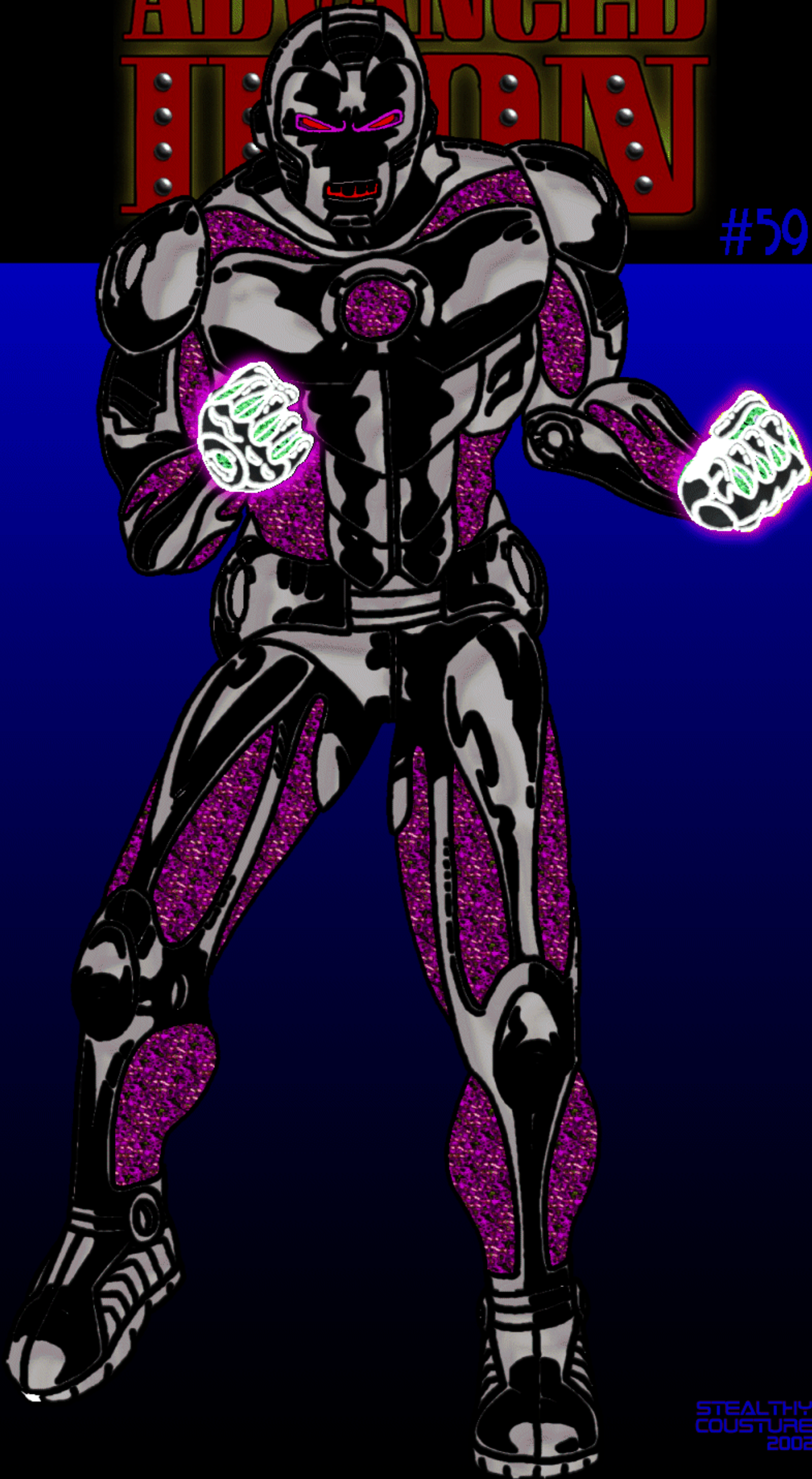


ADVANCED MORBID

#59



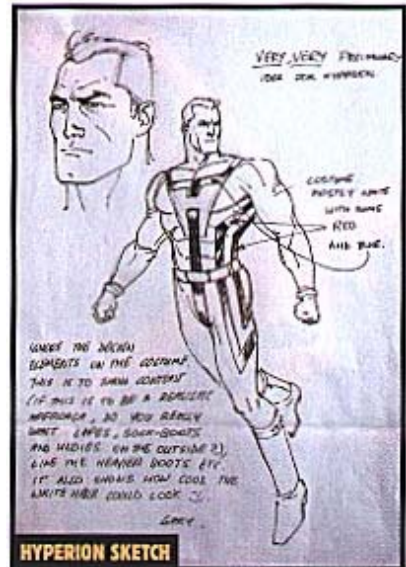
HUBE'S SHELLHEADISMS



THE NEW NOT-FOR-KIDS SQUADRON SUPREME

Well, looks as if my fears have been realized. (Big thanks to **Mike Kalibabky** for sending me a recent *Wizard* article on this, by the way!) In the last A.I., I yapped about the new **SQUADRON SUPREME** series coming up this spring scripted by **J. Michael Strazynski** and penciled by current AVENGERS artist **Gary Franks**. According to the article, the SS will be a **MAX** title and it *will* be a whole new take on the alternate-universe super-team. “[It] will be quite a departure from writer **Mark Gruenwald’s** classic 12-issue 1985-86 maxi-series, which defined the Squadron,” *Wizard* states. Strazynski notes that he’ll “trace the beginning of the team, from the arrival of [Superman knock-off] **Hyperion** as an infant, and how that event changes the world.”

However, it doesn’t sound all *that* different from what the late, great Gruenwald did with the SS. Strazynski states that the series will be called “**Supreme Power**” because “it echoes the adage that ‘**Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.**’” Didn’t the 1985 series do that? In it, the SS instituted their so-called “Utopia Program” whereby the team assumed control of the United States and vowed to wipe out crime, unemployment and even death! Founding team member **Nighthawk** vigorously dissented with the program, and eventually led a team of his own super-powered beings to confront the SS and dismantle the Utopia Program. The SS learned their lesson, and two one-shots, “**Death of Universe**” and “**New World Order**” (scripted by former **IRON MAN** great **Len Kaminski**) dealt with the aftermath of Gruenwald’s 12-issue series.



So? *Wizard* says the series will be a “departure,” but then the crux of what Strazynski says seems pretty analogous to Gruenwald’s overall SS plot. It *will* be cool to see the beginning of the team (which, to my knowledge, has never been fully explained in any Marvel comic – only touched upon), new costumes (check

SINISTER had the same names and costumes as their alternate-Earth counterparts, that's where all similarities end. (The *SINISTER Hyperion* plays an important role in the Gruenwald Squadron *Supreme* series, by the way. Following all this?) **Iron Man** battles **Dr. Spectrum** at the Taj Mahal and this is the first time we see him nail Spectrum with his **uni-beam's ultraviolet setting** to win the scuffle!



“Sinister” Dr. Spectrum.

It is the **Dr. Spectrum** of this **Squadron SINISTER** that is seen in **IM's** own pages, specifically #63-67 (volume 1). His ID is revealed to be one **Dr. Obatu**, an African economics minister. His Grandmaster-induced origin is detailed in **IRON MAN #65** (volume 1, natch!).

It is after this that Marvel's editors and/or writers apparently get confused. **AVENGERS #141**, written by **Steve Englehart**, has on its [classic] cover “*The Avengers...vs. the Squadron Sinister!*” (Oh how I loved that

cover! I remember buying a notebook for school that had this #141 cover on its front. I think it was 5th grade... It was drawn by **Gil Kane** and **John Romita Sr.**)

But, as the **Whizzer** tells the Avengers at the climatic confrontation, “*That's ‘Supreme’ – not ‘Sinister,’ Avengers! Just so you’ll know who creamed you!*” There’s even a footnote noting **AVENGERS #85-86** which I just discussed above! **Capt. America** even notes the differences between the two teams on the very next panel! (By the way – “creamed” is just what **Iron Man** gets – the Whizzer dispatches of him in just a few panels. But, **Shellhead** gets revenge in **AVENGERS #147** zapping Whiz with a repulsor before he’s ready!) But two issues later, **Iron Man** tells the **Scarlet Witch** “*You know Wanda, I could’ve used your hubby (the Vision) in my solo battle with Dr. Spectrum!*” **IRON MAN #63-66** is footnoted. But these Dr. Spectrums are separate entities! Further, in **AVENGERS #148**, while being crushed by a huge Dr.



Whizzer nails Iron Man! Ouch!

Spectrum power prism-created hand, **Iron Man** zaps Spec with his ultra-violet beam and states, “*Voilà Doctor: my ultra-violet beam! I’m sure you remember it!*” A footnote is made to **IRON MAN #64**. Once again – editorial confusion! How can the Dr. Spectrum in **AVENGERS #148**



remember **IM's** tactic? And how would **Iron Man** not realize this Spectrum is a different dude? Don't the Avengers have detailed files of all their encounters?

The Squadron *Supreme* **Dr. Spectrum**, by the way, is **Joe Ledger** – hot-shot astronaut who encountered a crippled **Skrull** spaceship and rescued its lone occupant. This Skrull, whose English equivalent name is “**Skymax**,” donates a **power prism** to Ledger out of gratitude, and eventually both Ledger and Skymax become founding members of the Squadron Supreme!



“Supreme” Joe Ledger

It's not until **Kurt Busiek** took over with **Volume 3 AVENGERS** that the Squadron Supreme again

took on Earth's Mightiest. If you've any doubt that Busiek is a big fan of those Englehart issues, just compare vol. 3 #5-6 and vol. 1 #141-144 and #147-149. Heck, the cover to vol. 3 #6 is a complete homage to vol. 1 #141!

In vol. 3 #5, **Iron Man** has the misfortune of choosing **Power Princess** to fight. She easily blocks **IM's** repulsors with her flying shield, and then pummels him



into the ocean! (Page 19 also features another Busiek homage to Englehart – **Hawkeye** nails the **Whizzer** with a boomerang arrow in exactly the same way

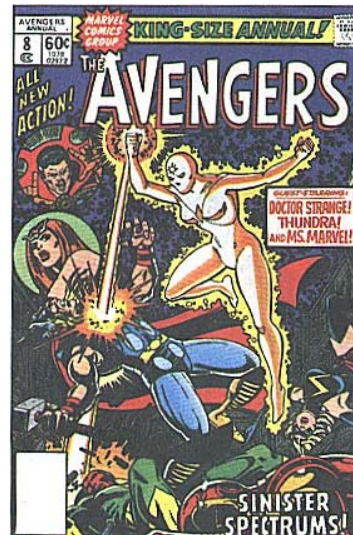
Cap knocked out Whiz in AVENGERS #148! Hawk even mentions the #148 trick in the dialogue!) In vol. 3 #6, **IM** is just as ineffectual against the Whizzer – his armor’s targeting computers cannot lock onto the speedster, and when Whiz makes a sudden 90° turn, **IM** crashes through a wall! Yeesh! (Hmm...sort of sounds like Busiek’s **Iron Man** in **IM’s** own title: *ineffectual*.)



Shellhead finds a way home for the SS.

But hold the fort! In **AVENGERS/SQUADRON SUPREME ANNUAL 1998**, the two super-teams join forces to battle nine-foot tall **Imus Champion**. Following their victory, **Iron Man** discovers a Champion artifact dubbed an “**Nth Projector**” – a dimension-splitting device which sends the Squadron home to their own Earth! At last! **Shellhead** makes himself useful!

Those of you that have **Shellhead’s** early battle with **Doc Spectrum** in **IM #63-66** know that **IM** crushed the Doc’s Power Prism with a handy jet-boot! Years later in **AVENGERS ANNUAL #8**, a foolish **Hank Pym** reassembles these pieces – and gives the malevolent jewel to his wife, the **Wasp**, as a birthday gift! Hei-LLOOOO!!! Needless to say, the prism’s Skrull intelligence takes over Mrs. Pym! It later takes over **Thor**, but **IM** is instrumental in defeating the controlled Thunder God, tricking him into fighting without his hammer for longer than 60 seconds, causing him to revert back to humble **Dr. Don Blake!**



Another interesting Avengers-Squadron Supreme tidbit: **THE OFFICIAL MARVEL INDEX TO THE AVENGERS #3** (under issue #148) notes that members of the corporate cartel (possessed by the evil **Serpent Crown**) that controlled the Squadron’s United States include big-time **Iron Man** baddies **Obidiah Stane** and **Justin Hammer!** A check of the few panels that the cartel is seen, however, reveals no one who looks like the Stane and Hammer we know and hate.

My eBay quest for Squadron stories is not quite finished, however. I still have to nail down several **QUASAR** issues that follow the Squadron DEATH OF A

UNIVERSE graphic novel. They explain how the SS ended up marooned in our universe (it essentially was the doing of their arch-nemesis, **Master Menace**).

IRON MAN EDITOR TOM BREVOORT – SEEING THE LIGHT?

Recently, in an interview with the online comics news site [The Pulse](#), **IM** editor **Tom Brevoort** basically came out and said that the current direction of the magazine hasn't exactly been up to snuff:

“IRON MAN is a book that hasn't quite been performing the way we hoped it would. We've been a little bit scattershot in our direction and in terms of realizing our goals. SO we've all been thinking about this extensively the last couple of months, and now we think we've got it.”



Tom Brevoort

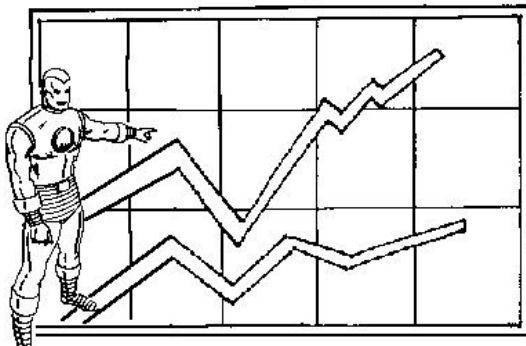
What does this mean, Iron Fans? Has our dissatisfaction been heard? I would venture to say **“You betcha”!!!**

And this is the best part: Brevoort and his assistant(s) have been listening and now they're doing something about it. Just look at the number of “negative” letters they have been printing in **“Iron Filings”** lately. They don't have to do that. Nor does Brevoort have to admit in an interview what he said above. You gotta credit Mr.

B. for having the *cojones* to do this. What does Tom offer as a “solution” to the **IM** “problem?”

“MANHUNT begins, in which an embassy in Washington is bombed, and upon surveying the wreckage, it's discovered that a Stark-manufactured weapon was used in the attack. And things get worse for Tony Stark and Iron Man from there -- the first chapter has one of the grimmest cliffhangers in the series to date. So look for the five-part MANHUNT storyline starting in IRON MAN #65 in February. For all those readers who haven't been too wild with the current state of the series: we think we've got it all figured out now. So let us know if we're right.”

OK, Mr. B.! You can be sure we'll do exactly that! And we know you'll be listening. Thank you for that!

