

X2: X-Men United Film Summary

X2: X-Men United by Bryan Singer

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Context

The first issue in the X-Men comic book series, created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, was published in 1963. When this original series failed to find an audience, it quietly faded away. However, after a 1975 revamp, it gained popularity and eventually became one of the most successful comic franchises in history.

The X-Men are mutants, humans who have experienced accelerated evolution and were born with superhuman powers and abilities. As mutants, the X-Men are often hated and feared by regular humans. In addition to dealing with human prejudice, the X-Men must also cope with powerful division within their own mutant community: some mutants wish to use their abilities to dominate humans, while other mutants choose to coexist peacefully with them.

The early 1960s, when the X-Men characters were first created, was a time of great political and sociological change in the United States. The country was gradually emerging from McCarthyism; meanwhile, the Civil Rights Movement was gaining ground. The X-Men characters face the same issues of bigotry and intolerance as many citizens of the real world at that time.

In 1940, the United States Congress passed the Alien Registration Act. Among other requirements, the law mandated that all alien residents of the United States over fourteen years of age file a comprehensive statement recording their personal and occupational status and political beliefs. The law's main objective was to stifle the activities of left wing political groups, such as the American Communist Party.

Congress's House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), created in 1938, was assigned the task of investigating people suspected of unpatriotic behavior. In 1950, Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, a member of HUAC, made a speech in which he claimed to know the names of over fifty people in the State Department who were members of the American Communist Party. In fact, this list, maintained internally by employee screeners at the State Department, contained the names of individuals suspected to be Communists, fascists, alcoholics, and "sexual deviants." For the next several years, McCarthy's committee investigated various government departments and questioned anyone suspected of Communism about their political affiliations. The X-Men's story is obviously influenced by this period in history, as the mutants face similar government debates, as well as the imminent passage of legislation requiring them to register themselves.

There are also parallels between the story of the X-Men and the fight of the Civil Rights Movement, which emerged in the mid-1950s and attempted to end racial segregation and achieve equal rights legislation for African Americans. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* legally ended the segregation of public schools. In 1955, the Montgomery bus boycott began when Rosa Parks refused to relinquish her seat. These two events sparked the Civil Rights Movement, which had two distinct leaders and philosophies.



The mutants of the X-Men's world fight against the same types of oppression faced by minorities in the United States. Professor X, the leader of a mutant team that has sworn to protect the very humans who hate them, bears comparison to civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. In contrast, Magneto, a mutant leader who uses his powers to dominate the humans, has been compared to the more militant Malcolm X. Today, the powerful central theme of prejudice extended toward those who differ from the majority remains as relevant today as when the X-Men were first created in 1963.



Summary and Analysis

X2 begins several weeks after the first X-Men movie ends, in a world in which a new species of humanity has evolved within a very short time. These evolved humans, called mutants, possess special powers that cause many regular humans to fear them. There is ongoing discussion across all levels of society about the "mutant problem."

The movie opens with a group of tourists being led through the White House. One tourist strays from the group and is approached by a Secret Service agent, who asks if the man is lost. The man suddenly reveals himself as a mutant, attacks the agent, and starts fighting his way through security toward the Oval Office. This mutant has the power to teleport short distances (an ability known in the X-Men comics as "bamfing"), which allows him to easily evade the agents and reach the Oval Office. The mutant tackles the president and pins him to his desk, then withdraws a knife and attempts to stab him. Just in time, a downed Secret Service agent shoots the mutant, who disappears. The knife lodges itself into the president's desk; a banner attached to it reads, "Mutant Freedom Now."

In a remote, snowy part of Canada, Logan, otherwise known as Wolverine, discovers the abandoned industrial complex called Alkali Lake. In the first X-Men movie, Logan asks Professor X, leader of the X-Men and founder of the school for mutant children housed in the X-Mansion, about his origins; specifically, he wants to know how he came to have his foot-long metal claws. Professor X tells Logan that he has no information for him, but that he might be able to find some answers at Alkali Lake. However, Logan is disappointed to find the complex deserted.

In the meantime, Storm and Jean take students from the mutant school on a field trip to a museum, where they have some trouble blending in with the humans. As Storm delivers a lesson to the children, Jean wanders away, bothered by another headache. Jean's powers are growing too strong, and she comments to Scott (Cyclops), her husband, that her telepathy is off. Foreshadowing the events to come, she tells him that her dreams are getting worse, and that she fears that something terrible is about to happen.

At the museum, students Bobby (Iceman), John (Pyro), and Rogue have wandered away from the group and are sitting in the food court. Two human teenagers start to bother Rogue, and Bobby and John come to her defense. When one of the teens takes John's lighter, John shows them why he is called Pyro. He directs the flame of the lighter to hit the boys. Iceman quickly extinguishes the flames with his wintry breath, but the boys rise to fight. Suddenly, all the humans in the museum are frozen in place. Rogue asks Bobby what he has done. Professor X wheels his wheelchair over to the students, explaining that he froze the humans and that it is time for them all to leave now in order to avoid trouble. As the mutants depart the museum, a television blares, reporting the mutant attack on the president and the growing hatred and fear of mutants.



