

MARVEL
COMICS

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ENDING TO:

WHAT IF...™

\$1.50 US

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63
JUL

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APPROVED
BY THE
COMICS
CODE
AUTHORITY

WAR MACHINE

HAD NOT DESTROYED THE LIVING LASER?



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07

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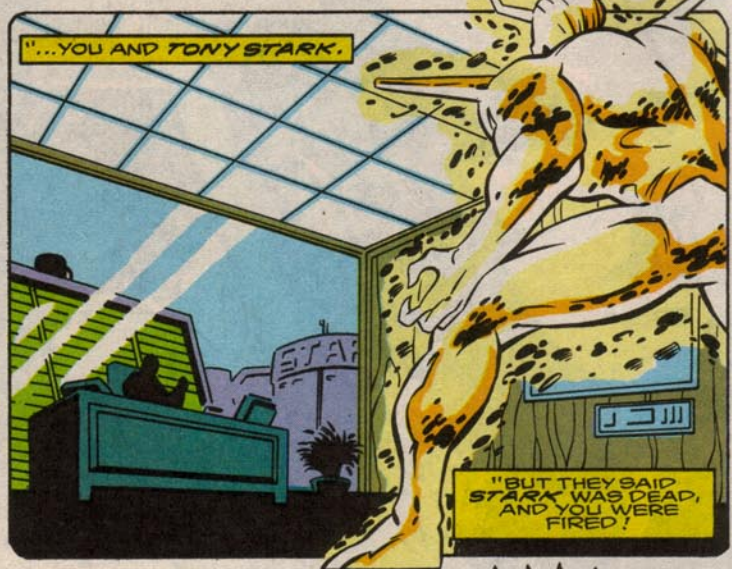


"AAAIIIGGHK!"

"THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING TO ME!"

"NOT WHEN I WAS SO CLOSE TO A NEW LIFE!"

"BEFORE TODAY, ALL I EVER WANTED WAS REVENGE ON YOU..."



"...YOU AND TONY STARK."

"BUT THEY SAID STARK WAS DEAD, AND YOU WERE FIRED!"



"I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO..."

"AND IN MY ADDLED STATE, STARK ENTERPRISES' NEW BOSS, JAMES RHODES, DID THE UNTHINKABLE."

"HE OFFERED ME A JOB."

"HIGH PAY / STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITIES / A CHANCE TO BE A SCIENTIST AGAIN!"

"I LEAPT AT THE CHANCE..."

"...FASTER THAN LIGHT! *"

*A SLIGHTLY BIASED RECAP OF IRON MAN #289. --ROB

BUT IT WAS ALL SOME SICK, CRUEL TRICK!

HOW COULD YOU DO THIS?!

OFFER ME HOPE, AND THEN... CONDEMN ME TO THIS... ETERNAL...

...EXILE...



ALL RIGHT, GUYS.

WE'RE DONE HERE.

SHUT IT DOWN.

FOR JAMES RHODES, THE MAN INSIDE THE ARMOR, IT WAS A HARD CHOICE TO MAKE. BUT WHAT OF THE ALTERNATIVE?

WHAT IF WAR MACHINE HAD NOT DESTROYED THE LIVING LASER?

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

DAN SLOTT WRITES	MANNY GALAN PENCILS
AMASH, KANE, LEWIS & STEGBAUER INK BATTALION	B. SHAREN & S. MOSSOFF COLORS
JANICE CHIANG LETTERS	TOMMY DEFALCO CHIEFLY EDITS
ROB TOKAR EDITS	



SHUT IT DOWN!
NOW!

COME ON, BRIGHT BOY. GET UP.

WHAT... ARE YOU... GOING TO DO TO ME?

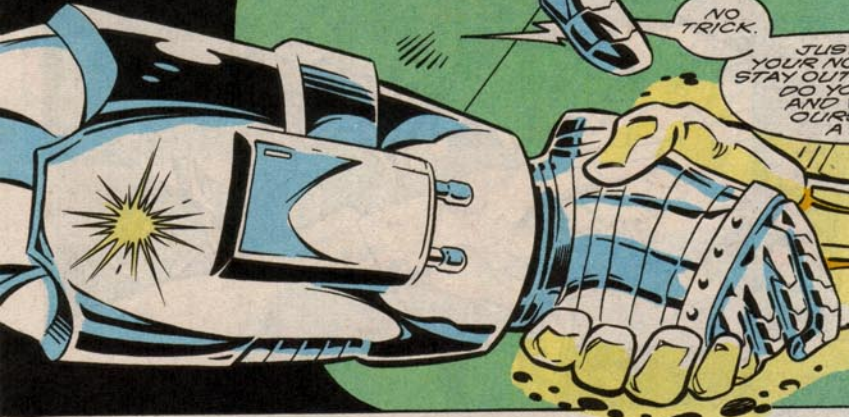
GONNA MAKE SURE YOU PUNCH IN YOUR TIME CARD PROPERLY.

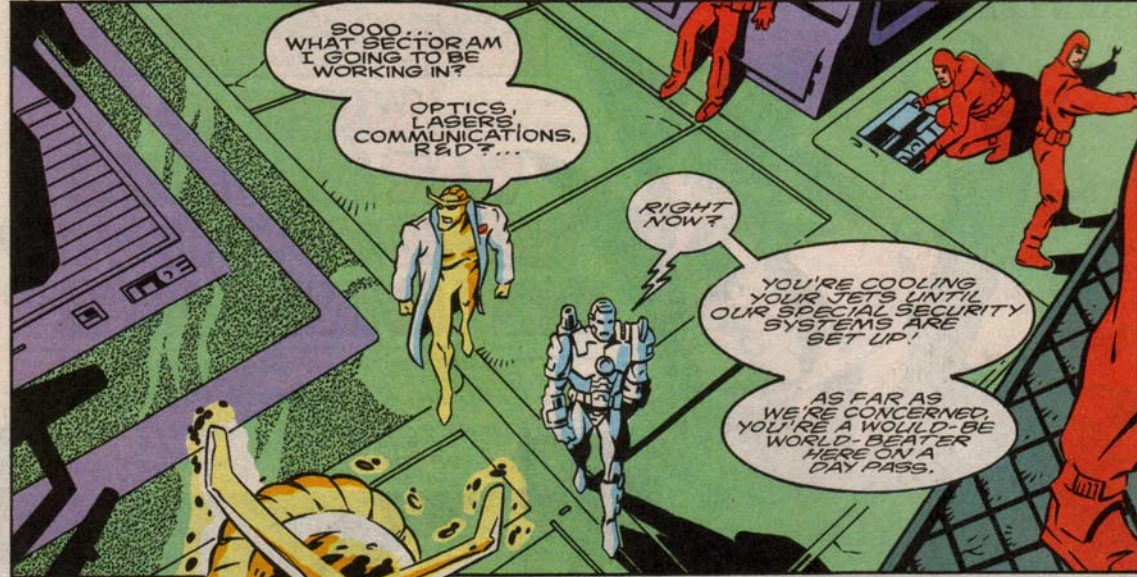
YOU ARE A STARK EMPLOYEE, AREN'T YOU?

IS THIS ANOTHER TRICK?

NO TRICK.

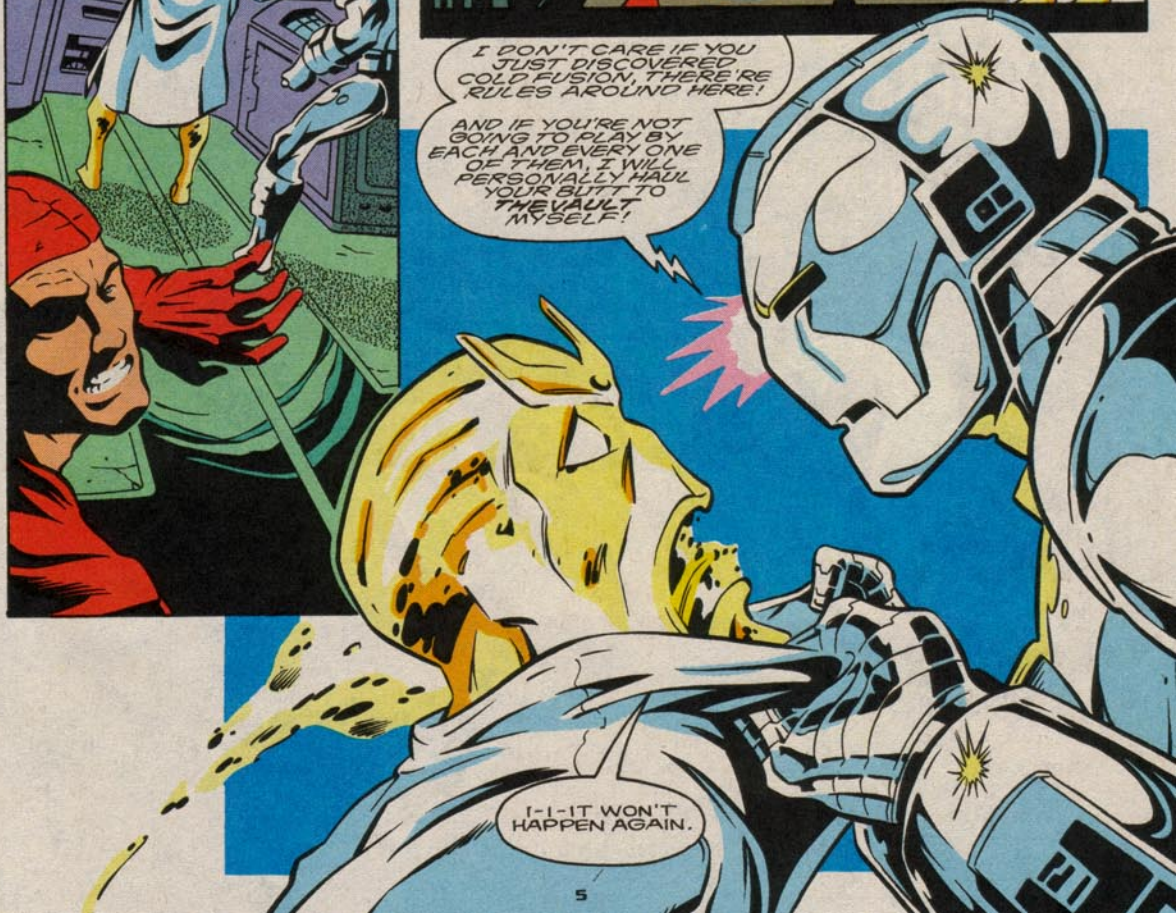
JUST KEEP YOUR NOSE CLEAN. STAY OUT OF TROUBLE, DO YOUR JOB, AND WE GOT OURSELVES A DEAL.







