

ADVANCED IRON

#54
2002



A.I. #54 Table of Contents



COVER by Bill Meiggs & Scott Brooks



FERRO FILES by Chris Frye features an interview with new IM scribe **MIKE GRELL!!**



HUBE'S SHELLHEADISMs by Dave Huber showcases a visit to New York City...and the apartment of **SEAN CHEN!!**



STARK REMARKS by Mike Kalibabky discusses the villains in the "Armor Wars" thatgot away??



THE CARIBBEAN CONNECTION CGI art by Welshcat!



THE RAMBLINGS OF THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN by Patrick Couture looks at IM's other appearances in the Marvel Universe!



"THE RETURN" original Iron Man comic story by Brad Lyons continues...in color now!!



RAMBLINGS OF THE... INCOMPREHENSIBLE IRON MAN by Welshcat!



INVINCIBLE...?? by Pat Couture



BEST OF THE BEST by Dave Huber & Pat Couture raps about Tony Stark's best all-time girlfriends!



ORIGINAL COVER ART by Scott Brooks & Bill Meiggs!

Ferro Files



Happy New Year Ferrophiles! Hope you had a truly joyous Christmas filled with many happy memories, pleasant time with friends and family, good food and an abundance of holiday cheer.

The New Year marks the dawning of a new "Iron Age" for Shellhead and ferrophiles, as the creative team of writer Mike Grell and artist Michael Ryan debut with, fittingly enough, January's issue 50.

Though the numbering of the current volume remains, Marvel Editor Tom Brevoort, quoted at the Marvel Website and in other interviews, sees the arrival of the new creative team as a sort of "relaunch" for the Golden Avenger. In fact, during the first six months of 2002, Marvel is unofficially dedicating its resources to shining the spotlight on Tony Stark and his newly armored alter ego, Iron Man.

Celebrating the 50 issue milestone with an anniversary-sized issue, #55 will also be an oversized issue, which includes a story written and illustrated by new Ironscribe Mike Grell. The reason for two extra-sized issues? Under E-I-C Joe Quesada's "dual issue number initiative," Iron Man volume 3, issue 55 would mark Iron Man's 400th volume 1 appearance.

Iron Man will be getting high profile exposure in other Marvel books as well. Shellhead will appear in the "Enemy of the State II" storyline running in issues 41-44 of the critically acclaimed and immensely enjoyable Black Panther series. Writer Christopher Priest promises one entire issue will feature a "knockdown drag out" between T'Challa and Tony. Also, the "real" Ultimate version of Tony Stark and Iron Man will make their debut in Ultimates #1, the revamped Avengers of the Ultimate Marvel universe.

Only time will tell how well the new team's run will be received, but if early fan response and industry buzz are any indication, 2002 could well be the beginning of a new "Iron Era."



MARVEL
COM

BLACK PANTHER #41 COVER BY SAL VELLUTO & BOB ALMOND

Ferro Files

Now Ferrophiles, on to our exclusive interview with new Iron Man scribe, Mike Grell-



AI- Tell us a little about the person, Mike Grell.

I'm married to a wonderful friend, Lauri. We have a bouncing 19 year-old son, Torrin, born the year I created the character Torin Mac Quillon in *STARSLAYER*, although Lauri and I didn't meet until years later and she does NOT read comics. We live in Lake Stevens, WA, north of Seattle, where we raise Friesian horses, the big, black horses you've seen in *LADYHAWKE* and *MASK OF ZORRO* (Despite the line in *Zorro* stating that the horse was a "black Andalusian stallion", it was really played by three Friesian geldings and one Mexican mustang for the bucking sequence).

We both perform with a medieval action troupe called *THE SEATTLE KNIGHTS*, jousting and sword fighting (see their website www.seattleknights.com for photos of us in action).

AI- How did you go about breaking into the field of comics?

Badly. I started out aiming for a newspaper strip and darned near missed, except for assisting on *BRENDA STARR* in the early '70's and doing *TARZAN* from '81-'83. In 1973, I went to the New York Comicon and met Allen Asherman and Irv Novick. They liked my portfolio and told me to get my carcass up to Julie Schwartz's office. Julie greeted me with his usual warmth: "What the hell makes you think you can draw comics?"-- then called Joe Orlando in to review my portfolio and Joe gave me an *Aquaman* script to draw.

AI- During the 1980's, you were one of the most successful and well-known writer/artists in the independent market, with your creation: *Jon Sable*. What do you think contributed to your success as an independent producer?

Like the bumble bee, I never read a book on aerodynamics. I recognized the relative unfairness in the industry and saw independents as a means of correcting things. I was the first to sign with Pacific, but my book came out second because Jack Kirby could draw an issue in about the time it took you to read it. I was the second creator to sign with First Comics, because -- despite Pacific's problems -- I refused to believe independent publishing wasn't the answer, and because my old pal Mike Gold was editor. Beyond that, though, I made a conscious decision to turn away from superheroes and fantasy and anchor my new character SABLE in the real world. (I was also a little tired of skintight suits and it took me years to learn how to NOT draw bulging muscles.) I fully expected to lose half my audience and was pleasantly surprised to find that they had grown along with me. On occasion, I confess, I have written just for the money and tailored my stories for a particular audience (Hey, I did SPAWN, right?), but my best material has been done for an audience of one: me. I try to write the kind of stories I'd like to read. I'm just lucky enough that a lot of people have the same tastes.

AI- You are also closely associated with DC's "Green Arrow," as well as "The Warlord" during this time. What are some of the differences, both positive and negative, between working for one of the "Big 2" versus producing a creator owned book with a smaller company?

There's always a certain comfort factor in knowing that, even if the sales on the book are borderline, you're still going to get paid in full. On the other hand, I don't know a single creator who hasn't got a pet project squirreled away somewhere that they'll only do for an independent, because they don't want to surrender the rights or sacrifice creativity for editorial policy. When it works right, both can have great benefits... or drawbacks. As an independent, you get a greater percentage of the money, but there may not be much left after expenses. With a major publisher, you'll always get your paycheck, but you may not get the big bucks from a movie or toy deal.

AI- Throughout the early 90's, we only saw sporadic and brief output by Mike Grell (re. Shaman's Tears & Maggie the Cat). Again, you published your creations with an independent publisher (Image Comics). Can you share a little about your experience with Image (compared to and contrasted with First)?

The biggest difference was in the numbers. When I did SHAMAN'S TEARS and MAGGIE THE CAT, I hired Mike Gold to act as in-house editor on the projects, because I believe being your own editor is the certain road to disaster.

AI- What do you see as the contributing factor to the brevity of these projects?

The frantic collector craze. People were buying comics sealed in mylar bags, never to be opened, on the bet that they'd increase in value and the collector would be sitting on the next hot collector's item. Todd McFarlane boasted to me that he had fans bringing comics to be signed that they had never even read (It wouldn't be "MINT" anymore, would it?). Here's a tip: Anything that exists in an edition of 500,000 is NOT a collectible. As soon as the first speculator tried to resell one of his "collectibles" to a dealer, the dealer probably pulled out a box full of them at 50 cents. There went the market. Sales dropped below the profit margin, and that was it. Comics today are struggling to sell half what we sold in 1973.

AI- From the mid-to-late 90's until now, the comic industry witnessed the virtual disappearance of many creators, yourself included. What happened to you? What were you doing/where were you focusing your creative energies during this time?

I began concentrating on writing and painting. I recently published my first novel, SABLE, and got a sale on a screenplay on the same subject. I've written a couple more screenplays which are getting some serious interest, and am working on another SABLE novel along with a couple more projects.

AI- What brought about your return to the field of comics?

My old pal and agent Ken Levin has a great relationship with Marvel, and he knew I was interested in getting back to the comic racks. After a meeting in New York, he gave me the heads up that I could expect a call from Marvel.

AI- In the past, some of your projects were closely associated with independent publishers. This could indicate a fiercely protective streak or a dislike for the "Big 2" and their policies. Now, after a long absence from the scene, you are writing a major character for Marvel. Any comments about your return to the "majors," so to speak?

It's really no different from doing THE LONGBOW HUNTERS or BATMAN MASQUE. Taking an assignment with a major publisher doesn't make me a whore (Okay, maybe SPAWN did.) and it doesn't mean I believe any less in the right of creators to benefit from their creations.

AI- After never doing Marvel characters before, why Iron Man?

Why not? I suppose, if given the choice, I'd pick CAPTAIN AMERICA or BLACK WIDOW as my favorite Marvel characters, but they weren't offered and Iron Man was.

AI- How have you gone about researching Tony Stark's/Iron Man's history?

Hey, I was there at the beginning. We're talking my childhood here. (Well... okay, post-adolescence, pre-girls... you get the idea.) Couple that with a solid editorial

relationship with Tom Brevoort and the loan of a giant stack of back issues from my pal Phillip Anderson at Artwork World (see www.artworkworld.com) who handles a lot of my art, so he has a vested interest in seeing that I get it right. I've managed to get the hang of it. Tom can always be relied on to keep me from straying too far off the path.

AI- Do you feel you have a solid grasp on the character and his history?

Egghead builds super armor, joins AA but still loses company and girl. Yeah, I think I've got it.

AI- What will your main focus be when writing Iron Man, the man or the armor?

You can't have one without the other, but it seems like the man has been overshadowed by the armor. My main focus is going to be on the *man* in the Iron Man. One of the things I always liked about Tony Stark was that, apart from his intellect, he was pretty much an ordinary guy... until he put on the armor. It made him more identifiable with the readers. He also had a major human frailty, a heart that couldn't sustain his life without periodic recharging. The heart's gone now, replaced by a mechanical version, but I've restored that human weakness by requiring him to recharge or die. Pretty much like before, but now the recharging period can be anywhere from 24-48 hours, depending on how much energy he uses. He can draw energy from his armor while wearing it, but he can also deplete his power source as Iron Man, further endangering his life. In other words, if he uses all his power to perform some heroic act, it could cost him his life.

