

ULTIMATE

IRON MAN

ISSUE

5



DIRECT EDITION

PARENTAL ADVISORY



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MARVEL

ORSON SCOTT CARD

ANDY KUBERT

MARK BAGLEY

Andy Kubert

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PREVIOUSLY IN ULTIMATE IRON MAN:

Tony Stark isn't a normal boy. His mother, Maria, was a geneticist working on a regeneration process where a virus turns every body cell into a neural cell, capable of new growth (like an embryonic cell). The problem with the process is that each cell is therefore hypersensitive, causing the infected person great pain. She accidentally infected herself and Tony (who was in her womb at the time) with the virus. The pain caused Maria's death during Tony's birth. Tony was saved from this pain by a revolutionary nanotech armor that his father, Howard, developed. The armor is a thin layer on the wearer's skin that absorbs shock and eats any metal that comes into contact with it.

Zebediah Stane, Howard Stark's main competitor in the world of defense technology, stole Howard's company and first wife, Lori, but couldn't get what he wanted most—the nanotech armor technology. So he started playing dirty. He kidnapped Tony and tortured him to get information on the armor. He was caught, sent to prison and his company went to Lori and the son she and Stane had together—Obadiah. The fate of his father and his mother's instability have led Obadiah to serious sociopathic behavior. Obadiah is now a student at the Baxter Building, a U.S. Government-run think tank, with Tony's best friends, Rhodey and Nifara.

When Tony and Howard were visiting the Baxter Building, they noticed Obadiah taking a loose hair of Howard's off Howard's jacket. They don't know what he plans to do with it.



S T A N L E E P R E S E N T S :

ULTIMATE IRON MAN

ORSON SCOTT CARD
WRITER

ANDY KUBERT & MARK BAGLEY
PENCILS

DANNY MIKI, JOHN DELL & SCOTT KOBLISH
INKS

RICHARD ISANOVE
COLORS

CHRIS ELIOPOULOS
LETTERS

OMAR OTIENU
PRODUCTION

SEAN RYAN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

NICK LOWE
EDITOR

RALPH MACCHIO
CONSULTING EDITOR

JOE QUESADA
EDITOR IN CHIEF

DAN BUCKLEY
PUBLISHER

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How many of these do we have to wreck before you start trying it on thinner sheets of steel?

Why don't I just use sheets of paper? Then I'd succeed every time.

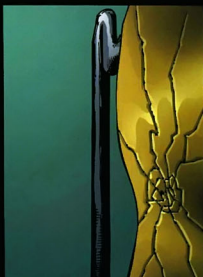
All right, Nifara, everything's set. Do it.



This resonance-imaging thing just isn't working, Rhodey.

Wait. It's still ringing.

Wow. You've discovered the gong.





It worked!

I'll try to forget that you sounded so shocked when you said that.



That's right, Nifara, don't be surprised when Rhodey happens to not screw up.

Even a stopped clock is right twice a day.

What do you want, Obadiah?



What do you call this primitive-looking weapons system?
"The glove"?

War Machine.

Oh, it's a **weapon**. I thought it was a fashion statement.

Is the Air Force going to mount these on airplanes so they can knock down incoming missiles?

Or is it for paddling bad middle-school students?

It's for ramming through your pants and right up your--



Kinky.



Nobody touches this without my permission.

Why not? You're just going to give it to your little buddy, Tony Stark, so he can take all the credit and make all the money.



Look, Nifara. Obi-wanker is cleverly trying to turn me against Tony.

James, why did you have to touch him? Now you have to wash your hands again.



It's big enough.

It's just a prototype, Dad.

It's a lot easier to do the preliminary work when it's super-sized.

What's the range? Flying, I mean.

Fly! Give me a break, Dad, this thing weighs a ton.

So far all it can do is hover and bounce.

You've solved a lot of tough problems, son. I'm proud of you.

That was Dad talking. The Boss says, I've poured millions into this, and you show me an oversized... prototype.

A prototype that hovers for a few minutes and then it's just a great big target.

What if I tell you that the regular-size model is made of a material that is impervious to any known projectile?

And light enough to fly? Excuse me, I mean "hover."



We've tested this material with everything in the arsenal. Spent-uranium projectiles only dent it.

And I'm only hearing about this now?
I didn't want to waste your time on it till it met my specs.



You better get behind the protective wall, Dad.

Should you be the test dummy?

Who else, Dad? If it doesn't work, I'm the only one who heals fast.



Why doesn't the shock knock him down?

Oh, the big stuff knocks him all over the place. Want to see?

Uh...is it safe?

For him it is.





Would somebody get some of this crap off me?



