

MARVEL®
Comics

THE GATHERING OF FIVE

PETER PARKER™

SPIDER-MAN

OCT
#96

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NO ESCAPE
FROM
*MADAGUE
WEB!*

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MACKIE

FELCHLE

HANNA

NORMAN OSBORN HAS BEGUN THE GATHERING OF FIVE.

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT THE LIVES OF YOUNG PETER PARKER AND HIS SUPER-HEROIC ALTER EGO, SPIDER-MAN?

READ ON, FAITHFUL READERS, FOR THE FINAL CHAPTER IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER.



THE GATHERING OF FIVE PART THREE

WEB of DESPAIR

HOWARD MACKIE
WRITER

SCOTT HANNA
INKS

NORMAN FELCHLE
GUEST PENCILER

GREGORY WRIGHT
COLORS

RS & COMICRAFT'S
LIZ AGRAPHIOTIS
LETTERS

BOB HARRAS
EDITOR IN CHIEF

RALPH MACCHIO
EDITOR

THE DAILY BUGLE...

...A BASTION OF JOURNALISTIC INTEGRITY AND HARD-BOILED REPORTING.

CURRENTLY THE BUILDING IN WHICH THE BUGLE RESIDES IS UNDERGOING MASSIVE RECONSTRUCTION. THIS IS NEEDED AFTER THE SUPER CRIMINAL ASSASSIN KNOWN AS NITRO WHO ATTEMPTED TO KILL THE CO-OWNER NORMAN OSBORN.

BUT THE PAPERS ROLL ON.

THE NEWS DOESN'T STOP JUST BECAUSE SOMEONE WITH THE POWER TO EXPLODE HIS BODY AT WILL TAKES OUT A FLOOR OR TWO.

HERE, AMIDST THE SETTLING CONSTRUCTION DUST, WE FIND YOUNG PETER PARKER BURNING THE MIDNIGHT OIL.

HEY THERE, TIGER, YOU UP FOR SPLITTING A MERRY MEAL?

YUM! YUM! THEM'S EATS, MARY JANE!

SPLIT MEAL

SO...? HOW'S IT GOING?

FINE. JONAH IS LETTING ME USE THE COMPUTER TO CATCH UP ON SOME RESEARCH I'VE GOT DUE FOR CLASS TOMORROW. IT FIGURES THAT MY HARD DRIVE WOULD CRASH JUST AS I'M TRYING TO CONVINCE MY PROFESSORS THAT I'M NOT A SCREW-UP!

WHAT'S UP WITH YOU?

NOTHING MUCH. I WAS LONELY AND FELT LIKE TALKING TO MY ADORABLE HUSBAND.

AND WHAT'S REALLY ON YOUR MIND?

WELL...YOU KNOW AUNT ANNA IS TALKING ABOUT HEADING BACK TO FLORIDA AND I'M NOT SURE HOW MANY MORE MERRY MEALS WE'VE GOT IN OUR FUTURE.

WITH BOTH OF US IN SCHOOL...PART-TIME JOBS JUST AREN'T CUTTING IT.

I HAVE BEEN GETTING SOME INQUIRIES FROM AGENTS LOOKING TO GET ME BACK INTO MODELING. AND I WAS THINKING...

ARE YOU ASKING MY PERMISSION TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

COME ON, PETER! YOU KNOW ME BETTER THAN THAT!

I JUST WANT US BOTH TO THINK ABOUT IT. TO KEEP OPEN MINDS.

FINISH UP SOON AND COME HOME. I MISS YOU.

ME, TOO.

AH, PARKER! POOR, YOUNG, MISERABLE PARKER.

THINGS JUST AREN'T WORKING OUT FOR YOU...ARE THEY?

GO AWAY, NORMAN!

I'M IN NO MOOD FOR YOUR MIND GAMES.

COME NOW, PARKER, IT'S BEEN SUCH A LONG TIME SINCE YOU AND I HAVE HAD A FACE-TO-FACE CHAT.

NORMAN,
I --

YOU WHAT,
PARKER?

SO JUST SIT DOWN AND TELL ME A STORY. A WORK OF FICTION.

YOU KNOW I ONCE CONSIDERED A LITERARY CAREER AS A YOUNGER MAN.

BUT THAT STARVING ARTIST THING...IT HELD NO APPEAL.
NOW LISTEN TO A STORY OF TRUE POWER.

"FIRST HIS FLESH, THEN HIS MUSCLE, THEN EVERY ORGAN AND BONE IN HIS BODY IS REDUCED TO ITS MOST BASIC COMPONENTS.

"SOON THE AIR CONDITIONING DUCTS CARRY A SIMILAR SCENT TO EVERY OFFICE AND CUBICLE IN THE BUILDING.

"IT ALL HAPPENS WITHIN A SPAN OF THIRTY SECONDS."

THERE IS NO LONGER ANY THREAT YOU CAN USE AGAINST ME.

YOU ARE COMPLETELY POWERLESS.

