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SMOKE AND MIRRORS

PART 3 OF 3

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SNOKE AND MIRRORS WISBORN

Part 3 of 3

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SO TELL ME WHERE THE THORNS ARE HOLDING THEIR CEREMONY, OR YOU DON'T GET OFF AS EASY AS YOUR PALS HERE...

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EVEN IF I KNEW WHAT YOU SEEK, I WOULD NOT TELL YOU, DOG! THE TSOO DO NOT--

WRONG ANSWER.

DAMN... MANTICORE HERE, STATESMAN. NO LUCK ON THE STREETS. HOW ARE THINGS GOING THERE?

NOTHING YET, EVERYONE'S GIVING IT THEIR ALL, THOUGH, I'LL SAY THAT.



"THE END OF LIFE ON EARTH. THAT'S WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT, VICTORIA. I JUST PRAY THE FREEDOM PHALANX CAN PUT A STOP TO THIS BEFORE THE THORNS BRING THEIR DEMON TO THIS WORLD."



"AT THE MOMENT, IT'S NOT LOOKING TOO GOOD."

"THE THORNS HAVE CAPTURED ME, A MODEL NAMED CANDY SOMETHING, AND A LITTLE BOY WHOSE NAME IS JIMMY, I THINK HE SAID."



"POOR LITTLE FELLA. I'VE TRIED TALKING TO HIM, TRIED TO CALM HIM DOWN, BUT HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND ANY OF THIS."

"HOW COULD HE? HOW COULD HE UNDERSTAND THAT HE'S PART OF SOME COSMIC ALIGNMENT THAT'LL BRING CHAOS TO THE PLANET?"



"CEASE YOUR TEARS, BOY! I CANNOT STAND THE NOISE ONE MORE MOMENT! RATHER, BE PROUD THAT YOU'RE SUCH AN INTEGRAL PART OF SOMETHING GRAND."

"LEAVE HIM ALONE, CREEP!"

"YOU EVEN THINK ABOUT TOUCHIN' THAT BOY, AND--"

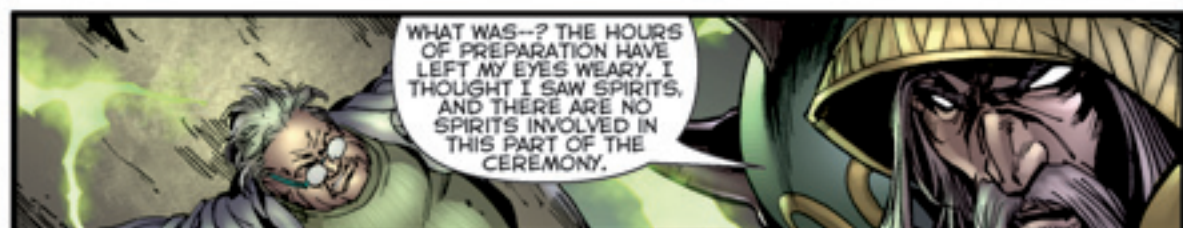


"AND WHAT? YOU THINK I HAVE ANYTHING TO FEAR FROM A DODDERING OLD MAN?"



"YOU TAKE THESE SHACKLES OFF ME, AND I'LL SHOW YOU WHAT THIS OLD MAN CAN DO."







"I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN, VICTORIA. BUT IT LOOKS LIKE WE MAY BE TOGETHER SOON."

"I CAN'T WAIT FOR THAT, 'CAUSE YOU KNOW HOW I'VE MISSED YOU OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, HONEY."

"BUT I SURE DON'T WANT IT TO BE THIS WAY. I DON'T WANT EVERYONE ELSE TO LOSE OUT ON THE KIND OF LIFE YOU AND I MADE TOGETHER..."



"YOU REMEMBER WHEN WE FIRST GOT HITCHED? YOUR FOLKS DIDN'T WANT YOU TO HAVE ANY PART OF A SKINNY KID WITH NO PROSPECTS."

"HEH, I GUESS I DID OKAY FOR MYSELF IN THE LONG RUN, THOUGH."



"AND WHEN I TALKED YOU INTO SEWING TOGETHER MY FIRST COSTUME? YOU THOUGHT ME BEING A SUPERHERO WAS ABOUT AS SCREWY A NOTION AS YOU'D EVER HEARD."



