

MARVEL
25TH
ANNIVERSARY

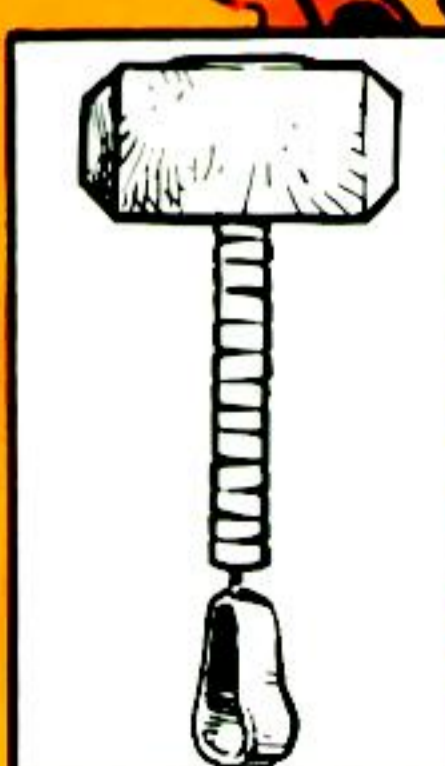


the mighty **THOR**

WHAT DO YOU CALL A 6'6" FIGHTING-MAD
FROG?

75¢
U.K. 40p
CAN. 95c

366
APR



ANSWER INSIDE

STAN LEE PRESENTS *the* MIGHTY THOR

ONCE THE SHINING RAINBOW BRIDGE CONNECTED ASGARD, HOME OF THE MIGHTY NORSE GODS, WITH MIDGARD*, HOME OF ORDINARY MORTALS...

... AND THOSE WHO TRAVELED BETWEEN THE WORLDS NEEDED SIMPLY TO WALK ACROSS HER CRYSTAL-LINE LENGTH.

PULL, TOOTH-GNASHER! PULL, TOOTH-GRINDER! PULL TILL YOUR HEARTS BREAK!

GAH!

BUT THE BRIDGE IS GONE, DESTROYED BY THE HAND OF WAR, AND ONLY THOSE WHO ARE HEROIC ENOUGH...

...OR FOOLISH ENOUGH...

...NOW DARE TO SET THEIR LIVES AT HAZARD AGAINST THE COSMIC STORMS THAT RAGE BETWEEN THOSE ANCIENT REALMS.

FEAR NOT. THERE WILL ALWAYS BE HEROES AND FOOLS!

*EARTH

Walter Simonson · John Workman · Max Scheele · Ralph Macchio · Jim Shooter
ART AND STORY LETTERING COLORS EDITING EDITOR IN CHIEF

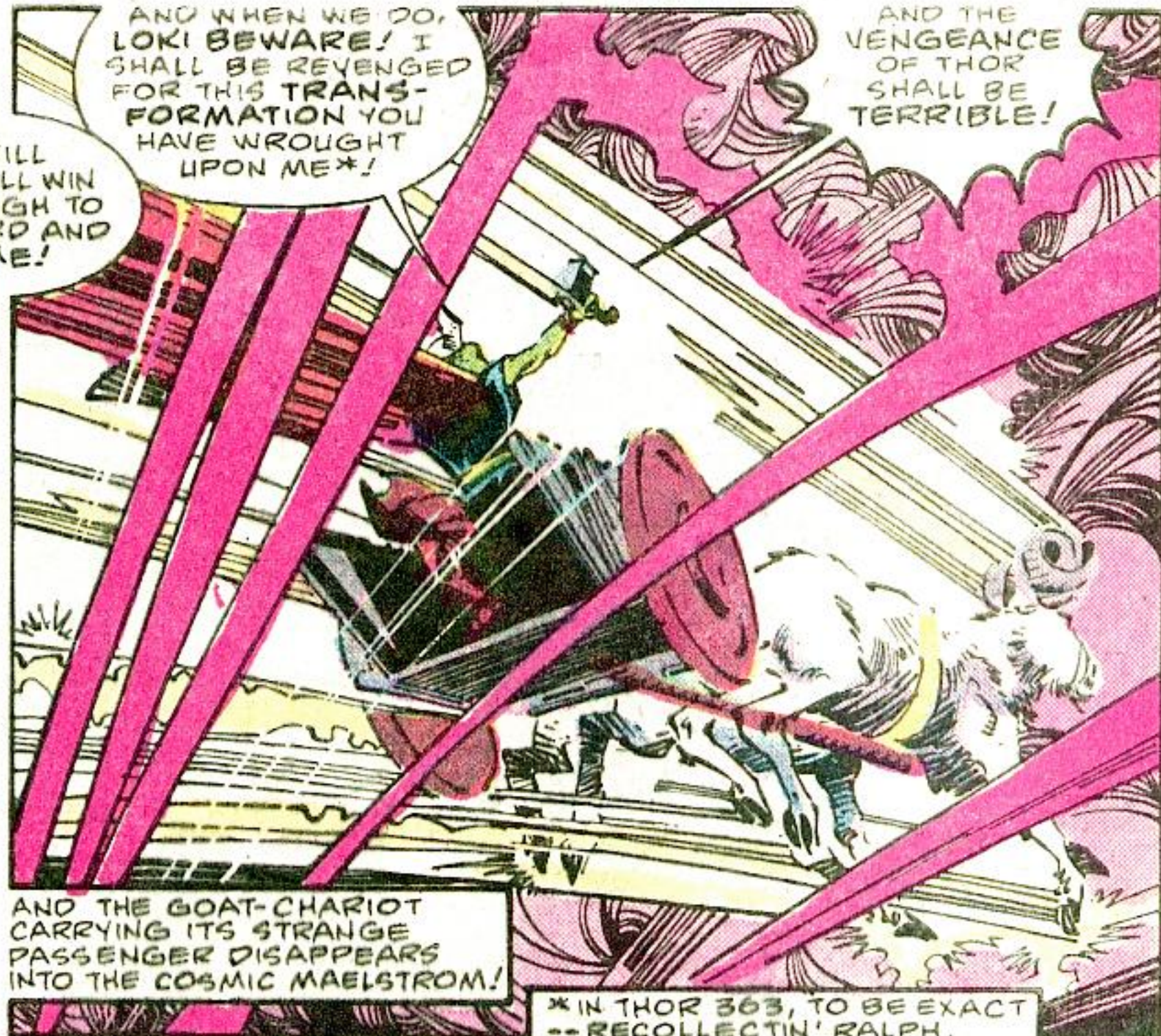
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THOUGH WE HAVE FOUGHT THESE TERRIBLE STORMS TILL I HAVE LOST COUNT OF DAYS...



...STILL WE WILL WIN THROUGH TO ASGARD AND HOME!

AND WHEN WE DO, LOKI BEWARE! I SHALL BE REVENGED FOR THIS TRANSFORMATION YOU HAVE WROUGHT UPON ME*!



AND THE VENGEANCE OF THOR SHALL BE TERRIBLE!

AND THE GOAT-CHARIOT CARRYING ITS STRANGE PASSENGER DISAPPEARS INTO THE COSMIC MAELSTROM!

* IN THOR 363, TO BE EXACT -- RECOLLECTIN' RALPH.

MEANWHILE, UNAWARE OF THE ANGER THAT SEEKS TO REACH ACROSS THE GAP BETWEEN THE WORLDS...



...LOKI STRUTS ABOUT THE FLOOR OF HIS GREAT HALL NEAR THE EDGE OF ASGARD.

THE ALTHING WILL MEET AGAIN TOMORROW AND WHEN IT DOES, LOKI, THE SON OF LAUFHEY, SCION OF THE FROST GIANTS...



...WILL BE PROCLAIMED RULER OF ALL ASGARD!

FOR I HAVE DISCOVERED HELMDALL'S RUSE AND HE KNOWS IT NOT.

UPON THE SPURIOUS HAMMER OF THOR I HAVE PLACED A SPELL. AT MY COMMAND, THE HAMMER WILL DO MY BIDDING.

AND ASGARD WILL BE MINE!

AND WHAT OF ME?

YOU SHALL REMAIN AS MY GUEST FOR A FEW DAYS LONGER.

FOR THOUGH I HOLD HELMDALL IN THE HOLLOW OF MY HAND, I DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE FORMER GUARDIAN OF THE BRIDGE.

I SHALL KEEP YOU IN READINESS AS YET ANOTHER STRING IN LOKI'S BOW.



ELSEWHERE, IN THE HOUSE OF HEIMDALL AT THE EDGE OF THE NOW SHATTERED RAINBOW BRIDGE...

I DO NOT LIKE IT.

TOMORROW, WE CHOOSE A NEW RULER OF THE GOLDEN REALM.

HAROKIN HAS PLAYED THE ROLE OF THOR SO WELL THAT NONE SUSPECT THE GOD OF THUNDER IS MISSING...

...BUT DESPITE OUR BEST EFFORTS, WE CAN FIND NO TRACE OF THE REAL THOR...

...AND I FEAR LOKI WILL SWAY THE CROWD BEYOND OUR ABILITY TO CONTROL.

WHAT SHALL WE DO? DO WE DARE PROPOSE A FALSE THOR AS RULER OF THE GOLDEN REALM IN THE HOPE THAT THE TRUE ONE WILL REAPPEAR?

SUCH A DEED WOULD SMACK TOO MUCH OF LOKI!

I FOR ONE WILL HAVE NO PART IN FURTHER DECEPTIONS.

HOGUN THE GRIM IS RIGHT. THE DANGER OF CORRUPTING THE ALTHING IS TOO GREAT.

I SAY THAT HAROKIN SHALL PLAY OUT THE ROLE OF THOR TOMORROW ON THE STAGE AND THEN RETIRE. LET THE GAME END AS IT WILL.

VOLSTAGG, HAVE YOU LOCATED THE GREAT SWORD OF SURTUR FOUND BY HILDY AND HER FRIENDS?*

I FEAR NOT, HEIMDALL, FOR EVEN NOW, MY DAUGHTER LIES IN SICKBED.

HOW SAY YOU, VOLSTAGG?

*THOR 363

THE HEALER THINKS SHE MAY BE DYING AND HE IS UNABLE TO QUENCH HER RAGING FEVER.

LIKEWISE, HER PLAYMATES WHO FOUND THE SWORD HAVE ALSO BEEN STRICKEN.

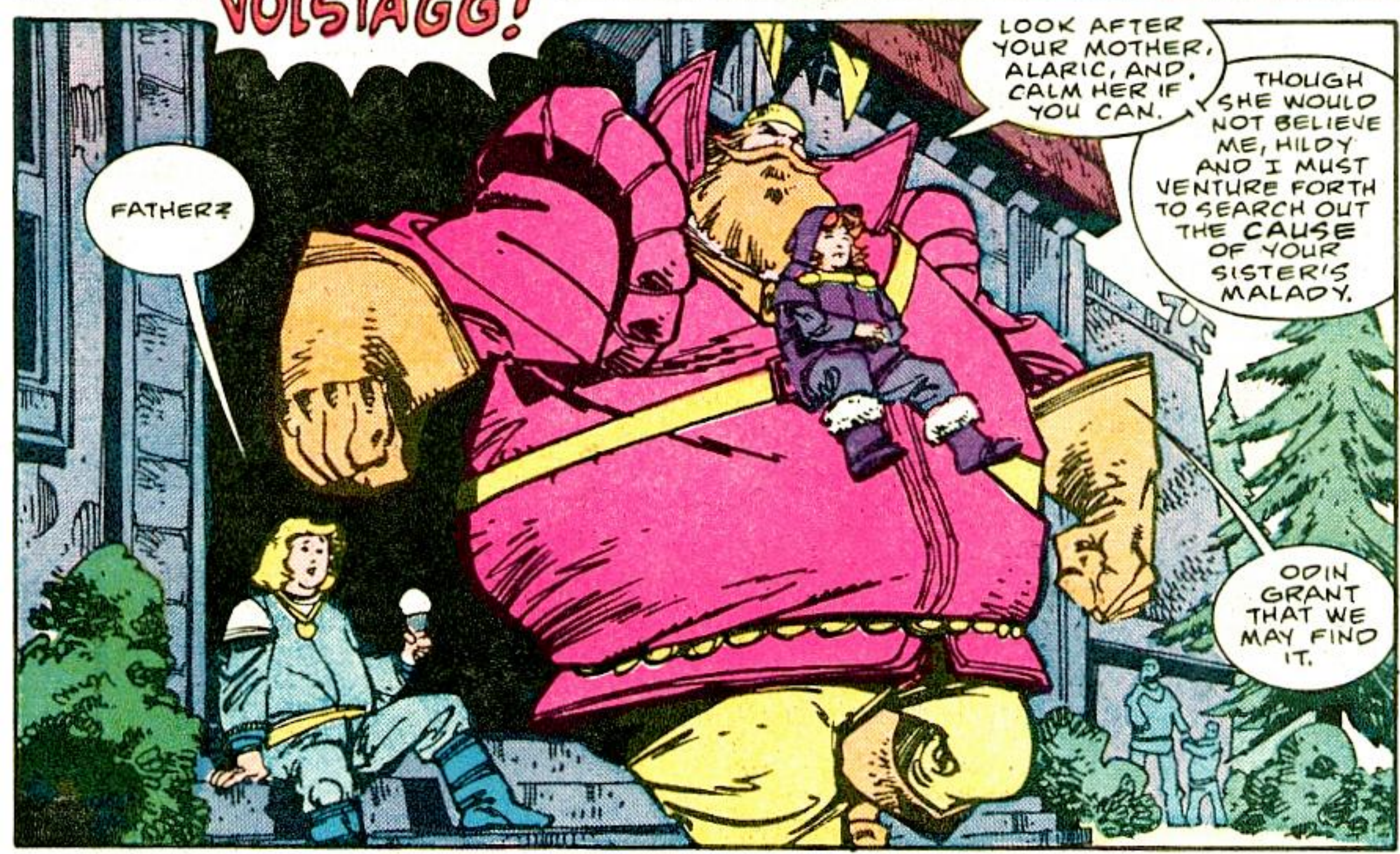
MY WIFE AND I HAVE THOUGHT OF NOTHING ELSE THESE PAST TWO WEEKS. IN TRUTH, I HAD FORGOTTEN THE SWORD.

WE MUST FIND IT! IF HILDY'S REPORT OF A VAST ENGINE DRAINING ENERGY FROM THE SWORD IS TRUE, THEN SURELY LOKI IS RESPONSIBLE.

YES, ONLY HE WOULD HAVE THE SORCEROUS KNOWLEDGE TO FIND THE SWORD AND KEEP IT SECRET WHILE BENDING ITS POWER TO HIS WILL...

...AND SUCH POWER IN HIS HANDS SURELY THREATENS ALL ASGARD!

PERHAPS IT IS THIS POWER WHICH THREATENS HILDY'S LIFE EVEN NOW.





ARE YOU COMFORTABLE, MY DARLING?

I... I AM ALL RIGHT... FATHER...

...BUT AM I NOT TOO HEAVY... FOR YOU? I FEEL AS THOUGH... I WEIGH... AS MUCH AS THOR'S HAMMER... MJOLNIR.

NONSENSE, LITTLE ONE! TO ONE OF VOLSTAGG'S MIGHTY GIRTH, YOU ARE BUT THE LIGHTEST OF FEATHERS...

