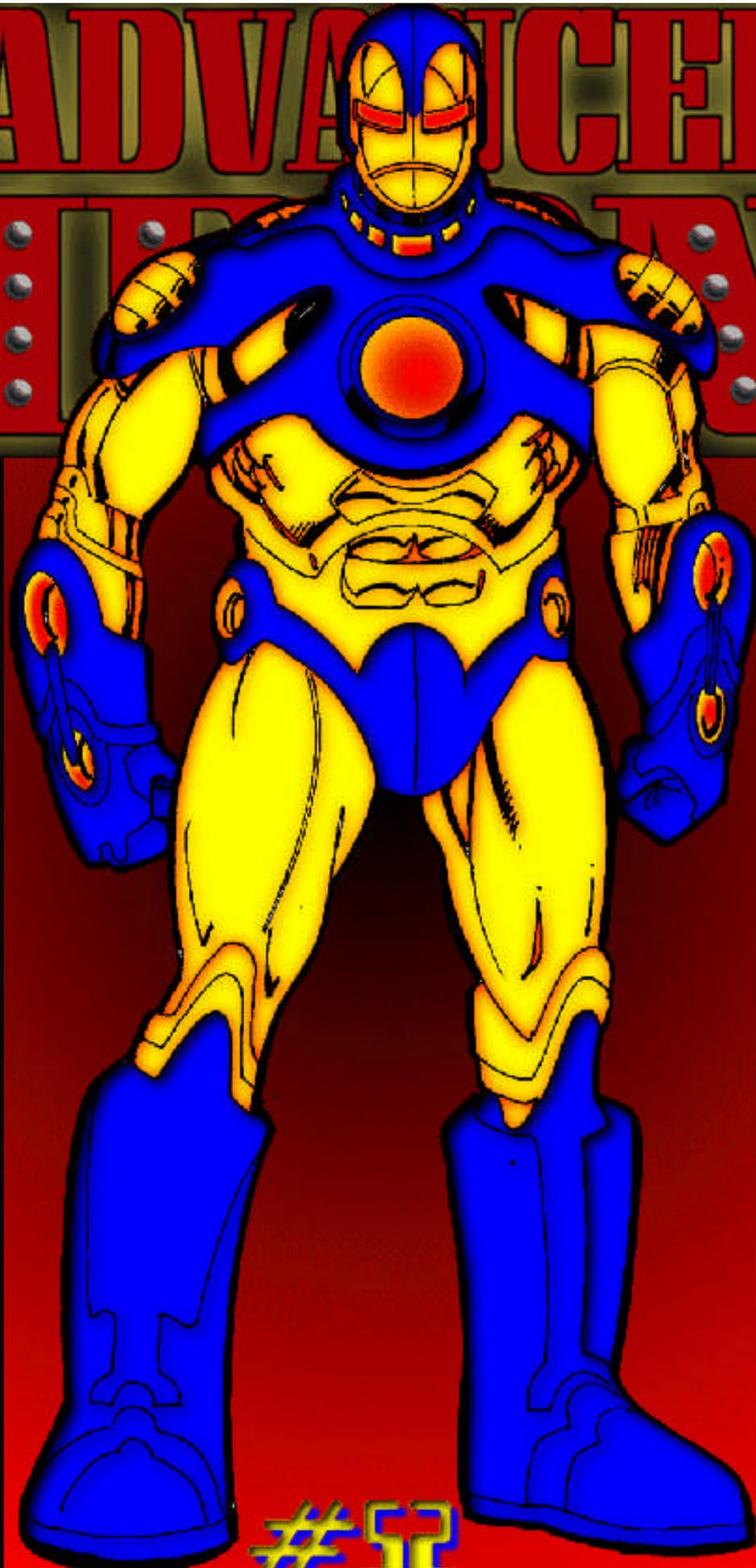


# ADVANCED IRON MAN



#52

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### Special Associate Editor's Note:

In our last issue, I wrote an article entitled "Seeing Red" in which I accused Frank Tieri of ripping off a Superman story. It's easy sometimes to forget that those names written at the bottom of a comic book's splash page are not just as fictional as the characters, they're actually real people. People with feelings, people who work hard and do their damn best to deliver a product they hope we can enjoy. Sometimes we're a little rough on these people when we're not satisfied with what they're doing. Even though the similarities between the IM and the Superman stories seem to be too important to be coincidental in my modest opinion, I was pretty rough back there. I'd like to apologize to Mr. Tieri for the harshness of my words and of my accusations. My choice of word was less than diplomatic. Mr. Tieri claims all the similarities between the two stories are purely coincidental and he should have been given a chance to defend himself in our last issue. I also apologize for not giving him that courtesy. It was never my intention to damage his reputation or hurt his feelings in any way.

--Patrick Couture

**Brad Lyons'** demeanor aside in last issue's **"A Minority Point of View"** (even considering the changes I idiotically forgot to make for Brad), he is just way off the mark. Let's start with this statement by Brad:

***Let's start off nice and easy with "Teen" Iron Man. This being my first dose of IM (that I actually read) I thought it was really good.***

***"I thought it was really good"????*** This statement alone makes the title of Brad's last article ominously prophetic: "A Minority Point of



View." One cannot be in a smaller minority than by saying **Teen Tony** was "really

good." You mean taking one of Marvel's flagship characters, turning him into a villain by means of "control" since virtually the character's conception, killing him off, and then replacing him with an alternate-dimension teen analogue?? You mean the storyline ("**The Crossing**") that was the laughing stock around comics for years (and still is) and made the names **Harras** and **Lobdell** nearly anathema to "creativity?" You mean that storyline that had to be "rescued" by **Jim Lee** and **Rob Liefeld** in "**Heroes Reborn?**" You mean the storyline that had to be "fixed" by the most talented writer of the current age, **Kurt Busiek?**

Oh, *that* story. "Really good." Whoa...

Now I'll tone down *my* column! ☺

I agree with Brad that "**Heroes Reborn**" was pretty darn good, even the armor (although we *both* may be in the minority here, Brad!). However, *plots* aside, the actual writing was bleak. Former A.I. chief **Bill Egan** detailed how lacking in words the "**HR**" universe was, **Iron Man** in particular. In **A.I. #34**, Bill noted that, compared to the **X-O Manowar** of the time, **Iron Man volume 2** had only **38.9 words per page** to **136.23 in X-O**, and a total of **856 words for the whole ish** compared to **2997 in X-O**. That's 250% more words, folks. Certainly, mere more words do not necessarily mean a better story, but they certainly increase the odds of it – merely by *telling* more of the story! And even in terms of artwork, X-O had an average of **99 panels/issue** compared to **70/issue** in "**HR**" **Iron Man**. Was X-O's art *better* however? Arguably so, in the opinion of many.

Regarding **Joe Quesada's "Sentient Armor"** story: while I didn't *love* it (does this mean I have to take a long walk off a short cliff, Brad? ☺), I did *like* it, as I noted in my luckily-published letter to "**Iron Filings**" in **IM #33**. There were indeed some truly eerie moments – **Whiplash** being beaten to death and Tony being helpless inside his own armor – but there were also some that didn't make sense: Tony leaving the Sentient Suit buried on the island, and regurgitating the spectre of Tony having a bad heart. Brad agrees with the former, but digs the latter. But still, Brad – despite Tony "not being the same," what kind of sense does it make for him to



leave an obviously very dangerous piece of technology buried on an island – *marked by a grave??* Answer: it *doesn't* make any sense. It's just plain dumb, despite how "sentimental" Tony may have been at the time. Just how dumb was it? Look no further than the **Iron Man Annual 2000** – the **Sons of Yinsen's** floating fortress is seen heading towards the island where the Sentient Suit was buried. Gee – 'ya think 'ol **Prof. Yinsen's brain** will be incorporated into that suit? One of the more obvious foreshadows.

Speaking of the old professor, Brad made the following statement:

***If you look back, making the Mandarin responsible for IM's origin instead of Wong Chu, and Wong Chu surviving the explosion (ish #s 266-268) was in the same ballpark as this [bringing back Wong Chu and Yinsen's brain].***

Say what? **[John] Byrne** using the **Mandarin** in the mentioned issues is HARDLY in the same ballpark. Having Mandy in the *shadows* and being the "brains" behind **Wong Chu** is hardly a mass alteration of **IM's** genesis – it is merely a minor "add-on." Compare that to Wong Chu being alive after all these years with no explanation as to how he survived Mandy crushing him, Prof. Yinsen's brain being preserved, and an entire cult of personality existing in a behemoth floating city, all using Yinsen/Stark **Iron Man technology**. Chee-yeah!! And what *exactly* happened to Wong Chu??

Brad continues by stating:



***Max Power was also an excellent story.***

You're joking, right? Right? Max Power was a *cheesy* story, but on top of that it was a *bad* story. Veteran IM fans *certainly* can handle cheese – hell, **George Tuska** is one of my fave IM artists....check out many of his regular characters for cheesy – but they can't handle *bad*.

Next, Brad says:

***I haven't seen hardly any reviews on the underwater filler. I guess no review is a good review. I enjoyed this one as well, but let me just say one word – Leviathan.***

I have a better word: "**Michelinie.**" As I stated in my review of this ish, (over at **Hube's Iron Man Review** – <http://members.aol.com/ironhube>) David Michelinie's awesome yarn of Iron Man taking on a **sentient satellite-killer** in the silence of space (#237) is vastly superior to either this filler ish OR the lame flick "Leviathan."

***The "Remote Control" saga was also an outstanding tale. It introduced what could be a very deadly business rival, Tiberius Stone, replacing Stane and Hammer. No one has even come close to these scoundrels. Trevor Donohue had potential, but now he's dying and***



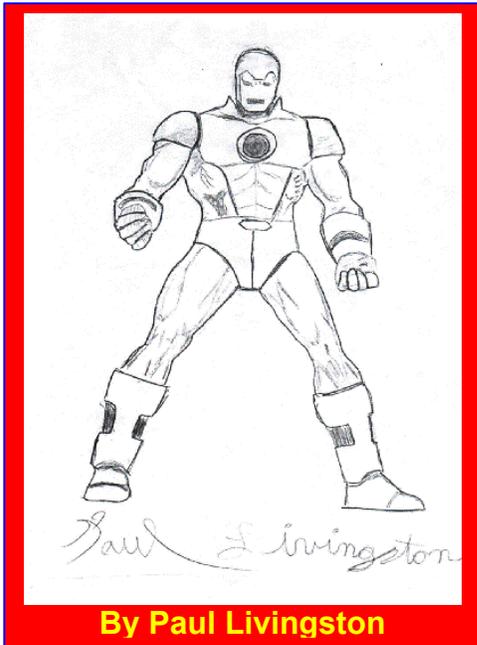
**By Patrick Couture**

***even helped Stark. Sunset Bain is dangerous but is also attracted to Stark, which makes her not-so-dangerous. The possibilities for Ty Stone are endless. Back to the story – let's just say that at the end of each issue I was excited and anxious and giddy like a little school-girl, just waiting for the next issue. Any writer who can do that is Grade-A in my book.***

I would say "outstanding" is a stretch. The story is hardly original, after all. At any rate, there needs to MUCH more character development of Stone before he can be rightly dubbed on par with Stane or Hammer. **Sunset Bain** should not be dropped as a villain (I'm not saying she has, but we haven't seen her much, have we?). One of **Busiek's** smart moves was bringing her in as a corporate baddie. The fact that she *is* attracted to Stark *makes* her dangerous! It makes her unpredictable, and unpredictable foes are wily ones, for sure.

And..."Grade-A?" OK. If you say so!

At any rate, that's enough outta me! I want to thank Brad Lyons for his comments last issue – and keep 'em coming!! ☺



By Paul Livingston

## KARMA KARMA KARMA CHAMELEON

If you haven't already nabbed **Iron Man #44**, his new armor debuts in all its splendor! We see only a few of its "new" features – one of which are cool, **spherical probes** – but the other is the revamped "**Chameleon Effect!!**" Remember that writer **Frank Tieri** solicited YOUR ideas for what features the new armor should have, and the old Cham. Effect was the overwhelming most requested addition! You can include me as one who asked for the Effect, and I also noted that it should be a *huge power drain* so as to avoid it being overused (Frank obliged here, too!). You may remember that the Effect was first

seen in **IM #200**, and was definitely *overused* in issues **#207** and again in **#214**. Writer **David Michelinie** dumped this feature as of **#217** by making it **adversely affect Stark's nervous system**. It was nice to see Frank T. note the Effect's past troubles in the recent **#44**.

## STEAL MY THUNDER, WHY DON'T 'YA? ☺

I feel terrible for our super-sleuth **Chris Frye** this issue. Chris did a spectacular job nabbing an interview with **Chuck Austen**, but also convincing Marvel editor **Tom Brevoort** to part with the info on the ID of the new **IM creative team**. Mr. Brevoort was gracious enough to give A.I. a heads-up that the info would be divulged at

*"Back in a classic issue of the **Fantastic Four** the recently-wed **Reed Richards** settled into domesticity by building a dishwasher or some such household appliance. It cleaned the dishes and I'm sure that, with minor adjustments, it could have breached the Negative Zone, operated all North America defense systems and sealed the hole in the ozone layer. In true Univac tradition, it filled a room.....**Tony Stark would have made it the size of a Bic Lighter.**"*

By Steve Saffel in the **Iron Man/ Force Works Collectors Preview**

the San Diego Con *before* this issue was ready, but allowed us to disseminate the news a day before the Con announced it via our **Advanced Iron Mailer** and posts on various message boards.

### **A.I. -- "AUTHORIZED" MARVEL SITE?**

A Marvel website "**User Agreement**" has been sent out via e-mail to those who have developed and maintain Marvel character fan sites, including **Iron Man**. At the time of this writing, A.I. has not yet received it; however, we are including a copy of the agreement for all of our readers to check out – to let them determine if the agreement is "fair." Apparently, if they decide to, Marvel has the right to dictate use of their copyrighted images of characters as they see fit (although something called "fair use policy" may get in their way). Part of this agreement states that images used on "authorized" sites "must use images from their own digital library." Fine, but, why can't that be all? That seems like a "fair" deal, after all...again, if Marvel *really* wants to be omnipotent. And look at other parts of the agreement:

- Part 2, section b, vii states: ***"acknowledge that ....content deemed negative towards Marvel or any of its interests will not be tolerated."***

How subjective can you be? Exactly what will Marvel deem "negative?" Will an unenthusiastic issue review be "deemed negative?" What if someone opines that some of Marvel's business dealings are just not wise? Will it have to be removed?

- Part 3 states: ***"Marvel shall control use to the Property through the use of IP addresses and/or passwords."***

`Nuff said.

How about this one for a logistics nightmare:

- Part 2, section b, i says: ***Each URL requires a separate application and authorization.***

Boy, sure hope you don't have too many links to other sections of your site, eh?

A.I. is currently undecided about what it will do if it receives this agreement, if this agreement is indeed valid (and it sure seems that way). Should we continue to operate, but just delete all Marvel-related

graphics from our pages? Will this affect the content of the 'zine? We'd like your input and, of course, support.

And another thing – aren't all these fan websites in essence "free advertising" for Marvel? Surely, the vast majority of fan sites generate interest in Marvel characters and hence, Marvel products. And Marvel – not the websites – makes the profit off its products. I have heard that there are *some* sites that actually have scanned in *whole comics* and put them on the web. I've never seen one yet, but it certainly seems like *these* sites would prevent profit-making by Marvel. *These* are the sites that Marvel should "go after."

Is Big Brother coming?

Here is the e-mail that was sent out to various sites:

New Media Group  
AUTHORIZED FAN SITE AGREEMENT

July 16, 2001

Dear Marvel Fan,

It has come to our attention that you are using Marvel's copyrighted and/or trademarked materials on your website [http://\\*\\*\\*\\*\\*](http://*****) without permission.

Protecting Marvel's many valuable trademarks and copyrights are of utmost importance to Marvel. At the same time, Marvel's fans and their websites are also very important to us. Marvel created the Authorized Fan Site Program to protect its valuable assets while allowing our fans to continue to use certain of our copyrighted and trademarked materials on their websites. If you would like to keep using our materials on your website then we would love to have you join our Authorized Fan Site Program.

Marvel Authorized Fan Site Program Membership Benefits

- \* Marvel provides Members with access to a digital library containing high quality Marvel trademarked and copyrighted images and logos.
- \* Marvel.com will feature a 'Fan Site of the Month'. The featured site will include a link to the selected fan site from Marvel.com.
- \* Marvel.com will automatically send Members its weekly newsletter, The Mighty Marvel Mailer, containing interesting and valuable information about the Marvel Universe (including most recent ship dates for comics) and information about upcoming Marvel events.

Membership in the program (which is free) would allow you to continue to present and build your website using Marvel copyrighted and trademarked materials.

It is important that you respond to this letter. We've made it easy for you to gain permission to use our assets on your website. Simply review the conditions of membership and return to us the completed Authorized Fan Site Application. Sites that fail to accept the terms and conditions of the agreement will be reported to Marvel's legal department and your service provider will be requested to deny access to your site.

Remember, if you are under thirteen (13) years of age we need your parent or guardian to sign to give their consent by signing the Application in the appropriate place also.

We look forward to signing you up.

Best regards,  
Marvel New Media

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Following this column is the attached Authorized Fan Site Application. Take it all in and then decide if you'd agree to it. Be sure to let us know. As more information becomes available, look for updates in the **Advanced Iron Mailer (A.I.M.)**. If you haven't yet subscribed to the A.I.M., send an e-mail to [AnthnyStrk@aol.com](mailto:AnthnyStrk@aol.com) and merely type "Subscribe to the AIM" in the title. That's it! You'll henceforth receive breaking Iron Man-related news via e-mail notice.

#### **ABOUT THE COVER**

What you see is an original **Iron Man** design by the legendary **BOB LAYTON** himself, but one he himself rejected. Bob had posted this on his own website, but graciously gave us permission to use it as our cover. The cool colors were added by A.I.'s own **Patrick Couture!**

That's about it! Thanks for stopping by and downloading this ish. As always, we greatly appreciate your support!

-Hube



**New Media Group**  
**AUTHORIZED FAN SITE AGREEMENT**

**NOTICE TO PROSPECTIVE MARVEL FAN PAGE MEMBER:** THIS IS A CONTRACT. BY INDICATING YOUR ACCEPTANCE BELOW, YOU ACCEPT ALL THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THIS AGREEMENT.

- 1) GRANT OF LICENSE
  - a) This Marvel Characters, Inc. ("Marvel") License Agreement ("Agreement") accompanies the Marvel digital library images and logos ("Property"). Successful applicants who agree to comply with the terms and conditions below will become Marvel Fan Page Members ("Members") and will receive "Authorized Fan Site" status. Marvel grants to Members a limited, nonexclusive license to use the Marvel digital library images and logos on non-profit, English language websites which are maintained by individuals for their personal use provided that you agree to the following:
- 2) USE OF MARVEL PROPERTY
  - a) You may—
    - i) electronically display only on a specifically authorized website any photographs, clip art or other artistic works, in whole or in part, that are included within the Marvel digital library (unless a specific notice to the contrary is indicated).
  - b) You shall—
    - i) limit the use of the license granted to the specific URL in the authorization application. Each URL requires a separate application and authorization.
    - ii) only use the Property in **static graphics or text form**. This authorization does not include, and **specifically prohibits**, games, animations, or other interactive applications utilizing Marvel Property.
    - iii) comply fully with the Federal COPPA standards for websites directed to children under the age of thirteen (13). Applicant is obligated to read Marvel's Privacy Policy ([http://www.marvel.com/about/privacy/privacy\\_policy.html](http://www.marvel.com/about/privacy/privacy_policy.html)).
    - iv) include the official Marvel.com logo () with a link to the Marvel.com website (<http://www.marvel.com>) above the fold of every page containing Marvel Property.
    - v) include a text link to Marvel.com on the bottom of every member page.
    - vi) include the following trademark and copyright notices on the member site:
      - (1) [Names(s) of character(s)] and the distinctive likeness(es) thereof are Trademarks of Marvel Characters, Inc. and are used with permission.
      - (2) Copyright © [year of first publication of Marvel material by Licensee, in Arabic numerals] Marvel Characters, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
    - vii) acknowledge that foul language, obscenity, pornography and content deemed negative toward Marvel or any of its interests will not be tolerated. Appropriate actions will be taken to Member Sites containing such material, including, revocation of authorization. You further agree to immediately remove any materials and/or information Marvel objects to from your website.
    - viii) accept responsibility for maintaining the confidentiality of your account information.
    - ix) not use all or any part of the Property for profit, business or other commercial purposes.
- 3) DELIVERY/ACCESS OF LICENSED MATERIALS TO LICENSEE
  - a) Marvel shall control access to the Property through the use of IP addresses and/or passwords.
- 4) AUTHORIZATION/TERMINATION
  - a) Authorization and membership are in Marvel's sole discretion and are subject to compliance with Marvel's terms and conditions.
  - b) Marvel reserves the right to deny or terminate authorization at any time for any reason.
- 5) PROTECTION OF RIGHTS
  - a) Licensee acknowledges and agrees that the names, characters, symbols, designs, likenesses, and visual representations comprising the Property are owned by Marvel. Except as stated above, this Agreement does not grant you any intellectual property rights in the Property.
- 6) GOVERNING LAW AND GENERAL PROVISIONS
  - a) This Agreement will be governed by, construed and interpreted in accordance with the laws of the State of New York.

7) ACCEPTANCE OF AGREEMENT

Please print out and complete this Agreement. Then, send it via mail or fax it to:

Mail: FAN SITE MEMBERSHIP • Marvel Enterprises, Inc. • 10 East 40<sup>th</sup> Street, 11<sup>th</sup> floor • New York, NY 10016

Fax: 917-472-2257 • Attention: Online Permissions

(Check applicable boxes)

- Yes, I am 13 years of age or older and I agree to the above terms and conditions.
- No, I am not 13 years of age or older. If under 13, parent/guardian must sign below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Applicant's site name and URL

\_\_\_\_\_ http://\_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Contact Information:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
First and Last Name Telephone number e-mail address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address City State/Province Postal code Country

\_\_\_\_\_  
Applicant's signature Date

**If applicant is under thirteen, the parent or legal guardian must give his/her consent by signing below.**

I, as parent/legal guardian of \_\_\_\_\_, agree to the above terms and conditions and agree to be bound by them. I further sign this document to signify my consent to allow my child/ward to receive Authorized Fan Site Status and become a Marvel Fan Page Member. I further understand that I can revoke my consent at any time by sending a Letter of Revocation by mail or fax (917-472-2257) to Marvel.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's/Guardian's First and Last Name Parent's/Guardian's e-mail address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's/Guardian's Signature Date



**REVOCATION OF CONSENT**

I, as parent/legal guardian of \_\_\_\_\_, a child under the age of 13, hereby  
revoke my consent to allow \_\_\_\_\_ to be an Authorized Fan Site Member.  
Please revoke my child's/ward's Fan Page Membership and Authorized Fan Site Status.

\_\_\_\_\_ http://\_\_\_\_\_

Member's site name and URL

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent's/Guardian's First and Last Name (please print)

Parent's/Guardian's e-mail address

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent's/Guardian's Signature

Date

**By signing below, I consent to allowing my child/ward to continue to receive *The Mighty Marvel Mailer* by email.**

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent's/Guardian's Signature

Child's/Ward's e-mail address

Mail or fax this form to:

FAN SITE MEMBERSHIP • Marvel Enterprises, Inc. • 10 East 40<sup>th</sup> Street, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor • New York, NY 10016

Fax: 91-472-2257

# Breaking the Borders

or How to Get Threatened with Strangulation by a Professional Comic Book Editor

by Scott Brooks

I'd put it off for over a decade.

After a couple of fruitless attempts at catching the eye of the ever-changing submissions editor at Marvel in the late 1980s, I'd settled into a routine of domestic life that left little time for my comic book dreams. But after quitting my graphic design job and setting up shop in my basement studio as an illustrator with my fellow illustrator wife, I now had some time to devote to trying to make it in the weird, wild world of comics.

And so it was that after three months of scribbling away late into the Conan O'Brien hours, I produced a dozen pages of minty fresh comic art to show at the **2001 Charlotte, NC Heroes Con** in June. Several top-talent creators were going to be there, including Marvel's editor-in-chief **Joe Quesada**. And I'd heard from my Comic Shop Guy that Charlotte was a great place to grip and grin with the pros in a low-key setting.

I took along my best friend Rick. He's not much into comics, but I needed someone in my corner, and since he's a fellow artist and the funniest guy I know, I figured if I struck out at this gathering, at least he'd provide some comic relief. (This proved quite true.) At the last minute we picked up a welcome third, "**scoob**" from the **Iron Man Message Board**. He and I had enjoyed sporadic e-mail correspondence, discovering that we live in different suburbs of the same city, but had never spoken by phone, much less met. He's chock full of talent and I'd encouraged him to show his work at Charlotte. Before long, he was along for the ride. I'll preserve his identity to protect his innocence.

It is my hope that besides garnering some sympathy from my fellow Iron Man fanatics, my Convention experience will benefit someone out there who hopes, as I still manage to do, to break into the unpredictable comix biz.

I thought I'd spare you the chronological blow-by-gut-pulverizing-blow ("*...then, dripping blood, I stumbled in the direction of **Alan Davis's** throne. As I stood amidst the crush of worshippers, I thought desperately, 'Surely here is a man who will understand my mix of old-school sensibilities and modern finishing style!'*"). Instead I'll go through an equally excruciating page-by-page, with comments as I remember them, attributing them to the people who said them as best as I can recall. Three days of portfolio reviews tends to dull your senses, and with the added passage of a few weeks since the events, the comments still echo but the speaker's faces blur.

The first ten pages were from a three-part Iron Man mini-series I'd plotted out for the primary purpose of doing these pages. In the story, Tony Stark is contacted by a (young, attractive female) paleontologist friend

regarding a strange artifact she'd unearthed that was buried in Cretaceous rock. It turns out to be a transportation device left by advanced aliens who rescued some of the dinosaurs before they became extinct. They then constructed a giant **Dyson sphere** in which to preserve them located out in the far reaches of our solar system. Of course Tony and the paleo girl travel to the sphere and have dino adventures, and of course they are hotly pursued by an evil **Roxxon** operative.

For better or worse, I didn't explain any of this to the people looking at my pages. I preferred to let the art tell the story, though I wish someone had asked me about the story itself. Perhaps Iron Man and dinosaurs don't go together, but it was something I had never seen, and thought it a novel and visually interesting linkage. I also generally refrained from defending the artwork, thinking that nothing I could say would change their minds anyway.

**Page one:** in the midst of a sandstorm, would-be thieves from Roxxon in bulky, clunky exoskeletal armor are set upon by the unexpected Iron Man. Repulsors take out one, but a physical assault on the second causes a forcefield to throw IM back. He quickly analyses the fields and neutralizes them with a blast from his unibeam. (*Scroll down to Page One.*)

**Comments:** The most immediate comment I heard was to be careful with my border breaks. The claw in panel one leads the reader's eye into the third panel. Likewise the hand in the third panel leads to the fifth panel. My intent with the border breaks was to make the action jump off the page, trusting the reader to know how to read a comic. That was my intent anyway. Another comment someone made was the awkwardness of the IM figure in the second panel. He also thought the panel was a bit too straightforward. My purpose there was to provide a clear establishing shot of Iron Man, but I agree it is a stiff pose.

**Page two** continues the fight with Iron Man dramatically stunning his two foes. He then notices a third operative skulking away, which distracts him long enough for one of the downed guys to seriously damage his bootjet. He finishes dispatching the offender with a power-siphoning cable from his gauntlet. (*Scroll down to Page Two.*)

**Comments:** This page was a mixed bag. One pro liked my little inset panel of IM noticing the shadowy figure, but most thought it was awkwardly placed. I got a few positive reactions to the big action panel, especially the way the robot guy's arm pushes out into space. Again I got hammered for overlapping elements from one panel to the next and it interfering with readability. **Bob Layton** in particular pointed out problems with separation of foreground, middle-ground and background elements. Things in the foreground should have thicker holding lines around them. He also commented on the way I didn't seem to take as much time finishing the robot-guys as I did IM. I didn't argue, but the truth is I was trying to make the assailants have a different surface texture than IM. Less mirrored than IM, but still polished and shiny.



