

MARVEL
VAULT
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DOCTOR STRANGE

roger STERN

neil VOKES



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SECRETS OF THE VAULT!

Way back in 1998, I was writing a series entitled *MARVEL UNIVERSE*. It was planned as an ongoing monthly series that would explore the farthest corners of Marvel's vast realities. Unfortunately, the series didn't find its audience and was canceled after just seven issues...even as we were working on this Doctor Strange story.

I had plotted the story - with a welcome assist from fellow scribe Joe Edkin. Said story was penciled by Neil Vokes and subsequently inked by Jay Geldhof, the gents who had produced the art for *UNTOLD TALES OF SPIDER-MAN: STRANGE ENCOUNTERS* (also scripted by Yours Truly). And I had just started to rough out the script when I received word that the *MARVEL UNIVERSE* book would be no more.

It's always disappointing when a series is canceled out from under you. Doubly so, when a series had given you an opportunity to write about some of your favorite characters in collaboration with such talented folks. But it happens. You dust yourself off and move on.

And sometimes, there are second chances in the world of comics. As when Tom Brennan recently called and said that Marvel wanted to print our orphan Doctor Strange story.

The two or three pages of script that I had roughed out, all those years ago, had been lost a couple of computers ago. But I still had a hard copy of the plot in my files, along with photocopies of Neil's artwork. So, I was able to dust off my old print-outs, and script the story...over twelve years after it was originally plotted.

And now, at long last, the story can be told!

We hope you enjoy it.

- Roger Stern

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New York's Greenwich Village. Years Ago.

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME.

SO MUCH HAS CHANGED SINCE I WAS LAST HERE.



FASHIONS ARE NOTICEABLY DIFFERENT, AND THERE ARE MORE SMALL, SPORTY CARS.

LOOK AT THOSE TWO-- ON THE ROAD, SO HAPPY AND CAREFREE.



I REMEMBER THAT FEELING. IT SEEMS A LIFETIME AGO NOW...



I WAS YOUNG AND WEALTHY.

I THOUGHT I WAS IMMORTAL...



AND THEN, EVERYTHING CHANGED.

NO!
NO!

THE RIDDLE OF TIME: MY JAG WAS AIRBORNE FOR JUST SECONDS—



--BUT THE FEAR, THE TERROR, SEEMED TO LAST AN ETERNITY.

LUCKY YOUNG FOOL.



I SHOULD HAVE BEEN KILLED OUTRIGHT.

BUT THE UNIVERSE HAD OTHER PLANS, DIDN'T IT?



I WAS A DIFFERENT MAN THEN, LIVING IN A DIFFERENT WORLD.



I NEVER EXPECTED TO BE WALKING THESE STREETS AGAIN, MUCH LESS LOOKING FOR A NEW HOME HERE...

OH... MY...

THIS OLD HOUSE

ROGER STERN *writer* (with thanks to JOE EDKIN for the plot assist)

NEIL VOKES *penciler* JAY GELDHOFF *inker* LEE LOUGHRIDGE *colorist*

JARED K. FLETCHER *letterer* TOM BREVOORT & TOM BRENNAN *editors across time*
JOE QUESADA *editor-in-chief* DAN BUCKLEY *publisher* ALAN FINE *executive producer*

Dedicated
to the masters,
STAN LEE and
STEVE DITKO

THE IMAGES I HAD
SEEN DID NOT DO THIS
STRUCTURE CREDIT.

CLEARLY, IT HAS SEEN
BETTER DAYS. BUT
THERE IS SOMETHING
ABOUT THE PLACE.

SOMETHING...
COMPELLING...

PARDON ME,
BUT ARE YOU...
DOCTOR
STRANGE?







"WEIRD"...?

I MEAN UNUSUAL. UNIQUE!

SORRY ABOUT THE MESS. WE HIRED A CONTRACTOR, BUT HE JUST UP AND VANISHED.

SO HARD TO GET GOOD HELP THESE DAYS.



I SEE...

