



Spider-Man: Maximum Carnage

Tom DeFalco (Writer) , J.M. DeMatteis , Terry Kavanagh , David Michelinie , Mark Bagley (Illustrator) , Sal Buscema (Illustrator) , Ron Lim (Illustrator) , Tom Lyle (Illustrator) , more... Alex Saviuk (Illustrator) ...less

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The perennial fan-favorite collection, back in print! Carnage, the spawn of Venom, has assembled an army of Spider-Man's criminally insane adversaries to spread his message of hostility, chaos and wholesale slaughter: Carrion, Demogoblin, Shriek and the Spider-Man Doppelganger! Outmanned and overpowered, the wall-crawler must recruit his own band of super-beings to combat the rising tide of evil: Black Cat, Cloak & Dagger, Firestar, Captain America, Deathlok and ... Venom?! Spider-Man's worst enemy becomes his uneasy ally in the battle to halt Carnage's mad rampage. But when he finds himself at odds with a number of his allies, who want to finish Carnage and his cronies once and for all, Spider-Man must decide whether to violate his personal code of honor to rid the world of pure evil. Can the web-slinger find an alternative before it's too late? Either choice carries dire consequences!

Collecting: *The Amazing Spider-Man* 378-380, *Spectacular Spider-Man* 201-203, *Spider-Man* 35-37, *Spider-Man Unlimited* 1-2, *Web of Spider-Man* 101-103

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Alex Saviuk (Illustrator) ...less

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From Reader Review Spider-Man: Maximum Carnage for online ebook

Prateek Kouloorkar says

This is a lengthy one with 1 dimensional plot, an all star marvel packed in it with spider-man and venom in center of the heroes.

From the beginning to the end its just fight and fight, could have summed up the whole thing in less than half of the plot.

Spider-man is a wuss and cant decide anything at all, the purpose of spider-man is unclear with venom being the standout and this fails to show the real ferocity of carnage and what he is capable of, this might be good for some but lot of the heroes have meaningless powers, probably Marvel wanted to match the DC in line up at the time.

Comics wise DC is another league and fact that i chose to read this because it is regarded as one of the best of marvel.

The Avengers here unlike in the movies are completely hopeless and that is primarily because of minimal to negligible presence and could have used them better to end all the nonsense real quickly.

I sure fell in love with Doppelganger, Venom and Demogoblin.

It brings back memories of spider-man animated series very well which is nice.

Logan says

This one has not aged very well. I'm confident that had I read these issues when I was a kid and just getting into comics, I would have loved this. But reading this as an adult? I can't stand the dialogue at all. 90% is the character's telegraphing what they're doing (think how Naruto characters shout their move as they're doing it) or their current situation. I'm fully capable of comprehending the situation and what's going on in the panels; I don't need a character explaining it to me.

I guess it's okay for kids (pre-teens) who are just getting into comics? I don't know, there's most likely better material. I'm just glad I didn't spend money on this and got it for free during a promotion Amazon had.

Ah well, on to the next one.

Isaac VR says

Maximum Carnage es un clásico y como clásico debemos respetarlo, sin embargo, tiene un gran problema: los personajes actúan en un nivel "malo legal", y los héroes son buenos legales.

Lo interesante es saber porqué Carnage está tan pendejo. Venom se lleva las palmas, Spiderman es un idiota y Mary Jane sigue tan sabrosa como siempre.

Totalmente recomendable, pero no esperen un Civil War.

Matt says

Collects The Amazing Spider-Man issues #378-380, Spectacular Spider-Man issues #201-203, Spider-Man issues #35-37, Spider-Man Unlimited issues #1-2, Web of Spider-Man issues #101-103

This is a classic Spider-Man story, but it really doesn't hold up very well. Carnage is a formidable opponent, but this story is spinning its wheels nonstop. In this story, Carnage forms a team of villains, so Spider-Man and Venom form a team of heroes to combat the bad guys. There are tons of Marvel cameos in this collection, but even the appearance of familiar characters hasn't stopped this story from aging badly.