On the **third page**, we shift scenes as Tony's paleo friend (Maureen to those who know her) races to the large tent where the alien artifact is being stored. She whips off the tarp covering it and activates it with her palm. It begins to hum with life and opens up to admit her. As she takes her position inside it, something startles her. (*Scroll down to Page Three.*)

**Comments:** Colorist **Tom Smith** told me that **George (Pérez)** would like how my girl looked consistent from one panel to the next. That was nice to hear. I had tried to make Maureen look like an individual, still attractive, but with a wider face, pointier chin and smallish mouth compared to the average Marvel hottie. I also meant for the alien transport pod to have a definite **Kirby-esque** look to it. This served the story since it turns out that a renegade Celestial is responsible for saving the dinosaurs (darn--ruined the surprise ending!) Neither of these things were commented on by anyone. I was particularly proud of panels four and five with the artifact throwing off light, creating interesting shadows on Maureen's hand and body, but again, nothing.

On this page **Bob Layton** whipped out his "**Tissue Pad of Doom**" as he called it and began fixing the "mapping problems" I had with the final panel's face. The ear was too low, the chin too small...when he was done, he'd done a very nice **John Buscema-ish** woman's face. (*Scroll down to Layton A.*) Another comment I remember this page eliciting was someone (**Joe Quesada?**) telling me to use reference when drawing stuff. He was pointing at the crate in the third panel. I'm rather proud of that crate, but I suppose the point is a good one. Using reference for even the throwaway stuff can give your art an air of verisimilitude it might not otherwise have.

**Page four** shows us what Maureen was reacting to -- the third armored henchman. As the alien transporter begins to close around her, the two exchange harsh words. (*Scroll down to Page Four.*)

**Comments:** I finally got a break on the panel overlap. A couple of people conceded that it worked in the second panel. However, the "TV Batman" page-tilt impressed no one, and bothered a couple of people. **Bob Layton** reminded me about foreground/background holding line weights again on the first panel, but said I did all right with it on panel two. Again his TPoD came out on the girl's face. Mapping problems again. (*Scroll down to Layton B.*)

On **page five**, we're back with Iron Man again. He checks the damage on his bootjet, then runs to catch up to the armored goon. Said goon is trying to pull Maureen from the alien transporter as IM throws open the tent-flap. He makes a diving tackle on the henchman. (*Scroll down to Page Five.*)

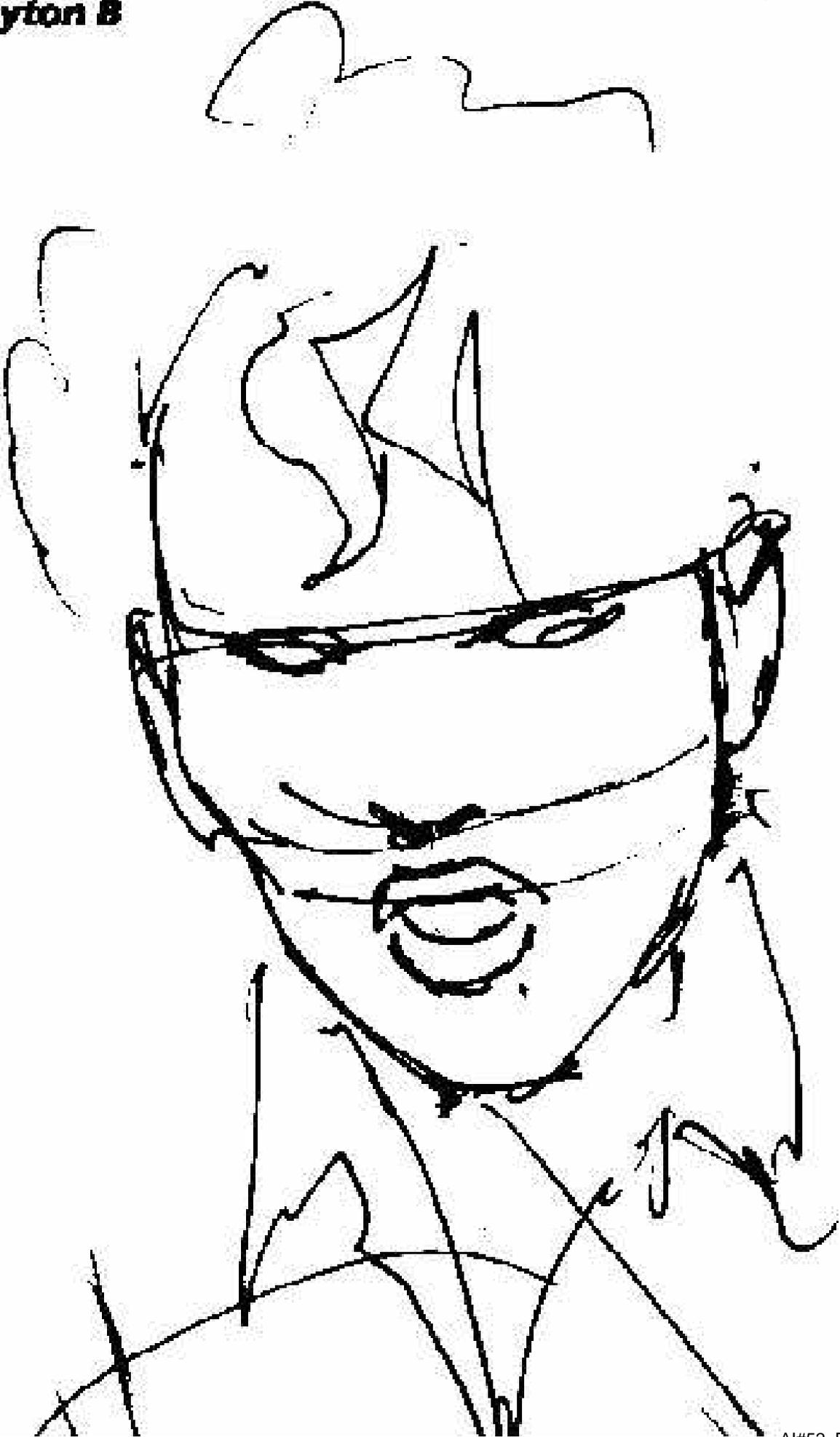
**Comments:** DC editor **Mark Chiarello** was building up a full head of steam by this page. I believe it was about at this point that I was threatened with strangulation if I ever broke another border. He also hated the panel layout on this page, especially the lack of separation between panels three and five. The figure of Shellhead in panel four gave several people fits. Its Modiglianesque proportions garnered me another drawing lesson from **Bob Layton**: neck too long, torso too long, weird right arm placement, right







**Layton B**





leg should be thrust forward more and foreshortened. (*Scroll down to Layton C.*) Also, the placement of the elements in overlapping panels four and five was confusing and awkward to some people.

**KC Carlson**, former DC editor, also upbraided me for ignoring the realities of cropping. Though he was the only one to do so, he was right. I'm a trained graphic designer and should have known better than to crowd the edges the way I did. Next time, I'll invest in some professional boards with proper crop and bleed marks.

**Page six** finds IM siphoning the energy out of his foe while reacting to Maureen's imminent departure. She's expressing some apprehension too as the final layers of the device envelope her. The ship achieves its launch status and then blasts off for home. (*Scroll down to Page Six.*)

**Comments:** One of the smaller publishers there liked my little inset panels showing IM and Maureen's eyes. **Layton** gave me a hard time for failing to solve the problems presented by the overlapping elements bathed in strong light in the penultimate panel. He didn't like how I chose to separate the fore, middle and background. He said the holding line on IM was too strong, and should have been almost entirely eliminated. He didn't like the radiating lines defining the fallen robo-goon, but didn't offer a solution as I recall.

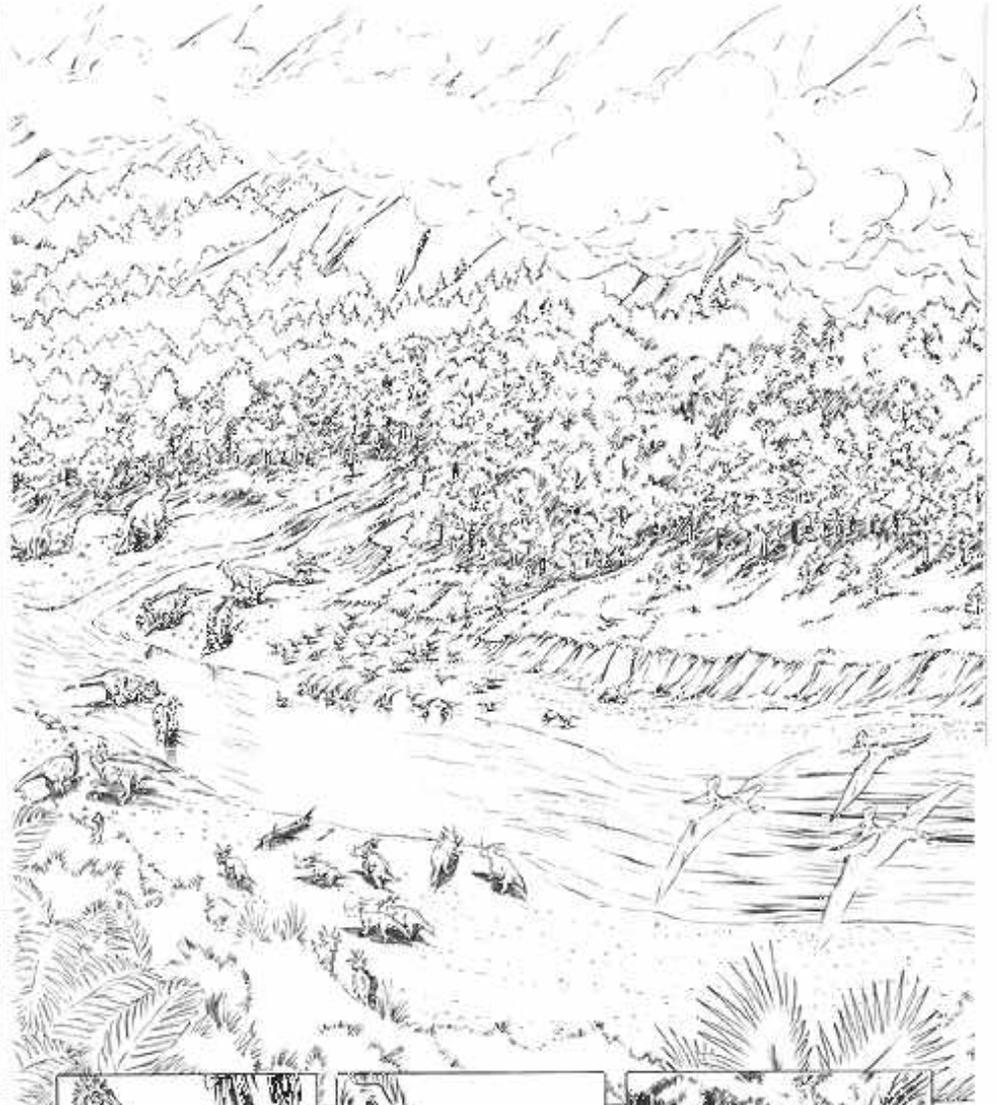
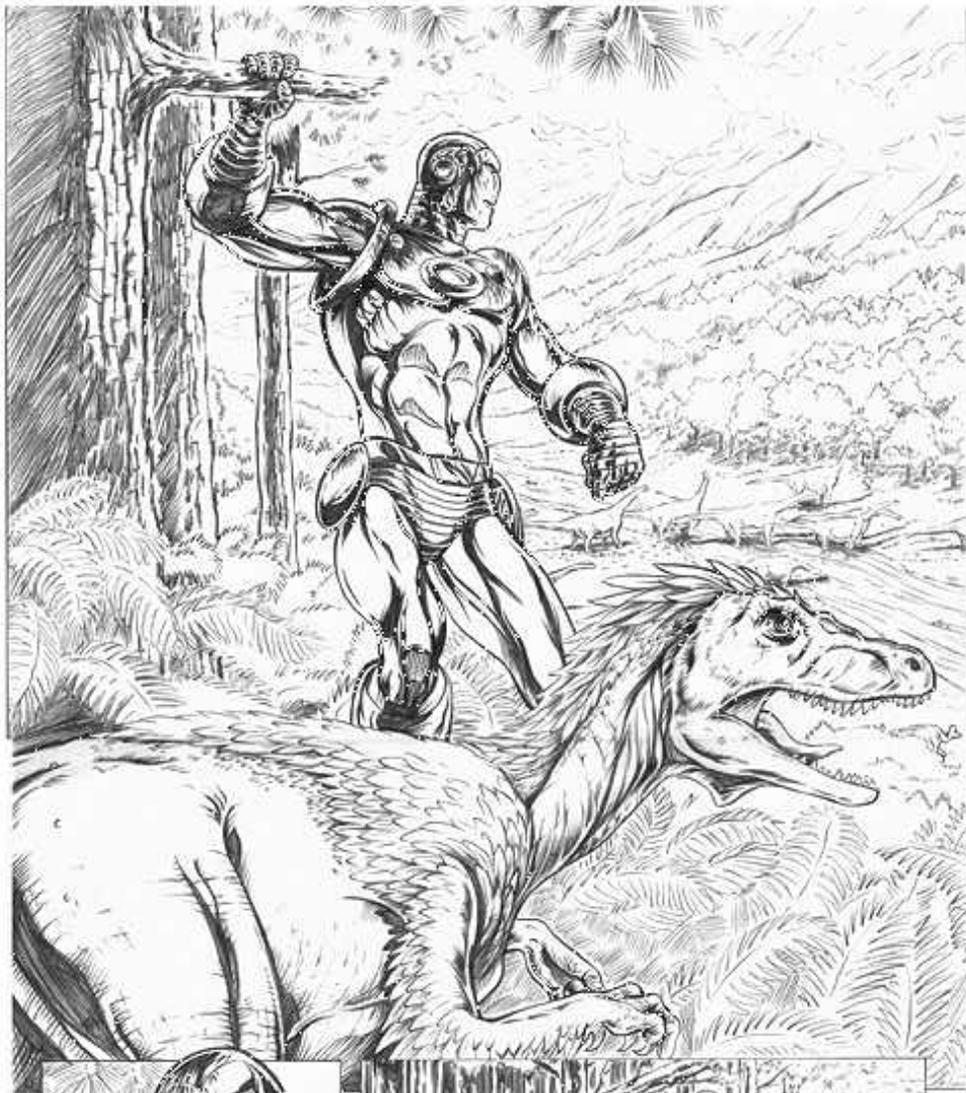
**Pages seven and eight** shift to a scene in what would be the second book of the trilogy. IM has followed Maureen to the dinosaur-filled Dyson sphere and has picked up a small velociraptor companion. They come upon what was to be a dramatic vista showing herds of herbivorous dinosaurs at a watering place. His armor too damaged to fly, IM is having to hoof it as he tracks down Maureen. The raptor is reluctant to follow IM into the valley since his instincts tell him it's unsafe to be around that many enemy dinos without his pack-mates. IM is forced to leave his friend behind. (*Scroll down to Pages Seven and Eight.*)

**Comments:** I really hoped this spread would dazzle. Far from it. This scene seemed to prompt more comments from the pros than any other. Writer **Jim Krueger** said I needed something on the right to help balance the strong figures on the left, possibly by making the pteranodons flying into the scene larger. **Layton** said, "Well, you're sure not lazy." I heard this phrase from several pros directed at me and at others. It appears to be a comment reserved for people who obviously put a lot of effort in but don't solve the problem at hand. I heard it from a couple of others. Several commented that the valley scene was too gray and fuzzy -- it all blended together into an ill-defined soup. In my defense, I was trying to achieve a look of grand scale and atmospheric perspective, though I think **Krueger's** suggestion was a good one. Someone (again, possibly Krueger) thought I shouldn't have bled the big scene off the edges since bleeds should be reserved for scenes with a lot of dramatic impact. Hm. **Quesada** said he wasn't convinced by the scene; he didn't believe my trees for a minute. He told me to get reference of such a valley scene. No one appeared to appreciate the amount of reference I put into the dinosaurs themselves. Most

Layton C







comic book dinosaurs are poorly referenced or not referenced at all. Oh well. Quesada did say the dinosaur needed more skin texture. On the plus side, he thought the reflections of the pine needles in Shellhead's armor was a very clever idea. Some people liked the dominant figure of IM, others demurred.

**Page nine** finds IM walking among the Argentinosaurs as the ground begins to quake violently. (*Scroll down to Page Nine.*)

**Comments:** Again the awkward panel breaks got tsked. One pro told me to look at **Steranko** for how to show the quick passage of time in reference to the first three panels. I seem to recall **Layton** liked the last two IM figures on the page. **Quesada** wanted more elephantine baggy skin on my big dino.

On **page ten** a stampede begins. IM is quickly battered aside into the river and is nearly trampled. But our hero is determined to prevail. (*Scroll down to Page Ten.*)

**Comments:** One pro (**Karlson?**) thought there wasn't enough transition between the last page and this to make it clear what was happening. Again my panel breaks proved an irritant. **Layton** redrew my Shellhead in panel two, shortening his torso and moving his kneecap around to the "front." (I think my kneecap is fine.) (*Scroll down to Layton D.*) He also worked on the IM figure in panel three, vexed by the difference in the size of IM's thighs where they attach to his torso, as well as the angle and foreshortening on IM's legs. (*Scroll down to Layton E.*) A few people liked my styracosaurus in panel three. I was very happy with that as well. The last panel got some favorable comments.

**Pages 11 and 12** are from another story entirely. I'd worked out a six-page vignette of a Batman/Captain America crossover, just to have a little DC in the mix of pages. (What a fanboy thing to do. Originally it was to be Batman/Iron Man, but I thought people would be sick of Iron Man after the previous pages.) I only managed to do the first two pages before I ran out of time. I also threw in Norman Osborn, Catwoman, Natasha Romanova and the Joker to really crazy things up.

On **page 11**, Cap observes Norman Osborn arrive at a Wayne Foundation soiree with a ditzzy date in tow. Catwoman tries to sneak up on Cap, but he grabs and flips her. She points out something alarming to him (an off-camera Green Goblin robot on a bat-glider, but don't worry about it.) (*Scroll down to Page Eleven.*)

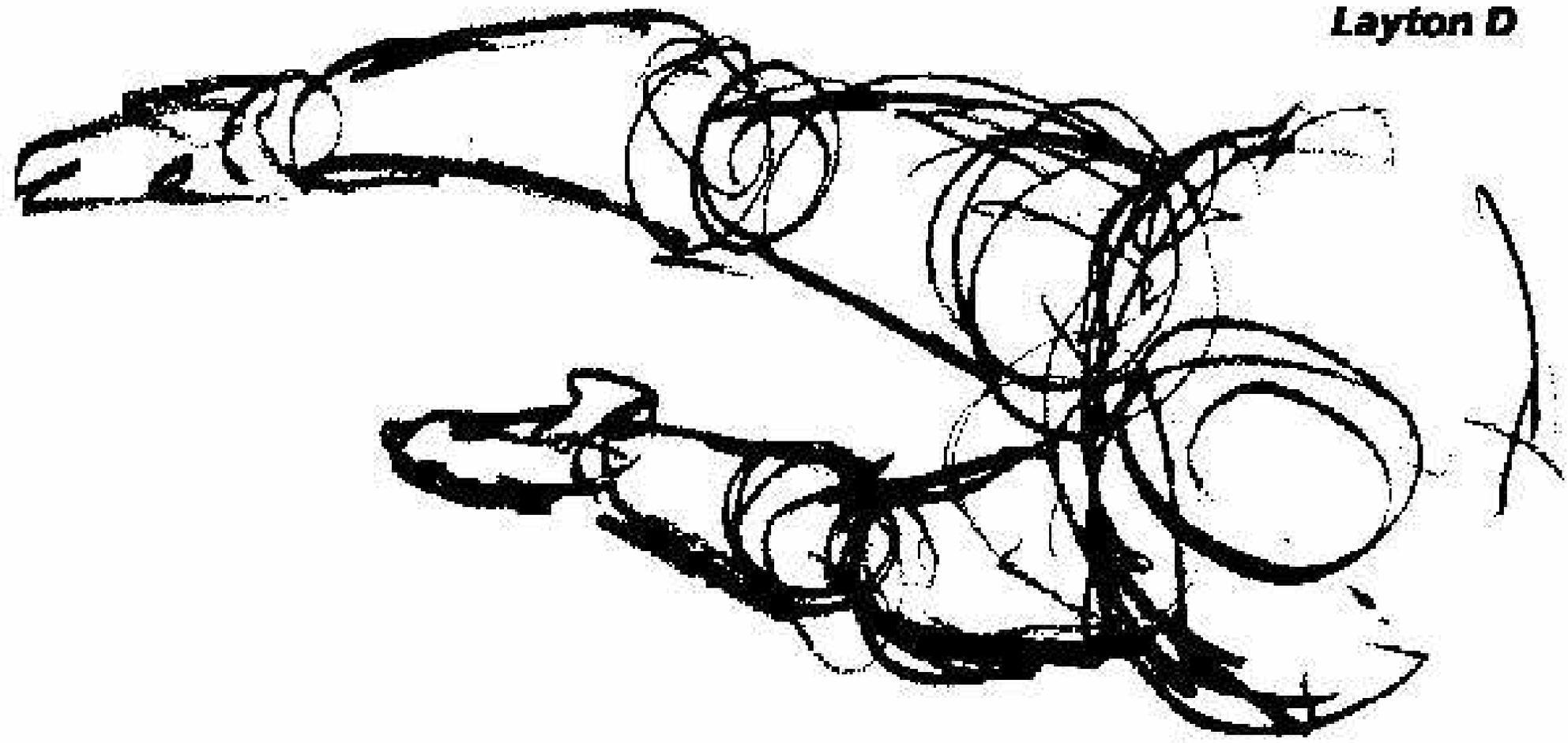
**Comments:** Everyone asked if this was older stuff. I don't know if that was because it was penciled lighter than the other pages, or because it looked lousier, or because it was at the back of my portfolio. Generally, you should put your older stuff in the back of your book, but since I had done all of these within a two-three month timespan I didn't build my book that way.

The building with its three-point perspective got a lot of favorable comment. One inker was very impressed with its professional quality. **Layton** told me to pull out my templates and straight edges when drawing





**Layton D**



**Layton E**





cars, though others thought I put too much detail in such tiny objects. (No one pointed out that the scale of the vehicles was way too big for the little figures on the sidewalk, which I myself admit.) **Quesada** made vague admonishments about the way I'd lit the figures on this page. I was going for an underlighting effect, but I'd tried to modify it since it can be murder on forms and faces sometimes.

**Page 12** finds Osborn stalking toward Bruce Wayne, who sizes up the situation with his date Natasha. The two men meet as the Joker, thinly disguised as a waiter, walks by, catching Tasha's attention. Joker whips off his fake bald-cap and pulls out a zany remote control device (to summon that Goblin robot of course.) (*Scroll down to Page Twelve.*)

**Comments:** This page got me a couple of compliments from **Sean Chen** — he liked my "Happy Hogan face" (Norman's) in panel one, and Bruce Wayne's hair in panel two. Someone thought my Joker face too "jowly" in the last panel. But the one comment I heard more than any other on this page regarded Wayne's chin in panel two. It skews out too much to the right side of his face. I silently blame looking at too many **John Byrne** three-quarter profiles, but didn't argue with anyone about it.

And that's it for the blow-by-blow.

Taking every comment sent my way with equal weight resulted in confusion. Some told me to work on my storytelling. Others told me I had the storytelling down, I just needed to work on my figures. One thought I had a nice finishing style, but my structure needed work. **Mike Mignola** and **Alex Toth** seem to be the influences everyone swears by if the number of times they were mentioned to me is any indication.

One telling encounter: **Mark Bagley** leafed through my book and without looking up asked me how old I was. I told him 35. He related how he'd told himself if he didn't make it by 30 he'd give up. I asked how close he thought I was. Poor question. His answer: "That's up to you." I thanked him, took my book and left to wonder if he was telling me that only the young get a shot at comic book work, or that if I haven't developed the skills to do professional level work by the time I was 30 I was hopeless. The truth is, other than a few pin-ups for *Advanced Iron*, this is my first attempt to do comic style art in a decade or more. Still, I know there is a good bit of ageism in the comic industry right now; I don't know how much that figured into people's reaction to me.

**Joe Quesada** sought to teach me what was wrong with my style by drawing an outstretched arm. First he drew a natural looking arm with rounded muscles. Too soft, no power, he said. Next he drew the same arm with jagged, straight hard lines. This was better, he said. There's a reason bodybuilders talk about being "cut," he said. I tried to deflect that by saying I guess I'd been influenced by **Gene Colan** too strongly. He assured me that Gene drew muscles as he demonstrated. I didn't disagree, though the only straight lines I ever remember Gene doing were the panel borders. (I later saw another drawing of these same arms on a table in the main hall —

apparently someone else besides me needed this lesson from Joe.) After the encounter with **Bagley**, I had a better question for Quesada. How far along was I, percentage-wise, to being professional-grade. "60-65%," he replied. Maybe he was being honest, but I believe he was giving me a number that was as low as he could go without his fearing I'd start shouting or break into tears.

But the hardest blows I took came from **Alan Davis**. He's an artist whose figure work and storytelling style I place in the highest esteem. Though I don't consciously try to emulate any one artist, I like the more naturalistic artists like Davis best and would hope to be considered among them one day. He flipped through my pages, handed them back and said a few dismissive words to the effect of "learn how to draw the human figure properly." He also didn't like how I rendered metal. His English accent and mild manner only made his pronouncements all the more devastating.

The overall experience was somewhat daunting. I don't think I ever received a critique in design school that was more discouraging, and those can be brutal at times. A few other kind-hearted artistic hopefuls who saw my stuff took the time to give me encouragement and praise, which was greatly appreciated. It's difficult to evaluate the advice you're given at a con, since everyone has their own ax to grind, as it were. It's also difficult to read between the lines. Most of these men were approachable, pleasant, and generous with their time. They weren't trying to crush anyone's spirit, and because of that, you wonder how brutal they might have been had they chosen not to spare your feelings. Since most all of them have run this same gauntlet themselves, you know they're sympathetic to your position.

Lest I sound bitter about the experience, I should admit that I am grateful to them for taking the time to share their knowledge. I learned a great deal in three days. The convention experience is like a great concentrated workshop. Comparing it to design school, it is as if a semester's worth of assignments and critiques were squeezed into a fraction of the time. It leaves you little time to digest and reflect on all the input. I don't think I realized that until many days afterward.

**Scoob** fared much better. Though he got his share of constructive criticism (to differentiate his textures better, separate fore/middle and background elements more clearly), several creators' eyes lit up when flipping through his pages. **Jim Krueger** sought him out on Sunday after having seen his stuff on Friday, wanting him to work on something for him. Inker **Karl Story** threatened to end his friendship with **Dexter Vines** if Dexter wouldn't ink something for him. I guarantee you'll be hearing great things from Scoob (in his real guise of course) within the year. He's a very knowledgeable artist with an excellent eye, a killer sense of style and is a serious student of comics. He's quite deserving of a stellar career in the field. I predict he'll go far.

I ran into **Bob Layton** Sunday. He remembered me and offered me encouraging words. He asked me to send him a good drawing and he'd ink it and post it on his site ([www.boblayton.com](http://www.boblayton.com)). I'm working on it, Bob. Please

be patient.) That was truly nice of him to offer.

I'm going to keep at it, and I hope my experience prepares (or corroborates, if you've been through this before) rather than discourages anyone with goals similar to mine. I recommend to fellow aspirants to start today and draw, draw and draw some more. From life. Use reference. Find some influences outside comics (Scoob really impressed **Mark Chiarello** by mentioning Alphonse Mucha and JC Leyendecker to him.) Go to conventions and press the flesh. Another important thing I learned is that less is more (though this article may indicate otherwise.) After four or five pages, these guy's eyes tend to glaze over. Just put in no more than six killer pages -- scoob only had 5 pages and a pin-up, and it did the trick. Developing a style is important, to distance yourself from the rest of the crowd, but get the fundamentals down first. Go look at **Mike Mignola** and **Alex Toth**. And be sure to develop a thick skin, or bring lots of band-aids. Oh, and finally, don't break any borders within eye-view of Mark Chiarello.

