

★  
ADVANCED IRON  
IRON CURTAIN #35



# ADVANCED IRON #35



## LAYTON'S LATEST

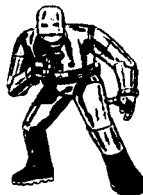
Bob Layton has been one busy dude. He currently is revising a *Dark Knight* story!! No word yet on a release date, but here's the skinny: it's a *Batman Elseworld* two-parter – Batman and the *Knights of the Round Table*!! Sound familiar? Sure, but Bob says the only similarity is that Arthur is in it.

Bob also has a 4-part *Charlton Elseworld* series going through the approval process!! But back to DC: Bob turned down the regular inking job on *Teen Titans*. Says Bob: "They made the mistake of sending me copies of the mag to read!!" He states further "... the book embodies everything that's wrong with comics right now. Like Jill [Bob's wife] said – 'They don't even *look* like teenagers!!' This late in my career... I just don't want to add to the 'chaos' anymore."

But perhaps Bob's biggest news? He got a call from Marvel asking him to do an *Iron Man* story for their upcoming black and white anthology book (has anyone heard of this??)!! Bob's response? "I told them I'd consider doing a story... but *not* an *Iron Man* one." Three

guesses why (the first two don't count)!! Nevertheless, Bob would like some fan suggestions as to what character he *should* do!! Feel free to let him know your thoughts....note: **Hercules** is the front runner.....

By the way, if you haven't congratulated Bob on his recent marriage, do so now!! Here's *A.I.*'s official statement: Congratulations, Babyface!!



## TONY STARK: THE WORLD'S GREATEST WEB-BROWSER CREATOR??

Hotshot **Bill Meiggs** forwarded me info from *Combo* magazine on more of **Kurt Busiek's** plans for *Shellhead*. First of all, thanks, **Bill**!! Here's some of what

**ADVANCED IRON** is published by Dave Huber for the fans of *Iron Man* and other armored heroes.

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Kurt stated in the article:

"What we want to move into is that Tony's Stark's life – Iron Man's life – is a 'Tale of Suspense.' All around him there are competing corporations like Fujikawa. There are mysterious power brokers like the Mandarin and Mordchai Midas. There are criminals like the Spymaster and the Controller."

Kurt continues: "Pre-Heroes Reborn, the adult Tony Stark was dead!! Iron Man is going to start out with and announcement on the news that the California State probate court has determined that this guy who says he's Tony Stark is really Tony Stark. He's got his money back. While he was sleeping, his company was sold to the Japanese-based Fujikawa Corporation (owned by the Kingpin). Is he going to try to overturn the sale on the grounds that he wasn't dead, or is there something else he would want to do?"

Expect to see the following: **Pepper Potts**, **Happy Hogan** and **Rosalind Sharpe** (from *Daredevil*). Also, Kurt will "redefine" the **Black Widow** – she'll go from superhero back to "super spy." For villains, Busiek has a new group dubbed "**The Death Squad**." **Whiplash** gets a significant "power boost" and (as we

know already) **Midas** will be revamped.

But – and get ready – Tony will leave California for Seattle and get into a new business....designing the *world's best Web browser!!!* Gee, does **Bill Gates** have a *suit of armor* we don't know about??

You may be asking – why a Web browser?? Kurt says that his *IM* scripting job lets him “be Kurt Busiek, ‘continuity geek,’ because way back in the *Iron Man* series Tony had to fight a threat from the future, which was a computer network that

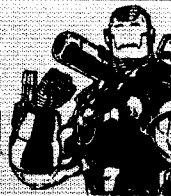
he had designed some time in the future. Well, I think it's time he designed it!!”

OK. Sound good? But – where in the heck did Tony take on this “computer network?” For the answer to that, I consulted the one, the only **Geary Bee**, who readers of Mike Kalibabky's former column “Stark Remarks” will remember is probably *the* definitive resource for all things Iron Man. Geary says, “The issue is *IM #5*, titled ‘**Frenzy in a Far Flung Future.**’ This is one of my all time favorites.” He also adds

the following info for collectors: “A quick reference book, just on the covers, is *The Photo-Journal Guide to Marvel Comics.* by Gerber, ISBN 0-9623328-4-4 volume 3, listing A thru J, and volume 4, ISBN 0-9623328-5-2 listing K thru Z. The above books may cost around \$30.00.”

Thanks a ton, Geary!! If any of you online have an IM question and are completely befuddled, you can reach Geary at: gbee@weir.net

## IRON MEN!!



- **Big DWAYNE WILDER** discusses IM and ... “**BEASTiality(?)**” in *“The Wilder Side of Iron Man”*
- **ALLEN BUJAK** ponders future armor developments in *“Iron Filings”*
- **JEFF PEARSON** continues his fan fiction story *“Pandora's Box”*
- *“Iron Curtain”* returns in **BILL MEIGGS'** *“Art of Iron Man”*
- **MATT MALEK** debuts as *AI* columnist with *“Accutech!!!”*
  - **ROGER OTT** “spies hard” in *“Ironing Board”*
  - **BILL EGAN** highlights fan reviews of the latest in *“Eye on Iron Man”*
- **BART NEY's** *“Virtual Iron”* showcases the latest in video gaming!
- ... and lastly, **ALLEN BUJAK** returns with his incredible rendition of **FIREPOWER** in *“The Armor File!!”*

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# The Wilder Side of Iron Man by Dwayne Wilder

## The Good Guys Win After All! Dept

In late June, the bondholders led by **Carl Icahn** took over Marvel Entertainment, Inc. This means **Ronald Perelman** is out. I believe the conventional wisdom states that this is good! Perelman basically wanted to make money. He wasn't as concerned with what the actual company represented. Icahn (who wants to make money, too!), at least considers what the actual company is doing. (Send all libel suits care of Dave Huber, Delaware!)

Just kidding! I don't profess to understand it all. But now, because of these events, Marvel is on the way back! And I don't just mean financially. The creative side will prosper due to who "won" this little court action.

And we have a federal judge in Wilmington. DE to thank! Hey, don't we know someone who lives in Wilmington?! (Hey,

Dave, meet any federal judges lately?!) You could invite them to the Comic Book Club! (Stories with the **Living Tribunal** would be best!)

The Marvel Board was replaced and Icahn is the new chairman. But I could have told you the outcome all along. I knew because it says in the *Comics Code Authority* that "Evil will not triumph and the Good Guys will always win!"

## Random Thoughts

**Mark Gruenwald's** birthday was in late June also. I still miss you, Gru! Speaking of Mark G., I bought the *Marvel Chillers* (paperbacks for Young Readers). Mr. Gruenwald wrote the one for the **Incredible Hulk**. I am currently reading it to my son during our reading time.....

Many Marvel movies are coming in the near future. Don't miss 'em! And don't even tell me you missed *Chasing Amy*! Every comic book fan/reader/collector should

see this independent movie. (And it's easily the best love story of the year!)

I heard from one of my **Star Wars** fanatic friends that *Episode 1* (Star Wars IV to the rest of us!) will be out **Memorial Day weekend 1999!!**

Get you tickets **now.....!**

This is that "dead time" between something barely passable (i.e. Heroes Reborn) and something greatly anticipated (i.e. Heroes Return)! Ah, those wonderful fall days.....

Have you read *DayDreamers*? This is a miniseries with Franklin Richards and **Howard the Duck** among others. This group of misfits is lost traveling between dimensions. They go from universe to universe. Hmmm. The Heroes are trapped in a pocket universe. The *DayDreamers* are traveling between universes. Coincidence? I think not! (It's possible our armored hero will be rescued by **Howard the Duck!**) Regardless, it is well

written by J.M. DeMatteis. Check it out!

New Iron Man villains to include **Midas**? Well, I guess it's better than his younger brother, **Poopus**! You guessed it! His powers include everything he touches turns to .....

Roger, the cover to *AI #34* is awesome! I am in awe of artists. Yes, the alcohol issues of *Iron Man* still stand as the most poignant and important of the character, Tony Stark. They are truly classics!

**Black Panther** and **Luke Cage** movies? These are great ideas and something I had not thought of.....

### The Captain Department

No, not the character Steve Rogers took after being stripped of his Captain America identity. I mean **Captain Kangaroo!!!** In issue 1232 of *Comics Buyer's Guide*, **Peter David** is angry! (And you wouldn't like him when he's angry!) Mr. David's column is devoted to the horrible way cultural icons such as Bob Keeshan (The **Captain**), and Jules Feiffer of the *Village Voice* are being shunned and dumped by the side of the road in favor of "younger" versions. He even referred to Ron Perelman and his attitude toward

Marvel Comics. Mr. David states our entire society is becoming this way and it's not pretty or good. We, as fans of Iron Man, experienced this concept "up close and personal" during the past year or so. It's a sad comment on our world. And don't even get me started on the way **Jerry Jones** fired **Tom Landry**.....I am a lifelong Cowboys fan and even after eight years, it still bothers me. In the "Class" Hall of Fame, Tom Landry is a charter member and Jerry Jones can't even find the building!!!

### Why I like Iron Man Department

This is my irregular commentary on the character, Iron Man. In the Marvel Universe, there is no other character like Tony Stark. He's a complex individual yet he does this "superhero" thing. Allen Bujak's comments in *AI #34* get to the heart of the character. Reading those comments started me to wonder why (at least for myself).

Iron Man is an extension of Tony Stark. The Golden Avenger embodies those complex human traits, the frailties as well as the strengths. I know Iron Man is a womanizing, alcoholic who is struggling with those problems. I know he

is trying to do the right thing and help others. In one way, he is what we are striving to be in our everyday lives: A strong hero with some control over the events around us. Someone who is working to be better than he was yesterday. Most importantly, he's human, just like you and me. Not some god or android or chemically enhanced being. He's of strong (stubborn sometimes?) character. We all strive for such a strength of character. I can relate. We can relate on so many levels. In all those complex ways, we are truly unique. And as Allen states, ".....but that uniqueness defines greatness."

I believe that's why "The Crossing" made me so mad! You can't embody those complex characteristics if you're a 17 year-old teenager! (Sorry, teens, you just can't!) With experience comes wisdom (in theory, at least!). And a teenager simply hasn't been through enough. (I know you think you have! So did I when I was a teen but now I know the truth.)

To take this incredibly great hero, a strong complex hero, and trade him for someone with no history or experience just ruined the entire concept of Iron Man.

Another point Allen makes is Tony Stark's

ability to think his way out of battles. We all feel we can use our brains to solve the problems presented to us (although, they are not life threatening, usually!). We can identify with this trait. We strive to be someone who thinks through the problem at hand.

It's a great mind exercise to see if I can solve the problem like Tony Stark does in any given adventure. Sometimes, it is obvious. Sometimes, I do better. Most of the time, I miss it but that's okay. It's the journey; not the destination.

Tony Stark's strong character and ability to think on his feet -- these are two reasons why I like Iron Man!

### Dwayne's Capsule Comics

This month's installment will be shorter than usual. I am featuring *Avengers #136* which is a reprint of Marvel's *Amazing Adventures #12*. (They couldn't meet the deadline that month so they reprinted another story.) Lucky for us, it featured our favorite Golden Avenger!

