

DR. STRANGE MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

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DOCTOR STRANGE

MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS



DR. STRANGE MEETS... DEATH!

BY **STEVE DITKO**

Once he was a man like most *others* — a *wordly* man, seduced and jaded by *material* things. But then he discovered the *separate* reality, where *sorcery* and *men's souls* shaped the forces that shape our *lives*. In that instant, he was *born again*, to become a man like *no other*—a man who left us *behind*, as he strove to stand against the unseen subtle perils hovering *thick* and *black* around our fragile existence...and so began the mystic majesty of.....*DR. STRANGE!*

Stan Lee PRESENTS: **Dr. STRANGE** MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!™



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DOCTOR STRANGE is published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 575 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10022
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New York, N. Y. 10022. Vol. 1, No. 4, October, 1974 issue. Price 25¢ per copy in the U. S. and Canada. Subscription rate \$3.50 for 12 issues. Canada
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IN THE ORB OF AGAMOTTO--

--DR. STRANGE REFLECTS.

"IT BEGAN AS **SILVER DAGGER** SURREPTITIOUSLY ENTERED MY SANCTUM SANCTORUM AND CAPTURED MY BELOVED **CLEA**.

"UPON SUBJUGATING HER WILL AND SUBDUING MY MANSERVANT, **WONG**, HE TURNED TOWARD HIS NEXT GOALS...

"... MY OCCULT **AMULET**, THE **EYE OF AGAMOTTO**, WHICH I HAD INNOCENTLY LAID ASIDE..."



"... AND ME!"

"HIS SILVER BLADE PIERCED ME NEAR TO DEATH AS I SLEPT, BUT EVEN AS I TOPPLED, MY STUNNED MIND PLOTTED **SURVIVAL!**

"I USED THE **NECROMANCY** OF THE **ORB OF AGAMOTTO**, **COMPANION** TO THE AMULET, TO **STILL** MY WOUND..."



"... BUT SUDDENLY, GROTESQUE TENTACLES SHOT FORTH FROM THE ORB, ENTANGLING ME, DRAWING ME... INSIDE!



"INSIDE WAS A WORLD OF UN-REALITY, WHERE A PRATTLING CATERPILLAR TOLD ME I HAD VENTURED TOO NEAR ILLUSION IN MY ESCAPE FROM DEATH, DOOMING ME TO THIS SHADOWY REALM!



"HERE THE ABSURD IS FACT, THE UNTHINKABLE COMMON-PLACE! CARTOONS HAVE DIMENSION, AND SOULS SERVE AS FOOD! NOTHING, BUT NOTHING, IS REAL ...



"... NOT EVEN THE OTHER INHABITANTS, WHO APPEARED TO BE PEOPLE I KNEW! WORSE, THE LONGER I REMAIN, THE MORE LIKE THEM I'LL BECOME!



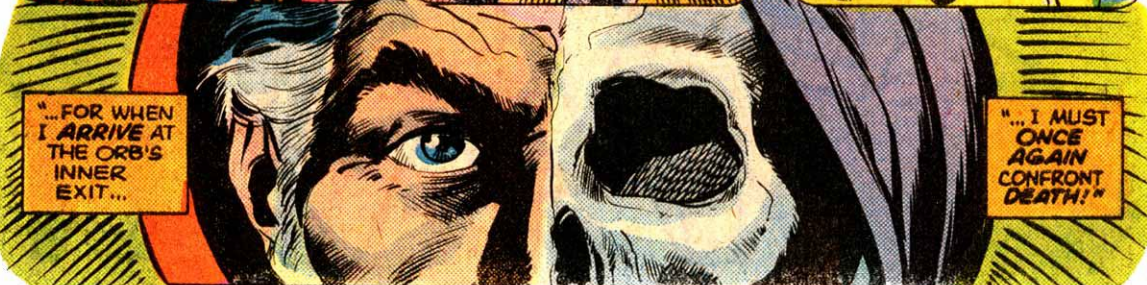
"BUT THERE IS ONE WAY OUT-- AT THE CENTER OF THE ORB. I HAD TO FIGHT MY WAY PAST ALL WHO OPPOSED MY PILGRIMAGE THERE...




"... BUT WITH THE AID OF THE WHITE QUEEN AND HER HORSE, ARAGORN, I HAVE FOUND THE PATH TO SALVATION -- IF I CAN CALL IT THAT...



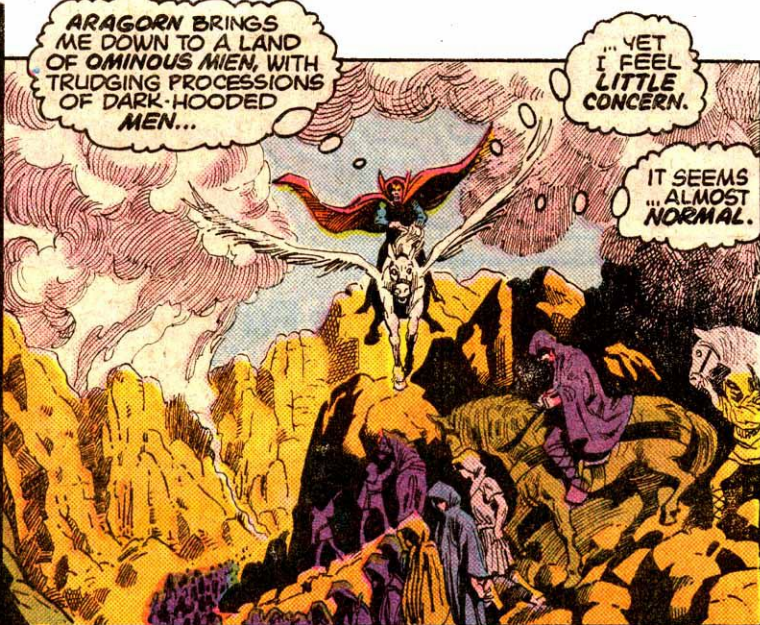
"... FOR WHEN I ARRIVE AT THE ORB'S INNER EXIT...



"... I MUST ONCE AGAIN CONFRONT DEATH!"



AND THE LONGER I REMAIN
WITHIN THE ORB, THE MORE
UNREAL I'LL BECOME.




ARAGORN BRINGS
ME DOWN TO A LAND
OF OMINOUS MIEN, WITH
TRUDGING PROCESSIONS
OF DARK-HOODED
MEN...

... YET
I FEEL
LITTLE
CONCERN.

IT SEEMS
...ALMOST
NORMAL.

--AM BECOMING!
MY THOUGHTS
CIRCLE THEMSELVES!

mmmm...



I MUST RESIST THIS
DEADENING OF MY SPIRIT!
I MUST BATTLE TO REMAIN
THE SORCERER SUPREME!

