

Stan Lee
PRESENTS:

THE MICRONAUTS!

TROPICA!

BLINDED BY AN EXPLODING COMET, ACROYEAR HAS CRASH-LANDED ON TROPICA, ONE OF THE MANY MOLECULAR ZONES OF HOMEWORLD...

DRAWING HIMSELF FROM HIS RUINED SPACECRAFT THE FORMER LORD OF SPARTAK REALIZES THAT HIS CHANCES OF SURVIVAL ARE SLIM...

SPACE
GLIDER

MARIONETTE

BUG

MICROTRON

PHAROID

GUEST-STARRING:
DR. STRANGE, MASTER
OF THE MYSTIC ARTS

THOUGH HIS EYES ARE
SIGHTLESS HE HEARS
HARSH, LABORING
BREATHING FROM THE
UNDERGROUND...

...AND KNOWS THAT
HE IS NOT ALONE!

BILL MANTLO
WRITER

PAT BRODERICK
PENCILS

DANNY BULANADI
INKS

SIMEK
LETTERS

SHAREN
COLORS

DEFALCO
EDITOR

SHOOTER
ED.-IN-CHIEF


MICRONAUTS® Vol. 1, No. 33, September, 1981. (U.S.P.S. 539-990) Published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, James E. Gallion, President, Stan Lee, Publisher, Michael Hobson, Vice-President, Publishing, Milton Schiffman, Vice-President, Production. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 575 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022. Controlled circulation postage paid at New York, NY and at additional mailing office. Published monthly. MICRONAUTS®, SPACE GLIDER®, BIOTRON®, MICROTRON®, ACROYEAR®, BARON KARAK®, GALACTIC WARRIOR®, LASERSONICS®, PHOBOS®, FORCE COMMANDER®, TIME TRAVELER®, HYDRO COPTER®, ASTRO STATION®, REP-TON®, ANTI-CHON®, NIKON ORBITER®, THORIUM ORBITER®, STAR SEARCHER®, BATTLE CRUISER®, CENTAURUS®, and PHAROID® are trademarks of MEGO CORP. and the likenesses of the characters to which those names are applied are the property of MEGO CORP. and the trademarks and likenesses are used with the permission of MEGO CORP. MICRONAUTS® copyright © 1981 by MEGO CORP. All rights reserved. All other material copyright © 1981 by Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. Price 50¢ per copy in the U.S. and Canada. Subscription rate \$6.00 for 12 issues. Canada, \$7.00. Foreign, \$9.00. Printed in the U.S.A. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This publication may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. Postmaster: Send address changes to Subscription Dept., Marvel Comics Group, 575 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.

SLOWLY, ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLY, ACROYEAR SHIFTS HIS POSITION ON THE GREENSWARD UNTIL HIS ENERGY SWORD FACES IN THE DIRECTION OF THE BREATHING.



IF IT IS SOME
ANIMAL THAT
STALKS HIM, HE
WILL NOT DIE
EASY.

BUT NOW
CAME HE
HERE?



With a shudder,
he remembers. He'd
quit the Micronauts to journey to
Spartak, the planet of his birth,
the planet he'd devastated while
battling the Microversian tyrant, Baron Karza.
Fleeing their ruined world, Acroyear's subjects
left their former lord one final message—
the sign of the "Traitor" to be seared in crystal
fire onto his forehead, branding him
an outcast for all time. He had
been in the act of accepting their
judgment when the legendary
Herald Comet appeared...



BY LIGHTING THE
HEAVENS, YOU MADE
ME A KING. NOW
WHAT FATE DO YOU
FORETELL FOR ME?

I WILL HAVE AN
ANSWER, IF IT
MEANS PURSUING
YOU ACROSS THE
MICROVERSE.

BOARDING HIS SHIP, ACROYEAR GAVE CHASE.



OVER HOMEWORLD, THE
COMET SEEMED TO
EXPLODE. ITS BRILLIANCE
COST ACROYEAR HIS SIGHT.

--AND
CONTROL OF
HIS CRAFT!

I HAVE CRASHED ON
HOMEWORLD, WHERE MY
FELLOW MICRONAUTS
PURSUE THEIR QUEST FOR
THE THREE KEYS TO THE
ENIGMA FORCE, WHICH
MUST BE FOUND ERE
GREAT DISASTERS O'ER-
TAKE THE MICROVERSE.

IS THIS, THEN, MY
DESTINY, TO
ABANDON MY SEARCH
FOR MY WANDERING
PEOPLE--

--AND TO
SWEAR MY
ALLEGIANCE TO
A
GREATER
GOAL?

OR HAS THE
HERALD COMET
BROUGHT ME HERE
TO DIE AT THE
FANGS OF SOME
UNSEEN BEAST?

