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Incredibly, *Incredibles* Deserves Comic Credit!

In an age saturated with films based on comics, addressing the same themes as comics, and poking fun at comics and comic archetypes, Disney/Pixar’s *The Incredibles* is especially noteworthy. In *The Incredibles,* a forcibly retired family of superheroes comes out of hiding first to save the father, Robert Parr (a.k.a. Mr. Incredible), from a sticky situation prompted by his illegal moonlighting as a superhero, and then to save the world. *The Incredibles* is obviously written for a children’s audience, so it naturally lacks the depth and scope of other comic movies like *300, V for Vendetta, Batman Begins,* and *Iron Man*.Despite this, it manages to deliver a solid story with a lot more to offer more mature audiences than the average “kiddie movie.” Even though it is not based upon any one comic book in particular, it does a very good job of addressing some of the most important themes of the genre.

The fact that super powers are such an integral factor in *The Incredibles* goes a long way towards improving its standing among so-called “comic book films.” Not only is the theme of super powers common among many films in the comic genre, but it is part of many comic book stories as well. All of the heroes in the film have some kind of super power, ranging from super strength to shooting ice out of their hands. It is rare for a comic targeted towards the same audience as *The Incredibles* not to include a character with super powers, whether it is a hero, a villain, or both. As comics start dealing with more mature issues, the presence of true superpowers becomes rarer. Some cases include Moon Knight, Batman, The Punisher, Iron Man, and the Green Arrow, all of whom derive their powers from either natural prowess, wealth, or both. Since many comics, including *V for Vendetta*, *Sin City,* and *Watchmen*, center around characters without super powers, the fact that the characters in *The Incredibles* have super powers is not enough to warrant its definition as an adequate example of comic style film. In response to this, one might argue that the stylized nature, exaggerated level of violence, and/or huge amount of training applied in conflicts between characters is a sort of super power. because it is doubtful that there is anyone alive that is capable of performing such feats as squaring off against a group of men carrying guns and defeat them all using nothing but a knife or sustaining hundreds of bullet wounds without dying.

Nearly all of the characters in *The Incredibles* have counterpart characters in the Marvel universe. This synchronicity would seem to suggest that comics at the very least influenced the writers/directors of *The Incredibles*. Most obviously, the Parr family closely mirrors the Fantastic Four. Elastigirl parallels the super-stretchy Mister Fantastic, Mister Incredible’s super strength and immunity to physical harm is very similar to The Thing, and Violet has the exact same powers as the Invisible Woman. Dash somewhat resembles the Human Torch, who has the ability to fly at supersonic speeds, but is arguably more closely similar to The Flash, who was not a Fantastic Four member. Jack-Jack’s plurality of powers makes him very similar to Mr. Fantastic and the Invisible Woman’s child Franklin Richards, who exhibits various psychic abilities as well as telekinesis, energy projection, and matter manipulation. The main villain, Syndrome, shares his invention based powers with Doctor Doom, the Fantastic Four’s nemesis. Other minor characters with parallels in the world of comics include Frozone (Iceman), Gazerbeam (Cyclops), Mirage (Psylocke), Stratogale (Archangel) and Thunderhead (Storm). It is possible that all such correlation is entirely coincidental, but the level at which it occurs is so widespread that any denial of its at least partially intentional nature should be excluded from argument.

The villain Syndrome and his henchmen bring to mind the “incompetent bad guy” type villains popular in many comics. Syndrome is a generally loud, overly dramatic, and underhanded villain, similar to The Riddler and Joker from the *Batman* comics or Dr. Robotnik from the *Sonic* manga. He’s concerned with the overly broad goal of world domination through a complicated scheme designed to build up his self image. This trend of overcompensation continues with the look and feel of his base, a massive, technologically advanced lair reminiscent of the ostentatious bases utilized by various comic book “bad guys,” including Lex Luthor from *Superman,* The Penguin from *Batman,* Norman Osborn/The Green Goblin in *Spider-Man,* and Shredder, the main villain in the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

Syndrome’s henchmen are all clad in intimidating neo-modern uniforms and tote lots of advanced weaponry, yet when it comes to combat, they are more or less inept, hesitating to take kill shots, missing easy targets, and crashing vehicles in situations where a rational person would just apply the brake. This type of villain appears over and over again throughout the comics genre, from the Shredder ninjas in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, to the Cobra henchmen in the *G.I. Joe* comics, to the lizard men found throughout the Marvel universe. However, this villain/henchman archetype is not unique to comics and comic book films. It is present in many non comic related films, such as the James Bond franchise, the Mummy franchise, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon,* and almost any Steven Seagal movie one cares to name. On its own, this argument does not provide sufficient evidence to make the claim that *The Incredibles* successfully conveys comic book themes, but when taken in conjunction with the presence of super powers and strong correlations between the characters of *The Incredibles* and characters present across the spectrum of comics, the argument for *The Incredibles* as a valid member of the comic movie genre becomes nearly undeniable.

As comics and graphic novels become more popular, it is likely that the number of movies based on comics or drawing heavily upon them for inspiration will increase as well. Obviously all movies can’t be comic book movies, but at what point does one draw the line? *The Incredibles* is an excellent example of a movie that falls solidly within the realm of comic-based cinema, but even it has areas in which it falls short of being entirely correlative to a particular comic. How much does a movie have to have in common with a comic for it to be considered a comic book film? Does it have to share the same characters, the same themes, or does it merely have to seek to convey the same message as a comic? Do the characters in a movie have to have super powers? Super skills? Or is simply working towards the goals of truth, justice, and the American way enough? These questions are all up for debate, but at least one thing is for sure: as far as comic book movies go, *The Incredibles* is nothing short of credible.

Works Cited

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