

This article tries to avoid spoilers as much as possible, but a few may have snuck in there. Please be aware of this when continuing.

With *Final Fantasy XIV's Endwalker* being released today, players may be wondering if it is worth jumping into the new expansion straight away. Early access started on December the 3rd, so now that players have had a few days to get acquainted with the expansion, is it worth the long wait queues?

The new expansion does not wait. It sends the Warrior of Light to Sharlayan, a new city Hub immediately. However, this does not mean players will get to the action straight away. Similar to the previous expansion *Shadowbringers*, it is a slow start. The Devs use this time to reacquaint players with the story from the base game and its expansions. It takes roughly five hours for a player to make their way to the first dungeon.

The *FFXIV* Dev team has continued the characterisation that have turned the Scions into the characters players know and love. For the first time in the game, lower ranked Scions Hoary Boulder and Coultenet, have voiced dialogue. These two characters who are not part of the core scion group have been involved in the events of the game since ARR, so it's nice to see Square give them some love.

Endwalker increases a player's interaction with their Scion accomplices by allowing the Scions to follow a player, or asking a player to follow a character. I was personally worried that this would be like the escort quests, but it's actually quite hard to lose them. When allies are following a player in traditional JRPG fare, way marks on the ground will indicate that players can have a conversation with their allies. Often this means that we as players get a perspective of the environment from the characters point of view. It's a nice throwback to traditional RPGs as well as letting players get closer to characters and the locations.

Unfortunately, there are a few issues with the follow system, as the Scions have a propensity for hovering above the ground. It seems to be mostly occurring in Sharlayan at the beginning of the game. Moving along will help them get their head out of the clouds, so it's nothing game breaking.

In *Shadowbringers*, there was a heavy lean towards Irish folklore, especially in Il Mheg. To compliment that, several characters in that expansion had Irish accents. In the town of Radz-at-Han, where the world is very influenced by Indian culture, a lot of the NPCs have Indian-British accents. It's something small, but it just adds that little bit extra.

The Indian influence is very obvious in Radz-at-han. It is brightly coloured with numerous tapestries. By comparison, Sharlayan is inspired by Mediterranean architecture. Both locations are very unique, something *Final fantasy XIV* has always managed. The music is on point as usual, even going so far as borrowing music from previous expansions during plot points that throwback to those expansions. Yoshi P (*Final fantasy XIV's* director) has gone as far as to suggest players turn off mount music so they can immerse themselves.

In comparison to the lovely cities, the first dungeon environment is an eclectic mix of mechanical and organic that borders on unsettling. The boss battles are interesting without being frustrating, something that was happening a lot post *shadowbringers* main story dungeons. A lot of attacks that aren't telegraphed until just before they happen. Extra frustrating if the player is an Australian on a NA data centre! A new mechanic shows up that can be very confusing at first because it just suddenly pops up. It just tells a player the spell will activate when it reaches the blue arrow, but as it was a new waymark I'd never seen before, I had no idea what to do initially!

Estinien has been added to the trust and this is the first dungeon he is involved in. His personality is similar to Alisaie in that he will often stand in the AOE's to get an attack off. It is fairly typical of a dragoon. I did encounter an issue during my first boss fight where Estinien seemed to not understand where the safe spot was on the arena and ran to the edge, away from it but it only happened the once. For something that was early access, it wasn't the worst thing that could happen.

Bi-colour gems, a new currency introduced in *Shadowbringers* is also available in *Endwalker*. They serve the same function as the ones from *Shadowbringers*, encouraging players to complete fates to earn them and unlock extra rewards. Riding maps, which increase a player's mount speed, become available from Bi-

colour gem vendors after 6 fates are completed. Best to grab these as soon as possible so movement is less tedious.

Players don't really need the extra incentive as the exp nerf has activated this expansion. Normally a character would outstrip the level of story quests so rapidly that players would often juggle two classes to make the most of the exp. With the nerf, exp isn't a struggle but it is nowhere near as easy as it was in previous expansions. It's best to stick to one job for the entire expansion.

Players were finally able to get hands on with the two new jobs that released with *Endwalker*. Sage and Reaper start at level 70 and can be found in the city States of Limsa Lominsa and Ul'dah respectively. In *Shadowbringers* level 70 jobs had no quests specific to their job, instead opting for Role quests and it's the same for this expansion. This is different for Sage and Reaper though, as they have job quests every 2 levels to help players learn how to use the classes.

