



WARFRAME

REVIEW

GENRE	Third Person Shooter, Mutliplayer, Free-to-Play
PLATFORM AVAILABILITY	Windows PC, PS4, Xbox One
RELEASE DATE	March 25 th , 2013
LAST MAJOR PATCH	December 4 th , 2015
DEVELOPER	Digital Extremes
REVIEW VERSION	1.0
REVIEW DATE	12/20/15
PLATFORM/PERIPHERAL	PC, Mouse and Keyboard
REVIEW REFLECTIVE OF	450 Hours Playtime

This game is in Open Beta at the time of this review.



*Grineer, Tenno, and Corpus.
The three main factions of the game (player faction in the middle).*

Gameplay

Grind and RNG

Within Warframe, these are what the player generally grinds for:

- **Resources**, items specifically for crafting usable equipment such as weapons and warframes.
- **Mods**, upgrades that power up equipment.
- **Fusion Cores**, items to power up Mods.
- **Affinity**, more conventionally known as experience points, earned towards equipment.
- **Mastery Rank**, an account wide "level" that influences available content, and log-in rewards based on the variety of weapons leveled up with affinity.
- **Specific Items**, usually equipment or components such as warframe parts (helmet, chassis, systems), and prime item components.

Much of the noted grind is not solely because of very low rates. It does not actually take a very long playtime time to gain the maxed rank for a specific piece of equipment. Additionally Mods are upgrades that carry over between equipment and provide the majority of the power the equipment would have- so to deal a lot of damage with a weapon, the appropriate Mod would only have to be leveled, and swapped between whatever new weapons the player acquires granted that the weapon has the Mod capacity, increased by leveling, to use the Mod.

I would say there is a disrespect for player time. First, the drop rates for items are not disclosed- the drop rate for Mods is

2% per enemy, but that's about it. Second, if the player were to encounter connection problems in the middle of a game session, s/he may not be able to rejoin and get the mission rewards. The option for rejoining is only available if the game crashes. Hypothetically if one were to play Survival for 50 minutes and disconnect, the rewards are forfeit. Third, there is also the rewards not scaling to the effort involved in the mission. More precisely, there are endless missions where the players choose to leave. The longer the stay, the tougher the enemies become; but the rewards don't get better, only more of them. The reward pools will loop after four reward intervals in the mission.

Mission Type	Reward Intervals			
Defense (waves)	5	10	15	20
Interception (waves)	1	2	3	4
Survival (minutes)	5	10	15	20
Reward Pools	A	A	B	C

The drop rates for components of an item are set up to be unevenly distributed. That is, "Prime" items, are powerful versions of existing items, and to acquire them their components and the blueprint must be acquired. It's expected to receive several barrel components before coming across the receiver or stock. Some other items are like this, such as warframes and Archwing equipment.

Optionally, there is a grind for Platinum as established by the player economy. Really it is the currency bought with real money for the microtransactions store, but it is tradeable.



Impatience is a source of income for the developers.

