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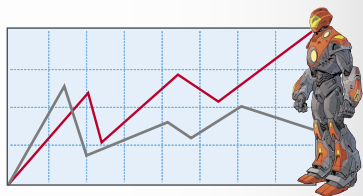
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**IRON MAN SALES RANK STATUS
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SOURCE: PREVIEWS TOP 100

IRON MAN #68 - Rank 58

ANOTHER TALE OF MISSING ARMOUR...

Former student of mine, and avid A.I. fan/contributor, **Mike Connolly** recently donated to me a very interesting graphic novel: **PUNISHER: THE PRIZE** from 1990.



In it, 'ol Frank Castle is on the trail of a missing "super weapon." Eventually, Frank meets up with one **Vincent Martinelli** – former Stark head of security, who, in this ish, is still working for **Stane International**. **Vincent Martinelli**? But I thought his name was **Victor** (commonly "Vic") **Martinelli**? Well, yes and no.

A quick glance at **IRON MAN vol. 1 #147** features a bit where Victor/Vincent confides in Tony Stark about his past. His *original* identity was **Vincent Martell**, but he changed it to **Victor Martinelli** after being placed in the federal Witness Protection Program as a result of blowing the whistle on the mob.

So, is Vince/Vic purposely trying to throw Castle off by combining his names in **THE PRIZE**, or is it just a case of writer ignorance? Who knows. But I digress...

The "prize" turns out to be a suit of **Iron Man armor** – another casualty of the "drunken fall" of Stark and consequent takeover of his company by **Obadiah Stane**. It is possessed by one **Raymond González** in Mexico.

Interestingly, the armor appears to the *original* suit first created in **ToS #39**... but seeing repulsor rays on the armor makes the avid IM fan wonder if it is not some original suit derivative. Without giving too much away about the finale, Castle's deadly skill with hand weapons – in this case a knife – ultimately saves the day, but not the armor!

The Punisher states towards issue's end that the "[U.S.] government says the suit was destroyed," but why would he believe them? They probably wanted it for themselves much like they

did with the **Iron Monger** armor! At any rate, there's quite a bit of Spanish in the ish, which the Spanish teacher in me led to me critique! (They did a good job.)

Chris Henderson wrote **THE PRIZE**, while **Mike Harris** drew it. No, I never heard of either of them, either.



CHUCK AUSTEN & THE REAL US WARMACHINE 2.0 STORY



Hey, who *wasn't* befuddled by the way-too abrupt ending to USWM 2.0? As was already noted via our website and A.I. Mailer (don't tell us you didn't read 'em!), this was due to big creative differences between **Chuck Austen** and artist **Christian Moore**. (In my opinion, Moore, being a total newcomer, should have said very little if anything at all. Moron.) Marvel president **Bill Jemas** was pissed enough to halt the whole deal at a mere *three* issues, when in fact the story was scheduled for *ten*.

Awesome as always, creator **Austen** was generous enough to fill us in at A.I. on the synopses of *all ten* USWM 2.0 issues!! Speaking of Chuck, he's virtually disappeared after his [supposed] last interview ever with the online Pulse comics news site. The e-mail address I have for him is no longer valid. So if you are reading this Chuck, please drop me a line and let me know how you are, hear?

USWM 2.0 ISSUE #1

We start with the end of a dream.

A woman is being beaten by a shade, a shadow, and angry form of a man hidden in darkness. Into this fray steps a bright and shining Knight in armor. He is light to the darkness of the man. With one savage blow, he cleaves the dark-enemy in half, winning the affection of the woman.

"Come to me and receive your reward."

The woman uses a bruised hand to lift the visor, revealing a young boy with tears in his eyes.

We widen to reveal the armor is small, boy-sized and there is a young lad of only about six or seven inside. The woman now holds him tenderly, cooing softly.

"Ssshhh. Sshhh. Calm down. Calm down. You'll be all right. Remember, you're my little knight in shining armor."

Tony Stark opens his eyes in the darkness. He rises from bed and walks over to the enormous bedroom window that overlooks the night city, grabbing a bottle along the way. Standing before the tremendous view, he pours himself a drink.

"Do you really need a drink, now?" A woman asks from the shadows. It's Bethany Cabe, Stark's head of security, lying in the bed beside where he once lay. He says he does. A celebration. He's finally learned the armor as a user, not just an inventor. Bethany congratulates him on his skills and how far he's come. He's better than any of the others, and they've had more practice with it. There's no way he can lose if Rhodey puts up a fight.

Stark toasts the view, his kingdom. Of course there's no way he can lose. But it will be a battle. A battle of knights not seen since the battle of Bosworth field when Henry Tudor wrested the crown of England from Richard the third. "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse." Bethany sings. "You'll never have to say those words. The horse and the armor are one."

"Richard never said those words, either." Stark muses. "A brave man doesn't call out in fear at the end of his life. He dies as he lived. With courage and nobility."

"So you know better what his last words would have been?" She asks.

"Of course I do. That last thing he said would have been:" Stark holds a drink out to the city lights. " 'I'll piss in your dead eyes, Henry.' "

CUT TO: ENGLAND

We're following a pair of cars along a path as they ride through the European countryside. Three men are in the lead car, four in the rear, and they're all talking as they head to their destination. Two are disenfranchised members of the IRA, the third is a local man looking for some fun and excitement, who seems to have found it.

The third man talks animatedly about how just the IRA cause is and how it's too bad money and world politics have turned against them and terrorism in general. He talks about where they're going and what they'll find hungry Russians willing to sell anything to the highest bidder. Even nuclear weaponry. They're waiting at a small repository in the countryside.

They arrive outside a small, abandoned farmhouse. There are others there, the remaining bidders. A truck is stationed before the group, doors closed. A large Russian man, boisterous, with a warm and engaging smile greets the newcomers.

Outside, the man who is not IRA talks about how his buddies down at the pub won't believe ... BLAMM, one of the IRA guys blasts him, spewing blood and brains over the Russian, who snarls, showing his true colors, then smiles and says "money forgives everything."

The place is a little over-protected for an abandoned barn, men with massive weapons are everywhere. And there is a long table set up to one side with Russian armaments of all sorts on display. The centerpiece is an unusual plastic crate, oddly shaped with latches on all sides. It's labeled in government stencil: TACNUKE. This is what the bigger money came for. A tactical nuclear weapon which was part of the stash below. The Russian announces that it is American and gives a little history as to where it came from.

With a little pomp and circumstance, the Russian steps in front of the crowd to the back of the truck. He announces the bidding will commence, and here's his first offering. With a flourish he throws open the doors of the truck and raises his arm regally. Inside the back of the truck are three War Machines (Each distinctive and unique looking, one with a bowler hat).

The crowd is stunned, but not displeased. They mutter among themselves. They were expecting fissionable material and neutron guns for some big nuclear weapons. This is not what they were expecting. The Russian is surprised by the reaction, their reaction is not what he was expecting. He turns to look at the War Machines, his back to the crowd. When he turns to face them again, his face has a look of horror on it. This isn't what was supposed to be in the truck.

One of the armed Russians steps forward and fires a missile into the truck, exploding it in a ball of fire and incinerating some of the closer guests. Then, from out of the smoke and flames, the War Machines stride, firing in all directions. More Russians step forward, and several men grab the display weapons. It's an all-out war and the War Machines are in the middle of the carnage.

The IRA man races across the field toward his car. He leaps up, reaching for the door, which pulls away as the other driver and his mates decide to hightail it. He stands and screams after the car, just as the three armored warriors rise up from the flames and smoke of the burning hole behind him.

Bad news.

The car making its getaway careens down the dirt road, through trees and toward a small town. Suddenly the roof of the car caves in on them and two armored legs are sticking through. The rest of the roof begins peeling away as a War Machine with dreadlocks systematically opens up the car like a tin can, laughing and screaming as if it's getting off on the whole experience. Panicking, the driver, veers toward a brick tunnel. Low Bridge. The War Machine is smacked off the car and lands unconscious in the middle of the dirt road.

He awakens to a cow, eating grass near his head, sits up and finds himself surrounded by local police.

USWM 2.0 ISSUE #2

Rhodey and Dugan sit in a heavysset, British policeman's office, explaining that this is a UN ordered SHIELD operation, but the guy's not buying it. They can't figure out why he's being so headstrong until he admits to having been refused service in SHIELD. Dugan and Rhodey look at one another, and before long, Parnell is being released into their custody and the policeman is talking about how pleased he is to be a new member of SHIELD.

They all return to the Sky-Carrier (The Liberty, it needs a name), worn and tired, but no worse for wear. Unfortunately they have to meet with Fury to talk about how they lost the nuke. They wonder how the others did trying to stop their nuke-hijackers.

As they exit the Blackhawk, groups of SHIELD agents, grunts, and maintenance crew run past them down a hall. Dugan excuses himself to go install their new recruit and pulls along the Brit policeman, asking if he minds if they go check on the girls. Sheva grabs a guy and asks what everyone's running for. He says Captain America is on board. The REAL Captain America.

Parnell waves it off and walks away.

Rhodey and Sheva look at one another. What's the big deal. Then they both smile and race off with the others. They get to the back of a huge crowd leading out into the hangar. They block the way, and most of the view. They stand on their tiptoes, but can only see part of a helmet walk past the sea of soldiers. After a large collective sigh, the crowd

disperses. Dugan, his three rescued girls in tow, walks up to an obviously disappointed Sheva and Rhodey and asks what the problem is. When they tell him, he smiles. Is that all? He asks if they want to meet him, he'll introduce them all later in Fury's office. Meet him at 1400 hours in the TFCC. But first, could Rhodey look in on Scotch? He hasn't been sleeping since Nathan was killed. Can Rhodey talk to him? Sure. Dugan walks off and Sheva looks at him and he asks. What the hell is the TFCC? She smiles, and walks away. "You live here Rhodes, you need to start getting to know the place."

With Stark, as we explain why he's angry at Rhodes and what his personal philosophy about non-violence is as he trashes the others in Iron Man practice sessions. He is clearly the superior to the others in combat and strength.

Parnell walks in and finds his wife lying on a bed, staring at the ceiling. She barely acknowledges him. He tries to engage her in conversation, but she won't say more than a few words. Parnell gets frustrated and leaves.

Inside Fury's office, Captain America is looking at some of Fury's wall photos. There are a few others in the room. We'll name them eventually, but they're Clint, Sam and others whose names we'll know from different circumstances, as well as Fury's old troupe from his WWII days. They're code-handles are Hawkeye and Falcon, etc.

"I can't believe you kept all this stuff, Nick. You don't seem the type." Fury pours a drink. "I can't believe you've never been in here in all this time." Fury offers drinks to the others and lifts a glass to Cap. "I'd offer you one, but I know better."

Cap smiles. "How's Dugan?" Fury scowls. "He's fine. Better'n ever." Cap asks if he's still trying to adopt those girls he found at the AIM HQ. He is. He's going through the interviews with the child protection people and the psychiatrists. "Well," Cap offers. "I hope this gives him what he seems to have been missing." Nick snarls. "Dugan's fine. The War Machine unit's breathed new life into him, and he's finally stopped living in the past." Cap notices the jukebox and comments on the contents. The Andrews sisters. Glen Miller. "Yeah. At least he has."

Rhodey shows up in Scotch's lab. Scotch looks like he hasn't slept in a month. He's laboring over a War Machine helmet. He starts at Rhodey's entrance, and asks with fear if Rhodey's going to throw him around again. Rhodey says no, why would he. The Flaw in the helmet. In the earpiece. The one that got Nathan killed. The explosion dislodged a piece of the earphone and drove it into Nathan's brain. Scotch is fixing it. Is that why he's been working night and day?

No. Yes. No. Scotch admits that's part of it. The other part is he feels responsible. Someone died because he made a mistake. It's eating him up. Rhodey tries to comfort him with little effect. Scotch just dismisses him and says he has to get back to work.