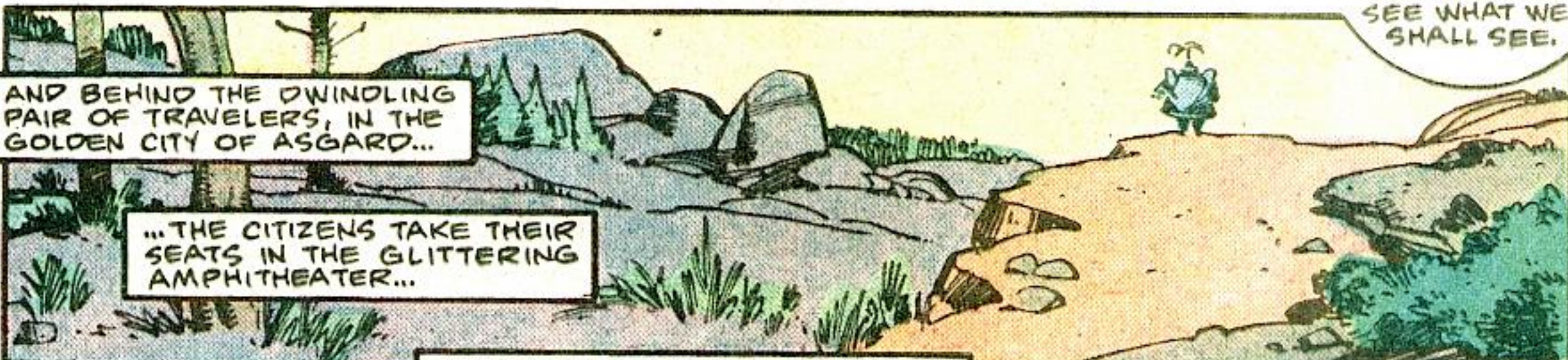
...LIGHTER THAN THE LIGHT ELVES THEMSELVES!



NOW YOU SHALL BE MY LITTLE HOUND...

...AND I SHALL BE THE BELLOWING HUNTER WHO FOLLOWS YOU INTO THE WILDERNESS. HARROOOO!

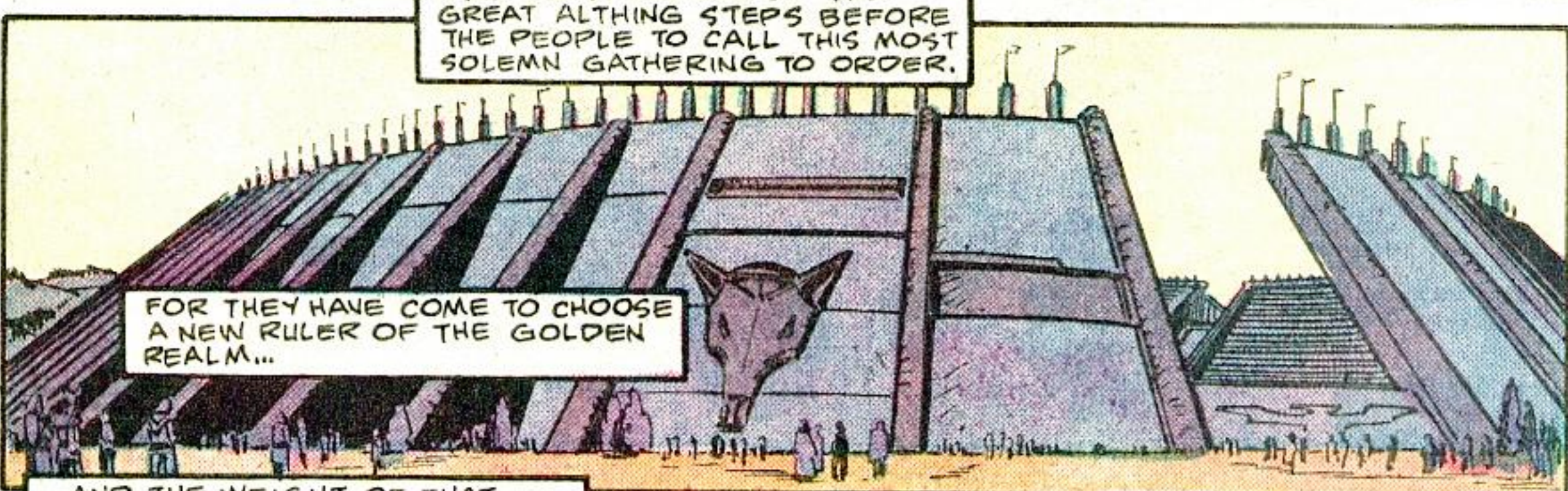
AND TOGETHER, WE SHALL FIND THIS INVISIBLE SWORD OF SURTUR AND SEE WHAT WE SHALL SEE.



AND BEHIND THE DWINDLING PAIR OF TRAVELERS, IN THE GOLDEN CITY OF ASGARD...

...THE CITIZENS TAKE THEIR SEATS IN THE GLITTERING AMPHITHEATER...

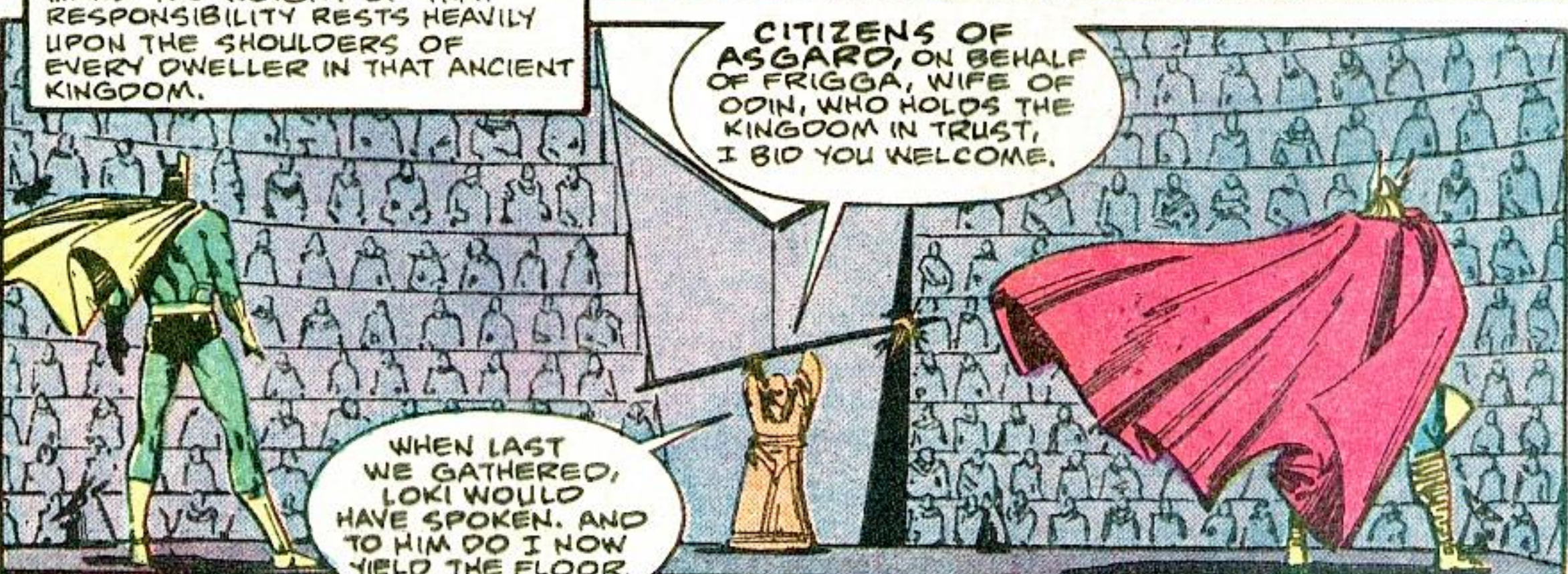
...AS THE LANGIVER OF THE GREAT ALTHING STEPS BEFORE THE PEOPLE TO CALL THIS MOST SOLEMN GATHERING TO ORDER.



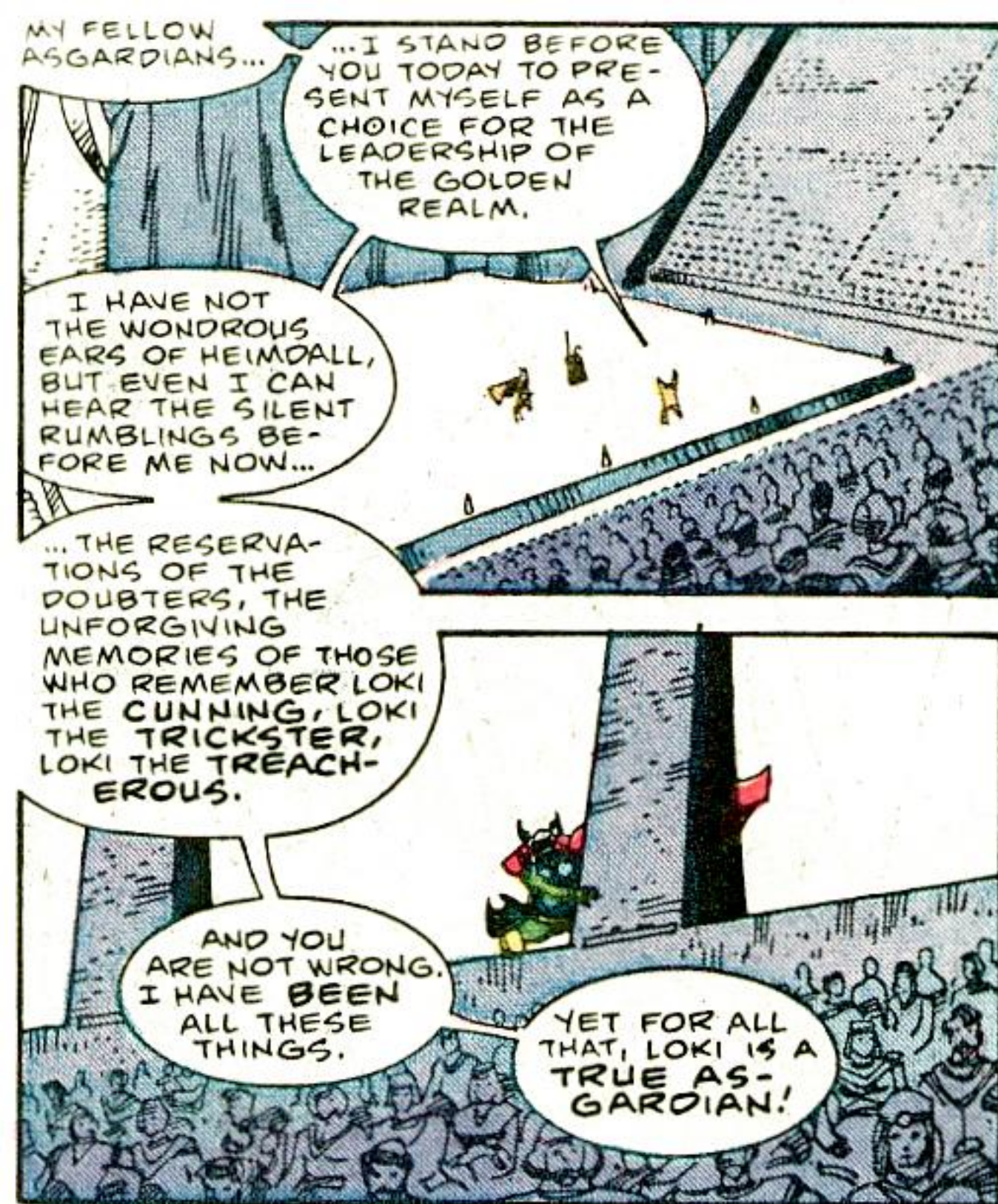
FOR THEY HAVE COME TO CHOOSE A NEW RULER OF THE GOLDEN REALM...

...AND THE WEIGHT OF THAT RESPONSIBILITY RESTS HEAVILY UPON THE SHOULDERS OF EVERY DWELLER IN THAT ANCIENT KINGDOM.

CITIZENS OF ASGARD, ON BEHALF OF FRIGGA, WIFE OF ODIN, WHO HOLDS THE KINGDOM IN TRUST, I BID YOU WELCOME.



WHEN LAST WE GATHERED, LOKI WOULD HAVE SPOKEN. AND TO HIM DO I NOW YIELD THE FLOOR.



MY FELLOW ASGARDIANS...

...I STAND BEFORE YOU TODAY TO PRESENT MYSELF AS A CHOICE FOR THE LEADERSHIP OF THE GOLDEN REALM.

I HAVE NOT THE WONDROUS EARS OF HEIMDALL, BUT EVEN I CAN HEAR THE SILENT RUMBLINGS BEFORE ME NOW...

... THE RESERVATIONS OF THE DOUBTERS, THE UNFORGIVING MEMORIES OF THOSE WHO REMEMBER LOKI THE CUNNING, LOKI THE TRICKSTER, LOKI THE TREACHEROUS.

AND YOU ARE NOT WRONG. I HAVE BEEN ALL THESE THINGS.

YET FOR ALL THAT, LOKI IS A TRUE ASGARDIAN!



WHEN BOTH LORD ODIN AND THE MIGHTY THOR LAY VANQUISHED...

...WHO STOOD ALONE BETWEEN FIERY SURTUR'S ANGER AND THE ETERNAL FLAME*?

WHO BRAVED THE FURY OF THAT ANCIENT WRATH, AND FOUGHT AGAINST THE BURNING DOOM OF ALL THAT LIVED*?

AND WHO LEARNED BY DOING SO THAT HE TREASURED ASGARD AND ITS WELL-BEING ABOVE ALL OTHER THINGS?



ODIN RULED THROUGH STRENGTH, BUT TO OUR EVER-LASTING SORROW, HE IS GONE.

NONE WHO LIVE CAN HOPE TO MATCH HIM...

...YET ALL KNOW THAT I AM NOT WITHOUT A CERTAIN POWER OF MY OWN.

A GREAT LEADER MUST BE TESTED. SURELY I HAVE BEEN.

WHO AMONGST YOU CARRIES THE BURDEN I BEAR? LOKI, THE URCHIN OF ASGARD'S ENEMIES!



LOKI, CHILD OF GIANTS! LOKI, FOREVER MISTRUSTED!

AND YET, AM I NOT THE FOSTER SON OF ODIN?

BUT I DO NOT ASK FOR YOUR TRUST. I HAVE EARNED IT!



LOOK, MY FELLOW ASGARDIANS, AND BELIEVE!

WHAT--!!

THE HAMMER!
HE HOLDS ALOFT
MJOLNIR!

BUT NONE
CAN LIFT IT
WHO ARE NOT
WORTHY.

EVEN NOBLE
BALDER
CANNOT RAISE
THE HAMMER
FROM THE
GROUND!



AND NOW, MY FELLOW
ASGARDIANS, THE
MIGHTY LOKI SHALL
PUT YOUR FINAL
DOUBTS TO REST!

HE KNOWS!
LOKI KNOWS
THAT I AM
NOT THE REAL
THOR AND
MY HAMMER
IS A FALSE
ONE!

