIR WOUNDED AND RETURNED FROM WHENCE THEY CAME.

SO THE CHEERING WARRIORS OF THE GOLDEN REALM POUR FORTH FROM THE DIMENSIONAL RIFT THAT LEADS FROM EARTH TO ASGARD...

...AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN DAYS BREATHE THE UNSULLIED AIR OF THE HOME OF THE MIGHTY NORSE GODS!

AT LAST!

TOO LONG HAVE WE TARRIED ON MID-GARD.*

*EARTH.

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HAVE A CARE WITH THOSE CRATES, FELLOWS! SUCH MORTAL GOODS AS THESE HAVE NE'ER BEEN SEEN IN ASGARD BEFORE...

BUT HURRY! FOR THE GATEWAY BETWEEN THE WORLDS IS NEARLY CLOSED AND WE ARE THE LAST FEW TO LEAVE THE MORTAL REALM BEHIND!

HAROKIN CARRIES HIS CASSETS AS LOVINGLY AS A MOTHER HER NEWBORN BABE!

HOGUN, I'VE LOST MY GRIP UPON THE LION OF ASGARD'S ARM!

...AND THEY MAY CHANGE THE FACE OF VALHALLA BEFORE WE ARE THROUGH.

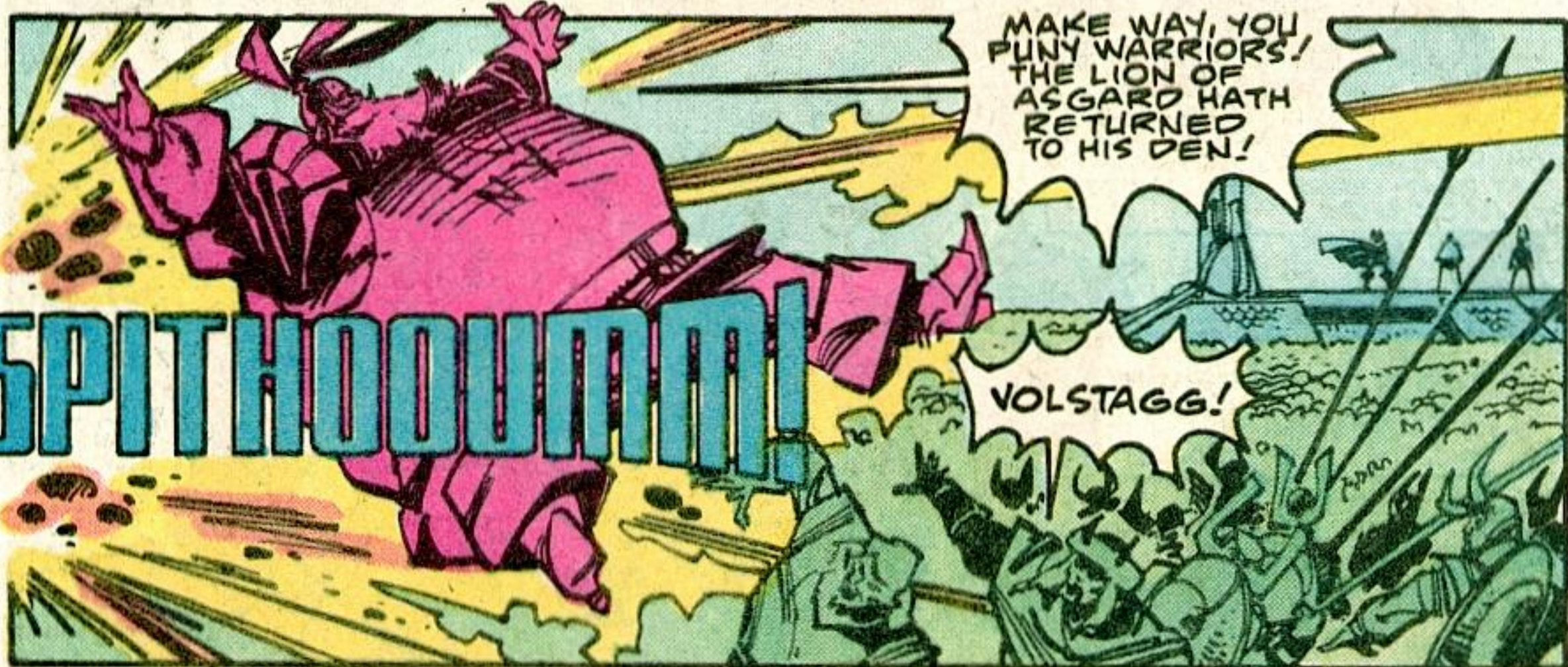
STILL, FANDRAL, HE IS A LARGE ENOUGH PRIZE FOR ANYONE.

AND WE HAVE ONLY VOLSTAGG TO SHOW FOR OUR STAY IN MIDGARD.

I, TOO, NO LONGER SENSE HIS MASSIVE GIRTH BEHIND US!

AND THE PORTAL SHRIEKS LIKE A THOUSAND DEMONS...

...THREATENING TO CLOSE BEHIND US AT ANY MOMENT!



MAKE WAY, YOU PUNY WARRIORS! THE LION OF ASGARD HATH RETURNED TO HIS DEN!

SPITHOOUM!

VOLSTAGG!

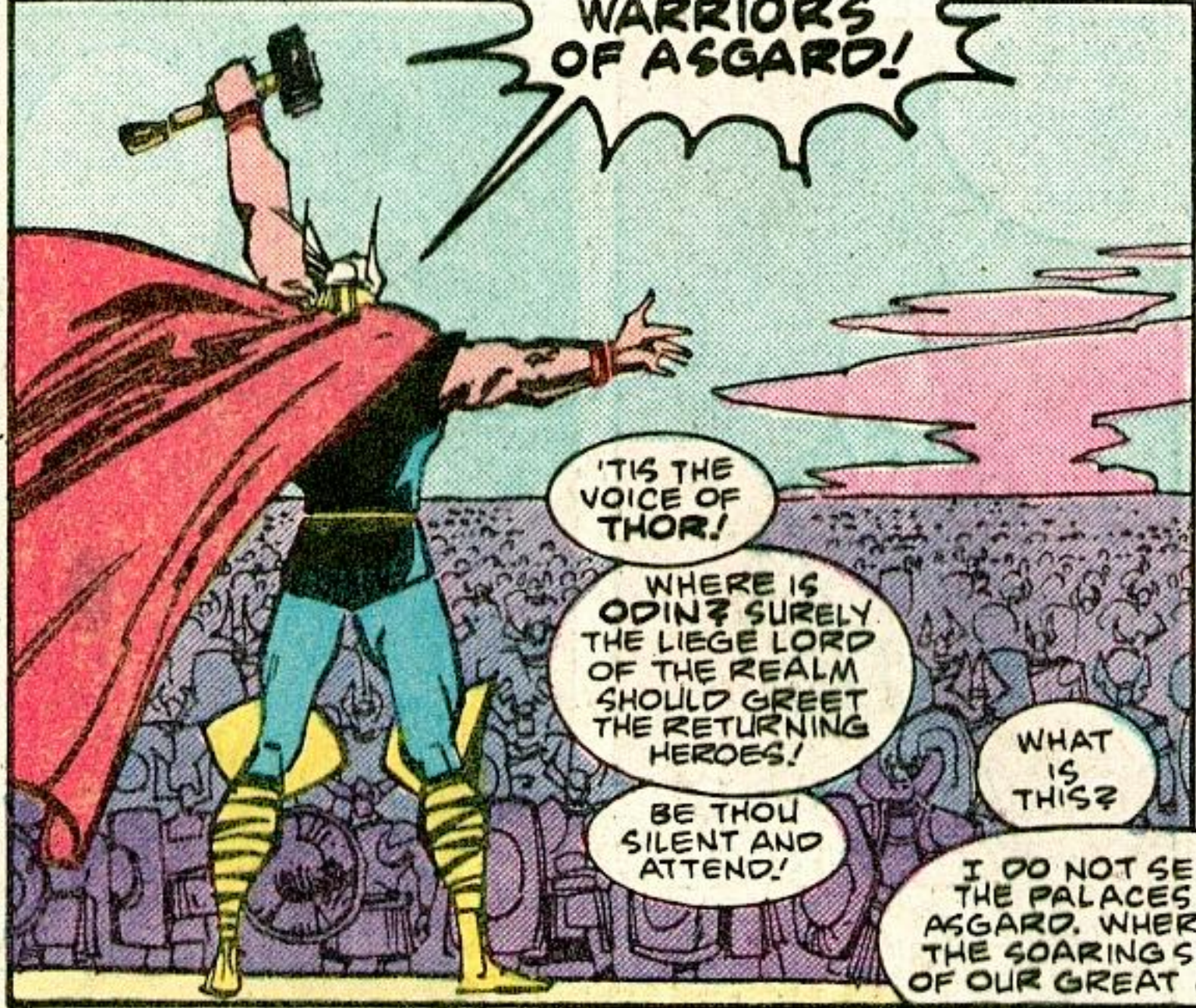
LANDING WITH ALL THE GRACE OF A GAZELLE, I SEE...

SAY RATHER THAT THE STRENGTH OF VOLSTAGG'S NEARLY BOUNDLESS FRAME HATH ONCE AGAIN COME TO THE AID OF HIS BROTHERS!

...WHILE THE PORTAL CLOSES BEHIND US FOREVER!

IN TRUTH, VOLSTAGG, I THINK ONLY YOUR MASSIVE FORM PREVENTED THE PORTAL FROM CLOSING LONG BEFORE THIS.





WARRIORS OF ASGARD!

'TIS THE VOICE OF THOR!

WHERE IS ODIN? SURELY THE LIEGE LORD OF THE REALM SHOULD GREET THE RETURNING HEROES!

BE THOU SILENT AND ATTEND!

WHAT IS THIS?

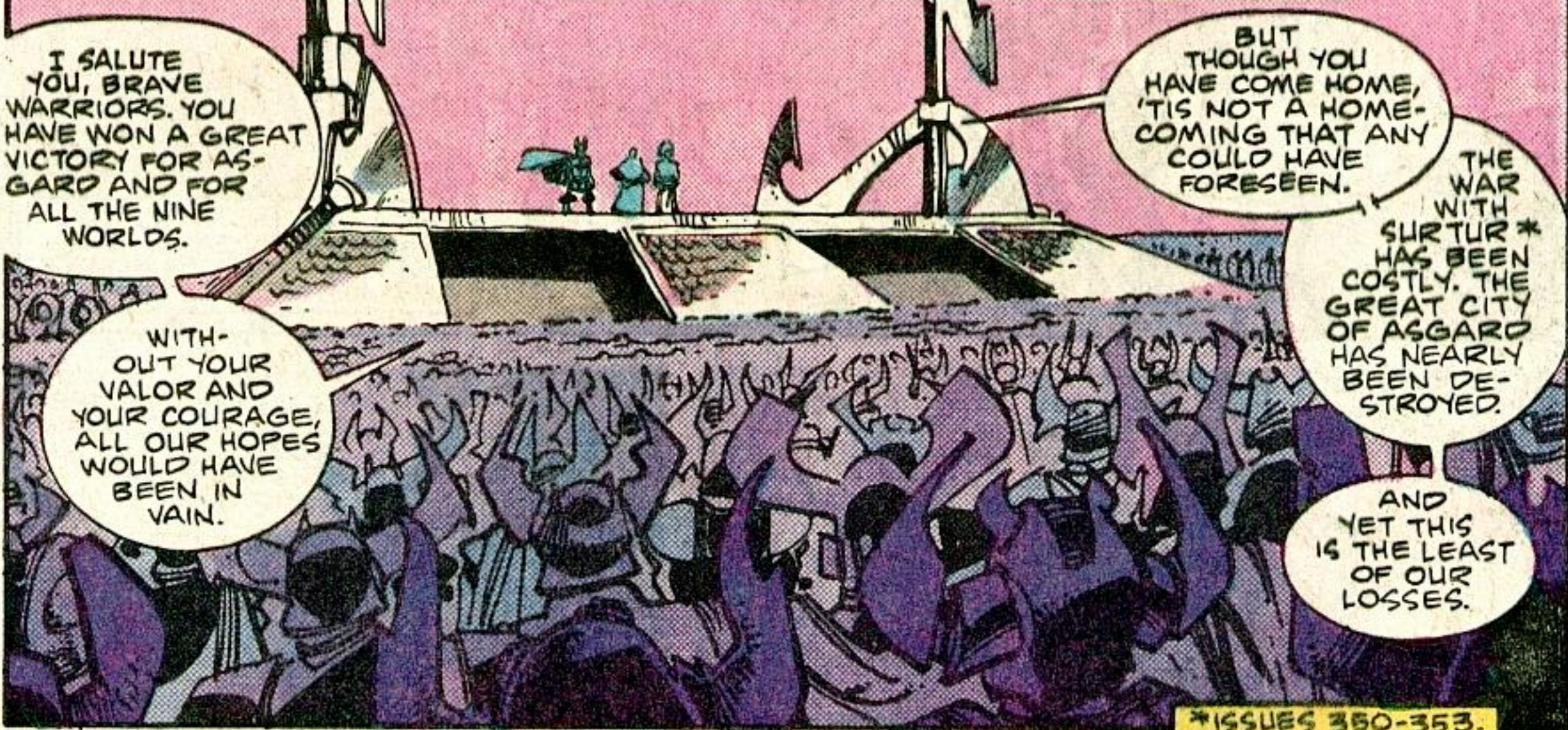
I DO NOT SEE THE PALACES OF ASGARD. WHERE ARE THE SOARING SPIRES OF OUR GREAT CITY?



WARRIORS, HEED THE WORDS OF THE LADY FRIGGA WHO STANDS BESIDE ME.

FOR SHE WILL SAY WHAT MUST BE SAID BEFORE THE ASSEMBLED MULTITUDE.

...AND ALL ACROSS THE PLAIN, A SILENCE FALLS MORE DEAFENING THAN THUNDER.



I SALUTE YOU, BRAVE WARRIORS. YOU HAVE WON A GREAT VICTORY FOR ASGARD AND FOR ALL THE NINE WORLDS.

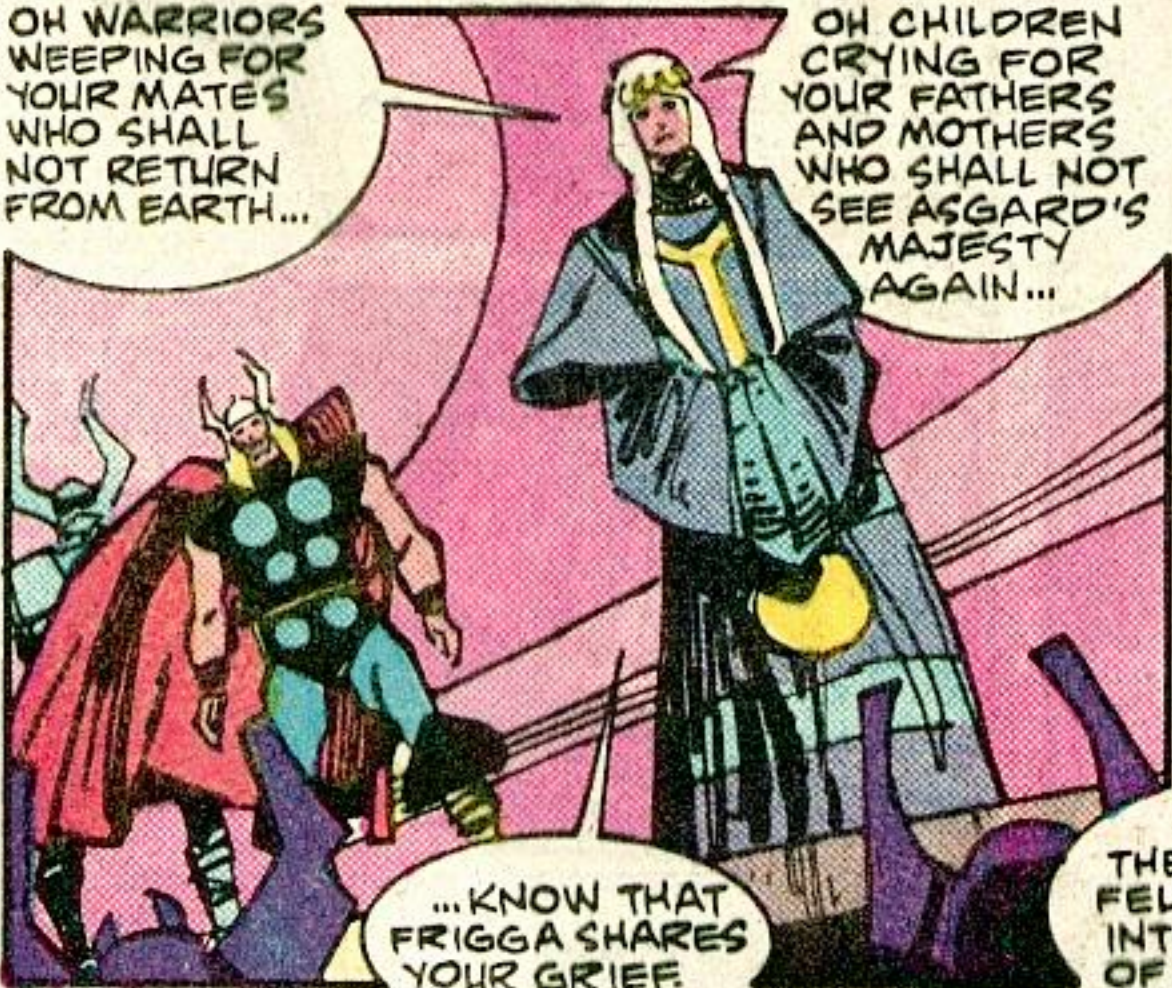
WITHOUT YOUR VALOR AND YOUR COURAGE, ALL OUR HOPES WOULD HAVE BEEN IN VAIN.

