

= Geneforge 2 =

Geneforge 2 is the second video game in the Geneforge series of role @-@ playing video games created by Spiderweb Software .

Players create a character from one of three character classes and explore the game 's 84 locations , deciding whether to ally themselves with one of the four factions or remain neutral . The game 's plot concerns an apprentice Shaper and an Agent (whose name is Shanti) , both members of a secretive sect of wizards who can create life by using their own life energy . They are sent on a mission to investigate a failing Shaper colony called Drypeak . When they arrive not all is well , the player becomes drawn into a four @-@ way war which has been hidden from the outside world .

The game 's development was made more simple by the use of the same game engine to that of its predecessor , though extra dialogue was involved due to the presence of four factions rather than the three in Geneforge . Video game journalists awarded both positive and average review scores , they were impressed by Geneforge 2 's plot and replayability but criticized the game 's graphics and ambient sound effects .

= = Gameplay = =

Geneforge 2 is a role @-@ playing game where the player 's choice of answers during conversations with non @-@ player characters affects how the player is regarded amongst the game 's four factions . The player character is an apprentice Shaper , a feared and secretive group who can create life . Players create a character from one of three character classes and explore the area surrounding Drypeak , a failing Shaper colony , solving quests and gaining experience . Each of the three character classes has a particular playing style and can approach tasks in different ways . Guardians are fighters who excel in standard combat skills , especially hand @-@ to @-@ hand fighting . They are capable of shaping creations , but have little affinity for magic . Agents are the game 's version of rogues , and excel in spell casting and are capable of hand @-@ to @-@ hand combat . The Shaper is a summoner , capable of creating living creatures by using their own life essence . Shapers rely on their creations for protection . Players can also convince certain non @-@ player characters to join them .

The game is played in 45 ° axonometric perspective , movement through the game 's environs is real @-@ time , combat is turn @-@ based . The game world is divided into 84 areas accessible through a world map . Clearing areas by defeating leaders or successfully traversing the terrain allows players to bypass those areas via the world map , reducing travelling time . The game uses an auto @-@ map , each area is completely darkened and is revealed as the player explores , similar to the fog of war used in real @-@ time strategy games . As the player completes tasks and defeats enemies they receive experience , leading to increased levels and additional skill points . The player character 's skill points can be used to increase their statistics . Canisters which increase skills or add new abilities are scattered throughout the game . Geneforge 2 offers a number of changes and additions over its predecessor . Three new creations are available to players : massive Drakons ; telepathic Gazers ; and acidic , decaying Rotghroths . Several new spells are available , such as Kill and Aura of Flames . The skill " Anatomy " , which allowed the player to cause extra damage in melee combat , is replaced with " Parry " , which has a chance of blocking incoming attacks . Also the spell " Dominate " which allows the player to take control of one of the enemies is replaced with " Wrack " . The game engine itself , however , is essentially unchanged from the original Geneforge .

= = Plot = =

An apprentice Shaper is sent on a training mission with a Shaper Agent named Shanti by the Shaper Council . The pair are tasked with assessing the failed Shaper colony Drypeak and making contact with the pair of Shapers , Barzahl and Zakary , who were dispatched years ago to revitalize the colony . The gates of Drypeak are found unmanned , much to Shanti 's disgust , the Agent and

her charge are also attacked by rogue Shaper creations . When the pair gain access to the colony , they find a dishevelled Zakary who informs them that both he and Barzahl were unsuccessful in revitalizing the colony , which remains a barren desert . He also states that Barzahl has died . Zakary and the population of Drypeak behave suspiciously . Shanti is shadowed by an armed guard against her will . She instructs the apprentice , who is not guarded , to explore Drypeak and beyond in order to discover the truth behind the colony and Barzahl 's disappearance .

After exploring a number of the game 's locations , the apprentice gains access to a guarded tunnel and is astonished to discover what lies on the other side . Whereas the valley where Drypeak is located is a dustbowl devoid of vegetation , the lands on the other side of the tunnel are lush and green , meaning highly illegal shaping is taking place in secret . Serviles , the Shapers ' slaves created from life essence , show abnormal intelligence and self @-@ awareness . While still reeling from the revelation of what lies beyond Drypeak , the Shaper apprentice discovers that Shanti has disappeared during one of her escapes from her armed escorts , her necklace lay broken on the grass outside the tunnel . At this point , approximately a quarter of the way through the game , the player 's choices expand considerably .

