Icewind Dale II

Icewind Dale II is a role @-@ playing video game developed by Black Isle Studios and published by Interplay Entertainment , released on August 27 , 2002 . Like its 2000 predecessor Icewind Dale , the game is set in the Forgotten Realms fantasy setting in the Icewind Dale region . The player assumes control of a group of mercenaries in a war between the Ten Towns of Icewind Dale and a coalition of persecuted races and religions .

The game is designed as an action @-@ oriented alternative to other Infinity Engine games , with less emphasis on exploration and story . It uses a real @-@ time adaptation of the Dungeons & Dragons (D & D) Third Edition ruleset . The Infinity Engine was extensively modified to comply with the Third Edition , but the team was forced to remove certain rules because of the engine 's outdated nature . It was the final game to be developed using the Infinity Engine .

The game was well received by critics , who praised its combat , pacing , and use of the Third Edition rules . However , some reviewers felt that the graphics and engine had become outdated , and could not compete with its contemporaries .

Gameplay

Icewind Dale II is a real @-@ time adaptation of the D & D Third Edition ruleset . The game is viewed from an isometric perspective , and a head @-@ up display (HUD) occupies the bottom of the screen . Accessible from the HUD are an automap and a journal that records quests and important events . The player uses a point @-@ and @-@ click interface to interact with the game ; for example , clicking on the ground moves the selected player character , and clicking on a passive non @-@ player character (NPC) will initiate dialogue . When conversations occur , the game presents multiple dialogue options . The game world is separated into area maps ? obscured by fog of war ? that are revealed as the area is explored . A multiplayer mode is available for up to six players over a local area network or the Internet . The " Heart of Fury " mode is also available , which increases the game 's difficulty and contains more powerful items . The game features over seven hundred items ; the designers included a system that randomizes the items the player obtains from enemies .

When beginning the game , the player may choose to play a pre @-@ selected party , or to create a party of up to six characters ; unlike the Baldur 's Gate series , Icewind Dale II does not permit the player to import characters from previous Icewind Dale games . While creating characters , the player chooses their gender , race , class , alignment , and attributes , among other things . The player can sometimes choose a subvariety of a race or class , such as Deep Gnome or Cleric of Ilmater . Race , alignment , and attributes affect the player character 's available dialogue options , as well as NPC responses . For example , some NPCs will be prejudiced against certain races , or a character of low intelligence will have limited dialogue options . Some sub @-@ races in the game are significantly more powerful than the core races present in AD & D Third Edition ; these sub @-@ races must earn more experience points than others before leveling up . Characters can reach a maximum level of thirty . It is possible to add additional characters to the party at any time , including during combat .

Icewind Dale II 's gameplay is focused on combat . The combat system is a real @-@ time adaptation of the turn @-@ based system used in D & D Third Edition , which caused the developers to remove certain aspects , such as " attacks of opportunity " . Dice rolls are simulated by the game . In place of the turn @-@ based rounds used in D & D , characters have independent rounds , during which they may execute one or more actions , depending on such factors as the duration of the action . The player can pause the game and issue orders to characters at any time . Each character can carry a limited amount of items .

Plot

= = = Setting = = =

 Icewind Dale II takes place in the Forgotten Realms D & D campaign setting , on the continent of Faerûn . It centers on the northern Icewind Dale region , and is set thirty years after the original game . The game begins in the harbor town of Targos , one of the Ten Towns of Icewind Dale , which is under siege by a goblin army . The goblins are directed by the Legion of the Chimera , an army composed of outcast races and religious factions , such as goblinoids , half @-@ breeds , and followers of winter goddess Auril . Targos hires mercenaries to defend against the attack . Areas encountered in the game include : the Black Raven Monastery , built over an entrance to the Underdark ; the town of Kuldahar , constructed around a magical tree that emits heat ; the Severed Hand , an ancient elven fortress that was lost during a war with goblinoids ; and the Dragon 's Eye , a network of volcanic caverns inhabited by yuan @-@ ti . Other areas include the Underdark and the Jungles of Chult .