BUT THOUGH YOU HAVE COME HOME, 'TIS NOT A HOME-COMING THAT ANY COULD HAVE FORESEEN.

THE WAR WITH SURTUR* HAS BEEN COSTLY. THE GREAT CITY OF ASGARD HAS NEARLY BEEN DESTROYED.

AND YET THIS IS THE LEAST OF OUR LOSSES.

*ISSUES 350-353.



OH WARRIORS WEeping FOR YOUR MATES WHO SHALL NOT RETURN FROM EARTH...

OH CHILDREN CRYING FOR YOUR FATHERS AND MOTHERS WHO SHALL NOT SEE ASGARD'S MAJESTY AGAIN...

...KNOW THAT FRIGGA SHARES YOUR GRIEF.



FOR ODIN, THE ALLFATHER, FELL WITH SURTUR INTO THE FIRES OF MUSPELHEIM.

YOUR LIEGE LORD... MY HUSBAND... HAS SACRIFICED HIMSELF THAT THE NINE WORLDS MIGHT LIVE!

BEHIND HIM HE HAS LEFT THE GREAT SCEPTER WHICH I HOLD BEFORE YOU NOW.



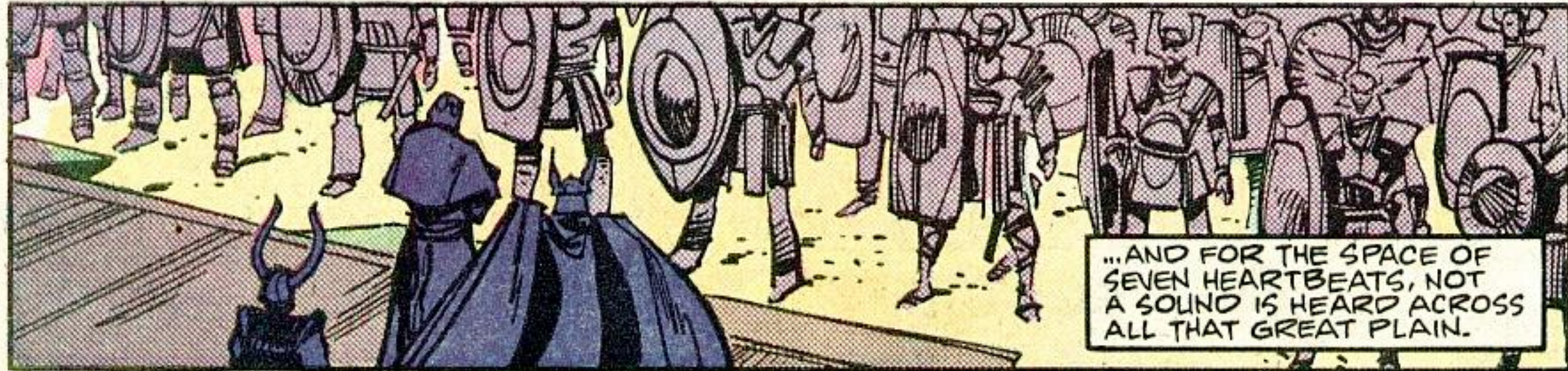
IN TIME, WE MUST CHOOSE A NEW RULER TO SIT IN ODIN'S HIGH SEAT AND TAKE UP THE SCEPTER'S CHALLENGE.



BUT TODAY, LET US MOURN FOR ALL THOSE WHOSE PASSING HAS ALLOWED OUR EYES TO SEE ANOTHER SUNRISE.



MY GRIEF OVERCOMES ME. I CAN SAY NO MORE.



...AND FOR THE SPACE OF SEVEN HEARTBEATS, NOT A SOUND IS HEARD ACROSS ALL THAT GREAT PLAIN.

ASGARDIANS! THE WAR IS OVER!

I SAY THAT AS FRIGGA NOW HOLDS THE SCEPTER IN TRUST...

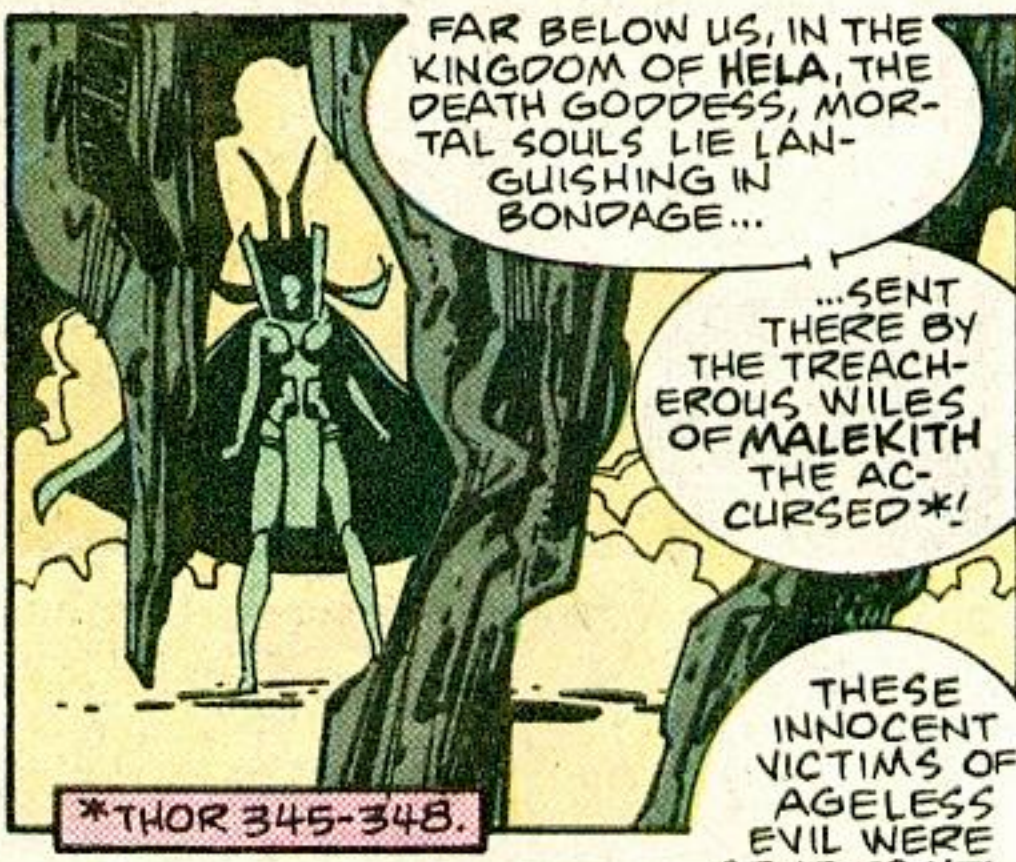


...SO SHOULD SHE CONTINUE AS CARETAKER OF THE REALM UNTIL WE CAN ELECT A NEW LEADER.

BUT THERE IS ANOTHER WRONG YET TO RIGHT!

FOR THE ALLIES OF SURTUR HAVE LABORED MIGHTILY IN HIS CAUSE AND MUCH OF THEIR WORK REMAINS TO BE UNDONE!

FAR BELOW US, IN THE KINGDOM OF HELA, THE DEATH GODDESS, MORTAL SOULS LIE LANGLISHING IN BONDAGE...



...SENT THERE BY THE TREACHEROUS WIVES OF MALEKITH THE ACCURSED*!

*THOR 345-348.

THESE INNOCENT VICTIMS OF AGELESS EVIL WERE SENT TO HEL WHEN THEY TASTED THE FOOD OF FAERIE...



...LEAVING BEHIND THEIR BODIES ON MIDGARD AS SLAVES TO THE DARK ELVES!

ALL AROUND US, ASGARD LIES IN RUINS.

AND THE GODS MUST ATTEND TO HER HURTS.

BUT MORTAL SOULS CRY OUT TO MORTAL SOULS AND BEG RE-LEASE!

I AM THE GUARDIAN OF MIDGARD AND I WILL NOT REST TILL THEY ARE FREE.

HEAR ME NOW, YOU EINHERJAR-- MORTAL HEROES CHOSEN BY THE VALKYRIES TO LIVE IN GLORY IN VAL-HALLA!

WILL YOU RIDE WITH ME TO HEL TO THWART THE WILL OF HELA AND SET FREE THE SOULS OF YOUR FELLOWS?

WILL YE RIDE WITH THE MIGHTY THOR INTO THE VALLEY OF DEATH?

THE CRY OF ASSENT SHAKES THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE NINE WORLDS AND IN HEL, EVEN HELA PAUSES A MOMENT AT THE ECHO.

YES, HAROKIN? WHAT WOULD THE LEADER OF THE EINHERJAR HAVE FROM THOR?

A MOMENT OF YOUR TIME, MY LORD.

I HAVE SOMETHING THAT I THINK YOU SHOULD SEE.

WHILE WE WERE ON MIDGARD, I HAD SOME OPPORTUNITY TO OBSERVE THE FIGHTING STYLES OF OUR MORTAL ALLIES.

AND I FOUND THEIR WEAPONS MOST INTERESTING.

SOME JUDICIOUS HORSETRADING HAS ENABLED ME TO RETURN TO ASGARD WITH A LARGE SAMPLING OF MORTAL INGENUITY.

MY MEN HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO MASTER THESE STRANGE AND WONDERFUL WEAPONS, MY LORD.

IN TRUTH I HAD NOT ANTICIPATED SUCH EARLY USEFULNESS...

... BUT SAY THE WORD, AND WE'LL SHOW HELA TEETH OF STEEL SHE NEVER DREAMED EXISTED.

I SOMETIMES THINK, HAROKIN, THAT THE PRESCIENCE OF MORTALS FREQUENTLY EXCEEDS THAT OF THE GODS.

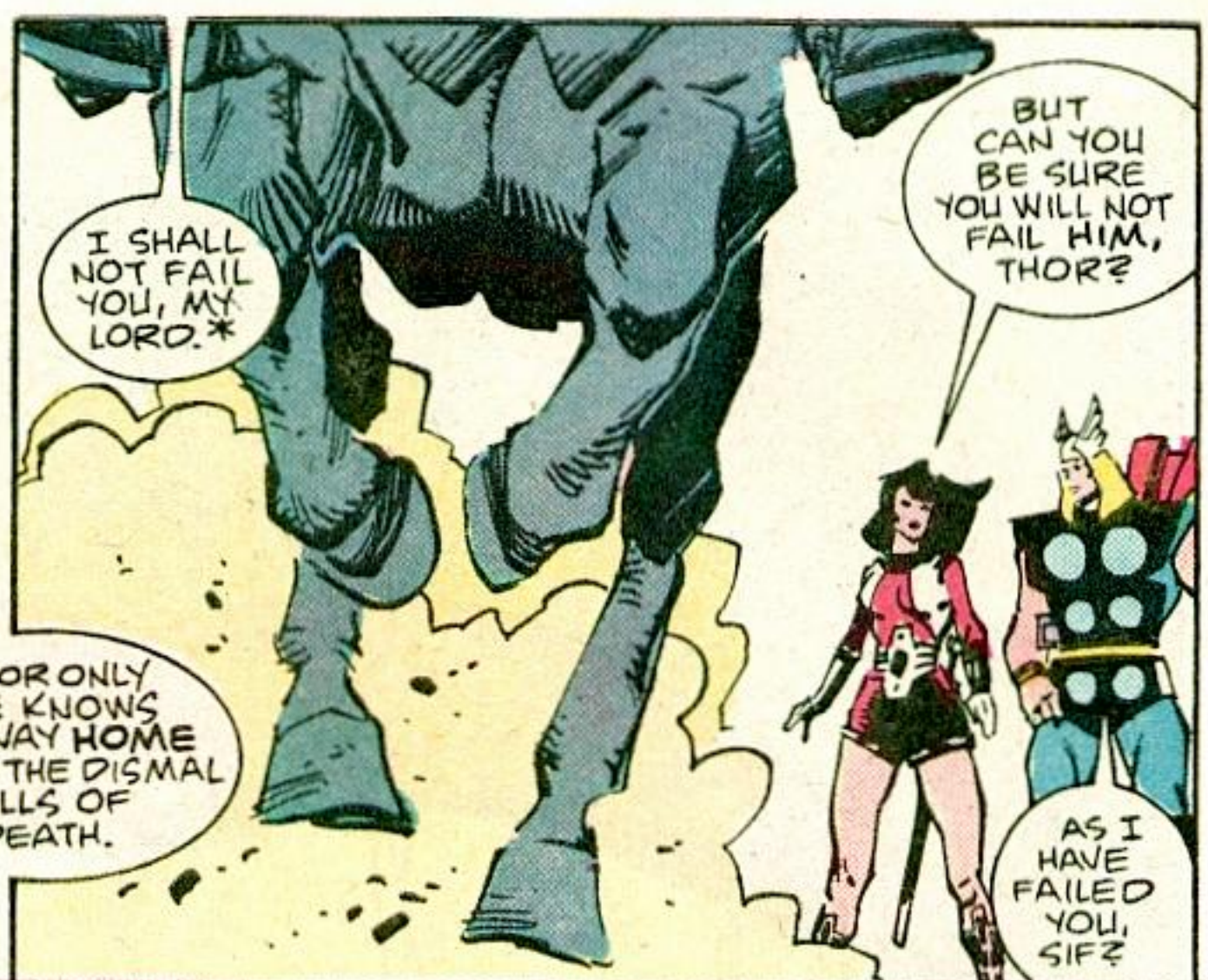


A SHORT TIME LATER...

I AM DEPENDING UPON YOU, AGNAR.

SEEK OUT BALDER IN THE REALM OF THE NORN QUEEN AND TELL HIM THAT I HAVE NEED OF HIM HERE IN ASGARD.

FOR ONLY HE KNOWS THE WAY HOME FROM THE DISMAL HALLS OF DEATH.



I SHALL NOT FAIL YOU, MY LORD.*

BUT CAN YOU BE SURE YOU WILL NOT FAIL HIM, THOR?

AS I HAVE FAILED YOU, SIF?

*THE RESULTS OF AGNAR'S MISSION CAN BE EXPLORED IN DETAIL IN BALDER THE BRAVE No. 1-- ON SALE AUGUST.



I MEAN, MY LORD, THAT WHATEVER YOUR INTENTIONS, YOU...

OR LOVE ME?

...YOU MAY YET DISAPPOINT THOSE WHO FOLLOW YOU.

I... HAVE NEVER SAID SO, MY LORD.



SOME DECLARATIONS, SIF, ARE NOT SPOKEN.

AND IF BEGGING COULD EARN YOUR FORGIVENESS, MY LADY, I WOULD ABASE MYSELF UTTERLY.

I HAVE NEVER ASKED THAT OF YOU.

NOR FORGIVEN ME FOR STRIKING YOU.*

*LAST ISSUE.