Back in the Oval Office, Colonel William Stryker examines the knife puncture in the president's desk, calling the attack a very close call. He requests the president's permission to commence a special mission to overtake the mutant school, which he calls a mutant training facility. He informs the President that he has received detailed information about the school from the imprisoned Magneto, a very powerful mutant who believes that mutants should replace humans on earth. (Magneto is the villain of the first X-Men movie. His plan to take over the world was foiled by Professor X and the X-Men.) Stryker tells the president that the country is in a state of emergency, and the president grants permission for the operation.

Senator Kelly joins the two men in the office and expresses his disapproval of the attack on the school, saying that his views on the mutant problem have changed. In fact (as viewers of the previous X-Men movie know), the person everyone thinks is Senator Kelly is actually the metamorphic, shape-shifting mutant Mystique, who took Kelly's form after he was killed in the first film. Kelly/Mystique asks Stryker if he wants to turn this into a war against the mutants. Stryker replies that it already is a war.

Logan returns to the X-Mansion to tell Professor X that his search for information at Alkali Lake turned out to be fruitless. There, he reunites with Rogue, whom he rescued from Magneto in the first movie. Bobby, who introduces himself to Logan as Rogue's boyfriend, feels a bit territorial with Logan. Since Rogue's mutant ability of absorbing the energy of anyone she touches renders her unable to experience any contact with people, Logan asks Bobby how they manage to have a relationship. Bobby replies that they are figuring it out. Jean also welcomes Logan back; there are obvious sparks between the two, but Jean resists because she truly loves Cyclops.

Professor X pinpoints Boston as the present location of the mutant who attacked the president. He dispatches Jean and Storm in the X-Jet to collect the mutant and return him unharmed to the mansion. Professor X and Cyclops leave the mansion to visit Magneto, and Logan is left in charge of the students for the night.

Sitting in his prison cell made entirely of plastic, Magneto sits contentedly reading *The Once and Future King*. Because of his extraordinary ability to control and manipulate metal, he must be contained in a cell without any magnetic elements. Stryker enters the cell to further interrogate Magneto. To accomplish this, Stryker applies some type of mind-controlling drug from a syringe to the back of Magneto's neck. An existing red wound on his neck shows that Magneto has previously experienced Stryker's drugging. Stryker begins to ask Magneto for more information about the school and Cerebro.

Cerebro is a machine designed by Professor X and Magneto for the purpose of locating both the mutants and the humans who exist on the planet. Cerebro is controlled by the powerful mind of the Professor, who links his mind to the machine through a special headset. It is obvious that Cerebro could be a very potent weapon for anyone seeking to destroy a group of people, whether it be mutants or humans. Logan joins the Professor inside Cerebro and witnesses its power for the first time. The Professor shows him that every white dot that appears represents a human; every red dot represents a mutant. Professor X is connected to each one of these individuals through Cerebro.



Professor X takes this opportunity to tell Logan that, as Cerebro clearly shows, he is not truly as alone as he may feel. After all, there are millions of mutants throughout the world. Logan reveals to the Professor that his search for answers about his origins was unsuccessful. The Professor explains that he cannot read Logan's mind to discover the answers for him. He says that the mind needs to discover things for itself.

In the dark of night, back in Washington, D.C., Kelly/Mystique is walking with purpose into Stryker's offices. She transforms herself into the image of Stryker's assistant, Yuriko Oyama. Yuriko/Mystique opens Stryker's files and discovers that Stryker has obtained detailed information about Cerebro's capabilities and design. When the real Yuriko approaches, Mystique transforms into the image of the janitor, takes the files containing Stryker's gathered information, and walks out the door.

Storm and Jean arrive in Boston and are guided by the Professor's direction to an abandoned gothic church. There, they find a very frightened mutant. He introduces himself as Kurt Wagner, a refugee from the German circus who was once known as "The Amazing Nightcrawler." As Jean examines the injuries he received during his attack on the president, she notices a red wound on the back of his neck that is exactly like the one on Magneto's neck. Kurt explains that he has no idea what happened during the attack, not having any memory of it. Storm asks Kurt if he has given himself the extensive tattooing that covers his body. He replies that he has. Kurt expresses the idea that God might be testing him, indicating his deep and unwavering faith.

Logan is having another nightmare, a common occurrence for him. He sees choppy and vague images that must be clues to his origin, but he can't quite see enough to help him understand the context of the images. He wakes up and heads to the kitchen in search of a beer. He finds Bobby in the kitchen, who tells him that he won't find any beer in the refrigerator: they are, after all, at a school. Bobby and Logan talk, and Bobby discloses that his parents think he is at a prep school for gifted children. They don't know he is a mutant.

Professor X, accompanied by Cyclops, enters the plastic prison to visit Magneto. During their talk, Professor X discovers that, quite unwillingly, Magneto has told Stryker everything he knows about the school and Cerebro. Professor X and Magneto discuss Stryker's potential plan, and Professor X reveals that Stryker has a mutant son who was once a student at the school. Suddenly, Professor X and Cyclops are ambushed. Yuriko, who is actually a mutant who also goes by the name of Lady Deathstrike, attacks and subdues Cyclops. Some type of gas pours into the cell holding Magneto and the Professor, knocking them both unconscious. Before Magneto falls, he yells that the war has begun.