"OVER THE YEARS, THOUGH, I THINK I HELPED A LOT OF FOLKS, AND I KNOW YOU WERE ALWAYS SO PROUD OF ME. I KNOW YOU WERE."



"THAT'S WHAT KEPT ME GOING, VICTORIA. THAT'S WHAT'S KEPT ME FIGHTING."



AND WE DON'T STOP FIGHTING, NO MATTER WHAT. EVERYONE READY?

READY...AND ABLE. SO HOW ABOUT THIS FOR A STRATEGY: PSYCHE MAKES THE MORE POWERFUL MAGES TURN ON EACH OTHER. I FIRE A COUPLE OF STASIS ARROWS TO HOLD A BUNCH IN PLACE, AND EVERYONE ELSE PICKS OFF THE STRAGGLERS. SOUND GOOD?



SOUNDS DARNED GOOD. JUST BE CAREFUL.

AND, HEY, LISTEN, IF WE DON'T MAKE IT THROUGH THIS, I JUST WANT TO SAY--

YOU TALK TOO MUCH. WE'LL MAKE IT, OK? WE'LL MAKE IT.



ALL RIGHT, FREEDOM PHALANX. THIS ONE IS FOR ALL THE MARBLES. ON MY COMMAND: ONE...TWO...



THR--UGGHH!





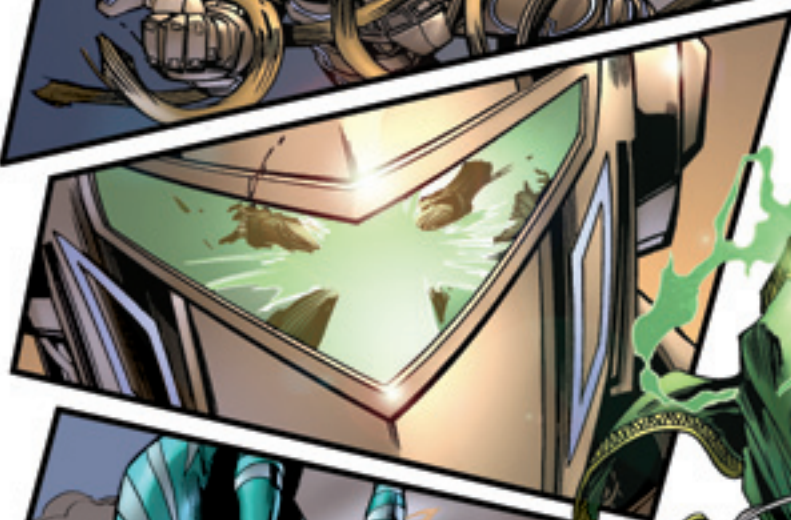
NO, YOU FOOLS! WE
OUTNUMBER THEM. OUR
POWER IS AT ITS ZENITH,
AND STILL YOU FAIL ME!
DEFEAT THEM, OR FACE
MY WRATH!

OH, IT'S
THE BIG, SCARY
SPECTERS! I
GUESS I SHOULD
COWER IN FEAR,
BUT HEY...

PSYCHE
DON'T PLAY
THAT.



AH, THE
TENTACLES. BEEN
THERE, DONE THAT.
I'M AFRAID. AND THEY
DON'T BEGIN TO HAVE
THE POWER TO DEAL
WITH MY LEVEL OF
ENERGY.



BAH, I
DON'T HAVE TIME
FOR THIS! THE TIME
OF THE THIRTEEN
KNELLS IS
NIGH!

I SHALL END
THIS NOW. WITH MY
NEWFOUND POWER, I
INVOKE THE SLEEP
OF FOREVER
ONYX!



WHAT THE--? WHERE AM I? I'VE BEEN PUT TO SLEEP BY THE THORNS BEFORE, BUT NOT LIKE THIS... IT'S SOME KIND OF DREAMWORLD OR SOMETH--

AURORA? WHAT THE HELL?

HELLO, SHALICE. I'VE MISSED YOU, AND I'M HERE TO GET BACK... TOGETHER.

AHHHH!



WHAT'S HAPPENING? WHY WON'T THEY WAKE UP?

