

= Geneforge =

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

Players assume the role of an apprentice Shaper , a sect of mages who can create living creatures through force of will . The apprentice is cast away on Sucia , an island abandoned by the sect 200 years prior . The island contains groups of the Shapers ' creations , who have formed their own ideologies regarding their creators in the intervening years . The primary motivation of the player is to escape the island and , in the process , deal with the forces working to steal the Shaper secrets abandoned on Sucia Isle .

The game 's setting stemmed from the idea of players being able to create and control a group of obedient creatures . The Shapers and the world of Geneforge were the result of Vogel imagining how would a being possess such power and how would they use it . The game 's setting , a mixture of science fiction and fantasy , differs from the pure science fiction setting the game had been envisioned as . Vogel had difficulties balancing gameplay with the powerful directed @-@ energy weapons players would expect to use in a science fiction game . Sales exceeded the developer 's expectations , despite fears that the departure from Spiderweb 's Avernum series would deter players . Geneforge received a positive reception from reviewers , despite the quality of the graphics being rated as poor and the game containing one piece of music , the title theme . The plot and setting were praised by reviewers for uniqueness and detail .

= = Gameplay = =

Players create a character and travel around Sucia Island , a location Barred to the members of the player character 's sect . Whilst searching for a way off the island , the game 's ultimate goal , players can form alliances with the island 's inhabitants and complete quests through combat or other means . Geneforge is played in 45 ° axonometric perspective , movement through the game 's environs is real @-@ time but switches to turn @-@ based combat in the game 's playing field . The game world is divided up into 77 areas accessible through a world map . The first two areas serve as the game 's tutorial ; introducing players to navigation , controls and shaping creations . Clearing areas by defeating guardians or successfully traversing the terrain allows players to bypass those areas via the world map , reducing travelling time . The game has an always @-@ visible auto @-@ map , which begins each area completely darkened , and is revealed as the player explores . As the player 's party performs tasks or 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 or to improve their aptitude in one of the fifteen available skills . Canisters which increase skills or add new abilities are scattered throughout the game .

Before starting the game , players choose from three basic character classes , each of which has a particular playing style . 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 excel in spell casting and are capable of hand @-@ to @-@ hand combat , but have poor shaping skills . The Shaper is a summoner , capable of creating living creatures by using their own life essence . Shapers rely on their creations for protection . Every character class is referred to as " Shaper " in @-@ game . Most objectives in the game must be completed via combat or diplomacy , but players can also use subterfuge to pass obstacles . All three character classes can use different methods , depending on which skills they are adept in . Some areas are difficult to pass , and some tasks are difficult to complete , unless the player character is a certain class . Each character class has a different combat style , the combat skills they are associated with cost fewer skill points to increase .

Essence is used for both creating creatures and casting spells ; the number , type and strength of creations is limited by the player 's essence capacity . For instance , if a character with 70 maximum essence summons a creature which costs 20 essence , their maximum essence is reduced to 50 until the creation is destroyed , either through combat or being absorbed by the Shaper to regain

essence . A total of 18 different creations are featured in the game , with larger and more powerful creatures costing more essence to create . The types and strengths of creations can be altered depending on the player 's combat style . Creations accompanying the player receive a percentage of the experience points received for completing quests or defeating foes , levelling up and receiving skill points in the same manner as the player character . These skill points can be spent to increase creations ' statistics , but every statistic increase costs more essence and reduces the amount of essence available to summon other creations or cast spells . Essence and health are regained from Shaper @-@ designed pools or by entering a friendly town .

Combat is turn @-@ based , with each character in the player 's party receiving action points at the beginning of the player 's turn . The number received is dependent on the items the player character has equipped and the skills the character or creations possess . Each action uses a specific number of points , for example , moving one square takes a single point and attacks or spells take five . Attacking or spellcasting with fewer than ten action points immediately ends the character 's turn , otherwise a character can continue to act until they run out of points . Most enemies will attack the player on sight , retreating in terror if they reach a certain threshold of damage without being killed . Other specialized behaviors are also present , including creatures which call for help , or creatures which act as sentries and retreat to an ambush location when threatened . Creations made by the player character can also be controlled by a similar artificial intelligence , or the player can invest more essence in the creation 's intelligence and control them manually .

Geneforge 's dialogue is delivered through on @-@ screen text . Encounters with intelligent creations or humans result in the player being given a series of pre @-@ determined questions or responses . Conversation options and the outcome of those conversations change according to the player 's previous interactions. as well as which quests have been completed ; which items the player has ; which group the player belongs to and the player 's leadership skill . The player can collect items from defeated enemies and the game environments to improve their own equipment . Non @-@ player characters can trade with the player , buying most items regardless of type . The shopkeeper has a fixed amount of gold at the start of the game which does not replenish itself . It is possible for the player to drain all shopkeepers of their gold reserves , making it impossible to sell further items .

= = Plot = =

The player begins as an initiate of a powerful sect of magicians , the Shapers . Members of the sect create living beings from the magical essence within themselves . Apprentices are sent to academies to learn the art of shaping and the player 's character has been accepted to do so . The player departs on a voyage to the academy aboard a specially modified Drayk , a dragon @-@ like Shaper Creation . During the journey , the Shaper passes a group of islands , one of which is recognized as the Barred Sucia Island . Locations Barred by the Shapers are closed to both the sect and outsiders alike , meaning a catastrophe has occurred or something very valuable is located there . As the Shaper examines Sucia , lost in thought , the craft is attacked and mortally wounded by an unidentified sailing ship . After igniting the vessel 's sails with a fireball , the craft deposits the Shaper on an abandoned dockside before dying . The player is now stranded on Sucia Island and must find a way to leave .

