



Dark Times for Mutants

X-Men, less than united.

X-MEN: THE LAST STAND: Directed by Brett Ratner. Written by Simon Kinberg and Zak Penn. Cinematography, Dante Spinotti. Music, John Powell. Starring Ian McKellen, Hugh Jackman, Halle Berry, Famke Janssen, Patrick Stewart, Kelsey Grammer, Anna Paquin, Shawn Ashmore and many more. 20th Century Fox, 2006. PG-13. 104 minutes.

It was with some trepidation that I watched *X-Men: The Last Stand*, the third X-film and the first directed by Brett Ratner. Ratner made his name with action (*Rush Hour*) and has picked up the reins of a series before (*Red Dragon*), but his uninspired style isn't on par with that of *X-Men* and *X2* director Bryan Singer

(whose *Superman Returns* is out next week). Singer had a clear empathy for his characters; he spent time showing how their mutant abilities shaped their lives and decisions. He also had a handle on the X-universe's inherent subtexts about power, otherness, freedom and acceptance.

Ratner at least gets the power aspect. In the Jean/Phoenix part of *The Last Stand* (inspired by comic writer Chris Claremont's "Dark Phoenix Saga"), Jean Grey (Famke Janssen) has returned from her apparent death (in *X2*) a changed woman. A latent and powerful part of her

psyche that calls itself Phoenix has broken loose from the psychic blocks behind which Professor Xavier (Patrick Stewart) had trapped it years before. In an early scene with Wolverine (Hugh Jackman), Jean's mental turmoil is painfully clear. Her horror at what her alter ego has done is wrenching, but it's not long before Phoenix reasserts herself and flees.

As for the mutant cure (a notion borrowed from the Joss Whedon-penned "Astonishing X-Men" comic book series), it elicits drastically different reactions. Brought word of the cure's existence by his old friend and student Dr. Henry McCoy (Kelsey Grammer), Xavier, as always, advocates peace and understanding. But for Magneto (Ian McKellen), the very idea of a "cure" is abhorrent. He wants it — and those who designed it — destroyed.

And that's not to mention the teenage love triangle between Bobby (Shawn Ashmore), Kitty Pryde (Ellen Page) and cure-considering Rogue (Anna Paquin); the troubled life of Warren Worthington III (Ben Foster), the mutant whose father developed the cure; Wolverine's longing for Jean; or the host of new characters, including Magneto's new recruits, many of whom are Asian, Hispanic or visibly mutated, and all "class three" or below (uber-powerful Jean is "class five"). In a different film, this might have been a disturbing suggestion about Xavier's recruitment tactics, or mutant power levels along racial lines. But Ratner's movie has little time for these

characters, who barely have lines or names, and no time for such complex issues.

The Last Stand feels constantly in a hurry, the character-developing quiet moments rushed through on the way to another action-packed sequence. Dialogue-heavy scenes are shot in bland close-up, characters centered in the frame like talking heads on a television. People speak in clichéd quips: When Wolverine pauses, not wanting to run off and use any means necessary against Jean just yet, Storm (Halle Berry) snaps at him, "If you're with us, be with us!"

But with them Wolverine is, right through a final battle that alternates epic moments with disappointingly illogical scenes. As Magneto points his soldiers at the facility where the cure was created, Jean/Phoenix stands around looking gloomy, curiously uninvolved though her powers could have taken care of the whole thing in a trice. Even more oddly, Jean's friends, the people she sacrificed herself for in the last film, seem focused only on stopping her, not on helping her. Power corrupts; too much power can only be destroyed.

The Last Stand has plenty of action and impressive set pieces, but it loses sight of the themes and relationships that made the first two X-movies work so well. Ratner's film is so uncertain about its characters that near the end, after the brutal and deadly battle, Wolverine strolls into the sunlight smiling. We haven't forgotten what happened just moments before. Why would he? **EW**

movie clips

OPENING OR RETURNING:

Click: Christopher Walken gives Adam Sandler a truly universal remote: it lets him put the wife on fast forward, put the boss on pause, help the kid get even ... until the remote goes all TiVo on him and starts making decisions on its own. PG-13. Cinemark. Cinema World.

Idiot, The: Reading and film series focusing on Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Vladimir Bortko's adaptation of the text. First reading and episode June 27: 7 pm film, 8 pm discussion. 142 Law, UO.

Monumental: David Brower's Fight for Wild America: Documentary about the former Sierra Club director's fight to keep wild places wild. "See it and just try not to get inspired," said *Outside* magazine. Part of Wilderness Week, the film plays at 7 pm June 29 at REI. Chandra, 344-0675.

