

## Matthew Vaughn's Entertaining, Stylish 'X-Men: First Class' Rocks

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 2, 2011 - 6:26pm

- [Brian Tallerico](#) [2]
- [Bryan Singer](#) [3]
- [Fox](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [James McAvoy](#) [6]
- [January Jones](#) [7]
- [Jennifer Lawrence](#) [8]
- [Kevin Bacon](#) [9]
- [Marvel](#) [10]
- [Matthew Vaughn](#) [11]
- [Michael Fassbender](#) [12]
- [Movie Review](#) [13]
- [Nicholas Hoult](#) [14]
- [Rose Byrne](#) [15]
- [X-Men](#) [16]
- [X-Men: First Class](#) [17]



Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Matthew Vaughn rights the ship of mediocre superhero movies with the incredibly accomplished “X-Men: First Class,” the best Marvel Movie since “Spider-Man 2” and a film that proves that big blockbuster summer entertainment can be both commercially crowd-pleasing and intellectually complex at the same time. “X-Men: First Class” features a spectacular mix of well-choreographed action, revisionist history, themes of tolerance, and great performances. This will be one of the best movies of this season.

“X-Men: First Class” has already drawn numerous comparisons to other films in the Marvel canon but the work that it actually echoes is Christopher Nolan’s “Batman Begins.” Like that film, Vaughn has approached legendary characters from comic-dom after two horrendous sequels (“X-Men: The Last Stand” & “X-Men Origins: Wolverine” as compared to “Batman Forever” & “Batman & Robin”) and tweaked the origin stories of well-known superhero icons. And he’s done so with emotional gravity, style, and remarkable ambition. Like Nolan’s superhero films, “X-Men: First Class” deals with serious issues (acceptance, tolerance, personal responsibility, abuse of power), but does so with the touch of a showman who knows entertainment is his primary objective.



X-Men: First Class

*Photo credit: Fox*

The first act of “X-Men: First Class” brilliantly parallels the origins of a hero (Professor X) and a villain (Magneto). It will be decades before these characters become what they are to millions of comic and movie fans but the seeds are planted in youth. Charles Xavier (James McAvoy) develops tolerance by studying genetic mutations and becoming well-known in his field. He uses his own mutation, mental telepathy, as a parlor trick to meet girls but strives to keep the fact that he’s a mutant secret while also protecting his friend Raven/Mystique (Jennifer Lawrence).

Meanwhile, Erik Lehnsherr (Michael Fassbender) is tortured in a concentration camp after revealing his ability to warp metal (“First Class” opens with a variation on the same scene as Singer’s first film). Erik is tortured by the man who will eventually serve as the villain of the piece, Sebastian Shaw (Kevin Bacon), who we meet again years later as he has developed powers of his own and is trying to start World War III by using the U.S. and Russia against each other in a manipulation of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Shaw and his team (including January Jones as Emma Frost and Jason Flemyng as Azazel) can only be stopped after Charles, Raven, Erik, and Dr. Hank McCoy (Nicholas Hoult) find others like them, including a girl named Angel (Zoe Kravitz), and the young men who would later be known as Banshee (Caleb Landry Jones), Darwin (Edi Gathegi), and Havok (Lucas Till).

Great prequels offer new insight into what we already know about the characters we love while also working as standalone films. “X-Men: First Class” does all of the above. Purists will cry that the film completely demolishes the comic mythology (and doesn’t even fit that snugly with Singer’s films, although neither did Nolan’s prequel fit with Tim Burton’s “Batman”) but it’s true to the spirit, tone, and message, and that’s all that’s really important. At its core, this is a story about two men developing different ideologies about their role within the human race. Do you hide your differences? Do you use them to your advantage? Do you try to change them? Do you embrace them?



X-Men: First Class

Photo credit: Fox

One thing that elevates “X-Men: First Class” is a focus on performance and character, no more so than in Fassbender’s stunning work as the future Magneto. He gives the best performance in the history of Marvel, perfectly capturing a man tortured by his past, seeking revenge, and finding his path to pure evil. Fassbender is simply great here. To be fair, McAvoy is good, as is Lawrence, but they don’t get the arc that Michael does. As for the young cast, they’re quite good without being showy. The cast for “X-Men: First Class” is huge with dozens of speaking roles (we didn’t even mention Rose Byrne, Michael Ironside, or Oliver Platt) but they all feel right. Credit should go to Matthew Vaughn and his producers for assembling such a strong team.

As for the action, Vaughn proved he could do it with at least the final reel of “Kick-Ass” but he’s actually much more reserved here. It’s not just the time period but the action feels more old-fashioned than we’ve become accustomed to in the Michael Bay era. The final conflict is expertly conceived and executed to work both thematically and as entertainment.

Some of these themes are hit a little too squarely in the long second act and I don’t believe the film needed to be quite so long. A few of the “*Mutant and proud*” moments could have been trimmed and audiences would have still gotten the same points, but it’s a minor complaint about a work that holds together thematically as well as any superhero movie. It’s not quite as tight as Raimi or Nolan’s second films although it certainly bears up under comparison to their first ones. Which means one thing – “X-Men: Second Class” could be our next superhero masterpiece.

*“X-Men: First Class” stars James McAvoy, Michael Fassbender, Jennifer Lawrence, January Jones, Jason Flemyng, Nicholas Hoult, Caleb*

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*Landry Jones, Edi Gathegi, Lucas Till, Zoe Kravitz, Rose Byrne, Oliver Platt, and Kevin Bacon. It was written by Ashley Edward Miller & Zack Stentz and Jane Goldman & Matthew Vaughn and directed by Vaughn. It is rated PG-13 and opens on June 3rd, 2011.*



[18]

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