

Spider-Man PS4 Review

By Liam Ferguson

Marvel's 'Spider-Man' for Playstation 4 is simply spectacular. Insomniac Games, the studio behind 'Ratchet and Clank' and 'Sunset Overdrive,' announced 'Spider-Man' at 2016's Electronic Entertainment Expo and instantly sent fans of both the studio's previous work and of the Spider-Man character into a frenzy of excitement, excitement that only gained more traction as the game approached its September 2018 release date. I can now wholeheartedly say that Insomniac (in association with Sony and Marvel Entertainment) managed to deliver on the hype and craft a satisfying, well thought out, emotional experience that leaves the player yearning for more.

The game does away with the Spider-Man origin story fans of the character have seen a million times over to deliver a Peter Parker who has been wearing the mask of his vigilante counterpart for roughly eight years when the game picks up. The 16-hour-long campaign of the game focuses on the titular hero attempting to balance his life as Spider-Man, a beloved superhero, with that as Peter Parker, a man held down by student loans trying to repair broken relationships and keep a steady job. The story begins light-hearted and fun as one would expect of a Spider-Man narrative in today's world. However, the game is not afraid to delve into dark, emotional territory which is something I will discuss later in the more **spoiler-filled** section of this review.

For now, I will discuss where the game shines outside of the story and that is, naturally, in the intricate gameplay design present throughout. Swinging around New York City as the beloved hero is, without a doubt, some of the best gameplay I have ever had the pleasure of experiencing, which makes the open-world exploration delightful. After so many comic book stories, movies and lackluster or now outdated games, the inherent fun of doing what Spider-Man does has finally been gorgeously translated into the gaming media. The physics engine has been crafted in a way that makes swinging your way through the city an utter delight as Spider-Man's movements feel natural and keep a constant sense of fluidity throughout. Insomniac has talked at length about how getting this particular aspect of the game right was of utmost importance as it is the character's most recognisable and beloved trait, and I can say they succeeded in their endeavour to create an excellent engine for the player to utilise. I found myself getting lost in the world for hours on end, doing nothing but swinging from one end of the map to another.

Furthermore, the combat feels as natural and appealing as traversing the iconic New York skyline. The system of rapidly switching between the gadgets at your disposal, dodging and punching enemies can be best compared to Rocksteady's 'Batman Arkham' series, however it is far from a direct clone of the acclaimed system created for that franchise. Every hit, whether it be on a street thug, demonic creature or corrupt government agent, makes you feel the connection and highlights the raw power behind the eponymous hero's punches. In moments of crisis, when there is a plethora of enemy forces surrounding you, it truly feels like you can take them all down with practice and precision, as the game does an excellent job at ensuring the player becomes adept at the combat system without it ever feeling too simple or too cumbersome. The combat excels in the game's boss fights which, unfortunately, are few and far between, but are all intensely memorable as you fight your way through Spider-Man's extensive rogue's gallery in an engaging, unique manner.

However, like any piece of media, the game is not perfect. Some side missions can feel repetitive and pointless and the title falls prey to a few tropes associated with the open-world genre of video games. There is a significant point in the middle of the game where a few missions begin to feel quite mundane but this is overshadowed in no time as the game shifts back into high gear and these small gripes barely take away from the experience.

Finally, I will discuss what I believe to be the strongest point of the game, the main story.

For those of you who want to avoid spoilers, you should skip this next part of the review!

The narrative presented in the game is filled with emotional, dark moments that manage to completely catch the player off guard. The inclusion of Otto Octavius, a character many will know as the villainous ‘Doctor Octopus,’ was a surprise kept under wraps before the release of the game. Watching the failed scientist transform from a man down his luck to a psychopath dead set on causing chaos to the city of New York was heartbreaking. The student-teacher dynamic built between Otto and Peter felt real and personal which only led to the reveal of the sinister Doctor Octopus to be all the more gut wrenching. I should also use this opportunity to discuss the sheer brilliance of the final slugfest between the hero and the aforementioned villain that perfectly meshes excellently written dialogue with the fantastic combat system.

Otto’s desperate plea for Peter’s aid as Peter states that “the best is all we can do, even when it hurts like hell” before condemning his father-figure to a life of imprisonment, shines powerfully as a moment of jaw dropping line delivery from Spider-Man actor Yuri Lowenthal and propels the scene into one of the greatest payoffs in gaming history. In addition, the broken relationship between Peter and Mary-Jane Watson is touching and presents a childlike innocence while still adding a sense of depth into the “will they, won’t they” scenario showcased. Watching the pair who clearly love each other reconcile their differences and decide to give the relationship another chance is touching and most importantly, feels real, despite the supernatural setting of the game. The mentor-student relationship between Peter and teenager Miles Morales, who during the course of the game loses a parent in part due to Spider-Man’s inaction, is dealt with in a suitable, careful manner. Peter is able to console Miles with an empathetic demeanour as he has dealt with the loss of both of his parents and his beloved uncle, Ben. Their growth of their relationship culminates when, at the end of the game, Miles reveals his newfound spider-like abilities to Peter. Our hero shows no hesitation in telling Miles that they are not “that weird” as he announces the fact that he is Spider-Man to the young boy in a wholesome, earned scene.

The death of Peter’s aunt, May, in the finale of the game is legitimately soul crushing as the player has been fighting desperately to cure the beloved woman thus far. May’s final wish to see her nephew under the mask of Spider-Man, as she states she has “always known” of his double life, really tugs at the heartstrings of any Spider-Man fan. Peter’s cry for help as he tells her he doesn’t know what to do, through tears, followed by her final words; “yes you do” right before our hero decides to use the devil’s breath antiserum to save the lives of thousands over the life of May is as heroic as it is emotionally painful. Indeed, the decision to kill Aunt May was a shocking turn of events on Insomniac’s part as this is something that has only happened a single time in a comic book from the 90’s that was later retconned. To sum it up neatly, the story of ‘Spider-Man’ soars due to the relationships between the hero and his allies and is capable of delivering realistic, well thought out dynamics between characters as well as plenty of surprises.

End of Spoilers

In conclusion, Marvel's 'Spider-Man' for PlayStation 4 is an unbelievable, stunning experience that will satisfy fans of both Insomniac Studios and the Spider-Man character to no end. The game captures the core elements of what make Peter Parker so beloved without compromising or feeling like a story that has already been told and due to this I can fully recommend it without any hesitation.