

# 'IRON MAN' SETS HIGH STANDARD FOR MOVIE

**Kyle Steele**

*The Clackamas Print*

Blockbuster season has finally arrived.

Marking its advent is the Marvel superhero movie "Iron Man." Directed by Jon Favreau, and starring Robert Downey Jr., Gwyneth Paltrow and Terrence Howard, it is the type of film that one might expect to bring in the summer movie time that is traditionally filled with explosions and other random acts of violence.

However, "Iron Man" is not merely another mindless summer movie.

Based on the comic characters created by writers Stan Lee and Larry Lieber, and artists Jack Kirby and Don Heck, the film follows billionaire weapons manufacture Tony Stark (Downey) just as he is starting the worst day of his life – as a bomb built by his company detonates, leaving him with shrapnel in his heart and imprisoned by a terrorist. Only through the intervention of another captured scientist does he survive.

Following his escape with an early incarnation of his famous suit, Stark is a man with a change of heart, literally and figuratively.

Even though this is a big-budget film, Favreau does his best to present dialog that is witty and meaningful while action unfolds on-screen. Assisting him is an impressive cast led by Downey, who flawlessly plays

Stark as an eccentric genius whose world has turned upside down.

Paltrow is also perfect in her role as Stark's assistant, and is convincing as a character who has a long-standing relationship with her crazy boss.

Howard as fan-favorite character James Rhodes, along with Bridges as the villain Obadiah Stane, round out a stellar group of characters that one might imagine seeing on a winning drama rather than a blockbuster.

The film uses its actors to their fullest, making the movie, at times, feel very believable. Some of the scenes are entertaining but do not seem out of place with those in some bad superhero movies of the past.

This is definitely a movie that both the standard film-watcher and the rabid comic fan can appreciate – the rabid comic fan because one who can easily be identified as the individual who works in the theater until the very end of the credits.

"Iron Man" is a great first step to the start of a new Marvel franchise. It's also nice to see a movie that takes the source material seriously but still have fun with a unique set of characters that have years of history behind them.

The biggest problem is that viewers will have to wait a while to watch the next installment.

## Intriguing plot twists cunningly mixed with violence and fantasy backdrop make for interesting read

**Jess Sheppard**

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Will is an orphan – all he knows about his heritage is that he is at least part human and part elf. Overall, he is unremarkable, except that he might be the heir of His Absent Majesty, the King of Babel.

"The Dragons of Babel," Michael Swanwick's newest book, chronicles the travels and transformation of Will le Fey from an awkward outcast to the finest trickster the city of Babel has ever seen.

Will's troubles begin when a war dragon from Babel crashes in his village. Although his wings are destroyed, his iron hide is ruined and his missiles are spent, the dragon is still cunning and deadly enough to set himself up as dictator, with young Will as his acting lieutenant.

The setup may seem romantic, like the novel is an elaborate fairytale, but it is no gentle children's story. In the first 50 pages alone, six children die in an explosion, the village collaborates in two first-degree murders and the dragon advises Will, in detail, as to how to sexually violate a woman.

Obviously, "The Dragons of Babel" should not be read by the faint of heart and would receive an R rating in an instant.

What makes it so gripping, however, is not the vulgarity. Rather, it is the combination

of modern crudity against a backdrop that could only be seen in high fantasy.

A great example of this idea is the resurrection of Will's best friend, Puck, after the explosion. The healing-women of the village perform a three-week-long restoration process using herbs, chants and five cubic centimeters of dextroamphetamine. Afterward, Puck and Will have a short argument that ends in Puck giving Will the finger and leaving.

Throughout the entire book, Swanwick challenges the fantasy stereotype with these sudden quips.

At first, it's hard to imagine characters in an epic fantasy throwing 21st-century profanity at each other. Only slightly more difficult to grasp is the character Alcyone.

Unquestionably, Alcyone has the most dramatic entrance of all. The high-elfen woman first appears to Will riding her hippogriff. Upon seeing him admire her beauty, she smugly flashes her breasts at him and promptly flies away. Thus, she becomes Will's true love.

In addition to Will and Alcyone, two other characters make up the cast of the story.

There is Esme, an eternal child who Will meets on the road shortly after he is cast out of his home. Esme knows a thousand things, but she is forever locked in existence as a young child, fearless of everything and able to sur-

vive on the luck and innocence of adolescence.

Finally, there is Nat. Will encounters him briefly in Camp Oberon, a refugee haven for victims of the war between the empires of Babel and Avalon, but it isn't until they are deported to the capitol that Nat takes Will under his wing and teaches him the ways of a con man.

It is Nat who helps Will weasel his way into the nobility and politics of Babel. Ultimately, the pair organize a plan to dupe the city into making Will the new king so that they can rob the palace.

But something is a little too perfect about Nat's scheme, circumstances and tidbits of fact. It makes both Will and the reader wonder, "Is it really just a trick?"

From the time Will is forced out of his village, to his gritty adventures in the slums of Babel, to his moment of truth before the Obsidian Throne, "The Dragons of Babel" remains pleasantly shocking, imaginative and addicting.

