

STARK

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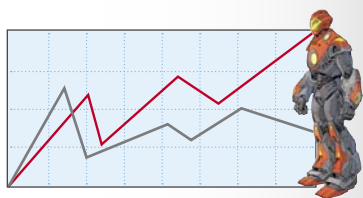
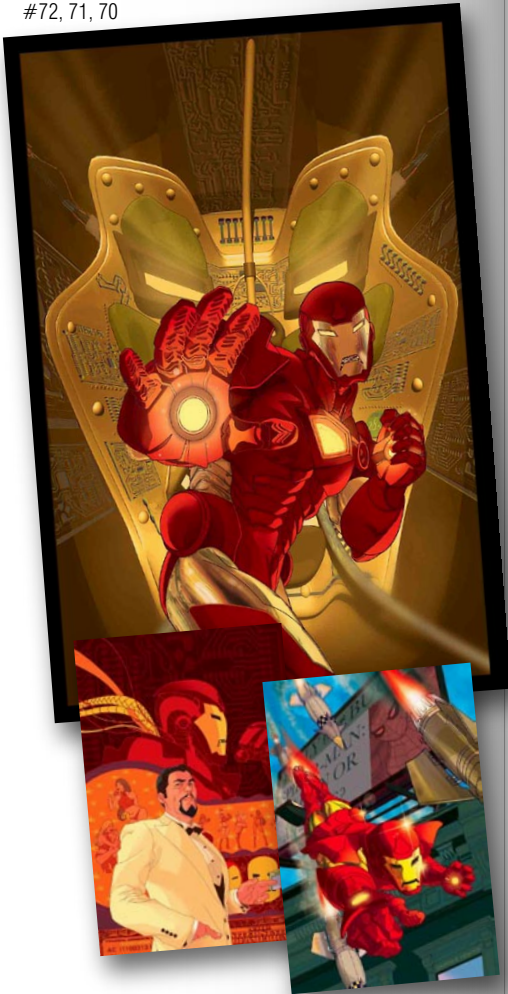
WHO'S AFRAID OF THE
HULK



PAT COUTURE!
2003

HUBE'S SHELLHEADSIMS

LATEST COVERS
#72, 71, 70



IRON MAN SALES RANK STATUS - CLIMBING

SOURCE: PREVIEWS TOP 100

IRON MAN #68 - Rank 51



Welllllll, what can a guy say? You know the 'ol adage: "Women – can't live 'em, can't live without 'em." I love my wife to death. She's a babe. (Don't you agree? Check out the pic. Yeah, that's my hand around her waist, in case you're wondering!)

But – and those married ones out there know what I mean – sometimes don't 'ya just wanna grab 'em by the shoulders and scream, "WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU THINKING!"

Case in point: I had a kickin' column in the works for this issue of A.I. Kurt Busiek and I exchanged numerous e-mails about the meaning of free speech in the post-9/11 world. I had 10 pages typed up and counting. Then, something weird occurred two weeks ago...

I come up to my computer to check my mail. I turn on the CPU and the dangd thing won't enter Windows. (I have Windows Me – it sucks.) I tried everything I could at home. The one thing I could do was use the system recovery disc, but there's a problem with that – it returns the computer to its original factory settings. Warnings clearly state that "You will lose any and all data added since." Oops, don't want that! I NEED all my data. So I ask the wife to disconnect all the stuff attached to the computer so I could take it to a computer guy. (Yeah, I asked her. I didn't do it myself. If you saw our desk and how you can access the back of the CPU, you'll KNOW why I asked her. I'm 6'3" and she's 5'1". 'Nuff said, natch.)

But wifey had something else in mind. She was gonna try to solve the problem herself! While 'ol Hube had fallen asleep on the couch, Gret (wifey) turns on the CPU and does everything that Hube had tried that afternoon. Then she gets this "great" idea: Use the recovery disc! Hooooooo-boy. I lost virtually everything Iron Man and Advanced Iron-related. I had not backed up many files. But this is exactly why I had asked wifey to disconnect everything so I could take it to some computer guy!! I mean, if Windows couldn't be accessed, at LEAST I could save the needed data. I didn't feel like doing anything AI-related for almost a week. But the urge soon returned. So here I am. Hoo-rah.

US WARMACHINE IN THE AVENGERS?

Just picked up AVENGERS #67 yesterday. I've been diggin' the latest arc (see Mike Kalibabky's article in this issue about the way-cool IM-Black Panther feud), but one main thing has ... "bothered" me. More on that in a minute. Lo and behold it turns out that an A.I.M. faction is [apparently] responsible for the red "death mist" that has been the focus of the last three issues. They're responsible because they wanted to engineer a virus that would ... kill black people! Immediate my thoughts turn to Chuck Austen – and US WAR MACHINE. For those who didn't collect the series or buy its TPB, the central bad dudes were A.I.M. and the central premise was their use of biological warfare to eliminate the Negroid race! Is there a connection? Austen DID report to A.I. back during the series' first run that USWM was going to be in "real" Marvel continuity, after all. We'll have to wait and see. There has been some interesting speculation on Usenet's rec.arts.comics.marvel.universe about the ultimate baddie in this Earth's Mightiest story. Some say it is Secretary of Defense Dell Rusk (notice how the "D" and "R" of his name match that of the real S.o D.'s – Donald Rumsfeld? Hmm ...). Others believe it is the Red Skull and the red "death mist" is the Skull's old red "mist of death" (see CAP #350, for one appearance of it). Some have pointed out that the name "Dell Rusk" is a play on an old name of the Skull's, too.

ANTI-AMERICANISM AT MARVEL & ELSEWHERE?



But what was especially interesting in the Usenet discussion was the readers' weariness of seeing in CAP, and now AVENGERS, the bad guys being revealed to be the US government! Or, at least, related to it. I don't read CAP regularly, but I have read much about what's been happening with him. I talked about this several AIs ago, too. Is "Blame America First" permeating CAP? Now the AVENGERS? Usenet participants have stated the same thing is happening in DC's JLA, too.

What's going on? Is it because there's a Republican administration in the White House – and the folks writing these comics are from the "blue" areas of America and/or are foreigners? (By "blue" areas, there was a very interesting country-wide county map of election 2000 showing how each county voted – blue for Al Gore and red for George Bush. The blue areas were concentrated on the coasts, while the vast majority of the interior of the US was red.) Does it really matter?

Michael Lackner and Michael Medved have written a bit on the happenings in CAPTAIN AMERICA titled "The Betrayal of Captain America": A White Paper. In it they discuss Cap's "New Deal" storyline where Cap compares the Allies' firebombing of Dresden, Germany during WW II to the terrorist attack on 9/11, the US's manufacture of weapons to terrorist actions, and the events in the Cap-altering origin story, THE TRUTH (shown right).

Also discussed are events in THE PUNISHER where President Bush is portrayed as a drunk who relishes the prospect of nuclear war, and

how the US government is suggested as the real force behind domestic terrorism in AVENGERS and again in CAP.


And Lackner and Medved note that this strain of anti-Americanism isn't limited to Marvel. Wildstorm's "Global Frequency" storyline has the US Air Force turning soldiers in mechanical killing machines and in "21 Down" the FBI is transformed into a "gene-experimenting, human rights-breaking" organization.

As long as these stories are intelligently written, with a modicum of historical knowledge, I certainly have no problem with 'em and surely may buy 'em. But as noted in the above White Paper, Joe Quesada himself, when discussing THE TRUTH, made the outrageous claim that "most of the US military is black." The truth of the matter (no pun intended) is that blacks make up less than 10% of combat personnel and less than 20% overall.