I HEAR A
HEAVY
TREAD, MY
HUNTER
DRAWS
NIGH.

HE WILL
FIND ME
BLIND--

--BUT FAR FROM
FANGLESS!

UNFORTUNATELY, IT ALSO DROWNS OUT THE SOFT FOOTPAD OF THE
SAVAGE CREATURE WHICH NOW LEAVES THE JUNGLE'S COVER ...

NOW ACROYEAR
CAN NEITHER
HEAR NOR SEE
THE BEAST!

THE MIGHTY
MICRONAUT
MAY WELL
GO BLINDLY
TO HIS
DEATH!

ACROYEAR'S ENERGY SWORD
CRACKLES WITH POWER! IT SINGS!

HOMEWORLD'S GIANT DOUBLE SUNS SHINE DOWN SAVAGELY ON THE MOLECULE HERETOFORE KNOWN AS SUBZERO ZONE.

FROZEN NO LONGER, ITS TUNDRAS HAVE TURNED INTO STEAMING SWAMPS...

...AND ITS PEOPLE STREAM FORTH FROM THE PROUD CITY OF POLARIA, HOPING TO ESCAPE DEATH WHEN ITS ICE SPIRES BEGIN TO MELT!

IN POLARIA'S ROYAL PALACE, COMMANDER RANN--LEADER OF THE FAR-FAAMED MICRONAUTS--CONVEYS THIS GRIM NEWS TO ARGON, KING OF HOMEWORLD...

THE EXODUS CONTINUES, ARGON. SOON POLARIA WILL BE A GHOST CITY.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND, COMMANDER RANN. YOU NOW POSSESS TWO OF THE THREE KEYS TO THE ENIGMA FORCE -- THE SENTIENT POWER WHICH PROTECTS THE MICROVERSE FROM DESTRUCTION, SURELY THEY MUST GIVE YOU THE POWER NEEDED TO STAVE OFF THIS 'TIME OF GREAT DISTRESS' WHICH THREATENS POLARIA.

YET YOU SEEM UNABLE--OR UNWILLING--TO USE THE KEYS TO PROTECT MY SUBJECTS.

IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE, ARGON. THE KEYS ARE POWERFUL, IT'S TRUE--BUT THEIR POWER SEEMS TO SERVE SOME SPECIFIC PURPOSE.

ON OCEANIA, THE FIRST KEY TURNED THE INHABITANTS OF SEAZONE INTO MEN-FISH SO THAT THEY MIGHT SURVIVE IN THE SEA ONCE THEIR CITY FELL.

A CITY DESTROYED--WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN SAVED--IS NOT A DISASTER?

IT'S PEOPLE LIVE, AND THE FORM OF THEIR SALVATION WAS CHOSEN BY ONE OF THEIR OWN.

HERE, PRINCE PEACOCK--APPARENTLY THE ONLY ONE CAPABLE OF WIELDING THE KEY TO SAVE POLARIA--REFUSES TO DO SO... BECAUSE HE BELIEVES THAT HIS PEOPLE HAVE BECOME AS COLD, AS HEARTLESS, AS THEIR CLIMATE!

INDEED, ACQUIRING THE KEY COST PEACOCK THE WOMAN HE LOVED--AND POLARIA A QUEEN.

ARGON, WHAT IF THE PURPOSE OF THE ENIGMA FORCE'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE AFFAIRS OF MEN IS TO FORCE THOSE STALE AND STAGNANT CULTURES BACK ONTO THE ROAD OF PROGRESS?

AFTER ALL, THOUGH SEAZONE AND POLARIA ARE DYING, THEIR PEOPLE LIVE BY ADAPTING TO CHANGE.

IN ANY EVENT, KING ARGON, COMMANDER RANN HAS TRIED TO EMPLOY THE POWER OF THE KEYS TO STAVE OFF POLARIA'S IMMINENT DESTRUCTION WITHOUT SUCCESS.



ARE YOU ASKING ME TO ACCEPT THE DESTRUCTION OF THESE CULTURES, WHICH HAVE DEVELOPED ON HOMEWORLD OVER THE CENTURIES, ON THE BASIS OF SOME UNFOUNDED THEORY?

NO, COMMANDER! THE PROPHECY FOR LOCATING THE ENIGMA FORCE WAS CLEAR IN ITS MESSAGE!



"A time of darkness there will be;
Of great distress on land and sea!

Find thyself and thou wilt find me--
the secret lies in these Keys three!"

I WANT YOU AND YOUR MICRONAUTS TO FIND ALL THREE KEYS, COMMANDER RANN-- SO THAT THEY CAN BE USED TO REVIVE OUR LINK WITH THE ENIGMA FORCE BEFORE ANY MORE OF MY REALM SUFFERS DISASTER!



