

# ADVANCED IRON

70





# ADVANCED IRON

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**Publisher:**

- Jeff Pearson ([jeffreywpearson@gmail.com](mailto:jeffreywpearson@gmail.com))

**Editor:**

- Jeff Pearson ([jeffreywpearson@gmail.com](mailto:jeffreywpearson@gmail.com))

**Contributors:**

- Jeff Pearson ([jeffreywpearson@gmail.com](mailto:jeffreywpearson@gmail.com))
- Dave Huber ([IronHube@aol.com](mailto:IronHube@aol.com))
- John Comerford ([Toastyj77@aol.com](mailto:Toastyj77@aol.com))
- Peter Welmerink ([apw1@voyager.net](mailto:apw1@voyager.net))
- Filipe Muffoletto  
([fcmuffoletto@xactware.com](mailto:fcmuffoletto@xactware.com))
- Ian Sokoliwski  
([vampiretwisted@hotmail.com](mailto:vampiretwisted@hotmail.com))
- Scott Brooks ([scott@stormerbrooks.com](mailto:scott@stormerbrooks.com))
- Heath McKnight ([hmcknight@mac.com](mailto:hmcknight@mac.com))
- 

**WebMaster:**

- Jeff Pearson ([jeffreywpearson@gmail.com](mailto:jeffreywpearson@gmail.com))

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## Issue 70 Contents

- Cover
  - Ian Sokoliwski
- Table of Contents/Issue Information
  - Jeff Pearson
- Hube's Shellheadisms
  - Dave Huber
- Iron Man Pinup
  - Felipe Muffoletto
- Iron Poly Vinyl Chloride Man
  - John Comerford
- The Stark Market Report
  - John Comerford
- Iron Man Artwork
  - Joel O'Conner
- Iron Mania at Wizard World Chicago
  - John Comerford
- Metal Head
  - Heath McKnight
  - John Comerford
- Hulk Smashed
  - Scott Brooks
- Rockets Red Glare
  - Peter Welmerick
  - Ian Sokoliwski

# HUBE'S SHELLHEADISMS



Dave Huber

*(A couple months ago, I wrote the following for Avi Green's comics blog, [Four Color Media Monitor](#). I also posted it at the [Iron Man Index](#). I've added an update at the end of the original article based on some of the comics I've purchased – and subsequently wished I hadn't – since then.)*

J. Michael Straczynski, in his "**Squadron Supreme**" series, has taken "blame America first" to the next level for Marvel Comics. Straczynski's series builds upon the foundation set in the "**Supreme Power**" series, which detailed (more or less) the origins of the Squadron's main characters. And, of course, both series utilize the heroes (and enemies) which **Mark Gruenwald** immortalized in his "Squadron Supreme" mini-series from the mid-1980s.

Gruenwald's series was ahead of its time in that it dealt with the situation of a super-group assuming total control of, in this case, the United States, in order to re-establish fundamental order after a world-wide crisis. One of the team's members, **Nighthawk** (who also happened to be the ex-president of the US), vehemently dissents from the Squadron's decision to take total control, and after failing to convince his fellow Squadders of the folly of their decision, quits the team. Eventually, Nighthawk recruits a bunch of other super-powered folk to battle the Squadron, and after the series' climax, the Squadron realizes their goal of a "utopia" was misguided.

Straczynski's "Supreme Power" details how the US government takes the utmost advantage of a super-strong, eyebeam-shooting alien infant (sound familiar?\*) code-named **Hyperion**. Eventually, Hyperion becomes disillusioned with what the government has done to him, but decides to pretty much "play along" so as to get what he's after -- more knowledge about his origins. The same alien craft from which Hyperion comes also yields a powerful gem, which becomes attached to an American covert operative (**Dr. Spectrum**), as well as the mysterious woman code-named **Power Princess**.

In "Squadron Supreme," Straczynski has his team assembled and working for the US government. This conveniently mirrors what is happening in the Marvel Universe proper with its "**Civil War**," as well as the Avengers-analogue title *The Ultimates*. (*Squadron Supreme* takes place on one of the many "alternate earths" of the Marvel Continuum.) Issue #3 is where Straczynski goes overboard with his leftist worldview. The Squadron has been on a United Nations-authorized mission to "take out" a powerful African mentalist whom the US presumes gained his powers via



## HUBE'S SHELLHEADISMS

Dave Huber

the same alien technologies that produced Hyperion, et. al. After successfully thwarting the bad guy, the Squadron is confronted by a team of African superheroes who proceed to inform the Squadders that the United States and white people in general are responsible for most of Africa's problems, and that this double combination never want to see "a peaceful, united Africa, with a growing economy." When the **Blur** (what Straczynski has renamed the **Whizzer**), a black man, requests to speak to the head African hero, he is told that his heart "has a great light," and that he "is a good man, Child of Africa." BUT -- he is "still an American." Thus, the African heroes "will pray for [his] health and soul." Later, aboard a returning flight home, Blur informs readers that, although he doesn't think white people are responsible for *all* our (black people's) problems, "they *are* responsible for a *lot* of them." He holds up his hand and states "This is the world I live in."

Blur references Straczynski's version of Nighthawk when he mentions "all [black people's] problems" as this world's Nighthawk is a wealthy [black] man whose parents were murdered by Nazi-like [white] skinheads (this sound vaguely familiar?\*\*.). Consequently, Nighthawk becomes the focal point from which to espouse the evils of racism, especially that found in the United States. Though Nighthawk hasn't really appeared yet in "Squadron Supreme," he was a prominent figure in "Supreme Power."

In issue #6, we finally see more of Nighthawk, but not before Straczynski has team members doubting their role as peacekeepers -- that is, for a single nation. Blur's mother informs him that various athletic companies have dropped him as a spokesman, but others have made offers -- all those with lucrative government contracts, including -- you guessed it (noted in a separate word balloon) -- **Halliburton**. Next time use a sledgehammer, eh J. Michael? It's apparent that Straczynski is setting it up for the Squadron to assume the role Gruenwald had them play, but the lop-sided left commentary keeps a'comin'. When Blur dashes off to request that Nighthawk join the Squadron, he pleads with him that, in so many words, his guidance is needed. He states

*Where they're using us is mainly to control people of color in Africa , in the mid-east ... you say you're against that kind of oppression. Well, why stop at the border?*





## HUBER'S SHELLHEADISMS

Dave Huber

There you have it, folks. American politicians, the people, even its superheroes now -- all puppets of the Halliburtons who disrupt Third World nations (that exclusively contain people of color, of course) at will so as to prevent them from solving their own problems and becoming an eventual threat to the American corporate order. Of course, just don't tell countries like Japan and Germany, to name two -- a duo of exemplary democracies with thriving economies and prodigious standards of living. This, after a mere 60 years of being utterly obliterated by ... the United States in World War II. The catch for the Straczynskis is that that "evil corporate plutocracy" known as the United States actually assisted those two countries in getting back together. Not so that they could "own" them. But because it was the right thing to do. Hell, Japan's thriving businesses have crushed US competition over the last quarter century or so. So much for "control."

But maybe these two examples don't count because their countries' populations aren't "people of color." Well, maybe Japan is. But, well ... Asians as a group aren't usually considered "minorities" in the United States because they tend to *thrive* as a group, economically and academically. They're not "victims" in need of a "saving" by the mindset that Straczynski brings us.

Speaking of the aforementioned "Civil War" series, *New Avengers* #21 had to contain the most disgusting out-of-character version of **Captain America** I've ever read. As you may be aware, "Civil War" has torn asunder the Marvel Universe's heroes, dividing them into two camps: One in favor of "registering" with the United States government (led by my personal favorite hero, **Iron Man**) and those in favor of remaining independent, non-affiliated "free agents." In a nauseating soliloquy which could have been written by perpetual Bush protestor Cindy Sheehan, Cap thinks to himself (courtesy of writer **Brian Michael Bendis**)

*"They want superheroes to be controlled by the government. They want us to be puppets to a corporate shell structure, like their politicians and everything else on the planet. What do you expect from a society that gets all its news from late-night comedy shows? Of course they don't care! Everything is a punchline. Everything is just -- no. That's not true. They care. They just care about themselves more than they care about the world they live in. They want to be comfortable, not safe. They don't want to fight for their freedom. They want someone like me to fight for it for them."*

# HUBE'S SHELLHEADISMS



Dave Huber

It is, to say the least, astonishing to read Captain America uttering (thinking) these words. If Cap truly feels this way (Bendis sort of gives Cap an "out" as he occasionally interrupts his self-tirade by stating that he's tired), then why not ditch the role of the Star-Spangled Avenger -- like he's done in the past?

Back in the mid-70s, Cap did just that on his own, after discovering (in a not-too subtle analogue to the Watergate Crisis) that a "highly placed government official" was a bigwig of the Secret Empire. He became "**The Nomad**" for a short time while he re-evaluated his role as a superhero. ([A trade paperback](#) collecting these relevant issues has been printed.) In the 1980s, Cap faced a similar situation to "Civil War" where the US government wanted him to work directly for them -- as he had back during World War II. He refused, relinquishing his costume and shield, which was later used by replacement **John Walker** (who eventually became the **US Agent**). Cap assumed the role of "**The Captain**" while Walker played Capt. America.

As I wrote in a blog post over at [Colossus of Rhodey](#) (where I blog every now and then), Cap, in the later case above *and* when he once contemplated running for president of the United States, gave impassioned speeches explaining just what his role as Captain America stands for. Turning down the offer to become a presidential candidate, he said

*[A president] must be ready to negotiate -- to compromise -- 24 hours a day, to preserve the Republic at all costs! I understand this ... I appreciate this ... and I realize the need to work within such a framework. By the same token -- I have worked and fought all my life for the growth **and advancement of the American Dream**. And I believe that my duty to the Dream would severely limit any abilities I might have to preserve the reality. We must all live in the real world ... and sometimes that world can be pretty grim. **But it is the Dream ... the Hope ... that makes the reality worth living.***

Similarly, when turning over his costume and shield to the government "Comission" (and John Walker) Cap alter-ego Steve Rogers noted

*Captain America was created to be a soldier. But I have made him far more than that. To return to being a mere soldier would be a betrayal of all I've striven for, for the better*

COMING  
TO  
YOU

# HUBE'S SHELLHEADISMS



Dave Huber

*part of my career. To serve the country your way, I would have to give up my personal freedom ... and place myself in a position **where I might have to compromise my ideals to obey your orders.***

*I cannot represent the American government; the president does that. **I must represent the American people. I represent the American Dream, the freedom to strive to become all that you dream of being.** Being Captain America has been my American Dream. To become what you want me to be, **I would have to compromise that Dream ... abandon what I have come to stand for.***

There is none of this excellent writing -- and characterization of what Captain America is -- in the current "Civil War" story arc. Cap has become just another cheap method of infusing a writer's personal politics into the story. And for Marvel, this means yet another left-of-center point of view. Here it's Bendis. In the "Civil War" title proper it's **Mark Millar**, an admitted leftist who also writes the "updated" version of the Avengers, *The Ultimates*. On *Squadron Supreme* it's Straczynski. Volume 4 *Iron Man's* first six issues featured **Warren Ellis**, another left-leaner who featured a barely concealed analogue of radical Aussie journalist **John Pilger** (named John "Pillinger." Yeesh.) And so on.

