

The clash between mutant and Samurai

 By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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The world's favourite mutant warrior returns with a vengeance as a defiant Samurai in *The Wolverine* - and he's as mad as hell.

Before Logan became a world-renowned superman of the superhero realm with his adamantium claws, his powers of self-healing and his primal "berserker" rages in a band of mutant heroes known as *The X-Men*, the century-old mutant first emerged in 1974, when the character made his premiere appearance in the very last panel of an issue of *The Incredible Hulk*.



The Wolverine is not sequel to the *X-Men*, but a retelling of the 1980 four-issue mini-series created by *X-Men* writer Chris Claremont and the legendary graphic artist Frank Miller (*The Dark Knight*, *Sin City*), with the character making a solo journey to Japan, only to be lured into a maelstrom of crime, betrayal and honour, in the midst of which he is forced to confront both his terrifying strengths and his undiscovered vulnerability. Set in modern-day Japan, he is lured to a Japan he hasn't seen since World War II - and into a shadowy realm of Yakuza and Samurai.

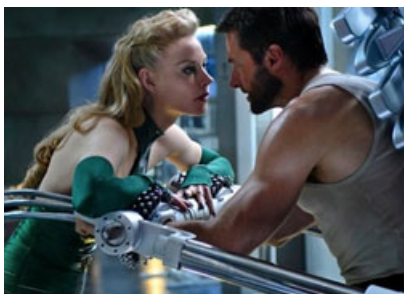
On the run with a mysterious, beautiful heiress

Suddenly finding himself on the run with a mysterious, beautiful heiress and confronted for the first time with the prospect of true mortality, he is pushed to the physical and emotional edge - further than he's ever been.

Director James Mangold (best known for *Walk the Line*, *3:10 to Yuma*, and *Girl, Interrupted*) and screenwriters Mark Bomback (*Total Recall*, *Unstoppable*, *Race to Witch Mountain*) and Scott Frank (*Flight of the Phoenix*, *Minority Report*) carved out a perilous journey in which Logan rediscovers the hero inside and is forced to grapple not only with powerful foes, mutant and human alike, but with the ghosts of his own haunted past as well, crossing his claws with Samurai swords.

There can only be one *Wolverine* and Hugh Jackman's embodiment of the character is now larger than life; following in the footsteps of six *X-Men* films and a seventh one on its way, Jackman is now the king of action heroes, ruling the genre with an iron fist. One cannot help but feel Jackman's portrayal of Valjean in *Les Misérables* seep into *The Wolverine*, as well as that of a washed-up boxer who fights 2000-pound steel robots in *Real Steel*.

The choice of whether to embrace his true nature or not



In *The Wolverine*, Jackman is now half Valjean - totally vulnerable as he struggles with identity and his reason to exist, facing faces the choice of whether to embrace his true nature or not - and half action-hero, a monstrous and relentless killing machine. And although he does not break out into song in *The Wolverine*, he does get to face a massive 13-foot robot that kicks ass, *Wolverine's* nemesis, the Silver Samurai. Jackman has bulked up considerably and fans will definitely swoon as he flexes his muscles and struts like only he can, filled with a charming arrogance that is sexy and alluring. Brought to the big screen with committed ambition, vigour and raw

passion by Mangold, *The Wolverine* delivers the complete opposite of what the director initially envisioned.

Mangold's initial vision for *The Wolverine* was to break the mould of the comic book-based film and do something quite different from the standard superhero film, where it's about stopping a villain's diabolical plot.

Not only an ultimate superhero film ...



The Wolverine is not only an ultimate superhero film, but offers a fusion of Iron Man, X-Men, The Hulk, The Avengers, Thor and Captain America. It ups the action level to its extreme by also infusing the film with Japanese mysticism, filled with Yakuza, Ninja, Samurai, and crime lords. In a way, it feels as if Mangold is blending a stereotypical superhero action genre with a serious dose of artistic earnestness, paying homage to legendary action heroes like Bruce Lee and masterful directors like Kurosawa. The film is visually arresting, particularly an awesome fight sequence on a bullet train, well contrasted by Wolverine's contact with a grizzly, perfectly

balancing a visceral experience with scenes that have emotional depth.

Surrounding Logan in his journey to Japan is a cast of colourful characters. Hiroyuki Sanada is perfectly cast in the pivotal role of the leader of a vast criminal empire (and the father of Wolverine's new love Mariko); Sanada is a legendary action hero of Japanese film and the first Japanese man to perform with the Royal Shakespeare Company, starring in dozens of Japanese and Hollywood films including *Twilight Samurai*, *Ring*, *The Last Samurai*, Danny Boyle's *Sunshine*, *Rush Hour 3* and *Speed Racer*. Although *The Wolverine* takes place away from the X-Men team, there are key appearances from figures in Logan's past, including Jean Grey, the telekinetic mutant and Logan's lost love, portrayed once again by Famke Janssen.

Logan's journey through Japan also involves two other powerful women, each of whom has her own light or dark fascination with him. Tao Okamoto plays out Mariko's complicated love story with Logan, and Rila Fukushima takes on the role of the fiery, sword-wielding bodyguard Yukio. Another powerful and complex woman is brought to life by Svetlana Khodchenkova, who takes on the green-eyed Viper, a cunning-and-treacherous mutant; this Russian-born actress, is best known in *The West* for her recent breakout role in the acclaimed spy story *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, as the Soviet operative Irina.

If you looking for an action film with spectacular visual effects and unyielding ninja fighting sequences, *The Wolverine* provides ample entertainment. Besides its superhero and comic book façade, *The Wolverine* is also a journey into the dark side of our beloved mutant's troubled soul. *The Wolverine* offers the best of best worlds and is guaranteed to strike a successful blow at the box office.

Behind the scenes

The heady atmosphere of present-day Japan - hyper-modern yet full of rituals and ghosts from the past - is central to the story of *The Wolverine*, and Mangold was committed to shooting there right from the start. Ultimately, the film's ambitious

80-day shoot would journey between Japan and sound stages at the Fox Studios in Sydney, Australia. To capture it all, Mangold worked with director of photography Ross Emery, production designer François Audouy and costume designer Isis Mussenden - who each contributed to a design that mixes together elements of noir cinema, Japanese folklore, graphic novel iconography and intense personal drama. Emery worked closely with Mangold to give The Wolverine a look that is grounded and realistic, yet pushes reality to its bleeding edges.

Shooting with the Arri Alexa digital cameras using anamorphic lenses, Emery attained maximum flexibility and cinematic crispness - bringing the audience right into the grit and sweat of the action. "The combination of the camera and lenses really gave us that classic film look that Jim loves," said Emery. "One thing I find particularly interesting about Wolverine is his immortality, the fact that with his healing factor he can go on forever like a god, and because of that he also experiences the loneliness of a god. Even when Logan loses those he loves, he knows that he will keep going on," Mangold observed. "He's been going on for a century now, through wars and battles and deaths of his loved ones and he's come to a point of great weariness. It's a classic theme - the man who can live forever but suffers because of it. Logan is a damaged hero and this story is very much about him looking to reclaim something he's lost in himself."

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Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit www.writingstudio.co.za
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