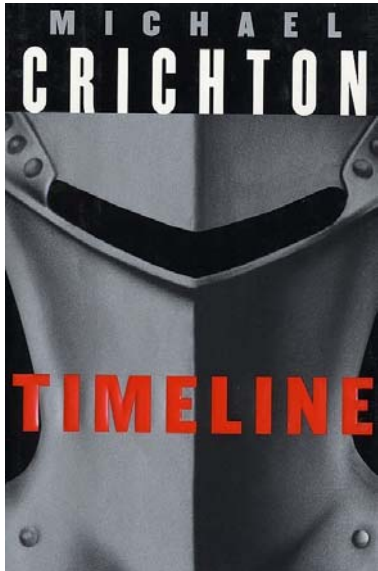


IT'S JUST A COINCIDENCE, RIGHT?

IRON MAN SALES RANK STATUS FOR JANUARY: STATUS QUO!

The above is based on **Diamond Distributors'** January rankings. **IRON MAN #64** ranks **#43** in retail sales, which is how much sales revenue the issue produces. **IM** has more or less held steady in the 40s and 50s over the last year or so.

Another reason why **Mighty Mike Kalibabky** is the best friggin' Iron Fan on Earth: I got an e-mail from Mr. K. asking me if I was familiar with the **Michael Crichton** novel *Timeline*. I wasn't, so I surfed over to [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and checked out the book synopsis. It reads as follows (the red text is added by me for hopefully obvious reasons):



When you step into a time machine, fax yourself through a "quantum foam wormhole," and step out in feudal France circa 1357, be very, very afraid. If you aren't strapped back in precisely 37 hours after your visit begins, you'll miss the quantum bus back to 1999 and be stranded in a civil war, caught between crafty abbots, mad lords, and peasant bandits all eager to cut your throat. You'll also have to dodge catapults that hurl sizzling pitch over castle battlements. On the social front, you should avoid provoking "the butcher of Crecy" or Sir Oliver may lop your head off with a swoosh of his broadsword or cage and immerse you in "Milady's Bath," a brackish dungeon pit into which live rats are tossed now and then for prisoners to eat.

This is the plight of the heroes of *Timeline*, Michael Crichton's thriller. They're historians in 1999 employed by a tech billionaire-genius with more than a few of Bill Gates's most unlovable quirks. Like the entrepreneur in Crichton's *Jurassic Park*, Doniger plans a theme park featuring artifacts from a lost world revived via cutting-edge science. When the project's chief historian sends a distress call to 1999 from 1357, the boss man doesn't tell the younger historians the risks they'll face trying to save him. At first, the interplay between eras is clever, but *Timeline* swiftly becomes a swashbuckling old-fashioned adventure, with just a dash of science and time paradox in the mix. Most of the cool facts are about the Middle Ages, and Crichton marvelously brings the past to life without ever letting the pulse-pounding action slow down. At one point, a time-tripper tries to enter the Chapel of Green Death. Unfortunately, its custodian, a crazed giant with terrible teeth and a bad case of lice, soon has her head on a block. "She saw a shadow move across the grass as he raised his ax into the air." I dare you not to turn the page!

Hey, is it me or does this plot sound eerily familiar? 'Nuff said.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN IRON MAN BLOWS?

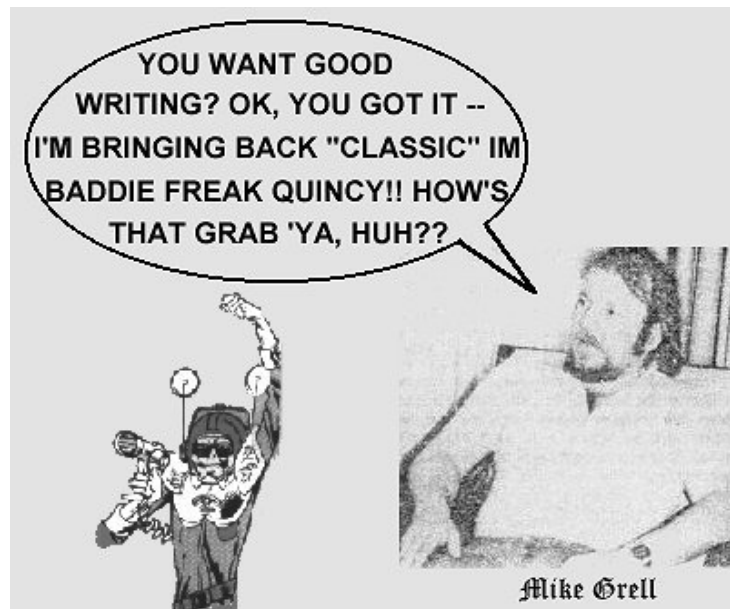
This is a frequently asked question, of course. Some people say, "Drop the book altogether." Well, I personally can't do that. I'm too caught up in the character's history that even if I *did* skip **IM**, I'd come back eventually and pick up issues that I skipped as back-issues. But here are a few [probably obvious] suggestions:

1. **Write to Marvel.** A lot. Tell them how dissatisfied you are. A lot. Marvel has shown they have the *cojones* to print "pan" letters, to their credit. And they listen. Just look at what [Tom Brevoort](#) said earlier in this article. The internet has played a *huge* role in this regard.

2. **Buy other Iron Man-related books.** Like **AVENGERS. THE ULTIMATES**. Even check out limited series like **THE ULTIMATE WAR**.

AVENGERS has been very good as of late, most recently featuring a Squadron-Supreme-esque yarn where Earth's Mightiest took over world authority during a global crisis; in addition, upcoming **SQUADRON SUPREME** artist **Gary Frank** has penciled the last two issues, #61 and 62. #61 was sensational: the Avengers become a *sovereign nation* in the eyes of the United Nations, but this doesn't sit very well with the United States government! The interludes, from **Cap** giving the arrogant **Henry Gyrich** a "last chance," to the **Vision** getting his picture taken, to **Iron Man** berating the **Black Panther** – just great, great stuff!

THE ULTIMATES – the "ultimate" treatment of the Avengers (as if you didn't know, and if not – how come?) – is in my opinion the best comic currently being put forth by Marvel. Brand new handlings of some of your fave characters – including **Iron Man** – features some of the best writing and art you'll find today. Comparing the first six issues of **ULTIMATES** (now available in TPB) to **Iron Man's "In Shining Iron,"** for instance, is like comparing **Shakespeare** to **Dick and Jane** readers.



3. **Check out offerings of past Iron Man creators.** **David Michelinie** and **Bob Layton's FUTURE COMICS's** first two titles, **FREEMIND** and **METALLIX**, have many **Shellhead**-related aspects to 'em. The former features an invalid transferring his personality into an android body, and the latter features a "tag-team" hero group who utilize a liquid metallic armor. And long-time Iron Fans will certainly recognize many "homages" to **IM** in Michelinie's writing.

4. **Get a hold of some IRON MAN back-issues.** If you're one of the unfortunates that doesn't have a complete collection of the **Golden Avenger**, then go out and get some of the more worthy mags from the past! Don't know which ones to get? Check out my [Recommendation Index](#) to get a good idea. Where can you *track down* the good issues? If you live light-years from a comic shop and there's no way for you to get to a comic convention where great deals are always available, my suggestion is to get registered on [eBay](#). That's how I finished off my **IM** collection, and I got some awesome bargains! (For instance, I nabbed **IM** vol. 1 #s 5-8 all in very fine condition for \$28.00!)

A BRIEF "BUSIEK BIT"

I e-mailed **Kurt Busiek** and asked him two questions about the "evil" **War Machine** of early **volume 3 IRON MAN**:

- Was the War Machine armor that **Parnell** found *definitely* the one that Rhodey apparently "**lost**" in the time stream (from his own series)?

Answer: "That was certainly my intent, yes."

Finally! This was never *definitively* established, merely implied. But now we know. The only "glitch" in this is that the armor **Parnell Jacobs** discovered didn't have a uni-beam, whereas the **WM** armor that dematerialized off of Rhodey in **WAR MACHINE vol. 1 #17** had a uni-beam. Any No-Prize ideas to "resolve" this discrepancy, Iron Fans?

- What (if anything) did you have in mind for **Parnell/War Machine** in the future, since he escaped in **IM vol. 3 #20**?

Answer: "No firm plans, but figured we'd bring him back at some point."



And how 'bout this: Remember that **Stuart Clarke** character who assisted Parnell with some of the **WM** armor's enhancements? Well, Kurt confirmed for me that it was Clarke himself who once donned a powerful **exo-skeleton** (at right) and beat the living crap out of some of Marvel's most powerful heroes! I can't believe I didn't think of this before (did anyone else?) – Clarke was



once the villain **Rampage**, and he defeated single-handedly the '70s super group the **Champions!!** For you younger Marvel fans out there, the Champions initially consisted of the **Angel**, **Iceman**, **Black Widow**, **Ghost Rider** and **Hercules**. They were financed by Warren Worthington's (Angel's) vast

family fortune. See if you can snag **IRON MAN ANNUAL #4** from 1977 if 'ya don't believe me – **Shellhead** teams up with the Champs to battle **MODOK!**

And now...a moment with **IRON MAN** inker **SEAN PARSONS!!**

I e-mailed Sean a few questions so Iron Fans could get to know him a bit better, and he graciously agreed despite his way-busy schedule:

HUBE: When did you start working at Marvel?

SEAN: I first started working for Marvel in November of 1996. I had just left **Rob Liefeld's** studio where I had spent the last 18 months working under some really great inkers. **Tom Brevoort** gave me my first gig inking **Dietch Smith**. He was also with me at Rob's studio. We did **MARVEL TEAM-UP # 6** (Spiderman vs. Hulk).

HUBE: What titles have you worked on at Marvel?

SEAN: That's tough, because I have done so much pick-up work and fill-in stuff. I have worked on **Generation-X**, **Uncanny X-Men**, **Gambit**, **Hulk**, **Marvelboy**, **X-Men: Black Sun**, and of course, **IRON MAN**.

HUBE: Where else have you worked in the art field, comics or otherwise?

SEAN: Mostly over at DC and Image. I have done some inked designs for t-shirts featuring the **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**, **The Goonies** and **Edward Scissorhands**.

HUBE: On **IRON MAN**, you've worked with **Sean Chen** and now **Michael Ryan**. Can you comment on each of their styles?

SEAN: I had a really good time inking Sean, I just didn't have the experience then that I have now. Having said that, Ryan is an animal with the pencil. He puts so much on the page I think he hates me sometimes! I really love it though. I think Michael is much more background intense and has an animated quality to his figure work. Both artists are more graphic design-oriented than illustration influenced. Both are really talented.

HUBE: I was initially not too "high" on your #50-present run work b/c I thought the inks were too heavy. But on #62 it seems the inks were absolutely perfect. I'm just dying to know -- is it my imagination or did you actually make any conscious "changes"?

SEAN: Absolutely. Michael and I have both been on an unending search for what we both want our work to feel like. Michael had drawn some heavy

contours on certain things in the **2001 Annual** and in **#50**. I had always been a very thin lined inker and when I was given the heavy "JOE MAD"- type lines, I took it to the extreme and inked it twice as thick as anyone wanted. I was unhappy with the result, but Michael was nice enough to not freak out about it. He never asked me to do it again though. HAHHA! My tools have changed since we started working on **Iron Man** too. I used to ink primarily with a nib, and I have switched to a lot more brush work in the last year. There is a regular increase in quality which I think shows through about every three months.

HUBE: Can you tell us anything about the current **IM armor's capabilities** (ie, weapons, defenses, other paraphernalia)?



Sean Parsons

SEAN: Nope! I wish I could say something on this subject, but I can't. I really am a bit in the dark. I know that Michael has some great ideas in his head for what the suit can do, and in our little world, the suit does some really bad-a** stuff. Tony just isn't using them in his current situations in the book. I hope Michael gets a chance to show some of the things he is thinking about.

HUBE: May I change the subject and ask more about you? Our readers always like to know more about the "person" behind their fave character. How old are you? Where do you currently reside?

SEAN: I'm 29 until mid-January. I have been back in Ohio for the last year. This is where I was born and raised. Prior to moving back here a year ago, I spent the last seven years in southern California. I lived in Orange County, about a half hour south of Los Angeles.

HUBE: You've mentioned your family on the **IMMB**. Kids are awesome (I have an 8 year-old daughter). How many kids do you have and how old are they?

SEAN: That is too funny! I have an eight year old daughter as well. She just turned eight around Thanksgiving. She loves going to conventions, too. Sadly, she only likes reading *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* books, so I have yet to become her hero.

HUBE: What do you like to do (hobbies) outside of artwork?

SEAN: I really enjoy inking. I even ink samples when I have some spare time. Which is never. I also enjoy carpentry. I am refinishing some antique furniture.

Or I was, before the cold weather hit! I have a small collection of swords, and I hope to start learning to color on the computer this spring.

HUBE: Did you study art in school/college?

SEAN: Only slightly. I studied Life Drawing for one quarter, then dropped out of college because my teacher scoffed at the idea that I could become a comicbook artist and make a living at it.

HUBE: Back to art: Who were the biggest influences (if any) on your style, and why?

SEAN: **Danny Miki.** First and foremost. I really got a lot of experience working as his assistant at Rob's studio. This guy is the texture king. Next would be **Scott Williams.** I doubt there is a inker in the business who started inking after 1991 who hasn't been influenced at least a little by Scott. Which leads to **Terry Austin.** I also learned a lot from **Marlo Alquiza** and **Jon Sibal.** If I can say one positive thing about **Rob Liefeld,** he had an arsenal of really incredible inkers. I also learned a lot from **Art Thibert.** I spent a year or so working for his studio and that was quite an experience.

On another note, I have done my fair share of spreading the gospel of inking myself. A few of my past assistants have gone on to some quite prominent work. Most notably, **Andy Owens,** who is working on **Superman** right now. Talk about the student surpassing the teacher...! Also, I have an incredible assistant right now. And, she is hot to boot. I have been working with **my wife** since 1997. I convinced her to quit her job and come work at home with me. She took to the brush like a champ, laying in my blacks, then later doing all my hardlines (tech, and inorganic backgrounds). It has been a lot of fun working with her. She just started going back to school full time, so that leaves me with more work than I am used to. I just hope she still remembers me when she is a big time web designer.

Thanks for taking the time to get to know me. I hope everyone gets some insight from this. I had fun. See 'ya in the funny books ... Sean.

