

STARK

AI 60

1993 - 2003
10 YEAR
ANNIVERSARY

THE ORIGINAL
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FAN MAGAZINE IN
THE WORLD!

ADVANCED IRON MAN

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2003

HUBE'S SHELLHEADISTS



HAPPY SPRING!

(Unless you're an Aussie Iron Fan, then Happy Fall!!)

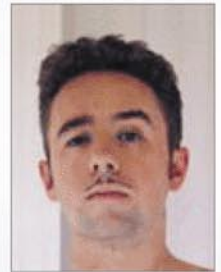
Remember - this is the...

10th Year Anniversary of Advanced Iron

WHY I MAY BOYCOTT 'THE ULTIMATES' COMICS AND POLITICS - AGAIN

As the United States is poised to attack Iraq at AI #60 press time, the ugliness of the debate is intensifying. Why do I even bring this up, you ask? Well, as I've connected politics to comics in my past columns (recent events in CAPTAIN AMERICA, IRON MAN, and radical conspiratorialist Steven Grant over at Comic Book Resources), a new occurrence has reared its head - this time in the form of remarks by ULTIMATES writer Mark Millar (pictured right). In an online forum, Millar recently wrote:

"Only three people in the world don't want peace - [George] Bush, Osama bin Laden and Dr. Doom"

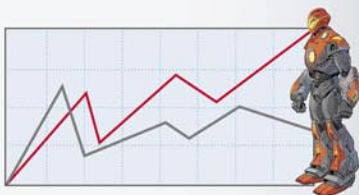


This, as any clear-thinking person knows, is completely outrageous. Equating Osama bin Laden with Bush? And then Dr. Doom?

Millar, from Scotland, also once said (in a January CBR column) that Bush was 'unelected', showing total ignorance of the American electoral system. He used the leftist/populist Michael Moore's book *Stupid White Men* as a 'guide' to what happened in Election 2000 ('rigging' of the election by Bush and Co.; Bush is part of an 'unelected junta'). You'd think someone unfamiliar with US electoral workings might want to get educated about it before making such asinine comments. Millar might want to check out Bill Sammon's *At Any Cost* to balance Moore.

Also check out what this 'expert', Millar, writes in this column about Bush adviser Condoleezza Rice - she wears 'fuck me' shoes. Millar likes to use the 'F' word a lot, and how he lectures Americans on race relations in our country, again using quite specious 'facts'. This, from a guy whose country hardly even has any black people as he himself states! Oh, and just so you Brits and Aussies out there don't feel left out, along with Bush, Millar called the presidents of both the UK and Australia 'pricks'. But I digress...

I myself am against military action in Iraq. I believe we can tighten economic sanctions even more to bring Saddam into compliance with UN resolutions, and step up U-2 and Blackbird reconnaissance flights (in addition to satellite fly-overs) to ensure that the Iraqi dictator is doing what he's supposed to. Saddam was greatly weakened after his defeat in 1991, so I think he's not really the threat that some (like Bush) are making him out to be. Of course, doing this certainly won't satisfy those on the radical left - they'll complain that tougher economic sanctions will further hurt common Iraqis, totally ignoring the fact that it has been Saddam seeing to it that the funds from 'oil for food and medicine' program in fact don't go where they're supposed to.



IRON MAN SALES RANK STATUS - SLIPPING

SOURCE: DIAMOND DISTRIBUTORS

IRON MAN #65 - Quality Rank: 43. Retail Rank: 63.

IRON MAN #66 - Quality Rank: 51. Retail Rank: 79.

And guess what, folks - this is before the price increase.

Yikes!

That being said, I do think Bush's view is very legitimate one - that force is a necessary measure to have on the table if Saddam Hussein continually refuses to abide by UN mandates.

Why can't Millar - or anyone else - simply debate the merits of a position instead of making ridiculous comparisons and/or indulging in personal attacks? Equating George Bush to Osama bin Laden is a disgrace. You don't need to be told why, and neither does Millar. In other words, Millar is a total idiot. (OK, I just made a personal attack myself, but at least I backed it up.) Just as he needs to get some knowledge about the American electoral system and race relations, so too does he need to learn the REAL differences between people like Bush - and bin Laden and Victor von Doom. Until he does, I'm considering ditching THE ULTIMATES off my monthly comics 'get' list.

What do you think?

IN THE INTERESTS OF EQUAL TIME...

Q: Hey Hube, what're you, some kind of far-rightist?

A: Heck, no. I'm actually a libertarian, (but not a hardcore one, I think it's bad to be a hardcore anything except maybe an Iron Fan!).

I am liberal on social issues but conservative on fiscal and constitutional matters. Just as I detest people using personal attacks against those who favor a conflict w/Iraq, so too do I think it's way out of line for people to impugn the patriotism of those who protest the administration's views. Certainly, there are many among the 'peace' protestors who do hate the US and whatever it may do, but there are MYRIAD reasons not to go to war, and very patriotic people have voiced their objections. More power to 'em. That's what makes America great.

Speaking of which, I hope people realize that freedom of speech does NOT mean one has a 'freedom from criticism!' Recently, the lead singer of the country group The Dixie Chicks told an English audience that she was "ashamed that George Bush is from Texas." While this comment is fairly innocuous, I was debating some folks online who stated that "not buying the Chicks' CDs in retribution would be infringing on the Chicks' free speech." Say what? You mean, if a celebrity, singer or whoever says something with which you disagree, you somehow don't have a right to NOT buy their stuff? WRONG! Heck, what if the Chicks said that they were Nazi skinheads in disguise? What if they said Hitler's Final Solution was a 'great idea' I'd be the first in line to boycott their stuff (if I bought country music, which I don't).

I wonder if the online folk who claimed 'infringement of free speech' would be so quick to state that if the Chicks said the just-cited what-ifs. Somehow, I doubt it.

And this is the difference - The Chicks and Millar make a lot of money doing what they do. If I find something personally offensive, why should I put out my hard-earned buck supporting its originator? I know many people (and am friends with some) who have views I find somewhat abhorrent. But they don't make my money espousing those views.

IRON MAN VS. HAWKEYE REDUX: THE AVENGERS-DEFENDERS WAR

Upon picking up IM #66 (and my last ULTIMATES issue), I always check out the TPBs and Essentials. I already knew I wanted ESSENTIAL UNCANNY X-MEN #1 (which collects the original X-Men's tales, #1-24) since I already had ESSENTIAL X-MEN #1 (gee, did'ja notice the "Uncanny" wasn't there? This collects the new X-Men's adventures from GIANT SIZE X-MEN #1 through #118). More on this in a sec.

I also skimmed through the AVENGERS - DEFENDERS WAR tpb which collects AVENGERS #115-118 and DEFENDERS #8-11 (both volume one, natch!). The stunning Carlos Pacheco/Jesús Merino cover certainly helped draw me in! Although the art in the collection isn't stellar (Sal Buscema and Bob Brown), and the story is a tad too mystical for my usual tastes, I bought it. In it, 'ol Shellhead takes on a disillusioned (disillusioned with the Avengers, that is) Hawkeye! Heck, I didn't even know Hawk even had hung out with the Defenders!

At any rate, Hawkeye and the other Defenders are tricked by the Dread Dormammu into retrieving the six parts of the mystic 'Evil Eye'. Original Avengers foe Loki, who once had teamed with Dormammu, ends up distrusting him, and connives a plot to get the Avengers to beat the Defenders to the Evil Eye's components. Hawkeye heads for a piece of the Eye in Mexico, but Shellhead is close behind. As IM is discussing the piece with a Mexican professor, Hawk launches a 'grabber' arrow to snatch the 'Eyepiece' from IM's hand! Now, I know what you're thinking - no way Hawk is gonna beat Iron Man!



Well, he shouldn't, you're right...

But of course, IM gets stupid and gets too close to Hawk as the archer lies stunned. Nasty Mr. Barton quickly nabs an acid arrow and smashes it on IM's helmet! IM quickly jets around to evaporate the acid, and then pummels Hawk with low-power repulsors. But after the third zap, Hawk flings a 'magnet' arrow near IM's gauntlet, throwing off the repulsor's aim. The blast hits a nearby building, threatening to crush several people! Dastardly Hawk knew IM would forget about the Evil Eye and save the innocents - and hence allow Hawk to escape into the woods with the Eye! (Writer Stevie Englehart must've forgotten about IM's myriad sensor arrays, but oh well). And when did Hawk and IM first mix it up? You got it - TALES OF SUSPENSE #57.

At \$14.95, it ain't a bad buy, especially if you're an old-timer like me. It's nice to reminisce with early-mid 70s tales by one of Marvel's best-ever scripters (Englehart). Other clashes in the collection include Thor vs. the Hulk, Cap vs. Namor, and the Vision vs. the Silver Surfer.

IRON MAN VS. HAWKEYE REDUX: THE AVENGERS-DEFENDERS WAR

- CONTINUED

Back to ESSENTIAL UNCANNY X-MEN #1. Y'know in all those old yarns, Stan Lee always managed to get all of Marvel's [new] teams to meet one another.