No, stay here. Let's see whether the flying boots can get him out.

Those boots don't have the stabilizing software yet, sir.

In combat, you use what you've got.



Hey! What do you think you're...



Doing!



Turn it off, dammit!



What were you trying to do, rip me in half?

Rhodes and Nifara have their War Machine working, so the next suit will be...

Usable?

Quick. Strong. Stable. Tough. Light.

Good enough for me. When?

As long as it takes to get it right.

Sir.

My deal with Rhodes is, we get his War Machine, and he gets our finished suit.

That's not how it works, son.

You give him money. You never give away technology.

That was the deal. Stick to it, or you don't get my tech.

I own your tech. I own every thought in your head. We have a contract.

You don't own anything if I haven't told anybody the formulas.

I learned that trick from the old man.

We give him a suit. One suit. Not the underlying technology.

With a lifetime warranty. Parts and labor.

All right.

And upgrades.

Until the day you stop trusting him.

We're friends forever.

Nothing lasts forever, Tony.

Sing Sing Correctional Facility





It's about time the government realized they need my expertise.

Who are we meeting here?



Hey!



You're not government, you're hit men!



Like we can't be both.



Why didn't you just kill me in prison?!

Then it would have been nothing but a prison murder.

Now it's special.



You do it. We can't have any of my blood on him.

You see, Zebediah, you shouldn't have annoyed Howard Stark. He never forgets.

Stark! Stark would never do this.

That's why he's going to get away with it. Everybody thinks he's one of the good guys.



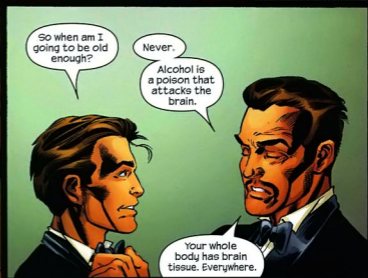
Sometimes I think I should give up and use those pre-tied bows.

Then we'd be as pretty as Christmas presents.



There's going to be a lot of alcohol there.

Don't touch it.



So when am I going to be old enough?

Never.

Alcohol is a poison that attacks the brain.

Your whole body has brain tissue. Everywhere.



Since I have brain-tissue redundancy out the wazoo, I should be able to drink with impunity.

Alcohol is evenly distributed throughout the bloodstream. All your brain tissue will be affected.

Even the brains in your butt.



Besides, Tony, it isn't intoxication that worries me.

It's dependency.

You think I'm an alcoholic? Dad, I've never even tasted beer!

We don't know how alcohol will affect you. Let's not find out.



Ambassador, I'd like you to meet my son Tony.

He's even prettier than his father.



I'm smarter, too. It drives him crazy.

I'd have left him home, but nobody will babysit him any more.



By the way, your excellency, you should take a look at some of our anti-EMP technology.

It might spare you the inconvenience of having your air force suddenly drop like flaming raindrops.

I see you are a poet of munitions young Mr. Stark.



I'm so sorry-- I'm needed on government business.

You're on your own, Tony.



How did he get out of prison? We know it wasn't a tunnel.

Someone came in and got him. In a food truck.





We know exactly how he died, Mr. Stark. He was torn in half, right down the middle of his body.

Torn, not sliced? Not blown apart?

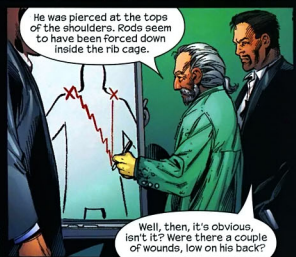


Ripped. By brute force.

But he was not pulled apart by the arms, Mr. Stark. They were duct-taped together.

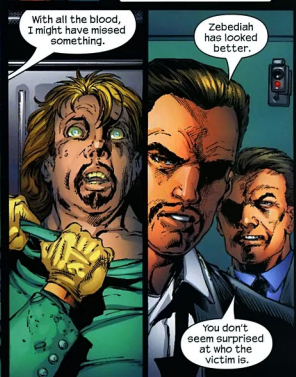
Were there any other injuries?

You're the weapons expert, Mr. Stark. We wondered if you would have any idea how it might have been done.



He was pierced at the tops of the shoulders. Rods seem to have been forced down inside the rib cage.

Well, then, it's obvious, isn't it? Were there a couple of wounds, low on his back?



With all the blood, I might have missed something.

Zebediah has looked better.

You don't seem surprised at who the victim is.