And what's further interesting is that Cap's "disillusionment" backdrop always seems to come when there's a conservative Republican in the White House. "Secret Empire" came during Richard Nixon's administration (although it's highly debatable he was conservative). "The Captain" was written in the middle of the Reagan years. Now, there's "Civil War" during George W. Bush's presidency. Even the tone of *Captain America* (as well as other comics) reflects a nastiness and condescension that you didn't see during the 1990s (coincidentally, when Democrat Bill Clinton was in office). Reagan, Bush #1 and the current White House occupant were (are) all depicted as buffoons quite oftent. The "Secret Empire" story is certainly the most "legitimate," for lack of a better term, as Nixon's heinous crimes were widely known and you didn't have to be a partisan to realize this. And even writer **Steve Englehart**, despite the obvious parallels, didn't mention names.





## HUBE'S SHELLHEADISMS

Dave Huber

*New Avengers* #22 takes "Civil War" to the next level: comparing the registration of super-powered individuals to the **Jim Crow South** of the American early twentieth century. Bendis does this through New Avenger **Power Man (Luke Cage)**, and what makes the comparison even more ridiculous is that Iron Man and Ms. Marvel just stand there, offering only rebuttals along the lines of "It's not the same!" all the while Cage pontificates like an experienced debater with a PhD in Rhetoric. I long ago signed up to receive [*New*] *Avengers* in my collection box at my local comics shop; I put this issue back on the shelf for some other hapless individual to buy. I haven't been purchasing the *Civil War* series (I've been reading the issues that a friend is buying) and I'm this close to dropping *Squadron Supreme*. The promise of "Civil War" was supposed to be a balanced debate on the registration of people with extraordinary abilities. It has turned out, thus far, to be quite UNbalanced -- the pro-Capt. America forces (against registration) being scripted by the likes of Millar and Bendis to have the [much] better argument. And, it royally pisses me off that my favorite superhero -- **Tony Stark/Iron Man** -- is being made out to be a quasi-fascist simpleton.

So? What's the point of all this?

Do I want a return to the 1960s where **Stan Lee** invoked the simplicity of the east-west Cold War to rouse American patriotism? Certainly not. But even Lee only used that backdrop as a plot device to tell a fantasy-laden *superhero* story -- a reality break, if you will. Contemporary comics, thanks to their overtly political writers, have done a 180 degree turn: they have made the fantasy *subordinate* to the political theme. Readers have nowhere to go now to escape the world around them. Marvel's current crop of storytellers keep hitting their comics' purchasers over the head with it. And it more and more represents only one side of the political and cultural story.

As a quick aside, former talk show TV host [Mike Douglas passed away](#) August 11. It was on his show that I once watched guest Stan Lee in the late 1970s. Douglas told Lee "*I've read some of your comics. You use a lot of big words. How is a young kid supposed to know what they mean?*" Lee didn't waste a second: "*If a kid has to look up a word in the dictionary, what's wrong with that?*"



# HUBE'S SHELLHEADISMS



Dave Huber

Indeed. I greatly credit Lee for my winning a spelling bee in 6th grade -- because I spelled "grotesque" correctly. I remembered it from a mid-1970s issue of *The Hulk* where he battled the "Grotesque Glob."

(\* Superman, maybe?)

(\*\* Batman, maybe?)

**UPDATE (9/3/06):** Yesterday I bought ('cause I signed up to get the title regularly at my local comics shop) *Ultimates Annual #2*. First, I was miffed that it referenced the takeover of the United States and its aftermath without *Ultimates #12* having even come out yet!! But second, the story focuses on **Captain America** and the **Falcon** tracking down a still-alive **Arnim Zola**. Zola, at his racist best, is using some "white dust" to kill non-Caucasians (and consequently turn them white). Now geez, where have we seen *this* before in fairly recent Marvel titles that involve Iron Man? Oh yeah, right – *U.S. War Machine* and in *The Avengers* itself as recently as late volume 3 (recall the **Red Skull** posing as Secretary of Defense "Dean Rusk" and using *his* "death dust" [but his was red, of course]?). But this wouldn't give writer **Charlie Huston** a soapbox from which to tell us all that race relations in the United States really haven't improved much since the days when Cap fought the Nazis in World War II, and not to mention how evil the U.S. government really is since it conspired to keep the psychotically evil Zola alive for their own dastardly purposes.

In a scene where Cap and Falc need a ride, Cap says people won't stop for him because he's white (and Zola's dust that's killing people is freaking everyone out). But, apparently since he *is* white, Falcon "proves" that Cap's whiteness got him a ride, while Falc's blackness denied him one. The dialogue ensues:

**Cap:** *How can you stand it? The lack of progress?*

**Falcon:** *Let's not get into this, shall we.*

**Cap:** *Colored people and the lack of ... I mean ... Black people and the ... African-Americans and ... stop giving me that look. You know what I mean.*

**Falcon:** *Sure, you mean you don't know what the hell you're talking about but I should act like you do because you mean well. Hey, no problem, just because they call you Captain America, doesn't mean you should be different from any other white guy.*



# HUBE'S SHELLHEADISMS

Dave Huber

Falcon goes on to describe for Cap how much he's missed in sixty years. And he informs him that

*"Missed some highs and some lows all over the world. But you got it right, progress here is lacking. And what really worries me is the complacency thing. It worries me not hearing more angry voices. Not seeing more action and fewer poses. Makes me worry about what's underneath. Makes me think about over forty million black skins in this country and over two hundred million guns ..."*

I think it's astonishing to proclaim that progress in race relations is "[sorely] lacking" after sixty years. Even the waning pages of the issue show Cap, back in the 1940s, sitting down in a club after hours with some government bigwigs getting the lowdown on Arnim Zola. We see a few silhouettes of some [black] janitors cleaning up in the foreground, while a couple panels later a few black soldiers approach Cap asking for an autograph. They tell him that they're "sorry for interrupting," but that they "weren't allowed in for the dance." Cap's face indicates that he's not pleased by this 1940s reality.

Indeed. An objective observer looking at 1940s America and 2006 America would conclude that "lack of progress" in race relations is an astonishing statement. Some of the progress includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- US military integration (1948);
- Public school integration (1954, via the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision);
- Creation of the Civil Rights Division of the US Dept. of Justice (1957);
- Creation of affirmative action (during the Kennedy Administration, 1961);
- Passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (and subsequent renewals);
- School busing (early 1970s; you can read about the schools in which I grew up – and now teach -- [here](#));
- Numerous black US House of Representatives members, [major] city mayors, not to mention many state house and senate members.



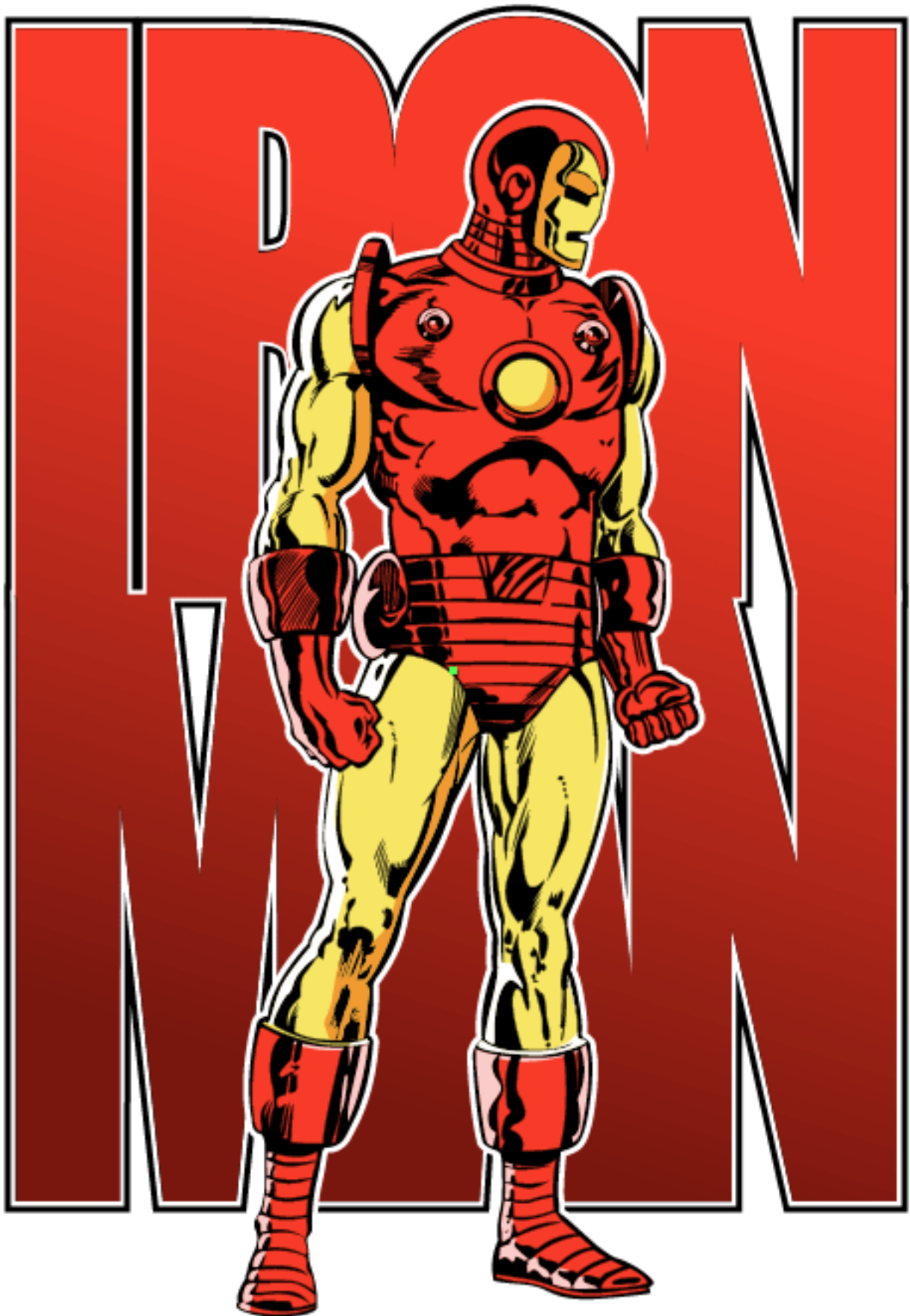
# HUBE'S SHELLHEADISMS



Dave Huber

It would be virtually unthinkable, in the vast majority of the country today, to deny entrance to a dance to someone based on their skin color. Sure, there are pockets where complete morons with 19<sup>th</sup> century racial attitudes exist, but the situation Cap witnessed at the end of *Ultimates Annual #2* would not only be *unthinkable* in 2006, it would be *highly illegal* – and those responsible would face [possibly severe] penalty. In the 1940s it was *clearly* “thinkable” and *completely* legal. That’s a “lack of progress”??

