Starfield’s big Shattered Space expansion isn’t weird enough

It’s been a long time coming for *Starfield* players. Bethesda’s sci-fi take on *Skyrim* originally launched last summer, and while there have been some updates and improvements since then, it’s taken more than a year for the game to get its first major expansion. This lead-up means there’s a lot riding on *Shattered Space* — which is a perfectly fine addition to the game that also feels incredibly underwhelming. After a promising setup, it ends up mostly being more of the same.

Things start, as they so often do in expansions, with a distress call. This one leads you to a derelict space station that is brimming with ghostly apparitions and which eventually whisks you away to the home planet of the House Va’ruun, a religious sect that worships a giant serpent. There, you learn the Va’ruun have been beset by a calamity that has caused some members to disappear, others to turn into violent wraiths, and a number of other strange and disastrous happenings in and around their main city. After a ceremony that actually converts you to the church, your job becomes solving the mystery of the calamity and helping the House put things back in order.

(Note: you can technically access *Shattered Space* at any point after *Starfield*’s opening mission, but Bethesda recommends being level 35 or higher to get through it. I played on a New Game Plus save at level 32 and didn’t really have any problems.)

It’s a great premise that promises all kinds of cosmic horror.

The planet you'll explore is rendered in a garish red and purple, filled with strange glowing growths, bubbles where gravity doesn't exist, and oddball creatures that would look right at home in *No Man's Sky*. The main city – which looks like a cross between a frontier town and an ancient temple – is filled with people struggling through the turmoil, whether it's lost loved ones, food shortages, or a crisis of faith.

Shattered Space is also notable for being incredibly focused. While much of *Starfield*'s appeal has been the sheer scale of its universe, here, you're limited to a single planet that's dense with things to do and see. It's reminiscent of the largely standalone *Far Harbor* expansion for *Fallout 4*.

This results in some great storylines, particularly in the sidequests, which have you doing everything from investigating a haunted orphanage to hunting down a livestock thief. At first, the religious sect seemed standoffish and difficult to understand. But eventually, it became clear that despite their complete isolation and belief in a big snake, they were all just people struggling to get by. Even the simple missions give you some new insight into the human side of this group, which, in the main *Starfield* campaign, is largely branded as a sect of violent zealots.

But how you do that is typical *Starfield* (and Bethesda) stuff. Quests have you fighting through dungeons, collecting or delivering items, and occasionally talking your way out of problems. There's a new backdrop, but nothing much has changed in terms of the structure or moment-to-moment experience of *Starfield*. Those alien monstrosities are just more enemies to fight; the ghostly wraiths are just more soldiers shooting at you. At the very least, the fetch quests are a good chance to try out the new dune buggy.

There's nothing particularly bad about *Shattered Space*. And if you're just looking for more *Starfield*, that's exactly what this is, only in one of the more visually and narratively

interesting locations in the game. But after so much time, I can’t help but want a little more than just *more*. *Shattered Space* had the potential to be weird and creepy and different, but it looks like players will have to keep waiting for something that feels truly new.

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