Aaron Wiener says

What to say.

Hmmm

So... listen. You have to really like cornball Marvel shit to like this.

Here are some excerpts;

Black Cat: "It aint over till the cat lady springs!"

Carnage: "You know what they say... no pain, no reign... of terror, that is"

?????

The story is fast paced and fun. The combat is constant. The emotional beats are sometimes powerful, and sometimes they fall very, very flat.

The end is a little too koombiyah for my tastes. Seriously... it's one of those "the greatest power is love" kind of deals ?. The second act is pretty damn dark.

Venom is a bonefied badass. Carnage and Shriek are awesome characters... imagine an angrier and more powerful version of Joker and Harley Quinn.

Also, for some reason, the Spiderman doppelgänger from Starlin's Infinity Wars is here. Why? ::shrug:: I dunno. But there he is.

Cloak and Dagger also play a large role. I like them, even if Cloak looks really fuckin dumb.

Now here's the weird part; Marvel had this character. His name is Nightwatch... he randomly appeared in this story and I shit you not, he is a pound for pound ripoff of Spawn. Like... down to the costume and the cape that thinks for itself. It's bizarre. How could they think we wouldn't notice?

There are a couple laughs, some great fights... I only recommend this for people who have a high threshold for early 90s comic book nonsense. If you like serious, thought provoking, artistic shit... go ahead and skip this shit show. If you don't mind having some mindless fun, have at it!

Rhino's Den says

Let's get something out of the way before we dive too deeply into this massive story: How many of you out there heard the music from the video game adaptation of this story in your heads while reading this book? I swear, as soon as I got to the first panel of Cletus Kasady being wheeled through a prison Hannibal Lecter-style I was hearing those Green Jelly sound bites like my old SNES was right next to me. Don't worry though; you're only in real trouble when you see the images on the page move around slightly like they did in the game.

Alright, with that out of the way, let's dive into this monster of a book; Maximum Carnage is a Spider-Man crossover event that spanned the entire line of Spider-Man books in the 90's, plus one that was introduced during this crossover. The story revolves around Spidey's not-so-long-time foe Carnage breaking out of prison with upgrades to his Symbiote suit, all while Peter is dealing with the death of his best friend who also happened to become one of his greatest enemies, his parents returning to his life after being held in a Russian Gulag for decades, and his wife, Mary Jane, constantly hounding him to stop risking his life and stay home with her and her smoking habit. Confusing? Yeah, that was the biggest problem with this book's structure, as it takes place smack dab in the middle of several ongoing stories spanning the entire Spider-Man library and gives little context as to what is being referenced aside from editor's notes saying "Go check out this issue!" Good news is that a majority of this story can be understood without going hunting for those stories, because once the fighting starts it focuses squarely on that for 90% of the book. The main focus is on Spider-Man assembling a ragtag team of heroes and anti-heroes, including Venom, Black Cat, Cloak and Dagger, Deathlok, Iron Fist, Firestar, Morbius, and Captain America, to take on Carnage and his new "family" of psychotics: Shriek (invented just for this story), Doppelganger (a monstrous Spidey clone from the Infinity War storyline), Demogoblin, and Carrion.

While Carnage's name may be on the book, the true threat in this story is Shriek, as she has not only a sonic blast ability, but she can also (for the sake of plot convenience) psychically project negative thoughts and emotions into the people around her. In a nutshell, she can bring out the worst in people and incites riots all throughout New York without even really thinking about it. This leads to some cool moments, particularly involving Spider-Man and Iron Fist, where the heroes have to deal with a crowd of innocents out to kill them.