If Quesada knows "facts" such as these, what other farcical "facts" are making their way through comics? To me, one is the incredibly outrageous comparison of Dresden to 9/11. In another [lesser] example, in Joe Q.'s own IRON MAN run, he wrote about US nuclear tests in the South Pacific during WW II. In a correction letter (that Marvel printed in IM vol. 3 #33),

I noted that there were NO such tests! The only nuke the US tested prior to Hiroshima and Nagasaki was in the New Mexico desert. Joe Q. is sorely lacking in some basic historical knowledge. It affected his IM story and as Editor-in-Chief it seems to be affecting all of Marvel now. I, personally, will avoid such silly Oliver Stone-ish schemes.

You can read the entire White Paper at:

 http://www.defenddemocracy.org/usr_doc/Captain_America_color.pdf (You'll need Adobe Acrobat Reader to view the file.)



TONY STARK ON THE WAR IN IRAQ

One thing I did manage to salvage from my e-mail discussion with Kurt Busiek was his answer as to what Tony Stark's reaction would be to the recent skirmish in Iraq. He said:

Depends on who's writing him. The Tony I grew up reading was an arch-liberal who abandoned munitions-making in moral disgust, but since then he's often been written as a conservative who nonetheless has a deep distrust of public officials, since they're so often out to screw him. I tend to view him, these days, as a liberal Republican -- but he's got a major streak of self-absorption that allows him to choose whatever the pragmatic road is for himself, while thinking that others who act out of similar self-interest are dangerous. Basically, he doesn't trust anyone with power except himself, because he approves of his own decisions but might not approve of theirs.

As such, I think he'd be very wary of any government becoming an aggressor without being able to prove their suspicions to his satisfaction (and if they were proved to his satisfaction, he wouldn't much care whether they were proved to yours or mine; that's Tony). Once the war began, he'd want it over as swiftly and as safely as possible.

But I think Tony's conservatism and general distrust of others with power would lead him to be a Republican who wants strong constraints on government power, not a Republican who thinks that the administration should be backed out of patriotism -- he used to be like that, but turned his back on it years ago.

He might quote Lincoln:

Allow the President to invade a neighboring nation whenever he shall deem it necessary to repel an invasion, and you allow him to do so whenever he may choose to say he deems it necessary for such purpose, and you allow him to make war at pleasure. Study to see if you can fix any limit to his power in this respect, after having given him so much as you propose. If to-day he should choose to say he thinks it necessary to invade Canada to prevent the British from invading us, how could you stop him? You may say to him, "I see no probability of the British invading us," but he will say to you, "Be silent: I see it, if you don't."

- Abraham Lincoln, February 1, 1848

RECENT TPB PURCHASE DEBT.

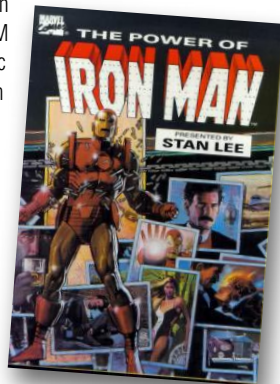
I picked up DC's KINGDOM COME TPB a couple days ago because I was dying for a good comic read. Did I get my wish? Yes and no.



If you like the subject matter – powerful superheroes using their virtual omnipotence to rule the world – I'd get a hold of Mark Gruenwald's SQUADRON SUPREME before I'd snag KINGDOM. Why? First, 'ol Mark did it first (SQUADRON came out in 1985; KINGDOM in 1997). Second, I found KINGDOM to be a little too similar in scope to SQUADRON. Third, Gruenwald's writing isn't nearly as verbose as Mark Waid's, who penned KINGDOM. And trust me – this is a good thing. The one definite plus in KINGDOM's

favor is, of course, Alex Ross' splendid painted art. Truly incredible. And, maybe my lack of knowledge of DC superheroes impeded some of my enjoyment, but I don't think so. I knew many of the characters, but not much of their background.

Funny...there's no DC analogue to Iron Man. I know, I know – the Squadron Supreme is Marvel's JLA, but since the SS is only a very small part of Marvel it's really the Avengers who represent the JLA at Marvel. But no Iron Man-like hero in JLA. At least KINGDOM COME featured some way-cool robotic Batman drones that patrolled Gotham City, and 'ol Bats himself donned an armored suit in the story's climactic battle (and even wore a visible exo-skeleton as Bruce Wayne!).



Speaking of TPBs, one of the items lost in my hard drive fiasco was WIZARD's "Top 100 TPBs of All-Time." There was one – one! – Iron Man TPB on the list: THE POWER OF IRON MAN. It came in at number 50, smack dab in the middle.

That's good, but is that the best IM collection in TPB format? I'd argue no. The best, in my opinion, is what many consider to be THE definitive IM story: THE ARMOR WARS. Both stories are by the incredible David Michelinie and Bob Layton. POWER collects IM vol. 1 #s 120-128 (#128 being the classic "Demon in a Bottle" tale) and ARMOR WARS collects IM vol. 1 #225-232.

Other IM TPBs include THE MANY ARMORS OF IRON MAN (which I don't own since I already have all the included issues). It contains the first appearances of many of Shellhead's specialty armors such as the first Space Armor (vol. 1 #142) and Stealth Armor (vol. 1 #152). There's also THE MASK IN THE IRON MAN. The [too] recent collection of Joe Quesada's vol. 3 run (#s 26-30) where the Iron Man armor comes alive.

Am I missing any? I'm purposely not including ESSENTIAL IRON MAN, by the way. I think there are only four at present. But – should there be any additional IM TPBs? What storylines do you think deserve one? Here are some I think are worthy:

- **THE LONG FALL**

This collects Denny O'Neil's "Stark in the Gutter" issues where Tony succumbs to alcohol and Obadiah Stane takes over Stark International. Some creative editing would have to be done since almost 40 issues are involved in the run.

- **CRASH AND BURN**

Len Kaminski's tale where the ramifications of Stane's ownership of S.I. come to pass, as well as the hidden machinations of the nasty computer program VOR/TEX. Features guest stars galore, including Deathlok, Venom and the Hulk. (IM vol. 1 #s 301-306.)

- **BRING THE HAMMER DOWN**

This would collect Kaminski's War Machine introduction issues, vol. 1 #s 281-283. 'Nuff said.

What do you think? Do you have any IM TPB ideas?



THE ICY HAND OF DEATH!



THE STORY

In Iron Man Volume 1: #86-87, Shellhead faces an icy blast from the past in the form of Gregor Shapanka, aka the Blizzard.

This is the first appearance of the classic Iron Man villain. However, Shapanka had formerly gone by the name of Jack Frost and, as Jack Frost, had suffered defeat at the hands of the armoured avenger (*Tales of Suspense* #45).

However, as the Blizzard, Shapanka is now back for revenge – and, as they say, “revenge is a dish best served cold”!

This proves to be entirely the case as Shellhead is nearly frozen to death in the cliffhanger at the end of issue #86, with the Blizzard’s ice darts and cold beams nearly proving too much for him.

Fortunately, in the next issue, Iron Man is rescued by Virginia ‘Pepper’ Potts Hogan, but not before the Blizzard reveals his icy origin to her.

The Blizzard escapes, leaving Pepper to tend to Iron Man. Shellhead decides to use a make-shift heat generator to counter the effects of the extreme temperature, and is able to battle the Blizzard once more. In fact, the heat generator proves to be the key in defeating the Blizzard as the icy one is sent back for another cold spell in prison.



THE ART

This picture is inspired by the cover of Iron Man #87 which depicts the scene in which Shellhead dodges the Blizzard’s ice darts.

I decided to do my own interpretation of it, eschewing the somewhat unrealistic, gravity-defying icicles that were emerging upwards out of the water, and simply going for a more realistic cold beam.

I also decided to go for a more dramatic angle for Shellhead, with him now flying towards the viewer, and placed the Blizzard on an ice slide instead of the ice block he was standing on in the original picture.

Furthermore, the Brooklyn Bridge setting has been completely replaced with a more dramatic setting to add to the cold, stark effect of the overall picture.

I didn’t think it was a great story in the end, with lots of corny dialogue and rather simplistic plot. However, it did introduce a great ongoing villain, and more importantly, it makes for an interesting picture.