I DON'T CARE IF YOU JUST DISCOVERED COLD FUSION, THERE'RE RULES AROUND HERE!
AND IF YOU'RE NOT GOING TO PLAY BY EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM, I WILL PERSONALLY HAUL YOUR SITT TO THE VAULT MYSELF!



MEANWHILE, DOWNSTAIRS
IN MED LAB #4...

STATUS,
BLAST IT,
STATUS!

CARDIAC'S
OFF THE CHART!
NEURAL STABILIZERS
HAVE SHUT DOWN
ALTOGETHER!

MED LAB 4

POWER'S
BACK
ON LINE!

CRYO-TEMPERATURE
STABLE!

ABE, THIS
SYSTEM WASN'T
MEANT TO TAKE
AN INTERSE POWER
SURGE AND
A COMPLETE
POWER LOSS!

ESPECIALLY NOT
AT THE MOMENT
WE WERE BRINGING
HIM OUT!

JUST DO
WHAT YOU CAN
TO STABILIZE
HIM, ERICA.

I'M GOING TO
FIND OUT WHAT
IN THE NAME OF
HEAVEN'S
GOING ON!

RHODES!
COME IN!

WHAT
IS IT,
ABE?

THAT? IT'S UNDER
CONTROL NOW.

WHAT?
WHAT DO YOU
MEAN ONE OF
STARK'S OLD
PROJECTS?

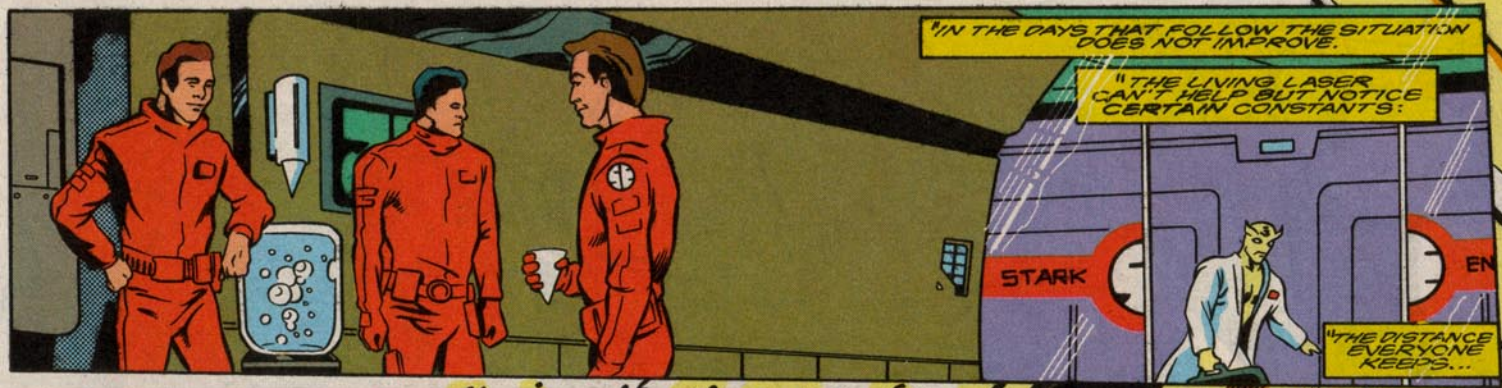
TOP
SECRET?!

LOOK, I
CAN'T TALK
ABOUT IT
NOW...

LATER, IN
PRIVATE... SO
WE CAN AVOID
SECURITY RISKS.

THAT'S
HOW YOU
THINK OF ME,
ISN'T IT?

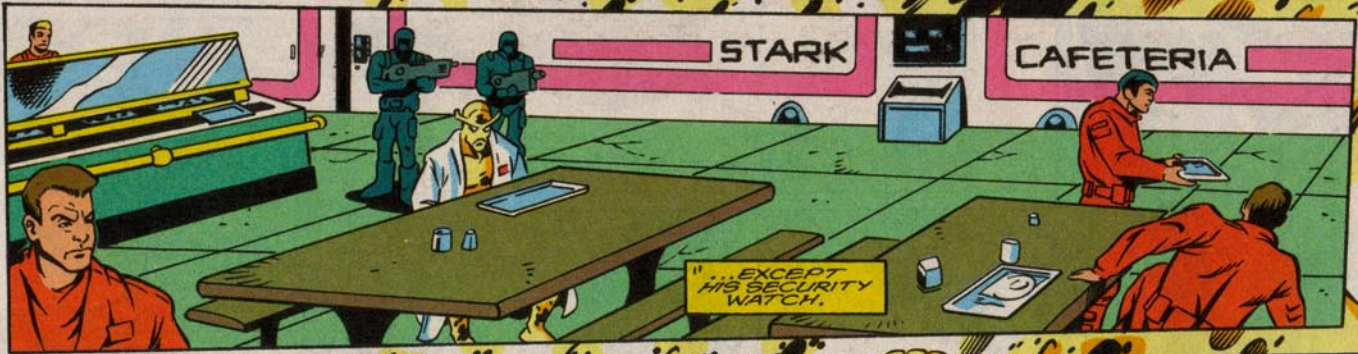
"SECURITY
RISK!"



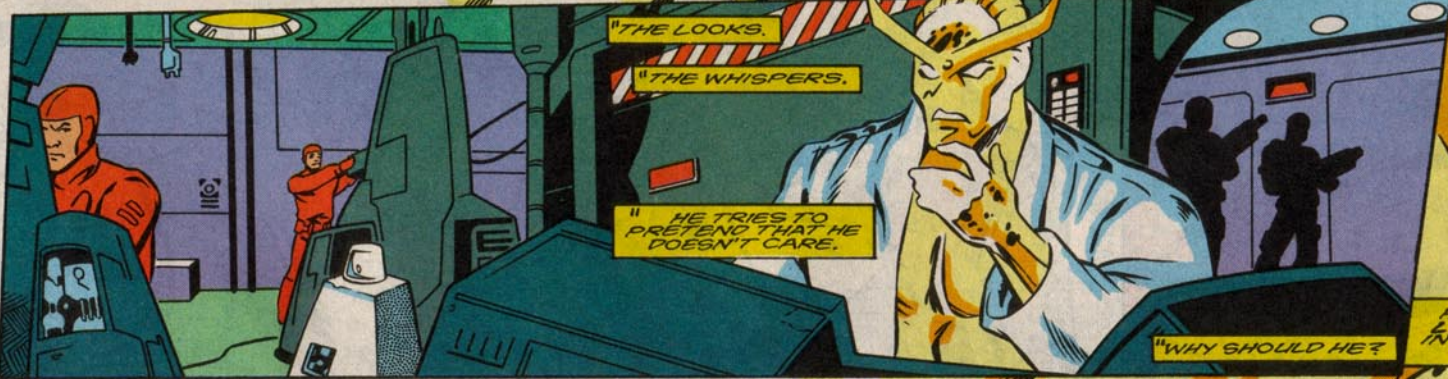
"IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOW THE SITUATION DOES NOT IMPROVE."

"THE LIVING LASER CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE CERTAIN CONSTANTS:"

"THE DISTANCE EVERYONE KEEPS..."



"...EXCEPT HIS SECURITY WATCH."



"THE LOOKS."

"THE WHISPERS."

"HE TRIES TO PRETEND THAT HE DOESN'T CARE."

"WHY SHOULD HE?"

"HE'S THE LIVING LASER! HE COULD INCINERATE THE LOT OF THEM!"



RHODES' OFFICE, A WEEK LATER...

THIS ISN'T WORKING OUT, RHODES.

NONE OF MY FELLOW "EMPLOYEES" WILL INTERACT WITH ME. IT'S LIKE I HAVE THE PLAGUE!

WHAT KIND OF WORKING ENVIRONMENT IS THAT?

TRUST WON'T COME OVERNIGHT. IT TAKES TIME, LASER.



ARTHUR.

MY NAME IS ARTHUR PARKS.