Parnell goes to the jail cell to see the AIM agent with one blue eye. He walks in and the agent is sitting with his head slightly tilted back, apparently in some kind of trance. It takes a moment for him to register that Parnell is in the room. He smiles and apologizes. He was just having a conversation with a new friend. Parnell sneers at this weirdness and gets to the point. What's wrong with his wife? What did they do to her in that AIM cell? The AIM agent says they did nothing that wasn't necessary. They merely took her to make certain Parnell became involved. He'll have to look elsewhere for his answers. Parnell gets up to leave, and the AIM agent stops him. "Don't you want to know who I was talking to?" "Not really." Parnell says, warily. "But he has a message for you." Parnell says nothing, wanting to leave. "He says no suicide by cop, muh-muh-motherfucker."

The AIM agent smiles. Parnell's eyes widen in horror.

Outside TFCC. Dugan is there without the girls waiting with Sheva. He checks his watch. Rhodey smiles and runs up late. "Tactical Flag Command Center." He says, proudly. Tells them he finally found a directory. "Why didn't you just ask someone? Dugan chides. They enter.

Cap and the others turn as they do. Cap is huge. Larger than life and bigger than Rhodey thought. He's at first dazzled, then when he sees how Sheva is reacting to him, gushing, flirting, he becomes cold. Cap introduces himself and Rhodey tries to act disinterested. But Cap talks with pride about all he's heard of Rhodey, and how he made a team out of nothing, and Rhodey can't help but swell a little. Especially when Cap remarks that they both have the same name." James Barnes. But most people call me Bucky." "Rhodey." Rhodes replies.

They've all gathered to discuss the recent events. Apparently very little of the defenses worked. Several nukes got away, and are targeted, mostly for the US. Even the great Captain America is fallible.

USWM 2.0 ISSUE #3

Rhodey notices he's spending more time chatting up Sheva than he is listening, and he tries calling him on it. But Cap repeats everything Fury and his men have said, word-for-word, without even diverting his attention or his warm smile from Josephs. Rhodey fumes.

They've only been able to track one nuke, and it's coming through South America somewhere. They lost it in Nicaragua. They begin questioning where it might be headed, what its target could be. Los Angeles? JPL labs in Southern Cal? Lockheed further north? Lawrence Livermore?

No, Rhodey muses. Texas. Why Texas? Everyone asks. Because it's the home for our oil companies. And our

President hails from there. Taking out a major city in our President's home state, along with the brains and workers behind getting our nation its oil would be a tremendous blow the US. Without affecting the oil reserves themselves, they could take out the people who handle it, causing shortages, creating havoc, and further demoralizing our nation.

Interesting thought, but they'd need more info to make a move in that direction. There are many more likely targets.

Then an announcement comes through that the shipment lost in Nicaragua has been picked up again ... heading toward Houston. Fury smiles at Rhodey. "I'm not paying you enough."

Everyone suits up, and Cap tears himself away from Sheva as they all go about their business. Cap mentions aside to Fury that Sheva is hot. "I'm not allowed to notice." Fury snarls.

Sheva and Rhodey head for the armory and begin suiting up. Dugan and Parnell arrive, Parnell having been briefed by Dugan. Parnell asks if the armor has been radiation-proofed. Everyone laughs uncomfortably.

On deck, they all head out toward their respective flights. They approach Fury, who is separating them into groups. Cap speaks up that he'd like one of the War Machine crew to come along with hi and his men. Fury starts to offer Dugan, but Cap cuts him off and requests Sheva. Rhodey snarls. Parnell laughs. They begin to head off in their own directions, when Parnell notices four points of light approaching fast. Fury gets on the horn to the Island. "Pri-Fly! What's that approaching?" No one knows. It's not showing up on the screens.

Then an announcement comes over the speaker. The SHIELD agents who spotted the truck carrying the nuke have been made. They're forced to engage the enemy, and a firefight has broken out.

Now the approaching lights are close enough to make out forms. They look human, and they're coming fast.

"Iron Men." Parnell says softly. "Yeah." Rhodey replies. "Who's the fourth one?" Parnell asks. "Who do you think." Rhodey sneers sarcastically. He calls to Fury. "Nick! We got trouble!" Fury calls into his headset. "Ready the Sparrows!"

Two SAM launchers rise up from beneath the deck. "NO! Those are my friends!!" Rhodey calls. Fury scolds. "They're coming in stealth and armed." "Pri_Fly! Give 'em a warning, five seconds and then drop 'em!"

"Aye, sir. Incoming unidentifieds. Pull up or be fired upon. You have five seconds."

Tense seconds pass, the lights do not swerve, do not stop, do not slow down.

Abruptly and without a second warning, the SAMs launch from right beside the startled Rhodey and Parnell. They watch in horror as the missiles fly true, right at their target.

USWM 2.0 ISSUE #4

The missiles approach the incoming lights. Rhodey and Parnell are tense. Cap and Sheva watch, breathless. Fury is impassive.

Suddenly the SAMs swerve off target, loop around, and head back for the carrier, with the Iron Men directly behind. Fury screams. "Pri-Fly! Detonate. SELF-DESTRUCT THOSE SAMs!" Parnell, Rhodey and Sheva put their helmets on. Cap, Fury, Falcon and Hawkeye all dive for it, some into the man over board nets, some into the blister, some into the waiting choppers.

Suddenly the SAMs become enormous fireballs, the heat and flames of which still expand over the deck of the carrier, and the flames lick over the diving personnel. And when the smoke and fire clears, the Iron Men are standing on the deck.

Rhodey, Parnell and Sheva gather themselves and step forward. "Hello, Jim." The lead Iron Man says. "Still wearing my suits, I see." "Tony?" Rhodey says, stunned.

"If the next words out of your mouth aren't: 'I'm sorry, Tony. Here's your suit back.' I will be forced to take that armor back by any means necessary. Do you understand? 'I'm sorry, Tony. Here's - your - suit - back.'"

Cap, Fury and the others have made their way back to the scene.

Rhodes is momentarily silent, then asks, "Have you been drinking?"

"ARCHERS!" Tony yells, apparently serious about any other answer. Little robots spring forth from packs on Stark's and the others' backs and begin whizzing around the deck. Suddenly they begin firing dozens of tiny metal balls in every direction. Cap shields himself as best he can, but everyone is affected by the little stingers. SHIELD agents drop like flies, screaming and convulsing.

"I'M SORRY TONY! HERE'S YOUR SUIT BACK!"

"TONY, LISTEN TO ME...!"

"LANCERS!"

The Iron Men raise their arms and fire taser weapons from their gauntlets. Hundreds of wires explode forth, piercing armor and skin alike. "SNAP THE WIRES," Rhodey screams, and does, as many as he can. But everyone is now on the floor screaming as volts of electricity flare through their bodies. Rhodey, barely able to move, snaps his last wires, and Cap, screaming heroically, rips his loose with hands and shield.

"I'M SORRY TONY! HERE'S YOUR SUIT BACK!"

"TONY, STOP THIS! YOU HAVE NO IDEA ...!"

"OIL!"

Hoses on the Iron Men's shoulders fire gallons of hot, sticky oil/glue/foam forward. Cap's shield flies into the scene and collides with one of the Iron Men, who's shot goes awry and gobs all over another. Amid the distraction, Cap charges forward, knocking the unbalanced Iron Man flat. Lying on top of the stunned man, Cap holds up a hand as his shield flies back into it. Then he begins slamming it repeatedly into the face of the confused Iron Man, seriously denting his head. A second Iron Man raises a fist to hammer Cap, but Cap turns his shield at the last instant and deflects the blow, then grabs the second Iron Man and uses it as a battering ram, slamming it down on the first.

Suddenly one of their boot jets kicks on, and an arm wraps around Cap's neck, and the three go skidding off over the deck.

Back on Rhodey, Parnell and Sheva, all of whom are glued hard to the surface of the deck. Stark walks over regally and stands over his defeated foe.

Stark sneers. "I'm sorry, Tony. Here's your suit back."

Rhodey fairly spits back up at Stark. "I'll piss in your dead eyes, Tony Stark." Then he turns his missile launcher completely around and fires all grenades into the deck underneath him. Stark is stunned and thrown back by the resulting explosion.

Stark lies on his back, flames all around him. He raises his head to see a figure step from the flames, covered in oil/foam/gunk, and mad as hell. Rhodey's got some ass-kickin' to do.

USWM 2.0 ISSUE #5

Stark kicks on his jets and flies right into Rhodey's stomach, they crash through a helicopter, over some machinery and into the deck. The two immediately begin hammering each other.

To the side, Dugan, Hawkeye and Falcon all watch, astonished, pulling wires from their flesh. "What should we do?" Falcon asks. "Get in a chopper. We still got a job to do." They head off, looking for a helicopter when the carrier lurches. Fury speaks into his headset. "What's going on?" Seems Stark's little "archers" have continued into the ship and are systematically dismantling the equipment, as well as still firing stingballs. And there are other little robots as well, each with its own, pernicious objective. It's disrupting the flight capability of the carrier.

Fury and the other run off to help the more immediate problem.

Elsewhere, Sheva is standing from the goop, helping Parnell out. The fourth Iron Man comes up behind her and whollops her, sending her careening over the edge of the deck and onto another. The fourth Iron Man, Beth Cabe, points to Parnell, who's still stuck in goop. "Just stay down, Parnell," she says, then steps over to the edge of the deck and calls down to Sheva.

"This is nothing personal, you know. My job is to retrieve stolen property for my boss." Sheva sits up and looks at her opponent. "Did Stark leave enough room in your armor for your boobs?"

Cabe is stunned. "What?"

Rhodey and Stark are wailing on each other. Rhodey can't get a word in edgewise. "Tony, LISTEN!" "WILL YOU ..." "TONY!" Stark is fuming, ranting, obviously a bit drunk and power mad. He's accusing Rhodey of stealing his inventions, of being an ungrateful friend, how could he do this, blah, blah, it descends into an almost pitiful scenario, and Stark is beginning to lose. Both are losing armor pieces, and finally, Rhodey hits Stark hard enough to dislodge his helmet's faceplate. Stark is exposed, and Rhodey's armored fist is coming.

Inside, Fury is trying to kill dozens of tiny little robots as they systematically dismantle his Primary Flight Control Deck. The little buggers are everywhere and they're causing serious damage. Over the speaker, the group fighting with the nuclear armed terrorists is crying for help. They're losing the skirmish and apparently one of the terrorists is threatening detonation. Then one of the little suckers rips lose something important, and primary power drops inside Pri-Fly. Fury speaks slowly. "Oh, shit."

Suddenly the carrier lurches, sending the planes and copters on the various decks bouncing toward the edge and over. Rhodey stops his fist in mid strike, as he and Stark skid down the now-incline of the upper deck, and over the edge. They land in the man-over-board net just as the emergency back-up generators kick-in. But above them, one

of the helicopters is falling right at them. The two try to dive free, but are tangled in the netting. They're stuck. There's nothing they can do. Jim speaks quietly. "Goddammit, Tony. You have no idea what you've done."

Then Parnell kicks on his boot jets and pushes the thing far enough out so that it misses the two men, and falls to the earth below.

Inside, Fury and the others are still fighting with the 'bots, with broken messages coming over the speaker. The last one is frightening. "I can't, NO! NO!, DON'T!!"

Parnell drops down into the netting with them, trying to dislodge Rhodey "We gotta go, man!". Tony screams and curses. "Let me out of here!"

Rhodey speaks. "I haven't got time to explain, Tony, but I only hope you haven't ..."

A mushroom cloud appears somewhere west of Houston, just off the port bow.