THIS JUST IN... (items come to light at press time)

- Did I mention that **Mike Kalibabky** is the best friggin' Iron Fan on the planet? He recently sent me a colorized pic of the upcoming Strazynski-Frank **Hyperion** from their upcoming **SQUADRON SUPREME** series. Here it is...
- **IRON MAN** raises prices in April! Yeesh! As of **issue #67**, expect to see **IM** go from \$2.25 to **\$2.99** (U.S. dollars). Twelve other Marvel titles are also affected.



for issue #59:

- **COVER ART** by **Pat Couture** features the new Stealth Armor!
- **A RENAISSANCE OF MAGIC** by **Welshcat** – more awesome CGI art & commentary, this time on IM #209!
- **STARK REMARKS** by **Mike Kalibabky** features a rap w/**David Michelinie** about IRON MAN: BAD BLOOD!
- **AN IRON CHRISTMAS** -- fan fiction by **Chris Frye**!
- **ULTIMATE SILVER CENTURION** Freedom Force Skins by **Sean Smith**!
- **WANDERINGS OF THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN** by **Pat Couture** researches IM's appearances in Fantastic Four!
- **FREEMIND #1 PLOT SYNOPSIS** by **David Michelinie**!
- **TIME NURTURES ALL WOUNDS** fan fiction by **Christian Ruelle**!
- **METAL HEAD** by **Heath McKnight** give you your movie info for the upcoming 2003 season!



Happy 2003! Enjoy!

-Hube

**IRON
MAN**



UNDER THE MYSTIC SPELL OF MORGANA LE FEY!

A Renaissance Of Magic

WELSHCAT © 2002

A Renaissance of Magic

Art Commentary

By Welshcat



Dave Huber's review of Iron Man #209 only gives the story a mere 1 Star, citing the combination of Iron Man and magic as "lame"! However, Shellhead has in fact had a long tradition with the antitheses of sorcery vs technology: Iron Man's arch enemy, the Mandarin is the prime example, and

how can one forget the classic Iron Man #150? Thus, IM #209 is the subject of my latest Iron Man artwork in which I have attempted to re-imagine the basic concept of the storyline.

IRON MAN #209 - THE STORY:

Briefly, the story is as follows: **Morgana (or Morgan) Le Fey** attempts to possess young **Lissa Russell**, sister of **Jack Russell** whose alter ego is **Werewolf by Night**. The reason for this is that Morgana has been eternally imprisoned in Gorre Castle by **Merlin the Magician** and will perish should she ever attempt to escape. Over the years, Morgana has sought to possess various female descendants of the Darkhold Cult, to whom Morgana herself belongs, so that she may once again be free to walk the earth with physical flesh once possession is complete. Lissa Russell happens to be one such person, and has been experiencing strange behaviour and nightmares in which she believes herself to be the modern incarnation of Morgana Le Fey.

Tony Stark encounters Jack and Lissa Russell at a Renaissance Faire in California. Lissa has an uncannily ability to discern that Tony is **Iron Man** as a result of Shellhead's last encounter with Morgana in IM #150. Naturally, when Morgana begins to weave her spell, Tony becomes involved as both he and an increasingly savage Werewolf attempt to rescue Lissa from the clutches of the evil sorceress before it is too late.

ART NOTES



IM #209 has always struck me as bearing a striking similarity to old Hammer Horror movies such as *"Lust For A Vampire"*, to which my version of IM #209 owes a large influence. In *"Lust"*, Mircalla, a beautiful blonde Victorian female student (played by the gorgeous Yutte Stensgaard) at a finishing school for girls turns out to be the modern incarnation of Countess Carmilla Karnstein (notice the anagram in her name), a notorious female vampire from centuries before. It's easy to draw parallels between the comely, blonde Lissa Russell and Mircalla in *"Lust"*.

Similarly, Morgana Le Fey has more than a passing resemblance to scream queens such as Julie Strain, often specialising in vampires herself (in particular, the comic-book heroine, Vampirella) - hence Strain's image has been used for Morgana in this picture.



In *"Lust"*, the male hero of the movie encounters Mircalla near an eerie, surreal forest and falls under her spell. While such an encounter does not actually take place in IM #209, I chose to set the picture in a moonlit, gothic wood to echo the scene from *"Lust"*. Morgana here is both evil

sorceress and beautiful temptress at once, beckoning Iron Man to a gruesome death like a ghostly lover.

On the ground, unconscious at the foot of Morgana, lies the Werewolf, shown here in his semi-transformed state before he has become fully savage. He does not stay this way for very long in the actual story.

Although Iron Man #209 is by no means a classic issue, the story certainly has the potential for an interesting picture full of fantastical, cinematic elements which I hope I've managed to capture.



For the **IRON MAN: BAD BLOOD** four-issue mini-series which appeared in 2000, **David Michelinie** and **Bob Layton** designed two new suits of armor, the **Evader** unit and a state-of-the-art outer-space rig.

Interestingly, the Evader armor seems to have been created as a logical conclusion, or at least extension, of the ongoing **Tony Stark/Justin Hammer** technology conflict: Hammer's taking control of the Iron Man armor during the **"Demon in a Bottle"** storyline, Hammer's illegal acquisition and distribution of Iron Man technology during the original "Stark Wars" (**"Armor Wars"**) epic, and now in **IM: BAD BLOOD** a seemingly twisted and manipulated Tony Stark unknowingly invents and manufactures a set of Evader suits and then delivers them into Hammer's waiting hands!



I asked former Iron Scribe **David Michelinie** a few questions concerning the two "Bad Blood" armors, one question on the **Tony Stark/Steve Rogers reconciliation** after the original Armor Wars, and two questions on **METALLIX**,

David's latest armored project.

KALIBABKY: How did the Evader design and gold & blue color scheme come about, and was there ever any consideration to make this armor a somewhat evil-looking suit to parallel the negative change in personality experienced by Tony Stark?



MICHELINIE: Questions about specific design elements would best be directed to **Bob Layton**, since he was pretty much in charge of all the visuals for that project. But while I don't know if "evil-looking" was a conscious choice, the Evader suits were an indication of Tony's growing aggressiveness and crumbling moral sense. So, as something that came from his mind during this period, it seems logical that they would be a reflection of his mental state.

KALIBABKY: The Evader helmet featured a **head-mounted weapon**, the first ever, as far as I know, for an Iron-Man-esque design. Any comment?

MICHELINIE: Didn't the Unicorn have a helmet blaster of some sort? Anyway, I think the "headlight" we gave the Evader armor was just an attempt to make it as different from Iron Man's configuration as we could.



KALIBABKY: At the end of Issue 2, Tony makes the following remark to Jim Rhodes, *“In some ways, this design is even BETTER than my Iron Man armor.”* Was there ever any discussion between you and Bob to actually add some Evader features to the then-current Iron Man suit?

MICHELINIE: Yeah, we definitely would have had Tony pirating his Evader design to make improvements on the Iron Man armor, had we done any more stories and had some control over the character.



The exciting, all-new outer-space Iron Man rig was revealed in **IRON MAN: BAD BLOOD 4**, and it’s a dandy!

KALIBABKY: Was this suit’s red and silver color scheme an homage, or at least a nod, to the silver and red armor featured during your and Bob’s second run on **IRON MAN**?

MICHELINIE: Not really. I don’t think either of us was overly fond of the red-and-silver color scheme – there’s nothing like the classic red-and-gold for my money! I think the main reason for going with silver instead of gold was that it was thought that the lighter color might show up better against the the dark backdrop of space. Plus, on the science side, the silver would reflect unfiltered sunlight more efficiently and help keep the guy inside from frying.

KALIBABKY: Were there any specific capabilities you had in mind for this new space armor that were not used in the story?

MICHELINIE: I don’t think so; not that I can remember.



In **IRON MAN 228**, Chapter 4 of the “**Armor Wars**,” Tony Stark and Steve Rogers had a near-friendship-ending falling out. The two men, however, did reconcile their differences to a small degree over the course of two pages in **IRON MAN 238**, “Two Live or Die in L.A.,” the issue wherein Shellhead locks horns with the **Rhino**.

KALIBABKY: Did you even plan an entire issue of **IRON MAN** or thereabouts around a Stark/Rogers reconciliation?



MICHELINIE: Anything we ever did in **IRON MAN** was fodder for future stories. I don't recall if we had specific plans for a big Steve Rogers/Tony Stark reconciliation, but I'm sure the ongoing situation would have affected interaction whenever the two got together. Having it come to a head in a major storyline would have been a logical step to take, but that would have largely depended on agreement by the writer and editor of the **CAPTAIN AMERICA** series at that time.



Finally, I have two questions concerning the **METALLIX** armor.

KALIBABKY: It seems to me that there are two carryover looks, as I call them, from the red and gold post-Armor-War Iron Man suit, created by you, Bob, and **Mark Bright** and first seen in **IRON MAN 231**, which are the “point” above the eyeports on the faceplate and the shoulder pieces on the armor's torso. Do you think there was any subconscious effort on your and Bob's part to make the **Metallix suit** a teeny-tiny bit like Iron Man's for all the current disenfranchised Shellhead fans, myself included, because, after all, it has been noted publicly that some of the technology concepts in **METALLIX** were originally to be used in the now backburnered **IRON MAN: THE END** oneshot?

MICHELINIE: I had no input on the design of the Metallix armor at all, so I can't really say what went into it. As you pointed out, it was originally designed to be

an element of an Iron Man story, so I would imagine that would be the source for any perceived similarities. I doubt that there was a conscious effort to make the armor Iron-Man-ish, since **METALLIX** is a completely different set of characters in a completely different concept.

KALIBABKY: During your runs on **IRON MAN**, technology was always in the picture, either directly as the armor took center stage or in the background while Tony Stark tinkered on something or other. Will the technology in **METALLIX** be handled similarly?



MICHELINIE: Cutting edge technology runs through all of the series at **Future Comics**, even in a “mystic marauder” title like **DEATHMASK**. There’s a lot of high-tech in **METALLIX** -- the smart metal armor itself being a prime example. But the big difference there is that the people using the science aren’t scientists. If Tony Stark had a problem with the Iron Man armor, he was the top choice to solve it. But with **METALLIX** we’ve got a soldier, an oceanographer, a pilot and a volcanologist. Not a mechanic in the bunch. So they’re not going to be able to “McGuyver” their way out of a jam like Tony Stark might be able to. Of course, they’re a team, and can help each other out; an advantage Tony rarely had unless he was hanging with the Avengers. I guess the biggest difference is that while technology is important to **Team Metallix**, it’s a tool for them, not a passion.

Thanks, David!

* * * * *



Funny books! REAL funny books! Well, here are two great ones...

I previously mentioned **SAVAGE DRAGONBERT: FULL FRONTAL NERDITY #1** (October 2002) by Karl Hornell as an Advanced Iron news item, but I just have to plug it again because it's THAT good, and it has a guest appearance by **Tony Stark!** The book collects a series of comic strips which ran previously in **SAVAGE DRAGON** as a backup feature.



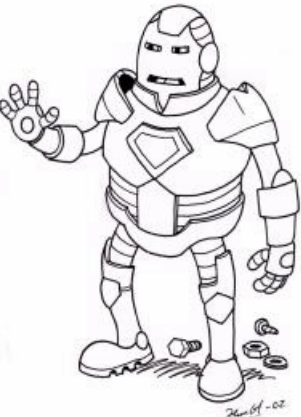
SD: FFN is a hilarious cross between Dilbert and the Savage Dragon. Writer/artist places his lead characters Dragonbert and Hitler's Brainbert -- imagine Hitler's brain, just the brain, running around loose -- in incredibly clever situations both in the real world and in the realm of comics. Hey, even **Rob Liefeld's Captain America** gets a wedgie by Zeek (an **Incredible Hulk** knockoff character)!



at \$5.59, this 80-page, black and white masterpiece is worth every penny.

Hornell drew me his rendition of the **current Iron Man armor**; original art, s. It's cute, corny, and just plain fun! I hope you dig it.

u familiar with **Chris Giarrusso's "Marvel Bullpen Bits,"** a series of strips first published on the **Marvel Comics Bullpen Bulletins page** and ng a cartoony version of the Marvel Universe? No? Well, you're in luck! hole she-bang has been collected in **MINI-MARVELS #1, FEATURING :Y** (February 2002), as a feature behind the lead story, "Newspaper Blues," wherein Spidey must collect newspaper subscription money from the X-Men,



Avengers, FF, and the Thunderbolts. Sheesh!



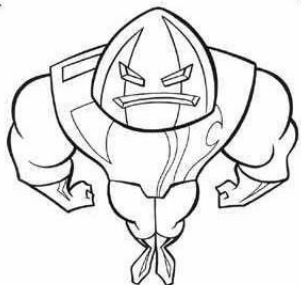
MINI-MARVELS #1, if you can find a copy, bears a cover price of \$3.50 -- very inexpensive for this high-level of entertainment.





Friedrich/Tuska, Micheline/Layton, Kaminski/Hopgood, and Busiek/Chen -- all **Iron Man Creative Teams Supreme!** But what about perhaps THE GREATEST Iron Team of all... that's right: **Stan Lee and Gene Colan**, who basically defined and refined Tony Stark and our Favorite Armored Avenger during their stellar late-1960s **TALES OF SUSPENSE** run? Okay, so I won't get into it, but I will show you a mighty-fine current **Iron Man** rendering -- **Iron MODOK**, with an inset illo of Shellhead -- by Mr. Colan which I found on his website, www.genecolan.com/commart_im.htm; go there to view his interesting Iron Man commissions gallery!

Any **DEXTER'S LABORATORY** fans out there? Good! That means you must also be a Justice Friends enthusiast and hold fond affection for **Living Bullet**, the JF's Iron Man. Here's a Living Bullet pic I found, and it's just for you!



Living Bullet
(SC-69)
CARTOON
NETWORK



An Iron Christmas

"Tony," Pepper called via the voice activated intercom system, "don't forget..."

"Thank you Ms. Potts," the raven-haired, blue-eyed genius behind the multi-national corporation: Stark Enterprises, interrupted brusquely. "A certain holographic A.I. system has already reminded me of my evening appointment several..."

"Hmmpf," pouted Friday.

A monochromatic specter, which resembled one of Santa's elven helpers moonlighting as a Victoria's Secret model, snapped into laser sharp focus directly in front of Tony Stark's furrowed features.

"Some people don't appreciate hard workers! After all, I'm merely doing my job- which, incidentally, you designed and programmed me to do. "

"Friday..."

"Yes, Boss?"

Pushing back from his CAD station and throwing his hands up in disgust, Tony Stark threw a mock glare at the holographic avatar his company's artificial intelligence manifested. "I can just as easily de-compile your subroutines and re-write your OS..."

With an "Eeep!," S.E.'s A.I. vanished into the ether leaving Stark Enterprises' founder alone in the dimly lit lab that served as his personal think tank.

"Tony," Pepper repeated somewhat crossly.

With a resigned sigh, the corporate maven switched the CAD station he had been trying to work at off. "Yeah Pep?"

"Your 'blind date' called and wanted to let you know it wasn't necessary for you to pick her up. She said she would meet you at the Rockefeller Center Ice Rink."

"My 'blind date', huh? What's with all the mystery? You haven't fixed me up with a 'nice, Jewish girl' for this Christmas party... have you?"

"No sir, cross my fing, err heart. I think you two'll have a terrific time."

"Thanks Pepper... I think."

