As those of you who have been reading this column for a while have surely noticed, if there's a comic book film playing anywhere, you can count on seeing a review of it right here in Frame by Frame. The latest candidate is of course *X-Men: First Class*, a prequel to the X-Men trilogy from a few years ago. *First Class* takes us back to the turbulent 1960s—and the infamous Cuban Missile Crisis—to tell the origin of the eponymous superhero team’s beginnings.

First and foremost, we are introduced to Charles Xavier—a powerful telepath later known as “Professor X”—and his friend, Eric Lehnsherr, destined to become the awesome but villainous Magneto. The two have a lot in common—secret super powers, a desire to help others like themselves—but whereas Xavier has lived a life of wealthy privilege, Lehnsherr is from a poor family in Poland where his parents were brutally killed in a Nazi concentration camp, just for being different. The differences in upbringing have given each man a diametrically opposed view of humanity and the world in general. Charles believes in the good of others. Eric distrusts all humans, and considers himself superior to them as well.

Eric isn’t alone in that attitude. An old enemy named Sebastian Shaw—who may very well be the first mutant—is determined to remake the world over in his own image, and he has the plan and the power to do it. Can Charles and Eric stop Shaw and his minions before the world as we know it is destroyed? And if you are mutant, should you even want to?

The X-Men have never been my favorite superheroes. I always found the characters rather uninteresting compared to Spiderman, the Silver Surfer, Batman or Superman. But the movie tries hard to embrace the human drama behind all the comic book blood and thunder, and in large measure succeeds. Moreover, the subtext behind the saga of the mutants can be interpreted in a host of ways, and could be perceived to represent everything from racism to class warfare to whatever else separates us as human beings. Without question, Eric (played the highly underrated Michael Fassbender) emerges as the most interesting character, for all his flaws. And it is those flaws that ultimately turn him into a archvillian. The fact that he has been persecuted simply for being born different does not liberate him from the laws of morality, even if Eric himself believes he is above such concerns. James McAvoy does well as Charles, and infuses the character with a believable combination of crusader’s zeal and what at times comes across as naive optimism. Naive or not, Charles is the more noble of the two men, and it is this dichotomy between the two leads upon which the whole plot depends. It is a good story, one that has more to it than meets the eye…and one that will almost certain produce a follow-up in the near future. And that would not at all be unwelcome.