Exploration of the docks reveals a strange canister filled with swirling liquid . Thinking the canister contains healing or energizing properties , the Shaper breaks the seal and absorbs the contents . Instead the contents absorb into the Shaper 's body , strengthening and changing it . The changes become visibly apparent , the player character 's skin smoothens and glows slightly . The canisters also affect the user 's mental state , causing a more violent and arrogant temperament . Serviles remain on the island , having been abandoned when the island was Barred . They are intelligent creations of Shapers , designed to serve them without question or hesitation . These Serviles have had no contact with Shapers for two centuries , and have separated into three groups with differing philosophies regarding their creators . The Obeyers are still faithful to the Shapers , the Awakened believe that they should be treated as equals . The Takers have rejected Shapers completely and

view the sect as oppressors to be fought .

After encountering the three servile groups , the player begins to learn of a group of foreigners known as Sholai , explorers who have been shipwrecked on the island . It was the Sholai , led by a man named Trajkov , who attacked the player with their last remaining ship . Trajkov controls a device called the Geneforge , created by the Shapers , which can rewrite the user 's DNA and make them incredibly powerful . This is the cause of the island 's Barred status , the device was deemed too dangerous in the wrong hands . Trajkov and his followers have allied themselves with the Takers , absorbing the contents of canisters and trying to claim Shaper powers as their own . The group have been unable to activate the Geneforge itself due to a Shaper being needed to activate the device . A Shaper named Goettsch was kidnapped for this purpose , in the same manner as the player @-@ character . Goettsch fled and stole the shaping gloves needed to safely use the Geneforge , causing Trajkov to attempt to kidnap the player as a replacement . During these events , some Sholai have escaped from their increasingly violent and unpredictable leader .

The player is free to join any one of the servile groups and share common goals , or remain unaligned . Geneforge can be completed without joining any group . Trajkov can be killed through combat or tricked into killing himself by using the Geneforge . He can also be aided in activating the device , if the player steals the shaper gloves from Goettsch . Goettsch offers the player fake shaper gauntlets , which do not protect Trajkov from the Geneforge 's energy should he be convinced they are genuine shaping gloves . The player can complete the game by using the last boat on Sucia Island . The small vessel is moored in a guarded dock on the far side of the island . Finishing the game unlocks one of more than a dozen game endings , dependent on the player 's actions during the game .

= = Development = =

Work on Geneforge began during the development of Avernum 2 , initially little information was revealed . In an interview published by RPGDot Vogel compared the game 's movement system to Fallout and revealed that a new game engine was being implemented . The project had initially been intended as pure science fiction but this was soon abandoned in favor of a mixed fantasy and science fiction setting . In an interview published on website RPG Codex , Vogel stated this was due difficulties maintaining game balance with futuristic weaponry which " should be devastating " . He added " I found it to be too difficult to model the weapons in a way that simultaneously felt sensible and maintained balance . "

Geneforge stemmed from the idea of creating a horde of creatures and the ability to care for those creatures or send them to their deaths . The choice was to be made by the player . From this point , Vogel considered who would be able to gain such powers , how they would control them and how these creatures would be treated . The game was developed with the intention of giving players choices ; which factions to side with , how non @-@ Shaper human outsiders are treated and whether to pursue goals through combat or diplomacy . Unlike most role @-@ playing games , Geneforge was designed so that it would be possible to complete the game without using violence . Vogel cited Baldur 's Gate II : Shadows of Amn , Planescape : Torment , Deus Ex and EverQuest as influences .

The game marked a departure from the Avernum series and its predecessor the Exile series , Vogel expressed a need to work on other projects - " every few years , I need to do something cool and weird . It keeps me interested . " He stated that the differences in Geneforge meant the game might struggle to find an audience , however sales exceeded his expectations .

= = Reception = =

Geneforge received positive reviews , the game 's story and lack of bugs received praise in particular . InsideMacGames ' Christopher Morin suggested that players interested in a " strong storyline and a unique take on magic " would be impressed , but not those who sought high quality graphics and sound . The game 's setting has been described as unique and fresh , the level of

detail in Geneforge 's fictional world was praised by reviewers. Jeff Green of Computer Gaming World praised the game for its " story and gameplay " as something that high @-@ budget games often lack .

The quality of the game 's graphics was rated poorly by most reviewers , reviewers noted that the overall quality of the game made up for this deficiency . GameSpy 's Carla Harker described the graphics as " ... dated by about seven years " and the game as a " technological pariah " , despite calling it one of the best role @-@ playing games released in the past year . Green similarly described graphics as dated and something to put up with in favor of gameplay . Website Just RPG 's Eric Arevalo described them as simplistic but noted the game 's story and the ability to control " fascinating mutant creatures " made up for this . The Entertainment Depot 's Nick Stewart differed , praising the graphics as " Simplistic without being plain , lavish without being overdone " as well as the fluidity of character animation and detail of character designs .

The almost total lack of music , except for the title screen theme song , and complete lack of voice acting was noted by reviewers . This highlighted the game 's sound effects and environmental sounds , such as weapons clashing and the background noise of towns . Nick Stewart found " a fairly decent variety of effects and noises scattered throughout " , that they " added somewhat to the experience " , but became irritated by the amount of hissing and popping in the environmental sounds after extended play . Carla Harker described the sound as " Almost non @-@ existent " and Eric Arevalo found that there weren 't enough sound effects . RPGDot 's Val Sucher noted that the music player Winamp could be played in the background , due to the game 's small memory requirements .