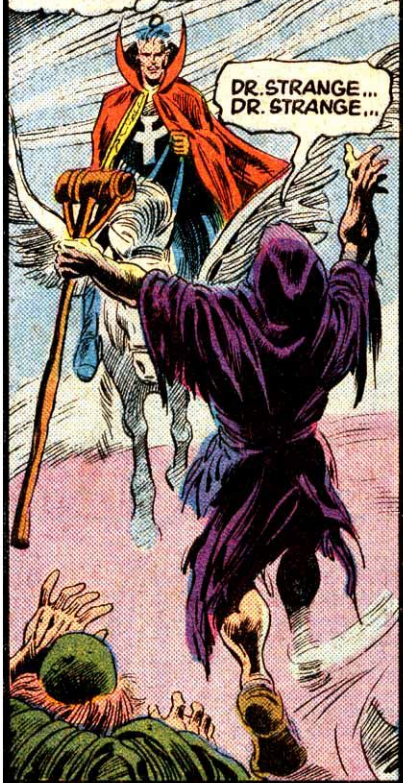
--OR MY BATTLE
WITH DEATH WILL
BE LOST BEFORE
IT'S BEGUN!

JUDGING FROM THE FORCE OF
THE ENNUI SWEEPING AGAINST
ME --

--AND THE LOOK OF THE
LAND TO WHICH MY STEED
HAS DELIVERED ME--

--I RIDE
NEAR TO
THAT
BATTLE
NOW!

THESE THREE WHO GREET ME -- THEY, TOO, SEEM ALMOST FAMILIAR!



DR. STRANGE... DR. STRANGE...

YOU KNOW ME, OLD ONE?



I HAVE HEARD TALES OF YOUR COMING... ON A HORSE, IT WAS SAID...

I RODE A HORSE ONCE... AS DID MY TWO BROTHERS.



WE RODE WITH THE ONE YOU SEEK, DR. STRANGE! AYE, WE RODE WITH DEATH, DR. STRANGE!



MY NAME IS FAMINE!

BY THE HOARY HOSTS OF HOGGOTH! YOUR SKIN--!



I KNEW YOUR MENTOR, THE ANCIENT ONE! I VISITED HIM IN HIS FINAL DAYS, YOU KNOW...!

DO NOT THINK TO PASS US BY, DR. STRANGE! OUR HANDIWORK IS EVERYWHERE!



YOU HAVE ENTERED THE DOMAIN OF THE DYING--



"...WHERE THE DENIZENS SUFFER THEIR DEATH THROES--FOREVER--"

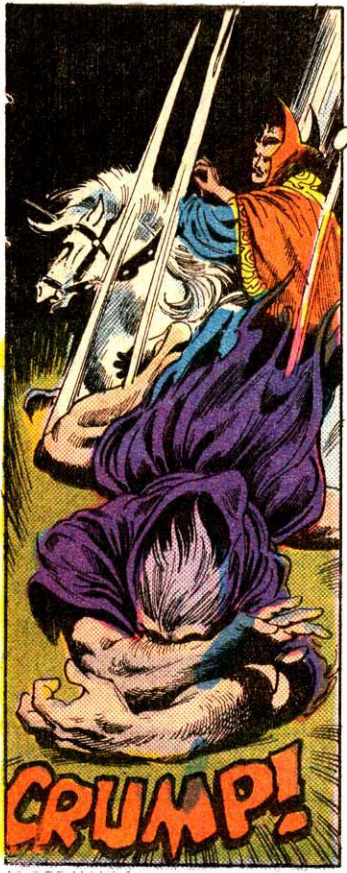
"...AND NEVER PASS BEYOND!"

IT'S HORRIBLE! THE AGONY OF THESE DAMNED SOULS...!



THE THROAT-SPLITTING SCREAM FROM ABOVE YANKS HIM BACK TO UNREALITY--

AAAAA



CRUMP!



HE WASN'T AFTER ME! HE WANTED TO KILL HIMSELF!

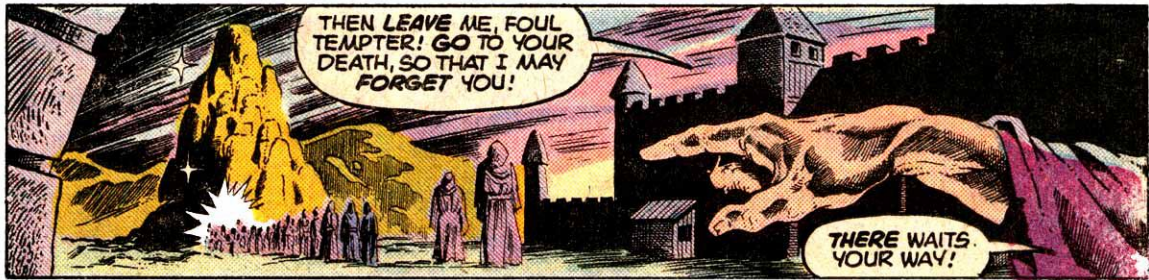
I STILL EXIST! MY BONES LIE SHATTERED IN MY PLAGUE-RIDDEN BODY--

--BUT I CANNOT DIE!

STRANGER, IF YOU HAVE ANY MERCY-- END MY TORMENT! KILL ME! PLEASE!



I-- I--



THEN LEAVE ME, FOUL TEMPTER! GO TO YOUR DEATH, SO THAT I MAY FORGET YOU!

THERE WAITS YOUR WAY!



GO ON! RIDE FROM ME WITH YOUR HEAD HELD HIGH--SINCE YOU FEEL NO PAIN, UNLIKE US WHO CANNOT RIDE ON!

HE IS WRONG--!



THE PAIN DOES BEGIN AGAIN, AS I NEAR THAT EERILY SHIMMERING...
...BECKONING?...

...HAZE! IT HAD VANISHED WHEN I ENTERED THE ORB!



DR. STRANGE--AT LAST! WE'VE BEEN GATHERING HERE AT THE CENTER SINCE YOU ENTERED THE ORB, MAGICIAN!

WE ALL KNEW YOU WOULDN'T ACCEPT YOUR LOT PLACIDLY, AND WHEN YOU PASS BEYOND--

--WHEN YOU DIE--

--PERHAPS SOME OF US CAN SLIP IN UNSEEN!



