● Because you know it's the first thing you always do, climb the Empire State Building...and take a crack at one of the toughest skydiving challenges ever.

SPIDER-MAN 3

Smack attack in black

PUBLISHER: **Activision** DEVELOPER: **Treyarch** GENRE: **Action** AVAILABILITY: **Retail** ESRB RATING: **Teen** MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: **2.8GHz CPU, 1GB RAM (XP)/1.5GB RAM (Vista), 6.6GB hard drive space, 256MB videocard (gamepad recommended)** MULTIPLAYER: **None** VERSION REVIEWED: **Near-Final Reviewable**

REVIEW

Thank goodness for tall buildings. Without 'em, Spider-Man would be pretty screwed. He's not much of a runner, can't leap more than a traffic light in a single bound, and clings to the ground on all fours. Go Sticks-to-Sidewalk-Man. Those skyscrapers are practically cloud busters in Treyarch's bigger, smoggier, and ultimately busier *Spider-Man 3*...though you'll still spend dizzying amounts of time logging eventless miles on your invisible odometer as you swing, yo-yo, and slingshot between semi-interesting cityscape to-dos. Hey, if anything, it's a superheroic leap over The Fizz Factor's disgraceful PC version of *Spider-Man 2*.

EVERYBODY WAS WEB-FU FIGHTING

Even the console version of *Spider-Man 2* was a colossal vacuum—a monster megalopolis plagued by soulless facades and mission déjà vu. *Spider-Man 3* doesn't make the urban jungle any less shallow, and you still can't enter most buildings, biff wandering pedestrians, or snarl traffic by standing in the middle of intersections (you just get run over). But this isn't *The Elder Scrolls: Spidey*, and core play still rallies around goof-off acrobatics, token hunts, scripted missions, and smacking around superhoodlums. What's improved? All of the above...more or less.

Remember chasing balloons and snatching purse thieves? Presto gone-o. Instead, the city's now pieced into areas—call them gangland turf—with colors (red, yellow, green) indicating crime rates. You still pound your share of faceless carjackers, street punks, and costumed goofballs, but you also occasionally receive individualized errands like rescuing bank hostages, stalking sequestered gangs, or disabling bombs via cathartic button-mashing minigames. The only downside? Cleanup has no discernible impact on crime frequency, which kind of damps your incentive.

Story missions offer more length and variety, diverting between one-way interior crawls (hunt Dr. Curt "The Lizard" Connors, infiltrate Scorpion's science lab, navigate a burning building) and outdoor scrambles (catch the falling dude, chase the helicopter, pick off the snipers). Unfortunately, most boss battles still play out in closed arenas, sometimes hobbling you with annoying penalties. In one sewer-based battle with the Lizard, for instance, you can't wall-climb—presumably an odds-evener. Weak.

MY HANDS! MY HANDS!

Otherwise, you'll either love or hate the hyped-up combo-fueled melee. I often wonder what it'd feel like tying my fingers in pretzels, and now I know. *Spider-Man 3* is the *Twister* of punch-kick slap-downs, one of the most frenzied onslaughts of digital derring-do I've wrung my metacarpals through since *Ninja Gaiden*. And that's using a gamepad—don't bother at all with a keyboard and mouse.

Part of the problem's an occasional lapse into punitive contrivance. At one point, you're supposed to lift debris off rail tracks by pounding two buttons...except you can't, until you clobber a platoon of respawning lizards. Even using your spider sense (bullet-time slowdown) or donning your new dusky duds (which merely buff your powers or let you go berserk) isn't enough to make incidents like this less than a dozen-try affair. But if you're up to it, this is certainly the best *Spider-Man* game that's graced a PC yet, even if it's also one of the toughest. ● **Matt Peckham**

● This looks way more interesting than it really is. Actually, you're just pressing buttons when Simon—er, the game—says.

VERDICT

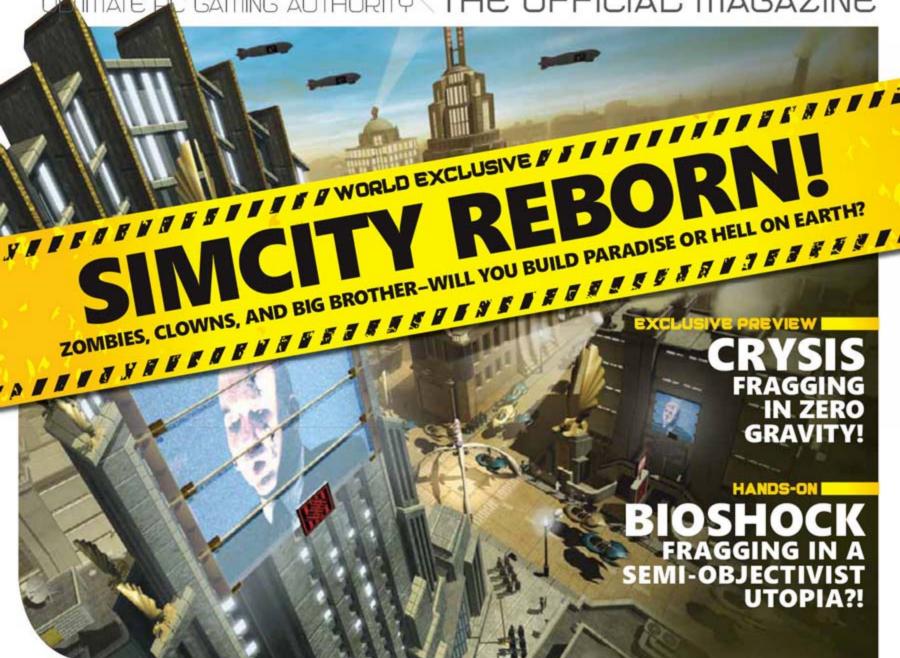☑ Well-crafted city; intricate story missions; improved random crime-fighting.

☒ Superficial crime-rate system; arbitrarily difficult areas; caged-in boss battles.

7 \10

GOOD

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