

Identity, global crises explored in X-Men

By Kam Williams

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The initial installment of "X-Men" (2000) was a character-driven affair which elicited sympathy for the mutants attending Professor Charles Xavier's (Patrick Stewart) School for Gifted Students by establishing them not as superficial superheroes but as vulnerable outcasts struggling to find their way to fit into a world which would ostracize them as freaks. The second episode (2003) further developed this theme, focusing also on the relationships among this motley crew of misfits, while upping the ante in terms of action and special effects.

Both of those adaptations of the popular Marvel Comic book series faithfully reflected the source material's underlying socially conscious theme, subtly suggesting that we'd all be better off if we learned to tolerate one another's differences. But for some reason, 20th Century Fox opted to ditch director Bryan Singer in favor of Brett Ratner, who is best known for making "Rush Hour" 1 and 2, the buddy comedies co-starring Chris Tucker and Jackie Chan.

The upshot is that "X-Men: The Last Stand" lacks the cerebral edge of the earlier adventures, though it certainly holds its own when it



Storm (Halle Berry) prepares to utilize her special abilities during an epic battle.

comes to action sequences. Unfortunately, the dialogue is frequently crude, and laced with lines that sound like they might work better coming from a comedian like Tucker's lips in upcoming "Rush Hour 3," such as when Wolverine (Hugh Jackman) chastises Storm (Halle Berry) with "Don't get your panties in a bunch."

This misogynistic tone permeates the production, evidenced by other instances in which we hear females unnecessarily addressed in an insulting fashion like, "Keep it up, bitch" or "I'm the Juggernaut, bitch." So, provided you don't mind gutter talk and that everybody's I.Q. appears to have dropped about 25 points, you still are likely to enjoy Ratner's less politically correct conclusion of the X-Men trilogy.

The plot's hook this ground is actually ever so intriguing, as scientists have come up with a universal cure guaranteed to transform any mutant who submits to an inoculation into a so-called normal human being. This triggers a flood of identity crises within the community, as each must decide

whether to surrender his or her powers and join humanity or to retain their genetic anomalies but remain alienated. The good mutants are again led by Professor X, an amenable advocate of peaceful co-existence, while the evil ones abide by the marching orders of the diabolical Magneto (Ian McKellen), a megalomaniac who opposes

the government's proposed genetic engineering as a form of ethnic cleansing. Given this thought provoking setup, one would reasonably expect a spirited debate at this juncture about the ethics of eliminating differences in such a fashion.

But no, instead, the picture plunges headlong into a non-stop display of technical wizardry as Magneto organizes an all-out assault against the Federal research lab located on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. Thus, a promising premise disintegrates into a special-effects-driven spectacular, with the screen seemingly cluttered with multiple mutants elbowing each other out of the way for a chance to showcase their special brand of magic.

Besides the aforementioned superheroes, reprising their roles are Anna Paquin as Rogue, James Marsden as Cyclops, Rebecca Romijn as Mystique, Shawn Ashmore as Iceman, Aaron Stanford as Pyro and Famke Janssen as Phoenix. Noteworthy cast additions include newcomers Kelsey Grammer as Beast, Dania Ramirez as Callisto, Ellen Page as Kitty, Ben Fos-

ter as Angel, Vinnie Jones as Juggernaut, Eric Dane as Multiple Man, Kea Wong as Jubilee, Luke Pohl as Flea, Shauna Kain as Siryn, Daniel Cudmore as Colossus, Cameron Bright as Leech, Ken Leung as Kid Omega, Mei Melancon as Psylocke, Lloyd Adams as Lizard Man, Lance Gibson as Spike, Vince Murdocco as Omega Red, Clayton Dean Watmough as Glob Herman, Omahyra as Arclight, Chris Claremont as Lawnmower Man, and X-Men creator Stan Lee as Waterhose Man.

As you might imagine, with so many characters vying for face time, it's best to forget about subtlety and substance. Nonetheless, "X-Men 3" is set to be a surefire kiddie crowd-pleaser, given the teeny-bop penchant for over-stimulating computer game warfare. PS: Stick around clear through the credits for a hint about whether "X-Men 4" might be in the works, despite this one being referred to as "The Last Stand."

Very Good (3 stars). Rated PG-13 for sex, expletives, intense action and high levels of gratuitous violence.

Prosecutor: Man who shot rapper Proof within rights

DETROIT (AP) - The man who police say shot and killed rapper Proof in a nightclub shootout acted lawfully in defense of another man, the county prosecutor said Tuesday.

But Mario Etheridge still will have to face weapons charges in the April 11 incident in which Etheridge's 35-year-old cousin Keith Bender also was killed.

Etheridge's lawyer has said his client fired a gun while trying to defend Bender during the April 11 fight at the CCC, an after-hours club on Detroit's Eight Mile Road.

"The evidence clearly shows that Mario Etheridge acted in lawful self-defense of another when he shot Deshaun Holton," Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy said at a news conference, using Proof's legal name. "Once the gunshots started, everything happened

fairly quickly."

She said Etheridge shot twice at the ceiling to stop Proof — who was a member of D12 and Eminem's best friend — before aiming the gun at him.

A message seeking comment was left Tuesday for Etheridge's lawyer, Randall Upshaw.

Bender's survivors filed a wrongful death lawsuit against Proof's estate on May 1.

Proof's attorney, David Gorosh, said in a statement released late Tuesday that he was gathering evidence in the civil suit that could lead the prosecutor's office to reconsider charges against Etheridge.

Upshaw has maintained that the 32-year-old Proof — who died with a blood alcohol level of 0.32 percent (four times the level considered drunk under Michigan law) — became belligerent during a

game of pool.

The man he argued with stopped to speak to him on his way out, Upshaw said, and Proof then argued with Bender and later returned with a gun, pistol-whipped Bender and shot him in the face.

Etheridge, who was working security at the club, took a gun from someone during the attack and fired it in defense of Bender, Upshaw said. But witnesses said Etheridge had two guns on him, Worthy said.

He earlier was charged with carrying a concealed weapon and unlawfully discharging a firearm in a building. Worthy said those charges would stand.

Etheridge's final pretrial court date is scheduled for Friday. If convicted, he faces up to five years in prison on the concealed weapon charge and four years on the discharging a firearm count.

JERRY'S NUGGET CASINO

THE ROYAL STREET THEATRE PRESENTS

MOTOWN

FRIDAYS
10 P.M. - 2 A.M.

In A Fect

June 2 and June 9

MOTOWN ANNIVERSARY PARTY

June 16

\$5

ENTRY PER GUEST

TWO DRINK MINIMUM PURCHASE REQUIRED PER GUEST
Bands subject to change. All guests must be 21.

1821 LAS VEGAS BLVD. N. - (702) 399-3000 www.jerrysnugget.com

JERRY'S NUGGET CASINO