The mutants were no exception! In issue #9, guess who the Children of the Atom meet?

Yep, the Avengers!

Both groups are on the trail of Lucifer - he was responsible for Charles Xavier losing the use of his legs - while Thor's mystic hammer has picked up 'evil

strange impulses' where Lucifer is. Xavier is insistent that the X-Men handle 'Lucy', and of course, the Avengers get cheesed!

The obligatory battle ensues! IM isn't exactly what you'd call effective in the donneybrook, either! Cyclops zaps Thor's hammer into his noggin, then the Beast body-checks him in mid-air! Then, Shellhead's put on the defensive as Marvel Girl telekinetically tosses rocks at him!

SHEESH! Eventually, Xavier telepathically informs Thor of his plans, and so Earth's Mightiest back off.

Lucifer, by the way, took on Iron Man in his very own mag in... volume one, #20! The villain is a member of an extraterrestrial race called the Quists, also known to other alien races as the Arcane. (This last sentence taken directly from the AI site's 'The Vault's' villain summaries!)

MORE ON 'SUPREME POWER' THE NEW SQUADRON SUPREME

Here's a follow-up to my article in the last AI on the Squadron Supreme, taken from the online Newsarama: "Supreme Power: While it has its moments of dark humor, it's a very intense, serious book. And because it's being done for the Marvel Max line - which is aimed at mature readers - there are very few limitations in terms of imagery and language. Marvel has said it wants me to take this book to the wall, and that's pretty much where I intend to go". [J. Michael] Straczynski also stressed that Supreme Power is not a limited series, rather it's intended and designed from the start to be an ongoing series. "It's a massive writing challenge, though one of my main goals is to do right by Mark's [Gruenwald's] original creation."

On January 16th, Straczynski posted again, saying he had just turned in the third issue of Supreme Power, which placed him roughly three weeks ahead of schedule on writing it, and again stressed that the story is going to be serious in tone. "[It's] one of the most mature things I've written, oddly enough, given the medium," Straczynski said. "My scripts have turned into these huge, 50 page - for a 22 page book - Alan Moore-ish tomes that are designed to be visually dense. It's a rethinking of a number of superhero conventions that, so far, has turned out very well, I think. For various reasons we've kept a fairly low profile on this, until we could get a number of issues ready to go, and to avoid word getting out prematurely on what we have in mind, 'cause over the long haul it will prove to be kind of controversial. Once it hits stores, I suspect it'll move out pretty fast unless folks have dibs on copies."

In speaking with Newsarama about Supreme Power, Straczynski declined to be any more specific on what will make Supreme Power controversial, saying that he didn't want to have his upcoming stories either co-opted or diffused by premature discussion. Straczynski also told Newsarama that the first issue is slated to go on sale July 16th.

ARTWORK BY OLIVER WARDEN





I feel I am treading on somewhat shaky ground here, depicting a scene with a shuttle in jeopardy, in the light of the Columbia Space Shuttle tragedy in January this year. However, I think that this rendition of IRON MAN ANNUAL #9 can be viewed in a positive light, as a timely reminder that good can still triumph over tragedy, as Shellhead manages to avert another potential disaster with the help of his old sparing partner and Roxxon Oil employee, Suntuirion.

THE STORY

This was one of my favourite Iron Man annuals, mainly because it was actually written by the Michelinie, Bright and Layton team and was just as good as any of the other stories in the regular comic book.

As I am sure everyone remembers from the Iron Man Annual story, the beautiful Sandy Vincent, also known as Stratosfire, was also a pawn of Roxxon Oil, utilising the same experimental technology that brought Suntuirion to life in IRON MAN Volume 1 #142-143 (when Iron Man fought him in his space armour). Stratosfire had the looks, charisma and personality of a pop star, yet she was relatively inexperienced in the hero business. Originally groomed as Roxxon's answer to Iron Man, she eventually became emotionally unstable when she discovered that Roxxon had ruthlessly murdered her best friend, Babs Bendix for revealing confidential information to Tony Stark.



Stratosfire was literally a shooting star, whose halo burned brightly for a time, as she made a misguided attempt to solve the world's problems without considering the consequences, and then finally went supernova when she was stopped by the intervention of Iron Man and Suntuirion as she attempted to destroy a space shuttle. I personally don't believe that Stratosfire was really a villain. She was more a

misguided individual who was understandably hurt and grief-stricken by her friend's death. To me, she falls more into the same category as Scott Lang's Ant-Man or Force, both of whom would ultimately become allies of Iron Man. It's a shame that Stratosfire never returned, as I would've liked to have seen her character develop and perhaps even eventually ally herself with Iron Man, becoming a true heroine in her own right.

THE ARTWORK

For this picture, I utilised the lovely Estella Warren's likeness for Stratosfire. I wanted someone who was extremely beautiful, yet could also convey that young and innocent look I wanted to capture in the character. I wanted this Stratosfire to be instantly likeable so that one could more easily sympathise with her and find it harder to see her as a villain. I have slightly modified her hairstyle, first of all because the original comic-book style appears to be slightly dated and more reminiscent of the big styles of the 1980s. Secondly, I wanted Stratosfire to have a youthful, girlish look and not that of a sophisticated woman.

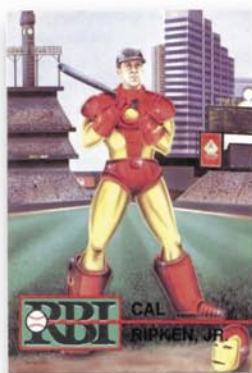
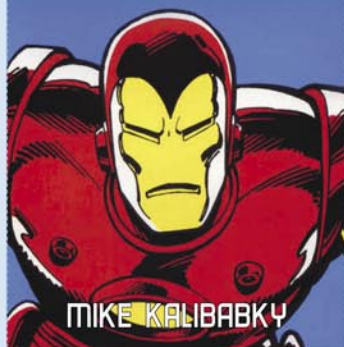


I decided to recreate the climactic scene from the story where Iron Man questions Stratosfire's methods and the lengths she will go to achieve her ends, even if it means jeopardising innocent lives. As she is momentarily distracted whilst considering these questions, Suntuirion teleports in to activate the 'Zed Control' which will destroy Stratosfire completely. I originally intended to set the picture in space, but after playing around with it for a while, I felt that it would look more dramatic within the earth's atmosphere from a bird's eye (or sky-diver's) point of view with the ground looming ever closer down below.

Overall, I'm pleased with how this piece turned out. I think it captures the spirit of the original and hopefully improves on the cover.

WELSHCAT

STARK REMARKS



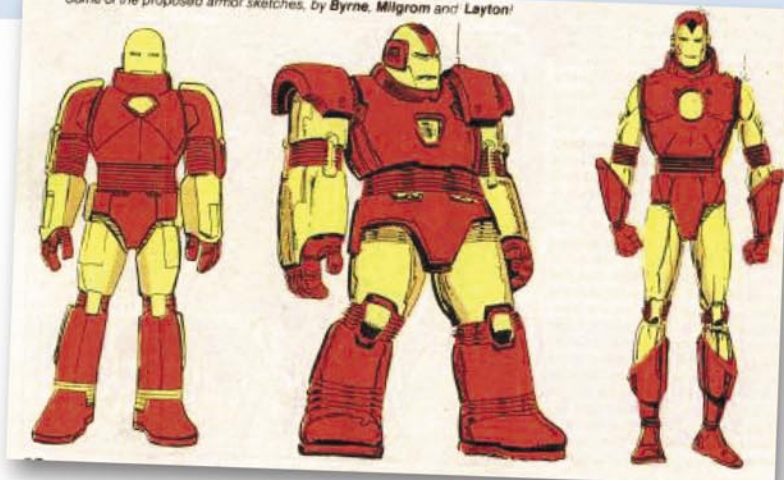
BASEBALL IS BACK!

Spring training in the major leagues is well under way, and what better way to celebrate the upcoming 2033 season than with a 1992 RBI Cal Ripken, Jr. card, featuring the former 'Iron Man' in a Post-Armor-Wars tin tuxedo!

Yes, sir, I picked up this treasure on eBay for a whopping 95 cents! If only MLB ticket and concessions prices were this affordable!



Some of the proposed armor sketches, by Byrne, Milgrom and Layton!



THE ORIGIN OF THE SILVER CENTURION ARMOR

In early February, a frequent visitor to the IRON MAN MESSAGE BOARD known as 'Darkwing' posted a JPEG of some preliminary design sketches by John Byrne, Al Milgrom and Bob Layton for what eventually would be the Silver Centurion armor that debuted in IRON MAN #200 (November 1985).

After some digging, I found the sketches in MARVEL AGE #31 (October 1985), along with an accompanying story 'The One with the Answers! IRON MAN #200' by none other than future Iron Scribe Len Kaminski!

A passage from Len's story blew me away...

