

ULTIMATE

IRON MAN

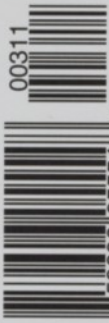
ISSUE

3



DIRECT EDITION

PARENTAL ADVISORY



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ISANOVE

MARVEL

ORSON SCOTT CARD
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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 hyper-sensitive, 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 to die during Tony's birth. Tony was saved from this pain by a revolutionary nanotech armor that his father, Howard, developed.

Tony's parents met while working together. Maria's regeneration process was necessary to the nanotech armor his father's company, Stark Defense Corp., developed. The armor absorbs shock, thus preventing injury, and eats metal that comes in contact with it. The problem is that it also eats away at the skin of the wearer after a very short time. Tony's unique genes, caused by his mother's virus, complement the armor perfectly. But the armor cannot protect him from everything...

Zebediah Stane has always been jealous of Howard Stark. With the help of Howard's ex-wife, Toni (whom he married and with whom he conceived a child), Stane orchestrated a hostile takeover of Stark Defense Corp. Howard outsmarted him, however, and managed to keep the secrets of the armor. But this hasn't stopped Stane. He attempted to steal the secrets of the armor from one of Howard's employees, named Nero, using a mind-reading device called "The Lid" that steals information out of the brain and lobotomizes the person in the process. Stane couldn't get much out of Nero, but he has just kidnapped Tony and is using The Lid on him in hopes of getting the information he desires.



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ULTIMATE IRON MAN

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Why aren't we getting more response from his brain?

I'm going to go wait in the van.



I don't see why it isn't changing his brainwave pattern.



Oh, well. Back on your head.



He seems to be feeling more pain now.

He's already maxed out. He should be a vegetable.

And yet he isn't.





You *could* just tell me what you know about the composition of this bio-armor.

Nothing to say? Then it goes on and on.

There's something weird going on with his right leg.



There's nothing wrong with his--



GET AWAY FROM THE KID!



They sliced half his foot off!

I didn't do that!



How long have they been torturing this kid?

Why isn't there more blood?

Hi, Dad.



Leave his foot alone.

The severed part of his foot is fresh, we could reattach it.

But the wound is healed over...

...like it happened a week ago.



I didn't know if you'd get here in time.

You did great, son.

Your foot will grow back, Tony.



What kind of damage did your Lid do to his brain?



It didn't work on him. It's like his brain was ...

...somewhere else.

I'm sorry.



How did that helmet thing work, Daddy?

It didn't. You've got brains of steel, kid.

Nobody can heal that fast.

My little Iron Man.





When this new stuff dries, it isn't blue at all.



As long as it doesn't wash off.

Only with anti-bacterial soap.

It's lousy armor, if your enemies can win by washing you.



What does it matter, when you grow back any parts you lose?

That's not the armor. That's just my weird genes.

When do I get toes again?



Why? You miss playing "This Little Piggy"?

I'll invent my own bio-armor that won't wash off.