For those of you who may not know, *Amazing Adventures* was a magazine featuring the **Beast** from the **X-Men**. Hank McCoy had transformed into the furry,

purple incarnation of his character in issue #11. He is trying to cover his new appearance due to the "scare" factor his appearance has now. He fashions a rubber "human" suit, a harness and he's ready to rejoin the human race.

The next day he gets to his lab and begins developing a cure for himself. Who decides to visit this very day?! None other than Tony Stark! (So, IM can't be far behind!) Hank works for the **Brand Corporation**. **Marianne Rodgers** is with Tony. She "senses" something is wrong. So, that night, Iron Man makes his appearance. He quickly encounters the Beast. (Hank had just shed his disguise to feel the freedom of his new body.) Of course, Tony doesn't recognize him and Hank thinks Iron Man is trespassing. The Beast attacks when Iron Man doesn't leave. Tony tries to bury him in equipment with his repulsor rays. As the battle continues, Hank "feels" the Beast taking control of his mind. He tries to keep control as he attacks. IM uses his unibeam to blind the Beast. An incredible battle sequence begins as Iron Man pounds the Beast into unconsciousness.

The guards finally arrive where they question Iron Man. This gives the Beast time to awake and

attack Tony from behind. He has lost control and another terrific fight scene begins. (Even the guards are shooting. Of course, the bullets don't hurt IM. But they hit the Beast who shrugs them off. The wounds heal instantly-- mutant healing factor?-- years before another mutant appears!)

At the end, Iron Man says, "Beast. Stop it!...I beg you..." I am not making this up! Iron Man is begging for his life! The Beast refuses and attacks again. IM is motionless and the Beast believes him dead. He escapes screaming he didn't mean to kill him, he just lost control.

Iron Man was faking it, of course. (And I can only conclude the begging was part of the "act"!)

Tony chooses not to pursue him because he saw such torment in the Beast.

This June 1975 issue was written by **Steve Englehart**, drawn by Tom Sutton and inked by Mike Ploog. Lettering was done by classic letterer, Artie Simek. *Amazing Adventures #12* originally appeared July 1972. (Two years before *Hulk #180!*)

And that's *Avengers #136* in a capsule!

**DWAYNE WILDER**  
**509 N. McKOWN**  
**SHERMAN, TX**  
**75092**

# IRON FILINGS

ALLEN "SHELLHEAD" BUJAK

Welcome to another edition of Iron Filings! You may have noticed that I also write **THE ARMOR FILE** for AI, but where that's a technical column, **IRON FILINGS** is intended to cover all other aspects of the Iron Man mythos.

## STATUS QUO DEPARTMENT

As I look at the lack of change in Iron Man sales, it gets me thinking - how many of the people currently buying Heroes Reborn are simply looking to complete their collections? There's been very little change relative sales of each book - and as the chart below shows, Iron Man is holding pretty steady. The next few months will be interesting. As usual, all of my information is courtesy of WIZARD magazine.

	4/95	5/95	6/95	10/95	11/95	3/96	4/96	6/96	9/96	10/96	11/96	12/96	1/97	2/97	3/97	4/97	5/97
P	1 to 25								2	8	7	7	7	7	7	12	7
L	26 to 50																
A	51 to 75	75					69	68									
C	76 to 100	95				79											
E	Not On List																
	No Data																
ISSUE#	317	318	319	323	324	328	329	331	v2#1	v2#2	v2#3	v2#4	v2#5	v2#6	v2#7	v2#8	v2#9

## TOO MUCH INFORMATION DEPARTMENT

Like millions of people, over fourth of July weekend, I was in an air conditioned theatre watching the movie Men In Black. Also like millions of people - I loved it. But I suspect there was something else we all shared - a lack of surprise. Before seeing the movie itself, I'd seen numerous commercials - each successive commercial seemed to show more of the movie than the previous one. In fact, after seeing the movie, I realized that I would have enjoyed it far more had I seen only the first commercial or just the trailer. I'll probably enjoy Men In Black more when I go see it again - it's a solidly written and fun movie (unlike The Lost World) - it's just too bad I couldn't get the same feeling the first time around.

But all of this got me to thinking about the intense curiosity we all have toward Kurt Busiek's Iron Man. We all want to know what the situation's going to be - but do we really want to know? I suspect not. We want some information - but not much. In fact, where Iron Man is concerned, simply seeing the armor goes a long way toward setting the tone for the book. Just look at the last few armor changes.

Issue #200 saw the Silver Centurion make its' debut - and the stories reflected a Tony Stark that was in control and larger than life. Issue #231 saw the return to red and gold - but with a sleek, tough looking suit. The stories of this time period were also excellent - culminating in a battle with Dr. Doom in #250. The same armor, after issue #250 was drawn as being very bulky - and awkward; this was matched by the stories, which were leaden and very slowly paced. Particularly the terrible Armor Wars 2. Issue #280 ushered in good stories again - and the armor changed, too - albeit slightly. With the debut of the War Machine - the stories had a tone that matched the gritty style of the suit. In issue #290, we saw the NTU-150 remote suit - which returned the armor to cleaner lines - while the stories retained the same high mark. We also saw Rhodey don the War Machine - and the stories, from his perspective remained somewhat tough in attitude. Issue #300 saw yet another armor - but this one seemed sleeker - less heavy. At the same time, Stark shed the burden of his paralysis and gained some measure of personal freedom. This armor served well, and the stories portrayed Tony Stark with the same tone that the armor portrayed Iron Man - in control and on the rise again. The Crossing came along, and the armor that was used was as dark as the story itself. In fact, I remember seeing various designs in AI #16 and thinking about how bleak the story must be. If there is a time in recent Iron Man history that defies the armor/story tone trend, it's what followed the Crossing. The armor didn't seem to change from The Crossing - but the stories became silly. The character of Tony Stark became equally silly - and armor remained archaic looking (rivets - puh-lease!). Heroes Reborn, however, echoed the trend once again - the Prometheus armor appeared almost cobbled together - unfinished - much as Tony Stark never truly set-out to be the hero. And really, now that Stark is more comfortable as the hero, the Prometheus armor seems out of place - and odd.

It's been said that the design reflects the designer - with Iron Man that's been very much true since issue #200. Even within The Armor File, the designs reflect my own personal taste. My Iron Man Model 30-A is a big, imposing looking suit - akin to the Silver Centurion - and my own take on Stark would be to make him larger than life - as with issue #200.

So before we read a new tidbit of information on the new Iron Man - maybe we should wait, and decide if we really want to know. After all - if you're looking to be surprised - there can always be too much information....

**SEE YOU NEXT MONTH WITH MORE IRON FILINGS!**

# A.I. FAN FICTION: "PANDORA'S BOX" BY JEFF PEARSON

(cont. from A.I. #33)

## Six Months Ago:

The look of concentration on his face was illuminated by the only light source in the small dorm room as the cursor on the computer screen blinked in silent defiance.

"Security Breach Averted. Connection terminated."

"Damn!" Stanley cried in frustration. Without looking, he picked up the carton of Mu Shu Pork and took another bite. The carton was empty. He pulled his eyes from the screen and looked in the carton, fully expecting his other senses to be in error. After verifying what his other senses told him, Stanley tossed the carton behind him. It landed in the stack of other empty cartons of Chinese food and pizza boxes. He glanced over at the alarm clock by his bed. It read 3:30am. In disbelief, he checked the time with the clock on his computer. It verified what his alarm clock told him.

*Twelve hours. I have NEVER taken twelve hours to crack a system! It's no wonder CrackerJack gave up on Hammer Industries. But then, he never was in my class and he doesn't have my connections.* Stanley rubbed his weary eyes, cracked his knuckles, and launched another virtual assault. He hated using the tips from his benefactor to crack a system.

It was a matter of pride. He had to admit though, sometimes the payments for the information they unlocked came in handy when it came time to pay tuition and he certainly couldn't have afforded the top of the line system he was working on now without them.

He entered the security codes he was provided with and was rewarded.

"Security Clearance Verified. How can I help you today?" read the screen.

Stanley answered back, "Initiate transfer of files 'SERaid.' Protocols Alpha One Beta."

"Protocols verified. Transfer Initiated. Estimated time to completion is four hours."

Stanley verified the transfer had begun, set his alarm clock for 7:30am, and then went to bed.

When Stanley woke to his alarm, the transfer had already completed and the connection had closed. He immediately started a backup to a CD of the information he had transferred. He did this every time he obtained the *special* information his benefactor requested. When the backup finished, Stanley pocketed the disc, went to the phone booth at the corner and dialed the number he had been given.

"The information you requested is available," he said without preamble.

He made mental notes as he listened to the instructions

from the voice.

Two hours later, Stanley returned. He locked the door and went to his computer. He patted his jacket pocket to verify the envelope was still there for the hundredth time since he had exchanged the disc for it. He was reassured by the feeling of the thick package.

*Let's see what was so valuable to them.*

He booted up, called up the files, and began reading the screen. As he read, a cold chill ran down his spine and his brow broke out in sweat. He glanced over to make sure his dorm room door was still locked.

According to the files, these were plans for some of the armors used by Iron Man, Force, Stiltman, and a host of others whose names he did not recognize. Stanley knew he had stumbled onto something big. Even he had closely monitored the news during the incidents dubbed by the media as the "Armor Wars." Iron Man had gone on a rampage against most of the other armored figures of the time. He even killed that Russian guy. Stark Enterprises claimed he had gone rogue and fired him. But nobody could figure out why he had gone off and those that knew weren't talking. It became a moot point when Iron Man was killed by government agents he had been attacking. CNN ran footage for weeks afterwards. He was soon replaced by a



new Iron Man and the whole thing blew over. Most felt it was a publicity stunt Stark Enterprises came up with. What Stanley did recognize is that there were similar circuits used in all of the armors listed. Stanley put 2 and 2 together and came up with industrial espionage.

*Industrial Espionage. Hammer stole these designs from Stark Enterprises and is using them in designs for armors he is selling to others. I bet there is more info that my contacts would pay dearly for.*

His fingers flew over the keyboard in a nervous fury and reconnected through the same back door he used before. Following his exact steps, he began to search for more he could steal and sell.

"Files requested not found," came the reply.

"What??!!" said Stanley

A feeling of nausea came over him. He quickly did a directory of the information he had downloaded last night. Twelve files were missing. He did another listing. Another five were gone. "Dammit! A virus!"

The door exploded inward. A hail of bullets tore through Stanley before he could utter another sound. Stanley slumped over his beloved computer screen. Two armored figures made their way through the wreckage. Using the butt of his weapon, one of the men pushed Stanley aside. Stanley landed with a thud on the floor, his lifeless eyes staring at the ceiling.

After verifying their kill, they made a systematic search of the room. Finally, one did a listing of his computer while

the other searched Stanley.

"The information isn't here," came the annoyed voice. "His body is clean too, although it looks like we just earned ourselves a bonus." the other one replied as he waved the envelope in the air.

The first one activated the radio in his helmet.

"This is Plumber One. The drain is clean and the clog is gone"

"Idiots. Return to Base," came the reply.

Both men turned, pushed through the astonished spectators that had gathered outside and flew off.

#### **Today:**

There was a slight feeling of inertia as the elevator began its journey down.

"HOMER, are you sure of the readings you are receiving?"