"It took the absolute cream of Marvel's artistic crop, working in unison, to design Iron Man's new armor. Superstars John Byrne, Al Milgrom, and Bob Layton submitted new designs, exchanged ideas, generated several tons of sketches, made suggestions submitted still more designs, and generally worked together to make the new armor the best possible".

"It was a team effort, says [editor] Mark [Gruenwald], The final design was a composite of the best suggestions of all three of them, the finished version of which was done by Bob Layton".

WOW! No wonder why I had dug the Silver Centurion armor to the point that it got me hooked on IRON MAN in the first place: Bob Layton had a definitive hand in its final design!

Along with initial design sketches was a silhouette of the finished product (shown above).

Looking at the preliminary Silver Centurion designs, one realizes that features from all three were ultimately used. Milgrom's armor found its way into IRON MAN #200 as the blue 'Iron Monger' suit worn by Obadiah Stane.

The high collar on Layton's sketch became a feature on the Post-Armor-Wars armor first seen in IRON MAN #231 (June 1988). Byrne's collar and helmet arrangement appeared on his version of the Silver Centurion armor featured in HULK #316 (February 1986).

Many thanks to Darkwing for starting this ball rolling!



METALHEAD



Hey everyone, this month is going to be a little short, because I have a film premiering at the Palm Beach International Film Festival, and I've gotta get the flick ready to go!

Oh, by the way, Alfred Molina (FRIDA) has signed on to play Doc Ock in the Spidey sequel.

Well, at least his hair looks like Ock's!

Anyway, I'm just going to go through a brief summary of the Iron Man film over the last 3 years:

1. At the end of 2000, the IRON MAN rights left Fox and went to Don Murphy's Angry Films (produced FROM HELL). The first writers were the guys who did SHREK: Ted Elliot and Terry Rossio.
2. With no explanation in sight, Elliot and Rossio are off and Tim McCanlies (THE IRON GIANT) is onboard by the summer of 2001, to pen the script. I read a review of the script, with Nick Fury in it, but can't find the link anywhere. The reviewer, Harry from Ain't It Cool, liked it a lot. I'll send a link when I find it.
3. By the end of 2001, Joss Whedon (BUFFY, TOY STORY, ALIEN: RESURRECTION) is onboard to write and direct.
4. Not much happened in 2002, and Joss Whedon walked off in September. He said it was something that wasn't totally his.
5. The Iron Man Game Boy Advance game comes and goes, and can't be found anywhere except a couple of stores. It's enjoyable, but short, according to reviews.

6. Rumblings that New Line and Angry Films are still prepping an Iron Man Movie.
7. On Feb. 13, 2003, it's announced SMALLVILLE's (and at one time, writers on the Spidey sequel) Alfred Gough and Miles Millar will write the IRON MAN movie. Release is set for 2005.
8. Rumors are flying who might be the one to play Stark.



"Hey Leo, want to play Tony Stark?"



"Sounds good, yo!"

9. Avi Arad, bigshot at Marvel Films, wants Leonardo DiCaprio to play Stark/Iron Man, just a week after Gough and Millar are announced as writers.
10. Nothing since then, almost a month later. If the movie gains no more steam, will Angry Films lose the rights at the end of the year, three years after acquiring them?

Stay tuned...

Sites I visited: www.superherohype.com

IRON MAN ARMOUR CONCEPTS

ARTWORK BY BRANDON PERLOW

The following Iron Man movie armour concepts were previously posted on the Iron Man Message Board by Brandon who has kindly allowed us to reproduce them in Advanced Iron.

I planned to write a little about Brandon and his truly awe inspiring renderings but unfortunately

I got his info and images just after I finished putting this issue of AI together, and ran out of time.

I will aim to include some info on Brandon next time, in the interim if you'd like to contact him he can be reached via email at

bperlow@speakeasy.net

Enjoy.

- Angelo

















BOB ALMOND'S BLACK PANTHER PRINT

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Mike, who a few weeks back submitted a website news item on Bob Almond's awesome Black Panther print, sent in this character key.

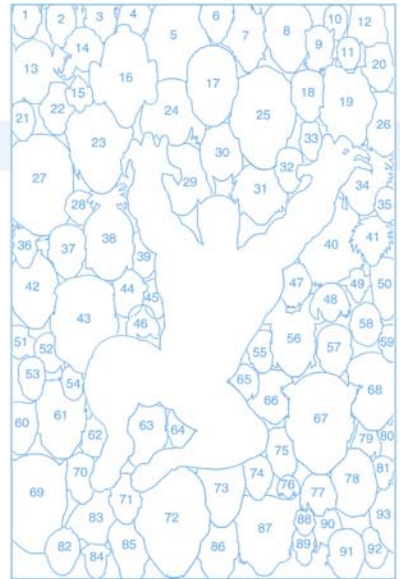
KEY fb flashback i image (not actual appearance: may be dream, illusion, photo, etc.) * future alternate versions

1. Yellowjacket: 42
2. Quicksilver: 42
3. Justice: 13,14
4. Warbird: 27, 42, 43
5. Dr. Doom: 27, 28
6. Nightmare: 21, 22
7. Mephisto: 21i, 30i
8. Hunter/ The White Wolf: 22, 24-28, 36*, 44
9. T'Chaka: 22i, 27fb, 30fb
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14. Scarlet Witch: 27, 30fb, 41fb, 42, 43
15. Daki: 21i, 22, 23, 30fb, 36*, 37*
16. Achebe: 13, 21i, 22, 23, 30fb, 31fb, 36*, 37*
17. Klaw: 22i, 26-29, 35fb
18. W'Kabi: 14-16, 22, 24, 32, 33, 35, 40, 41, 49
19. N'Jadaka/Enk Killmonger: 13, 15, 16, 18-25, 31fb, 36*
20. Omoro: 31-33, 38
21. Vision: 30fb, 35fb, 42
22. Triathlon: 23
23. Storm: 25-27, 48fb
24. Nakia/Malice V: 13, 22i, 23-25, 31-33
25. Everett K. Ross: 13-30, 31i, 34&35(as Mephisto), 36*, 37*, 38 & 39 (as Mephisto), 39 (as Chiantang & Black Dragon), 40-49
26. Ramonda: 18, 21, 24, 25, 32, 41
27. Magneto: 28, 48i, 49i
28. Akafe: 31, 33
29. Okoye: 16, 19, 20, 25, 32-34, 38, 41-43, 49
30. Nikki Adams: 14-20, 22, 24, 25, 30fb, 31i
31. Zuri: 18-21, 23, 24, 27, 32, 33, 35, 40, 41, 44, 49
32. Taku: 18, 23, 26
33. T'Challa's un-named Eman': 18, 42, 43
34. Monica Lynne: 13, 15, 16, 18-22, 24, 26-28, 30, 31fb, 32, 33, 36*, 37*, 44-46, 48
35. Kono, the high priest: 21
36. Hydro-man: 13, 14, 17fb
37. N'Kano II/Vibraxas: 24-29, 31-35, 41i, 48, 49
38. Queen Divine Justice: 13, 15-22, 24-29, 31-35, 36*, 38, 41-49
39. Danny Vincent(e)/Junta (& Erma'): 41-45
40. M'Baku the Man-Ape: 32-35, 39fb, 48, 49
41. Un-named Dora Milaje priest: 13, 16, 35fb
42. Deadpool: 22, 23
43. Hulk: 15, 17, 21i, 30fb, 35, 38fb
44. Thing: 26, 27fb, 30fb, 31i, 33
45. Mr. Fantastic: 26, 30, 43
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47. N'Gamo, M'Baku's assistant: 33
48. Dakota North: 31-33
49. Cockroach: 16, 17
50. Cottonmouth: 16, 17
51. Hellcat: 35, 38fb
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56. Nightshade: 16, 17, 38-41, 43-45, 48
57. Black Goliath: 17
58. Boss Morgan: 16, 17

59. Siletto: 16, 17
60. Dr. Strange: 35, 38fb
61. Namor the Sub-mariner: 27-29, 35, 38fb
62. Un-named samurai warrior: 43
63. Henry Peter Gynich: 30, 34, 35, 36*, 38, 40-43, 44fb, 45, 46, 48
64. Senator Rakim: 41, 44fb, 45
65. Colleen Wing: 38
66. She-Hulk: 22, 23
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68. Falcon & Redwing: 16, 17, 37*
69. 'Happy-Pants' Black Panther: 35, 40-49
70. Dubya/the Prez: 43-45
71. Kiber the Cruel: 43
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73. Ironfist: 16, 17, 38-40, 41fb, 42fb, 45fb, 48fb
74. Chiantang/The Black Dragon: 30 (as Mephisto), 38 & 40 (fb as Mephisto), 31, 32, 34, 35, 38, 39 as Ross), 40 (fb as Ross), 38fb, 39, 40
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76. Wasp: 23, 27, 30i, 42-44
77. Brother Voodoo: 17-22, 37*
78. Moonknight: 20-22
79. Baron Macabre: 36*, 37*
80. Sombre: 36*, 37*
81. Salamander K'Ruel: 36*, 37*
82. Abner Little: 41-45, 48fb
83. Princess Zanda: 42-45, 48fb
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85. Hatch-22/The Six-Million Year Man: 43
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87. Wolverine: 41-44
88. Lord Karnaj: 36*, 37*
89. Venomm: 36*, 37*, 49
90. Madame Slay: 17fb, 36*, 37*
91. Bob Almond: 17, 39, 40
92. CJP: 20
93. Sal Velluto: 17, 29, 39, 40

