

The Tale of Borderlands 3

There was no doubt that the hype was immense. Ever since they aired that one trailer at E3, people were sitting with gritty anticipation of what was to come. Somewhere in there, they announced that final DLC for Borderlands 2, Commander Lilith and the Fight for Sanctuary. When it finally hit, it was fairly well-received, but regardless of the reviews, it showed that this Texas company cared enough about their games to release a DLC for it nearly seven years to the day it launched. Of course, despite best intentions, sometimes business does get in the way of friendship.

The pre-launch controversy was immense as well. It was one thing after another. First, it was the “goon squad incident” as some people, myself included, came to know it as. In short, YouTuber/streamer SupMatto discovered a way to potentially view the game early (it is often miscredited that he discovered the test streams on Twitch, someone else who shall remain nameless did). This caught the attention of Take-Two Interactive, whom realized that he was “selling leaks” (this was also not the case) and promptly sent a team of private investigators to his house. This ultimately ruined his career, and 2K tried to bleed him dry with legal costs, but was unsuccessful. This marked the start of the crumbling community relations.

Of course, most of the controversy came from the man at the helm of Gearbox Software, Randy Pitchford. Few figures have been as controversial as him in recent memory, and it isn’t for the betterment of his company. Initially, it was the flash drive fiasco. Somehow, he had managed to leave a flash drive in the parking lot of a Medieval Times Dinner and Tournament. The employee who collected the flash drive promptly inspected it, and discovered it contained two major things: proprietary company documents that should not have been viewed by unauthorized parties, and a sizeable amount of illegal pornography. David Eddings, the former voice actor for Claptrap, spearheaded an effort to arrange a class-action lawsuit against Randy Pitchford and his wife for embezzeling corporate funds for personal gain. Nothing much has come from this lawsuit, but it is important nonetheless.

Eddings was originally supposed to be the voice actor for Claptrap in BL3, but this eventually did not turn out to be the case. He asked for the union pay rates for his work, to which other Gearbox employees noted that he had done it for free previously and should do so again. All of these controversies and their community outrage pale in comparison to the biggest controversy of them all: Gearbox sold out to Epic Games, and BL3 was going to be an EGS (Epic Games Store) exclusive. It was noted that this exclusivity deal netted Gearbox approximately 5 million dollars, however none of the involved parties have confirmed this number. A large “boycott Borderlands 3” movement was started, but it is unknown how much of an effect that this actually had on the game’s revenue. Throughout all the controversies, the Gearbox employees that had to actually make the game continued on, albeit under extreme pressure.

This effect first became apparent around the time that Borderlands 3 actually launched. It was clearly a rushed release, with far too many bugs present in that first build. Of course, this was quickly rectified with some “emergency” patches, as are so common in this era of launching

unfinished games. Eventually, they would announce their first limited-time event. These events became the bane of every busy player who didn't have hours on hand to dedicate to farming limited-time items, and the favorite thing of every modder smart enough to whip out a text editor and a proxy. Community relations were at an all time high. From an outsider's view, the members of the so-called "Stream Team" looked like they were genuinely having fun, something that would persist until about the end of the year. Later that year (2019), they released something that fans were initially quite controversial over: Mayhem 4. Initially, the whole Mayhem system had mixed reception, but to those that knew how to play the game to its limits, M4 was the best thing since sliced bread. This launch was coupled with the first of many "free content updates", with this one being the Takedown at the Maliwan Blacksite, something that would become the favorite of every streamer and top-tier player. After the dust had settled, M4 was overall well-received, and the takedown that came with it was extremely good. That next December, they launched the first of four promised DLCs, the Handsome Jackpot. This DLC was very well received, and due to the opportunistic timing of its release, it was also one of the most-played.

At the turn of the decade on February 28, 2020, Gearbox had an expo at Pax East. There, Randy Pitchford performed a few unwanted magic tricks, then teased the timeline of DLCs and events to come. There, he announced campaign DLC 2, which would release after BL3 re-released on Steam around March 17. This second DLC was almost entirely developed before the coronavirus pandemic, and is of top-notch quality. As soon as the game hit Steam though, it was promptly review-bombed for no apparent reason. Two weeks later, DLC2 hit the public. The game would then remain stagnant for a bit, until the next content update came.

That next content update was the Revenge of the Cartels, an event previously teased at Pax East. By some standards, this limited-time event is some of the best content in the game. It was, for sure, very good, but the limited-time nature of it meant that some wanted more of it. It was around this time that certain people figured out an ingenious way to essentially add it permanently to the game. Playership was at an all-time high during this event, since many people had been told to stay home either with coronavirus or due to coronavirus. Of course, some people cited these limited-time events as an attempt to artificially increase the player count, as players knew they had to farm the limited time items while they could, or they would be left in the dust.

