

When it comes to supervillains in animated movies, there's some truly memorable big baddies, such as The Prowler (Spider-Verse), Megamind... [villain from Big Hero 6] this guy from Big Hero 6, um, I think his name was... Angry Nigel. But I think Syndrome outshines them all, and his villain reveal is so well constructed, let's just say I'm a big fan.

[Intro]

The Incredibles came out in 2004, this follows something of a revival for superhero movies with the X-Men, Blade and Spider-Man, no not that one nor that one, this one, but given Pixar movies can take about 4 years to make, The Incredibles doesn't draw its superhero influence from its counterparts, but rather the golden age of comic books hence why it's set in the 1960s. And of course, when you have comic books, you have comic book fans.

Franchises live and die by the size of its fandom and so they will often sculpt and mould the media to please them, aka fan service. But this constant to-ing and fro-ing of influence over the media piece itself, can give some hardcore fans the disillusion that because they such a big fan, then they must also have a degree of ownership over it. This is how a toxic fandom is spawned. Which brings me back to The Incredibles.

Syndrome: I mean, after all..... I am your biggest fan.

Syndrome is the movie's surprise antagonist, he's set up at the start of the movie as a young fanboy, desperate to stand alongside his idol, Mr Incredible aka Bob Parr.

Incrediboy: I know all your moves, your crime fighting style, favorite catch phrases, everything! I'm your number one fan!

(Mr. Incredible kicks him out of the car and accelerates.)

And the rejection sets him on this dark path from sidekick to psycho.
So let's look this villain reveal a bit closer to see what else it reveals.

(Bob enters in a meeting room.)

(He waits quietly for anyone, as he looks around)

The scene opens with Bob's meeting with destiny. He enters the conference room and sits at the furthest end of the table. Note the number of empty chairs, a hint of all the other superheroes that came before him and how he is the last one in line. I love the Syndrome's themed table here, Syndrome really knows how to do branding.

[buy my merch gag]

But then knock knock, it's the Omnidroid.

(But suddenly, the Omnidroid v.X9 attacks him out of nowhere, and it throws him)

Mr Incredible has fought this before and won just barely, but he was prepared before. This time he's caught totally by surprise and thrown around, while a voice rings out.

Syndrome: It's bigger! (The Omnidroid throws him again) It's badder! (And again) Ladies and gentlemen, it's.... (And again, this time it grabs Mr. Incredible and it uses its two tentacles to decapitate him, which it almost does) Too much for Mr. Incredible!!!

Syndrome here is narrating the fight like it's a show, the language harkens back to movie trailers but more aptly, comic books, with it's overly dramatic language.

Syndrome: You know, I went through quite a few supers to get it worthy to fight you, but man, it wasn't good enough!!

We later learn this line is in reference to the number of superheroes the Omnidroid has fought and killed while it got updated and refined, like beta testing a bomb. Syndrome exploited the supers yearning to return to superhero work, just like Bob, following the changes in law banning them.

You could see this as a commentary on the overabundance of superheroes, something you might be feeling now with the ever growing MCU, despite pre-dating the whole thing.

But I think the disposable nature of the supers is because he treats them like products.

Syndrome is able to be devoid of empathy because he doesn't even see people as people. Whether they're admired superheroes or terrified citizens, ultimately they're just playthings.

Syndrome: After you trashed the last one, I had to make some major modifications. Sure it was difficult, but you are worth it. I mean, after all..... I am your biggest fan.

This is the moment when for Mr Incredible the problem goes from a general vague threat, to one deeply personal.

MR. INCREDIBLE: Buddy?

I have to commend the direction, they could have had Bob have a mini-flashback here, to hold the hands of the audience to say, hey remember that kid at the start? That's him now, my how he has grown. But they don't, trusting us to know exactly who this person is with a single line which perfectly encapsulates everything about this villain.

Let's go back to that first scene, look I know I'm talking about this scene but I have hold of the remote so shush.

(Mr. Incredible gets into his car.)

Incrediboy: Cool! Ready for take-off!

Mr. Incredible: What the...? Who are you supposed to be?

Incrediboy: Well, I'm IncrediBoy.

Young Buddy here sneaks into Mr Incredible's car. This is already grossly crossing boundaries. Sometimes fans have such a parasocial relationship with their heroes, they forget it's one-way and not one that deserves to be reciprocated no matter how big a fan they are, which is why when fans turn up at celebrities' houses, it can be incredibly dangerous, especially if they are scorned. Because if you base your entire identity on being a fan of something, then what happens when that something is taken away?

SYNDROME: [angrily yells at Mr. Incredible] My name is not...BUDDY!!!!

(The Omnidroid throws Bob on the floor. Syndrome lands.)

SYNDROME: And it's not Incrediboy either! That ship has sailed. All I wanted was to help you. I only wanted to help!

This is a lie. And this is worse than some elaborate trick because it's a lie that even Syndrome himself believes is true.

During the encounter with Bomb Voyage, he turns up again, throwing himself into a dangerous situation that Mr Incredible is forced to take responsibility for. And the whole time, he's still trying to impress Mr Incredible, he doesn't do anything to Bomb Voyage, he's right there! He's right there!