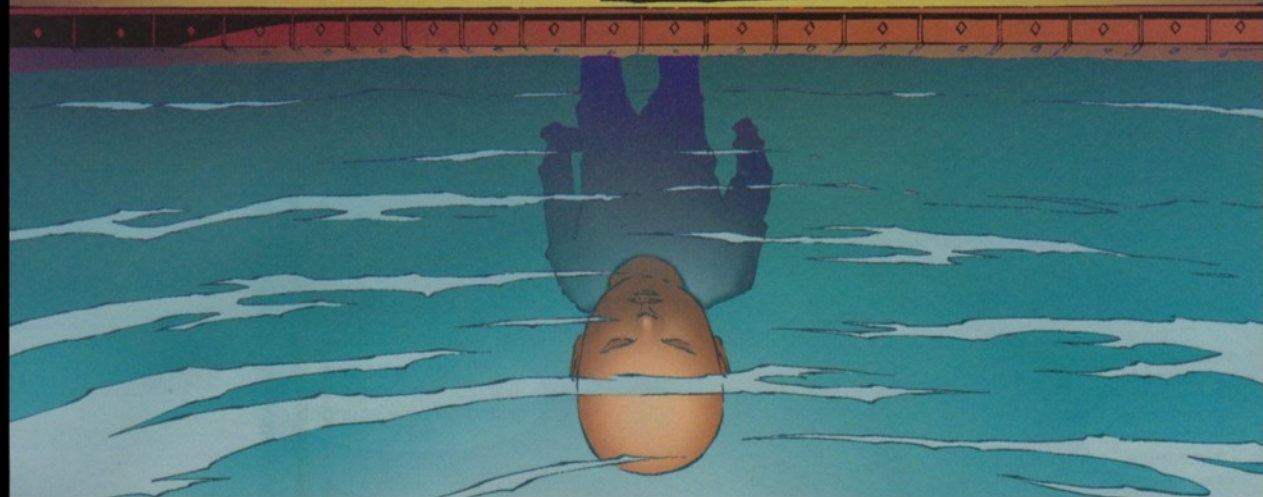


He's reinventing bio-armor. Ours isn't good enough.

I miss Nero. He didn't make fun of me.



Why didn't that Lid thing wreck my brain? It wrecked Nero's.



TEN YEARS LATER



Look who's sweeping up.



I never seen you around school.

No surprise. This is my first time here.



You got to be the janitor. You way too young to be a student here.



I'm harvesting your metal shavings for a project I'm working on. Want to see?





Nobody got to bring flies to Van Buren High.

They aren't flies.



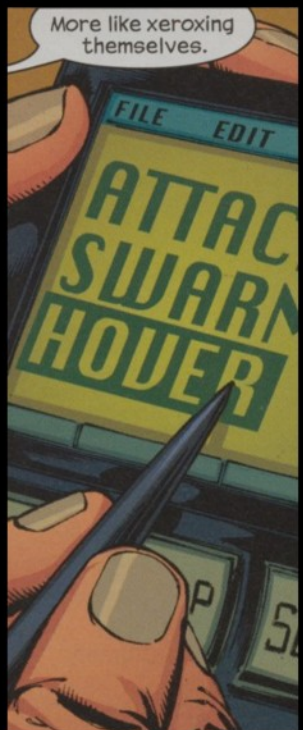
I am *not* cleaning up that mess.



They're replicating.

What?

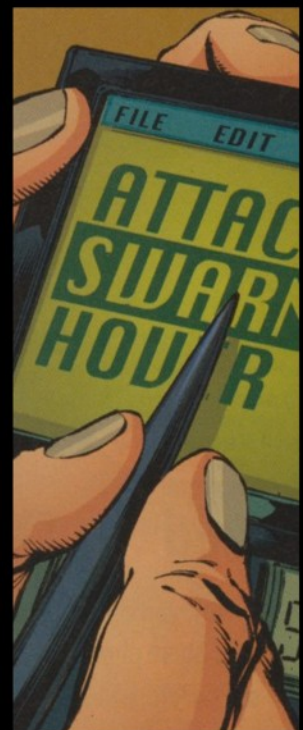
Makin' babies.



More like xeroxing themselves.



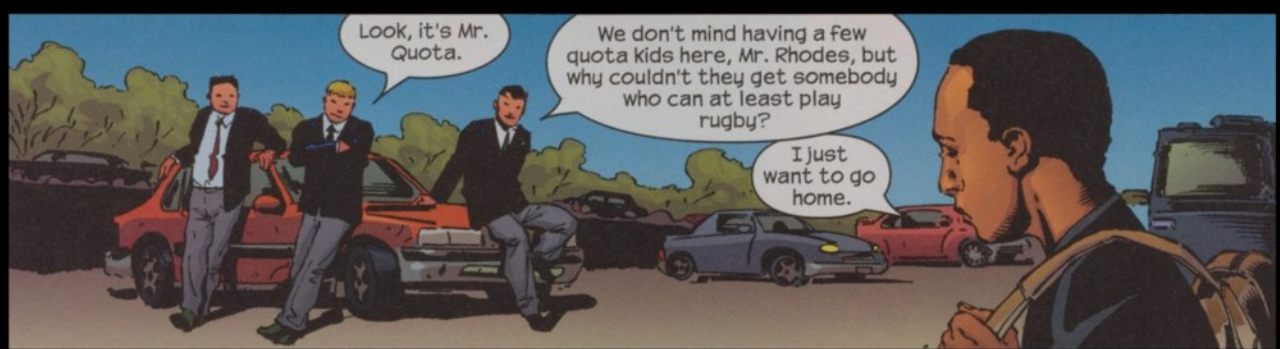
So your little metal flies, this what doodoo look like to them?



They don't do anything useful yet. But getting them to replicate, that was the hard thing.

Why you come here to do this?

They don't have a metal shop at my school.