= = = Story = = =

 The game begins as the player 's group of mercenaries arrives by ship to defend Targos . They report to the town palisade and fend off an assault by the goblin army . Afterwards , the mayor of Targos orders them to start an offensive on the goblin army . The group kills the chieftain of the army , and discovers that he was under the command of a woman named Sherincal . When they return to Targos , the mayor asks them to rendezvous with reinforcements from Neverwinter . The group travels to meet them in an airship piloted by Oswald Fiddlebender .
 A storm causes the ship to crash , and the group awakens to discover that a glacier blocks the reinforcements ' path . While investigating the glacier , the group finds Sherincal , a half @-@ dragon , guarding the entrance to an Aurilite temple . They learn that Sherincal leads the Legion of the Chimera 's western forces , and that the leaders of the Legion of the Chimera , cambion twins named Isair and Madae , reside in the Severed Hand . Inside the Aurilite temple , the group finds a prisoner from Kuldahar , who asks them to warn Kuldahar of the threat posed by the Legion of the Chimera . After this , the group creates a passage through the glacier , and meets with the reinforcements .
 As the group travels to Kuldahar , they meet a drow (dark elf) named Nym , who tells them that the pass to Kuldahar is guarded by the Legion of the Chimera , and that an alternate path through the Underdark exists . Later , Isair and Madae locate the group with information from Nym . They state their intention to attack Kuldahar , and warn the group to not interfere . The group then passes through the Black Raven Monastery to enter the Underdark . After exiting the Underdark , they are flown to Kuldahar by Oswald Fiddlebender .
 When the group lands in Kuldahar , they discover it has been invaded by the Legion of the Chimera . They meet the Archdruid of Kuldahar , who tells them that a portal has been opened to allow yuan @-@ ti from the Jungles of Chult to assault Kuldahar . After the group prevents the attack , the Archdruid tells them that they may reach the Severed Hand through an exit at the bottom floor of the Dragon 's Eye . The group travels through Dragon 's Eye , and proceeds to the Severed Hand . Once inside , they learn that the war between the Ten Towns and the Legion of the Chimera was caused by the mayor of Bryn Shander , who had sent Isair and Madae poisoned food . They also discover that a mythal that was cast on the Severed Hand has been corrupted , and the structure will be transported to the plane of limbo . Eventually , the group finds Isair and Madae , and kills them .

= = Development = =

 During summer 2001 , Black Isle Studios employed three development teams . These included the Icewind Dale team , the team developing Torn , and a team working on an unannounced project . Before and during Torn 's development , several members of its team expressed interest in developing another game using the Infinity Engine . The development team was not made aware of

Black Isle Studios ' decision to develop Icewind Dale II until Torn 's cancellation . Lead designer J. E. Sawyer described , " I don 't know when the producers decided to make the game , but I was told that we were making the game when I learned that TORN was being cancelled ... on a Wednesday afternoon " , and that Feargus Urquhart " asked me to work with Steve Bokkes to create a story and area overview by Thursday afternoon . Steve and I talked about it for the rest of the day . I went home that night and worked on the overviews until the next day . I came in and turned the docs in , and after the Friday division meeting , the project was in development . " During this period , Interplay Entertainment relied on Black Isle Studios ' games to alleviate financial trouble , which put pressure to release games quickly . The decision to develop Icewind Dale II was based partly on the original Icewind Dale 's reception , and the development teams ' ability to create a game with the Infinity Engine relatively quickly . Sawyer said of the decision , " In all honesty , the reasons for making Icewind Dale II have to do with limiting risks and maximizing our chances for a popular title . " Conceptualization of Icewind Dale II progressed during the development of the Icewind Dale expansions , and production began late July 2001 , shortly after the completion of Icewind Dale : Trials of the Luremaster . After six months of development , Icewind Dale II was officially announced on February 4 , 2002 .