"Quite sure. Anthony. Someone has bypassed your precautions, and is using your designs used in the Iron Man armors."

The doors opened in front of Tony, the lift having completed its journey a few hundred feet below ground level. Tony Stark emerged. It was here that Tony Stark was free -- free from the pressures of his dual life. No whiny lawyers clawing for his time and no power-thirsty supervillains bent on world domination clawing for his life. In the background, Tony could here the steady hum of this automated factory. HOMER was busy creating the future Iron Man.

"Homer, give me a visual of the coordinates of your readings."

Tony sat down in front of

what appears to be a large circular coffee table. It was about six feet across, metallic, with a glass top. As Tony sat, the glass darkened and a 3D image of the Earth appeared about a foot above the surface of the table. On the globe, a small white dot shone brightly. Near the first dot, another smaller dot dimly came into existence.

"HOMER, what is the smaller reading?"

"It just appeared.

Anthony. I have detected the signature from your circuits. However, it only appears sporadically. I would venture to say that some form of cloaking technology is in place that is only effective when the detected circuits are inactive. I am unable to narrow down the exact coordinates. However, it appears to be coming from the Winchester, New York area."

"Keep tabs on it. I'll deal with the main reading for now. Give me everything you have about the position of the first reading," said Tony.

"They are emanating from a facility just outside of Phoenix, Arizona. According to records, it is an old storage facility used by the US Army during the Gulf War. After the war, it was closed down due to budgetary cutbacks. However, I am unable to obtain any other information about the area. I am encountering security lockout notices that the information is classified by the US Government," said HOMER.

*Why would they restrict information about an abandoned storage facility? Unless it's not abandoned. I know the government has*

*used these types of facilities to house their "special projects" such as X-Force. Heck, Stark Enterprises even helped build the site they now call The Vault. I wonder what is there? I have to find out. I can't have a repeat of my Armor Wars. I just about lost it all then. But if they have rebuilt FirePower, I can't let them keep it. I won't let them keep it.*

"HOMER, keep digging on for information that site without tripping any alarms. You might want to concentrate on key searches on X-Force, SHIELD, or other special program keywords. I don't want to go in with guns blazing if friends are there. I also don't want SE to be tied to anything that might come about there," said Tony.

"This will take a few hours to complete," said HOMER.

"Let me know when. Give me a status report on our latest project."

"As predicted, the addition of the vibranium substrate mesh to the sub-dermal layer increased performance. Final analysis indicates performance was 3% higher than predicted. However, an unforeseen side effect is a 12% loss of sensor efficiency."

"That is unacceptable."

"Yes, Anthony. I concur. I am in the process of installing some adjustments. Final testing shall commence in six hours."

"In the meantime, I will have to check that reading out."

"Is that wise, Anthony?"  
We do not know who we are dealing with."

"I know. But I can't wait. I

put the cork in that bottle once. I will not allow my technology to cause such suffering in this world again."

On the wall Tony approached, dozens of suits of armors stood in a row in their individual storage modules as if waiting for Tony to select them to be used for his task. Tony solemnly approached the closest of the long line of silent soldiers. All of them, his children created from the echoes of his mind. They were the only children he would know. After unlocking the security lock on the storage unit, Tony began the ritual he has performed so many times before. The pieces came together like a second skin until finally, he locked the helmet into place and watched the indicator lights come on as the armor came to life. Where once stood Tony Stark, was now replaced by the Invincible Iron Man.

The diagnostic displays confirmed what he instinctively knew, all systems are fully functional. In many ways, the armors he wears become a part of him; his familiarity with them sometimes even shocking to himself. He strode over to his accessory equipment storage unit as the armor completed its boot cycle. He unlocked the unit, removed selected pieces and attached them to various parts of his armor. *After the government built into FirePower a way to cancel the effects of my negator packs, I had to completely redesign them. I am glad I took the time when I had it. These new ones should disable any and all*

*circuits based on my designs despite any counter measures some one may have come up with,* Tony thought.

Confident he had prepared for any contingencies, Tony activated the cybernetic link in his helmet and sent the command to open the launch port to the outside world. He positioned himself on the launch pad. With a thought, his boot jets roared to life lifting him up and out to the outside world.

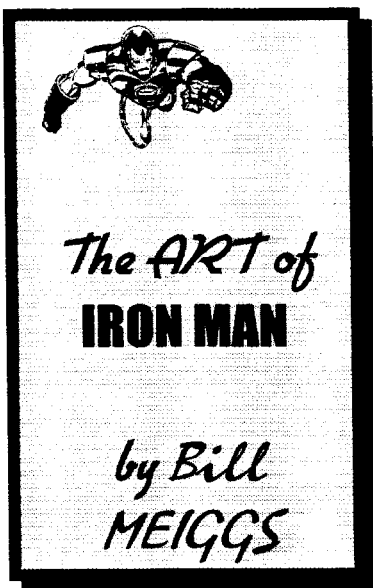
**TO BE CONTINUED!!**

**BE SURE TO CHECK OUT  
JEFF'S WEBSITE  
DEVOTED TO THE  
GOLDEN AVENGER AT:**

**<http://users.deltanet.com/~jeffp/HallofIron.html>**

**And you can reach  
Jeff via e-mail at:**

**[jeffp@deltanet.com](mailto:jeffp@deltanet.com)**



Well I finally made it back!! Sorry about not being here last month. I was just too tied up in my two full time jobs to contribute. Lucky for me our editor is such a big sweetheart! Dave told me not to worry -- he fully understood and if it happened again he would just break my drawing hand! It helps to have such an understanding editor, let me tell you. Well, the "Heroes Reborn" issues of *Iron Man* are starting to reach their end. Is it just me or has it seemed like this has been going on for awhile now? I know it runs for a year but I guess I'm getting a little weary of it already. I hate a story-line that runs for this long. What happened to the old two-issue, three-issue stories?

I guess the actual artist of record on this run of Shellhead will be **Ryan Benjamin**. If I'm not mistaken, he has done, or will have done, more total art

pages than **Portacio** by the time that it ends. I've written here before that his artwork -- primarily his figures -- appear stiff, kinda like a Toy Biz figure. It has improved lately though, and I think he is doing a good job overall.

Well, by now everyone knows that **Kurt Busiek** will be handling *Iron Man* from a plot and writing standpoint, and the penciller that was named is going to be **Sean Chen**. Chen is coming off the new relaunch of *X-O Manowar* by Acclaim. Sean has a dramatic clean art style that in my opinion will look great on Iron Man. If you look real close at his artwork you can see his influence. Sean was trained by the ultimate Iron Man artist himself, **Bob Layton**! Matter of fact, Sean was going to be Bob's choice as penciller if he and **Dave Michelinie** had been chosen as the new team for the book. With this awesome endorsement, I can't wait!! Well, finally the inker for the new series was named. It'll be **Eric Cannon** who previously worked for Rob Liefeld's Extreme Comics. Kurt Busiek stated on AOL that Sean Chen was real happy with the job that Eric did on his Iron Man samples. Eric just inked some of the pages in the current *Uncanny X-Men*, and it looks really good. I think we are all in for a treat when this new tandem gets going !!

OK, and now for the second part of my sometimes monthly column. This is where I talk about my attempts at drawing the character we all love. This

month in the ongoing alternate timeline story "Iron Curtain," we see a lot of interaction between the **Force Works 2** teammates. No action this month, sorry. It's coming though, so don't worry!!!! A lot of times in telling a story with pictures you have to have a few pages with the characters talking and such. Primarily this gives you some background on just what is going on now and in the past.

Last installment you first see a character that I don't think was really explained who he is. This is **Reed Richards** who in the normal Marvel Universe is of course the leader of the **Fantastic 4**. Here he is one of Stark's best inventors and as you can see with his mechanical arm, he looks a little different.

Well, enough talk for this month. Hey, it would be great to hear from you readers!! I always welcome e-mail or snail mail for that matter. You can reach me at either of the addresses below. See you people next month!!!

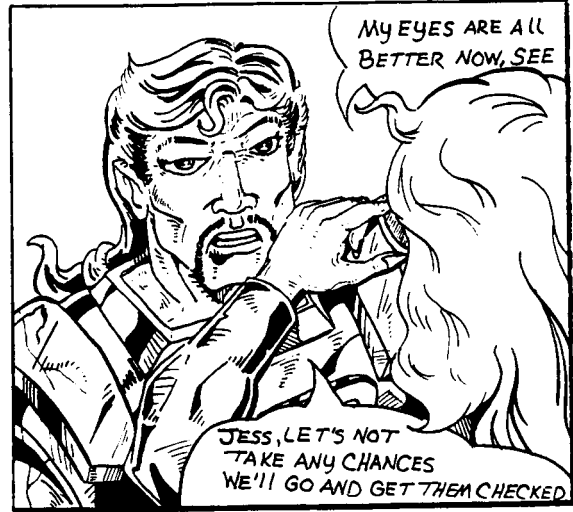
**Bill Meiggs**  
317 Cedar Rd.  
Chesapeake, Va. 23320

E-mail at  
**EMSJOCK@aol.com**



TONY ARE YOU OK?

YEA JESS, I'M FINE... LET'S GO GET YOUR EYES CHECKED OUT...



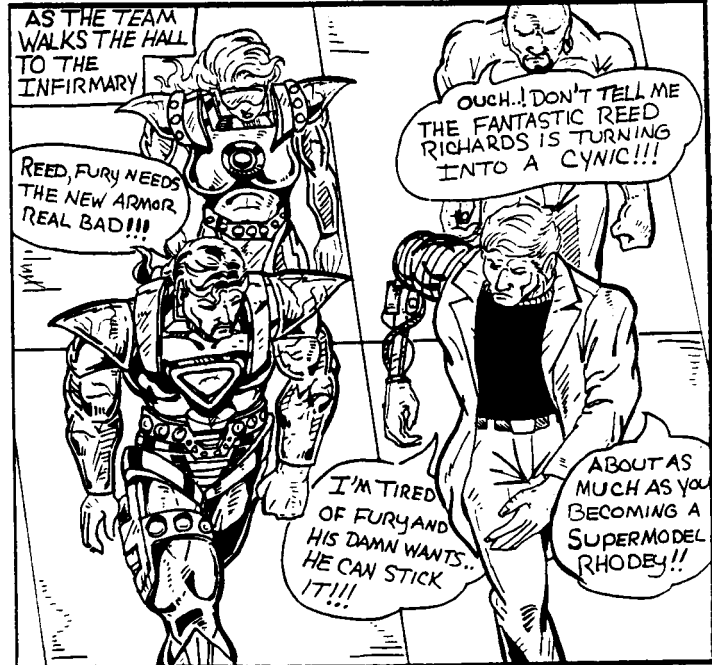
MY EYES ARE ALL BETTER NOW, SEE

JESS, LET'S NOT TAKE ANY CHANCES WE'LL GO AND GET THEM CHECKED



LET'S GO TO THE INFIRMARY GUYS

OK TONY



AS THE TEAM WALKS THE HALL TO THE INFIRMARY

REED, FURY NEEDS THE NEW ARMOR. REAL BAD!!!

OUCH..! DON'T TELL ME THE FANTASTIC REED RICHARDS IS TURNING INTO A CYNIC!!!

I'M TIRED OF FURY AND HIS DAMN WANTS.. HE CAN STICK IT!!!