BRETTONE ACADEMY
GRADES 7-12
AMERICA'S FUTURE

Mr. Stark. If your father finds out you took off again, I'll be fired. Does that mean anything to you?

I won't tell him if you don't.

School's almost over. Why did you bother coming back?

I didn't want you to get into trouble, Mr. Proctor.

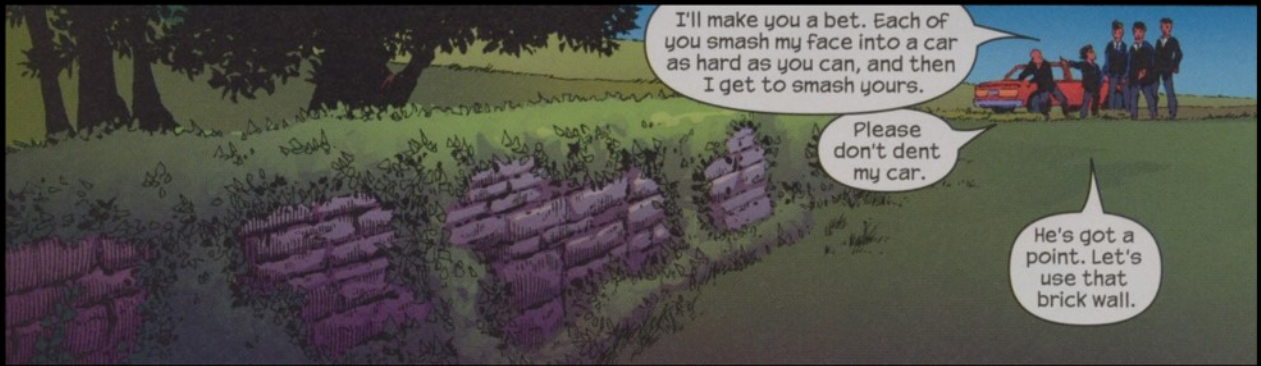
Nice of you.

Look, it's Mr. Quota.

We don't mind having a few quota kids here, Mr. Rhodes, but why couldn't they get somebody who can at least play rugby?

I just want to go home.







Okay, who's next?



He isn't even bleeding.

There isn't even a bruise.

Okay, guys. Two more times, and then I get to do it to you.



What about *my* turn? A deal's a deal!



Hey!

Now it's my turn!



I don't know *what* you are.



And I don't know why you're so unbreakable.

But I'm *not* unbreakable, and now you've set me up!

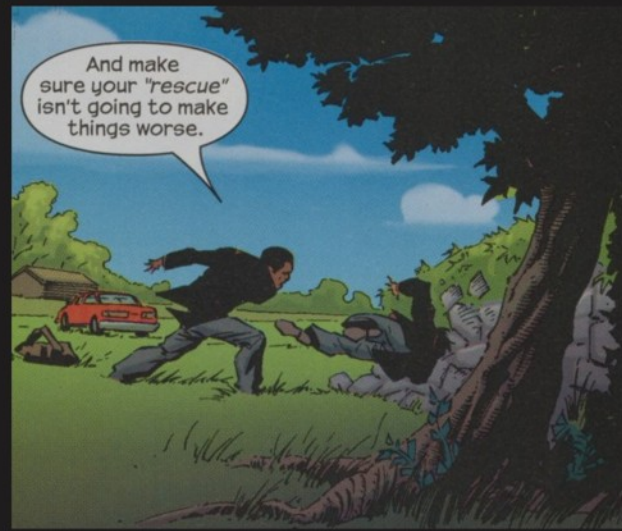


It was three against one.

You thought the poor black boy needed to be rescued, is that it?