"No problem, Boss. I'm closing up the office and heading home. Before I go, do you need me to call the Make-a-Wish sponsors and tell them you're running late?"

"Pepper, have I ever told you that sometimes you make my former personal assistant, Bambi Abrogast, seem absolutely demure."

"Happy and I will see you at the house for dinner Christmas Eve, right?" The freckled redhead asked, ignoring the playful jibe.

"I'll be there. Wouldn't want to miss Hap's fruitcake and Mrs. Potts' plum pudding."

"Night, Tony."

"Goodnight Pepper."

Turning his chair, Tony leaned back and laced his fingers behind his head. "Friday?"

Assuming the guise of a mouse, in a stocking hat, Friday bashfully reappeared from a "hole" in the cyber-ether. "Squeak?"

Tony chuckled. "Would you bring the V.A.T. online please?"

The holographic rodent twitched its whiskers and a luminous field appeared over the multi-function interface that served as Tony's desk. Hovering at eye-level, several holographic panes also flickered to life in an arc surrounding Tony's chair.

Reaching his hands into the glow of the haptic field interface and summoning up a virtual keyboard and several custom interfaces that allowed him to remotely manipulate the Virtual Armory Technician, Tony began to run some last minute diagnostics on his Iron Man armor.

The V.A.T. was a futuristic crucible of sorts that allowed the creator of the incredibly complex Iron Man armor to "tinker with his toys", as he liked to put it. Since many of the components of the technological marvel that was the Iron Man armor were based on incredibly complex miniaturized systems, Tony applied his formidable intellect to the creation of an advanced fabricator/proto-typer, similar to three dimensional "printers" used in the R & D department of many companies. Of course, as with all things Stark, the V.A.T. employed technology and boasted a user interface several steps beyond cutting edge. Ultimately, the V.A.T. enabled Tony to fabricate tools and parts on the fly as he upgraded, repaired or otherwise manipulated his armor.

"Diagnostic. Parameters: Sub-Orbital Flight, associated systems. Fast scan: Refractory Coating. Codicil: Current fabrication project- Sub-orbital Booster Assembly and hard point attachments," Tony commanded, initiating the V.A.T.'s dedicated diagnostic system, as well as his armor's own operating system. Using the lumino-haptic interface at the same time, he began to manually manipulate the holographic wire-frame model of a design he had been tinkering with and refining since his last foray into space.

Musing to himself, Tony scanned several motive and propulsion related files as he played with the configuration of the virtual prototype. One in particular gave him pause. "The defensive field and flight systems of Mac Hudson's Vindicator armor operate on the principles of manipulating and channeling the Earth's magnetic fields.

A field very similar to the tractor/pressor fields my armor can create. I don't think the good Dr. Hudson would mind if I borrowed from his book and added some improvements"

Continuing to call up diagrams of his armors' related sub-assemblies, including the flight system of his Silver Centurion armor, Tony quickly kludged together a back-pack mounted supplement for his current armor's flight system. Speaking to the V.A.T., he initiated a multigenerational revision of the prototype with instructions to begin fabrication after the third generation revision.

As inspiration became thought, Tony commanded the V.A.T., "Rename current project: Geo-Magnetic Repellor Flight System."

Disengaging himself from the workstation, Tony leaned back and reflectively stroked his trademark Van Dyke as the V.A.T. began to give form to his idea. Friday's impersonation of Big Ben startled him from his reverie. "At the time of the toll, you could still make it to New York in time to engage in some small talk with your date before you're actually late."

"Enough." Tony rose from his chair and stretched.

Crossing his lab to an alcove housing a basin, small vanity, wardrobe and shower stall, the brilliant industrialist shed his black T-shirt and khakis. Showered, shaved and re-dressed in a fresh, "stand-by" Armani, Tony emerged back into the lab proper in record time.

As he checked his appearance in a nearby full-length mirror, Tony felt the faint vibration and heard the slight hiss of compressed air that heralded the arrival of a pneumatic lift from the sub basement several levels below. Carved out of the dense Washington bedrock, the levels below Stark Manse housed incredibly sophisticated automated manufacturing facilities.

His armor, along with the newly fabricated sub-orbital flight enhancement sparkled and twinkled in the glow of the safety lights ringing the lift shaft.

"Note to self:" Tony spoke with his trademark rakish grin, "bonus for employee, Friday."

"Gee, thanks, Boss."

Carefully smoothing his suit, Tony stepped over to the lift where his armor stood, cradled in a light armature. With a command from the wristwatch/remote unit he wore, the gold sections of his armor telescoped into their respective housings with the sound of silk across silk. The remaining components folded open like crimson flower petals, allowing their creator to ensconce himself within their familiar embrace.

Helm firmly in place, Tony silently issued the cybernetic command that polarized the armor, causing the crimson sections to cocoon closed around his torso, feet and hands and the gold sections to flow from their housings, covering the rest of his body. A metallic "Shhhring" echoed quietly through the lab as soft, silk-like, micro-circuited material became like supple, diamond-hard mail around its wearer. A flick of his metal shod index finger lowered the golden faceplate, completing the transformation from Tony Stark; billionaire philanthropist and CEO to Iron Man: the invincible, armored human fighting machine.

Another silent cybernetic command caused the skylight over the lift to iris open as micro turbines began to cycle. With a keening whine and the "whoosh" of displaced air, the Invincible Iron Man vaulted into the overcast, twilight sky. On-board systems quickly and efficiently checked local airspace and notified regional, national and international air traffic control systems of the Armored Avenger's intended flight plan. Accessing the appropriate bandwidths and engaging a set of military "handshake" protocols, the armor's computer accessed NORAD, the ESA and NASA's monitoring systems and acquired the appropriate IFF and GPS tags from each system.

"So far, so good. Systems are green across the board."

The armored figure continued to gain altitude as his ballistic course carried him westward, over the sparkling expanse of the Northern Pacific. Bursting through the patchy cloud cover, Tony watched the sky quickly lose its twilight grayness and shade to a deep indigo. The stars shown with cold and brilliant luminosity as the air grew thin.

Monitoring the telltales of his armor's systems, Tony gradually cut the thrust from his boot jets and began to incrementally add power to the Geo-Magnetic Repellor system. As the system approached threshold, the armor seemed to slow in its flight and, from a vantage point outside the armor, momentarily hung motionless. Power continued to build and the crimson and gold Avenger slipped free from the constricting bonds of gravity as the oppositional field generated by the G.M.R. pushed against the Earth's own magnetic field.

One eye on the HUD system and the other watching the turning crescent of the Earth below, Tony marveled as the Pacific Ocean slid by below him and the familiar shapes of the Hawaiian Islands quickly receded from view. "Note for post shake down evaluation and V.A.T. reference: Power consumption is a little steep, but since this is just a quick Seattle to New York jaunt, it's nothing to be overly concerned about."

Tony keyed the armor's transceiver assembly for a XM radio intercept and smiled as the sound of Montavani's Orchestra performing "Carol of the Bells" filled his helmet. Below his flight path, the eastern edge of the Eurasian landmass quickly orbited into view. A communication system monitor began flashing for attention. Mercurial mental commands muted the music, identified the signal's source and pulled up several relevant panes of information on his HUD, all in an eye blink.

"szzttt... DWB flight 10... szttt... out of... crrzzzz... Mayday. I repeat... szzzttt..." the signal was lost to static.

Even as Tony began to lessen power to the G.M.R. system, slowing his flight, the armor's communication and decryption systems began to analyze, process, collate and cross reference the signal it was receiving. Seconds later the information sprang into view on the armor's faceplate:

Modified Boeing 747 airframe. Flight DWB 1001. Bound for San Francisco, California from Chechnya, Russian Federation. Crew: 2. 4 doctors on board. 20 passengers, including nurses, patients and family members. Analysis indicates high probability of significant damage to the electrical system. Extrapolation of probable engine or multiple engine failure and airframe damage. Current position: ** ° latitude by **° longitude.

"Damn," Tony whispered. "A Doctor's Without Borders flight." He scrolled further down the report and accessed the plane's flight plan and the current airspace telemetry from Kyoto International Airport and the Honolulu International Airport. Plotting an intercept course for the distressed craft, Tony reoriented his flight, re-engaged the G.M.R. with enough power to give him a little extra boost and throttled his boots jets up to 120% of their rated output.

Moments later and hundreds of nautical miles east of his last position, Tony disengaged the G.M.R. Pulling alongside the stricken aircraft the crimson and gold Avenger radioed the pilot, "Looks like you could use a hand."

"Are you a sight for sore eyes, Shellhead."

"Rhodey?!"

"Right the first time, Tinman."

"What the blazes are you..."

"Would love to catch up but now's not a good time." The plane wobbled and continued to lose altitude at an unhealthy rate. "I could really use a hand."

Nodding his head in agreement, Tony maneuvered himself beneath the falling aircraft and began to apply the awesome power of his armor to righting the crippled craft. A shudder ran through the plane's airframe and he could hear the sound of new warning buzzers adding their din to the cacophony of the cockpit, via the open radio link he was maintaining. As he consulted the updated sensor data streaming across his helmet's HUD, he shuddered inwardly. The airframe was cracked in several places and would not stand up to much more of his manhandling.

"Hey Tony," Rhodey queried his one time employer. "Do you think you could keep the ride a little smoother? I mean, you know me, I'm not one to complain about a little turbulence, especially when I'm doing the flying, but we've got patients in back that are in pretty bad shape and Doc Sondheim says all this bouncin' around ain't helpin' their situation."

"Erica's onboard too?"

"Yup."

"A conventional invitation to this little in-flight reunion would have been fine with me, Mr. Rhodes."

"Aw shoot! You know me, Shellhead. I'm not one to stand on a little formality."

"That you aren't, my friend."

With Iron Man's help, the plane had leveled off but was in no condition to continue its transpacific flight to San Francisco. As with most problems he faced, Tony Stark had a plan- or at least the start of one, to deal with the challenging situation he currently found himself in.

"Rhodey?"

"Go ahead."

"Have you got this bird under control?"

"Yeah," the stressed pilot affirmed. "For now," he added under his breath as he licked his dry lips.

"I need to grab a little juice. I was out here testing a new flight system and it's expended more of the armor's stores than I am comfortable with. Don't worry, I'll be right back and we'll get this bird and its patients to New York in no time."

"Cop... say again, Shellhead!? I thought you just said New York."

"I did."

"Not to sound ungrateful, mind you, but Doc Sondheim says we're a little pressed for time. We've got specialists on standby in San Fran and our passengers really need to make that appointment on time, if you catch my drift."

"I understand. Find out what and who Erica needs, relay it to me and I'll make sure it's waiting in New York. Now, hold on. I'm disengaging."

The Armored Avenger swept out from under the shuddering 747 and began a steep ascent toward the star spangled heavens. At the apex of his flight, Tony swept his gaze over the slowly rotating globe until he spied a nearby storm front. He quickly reoriented himself and dived toward the roiling mass of clouds. Several mental commands rerouted reserve power to the outer layer of his armor, causing it to heat up and an electrical field to form on its exterior surface.

Rechecking his angle of descent and the location of the crippled 747, he banked sharply, grazing the boundaries of the hot and cold air masses forming the storm front. The sonic boom caused by his speed and abrupt turn sent an enormous pressure wave through the seething mass of clouds. The abrupt change in air pressure, coupled with the grazing from the heated electrical field enveloping his armor, sent hungry arcs of azure lightning clawing after him.

Tony gritted his teeth against the bone-jarring shudder of his armor, as Mother Nature pounded mega-joules of pure static electricity into his armor. Sophisticated thermocouples soaked up the sudden influx of raw energy and converted it to a form more suitable for the armor's usage. Switching off the flow of electricity from his storage batteries, correcting the polarity of his armor and divesting it of any lingering static, he banked away and resumed his place beneath the unsteady jet.

"You OK Shellhead?"

"Never better. Nothing like a bracer from Mother Nature to get re-energized."

"Whatever you say. Now, about this plan of yours..."

Checking the system diagnostics for his armor, Tony noted that his armor and the G.M.R. had weathered his little physics experiment relatively unscathed. Several power storage cells had overloaded and burned out, but nothing critical had been damaged. Issuing cybernetic commands, he began to enhance the structural integrity (S.I.F.) and inertial dampening (I.D.S.) fields of his armor and mate its output to the force field generators mounted in his gauntlets. As the armor's systems reconfigured themselves, their creator continued to refine his rescue plan.

"Rhodey, this is going to be close but we should be touching down at JFK in just a few minutes. First we need to get the airframe shored up so we can get this crate turned around. I don't have the

fuel or the power reserves to keep the plane together for a conventional flight back to SFO, but I can-

"Tony," his friend interrupted, "orbital mechanics and sci-fi propulsion systems were never my strong suit. I trust you. Forget the rest of the Mr. Wizard lecture."

Beneath his helmet, Tony Stark grinned. "Understood. When I give the word, come about to a heading of 271⁰ degrees west."

"Roger."

"Now."

In the cockpit, James Rhodes whispered a prayer to the gods of aviation as he strained to bank the damaged aircraft into a lazy turn. Several metallic shudders accompanied the maneuver, but the craft remained intact.

Tony watched the power expenditure curve of his armor as he continued to reinforce the 747's weakened airframe with his armor's own structural integrity field, through his direct contact with the plane. So far, so good, he thought to himself as he blinked a rivulet of sweat out of his eyes. Now here's where things get tricky. The armor's power levels began to decline precipitously as he began to provide the plane's occupants with the additional protection of his armor's inertial dampening field, something they would desperately need for the next part of his plan. The glowing force-emitters on the backside of his gauntlets were beginning to overheat being forced to carry double and soon triple their required load capacity.

"Rhodey."

"Yeah, Boss?" the exhausted pilot replied, slipping into an old, but comfortable pattern of banter.

"I'm just about ready to engage my 'sci-fi propulsion system'..."

"I hear an awful big 'but' coming..."

"... but, you and Erica are going to have to shut down all the plane's electrical systems for about 10 seconds, otherwise my stunt will short out every electrical system onboard. Since you're going to have to help me land this bird once we hit New York airspace, we can't let that happen, can we?"

"Sheoot, man! That ain't a problem on my end. Heck, half this bird's electrical systems are already down and what's left are scrambled real good. We're just lucky that the radio and the hydraulics still work. Let me relay the message to the Doc... standby."

Tony listened impatiently as Jim relayed the news to the doctors in the surgical cabins.

"Tony, the docs aren't really happy about this but they'll be ready when I give 'em the word."

"Keep your finger's crossed Rhodey and hang on."

With that, the armored Avenger clenched his gauntleted fists deep into the metal skin of the fuselage and gritted his teeth, steeling himself for the Herculean effort of keeping a powerless 747 in flight for the next ten seconds. The knowledge that the lives of 26 people, some clinging to life by the slenderest of threads, were riding on his shoulders could have added to the already incredible burden but for the hero, Tony Stark, it merely solidified his resolve.