Buddy is not interested in helping people, he just wants to be *seen* to help. He wants to be a hero. He wants the glory and the praise, the same kind he heaped onto Mr Incredible himself. But without actually being a hero.

Syndrome: Oh, come on! You gotta admit, this is cool! Just like a movie! The robot will emerge dramatically, do some damage. Throngs of screaming people! And just when all hope is lost, Syndrome will save the day! I'll be a bigger hero than you ever were!

Mr. Incredible: You mean, you killed off real supers so that you could..... PRETEND TO BE ONE?

This performative nature of causing a situation, so that he can resolve it and get praised for doing so is a real thing called Hero Syndrome. Oh look at that, it's in the name! For example a firefighter might start a fire, not with the intention to cause harm, but just so they can be the one to put it out.

So when Syndrome says he was trying to help, he would rather endanger people more, if it would make him look like a hero.

MR. INCREDIBLE: [sadly] I was wrong to treat you that way. I'm sorry.

As we've seen Mr Incredible was not wrong to push Syndrome away, he was overstepping boundaries. I've seen some people say this is Mr Incredible's fault, that he should have let Buddy down gently. But no. He shouldn't. Fuck Buddy. No, not like that!

Mr. Incredible: Look, I've been nice, I've stood for photos, signed every scrap of paper you pushed at me but this is...

Incrediboy: No, no, no, you don't have to worry about training me. I know all your moves, your crime fighting style, favorite catch phrases, everything!

Notice Buddy's one track mind and how he constantly assumes what Mr Incredible is thinking.

Incrediboy: Hey, hey! Aren't you curious about how I get around so fast? See? I have these rocket boots--

Mr. Incredible: Go home, Buddy.

When his fanaticism has made him blind, he won't see the lines that he has crossed. So Mr Incredible is in the right, like if I came home to someone sleeping with my wife, I'd be in the right to say "Hey what the hell!?" and if they then pulled a gun on me, I too would be like "Oh I apologise for my harsh tone earlier, would sir like a beverage, cuckolding is such thirsty work..."

SYNDROME: See? Now you respect me, because I'm a threat. That's the way it works!

Now we roll into the villain's monologue, a useful exposition dump, laying down motivations and backstory, but this is demonstrating one of Syndrome's defining traits, his showmanship. Just like narrating the Omnidroid fight before, now he's gloriously boasting his accomplishments, making up for the bruising his ego took when Mr Incredible rejected him.

SYNDROME: Am I good enough NOW?! Who's super NOW?!?!

Notice how even while he is winning, Syndrome still thinks of himself as the victim. At no point does anyone tell him he can't help because he's not a superhero.

Mr. Incredible: And now, you have officially carried it too far, Buddy.

Incrediboy: This is because I don't have powers, isn't it? Well not every superhero has powers, you know. You can be super without them. I invented these. I can fly. Can you fly?

This is purely his own insecurities being projected, like before how he presumed to know what Mr Incredible was thinking, he now presumes the rejection came from his lack of superpowers, instead of his narcissism. A manifestation of a world where some people have superpowers, and others don't, and the value and worth placed on them.

And this is a point that Mr Incredible himself begins to echo.

Bob: It's not a graduation. He's moving from the fourth grade to the fifth grade.

Helen: It's a ceremony!

Bob: It's psychotic. They keep creating new ways to celebrate mediocrity but if someone is genuinely exceptional, then-

Helen: This is not about you, Bob!

For Bob, if he cannot be a superhero, then what value or worth does he have. And Syndrome represents what happens when a character's wants outweigh the character's needs, in Bob's case it's to take his place in the family unit. Therefore always having something that no amount of superpowers will help Syndrome get.

SYNDROME: I'm Syndrome! Your nemesis and e-!

(Syndrome makes a grandiose gesture with his arms, inadvertently flinging Mr. Incredible into the jungle.)

SYNDROME: Oh, brilliant.

And just like that, Syndrome throws his plaything away, beginning the chain of events that'll eventually spell his downfall.

We never learn about Syndrome's backstory, why he rejects his true name and hides under a pseudonym, but we see he is often alone, even at the end of this scene he is alone, because he would rather live in the facade of his own creation than the truth. And in the end, when Mr Incredible's family comes to the rescue, Syndrome is still alone and no-one is there to save him.

In the space of mere minutes, we see the extremes that Syndrome's idolisation of Mr Incredible has caused. Syndrome represents toxic fandom, and this predates a lot of what

we see happen to Star Wars, but with the increased access to people online, there's now a greater platform to ruin people's lives, while still claiming to be just a fan.

Fandom's are wonderful when in the right place, like debate, criticism, theories, supporting creators on Patreon-

[patreon plug gag like merch]

But when it begins to invade the lives of the creators in uninvited ways, that's when it crosses a line. And to be clear, there's nothing wrong with seeing someone you recognise in the street and asking for a photo or an autograph, but it's a different matter if you follow them home or claim to be a greater part of their lives.

So if we can take just two lessons away from Syndrome in this scene, it's one:

- It's ok to have heroes and idols, but remember they owe you nothing
- And two, no capes.