PEOPLE LOVE ME, PARKER. THE OSBORN NAME HAS BEEN RESTORED TO ITS RIGHTFUL GLORY.

I AM EVERYTHING YOU WILL NEVER BE.

"IMAGINE, IF YOU WILL, THAT RIGHT NOW, SOMEWHERE, THERE IS A PACKAGE BEING DELIVERED.

"AN ORDINARY CARDBOARD BOX. NOTHING TO LOOK AT REALLY. WHAT DOES IT HOLD?

"ONLY TIME WILL TELL.

"AS THE BOX IS OPENED, THERE IS A SLIGHT PUFF OF COOL AIR AND A SLIGHTLY ACRID SCENT.

"THE BOX APPEARS EMPTY.

"THE RECIPIENT IS PUZZLED EVEN AS HE FEELS A TINGLING SENSATION OVER HIS ENTIRE BODY...

"...AN ITCHING WHICH SEEMS TO PENETRATE TO THE VERY MARROW OF HIS BONES...

"...AN ITCH WHICH HE NEVER GETS TO SCRATCH.

IMAGINE THAT, PARKER. WOULDN'T IT BE A WEAPON OF IMMENSE POWER TO LAUNCH AGAINST ONE'S ENEMIES?

BUT OF COURSE...IT NARRATIVE LEFT IS SIMPLY A STORY. A FANTASTIC OVER FROM A YOUTH MISSPENT ON H.G. WELLS AND COMIC BOOKS.

NOW I AM ALL BUSINESS.

WHAT ARE YOU UP TO, NORMAN?

WHAT ARE YOU TELLING ME? IS THIS SOMETHING YOU'RE GOING TO DO, OR...

...IF YOU DID THIS THING I SWEAR I'LL --



YOU MISSED THE POINT OF THERE IS NOTHING THE STORY, PARKER. AND HERE I THOUGHT YOU WERE THE BRIGHT ONE.

YOU CAN NO SOONER STOP ME THAN THE MAN IN THE STORY COULD STOP HIS GENETIC DISSOLUTION.

I CAN TAKE ANYTHING FROM YOU AND THERE IS NOT A THING YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT.

YOU ARE NOTHING...



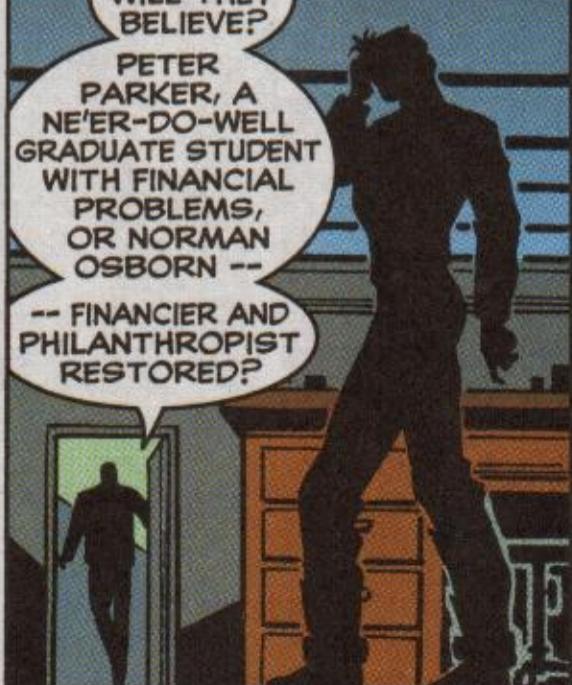
...AN INSIGNIFICANT PLAYTHING OF WHICH I AM QUICKLY TIRING.

GO TO THE POLICE, OR TO THE PRESS.

WHO WILL THEY BELIEVE?

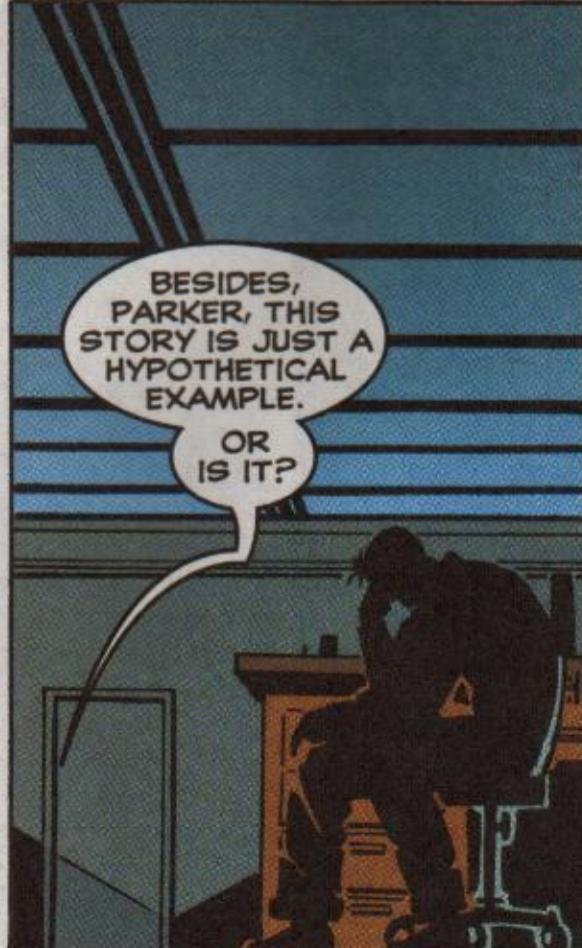
PETER PARKER, A NE'ER-DO-WELL GRADUATE STUDENT WITH FINANCIAL PROBLEMS, OR NORMAN OSBORN --