"Now!"

Tony waited a moment for the crew to shut down the plane's electrical systems then sent two cybernetic commands in rapid-fire sequence. The first ballooned the output field of the G.M.R. to encompass the crippled aircraft while the other released the safety interlocks, allowing the armor's systems to divert power from *all* systems and sources to the G.M.R., the S.I.F. and the I.D.S.

Moisture steamed and hissed as superheated air vented from micro turbines cushioned the Armored Avenger's landing. A surreptitious glance and quick multi-spectrum scan confirmed the absence of any type of surveillance, electronic or otherwise, in the surrounding area. Rippling like water, a man-sized mass of air hidden in the shadows of one of the Rockefeller Center's rear service entrances, took form. Sophisticated image projectors that cloaked his armor from view disengaged and like a specter casting aside its concealing shroud Iron Man stood revealed.

A mental command depolarized the armor and allowed an only slightly disheveled Tony Stark to step from the armor. Another command sequence, this one issued from his wristwatch/remote unit, caused the armor to compress into its standby mode, re-engage its cloaking system and "park" itself in nearby proximity, awaiting its master's summons. Tony smoothed his slightly rumpled slacks and coat, straightened his tie and jogged up the stairs to street level.

"Good thing I wore the wool suit," he observed as his exhaled breath condensed in the cold night air. Tony hustled around the corner of the building and hurried to descend the escalator to the famous ice rink that glistened below festive twinkling Christmas lights amidst a faint swirl of snow flurries.

Looking about for a damsel in distress or, at the least, a single socialite that gave the impression of being upset and impatient, the debonair CEO of Stark Enterprises scanned the groups of tables, benches and holiday stands scattered about the skating rink's plaza.

From over his shoulder, a friendly, female voice interrupted his scan of the holiday shoppers and skaters. "Tony Stark. I can't believe running into you here!" Something about the playful tone of the woman's voice caused Tony to start as he turned to face her.

"Ling. Ling McPherson."

"One and the same."

"It's great to see you."

"You too."

"You look terrific," Tony said as he appreciatively surveyed the attractive, Asian-featured woman. "Um... I'd love to catch up with you. It's been what..."

"...at least two years. Probably more..."

"...but I'm running late. My personal assistant set me up with a blind date and I was supposed to meet her here and we were headed for Make-a-Wish's Charity Christmas Auction at the Rock."

Ling threw him a mock glare as she reached up and smoothed Tony's static mused hair. "Hmmm. The Tony Stark I remember was a stickler about his public appearance and was someone for punctuality... especially if it involved squiring some lucky girl around for an evening on the town. Of course, I do remember an occasion or two where he would make a hasty departure with some lame excuse of a corporate emergency or other dire predicament."

Grinning, Tony grabbed his chest in mock angst, "Ooo! Discovered for the cad I truly am." A faint suspicion began to form.

"I'll help you find your wayward date." She slipped her arm into the crook of his and with a grin that reached to the sparkle of her jade green eyes, offered, "Of course if we spend too much time looking for this poor blind date of yours, we'll be even later than we already are."

Tony laughed. "I should have known. I apologize for my tardiness."

Sharing warm reminisces, the couple made their way, arm and arm toward their holiday rendezvous.



First of all, kudos for a great website and a great 'zine. I read the included review of the game **"Freedom Force"** in AI #58 with some interest, since I make custom character skins for that game, mainly for the "Iron Mod" add-on that (surprise) features ol' Shellhead himself. Jeff Pearson wrote an excellent review of a great game.

Being a big fan of the **"Silver Centurion" armor** from way back when (and this all *does* tie together, I promise!) I set out to make a sort of **"Ultimate" Silver Centurion skin** for that game. The result is in the picture above, and I think it came out sort of interesting. Of course, the way things are going I doubt we'll see anything as interesting as a new Silver Centurion in the comics, but a guy can dream. :)

Regards,
Sean Smith (a.k.a. CastleBravo)



Bonjour and welcome to my humble column dedicated to the many appearances of Iron Man in mags other than his own. This time around, I'll be looking at some of Iron Man's apparitions in the pages of the Fantastic Four!

As a teenager, when I decided to start buying comics in their original English version, I long hesitated on what title to collect regularly. The FF was a solid contender back then because I had very fond memories of some old John Byrne issues that I had read in French as a kid. In fact, if the awesome cover of IM #222 had not caught my eye, I might be writing for Advanced FF today! The twists of fate are uncanny indeed. But enough about me... it's clobberin' time!

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FANTASTIC FOUR #202

"There's one Iron Man too many!" – January 1979

Story: Marv Wolfman

Illustrators: John Buscema & Joe Sinnott



When **Iron Man** attacks the Baxter Building, kicks the **FF**'s fantastic butts in single combat and then takes off with their entire headquarters, the **FF** are left defeated and homeless. With no other lead to follow, they decide to pay a visit to industrialist **Tony Stark** to ask him what could have possibly gotten into his famous bodyguard.

Stark immediately vouches for **IM**, explaining that the **Golden Avenger** spent the whole day with him and couldn't have attacked the **FF**. The five heroes then jump on board of an **Avenger** quinjet and proceed to locate the **FF**'s missing HQ on a tropical island in the Atlantic. But to retake their home, the **FF** will have to battle **Quasimodo**, the living computer, while **Iron Man** takes care of his powerful robotic doppelganger.



All in all, a fun comic. Be warned though, it is from the **1970s**. Reading this will make you appreciate how comics have matured and grown over the years! The story is a bit simple but filled

with non-stop wall-to-wall action, as plots usually were back in those days. Character development is **non-existent**, but that is also typical. The Marvel status quo of the 60s and 70s remained **virtually untouched** until the 80s.

As for the art, I think it's cool but I've always liked **Buscema and Sinnott** so I'm very biased here. Something that made me smile is **Stark's** face in a panel on page 14. You can totally recognise the **influence from Romita Jr. and Layton's work** being published at the same time in the pages of **IM**. The shape of the face, the hair, everything matches with the **Stark's** new look over in **IM**. At the same time, his armor **looks very retro**, more like its earlier renderings than like **Layton's** way of drawing the shimmering metal suit.

Also, didn't that **Quasimodo** guy make another appearance later in a back-up story in an **Iron Man** annual? I can remember the story, **Iron Man** trapped **Quasimodo** in a virtual reality simulation or something of the sort. Anybody remember which issue it occurred in?



As the fake Iron Man attacks the FF, the Torch says: **“Stand aside, Ben. I don't care if he's Iron Man or Jimmy Carter himself! No man crashes in like that without**

answering to the Human Torch! Flame on!” For the youngsters out there wondering: «Jimmy who?», that was the name of the President of the U.S. back then. End of the history lesson.

* * *

FANTASTIC FOUR #242-244

“The Trial of Galactus” –1982

Story and art: John Byrne



For those of you who are not familiar with this saga, simply know that it is generally acclaimed at **one of the greatest FF stories ever told.**

The story begins with **Terrax the Tamer**, **Galactus'** herald at the time, attacking the **Fantastic Four** and actually **levitating part of the island of Manhattan into the Earth's orbit!** While the **FF** deal with the mad **Terrax** up there, other heroes are left to deal with the repercussions down here! **Iron Man** and **Thor** combine their powers to save the people trapped in the many New York tunnels that are rapidly being filled with water.

Of course, when the herald of **Galactus** shows his mug, you know his master isn't far behind! And so for the second cataclysmic time, the **world devourer** sets foot on our little planet, once more intent on having it for dinner. It is up to the **FF**, the **Avengers** (**Iron Man**, **Thor**, **Cap** and the **Wasp**) and **Doctor Strange** to stop the hungry demi-god!



These three comics are truly excellent, this is **John Byrne** at the top of his form. Definitely one of his greatest masterpieces ever. I am a **huge Byrne fan** myself, I have thoroughly enjoyed all of his great

works on titles such as the **X-Men**, **Alpha Flight**, **the FF**, **Hulk**, **Avengers**, **Omac**, **Superman**, etc. I love his storytelling, his originality and his characterisation. I also love his art, this man will always be **one of my favourite** artists in American comics.

Iron Man may not play a very big part in this story, but hey, he's there and **that only makes a great story even cooler.** Also, let's not forget that these three comics launched a saga of cosmic proportions that would have **many far-reaching repercussions in the following years.** Following the events that take place in these pages, a chain of events is set in motion that will involve the **Silver Surfer**, **Doctor Doom**, the **Skrull** and **Shi'ar** empires, the **Watcher**, **Odin** and the living embodiment of the universe itself: **Eternity** (not to mention **aunt May** and **Byrne himself** who will play a part in one of his own stories).



The entire storyline (**FF #242-244 and 257-262**) were united into a very thick trade paperback simply entitled **«The Trial of Galactus».** If you like cosmic stories, then believe me, this is well worth the **13 Yankee bucks** you'll pay for it.



Iron Man thinks to himself: **“I hope Richards knows what he’s doing; I’m doubtful we could defeat Galactus a second time tonight, and if he should fail to be grateful enough for our help... it could quite literally mean the end of EVERYTHING!”**

* * *

FANTASTIC FOUR #337-341

“Into the time stream” – February to June 1990

Story and art: Walter Simonson



If you have read **Avengers #296-297** and enjoyed the story, you’ll want to read this! For those of you who have not read those old Avengers issues, know this: the **Avengers** discovered that, some 20 years into the future, time travelling has been made impossible by the presence of a great «**time bubble**». Their attempt to penetrate it failed. They did however find out that within the bubble was a renegade **Celestial** and that he was constructing some sort of weapon of incalculable destructive power. They also discovered that the council of cross-time **Kangs** was conspiring to capture the weapon.



Reed Richards becomes interested in the case when the expanding time bubble begins to affect the present. But if the **FF** are to investigate, they need the knowledge of someone who was present on the **Avengers**’ original mission. They choose to recruit the help of **Thor**, who in turn brings **Iron Man** along for the ride.

The heroes strap themselves onto **Richards**’ new time sled and launch into the time stream. The sled manages to penetrate the time bubble, but their worries are far from over. They soon find themselves under attack by **Death’s Head** (see last issue of **Advanced Iron** for more details on the Marvel UK character). They are then

attacked by three distinct **Kangs**, and only once they overcome these powerful obstacles do they finally come face to face with the true reason for the time bubble's existence.

He's grown gigantic, enormous, colossal. He towers over them, drunk with sheer energy, driven mad by his insatiable hunger. He is **Galactus**, and he is in the process of devouring galaxies, space, light and time: **our very universe**.



Man... talk about battling against impossible odds! This is a great story, if you go for stuff that takes place on a cosmic scale. It also takes root in the previous story I reviewed, **The Trial of Galactus!**

But contrary to that one, **IM** plays a much more important role here, even pulling the heroes' collective farts out of the fire a few times!

I actually spoke to **Walt Simonson** about this story on his first visit to **Montréal** some years ago. Great guy, his wife is a wonderful lady too. He was still working on his **IM 2020** graphic novel at the time and he seemed to be **genuinely interested** by the character of **IM**. He told me he had been wanting to work with him for some time and that he couldn't pass on the opportunity to make him a part of this story. **I am a big fan** of Simonson's art and I think his **IM** looks **awesome**.

The story also features another of Simonson's long-time favourites, **the mighty Thor!** His run on that title has created stories that all **Thor** fans cherish. The writer/artist certainly demonstrates his excellent knowledge of the character in this story, truly using **Thor** to the fullest. In fact, on the cover of #339, he's the only one easily recognizable, but a blurb adds: «**Hey! Whose book is this anyway?**» ;-)



Only one thing annoyed me a little about this story, but maybe I'm just too picky. In the second issue, **Iron Man's** shoulder unit **is almost blown off** by

one of the **Kangs'** futuristic weapons, you can even see smoke coming out of the metallic crater. And yet, on the following pages, the armor looks **perfectly intact**, as if nothing had happened. A slight oversight, I know, but an annoying one nevertheless.



Ben Grimm asks: **“Lemme get this straight, Stretch. Galactus is inside the giant gizmo below us with a black hole, eating everything in sight, right? And the**

Shi'ar warrior, Gladiator, is about ta ram all these major explosives down his gullet ta try ta blow up the whole kit and kaboodle, right? So my question is... shouldn't we be somewhere else?”

* * *

UPCOMING WANDERINGS:

Dammit, this can't be happening! I swore I would not buy another issue of Iron Man as long as Grell was writing the book, but Marvel managed to find a way to trick me! They cooked up a three-issue crossover between the January issues of Thor (#58), IM (#64) and Avengers (#63). It looks as if IM will be wearing a new armor to battle the thunder god himself! All right, all right... only one more Grell issue, and only because I'll need it to understand what's going on in the Avengers comic that I still read every month (a guy has to get his dose of IM somewhere!) The arc will be drawn by Alan Davis, so at least we know the art will rock!

Iron Man will also be featured alongside Cap and Thor in the pages of Marvel Double-shot #2, and they will be drawn à la Simpsons! Now this I gotta see... in December!



As for me, I will be back in our next issue with a look at three of Iron Man's appearances in novels! Don't miss it!

That's it for now. I hope these reviews will be **useful tips** to you. If you have any questions, comments, suggestions of issues you'd like to see reviewed, arguments or even if you just want to say **bonjour**, send me a message at cousture@yahoo.com and while I'm at it, I cordially invite you to visit **my Iron Man web site** (yes, this is my legendary shameless plug) at the following address:

<http://membres.lycos.fr/cousture>

And check out my **“Wanderings of Iron Man”** page, where you'll be able to access all of my past columns for A.I. as well as **some new and exclusive reviews** of some of Iron Man's coolest appearances as a guest-star in the pages of other Marvel mags.

Hope to hear from you and **bonne lecture!**

NOTE: the number in parentheses after the page number indicates how many panels I used for each individual page while working out the breakdown. This is simply a reference point, not the number of panels you should be expected to use.

PAGE 1(1): We open with a full-page splash taking place in the Practical Lab section of the Flint Technologies complex. In the close foreground of our low-angle shot is McKINLEY FLINT, his face large as his head lies on the floor. His eyes are staring, his mouth is slightly open; for all we know, he could be dead. In the background, chaos reigns. A large, multi-limbed mobile machine--an experimental surface exploration vehicle (S.E.V.?) being developed for NASA--is going berserk, smashing anything and anyone in sight. White-smocked SCIENTISTS are panicking.

PAGE 2(4): ALARICO SANCHEZ and a group of SECURITY GUARDS rush into the room, and Rico starts barking commands immediately, beginning with an order to set up a defensive cordon around their fallen boss--who we can now see is on the floor near an overturned high-tech wheelchair, all of which is surrounded by fires caused by the berserk robot's rampage. ISAAC RACHIMI already stands between the 'bot and the fallen Mac, pistol in hand. SAHARA GRACE is on one knee nearby, holding her head, apparently having taken a hit in the initial outburst. Sanchez calls (via radio headset?) for a fire suppression team to get to the Practical Lab immediately, and orders his men to take out the 'bot, aiming for possible weak points such as visual sensors, limb joints, etc.

