

The Intergalactic Nemesis



Study Guide

The Intergalactic Nemesis

"A must-see!" –The Austin Chronicle

"Pitch-perfect... totally nuts and a ton of fun! ... An official selection of Fantastic Fest ... Do not miss it!" –The Austinist

"Something you simply must experience if you are a fan of awesome." –collider.com

The Intergalactic Nemesis is a hilarious, uplifting adventure of heroes-by-circumstance overcoming impossible odds.

This media-combining project by Jason Neulander has been around for a while. Originally performed and recorded as a radio drama in 1996 in an Austin, TX, coffeehouse, *The Intergalactic Nemesis* was eventually turned into a live



stage play. In the staged version, Neulander kept all of the components of a 1930's radio drama -- including the manual sound effects and the audience acting as the studio audience. That stage version proved so popular in Austin that they ended up playing in several theaters and spawning a sequel, which lead to a national tour of the show.

When *The Intergalactic Nemesis Live-Action Graphic Novel* premiered in 2010, more than 2,100 people turned out. Now, in its inaugural touring season, the production hits 24 venues around the country.

The premise is simple: a period adventure story (with no small share of laughs) that harkens back to the serial dramas of the 1930's. *The Intergalactic Nemesis* tells the story of Pulitzer-winning reporter Molly Sloan, her intrepid assistant Timmy Mendez, and a mysterious librarian named Ben Wilcott as they face the most serious threat Earth has ever known: an impending invasion of sludge monsters from the planet Zygon.

The telling is what makes the experience of *The Intergalactic Nemesis* so incredibly unique: while three actors, one Foley artist, and one keyboardist perform all the voices, sound effects and music, more than 1,000 hand-drawn, full-color, hi-rez, blow-your-mind comic-book images blast from the screen, all performed LIVE.

"In 20 years of directing and producing plays, I've never seen an audience respond so positively," says project creator Jason Neulander.

Find out more about *The Intergalactic Nemesis* at:

<http://www.theintergalacticnemesis.com/>

Jason Neulander

Jason Neulander is a writer, director, and producer based in Austin, Texas. From 1994 to 2008, Neulander was the founder and Artistic Director of Salvage Vanguard Theater, where he directed and produced more than fifty world premiere plays, musicals, and operas. *The Austin American-Statesman* stated: "Neulander aims to change the world. ... Unlike most of his artistic compatriots, he is winning." In 2004, 2005, and 2007 he was voted "Best Theatre Director" in the *Austin Chronicle* "Best of Austin" readers' polls, with works staged at Salvage Vanguard Theater in Austin; The Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis; Portland Center Stage; The Guthrie; The Public Theater, et al.



Bio and photo from: <http://www.staple-austin.org/guests/>

From 2006 to 2009, his radio play *The Intergalactic Nemesis* played more than 30 venues coast-to-coast, including sold out performances at the 1,100-seat Wortham Center in Houston and the 1,200-seat Paramount Theatre in Austin. In 2010, he authored and published a comic book of the Nemesis story, with artwork by Tim Doyle, and produced and directed a "Live-Action Graphic Novel" version featuring projections of art from the comic with live actors, music, and sound effects that premiered in its entirety to an audience of 2,100 people at the Long Center for the Performing Arts. The show has since played FantasticFest, and is scheduled to tour the Midwest in 2011-12. He is currently working on a children's book called *The Clowns Come Home*.



Theatre Conventions

We all know that what happens on stage is not real. Yet when we watch a play, we willingly suspend our disbelief. We let ourselves pretend that the characters are real people and not actors, and that the events we see are actually happening. As part of this relationship between the actors and the audience, playwrights and directors often make use of theater conventions. The following are common techniques that help to tell the story and engage the audience.

DOUBLING: Actors may take on more than one role. In school performances such as *The Intergalactic Nemesis*, actors almost always play at least two and sometimes three roles. They use costumes, posture, and changes in their voices to create different characters.

FREEZING: When certain characters become motionless during a scene, they are not part of the action even though the audience can still see them. This often happens when we are meant to be inside a character's memory or imagination "taking a moment out of time." This is also an excellent method to talk with young people about how quickly the human mind works, how we can remember a whole story in the blink of an eye.

DIRECT ADDRESS: Actors often tell their thoughts directly to the audiences. This is a way in which we can hear what an actor is thinking. S/he acts both as a character and as a narrator who gives us important background information and provides his/her own commentary on the action.

