

3 things Spider-Man PS4 can learn from its predecessors

2016 has been a pretty good year for Spider-Man. Between Tom Holland's excellent debut in *Captain America: Civil War* creating a renewed optimism for *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, and the upcoming *Deadpool/Spidey* team-up in the new comics, the dark days of 2014 seem to have been exorcised. With all that in mind, fans of the web-slinger must have thought Christmas had come early at E3 when it was announced that Insomniac were teaming up with Marvel for the next iteration of Spider-Man video games.

Once upon a time, the superhero gaming genre was dominated by everyone's favourite web-slinger. *Spider-Man 2* (PS2) and *Ultimate Spider-Man* are still widely regarded as two of the greatest superhero games of all time, and even the mechanically out-dated PS1-era titles can stand on the shelf beside them for both their sentimental value and vibrant characters. Thereafter, however, the Spider-Man franchise hit the buffers with a number of titles that just never lived up to their predecessors. Spidey's gaming malaise pushed the door open just far enough for Rocksteady to blow us all away with the incredibly popular *Batman Arkham* series, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Fast forward to 2016 and *Spider-Man PS4*. The trailer looks spectacular (if you'll pardon the pun) and fans are daring to believe that Insomniac can create a series that can rival Rocksteady's *Arkham*. Matching those expectations may seem like an unenviable task, but there is a surfeit of Spider-Man games that can, for better or worse, aid Insomniac in their quest to match those lofty expectations. With that in mind, here are three key things that *Spider-Man PS4* can learn from its predecessors.

1. Web swinging mechanics

When discussing the lessons future Spider-Man games can learn from previous iterations, the only place to start is with the web swinging mechanic. The quality of the web swinging practically makes or breaks the rest of any Spider-Man game, for obvious reasons. Web swinging is why we all want to play this game. It's what makes Spider-Man such an enticing video game franchise. No other superhero game has a selling point as unique as this one, and it's imperative that the one thing we all picked up the game for is as good as it can be.

Aside from the importance to the character and to the player, the web swinging mechanics are a point of huge debate in Spider-Man games because we've already experienced perfection. *Spider-Man 2* (PS2) had the web swinging physics down perfectly. For a start, the webs actually attached to physical objects, rather than just grappling on to some far distant

satellite, passing 747 or particularly buff seagull. The player could gain height, turn corners, dodge obstacles and perform tricks all in their own time, without the game doing any of it for them or hindering their freedom to do so. Spider-Man felt the right size and speed, too, which made traversing the city feel fluid and slick, rather than clunky and heavy. Ultimate Spider-Man's web swinging was done in much the same way, just with a little added dynamism more appropriate for the cell-shaded comic book art style. In spite of the overwhelming success of both games, it seems every game since has managed to break the web swinging or flat-out nullify the need for it by making the games linear. The Amazing Spider-Man games even removed fall damage, so there was no incentive for the player to be the best web-slinger they could be.

It should go without saying that Spider-Man PS4 needs to make sure web swinging as good as it possibly can be, but having endured some truly terrible steps down from Spider-Man 2 and Ultimate Spider-Man, you'll have to forgive us long-suffering Spidey fans for making this point. Just, please, Insomniac, don't mess up the web swinging.

2. Understand the source material

This is another one that should go without saying, but if you'll permit a nerd rant, this is a simple point that some previous titles have completely underestimated or just flat-out ignored. There are plenty of examples of poor character portrayals across the previous games, but for the sake of time let's just take one example; Cletus Cassidy.

The Amazing Spider-Man 2 game featured a plot line about Spider-Man questioning whether killing criminals was an acceptable form of justice. The character that was used as the moral compass in the discussion wasn't Sin Eater, or Punisher, or characters that can join the debate if taken from a different angle, like Kraven the Hunter or even Black Cat. No, the character that was used was Cletus Cassidy, aka Carnage. For those who don't know, Cassidy is a sadistic serial killer that hacks and slashes his victims to ribbons, and was actually based on the Joker from the Batman comics. When he bonds with the Carnage symbiote, his aggression and blood lust are multiplied even further, creating a monstrous villain that happily slaughters women and children in road-side diners. Carnage even tries to kill his symbiotic offspring, Toxin, and throws a baby out of a window in one comic. The problem with using him as the voice of morality in the Amazing Spider-Man 2 is that Carnage isn't just a slight deviation from Spider-Man's beliefs; he's in direct competition. They're day and night, chalk and cheese, and the idea that Spider-Man would even consider getting in to a moral debate about life and death with a man like Cletus Cassidy flies in the face of everything we know about both characters. Hell, even a character like Big Wheel would make more sense in this debate than Cletus Cassidy.

There's not enough time in the day to talk about how poorly Venom is portrayed in Spider-Man 3, or how Spider-Man: Friend or Foe makes the flub of the century when they put both the Green Goblin and the New Goblin in the same game, but suffice it to say that previous incarnations of Spider-Man games have not always done their research. With Marvel on board with the PS4 project, glaring character issues like these will surely be mitigated, but with so many obvious character errors in previous titles, it's a point that has to be made.

3. Stay away from the Arkham series

Here's the thing about Spider-Man PS4; as previously stated, Spidey fans are desperately hoping that Insomniac and Marvel can come together to create a game series that can sit on the shelf beside Rocksteady's Arkham series, and bring the web-slinger back up to Batman's level. It feels as though the tide is starting to turn back in Spidey's favour on the big screen, but the Batman games are a goliath that even our friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man would have trouble bringing to its knees.

The problem with competing with Arkham is that all too often there is a feeling that they are the archetypal superhero game. Previous Spider-Man games have already proven the Arkham obsession, attempting to copy aspects of the vaunted Arkham combat and stealth systems. Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions is particularly guilty of this, when they introduced us to Spider-Man Noir. For those unfamiliar, Spider-Man Noir is the Spider-Man of 1930s America, dressed all in black and stealthily dispatching his enemies from the shadows. You could probably put the back-end of the last sentence on Batman's tombstone. Shattered Dimensions even lifted the Scarecrow boss fight from Arkham Asylum in the ending sequence of the game, where all four Spider-Man have to tackle lead-villain Mysterio in their own personal boss battles.

The Amazing Spider-Man games are just as guilty for shameless connections to the Arkham series, too, and players are clever enough to spot them. It has to be said, of course, that the Arkham fight style does have its roots in Spider-Man 2 (PS2)'s combat style, but Rocksteady took elements from it and made it their own. Recent Spider-Man games have been far less subtle, and it just comes off as unimaginative and a little bit desperate. That's not to say that the virtues of the Arkham series should be completely disregarded, but Spider-Man PS4 needs to be able to stand on its own two feet if it's ever to compete with Arkham.

So there you have it; three things that Spider-Man PS4 can learn from its predecessors. There are more lessons it can learn, of course, but these are the three key pillars Spider-Man games must now build on if they hope to compete with the Arkham series. For what it's worth, I believe the Insomniac/Marvel alliance is the perfect storm for the next generation of Spider-Man games, but I've been here before. With the new movie series and

some highly anticipated comics upcoming, it's a good time to be a Spider-Man fan. Spider-Man PS4 could make it perfect.