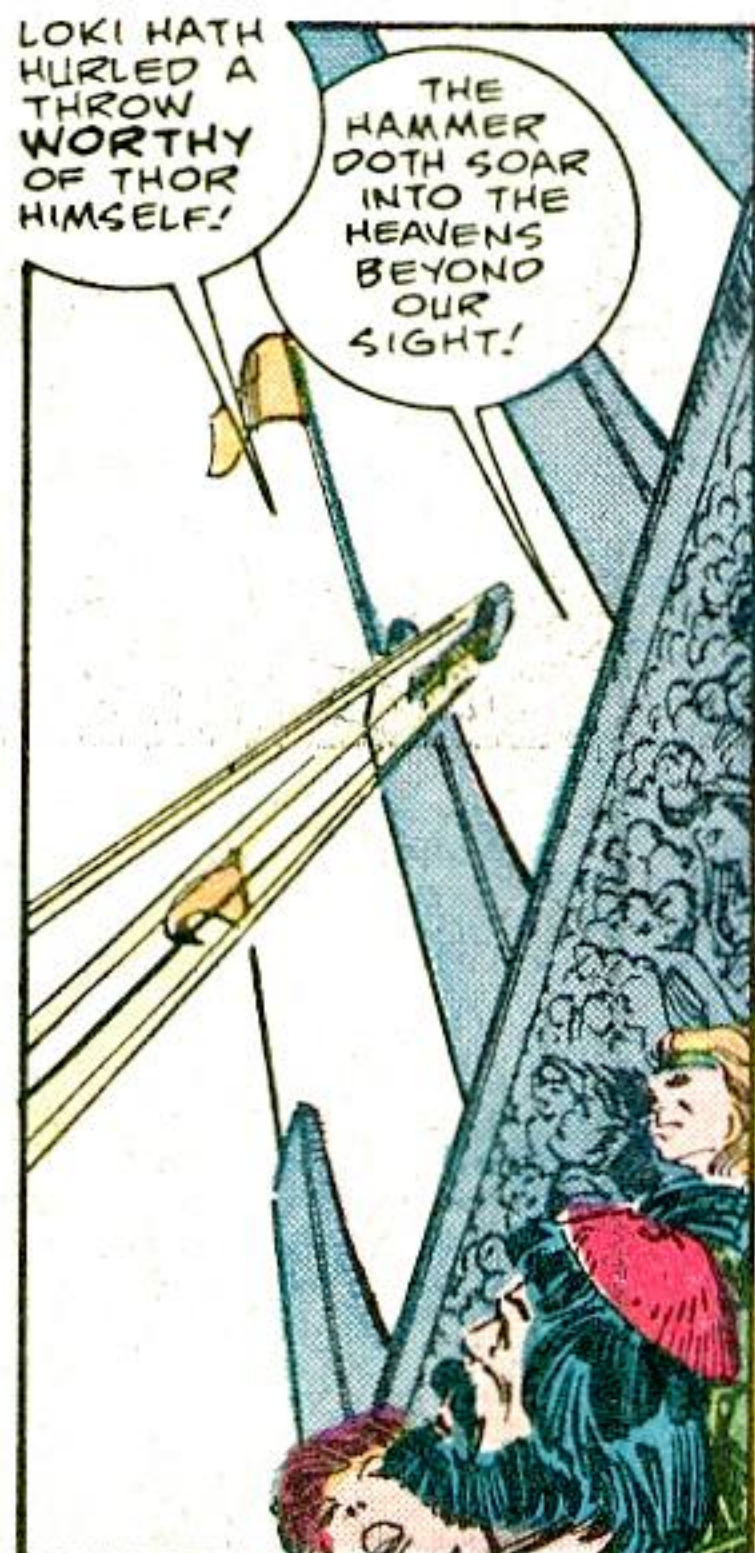


BEHOLD!
THE VERY
POWER OF
THOR IS
MINE!



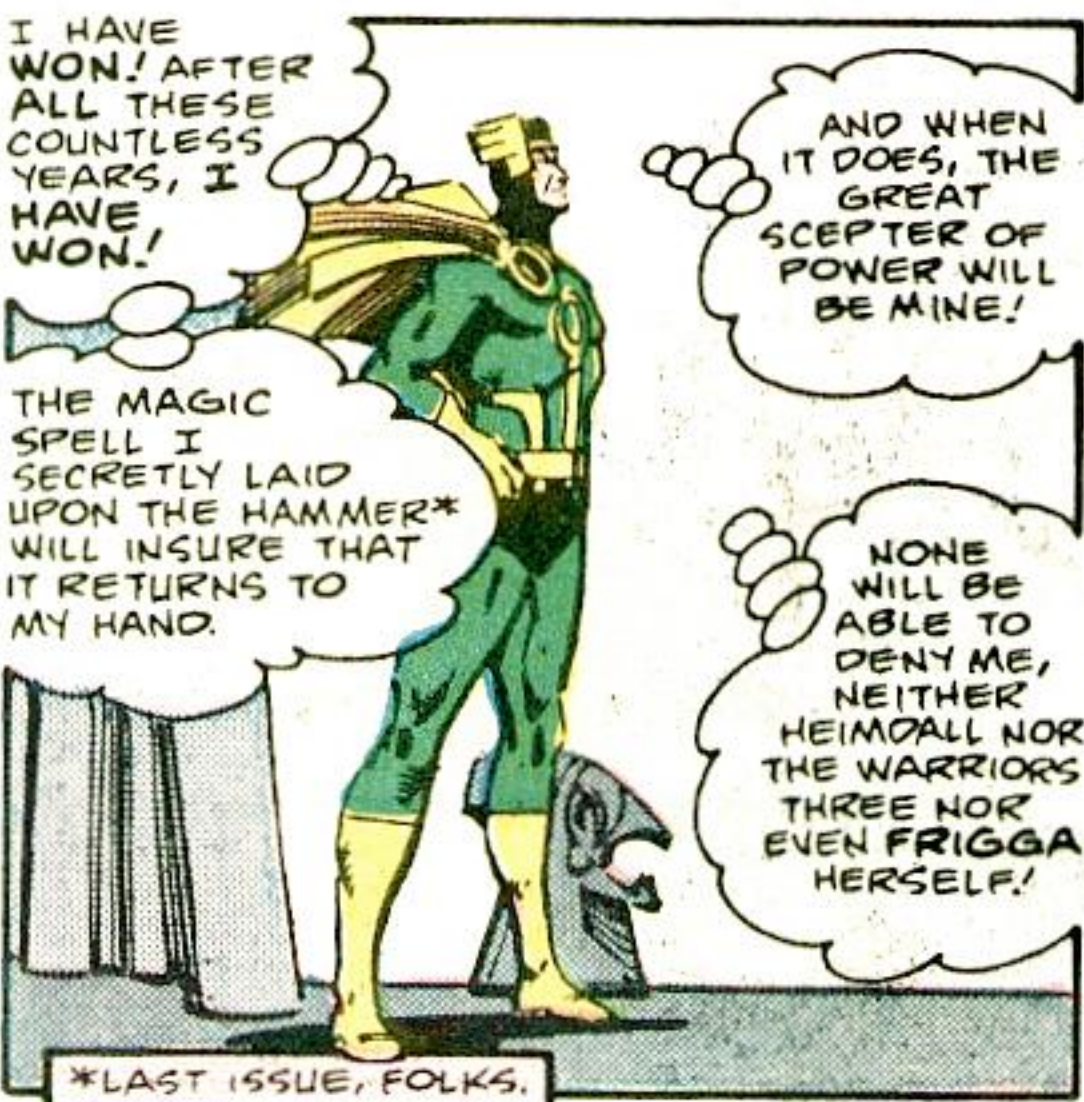
LOKI HATH
HURLED A
THROW
WORTHY
OF THOR
HIMSELF!

THE
HAMMER
DOETH SOAR
INTO THE
HEAVENS
BEYOND
OUR
SIGHT!



I HAVE
WON! AFTER
ALL THESE
COUNTLESS
YEARS, I
HAVE
WON!

THE MAGIC
SPELL I
SECRETLY LAID
UPON THE HAMMER*
WILL INSURE THAT
IT RETURNS TO
MY HAND.



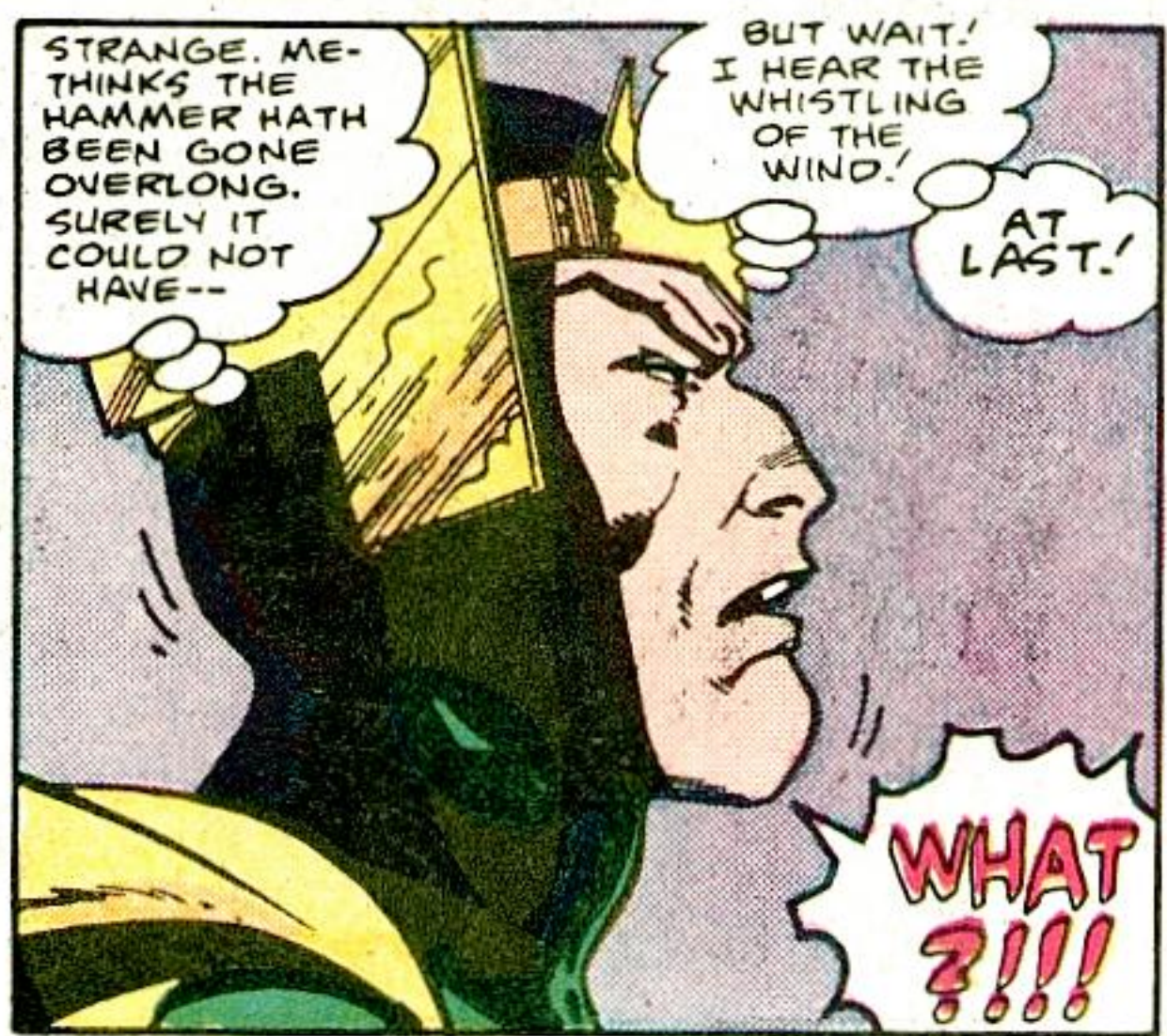
AND WHEN
IT DOES, THE
GREAT
SCEPTER OF
POWER WILL
BE MINE!

NONE
WILL BE
ABLE TO
DENY ME,
NEITHER
HEIMDALL NOR
THE WARRIORS
THREE NOR
EVEN FRIGGA
HERSELF!

STRANGE. ME-
THINKS THE
HAMMER HATH
BEEN GONE
OVERLONG.
SURELY IT
COULD NOT
HAVE--

BUT WAIT!
I HEAR THE
WHISTLING
OF THE
WIND!

AT
LAST!



WHAT
?!!!

*LAST ISSUE, FOLKS.

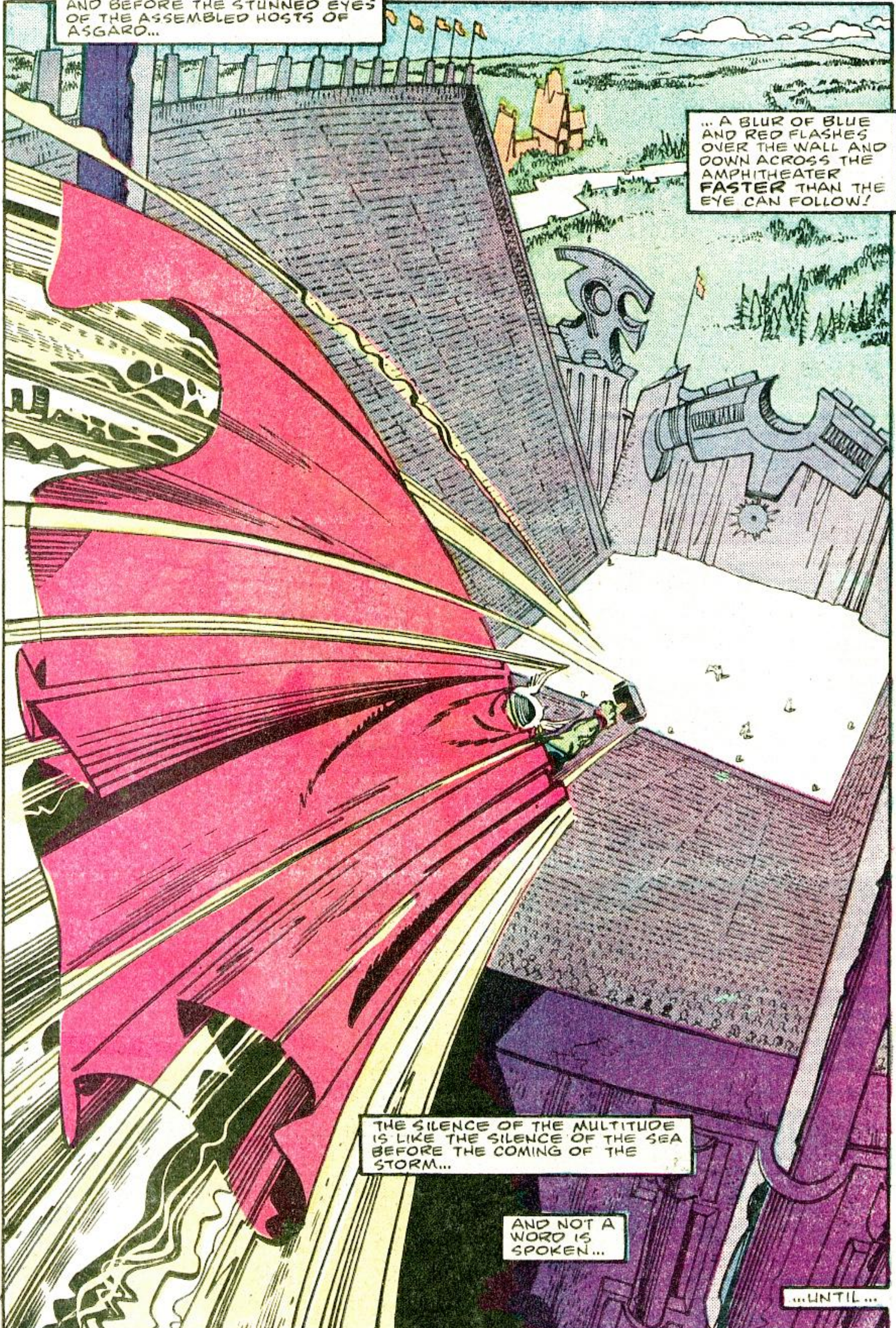
AND BEFORE THE STUNNED EYES
OF THE ASSEMBLED HOSTS OF
ASGARD...

... A BLUR OF BLUE
AND RED FLASHES
OVER THE WALL AND
DOWN ACROSS THE
AMPHITHEATER
FASTER THAN THE
EYE CAN FOLLOW!

THE SILENCE OF THE MULTITUDE
IS LIKE THE SILENCE OF THE SEA
BEFORE THE COMING OF THE
STORM...

AND NOT A
WORD IS
SPOKEN...