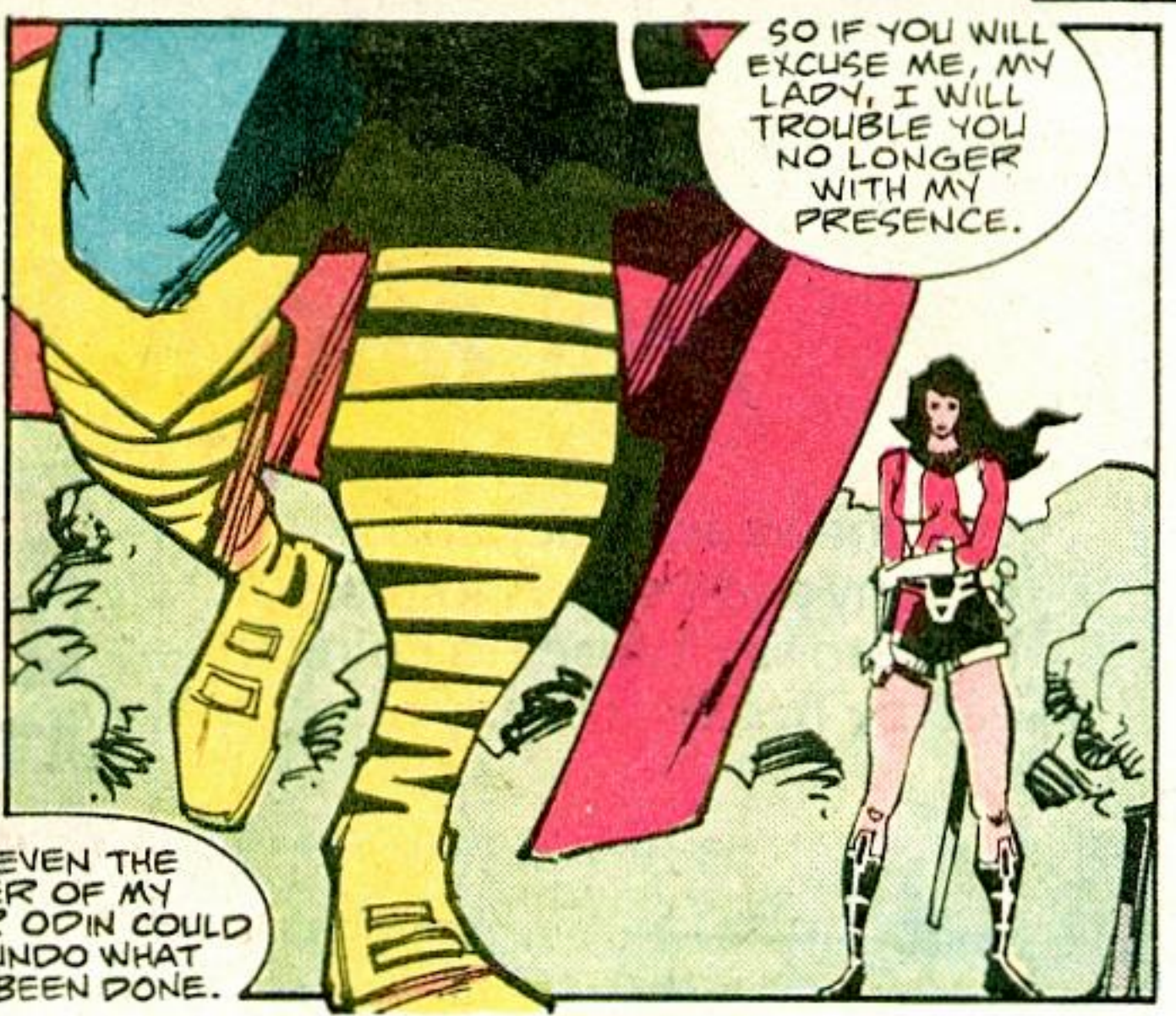


PERFECTION IS NOT GIVEN EVEN TO THE GODS OF ASGARD, MY LADY.

AND WITHOUT PERFECTION, THERE IS ALWAYS FAILURE.

I WOULD GIVE ANYTHING TO BE MADE PERFECT IN YOUR EYES AGAIN.

BUT EVEN THE POWER OF MY FATHER ODIN COULD NOT UNDO WHAT HAS BEEN DONE.



SO IF YOU WILL EXCUSE ME, MY LADY, I WILL TROUBLE YOU NO LONGER WITH MY PRESENCE.

THOR SEEMS GRIMMER THAN IS HIS WONT.

BUT NEVER DOUBT THAT HE LOVES YOU, SISTER.

I CANNOT IMAGINE, HEIMDALL, THAT IF HE TRULY LOVED ME, HE WOULD HAVE STRUCK ME UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.

HE STRUCK ME, HEIMDALL! HOW CAN I EVER FORGET THAT?

WHAT TINY IMAGINATIONS IMMORTALS HAVE.

FLAWED HE MAY BE AND DEEPLY HURT BY THE LOSS OF HIS FATHER.

YET PERHAPS NO WOUND GOES DEEPER THAN THIS ONE.



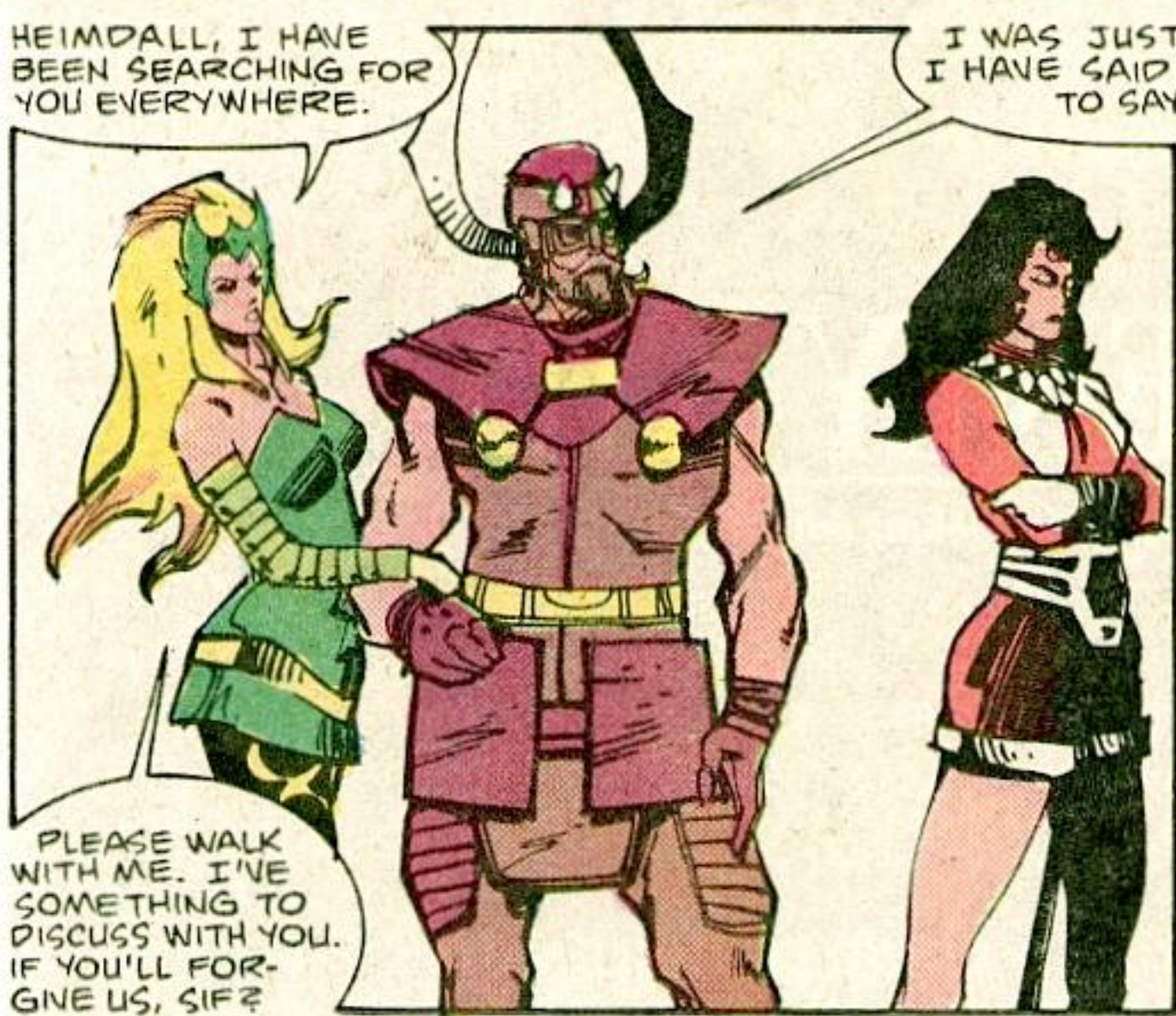
NO ONE HAS ASKED YOU TO. BUT IS IT SO DIFFICULT A THING TO FORGIVE?



SMALL WONDER HE SEEKS THE PITS OF HEL SO EAGERLY.

HEIM-DALL?

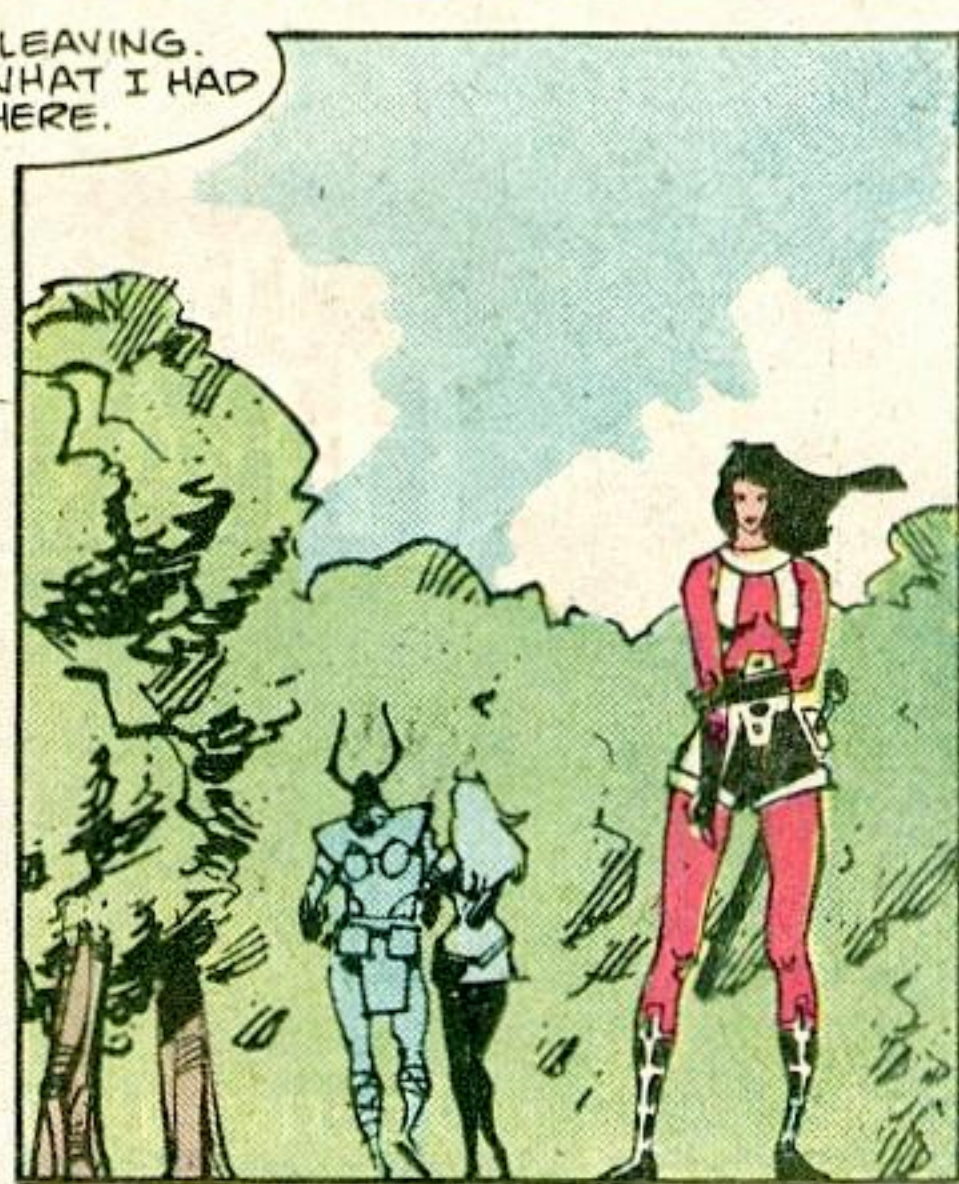
'TIS THE ENCHANTRESS!



HEIMDALL, I HAVE BEEN SEARCHING FOR YOU EVERYWHERE.

I WAS JUST LEAVING. I HAVE SAID WHAT I HAD TO SAY HERE.

PLEASE WALK WITH ME. I'VE SOMETHING TO DISCUSS WITH YOU. IF YOU'LL FORGIVE US, SIF?



AT THE EDGE OF ASGARD, NESTLED AGAINST THE MOUNTAIN'S ROOTS STAND THE HALLS OF ODIN...

... AND AS THE DAY DRAWS ON, A SINGLE VISITOR ENTERS THE GREAT GATEWAY.



I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU, MY SON. EVER SINCE I HEARD YOU SPEAK OF HEL, I KNEW YOU WOULD COME.



I DOUBT THAT HE IS IN HELA'S WAITING ARMS, THOR.

YOUR FATHER WAS EVER TRUE TO ME IN HIS HEART.

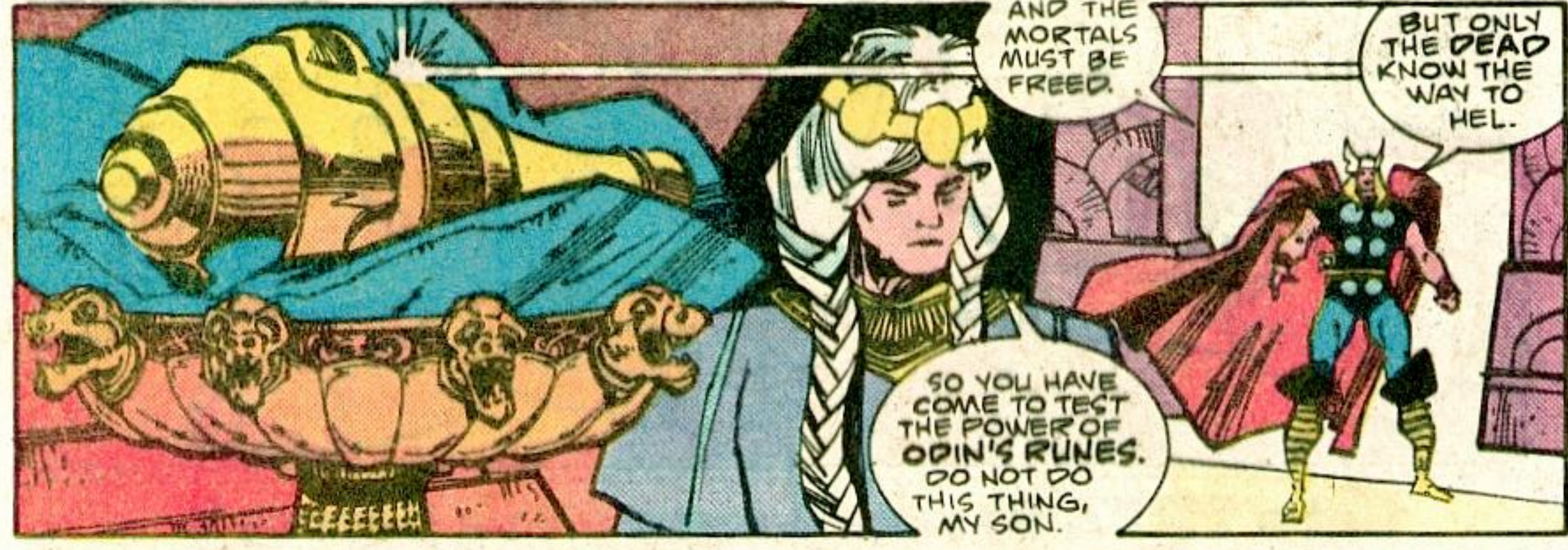
ODIN WOULD NOT HAVE DESERTED ME FOR HER.



HELA WOULD NOT HAVE ASKED HIS PERMISSION, MOTHER.