As I said before, I like the basic humanity of the guy, and his human weaknesses. At the early stages of his career as an inventor/boy genius he pursued a lot of things that he probably shouldn't have, almost as a mental exercise just to see if he could. I'm bringing him face-to-face with some of the demons from his past and a few new ones. Physically, he's Joe Less-Than-Average (he now has a neck smaller than his thigh and no longer wears a size 3 7/8 hat), still athletic but with a serious heart problem that could kill him at any moment. It makes him more aware of the important things in life and maybe a little desperate to make a difference.

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

Not at all. They are one and the same, nothing schizo about it... BUT... As Iron Man Tony can be free to experience all the things he's missing, the rush of flying, the thrill of battle and the satisfaction of just kicking the crap out of some son of a bitch who really deserves it. As Iron Man, Tony becomes a modern knight-in-shining-armor.

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

Sexy Bill Gates?!??

AI- And Shellhead?

Tony's inner child.

AI- In your research, did you gain an appreciation for a particular Iron Man storyline?

Well, it may be purist, but I always liked the origin.

AI- Did any single issue stand out?

Well, I hope #50 will. I also liked the Sentient Armor storyline, right up until it ripped its heart out. I felt it took away that element of human frailty that was at the - uh - *heart* of the character.

AI- Who is your favorite supporting character?

I always thought Tony should have wound up with Pepper.

AI- Favorite villain?

The Black Widow, when they were at odds. Even when they weren't.

AI- Will you be building any of your stories on what has come before?

Of course. When you're dealing with an icon of the comic industry, you can't reject decades of history as if they never existed. There's a lot of great material to draw on for inspiration.

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

I think people like him because at the heart of the character is an ordinary guy who just happens to have done an extraordinary thing. Along the way he's struggled to overcome serious physical and emotional problems and, maybe best of all, (he) hasn't always done exactly the right thing... but he sure as hell tried.

AI- What kind of contribution to Shellhead's mythos do you see yourself making?

That's like asking: "How do you think history will remember you?" Only time will tell.

AI- Will you be doing any artwork on the book...covers perhaps?



Yes. At this moment there are no concrete plans for covers, but it's been discussed. I will be illustrating a 12 page story I'm writing for issue #55 (#400 under the old numbering system.)

AI- Any comments about your cohort, Michael Ryan? He's not exactly the most well known creator.

He will be. Michael's complex designs and attention to detail are amazing. After seeing what he did with an exploding airplane, I no longer have reservations about writing scenes that would be beyond the range of a lot of artists... including myself.

Now and then, like when I'm writing a scene involving a split panel showing a big parade in Chinatown above an elaborate drug manufacturing complex below the streets, I find myself thinking "Better him than me."

AI- We know, from advanced press, that your first storyline deals with Tony investigating the murders of homeless Europeans, in a war ravaged country, with the possibility that weapons Tony created in the past are being used to commit the crimes. What can readers look forward to next?

Look for the return of an old nemesis with a new twist in issues 53,54 & 55, entitled "BOOK OF THE TEN RINGS". And the back-up in 55 is a pip. (Ed. Note- This marks Mike's first professional work for Marvel as an artist.)

AI- Other than new armor at the beginning of your tenure, any other tantalizing tidbits you can share exclusively with A.I. readers?

The next story arc (after the Mandarin makes his reappearance) will re-connect Tony and Rumiko and send Iron Man into a nightmare world of Ty Stone's imagination.

AI- Well ferrophiles, that does it for me. Sounds like Mr. Grell has given us quite a bit to look forward to. A.I. and I want to thank Mike for his willingness to answer our questions, as well as for the time he took out of his busy schedule to answer them. Until next time- *Chris.*

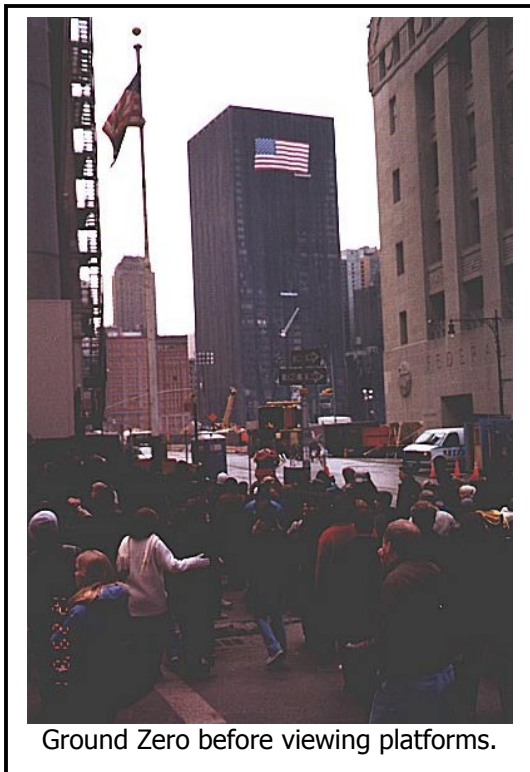


HUBE'S SHELLHEADISMS

I LOVE THIS TOWN!!

The first time I visited **New York City** was back in 1985. I was playing in a band (I was a junior in college) and our guitar player's brother lived on 56th street. We went up to listen to some bands, drink, and generally have a nutty 'ol time. I didn't visit again until 2001, when my father-in-law from Costa Rica was visiting. He wanted to see the Big Apple,

and my wife and I obliged. Most of that trip was focused on seeing the **Statue of Liberty** and hanging around **Battery Park**. And, the twin towers of the **World Trade Center**, which were only a few blocks away. This was only *two weeks* prior to September 11, folks.



Ground Zero before viewing platforms.

I just got back from my 3rd sojourn there. I suppose the main thing I noticed was a **much friendlier attitude** among the residents. Whether this is due to **9/11** or the revitalization of the city since **Rudy Giuliani's** term, I cannot say. Probably a combo of both, based on what a few people told me. For example, there was our hotel bellhop, Fausto, who talked about the day of 9/11 at length. I asked him if he lived Manhattan, to which he said, "No, the Bronx." He then added on his own, "Before Giuliani, the subways were a mess. Dangerous. Now, they're clean and getting to work is no hassle."

Ground Zero was well protected. There were **cops everywhere**, and **viewing platforms** were almost done being constructed so that people could see the wreckage up close. These were actually

completed on the second day of my visit (I visited GZ on my first full day), but a couple of cabbies told me that the lines to get on the platforms were up to five blocks long! As you can see, without the platforms, glimpses of the **Tower remains** were limited. Still, the view kept improving as we moved around the area, the last one being the most revealing. The whole area is over 10 acres, so you can imagine the size of this in a cramped territory like Manhattan. In addition,

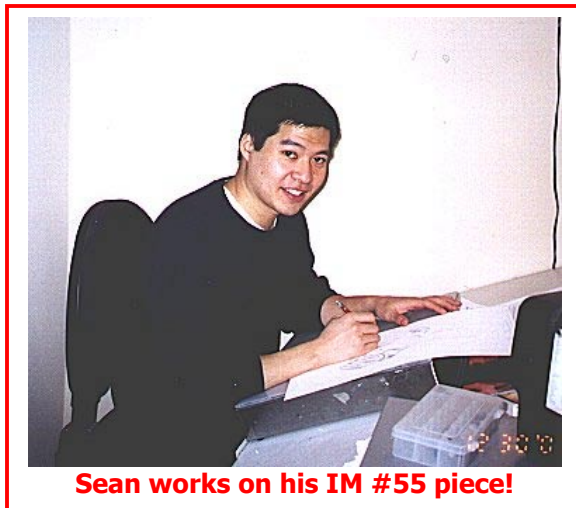
the **makeshift memorials** were at times overwhelming. They ringed virtually the **whole perimeter** of Ground Zero. Posters from classrooms from across the nation were there, missing person notices, and sympathy cards were in abundance. It was indeed solemn.

SEAN CHEN – AT HOME

I was hoping to get a quick visit in to **Marvel's offices**, but alas it was impossible. I arrived in NYC late Friday afternoon (12/28), and Marvel closed shop at 3pm that day, not to reopen until January 2nd. Just my luck. But hold on! Several times in the past I had asked former **Iron Man** artist extraordinaire **Sean Chen** about getting together in NYC since he did the book. Nothing had ever worked out – until now! Before I left for the Big Apple, I e-mailed Sean about meeting, and he graciously agreed. I called him as soon as arrived Friday afternoon (still hoping I wasn't too late to see Marvel), but he wasn't in. I left a message and he returned my call while I was at dinner. He sadly informed me about Marvel's vacation time, but cordially invited me over to his humble abode Sunday afternoon! Can you say, "All riight!" ??



Memorial adjacent to Ground Zero.



Sean works on his IM #55 piece!

My wife Grettel and daughter Vanessa had accompanied me to NYC, along with another has-an-only-child-that-is-a-daughter couple who we got to know quite well via our daughters' dance classes. While our wives and daughters did the female "shopping thing," Roger (the other dad) and I snagged a cab and headed off to Sean's place. (No, I *won't* reveal where he lives, you ninnyes! 丿) What I *will* reveal is that his apartment was very very nice – Sean himself had **made most of the furniture!** He

stated that this is a hobby of his, and that his parents have a shop in Maryland where he can woodwork at his leisure. In the corner of the main room was **Sean's drawing table**, complete with a huge show window right in back of it, with a magnificent view of the **Empire State Building**. To the left of the drawing table was a small bookshelf with many reference books and guides (about subjects like planes, cars, etc.). On the left wall was a large bookshelf (made by

Sean himself) complete with works of all subjects and authors, most of which were not art related.



Sean was working on an **Iron Man** pic as we entered! Why? Well, as **A.I.** reported via **A.I.M.** (**Advanced Iron Mailer**) back on December 14, **George Tuska** will have an **IM pin-up** in issue #55....**and so will Sean!** As a matter of fact, **so will many past IM artists**, Sean revealed, **since #55 is IM's 400th issue overall.** Sean also has just finished an issue of his current title, **Wolverine**, of which he had a complete photocopy. Geez, I gotta tell 'ya, flipping through those pages sure made me yearn for Mr. Chen's pencils back on our favorite armored Avenger!