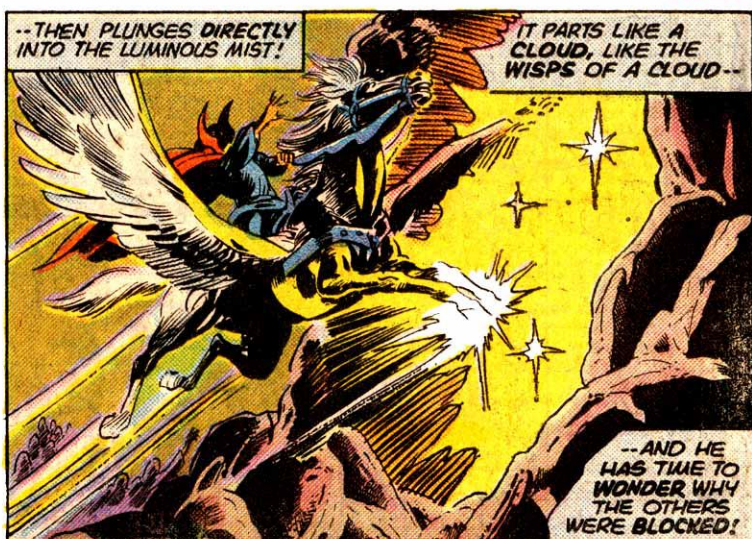
THE STENCH OF DECAY IS THE AIR HERE, AND THE PSYCHIC VIBRATIONS ARE THE SHEEREST DESPAIR HE HAS EVER SENSED--AND THE RAGGED APPARITIONS IN THE ROAD BEFORE HIM SCHEMED TO DIE!

WHILE HIS SOLE GOAL IS LIFE!

COME ON, THEN!



HE LEAPS THEM, CLEARING THE GROUND IN ONE GREAT, SURGING ARC--



--THEN PLUNGES DIRECTLY INTO THE LUMINOUS MIST!

IT PARTS LIKE A CLOUD, LIKE THE WISPS OF A CLOUD--

--AND HE HAS TIME TO WONDER WHY THE OTHERS WERE BLOCKED!



HE WILL NEVER KNOW WHAT HE LEAVES BEHIND.

LET ME IN! LET ME IN!

OH, GODS! IT'S SOLID AGAIN!

WHY IS HE THE ONLY ONE TO MEET DEATH? WHY NOT US?

WHY MUST WE GO ON?

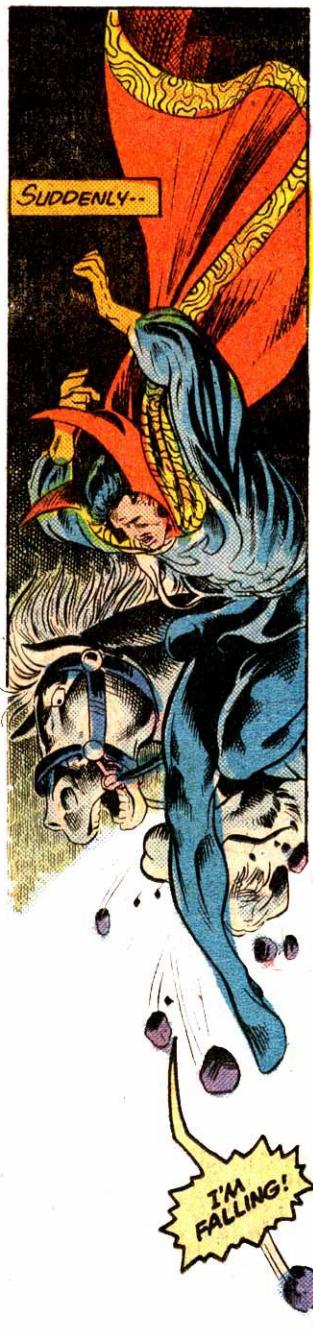


ON THE OTHER SIDE, DR. STRANGE SITS HIS STALLION ALERTLY, GIVING HIS EYES THE TIME TO ADJUST TO THE DARK...

...HIS EARS TO THE SILENCE.



--AND BEHOLDS WHERE HIS JOURNEYS HAVE BROUGHT HIM!



SUDDENLY--

I'M FALLING!



GRADUALLY, HIS PUPILS PICK OUT HIGHLIGHTS-- THEN LOOMING SHAPES-- THEN HALF-RECOGNIZABLE MASSES.

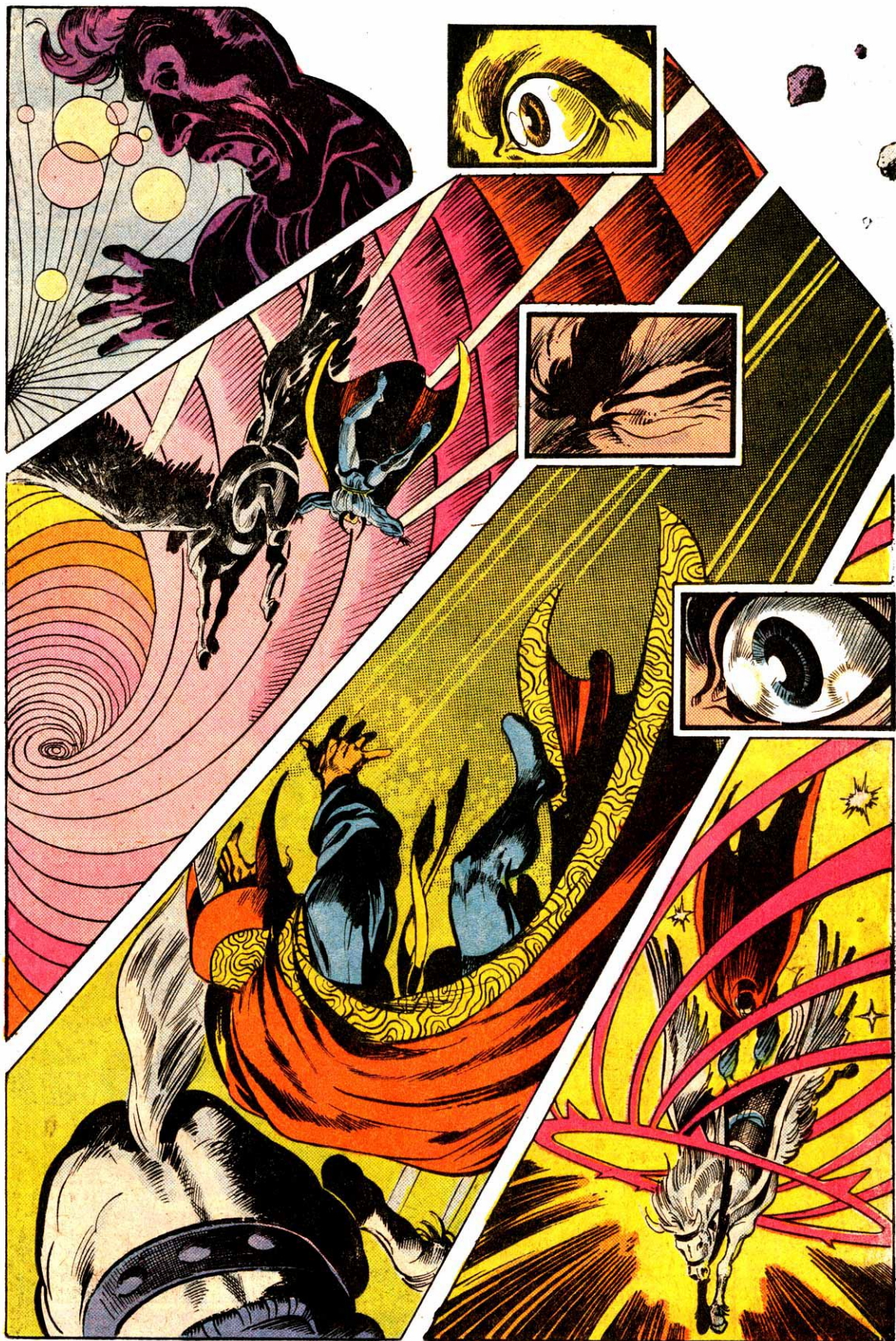
HE FINDS HIMSELF IN A CAVE...

