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[Ultimate Spider-Man](#)

An original game filled-up with original mediocrity.

Until now, any game marked by the spider logo was a curse to anyone attempting to give it some credit (I am talking about the PC versions). Ultimate Spider-Man, unlike its brethren, manages to escape this dark legacy. I mean that unlike the other iterations of Spiderman, this one can be actually played. But this doesn't save it from being a fine example of misplaced talent. **Story** Ultimate Spider-Man doesn't bare the Marvel's comic-book title for nothing. For this project, Treyarch hired the creators of the comic, Brian Michael Bendis (screenplay) and Mark Bagley (character design). So, like in the comics launched five years ago, the game depicts the life of the teenager Peter Parker who has a knack for mixing school classes with fighting crime. You will also have the opportunity to take over his twisted friend, Eddie Brock Jr, dressed up with the Venom suit. The venom suit was created by doctors Richard Parker and Edward Brock in their attempt to find a way to cure cancer. Of course, like in all comic-books, this project proved to be a total failure. And eventually, envy and frustration will make it even worse: an abject weapon for the vindictive Eddie.

Gameplay If you don't own a gamepad, don't even bother to play it - the combination of keyboard and mouse are licensed to kill the gameplay of USM. First of all, the camera-view auto-levels (and it is a killer) when Spidey is in motion and secondly, like all console-designed games, gaining advantage over opponents and in game-physics, you will be required to do swift combinations of moves. But if you do have a game-pad, and if you are a great fan of Marvel's Spider-Man comic-books, this one may prove to be a worthwhile experience. Ultimate Spider-Man is an open-ended and free-roaming action game (like GTA). Here, as with all games of this kind, you will be provided with far than sufficient useless things to do: there will be city events (they range from stopping speeding cars and beating-up thugs to helping laboring women), 60 trick races (you must find your way from one point to another in a limited time), 30 combat tours (smack some stupid perps), and there are also lots of hidden tokens to collect (which unlock comic covers or landmarks). And you will have to take care about much of these things because they represent prerequisites for you to advance with the story. The lack of diversity of these activities will get on your nerves eventually. It would have been much more fun if you could choose from a story mode and a free mode (swing around the town and look for stuff to do). In USM you will have the opportunity to play from both sides: as the honorable Spider Man, or as his antithetic representation, Venom. This enables two extremely different styles of fighting and moving: one that is defined by ingenuity and swiftness, and another that unites brute force with endurance and takes them to a higher level. The assortment of actions provided by USM is incredibly slim (kick/punch, cast web, grab, jump and some combos like jumping against a wall, or hanging your cocooned victims by a street pillar) but, surprisingly enough, the way your character acts is full of flavor. While Spider-Man can be a nuisance even for the toughest of his opponents because of his great reflex and speed, Venom feels slow and overwhelming even for the player. It is just unbreakable. And while Spidey proves an impossible target while jumping from the wall straight into your head and then out of your reach, Venom enjoys to engulf you within himself or to grab you with his tentacles and then break every bone in your body. But if you are really lucky, instead of just being clawed to death, you may find your doom piled up under the vehicle he has just thrown at you. In terms of movement, Spider-Man can make even Flash blush with envy. While throwing web all-over the place and swinging on it, his mechanics look very smooth and very well tuned. Unfortunately, the camera can't always keep up the pace, and sometimes you may find yourselves jumping in the opposite direction or hooking/grabbing to the wrong corner of the

building. Also, there are many places where you can't find anything to grab on, and there is the frustration of not having the possibility to cast spiderwebs to hanging points underneath. The place you will be spending around 25 hours of your life (the plot of the game takes up about 25% of this time) is made up of Manhattan and the neighboring Queens. Here you will meet many Marvel stars (even Wolverine will be there) that look really awesome. There are no more funny costumes and dull-looking faces. Just wait to see the Goblin or the Rhino. Taking on the tasks provided by the story it is worthwhile because of the comics you get to see. Otherwise, the game is once again painfully annoying because what is required from you is not always clear. There will be lots of trial-and-error sessions where the fact that the controls and the camera-view are a little loose will be enough convincing for many non-spider-man fans to uninstall the game.

ConceptI remember Driver, where the missions took place in wide areas, but because of the tight schedule and the long tail of fans wearing blue you never had the opportunity to scout those cities. Even so, the experience of freedom remained unscathed. You could always try to use "the other left" to get somewhere. And of course, you had the free ride option. Making a game linear is imperative when all you want to do is to sell an issue of Marvel's Spider-Man. Breaking up an excellent comic with dumb tasks just because some marketing numbers show that linear games do not sell is an act of mockery to all Spider-Man fans. GTA sells out well because it has cars and cops using tanks, and civilians that die if shot. GTA also sells out well because it brings variety. I wonder why thugs insist on preying on the weak even though the only thing they get is some make-up from the "omnipresent Spider-Pest". And they are a little tougher than a chicken. So why do I have to beat the hell out of them hundreds of times and have utterly no effect on their behavior? This is far from being rich. The bottom-line is that you won't feel free if you don't have anything to choose from. Freedom is determined by the variety of choices you are provided not be the size of space you get to hang out in. In USM you get to fight, or race, or fight again. Nice! I must be a screwball to find pleasure in this. I think Treyarch tried to save this anomaly by unlocking some comic-book covers, costumes, characters and art-works. This is disgusting. The art-works, and covers have such a low-res quality, you can barely distinguish anything. And most of the costumes are worthy of being burned considering the effort required to unlock them.

VideoEvery character in the game looks very well - no wonder, since they were drawn by Bagley. I am convinced that their comic-book touch will seduce and break many hearts. But they will also burn many eyes. I burst into tears many times during play. Those bright colors make a terrible mix with the plain outdoor textures. Add to this the lousy (and lazy) camera-view and you'll have the complete picture. This is an unforgivable thing for a game that requires high concentration great reflexes. Too bad it doesn't come up with free yoga sessions. How is it possible to make game with so many exhilarating moments, with a smooth character design and delighting object mechanics and be such a failure in providing the tools needed to contemplate these jewels.

SoundOnly the voice acting deserves to be mentioned. It does what is supposed to do: it brings characters to life. Otherwise, the sound effects are comparable with what you can when putting your ear against an armored door. Some buzzing and that's all. However, you will have a lot of fun with the soundtrack, after shutting it up, of course. There's just some mambo-jumbo techno-music, which has the unique ability of frying brains without a cooking-pan.

MultiplayerIt would have been nice to have some street-fighting in multiplayer. Spidey and Venom raging across the streets... Dream on! It won't happen.

ConclusionLike I said, USM is a fine example of feeding diamonds to hogs. I do not understand what happened in the process of making this game. I am sure I misplaced many good aspects of the game. There was too much dirt over them for me to see anything. I hope Spider-Man fans will excuse my criticism.