Creative Writing: X-Men Essay, Research Paper

Creative Writing: X-Men

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When many people hear about the X-Men, they think of a silly kid’s comic

book, but that is not so. X-Men, actually most comic books in general, are a

unique blend of two classic art forms; drawings, sometimes even paintings, and

storytelling. A comic artist must be able to convey the right mood and feeling

for his or her art. They must also be able to fluidly tell a story and fit it

all in the allotted number of pages. The stories often probe deep into the

human psyche, questioning what is right and what is wrong or showing human

frailty. That is not all. In a series like the X-Men, where there are at least

a few hundred characters, past and present, leading and supporting, even dead

and alive, the writer must keep track of a character’s experiences and their

personality. They must also keep track of continuity, making sure they don’t

contradict past events. This last rule is only loosely followed sometimes.

All in all, a long, ongoing story can be like a soap opera. My favorite

example of this is “The Summers Family,” Which goes a little something like

this: There are two brothers, Scott and Alex Summers, who were orphaned as

children when they were pushed from a plane being attacked by an advanced alien

race. Their mother died but their father went on to become a space pirate.

Later, Scott falls in love with Jean Grey, who becomes an omnipotent

primal force, the Phoenix, who commits suicide to save the universe from herself.

Meanwhile, a bad guy has made a clone of Jean named Maddie, who marries Scott.

They have a baby, Nathan. Jean returns from the dead, not actually having been

the Phoenix, but actually a body template. Scott leaves his family and joins a

team of super heroes with Jean and some other old friends.

Well, Maddie becomes a bad guy and apparently dies. Later, the baby,

Nate, is infected by another bad guy with an incurable virus, so he’s sent 2000

years into the future where he grows up then comes back to help fight the good

fight. Nate was brought into the future by a group of people pulled together by

his ?older sister.?

His older sister is Rachel, who was born in an alternate timeline where

almost all the good guys were dead. Her parents were Scott and the real Jean.

She came back to prevent her time from ever happening and ended up about 2000

years in the future because a friend was stuck traveling about in the time

stream.

Meanwhile Alex feels that he cannot live up to Scott’s standards so he

constantly tries to escape his shadow. He gets brainwashed into being a bad guy,

recovers to lead a group of good guys, and gets brainwashed again.

Great family history, no? Oh yes, there may be another brother around

somewhere.

The X-Men are all mutants, Homo Sapien Superior, the next evolutionary

step for human beings, a minority group of people with a genetic quirk, an ?X-

Factor? that grants them extraordinary powers. Some are blessings, like the

ability to control the weather or to fly. Some are curses, such as the ability

to blast uncontrollably strong beams of force from the eyes. Blessed or cursed,

mutants are a group of people who are feared for their differences. Some

mutants strike back against humanity in a harmful manner. One group who attacks

regular humans is the Acolytes, formerly lead by the X-Men’s oldest enemy,

Magneto. They have attacked hospitals and orphanages just to ?cleanse the

genepool.? Some strive to bridge the gap between mutant and human. These are

the X-Men, a group of mutants, formed by Professor Charles Xavier, the world’s

strongest telepath, ?sworn to protect a world that fears and hates them.? The

X-Men comics are not just about prejudice either. They tackle many social

issues, such as abortion and AIDS.

The original team of X-Men consisted of five teen-agers and Xavier

(Professor X). These were not as popular as other titles of the times such as

Superman, Batman, Spiderman, The Fantastic Four, and The Avengers. The early

stories were basically about a supergroup that went around facing super bad guys

and some prejudice now and then. After sixty-odd issues, X-Men started just

reprinting old stories. This went on for about thirty issues when the book was

going to be canceled. The X-Men were saved by the creative team of Dave Cockrum,

John Byrne, and Terry Austin with Giant Sized X-Men #1.

Giant Sized X-Men #1 introduced an ?all-new, all-different X-Men.? This

boasted in a new team of mutants. The new team of X-Men was multi-racial and

multi-national, whereas the original team was a bunch of white American kids.

It was also a very radical team, considering the time period (the late

seventies). Since the book was scheduled to be canceled, the creators decided

to be a little bit radical in their approach to this dying comic book.

The person who took over field command was Storm, an African native.

Think of that, a black woman leading a superhero comic book team, a role she

usurped from a young white male (Cyclops). It was quite a change from the norm.

There was also a young Russian, Colossus, during a time when Russians were taboo

in America.

