



By Paul Wardle

Directing the \$75 million Hollywood epic the X-MEN is a task that few could handle. The comic boasts a team of superheroes, each with different powers, personalities and nationalities. Singer's suitability for the assignment stirred controversy with comic fans because of his lack of familiarity with the comic book. Singer's previous directorial credits include *THE USUAL SUSPECTS*, *APT PUPIL* and the short, *LION'S DEN*. All have won awards.

Singer is energetic and soft-spoken, with a mind that always seems elsewhere. Last February, he was about to wrap up his 91st. and final day of shooting. These final scenes were being filmed in an abandoned distillery on Toronto's western wa-

Hugh Jackman raves as Wolverine, makeup designed by Gord Smith. Below: Storm (Halle Berry) faces off against Sabretooth (Tyler Mane). Below: The comic's Storm and Rogue.



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MARVEL SUPERHEROES

terfront.

"My partners are huge [X-Men] fans," Singer began, "and I do nothing, repeat, nothing without their full support. I have the perspective of someone who's coming in fresh, just trying to make a good movie. I have objectivity, but I also have the consultation of people who are fanboys. So you can tell all the fanboys who are [writing about me on the Internet] that I'm approaching this like a fanboy. I have no choice. But very often these films based on comics get mired in the lore so much that the fans are disappointed because the story [that made the comic good] is not there, and the non-fans are not enticed into this universe, because it's not a good movie. Even if fans are unsatisfied, they shouldn't [blame] my lack of fanaticism, because that presence is definitely [on the set], in my producers and collaborators on this film."

Heading up the crack production team working on the X-MEN movie are executive producer Tom DeSanto and producer Ralph Winter. With his boyish charm, stocky but athletic build, and side-parted hair, DeSanto could pass for one of the superhero actors he works with. Winter looks older, but is no less energetic. An X-Men fan from way back, DeSanto can rhyme off trivia like the proverbial chapter and verse.

The two work closely with director Bryan Singer, as well as co-producers Lauren Shuler Donner, whose well-known husband Richard is also an executive producer.

The \$75 million budget has not been exceeded, but as Winter pointed out with a laugh, "Nobody's going to say, 'Hey! Let's go see that movie that

"Often these films based on comics get mired in the lore so much that the fans are disappointed because the story [that made the comic good] isn't there."



Patrick Stewart stars as the wheelchair-bound Professor Xavier, out to save mankind from a war with evil mutants. Fox opens the film nationwide July 14.

came in under budget!" Therefore, the producers have been careful to spend a large portion of the total budget (at least 15-20%) on special effects. There are 300-400 effects shots in the movie. This requires two (sometimes as many as four) separate units shooting each of the 91 days allotted.

The plot of the movie concerns Logan, primarily known as Wolverine in the comics, who stumbles upon this school for mutants, and the X-Men, mutants who are using their powers to defend mankind. "We see this strange group of mutants through his eyes," explained Singer.

It is a secret organization, an

ultra-private school run by the wheelchair-bound Professor Xavier. "They're preparing for conflict, and to prevent that conflict, so that one race of mankind doesn't wipe out the other, which is quite possible, with mutants of such power."

Singer said the central themes of his X-MEN are "prejudice, overcoming self-loathing and understanding one's place in the world. Those are universal concepts, for young people particularly."

The opposing forces in the central conflict of the movie are good mutants versus evil mutants, with Professor X on one side and Magneto, the super-villain who leads The Brotherhood

Of Evil Mutants, on the other. "One says, 'There cannot be conflict,'" noted Singer, "and the other says, 'By any means necessary.' They're two men cut from similar cloths. They are just going in different directions. Magneto's direction is wrong. He believes a war is coming and there's no necessity for that belief."

There were numerous delays in starting production, which finally began September 27, 1999. To start with, Hugh Jackman, who plays Wolverine, wasn't available until November. He was only the second choice, after another actor was bounced back and forth, and eventually bowed out due to injury and a prior commitment. Ian McKellen, who portrays Magneto, Master Of Magnetism and the X-Men's arch-nemesis, had to leave only a couple of months later to start shooting LORD OF THE RINGS in New Zealand. There were even alternate choices for which female characters to include as late as last spring.

Ralph Winter, whose lengthy list of credits include two STAR TREK movies, claimed working on those movies prepared him for the kind of fanatical response this film is likely to garner. The way to approach a film like this, he said, involves "reaching your core audience, but also reach out to new viewers. We're flying in the face of reality here. They [the actors portraying the super-powered mutants] can't all look like Schwarzenegger, so what do you do, pad everyone?"

In addition to these concerns, Winter claimed, "It's a challenge to put boundaries around their powers. Each character possesses enormous powers, but also enormous deficien-

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WOLVERINE HUGH JACKMAN

*An Aussie debuts as
Marvel's popular X-hero.*

By Paul Wardle

For years, fans of the *X-Men* comics have speculated as to who might play their favorite heroes if ever a movie should be released. Of all the characters those fans have wished to see depicted on the big screen, perhaps none was so eagerly anticipated as the coveted role of Wolverine. Any guesses that may have been made have no doubt turned out to be wrong. A relative unknown in Hollywood, Hugh Jackman is an Australian actor whose most important credits were in stage productions. He has won awards in both England and Australia for his roles in musicals like "Oklahoma" and "Sunset Boulevard."

Now don't go getting the wrong idea. Jackman is not some pantywaist choirboy. Watching scenes where he fights larger men, threatening to slash a thug's face with his adamantium claws, it is evident that in the course of over 91 days of filming that have taken place since shooting of THE X-MEN started

in September, 1999, Jackman has become the living embodiment of Wolverine. The character is one of Marvel's most violent, and yet a strangely complex personality with a background shrouded in mystery. Logan is a mutant who possesses a hatred for practically everyone and everything, and the metal claws that burst through sheaths in his wrist, can cut almost any substance to ribbons.

"At times it's a little daunting," said Jackman when asked how it feels to play such a character. "I was at lunch today with a guy who'd been reading [*X-Men* comics] for years. His dog is named Logan! Another guy in a health food store told me he has friends with Wolverine tattoos! If these people don't like my performance, they're going to come after me!"

Since in the comics Wolverine is Canadian, Jackman noted Canadian fans are adamant that he must be played as a Canadian. This is especially obvious to Jackman, who has been shooting in the cities of Toronto, Hamil-

Jackman springs into action as Wolverine, holding adversaries at bay with metal claws that burst through sheaths in his wrists, makeup by Gord Smith.



Director Bryan Singer sets-up a shot in the lair of Magneto, who leads the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants.

cies. Each character has a struggle to deal with. Professor Xavier has vast mental powers, yet he's crippled. Cyclops has these incredible eye beams, yet he can't take off his glasses [for fear of hurting innocent people]. Jimmy [James Marsden, who plays Cyclops in the movie] has lost one of the greatest tools an actor has...his eyes. He has to play every scene behind a visor, or glasses."

Singer chose beautiful Dutch actress Famke Janssen to play Jean Grey, the redheaded telekinetic who's romantically attached to group leader Scott Summers. Grey, known in the comics as Marvel Girl and then as Phoenix; and Summers, (also known as Cyclops) are the Professor's chief assistants in readying the newer mutants for battle. "I wanted to go with a mature Jean Grey," Singer explained, "because I was playing Rogue very young. I wanted to take some of the attributes of Kitty Pryde, Jubilee and Rogue and sort of merge them into a young Rogue. So then I needed someone who's more of a woman to balance out Rogue. In casting a younger Cyclops and an older Wolverine, there's an imbalance that can occur. It's part of that weird thing about casting an ensemble and trying to keep it interesting."

The audience's entry into the storyline, particularly for viewers unfamiliar with the comic

book series, centers around the characters of Logan [Wolverine] and Rogue. According to Singer, "It takes the essence of that lost feeling of waking up one morning and realizing you're different from everyone else. It takes two characters who deal with that, both in similar and different ways, and brings them together. Here I think we have a superhero comic movie that women can appreciate every bit as much as men."

Singer described Wolverine as "a book that thinks he's closed, and a person looking for answers to a past that has been erased from his mind." Despite the violent nature of Wolverine's psyche, actor Hugh Jackman has brought to the character, in Singer's words, "a kind of sweetness. He's played all kinds of characters. He brought dimension to the character, and the physical qualities to do actions quickly."