I'd appreciate any comments, criticisms or questions regarding my art or my experience at Heroes Con. If you were there, I'd love to compare notes. And no, I won't reveal scoob's true identity. Email me at:  
scott@stormalbrooks.com





Ferrophiles, I've got a secret... I talked **Iron Man** Editor **Tom Brevoort** into telling me who the new creative team for **Iron Man** is, after **Frank Tieri** and **Keron Grant** finish their run in issue #49. Want to take a guess?! **Michelinie & Layton**, you say?! Sorry, wrong answer! Though we can all still hope.

The new writer has proven his abilities in the comic book marketplace, as a writer and artist in both the general market as well as the smaller independent market. His independent credits include many popular characters, of which one saw a lengthy run as a nationally syndicated newspaper strip during the 80's and 90's. He's also had an extensive, critically acclaimed run on a currently hot second tier DC character, as well as publishing 56 issues of his own creation with First Comics. (A pretty impressive feat for an independent title!) So who is this mystery man?! None other than **MIKE GRELL**.

Mike Grell's professional resume is impressive. He has worked for virtually every comic publisher, including DC, Dark Horse, Image, Marvel, and Valiant, as well as a host of well known independents. The characters he has written and illustrated is a veritable "who's who" in fictional literature: **Tarzan, James Bond, Green Arrow, Turok, Spawn and Zorro.** All have felt the touch of this talented creator's pen. Mike is probably best known for his work on DC's **Green Arrow** and **Warlord** in the 80's, as well as for his creator owned titles, **John Sable- Freelance** & the recent **Maggie the Cat.**

John Sable, Mr. Grell's spy-for-hire moonlighting as a children's book author, was published by First Comics and, in its two incarnations, lasted 56 issues as **John Sable- Freelance** and 10 issues as **Sable.** Recently, Mike had his first full-length novel, based on his creation, published. Mike knows how to put together engaging, detailed, character-driven stories with well developed sub-plots and liberal doses of high tech action.

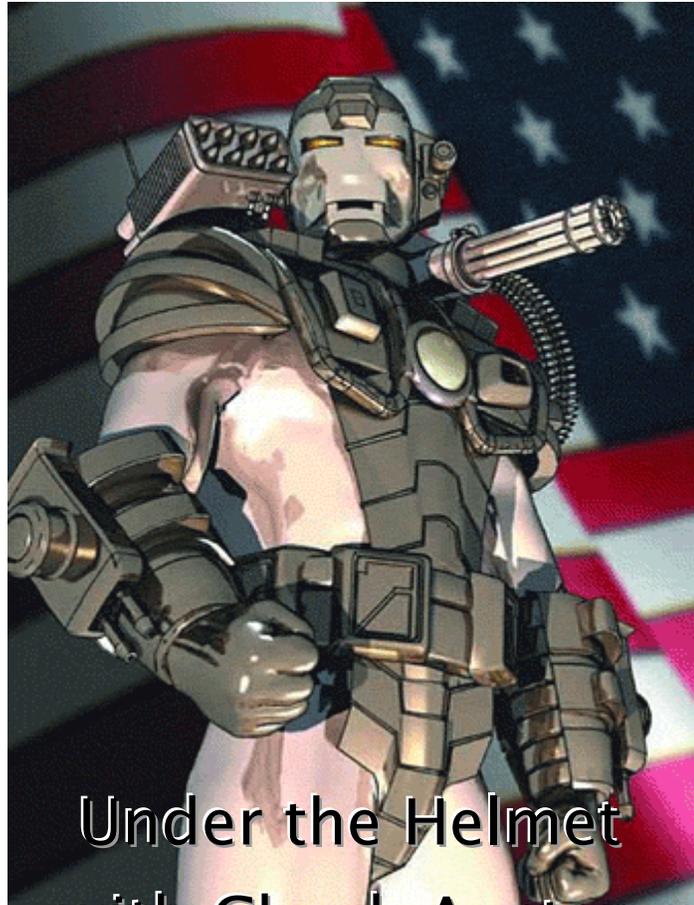
As for the newest **Iron Man** artist... he was one of the most prolific members of Wildstorm's second wave of in-house artists. One of his last Wildstorm projects was the very entertaining superhero meets special ops book, **The Patriots.** Since leaving Wildstorm, his work has been featured in several hi-profile Marvel titles, including **Heroes Reborn** and **Heroes Return.** He is currently teamed with writer Robert Weinberg as the penciller and inker for **Cable.** The new artist for **Iron Man,** you ask? **MICHAEL RYAN.**

Michael is a gifted and conscientious artist, whose work has graced many titles of late. Besides delivering consistently excellent and on-time artwork for **Cable,** Mr. Ryan recently finished pencilling chores on the three issue **Thunderbolts** spin-off, **Citizen V and the V Brigade.** He has also been known to lend his talent to fill in on any Marvel title that may need help because of scheduling or deadline problems.

With his recent work as an example, Michael's style has developed into a unique blend of the current "neo-mangaesque" approach, at least in his figures and especially in his characters' faces, but with layouts and backgrounds that favor a more classic approach. (If I had to pinpoint influences for his style, I'd say Michael's work resembles a mesh of Salvador Laroque's (**X-Men X-treme**) and Mark Farmer's (**Avengers**) styles with a dash of Carlos Pacheco (**F.F.**) thrown in for good measure.) His style is clean, dynamic and detailed. He shows a special affinity for creating hi-tech, detailed, yet believable gadgetry and vehicles. He is a competent storyteller who is able to craft visuals which compliment the flow and tone of the story.

For those Ferrophiles who are unfamiliar with Mr. Grell's and Mr. Ryan's work I would say, "Fear not, Shellhead and Tony Stark should be in good hands."

Without further adieu, let's get to **A.I.'s exclusive interview** with U.S. War Machine writer & artist, **Chuck Austen...**



Under the Helmet  
with Chuck Austen

**First, There are probably others in the same boat as me, readers who don't know who the heck Chuck Austen is. Can you tell us a little about yourself?**

I'm a man. I'm 6'1", almost 200 pounds, not all of it where it should be. But that's probably not what you meant. I started in the comics field about fifteen years ago. Most people know me for my work on *Miracleman*, which was the equivalent of an issue of art spread over three issues.

Then I tried my hand at **Marvel** and **DC**, got fed up fast (within a year), and moved on to doing work with independents. I worked for **Slave Labor** with Dan Vado doing a comic called *Hero Sandwich*, at the beginning of the Black and

White boom, then through the Black and White bust, and got burned out on adventure comics altogether.

From there I started doing adult, or “porno” comics as members of the **Iron Man Message Board** keep pointing out, mostly because I wanted to do romantic comedy comics, and doing them for an adult publisher like **Rip Off Press** was the only way to do romance comics back then. I personally have no problem with sexual material, so I did it. The comic was called **STRIPS**, although I did another for **Malibu** called **HARDBALL**, which was basically a way to do a baseball comic, which I've always wanted to do. I produced nine issues of **STRIPS** for Rip Off, four issues of **HARDBALL**, then got out of comics altogether for a lot of reasons.

About three years ago I started self-publishing **STRIPS** to make some extra money, but the industry had taken it in the teeth and everyone said it was going to be dead in a year or so. My sales were around 3,000, which everyone said was good for the time, but it wasn't enough for me to survive on.

In the meantime, I had been working in animation for **FOX's King of the Hill** and the **Simpsons**, and there are a lot of comics fans in that industry as you can imagine. Two, who were particularly good friends of mine, spent a lot of time in heated debate with me about comics, their grim future, and what could be done to change it. I was a big proponent of more emotionally involving stories told on a weekly basis for cheap (like under a dollar), something we knew was possible based on producing a weekly animated series regularly, and when I got fed up with animation about a year ago, those two friends convinced me to get back into comics ... to convince **Joe Quesada** to take a chance and doing things my way. I never thought Quesada'd go for a weekly black and white comic, but look what I know.

### **Baseball and Romance comics?**

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**STRIPS** and **HARDBALL**, the adult comics I did, were actually romance comics. Not like the fifties, moony-faced crap you probably imagine from the 50's. But "real", *Pretty Woman*, *Ally McBeal*, funny, touching, sexy romance comics.

And I've always been a big baseball fan, so I'm seriously interested in doing what they do in Japan -- a massive 20 volume baseball comic. Don't ask me why. It's just what floats my boat.

### **I notice that your wife shares quite a few by-lines with you, can you tell us a little about your working relationship?**

My wife and I began working together as writers shortly after we met. She's a writer for television, helped start the **Power Rangers** and now works for **NBC**.

She and I have a lot of similarities in our viewpoints, obviously, but enough differences to keep things creatively volatile and exciting.

We have written a couple scripts together and have dreamed of working together on something that actually gets made. She, unfortunately, was too busy to help out on **War Machine**. But someday we hope to do a project together that actually gets seen by the rest of the world.

**Tripping the Rift** keeps rearing its ugly head, and she's had a lot to do with keeping that alive, so who knows. Someday. I respect her as a creative talent immensely, and we love working together.

### How did you get started in comics?

I was a fan in my early teens, mostly of **Spider Man** and **Captain America**. **Captain America** was going through his "I don't believe in America" Englehart days, and as a reader, I was frustrated with that. I wanted Cap in uniform. So I started doing my own stories. Same with **Iron Man**. I used to love **Iron Man**, but never liked the stories in his series, so I never got into him, other than as a character, so I did my own stories, at least until **Layton and Michelinie** came along.

I began working in comics after I submitted some work to **Eclipse** and they accepted me as an artist for their **Bruce Jones** books, **Twisted Tales** and **Alien Worlds**. I think I did two stories for those titles before I got **Miracleman**.

### You are currently a part of the creative team of the high profile **Elektra** re-launch, what can you tell us about how you scored this assignment?

Not much of a story. I sent the **War Machine** proposal to Quesada, and he needed someone on **Elektra**. He asked me to do a sample piece with her in it, I did, and that was that. I'm sure there was a lot more on Marvel's end, but from my perspective, Joe just took a chance on me. He remembered me from **Miracleman**, he liked the **War Machine** proposal, and he and Brian were looking for something different on **Elektra**. I guess I was something different. Completely the right place at the right time. First time in my life.

### What draws you to **Elektra** as a character?

The way **Brian (Michael Bendis)** writes her. He has such a great handle on the character and the series. I love the fact that she's an assassin, something so utterly different from your standard hero book, and at my age, I'm always looking for something new and different.

Personally, I always thought the story **Miller** did where he killed her off had such power and importance, I almost don't consider this the same woman. She is, and

it all works within Marvel continuity, but that story had a definitive power and meaning and it will always stay with me as "**The Death of Elektra**", so if it weren't for Brian and the way he does her, I probably wouldn't have much interest.

### **How about War Machine/Jim Rhodes?**

I've always liked **Jim Rhodes** since his creation back in those great **Layton/Michelinie** years. He was like Stark's mirror opposite, smart, but from a real, everyman background, struggling, poor, and he was such a likeable guy. He was more relatable to me.

Stark was nothing like me and I had a hard time relating to him as a teenager. Rhodey was me in a lot of ways and he made it easy for me to relate to Stark through him, which is what L&M obviously intended. So Rhodey has always stuck with me since those early Iron Man comics as a favorite character, someone I liked and wanted to write.

As time went on, and I grew out of my shyness, I went through my "Stark period" and had money, dated a lot. I was more able to understand Stark. I also come from an alcoholic family, I'm not an alcoholic myself, I don't even drink, but that made Stark MUCH more personal to me as I made those discoveries as an adult.

So the characters in the ***Iron Man*** series were always favorites, and **Michelinie's** dialogue was the **Bendis'** of his time, or the **Lawrence Kasdan**, natural rhythm's of speech, intelligent banter, minimum of cliché's. His writing had a great impact on me as a young creator.

**The treatment of the Jim Rhodes character is important to Ferro-philes. Will we see the everyman, identifiable character that sprang from the Layton/Michelinie era or will he be the more war hardened and occasionally self righteous character that developed in the later part of the War Machine series. Maybe he is a mixture of the two?**

A bit of a mix. He's based on a friend I used to have who had many of Jim's qualities. I think he'll be MORE like the L&M years, though. Not SO angry and self-righteous and war-hardened. More Black, though. His African-American heritage will be a larger part of his personality and the story in particular.

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### **What kind of weaponry can we expect on the War Machine armor?**

Hi-tech, but grounded in reality. Very **Tom Clancy**. No uni-beams. But some interesting offensive capabilities that lend themselves to the name **War Machine**. There's the grenade launcher and mini-gun, TOW attachments, 50 caliber modules, a lot of specific, hi-tech military weapons, depleted uranium HEAT rounds, etc.

**If there is a War Machine then there must be an Iron Man....right?**

Hmmm -- you would think that, wouldn't you.?

**Will we see much of Tony Stark? Will he be in inventor mode, creating things?**

Stark is the brilliant head of a corporation called **Stark Enterprises**. That means he does things related to that position. As far as how much you'll see him, this is Rhodey's story, so it focuses on Jim Rhodes, not Tony Stark. Sorry. I know you guys are busting for more Iron Man, but this series is called **US War Machine**, not **US IRON MAN**.

**One of the unique things about this series is that it is done in a black and white format. What was the rationale behind this approach?**

To keep the costs down. I'm a firm believer in making comics affordable. Inexpensive. Black and white is the cheapest form of reproduction. Plus, it allows more latitude in taking the series overseas to other markets, where the markets are completely driven by black and white. If I can make this concept valuable world-wide, it can only help the floundering American market.

**The b&w look seems to be manga inspired. Are there any manga or Japanese Anime titles that influence this work? The new shield helicARRIER seems retro in style but its massive size reminds me of something one might have seen in Gatchaman (a.k.a. G-Force/Battle of the Planets).**

Absolutely. All my main influences are Japanese, for a lot of reasons. But I still love American style and sensibility, so it's a complete blend. I'm not familiar with **Gatchaman**, though. My influences are probably too obscure for most Americans. **GOLGO 13, TOUCH, HEN, "F". SILENT SERVICE, EAGLE**, some baseball comics, and the obvious ones: **AKIRA, URUSEI YATSURA**, and **MAISON IKKOKU**.

**The sample artwork also looks very technically detailed. Do you have drafting or technical drawing in your background?**

I have too much technical drawing in my background, and years of art schooling. But most of the artwork is what I'll call, computer assisted, so a lot of the models are built in 3D and then used as rough pencils for the finished art.

**I was reading the new Wizard and one of their "trivia" columns said that you can crank out 10 pages of artwork/day with a computer program you use. Can you tell us a little about this?**

It's actually closer to four or five pages a day. Brian and Wizard exaggerated slightly. On **War Machine** it's more like ten, but I have a studio helping me, I don't do it all my self.

I use two programs. **Animation Master** to create the models, and **RAY DREAM Studio** to do the set building and rendering (although I'm converting to **3D Studio MAX** because it's what the animation studio uses). The models basically give me the "rough pencil" stage, but enough information for me that I can go right into the image and "ink". All of the work is done on the computer, including Nathan's stunning colors on **Elektra**. I build the model and the sets, move the camera to the position I want, with the lens depth I want, and the lighting I want, then render an image, or "panel". I save all panels into a file, then, when I have a complete page (or usually several complete pages), I open all the files in **Photoshop** and assemble them into page form, with panel borders, etc. Then using the tools in Photoshop, I draw directly on the computer (with a mouse, actually, I never used a tablet) until I have what I consider a finished page. Then I print the image onto board, do manual touch-up with the traditional tools, and ship it off to Marvel. Although more and more often lately I deliver entirely digital.

**Did the prospect of a new format, weekly, out of continuity book cause you any second thoughts?**

Only in that I honestly did not want to step on anyone's toes within normal continuity. You can ask Ralph. Every time I sent in a script, I would ask if it was a problem, if I had offended anyone within normal continuity editorial circles. Was my portrayal of Stark, or **Bethany Cabe**, or any of the other characters or events problematic. They just kept saying, "Don't worry about it. Keep sending in scripts."

The weekly part was more of a nightmare than I had anticipated. I originally intended to use some friends from animation who had promised to help set up this new "business". Then one-by-one they all had to bail, and fortunately for me, **John Petrovitz**, my new partner, stepped in and offered his animation studio which was between projects to help finish it off. And it's all coming together beautifully. More beautifully than I could have imagined. The first three are in and they look great.

**Speaking of continuity, In another interview, you said something to the effect that you really liked Jim "Rhodey" Rhodes as a character. That being the case, what led you to decide to "chuck" continuity for this project?**

Yeah, I wondered when we'd get to this. This has been a hot topic on the **IMMB**, and maybe I should address it fully. I'm sure it won't change the minds of people like "Tony Stark" or "Iron Centurion", their minds are made up, and logic doesn't enter into it, but at least they'll be dealing with complete information when they bash me.

There are two types of continuity: Internal continuity, meaning the logic and development of a series, and "external" continuity, or the continuity of the Marvel universe specifically and how it affects **Iron Man's** or **War Machine's** internal continuity.

Now, imagine **Ally McBeal's** internal continuity. She's dating whoever, used to date so-and-so, and she still mourns the loss of her dead high school boyfriend, Billy. Writer's on the show have to keep track of all that and try to write good stories in that arena. So a writer watches every episode of Ally McBeal, gets a handle on the characters, wants to write a story, and it's a great story about Billy coming back to life inside the body of another man. Touching, sweet, has Emmy written all over it. Problem is, there's external continuity to Ally. Seems Billy made an appearance on **Star Trek: Voyager**, fell in love with **Seven of Nine**, and she keeps him in a box in her closet because he's an extra-corporeal entity with no physical form. So this terrific story set in Ally McBeal's "world" can't happen because Billy is unavailable. Or else the writer has to re-write her story so that it includes the relationship with Seven-of-Nine, and puts Billy back in his box in the closet, because the ratings are higher on Voyager and the show-runner on that series has more clout.

Now, the people who watch Ally McBeal don't watch Voyager, and can't even imagine how the two could be related, and yet they are, the networks say so, so you have to reference it, or forget your story. Even if it means diluting the power of the original story, even if people stop watching Ally McBeal because they can no longer buy the "reality" of the series. Now, before you tell me that isn't the same, and go off on how ludicrous that is, I have two words for you: "**Teen Tony**". And two more words. "**Secret Wars**".

Sometimes, rather than explain into continuity a really bad, wrong-headed idea, the best thing to do is let it go and pretend it never happened, or, better yet, keep things separate, and do crossovers only in alternate realities. Personally, I liked the "**Flash of Two Worlds**" story because they weren't in the same continuity. Especially when most people other than anal retentive fans who re-read every issue of every Marvel comics three times a year, don't remember or care about who or what "**Teen-Tony**" was. Just like who really cares that **Peter Parker** was cloned?

(And) I know you all feel the same way. Look at the **Advanced Iron website**. "ALTERNATE IRON" NOW COMPLETE AND ONLINE !!! Imagine a world where "*The Crossing*" never took place... A world where Tony Stark is still a cool exec running Stark Enterprises... A world with no more heart attacks, no more alcohol, and dead means dead." It's right there. Fan fiction where "*The Crossing* never took place." Not explained away. Never -- took -- place. If Tony Stark were suddenly the head of Stark Enterprises, written and drawn by L&M, a playboy, a

brilliant inventor, and headed for Armor Wars III, would anyone really complain? If you said "yes," you're lying through your teeth.

All I ever hear about on the **IMMB** is how "**The Crossing**" sucks, Tony Stark not being the head of his corporation sucks, Frank Tieri sucks, Joe Quesada sucks, artist du month sucks, Chuck Austen sucks and he does "porn." Never mind that Chuck wants to "chuck" **The Crossing**, make Stark head of Stark Enterprises, bring back the **War Machine**, and write one of the most action oriented, powerful stories ever done in the **Iron Man** arena. Have some conviction, you whiners. You can't have it both ways ;-)

My liking **Rhodey** as a character has nothing to do with my hatred of continuity. I don't see what one has to do with the other. Continuity has nothing to do with character. INTERNAL continuity, maybe, but my depiction of Rhodey is consistent with internal continuity of Rhodey, though you'd never know that because -- and this is important -- you haven't seen the work yet.

Continuity isn't about story, or what's right. Continuity is about being a slave to every picky-@\$\$ little thing that every creator did, no matter how brilliant or how stupid, before you ever came along, IN EVERY SINGLE MARVEL COMIC BOOK, and trying to find a way to make sense of that monkey-puzzle in every issue you write. The concept is fun for a ten year old, but ludicrous for an adult, and I stand by my conviction on this subject. Or maybe you'd like to see me bring back the **TERMITE!**

Continuity isn't about "am I true to the character of Rhodey". Continuity is about "You can't do a story with the **Eidolon armor** because it was uploaded in Obscure Comics number 54, which we don't have a copy of, but I'm sure if you looked around at your local comics shop... and "You can't use Rhodey without explaining for two useless issues why he left his **Salvage operation** where he rescued **Captain America's shield** and is now making a good living, went back to work for Stark, and then have Stark fire him an issue later so you can tell the story you want to tell. Oh, and when you're done, put it all back, no characters are really dead, and Rhodey again works running his salvage operation.

And put **Thor** in it. Thor's "hot." Okay. That takes up, like, seven of my twelve issues. Where do I squeeze in the story? If it came to that, I would have said, don't use **War Machine**. Don't do this story. I would have understood completely that this story didn't belong. And doing the story as is, with a new character, without **War Machine**, and Rhodey, and Stark, it would have been so obvious that the story was "really" Rhodey and Stark and **War Machine**. I wrote this story about them, about their characters, and how they relate to one another, and all of you would have known it in a heartbeat and been angry about it. It was those things, and many others like them that I can't reveal without giving away the story, that made me think the thing just couldn't be done.

As much research as I had done -- every issue of the original **War Machine** series, Every issue of **Iron Man** with **War Machine** in it, endless issues of **West Coast Avengers** (okay, they just seemed endless), and I couldn't get it all. There was still stuff I missed in other Marvel comics that completely screwed me. So let it go. Don't do it. Forget the idea completely. No matter how good it is. Or ... Make it a "**What If**"? Do it "outside" continuity. Use the characters and tell the story I want to tell. When Marvel stepped in and said "Forget continuity. Tell your story." It was, quite honestly, the first time I had considered it, and I gotta tell ya, it made perfect sense. Until you have tried to write a complex and compelling story in (external) continuity, you don't know pain. And by complex and compelling I mean something more mature than "how can I bring back **Titanium Man** and make him tougher and more scary than last time?"

This **U S WAR MACHINE** story has meat to it, I'll even offer a money-back guarantee to anyone who doesn't like this comic, get it to me and I will personally pay you your \$1.50 back, and I'm glad Marvel was brave enough to let me do it as I had originally intended it, without castrating it by shoe-horning it into continuity. If people have a problem with that, then, oh my God! They may have to judge the story on it's own merits rather than on how well it fits between issue 24 of **War Machine** and issue 42 of **Iron Man v.III**. I can live with that.

**So what your saying (in regards to continuity) is, if the story is good enough for publication, forget established continuity and go ahead and tell the story. Let it stand on its own merits, outside of continuity?**

Largely. I still think stories can and should be done in continuity for people who enjoy them. But I think you'll soon find the best, most intelligent and creative work being done outside continuity. It's just more freeing for a creator. There are more possibilities and room to thrill the audience, and as we become more jaded, more worn out on the old cliches, a good thrill will really get us going.

Continuity only REALLY works if every reader and creator reads every single related comic. Otherwise too much time has to be wasted to explain stupid details, and if a writer comes up with an amazing, sensational idea, but it can't fit because they missed an important continuity detail, we've all lost something special.

**Is this a way to possibly save the struggling comic industry? Is it maybe time for the comic industry to just "chuck" continuity and begin to sell monthly stand alone stories? Or is there still a place of "eternal" serialization in comics?**

I think there will always be a place for serialized continuity, but it will become increasingly smaller and smaller until publisher's question it's viability financially as non-continuity stuff becomes more and more marketable. Like the **Preacher**, or the **new Punisher**. They're not really set in continuity, and they don't need to

be, and they're not likely to reach a non-fan than any other comic being published. And it's no coincidence that they're created by the same people.

Here's an example to explain, totally hypothetical, like so many of my answers earlier (please don't infer from my earlier rant that Marvel tried to make me do any of the things I said, like include Thor. It never happened. Marvel was ever anything but sensationally supportive).

Anyway, here's my example. My goal is to sell four million copies of **U S War Machine**. It's not a sensationalistic, or arbitrary goal, it's a goal based on actual publishing figures of the best selling comics in Japan. 4 million.

Can I do it? Who knows, but I want to do everything I can to attain that number, so everything I've done is to make this story accessible, exciting, rocket along like a train out of control, impact people emotionally not just shock value, and get them talking.

Am I being realistic? Hell no, but this is an industry about fantasy, and mine is 4 million copies a week. So it's got to be accessible. Most people don't want to read exposition, so two issues of explaining where Rhodey was, what he did for 30 or 40 odd issues of continuity as **War Machine**, AND his long and enduring relationship with Stark and get him to the starting point for MY story would have been a snorefest beyond snorefests. It's ridiculous to try, and no one should have to, because no "normal" reader wants to wade through bullshit like that. Imagine if every episode of ER had to begin with half an hour of re-cap, and then end with half an hour of returning things to normalcy. It would never have hit number 1.

Granted, every story starts with a person's back-story and their history with other characters, but if it doesn't work with the story you're trying to tell, the writer usually has latitude to change their character's back-story. With continuity, you're stuck, no matter how stupid the back-story is. Need I remind anyone again of the **Termite?**

So, back to my point. 4 million copies of **War Machine**. No gimmicks. No variant covers. No insert cards. Hell, I'm not even using color. I want to get there honest and real, dragging people's bleeding carcasses across the pavement. Now, 100,000 is an exceptional selling comic these days, and at that, it's still largely due to multiple copy buyers. So, to achieve that 4 million number I have in mind, I have to reach people that we KNOW are not buying every single Marvel comic, and certainly do not own every single Marvel comic ever published. So to get them, I have to make the story instantly accessible, instantly exciting, with nothing to bog it down. If that means I "chuck" continuity, then it's outta here, baby. If using continuity means I lose 950,000 potential readers, then continuity becomes a noose around my neck before I even begin. The only way I can get there IS with gimmicks.

Now it has been "noted" in places by people that retailers aren't equipped, and don't want to have to rack and make space for a weekly comic. Has anyone thought about that? If I achieve my goal and sell 4 million copies of this book, what retailer in their right mind wouldn't want a piece of that action? We're so used to thinking small that the concept of racking a huge weekly seller never occurs to us, all we can consider is where we're going to stick four times as many "**Sonic the Hedgehog's**". No. I'm talking about a different ball game entirely than the one we're used to, and I sincerely want to make that happen for both retailers and Marvel, and ultimately myself. Because as a fan of the medium, an industry selling 4 million copies a week is a healthier industry, and one that can afford to try new things. Like baseball comics.

**Care to comment on the above in regards to the attempts by the Big 2 to address continuity issues, specifically *Heroes Reborn/Return* and events like *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, *Zero Hour*, etc.?**

In an unhealthy industry, it's a waste of time. You're appealing to a smaller and smaller audience that's spiraling in on itself like a toilet bowl, and alienating people who can love this material. Ever hear of ***The Matrix? The Terminator?*** Ask the average person on the street what those are, and they can tell you, even if they haven't seen the movie. Now, created in the same time-frame, let's consider, I don't know, ***Thunderbolts***, a very continuity heavy comic. Ask the average person on the street about ***The Thunderbolts*** and you'll get a blank look, guaranteed.

Eventually people get bored with the "Yes, it's in continuity, but it's boring me to tears for three bucks. What? I can go see *The Matrix* for twice that and wet my pants over the stunning visuals and rapid-fire story?!? I'm there!!" And we've lost a reader, to the same material we as an industry CREATED!!!

The average reader on the street doesn't give a s#!t about ***Heroes Reborn***, or ***Teen Tony***. Why sit through ***Heroes Reborn***, which is basically square-pegging a round hole to explain things for a miniscule, though loyal, legion of fans, when ***The Matrix*** is reaching millions of people with the same concepts born in superhero comics WITHOUT the noose of continuity? Unless you want to keep the industry small. Personal. Something just for you that the world doesn't know about or interfere in. But if you want to increase the size of the industry, you let go of the "sure" sale to a dwindling fan base, and try to reach people in the real world.