NON-CONFORMIST CASTING: We often assume that actors will be cast in the characterization that they are meant to portray. However, characters are sometimes represented by actors of a different gender, race and age. Throughout the history of dramatic arts this has often been the norm — for example, all women characters had to be portrayed by men on Shakespearean, Kabukian and early Christian stages. Today, non-conformist casting, while not viewed as the norm or required, can serve several purposes: occasionally the actor that might not visually fit the part but is most capable of carrying a complex role is cast; sometimes in a small company "doubling" is required; but an important choice for a director or playwright is to intentionally select an actor to explore society's conceptions about race, gender, sexual orientation and age.

TREATMENT OF TIME: In the few minutes between scenes, any amount of time—even years—can pass. Time can be compressed and "put in fast-forward." Another commonly used technique is flashback, in which a character remembers events from the past. These memories are so vivid that we actually relive the event with the character.

Topics for Discussion

- One major challenge playwrights face is allowing the audience to see into the minds of their characters. Without having an actor say "I am sad", how could you let an audience know that a character is thinking or feeling these things?
- Why might a theater company use only three actors and not more?
- What makes freezing an effective technique?
- Imagine that you run into a spaceship full of aliens while strolling through the park. They have never heard of theatre and want to know why anyone would want to watch a made-up story being acted out. Explain to these creatures why theatre is important and enjoyable.
- Ask students to watch characters carefully and observe which characters each actor portrays.
- How does *The Intergalactic Nemesis* follow or break these stage conventions?

Engage and Respond

Discussion

Use these tools to enhance your experience of the performance.

Observe

- How sound effects are produced
- What elements are used to create atmosphere and location
- The choices of color, shape, and space on stage, in the graphics, and in the lighting
- Your own emotional response

Listen

- How does the music add to or work with the visual elements of the show?
- How do the sound effects add to or work with the visual elements of the show?
- How do the actors use their voices to convey character?

Think

- How do qualities of color and line convey story and emotion within the graphics?
- How do the images, music, lighting, sound effects and vocal acting add to the experience of this novel?
- What messages about the human experience and relations do you think the artists are trying to convey?

Feel

- Your own responses. What gives you excitement? Do any elements make you uncomfortable?

While it is important to discuss one's perception of the performance, we encourage you to notice the basic elements of the performance before interpreting it. By taking the time to notice the basics of what you see and hear, you will be open to the fullest possibilities of interpretation. Use the questions to the left and below for class discussion and individual contemplation.

- How would you describe this performance to someone who hasn't seen it?
 - What did the music sound like?
 - How were special effects executed?
 - What did the lighting look like?
 - How were the actors used?
- How was the performance similar to or different from what you expected?
- Which forms of communication seemed to have the biggest impact on you?
 - Colors?
 - Lighting?
 - Vocal work?
 - Sound effects?
 - Music?
- What were your feelings during the performance?
- How did this performance compare to reading a graphic novel?

Write it Down!

- Write a review of *The Intergalactic Nemesis*. Like a critic who writes for a newspaper, your job is to review the performance for the public. Identify important elements of reviews, such as the name of the theater and performance, your opinions about the graphic images and voice-acting and your opinions about other artistic elements such as use of sound effects, music, and lighting.
- Write a philosophical evaluation of the performance. What messages about the human condition were the artists trying to convey? Were the messages specific or universal? Were the artists successful? Bring your own personal experience to bear on your perception of the performance.

Create a Visual Interpretation!

- Use markers, pen and ink, pencils, paint, pastels, collage or found and recycled materials to create a visual interpretation of the performance.

Research!

- Research the ways radio drama and graphic storytelling have been used in the past and present your findings to the class.

A History of Radio Drama in the United States



From the 1920's through the 1950's, radio was the central form of mass communication in the United States, and shortly after its invention it quickly developed into a widely used form of entertainment media as well. Initially, music and talk-radio were the central components of most radio stations, but many did not have consistent programming. Often, weather reports were the only regularly scheduled broadcasts.

Radio's entertainment possibilities expanded in the mid 1920's, when larger stations began to develop programming that used announcers or narrators. These programs used clearly defined openings and closings and were built around specific program ideas or themes. Radio drama began to be produced in 1927, when networks began adapting short stories, and even writing original scripts, for broadcast.

In the early 1930's national advertisers recognized the potential for radio advertising and became willing to buy airtime and sponsor programs. As this happened, networks competed for their share which resulted in the development of many new program forms. Among the new program types was the serialized drama and as network daytime serials became popular, stations developed daytime schedules, too. Other shows were adapted from comic strips, such as *Blondie*, *Dick Tracy*, *Li'l Abner*, *Little Orphan Annie*, and *Popeye the Sailor*.

