

**X-Men: The Last Stand.** Directed by Brett Ratner. Starring Hugh Jackman, Halle Berry, Ian McKellen, Patrick Stewart, Kelsey Grammer (blue, if you can believe it), Rebecca Romijn (variously pronounced but ...woof! except blue and got warts), and Vinnie Jones, the big, lantern-jawed soccer star from You-rope, whom you mighta noticed in *Snatch* (“...because mine says ‘Desert Eagle Point Five Oh’ on it and yours says ‘Replica’...” deathless line to go down with Dirty Harry’s “...most powerful handgun in the world and would blow your head clean off...” or “It’s gonna be a bumpy night...” or “Frankly, my dear...” or “Squeal like a piggie...”) and the pathetic 2001 You-rop-ee-yan remake of *The Longest Yard* called *The Mean Machine* ...not to be confused with the pathetic American remake of *The Longest Yard* called *The Longest Yard*, one of those cinee-mah classics just screaming for an encore).

Come now the first *X-Men* to sing a muted hymn to troubled adolescence, that time when “mutations” in a boy’s or girl’s hormonal structure can lead to pubescent X-clusion, X-pulsion, X-nophobia, when alienation, confusion, despair can force a retreat into in-X-plicable cliquishness, clanishness, sulkiness; into X-acerbated selfaware-itude, self-absorbosity, self-centrospection: preening, keening, teening, mostly in the form of absurd hair, lingo, tight (fee-males) or loose (males) britches, Dad’s a dummie, and how would I look with a tattoo of the Chinese ideogram for “refined sugar” on my forehead? Sure enough, the X-Men (who include women and dunno with the cinee-mah-tic obsession over currency how that sobriquet—variously pronounced—escaped “mutation” into the X-Humans—“ex-humans,” get it? Whap! Sorry I hadda do that, but you drifted off over there again—or the X-Patriots or the X-iles on account of the Government (ptui!) is the source of all evil X-cept what business guys and science guys perpetrate... oh, yeah and Dad.

Probably safe enough to say that Halle Berry likely *is* a mutant. When was the last time you saw a woman looked like *that* in real life? And if you did, would you care what the weather is like? On the other hand, why would you take one of Hollywood’s real dolls and a) deprive her of even the whisper of a chance to *perform* and at same time b) slap a white wig on her then blink her eyeballs (apart from her umph umph and her umphety umphs her most expressive feature) up into her head. Likewise, what kind of wisdom hires side of beef(cake) Hugh Jackman and buries him in hair? Answer: Same kind that stars Kelsey Grammer (never a thespian, but a guy with *some* range... little enough of it dramatic, alas) but paints him blue (looks as if that ozone hole or the acid rain or the avian virus or whatever jinx *du jour* is gonna turn us all blue in the end, if Shape-Girl, Fog-Boy—from last time out—and now Beast-Guy offer any evidence), covers him (too) with hair and fetches him up a fifty-five-gallon drum chest. Frasier Crane as action hero?

Anyhow, that said *The Last Stand* is predictably filled with action (and sulky adolescents) and do-good-itude, the implication being that your comic-book-reading, rap-couplet-grooving lout of a teenage son, the one with the shaved head and the baggy britches down around of his knees, the one who can’t read the menu in McDonald’s is gonna save us all when the chips (not to say the britches) are down so be patient with him during his time to “mutate.” Oh, yeah... might’s well on account of there’s no cure for it and if there were, it’d be—like—bad! So it is, then, that a bazillionaire industrialist (ptui!) has

contrived a cure for mutantosis (backhanded advertence here to the genetic theory of sexuality and can *they* be cured/saved or at least made look like us regular guys?), mostly for the sake of his tortured son, (Teen) Angel, who has wings which is how you know a feller's an angel in the movies (*Michael*), a cure Mr. Industrialist (ptui!) proposes to dispense from a national string of clinics Mutant Cures R Us (or something). Some mutants bite; others don't. The Government (ptui!) insists it's all for the good of the population, enlisting Secretary of Mutant Affairs (Grammer), the Beast, to sell the scheme to both mutants and um, er... the rest of us. Magneto (tired old Ian McKellen and pretty much beyond the age of Spandex so they swaddle him in a cape... mercifully), leads a revolt of the different against the diffident... and we're off.

Now this film is called "The Last Stand," so be prepared to lose a few of our favorites, though in this world there's no guarantee (and thus no comfort) that "last" means *last*: for instance, you may (or may not) be pleased to discover that Jean Grey, killt off nobly in episode one, returns as—no!—Phoenix only bad this time around, kind of a "met-him-pike-hoses," as Molly Bloom has it, X-cept in reverse. Well, it does end with the world safe for us dumbos without powers, with oddly fitting disappearances for any number of the principals (not to say principles), with Wolverine (Jackman) a free radical and therefore vulnerable to fee-males of the mutated persuasion (these mutations most often taking the form of high cheekbones, pouty lips, tight jeans, be it noted), with industrialist father reunited to angelic (but tormented) teenage son, with the School for Mutants (might be one closer than you think around here... urf urf!) open for business and for X-hilarating discussions of the Ethic of Other.