Wolverine is among the most popular of the X-Men characters among comic book fans. Why does Jackman think this character has sustained such great popularity over the years? "He's got a sense of humor," the actor replied. "He's funny, and unpredictable, and very tough, but in a believable way. And he's flawed. I'm sure he would do things differently if he thought them through, but he doesn't. All young boys want to be like Wolverine, because he's not bound by anything. He doesn't care what anyone thinks about him. He lives his life exactly as he wants to, and he says and does what he wants. It would be pretty free being Wolverine in real life."

To research the workings of special effects for this project, Singer was allowed to hang around George Lucas during the making of STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM MENACE. "I also visited James Cameron on TITANIC, and was able to preview all the effects on that picture," he said. "I have a great visual effects supervisor, Mike Fink, who I trust a lot. It's just a tool, like cinematography, like any of the other things you have to learn when you make your first feature."

The casting of Patrick Stewart as Professor Xavier is one of the few choices that fans can't





Jackman as Logan, a reluctant superhero consumed by hatred for both his fellow mutants and mankind, selecting a uniform at X-Men headquarters.

“It’s a fine line we walk between making this movie real and still maintaining the essence of the story,” said actor Hugh Jackman, “without it being two-dimensional.”

ton, and the town of Oshawa; his first trip to Canada. “No, no, no. [the guy said] If you don’t play him Canadian, you’re in trouble!” So of course on the set, there’s a hockey stick hanging there and I had to ask for a case of ‘ExI [Molson Export Beer].”

One expression that Canadians do not use, but is a staple of Wolverine’s dialogue in the comics is the word “Bub,” which he uses to refer to just about anybody. For the fans who have just got to know, Jackman does throw in a couple of “Bubs” here and there. “Twice so far. It hasn’t actually been in the script, but I’ve just slipped it in a couple of times. Hopefully it will make it into the movie.

“It’s a fine line we walk between making this movie real and still maintaining the essence of the story,” Jackman continued, “without it being two-dimensional in any way. My hair, for example. We had to work on that for a long time, because all the fans have got to be able to say from the first moment, ‘That’s Wolverine!’ but by the same token, he’s got to be able to have a drink in a bar without anybody thinking, ‘Who’s this freak?’ The more I find out about [Wolverine], the more of a responsibility and an honor it is, because this character, in people’s imaginations, is larger than life.”

Wolverine doesn’t require

the amount of body makeup or prosthetics that is necessary for other mutant characters in the film, but the claws have to be attached to his wrist. They have to move with agility, and look like they are actually a part of his arms. They are also extremely sharp and dangerous. They are, after all, a weapon. How did Jackman adjust to these new appendages?

“I’ve got a nice scar just here on my leg, actually,” Jackman revealed while pointing out the portion of his knee to which he referred. “The X-Men uniforms that we wear have padding built into them around the knee. Thank goodness, because we have to jump around on them. It’s high density rubber, which is one centimeter thick. I was [shooting] the fight with Sabertooth, and I punctured straight through [the padding to my knee]. I don’t even know how I did it. I remember thinking it was sore, but at the end of the day, I took off the suit, and there was a huge red patch. I had punctured straight through the skin. The first claws I had were razor sharp, and I said, ‘This is ridiculous. I could kill somebody.’ Having done stage fighting, getting used to that extra nine inches [in front of your fist] is the hardest part, because you keep wanting to get in close to the [person you are fighting],

but you don’t have to.”

Of course Jackman is not doing all the stunts himself, but the major portion of the fight scenes are in close-ups and medium shots, and much of that is Jackman. “We had three straight weeks of work with the stunt guys,” said Jackman. “I had to kind of [learn] the fighting style of Wolverine, and how he uses those claws, because he’s the best at what he does. He can’t look like an amateur.”

Jackman is no stranger to fight scenes from his work in the theatre, and in independent films in his native land. “I had four years of training as an actor. I have never trained fully in martial arts, but done enough to adapt. Specifically I trained for this. Wolverine’s a street fighter. He’s quick; he’s smart; but it’s not pretty. There isn’t *anything* pretty about what he does, and it’s unpredictable. He’s not in there to spar with you. If he can slash your head off in one [motion], that’s what he’ll do, because he doesn’t want to stick around.”

Like many involved in this production, Jackman was not an X-Men fan when he took on this role. “Bryan [Singer] didn’t want me to read any [X-Men comic books]!” he revealed. “But I’ve read quite a lot. [The comics] have been a great influence on me in getting how he is; how he draws his claws, and the history.

Of the climactic fight with Sabertooth, the huge animalistic villain played by Tyler Mane, Jackman was unintimidated, despite the fact that Mane is an ex-wrestler, and weighs 270 pounds. “I never worried about it. It was only later that I realized I could have easily poked him in the eye [with the claws], but at the time, it was great fun. At one point, we were going so hard, I started getting this huge headache, and before you know it, I had heat exhaustion. You’d think a guy from Australia would be [unsusceptible] to

that, but I was in the trailer vomiting. It’s so hot in those suits.”

Not only is it hot, but sometimes painful as well, as Jackman explained, “There was one point when we were shooting a scene where I was falling down, and stuck my claws in the side of a building to [break my fall], and I’m hundreds of feet in the air. I was dropped with my full weight and I had a harness on at the time that was around my groin, and somehow in mid-flight, my balls got entangled. I still wince thinking about it.”

At the time, Jackman screamed a four-letter word, and called for someone to get him out of there. “But that was just as painful. They’re yanking me up, basically by my balls. As I got out, I couldn’t help crying. That was definitely the last take of that day. The director was asking the cameramen if they got it [on film], because he knew he got a realistic reaction shot, and also he knew I wouldn’t be shooting anymore.”

Moving in Wolverine’s costume was also not easy at first,

The comic’s Wolverine, teamed with Cyclops. Jackman read the comics to add nuance to his performance.



said Jackman. “[Wolverine] is a reluctant member of the group and [therefore] a reluctant uniform wearer. So he gets a uniform which is not his. It wasn’t made for him. So we made out that it was very tight on him. In fact all the costumes are very tight. They wanted them to look sleek. These things are very expensive, and made of leather, and it was very difficult to move. I couldn’t bend down at first. We did one scene where I was dropping onto the floor, and when I landed, the seat of my pants went [makes ripping sound]. After that, it was perfect,” he joked.

“We’d just try to work [the costumes] in: wear them in the trailer; try to eat lunch in them; by now they feel like a second skin.”

Unlike other members of the X-Men, Wolverine is not keen to join at all, preferring instead to stay on his own. He would have nothing to do with both mutants and humans, if he had his way, with only a few exceptions. As Jackman explained it, “At the end of the movie, he’s a reluctant member, but still very distant. One of the key relationships that’s being explored in this movie is the Rogue-Logan relationship. After a while, without expecting to, or wanting to, he begins to care about this little girl, and she looks up to him for that protection in this world. Not only in the outside world, but also in the world of mutants. Even in Professor Xavier’s presence, she still looks up to [Logan]. I understand that in the comic book, there was only one issue where you saw her as a teenager. This movie is exploring, particularly with Rogue, that point at which a mutant discovers that they are different, and how they cope with it.”

According to Jackman, Logan gravitates towards Rogue, because he senses a kindred spirit in her isolation. “Logan represents, for the audience, that person who is skeptical of everything; the uniforms, the names that everybody [is given], and what they stand for. He kind of sits in the middle of the Xavier and Magneto camps. Through him, the audience can come into this world.

“The X-Men represent tolerance,” Jackman continued. “You’ve got The Brotherhood

“As an actor [Patrick Stewart] is consummate,” said Jackman. “When he walks onto the set there’s a different atmosphere. His passion is never-ending.”



Jackman as Wolverine faces-off against Ian McKellan as Magneto on a speeding train, refusing to join in the mutant supervillain’s war on mankind.



Of Evil Mutants, The X-Men, and then you’ve got Senator Kelly, who represents a part of mankind that doesn’t understand these other two camps. Logan is not a part of any of those. He’s a mutant and he knows that, but he’s not necessarily flaunting it. When you discover Logan, he would be very happy going through life without anybody knowing who he was. This is the point in his life where we find him, so it’s a good journey for him as well. 15 years ago, he was experimented on, and he doesn’t know anything about his past and isn’t happy with what’s happened to

him. He hasn’t worked out exactly how he feels about [being a mutant]. Now we can explore where all Logan’s anger comes from. No one is just angry. The movie’s trying to establish a believable background to all the characters. People who are going to see this movie who don’t know anything about X-Men. They have to be brought into it, to understand what a mutant is. The audience will work that out for themselves. It’s not spelled out.”