 Icewind Dale II was originally planned to be an incomplete conversion to the D & D Third Edition ruleset , with many rules omitted . The kit system (class specialization) introduced in Baldur 's Gate 2 was to be used , but this idea was later abandoned . Sawyer and several other members of the team pushed for the game 's conversion to Third Edition . The development team was eventually granted an extension , which allowed them to complete the change to Third Edition rules . The Infinity Engine required extensive modification to comply with Third Edition rules , as it had originally been designed for Second Edition rules ; certain elements of the rules were removed due to interface and engine issues . The game 's interface was redesigned , and all @-@ new art was created . It features new item icons , with new spell icons by Brian Menze ; Menze had previously created Planescape : Torment 's spell icons . Jason Manley , the portrait artist for the previous Icewind Dale games , left Black Isle Studios in late 2001 ; several new works he painted before his departure were later used in Icewind Dale II . Black Isle Studios artist Justin Sweet was asked to substitute . The game 's resolution was increased to a minimum resolution of 800x600 , with an unofficially supported maximum resolution of 2048x1536 .

 J. E. Sawyer managed rule implementation , but the areas of the game were divided between designers . For example , designer Chris Avellone created the opening sequence , designer Dave Maldonado developed the Black Raven Monastery and a large area of wilderness , and designers John Deiley and Damien Foletto created the ending areas . Partway through development , Sawyer left the team to work as the lead designer on another internal project ; Dave Maldonado and Chris Avellone were given his areas to finish . The developers wanted the game to contain more breaks from combat , with character interaction and puzzle solving , than the previous Icewind Dale . The decision to include more puzzles was influenced by the positive reception to the puzzles in Icewind Dale : Trials of the Luremaster .

 The game went gold on August 5 , 2002 , and was released on August 27 . After the release of Icewind Dale II , Sawyer expressed dissatisfaction over the Icewind Dale series , saying that , " I wasn 't particularly thrilled with how my work on [Icewind Dale] came out ... " and , " ... [Heart of Winter] managed to actually be worse than my Icewind Dale stuff . " In regards to Icewind Dale II he said , " [It] came out better than I expected , but still , not exactly awe @-@ inspiring . " Chris Avellone later said , " Icewind Dale was a fun series , but it didn 't try to set the bar for anything other than a fun romp . People may remember enjoying it , but it wasn ? t trying to break any new ground or do anything revolutionary . In some respects , it was almost a step back from other games we 'd done and focused more on exploration and dungeon crawls . " A Collector 's Edition containing bonus material , such as a full @-@ color cloth map and soundtrack CD , was also released . Icewind Dale II was the final game developed using the Infinity Engine .

 = = = Audio = = =

The music of the game was composed by Inon Zur , whose previous works included Baldur 's Gate 2 : Throne of Bhaal and Fallout Tactics . Inon Zur worked with Jeremy Soule , the composer for Icewind Dale , to maintain the tone of the music . Inon Zur also worked closely with Interplay audio director Adam Levenson while composing the music ; Zur and Levenson had worked together on several previous titles . Inon Zur said that while composing the theme for the game , " I wrote and rewrote the main theme several times " , and " we tried to create a piece that would preserve the sound of the first Icewind Dale [...] we made great efforts to convey the new elements also . Capturing all of this in 30 @-@ 45 seconds was not easy however I believe that we eventually found the right path for this game 's soundtrack . " Zur described the composing process , " After learning the storyboard and getting additional insight from the producers / music supervisor I 'll start to compose . The thematic idea (main melody or rhythmical groove) comes first . Then comes the accompaniment followed by the orchestration , " and that , " each piece should have its own unique flavour so every step is carefully examined . I have to make sure that the main idea of the piece is reflected in all these steps . " He called the composing experience " very pleasant and rewarding . "

The music was composed in five weeks , and the recording and mixing lasted three weeks . As the game 's music budget was low , a small Los Angeles orchestra was used to record the music ; the sound of the each instrument was doubled during production . Inon Zur described the music as having " some uniqueness to it , that basically it developed throughout the game [with] the [inclusion] of more instruments , taking flutes and percussion and combining them with the standard orchestra . " Zur later said , " I thought that we definitely met some high standards ; we compared our products to big budget films scores , " and , " in the end we were quite happy . " The game features voice work from Gabrielle Carteris , Peter Stormare , and Grey DeLisle , among others .