Speaking of *Wolverine*, I'm sure most of you know that **Frank Tieri** – recently departed **IM** scribe – writes it. Sean showed Roger and I a copy of Frank's most recent plot, and it was interesting how Sean scribbles small little doodles right on the pages of the plot to get his ideas flowing. It looked like the next step was laying out various panels on what can best be described as a gridded sheet of paper, criss-crossed by roughly 10 lines across and up & down. Looking through Frank's plot it was clear that Tieri gives his artist quite a bit of creative "leeway" in determining the pages' layout. In other words, his plot was very general, at least much more general than others I have seen from other writers. Certainly this is not a good or bad thing, just a case of personal preference. I'm sure many artists appreciate creative leeway such as Frank's.

I KNEW I SAW HER SOMEPLACE BEFORE....!

Who? **Rumiko Fujikawa**, that's who. I must be like the only Iron Fan who dug this chick. Maybe it's because Sean Chen draws her so beautifully. Maybe it's 'cause I think Asian women are absolutely stunning. Maybe it's 'cause....nah. Is it? I never made the connection, until.....

According to Sean, Rumiko's "look" is patterned after Asian porn star **Kobe Tai!** If you've ever surfed an adult site, however briefly (oh, right – quit saying "Not me! Never!"), there's a good chance you've seen her. And boy, talk about a resemblance! Kobe has recently gone "legit," acting in bit parts on TV shows, and



The stunning Kobe Tai.



Kobe's analogue...?

according to Sean, has done voices in some animé programs. (Geez, remember that compromising position in which Stark caught Rumiko and "friend" Ty Stone...?)

I'd like to once again wish Sean a very happy engagement – he is now engaged to longtime girlfriend Julia! Congratulations! And one last thing: I certainly wouldn't want to mess with Sean – the guy is pumped! His arms are about the size of my legs! He must be busy working out to those Schwarzenegger videos in between those *Wolverine* pages! Whoa!

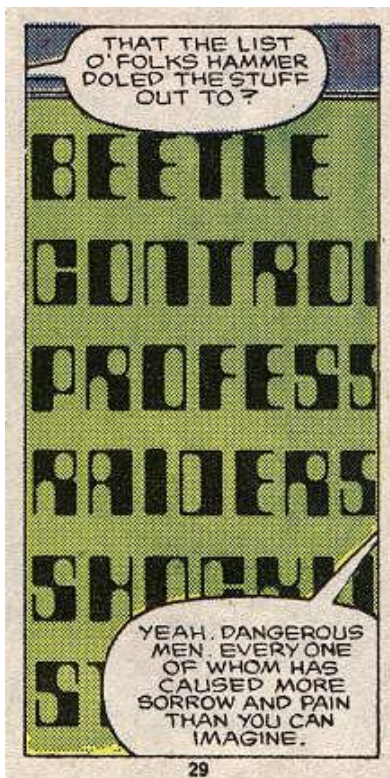
-Hube



The Ones Who Got Away

How I overlooked it until now, I'll never know. After reading **IRON MAN 225** and **226 -- "Stark Wars" ("Armor Wars")**, **Parts One and Two** -- for the umpteenth time recently, I noticed something astonishing: a couple of armored baddies employing Stark's Iron Man technology had slipped through the cracks!

It was easy to miss, too, unless a reader read both **225 and 226** in one sitting.



In issue 225, on page 29, panel 6, Tony and Rhodey look at a computer file which lists the names of armored who bought the **stolen Iron Man technology** designs from **Justin Hammer**. Two of the names, partially obscured in panel 6, also appear on a printout that Stark downloaded from the **West Coast Avengers database**; namely, **Professor Power** and **Shockwave**. Cameos of this duo are presented on page 9, panel 1. However, in issue 226, page 13, panel 7, Tony again reviews the West Coast Avengers file, only this time Professor Power -- listed as "Power, Anthony" -- is ruled out as a receiver of the pirated technology, because it's stated that his name hadn't appeared on the Hammer file! Surely an innocent oversight by **David Michelinie and Bob Layton**.

Then I got to thinking: would either **Professor Power** or **Shockwave** have posed much of a threat to Iron Man?

Professor Anthony Power was a brilliant historian, diplomatic advisor to U. S. presidents, and a patriot of the highest degree -- until his severely traumatized son Matthew returned home from the **Vietnam War**. In an attempt to help his son, Power enlisted the assistance of **Charles Xavier**.

Matthew's psyche ultimately became a battlefield on which Xavier clashed with **Mentallo**, resulting in the young man's death. Grief stricken to the point of irrationality, Power, with the financial backing and technical support of several sympathetic American businessmen and scientists, transferred his mind into the body of his deceased son. Donning a specially-designed, high-powered body armor, **Professor Power** vowed revenge upon Charles Xavier and his **X-Men**.

Power's armor gives its wearer the powers of flight, super-strength, and laser-beam projection. Clearly, the suit is vastly inferior to the **Model VIII Mark I (Silver Centurion) Iron Man armor**.



Because Power had a solid source of independent funding and scientific aid for his anti-mutant crusade, it's doubtful he would seek out additional help from the likes of Justin Hammer.

Interesting note. Currently in the pages of **THUNDERBOLTS**, notably **issue 58**, **Mentallo** and a band of escaped supervillians -- one of whom is **Hawkeye!** -- are currently in the process of obtaining

"the greatest weapon on Earth, courtesy of the late and not-at-all lamented Justin Hammer!" I mentioned to T-BOLTS writer **Fabian Nicienza**, via a message board post, that I hoped like heck that this "weapon" has some link to the original **"Stark Wars"/"Armor Wars."** His reply: **"We'll see."** I'm thrilled to

pieces! Start checking out THUNDERBOLTS.

I asked **Iron Scribe David Michelinie** if he had any thoughts, comments, or background on the character of **Shockwave**. He didn't. In fact, I had a difficult time trying to find anything whatsoever on this particular armor-clad warrior. Out of desperation, I posted an online plea for info on Shockwave -- and I got it!



Secret agent **Lancaster Sneed** suffered severe injuries from a shrapnel burst during a mission in North Africa. As part of his rehabilitation, Sneed's body was rebuilt with metal plates. He, however, was deemed medically and psychologically unfit for active duty, and, as a result, dropped out of sight, fleeing to the Orient where he honed his already-keen martial arts skills and developed an electrically-charged exoskeleton which emitted "shockwaves" when brought into contact with his flailing fists and feet. Sneed joined a traveling carnival as a martial arts sensation but quickly tired of his sideshow status and soon joined the ranks as an operative for hire, putting him on a collision course with **Shang-Chi**, Marvel's master of Kung Fu and son of Dr. Fu Manchu!

A comparison between Shockwave's battlesuit and Iron Man's armor is laughable, especially when one considers that Shang-Chi once easily defeated Shockwave by **simply knocking him into a pool of water: Zzzt!!!!**

It's reasonably safe to assume that the rig worn by Shockwave wasn't advanced enough to even accept **Iron Man technology!**

Conclusion: Neither **Professor Power** nor **Shockwave** posed a significant enough threat to warrant a visit from our **Invincible Iron Man** during the "**Stark Wars.**" Lucky for them.

MIKE KALIBABKY
5325 McNiven Rd.
Chisholm, MN 55719
e-mail: wrdslngr@uslink.net

LAST MINUTE ADDITION TO “STARK REMARKS!”

Marvel Legends Custom Cover Sketch Cards by Bob Layton!

The recent **2001 Marvel Legends card set** featured a Custom Cover Sketch subset, highlighting various Marvel characters drawn by a number of well-known artists. And wouldn't you know: the **Iron Man subset** was rendered by one of the greatest Iron Artists ever, **Bob Layton!**

As far as I know, there are at least five Layton cards in the subset: **Iron Man**, **Doc Doom**, **Pepper Potts**, **Happy Hogan**, and **Jim Rhodes**. I chatted with one card collector in the know, and he stated that the **Layton cards sell for anywhere between \$100 and \$300!** I was able grab a few card images from various sources. Enjoy!



THE INVINCIBLE
IRON MAN



Action, Intrigue and Glamour in

THE CARIBBEAN CONNECTION

WELSHCAT 2001



Bonjour! If you're like me and **you simply can't get enough iron in your diet**, if IM back issues are simply not enough to satiate your thirst for **Stark action**, then this column is for you. As per usual, I'll review three **cool comics featuring our good buddy Iron Man** for you. Okay, so I don't exclusively review cool comics, but it just so happens that this time, all three of them **are**. The issues are from a quarterly series that started in **1990** under the title "**Marvel Super-heroes**". Each seasonal issue featured between three and six stories, each about a different Marvel character. On at least **three occasions**, **Shell-head** was featured in the pages of MSH, in **summer 90, spring 92 and spring 93**.

* * *

MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #2

"Cold Feelings" – Summer 1990

Story: Bob Denatale

Penciler: Larry Alexander

Inker: Chris Ivy



the story:

Let's **travel back in time** to the days shortly following the **Armor Wars**... when **Stark** was wearing that cool **red and gold armor** that had replaced its **silver centurion** predecessor. Miss those days? Then you'll get a kick out of this. The story begins with **Stark** arguing with **Edgar Eliot**, a representative of the **defence department**. **Stark Enterprises** has developed a new **rocket engine** and the government wants it exclusively. **Stark** declines of course, he's been out of the weapons trade for years and he has no intention of going back.