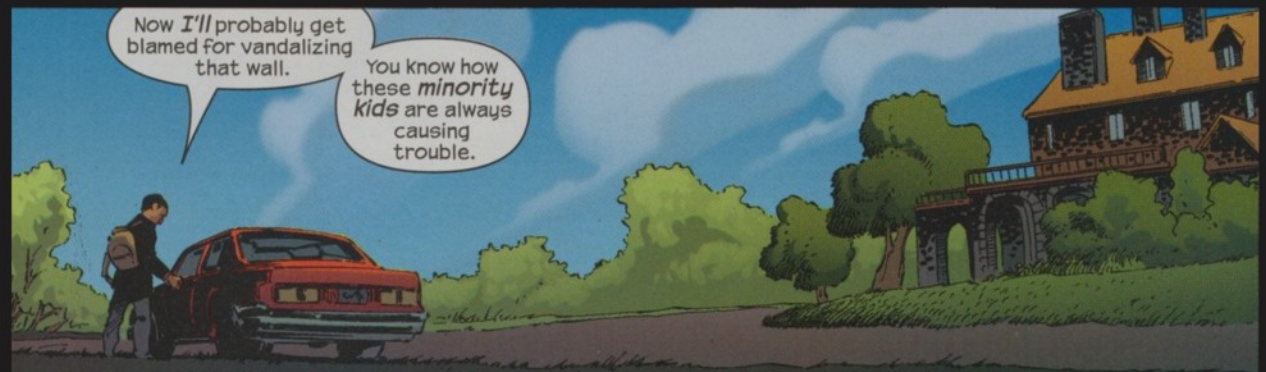
Before you go trying to *save* somebody by breaking walls with your freaky head, why don't you find out first whether they *need* saving.



And make sure your "rescue" isn't going to make things worse.



What did I do?



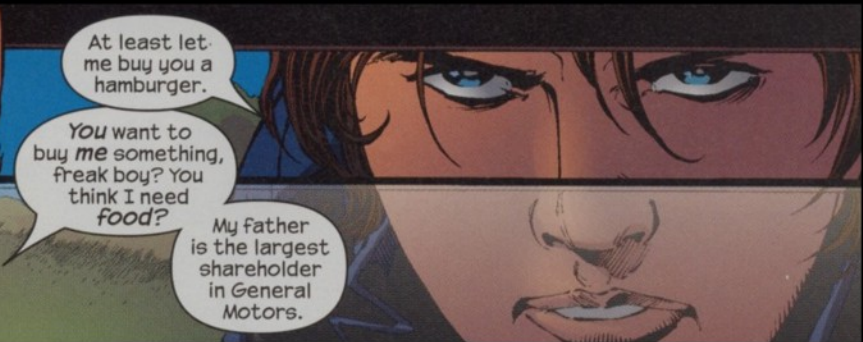
Now I'll probably get blamed for vandalizing that wall.

You know how these *minority kids* are always causing trouble.



I'm sorry. I screwed up.

Just tell me *how* I screwed up.



At least let me buy you a hamburger.

You want to buy *me* something, freak boy? You think I need food?

My father is the largest shareholder in General Motors.



And you drive *this* piece of crap?

It's my disguise.

So are you giving me a ride home or not?



Are you *trying* to piss me off?

Who has to try?

And the top dozen shareholders of GM are all mutual funds.



Woo-hoo. Kentucky fried.

I reckon y'all wouldn't mind treatin' me to mah daily fried chicken.

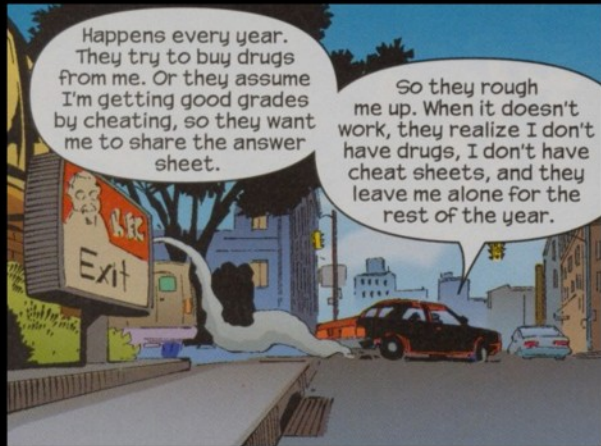
I never knew black people said "reckon."



Stop thinking you know anything about me because I'm black!

I know that you like watermelon, you dance real funky, and you can slam-dunk a basketball.





Happens every year. They try to buy drugs from me. Or they assume I'm getting good grades by cheating, so they want me to share the answer sheet.

So they rough me up. When it doesn't work, they realize I don't have drugs, I don't have cheat sheets, and they leave me alone for the rest of the year.



So getting your face mashed into the hood of your car--that was, like, strategy.

But now they've got something to prove. Thanks to you, Buttwipe Man.

Cool name for a super hero.



Rich kid lives here?

Dad thought I should grow up in a regular neighborhood.



Oh, so he wanted you to be normal.

What do you think, is it working?



Maybe we should start locking these doors.



Who are you?

I'm the woman who might have been your mother, if I hadn't been such a fool as to divorce your father.