USWM 2.0 ISSUE #6

The Sky-Carrier (which I'm going to name The Liberty. It needs a name) Hovers near the epicenter of the blast, close enough to see the glow from the nuclear fire, far enough not to be affected.

Iron Men, soldiers and War Machines are sitting around with helmets off in the TFCC, everyone is silent and listening. Bits and pieces of info are coming in over the speakers. "Radiation cloud ... hundreds presumed dead ... fortunately it was pretty far west of Houston ... Radiation will be a factor in the coming weeks and months ..." And on and on and on. We've all heard it before, tragically, recently.

Stark comments that they should go there. Do something. Most everyone in the room blames him, and no one blames him more than he himself. There's nothing they can do. They're not radiation proof. But they have to stop the other nukes, wherever they are.

This issue is the calm, post-catastrophe issue where Stark decides he need to re-think his decision on the use of his armor, and his guilt forces him to stop drinking and become a temporary member of the War Machine unit, under Rhodey's direction. The issue ends with him entering the training room and offering his services ... to follow Rhodey.

USWM 2.0 ISSUE #7

In this issue, Tony tries to be subordinate, but can't seem to let Rhodey run things. It takes some doing, but eventually he settles down. He and Rhodey remember why they became friends in the first place. Then they go off on their first mission. They've found the second nuke (there were three in all), and it's in the hands of a splinter faction of the IRA, or rather extremely fanatical ex-members of said organization. They've tracked them down through cameras in the homes of one of the members. The cameras were placed when the owner of the house was called out to "having won a weekend getaway" and then agents went into his home and bugged the shit out of it.

Apparently the plan is to use the nuke on London.

The fanatics learn they are being tracked and break for it, and no one knows where to.

Stark and Rhodey meet and have a conversation with an IRA member who knows the individuals, and knows them to be lunatics with a homicidal side that has nothing to do with cause. He's horrified at the idea of a nuclear bomb being used to decimate London. They're supposed to be working for peace, now, and the thought of killing everyone in London is so appalling it rivals the Omagh blast that killed a pregnant mother of twins. He insists on being armored to help, if he gives the information necessary to track the terrorists to a warehouse north of London.

When they arrive at the warehouse where the weapon is supposed to be stored, they find instead, armored former IRA members, fully-outfitted in armor that rivals that of the War Machines.

USWM 2.0 ISSUE #8

Rhodey, Stark, Parnell, Sheva and the IRA men kick some armored ass all over London. The lead terrorist comments that there will be dead people in London as far as the eye can see. Finally they beat them to a pulp inside their armor, but the lead member will only repeat what he's said. Dead people as far as the eye can see. Rhodey and Stark run around London trying to figure out where the bomb could be. Finally Stark gets it. The Millenium Wheel over the Thames. It's called the Eye by the locals. He uses one of his ocular sensors, and yep, it's there. One nuclear bomb.

USWM 2.0 ISSUE #9

Rhodey and Stark drop into the Wheel with only minutes to spare. It's too sophisticated for Rhodey, so Stark has to dismantle it. Parnell takes all the tourists and throws them overboard, then jumps out himself. Stark suggests Rhodey do the same, but Rhodey declines. He's nervous and scared. But he doesn't want to leave his friend. Stark begins dismantling, but there's some sophisticated security associated with it. As he talks, he tells Rhodey these guys couldn't have acted alone, they needed brilliant help. Either a Reed Richards, or "You-Know-Who". Rhodey does.

Something explodes where Stark is working, and Rhodey jumps. But it's just a laser security trap. Stark's got it handled. A few more seconds, and ... there. The people of London are safe.

Rhodey breathes a sigh of relief and tells Stark. "Congratulations, man. Gimme a hug." But Stark turns around and Rhodey almost faints. The front of Stark's armor is melted away, and his heart is exposed. "Jesus."

Rhodey grabs the man as he falls and leaps from the Eye, down to a hospital two buildings down (there really is a hospital 2 buildings down).

SHIELD and the IRA member who helped them are hailed as heroes for saving London.

Later, Rhodey is de-briefing Fury, and explaining that Doom probably has the other device and provided these IRA thugs with weaponry and armor, as well as the protection the nuke in the Eye had.

In a hospital room, Tony is in a coma, with Beth at his side. Rhodey enters with Smitty and Ralf, who immediately go about setting up equipment as Rhodey and Beth make small talk about the situation and how it came out. Finally she asks what Tweedle-Dee and Dum are doing. Rhodey explains. "He may never come out of this coma, and I don't know what he's thinking in that head of his, but I don't want him spending the rest of a long life locked away in his mind blaming himself."

Smitty tells Rhodey it's all set up. Rhodey flicks the switch. Suddenly, Stark's face flows into a contented smile.

Inside Stark's mind, he's Iron Man the armored avenger. Superhero and saviour of millions, flying through a clear blue sky. Somewhere, the words "my knight in shining armor..." float up to greet him.

USWM 2.0 Epilogue

Gypsies arrive at Von Doom's Castle bearing a crate exactly like the one in issue #1. He waves to a servant who pays them cash, and then dismisses them all. He lovingly caresses the box and begins to laugh.

These issues may extend to ten, given the material and action involved. War Machine 3 will see Doom use the nuke, and others to destroy the oil fields of the Middle East and control world power. The War Machine unit will have to move in to stop him, after the fact.

Check out my (Hube's) reviews of USWM 2.0 at the recently completely revamped...

HUBE'S IRON MAN REVIEW: <http://members.aol.com/ironhube>

HUBE'S [MODERN] IRON MAN MOVIE CAST

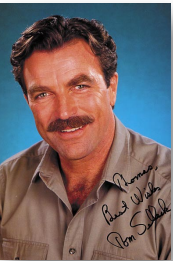
As more and more Marvel movies are making their way to the silver screen, and more news about an Iron Man flick disseminates throughout the internet, Pat Couture and I bandied about just who would comprise the "ultimate" (not Marvel "Ultimate," if you know what I mean) IM movie cast.

Heath "T-Rex" McKnight, our resident movie guru, did up an awesome cast back **ADVANCED IRON #21** from 1995. (Want to check out that ish? Visit the A.I. Archive at our website!) In Heath's article, he had lots of "big name" stars in the cast: Ralph (pronounced "Rafe" – what's up with THAT?) Fiennes as Tony Stark/IM; Julianne Moore as Bethany Cabe; Laurence Fishburn as Jim Rhodes; Robert DeNiro as Edwin Cord; and Nicole Kidman as Kathy Dare.

This is indeed an "ultimate" Iron Man movie cast; however, the obvious problem with it is that there's really NO WAY the production company could afford all those big-name stars and still have a budget to implement all the cool F-X needed for an adequate Shellhead film! So, with that in mind, here's Hube's and Pat Couture's up-to-date IRON MAN casts!

IRON MAN/TONY STARK

Hube's 1st choice: **TOM SELLECK**.



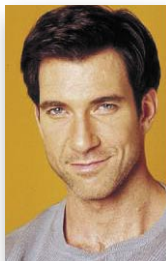
OK, I know, I know – Tom's pretty much and old man now. But he still can pull it off. First, Selleck is a one big dude – tall and muscular. He's looked exactly like Tony Stark ever since he's had his mustache (which has been most of his acting career – there *are* several movies/TV shows where he hasn't had it, though. Check out the classic war movie "Midway" and various episodes

of "Friends" where Tom played Monica's boyfriend Richard). He's surely a decent enough actor (ever see "An Innocent Man"?) and casting Selleck certainly would not entail a sizeable portion of an IM flick's budget! (Oh, and if you're sharp-eyed, the Selleck signature on that photo ain't from MY collection, OK? I merely snatched the pic from the web! J)

Hube's 2nd choice:

DYLAN McDERMOTT.

Guaranteed to satisfy the 21st crowd. McDermott, probably most widely known for his role on ABC's "The Practice," (although he's no longer on the show) easily has the intensity to do Tony Stark proud. Also good for the film's budget. Tall and buff, the only "problem" would be seeing Dylan with a 'stache. Hmm.



JIM RHODES

Hey, did someone mention "The Practice"? Indeed. Hube's choice to play Jim "Rhodey" Rhodes is that show's **STEVE HARRIS**. Intense and versatile, Harris is another

budget-conscious consideration who'd do an excellent job as Stark's confidante.

HAPPY HOGAN



"Allow me to introduce you to Mr. Joshua." Anyone out there not seen the first "Lethal Weapon"? Yeah? Who was Mel Gibson's nemesis in that film? Can't remember? How 'bout Keanu Reeves' partner in the unintentionally funny "Point Break"? The head government dude in "Predator 2"? Not yet? Come on!! It's **GARY BUSEY!!** That's right – Gary Busey. Yep, he

has the necessary gruffness, the disheveled hair and facial features (that you'd expect from a former boxer), the "everyman" demeanor...just right for the role. And again – budget conscious!

PEPPER POTTS/HOGAN

She wanted the role of Catwoman in "Batman Returns" so badly she showed up at the director's house in costume. Once a hot property in the 80s ("Blade Runner," "No Way Out") **SEAN YOUNG's** rep slipped in the next decade... and beyond (the awful "Fire Birds" and a bit supporting part in the first "Ace Ventura"). But she still has enough of a rep to bring in old and young movie-goers alike, and she's still a darn attractive babe! Oh yeah – having that diminished rep makes her...budget conscious!



RUMIKO FUJIKAWA



As former IM artist **Sean Chen** revealed a few A.I.'s ago, the basis for Ru was porn star **KOBE TAI**. I've read that Ms. Tai is working her way into mainstream films (just like Tracy Lords) so why not continue her career here, eh?

JUSTIN HAMMER

Just like Heath posited in his IM cast, I'm going with **MAX VON SYDOW**.

Sydow wouldn't be a huge cost now that his "prime" movie days are behind him. (His last major flick that made any cash was "Minority Report.") Sydow has an excellent villain's flair (again, in "Minority Report," and who can forget "Flash Gordon," eh?) which I think would fit perfectly for Justin Hammer's role.



PAT'S PICKS FOR THE IRON MAN MOVIE CAST

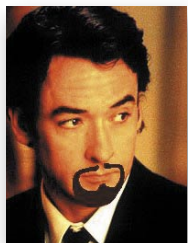
Well Dave old buddy, you did a great job and now it's my turn. Here are my three top choices for the role of Anthony Stark. Please note that Leonardo DiCaprio is not among them, nor would he be on my top 1000 list.

1) TIMOTHY DALTON

Yeah, yeah, I know, I've just been influenced by Alex Ross' beautiful renditions of Tony Stark looking like him in the MARVELS series, but it worked! Plus, every time I watch the movie *ROCKETEER* (featuring a Dalton with a mustache in the role of the villain), I just can't help but smile and think: "This is the guy." As you can see on the manipulated pic at right, he would look great with the goatee. Now if that's not Tony Stark, I dunno who is.



I personally think Dalton is a very talented actor. We all know the man can play a character that has class, grace and charm. He's just the right age, the right build, he's suave, he looks like an intelligent guy and he would make a perfectly believable Tony Stark. I know he's getting older, but after careful consideration, I don't think he's too old yet. The only problem I see is his British accent, he'd have to find a way around that. Perhaps my good buddy Dave could teach him to speak with his cool "JFK" accent!



2) JOHN CUSACK

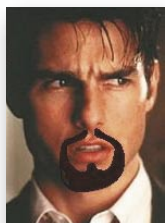
Surprised? I know, I know, I didn't think of him at first either. But then it occurred to me: Cusack is an extremely talented actor. I have yet to see a single movie in which his performance is disappointing (not all of his movies are good, but his acting always is). I've begun to think

the guy could really play any role, and yes, I think he'd make a very intense and impressive Stark.