That answer does not satisfy **Mr. Eliot**, to say the least. He returns to **SE** under the cover of night and gains access to the premises thanks to a security guard that is **actually on his payroll**. If the obsessive **Eliot** can't have the rocket, **no one will!** Using a **powerful acid** as his means of sabotage, he unwittingly causes the engine to **blow up**, releasing the new and powerful coolant. In a matter of minutes, the entire area is turned into a **gigantic ice storm**. You guessed it, this is a job for **Iron Man!**



what's cool:

The coolest thing about this comic has got to be the cover. I have no idea who did it, but he or she has got major talent. As you can see on the right, this is **one sweet IM pin-up**. The cover just by itself is worth the small price you'll probably pay for this comic! As for the art inside... well... it's okay. If you liked that period of **Stark's** life and if you miss **SE** and **Mrs. Arborgast**, you'll get a kick out of this story. Some of the other stories in this issue are interesting also. There's a cool **Rogue** story involving **Mystique**, a fun **Tigra** story (**I love Tigra**) in which she must rescue her father and finally a pretty cool **Falcon** story that involves **Stane International** and a trio of armored gentlemen called the **Iron Trinity**.



WHAT'S BAAAAAD:

Well, as I said, the art of the IM story is **okay**. No more and no less. As for the story, well, **the whole thing is a bit silly really**... a rocket engine coolant causing a full-blown ice storm? I dunno... I think melancholy for the old days made me enjoy this one, really...



Stark says: **"I'm sorry Mr. Eliot. I gave up making weapons a long time ago. It's not a part of my past I'm particularly proud of. I'm not about to turn around and help the military in its mad scheme to militarize space. On the contrary, I'm going to do my best to keep it peaceful and put it in the hands of the private sector."** (Are you reading this Dubya?)

MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #9

“The applicant” – Spring 1992

Writer: Kurt Busiek, yes you heard me right, **Kurt Busiek!**

Penciler: James W. Fry III

Inker: Karl Kesel



the story:

Did you ever want to read **the very first Iron Man tale Kurt Busiek** ever wrote? **We'll forget IM vol.3 #1** because **THIS one is it buddy!** Not only that, but this is the very tale that inspired the talented writer to come up with the story to the acclaimed mini-series **MARVELS** (the series that rediscovered **Marvel heroes** through the eyes of ordinary people). **As if that wasn't enough to make you crave this book**, I'll go on and tell you all about the story...

His name is **Chester Harrigan**. He's been working as a mechanic for **Stark Enterprises** for almost 3 years and just like he has been doing every month since he got hired, today **Chester** is applying for a new position. He wants to be **Iron Man**.



The next morning, when his phone rings, **Chester** is asked to replace **Stark's** chauffeur for the day. He knows **Stark** got to be real good friends with his first chauffeur and he figures this is his big chance to get a shot at the **Iron Man** job. Before the day is through, **Stark's** car (with both men inside) will get ripped to shreds by an **armored terrorist** calling himself **Skullcrasher** and **Chester** will get to see **some actual Iron Man** action up real close and personal!



what's cool:

This is a very cool story, by an **extremely talented writer** and a pair of **damn fine artists**. **Tony, Rhodey** and **Iron Man** look absolutely great... **ah! The memories!** On top of that, this issue also features a **fun tale about the West Coast Avengers** and you'll get some more **Iron Man** in that one too since he was a member at the time! The cover is by that **Keith** guy, you

know? The creator of the **Maxx**? Only he could get away with those proportions (compare the size of Iron Man's hands to the size of his head and you'll see what I mean) ;-)



WHAT'S BAAAAAD: Well, if I really have to find something bad about this book, I guess I'll go with **the third story** featuring **Thor**... if you're suffering from insomnia, this story will work better than any sleeping pill you can find on the market! And don't get me started on the art...



Chester thinks to himself: **"I've admired Iron Man for years. He's different from the others. Sure, Thor, Captain America – those guys are heroes too, but you can't BE Thor or Cap, can you? But there's a guy in that suit. A guy like me."** (Now there's a thought that has crossed every Iron fan's mind at least once in his or her life).

MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #13

"THE ALL-IRON MAN ISSUE OF MSH" – Spring 1993
and "Gold Fever"

"The Sting"

Writer: Jim Owsley

Penciler: Greg Laroque

Inker: Vince Colletta

Writer: Kurt Busiek

Penciler: James Fry III

Penciler: Jim Sanders III



the story: **Two Iron Man**

stories in an 80-page long comic celebrating 30 years of Iron Man!

Got your attention? Good!

The first story takes place some time prior to **Iron Man #167**. **Stark** is late for a test flight! As he roller-skates in front of **Mrs. Arbogast's** desk, **Iron Man** gets told off big time (**man, I miss that woman**). The test flight then gets under way but while they're flying over the Atlantic, **Stark's** test pilot reveals **he's a spy** and ejects **Tony** out of the plane. Two **armored men** retrieve the



industrialist only to brutally deliver him on **an uncharted little island** where he is met by the man behind the theft, his long time nemesis... **Justin Hammer!**

Hammer plans to steal the plane and leave our hero stranded on the island. What he doesn't know is that **Stark** had foreseen all of this. While the plane begins its **self-destruct sequence**, **Rhodey** delivers the armor to his owner. What **Stark** hadn't planned on though, is that **the volcano on the island would erupt**, threatening the inhabitants. Before going after **Hammer**, **Iron Man** must battle this powerful force of nature.

The second story (written by none other than **Kurt Busiek**) takes us back to the days of the **Silver Centurion armor (YESSSSS!)**, shortly prior to **Iron Man #215**. The story begins with **Iron Man** fishing a car out of a river in Greece. Turns out that the driver is a P.I. with whom **Rhodey** served in Nam and whom had been hired by **Circuit Maximus** weeks before to investigate the **heist of several gold shipments**. Now, with **Iron Man** on the job, it won't take long to discover that the man behind the thefts is none other than one of his oldest enemies, **Midas!** But he is **not as you remember him...**



what's cool:

This is a must have, guys. Let's face it, it's not every day you get **TWO untold tales of Iron Man's past**, in which he fights two of his most merciless rivals, **Justin Hammer and Midas!** The stories make sense and **fit perfectly well** in IM continuity. The **Busiek** story illustrates how well the man knows his IM history. And I don't know about you guys, but for me it was **GREATER THAN GREAT** to see **the Silver Centurion armor** (my all-time favourite) back in action! Also, this story may turn out to be very important, especially after the recent appearance in the pages of **Marvel Boy #1** of a mysterious man wearing a golden IM armor and who owns a company called the "**Midas Foundation**". **Is Midas back?** On top of these two great stories, you get **four awesome IM pinups** by **Kevin Hopgood, Bruce Patterson, Gene Colan and Don Heck**. As if all those goodies weren't enough, you also get an **AWESOME cover** featuring many of IM's past armors. Cool stuff indeed!



WHAT'S BAAAAAD:

Nothing's bad about this one... the only thing that slightly disappointed me in **the second story** is that **Midas** doesn't use the word "**sir**" in every sentence like he used to... an oversight perhaps? Coming from **Busiek**, it seems surprising.



Midas boasts: **"I believe I'll make a slight change in my plans, Iron Man. Rather than simply concentrating on cornering the world's gold supply – I'll allow myself the luxury of revenge."**

* * *

UPCOMING WANDERINGS:

There are some **intriguing Iron Man** appearances on the horizon for us, Iron fans! Coming in January, Marvel is going to offer us not one but TWO alternate versions of our favourite character. On the right is the new **Ultimate Iron Man** that will be making his *début* in the pages of «**The Ultimates #1**». It sure looks a lot cooler than **Mike Allred**'s attempt! Also in January, the new **Marvel Mangaverse** will be introducing the new **Iron Girl**... you can already glimpse at her by visiting my site. In February, don't miss the Shell Head / Wolvie team-up in **Black Panther #41**!!

As for me, in my next column I will be taking a look at three very cool **WAR MACHINE** appearances! Fans of **Rhodey** won't want to miss this one! That's coming up in the pages of **Advanced Iron #55**!!

Many thanks to all those of you who have been sending their questions, comments, arguments, suggestions of issues they'd like to see reviewed and also to those who wrote simply to say **bonjour**. It's always a pleasure to hear from Iron fans from around the world. You can always send me a message at cousture@yahoo.com. And while I'm at it, I cordially invite you to visit **my Iron Man web site** (yes, this is my traditional shameless plug) at the following address:

<http://www.geocities.com/poppyslaw>

Check out my "**Wanderings of Iron Man**" section, where you'll be able to access **all of my past columns** for A.I. as well as **some new and exclusive reviews** never before seen in these pages. If the site is not accessible, please try again an hour later. Geocities has been trying to squeeze money out of us by limiting our amount of byte transfer. I hope to find a new home for my site before long. I'll keep you posted.

Bonne lecture and happy New Year mes amis!



SPECIAL ADDITION TO THE WANDERINGS OF IRON MAN COLUMN!!!

It's always so cool to hear from you guys. One of the most faithful readers of my column and huge Iron Man fan himself, Mr. **Hugo V. Negron**, keeps in touch with me regularly and it's always a pleasure to hear from him. Upon seeing on my site that I would be reviewing three issues of the «**Marvel Super Heroes**» series in this issue of A.I., he's informed me that three more issues have also featured Iron Man in their pages. Here's Hugo himself with the details:

Marvel Super Heroes Special Edition #15: Do you recall **Iron Man Annual #10**, "Atlantis Attacks"? In this annual, there was a small back-up story entitled, "Can You Top This?" in which several of **IM**'s old baddies were at a bar sharing stories of their defeats at the hands of our armored hero. This was more of an art-pin up series of drawings than an actual story. Well, there was one drawing of a guy decked out in a purplish costume torturing some old man who was chained up while **Iron Man** is shown swooping in from the back. I didn't recall this scene OR the villain from any of my **IM** issues, so I actually found this scene - in **Marvel Super Heroes #15!** When **Stark** puts the ixnay on a satellite program because of costly power supply problems, the scientist in charge of the cancelled program tries to find a viable power supply. He ends up coming across "**Inoshiro Kondo of Ranma, Inc**", a baddie who, with the use of the mysterious element Z, can transform from "flesh to smoke and from smoke to crude oil". Oh, on top of that his hands can turn into razor sharp diamond claws. A rather corny enemy, but hey, in the end you find out **Kondo** was being protected and empowered by **Mi Yu of the Shinma** (remember the **Face Thief**?? I'm just a big fan of continuity) **Len Kaminski** was the writer, with **Keith Pollard** the artist. Not a bad story at all (despite the corny villain and his corny powers/costume), and we get to see **Tony** "whoop it up" at various exotic locales with various exotic females until the ending battle scenes.

