Charlie Bewers

Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales on PlayStation 5 – A strong but short addition to the franchise

One of the launch titles of the still-coveted PlayStation 5 developed by Insomniac Games, Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales, was released in 2020 as a spin-off to the critically acclaimed 2018 game Spider-Man for the PlayStation 4. Spider-Man: Miles Morales is exactly what it says on the tin, following the adventures of newly debuted wall-crawler Miles Morales, freshly under the tutelage of the original Spider-Man Peter Parker, facing his own adventures and troubles in Insomniac's beautifully sprawling rendering of New York City. Morales's character is famous for becoming a new version of Spider-Man in the comics when his version of Peter Parker died. The game reworks this so Parker is still alive and acting as a mentor to the novice. The game serves up an attractive display of the capabilities of the next generation of gaming consoles, with some raw emotional storytelling and characters you care about. It is, however, rather short, and one could question whether this should have perhaps been released as add-on downloadable content for the original PS4 game as opposed to a standalone title.

When it comes to game mechanics and animation, Miles Morales blows the original 2018 game out of the water, making full use of the PS5's new Duelsense controller and the capabilities it has, using a plethora of different small vibrations in the controller itself as you perform different actions, like traverse the NYC landscape via webs, fight different enemies or even simply walk along the pavement of the concrete jungle. Every vibration with minuscule differences is tailored to increase immersion. Furthermore, when it comes to a Spider-Man game, one of the main concerns for players is the web-swinging mechanics, the famous way in which every version of Spider-Man shoots webs from his wrists and swings from building to building that in previous games have been infamously portrayed rather bad. Luckily, this game more than delivers an extremely faithful and captivating experience. Again, make use of the new Duelsense controller to put tension in the remote's shoulder button every time you make Miles shoot a web, along with a small noise from the controller that lines up with the action on the screen. In addition to this, all the web swinging in the game is again physics-based, as was the PS4 original, meaning you won't get the cheap experience of swinging off clouds like the failed PS3 Spider-Man games. Instead, you will swing in the way in which the web you've shot has attached to whatever physical object (like the top of a building) it has reached. If you're in an open space with no high objects you can shoot a web to, then you'll be running. As mentioned, the animation is a lot smoother than the 2018 counterpart as well. Miles feels a lot more fluid and less rigid than Peter to control. In both swinging and fighting animations, this comes out as Miles uses more flamboyant movements and thus perfectly conveys Miles' character as this excited newcomer to the role of Spider-Man, desperate to prove himself to his teacher.

Looking further into the game, the graphics boast the capabilities of the PS5's famed SSD and processing power. With new particle effects, improved lighting and the much-awaited arrival of raytracing, wherein the graphics in the game simulate light rays bouncing off surfaces to produce realistic reflections in the world of the game. One cannot deny the alluring experience of web-swinging in glorious 60fps. Likewise, the new and powerful SSD brings the loading times in the game to a bare minimum; no more waiting for minutes in a load screen means more time experiencing the game you've paid to play. Astoundingly, you can actually get from the PS5 home screen to playing the game itself in an astonishing 7 seconds.

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Despite stunning visuals, the gameplay and story of Miles Morales have their pros and cons. The gameplay itself is set out in a way that is new and refreshing, not copying much from the 2018 original. Whilst many of the powers are the same, Miles famously has the ability to use bioelectricity, the energy that he produces from his body, which allows him to charge webs and methods of attack with electricity. So, gamers can customise their move combinations, and playstyle build with different augmented and charged powers to whatever best fits their playstyles. Whilst fighting in the game is enjoyable, the enemies tend to get rather repetitive. Miles Morales only has a fraction of the different factions of enemies its 2018 predecessor has, and so the enemies you fight through the game can get rather tedious as by the end of the playthrough, there is not much that surprises you. That is not to say there will not be. Avoiding spoilers, the boss battles in the game are constructed masterfully, with the fight at the end being animated and laid out in such a way that allows the player to feel the challenge whilst also experiencing the emotion behind who it is that you are fighting.

The story of Miles Morales is definitely a strong feature of this game. Whilst shorter than the 2018 game, the characters feel more grounded and realistic in that there is more of a focus on 'family' in this game. Both are family in the sense of Miles' blood relatives and his close friends. Nadji Jeter voices Morales and owns the role in a way that is not seen in many modern games. Nevertheless, this, too, is not without issue. Again, without getting too into spoilers, the game's main villain turns out to be someone you didn't expect (if you haven't read the comics), and whilst the game's story is supposed to portray this person as more of a tragic victim of circumstance than a moustache-twirling, puppy-kicking bad guy, it doesn't fully deliver on that. The character itself feels flat in places, and their actions paint her to be more of a narcissistic hypocrite than a compelling character. That is not to say she's a terrible antagonist; the voice acting is still on point, and you can still see that what the character believes she is doing is right and just, as any well-written villain does.

Furthermore, perhaps the greatest weakness of the game is that it is shorter than its predecessor, and this absolutely shows. Whilst still packed with things to do, like different activities and side missions, the game will only take an average of 18 hours to complete, compared to the average of 34 hours needed to complete the PS4 original.

Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales is a very strong introduction game to a character previously only seen on the pages of comics, animated movies, or TV shows. It tells an emotionally packed story personal to the character of Miles himself, dealing with death and betrayal from those close to him, and that is easy to feel when playing. Although the game is a lot shorter than most AAA titles, it is still jam-packed with compelling content and offers a myriad of technical improvements from its predecessor. I, however, would argue that due to its length of playtime, it should not have been released for the standard AAA game price of £60 (€70).

*8.5/10

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