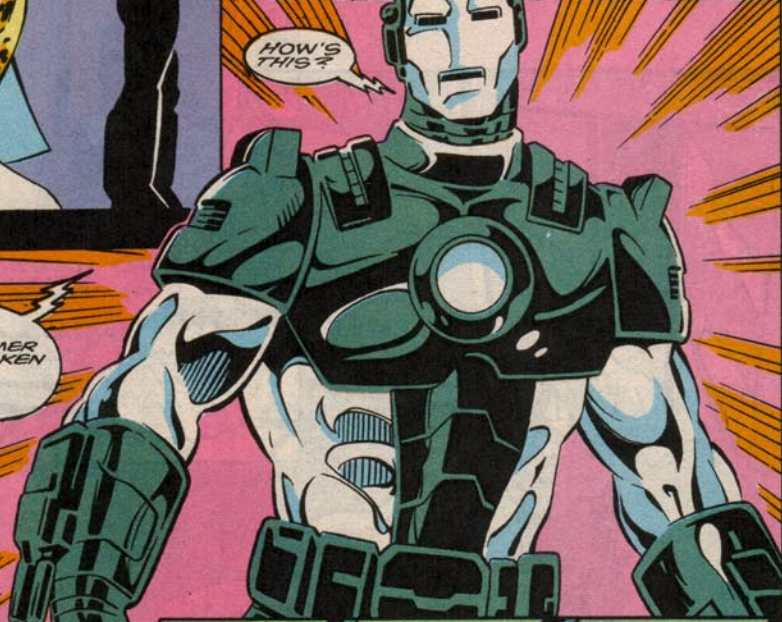
WELL, ARTHUR, MAYBE I CAN TAKE THE FIRST STEP.



HOW'S THIS?

I HAD THE PRISMA-POLYMER LASER-PROOFING TAKEN OFF THE WAR MACHINE.

I'M JUST YOUR RUIN OF THE MILL IRON MAN NOW.



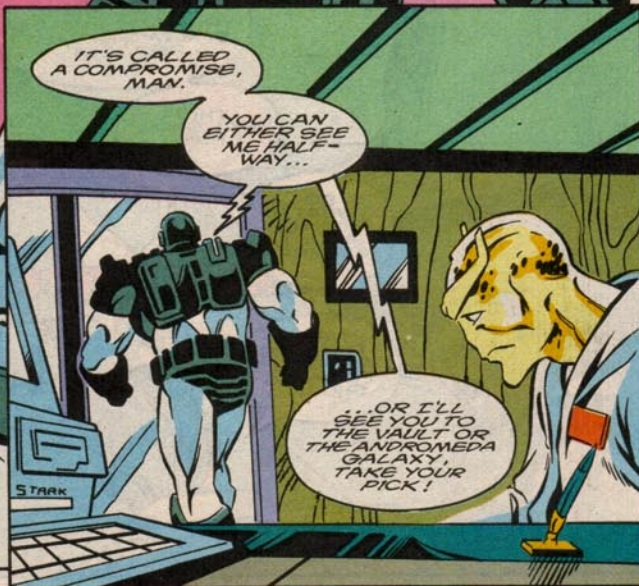
FORGIVE ME IF I'M NOT IMPRESSED.

ONLY GUY AROUND HERE WHO'LL TALK TO ME DOES IT THROUGH A BIG TIN-CAN!

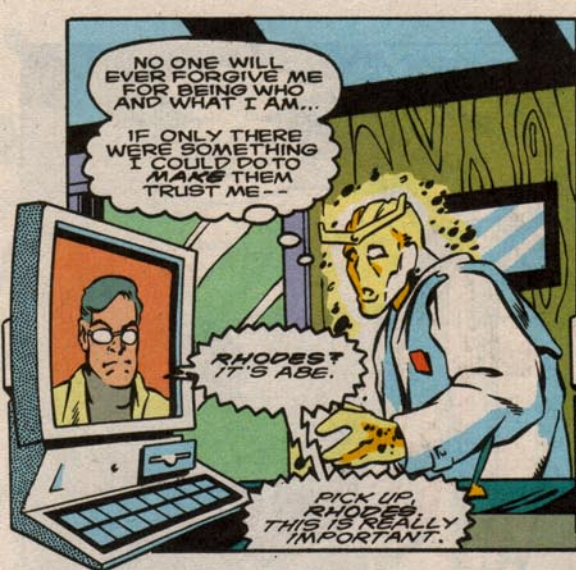


IT'S CALLED A COMPROMISE, MAN.

YOU CAN EITHER SEE ME HALF-WAY...



OR I'LL SEE YOU TO THE VAULT OR THE ANDROMEDA GALAXY, TAKE YOUR PICK!





...INSIDE?

NO!

THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING!

HE IS WRONG, OF COURSE. ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE.

WITH EVERY ACTION MADE, EVERY CHOICE TAKEN, AN INFINITE NUMBER OF REALITIES SPRING TO LIFE.

ALLOW ME TO DEMONSTRATE.

SUBMITTED FOR YOUR APPROVAL: THREE OUTCOMES FROM THREE DIFFERENT POSSIBLE ALTERNATE REALITIES, EACH IS EQUALLY VIABLE.

WHICH PATH SHOULD WE FOLLOW? I LEAVE THAT TO YOU.

EXERCISE YOUR GREATEST POWER-- CHOOSE!



REALITY A: WHERE THE SIX REALITY'S ARE BROKEN...



REALITY B: WHERE AN UNEXPECTED CHOICE LEADS TO AN UNIMAGINABLE CHANGE...



OR REALITY C: WHERE FEAR AND DOUBT PREVAIL AND TRAGEDY IS SURE TO FOLLOW.

ENDING A:

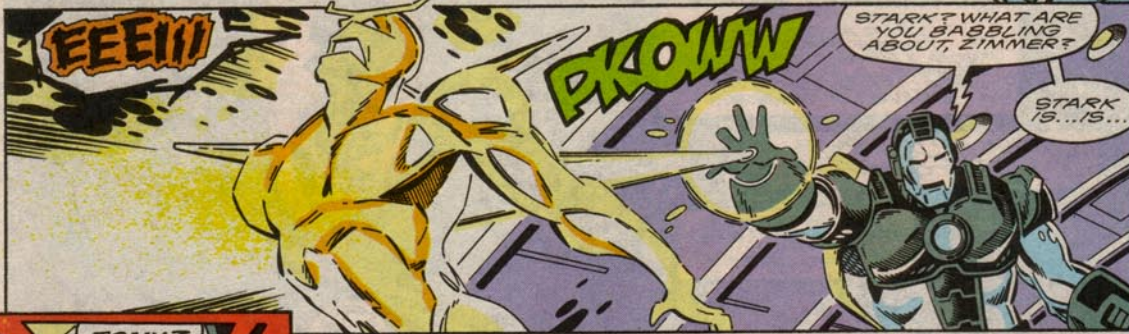


STARK!

WHAT THE @**#! IS THIS?!

IRON MAN! HURRY, HE'S KILLING STARK!

SHRRAKK



EEEE!!!

PKOWW

STARK? WHAT ARE YOU BABBLING ABOUT, ZIMMER?

STARK IS... IS...



TONY?



IT WAS THE SECRET PROJECT.

...STARK HAD US FREEZE HIS BODY NEAR DEATH...

...WE WERE SO NEAR A CURE BUT NOW...

NOW?!



NOW YOU DO EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO SAVE HIM, ABE!



BUT THE LASER...

YOU WORRY ABOUT STARK!
I'LL DEAL WITH THE LASER!

TONY DIED ON ME
ONCE, ABE...

THEY LIED TO ME...



THWOOOM

I WON'T LET IT HAPPEN AGAIN!



KTANG

YOU LIED TO ME!



YOU TOLD ME STARK WAS DEAD!

YOU TOLD ME THAT--

THAT'S THE LASER-PROOF ARMOR...

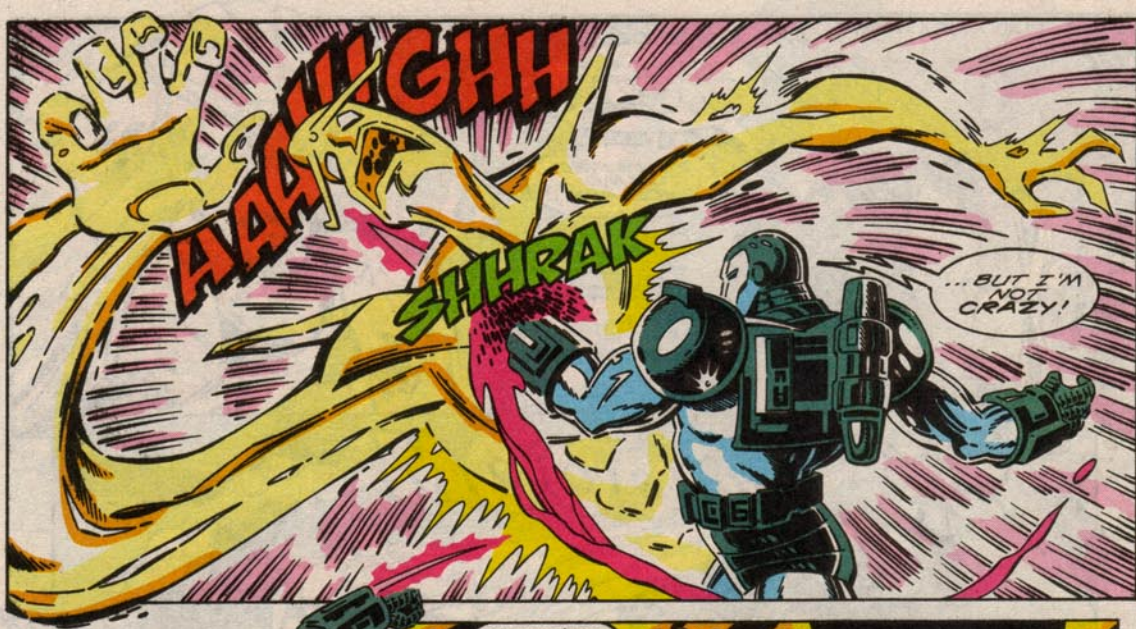
THAT MEANS YOU NEVER TRUSTED ME!