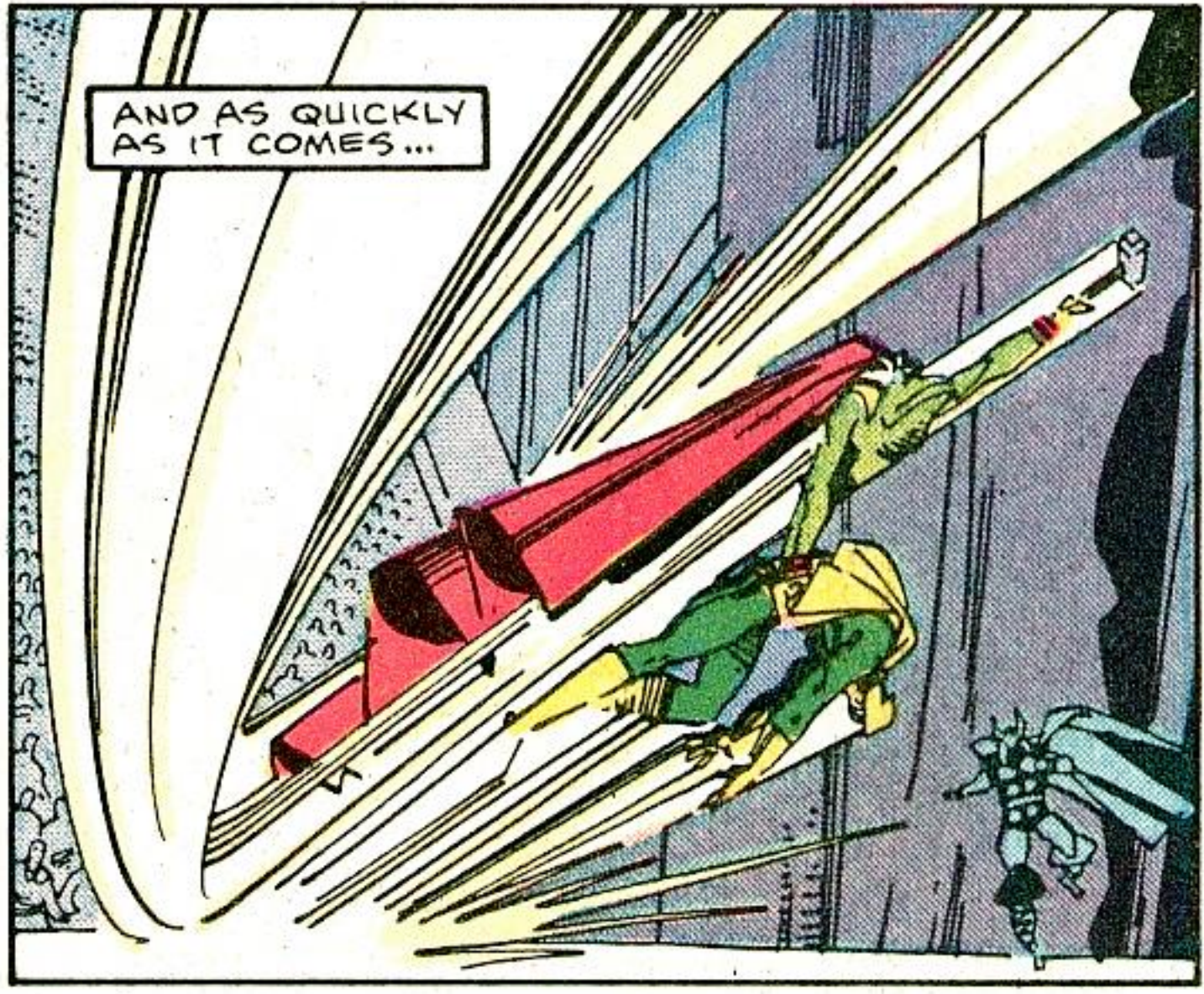
...UNTIL...



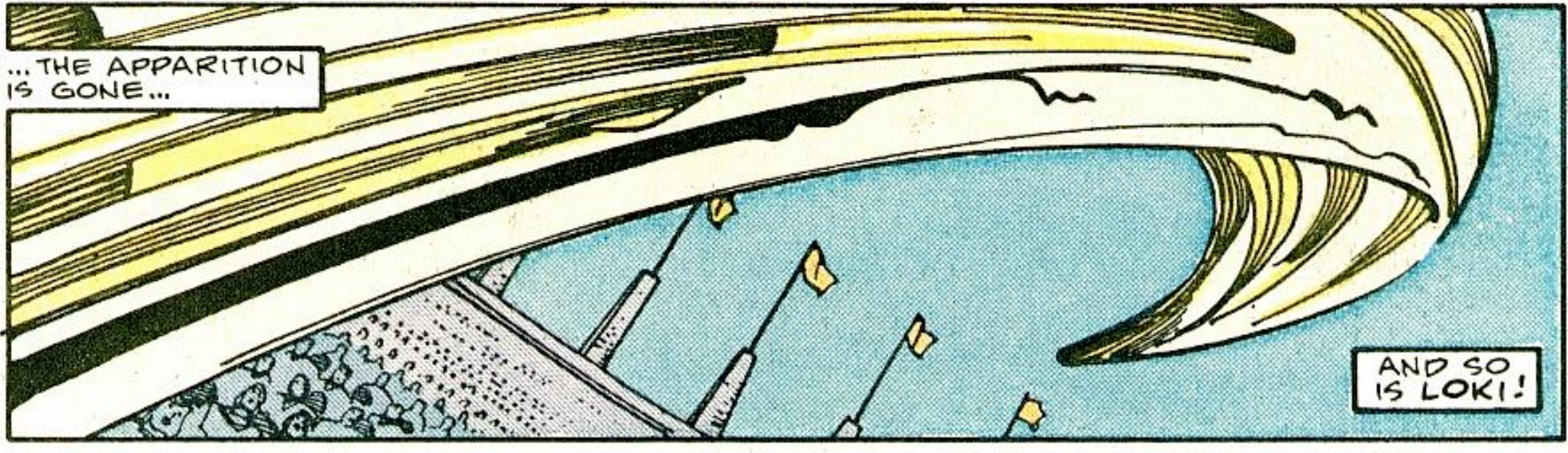
NO! NO! IT CANNOT BE!



AND AS QUICKLY AS IT COMES...



...THE APPARITION IS GONE...



AND SO IS LOKI!

THEN THE STORM DOOTH BREAK!



THOR! IT WAS ANOTHER THOR!

NAY! THOR WAS NEVER SO UNGAINLY!

A DEMON! SOME ENEMY HATH SEIZED THE ONE WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN OUR LEADER!

TO ARMS! SADDLE YOUR HORSES AND LET US FOLLOW! THIS SPECTER HAS DARED TO MOCK THE GREAT ALTHING!

HEIMDALL! YOURS ARE THE SHARPEST EYES IN ALL OF ASGARD!



TELL ME THAT I DID NOT SEE WHAT I HAVE SEEN.

THERE IS NO TIME TO LOSE. EVEN NOW I AM WATCHING THE RE-TREATING FLIGHT OF OUR VISITOR!

WE MUST RACE BACK TO MY HALL. THERE, YOU SHALL DIVEST YOURSELF OF THIS GARB!



I KNOW NOT WHAT THIS SIGHT PORTENDS, BUT I THINK IT BEST THAT THE FALSE THOR VANISH AND HAROKIN REAPPEAR POSTHASTE!

ALL STARE IN THE DIRECTION OF THE VANISHED APPARITION!

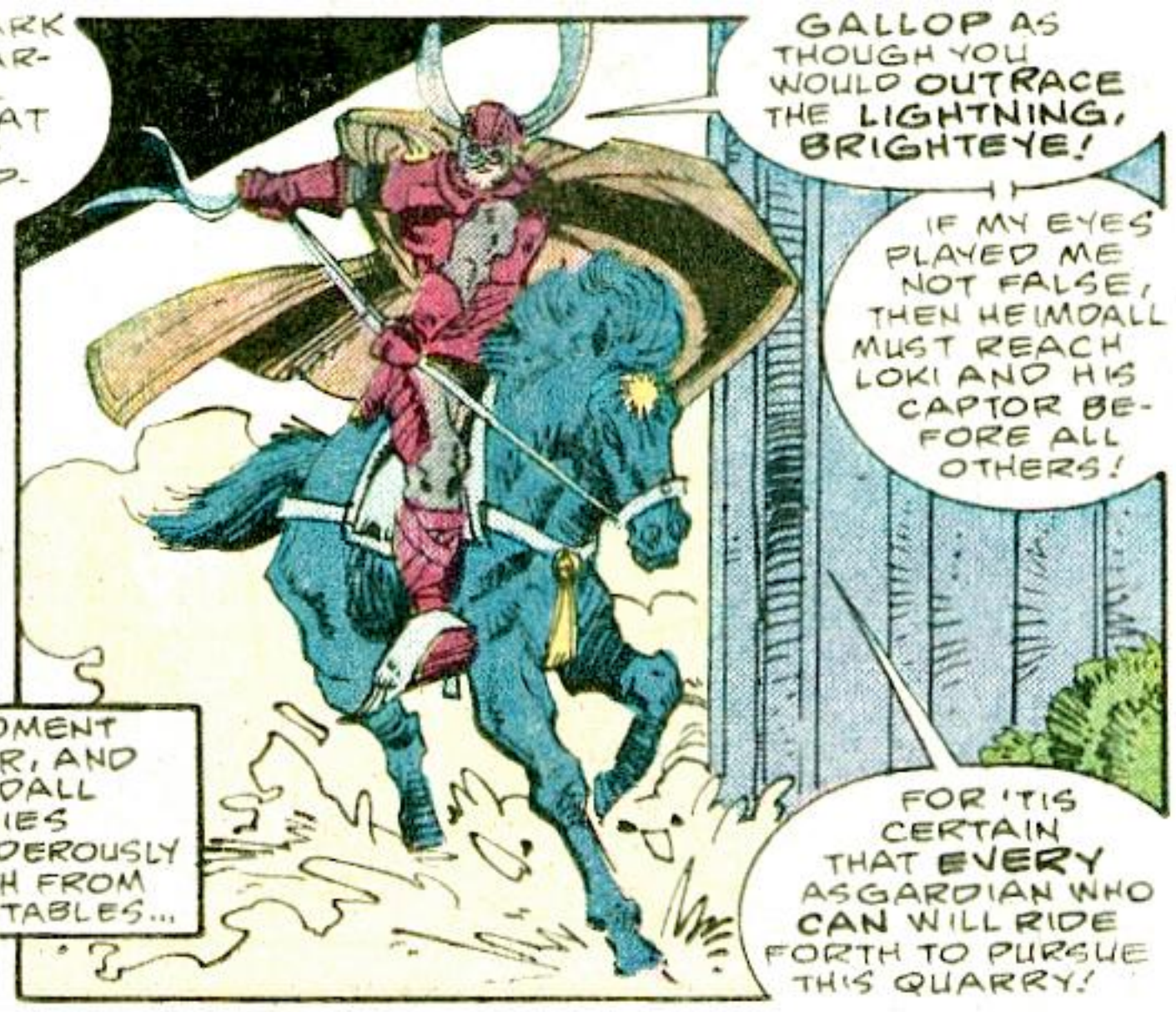
AND ANY WHO REMARK UPON THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THOR WILL SIMPLY ASSUME THAT HE HATH SPED TO INVESTIGATE THE KIDNAPING OF LOKI!

GALLOP AS THOUGH YOU WOULD OUTPACE THE LIGHTNING, BRIGHT EYE!

IF MY EYES PLAYED ME NOT FALSE, THEN HEIMDALL MUST REACH LOKI AND HIS CAPTOR BEFORE ALL OTHERS!

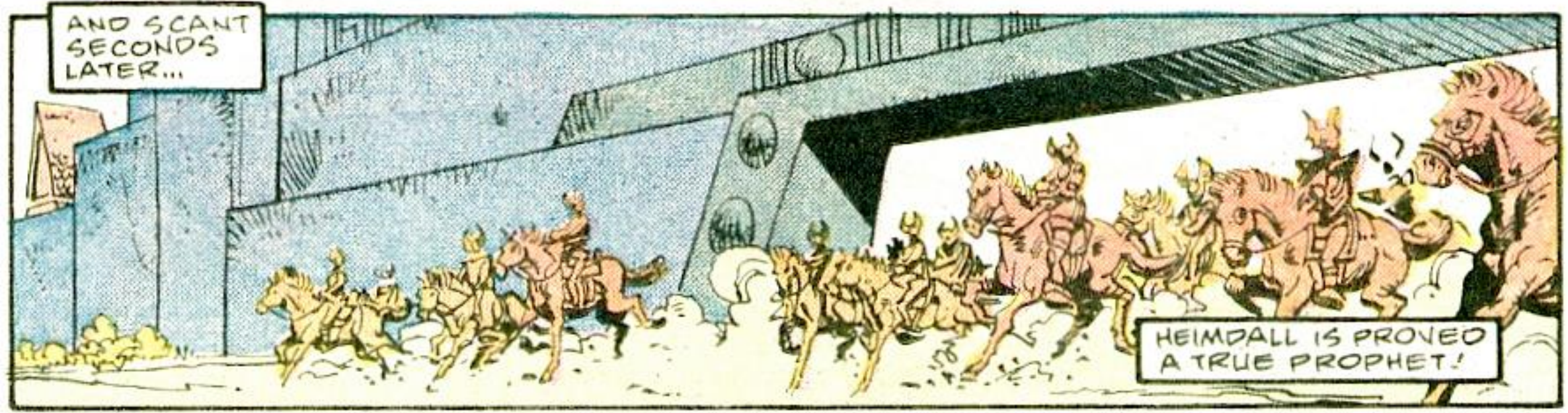
A MOMENT LATER, AND HEIMDALL SALLIES THUNDEROUSLY FORTH FROM HIS STABLES...

FOR 'TIS CERTAIN THAT EVERY ASGARDIAN WHO CAN WILL RIDE FORTH TO PURSUE THIS QUARRY!



AND SCANT SECONDS LATER...

HEIMDALL IS PROVED A TRUE PROPHET!



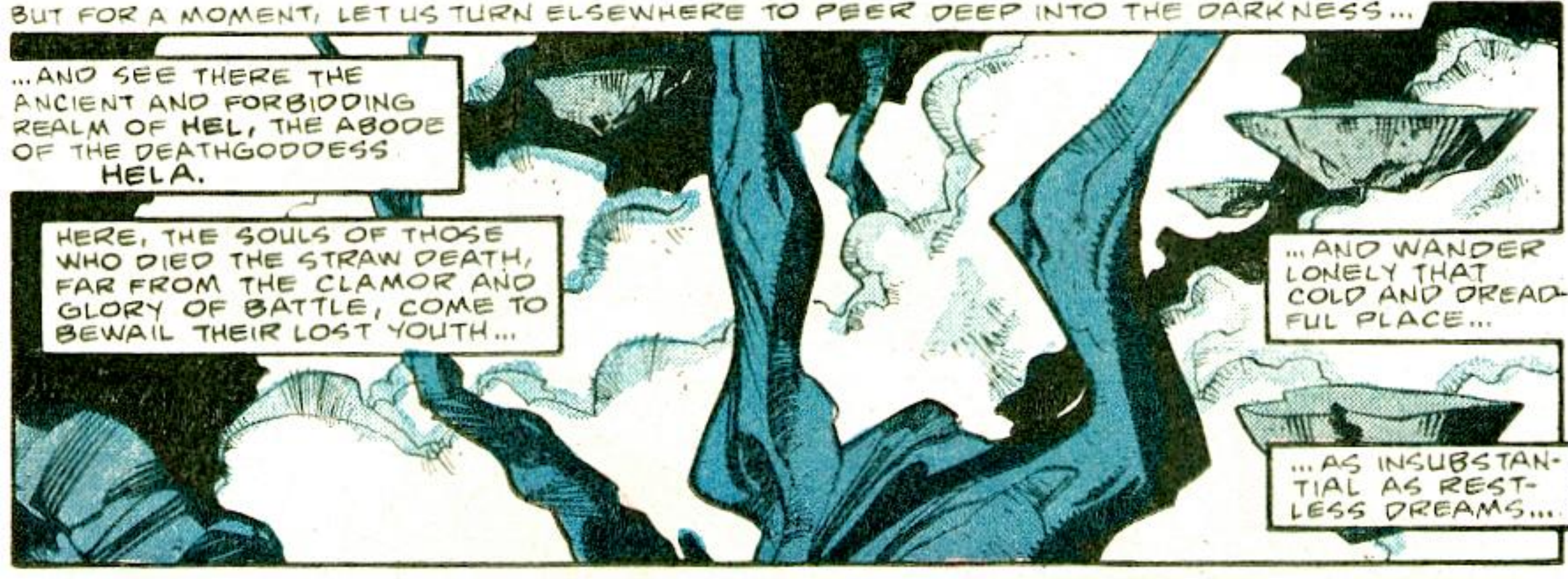
BUT FOR A MOMENT, LET US TURN ELSEWHERE TO PEEER DEEP INTO THE DARKNESS...