AND BY NOW, SHE MAY HAVE FOUND HIS SHADE AND LURED IT WITHIN HER KINGDOM.

I MUST KNOW.



AND THE MORTALS MUST BE FREED.

BUT ONLY THE DEAD KNOW THE WAY TO HEL.

SO YOU HAVE COME TO TEST THE POWER OF ODIN'S RUNES. DO NOT DO THIS THING, MY SON.



THERE ARE SOME MAGICKS THAT EVEN ODIN FEARED TO WORK.

SINCE THAT ROAD IS KNOWN ONLY TO THE DEAD, MOTHER...

...THEN I SHALL ASK THE DEAD TO SHOW ME ITS SECRET.

LET THE PATH TO DEATH REMAIN UNTRODDEN BY THE LIVING.

AND WHEN I HOLD THE RUNES OF MY FATHER IN MY HAND, THEY WILL ANSWER ME.



FAR ABOVE ASGARD, TOWERING OVER ALL THE REALM STANDS THE HLIDSKJALF, THE HIGH SEAT...

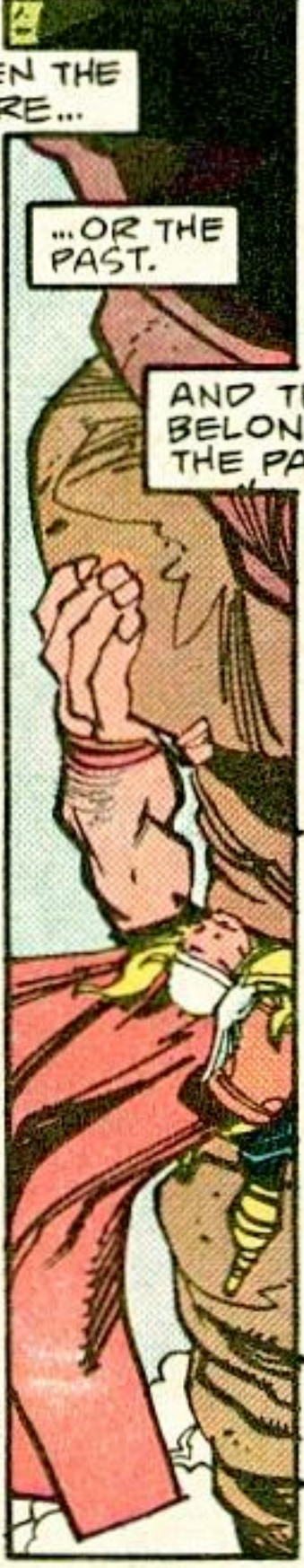


...WHERE ONCE ODIN SAT AND WATCHED THE WORKINGS OF THE NINE WORLDS.

FROM THE HIGH SEAT, IT IS SAID THAT A GOD CAN SEE ALL THINGS...



...EVEN THE FUTURE...



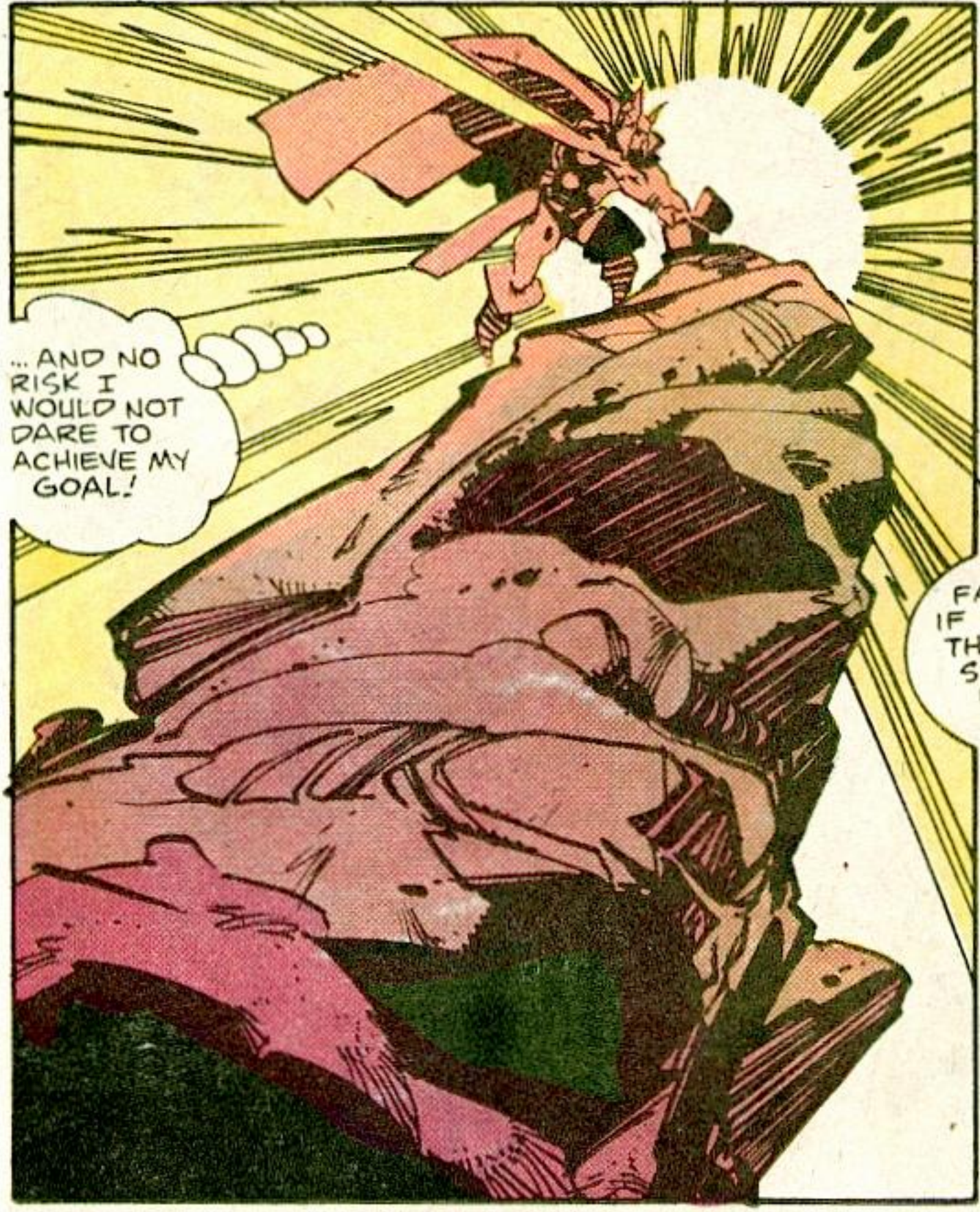
...OR THE PAST.

AND THE DEAD BELONG TO THE PAST.



THE CASKET GROWS HEAVIER AND HEAVIER THE HIGHER I CLIMB...

... BUT THERE IS NO WEIGHT... TOO GREAT TO KEEP ME ...FROM ACHIEVING THE SUMMIT.



... AND NO RISK I WOULD NOT DARE TO ACHIEVE MY GOAL!



FATHER, IF YOU ARE THERE, I SHALL FIND YOU!

INTO THE TEETH
OF THE HOWLING
STORM, I CAST
THE RUNES OF
ODIN! THE RUNES
OF LIFE AND
DEATH!

TWELVE
I CAST!

ANGERBODA I
CALL! MOTHER OF
THREE MONSTERS!
WITCH WHOM HELA
HATH SUMMONED
LONG AGO!

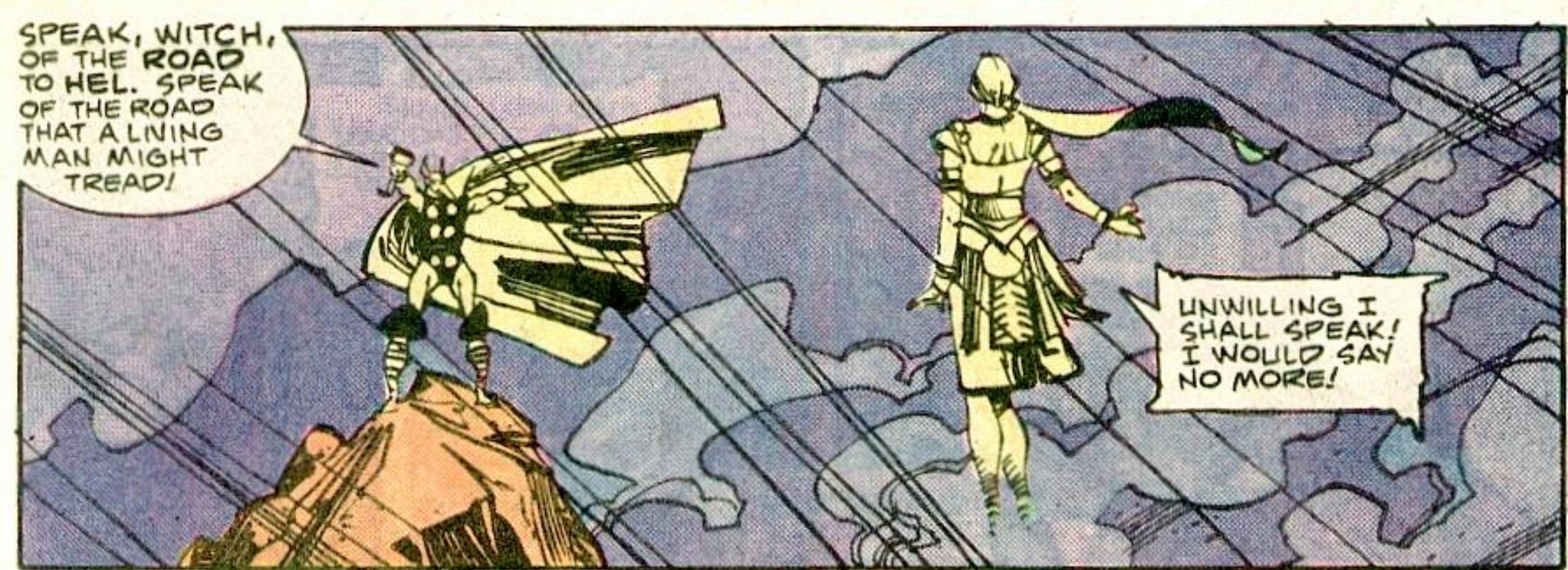
RISE FROM YOUR
TOMB AND WALK
AGAIN IN THE
LAND OF THE
LIVING!

THE STORM
GROWS MORE
FRENZIED!

ANGERBODA
IS HERE!

UNWILLING I
HAVE COME,
SON OF ODIN!
I WOULD SAY
NO MORE!

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SPEAK, WITCH, OF THE ROAD TO HEL. SPEAK OF THE ROAD THAT A LIVING MAN MIGHT TREAD!

UNWILLING I SHALL SPEAK! I WOULD SAY NO MORE!



THE RUNES ABOUT YOUR NECK MAKE YOU MINE TO COMMAND! SPEAK, WITCH, OF THE ROAD TO HEL.



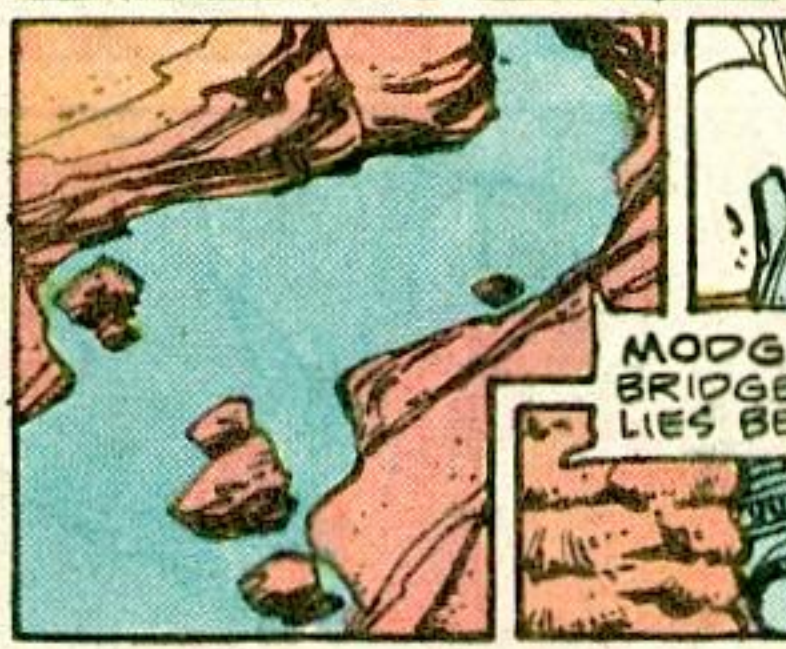
SEEK IN THE SHADOWS OF THE HEL-HOUND, GARM, FOR THE ENTRANCE!



BLACK THE ENTRANCE, BLACKER STILL THE JOURNEY.



NINE DAYS RIDE WILL BRING YOU TO THE RIVER GJOLL AND THE BRIDGE GJALLERBRU!



MODGUD GUARDS THE BRIDGE AND HELGATE LIES BEYOND IT.



UNWILLING I HAVE SPOKEN! I WOULD SAY NO MORE!



AND I HAVE SEEN WHAT NO LIVING BEING SHOULD SEE.

RETURN, ANGERBODA, TO YOUR GRAVE AND LEAVE THE LAND OF LIFE. I HAVE LEARNED WHAT I MUST KNOW AND I RELEASE YOU!

I SHALL RETURN TO HEL, MIGHTY THOR, BUT NOT ALONE!

FOR IF YOU WOULD TRAVEL THE ROAD TO DEATH, I CAN SHOW YOU A QUICKER WAY TO FIND IT!

EMBRACE ME, FOOL!

AND FALL WITH ME TO THY DOOM! HELA SHALL GREET THE SON OF ODIN AT LAST!

HER STRENGTH IS UNBELIEVABLE!

SHE HAS SEALED MY LIPS! I CANNOT SPEAK TO COMMAND HER!

AND IN ANOTHER MOMENT, I SHALL JOIN HER ON THE HELWAY...

...BUT NO LONGER AS A LIVING BEING!

THE RUNES BROUGHT HER TO THIS WORLD!

THEN LET THEM SEND HER BACK TO HEL!!

SHATTER!

AAAIEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!

IT IS OVER. ANGERBODA HAS RETURNED TO THE REALM OF DEATH!

AND I MUST RETURN THE RUNES TO MY FATHER'S HALL.

BUT I FEEL AS THOUGH THE STORMCLOUDS HAVE SETTLED UPON MY HEART...

...AND DIRE FOREBODINGS ECHO IN MY SOUL THIS NIGHT!

MEANWHILE, FAR BELOW THE HIGH SEAT, IN THE GREEN WOODS NOT FAR FROM ASGARD...

THAT MAY BE, AMORA, BUT WHAT OF YOUR NOISY FRIEND WHO FOLLOWS US?

WHAT?

THE EXECUTIONER, I BELIEVE?

