

Title: The Modern Knight in Shining Titanium Alloy

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The archetype of the sacrificial hero has hundreds of examples, dating back to 13th century Europe when feudalism was the basis of rule and law. Sir Gawain (Sir Gawain and the Green Knight) is one of the earliest and most timeless prototypes, encountering parabolic struggles and ornamented with Christian symbolism--reflective of the Bible's social significance. In comparison, the modern audience's fascination with comic book heroes--once looked down on as a childish exploit--has become the 21st century's standard source of popular storytelling. The archetype of the hero remains the same, but how does one make a centuries-old antecedent contemporary? The modernity lies not within the model, but the lens through which society judges what being a hero means. Comic books owe much of their gratitude to the societal focal shift in Europe from Christianity to Secular Humanism. Had the Renaissance never occurred, the Marvel Universe might look less like the varied personalities, strengths, and weaknesses that it is today and more like a pantheon of saints, all aiming to achieve the same Christian ideal that Sir Gawain aimed for. That is not to say that there is no value in King Arthur's knights. His knights' tales of valor established not just the model of a knight, but the ideal of what separated a knight from a hero: self-sacrifice. However, what makes Iron Man the 21st definition of a hero is the lesson that greatness is not intrinsic, nor does it stem from religious devotion; it is a choice.

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