He is a little bit too small, but that can be remedied, actors bulk up all the time. And after all, is it really so important that Stark be portrayed by a muscular actor? It's Stark's, brains, charms and intensity that need to be portrayed. I think he would make a great younger Stark, perhaps a bit more playful and reckless, like Tony was as a younger man. And as you see, he looks fine with the goatee also! Plus, my wife loves him (well, as much as you can love a guy on a big screen, don't wanna start any rumours here) so if he were to play Tony, I wouldn't have to spend any time or effort to convince her to see it!

3) TOM CRUISE

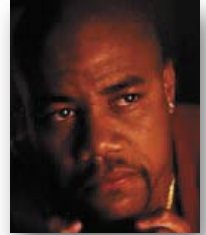
Well, my better half might agree with my previous one, but she sure as heck won't agree with this one! I also expect that regular A.I. collaborator Welshcat might stop talking to me after he reads this. Come on Welshie, find it in your heart to forgive me! But yes, it's true, I like Tom Cruise, always have. I enjoy his movies, I think he's a talented actor. When I heard rumours a while back



about the possible casting of Cruise in the role of Tony Stark, I was very happy about it. I think he would pull it off quite nicely. He also has the charm and the intensity to play Stark, I think he'd be particularly good at playing down-on-his-luck Stark in his battle against alcoholism. Just think of the scenes where he plays a drunk Jerry Maguire, that's what I'm thinking about. And, as you can see on my third masterpiece, he looks just fine with a goatee on. Anyways, I'll stop now before Welshcat bombs my house.

JIM RHODES

Well, while we're on the subject of Jerry Maguire, you guessed it, my vote for the role of Jim Rhodes will have to go to Cuba Gooding Jr. I think he's got the perfect look for the job and clearly, he lacks nothing in the talent department! In fact, I'd be worried that he'd steal the show! This is truly an extraordinary actor. I think he would need to try and have a deeper voice, I imagine Rhodney having a much deeper voice than what Gooding has in his movies. Also, he would probably look too young next to a guy like Timothy Dalton.



You had a good point Dave when you remarked that not all roles could be filled by big stars, otherwise the cost of the movie would be unrealistic. Therefore, I know we will never see Gooding playing Rhodney but I just couldn't resist anyways.



BETHANY CABE

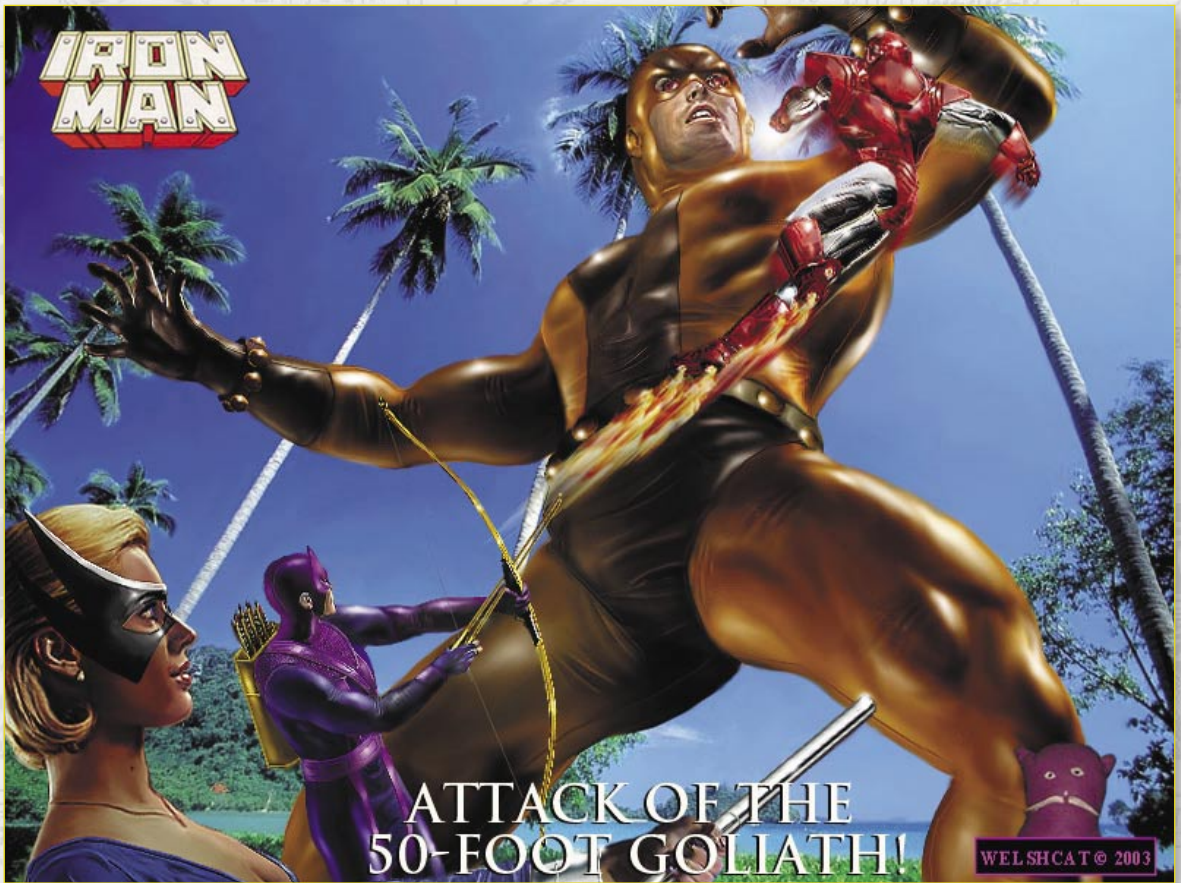
Yeah, Beth! Forget about Rumiko man, I just can't stand her anyway! It's hard enough to put up with her in the comics, let's at least be free of her in the movie! I think what the movie needs is Beth! And my vote for the role of Cabe is Elizabeth Shue. There are not

many actresses who have managed to touch me, but Shue is definitely one of that elite group. She plays her roles beautifully and with such sincerity and natural ease that I can't help but believe her. She looks sensitive, classy and intelligent. She's also a talented actress, a magnificent woman and also looks great with red hair, as you can plainly see at right. And yes Dave, I believe that would be a wise budget decision too because she's been hardly visible lately so I think she'd ask for a reasonable fee.



JUSTIN HAMMER

Now in this case, Dave, I have to concede, I think you found the perfect guy for the role. I had always thought that Ronny Cox (you might remember him for his role in the first *Robocop* movie) would do a good job, and he probably would, but Sydow would be even better. So I raise my hat to you and rally your decision.



GOLIATH ATTACKS!



THE STORY

Iron Man vol. 1 #206: When Goliath of the Masters of Evil breaks loose from the West Coast Avengers' compound, Hawkeye and Mockingbird are the only ones around at the time who are left to recapture him and prevent him from wreaking havoc and destruction.

Unfortunately, Goliath has the strength of Wonder Man and Thor, and he proves too much for the two Avengers. However, Iron

Man shows up to rescue them in the nick of time. The armored avenger goes one on one against the gargantuan villain, matching him blow for blow. But before the battle is up, Iron Man receives a distress call from Rhodey's space shuttle, and must abruptly leave the Avengers to mount a daring rescue.

When Shellhead returns, there is no sign of the Avengers anywhere – Goliath has thrown them into the ocean locked in an adamantium cell which Iron Man had placed them in for safekeeping. Shellhead frees them, and finally decides not to hold back any longer, firing his new pulse bolts into Goliath's mouth, knocking him out cold.



THE ARTWORK

Unlike the cover of the original story, I wanted to capture the huge size of Goliath, with the villain looming over our heroes. I also wanted Iron Man actually in battle with Goliath this time instead of flying away.

Of course, a few artistic liberties were taken with the sizing etc. Goliath is not shown here full height (more like 15 Ft Goliath), otherwise the other figures would have to be extremely small and would not look good in the picture, or Goliath would himself have to be outside the picture if the others remained their current height. Hawkeye probably wouldn't be that high up either, but put him any lower down and that doesn't work either. So you'll just have to imagine he's standing on a rock or a stray stool someone left lying about or something.

All the base figures here were created and rendered in Poser 4 (with the exception of Mockingbird) and then repainted into my own style using Photoshop. Mockingbird utilises the beautiful Rebecca Romijn Stamos's likeness. Apart from the obvious physical California girl similarity, Rebecca had the perfect hairstyle in the original picture of her for the style that Mockingbird was sporting in this issue and around this particular time.

I think I've managed to capture the look of the original comic, especially with all those tall palm trees in the background.

- WelshCat

FERROFILES

Greetings Ferrofiles! Hope you have had a great summer. Thought the Hulk rocked. Verdict's out on The Matrix Reloaded until I see Matrix: Revolution. Pirates of the Caribbean was extremely fun summer fare, as was Terminator 3. Finding Nemo was entertaining. X2 was great. Bruce Almighty was a pleasant surprise, especially considering Hollywood's (usually) cavalier treatment of Christianity / God and my concern with how obnoxious/sacrilegious Jim Carey would treat the material. Johnny English was hilarious- Rowan Atkinson is a truly entertaining ham! Tomb Raider 2 was better than the first. And The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen was fun but not extraordinary. So, what did you think of this summer's cinematic fare?

I dropped a line to recent Iron Man contributors to find out what their current schedules include and what future projects are on the horizon:

Michael Ryan: He is doing two issues of *Captain Marvel* and then moving onto the book *Mystique* for a few issues, maybe six. He may become the new regular penciller. Both titles are shot from pencil meaning no inker and a chance to see Mike's incredible pencils. (Mike's frequent collaborator, Sean Parsons said, "I hear it looks great but is killing his hand. We both look forward to working together again on something in the future. Possibly *Mystique*, if Mike can convince the editors.")

Sean Parsons: Can be found doing a three issue fill-in on *THE OUTSIDERS* #4-6 over former *CAPTAIN MARVEL* penciller Chris Cross. Inking *DETECTIVE* # 788, a handful of uncredited pages in *NIGHTWING* #86 and a half dozen pages of *SPAWN* #128 as part of CrimeLab Studio's inking crew. He also recently finished some G.I. JOE toy packaging designs, but says, "I don't think any of that work will see print for at least six months." Sean has also recently launched a website

Kurt Busiek: Is working on several projects, including at least one that has Iron Man in it! (That would be *JLA/Avengers*, if you've been comatose or something.) Other current projects include: *ASTRO CITY: LOCAL HEROES* (and more after that one's done); *ARROWSMITH*, a steampunk/Alternate History title from Wildstorm's Cliffhanger imprint; *SUPERMAN: SECRET IDENTITY*, debuting in late 2003; and *Dark Horse's CONAN*, debuting in early 2004. All this, plus several other projects that haven't been announced yet. By Crom this writer is busy!

Mike Grell: Illustrations for *Carlos* magazine's (London, UK) reprinting of a classic James Bond short story by Ian Fleming. He will be writing the comic book version of Zodiac Media's "Cottontail Avenger", an original new comic book character and TV series.

Well that's what I've been able to find out this go round Ferrofiles. I will try to find out what is going on with Future Comics' founders David Michiline and Bob Layton, as well as touch base with Robin Laws, Sean Chen and Jerry Bingham.

Let's move on and find out a little about recent (and recently departed) Iron Man scribe **Robin Laws**.

Let's start with the vital stats for Robin Laws: full name, age, interests outside comic books, first comic read, currently reading, etc.

I'm Robin D. Laws, 39, interested in cinema, literature, music, visual art and US politics as a spectator sport. The first comic I read had to have been some Disney title, way back in the depths of my conscious memory.

I'm currently going through a spate of short-story reading so my table is piled high with Best American Short Story anthologies and the like.

NFL or CFL?

I suppose on patriotic grounds I should say CFL but the reality is that I'm not much of a sports fan.

Favorite NHL team?

If I were a sports fan, I would have to root for the Toronto Maple Leafs, but, being a freelance writer, I have enough suffering in my life as it is.