NEVER!



HEY, I MAY BE STUPID...

ZZZAW



AAHHHHHH
SHHRRAK

... BUT I'M NOT CRAZY!



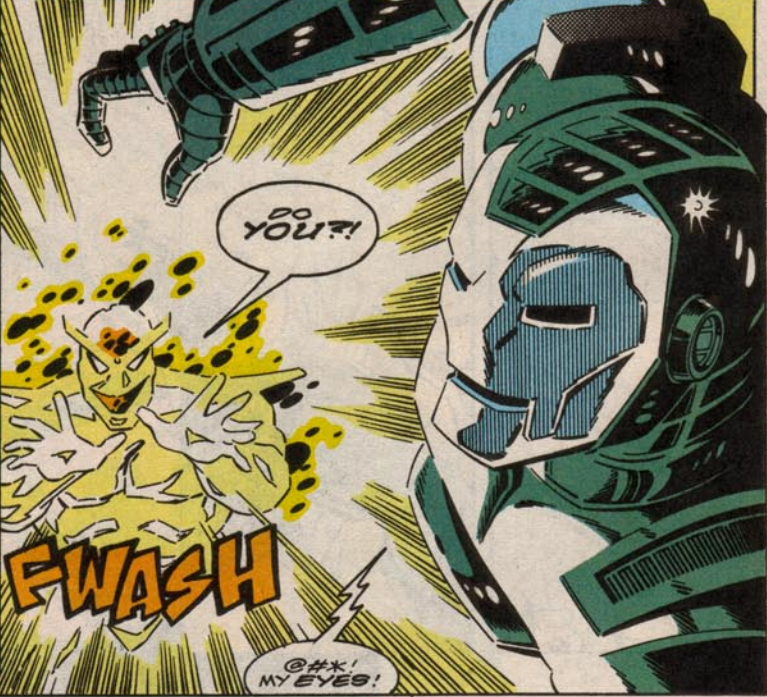
OR MAYBE I AM.

CRAZY FOR GIVING SCUM LIKE YOU A SHOT AT REDEMPTION!



Y-YOU'RE RIGHT, RHODES.

I SEE THE LIGHT NOW.



DO YOU?!

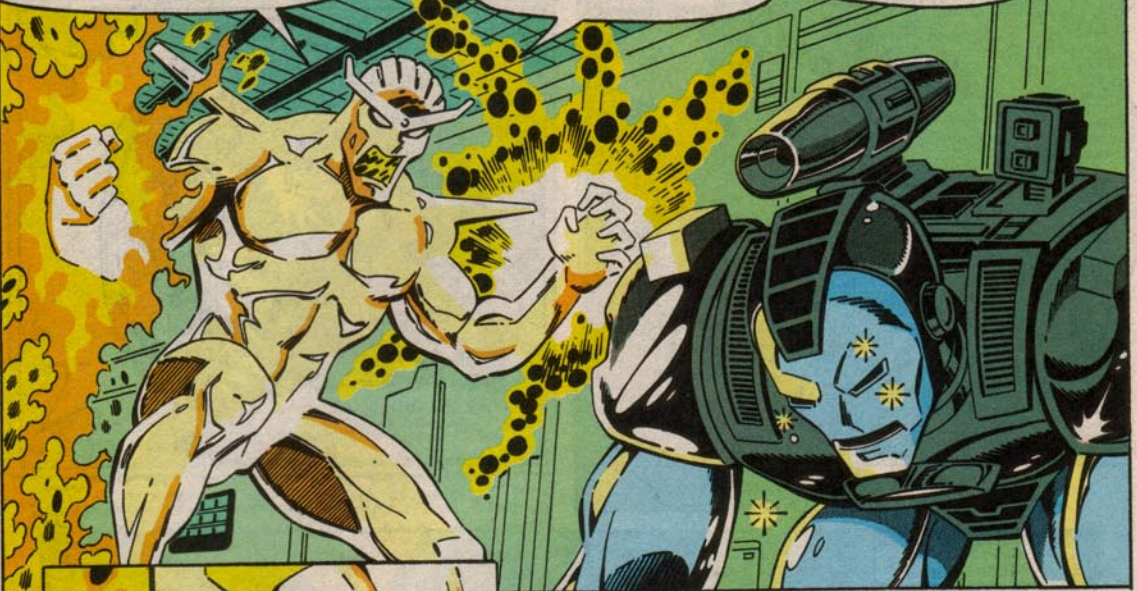
FWASH

@**! MY EYES!

I PIGGY-BACKED MY LASERS ONTO THE LIGHT HITTING THE CONES OF YOUR EYES.

YOU'RE BLIND, RHODES! HELPLESS, VULNERABLE, COMPLETELY AT MY MERCY.

IT'S PAYBACK TIME! THIS'LL TEACH YOU FOR...



...FOR TAKING A CHANCE ON ME...



@#*!

WHAT'S GOING ON?!

WHAT'S HE WAITING FOR?!



GET A GRIP, JAMES.

OVER A THOUSAND STARK EMPLOYEES ARE COUNTING ON YOU TO STOP THIS MADMAN, NOT TO MENTION--

DEAR GOD.

--WHAT IF HE'S DOUBLING BACK FOR TONY...?



COMPUTER, INITIATE THERMAL IMAGING MODE.

OPTION N/A; REQUIRES VISUAL ACCESS.

ULTRASOUND IMAGING?



OPTION N/A. REQUIRES VISUAL ACCESS.

CEREBRAL IMAGING?

WARNING/ WARNING/ WARNING/

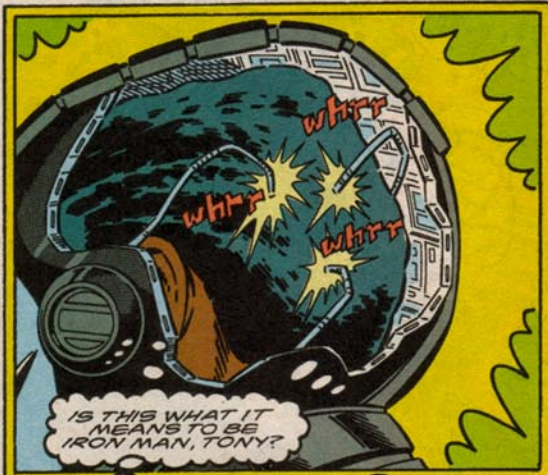
CYBER UP-LINK:
HIGH RISK PROCEDURE.

68% CHANCE OF
PERMANENT
BRAIN DAMAGE.

UNDERSTOOD.

DO
IT!

EXECUTING!



LOSING MORE AND MORE OF
YOUR HUMANITY TO THE MACHINERY?

IMPLANTS
RESPONDING.

CEREBRAL
IMAGING
ON-LINE.

T-149

T-31

MAN, THIS
IS GONNA TAKE
SOME TIME TO
GET USED TO...

... TIME I
DON'T GOT!

THERE!
HE WENT
THAT WAY!

SYSTEM
FUNCTIONING

LEVEL 4

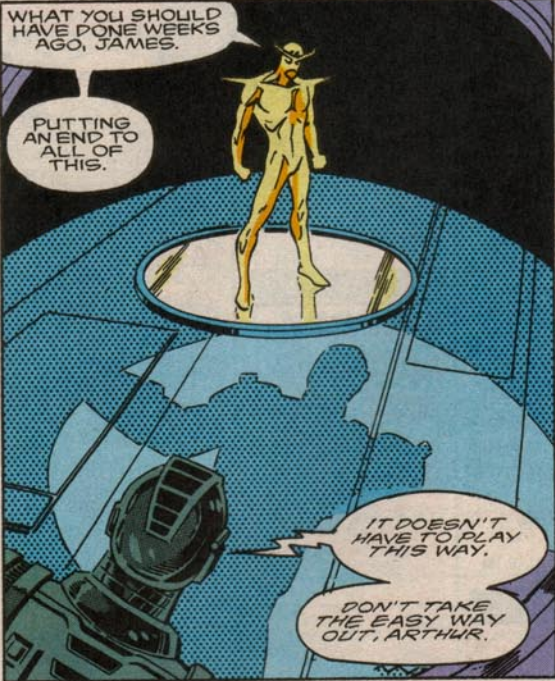
HE'S HEADING
FOR THE
COMMUNICATIONS
LASER!

WHAT
ARE YOU
DOING,
MAN?



WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE DONE WEEKS AGO, JAMES.

PUTTING AN END TO ALL OF THIS.



IT DOESN'T HAVE TO PLAY THIS WAY.