To his credit, writer Huston’s dialogue is “ambiguous” enough, I suppose, that it doesn’t directly blame “white hegemony” for the problems in the contemporary black community. For example, Falcon’s comments about “complacency” appear directed at African-Americans themselves, while the comment about “200 million guns” seems directed at the [white dominated] government. It could be argued that Huston – unlike some of his contemporaries such as Millar, Ellis and Bendis – at least leaves open the door to real questions and debate about his main topic. I’d think most readers would agree that race relations could always improve, and that surely more needs to be done in the realm of civil rights. But I’d also think most people would agree that white racism has dwindled by leaps and bounds, and arguably is *not* the primary reason for some of race relations’ continuing dilemmas. That being said, while Huston may leave open the door, his bias (no pun intended) is in the racism corner – as witnessed by the theme of “lack of progress.”



Original IM artwork was created by Greg LaRocque and Michael Reposito.



# Iron Poly- Vinyl Chloride Man

By: Ironman John B. Comerford

With so much **Iron Man** swag available for our crazed collections, **Iron Fans** can go crazy finding the most obscure items to display or hoard for their own dragon- like mounds of **Iron Mania**. There are **Iron Man** cards, action figures, comics and statues... but did you know about the expansive **PVC** collection available?

According to the **PVC Toys Information Centre** (<http://www.pvc-toys.com>), **PVC** has been used for over 4 decades to make toys for children due to its versatility and durability. That being said, the European Union seems to have restricted the use of phthalates (a chemical used to make the **PVC** soft and pliable) in their toys due to possible hazards. But that can't be!! Our precious **Iron Men** would never knowingly harm us simply for collecting them! Just to be on the safe side, don't chew on your **Iron Man** collection ;).

Throughout the years there have been many incarnations of **Iron Man** in plastic, but through the various toy evolutions, there will always be a place dear in our hearts for the solid, molded, unarticulated **PVC** toy. From the days of 100 count bags of cowboys and Indians **PVCs**, to the trips to the museum where the machine would mold a dinosaur out of plastic for you (the younger **ADVANCED IRON** readers may not remember this!); these toys have permeated our childhood as artifacts of fascination and grown into our adulthood as collectibles. Below are some of the **Iron Man PVC's** you may or may not have known were available to satiate your own **Iron Mania**!!

**Figure 1:** Some of you may remember seeing this in **ADVANCED IRON** #66's "Unofficial Iron Man Toys Part II". The Marx **Iron Man** is the first **Iron Man** toy produced. These were molded in several colors, and the word on the street is that the silver colored editions are rare **Marvel Mania** prize giveaways.

**Figure 2:** The Gulliver **Iron Man** is a vintage **PVC** from Brazil. For all intents and purposes, this toy maybe rarer in the U.S. than the Marx **Iron Man** – its distant cousin.

- 1978-

**Figure 3:** This **Iron Man PVC**, which I lovingly refer to as "Monkey **Iron Man**" (for what I hope are obvious reasons) was a flexi- plastic attempt at capturing **Iron Man** in all of his glory.... perhaps drunken glory, but glory nonetheless. -1990-

**Figure 4:** The **Iron Man** Modular armor makes an appearance adorned atop some hard candy straight from the Negative Zone. Annihilus eat your heart out. - 1994-

**Figure 5:** This **PVC** also serves as the cap for the plastic yellow pen which originally came with it. Aside from uncomfortably straddling a granite

peak for no apparent reason, the mold of this **PVC** is actually pretty good, although it earns the name “Crotch- Problem Armor **Iron Man**.” - 1995-

**Figure 6:** This is one of the neatest **Iron Man PVC**'s around. It's a great mold of the Modular Armor and it captures an iconic powerful pose for **Shellhead**. - 1995-

**Figure 7:** The Figural **Iron Man** Stamper is a cool **PVC** whose base doubles as an **Iron Man** Stamp (no ink included). This **PVC** is unique because it may be the closest plastic depiction to date of the armor used in Season II of **Iron Man** The Animated Series!  
- 1996-

**Figure 8:** This **PVC** from Yolanda is available in a Gold highlight (pictured) or a yellow highlight version. The sheathing of the left arm is stripped away to depict the armor from the Volume 1 story arc by Hopgood and Kaminski when **Stark** used the telepresence armor. - 1996-

**Figure 9:** This is the first **PVC** of the Renaissance armor as depicted by Chen during his Volume Three art run. This **PVC** was originally - 2000-

**Figure 10:** This cool **PVC** is actually the stick that held a large piece of hard candy. After eating the candy (or melting the candy away under hot running water because it was five years old... and nasty... and probably molding...and I'll stop now...- ugh- ) **Iron Man** is revealed atop a stick bearing his name. The Iron will it must have taken to be stuck inside rotting candy for five years is truly awe inspiring of our hero. - 2001-

**Figure 11:** The Marvel Figure Factory toys are novel, well conceived modern approaches to the **PVC** concept. These are essentially **PVC** that you assemble, which were well marketed as build a figures, even coming in a sealed crate in the package. The **Iron Man** in particular is a nice piece in a relatively powerful pose. - 2005-

**Figure 12:** The Bandai **Iron Man** is an overseas Japanese release of “Gashapon”, the Japanese version of the U.S. Figure Factory toys. Here **Iron Man**, the butt of yet another crotch joke (see Figure 5) has been lovingly referred to as “Crotch Repulsing **Iron Man**” on the message boards. Good stuff, on to the next **PVC**.... - 2006-

**Figure 13:** Most recently, Marvel released a line which cashed in on the old **PVC** formula in a new and exciting way. Dubbed “Zizzlingers”, these **PVC**'s are packed in bags of food coloring that when placed in water, “Zizzle” open to reveal the **PVC**'s packed inside. This is the **Iron Man** version. - 2006-

**Figure 14:** Finally, **Iron Man** has been released with a series of other Marvel Toys in **PVC** form (albeit with slight action accessories, this one shoots spring loaded repulsor blasts) as kids meal inserts at Burger Kings in the U.K. Here's hoping that our overseas friends don't shoot their eyes out with a well placed plastic repulsor ray. - 2006-



				
<b>Figure 1 Marx Iron Man</b>	<b>Figure 2 Gulliver Iron Man</b>	<b>Figure 3 Applause PVC Iron Man</b>	<b>Figure 4 Candy Topper Iron Man</b>	<b>Figure 5 Pen Topper Iron Man</b>
				
<b>Figure 6 Modular Flight Iron Man</b>	<b>Figure 7 Figural Iron Man Stamper</b>	<b>Figure 8 Yolanda PVC's Iron Man (Gold Version)</b>	<b>Figure 9 Topps Renaissance Iron Man</b>	<b>Figure 10 Topps Candy Stick Iron Man</b>
				
<b>Figure 11 Marvel Figure Factory Iron Man</b>	<b>Figure 12 Bandai Iron Man</b>	<b>Figure 13 Zizzlinger Iron Man</b>	<b>Figure 14 UK BK Iron Man</b>	<b>Figure 15 Iron Armory</b>

PVC's are a hard thing to track and find as they are small and often released without any hype or fanfare (or even as gumball machine accessories). If any Iron Fans find PVC's that aren't depicted here, let us know and we'll feature them in a future **ADVANCED IRON**.

I hope you've enjoyed the **ADVANCED IRON** foray into Iron Poly-Vinyl Chloride Man madness. Additionally, thank you all for your squinting eyes when looking at my pictures... obviously I am **not** a photographer and thanks for reading,

Ironman John

\*\*\*\*\*

08/27/2006

# The Stark Market Report

By: Ironman John B. Comerford

There has been a lot of *Iron* activity since we last examined our ferrous market. The *Toy Biz Iron Man Marvel Icons* figure has shipped in standard quantities to stores, and the monthly comic book is monthly again (as a matter of fact, by the time the awesome **ADVANCED IRON** readers read this we'll have more issues of *Iron Man* vol. 4 since the last **A.I.** than we've had in the previous year)! Additionally, *Iron Man* has been actively appearing in Marvel's Civil War event and its related comics. Although some fans are unhappy with the characters portrayal, the crossover has brought in new readers to the comic and posters to the various *Iron Man* message boards around (this information comes from my own active reading of comments on those boards). Needless to say, there is prolific *Iron Man* chatter going on at places like <http://invincibleironman.com/forums> and the Civil War forum at <http://forums.comicbookresources.com/index.php>.

On June 23, 2006 an **eBay** auction for a slabbed *Iron Man* v1 # 15 CGC'd @ a **9.6** sold for a whopping **\$249.95**. The significance of this sale however, lies not in the fact that it is a high grade silver age book, but the fact that the copy is a printing variant (which likely helped command the premium the seller received for it). This issue had a varying color bar in the printing process, leaving either a **yellow** or a **green** bar above the media box.

This slabbed issue was the rarer yellow bar variant, whereas the more common green bar variant may have sold for less (be advised that although [ComicsPriceGuide.com](http://ComicsPriceGuide.com) states the green bar is the rarer of the two, I believe this to be in error as I have seen the green bar pop up nearly every time I've physically seen a copy of the issue myself. That being said, I also concede to a possible localization of this book in the Chicagoland area which may make it appear to be in abundance all over). Either way, be aware of this books status next time you are looking for **Silver Age Marvels**. As with *IM's* armor, yellow is the way to go!

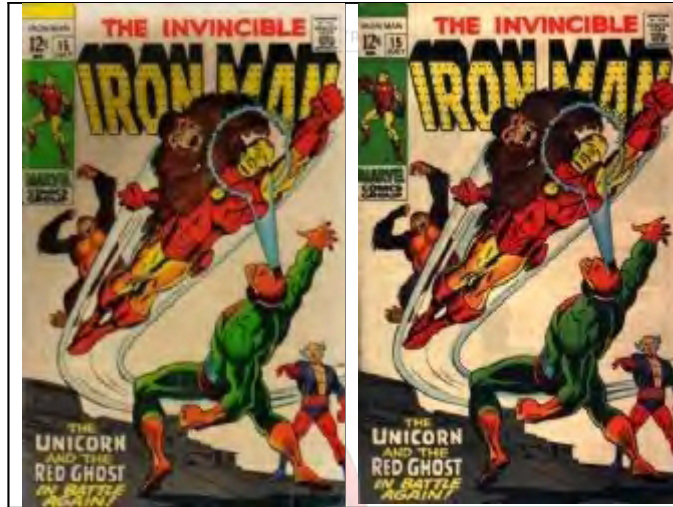
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Silver Age *Iron Man* variants aren't the only era to be impacting the current market. As most of you know, *Ultimate Iron Man #1* is available with several covers to collect. However, the particular printing of interest is the Hitch sketch cover of "techno Tony" (a somewhat obscure looking cover). Some sources on [eBay](#) and message boards have noted that the copy of the cover stating "Not For Resale" where the UPC symbol should be is actually a convention exclusive of some kind which has been under printed. Please see the scan below for a comparison, but note that I have not been able to verify this as of yet. I can state however, that [eBay](#) sales of this issue have been active, and it has actually sold for more than **20 bucks** on some occasions. On a final note, be on the lookout for the collected release of *Iron Man: The Inevitable* in tpb form for **\$14.99** (a nice follow up to the collected *Extremis* arc available in hardcover).