When Jackman first sent in an audition tape, he was one of thousands that director Bryan Singer considered for the role.

He was called back in 1998, but was embroiled in another commitment. They wanted Jackman to do a screen test for Singer in Los Angeles, but in the meantime, another actor who was originally chosen, became unavailable. Then the actor was back again, and Jackman finished his play, and went back to Australia. He was about to start another film there, when he got the call to play Wolverine.

“I started filming a month into the shoot [in 1999], so for them it was a pretty scary time, because it was a leading role, and they still hadn’t cast it. My final audition was in a set that serves as the Senate room, where they’re going to discuss the Mutant Registration Act.”

Besides Rogue, another of the important relationships Logan makes during the course of the film is between him and Professor Charles Xavier, mentor and benefactor of the X-Men. As Hugh Jackman explained it, this is a relationship of equals. “Logan is the least reverential person around [Professor X]. There’s one scene where I call him ‘Chuck.’ No one else has even called him Charles. Logan deliberately makes jokes about him, but there’s an underlying respect he has for him. Certainly, by the end of this movie, once he understands what Professor X is about, he becomes very loyal and respectful. He would probably do anything for the professor. To win Logan’s respect is difficult and Professor X wins it by the end of the movie. He understands that the professor is genuine and sometimes will say, ‘I don’t know.’ Logan finds that refreshing. They also realize that they need each other, and that Professor X offers to help Logan with some of these questions about his past.”

Working with Patrick Stewart, who stars as Xavier, was wonderful, said Jackman. “As an actor, he’s consummate. When he walks onto the set, there’s a different atmosphere. His passion for the piece is never-ending. He’s a very giving actor. He will discuss and question the script a lot. He’s got a sense of quiet authority about him. He commands attention as a person, and it’s magnified as an actor.” □

really argue about. "A bald man who looks good sitting in a chair, giving orders?" Singer laughed. Of working with the veteran actor, Singer noted, "Charming to work with. He's a really fine actor, so that makes my job a lot easier. But trying to take you away from thinking about Captain Picard is the first order of business. A lot of detail: speech, wardrobe, attitude; all these things had to be discussed early on with Patrick, to find a way to shake that. There's also some good to bring out of that. In any other film, he's a wonderful, bald actor. In a genre picture, he's a superstar... in my opinion."

In contrasting Xavier from Picard, Singer said, "I think Picard is more of a soldier, and, as much as he loves his crew, they are still the crew. The X-Men are more like a family. Xavier is more responsible for them. He is more like their teacher. STAR TREK is a government exploration team. Here, they are more like outcasts. They're running a more private, intimate operation. And unlike Picard who is already the captain of a ship when we meet him, here we see the very beginning stages of Xavier building the school and bringing these people together."

Singer also alluded to the fact that other characters and concepts that have not yet been used may find their way into future sequels, if any. Specifically, he referred to The Danger Room, a mechanized enclosure designed to keep the X-Men on their toes with a constant bar-



The X-Men spring into action (l to r), Famke Janssen as Jean Grey, Halle Berry as Storm and James Marsden as Cyclops. Right: Magneto, their comic book adversary.

rage of weaponry to dodge. He also would have liked to use The Beast, one of the original X-Men, who, along with Cyclops and Marvel Girl, was created in 1963. Gambit and Nightcrawler are other characters that may make their way into a sequel, and many different villains from the comics will be considered.

For the last three years, Singer, who had never read the X-Men comics before, has been catching up on what he missed, consulting fans on the crew as well as learning the history of the group. Certain characters have become composites, most notably Rogue. "She's not the Rogue most of you know," said Singer. "She's young, innocent, with almost no life experience. She's run away and she just discovers all this through very innocent eyes. She is kind of a

merger of these younger X-characters and I used her as a vessel, because I found her mutation so vital to telling the story and so extraordinary. It's so indicative of the curse of being a mutant. To have this amazing power, but at the same time, the inability to touch or be touched."

Singer rejected the first two scripts he was shown, before settling on the present adaptation. "They didn't have a soul," he said of the early drafts. "This is a more retro-comedy/drama. I deal more with the origins. I wanted to develop it more."

The difficulty in making something like this come to life is multiplied by its ensemble nature. Instead of dealing with one person's powers/problems/conflict, you have five or six X-Men to deal with at a time. "When I meet [X-MEN comic] fans and hear the questions they ask me, [with some of them, their] perspective is so narrow, so specific. It's tens of thousands of pieces of material over nearly four decades. You have to get to what is at the heart of The X-Men. I owe it to fans of this series to make a serious film. Sure, there's humor and action and fun, but ultimately, I take it very seriously. We're trying to make this kind of movie for \$75 million. Very difficult!"

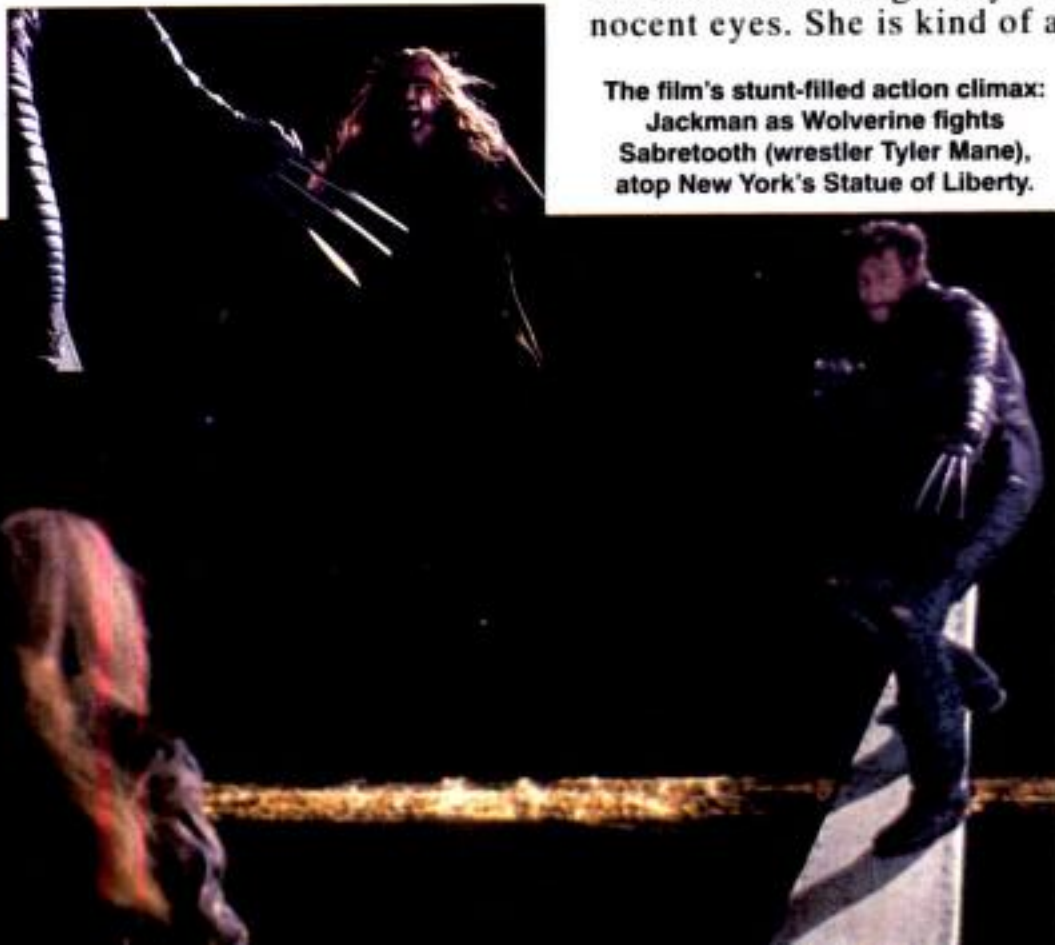
So what things did he have to cut out to get the film in under budget? "You want to do them initially, and all of a sudden, as you're making your



movie, you realize that you don't need them. Things like The Danger Room. I could've had a Danger Room, and then that sequence would've taken a certain amount of time and money from other sequences that I like better. That's an example of something we toyed with early on, and when we looked at the price tag, in the end I didn't think it was necessary. In TITANIC, there were many sequences filmed, that ultimately were cut. I'm not in a position to cut sequences. I shoot the sequences I'm going to put on film. Some things get cut, but not a lot."