We Americans know all Canadians grow up playing hockey and saying "eh" so is there anything else we need to know to set the contextual framework for the rest of this interview? ;-)

It is true that the Canadian ancestral cry is "Car!" which is what you yell when you see a car coming down your street and have to momentarily move the net you've set up to play street hockey.

Just so long as we don't get into the whole "about" thing...

You are primarily known for your work in the RPG Industry. If you would, share some of the highlights and memorable accomplishments of your career with us and how you feel it qualifies you and translates to work in the field of comics.

My notable hobby game credits include design of the RPGs **Feng Shui**, **Dying Earth**, **Heroquest**, **Pantheon**, and **Rune**, co-design on the **Shadowfist** trading card game, and the peculiarly influential RPG advice book *Robin's Laws of Good Gamemastering*, along with a raft of supplements for many other companies over the years.

The skill set required for RPG design is almost completely unrelated to that of the comic book writer. Maybe it teaches you a little about the fantasies people are pursuing when they pick up a piece of genre writing, but that's about it.

It's my work in prose fiction — the novels *Pierced Heart*, *The Rough and the Smooth*, and *Honour of the Grave*, along with short stories published in *Inferno!* Magazine and the anthology *Book of All Flesh*, that pertains to comic book writing. But even there, though the general principles of storytelling pertain, the toolkit you get to use in achieving them turns out to be quite different.

How did you go about scoring the Iron Man writing gig?

I was already working on **Hulk: Nightmerica**, I was available, and someone thought I'd be flexible enough to take over from another writer in mid-storyline.

Is Iron Man your first professional comic work?

It was the first to appear in stores but I was working on various incarnations of *Nightmerica* considerably before that.

Why comics?

Originally I was slated to do *Nightmerica* in prose fiction form — and in fact submitted a first draft before the decision was taken to do it as a comic book instead. Bill Jemas approached me to write for Marvel because he read and remembered my first novel, *Pierced Heart*.

I never really considered comics as a market for my writing, but then I never planned to become a game

designer either, and just fell into it backwards by pursuing opportunities as they landed in front of me.

The “Manhunt” storyarc seemed to be a co-plotting and scripting exercise for you while “Vegas Bleeds Neon” was entirely your story, can you share a little about what went through your mind when you were asked to come onboard and pretty much salvage a previous, and quickly departing, author’s story; and what your specific contributions were to the story?

My first thought was that it would be dangerous to say no, and dangerous to say yes. So I said yes.

“Salvage” is kind of a loaded word, don’tcha think?

During my first pass at Manhunt, I tried to depart quite a bit from the original conception of the arc, but that didn’t work, so in the end I found different ways to stage the same broad story points. So whereas Mr. Grell had Tony finding the location to Temugin’s lair through Method A at Point X in the story, I had Tony finding the location through Method B at the same point. It’s my hope that the unusual process involved in the creation of the story is invisible to the reader, and I wouldn’t want to go through and claim responsibility for particular bits or distance myself from certain others.

Do you try to reflect current events and hot topics in your writing? (I.e. the albeit tenuous parallel between Tony’s dye blonde job and Scott Peterson’s; The Eastern ideals that Temugin baited Tony with; etc.)

I do; part of the brief at Marvel these days is to connect these classic characters to the real world we all live in. I wasn’t thinking about Scott Peterson with the peroxide scene — that’s just kind of an obvious visual thing to do to emphasize Tony’s fugitive status. Likewise, Temugin’s eastern philosophy stems naturally from his character as already established; eastern thought has been a hot topic in Western culture for over thirty years now, and I don’t think it’s going away any time soon.

But definitely the North Korean crisis was in my mind when I added them to the mix. As someone who follows international affairs it wasn’t a big surprise to me that the Kim regime grabbed headlines just as those issues hit the stands.

As the embassy bombing evokes memories of Oklahoma City, I thought it was crucially important to recognize the horror of that real-world event, and to somehow earn the right to make that reference.

There’s a political thread running through Nightmerica as well, as you might intuit from the title.

So, I’m going to go out on a limb and guess you are a comic fan.

I was a comic fan as a kid in the late seventies and early eighties. With the exception of a few things like Sandman, Yummy Fur, Dark Knight and Watchmen, I hadn’t really followed the form until the Nightmerica gig came up.

What did you grow up reading?

A full smorgasbord of Marvel and DC titles. Iron Man was definitely a big part of my comic book pile as a kid. The runs that really stand out in my mind from that

time are the Uncanny X-Men from the relaunch into the Byrne years; Miller’s Daredevil, and the Engelhart/Rogers Detective Comics. Reprints were a big part of the newsstand back then so it was easy to catch up on the Lee/Kirby era.

What are you currently reading? Wanting to read?

Probably my favorite thing is Alias. Also digging Bendis’ Daredevil.

Favorite character?

Hamlet. Oh wait, you mean comics character. The Hulk.

Villan? Magneto.

Team? X-Men.

Story?

Hmm, not sure. The first Galactus story, maybe?

As a writer, what is the attraction to the superhero genre in general and Iron Man in particular?

The genre invites us to explore issues of power and morality. It offers us the opportunity to re-imagine the joys and frustrations of our own daily lives in a safely imaginary world of candy-colored surrealism, and has the breadth to take us from beauty to horror and back again.

Iron Man offers this great tension between strength and vulnerability — hard on the outside, soft on the inside. I like Tony and found his voice easy to locate. Even though I’m not a suave zillionaire tech genius, I relate to him.

Tell us a little about your approach to writing. How do you go about coming up with story ideas?

Sometimes it starts as a variation on a well-known literary model — all safely in the public domain, of course. Or with an image. Or a question: “what if this real, recognizable situation happened to a super-hero”? But ultimately I think any really memorable story arises out of a character’s journey from one powerful emotional state to another.

I find it hard to interest myself in stories that arise out of a purely logistical problem: what if Iron Man was trapped in a cube beneath the earth? Or “what if Helmet Face attacked Iron Man again, but this time his helmet was cooler looking?”

If the first installment of “Vegas Bleeds Neon” is any indication, your stories tend to be very character and plot driven. What was your focus going to have been if you had stayed on the Iron Man title? Can you share some of what you had planned?

I didn’t have anything planned; I was never under the impression that I was going to stay on the title. That said, the Vegas story does convey my feel for the character and his milieu.

Do you feel you have a solid grasp on Iron Man and his history?

The important thing is to have the core concept down and a feel for the person inside the costume — or armor, in this case. As you’ll see if you check out the Epic guidelines, Marvel currently discourages new writers from delving too much into the past history of a character. They’d sooner see new stories, even if they repeat classic themes, than ever more baroque

FERROFILES

elaborations of long-ago continuity. As a new reader coming back into the scene after many years away from it, I have to confess that I found a number of the comics I checked out to be completely incomprehensible, because they depended on so much detailed knowledge of past continuity. Comics badly needs to renew its readership base, and this won't happen until the books make crystal-clear sense to new and casual readers. This sometimes means taking a step back from the desires of the most devoted fans, who know the back issues inside out. I recognize that this seems like a bizarre irony, especially when you're one of those fans — which, if you're reading this, you almost certainly are.

Let's turn our attention to Iron Man and Tony Stark. As a writer/creator, what draws you to the character of Tony Stark? Give us a quick rundown of your take on Tony Stark. What drives him?

On a psychological level, Tony's a recovering alcoholic. On a mythic level, he's a man of tin who wonders what life would be like if he only had a heart. Both of these statements get at the same thing: Tony's got a sense of emptiness inside, and that sense drives him to create, to build, to pursue dangerous pleasures, and to perform acts of heroism.

How about Iron Man? Many writers see the two as somewhat dichotomous characters.

Iron Man is a suit that Tony wears, for reasons arising from Tony's motivations and psychology. I don't see a dichotomy at all. Unlike, say, the Hulk, where each side of the character is a projection of the other's fears and hatreds.

Let's play "word association: Tony Stark?"

Millionaire industrialist.

Iron Man? Invincible.

Supporting cast? Hmm...

If you could only use three words to describe Tony Stark, what would they be?

Troubled genius. There, I got it in two.

And Shellhead? Armored troubled genius.

Many fans think that the past several authors have not portrayed the armor at its peak. What is your take on the armor's power level?

The key here is that the current regime at Marvel wants to de-power all of the characters across the board, to make them more believable and relatable, and also to set aside the entire concept of character power levels as something that drives the narrative. Another of the instructions from the Epic line brief is "Don't let the characters' power levels get in the way of a good story."

So it's not that Iron Man has been de-powered relative to other characters in the universe, it's that everyone has been de-powered. Iron Man is still one of the heavy-hitters in the Marvel Universe. Temugin is a serious threat to him not because Iron Man is weak, but because Temugin is strong.

Another point to consider is that Tom Breevoort is extremely hardcore when it comes to the time-honored

rules of action-adventure narrative, so if you, the writer, want to put your hero in a dangerous situation at the end of an issue, Tom's gonna push you to put him in the maximum possible physical jeopardy. Sometimes that means threatening the armor, even though there are some readers who have a power-fantasy identification with the armor and really hate it when it gets trashed.

Who is/are your favorite supporting character(s)?

I'm partial to the pre-War Machine Rhodey.

Favorite Iron Man villain?

Most of his villains have been killed off over the years. It's too bad Justin Hammer is dead, dead, dead. I hope I helped make Temugin a more interesting, hook-laden character the next time a writer wants to use him.

Why do you think Iron Man has endured for almost 40 years?

Because the internal tension within the character is strong. Tony is more like someone you might actually meet than many comic book heroes. And there's also the constituency of people who like imaginary super-tech, much like the sub-group of Trek fandom that rhapsodizes over ship layouts and tech manuals. But he might not endure much longer, unless new readers start picking up the book.

What's your take and/or comment(s) on the whole "losing the secret identity" thing that seems to be in vogue at Marvel?

I don't know anyone who has a secret identity. I can't relate to the problems one faces when one has a secret identity. Some characters need to have the secret ID to remain true to their concepts — Spider-Man would lose a big chunk of his everyman hero appeal if he got outed, for example — but most of them are better off without it. I'm glad Tony shed his secret ID before I came along; it dispensed with a lot of uninteresting plot obstacles. It will certainly make things much easier for the upcoming change in direction.

Ultimate Tony / Iron Man or "Classic Marvel Universe Tony / Iron Man?"

I will cop out completely here and say each is best suited for his particular universe.

It seems that the entertainment industry, as a whole, is becoming more networked, some would even say incestuous, (i.e. comic and video game related television series, movies, mass market paperback tie-ins, etc.) what is your short-term and long-term take on this conglomeration?

Anyone who likes comic book superheroes should fall down on his knees in gratitude that this bombardment of cross-marketing exists, because without licenses and entertainment tie-ins to fill the corporate coffers, the comic companies would likely be on the verge of shutting their doors forever.

In more general terms, the awful thing about the increasingly interconnected, synergistic, big-C corporate entertainment industry is that it's gotten pretty adept at determining what audiences want, and which turns out to be diverting, straightforward genre material that feels edgy enough to be naughty and thrilling but also familiar enough to be reassuring. Delivering these elements

successfully is still easier said than done, which is why the people who can do it reliably make zillions of bucks at it — and why this season of summer blockbusters has mostly stunk worse than a bushel of rotting smelt.

But as far back as we have had mass-market entertainment, there have been a handful of artists who can deliver these basic thrills while at the same time lacing their work with deeper layers of meaning and challenge — Hitchcock, Hawks, Kubrick, Soderbergh... I think these guys throw down the gauntlet to everyone working in a pop culture context, to deliver both the transitory diversion and the resonant moments and images that stick around in our minds forever, shaping us in ways we only partly understand.