PAGE 3(5): But small arms fire proves ineffective. Rico demands a situation report and HEIDI HO gives us a bit of background: they were experimenting with a new method of controlling the robot via remote mental input. Their boss, Mac Flint, had insisted on being the active participant, against her advice. But when the mental link had been established, the S.E.V. had suddenly gone "mad," beginning a destructive rampage that they can't stop. Sanchez asks why they don't just throw the "off" switch. Heidi answers that it isn't that simple: breaking the link outside proper procedures might kill Mac!

PAGE 4(4): The robot climbs up to the lab's second level: suspended observation walkways where computer technos normally control experiments. Perhaps it spider-crawls along the underside of the "floor." It appears to be heading for an exit of some sort, and Sanchez knows that they have to keep it contained until he can call in reinforcements and heavy ordnance. He orders guards with automatic weapons, or grenade launchers on their M-16s, to blast the suspension cables or support posts, which drops the robot back to the floor as scientists flee.

PAGE 5(4-6): We then cut to HEATHER GARDNER, FlinTech's V.P. and operational head, as she asks Rico (via radio) for an update. Between barking orders, Rico provides the reader with a bit more background: apparently, part of Mac's mind is inside the deranged robot, he's still controlling it--he is actually causing the growing destruction. They don't know how to stop it, and if they can't contain the violence, everyone at FlinTech could be in danger. Heather switches lines and orders evacuation procedures to begin immediately.

PAGE 6(5-6): In the Practical Lab, security personnel have cornered the robot as fire suppression technos douse the flames around Mac. The 'bot then opens its anal port and drops several squarish parcels on the floor. Answering Sanchez's question, a miscellaneous SCIENTIST explains that the packets are seismic charges meant to test crust depth on asteroids. Rico responds, "Those are live rounds?" The scientist shrugs sheepishly: "We, uh, w-we were going for realism...!"

PAGE 7(4): The charges explode, and the undamaged robot drops down through a new hole in the floor directly beneath it. Debris shaken loose from the ceiling falls around Mac, once again isolating him from his would-be rescuers. Sanchez starts to lead a group of his men down through the hole, saying that maintenance tunnels running beneath the entire complex could take the robot anywhere.

PAGE 8(4-5): Isaac drops down behind the security squad, asking if he can borrow a couple of Rico's men. When Rico says he needs them all, Isaac explains that he may have a way to save the boss, but needs help. After a split second of hesitation, Rico agrees, and takes the bulk of his armed troops in one direction while Isaac heads down another tunnel with a couple of guards.

PAGE 9(4-6): Here we cut to a short sequence at the front gate where personnel are being evacuated. We show a calm LOUDEN WRIGHT walking beside LAURA BIRDSONG, who is using a stylus to tap data into a handheld PDA. Louden says that there's no reason to panic, that this is merely an example of God's will. Laura quips that she'll need a little more than that to spin-doctor this catastrophe. Behind them, a nervous little man, ART VANDALAY, says that he wishes, just for once, that one of these emergency evacuations would turn out to be a drill!

PAGE 10(5): Meanwhile, in another part of the complex, the renegade robot breaks out from beneath the ground and continues its unfocused destruction. Sanchez radios back to the lab that he needs more info to develop a strategy. YURI KHORKINA takes a headset from one of the emergency crew and explains that they were trying to transfer Mac's mind to the 'bot, a preliminary test for a bigger project, but that only part of the transfer went through. Because the artificial intelligence grid in the 'bot was not specific to the would-be controller, it only accepted Mac's id, the primal, unrestrained part of the human mind. As a result, the robot is now essentially being controlled by 32 years of previously pent-up rage at being a vegetable stuck in a metal chair!

PAGE 11(5): Back in the tunnel below the Practical Lab, Isaac and the security guys are trying to smash their way up through the floor to get to Mac. Sahara shows up with axes or other more efficient implements. (Maybe something high-tech that would logically be in the area?) Isaac thanks her, but tells her to evacuate with the others, that the flooring has been rendered unstable by the explosion and could collapse on them all. But Sara grabs an axe or something and pitches in, saying that Mac is her charge and she's going to do everything she can to save him. Isaac is irritated at her defiance, but admires her courage and respects her dedication.

PAGE 12(4): At this point, Dr. Ho radios to Sanchez that the Solar Synthesis Lab could be the answer: it was designed to test off-world designs by simulating conditions brought about when encountering solar flares, and might produce interference strong enough to screw with the robot's systems. Outside, Rico wonders how to herd the powerful robot to the lab in question. He then spots an 18-wheeler at the loading dock of a nearby building and sprints towards it.

PAGE 13(5): At a nearby gate, where more workers are being evacuated, SAM PERSHING sees Sanchez drive the truck towards the robot. His face is set in a hard scowl as he steps away from the line of evacuees. Meanwhile, Rico's plan isn't working. When he pushes the robot against the wall of the Solar Lab, the 'bot--designed to navigate the harsh terrain of alien planets--merely crawls over the truck trying to herd it!

PAGE 14(5): However, as the robot reaches the ground, it's slammed into and through the wall of the Solar Lab by a loading vehicle (set up at the loading dock earlier?) driven/piloted from off panel by Sam Pershing. As the on-its-back 'bot struggles to right itself inside the lab, Rico waves Pershing into the truck cab, and radios Doc Ho to fire up the flares. As the truck rumbles away, Rico compliments Pershing--he's pretty resourceful for a "suit."

PAGE 15(3): A multi-band burst of radiation and light fills the Solar Lab, and hopes rise--but the robot is too well shielded: it crashes out through a far wall and continues its rampage.

PAGE 16(5): Meanwhile, in the Practical Lab, Isaac & crew break up through the floor and Isaac checks Mac's vital signs as Sahara and the others get the wheelchair upright. As they put Mac in the chair and Sara adjusts its components, Rico radios in and tells them all to evacuate. Cutting back to an exterior, we see security troops laying down heavy fire as the robot heads for another building--the Propulsion Development Annex. Rico knows that experimental propellents are being worked on there, and if the containments are breached, a toxic cloud could quickly spread, killing everyone in the area! Their last hope, a heavy duty riot control vehicle, is on its way from the motor pool, but it might not be enough even if it arrives in time.

PAGE 17(6): As Sara hooks up Mac's communication system, Isaac asks why they can't just reverse the same device that put Mac's id into the robot, have it suck the id back out. Heidi explains that the process has to be reversed by the recipient, as a safety precaution against the transfer being tampered with at the source. But as Mac's right hand is placed over the keypad on its arm rest, his fingers tap and his voice simulator says, haltingly, "Fry...me..." Everyone reacts with a general, "Huh?" as Mac struggles (since he's only working with part of his mind here) to tap out, "Solar...lab. Ee...im...pee..." ROCKNE STALLONE perks up: "That might work! Isolating an electromagnetic pulse, boosting it to maximum, might be enough to break the link and draw the id back through the default circuit!" Mac's chair heads for a ramped exit as the others follow, and Sahara asks, "Is that safe?" Rockne answers that the E.M.P. should only affect electronics, and not have a harmful effect on Mac. Sara: "Should'?" Rockne admits that this has never been tried before, and as such does involve a certain element of risk. Isaac stops: "Then we should wait until we can make sure--" Mac's emulated voice interrupts: "Now. That's...an...order..."

PAGE 18(5): Outside, near the Propulsion Annex, a tanklike vehicle arrives and at Sanchez's command shoots a stream of greyish foam at/onto the robot just as it reaches the building. The foam is laced with titanium threads and solidifies instantly, impeding the robot--but not stopping it. The 'bot struggles, inching forward through the thick, clinging mess, as the id that controls it becomes more and more frustrated.

PAGE 19(4): Finally, and suddenly, the robot emits a burst of force that strips away the titanium foam, slinging it everywhere. The security troops duck and dodge, maybe some of them getting clobbered, and the tank's barrel is blocked/bent/covered. The robot starts tearing at the wall of the Propulsion Annex. In the Solar Lab, Mac's chair has been wheeled in and both Sahara and Isaac are reluctant to leave him until he orders them away. Mac sits; the E.M.P. flashes (different effect than the multi-band flash on page 15).

PAGE 20(5): And outside, the robot freezes just as it's about to smash a tank full of Really Bad Stuff. Back in the lab, Mac is unmoving (what else would he be?) in the dark and immobile chair. A spare chair is rolled in, and tension mounts as Mac is placed in the chair and his hand positioned on the communication keypad.

PAGE 21(5): Relief shows on the faces of the gathered employees as Mac's emulated voice says, "Well, back to the ol' drawing board..." Mac then wheels his chair around and starts to roll away, adding, "I'm sorry the experiment put you in danger. You did a fine job. Thank you." A pissed-off Alarico Sanchez then addresses a couple of miscellaneous scientists: "Next time we have an emergency, I'll expect a full briefing! No more surprises like that damned force pulse!" As he strides angrily away, the scientists look at each other in confusion: "Force pulse? What's he talking about?!"

PAGE 22(5-6): We then cut to a short while later, to an exterior shot of the administration building that houses Sam Pershing's office. As we follow a conversation inside, we see Sam at his desk, talking into a state-of-the-art scrambled SatPhone system in an open briefcase on his desktop. He's talking to an unidentified "boss" in the NSA, telling him that the mind transfer, despite an unexpected glitch, had actually worked. The "boss" tells him that they'd picked up some interesting sensor readings from the surveillance satellite in geosynchronous orbit over FlinTech, and he'll expect a full report within the hour. Sam breaks the connection, pushing a button to switch SatPhone channels as he says, "Did you get that, Hangman?" We then end the page with a shot of the briefcase communications rig as a voice from a speaker says, "Yes, Mr. Pershing, thank you. This is a significant development indeed. It appears that we may have to act more swiftly than we previously thought. Swiftly... and decisively!"

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Okay, here's what I have in mind for filling that unexpected six pages at the end of FREEMIND #1.

We start with a cityscape of San Francisco, then move to a distinctive modern skyscraper (or is there some other kind of H.Q. that you think would be better?) with a sign in front saying "Ang Mann Associates". Cutting inside to a Luthor-level office, we see Ang hanging up his own satphone, then turning to a small shrine behind his desk. The shrine includes a bust of Buddha, incense burners, etc., as well as framed photographs of his mother and father. He speaks out loud to the photos, saying that his father's spirit had guided him to the path his life must take, and now he stands poised to honor that spirit with success.

At this point an ASSISTANT enters the office and tells Ang that it's time for his daily (weekly?) report to Beijing. Ang scowls: he needs the connections and funds his government sponsors provide, but he's no cur on a leash, trained to bark at their command. He'll report when he has time. Right now, he has a more important matter to see to. He asks if Ms. Calibri is on the premises. The assistant checks a wireless PDA and says that security tags indicate she's in the serenity garden on the roof.

We cut to the roof of the building, where we see a young woman of Mediterranean heritage (ANNA CALIBRI) lounging beside a fish pond in a gladelike setting. She looks peaceful until her hand suddenly darts out with almost superhuman swiftness and plucks a large goldfish from the pond. She holds the fish by its tale as it slowly suffocates, its struggles diminishing. She cocks her head to one side as she watches, more curious than cruel. But then a hand comes in from off panel, holding its cupped palm beneath the fish. Anger flares briefly as she looks up--but then she smiles and drops the fish into the hand.

Widening the shot, we see Ang Mann kneel down and let the fish go, back into the pond. The two stand, with Calibri very close, sensual. Ang says that with what she'd been through, he would have thought Anna would have a greater respect for life. She answers that life is predictable, while death is enigmatic, and thus infinitely more fascinating. He says he has need of her, and Calibri answers that, as always, she's his: mind, soul...and body. Ang ignores the innuendo--this is business--and walks away, Calibri following.

The two take an elevator to another level, go through a door marked, "Residence Wing." (If you think having field operatives living on-site doesn't work, we can think of something else.) They walk past doors with names on them: Fevre, Imp, Fugue, Push--again giving the impression that our canvas is far wider than this one story. When they reach a door marked "Sirocco," they go in to an ultra-plush apartment; Ang Mann treats his people well. During their walk, Ang & Calibri discuss life & death. We get hints that Ang had saved Calibri's life at some time in the past, and that she feels great loyalty towards him, wanting to please him in every way, sort of like an eager puppy. A very sexy eager puppy. For his part, Ang considers death a necessary means to an end,

FM#1/Plot/Michelinie/P.7

but that eventually, life is his goal. And what he has just learned from Sam Pershing may well provide the key to that ultimate objective.

At the end, Ang pushes a button on a wall and a panel starts to slide open as he says, "I may have given you a new life, Anna. But now, you can help me build..." Our last shot shows the open closet with the metallic Sirocco costume/uniform inside as Ang finishes his sentence: "...a new world!"



CHAPTER 1

The metal detector didn't shriek when he stepped through it, so he was allowed to retrieve his car keys and Rolex from the tray. A guard handed over a clipboard with a pen and he gave his signature. The second guard reminded him that all conversations were recorded and he nodded with understanding. That same guard pressed a button on his desk and an electric buzzer signaled that the door was unlocked for the other guard to open it. Pausing to exhale his suppressed anxiety, James 'Rhodey' Rhodes stepped into the visiting room of Rykers Island Prison and watched out of the corner of his eye as the door was closed behind him. The buzzer sounded again, somewhat distant in the empty room.

Rhodey pulled back one of the chairs facing the glass window that divided the room and sat down. The window was set in front of a large desk which had vertical wood panels drilled into it to give privacy from the other visitors, but there was no one else scheduled to visit an inmate so early. On Sunday mornings, prison visitors are either in church or in bed.

Rhodey began to look over the room for any changes since his last visit. After completing his evaluation Rhodey wasn't surprised to find it unchanged, prison budgets being what they are. The room had the same pea green color that it had from Rykers last renovation twelve years ago. It instantly reminded Rhodey of the brig at Paris Island, the only time he was placed behind bars.

Rhodey had been a recruit in the US Marine Corps for only half an hour when three rednecks cornered him in the privy. They told young Rhodey that coons had no place in the corps, that he belonged on the streets getting high on crack and robbing liquor stores. Rhodey tore into them like a lion. He broke the jaw of one good 'ol boy, cracked the skull of another, and lacerated the face of the last one by ramming him into the sink mirror. An MP who was entering the privy quickly arrested Rhodey and tossed him into the brig while the corpsman tended to the bigots. Rhodey spent a sleepless night wondering if he would be discharged from the corps, or since he was barely a recruit, let alone a marine, turned over to the civilian authorities. But in the morning he was visited by Gunnery Sergeant Prescott, a man looking like he stepped off a Republic sound stage that shot John Wayne films.

"Stand up, kid," snapped Prescott. "You ought to look at yourself. Have trouble

sleepin' without a night light?"

Rhodey stumbled over to the cell door. "Yes, sir," he muttered, rubbing his eyes.