DON'T TAKE THE EASY WAY OUT, ARTHUR.

THAT'S WHAT I'M ABOUT, JAMES.

ARTHUR PARKS, THE LIVING LASER. A TWO-BIT SUPER-VILLAIN.



YOU WERE A FOOL FOR THINKING I COULD BE ANYTHING ELSE.

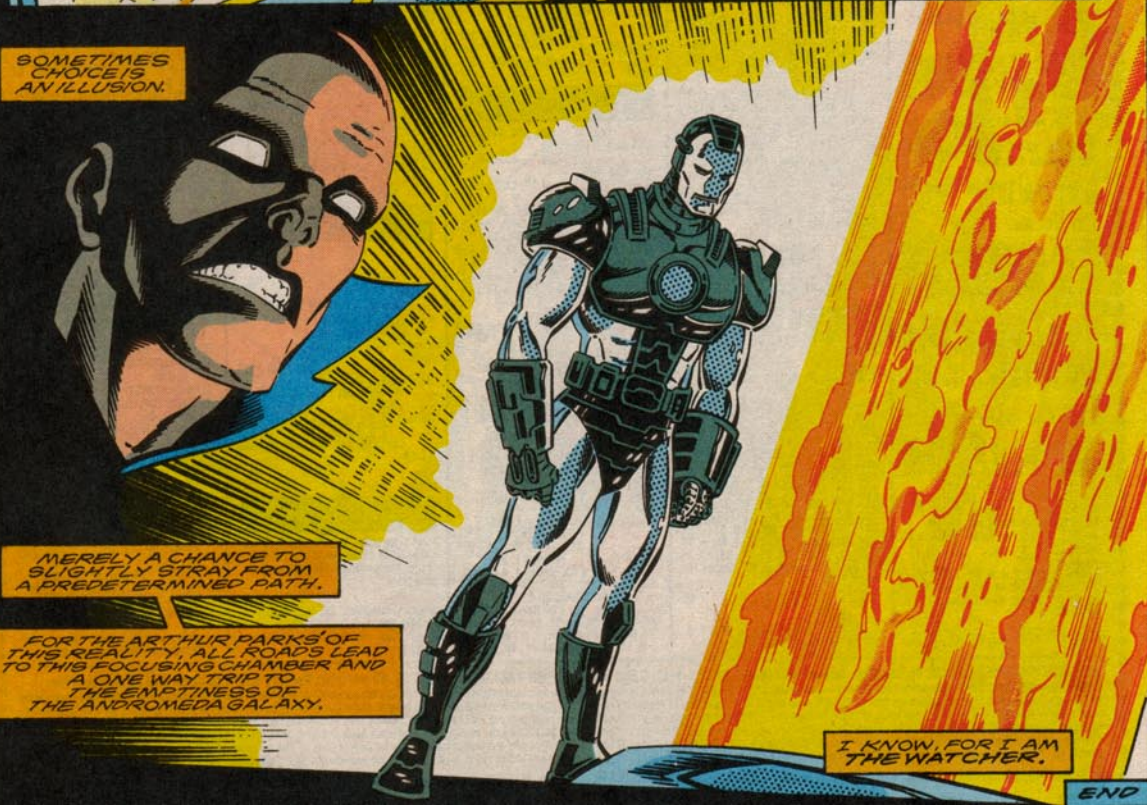


AND I WAS A FOOL FOR BELIEVING YOU.

SOMETIMES CHOICES IS AN ILLUSION.

MERELY A CHANCE TO SLIGHTLY STRAY FROM A PREDETERMINED PATH.

FOR THE ARTHUR PARKS OF THIS REALITY, ALL ROADS LEAD TO THIS FOCUSING CHAMBER AND A ONE WAY TRIP TO THE EMPTYNESS OF THE ANDROMEDA GALAXY.

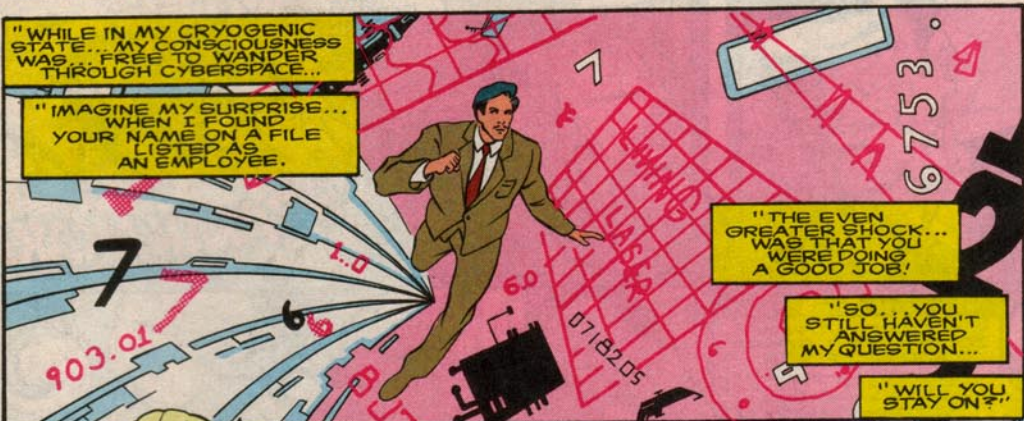


I KNOW, FOR I AM THE WATCHER.

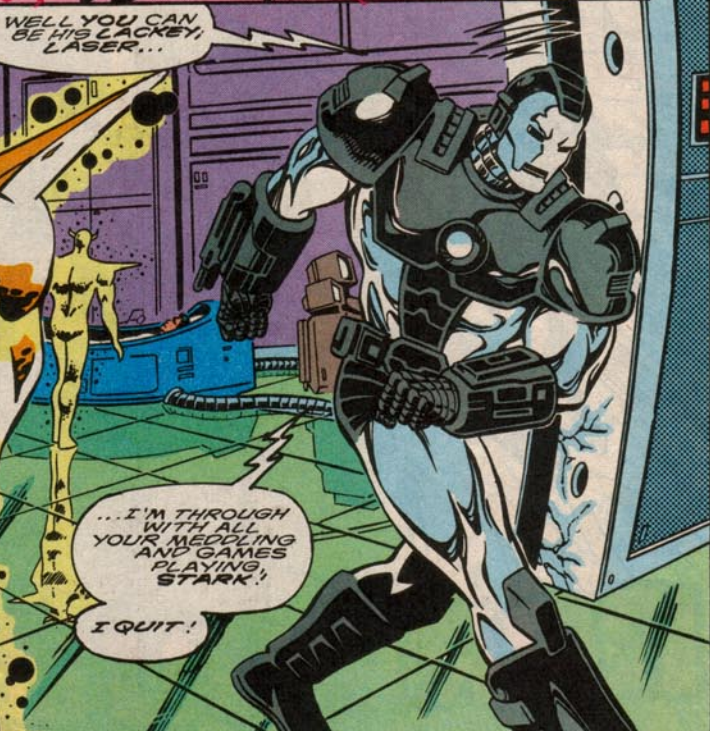
END



"WHILE IN MY CRYOGENIC STATE... MY CONSCIOUSNESS WAS FREE TO WANDER THROUGH CYBERSPACE..."
"IMAGINE MY SURPRISE... WHEN I FOUND YOUR NAME ON A FILE LISTED AS AN EMPLOYEE."



"THE EVEN GREATER SHOCK... WAS THAT YOU WERE DOING A GOOD JOB!"
"SO... YOU STILL HAVEN'T ANSWERED MY QUESTION..."
"WILL YOU STAY ON?"





GENTLEMEN, IRON MAN IS NO LONGER A FACTOR IN OUR PLANS TO DISMANTLE STARK ENTERPRISES.

OUR HIDDEN SENSORS SHOW HIM LEAVING THE S.E. COMPOUND TWO DAYS AGO AND HE HASN'T BEEN SEEN SINCE.

SOURCES INSIDE SE HAVE ASSURED US THAT HE HAS RESIGNED HIS POSITION AS CORPORATE BODYGUARD.

THERE IS NO BETTER TIME TO STRIKE.



AND OUR PATRON HAS PROVIDED US...

...WITH THE NECESSARY EQUIPMENT.



SE LOADING BAY

EASY NOW... ALMOST THERE...