= = Reception = =

Icewind Dale II reached sixth on the NPD PC games sales chart in the last week of August 2002 , and climbed to fourth during the first week of September . Icewind Dale II 's reception was generally positive . Game Informer hailed it as , " one of the best RPGs ever released for the PC , " and GameSpot called it , " simply a great role @-@ playing game . " However , PC Format said , " it 's uninspired and uninspiring , giving itself a narrow remit and fulfilling that unspectacularly . " Certain reviewers compared Icewind Dale II to Neverwinter Nights . IGN said , " [Compared to Neverwinter Nights] the pace of IWD2 is more varied , its balance better , the gameplay more interesting , " and Game Informer considered the interface superior to that of Neverwinter Nights . PC Format said , " in the light of Neverwinter Nights in particular , there ? s little that stands out in Icewind Dale II to recommend it , " and PC Zone said , " it 's not the BG2 killer we had all hoped for and neither does it stack up to Neverwinter Nights . "

Many reviewers praised the game 's combat and pacing . G4 called the game 's combat " sublime , " and said that " no Infinity Engine game thus far has had such interesting and intricate tactical combat . " GameSpot called it " expertly paced . " PC Zone complained that certain gameplay mechanics had become outdated , but that " the only real downer is the antiquated spell system and the inexplicable necessity to rest after every fight . " The game was also praised for its implementation of the Third Edition rules and interface . Computer Gaming World said that " IWD II has the Third Edition rules down , and in no other place in the game is it more apparent than with character development , " and PC Gamer said it had " a dazzling implementation of the D & D 3rd Edition rules . " GameSpot called the interface " a big improvement on the spread @-@ out interface of all previous Infinity Engine games , " and IGN said that " the customization improvements to the interface that seem so natural , they make you wonder why they weren 't thought of before . " Game Informer called the interface " absolutely inspired " and its inventory system " second to none . "

The game was criticized for its graphics and engine , which reviewers considered to be outdated . G4 called the engine " old " and " clunky " , and PC Format said that " the whole thing is limited by the creaking engine . " However , certain sources praised the engine . Game Informer called it " the best role @-@ playing engine that has ever been invented , " and GameSpot said that " ' immortal ' may be a better word to describe the engine , because the fact is , Icewind Dale II plays great . " In

regards to the graphics , GameSpot said that " in many ways Icewind Dale II represents the best use of the Infinity Engine 's prerendered , isometric settings to date , [but] that doesn 't change the fact that Icewind Dale II generally looks dated . " IGN thought the sprites had become out @-@ dated , and that " the animations are crude by today 's standards . " New Straits Times agreed , saying that although some of the effects were attractive , the " dated Infinity engine " could not compare to contemporaries Dungeon Siege and Neverwinter Nights . However , Computer Gaming World believed that " it consistently offers the same striking and imaginative environments that establish the tone and immersive charm of the game , " and Computer Games Magazine said , " it may not look like much , but it 's got it where it counts . " The game 's pre @-@ rendered backgrounds received praise . IGN said that " the artwork is attractive , both conceptually and in its final form , " and Game Informer called them " beautiful " . Many reviewers complained about the game 's pathfinding AI , which PC Zone called " outrageously bad . "

 Game Informer called the writing and story " on par with any fantasy novel . " PC Gamer said it had " some of the richest and most enjoyable dialogue since Planescape Torment , " and an " impressive storyline . " GameSpot called the story " engrossing , " and said that " the game is very well written , offering up a number of strong characters and serious themes . " PC Zone noted that , " thanks to the excellent NPCs , the battles have a lot more meaning , as there is a strong storyline behind the endless hacking and slashing . " PC Format thought that " IDII also suffers , like its predecessor , from a story irrevocably weakened by anonymous central characters ? the six you create . " In regards to the audio , GameSpot said that " Inon Zur does a truly fantastic job that 's perhaps even better than Soule 's effort in the original Icewind Dale , " and that " the voice acting in Icewind Dale II is as great as you 've perhaps come to expect from a Black Isle Studios role @-@ playing game . " Computer Gaming World said that " [the] sound effects , music , and voiceovers are all excellent . "

 Allen Rausch , writing for GameSpy 's 2004 retrospective " A History of D & D Video Games " , " While nobody would mistake it for " 2002 RPG of the Year " material , Black Isle Studios managed to give the Infinity engine a terrific game as its swan song . "