

'Spider-Man' still spinning magical web third time around

Contributed by Tim Riley
Sunday, 06 May 2007

SPIDER-MAN 3 (Rated PG-13)

Three years is a long time to be left hanging on the adventures of Spider-Man. But the wait for "Spider-Man 3" was well worth it, considering that the filmmakers have spent what approximates the GNP of several Third World countries to deliver a crowd-pleasing bonanza of dazzling special effects.

State-of-the-art technology enhances the visual appeal of this blockbuster to the extent that the effects alone are worth the price of admission, even more so if you get the chance to see the film on an IMAX screen.

Most important of all, "Spider-Man 3" at least to this untrained eye, adheres to the sensibilities of its comic book origins.

No matter how old he gets, Tobey Maguire still looks like a high school geek in his civilian role of newspaper photographer Peter Parker.

His goofy charm is rooted in his basic innocence, making him the almost perfect boyfriend for equally naïve Mary Jane Watson (Kirsten Dunst), who is now becoming a little more unsettled about Spider-Man's growing popularity with an adoring public.

Actually, she becomes more resentful of Peter Parker's alter ego when her own bid for public acclaim falls flat in a failed attempt to star in a Broadway musical. It's not all razzle-dazzle pyrotechnics and protracted battle scenes for "Spider-Man 3" as tension rises between Peter/Spider-Man and Mary Jane.

More tension develops as James Franco's Harry Osborn grows increasingly bitter about how Spider-Man killed his father, the Green Goblin (Willem Dafoe). This is a tough matter because Harry, Peter and Mary Jane are all childhood friends, and now they are being torn apart.

Peter's greatest challenge, however, is the looming battle with himself. When the film opens, things are going so well for Peter that he's on the verge of proposing to Mary Jane. As the lovebirds go for a ride, a black substance clings to Peter's scooter, and later it attaches itself to his Spider-Man suit, turning it from the familiar red and blue to a menacing deep black.

The black suit transforms Peter so that he becomes stronger and quicker, but it also brings out the dark side of his personality.

Peter acquires the false confidence of a gigolo, and starts swaggering around town in a flashy new suit, adopting the persona of a hipster. He even becomes a bit enamored with pretty blonde classmate Gwen Stacey (Bryce Dallas Howard) that Spider-Man rescues from a freakish industrial accident, and moreover she's the daughter of a police captain (James Cromwell) eager to bestow an award to the hero in a very public ceremony.

Peter's prideful behavior makes him more vulnerable on the one hand, but also causes friction at work with rival photographer Eddie Brock (Topher Grace). At least, J.J. Jameson (J.K. Simmons) still delivers the comic goods as the gruff, acerbic boss at the Daily Bugle.

While there are numerous personal dramas being played out, "Spider-Man 3" is ever mindful of delivering incredible action sequences that seek to outdo each previous scene in ever increasing intensity and scale.

To that end, Spider-Man has to take on two classic villains.

First, there's the doltish criminal Flint Marko (Thomas Hayden Church) who becomes Sandman when he stumbles into a radioactive test site where they're performing a molecular fusion experiment and his DNA is accidentally fused with a large pit of sand. He becomes a menacing, malevolent force capable of changing shape and size with ease.

At first, Sandman continues his life of petty crimes until he realizes his full potential as a threat to Spider-Man's existence.

Spider-Man's true arch-nemesis is Venom (Topher Grace), a villain created from the same mysterious black substance that once attached itself to Spider-Man's red and blue suit.

With a background similar to Peter's, Eddie Brock's transformation into Venom creates a bad guy with the same powers and abilities as the hero. Since Eddie was jealous of Peter, it's rather fun to have this showdown between the alter egos of Venom and Spider-Man.

Aside from the villains being interesting, what makes "Spider-Man 3" work best is the solid spectacle of great actions scenes that crackle with eye-popping zeal. The terrific effects help to gloss over some of the film's clunky parts.

While "Spider-Man 3" is burdened with a few too many sub-plots, this fun film still weaves a magical web of spectacular action.

Tim Riley writes film reviews for Lake County News.

{mos_sb_discuss:5}