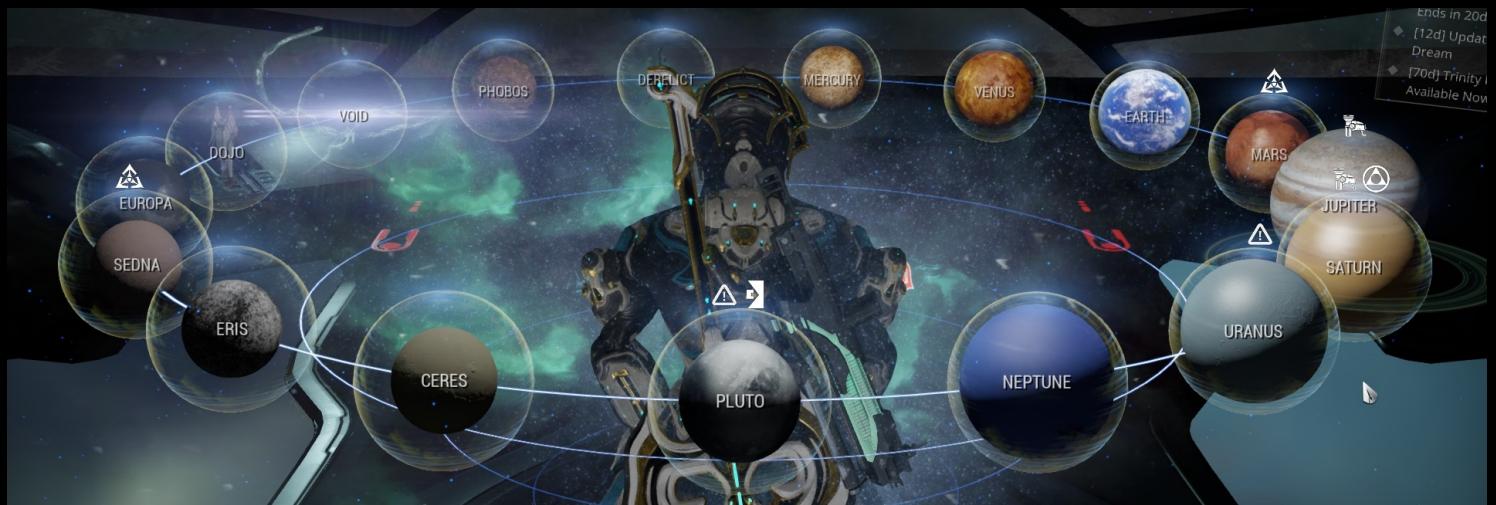
Time Walls

There are time based limits to how much the player can accomplish daily. The most notable is the crafting system being the main method of acquiring new equipment to play with.

Typically, a piece of equipment takes hours to build with a microtransaction available to immediately finish building. The cost of rushing does not scale with the time remaining. In above screenshot, it costs 50 Platinum to rush Saryn to completion with nearly three days remaining to build. To the left is Frost Prime starting

at the same cost to rush but with 92% of the build completed, yet the cost has only been reduced by 42%. With this in place, it's also not possible to build two of the same item in parallel even if you're building something minor like two consumable items that both take one minute.

Additionally, there are daily maximums imposed on certain systems i.e Reputation for Syndicates, and the maximum amount of trades per day. These are lifted slightly by having a higher Mastery Rank. Which in itself, should the player have enough Mastery points, is only allowed one rank up a day.



There are 257 mission nodes total and at most 10 or 15 of them are considered worth playing by the community.

Co-Operative Play

Majority of the game is Player v.s Environment. Most of the missions are not played by the community. Instead everyone is focused on specific missions that grant an exceptionally large amount of a desired resource, item, or affinity. For example, people go to Draco, Ceres for Affinity and Triton, Neptune for Fusion Cores, but if one were to start out playing, when most mission nodes and planets are locked, the game is much like a ghost town.

Unusually for a co-operative game, the squad options are barebones. It's as if the squads were thought out for the extremely short term play i.e get a group via matchmaking for a mission, and disband afterwards, repeat. Within Warframe, there's no way to change invitation permissions for the squad. So if the squad wants any squad member to be able to invite new members, it can't be changed from host-only invitations, vice-versa without disbanding and reforming the squad. There's also no way to change group pri-

vacy options between Friends Only, Invite Only, Public once the squad has been formed.

Finally, there's also no vote kicking option. Admittedly, very rarely did people actually need to be kicked from the squad because of etiquette issues, but from the perspective of post-game if clan members are playing with each other and one person randomly joined in by matchmaking, the squad would have to be reformed if they want to replace the random with a clan member.

The maximum size of a squad is typically four players, and the only mission type that permits any higher is Raid, capped at eight players. A couple times while playing I had to pick and choose what friends can come into the squad because of the four player limit. I think it's restrictive.

Alerts, Invasions, and Infestations

Often, time limited missions are available, Alerts or Invasions with a guaranteed reward. Alerts offer, most of the time, some amount of Credits that can be acquired in any other mission. Sometimes it's something special like a rare upgrade, Orokin Catalyst that only shows up a few times a month. Other kinds, Invasions and Infestations which, like Alerts, offer a guaranteed reward but the mission must be done some amount of times, each completion contributes to progression toward the end of the Invasion. For Invasions, the player pick the faction they want to support, but regardless of which faction wins, the reward is given out anyways.