ABOUT AS MUCH AS YOU BECOMING A SUPERMODEL RHODEY!!



YOU GUYS GO ON... I'M BEAT... IT'S SACK TIME FOR ME....



ACTUALLY I'M JUST FRUSTRATED BY THE LATEST TEST... IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE TO GENERATE AN ENERGY BOLT THAT GETS STRONGER THE FARTHER IT GOES



INFIRMARY

WE'LL GET IT REED... JUST KEEP PUNCHING

# ACCUTECH

## RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

(A SUBSIDIARY OF STARK ENTERPRISES)

Greetings and salutations! Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is **Matthew Malek**, and I'm hoping that my column, *Accutech*, will be a welcome addition to the pages of *Advanced Iron*. What exactly is the purpose of this column? Well, we all read comic books, and so we are all aware that the science fiction genre uses a large quantity of "pseudo-science" or "techno-babble." Since Iron Man is a technologically-based hero, it is only natural that we find a higher concentration of this pseudo-science in his series. That's where I come in. I am about to enter my second year as a graduate student in a physics Ph.D. program. As such, I am qualified to sort through the techno-babble and see what is purely fictional and what has a basis in reality. Reading through some of my old *Iron Man* issues, I was pleasantly surprised to see that much of the "Iron Science" does have a factual undercurrent to it. So, once a month I will select some scientific "discovery" or technological "fact" mentioned in *Iron Man* and explain the actual physics behind it. I suppose you can consider this column the *Iron Man* equivalent to the recent *Physics of Star Trek* bestseller.

I also take requests! If you are wondering about

any of the physics in an *Iron Man* issue, send me your question and I'll try to answer it in a future column. I won't be able to answer everything, but I'll do my best. For example, I doubt I could tell you how to build a repulsor ray, but I could explain some of the basic concepts behind it (and I might in a future column).

The name *Accutech* is a tribute to the technology which gave me this idea in the first place. Remember the **Beta Particle Power Generator** (first seen in *Iron Man* #219)? That's the inspiration for this column and this month's topic. Since it was the brainchild of scientists at *Accutech*, I decided to steal the name for myself! As for the Beta Particle Power Generator, read on:

### From Iron Man #219:

"Microscopic beta particles pass through space-- and the Earth-- every second of the day. If those particles could be *slowed* in their cosmic passage, even minutely, an *enormous* amount of energy could be generated"

Currently, I am focusing my studies on particle physics. I had never heard about beta particles, so I assumed they just didn't exist. However, a little research proved me wrong.

In nuclear physics, there are several different ways a nucleus can decay. One of these is called "alpha decay." When this happens, an alpha particle is emitted. In actuality, an alpha particle is just a helium nucleus: two protons and two neutrons. Another decay is called "beta decay" which emits (surprise!) a beta particle as a by-product. An element that undergoes beta decay moves up one number on the periodic table. Examples include: potassium becoming calcium, copper changing to zinc, and hydrogen becoming helium. You are all very familiar with the beta particle that is emitted during these decays. It is simply another name for the *common electron*.

So what is so fascinating about beta particles? Why on Earth did I bring this up in the first place? Although in our reality, the beta particle is only an electron, there is a particle which closely resembles the description given in the quote above. It is called the *neutrino*.

Neutrinos were first proposed by **Wolfgang Pauli** in 1930 as a way to account for "missing energy" in, ironically enough, beta decays. The idea took some time to catch on because neutrinos are hard to detect. They have no mass, no

electrical charge and move at the speed of light. However, the idea eventually gained acceptance, and in the 1950's, neutrinos were experimentally verified. The neutrinos which sound a lot like Stark's "beta particles" are solar neutrinos.

Yes, solar neutrinos are generated in the sun, primarily in the nuclear reaction where two protons collide to form hydrogen, a positron and a neutrino. Neutrinos are fundamental particles (they are not composed of any smaller particles) and are far smaller than microscopic. No microscope on Earth could see them! They can only be detected by more subtle and indirect means. These neutrinos are continually produced and emitted by the sun, so they do "pass through space". What about the Earth? The quote specifically describes particles which also pass through the Earth. Neutrinos are not very likely to interact with matter. Because it does not interact, a neutrino of moderate energy could easily penetrate 1000 light-years of lead! This is reassuring, since 50 trillion neutrinos pass through every square centimeter of the Earth each second of every day! During the day, they bombard us from above; at night, they pass through the Earth and come at us from below.

So far, these solar neutrinos match the description of Stark's "beta particles" perfectly. But, how could they be useful as a power source? What is this notion of "slowing them down?" As far as we can tell, neutrinos are massless

particles. A massless particle can only exist if it moves at the speed of light (this proof is mathematical). A more familiar example is the photon. Photons are also massless particles which move at the speed of light. Given this, could we slow a neutrino down? According to our current knowledge, the answer is "no." However, particle physics is **not** a complete science. Despite all we know, there are still some mysteries which remain. One of these unanswered questions involves a deficit in the number of observed solar neutrinos. Experiments designed to measure these neutrinos, such as the **Super Kamiokande** in Japan, have not been able to detect as many of them as astrophysical calculations predict. A proposed theoretical solution to this involves the neutrino having some small mass. If so, it could change (or oscillate) into some other massive particle before it reaches the Earth.

All of this is pure theory and remains unproven, but let's assume it to be true for a moment. If the neutrino had some small mass, then it would not be able to move at quite the speed of light. This means that we could generate some technology that would slow them down further and absorb the excess kinetic energy. With 50 trillion of these neutrinos passing through every square centimeter of the Earth every second, this could definitely be an enormous source of energy. Apparently, Stark's Beta Particle Power Generator is really acting to slow down solar neutrinos!

In issue #219, Mr. O'Conner tells Tony that this power supply is cheaper than solar energy and safer than nuclear. I understand what he means, but the irony does not escape me: These "beta particles" or neutrinos *are* being produced in the sun, so it is just a *different* type of solar power. Additionally, they are produced by nuclear reactions, so they are still a form of nuclear power.

On a final note, I would like to point out the implications of using this technology in the Iron Man armor. In issue #231, Stark designs his new red-and-gold armor. He uses a beta particle power supply (see page 16, panel 2). This means that Iron Man is now receiving immense amounts of power from the sun's neutrinos. We can still refer to the iron suit as "solar-powered, steel-mesh armor," but there are some noticeable differences. Since the armor is no longer charged by light, Tony doesn't have to worry about losing power when he is out of the sun for too long. Recall that neutrinos pass effortlessly through every part of the Earth all the time! With this new, continuous power supply, the suit no longer requires power storage pods. We all know that the classic red-and-golds had the round hip pods to store energy in. Even the more advanced red-and-silver suit had two square hip pods for the same purpose. Iron Man did not remove them often, but look in issue #226 when he battles Stingray. Stingray is defeated when Iron Man uses his power pods as a trap and then sets them off from a

distance. The new red-and-gold armor was the first armor without the need for power pods; most of the armors since then have followed this design. I would suspect that every armor since issue #231 has employed a beta particle power supply, **except** for the space armor used in issues #278-279. Since Tony knew he would be going into deep space, far away from any stars, he probably designed a more conventional power supply into the armor. This way he would not deplete his energy reserves once he left the vicinity of a large neutrino source.

Well, that's all for my first *Accutech* column. I hope you enjoyed reading it! Let me know of any comments, questions, or suggestions that you have. Thank you.

-Matthew S. Malek  
mmalek@suffolk.lib.ny.us

*And Iron Fans...us an added bonus from Matt - we've included the major portion of a letter he wrote to Marvel discussing how to "repair" the mess made by "The Crossing!" Let Matt know what you think!!*

If what you did to Tony Stark is bad, the way that you did it is even worse! In "The Crossing," you stepped all over the values and heroics that Tony has always stood for. It is incredibly invalidating to hear that the hero you have admired for years has been controlled by evil influences and used as a spy for decades! You made Stark into one of the "bad guys" he fought so hard against. You made him turn on both teams that he had founded. You took a pillar of the Marvel Universe and crushed it. I realize that the cheap death scene which you portrayed in *Avengers* #395 was intended as Tony's "death bed redemption," but it didn't work. It was too formulaic and unbelievable. The villain who has a change of heart and tragically sacrifices himself for the heroes has been used too often. Quite frankly, I am not one of the whiny fanboys who refuses to accept any change in comic books. Had you written Tony's death and done it well (with no violations of the character), I would have been sad, but satisfied. An example of this is the "Stark Wars." If *Firepower's* nuke really had destroyed Tony in issue #230, it would have been a fitting end for our hero. He would have died in a heroic quest to salvage his technology from those who would have misused it. But "The Crossing" made a monstrosity of poor Tony. I was so upset that I almost stopped collecting Marvel comics altogether!

But, I decided to have faith in ol' Marvel. I've been here for a long time and I've learned that things are not always what they seem to be. People you thought dead have a habit of resurfacing when you least expect it. Everyone thought Jean Grey was dead and she returned. Nobody thought Reed Richards was dead and he's back, too. I don't believe ShellHead is dead. Heck, I don't even believe he was ever under the influence of Kang, nor do I think he betrayed his teammates. How can this be so? I've had a theory for some time now and I've been biding my time while I collect evidence for it. Finally, I have enough so that I can present the true fate of Tony Stark to you. Curious? Well, read on:

I submit to you that Tony Stark has been a prisoner of Kang for some time now. At the end of *Iron Man* #318, Tony arrives at his isolated arctic base to have some time to himself. Upon entering, he is kidnapped by Kang and replaced by an evil Tony Stark from an alternate timeline. Not only that, but the harmless arctic refuge is replaced with a behemoth tank-in-disguise, so that this Evil Tony can attack the Avengers with it later. The

new, Evil Stark has been working with Kang willingly for some time now. In order to infiltrate the Avengers of our timeline, he submitted to memory transplants, much like the ones which Moonraker received, which enable him to act just like our own Stark. There are subtle differences, like this Evil Stark had a different armor with rivets on the mask, but they are small enough so as not to arouse suspicion. Evil Stark goes through with his attacks on the Avengers and helps Kang according to plan. The Avengers travel back ten years to an alternate timeline and bring Young Stark forward to our time. The two Starks fight and the ironic thing is that neither is native to our dimension. Finally, the Evil Stark dies; overwhelmed by the memories of our heroic Stark (it's confusing having three Starks running around, isn't it?) he makes the ultimate sacrifice. The Avengers believe their own Stark is dead but work to save Young Stark, who takes over as Iron Kid (for now).