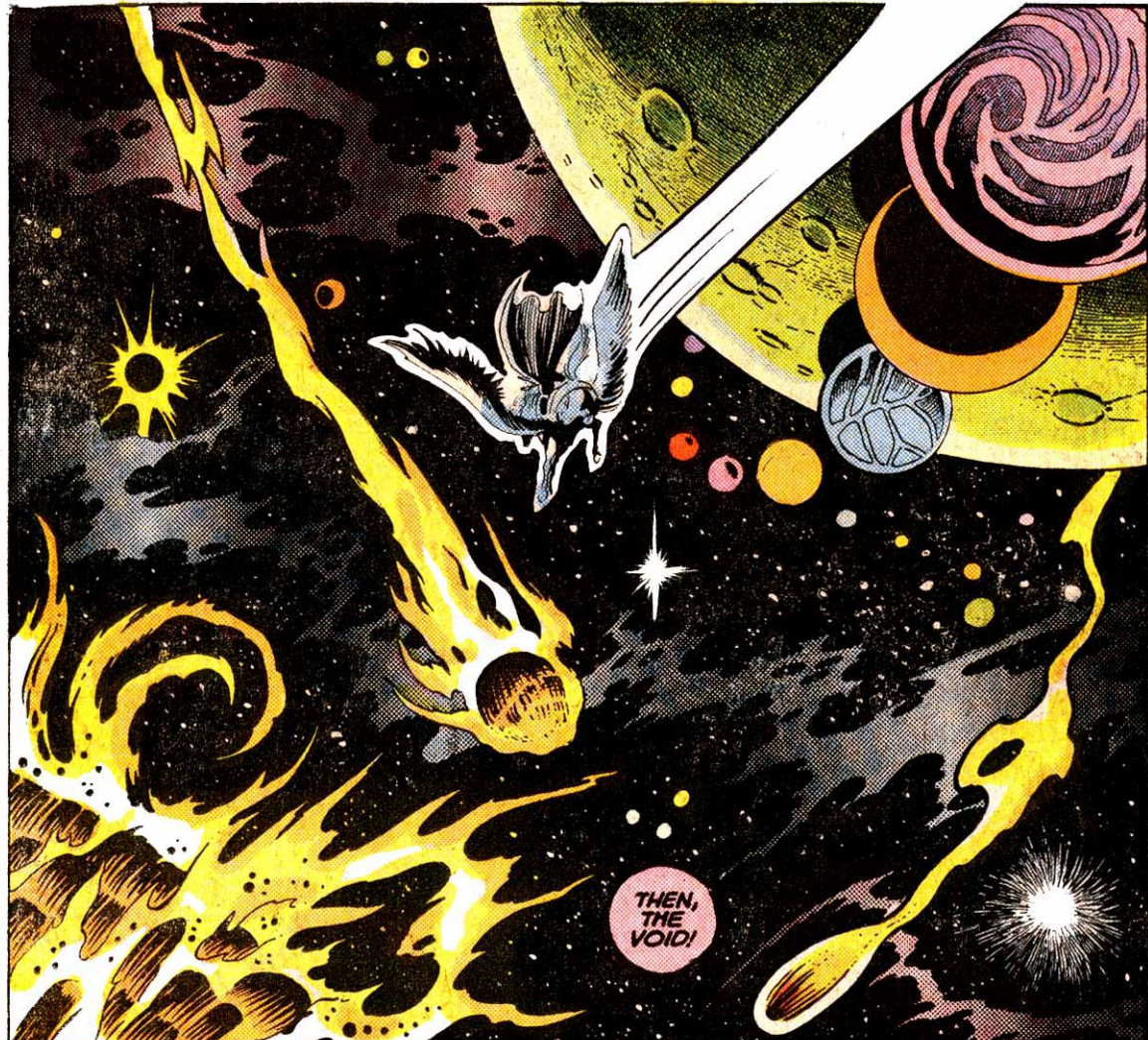
... AND IT'S NOT SO DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER CAVE.



--ONLY TO FEEL THE PASSAGE SWIFTLY NARROW AROUND HIM. HE DISMOUNTS--

CAUTIOUSLY, HE PRODS ARAGORN FORWARD--





THEN,
THE
VOID!



IT...
IS...
SO...

NO! I AM! I AM WHAT
I MUST CONCENTRATE UPON!

I DON'T DARE LET THE
IMMEN...SITY OF MY
SURROUNDINGS--

--MAKE ME FORGET
WHAT I HAVE COME
FOR! I FEEL AS IF
I'M SLIPPING AWAY--



--SO I MUST FIGHT--

SHADES OF THE
SHADY DEMONS!
ARAGORN!

HE BECAME A SKELETON--JUST AFTER THAT METEORITE STRUCK HIS HOOF!

THEN YOU MUST NOW REALIZE YOUR QUEST TO THE CENTER OF UNREALITY HAS BROUGHT YOU *OUTSIDE*, SPIRIT!

"THEREFORE, THERE IS NOTHING FOR YOU BUT TO DIE!"

"THE SLIGHTEST TOUCH OF MY REALM DISPELS LIFE WITHIN YOU! THE SIZEABLE ROCK WHICH SMOTE THE OTHER SPIRIT DISPATCHED IT ALMOST INSTANTLY, AS YOU SAW!

"EVEN NOW, THE SUBMICROSCOPIC PARTICLES ALWAYS PRESENT IN SPACE CUT THROUGH YOU--

--BRINGING WEAKNESS--BRINGING BLOOD ONCE MORE FROM YOUR WOUND--

BRINGING DEATH!

IT TOUCHED HIM-- AND HE DIED!

YOU FLICKER WITHIN THE DEPTHS OF DEATH AT LAST!

