= Neverwinter Nights 2 : Storm of Zehir =

Neverwinter Nights 2 : Storm of Zehir is an expansion pack for the role @-@ playing video game Neverwinter Nights 2 , developed by Obsidian Entertainment and published by Atari . It was released in late 2008 in North America , Europe , and Australia . Like previous entries in the Neverwinter Nights series , Storm of Zehir is based on the paper and pencil fantasy role @-@ playing game Dungeons & Dragons , and uses the game 's 3 @.@ 5 edition ruleset .

Storm of Zehir was inspired by older video games like the Baldur 's Gate and Icewind Dale franchises . The storyline foreshadows the events of the fourth edition of Dungeons & Dragons and follows the adventures of a group of merchants in the Samarach and Sword Coast areas of the Forgotten Realms campaign setting .

Storm of Zehir received mixed reviews from critics . Reviewers were pleased with new features introduced in the game , like more options for party customization and an overland map , but were not impressed with the game 's storyline and technical achievements .

= = Gameplay = =

Storm of Zehir is an expansion of Neverwinter Nights 2 and continues the formula of a role @-@ playing video game played from an overhead third @-@ person perspective . Players first create a character along the lines of the Dungeons & Dragons 3 @.@ 5 rules by selecting a variety of traits , such as a race , class , and feats . New character creation options include the yuan @-@ ti pureblood and gray orc races , the swashbuckler class , and the hellfire warlock and doomguide of Kelemvor prestige classes . The rest of the player 's party can also be created , unlike Neverwinter Nights 2 , but pre @-@ made characters are available if the player is not interested in complete customization . The party can then explore several regions on the Forgotten Realms continent of Faerûn . The game provides an overland map that is used to move between different areas like towns and dungeons . While on the map , characters can use various skills to identify treasure , monsters , and other points of interest , such as side quests and secret locations . The party can rest while on the map , but doing so puts them at risk of random encounters in the form of wandering monsters .

In combat , players have access to a variety of abilities and magic spells , based on the makeup of the party . Storm of Zehir uses the dice @-@ based d20 System of Dungeons & Dragons and each action requires a random number generated by a die roll . The player can control a character individually by selecting specific actions to be taken against enemies , or allow the game 's artificial intelligence to fight by using a pre @-@ selected set of behaviors for each character . Defeating monsters and completing quests bestows experience points on the party , which are used to gain levels and become more powerful .

The player character can engage in other activities outside of combat , such as completing quests and interacting with non @-@ player characters . While in conversation with other characters , the player character can influence them by using several skills , such as " Intimidate " or " Diplomacy " . The entire party can assist in this process if they have the appropriate skills . Characters can create weapons , armor , and other goods with raw materials through a system of skill @-@ based crafting . Storm of Zehir also includes a regional economy whereby players can establish trading outposts in various towns and create caravan routes between them , providing merchandise to consumers along each route . The caravans can be personally observed and managed by the player , such as providing security if attacked by bandits .

= = Plot = =

The plot events and characters are described , below , using in @-@ universe tone .

= = = Setting = = =

Like other games in the Neverwinter Nights series , Storm of Zehir takes place in the Forgotten Realms campaign setting , on the continent of Faerûn on the planet Abeir @-@ Toril . It is set mostly in the Samarach and Sword Coast regions , with visits to locations featured in previous games such as Crossroad Keep and the city of Neverwinter . Since the Shadow War depicted in Neverwinter Nights 2 and the subsequent disappearance of the game 's protagonist , the Knight ? Captain , Neverwinter and the surrounding area have been declining economically . Several merchant companies have been attempting to establish a foothold in the region , with limited success .

= = = Story = = =

Storm of Zehir 's story begins with the player character escorting a ship called the Vigilant , sailing from the Sword Coast to Samarach . Halfling captain Lastri Kassireh quickly advises the party to go below decks in anticipation of an impending storm . The violent storm , coupled with a possible act of sabotage , culminates in the Vigilant becoming shipwrecked on the shores of the xenophobic nation of Samarach . The captain is missing , but the party quickly sets to work organizing the survivors , such as finding defensible positions nearby and salvaging equipment from the wreckage . Before long , a tribe of goblins discovers the group , and their leader issues a challenge in an unknown language . One of the other passengers of the Vigilant , the bard Volothamp " Volo " Geddarm , claims to speak the goblin tongue but inadvertently insults the goblins and instigates a battle . After the goblins are defeated , a group of humans approaches and arrests the party on suspicion of treachery , escorting them to the Open Palm market in the nearby city of Samargol . There , a local merchant named Sa 'Sani intervenes on the party 's behalf , revealing herself to be the recipient of the goods traveling aboard the waylaid Vigilant . She subsequently recruits the party to investigate the ship 's demise and the whereabouts of Captain Kassireh .

