



ANDROMEDA: THE FINAL VERDICT

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Gamers who have frequented social media, recently, are no strangers to the myriad of memes and videos mocking Mass Effect Andromeda's animations and writing. Andromeda has been labelled outright "bad" by many people because of this. But is it really the case or has the game been subject to unfair judgement? Yes and no.

First of all, let's focus on the story. A private organization called the Andromeda Initiative has embarked on an ambitious journey to the Andromeda galaxy to find a new home. Thus 4 arks set out from the Milky Way. Each of these arks house 4 species – Humans, Salarians, Turians and the Asari. Since the Andromeda galaxy is millions of light-years away from the Milky Way, the colonists are put into cryostasis so that they can survive the 600 year journey. Each of the arks has their own Pathfinder, an elite soldier-explorer who is trained to assess the viability of planets for settlement. In typical Mass Effect fashion, nothing goes according to plan and as the human Pathfinder, you are tasked with finding a new home for your species.

This lays the foundation for an interesting premise. But there is so much wasted potential here. Immediately, there is this lack of a proper motivation factor to get you out there and colonize these worlds. In the original trilogy, there was the looming threat of the Reapers which infused a sense of urgency and tension to the story. Without this, the game loses a lot of its purpose and it makes you question why you're doing all this in the first place.

Bioware also missed a huge opportunity with the new alien species of the Andromeda galaxy. The additions seem way too safe in terms of conceptualization – it's nothing outlandish or ridiculous like the Volus or the Elcor in the original trilogy. One of the species actually look like discount, evil Protheans – a crying shame for a series that has always excelled in the world-building aspect.

Sad to say, this is probably the first Bioware game that made me lose interest about the NPCs really quickly. In the past titles, I would actually

want to interact with my squadmates and crew to learn about their stories, feelings, and motives. Andromeda fails to live up to the engaging, interesting characters of past Bioware games. Now it might seem unfair to compare but it should be taken into consideration that RPGs are played because of how they immerse the players in the story and make them feel like a part of the world rather than making them trudge through hours of mundane, boring dialogue. It would have been somewhat excusable but some of the writing in this game is downright cringe-worthy.

The gameplay is the only saving grace. Gone are the days of Mass Effect feeling like a budget Gears of War with some abilities mixed in. Andromeda has very deep RPG elements that allow you to customize your playstyle any way you want. There are no classes, rather, there are profiles that you can switch on the fly. Profiles give you added bonuses to certain aspects such as percentage damage boosts to biotic powers, or weapon accuracy bonuses, etc. You are free to choose any skill from the Combat, Tech, and Biotics tech trees. How you choose to augment these skills with the appropriate profiles will play a huge role in how effectively you deal with various combat scenarios. Skill combos are very important in winning unfavourable fights; so is making proper use of the new mobility system. The player's character is extremely agile as he/she is equipped with a jumpjet that allows them to zip across and over the battlefield to give them new angles on the enemy. Weapon and Armor crafting is similar to Dragon Age Inquisition but, in my opinion, the whole system works better in Andromeda because of the various attachments you can plug in to your gear. In my playthrough I made a heat seeking sniper rifle that never needed ammo and operated on a Mass Effect 1 style cooldown system. It also leeched the enemy shields so that was an added bonus. The possibilities are staggering.

Voice acting is hit and miss here as there were many occasions which made me think how bored the voice actors were. Sometimes it feels like someone is literally reading out of a script with no emotion and no knowledge of the context. There are moments where the voice acting feels amazing

but those moments are few and far between. Now you might be wondering about the facial animations and I will say this: they aren't as bad as the internet trolls make them appear to be.

Mass Effect Andromeda is right up there as one of the best looking titles of the year, courtesy of the Frostbite Engine. But what stood out to me most was the art direction. I was really glad to see that the team had nailed the familiar style of the Mass Effect games while incorporating new, foreign elements into the mix. While the new addition may feel underwhelming, they are visually appealing from a purely aesthetic standpoint.

Overall, my final verdict is that Mass Effect Andromeda gets a lot of flak for the wrong reasons. There are definitely a lot of things wrong with it but I'm not losing all of my hope for Bioware yet. This is a new direction for the series, and if Bioware can fix the story problems the series can go beyond feeling like a great third person shooter masquerading as an RPG. After around 50 hours of play, my advice would be to hold off from buying this one and waiting for a sale.

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