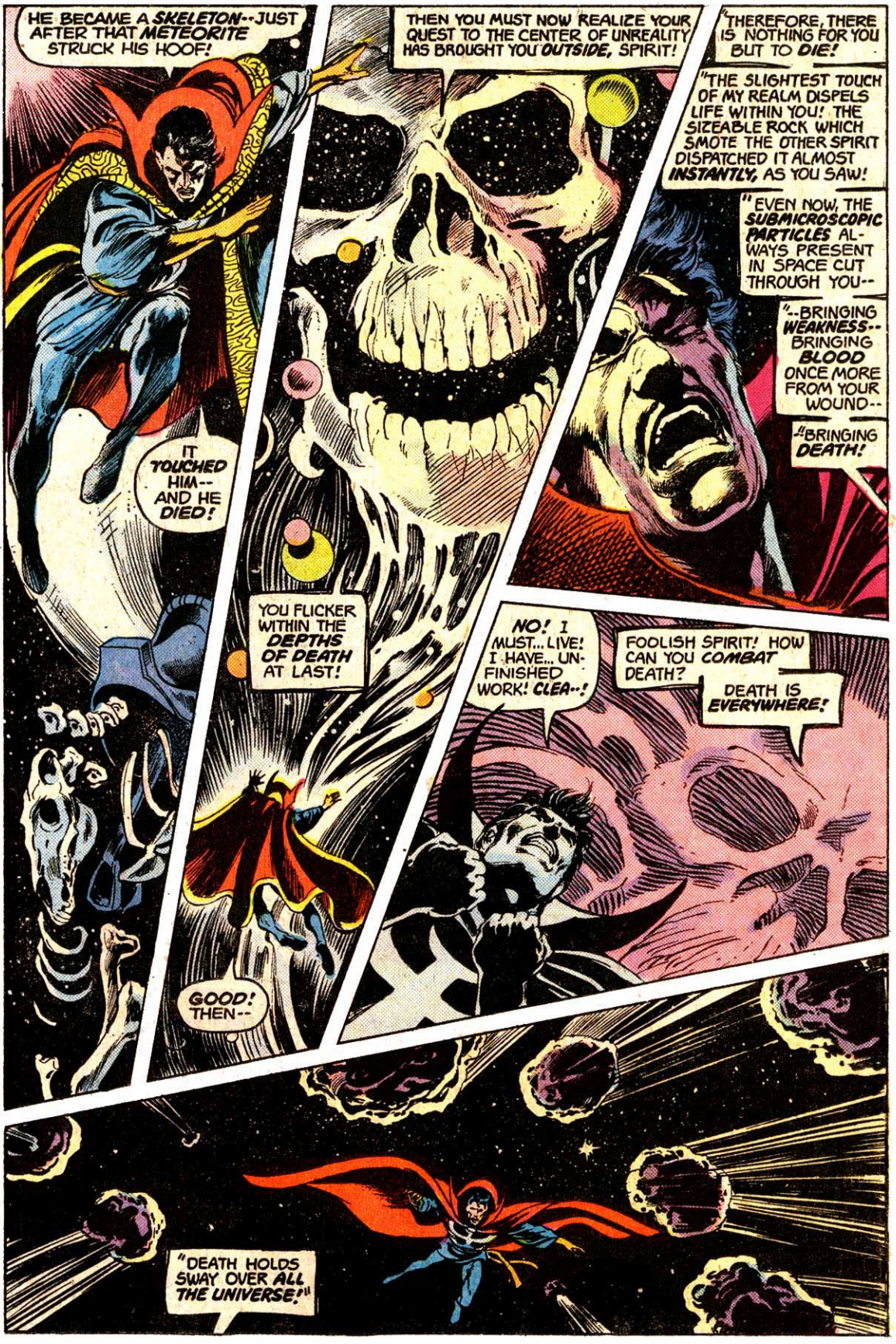
NO! I MUST... LIVE! I HAVE... UNFINISHED WORK! CLEA--!

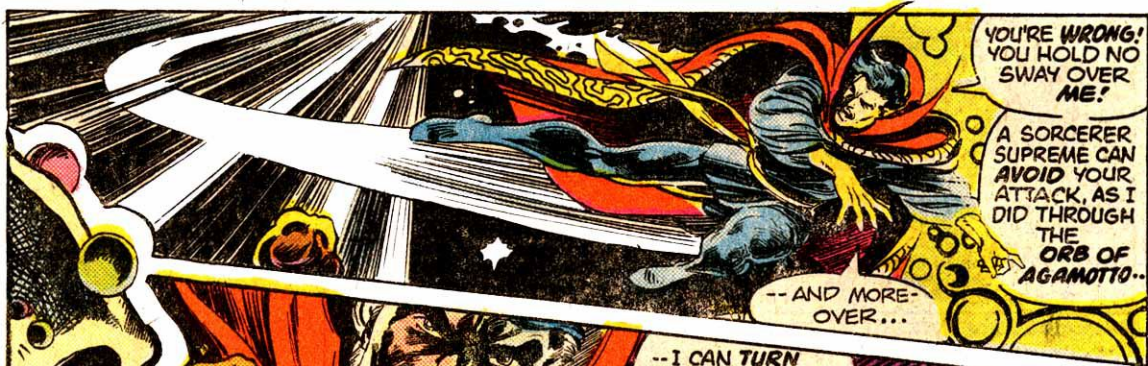
FOOLISH SPIRIT! HOW CAN YOU COMBAT DEATH?

DEATH IS EVERYWHERE!

GOOD! THEN--

"DEATH HOLDS SWAY OVER ALL THE UNIVERSE!"





YOU'RE **WRONG!** YOU HOLD NO SWAY OVER ME!

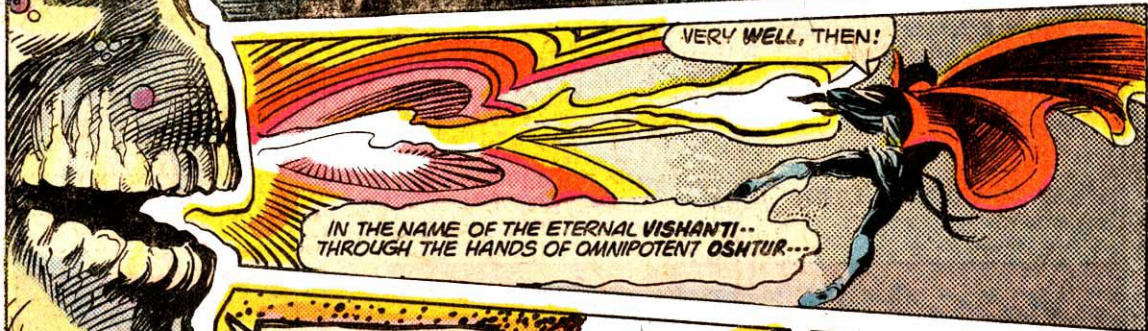
A SORCERER SUPREME CAN **AVOID** YOUR ATTACK, AS I DID THROUGH THE **ORB OF AGAMOTTO...**

-- AND MORE--
OVER...