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In the realm of **Toy Biz's** Marvel Legends, **Iron Man** is a continued hit with collectors and fans as regular sales of the **Gold Variant Iron Man** and the **Stealth Armor Iron Man** (both from Series One) commanding premium prices nearly *every single sale* online. It might be a safe claim to make stating that the **Stealth Armor Iron Man** is they keystone Legends toy for both Legends and **Iron Man** collectors alike. At times this piece has sold for **\$100**, and regularly hits **\$75** in online sales. Its counterpart, the **Gold Variant Iron Man** typically sells for around **\$40- 50**; and even the **Modern Armor Iron Man** from Series Eight has been seeing **\$30** (i.e., **eBay** Item #190024775217 was at \$31 with two days left as of this writing), possibly due to increased interest in New Avengers or Civil War.

Finally, **Sideshow Collectibles** ([sideshowcollectibles.com](http://sideshowcollectibles.com)) has released a fantastic **Iron Man** statue featuring a portrayal of **Iron Man** as illustrated by Adi Granov's cover to Volume 3, Number 76. **Sideshow** has offered the statue with an exclusive interchangeable **Tony Stark** head – *limited to only 500* - which more or less sold out during the pre-order. However, the statue, which was selling new for approximately **\$270.63** (after shipping) is now actively selling on **eBay** typically **over \$300 and sometimes as high as \$600 only weeks after its initial release!!** However, potential buyers should be advised that a source at **Sideshow** has informed me that the statue has shipped with occasional damage risk. It seems that occasionally the arm molded as 'punching' the ground sometimes breaks during shipping. The foam packing for the statue is not a perfect mold for the piece, and as the statue lies in the foam, pressure on that arm tends to break it at the shoulder. In regards to this, I have been informed that **Sideshow** has a "certain amount of the production set aside for such an occurrence" should yours arrive damaged. This is not good news for such a high profile piece, however at least **Sideshow** has taken measures to aid their customers in cases such as these.

Hopefully the **Stark Market** is in full swing for all of our dedicated **Shellheads**, and as usual, thanks for reading and being the greatest **Iron Fans** on Earth!

Ironman John  
\*\*\*\*\*  
08/27/2006

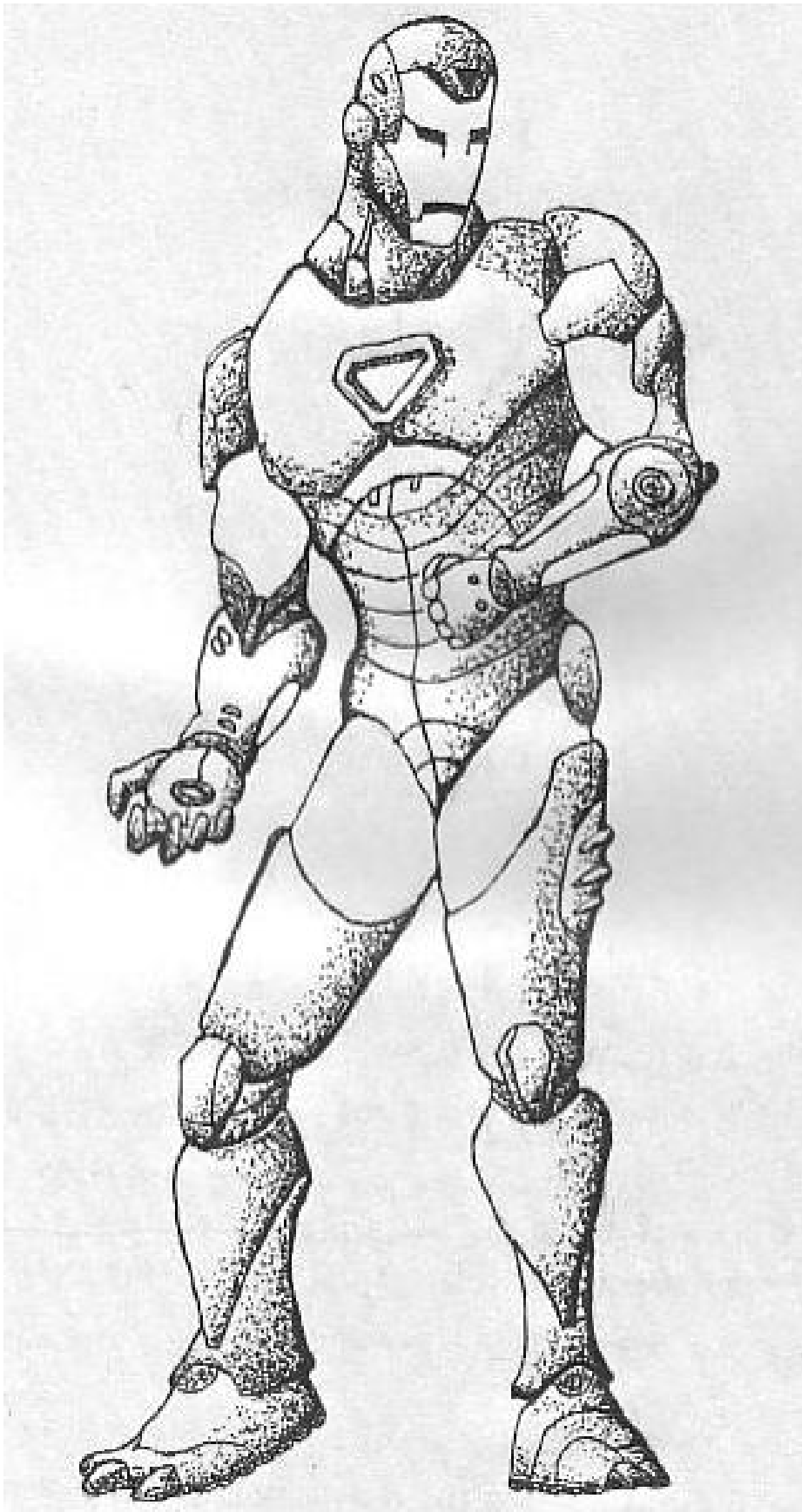
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Here's a little something I threw together the other day. I tried something different with the shading. Not sure I like the results. But it is what it is.

Thanks!

Joel "Charmless Man" O'Connor

NOT EVEN  
ON YOUR  
BEST DAY,  
BUB



## Iron Mania At Wizard World Chicago

By: Ironman John B. Comerford

On Saturday, August 5, 2006 I was in attendance at the gala **Wizard World Chicago** event. This was my first foray into **Wizard World** (although I've lived in the Chicagoland area my whole life, I've never managed to go to a previous **Wizard World** here) and I found myself tripping the sensory overload circuit breaker in overtime! There was so much comic book and entertainment stuff to see, and to my delight, **Iron Man** stuff was in abundance at the show!

While attending, I learned why people say to stay away from artist alley.... it's like a flea market with clever salespeople at every booth! However, these guys have a one up on their dime store counterparts in that many of them are highly talented artists with their own self published books for sale at the show! One corner of this area caught my attention, as out of the corner of my eye I saw a very familiar display... lo and behold the guys from **Fyberdyne Labs** were there AND they were there with their famous **Iron Man** helmets! For those of you who aren't familiar with this talented crew, **Fyberdyne** (<http://www.fyberdyne.com/>) is the group to first create a replica **Iron Man** helmet, which through the input of painter extraordinaire *Alex Ross* (also in attendance with an amazing two story Joker portrait hanging over his booth), evolved into the most fantastic 3-D **Iron Man** head ever molded!!! Even better, they had the original on display with two other prototypes, an **Iron Man 2020** and another **Classic** mold! I made the rounds at the con on several occasions, but unfortunately, the **Fyberdyne** reps were off roaming the grounds on their own, so I never had a chance to talk to them, but check out these amazing images from the show!



Moving on, I ran into many of the new **Iron Man** statues, including several statues, busts and mini statues. The **Iron Man** Origins statue was present



(looking much better in real life than in the online images I've seen). A new **Iron Man** statue was present which featured the new *Mike Grell* inspired armor and fits in with a *New Avengers* theme. This was a really nice piece, which I plan on getting whenever it's released. In total, I counted **5** statues which are yet to see release (and as we know from the internet there are more than that on their way).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>New Avengers Iron Man Statue</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Marvel Origins Statue</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sideshow Collectibles Exclusive</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Diamond Select Iron Man Statue</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Diamond Iron Man Polished Mini Bust (miniaturized from the original highly polished super limited full sized piece from just over a year ago)</b></li> </ul>	

We finally made our way to the **Marvel** area of the floor, which was divided into two sides each labeled by theme of the **Civil War** event. The left was labeled the "**Iron Side**" above the creator booth, while the right creator booth was labeled "**Cap Side**". Eventually, **Iron Man** fan favorite *John Romita Jr.* was present signing autographs (on the **Iron Side**, rightfully so). The back of the booths were decorated in **Iron Man** movie posters (probably about 20 of them, making a wall of *Adi Granov Iron*), and surrounding the booth were new toys and statues contributing to the **Marvel Mania**. An image of the **Iron Man** promotional movie posters from director Jon Favreau's upcoming film is watermarked in the background of this article.



There was other random **Iron Man** merchandise around the convention as well. Of course comics were in abundance. One dealer had a **Tales Of Suspense 39** which was **CGC'd** at **9.0**. I was stunned by this book, and the asking price was **\$13,900** !!! The **Iron Spidey** Toy was present in a display case and appeared to be very well done with a seriously awesome sculpt. Additionally, there was a t-shirt vendor with a booth that may have actually been a living Shirt Monster coming

to gobble up all of the fan base on Earth. Luckily, I made my way out alive and with a great **Iron Man** t-shirt in tow. This is a nicer item than just a shirt with bad printing on it; the letters are raised, puffy ones that compliment the shirt nicely.

We were also present at the **Ultimate Marvel Panel** with *Joey Q*, *Jeff Loeb* and *Michael Turner*. It seems that *Joey Q* TRULY appeared to let it slip (unless it was very well staged) that **Cap** was or is planned to die during one of the **Ultimates Runs**. *Jeff Loeb* suggested that **Ultimate Iron Man** bites the dust however, and isn't with his run of **Ultimates 3**, which will begin immediately when