After that, you'll notice that this book is absolutely massive, with 14 chapters, and that there are a good four distinct teams with some change of creators tied to this book; well that's because this is what the creative teams of crossovers looks like, especially old-school crossovers that only involved one corner of the Marvel Universe as opposed to the whole slate. This also, however, illustrates one of the most glaring flaws in big crossovers like this one: the quality is all over the spectrum. The writing, while staying on-point for the most part, fluctuates from chapter to chapter with some inconsistencies here and there, but the art is another story entirely. The art in this collection varies from really good (when Mark Bagley is in charge) to really bad (Sal

Buscema's looks-like-a-cheap-knock-off-of-Tim-Sale's-work style), with a whole lot of "meh" in-between. There are inconsistencies between chapters here, too, such as both Peter Parker and Eddie Brock having short hair at the end of one chapter and mullets at the beginning of the next, or MJ being in a nightgown at the end of one chapter and fully clothed in business attire at the start of the next chapter (both of these points are referencing the same transition between chapters 3 and 4, by the way).

My biggest gripe with this book, however, lies in the penultimate chapter, and beware of spoilers for this part of the story.

(SPOILERS!! RANT INCOMING!!) The way the heroes take out the bad guys in this book infuriates me to no end; throughout the book, the moral dilemma of taking one life to save hundreds is front and center, which can make for some quality storytelling with morally-sound heroes like Spider-Man, and the titular hero stands his ground by the end to show that goodness and love wins out over all, last stand-style. Cool, up until the team comes back with a GUN THAT SHOOTS HAPPY RAYS AT THE BAD GUYS!! Or, as Spidey himself describes it in the book: A F*****G 'GOOD BOMB!!' Are you freaking serious?!?! THAT'S all you could come up with in that weekend conference at a New York hotel that you bragged about in the introduction?? A F*****G...GOOOD...BOMB?!?!? And as if adding insult to injury, this infuriating plot point takes place during one of Buscema's chapters, so the art is terrible to boot!! (SPOILERS ENDED!! RANT [maybe] OVER!!)

...*whew* Okay, now that that's out of my system, let's move onto some of the positives about this story. Like I said in the spoilers section, the moral debate over taking one life to save hundreds is pretty well-done here, with ol' Web-Head torn between the two sides for a good chunk of the book. Once Cap shows up on-scene, though, there's no debate over which side is right for Spidey, as it should be; the Sentinel of Liberty is and should always be a shining example of the moral high ground. Another thing I liked about this book was the character progression for Venom, especially in the final chapter. Throughout the book, he has only one goal in mind: kill Carnage; in the end, though, he accepts that Spider-Man may have a point about Kasady being a victim as much as the one's he's killed due to his childhood trauma, and decides to try it his way for a time. Finally, it was really nice to see so many characters slugging it out for fourteen chapters, like dumping out the whole toy chest and just going to town for an afternoon.

All in all, I'm very glad that this story inspired one of the beat-'em-up games I played to death as a child, and the story had some good qualities to it. Overall, though, this story is a true 90's-era mess that didn't really need to happen with an infuriating penultimate chapter (oh, look, here comes a Red Lantern ring). If you're a tried-and-true Venom and Carnage fan, you likely already own this, but otherwise, you can skip it and not miss much.

2 out of 5 stars.

Chris Gordon says

I'm giving Maximum Carnage five stars not for the same reasons I gave Kraven's Last Hunt or Death of Jean DeWolff five stars, since those two stories were better written and more nuanced than Maximum Carnage. Rather, this graphic novel deserves five stars for being one of the most fun and exciting stories in Spider-Man's catalog. And as an added bonus, Venom makes one of his greatest appearance across all mediums; he plays bad-cop to Spider-Man's much maligned good-cop, and I often found myself rooting for him over Spidey most of the time!

I love this story, for it is the embodiment of fun and care-free comic book writing without being the least bit corny. It was extremely fun to read the entire way through (and it isn't that short a graphic novel, mind you). I read a similarly lengthed Spider-Man graphic novel not that long ago and lost interest halfway through. This story had what any cool comic should have: tons of characters, great action sequences, awesome art with VIBRANT COLORS (which is becoming frighteningly less frequent in modern comics), and an interesting plot.

