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'Spider-Man 2' provides more action, plot intensity

The blockbuster sequel improves upon the original in various ways

JAMES EPLER

UNIVERSITY DAILY (TEXAS TECH U.)

(U-WIRE) LUBBOCK, Texas — After making his debut in the original and fairly decent "Spider-Man" in 2002, the web-slinger comes roaring back onto the silver screen in "Spider-Man 2" with a fierceness that should make heroes like The Hulk, The Punisher and Hellboy run home crying to momma.

MOVIE REVIEW

"Spider-Man 2" improves on every aspect of the original and brims over with edgy excitement and genuine summer movie joy.

It's the quintessential summer movie. The original "Spider-Man" was more of a cookie-cutter comic book movie: A loner experiences a tragedy, (in Peter Parker's case, the death of his uncle) and decides to use his newly discovered superpowers to fight evil.

It's been done many times, and even "Daredevil" (2003) gave the same material more depth.

"Spider-Man 2," however, gives us more character meat to chew on. Moreover, the special effects are tighter and more convincing, and the adventure story and the love story gel more naturally.

It almost feels like classic film noir watching Mary Jane Watson (Kirsten Dunst) look deep into Peter Parker's (Tobey Maguire) eyes and command

him to kiss her to prove he has feelings for her.

Maguire's Parker spends much of this film feeling torn between his responsibilities as a hero and what he may be sacrificing because of it. His conflicted state is having an adverse effect on his web-slinging skills, as he sometimes finds himself in midair unable to get his web up. (Insert Freudian reference here.)

Meanwhile, Parker finds himself fired from job after job. Being a superhero is great, but it doesn't pay the bills. He's constantly tardy because he's trying to save lives and deliver pizza in less than 29 minutes.

Parker is also writing a paper for school about Dr. Otto Octavius (Alfred Molina), a brilliant scientist who is hoping to expand the boundaries of fusion. It's a dangerous experiment; so much so that the good doctor has created four mechanical arms that attach to his spine and take orders from his brain to do the work for him.

Parker's best friend, Harry Osborn (James Franco), is sponsoring the experiment through his late father's old company. Harry has also vowed vengeance on Spider-Man for killing his father, who, unbeknownst to Harry, was the Green Goblin.

Octavius' experiment is a disaster, however, and the apparatus attached to his spine turns into an angry dreadlock-looking monster with a mind of its own.

The battles between Doc Ock and Spider-Man are terrific, especially one involving a clock tower and a train. The Doc Ock villain is a vast improvement over the Green Goblin, who

looked more like something a bad "Power Rangers" episode coughed up.

Amidst the eye-popping special effects and chase sequences, it's the little things that make this comic book movie a keeper.

J.K. Simmons steals every scene he gets as the fast-talking Jameson, editor of The Daily Bugle who pays Parker for pictures of Spider-Man. Rosemary Harris adds nicely to the tender side of the film as Aunt May, and Molina's Octavius matches the hero step for step in terms of a conflicted psyche.

Maguire proves he is still the right man for this job, even though he reportedly almost lost the gig to Jake Gyllenhaal ("The Day After Tomorrow") for this second film. We get more of an opportunity to actually see Maguire in the Spider-Man uniform (no fair telling how), which makes the computer-generated hero of the original film seem more human.

I also appreciated Dunst's Mary Jane refusing to simply be a damsel in distress. Dunst gives her character a genuine emotional center, which elicits similar results out of Maguire.

It's a good match. Director Sam Raimi, who also helmed the original, has turned all aspects of this franchise up several notches. By the end of "Spider-Man 2," he has readied the franchise for the third film, perhaps dangerously treading on a trap of predictability.

It also begs the question, could any future "Spider-Man" movie improve on "2"?

It's hard to imagine.

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GUITAR

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reader what internally and superficially happened to the guitar, but the reasoning behind each venture. The almost year-to-year coverage of Strat changes is as in-depth as the photo that depicts what the guitar looks like completely disassembled.

Some information in these pages is probably mundane for the aspiring musician but tantalizing for the Strat collector, or unbelievable for the music historian but common knowledge for the rock 'n' roll fan. The point that becomes vividly clear in "The Stratocaster Chronicles" is that there is something within the detail that will intrigue every reader.

Besides attention to details — such as why the logo location on the Strat changed in 1985 — Wheeler does well to feature the guitar's influence on American culture. This guitar is as popular as the hot rods of the 1960s and the Playboy bunnies of the 1980s.

Most of what influenced the cultural impact of the Strat was the musicians who picked, bent, or slide-pressed the strings. Similar to the interviews from the guitar's creators, there are numerous stories from musicians that tell how they obtained their first Strat, or even when they first heard Hendrix play a Strat. There is also intriguing information about debut performances using Strats and, probably most fascinating, tracking the influence of the Strat through evolving genres of music. The Strat alone is a crafted electric guitar, but Wheeler tells us of the musicians who took it with them to

THE STRATOCASTER CHRONICLES

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF THE FENDER STRAT

BY TOM WHEELER FOREWORD BY ERIC CLAPTON

Courtesy

The latest book by School of Journalism Associate Professor Tom Wheeler, 'The Stratocaster Chronicles,' celebrates the 50th anniversary of Leo Fender's famous electric guitar. Wheeler teaches magazine journalism courses and is a former editor of Guitar Player Magazine.

Sunday church, "Lawrence Welk" and numerous music festivals.

"The Stratocaster Chronicles" is probably exactly what the people at Fender were looking for in an anniversary collectible book. There is even a foreword from Eric Clapton and a CD including interviews and Strat sounds. Wheeler attacks his newest guitar book with the same precision and work ethic that created the legacy of the Strat in the first place. Wheeler's chronicle is at worst an interesting coffee table book, but flirts with the idea of being a treasured encyclopedia of the Fender Stratocaster guitar.

"The Stratocaster Chronicles" is available at the University Bookstore for \$50.

Toshio Suzuki is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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