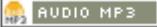- Home
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Worldbuilding Ep. 009: Plot Part Two, Scene Construction and a Look at the Worldbuilding of *The Incredibles*

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Worldbuilding Episode 009 Show Notes

Steps for Creating the Main Plotline and the Individual Scenes Within the Main Plotline

1. Determine your beginning and ending by considering the plot's question and answer. The plot is a

question that must be answered by the story's ending (look at your Premise to determine the question that the plot demands to be answered).

2. Example Premise (from *It*): When a group of traumatized adults are called back to their hometown to face an immortal creature that uses fear as a weapon and devours children, each adult must overcome his/her personal worst fear and fight the creature that terrorized them in their youth.
3. Plot's question: will the adults destroy the creature?
4. Plot's question must be answered in the ending somehow, or else the story will be unsatisfying.
5. Every plot needs a beginning and an ending, which is the question and the answer that forms the first beginning and end points of your plot.
6. Your scenes are the building blocks of the plot; each scene needs a:
   - **Location:** We'll examine–in a future episode–how the story locations of your world can be inspired by your thematic subjects
   - **Conflicting Characters:** Again, look at your premise and thematic subjects to find the conflicts
   - **A Need:** What are the needs of your characters? The need drives the scene
   - **A Logical Cause and Effect:** Why are the characters here, and how will their actions affect the next scene?
7. The scenes move inevitably toward the plot's answer; the story ends when the question is answered
8. Write a brief summary of each scene on a notebook paper or on an index card; answer all of these questions to create a causal link of events leading from a beginning to an ending

A Look at the Structure and Design of *The Incredibles*

Story's Premise

When a family of exceptionally gifted superheroes are forced to conceal their talents in a world that promotes conformity, the family must make a choice between revealing themselves to save society from a new villain or remaining hidden and safe.

Thematic Subject and Thematic (Philosophical) Questions

This is a movie about *conformity*. The film comments on our society's tendency to box exceptional individuals into conforming squares and to beat down and discourage the gifted. It especially satirizes the average who are in positions of power and who are threatened by exceptional people. It's easy to see how Brad Bird, an exceptionally gifted animator and artist, comments on personal experiences he has had with middle men, number crunchers and managers as he fought his way to a position in life where he was free to work his craft.

The Cast of Characters (representing opposing/contrasting facets of the thematic subject of conformity)

Bob Parr/Mr. Incredible: Mr. Incredible is forced into a life of normalcy where he must conform to the needs of an average society. Look at the name "Parr"; a par in golf is an average score for a hole. He also feels that the needs of his family normalize him and keep him from utilizing his gifts. His desire: "I will hide my gifts to protect my family but I secretly feel imprisoned by my family and my society. Conformity makes me miserable."

Helen Parr: Helen, Jack's wife, also must conform. However, she is willing to pay the price since her family is more important to her than the need to exploit her gifts. "I am willing to conform as the price I must pay to raise a family."

Dash Parr: Dash, the son must conform to the demands of public school (and everyone knows what experience school can have on exceptional people). "I want to explore my gifts to the fullest. Why can't I be exceptional?"

Violet Parr: The daughter, in contrast to the son, doesn't want to be noticed. "I want to be invisible because being exceptional means being different. I want to conform to society because I am embarrassed that I am different."

Lucius Best/Frozone: His name is "Best," again alluding to being exceptional. He is a "cool" guy, literally and figuratively, and his exploits show that he, like Parr, is an exceptional individual that is fighting against conforming to a normalizing society.

Buddy (the main villain): He wants desperately to be noticed. He is the end result of someone exceptional who society ignored in its attempt to make every individual conform. When society ignores the needs of an individual to be recognized as special, the Buddies are the end result. He is jealous of others' exceptional gifts, and so he lives vicariously through their exploits. The main conflict of the movie centers around his attempt to fabricate a scenario in which he can be the hero for one time in his life, and receive the recognition that he was never given.

Edna: An exceptional individual that used to design costumes for "the gods." She represents gifted people that find a way to create and be special outside the confines of society.

Other antagonists: Aspects of the theme are explored through characters who represent conforming values, such as Parr's boss, a manager, the public school principal and Dash's teacher, all of whom fight for the side of average, unexceptional, people.

Also, look at the settings. These represent, visually, the thematic subjects as well. Parr's workplace and home are boxy, confined spaces with muted colors, showing the limiting effects of the life of conformity.

In contrast, Parr (and family) exuberantly exploit their talents on a volcanic island full of wide open spaces, organic shapes and textures, and lush and saturated colors. The island, in contrast with cold suburbia, is a place of danger, excitement and color, the perfect location to explore the subject of being exceptional.

The art design also reflects the thematic subject. The art team based the animation design on 1950s and 1960s art styles, creating a look that harkens back to an era known for its conformity.

Now, let's look at how the plot is structured:

The plot starts and ends with the premise, using that to ask its question and ultimately answer it. Characters, situations, events, locations are all derived from the thematic subject (once this becomes apparent to the storyteller). We'll work on the first scene for today.