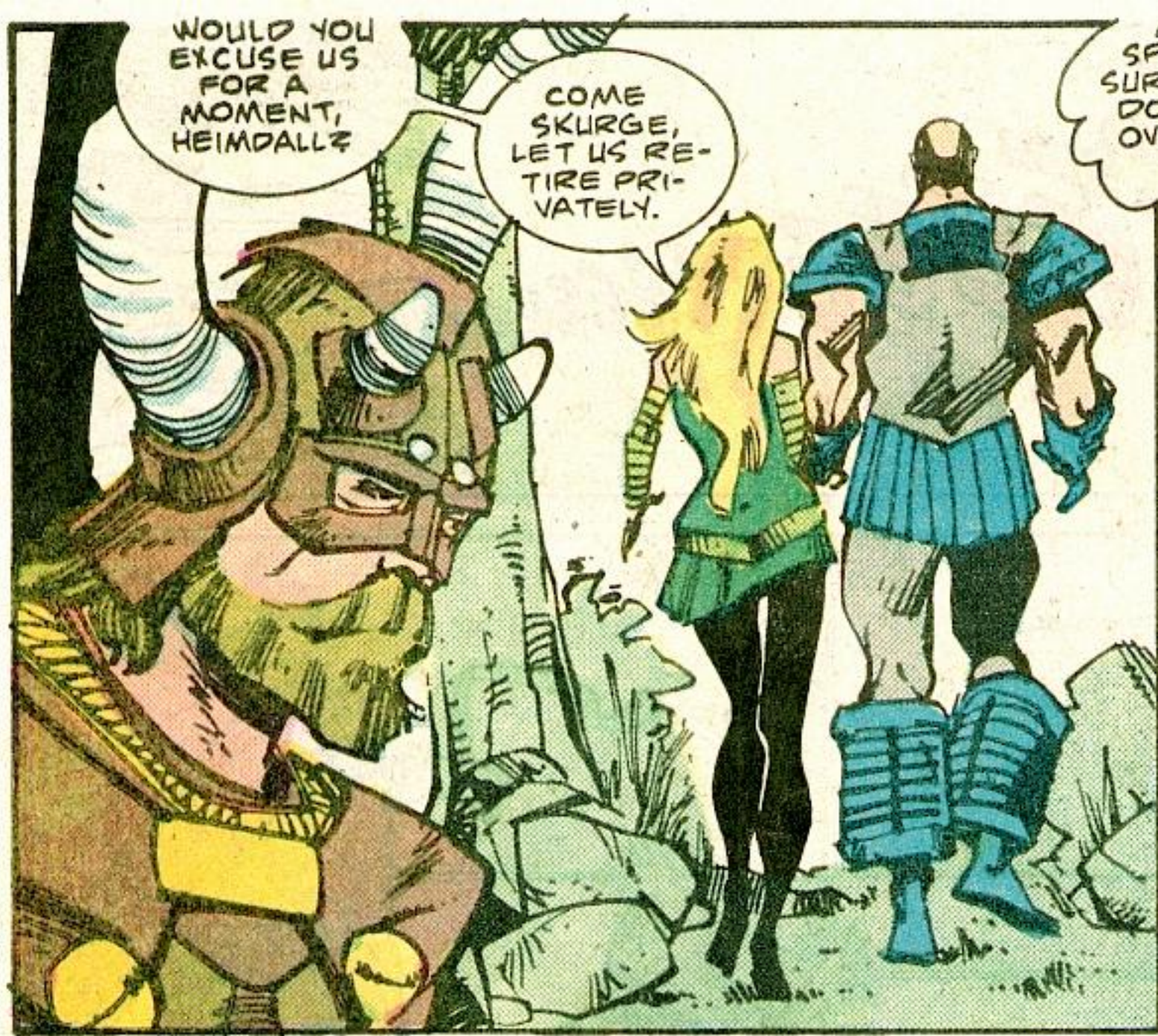
FOR LO, THESE MANY YEARS, HEIMDALL, YOU HAVE STRAYED NOT A FOOT FROM THE RAINBOW BRIDGE.

A FAITHFUL GUARD AND GUARDIAN

BUT NOW THAT THE BRIDGE HAS BEEN DESTROYED, I THINK THE TIME HAS COME THAT WE SHOULD KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER.

ENCHANTRESS! AT LAST! I HAVE BEEN LOOKING ACROSS ALL OF ASGARD FOR YOU!

HOW INOPPORTUNE OF YOU TO FIND ME AT THIS MOMENT, SKURGE!



WOULD YOU EXCUSE US FOR A MOMENT, HEIMDALL?

COME SKURGE, LET US RETIRE PRIVATELY.

AND A SIMPLE SPELL SHALL INSURE THAT HEIMDALL DOES NOT SEE OR OVERHEAR WHAT FOLLOWS.

AMORA, I HAD TO FIND YOU WHEN I CAME BACK TO ASGARD! YOU LEFT ME ALONE ON EARTH.



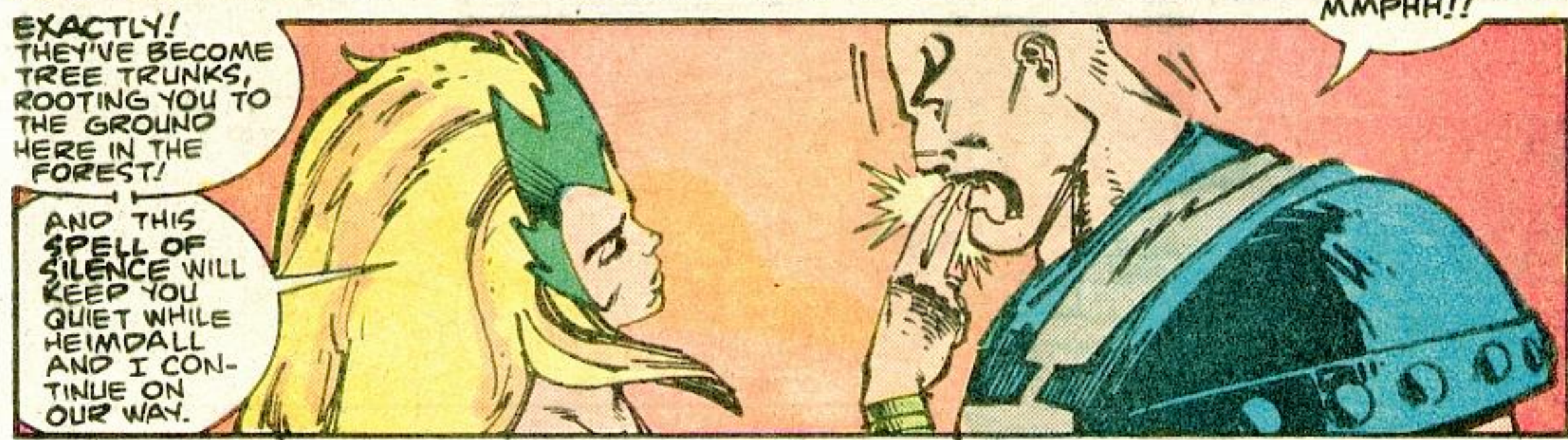
I COULDN'T STAND TO BE WITHOUT YOU FOR SO LONG!



PERHAPS 'TIS TIME YOU LEARNED TO STAND UPON YOUR OWN TWO FEET AGAIN.

WHA--!!

MY FEET! MY LEGS! THEY-- MMPH!!

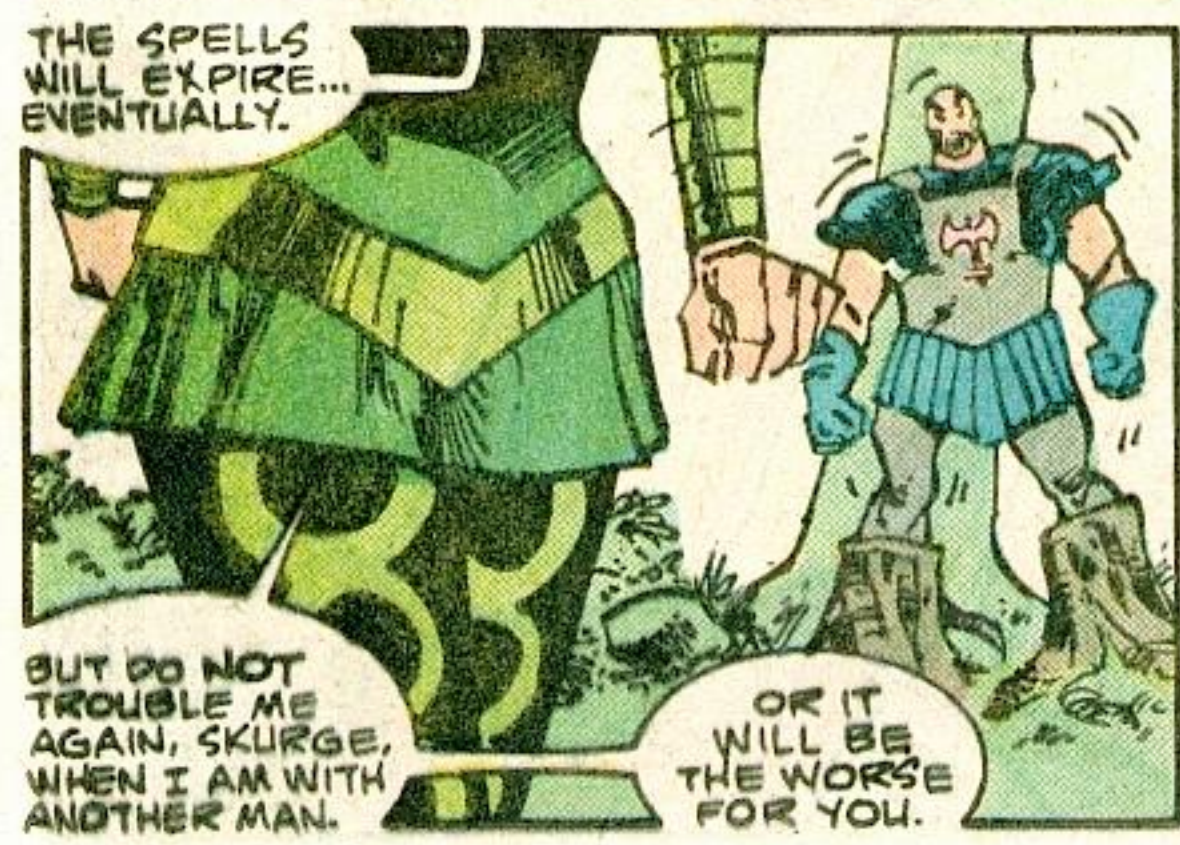


EXACTLY! THEY'VE BECOME TREE TRUNKS, ROOTING YOU TO THE GROUND HERE IN THE FOREST!

AND THIS SPELL OF SILENCE WILL KEEP YOU QUIET WHILE HEIMDALL AND I CONTINUE ON OUR WAY.



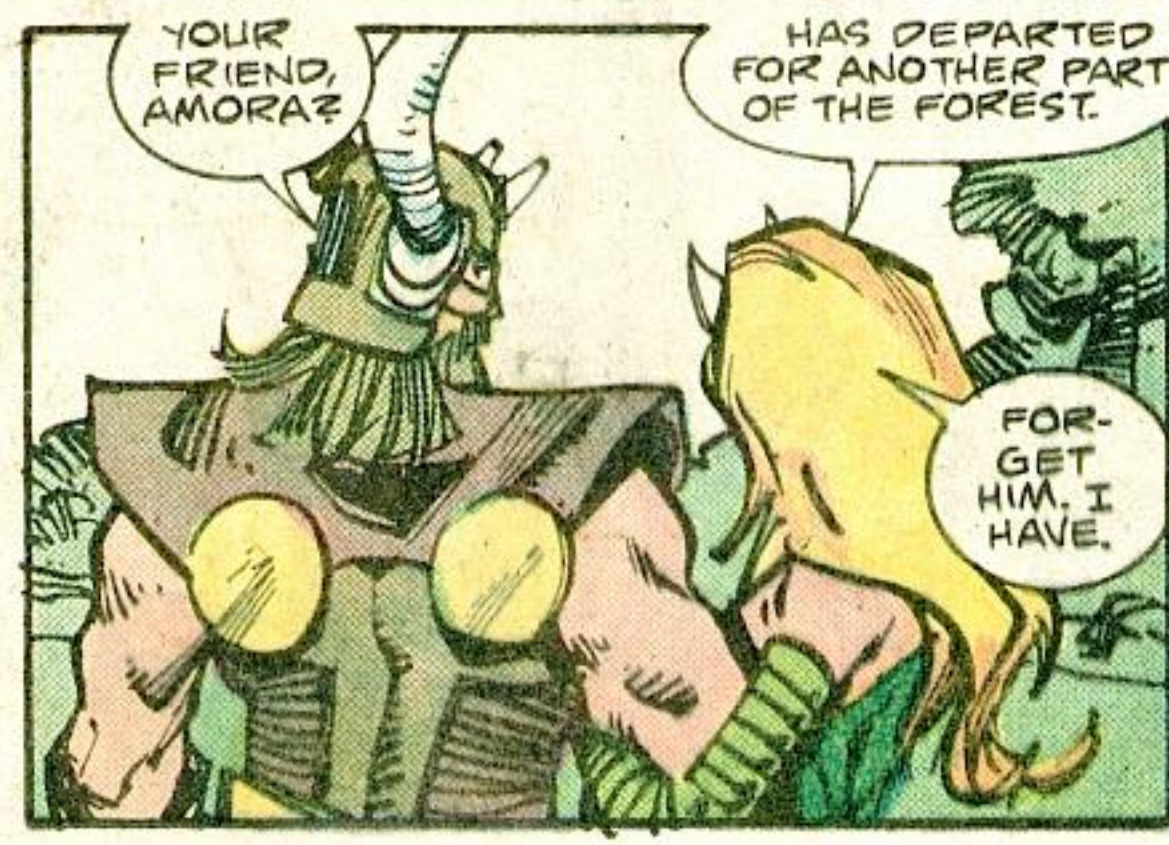
MY FEET! MY LEGS! THEY-- MMPH!!



THE SPELLS WILL EXPIRE... EVENTUALLY.

BUT DO NOT TROUBLE ME AGAIN, SKURGE, WHEN I AM WITH ANOTHER MAN.

OR IT WILL BE THE WORSE FOR YOU.



YOUR FRIEND, AMORA?

HAS DEPARTED FOR ANOTHER PART OF THE FOREST.

FORGET HIM, I HAVE.

THE DAYS PASS AND THE REPAIR OF THE GOLDEN CITY CONTINUES DAY AND NIGHT...

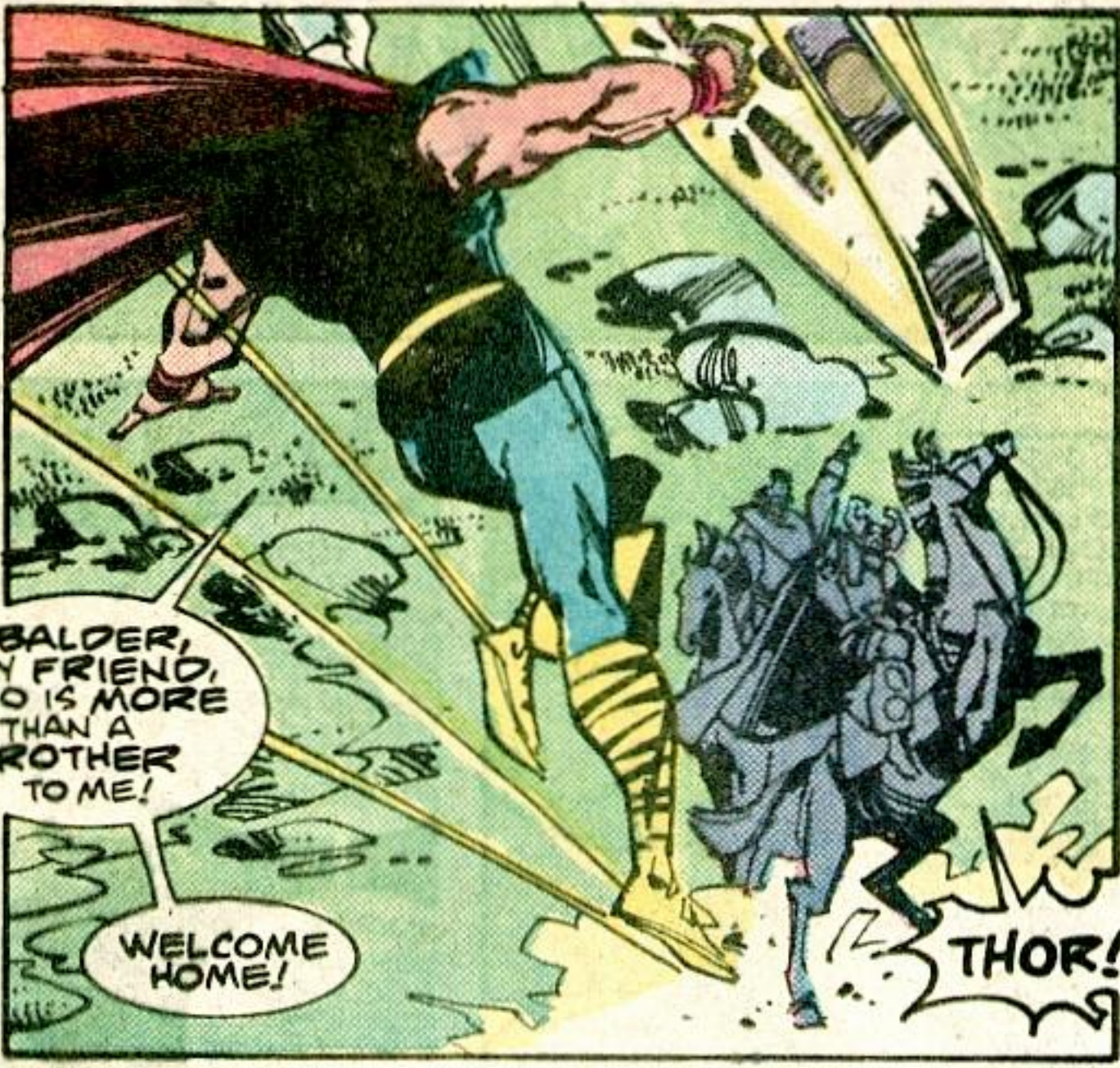
... AS DO THE PREPARATIONS FOR THOR'S FORTHCOMING JOURNEY WITH THE HEROES OF VALHALLA...