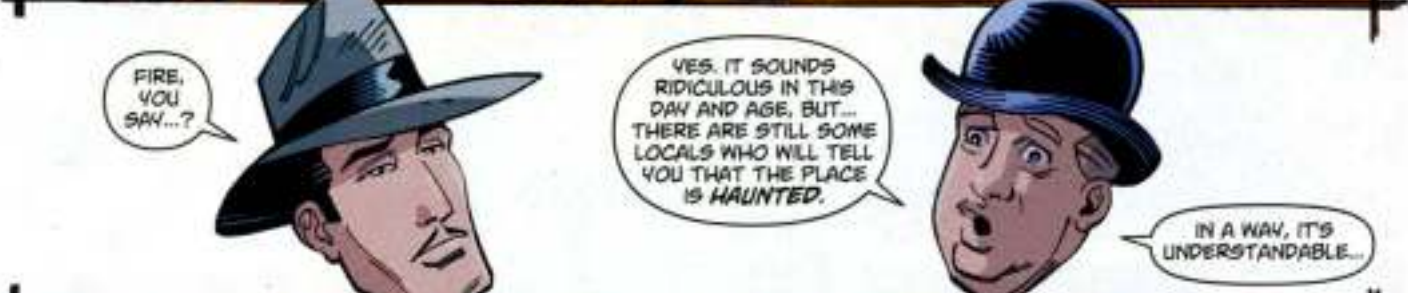
IT IS A BIT OF A FIXER-UPPER, BUT STRUCTURALLY, THE BUILDING IS QUITE SOUND, AND I...

LOOK, DOCTOR, I WON'T LIE TO YOU. THE PROPERTY DOES HAVE AN UNFORTUNATE HISTORY...



"...THERE'VE BEEN A SERIES OF HOUSES ON THIS LOT, GOING BACK TO COLONIAL TIMES. THIS CURRENT STRUCTURE IS THE SEVENTH.

"THE SIX PREVIOUS DWELLINGS ALL CAME TO MYSTERIOUS ENDS-- MOST OFTEN THROUGH FIRE."



FIRE, YOU SAY...?

YES. IT SOUNDS RIDICULOUS IN THIS DAY AND AGE, BUT... THERE ARE STILL SOME LOCALS WHO WILL TELL YOU THAT THE PLACE IS HAUNTED.

IN A WAY, IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE...



"...THE FIRST BUILDING ON THIS SITE HOUSED A SATANIC CULT.

"I'M AFRAID THEY CARRIED OUT SOME GHASTLY RITUALS BACK THEN."







--AND I MUST DEAL WITH IT, IF I AM TO FULFILL MY DESTINY.

THIS STRUCTURE AND THE GROUND? BENEATH IT HAVE BECOME A FOCUS FOR GREAT SUPERNATURAL ENERGIES.



HERE I SHALL MAKE MY SANCTUM SANCTORUM.

A FEW MODIFICATIONS WILL BE NECESSARY, BUT...



EH?
A CIGARETTE? BUT I DIDN'T--! I WOULDN'T--!

THERE ARE DEFINITELY INFERNAL FORCES AT WORK HERE.



LOOSE THE VAPORS OF VALTORR WHICH KEPT THE TRUTH CONCEALED--



--BY THE BLESSED THREE VISHANTI, LET MY GARBS NOW BE REVEALED.

EYE OF AGAMOTTO, LEAD ME TO THE ONE BEHIND THIS...



THERE!

THAT WAS NO COMMON VERMIN.



ITS SPEED IS CERTAINLY MOST UNCOMMON.

BUT IT WILL NOT EVADE ME...



THIS CANNOT BE.

THIS CORRIDOR IS MUCH TOO LONG. IT COULD NOT POSSIBLY BE CONTAINED WITHIN THE HOUSE.



AND THE FAR DOORWAY RECEDES BEFORE ME.

THIS IS THE STUFF OF DREAMS, BUT I DO NOT SENSE THE HAND OF NIGHTMARE AT WORK HERE. IT MUST BE AN-



--ILLUSION.

WHAT GAME IS BEING PLAYED HERE?



UNLOCKED...?