Roy Lichtenstein: Reflections: One of the great pop artists of our time discusses his work, his process and more. Plays at 6 pm June 28 at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art. jsma.uoregon.edu

Scary Movie 4: Director David Zucker (*Airplane!*) takes on the fourth entry in the seemingly endless series, which sends up *War of the Worlds*, *The Grudge*, *The Village*, *Saw* and more. Stars Anna Faris and Regina Hall with an outlandish array of celebrity cameos, including Shaq, Dr. Phil and Lil' John. PG-13. Movies 12.

Shadowlands: Richard Attenborough's affecting 1994 film depicts the unexpected romance between author and Oxford don C.S. Lewis (Anthony Hopkins) and an outspoken American poet named Joy Gresham (Debra Winger). PG. Plays at 7 pm June 23 at Unity of the Valley.

Superman Returns: At long last, the man of steel returns to movie

screens — and to Earth. In director Bryan Singer's new film, Superman's been gone five long years, during which his former flame Lois Lane has had a son and found a new fellow. Oh, and crime is rising in Metropolis and Lex Luthor has broken out of prison. Starring Brandon Routh as the man in tights, Kate Bosworth as Lois and Kevin Spacey as Lex. PG-13. Sneak screenings late on June 27 at Cinemark; film opens June 28 at Cinemark and Cinema World.

Waist Deep: Tyrese stars as a young man trying to keep on the right side of the law for the sake of his son Junior. But he doesn't see a lot of legal options when Junior is kidnapped and held for ransom. R. Cinemark.

Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit: Nick Park's and Steve Box's outstanding creations, an eccentric inventor named Wallace (Peter Sallis) and his long-suffering, silent but faithful dog, Gromit, must solve the mystery of a vegetable-ravaging "beast" to save their village's Giant Vegetable Competition. Helena Bonham Carter and Ralph Fiennes co-star. Most excellent, divine comedy. **2005 Academy Award for best animated feature film.** G. Plays at 10am June 27 only. Movies 12.

Films open the Friday following EW publication date unless otherwise noted. See archived reviews at www.eugeneweekly.com

CONTINUING:

Benchwarmers, The: Got picked last for kickball? So did these guys. David Spade, Jon Heder (aka Napoleon Dynamite) and Rob Schneider play grown-up geeks who start a baseball tournament to get revenge on nasty Little League teams. PG-13. Movies 12.

Break-Up, The: Ah, celebrity couples working together. Last summer we had Brangelina in *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*; this year we get ~~Jenae Vineifer~~ — oh, that just doesn't work. Jennifer Aniston and Vince Vaughn star in the latest from director Peyton Reed (*Bring It On*) as a Chicago couple who apparently aren't very good at breaking up. PG-13. Cinemark. Cinema World. **Online archives.**

Cars: The animation wizards at Pixar (*Toy Story*, *Finding Nemo*) team up with Disney for the story of a rookie race car (voiced by Owen Wilson) taking an unexpected detour on his way to a big race. Bonnie Hunt and Paul Newman also voice characters. G. Cinemark. Cinema World.

Da Vinci Code, The: Dan Brown's gazillion-selling book about a centuries-old religious mystery arrives in cinematic form with a glowing pedigree. As if the book isn't popular enough, the adaptation is directed by Ron Howard and stars Tom Hanks. And you probably know this. You're actually on the way to the theater already, aren't you? PG-13. Cinemark. Cinema World. **Online archives.**

Failure to Launch: Sarah Jessica Parker is a professional who aims to move Matthew McConaughey out of his parent's home. Also stars Zooey Deschanel, Terry Bradshaw and Kathy Bates. PG-13. Movies 12.

Fast and the Furious, The: Tokyo Drift: The series gets a new star in Lucas Black (*Friday Night Lights*), whose character moves to Japan and gets caught up in the underground world of drift racing. PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark.

Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties: Bill Murray returns as the voice of the once-somewhat-classic Garfield, who follows his owner Jon (Breckin Meyer) to London.

Some kind of mad cat switcheroo ensues with a high-falutin' royal feline named Prince. PG. Cinemark. Cinema World.

Ice Age 2: The Meltdown: Manny (Ray Romano), Sid (John Leguizamo) and Diego (Denis Leary) are back for another adventure. The animals are excited that the ice is melting — it's a paradise of water parks! But where is all that new water going to go? PG. Movies 12.