While the Professor is being captured at the prison, Stryker's attack on the school begins. Helicopters surround the building, and a team of men storms it. While the men manage to subdue a few children with tranquilizer shots, most escape with the help of their powers. Logan goes into one of his rages (known in the comic book world as a berserker), killing several intruders and collecting the children for escape through the secret tunnels and passageways of the school.



Rogue, Bobby, and John find one of the tunnels. As they run for escape, Rogue says that they must stop to help Logan. As they turn back toward the school, they see Logan encounter Stryker. There is a flicker of recognition in Logan's face. Stryker laughs, asking Logan if he recognizes him from his past. Before the intruders can attack Logan, Bobby touches a nearby wall, creating a barrier of thick ice between Logan and Stryker. Stryker puts up his hand, and Logan touches the ice in an effort to meet it, sensing that it is the hand of the person who made him.

Rogue shouts for Logan, who snaps out of his reverie and escapes along with the children through the tunnel. They enter the garage, where Logan hotwires a car, and they escape into the night. As they drive away, Rogue returns Logan's dog tags to him. (In the first movie, Logan asks Rogue to keep them for him until his return.) These tags are a link to Logan's past. The group decides to head toward Boston, where Storm and Jean have been sent and where Bobby's parents live. Meanwhile, Stryker enters the secret halls of the X-Mansion and discovers what he came to find: Cerebro.

In the next scene, a beautiful woman sits at a bar, flirting with a security guard from Magneto's prison. The woman, actually a transformation of Mystique, gives the guard a beer into which she has slipped two sleeping pills. He eagerly follows her into the bathroom, where he soon passes out. Mystique pulls down his pants and injects him with a syringe full of a milky substance.

Professor X awakens from the gassing to discover that he has been captured by Stryker. He is wearing a helmet that prevents him from using his mutant powers. Professor X comments that for a man who hates mutants, Stryker certainly keeps interesting company; he is referring to Lady Deathstrike. Stryker explains that she is under his control, then medicates her with drops from a syringe applied to the back of her neck. Professor X figures out that Stryker also used this drug to compel a mutant to attack the president. Stryker explains that the drug is a powerful neural inhibitor that is created by the brain of his mutant son Jason. Jason is brought into the room in a wheelchair. He uses his powers to project images into Professor X's mind. Stryker explains that he intends to use the Professor to find and kill all the mutants.

Logan, Bobby, John, and Rogue arrive at Bobby's home. While they clean up and find clothing to replace the pajamas they were wearing when they escaped, Bobby's parents and brother arrive home and are startled by the visitors. Bobby explains that Logan is a professor from his school.

The security guard, whistling happily because of his encounter with the beautiful woman the previous night, enters Magneto's cell to deliver his meal. Magneto quickly senses something different about the guard. It seems that the injection he was given last night by Mystique was a large dose of iron, a magnetic metal that Magneto can control. Magneto uses his powers to pull the tiny specks of iron from the guard's body, killing him. He then forms the iron into three small balls, which he uses to break through the prison doors and escape.



Bobby and his friends sit with Bobby's parents and try to explain the situation to them. In order to do this, Bobby must "come out" to them as a mutant. Bobby/Iceman shows his parents an example of his powers by touching his mother's teacup, quickly freezing the hot tea inside. In the meantime, Logan finally reaches Jean on the special phone he has found in the car; he tells her to pick them up quickly. Bobby's mother naively asks if Bobby has ever tried not to be a mutant. Bobby's brother, upset to learn that his brother is a mutant, runs up to his room. He calls the police and tells them there are intruders in the house.

Storm and Jean bring Kurt back to the X-Jet. Storm further questions Kurt about his tattoos. He explains that they are angelic symbols and that he has given himself one for every sin he has committed, so he has quite a few. He talks to Storm about what he senses as her great anger toward the humans who hate her. Storm says that anger can help someone survive. Kurt counters that faith can also help.

Back at Bobby's house, the police surround the area and demand that the mutants surrender. As the group of mutants steps onto the porch, with Logan's claws exposed, a police officer shoots Logan in the head. Because of the metal encasing Logan's skeleton, the bullet does no more than lodge in his skin like a splinter. John/Pyro attacks the police with his ability to control fire, shooting flames toward the officers and their cars. Rogue, seeing that the officers are in real danger from Pyro, removes her glove and touches Pyro's ankle, draining him of his powers and halting the attack. Just in time, Storm pilots the X-Jet to the street in front of the house. As the mutant group runs for the jet, Bobby turns to look back at his family. He then chooses to join the X-Men.

As the X-Jet flies away from the police, two military jets swoop in to attack. Storm uses her powers to create tornadoes that down one of the jets, but the other manages to fire two rockets at the X-Jet before it is felled by the storm. Jean uses her telekinetic powers to halt one of the rockets, but the other slams into the X-Jet. Unable to strap herself to her seat in time, Rogue is sucked out of the hole in the back of the jet and plummets toward earth. Thinking quickly, Kurt bamfs out of the plane to Rogue, grabs her, and bamfs back into the jet. The jet is quickly losing power and altitude. Suddenly, the jet slows and the gaping hole in the plane's rear closes up. The plane stops just feet from the earth, saved by the power of Magneto.