The Chief, Marvels Marketing guy, Loeb and Turner

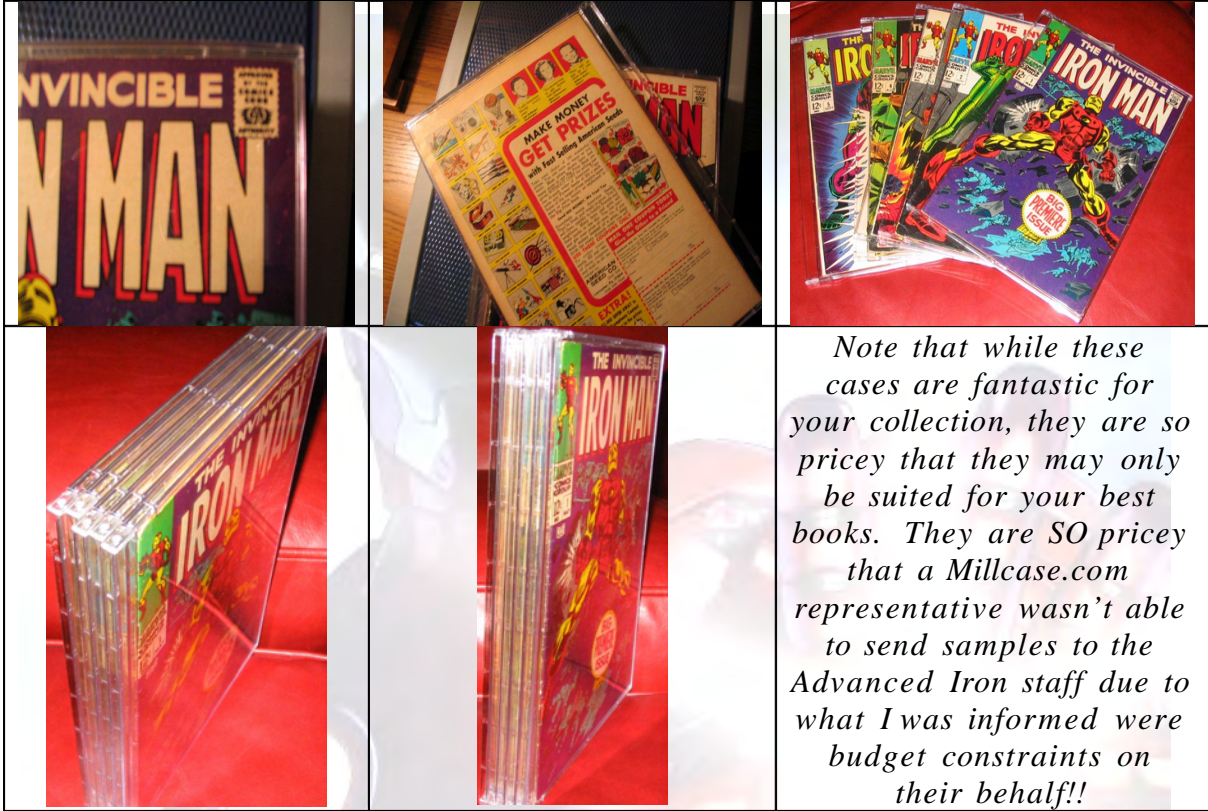
*Millar* finally finishes **Ultimates 2**. I was set for a question to the panel regarding **Ultimate Iron Man** vol. 2 by *Scott Card*, but another fan beat me to it. According to *Quesada* there are 3 issues ready and the artwork will begin when the actual book is written in its entirety at the request of *Scott Card* for some reason.

Finally, of interest to collectors, there was a new type of storage medium being sold at the Wizard Booth at the show. These hard plastic clamshell cases, called Mill Case are really fantastic ways to store your higher end books (sheathing your whole collection in these is probably very cost prohibitive at *5 for 20 bucks*!). Don't expect your early **Silver Age** stuff to fit in these, but **mid Silver** stuff goes in PERFECTLY. Here are some images of these great cases, which IMO are the best thing on the market now (CGC cases aside). As you can see from the images, they are well worth it for your better books. Combine this storage with some microchamber paper and the books are completely archived.

STARK INDUSTRIES PROTOTYPE  
MARVEL LAUNCHING MAY 2 2008







*Note that while these cases are fantastic for your collection, they are so pricey that they may only be suited for your best books. They are SO pricey that a Millcase.com representative wasn't able to send samples to the Advanced Iron staff due to what I was informed were budget constraints on their behalf!!*

**Wizard World Chicago** was a fun convention loaded with **Iron Man** stuff, great deals (more .50 bins than you could possibly dig through) and great fans. There were even a few people present wearing **Iron Man** costumes (word is that **Iron Man** was booted off stage when brought up for the costume competition against a fan **Captain America**). Of note, other attendees included *John Taddeo* with a fantastic **Zoom Suit** display, **Marvel** Editor *Tom Brevoort*, and the guys from **CGC** taking submissions for on-site grading (although I have to say that my experience with them so far is another story entirely...).

Hopefully our **ADVANCED IRON** coverage of the Chicago convention has been informative and fun. There certainly was enough **Iron Mania** present for any rookie or seasoned **Iron Fan** to go crazy with.

Thanks for reading,

Ironman John  
\*\*\*\*\*

08/31/2006





## Metal Head

by Heath McKnight  
with an assist from  
Iron Man John B. Comerford

<\*\*\*\*\*BREAKING NEWS: As this issue was going to press, it was announced Jon Favreau confirms Robert Downey, Jr. is Stark/Iron Man!!!!>

It is true. Robert Downey Jr. is Tony Stark. I am about as excited as I can be. I saw what he can do and he is extremely enthusiastic about playing Stark. I can say with absolute certainty that there is no better choice. The humor and emotional dimension he brings truly raises the bar on this project. Get ready. \*\*\*\*\*>



<ed. notes: If your a core Iron Man fan, then you probably have already heard this news. Heath sent this to me as soon as it broke. It was my fault for not getting the issue out quicker. My apologies to Heath>

Hey everyone, and welcome to another editing of Metal Head! Sorry I missed last issue, the first time in years, but as I inch closer to production on my next film 9:04 AM ([www.904am.com](http://www.904am.com)), things just get busier and busier! And a big thanks to Iron Man John for throwing some Iron Man coverage last issue, and helping out this issue!

### IRON MAN NEWS

So, here's a recap of everything that we know: Jon Favreau (ELF, ZATHURA) is directing from a script by Arthur Marcum and Matthew Hollaway. Marvel Studios is financing it, and Paramount Pictures, through their deal with Marvel, is releasing it on May 2, 2008, six years after Spider-Man opened on that weekend in 2002.

As far as casting goes, only Terrence Howard has been approached, to play Rhodey, but no other actors have. We do know the villain is The Mandarin, and Favreau wants a younger Mandy, so that should be interesting. Does Rhodey mean War Machine? Time will tell!

There has been no hints, no rumors, or anything (save Tom Cruise, but that's a rumor stretching back to IM's Fox days with writer Jeff Vintar, way back in 1998) on who is going to play Stark/Iron Man. But that doesn't stop the speculation. Favreau has said he wants an unknown, or someone who isn't

## Metal Head

by Heath McKnight  
with an assist from  
Iron Man John B. Comerford

completely famous. This makes it easier to sign an actor to multiple picture deals.

Regarding the armor, Favreau has this to say about it at Comic Con: "The suit will be more like a weapons platform than a flying suit – more of a War Machine-feel to it." And, despite what executive producer Kevin Feige said a few years ago, the armor will indeed be red and gold. The teaser poster that premiered at Comic Con, painted by Adi Granov, looked great, but Favreau said that's not the final look.

Rumors indicate that a preliminary Iron Man trailer may be ready either for FF 2 or the upcoming Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles CGI movie although the latter is unlikely with a March '07 release date. Recent developments also indicate that Iron Man's weekend has been freed up from competition as the 22<sup>nd</sup> James Bond film has changed release dates to a later, November release date. In the meantime, the Iron Man Myspace page originally begun by Favreau to keep the channels of information about the movie clean and flowing, has grown beyond the scope of it's original intent. Without a forum moderator, the best place for IM news is Fav's own bulleting postings in MySpace. Additionally, the fan loving director, his wife and family deserve a congratulations for the birth of his newest family member and third child.

Production begins January 2007 for a release, again, in early May 2008. Which means there may be a lot of F/X work done. I'm excited about this one! I predict a cool trailer of sorts next Fourth of July 2007 when Paramount re-releases the highly anticipated Transformers movie.

### OTHER MARVEL STUDIOS FILM NEWS

Through their agreement with Paramount, Marvel will produce about 10 movies that Para. will release over the next few years, starting with Iron Man. Also slated for summer 2008 is The Incredible Hulk, with new director Louis Leterrier (those The Transporter films), and writer Zak Penn (X2 and X3). It's been rumored that Dominic Purcell (Prison Break) will take over as Banner from Eric Bana, who wants to reprise his role as the haunted doctor, and the Hulk will only be around seven feet tall. Though Marvel is financing it, Universal will be releasing it, like the first one (they also paid for that one, but not this one).

Next up is Ant-Man, which will be directed Edgar Wright (he directed the brilliantly funny Shaun of the Dead). He hopes to do something cool and funny, with Scott Lang finding the costume after Hank Pym dumped it.

Other films in the pipeline, per their Paramount deal:

## Metal Head

by Heath McKnight  
with an assist from  
Iron Man John B. Comerford

Captain America (writer attached)  
Nick Fury (writer attached)  
Thor (writer attached)

When I saw that all these characters are being developed, I realized Marvel may be planning an Avengers movie. And they are! Zak Penn is also writing it, citing The Ultimates as his inspiration, but he's having to "table it" while working on Hulk.

The budgets for these films, according to Marvel, can range from the \$60s to over \$160 million! I hope they do the Hulk justice, because despite a lot of problems, I loved the first Hulk movie's action! And I'd love to see Eric Bana return to the role of Bruce. And definitely Sam Elliot as General Ross.

### OTHER MARVEL PROJECTS

We have Ghost Rider, by Mark Steven Johnson (Daredevil) and starring Nicolas Cage, coming out in early 2007; Spider-Man 3, with everyone returning and Thomas Hayden Church (Sandman) and Topher Grace (Venom) onboard as villains. James Franco appears to be playing a non-Goblin villain who will be flying around like Goblin. Rumors of a giant villain seemed to have been squashed when the first trailer hit, and a gigantic Sandman (in sand mode) attacked. This looks like a great film, with Peter going dark because of the symbiote costume.

In June 2007, Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer opens. Doug Jones (Hellboy's Abe Sabien) will play the Surfer, and I'm guessing Galactus will show up at some point. Everyone returns, including Doom.

### OTHER SUPERHERO MOVIES

The Dark Knight, featuring Heath Ledger as the Joker, will hit theatres summer 2008, with everyone returning, including director Christopher Nolan. I don't believe fantastic writer David S. Goyer will be returning, but he's said he will. He did the Blade films and is busy working on The Flash for DC/WB.

Hellboy 2: The Golden Army, will hopefully go into production in May 2007 for a release in 2008. Guillermo del Toro returns, and this time Doug Jones will get to voice Abe Sabien (vs. the original's David Hyde Pierce). Universal takes over from Revolution/Sony.

Watchmen is back at Warner Bros. with 300/Dawn of the Dead's (remake) Zack Snyder directing. It sounded really cool at Paramount before they killed it (rumors of two-time Oscar winner Hillary Swank wanting a role couldn't save



## Metal Head

by Heath McKnight  
with an assist from  
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it), with exciting director Paul Greengrass behind the lens. Also, 300 opens early next year.

The financiers of Superman Returns wants a Supes sequel, but don't expect one until 2009. Bryan Singer has promised to go all "Wrath of Kahn" in this one. He may do a small independent film in the meantime. I certainly loved The Usual Suspects, so I'm excited about what he might do.

Nothing new on the Wolverine and Magneto spin-offs, but expect more news late 2006/early 2007. As for the Wonder Woman movie, it's moving forward at a glacial pace, even with popular Joss Whedon onboard as writer/director (he did Buffy, Angel, Firefly, Toy Story, Alien Resurrection, uncredited re-writes on Speed, and much, much more).

Always remember to visit [www.invincibleironman.com](http://www.invincibleironman.com) for my regular updates at the Iron Man movie news and Metal Head boards!

Heath McKnight  
[www.mpsdigital.com](http://www.mpsdigital.com)



Hulk Smashed!  
by Scott R. Brooks

It's been a while since I've submitted something to Advanced Iron. I did this splash page after having some (non-Iron Man) pencil page samples shot down by some pro artists at this past summer's Heroes Con in Charlotte. I was told my pages weren't action-packed enough. For therapy, I had to do something to see if I could get some slam-bang superhero action onto a page. Taking the inevitable return of a very ticked-off Hulk as my inspiration, this is the result.