The others in the team were Wolverine, a Canadian, whose violent nature

was very different from the ?boy scout types? like Superman. There were also

Sunfire from Japan, Banshee from Ireland, Nightcrawler (no, he is not a worm)

from Germany, and Thunderbird, an Apache Indian. One thing that made this group

of X-Men stand out was that on the first mission for the new team, issue #95,

they killed off Thunderbird, an extremely new and radical thing. About 40

issues later they killed off one of the large mainstay characters, Jean Grey,

who was a founding member. Of course, as I explained earlier, she came back a

few years later, but it was a really big thing at the time.

That X-Men team went on many adventures, saved galaxies and all reality,

and built up a huge supporting cast, paving the way for spin-off books. A

current list of X-Men books includes the following titles; Uncanny X-Men, X-Men,

X-Factor, X-Force (originally New Mutants), Excalibur, Generation X, X-Man,

Wolverine, Cable, and Deadpool, not to mention a lot of four issue limited

series titles.

So, you may be asking, where does all the social stuff come in? Well,

it started coming into play early on, with the first group of X-Men. People

began to realize what it could mean to have people being born with great super

powers. They began to feel afraid and obsolete. One man, Dr. Bolivar Trask,

played on these fears and built giant robots to capture and control mutants. I

believe this was around issue #15. They were called Sentinels and have been a

recurring problem for they X-Men. This parallels to the United States

government taking action against other groups of people they did not understand,

such as the Indians forced onto reservations, or the blacks that were oppressed

with laws until very recently.

Another government action was the Mutant Registration Act, which

required mutants to check in with the government to the government could keep

tabs on them.

One storyline dealing with racism is called ?Days of Future Past? (which

I recently bought for a total of $21, one issue is even autographed by the

artist). This story illustrates a consequence of racism out of control. In it,

the Sentinels are programmed to protect humans from all mutants. The Sentinels

figure that the best way to do that is by taking over the humans. In the end,

all the heroes are dead and the Sentinels prepare to launch an attack on the

rest of the world to save it from the mutant menace just as Europe is about to

launch nuclear missiles at the conquered North America to keep the Sentinels

away. The world is a nightmare where people are killed or shipped to

concentration camps for being born a little differently from most others, when

racism wins out over reason.

Another template of a society gone mad with racism is shown in the

island country of Genosha. At one time Genosha was a thriving country, one of

the most popular tourist attractions in the world. It seemed perfect, everyone

seemed happy. But things are not always as they seem. Genosha was secretly

taken care of by mutates, mutants who were made to be subordinate through

mindwiping techniques. The whole country, even the transportation systems like

the railroads, were run off mutate energy. All the low jobs were given to the

mutates, who didn’t even have mind enough to speak in protest. Eventually the

X-Men helped to free the mutates, but, after failing to live peacefully together,

a civil war broke out, leaving the once prosperous nation in ruins.

The normal humans are not the only people guilty of racism in X-

Men. The first villain ever fought by the X-Men was Magneto, a mutant who

sought to rule over the mutants and crush humanity for being inferior. After

being defeated time and again and even switching sides once, Magneto decided to

gather up mutants and live off of Earth and away from humans on an orbital space

station called Avalon. It was eventually blown up and Magneto lost his memory

then joined the X-Men again.

Magneto mirrors many things tried by minorities in America. His

attempts to fight back are like the Black Panthers and some Indian tribes. His

separationist views are like some of what Malcolm X thought. Then there is the

inevitable attempt to fit in, which seems to work as a temporary, surface fix.

Another group who struck back out of fear was the Brotherhood of Evil

Mutants, lead by Magneto, then Mystique, and now Havok. Mystique’s Brotherhood

was even more militant in some ways than Magneto was. They attempted an

assassination of a presidential candidate which, if successful, would have set

the Days of Future Past storyline into actuality. They were as much, if not

even more like the Indians and Black Panthers than Magneto (until they became a

government sanctioned group in return for full pardons). Havok’s group is too

new to assess right now.

Social organizations have also been involved in the racial issues, as

they often were long ago. There have been two prime examples of this. One was

a story called God Loves, Man Kills, where the preacher tells his clergy that

mutants, having strange powers, are all hellspawn and condones hunting them down

and killing them to keep the threat away and to put a little chlorine in the

gene pool. This is like the Ku Klux Klan or a racist church one may hear about

in movies or television shows. The other example is also a church but it shows

a school of more open thought. In this church, the preacher recognizes that

some of these mutants use their powers to help others and they should not be

prejudged. The X-Men are even compared to angels in this story. This shows the

organizations, such as churches, that are open to people, no matter who they are.