Wow. I thought they only said cheesy lines like that on the soaps.

Loni Stane. You had five years to get pregnant before you ditched my dad and took his company away from him.



I looked her up on the Web.

My guess is she didn't want me.

I didn't want you, either, but you wouldn't go away.



Look, I've got stuff I want to show Rhodey here. Why don't you go sit on the front porch till Dad comes home from the office?

Rhodey?

Then you and Dad can talk over old times.



I'm glad I taught my son Obadiah better manners than that.

My mother's dead. But I'd rather have her than you.



Man, you are cold.

How big is your head?

My head?



Ow!

Is your head huge? Or do your ears just stick out?



I want to give you back your stock.
Give it?



All I ask is that you do me a favor.
Ah, that's the Loni I know. Too bad the stock is worthless.
It still has value for you.
Just tell me what you want.



Why didn't you invite Loni in, Tony?
I turned the porch light on for her.
I thought it turned on automatically.
It does. But I didn't deactivate it.



Aren't children wonderful.
What do you want, Loni?
There's a school I want to get Obadiah into.



Treating her like that was a stupid mistake, Tony.

Our lives would be completely different if she hadn't betrayed you.

She had nothing to do with your mother dying. And that's the only difference that matters.



Don't ever show what you're feeling. Especially not to your enemies.

Oh, right. Like you've ever lived by that little rule.

When you're at war, have no mercy.

But when you're not, show no hostility.



So you want me to be a hypocrite.

I want you to have the element of surprise.



Don't touch that.



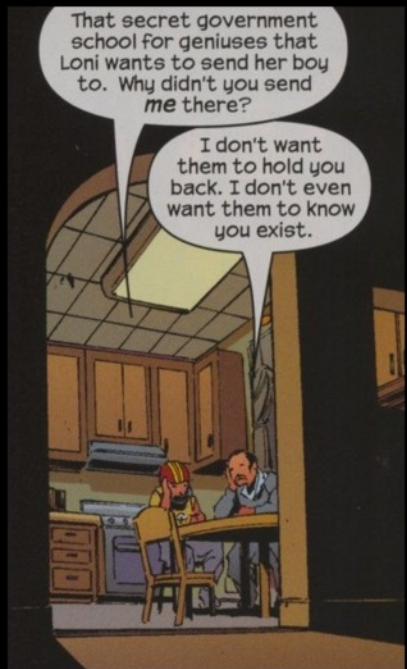
If you're thinking of joining the football team, they'll never let you use that on the field.



It's a prototype. For a whole suit of armor.

You've got armor. *Subtle* armor.

I want armor that stops them before they throw me around.



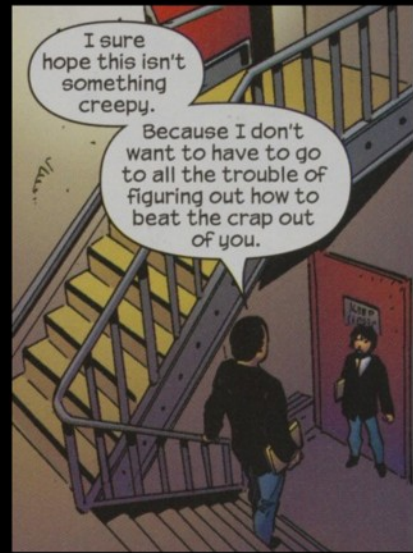
That secret government school for geniuses that Loni wants to send her boy to. Why didn't you send *me* there?

I don't want them to hold you back. I don't even want them to know you exist.



I'm not going to be able to get rid of you, am I?

I've got something to show you.



I sure hope this isn't something creepy.

Because I don't want to have to go to all the trouble of figuring out how to beat the crap out of you.



Was I supposed to bring the weenies or the marshmallows?



Is it Halloween?

I need you to try it on. So I can test it.



You try it on. I'm not letting you make a fool out of me.

I'm the only person who can touch the outside of it. I need you to wear it while I get zapped.



It didn't zap me.

It isn't on.



If anybody sees me in this get-up, I'll have no choice but to kill you.

Any tips on how I can do that?

Look. They're playing dress-up.



Quota boy wants to join the team.

This is so sad.

On the other hand, we could use another tackling dummy.



Didn't I tell you this would happen?

Stay out of the way, Brickhead.

Put on the helmet, Rhodey.

Oh, they've got cute nicknames for each other now.

They're best girlfriends now.



Put on the helmet!