I think the idea is pretty cool. It makes the game's setting a bit alive and dynamic with factions getting into conflicts with each other independent from player involvement. These are pretty much the main reason to bother unlocking more mission nodes. Additionally people tend to play the Alerts. But the system itself isn't perfect.



Sometimes the best choice is so dreadfully obvious.

On the conclusion of the invasion, it makes sense for some kind of effect, like the faction taking control of the area at least, but it doesn't. Though during the invasion, the faction that wouldn't normally appear in the planet's sectors may show up in other nodes, but it turns out once the invasion is over the players get their pay and nothing else happens.

Field Bosses (Death Marks)

After killing a boss or participating in Invasions, an assassin may be sent after the player. The assassin will then randomly show up in missions to kill the player. It's another merit of the game that makes the setting more interactive.

Getting killed by the assassin can have it's unique penalty depending on the assassin. If the player were to be marked for death and killed by Zanuka Hunter, s/he would be kidnapped and imprisoned- taken out of the current mission and placed in another missions with a "break out" scenario. The mission itself isn't difficult, but it's an interesting touch, which is more than the usual case of getting killed by a boss. The exception is Stalker, which if the player is knocked down into Bleedout, he simply leaves and says his job is done. Even though, a team member can revive the downed player and continue the mission as if Stalker never showed up to begin with. The reward, should the player defeat the assassin instead, is normally weapon components or blueprints exclusively dropped by that assassin.

The encounter is uncommon however. The chances which an assassin shows up in a mission is around 1.5% assuming the player is on the appropriate map where the assassin will spawn in-

i.e Zanuka Hunter will only spawn where Corpus is the controlling faction. The chances do increase when players are in a squad with people having the same Death Mark.



Stalker, one of the assassins.

Additionally, the same things are in place for Syndicates- syndicates sending in elite squads of regular monsters after the player. These are more common, but they are less interesting than an actual unique boss.

Specificity at the Cost of Breadth

The several weapons and skill sets provided in Warframe are less about filling a playstyle. Though a playstyle preference could be found within a role; mostly the game and the player community incentivize optimization toward a specific thing. That is, out of the 4 skills ("Powers") a warframe provides, the player may end up using only 1 of them.

For example, a popular build commonly demanded by multiplayer groups is an "EV Trinity", a Trinity warframe specialized for Energy Vampire which restores the squad members' energy. There are four statistics in relation to the Powers used: efficiency, range, strength, and duration. The "EV Trinity" minimizes duration in favor of strength and efficiency, making one of the Trinity skills completely useless as the buff expires within a second. The extreme minimizations of a stat, below the starting values, is do-able because of "Corrupted Mods", special rare Mods that give bonuses to a stat and maluses to another. The same sort of trade offs happen for other popular warframe builds.

There are also other incentives to limit options in game such as the bonuses on the Mesa warframe gained from not equipping a melee weapon. Having less equipment increases Affinity, as incoming points from group kills are divided among equipment.

My opinion, I think this leads to repetitive and simplistic play, and my ideal is that the game provides many options to play with. In the multiplayer groups looking for optimal play, the squad members are specified sometimes to the point combat involves simply pressing one button e.g Nekros spamming Desecrate, and Excalibur spamming the 'E' key (for Exalted Blade).

Parkour

The player character actually has a wide range of movement including rolls, backflips, and long jumps. Additionally there's also wall running, clinging, scaling. It's possible to cling to a wall and shoot for a limited time, but it's almost never used in the game.



Some of the tiles weren't designed with wall running in mind.

Interestingly, Warframe has an equivalent to bunny hopping. The fastest way to move isn't simply sprinting. It doesn't comprise simply of spamming the jump button, but of specific series of rolls

Stealth

Two of the available mission types are based on stealth gameplay, Spy and Rescue. Ideally in those mission types, the player doesn't get spotted. Though after the objective has been completed, it's completely okay to set off the alarms. Without stealth those missions are do-able, just with some hassle, added time limits, or additional objectives to complete after the main one is done.