... UNTIL...

THAT CLOUD OF DUST BELOW THE HORIZON!
AT LAST!



THE WAITING IS OVER!



BALDER, MY FRIEND, WHO IS MORE THAN A BROTHER TO ME!

WELCOME HOME!

THOR!



LET ME EMBRACE THEE, BRAVE ONE!

NEVER HAVE I SEEN THEE LOOK BETTER!

MY THANKS, AGNAR, FOR BRINGING HOME THE LIGHT OF ASGARD!



AGNAR HAS TOLD YOU WHAT I PROPOSE TO DO?

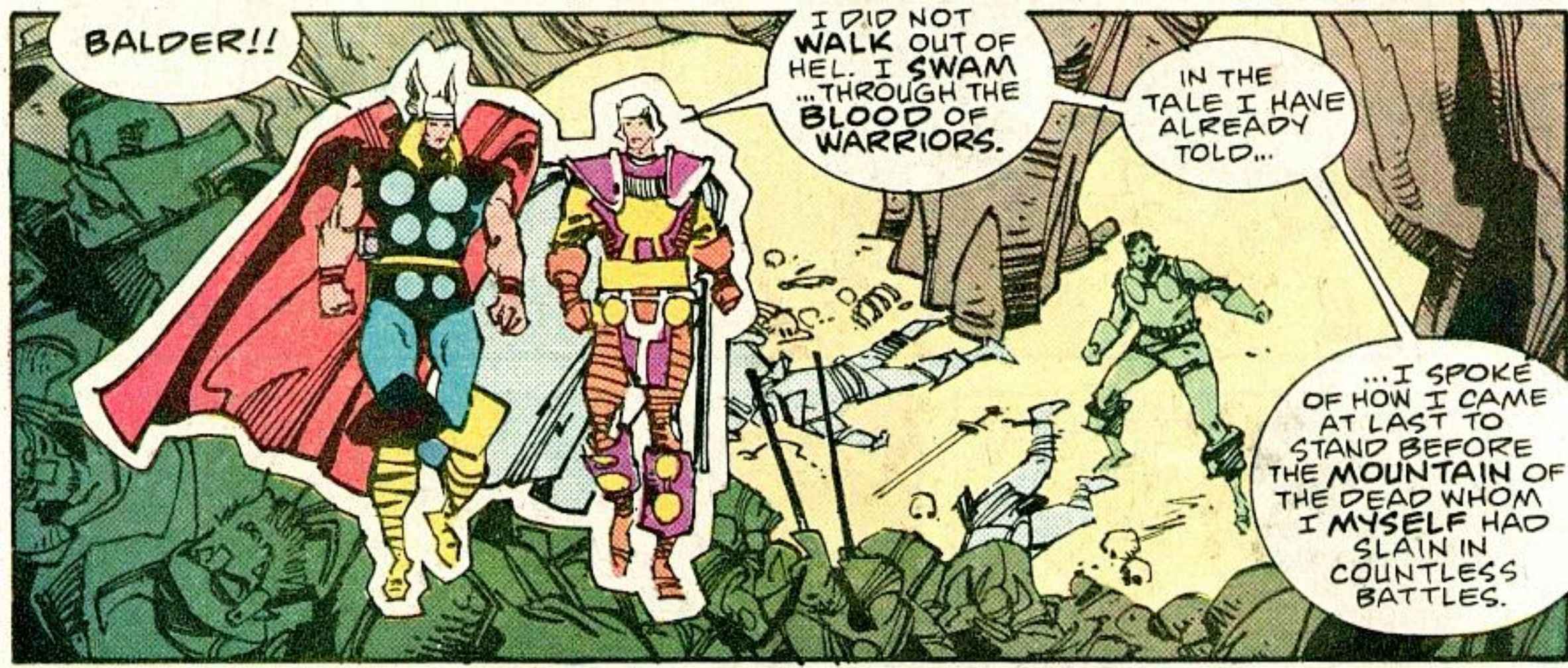
WHAT SAYEST THOU?

HE HAS, NOBLE THOR. AND THE THOUGHT TO RESCUE THESE LOST MORTALS FROM HEL ONLY DOES YOU HONOR.

BUT IN TRUTH, I WONDER IF YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE ASKING OF THE EINHERJAR, OF ME, AND OF YOURSELF.

MUCH DID I TELL VOLSTAGG OF MY SOJOURN IN HEL, THOR*... BUT EVEN FROM HIM I HELD BACK THE LAST HORROR.

*THOR 338/339.



BALDER!!

I DID NOT WALK OUT OF HEL. I SWAM ...THROUGH THE BLOOD OF WARRIORS.

IN THE TALE I HAVE ALREADY TOLD...

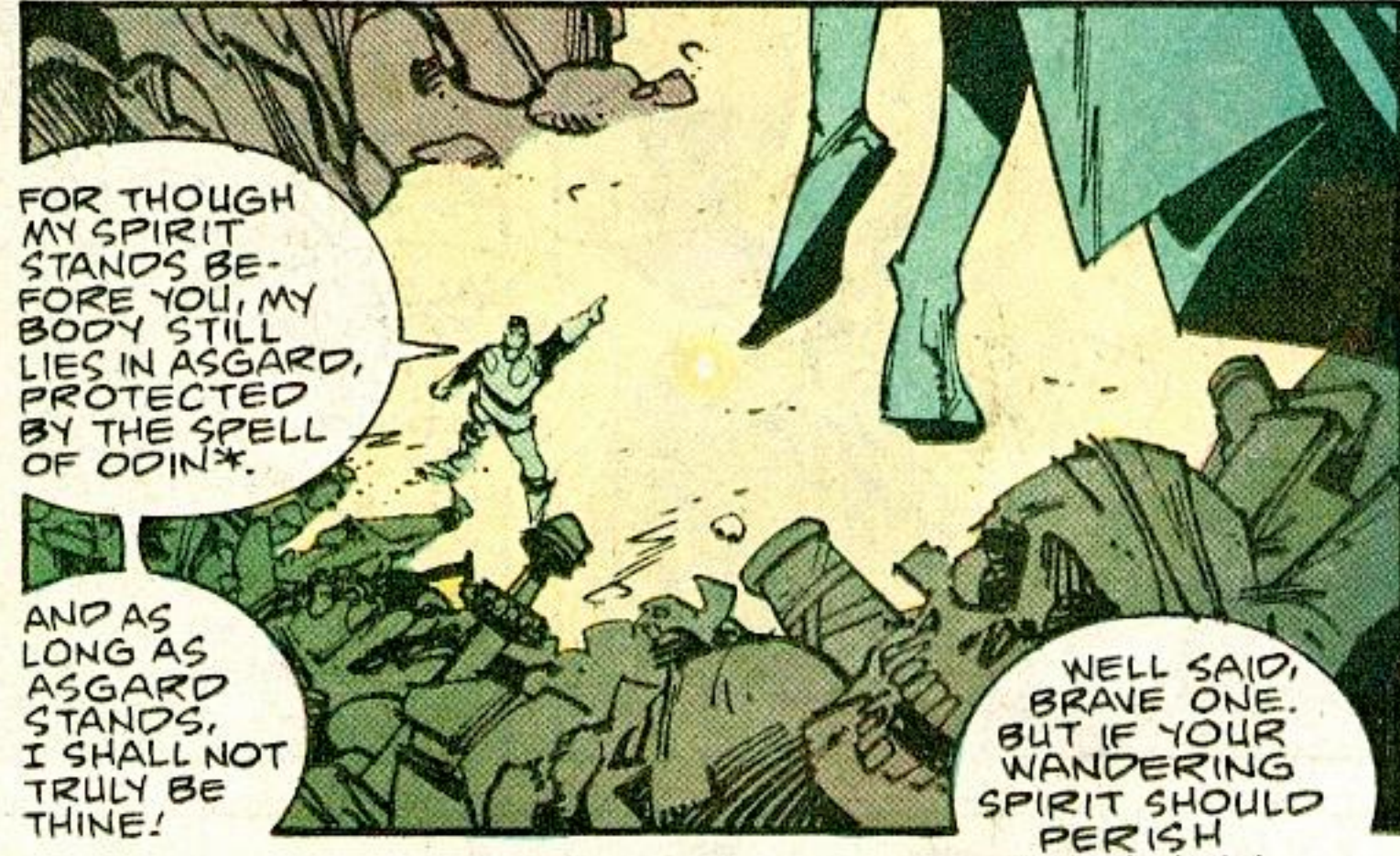
...I SPOKE OF HOW I CAME AT LAST TO STAND BEFORE THE MOUNTAIN OF THE DEAD WHOM I MYSELF HAD SLAIN IN COUNTLESS BATTLES.



I DID NOT SPEAK OF HELA, OR HOW I FOUND HER WAITING FOR ME THERE.

WELCOME, BALDER. LONG HAVE I AWAITED YOUR COMING.

AND LONGER STILL WILL YOU HAVE TO WAIT.



FOR THOUGH MY SPIRIT STANDS BEFORE YOU, MY BODY STILL LIES IN ASGARD, PROTECTED BY THE SPELL OF ODIN*.

AND AS LONG AS ASGARD STANDS, I SHALL NOT TRULY BE THINE!

WELL SAID, BRAVE ONE. BUT IF YOUR WANDERING SPIRIT SHOULD PERISH WITHIN MY KINGDOM...



...NOT EVEN ODIN'S SPELLS WILL CALL YOU BACK TO ASGARD.

*WAY BACK IN THOR 275!!

BUT FOR ONE SO BEAUTIFUL, EVEN DEATH MUST BE FAIR.

THERE, BRAVE ONE, LIES THE PATH FROM DARKNESS.

IF YOU BUT CLIMB THAT WINDING ROAD, BALDER SHALL SEE THE SUN AGAIN!

BUT BEFORE YOU GO, I HAVE GATHERED SOME OLD FRIENDS WHO WOULD LIKE TO GREET YOU.

THEY HAVE WAITED A LONG TIME TO SEE THEIR FORMER BATTLE COMPANION...

...AND JOYFULLY DO THEY LONG TO TASTE THY SHINING STEEL AGAIN!

COME, BALDER, AND WELCOME THY FORMER SWORD-MATES!

COME, BALDER, AND PLAY THE GAME OF DEATH!

HER LAUGHTER ECHOED THROUGH THAT FORSAKEN PLACE!

THERE WAS NO OTHER SOUND.

...AND BECOME NO MORE THAN THE FOES I HAD ONCE SLAIN...

AND I KNEW THEN THAT TO FALL TO THE WEAPONS OF THE WARRIORS BEFORE ME WAS TO SURRENDER TO HELA...

...A MINDLESS, WILL-LESS SLAVE TO THE GODDESS OF THE UNDERWORLD.

AND SO I FOUGHT.

I FOUGHT AS I HAVE NEVER FOUGHT BEFORE-- AND HOPED NEVER TO FIGHT AGAIN.

TIME HAD NO MEANING IN THAT TERRIBLE PLACE...

... AND I DO NOT KNOW HOW LONG THE BATTLE RAGED...

... OR HOW MANY BITTER TEARS I SHED.

I KNOW ONLY THAT IN THE END, I STRODE OUT OF HEL ALIVE.

MY HAIR WAS WHITE...

... AND I HAD SLAIN MY TEN THOUSANDS...

... AGAIN!

THIS IS WHAT YOU ASK OF EVERY HERO WHO RIDES WITH YOU.

HELA SHALL BE WAITING EAGERLY TO GREET THE MEN WHO HAVE DONE SO MUCH TO FILL HER EMPTY HALLS.

I HAVE GIVEN MY WORD, BALDER. I WILL GO INTO HEL IF I HAVE TO GO ALONE.

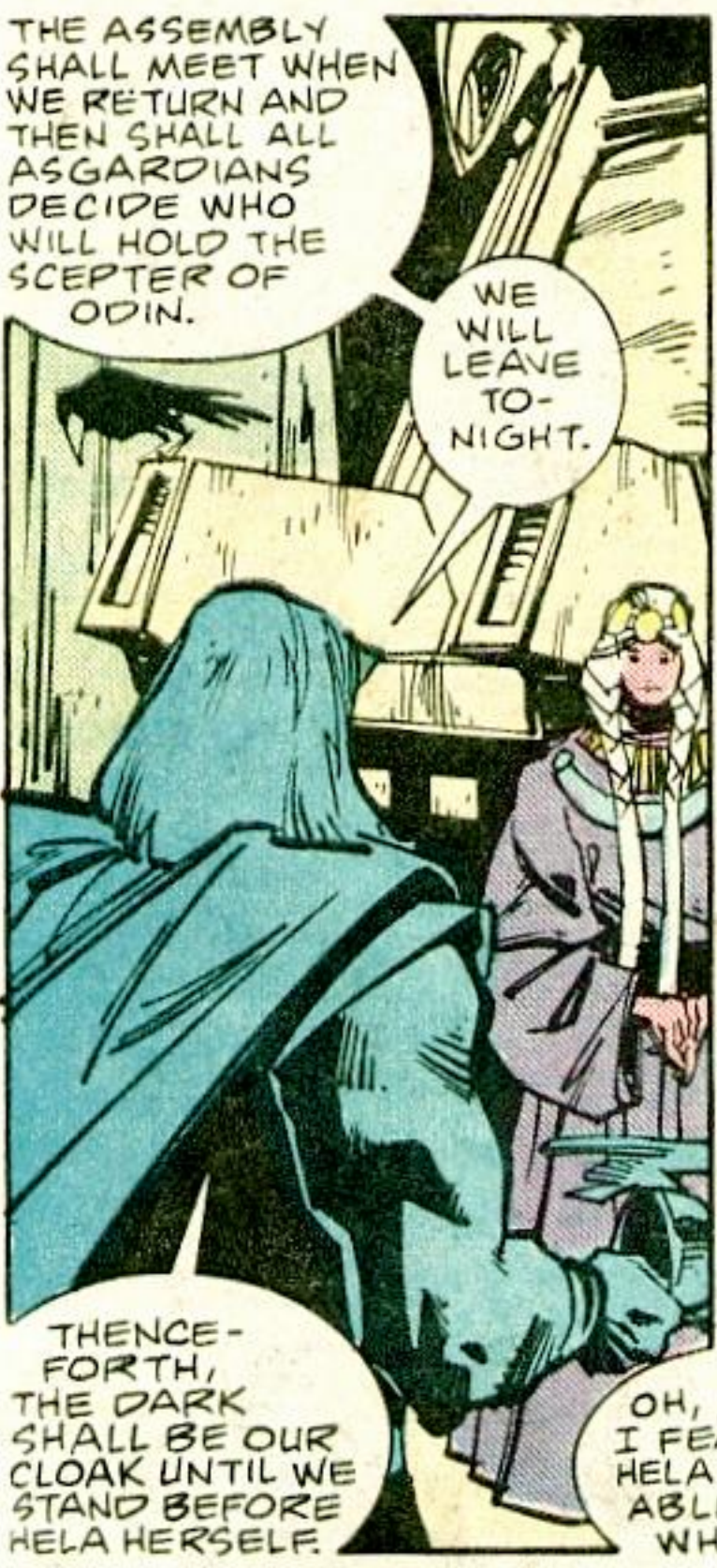
I KNEW YOUR ANSWER, MY DEAREST FRIEND. AND ONE AT LEAST SHALL RIDE WITH YOU INTO THE DARKNESS.

THEN LET THE HORDES OF HEL BEWARE.

SUNSET--AND THE HIGHEST OF ODIN'S HALLS IS STILL CAUGHT IN THE GOLDEN LIGHT BEFORE DARKNESS COVERS THE LAND...