Okay, I know Iron Man's mask is missing. I know I'm the only one who likes it that way. Basically I wanted to draw Tony's expression, but for the benefit of those who would like some justification, here's the story: the Hulk managed to knock Shellhead's mask off earlier in the fight, and now you're seeing Tony's attempt to take the Hulk out before the big green ape connects with a blow only Tony's plastic surgeon would love. Will the result be a repeat of Iron Man #132, where Iron Man decked the Hulk, or is the Hulk going to get in another shot before Tony can summon the missing mask?

This is my first attempt at drawing the Extremis armor. Hat's off to Adi Granov and Pat Zircher for making it look easy to draw. It ain't.

Feedback is appreciated. Drop me a line at: [scott@stormerbrooks.com](mailto:scott@stormerbrooks.com)







## ROCKETS LAST GLARE

By Peter J Welmerink

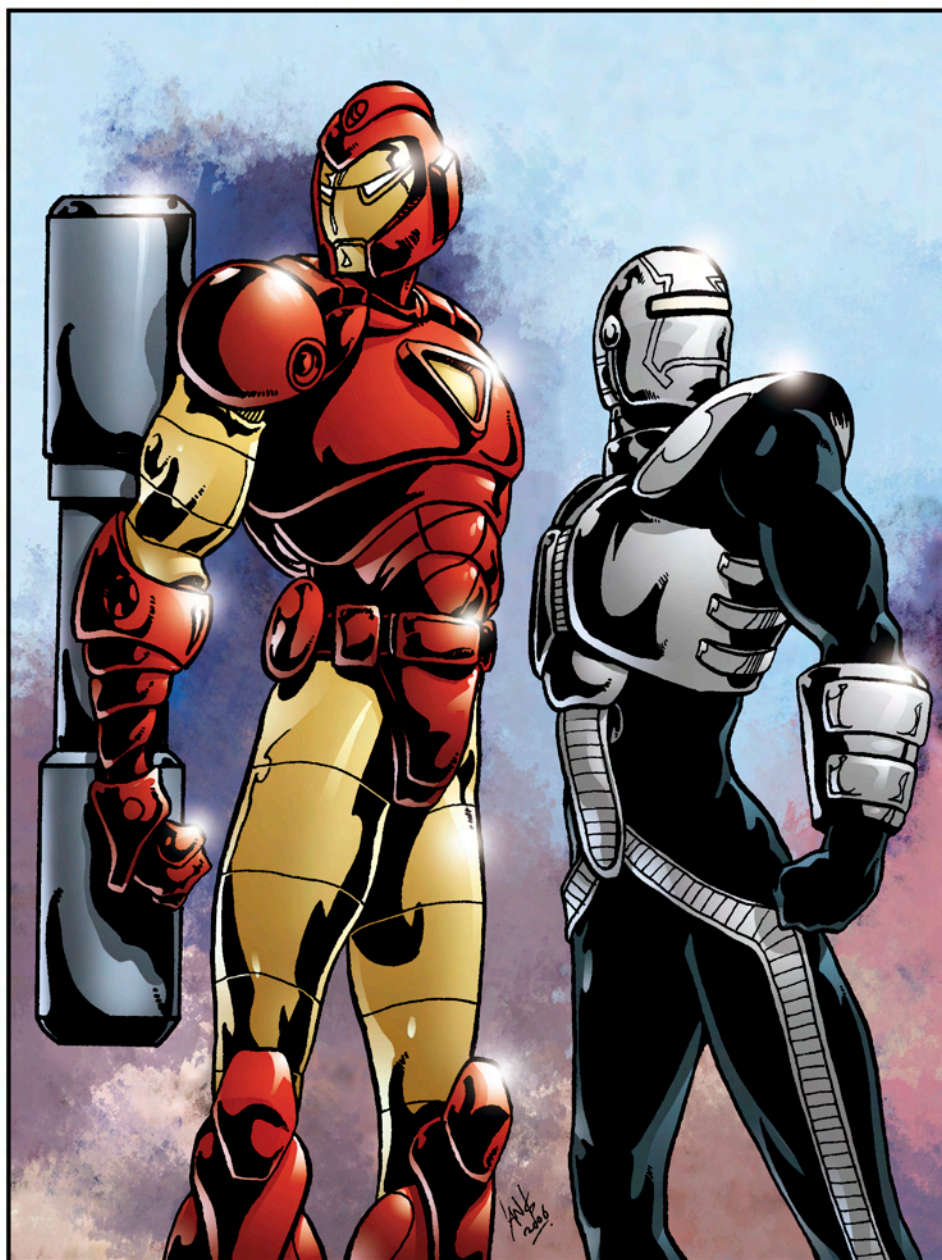
Illustrated by: Ian Sokolowski

Note from author: This story takes place during the Marvel's HOUSE OF M storyline. (Iron Man House of M ish 1 – 3 Sept 2005 thru November 2005) In this story, Iron Man hasn't saved the day yet, he is still hunted as a terrorist and a rebel, the Vision technology (influenced as it was by Howard Stark in IM: HoM) has infected various computer systems, and due to Iron Man's "anti-mutant actions," sapien quarantine camps are on the rise in Chicago and around the surrounding countryside.

### Part 2 and Conclusion When the Walls Come Tumbling Down

There was a moment of blackness which then exploded in a glare of blinding brilliance. My visor adjusted immediately to the bright daylight as I changed my trajectory in mid-flight, arched my back, straightened my heels to gain thrust from my boot-jeets, and came about in full circle.

The 80-foot Sentinel teetered, arms bent at the elbow and palms up. A smoking crater stood in the hillside before it from where it had last fired its plasma palm cannons. Now it stood stunned. I could hear its guts whining as internal actua-



## ROCKETS LAST GLARE

By Peter J Welmerink

Illustrated by: Ian Sokolowski

tors faltered, systems governing its movement failing as the hole in its midsection coughed black billows and spit sparks.

“Don’t trip over your brothers, big boy,” I said as I fired my own palm blasters into its face. The pinprick of solid energy smote the Senti right above the nose region—if it had a nose—entering as a small two-inch diameter hole and blasting out the back of its headbox in an array of cogs and electronics.

The burst sent the Sentinel reeling backwards. Its calves hit the legs of its brother directly behind it who was on hands and knees, head hanging low like a guy on the ground trying to revive from getting punched in the belly. Another big bot lay on its back with a similar gut-shot. The two on the ground I had recently blasted a similar fatal burst in their chest cavity before the other brother here tried to intercede. It hadn’t been easy and almost drained my system, putting me in red line for core shutdown if the battle lasted longer than it did.

With a groan—more out of metal joints fighting each other and losing—the second Sentinel toppled backwards, hitting the head and shoulders of its downed kin. Both rang like thunder when they hit the ground, shaking the earth like two huge boulders had been cast down.

I leveled out and hovered above the broken Senti’s and shattered landscape, looking at the metal carnage and the devastated roadway which the lower portions of the giant bots lay across. They blocked any exit up the street called Lake Michigan Drive. A few yards further and they would have landed on the I-96 expressway which looped around into the downtown area.

Not that anyone was coming into or out of the city of Grand Rapids right now, not with twelve—make that ten—Sentinels, an army of blue-bodied Synthmen, a super computer that seemed to want to eradicate humanity...and two guys in metal-mesh armor, one from out of town and one a local armored hero, trying to quash the rogue tech.

Leaving the broken remains of the two downed Senti’s, I rose into the air, coming high enough over the treetops to get a better view of the neighborhood. The Iron Adolescent hovered above Lake Michigan Drive, a main street that led to the downtown area, launching his wrist armament into the mass of blue Synthmen who climbed atop each other trying to reach him.

A Sentinel stood nearby, too preoccupied at the moment with the smaller robotic units, the Synthmen, who clattered up the big bot’s legs like angry ants.

If the transmitter tower in the center of town, which supposedly this RAS super computer was controlling, had called the Sentinel’s in to combat us, it was doing a heck of a job controlling it’s smaller army from not trying to take down the Senti’s. The other Sentinel’s that had come in from the Lake Michigan shoreline were scattered about the west side of the neighborhood. Two of the 80-foot metal monsters stood in the downtown area looking like giant sculptures next to the highrise buildings. Every one of them

## ROCKETS LAST GLARE

By Peter J Welmerink

Illustrated by: Ian Sokolowski

seemed to be firing at the ground, mostly at objects I couldn't see from my perspective. Thinking about the people still living in the bombed-out and shamble of a neighborhood, I hoped the big bots weren't raining hellfire down on frightened civilians.

There came a loud crackling sound, like a huge pile of dried twigs being snapped and amplified by a loud speaker next to the ear. I glanced to the Sentinel nearest me, the one with the angry Synth-units clawing at its legs. It swatted at the Iron Adolescent and he barely dodged the huge metal hand. It then sank its fore limbs into the side of a home and lifted.

"Incoming!" Paul Weiterink, the man encased in the Iron Adolescent armor, called over my audio receptors.

I caught movement in one of the upper floor windows of the two-story house the Sentinel had in its grasp. The foundation and lower flooring creaked and crumbled away as the structure's integrity literally lost ground.

"Oh my god! There are children in there!" I cried, seeing two little faces peering, fear-filled, out the second floor window as they rose higher into the air.

The Sentinel's glowing blue-white eyes seemed to burn into me, and if the thing could have managed an evil grin, I think it would have.

The Senti raised the crumbling house above its head, readying to throw it at me.

"No!" I bellowed as I hit my bootjets as the big bot launched the house.

The house seemed to shatter like a glass bowl even before it left the Sentinel's hands. Debris erupted at every angle as if the home had been hit by a missile and exploded. I halted abruptly in mid-flight, eyes darting all about the raining wreckage of wood and tile and furniture. Such a storm of dust and debris clouded the immediate area even heat sensors made the view like looking at a static-ridden television monitor.

I bellowed again, this time in total rage at the young life lost to the metal beast.

<<Pulse and chest beams at full power in 5.7 seconds>>

The dirty boil of debris was still falling as I fired. A muffled electronic roar emanated from the Senti as palm and chest beams—dense solid lines of light—struck the creature. The beams hit at a mid-point of the Senti's left shoulder, one at mid-neck and the last blasting into the left side of its head.

I had fired without much real aim but the results were catastrophic.

Though Stark International had designed the Sentinel and I knew most of the layout and hot points of the thing, I didn't know all the logic and total drive circuits inside and out. I knew there was a major conduit somewhere on the left side of the big robot but didn't



## ROCKETS LAST GLARE

By Peter J Welmerink

Illustrated by: Ian Sokolowski

know all its critical functions or what would happen if the conduit was damaged or disrupted...

Until now.

The Senti sparked and sputtered and visibly shook. With a piercing electronic screech that almost blew my audio receptors, the giant bot toppled, landing atop another house—vacant I hoped—and a score or two of the blue Synth-men. I had seen death throes before but nothing like this being. With obvious “nerve” centers disrupted, the Senti spasmed and twisted and flailed, pounding flat and totally destroying anything standing around it.