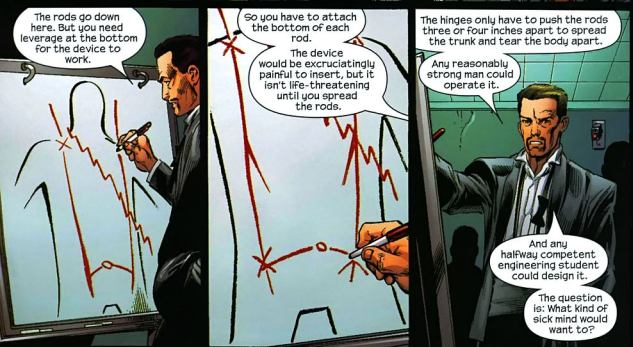
Wasn't I supposed to be told? You have a serious leak in your office, detective.

My negotiations man knew all about Zebediah being nabbed. It's his job to know things like that.



Yes, as you suggested. Very small punctures. Here and here.

How did you know that, Mr. Stark?



The rods go down here. But you need leverage at the bottom for the device to work.

So you have to attach the bottom of each rod.

The device would be excruciatingly painful to insert, but it isn't life-threatening until you spread the rods.

The hinges only have to push the rods three or four inches apart to spread the trunk and tear the body apart.

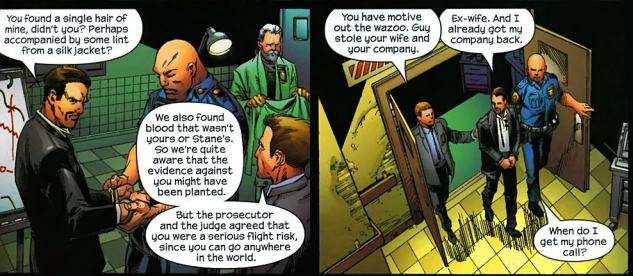
Any reasonably strong man could operate it.

And any halfway competent engineering student could design it.

The question is: What kind of sick mind would want to?



That was our question. Till we found clear evidence that you were at the scene.



You found a single hair of mine, didn't you? Perhaps accompanied by some lint from a silk jacket?

We also found blood that wasn't yours or Stane's. So we're quite aware that the evidence against you might have been planted.

But the prosecutor and the judge agreed that you were a serious flight risk, since you can go anywhere in the world.

You have motive out the wazoo. Guy stole your wife and your company.

Ex-wife. And I already got my company back.

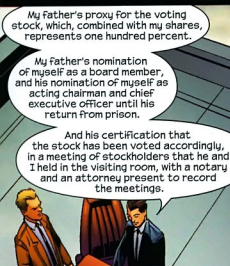
When do I get my phone call?



Sorry I'm late, gentlemen.

Late? You aren't expected here, Tony.

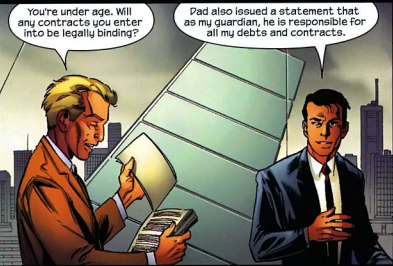
Call my father, if you please.



My father's proxy for the voting stock, which, combined with my shares, represents one hundred percent.

My father's nomination of myself as a board member, and his nomination of myself as acting chairman and chief executive officer until his return from prison.

And his certification that the stock has been voted accordingly, in a meeting of stockholders that he and I held in the visiting room, with a notary and an attorney present to record the meetings.



You're under age. Will any contracts you enter into be legally binding?

Dad also issued a statement that as my guardian, he is responsible for all my debts and contracts.



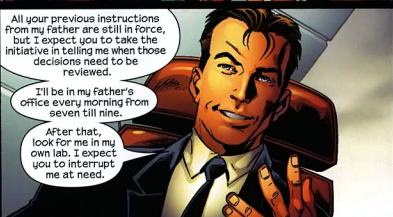
I think it's time for me to be brought up to speed on all the operations of Stark Enterprises. Ryan, will you please report on personal weapons development?

Bill, you can sit down now. Your report on pending negotiations will be next.

Of course, Mr. Stark.



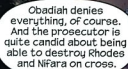
Of course, Mr. Stark.



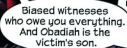
All your previous instructions from my father are still in force, but I expect you to take the initiative in telling me when those decisions need to be reviewed.

I'll be in my father's office every morning from seven till nine.

After that, look for me in my own lab. I expect you to interrupt me at need.



Obadiah denies everything, of course. And the prosecutor is quite candid about being able to destroy Rhodes and Nifara on cross.



Biased witnesses who owe you everything. And Obadiah is the victim's son.



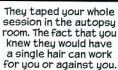
So all we've got is the blood of an unidentified killer.



They're calling him your "assistant."




You think they've got enough to convict?