Sure, there were some things that bothered me, like why did the fights between the heroes and Carnage's gang have to go on for so many rounds? Why didn't Carnage just end it quickly by murdering everyone when he had the chance? I mean, his madness made him unpredictable and illogical, but even he should know better than to screw around with Spider-Man for too long instead of just killing him once and for all, which he was clearly capable of were it not for his uncharacteristic leniency...but I digress. Overall, I think it was a fun and cool story and I would recommend it to anyone who wants a good time without the need to take things so seriously. And if you do want to take this story seriously, I suppose there is enough substance there for you to get at least something of substance out of it, like the moral about doing the right thing even when it's not popular.

People seem to really pan this story and call it lackluster or even bad, but I can't see why. As long as you don't expect to get Shakespeare from this, I think you'll like it a lot – I know I did. Definitely one of my all-time favorite Spider-Man graphic novels to date.

Variaciones Enrojo says

Reseña de Luis Javier Capote Pérez para Zona Negativa:
<http://www.zonanegativa.com/obras-mae...>

Si pasada la primera decena de entregas la colección Obras maestras empezó a introducir la recopilación de sagas que no eran especialmente memorables, al alcanzar la veintena empezó a dar pábulo a historias cuya calidad era bastante más baja. Matanza Máxima es probablemente el principal y mejor ejemplo de aventura olvidable que recibió el inmerecido título de “obra maestra” por recopilarse en una cabecera que estaba reconvirtiéndose rápidamente en repositorio de todo tipo de materiales.

Pongámonos en situación y remontémonos hasta la turbulenta década de los noventa. En el año 1993, Spider-Man cumple treinta años de existencia, poco tiempo después de que Todd McFarlane, el hombre que redefiniera gráficamente el personaje, abandonara la casa de las ideas para co-fundar Image Comics. Durante los años anteriores, la franquicia arácnida ha gozado del creciente favor del público, por obra y gracia de los lápices de don Todd (y después de él, de Erik Larsen). De la mano del trepamuros, el dibujante canadiense hará sus primeros (y lamentables) pinitos literarios, mientras los buques principales de la franquicia son manejados por guionistas veteranos como David Michelinie o Gerry Conway. Peter hace vida de casado con Mary Jane y compagina sus obligaciones maritales con su tradicional puesto de fotógrafo, pero más allá de la espectacularidad gráfica aportada por McFarlane (que no oculta sus evidentes carencias) hay que reconocer que las colecciones arácnidas se mueven con el piloto automático puesto. Cuando desaparecen camino de Image dos de sus dibujantes insignia y la burbuja de las ventas empieza a desplomarse, se hace necesario desarrollar una serie de estrategias para intentar revertir la tendencia y combatir la pujante llegada de una nueva competidora. Todo vale en la guerra: desde inundar el mercado con colecciones de ínfima calidad hasta dar carta de naturaleza superheroica a antiguos villanos como Veneno (por responder a la ética y la estética de moda en el momento) pasando por la organización de aventuras y cruces en los que todo parecía removarse para volver a aposentarse sin cambios sustanciales. Matanza Máxima es un buen ejemplo de saga

sacacuartos de la época. Durante tres meses, las cuatro colecciones regulares protagonizadas por Spider-Man y su nueva cabecera trimestral (¿quién recuerda las series *Unlimited*?) se dedicaron a contar el enfrentamiento entre Spider-Man y Matanza.

