

Quicksilver Takes the Gold: "X-Men: Days of Future Past"

Written by Mike Schulz
Monday, 26 May 2014 16:54

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X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

Director Bryan Singer's *X-Men: Days of Future Past* opened this past weekend, and generally speaking, I liked it. At random moments throughout, I even loved it. And in one glorious, exquisitely crafted sequence about 40 minutes into the picture, I even fell madly *in* love with it.

If you've also seen this seventh entry in the franchise that began with Singer's 2000 *X-Men*, you doubtless know which sequence I'm talking about. For the uninitiated, however, it takes place in 1973. Arriving from a war-torn year in the not-too-distant, post-2014 future, Hugh Jackman's Wolverine has time-traveled to the Nixon era to (a) enlist the aid of Charles Xavier and Erik "Magneto" Lehnsherr, (b) stop the shape-shifting Mystique from assassinating the mutant-loathing scientist Bolivar Trask, and (c) prevent the worldwide extermination of mutants at the hands of Trask's merciless robot Sentinels. (The film's plotting is even more labyrinthine than this sentence suggests, yet screenwriter Simon Kinberg's numerous, dovetailing storylines are delivered with remarkable lucidity.) After James McAvoy's Xavier and his ally, Nicholas Hoult's Beast, are recruited to the cause, we learn that Michael Fassbender's Erik is currently in custody at the Pentagon, being held on suspicion of murdering JFK. (In a great dark joke, Magneto's powers are presumed responsible for the trajectory of the "magic bullet" that killed Kennedy.) A prison break is therefore mandatory, and it's suggested that the free mutants seek the help of the goofy young slacker Peter (

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American Horror Story

's Evan Peters), a.k.a. Quicksilver, who's able to run at the speed of light. Long story short: best idea ever

Peter does indeed release Erik from his subterranean cell, yet before they and their mutant allies can make their escape, the men find themselves in a Pentagon kitchen swarmed by armed police officers who immediately open fire. What happens next, meanwhile, may constitute the wittiest, funniest, most joyous 60 seconds in the history of cinematic superhero sagas. With the action taking place in slow motion and, hilariously, Jim Croce's "Time in a Bottle" on the soundtrack, the clearly delighted Peter races through the kitchen and along its walls; gently scoots the whizzing bullets away from our heroes' bodies; rearranges the cops' fists so they'll punch each other (and themselves) out; and even takes time to sample the meat gravy spinning through the air. Once this slow-mo Croce segment ends, we watch as, in an instant, the bullets miss their marks and the officers fall to the ground unconscious, and Wolverine and his companions stare at Peter's doings with looks of "What the hell just *happened*?"

Peter, for his part, just smiles. But back in the real world, the audience – or, at least, *my* audience – bursts into spontaneous, wholly deserved applause.



If it seems that I've spent an inordinate amount of wordage on this particular scene, that's completely intentional, because *Days of Future Past's* Pentagon escape highlights everything that's most wonderful about Singer's latest, and suggests how the film, and maybe all current films in its genre, could've been more wonderful still. Can you imagine a superhero epic in which a scene of this caliber – inventive, hysterical, utterly surprising – was the norm rather than the exception? One in which the crowd actually clapped at the narrative's climax instead of merely at a mid-movie show-stopper?

As with all über-expensive comic-book blockbusters, this newest *X-Men*, prior to its more subdued postscript, ends with 20-plus minutes of pounding, clanging, thunderously boring action; heroes bash robots, robots bash heroes, heroes and robots bash against crumbling edifices You know the drill. Yet while the visual effects are impressive and yadda yadda yadda, nothing in these scenes of outsize peril is of any true *interest*

. Sure, the occasional "meaningful" death may result near the finales of comic-book movies,

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such as Jean Grey's demise in the Brett Ratner-directed *X-Men: The Last Stand*.

But nearly without fail, character and story are swallowed whole whenever there's an onslaught of CGI wizardry dominating the screen, and this sad fact holds true even for an outing as fundamentally clever as

Days of Future Past

. By now, and I expect I'm not alone in this, I've seen so many digitized "miracles" in superhero flicks that this film's Sentinel attacks and floating sports stadium evince nothing so much as yawns; Singer's work becomes duller than hell at the exact moments it should thrill the bejeezus out of us.

Yet why get in a dither about the movie when so much of it is so spectacularly satisfying? The cast, it should go without saying, helps tremendously; beyond the contributions of the aforementioned stars, we're treated to juicy turns by Jennifer Lawrence as Mystique, Peter Dinklage (with a porno mustache) as Trask, and the always reliable one-two punch of Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen. (Several other familiar characters make appearances, too, including – contrary to previous reports – Anna Paquin's Rogue.) And while excited gasps may never occur, dozens of random chuckles absolutely do. The '70s-time-travel element yields many fantastic gags, including Wolverine's shock at the sight of his pre-adamantium claws, and you may find it impossible not to giggle, at the very end, when you realize that *Days of Future Past's* inspiration, overall, is less Stan Lee than

Back to the Future-
meets-

Groundhog Day.

Does anyone else think this is absolutely the preferable way to go? Wouldn't you rather attend, say, a lighthearted, superhero-flavored heist comedy – an

Ocean's Eleven

for X-Men – than yet another tired, apocalyptic slugfest? For years now, comic-book movies have cornered the market on seriousness. Maybe it's time for them to fully, finally, embrace the "comic."

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