It's not the kind of stealth where, the player aims to do the mission without having to kill NPCs. In fact, there's stealth kill bonuses that accumulate after each kill, highest being 500% Affinity bonus. Since corpses disappear after a few seconds, there also isn't the worry about concealing the corpse as in a "purer" stealth game, but still, the enemies aren't so oblivious where they wouldn't notice something being killed right in front of them.

Stealth is slightly based on the sounds the player makes. By slightly, as in most of the movement by the player is silent; parkour, running, sprinting, and jumping (though the landing isn't) is silent. Neither is there the worry about the different materials the player is walking on. For the most part, the sound component in stealth refers to gunfire. In the available weapons, there are a class of ranged weaponry that kill silently (throwing knives).

Overall, stealth is a minor part of the game and a means to an end. It can be extremely easy to accomplish when playing a warframe tailored specifically to stealth. In my opinion, the stealth aspect of having to conceal oneself is completely gone when there's a skill that permits invisibility (Loki) for a long time, especially when most movements are silent.

and "Bullet Jumps". With the environment, the sequences would have to be adjusted for sharp turns or random props on the map.

However compared to the enemies, the player by far outmaneuvers. It could be considered that, in the missions where complete extermination of an enemy isn't part of the mission, the enemies can simply be skipped over. By the time, an enemy foot soldier crosses a gap, the player may be on the other side of the map already. The disparity in the abilities of the player and the abilities of the average enemy is rather typical for a horde shooter though. Possibly, the combat isn't really designed around parkour, but the mission types are.

The player could, if available, perch high in the air where line of sight is blocked and the enemies can't attack, but a lot of the mission types place constraints that prevent the use of that being viable. That is, the mission may require the total extermination all enemies, collection of life support modules scattered around the map, or defend a location.

Parkouring does have a lot of potential since there really is a lot of possible movement with the available animations the player character has. For the most part it serves to travel around a map quickly, and could be improved with more of it's involvement in combat.