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95. Dzokar Gapon: 13, 14
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97. Ross' mom: 21
98. Kraven the Hunter II: 21i, 30fb
99. Kazar & Zabu: 22i
100. Hatute Zeraze ('Dogs of War'): 22i, 23, 25, 26, 44
101. Jarvis: 22
102. Frank Shlichting (Constrictor): 22, 23
103. Mary 'Skeeter' MacPherran (Titania): 22, 23
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105. D'Won: 24
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108. 'Bug' aliens: 25
109. Barney Fiddler: 26
110. 'Iyo' (Deviant mother): 26, 28fb
111. 'Omode' (Deviant mother's human child): 26-29
112. Lord Ghaur: 26-29
113. Ted Koppel: 27
114. Warlord Kro: 27, 28



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116. Karkas: 27
117. Firestar: 30fb
118. Wonderman: 13i, 30fb
119. Human Torch: 30fb
120. Wheeler: 31
121. M'Koni/Mary Wheeler: 31-33
122. Maria Henckel: 31i, 33
123. Devlor: 31fb
124. Huntara: 31fb
125. Psi-lord: 31fb
126. Billy, M'Koni's son: 31, 33
127. Hawkeye: 30i, 35fb
128. Chieftan Kimboya: 35
129. Black Knight: 35fb
130. Boomerang: 35fb
131. Eel: 35fb
132. Blackwing: 35fb
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134. Toyosi (Queen's 'grandma'): 35fb, 41
135. Faida: 36, 37
136. T'Charra: 36, 37
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138. Myron 'MGM' Mason: 41, 44fb
139. Happy Hogan: 42
140. Pepper Potts: 42, 43, 44fb, 45
141. Jeffrey Sutter: 42
142. Vindicator: 42-44
143. Guardian: 42-44
144. Sasquatch: 43, 44
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147. Snowbird: 43, 44
148. Joseph Legarde Stone: 43
149. Canadian Prime Minister: 44, 45
150. Sundance: 46, 47
151. Loki: 46, 47
152. Rawhide Kid: 46, 47
153. Two-Gun Kid: 46, 47
154. Kid Colt: 46, 47
155. Odin: 47
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Time Nurtures all Wounds

by Christian Ruelle

CHAPTER TWO

After three weeks Brendon was still surprised that it was actually happening: his parole hearing had finally arrived. In approximately five minutes, a guard would knock on the door of the holding room and escort Brendon and his new lawyer down to the boardroom and his chance at freedom.

Actually, that was no longer a certainty. The beating Brendon laid on Spider put him in the cooler for his remaining three weeks until his parole hearing. The captain of the guard visited Brendon a few days later and told him that his phone and visitor privileges had been revoked. The captain also informed Brendon that the warden was leaning on the Department of Corrections to cancel the parole hearing, so he might as well make himself comfortable and make the best of his sentence at Rykers, with time added on for assault and battery.

But the warden quickly discovered that he was outclassed by Brendon's unlikely benefactor, Tony Stark. His onetime enemy saw to it that Brendon's parole hearing would be convened, and that he would have suitable legal representation. All that was left to the fates was if the parole board decided to turn the key and let the jailbird out of his cage.

"Now, when we get inside the boardroom, I want you to sit up straight," instructed Brendon's imposing lawyer. "Keep your hands clasped and on the table. Parole boards hate it when inmates tap their fingers or scratch their hair. It gives the impression that they have no wish to leave this institution."

"No scratching," muttered Brendon. "Got it."

"That's another thing," reprimanded the lawyer. "When you're spoken to, speak clearly, confidently, and with enthusiasm."

"You sound like you've had some experience in these matters," grinned Brendon. "Did Stark have some representatives busted for industrial espionage?"

The lawyer sneered, straightened his posture, and placed his hands on his hips. "Let's get something straight, Brendon: Mr. Stark secured your parole hearing. Most people who've been victimized tend to curse the perpetrator, but he's fighting for you as if you're his brother. You might not appreciate his help, but if you want me to continue acting as your lawyer you'd better start showing him some respect."

Brendon fell silent, considering the threat of representing himself before the parole board.

"You know something, bud? You're right. This is all happening thanks to Tony Stark. If I'm granted parole I'll remember to thank him personally."

There was a knock at the door. The lawyer walked over to it, gripped the doorknob and turned to face Brendon. "That's better. And finally, my name again is Mr. Conway."

"Sorry," grinned Brendon. "It must have slipped my mind."

Conway opened the door and a large, sullen guard entered the holding room. "Mr. Conway. Mr. Doyle. Are you two gentlemen ready to meet the Board?"

"Yes, my client and I are ready."

The guard turned to Brendon. "Stand up please, Mr. Doyle."

Brendon grinned and complied. Prison guards are no different from the city cops: They'll always treat you with respect when a lawyer is present.

Conway gathered his paperwork and gingerly placed them in his briefcase. He adjusted his tie and walked towards the open door. "Let's not keep the Board waiting."

Tony's investigation into the Ghost's theft of Microsoft's new computer program had led to a vacant warehouse along the wharves of Boston Harbor. Tony had donned the Prometheus II armor

and flown to confront the Ghost before he chose a buyer for the stolen program. Tony had a bit of help in that matter from Pepper, who was masquerading as a Texas businessman; increasing her bid whenever offers became stagnant on the Ghost's secret website.

"How's the auction going, Tex?" kidded Rumiko.

Pepper didn't bother to turn and look at Rumiko and keyed in a new bid. "If Tony doesn't get that program, I'll be able to give it to Gates as a birthday present."

"When do you think Tony will report in?" asked Rumiko worriedly. "We haven't heard a peep from him in over an hour."

Pepper huffed and spun her chair around. "Trust me, we'll hear from Tony when we hear from Tony. Until then, don't bother me while I'm trying to help him."

Pepper spun back to her computer screen and keyed another bid into the website. Her latest offer made the other auctioneers fold or increase their wagers.

"You really hate me, eh?" asked Rumiko after a long silence.

"Hate's too strong a word. I was thinking dislike."

"Rumiko walked over to the wall that the computer desk was facing and leaned against it. She gave Pepper an icy stare, compelling her to look up from the computer screen. "Listen, I love Tony. I may not have behaved like it before, but I loved him then and I still do. And like it or not the two of us need to stop acting like candidates for the next Aaron Spelling drama."

Pepper stared back at Rumiko and went back to her computer. "That's a great idea from a girl who used her boyfriend's artificial heart like a doormat."

Rumiko's posture went from commanding to aggressive in a heartbeat. But instead of hitting Pepper she walked to the doorway, stopped, and glared at her. "Pep, if you're frustrated that you don't have a life, don't take it out on someone who does."

Pepper leapt out of her chair and was striding over to Rumiko before realizing that she had left. Pepper returned to the computer and flopped into her chair, cursing Rumiko under her breath. Just then the Ghost's website went offline, making Pepper lean forward and try to reconnect with the site. All that her efforts produced were an information box stating that the site had been disconnected. Whatever was happening in Boston, Tony had just placed the final bid.

The parole board looked over Brendon as if he were a germ. Chairman Kirsch would studiously adjust his glasses while browsing through his copy of Brandon's file, Mr. Putnam turned to a clean sheet of notepad paper and wrote a few notes, and Mr. Rawlins tapped a fountain pen on the Board's table as he glanced from file to convict.

Sitting at the defendant's table, lawyer Conway arranged his notes, while sitting at the table to his right, the prosecutor did the same.

Sitting in the third row of audience chairs, Rhodney Rhodes nodded encouragement to the jumpsuit-clad convict who sat still with his cuffed hands clasped on the scratched defendant's table.

"Mr. Uh...Conway," began Kirsch. "Your client's file says he assaulted a fellow convict in Rykers Island's cafeteria three weeks ago."

Conway stood like a student addressed by a teacher. "Yes sir, Mr. Doyle was involved in an altercation in Rykers cafeteria."

"A very foolish act, considering he was aware that his parole hearing was soon approaching."

"Yes sir, it was. But my client acted in defense of his person."

Now the prosecutor sprang to his feet. Brendon smirked with the thought of America's court system being the inspiration for the arcade game Smack the Mole.

"Gentlemen, Mr. Doyle viscously attacked an inmate and placed him in Rykers infirmary. This action, taken with his previous record as a mercenary and self-styled costumed criminal, demands that Mr. Doyle's parole be denied and a charge of assault and battery be added to his sentence."

Rawlins leaned forward and pointed at the young prosecutor with his fountain pen. "Let me remind

you, Mr. Glossberg, that it is for us to decide the approval or denial of a convict's parole."