According to Singer, the reason for Fox capping the budget at \$75 million was due to there being "No major stars, and you factor in the amount of money that you're going to be spending on the campaign, which, with all these kinds of movies is significant. I haven't compromised

The film's stunt-filled action climax: Jackman as Wolverine fights Sabretooth (wrestler Tyler Mane), atop New York's Statue of Liberty.



X-MEN

GORD SMITH MAKEUP EFFECTS

The Canadian effects ace on realizing comic book design and fantasy action.

anything. I made my film."

To make characters like this real for the viewers is difficult, noted Singer. But he approaches the problem with this in mind: "The great thing about the X-Men is, as larger-than-life as they seem, with all these physical attributes, at the core, the essence of their characters is very specific. They're still human beings. The story takes place in Washington and parts of Canada, places that are real."

Besides the settings, other things about the storyline will, Singer claimed, be easily identifiable to first-time viewers. "I think every young person goes through a stage in life," Singer said, "when they feel ostracized."

Singer had his own ideas about the redesigning of the X-Men costumes. Though he is duty-bound not to describe them in detail, he did note, "I wanted something that merged original designs with something more sexy, yet that would be practical." The uniforms are made from a variety of materials, including leather.

In the film, political forces within the U.S. government want to wipe out mutants, or at least incarcerate them. "Some right-wing Senators have certain opinions about it," said Singer. "Other people are letting it go. It's where we would be on any issue. Magneto is

The fate of humanity hangs in the balance as Sabretooth and Mystique enter the sanctum of the X-Men.

By Paul Wardle

On a lonely, industrial service road that runs behind The Kodak Building in a north-western district of Toronto, lies an unimpressive office. At the front of the low-rise industrial structure are two black doors. The only marking on the building is a small plaque between the doors that reads FXSMITH. The interior is surprisingly clean and stylish, and reflective of the man who toils here: special effects maverick Gord Smith. Smith's experiments with translucent silicone for skin tissue have set a new standard for film realism.

A quiet, retiring man, the grey-bearded Smith carries himself with a foppish dignity that recalls Charles Laughton in *THE ISLAND OF LOST SOULS*. When Smith exhibits his toothy grin, he could easily pass for a mad scientist in an old B-movie. The X-MEN movie required Smith to design The Toad's darting tongue, Wolverine's adamantium claws and Mystique's unique body paint and scaly body. "In a very general sense I've been responsible for the looks of all the characters," said Smith. "I've been supervising the special makeup effects, hair and wigs."

Four different sets of claws for the character of Wolverine had to be built and grafted on to the arms of Hugh Jackman and various stuntmen. "The claws were dealt within a number of different ways," he said. "All four of the Logans [the given name of Wolverine's character]



Smith, the Toronto makeup specialist who switched from acting to effects work to cure himself of a childhood phobia of blood.

have individual, custom-made claws that they wear. They just kind of hold on to them in the palms of their hands and squeeze their fist. They're custom formed to fit over their knuckles so that it looks like the claws are coming out of their hand. That way it's safe. They can put them down rather than walk around with a set of ginsu kitchen knives all the time they're on set."

In the comic books, Wolverine's claws are retractable, though they emerge from sheaths in his wrist rather than between his fingers like those of a cat. How was Smith able to make this look believable? "I have mechanical arms that were made with blades shooting out and retracting, Smith explained. "Also, a lot of the stuff that's in action is being done with CG [computer animation]. If it's a wide shot and we see the full

figure, with the blades retracting and shooting out, those are done with CG. Any time it's a close-up to establish detail, it's live."

What character's makeup provided the biggest challenge? "The major character for me has been Mystique," he said. Played in the film by the gorgeous Rebecca Romijn-Stamos, Mystique can metamorphose into any shape, and normally had dark blue skin, with scaly growths on her back and legs. Her costume is the most nude of all the female characters and this means tons of body makeup which took eight women to apply. "She wears about 75 prosthetics that are of a new technology that we've developed where, in this particular case, we can reuse the prosthetics. We don't glue the prosthetics down except on the very edges, the rest of it is self-sticking. It's reasonably comfortable for the actress. We don't have to cover her in glue. Most of her body is covered in scales, and then the rest of her body we spray blue."

The prosthetics used in the movie for skin contact are primarily made from a process which Smith developed himself, and which other makeup artists have been trying to accomplish for over 40 years. The innovations Smith has created have made him one of the most sought after of movie makeup men. Silicone is used in connection with, or instead of, latex, and the pliability of the substance creates a translucent quality that makes it more moveable and realistic looking





Rebecca Romijn-Stamos as Mystique, body paint and 75 prosthetic pieces applied by a team of eight women. Right: One of Magneto's aquatic henchmen.

than was ever possible with previous time honored methods.

Despite the fact that Smith has been conducting his research and development for the past seven years, he claims the silicone prosthetics used in X-MEN have taken the science-fiction of fake skin to even more amazing levels. The reusable, self-sticking prosthetics are also used on the character of Sabertooth. "We don't need to really make them up, except to shift color. When he gets excited, we add red, for instance.

One of the crosses actors have to bear is the removal of makeup. Fake beards, hair or prosthetics were glued on with spirit gum in the past. Boris Karloff screamed obscenities in the 1930's when the eyelids he wore as the Frankenstein Monster were ripped off at the end of a shooting day.

"We haven't had to have a dermatologist on the set yet," Smith reported proudly. "We've been shooting for a very long time, and they have to wear the prosthetic for many hours every day. It's not painful at all in this particular case, except for Mystique, and that's mostly because of the paint. We have to paint her entire body; her face, in her ears, up her nose, around her eyes, and we use a water-proof

paint so that sweat doesn't affect it in any way.

"In order for the paint to be waterproof," Smith continued, "it has to be suspended in an alcohol base, and you just spray her in a well-ventilated room and mask her. Once it's on, it's quite permanent. Taking it off is a little labor intensive, but it comes off with adhesive removers and creams and things."

Originally, X-MEN was to have been completed in 91 days, but Smith said it would continue until March in Toronto, and then resume in California. "It changes hourly," remarked Smith. "We're making stuff up as we go along, but I'm prepared, because it was obvious at the beginning of the picture that it was going to go that way."

A tight-fitting glove gives the impression that Wolverine's claws are of his hands, but the claws are still dangerous, and if not for the skill of Hugh Jackman's fighting, serious injuries could easily occur. Padding between the blades and his hand is some protection for Jackman, but he still has to be ultra-careful. "Anything banging into the end of those claws levers them into the top of his hand," said Smith. "We have real blades for

"Phobias are a dangerous thing if they get out of hand," said Smith. So I either had to put myself in the hospital...or do it myself, and get paid for it."

punching through walls, plastic extruded blades for general usage, and rubber blades for getting close in stuntwork."

Far from being problematic to translate comic book fiction into realistic designs, Smith reported, "I think it's the easiest gig I've ever had in my life." The fantastic elements of the story were a refreshing change after the high-realism effects he is usually called upon to do. "Within the fantasy world, you end up with a fair bit of dramatic license. You

which creates a separation between the lens and her pupil and iris. I won't allow her to wear lenses more than four hours a day."

Black binders full of color and black-and-white photos of Smith's work are on display in his office, where two antique roll-top desks still function as intended. The gore and makeup effects seen in the photos make one wonder what kind of background or education prepares a man for this type of career. The answer is never what you expect.

"I've been in the theatre all my life. I'm a classically trained actor. I've had three theatres of my own," he said, and then revealed the main reason for his sudden change in careers. "I had a really bad blood phobia and decided to deal with it. A chance allowed me the opportunity to get into the film industry and deal



with it [that way]."

His crippling fear of blood surfaced in his childhood due to his father's death from leukemia. He underwent therapy, but nothing worked until he turned to the business of manufacturing fake blood and gore for the movies. Once he had achieved notoriety for his work, he was unexpectedly asked to appear on a talk show segment tackling the subject of phobias. He agreed to be on the show and revealed his own affliction, which prompted the interviewer to ignite Smith's fears, hoping to make him pass out on camera.