Marvel Super Heroes #14: Sigh... surprising that **Dave Micheline** wrote this one! **Stark** builds a sonic drill and a cult of monkish looking "Luddite" weirdoes bent against modern technology try to sabotage it. One member, brother **Seraph**, has the uncanny ability to emit electrical impulses and affect mechanical devices from pop machines to (naturally) our **IM**'s armor! Simple stuff, and pretty boring, but hey, we get to see **Cybil** the publication gal again (remember **Endotherm**? - At least I think its the same gal).

Marvel Super Heroes #8: Okay. First off, this is probably the worst story ever written if taken within the context of continuity or any level of seriousness. If you take it for a joke, it's STILL bad! I'll admit I laughed, but only because it was so horrible....and that's including the hopelessly hokey **Steve Ditko** art! **Iron Man** meets 15 year old (I'm not kidding) buck-toothed **Squirrel Girl**! Yep, that's right! **Squirrel Girl**, who wants to be his partner. She has a tail, a "knuckle spike", a sharp tooth that can bite through most anything, and has the power to control and communicate with squirrels! Together they take on **Dr. Doom** and hand him (in the words of **IM**): "the most inglorious defeat of his career". Maybe this is one of those "make believe" stories, right? Sheesh! In the words of **Squirrel Girl**: "Chitty Chik Chuk".

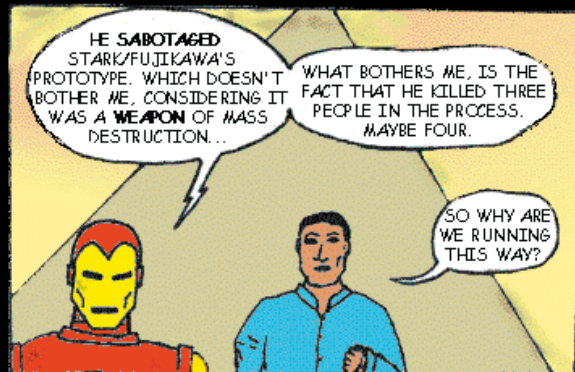
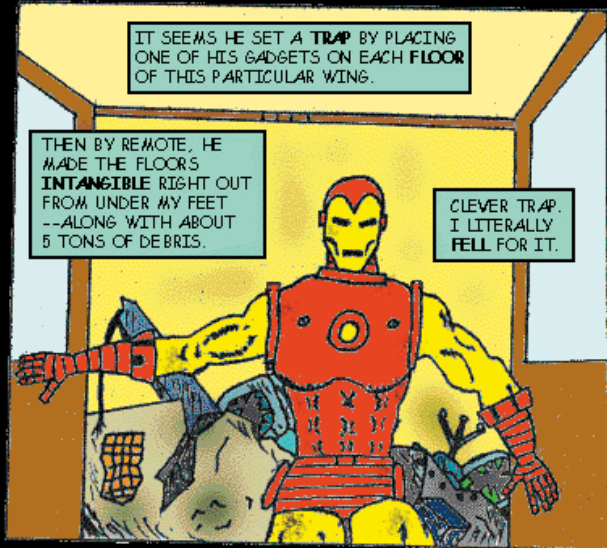
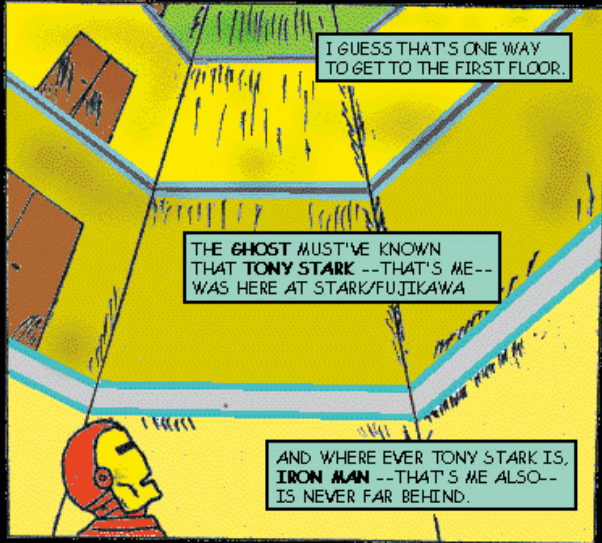
Well, there you have it! Hopefully this can add to your wonderful column on various **IM** appearances. Sincerely yours, **Hugo V. Negron**.

Now in color!!

Page 1 was done a while back *before* I figured out the gradient tool. So don't mind the gradient overkill in pages 2, 3, and 4-- I'm still experimenting. Let me know what you think on the message boards!!

THE INVINCIBLE

IRON MAN



THE RETURN

KICKRASH

IRON MAN
YOU ARE THE
SABOTUER!

RHODEY
IS THAT--

THE EIDOLON
WARWEAR!
BUT HOW?

HOW DARE YOU SET FOOT ON FUJIKAWA PROPERTY! I NEVER THOUGHT STARK WOULD GO AS FAR AS TO HAVE HIS IRON LACKEY DESTROY OUR PROTOTYPE!

POW



LADY, I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, BUT I THINK YOU HAVE ME CONFUSED WITH A GHOST.

SHRAK



NOT A SCRATCH.



FOOL! I SAW YOU WITH MY OWN TWO EYES DEMOLISH THE WEST WING. OUR SECURITY CAMERAS RECORDED THE ENTIRE INCIDENT!



THEN IF YOU RECORDED IT, YOU SHOULD'VE SEEN THE GHOST AS WELL.

MS. FUJIKAWA! WAIT!

MS. FUJIKAWA? -- RUMIKO?! THEN THAT WOULD EXPLAIN WHY WANG SAID SHE WAS DEAD --

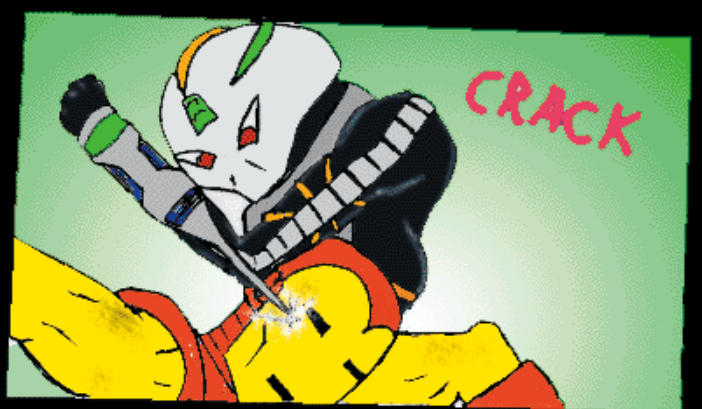
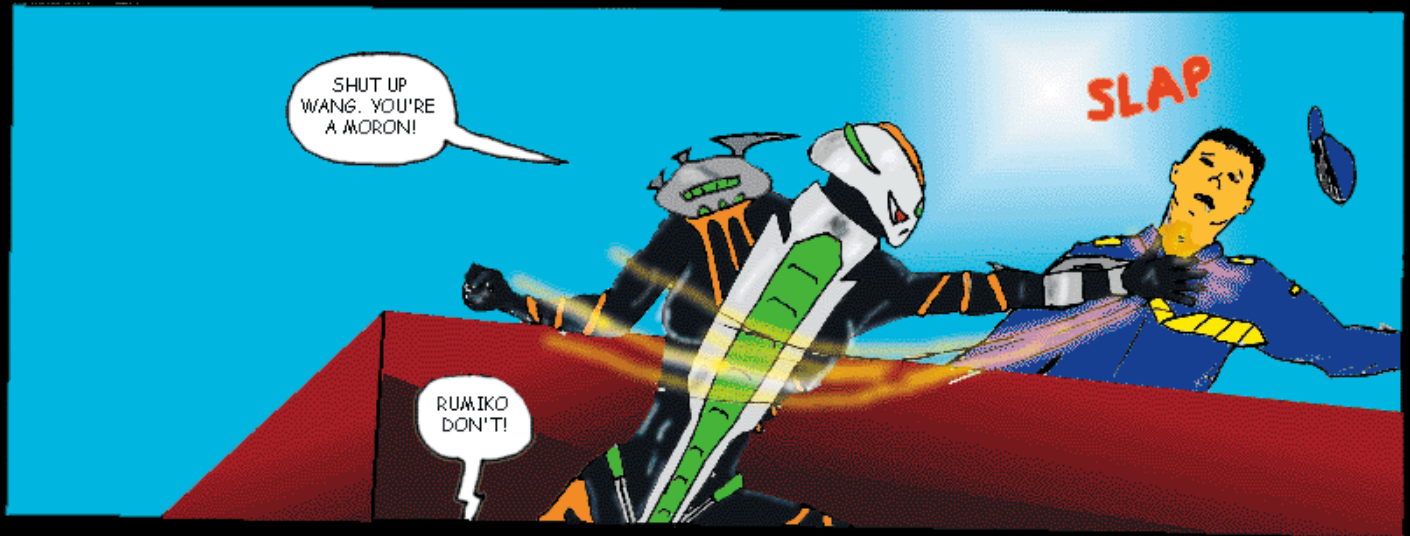
WHEN RHODEY EXPLAINED HOW HE ACQUIRED THE WARWEAR IN THE FIRST PLACE, HE SAID HE HAD ACTUALLY DIED FOR A SHORT PERIOD WHEN THE SUIT BONDED WITH HIM.



AS FOR HOW AND WHY RU BECAME BONDED WITH IT IS AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT STORY.

IT'S TRUE -- THERE WAS SOMEONE ELSE. I SAW HIM. SEE FOR YOUR... WHA?... IT'S NOT HERE!

BLAST! THE GHOST MUST'VE GOTTEN TO THE VIDEO FIRST.