HIS REALM? HE ACTS AS IF HE CARES MORE ABOUT THE MICROVERSE THAN WE DO!

MICROTRON, HAVE YOU SEEN ARGON'S SISTER, THE PRINCESS MARI?

SHE IS OUT ON THE TERRACE WITH PRINCE PEACOCK, COMMANDER, TRYING TO GET HIM TO LEAVE POLARIA WITH US!



BUT YOU MUST COME, PRINCE PEACOCK! IF THE SUN GROWS ANY HOTTER, POLARIA WILL MELT AROUND YOU!

LET THE SUNS BLAZE DOWN, FAIR MAID! LET MELT THE ICE AND SNOWS!



THIS ACCURSED KINGDOM HAS MADE ALL POLARIANS AS COLD AS ICE, AS DISTANT FROM EACH OTHER AS THE TWIN SUNS OF HOMEWORLD ONCE WERE FROM SUBZERO ZONE.

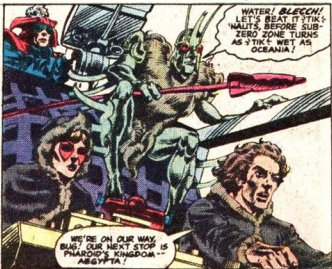
MY PEOPLE NEED WARMING, MILADY-- 'TILL MAKE THEM HUMAN AGAIN.



BUT NOT I! THE COLDNESS OF MY HEART COST ME THE WOMAN I LOVED! I'LL NOT OUTLIVE HER!

UNABLE TO SWAY PEACOCK OR TO FORESTALL POLARIA'S DESTRUCTION, THE MOROSE MICRONAUTS BOARD THEIR ASTROSTATION AND TAKE THEIR LEAVE...

THE ICE MELTING OFF OF SUBZERO ZONE'S MOUNTAINS WOULD WATER MY NATIVE SANDSTONE FOR MILLIMNAT!



WATER! BLEECH! LET'S BEAT IT! TIK-NAUTS, BEFORE SUB-ZERO ZONE TURNS AS TIK-NET WET AS OCEANIA!

WE'RE ON OUR WAY, BUG! OUR NEXT STOP IS PHARO'D'S KINGDOM-- AEGYPTA!

AEGYPTA, WHERE I MUST DO MY DUTY TO HE WHOM I AM BOUND TO SERVE-- AND BETRAY THE MICRONAUTS, PERHAPS UNTO DEATH!



I WISH THERE WERE SOME OTHER WAY!

HEY, NAUTS! YA TIK-NERE THAT SOUND-- LIKE A GIANT TIK-N CRACKIN' HIS KNUCKLES?

IT'S POLARIA! THE SUN'S TIK-N BREAKIN' IT UP!



INDEED, WHERE ONLY A SHORT TIME BEFORE MAPS HAD SHOWN A SHINING CITY--

--THEY WILL, IN THE FUTURE, DEPICT ONLY A SHIMMERING LAKE.



IT WAS SO USELESS, ARCTURUS! IF ONLY PEACOCK COULD HAVE SHOWN QUEEN FRIA THAT HE LOVED HER, TOGETHER THEY MIGHT HAVE USED THE KEY TO SAVE THEIR CITY!

INSTEAD, THEY DIED-- AND THEIR CITY DIED WITH THEM!

THERE WAS NOTHING WE COULD DO, MARI! NOTHING!



MEANWHILE, BACK ON TROPICA, THE MIGHTY-- BUT BLIND-- KING ACROYEAR HAS JUST DISCOVERED THAT HIS UNSEEN ENEMY IS...

BEHIND ME!



BY THE WORLDKIND! WHAT MANNER OF CREATURE DO I FACE? HIS GROWL REVERBERATES LIKE THUNDER... YET, HE MOVES AS SILENTLY AND STEALTHILY AS A TARN...

EH? WHAT NEW SOUND...? MUSIC?



FOR A MOMENT, THE DULCET TONES RING LOUD IN ACROYEAR'S EARS. THEN THEY PASS, LEAVING HIM CONFUSED-- AND ANGERED!

'TIS SOME TRICK-- MEANT TO UNBALANCE ME! PERHAPS THE CREATURE'S NATURE IS TO CHARM ME WITH SONG WHILST HIS FANGS SEEK OUT MY THROAT! BUT I'LL NOT SUCCEMB!

GRRRR



EYES BLAZING, THE PREDATOR BACKS AWAY... BUT ONLY FAR ENOUGH TO SECURE A WEAPON WITH WHICH TO COUNTER ACROYEAR'S ENERGY SWORD!

THUS ARMED, THIS SLAYING JUNGLE-BEAST ADVANCES ON THE SIGHTLESS SPARTAN...