If you like your little cottage industry where it is, with geeky nerds discussing the minutiae of who's a better villain, ***Titanium Man*** or ***Crimson Dynamo***, or what happened in ***Legion of Superheroes*** number 121 that made ***Particle Boy*** lose his powers for five minutes, you keep the Code, you keep things in continuity, and you keep your personal little clique of like-minded individuals that buy 50,000 copies a month. Me, I'm going for the gold. Will I fall on my face? Maybe, and

then "Iron Centurion" can have the last laugh, and that will at least make HIM happy. But if I make it, if Marvel and Bill and Joe and Stuart and Nancy, and Smitty and Ralph and NIC and I can really change the world ... how cool is that? How TOTALLY, unbelievably cool is that?

And I think most of you really, REALLY want to come along with me, because it's going to be a thrill ride, no matter how you look at it. You'll get your dollar fifty's worth. I guarantee it.

**Is it true that, since this series is out of (Marvel) continuity, there will be no other superheroes in the world (no F.F., Avengers, X-Men, etc.)?**

Absolutely true. Well, mostly. I've said enough. ( **Ed.-If you read *Previews and Wizard*, you'll know that Cap and Shellhead do exist and make appearances.**)

**In the same interview, you said that you could continue Jim's story beyond the initial 12 (weekly) issues? What could we see if this were to happen?**

I can't really say without giving away too much about the first one. Let's just say the **First Armor Wars** was tame compared to what I have in mind for the second 12 issues and beyond of **U S War Machine. War Machine** means a machine designed for war. In every way you can imagine that title, it will apply to this comic if I go beyond issue 12. I'll also say that the series was originally intended to be in continuity, so the characters are all pretty true, with one notable exception, to where they were in the "day-job" series. That notable exception takes the series in a direction I had never anticipated it to go, so don't expect this to be just an adult "**Iron Man**" book. It goes in directions that will constantly surprise you. Guaranteed.

**What sources did you use when plotting the War Machine story? Did you consult any past creators (like Michelinie, Layton, etc.) directly?**

I consulted their work. I don't know any of them personally, and the series got the "go" before I'd been at Marvel more than a month, so there was never time to meet any of the creators at conventions or anything of the sort. And I honestly didn't want to meet them and ask their opinions, any more than I'd expect them to ask me mine. I would think it would be painful, and I might be too influenced by their ideas. I know that L&M have made it very clear that they don't think Rhodey should be in armor. He's the conduit for the reader to identify with Stark. That right there means we have a difference of opinion.

Beyond that (**War Machine's** comic appearances), I consulted my **Tom Clancy** handbooks, all my War reference, my old issues of **Scientific American**, **Popular Science** and **Popular Mechanics**. Read and re-read various different books on military actions like **BlackHawk Down**, **War Story**, **Firebirds** for

referencing Rhodey's past as a military helicopter pilot. I devoured books like **Rogue Warrior** (and the follow-up fictions), **Delta Force**, books on the **SAS** and **Special Forces**, and checked various websites devoted to military advances, and military, scientific theory. Anything and everything I could find relating to the subject and the plot, I read. AND I went back and re-read **Starship Troopers**, the book, by **Heinlein**. Oh, I also consulted **Advanced Iron** for anything I thought I was missing, but I just lurked.

### Did you ever speak to Len Kaminski, who created War Machine?

Never spoke to him. Don't know him. Never wanted to talk to him, at least not to get his take on my version of **War Machine**. I enjoyed reading his run on **Iron Man**, though. But this isn't Kaminski's **War Machine**. This is, and I'll let this out for the **Iron Man** fans, this is a War suit developed by Stark for DARPA and the military, and within the "real" world, it is the most sought after piece of military hardware ever developed. It is a true "**War Machine**", using cutting edge technology to enable soldiers to be more efficient and deadly, just like any other form of military tech.

Kaminski's **War Machine** was the **Variable Threat Response Armor**, another rev of Stark's armor, and Stark doesn't kill. Which is where my original idea came from, all those years ago. Why would a man sworn not to kill, develop a suit called "**The War Machine**", with an M103 mini-gun and a grenade launcher on the shoulders? So I read every appearance of **War Machine** I could find, the entire first series, his "creation" in **Iron Man**, **War Machine's** assumption by Rhodey. I even read the "*What If*" with the **Living Laser**. The only thing I never saw, and can't find to this day, that I know of, was the **Eidolon** "upload" (**Ed.'s note- the event in question took place in a War Machine story in the one-shot "Tales from the Marvel Universe."**) but I don't need it anymore. Not finding it led me in a direction that was more fun, and has become my favorite part of the series.

### Down the road, what else can we look forward to from Chuck Austen? Any chance of an Iron Man story?

I'd love to do an actual, in continuity **Iron Man** story. We're talking childhood dream time. I had a great one for the "**Silent Night**" in December, but I never pitched it because **War Machine** came up and I've just been too busy. To be honest, though, I have a lot of the same problems with the regular series as everyone else right now. I would handle it very differently, and I don't know if my ideas, or my style of writing would fit in an all-ages book.

There's also that continuity thing that still bothers me. I'd just start it out with Stark as the head of **Stark Enterprises** and maybe, maybe explain as I go what happened to put him there, and I'd rarely have a guest star other than **Captain America** if they'd let me.

I also have some projects of my own I'd like to do, and a **Kirby** project I'd like to revisit.

**Advanced Iron wants to thank Chuck Austen for taking the time out of his very busy schedule to let us know a little about his up-coming War Machine series, *U.S. War Machine*, as well as sharing his erudite thoughts on comics and the industry. Thanks Chuck!**

**CF**

In case you missed it at Newsarama...

## THE ART OF WAR

Marvel's New 'Mature Readers' Book Is Full of Surprises...

While not always successful, under the Bill Jemas-Joe Quesada era, Marvel can at least say they've experimented with different comics formats. There have been some misses of course... **Backpack Marvels** was a noble experiment that didn't quite work out, and the once-announced Fumetti Comics never got past the 'Whose bright idea was that?' stage.

The jury is still out on the publisher's intention to improve their trade paperback and collected edition program, and of course next on the list and in the news of late is the September-debuting '**Mature Readers**' line. But the format experiments won't end there. Quesada has also been vocal about his desires to experiment with b&w comics, with weekly-shipping comics, and with lower price points. So while it no surprise projects in these formats would eventually be announced, it may come as a surprise to some they'll all come in one package.

September will see the debut of a format-busting, b&w, weekly-shipping, \$1.50 cover-priced new limited series, the third launch title (along with **Alias** and **Fury**) in the 'Mature Readers' line.

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As readers may have already surmised from the image to the right, the new series is entitled **U.S. War Machine**, a 12-issue, weekly limited series featuring 24 pages of story an issue (and no ads) written and illustrated by Chuck (**Elektra**) Austen.

### **Setting the Stage For War**

As should now be obvious, the series features Jim Rhodes and the Tony Stark-created War Machine armor, but according to Chuck Austen, in this case **U.S. War Machine** refers to a unit led by Rhodes, including "all if its supporting characters, all its members, and the environment they share."

"This is really the story of a group of disparate individuals all trying to work together as a team."

According to information provided by Marvel, "Billionaire inventor Tony Stark has created the War Machine, a weapon of such destructive power that its single usage has prompted its shocked creator into vowing to never again manufacture munitions. This means that the awesome instrument of lethal force known as the MPI-2100 mobile infantry suit will be put on ice. While Stark feels that this concludes the subject, it is in fact merely the beginning. For the terrorist organizations known as Hydra and A.I.M. now crave the deadly technology. And when the super-spy agency called S.H.I.E.L.D. gets involved, the stage is set for a global conflict that could snuff out millions of lives!" Add Austen: "The basic story is Jim Rhodes - our star and everyman, though not necessarily the everyman that Bob Layton and David Michelinie envisioned him to be - is offered a job by S.H.I.E.L.D. to head up a Special Forces division, using the War Machine armor, and Jim has a personal stake in their first mission because it involves 'ethnic cleansing'. A white supremacist has taken over A.I.M. and he plans to use A.I.M. technology for enforcing his own ideas of racial superiority. Naturally, Jim wants to put a stop to that."

And he's going to use every bit of the power at his disposal. Austen said it was simply the name of the character that led him to the idea of the story.

"It was my honest feeling that if you're going to name a character War Machine, you have to live with that name, you can't candy-ass it. War Machine is not the name of a non-violent character. And war is brutal, deadly and has severe consequences."

And being that it's a 'Mature Readers' title, Austen isn't going to shy away from showing the brutal, deadly and severe consequences in detail. But fans of the Marvel Universe Jim Rhodes need not worry...According to the creator, this series is completely outside "normal" Marvel continuity, and he couldn't be happier about it.

"When I first brought it in, it was intended to be set inside continuity. But I had only a passing knowledge of continuity, true 'continuity' and as we tried to force **War Machine** into that mould, it became untenable. I was seriously wondering if I could do it. From the research I was able to do before presenting my proposal to Joe Quesada, I thought I had an idea of where Rhodey was and who he was- a lot of it

based on assumptions I had to make because I couldn't find certain back issues, and I still remembered Rhodey from his Layton/Michelinie days, which confused things more. But I quickly found out that I'd missed some crucial stuff and nothing was right. And to make it fit was diluting the concept, eating it alive.

"My editor Ralph Macchio was going to help me get it together within the environment, but I could tell it was going to be rough. I have to say, continuity is a hangman's noose for creativity. I liken it to the Comic Code for the pure devastation it's wreaked upon the industry. It's so dense and ridiculous that it's impossible to tell a decent story and maintain continuity. And I can only say that now, really, after being given the golden opportunity that Joe, Ralph, Bill [Jemas], and Smitty [assistant editor Brian Smith] have given me. As a fan, I used to enjoy continuity, way back when. But now, as a creator...

"So instead, I was allowed to take some fabulous ideas from the Marvel Universe, brilliant old, existing stuff, and skew them and give them power and meaning that I never could have given them if I'd had to put all these characters back on the shelf in the same spot where I'd taken them from when I started.



"We got word, literally as I was talking to Smitty on the phone, that **War Machine** and anything in the new 'Mature' line didn't need to be set in continuity. I almost spun over and did a handstand. Since I was officially playing with the Marvel 'toys', I could go crazy, I could do anything I wanted with all these tremendous ideas, and it didn't affect the Marvel Universe negatively. In one instant, I became a God!

"And Ralph was great. He's Mister Continuity and yet he understood perfectly. I likened it to having the *X-Files* in the Marvel Universe. How interesting or 'real' can a story feel about aliens and abductions and all that when you've got the Kree and the Skrulls dropping by for lunch every other Tuesday? In order for the story to have any impact, any power, it needed to be away from all that other magic. Where's the sense of peril for War Machine and the world when Thor and the Avengers are just over the hill? Once we agreed on that, Ralph gave me some great input for taking the ideas *from* the Marvel Universe and making them work within my invented universe.

"So that's my long-winded way of saying this is not set in the Marvel Universe. There are a few surprise guest stars, but none in the way you might think. There are no superheroes. There are no alien races that we know of. This is set - somewhat - in a 'real' world. A real world that has a genius like Tony Stark around making mechanical magic."

But that all said, Austen also said the story will still be very recognizable to readers of the Marvel Universe.

"And it will be, at least I'm trying to make it, completely accessible to non-Marvel readers as well. A.I.M. and S.H.I.E.L.D. and all the rest are re-presented in a way that introduces them to the audience as if they've never seen them before, so outsiders will get it. But it also presents them as they've never been seen. My A.I.M. is not the A.I.M. of the four-color books. So it will be, I hope, a fresh perspective that will make people sit up straight and beg for more.

"The one thing you lose, however, taking things out of continuity, is that unwritten backstory. Everyone knows Who Stark is, and who Rhodey is, if you're a fan of any long-term standing. So you can cut corners, use shortcuts as a writer to get to your point quicker, because fans can fill in the blanks with continuity. But I think fans will like it, because I try to be respectful of the original universe, and I try to stay true to the spirit of the characters within that realm. In a sense, this is like *Ultimate Iron Man*, or *Ultimate War Machine*, if Tony Stark were to really exist and have a friend named Jim Rhodes in our world. No superheroes. Just a brilliant inventor and his metal suit.

"But if you want to know if Tony Stark appear will appear as Iron Man, well...that would be telling."

Ah well, we tried.

The creator describes the series as having "humor, violence, hi-tech weapons, sci-fi elements, horror, love and sadness. It made my wife laugh out loud and cry her eyes out when she read the scripts."

"I can't think of a parallel in comics," he responded, asked for a comparison. "Smitty said it was like reading a movie on paper after he'd finished the 12th script. I guess it's more influenced by movies combined with the thriller novels I enjoy, like Dick Francis, or Jack Higgins, Dean Koontz - like that.

"**War Machine** is also influenced by my childhood as a military brat. I was a huge *GI JOE* collector and I used to love going on 'field trips' with my dad. He was a Chief aboard an aircraft carrier and I'll never forget walking into one of those things, the scope, the size, the power, the number of people, the way they talked, acted, moved. It was a different world, and a world so removed from civilian life. This is my chance to delve into that world, show something truly unique and make it as accurate as I possibly can within my limited framework. I've even thought we might want to put a definition of terms in the book so people know what the characters are talking about at times. Lots of acronyms - HEMMT, HEAT rounds, M-1, M3, X-45 - you know?"

"Oh, you know what? It just occurred to me. This is like a Jim Cameron *Aliens* movie, or *Terminator*. In *Aliens*, you had the mother-love thing happening in the midst of these fantastic happenings, and this is closer to that than anything I can think of...*Aliens*...yeah. Hi-tech soldiers and deadly enemies with a certain humanity under its surface. This ain't the **Authority** with arrogant, superior, snotty people ripping open bodies and crushing skulls. This is U.S. War Machine with human, down-to-

Earth, average people ripping open bodies and crushing skulls. It's completely unique."

And "intense"...As he touched on previously, Austen took full advantage of the freedom the 'Mature Readers' label allowed.

"My options were wide open. I was given no limits in content or language, and I was able to tell a story that I honestly think would have been too intense for the four-color books. I don't think you'll get any argument from the guys at Marvel. This story is not for kids. Even though it's a direct result of seeing what life has become like for my children, and how different it is based on certain social/racial changes. And yet how frighteningly the same as it was hundreds of years ago. I'm very proud of it, and I hope everyone enjoys reading it as much as I enjoyed creating it."

### **How the War Was Won**

For readers assuming this series came to be as a result of Austen's work on the upcoming **Elektra**, you've got the chicken before the egg. According to Joe Quesada, Austen came to Marvel via a "cold submission" the Editor-in-Chief got in the mail.

"Chuck just sent in this submission I make it a point to try to read all the submissions that were sent to me," Quesada said. "Then one day this package came in and I opened it and my first reaction was 'holy mother of God'. It was a six-page sample - what will be the first six pages of issue #1 - and I was just taken aback by this thing. It was just unreal. I told Chuck we just have to do this. But just as we were in the process of getting the wheels moving, the **Elektra** thing came up, and I thought this was the guy for that.

"Once we got **Elektra** going I sort of hesitantly asked Chuck, 'Can you still do that **War Machine** thing?' And his response was, 'Oh yeah'. So here we are..."

Austen also recalled Quesada's reaction to the proposal...notable because he had originally figured it as a color series.

"The original proposal I sent was grey-toned art, in my mind as tonal guides for a colorist," explained the creator. "But Joe decided he wanted to do it exactly as I sent it, and to be honest, it's my preference anyway. My honest opinion is that in order for the market to grow in this country it needs to be strengthened with international sales. And sales in Japan are the highest, and their market is entirely driven by black and white, and weekly, since as far back as 1959. So doing this in b&w is, I think, the smartest thing Marvel could do. And keeping the price down to a buck-fifty was what we all wanted. I can't say enough about how we all wanted this to work, and how well it has."

"When I saw the pitch in b&w, it immediately struck me as this is the way the book as to be done," added the E-I-C. "In short, I didn't miss the color at all. I didn't think there was anything lacking, so I said let's do this in b&w, which keeps the price down. Because when you're doing a weekly comic, \$2.25 is a lot to ask from a reader."

Austen explained (and as you can see by the sample images) this isn't just penciled pages sans color. The process he uses to create it is specifically geared for the lack of color.

"It's similar to how I generate artwork for **Elektra**, but since I'm using a studio to finish it, (NIC Entertainment, free plug), and we need to do it once a week, and it's in b&w, there are big differences.

Continued Austen, "One, I get to use brush more, because I like it personally, and it's faster than pen. Two, it's toned in a way that rivals the best of any Japanese comics you've ever seen. It's not a color book without the color. And three, it's bared down to basic, solid storytelling. The story is realistic and intense, so I didn't want the artwork competing for attention. I wanted it to tell the story, and suck you into a 'realistic' world with great visuals without being distracting."

As to why weekly, Quesada's answer was simply, "because Chuck said he could."

"In his initial pitch, he mentioned the fact he's done this sort of thing before and he could produce it on a weekly basis. And that immediately intrigued me, because when you see it, it's probably the most traditional Manga kind of comic I've seen come out of somebody not actually from Japan. I was like 'My God, Ottomo lives... in a Marvel comic book'. I had one or two ideas - either to make it weekly, or put it out as one gigantic telephone book-type graphic novel, but we've never tried the weekly thing. We have, but not quite with anything like this. And when people read **War Machine**...it's been years since I read something in which every bit of story is driven by action. Every thing is told through action, and I think readers will immediately be attracted to that.

"So we're going to see how fans react to it. It's going to be tough for retailers to figure out how to order this, because we don't even know. But I know what's coming, and this is one of those truth in adverting things...everyone here at Marvel who saw this book said we have to do this. No matter how much we have to fight for it, this book as to come out."

### **Preparing For Battle**

And although his enthusiasm for the project is obvious, Quesada knows with any announcement Marvel makes, there will be critics. One question that might be asked is why offer a book with a new, experimental format and lower price point, only to limit the audience by making it a book only older readers can buy?

"The reason we're doing this format, the reason we're doing b&w, is to serve *that* story," responded Quesada. "If I were to change the story to make it for all audiences I would be destroying that story. There is a reason for all these moves we make. And yes, there will be some stuff in this book that's going to be sheer shock value, but it's some of that stuff that immediately attracted me to the story. There is just something amazing and just visceral about what's happening, that we don't want to cut. We don't want to cut away from some of the grotesqueness we'll see 'on camera', or not on camera. We don't want to shy away from certain issues; we want to tell it exactly the way it is.

"If Chuck has written the story for all ages, we would have done it for all ages, but that isn't how the story came out. So rather than change Chuck's vision at this point, and since we wasn't writing **Spider-Man** or anything... I mean we can screw around with **War Machine**. Plus the other thing is this, I think there's a very good possibility we might be able to take something like this, and who knows, maybe we can get some sort of mature Anime out of this down the road, maybe for HBO or something like Todd McFarlane did with **Spawn** - which certainly didn't hurt Todd's audience at all.

"This was a matter of what imprint served the story best."

And while Quesada said attracting new readers is the goal of every comic company, and hopes the 'Mature' line will bring new readers in, he also says that isn't the "sole goal".

"It's 'variety is the spice of life' basically. It's the ability to give creators a chance to tell stories they normally couldn't be able to tell through the regular Marvel imprint. The Marvel imprint is like candy to kids. They see Marvel and there's a certain expectation of the kind of product you're going to be offering them. It's sort of like saying Disney movies, there is a certain expectation. That's why Disney has Miramax. The 'Mature' line is going to be a place for creators to do different things other than just the stuff expected of Marvel Comics.

"Now mind you we're starting off the line with some recognizable stuff, that's played in the Marvel Universe before. That doesn't mean that's *all* we're going to doing. Those are some of the initial things that were pitched to us that just sounded really, really juicy, but we have other stuff coming up. People just have to give the line a chance to grow. Epic didn't appear overnight...Vertigo didn't appear overnight. These imprints were built slowly. But for whatever reason, everyone seems so unforgiving of Marvel - like all of a sudden if we announce creator-owned books we have to announce entire Eisner Award-winning line-up. And who knows, maybe they will win Eisners, but the point is - give us a break, we're just kicking off an imprint. People should look at how Marvel Knights kicked off. We started off with a very sort of even tone, not an incredibly noisy line-up, but over the years Marvel Knights has done some incredibly prestigious stuff.

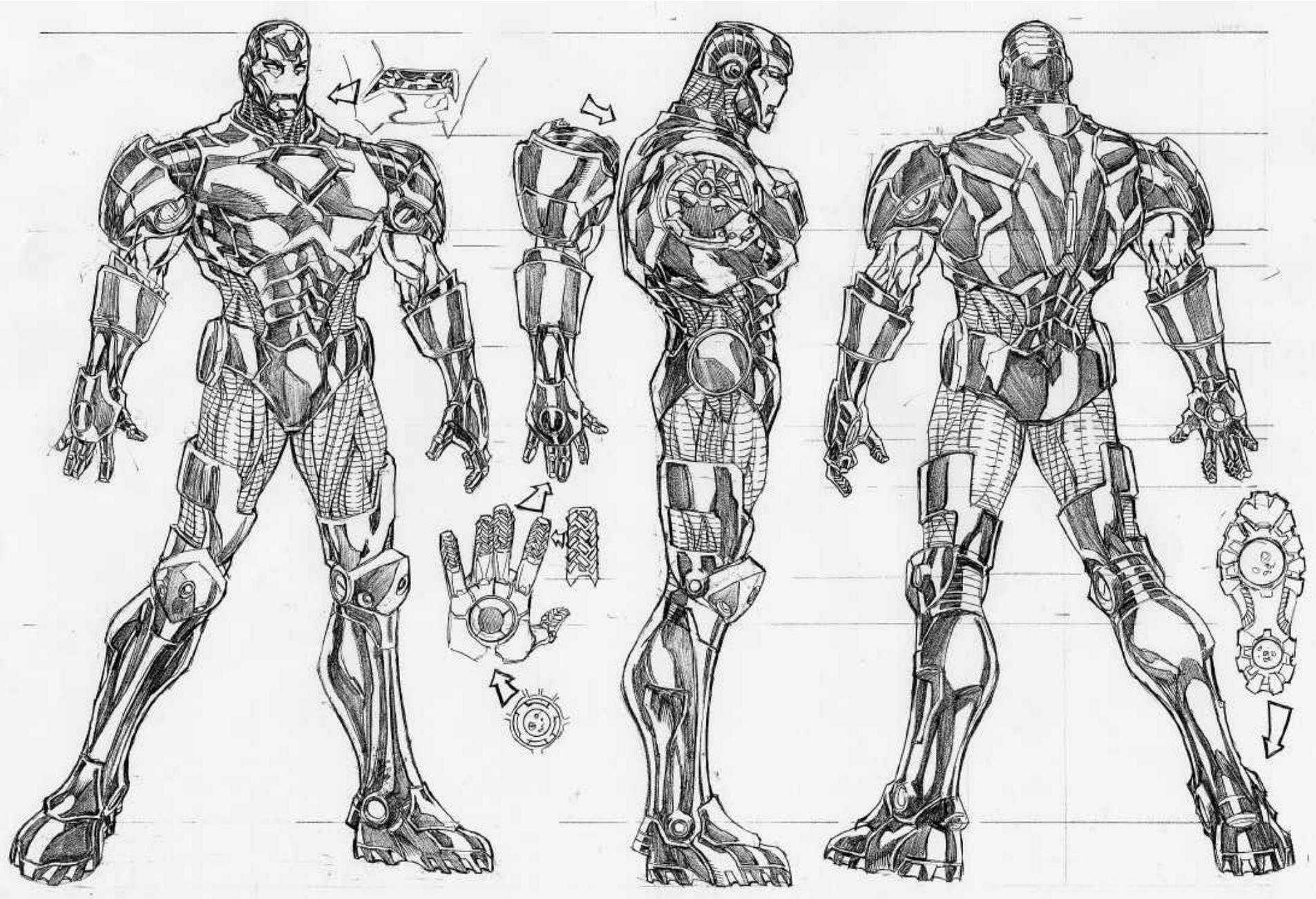
"We want to do this right, so you do them as they come along. It's the same with creator-owned; we got some creator-owned stuff coming. It's just not all going to appear when everyone wants it, which is tomorrow. But it's all coming."

**LAST MINUTE PUBLISHER ADDITION.**

**Courtesy of Tom Brevoort,  
Chris Frye acquired this  
sneak preview of the**

**Ryan-Grell**

**Iron Man Armor!**





THE INVINCIBLE  
**IRON MAN**  
Doom Quest

Trapped in the Time Lost Land of Camelot,  
Iron Man battles Doctor Doom!

Walt Disney 2001



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Notes on the following story:

"Rotting Inside the Shell" is an out-of-continuity piece of fan fiction set during the Secret Wars. It occurs between Iron Man 181 and Iron Man 182, except that in this variant, the Iron Man featured in the first Secret Wars is Tony Stark instead of Jim Rhodes (who had taken over the duties of Iron Man from issues 170-199, during Tony Stark's struggle with alcoholism).

The motivation behind this storyline is to bring power back to Tony Stark, the original Iron Man; a means of making Tony once more an important figure in the Marvel Universe. Iron Man usually had lucked with major storylines apart from his own solo book, dating back to his departure in Avengers 16; he was estranged for a number of years from the Avengers during his alcoholism, and while Tony later returned for an admirable stint in Steve Englehart's West Coast Avengers, the Armor Wars storyline expelled Iron Man from the superhero community. While he would eventually return, storylines in Tony's book (his paralysis, neural decay, and faked death) continued to bar him from showing his stuff. Even the current Kang storyline in the Avengers has a relatively detached Stark, in horridly outdated armor at the beginning of the book, and who will probably be MIA for much of the storyline.

This fan story of mine puts Tony at the center of the chaos, attempting to show him in the midst of Marvel's biggest and still best maxi-crossover ever. However, at first it seems like Tony won't be able to reinforce his place in the Marvel Universe. For you see, Tony Stark here is not the strong and confident man we're used to, but a drunken wreck, who has been wandering the alleys of Manhattan with no care for anything but alcohol. Will Tony defeat his disease in this universe? Will he help the heroes defeat the Beyonders, or bring them down with him? Wait and see, to quote a great sage.....

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## **ROTTING INSIDE THE SHELL, PROLOGUE**

"Morley? It's Jim. Listen, I got a big problem with the armor."

"It'll have to wait, Jim. There's something weird going on at Central Park.....some kind of strange energy emanating from there that's driving my instruments nuts. Maybe our tin-plated friend can take a look?"

"That's exactly the problem, man!"

"Huh? I don't quite follow."

"The tin suit.....it's gone! Completely freaking gone."

James “Rhodey “ Rhodes was trying to keep his temper in check, as he tersely explained himself inside the phone booth. It was bad enough that he’d just come back from Japan, where he was embroiled in mortal combat with the Mandarin.....it was worse that his head was pounding as though a jackhammer was inside, sending mysterious pains throughout the basis of his skull. But now, the Iron Man armor-- the greatest technological achievement of once-and-future inventor Anthony Edward Stark, and Rhodey’s most prized possession, simply disappeared. Rhodey couldn’t explain how, the crimson-and-gold shell was inside his briefcase, and five minutes ago when he checked again, it was still present. But now, the briefcase was completely empty, all the spaces vacant.

“Gone? What happened in your time in Japan? “

” Nothin’! My chrome undies functioned perfectly when I was fighting the Mandarin, and I had ‘em on my lap during the flight back!

“Only when I got to this phone booth did they just go away. “

“ So you have the briefcase, but the armor’s not in it? Jim, it couldn’t just.....vanish! “

” Well, big brain, you got a better idea to explain what happened?! “

He couldn’t understand it, but he didn’t like it. Jim had only been Iron Man for a couple months, but he liked the experience more than anything else.....he had been Tony Stark’s pilot for years, and had worked with every form of airplane out there, but flying the metal suit was a truly invigorating act. Rhodey remembered the sensation the armor gave him when he flew, air rushing into the holes of the helmet, the soles of his feet heating up as the turbines blasted at full thrust, the rest of the world blurring around him as he sped at Mach 1. The feeling of mechanical might that Jim got was one of the greatest highs possible, and now he wasn’t sure he’d ever experience it again.