The ramblings of the Incomprehensible Iron Man

A brief and irreverent look at Tony Stark's college years!

By Welshcat

Note: this is merely intended as a parody on college stereotypes, with no disrespect intended towards any of the people named within.

Chapter 1



Teen Tony. That's what they all called him, even though this was the last year that he would be a teenager. But the nick-name stuck - perhaps because of the nice alliteration it had, and more so, because the foppish sound would somehow inappropriately epitomise his entire time spent at college during his joint Electrical Engineering and Computing degree.

Tony Stark - a brilliant prodigy since his formative years, when his parents, Howard and Maria, now deceased, bought him his first Multi-kit Meccano set and he swiftly proceeded to build what looked like a makeshift battle armour out of various metal pieces and a few nuts and bolts. He always liked to take things apart and put them back together again, though not all his attempts were of the same degree of success, particularly his alarm clock, his toaster, his central heating system or his father's pacemaker, to name but a few! Now however, he was ready to take on the world - show them what he was made of - to be a man! Yes, his classmates would



gasps in admiration at his technical skills that were far beyond any of his peers. All the girls would swoon over him, while the other guys on the course would be silently raging in jealousy, yet bearing a grudging respect. He could imagine it all right now. He would become Anthony Stark, the playboy Billionaire inventor and head of... Stark...Enterprises? No, maybe not *Enterprises*. That sounded like he was too much of a Trekkie, and he wanted to play down that aspect of himself. Maybe Stark Industries. Yes, that sounded better already.

The beautiful girls... the jealous guys... Tony walked to his first lecture with eager anticipation. Who would he meet? What would he even say to the girls? Would they like the facial fluff he'd been cultivating above his upper lip, or would they recoil in horror? He looked down at his outrageously expensive and mugger-friendly designer watch, and gasped. He was already ten minutes late for his ten o'clock lecture! All this speculation and daydreaming had distracted him, and he'd completely forgotten about the time. This was no way to start off a promising career! He rushed quickly through the hallway towards his destination.



As Tony entered the huge lecture theatre, he quietly slipped in... then slipped back out again! A few minutes later, having found the correct venue, he managed to find a seat at the back. He could hear the lecturer droning on in a dull, monotonous voice about all the preliminary details of the course and how, since the students were all adults now, the lecturers expected the best from them. From what he could tell from that distance, the lecturer looked almost like a former PhD student who'd been in academia so long that he'd simply moved from doing his research to

lecturing, and had never developed any proper presentational or communication skills. And so the lecture went on for what seemed like an eternity.

To pass the time (and it should be mentioned that he finally arrived at 10.30 am), Tony surveyed the room generally, first to see what kind of people were on his course, and secondly, to see if there were any girls he might get acquainted with. His eyes thoroughly scanned each row of seats. Most of the students looked like they were from overseas. "Ok", he nodded, "well that's fine with me - always good to meet some people from other cultures. Now what about some home-grown classmates?"

He spotted what looked like a few Americans. They were few and far between. And those he could see looked distinctly nerdy - they were garbed in stereotypical thick-rimmed glasses and looked like their mothers still dressed them. "This can't be!" Tony thought. He shook his head, but then resigned himself to the fact that maybe he'd just have to dedicate most of his time to the girls on his course. "But... hang on a minute!" He was hit by a sudden realisation. "Where are they?" He didn't remember seeing any students of the fairer sex on his way in. He hurriedly scanned around hoping his initial impressions were wrong. His eyes settled on someone vaguely female sitting in the front row with long flowing black hair. As he tried to get a better look, her head turned slightly, to Tony's dismay. The back of her head might've seemed moderately feminine, but her face was so masculine that she could've easily been a transvestite. Worse still, as Tony noticed, she was extremely broad shouldered, muscular and drably attired, and had facial hair to rival Tony's own.

"Did I sign up for the wrong course?" Tony muttered to himself. He pondered for what seemed like only a few minutes, until suddenly the lecturer's voice could be heard dismissing the class. His very first lecture was over, and his hopes were already dashed. "Maybe I should take up English Literature instead?" he wondered. He stopped himself. "No. I came here because I still believe in my dreams, so I'm going to stick it out. Besides, maybe the smaller seminar groups would be better, or perhaps even the Freshman's Fair?"

Chapter 2

Tony was feeling a little better as he headed to his first seminar group the next day. He'd learnt a few things in his first couple of lectures, so not everything was a waste. And he couldn't wait for his computing classes. The class had not started yet, so he sat down, and tried introducing himself to a few students. His attempts were met with little response, mostly because the large percentage of foreign students couldn't speak a word of English, and the only word he could understand that one student named Chen Lu kept muttering was something about radiation. Finally he turned to another student wearing thick glasses who appeared to be American.

"Hi" said Tony, sticking a hand out to introduce himself. "I'm Tony. Tony Stark."

The student slowly turned around, looked at the outstretched hand as if unsure of what to do with it, then looked back at Tony. "You m..m..mean... m..m..me?" he stammered.

"Yes" Tony replied, his hand still outstretched. "I'm Tony. What's your name."



"B..B..Bill", the student finally answered, "er, B...B..Bill G..G..Gates."

"Well pleased to meet you." Tony smiled.

"E..Er, yeah." Bill replied. "Y..You too."

"So do you want to be an Engineer too?" Tony inquired.

"W...Well, m..my dad wants me to, b..but I'd rather g..go into c...c..computing, b...but I'm not too sure y...yet. I..It depends if t..t..there's a w..w..window of opportunity"

"Cool" Tony exclaimed. "I like computers too. But say, there don't seem to be many girls in this class." Tony looked around again and could see that manly looking girl sitting a few rows in front. "Yep," he nodded again, "not too many at all."

"I..I hadn't n..noticed" Bill replied. "I'm s..so busy studying all the t..time I don't think of m...much else. I read in the p..p..prospectuses that there would b..b..be some, but I g..g..guess that the prospectus is never as g..g..good as the real thing!"

"Kind of like some demo versions of some computer programs." Tony agreed.

"Er... yeah! Th..that's a g..g..good one!" Bill chuckled. "I..I'll have to r..r..remember that one d..day!" He continued: "B..B..But, I w..w..wouldn't know what t..to s..say if there w..were any g..girls. The only t..t..topics of c..c..conversation I kn..kn..know are HTML programming and D..D..DOS"

"Well I'm determined to meet some" Tony continued, "Surely there must be ..."

"If you want to meet some girls you shouldn't have picked Engineering." A voice from behind interrupted. "There aren't any girls here!"



Tony turned around to see another student who was completely bald, and looked like a reject from the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. "Hey! It's Richard O'Brien!" he exclaimed.

"Stane actually," the bald student snorted, "Obadiah Stane!"

"Hi. I'm..."

"I know who you are" Stane interrupted again.

"Oh?" Tony looked perplexed. "Does my reputation somehow precede me?" He felt a sense of pride filling up within him.

"No." Stane replied. "I just overheard you introduce yourself."

"Oh." Tony' ego deflated again. "But you were saying something about no girls on this course? What about her?" Tony pointed to the manly looking girl.

"You mean Indries Moomji? Like I said," Stane reiterated, "there *aren't* any girls here."

"Yeah, I guess not," Tony agreed. "What kind of man would fall for someone like her?"

Stane went on to explain: "Everyone knows that Engineering students are typically nerds with few social skills and that all the girls choose subjects like Law, Business Studies or English. If you want girls, you ought to go there. Don't you know that all engineers are a bunch of introspective, socially inept technophiles!"



"But I've always wanted to be one!" Tony exclaimed. "That is, I want to be a successful entrepreneur one day."

"Like Richard Branson, huh?" Stane remarked.

"Who?" Tony had definitely never heard of him.

"Oh, just some idiot on the business course in the year above. He has some

obsession with chastity - I hear he's still a virgin - probably will still be for the rest of his life."

"That's unfortunate." Tony thought.

"But he does have a beautiful girlfriend. She's an ex-gospel singer I'm told. Her name is Whitney Houston."

"Really?" Tony perked up. "I'd like to meet her. Maybe you could introduce us."



"I don't think you'll have much chance with her," Stane shook his head sadly. "She's a bit of an ice-maiden. Some people nickname her 'Whitney Frost'... although her brother's name is Jack - and he does resemble a fat snowman, so that could explain things. But she likes to keep a cool façade all the time and likes to hide her face - which she's nothing more than a pretty one in my opinion!"

"That's too bad." Tony replied.

"What's equally annoying," Stane added, "is that Branson insists on keeping a full beard even at his young age." Stane looked at Tony's own facial growth. "Say, what's with the hairy lip?"

"Oh this?" Tony smiled proudly. "I've been cultivating it for weeks now. Do you think it's becoming?"

"Sure." Stane replied. "Becoming dated, that is - if you want to look like Tom Selleck, then it's fine. But it's so... eighties!"

"Damn!" Tony tried to cover his mouth behind his hands. "I thought that feature was my magnum opus! Well at least I might be able to nurture a head for business here."

"Oh, you won't develop any of those skills in this degree." Stane replied. "You'll be a fully-fledged geek by the end just like other geniuses."

"Excuse me," Tony interrupted, "But I'll have you know that my high school teachers told me I am one already... er,... a genius that is!" He paused for a moment and thought that might sound a bit premature at this early stage, so he tried to change the subject. "But you seem to be quite knowledgeable about things here."



"I'm repeating a year - I failed my first year so I have to sit through it all again with you lot. I spent too much time playing chess."

"Oh?" Tony paused. "You're a bit of a chess expert?"

"Yes." Stane nodded. "In fact I'm president of the chess club. I spent most of my time last year competing in various contests. You should come along one day. It's an excellent intellectual challenge, and good fun too... well, maybe except for that incident with that dog in the locker... but never mind about that!"

"Uh, I'll think about it" Tony replied, knowing that he probably wouldn't. "What other clubs are there?"

"Well there's always the wine and cheese society which meets on a Thursday night. You could really get hooked on that one!"

"That might be fun" Tony laughed.