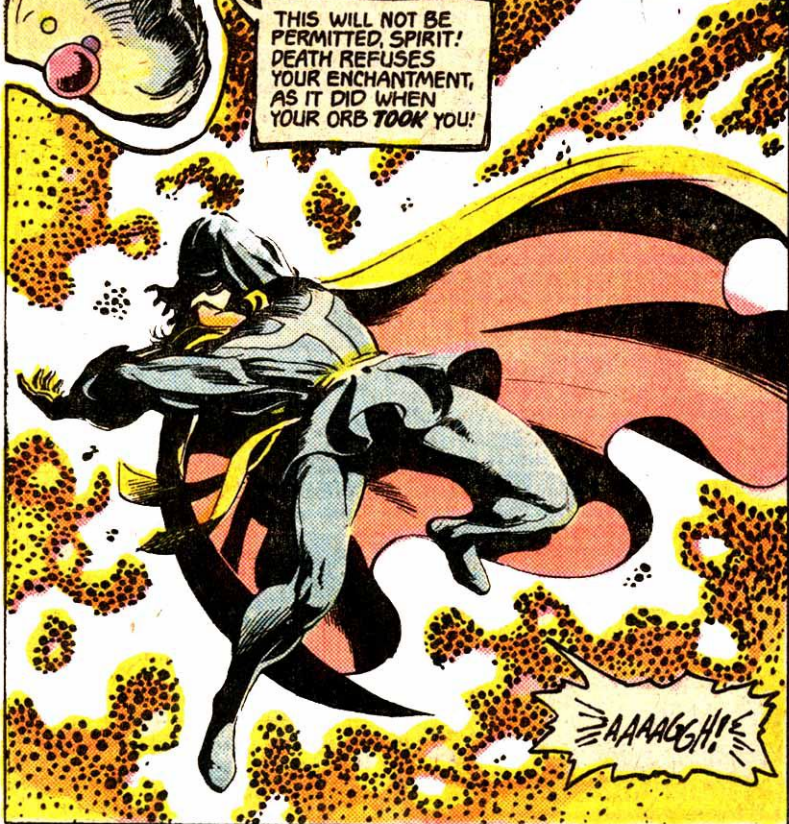
-- I CAN **TURN** THE ATTACK ON YOU IF FORCED! I WOULD RATHER SIMPLY **DEPART**--

HA HA HA HA HA HA



VERY WELL, THEN!

IN THE NAME OF THE ETERNAL VISHANTI--
THROUGH THE HANDS OF OMNIPOTENT OSHTUR--



THIS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED, SPIRIT! DEATH REFUSES YOUR ENCHANTMENT, AS IT DID WHEN YOUR ORB TOOK YOU!

AAAAGH!



"DO YOU NOT YET **COMPREHEND?** YOU CANNOT CONTEND AGAINST **UNIVERSAL LAW!**

YOU HAVE LEFT THE REALM OF **UN-REALITY, SPIRIT!**

"IN THE **REAL** UNIVERSE, **EVERYTHING** DIES!"



I'M-- IN THE REAL UNIVERSE? MY UNIVERSE?

"DID YOU NOT CHOOSE TO BE REAL?"

"THEN YOU MUST DIE!"



I WON'T ACCEPT THAT! IF I CAN'T ATTACK YOU--

--I'LL ESCAPE YOU!

I ASK AGAIN: HOW?



THERE IS NO WAY TO EMBRACE REALITY AND ESCAPE THE COSMOS!

"TIME MEANS NOTHING TO ME..."



"...AND YOU MUST CONTINUALLY WEAKEN IN MY PRESENCE!"

"ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, YOU WILL FEEL MY TOUCH!"



HEAD--SPINNING! I'M LOSING TOO MUCH BLOOD --AND FOR WHAT?

ALL MY MANEUVERING AMOUNTS TO STANDING STILL COMPARED TO THE SCOPE OF THE STARS--

WAIT!

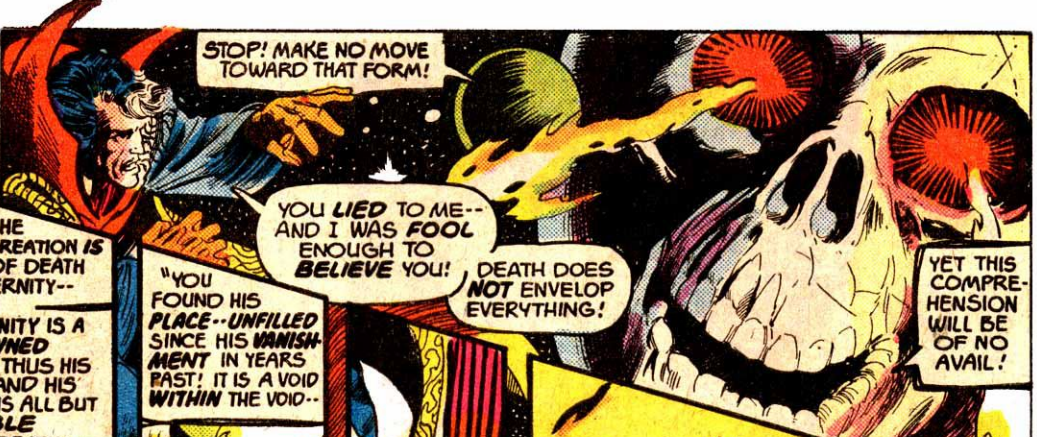
WHAT'S THAT?



BY THE TWELVE MOONS OF MUNNPOP! IT'S A HOLE IN SPACE --

--AND ITS SHAPE IS THAT OF-- ETERNITY!*

*REMEMBER--FROM SOME OF THE MYSTIC MASTER'S GREATEST TALES? --ROY.



STOP! MAKE NO MOVE TOWARD THAT FORM!

YOU LIED TO ME-- AND I WAS FOOL ENOUGH TO BELIEVE YOU!

DEATH DOES NOT ENVELOP EVERYTHING!

YET THIS COMPREHENSION WILL BE OF NO AVAIL!

IN TRUTH, THE WHOLE OF CREATION IS THE SUM OF DEATH AND ETERNITY--

"YOU FOUND HIS PLACE-- UNFILLED SINCE HIS VANISHMENT IN YEARS PAST! IT IS A VOID WITHIN THE VOID--

-- BUT ETERNITY IS A MAN-SPAWNED CONCEPT! THUS HIS SHAPE-- AND HIS SIZE! HE IS ALL BUT INVISIBLE NEXT TO DEATH!



YET I FOUND HIM!



-- BUT IT WILL NOT BE A HAVEN FOR YOU, SPIRIT! DEATH WILL NOT ALLOW IT!"