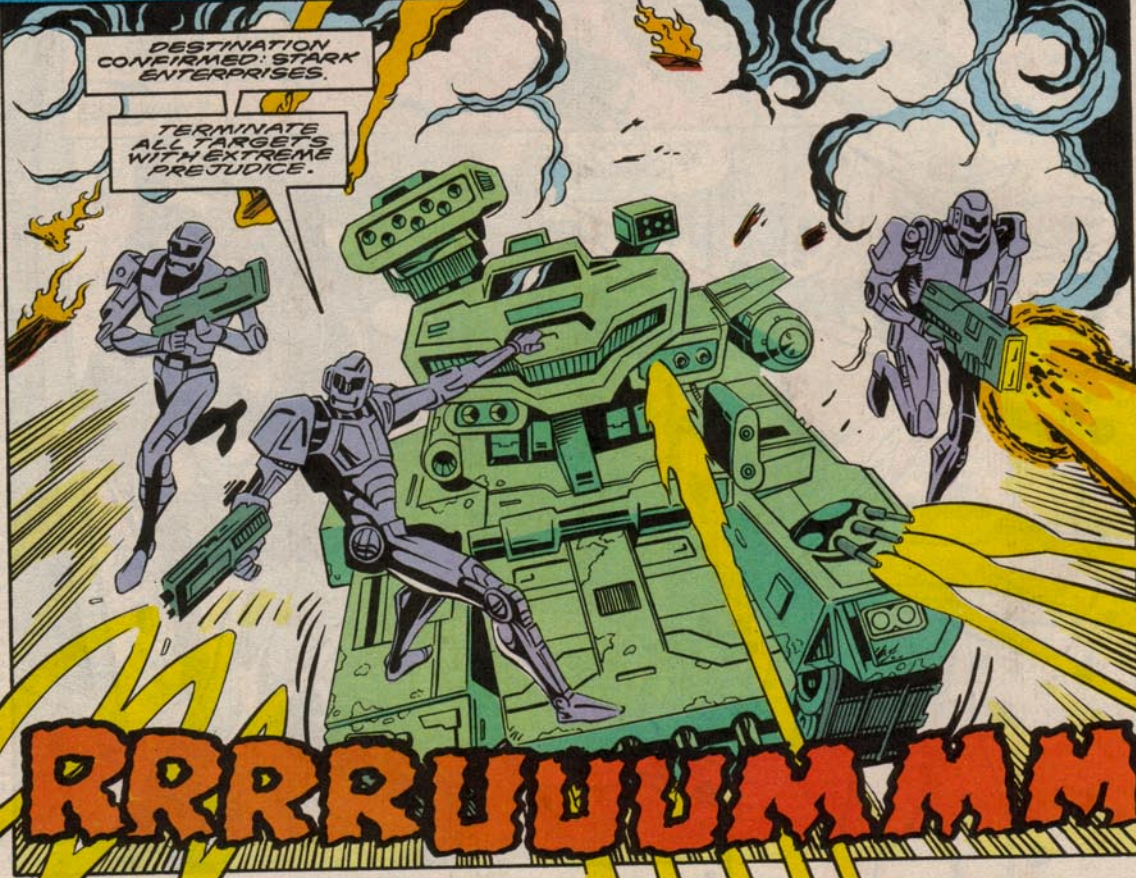
HEY!

SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING'S MOVING INSIDE THESE CRATES...



SHRAAAAK

BRAKAKAKAKA



DESTINATION CONFIRMED: STARK ENTERPRISES.

TERMINATE ALL TARGETS WITH EXTREME PREJUDICE.

RRRRUUUMMM

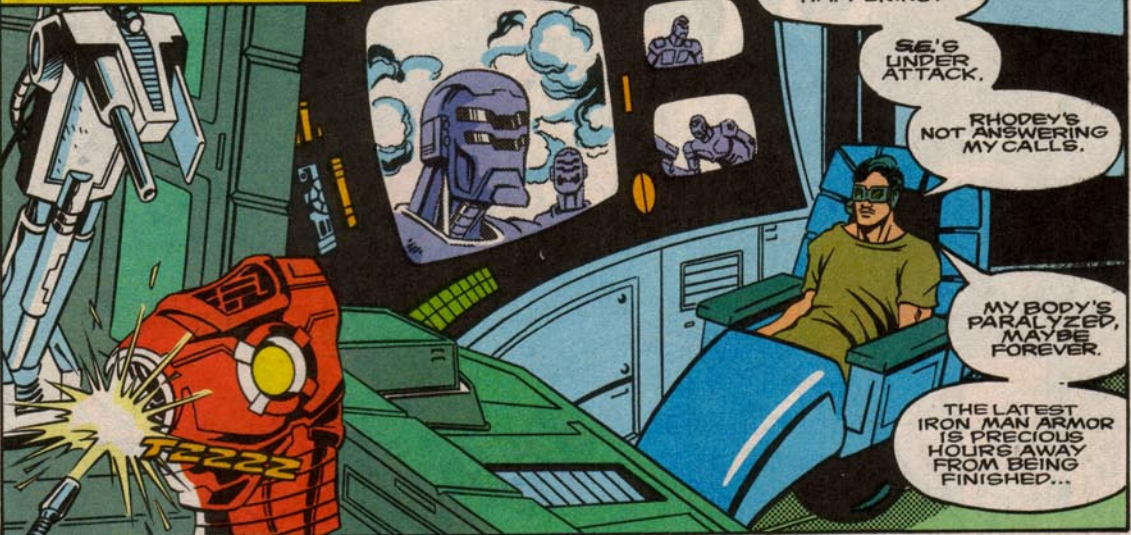
I CAN'T BELIEVE
THIS IS
HAPPENING.

SE'S
UNDER
ATTACK.

RHODEY'S
NOT ANSWERING
MY CALLS.

MY BODY'S
PARALYZED,
MAYBE
FOREVER.

THE LATEST
IRON MAN ARMOR
IS PRECIOUS
HOURS AWAY
FROM BEING
FINISHED...



BUT THAT
DOESN'T MAKE
ME COMPLETELY
HELPLESS...

... DOES
IT,
LASER?

KLICK-KIK

THIS IS
A VERY
SPECIAL
GUN,
ARTHUR.



I'VE NEVER
FELT MORE
VULNERABLE IN
MY ENTIRE
LIFE!



I DESIGNED IT
FOR THE SPECIFIC
PURPOSE OF
DESTROYING YOU.

BUT... I
CAME HERE
TO HELP...

IT DOESN'T
LOOK LIKE
YOU'RE GOING
TO GET THAT ARMOR
FINISHED
IN TIME...

I DON'T
CARE. I NEED
IRON MAN.

WELL, WHY
DIDN'T YOU SAY
SO, "BOSS"?

'CAUSE IF
IRON MAN
IS WHAT
YOU WANT...



**IRON
MAN**

IS WHAT
YOU'LL GET!

MR. PARKS,
WHEN THIS IS
ALL OVER...

... REMIND ME
TO GIVE
YOU A RAISE.

AS A WATCHER,
I DO ENVY YOUR POWER
TO CHOOSE.

IN THE SPACE OF
A MOMENT, YOU CAN
CHANGE THE WORLD...
OR CHANGE
YOURSELF.

TAKE THIS REALITY'S
ARTHUR PARKS...

... WHO THANKS TO
A SECOND CHANCE AND
THE GIFT OF HOLOGRAMS,
WAS ABLE TO TRANSFORM
HIMSELF FROM A
SUBSTANCELESS MAN
OF LIGHT...

... INTO A MAN
OF IRON!

END



YOU CAN'T BE ALIVE... YOU CAN'T...

WHAT THE @##*?!

TONY?!

JIM... THANK GOD... YOU'RE HERE!



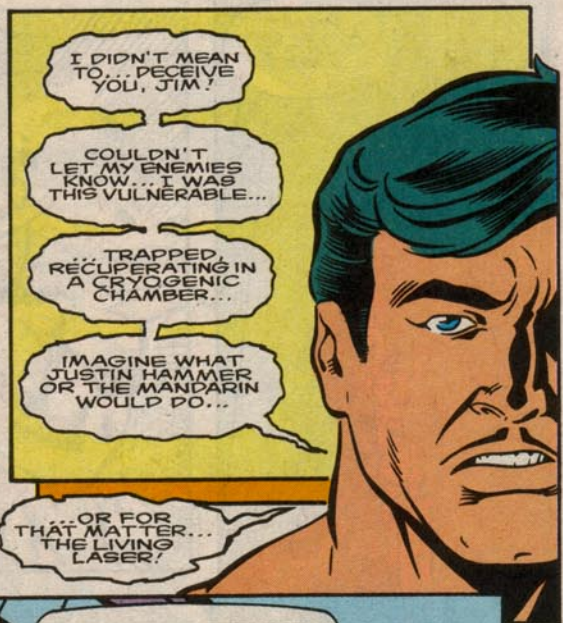
GET HIM OUT OF HERE... BEFORE HE KILLS ME!



IF THE LASER WANTS TO KILL YOU, "FRIEND"...

...HE'S GOING TO HAVE TO GET IN LINE!

I TRUSTED YOU, MAN! WHAT KIND OF BULL IS THIS?!



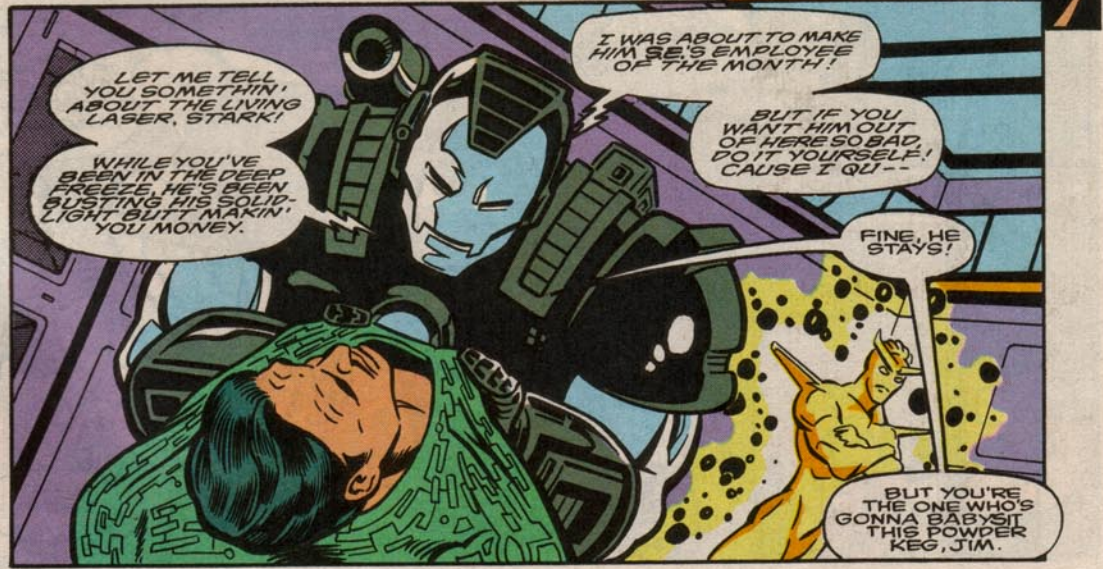
I DIDN'T MEAN TO... DECEIVE YOU, JIM!