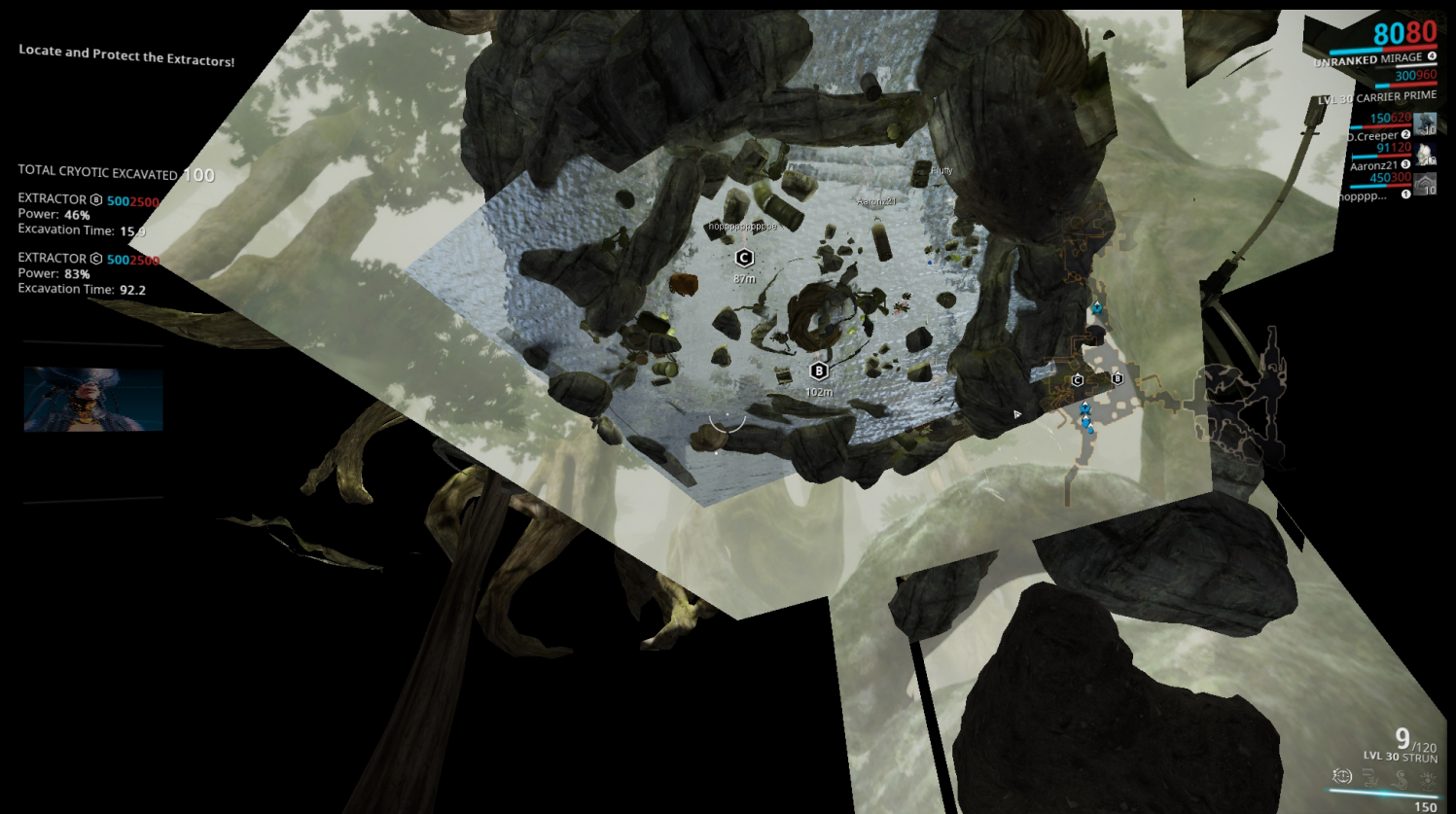
Maps are large, branching, randomly generated, and quickly traversable with parkour. Groups rush toward the objectives anyways.

Development

Warframe is currently in open beta, and the game will be continuously updated. Even if it wasn't in beta it would still be updated as usual for F2P games. Though it's nice to have new content come from a game continuously, there have been questionable updates over the course of months if not years. More specifically, very flawed features that could be considered unbalanced or poorly thought out, and the release of a new one without the previous feature being revised. The possible reason for this is that each of these features, regardless of quality, also mean more things that can be bought with Platinum.

In Update 18, this could particularly be the case with the release of the Focus System where the player had little knowledge what exactly each Focus tree provided. For example, a focus tree, Zenurik, with the description "sheer strength could erase any resistance" can be interpreted with increasing damage or piercing resistances, but really it's the focus tree with utilities and energy restoration. When another Focus tree was instead preferred, the player would have to acquire the item (Focus Lens) related to that focus tree. There is only one chance per day to get a Focus Lens out of a prize pool that contains items other than lens, unless of course, the player buys it on store. It is not concrete, but the suspicion comes from the limited knowledge at the time, and its relation to the microtransaction. Albeit, the item was not initially available on the microtransactions store, and beforehand was traded among players, who were selling at higher prices.

Two things to consider, first in a Devstream, developers anticipated 2015 to be the "year of quality". Yet sizeable components of this game have not been revised or improved, and the introduction of the Focus system in 2015 could hardly be considered quality. Second, Warframe has been in beta since 2013, first available on Windows computers then ported to PS4 and Xbox One, has opened it's microtransaction store, and the Steam Workshop for the community to design items. It is questionable that the customers are the beta testers; not only that, but the direction of development- the addition of extras before getting the core game done.



Falling under the map- one of the things that entail playing a game in beta.

Kubrows (Released July 18th, 2014)

Kubrows are companions, genetically engineered "dogs", for the player character that accompany in combat. They're available after completing the Howl of the Kubrow quest.