Professor X is having delusional visions created by Jason. Stryker's plan involves Jason tricking Professor X into a "dark" version of Cerebro that is being built by Stryker, where he will be forced to concentrate so intently on the mutants that he will destroy them all. Jason is controlling the Professor's mind. Taking the form of a small girl, he leads Professor X into the dark Cerebro to begin working to locate the mutants.

Magneto meets up with Mystique, who has joined the rescued X-Men in a forest while they discuss their options. Magneto reveals all he knows about Stryker's plan to solve the mutant problem. He explains that Wolverine was created as one of Stryker's experiments, and that Mystique has found the plans for the secret base where Wolverine was created. Jean reads Kurt's mind to discover that the base is actually hidden deep within a dam at Alkali Lake, the abandoned area Logan explored.



When Logan finds Jean alone, he expresses his feelings for her, but she tells him that she loves Cyclops. Meanwhile, Kurt asks Mystique why she does not always choose to look like a normal human, since she can assume any appearance she wants. She responds that she shouldn't have to look like everyone else.

The X-Men suit up to begin their mission of saving Professor X and the mutant population of the world. Rogue and Bobby ask why they don't have uniforms; they are told that they are not X-Men yet. Pyro talks with Magneto about his powers, explaining that while he can control flames, he cannot create them. Magneto is impressed with Pyro and tells him so. Pyro begins to ally himself with Magneto.

The X-Jet lands near the Alkali Lake base, where the team develops a plan to penetrate security and execute the Professor's rescue. It is decided that Mystique will be the primary person to infiltrate the base. She takes the form of Wolverine and approaches the entrance. Stryker, intrigued by Wolverine's return, opens the doors to him. Upon entering the base, Mystique, still in the form of Wolverine, quickly overtake the guards and heads to the control room. Assuming the form of Stryker, Mystique then cons her way into the control room and subdues the guards there. From the control room, she is able to open the doors to the rest of the mutant team. As the team assembles, Logan removes his communications equipment and leaves to confront Stryker.

As the team begins to search for the Professor, Cyclops appears and starts attacking them. He is obviously under the influence of Stryker's mind-controlling drug. Jean sends the rest of the team forward and stays behind to confront her husband. Cyclops shoots his eye beams at Jean, who deflects them with her powers. A stray beam hits the wall and damages the dam housing the base. After fighting Jean for a few moments, Cyclops snaps back into reality and realizes what he has done. He and Jean reunite as the dam begins to crumble around them.

Wandering the depths of the base, Logan stumbles across the experimentation chamber in which he was created. The memories come flooding back to him. Suddenly, he encounters Stryker and Lady Deathstrike. Stryker explains that, contrary to Logan's belief that he is a unique creature, there is another one just like him. Lady Deathstrike then displays her matching claws, which she unsheathes from the tips of her fingers. Wolverine and Deathstrike begin to battle. The two opponents seem equally matched: they both possess skeletons coated with indestructible metal, razor-sharp metal claws of one foot in length, and the mutant ability to heal themselves. At first, Wolverine appears unable to defeat Lady Deathstrike. At last, he succeeds by injecting her with the same metal that coats their skeletons, filling her with enough metal to finally kill her.

Back on the jet, Pyro, Iceman, and Rogue are anxiously waiting for the return of the X-Men. Pyro decides to defy instructions and leave the jet in search of the others. Meanwhile, as the X-Men approach the outside of the dark Cerebro chamber, the powers of Professor X begin to affect them, impairing their abilities and sending them to the ground. However, Professor X's powers fail to affect Magneto, as he is wearing his special helmet that protects him from the Professor's mind. Magneto forces his way into the dark Cerebro. It becomes clear that Magneto intends to do more than save



Professor X and the rest of mutants. He also intends to use the Professor and Cerebro to kill all of the world's humans instead. He gives the new instructions to Jason, who then shifts his control of Professor X's mind to reflect the change in plans.

As Stryker attempts to escape the crumbling dam in his helicopter, Logan catches up to him and chains him to the base of the helicopter. Stryker tells Logan that he is just a failed experiment. As Logan is leaving, Stryker begins to beg for his life, saying that he will tell Logan anything he wants to know as long as Logan spares him. Logan leaves him anyway to help his friends.

Outside of Cerebro, the X-Men decide how to best proceed in order to stop the Professor and save the humans, who are beginning to feel the strong effects of mind control. It is decided that, although it is very dangerous for Kurt to bamf into a place he cannot see, he will do so anyway, taking Storm along with him into Cerebro. Storm proclaims that she has faith in Kurt. Jean tells Storm not to believe anything she sees inside Cerebro.

Mystique and Magneto escape the dam and flee in Stryker's helicopter. As they are lifting off, they notice Pyro and convince him to join them. The three mutants fly off together. Inside the dark Cerebro, Storm creates an ice storm, breaking the illusion that Jason is projecting to trap Professor X. As soon as the connection is broken, Cerebro begins to crumble. A piece of the collapsing chamber kills Jason. Kurt quickly grabs Storm, bamfs away with her, then returns to rescue the Professor. The dark Cerebro is completely destroyed.