COULDN'T LET MY ENEMIES KNOW... I WAS THIS VULNERABLE...

...TRAPPED, RÉCUPERATING IN A CRYOGENIC CHAMBER...

IMAGINE WHAT JUSTIN HAMMER OR THE MANDARIN WOULD DO...

...OR FOR THAT MATTER... THE LIVING LASER!



LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHIN' ABOUT THE LIVING LASER, STARK!

WHILE YOU'VE BEEN IN THE DEEP FREEZE HE'S BEEN BUSTING HIS SOLID-LIGHT BUTT MAKIN' YOU MONEY.

I WAS ABOUT TO MAKE HIM SE'S EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH!

BUT IF YOU WANT HIM OUT OF HERE SO BAD, DO IT YOURSELF! CAUSE I QU--

FINE, HE STAYS!

BUT YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S GONNA BABYSIT THIS POWDER KEG, JIM.

"'CAUSE I DON'T WANT TO BE THERE WHEN HE GOES OFF!"



WHAT KIND OF JOKE IS THIS?



YOU CALL THIS A PAYCHECK?! HUH?!

UH... SIR... MAYBE THERE'S BEEN AN ERROR...

THERE'S NO NEED TO UH... TO... UH...



DON'T WORRY, FOLKS EVERYTHING'S UNDER CONTROL.

WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM, ARTHUR?

I WAS PROMISED FAR MORE THAN THIS PALTRY AMOUNT!

HEY, WELCOME TO THE REAL WORLD, PAL.

THIS ISN'T LIKE ROBBING A BANK, MAN, YOU DON'T GET IT ALL.

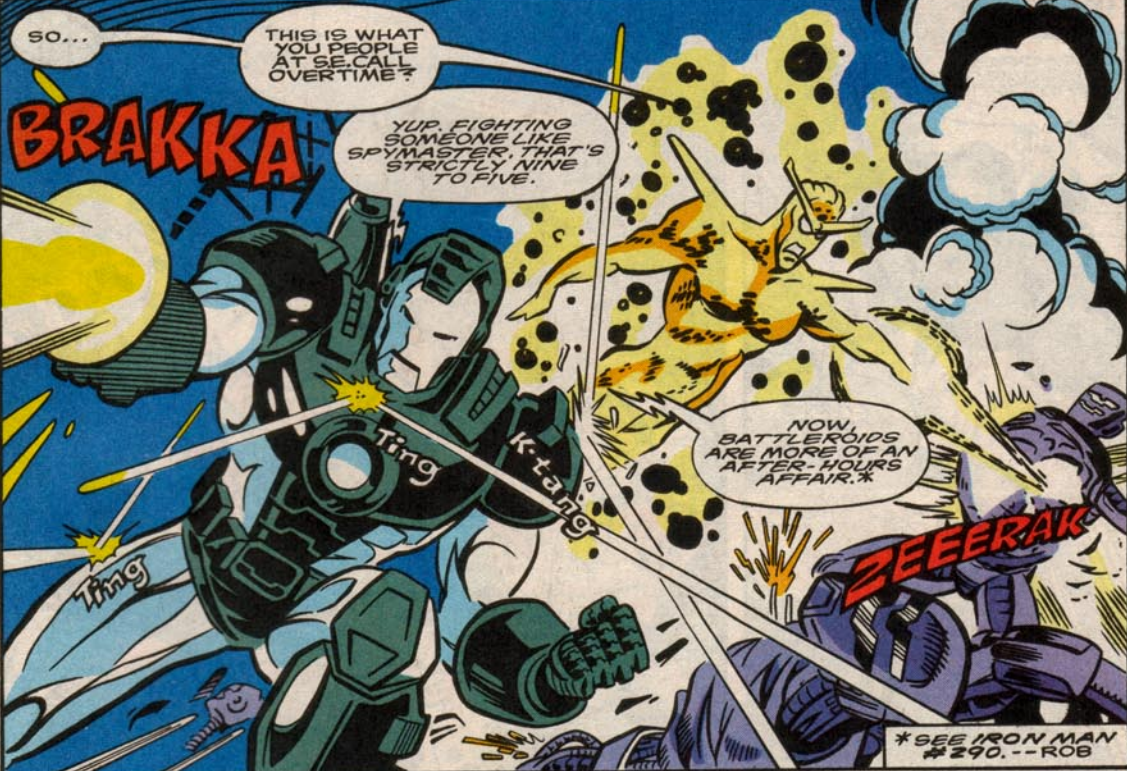
SOME GOES BACK INTO THE SYSTEM... TAXES, PENSION PLANS...

BUT...

NO BUTS, IF YOU WANT MORE, YOU COULD SIGN UP FOR OVERTIME...



OKAY... I GUESS.



SO...

THIS IS WHAT YOU PEOPLE AT SE CALL OVERTIME?

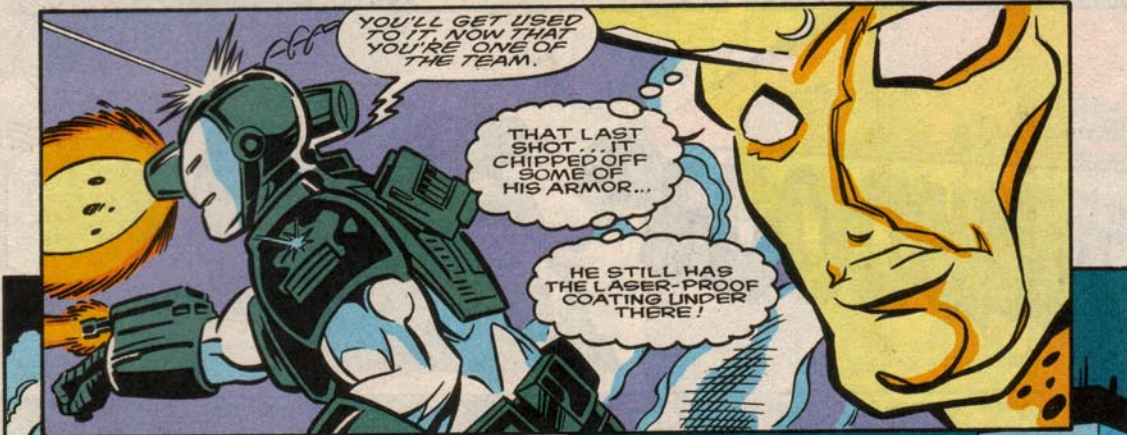
BRAKKA

YUP, FIGHTING SOMEONE LIKE SPYMASTER, THAT'S STRICTLY NINE TO FIVE.

NOW, BATTLEBOIDS ARE MORE OF AN AFTER-HOURS AFFAIR.

ZEEERAK

*SEE IRON MAN #290.--ROB



YOU'LL GET USED TO IT NOW THAT YOU'RE ONE OF THE TEAM.

THAT LAST SHOT...IT CHIPPED OFF SOME OF HIS ARMOR...

HE STILL HAS THE LASER-PROOF COATING UNDER THERE!

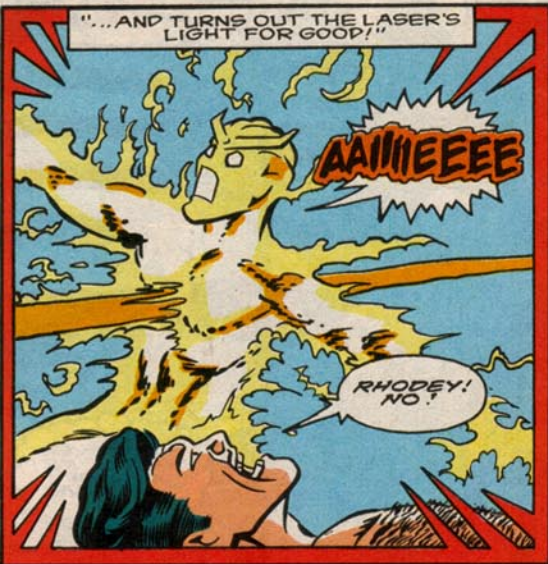
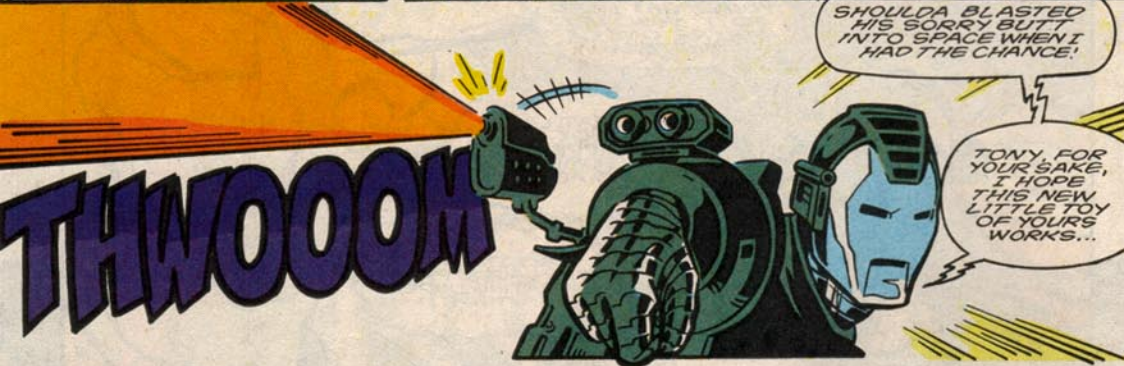


WAY TO GO, SHELLHEAD!

