

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4 PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, OR PC INTERNET OR LAN)

> **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES

> **DEVELOPER** GEARBOX SOFTWARE

> **RELEASE** 2008

BORDER

THE FINAL FRONTIER

IN THE DISTANT FUTURE, SEVEN COLONIZATION SHIPS DEPART FOR THE EDGE OF THE GALAXY. THEIR PASSENGERS SEEK A BETTER LIFE AND THE UNTOLD MINERAL RESOURCES OF THE REMOTE PLANET PANDORA.


After years of travel, the caravan finally reaches its destination. The mix of settlers, prospectors, scientists, and corporate lackeys set about dismantling the ships and converting them into makeshift settlements. It eventually becomes clear that there is little on the desolate planet outside of decrepit alien ruins. Those who have the money leave, and the remaining stranded population devolves into lawlessness. Some seek to get rich by hunting down remnants of alien technology. Most are just trying to survive. After seven Earth years, Pandora's slow orbit finally enters spring and countless horrifying creatures emerge from hibernation. Just when the colony is set to implode on itself, a beacon of hope emerges. One key discovery has the potential to change not just Pandora itself, but the entire galaxy. Welcome to *Borderlands* – a game unlike any other, yet still innately familiar.

While working on projects in the *Halo* and *Half-Life* franchises and its own *Brothers in Arms* games, developer Gearbox Software has been kicking around another idea. As huge fans of the *Diablo* series, team members wanted to blend that level of addictive loot grinding and leveling up with the fast-paced action of first-person shooters. Gearbox had proven itself in the FPS realm, but how would it satisfy that insatiable RPG desire for a constant flow of new weapons and items? *Borderlands* utilizes a revolutionary weapons system that features over half a million guns. Combine that with rich frontier lore, violent vehicle combat, and gameplay built for co-op from the beginning, and that *Diablo*-caliber level of addiction doesn't seem so far out of reach.




LANDS







■ Settlements are being designed around a gritty high tech philosophy



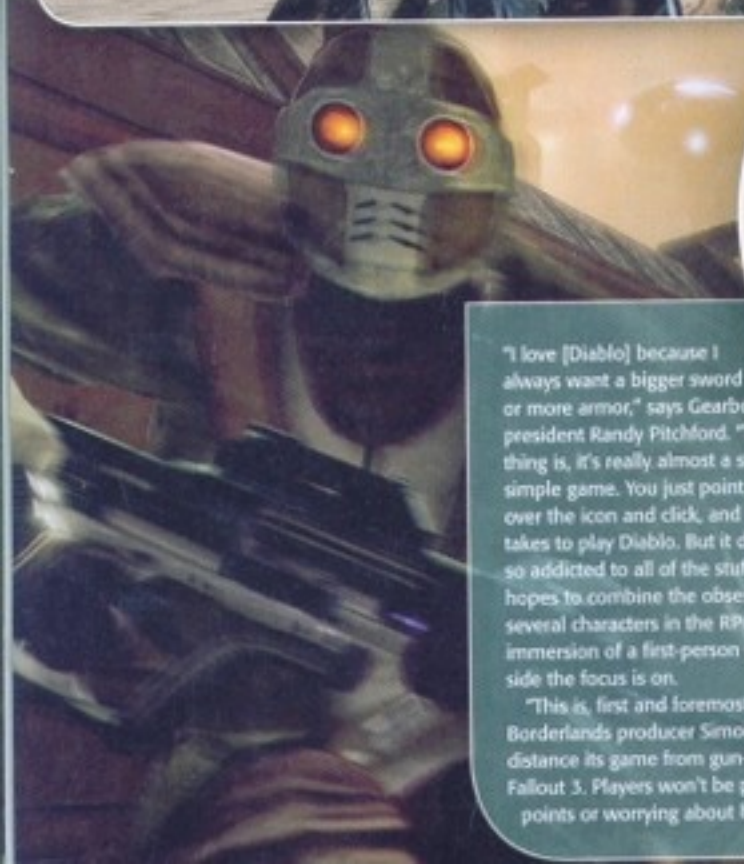
■ New Haven leader Helena Pierce (right) is jokingly referred to as "Dealbreaker" around the Gearbox offices



■ At one point, bandits will hijack a massive mining machine. Players will jump into it and experience something akin to a futuristic pirate ship battle



■ Shopping will play a major role in *Borderlands*. Early concept art for the vault is shown below



"I love [Diablo] because I always want a bigger sword or more armor," says Gearbox president Randy Pitchford. "The thing is, it's really almost a stupidly simple game. You just point the cursor over the icon and click, and that's what it takes to play Diablo. But it didn't matter because you were so addicted to all of the stuff." With *Borderlands*, Pitchford hopes to combine the obsession that led him to max out several characters in the RPG classic with the twitch skills and immersion of a first-person shooter. It's clear, however, which side the focus is on.