-- FINANCER AND PHILANTHROPIST RESTORED?



BESIDES, PARKER, THIS STORY IS JUST A HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE.

OR IS IT?



MADAME WEB DREAMS.

BUT, FOR ONE CURSED WITH AN AGED BODY WHICH CONTINUES TO FUNCTION ONLY BECAUSE OF A MASSIVE ARRAY OF LIFE SUPPORT MACHINERY, AND GIFTED WITH THE POWER OF PRECOGNITION...

...DREAMS ARE A WINDOW INTO THE FUTURE.

IN THE DREAM MADAME WEB IS STILL OLD, ENFEEBLED AND TIRED.

THE DREAMSCAPE AT FIRST OFFERS NO ESCAPE FROM THE PAIN WHICH WRACKS HER BODY.

INITIALLY IT SHOWS NO ESCAPE FROM THE TORTURE HER LIFE HAS BECOME.



BUT SUDDENLY THE DREAM TAKES A DIFFERENT TURN AS A MAN EXTENDS HIS HAND TO HER.



AND NOW WEB KNOWS THAT SHE HAS PASSED FROM THE DREAMSCAPE OVER TO THE AREA OF HER MIND IN WHICH PRECOGNITIVE FLASHES OCCUR.



JOIN ME AND
YOU WILL HAVE
YOUR FONDEST
DREAM COME
TRUE.

THE
SPRING OF
YOUTH WILL BE
YOURS ONCE
MORE.



BRING TO ME THE
MISSING PIECE AND
YOUTH, IMMORTALITY
AND BEAUTY WILL
BE YOURS!

HOW?
HOW CAN
THIS BE?

JOIN THE
GATHERING
OF FIVE.

THE "MISSING
PIECE"?
HOW --?

LOOK INTO
YOUR MIND.
YOU WILL
FIND IT FOR
ME AND FOR
YOUTH!

HOW?

SPIDER-
MAN.

MEANWHILE...

