

Video Game Review: 'James Cameron's Avatar: The Game' Looks Amazing, Plays Average

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 13, 2010 - 10:48pm

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CHICAGO – A movie as gigantic as James Cameron's "Avatar" is bound to have a video game tie-in to go with it and one would assume that such a detailed and complex fantasy world as that created in the film threatening to be the highest grossing of all time would make for a wonderful virtual playground. One would be mostly correct in that "James Cameron's Avatar: The Game" is one of the most beautiful in recent months. The gameplay is another story.



Video Game Rating: **3.0/5.0**

According to the notes sent with the title, Cameron was involved in the production of the "Avatar" game from the inception of the movie project. As he says, "Together with Ubisoft we were able to build one world but create two distinct ways to enjoy it. The thing that sets the Avatar game apart is the sensory nature of the experience. The game stays true to the spirit of the movie, so I am happy that Avatar fans will have this interactive channel to allow them to experience Pandora beyond the movie."



Avatar: The Game

Photo credit: Ubisoft

The game doesn't follow the specific plot of the film but creates its own not too distinct from its action. To start the game, the player takes on the role of an RDA soldier named Ryder as he begins to work within the avatar program, allowing him to get closer to the Na'vi of the planet Pandora. For the first few missions, Ryder deals mostly with some nasty wildlife and learns the basic control scheme.



Avatar: The Game
 Photo credit: Ubisoft

It's not long however before our hero has to pick a side. When a mole within the avatar program, someone working to help the Na'vi in the war that the humans have brought to their planet, is revealed, the player must pick sides and play through the rest of the game as a soldier or within the body of your avatar as a Na'vi. Of course, most fans of "Avatar" are likely to pick the Na'vi side, one that allows for a bit more planetary exploration and, well, good karma.

But it should be noted that the karma only extends so far. The sad thing about the two arcs of "Avatar: The Game" is that they're not that distinct. Of course, you're going to spend more time in the Hometree if you choose the path of good, but you'll also hold on to your machine gun, making for an experience that's not quite as peace-loving as fans of the movie might expect. To be fair, if you choose the Na'vi path, you're going to have to be a little more stealthy and creative with the bow, easily your most effective weapon.

Weapons are not the only form of combat in "Avatar: The Game." There are RPG elements of the game as four skills can be mapped to the face buttons and more open up as the player earns experience points. The skills include a bash that temporarily stuns the enemy and one that recovers health. The latter can also occur through the collection of cell samples throughout the planet of Pandora.



Avatar: The Game
 Photo credit: Ubisoft

About that planet; "Avatar: The Game" looks absolutely amazing. Available to play in 3-D on some Stereoscopic TVs, the game is simply beautiful. The planet of Pandora has been marvelously recreated with a depth of field that's rare in games like this. The height of climbing to the highest peaks of this gaming world has a rare three-dimensionality without the glasses or the special TV. Easily the best element of the game is the environment in which it takes place.

Sadly, the gameplay and the writing are a little less remarkable. It isn't long before the player realizes that most of the missions strike the same chord - go from point A to point B and either collect C or kill X and Y. The repetitive nature of the missions wouldn't be such a problem if

the actual controls felt more seamless. The flying controls have a jerky quality that's unacceptable, the camera often leads to unpredictable falls, and shooting feels inconsistent. Most crucially, far too much of the game is spent traveling needlessly. No game should ever include a mission introduced with "go talk to _____," who then gives you the actual mission. It's the little things like that which take a player out of an experience to see the flaws in the writing. On a similar note, the voice work and dialogue are weak.

Ultimately, enjoyment of "Avatar: The Game" comes down to expectation. If you merely want to take a trip back to the world of Pandora, the game does a remarkable job of recreating and expanding on the universe created by the king of the world. What you do when you get there is another story.

'Avatar: The Game' was released by Ubisoft and developed by Ubisoft Montreal. It is rated T (Teen). The version reviewed was for the PS3, but the title is also available for the XBox 360, DS, PC, PSP, and Wii. It was released on December 1st, 2009.



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