After rescuing the captain from goblins , investigating the wreckage of the Vigilant , and recovering some of Sa 'Sani 's goods , the merchant offers the characters employment in her trading corporation . The party undertakes various missions throughout Samarach for her , establishing trade routes through the jungles of Chult and protecting caravans along them . As the group continues to expand their trading operation , they eventually discover a large plot involving followers of the new yuan @-@ ti god , Zehir . They learn that the yuan @-@ ti , evil serpentine humanoids , have been infiltrating human settlements from their temples in the jungles of Chult and posing as merchants . After Sa 'Sani commits an act of murder at Crossroad Keep , the party learns that she is a yuan @-@ ti priestess of Sseth who has adopted this guise . The characters are given the option of aiding Sa 'Sani against a powerful yuan @-@ ti House Se 'Sehen that shifted its attention to the new god , Zehir . In order to stop the House Se 'Sehen 's plot to conquer Sword Coast , the party has to infiltrate the House 's stronghold , the Temple of the World Serpent , and assassinate N 'Safa , the high priest , and a powerful being called the " Herald of Zehir " , which is a gift from the God himself . Afterwards , the party has the opportunity to slay Sa 'Sani as well .

= = Development = =

Development of Storm of Zehir began during the end of development of Neverwinter Nights 2 's first expansion , Mask of the Betrayer , and was initially referred to as " NX2 " by its designers . The game was formally announced by Atari in June 2008 . It would be developed by Obsidian Entertainment , creators of Neverwinter Nights 2 and Mask of the Betrayer , and was given a release date of the fourth quarter of 2008 . Despite being released after the fourth edition of Dungeons & Dragons , Storm of Zehir would continue to use the 3 @.@ 5 edition rules . The design team for Storm of Zehir was smaller than that of Mask of the Betrayer and was given a shorter development period .

Like Neverwinter Nights 2 , Obsidian was inspired by older role @-@ playing video games for Storm of Zehir , such as Fallout and the Baldur 's Gate series . Assistant producer Rob McGinnis said " [The game] plays more like a classic CRPG " . The game was intended to be " more

authentic " to pencil and paper Dungeons & Dragons by offering players a light @-@ hearted approach to adventuring and a focus on exploration . The designers included a party system they felt was more teamwork @-@ oriented , such as the ability to custom @-@ make the entire party and allowing party members to collaborate on social interactions . The game 's programmers were instructed to include the ability to change party members whenever the player wished .

  Storm of Zehir 's storyline occurs concurrently with Mask of the Betrayer , which was set in the Rashemen region of Faerûn . The story was shaped by lead designer Tony Evans and written by Obsidian designer Annie Carlson . The team leads decided to create an adventure that they considered more in line with the roots of Dungeons & Dragons by departing from the more serious , epic stories presented in Neverwinter Nights 2 and Mask of the Betrayer . Evans said " This direction for the title can be seen throughout - finding random (and not random) goodies while searching the overland map , the addition of the Swashbuckler class , the variety of personalities in the cohorts ... " The game 's music was composed with this in mind ; Evans wanted themes that would portray the feel of a " light @-@ hearted adventure " . Audio director Alexander Brandon collaborated with composers of games like the Heroes of Might and Magic series and Primal , as well as " rookie composers " from Rogue Dao Studios . Brandon had the option of using a live orchestra , but decided against it to include more music in the game .

  Obsidian implemented an overland map feature to allow players the opportunity to explore the areas of the game in great detail . Designer Nathaniel Chapman said " Furthermore , it provided an opportunity to increase the effectiveness of various skills that , frankly , were underutilized in previous Neverwinter Nights titles " . Obsidian created the map with a design philosophy centered on " interstitial space " . Chapman explains :

  " It 's essentially the term for the space that exists between the things you are mainly concerned with in your study . So , if you ? re interested in looking at cells in the body , the goo that surrounds the cells is referred to as interstitial space . If you 're designing a building , the space between each floor is interstitial space . That , in a way , is the space that Overland Maps in games like Fallout , Baldur 's Gate , Final Fantasy , Darklands , and , of course , Storm of Zehir are conveying - those monster @-@ filled roads , boundless plains and spooky forests you travel through on your way to meet interesting people (and possibly kill and loot them) . "

  The map 's first prototype was inspired by the map seen in the Indiana Jones films . It behaved similarly to normal gameplay , and Obsidian decided to revamp it to create a " more dynamic and reactive interstitial space " . Characters would be able to avoid monsters by having a high enough Survival skill and could find hidden items and locations with high Search skills . Groups of adventuring NPCs could be observed and interacted with by players , including helping them fight aggressive monsters . Trade caravans created within the game 's economic subplot are visible and the player can actively protect their own investments . The overland map feature was created with the modding community in mind , and players using the Neverwinter Nights 2 toolset can modify the map 's options on an individual basis .