I HONESTLY DON'T KNOW, BUT FROM THE WAY THEY'RE MOANING AND TWITCHING, I'D SAY THEY'RE IN A HELL OF THEIR OWN RIGHT NOW.



WHAT'S HAPPENING? THIS PLACE LOOKS LIKE--

CREY INDUSTRIES, MR. BERRY, WE BELIEVE YOU HAVE SOME SUPERPOWERS THAT ARE RIGHTFULLY OURS...



...AND I'M AFRAID THE PROCESS OF REMOVING THEM WILL BE INFINITELY MORE PAINFUL THAN THE ONE THAT GAVE THEM TO YOU.

NO! GET AWAY!

4
END INSIDE
THE MIND OF
POSITRON...

MY
ARMOR!
IT'S FLAKING
AWAY, BIT BY
BIT! BUT
WITHOUT
IT...

...THERE'S
NOTHING TO
HOLD ME
TOGETHER! I'M
JUST... OH, GOD,
HELP ME!



WHERE
AM I? ALL
THOSE
PEOPLE...
STARVING,
DYING...

...AND
I CAN'T DO
ANYTHING.
I HAVE THIS
COSTUME,
THESE
ARROWS...
BUT NO
FOOD OR
WATER.

NO...



NOW, WE MAY FINALIZE THE CEREMONY. PREPARE FOR THE KNELLS. THESE FOOLS ARE HELPLESS.



HELP ME, STATESMAN!

NO, HELP ME! MY DAUGHTER HAS BEEN ABDUCTED!

NO, I NEED YOU MORE! MY HUSBAND IS TRAPPED UNDER A COLLAPSED WALL!

NO, ME! I'M DYING!

ME! ME!

NO, ME!



GET BACK! I WANT TO HELP YOU ALL, BUT I CAN'T! I CAN'T!

THERE'S SO MUCH TO DO, AND I CAN NEVER DO IT ALL! NO MATTER HOW LONG I LIVE!



EXCELLENT! NOW IT BEGINS.



WE CAN'T LET THIS GO ON. I'VE GOT TO--

I THINK I HAVE AN IDEA.

HEY! HEY, YOU, MAGIC GUY?



LOOK, IF YOU'LL STOP THIS RIGHT NOW, MAYBE WE CAN WORK SOMETHING OUT, Y'KNOW? I MEAN, YOU AND ME? I'VE BEEN ON THE COVER OF COSMO, YOU KNOW.

QUIET, WOMAN! WHEN MY MASTER ENTERS THIS WORLD, I WILL HAVE YOU AND A THOUSAND THOUSAND LIKE YOU IF I CHOOSE.



YOU DO HAVE THE HONOR OF BEING HERE FOR HIS ARRIVAL, THOUGH. THE TIME HAS COME. ONCE I STRIKE THE GONG THIRTEEN TIMES, THE PORTAL SHALL OPEN, AND THE FUTURE SHALL BELONG TO MY KIND.

GET AWAY! WE'RE NOT TOGETHER ANYMORE! AND I'M MY OWN PERSON!

BUT YOU STILL CARRY PART OF ME INSIDE! WE STILL--

LIKE HELL! I MAY BE A LOT OF THINGS, AND SOME OF THEM AREN'T SO NICE, I SUPPOSE, BUT I'M ME...

...ME!

SOMETHING'S HAPPENING IN THE WAKING WORLD. OH, NO...

WE HAVE TO STOP THE IDIOT WITH THE GONG... FAST!

NOT SURE THIS WILL WORK, BUT IT'S ALL WE'VE GOT...

BACK AT HQ, MANTICORE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT WORKING TOGETHER.

HE'S A MOUTH, BUT SOMETIMES MAYBE HE'S GOT THE RIGHT IDEA.

I CAN'T GET OUT OF THIS DREAMWORLD ON MY OWN, BUT IF I CAN TAP INTO THE DREAM STREAM...

COME, MASTER, COME INTO THIS WORLD, AND LET ALL BOW DOWN BEFORE YOU!

PHALANX, IF YOU'RE GOING TO DO SOMETHING, FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, DO IT NOW!



NO, THEY CAN'T.



