

## = Neverwinter Nights 2 : Mask of the Betrayer =

Neverwinter Nights 2 : Mask of the Betrayer is a role @-@ playing video game developed by Obsidian Entertainment and published by Atari . It is an expansion pack for Neverwinter Nights 2 . It was released in Autumn 2007 for the PC in North America , Europe , and Australia . Like the first game , Mask of the Betrayer is set in the Forgotten Realms campaign setting of the paper and pencil role @-@ playing game Dungeons & Dragons and employs the 3 @.@ 5 edition rules .

Mask of the Betrayer continues the story of Neverwinter Nights 2 by following the fictional main character , the Shard @-@ bearer , who is afflicted by a curse that requires the devouring of spirits ( and occasionally souls ) to survive , and the character 's quest to determine the nature of the curse . The game takes place in two nations of the Forgotten Realms , Rashemen and Thay , which are considered part of Faerûn 's " Unapproachable East . "

The expansion received generally favorable reviews upon its release . New character traits , such as spells and combat abilities , were welcomed by players , as were the storyline and setting . The game 's technical aspects received mixed reception , with some reviewers welcoming the changes and others complaining that the technical glitches present in the original game had still not been addressed . The new " spirit eating " mechanic , which forces players to constantly replenish the main character 's life force by sucking out the force of spirits , undead , and gods was not appreciated by many reviewers .

## = = Gameplay = =

Mask of the Betrayer is an expansion pack for Neverwinter Nights 2 and its core gameplay is identical . The game uses the 3 @.@ 5 edition rules of the tabletop role @-@ playing game Dungeons & Dragons . Players can create a character from scratch and make use of Mask of the Betrayer 's new races , classes , and feats , or import an existing character from Neverwinter Nights 2 . Characters must be at level 18 to begin the game . The level cap has been raised from 20 to 30 , allowing for epic level characters and accompanying prestige classes and feats . Mask of the Betrayer features all of the races from Neverwinter Nights 2 , as well as introducing two types of elves ( the wild elf and the half @-@ drow ) , and four types of genasi . It also contains two new base classes , the " favored soul " and " spirit shaman " , and five new prestige classes . The game adds more than 100 new feats and magical spells to the base game .

Like other Dungeons & Dragons games , the player character in Mask of the Betrayer generally relies on combat to progress throughout the game . The hero has different options in combat depending on their choice of class and abilities , including melee or ranged physical attacks and spells . The player character also has the opportunity to solve puzzles occasionally , such as breaking a contract with a devil by searching for loopholes . Certain actions , such as defeating enemies , result in the player character being awarded with experience points which are used to gain levels and become more powerful . Throughout the adventure , the player character is able to recruit followers and create a party . Each follower has their own agenda , and the hero may alienate followers with their actions if they disagree on a course of action .

## = = Plot = =

## = = = Setting = = =

Like other games in the Neverwinter Nights series , Mask of the Betrayer takes place in the Forgotten Realms campaign setting . The story is a direct sequel to the plot of Neverwinter Nights 2 , set almost immediately following the events at the main game 's end . The main campaign is set in Rashemen near the kingdom of Thay , and the Red Wizards of Thay are a driving force behind the campaign story .

== Story ==

In Act I , the Shard @-@ bearer 's story resumes after the defeat of the King of Shadows . The player awakens alone in an underground barrow in Rashemen , where he meets Safiya , a Red Wizard of Thay . The player follows Safiya to the Veil Theater in the nearby town of Mulsantir , hoping to find Lienna , an acquaintance of Safiya 's mother , who is supposed to provide the player with some much @-@ needed answers . Unfortunately , the player finds that the theater has been attacked by Red Wizards , and Lienna has been killed . At the back of the theater , the player finds a portal to the Plane of Shadow , a dark reflection of the Prime Material Plane , where he defeats the Red Wizards who murdered Lienna . Upon returning to the Prime Material Plane , the player finds that the spirit @-@ god Okku has besieged Mulsantir , demanding the player 's blood . The player confronts Okku and defeats his spirit army . At the end of the battle , the player learns that he has become a spirit @-@ eater , an accursed being who must feed upon feys and elementals ( and sometimes mortal souls ) in order to survive .

In Act II , the player meets a group of gargoyle @-@ like creatures who reveal that Lienna and her " red twin " ordered them to kidnap the player from the Sword Coast . This plot was allegedly inspired by the Slumbering Coven , a sisterhood of hag oracles who dwell in an ancient flooded city . The player follows this clue to Lake Mulsantir , where he finds another portal to the Plane of Shadow . In this " alternate reality , " the player enters the flooded city and confronts the hags . The Slumbering Coven reveal that Lienna , along with Safiya 's mother Nefris , were responsible for the hero 's current dilemma . They send the player to Nefris 's Academy in Thay to discover her motive .