  Storm of Zehir was ready for mass production on November 1 , 2008 and was released on November 18 , 2008 in North America , November 21 in Europe , and December 11 in Australia . It was also made available for download on digital distribution service Direct2Drive .

  = = Reception = =

  Storm of Zehir received mixed reviews . Critics were generally pleased with the departure from previous games in the series in terms of open @-@ ended gameplay and its similarities to " old school " role @-@ playing video games , but they criticized the game 's story and frequency of random encounters . It was a runner @-@ up in the RPG category for IGN 's Best of E3 Awards at the Electronic Entertainment Expo video game convention in 2008 .

  Reviewers were in favor of Storm of Zehir 's focus on exploration and the ability to postpone or ignore the game 's main storyline , and they compared the gameplay to older role @-@ playing video games such as Icewind Dale II and Fallout . GameZone 's reviewer said " This is a game that harkens back to the good old days of adventure D & D video @-@ gaming " , and IGN said " this

feels like an homage to the old school D & D games of the past " . The ability to handcraft an entire party instead of just the main character was welcomed , with GameSpot 's reviewer noting " Rather than playing as a solo hero chosen for some great destiny , you roll up a party of four average joes just like you did way back when in D & D classics like the Baldur 's Gate and Icewind Dale franchises , " (It should be noted that Baldur 's Gate did not actually contain the ability to create the entire party in single player mode ; however , in multiplayer , this was possible) and IGN saying " There 's a strange kind of nerd joy when it comes to creating a D & D party " . Reviewers also appreciated the " Party Conversation System " , which allows typically underutilized social skills to be used by the entire party during conversation . GameSpy said " It 's a terrific convention in which the game responds not to one but to every member of an adventuring party . [Characters] have the option to interject some special comment into a conversation that might open up otherwise unavailable avenues " . Reviewers were grateful that the time @-@ based , " spirit @-@ eating " gameplay mechanic of Mask of the Betrayer was not included .

Reviewers generally praised Storm of Zehir 's use of the Dungeons & Dragons 3 @.@ 5 edition rules with the exception of GameSpy , who expressed skepticism of the ruleset in a preview of the game . The game 's handling of character death was not well received , despite being more faithful to the pencil and paper version than previous Dungeons & Dragons video games . Unlike Neverwinter Nights 2 and Mask of the Betrayer where defeated characters would be automatically revived after a battle , Storm of Zehir requires a powerful spell or a " Coin of Waukeen " to resurrect dead allies . Reviewers considered this requirement unforgiving ; GameSpy said " This merely forces the player to troop back to town through a zillion meaningless random encounters . This may be " realistic " (whatever that means in a world where players fight against newborn gods and sentient snakes) , but it 's simply not fun . Baldur 's Gate had this all worked out over a decade ago . Why do we need to re @-@ invent the wheel ? "

Critics gave the game 's technical achievements a lukewarm reception . Several reviewers described the Electron engine as aging ; IGN Australia said " The two year @-@ old engine is surprisingly sluggish for something that looks dated . The simplistic Overhead Map adds nothing to the visual attractiveness , but this isn 't a bad @-@ looking game " . GameZone referred to the graphics as " serviceable " , and IGN said " The world map is a bit ugly , but otherwise Storm of Zehir looks slightly better than its predecessors " . Critics widely panned the voice acting , but praised the music .

The focal point of criticism was Storm of Zehir 's story . Critics considered its focus on trade and economics shallow compared to the epic adventures presented in Neverwinter Nights 2 and Mask of the Betrayer . GameSpy referred to the storyline as a " boringly generic adventure " , and GameSpot said " The quests reflect this mundane storyline . You run a lot of lame errands to kill specific monsters and recover lost or stolen merchandise , and you clean out a bunch of formulaic dungeons , caves , graveyards , and the like " . Other complaints included the presence of random encounters on the overland map , which were considered excessive , as well as long load times .