RARRGH

COME, CREATURE! MY ENERGY SWORD AWAITS! YOU'LL PAY DEARLY FOR YOUR DINNER!



THERE IS A HIGH, MELLIFLOUS TRILL OF PROTEST...

...FOLLOWED BY A SIBILANT SHRIEK AS A DARTING SPHERE OF LIGHT LAUNCHES ITSELF AT THE UNSEING ACROYEAR!



THE MUSIC AGAIN--
LOUDER THAN BEFORE--
CRYING OUT IN MY EARS
LIKE SOME WAILING
BANSHÉE!



I CANNOT THINK--
CANNOT LISTEN FOR
MY ENEMY'S
APPROACH-- UNLESS
I DRIVE IT ...

...AWAY!

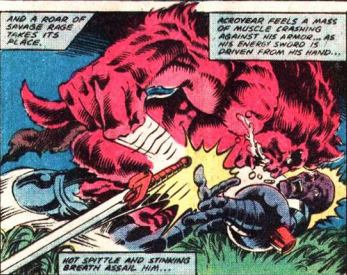


SWAT

ROWR?

THE MUSIC
STOPS.

AND A ROAR OF
SAVAGE RAGE
TAKES ITS
PLACE.



ACROYEAR FEELS A MASS
OF MUSCLE CRASHING
AGAINST HIS ARMOR... AS
HIS ENERGY SWORD IS
DRIVEN FROM HIS HAND...

HOT SPITTLE AND STINKING
BREATH ASSAIL HIM...

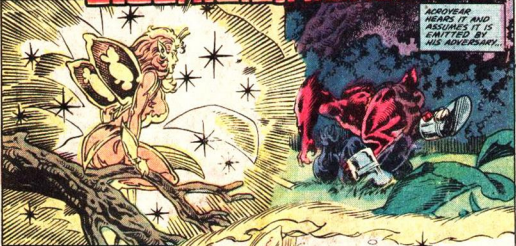


HE FACES A
DEATH WHICH
HE CANNOT
SEE...

THEN-- AGAIN--
COMES THE
MUSIC!

SILLAILILIAISREEEEEEE

ACROYEAR
HEARS IT AND
ASSUMES IT IS
EMITTED BY
HIS ADVERSARY...



HE IS WRONG.
THE SOUND
STEMS FROM
A WINGED
MAID NO
BIGGER
THAN
ACROYEAR'S
HAND. SHE
RISES...



...AND DARTS BETWEEN ACROYEAR'S
SIGHTLESS EYES AND THE CLAWS
POISED TO RAKE THEM OUT.



IT IS THEN, TO ACROYEAR'S AMAZEMENT, THAT HE ENCOUNTERS
NOT THE ULTIMATE DARKNESS OF A SWIFT AND SAVAGE
DEATH... BUT AN INCREDIBLY INTENSE LIGHT THAT SEEMS
TO SING OF LIFE ETERNAL!



THE
SONG
SWELLS
IN HIS
HEART!

AND, WHEN THE SONG IS DONE,
ACROYEAR... UNDERSTANDS.

YOU STRUCK
BLINDLY, ALL
IS FORGIVEN.

I... AM
SORRY... IF
I HURT YOU.

SIGHTLESS ONE! I
TOO, AM SORRY! UNTIL
FIREFLYTE OPENED UP
A CHANNEL OF
COMMUNICATION
BETWEEN US--

--I SHOULD
HAVE REALIZED
THAT YOU WOULD
MISTAKE MY
GUTTURAL SPEECH
FOR THE GROWL-
INGS OF SOME
WILD BEAST.

AS LONG AS
FIREFLYTE
DANCES BEFORE
HIS SIGHTLESS
EYES, ACROYEAR
"SEES"

YOU SPEAK! YOU REASON!
AND YET YOU SOUGHT TO
BURY YOUR FANGS IN MY
THROAT!

PLEASE, YOUR
SPEECH SOUNDED
AS WILD TO ME AS
MINE DID TO YOU--
AND YOUR SWORD
NEARLY CUT ME
IN TWAIN!

THEN,
WHEN YOU
STRUCK MY
FRIEND,
FIREFLYTE, I
BECAME AS A
WILD THING AND
GAVE WAY TO
RAGE!

--AND TAKE
YOU TO A
PLACE WHERE
YOU WILL FIND
FOOD AND
SHELTER.

A CITY?

BUT NOW WE
UNDERSTAND EACH
OTHER. HERE,
LET ME RETRIEVE
YOUR HELMET--

A BEAUTIFUL
CITY! MY CITY!
FIREFLYTE WILL
LEAD THE WAY
SO THAT YOUR
EYES MAY SEE
THROUGH
HERS--

--MIRTHRIA,
HOME OF DEVIL
OF TROPICA!