Matanza era la evolución villana de Veneno, en un momento en el que este último había sido reconducido a la situación de antihéroe (y protagonizaba la que habría de hacer una larga sucesión de miniseries). Más feo, más malo y más chiflado, se convierte en la amenaza que fuerza a una incómoda alianza entre Peter y Eddie Brock. Juntos quizás puedan enfrentarse a un ser demasiado despiadado como para combatirle por separado. En torno a ellos se reunirá un equipo variopinto de héroes que incluye a la Gata Negra, a Estrella de Fuego, al segundo Deathlock o al redivivo Puño de Hierro (recuperado poco antes por John Byrne). Por su parte, Matanza también reúne a unas huestes tan monstruosas y desquiciadas como él mismo. Sin embargo, pese a su circunstancial coincidencia de objetivos, Spider-Man y Veneno siguen siendo muy diferentes en cuanto a métodos. Sus divergencias son reflejo de las diferencias conceptuales existentes entre el héroe tradicional y el antihéroe gris oscuro en auge en ese momento, empezando por la cuestión del respeto a la vida. Quizás, sólo quizás, es éste el único elemento mínimamente interesante de una saga excesivamente larga y poco merecedora de ser uno de los hitos del trigésimo cumpleaños del trepamuros. El resto fue un trimestre de persecuciones, tortazos y discusiones que prologaba lo que habrían de ser unos años movidos para Spider-Man y su franquicia.

Como era de esperar al tratarse de un evento que englobaba cuatro colecciones y dos especiales, el número de autores implicados fue bastante elevado. En la parte literaria tenemos a cuatro guionistas hondamente relacionados con la franquicia de la telaraña: Tom DeFalco (que había dejado aventuras para el recuerdo diez años atrás en la colección principal del arácnido); David Michelinie (que llevaba varios años en el negocio, aportando literatura a los dibujos de Todd McFarlane, Erik Larsen y sus sucesores); J. M. DeMatteis (que aportaba la parte de introspección psicológica y había firmado junto a Mike Zeck la mítica Última cacería de Kraven) y Terry Kavanagh (un escritor del montón que medraría en la Marvel de esos años para perpetrar dos penosas etapas de las aventuras del Hombre de Hierro y del Caballero Luna). DeFalco y DeMatteis continuarían varios años más en la franquicia (y de hecho don Jean Marc pasó a saludar durante la última aventura de la familia Kravinov) prestando sus bolígrafos a episodios tan controvertidas como el asunto del clon hasta el final del milenio. David Michelinie no duraría mucho más y cerraría el largo capítulo de su presencia en la colección principal del trepamuros con la saga Triunfo y tragedia (publicada hace veinte años en un único tomo por estos pagos). Terry Kavanagh desaparecería (afortunadamente) después de escribir las aventuras de Iron Boy, aunque reaparecería para echar una mano a Alan Davis en la Patrulla-X del cambio de milenio. Por lo que respecta a la parte gráfica, hay que destacar la presencia de Mark Bagley, un dibujante que después de una larga presencia en las colecciones arácnidas, trabajaría junto a Kurt Busiek en uno de los conceptos más interesantes de la Marvel de los noventa, los Thunderbolts. Junto a él encontramos al veterano Sal Buscema, al ubicuo Ron Lim y a dos autores que se prodigaron principalmente en esos años en la franquicia arácnida: Alex Saviuk (cuyo estilo clásico y deudor del de John Romita padre le abriría la puerta hasta la realización de una novela gráfica centrada en la relación entre Peter y Mary Jane) y Tom Lyle (que llegó a hacer alguna incursión literaria en una depauperada división cósmica de Marvel años después).

Estilos variados y diferentes que, no obstante, dieron como resultado un producto cohesionado dentro de su mediocridad.

Matanza Máxima demostró la carencia total de relieve de un personaje tan anodino como el villano protagonista (del que el propio DeMatteis se burlaría en el primer encuentro entre Spider-Man y Batman) y los intentos repetidos por recuperar unas ventas que habían sido anormalmente elevadas en los años inmediatamente anteriores. Como dato anecdotico merece la pena traer a colación el hecho de que sirviera como argumento para la realización de un videojuego homónimo que salió para Megadrive y SuperNintendo. Un juego de lucha de avance lateral en la mejor tradición de Target: Renegade o Final Fight, tan profundo como los comics de los que traía causa.

