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X-Men stars get digital facelifts

Wednesday, May 24, 2006; Posted: 7:16 a.m. EDT (11:16 GMT)

CANNES, France (AP) -- What a pair those dashing young mutants Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart make in "X-Men: The Last Stand."

The two 60-something actors had 20 years shaved off their features for the opening sequence in the comic-book franchise's latest flick, the filmmakers using digital technology to match current features to those in old photos.

In the scene, McKellen, 67, and Stewart, 65, look like fair approximations of themselves in their mid-40s, a time when McKellen was busy doing Shakespeare on the British stage and Stewart had just taken over the starship Enterprise on TV's "Star Trek: The Next Generation."

"It's as brilliantly done as airbrushing in a magazine. You cannot tell the difference," McKellen said. "You can grow hair, you can shrink eyebrows, you can change cheekbones, you can magnify bosoms, shrink waists. You can do anything you want. It looks like a younger person. Patrick looks sensational."

"X-Men: The Last Stand" premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in advance of its worldwide theatrical release between Wednesday and Friday. The film is the third in the series adapted from the Marvel comic books about a world where superpowered mutants live in not-so-peaceful coexistence with the majority of humanity.

The comics and films center on the X-Men, a band of noble superheroes headed by Charles Xavier (Stewart), a wheelchair-bound telepath working peacefully toward a world where humans and mutants can live in harmony.

McKellen plays Xavier's former comrade,



Digital technology helped shave years off the X-Men's appearances.

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Ian McKellen

Eric Lehnsherr, a mutant able to manipulate metal, whose mutant alter-ego Magneto has decided that violent revolution is the only way for mutants to get a fair shake.

The opening sequence of "X-Men: The Last Stand" features Xavier and Lehnsherr 20 years earlier, still allies as they make first contact with super-mutant Jean Grey as a teenager, who grows into a powerful telepath played by Famke Janssen.

Patrick Stewart

Great Britain

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Wrinkles and sagging jowls have been magically wiped clean from Stewart and McKellen's faces.

"I'm scared for Hollywood, because A-list movie stars are going to be putting that in their contract. 'I want 10 years taken off me.' This technology is unbelievable," said "X-Men: The Last Stand" director Brett Ratner. "It's like painting the lines out of your face. Why do people have to have plastic surgery, anymore? Just be in a movie and look flawless and perfect."

Stewart said he and McKellen had fun with the process even before the digital effects were applied, toying around with their carriage and body language to re-create the bearing of men 20 years younger.

The technology could come in handy if plans for "X-Men" prequels ever materialize, Stewart said.

"I'm saying the other day there has been talk of a prequel with a younger Magneto and Xavier," Stewart said. "Well, here we are, Ian and I. Wheel us out and spend the money on the technology."

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