- *WelshCat*

STARK REMARKS



METAL & CLAWS

IRON MAN vs. BLACK PANTHER

BY MIKE KALIBABKY

If you've been enjoying the hostilities between Iron Man and the Black Panther as depicted in Geoff Johns' current run on AVENGERS -- and who doesn't enjoy watching a good rhubarb? -- you have three men to thank: writer (Christopher J.) Priest, penciler Sal Velluto, and inker Bob Almond, the three fellows who began the tension between the two during their impressive run on BLACK PANTHER, particularly issues #41-45, ENEMY OF THE STATE II, which, in my opinion, contains one of the best-ever Iron Man stories and makes me believe that Priest, Velluto, and Almond would make an Iron Man dream team.

But rather than retell the story -- which would be difficult anyway, due to Priest's intricate and layered plot -- I will briefly guide you issue by issue as to how a single incident helped ignite the IM/PB feud and how their aggressions became a business and technological mano y mano.

You see, the whole thing began with Quinjets.

Quinjets?

Quinjets!

As all the Iron Faithful know, the Quinjet is the Avenger's main mode of transportation, one originally designed and built by the Black Panther's Wakanda Design Group. And to this day, WDG faithfully supplies the vehicles for Earth's Mightiest Heroes.

But something happened between old Shellhead and the Panther. And that something is this: Tony Stark purchased a slew of WDG stock, making him the sole minority shareholder, a notion which didn't sit right with BP. (BLACK PANTHER #19.)



In fact, the Panther was already plenty upset with his fellow Assemblers, in that the U.S. government had been involved with a potential coup of Wakanda, the land over which the Panther, a.k.a. King T'Challa, ruled.

(BLACK PANTHER #9-12, ENEMY OF THE STATE.)

The Panther attempted to prove U.S. involvement in the takeover by rejoining the Avengers -- not to avenge, but to spy. (Flashback BLACK PANTHER #41.)



Priest revealed his thoughts on the EOTS II story arc in a piece for his website, *DigitalPriest.Com*:

"Issue #41, our big IRON MAN crossover, could be a Day One sort of deal. We had paired the series down and cleaned house. Only, there would be no crossover. Mike Grell had replaced [Frank] Tieri on IRON MAN, and we all felt it would be unfair to saddle him with a crossover to resolve some dangling plot stuff his first day on the job. So, rather than running two months in two books, ENEMY OF THE STATE II would run four months in PANTHER, with IRON MAN editor Tom Brevoort's unprecedented support (it is unheard of to borrow someone's character for four whole months, or to seemingly compete with the new writer at the same time). For a brief moment in time, Marvel was nearly publishing IRON MAN WEEKLY, as Shellhead appeared in his own title, THE AVENGERS and PANTHER all at the same time. I was able to delve into my more cynical take on Tony Stark and the reasons for is discomfort with T'Challa, exorcising my own demons with the sickness of political correctness and race sensitivity in this country. Best of all, I was allowed to put these two guys against each other. Both of them cunning, ruthless, and willing to bend the rules to win the game: the game being more important than actually who wins or loses (as such things are subjective designations, after all).

"ENEMY OF THE STATE II became this really fun, really enormous caper, with Stark and T'Challa battling one another physically, politically and economically, pulling the rug from under one another at every turn, outwitting and out-foxing each other. It was a great mess that made absolutely no sense until all the pieces came together in issue #44.

"ENEMY II likely, would read better as a trade paperback, but the likelihood of more trades featuring the Marvel Knights version of Black Panther is way up in the air, to my great irritation. ENEMY II would make a better trade, I think, than it made comics, as the reader would no longer have to wait four weeks to resume the complex and layered story. This arc was PANTHER and Sal and Bob at their Sal and Bobbest, and I am deeply disappointed that Marvel is kind of waiting to see what they'll do. The logic is reasonable: we are moving on to a new evolution in the PANTHER series. If there's to be a trade, it would make more economic sense to support the current incarnation of BLACK PANTHER, not the previous one. I can't argue with that logic, but emotionally, I'm disappointed that our best work on this series may not have the opportunity to be presented in a format that maximizes the best things about it: its density and complexity."

Back to Quinjets. Or, rather, the WDG stock subplot, of which inker Bob Almond remarked to me in an e-mail:

"The WDG thing was one of a few significant events to occur in our title that other editors and creators didn't really take notice of and play up. As a result, these consequences were generally missed by the Marvel Universe and fandom at large. You can count yourself as one of the outsiders to breach our little clubhouse and discover the wealth awaiting within."

Here now, are some highlights of the Iron Man/Black Panther feud in ENEMY OF THE STATE II, by Priest, Velluto, and Almond. I hope what follows coaxes you into seeking out this magnificent story for your comic book collection.



BLACK PANTHER #41 (EOTS II, Book 1: "Mirror, Mirror"). Tony Stark contacts T'Challa to discuss an incident that might be linked to the Wakandan coup. During their conversation, the WDG shares issue surfaces, and T'Challa states that he wants the shares returned to the open market via a broker

dispatched to conduct the transaction. Stark is not amused. Agent [Henry] Gyrich, once Avengers NSC liaison, now "Panther wrangler," visits Stark and informs him that the Wakandan coup incident is far from over. Meanwhile, T'Challa meets with Wolverine in Ontario, Canada.

BLACK PANTHER #42 (EOTS II, Book 2: "Alliance"). Tony Stark learns that the communications cables running through his home, Stark Enterprises, and the Avengers mansion are infested with nanites, placed there by the Black Panther, using the ABC Wire and Cable Company, owned by T'Challa! All of Stark's secrets -- including those of the Iron Man armor -- are now at BP's fingertips! As a result, Iron Man summons the Avengers to a special meeting and makes a motion to expel the Panther.



In what seems to be a perplexing move to annex a small island on Lake Superior, T'Challa journeys to Sault Saint Marie, Ontario, via cruise ship... with Tony Stark -- who had been briefed by Agent Gyrich -- on his heels.

Stark meets T'Challa at a poker table and the two engage in a tense heart-to-heart conversation, their animosity rising. Stark ups the ante with his shares of WDG stock.

Later, IM, BP and Wolverine meet in combat after it's discovered that BP and Wolvie have stolen something from the ship. The Panther takes down Iron Man's force field; Wolverine takes down Iron Man.

BLACK PANTHER #43 (EOTS II, Book 3: "The Kiber Chronicles"). Iron Man explains to Gyrich that Panther's superpower is getting people to underestimate him. Shellhead uses his onboard systems to take down the Panther's comlinks and to crash the controls of his and Wolverine's escape plane. Iron Man gives chase.

During the subsequent undersea battle, Stark learns that through financial maneuvering, T'Challa has taken control of Stark Enterprises! Wolvie tags IM's armor with a highly-corrosive agent designed to detonate the suit's liquid oxygen cells.



Panther and Wolverine are picked up by an awaiting, hovering Wakandan N'Yami battle cruiser.



BLACK PANTHER #44 (EOTS II, Book 4: "60 Minutes"). Iron Man once again appeals to the Avengers to dump BP from their roster.

Stark sifts through what has happened thus far and encounters a key figure and antagonist, who tells him: "You dare to place your filthy hands on the Jewel of Wakanda -- Wakanda Design Group." The antagonist also asks IM a very thought-provoking question: "Have you ever wondered why T'Challa never built a suit of armor for himself? T'Challa has not built a suit of all-powerful, invincible armor -- because he chose NOT to."

In a flashback, Iron Man severely disables the escaping N'Yami battle cruiser from BP 43! A Tony Stark from 11 seconds in the future dons a new state-of-the-art stealth armor with the intention of a final confrontation with the Black Panther.

INTERLUDE. Confused? Good! Excited? Great! As I mentioned, EOTS II is a complex thriller that will ultimately make perfect sense once you dive into it fully.