It is a pretty far-fetched theory at first glance, but I have collected information to back it up. For starters, we saw Moonraker receive a memory implant from Libra. This shows us that is certainly possible. Next, in Force Works #21, we learned that the Suzi Endo who was CyberMancer in "The Crossing" was not our Suzi Endo at all! She was from an alternate timeline ten years in the future. In Iron Man #321, she replaces our Suzi Endo, who had been summoned by Evil Stark. It makes sense that, if this wasn't the real Suzi Endo betraying the Avengers, it was not the real Tony Stark, either! It was the Evil Stark from the reality that CyberMancer came from! In Force Works #22, the alternate Wonder Man even tells us that Evil Stark and Endo were both working for Kang in the alternate timeline, so it makes sense that they would have both "crossed" over to do Kang's work here as well. But those two were not the only ones who switched over to our universe. Just as Evil Stark and Endo replaced their counterparts in our reality, just as the rivet-studded Iron Man armor and the arctic fortress replaced their alternates here, the Machinesmith featured in "The Crossing" was not native to our reality. He was from Evil Stark's own timeline, where they were good friends. As an anchor to his true life, Evil Stark brought Machinesmith over here as well and kept him in the fortress. We know our Stark would never associate with our Machinesmith, as our Machinesmith is a wanted super-villain. In Captain America #450, Bill Clinton tells Cap about the whereabouts of



our Machinesmith and he was not up near any arctic bases. All of this evidence points to the fact that Evil Stark was not native to our reality.

As for proving that Young Stark is not native to our timeline, read Avengers: Timeslide. The Avengers go back ten years to bring a nineteen year old Young Stark into our present. But, we know that Stark is older than 29! He's one of the older heroes in the Marvel Universe and is probably about 40. We also can tell that time is not in synch between the two timelines because Peter Parker is now about 25. Ten years ago he would have been 15. He was only 16 when bitten by a radioactive spider and the Parker we saw in Timeslide did not look that old. Also, Young Stark comes from a world that is much more technologically advanced than our world was back then. He came from a world of holographic imaging and supercomputers. Because his world was more advanced than ours, Young Stark grew up with higher technology and was smarter than our Stark. At nineteen, he had invented holographic phone watches! When Tony first invented his armor, he barely had radio technology available to him. Definitely another inconsistency between timelines. Finally, there is the simple fact that, just because Young Stark went into our future, Stark did not cease to exist. Also, our Jarvis did not remember a visit from future Avengers. Doctor Doom did not recall an early encounter with the Avengers before he ever attacked the Fantastic Four in FF#5. Clearly the discontinuities between timelines proves that they are not one and the same.

How, then, do I explain the fact that an older Meredith McCall will probably remember Young Stark? How come he has to transfer schools to avoid an unexplained absence at M.I.T.? Well, Kang screwed around with time in a pretty serious way (erasing Viet Nam from history is pretty intense). Even though things seem back to normal now, there are bound to be a few errors in time lying around. Call them time-burps if you will. There are aftershocks of the events from "The Crossing" and they are clearly patches of time that were juxtaposed from a different reality into ours.

So, what will happen now? How do we fix this enormous mess and restore Tony Stark to his former glory? I think one of three things has happened to Stark. The most likely seems to be that he is still the prisoner of Kang. Perhaps Kang has kept him in stasis ever since the end of issue #318. In that case, Tony will have to escape somehow and


return to a world that believes he died as a traitor. Or, maybe Stark has been conscious and forced to watch all that has transpired at home. It must be sheer torture for a man like Tony to see such terrible things being done in his name, yet be helpless to do anything about it. Once again, an eventual rescue or escape must transpire to re-integrate Tony to our world. In either of the above cases, Young Stark would have to die or be returned to his own timeline. Other, less likely possibilities include Kang stashing Tony Stark in 2099 to keep him out of "The Crossing." This would mean Tony is ignorant of this entire ordeal, but is now in a completely new world. Perhaps he will return home and become the one, true Iron Man again. Or, perhaps Young Stark will stay the Iron Man of 1996 while Stark becomes Iron Man 2099 and receives a new title for himself. Finally, it is even possible that Kang placed Tony in Malibu's Ultraverse. In this case, we can see him have some adventures there for awhile before he returns home. Maybe he will even meet up with his fellow Avenger, the Black Knight, and his new team: Ultraforce. Anyway, these are my suggestions for what to do next. Now that we know Tony is still alive and out there, we need to bring him back into action!

The last theory that I offer you has little to do with Stark himself. Instead, it concerns the new Masque. She was recently revealed as being none other than Bethany Cabe. How can this be so? Why has this woman (who we know is a decent person and a good friend to Tony) become a killer and a criminal? Also, since she and Stark resolved to be "just friends," why did she start flirting with Stark in issue #319? It's because she's not entirely Bethany Cabe anymore. She's also partly Whitney Frost, a.k.a. Madame Masque. Remember back in issue #198-#199 when Obidiah Stane switched the minds of Cabe and Frost? Well, each mind was eventually returned to its proper body in issue #204 and everything seemed normal. But with time, the cure began to wear off. Parts of Frost's personality began to reassert itself in Cabe and vice versa. Eventually, the Whitney Frost side of Bethany Cabe took over and Cabe desired to be the only Madame Masque. So, she killed the original Madame Masque, as we saw in Iron Man #248, and took over as the new Masque. She became a split personality. Part of the time, she was a major crime boss and the rest of the time, she was good old Bethany Cabe. But the cure wore off further and the two personalities began to merge. That's why Bethany began to be attracted to

Stark (who was really Evil Stark, but she didn't know it) again in issue #319. Cabe may have resolved her feelings for Stark, but Frost had not. On the other hand, Masque began working a little with the good guys as Cabe's morals tamed her a bit. So, we now have a woman who is a composite of two personalities: Bethany Cabe and Whitney Frost all rolled into one! It is a little bit like the way Rogue/Carol Danvers used to be.

Well, I am done ranting. I'm glad I got the chance to tell you how the real Iron Man is still alive. Now you can go ahead and write the stories up to let the rest of the world know, too.

Sincerely,

  
2/1/06



ROG  
197

# ROGER OTT'S IRONING BOARD

## SPY HARD

No, I'm not talking about Leslie Nielson here. We're talking **Spymaster** again, only this time, it's the successor to the original. But, being second in line by no means makes this mysterious individual any less ruthless than the first Spymaster. Hell, this new guy even posed as Santa Claus for cripes sake! How much more devious can you get than that?

After the death of the original Spymaster (see *AI #32 for the scoop*), criminal industrialist **Justin Hammer** was searching for a new right hand and enlisted that incorrigible ne'er-do-well known as the **Taskmaster** to find and train the best of the best (*geez, another movie title*) to be his new industrial spy and saboteur. Taskmaster recruited five hopefuls, including a woman (*who would've filled out a Spymaster suit pretty nicely, I'd wager*) and began a grueling process of elimination to decide who gained the mantle of the new spy supreme. Known only as Number One, the man who would be Spymaster began dispatching his opponents one by one using whatever means necessary. After killing all four other applicants, Number One was declared the winner and given the name of the Spymaster. As a field test before turning him over to Hammer, Taskmaster instructed Spymaster to infiltrate the annual Stark Enterprises Children's Christmas Charity party. Posing as Santa Claus (see, *I told you*), the spy guy got past Stark security and was about to claim his prize when a child noticed that Santa was "packin' a gun." Shedding his jolly disguise, Spymaster soon found himself in battle with Iron Man. After several minutes of fighting, Iron Man gave in to Spymaster before any children were hurt. Claiming his "diploma" in the form of the

golden angel ornament atop the Christmas tree, Spymaster then took his leave, successfully proving himself to be a worthy successor to the name of Spymaster.

Several months later, after Tony Stark had been put into cryonic suspension in order to halt the techno-organic virus that was deteriorating his nervous system, Justin Hammer had Spymaster, along with his other operatives **Beetle**, **Blacklash**, and **Blizzard**, infiltrate Stark Enterprises in order to steal the industrial secrets that Stark had so carefully kept secret. After gaining entrance to SE, Spymaster and crew quickly found themselves in conflict with James Rhodes, who had succeeded Tony Stark in the role of Iron Man. While Iron Man made light work of the others, he found Spymaster to be slightly harder to beat. S-M used an electromagnetic pulse to disable Iron Man's armor, and while the armor was useless, Rhodes still managed to knock Spymaster flat. During an ensuing battle between Iron Man and the **Avengers West Coast** (*read the books to find out why*), Spymaster revived and with his teammates, attacked the Avengers and Iron Man, but were beaten.

While he hasn't been seen since, we all know that Spymaster is out there planning, waiting patiently for the right opportunity to challenge the might of Iron Man once again.

**ISSUES:** IM#'S 254, 285-286 **QUOTE:** "I'm ready for you Avenger! These power chucks will turn your head into tinfoil-wrapped jelly!" -Spymaster - *IRON MAN #254*

### HEROES REBORN

Well, the Heroes Reborn shtick is about to wind to a close, and I for one am glad. I really enjoyed the first few issues of *IRON MAN*, *FANTASTIC FOUR*, and *AVENGERS* volumes II, but after Jim Lee and Whilce Portacio stopped being regular pencilers, the flare went out of the whole thing. They were the main reasons that I was so geeked about the whole HR thing to start with. The best thing that's happened lately is that Captain America got his "A" back. Now, I understand it, there's going to be 13 issues of the HR titles, in order to give Marvel the time necessary to initiate the Heroes Return. I can't wait for *IRON MAN* #333

### CREATIVE JUICES

In other news, the creative teams (as posted in *WIZARD* #72) for the post HR books are simply awesome. Kurt Busiek and George Perez on *AVENGERS*- Yes! Waid and Garney back on *CAP* again- Yes! Busiek and Sean Chen on our old pal *IRON MAN*- Yes! And the one that surprised me the most was Scott Lobdell and Alan Davis on *FANTASTIC FOUR*. I've long been a fan of Davis' work, so I might actually start to pick this book up again.

The thing that really gets me is why did Marvel even have to go to Jim Lee and (gasp) Rob Liefeld in the first place? I'm more excited about the creative teams on the post HR books than I ever was about the coming of the 12 issue sets by the Image boys. Nothing against Lee (and I'll refrain from bashing Liefeld this time, but more on him later), but why even go to the Image camp at all when these awesome and tremendously talented folks were out there all along? I don't ever expect to hear an answer to that question, but I can always wonder, can't I? Anyway, Iron Man will be back like he should be- Yes!

Next Month: Uhhhhh....I don't know yet.

ROGER OTT

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### HOW LOW CAN HE GO?

Rob I-can't-keep-a-job Liefeld has started another company, and his flagship character is (heh) **Agent America**. I can't believe (\*snicker\*) the audacity of this guy. He's got to (\*snort\*) be kidding. Doesn't he? DOESN'T HE?!

### THE GAUNTLET PROTOCOL

Last month, I started the count-down without a word as to what it was. Well, right here, right now, I'm going to spill the beans (*but only some of them*), on what this whole thing is all about.

**Gauntlet** is an armored character I created some five years or so ago because of my affinity to Iron Man and armored characters in general. Over the past several months, I've been working on a plotline for a story involving this character. I've been drafting various armor designs and working on the characterization pretty steadily as of late, and the whole Gauntlet Protocol is going to be my first effort at putting my ideas on paper for the world to see. The book will consist of a stand alone story about six pages long, a bunch of technical armor illustrations, some character sketches, and a run-down on my plot ideas for what may hopefully some day be *GAUNTLET: THE SERIES*. Since finally getting on-line last month, I've been in regular contact with Allen "Shellhead" Bujak concerning some technical things (*he's a techno god, that Allen*), and I'm pretty close to having everything nailed down. My idea is to have this thing ready to fly by Christmas this year, and it will be included with your regular AI as an extra, no charge to you.

Over the next several months, I'll be supplying some more information, character bios, and a few other hints and tidbits here and there as they come along, and perhaps even a preview of the armor design itself.