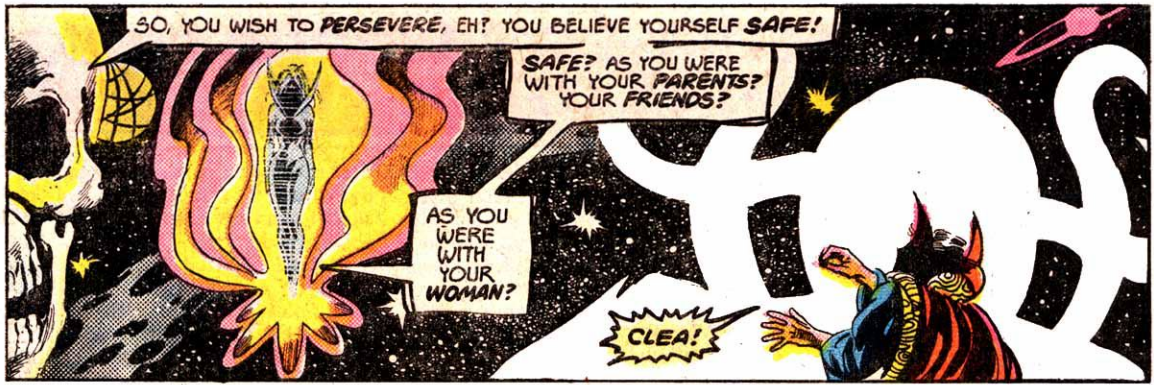


AGAIN YOU ARE WRONG, DEATH!

DR. STRANGE SHALL REACH THAT SANCTUARY --



-- IN SPITE OF ANYTHING YOU RAISE AGAINST HIM!



SO, YOU WISH TO PERSEVERE, EH? YOU BELIEVE YOURSELF **SAFE!**

SAFE? AS YOU WERE WITH YOUR PARENTS? YOUR FRIENDS?

AS YOU WERE WITH YOUR **WOMAN?**

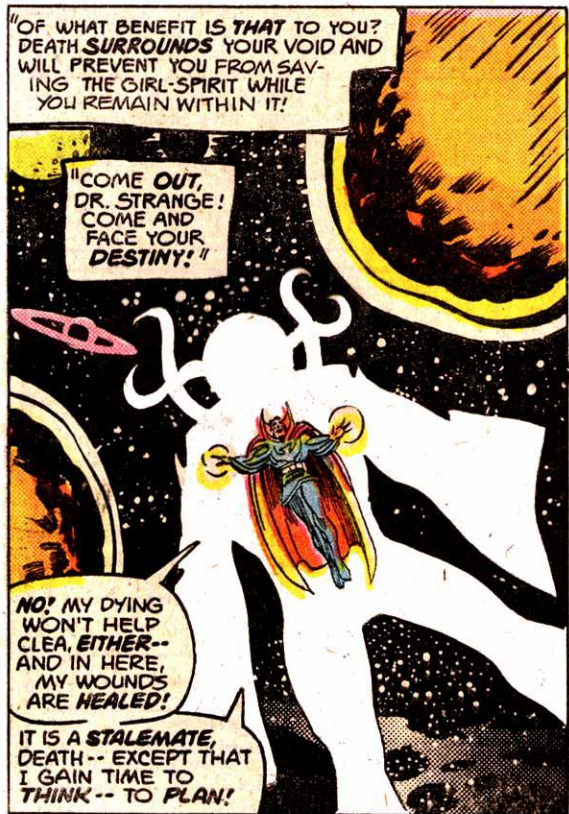
CLEA!



"SHE IS DYING, SPIRIT-- UNDER THE **PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL TORTURES OF SILVER DAGGER!** IF YOU DO NOT RETURN TO MY REALM--



--SHE WILL COME TO ME! WILL YOU STAND **ALOOF** AND **WATCH** AS WE ON **THIS SIDE** CONDUCT OUR AFFAIRS?

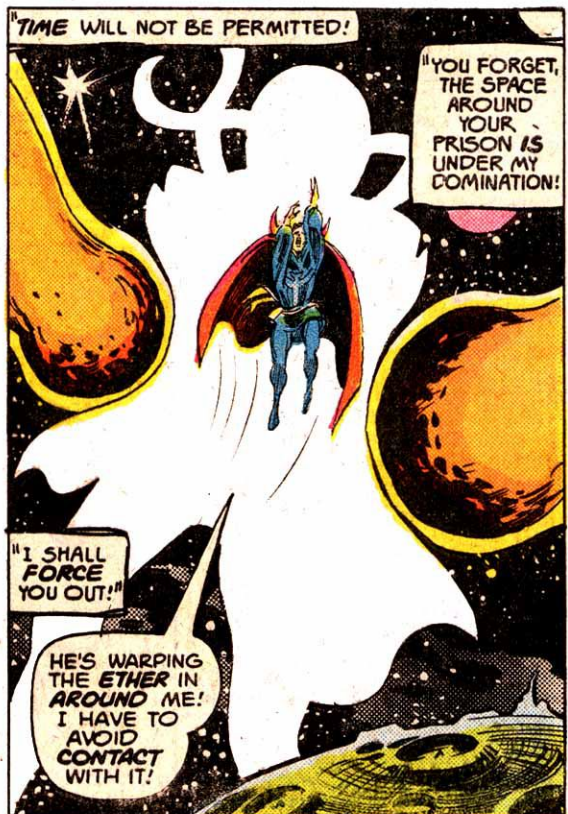


"OF WHAT BENEFIT IS THAT TO YOU? **DEATH SURROUNDS** YOUR VOID AND WILL PREVENT YOU FROM SAYING THE GIRL-SPIRIT WHILE YOU REMAIN WITHIN IT!

"COME OUT, DR. STRANGE! COME AND FACE YOUR **DESTINY!**"

NO! MY DYING WON'T HELP **CLEA, EITHER--** AND IN HERE, MY WOUNDS ARE **HEALED!**

IT IS A **STALEMATE, DEATH--** EXCEPT THAT I GAIN TIME TO **THINK-- TO PLAN!**




TIME WILL NOT BE PERMITTED!

"YOU FORGET, THE SPACE AROUND YOUR PRISON IS UNDER MY **COMINATION!**

"I SHALL **FORCE** YOU OUT!"

HE'S **WARPING** THE ETHER IN AROUND ME! I HAVE TO **AVOID CONTACT** WITH IT!




BUT I CANNOT-- NOT FOREVER!
THERE IS NO END TO THE PERILS
INTO WHICH DEATH CAN PLUNGE ME--

--BUT THERE IS
AN END TO MY
STRENGTH,
EVEN BOL-
STERED WITH
EVERY SPELL
AT MY
COMMAND!

AT LAST,
THOUGH THE
THOUGHTS
CHILL MY
BONES, I
SEE NO WAY
I CAN
TRIUMPH!

I CANNOT
ATTACK, I CAN-
NOT ESCAPE, AND
I CANNOT AVOID!
ONLY ONE OTHER
COURSE
REMAINS
TO ME!



IN ANY OTHER SITUATION,
I COULD HOPE FOR
ULTIMATE VICTORY--
--BUT THIS TIME, MY
ALMOST IRRESISTIBLE
FORCE HAS MET A
TRULY IMMOVABLE
OBJECT!



SURRENDER.


PERHAPS THIS
IS ONLY THE
DULLING OF MY
WILL AGAIN--
BUT I KNOW IT
IS NOT! I HAVE
SELDOM FELT
SO LUCID!

