

'The Amazing Spider-man' Lacks Personality Despite Best Efforts by Talented Stars

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on July 3, 2012 - 10:03am

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – They could have called it “The Meh Spider-man.” While Andrew Garfield, Emma Stone, Denis Leary, Sally Field, and Martin Sheen do their absolute best to elevate one of the most generic and uninspired superhero screenplays since men first put on spandex in front of the camera, they can’t save this wasted opportunity to reboot a franchise in a way that doesn’t feel generated by a committee of Marvel producers. Marc Webb’s “The Amazing Spider-man” isn’t awful enough to be truly memorable but it certainly doesn’t offer anything new, trudging through most of the same plot details that Sam Raimi covered with personality and style in his trilogy. There are glimpses of what could be in the eventual sequel when the cast is allowed to shake off the generic nature of its origin story but the likelihood of a better follow-up doesn’t excuse the mistakes made here.

A young Peter Parker watches as his father Richard (Campbell Scott) and mother Mary (Embeth Davidtz) flee into the night. Peter never sees his parents again and is raised by Uncle Ben (a fantastic Martin Sheen, offering the only emotional gravity to a piece desperately in need of more) and Aunt May (a solid-but-wasted Sally Field). A teenage Peter (now Andrew Garfield) finds a briefcase owned by his father and tracks a hidden file within it back to Oscorp, the biotech company at which his father worked and where his secret crush, Gwen Stacy (Emma Stone), is currently interning after school.



The Amazing Spider-man
Photo credit: Sony Pictures

At Oscorp, Parker not only crosses paths with his father's former colleague, Dr. Curt Connors (Rhys Ifans), who is working on cross-species genetics, but the young man gets bit by a genetically-engineered spider. Before you know it, he's kicking ass on the subway, dunking like LeBron, and visiting sweet Gwen in her 20th floor apartment by knocking on her window. With Uncle Ben's death at the hands of a petty thief that Peter could have stopped still ringing in his moral ears, he sets out on a quest for vengeance.

At this point, "The Amazing Spider-man" needs a villain or two. The film goes 50 minutes without an action sequence (other than the subway beat-down) and longer without an actual villain. The lack of narrative thrust and incredible familiarity with every one of the story beats of the first hour makes for a film with no thrust for a surprisingly long time, almost as if it's going through the required motions. Peter has to get bit. He has to have a love interest. Ben has to die. He has to experiment with his growing powers. Yadda yadda yadda. When writers James Vanderbilt and Alvin Sargent and Steve Kloves have the guts to try to actually rewrite the franchise (by reimagining Peter's father/mother for example) then the piece has a bit of life but the first act is so bereft of risk-taking or personality that it's depressing. It's tracing over something that's already been drawn.



The Amazing Spider-man

Photo credit: Sony Pictures

I almost forgot the villains. It turns out that Gwen's dad (Denis Leary) happens to be the Police Captain hunting the masked vigilante pretending to be a spider. That could make for an awkward Thanksgiving dinner. At the same time, Dr. Connors experiments with a new Oscorp drug designed to regenerate limbs with super-villain-creating results. With vengeance still on his mind, can Peter save the city from Connors while keeping his secret from his girlfriend's dad long enough to convince him that Spider-man is a hero and not a bad guy?

When it was announced that the talented director of "(500) Days of Summer" was going to helm one of Marvel's Summer 2012 blockbusters, it raised a few eyebrows. To be fair, Webb does excellent work with his actors, clearly more interested in the developing relationship between Peter & Gwen or the dynamic between Parker & Ben than in the actual action of the piece. When the film gets to the requisite slam-boom-bang, Webb loses interest and seriously fumbles the ball. The action scenes in "The Amazing Spider-man" have little personality and no style. And the film is thematically thin. At its core, "The Amazing Spider-man" is the timeless tale of being a hero for vengeance vs. being one for justice but not only have a half-dozen superhero movies handled the same theme already but their creators seemed more interested in the subject matter.



The Amazing Spider-man

Photo credit: Sony Pictures

Why not completely dismiss this inevitable franchise? Garfield & Stone. They're two of the best actors of their generation and they are the only creative voices here who bring something new to the legendary web-slinger. In particular, Stone screams movie star with every glance and awkward exchange with her crush. In fact, the sexual chemistry between the two leads is one of the best in the Marvel canon. With lesser actors, the film would have been a complete disaster.

There's a phrase in CGI animation called the "uncanny valley," where animated creations fall into that chasm where they get close enough to real that they start to look creepy, almost zombie-like. Our brain can tell they're not human but they don't look animated either, and so they don't work. There's a similar valley in superhero movies where filmmakers can fall into that gray area between drama and comic book movie. Sam Raimi and Joss Whedon make glorious, fun, comic-book movies – films that could be sketched frame for frame and sold at Chicago Comics. Christopher Nolan makes dramas about men faced with the concepts of heroism and villainy. Marc Webb's "The Amazing Spider-man," like many bad superhero movies, is neither. It's not fun enough to be a comic book movie and it's not smart or deep enough to be a drama. If it were a color, it would be gray. Everything about it screams "safe," even the alleged "dark" angle of the story, which is predictable and easy. It is a reboot in the literal sense of the word in that it's just trying to sell the same thing again instead of what it should have been – a fresh start.

"The Amazing Spider-man" stars Andrew Garfield, Emma Stone, Rhys Ifans, Denis Leary, Martin Sheen, and Sally Field. It was directed by Marc Webb. It opens on July 3, 2012.



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