...AND SEE THERE THE ANCIENT AND FORBIDDING REALM OF HEL, THE ABODE OF THE DEATHGODDESS HELA.

HERE, THE SOULS OF THOSE WHO DIED THE STRAW DEATH, FAR FROM THE CLAMOR AND GLORY OF BATTLE, COME TO BEWAIL THEIR LOST YOUTH...

...AND WANDER LONELY THAT COLD AND DREADFUL PLACE...

...AS INSUBSTANTIAL AS RESTLESS DREAMS...



...WHERE EVEN THE ECHOES ARE WITHOUT SOUND.

KAKKROO KAMMM!!!



MALEKITH!
WHERE IS
MALEKITH?

NONE
WILL KEEP
KURSE FROM
HIM!!

THE WARRIOR
WHO HAS COME
FROM NOWHERE*
HAS DESTROYED
HALF MY KINGDOM
AND SEEMS
BEYOND THE
POWER OF MY
TOUCH!

AND
HE SEEKS
ONE WHO
HAS NOT
YET
DIED!

DRIVE
HIM, YOU
WARRIORS,
AND SPEED
HIM TOWARD
THE BRIDGE
ACROSS THE
RIVER
GJALLER-
BRU!

*NOT EXACTLY NO-
WHERE--SEE THOR
363--RM

DRIVE
HIM
FORTH
FROM HEL
AND LET THE
LIVING FEAR!

I'LL WARRANT
THIS IS MORE
OF THOR'S
WORK!

BUT WHEN THIS
KURSE IS DRIVEN
FORTH, I SHALL
TURN MY ATTEN-
TION TO THE GOD
OF THUNDER AND
I WILL BE
REVENGED!

WOULD
THAT I HAD
SLAIN
HIM
ON THE SPOT
WHEN HE
FIRST RODE
INTO HEL*!

*THOR 361/362, SCORE-
KEEPERS!--RM

MEANWHILE, NOT FAR BEYOND THE EDGE OF THE REBUILT CITY OF ASGARD...



NOW, LOKI, THE TIME OF RECKONING IS AT HAND!



OOFF FFF!!

IT SPEAKS! THE FROG CAN SPEAK!



AND WHY NOT, TRICKSTER? I CARRY THE HAMMER THAT HAS GIVEN A HUMBLE FROG THE POWER OF THOR!

AND THOR IS NOT MUTE!

PERHAPS NOT, BUT HOW PRICELESS IS THE SOUND OF HIS CROAKING VOICE TO LOKI'S EARS!

HOW MANY ASGARDIANS WOULD ABIDE A FROG AS RULER OF THE GOLDEN REALM, REGARDLESS OF ITS NOBILITY?

ANOTHER NAME MIGHT HELP.



WRETCH!

MAY WE NOT REFER TO THOR HENCEFORTH AS THE MIGHTY FROG OF THUNDER?

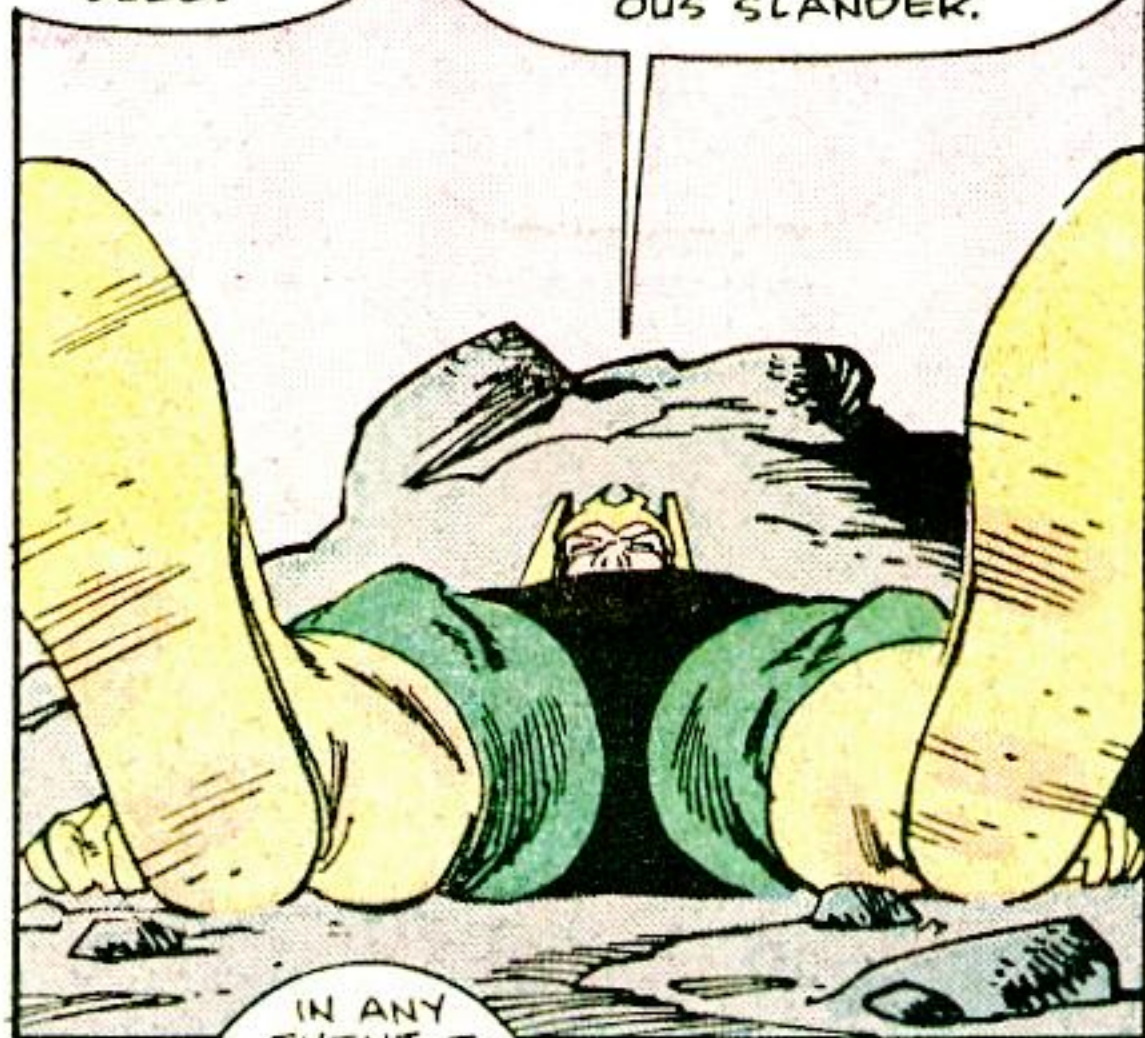
YOU HAD BEST UNDO THIS MAGIC SPELL, OR YOU SHALL GREET HELA FACE TO FACE!

THOR IS NO LAUGHING-STOCK OF ASGARD AND THIS TIME YOU HAVE GONE TOO FAR!

ALAS, MY LOVING STEP-FROG, THE SPELL IS ACCOMPLISHED AND CANNOT BE UNDONE!

BESIDES, THERE IS NO PROOF TO LINK GOOD LOKI WITH WHO-EVER HATH DONE THIS FOUL DEED!

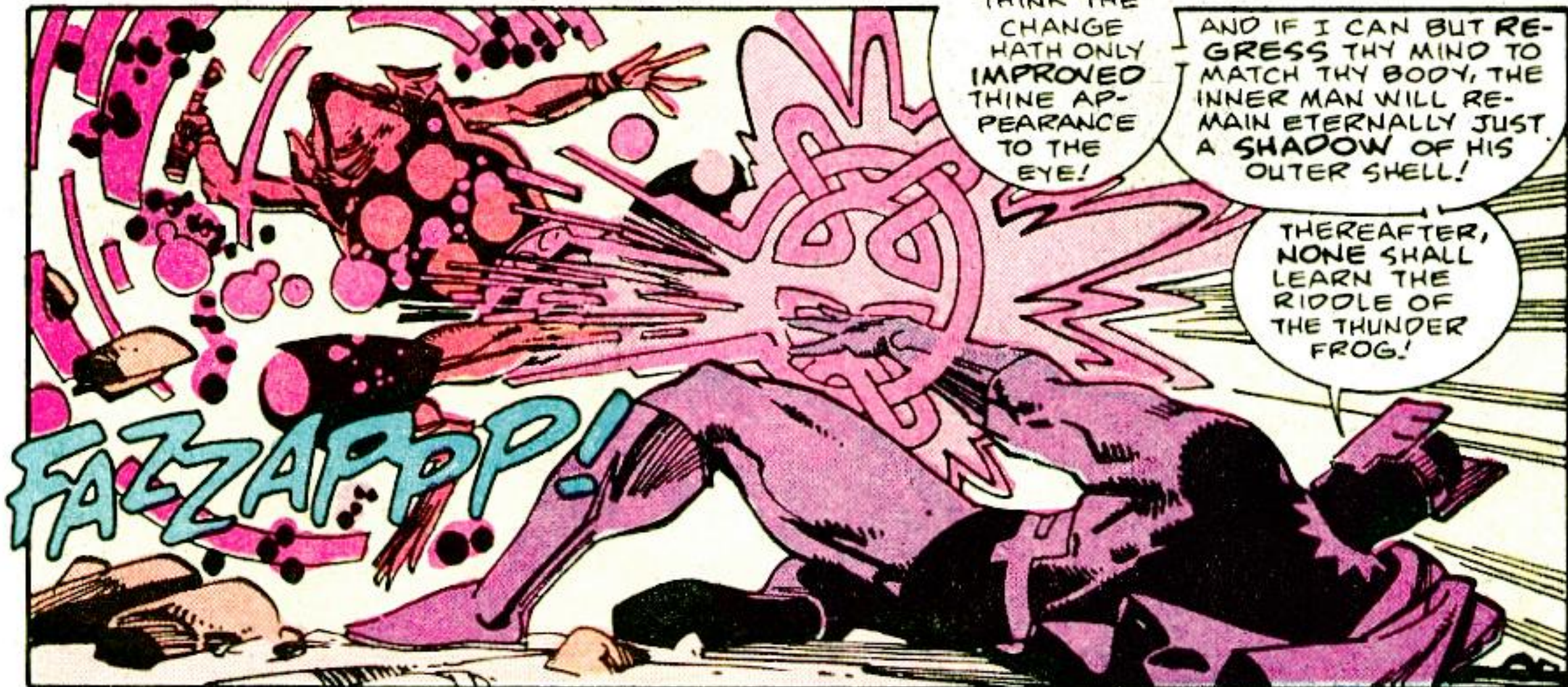
THE SUBTLE SPELLS OF BELIEVABILITY I WOVE ABOUT MYSELF BEFORE THE AL-THING WILL HELP CONVINCCE OUR FELLOWS THAT I AM INNOCENT OF THIS HUMOROUS SLANDER.



IN ANY EVENT, I THINK THE CHANGE HATH ONLY IMPROVED THINE APPEARANCE TO THE EYE!

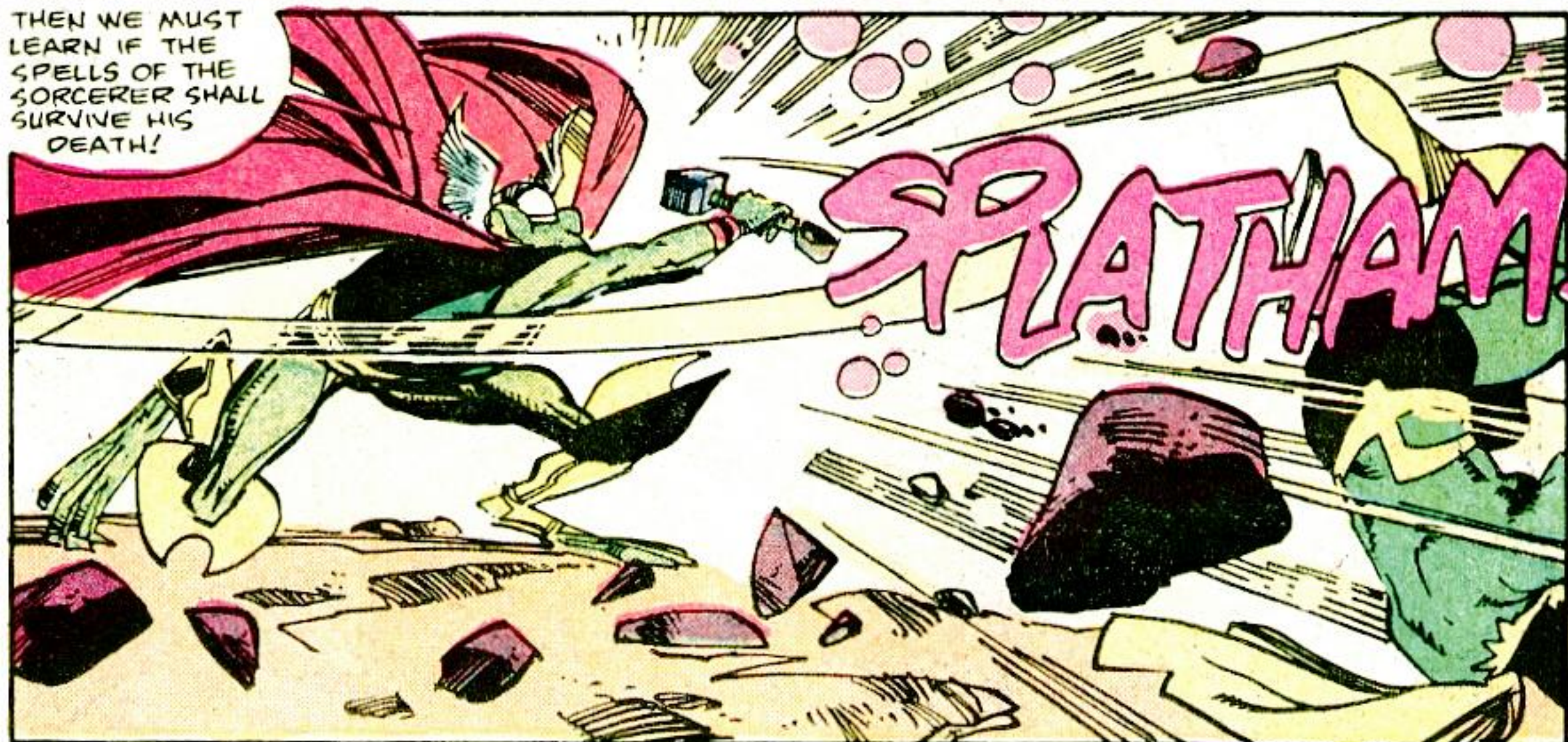
AND IF I CAN BUT REGRESS THY MIND TO MATCH THY BODY, THE INNER MAN WILL REMAIN ETERNALLY JUST A SHADOW OF HIS OUTER SHELL!