SURPRISE!

WELCOME BACK STEPHEN!

HAH-HA-HA!

DID WE FOOL YOU?

♪ FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW... ♪



MY OLD FRIENDS... COLLEAGUES...?

I...DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. I WASN'T EXPECTING THIS.

IF ANYONE DESERVES A PARTY, IT'S YOU, STEVIE!



WE'VE ALL MISSED YOU--EVER SO MUCH.

MAY I TAKE YOUR--UH--CAPE, SIR?

YES, WHAT ARE YOU HIDING UNDER THERE, STEPHEN? HMMM...?



OH...JUST THIS OLD THING.

NICE.

I'LL HANG IT UP FOR YOU, SIR.



DRESSED TO THE NINES, AS ALWAYS!

SUCH A DASHING FIGURE.

I ADORE THAT TOUCH OF GRAY AT THE TEMPLES.

BACK OFF, GIRLS! I SAW HIM FIRST.

NOW, LADIES, THERE'LL BE TIME ENOUGH FOR PLEASANTRIES LATER.



TILL LATER THEN...

PRIME RIB, SIR?

THAT'S VERY TEMPTING. IT'S BEEN TEN YEARS SINCE I'VE TASTED BEEF.



YOU'LL HAVE YOUR FILL BEFORE THE NIGHT'S OVER.

BUT LET'S START THINGS OFF RIGHT, SHALL WE?



I KNOW JUST WHAT YOU NEED--A GOOD SINGLE MALT SCOTCH, STRAIGHT UP.

NO, THAT'S...



...THAT'S MY OLD FAVORITE.

NOTHING BUT THE BEST FOR OUR STEVIE!

HERE'S TO YOU, MY FRIEND--AND TO THE GOOD LIFE!



YES...
THE GOOD...
LIFE...



THERE'S BEEN
NEUROLOGICAL
DAMAGE. YOUR
HANDS--!

RIDICULOUS.
MY HANDS
ARE FINE

FOR
ORDINARY
ACTIVITIES,
YES. BUT
NOT FOR
SURGERY.



I'M
AFRAID YOU'LL
NEVER BE
ABLE TO
OPERATE
AGAIN.

NO.



YOU CAN
STILL CONSULT.
I COULD USE AN
ASSISTANT--

STEPHEN
STRANGE
ASSISTS
NOBODY!



I MUST BE
THE BEST...THE
GREATEST.

OR ELSE...
NOTHING.



EVER
HEARD OF
THE ANCIENT
ONE? THEY SAY
HE CAN CURE
ANYTHING.

AW, HE'S
JUST A
LEGEND.

IF THERE'S
A HOPE...IF
THERE'S EVEN
A CHANCE
OF A CURE...



...I MUST FIND IT.
I MUST FIND...THE
ANCIENT ONE...

I CANNOT
HELP YOU,
STEPHEN
STRANGE--



--YOUR MOTIVES
ARE STILL SELFISH AND
YET, I SEEM TO SEE A
SPARK WITHIN YOU...

...A SPARK OF DECENCY,
OF GOODNESS, WHICH
I MIGHT BE ABLE TO
FAN INTO A FLAME.



IF YOU WILL
STAY HERE...
STUDY WITH ME...
PERHAPS YOU WILL
FIND WITHIN YOUR-
SELF THE CURE
YOU SEEK.







WELL! THIS IS A REAL SURPRISE...JUST NOT THE ONE I'D EXPECTED.

DOES MY FUTURE HOME HARBOR A DOOR TO AN EXTRADIMENSIONAL REALM...



...OR DOES THIS REALITY EXIST WITHIN THE DOOR ITSELF?



I SUPPOSE ONE CAN NEVER HAVE TOO MUCH STORAGE SPACE.

DID YOU KNOW OF THIS, ANCIENT ONE?



IS THIS YET ANOTHER PART OF YOUR GREAT "LESSON PLAN"...

YOU IMPROVE, STUDENT, BUT YOUR SPELL IS INCOMPLETE...

...SEVEN ARE THE RINGS OF RAGGADORR.