Glossberg lowered his head like a disciplined child. "If I've offended the Board, I apologize immensely."

"Well then," said Putnam. "Now that we all know our duties, let's move this hearing along, shall we?"

"Indeed," said Kirsch, adjusting his glasses. "Mr. Conway, call your first witness please."

Conway stood and did that lawyer bit of adjusting his tie. "Gentlemen, I call James Rhodes."

The laser blast sent Iron Man reeling backwards and into a stack of dust-covered crates filled with Chinese umbrellas. As the dust cleared, Iron Man sat amongst the wreckage, called up his monitor screen, and checked his damage. Despite the laser's intensity, the armor was not breached. Iron Man brushed the tattered souvenirs off his shoulders and stood up, his armor's targeting systems were activated and searching.

From the other side of the warehouse the shadow of a cloaked figure took form and materialized, revealing itself to be the Ghost, the most elusive and mysterious of Iron Man's foes.

"Sorry to be so brusque, Iron Man. But this auction is being conducted over the Net."

Iron Man advanced on his adversary. Targeting was acquired; his repulsors glowing with power.

"I've got other things to deal with today, Ghost. So turn over the computer program."

The Ghost responded by firing another blast from his laser gun. Iron Man deflected it with the force shield generated by his left gauntlet, and returned fire with a repulsor blast. The Ghost was struck on the torso and was knocked off his feet. The cloaked saboteur struggled to stand. Smoke drifted from the mark where the repulsor blast connected. "Lucky shot," panted the Ghost. "Just a..."

Iron Man slammed into him and carried the Ghost into the air, an orange streak trailing from his boot jets. Iron Man swatted the laser gun out of the Ghost's hand and tossed him into the wall. The Ghost bounced off it and fell to the floor, lying there sprawled. Iron Man landed and pulled him to his feet, shaking the Ghost back into consciousness.

"I'm tired of being polite. Turn over the computer program."

The Ghost reached into his utility belt and held a metallic vial up to Iron Man's faceplate.

"Here it is."

Just as Iron Man realized what the Ghost was holding it ignited. Magnesium flare. Flames leapt towards the eye slits. The Plexiglas prevented any eye damage, but the flare temporarily blinded him. The Ghost broke free and Iron Man lifted off into the air, hovering inside the warehouse. Iron Man knew from experience that his armor's systems couldn't locate the Ghost when the saboteur's battlesuit was activated in either invisible or intangible phase, so the best he could do at the moment was defend himself with the armor's force field until his vision cleared.

The laser blasts started again. The shots were aimed at Iron Man's helmet, meaning the Ghost was trying to blind Iron Man further. Iron Man activated the polarized lenses in his eyeslits, dropped his force field and laid down suppressing fire in the Ghost's probable location, knowing the odds of hitting him while in his present condition to be unlikely.

The warehouse fell silent and Iron Man blinked. The white haze was fading into a spotted haze. Then Iron Man heard the sound of something flat and metallic latching onto his armor. A second object followed, then a third, and then a fourth. "That's an impressive suit of armor you're wearing, Shell-Head," taunted the Ghost. "Let's see what it takes to chink it."

Iron Man knew what that meant. It was too late to reactivate the armor's force field, so he prepared for what was about to happen.

The magnetic bombs exploded in unison, dropping Iron Man to the floor and making a crater out of the area where he landed. Iron Man slowly sat up, chips of tile flaking off his back.

The heel of the Ghost's boot knocked him back onto the floor. Iron Man opened his eyes and looked up at a blurry shadow. It wasn't the Ghost in his intangible phase, it was his vision clearing.

The Ghost adjusted the frequency of his laser gun and pointed it at Iron Man's faceplate. "I always knew I'd be the one who finally killed you," the Ghost boasted. "Perseverance. The stuff glory is made of."

The armors' unibeam fired first. Its power scorched the Ghost and its force hurled him into the air. The Ghost landed near the warehouse's receiving doors; his laser gun was lost, his battlesuit and cloaked singed.

Iron Man stood and walked over to the fallen Ghost. His vision had cleared, and the damage to his armor was minimal. "I can do this all day, Ghost, but I doubt you can," challenged Iron Man. "Wise up and give me the program while your arms are unbroken."

The Ghost sat on his knees and turned to the approaching Avenger. "What? And throw away the chance for the biggest payday in my entire career?" The Ghost threw a handful of pellets at Iron Man with all his strength. "Never!"

The pellets landed at Iron Man's feet and exploded on impact. Iron Man activated his force shield, expecting incendiary devices, instead a dark cloud expanded in front of him; smoke pellets.

Iron Man prepared to fire a repulsor blast into the smoke screen, but an explosion across from it rocked the warehouse. Activating the armor's infra-red, Iron Man peered into the smoke, already knowing what he'd discover. The Ghost had taken a magnetic bomb and blown apart the receiving door.

Iron Man left the warehouse the way he entered: through the skylight. Hovering above Boston's wharves, he scanned the area for any trace of the Ghost, who hopefully didn't activate his battlesuit. Iron Man quickly found him, not with his armor's systems, but from the crowds of Bostonians that were screaming and running away from the ghostly image of a cloaked figure running towards the John F. Fitzgerald Expressway.

The witness chair was stationed to the left of the Board's table. Rhodney sat straight with his elbows on the arm rests. His face betrayed no emotion, and his eyes followed Conway as he paced across the boardroom.

"Mr. Rhodes, what is your connection to Mr. Doyle?"

"Brendon and I served in the Marine Corps together."

Conway, still pacing, nodded. "And what was your impression of his character?"

"I thought that Brendon was a good marine, and that he was dedicated to the corps and to his fellow marines."

"Did you have any contact with him after you were both honorably discharged?"

"No, he dropped out of sight. A lot of the men I knew over there did the same."

Conway's pace turned from the wall and back towards the witness chair. "So the next time you saw him was as the Mauler?"

"That's correct."

Conway nodded again and flourished with his left hand. "Could you tell us what happened, Mr. Rhodes?"

Rhodney glanced over at Brendon, who was slumping in his chair. "Brendon was hired by Edwin Cord to steal the Mauler, a suit of armor that his company built with technology stolen from Stark International."

"I see," said Conway. "So did Mr. Doyle deliver this armor to his employer?"

"No, he didn't," said Rhodney. "Brendon learned that I was working for Stark International so he refused to turn the Mauler Armor over to Cord. I saved his life in Southeast Asia. It was Brendon's way of paying me back."

Conway stopped pacing and studied Rhodney's expressionless face. "Thank you, Mr. Rhodes. Nothing further, gentlemen."

Conway returned to the defendant's table and tapped Brendon on the shoulder, getting him to sit up straight again. A.D.A. Glossberg took his turn of pacing about the floor. "So, Mr. Rhodes," said Glossberg. "Mr. Doyle and yourself were both honorably discharged?"

"Yes, we were."

"Yet whereas you became successful in security, Mr. Doyle became a mercenary. Hardly the occupation for a man who earned an honorable discharge, wouldn't you say, Mr. Rhodes?"

Rhodney looked back at Brendon who fidgeted.

"No, it isn't."

"Indeed," said Glossberg.

"Brendon was better than that," said Rhodey. "He was the best marine I ever..."

"We were told of this Mauler Armor earlier," interrupted Glossberg. "When Mr. Doyle kept it, what did he use it for?"

Rhodey remained silent for a moment. "Brendon used it in his mercenary work."

Glossberg raised his eyebrows and looked at Brendon, who was staring down at his cuffed hands.

"So, Mr. Rhodes, who was it that apprehended Mr. Doyle? If he was wearing the Mauler Armor it certainly couldn't have been the police."

"No. It was Iron Man."

Glossberg took a step closer to the witness chair. "Iron Man. Who was recently revealed to be your employer, Tony Stark?"

Instinctively, Rhodey shook his head. "No. At that time it was one of Stark International's test pilots."

Glossberg, Conway, the Board, and Brendon were genuinely surprised by Rhodey's answer. Brendon sat forward and placed his hands under his chin; listening to Rhodey testifying.

"Really," said Glossberg, trying to redirect his line of questioning. "So why would Tony Stark aid the man who broke into his factory, steal a product built with his technology, and use said product in his criminal affairs?"

Rhodey silently considered his answer, knowing he couldn't say that he persuaded Tony to help Brendon as far as he had.

"Because...Because Tony Stark believes in the human spirit. That each of us has the strength to admit our failings and change our lives for the better."

Flying above Boston, Iron Man discretely followed the Ghost as he ran north up the John F. Fitzgerald Expressway, causing motorists to stop, abandon their vehicles and flee from the apparition that interrupted their midday commute. Iron Man had decided to wait for the Ghost to reach one of the Big Dig construction sites before he swooped out of the sky and attacked the Ghost.

The Ghost stopped running. Iron Man thought he was getting his bearings, but the Ghost took a magnetic bomb out of his utility belt and tossed it into the valley of abandoned cars and their fleeing drivers.

