

## The Iron Man's Challenge (The Iron Man: part 5)

There was no time to be wasted. The Iron Man allowed himself to be taken to pieces, arms, legs, body, head, all separate, so each part could be flown out to Australia. The Iron Man's parts were landed at the same spot and the engineers fitted him together. He stood up on the beach and shouted his challenge.

"Sit up," he roared. "Sit up and take notice, you great space lizard. I challenge you to a test of strength. And if I can prove that I am stronger than you, then you must promise to become my slave."

The dragon smiled. He was so astounded that he agreed. He thought, when this silly little creature has finished his antics, I'll just lick him up. After all, if he wanted, he could flatten the Iron Man with one eyelash.

Engineers made a steel-lined pit. They poured fuel oil into the pit. They lit the fuel oil and the flames roared up fiercely through the bars of the grid. The space-bat-angel-dragon got his first shock. The Iron Man was stretching himself out on his back, on the grid, among the flames, his ankles crossed, his hands folded behind his head – just as if he were in bed, while the flames raged under and around him. The monster stared down and the Iron Man smiled up out of the midst of the flames.

"If you can't bear to be made red-hot like me, then you are weaker than I am and you will be my slave."

The monster began to laugh. "All right," he roared. "Build the fire and I'll lie on it." He laughed again. He knew the Iron Man couldn't build a fire the size of Australia, but then his laugh stopped. The Iron Man was pointing upwards, at the sun.

"There is the fire for you," he shouted. "You go and lie there, until you are red-hot."

The monster gazed up at the sun. He felt strangely cold suddenly. But how could he refuse? With slow giant wingbeats, he lifted his immense body off the earth, while the whole world watched... The monster was white-hot on the sun. Then they saw him returning, a blazing shape tearing itself off the sun.

BUMP!

"There," he roared. "I've done it."

The Iron Man nodded. But his answer was to signal to the engineers. Once more they poured oil into the trough under the grid. Once more they lit it. Once more the flames roared up and the black smoke billowed up into the clear blue. And once more the Iron Man stretched himself out on the grid of the raging furnace. The dragon watched in horror. He knew what this meant for him. He would have to go once more into the sun's flame.

The Iron Man's hair, toes and elbows were red-hot. At this point, the Iron Man was terribly afraid. As the edge of the Iron Man's ear started to melt, the fuel was used up and the flames died. He looked up at the dragon. He could hardly speak after his ordeal in the flames. Instead, he simply pointed towards the sun.

The monster did not laugh. He set off, beating his colossal wings. He landed among the flames, as before. He and the sun were one blinding whiteness. Slowly, he came back from space. Much more slowly than before. His white-hot flying body cooled slowly to red as he came and as he grew larger, he finally became once more black.

BUMP!

The dragon landed ponderously because he was exhausted. The fires of the sun had worked on him in a way that was awful to see. "Round three," Iron Man shouted.

"Enough, enough, enough!" the dragon roared.

"Very well. From now on you are the slave of the earth. What can you do?"

"I am utterly useless. All we do in space is fly or make music."

"Well, you can sing for us," said the Iron Man.

The singing had the most unexpected effect. The whole world became wonderfully peaceful. People stopped making weapons.

**Design a front cover for this story. Think carefully about the pictures that you want to include. Try to make the cover reflective of all the five parts of the story, so you give the reader a clue about what the story will be about, but don't give it away. Finally, write a one sentence summary to persuade a child to read this book - You must read this incredible book because...**