Logan locates his friends and warns them that the dam is crumbling fast and that they must get out. They gather the mutant children who were kidnapped from the school and find an exit from the underground base just as the water begins to break through the cracking walls. Logan leads them toward Stryker's helicopter, intending to use it for their escape. He discovers that it is already gone, taken by Magneto and Mystique. Just then, the X-Jet appears above them, clumsily piloted by Rogue. She manages to land the jet successfully, and the team gets on board.

Before Logan gets on the plane, he notices Stryker, left chained to a wall by Magneto. Logan confronts Stryker, then decides to leave the past behind him. He drops his dog tags at Stryker's feet and leaves him there to die. Aboard the jet, Storm and Jean have trouble engaging the engines to take off. The dam is quickly imploding, and if they do not lift off quickly, they will all be engulfed in an enormous flood. As the dam finally collapses, Jean decides that she must take action. She leaves the jet and seals the door behind her. Using her extraordinarily heightened telekinetic powers, she levitates the jet off the ground and holds the water back until the jet is able to fly away. Unable to save herself, she is finally overcome by the force of the water and is swept away in the flood.

The president is in the White House, preparing to address the nation about the steps he will take to control the mutants following their recent worldwide attack on humans. As he is beginning his address, the humans of the world (except the president) are frozen in



time. The X-Men, including Bobby and Rogue, appear in uniform in the Oval Office. Professor X explains to the president that it was Stryker's plan, not a mutant threat, that endangered the humans. He returns the files recovered from Stryker to the president, then warns him not to repeat the mistakes of the past. He proposes a plan that involves working together for a better future.

As things return to normal at the X-Mansion, Professor X explains to the mourning Cyclops and Logan that Jean freely elected to sacrifice herself to save them. Logan also comforts Cyclops by reminding him that Jean chose to be with Cyclops instead of Logan. As the students settle into Professor X's classroom, he begins to teach them the story of *The Once and Future King*.

As the film concludes, the voice of Jean reminds us that evolution sometimes leaps forward. The scene shows the aftermath of the dam's destruction: it has left behind a beautiful lake in the forest. As the movie closes, there is a subtle shadow beneath the lake's water. Could it somehow be Jean, who is known in the comic book series as Phoenix?



Characters

Professor Charles Xavier, played by Patrick Stewart

Description

Professor Xavier ("Professor X") is the leader of the X-Men, a group of mutants who have sworn to protect humans, even those who hate mutants. Professor X founded a school for mutants, where young mutants can go for harbor and sanctuary and to develop their mutant abilities. He has genuine concern for young mutants, who may otherwise find themselves displaced outcasts.

According to the comic book series, Professor X was rendered a paraplegic by an alien who dropped a boulder on his legs. The Professor is considered to be one of the most powerful mutants and is also a gifted scientist. His telepathic ability to read and control both humans' and mutants' minds is unmatched. Using the machine he created, called Cerebro, he is able to locate and connect to every human or mutant on the planet. The Professor is one of the mutant world's most vocal proponents of fostering good relations between humans and mutants.

Analysis

When drawing parallels between the story of the X-Men and the American Civil Rights Movement, Professor Xavier's role can be compared to that of Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor X is a strong advocate of finding ways for humans and mutants to not only co-exist without violence or conflict, but also embrace, support, and help each other. Like King, the Professor believes that the two very different societies can live together in peace and unity against the malignant force of bigotry.

Professor X is never portrayed as anything other than a kind, benevolent mentor to all mutants. In the comic book world of good versus evil, there is no doubt on which side the Professor lands. In this way, his character contrasts with that of Magneto, who, while wanting to destroy humans, also fights to save mutants.

Logan/Wolverine, played by Hugh Jackman

Description

The most extraordinary feature of the mutant Wolverine is not his natural genetic mutations, but rather the manmade modifications to his skeleton. As part of a top secret military experiment, Logan's entire skeletal structure was plated with the indestructible metal adamantium. Along with this internal armor, he was given retractable metal claws of one foot in length that project between the knuckles of each hand.



Logan's reinforced structure, genetic mutations, enhanced senses, and ability to heal rapidly make him a powerful force for the X-Men. However, he is often a reluctant participant in the conflict that surrounds him. In both *X2* and the first film, as well as in the comic book series, Logan's lack of personal recollections about his origins preoccupies and troubles him. With the exception of some random images that visit him in dreams, he retains no real memories of his past or how he became who he is. He is constantly searching for information and answers that might lead him to self-discovery.

As shown in the film, another of Wolverine's significant characteristics is his fiery temper and concomitant tendency to go into berserker rages when fighting. During these times, he is more willing to kill his enemies than other X-Men would be.

Analysis

Of all the X-Men, Wolverine certainly stands out as the reluctant hero. During his character's development in the comic books and films, he is gruff and often vicious: the epitome of the comic antihero.

While Professor X is the leader of the X-Men, *X2* certainly focuses on the journey of Logan. Early in the film, Logan's quest to Alkali Lake establishes that his burning questions about his origins serve as his driving motivation. As the film progresses, Logan is unsatisfied upon discovering who made him the way he is; he needs to know why as well.

Logan's motivations almost always revert to the self-serving. Even while his fellow X-Men are fighting to save humanity, he is compelled to leave them in search of answers about himself. However, the film also contains many instances in which Logan shows great affection and compassion toward others. He is certainly a good, if flawed, protagonist.