There is still fine work being done in the art-house or alternative stream of whichever medium interests you, whether that be music, movies or comics. Sure, you have to seek it out, but art never has an easy time of it. It's not supposed to.

It seems that all things comic related are ripe for development as television and/or movie deals, including our own favorite Armored Avenger. Do you think this is a healthy trend?

It's healthy so long as the TV shows and movies don't suck. So far the track record has been amazingly good. Even the weaker projects seem to attract plenty of licensing and after-market sales. If these comic book movies didn't exist, it's not like there'd be a big wave of big-budget art house movies to take their place. Their niche would be filled by other loud, CGI-laden, simply-told action movies, originating in some other field.

Dream project?

I'd like to find a publisher for *Payne County*, a literary novel about a trio of guys growing up in a town oddly haunted by the specter of death — though I've no doubt blotted my copybook with the lit crowd by attaching my name to games and comic books.

Weirdest or most out there project?

I have an idea for a non-genre comic book called *Feral*, about a gallery owner who specializes in art by notorious criminals, who is faced with a choice between his antisocial ideals and his need for ordinary happiness. I might go ahead and write this simply as an exercise in the form, though I doubt I'd be able to find an artist and publisher for it.

Future plans?

Nothing to announce, comics-wise. The whole comics thing has been a big roller coaster from the get-go, and whatever I think is going to happen with it at this moment will likely be 180° different by the time you publish this interview. And then will reverse itself again a month later...

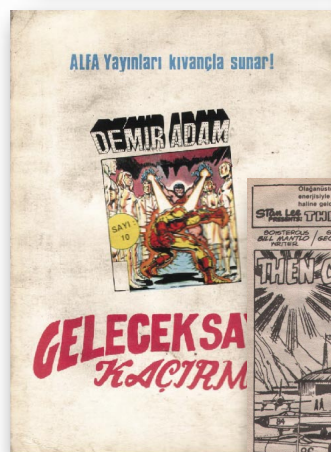
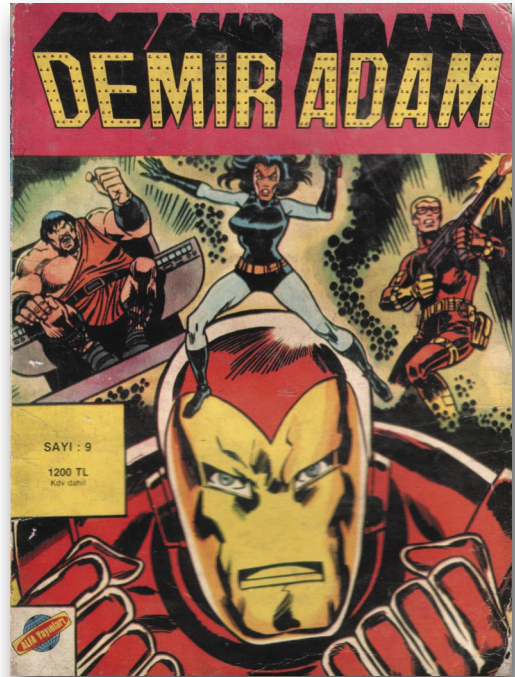
I'm working on a second novel for Games Workshop's Warhammer line, entitled *Sacred Flesh*, featuring the same characters as *Honour of the Grave*.

Finally, I've been away from my gaming tribe for too long, and look forward to working on a game or two during the next year...

Well that's it for this installment of Ferro Files, Ferrofiles! Be sure to check back for next issue- We'll get to find out what makes Shellhead's latest scribe, John Jackson Miller, tick and pick his brains for hints as to what he has in store for our favorite Armored Avenger.

CHRIS FRYE

Images: Holger Hinzberg



Time Nutures all Wounds

by Christian Ruelle

CHAPTER FOUR

It was his first day of work yet Brendon had quickly settled into his duties. Although Rhodey preferred to fill his security ranks with ex-military personnel, they were often intimidated with the futuristic laboratories, cavernous warehouse, blaring factory, and the vast acreage that was Stark/Fujikawa. In Brendon's eyes however, the property hadn't changed much from when he broke into it steal the Mauler Armor. Only now Brendon would spend his work hours studying Rhodey's new security system and curry Stark's favor before he made his move.

"How's it going, Brendon?"

Brendon looked up from his security monitors and at the fellow marine who had given him a second chance.

"I've been staring at these screens for most of the day and I haven't seen squat," Brendon said. "But for the record I'll say it's going slow."

"Tedium's a part of monitor surveillance," Rhodey said. "I'll mark you down for grounds patrol. I'd hate to see you get discouraged and quit my security team."

"I appreciate the offer, Rhodey, but I prefer to stay indoors. I guess I still need time adjusting to freedom."

"Well, as long as it's a health reason," Rhodey shrugged. "Just get over it quickly. I can't show anyone preferential treatment."

"Don't worry, Rhodey," Brendon grinned. "I've got a feeling that I'll be back to my old self in no time."

"That's good to know," Rhodey said. "Now get your agoraphobic butt out of that chair and follow me, the boss wants to see you."

Brendon leaped out of his seat like he was pulled by a rope. "Stark wants to see me?"

"Yeah. He doesn't always greet new employees, but in your case he's making a big exception."

A guard with a coffee mug walked into the room and past Brendon's station. "Hey, Steve," Rhodey called out. "Could you finish that cup over these security monitors?"

Brendon silently gazed out the passenger window of Rhodey's car as they drove to Stark/Fujikawa's main building. "So is Stark Iron Man or not?" Brendon asked.

Rhodey glanced at Brendon and returned to watching the road. "What made you ask that?"

"Well, after all these years Stark goes public with his shenanigans in that iron suit, but you told the parole board that it wasn't true. So, which is it?"

After a moment's silence Rhodey looked at Brendon. "Tony wasn't always Iron Man."

Brendon looked away from the scenery and folded his arms across his chest. "So you weren't pulling the wool over the parole board's eyes. I guess that wasn't Stark I surrendered to either."

"Yeah," Rhodey said. "That was someone else."

"Who?" Brendon asked, now glaring at Rhodey. "It was you, wasn't it?"

"I've never worn that armor," Rhodey said. "Tony's hired several fighter pilots to be Iron Man. Most of them are dead now."

Tony and Rumiko exited the main building and were descending the stairs to their waiting limousine when Rhodey's car drove into view.

"You don't mind if we stay a minute, Ru?" Tony asked. "Rhodey's bringing someone that I have to meet."

"Are you kidding?" Rumiko smiled. "It gives me the chance to set a reservation at Bayard's. It's been three days and you haven't had to fight a kyoujin. This calls for a celebration!"

Rumiko took her cell phone out of her coat pocket and stepped away from Tony. At that moment Rhodey's car pulled up and its two occupants stepped out.

"Mr. Doyle, I presume?" Tony grinned as he offered his hand.

Brendon stepped forward and gave Tony a firm handshake. "Mr. Stark, I've been looking forward to meeting you ever since I was granted parole. I want you to know that I'll repay you for your confidence."

"I'm glad to hear that," Tony said. "But you should know that people who start out repaying me always end up paying with interest."

"We've got ourselves a diamond in the rough," Rhodey said. "Brendon's behaving like were housing the Constitution."

"It sounds like Rhodey's faith in you wasn't unfounded."

"No sir," Brendon grinned. "The Marine Corps instilled within us a sense of trust and fellowship." Brendon turned to Rhodey and jabbed him on the shoulder. "Semper Fi."

"That's very stirring," Tony said, "but Ms. Fujikawa and I have to leave. Good luck with your parole, Mr. Doyle. I'm certain you'll make the most of it."

"I intend to do just that, Mr. Stark," Brendon called out as Tony and Rumiko stepped into the limousine.

"So that was Doyle?" Rumiko asked as the limousine drove through the security gates.

"The one and only," Tony answered.

"Charming guy," Rumiko said sarcastically.

"Are you still upset that I hired him?"

"No, Tony," Rumiko said bitterly. "I'm just upset that he didn't stab you to death."

"Give him a chance," Tony smiled. "That's what he's planning."

Brendon arrived at Stark/Fujikawa the next morning an hour before the day shift. The night watch would be the only personnel on site, and Brendon knew they'd be anxious to get home.

A grin spread across Brendon's face as he swiped his time card across the clock. Today he would kill Stark and earn a day's wage.

As Brendon walked towards his station, he greeted the departing night watch. Brendon joked about last night's sitcoms while they mumbled and shuffled towards the clock. Brendon reached his station, turned on the computers, and proceeded to hack into the security system. Although Stark/Fujikawa was as renowned for its secure computer system as it was for its technology, Rhodey had given Brendon a copy of its the companies security manual, enabling the computer literate parolee the shortcuts he needed to plant a virus that would shut down the security systems and unlock the vaults in the warehouse. It was all scheduled to happen at 1 o'clock in the afternoon...Brendon's lunch hour.

Tony Stark arrived at the main building at 8 o'clock with Rumiko and Pepper. They had just entered the lobby when Tony took Rumiko's hand and gently pulled her towards him.

"Can you manage things without me?" Tony asked. "I have some work to finish in my personal laboratory."

"Are you asking me this because I poured out my frustrations about my family, or because you didn't take my advice about hiring parolees?" Rumiko asked with a grin.

"Certainly not," Tony said. "I'm asking because underneath your party girl image is a brilliant businesswoman."

"Thanks for the motivational speech, hero," Rumiko laughed as she placed her hand on Tony's cheek. "Now run along to your lab and try not blow this place to the moon."

Tony walked away and Pepper stepped forward, waiting for Tony to get out of earshot so she could speak freely.

"He can't be serious, leaving you in charge for the day!"

"Again with the criticism, Pep?" Rumiko asked with a huff. "I'm beginning to suspect that you're in correspondence with my family."

"Then I'm glad I'm not the only one who knows you're just a spoiled child!"

Rumiko glanced around the lobby and saw the stares from the executives who had just arrived. "This isn't the time or the place to have this discussion. If you still want to argue, pick another time."

"I take lunch at 1 o'clock," Pepper said. "We'll talk then if it doesn't interrupt your manicure."

"Fine," Rumiko said bitterly. "Until then...get to work."

The Avengers Quinjet flew over the Atlantic Ocean with the speed of a lightning bolt. At the controls were Captain America and Carol Danvers, known as the superheroine Warbird. Accompanying them were Thor, the Scarlet Witch, and the artificial being known as Vision.

"We'll enter French airspace in twenty minutes, Cap," Warbird said. "Does this bring back any memories of D-Day?"

"I'm just as scared as I was then." Cap answered with a grin.

"Thou art frightened, captain?" Thor asked with surprise. "In all the years I hath fought alongside thee, never hath I seen a more courageous warrior!"

"I don't think a god, and a Norse god like you could understand," Cap said. "But every soldier is scared before a battle. All the combat experience and even a super-soldier formula won't change that. It's what a soldier does with the fear that determines how he'll act in battle."

"Ha!" Thor laughed. "Such qualms may trouble a mortal warrior, yet I hath no such troubles. I yearn for the dust of the battlefield. The clangor of steel. And the cries of the combatants!"

"Thor...I'm glad you're on our side," Warbird said quietly.

A blip appeared on the Quinjet's radar, attracting Captain America and Warbird's attention.

"We have an unknown object approaching with incredible speed," Cap announced.

"Perhaps Thor's soliloquy inspired Valhalla's residents to join us," Scarlet Witch quipped.

"The more the merrier," Thor grinned.

"Attention unidentified object," Cap said into his headset. "We have picked you up on radar and our weapons are locked on you. State your intentions or we'll open fire."

"I was only hoping to catch a ride," Iron Man said.

"Tony," Cap said startled. "I thought you needed to finish those projects."

"My work's never going to get a patent if Ultron wipes out humanity. Now could you slow down and let me in?"