“ Jim, you don’t have to yell, I can hear you! “

” Sorry, Morley. I just can’t explain this. How are we gonna support our new company now? The tin suit was our means of income, an’ now that’s gone. “

” Hold on. The armor disappeared at the same time I detected the presence at Central Park. Might it have anything to do with that? “

” If that mystic portal jazz can steal my armor outta nowhere, how am I gonna fare against it alone? “

” Just saying, is all. But we destroyed all the spare armors a while back.....and I’m not sure Tony Stark could help us out. “

Rhodey winced when he heard that name.....how WOULD Tony Stark take this news? Tony was the designer of the suit, and the pilot for many years; he gave the suit to Jim when Tony spiraled downward into alcoholism and proved unable to use it responsibly. Rhodey had made a commitment to Tony, that he would carry on the proud title of Iron Man while its true owner dealt with his problems. Now, Iron Man seemed gone, and with it the last mark Tony Stark left on the world. Tony had already lost his company to Obadiah Stane, and his reputation to a bottle; if the man had any consciousness left after his hard drinking, he probably couldn’t handle this.

“ I dunno, man, but we gotta do something. All of us need the metal jammies, an’ that includes Tony.....when and if he stops drinking himself to death. Meet me for a steak tonight, we’ll talk about it from there. “

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Even if Tony Stark had known what his friends were talking about, he wouldn’t have cared. He hadn’t really cared about anything in months.

It was the middle of one of the worst blizzards in New York’s history, and Tony was in the middle of it. As he wandered across the streets, he felt chilled nearly to the bone, with nothing but a ragged tuxedo from a better time and a good-will trenchcoat to protect him. He could barely see anything, for the snow blocked his eyes. Tony briefly thought about the microscopic cleaning motors in the Iron Man armor, and how the suit could easily get him through the cold, but quickly blotted those memories out.

The day of Iron Man had passed him.....Jim Rhodes was Iron Man now, and from the reports Tony saw at the shelter's old black-and-white TV, had done a good job about it. Even the life of Tony Stark, the cool executive with a heart of steel, was gone, ever since Obadiah Stane bought out Tony's corporation and froze his assets. This was Tony Stark's life now, a life in the Bowery. Even Gretl Anders, one of the few friends Tony made in the gutter, was gone. All Tony could do was look for her.

" Funny, " Tony muttered to himself, pulling a bottle of cheap scotch whiskey out of his trenchcoat. " Had it all, didn't I? Billionaire, industrialist, playboy, inventor.....HERO, even. Can't forget hero, can I? Admired by men, loved by women, and none of it meant as much as THIS! "

Tony proceeded to unscrew the lid on his bottle and proceeded to take a swig, the amber fluid soothing his chilled muscles as he gulped it down. At times, it seemed as though the alcohol Tony managed to secure with whatever little money he could scrape together was the only solace in his life, the only reason he could carry on.

" But then, if that's all my life had to offer, what's the point? Maybe the life of a homeless drunk is what I'm best suited for. Maybe the rest of the world can do without Tony Stark.....it seems to have managed well enough with Stane leading my company, and Rhodey handling the Iron Man chores. Maybe if I left this world tonight.....nothing would happen. "

After finishing his thought, Tony went back to his liquor, clenching the bottle tight as he raised it up to his mouth. He knew exactly what to expect; the alcohol would slide out of the neck and down Tony's throat, dulling his senses and stopping the pain for a little longer. He expected to finish the bottle, or at least what was left of it.

Tony didn't expect the scotch, along with everything around it, to suddenly disappear.

But it did, the bottle flashed white, disappearing. With it, so went the rest of Manhattan, as the world flashed white around Tony Stark. And as Tony found himself floating through a void of pure negative space, he wondered if he should have been careful what he wished for.....

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***When ace pilot James Rhodes garbs himself in the solar-charged steel-mesh armor, created by Tony Stark, inventor extraordinaire, he becomes the world's greatest human fighting machine, the Invincible Iron Man. However, recently the Iron Man armor mysteriously vanished from Rhodey's possession, at the same time Tony Stark disappeared from the earth. What has happened to Tony and his armor? Read on.....***

" H-how'd we get HERE? I mean, one minute we're checking out this giant whatchamacallit in central park, then poof, the final frontier! "

" This much I can tell you, Captain Marvel-- this device apparently caused sub-atomic particle dissociation, reducing us, as we entered, to protomatter, which it stored-- until it teleported us here, to pre-set coordinates in space, where it reassembled us inside a self generated life support environment! "

" Uhhhh....whazzyou sayin', Reed? "

For the first time in months, Tony Stark felt the embrace of armor against his body. Wearing the metal suit he built so many years ago was a very distinct experience, as the micro-thin interior padding of the armor insulated his frozen body, powerful electrical currents running through the suit's various layers, and the Heads-Up Display lowering to his eye levels. Ever since he gave up being Iron Man, Tony Stark had felt naked, weak, and confused. Now, Tony no longer felt naked and weak, but he was still confused.

He couldn't understand how he was teleported to this station floating through an uncharted sector of space along with the other "super-heroes", he couldn't understand how the Iron Man armor he gave to Jim Rhodes so many months ago materialized upon his body, and most of all, he couldn't understand

how it was so difficult to think, how he felt so dazed, even moreso than before he came here.

And this situation was worsened by the presence screaming in his ears.

Even though his ears were shielded by the studs on the sides of his helmet, and even though his eyes were protected by tinted Plexiglas lenses, Tony couldn't keep out the presence. A huge being of solid light emerged from the sky, without any form, without any solid state. It was pure energy, beyond any need for physicality, and it shined brighter than any sun, blinding Tony and the heroes surrounding him with its luminescence. It shouted in a voice without any specific gender or tone, but all understood it, precisely.

" I AM THE BEYONDER! SLAY YOUR ENEMIES AND ALL YOU DESIRE SHALL BE YOURS!  
NOTHING YOU DREAM OF IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO ACCOMPLISH! "

With a mere flicker of its essence, this being pulled chunks of matter out of nowhere, colliding asteroids to form a makeshift planetoid. With another " gesture ", if a nearly godlike being can be capable of gestures, the satellite which the heroes were mounted on was sent towards this planetoid, humbling the champions of Earth. Even the fiercest of the heroes, such as the X-Men, or the Hulk, stepped back a couple paces when faced with what the Beyonder was planning.

As for Tony Stark, he wasn't very fazed. His state of confusion and dizziness prevented him from feeling the full impact of the Beyonder's meaning, but also, at this time in his life, nothing really seemed to have any point. Even the Beyonder transporting him to this infant sphere, complete with armor, was little more than the space that fills the gap between life and death.

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" I suggest that first we find out something easier-- like who is here! I'll start! Everyone knows us because we're the Mighty Avengers, and we're famous! But, just in case, I'm the Wasp, and with me are the She-Hulk, Captain Marvel, Captain America, Thor, Hawkeye and.....Iron Man.....who's really on leave but is with us anyway! "

With as much ease as it had when it brought the heroes here, the Beyonder instantly teleported them to its newly created world. The champions stood their guard, ready for anything; the Avengers stood forward, at arms to whatever " enemies " the Beyonder was referring to, while the Fantastic Four and the other heroes stood by their sides, ready and waiting for any attacks. Even the X-Men, distrusted by the other heroes due to their somewhat dubious methods, stood their guard. Any bystanders nearby would definitely get the impression that all of these heroes were the finest specimens of their planet, and that precious little obstacles could bar their path.

At least, almost all of them were the finest.

It was pretty obvious to all present that something was wrong with the man inside the metal shell of Iron Man, but Jan Van Dyne, better known to the world at large as the Wasp, was one of the two who actually had an idea of the problem. She had briefly dated Tony Stark after her painful divorce, and while their affair was brief, even then Jan could tell that something was troubling Tony; these problems later manifested in a more ugly state, as Tony stopped answering hails from the Avengers, launching into a long drinking binge. Jan had heard that a new man was carrying on the duty of Iron Man, but she could tell that the Iron Man present was Tony; he slouched in his stance, staying on both legs mainly due to the magnets in his iron soles, and his mechanically altered voice slurred as he spoke. Though Jan was still uncomfortable around the man after the way their affair ended, she still cared for him as a friend, and couldn't bear to see him like this.

Captain America was the other person present who understood that Tony Stark and Iron Man were the same man; and since Cap instinctually thought of his fellow Avengers more as teammates than friends, a

worried but stern look crossed his masked brow as he looked at the man of iron. Cap had known Tony and Iron Man for years, ever since Tony thawed him out from his state of suspended animation, and he knew that Tony was one of the most capable men he'd worked with in his long career, be it from his time in the Second World War or his years in a further future, but that capability seemed gone; Tony was stuck in his alcoholic prison, and nothing that Cap had said would convince him otherwise. Worse, the Avengers were now in the middle of space, brought seemingly by some omniscient force, and they needed their full strength and attention. Now, one of the most important Avengers' judgment was badly impaired, and he would surely bring down everyone else with him.

As the various heroes in the crowd discussed the events amongst each other, be they Avengers, members of the Fantastic Four, independent heroes like Spider-Man, or altruistic terrorists like the X-Men, Captain America turned to Jan, and the two leaders of the Avengers turned over to the man of iron.

" Iron Man, " Jan said softly, " Tony--Where have you been? "

" Wasp? " Iron Man replied, the modulator in his mouthpiece barely disguising the drunken slur to his words, " How d'you think? Been livin' on the streets since Stane took over m' company...."

" Let's make it clear, " Captain America interrupted, a twinge of irritation in his voice, " Have you been drinking? "

" Wha'? " Tony replied, lurching forth a pace defensively?

" Please, Iron Man. We're on a foreign sector of space with no idea what we may be facing. Have--you--been--drinking? "

" Jus' had a litt'l bit ", Tony replied in his inebriated state. " Warped away t' this crazy planet 'fore I could have any more....."

" I'd.....like to believe that ", Cap said sternly. Behind his metal visor, Tony's face formed into a scowl, but he didn't have time to react.

Being blasted down by a force blast often stops one's actions.

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Tony Stark didn't see the blast coming, but he wasn't damaged by it. He knew that there was precious little on Earth, natural or manmade, that could hurt his armor, but this nevertheless knocked Tony down. Moving as though he was submerged in molasses, Tony slowly turned to Captain America, and asked the star-spangled leader who shot them.

" Cap, " he said, " Y' see-- who did-- that? "

" Quiet, Iron Man, " Cap said, standing ground and pointing his indestructible shield over towards the horizon, look! "

Over the horizon, the Beyonder had brought a veritable who's who of villains. There was the time-travelling conqueror Kang, the nearly omnipotent though horribly insecure Molecule Man, the seductively sorcerous Enchantress, Spider-Man's foes Doctor Octopus and the Lizard, and the aptly named Absorbing Man; behind them stood the Wrecking Crew, a pack of superhumanly strong goons. The villains nearly equaled the heroes, in terms of power as well as ranks. The Beyonder must have chosen the most prominent of the moralistic sides referred to as " good " and " evil ", though why he did this remained a mystery.

They were pretty well equipped, too; the Wrecking Crew was manning a giant alien machine, hobbling along on three robotic legs, but equipped with enough weaponry to annex a small nation. The heroes

didn't have time to wonder why the Beyonder equipped their foes so well, nor would their enemies let them. With one gesture, Captain America ordered his allies to attack, and one of the most epic battles in all parties' histories was started.

The Incredible Hulk burst through, using his massive emerald muscles to smash the Wrecking Crew's walker as though it was made of cardboard, while enduring its firepower. From there, the scales were evened, and the "villains" compensated for their lack of power with brutality. In the back, energy bolts flew through the sky, shot from both sides, doing more damage to the terrain than to any living combatant. Fist met fist, and weapon met weapon; both sides of opposing moralities fought on, but never really managed to succeed. However, all knew that if anyone made one mistake, they would lose the battle, and with it, their lives.

Unfortunately, this thought never crossed Tony Stark's mind. The head inside his helmet was aching, his line of vision shook, and he had trouble thinking; all he could see was that he had been out too long, and that his abilities were needed. Remembering the men who shot him a minute ago, Tony flew forward, attempting to replace stability with speed. In his effort, he managed to succeed, and Tony's iron-clad fist connected with a face.

Whose face, he didn't recognize.

After regaining his bearings, Tony witnessed his victim; a large, massively muscled man, decked out in green tights. He wielded a gigantic wrecking ball, and started swinging it, lurching towards the man of iron.

"Iron Man," the man said, increasing the speed of his weapons his masked brow knitted, "Remember me?"

"Who?", Tony muttered, his voice drowned out by the chaos occurring around him, "Don't.....rem'mb'r....you....."

"You stomped me back in Niagara Falls," the man replied, decidedly lacking in tact and charm, "An' the Wrecking Crew don't like bein' stomped, right fellas?"

Behind the man, three more hoods emerged. All of the Wrecking Crew were like the first, big, muscular men in fancy costumes, wielding construction site equipment as weapons. They didn't look so tough to Tony; he'd fought much stronger opponents, and succeeded.

That's when they started pounding on him.

"We're gonna show you how we do the stompin', tin man!" Fists met metal, and Tony was knocked down again; any other man would have been a grease spot when facing such a savage beating, and even Tony's armor didn't protect him. The suit's metal fabric strained as he was attacked, and he couldn't react fast enough to stop them.

Fortunately, Iron Man's fellow Avenger Hawkeye managed to notice his plight. The archer was busy using his arrows to hold back the Enchantress, but he caught a glimpse of the Wrecking Crew first, and saw how bad a beating they were giving Iron Man. Clint Barton knew that something must have been wrong with the armored Avenger, since hoods like the Crew, super-powered or not, were normally beneath him. But Clint didn't bother asking questions.

"Hang on, Shellhead!", Hawkeye yelled, pulling a grenade-mounted arrow from his quiver, "I'll stop these turkeys....!"

Clint's "war cry" managed to distract the Crew, giving Tony Stark a little room to move. Instinctively, Tony activated a cybernetic command which was sent to the computers in his gauntlets, and charged up a repulsor blast; however, his arm shook too much, and threw off his aim. The intended recipient of the

particle blast would have been one of his foes, but the actual recipient ended up being the last thing he wanted to hit.

Clint Barton's shoulder.

As the archer dropped his bow and screamed a long stream of curse words, the Wrecking Crew turned their attentions back to Iron Man. The man in green with the wrecking ball, whose name Tony Stark still could not recall, laughed as he saw his foe's misfire.

" Well, I didn't think it'd be so easy! Fuse a few circuits, tin man? "

" Too bad for you! "

The Crew continued their onslaught, and Tony Stark felt more pain. He slipped into unconsciousness, passing out into a state of darkness. At least this way, the pain would end.....

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***When inventor extraordinaire Tony Stark garbs himself in solar-charged steel-mesh armor, he becomes the world's greatest human fighting machine, the Invincible Iron Man. But now, the man of iron has been spirited away to another world with several other champions of Earth, to engage in a contest of might established by the godlike force known as the Beyonder. And, incapacitated by forces inside his body, Iron Man lies unconscious, beaten nearly to death by his foes. Will Tony Stark survive, and does he even want to? Read on.....***

" Strange....I'd always thought Iron Man was so sophisticated—worldly-- It's as though a different man were inside that armor lately! "

" It's the same man, Monica. Except that he's decided that his own life is of little consequence.....and that life's been slipping away more and more every day with every swig of the bottle that Tony Stark takes. "

Captain America and Captain Marvel were among the crowd of heroes assembled who were observing the beaten and battered body of Tony Stark. His visage was anything but a pretty sight; he was unshaven, unwashed, and unconscious, half dead due to both the blows that the Wrecking Crew dealt him, and the pints of liquor flowing through his bloodstream. His body was a continuous bruise, with discolored marks from his blows appearing all over Tony's skin. Even Tony's armor was gone, as his saviors removed what was left of it a moment ago in order to inspect his injuries.

The Avengers and the other heroes managed to save Tony Stark from the Wrecking Crew, and defeat the other " villains " matched up against them. Afterwards, they even managed to find shelter, a highly equipped fortress created entirely for the heroes' needs. The facilities of this compound were truly excellent, advanced beyond those of anywhere on Earth. But nevertheless, the original Iron Man was nearly comatose, lied out on a steel medical table inside what appeared to be the medical wing of this complex. And even the alien technology present, even the skills of his comrades, didn't seem enough to save him.

" Dr. Richards ", Captain America said flatly, as the star-spangled champion turned to his ally in the Fantastic Four, " do you think you can save Tony? "

Stretching his neck towards Cap almost comically, but with seriousness in his manner, Reed Richards replied to Cap; " The Hulk and I managed to find a healing device-- a cell regenerator which utilizes principles beyond human technology. I already tested the machine on Hawkeye, and it managed to heal his shattered arm; he'll be sore for a day or two, but otherwise will recover normally. "

" Iron Man, however, I'm not totally sure of. He looks in shabby shape-- the Wrecker and his associates dealt him some rather nasty blows. Not only that, but from what I've been told, he's been abusing alcohol

for the past few months, and I don't know how much damage Mr. Stark has done to himself. "

" But it's worth a shot. We'd better hurry, because from my glance, it doesn't look like Stark has much longer."

" It's no wonder that the name Mister Fantastic is renowned for compassion as well as courage. You give added meaning to the word HERO, Richards. "

" We have yet to see if that's true, Captain. "

Then, followed by their comrades, the leaders of both the Avengers and Fantastic Four took the unconscious body of Tony Stark to the chamber of the healing machine, a large tube which looked more like a coffin than anything else. Dr. Richards crossed his elastic fingers, hoping that it wouldn't be the case.

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Tony Stark saw nothing, heard nothing, and said nothing for a lengthy period of time. He could do nothing but feel, and even then, Tony had little sense of where he was, other than a throbbing headache and a raging thirst. Eventually, he moved slowly, and gradually, as though he were coated in molasses.

He didn't know where he was, only that he was in a small cylinder with a glass lid. Tony pushed the lid open and, with the same slow, uneasy speed, emerged from his chamber. He was almost naked, unclad except for a pair of briefs, and totally unprepared for what lied ahead. Especially concerning social situations.

Reed Richards stretched his body to Tony's position, contracting at Tony's feet. " Iron Man, " he said with more curiosity than concern, " How are you doing? "

" You.....know, then.....", Tony whispered, softly and almost inaudibly

" Yes, Mr. Stark. You were badly wounded in our battle six hours ago, . We managed to find a well equipped base prepared for us, complete with advanced medical facilities. I had to remove your armor in order to use them on you. "

" And..... ", Tony asked, almost hesitantly, " my armor? "

" The blows from the Wrecker did a lot of damage to your Iron Man armor, Mr. Stark. Fortunately, there were devices which repaired machinery as well as flesh in this station. Your armor is repaired and recharged over on that table. "

Tony Stark turned around, and there on a modest diagnostic table, lay the pieces of steel and wiring that composed his Iron Man costume. They sat there under the mechanical lighting, but were pointed in his direction, as though they were asking to be worn by him. With his same slow, cautious speed, Tony lurched towards his invention, wanting to put it on, yet hearing a voice in his subconscious telling him not to. Tony was about to reach for the chestplate, and clasp it to his bare chest, until.....

" Hey, Stark! I got words with you! "

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Hawkeye marched towards Tony Stark, stomping angrily on the floor. His right shoulder was wrapped in a bandage, moving little, while his left arm pointed at Tony. The Wasp was following him, gesturing for Hawkeye to cool down his raging temper. Unaware of what was enraging Clint Francis Barton, Tony asked, in a soft voice, " Hawkeye....? How....were you wounded? "

Clint walked right up to the former industrialist, leaning towards him with a scowl behind his chain mail mask. " Ok, lemme see here. All of us AVENGERS were taken to planet Mongo with every baddie from Molecule Man to Mister Doll, you, STARK, were taken here after you were melting your brains with cheap scotch, we get into a fight, you get your tin-plated ass beaten down, and I go to get your bacon out of the fire, only for you to freaking SHOOT me in the arm like the drunk you are! Now, all I wanna know is why in the name of my great aunt Gladys you even decided to get drunk as a skunk in the first place!"

" Clint, please! ", Jan Van Dyne shouted with a mix of care and sternness. She knew that, whatever Tony Stark's many problems were, the last thing the man of iron needed was to be cast out and scorned.

" Butt outta this, Jannie! I wanna give this back shooting booze hound a piece of my mind! "

Tony Stark said nothing, and lowered his head, but not in shame. Instead, he moved the iron breastplate in his hands, and fit it around his body. From there, Tony continued to put on his metal mesh armor, quickly but steadily, as though trying to hide himself from the world.

" Dammit, Stark, get outta those tin threads and say something! "

When Tony finally turned to Hawkeye to answer his angered statements, he was fully clothed in armor, his haggard and bearded face shielded by the iron visor. For one second, Tony looked at his former comrade solemnly, staring at him with anthropomorphized eyes, then turned his back on Clint. He then proceeded to activate the boot jets in his soles, flying up and away from his accusers.

" Get back here and answer me! "

It was too late. Tony flew fast, reaching speeds of 900 estimated miles per hour and eventually burst through the ceiling of the fortress. Iron Man soared away, intently trying to get as far away from anyone as possible!

" Why, you..... "

" Enough, Clint. " Jan said with more than a twinge of irritation. " I don't think that Tony wants to hear you now, or any of us. At least he can't find any booze here.....I think. "

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Tony Stark rocketed through this alien world with little conscious effort, as though he was being animated by forces beyond his control. He didn't know where he was going, nor did he care. The only thought in his mind was to get away from those accusations.

The weather conditions that Tony was flying through were less than optimal; the sky was gradually blackening with clouds, indicative of a major storm brewing. Small drops of atmospheric moisture collected on Tony's golden faceplate, and a draft battered his course slightly, instantly compensated for by the gyros in his armor, but still being forceful enough that Tony could feel it. Tony knew that being out here, on this foreign planetoid with unknown conditions, was probably not the wisest thing to do.

But again, what Tony knew was in an entirely separate category from what Tony cared to do.

He hadn't been in the Iron Man suit in months, having given it up to his confidante Jim Rhodes after an embarrassing defeat by the low tier villain Magma; at the time, Tony felt tired of being a hero, wanting to spend a little time to enjoy himself. Ever since then, Tony had precious few active memories; he could only remember a few key events in the most part recent life. Many people had tried to tell him that his problems were due to his drinking; friends, employees, even Captain America. But Tony couldn't believe that.

*Maybe I have been hitting the bottle a little hard as of recent,* Tony thought to himself as he continued his

uncharted course, *but they can't know what it's like. They can't understand what's inside me, why I have to drink, why I had to give up being Iron Man. They don't see that if I didn't drink, things would be worse.*

But then, for Tony, life hadn't exactly been great. After he surrendered the role of Iron Man, Tony dropped out of his business life as well, leaving his employees to handle the store while Tony relaxed, going to parties and nightclubs instead of boardrooms and Avengers meetings. During this time, Tony's lapse enabled his fierce rival Obidiah Stane to buy out the rights to Stark International, paying for all the debts the company accumulated in Tony's absence, and sending a freeze upon Tony's assets. Tony knew about Stane's past, the shady activities he'd sponsored, and the horrible weapons he'd used Tony's company to manufacture. But instead of responding, Tony instead spent his time in the gutter, spending what little money he had left on bottles.

*Probably just as well, though, he thought to himself as his muscles tensed up, hearing his excuses but never believing them. Stane bought out my company fair and square; he claimed my property legitimately. Even if I wanted my position in the world back, I couldn't take it, and I probably couldn't have stopped him if I wanted to. Probably.....*

Now, Tony was sucked from his impoverished exile into a foreign world, allied with the heroes he once fought by side with, and clad in the armor he once wore. He didn't really remember how he got here, and the details of the last day in his memory were sketchy; all Tony remembered, past when he woke up in Reed Richards' improvised lab, was a power from above staring down on him, and the pain of the injuries he'd been dealt. Even after Richards' cell healing chamber got Tony out of critical condition, he still felt the sores underneath his armor, aching seemingly through the metal layer covering his skin. What's more, his one-time partner Hawkeye was very irate with Tony, over an injury he didn't even know he inflicted.

*Must have slipped my aim, Tony half-heartedly reassured himself as usual, getting angrier and angrier with each statement he thought. Hadn't worn this metal in a while, and I'm not sure I want to keep wearing it now. How could I be expected to perform at full capacity, when out of practice and being taken down by surprise? That's a condition that has to be taken into account, right?*

*Right?*

NO!

Then, with but a thought, a full powered repulsor blast emitted from Iron Man's gauntlets, as he shot down force from above on the terrain. The world around Tony Stark grew red, as he was unable to reconcile where he was, and who he was. He destroyed everything around, trying to ease the conflict inside his soul, as he activated the full brunt of his micro-circuited arsenal on a large butte in his field of vision. The flattened rock was little match for Tony's science, as chunks of sandstone flew off into the air, carried far away by the winds.

Blasts of concentrated voltage, high intensity lasers, thousand-decibel sonics; all of them were deployed upon the inanimate objects in the Golden Avenger's path. Tony's shielded brow knitted, as he stared at the wreckage; he stopped for one second to look at what he did, then got back into position and continued destroying, trying to ease his pain and his thirst. It wasn't working, but he kept up faint hopes.

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About 300 meters away, Reed Richards looked at the scanners he'd appropriated. He was attended by Captain America and the Hulk, as they all monitored the sensors, keeping watch for potential threats. And on the screen, a huge source of energy registered, as sophisticated telescopes in the base's watchtowers closed in on the source.

Given the storm brewing in the background, it was difficult for Reed to make out exactly what his instruments were telling him, but amidst the static, Reed Richards managed to discover what the spike of

energy was. Or, more precisely, who; it was Tony Stark, more recently known as Iron Man. He was blasting at the terra incognita left and right, removing all safety precautions in his rage.

“ It seems as though we’ve found where Tony is, “ Cap said, seeing the depths of how far his partner had fallen.

“ True, Cap, even with the weather interference, we can see what Mr. Stark is doing. I don’t register any beings around him, though. It seems as though Iron Man is attacking nothing, for reasons beyond me. “

” He’s probably just letting loose his frustrations, Richards. I can relate to Stark in that sense, “ The Hulk replied, with a thoughtfulness oddly juxtaposed against his massive, bestial looks. “ I could brave the storm, want me to go corral the tin man? “

” No, Dr. Banner “, the star-spangled Avenger stated firmly. “ We’ve gone through this before. Tony Stark is not going to accept help until he can admit that he wants and needs it.....or by the time it’s too late. “

Cap paused, lowering his head; the Sentinel of Liberty, an inspiration to millions, sighed as he thought over his mistake with Tony. Reed Richards interrupted Cap’s moment of silence with more pressing concerns;” Furthermore, we can’t afford to waste any strength. The storm is headed towards our direction, and my instruments show that it’s of a magnitude that no earthly storm has ever received. If we lose anyone--ANYONE-- to locate and retrieve Stark, then we’re leaving ourselves wide open for an assault. We have to be ready for ANYTHING, and hope that Iron Man is the same. “

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As he monitored the piles of rubble around him, where a butte once stood, Tony Stark jetted down to Earth. Even with winds battering him, Tony could get down to the ground with relative ease, but that was little comfort. For, despite his release of frustrations, Tony felt no better, no less.....thirsty.

As Tony held a fragment of blackened Earth in his gauntlet, he thought to himself, feeling exhausted and depressed instead of frustrated and enraged. *Well, Tony, that was a waste of effort. Using weapons more powerful than the armories of most nations to prove what? To accomplish what? To show an inanimate object your strength?*

*I don’t need this. I need to do something else to calm my soul, if such a thing even exists. I need.....I need.....*

Tony lowered his head in shame, sighing as he thought this admission to himself;

*.....a DRINK.*

Then, as though on cue, the need for alcohol dissipated, as Tony felt drops of fine champagne lining his mouth, and liquid inside his gullet. His senses dulled, and the part of him which was always in pain quieted, as Tony received a feeling equivalent to drinking the most wonderful form of liquor possible, and in a very acceptable quantity, about a quart according to his armor’s sensors. . Tony had no idea where this alcohol was coming from; it seemingly materialized out of nowhere, and inside Tony’s body. But, like almost every other event in his life, Tony had no intention of pondering this imponderable.

Inside his helmet, Tony relaxed, passing out with a state of calm that he rarely received. And as Tony, again, lapsed into unconsciousness, at peace with the world. In his state, the fierce winds carried his metal-plated form aloft, and the power of the storm overwhelmed even his armor’s automatic gyros. But inside the armor, even though Tony was in potentially great danger, the winds just felt like they were rocking him to sleep.....

