

## ***Iron Man VR (Prologue) – Exploring Superpowers ad nauseam***

By Thomas Mengel

*I stood on a rocky island looking at Tony Stark’s Malibu home at the coast, illuminated by an impressive sunset over the Pacific Ocean, when the futuristic red and gold flight-and-armour-suit clicked in around my body and automatically became my second skin.*



*Extending my arms downwards and pushing the button on my move controller activating the repulsion system send me flying upwards and taking me to new heights. Slight adjustments of my arms let me control height, speed, and direction of my flight away from the island towards my – well Tony Stark’s – home.*



This is not a full-fledged review of the complete aerial shooter game. [Iron Man VR](#) is based on Marvel’s superhero and was published for the Play Station 4’s Virtual Reality (PS4 VR) headset by Sony Interactive Entertainment at the height of a global pandemic (release date: July 3, 2020). Rather, these are the initial impressions of my first experiences with suiting up – literally putting on the required VR headset, optional earphones, and grabbing the two Play Station Move Controllers needed to manipulate the flight and weapon systems.

Motivated by my earlier description of what the campus of the future might look like through the lens of gaming and VR ([Mengel, 2021](#)), this review of the *Iron Man VR Prologue* describes my explorations of what flying and fighting feels like, wearing and employing the flight and armour systems of billionaire industrialist and super hero Tony Stark. Finally, the story about these first adventures is accompanied by my reflections about this experience as a 64-year-old leadership professor and futurist.

Superheroes are not my thing and superheroic intervention is far from my preferred leadership paradigms of shared and networked leadership oriented towards joined values ([Mengel, 2021 ed.](#)). However, when putting on my PS4 VR headset, entering the *Iron Man VR* universe, and changing the world for the better, I was quickly drawn in.

*My first tasks in the game let me focus on advancing my flight skills and developing my shooting and punching capabilities while manoeuvring around tiny islands and through rocky arches.*

*“Ok. First the thrusters,” I hear Stark saying. “Good. It feels really good!”*



*Stark’s comments were reassuring. Yet, I was off to a rather bumpy start. The VR game environment was forgiving when I crashed into rather than flying over a rocky cliff or after splashing into the ocean. In “reality”, I would have never made it, but here I was, a superhero with seemingly unlimited capabilities. Fully immersed I lost track of time while following the directions on the vizor of my futuristic helmet guiding me to my home base. The voice of my charming assistant, Pepper Potts, accompanied my manoeuvres with flirty and snarky remarks. After the first 45 minutes of my rough flight, I landed in front of Tony’s homebase*

*greeted by the charming readhead, who was almost as attractive as the “real life” character, played by Gwyneth Paltrow in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.*

Thirty to fortyfive minutes initially were the maximum that I could play without staggering or falling over. While sitting on a gaming chair is a possibility, standing upright is the right way to fully immerse oneself into the flying and shooting experience. Due to the immersive 3D-environment and the whole-body movement within the play area, slight nausea started to settle in and some reorientation (and disentangling of the cables connecting the headset and the playstation) seemed advisable, even when I felt a sense of substance induced excitement and wanted to keep going. Luckily, my body seemed to increasingly get used to the full immersion VR experience. I got better at managing body movements without entangling cables and at following instructions on my vizor telling me when it was time to turn back to the front and centre position to keep the cables clear of my feet.

I was proud to have mastered the flying and fighting tasks and I felt comfortable putting my super-heroic capabilities to a “real” test in fighting the bad guys and in saving humanity (well, at least locally at the Pacific Coast of the US). Before being tasked with these challenges, however, my second session was to follow Pepper into my (Stark’s) Malibu home and “pack up the past”.

*“As of today, Stark Industries no longer sells weapons of any kind,” Pepper greeted me and took an instant photo before leading me inside the mansion. She pointed me to where I left my glasses in the lounge before heading to the veranda. I picked up my glasses, explored the surroundings that I already knew from the movie, and completed some additional tasks that all helped me develop my tactile and movement skills in VR. I removed a remainder of my weapon dealer’s past – a gun affixed to the wall in an ornamental frame – and put it away into a chest. I followed Pepper, who was waiting for me at the overlook, a veranda with a breathtaking view of the pacific ocean now illuminated by a spectacular sunset. Pepper guided me to what looked like a candle-light dinner table with two plates and a dome on each of them. When I lifted the first dome, instead of a hearty meal I found a Stark Industries Pulsar that I put on my wrist to destroy the remaining drones also produced by Stark Industries to confirm the end of Stark’s weapons production and dealership.*

*“I guess it is not dinner just yet,” Penny said with some disappointment in her voice. “What’s under the other plate?”*

*I lifted the other dome and picked up the controller for Gunsmith A.I., Stark’s AI simile which he had created as assistant to help him design weapons.*

*“Early retirement. You’ve earned it,” Stark said to Gunsmith after one final brief conversation with him.*



*“Time to put him to sleep,” Stark said to Pepper, shut the AI down and handed her the controller to stow it away.*

*“I wanna change the world,” Stark said. “AI Gunsmith was good at what he did.”*

*“But what he did wasn’t good,” Pepper responded before taking another photo of me.*

*“The world doesn’t need another cruised missile. The world needs you Tony! The world needs Iron Man.”*

That concluded the prelude and I was ready for the “real” adventures. But I’ll leave that for later.



I was hooked. Knowing fair well that the world wouldn’t be saved by a futuristic flying and fighting super-hero, I also knew that I would soon immerse myself deeper into the exciting “world” of *Iron Man VR*. Both to further explore the features and possibilities of VR and gaming for world building and for expanding my imagination.

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- All photos are screenshots from [Marvel’s Iron Man VR – Demo Gameplay | PlayStation Underground](#)
  - Mengel, T. (2021). [It’s all a game – Ready to play on the campus of the future? \*Human Futures\*, 08/2021, p. 22f.](#)
  - Mengel, T. (2021; ed.). [Leadership for the Future: Lessons from the Past, Current Approaches, and Future Insights. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.](#)

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