



ANTHEM™

First impressions of the VIP DEMO

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When I first booted up the demo, I expected to find a large server queue seeing as how *Anthem* was hyped beyond measure. What I didn't expect was being locked out of the game for more than a day due to technical issues.

That is the essence of my experience with the VIP Demo. When I finally managed to log in to the hub area, I couldn't start the first mission because the loading bar would get stuck at 95 percent. EVERY. SINGLE. TIME. I decided to exit the game and start it up again. This time, I was greeted with a message which prompted me to continue the in-progress mission that I started. I did manage to load in after that, but my Javelin (a mech-suit that your character dons to battle the evil forces beyond the Fort) loadout was completely in disarray.

There were no tutorials as the demo gives you a level 10 character by default, so I had an insanely hard time with the controls. I decided to abandon the mission and enter the hub area. I started looking over the key bindings and mouse configuration options, and I found that there's a surprising amount of depth here. After tweaking the minute details such as mouse acceleration and flight

responsiveness, I decided to test everything out in free roam.

Before going into the fray, I decided to try out the Javelin customisation options in The Forge. One thing I love about the appearance settings is that it allows you to tweak several parts of your Javelins according to your specifications. While in certain games like *Destiny*, which restrict you to using a shader for each part, *Anthem* allows you to create your own colours and apply them on a

plethora of material types starting from leather to polished metal. After decking out my Javelin in classic Iron Man colours, I decided to jump straight into the action.

I had to go through the same loop of exiting the game at the loading screen and booting it up again to enter the free roam instance. Once I did, I was greeted by a jaw-dropping landscape. The Frostbite engine never fails to disappoint but

Bioware has taken this to the next level with hyper-realistic global illumination, smooth reflection maps, and meticulously detailed character models. Different parts of your Javelin move around to adjust your flight trajectory, the sense of speed is accentuated by the distortion caused by the wind, and particle effects litter the screen invoking the raw power that your Javelins possess.

Speaking of powerful Javelins, it took me

quite a while to get used to the flight controls. It feels like the game was built from the ground up with consoles in mind. The mouse controls for the flight felt really sluggish at first. I started tinkering with the mouse settings yet again. After a few failed attempts, I finally figured out the combination to ensure that the mouse acceleration doesn't interfere with my movements. It didn't help that the acceleration settings are mislabelled as

"responsiveness" and "smoothing". Regardless, as I mentioned before, it's good that Bioware included these features in the first place but they really need to set the initial settings properly. After the settings were tweaked, the flight controls felt sublime and I did feel like a total badass in a powerful mech-suit, zipping across alien structures with ease.

After a few minutes of flying around in my Iron Man armour, I decided to engage a few enemies I spotted in the distance. The shooting in this game feels really lacklustre. The real hero of the combat is your Javelin as it comes equipped with a myriad abilities to annihilate your foes. You have two standard offensive spells, one defensive spell, and a really satisfying ultimate. There are four unique Javelin types and all of them have their own special abilities and ultimates. You can also customise the various abilities by collecting loot from enemies.

There wasn't enough story in the demo for me to give a constructive opinion about it, so I will leave this for the final release.

Overall, I feel like *Anthem* needs a lot of work in the technical side. The game is riddled with bugs and connectivity issues that mar an otherwise solid looter-shooter.