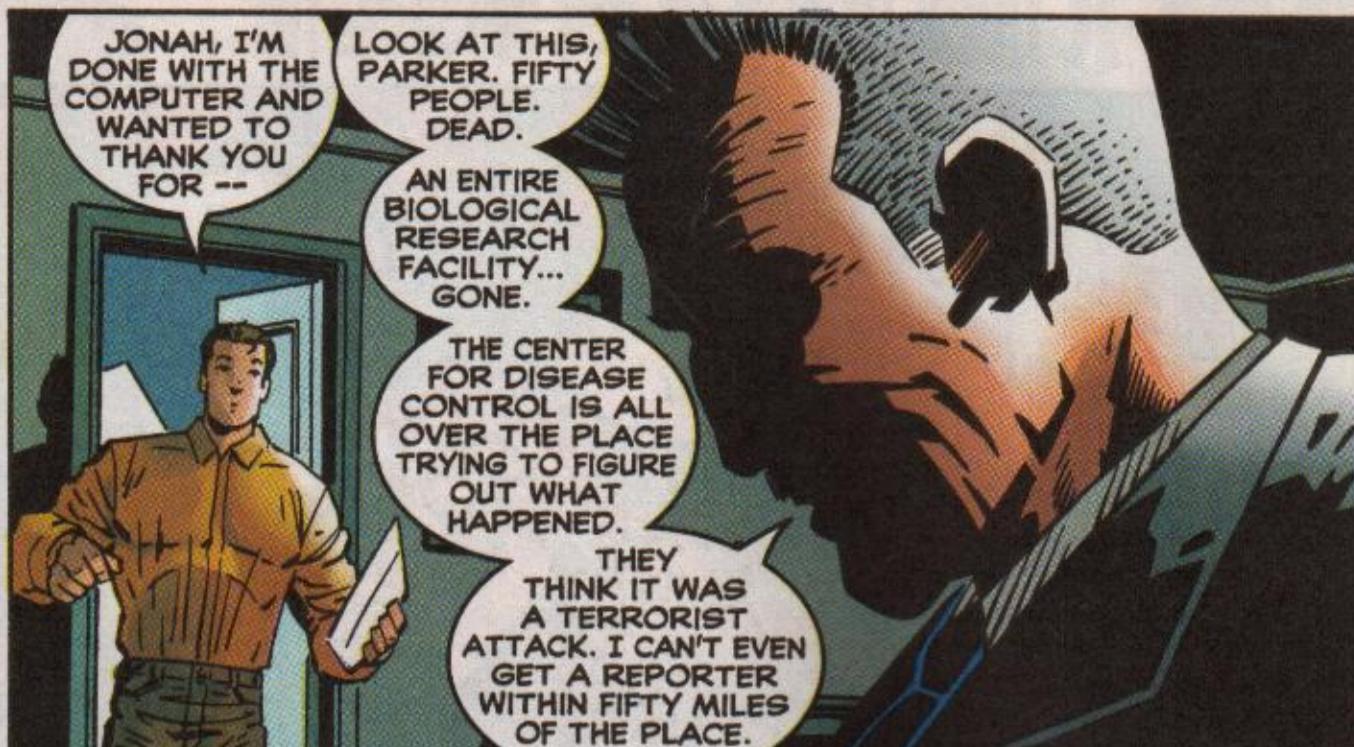
JONAH, I'M DONE WITH THE COMPUTER AND WANTED TO THANK YOU FOR --

LOOK AT THIS, PARKER. FIFTY PEOPLE. DEAD.

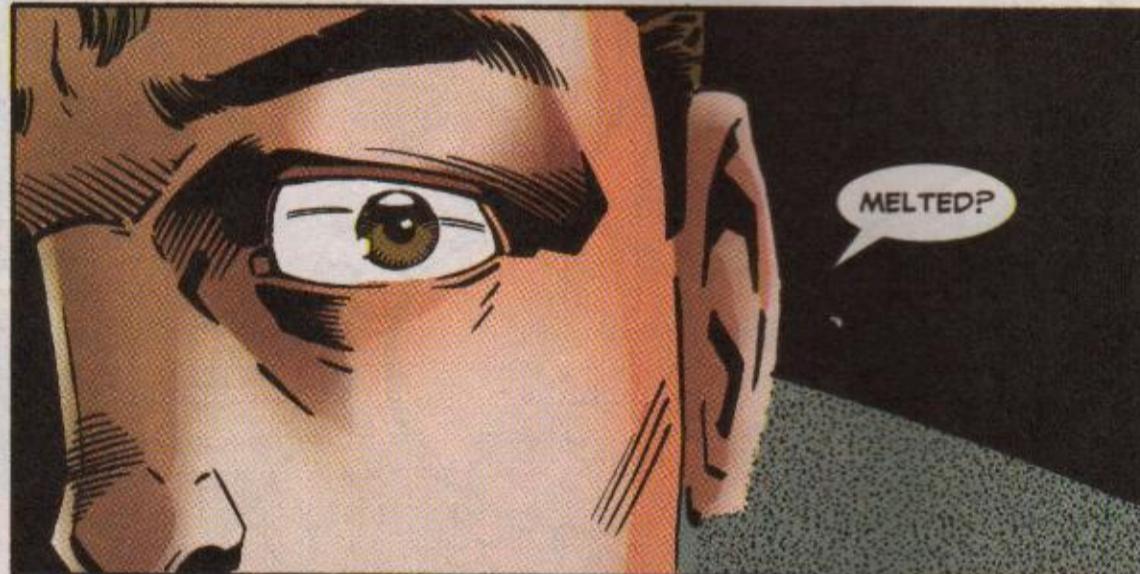
AN ENTIRE BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH FACILITY... GONE.

THE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL IS ALL OVER THE PLACE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT HAPPENED.

THEY THINK IT WAS A TERRORIST ATTACK. I CAN'T EVEN GET A REPORTER WITHIN FIFTY MILES OF THE PLACE.



THE BEST I CAN GET IS THAT THEY ALL SEEMED TO HAVE JUST MELTED WITHIN THEIR CLOTHES.



MELTED?

I WANT NO SPACE DEVOTED TO THIS STORY, JONAH.

THERE IS NO REASON TO PANIC THE PUBLIC WITH STORIES OF A COMING PLAGUE. THEY ARE BEST LEFT TO THE SUPERMARKET TABLOIDS.

YOU AND I WILL HAVE TO SPEAK FURTHER ABOUT THE SENSATIONALISM WHICH HAS BEEN PERMEATING THIS PAPER, JONAH. IT HAS GOT TO STOP.

INTERESTING, NORMAN. I DID SOME DIGGING...

...AND CAME UP WITH A CONNECTION BETWEEN A SMALL SUBSIDIARY OF OSBORN INDUSTRIES AND THE BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH --

YOU REALLY DON'T WANT TO GO THERE, JONAH.

THINK OF YOUR FAMILY.





LET IT GO,
JONAH.