# THE MANY COLORS OF IRON MAN





“OWW...damn that hurt,” Reilly said underneath his armor. “Hey Kruptkey, are you ok?”  
“Give me five minutes...I think I want to just sit here unconscious for a while.”

Reilly puffed out a breath of air, and decided to follow his friend’s example. It was not too long ago that these Guardsmen were trying to apprehend the super villain known as the Wrecker. But just like in many cases dealing with escapees, the Guardsmen didn’t exactly win with grace. In fact, they lost with a giant crowbar smashing into their hides. Some of the guards at the Vault usually blamed it on the armor. The old Stark models could have beaten the pants out of any villain any day. But with these Stane International replacements, the villains could break out of the Vault at their discretion. Granted, for a while they had newer suits made by Tony Stark that were reminiscent of the older design, but the draw back with it was that it could only work in the confines of the Vault. Which means if the so-called “Bad Guys” could reach the out side world, it would mean getting an invitation to a beating with the long range “Stane” brand battle armor.

“Ok Kruptkey, let’s get up and report back to HQ.”

“F--- you man, I just got spanked by a crowbar.”

Reilly rolled his eyes and helped his fallen comrade up from the rubble of concrete, “Would you just get up, the crowds are gathering around us.”

Kruptkey looked around and noticed the civilians had started to mass around the recently beaten law enforcement duo. “Great, if this wasn’t humiliating enough.”

“Yeah I’m sure the Guardsmen fan club will be disappointed.” They made their way out of the crowd and headed for the transport chopper. Upon reaching the landing point, they were surprised to find the entire copter buried in concrete and bricks.

“OH FOR CRYING OUT...” Kruptkey shouted in anger, “He beat the hell out of us, but was this really damned necessary?!?”

Reilly took off his helmet and unkempt his stringy red hair, “Do your boot jets work?”

Kruptkey leapt into the air only to land back on his feet again, “Nope.”

Reilly noticed a near by diner, “I’m starving. What about you?”

“I could go for some steak and eggs.”

“Let’s go,” the two men started off towards the diner. Reilly noticed that the back of his helmet was completely cracked open. He posed in his best imitation quarterback pose, and flung the helmet toward the rest of the rubble.

## The Diner

“Well what do you think? Was that worse than the New Warrior incident?” Reilly said while taking a bite from his bacon cheeseburger.

“You mean finding out that Namorita chick could do that electric shock thing?” Kruptkey replied as he cut up his steak, “I’d say worse...that Namoritta chick was pretty easy on the eyes.”

“Yeah, she was a hot one. Plus that probably shouldn’t count since they weren’t actually super villains.”

“What about getting beaten up by that Wizard? He’s sort of like a Dr. Doom...except more wuss like.”

“That was definitely worse, at least today we got beat by a super heavy weight. “

Kruptkey sat back in his side of the booth, “So do you think we’ll ever actually apprehend any villains?”

Reilly thought for a moment as he chewed his food. After he was done he replied, “No, not until we learn.”

“Learn? What’s to learn Reilly?”

“We have to learn that the hardware can only be as dangerous as the person wielding it. We blame all our failures on this piece of scrap we’re wearing right now.”

“Aw come one you’ve got to admit those Stark models were...”

“Ah shut up about the Stark models already Kruptkey. Those suits were great, but for crying out loud...we once got beaten up by that boomerang guy. Are you listening, we got stomped by a guy who threw a bunch of boomerangs.”

“All right, Reilly calm down. The entire diner can hear you.”

“I’m just saying that the suit has nothing to do with us losing most of the time.”

“Well, what do you want to do about it?” Kruptkey asked as he began to down his iced tea.

“I...I just...I just want to prove that I can take out those super baddies myself. I mean a guy who can shrink down to the size of an ant has a better chance than me.”

“And a woman who can do that too, man.”

“Thanks Kruptkey, you really know how to make a guy feel more confident about himself.” Reilly looked out the window, wondering when the Vault clean up crew was going to come over and pick them up. Suddenly, his eyes gazed upon a disturbing sight. Three thugs wielding automatic pistols were by the entrance of the diner. One of the thugs signaled the other two and in a split second, the three of them were inside the diner barking orders.

“ALL RIGHT EVERYONE, THIS IS A ROBBERY!” the headman said as he let out two bullets into the ceiling. “I WANT EVERYTHING OF VALUE...AND...” The henchmen noticed Reilly and Kruptkey in their respected suits of dented armor. “Where the hell did you guys come from? A Star Trek convention?”

Kruptkey and Reilly looked at each other, stood up and approached the headman.

“HEY, STAND BACK OR YOU’RE DUST TREKKIES.” He aimed his gun toward the two guardsmen. His two partners joined him by his side.

“Hey Hugh,” one of the men whispered, “I think they’re actually fans of the BattleStar Galatica show. They look like the robots who...”

The headman shoved his partner to shut him up, “Quiet you, and use my code name,

there's witnesses."

"Sorry Hugh."

"Why you...."

"You punks finished?" Reilly said as he raised one of his repulsor blasters.

Hugh turned to what appeared to be a man who was into too many sci-fi movies, "What if we aren't wannabe 3CPO?"

"Well I suppose I could just do this," A low intensity repulsor ray emitted from Reilly's gauntlet brushed away the three men into the other side of the diner. All three men were stunned and kayoed by the tremendous force of the rays as they hit the tiled floor. The customers and employees of the diner were so stunned by the entire spectacle they needed a few moments to take in everything. When they finally noticed that the two men actually saved them, they broke into cheers and applause.

"Hey I never heard this before!" Reilly said to Kruptkey.

"What's that?"

"The sound of actually kicking someone's ass. THANK YOU EVERYONE, I do this for a living people." The applause and cheering got louder as they exited the diner.

"Hold on a sec," Reilly said, "I forgot to pay the..."

"Don't worry," The owner said behind the counter, "On the house for heroes."

Reilly smiled, "Yeah Krupt, I think I like the taste of victory."

...to be continued... maybe...





Back in 1997, I sent in this question to the then "**Stan's Soapbox**":  
*When you originally created Tony Stark, did you base him loosely on **Howard Hughes**?*

Stan Lee's reply: **"Not loosely, Mike, but very tightly. Howard Hughes was one of the most colorful men of our time. He was an inventor, an adventurer, a multi-millionaire, a ladies man and finally a nutcase. Actually, he was just like me<except for four of those qualities!"**

To be honest, I already *knew* the answer before submitting the question. I just hoped for further elaboration, and to get a No-Prize, which I did.

Here is a *very* brief and dreadfully incomplete overview of the man who inspired Tony Stark:

In 1925, at age nineteen, Howard Hughes inherited his father's fortune, which was largely amassed by leasing specialized drill bits leased to oil companies. Possessing a highly inquisitive and brilliant mind, he used the assets of the **Hughes Tool Company** to finance the inventor's forays and follies into the worlds of aviation and motion pictures, among other ventures. In aircraft designed and built to his specifications, Hughes established a number of daring and spectacular flying records, capturing the world's attention, and bagging more than a few starlets and vixens along the way. Hughes would create a number of companies, employing thousands of workers.

This column will focus upon one interesting **Hughes-Stark similarity**, but not a similarity with the two men. Instead I'd like to examine two similar, parallel *inventions*: **Hughes' Hercules** (HK-1 flying boat) and **Stark's Jupiter Landing Vehicle** (JLV), as seen in ***Iron Man #116 & 142, and Iron Man: Bad Blood #3***.

In early 1942, one of the gravest threats to the American offensive in World War II was the sinking of troop ships by **German submarines**.



Enter **Henry J. Kaiser**, a famous industrialist who had garnered attention to himself for his incredible feat of mass producing cargo ships at the start of the war. Kaiser had a brainstorm: Why not develop huge flying troop carriers? He wasted no time contacting Hughes, and a

partnership was quickly created. The U.S. military hired the two men to produce three of the flying boats, which would be designed to carry 700 fighting men each. Unfortunately, the collaboration between Kaiser and Hughes failed. Kaiser bowed out of the project, leaving Hughes with the plans still on the drawing board. Hughes worked diligently, determined to finish the plane -- even after the war had ended -- ultimately pouring over \$7-million of his own money into the Hercules. Total estimated cost: \$50-million.

***Made largely of wood*** due to wartime metal-use restrictions, the *HK-1* was dubbed "**The Spruce Goose.**" The immense size of the plane --boasting eight engines, a wingspan the length of a football field, a tail section eight stories high, and an overall weight of over two-hundred tons -- made it impossible for one man to fly manually. Hughes immediately engaged his engineers to work up a system of hydraulic controls, which were to become an important development in aeronautic history.

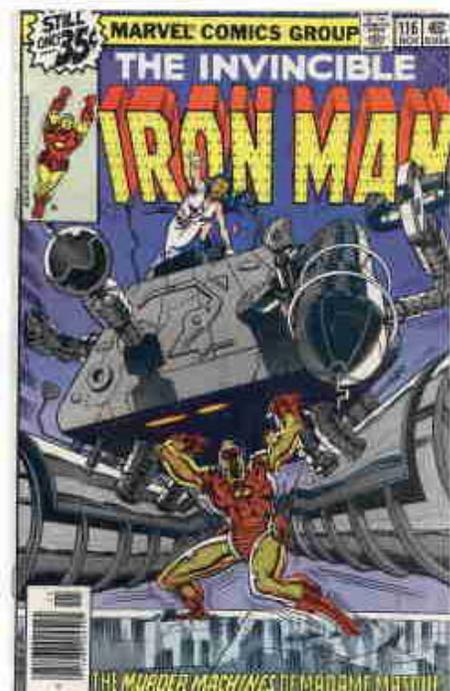


Hughes announced that he would be the first man to pilot the Hercules, and if it failed to fly, he vowed to leave the country. Criticism of Hughes and the plane, which many deemed nothing more than an extravagant joke, was fierce and harsh.

On November 4, 1947, in Long Beach Harbor, with much media fanfare and public hoopla, Hughes gently coaxed the wooden behemoth 70 feet above the water's surface, for a one-mile flight. It was a day of overwhelming triumph for both man and machine.

Afterwards, the Hercules was put into storage, never to be flown again.

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**Iron Man #116** (November 1978) showcased the first appearance of Tony Stark's **Jupiter Landing Vehicle (JLV)**. Writer **David Michelinie** described the JLV as "Earmarked for exploring the cruel surface of the 5th planet, it has been designed to withstand **anything** the unknown might throw its way." Touting impressive versatility and maneuverability, the physically enormous device was aimed directly in the path of a fighting-mad **Iron Man** by an emotionally distraught **Madame Masque**. Shellhead, flexing the (often forgotten) awesome power of his **Iron Man** armor, nearly destroyed the vehicle during the

short-lived encounter.

It was back to the drawing board....

....until the partially revamped and newly rebuilt JLV debuted in **Iron Man #142** (January 1981), "**Sky Die**," part one of the classic **Michelinie/Romita, Jr./Layton** space saga, featuring Tony's first outer space armor. With the JLV ready for final testing, SI employee and electronics whiz **Scott Lang** is K.O.'ed by a **Roxxon infiltrator** who attempts to destroy a Stark laboratory being used by **S.H.I.E.L.D.** scientists determined to discover why 200 people in the small town of Allentown, Iowa, suddenly and mysteriously died. **Iron Man** busts loose; the JLV busts up. Before the battle, interestingly, Tony climbs into the JLV's cockpit and reminisces a la Howard Hughes on how he used to both design and test his inventions.

At this point, the plight of Jupiter Landing Vehicle almost seemed humorous, somewhat analogous to Hughes' Hercules. Iron Fans waited anxiously for the next installment in the perilous life of the JLV. It would be a long wait.

A very long wait -- 19 years in fact, whereupon we discover in **Iron Man: Bad Blood #3** (November 2000) the JLV in storage but on display in the Seattle Aerospace Center, the demonstration site of the world's first negative energy condenser. Tony Stark is in attendance at the event. It isn't long, however, before the JLV screams to life, piloted by a man intent on stealing the condenser for his employer. **Iron Man** quickly and efficiently sees to the safety of the condenser by again walloping the JLV, proving that three times isn't the charm.

Intrigued by the Stark/Hughes parallel, I asked **Iron Man** scribe **David Micheline** for his comments on the JLV/Hercules comparison.

**MK:** In general, did you ever consciously have Howard Hughes in mind while writing the character of Tony Stark and in developing Stark-created technology? And, if so, did you do any background reading on Mr. Hughes?

**DM:** I don't recall that **Bob Layton** or I ever even mentioned Howard Hughes in our **Iron Man** co-plotting sessions. I know I never intentionally patterned Tony Stark after Hughes. We just built on what had gone before in the comic, generating what we felt were logical extensions of the established character. **Stan Lee** may have been inspired by Hughes, but I think Bob and I were more inspired by Stan!

**MK:** What prompted the original idea for the JLV, and did you ever intend for it to actually be used in an Iron Man storyline?

**DM:** If you mean, did we ever intend the JLV to be used to explore Jupiter, no. The main purpose of the JLV in that initial story was to personalize the property destruction. In most super hero battles, downtown Manhattan or Metropolis or Megacity or whatever gets trashed. Then the hero goes home to dinner. With our story in **IM #142**, we wanted to show how much Tony had put into the Jupiter Landing Vehicle, both financially, intellectually and emotionally. Then we forced him to destroy it with his own hands, to show that there's a



lot more in the way of consequences than is usually covered in your average costumed hero free-for-all.

**MK:** Did you purposely intend to use the ill-fated JLV as on-going comic relief of sorts?

**DM:** Not in the first story. But when we were plotting the second we thought it would be fun to have **Iron Man** forced to destroy the machine a second time, kind of an homage to classic slap-the-forehead, "Not again!" shtick.

**MK:** Of all the technology you could have revisited in **Iron Man: Bad Blood**, why the JLV?

**DM:** Again, for the joke. We thought long-time readers would get a kick out of it, sort like the ultimate, "D'oh!" And since the machine worked well in the scene we devised, with the surface purpose of providing a getaway vehicle for the thief, we figured new readers could read it on that level while fans of our earlier work would get an inside chuckle. Plus, we thought it would be interesting to show how the JLV, so cutting edge and awesome in its time, had now become a museum piece. (Analogies to certain comic book writers should not be inferred...)

**MK:** A couple of very Howard-Hughes-esque things have occurred in **Iron Man**. First, near the end of the "**Stark Wars**" (Armor Wars I), Tony went into seclusion to build a new suit of armor to combat Firepower. This "seclusion" premise was very prominent in the life of Hughes, a man known for strange and lengthy disappearances during which he'd be researching or developing new interests. Second, during the story "Deep Trouble," Stark, as **Iron Man**, goes underwater to recover a canister containing lethal, poisonous gas. Hughes, similarly, used technology he designed to recover a sunken Russian submarine for the U.S. government. Any comments on either story?

**DM:** Once more, there was no conscious attempt to parallel Hughes in either of those cases. Tony sequestered himself to design new armor because he needed total, undistracted concentration. His life depended on it. And while I don't remember the exact genesis of "Deep Trouble," I imagine it came about because we thought it would be cool to do some underwater stuff, and figuring out the details of an underwater specialty armor would give us some new toys to play with.

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I'll conclude with a Howard Hughes story which ran in my weekly newspaper column for the April 4, 2001, edition of *The Chisholm Tribune-Press*. Chisholm, as in Chisholm, Minnesota -- the busy little town made somewhat famous by the film ***Field of Dreams***. In my opinion, this would make a sensational **Iron Man** story after a little dippy-doodling. Substitute Tony's father, Howard Stark, for Hughes, and have Tony and Rhodey discover the backstory in the present via some obscure documents....

The first two short blocks of text serve as a brief introduction.

Back in February when the *U.S.S. Greneville* inadvertently struck and sunk a Japanese fishing vessel near Hawaii, many older Americans were outraged. Why? Because the incident had occurred? No. Because President Bush and the United States government had been overly apologetic for the incident to the Japanese prime minister and the people of Japan? Not exactly, but it indirectly became the focal point for their anger. Many older Americans -- particularly veterans of World War II -- were, and still are, upset that the Japanese had never apologized to the United States of America for their attack on Pearl Harbor.

Ironically, the Sunday, March 25, 2001, *Parade* magazine featured a frightening, full-sized pull-out promotional poster for the film *Pearl Harbor*, coming to theaters on May 25. Printed over outdoor scenes of a woman hanging her laundry and a group of youngsters playing baseball while the ominous, ashen-gray skies overhead are thick with fast-moving, locust-like swarms of Japanese planes are the chilling, well-known words: "IT WAS A SUNDAY MORNING... A DAY THAT WILL LIVE IN INFAMY." One must ponder what types of sentiments will sweep through our nation in the aftermath of a movie which portrays a highly-charged, horrific, and ultimately world-altering event in human history.

In January of 1934, millionaire inventor Howard Hughes entered and won an air race for amateur aviators in Miami, Florida. Immediately afterwards he set upon the idea of creating the world's fastest airplane. Hughes enlisted the aid of two brilliant aeronautic engineers, and for eighteen months the three men labored in secrecy to design and build the *H-1*.

On one summer's day in 1935, the *H-1* was wheeled out from its hangar. The plane was a revolutionary piece of engineering for its day. The exceptionally streamlined design included extensive flush-riveting and retractable landing gear. Hughes declared that he would be the first man to test fly the *H-1*. The plane performed perfectly. Observers watching the flight stated that they had never before witnessed such incredible speed from an aircraft. In triumph, Hughes announced that he would try to break the land-plane speed record. The attempt was scheduled to take place on September 12, 1935, at Martin Field in Santa Ana, California.

Darkness fell on the airfield before Hughes could complete his four test runs, forcing him to continue the following day, Friday the 13th. Despite warnings from superstitious friends and fellow pilots, he resumed his quest to become the world's fastest flyer -- one that quickly ended after Hughes fearlessly broke the existing record of 312.39 miles per hour by almost 40 mph -- and then crashed after running out of fuel. Miraculously, the *H-1* suffered little damage and Hughes was unhurt. News of the record-breaking flight made headlines around the world.

Hughes and the *H-1*, affectionately called the *Winged Bullet*, would break two more speed records, one of which was accomplished en route to his receiving the Harmon Trophy in January 1937 for his contributions to the advancement of aeronautics.

The heroics of Howard Hughes and his flying machine were of particular interest to the United States Army. The *H-1* was twice as fast as their swiftest interceptor. They invited Hughes to demonstrate the plane's capabilities. He accepted, and then promptly snubbed them on the arranged meeting day. True to his nature, Hughes was not about to allow anyone to steal his ideas.

Having succeeded in becoming the fastest man alive, Hughes eventually became bored with the *H-1* and sold its designs to the Timm Company, which went out of business before production of the plane could begin. But the story of Howard Hughes' remarkable aircraft did not end there.

It is uncertain how the designs of the *H-1* fell into the hands of the Japanese -- who used them to build plane of their own -- **the Zero**.

\*\*\*

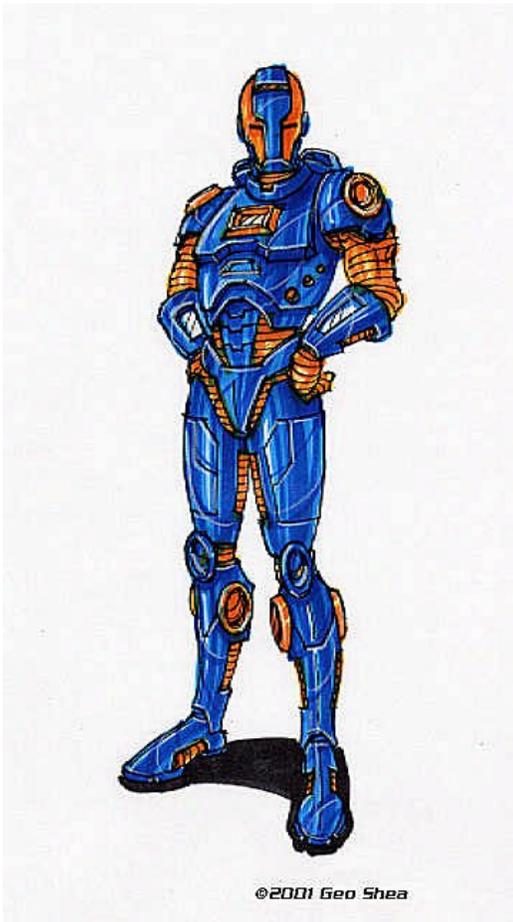
I asked artist/penciller **Dan Jurgens** about his take on **Iron Man** in upcoming issues of **CAPTAIN AMERICA**. Here's what he said...

"My approach to **Iron Man** was based largely on what **Bob [Layton]** was doing during his runs on the book. I could only go so far because of **IM's** switch to the new armor, but what Bob has always excelled at is the sheen of the metal. Heck, with Bob inking the book, I just had to find some way to get **Iron Man** in somehow. I couldn't use **IM** to the full extent I'd first planned because of the armor change. All I had of the new design was a simple sketch to go by, and that doesn't take you very far.

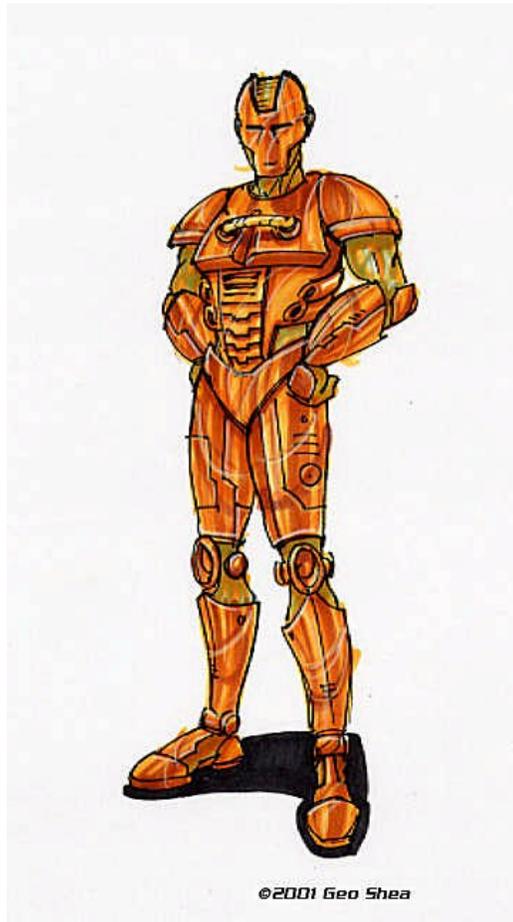
"It was difficult to use **IM** anywhere near the way I wanted because the character was in flux at the time. You'll see that by the change in armor from 45 to 46. Still, I like drawing **IM**, and would love nothing more than to do a project with him in that classic armor that **Gene Colan** drew so well.

"For me, **Cap**, **Thor** and **Iron Man** have always been the 3, 4, and 5 hitters in the **Avengers** line-up. They work together, care about each other and back each other up no matter the situation. I've always found **Iron Man** interesting, and Tony Stark even more so.

"By the way, have you seen those new shoes with roller skates in the soles that flip out so you can skate around? Just like **Iron Man!**"



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# THE WANDERINGS OF THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

BY COUSTURE 

#5

series that began in 1988 and lasted several years? Every bi-monthly issue would feature was featured in the pages of MCP on several occasions over the years. In our last issue, I

\* \* \*

## MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #58



wearing is **old**

freckled-face secretary. No, this is not an old

still in its early stages of development. After bad guy gets away with the precious module.

hasn't been made public yet, the thief has to be one of the people working on the project.

of armor!





missed. Although the art isn't great, it does capture the atmosphere of those old 1960s



wonderful contribution to the early days of Spider-Man...

that's just me...



**“As a matter of fact, if I were to incorporate it into my armor, I'd have room for a lot more adaptations and accessories – and while I'm at it, my whole look could probably use some streamlining.”** Stark thinks to himself.

## **MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #78**



playing around

an on-line bulletin board, but what he doesn't know is that the bloody thing is infected with a

downloads information into his armor computer, the

functioning just as our hero is flying above





about the three [Marvel Fanfare](#) issues he painted some years ago... next time! This MCP issue isn't painted though, but the art is still great and

to slow himself down). We haven't seen an author and an artist have so much fun with

On top of that, the three other stories featured in this issue of MCP are very good. One of



A little girl who sees IM grab hold of the Excalibur prop and accidentally pull it loose from the stone asks her father: **“Look at that, dad! Does that mean he’s the king of England now?”**

## **MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #82**



malfunctioning and endangering the lives of everybody working on the site. Tony himself

armor and follows the ghostly apparition into an old cave.

up in bed as if nothing had happened. He proceeds to buy



Hawaiian and he draws his homeland and the history of his

me. A cool story that gives you food for thoughts.



Well, as much as I enjoyed



it any different at all!



When Carl tells him he won't make any money by turning the place into a wildlife refuge, Tony answers: **“No, I won't. But maybe – by giving something back to this island – maybe I'll be making some REAL progress.”**

\* \* \*



send me a message at [cousture@yahoo.com](mailto:cousture@yahoo.com) and while I'm at it, I cordially invite you to

address:

<http://www.geocities.com/poppysaw>

coolest guest-stars in the pages of other Marvel mags.

Hope to hear from you and bonne lecture!



## **“THE RETURN” Part One**

**By  
Brad Lyons**

Hey Folks! Just a little introduction for my fan fic. It all takes place right after ***Iron Man*** #40 vol 3. My original intentions for this tale were to be a sort of “filler fic” before “The Big Bang Theory” takes place. But with recent

developments in #44, I’ve decided to make it an “alternative” story branching out from #40. (Not that it needs an alternative.) In other words, *Iron Man* #44 stole my thunder! You’ll know what I’m talking about mid-way through the story. I want to make it clear that my story was almost complete BEFORE #44 came out, just so you don’t think I’m a complete rip-off! I hope you enjoy.

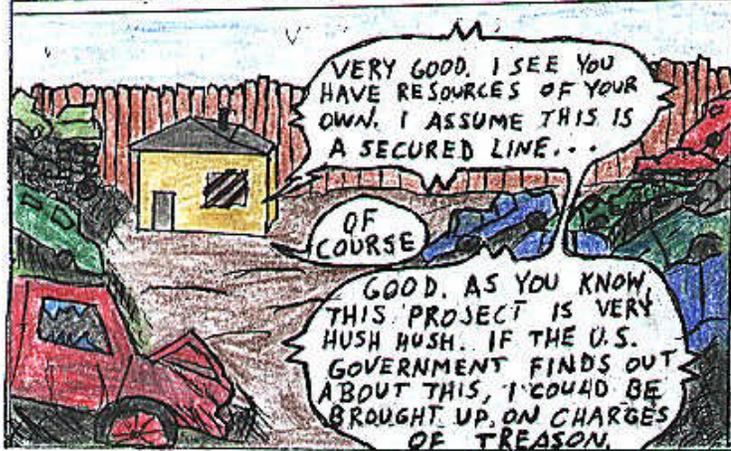
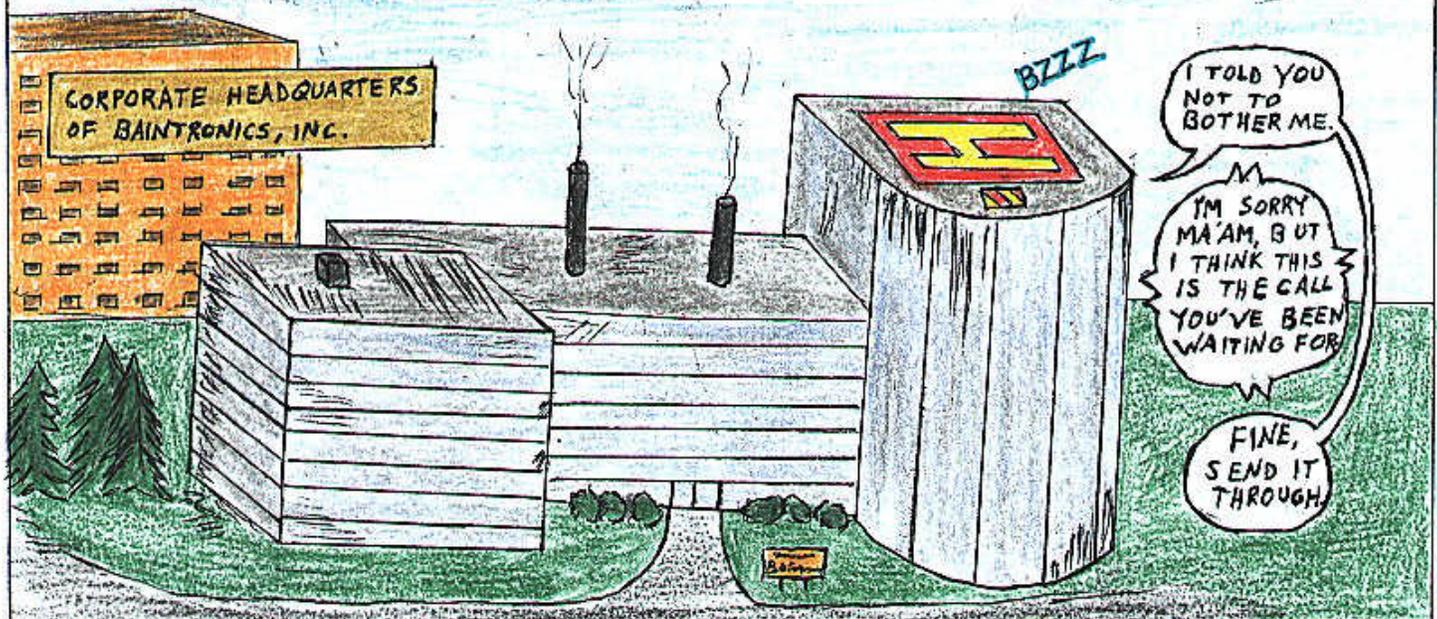
Please let me know what you think. I can be reached at [futureb0y@yahoo.com](mailto:futureb0y@yahoo.com) (the “0” in futureb0y” is a zero).