THEREAFTER, NONE SHALL LEARN THE RIDDLE OF THE THUNDER FROG!



THEN WE MUST LEARN IF THE SPELLS OF THE SORCERER SHALL SURVIVE HIS DEATH!

SPRATHAM!



MY THOUGHTS ARE GROWING CONFUSED! LOKI'S MAGIC PENETRATES MY VERY BRAIN!

CROAK!
CROAK!

FOOL! HE STILL WEARS HIS BELT OF STRENGTH! HIS NATURAL STRENGTH IS DOUBLED!

AND NO MATTER HOW MANY SPELLS OF PROTECTION I FLING IN HIS PATHWAY, I CANNOT DEFLECT THE DEADLY BLOWS OF MJOLNIR FOREVER!

THOR!
DESIST! HEAR ME OUT! PERHAPS THERE IS A WAY I CAN UNDO THIS TERRIBLE CURSE AND FREE YOU FROM THE SPELL!

HE HEARS ME NOT!

THRASHAKK!

INCREDIBLE! THOR SHATTERS MY SPELLS LIKE MATCHWOOD.

AND THOUGH HIS MIND IS SLOWLY YIELDING TO MY MAGIC, HIS AWESOME ANGER GOADS HIM ON!

HIS ANGER IS SO GREAT THAT RATIONAL THOUGHT IS CAST ASIDE AND ALL HIS BEING IS CONCENTRATED TOWARD ONE END...

...THE DESTRUCTION OF LOKI!

CHUGGA-RRUMPH!!

IN TRYING TO GRASP THE SCEPTER OF POWER, I MAY HAVE DOOMED MYSELF!

MEANWHILE, BEYOND THE EDGE OF THE GOLDEN CITY AT THE EDGE OF THE WILDERNESS...

JUST A... LITTLE FARTHER... FATHER...

BEYOND... THIS LAST RIDGE...

COURAGE, HILDY... PUFF... PUFF.

WE'LL BE THERE IN A MOMENT!

THE VERY STENCH PROCLAIMS THE HAND OF LOKI IN THIS MATTER!

AT LAST!

VOL-STAGG THE VALOROUS HATH ATTAINED THE SUMMIT AND--

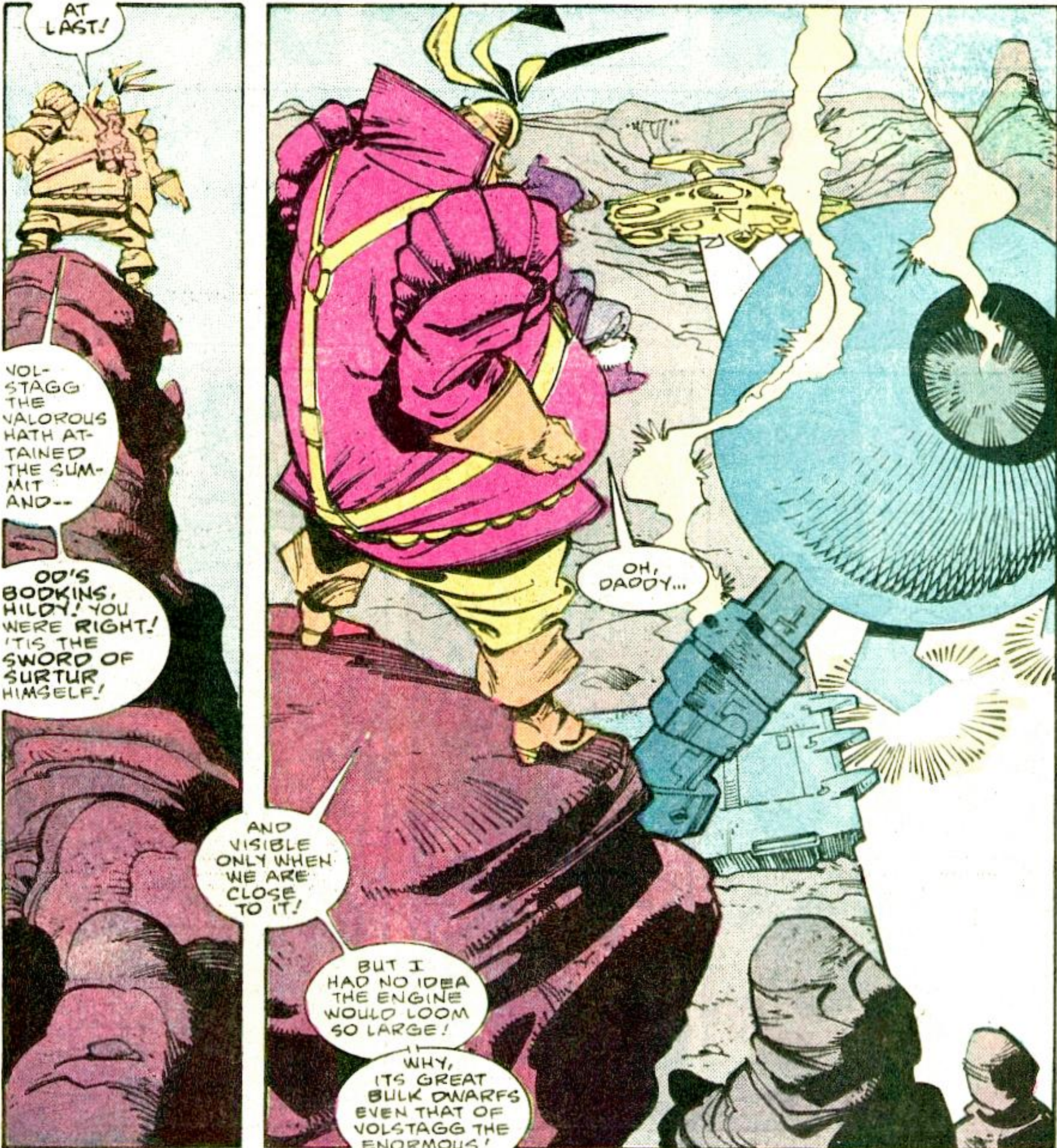
OO'S BODKINS, HILDY! YOU WERE RIGHT! 'TIS THE SWORD OF SURTUR HIMSELF!

OH, DADDY...

AND VISIBLE ONLY WHEN WE ARE CLOSE TO IT!

BUT I HAD NO IDEA THE ENGINE WOULD LOOM SO LARGE!

WHY, ITS GREAT BULK DWARFS EVEN THAT OF VOLSTAGG THE ENORMOUS!



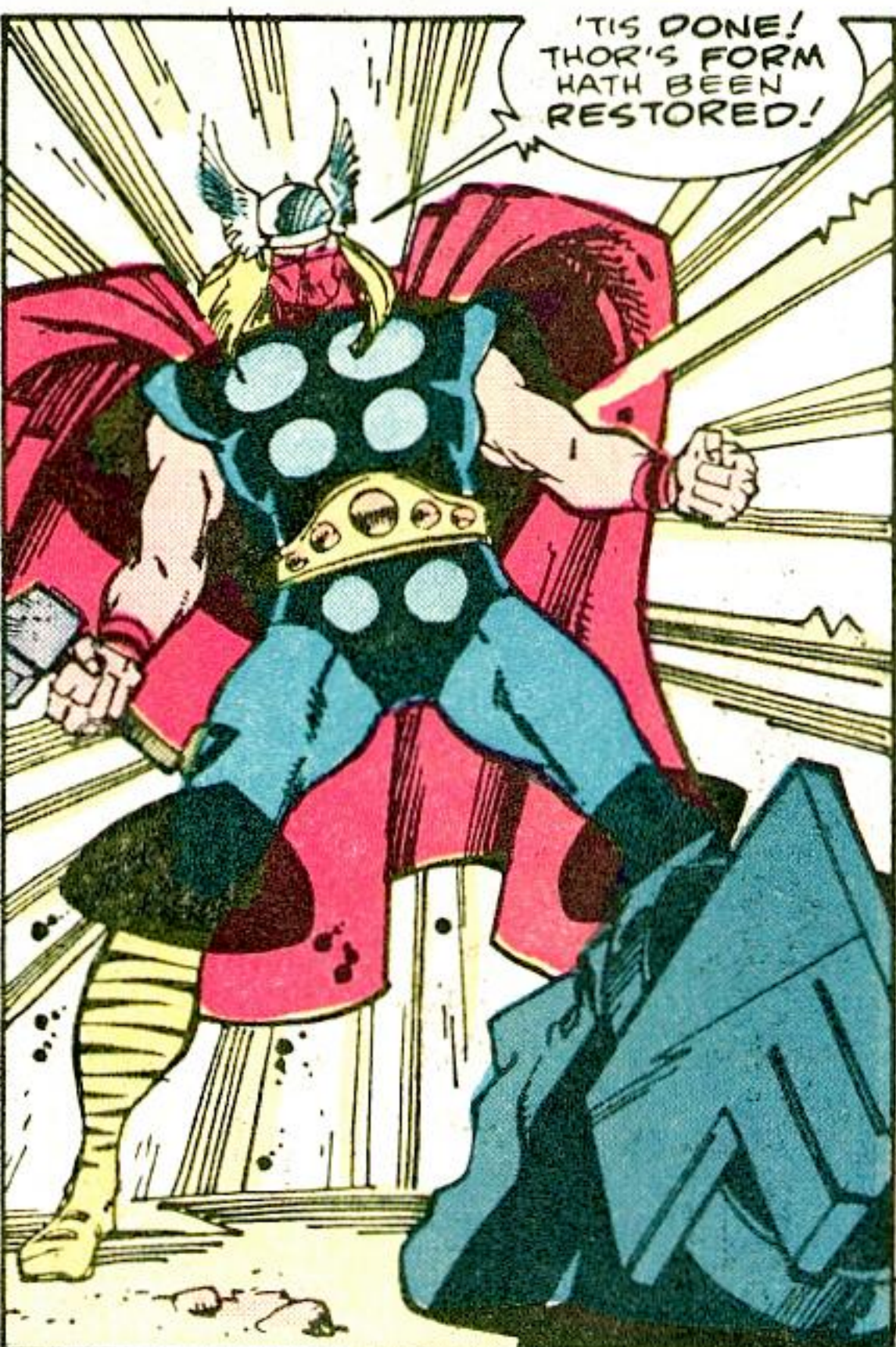
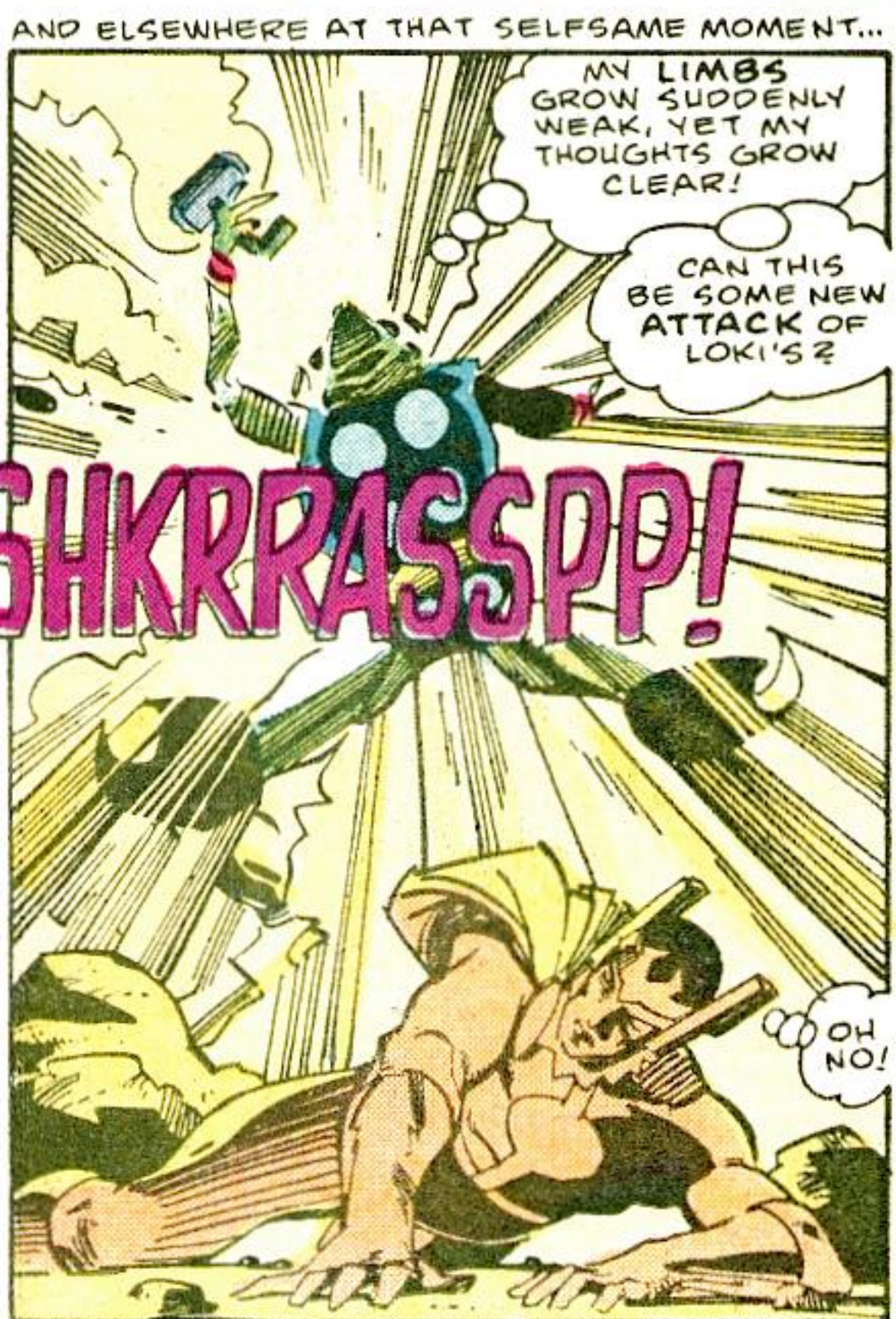
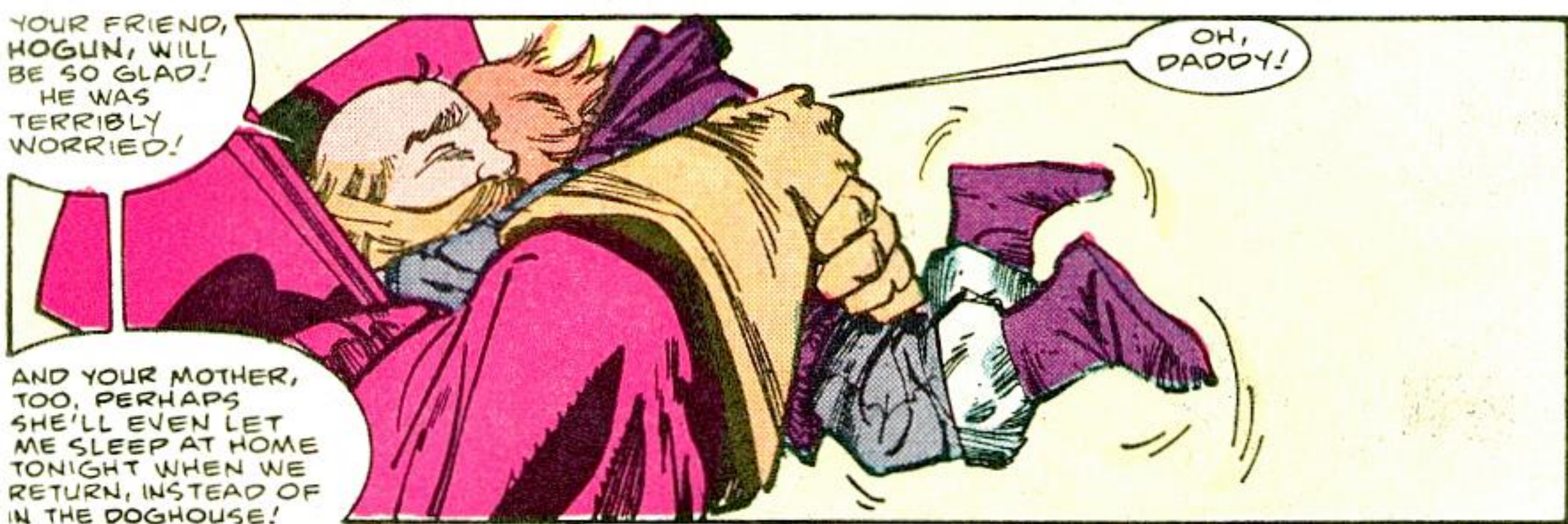
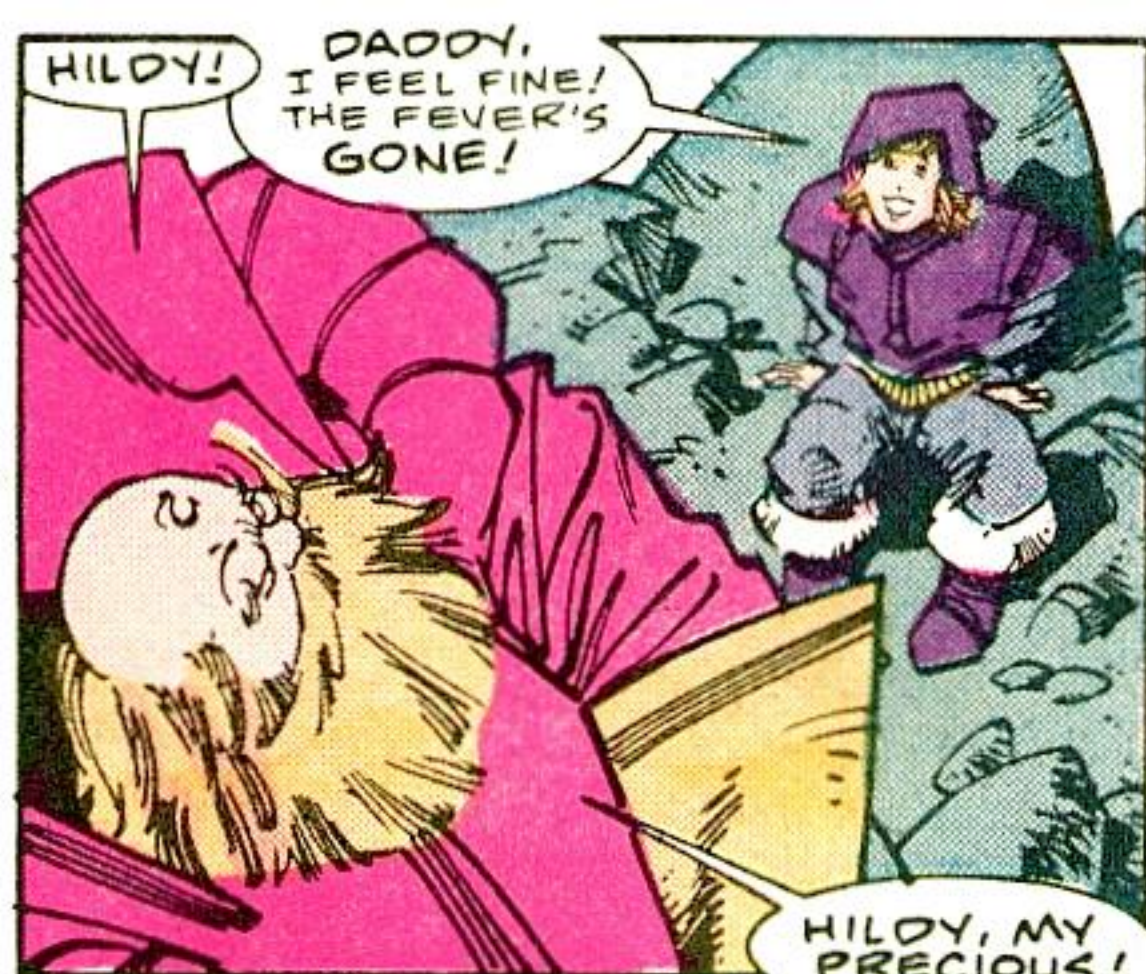