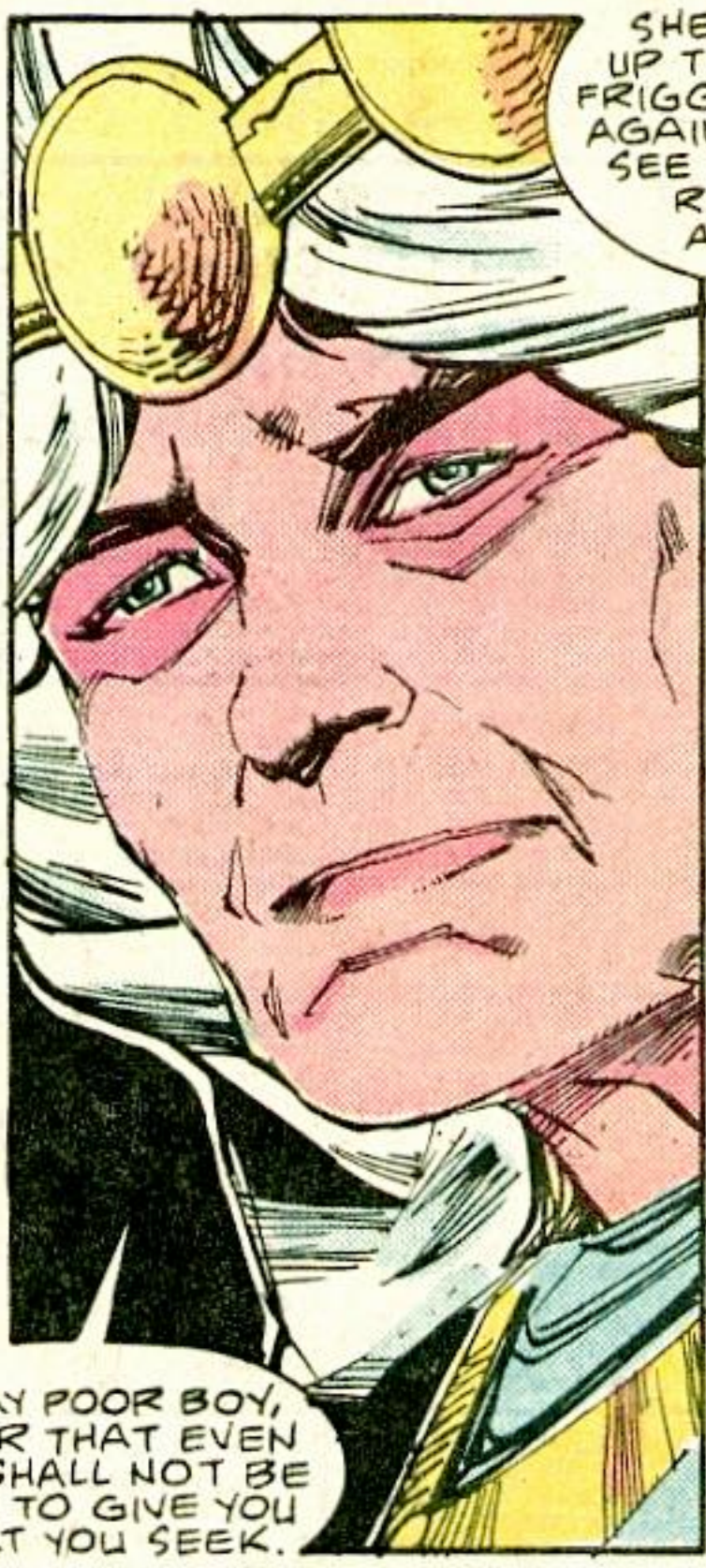
I HAVE COME TO SAY GOODBYE, MOTHER. LET THE CALL GO OUT TO SUMMON ALL LOYAL ASGARDIANS TO THE ALTHING!



THE ASSEMBLY SHALL MEET WHEN WE RETURN AND THEN SHALL ALL ASGARDIANS DECIDE WHO WILL HOLD THE SCEPTER OF ODIN.

WE WILL LEAVE TO-NIGHT.

THENCE-FORTH, THE DARK SHALL BE OUR CLOAK UNTIL WE STAND BEFORE HELA HERSELF.



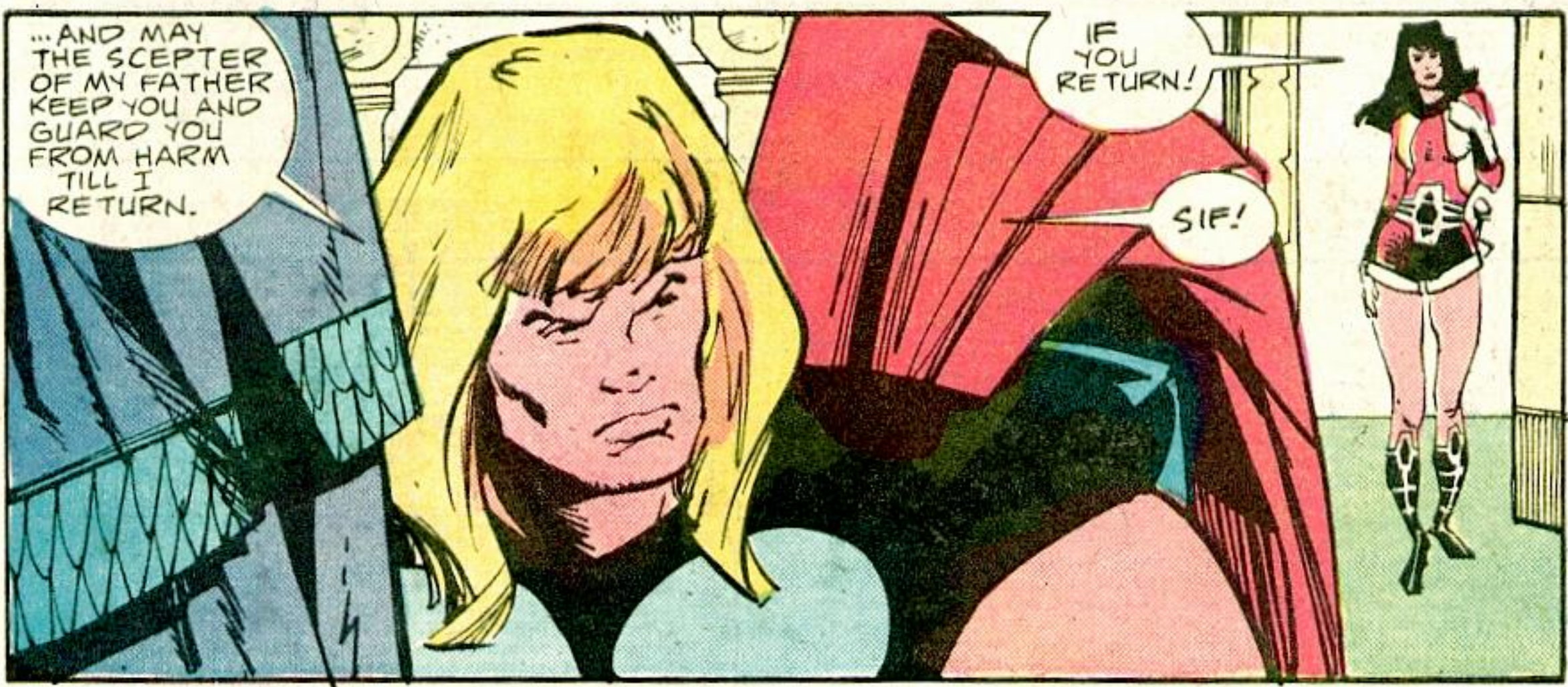
SHE WILL YIELD UP THE MORTALS, FRIGGA! OR NEVER AGAIN SHALL I SEE THE GOLDEN ROOFS OF ASGARD.

OH, MY POOR BOY, I FEAR THAT EVEN HELA SHALL NOT BE ABLE TO GIVE YOU WHAT YOU SEEK.



IF ALL YOU FIND IN HEL ARE THE MORTALS, I FEAR YOU WILL NOT BE SATISFIED, THOR.

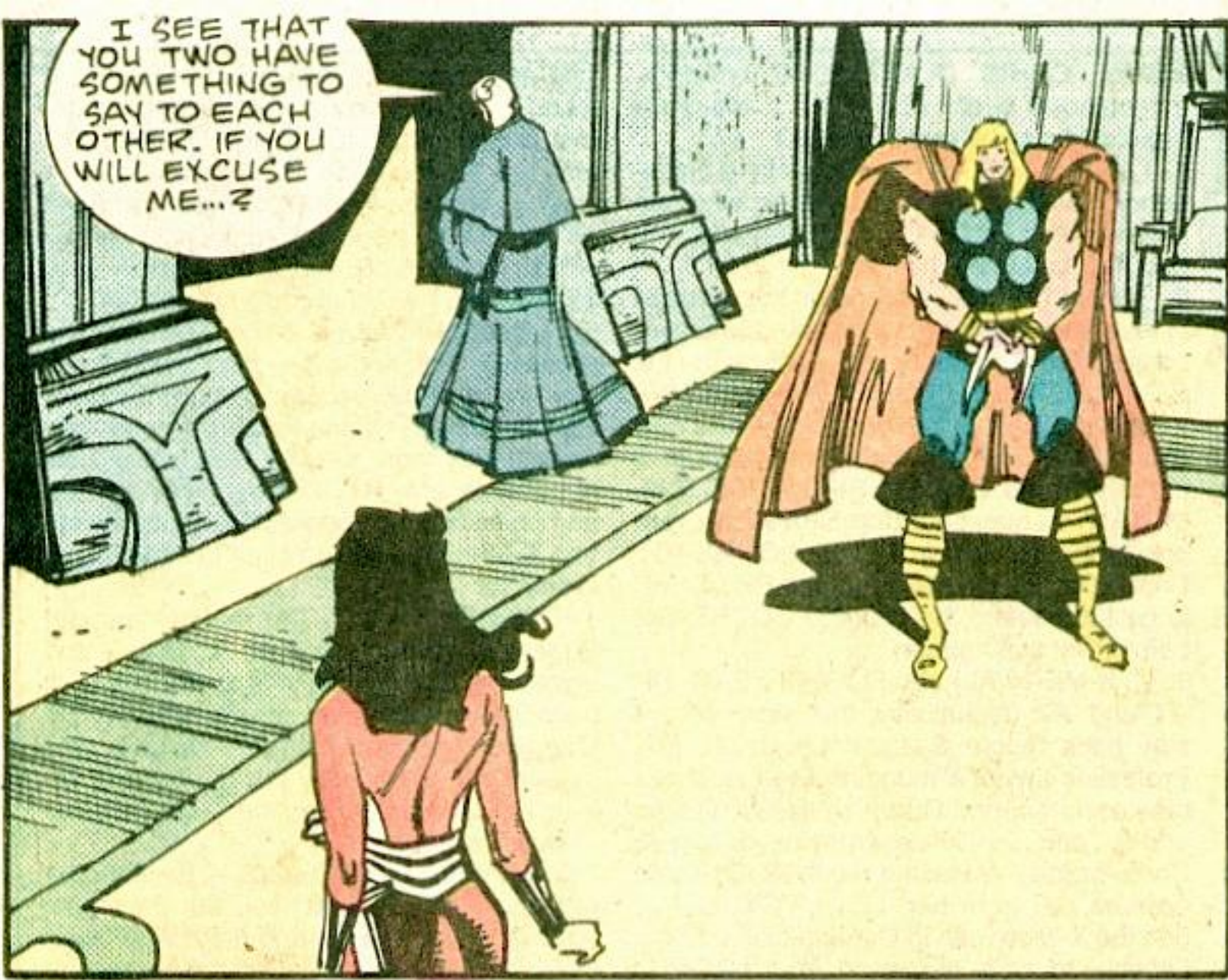
THEN SO BE IT. MAY THE GOLDEN REALM ENDURE AS LONG AS THE NINE WORLDS...



...AND MAY THE SCEPTER OF MY FATHER KEEP YOU AND GUARD YOU FROM HARM TILL I RETURN.

IF YOU RETURN!

SIF!

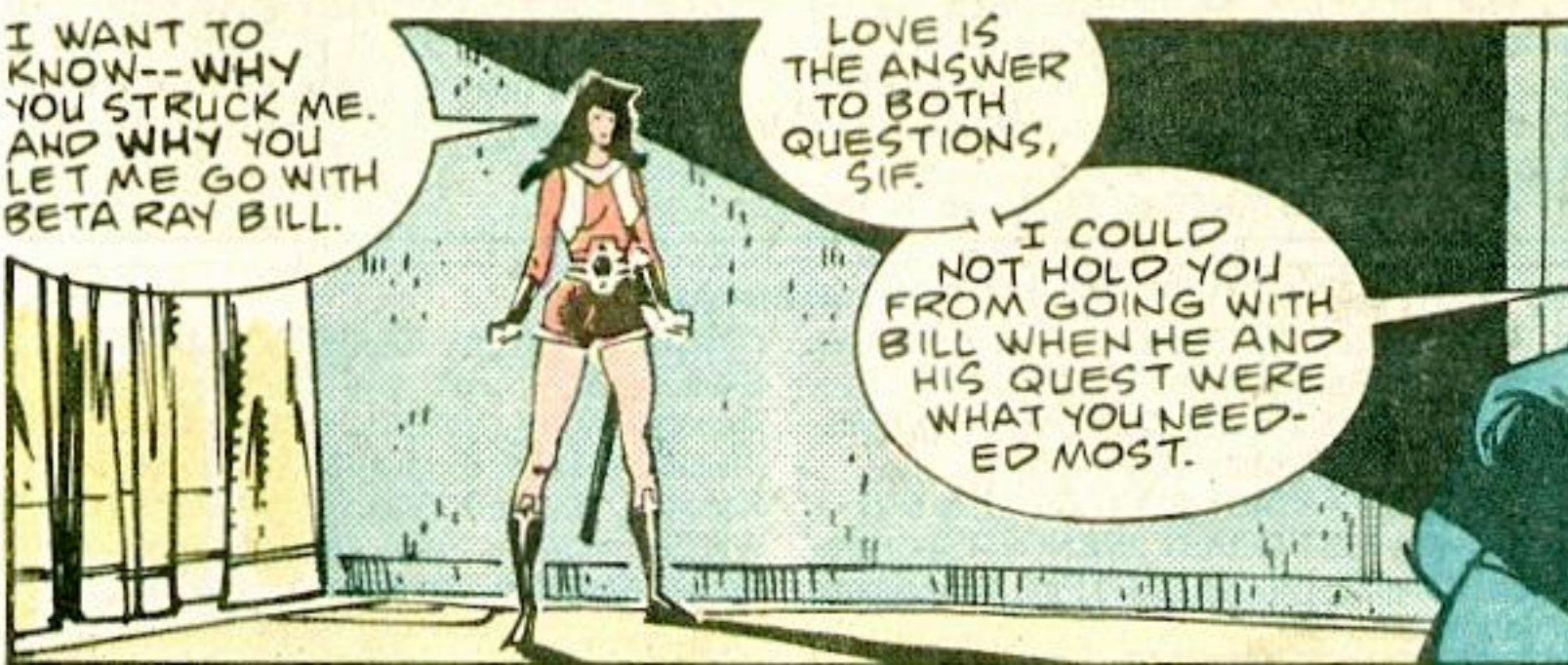


I SEE THAT YOU TWO HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY TO EACH OTHER. IF YOU WILL EXCUSE ME...?



WHAT IS IT YOU WANT, SIF? I CAN SEE THAT MY VERY PRESENCE CAUSES YOU PAIN.

WHY DO YOU SEEK ME OUT?



I WANT TO KNOW-- WHY YOU STRUCK ME. AND WHY YOU LET ME GO WITH BETA RAY BILL.

LOVE IS THE ANSWER TO BOTH QUESTIONS, SIF.

I COULD NOT HOLD YOU FROM GOING WITH BILL WHEN HE AND HIS QUEST WERE WHAT YOU NEEDED MOST.

AND MY LOVE FOR LORELEI WAS SO ALL-CONSUMING, SO ALL-ENVELOPING THAT I WOULD HAVE DONE ANYTHING FOR IT.



BUT THAT LOVE WAS FALSE; A SPELL WROUGHT OF MAGIC!

PERHAPS THAT MADE IT ALL THE MORE POTENT.

NOW, LIKE ALL MAGIC, IT HAS FADED INTO NOTHING BUT THE CONSEQUENCES REMAIN.