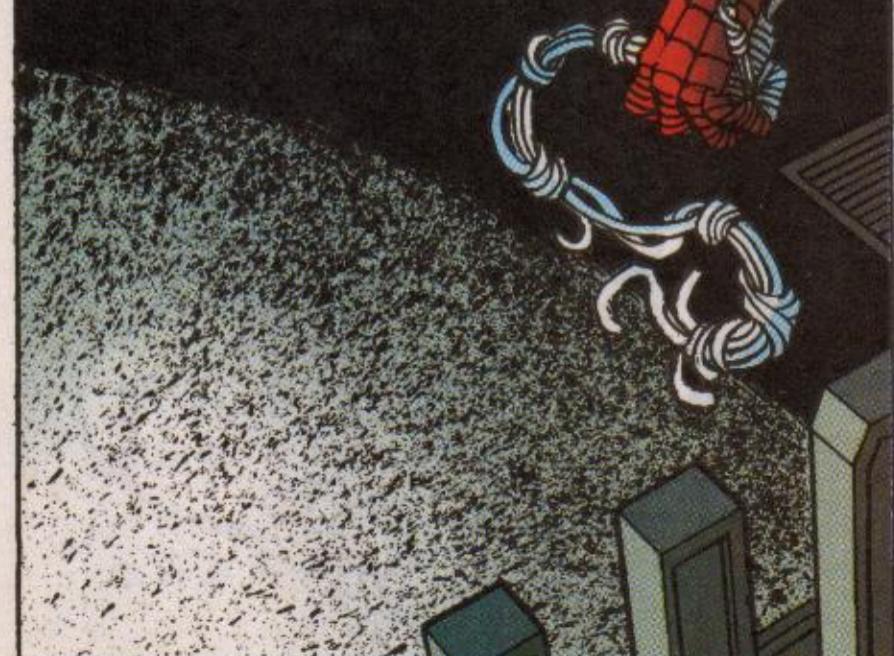
FORGET
WHAT YOU
HEARD,
PARKER.



AND SLEEP WELL.



IT
ALMOST ISN'T
A CHALLENGE
ANYMORE!







BACK AT THE
BUGLE, J. JONAH
JAMESON PACES...

HE'S GOT TO BE STOPPED.

THE MAN IS A MENACE!

HE TALKS TO ME THAT WAY AND THINKS I WON'T ACT!

I'LL SHOW HIM!

SHOW HIM ONCE AND FOR ALL! THIS INSANITY ENDS TONIGHT!

ROBBIE.

I WISH YOU COULD BE HERE.

BUT IF THINGS GO BADLY TONIGHT, JOE...
...I'M COUNTING ON YOU.

NORMAN'S GOT TO BE STOPPED...
...NO MATTER WHAT!

AT THAT
MOMENT, IN
A RUNDOWN
HOTEL ON
MANHATTAN'S
LOWER EAST
SIDE...

NO...
ACK...
ARGH!

THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS TO
THOSE WHO EVEN *THINK* OF
BETRAYING NORMAN OSBORN,
Ms. MONGRAIN.

YOU HAD
SUCH A SIMPLE
ROLE TO PLAY,
ALISON. ALL YOU HAD
TO DO WAS WATCH
OVER THE PACKAGE
ENTRUSTED TO YOUR
CARE AND KEEP YOUR
MOUTH SHUT.

BUT Mr. OSBORN KNEW YOU
WOULD TRY DOING EXACTLY
WHAT YOU AND THE FELLOW
FROM THE DAILY BUGLE
ARE TRYING TO
DO NOW.

YOU MAY
HAVE LED OSBORN'S
SCRIER ON A MERRY CHASE
AROUND THE WORLD, BUT I
WILL GUARANTEE THAT PETER
PARKER NEVER LEARNS
THE TRUTH --



ELSEWHERE...

SO, LET
ME GET THIS
STRAIGHT...

...SINCE
THE LAST TIME
I SAW YOU, YOU'VE
BEEN IN AND OUT
OF COMAS, HAVE
SUFFERED SHORT-
TERM MEMORY
LOSS...

...AND JUST
REMEMBERED
THAT I HAD
HELPED YOU
IN THE
PAST.

THAT IS
CORRECT,
CHILD.

I KNOW
YOU HAVE
HELPED ME IN
THE PAST, BUT I
DON'T KNOW
HOW.

I KNOW YOU
ARE CAPABLE OF
SUPER-HEROIC DEEDS,
BUT AGAIN, I AM AT A
LOSS TO EXPLAIN HOW.
I NO LONGER SEEM TO
BE ABLE TO REACH
INTO THE MINDS
OF OTHERS.

IN MY
CURRENT STATE
OF DECREPITUDE, THE
ONLY THING OF WHICH
I AM CERTAIN IS
THAT I AM OLD AND
WILL SHORTLY
DIE.

I HAVE
SEEN MY OWN
DEATH PLAYED OUT
IN MY PRECOGNITIVE
FLASHES TIME
AND TIME
AGAIN.

IN ONE
OF THOSE
PRECOGNITIVE
DREAMS I
HAVE LEARNED
OF SOMETHING
WHICH MIGHT
HELP ME.

BUT I
WOULD NEED
YOUR HELP IN
RETRIEVING THIS
THING.

