

## Interview: Writer, Actor Justin Theroux on His 'Iron Man 2' Screenplay

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 5, 2010 - 1:07pm

- [Gwyneth Paltrow](#) [2]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [3]
- [Interview](#) [4]
- [Iron Man 2](#) [5]
- [Jon Favreau](#) [6]
- [Justin Theroux](#) [7]
- [Mickey Rourke](#) [8]
- [Muholland Drive](#) [9]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [10]
- [Robert Downey Jr.](#) [11]
- [Sam Rockwell](#) [12]
- [Scarlett Johansson](#) [13]
- [Tropic Thunder](#) [14]

CHICAGO – Justin Theroux has a long resume as both a cult actor ("Muholland Dr.") and screenwriter ("Tropic Thunder"). Through a key connection and his own point-of-view, he was hired to write "Iron Man 2," the sequel to one of the biggest blockbusters ever.

Theroux is best known as an actor, especially in films for director David Lynch – both Muholland and "Inland Empire." He has done stints in television, in "The District," "Six Feet Under" and "Parks and Recreation." He even topped those recently by playing John Hancock in the multi-award winning "John Adams" miniseries on HBO.

His breakthrough screenplay was 2008's "Tropic Thunder," which starred Robert Downey, Jr. (who plays Tony Stark/Iron Man), which led to his latest assignment, the screenplay for Iron Man 2.



Electric: Mickey Rourke as Russian Villain Ivan Vanko in 'Iron Man 2'  
Photo Credit: Industrial Light & Magic/Marvel © 2010 Marvel Entertainment, LLC

HollywoodChicago.com interviewed the eclectic Justin Theroux, amid the highly anticipated opening for Iron Man 2 this week.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** How did you get involved in the project? Was it a connection or a certain writing sensibility got you the job to write this sequel?

**Justin Theroux:** I think it was both. I worked with Robert [Downey, Jr.] on 'Tropic Thunder,' and he asked me to meet with Kevin Feige [producer] and Jon [Favreau, the director], and so we hit it off and had some common ideas as to where the story could go and just jibed in general. That's how it came to be.

**HC:** Considering the point of view and balanced screenplay of the first Iron Man, was there any specific instructions, either from the production staff or Jon Favreau, regarding how to approach the sequel?

**JT:** No, there was no instruction on that I had to do this, or this, or this. We all kind of came up with it together, we all sat down and unpacked our bags as to what we thought would be interesting for a sequel. Everybody got to weigh in, and the best ideas rose to the top. Then I sort of skimmed the top of that, took them away and started writing it. But it was very communal effort in that respect. All of our interests were in just creating the best sequel we could. So the best ideas won the day.

**HC:** You have the United States military and government desiring Iron Man's secrets to use as weaponry. What alliance between commerce and the military industrial complex is most dangerous, in your opinion?

**JT:** I'm not an expert on geopolitics, but I am interested. I don't know, I would guess it's when the 'tail starts to wag the dog.' If the military has a genuine need for something and the means and desire to pay for it, that's obviously fine. I think it's when contractors and people who create weapons foist their wares on perhaps a military that doesn't want or need what they're creating, or digs the taxpayer into a hole where we can't afford to pay for it.



Justin Theroux and Heidi Bivens at the Iron Man 2 Premiere  
in Hollywood, California, April 26th, 2010

*Photo credit: Michael Buckner for © 2010 WireImage*

**HC:** Was that part of the discussion in developing that theme for Iron Man 2?

**JT:** It was part of the discussion but more to the point, we started the conversation regarding the sequel with the last line of the first movie, which is 'I am Iron Man.' Then we thought, 'what problems does that present?' If you have this thing that can fly through the air and crush city buses, and do incredible things, who are the people who are going to crawl out of the woodwork and say that they want it? We thought the government would definitely be one of those people. [laughs]

That is why we have the Senate scene. Here's Tony, who is now atoning for the sins of his past as a weapons maker, but now he is the most desirable weapon on the planet. In that sense, it is sort of an arms race. The argument we put forth is he said he could handle being the peacemaker and the only sheriff on the planet, but what problems does that present and can he do it by himself?

**HC:** The most successful comic book films never forgets the intrigue or the hero or the villain. What in your screenplay do you feel is the most intriguing thing about Iron Man or his nemesis?

**JT:** I think most intriguing thing about Tony Stark is that he's more 'flesh and blood' than most superheroes. He's not a guy who has to disappear into a phone booth and then come out and his voice is deeper and no one knows who he is. I love that his true identity is the same as his superhero identity. It allows him to be human, and people know when he's flying around that it's Tony Stark. He is, in a sense, someone we can relate to, even though he's a billionaire playboy. [laughs]

We have a couple of degrees of villains in this film. We have Justin Hammer [Sam Rockwell] who is our surface villain, who is just another business man not unlike Tony, he's just a cheap suit version of him. And we have a guy who has a genuine, emotional vendetta to repay against Tony, which is the Whiplash character played by Mickey Rourke. His character is so great because it comes out of a deep and steeped history that plays with legacy and destiny.

**HC:** This is a comic's geek question. What, in your opinion, is the difference between the Marvel universe and the DC universe that makes the Marvel films work better and subsequently become more popular?

