

The Infectious Imagination Of Henry Bramble

Influences: Narnia, Never-Ending Story, The Wizard Of Oz and Willow.

I want to expand the short film into a one-off feature length film where I am able to explore Henry's background in more detail. I want to explain through subplot why Henry's mother has to leave Henry with an estranged relative.

The most believable reason I can think of is that something life-threatening has happened to Henry's father who is abroad. Henry's father is driven by the need to help others (a trait that has been passed down to Henry), so much so that he neglects his own family, spending too much time abroad. I'm guessing he is some kind of aid worker or journalist, operating in some of the most dangerous parts of the world.

On hearing that Henry's father has been injured, Henry's Mother has to leave the country to be with him. Taking Henry to such a dangerous country would be impossible and having failed to find a friend, neighbour or family member to look after Henry, she has no other choice but to take him to her estranged Uncle Geoffrey.

Her husband once had a very close relationship with his Uncle, but due to an incident in the past, the old man lost his warm gentle kindness (along with his imagination), becoming a bitter reserved and pompous recluse. Although extremely nervous about leaving Henry with him, she believes deep down Uncle Geoffrey is still the kind gentle man her husband adored. She hopes that being forced to look after Henry, the experience will do him good and hopefully give Henry the temporary father figure he needs for while she is away.

I want to expand Geoffrey's story too, explaining why he wants to write a book, what kind of book it is and what is motivating him to write it. Maybe he used to write as a child, but his strict father forced him to get a proper career as a lawyer and all his ideas and stories got forgotten. Only later does Henry discover them in the attic perhaps. I like the idea that one single tragic event changed Geoffrey as a person (his wife or father dying?) and unable to cope, he put all his energy into his career, climbing the ladder of law and establishing himself as a hard working high court judge. He retired at seventy only because legally he had to. Not knowing what else to do, he put all his efforts into writing only to suffer from writer's block.

I also want to explore deeper the imaginary world of Minoitaniga and firmly set its rules. For me, a forest full of hungry Voydarkatron's is just the tip of the iceberg. I imagine vast mountains, castles and epic landscapes for Henry to travel across with an array of weird and wonderful creatures to befriend, fight or run away from, all as obscure and un-earth-like as the Voydarkatron.

On the surface Henry's journey in Minoitaniga is simply to get a drop of blood from a Voydarkatron that will restore his uncle's imagination, just like Dorothy's is simply to find a way back home, but during their quest they learn skills and experiences that will help them face their problems in the real world. Unfortunately (un-like the short film) it is a much more complicated task that requires him to find and connect three or four pieces of the puzzle. Like in Pan's Labyrinth, Minoitaniga is a symbolic psychological rendition of what Henry is dealing with in the real world and I am keen to get as many metaphors in as possible, structuring the world like a flipped mirror image of Henry's reality. For example I always saw the Voydarkatron as Geoffrey, trying to stop Henry from playing/imagining, sucking it out of him and anyone else that dared to get close.

I need to decide if Minoitaniga is a place Henry has been to before in his day dreams at school etc. or a place created only from Henry's experience in Geoffrey's house? Did his mother also experience this world here as a child or is that too similar to Narnia? I like the idea in *The Wizard Of Oz*, where the real life characters are also the fantasy characters and wonder if this could apply to Henry Bramble. I see the tone of this film very much in line with the Narnia books and films rather than *Lord Of The Rings*, which I find a little too serious and dark for this story, or *Nanny McPhee* which I find too light-hearted and overly child-safe.

Perhaps in Minoitaniga (like swans here in the UK) it is an offense to kill a Voydarkatron as they are owned by the Guardians of Minoitaniga. The Guardians are a cross between squabbling Greek Gods and *The Wonderful Wizard Of Oz*. Unlike Gods they are living flesh and bone and are secretly cowards pretending to be more powerful and frightening than they really are. If Henry is caught killing a Voydarkatron (it would have to be in self defence, or in an attempt to save a friend like Raygo) he would be hunted and arrested by aggressive and frightening Morlog soldiers and brought before the Guardians. They would then send him on a quest/challenge that he could not possibly complete/win.

The Guardian's Morlog army is headed by commander Maliglut, (He is probably the flipside of the publisher in the real world) who gets more and more irritated by Henry's ability to survive and becomes intent on destroying the boy himself. It would then be up to Grimbo Grumblebark (Raygo's reluctant, grumbling best friend who unfortunately never quite made it into the short film due to budget restraints) and his underground tree root tribe, to enter the real world, kidnap Geoffrey and drag him back into the fantasy world in the hope that he will come to his senses and help save Henry from Maliglut.

I want to scare children both in a fun way (through being chased by monsters in the fantasy world) and through the characters and drama in the real world. I envisage Geoffrey in the feature film version as being initially much colder and frightening than Paul Copley's performance in the short. He needs a bigger journey to get through ninety minutes worth of story. When he slaps Henry, it has to be shocking and stomach churning for the audience. It is Geoffrey's lowest point but is also the beginning of his journey back to a better, kinder life full of imagination.

The real antagonist of the film is a new character I am considering introducing as Geoffrey's publisher/agent. Perhaps he is also part of the family and ties into why Henry's mother's fond relationship with her favourite Uncle ended? I want audiences to genuinely hate and despise him. He must be the most heartless, greedy conniving and manipulating bastard we have ever met. In doing so I kind of feel he must have something to do with Henry's father's fate, though how I connect a kidnapped aid worker with the publisher's need of a completed book written by a high court Judge, I really don't know, but if I can find a convincing connection without overcomplicating the plot then all the better. This is really the part I really need to crack.

The publisher has to believe that Henry is the reason why Geoffrey is struggling to finish the book and Geoffrey not finishing the book has to have dire consequences for the publisher. Perhaps he is not a publisher but a politician and Geoffrey is writing the book for him? I need to solve this puzzle so it makes perfect sense and is above all believable without getting too complicated. It has to be really simple and so maybe it is just about money. Maybe Henry's father is connected to money rather than aid, or maybe Henry has no father and his mother is the direct link?

Henry's presence in the house is slowly beginning to have a profound effect on Geoffrey and everything he knows or thinks he knows is starting to crumble around him. Henry can't help reveal Geoffrey's self-deceit, but instead of learning from it, Geoffrey, with the encouragement of his manipulative publisher, gets more and more uptight with the boy until eventually he explodes and slaps him. From that point onwards, the shock of his own violent action towards a defenceless boy, Geoffrey starts to take responsibility for himself and his empty life and consciously begins to re-build himself for the better. From this moment on, albeit hesitant at first, Geoffrey's feeling towards Henry grows stronger, which in turn only encourages the publisher's actions to become even more desperate and wicked as he struggles to keep a hold on Geoffrey. In the end the publisher has to resort to shocking blackmail to get what he wants. Geoffrey appears to have no choice but to do as he is told, but then he does something completely unexpected which pays off. The publisher loses the fight and is exposed for the dirty rat he is. Geoffrey achieves his publishing dream (in the form of a children's novel inspired by Henry) and Henry's mother brings his father back home safely, who promises to spend more time with them (or if Henry has no father, Geoffrey, like in the short version, insists on seeing Henry more regularly thus giving Henry the father figure he so desperately needed).

I know a lot of this is still rather abstract, but hopefully you get the tone and type of expanded story I want to create. It is still very much a work in progress and my ideas meander between pretty detailed thoughts on how the story will go to rather quite vague. However, there should be enough here to start creative discussions. If we can create a solid traditional three-act story structure (including sub plots and relevant beats) and create a two or three page outline from it. I can then use this as a concise template for me to work from in developing a first draft.