SURE.
YOU'VE
ALWAYS DEALT
STRAIGHT WITH
ME IN THE
PAST.

AS
LONG AS IT'S
NOT ILLEGAL...
I'LL HELP
YOU.

I
WOULD NOT
ASK YOU TO
BREAK THE LAW,
BUT, I MUST
WARN YOU, THE
TASK WILL BE A
DANGEROUS
ONE.

YOU
WOULDN'T
KNOW IT TO
LOOK AT ME, BUT
RIGHT NOW I AM
ONE GIANT BALL
OF PENT-UP
ANGER.

HERE'S HOPING
THAT I'LL GET A
CHANCE TO VENT
A LITTLE.

BESIDES...

...HOW
HARD CAN
IT BE?



MADAME WEB DREAMS.

NORMAN, THIS CEREMONY...THIS GATHERING OF FIVE --?

THE TIME IS ALMOST AT HAND. SIMPLY BRING ME THE MISSING PIECE AND YOUTH SHALL BE YOURS ONCE MORE.

I DON'T KNOW HOW --

OSBORN!

YOU...

...ARE A DEAD MAN!

"HOW HARD CAN IT BE?"

NOTE TO SELF:
NEXT TIME A LITTLE
OLD LADY ASKS
YOU TO HELP
HER...

...ASK
EXACTLY HOW
DANGEROUS THE
TASK IS GOING
TO BE!

I'VE
GOT YOUR
MISSING PIECE,
MA'AM.

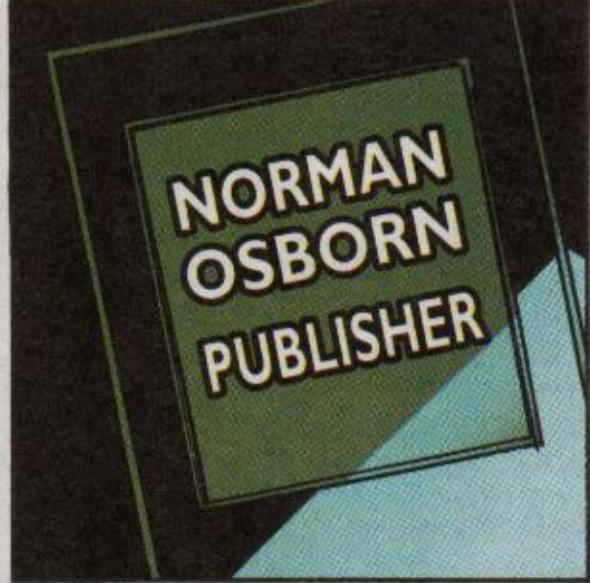
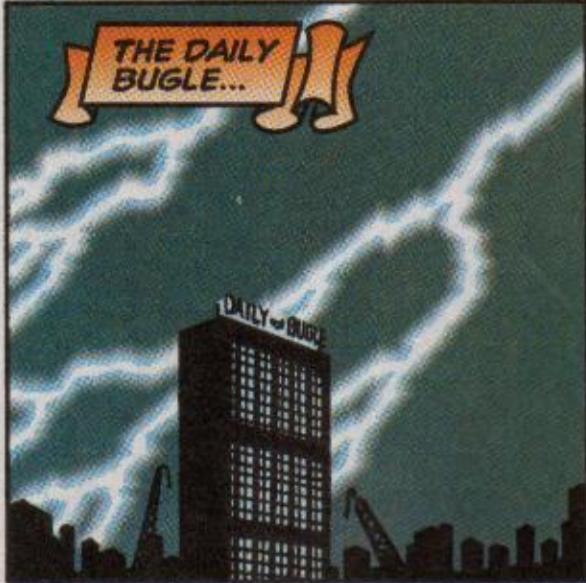
I HOPE
IT WORKS
FOR YOU
AND...

...IF YOU
NEED ANY-
THING ELSE
DONE...

...YOU
MIGHT WANT
TO GIVE THOR
A RING! I
UNDERSTAND
HE'S BACK IN
TOWN!

J. JONAH JAMESON
IS ABOUT TO MAKE
THE MISTAKE OF
HIS LIFE.

THE DAILY BUGLE...



...ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR...



IT IS ALL COMING TO A HEAD.

THE GATHERING IS NEAR.

THE POWER IT OFFERS IS CERTAIN TO BE MINE AT LAST.

THE TIME SPENT WITH THE ANCIENT ORDER OF SCRIBERS GAVE ME ALL THE INFORMATION I NEEDED TO ACQUIRE THE PIECES OF ANCIENT POWER AND ENSURE THAT I STAND AT THE CENTER OF THE GATHERING.

ALL THAT I HAVE DONE UP UNTIL THIS POINT WILL BE NOTHING COMPARED TO WHAT I'LL ACCOMPLISH DURING THE COMING DAYS.

IT IS TIME TO END ALL THE GAMES I'VE BEEN PLAYING.
TIME TO CHANGE.



OSBORN!