"Phobias are a dangerous thing if they get out of hand," said Smith. "So I either had to put myself in the hospital with a bunch of fucking assholes who charged an awful lot of money and didn't know what they were doing, or do it myself...and get paid to do it," he chuckled. □

get to push the envelope a little farther."

A lot of the work involves eyes. Smith supervises the application of special lenses for Toad, Sabertooth and other characters. "Toad is a dirty, grainy yellow, with green hair and toad-like eyes. We built some animal-like lenses for Toad, Mystique and Sabertooth. They all wear large contact lenses and I have doctors on the set all the time. It's very specialized. I personally stay out of it, except from a design perspective. Everyone's eyes are different. Rebecca Romijn-Stamos' eyes are very dry. It's a symptom that's well known in the optometrist's field. Someone like that would generally be told not to wear contacts because the surface of their eye could literally flake off with any kind of abrasion. She wears bandage lenses underneath the scleral lenses

with it [that way]."

X-MEN

ROGUE ANNA PAQUIN

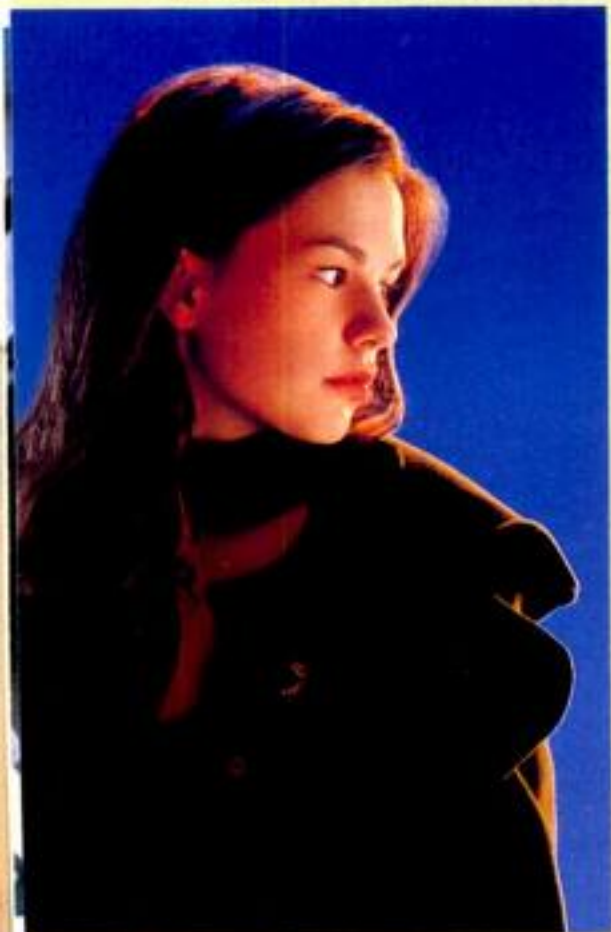
The Oscar-winner on playing a teen superhero.

By Paul Wardle

Anyone who remembers Anna Paquin's breathless acceptance speech at the 1994 Oscars when she won for best supporting actress in *THE PIANO*, will have no problem believing she is shy. Unbelievably cute and sensitive, Paquin is noticeably nervous during interviews. Perhaps the fact that she was surrounded by a table full of male journalists when I interviewed her at a press junket in Toronto, has something to do with it.

Paquin plays Rogue, who, for much of the film, wears a hooded cloak, symbolic of Rogue's withdrawal from human society. The petite girl

Younger than the Rogue of the comics, the 18-year-old Paquin wears a hood to symbolize her isolation.



manages to convey vulnerability as well as power in this complex role. Giggled Paquin, as she uncomfortably began the interview, "When we meet Rogue in the movie, she has recently discovered her powers, and is still quite overwhelmed by her abilities, and what that means for her in terms of being able to have a normal life. She has been quite lonely, because it's very new for her. At some stage in all people's lives, they've felt like they are different; that they don't fit in."

Just barely 18, Paquin's first introduction to Rogue came from watching the *X-MEN* cartoon when she was a child. "I thought it was really cool when I got to play her," she said.

When we first encounter the character, she meets up with Wolverine in a small-town bar, perhaps somewhere in Alberta. "Wolverine is one of the first other mutants she's come across," said Paquin, "so obviously she feels a connection to him, because he's going through similar things to what she's going through, even though he's a lot older than she is. They have something very significant in common. The nature of her mutation is incredibly different [from] his, which is almost beneficial to him. He can feel, he has the claws, whereas she can't touch anyone ever. That's an incredibly isolating thing."

Rogue's power enables her to suck the life force or abilities from any being, even taking on their memories and secrets. She is incapable of having a normal relationship for fear of killing a



Paquin as Rogue, a mutant whose touch saps the life force or ability of anyone she contacts, unphased by the finger-knives of Wolverine (Hugh Jackman).

potential lover. "I try as much as I can to feel what it would be like to be any character I play," said Paquin when I asked her if she was able to feel Rogue's isolation while playing her. "I try to imagine what it would be like to not have any physical contact ever. Not by accident, not just brushing against someone. She has to be very careful not to be careless that way. That would be incredibly difficult."

"It seems, from reading the comics," she continued, "that it's quite normal for people to get freaked out when they meet a mutant. It seems to Rogue that the best thing to do is to run away. If she's not near anyone she loves or cares about, then she can't hurt them. In the comic book, I believe that the young gentleman who discovers with her that she's a mutant, goes into a coma for quite some time."

There is a scene where the young debutant, who lives with her parents, undergoes her stunning transformation, not just into womanhood like most young girls, but into mutanthood. The character is very complex, according to Paquin. "I think she's very strong, because she's had to survive being a young girl by herself. It's not exactly the safest thing to be a young person on your own, but she knows how to protect herself, and is also very unselfish to make sure she doesn't hurt anyone. She takes precautions."

Among the precautions she takes are the wearing of gloves. "Wearing gloves for five

months isn't all that much fun," she said, "but it's winter, so..."

Paquin praised Bryan Singer, the director of *X-MEN* as being wonderfully creative. All the directors she's worked with are different, she added. "You can't even compare them, because they all have their own processes and different ways of attacking a film."

I asked Paquin if she takes a naturalistic approach to her acting, and she revealed that she had never taken acting classes. "I don't do parts where I can't find something that I understand about the character. I want to make the character realistic enough that the audience will be able to relate to her. I try to be that character. I will try to react like that character."

The amount of powers or abilities Rogue can absorb depends on the amount of time she spends with the person, the duration of the touching. The powers she takes on will eventually fade, and their memories will be lost. "She will feel connected to that person, which I think would be an incredibly confusing thing, to suddenly feel an intense bond with someone you have never met. I think there's one moment in the film where I don't know whether it will translate at all, where she has an understanding of a character that she would not have had anything in common with or understood in the slightest. I think that's kind of a scary thing."

Once again she laughed at

her vagueness, but cried, "I don't want to ruin the whole movie!" The questions turn more nonspecific as Paquin is asked whose abilities she would like to absorb if she had those powers in real life. "I think it would be great to play the guitar like Jimi Hendrix for a day. That would be fun."

Unlike Wolverine, there is no climactic battle between Rogue and a villain among The Brotherhood Of Evil Mutants. Still, the role is physically demanding, as Paquin explained: "A lot of times you're pretending that physical things are happening to you and they're not. Pretending you're absorbing powers, when I have no idea what that would physically feel like, is strange. Thankfully, in the moment, it just happens. I imagined that it would feel like a surge of power, and what that person is thinking and feeling; suddenly getting all that information. It's physically draining at the same time as it is [surging]."

In the movie, the character of Rogue is portrayed as a composite of three different female characters that have appeared in various X-MEN comic titles. She is a much younger character than she has become by the time she has developed to the point at which she is seen in comics. "She's not Rogue right now as the comic books portray her," explained Paquin.

"Rogue's been around for years and years. I hope I don't disappoint people too much. I've read lots and lots of comic books to get her.

"I think she's a little skeptical," Paquin supposed of her character's place within the X-Men team. "She's looking for a place where she can fit in, and she finds all these people who are like her and understand what she's going through. I think that's kind of hard for her to believe; that these people were there all along and all of them have had experiences somewhat similar to hers. It takes her a little while to adjust to being around people who don't think she's a freak. She has to cover herself up and wear gloves, but everyone has their thing that makes them different, and she doesn't get ostracized for that in this community." □

"Put it this way," said DeSanto, "the fans that know this storyline are happy. It's centered around what I feel is the crux of the mythology: Xavier & Magneto."