Inconvenient Truth, An: Following the 2000 election, Al Gore changed tack, turning his focus to the worldwide crisis that is global warming. Director Davis Guggenheim combines footage of Gore's traveling multimedia presentation on climate crisis with Gore's personal story, creating an effective and engaging film. PG. Bijou. **Online archives.**

Just My Luck: Ashley (Lindsay Lohan) is the luckiest girl in Manhattan. She can always get a cab! Which isn't really that hard, but whatever. When Ashley kisses the wrong guy, her good luck magically gets swapped for his bad juju. Guess it's the subway for you, Lohan. PG-13. Movies 12.

Lake House, The: Kate (Sandra Bullock) and Alex (Keanu Reeves) are carrying on a correspondence through the mystical mailbox of a house on an Illinois lake — despite living in worlds that are two years apart. Time-challenged romance sounds kinda corny, but hey, Ebert and Roeper both liked it. PG-13. Cinemark. Cinema World.

Mission Impossible 3: Can Tom Cruise dodge the mountains of press about his personal life — er, many guys with guns and explosives in his way — and save the woman he loves from an impressively creepy Philip Seymour Hoffman? R. Cinemark. **Online archives.**

Nacho Libre: Jack Black stars as Nacho, a cook in a Mexican

monastery with a secret second life as a lucha libre wrestler. But the real story is that the goofball flick is directed by *Napoleon Dynamite's* Jared Hess and written by Hess, his brother Jerusha Hess and Mike White (*School of Rock*). PG. Cinema World. Cinemark. **See review this issue.**

Notorious Bettie Page, The: In a star-making role, Gretchen Mol (*Rounders*) plays the 1950s pinup queen. Director Mary Harron's (*American Psycho*) new film is an engaging and stylish visualization of Page's life and times. R. Bijou LateNite. **Online archives.**

Omen, The: The evil child returns for a remake with an ominous release date (a rare Tuesday opening to hit 6/6/06). Julia Stiles and Liev Schreiber play the nice parents who don't know their adopted son Damien is actually the spawn of Satan. With Mia Farrow, the classic mom-of-evil, as the nanny. R. Cinemark.

Over the Hedge: A gang of woodland creatures wakes up from their winter hibernation to find a big green thing has appeared in their world. On the other side, they hear, wacky creatures called "humans" exist. Bruce Willis, William Shatner and Steve Carrell are among those voicing the critters that venture forth for an antic-filled exploration of suburbia. PG. Cinemark.

Prairie Home Companion, A: Director Robert Altman and writer Garrison Keillor present a winning story about the imagined death of Keillor's radio classic, "A Prairie Home Companion" (still going strong in real life). A first-rate ensemble cast, including Keillor, Meryl Streep, Lindsay Lohan, Kevin Kline, Lily Tomlin, Woody Harrelson and Tommy Lee Jones, makes the film sparkle. PG-13. Bijou. **Online archives.**

Shaggy Dog: Tim Allen and a big

shaggy dog star in this Disney flick. PG. Movies 12.

She's the Man: Start with Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, add in adolescent love and soccer-mania and you get this romantic comedy starring Amanda Bynes (*What a Girl Wants*) in which mistaken identities and cross-gender relationships abound. PG-13. Movies 12.

Silent Hill: Sure, it's based on a video game, but it stars Radha Mitchell (*High Art*) and Sean Bean. Shouldn't that be good for something? Mitchell plays a mother whose quest to heal her terminally ill daughter takes a detour to the creepy titular town. R. Movies 12.

Take the Lead: Stars Antonio Banderas as Pierre Dulane, a New York City ballroom dance teacher who taught inner-city kids to move their feet. PG-13. Movies 12.

V for Vendetta: From the pages of David Lloyd & Alan Moore's graphic novel springs "V" (Hugo Weaving), a masked freedom fighter who's taken up arms against the totalitarian government in a futuristic Britain. Finding an unlikely ally in a young woman, Evey (Natalie Portman), V urges the citizenry to fight the oppression of the state. Andy & Larry Wachowski (*The Matrix*) wrote the screenplay. R. Bijou LateNite. Movies 12. **Online archives.**

X-Men: The Last Stand: The third X-Men movie combines the loved-by-fans "Dark Phoenix" storyline with the discovery of a "cure" for mutancy. Hugh Jackman, Halle Berry, Famke Janssen and the rest of the core cast return (sans Nightcrawler, oddly). Stay through the credits for a vital scene. PG-13. Cinemark. **See review this issue.**

Bijou Art Cinemas (686-2458)
Cinema World 8 (342-6536)
Cinemark 17 (746-5202)
Movies 12 (741-1231)