In the end, Logan finally decides to leave his past behind him and commit to the mission of the X-Men. When he throws his dog tags, the symbol of the military experimentation that created him, at the feet of his maker (Colonel Stryker), Logan proclaims once and for all that no answer can satisfy him. His only hope to find peace lies in the future, not in the past.

Eric Lensherr/Magneto, played by Ian McKellan

Description

Magneto establishes himself as an enemy to humans in the first X-Men movie. Having been foiled and captured by the X-Men, he spends the first part of *X2* in a plastic prison cell, the only type of room that can safely and securely hold him. One of the most powerful mutants on the planet, Magneto possesses the ability to mentally control the forces of magnetism, and is thereby able to manipulate metal objects.



Magneto was once a friend and colleague of Professor X, helping him develop the powerful mind machine Cerebro. According to the comic book and first movie, Magneto is the only one of his family to survive the Auschwitz death camp during the Holocaust.

Analysis

Magneto maintains the angry, pessimistic belief that equality between humans and mutants is a myth that can never be realized. He believes that the only effective course of action is for mutants to take over the earth. Like Malcolm X, Magneto sees revolution or force as the only means for the oppressed to assume their rightful place in society. In this way, he serves as a foil to Professor X's character, whose philosophies of seeking nonviolent solutions more closely resemble those advocated by Martin Luther King, Jr.

In this movie, Magneto is not the malignant villain that Stryker is. Indeed, it is not clear that any of Magneto's actions arise from purely evil intentions. Even in the end, when Magneto tries to turn the tables on Stryker by using Professor X and Cerebro to kill the world's humans, it is not the plot of a moustache-twisting villain, but that of a revolutionary, fighting for his place in the world.

William Stryker, played by Brian Cox

Description

Colonel William Stryker is a vocal and powerful anti-mutant activist who has a good deal of influence with the president. He is rumored to have performed experiments on mutants during his military career. Stryker reveals himself as the creator of both Wolverine and Lady Deathstrike. With the help of a mind-controlling drug he has injected into a mutant (Kurt), he is able to stage an attack on the president, thereby receiving permission to attack the X-Mansion and begin his plot to destroy all mutants.

Analysis

The origin of Stryker's hatred of mutants is unclear, but his motivations are clearly tied to his ambivalence toward his wheelchair-bound, incapacitated mutant son, Jason. He resents Professor X for being unable to cure Jason when Jason was a student at the mutant school. He also clearly blames Jason, and therefore Professor X as well, for his wife's suicide.

Colonel Stryker is the archetypal comic book villain. He will not stop until he accomplishes his objective, which is the total obliteration of the mutants he so despises. Yet, also typically, the villainous Stryker has close ties to that which he hates: his son.

Dr. Jean Grey -, played by Famke Janssen

Dr. Jean Grey is a mutant born with the powers of telepathy, the ability to read minds, and telekinesis, the ability to move objects with her mind. During the course of the



movie, she experiences an increase in the intensity of her powers, which causes her headaches and nightmares.

This is a story in which Jean faces many choices. She chooses to love her husband, Scott, over the advances of Logan. In the end, she opts to sacrifice herself to save the other X-Men. Her role is to illustrate the power of free will, and the strength and responsibility that comes along with it.

It is interesting to learn that, in the comic books, Jean's name is Phoenix. At the end of the movie, those with this inside knowledge receive a hint of events to come. A shadowy image that looks like a phoenix can be seen under the water of the lake. In mythology, a phoenix is a bird that lives for hundreds of years and then consumes itself by fire, later to rise renewed from its own ashes.

Kurt Wagner/Nightcrawler -, played by Alan Cumming

A refugee from the German circus, Kurt Wagner is a mutant with blue skin and deformed hands and feet. He has long canine teeth, yellow eyes, pointed ears, and a prehensile, forked tail. In both the comic book series and the movie, he has the power to teleport short distances, leaving behind the smell of brimstone. This ability is known as bamfing. The term "bamfing" is a reference to the comic book illustrations of Kurt's instantaneous disappearances, which are often represented by the word "bamf." He also has the ability to attach himself to surfaces.

In the film, Stryker drugs Nightcrawler and sends him to attack the president. After the attack, he is rescued by the X-Men and joins their cause. Kurt is a very religious man and displays great faith. Interestingly, in the comics, Nightcrawler actually becomes a Catholic priest.

Rogue -, played by Anna Paquin

Rogue is a young mutant with the ability to absorb the energy and power of other people, including mutants, through skin-to-skin contact. When she does this, it greatly weakens the person she is touching. The longer she maintains contact, the more she harms the person. Because of this, Rouge always wears gloves and is careful not to make casual contact with others.

In the first movie, Rouge is rescued by Logan and travels with him to the refuge of the X-Mansion. In this second film, Rogue and Bobby are trying to develop a relationship; however, they are finding it difficult to do so without the ability to touch one another.

Oro Munroe/Storm -, played by Halle Berry

Storm is a mutant with the power to control the weather. She can produce and control such phenomena as lightning, tornadoes, and wind. She teaches and cares for the children at the mutant school.

Scott Summers/Cyclops -, played by James Marsden



Cyclops, a mutant possessing the power to project beams like lasers from his eyes, is married to Jean and is a leader of the X-Men. He wears a special pair of glasses or a visor to help control the beams.