Stylish villainy: Ian McKellan as Magneto, leader of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, pursuing a war with humankind that he sees as a battle for survival.

right. There is prejudice and hatred against his kind. It could eventually result in the destruction of and experimentation on his people. He's not a thug trying to steal money, or seek revenge against a company that he wants to blow up for firing him 30 years ago. He has a belief that is true, but his way of dealing with it is what is wrong."

Asked about his casting of Rebecca Romijn-Stamos as Raven Darkholme, Singer replied that while playing the villainous villainess Mystique seems against her nature, "Ian isn't exactly a Nazi either." Singer referred to Ian McKellan, who, though he plays super-villain Magneto in this film, has also worked with Singer before on APT PUPIL where he portrayed a Nazi war criminal pursued by a teenage boy. There are even concentration camp sequences in X-MEN, but the production wishes to keep their nature and significance under wraps.

Shooting was conceptualized early February of 2000, and postproduction reportedly will be done in 18 weeks instead of the usual 26. The film score, by

Michael Kamen, will be ready by May 22, and the movie will be in theatres July 14. "Unlike Spielberg and Lucas who have everything worked out years in advance," said Winter, the concepts and designs used in X-MEN, for sets, costumes, prosthetics and such, were completed by April 1999, with effects shots began in September. Ninety-one days to shoot a movie like this is not as long as it may sound. Quickly it became apparent that costumes and hair would have to adjust for the conditions. One of the X-Men, a goddess of the elements from Kenya, called, appropriately enough, Storm, posed a problem.

"Is her hair and cape affected by the weather?" Winter asked rhetorically. Since Storm [played by Halle Berry] produces adverse weather conditions, as part of her super-powers, this was a valid question.

DeSanto defended the veil of secrecy that has surrounded this production, and the ban on discussing the plot of the movie in any detail. "It's like when you're a kid with a Christmas gift," DeSanto began, "Half the fun is shaking the box and try-

ing to guess what is inside." DeSanto, who worked with director Bryan Singer on THE USUAL SUSPECTS and co-produced his next film, APT PUPIL, analogized about what happens if someone tells the child what it is just as he's opening the present. "What's wrong with going into the theater not knowing anything about the movie, and letting it happen?"

"Let's put it this way," DeSanto teased, "the fans that know the storyline are very happy. It's centered around what I feel is the crux of the mythology: Xavier and Magneto. Those two philosophies butting heads with humanity."

Asked what characters would be changed from their comic book version, to work in the film version, DeSanto mentioned The Toad. "Toad's probably the character we changed most from what he was in the comic. Toad, in the comic, was sort of this nebbish sycophant of Magneto's. How could we make this character formidable, but still keep elements of the original; make it humorous without making it campy. The humor comes out of the characters, but not out of making fun of the characters. That's why I think the third SUPERMAN movie failed. As soon as you bring Richard Pryor into the mix, you no longer believe a man can fly. You begin to see the wires. It loses its magic."

From the first time DeSanto read an X-Men comic as a child, "The characters and the whole mythology of this world...I fell in love with it," DeSanto said. "When you're a kid, you cry out, 'Why can't anyone see how unique and special I am, and celebrate that instead of beating me down for it?' The X-Men do that. They go to a school where their uniqueness is embraced."

DeSanto feels that Singer can bring a unique quality to this production. "Bryan doesn't make movies. He makes films," said DeSanto of his collaborator. "He's a great storyteller. His handling of the ensemble cast in THE USUAL SUSPECTS [was great]; giving each of those

X-MEN

COMIC BOOK ORIGINS

The X-MEN movie comprises heroes from many different eras in the series, 30 years, and if future sequels occur, other heroes and villains discussed here may also be brought to the big screen.

The first issue of *The X-Men*, September 1963, debuted to absolutely no fanfare. The cover proclaimed these new powerful teens "the strangest superheros of all," but X-Men was not a very good seller for Marvel Comics Group in the 1960's, despite having artwork by such legendary comic book artists as Jack Kirby, Alex Toth, Jim Steranko, Barry Smith and Neal Adams, among others.

Marvel Comics, now Marvel Entertainment, will tell you that the X-Men, like most of the Marvel characters, were created by Stan Lee. But Jack Kirby, to his dying day swore that the concepts for X-Men and many other Marvel heroes came solely from his own head, and that Lee only wrote partial dialogue and served mainly as editor and occasional sounding board. What we do know for sure is that Kirby laid out and penciled the first 11 issues of *X-Men* and laid out many more for succeeding artists.

Originally, Lee had planned to call the new book *The Mutants*, but publisher Martin Goodman at that time thought the title would discourage sales to children, who he thought would not know the meaning of the word mutant. The storylines in the early days centered around a school for mutants, a setting which will form the heart of Bryan Singer's film. The first five students were Scott Summers, Jean Grey, Hank McCoy, Bobby Drake and Warren Worthington III. Each student was given a uniform, tailored to



The first September 1963 issue of Marvel's enduring comic book franchise, a debut with no fanfare and initially with little success.

each one's special needs, but identical in color (blue and yellow) with an "X" on the belt buckle.

Each was given a code name. Jean Grey's was Marvel Girl, whose telekinetic power to move objects and people with her mind, was almost as effective as that of Professor X himself. Her love interest was the leader of the super-team, Scott, whose code-name of Cyclops was appropriate. Though he had two eyes that could see, he was forced to wear a visor at all times, or the destructive red beams that came from his eyes would destroy everything in its path.

Worthington was the rich kid of the group and was known as The Angel, due to the enormous wings that grew out of his back. The Beast was the big-footed, yet highly intelligent scientist of the team, and Hank McCoy was known to use vocabulary that was comical coming out of such a brutish figure. Bobby was Iceman, who could ride on a sheet of ice, freeze villains solid or attack with an icestorm.

Their primary foes were at first The Brotherhood Of Evil Mutants, any one of which could often fight the group to a stand-still. Among the most memorable adversaries of The X-Men were Magneto, The Vanisher, Mesmero, The Juggernaut, The Sentinels, Unus The Untouchable, The Blob, The Mimic, The Toad and The Stranger.

Other characters, like Havok (brother of Cyclops), Polaris, Sunfire, The Banshee, Quicksilver and The Scarlet Witch seemed at first to be villainous, but later fought on the good guy's side.

In the 38th issue, Professor X died, and in the following issue, the group went on without him and got new, more individual costumes. But by issue #65, The Professor returned, revealing that it had been someone else (The Changeling) that had taken his place, and was now dead. These major changes in the series did little to help its sales, yet with the addition of scripters Roy Thomas, Arnold Drake and Denny O'Neil, the stories got even more dazzling, complex and mind-blowing.

After 66 issues, *X-Men* ceased to publish new adventures, turning the the series over to reprints from the early issues. The *X-Men* were not selling well enough to justify more stories. Then, in the summer of 1975, *Giant-Size X-Men #1* appeared, reviving the group with a brand new line-up of heroes from all over the world. Scott and Jean Grey were on hand to help Professor X train the newcomers, including Storm, Wolverine, Colossus, Nightcrawler, Banshee and Thunderbird. When *The X-Men* monthly comic book resumed after a five-year hiatus, it began new stories with issue #94 and continues to this day.

Paul Wardle

characters a unique personality. I felt he would take it seriously. The first two scripts I read were not taking it seriously. They weren't getting it. It's about Xavier and Magneto. It's Martin Luther King and Malcolm X and the next wave of human evolution. The themes of prejudice and the outcast really resonated with Bryan."

Tracing his long involvement with this project, DeSanto noted, "The first time I inquired about [it] was October of 1995. Peter Rice, who was then an executive at 20th Century-Fox, now president of Fox Searchlight, and I had become friends. Bryan knew I had written a treatment for ALIEN 4, and called Peter up to take a look [at my treatment]."

When the studio decided to go with another version, DeSanto asked about X-MEN, found out that the original directorial choice had dropped out, and saw the first two scripts. When they were deemed inadequate by Singer and DeSanto, they began to discuss a different approach. "Bryan was initially resistant," said DeSanto, "because I think everyone who doesn't know comic books immediately classifies them as juvenile and childish, but in fact they are an important American artform with some great stories.

"I was given the task of taking over 30 years of mythology and diluting it down to two hours," he said. "Bryan went back and pitched [Rice] the story and they thought it was great."