"Don't call me sir," hollered Prescott. "Save it for the men who wear the silver clusters and eagles on their shoulders. Or were those jug heads right about you? Are you the Harlem representative of the Uncle Tom Society, Rhodes?"

"No!" Shouted Rhodey, standing straight for the first time since the MP's pushed him into the brig.

"I didn't figure that, not from the beatin' you gave those flunkies. So how do you feel?"

"I don't know...nervous."

"Figure you're goin' to prison and walkin' out an old man?"

Rhodey lowered his eyes. "Yeah."

"You just might yet," said Prescott. "How'd you learn to fight like that, Luke Cage givin' lessons at the community center?"

"No, I learned on my own. Where I live you have to protect yourself, like it or not."

Gunnery Sgt. Prescott made a grin that would have shattered glass. "Let me tell you somethin', kid. In my day, you learned how to throw a punch no matter where you lived."

What's...what's going to happen to me, Sgt?"

"There's been talk, Rhodes, and none of it's good: The lawyers want to turn you over to the civie police. Your Lt. wants to personally bust your butt. And the commandant is itchin' to throw you in the military big house."

Rhodey shook. He didn't even get his boots dirty and he was already being discharged from the corps. He wanted to plead his case, but he couldn't find his voice.

"That was until I got to speak with the commandant," said Prescott. "And convince that bird colonel that you were worth a second chance."

Rhodey's expression turned from sorrow to disbelief. "What?"

"I got you a second chance, Rhodes," said Prescott, digging the cell keys out of his pocket. "Someone somewhere might say you owe me."

"Aw, man, Sgt. I can't believe it."

Prescott turned the lock and opened the door. "Do you believe now, kid?"

Rhodey grabbed his fatigue cap from the cot and stepped towards open air. "Oh, I believe. Do I believe."

Just then Prescott's index finger jabbed at Rhodey's chest, nearly knocking him backwards.

"Remember, Rhodes: You owe me. I'm goin' to turn you into a marine. You're goin' to put that anger you're luggin' inside you into boot camp. Pull another stunt like this and you're right back in this sweat lodge, understand?"

Rhodey's eyes went from Prescott's finger to his grey eyes. "I understand, Sgt."

Prescott dropped his arm and let Rhodey through. "Good to hear, now report to the barracks. And remember one last thing."

"What's that, Sgt?"

"Don't ever try takin' a swing at me. I didn't get these stripes because I'm sensitive."

Rhodey was brought back to the present by another shrieking buzzer. He focused on the opening door on the other side of the glass window as a guard armed with a baton walked through it. The guard made a sudden motion with his head and a cuffed prisoner stepped into the visitor's room. The guard guided him to the desk with a hand on his

elbow, and pulled the chair across from Rhodey out. The guard unlocked the cuffs and watched cautiously as the prisoner rubbed his wrists and sat down. The guard walked back to the door and closed it. The buzzer went off again, with the guard remaining inside the visitors room, hands and baton behind his back.

Neither visitor or prisoner smiled or frowned at the other, they merely stared. Finally Rhodey reached for the receiver and held it to his ear. A moment later the prisoner did the same.

"Hey, Rhodey," said Brendon Doyle.

"Hey, Brendon," said Rhodey.

"It's been a long time since you were last here," Brendon said. "I nearly believed you forgot about me. Everyone else on the outside has."

"After all we've been through, man, I couldn't forget even if I tried."

Brendon flashed an Irish grin. "What exactly do you mean, Rhodey? Southeast Asia, or that bit of thievery I pulled on your boss?"

"Southeast Asia, Brendon. "We had a code in that inferno: 'Watch each other's back'. I haven't forgotten that. No self-respecting marine would.

"Semper Fi," chuckled Brendon. "The one thing the military bean counters can't trim."

"The motto applies in civilian life, too," said Rhodey. "Tony Stark never served, but he behaves like his tailor outfits him in the uniform. He's helped a lot of people. He might even help you."

Brendon looked down at the desk and back at Rhodey. "After I broke into his factory and stole that ridiculous Mauler Armor for Edwin Cord, I doubt the man would help me with a crossword puzzle."

"But you didn't give Cord the Mauler Armor," Rhodey reminded him. "You surrendered it to Iron Man."

"Your bloody boss is Iron Man!" Brendon shouted, fist hitting the window. "He shows it to the world by changing into his bloody iron suit in front of some news cameras and for what? To stop a bank robbery!"

Rhodey scratched his chin in embarrassment. "Uh, yeah. I know. It's going to take a while for that to sink in. Especially since I helped keep it a secret for all these years."

"With the money Stark's paying you, you'll find a way."

"It's an incentive," grinned Rhodey. "You got pretty upset, Brendon. Did I hit a nerve?"

Brendon shrugged. "It's nothing, Rhodey. I've been catching grief in this can ever since Stark stepped from behind the curtain."

"You're kidding."

"You don't kid about life in the joint. Not a day goes by when I've got some tattooed lifer insulting me about my past as the armored mercenary who gave up without a fight to an Avenger."

"I...I don't know what to say."

"Forget it, Rhodey. I'm a big boy, and I can take care of myself, remember? I was the guy who beat Paris Island's martial arts instructor in ten seconds flat."

"I remember," grinned Rhodey. "I was next in line."

"Well, we Irish know more than just boxing and drinking chants, but let's cut to the chase. Why are you here, Rhodey?"

"When's your next parole hearing, Brendon?"

Brendon whistled. "Three weeks, but I already know I'll be denied. Cord may be in

prison too, but he still has friends in high places."

"Well, so does Tony Stark."

Brendon leaned forward. "What are you saying, Rhodey?"

"I'm going to talk to Tony, grinned Rhodey. "See if I can convince him to call in a few favors. Like I said, Tony's helped a lot of people, especially the people of New York City. If anyone can sway a parole board, he can."

Brendon turned from the guard and back to Rhodey in disbelief. "What...what are you trying to say?"

"I'm saying that I can get you a job at Stark/Fujikawa. You'd still be a parolee, report to a parole officer, live in a halfway house, but it would be a new start for you."

Brendon took the receiver away from his ear and ran a hand through his scalp. "You're...you're serious aren't you? Why'd you do that for me? I could've cost you your job."

Rhodey grinned and put his fist against the window. "Semper Fi."

Brendon's eyes went distant as his mind replayed Rhodey's offer. Then the Irish grin returned and he placed his fist opposite Rhodey's. "Semper Fi."

"Good," said Rhodey. "I'll call Tony as soon as I leave Ryker's, see if we can get the ball rolling."

Brendon stood up and the guard instinctively walked over to him. "Sure. Listen, Rhodey, I appreciate what you're doing."

"It's no problem, Brendon. I'll be in touch."

Brendon hung up the receiver and Rhodey did the same. Brendon stood up and was cuffed by the guard. Rhodey stood and watched as Brendon was led to the door. The buzzer broke the silence and the guard opened the door. Before he was led down the hallway Brendon turned and nodded to Rhodey. Rhodey returned the farewell as the door closed on his fellow marine.



In his luxurious penthouse atop Manhattan's distinct Stark Tower, multibillionaire Tony Stark was trying to be in three places simultaneously. He awoke this morning to the sound of the Avengers call signal beeping on his bedside table. The groggy Stark telephoned Avengers Mansion and was told by his onetime butler Jarvis, that the villainous robot Ultron had destroyed a Russian army base outside St. Petersburg, Russia. Now at five past eight, Tony was pacing across his den as CNN played live footage of Russian troops scrambling about like Indians around a bonfire. The attack on the former superpower was shaping up to disrupt Tony's itinerary for the day: He needed to speak with girlfriend Rumiko Fujikawa about the worsening Japanese stock market, he had a 9 o'clock phone conversation scheduled with Microsoft founder and chairman; Bill Gates, about the company's recent break-in, and finally he was scheduled to toss the game coin at the NFC Championship game between the New York Giants and the St. Louis Rams. Tony picked up his cell phone from the coffee table and redialed Avengers Mansion. As a founding member of the illustrious team of heroes, Tony knew his business obligations and social commitments would need to be placed aside if his alter ego, Iron Man, was called upon.

The dial tone whined in Tony's ear as he turned back to the TV. CNN was now replaying recorded footage of the attack. Laser blasts toppled watchtowers, ammunition depots exploded, and startled soldiers fired their weapons into the night sky. The camera tilted skywards, and focused on the silver frame of Ultron standing on the observation deck of an immense spacecraft, watching the destruction he created with silent pleasure.

"Tony," said the confident voice of the Avengers chairman, Captain America.

"Cap," said Tony with growing frustration. "Are you certain that you don't need me at the mansion?"

"Positive," Cap said. "It's clear Ultron was responsible for the attack, but we're uncertain about his objective, let alone if the Russian government will allow the Avengers to set foot on their soil and deal with him. I'm afraid, Tony, that if you were here, you'd hear pure speculation, and you get enough of that at your board meetings."

"Cap, you're so thoughtful," Tony grumbled.

"Tony, I know how you feel," Cap said. "There are thousands in danger and you're being ordered not to stop it. All we can do is plan ahead. It's not easy, but until then it's all we can do."

Tony weighed Cap's words and nodded solemnly. "You're right."

"I'm sorry, Tony. Just try to take things easy. If we're going up against Ultron again, we all need to be at the top of our game."

Tony hung up, walked out of the den, and onto the penthouse observation deck. There his secretary, Virginia 'Pepper' Potts was speaking into another cell phone.

"Pep," Tony asked. "Did you find Rumiko?"

Pepper spun around and covered the cell phone with her hands. "Find her?" she whispered. "Why do you think I'm standing out here, Tony? If I have to hear her reprimand me one more time I'll throw this phone..."

"Thank you very much, Pep," Tony said as he exchanged cell phones. He turned back into the penthouse and spoke softly to Rumiko Fujikawa. "Hello, beautiful."

"Hello yourself, hero," said Rumiko teasingly. "Why didn't you talk to me right away? We're supposed to be partners...in both business and pleasure."

"I'm very sorry," Tony chuckled. "So what's the situation in Tokyo?"

"Bad enough for my grandfather to commit seppuku."

Tony stopped in his tracks, his complexion turning white.

"Tony?" Rumiko asked worriedly. "Tony that was a joke."

Tony chewed his lip. "A joke, eh? Considering your grandfather's pride it wasn't amusing, Ru."

"I'm sorry, Tony, really. The stock market isn't as bad as the media hype says. I guess your Yankee egos needed to be bolstered."

Tony glanced at his watch; Bill Gates would be calling in half an hour. "Well, your material needs work. So does your relationship with Pepper."

Rumiko sighed. "I know, Tony. I didn't mean to snap at her like that. Tell her I'm sorry, will you?"

"Don't worry I..."

"Tony!" Pepper shouted as she ran into the den, holding a cordless phone like a track baton. "It's Bill Gates!"

"Eh?" Tony said. "He's called ahead of schedule. Ru, could you hold on, please?"

"As long as grandfather pays the bill," Rumiko giggled.

Once again Tony exchanged phones with his secretary. "Terrific," Pepper muttered, bringing the cell phone to her ear. "Hello again, Ms. Fujikawa."

Tony grinned as he watched Pepper walk back onto the observation deck, then focused his attention on the present conversation. "Bill, it's Tony."

"Hello," Gates said. "I'm sorry but I had to call early. I've got some anxious shareholders waiting in the next room."

"I understand and appreciate your situation. So how much information was taken concerning Microsoft's new computer program?"

"All of it, Gates grumbled. "Three years of work snatched like it was a candy bar from a convenience store."

"Well, in your case, it was snatched like an apple from a tree."

The line went silent; then Tony heard muttered cursing.

"I don't appreciate your sense of humor, Stark! I'm fighting for my life out here!"

"I know the feeling," Tony said. "Listen, I've read the reports on the heist, and it sounds like the work of the Ghost. I'm certain you've read about my run-ins with him over the years."

"Oh, really?" Gates said. "Then what do you propose I should do, Stark? Pay whatever ransom it takes to keep my competitors from getting their hands on my work?"

"If he contacts you, barter with him. I'll look into the Ghosts' previous employers. If I'm lucky I'll draw a bead on whoever hired him and where he's hiding. If you're lucky he's holding out to get a bigger paycheck."

Again, silence on the other line. "I'll do that," Gates said. "Thanks for your help, Tony."

"No thanks are necessary, Bill. Just 20% of the profits Microsoft will reap from its new program."

"20%?" Gates shouted. "That's an outrage!"

"No," said Tony. "It's a finders fee." And before Bill Gates could respond he hung up. Tony also turned off the TV and its violent images and walked back onto the observation deck. When Pepper saw him she tossed him the cell phone.

"Diamond earrings," Pepper grumbled. "Does she think she can buy my friendship?" Pepper walked back into the penthouse and angrily closed the sliding glass door.

"Ru," Tony scolded. "When I said you needed to work on your relationship with Pep, I never mentioned bribery."

"I was only trying to be nice," Rumiko said. "I thought if I got all sentimental on her, she'd hang up."

"Anyway, Ru, I'm glad business isn't as bad in Tokyo as I feared. When will you be back in New York?"

"I've got the jet ready to fly the second I'm finished helping grandfather secure Fujikawa's holdings. A day at the most, Tony."

"I'm glad to hear that, Ru," Tony said. "I've missed you so badly. Without you in town, I've had every actress and supermodel in town leaving messages on my answering machine."

"Don't even think of returning those calls, mister," said Rumiko with a touch of humor in her voice.

"I wouldn't conceive of it," Tony grinned. "I've got to be at a football game, so I'll see you soon, darling."

"I won't keep you waiting much longer, Tony. I love you," and with that, Rumiko hung up.

Tony collected his car keys, threw on his New York Giants jacket, and walked over to his personal elevator. As he waited for the doors to open he heard a phone ringing and Pepper's hurried footsteps. "Tony," Rhodey's on the phone. He said he's calling from Rykers Island."

Puzzled, Tony took the phone and sat in a chair. The elevator doors opened and closed with no occupants. "Rhodey," Tony said. "Pep said you're calling from Rykers. You did pay those parking tickets, right?"

"If I may correct you two I've left Rykers and I'm driving back to the tower. I was visiting a friend, that's all."

"A friend? Who?"

Rhodey was silent, as if he wasn't sure how Tony would take the news. "Tony...I was visiting Brendon Doyle."

The answer made Tony sit upright, his memory replayed images of Doyle in the Mauler Armor, using Stark technology for his mercenary dealings. "Well...Rhodey, I understand you and he were close, but why are you telling me?"

"Honestly, Tony, I'm asking for a favor."

"Concerning what?"

"Brendon has a parole hearing in three weeks, and I sort of promised you'd make some phone calls and..."

"Get him out of prison." Tony finished. "Rhodey, I'm not criticizing your concern for a friend, but with Doyle's record I doubt a recommendation from Nick Fury would get him out."

"That's not all," said Rhodey. "I also said that you'd hire him."

