



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 on a different airliner. He was too big to be flown out in one piece.

At the same time a ship sailed from China, loaded with great iron girders, and another ship sailed from Japan loaded with fuel oil. The Iron Man had ordered these. The girders and the oil and a team of engineers were unloaded on the beach of Northern Australia, near the space-bat-angel-dragon's neck. Then 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.”

The space-bat-angel-dragon sat up slowly. He had never noticed the fussing of the boats and aeroplanes down there on the beach near his neck. Now he gazed in surprise at the Iron Man, who seemed very tiny to him, though his voice was big enough.

The Iron Man spoke again.

“I challenge you,” he shouted, “to a test of strength.”

A test of strength? The space-bat-angel-dragon couldn't believe his ears. A tiny little creature like the Iron Man challenging him to a test of strength? He

simply laughed. Loud and long. Then he peered down again at the Iron Man, while the echo of his laugh was still rolling round the earth. He peered down out of the sky at this odd little thing on the beach, with the even tinier men scuttling around it.

“And if I can prove myself stronger than you are, then you must promise to become my slave,” cried the Iron Man.

The dragon smiled. Aircraft flew around, watching this amazing conversation between the space-bat-angel-dragon and the Iron Man. Ships out at sea watched through telescopes.

“And if you don't accept my challenge,” shouted the Iron Man, “then

you're a miserable cowardly reptile, not fit to bother with."

The space-bat-angel-dragon was so astounded that he agreed. Why, he thought, when this silly little creature has finished his antics, I'll just lick him up. So the monster agreed, and watched to see what the test of strength was to be. After all, if he wanted, he could flatten the Iron Man with one eyelash.

The engineers had fastened all the girders together in the shape of a grid, a huge iron bed the size of a house. Under this they had made a steel-lined pit. Now they poured fuel oil into the pit. The space-bat-angel-dragon watched.

Now they lit the fuel oil and the

flames roared up fiercely through the bars of the grid.

And now 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.

The flames became fiercer. The grid became red-hot. The Iron Man's hair and elbows and toes became red-hot. His body became first blue, then black, then began to glow dully. He was getting red-

hot. Still he smiled up at the monster, and still the flames grew fiercer.

And now the Iron Man was entirely red-hot. Pretty soon, he was almost white-hot. And still he smiled, out of white-hot eyes and with white-hot lips. And all the time the space-bat-angel-dragon stared down in astonishment.

But now the fuel oil was all burned away. Suddenly the flames died, flickered and went out. The white-hot Iron Man sat up, stood up, got stiffly off his glowing bed and began to walk to and fro on the sand, cooling. He cooled slowly. He went from white to orange, from orange to red, red to black, as he walked, coolly swinging his arms.

Now at last he spoke to the monster.

“If you can’t bear to be made red-hot like me, then you are weaker than I am, and I have won, and you are 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. Go and lie on the sun till you are red-hot.”

The monster gazed up at the sun. He felt strangely cold suddenly. But how

could he refuse? All right! And he set off.

With slow giant wingbeats, he lifted his immense body off the earth, and flew slowly up towards the sun, while the whole earth watched ...

Slowly he covered the distance, getting smaller and smaller as he went. At last he landed, a ragged black shape sprawled across the sun. Everybody watched. And now they saw the monster begin to glow. Blue at first, then red, then orange. Finally his shape was invisible, the same blazing white as the sun itself. The monster was white-hot on the sun.

Then they saw him returning, a blazing shape tearing itself off the sun. This shape became red as it flew. It was

writhing and growing larger. Slowly once more it became the black bat-winged shape of the dragon flying back to earth, down and down, bigger and bigger, cooling as he came, until

BUMP!!!!

He landed – this time much more heavily than before, on Australia. He landed so heavily that all over the world bells tumbled out of church towers and birds'-eggs were jarred out of their nests. The monster stared down at the Iron Man.

But it was hardly the same monster! His horns drooped, his face was wizened and black, his claws were scorched blunt, his crest flopped over limply and great

ragged holes were burned in his wings. It had been terrible for him on the fires of the sun. But he had done it, and here he was. The fires of the sun are far, far hotter than any fires here on earth can ever be.

“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.