In the film, Cyclops is captured by Stryker and turned against the X-Men with mind-controlling drugs. Only after he recognizes Jean does he snap out of his trance and return to the X-Men.

Mystique -, played by Rebecca Romijn-Stamos

Mystique is a gifted, metamorphic shape-shifter who is able to take on any human form she wishes. She is a loyal ally of Magneto, believing that mutants must take control of the earth from humans.

John Allerdyce/Pyro -, played by Aaron Stanford

Pyro is a mutant and a student at the Professor's school. He is an angry young man who is easily persuaded to join forces with Magneto and Mystique. Pyro has the ability to direct and control flames, increasing their size or intensity. However, he is unable to actually create flames and must rely on his lighter to start fires.

Bobby Drake/Iceman -, played by Shawn Ashmore

Bobby is a mutant with the ability to transmit intense cold to anything he touches. While he is away at the mutant school, his parents believe he is at a prep school for the gifted. During the course of the story, he has to confront his parents and explain to them that he is actually a mutant. In the end, he chooses to continue his mutant education rather than stay with his mutant-fearing parents.



Themes

Good vs. Evil

The classic struggle of good against evil is a fairly constant theme throughout the history of storytelling. The X2 story is no exception; indeed, it is a rather straightforward illustration of the theme.

Accordingly, the mythological archetypes of the hero and the villain also appear in the film. Without question, Professor X plays the role of the benign leader and is also, quite literally, the teacher. He is the archetypal wise old man who provides guidance and wisdom.

Logan serves as another type of hero: the mythic warrior on a quest. The questing hero is another mythical archetype appearing throughout ancient and modern literature. As Logan drives on, perpetually seeking answers about his past, his journey of self-discovery leads him to his true vocation: to protect the human race as a member of the X-Men.

The character of Magneto stands as an exception to these rather rigid mythical roles. He is a mutant driven to do what he believes is right. He will ally himself with the X-Men when he perceives a danger to the mutant race. However, he continually aims to eliminate, rather than coexist with, the humans who try to strip him of his rights. Magneto drifts from the role of villain, to hero, and back to villain as the events of the film unfold.

It is interesting to note the visual clues in the film that support the good versus evil (or light versus dark) theme. Most noticeably, when Cerebro is housed in the X-Mansion, under the control of the benevolent Professor X, it is a bright, clean, white room. The version of Cerebro at Stryker's base is a darker, grungy room with an industrial atmosphere.

Tolerance and Bigotry

The story of the X-Men explores the effects of bigotry on a society. While Colonel Stryker embodies the total hatred of the mutant race and acts on those intense feelings, the film also illustrates the more pervasive feelings of mistrust, suspicion, and fear that the humans in the X-Men's world generally feel toward mutants. Subtle moments, such as the human reactions to the mutant students in the museum, indicate that bigotry and prejudice are so omnipresent in a mutant's life that they hardly warrant acknowledgement.

Professor X serves as the voice of tolerance in both the film and the X-Men's world. While he does not dispute that there is much work to be done to find ways that humans and mutants can coexist, he always believes that this goal is possible. Professor X



knows that the only way to overcome bigotry is to foster tolerance and compassion for those who are different, He consistently attempts to convey this message, not only to his mutant students, but also to humans. In the beginning of the film, Professor X explains that intolerance is an inherent human condition. Sharing the world, he says, has never been humanity's defining attribute.

Earning Your Stripes

A minor, but important, theme of the movie is the idea of earning a place on the X-Men team: specifically, earning one's uniform. The "journeyman's quest," or the test of an apprentice, is another archetypal story that often appears in literature and film. While this theme does not receive the most screen time, the story of how Iceman, Pyro, and Rogue develop their abilities and step into their respective destinies is certainly an important element in the film.

At the end of the film, Pyro joins Magneto and Mystique on the helicopter as they fly to safety without regard for the others. In contrast, Iceman and Rogue use their powers and knowledge to help the X-Men with their mission. Iceman's wall of ice spares Logan from being captured by Stryker during the attack on the X-Mansion. Rogue's piloting of the X-Jet provides the team with a means to escape the crumbling dam.

Iceman and Rogue are rewarded for their efforts. When the X-Men join the president in the Oval Office to explain Stryker's plot, Iceman and Rogue appear in their X-Men uniforms, full-fledged members of the team at last.



Style and Cinematography

X2 is certainly a film largely driven by special effects. While watching the movie, it becomes clear that the special effects are essential to move the story forward. For example, it would be nearly impossible to tell the story of Mystique without showing her morph into different characters. The excitement of Magneto's escape hinges on the audience's belief that Magneto is really able to sense and extract the minute amounts of iron in the guard's body.

It is also interesting to pay special attention to the characters' wardrobes. The film's costume designers apparently referenced the comic book series to guide decisions regarding the characters' clothing and to ensure that it retained each character's essence. For example, in the gothic church, Jean can be seen wearing a jacket with a phoenix embroidered on the back, referring to her comic book X-Name. The letter X is also incorporated in character's outfits and can be spotted on pieces of jewelry and belt buckles.