And I know what you're thinking at this point -- T'Challa MUST be more technologically advanced than Tony Stark! And you HATE this notion! But trust me, I felt the same way at first.

This is the absolute beauty of EOTS II. However, if you were to read more of the Priest/Velluto/Almond BP run, you'd be in even more awe of the Panther's technological prowess. As Bob Almond told me: "I know personally I was proud of the effort we made in BLACK PANTHER #23 to capture the original Lee/Kirby description by Reed Richards of the Techno-Jungle from FF #52: 'The entire typography and flora are electronically-controlled mechanical apparatus! The very branches about us are composed of delicately-constructed wires... while the flowers which abound here are highly complex buttons and dials! Even the boulders can be heard to hum with the steady pulse of computer dynamos.' We tried to capture this realistically accurate and without copying Kirby. Unfortunately, to our chagrin, much of those techno-jungle details were covered up by the copy and dark coloring."

METAL & CLAWS

IRON MAN VS. BLACK PANTHER



During the run, two of the Panther's more astounding inventions, the above mentioned Wakandan N'Yami battle cruiser and the Prowlers, huge mobile battle tanks in the configuration of panthers, have been featured. Both somewhat remind me of the huge tech Tony Stark created for Nick Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. in STRANGE TALES.

Bob made this comment on the Prowlers' appearance: "Sal wanted the Prowlers, introduced earlier in the BP run before our term, to look more like giant Star Wars-style At-At Walkers than giant panther Transformers so he slightly redesigned them in issue 29 during the war between Wakanda and Atlantis."



Finally, the time-travel technology used to pluck an alternate Tony Stark from 11 seconds in the future came from Jack Kirby's kooky but cool BLACK PANTHER run from the late-1970s: King Solomon's frogs, a pair of decorative brass frogs that in reality were temporal devices! Characters and concepts from Kirby's run weave their way through EOTS II, including an appearance by Abner Little, a treasure hunter who was featured in IRON MAN 18 (Vol. 3), wherein Little attempts to hire Stark Solutions for a particular task.



BLACK PANTHER #45 (EOTS II, Book 5: "All the Presidents' Men"). Stealth Iron Man engages the Black Panther, who uses a NEGATOR PACK taken from Stark Enterprises as a defensive

measure. The Panther then subdues Stealth Iron Man by disrupting Stark's Ultron heart with an invasive computer program! The real Iron Man confronts T'Challa in the aftermath and the two appear to reconcile their differences. But we all know better, as we've seen in the recent pages of AVENGERS, where the Iron Man/Black Panther feud continues... since Tony Stark never did relinquish his shares in WDG. Good thing AVENGERS scribe Geoff Johns is a Priest/Velluto/Almond fan, too.



- THE END.

Now go out and purchase BLACK PANTHER #41-45 and enjoy one of THE BEST Iron Man stories ever!

My thanks to A.I. Editor Dave Huber and inker Bob Almond for assisting me with this column.

FINAL NOTES

In March 2003, Bob was awarded "Best Inker of 2002" by Comicboards.com and Squiddies.org for his stellar work on BLACK PANTHER. To me, they were well deserved. Bob is a consummate comics pro who not only loves the medium but also does as much as one man can to promote it. Not to mention that the guy is a top-shelf talent in the industry.

Bob sent me two War Machine pics that I'd like to share. (shown next on page). The first is a yummy commission he and penciler Sal Velluto recently produced for client Damon Owens.

If you'd like to see the pencils, too, check out this link to Bob's site, <http://almondink.com/gallery/warmachine200.html>. Also from his site, you can contact Bob on how to get an original piece of commissioned art by Sal & Bob for your very own!

The second War machine pic comes from Malibu Comics' SIREN INFINITY from a few years back. Bob teamed with artist Kevin West to produce this outstanding piece.

Never Boring is The Butcher!

Artist Butch Adams sent me a pic of his latest wild work, a painting of Lego Iron Man! You can check out many other cool and unusual samples, many items for sale!, from **The Butcher** by visiting his website: <http://www.butcherbrand.com/gallery.htm>





War Machine by Sal Velluto and Kevin West

METALHEAD



Iron Man movie recap...

After a long drought following Joss (BUFFY, ALIEN RESURRECTION) Whedon dropping out as writer/director, Angry Films producer Don Murphy and Marvel Films' Avi Arad hired Miles Millar and Alfred Gough to write the screenplay.

The two writer/producers have had success with SMALLVILLE and did a draft of the SPIDER-MAN 2 script. The screenplay should be done by September and it looks like all systems are go.

One controversial pick is Leonardo (TITANIC) DiCaprio as Tony Stark/ Iron Man, something Arad apparently wants. Fans aren't too happy, to say the least! Make sure you check out the Metal Head Message Board for up-to-date information!

*Sorry for the short article!
More soon!*

FERROFILES

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARK "DOC" BRIGHT

Greetings Ferrofiles.... I'm back after a brief hiatus during which I moved, started a new job and everything that those two life-changes entail. Recent news about our favorite Armored Avenger has been exciting: Smallville producers/writers Alfred Gough & Miles Millar are writing the script for Shellhead's celluloid debut with New Line Cinema. (If anybody has contact info - please shoot me an email so I can score A.I. an interview and updates).

With this installment of Ferro Files, we chat with former Iron Man penciller Mark "Doc" Bright. Mark's run on Iron Man started with a bang on Shellhead's acclaimed 200th issue and lasted until issue 231, with a few fill-ins by other artists. Mark has worked for virtually every major publisher and recently wrapped up a pencilling gig on Marvel's Marville.

First, tell us a little about yourself - biographical stuff, interests outside of comics, etc. Whatever you feel like sharing.

Interests outside of comics:

That list gets whittled down each passing year. I really like music but rarely buy anything now, so that means I don't listen to quite as much because I don't have new music to 'freshen up' what I listen to. Along those same lines, I play bass guitar but the band I was in broke up 3 years ago. Without a band to play in, I more or less stopped playing my bass. I like to read books - Dick Francis and Stephen King being the authors whose work I followed the most thoroughly but almost any author (or musician) starts to repeat themselves after a while. I do still look forward to new installments of King's "The Dark Tower."

I watch a lot of TV. Better explained, I watch a lot of taped TV, there's not a lot on during the week that I care about but the stuff I do watch, I also videotape to watch again later. For the past two years I have been watching my "Star Trek: Voyager," "Buffy" and "Angel" tapes. I used to watch a lot of "Xena" but the last episode of the series sort of wrecked everything that I used to like about that show.

Are you a comic collector?

No, not really. I have some stuff from before I started working in comics and some things from when I was working at Marvel - Byrne, Miller and Simonson stuff. I collected comics while I got them for free but after getting comics for free for ten years the "sticker shock" of comics was too much to overcome once the free bundles stopped coming. The thing is, even when I was collecting free comics, the comics I collected, I rarely actually read. I was more or less just saving them to keep an eye on other artist's work.

Has anything prompted you to pick up any particular title?

For some reason, I was really into "Concrete" about five years ago.

Favorite read right now?

Most recently, I have been reading "Ranma 1/2" in the collected reprint volumes but a year ago, I picked up #s 13, 14 and 15 and I still haven't read them yet so I think I can say my fascination with that title is gone. Even though I still like it's concept and execution and the fact that it remains the same book that it was when it first began. I just reached my "Ranma 1/2" saturation point.

How did he get into the comics field?

<http://www.mdbright.com/MDBsaysMarvel.html>

What or who are influences on your pencilling style?

My "Style"? I know that I have one, I just never think of it as an actual style. Some things I try to draw one way, some things call for something else. I know that I draw a body type with huge thighs, though since the advent

of Image Comics, the thighs on my characters seem sort of "slim" now. I also know that I tend to draw ugly people, this really dismays me when I draw women.