COUNTDOWN TO THE  
**GAUNTLET**  
**PROTOCOL**

6 5 4 3 2 1



# EYE ON IRON MAN

Iron Fan's provide their reviews of .....



## Iron Man #9



-- Dave Huber, Wilmington, DE  
 "An elegantly tailored yarn -- one of the best 'reads' of the 'Heroes Reborn' Iron Man, indeed probably the best (this, despite the fact that there are still too few words in the damn book...!). The flashbacks were very well-done and made you feel as if you were Tony Stark 'seeing' them. I wasn't very impressed, however, with the Rebel-Titanium Man battle. The dialogue was childish and the battle seemed pointless. This was only a very minor flaw in an otherwise great story."



-- Bill Egan, Cupertino, CA  
 The true Rebel is finally revealed. We find out that though he was intelligent and athletic, he always felt he was in "Tone's" shadow -- at best a protégé to the boy genius, the original Atomic Knight. It turns out that his obsession with besting others was always his undoing -- finally killing him in the end. This is a very well told story, with the exception of the very plastic Titanium Man

OVERALL RATING for #9:

# TITANIUM

## Iron Man #10



-- Bill Egan, Cupertino, CA  
 What happened??? I thought things were really on the right track in #9, then we go back to the simplicity of a good brawl. I wasn't pleased with the simple discarding of Madame Hydra and the Mandarin. And it REALLY irked me that this book continues to be showcase for the Hulk and Terrax (who should obviously be handled in the FF) at the expense of the books namesake: Iron Man!



-- Dave Huber, Wilmington, DE  
 "First of all, in the 'Iron Man Recap' section, where in #9 did Rebel express his 'desire' to get another shot at T-Man -- much less Crimson Dynamo?? At any rate, this ish was garden-variety fare, with many inter-twining story threads taking place at once. Scott Lobdell either lied or his original idea about the Mandarin was ditched -- he had said Mandy was actually MODOK!! Whoops. And how 'bout that panel where IM and Reb bust in on Hydra headquarters -- does that Iron Man look like it was drawn by George Tuska, or what?? Yes!! And that Crimson Dynamo -- he looks like a hybrid of Dynamo IV and the Mauler, eh?"

OVERALL RATING for #10:

# SOLID STEEL



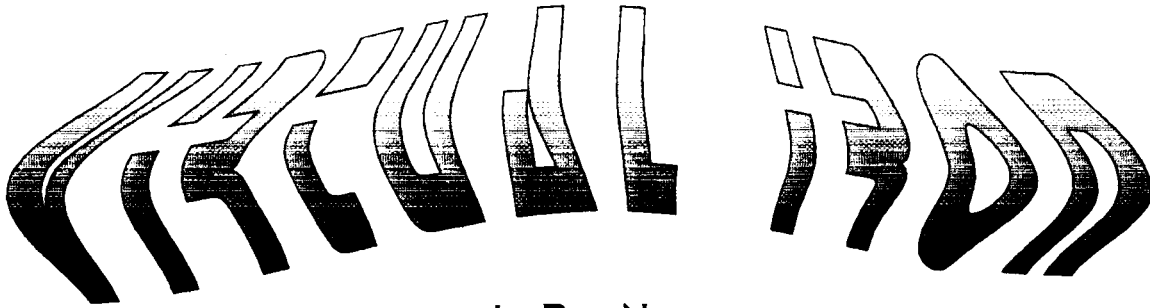
# EYE ON X-O

## X-O MANOWAR #9 by Acclaim Comics

I guess it has to happen to even the best of them. X-O, while still quite well written, falls back into the Power Rangers mode. Donovan fights a giant bird-like robot, controlled by a munitions dealer from outer space. I won't give away the final punch to this silly, but powerful creature. But if you've read Iron Man in the past few years, you'll see Donovan's "innovative" attack as old hat for shell-head. Fortunately for the reader, there are other things going on in the background. Such as Donovan's battle in a dream world, which coincides with his physical (X-O controlled) battle in the real world. These sequences seem like something out of the Twilight Zone, and actually give me the heebie-jeebies. Then there's Diana Hunter of Inquest, who would have been an interesting character (she was very anti-tech last issue, but shows up watching TV and talking on the phone in this issue!!!) All, in all this is still an issue worth reading, if only for the dream sequences. But things could get ugly if Augustyn gets any lazier with the character development.

BILL'S X-O RATING: **SOLID STEEL**





by Bart Ney

## ***GREETINGS***

Okay True Believers we are back again looking at Iron Man in the Digital World. Of course currently there aren't a lot of Iron Man direct licenses in the digital world so we look at what is close and we "extrapolate" (remember that word from your high school math classes?) what we think will work in the ultimate Iron Man video game. Now that I'm done imitating Stan Lee, let's get on with it:

## ***VIRTUA WORLD LET DOWN***

Last issue I said we would "peek in" on a place called Virtua World where participants partake in a "Mech Warrior" style dogfight through a multiplayer network. Well, I won't go back on my word but let's not spend too much time here. The concept was great! You walk in to a bar like atmosphere (except for all the twelve year olds around your feet) and order you and your 7 bloodthirsty buddies up a mission. You can also choose a racing scenario on a Martian outpost station. You are then taken (unless you have to wait, but they have pool tables) to a staging area and shown a very campy movie starring (depending on what mission you choose) Judge Reinholdt and Cheech Marin, that is supposed to unfold the game's backstory and teach you the basic controls.

Virtua World (VW) gets points for trying to create atmosphere and an immersive experience but unfortunately it falls short on too many fronts to be considered worthy of an Iron Fan's time. First off us Iron Fans are used to cutting edge technology and that just is not the case here. Mech Warrior 2 running on my Playstation looks infinitely better than the graphics going on at VW. You are enclosed in a fairly cool cockpit full of buttons and LED lights but as a beginner you can't use any of them. I know that on a previous visit there was an intercom system, however that was not accessible on my last visit and that really detracted from being able to fully interact with your friends out on the virtual landscape.

When you get down to it Virtua World needs a revamp. In order for a such a technology based attraction to be successful you have to at least be better than what we have at home.

## ***GAMES ON THE HORIZON***

It looks like there are a few interesting games coming down the pike for us to take a look at. Our favorite delayed title "**Marvel Super Heroes**" will finally make its debut in our homes (at least for Saturn and Playstation owners) this August. Capcom had an ad on the back of the August issue of Next Generation with a decent picture of Shellhead so I stuck it on the next page, enjoy!



Although I personally haven't been the biggest fighting game follower, "Star Wars: Masters of Teras Kasi" looks like a really impressive new title. In this Playstation exclusive you can be Han, Luke, Leia, Chewbacca, Boba Fett, Darth Vader, a Gamorrean Guard, and at least one new character. The masters at Lucas arts are making sure this game has power beyond just the impressive Star Wars license by having each character composed of more than 1,200 polygons. Similar games chime in at around 600! Also, some of the lighting effects were done by Industrial Light and Magic and this game actually served as a test bed for other projects like the "Spawn" movie. No release date has been given.

Other games to be on the lookout for late this year are: **Tomb Raider 2**: Lara now has more moves and an even more detailed world to run around in, **Aliens Vs. Predator**: The best the Atari Jaguar had to offer is now making its way to the Saturn and the Playstation with all new level design, **Metal Gear Solid**: Believe it or not a 32 bit version based on this old Nintendo 8 bit classic is in the works, **Armored Core**: Brand new 3D mech game from Sony, **Youngblood**: Rob Liefield must be doing something right because he will probably make a pile of cash off of this 3D isometric shooter, and last but not least **Superman** is going to have a new game out about the time of the release of his new movie.

### ***STARK SHADOWS***

Heroes Reborn is winding up and giving way to Heroes Return. I think Iron Man #10 sums up what has been the best and the worst of this incarnation of Shellhead. The artwork was great and the story really intriguing, but once again it felt too short. Finding out Doom has been behind the scenes of all the mischief in Iron Man was ideal and I can't wait to see how this all will end. I am ready for it to end though. I really want to see an Iron Man who exists in the Marvel Universe and a Tony Stark that is surrounded by the likes of Ms. Arbogast, Bethany Cabe, Abe Zimmer and definitely James Rhodes.

### ***YOUR BIG SHOT***

Virtual Iron is an open forum. I'd love to hear from anyone who has an interest in Iron Man and/or video games. If you would like to contribute something to this article feel free to contact me with the following information:

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### ***NEXT ISSUE:***

Let's be honest, I have absolutely NO idea what will be in next month's issue! So to find out make sure you are back here in 30!



# THE ARMOR FILE

## BY ALLEN "SHELLHEAD" BUJAK

Welcome Iron Fans to the only open forum for a technology based discussion of Iron Man. For the uninitiated, **THE ARMOR FILE** highlights a fan designed armor every month. Any armored hero is fair game, though the primary focus is the Marvel Universe. When there are no other submissions, I feature an armor of my own design. I warmly welcome any submissions - with any level of detail you wish to go into. I, personally, enjoy rendering realistic armors - but any illustration of any kind of any armor is welcome here. Now that we all know the premise of this article, let's get started.

## MARS OR BUST!!

As I'm sure everyone has heard - NASA's latest space probe - the Mars Pathfinder is on the red planet and is relaying information to Earth. We're all in awe of the pictures that we've seen from this mission - and I'm sure the scientific community is taking a bow. But should it? I've heard scientists from the Jet Propulsion Labs talk about how the Mars Sojourner was never designed to increase our knowledge of Mars - they simply wanted to see if they could accomplish such a mission in a short amount of time. This is a \$300 million mission! And it's funded by our tax dollars! I know what you're thinking - here comes the political argument. No - at least not this time. Instead, I think this is a matter of will over at NASA. What is interesting to note is how NASA has changed and what they intend to do.

According to a report on CNN, NASA is planning to send another probe to Mars in 2001 - a probe designed to collect samples. In 2005 another probe will arrive to take the samples and deliver them to Earth. Am I the only person that sees this as stupid? First and foremost, if something goes wrong, we're talking about time being taken before NASA's aware of the problem. In fact, NASA may not know for months or weeks that a problem has claimed one of these probes - the probes don't transmit all the time - only when they approach their destination. Aside from the obvious fact that things can go wrong - we're talking about 2007 before we get an actual rock back from Mars. That's a long time! Especially when the Viking program was 20 years ago. So roughly 30 years from our first Mars probe - we get samples back - from another probe. Talk about slow going! Where's Tony Stark when we need him?

I'm not kidding either - NASA's approach these days stems from the top. Daniel Golden is the head of NASA. Two years ago I heard him speak at the Illinois Institute Of Technology just before I graduated. I was dismayed at what I heard. Instead of drawing for the audience a bold program of exploration - he instead talked of waiting for technologies to evolve. He spoke of cameras the size of sugar cubes - instead of being the size of a TV remote control (as they now are). It's good that he expects technology to change - but it's bad that he's waiting for the perfect technology to come along before he does anything. He's not a visionary - he's a bureaucrat - waiting for the perfect way to do something.