When confronted with the apprentice 's findings , Zakary confesses to being part of a plot to conceal illegal experiments from the Shaper Council . Both he and Barzahl were sent to Sucia Island , the location where the original Geneforge game is set , where Barred Shaper technology had allowed Shapers to manipulate life in countless ways . Instead of destroying the Geneforge , the pair agreed to spirit away the technology and experiment in private . Several of the intelligent serviles who lived on Sucia were brought along ; a number of Shapers also followed Barzahl . Zakary remained in Drypeak to provide a front for the experimentation and rogue serviles which lay beyond the tunnel . Barzahl moved further into the valleys to build settlements and run experiments . Repeated use of the canisters can render the user cold , detached and possibly mad . When Zakary saw this happening to Barzahl the pair argued , Zakary regretted his part in the deceit . This occurred a year before the arrival of Shanti and the apprentice , Zakary had lost contact with Barzahl since the argument . Zakary pledges his loyalty to the Shaper Council once more and asks for help from the apprentice in dealing with what lies beyond the guarded cave .

Using the Geneforge to empower himself and his followers , the Barzites , Barzahl intends to bestow god @-@ like abilities on himself and his followers within the city of Rising . Barzahl cut off contact with Drypeak , preparing to repel the inevitable assault of the Shaper Council , who they wish to remain independent from . The Takers , a faction of intelligent serviles who had originated on Sucia Island , were given powers by Barzahl because they worked for him . In turn the Takers created powerful dragon @-@ like beasts called drakons , taught the drakons how to create life themselves , and betrayed Barzahl . The Takers stand for the total destruction of the Shaper Council . The Awakened , the other servile faction in Geneforge 2 , believe that Shapers should treat them as equals . They had been working with the Barzites , but the Awakened 's leader Learned Pinner rejected the Barzites ' view that serviles need to be controlled . Trade and communications between Zakary 's now Shaper Council loyalist Drypeak and the other three factions have ceased , replaced with spies and subterfuge . The player is free to decide which faction they wish to join , if any , and to explore the game world , reacting to the characters and situations they encounter .

= = Development = =

Geneforge 2 was developed in tandem with another Spiderweb Software title , Blades of Avernum . Developer Jeff Vogel described the game 's production as " very relaxing " , since the game engine was already completed from the previous game he was familiar with it and therefore could devote his time to creating the game itself . Due to the different reactions the player receives from the factions , depending on their actions and conversation choices , it required days to complete a single town . This was further increased from the original game , due to there being four factions instead of three . In an interview held during the development of Geneforge 2 Vogel stated " I 'm really excited about the Geneforge series . And we 're already thinking about Geneforge 3 . " A 20 area demo version was released , allowing players access to towns , mines and woodlands .

= = Reception = =

Geneforge 2 received both positive and average review scores . Video game magazine PC Gamer 's reviewer stated that " graphics aside , Geneforge 2 is a terrific game " for players new to the RPG genre . The reviewer of Computer Games Magazine praised the Spiderweb Software 's titles and said that Geneforge 2 " is probably the best twenty @-@ five bucks an RPG fiend can spend . " CNET 's staff member was more critical , describing the game as " complex enough to keep you interested , but not quite good enough to enjoy . " Indie gaming website Game Tunnel 's Gianfranco Berardi praised Geneforge 2 as " an RPG of amazing quality . " Inside Mac Games ' Ken Newquist stated the game is " a real find " for players who have been disappointed by lack of gameplay in expensive mainstream titles .

The game 's graphics and sound effects received a largely negative response , Matt Peckham of GameSpy described them as " yesteryear " and " minimalist " respectively . Ken Newquist called the graphics " far from spectacular " and stated they were worse than older titles such as Baldur 's Gate . He also highlighted that enchanted items look identical to their mundane counterparts and that highly evolved creatures are identical to their standard brethren . Newquist also disliked the ambient sounds , which make up the game 's soundtrack , calling them " numerous , but repetitive " . Gianfranco Berardi was more positive . He stated that " the graphics aren 't exactly top @-@ notch " , but noted variation between different areas . He also said " the sound effects and ambience simply added to the involving storyline . " CNET 's editor described the sound effects as " merely adequate " and the graphics " less so " .

Gianfranco Berardi praised the plot , stating that it " isn 't just good background noise like in most games . " He added that he found the plot involving , and that it can cause the player to stop and think about their actions . Matt Peckham described the plot as " fantastic and original " , and praised the game 's replayability . Ken Newquist compared the game 's setting to the pen and paper role @-@ playing game Gamma World , and stated " players get a huge world to explore and ? thanks to the intricacies of the game 's plot ? re @-@ explore . "