Following the go ahead, DeSanto met with Stan Lee, charismatic figurehead of Marvel, who edited and wrote the earliest issues of the *X-Men* comics as well as countless other Marvels. Bryan's vision for the film was pitched to Stan and to Lauren [Sculer-Donner] at Fox and it was approved by all as in keeping with the Marvel image. "Ultimately, it's Bryan's vision. Otherwise it's going to be phony and false," said DeSanto.

Yet it was up to DeSanto, the resident fanboy, to educate Singer, who represents the non-comic reading audience. Extensive discussions of the characters and their comics followed. "Why do they wear costumes?"

X-MEN

SABRETOOTH TYLER MANE

*The wrestler on turning
Marvel supervillain.*

By Paul Wardle

A relative newcomer to the *X-Men* comics, Sabretooth has nevertheless appeared in many related titles and solo adventures. Though he is not so much a villain as a tortured anti-hero, in the *X-MEN* film directed by Bryan Singer, the character serves primarily as a foe to fight Wolverine. Sabretooth's great size and savage countenance requires an actor with an imposing physical appearance. Filling that bill is Tyler Mane, who will no doubt be well-known to fans of pro-wrestling, but much less so to moviegoers. He wrestled for 11 years, primarily as a bad guy. Standing a colossal six-foot 10 inches and weighing 270 pounds, Mane will no doubt look the part of the enor-

The Sabretooth of the comics battles Jean Grey. Mane read the books each day on the set to get inside his role.

mous beast-like mutant, but in real life he is friendly and non-threatening.

In Toronto to film *THE X-MEN*, Mane made a special trip to the set on his day off to chat with journalists covering the production. "Sabretooth is a mutant," said Mane, "with superhuman strength and it's a fun thing. You get to do something totally different from a normal acting role. You get to throw people all over the place, and beat the heck out of them. It's like a flashback to the wrestling days. He's just got a one-track mind...tearing people apart. You don't have to worry about being a nice guy. He's more about action than speaking. He takes care of business, then worries about the consequences later."

The climactic battle between Sabretooth and reluctant X-Man Wolverine, contains no deep philosophical motive. "Every time I see [Wolverine], I want to tear his arms off and flog him as best I can."

"I believe Sabretooth is approximately 150 years old," Mane continued. "and Wolverine is about 50+ years old. They both go back to the days of FBI special forces together. They've got a long history."

Mane researched his role by reading dozens of Marvel comics that feature Sabretooth and Wolverine. "I couldn't believe the price of them!" he joked. "Somebody's making a lot of money!" It wasn't until he put on the costume, however, that he really felt like Sabretooth. "It took a little getting used to. I'm wearing four-inch lifts in it. Like 6'10" wasn't tall enough. I'm completely in



Mane howls as Sabretooth, Magneto's destroyer and main henchman, big, bad and leather-clad, with four-inch lifts that make him tower to a height of 7'2".

leather, and it was pretty heavy and took a while to get worked in, but then it was okay."

From the comics, Mane learned to possess the right attitude for Sabretooth. "The way Sabretooth's lines were written, he's not very well-spoken. He's more of a grunter and groaner. Every day I would read the comics and then go to work. I'd try to get that primitive, animalistic feel to [my performance], and after sitting in a trailer for hours, it's very easy to get to that state [he laughed]."

"Sabretooth doesn't really care about many things or people. Even the people who are on his side, he doesn't think are on his side. He's looking out for number one." In the film, Sabretooth joins up with The Brotherhood Of Evil Mutants, but like his counterpart in the *X-Men*, Wolverine, Sabretooth isn't much of a team player.

"Sabretooth is [Magneto's] main henchman; a destroyer. He's the one Magneto counts on to get things done."

Despite the caveman-type impulses that Mane must call up to play Sabretooth, his training in professional wrestling has enabled him to get in and out of character without injuring fellow actors. "I'm pretty much able to control that," he said, but he is tough. Refusing to take off the special lenses he wears on his eyes for the character, Mane almost suffered eye damage, because he was trying to be a trooper who didn't need to fol-

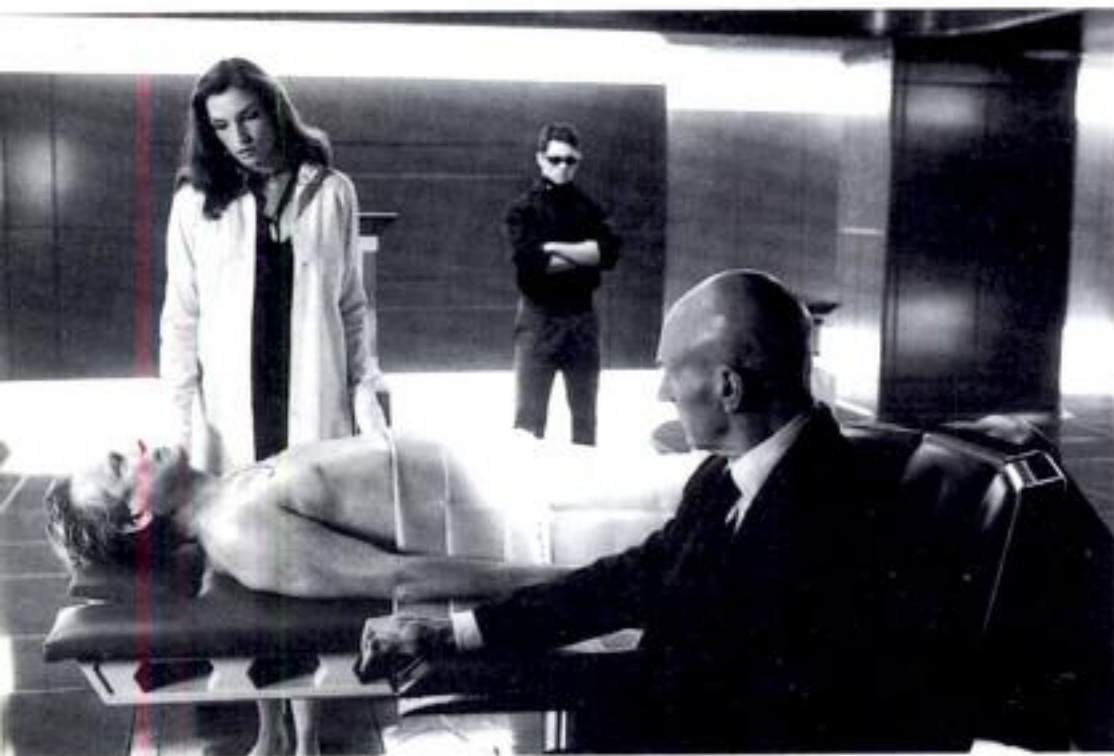
low doctors' orders.

The most memorable scene in the film for Tyler Mane was a battle sequence in a train station. It was the first time he met Ian McKellen (who plays Magneto) and Halle Berry (who plays Storm, one of the *X-Men*). "I've done some film work before," said Mane, "but nothing along these lines, with this big a budget. Surely I haven't worked with people of this caliber. It was very educational to watch them work."

Fighting with Hugh Jackman who plays Wolverine, also worked very well for the veteran wrestler. "He's got stage fighting experience. When we got together, it was a lot of fun experimenting and developing things. He came in with an understanding of how he wanted Wolverine to react to situations and I had [similar thoughts with regard to my character], and it was very open. If I felt that Sabretooth would not do a certain move, we would change it, and he would do the same with Wolverine."

Adapting his wrestling techniques to Sabretooth posed little problem for Mane who was a villain in his former profession. "It is a little different, because you don't really have super-human strength, but all the fighting [experience] definitely did help. I think it put Hugh's mind at ease when he found out I had 11 and a half years of that background. To wrestle professionally, you need to know what the heck you're doing." □





Bruce Davison as the mutant-hating Senator Kelly, ironically finds a safe haven among the X-Men (l to r) Famke Janssen, James Marsden and Patrick Stewart.

was one of the questions Singer asked early in these talks. True to the X-Men mythology, this question and others that even comic fans may have always wondered about, have been worked into the script.

Likewise, DeSanto claimed there is a scene which explains why Jean Grey is not given a code-name like the others. In the comics, Jean was often referred to as Marvel Girl in the 1960's and as Phoenix in the mid-to-late 1970's.