"And then there's the alcoholics anonymous the following night for those recovering from the wine and cheese society. But I'm sure you won't ever need that."

"Let's hope not." Tony laughed again. The gout from too much cheese will probably get to me first!"

After that lengthy conversation which was in fact far too long for it to have really happened in the short space of time before the class, the teacher eventually began to teach. It was a highly productive, if unresponsive session, and by the end there was definitely a lack of group bonding in any form whatsoever. This would, unfortunately, be the template for all future classes for the next three years.

As the class wrapped up, Tony turned to Stane again. "Well, it was nice meeting you."

"The pleasure's all mine." Stane replied, somewhat insincerely. "I'm sure we'll speak again. By the way, do you know Bill Stammers?"

"Yes," Tony whispered. "I heard him, but I didn't think it was very nice to say anything. He seemed so shy!"

"No, no" Stane retorted, pointing to an entirely different student to Stane's right. "*This* is Bill Stammers. He's a sociable type like me."

"Oh... right!" Tony looked a little embarrassed. "But he did stammer you know... Bill Gates, that is." Trying to forget about his little faux pas, he shook Bill Stammers's hand. "Pleased to meet you too."

"Likewise." Stammers responded. "You might've heard of my father - he's an up-and-coming businessman - Justin Stammers?"

"Can't say that I have." Tony replied.

"Ah, well never mind. I think he wants to change his surname so it'll all be irrelevant anyway. Says it's bad for business - a bit of an impediment. Doesn't quite hit the nail on the head!"

"Well, I'm sure he'll find something suitable," Tony assured him. "I think I'd like to meet him one day."



"I'm sure he'd like that." Stammers replied. "And I see you've become acquainted with old 'Shellhead' here."

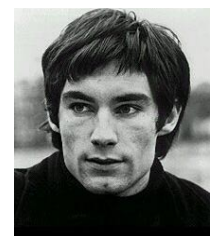
"Shellhead?" Tony looked puzzled.

"Yeah, that's what some of us call Obi," Stammers laughed.

"It's because I'm follicly impaired." Stane explained. "A rather stupid name however, and somewhat humiliating!"

"Well," joked Tony, brushing his own hair, "let's hope I never have to use it myself."

Tony said goodbye, and was feeling in a cheery mood. "Things are looking up" he thought. "I think Obadiah and I could be good friends for a long time!"



And so, we bid farewell to Teen Tony, knowing that he is in perfectly capable hands, and that his college education will stand him in good stead in later life, endowing him with the confidence, social skills and business mind we will all come to associate him for, and resting assured that he will never succumb to

temptation through those wine and cheese parties! Indeed, we shall all look back fondly upon these days and recognise that it was here within this very classroom that his technological teeth were initially cut, and where we saw a glimmer of the knight in shining armour he would one day become... the Invincible Iron Man!

THE END.



If I was to ask you to tell me, off the top of your head, how many times has Iron Man died... what would you answer? Once? Twice? Would you believe **at least seven times?**

As we all know, death in comics is much easier to cheat than death in real life. **Iron Man** was never an exception to that rule. In fact, our hero died so often, it makes you wonder when he'll next kick the bucket! Here's a list of **Iron Man deaths**, let me know if I'm missing any:

- 1) **Iron Man** and all his fellow **Avengers** (except **Moondragon** and **Thor**) were killed by the cosmically empowered **Korvac** in Avengers #177 along with the **Guardians of the Galaxy**, for good measure. **Korvac** finally brought the heroes back to life with his dying breath, after being spurned by the woman he loved. Women... can't live with them, can't live without them ;-)
- 2) **Iron Man (Rhodey)**, the **Avengers**, the **X-Men**, **Spidey**, **Hulk** and all the heroes present on Battleworld were blown to bits by **Doctor Doom** in the penultimate issue of the Secret Wars mini-series. In the end, the heroes were brought back to life thanks to the **Beyonder** tricking **Doom** into losing control of his omnipotence. Tsk... loser... I could deal with omnipotence... just try me...
- 3) **Iron Man** was next killed in the pages of West Coast Avengers annual #2. Along with the rest of the team, **Tony** ingested a powerful poison in order to enter **Death's** realm and save the souls of the **East coast Avengers**. The now dead **Iron Man** was then killed (if such a thing is possible) by an exploding bomb in Avengers annual #16, seconds before becoming **Count Dracula's** next meal! Remember that next time you think you're having a bad day!
- 4) **Iron Man** and a ton of other heroes died at the hands of **Thanos** in the pages of Infinity Gauntlet #4. Actually, **IM** got his head ripped off by **Terraxia**, the cute (?!?) purple chick **Thanos** created as his perfect mate. She even referred to **Tony** as *"that metal-clad nuisance that pestered you"* while still playing with his severed head. How rude!
- 5) The next one is up for debate. Did **Stark** actually die in Iron Man #284? He sure came close if he didn't. And although he was kept in cryogenic suspension, thus keeping his body from truly and completely dying, he did refer to this experience afterwards as *"when I died"*. Highly philosophical debate to be had here, folks.
- 6) I won't elaborate on **Stark's** death at the end of The Crossing. I'd prefer to forget that ridiculous storyline if that's okay with you. Just mentioning it like this is painful enough.

- 7) **Iron Man**, along with just about every other non-mutant superhero in the Marvel universe, was killed while sacrificing his life to defeat **Onslaught**. He was then reborn to a “new life” thanks to **Franklin Richards**’ reality-altering powers. For 12 issues anyway. We learned in the 13th issue that **Stark** had been killed by some aliens who then stole his armor, but that’s an alternate reality of some sort (and it sucked **greatly**) therefore it doesn’t count. And speaking of alternate realities...

The comics in which we’ve been privileged to see **Iron Man** die the most often, I think, is the What If series. In almost all of his appearances there, **Iron Man** ended up dead. It’s a fact, just see for yourself:

What if #3 «*What if the Avengers had never been?*»: After getting a thorough beating by the **Hulk and Namor**, **Iron Man** sacrifices his remaining power to save the life of **Henry Pym**, and, deprived of his life-sustaining chest plate, he finally dies of a heart attack.

What if #25 «*What if Thor and the Avengers battled the gods?*»: **Loki** kills **Iron Man** with the help of **Odin**’s powerful battle-sword.

What if #32 «*What if the Avengers had become pawns of Korvac?*»: With a simple gesture, **Korvac** vaporizes **Iron Man** to atoms.

What if vol.2 #25 «*What if the Marvel super-heroes had lost Atlantis attacks?*»: **Iron Man** is roasted alive by the demon **Seth**.

What if vol.2 #33 «*What if Phoenix rose again?*»: **Iron Man** is killed by the **Sentinels**.

What if vol.2 #54 «*What if Death’s Head I had lived?*»: **Iron Man (War Machine)** is slaughtered when **Charnel** thrusts razor sharp blades through his helmet’s eye slits.

What if vol.2 #55 «*What if the Avengers lost Operation: Galactic Storm?*»: **Iron Man** blows himself up to take out the **Kree accusers** with him.

What if vol.2 #66 «*What if Rogue possessed the power of Thor?*»: **Mystique** freezes **Iron Man** in his armor and uses him as a human bomb in order to destroy power generators. Apparently, and contrary to the events of **the Avengers** annual this story is based on, he does not survive the ordeal.

BEST OF THE BEST

BY HUBER & COUTURE

Welcome back to the second edition of **BEST OF THE BEST**. This is the column where the two A.I. editors pontificate about the “best” of a particular aspect of **Iron Man**. In our first column, we rapped about **IM’s best battles**. This time out we’re going to slow it down a bit, and investigate the “best” women in Tony Stark’s/Iron Man’s life. Who was the best match for Tony? Who would make the best...wife? Who just didn’t cut it? Here are our picks for best and worst Stark babes of all time:

#1. BETHANY CABE



Other than Jim Rhodes, no other **Michelinie/Layton** Iron Man creation has been better than the gorgeous, glamorous **Beth Cabe**. Of course, it certainly helped matters that her first appearances were handled by the competent **John Romita Jr.** on pencils, and **Bob Layton** on inks (her debut was in **IM #117**). What makes Beth number one is not only her beauty, but her **inner strength**. She was a P.I. and professional bodyguard, held Tony together during his initial bout with alcoholism (**IM #128**), and even donned the **Iron Man armor** one time (**IM #300**). Now *that’s* grit! She later returned to Stark’s employ as head of security, even challenging Rhodey in his War Machine armor – “That suit doesn’t scare me” (in **War Machine #8**).

Pat: I have to completely agree with Dave about this one and I have yet to meet the Iron Fan who would disagree with us. If you are reading this and think otherwise, drop us a mail! Beth was the best all right: intelligent, self-reliant, adventurous, sexy... she’s the only

one who understands Stark and who shared a friendship with him as strong as their love. *Sigh* Beth, come baaaaaaaack! ;-)

#2. PEPPER POTTS/HOGAN

Who has been with Tony longer than Pepper? Soon after her first appearance in *Tales of Suspense #45*, IM's adventures were chock full of thought balloons where Tony and/or Pepper were silently longing for one another. But, of course, things just never seemed to click. Whether it was Tony's **bum ticker** in the early days, to friend **Happy Hogan's crush on her**, to the **inherent danger** of being close to Stark/Iron Man, Tony and Pepper never had a relationship. This doesn't mean that the two never hooked up, of course! And, Happy himself witnessed two of these "swapping of spit" moments – in *Iron Man #63* and again in *Iron Man volume 3 #24*. Kind of like a stereotypical soap opera, eh? Come on!



Pat: So Dave, have you been secretly watching a few afternoon soaps? ;-) All joking aside, you're absolutely right. Makes you wonder how come women don't love comics any more than they do. I always liked Pepper and although their secret romance spiced up stories quite well in the early days, I'm glad they never ended up together. Pepper would simply not fit in with Tony's life style, she's too much of a Plain Jane. Every time he'd go on a mission, she'd sit home, worry and eat chocolate... she'd be weighing 400 pounds by mid-2003 at this rate! ;-) Nah, she's a fine secretary and a good friend but let's leave it at that. She's my number 5. By the way, what the heck happened to her kids?