When a family of exceptionally gifted superheroes are forced to conceal their talents in a world that promotes conformity, the family must make a choice between revealing themselves to save society from a new villain or remaining hidden and safe.
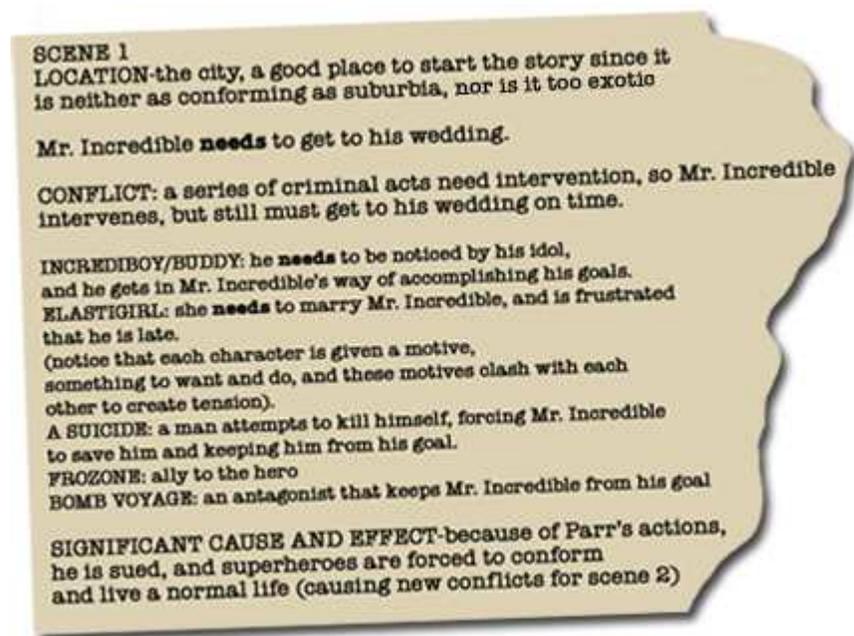
Main Plotline's Question

How will a family who must hide their superpowers from the world defeat a villain who begins killing off gifted individuals?

Answer

The plotline (and the story) will end when the family finally defeats the villain and figures out how to happily live (and compromise) as superheroes in a society that fears the exceptional.

An Example of the Design of a Scene

SCENE 1
LOCATION-the city, a good place to start the story since it is neither as conforming as suburbia, nor is it too exotic

Mr. Incredible **needs** to get to his wedding.

CONFLICT: a series of criminal acts need intervention, so Mr. Incredible intervenes, but still must get to his wedding on time.

INCREDIBOY/BUDDY: he **needs** to be noticed by his idol, and he gets in Mr. Incredible's way of accomplishing his goals.
ELASTIGIRL: she **needs** to marry Mr. Incredible, and is frustrated that he is late.
(notice that each character is given a motive, something to want and do, and these motives clash with each other to create tension).
A SUICIDE: a man attempts to kill himself, forcing Mr. Incredible to save him and keeping him from his goal.
FROZONE: ally to the hero
BOMB VOYAGE: an antagonist that keeps Mr. Incredible from his goal

SIGNIFICANT CAUSE AND EFFECT-because of Parr's actions, he is sued, and superheroes are forced to conform and live a normal life (causing new conflicts for scene 2)

Scene 1 begins with a character (Mr. Incredible) who must fulfill a *need*. Here, Mr. Incredible's need is to get to his wedding on time. Of course, the scene's interest will derive from the continual frustrations and challenges that keep Mr. Incredible from fulfilling his need.

The scene will end when the character succeeds or fails and the scene's question (of whether the character will succeed in meeting his/her immediate need) is answered. The character's actions and reactions during the course of the scene needs to affect the next scene (as it does in *The Incredibles*–Mr. Incredible's actions in Scene 1 result in a lawsuit, which creates a new need for the character in Scene 2).

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3 Comments so far

1. Kathy Clesson February 18, 2007 1:12 pm

   I am impressed with this whole concept and the shared information on episode shaping and secondary world creation here. Thank you for opening up your approach to the web.

   I can see connections on a unit level (perhaps while teaching a fantasy novel or during a Medieval Arthurian Romance unit) and on a course level. You have really got me thinking. I will be teaching a science fiction and fantasy elective in a laptop environment next spring. Is there a way my students could subscribe to and create through your site? I have looked through your archive and, like you, I apply Campbel's monomythic pattern and Tolkein's lecture "On Fairy Stories" as context for study and creative writing. The visual variations on plot structure are wonderful.

   Please forgive the rambling nature of this response. I am thinking with my fingers.

2. Editor February 19, 2007 10:06 am

   Hi Kathy,

   I would be very flattered if you used the site for your class. Anyone is welcome to come to the forum and subscribe to share ideas and projects. A major motivation of the show is to build an interactive community around this topic, and contributors who can bring in new people and new perspectives would be very helpful.

   Thank you for the feedback about the plot episode. Plot is an especially difficult subject to analyze when considering nontraditional narratives (like interactive fiction, multiplayer stories and games) and the newer emerging forms of storytelling. And it's difficult to determine where the boundary lies between a story, where the author has complete control, versus a game, where players have control over their characters' choices within the narrative. I felt like I was struggling with nailing down the answer to plotting, but I am glad you liked what I did come up with.

   If you have questions about where to find the forum, or how to subscribe, please let me know. By the way, I would love to know more about your class; will the forum serve your needs?

   Paul

3. Editor February 19, 2007 10:09 am

   Kathy,

   A sidenote: if you would like me to set up a category within the forum where your students can participate in an online Socratic Dialogue, let me know. I'm not sure how you want to use the site, exactly, but if you give me more details about the class and your needs, I may be able to help.

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- Worldbuilding Ep. 015: The Party
- Good news: a new episode is almost here

- Announcement: New Site Coming Soon
- Forums are back
- Forum may need a complete reinstall
- Worldbuilding Ep. 014: Setting Part Three, Using Image Systems
- Episode 14 will be up tomorrow afternoon
- Daughter of the Sun Artwork
- Podcast Update for November 2007
- Roleplaying Game Art and Design Thought Experiment: Art Directing for the CORE Game Engine (Chupa/Cinematic Open-source Role-Playing Engine)

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- Coming soon!

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