Iron Man dove out of the sky and flew towards the bomb. He grabbed the weapon with both hands and not knowing where to dispose of it, held it close like a favored Christmas toy. The bomb exploded. Its sound wave shattered the windows of the neighboring office buildings and hotels. When the smoke cleared it revealed Iron Man, on his hands and knees; stunned. Iron Man called up his monitor screen, it read that the armor's force field had decreased to 55%.

Footsteps made Iron Man turn to his right. Walking towards him was the materializing Ghost, tossing a silver orb in his hand. "You heroes are so predictable," taunted the Ghost. "Taking the bullet for the innocents, never knowing how guilty every one of them is."

"Ghost," said Iron Man as he rose to his feet. "You villains need to start reading Dr. Phil."

The Ghost threw the orb at Iron Man, bouncing off his chest and rolling around his feet, it exploded; napalm grenade. The flames engulfed Iron Man, who was seemingly unaffected. The flames suddenly died down and the lenses in the armor began to shine like a super nova. "Thanks for the V-8, Ghost," said Iron Man. "That was just the energy boost I needed to kick your tail."

The Ghost leaped as Iron Man shoved him back against the railing. He took a knife with a laser blade out of his boot and began to stab at Iron Man's chest.

Sirens from the police and emergency rescue were quickly approaching. TV news helicopters buzzed far above the two combatants. The Ghost tightened his grip on Iron Man's neck and glanced up at their audience. "Look at them. Do you know who they are? They're witnesses. Witnesses from across the world to the moment that sets my fee into the stratosphere: The killing of Iron Man!"

Iron Man replied with a left hook to the Ghost's jaw, knocking him backwards onto the expressway.

As the police moved in to arrest him, the Ghost began to dissolve into the asphalt.

"He's becoming intangible again!" Iron Man shouted to the police officers. "Warn the officers on the streets!"

The street below became shrouded with smoke from the Ghost's smoke pellets. Iron Man peered down and saw a small section of the dark cloud burst and the police barricade in front of it topple. Behind the barricade was the Callahan Tunnel. Iron Man activated his boot jets and flew into the tunnel after the Ghost.

"Mr. Doyle, please describe your career as a mercenary."

Sitting in the witness chair, Brendon had regained the composure he displayed prior to Rhodey's testimony. He sat straight, his cuffed hands in his lap, and his eyes on the pacing Conway.

"Well, it's difficult to explain. After my discharge from the marines, I was emotionally adrift," confessed Brendon. "I'd been through experiences a person wouldn't dare to dream of, I felt discarded by the corps, and I felt pessimistic about my future. What did I know about being a civilian? I was a soldier. So if there was someone who was willing to pay me to do what I was trained for, I figured, why not?"

"I see," said Conway. "Desperate people do desperate things. Was that why you went to work for Edwin Cord?"

"Yes. Mercenary work had become irregular."

Conway rubbed his chin as he kept pacing. "So is that why you kept the Mauler Armor for yourself?"

"No," said Brendon. "My old marine buddy, Rhodey was working for Stark. He saved my neck when we were in Southeast Asia, so I figured I'd repay the debt by renegeing the deal I made with Cord."

Conway paced back towards the witness chair. "Mr. Doyle, you were in possession of a state-of-the-art weapons system, you had the means to accomplish your tasks as a mercenary. Why did you turn yourself over to Iron Man?"

"It...it was the...right thing to do," stammered Brendon.

Conway stopped pacing and faced the Board. "I have no further questions for my client, gentlemen."

Now Glossberg stepped onto the floor. Brendon was tempted to tell the A.D.A. that his dance card was filled for tonight.

"Mr. Doyle, you've admitted to your criminal record. How about admitting to assault and battery three weeks ago?"

"That was justified." Brendon said coldly.

Conway leapt out of his chair like he was pulled by a string. "Objection, gentlemen. That incident should have no bearing on this hearing."

Chairman Kirsch sat back and adjusted his glasses. "Mr. Uh...Conway. While it's an unfortunate fact that violence amongst our nation's prison population continues to rise annually, your client's assault and battery charges have weight in this matter."

"Your client has a history of violence, Mr. Conway," said Rawlins as he pointed at defense lawyer with his fountain pen. "The Rykers charge will be taken into account."

Conway accepted defeat and sat down. Glossberg continued his line of questioning. "You say your actions were justified, Mr. Doyle. What about your mercenary career? You couldn't find employment in civilian life, so was that career choice justified?"

"I wasn't in the best mental shape after I left the corps," said Brendon. "I needed to support myself, and that was the only work I could find."

"Perhaps you didn't look hard enough," said Glossberg. "Or you had no reason to do so. The mercenary business, it's dangerous, but profitable. Am I correct?"

"I was well paid," admitted Brendon.

"Well enough I'm sure to return to that career if you were to be granted parole by this Board," said Glossberg, stepping closer to the witness chair.

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Brendon didn't flinch. He stared the prosecutor straight in the eye. "If the Board were to grant me parole I'd use the opportunity wisely and not make the same mistakes. I'd never return to my old career, councilor. There's just nothing there for me anymore."

The Callahan Tunnel was empty except for dozens of abandoned vehicles. Iron Man guessed that their drivers abandoned them when the Ghost's magnetic bomb exploded on the John F. Fitzgerald Expressway. Iron Man now flew slowly towards the tunnel's other end, infra-red scanning for any traps the Ghost might have planted when he ran inside.

Near the middle of the tunnel, the armor's infra-red detected a circular object that was not part of the tunnel's design fixed to its wall. Magnification of the distant object revealed it to be one of the Ghost's magnetic bombs, primed and set to explode in three minutes.

Iron Man flew towards the bomb and hovered in front of it. "Two minutes left," thought Iron Man. "Finding the Ghost will have to wait. Anyone in this tunnel when this bomb goes off is going to be blown apart, crushed, and drowned simultaneously unless I disarm it."

An X-ray scan revealed the bomb's inner workings. A basic design regardless of its owner's reputation. Small cutting and probing tools extended from Iron Man's fingertips as he reached for the magnetic bomb.

A hand grabbed Iron Man by the neck. A shadow to his left took form. "Leave the bomb, Shell-Head," said the Ghost. "That's insurance in case I don't kill you with my own two hands."

Iron Man broke free of the Ghost's hold and kicked him in the stomach, knocking him to the ground. The Ghost threw a handful of pellets at Iron Man and they exploded all around him; flash pellets. When Iron Man looked down at the ground, the Ghost was gone. He turned to his right, turned to his left; nothing. Then, Iron Man was grabbed from behind and a metallic cord was wrapped around his neck. As the cord was tightened it began to grate against his armor, filings flaked away from his neck.

"How's this for an upgrade?" the Ghost shouted. "This garrote will saw through your neck and leave me with enough time to get out before the Big Dig gets even bigger!"

Iron Man put his hands around the garrote and reactivated the cutting tools in his fingertips. Within seconds, the garrote was sliced into two strands. Iron Man grabbed the Ghost by his left wrist and hurled him forward. The Ghost connected with an Explorer and he fell to the ground.

Iron Man glanced at the magnetic bomb, a full minute until it detonated. He stepped forward and grabbed the Ghost by his cloak, pulling him to his feet. "Ghost! We need to disarm the bomb! Do you have a..."

Iron Man was startled to see his left arm becoming intangible. He looked at the Ghost and saw that the saboteur had placed a circuit panel on his left forearm. The intangibility quickly spread over his armor, lowering Iron Man's guard and allowing the Ghost to grab hold of him and shove Iron Man towards the wall. Recovering from the shock, Iron Man realized what the Ghost was attempting. His thoughts went back several years to the incident when the Ghost killed the original Spymaster by removing the circuit panel that he had given him to pass through a wall. Without the circuit panel, the Spymaster materialized and was killed instantly.

The now intangible Iron Man was shoved through the thick Callahan Tunnel and came out up to his torso into the murky waters of Boston Harbor. The Ghost was also intangible, and with one hand pushing Iron Man's chin back, reached for the circuit panel with the other. Iron Man fired the unibeam point blank at the Ghost, knocking him back into the tunnel. Iron Man quickly followed him before the harbor's strong currents tore the circuit panel loose.

The still intangible Iron Man found the now materializing Ghost on the ground stunned. Iron Man looked back at the timer on the magnetic bomb, there was twenty-five seconds left. Iron Man reached into the Ghost's utility belt and came away with a circuit panel and a computer disk inside a zip lock bag. "I'd take you along Ghost," said Iron Man, "but your vendetta against me could extend to suicide. I'll just borrow a few things and take that stolen program back if you don't object."

Iron Man flew towards the magnetic bomb, fifteen seconds left. He secured the circuit panel and

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activated it. With the bomb intangible, Iron Man removed it from the wall and passed through it at top speed. Iron Man was now sailing through the waters of Boston Harbor, twelve seconds left. He activated his armor's sonar and scanned the area; there were no boats on the water's surface. He released the bomb and headed to the surface, nine seconds left. Iron Man broke through the surface and continued flying skywards, four seconds, three...two...one.