AND TO CLEAN UP ALL LOOSE ENDS!



I CAN'T
BELIEVE I'M
BEING PUT INTO A
SITUATION LIKE
THIS AGAIN!

I'M
PRACTICALLY
MAKING A CAREER
OUT OF SAVING THE
LIFE OF NORMAN
OSBORN.

I
HATE THE
GUY!

IT'S
JUST TOO
MUCH!

WHAT?

THWAP

NO!

FIGHTING
SOME SORT OF
PREHISTORIC DINOSAUR
THAT APPEARS OUT OF
NOWHERE WHILE I'M
TRYING TO STOP THE
MAN WHO HAS MADE A
CAREER OUT OF SLAMMING
ME ON THE COVER OF
THE DAILY
BUGLE...

DID I
SAY THAT
THAT WAS
TOO MUCH?

... THAT
IS TOO
MUCH!

SOMETIMES
I JUST HAVE
THOSE DAYS.
AND
THEY SEEM
TO LAST FOR
YEARS!

BACK AT
THE BUGLE...

WHAT
IS IT, JONAH?
I'VE NO TIME
FOR YOUR IDLE
CHATTER. I'M FAR
TOO BUSY
TRYING TO TURN
YOUR PAPER INTO
SOMETHING WORTH
THE TREES WHICH
HAVE DIED
FOR IT.

SPEAK
UP,
JONAH.

I AM A
VERY BUSY
MAN.

MEANWHILE...

EXCUSE
ME, MISTER I-
DON'T-KNOW-OR-
CARE-WHERE-YOU-
CAME-FROM
DRAGON!

I HAVE
NO TIME FOR
THIS, SO LET'S
SEE IF WE CAN GET
RID OF YOU AS QUICKLY
AS YOUR JAPANESE
COUSIN DISAPPEARED
FROM THE BOX
OFFICE!

GET OUT OF
HERE, JONAH.
YOUR VERY
PRESENCE
SICKENS
ME.

I AM
AMAZED THAT
YOUR SON JOHN
HAS TURNED OUT AS
BRAVE AS HE HAS, OR
THAT YOUR WIFE HAS
CHOSEN TO STAY
WITH YOU.

MARLA IS AN
ATTRACTIVE
WOMAN,
JONAH.
SHE
COULD DO
MUCH BETTER
THAN YOU.
PERHAPS
I --

NORMAN...

... I ...

GET
ON WITH
WHATEVER IT
IS YOU CAME
HERE TO
SAY.

HE'S
ALL YOURS,
BOYS!

WHAT
DO WE DO
NOW?

I DON'T
KNOW! CALL THE
A.S.P.C.A., STEVEN
SPIELBERG OR
SOMETHING?



IT'S OVER,
NORMAN.

IT ENDS
TONIGHT!

I WANT
YOU OUT OF
THE BUGLE, OUT
OF THIS CITY AND
OUT OF MY
LIFE!

Oh,
DO
YOU?

AND HOW DO
YOU INTEND TO
ACCOMPLISH
THIS MIRACLE?

OR HAVE YOU
FORGOTTEN HOW
EASILY I COULD REACH
OUT AND CRUSH YOU,
YOUR SON AND
YOUR WIFE.

NO
MORE
THREATS,
NORMAN!

I --

YOU'LL
WHAT?



"IS THAT
WHAT YOU
WANT?"

"DO YOU HAVE
WHAT IT TAKES
TO SQUEEZE
THE TRIGGER?"

"FEW
DO."

BUT YOU'VE GOT TO
ASK YOURSELF, JONAH...
ARE YOU SURE
I'LL DIE?

OTHERS
HAVE TRIED AND
FAILED. I HAVE COME
BACK. I MIGHT
AGAIN.

AND
THEN WHERE
WOULD YOU
BE?



DO IT!

"DO IT,
JONAH!"

PULL THE
TRIGGER.

COWARD.
I
EXPECTED
NOTHING
LESS.

YOU SICKEN
ME, JONAH!
BUT THEN,
YOU HAVE
ALWAYS BEEN
GUTLESS.

IT IS WHY YOU
HATE SPIDER-
MAN SO.

HE
REPRESENTS
ALL THAT YOU
COULD NEVER
HOPE TO
BE.

LOOK AT YOU
STANDING THERE
AND QUIVERING
LIKE A
CHILD.

I SHOULD
PUT YOU OUT
OF YOUR
MISERY.

PLEASE...

NO!