As said earlier, the X-Men don’t revolve only around prejudice, but they

battle other social injustices as well. One is the fear inspired by the Legacy

Virus. This is a disease that attacks a mutant’s genetic structure and eats it

away, much like the AIDS virus attacks and destroys a person’s immune system.

The X-Men have already lost some close friends to this disease. At first it was

thought that only mutants could get the virus, like it was once thought that

only homosexuals or drug users could get AIDS. Then a friend of the X-Men,

genetic researcher Moira MacTaggert, a normal human, contracted the disease and

panic spread like wild fire. Now all of the sudden every Tom, Dick, and Harry

is afraid of catching ?that Mutie disease.? For a while, as I remember, people

thought one could catch AIDS by being near an infected person. That is how

people see the Legacy Virus: get near a mutant and you’ll catch that non-curable

disease they all have.

Another issue the mighty mutants have confronted is abortion. Is it

right to prevent a life if it is known that the baby will have what is

essentially a birth defect? In one storyline in X-Factor a doctor discovers a

way to tell if a fetus will be a mutant or not. This information can be passed

along to the parents who can decide if they want a mutant baby or not. In the

end, Wolfsbane, a conservative Scottish Catholic lass, destroys all the research

information the doctor has, preventing mutant abortions.

Currently, anti-mutant hysteria is at an all time high. An ultra-

powerful combination of Professor X and Magneto took control of an army of

Sentinels and programmed them to round up super-powered people and destroy New

York City. This amalgamated being, called Onslaught, decided he would get rid

of all normal people and then decided to just kill everybody. To destroy him,

Earth’s popular heroes, the Fantastic Four and the Avengers, sacrificed

themselves. Most people view it in this way: a mutant killed all of their

favorite heroes so mutants are all evil.

It also did not help the mutant cause that a popular anti-mutant

presidential candidate was killed on live television by an as-of-now unknown

mutant. No, mutants are not riding high on America’s popularity list.

The X-Men are popular outside comic books also. There is a cartoon and

a comic spin off of the cartoon, since it is geared towards younger people. As

Philip always points out, there is an X-Men ravioli out there. Clothing, shoes,

video games, toys, dolls, Pez dispensers, shoestrings, you name it, the X-Men

are likely to have it.

So why do I like the X-Men so much? It is a combination of a lot of

things. Great stories, characters you can get attached to, beautiful art, a

different perspective (everybody loves Superman, but nobody loves mutants), and

social relevance. What else could make a better escapist’s world? Not only all

that, but they are everywhere you turn.

And now, a few of the X-Men:

Professor Xavier, founder of the X-Men, telepath

Magneto, first enemy of the X-Men, one-time leader, now a team mate, ability to

manipulate magnetic fields

Cyclops, first and leader of the X-Man, Phoenix’s husband, fires uncontrollable

optic

beams

Phoenix, Cyclops’ wife, founding X-Man, telekinesis (can move objects with

thoughts)

and telepathy

Beast, founding X-Man, super strong and intelligent, hand-like feet

Archangel, founding X-Man, originally had feathered wings, but they were ripped

off and

later replaced

Iceman, founding X-Man, can turn into ice and manipulate nearby temperature

Storm, leader of second team of X-Men, manipulates weather

Wolverine, most well-known X-Man, has bone claws and the ability to heal

extremely fast,

had indestructible metal laced bones and claws until Magneto sucked them

out of him

Nightcrawler, now leads Excalibur, ability to teleport

Colossus, now with Excalibur, body transforms into an organic steel, also super

strong

Jubilee, now with Generation X, formerly Wolverine’s sidekick, ability to

produce

“fireworks”

Cable, son of Cyclops and a clone of Phoenix, leads X-Force, telepathy and

telekinesis

There are many, many other mutants, but these are a few pretty important ones.

Freak. Flatscan. Deadend. Genejoke. Mutie. Words. Powerful words

meant to distance… to demean… to destroy the havens of self respect we each

carry and nurture within us. Seeing past their differences, humans and mutants

share a common, unbreakable bond. Underneath all the ?words?… we are related.

We are all family.

-Professor Charles Francis Xavier, Uncanny X-Men #294