The Magnetic bomb exploded. The force of the blast broke the surface of the harbor and shot a geiser of water into the sky. Iron Man hovered above the harbor, unharmed. He deactivated the circuit panel and inspected the Microsoft disk, undamaged in the fighting and explosion. "I suppose I could just tell Gates that I lost it, but I'd rather not. Guys like the Ghost I can deal with, but the U.S. Attorney General? No thanks." Iron Man flew towards New York City, tuning his sensors to the Boston Police Department's radio band. "That's right, captain," said an officer with a thick Boston accent. "We've gone over the Callahan Tunnel with lights, magnifying glasses, and dogs. That Ghost guy disappeared like the Red Sox entering October."

"It's all in the pitching, officer," Iron Man thought to himself as he continued on his way home.

The parole board walked back into the board room after a forty minute deliberation. Whatever their decision was, it wasn't registered on their faces. They sat down and looked over at Brendon, who had been perspiring for quite a while.

"Mr. Doyle," said Kirsch. "Will you stand, please?"

Brendon complied with Kirsch's wishes. Conway stood with him and put a reassuring arm on Brendon's shoulder.

"Mr. Doyle this Board has taken into account your conduct in Ryker's prior to your recent assault and have judged you to be a model convict. We have also taken into account your army record and the testimony of Mr. Rhodes. And we have also taken into account Mr. Stark's efforts to assist you in preparation for this parole hearing. Therefore, it is our decision to grant you parole beginning this Thursday. This matter is at an end." With that statement, Kirsch ended with a tap of his judicial hammer.

"Congratulations, Brendon," said Conway, shaking his hand.

"Yeah, thanks Mr. Conway, thanks," said a shocked Brendon.

Rhodey walked over to the defendants table and shook Brendon's hand. "Congratulations, Brendon. You handled yourself pretty well up there."

"No sweat, Rhodey." said Brendon, wiping his brow.

"So can I expect you to be working at Stark/Fujikawa?"

"Count on it, Rhodey," grinned Brendon. "I wouldn't miss it for the world."

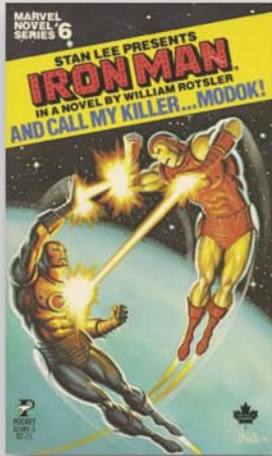
To be continued...

GOD!

#13 THE WANDERINGS OF THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN *by cousture*



Bonjour and welcome to my little column dedicated to the many appearances of Iron Man in pages other than those of his monthly comic. This time around, I'll be looking at three of Iron Man's apparitions in the pages of novels! I hope that these reviews will encourage you to give comic-related novels a shot because, in my experience, many of them are quite entertaining.



IRON MAN (MARVEL NOVEL SERIES #6)

And call my killer... Modok!

1979

Story: William Rotsler

Cover: Bob Larkin

Publisher: Kangaroo Book, Pocket Books, New York

QUOTE

As he daydreams, Modok says:

"As you have seen, nothing sent against this armor has been effective. The suit is nearly impregnable. You could use it in fires — oil fires for example. No troops could stand against it. A company of trained loyal troops equipped like this... could conquer, control and monitor ANY area, against ANY enemy!"

THE STORY

Unless I am mistaking (it's been known to happen, every once in a while), this is the very first Iron Man novel ever published. Not that there have been all that many throughout the years, but still...

Modok wants to get his hands on Iron Man's armor and he's willing to do anything to get it. When the story begins, Stark is giving a conference at Benford university. He is unaware that outside the auditorium, the entire campus is being literally invaded by an army of A.I.M. agents.

When they burst into the crowded auditorium and start shooting at students, Stark dives for his attaché case and starts busting head as Iron Man. A.I.M. is forced to retreat but Iron Man is badly injured in the battle. For Modok, the first initiative has failed, but the war has only begun.

WHAT'S COOL?

All in all, a fun novel to read. I don't know why, but when I first read this (I was about 17 at the time), I thought it was great. Now, 13 years have passed and, well... I just think it's okay. Must be maturity and old age, right? Naaaah... :-)

I always thought that Modok was a fun character and he is the main bad guy in this book. His superhuman intelligence and cruelty are well used by the author.

Also, you will recognise a lot of old faces like Jasper Sitwell, Nick Fury, Pepper and Happy. Don't expect a literary masterpiece, but simply an enjoyable ride.

WHAT'S BAAAAD?

In two words: chapter two. It's not badly written or anything, but it's a long retelling of IM's origin and I just can't take that anymore.

I mean, I love Iron Man and all, but in my personal opinion, his origin lacks something, especially compared to the high-drama and adrenaline-filled origins of guys like Spidey, Batman or the Hulk.

And by now, I've just heard it all too many times. So I had to skip some pages of that second chapter because I'm simply suffering from an origin-retelling overdose.



SPIDER-MAN/IRON MAN

Doom's Day Book Two: Sabotage

1997

Story: Pierce Askegren & Danny Fingeroth

Cover: Vince Evans

Illustrations: Steven Butler

Publisher: Byron Preiss, Berkeley Boulevard Books,
New York

QUOTE

Tony Stark tells Peter Parker:

"Cosmo and Anna Marie both had good things to say about you, and neither of those two are easy to work for. There's always room in SE for one more, and I'd like to have you on board."



THE STORY

As we all know (even though sometimes Marvel tends to forget), Tony Stark is one of the most brilliant men on Earth, a true genius. He has created many inventions that have had a big impact on the world, but this new one is in a category all of its own. This new creation will literally change the world as we know it and open a new age for human civilisation.

This formidable new invention is called the 'Infinity Engine'. It can tap into the quantum field to provide clean and safe energy to everyone on Earth. While Tony Stark reveals this new wonder to the world at a special ceremony, one of the few people in the audience who actually understands and marvels at its full implications is a Daily Bugle photographer, a certain Peter Parker.

But he is not alone, and many are those who would love to get their hands on so powerful a tool. There is Hydra, the international terrorist organisation and their main competitors, the evil scientists of A.I.M. A third party is also greatly interested by this new wonder, but he stays in the shadows, unwilling to reveal his hand in the unfolding drama. For Doctor Doom does not need to make a personal appearance to influence the outcome of the bold sabotage attempt that Hydra and A.I.M. are about to launch.

WHAT'S COOL?

I am a slow reader, especially in English, and I read this novel in a matter of days, that should give you a hint of how much I enjoyed it.

What a great read! Great suspense, amazing action scenes, believable and well-researched characters... what a blast! Just thinking about that scene where Spidey falls from a hovercraft towards New York city below, unable to use his webbing to slow his descent because of the incredibly high speed of his fall... wow! Or that other scene where Iron Man battles an incredibly powerful Dreadnought in the upper atmosphere, wearing a new version of his space armor which contains very little weaponry... truly one of our favourite hero's most spectacular defeats! But don't you worry, Iron Man comes back with a vengeance! Those are only two of this book's numerous memorable moments.

In this novel, Iron man is written exactly the way he should always be. He's not just a guy wearing a powerful armor that makes him the equivalent of a walking tank. He's first and foremost a brilliant man, and he proves time and time again that his greatest weapon is his brain. When faced with a desperate situation in which he apparently cannot hope to win (and this occurs on many occasions in this exciting adventure), he analyses, adapts and reacts accordingly. The full potential of his armor are exploited in the course of the story. Iron Fans will be amazed by the new capabilities the writers have integrated to the armor's traditional weaponry. This is truly Iron Man action at its best.

Many characters from IM's supporting cast also make appearances. There's HOMER, Bethany Cabe, Mrs. Arborgast and Happy Hogan. I thought the use of these characters was a very nice touch. That, among other things, makes Iron Man a character just as important to the story as Spider-Man is, instead of it being a Spidey story in which IM randomly appears. In fact, a lot of the book is told directly from Tony Stark's perspective. Great stuff, it's like actually being inside the suit yourself.

The cover art is beautiful, it's what made me buy the book to begin with. On top of that, Steven Butler beautifully illustrates the beginning of every chapter (example at left). The scenes he draws are ones that the reader will encounter later in the chapter, it gives you a hint of what's to come and that just enhances the suspense and the excitement without selling any punch lines early. His art is truly excellent and a perfect addition to the story.

As you can see by the title, this story is the second chapter in a bigger plot called "Doom's Day", but you absolutely do not need to have read the first chapter (featuring Spider-Man and the Hulk) to understand this one. What little you need to know is briefly explained in the course of the story. As for the ending, it opens a window to the third part, which features the Fantastic Four, but the story doesn't leave any major loose ends.



X-MEN/AVENGERS

Gamma Quest Trilogy Book 3: Friend or Foe?

2000

Story: Greg Cox

Cover: Julie Bell, Illustrations: George Pérez

Publisher: BP Books, Berkley Boulevard Books,

New York

QUOTE

When Captain America yells out:

“ Avengers Assemble!”, the Beast looks at Storm and says: “ Ah, how I’ve missed that classic clarion call! Somehow, ‘X-Men Exacerbate!’ doesn’t have quite the same ring to it!”