Q. says

This series is the equivalent of a youngster gathering all of his action figures together and making up a story while he's banging them all together. "Maximum Carnage" isn't bad by any means but suffers from a number of problems that continually plague crossover events such as this. The series is significantly padded, as evident by the first seven issues barely moving the plot forward. It's almost as if the series was proposed and then the head honcho said I need you to make it twice as long. There also isn't any real character development for anybody. All the characters play out their respective roles with business as usual. But what may be the series worst problem is that nothing has really changed by the end. Every character is essentially in the same position as they were at the beginning.

That being said, this is the kind of story line I would have eaten up as a kid with a large group of heroes and villains duking it out through New York City. It's not "Justice" or "Old Man Logan", but then again it wasn't trying to be.

Nathaniel Tortorelli says

SpiderMman in a fun simple comic.

If you're looking for a break from the normal, deep Marvel, you'll like this. This book has Carnage, the best of Spider-Man's rogue's gallery, recruit a handful of villains, spreading from Spider-Man's doppelganger (my personal favourite in this comic) to the deadly Carrion. Due to the escalating situation, Peter Parker finds an injured Venom prepositioning a temporary team-up in order to defeat Carnage and his "family". Eventually, other Marvel heroes such as Iron Fist, Captain America and more join Spidey in his attempt to end Carnage's killing spree. Spidey's team is polarized between Venom's want to end Carnage once and for all and Spider-Man's wish to not have his own hands bloodied (his refusal to kill).

You don't need to be a fan of Spider-Man to be a fan of this amazing comic book. This comic book is just classic comic fun all around.

Jan Geerling says

Not the deepest of Spider-Man stories, but it has many elements that make him a great character. His ability to stay true to his moral compass and always find hope during the darkest of times was/is an inspiration. And the storyline is also a childhood memory. Many seem to hate 90's comics. I don't. A not even feeling guilty about it pleasure.

Eldon Farrell says

For me, Spider-Man (hyphen optional) is always about nostalgia. I read A LOT of Spider-Man as a child and I love going back to the stories I remember and enjoying them again. This one, however does not represent the best of what Spidey can be. It started out great, but once it tried to tie everything together near the end, suffice it to say, it lost the thread somewhere along the way.

Ahdom says

Dang! What a knock-down-drag-out this one was! Spidey is in over his head fighting Venom, but what happens when a psychopath inherits the symbiote? Carnage is impossible to beat and because of that, Spiderman has to make some alliances, some of them the most unlikely, but under the circumstance, necessary. I remember playing this game back in the 90's and now I think it warrants a revisit. I am so glad to be reading the symbiote comic arcs, they are the best!

Andy 117 says

"If the Dalek gets out, it'll murder every living creature. That's all it needs."

"But why would it do that?"

"Because it honestly believes they should die."

There's a Doctor Who episode from the first series of the 2005 relaunch - back when Christopher Eccleston had his big shot as the Doctor - called "Dalek". In it, they find a single Dalek; they were popular Doctor Who foes, introduced in the 60s. Without any orders - a soldier without command - the Dalek reverts to a prime directive (or previous orders), which basically subsists of "kill everyone". The Doctor and the Dalek have history, as the Dalek is the last remaining unit of the species that wiped out his entire race. Now the Dalek is cutting through this underground facility, using its immense and unflinching intelligence to find the most efficient ways to murder hundreds of people, using the Doctor's friends as hostages to ensure it can get out and murder hundreds, thousands, millions more. So the Doctor, watching, boiling, as this massacre is played out, finds a big-ass space gun (it's a silly show) and faces the creature in a showdown. Finger on the trigger. Ready to destroy this barely-living monster and end what could well be the wholesale slaughter of all life on Earth. And, faced with a decision that could break his moral code for good, the Doctor... lays down his weapon. He can't do it.