The guys that I wanted to draw like were (In chronological order) Curt Swan, Jack Kirby, Neal Adams and John Byrne. Looking at this list of people you might see that I had huge problems each time I switched from one artist I admired to another, not only in artistic style but also in storytelling, though Byrne did a good Adams every so often and Byrne's storytelling was in the same vein as Kirby's.

So your style is completely unique?

Not so much 'unique' as 'oblique.' I have certain habits/traits in what I draw but there's nothing in my work where someone could pull out something to copy and look like my work - though strangely enough it's easy to look at a page of mine and someone would know that I drew it.

What do you believe to be one of the most crucial aspects of pencilling?

Having a really good eraser. Most important is to know that you are telling a story and not just drawing what you think is cool.

What did you like most about drawing Iron Man?

Flying sequences. I LOVE flying sequences - I did a really fun one with Denny O'Neil where Iron Man chased down some missiles for about 3 or 4 pages. I had fun with that.

What did you dislike most?

Tony Stark stuff. I don't like drawing the civilian alter egos of the title character.

What was your greatest difficulty in pencilling Iron Man?

Trying to reconcile that a man fit inside of the suit, the most difficult aspect of that was the head inside of the helmet. Could you have really seen his eyes inside of the eyelits unless he was looking straight at you? How bad was his peripheral vision? How did he lift his arms with those shoulder pads? It's stuff like this that also makes drawing characters with super bulky body types like "The Hulk" or "The Wrecking Crew" so difficult for me, I can't see how those body part proportions can actually work on one figure.

Did you ever read the letters page...and if so, did you respond to any of the comments in the style or content of his illustrations? (i.e. did you ever modify some element of the armor or include something in the background in response to fan input)

I never read the letters pages of books that I worked on after my first year in comics. Invariably there were never letters that mentioned things about the book that I thought people would write to the editor about.

How did you develop your "armor" style" (i.e. ability to draw realistic looking metal shells around people) and did that get you the penciling job?

I just looked at what the people who worked on the book before me had done and did my best to emulate what they had done.

Did you have anything to do with the creations of the Silver Centurion armor, the Undersea armor or the new Red & Gold armor? If so, what were your contributions?

I didn't design anything in the book other than Stark Enterprise's complex and, of that, the only thing I really did was to make his main office building into a multi-storied "S."

I did no design work on any armor that Iron Man wore. I had tried that when I initially started on the book by modifying the big battery box on Iron Man's back into a form-fitting module. The editorial reaction to that was that they thought I had forgotten the battery box so they had the inkers put the battery box right on top of the module so that for an issue or two Iron

Man had TWO power supplies strapped to his back. Eventually the only remnants of my modification were those two hooks that came up over his shoulders that apparently held the battery box in place.

During my run on Iron Man there was never any talk of new armor until near the end of the "Armor Wars" story arc. Since Dave, Bob and Mark Gruenwald all knew that I was leaving the series there was no point in asking me to do any new versions of armor.

Purely opinion: do you like the Red-and-Silver Silver Centurion or the new (post Armor Wars) Red-and-Gold better?

I really liked the red and gold stuff from just before I joined the book the best. All of the recent armors seem to 'try too hard.'

You depicted Iron Man's repulsor emissions with a swirling effect. Any specific reason for this? Other than just trying to be different?

No.

What led to you being hired on Iron Man?

Denny O'Neil had been my editor on Power Man & Iron Fist. When it was cancelled Denny may have suggested that I pencil Iron Man. On the other hand, perhaps it was Mark Gruenwald's idea. What with having my only monthly book cancelled, I didn't ask a lot of questions as to why I was hired onto another title.

Did Michelinie and Layton's plots leave you a lot of room to create, or were they basically a panel by panel description of what they wanted?

I think that they were basic Marvel Style plots that always left room for a penciller to do what they do best.

What kind of relationship did you have with Michelinie and Layton during that time? Were you often in touch?

I talked to Bob quite a bit in the beginning and Dave a few times before we actually did the first issue of the Michelinie/Layton/Bright run of issues but basically, I just tried to draw what Dave wrote.

Of all the Iron Man issues you pencilled, which, hands down, was your favorite?

Issue #200, it was my first issue of Iron Man but since it was double sized it also gave me a more extended chance at working out the Iron Man character. It was also a new armor, actually two sets of New armor, Stark's and Stane's.

How did he feel about being the chosen artist for the "200th" issue of a mainstay book without having done any previous work?

I was just happy to get the assignment because "Power Man & Iron Fist" had just been cancelled. I was more excited about working with Denny O'Neil than about what issue # I was going to start pencilling.

Funniest Iron Man experience?

Sitting in Denny O'Neil's office and telling him what I would have done differently in Iron Man #200 - without him having asked me for any comments about the story that he wrote. The reason why this is funny is that he actually continued to like having me pencil the book even after that conversation had proven me to be a complete idiot.

Do you still follow the character?

No, I tend to stop following a character after I leave a book because, it's like watching someone else date your ex-girlfriend. Sometimes I take another look when the second artist after me comes along because by then it was usually a whole new book - new creative team, new direction - back then very few writers made it to a third artist on a book. I did really like what J.R. Jr. did with the book when he came on though I didn't read the book as much as I just looked at his artwork.

What led to you finally leaving the title?

I was disenchanted with my role on the book and I didn't like doing breakdowns.

Do you have any advice for pencilers and/or inkers?

I'm pretty well "old school" as far as comics go, so I think that any advice I would have wouldn't really be useful for anyone doing a lot of comic book work now.

In your opinion "Doc," what three words best describe Iron Man:

"Got Jet Boots?"

And three words that describe Tony Stark:

"Who is he?" - Aside from the story arc where Tony realized his alcoholism, I don't recall much of importance about Tony Stark. In fact I think that most superhero books spend *way* too much time dealing with the character's civilian personality. The guy in the costume is always different from the guy in "Dockers" and the guy in the costume is who we buy the book for. We don't buy "Tony Stark," "Reed Richards and Family" or "Dr. Don Blake" - we buy "The Invincible Iron Man," "The Fantastic Four" and "The Mighty Thor." I think that there is a reason why we name the comics after the costumed persona rather than the civilian one.

Tell us about your time at Acclaim. With Quantum & Woody.

Rather than bore you here I'll point you to my bio section of my website which has a section devoted to Acclaim Comics.

You can use anything from there that you'd like to. <http://www.mdbright.com/MDBsaysAcclaim.html>

In all the comics you've done, which has been your favorite comic to illustrate?

That would be "Icon" for Milestone comics with "Green Lantern" running a *very* close second. To be fair though, I had a better connection with "Icon" because I had the chance to write a few issues of it. And I was on it longer than any other title I worked on. I was basically the only person to draw those characters and most importantly I was there when the book started.

In terms of just drawing the character, my favorite was "Green Lantern" (the Hal Jordan incarnation)- the costume, the ring, the mask, the wave at the front of his hair.

Are you still pencilling comics? If so, what are you currently working on?

I have a six-issue mini-series for Marvel titled "Marville" that started in mid-September. Bill Jemas is writing it and Paul Neary is doing the inking.

Are there any current titles you would really like to work on?

I haven't read a comic book in over a year now, I have no way to know what I'd like to work on since I don't know what's happening in any comics.

Would he consider working on Iron Man again?

Sure, I'd consider it. I think people have over-complicated his armor recently though. I'd like to change that.

If you had the opportunity again, would you work with Bob Layton as your inker?

Bob is a really good inker and I enjoy his work immensely but Bob prefers to ink breakdowns and I prefer to do finished pencils.

That would create a problem for one of us so I don't see us working together again unless one of us changes the way that we like to work.

How does it feel to know that you contributed to some of the best, most popular issues of Iron Man?

That's flattering but I don't think that any of the issues that I did contained anything all that important to the character, aside from "Armor Wars".

Do you realize that you are regarded as one of the most revered artist ever to illustrate our armor-clad hero?

Mark still doesn't realize that, though it's a flattering comment.

Where did the nickname "Doc" come from???