"This is, first and foremost, a first-person shooter," clarifies *Borderlands* producer Simon Hurley. Gearbox is careful to distance its game from gun-based RPGs like *Mass Effect* and *Fallout 3*. Players won't be pausing the action to select attack points or worrying about hit percentages. Anyone who's

ever wielded a shotgun in *Doom* or an assault rifle in *Halo* will be able to jump right into *Borderlands'* interesting mix of gameplay. But instead of raiding dungeons, Gearbox has created a world filled with *Deadwood's* frontier grit, *Mad Max's* deadly vehicles, and some Indiana Jones-style

fortune hunting.

The story follows three characters, Roland, Mordecai, and Lilith, as they pursue their own motives on the volatile planet of Pandora. After years of struggle on the recently populated world, the citizens are rallying around the discovery of a mysterious metal vault carved into the side of a mountain. This massive structure is thought to be from the same ancient alien race whose technology has been discovered elsewhere in the galaxy. This tech has not only pushed science forward by leaps and bounds, it's also made those who discovered it extremely rich. The vault is thought to contain all of the aliens'



MORDECAI

Mordecai came to Pandora in search of someone from his past. When New Haven leader Helena Pierce informs him that this man, Quinn, died a year ago, Mordecai sets off to uncover how he died and what he was carrying.

More of a lone ranger, this character specializes in sniping enemies from afar. One skill called "Angel on your Shoulder" gives a critical hit boost to allies whenever he headshots an enemy attacking said allies. Mordecai can also simply give a boost to his party's accuracy stats. Partway through the game, he will befriend an alien creature that will assist in combat.

ROLAND

This former soldier of the Crimson Lance is content to stick around on Pandora as a hired gun. A decade-old vendetta is rekindled when the leader of the Brigadiers is said to have a suspiciously similar name to a man Roland swore to kill.

All three characters have three focus skills with multiple functions that they can cycle through in-game without having to go to a menu screen. Roland's Leadership skill, for example, raises experience gained for everyone in the party while Medical can increase health regeneration. If he switches over to Support, it will do things like increase weapons damage or ammo regeneration.



LILITH

Lilith is one of only six Sirens in the galaxy, a group of people with ridiculous powers but no way to control them. Gearbox describes her as a mix between Firefly's River and The Matrix's Trinity, with some kind of untapped power combined with speedy moves and quick learning skills. Lilith hears that there is another Siren on Pandora and seeks whoever it is out in hopes that she can discover more about herself.

The image on the left shows her in regular form while the right design means she's ready to kick ass. She serves essentially as the mage of the group, with powers like increasing the group's rate of fire and creating temporal bubbles that slow down enemies and projectiles or speed up allies. Not much more is known on how she will incorporate magic into Borderlands' FPS gameplay style.



secrets, drawing those in search of wealth, power, and scientific advancement. The trouble is, the people who discovered it were completely wiped out by some kind of protective force. Only a scattered radio transmission remains—hinting at the vault's majesty, but not its location. The main characters aren't necessarily after the vault's contents at the outset, but their personal quests will most assuredly lead them to it (see sidebar).

Our demo begins in a settlement called New Haven, an appropriately named town that's managed to secure itself from roaming Brigadiers (known more commonly as

bandits) and indigenous creatures. Unofficial mayor Helena Pierce makes the rules in this dusty settlement that consists mostly of ramshackle metal huts cobbled together from the good ship "Haven." She's been having trouble recently with attacks from a flying species called rakk and tasks Roland to destroy a hive with explosive cesium charges that only bandits have. In the distance, you can see Mordecai sniping a stray rakk with a tracking device.

While stopping to load up on guns and equipment, the shopkeeper asks if you can activate a transporter holed up in a bandit-infested military bunker so that

he can get his stuff out of it. On the way out of town, Helena offers you an extra reward for assassinating a bandit leader, since you'll be swiping the cesium anyway. Gearbox is specifically structuring the game so that players will always be juggling several quests of varying length and complexity. "We're encouraging the player to just play five more minutes to get something new," says Hurley. "Sometimes it's just a new gun, sometimes you finish a quest, and sometimes it's another piece of the story that clicks into place." This simultaneously allows players to make meaningful progress even in brief bursts while also encouraging the "just one more" kind of gameplay that can unintentionally lead to marathon sessions.