### **“THE RETURN PART ONE” REFERENCE GUIDE**

- Page 1:** Sunset Baine is the CEO and owner of Baintronics, a company known for its “shady” business ethics.
- Page 2:** Tony found his former girlfriend Rumiko in bed with Ty Stone in *Iron Man* #47.
- Page 3:** Rhodey walked out on Stark/Fujikawa, among other things, in *Tales of The Marvel Universe*.
- Page 4:** The Ghost first appeared in *Iron Man* #219 volume 1.
- Page 7-9:** The Ghost’s technology enables him to turn invisible or intangible at will.

# IRON MAN IN THE RETURN

PART 1



WASHINGTON STATE:  
MOUNT BAKER

NO, JOCASTA. TELL  
HER I'LL CALL HER  
BACK.

I JUST HAVE TO  
START THESE AVALANCHES  
FOR THE SKI PATROL  
BEFORE SKI SEASON  
BEGINS.

I DON'T MEAN  
TO PRY SIR, BUT  
DIDN'T YOU AND  
MS. FUJIKAWA  
HAVE SOMETHING  
OF A "FALLING  
OUT"?

TONY, YOU HAVE A  
CALL. ITS MS FUJIKAWA.  
SHALL I PATCH HER THROUGH  
TO YOUR HELMET RADIO?

YES...YES  
WE DID  
INDEED

SHRAK

RUMBLE

THANKS  
IRON MAN!

WOOSH

MOMENTS LATER AT  
TONY STARK'S  
SMART HOUSE ON  
EVERGREEN ISLAND

I WONDER  
WHAT RU  
COULD WANT?

ITS ONLY BEEN  
A FEW WEEKS  
SINCE I CAUGHT  
HER AND TY...

AND SHE DIDN'T HAVE  
MUCH TO SAY THEN.

TY PROBABLY GAVE  
HER A BLACK EYE...  
DONT I WISH...

... AND NOW SHE'S  
COME CRYIN' BACK  
TO ME.

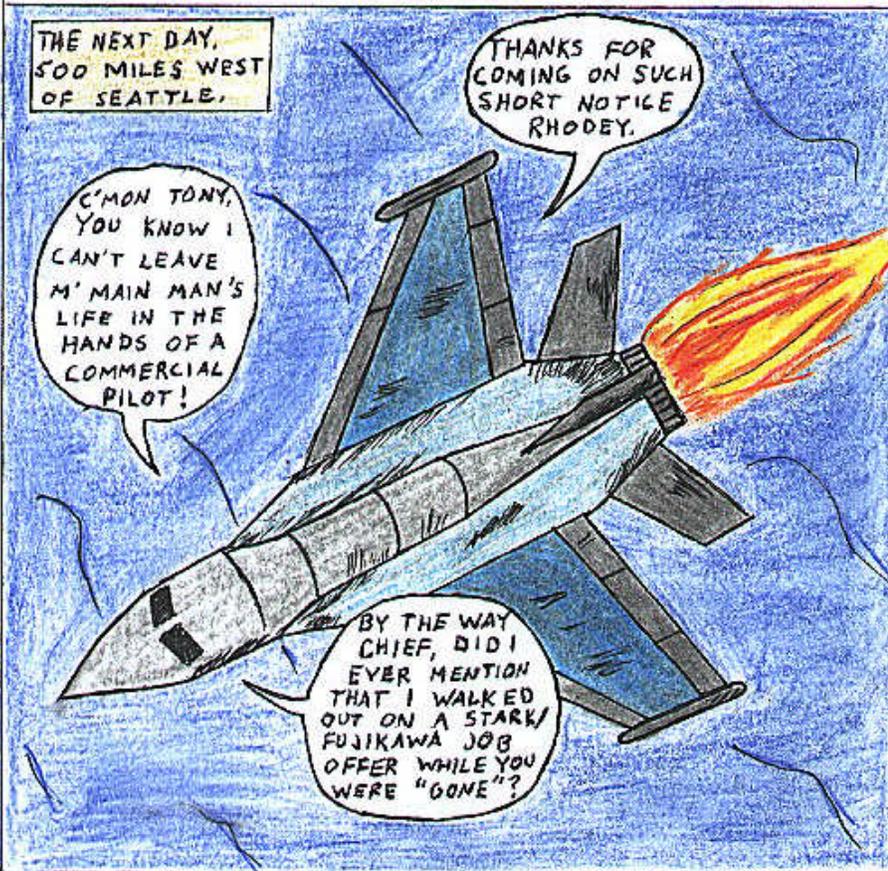
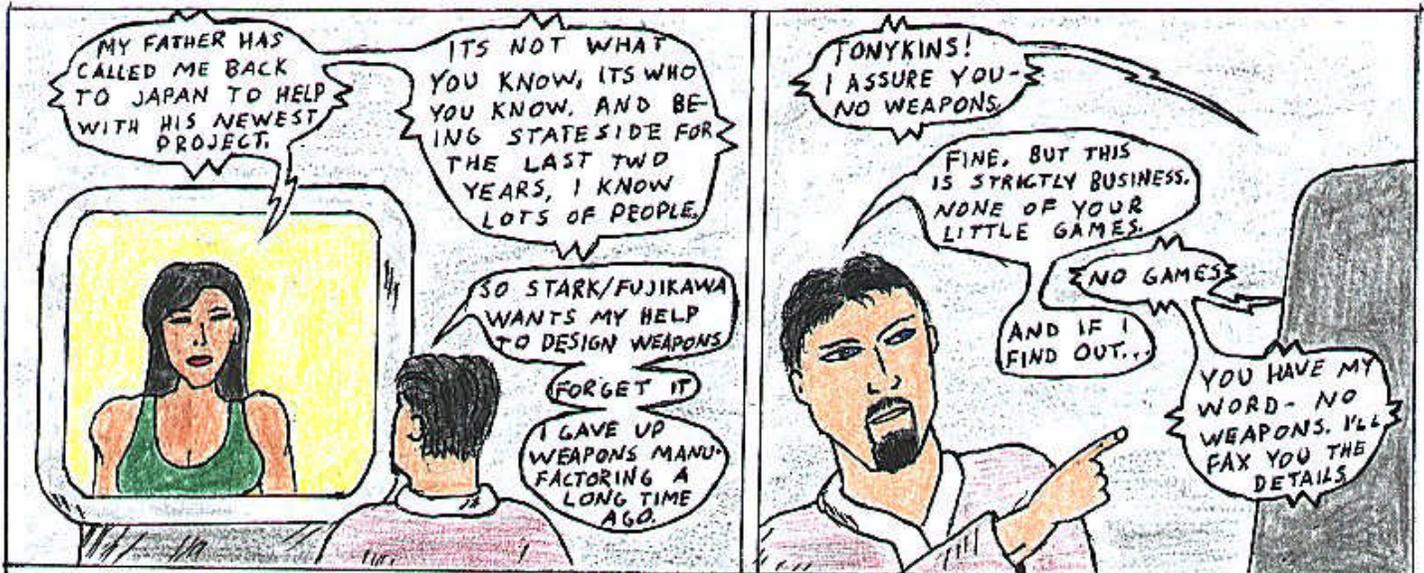
YES RUMIKO?  
WHAT CAN I  
DO FOR YOU?

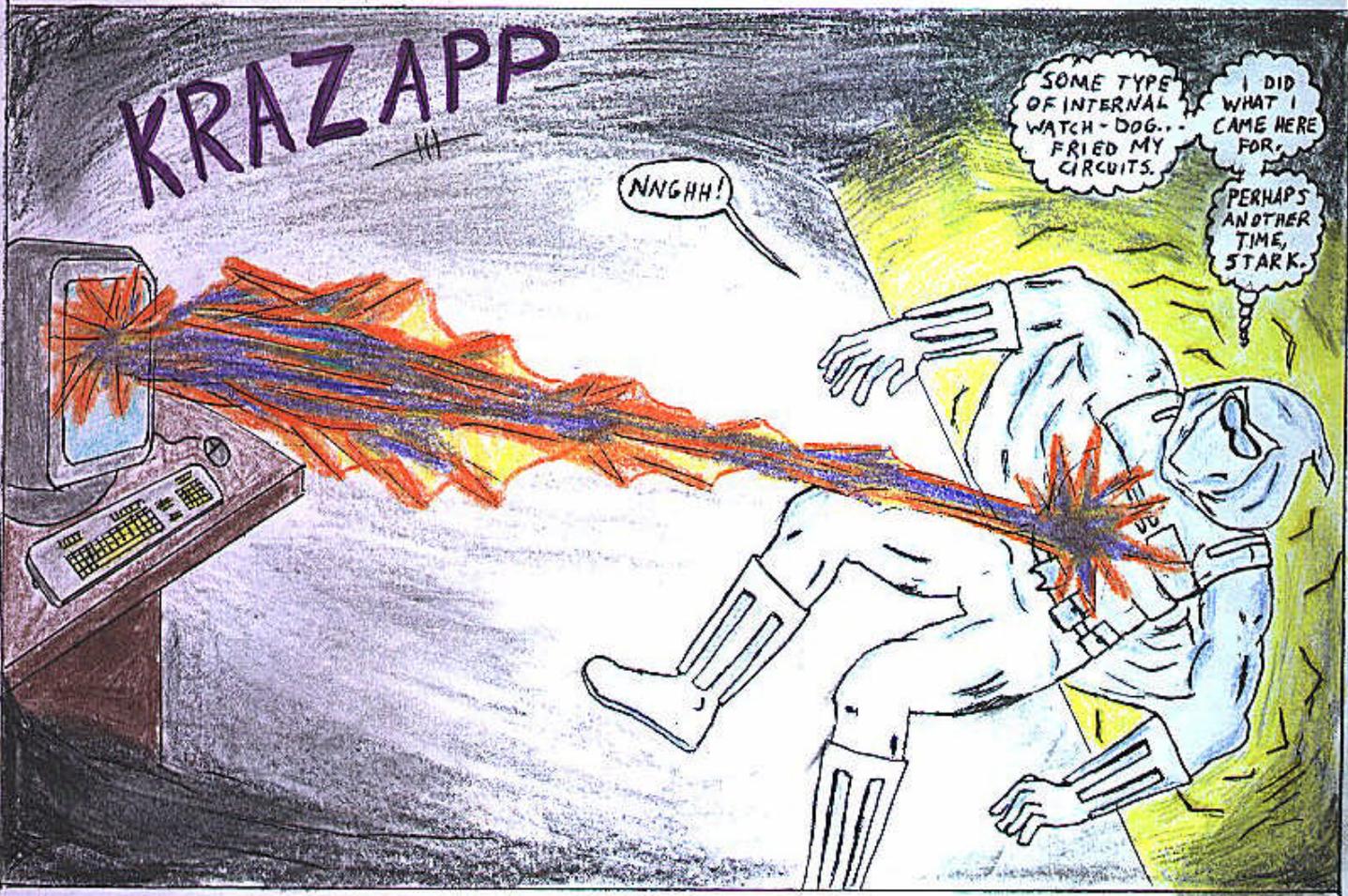
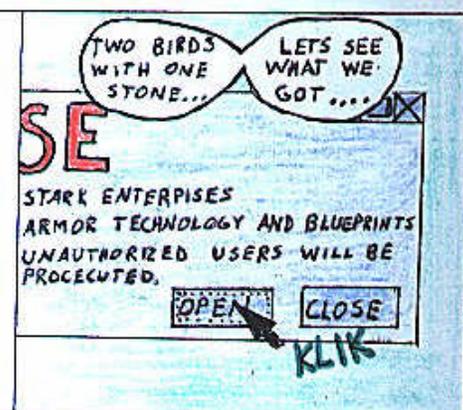
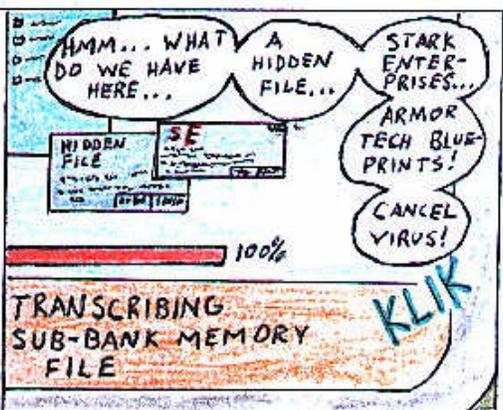
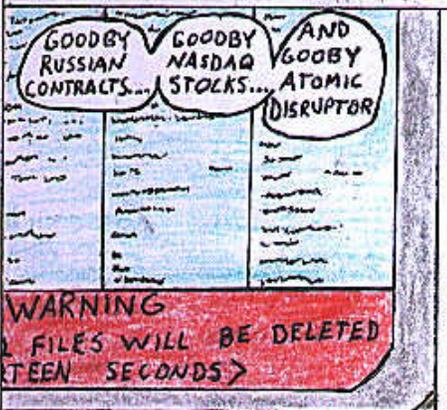
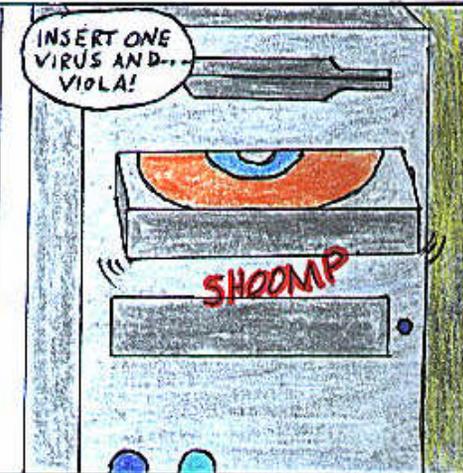
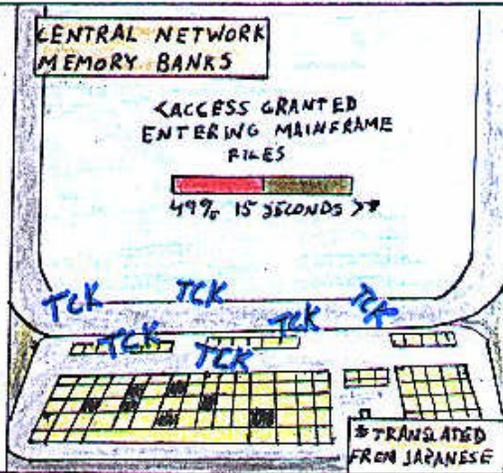
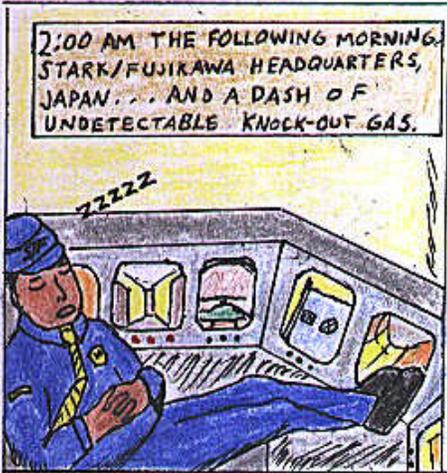
WELL,  
NO BLACK  
EYE

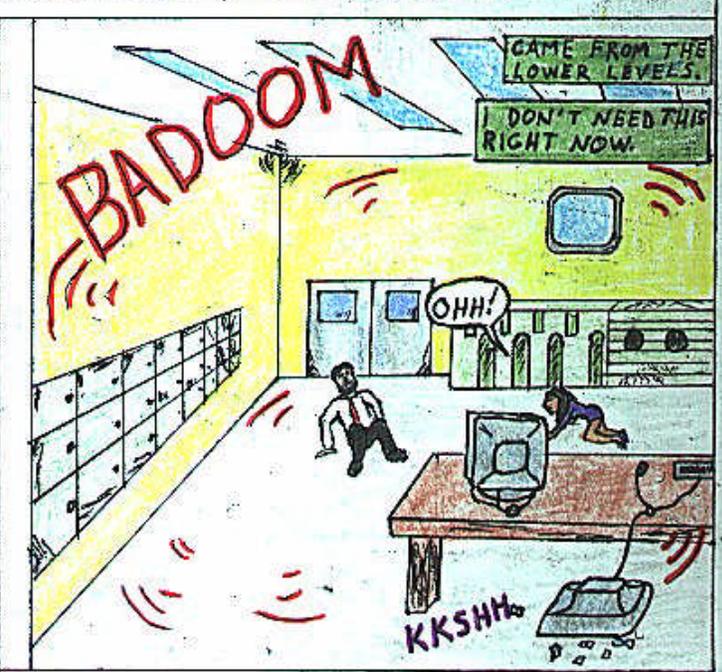
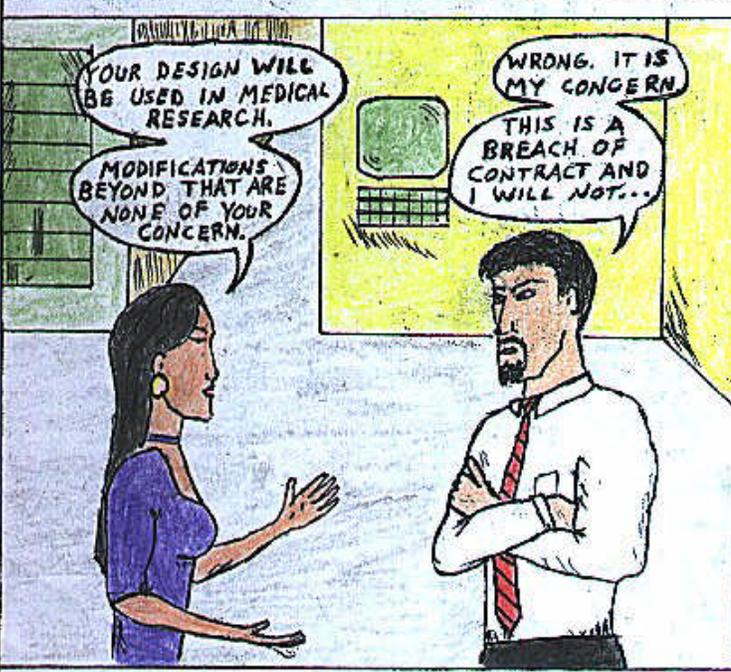
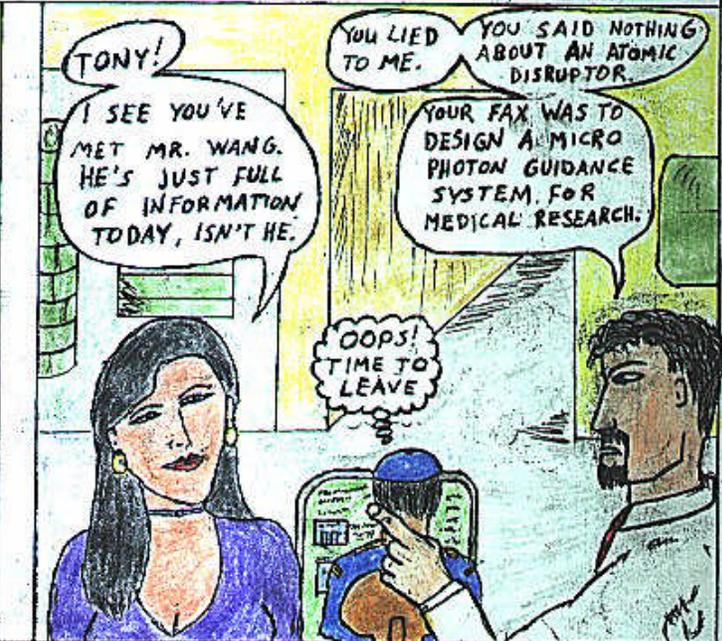
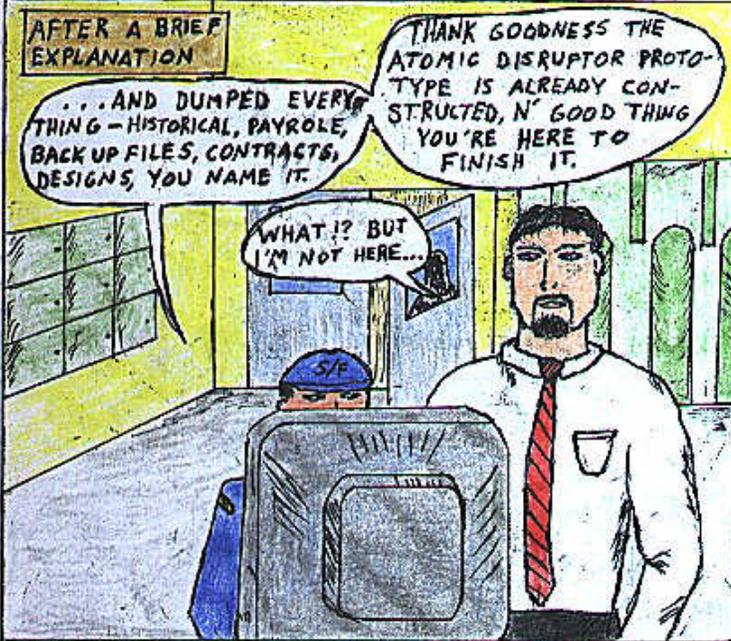
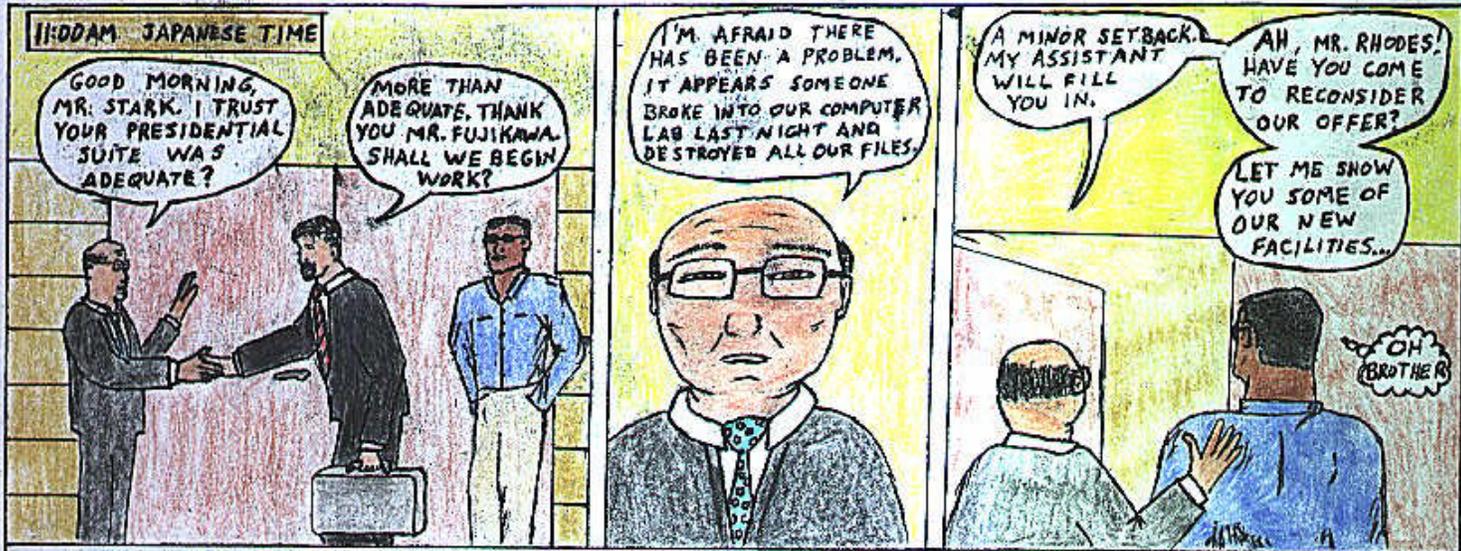
NICE TO SEE  
YOU TOO, TONY.  
SINCE YOU'RE  
OBVIOUSLY NOT  
UP FOR  
SMALL TALK...

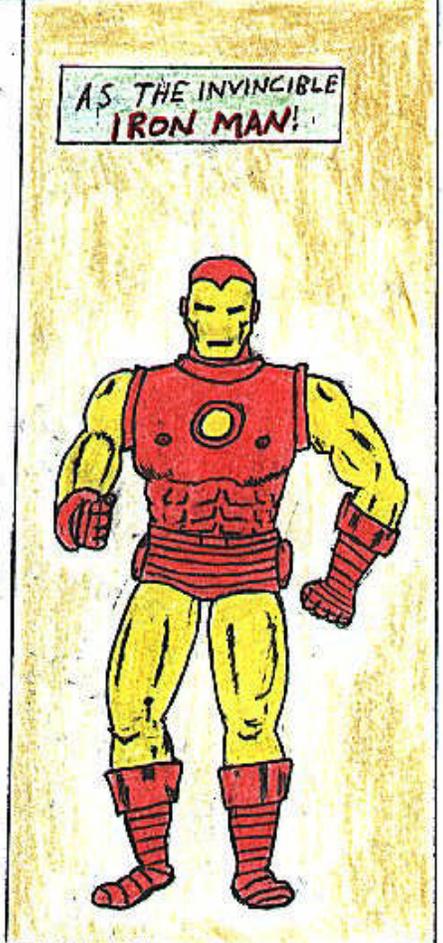
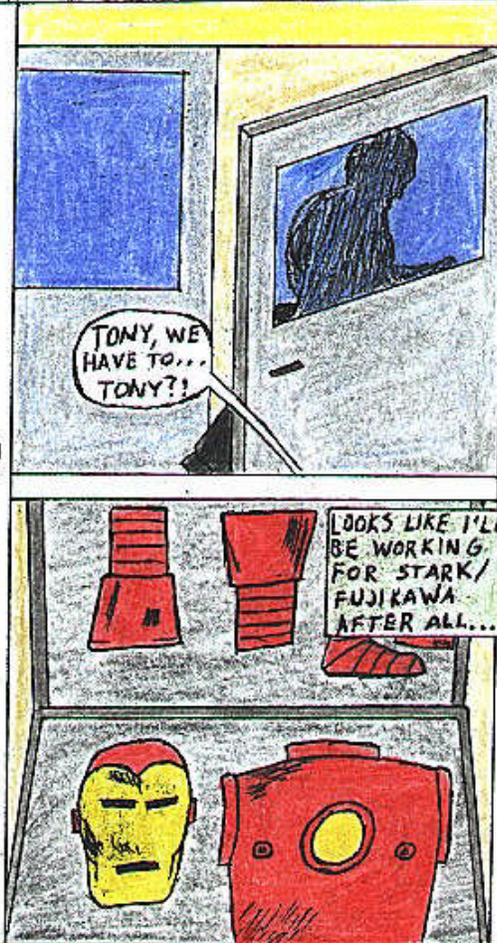
I WANT YOU  
TO KNOW I'M  
ONLY DOING  
THIS AS A  
FAVOR FOR  
MY FATHER

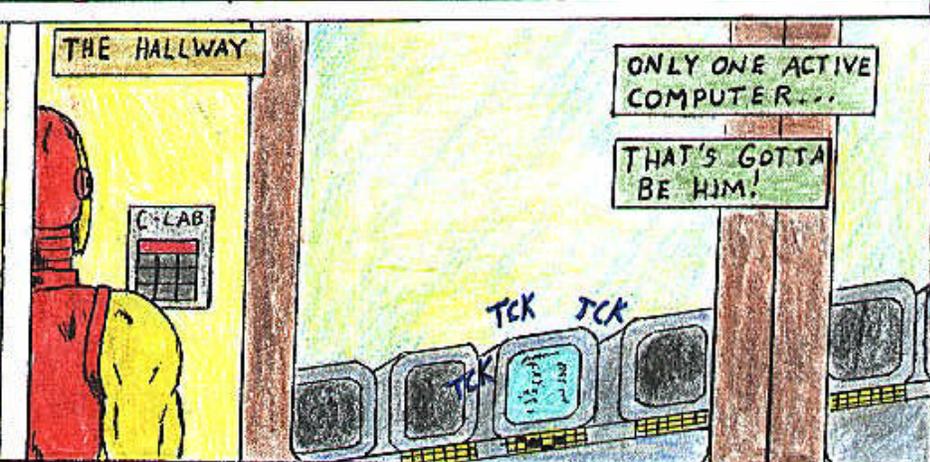
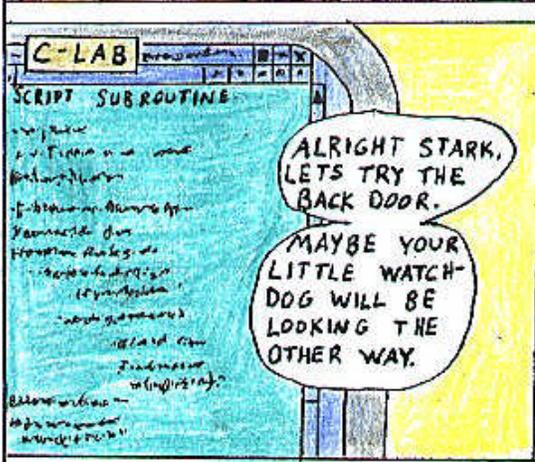














AFTER THE LITTLE STUNT  
RU PULLED TRYING TO  
SWINDLE ME...