AND FASTER THAN
THE TALE CAN BE
TOLD...

...THE GREAT ENGINE
ABOVE THE SWORD AND,
YEA, THE SWORD
ITSELF...



... ARE BREACHED AND
OVERWHELMED BY THE
SEA OF BOULDER
THUNDERING DOWN THE
MOUNTAINSIDES!





AND NOW, LOKI--

COME, COME, THOR. SURELY YOU HAVE NO QUARREL WITH ME! YOU ARE YOURSELF AGAIN!

SMALL THANKS TO YOU, I'D WAGER!

HOW LITTLE YOU KNOW ME. YOUR SORRY PLIGHT TOUCHED EVEN LOKI, AND I SOUGHT TO MOVE HEAVEN AND EARTH TO SAVE YOU.

TO PRODUCE THE PROPER COUNTERSPELLS, I NEEDED TO INVOKE YOUR LEGENDARY ANGER.



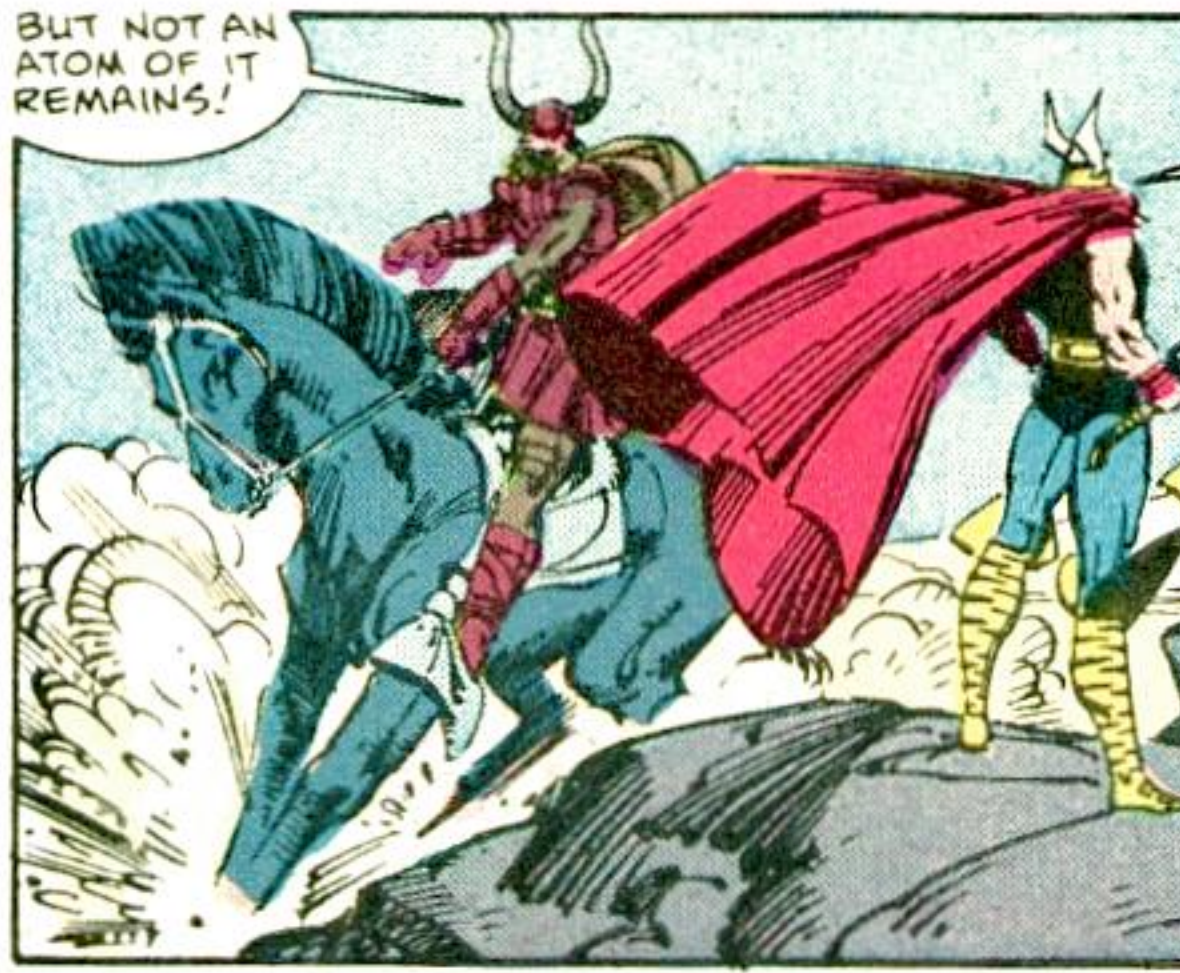
WE SHALL SEE, SOMEONE APPROACHES WHO MAY PUT THE LIE TO YOUR LIPS.

THOR! IT IS TRULY YOU! WELCOME HOME!

THANK YOU, HEIM-DALL.



VOLSTAGG HAS SUCCESSFULLY DESTROYED THE GREAT ENGINE THAT WAS DRAWING POWER FROM SURTUR'S SWORD.



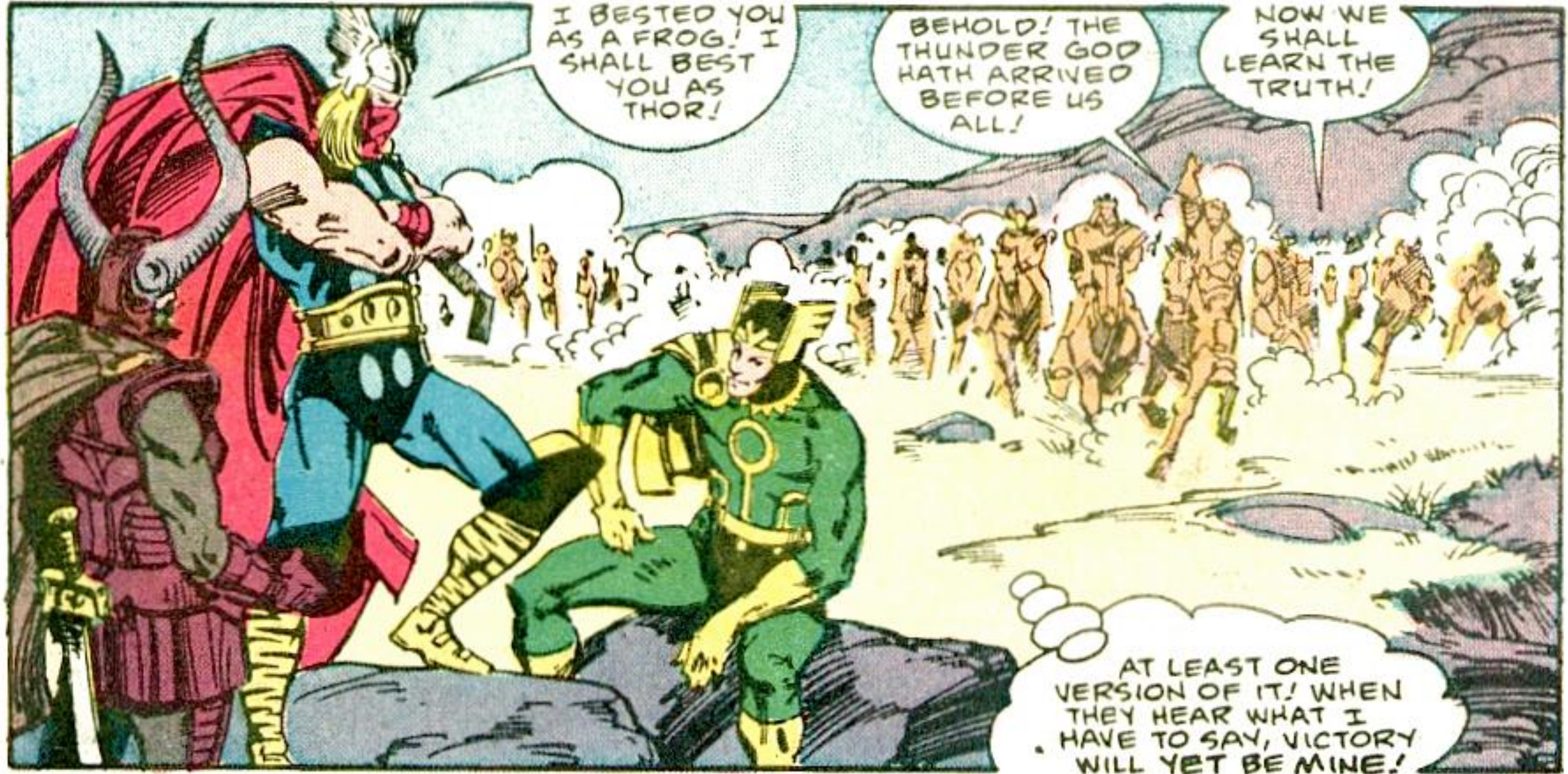
BUT NOT AN ATOM OF IT REMAINS!

THE SWORD OF SURTUR! THAT WOULD PROVIDE THE NECESSARY ENERGY FOR SUCH A TRANSFORMATION AS I HAVE EXPERIENCED!

PERHAPS, THOR, BUT I GATHER THAT THERE IS NO PROOF.

AND THE OLD LAW-GIVER IS QUITE STRICT. HE WOULD DEMAND EVIDENCE, NOT STORIES!

'TIS TRUE, BUT THOR IS A FROG NO LONGER.