Indeed, the X symbol can be found throughout the film. Look for it everywhere: on costumes, sets, and props. It serves no real purpose except to subconsciously surround viewers with the symbol and give a nod to the rich X-Men world originally created in the comic books.

Motifs

Mutants Affect the Family

One appropriate conclusion to draw from the film is that being a mutant has a dramatic affect on one's family. In the world of the X-Men, it seems that most young mutants are alone. Realizing this plight, Professor X has taken it upon himself to develop a place of refuge for them.

The most moving plot line exploring the effects of a mutant on the family is when Bobby must "come out" to his parents, disclosing that he is a mutant. His brother becomes openly hostile, while his mother asks if he has ever tried not being a mutant (in essence, not being himself, or who he really is). It is not difficult to imagine a similar scene taking place in living rooms across the country, with any teenager finally saying to his or her parent, "I have to tell you something that you are not going to like."

Problems of Technology

For the most part, technology helps make our lives, and the lives of the X-Men, easier. However, sometimes that same technology can stand in our way or fail us. There are several examples in the film of times when the X-Men's technology, intended to help them, actually lets them down.

For example, when Logan finds Cyclops's cell phone in the car during the escape from the mansion, he is unable to reach any of the others on the phone. Another example is the failure of the X-Jet to lift off while the dam begins to crumble. That failure ends up costing a team member (Jean) her life. The metal detector outside Magneto's plastic prison, while working as it was designed to, is not sensitive enough, failing to detect the tiny amount of iron that Magneto capably uses as a weapon.

The Cost of Using Powers

There is no such thing as a free lunch, even for a mutant. The X-Men sometimes pay a harsh price for using their powers. Often, the price is pain, either to the mutant or to others. In the first movie, Logan discusses how he feels pain every time he extends his claws. Early in this film, Jean discusses the headaches and nightmares she experiences as her powers are increasing.

Some mutants, such as Rogue, can inflict unintended harm to others when they use their powers. When Rogue touches another mutant or human, she saps that person of his or her energy, which causes that person to feel pain and eventually lose consciousness. Rogue is shamefully aware of the detrimental effects of her powers on others, and so she is more reluctant than other X-Men to use her abilities.



Symbols

Logan's Dog Tags

Logan has retained his dog tags for years, even though he has no memory of his military career. At the end of the first X-Men film, he leaves the tags with Rogue, a reassurance that he will return to claim them. We do not see the tags again until Rogue returns them to Logan, after Stryker's attack on the school and their escape from it. At this point, Logan has just acquired some key information about his past: he has encountered the man who created him. The dog tags remind the viewer that Logan has an extensive backstory of which none of us, including Logan, are fully aware.

In the end, when Logan decides to leave Stryker, his creator, chained to the crumbling dam, he also drops the dog tags at Stryker's feet. It is a significant gesture highlighting the fact that Logan has finally, fully joined the X-Men, even knowing that he will never truly understand his origins.

The Once and Future King

A story about the rise and fall of the fictional kingdom of Camelot, *The Once and Future King* appears twice in the film. First, Magneto is reading the book as Stryker enters the plastic prison cell to interrogate him. Then, at the end of the movie, Professor X begins a discussion of the book with his young students.

In the novel, King Arthur decides that it noble to use one's power in the defense of those who have none. It also explores the idea of friends being driven apart by different ideologies. Both of these notions parallel the storyline of X2.

Eyes

Several of the mutants' powers are apparent in their eyes. When Storm summons the weather, her eyes go completely white, giving her a ghostlike or even dead appearance. It isn't clear if her eyes are the source of her powers or if the change in their appearance is simply a side effect.

Eyes are certainly the source of Cyclops's power. Rays of concussive force shoot constantly from his eyes and can be blocked only by his protective eyewear. According to the comic book, an accident in his youth caused his eye beams to be "always on," requiring him to wear the special glasses.

When, at the climax of the film, Jean is using her powers to their fullest extent, her eyes are glowing red. She is feeling power that she has never experienced before, and this is reflected in her eyes.



Essay Questions

Further discuss the parallels between the ideologies of Professor X and Magneto to those of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X.

Compare the concept of the Mutant Registration Act discussed in the film to the Patriot Act passed by the United States Congress after the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001.

What is the role of faith in the film? Is faith the opposite of anger?

Many have compared Bobby's "coming out" to his parents as a mutant to the discussion many teenagers have with their parents in which disclose that they are gay. How does the reaction of Bobby's family support this comparison?

Is Magneto the villain of the X-Men's world? Could it be argued that his actions, while violent, are somehow just?

Nightcrawler asks Mystique why, when she has the capabilities, she does not simply live in the world looking like a normal human. She replies that she shouldn't have to. Is there ever a time when one should conform to society's norms in order to keep the peace, or is it always better to be one's true self, no matter what?

At the end of the film, Jean sacrifices herself for the good of the X-Men team. How is this an archetypal sacrifice in Western mythology? Provide examples of other characters in our stories that give up their lives to save others.

Wolverine is a character who has no knowledge of his personal history. How important is one's history in defining who one is as a person?

What motivates Pyro to abandon his friends and leave with Magneto?

Which of the X-Men do you consider to have the most powerful ability? Which mutation would you want for yourself? What would be the personal cost of having such powers?