Now, this is thrilling, award-winning sci-fi television. It cleverly, integrally meshes character study and pitch-perfect action pacing to create a morality play with genuine stakes and personal impact. It has nothing, really, to do with Maximum Carnage, because Maximum Carnage is crap from a stinky toilet. However, it does have very similar set-up and moral cues. On the surface, Carnage is the Dalek, Spider-Man is the Doctor; a creature that knows nothing but killing meets a man who will have to decide if stopping that killing is worth scarring his soul. It could've worked. We could argue all day of Spider-Man is the proper vehicle for this kind of conflict, but it could've worked. Brevity is the key - Dalek clocks in at just under three quarters of an hour. Maximum Carnage would, optimally, be three, maybe four issues long.

It's fourTEEN.

Oh.

So, Maximum Carnage is kneecapped, not by its premise, but by its length. Its obligation to the sort of brainless comic book action that acts as little more than padding between character moments, and character moments that have to be stretched thin so as not to waste what little narrative twists there are in one fell swoop. The first few issues consist of bouts between teams of characters that register as little more than

white noise. The middle few issues finally let the morality play come to a head, and then, weirdly, we go back to that white noise. It's frustratingly predictable, but it's also bad in some really fascinating ways. Especially considering the mission statement laid out in the foreword, a Den of Lies that seems to imply that the many, many creators working on this project thought they were doing something special, unique, and worthwhile with this half-assed morality play.

Most pressingly, the morality play is busted. Carnage has assembled a team of villains, including new character, Shriek, a sort of evil Black Canary type, and they have one simple goal: kill everyone in New York. This is framed as "anarchy" - rules are for losers, Carnage quips, and so here we go a-murderin'! Carnage is practically a redneck Joker in a spiky red Venom outfit, so it's sort of ripping a page out of late-80s Batman in making a villain that is irredeemably evil through their outright insanity - laughing as they slaughter millions of innocents, Carnage is just crrrrrazy! Spider-Man has assembled a team of heroes (except, whoa, look out! Venom's on the team!), and they have one simple goal: stop Carnage. This is framed as "order". So we have this dichotomy here. Anarchy = murder = bad. Order = not murder = good.

Ignoring for a second that this is provably not the case in the real-world in any manner of truth... what? Anarchy is bad, order is good? This does frame Spider-Man as wanting to stop murders not because he believes life is sacred, but because the LAW told him to do it, but moreover, there's a narrative wrinkle: Cletus Kasady, the man who is Carnage, has his backstory revealed, and it's that his childhood was dogged by systemic bullying. Carnage is actually enacting revenge on "order" - the same order that Spider-Man wants to uphold - because it failed him, as an orphan sent to a broken home. Since we're playing by Batman rules, this is what "made him insane!" - what turned him into Carnage - but the fact that this is never redressed is mind-boggling. (Well, Venom manages to exploit it when he fights Carnage one-on-one, but it really should have factored into Spider-Man's character arc, because, well, his is the important one, but also Venom is bleh.)

Combined with the restrictive, PG nature of the violence you can actually depict in a Spider-Man book, and the literal massacre is depicted rather tamely. We see very few people actually die, and while I don't really want to have seen this book cater even further to the nihilistic, vapid tropes of insanity-driven mass-murder, the result is rather counter-intuitive: the stakes appear less pressing, because we're never shown them, and this, in turn, trivializes death itself. There's a reason folks are more shocked by a single death than hundreds, and it's because statistics are interpreted as collateral. So Carnage is well on his way to killing every living person in New York, but New York as we see it appears to be ticking along just fine. Even a simple, bloodless, visual representation of their progress, like maybe symbiote tentacles being left behind and sprouting around buildings, signs, cars, etc., would have gone a long way to making the entire point of the character - that he can and will murder all life on Manhattan island and beyond - feel like there was any actual weight.

So slow is the book, Spider-Man doesn't have a moral anchor. Instead, he has three. Aunt May, Mary-Jane (now his wife), and his dad (now... back, for reasons). Mary-Jane is done the least justice; I think they were trying to go for an angle where she's worried that Pete will die, as a way of ramping up the tension. Instead, she just seems to hound him about how he can't keep going out and being Spider-Man all the dang time, which makes her into less of a worried companion and more of a doting, nagging ball-and-chain. It's a bad time.