What's wrong with this? Nothing - if you want to stay where you are. But when we first tried to conquer space and went to the moon, we took the initiative. No one really thought we could do it. But John F. Kennedy was a dynamic, motivating leader - and he convinced the country that we could do it. And we did do it. It took time, it cost lives, but we taught ourselves how to use what we had at hand to get the job done. But today, NASA is consumed with doing what they're doing - not doing what they've never done. And it's not really safer than it was during the days of Apollo, Gemini and Mercury. During a test of the Apollo 1 capsule, three astronauts lost their lives. In the weeks that followed - the capsule was re-designed from the ground up. But seven astronauts died aboard the space shuttle Challenger. So much for NASA being safer these days. But Dan Golden wants to be safe - he wants to send probes. But probes are anti-septic. There's not really a thrill with a probe - we're not doing anything but looking at a TV or computer screen. We're not going anywhere. Just look at how interest has dropped with the Mars Pathfinder. As Daniel Burnham, world renowned architect after the great Chicago fire said "Make no small plans - for they have no magic to fire men's souls" Sojourner has proven these words - less than a week after it arrived, it's off the front page - while the human drama of Mir dominates.

Maybe NASA should consider that - after all, lack of public support killed the Apollo program in mid-stride. It make take more money, time, effort and sacrifice to send men to the stars - but there will always be men in line to try. And those men, would gladly give their lives to join the ranks of Columbus, Magellan, Armstrong, Grissom, Shepard. We must honor those who choose to dream by giving them the chance to succeed - not look at the news and wonder why more isn't being done.

In closing, I want to salute the real heroes of the Mars Sojourner - the engineers. They built a device that's thousands of miles from Earth - across the vastness of space. And the damned thing works! They built a probe - that can gather scientific information after travelling for 18 months to reach its' destination - and landing on another planet. These are the heroes for NASA - it's just too bad all that talent is moving in the wrong direction.

# **FIREPOWER**

# **MODEL 1 MARK 1**

**NAME:** Jack Taggert

**AGE:** 33

**RESIDENCE:** Southern California

**MARITAL STATUS:** Single

**OCCUPATION:** Security Consultant - Force Works

**FORCE WORKS POSITION:** Military Advisor

**HISTORY:** Jack Taggert was born in Atlanta Georgia to factory worker James and his wife Alysha. Jack was small as a child - initially not very athletic - and as a result, got picked on by kids at school. His father worked out with him - and by the time Jack was 9, he was the toughest kid in school. Although he had a hard time controlling his temper, Jack was a good kid. James was killed in a fight in a bar when Jack was just 10. The death of his father shook Jack deeply - apparently his father had been mistaken for someone else and was killed in their place. Jack learned then why his father so strongly believed in justice.

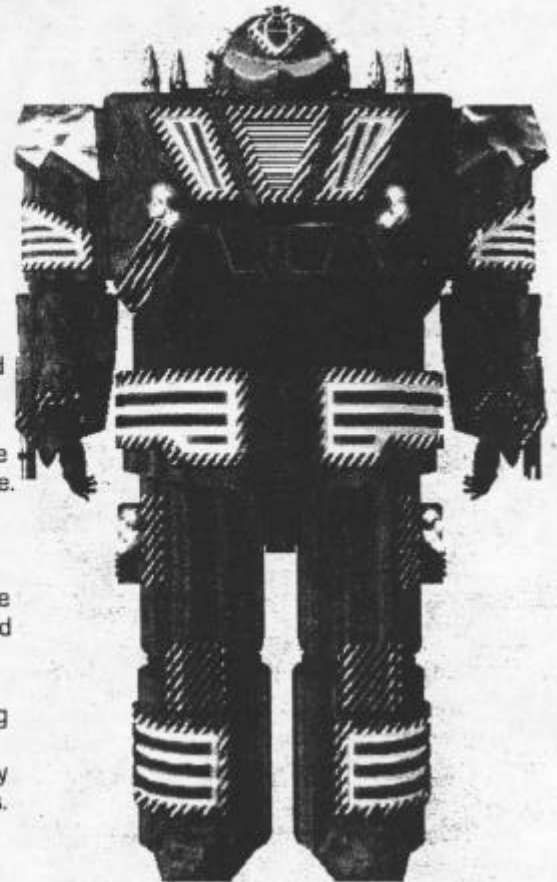
Two years later, Alysha remarried - to a Marine Sargent. Because of that, Jack and Alysha moved from Atlanta and went from base to base. Jack never trusted his stepfather at first - but in time found that he was an honorable man. Jack grew to admire him so much that after High School, he joined the Marines.

Jack took to the Marines well - he liked the structure and discipline that military life provided. As he excelled in the Marines, he was assigned to tougher and tougher missions. One summer, he was assigned to a covert, joint mission - he was to team up with a young naval intelligence officer - Jeff Carmichael. At first he didn't like the notion of nursemaiding a young officer - especially from the Navy. But when the mission went bad, Carmichael did what he had to do - he proved to be as tough as they came. But Jeff took a bullet in the leg - he couldn't make the rendezvous. Despite Jeff's requests to leave him, Jack carried him to safety. Jack then went to the landing zone - met their extraction chopper and at gunpoint forced the pilot to fly to where he'd left Jeff. The incident very nearly cost Jack his career. Jeff never forgot that - but because of the nature of their future missions, the two found they could not keep in touch.

After several years, Jack was recruited to a special project - so secret that it had no name - or so he was told. The project was a huge, hulking, battlesuit - a walking tank with all manner of weapons - Firepower. His first job as Firepower was to take on Iron Man - which suited him fine. Jack saw Iron Man as nothing more than "the Energizer Bunny with attitude". That view was supported by Edwin Cord - whom Jack met while working as Firepower. Cord showed Jack evidence of Iron Man's wrong doing - so Taggert had no problems with killing the armored avenger. In their first encounter, that's exactly what appeared to happen - Iron Man seemed to die at the hands of Firepower. Jack was proud of his work - and for the first time felt more the hero than the soldier. Cord suggested to Taggert that killing Iron Man wasn't enough - that decimating Stark Enterprises was the next step. Jack didn't like the idea - but orders falsified by Cord led him to believe that the president himself ordered it done. So despite his misgivings, Taggert pressed on - once more the soldier.

After confronting Stark directly, Firepower met up with a new Iron Man. Instead of easily killing him - as Taggert expected to do - Firepower was defeated, his armor was trashed. Jack Taggert was taken into custody and court martial proceedings were begun. When proceedings began, Taggert proclaimed his innocence - but as the trial progressed, he began to see that Stark was the victim. The media portrayed Firepower's attacks on SE as dangerous and almost terrorist like. As details surfaced about Cord's activities, Jack knew he had been duped. During the court martial, Jack learned that the man who killed his father was killed in an auto accident. He felt that his father could rest in peace - but also began to rediscover the concept of justice. He came to believe that a court martial would be justice - and that he was in fact guilty. But he was saved from himself by Cord - whose falsified orders were presented as evidence. Despite the victory, Taggert felt awful - his idealism about serving in the military was gone. And yet, he wanted to defend his country - he wanted to make a difference. But he admonished himself for letting Cord convince him that he was on some kind of crusade. Taggert promised himself that from that time forward, he would follow orders to the letter - without question or hesitation.

For a while, it worked. A new Firepower armor was constructed - and Taggert acted like little more than a robot - doing his job without thinking about what to do. Ultimately, he faced Iron Man again - but this time, his real target was Atom Smasher. Iron Man tried to talk to Atom Smasher - but Taggert didn't want to cloud the issue - his orders were to contain the situation by force and that's what he tried to do. But he failed - Iron Man used an electromagnetic pulse and disabled both Firepower and himself. Taggert was livid - not only had he failed - but he had been humiliated - Iron Man carried him out of the building - his massive armor immobile.



The incident didn't bother his superiors - Taggart did what he could. But that wasn't how Jack saw it. He knew that Iron Man was right - the situation should never have been resolved by force. That left him with a problem - he couldn't just blindly follow orders. Yet, he didn't want to risk questioning orders and thus become the same misguided kind of fool that Cord had been. So while the Firepower program was called into question, Taggart wrestled with whether or not he had the strength of mind that he had in body. It was a question of faith - a question he wasn't given time to answer. To answer congressional charges that the Firepower program was misguided and irresponsible, a war-games exercise was held - between Stingray and Firepower. Stingray was also a government operative - but his armor wasn't as massive as Firepower's. The games would decide what approach would best work - light and fast or slow and well-armed. It was a potentially brutal match - but in the end was rather tame - and Stingray won. Unknown to Taggart, Stingray was his old friend - Jeff Carmichael - and Jeff knew Taggart's style. Added to Taggart's indecision - it was an easy victory for Stingray. Although Jeff knew that Jack had hesitated too much - the two had no actual contact and there was not even a way for Jeff to confirm that it was his friend he faced.

The loss to Stingray brought the Firepower program to a stop - with one final mission lined up. A case of weapons grade plutonium was being shipped via rail car to a top secret storage facility. Firepower would have to guard it. Taggart decided to wait in the same car as the plutonium - in the event of an attack, he'd be ready to strike. The attack came - but not as planned - the train stopped and then was attacked, it was a set-up. Taggart unleashed the full force of his armor - and was winning the fight. Then his armor shut down. All his systems powered down - and he was left helpless, while the plutonium was taken.

This defeat was different, however. The command codes that controlled Firepower were known only to Taggart - or so he had been told. If someone got hold of those codes - there was a leak in the organization - and it almost made Taggart look like a traitor. Worse yet, Taggart hadn't reported the codes to anyone - which meant someone gained control of the Firepower armor behind his back. Telemetry from the armor proved that a signal was broadcast to the armor - and shut it down. But Taggart still didn't like being duped. Worse yet, when he reported his suspicions, his superiors called it a "non-issue".

Taggart was furious - and began to do some digging. After a little hacking, and a some breaking and entering, Taggart found evidence linking his superiors to a local militia group. Jack stole the Firepower armor and waited at the home of the Colonel Judson Graham - who was in charge of the Firepower program - and who always stood up for Taggart. When Graham arrived, Firepower walked out of the shadows and confronted his old friend. Graham resisted - but Taggart held him off the ground - by the neck, and the Colonel relented. He explained how America had gotten "weak" and how it needed Firepower - without the military bureaucracy. Judson felt that a militia group with the Firepower armor could teach people what America was all about. But he still refused to tell Jack where any evidence of this was hidden. Using the armor's sensors, Taggart found a cache of weapons in the house - he stormed through the wall - and inside, found records of the plan. Knowing that he couldn't trust anyone, Jack Taggart flew off into the dawn - toward Washington.

At the newly established Force Works, Tony Stark and Jessica Malcom were awakened by an alarm. PLATO - the main Works computer - had detected massive military activity on the west coast. With some hacking, Abe Zimmer managed to find out that the target of the military was none other than Firepower. Stark wanted to know what was going on - he ordered Force Works 2 to armor up and meet at a hex-jet hangar.

At almost the same time, Stingray had been summoned - as the government's other armored operative, he was put in charge of a task force that was charged with bringing Firepower down. A man he knew only as Gyrich, and Senator Boynton were the ones that briefed him - although he'd been told a Marine Colonel was also going along. But, Colonel Graham elected to follow at a safe distance. With the lead that Firepower had, it would be Chicago before the task force intercepted Firepower.