#3. RUMIKO FUJIKAWA



Yep, that's right! I personally feel that Ru is **the most beautiful woman** Stark has ever been involved with (it certainly helps that **Sean Chen** – one of the best IM artists ever – drew her), but she also was one of the strongest in constitution. She had the guts to challenge Tony's workaholic ethic, daring him to have fun – and it even worked a few times! She initially didn't come across as the pampered daughter of the Fujikawa half of the **Stark/Fujikawa elite**, but once **Kurt Busiek** (and later Chen) left the book, Ru

descended into a “get even” adolescent type when Stark rival **Ty Stone** appeared on the scene. I’d like to see her come back, but I doubt it’ll happen. (First appearance: ***Iron Man volume 3 #4.***)

Pat: I disagree (it had to happen at some stage!) I hated Rumiko from the start. Sure she’s gorgeous, but that’s it. She could never accept Tony for who he is, she constantly had to try and change him. All she’s interested in is partying, she’s just an immature and annoying spoiled brat, completely unreliable and a constant source of problems and trouble. Stark needs a real woman, not a teenager brat daughter! I’m glad she’s gone and if I never see her again, it’ll be too soon. Ru is nowhere on my list.

#4. WHITNEY FROST/MADAME MASQUE

What stronger woman could there be than the head of a crime cartel like the **Maggia**, an operative of **Midas**, and who’s the daughter of one of the “nefarious” baddies in the Marvel Universe, **Count Nefaria**? Such was her effect on Stark that he dropped concern of his company to virtually literally “run away” with Whitney, all the while the mischievous Midas was taking over **Stark International** (see ***Iron Man #s 103-107***). It took the accidental death of her pappy, Count Nefaria, in ***IM #116*** to pry Frost away from Tony, but her feelings hadn’t seemed to wane much, as witnessed in the **volume 3 Avengers’** battle with the ironically super-powered *new* Count Nefaria. (First appearance: ***Tales of Suspense #98.***)



Pat: Ah, yes... Whitney. None of Tony’s women ever had such depth (aside maybe for Cabe once she realised her ex-husband was still alive). Masque is a tortured soul, constantly torn between her past and her present, between pride and shame, between love and hate. She is fascinating and unpredictable, her frailties and failures make her all the more human and believable. The short time she spent with Tony was unequalled in sheer passion, I don’t remember Stark ever falling so hard for anyone else. I’d love to see her make a comeback. She’s my number 2.

#5. GRETL ANDERS

You’ve all heard the phrase “Love is Blind,” right? It must’ve been in this case, that’s for sure. By far the most *unattractive* woman Tony has ever been with, Gretl nevertheless proved to imbue Tony with the

fortitude to **overcome the lowest point in his life**. As Gretl gave birth to her baby (no, Tony was *not* the father) in a raging blizzard, **she died in Tony's arms**...but the presence of the newborn forced Tony to survive the night protecting the infant (**IM #182**). This began his road upward to regaining his sobriety, sanity, and ultimately his company and life. (Gretl's first appearance: **IM #178**.)

Pat: Could it be our friend Dave has a soft spot in his heart for Gretl's and Gretl's in general? ;-)

(Good one, Pat! Pat is referring to my wife, who just happens to be named Grettel! -- Dave) I think whether Gretl was a girlfriend at all or just a friend is highly debatable to begin with. Stark was in no condition to involve himself in a relationship at the time. The way I see it, she did nothing to help Stark and only accidentally managed to do so by dying, therefore I find it hard to credit her as Stark's saviour. She just accidentally found herself in the middle of what is perhaps the most interesting Tony Stark story ever told.



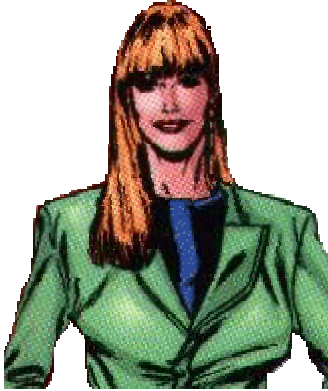
Personally, I would have awarded third position to **Janet Van Dyne**, the winsome Wasp! The two got involved in the pages of **Avengers #224** and let's face it, they are one heck of a good match! Both millionaires, both super-powered heroic Avengers, both well-known public figures and both young and good looking. I personally think it's a shame it didn't work out.

My number 4 would have to be the most recent of Stark's flames: the beautiful computer hacker and martial arts expert from **Sarawak** that Tony met in his latest **Annual (2001)**. Ana Wei made quite an impression on me. She's strong-willed, brilliant (and shares her passion with electronics with Tony) and can defend herself quite well! The two characters hit it off right away and Ana reacted a lot better to Tony's use of a secret identity than Calista Hancock did! Only problem is she's got a kid and I can't really imagine Tony playing dad at this point in time. Maybe I should've picked the Black Widow instead...



Hube & Pat's 5 "Lamest" Stark Babes:

#1. KATHY DARE



Who else? First, she's a royal pain-in-the-you know what, then after Tony bounces her, **she shoots him!** Led to one of the worst traumas in Tony's/Iron Man's existence: First, Tony's **loss of the use of his legs** and a necessary redesigning of the **IM armor (IM #244)**, then, the invasion of Stark's body by the **neural parasite** which was imbedded in the **artificial nervous system** that allowed Tony to walk again! The latter also resulted in the design of the **War Machine armor (IM #281)**, the **Telepresence armor (IM #290)**, and a near-fatal rift in Tony and Rhodey's friendship (**IM #289** – not resolved until **#312**). OK, *maybe* we can thank her for the War Machine.....! (First appearance: **IM #233**.)

Pat: Once more, how could anyone disagree with that? Dare's a lunatic and a psychopath, it's as simple as that. But she did make for some interesting stories.

#2. CLYTEMNESTRA ERWIN

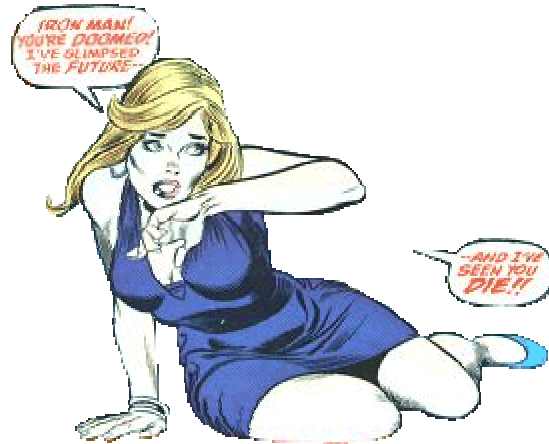
She fell in love with Tony as he began his ascent from alcoholism. She was the sister of brainy but dopey **Morley Erwin**, who assisted Jim Rhodes with the **Iron Man armor** when Rhodey filled in for Tony. She never voiced her affection, no. She merely held inside her deep *hatred* for Tony as she blamed *him*, not **Obadiah Stane**, for the death of her bro (issue **#199**). Then, to get even, she teams up with **A.I.M.** to plan Stark's death! (Revealed in **IM #216**.) Never made sense to me.... (First appearance: **IM #171**.)

Pat: I'm behind you 100% once more. What a freak! She deserved to get that A.I.M. glider right between the eyes.

#3. MARIANNE RODGERS

Ugh. Anyone who recalls those **70s issues** where she was Tony's steady squeeze may cringe. She was a clingy, seemingly dopey blonde who had **ESP (extra-sensory perception) powers**. These powers, which kept overwhelming her when **Tony/Iron Man** was in danger, eventually did just that permanently – and Stark had to put her in an

institution. She came back during the **Midas** takeover of Stark Int'l, zapping the bloated one into a vegetable (**IM #107**) – but she was aiming for Tony! She came back again during the, um, "**Crossing.**" 'Nuff said. (First appearance: **IM #36.**)



Pat: At the risk of it becoming a habit, I will have to agree once more. Rodgers was awful, the only thing she had going for her was her looks. She was a complete crackpot and her presence only generated weird freaky stories that did not belong in the pages of this book.

#4. ROXIE GILBERT

Although they never really got romantic, why in the world was Stark chasing after this PITA (Pain In The A**)?? She's the sister of IM baddie **Firebrand** (the first one) and shares his politics, albeit in a more peaceful manner. This obviously conflicted with Tony's own views, and while this may have led to some slightly mildly interesting banter in the **Vietnam-era 70s**, it is sadly dated now. It (and she) was more annoying than anything else.

Pat: I'd love to agree again, but I can't. I don't think I even have any comics with her so I really can't say I have an opinion. My number 4 would have to go to **Sunset Bain**. Don't get me wrong, I think she's a fascinating and cool character to have around, I wish she'd pop up more often! But as girlfriend, she was a total £@&*!!! She tricked Tony into giving her the security codes of his father's company so she could steal his secrets and start her own business! Her possible future in the world of the **Iron Man of 2020** only makes her an even more dangerous threat. Yes, she's a great character, but truly one of the absolute worst ladies Stark could have possibly gotten involved with.

#5. KRIS DeGANN

When you take a pitiful character (**19-year old Tony Stark**), put him in a pitiful situation (frat house party at Columbia University), and then try to devise a romantic interest for him, you get **Kris DeGann**.

She actually should be #1, but that would give the **Teen Tony issues** too much notoriety. (First appearance: **IM #326**.)



Pat: Once more, I can't comment because I stopped buying the book during this ridiculous storyline so I've never even heard of her. My number 5 would have to go to **Indries Moomji** (from the pages of **IM #171**). She was a part of Obadiah Stane's plan to destroy Tony Stark and take control of his company. She manipulated Stark into falling in love with her and then left him coldly, leaving him broken hearted and vulnerable. A truly soulless and cruel woman.

What about you faithful reader? If you want to share with the rest of us who your best and worse Stark babe is, send us a mail!

Hope to hear from you soon!

--Hube and Pat
(IronHube@aol.com & cousture@yahoo.com)