During the middle to late 1940's, radio drama reached its peak in American households, but with the advent of television in the 1950s, radio drama lost some of its popularity, and in some countries, has never regained large audiences. However, recordings of OTR (old-time radio) survive today in the audio archives of collectors and museums, as well as several online sites.

Information adapted from: <http://www.balancepublishing.com/golden.htm>

Listen to some old-time radio at these websites:

www.wpr.org/otr/

www.otr.net

www.oldtimeradiofans.com

www.mysteryshows.com/

www.otrcat.com

www.old-time.com



Making Radio Drama Come To Life

Voice Acting: Radio drama has different needs than conventional dramas. While actors do not need to be in costume or even look like their characters, they must have a large and varied vocal range with which to create many characters. This kind of acting is called **voice acting**. Voice actors can be used for animated movies and television shows, video games, books on tape, radio drama and comedies, dubbed foreign language films, puppet shows, amusement park rides and more!



Foley Artist or Sound Effects Artist: Because we can't see what's going on in a radio drama, a sound effects artist, or **Foley artist** is used to create the atmospheric sounds required to make production believable. Foley artists are also used to create sound effects for film, television, and sometimes stage productions. The items that a Foley artist uses to create environmental sounds like thunder and fire are often quite surprising! See the activities below and on the next page to try your hand at Foley!

Basic Sound Effects Kit

Adapted from <http://ruyasonic.com/>

- **CRASH BOX** --made from a metal Christmas popcorn container. Fill it about a third-full with broken coffee mugs, gravel, crushed cans, screws and some toy wooden blocks. Experiment until you get a good sound, then seal the lid on with duct tape.
- **THUNDER SHEET** - 2x4 foot 16th inch high-impact polystyrene. Look in your local yellow pages for "Plastics" and call around.
- **WALKBOARD** - 2'x3' doubled 3/4 inch plywood for footsteps. Put tile on one side to get a different sound.
- **STIFF PLASTIC BAGS** - for fire, static, even--with the right motion--marching feet.
- **CLIP BOARDS** - for gun shots. Try to snap them on top of a metal trash can to sound "bigger."
- **TOY RATCHET** - get the large plastic New Year's noisemakers. The typical little metal ones sound too small. Ratchets are good for handcuffs, winches and drawbridges.
- **SLIDE WHISTLE** - Besides eeeYOOP, it can also be quickly slid back and forth for radars and space sounds.
- **PLASTIC EGG MARACAS** - for jungles, rattlesnakes, weirdness. You could make some with plastic Easter eggs and rice, but many music stores sell them for \$2 each and those have a finer gravel that sounds good.
- **METAL SPOONS/SPATULAS** -- get a really big pancake flipping spatula and some large metal cooking spoons for great sword fights. Use dinner forks for diner sounds.
- **PLASTIC TUMBLER** - for pouring water. Drop AA batteries in empty tumblers for ice cubes.
- **VOICE FOLEY** - sounds include grunts, groans, breaths, wheezing, humming, buzzing, barking and more!

Helpful Hints

- Use sound effects sparingly.
- Sound effects should support the story and suggest action, but too many sound effects may make the scene difficult to produce and detract from the story.
- Sound effects that must be timed precisely with the dialog should be done manually—a knock on the door, for instance.
- Sound effects or music that serves as background or mood may be recorded earlier and played back on a boom-box fading in and out as needed. To avoid rewinding tapes, be sure to record several minutes of each background effect.

Activity:

Find an old-time radio script at one of the links listed on our resource page and read it as a class. Consider these questions:

- What kinds of sound effects are needed?
- How could those effects be created?
- What kind of voices might the characters have?

After you think you have a good feel for the script, try performing it in class!



War of the Worlds

Perhaps America's most famous radio drama broadcast is Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds*, a 1938 version of the H. G. Wells novel, which convinced large numbers of listeners that an actual invasion from Mars was taking place.

The broadcast started with an introduction noting that the action is set in 1939, a year ahead of the actual broadcast. The program continued as an apparently ordinary radio show, only occasionally interrupted by news flashes describing the mounting action of an invasion by Martians who land in New Jersey and make their way to New York, incinerating and poisoning humans along the way.

The *War of the Worlds* broadcast contained a number of explanations that it was all a radio play, but if audience members missed a brief explanation at the beginning, the next one didn't arrive until 40 minutes into the program. It's estimated that this program fooled approximately one million people.