Compared to the pre-existing (robotic) companions (Sentinels), Kubrows are far less a viable option. Already, there is a lack of balance among Sentinels- the popular choice being the Carrier which gives the utility of increasing the pick up range of drops. First, Kubrows have to be maintained outside of missions, and have "DNA Integrity" and "Loyalty" to upkeep. DNA integrity deals with the maximum amount of health in-mission, but if it reaches

-100%, the Kubrow is dead. Daily, the statistic degrades by 10%, 5% if the incubator upgrade is installed. DNA stabilizers in packs of six, cost 75,000 Credits on the Market each restoring 40%. Loyalty is tied to in-mission damage the Kubrow is capable of dealing which degrades daily, but also degrades if the Kubrow is killed in mission while the player isn't. For the most part upkeeping Loyalty is trivial since it just involves "interacting", a cutscene of the player petting the Kubrow- it's essentially costless, but it gets old. Compared to all this, Sentinels have no such upkeep required to worry about.

Secondly, Kubrows are behind several time walls. To get a Kubrow in the first place, an egg must be acquired, which drops at



*Unfortunately Equinox is forced to shoot at her dress.
Equinox was released after Archwing, so this isn't the case of a previous design clashing with a new feature.*

very low rates and only available on Earth. Aforementioned egg must be incubated for 48 hours (or 24 with Incubator Upgrade) so the puppy will hatch. Afterwards a server resets (can either take 24 or 48 hours) must occur for the puppy to mature. In comparison, a Sentinel just needs 24 hours in the foundry to acquire.

For all this hassle, Kubrows have the advantage of having a higher amount of health and shields than Sentinels, and can go in Bleedout and be revived once their health in mission hits 0, but really in terms of the abilities Kubrows have, it doesn't offer much, or much difference to what is already offered by Sentinels. Additionally, Sentinels can be switched easily from the inventory, while Kubrows have their own compartment in the ship where only one can be active at a time.

As for in-game combat, unlike the Sentinel which sticks close by to the player at all times, the Kubrow can stray from the player to attack, but they become a liability if they're downed into Bleedout while far away. They're a rather ignorable part of the game since simply, the option is not to use them.

Archwing (Released October 24th, 2014)

A game component with its own equipment and missions modes taking place in open space and underwater- the player character equipping a set of mechanical wings in to combat. Archwing involves the Archwing itself, with its own set of skills, energy, and health, and specialized melee weapons and guns.

Much of its gameplay involves shooting at a small red dot 500 meters away and does not grant the same breadth in movement the regular mode of play does. Despite space and water allowing six degrees of freedom in movement, the design in Archwing is the regular third person shooter (as opposed to a six-axis shooter) scheme imposed onto a space environment. Thus, moving and shooting in Archwing is very awkward.

At the minimum, the HUD shows the distance of enemy targets, but it doesn't display other useful information for the scenario of shooting fast moving targets at very long distances. The player is

shooting without much knowledge of how fast the target is moving or the direction. For this reason, six-axis shooters taking place in space typically have lead indicators for targetting, which Archwing does not feature.

Even though this is a separate "mode" of play, the Archwing equipment is required for certain quests, events, and alerts, making this part of the game hardly ignorable.

Focus (Released December 3rd, 2015)

The 5th skill usable in combat is tied to a system with its own set of experience points. Focus is gained from excess Affinity points gained on a piece of equipment, with a Focus Lens installed.

The optimal way to get Focus points is to play specifically as Loki or Ash, warframes specialized for stealth, and repeatedly stealth kill enemies for the Affinity bonus on stealth kills, while playing solo. In that way, hitting the daily maximum of 75,000 could easily take 15 minutes. Any other way grants meager points in comparison.

Part of the reason for this is because Affinity gained by group kills do not contribute toward Focus points. This left several warframes with support roles at a massive disadvantage if a lens were installed on them. To clarify, when I say a disadvantage, I don't mean to imply players "competing for Focus points", although that would almost be the case since only kills would count, it's in the sense that Focus acquisition is biased in favor of offensive warframes if not already horrendously biased in favor of stealth already.