IT'S ALL PART OF THE JOB DESCRIPTION, BOYS.

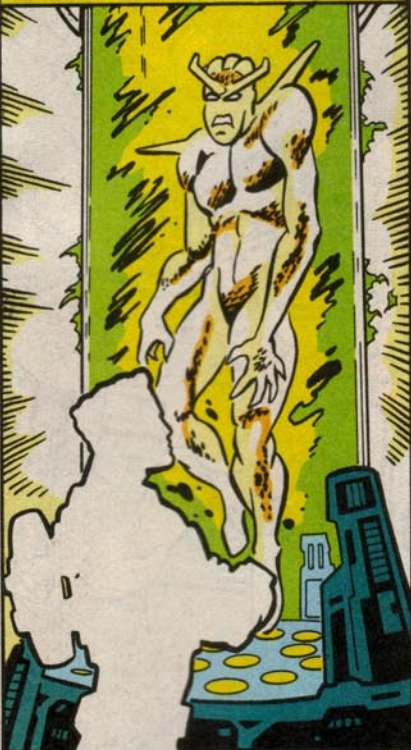
YOU SURE SAVED OUR HASH AGAIN!

HE'S NEVER TRUSTED ME! NONE OF THEM HAVE!



FOR JAMES RHODES, DAYS STRETCH TO AN ETERNITY...

...AS TONY STARK'S MAKESHIFT LASER-ACCELERATOR SLOWLY RECONSTITUTES ARTHUR PARKS' FORM.



JIM? I'D
THOUGHT I'D
FIND YOU
IN HERE.

GOT NOTHING
TO SAY TO
YOU, STARK.

IN FACT,
IF IT WASN'T
FOR THE LASER,
I WOULDN'T BE
WITHIN A MILE
OF YOUR LYING,
DEFROSTED
CARCASS.

I KNOW. I OWE
HIM A GREAT
DEAL FOR THAT.

I CAN'T HELP
FEELING THAT AS
LONG AS YOU'RE
HERE THERE'S
SOME CHANCE
FOR ME TO GET
THROUGH TO YOU.

THAT MAYBE
THERE'S SOME
WAY TO MAKE YOU
UNDERSTAND WHY
I DID WHAT
I DID.

SOME WAY
OF SALVAGING
OUR FRIENDSHIP.

BUT RIGHT
NOW, THERE'S
SOMETHING FAR
MORE
IMPORTANT THAN
EVEN THAT.

STARK
ENTERPRISES
ORBITAL
FACILITY HAS
GONE OFF-LINE.

THERE'S
SEVENTEEN MEN
AND WOMEN UP
THERE,
AND GOD KNOWS
WHAT'S HAPPENED
TO THEM.*

LOOKS
LIKE A JOB
FOR THE WAR
MACHINE,
RIGHT?

WITH BOOSTER
PACKS YOU CAN
HIT ORBIT IN
AN HOUR.

OR YOU
CAN LET
ME GO...



...AND I'LL
BE THERE AT
THE SPEED
OF LIGHT.



*SEE IRON MAN #264. -- ROB

EVEN IN HIS WEAKENED CONDITION, THE LIVING LASER STILL MAKES THE TRIP FROM THE SE COMPOUND TO THE GEORBITAL FACILITY...

...IN UNDER A SECOND.



MY GOD, ALL THESE PEOPLE... THIS DAMAGE...

WHAT COULD HAVE DONE THIS?!



I AM TECHNOVORE.

YOU ARE LIGHT-BASED ENTITY.

PREPARE TO BE ASSIMILATED!



ASSIMILATED?!

FOR WEEKS I'VE TRIED TO "ASSIMILATE" WITH OTHERS! AND NOW YOU WANT TO -- TO -- TO...

I'LL GIVE YOU SOMETHING TO ASSIMILATE!



ARTHUR?
YOU THERE,
MAN?

IS
EVERYTHING
OKAY?

COME
IN!



I'M ALL RIGHT...
EVERYTHING'S
UNDER CONTROL.

WHAT
HAPPENED,
ARTHUR?

THE STATION
HAS BEEN INFESTED
BY SOME KIND OF
TECHNO-ORGANIC
VIRUS CALLED
THE TECHNOVORE.

BEING
NEITHER TECH
NOR ORGANIC I
RUN NO RISK
OF INFECTION.

I DOUBT,
HOWEVER, THAT
THE STATION WILL
EVER BE FREE
OF CONTAGION.

GOOD WORK,
YOU CAN GIVE US
A MORE DETAILED
DEBRIEFING WHEN
YOU GET BACK.



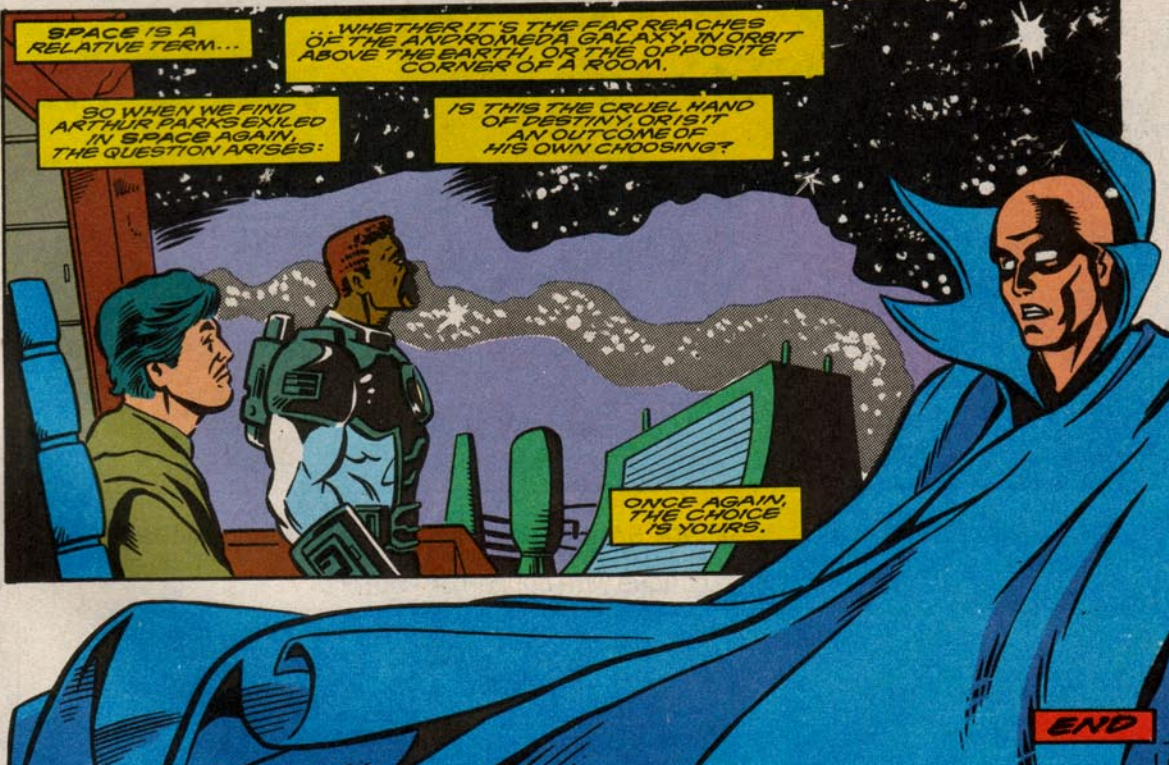
I... I DON'T THINK
I'M COMING DOWN,
MR. STARK.

IF IT'S ALL
RIGHT WITH
YOU, SIR.

I THINK I'D
RATHER DO
MY WORK
UP HERE.

THERE'S
PLENTY OF
WORK STATIONS
AND... AND...

UHM... LIVING
LASER
SIGNING OFF.



SPACE IS A
RELATIVE TERM...

WHETHER IT'S THE FAR REACHES
OF THE ANDROMEDA GALAXY, IN ORBIT
ABOVE THE EARTH, OR THE OPPOSITE
CORNER OF A ROOM.

SO WHEN WE FIND
ARTHUR PARKS EXILED
IN SPACE AGAIN,
THE QUESTION ARISES:

IS THIS THE CRUEL HAND
OF DESTINY, OR IS IT
AN OUTCOME OF
HIS OWN CHOOSING?

ONCE AGAIN,
THE CHOICE
IS YOURS.

END