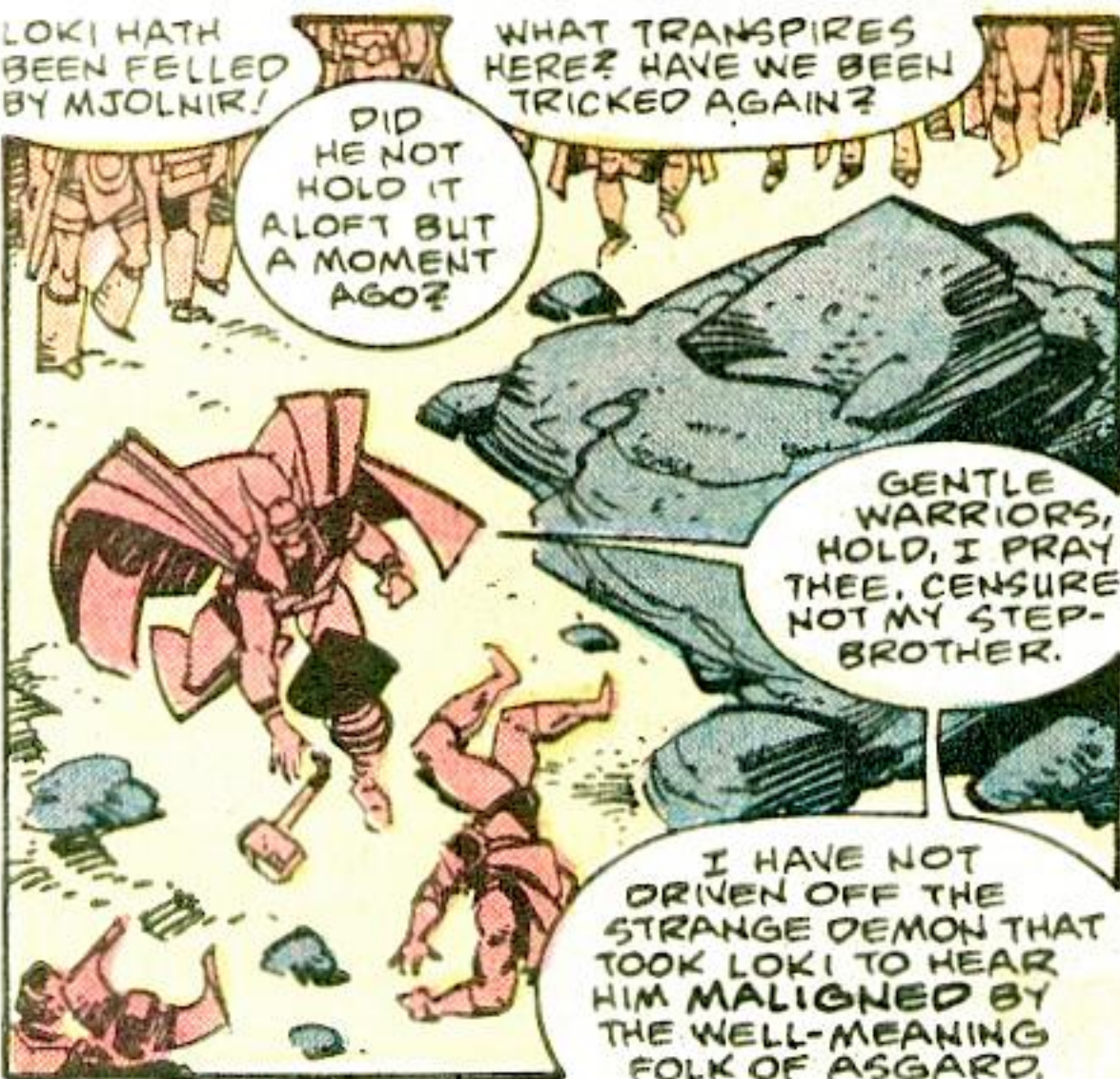
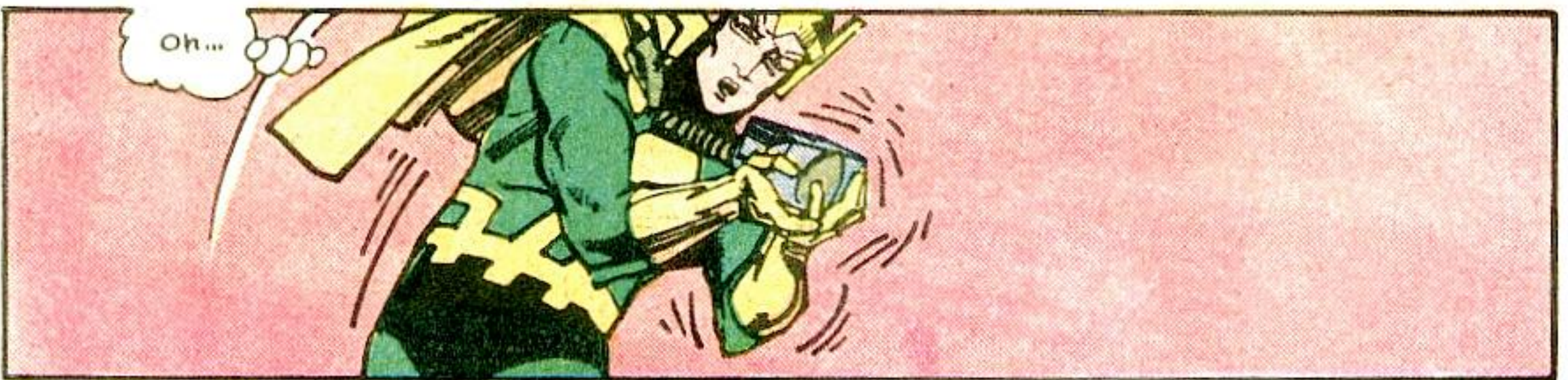


I BESTED YOU AS A FROG! I SHALL BEST YOU AS THOR!

BEHOLD! THE THUNDER GOD HATH ARRIVED BEFORE US ALL!

NOW WE SHALL LEARN THE TRUTH!

AT LEAST ONE VERSION OF IT! WHEN THEY HEAR WHAT I HAVE TO SAY, VICTORY WILL YET BE MINE!



WITH THIS VICTORY OVER THE EVIL THAT OPPOSES ASGARD...

...I WOULD THANK THE ALTHING FOR THE POST-PONEMENT THAT ENABLED ME TO RECOVER FROM WOUNDS I SUFFERED AT HELA'S HANDS.

TIME ALONE CANNOT HEAL THE WOUNDS OF HELA'S HAND OF GLORY, BUT PROUDLY WILL I BEAR THE SCARS WON IN THAT DEADLY BATTLE.

UN-BELIEV-ABLE!

TRULY, THE MIGHTY THOR IS THE BRAVEST ASGARDIAN OF ALL.

WHAT OTHER WARRIOR WOULD DARE THE TOUCH OF DEATH HERSELF?

HOW CAN THERE BE ANY DOUBT? THOR SHOULD TAKE HIS FATHER'S SEAT...

...AND RULE THE REALM OF ODIN!

AND HERE BEFORE YOU I SHALL REMOVE THE BANDAGES THAT HAVE HIDDEN MY FACE FROM MY FELLOWS.

MY FELLOW WARRIORS! MUCH THOUGHT HAVE I GIVEN TO THE RULING OF THIS NOBLE LAND.

AND THOUGH I HAVE EVER BEEN CALLED HEIR TO THE THRONE OF ASGARD, I STAND BEFORE YOU NOW TO RENOUNCE MY CLAIM!

WHAT?

HOW CAN THIS BE?

FOR I AM A GOD OF TWO WORLDS. MY FATHER WAS ODIN AND THIS IS HIS KINGDOM!

MY MOTHER WAS JORD AND MIDGARD WAS HER WORLD. I HAVE EVER BEEN THE GUARDIAN OF EARTH AND IT IS A BURDEN I WOULD NOT LIGHTLY LAY DOWN.

FOR THE SAKE OF THE MORTALS WITH WHOSE SAFEKEEPING I HAVE BEEN ENTRUSTED, FOR THE SAKE OF MY MOTHER AND HER WORLD...

...I ASK YOU TO LET ME LAY ASIDE THE SCEPTER OF ODIN AND REMAIN AT THE FOOT OF HIS GOLDEN THRONE!

THEN WHO--?

STILL, THERE IS ANOTHER PERHAPS MORE WORTHY OF THE THRONE THAN I.

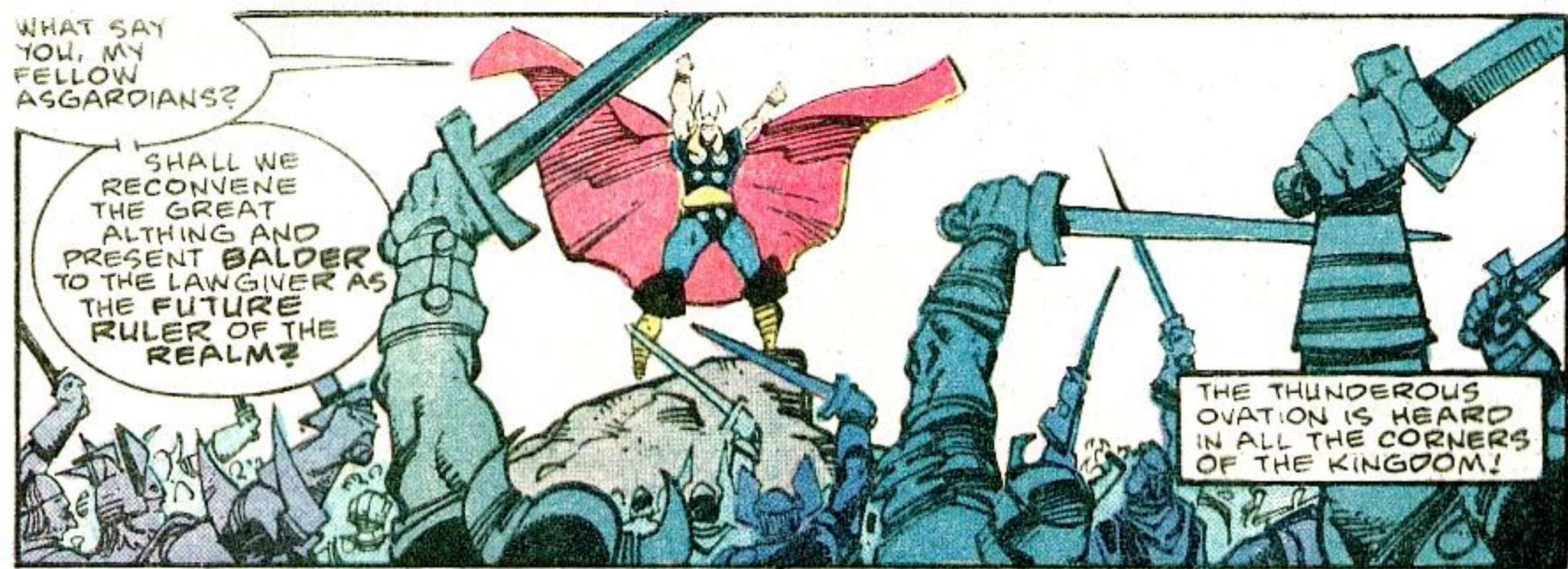
ONE WHOSE BRAVERY IS THE EQUAL OF THOR'S; ONE WHOSE NOBILITY SURPASSES MY OWN.

I SPEAK OF NONE OTHER THAN BALDER THE BRAVE!

BALDER, WHOSE HONOR IS BEYOND REPROACH!

BALDER, WHOSE SENSE OF JUSTICE MATCHES THAT OF ODIN HIMSELF!

SURELY, THE SHINING BALDER WOULD BE A RULER WORTHY OF THE GOLDEN REALM.



WHAT SAY YOU, MY FELLOW ASGARDIANS?

SHALL WE RECONVENE THE GREAT ALTHING AND PRESENT BALDER TO THE LAWGIVER AS THE FUTURE RULER OF THE REALM?

THE THUNDEROUS OVATION IS HEARD IN ALL THE CORNERS OF THE KINGDOM!

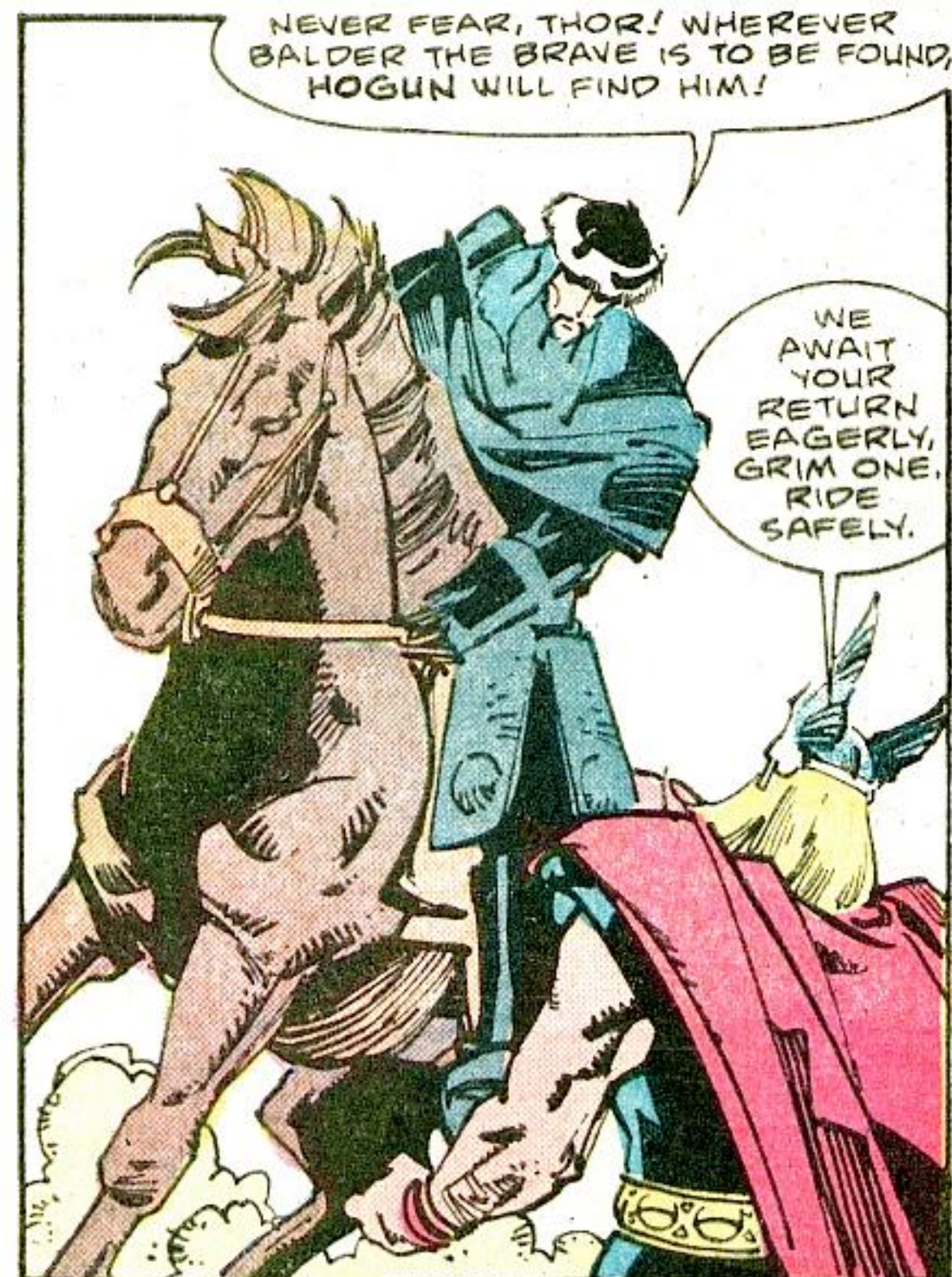


PERHAPS YOU ARE UNAWARE, MY BROTHER, THAT BALDER THE BRAVE HAS NOT RETURNED FROM THE KINGDOM OF KARNILLA*.

HE MAY HAVE FOUND OTHER THINGS TO DO IN NORNREALM THAN ATTEND THE ALTHING.

SHOULD NOT A MESSENGER BE SENT TO SEE IF THAT LOYAL SON OF ASGARD WILL RETURN AT ONCE?

*AND IF YOU'VE BEEN FOLLOWING THE BALDER THE BRAVE LIMITED SERIES, YOU KNOW WHY!--RALPH "QUICK PLUG" M.!



NEVER FEAR, THOR! WHEREVER BALDER THE BRAVE IS TO BE FOUND, HOGUN WILL FIND HIM!

WE AWAIT YOUR RETURN EAGERLY, GRIM ONE. RIDE SAFELY.



BUT NOT TOO QUICKLY, HOGUN. FOR MY SPIES HAVE TOLD ME OF THE FATE OF BALDER THE BRAVE.

AND BEFORE HE RETURNS TO ASGARD, LOKI MAY YET WREST A VICTORY FROM THIS DEFEAT.

IT IS NOT QUITE AS I WOULD WISH, BUT WE DO WHAT WE CAN IN THIS WORLD!

AND HEIMDALL HIMSELF HAS GIVEN ME THE IDEA!

next: **The King is Dead! Long Live the King!**
(OR IS IT THE OTHER WAY AROUND?)