Of course, I have not discussed what came with that Cartels event update. Something that, initially, was so poorly implemented it drove people away from the game. Something so rushed they didn't even think to test it. Something that drove in the nail of "Gearbox doesn't play the game on top difficulty settings" and "we're the beta testers." That *thing* was Mayhem 2.0. It was dreadful. The Mayhem modifiers system persisted, where random effects were applied to gameplay, but this time it was amplified far beyond what anyone had wished for. Players knew what it was and they knew it well. It was the start of this game's dreaded "power creep" issue. Put simply, each incremental update and level cap increased alienated more and more players, and most importantly, more and more usable weapons and items. This had the effect of every Mayhem 10 (because M2.0 increased the difficulty cap from 4 to 10) being more or less the same, which resulted in the entire game being playable with just a few items, sometimes so few that everything you needed could fit in your four-slot hotswap. This wasn't good at all, and

Gearbox knew they had a massive issue on their hands. Some players even found a way to summon infinite copies of a certain gun, by exploiting a loophole in one of the player character's skills.

Half a month later, they released the first of two major patches to fix M2.0. Phase I was described as "stat scaling and gear" while Phase II was described as "character balancing and build diversity." The first patch introduced the hotly-requested feature of having the Mayhem level of an item display on the item card, a feature that had actually existed since the launch of M2.0 but was not displayed due to what one can only describe as "programmer laziness." One of the major issues that was outlined by the community during the days before and after the Phase I patch was the fact that non-weapon sources of damage, including Moze's Iron Bear (which was supposed to be immensely powerful) became completely useless on M3 and higher. This left the community with terrible player builds, and running an older version of the game from this time highlights this. It then became apparent to the community that Gearbox was obviously not listening to them at all. This feeling was amplified by a few other things. Gearbox essentially abandoned the community around this time, and semi-abandoned the Stream Team.

Since Gearbox had essentially shut themselves in, they had to do something to keep people playing the game. Previously, another takedown challenge had been released along with that Phase I patch. The so-called Guardian Takedown was flamed almost instantly on arrival. Players flamed it for being too confusing, too difficult, having platforming sections, having invisible and moving platform sections, having too many enemies, and the list goes on and on. While a sizeable amount of the player base has still not completed either takedown, the Guardian Takedown features a significantly lower completion percentage with respect to the earlier Maliwan Takedown. Some people thought this new takedown was the greatest thing since sliced bread, others said it was literally the Devil incarnate. Whichever one it was is still up for debate.

Soon enough, that Phase II patch was released. With it came a massive set of improvements, and some people said the game was fun to play again. It was around this time that the community stopped their massive flamage of Gearbox, not knowing what would come next. A while later, that next month, the third DLC was released. The Bounty of Blood DLC was very well received, but many cited it as another point of locking all the good items behind a paywall. In response, some clever modders found a way to have DLC items without actually having the DLC. The power creep issue was back just as it was three months earlier with the Cartels event. This time though, the improved M2.0 system meant that the game was now fully playable on M10 without any crazy "tricks" that community members discovered that allowed players to deal reasonable damage on M10.

The game became rather stagnant for a bit, until the launch of the final campaign DLC (that would be included with the first Season Pass). Psycho Krieg and the Fantastic Fustercluck (a name chosen only to get past the marketroids, no doubt) was the fourth and "final" DLC for the game. It had mixed reception, with some fans absolutely praising it since it meant the "return" of fan-favorite Maya, who had, as some people described it, "died of bad story writing" in the base game. Others criticized the DLC for being horrendously short, but considering the circumstances, many players took it for what it was: something the community had asked for, and Gearbox

answered. Throughout all the turmoil, they eventually did listen and took it upon themselves to give the community what they wanted.

However, this was not the end. A while later, a month or so, Gearbox announced Season Pass 2. This pass came at a reduced cost, and gave players two sets of player model replacements (Multiverse Final Form Cosmetic Pack and Disciples of the Vault Cosmetic Pack) and two more DLCs: Designer's Cut (also called Arms Race) and Director's Cut. Arms Race was fairly well received, but much to the bane of a certain community member, Gearbox mistakenly called Arms Race a "roguelike" despite it having none of the required elements.

After the launch of Arms Race, Gearbox has all but abandoned the community. That was, at least, until the announcement of Director's Cut, which will feature everyone's least favorite character Ava in an attempt to solve some mysteries. It will also feature "cut content" but what this includes is completely unknown. Arms Race seems promising, and upon the Stream Team's feedback and testing of it, it seems like it will be the final update for the game. Weekly hotfixes have already slowed to a crawl, and the game is more stable than ever before. Most of the major performance issues have been worked out.

As it stands right now, BL3 is on its way out. The game has ran its course, but now it's time for the community to pick it up. Being in development for a somewhat long time, c0dycode released B3HM (BL3 Hotfix Merger) on December 24, 2020 to much community fanfare. B3HM allows the lay man to mod BL3, without the need to set up any complicated MITM proxies and pull off any hex edits. While the Python SDK is still forthcoming, and another SDK is in the works, BL3 modding hasn't hit its prime just yet. Once it does, perhaps the game can finally become what the community always wanted, whatever that is. So, overall, BL3 has been a pretty good game. Some will tell you that it is even superior to BL2, although this point is hotly debated considering the myriad of controversy that BL3 has experienced. Was it a blockbuster hit? No doubt. Did it make tons of money? Of course. Was it good? Well, I'll leave that up to you.