**JT:** I don't know if they work better. Every superhero character has some things going for it and things that work against them. 'The Dark Knight' was damn good. I try not to choose sides, I'm a big fan of any movie that can be good or any superhero that can be fleshed out, brought to life in an exciting way.

**HC:** Were you a comic book fan as a kid, and did you lean towards any side or the other?

**JT:** Yes I was a fan. I didn't go to any side or the other, I was sort of a fickle comic book fan. I would drop them as soon as a story line came up that I wasn't interested in. So I wasn't a committed comic fan in that respect. I also loved independent comics and other genres.

**HC:** To what do you attribute the popularity of superheroes and comic book movies. What is it about their particular escapism do you think audiences connect to?

**JT:** I think for anyone, and I count myself among these, who has stepped off a subway and has been harassed, bullied, punched or had things taken from them, I relate to immediately the desire to land a big fat iron fist into their face. [laughs]

When someone gets bit by a spider and starts climbing the walls or when someone is trapped in a cave and puts a thing in their chest and suddenly beats the bullies that are keeping him there...to me that is the most dynamic moment in any superhero film, I love that. And I love to see it told in any permutation or way.



Justin Theroux as Adam Kesher in 'Muholland Dr.'

*Photo credit: © Universal Pictures*

**HC:** After doing two films with David Lynch, what do you most admire about how he works with actors and the final product that he produces?

**JT:** I admire the purity of his product. He's probably has the most direct access from his brain to the screen that I ever worked with, in other words what he imagines probably hits the screen exactly as he imagined it more than any other director in the world. He really does listen to no one but himself.

Every moment, thing, piece of costume and line has been assisted over by him. He does not take commercial necessity into account at all. You are really getting exactly what David wants you to see. And I love that. When I see his films it's like looking through a telescope directly into his brain.

**HC:** And how does that relate when he works with the actors as far as getting that vision complete?

**JT:** He's just a wonderful communicator, in that he is very kind and gentle, and embraces the performers in a wonderful way. He lets you bring what you want, you have to say his lines, there is very little improvisation in his films, but you can say things that you don't understand, but later you know it will make sense in a sort of dream logic that you couldn't possibly anticipate.

I remember seeing Muholland Dr. for the first time and thinking, 'I don't remember shooting that movie.' [laughs] It was so different from set to completion. The vibe while we were doing it was a comedy, we were having fun. And all of a sudden I was watching it and I was like, 'Jesus Christ,' it was so different from the on-set experience.



[Read Patrick McDonald's blog.](#)  
['Lights! Camera!'](#)

[Chicago!' on  
ChicagoNow.com](#) [15]

**HC:** You did a part in the recent John Adams miniseries on HBO. What connection to history became most apparent to you when playing John Hancock, and in general pretending to be a founding father?

**JT:** The thing that became most apparent was not a similarity but a disconnect between the current government and the one that kicked it all off. The guys who founded this country were geniuses. They may have had a difference of opinion, and they were vocal, but they were philosophers, scholars and poets. They were just incredible thoughtful men. They would ponder things in such a way that reverberated through the ages, considering what it means to be a democracy.

**HC:** In becoming a director yourself for the 2007 feature Dedication, what appreciation did you gain about the particular craft of directing that surprised you?

**JT:** I was shooting a very low budget movie and it was actually David Lynch who gave me a sage piece of advice. If you run into an obstacle, rather than fight it, embrace it, and see where it takes you. David is one of those great directors that if you're shooting a scene on the beach, but then it is raining, he'll be 'all right, that's great, it's raining' and he'll flow with the natural order of the universe and let it happen.

And I did that. We had moments on my film where we couldn't get the people we wanted or the things we needed and I would embrace it, turn into it, and it created some of my favorite moments in the film. It was a big lesson with going with the flow.

**HC:** Finally, how did you access your inner Evil Wizard for Danny McBride's script and David Gordon Green's direction in the upcoming 'Your Highness'?

**JT:** I watched Gary Oldham's 'Dracula,' and I thought Oldham's hair looks fantastic, that's the hair I want. And then I borrowed a page from 'Wild at Heart' and got some teeny Willem Defoe teeth. And the rest was just an English accent. It was a really well crafted, thought out character. [laughs]

*"Iron Man 2" opens everywhere May 7th. Featuring Robert Downey Jr., Gwyneth Paltrow, Scarlett Johansson, Don Cheadle, Mickey Rourke, Sam Rockwell, Samuel L. Jackson and John Slattery. Written by Justin Theroux and directed by Jon Favreau. Rated "PG-13"*



[16]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [17]  
Senior Staff Writer  
[HollywoodChicago.com](http://HollywoodChicago.com)  
[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [16]

© 2010 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

**Source URL (retrieved on Mar 28 2024 - 6:36am):**

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/10577/interview-writeractor-justin-theroux-on-his-iron-man-2-screenplay>

#### Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/gwyneth-paltrow>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/iron-man-2>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/jon-favreau>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/justin-theroux>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/mickey-rourke>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/muholland-drive>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/robert-downey-jr>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/sam-rockwell>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/scarlett-johansson>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/tropic-thunder>
- [15] <http://www.chicagonow.com/blogs/lights-camera-chicago/>
- [16] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>