Sage is a complicated class. The game throws players into the deep end after only giving two pieces of advice. First to link to the Tank with Kardia and second to use Eukrasia to enhance the existing Diagnosis. What isn't explained is that these abilities are often Damage Over Time abilities. It's about juggling a shield over the tank or target, dealing damage and supplementing it with the Sage's special Addersgall abilities. These abilities not just heal but also reduce the damage taken by the target player. Sage seems to have a propensity for small shields, only having Haima, a large shield that has a long cool down. This shield should only really be used for tank busters and emergencies. Sage plays like no other classes, not even their companion shield healer Scholar. As mentioned, it's a complicated class.

Reaper is fairly straight forward. As a melee dps class, the job is about dealing damage using Slice attacks until the Soul gauge is at 50%. This activates the actions Blood Stalk, Grim swathe or Gluttony. After using one of these abilities, players can then use Gibbet, Gallows or Guillotine. Gibbet and Gallows are position based, similar to Dragoon. It's only these two attacks that have positions and the quest suggests players alternate between the two unless there are multiple enemies. Then it would be best to use Guillotine.

Aside from getting two new jobs, Summoner has been revamped, changing it completely from the job it was originally. Players still summon a carbuncle, but

they no longer order it to attack, instead it can place a shield buff or an attack increase. Summoner has been reduced to using mainly Ruin or Tri disaster, unless they have one of their primal summons out.

When the primal is summoned, it does its own attack, before relying on the player to use shining Brilliance to use the associated primal's ability. It's a cycle between changing summons and their abilities. The old summoner suffered from having too long a rotation, one where things seemed very disjointed and didn't really flow. The rejigged Summoner job has the opposite problem. There's not much to do while waiting for global cooldowns. With any luck, this will change as Summoner reaches level 90.

The other job to get large changes (but not as much as Summoner) is Monk. Originally Monk had 6 abilities with positionals. This meant that players would have to swap between flank, back and flank again. It was one of the hardest classes to get the most out of for this reason.

The dev team have improved this by removing four of the positionals, and leaving only the last attack of the three-part combo with its position requirement intact. It is much harder to gather Chakra's now, but as it unlocks some of the more powerful moves, it makes sense. The ability to use perfect balance to unlock an extra variety of attacks gives players a reason to use it, beyond trying to avoid annoying positionals. Depending on whether a player has one, two or three different Beast Chakra's, it will change what attack is available to a player. The attacks that Chakra's unlock, will either grant a Lunar Nadi or Solar Nadi on the Master's gauge. Having both Lunar, solar and three beast Chakra's in the Masters gauge will unlock a powerful attack. On top of this, to make up for Monk being one of the only classes to not have a ranged attack, they now have the ability to teleport to a player or enemies' side instantly.

Another class that had some changes was Astrologian. With Sage's release, healers were split into Pure healers or Shield Healers. Astrologian was changed to a Pure healer, meaning their Nocturnal sect toggle was removed. As well as this, Astrologians can use Divination at any time. The Arcanas instead now affect the Astrologian themselves. Just like how divination used to work, (and similar to monk), whether a player has One, two or three unique Arcanas will change the

effect. Players will now have to juggle two sets of cards now. Aside from the main one, there is also the minor arcana too. It's a lot to keep a handle on!

Dragoon and Black mage also had changes in regard to two of their major abilities. Players used to have to activate these abilities manually, but with the change to them being a trait, they are now passive and activate automatically. It makes the rotations of both a lot smoother and much easier to handle.

Other smaller changes make the world of Eoreza a more convenient place for players. The aethernet systems in the city states now have a map show up when a player interacts with it. The list has also been split into the aethernet and exits allowing players an easier time getting around. Beforehand, memorisation was required, especially in locations like Ishgard where places had obtuse names.

Player's armouries have been expanded, at least for main hand weapons and rings. The rest of the chest has stayed the same, and the glamour chest is still stuck at 400. Criminal.

Another small but significant change is to retainers. Players can see if a retainer can go on a venture before attempting to send them out. Normally a player would select the venture and then a popup would inform them that the retainer was too low a level. Even worse, if a player had not collected an item, they would not be aware that their retainer also can't collect it until trying to send them out. Now any ventures a retainer cannot take will be in red, any they can take will be in white. If a retainer can't harvest an item due to the connected player having never collected it, the image of the item will be faded and will have no tick next to it. These two small changes seem like nothing much, but it will mean players won't have to waste their time as much.

So, after all these changes big and small, is it worth jumping into one of the most anticipated MMORPG releases of late? In short, yes. There will be congestion due to the growing popularity the game has enjoyed recently, but even with those wait times and queues; the expansion is incredibly enjoyable. If you were keen on *Heavensward* or *Shadowbringers*, then *Endwalker* is very much more of the same and that is in no way a bad thing.