At the Academy , the player enters a portal to the Astral Plane where they meet Myrkul , the former god of the dead . Myrkul reveals that the spirit @-@ eater 's curse " originated as a punishment for his former servant , Akachi " The Betrayer " , who once led a crusade against the realm of the dead . Akachi 's empty and hungry soul now resides in the player 's body , and the player 's own soul has been displaced to the Wall of the Faithless , in the realm of the dead .

In Act III , the player meets the Founder of the Academy , and Safiya realizes that she , Lienna , and Nefris are all splinters of the Founder 's soul , and that the Founder was once Akachi 's lover . The Founder explains that , while Lienna and Nefris understood their identities , the truth was hidden from Safiya for her own safety . The Founder also admits that she is responsible for the player 's plight - she wanted to use the player to end the spirit @-@ eater curse ( and Akachi 's suffering , as well ) . She returns the silver sword of Gith to the player , which allows him to open the Betrayer 's Gate and travel to the realm of the dead . There the player finds the City of Judgment , ruled by the current God of the Dead , Kelemvor Lyonsbane . As the player arrives , an army is assembling outside the walls , led by Akachi 's captains from his First Crusade - Zoab , a fallen solar , Rammaq , a demilich , and Sey 'ryu , a blue dragon . The captains recognize the player as Akachi 's heir , and the player must decide whether to lead their crusade against the City of Judgment or to oppose them .

Depending upon his choice , the player character must assault or defend three key positions around the City of Judgment . After the battle , the player learns where his own soul is located and wrests it from the Wall of the Faithless . The player is then pulled into a dreamscape where he must battle Akachi 's avatar , The Faceless Man , for control of his soul . After defeating the Faceless Man , Kelemvor narrates the ending , which varies based on the player 's choices throughout the game .

== Development ==

Obsidian Entertainment began planning Mask of the Betrayer , codenamed " NX1 " by its developers , before the release of Neverwinter Nights 2 . The game was announced in April 2007 . Obsidian Entertainment 's CEO , Feargus Urquhart , said that Mask of the Betrayer would continue the story of Neverwinter Nights 2 , and improvements would be made in character development and the companion system along the lines of a previous Obsidian game , Star Wars : Knights of the Old Republic II . Lead designer Kevin Saunders described the game as " high @-@ level " , and characters would need to be at least level 18 before starting . A character could be imported from

the first game , or players could make one from scratch and take advantage of Mask of the Betrayer 's new races , classes , and other features . The races consisted of two new types of elf as well as all four basic types of elemental genasi ; all of which had been commonly requested by the fan community . New base classes include the favored soul and the spirit shaman , both divine in nature . Prestige classes include the Red Wizard of Thay , the first time the class has appeared in a video game , and the Arcane Scholar of Candlekeep , a new class created by the game 's developers . Obsidian stated that the game would also include over 100 new feats and spells , including many epic feats .

A priority for developers was the improvement of the original game 's performance . Saunders said " Throughout the course of the project , we fixed many bugs , optimized performance , made better use of the graphics technology , and in general , tied up loose ends . For example , we revamped the camera and party controls , adding an RTS @-@ like strategy mode that makes combat much more enjoyable . " Neverwinter Nights 2 programmers made improvements to the engine , . such as the addition of a color desaturation filter that turns almost all colors into shades of black and white . The art team developed new environments for the regions of Rashemen and Thay that they felt would be appealing to the game 's modding community , such as snow @-@ covered forests and a magical academy . Mask of the Betrayer is the first time either region has been featured in a Dungeons & Dragons video game ; Obsidian stated that one design goal was " to immerse the player in the land of Rashemen . The art , music and characters were chosen and crafted to convey this very intriguing area of the Forgotten Realms . "

Modifications were also made to the Neverwinter Nights 2 toolset with the intention of giving more options to module creators in the fan community and making it easier for players taking the role of the Dungeon Master . Urquhart said that the additions include " an Appearance editor for humanoids and monsters to make it easier to cloth and color them , the saving and loading of lighting sets , undo functionality for terrain drawing , creating blueprints more easily , adding in more trees to use , [ and ] refining the texture sculpting tools . " Over two dozen monsters were created for Mask of the Betrayer , such as new types of golem , dragons , and hagspawn . New spell effects , character models , and environmental effects were also added ; Saunders stated that the genasi models in particular had been a challenge for artists and he had originally opposed the inclusion of the new races because of this .