Aunt May is there being Aunt May - people are good, she tells Spider-Man. Pete's dad is there being a jerk? People are bad, he tells Spider-Man.

It takes fourteen issues of Spider-Man going back-and-forth-and-back on these three points before he decides

to ignore ALL THREE and just go with his gut. So... like, I appreciate the illusion of narrative depth as much as the next superhero fan, but, what. What. WHAT.

Anyway, this all comes to a head. Spider-Man and his morally grey team (Remember: Venom! Ooooh! Can he trust him?) realize that Carnage, Shriek, and the rest of them need to be stopped at any cost, by any means. So Spider-Man, watching, boiling, as this massacre is played out, finds a big-ass sonic gun (it's a silly comic) and faces Carnage in a showdown. Finger on the trigger. Ready to destroy this barely-living monster and end what could well be the wholesale slaughter of all life on Earth. And, faced with a decision that could break his moral code for good, Spider-Man... lays down his weapon. He can't do it.

Nah, Venom does it for him. Then it turns out it doesn't even work. An- ...wait, there's still HOW MANY issues left?

...yeah, look, the conflict at the core of Maximum Carnage is pretty simple. Spider-Man's morality is on the line. And, geez, even if I disagree with the whole "well, anarchy is bad because it means people will just kill each other without consequence" angle, I can accept it for the sake of upholding comic book surrealism. Roll with it. Anarchy bad, order good. Reductive to the point of being wrong, but simplicity is the lifeblood of these sorts of tales. There's an excuse for that. What there is no excuse for is getting to the climax of Spider-Man's identity crisis in the first third of the book and then spinning your wheels on letting it play out over and over again. Whatever point Maximum Carnage had is lost - not in the fights, as much as they are barely fluff - but in repetition.

This kind of story has worked before. Not just in Doctor Who, either - any series that has a villain has had a homicidal maniac for a villain. More often than not, that maniac acts as little more than a mirror into our protagonist's soul. It's an easy proposition, and it takes little effort to bend established rules before they're uncomfortable in thought-provoking ways. Maximum Carnage might be one of the most blatant examples of how not to write this kind of story - it breaks the established rules, points at them laughing saying, "ha, look at that!", takes FOREVER to do what it has to do, then, at the end, it glues the rules haphazardly back together and solemnly exclaims that the goodness was in our hearts all along. You know that conflict with Peter's dad thinking humanity is bad? Eventually, Pete confronts him, says "I don't agree," and he walks away. That's the extent of that narrative lead. It's all such empty, shallow posturing, and y'know, like I said, at four issues, it might not have been a problem, but to keep it up for so, so long, a gentle breeze knocks the thing over and sets it on fire. Not even the endless procession of cameos and guest appearances makes the back half of the book feel any fresher than the front half, shitty red Joker basically making the same jokes, Spider-Man having the same ethical dilemma, Venom doing the same "just kill this ONCE" devil-on-Spidey's-shoulder act. It's bad enough, without adding in the very 1990s attitudes to lawfulness, mental illness, and, err... humour (at one point, Spider-Man quips, "too late!" before moving on and declaring, "too LAME!"). Yeesh.

Maximum Carnage thinks it's really very mature and epic, but really, it is crap from a stinky toilet, and I recommend it only to big doo-doo heads.

Gianfranco Mancini says

Classic cheesy 90s crossover with Spidey, Venom, Black Cat, Morbius, Cloak & Dagger, Firestar, Iron Fist, Deathlok, Captain America and **Spawn**... Nightwatch vs Carnage, Shriek, Demogoblin, Spidey's Doppelganger and Carrion. Maybe not best Spider-Man's story ever but I had a lot of fun re-reading it after

years... it was like watching a WWE Royal Rumble event on tv while drinking a cold beer.
