



'The Incredibles' Almost Had a Totally Different Villain



By Rachel Sandell

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Rachel Sandell is an experienced editor and proofreader with a love for language and storytelling. A graduate of the creative writing MFA program, The Rainier Writing Workshop, she is the author of five short stories and analyzes the different facets of fiction her spare time. She's also a huge...

SUMMARY

- Syndrome was initially intended to be a smaller character in *The Incredibles*, but his role was expanded to become the main antagonist.
- The original villain, Xerek, was a well-dressed older man with connections to both heroes and villains, but his personal conflict with Elastagirl would have made him a weaker foil for Mr. Incredible.
- Syndrome's upgrade to central antagonist was a better choice for the film, as his character had more impact and his darkly playful energy balanced the film's tones effectively.

Pixar's *The Incredibles* is genuinely one of the **best superhero movies** out there in this modern age of film supers that seem to multiply by the hour. Even nearly twenty years after its release, the film holds up as a neatly written, family-oriented superhero story with plenty of fun moments and dark themes. The characterizations of the protagonists and antagonists are top-notch, and its self-awareness of superhero tropes never veers into the realm of the obnoxiously meta. One contender for the **best part of *The Incredibles***, however, has got to be the villain. Buddy Pine, aka Syndrome (**Jason Lee**), is Mr. Incredible's (**Craig T. Nelson**) #1 fan turned #1 rival, and he's everything a villain should be: striking, iconic, and an effective mirror for the hero's weaknesses. It's hard to believe, but Syndrome was almost relegated to being a one-note rival in the first few minutes of the film rather than the main antagonist.

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The Villain from 'The Incredibles' Was Almost Totally Different



According to writer/director **Brad Bird**, **originally the beginning of *The Incredibles*** was set at a suburban barbeque, where Bob and Helen Smith (instead of Parr) struggle to make friends. When Helen gets caught up in an argument with a neighbor about the value of motherhood, Bob gets distracted watching and accidentally slams a butcher knife down on his fingers. Of course, the knife bends around his hand, but the neighbors at

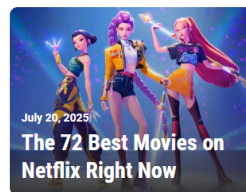


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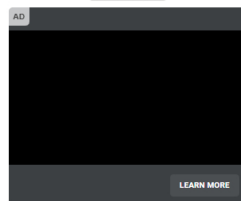
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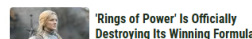
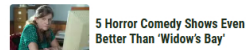
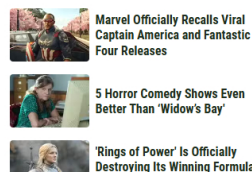
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the barbeque don't notice and assume he's injured. As Bob and Helen make their getaway with baby Violet, they laugh about the experience but end the scene somber due to their situation of being in hiding.

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That night, a villain from their past pays them a visit. This is the original version of Syndrome, who was supposed to remain a much smaller character, not unlike Bomb Voyage (**Dominique Louis**) was in the final cut of the film. The Smiths fight Syndrome and manage to escape before the house goes up in flames (with Syndrome still inside), and that was pretty much the extent of Syndrome's original role: to reveal that the Smiths used to be superheroes.

The planned main villain for *The Incredibles* was actually a well-dressed older villain named Xerek. And what could be more different from a flamboyant man-child armed with deadly gadgets and an entire island as his personal testing grounds, than a seemingly mild-mannered man with connections in both the hero and villain environments? Some elements of Xerek's plans transferred over to Syndrome, especially when it comes to personal ties to one of the protagonists. This villain, however, had more of a connection to Elastagirl (**Holly Hunter**) than Mr. Incredible. As an ex, Xerek certainly would have been a personal foe of Helen's, and by extension, the Parr family.



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Unfortunately, not much is known about Xerek or his true motives – the mystery is part of his draw. While he never made it into the final cut of the movie, **he did make an appearance in the tie-in Incredibles comic books** by BOOM! Studios, which were unfortunately canceled before the run's end. Depicted as an older man in a nice suit, Xerek is a stark contrast to the colorful superheroes.

However, Xerek has his disadvantages as a villain. When it comes to being a foil for the hero, he would have been a much stronger contender for the main villain if the central protagonist was Helen instead of Bob. The two of them have history and a personal connection, so placing Xerek in a story as the antagonist with Bob as the focus character wouldn't have been as strong of a contrast. The personal conflict and stakes would have been lower.

Xerek would have been better placed in *The Incredibles 2* due to the increased focus on Helen for the sequel. Sadly, Xerek didn't get to make an appearance in that movie either; that honor goes to Screenslaver. It seems like Xerek will never get to have his moment in the sun when it comes to feature films.

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Syndrome Was a Better Choice for 'The Incredibles' Villain



In addition to being a better character foil for Bob, Syndrome has much more pizzazz than Xerek. According to writer/director **Brad Bird**, after seeing the storyboards for the beginning of the film, Xerek left far less of an impact than Syndrome did. Despite limited screen time when it comes to the main story, Syndrome captured audiences' attention. The storyboards for the home invasion scene are fun, frantic, and chilling – Syndrome's performance here cemented his upgrade from one-and-done rival to central antagonist.

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In addition, *The Incredibles* may have many dark themes and mature moments, but it's still also a kid's movie, even if it is action-heavy and includes plenty of danger and death. Syndrome is the **perfect villain** to balance the juxtaposing tones of the film – his darkly playful energy is just a better match for this type of story than Xerek would have been.

There's a reason why it's difficult to imagine *The Incredibles* without its iconic villain. Syndrome is just one of the many aspects of *The Incredibles* that contributed to high quality, and he certainly contributed to the fun and laughs – even if he was the one behind dozens of confirmed deaths. Syndrome went from a rejected fanboy to a funny and dangerous villain in only fifteen years, and his motivations are intricately tied to Mr. Incredible. Had his character stayed put within the first portion of the film, as the one-and-done version of Syndrome, *The Incredibles* would have been a completely different story.

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Syndrome's promotion from side character to antagonist with style changed the story for the better. If he had stayed on the sidelines, the film would have been weaker for it. Character, setting, action sequences, animation, music, and structure are all working overtime to make *The Incredibles* a stellar superhero story, and Syndrome is certainly pulling his weight. He is much more recognizable than Xerek would have been, and he's much more iconic than Screenslaver was in the sequel. Syndrome's only downside? No one ever warned him not to wear a cape.



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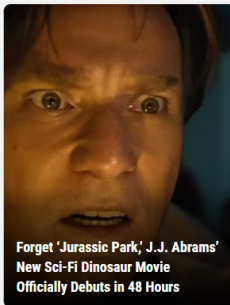


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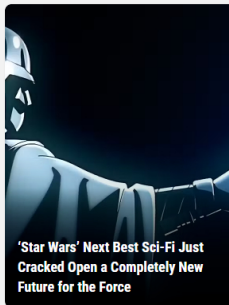
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