The crew for the film consisted of over 350 personnel, and an extra 50-75 part-timers on any given day, mostly for makeup and effects work. Location shooting took place in Washington, D.C., and parts of Canada. The interior of the Casa-Loma, in Toronto, Ontario, Lakeside Park in Burlington, Ontario and the inside of Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto's theatre district were only a few of the sites used. The exterior of Magneto's lair was shot in a conservation area. An eight inch lip was built on top of the ground and flooded with water.

In addition to the costumes that each member of the X-Men wear, other accessories to suit the characters' individual needs, had to be developed. A special wheelchair was built for Professor Xavier and four different sets of claws are used for Wolverine. Despite the excellence of the sets and effects, the production has somehow managed to stay under budget.

The only major compromise DeSanto and the crew have had

to make is continuity. Ideally, DeSanto would have liked to present the X-Men's history chronologically and explore all the relationships as they occurred in the comics, but it was obvious early on that this was impossible. Some characters would have to be dropped, and a mixture of new and older characters would be joined together in a manner that doesn't necessarily coincide with their comics' counterparts. But the makers of this film realize that comics don't necessarily translate to film as written. Adjustments must be made, and this includes fans, who will have to adjust to not having their own way and judging the finished film on it's own merits.

Though fans may have problems with individual details in the sets, costumes or casting, Singer is adamant that this is not a movie made by people who have no affinity for the comics. The last three years of intensive research into the genre, and the advice of his colleagues has opened him up to a new world, one that he is determined to bring to the screen without compromising either his ideals, nor the traditions that have carried these characters through the decades. Throughout that time there have been numerous changes to the X-Men style, costumes and membership, not without some anger from fans. While this film will also provoke similar responses from some fans, it seems, at least, that its heart is in the right place. □

X-MEN

TOAD RAY PARK

The STAR WARS star on a new comic book role.

By Paul Wardle

Ever since Ray Park won the coveted role of Sith lord Darth Maul in George Lucas' STAR WARS EPISODE 1: THE PHANTOM MENACE, he has been astonished by all the attention he has received. Park has been involved in Chinese martial arts since age seven, and though his training was a definite plus when capturing his character in X-MEN, he has been thrust into the spotlight very soon after his acting career had begun. Having met STAR WARS fans at conventions and other promotional gatherings, Park was unprepared for the seriousness with which some fans take the subject matter. The same is true of comic book fans, and Park will no doubt run into similar adulation after he appears in X-MEN.

Park has been cast as The Toad, a malevolent misanthrope who kowtows to the X-Men's chief nemesis, Magneto. In the X-Men comics, Toad was one of the first villains the X-Men ever faced, appearing as early as 1963. The ugly little hopping creature was never much of a problem for the superheros, but Magneto was a different story. The makers of this film have altered the character of The Toad somewhat, making him more interesting and complex.

The British-born Park, who represented Britain all over the world on the nation's martial arts team, made his first trip to Canada, where much of the filming for X-MEN took place. "Toad is more of a... 'toady,'" Park began, in reference to his character, "a greedy, toady su-

per-human who has powers. He can jump and leap and bound. That's where he gets his name from. I never knew there was a character called Toad in the X-Men [comics] when I was a kid. He's a lackey, in a way, but that's different in the movie.

"From what I've been told, Toad wasn't in the [comics] that much, so it's a very good opportunity for me to try and develop the character. I tried a lot of different ideas. He has to be hard, in a way. He's evil, but also, [I wanted to make him] funny, geeky, slimy, creepy looking; to try to bring all those aspects into it, which I hope I've achieved."

The film was still shooting near the end of February, reaching 100 days or more of filming, before post-production work was even begun. During that time, Park had a lot to get used to, including a long, protruding tongue that Toad has been given. "It's about six feet [long] and it does grow to 12 feet," Park elaborated. "It's green and slimy and gooey. It's good, because it gives Toad a little bit more versatility, not just in ability for fighting, acrobatics, but it's funny as well. It's a cool idea."

The darting tongue was a mix of prosthetics and CGI effects, an innovation that sets the Toad apart from his comic book counterpart who had no such appendage. Though Park can't reveal what scenes feature the Toad's tongue, he promises it will not be pornographic. "I had to have this mouthpiece fitted," he revealed. "They just bent a mold to fit my mouth. I only wear it when [my character] has to use it."



Park plays Toad, one of Magneto's lackey's, with a slimy 12-foot tongue.

The endless jumps and leaps executed by the Toad have certainly benefitted from Park's extensive martial arts training. Though stunt doubles and effects were occasionally used, Park didn't want to rely too heavily on them. "It's got to be believable, as well. He's a mutant, but he's human. It's got to look like just a little bit more than the average person," said Park of the jumps. In real life, he can jump over the height of his own head.

Working with veteran actors like Ian McKellen (Magneto) and Patrick Stewart (Professor X), is a wonderful education for the newcomer. In particular, the nature of the Toad's subservience to Magneto dictates that they must have many scenes together. "I'm working with some really good actors," Park reported glowingly. "I just sit back, open my eyes and ears, and listen. I've got so much to learn, and I want to develop more as an actor. If I've got an idea, I will [suggest it to Ian], or to [director] Bryan [Singer]. It's great to not be afraid to do that and to just relax and be creative and try new things."

Specifically, Park drew

strength from McKellen's incredible confidence as an actor. "How he's just sure of himself, and you can tell his experience comes into it. If he didn't like something or wanted a different way to say something, he knew exactly what he wanted. It's been so good for me to just sit back and watch."

Park loves the chance to play a physical character like Toad. Even as a child, he jumped off buildings and did dangerous stunts for his age, without the fear that comes with experience. Even now, he approaches potentially dangerous moves with no trepidation for his safety. His martial arts have been used as a basis for the three fighting characters he has played in films so far, including the Headless Horseman of *SLEEPY HOLLOW*.

"I've been doing it 18 years," he said. "That gave me the discipline and taught me to focus. The challenge is not to get too uptight, and I can always overcome a challenge by visualizing what I want to do. It always goes back to my training when I used to compete. If there's anything I can't do, I just go back to basics and break

"If I'm totally evil all the time," mused actor Ray Park, "it's boring. It's got to have that sleazy comic speck to it as well. There has got to be a balance."

it down, and analyze why I can't do it. Then I just start from the basics and work myself up. In all the things that I've done, I wouldn't necessarily be doing martial arts stuff, but it would just be that training, the preparation, the condition of my body, that would help. My body is used to doing different stuff.

"I seem to work better when I'm working more," said Park. He is not one for sitting around on movie sets. Of course this is inevitable unless you're in every shot. "It's like an addiction for me," Park said of his training. "I try to keep up all my training when I'm on a movie, but it's hard. When [nothing's happening for me on the set], I just buy loads of magazines and CDs and eat a lot, and just go to the gym every chance I get to burn it all off."

The lithe, athletically built Park also differs from the Toad of the comics in stature. Unlike most heroes and villains in comics, Jack Kirby created a misshapen little monstrosity for the body of Toad. In the guise of Ray Park, the character will be more formidable-looking.

His character's function in the movie is primarily to do work to fulfill the needs of Magneto, "without him lifting a hand, and I'm creating [mayhem] in a way, maybe mucking things up." This is where the character's comic relief sensibility comes into play. "If I'm totally evil all the time," Park mused, "it's boring. It's got to have that sleazy comic speck to it as well. There's got to be a balance."

With his newfound popularity from playing Darth Maul, Park has come under close scrutiny from fans of the *STAR WARS* series, and will no doubt face another round of fan criticism with this role. Is he prepared for what's inevitably to come? "Darth Maul was an evil

guy, but then they meet me, and I'm totally different. When I talked about how I prepare and train, it made a lot of people want to start martial arts. I teach gymnastics as well, and all the kids were just blown away by [Darth Maul], and playing with the action figures. I remember when I was a kid, I wanted to be a super-human as well, so it's great to see their reaction."

Park also says it's more fun to play villains than heroes. "There's no rules really. You can just have fun with it. I haven't chosen to play bad guys. It's just happened that way. And everyone seems to like the bad guys anyway."

Although he's worked with directors George Lucas and Tim Burton, Park says he's comfortable with Bryan Singer as a director. Singer has been very helpful to Park in trying out new approaches to his character. "I wondered how I was going to do this without making it a cliché, like *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME* or something? I didn't want to go that route." □

Marvel's Quasimodo-like Toad, to the left of Magneto in the original story of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants.