They taped your whole session in the autopsy room. The fact that you knew they would have a single hair can work for you or against you.



The jury won't like the way you came up with an exact design for the murder weapon on the spot.



Si Ma, I'm going to be here for a while, apparently.



I need you to look after Tony for me.



They've got enough to hold you till the trial.



He's running a corporation, and he needs a babysitter?



HOWARD STARK

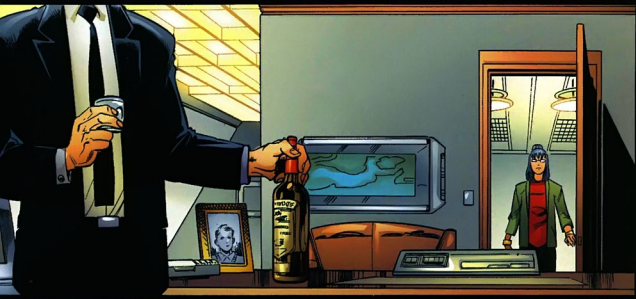


Good morning, Tony.



Uh...Mr. Stark. Your messages are waiting on your desk.





Si Ma. You don't knock?

So you've started drinking?

No.

I saw you.



I just finished drinking.

Till next time.



Your father trusts you with everything. Why start drinking now?

He doesn't trust me *that* much. He sent you.



Other people have hours, days, *months* without pain. They can think clearly.

For the first time in my life, I know what it feels like.



Alcohol kills brain cells. It impairs your judgment.

So I only drink a little.

When you're impaired, you don't know what "a little" is.



What are you doing?

Pouring out your father's booze.

Not you. That ferry down there. Heading right toward us.

Surrounded by harbor cops.



Evacuate the west side of the building and prepare to blow that ferry out of the water before it reaches us. No shooting till I say.

And get in touch with the harbor police to find out what they think is going on.



You want to see how impaired I am? Follow me.



Is the big one fully assembled?

Yes, sir. But not tested.


I think I'll test it. Under real world conditions.



Activate.
Step out and kneel.

Tony. You have no business doing this yourself. Too much depends on you.

If something goes wrong, I'm the one with the best chance of survival.



Police are reporting
at least forty hostages
aboard the ferry.

How many
terrorists,
Si Ma?

At least five.
Probably six-- they'll
hide the guy controlling
the bomb.

Any
demands?

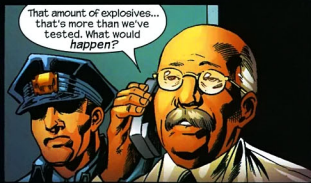
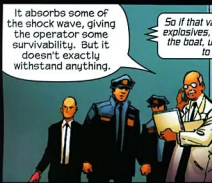
No communication.
But we have to assume
the ferry is full of explosives.
Maybe they drove aboard in
that panel truck. It could
hold enough of a bomb to
blow the west face off
your building.

Or take out
a tidy chunk of
Manhattan.

Maybe they'll
go for the South
Brax.

This doesn't look like
impaired judgment to
you? It does to me.

Well, kids, let's
see whether this
suit floats.





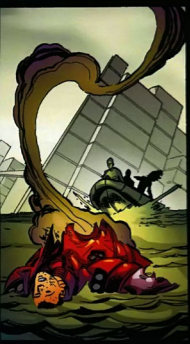




I think maybe...



... I got to them before they...



He's still alive, ma'am. Barely.

Get him back to the Stark building.



Judgment impaired. But very brave.

TO BE CONTINUED
in 2006

ULTIMATE

IRON MAN

So ends the first Ultimate Iron Man mini-series. You've witnessed Tony Stark's birth and his voyage from boy to man. But, as you can tell, it's not over yet! Coming next year is Ultimate Iron Man 2, by Orson Scott Card and new artist Pasqual Ferry (*Adam Strange, Mister Miracle*)!!

As this mini-series wraps, much thanks to Orson for writing such a brilliant and innovative story, Andy (*and Mark, who helped at the end*) for bringing it to life visually, Danny (*with help from Batt, Jesse, John and Scott*) for awesome inks, Richard (*with help from Dave and Laura*) for incredible colors and Chris for his always-impeccable lettering.

Come back in 2006 to learn the fate of Howard and the journey of Tony as he becomes the man you know so well in The Ultimates!

ULTIMATE



IRON MAN
ORSON SCOTT CARD PASQUAL FERRY DAVE McCAG

2006

Nick Lowe
Editor

Joe Quesada
Chief

ULTIMATE IRON MAN c/o MARVEL COMICS
10 EAST 40th, NEW YORK, NY 10016

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The story
of Ultimate
Iron Man
continues!



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