The design team was focused on making the companion system deeper and contain a sense of accountability with players . Companions who are treated well and who agree with the protagonist 's actions bestow certain benefits , such as bonuses in combat . Companions who are treated poorly will not cooperate with the hero and may even abandon the hero . The story , revolving around the hole in the player character 's chest and his need to feed on the spirits of others to survive , was described by Obsidian as less all @-@ encompassing than the first game and more personal in nature . Saunders commented " It 's an epic story , but it 's a very personal one . You awaken in a pool of your own blood . Your immediate goal is survival . The shard of the Sword of Gith has been ripped from your chest and in its place is a dark hunger , a craving that threatens to consume you . The early part of the game involves determining the source and implications of this craving . " Saunders also stated that the story , written by creative lead George Ziets , was " very dark " and that the ending would bring some closure to the story of the Shard @-@ Bearer .

= = Critical reception = =

Reviews of Mask of the Betrayer were generally favorable . Obsidian Entertainment 's handling of epic levels in the expansion was particularly praised , although some reviewers said that at higher levels the expansion became unbalanced . A number of reviewers mentioned that the expansion allows for more customization of both characters and levels , with Game Informer saying that " Piles of new feats , spells , and classes will give even seasoned D & D vets plenty to explore , either in the official campaign or custom scenarios built by the community . Likewise , builders can benefit from the ever @-@ improving toolset and ( supposedly ) fixed persistent @-@ world implementation . " Eurogamer also described the new classes , prestige classes , and races as " pretty damn neat "

. Eurogamer stated that starting Neverwinter Nights 2 over from the beginning after installing Mask of the Betrayer is also interesting because the expansion " integrate [ s ] with the previous game ( i.e. you can select one of the new races and classes and go back and play NWN2 with them ) " .

Reviewers said that the expansion 's single @-@ player game was more difficult than that of Neverwinter Nights 2 ; 1UP.com stated that Obsidian " [ Upped ] the ante with tougher enemies and a more challenging experience altogether " The expansion also has more puzzles which make the player think , rather than somehow being resolvable through combat , with one reviewer noting that the expansion has " genuinely tough logic puzzles ( some frustratingly short on clues ) and a series of side quests that completely vary ( some might not even open up ) depending on your party makeup " . Multiple reviewers mentioned that the expansion is more serious than Neverwinter Nights 2 .

The game 's story and writing were praised by many reviewers , with some noting its avoidance of common fantasy clichés . Some reviewers also compared the quality and tone of the writing to Neil Gaiman 's The Sandman series and to Planescape : Torment .

" Planescape : Torment fans will feel right at home , reading the intriguing passages that depict the character 's actions and feelings , among other things , while newcomers will probably just skip them ( their loss ) . And even though the amount of text is nowhere near as large as that of PS : T , the quality is right up there with the big boys , with even the most insignificant ally having at least one or two interesting things to say . "

The expansion 's sound was described by GameZone as being " exactly what it needs to [ be ] , in that it supports the story and gameplay . " Its voice work was described as " decent " , although some dialogue is purely text . Graphics were also improved from Neverwinter Nights 2 , with better textures and spell effects , in addition to a new option so that the player can change the game 's level of violence . Reviewers also mentioned that the graphics , especially that of spells such as lightning , could make combat difficult ; GameSpy said ,

" All those high @-@ level spells also throw out a ton of spectacular graphics effects that do wonders to obscure what 's going on during a battle . As beautiful as they are [ ... ] , we 'd trade all the eye candy in the world for the ability to accurately select a target . "

Mask of the Betrayer was nominated for Best RPG of the Year by G4 TV , and it was named Runner @-@ up for RPG of the Year by GameBanshee .

Criticism of the expansion was aimed at its poor camera angles and other technical issues , although the game and updates since Neverwinter Nights 2 's release fixed many bugs of the original . IGN criticized the spirit meter mechanic , a statement echoed by GameSpy , who said ,

" On a purely mechanical level , the spirit meter ends up being more annoyance than fun . [ ... ] from a role @-@ playing / story standpoint it 's actually the reverse of what the mechanic was supposed to accomplish . "

John Walker , for GamesRadar , criticized the companions available :

" NWN2 was immediately joyful , with hilarious characters and dialogue juxtaposing the dark story . MotB is far more serious , and while the companions fulfill the role of representing personality extremes , none of them are particularly entertaining company . There 's no one to compare with Khelgar 's dwarfish temper , nor Neeshka 's impish naughtiness . Most are positively dull . And this isn 't helped by the opening dungeon being tedious beyond belief . " ? John Walker , GamesRadar