"WITH THAT, THE STRANGER HANDED OVER THE KEY... AND LEFT."

AND WHAT HAS THE COMING OF THE KEY TO MIRTHRIA TO DO WITH THIS GAME YOUR PEOPLE PLAY?

EVERYTHING! WHOEVER HELD THE KEY WOULD BECOME THE HAPPIEST BEING IN THE UNIVERSE! NO DEVIL COULD KEEP IT, FOR THAT WOULD MAKE HIM HAPPIER THAN EVERYONE ELSE...

...AND, THUS, UTTERLY UNHAPPY BECAUSE HE COULD NOT SHARE HIS JOY.

SO OUR COUNCIL HID THE KEY INSIDE A SIMPLE CHILD'S GAME WHICH WAS THEN DISTRIBUTED TO ALL OUR POPULATION-- SO THAT EVERY TROPICAN WOULD HAVE AN EQUAL CHANCE OF FINDING THE KEY!

THEY PLAY TO FIND A KEY THEY DO NOT WISH TO FIND? WHY DO THEY NOT JUST ABANDON THE GAME -- OR TURN THEIR SHELLS OVER AND BE DONE WITH IT?

PUZZLED, AROOVEAR WALKS BLINDLY FORWARD...

...AND ACCIDENTALLY COLLIDES WITH A GAME IN PROGRESS.

THE SHELLS OVERTURN. THE DEVILS PLAYING THE GAME WAIL IN HORROR.

AND TWIN GLOWS SIMILAR TO FIREFLYTES, RISE UP AND PERCH UPON THE PLAYERS' SHOULDERS.

OH, DEAR! YOU HAVE RELEASED THE FIREFLYTES WHO DWELL BENEATH THE SHELLS--

--AND WHO EXIST TO REVEAL THAT THE PLAYER HAS TRIED TO STEAL ALL HAPPINESS FOR HIMSELF! ROBBING ANOTHER OF HIS CHANCE AT HAPPINESS IS SOMETHING NO DEVIL CAN LIVE WITH!

I KNOW, FOR I TIPPED MY SHELLS BY ACCIDENT!

THAT NIGHT, WHILE
DEVIL SLEEPS,
ACROYEAR QUERIES
FIREFLYTE...

THE KEY BROUGHT TO MIRTHRIA MUST BE ONE OF
THE THREE KEYS OF THE ENIGMA FORCE! IT CAN
AVERT GREAT DISASTERS TO HOMEWORLD AND THE
MICROVERSE.

SUCH A DISASTER HAS
ALREADY OVERTAKEN POOR
MIRTHRIA, I FEAR.



WHAT DO
YOU
MEAN?

LET ME GIVE YOU SIGHT,
LORD ACROYEAR--

--THAT YOU MIGHT
VENTURE FORTH
FROM THIS PLAYER'S
PLAIN--

--AND "SEE," FAIR MIRTHRIA AS ONCE IT
WAS-- BEFORE THE ADVENT OF THE
GAME.



AGAIN FIREFLYTE'S
SONG GIVES ACROYEAR
THE GIFT OF SIGHT...

...AND HE
FOLLOWS HER
FLOATING FORM
TOWARDS A CITY
LIVING SOMETIME
IN THE PAST.



THE CLANK OF HIS ARMOR
WAKES THE SLEEPING
DEVIL...



...WHO WONDERS WHY HIS FIREFLYTE
HAS ABANDONED HIM TO LEAD THE
SIGHTLESS STRANGER INTO HIS
UNINHABITED CITY.



AYE, DEVIL
WONDERS--
AND FOLLOWS!

THE CITY STREETS OF MIRTHRIA HAVE
FALLEN INTO DISREPAIR SINCE THE
DEVILS WHO LIVED HERE HAVE
DEPARTED TO DEVOTE ALL THEIR
TIME TO THE GAME...

BUT YOU SEE MIRTHRIA
AS IT WAS... DON'T YOU,
LORD ACROYEAR?



YES! AS A
LIVING CITY WITH
LAUGHING FOLK
AND SINGING
CHILDREN! WHY
DID THEY GIVE UP
THIS HAPPINESS,
FIREFLY?



DEVIL TOLD YOU. A
STRANGER CAME WITH A
KEY WHICH PROMISED
GREATER HAPPINESS
STILL -- AND ALL THE
DEVILS BECAME OBSESSED
WITH *NOT* FINDING IT LEST
THEY BECOME HAPPIER
THAN THEIR NEIGHBORS.

SUCH WAS NOT THE RESULT
WHICH THE STRANGER HAD
INTENDED -- BUT 'T WAS THE
RESULT NONETHELESS.