Focus Lens are also rare, and the only way to acquire them is to complete daily Sortie missions for a chance at getting a lens. They also can not be removed from a piece of equipment, and must be replaced; the previously installed lens being destroyed in the process. In a sense, it leads to playing with the same equipment if one were to pursue progressing in the Focus Tree- particularly stale gameplay if it was a warframe as opposed to one of the weapons.

Buying high end equipment just as it releases. The items in Prime Access packs are mostly acquirable in-game, with the items that aren't being cosmetics. I don't have much faith in this payment model because it sounds like the developers have more incentives to just release items with lesser regard for improving the overall quality of gameplay.

Warframe is free to play and relies on microtransactions. Most of what is offered are time savers or to satiate impatience and anticipation. The items purchasable do not guarantee victory. Neither is the balance heavily biased for purchased weapons. They only come with a preinstalled upgrade, Orokin Reactor (acquirable by playing), that doubles Mod Capacity. Thus the game isn't pay-to-win, but the microtransactions aren't purely cosmetic either.

The most important thing to buy with Platinum is open inventory slots which have no other way to be acquired. The closest to acquiring it is completing events which award a weapon that comes with its own inventory slot. It is possible to playthrough the game without spending Platinum, but with a small amount of inventory slots, it would involve removing equipment as more are acquired.

I consider the system for microtransactions mostly okay as it's possible to play through the game without spending money on Platinum. I did spend Platinum, but I got all except the starter amount by trading with other players.

Expectations

I played Warframe when it was in closed beta. I thought the game's setting had some potential, but at the time the game was pretty barebones. More specifically, there was only one tileset. From there having more tilesets would definitely be an improvement; so bar wasn't exactly set high. I did hear about the parkour and wall running, and I wanted to try it out, only to find out a portion of the available maps were actually designed with that kind of movement in mind.

As for the grind intensive games, I've played Diablo II both Battle.net, and single player. So the grind here, though present, isn't as bad as the grind involved in Diablo II, I would say. That, and on the single player scenario of Diablo II, I'm familiar with making the best use out of cheap equipment. In Warframe, that would mean landing headshots.

I've also played games that also don't necessarily give a reward per kill. I play Devil May Cry games habitually, and much of my focus is on the metagame with combos. Essentially I'm killing the monsters in Devil May Cry without much regard for a "reward"- the real "reward" at this point is if the combo turned out awesome looking. So I figure it doesn't make much of a difference if I killed a bunch of things in a game that does give a reward per kill when I installed Warframe. Of course, now that impression has changed since in Warframe I'm not experimenting with a large array of viable options, as I thought I would, in the sense of combat.

I've always preferred the kind of shooter where the player holds a number row full of weapons. So with Warframe, I thought on numerous occasions that three weapons- the primary, secondary, and melee- aren't enough. Warframe follows the approach where the different loadouts are numerous, but very limited i.e each loadout consists of four skills and three weapons (the fifth skill doesn't change between different equipment). Ideally for me, there would be numerous different loadouts that aren't very limited, or the trade off being less loadouts and less limits.

Prime Access Page, accessed on December 2015.

Prime Access Page, accessed on December 2015.

As for the scope of F2P games- it's really a payment model, but F2P games have some distinct features that affect gameplay it might as well be considered in this section. I typically don't play them. I also have not spent money on an F2P game. I don't think very highly of the business model either because it's possible to invest a lot of money without having ownership of the game.

Playing Experience



Currently, the highest rank is around 21 or 22, it'll get higher as more equipment releases.

The first ever time I played the game was during closed beta in 2013. So after two years, I decided to give the game another go. At the time of this review, I have accrued about 450 hours in-game. The count does include 2013, but a large chunk of the playtime is from 2015 starting at August.

I've done all the Quests as of Update 18 with the exception of Limbo Theorem, but I completely ignored Syndicates except Cephalon Simaris.

GENERAL STATS	
Time Played	18d 23h 12m 53s (455 hours)
Skill	30
Gross Income	33,240,860
Solar Map Progress	234 / 257
Solar Map XP	13,163 / 14,796
Missions Completed	2,241
Missions Failed	58
Missions Quit	61
Completion Rate	94%
Quit Rate	3%