As you head out to the ominous canyons, the game generates a unique instance for the road ahead. While the general path remains consistent, things like barriers, caves, bunkers, towers, enemies, and explosive





■ Tagging the rakk with a tracking device



■ Scythid sprinters enjoy tipping people out of their buggies and tearing them apart with their retractable tanks



■ While this screen shows untrained bandits, another faction called the Crimson Lance is also vying for territory on Pandora. This highly trained private military shoots more accurately by aiming down the sights and actively seeking cover and flanking positions

cacti will be different every time you return. Sometimes there will be a cave to explore. Other times it'll simply be a blank wall. All of this occurs with absolutely no loading whatsoever. In fact, players will never see a single load screen once they've entered the game.

A bandit camp appears up ahead, but there's already a scuffle in place. A four-legged beast with a natural metallic plating over its head and back is attacking the bandit group. Again, this is not scripted. This "skag" happened to be generated next to hostile forces so it decided to get aggressive. Roland moves down some distracted troops while the rest of them aim for the tender spots on the skag's side and unload clips into its mouth as it jumps at them. Once the beast falls, the bandits turn to face us. Though the AI is still unfinished, we're still able to get an idea about how these untrained rebels

fight. Since they're just a bunch of common thugs with no military experience, the bandits shoot from the hip and aren't all that concerned with cover. They clamber over walls and hop gaps to get a better shot at you.

After the smoke clears, a bounty of weapons, gear, and items lies scattered across the ground. All of the resulting loot was actually equipped on the troops during battle, so if you see an enemy with a particularly flashy gun, it can be yours the instant you take him out. As you pass the aiming reticle over loot, its name and stats appear in a color-coded box similar to what you'd see in an MMO (dark

gray indicates weak, green means better, etc.). The variety of handguns, shotguns, rifles, and machine guns is staggering. Throughout our time with *Borderlands* we never saw the same gun twice, and Gearbox claims the same will be true

when players go through the final game.

"Back when I first started making shooters at 3D Realms on *Duke Nukem*, the rule was the PC keyboard had one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and zero. That's how many guns you could have in your game," says Pitchford. "It's going to be all different now." He boasts that "you can take every shooter in his entire generation on the Xbox 360, all of the weapons that every one of them has, add them all together and this game has more — two orders of magnitude more."

Thousands upon thousands of barrels, grips, knife attachments, ammo, and clips are mixed and matched resulting in over 500,000 unique weapons. "There are a lot of strong checks and balances," says director Matthew Armstrong. "It's very procedural as opposed to completely random. These guns are being built intelligently." Every gun will have a unique name that suits what it does and its own mix of sounds, including reload and fire noises.

We saw a ridiculous amount of guns, but perhaps the strangest was a revolver that fired shotgun shells. Gearbox is constantly surprised with what the system



■ Skags have a natural armor plating that renders traditional headshots ineffective



ANATOMY OF A GUN JAKOBS SVR 9710-X "THUNDER" COMBAT SHOTGUN

Every single one of over 500,000 weapons in *Borderlands* has a unique name, a unique look, and unique personality. These weapons are not randomly generated, but procedurally crafted. One such weapon is the Jakobs SVR 9710-X "Thunder" Combat Shotgun, a rare and high quality weapon that is more effective than most shotguns at longer ranges. Slow to fire and reload, it more than compensates by doing massive damage, having a tight spread, and featuring a minor temporal effect that slows enemies.

THE SIGHT

With a tight spread and good range, this shotgun benefits from a quality sight

THE BODY

A heavy body provides good recoil reduction but a fairly slow fire rate



THE STOCK (JAKOBS SIGNATURE)

Solid, high quality wood grain is the signature of Jakobs weapons. The stock is extremely stable, but the weight makes the gun harder to use while moving. A person who wants to fight on the run should seek out a shotgun with a pistol grip or lighter stock.