Tony was so startled he nearly dropped the phone. "You promised him a job, too? Rhodey, you've really overstepped your bounds."

"Tony, I hear what you're saying, but that Mauler incident was years ago. And don't forget he surrendered the Mauler Armor to you."

"That he did, once he saw that my new armor would've beat him like a tin drum."

"Listen, Tony. Brendon's made some bullheaded mistakes, but I think he's paid his debt to society. If you're anxious about hiring him I'm sure Brendon will understand, he doubts you'd hire him anyway. "But Tony, you should've seen the look on his face when I left him. It was the look of hope. Tony...I've seen that look on you, man."

Tony sighed and weighed his options. Brendon Doyle was a mercenary and an enemy, but James Rhodes was one of his most trusted friends. If Tony ever owed a debt to another man, it was Rhodey, and Rhodey never asked him for anything before.

"All right, Rhodey. I'll speak with the mayor, tomorrow. I'm certain my security department has a few openings for your friend, so see to it."

"Sure thing, Tony" said Rhodey enthusiastically. "Listen, man, thanks."

"Yeah," said Tony, rising out of the chair. "Well, you wouldn't lean on me so fiercely if you didn't believe in Doyle, so I guess he's worth a second chance. See you later, Rhodey."

Tony hung up and Pepper reappeared. "What was that all about?"

"I could say that Rhodey persuaded me to get a deadly criminal out of prison so he could work at Stark/Fujikawa, but that would only worry you," Tony quipped. "So I'll just say Rhodey talked me into hiring a friend of his still in prison."

"What?" Pepper shouted. "You're hiring a criminal? Who is this guy?"

Tony returned the phone, hit the elevator button, and stepped inside. "Rhodey will explain everything when he gets here. Look at it this way, Pep, we know exactly what were getting out of this employee." The doors closed and Tony was taken to his private garage.



Brendon Doyle stood impatiently in the serving line at Rykers cafeteria. Ever since he was returned to his private cell, Doyle had found it impossible to merely stand still. Three weeks, just three weeks and he'd be out. No more sleeping on soiled mattresses. No more lousy food. No more prison issue clothing. No more guards telling him what to do. No more insults from these lifers and three-time-losers.

Brendon slid his tray across the serving table, stopping to let the prisoners working the serving line toss food on the tray with their ice cream scoops and dirty spoons. He looked casually at tonight's menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes, chopped carrots, string beans, and a stale biscuit. At the end of the line Brendon was given cutlery and a plastic cup for the water pitchers stationed at each table.

Brendon sat alone in the corner and started to pick at his meal. The anticipation of his upcoming parole hearing spun around his head. Three more weeks. In three weeks he'd be out and it was all because of Rhodey. The marine who still believed he could turn his life around. Semper Fi, Semper Fi.

"Yo, Doyle," said a loud voice, pulling him back into the present.

Brendon knew whose voice it was before he saw him. It was Spider. A six foot five brute who got a 20 year sentence for murder. It was extended to life after he killed another inmate.

"I heard you had a visitor, Doyle," Spider said, dropping his tray on the table before he sat across from Brendon. A spray of gravy flew into Brendon's face.

"Yeah, I did." Brendon said, wiping a shirt sleeve across his cheek.

"So who was it? The Green Goblin? Bullseye?"

"No," said Brendon, looking at Spider. Spider had a wolfish grin on his face. It wasn't going to be a peaceful dinner.

"Yeah," said Spider. "Why'd those guys visit a loser like you?"

"I guess they'd ask for some pointers on avoiding prison, but they've been there already."

"Oh, yeah," admitted Spider. "But those freaks, they come and go, you just stay and stay."

"I like it here," joked Brendon, hoping more self humiliation would make Spider leave him alone. "The food's not so bad, I've got a roof over my head, and I have time to read."

"Stow it, Doyle!" Shouted Spider. "Rykers' the gutter, and you know it!"

"Yeah," admitted Brendon, his anger boiling. "Rykers' the gutter, the cons are the

gutter, and the guards are the gutter, but I'm getting out of here. Unlike you I'm getting out."

"Oh, so you're getting out," taunted Spider. "One of your costume buddies breaking you out or something?"

"They aren't my buddies. I'm getting out and I'm staying clean. No costumes, no schemes. I'm just going on with my life."

"No fooling?" laughed Spider. "So you won't be doing Halloween with that rich guy, Stark?"

Brendon sprung to his feet and in one, swift motion turned the table over. Before Spider knew what was happening, Brendon delivered a spin kick to the lifers' jaw.

The cafeteria erupted in applause. The guards on duty pushed their way through to stop the beating. The sounds of whistles, trays and cups crashing together mixed with the martial arts blows Brendon laid on Spider's body.

"Don't ever say that name again!" Brendon shouted to the semiconscious lifer.

The guards broke through and tackled Brendon. He tried to break loose, but the cold touch of handcuffs was clasped to his wrists.

"Don't ever say that name again!" Brendon was hauled to his feet. Spider staring up at him in a pool of blood.

The guards began to shove Brendon through the crowd and towards the cooler. The guards surrounding him like an entourage protecting a celebrity from the paparazzi. The prisoners continued to cheer and stomp their feet like a mad audience.

"All of you, don't ever say that name again!"

To be continued...

METAL HEAD

Hi Iron Fanatics, **Heath McKnight** here again with a look at the 2003 slate of films that will interest us all. Like me, you may be having post-2002-genre-emptiness syndrome, since this has been the biggest year in genre entertainment in a long time. If you remember an article I did a few issues back, I argued that 2001 started the genre craze lasting until around 2005 with the **new Indiana Jones movie**. Well, now I think it started late March 1999, when **THE MATRIX** started. So, with the post-2002-genre-emptiness thing haunting us, let's look ahead to what 2003 has to offer genre fans! It is truly **Marvel Films** and comic book movies' year!

(Note: All release dates are subject to change, and one or two movies that are slated for release, but haven't started shooting, may be shut down.)

Though there are some genre films in January (known as the dumping ground month for bad movies), things get cookin' when **DAREDEVIL** opens on Valentine's Day. What better time to open a film with a red-clad character and a twisted love affair with a woman who has a thing for sais?

Unlike last March, which saw a million summer and fall-style films open in one month (like ICE AGE, PANIC ROOM and RESIDENT EVIL), the only two half-way interesting genre films are Robert Rodriguez's digitally shot **ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO** (part three of the EL MARIACHI and DESPERADO trilogy) and **CORE**, bumped from last November, which is a movie about the Earth's core stopping and the "terranauts" who have to re-start it. Really. I'm not kidding you. Anyway, it sounds like a really LATE capitalization on the disaster films made popular by 1996's TWISTER.



April finds us watching, perhaps, **DREAMCATCHER**, based on **Stephen King's** hit novel. This sounds like a strange movie, but may be a doozy, which has four friends and the Army trying to stop a "virus" from spreading from a UFO. **TIMELINE**, the first **Michael Crichton** book/film since 1999's THE 13TH WARRIOR (see *Hube's column for more info on TIMELINE!*). This flick is about some college students traveling back to the 14th century France to save their professor who made the time machine he used to become trapped back then. Or something. The 1993 comic **BULLETPROOF MONK** is adapted with CHOW-YUN FAT (who was good in the John Woo films) in the lead role. **BASIC**, directed by the once great John (PREDATOR, DIE HARD 1 and 3) McTiernan, may return the director to his old action roots. It's a military mystery flick with Travolta and Sam Jackson (both in PULP FICTION), and sounds sorta like Travolta's THE GENERAL'S DAUGHTER.

X2 starts things off with a bang, launching May 2nd (one year after SPIDEY); with a bigger budget and more action; returning director Bryan Singer says the X-MEN sequel will be HUGE! Of course, the title changed from X² (squared) to X-MEN 2 and now X2...just thought I'd mention that...Jim Carrey stars in **BRUCE ALMIGHTY**, a comedy that finds **Morgan Freeman** once again playing someone with power, this time God, giving Jim Carrey God powers...for some stupid reason, I'm sure. **FINDING NEMO** is the fifth film from **Pixar/Disney** (TOY STORY; etc.), and should be fun; it's about a clown fish looking for his son. Really. The big one this month, and maybe this year, is **THE MATRIX RELOADED**, promising to be bigger and better than THE MATRIX (wow!), and opens May 15th, occupied last year by STAR WARS 2. Funny, May 3rd saw SPIDEY and May 16th saw STAR WARS. This year, it's another comic book flick and a hugely successful sci-fi film opening in basically the same spots. Only, I don't think X2 will stop MATRIX 2.

Opening in June or July (not sure which yet) is THE RING's Gore Verbinski (THE RING ruled) directing **PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN**, based on the Disney ride, like 2001's COUNTRY BEARS and the upcoming **HAUNTED MANSION** with **Eddie Murphy** (that one sounds dumb). PIRATES looks cool, with **Johnny Depp** in it, and the poster and trailer highlight the skeleton pirates. (Then again, pirate and nautical movies usually tank...)



Things heat up in June, with **THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS 2** (might now be called 2 FAST 2 FURIOUS), **FREDDY VS. JASON** (finally happened) and **CHARLIE'S ANGELS: FULL THROTTLE**. On June 20th, the biggest film (pun intended) hits with **HULK**, featuring a gigantic CGI Hulk and a rad director, **Ang Lee** (ICE STORM, CROUCHING TIGER...). **THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD**, with **Russell Crowe**, is about the 1812 Atlantic Ocean Wars. (Then again, pirate and nautical movies usually tank...)

July opens with **SINBAD: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN SEAS** from DreamWorks, a traditionally animated film that might bomb after

Disney's TREASURE PLANET did just that in November 2002. The big one this month is **TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES** with Arnie back, but no Sarah Connor, Eddie Furlong (some other dude plays John Connor) or James Cameron. Sacrilege? Hell yeah! A female TX? Okay, but how is she cooler than the T-1000? A remake of T2? Sounds like it. Will I be there opening day? Hell yeah, but with reservations, since I now think T2's non-action scenes



Come with me, Heath, if you want to live.



really friggin' suck! The troubled comic adaption **THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN**, with **Sean Connery** opens; there have been rumors of wars with Connery and the director (BLADE's Stephen Norrington) and the shutdown from the floods at Prague. Should be cool, since **Alan Moore's** comic on which it's based is cool. Also opening are **BAD BOYS 2** (shot near where I live), **TOMB RAIDER 2** (directed by the now-failed Jan de Bont, which is funny, since John BOYZ IN THE HOOD Singleton directed the FAST AND FURIOUS sequel -- why are these big directors doing sequels to someone else's films?) and **THE EXORCIST** prequel.

August, usually a quiet month as the summer winds down, has **GIGLI**, some thriller with Bennifer (**Ben Affleck** and **J-Lo** -- she used to be a good actress once, in OUT OF SIGHT and stuff) and **Pacino**. Also opening are **CURSED** (a werewolf film from SCREAM's Wes Craven and Kevin Williamson); **S.W.A.T.**, based on the old show with **Sam Jackson**, Colin Farrell (Bullseye in DAREDEVIL) and Michelle Rodriguez (in RESIDENT EVIL); Renny (I was once cool with DIE HARD 2 and DEEP BLUE SEA) Harlin's

MINDHUNTERS, about seven FBI profilers and one is a serial killer; and **A SOUND OF THUNDER**, which follows a time-traveling hunter out to bag dinosaurs (reminds me of some book I read in early 1994 like that), which is based on **Ray Bradbury's** short story (not the one I read).

September: Nothing as of now. Possibly **HOUSE OF THE DEAD**, based on Sega's zombie/Resident Evil rip-off, with teens, an island, a funky "house" and lots of zombies. And a lower budget, but probably a funnier film, than RESIDENT EVIL the movie (which has a sequel coming out in 2004).

Quentin Tarantino's first film in 6 years, **KILL BILL** (the "slaughterhouse movie to end all slaughterhouse movies") opens October 10th, four days shy of nine years since his gigantic film PULP FICTION opened in 1994 (memories...for me, at least). He also has a WWII film opening a year later (I'll talk about that in 2003 or '04). A totally *unnecessary* remake of the **TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE** (morons) opens this month, as does **MACABRE**, from the company that does these semi-annual horror films, founded by uber-producer **Joel Silver** (DIE HARD, THE MATRIX and more) and Robert (BACK TO THE FUTUREs and FORREST GUMP) Zemeckis -- only thing is, Zemeckis himself directs. *But*, it hasn't started shooting, so things may change, and I'll let you know if it does. SUSPECT ZERO, which was once a great script turned to crap and UNDERWORLD, a sort of Romeo and Juliet, vampires and werewolves movie (don't ask, and besides, there are WAY too many vampire movies out there).

November starts off with a HUGE bang as the \$300 million, shot back-to-back MATRIX sequels come to an end with **THE MATRIX REVOLUTIONS**, opening the 11th. Funny, LORD OF THE RINGS cost \$270 million and was shot back-to-

back-to-back, but I hear **THE MATRIX sequels** will be amazing! Following seven years after the dreadful SPACE JAM!, and trying to be more like ROGER RABBIT, is **LOONEY TUNES: BACK IN ACTION**. Also, no explanation is necessary for these: **Mike Myers** as **THE CAT IN THE HAT** and **Jackie Chan** in **AROUND THE WORLD IN 30 DAYS**. Absent this time around is the third HARRY POTTER, since Warner Bros. has too many franchises coming out this year, including LORD OF THE RINGS (New Line is now under Warner), MATRIXes and T3.

LORD OF THE RINGS comes to an end with **THE RETURN OF THE KING** ...man, these films are great (I didn't read the books, but I dig the films), and I'm sure we'll all be sad once it's all over. I liked THE TWO TOWERS better, since it wasn't an intro movie (much like the second HARRY POTTER and ATTACK OF THE CLONES were better than the first, intro movies). **Tom Cruise** is in **THE LAST SAMURAI**, as a Civil War vet training Japanese troops to kill the samurai. Two big budget Peter Pan films compete with each other: the \$100 million **PETER PAN**, which has Peter convincing some kids he's real (similar, sort of, to HOOK, maybe??). Like HOOK, **Bob Hoskins** may be in it, but not as Smee. The other is the lower-budgeted (not sure how much) **NEVERLAND**, which is more about PETER PAN author James M. Barrie's struggles to realize the PAN play, with Johnny Depp playing Barrie. Like in HOOK, **Dustin Hoffman** is in the film, but not as Hook. The funniest thing of all between the two films is the Redgrave sisters, who are allegedly each in one of the films. Yuk yuk yuk! Expect one of them to open earlier in the fall, probably NEVERLAND.

Special thanks to these websites:

www.aintitcool.com (best and biggest rumors site)

www.cinescape.com (announcements and my favorite movie news site)

www.darkhorizons.com/news.htm (which has the 1997-2003 release calendar)

www.corona.bc.ca/films/homepage.html (details and rumors on the films)

imdb.com (facts about the films)