M.D. Bright - get it? I was the one who decided on the nickname in response to a bit that Mark Gruenwald did in a letters page Q&A column.

Lastly, this is not a question but a comment. I am happy to finally be able to congratulate you directly for your spectacular work. I am a big fan. You are, in my opinion, one the very, very best Iron Man pencilers of all time. Thanks for the memories! Thank You Mark D. Bright!

Thank you for wanting to have me respond to your questions.

Well, that's it for me ferrophiles. Hope you enjoyed this visit with former Iron Man artist extraordinaire, Mark Bright. Keep an eye out for Mark's work in the future. I'm sure whatever it may be; it'll be great.

CHRIS FRYE

Time Nurtures all Wounds

by Christian Ruelle

CHAPTER THREE

Years ago, soon after graduating M.I.T., Tony Stark was told by his father, Howard, the formula to a successful business transaction: It must be quick, painless, and profitable. If the patriarch were alive he'd grudgingly admit that his son had succeeded once again.

Tony and Rumiko had flown out to Microsoft's Headquarters in Redmond, WA, for a meeting with its founder and chairman, Bill Gates. First they showed the recovered disk to him. Then Tony reminded Gates of their phone conversation where Stark/Fujikawa would receive 20% of the profits Microsoft would reap from their new computer program, to which, Gates reluctantly agreed. Tony brought up the recent news of Microsoft's rapidly declining shares on the New York Stock Exchange. Gates chuckled nervously and said that new investors were already making inquiries. Tony grinned and said that Stark/Fujikawa would gladly take those remaining shares along with the program's profits. Gates gritted his teeth and said that was acceptable. Tony also mentioned the estimated cost of repairing Boston's business and waterfront district, and said that since the damage was caused over Microsoft's computer program, it would be a wise public relations move for Microsoft to accept the bill that the financially strapped city was struggling to pay. Gates cursed under his breath and with a forced smile said that was a brilliant idea. Papers were drawn up and signed, handshakes were exchanged and photographs were taken. A press conference was scheduled for 10 o' clock the next morning and the disk was presented to an aggravated Bill Gates. The meeting lasted 35 minutes. Tony and Rumiko walked out of Microsoft's Headquarters with the finders fee Tony had originally made and 40% of Microsoft's shares.

* * *

Brendon had been transferred to a private cell in Ryker's transition wing the day after the parole board's decision. He was alone, Conway had left after their final meeting earlier that morning. Not that Brendon was crying a river over the pompous lawyer, he did what Stark had paid him for: represent a convict in a parole hearing. It wasn't like Conway was supposed to let Brendon move in until he got back on his feet. As a parting gift, Conway gave Brendon his parole officer's card: Sgt. Leon Cosby. He was probably a riot once a convict got to know him.

"OK, Doyle," said a surly who appeared at the cell door. "On your feet. Your ride's here."

Brendon rose from his cot and placed his hands on the concrete wall. The cell door slid open, the guard walked in, handcuffed Brendon, and walked him towards the processing room. Upon his arrival, the guard in the adjoining property room placed a worn cardboard box on the shelf. Inside the box were the civilian clothes and items Brendon had worn on the bus trip to Rykers. He signed the release form, was permitted to change his clothing, and stood in front of a prison camera for a final set of photographs.

When Brendon stepped out into the plaza he saw Rhodey waiting to greet him. "Welcome back, marine," Rhodey said with an extended hand.

Brendon grunted and shook Rhodey's hand. "What? Does that mean I've moved to the next circle of hell?"

"Yeah. Only this time the hours are nine to five," Rhodey laughed. "Come on. We're going to miss the ferry."

Brendon rubbed his hands and breathed deeply, looking up at the clear sky. "Actually, Rhodey, I wouldn't mind if we took the next one. Freedom's a precious thing, you know. You really ought to stop and take the time to appreciate it."

* * *

Tony and Rumiko drove out to Evergreen Island and Tony's extraordinary mansion known as Stark House. Tony had the architectural wonder built when he moved to Seattle and established Stark Solutions, and since he and Rumiko would be in town to close the Microsoft deal, they both agreed to a small vacation from the stress in their lives.

Upon arrival at the mansion, The two settled in. Starting with lunch on the patio.

"That was grand theater, Tony," Rumiko said while she carried a tray laden with sandwiches and soft drinks to the table. "You came out of that meeting with everything but Gates' teeth in your coat pocket."

Tony looked away from the scenery and towards his equally beautiful girlfriend. "Claiming his pearly whites was never my intention, Ru, just a stake for when Microsoft rebounds with its new computer program. This way, Stark/Fujikawa gets some free publicity and a lucrative financial deal."

Rumiko set lunch on the table and sat across from Tony. "That's all well and good, but I'm so impressed with how you handled that meeting," Rumiko said, awe struck. "If only my family would give me more authority in the company. I know that I could do the same!"

Tony smiled and placed a reassuring hand over Rumiko's. "Don't worry, Ru. Your family will realize that your place is in the business world. Just give them time."

Rumiko sighed and closed her eyes. "In Japan, business is conducted on tradition, not faith." Rumiko laughed nervously and looked at Tony with watery eyes. "The only one in my family who has any faith in me is grandfather. And that's because he doesn't want me to feel discarded."

Tony gently squeezed Rumiko's hand. "I went through the same situation, Ru. Just give them time."

After a moment's silence, the two began to eat and make conversation: How they should spend their two-day vacation. What investments they should consider. Which prime-time interview they should accept.

"I think I've made things with Pepper worse," Rumiko confessed.

Tony's eyes widened and he painfully swallowed his mouthful of sandwich. "Uh, how worse are we talking about?"

Rumiko tapped her chin in thought. "Loan me one of your armors. That's how worse."

"Ok," Tony said. "Tell me what happened."

"I spoke with Pepper while you were out and tried to bury the hatchet. I told her that we had to stop bickering but Pepper was just tuning me out. Then she accused me of not loving you so I..."

"So you what?" Tony asked.

"I...kind of said that if she was frustrated with not having a life, she shouldn't take it out on someone who has one."

Tony leaned back in his chair and whistled. "That's about as worse as it can get."

"Yeah," Rumiko admitted. "I'll have to work on my communication skills before I ask my parents for a seat on the board of directors."

Tony stood, walked over to Rumiko, and offered his hand. "It's just a wound that time will heal, but I could use your help with a quandary."

"Concerning what?" Rumiko asked as she accepted Tony's hand and rose out of her chair.

"A prospective employee who happens to be a dangerous man."

Rumiko slipped her arm around Tony's. "I'm listening, hero."

"Here's the story," Tony said as they walked the length of the patio. "Rhodey's got this marine buddy named Doyle who's just received parole. The crux is I put him in prison for stealing a suit of armor that was built utilizing my technology. Now Rhodey's asking me to hire this man as a security guard."

"Oh, great," Rumiko teased. "Another one of your friendships that I can ruin. Thanks, Tony."

"Come on, Ru," Tony smiled. "What do you think?"

Tony and Rumiko stepped off the patio and onto the paved walkway that led to the dock. "Don't hire him," Rumiko said bluntly.

"What makes you say that?"

Rumiko tightened her grip on Tony's arm and leaned into his shoulder. "Oh, let me think," Rumiko sighed. "He stole your technology. He's fresh out of jail. And he's had plenty of time to build a grudge, probably on you; Mr. Billionaire tells the world he's a superhero."

"I've considered that," Tony grinned. "Just not as precise as you."

"Hey, you asked for my help," Rumiko teased.

"Duly noted," Tony said. "Now, Rhodey's been very supportive of Doyle. He's been this man's only contact with the outside world.

"So what?" Rumiko scolded. "Was Rhodey in that cell with him for all those years? Does he know what thoughts are running through his head?"

"No, he doesn't," Tony confessed as they stepped onto the dock. "Still, I know Rhodey, and I generally know what's running through his head. If he believes Doyle deserves a chance, maybe I should provide it."