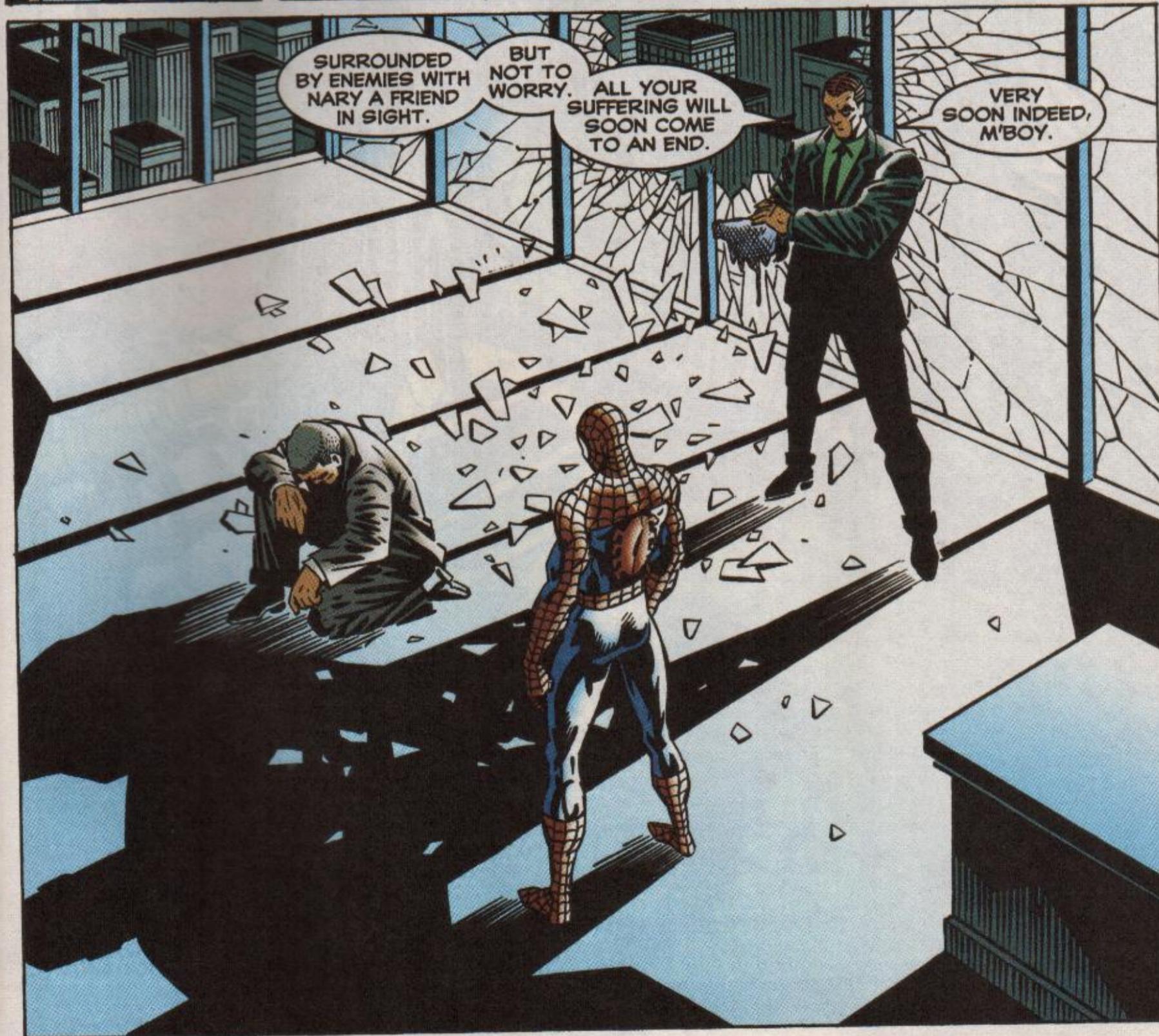
YOU DARE...?
WHAT IS IT, SPIDER-MAN?
HAVE YOU COME TO GIVE IT ONE MORE TRY? ARE YOU HERE TO GIVE ME ANOTHER BEATING?

THWAP

OR CAN YOU SIMPLY NOT BEAR TO SEE YOUR TWO GREATEST ENEMIES DO TO EACH OTHER THAT WHICH YOU WOULD LOVE TO DO?

HOW SIMPLE YOUR LIFE HERE. TAKE THE GUN.

PROVE TO JONAH THAT YOU CAN BE A MAN.



LATER
THAT
EVENING...

I HAVE
BROUGHT TO
YOU THAT WHICH
YOU HAVE BEEN
SEEKING, MR.
OSBORN.

ARE YOU PREPARED TO
ENTER FREELY, AND OF
YOUR OWN FREE WILL,
INTO THE GATHERING OF
FIVE...NO MATTER THE
CONSEQUENCES?

WHAT
MORE CAN
HAPPEN TO
ME?

I AM AN
OLD WOMAN...
SOON TO
DIE.

I WANT
MY YOUTH.
I AM
WILLING TO
RISK MY
LIFE.

EXCELLENT.

I...

"...I SEE...DEATH...DESTRUCTION...A
GENETIC BOMB...THE WORLD BROUGHT TO
ITS KNEES BY OSBORN... I SEE...SPIDER-
MAN DEAD...THE WORLD...DEAD."

WHAT HAVE
I DONE?

TO BE CONTINUED...

IN THE PAGES OF
SPECTACULAR
SPIDER-MAN 263!