THE CYLINDER

This shotgun has a five shot smooth cylinder. Not bad, but not the best either

THE BARREL (RARE PART)

Broad and heavy, but long as well, this barrel brings good damage and a tight spread

JAKOBS

A low tech but high quality family owned manufacturer, Jakobs weapons are powerful, doing more damage than almost any other manufacturer, but the weight tends to result in a lower fire rate. Jakobs weapons are especially well suited for sniper rifles and shotguns

"THUNDER"

A longer effective range than most shotguns coupled with extreme damage has earned this weapon the nickname "Thunder". Many of the better quality weapons you will find in the *Borderlands* will have such nicknames

COMBAT SHOTGUNS

The Combat Shotgun is a pump-action short range weapon. Ammo is fired from a cylinder allowing for a fairly quick breach reloading action

comes up with. They've seen rifles shoot everything from homing darts to rockets. "One of the guns tracks onto something and locks, and after three seconds [the target] suddenly explodes," Armstrong says.

Even though guns are the focus of *Borderlands*, items and armor tally up to a half million as well. Every piece

health, and rain down fiery death from above.

Of course, players can choose to take all of the loot for themselves or they can share with up to three friends in full on and offline co-op. Basically, one player will start up a game and the remaining players will visit that world with their persistent characters. All loot and

says. "Except if I talk to Simon and say I'm playing this new game and it's great, and he says 'Oh s---, I'm playing that game, too.' 'Great, I'm playing as the soldier.' 'Oh, then we can't play together.' That's awful. The fact is, fundamentally, we want a fun game and a lot of things we'll bend down for fun."

Even though it's possible to have four Liliths running around in a party, it may not be the most effective way to play. All three characters have unique focus skills that are meant to compliment each other. Armstrong points out that you could have a bunch of Rolands with health regeneration skills maxed, but you're going to wish someone had ammo

generating skills once you run out of bullets. Even if there are some repeated characters in your party, however, everyone will be wearing different armor and helmets anyway, so it's not like you'll have to worry much about the clone trooper effect.

YOU CAN TAKE EVERY SHOOTER IN THIS ENTIRE GENERATION ON THE XBOX 360, ALL OF THE WEAPONS THAT EVERY ONE OF THEM HAS, ADD THEM ALL TOGETHER AND THIS GAME HAS MORE - TWO ORDERS OF MAGNITUDE MORE.

—RANDY RITCHFORD

of armor alters your appearance in a different way, including a custom accessory type that's specific to each of the three main characters. Additionally, you'll need shields, energy generators, storage decks, and glove microchips that allow you to program grenades to do many strange things like track vehicles, steal

leveling will be reflected when the visiting characters return to their own game. But with only three different characters, how will the game support a four-player mode? "Early on we had a very strong discussion [on whether] we should limit this to three character co-op and say you pick one of these characters," Armstrong



The bandits' melee weapon of choice is basically a buzz saw on a stick.



Vehicle explosions involve a ridiculous amount of shrapnel, tires, and bodies.



Even if you don't have any friends, you don't necessarily have to go it alone. AI allies will crop up from time to time to give you a hand if you'd like. Depending on the mission ahead, players can select from among a medic, sniper, or gunner for support, in addition to the other two main characters. Squad

After several of the choicest goods are raided from treasure chests and fallen bandits, it's time to spend the skill points received from leveling up. Players can choose to increase any number of stats like health and ammo capacity, dash speed, jump distance, accuracy, or critical hit damage (a.k.a. headshots). Outside of

the best way to travel is by snagging a vehicle.

Roland and Mordecai hop in a desert buggy and take off in the direction of the tracking signal. Upon entering a vehicle, the view pulls out to third-person and you can decide whether to man the wheel or turret while leaving the other role to the AI or a human player. Unlike most FPSs, you're not shoehorned into being the driver all of the time. Gearbox is putting a special focus on properly functioning driving AI. "The AI actually understands the terrain that it's driving on as well as what type of things equal cool," says Hurley. We witnessed this AI in action in a wide open desert area with plenty of bumps and hills. Mordecai provided a steady ride for aiming purposes, found some nice jumps, and managed to steer clear of any walls or head-on collisions with other vehicles. But if you'd like to take the wheel at any time you can swap roles at the press of a button. This goes for co-op as well. "In co-op mode if you both hit the melee button at the same time you can swap seats, which is nice and convenient if you

WE'RE BUILDING THIS GAME FROM THE START AS A CO-OP GAME THAT YOU CAN PLAY BY YOURSELF.