The Synthmen who hadn’t gotten crushed evacuated the area.

“Jarvis, scan for organic life forms?” I asked my built-in computer as I looked to the destroyed home where the two small children had been. I dropped down to the carnage and began tossing chunks of house aside.

ZERO LIFE FORMS IMMEDIATELY DETECTED, HOWEVER..., Jarvis said with my helmet.

The poor kids. Obliterated.

“I have the kids.”

I looked up to see the Iron Adolescent descending with two dirty faced and crying kids.

...HOWEVER, SIR, MANY HAVE COME OUT OF THEIR SHELTERS. Jarvis concluded.

As Paul Weiterink, the Iron Adolescent, touched earth, we both glanced about. Creeping from the darkened hollows of doorways and delapidated homes; men, women and children slunk forward, eyes darting this and that, wary of their surroundings. Some folk held make-shift weapons: thick table legs, hammers, knives. A woman cried and took the young children from IA’s arms.

The desperate people flocked around us. “Help us. Save us,” they said.

I looked to the downtown area, to the east, roughly a mile away. The remaining Sentinels had landed along with the two who already stood amidst the buildings there. My scanners detected the Synthmen lurking and wandering, hundreds of them, on the perimeters.

I felt my gut churning, a twisting knot of nerves and anxiety. The odds were staggering. Death unquestionably loomed. To save the people and the city, the task was surely impossible.

## ROCKETS LAST GLARE

By Peter J Welmerink  
Illustrated by: Ian Sokolowski

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“It’s possible to get downtown, take out the transmitter tower and the RAS computer,” the Iron Adolescent said as we spoke openly in the midst of the small crowd of people who had gathered about us. “We could fly in at any angle or direction, one of us diverting the Synth units and Sentinels while the other goes in deep, so-to-speak.”

“The RAS system in the community college building isn’t well guarded. It keeps the Synthmen patrolling the perimeters along the river and around the city proper,” one of the men of the group said. He wore a faded and dirty shirt, dusty jeans and his hair was unwashed and greasy. A small girl clung to his leg, never leaving his side and staring up at us with big fear-filled eyes. “It didn’t have any real threats to call guard units to its side.”

“Until now,” I responded. “Two Sentinels landed downtown even before our recent melee, and now the remaining ones are there, along with an army of the Synth’s lining the river’s edge on the west side here. Even if we can get to the transmitter, it will be like busting through a brick wall with a head-less hammer.”

I wasn’t saying it couldn’t be done, but I expected the RAS-controlled Sentinels and the Synthmen to put up a fierce fight. When you brought a fight to the hive, the bees usually fought a bit more furiously.

The recently erected radio tower the RAS was using to do long range transmissions stood on the west side of the river, directly across from the central part of the city proper. As it stood now, five Sentinels lumbered about the tower; a third had joined the other two in the city proper. The Synthmen lined the west river bank a score deep (as far as my sensors could tell) and stretched from the 196 expressway overpass to the north, all the way to the span of what was called the 131 expressway S-curve to the south. Hundreds more of the humanoid robots meandered the downtown streets, some even perched on rooftops of the high rise buildings. Waiting. Waiting.

The RAS knew we were coming.

#

“What are you doing there?” the Iron Adolescent asked standing atop the hip joint of the Sentinel that had thrashed half a neighborhood block during its death throes. I stood in the dismantled chest cavity, shoulders and head the only items visible to anyone. I had been rummaging and reconfiguring things for about an hour while IA gathered the civilians he could find in the immediate area and make sure they all were heading the opposite way from which the final battle would shortly ensue.

I plugged a small coupling unit to an input socket in my right arm gauntlet, routed a trickle of power to it and the attached device. I watched the internal readouts in my

## ROCKETS LAST GLARE

By Peter J Welmerink

Illustrated by: Ian Sokolowski

helm run the diagnostics, looking for any energy leaks or fluctuations that might mean I hadn't hooked things up quite right.

"The reality of our predicament, Paul, is that we're two guys—though heavily armored and enough tech and weaponry to give a small army a run for their money—we're up against machines, not a regular army of men. We don't stand a chance of quashing this situation unless we have something big to take down the opposition." I said as I peeled a piece of wire conduit from the guts of the downed Senti with a small laser in the index finger of my left gauntlet. "Thinking about what we needed a while ago, the run-in I had with the Sentinel over Lake Michigan gave me an idea."

"And that is?" Paul said taking a step closer to the gaping hole in the Sentinel's chest.

One last diagnostics check and I was satisfied. I hit my bootjets and did a slow climb from the broken giant bot.

"This right here," I said as the Iron Adolescent got a glimpse of my right forearm. Fashioned from metal sheeting from the Senti, along with some of its internal wiring, fusing a firing mechanism and the piece of hardware I had my mind set on, I lifted my arm showcasing the awkward looking addition. "The Sentinels carry EMP charges. I got knocked for a major loop by one, and figure we can use the same thing on that menagerie of mechs in the city there."

"Your plan?" IA asked as I landed before him.

I twisted my forearm with the new piece of hardware attached to it. I could flex my arm at the elbow, but even with the enhanced strength of my metal-mesh suit it felt like I was trying to tote a small elephant off my right arm.

"I don't expect we can take the whole group of both Sentinels and Synthmen out with one blow. And the RAS probably already knows we're targeting its transmitter tower and is going to throw everything it has at us," I said glancing eastward to the city proper. "An EMP blast can disrupt anything electrically driven, even fry smaller power systems. I have a plan to take out the tower, but I still think the RAS can still control things from its roost."

"That's where you come in, Paul," I continued. "You know the exact coordinates and the ins and outs of the downtown area and buildings. I can map it but I surely can't fly it like you can—have—for all these years living here. I'll take out what I can of the bigger boys and the Synthmen, giving you a shot at the RAS."

"If I recall your story, the EMP field blew out your armor's power grid too. If you get caught in your own blast, or something goes wrong..."



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I cut him off. "It's the chance we take in our line of work."

The sound of screams came from down the street. We both turned and saw a small group of civilians—hopefully the last to head to safer ground—heading our way. Behind them, a score of Synthmen pursued, firing upon them.

"This is it," IA said. "Let's get this done."

I nodded, checked my external and internal systems.

"Thanks for helping out, Iron Ma...Mr. Stark," the Iron Adolescent said offering me an open-palmed gauntleted hand.

"Not a problem," I said as we shook, Iron Man to...what could I say...iron man.

I don't think Paul could sense the anxiety in my voice. We were going up against a mechanized force that even I hadn't faced before.

If I could have trusted the transmission to be sent and received outside of this area, I would have sent out a message on where they could find my body.

The odds were not in our favor.

#

I knew what the biplane pilots in the old King Kong movie felt like; flying around a giant—in this case five—while trying to shoot and score a hit without getting swatted by colossal hand and clawing fingers. I could also empathize with pilots of old, old war pilots who flew about aggressive ground targets who continuously fired back, trying to knock you from the sky.

I hadn't gotten the shot I was looking for though I'd inflicted a bit of damage. So far there was a Sentri missing an arm; one whose right eye had blown out leaving a large divot in the side of its braincase; another fought on with a Swiss cheese chest from a barrage of dense plasma beams, and the other two flew about trailing smoke.

I suppose there was something to be said about being the little man on campus.

Armless fired its pulse cannon from the wrist of its good hand. I hit my bootjets, thrust and dropped, thrust and dropped as the sky boomed close to each spot I'd just been.

"While you're playing over there I could use some help," the Iron Adolescent said about a hundred yards away dealing with the Synthmen on the ground.

The Synth units crowded the grounds before the river and at the west bridge entrances to the spans that crossed the river into downtown. I'd seen smaller mobs pack the

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streets of Chicago, but the bots that were pushing forth meant business, firing at IA while he pulled some evasive maneuvers even I was stunned by. Paul didn't fly the same path twice and swept back and forth and cross-wise through the throngs.

SENTINEL COMING IN FROM THE WEST, Jarvis warned.

I glanced back to see the big monstrosity coming through the smoke like a giant ballistic missile. Armless and Holey Chest suddenly lurched forward and rose off the ground, arms outstretched towards me.

"Cripes, I'm going to get sandwiched!" I said in exclamation.

I hit my boot thrusters and twisted, feeling my vertebrae pop.

The three Sentinels changed course in an eyeblink to intercept.

I shot sidelong, then again torturing my spine, arched straight upward.

The three Sent's were too big, too slow and already in a collision flight path. There came a great metallic BOOM as they hit each other in mid-air, the concussive force even making me flail a bit as the shock wave slammed into me.

There was a second tremendous and tumultuous crash as the three tangled behemoths hit the ground, landing atop the Pearl Street Bridge and a large horde of Synthmen caught by surprise under the Sentinel's bulk. The bridge was not able to take the load. It buckled and plummeted into the dark river waters along with the out-of-commission Sentinels and the mangled bodies of hundreds of Synthmen.

"That wasn't quite what I was asking for," IA said flying passed me, palm blasters flashing at the opponents below. "But it worked."

"This isn't getting any easier. Three Sent's down, but five standing. I gotta pull my Ace of Spades," I said as I also fired into the line of Synthmen below. "It's just a matter of time before one of us runs out of luck and power."

Already my systems were taxed. Paul's armor had to be red-lining over and over. He had the fire power but I'd done a good sweep of his suits schematics and power output. If he were running off gas, his armor would be running on fumes by this point and ready to crash.

"There's too much opposition out here, Tony. If I'm not keeping the Synth's focused on me, they'll be focused on you. And I know the Sentinel's are keeping you busy," IA said as a laser blast from the street below glanced off his left thigh and he heard him curse as he twisted away.