The Quinjet reduced speed. A roof panel slid open and Iron Man slowly lowered himself inside.

"Welcome, Tony," Vision said in his monotone voice. "We didn't expect you to join us for this mission, but I'm glad you arrived unannounced."

"Thanks. So what's the situation in Russia?"

"We were right about Ultron's attacks on the military being a smokescreen," Cap said. "The Russians have moved their military out of their major cities. That allowed Ultron to seize control of a modernized factory in Moscow. Satellite infrared shows that he's preparing to mass produce a new army of Ultrons."

"Sounds grim," Iron Man said. "What's our E.T.A.?"

"Thirty five minutes."

"That long? I should have kept on flying!"

Brendon may have appeared to be studying his security monitors, but he was really focused on his watch. Within a few hours the virus he planted in the security system would go into effect, but every minute felt like an eternity. Brendon clenched his hands and gazed into space, imagining himself entering the warehouse vaults and taking back what he now considered to be his property. Then he would make Stark suffer for all the taunts from the convicts and for the years that he lost. Then Brendon remembered that Rhodey said Stark wasn't Iron Man during that encounter. Rhodey had to be telling the truth. Rhodey was the only person who had ever been honest with him. Brendon suddenly snapped out of his thoughts when he felt blood seeping out of his palms.

"Mornin', Brendon."

The sound of Rhodey's approaching voice made Brendon quickly fold his arms across his chest. Brendon managed a calm smile as Rhodey stopped at his security station.

"H...hey, Rhodey." Brendon stammered.

Rhodey's expression changed from cordial to shock in a heartbeat. "My God. Are you ok?"

"I'm fine," Brendon said as beads of sweat formed on his forehead. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"Your hands," Rhodey pointed. "They're bleeding."

Brendon reached for the box of Kleenex beside his security monitors. "Jeeze. I must've...cut myself. I picked up some broken glass from the parking lot."

"You better run down to the infirmary," Rhodey advised. "I'll get somebody to cover for you."

"No thanks," Brendon muttered as he wiped his hands. "These cuts aren't that deep."

"Well, next time call grounds keeping. You're here to provide security, not..."

"Rhodey!" A guard shouted from the hallway. "I think you should see this!"

Rhodey ran towards the rec room with Brendon close behind. They found several employees looking up at the TV in the corner. CNN was broadcasting live images of a battle scared factory in Moscow. Flames outside the factory lit up the night and numerous laser blasts could be seen inside.

"What's going on?" Rhodey asked.

"The Avengers are fighting that Ultron robot in Russia," a maintenance worker said.

"And get this, the boss is with 'em!"

"Tony?" Rhodey asked, but I saw him drive in today, it's impossible!"

"Look for yourself." another guard said. "There he is!"

The room was silent as Iron Man flew into view, firing repulsor blasts at several robotic copies of Ultron.

Brendon grabbed Rhodey by the shirt and pulled him back. "You told me Stark wasn't Iron Man!"

Rhodey forcibly removed Brendon's hand and stared him down. "Listen. That's not Tony. I saw him arrive at 8 o'clock."

"So did I", said a guard. "Him and Ms. Fujikawa. Pepper was with them too."

"Then what the bloody hell is going on here?" Brendon asked.

"Damned if I know," the maintenance worker said. "But this beats watching the talk shows."

The battle against Ultron had been lengthy, but the Avengers succeeded in chasing him off. The few robotic copies that Ultron created were destroyed along with the computer program Ultron used to activate the factory. The Avengers were now helping the Moscow Fire Department extinguish the flames in and around the devastated building.

"Curse that Automaton!" Thor shouted. "Fleeing the field of battle! Despite his metal shell, Ultron art as cowardly as the many villains we hath opposed!"

"What counts is that Ultron lost," Captain America said with a calm hand on Thor's broad shoulder. "He won't be building an army of duplicates here. And the factories that can mass produce them will now be on guard."

"Cap's right," Scarlet Witch said as she brushed the dirt and smoke from her costume. "I think the locales can take it from here."

"Fine," Cap said. "The State Department will want a report on this incident. I'll arrange a meeting on the flight back to New York."

"Have you seen the others?" Scarlet Witch asked looking about the charred ruins.

"There be Iron Man standing vigil to the west," Thor said. "Warbird flies overhead, yet she begins to descend from the sky to hath words with our armored friend."

When the smoke of battle cleared, Warbird had seen that Iron Man was standing a great distance from the other Avengers. She flew gracefully to the ground and walked over him. "Tony?" Warbird asked. Not bothering to say the name Iron Man since Tony had revealed his identity to the world some weeks ago and they were in a foreign country, "Is anything wrong?"

"No." Iron Man said after a moment's silence.

"Are you scanning for a counter attack from Ultron?"

"I've already scanned the city's airspace, and haven't detected Ultron's ship."

"He escaped again huh?" Warbird chuckled. "I bet Thor's already gone on a tantrum"

about it."

A news helicopter hovered closer for a camera shot, sending dirt and small debris flying towards Iron Man and Warbird.

"Jeeze!" Warbird shouted as she covered her eyes. "The fight's over, guys! Don't you have any other news to cover here in Europe?"

Iron Man looked up and stared at the dozens of news helicopters flying around the Avengers. "Those live shots are being sent to news stations across the globe. Every person in the world saw us defeat one of our most persistent foes."

"Yeah, join the Avengers and you join the circus," Warbird grumbled as she brushed her blond mane. "I think I've got glass in my hair. Look, Vision is landing the Quinjet, let's go home, Tony."

"I'll be right behind you." Iron Man said as he waved to the cameras.

Brendon managed to keep the security jeep under the Stark/Fujikawa's speed limit of twenty miles and parked outside the warehouse. He had asked one of the guards to cover his station so he could squeeze a few extra minutes of lunchtime, but food wasn't on Brendon's mind. As he walked through the warehouse doors he looked at his watch, and then up at the clock above the main desk. The time on both read 2:57.

"Brendon, right?" asked the guard at the main desk. "I heard Rhodey talking about you. Said you both served in Southeast Asia."

"Yeah, we did," Brendon said as he walked over to the desk. He had to stomach just three more minutes of cajoling his coworkers.

"You must've seen a lot of action," the guard grinned. "Hey, what kind of gun did you use? How many kills do you have?"

Brendon blinked. That's when he took a good look at the guard. He was just a kid, maybe about 23. "I carried all kinds of guns," Brendon said. "I don't know how many I killed over there."

"Hey, Buddy. You can relax. I was in the Army. Tried that money for college route, but I never saw any action. So come on, was it just like the movies?"

Brendon shook his head in disgust. There's no way Rhodey would have a kid, and an idiot like this one, on his security team. Maybe the kid was a guard's nephew. The guy would've told Rhodey he had a nephew who dropped out of college and needed a job, the kid had some army experience and if Rhodey could convince Stark, he'd keep an eye on the kid and make sure he did his job. Rhodey was like that, granting favors for people who didn't deserve them.

"I'm not wasting anymore breath on you," Brendon spat. "Now shut up."

The grin on the kid's face disappeared and he began to rise out of his chair. "What? You want some of this?"

Brendon looked the kid over and then at the clock behind him...The timing was perfect. The alarms went off and the computer screens flashed and went clear. The lights went off and the emergency lights activated.

"Whoa," the kid said with wide eyes. "What's going on? An earthquake?"

Brendon punched the kid square in the face, breaking his nose. The kid fell back into his chair. Brendon leapt over the desk and gave him a karate blow to the side of the head, rendering the kid unconscious.

Brendon ran down the stairs to sublevel 2 of the warehouse. He knew that Stark would place it back in its original vault. Since Brendon surrendered it to Stark, there wouldn't be a need to build a new hiding place or change the code.

Brendon arrived at his destination. It felt like he had turned back the hands of time. Only now he wouldn't make the same mistake. The experiences at Rykers made sure he'd never forget that mistake. Brendon punched in the code and the doors slid open. There just as it had been years ago...was the Mauler Armor.

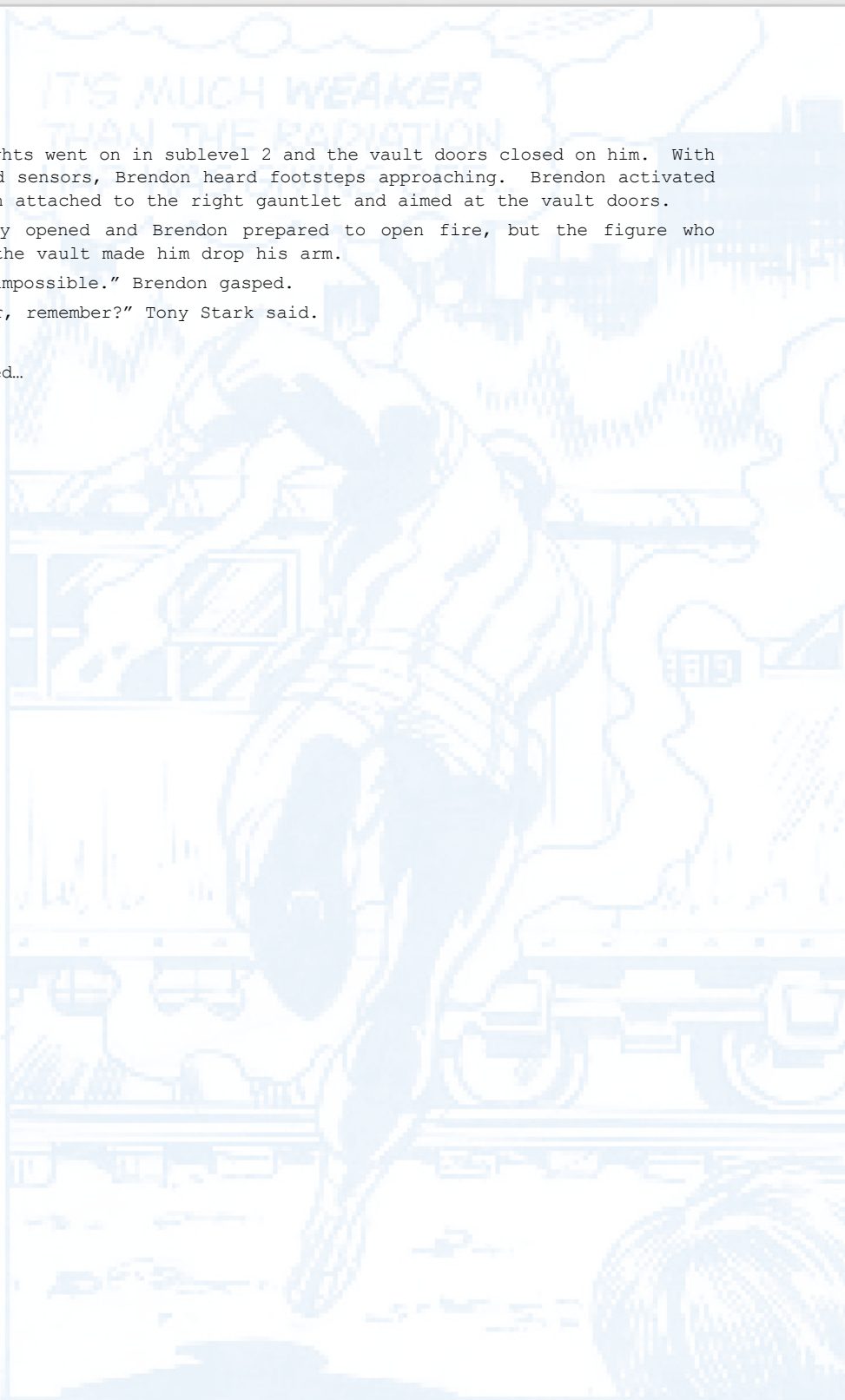
Brendon put the silver and blue armor on as quickly as possible. It wouldn't take the technicians long to fix the bug in the security system. Dressed in full armor Brendon donned his helmet. First Brendon checked the power levels. It registered at 100%. Then he checked the weapons systems. It also registered 100%. Finally he checked life support. Again it registered 100%.