MY FIREFLY
SPEAKS TO ACROYEAR,
REVEALING THINGS TO
HIM WHICH SHE NEVER
SHARED WITH ME!

WHAT OF YOU, LORD
ACROYEAR? DO YOU
CRAVE HAPPINESS?

OF ALL I KNOW,
I KNOW MYSELF
LEAST OF ALL.



NO, I DO NOT CRAVE HAPPINESS AS
SUCH, NOR COULD I ENJOY IT WHILE MY
PEOPLE WANDER THE STARS AND THE
MICROVERSE REMAINS ENDANGERED.

I ONLY DESIRE THE
RETURN OF MY SIGHT--
FOR A WARRIOR
BLINDED IS NO
WARRIOR AT ALL.



PLAY THE
GAME!
PERHAPS YOU
WILL FIND
THAT WHICH IS
HIDDEN
FROM VIEW.

ALL IS HIDDEN FROM MY VIEW,
FIREFLYTE, SAVE THAT WHICH I
"SEE" WITH THE VISION YOU HAVE
LENT ME.

TRUE.



WOULD YOU PLAY THE GAME IF
--BY HELPING YOURSELF-- YOU
COULD BENEFIT THE ENTIRE
MICROVERSE?

"NO! I HAVE FOLLOWED! I HAVE
HEARD! I HAVE SEEN! I
BROUGHT YOU HERE OUT OF
KINDNESS-- AND YOU WOULD
BETRAY ME BY TRYING TO
TAKE ALL HAPPINESS FOR
YOURSELF!"

I WOULD BE A FOOL NOT TO.

THAT IS WHERE
YOU DIFFER FROM THE
DEVILS WHO, HAVING
EYES, ARE TOO
BLIND TO SEE
BEYOND
THEMSELVES.

YOU MOVE
MY HAND
TO A
SMOOTH-
SURFACED
OBJECT.



OF COURSE, IT IS A SHELL --
SIMILAR-- BUT LARGER-- TO
THOSE USED BY THE DEVILS IN
PLAYING THEIR GAME.

THERE MUST
BE THREE
OF THEM!



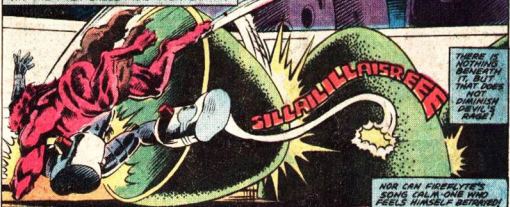
TO FIND THAT
WHICH IS
HIDDEN, I WILL
O'RETURN
THEM ALL.

IT IS
SACRILEGE!
IT IS
BLASPHEMY!

IT IS AGAINST
THE RULES!



ACROYEAR HEARS DEVIL'S RUSH BUT, BEING BLIND, CAN DO NOTHING TO AVOID IT! TOGETHER THEY
HIT THE FIRST SHELL-- AND OVERTURN IT!



THERE IS
NOTHING
BENEATH
IT, BUT
THAT DOES
NOT
DIMINISH
DEVIL'S
RAGE!

NOR CAN FIREFLYTE'S
SONG CALM ONE WHO
FEELS HIMSELF BETRAYED!



DO NOT SING YOUR TREACHEROUS SONG TO ME, FIREFLYTE! YOU HAVE INITIATED THE ACROYEAR INTO OUR GAME--AND OFFERED HIM THAT WHICH ALL DEVILS COMPETE FOR!

BUT WHICH NONE WANT, OH, DEVIL, I COULD HAVE SHOWN YOU WHERE TRUE HAPPINESS LAY--

--BUT WOULD YOU HAVE TAKEN IT, KNOWING THAT IT WOULD MAKE YOU HAPPIER THAN ALL YOUR FELLOWS?



NO DEVIL DARES TO BE HAPPIER THAN ANY OTHER.



THUS, YOUR LACK OF INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVE HAS MADE YOU ALL MISERABLE.

ONE CANNOT BE HAPPY IF HIS NEIGHBORS ARE NOT!



NO-- BUT PERHAPS YOU MISINTERPRETED THE MEANING OF THE GAME.

WHAT IF, BY ATTAINING TRUE HAPPINESS, ONE GAINS THE ABILITY TO MAKE ALL AS HAPPY AS HIMSELF?



I AM BEGINNING TO GUESS WHO THE STRANGER WAS WHO BROUGHT THE KEY TO MIRTHRIA. HAPPINESS FOR ALL IS THE SORT OF GIFT A TIME TRAVELER--THE LIVING EMBODIMENT OF THE ENIGMA FORCE-- WOULD BESTOW.

ACROYEAR'S ENERGY SWORD SLICES THROUGH THE SECOND GIANT SKULL!