Before I begin, I can already hear some of you ask me: “Why did you start with the third book, man? What about the other two?” The answer is very simple. When I saw Iron Man on this beautiful Julie Bell cover, I picked it up and bought it. There you have it.

I thought that, like the Doom’s Day trilogy, this would only be loosely tied to previous books. I was wrong. It is a direct continuation of what has been occurring in the two other ones. I didn’t know that, but now you do. So the fact that I only read the last instalment may influence my judgement of this novel, keep that in mind for later.

THE STORY

When this story begins, the Leader has kidnapped Wolverine, the Scarlet Witch and Rogue and is holding them captive in his hideout on the moon. Meanwhile, on Muir Island, Iron Man is fighting some mighty powerful robot-sentinels along with the Hulk, Iceman, Storm, Nightcrawler and Wolverine (obviously a fake). The problem with these robots is that they are powered by a gamma reactor that is programmed to explode if the robot is defeated. It’s going to take the combined efforts of Iron Man, the Hulk and Nightcrawler to keep the whole island from going ka-boom!

Everybody then meets up with the Beast, Captain America, Cyclops and the Vision and they all head for the moon to kick the Leader’s butt and rescue their team mates. After a fairly boring space skirmish between IM and a Skrull spaceship, the heroes land on the moon and do battle with the Leader. To defend himself, the big green-headed one controls the brainwashed trio of Rogue, Wolverine and Wanda and also has a secret ally... the Super-Skrull.

WHAT’S COOL?

This book has its moments. I found particularly interesting that the author wrote from Iron Man’s perspective on numerous occasions, making him an important player in the unfolding events.

The fight between Iron Man and a brainwashed Rogue was interesting, aside from that silly stunt where Iron Man projects his gauntlets to grab Rogue’s ankles, and then reels them (and her) back in with attached steel cables... I don’t mind an author adding to IM’s known arsenal, but this is just silly. Throughout the battle, Rogue tries to get under IM’s armor to come in contact with his skin and Stark thinks: “This skirmish has to stay the super-brawl equivalent of safe sex.” That made me laugh. Hey, it’s not so surprising. Stark is supposed to be a playboy after all, and Rogue is quite attractive!

Oops, this part is supposed to be about cool things, right? Okay, hum... let’s see... ah! There’s the beautiful Julie Bell cover. There are also the George Pérez illustrations that are spectacular, as always. Sadly, I doubt that Mister Pérez took the time to read the book (can’t say I blame him) because several of his otherwise beautiful drawings do not accurately depict what is going on in the chapter. Others are more accurate, but they sell punch lines before you actually read about them and that ruins what little surprise there is in this book at all. Okay, since I seem to be set on moaning, so I’ll just officially switch to the bad stuff, shall I?

WHAT’S BAAAAD?

I didn’t enjoy this book as much as the IM/Spidey novel. The fact that it is not a self-contained story is no doubt partly responsible for that. But it’s not the only problem.

Several times, while I was reading this, I couldn’t help but roll my eyes up and think: “Oh! Franchement!” (Québec equivalent of Fer Pete’s sake!). Take for example the silly robot-sentinels that the heroes spend the entire three first chapters fighting... they’re just silly. The Leader has covered them with artificial skin to make them look like the Hulk, the Abomination and other Gamma-irradiated creatures. Why? For what purpose did he go through all that trouble? It’s just silly, there’s simply no reason for it. It might have been more visually pleasing in a comic, but this is a novel, so who cares? The gauntlet-cables thing was another such gimme a break moment.

Another thing I found annoying is the author’s habit of over-describing scenes. Sometimes it’s a lot of fun and it helps you feel like you’re actually there... but other times, especially when it occurs in the middle of a fight or a high-suspense sequence of events, it simply breaks the rhythm of the action and it kills the excitement.

X-MEN/AVENGERS

Gamma Quest Trilogy Book 3:

Friend or Foe?

CONTINUED



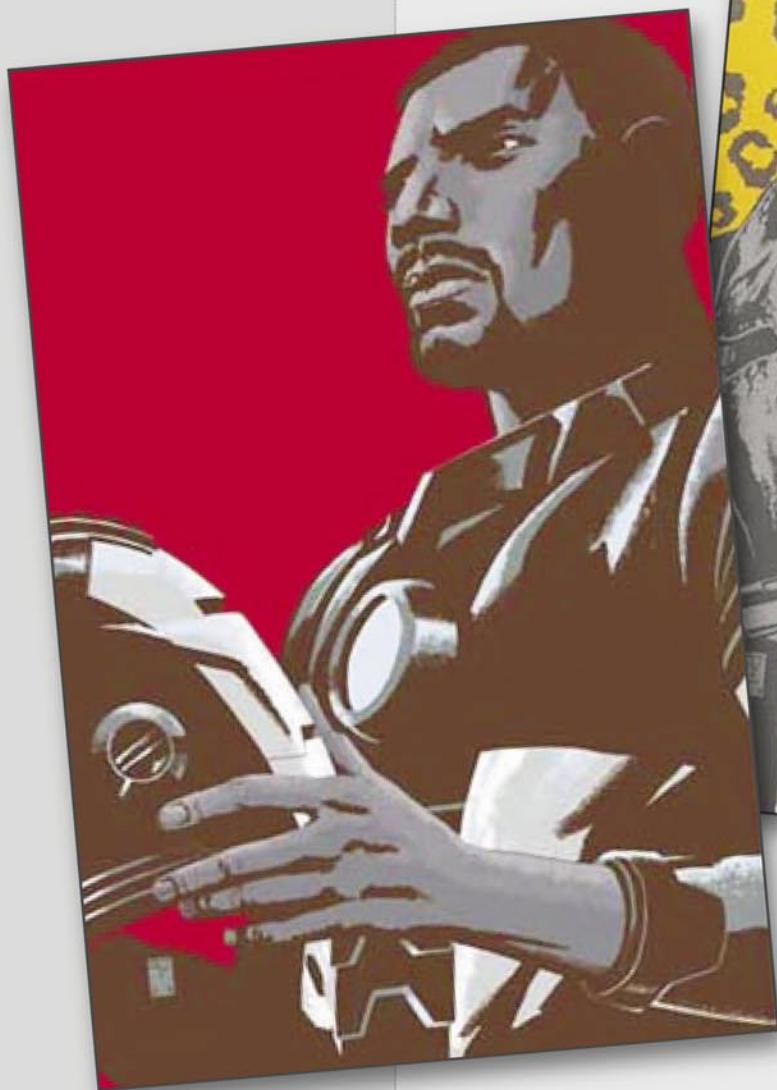
Either I'm unusually shrewd, or the story is overall extremely predictable. I was rarely surprised, I saw the supposedly 'shock revelations' come from miles away. In fact, sometimes I was so bored that I actually skipped several pages... Part of me thinks that I'm not the best person to comment on this story because I only read the last instalment, but the other part of me thinks that, if the other two books were anything like this, I never would have bothered to read all three of them anyway.

UPCOMING WANDERINGS

Well boys and girls, it looks to me as if our good pal WAR MACHINE is going to make a comeback! And I'm not talking about the mercenary who stole his armor either, I'm talking about the real deal: Jim Rhodes himself!

How cool is that? Marvel has released images from its Second Wave of new titles, due to hit the stands in May, and among them was a picture (below) from a comic entitled THE CREW.

It sounds interesting, I will certainly give it a shot.



As for me, in my next column, I will be looking at three wanderings of the Silver Centurion Iron Man, by far the coolest armor ever created, in my most humble opinion.

Be there or be square!

ABOUT THE NEW ADVANCED IRON

Just thought I'd quickly introduce myself. My name is Angelo, I'm 28 and I'm currently located in Portsmouth, England, UK. Just like everyone else reading this, I've been a lifelong Iron Man fan and have spent most of my life collecting and completing my complete runs (Yehhaa!).

I wanted to do my part in helping the AI community and the best way I could think of was by re-designing AI.

You'll no doubt have noticed that AI looks considerably different this issue and hopefully you will be pleased with the improvements. As I only managed to spend a couple of days on the re-design, please forgive me if some pages are a bit flakey. There was so much more I wanted to add to this issue, like more content and a whole lot of design tweaking (I'm never happy with any of my work, I always feel there is room for improvements), but due to life's other commitments, I never managed to free up more time to do it.

So bear with me while I get AI into 'ship shape', and don't be surprised if next issue has evolved even further - by then I think AI will be exactly as I planned.

Saying that, AI is a community zine and if I'm doing something you like or don't like I'd appreciate any feedback. Also if you have any suggestions, comments or ideas, feel free to drop me a line at angelo@fortysevenonline.co.uk and let me know what you think.

So, that's me, It's 4am here as I write this so I'll leave my Iron Man stories till next time. Thanks for giving me the chance to help AI remain the best Iron Man zine in the universe.

- Angelo Tiroto