THE ANCIENT ONE
TOLD ME THAT NO
MAN EVER BELIEVES
HIS TIME HAS COME--
BUT I AM FORCED
TO BELIEVE!




DEATH IS A PART OF LIFE, JUST AS LIFE IS A PART OF DEATH.
ESCAPE-- ATTACK-- THESE ARE BORN OF THE INSTINCTIVE FEAR
AND ANGER DEATH BREEDS WITH HIS APPROACH.

BUT DEATH, THOUGH REMORSELESS, IS NOT EVIL. WHEN THE TIME
COMES, DEATH IS ONLY AN EXPERIENCE FOR THE SOUL-- ONE
UNLIKE ANY OTHER, BUT AN EXPERIENCE NONETHELESS.
AND FEAR AND ANGER ONLY CONFUSE PERCEPTION.



I HAVE FEARED DEATH, DEEP INSIDE,
THOUGH MY ARTS HAVE TAUGHT ME MUCH
ABOUT THE MASTERY OF MY MIND.
DESPITE MY ARTS, I AM A MAN, AND
MEN DO NOT WISH TO DIE. THUS, I
HAVE FOUGHT EVERY STEP OF THE WAY!

BUT I FIGHT NO LONGER!
I FEAR DEATH NO LONGER!



I AM READY TO DIE.

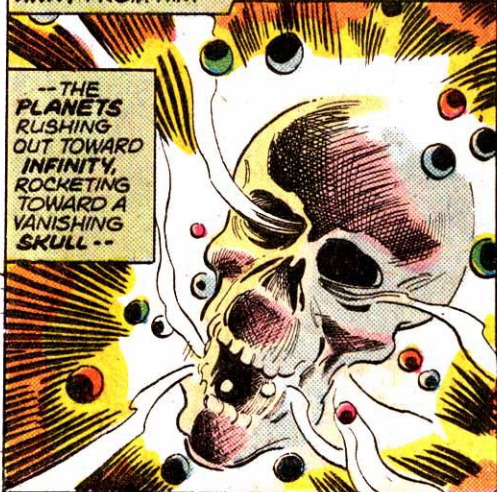
WITH THAT, HE OPENS HIMSELF, AND GROWS,
AND GROWS, TO FILL THE MAMMOTH FORM.
HE INHABITS--TO FEEL DEATH'S TOUCH ON
ALL OF HIM AT ONCE--

--AND HE
DIES.



BUT SUDDENLY, THE UNIVERSE AROUND HIS
BODY BEGINS TO SHUDDER, LIKE THE
FLANKS OF SOME RAGING BEAST-- AND THEN,
EVEN MORE QUICKLY, IT STARTS TO FALL
AWAY FROM HIM--

--THE
PLANETS
RUSHING
OUT TOWARD
INFINITY,
ROCKETING
TOWARD A
VANISHING
SKULL--



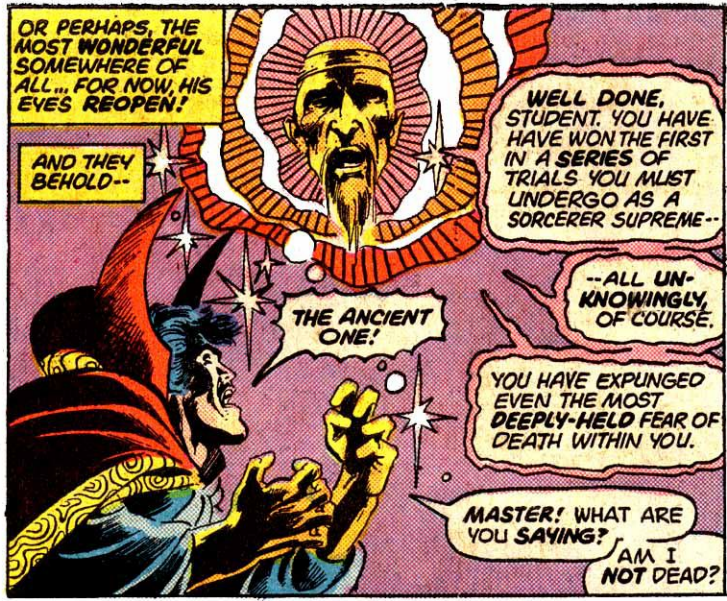
--AND EVEN MORE
SUDDENLY, HIS
LIFELESS FORM IS--



--NOWHERE.

OR PERHAPS, THE
MOST WONDERFUL
SOMEWHERE OF
ALL... FOR NOW, HIS
EYES REOPEN!

AND THEY
BEHOLD--



WELL DONE,
STUDENT. YOU HAVE
WON THE FIRST
IN A SERIES OF
TRIALS YOU MUST
UNDERGO AS A
SORCERER SUPREME--

--ALL UN-
KNOWINGLY,
OF COURSE.

YOU HAVE EXPUNGED
EVEN THE MOST
DEEPLY-HELD FEAR OF
DEATH WITHIN YOU.

MASTER! WHAT ARE
YOU SAYING?

AM I
NOT DEAD?

THE ANCIENT
ONE!



ON YOUR
PLANE OF
EXISTENCE,
YES, ON THIS
ONE--MINE--
IT MATTERS
NOT.

YET YOU SHALL
LIVE AGAIN,
MY PUPIL--
REBORN INTO
YOUR REALM WITH
NO PHYSICAL
FEARS TO ARREST
YOUR DEVELOPMENT.
THIS IS THE YIELD
OF YOUR ACTIONS.

YOU SHALL LIVE-- AND
YOUR LIFE SHALL BE
TOUCHED WITH ETERNITY,
FOR YOU WILL NEVER
FEAR DEATH AGAIN.

FROM THIS MOMENT
FORWARD, YOU WILL
NOT AGE. DEATH
MAY COME ONLY FROM
WITHOUT, IN BATTLE--
AND NOT FROM WITHIN.

YOU MAY LIVE FOR
600 YEARS, AS I
DID ONCE I WON
THIS TRIAL... OR YOU
MAY LIVE EVEN
LONGER...
FOREVER!



I DO FEEL...
DIFFERENT.



ON YOUR FOREHEAD,
THE ANKH, SYMBOL OF
ENDURING LIFE.

BEFORE YOU,
MANY OTHER
UNEXPECTED
TRIALS--
TRIALS OF
WHICH I MAY
SAY NO MORE--

--YET IF YOU
LIVE YOUR NEW
LIFE WELL, YOU
WILL MEET
THEM WELL--
AND IN THE END,
YOU, TOO, SHALL
BECOME--

--ONE
WITH
ALL.

HIS VOICE AND FACE FADE...
AND SO DOES OUR STORY.
REJOIN US IN DR. STRANGE #5,
FOR THE GRAND FINALE!

SHOWDOWN WITH SILVER DAGGER!