IT, TOO, IS EMPTY!

IF WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE, THEN WHY DIDN'T FIREFLYTE GUIDE ME TO THE KEY?

SWOK!

UNNGH!

YOU SAID IT YOURSELF: "ROBBING ANOTHER OF HIS CHANCE AT HAPPINESS IS SOMETHING NO DEVIL CAN LIVE WITH!" POSSESSING THE KEY WOULD HAVE MADE YOU SO MISERABLE THAT I FEARED YOU WOULD DO YOURSELF HARM.

LIES! WHY SHOULD THIS OUTSIDER FARE ANY BETTER? WHY WOULDN'T HE SIMPLY STEAL HAPPINESS AND LEAVE ALL MIRTHRIA UNHAPPY?

BECAUSE I DO NOT FEAR TO FIND HAPPINESS, DEVIL. BECAUSE I DO NOT EVEN DESIRE IT.

BECAUSE I WOULD USE IT, NOT FOR MYSELF, BUT TO SAVE THE MICROVERSE!

NOT WISHING TO HURT DEVIL, YET NOT WISHING TO BE HURT HIMSELF, ACROYEAR BLINDLY HURLS THE ENRAGED MIRTHRIAN FROM HIM! DEVIL STRIKES THE THIRD AND FINAL SHELL ATOP THE TOWER TERRACE, SHATTERING IT...

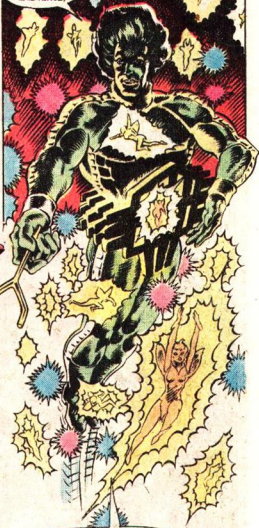


IMMEDIATELY, THE NIGHT IS FILLED WITH A GENTLE GREEN GLOW, AND A SONG--AS SWEET AND AS MYSTERIOUS AS THE MUSIC OF THE FIREFLYTES--PERVADES THE ATMOSPHERE!

IN THE CENTER OF THE GLOW, SURROUNDED BY SINGING FIREFLYTES, IS A VISION ACROYEAR KNOWS WELL-- FOR IT IS ONE OF THE EMERALD EMISSARIES OF THE AWESOME ENIGMA FORCE!

GREETINGS. I AM THE TIME TRAVELER--OR, RATHER, I WAS. YOU WHO HEAR MY WORDS, KNOW THAT I AM NOTHING BUT A MEMORY NOW.

THE FACT THAT YOU HEAR AND SEE MY IMAGE MEANS THAT I HAVE PASSED BEYOND THE PALE OF EXISTENCE.



BUT TAKE THIS KEY--USE IT WELL--FOR HAVING FOUND IT, YOU POSSESS THE STRENGTH REQUIRED TO WIELD IT.

BATHED IN THE GLOW
EMANATING FROM THE IMAGE,
ACROYEAR SHIELDS HIS EYES
AND REALIZES...

I... CAN
SEE!

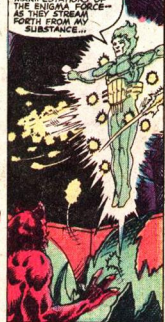


LONGING TO ACCEPT THE
HAPPINESS IT OFFERS, DEVIL
STARES INTO THE BRILLIANCE...

HOW? HOW CAN I
ACCEPT THAT WHICH
WILL BE DENIED TO
OTHERS?



HEAR THE SONG
OF THE FIREFLYTES--
THE MELODIOUS
MANIFESTATIONS OF
THE ENIGMA FORCE--
AS THEY STREAM
FORTH FROM MY
SUBSTANCE...



"...BRINGING
HAPPINESS
TO ALL!"



AT ONCE,
KNOWING
AGAIN THE
VERY HAPPINESS
WHICH THEY
ABANDONED TO
ENGAGE IN
THE GAME THE
DEVILS OF
MIRTHRA GIVE
UP THEIR
SOMBER PLAY--
AND BEGIN
TO LAUGH
ANEW!

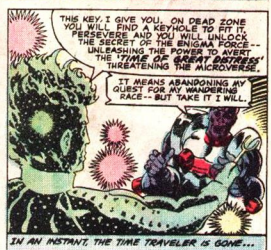
MY TIME IS ALMOST
DONE AND SOON, I
WILL FADE INTO
OBLIVION.

THE KEY--?



THIS KEY, I GIVE YOU. ON DEAD ZONE
YOU WILL FIND A KEYHOLE TO FIT IT.
PERSEVERE AND YOU WILL UNLOCK
THE SECRET OF THE ENIGMA FORCE--
UNLEASHING THE POWER TO AVERT
THE 'TIME OF GREAT DISTRESS'
THREATENING THE MICROVERSE.