Discuss:

- 1) Do you think you could have been fooled by a radio broadcast like this? Why?
- 2) Why might people have trusted the "news" they heard on the radio in the 1930's?
- 3) What events were occurring in 1938 that may have made people more susceptible to believing they were under attack?
- 4) Define the concept of 'mass hysteria.' Provide examples. How did the concept of mass hysteria influence events in the aftermath of this broadcast?
- 5) Do you think that it is possible that a 'fictional broadcast' could induce similar mass hysteria today?



Research:

Research the broadcasts of updated versions of *The War of the Worlds*, which aired in Ecuador (1949) and Buffalo, NY (1968). How and why did both these broadcasts create similar public and mass hysteria?

Graphic Novels

Adapted from Scholastic.com

<http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/collateral.jsp?id=1399>

The term “graphic novel” was first popularized by Will Eisner to distinguish his book *A Contract with God* (1978) from collections of newspaper comic strips. He described graphic novels as consisting of “sequential art”—a series of illustrations which, when viewed in order, tell a story.

Although today’s graphic novels are a recent phenomenon, this basic way of storytelling has been used in various forms for centuries—early cave drawings, hieroglyphics, and medieval tapestries like the famous Bayeux Tapestry can be thought of as stories told in pictures. The term graphic novel is now generally used to describe any book in a comic format that resembles a novel in length and narrative development.

Graphic novels can dramatically help improve reading development for students struggling with language acquisition, including special-needs students, as the illustrations provide contextual clues to the meaning of the written narrative. They can provide autistic students with clues to emotional context that they might miss when reading traditional text. English-language learners will be more motivated by graphic novels, and will more readily acquire new vocabulary and increase English proficiency

The notion that graphic novels are too simplistic to be regarded as serious reading is outdated. The excellent graphic novels available today are linguistically appropriate reading material demanding many of the same skills that are needed to understand traditional works of prose fiction. Often they actually contain more advanced vocabulary than traditional books at the same age/grade/interest level. They require readers to be actively engaged in the process of decoding and comprehending a range of literary devices, including narrative structures, metaphor and symbolism, point of view, and the use of puns and alliteration, intertextuality, and inference. Reading graphic novels can help students develop the critical skills necessary to read more challenging works, including the classics.

When reading graphic novels, students can compare and contrast the experience of receiving information solely through written narrative, and the experience of receiving information visually without words. They can analyze how information about character is derived from facial and bodily expressions, and explore meaning and foreshadowing from image compositions and viewpoints. You can invite students to find examples where the viewpoint of the picture is critical to the reader’s experience of the story.



Graphic Novel Activities

- In any subject area, studying a graphic novel can bring media literacy into the curriculum as students examine the medium itself. Students can explore such questions as:
 - How color affects emotions
 - How pictures can stereotype people
 - How angles of viewing affect perception
 - How realism or the lack of it plays into the message of a work
- Study race, ethnicity, gender and class representations in graphic novels or cartoons.
 - Have students choose three characters from comics and track them over a two-week period. Ask them to collect copies of the comics for the period and turn in the comics with the rest of the project.
 - Students will summarize the daily storyline for each comic strip and record the issues of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and/or class that arise from the comic.
 - Ask students to evaluate how "fair," "equitable," and "realistic" each comic strip is overall, referring to evidence that they have collected in their daily summaries.
 - Have students perform a "comic character makeover" and rewrite one of the three characters to make the character more realistic and equitable. Use the Comic Creator at <http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/comic/index.html> for this part of the project. Remind students that their language use should be appropriate for the comic they are working on, so the comic may not necessarily follow all the rules of standard written English.
 - Students will accompany their revised comic strip with a character sketch of their "new and improved" character.

*Extended lesson plan can be found at:

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/comic-makeovers-examining-race-207.html?tab=4#tabs>

- In place of traditional essay formats, ask students to respond to literary works, history lessons or current events by creating graphic novels that demonstrate their understanding of the material. By creating comic strips or cartoon squares featuring characters in books or history, students are encouraged to think analytically about the characters, events, and themes in ways that expand their critical thinking by asking them to crystallize the significant points of the book or event in a few short scenes.
- Blank-out the text in a graphic novel or comic strip and ask students to fill in the dialogue. Starter questions to consider may be:
 - What is the relationship between the characters?
 - How old are the characters?
 - What are the characters wearing?
 - What time of day is it?
 - What posture is each character assuming? Why?
- Use graphic novels in tandem with the Radio Drama lessons by asking students to create graphic images for a script from one of the websites listed on page 13. Or, adapt a novel or history lesson into an Old-Time Radio script of your own!