They stopped, and stared at each other as they held hands. "Just like the chance you gave me after my fling with Ty Stone?" Rumiko asked with a soft smile. "I was trying to hurt you. But Tony, this man Doyle; he might try to kill you."

"The Doyle I remember was a pushover," Tony grinned as he stroked Rumiko's hair. "You're a more deadly adversary."

"You're full of jokes today, Tony. Does that mean this guy's the new night watchman?"

"I haven't reached a decision, Ru."

Rumiko slipped her arms around Tony and hugged him tightly. "It sounds like you have. And I don't like it."

"I'm never impulsive, Ru."

"Oh really?"

Tony gazed down at Rumiko and softly brushed away the hair from her eyes. "Except when it comes to you," Tony whispered.

And with the midday sun glaring down on them and the waves of the lake splashing under their feet, the two kissed softly.

* * *

Brendon awoke to a bright day and a bullhorn echoing inside his head. Sitting in bed, placing his feet onto the floor, Brendon surveyed his environment with blurry vision. It took him a moment to realize that he was not in a prison cell but in a room, a bedroom with a dresser, desk, chair, TV, bookshelf, paperbacks, and a carpet that blanketed the floor. Brendon had awoken in his room at the halfway house. It was a two story home in the Bronx supervised by a partially deaf parole officer with 14 other parolees under his wing. Now that Brendon knew where he was, he struggled to remember where he had been. Judging by the headache, he could safely deduce that he'd been out in the bars, then he remembered the house parole officer telling his parolees that the bars were the fastest route to get back behind them. The phone beside the bed suddenly rang, the volume of the bell was amplified by Brendon's hangover. He picked up the receiver and held it up to his ear, shaking off the effects of alcohol before he spoke.

"Yeah?" Brendon growled.

"Up and at 'em, marine!" Rhodey shouted cheerfully. "You don't want to start your first week of freedom snoring."

"I'm not your damn puppet," Brendon muttered into the phone.

"Huh?" Rhodey asked.

"I..Uh...said I'm not going to do that," Brendon said. "Thanks for the wake up call, Rhodey."

"No problem, man. So where were you last night? I called by the house and the parole officer said you weren't in."

"I was getting drunk!" Brendon shouted. "After all those years in a cage, what do you think I'd be doing when I only had enough cash to get a drink!"

"Uh,,,Brendon," Rhodey said cautiously. "Maybe I called at the wrong time to give you the news."

Brendon rubbed away the final traces of his hangover from his eyes. "Just give it to me," Brendon grumbled.

"You're hired," Rhodey said. "Tony called me last night. He'll be back in New York tomorrow morning but he wants you to start work next week. Brendon...Will you take the job?"

"Take the job?" Brendon asked with a sneer. "You bet your life I'll take the job."

* * *

Stopping momentarily at Stark Tower to drop off Rumiko and their luggage, Tony drove to Avengers Mansion, his childhood home and now headquarters of the world's premiere team of superheroes. Upon arriving at the mansion's Fifth Ave address, Tony drove to the security gate, showed the security monitor his Avenger's Membership Card, and drove through the opening iron gates.

"Master Tony, it is a pleasure to see you once again."

Tony walked further into the Public Conference Room and shook his former butler's hand. "Likewise, Jarvis. I trust that our guests haven't been a burden as of late."

"Not at all," Jarvis replied as they walked through the gallery. "Except that Master Thor continues to increase the cost of alcoholic beverages on our grocery bill."

"Well, fighting would-be-conquerors, costumed lunatics, and alien invaders can work up a thirst. So I think we'll let it slide for now."

"Yes, Master Tony," Jarvis said as Tony stepped into Elevator A. "I'll place an order at the brewery right away."

Tony walked into the Assembly Room and was greeted to the sight of Thor, the Norse God of Thunder, chugging a stein of beer. A tapped keg rested on the Avenger's round table in front of him while four empty kegs laid at his feet. Sitting across from Thor was Wanda Maximoff, the Scarlet Witch, clad in an evening dress and watching Thor's binge with a mixture of amazement and repulsion. Pacing the room, deep in thought, was Captain America, the mask of his star spangled uniform was pulled back to reveal a troubled face.

"Pardon me," Tony said cautiously. "But I'm looking for the Avengers. Staunch heroes, champions of justice, very photogenic, living rent free under my roof. Has anyone seen them?"

Tony's witticism about his fellow Avengers made them laugh for the first time in many hours and they welcomed him back from his many days of absence. Tony joined them at the round table, taking the empty chair next to Wanda.

"Welcome back, Tony," Captain America said.

"Aye, Anthony," Thor said. "For far too long our bold company has charged into battle without the presence of a second founding member. It doth my warrior's heart proud to hath thee return and standing beside us once more in our hour of tribulation."

"It sounds like Ultron's attacks on Russia's military haven't caused their president to ask for our help."

"Not publicly," Wanda said. "Russia's thirteen years removed from the Cold War and they're still scrapping out an existence. The last thing they want is to appear defenseless against super powered tyrants."

"I've seen what the Russians can do when their backs are against the wall," Cap said. "But they're going to need more than pride and General Winter to defeat Ultron."

"I still voice that we squander precious time awaiting the stubborn mortals to defend their realm!" Thor shouted, slamming his stein down on the round table. "Verily we should act as my father's ravens and fly to Russia and battle the vile automaton!"

"Easy, Thor," Cap said with a hand raised to signal a pause. "Your opinion has merit but the Avengers don't run roughshod over the laws of any country."

"We'll go to Russia only if they request our aid."

"We've got a hotline for that," Wanda said. "Now let's talk about why Ultron's turned the place into his personal shooting gallery."

"The former Soviet Union's stockpile of nuclear weapons springs to mind," Tony said.

"Set the world afire within seconds," Wanda mused. "Leaving nothing but charred buildings and himself. Simple, but effective."

"Seizing Russia's nuclear arsenal is possible. But it might also be a smokescreen," Cap said. "Ultron might want to seize Russia's industrial base. The country's bankrupt, but their modern factories were built by American companies. If Ultron gets a hold of them he could build a new army of Ultrons."

"I definitely don't want to go through that again," Wanda sighed.

"I welcome the opportunity to battle Ultron's legions!" Thor cried. "Be they forged of Adamantium or steel, they all shall fall to the might of my hammer, Mjolnir!"

"I'm certain they would, Thor," Cap grinned. "But the goal is to prevent Ultron from building that army."

"I own a factory or two in Russia," Tony said. "I could make a request with the State Department that the Avengers inspect them."

"You can try, but don't expect any international cooperation," Cap said. "The U.S. is just as concerned about insulting the Russians as they are about appearing weak."

"So it appears we can do nothing but wait for the vainglorious men to step off their marble pedestals and cry for our help," Wanda said with a smirk.

"In not so eloquent words...yes." Cap nodded.

"How many acts of brutality must our foes commit before the people of Midgard realize we battle not for sport, but for justice?" Thor grumbled as he brought his stein to his lips. "What fools these mortals be."

Tony checked his watch and rose from his chair. "You can take your frustration out on Ultron when we face him. And sooner or later we will. I have a few projects at Stark/Fujjikawa that require my attention. So I'll take my leave."

"We understand, Tony," Cap said.

"Yes. We'll keep you posted on this Ultron dilemma," Wanda said with a hand on Tony's shoulder. "The first call to action we receive and we'll signal you and a few of our reserve members."

"Thanks, Wanda. Good day to all of you."

"Farewell, Anthony," Thor toasted with a fresh stein of beer. "When next the Avengers meet, let Odin allow it to be on the field of battle against the evil that desires rule over Midgard!"

* * *

To be continued...

BUT...THAT
SUBWAY
CAR....!

OH MY
GOD!