ARE YOU CERTAIN THERE IS NOT ANOTHER ANSWER? THAT IN FACT YOU MAY NEVER HAVE LOVED ME TRULY?

WHAT CAN I ANSWER TO THAT?



YOU WOULD HAVE CERTAINTY WHEN ALL I SEE NOW IS ILLUSION.

WHEN ODIN VANISHED, HE TOOK ALL CERTAINTY WITH HIM.

BUT THIS I TRULY KNOW, I LOVED THE LADY SIF AS I HAVE NEVER LOVED ANOTHER.

WILL YOU CALL BILL TO THE ALTHING?

FOR WHAT REASON? HE IS NO ASGARDIAN.

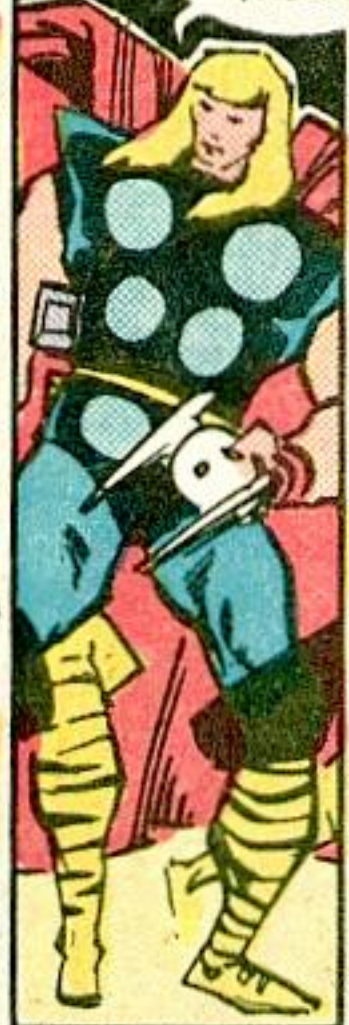
HE IS ODIN'S LAST, PERHAPS HIS GREATEST WORK. AS WORTHY AS THE MIGHTY THOR HIMSELF!



ANOTHER CERTAINTY, MY LADY?

VERY WELL. SUMMON BILL BACK FROM EARTH IF YOU DESIRE. BUT REMEMBER WHAT I AM LEARNING NOW...

...MAGIC, EVEN MY FATHER'S, MAY ONLY BE ILLUSION IN THE END. AND WE LIVE WITH THE CONSEQUENCES.



NOW IF YOU WILL PARDON ME...

...THE LONGER WE DELAY, THE LONGER INNOCENTS MUST LANGUISH IN HEL.



DID YOU REALLY HOPE HE WOULD ANSWER SUCH QUESTIONS?

I...I WANTED TO HEAR SOMETHING ELSE.



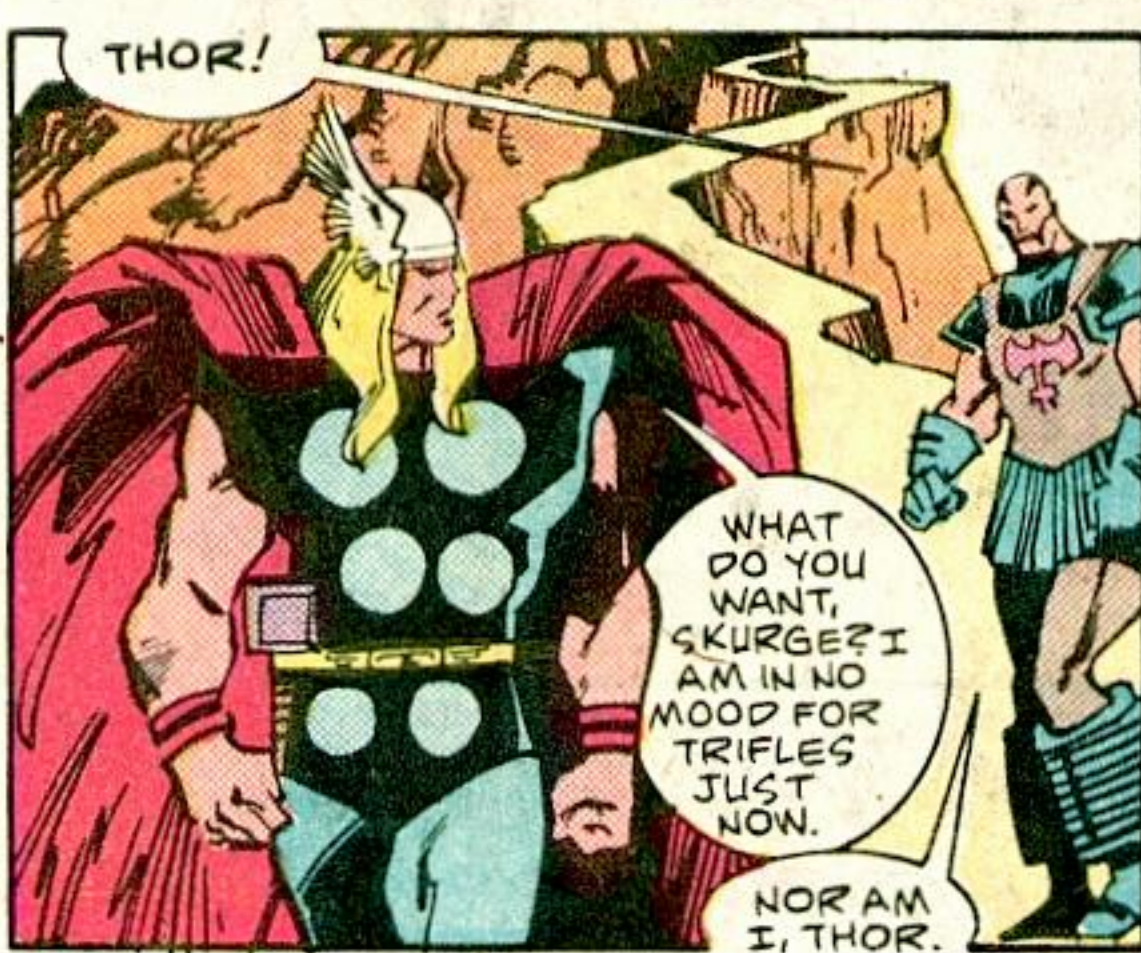
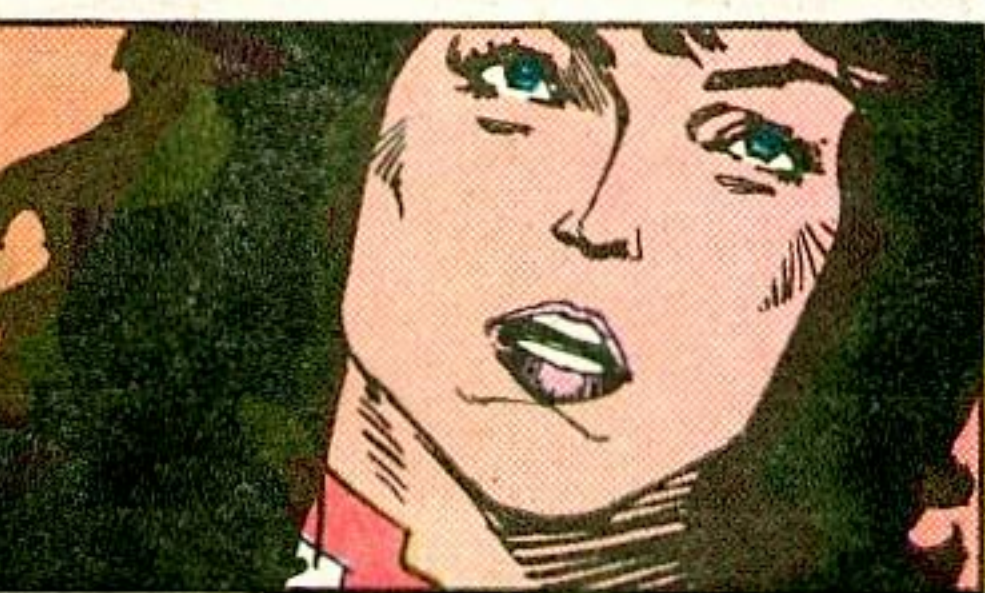
SIF, MY FOSTER-SON IS FALLABLE, AS ARE ALL OF US. AND HE HAS LOST HIS FATHER.

YET HEED THIS ONE WORD--BETA RAY BILL IS A WORTHY HERO IN-DEED.

BUT BEWARE--HE IS A MORTAL AND IN THE END, MORTALS MAY BE AS ILLUSORY AS MAGIC.



DO NOT JUDGE HIM TOO HARSHLY--THE POWER OF LOKI'S ENCHANTMENTS IS BEYOND QUESTION.



THOR!

WHAT DO YOU WANT, SKURGE? I AM IN NO MOOD FOR TRIFLES JUST NOW.

NOR AM I, THOR.

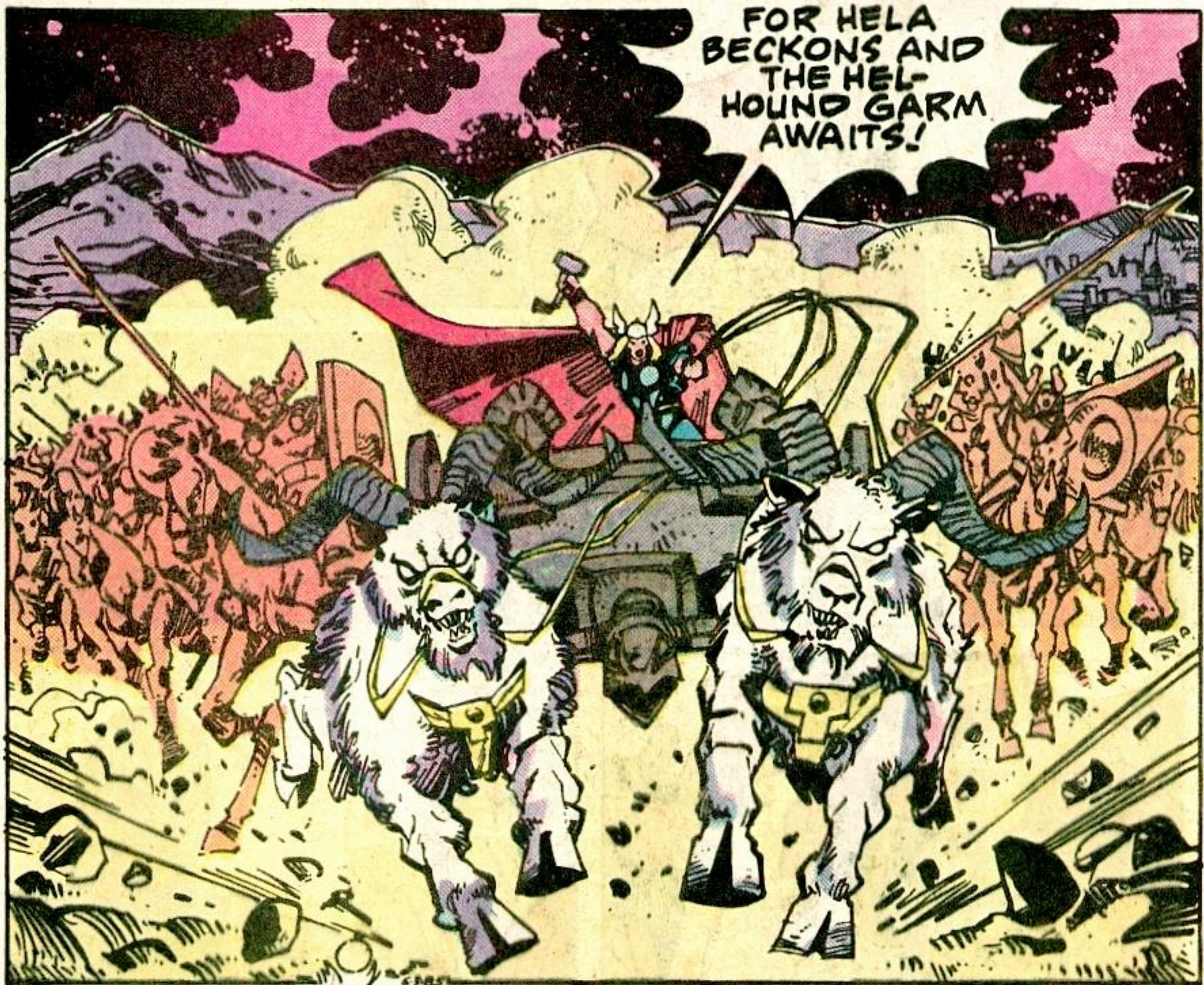
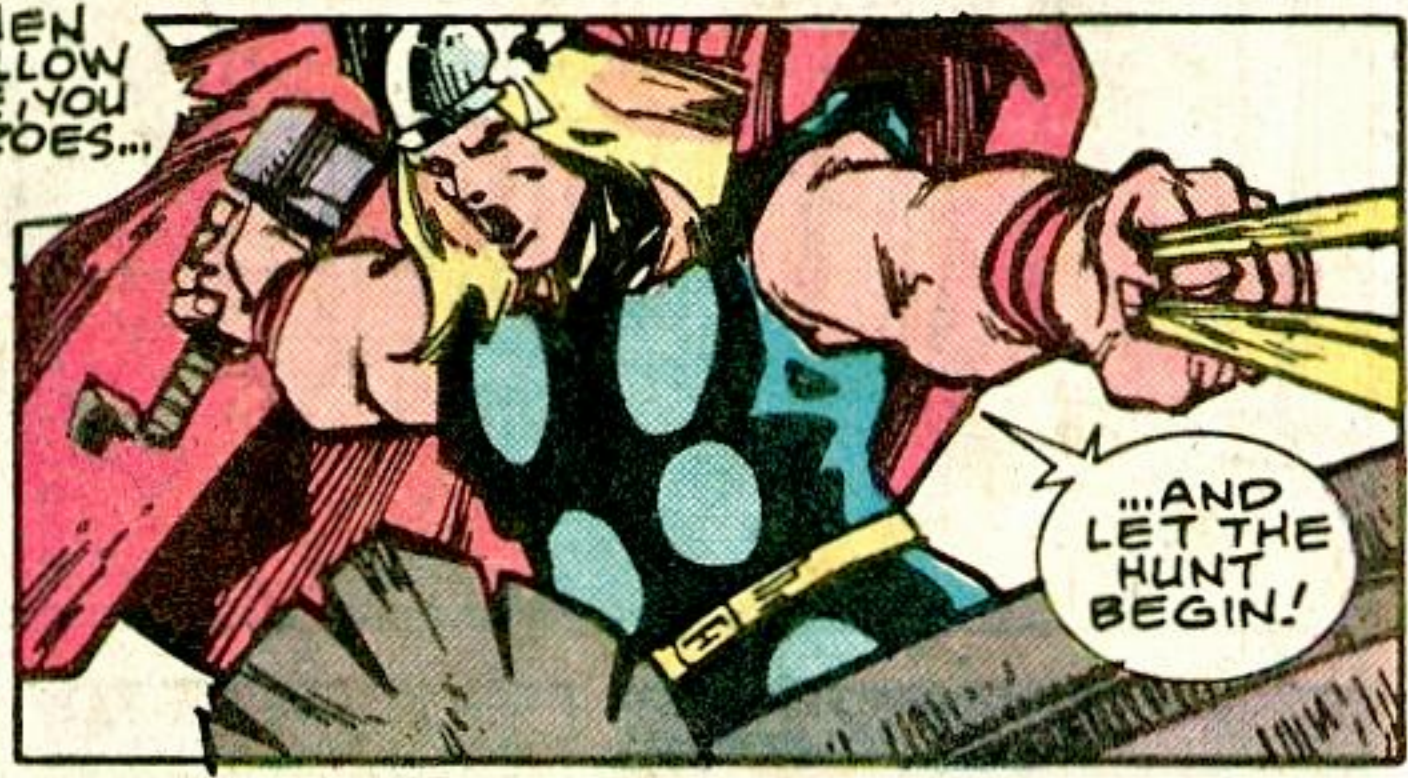


I WANT TO RIDE WITH YOU INTO HEL!

YOU WOULD NOT REGRET IT! 'TIS SOMETHING I NEED TO DO.

I THINK PERHAPS THAT WE SHARE THE SAME NEED, EXECUTIONER.

VERY WELL WE LEAVE WITHIN THE HOUR.



**NEXT: THE QUICK AND THE DEAD!
OR HEL IS FOR HEROES!!**