Resources:

The Intergalactic Nemesis website:

- <http://www.theintergalacticnemesis.com/>

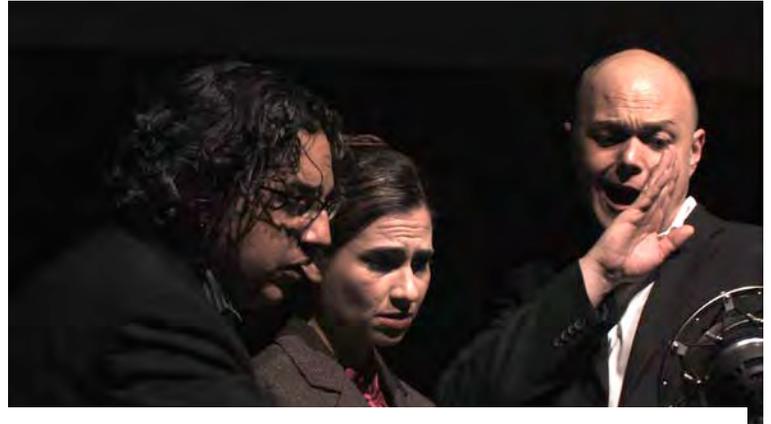
Old-Time Radio information:

History:

- <http://www.balancepublishing.com/golden.htm>
- <http://www.old-time.com/otrx.html>

Listen:

- <http://www.oldtimeradiofans.com/>
- <http://www.wpr.org/otr/>
- <http://www.otr.net/>
- <http://www.mysteryshows.com/>
- <http://www.otrcat.com/>
- <http://www.old-time.com/>



Find Scripts:

- <http://www.genericradio.com/library.php>
- http://www.simplyscripts.com/radio_af.html
- http://www.otrr.org/pg06a_scripts.htm

Sound Effects and Foley:

- <http://ruyasonic.com/>
- <http://www.marblehead.net/foley/>
- <http://www.audiotheater.com/foley.html>
- <http://www.old-time.com/sfx.html>

Graphic Novels:

Literacy information:

- http://www.readingonline.org/newliteracies/jaal/11-02_column/index.html#Anchor-Abou-10142
- <http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/collateral.jsp?id=1399>

Lesson Plans

- http://ccb.lis.illinois.edu/Projects/childrenslit/jdbone/lesson_plans.htm
- <http://ethemes.missouri.edu/themes/1128>

Comic Creators:

- <http://ethemes.missouri.edu/themes/1128>
- <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/>
- <http://disney.go.com/surfswell/comiccreator.html>



ABOUT LIVE PERFORMANCE (Audience Tips)

Theater, unlike movies or television, is a LIVE performance. This means that the action unfolds right in front of an audience, and the performance is constantly evolving. The artists respond to the audience's laughter, clapping, gasps and general reactions. Therefore, the audience is a critical part of the theater experience. In fact, without you in the audience, the artists would still be in rehearsal!



Find Your Seat

When the performance is about to begin, the lights will dim. This is a signal for the artists and the audience to put aside conversations. Settle into your seat and get ready to enjoy the show!

Be sure to use the restroom before the show begins.

Look and Listen

There is so much to hear (dialogue, music, sound effects) and so much to see (costumes, props, set design, lighting) in this performance. Pay close attention to the artists onstage. Unlike videos, you cannot rewind if you miss something.

You are sharing this performance space with the artists and other audience members.

Your considerate behavior allows everyone to enjoy a positive theater experience.

Energy and Focus

Artists use concentration to focus their energy during a performance. The audience gives energy to the artist, who uses that energy to give life to the performance. Help the artists focus that energy. They can feel that you are with them!

Talking to neighbors (even whispering) can easily distract the artists onstage. They approach their audiences with respect, and expect the same from you in return. Help the artists concentrate with your attention.

Laugh Out Loud

If something is funny, it's good to laugh. If you like something a lot, applaud. Artists are thrilled when the audience is engaged and responsive. They want you to laugh, cheer, clap and really enjoy your time at the theater.

Please, don't feed the audience.

Food is not allowed in the theater. Soda and snacks are noisy and distracting to both the artists and audience.

Discover New Worlds

Attending a live performance is a time to sit back and look inward, and question what is being presented to you. Be curious about new worlds, experience new ideas, and discover people and lives previously unknown to you. Your open mind, curiosity, and respect will allow a whole other world to unfold right before your eyes!

Unplug.

Please turn off all cell phones and other electronics before the performance.

Photographs and recording devices are strictly prohibited.