## ROCKETS LAST GLARE

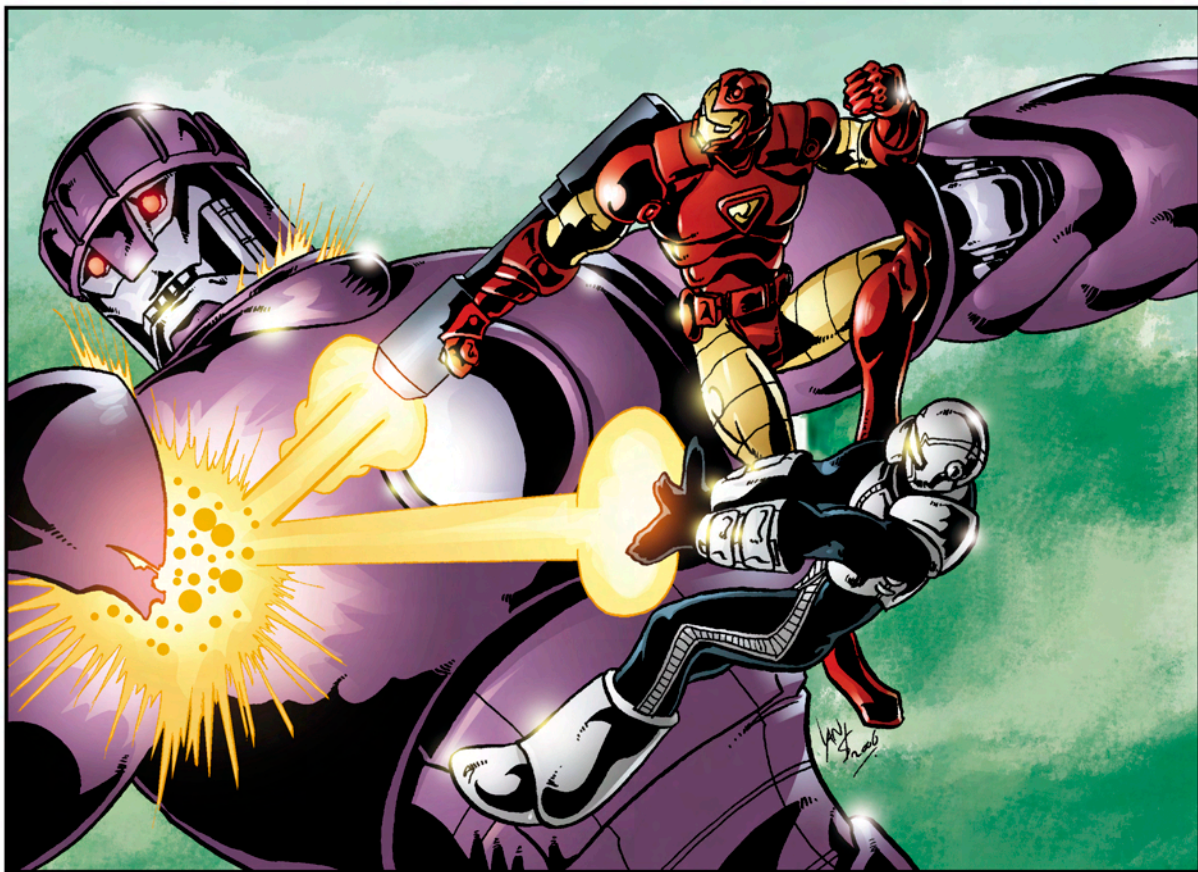
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Something sailed out from the tree line from the edge of the west side neighborhood. It was followed by its partner. The small flaming projectiles hit the Sentinel with the damaged skull, pounding into its iron hide at shoulder and mid-neck.

RPG'S...ROCKET-PROPELLED GRENADES...HAVE BEEN LAUNCHED, Jarvis said after the fact.

The fatally-wounded Sentinel, its main power conduit severed like I'd done to the house-hoister what seemed like a life time ago, sputtered and shook. Its arms flailed and body jerked violently as its motor functions went berserk. It teetered, throwing a hand out to catch itself. It latched onto the transmitter tower then literally twisted itself up into the metal skeletal work of the structure as it spasmed again, now legs and torso and arms thrashing in a failing electro-circuit death throe.



I scanned the neighoring homes and saw a small group of civilians running between the houses. Several of them carried small arms and grenade launchers.

“The people are fighting back,” IA said hovering about fifty feet away, firing down into the Synthimen who continued to swarm beneath us.



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I looked down the street. The people were heading straight towards the army of Synthmen. They wouldn't stand a chance.

"The towers down. You have to take out the RAS," I said to Paul.

Most likely getting a signal from RAS, the two Sentinels that had been standing motionless deeper in the downtown area started heading towards us, towards the bigger battle. The majority of the Synth units crowded along the city's perimeter. The building in which the RAS was located stood all but unguarded by only a few dozen Synthmen according to my scanners.

"You won't stand a chance fighting it out alone," Paul said through my audio receptors.

"I don't need to fight at all," I responded lifting the arm attached with the rigged EMP "gun". "Do as we discussed. Get to the building, drop all but your gauntlet munitions, and get inside and take out the RAS. When the EMP goes off, the armor's flight and main power systems will be down for the count."

The Iron Adolescent turned and roared towards the city proper, avoiding the searing ground fire.

I watched through the electronic image my scanners flashed within my helm as Paul soared and curved between the high-rise buildings. He did a quick fly-by of the community college building that housed the RAS, and then dropped towards the ground. There was a utility entrance on the north side of the six-story structure. This would be his access. Paul knew the way to the RAS's location in the sub-basement computer lab. I had faith that he could do it.

"I was just thinking," he said. "The blast sphere of the EMP charge...won't that take you out too?"

The two full-bodied and fully functional Sentinels stepped around a building directly in front of me. The Sentinel in the air looped around and was coming in hot. The Synthmen filled every nook and cranny of the city's perimeter and massed towards the civilians who were ready to fight to the death for their livelihood.

I hit my bootjets, rising to an elevation only a few hundred feet above the river, the city of Grand Rapids and the chaos below.

I leveled my arm with the EMP weapon, said a little prayer...and fired.

#

A blue-white flare, first solid light, then a translucent wave distorting sky and earth alike erupted before me. The initial brilliance and thump of the concussive blast made my automatic defense systems take over. My eye and mouth plexi-slits snapped shut in a

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nano-second. The armor's exo-shielding pulsed and became a secondary layer of static skin across the suits surface.

Other than the helm guard, all else was for naught as the electro-magnetic discharge expanded and rolled down, then out, enveloping everything within a quarter mile.

Brain rattled, all propulsion systems disabled, I felt myself falling. I slowly turned my head, moving like a fly in molasses. All around, the city took on a yellowish hue—color distortion created by the helmet's flare lenses. The buildings seemed to lean away from the blast then sway back inward. The Sentinel's on the ground moved but in jerking motions, like watching one of those old hand-cranked motion pictures, frame by jerky frame, or the slow motion of a sleepy eye blink.

The Sentinel in the air twisted slowly earthbound. Its glowing orbs dimmed. Its power packs snuffed of life. It swept below me, only a few feet away it seemed. The rush of air in its wake threw me into a sluggish somersault.

The Synthmen on the banks of the river and the streets slowly toppled like a table full of plastic toy soldiers, falling like dominoes into each other, falling at different angles.

The river came up, the dark rushing waters of the Grand River, moving like murky syrup in my distorted blast haze. I hit on my back. My spine felt like it had shattered. The watery nest of my impact rose up around me, then coalesced back around me as I sank. The river was shallow and the bottom came quick. I floundered there in slow motion until the armor silted.

A rippled shadow loomed above me. It drew closer, and then broke the waters surface. The face of a Senti, looking like a planet dropping on me, drew down upon me. The blackness came first, and then the crushing weight.

My mouth opened, but no words or scream emitted.

There was nothing to say in the face of death.

#

I blinked, or opened my eyes. Not sure. But a blinding glare made me squint. The helmet lenses did not fall and I felt the rush of cool air, took lungfuls of it, when realizing it was simply the sun battering my eyeballs.

"He's coming back around," a male voice said close by, and I slowly turned my neck—agh! the pain—and found several people standing around me.

"Iron Man, you all right?"

I turned my head to the left, the aching muscles in my neck only giving off a momentary needle of pain. Paul Welterink stood beside me, without armor but in civilian clothing.

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“We all dead and just haven’t got our wings yet?” I asked, half joking. My brain felt groggy, like being awakened too quickly from a deep sleep.

Paul knelt down beside me and leaned in close. He spoke low, not wanting the other folks to hear. “I thought you’d bought the farm. It took us nearly four hours to pull you from beneath the Sentinel that landed on you. Your armor’s life support obviously kept you among the living.”

I tried to rise but the armor fought me. I thrust my chin out, hitting and activating the system monitor.

<<Full system online in 12.3 seconds>>

“Casualties, both sides?” Don’t know. That was all I could think about seeing the be-draggled people milling about us.

“A few civs dead before the EMP charge went off. All mechanized units, big and small, down for the count,” Paul said as the cells in my armor suit came to life and he was able to help me sit up.

“The RAS?” I said, slowly looking around. The throng of people blocked my view but I could tell immediately we were not in the downtown area but back up on the grassy hill where IA and I had initially spied the city center. A wood trailer with rusty hubs and sun-faded frame sat silent in the tall grass, probably the vehicle by which they had dragged my heavy carcass up here.

Paul smirked. “Believe it or not, I just unplugged it. I’m sure it’s got long tendrils, network-wise, so I don’t know if I killed it at the core or not. Time will tell. We did manage a correspondence with a House of M emissary and they are sending some troops and such up here to investigate and help clean-up. Guess all the action around here finally got their attention.”

*Or they somehow found out where I was,* I thought to myself. I hadn’t told Paul about being an outlaw now, at least Iron Man being an outlaw.

SYSTEMS FULLY ONLINE, SIR. INSTRUCTIONS? Jarvis’s familiar electronic voice said coolly.

I didn’t need to bring more trouble to the citizens of this shattered burg with House members on their way.

I stood and several of the people began to clap. I nodded to them as their thank-you’s resounded.



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“I must be on my way. Sir, could I give you a quick lift to your homestead?” I asked Paul. From the throng milling about more focused on me than him, his identity as their armored superhero was obviously unknown in his civilian guise.

“Sure,” Paul said. His voice lowered to a whisper that only my audio receptors were sensitive to. “But watch the armpits, I took a rather nasty fall when you blew the lights out.”

I gently secured him, feeling my own aches and pains now. My back felt on fire down along the length of my spine, and my arm which had housed and let loose the EMP blast throbbed like the dickens. I'd been lucky I hadn't misjudged the weapons capacity and blown my arm clean off.

We both saluted the crowd as we rose into the air.

“Where to?” I asked.

“Beachfront home. I have to call my armor back before the House of M folks arrive. They aren't too keen on unregistered armored superheroes,” Paul replied.

The flame blew out along my spine and was replaced with a cold shiver.

#

The waters of the big lake rose and curled. Small white caps rolled to shore, raced up the wet sand, then receded to be replaced by another gentle onslaught from Lake Michigan. A cool breeze blew making the pines and other trees sway along the sandy bluff overlooking the expanse of dark but comforting water.

“You think you have things under control here for now?” I asked my new friend, Paul Welmerink, the Iron Adolescent.

“I think I can manage,” Paul said sitting on the couch in his living room, using a dry cloth to wipe out the inside of his helm.

“I better get heading back home myself. Got things stirred up back in Chicago. I feel I better look into this Vision Virus and other things.” I didn't want to mention my sudden nervousness with the thoughts of signing over the deed to Stark Enterprises and the House of M's pursuit of a gladiator friend, Johnny Storm, who they thought was the rogue Iron Man. The haunting image of my father, Howard, controlling the Sentinels from an episode back in Chicago... God, what was he up to also.

“If you need some support again, give me a buzz. You have a secure link to my armor's comms now. Feel free to use it if big trouble comes aknockin' again,” I said extending a gauntleted hand to the man.

## ROCKETS LAST GLARE

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The sun broke through a set of clouds and shone in through the sliding glass doors, into the room, as we shook hands.

“Will do. Thanks again for your assistance,” Paul said as I walked out of the room, out onto the balcony of the small A-frame home with its secrets lying beneath it, the home base of another hero.

No thanks were needed really. I was sure Paul, the Iron Adolescent, knew that.

Fighting the good fight...that's what we do.

END

About the author: Peter Welmerink lives in the green burrows of Rockford, Michigan. You can check out his author site at [www.peterwelmerink.com](http://www.peterwelmerink.com). He would like to thank the crew at ADVANCED IRON for letting him spin a yarn about his favorite superhero, Iron Man. He'd also like to thank Mr. Ian Sokolowski for doing some great illustrations. Long live Iron Man and Advanced Iron!



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