TRY AGAIN... CONCENTRATE IF YOU ARE TO BECOME A SORCERER...

...YOU MUST LEARN DISCIPLINE, OF BOTH THE MIND AND THE BODY...



...ONLY THEN WILL YOU BE ABLE TO COMPREHEND AND CHANNEL THE FORCES FROM BEYOND THIS REALITY.

YES, I...



...UNDERSTAND.

YOU UNDERSTAND NOTHING, MORTAL!

YOU ARE HELPLESS--!

HARDLY.

NO INCANTATIONS ARE NEEDED TO DEAL WITH SUCH A CREATURE.

A SIMPLE BOLT OF BEDEVILMENT SHOULD SUFFICE...



AH! THANK YOU, MORTAL--

EH?

--THANK YOU!

IT'S SHRINKING. WHY IS IT SO HAPPY?

I WOULD SWEAR THAT IT'S SOMEHOW CONCENTRATING THE ENERGY OF MY MYSTIC BOLT, OR--



AA-HAA-HAA-HA

--OR TRANSFERRING IT ELSEWHERE?

THIS DOES NOT BODE WELL.

I MUST RETURN TO THE PHYSICAL PLANE--





-IT IS TIME TO ESTABLISH, ONCE AND FOR ALL, WHO IS THE MASTER OF THIS HOUSE.



WE QUITE AGREE, MORTAL.

LONG HAVE WE BEEN BARRED FROM THIS REALITY-- BUT NO MORE!

NO MORE, MISTRESS TYANON.

TYANON...



...THE ANCIENT ONE'S TEXTS WARNED OF THIS CHAOS-ENTITY. IF A BEING OF SUCH POWER WERE TO GAIN ACCESS TO THIS WORLD, HUMANITY WOULD BECOME AS CHATTEL.

HEAR MY PLEA, OH GREAT VISHANTI-- GRANT THAT MY WILL SHALL PREVAIL!

GET YE HENCE, FOUL SHADE OF MADNESS-- ENTER NOT THIS EARTHLY VALE!



IS THAT YOUR BEST? THE LOWLY SHAMAN WHO SOUGHT TO CONFINE US DID BETTER--

--AND HE WAS BUT PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL.

PARTIALLY, YES...!



YOUR EFFORT WAS LAUGHABLE.

TRY HARDER, WEAKLING-- IF YOU CAN!

CASTING THAT SPELL WAS--DIFFICULT. DOES THE NERVE DAMAGE PLAGUE ME EVEN NOW?



MORTALS! THEY NEVER KNOW THEIR PLACE!

HAH! FLING HIM ABOUT AGAIN, MISTRESS.

FIGHT FOR YOUR PITIFUL LIFE, YOU FOOL. FIGHT!



SERAPHIM SHIELD ME...

WHY THE TAUNTS--? OF COURSE! CURSE ME FOR A NOVICE, THE CREATURE HAS BEEN FEEDING OFF MY SPELLS--



--GROWING TO FORM A LIVING PORTAL FOR TVANON. IF I KEEP USING MY MAGICKS IN THAT MANNER, I WILL ENSURE HER VICTORY.

YES...I SEE...



...BUT I BELIEVE TVANON DOES NOT!

SHE HAS NO EYES!



TVANON "SEES" THROUGH THE EYES OF HER FAMILIAR, AND IF HE IS BLINDED--



--SO IS SHE.

FAMILIAR!
WHERE--?

MYFTRUSS!
UVRB HRRR--!



YRRRGH!

THAT'S IT.
KEEP BELLOWING.



MORTAL! YOU CANNOT
ESCAPE ME--

ICV GRIP OF
IKTHALON...



"... SHIELD ME
FROM HER IRE."

HEY, DID
THE CRAZY
LIGHTS, MAN!
THAT MUST
BE SOME
PARTY.



IKTHALON'S TALONS
JUST BARELY HOLD THE
CHAOS FLAMES AT BAY.

HOGSOTH
STEADY NOW
MY HANDS.

OSHTUR
GUIDE ME
PAST MY
FEAR.