Suddenly the lights went on in sublevel 2 and the vault doors closed on him. With the armor's sound sensors, Brendon heard footsteps approaching. Brendon activated the laser cannon attached to the right gauntlet and aimed at the vault doors. The doors slowly opened and Brendon prepared to open fire, but the figure who stepped inside the vault made him drop his arm.

"It's...bloody impossible." Brendon gasped.

"That's my armor, remember?" Tony Stark said.

To be continued...



"THERE! NOW IT CAN EXPLODE HARMLESSLY WITHOUT ENDAN-

AND WITH THAT OUT OF THE WAY I CAN RUSH HAPPY BACK TO THE HOSPITAL.

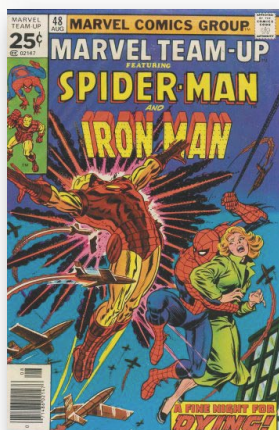
#15 THE WANDERINGS OF THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN *by cousture*



Bonjour and welcome to my humble column dedicated to the many appearances of Iron Man in mags other than his own.

With his second movie in the making, Spider-Man is the coolest hero around these days. Kids are all Spidey-crazy (I should know, I'm a primary school teacher - Spidey hats, Spidey shirts, Spidey pencil cases, Spidey shoes, there seems to be no end to this craze. Spidey is as big today, or perhaps even bigger, than Batman was in the early 1990s. I resisted as long as I could folks, but I decided to finally give in to popular pressure. Since you can't beat them, join them... right?

Iron Man and Spidey have worked together on quite a few occasions in the past. Here are some of their most memorable adventures together.



MARVEL TEAM-UP #48-51

THE STORY

There's a mad bomber on the loose and the police are completely baffled by the case. His latest objective was the Stark International jet fuel tank reservoirs. The following explosion sends Spidey (who just happened to be in the neighbourhood) flying across the sky, only to be rescued at the last second by Iron Man.

The two heroes are then recruited by police captain Jean De Wolff. She's in the middle of debriefing them when the three characters are attacked by a mysterious hooded man calling himself The Wraith, a new villain who is able to manipulate the mind of others and make them see any hallucination he wishes them to see. The Wraith disappears before IM and Spidey get a chance to apprehend him, so the two heroes decide to ask the help of someone perhaps more suited in this kind of case, the master of the mystic arts, Doctor Strange. I can't tell you much more without revealing the ultimate plot twists so I'll shut up now.

WHAT'S COOL?

Aside from being an entertaining story featuring Iron Man and Spider-Man, you mean? Glad you asked, 'cause there's more actually.

Remember the Midas take-over of Stark International (IM #103-107)? If you were like me when you read these issues, you probably asked yourself who the heck was that Jean De Wolff cop lady and that Wraith guy who were helping Tony?!? These issues answer your questions and also explain the origin of their relationship with Shellhead.

As far as I know, this is the first meeting between IM and Spidey, without the rest of the Avengers around. Their relationship knows a very rocky beginning (which makes it very interesting), but it gets better as the plot moves along. On top of that, before the story is over, you'll also catch glimpses of J.J. Jameson (one scene between him and Parker in the courtroom is hilarious), Professor X, Moondragon, Daredevil, the Hulk and Nick Fury. All in all, a fun read.

WHAT'S BAAAAD?

Keep in mind that this is an early 1970s comic. The story is a bit cheesy, there are a lot of technological doohickeys that don't make much sense and some of the so-called detective techniques used to solve the crime are... well... wacky.

The art is all right...not Sal Buscema's best, but still all right. I really love the first two covers though, even if the scenes depicted on them don't actually occur in the comics.

A Fine Night For Dying Aug 1976

Madness is all in the Mind Sept 1976

The Mystery of the Wraith! Oct 1976

The Trail of the Wraith! Nov 1976

Story: Bill Mantlo

Art: Sal Buscema & Mike Esposito

QUOTE

When Iron Man suspects him of being involved in the mysterious bombings, Spidey replies:

"Of all the Avengers, it's you and Thor who get me most! The high and mighty founding fathers of a venerable old team, preaching about respecting each other's privacy — and then coming down on ME because I like to hold on to mine! Ask the Vision or the Scarlet Witch or Moondragon which side I'm on, pal — and then take your suspicions and buzz off!"



Marvel Team-Up #72

- Crack of the Whip!

August 1978

Writert: Bill Mantlo

Artist: Jim Mooney

Cover: John Byrne/Bob Layton

QUOTE

Iron Man says:

“Whiplash! So that explains why you summoned me in on this case, Jean! If my old foe is back working as a paid assassin—then so is the organization he used to work for... the Maggia!”

MARVEL TEAM-UP #72

THE STORY

It is not absolutely necessary to have read MTU #48-51 to understand this one, but it does make it much more enjoyable if you know what's happened before.

When Spider-Man attempts to stop a robbery, he is shot with drugged bullets that seriously dull his senses. But Spidey nonetheless manages to throw the robbers' getaway truck on its side. He is then attacked by Whiplash who seriously wounds the groggy hero. Before blacking out, Spidey manages to throw a spider-tracer on the bad guy's back.

When Spidey wakes up, he's surrounded by doctors, police captain Jean De Wolff and Iron Man (who has been called on the scene because of his expertise in dealing with Whiplash). IM correctly deduces that Whiplash's presence points to the involvement of the Maggia! Just wait until you see who Whiplash's Maggia boss is... no, it's not Madame Masque!

WHAT'S COOL?

Once more, a fun read, despite the basic simplicity of the story. Whiplash was a fun villain, even though he was still a bit of a pushover back then. But as you well know, he later evolves into Blacklash and becomes much more of a serious threat to IM.

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.



THE VIBRANIUM VENDETTA

THE STORY

Instead of giving you a short overview of this story (and in so doing, inevitably selling off some of the twists and punches), I'll simply give you a list of some of the most interesting characters and briefly tell you what their agenda is. That way, you'll get the idea of what's going on, who's involved, but you'll have no idea what the heck happens. Clever, no? ;-)

Roxxon Oil: The infamous company (along with Jonas Hale) is back with a new revolutionary material called "nuform", a synthetic metal that imitates the properties of the very rare and expensive vibranium. They're planning to market it very soon, but what they're not telling the public is that the new compound has the nasty habit of degenerating into "Arctic vibranium" which melts all metals in its immediate vicinity. Can you imagine that happening to skyscrapers, airplanes, bridges? Well, Roxxon doesn't give a damn as long as it can make a quick buck.

Arthur Dearborn: Yup, he's back too, still at Roxxon's employ, still as blind as ever to the company's dirty dealings. And if Dearborn is back, can Sunturion be far away?

The Black Panther: T'Challa is a very nervous man. If the rumours are true, if Roxxon really has discovered a way to create a cheap substitute to vibranium, then his country (the world's sole source of vibranium) is in big trouble.

The Vibranium Vendetta 1991

Amazing Spider-Man Annual #25

- The Spider and the Ghost

Writer: David Michelinie

Penciler: Guang Yap

Inker: Jeff Albrecht

Spectacular Spider-Man Annual #11

- The Ghost and the Machine

Writer: David Michelinie

Artist: Marie Severin

Web of Spider-Man Annual #7

- The Machine and the Man

Writer: David Michelinie

Penciler: Guang Yap

Inkers: Aiken & LaRosa

QUOTE

After being hired by the Kingpin, the Ghost says:

"I'll accept your fee for stealing their secrets! The destruction... I'll do for free!"

UPCOMING WANDERINGS

Do I need to tell you to check out JLA-Avengers by Busiek and Pérez, one of the most anticipated and most talked about mini-series in comic-books history? I didn't think so. Here's hoping IM fights somebody cool, not that Steel loser...

As for me, in our next issue I will be reviewing (for your reading pleasure) some more comics featuring good old War Machine! Don't miss it!

That's it for now. I hope these reviews will be useful tips to you. 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>

Check out my "Wanderings of Iron Man" page to access all of my past columns for A.I. as well as some new and exclusive reviews.

Hope to hear from you and *bonne lecture!*

The Ghost: One of IM's all-time greatest foe's been hired by the Kingpin to steal the uniform formula from Roxxon and cause enough destruction to set the company back a few years, enough time for the Kingpin to come up with his own version of it.

Ultron-13: Shortly after his defeat at the hands of the Avengers West (AWC #68), Ultron escapes the Guardsmen who were escorting him back to the Vault. He needs to find a new gambit to destroy all life on Earth, and he finds it... synthesized vibranium is just what he needs to build his invincible robotic army, and he's not going to let anyone stand in his way.

Iron Man and Spidey: Throw them in the mix and what you get is the Vibranium Vendetta. What more can I say?

WHAT'S COOL?

Whaddaya mean, what's cool? Isn't it obvious? This is a story written by David Michelinie for starters, generally acclaimed as THE best writer to ever tackle Iron Man (and who also did an amazing job on the Spider-Man book, he's the creator of Carnage after all!) It features The Ghost and Surturion, two of IM's coolest villains EVER! It also features Ultron, truly one of the most powerful and interesting foe the Avengers have ever fought. You get the Black Panther and Spidey on top of all that, and you still wanna know what's cool?? Maaaaan... tough customers!

I should also mention that the three covers are drawn by Spidey artist extraordinaire and creator of the Savage Dragon; Erik Larson. Verrrrrry nice.

WHAT'S BAAAAD?

Okay, so this is a very cool story. But, aside from the covers, the art is not great. I wouldn't say it's bad either, just that it's not great. Part two, in particular, is below par, in my modest opinion. It's a shame such a cool story didn't get the great art it deserved. It would've made it an instant classic. But let's not forget that, in those days, Marvel often hired completely unknown artists for its annuals and the final result was not always a pleasant surprise.

There's another thing that bugs me, but to explain my point, I'm going to have to go political on y'all, so forgive me in advance.

Michelinie writes another story in all three annuals, a shorter one featuring the Outlaws (a team composed of Silver Sable, Rocket Racer, Prowler and Will-O-The-Wisp). I don't care much for these characters to begin with, but this particular mission was of interest to me because it takes them to my beautiful homeland: Québec. In the story, the Outlaws must infiltrate the hideout of a «political extremist» and a «zealot» who's kidnapped the daughter of some Canadian member of Parliament. Michelinie seems to have a thing for imaginary Québécois «political extremists», because he wrote another story about that, in the pages of Justice League Task Force, in which the heroes had to combat evil French-Canadian «extremists» and «separatists». That issue in question actually created quite a bit of a scandal here when it came out.

I know this is just fiction, but still... it shows a great deal of ignorance for the political situation of Québec and also vehiculates stupid stereotypes about us (the Québécois bad guy is made to look like a stereotyped Frenchman, curly mustache and all, for Pete's sake). It would be like somebody writing a story in which the Defenders must battle the evil and extremist Republicans from Texas... imagine the stir! When it looks and smells too much like biased political propaganda, that's what it is. This story, in my humble opinion, greatly insults the democratic nature of Québec sovereignists. Yes, some people here wish to see the province secede from Canada in a democratic fashion and it's got nothing to do with extremism, kidnapping or terrorism in any way.

So, Mr. Michelinie, I'm a great fan of your work, but in your next Québec story (I do hope there is one), please leave the political lunatics aside, ok? Thanks! And if you need a hand to make it look more genuine and less insulting, drop me a mail! Chuck Austen appreciated my help recently in writing a more believable Northstar, so I'm sure you would too.