PSYCHE? WHAT ARE YOU--

I'M HERE TO GIVE YOU A BREATHER, SYN. SO YOU CAN SEE WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW, AND END YOUR NIGHTMARE.

YOU GET ME?



UH...
YEAH, YEAH,
I THINK
I DO.
YEAH, I
DO!

I WAS
SOMEONE BEFORE
THE TORTURE CREY
PUT ME THROUGH, AND
I'LL KEEP BEING
SOMEONE...



...POWERS
OR NOT.

BUT RIGHT AT
THIS MOMENT, I'M
PRETTY FREAKIN'
GLAD I'VE GOT
THE POWERS!





SOON,
THERE WILL BE
NOTHING LEFT.
I'LL JUST
BE--



YOU'LL BE
THE SAME SACK OF
PUCKS YOU ALWAYS
HAVE BEEN, POS. NOW
PULL IT TOGETHER,
BUDDY.

WELL... YES.
IT'S OBVIOUS NOW. I
SUPPOSE THE SPELL
OF THE THORNS KEPT
ME FROM SEEING THAT.
IT PROBABLY WORKS
ON THE PRINCIPLE
OF--

NOT THE TIME,
OPPENHEIMER. WE
HAVE TO GET
CITADEL.



BE READY FOR
ANYTHING IN HERE,
BECAUSE WE--

AH. GOOD, I WAS
HOPING YOU'D
FIND ME.

CITADEL, WHAT'S HAPPENING?
THE REST OF US WERE
TRAPPED IN NIGHTMARES,
AND YOU'RE SITTING
HERE--

DRINKING
LEMONADE AND
READING A BOOK
ON DREAM
THEORY, YES.



YOU SEE, WHILE I HAVE
THE ABILITY TO DREAM, IN MY
CASE IT'S NOT A RANDOM ACT. I
ACTIVELY PROGRAM MY DREAMS
EACH TIME I SLEEP.

WHEN IT BECAME
OBVIOUS I WAS TRAPPED
HERE, I DECIDED TO USE THE
TIME READING A PROGRAM FROM
MY FILES REGARDING DREAMS,
TO SEE WHAT I COULD
DISCERN.



AND THE
LEMONADE?

I LIKE
LEMONADE.

QUICK,
EVERYONE
JOIN
HANDS!



IS
THIS WHERE WE
SING "KUMBAYA"
AND--

SHUT
UP! IF WE ALL
CONCENTRATE, I
CAN CHANNEL OUR
MENTAL ENERGY
INTO THE WAKING
WORLD! I CAN
BRING US OUT
OF THIS...

HURRY,
PSYCHE!



"I CAN SEE THE PHALANX STRUGGLING, VICTORIA, BUT THEY'RE NOT GOING TO MAKE IT IN TIME."

"THIS MANIAC STRIKES THE GONG THREE MORE TIMES, AND IT'S ALL OVER."



"IT'S UP TO ME. I KNOW THE DOC TOLD ME NEVER TO USE MY SUPER-SPEED AGAIN... THAT MY HEART COULDN'T TAKE THE STRAIN..."



"BUT BABY, THIS OL' HEART COULDN'T TAKE THE STRAIN IF I DIDN'T DO THE RIGHT THING NOW..."



"WE'RE ALMOST BACK... TO CONSCIOUSNESS. HANG ON, PEOPLE!"

"I LEARNED A TRICK LONG AGO... LEARNED HOW TO VIBRATE MYSELF THROUGH SOLID OBJECTS. GUESS IT'S LIKE RIDING A BIKE..."





WE MADE IT! AND LOOK, THE PORTAL IS CLOSING!

I SAW WHAT HAPPENED, BUT NO TIME TO EXPLAIN IT NOW. HIT THE THORNS WHILE THEIR POWER IS WANING!



GOTCHA, PSYCHE! MANTICORE, YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO?

CHECK! YOU GET A WAVE OF 'EM TO SWEEP OVER YOU...

...AND I MOP UP THE LOT OF 'EM WITH A STUNNER ARROW. YES!

CITADEL, YOU UP FOR A NUMBER 17?

AH, THE "BALD MAN AND THE TURTLE," EH?

I BELIEVE THE PHRASE IS "LOOK OUT BELOW!" OR... DON'T.









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