BUT STILL ENOUGH TO
RECIPIATE AN ENTIRE
PORTION OF QUEENS--

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



Bonjour and welcome to my humble column dedicated to the many appearances of Iron Man in comics other than his own. In this issue, I will be taking a look at a particular armor of Iron Man's, the one that has always been and remains my absolute all-time favourite; the **Silver Centurion armor**. This armor was scarcely seen in contemporary Marvel books, but I managed to dig up these three guest-appearances for you.



SECRET WARS II #5

THE STORY

For those of you who are not familiar with the concept of this nine-issue limited series, Secret Wars II tells the story of an omnipotent and all-powerful being called the Beyonder (introduced in the first Secret Wars series) who comes to Earth seeking knowledge. Where he comes from, the Beyonder is the universe itself, he is all there is. He has come to Earth to understand the essence of humanity.

In this fifth issue, the Beyonder unsuccessfully attempts to return to his own universe and to his former state of contentment. But his contact with humanity has changed him and he soon returns to our universe. After a battle against the X-Men and the Celestials, the Beyonder is attacked by both East coast and West coast branches of the Avengers, among which is Iron Man in his brand new armor.

WHAT'S COOL?

November 1985. Why is that date important? Because this is the very same month during which IRON MAN #200 was published. This means that, depending on what exact date it came out, this comic could actually have preceded the armor's first appearance in the IM series (if it was shipped a week or two before IM #200). The very first time fans got to see the new armor was the month before, in West Coast Avengers vol.2 #1. Confused yet? Bottom line is, this is a historic issue for this particular suit of armor and it is very prominent on the cover.

WHAT'S BAAAAD?

This was not a very good series. Oh, it had its moments, but all in all, it was not very good at all. This issue is one of the ones I liked best actually. But it's still not great.

The art is not impressive, to say the least. As for Iron Man, you can barely see him among all his team mates in the last two pages of the book, despite his important place on the cover. So unless you are a huge fan of this particular armor and you want to pride yourself on owning every single comic that ever featured it, you better just skip this one. The ninth and final issue of the limited series also guest-stars Iron Man (among many others), and although the art isn't any better, Shellhead does have at least 4 or 5 lines which is an improvement, I suppose...

Secret Wars II #5 - Dispair!

December 1985

Story: Jim Shooter

Penciler: Al Milgrom

Inkers: Leialoha & Rubinstein

QUOTE

Here it is folks, Iron Man's only line in this entire comic:

**"He's wandering off!
Should we Stop him?"**



Fantastic Four #293

- Cenreal City does not answer!

August 1986

Story/Art: John Byrne

Inker: Al Gordon

QUOTE

When Iron Man emerges from the dome, he barely manages to say:

"...power... gone... food concentrates... exhausted. Barely managed to... escape alive. Why... didn't... anyone... come AFTER me..?"

FANTASTIC FOUR #293

THE STORY

I have acquired this comic very recently, following its recommendation by the staff of WIZARD as one of the 25 coolest Avengers moments of all time.

The story begins with the She-Hulk contacting the Baxter building and requesting the help of the rest of the FF team. She is accompanied by the West Coast Avengers (Iron Man, Tigra and Wonder Man) who have been summoned to Central City to investigate a very strange occurrence. It appears the entire city has been engulfed in a gigantic black dome.

Before the FF arrive, Iron Man manages to build a flux field generator that allows him to penetrate the dome. He flies into it, only to be spitted out almost instantly, his armor damaged and himself apparently badly injured. It turns out that what only appeared to be half a second to the onlookers was actually 3 weeks for Iron Man! Wonder Man proceeds to fly the injured hero back to Avengers compound, just before the FF arrive on the scene. To know what this black dome is really all about though, you'll have to buy the following issue.

WHAT'S COOL?

know I've told you before but I'll never say it enough, I am a huge John Byrne fan. I think he is one of the all-time greatest comic book creators on this planet. His stories are even more effective when he also handles the art chores, as he does here.

This is a very cool comic indeed. The story and suspense are excellent, the art is awesome... very cool stuff. Gotta get my hands on the following issue to see what this whole black dome thing is about...

WHAT'S BAAAAD?

Byrne is a great artist, no doubt there... BUT... he seems to have a lot of trouble with this particular suit of armor. He has drawn it on three separate occasions (that I know of: this FF comic, an issue of the Hulk I'll review for you soon and the cover of the Official Marvel Universe handbook), and he got it wrong each time. The armor is too bulky, the head looks like R2-D2's dome and the body looks like a big barrel (for a well-informed explanation on why Byrne draws him this way, check out Mike Kalibabky's column in our last issue).

Come to think of it, he's not the only one who struggled with this armor. There are actually more artists who got it wrong than there are who got it right, in my opinion. Unfortunately, Mr. Byrne is in the first category in this case.

If it's any consolation, he always did a great job drawing the previous and following armors.





MEPHISTO #4

THE STORY

This is the final chapter of a four-issue limited series. It is the only one I own, but I can tell you that the previous one featured a battle between the cruel and devilish Mephisto and the X-Men.

Mephisto is at war with Hela, keeper of the Norse gods' realm of the dead. She has recently attempted to steal the souls of mortals, thus directly competing with Mephisto. To avenge himself, Mephisto wishes to steal Thor's soul with the help of the captured X-Man, Rogue. He surrounds himself, the battered remains of Thor and Rogue with a giant wall of flame.

The Avengers arrive on the scene, soon followed by their West Coast counterparts. Iron Man's attempts to pierce the barrier fail, but Hela's intervention opens a breach in the wall. Iron Man is then one of the first Avengers to fearlessly attack the powerful Mephisto... with mixed results. The Avengers assembled are about to have a taste of the prince of lies' raw power.

Mephisto #4

- His satanic majesty's request

July 1987

Story: Al Milgrom

Penciler: John Buscema

Inker: Bob Wiacek

QUOTE

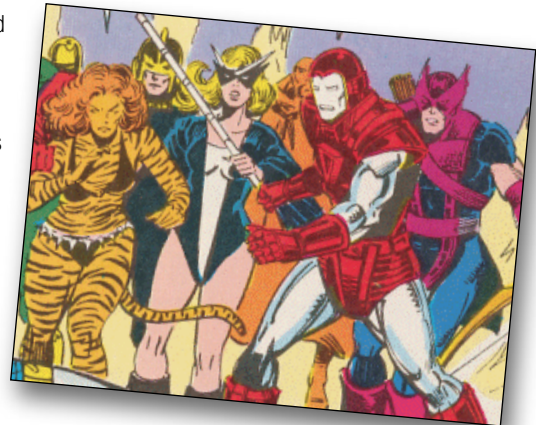
Upon discovering the body of Thor, Iron Man explains to his shocked comrades:

"But being ABLE to live forever doesn't necessarily mean you can't be KILLED!"

WHAT'S COOL?

What's cool, you ask? Did you see who draws this comic? The legendary John Buscema! And the inker is a man Iron fans know well, Bob Wiacek! Remember how I told you that most artists got the Silver Centurion armor wrong? Well, these two are definitely NOT part of that group. The armor looks awesome, second only to Mark Bright's art, in my opinion.

The story is very entertaining and the good news is that buying the previous issues is not a must. If you're not familiar with what was going on in the Thor comics at that time, you might be a bit confused at first to find him in this weakened state. But the following explanations will help you understand what you need to know.



UPCOMING WANDERINGS

As you may know, a limited series entitled «The End» is currently being published by Marvel. It is written and drawn by Jim Starlin and features the evil galactic nihilist Thanos and many Marvel heroes. Although I was initially tempted to buy it, I finally decided not to (gotta give myself monthly quotas, otherwise my wife will force me to seek therapy). Is anybody buying this series? Is it any good? Drop me a message, I'd love to hear about it and know more about Iron Man's involvement.

As for me, in my next column, I will be looking at some of Iron Man's adventures in the pages of Spider-Man comics! Great comics that every IM fan should own!

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

<http://members.lycos.fr/cousture/bd>

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

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