I'M ACTUALLY GOING TO  
ENJOY CHASING THE GHOST



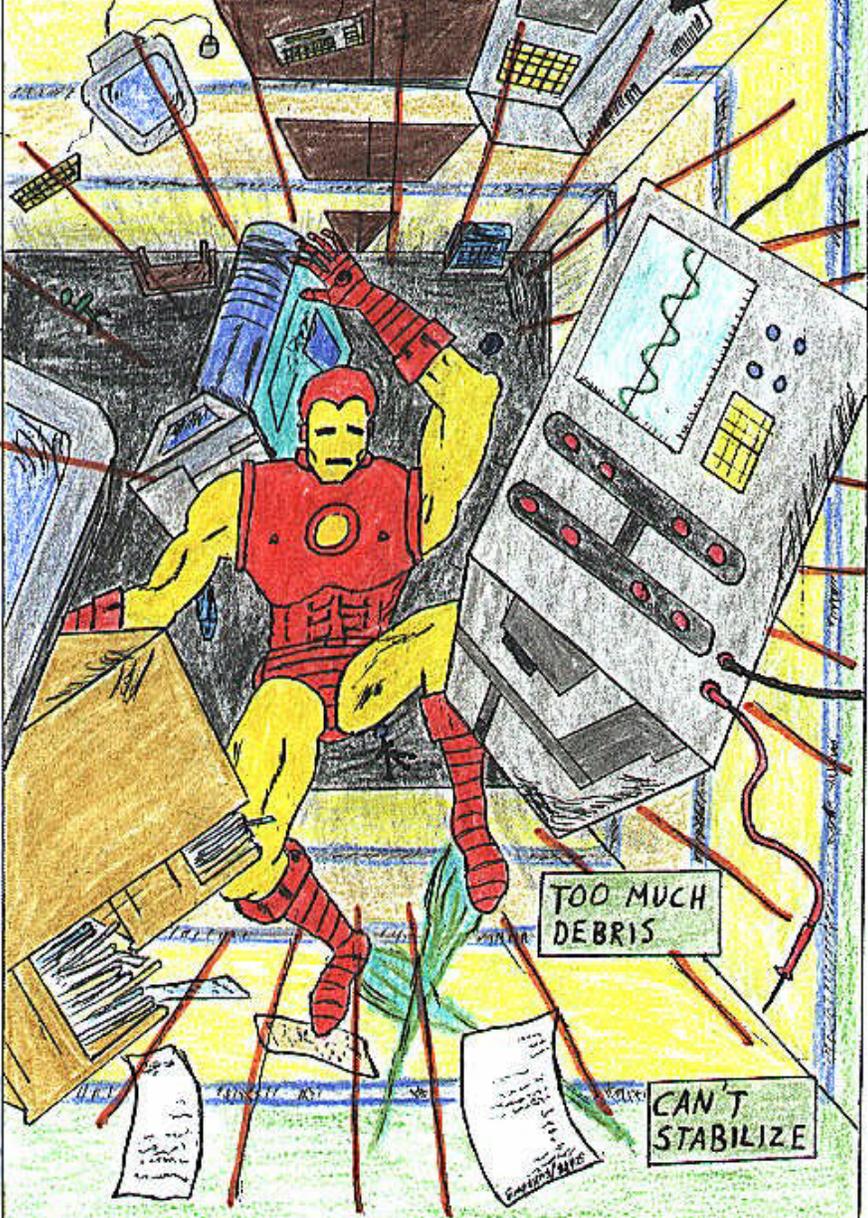
HE'S GONE...  
OR INVISIBLE



...THIS IS  
GOODBY...



IT WAS A TRAP, HE IMMATERIAL-  
IZED ALL THREE FLOORS AT ONCE!



CRASH  
OUCH



WANG, ARE THE MOTION  
DETECTORS PICKING UP  
ANYTHING?



SHE'S  
DEAD!



DON'T MISS THE EXCITING  
CONCLUSION IN A.I.#53!

Yet Another Tantalizing and Nutritious...



By HEATH McKNIGHT

## IRON MAN

Not much new, but Marvel had a poster at a licensing show with their movies and the years they're coming out. For 2004 and beyond, **IRON MAN** is listed there. To recap: **Tim McCanlies** (THE IRON GIANT) is writing, **Don Murphy** of Angry Films is producing and **New Line Cinema** is releasing. That's all I know (and I really really really wish I could direct it).



## SPIDER-MAN

The teaser trailer is out. Go find it, darn it! IT ROCKS! *The film costs over \$150 million* and most of that's going to effects! You REALLY DO swing around with Spidey!!!!

## HULK

**Ang Lee** is directing. In his BMW film, CHOSEN, Clive Owen's character (this guy should play James Bond, I'm telling you!) is given a bandaid by a GOLDEN CHILD-like little kid, and lo and behold, it's a Hulk bandaid. How cute.

## BLADE 2: BLOODHUNT

It's shooting in Prague and hopefully will rock. **Guillermo Del Toro** is directing with **Wesley Snipes** starring again as bad-ass Blade. Apparently **Kris Kristofferson's** character Whistler is back...wow, that's weird. Oh, and the vampires team up with Blade to fight an evil force!



**WHAAT? WE'RE HUMAN??**

## X-MEN 2

Rumors are about that the **Sentinels will be human**...okay, that just sucks ass! THEY'RE GIANT ROBOTS, HOT DAMMIT! ARGH! Someone get X-Men fan and producer **Tom DeSantos** on the phone, he'll fix this right up...oh, wait, he wasn't brought back...Man, this one might suck without him...At least **Bryan Singer** is coming back.

## GHOST RIDER

**Nicolas Cage** (once up for Tony Stark and Superman) is in final negotiations

and maybe even has already signed on. **Stephen Norrington** and **David S. Goyer** are directing and writing, respectively (BLADE). Should be fun. \$75 million budget with **Bernie Wrightson** doing sketches! YEAH!

## BATMAN YEAR ONE AND BEYOND

Two live action films, one is being directed by **Darren Aronofsky** (REQUIEM FOR A DREAM, one of the strangest and darkest films ever) is directing and writing the script with **Frank Miller**. Oh, man, that's gonna rock! BEYOND is being directed by **Boaz Yakin** (REMEMBER THE TITANS. Huh? I'm trying to forget!!!) Who knows what will first happen.

## MATRIX RELOADED and part 3

Both out next year. Same cast and crew, shooting in LA and Australia.

## STAR WARS 2: HEATH STRIKES BACK

Um, okay, it isn't called that, but **Ewan MacGregor** said this script by **Lucas** and **Jonathan Hales** is better than the first. Thank God! Expect big effects and little substance (or maybe a better movie).

Sorry, George, but I just got lost on what THE PHANTOM MENACE was all about: A kids' movie, a political movie or a space opera.



Well, that's all I can think of...Oh, go to [www.mpsdigital.com](http://www.mpsdigital.com) to find out about my

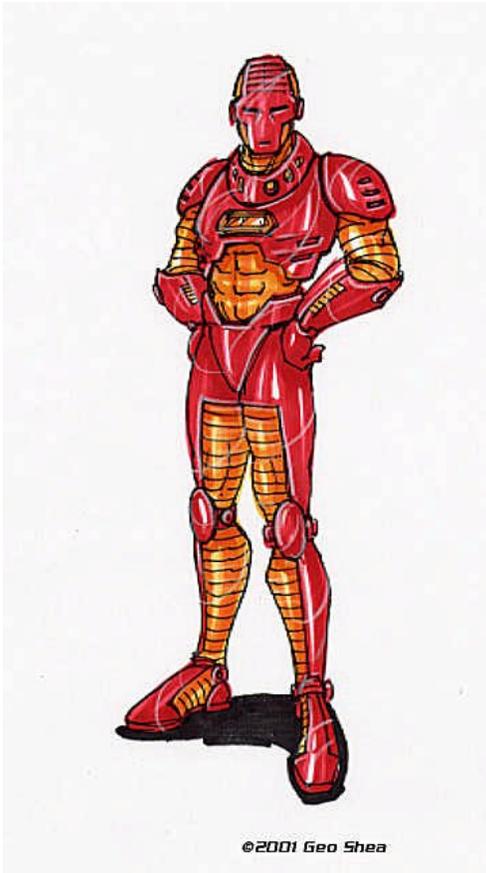
first movie **SKYE FALLING**, premiering July 30 (or go to [www.skyefalling.com](http://www.skyefalling.com)) and news about our new feature **UNTITLED**, my non-linear anonymous movie.

I quit the comic **IRON MAN** until someone good is on again. CRAP is all I can say, ARGH! **Flash** is terrific (very cool writing and art straight outta Vertigo), **Peter Parker Spider-Man** by Paul Jenkins is amazing (he's the best writer I've read in a while), **Captain America** still rocks (I love America and feel great reading it, even if it is the same stuff issue after issue -- too bad **Bob Layton's** leaving after issue 50...); **Amazing Spidey** by J. Michael Strazynsky (spelling??) is too wordy and not enough...substance, I guess, but I still like it. All in all, it SUCKS without a good monthly dose of Iron. I'm getting ANEMIC! HELP! Where's my back-issues at...So, in conclusion I am still —

**HEATH McKNIGHT**  
[heath@mpsdigital.com](mailto:heath@mpsdigital.com)



*(Editor's Note: Thanks to [MARTINAC00@aol.com](mailto:MARTINAC00@aol.com) for the Iron Man movie poster at the beginning of this article!)*



# TECH WATCH

## *STARK CREATES IT, TECHWATCH REPORTS IT*

**The new millennium has arrived, and there is more to come.**

I always thought that Marvel has been afraid to use nanotechnology (i.e. Hardware or X-O Manowar) in an Iron Man armor for fear that it would radically depart from the idea, the essence of Iron Man. Almost as if something so malleable would not be thought of as IRON. Clearly this is not the case, and advancing technology (real world and comic book) has left the powers that be with little choice.

The newest Iron Man armor (TechWatch Designation Model 12) utilizes many fan suggestions for weapons and devices and SynthKinetic Interfacing Nanofluid, or S.K.I.N. SKIN has been described as many things. It is “a flexible elastic alloy” and the “cutting edge in polymer based nano-tech smart alloy design”. It is lightweight but very dense, and harder than titanium whose strength approaches low-grade adamantium. It is liquid metal circuitry that shapes around the object its forming around into a nearly adamantium-hard shell. SKIN

can be contracted to fit into a small container, or stretched and shaped into another form. By placing a camera or a digital locator on the delivery device, SKIN can be interlaces with thousands of micro G.P.S. circuits and anti-grav units, thus making it completely remote controllable, traceable, trackable, and maneuverable.



TechWatch believes SKIN is simply a polymer of low grade adamantium strength made up of nanites in which other circuitry (e.g. repulsors, anti-grav units, camouflage/chameleon circuits, energy induction circuits) can be incorporated. This is comparable to X-O Manowar armor. Going by this definition (as seen in Issue #26, the entire armor would flow from a “ball” or shape of SKIN into the armor. However, Issue #42



& #44 would appear that most armaments and devices of the armor are separate components that physically fit onto the suit of SKIN. Hopefully this distinction will be made clear in future issues, especially with the new creative team.

A catalog of the features of the new armor, as outlined in Issue #44, with heavy editing and explanations by TechWatch, follows

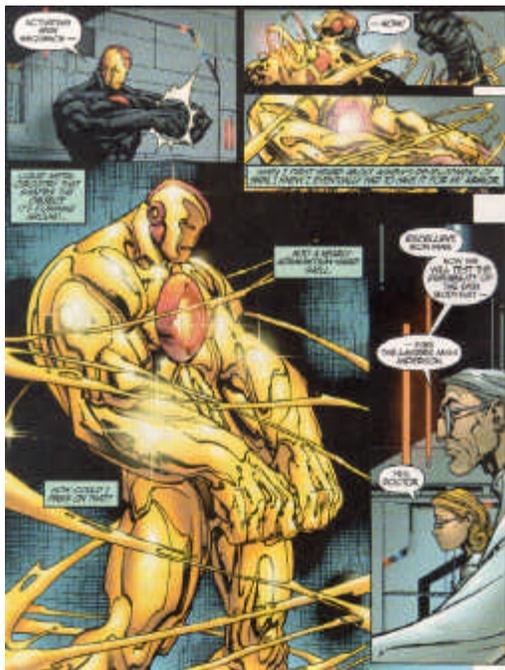
**Smart Bombs** - Robotic Probes housed in gauntlets and serve the dual function of flying weapons and sensor array.

**Energy Shield** - The energy shield is the same technology using in Captain America's energy shield. The energy shield is emitted from the armor's gauntlet and can also be reshaped into a blade and undoubtedly other shapes. A low-power version of the shield can be spread over the entire armor.

**Chameleon Effect/Cloak** - (The cloak is very similar to the version made famous on Star Trek as in it can only work when the weapons aren't firing or when the armor is in a combat mode.) It renders the armor invisible to the human eye and undetectable by most sensors. Cloaking utilized a great deal of energy and can only be utilized when armor is not in combat, or is not performing other strenuous activity.

**Holographic Projector** - Unit that projects holograms and illusions, usually for distraction of enemies. Also used for projecting schematics, maps, and information (as in Iron Man #24)

**Energy Absorber** - (Energy Induction Unit) External converter that transforms

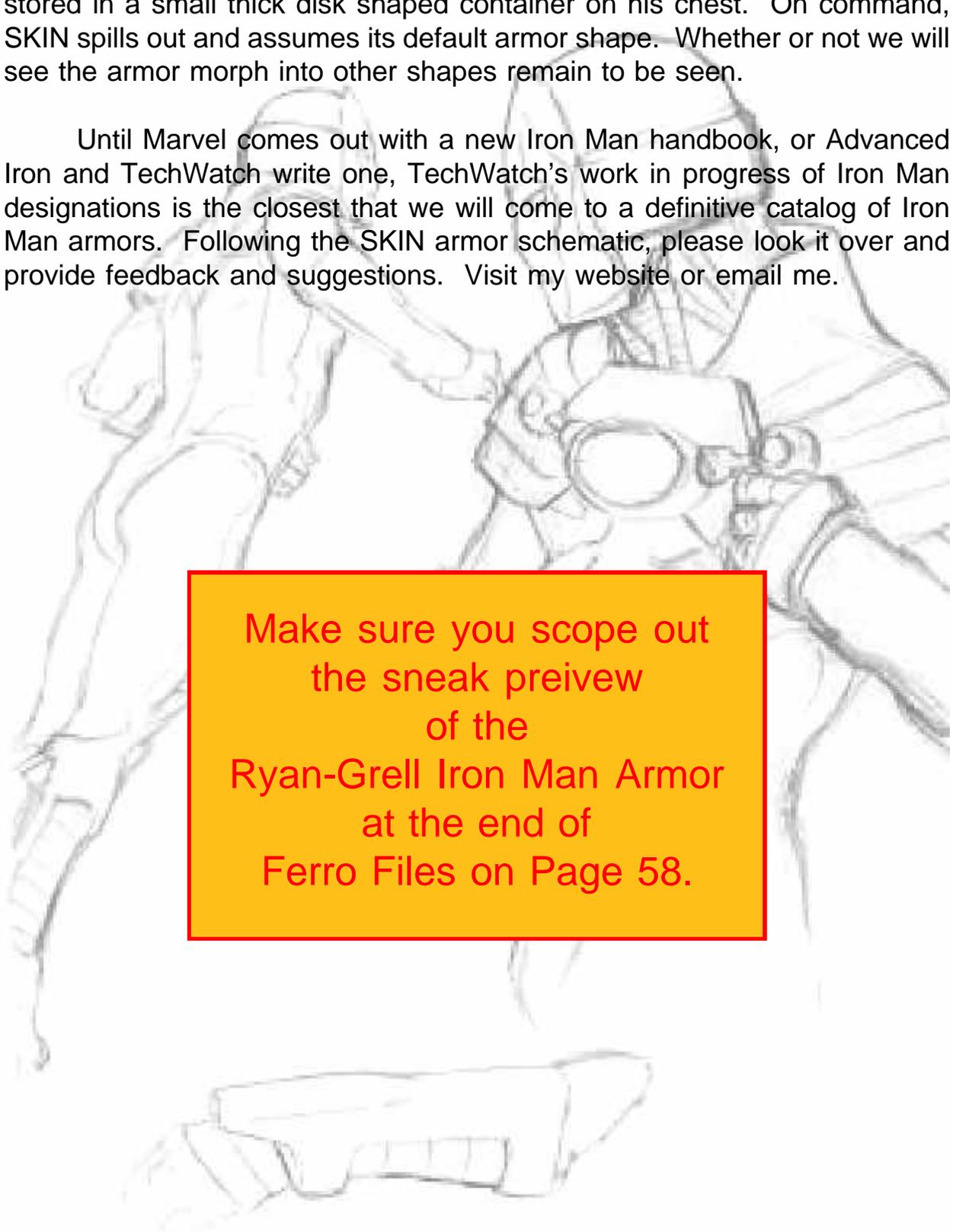


a variety of energy forms into power that can be utilized by the armor. The absorber allows Iron Man to focus energy blast through the armor's Unibeam. (This is simply the original "Thermocouple" device that Busiek renamed "Energy Induction Unit")

**SKIN Armor** - The gold areas of the Iron Man armor now consist of SKIN. SKIN is a flexible, elastic polymer composed of nanites that give it its fluid like nature. It is lightweight but very dense. It is harder than titanium with strength close to low-grade adamantium. SKIN can be contracted to fit into a small container or stretched,

shaped, and morphed into various form. The alloy's mysterious properties were developed by Askew Technologies and the exact elements incorporated in the armor remain unknown. Stark has set up the SKIN of his armor to be stored in a small thick disk shaped container on his chest. On command, SKIN spills out and assumes its default armor shape. Whether or not we will see the armor morph into other shapes remain to be seen.

Until Marvel comes out with a new Iron Man handbook, or Advanced Iron and TechWatch write one, TechWatch's work in progress of Iron Man designations is the closest that we will come to a definitive catalog of Iron Man armors. Following the SKIN armor schematic, please look it over and provide feedback and suggestions. Visit my website or email me.



Make sure you scope out  
the sneak preivew  
of the  
Ryan-Grell Iron Man Armor  
at the end of  
Ferro Files on Page 58.

Hardware

<http://go.to/omniware>, [iamHardware@cs.com](mailto:iamHardware@cs.com)

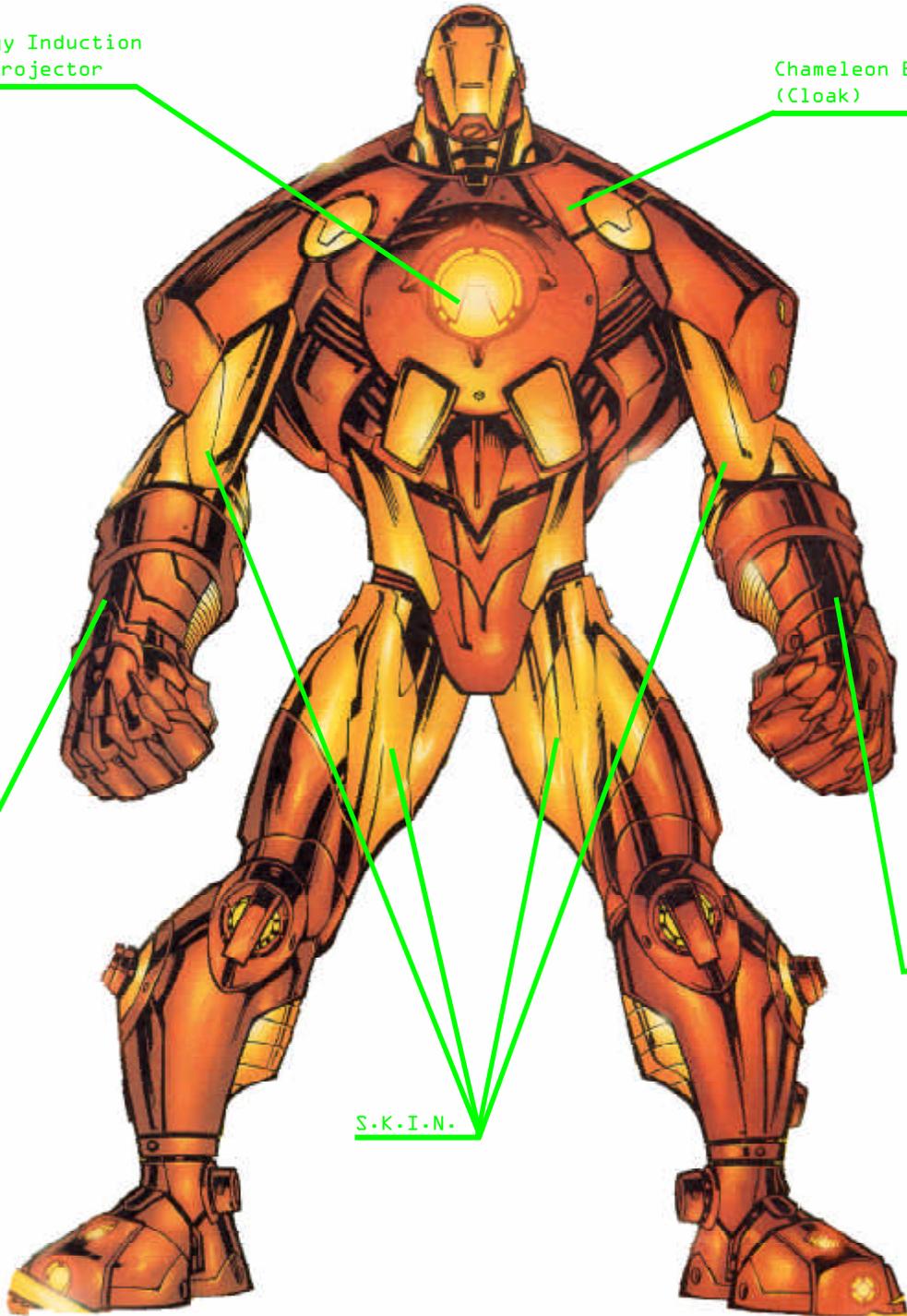
UniBeam/Energy Induction  
Holographic Projector

Chameleon Effect  
(Cloak)

Energy  
Shield/Blade

Smart Bombs/  
Robotic Probes

S.K.I.N.



Iron Man Model 12  
(TechWatch Designation)  
Popular Nomenclature:  
**S.K.I.N. Armor**

# Iron Man Armor Designations

Popular Name	Other Names	First Ap	TECHWATCH DESIGNATIONS	A. I.	Marvel Handbook	Iron Manual
Original Gray		TOS#39	Iron Man Model 01	Mark 01	Iron Man Armored, Flying Unit Mark I	Mod I Mark I
Golden Armor		TOS#40	Iron Man Model 02	Mark 02	Iron Man Armored, Flying Unit Mark II	Mod I Mark III
First Red & Gold		TOS#48	Iron Man Model 03	Mark 03	Iron Man Armored, Flying Unit Mark III	Mod II Mark I/IA
Second Red & Gold	Proto-Classic	TOS#56	Iron Man Model 04	Mark 04	Iron Man Armored, Flying Unit Mark IV	Mod III Mark I
Classic		TOS#65	Iron Man Model 05	Mark 05	Iron Man Armored, Flying Unit Mark V	Mod IV Mark I
Space Armor I		IM#142	<b>SPECIALITY: Space Armor Version I</b>			Mod V Mark I
Stealth Armor I		IM#152	<b>SPECIALITY: Stealth Armor Version I</b>			Mod VII Mark I
Alcohol 2nd Gray	Recovery Armor	IM#190?	Iron Man Model X-1	Mark 06		
Silver/Centurion		IM#200	Iron Man Model 06	Mark 07	Iron Man Armored, Flying Unit Mark VI	Mod VIII Mark I
Deep Sea Armor		IM#218	<b>SPECIALITY: Deep Sea Armor</b>			Mod VI Mark I
Stealth Armor II		IM#229	<b>SPECIALITY: Stealth Armor Version II</b>			
New Red & Gold		IM#231	Iron Man Model 07	Mark 08	Iron Man Armored, Flying Unit Mark VII	Mod IX Mark I
Space Armor II		IM#278	<b>SPECIALITY: Space Armor Version II</b>			Mod X Mark I
War Mach I		IM#282	<b>SPECIALITY: Variable Threat Model</b>	Mark 10		Mod XI Mark I
War Mach II	Rhodes's Armor	IM#284	<b>SPECIALITY: Variable Threat Model II</b>			Mod XI Mark II
Tele-Presence		IM#290	<b>SPECIALITY: Neuromimetic Telepresence Unit 150</b>	Mark 09		
Modular	NFL Armor	IM#300	Iron Man Model 08	Mark 11		
Hulkbuster Armor		IM#304	<b>SPECIALITY: Hulkbuster Armor</b>			
Heavy Metal	Crossing Armor	IM#318	Iron Man Model 09			
Artic Armor		IM#317	<b>SPECIALITY: SubZero Artic Climate Armor</b>	Mark 12		
Retro Armor	Teen Tony Armor	IM#325	---	Mark 13		
Heroes Reborn	Promeithium Armor	IMv2#1	---	Mark 15		
Heroes Return		IMv3#1	Iron Man Model 10	Mark 16	Iron Man Armored, Flying Unit Mark VIII	
Prototype Safe		FFv3#14	Iron Man Model X-2	Mark 17		
Safe/Sentient		IMv3#14?	Iron Man Model 11	Mark 18		
Space Armor III	Heroes Return 2	BB#4	<b>SPECIALITY: Space Armor Version III</b>			
Junkyard/Beta		IMv3#42	Iron Man Model X-2			
S.K.I.N. Armor		IMv3#44	Iron Man Model 12			



# ADVANCED BROON



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