IT MEANS ABANDONING MY
QUEST FOR MY WANDERING
RACE-- BUT TAKE IT I WILL.



IN AN INSTANT, THE TIME TRAVELER IS GONE...



AND SO...

MY PEOPLE
ARE HAPPY
AGAIN--
LAUGHING--
SINGING!

EACH HAS BEEN TOUCHED
BY THE ENIGMA FORCE
THROUGH THE FIREFLYTES.
BY ABANDONING THEIR
ALL-- CONSUMING SEARCH
FOR HAPPINESS, THEY HAVE
FOUND IT AT LAST!



BUT WHAT OF
THE REST OF THE
MICROVERSE?
SHALL THEY BE
DENIED
HAPPINESS?

NOT IF I
JOIN THIS
KEY WITH
ITS MATES...
IN DEAD ZONE.



I MUST ABANDON MY
QUEST FOR MY PEOPLE,
AND REJOIN THE
MICRONAUTS. I WILL
NEVER LOSE HOPE OF
BEING RELINQUISHED WITH
MY FELLOW ACROYEARS--

-- BUT I KNOW
NOW THAT I OWE
MY FIRST
ALLEGIANCE TO
TO THE ENTIRE
MICROVERSE.



ACROYEAR, I
HAVE NEVER
BEHELD ANY
LAND BEYOND
TROPICA... I
WONDER...

ALL WHO
WOULD SERVE
THE MICROVERSE
ARE WELCOMED BY
THE MICRONAUTS,
DEVIL.

YOU HAVE MADE
ME VERY... HAPPY!



THIS, SIDE BY SIDE, THE
MIGHTY ACROYEAR AND
THE TITANIC TROPICAN
DEVIL LEAVE MIRTHRIA
AMIDST THRONGS OF
WELL-WISHERS--

GUIDED BY
THE SONG OF
FIREFLYTE
THEY SEEK
THE DEAD
ZONE...

MEANWHILE, IN THE VOID BETWEEN DIMENSIONS IS A MAN OF THE LARGER MACROVERSE-- OF EARTH-- DR. STRANGE, WHO IS AT HOME WHEREVER HIS MYSTIC ARTS CARRY HIM. THIS DAY HAS SEEN THE MYSTIC MASTER VISIT EARTH'S DIM PAST AS HE SOUGHT TO UNRAVEL A MYSTERY POSED BY AN ANCIENT OBELISK SCRIBED IN A LANGUAGE UNKNOWN TO SCHOLARS.

GRANTED GREAT POWERS BY A SWORD EMBEDDED IN A GLOWING STAR, THE CITY'S PRINCE-- WAYFINDER-- REDUCED HIS SUBJECTS IN SIZE, AND FLED WITH THEM INTO A SUBATOMIC SOLAR SYSTEM.



I WITNESSED AN ASSAULT ON AN ANCIENT CITY WHOSE SCIENCE WAS SO ADVANCED AS TO MAKE ITS INHABITANTS SEEM AS GODS!

STILL IN ALL, 'T WAS NOT ENOUGH TO PREVAIL AGAINST THE SWIRLING DEMONS WHO SOUGHT TO DESTROY THEM.

*SEE ISSUE # 31. -- TOM.




THAT HAPPENED UNTOLD EONS AGO. NOW, I SHALL FOLLOW THE ESCAPE ROUTE OPENED THROUGH THE SPACEWALL-- THE BARRIER BETWEEN WORLDS-- TO DISCOVER THE FATE OF THOSE FIRST VOYAGERS TO...




...THE **MICROVERSE!** THERE! A MOLECULAR WORLD COMES INTO VIEW!





MY ENCHANTED CLOAK OF
LEVITATION WILL BRING ME
GENTLY TO THE SURFACE
OF THE PLANET.

HMM! THIS MOLECULE
RESEMBLES A VAST
GRAVEYARD WITH
TOMBS AND SEPULCHERS
AS FAR AS THE EYE
CAN SEE.



IT IS, IN TRUTH, A 'DEAD ZONE'.
HAVE THOSE WHO I HAVE
FOLLOWED FROM ANCIENT
INDIA ARRIVED IN THIS MICRO-
VERSE-- ONLY TO FIND DEATH?



THIS IS A
DISAPPOINTING
ENDING TO MY
QUEST! I HAVE
NOT LEARNED
WHAT BECAME
OF PRINCE
WAYFINDER AND
HIS PEOPLE--

--OR OF THE
WHIRLING
RACE OF
DEMONS
WHICH THEY
FOUGHT.

**NEXT
ISSUE: BY BROTHER BETRAYED!**