

Tobey Maguire ‘Black’ in Action in Venomously Conflicted ‘Spider-Man 3’

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CHICAGO – At the heart of every great film is a good conflict. In Spidey’s third advent, his heart is venomously conflicted and so is the film.

The film gets gargantuan props on its special effects. Of course, the entertaining visual acuity is expected and is no surprise.



Spider-Man (Tobey Maguire) battles his inner demons in “Spider-Man 3”.

Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures

Some 200 [Imageworks](#) [19] animators and 1,000 action artists in total were used to trump the previous two in the technology department.

As for the story, though, there were more subplots meringued together than a single film can eat. With a twinge more fluff whipped in, this could have easily been “Spider-Man 4,” too. Hence, I’m:

con-flict-ed [kuh n-**f**lik-tid] (*adjective*): full of conflicting impulses It’s an optical joyride – weeee! – and a cerebral discombobulation – ayiyiyi. The film’s makers premeditated all 140 minutes – yes, you may check your watch a couple times as that is two hours and 20 minutes – exactly for that effect.

“There’s so much more going on in this movie: more characters and more plotlines,” said visual effects supervisor [Scott Stokdyk](#) [20] in the film’s production notes. [John Dykstra](#) [21], who snagged an Oscar for his work as visual effects supervisor on “Spider-Man 2” in 2004, declined to work on the third film.

Tobey Maguire, who plays Spider-Man for the third time, concurs.

“When I read the script, I was really excited about the different direction we were going with Peter Parker and the other characters and storylines,” he said. “We are covering a lot of new ground here ... while maintaining the continuity of the characters.”

In terms of its plot, less can sometimes be more and more can sometimes be too much. However, the film’s action sequences serve as its

redeeming savior. Director [Sam Raimi](#) [22] focused squarely on using people for stunt work when their bodies were humanly capable and *computer graphics* (CG) when they weren’t.



Director Sam Raimi (left) and Topher Grace (right) on the set of “Spider-Man 3”.

Photo courtesy of Merie W. Wallace

For example, a water scene with Sandman – a new DNA-fused sand character played by [Thomas Haden Church](#) [23] of “[Sideways](#) [24]” – required computers because stunts couldn’t stack up and synthesization was required.

“We had to put a CG Sandman in ... because the velocity of the water is too great to have Church or a stuntman perform portions of the sequence,” Stokdyk said. “Water is a huge challenge for visual effects. Our goal here was to seamlessly integrate the elements for this sequence between practical and CG.”

To prepare himself for Sandman, Church pumped iron for 16 months to bolster his real-life form.

Because real sand proved to be so difficult to manipulate in certain scenes, ground corncob was sometimes used as a double. It weighs half what sand does and the cast and crew enjoyed munching on it. When real elements weren’t used, technology came to bat.

Stokdyk was charged with the two-year process of developing previously non-existent computer programs. Added producer [Grant Curtis](#) [25]: “Stokdyk and his team created new technology to manipulate every piece of sand on [Sandman].”

He added: “Existing technology allowed management of thousands of particles at once, but to animate Sandman the way [Raimi] wanted, we would have to be able to render *billions* of particles. In the end, the new software they wrote required 10 man years to code.”

In a scene commonly splashed in the film’s trailers where Spidey pounds through Sandman’s chest, Baxter Humby – a congenital amputee boxer – doubled as [Tobey Maguire](#) [26] for the take. He lent a hand in conveying the intended effect after being brought into the world devoid of his right one.



Sandman (left) takes on Spider-Man (right) in “Spider-Man 3”.

Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures

After changing shape and manipulating himself to stand 10 or even 80 feet tall, forming giant sand fists, hammers or a mace and shifting into a sand tornado, you could imagine it’d be quite an unusual story development when Sandman decides to flutter his eyelashes and momentarily befriend Spider-Man.

Huh?

[James Franco](#) [27] as New Goblin – the angst-laden green chap who should retire as an actor and model for a living – was armed with “contemporary but deadly practical” weapons like pumpkin bombs (Spidey “hates those things”) and a sky stick that’s more sleek and agile than his previous glider.

Costume designer [James Acheson](#) [28] breathed verve into the character’s military look. He added: “[His] clothing reflects a cross between urban SWAT troops and kind of a black knight but with rather nasty attributes like blades that come out of his arm.”

By the way, never again should a film ever script a butler character – Franco’s, in this case – to imbue life-altering wisdom. Such sage words were ridiculously placed.

Spidey’s eternal love interest – again played by [Kirsten Dunst](#) [29] – for the first time sang in this film and was again designed to look scrumptious. She colored her natural blonde hair red.



Kirsten Dunst stars as Mary Jane Watson. She died her blonde hair red.

Photo courtesy of Merie W. Wallace

[Bryce Dallas Howard](#) [30] – who in the film was paid also to have the hots for Spidey – oppositely colored her natural red hair blonde.



Bryce Dallas Howard stars as Gwen Stacy. She died her red hair blonde.

Photo courtesy of Merie W. Wallace

As for Maguire playing New York’s favorite superhero, chalk the creation of each suit up to 200 man hours. Filming required 40 of them. That’s 8,000 man hours in total just for the familiar red suit.

While Spidey was still red and celebrated by the city, one scene with about 600 latex “web” balloons had to be painted by hand with a Sharpie marker.

Though the concept of a black, incendiary Spidey is a sexy one, the symbiote’s introduction into the film is underdeveloped. A terribly random event whereby a stringy black substance plummets like a meteor from space happens in Spidey’s nearby vicinity without him noticing. It inconspicuously slithers on his moped.

At another nonsensical moment in the film when the story could just as easily have sent him into a bathroom to brush his teeth, the alien paraphernalia struggles to attach itself to Spidey’s body. “GQ” Maguire on steroids is born.



Tobey Maguire sells black Spidey in a special shoot.

Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures

"We wanted to explore the darker side of [Peter Parker's] character," producer [Laura Ziskin](#) [31] said. "When his suit turns black, it enhances and emphasizes characteristics that are already in the host. In this case, it makes him stronger and quicker, but also more prideful and aggressive."

When Spider-Man decides the power afforded by the blackness is the apple in the Garden of Eden he shouldn't enjoy, it becomes [Topher Grace](#) [32]'s obsession. Venom – another new character who Raimi at first kept clandestine and even said he hated – is thusly born. He's bad, needs a spanking and enjoys it.

While at first Raimi frantically vetoed having Venom as a villain because he despised the character's "lack of humanity," Marvel producer [Avi Arad](#) [33] convinced him otherwise. Grace left "That '70s Show" to appear as Venom.

"I had black goo poured all over me, wires attached to my face that people with fishing poles were pulling up and other people below me were pulling down," Grace said. "When you see my character in pain, there wasn't a whole lot of acting required."

Venom's short journey transitions from his initial transformation into a third and final stage where he's fully developed. By the film's conclusion, he's entirely CG and sports a "menacing, unhinged jaw and full mouth of very sharp teeth".

"Everything is alive on 'comic-book Venom,'" Stokdyk said. "The challenge was to make a character that was monstrous, very detailed and very kinetic but not delicate."

Venom replaced a character known as Vulture from early production. Another one known as Lizard was initially going to be the film's main desperado.

With its gold-studded cast and flashy visuals, the film's official \$258 million budget catapults it to the top spot as the most expensive film ever made in U.S. dollars. This barrier breaks the 2005 "[King Kong](#) [34]" record of \$207 million.

In adjusted dollars, "[Voyna i mir](#) [35]" back in 1968 takes the budget cake with \$560 million.

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