During his flight, Taggart realized that he'd found the balance that he had been seeking. He's no longer torn between orders and conscience - he's doing what he thinks is right, and that's all that matters. His revelation is interrupted when he detects an aircraft following him - a hex-jet. But Stark, aboard the Hex-Jet, orders Rhodey to maintain an observation distance - at least until Abe Zimmer and Phillip Grant can try to find out what's going on. Firepower decides to let sleeping dogs lie - and proceeds to Chicago. Just as he's reaching the city - he's approached by forces mobilized out of Great Lakes Naval Air Station - as well as the task force that has been following him. But before the shooting starts - Stingray approaches Firepower - and starts talking. Taggart doesn't buy it - he sees Stingray as another government stooge. He immediately attacks Stingray - but Stingray orders his forces to not attack. Seeing the battle among the skyscrapers, Force Works moves in. They manage to subdue the combatants - but out of frustration, Stingray utters a single phrase - "Dammit Jack!" - and immediately Firepower is stopped cold. Atop the Sears Tower - the armored heroes discuss what's happening - beginning with Stingray who removes his helmet and reveals his identity to his friend. Taggart does the same - realizing that he might have an ally after all. Firepower goes on to explain the situation - Iron Man immediately suggests that Force Works accompany Firepower - the influence of Tony Stark would make the going easier. Firepower refuses - this is his battle - and he's unwilling to have anyone else die for it. Before the argument can go farther - Colonel Graham arrives and immediately orders all units to open fire.

Infuriated by the danger to innocent lives, Firepower springs into action - along with Force Works and Stingray. Iron Man and Force Works cover Firepower's escape - while the colonel radios Washington. In a Hex-Jet pursuing Firepower, Stark attempts to ease fears in Washington - but he finds that he is Persona Non Grata - Force Works is to be apprehended along with Firepower. Stark then realizes that there will be a welcoming committee waiting at Washington - Mandroids. Although Firepower is made aware of this - he presses on. Force Works - pushing the Hex Jet to the limit - catches Firepower over the capital. A massive battle ensues - Mandroids swarm on Firepower - as Stingray and Force Works attempt to reach him. Iron Man and War Machine reach him just as Firepower hits the ground. Before the

armor's system shutdown, Iron Man extracts all the evidence of the conspiracy. He and War Machine take the information and immediately make for the White House. The rest of Force Works holds off the Mandroids - while Stingray gets Taggart to medical help. Iron Man and War Machine are successful - and pardons are issued for Force Works, Stingray and Firepower. But the end is not that simple for Taggart - he no longer believes in serving the government - yet he still wants to make a difference. As he and newly resigned Stingray, Jeff Carmichael leave the hospital a Hex-Jet touches down in the parking lot - Force Works 2 is inside. They extend an offer to both Taggart and Carmichael - to join them as a new Firepower and Stingray, respectively. Each with an all new armor - and a voice in what missions the team takes and doesn't take. Not only do they accept the offer - but for the first time in years - Jack Taggart feels comfortably in control of his life.

**PERSONAL PROFILE:** Jack Taggart has made many mistakes in his life - first, his blind faith in Edwin Cord - then his blind faith in his orders. He's never really been sure of who he is. But now that he's got a bright future ahead - and truly respects who he works for and with - he's also trying to find out who he is.

Jack's also trying to learn to be a civilian. He's been in the military for a long time - and marching to his own tune is a new idea for him. It is difficult for him to socialize however - having always been so duty-bound. As he makes more friends, he'll likely soften up - for now, he can be blunt and cold at times.

But Jack is also looking for a relationship - he's never felt he could as Firepower, but when he sees what Tony Stark and Jessica Malcom have, it's clear to him that it's possible to be involved with both a woman - and a suit of armor.

**TEAM DYNAMIC:** Jack Taggart is the oldest armor wearing member of Force Works 2 - he's also worn armor the longest, except for Iron Man. That makes him an interesting contradiction - he's the newest member of the team - yet among the most experienced. So while he's just getting used to his teammates - he's confident in battle.

Jack's biggest problem is the civilian support group for Force Works 2 - particularly Phillip Grant. Phillip's come a long way from the hacker than Bethany Cabe caught breaking into SE's computer - but to Jack Taggart, Phillip's an unprincipled brat just the same. In order to bring them together, Stark has gotten them to start playing chess against each other over the Works' computer system. Each one thinks they're playing someone else - when they're really playing each other.

Jack's primary team function is military advisor. Because Force Works 2 encounters the military on a regular basis - they need someone that can give them an idea what to expect. Although he's resigned from the Marines, Jack still has friends in the military. Unlike U.S. Agent and Force Works 1, Jack wants to be with Force Works 2 - he likes these people and knows that he can learn a lot from each one of them.

**ARMOR OVERVIEW:** The first thing that jumps out at you about Firepower is that he's BIG. The Firepower armor is so huge - a special Hex-Jet had to be commissioned. The Hex-Jet MXD - Mission of eXtended Duration. The size of the armor is due to the fact that there are actually two suits. One is literally inside the other. The armor's designed to take a lot of punishment - you could drop it at ground zero of a nuclear blast - and it would survive. The inner suit - gray and crimson - is as sleek and low-profile as possible. It fits within the central torso of the larger outer suit. In fact, the inner suit is oriented in such a way, that the arms of the wearer are pinned at his side while he wears both suits. Not uncomfortable, it's more difficult on the mind. The cybernetic controls translate commands directly to the outer suit - but the wearer has to get comfortable with the idea that his limbs don't move. The legs of the inner suit are a different story - they do move, slightly. The feet of the inner suit line up roughly with the middle of the thigh on the outer suit. So some leg motion is needed to walk. Striking a balance between moving the legs and not moving the arms is the trick.

But of course, there's a very good reason for this odd internal layout - ejection. If the external suit become damaged - the inner suit ejects - right out the top. Explosive bolts all over the outer suit are only part of the self-destruct of the outer suit - acid flows over the suit and burns any and all exotic materials (such as the energy emitters). When the outer suit blows - there's nothing left. The inner suit, by itself is the lightest armed of any Force Works 2 suit. But it is a suit that is stronger than the rest. If the outer suit should become crushed, the wearer will need to break out relying only on the inner suit. That also explains the extensive shield generators covering the inner suit.

The outer suit is like a walking tank - very clumsy in a lot of respects - it doesn't move as though there's a man inside. But the armor is just what the name implies - Firepower. The lower section of the outer armor's legs are totally devoted to flight systems - meaning that Firepower can be very fast, despite his size. The thigh modules provide power for the "boots". The boots are orbit capable - but it's not really advisable because of the limited maneuverability that the suit has - even thrust vectoring can only go so far. The gauntlets handle various weapons, and internally contain various ammunition. The primary loadout consists of a mini-gun, 4 RDRC (Rapid Discharge Repulsor Cannon), and two grenade launchers - per gauntlet. The upperarms contain power generators - much as the thighs do for the jets. The helmet has shield generators, an extensive display system, and 4 RDRC. The helmet, since it is not attached to the wearer's head, is more like a turret and can swivel 360° around.

The chest is the most vital section of Firepower. You can see in the close-ups that next to the helmet - on the top of the chest, are two ribbed heat sinks. There are two more heat sinks on the lower chest (off to either side from the center) and two in back. Behind the top heat sinks are black slots - which are actually launch tubes for hockey-puck like discs. The discs can be explosive, tear gas, liquid Nitrogen or a new passive restraint from SE called GOO (Gelatinous Offensive Oppressor). Disc launchers can also be fitted in the gauntlets if needed. In the center of the chest is a high-powered uni-beam emitter - a Force Works 2 standard. Next to the uni-beam are two clusters of 3 RDRC. Below the uni-beam are two glowing blue emitters - both are MDRC (Maximum Discharge Repulsor Cannon - slower fire rate - lots of power). The RDRC and MDRC are both more advanced than the previous models which made their debut in AI#25 with the Crimson Venger. Immediately behind the helmet are 6 launch tubes - for various kinds of missiles as well as an aft shield generator.

**NEXT MONTH - WHO KNOWS???????**

# FIREPOWER MODEL 1 MARK 1 INTERNAL ARMOR BASIC LOADOUT



SHIELD GENERATOR



SHIELD GENERATOR

BOOT-JET HEAT SINKS



FORCE WORKS DATABASE ENTRY  
PRIMARY ARMOR - BASIC INFORMATION  
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CLASSIFIED  
ACCESS LEVEL **BETA** OR HIGHER REQUIRED

# FIREPOWER MODEL 1 MARK 1 EXTERNAL ARMOR BASIC LOADOUT

INTERNAL ARMOR  
SHOWN FOR  
COMPARISON

MISSILES

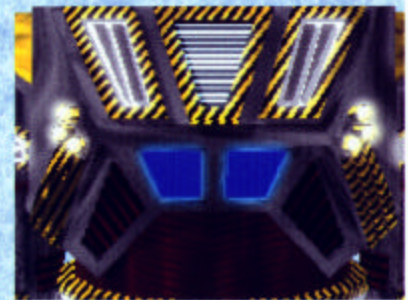
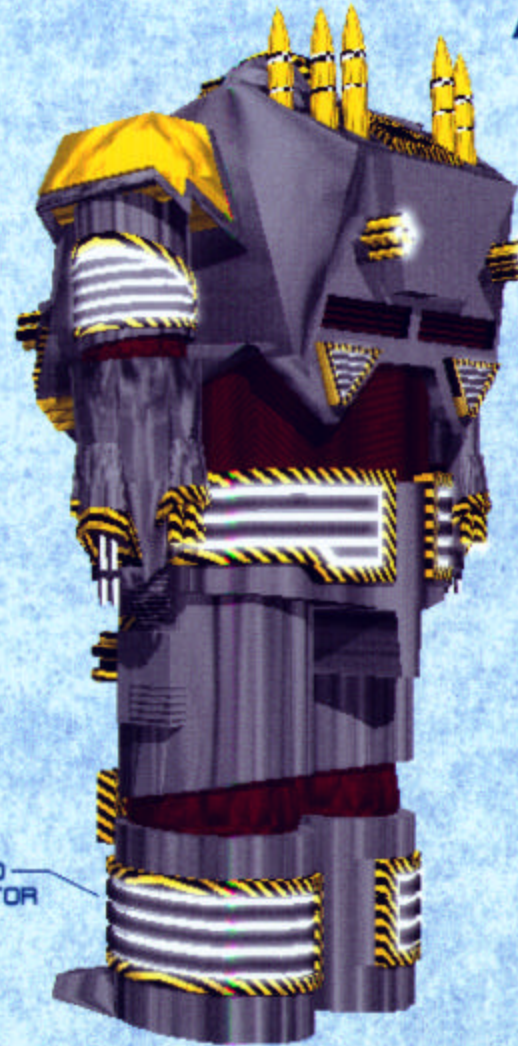
RDRC-2

SHIELD  
GENERATOR



WEAPONS  
CLUSTER  
4-RDRC  
1-MDRC

SHIELD  
GENERATOR



GAUNTLET  
WEAPONS  
CLUSTER  
MINI-GUN  
GRENADES  
RDRC



FORCE WORKS DATABASE ENTRY  
PRIMARY ARMOR - BASIC INFORMATION  
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CLASSIFIED  
ACCESS LEVEL **BETA** OR HIGHER REQUIRED