

## Comics For Extra Credit - Part 3

I've got Ironman to blame for catching the comic bug over the past few weeks. This weekend I went to see another Marvel character, *The Incredible Hulk*, be re-introduced to the public. This is the second *Hulk* movie in five years; the previous *Hulk*, directed by Ang Lee, more famous for *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* with its martial artistry and Yo Yo Ma soundtrack, was a complete flop.

The 2008 *Hulk* has far more promising; for one thing it has a stronger cast. Ed Norton plays scientist Bruce Banner, the main character, who as Hulkmaniacs know is pelted by gamma radiation that turns him into a huge green monster whenever he becomes angry. Liv Tyler, who I loved in *Armageddon*, plays Dr. Elizabeth Ross, Banner's scientific colleague and love interest. William Hurt plays her father, a black-ops style general who wants to use Banner's hulkiness to turn soldiers into more powerful fighting machines.

What makes this story work is not the special effects, but Norton's portrayal of Banner, who is struggling with science and inner demons to shake the monster out of him. He is more like the Banner played by Bill Bixby in the 1978 series: always on the run, always just shy of a cure, and always the hero. And the monster is a bit smarter in this movie; he quickly knows how to shield himself from flying debris by tearing cars and tanks in half. I don't remember previous Hulks being as resourceful. By the way, you'll catch glimpses of Bixby and Lou Ferrigno, his green alter ego, in the movie that you won't want to miss.

The Hulk is not the only hero in the Marvel universe who would prefer not to be a hero-monster; the *Fantastic Four* have Ben Grimm, The Thing, an astronaut who was also pelted by radiation and turned into something alien. But the Hulk is more famous because he came first and is not part of a super team. He's also the more interesting character because he's more complex. Ben takes advantage of his new physique, and shoots his big mouth when it's clobbering time. The Hulk merely mumbles and runs away to find new clothes and a lab to cure himself and suppress his anger. The new movie supports this by flashing Days Without Incident; the audience got a chuckle when that number dropped to 0 and 1.

There are some things to learn from *The Hulk*, as there were from *Ironman*. For one thing, it's obvious that a little knowledge can become dangerous in the wrong hands. For another, you see a struggle within a man who could use his strength for greed or ill-taken power - he can't harness it well enough to use it for good - but he only wants to be himself. The Hulk is not the only hero who would prefer to human, but he works harder to return to humanity than any one of them.

*Ironman* is the better movie, but *The Incredible Hulk* is worth your time if you're a Marvel fan. You'll even get another hint that these characters will come together in sequels. These characters are a franchise that has lasted 46 years, but the hits, starting with the first *Spiderman*, have been coming for only six. These comics, the Beatles and the Stones have been among the few cultural icons that my generation has passed on to the future. They may be fictional, but they are icons nonetheless.

## About the Author

Contact Stuart Nachbar at [Educated Quest](#), a blog on education politics, policy and technology or read about his first book, *The Sex Ed Chronicle*, a novel on education and politics in 1980 New Jersey, at [Sex Ed Chronicles](#).

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