—MATTHEW ARMSTRONG

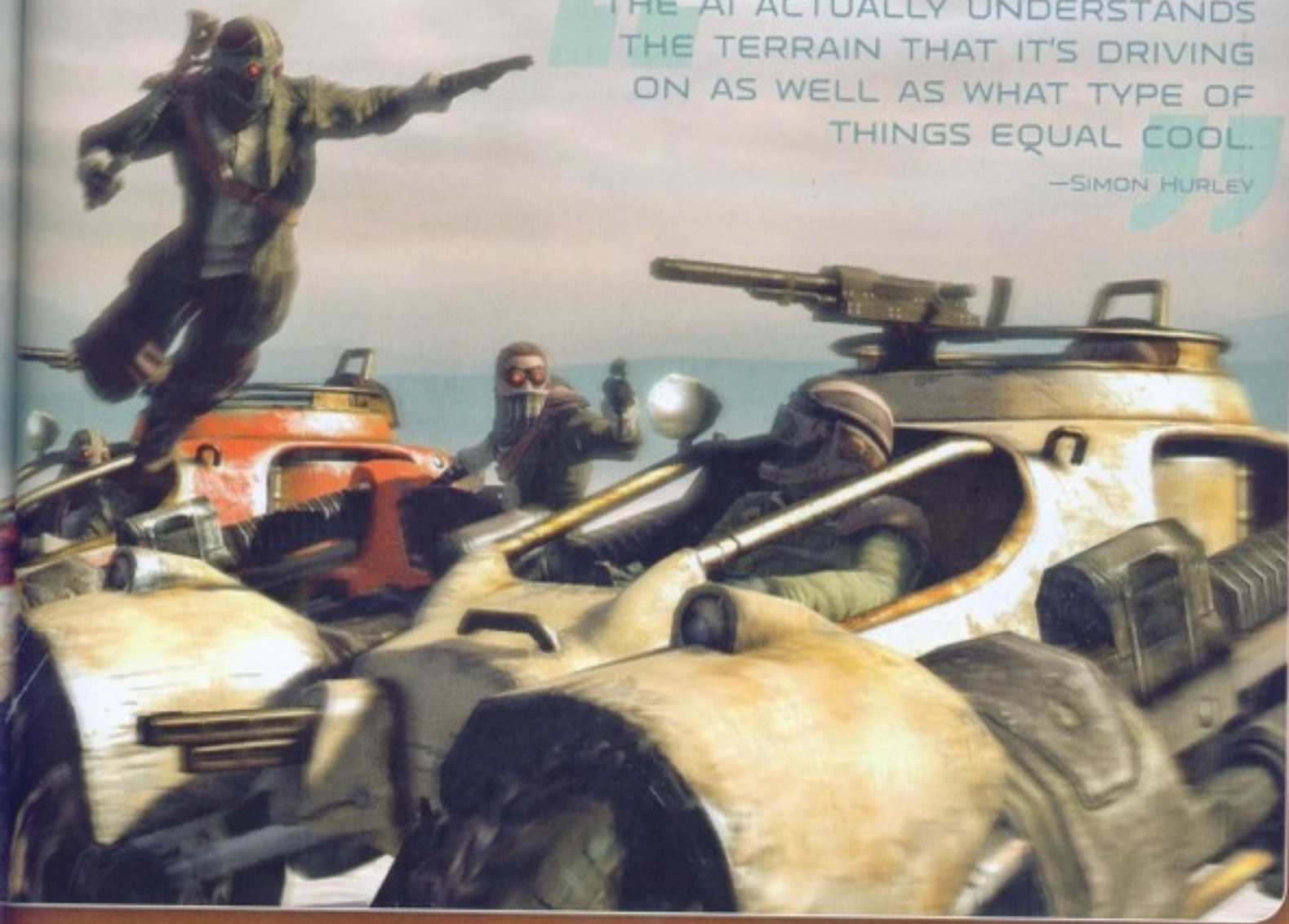
commands are simple: "stay close," "stay far," and "stay here." Allies will wait for you to shoot first before they attack or they will return fire if shot at, so you shouldn't have to worry about them broadcasting your position. You can also equip them with weapons and gear and decide how they'll level up. "We're building this game from the start as a co-op game that you can play by yourself," Armstrong says.

these general boosts, each character also has three unique focus skill trees to develop.

With cesium charges in hand, Roland activates the transporter found in one of the bunkers to get his reward from the shopkeeper. A vast network of transporters will be scattered all throughout Pandora to make traversing areas you've already visited that much simpler. When venturing out to new territory, however,

“THE AI ACTUALLY UNDERSTANDS THE TERRAIN THAT IT’S DRIVING ON AS WELL AS WHAT TYPE OF THINGS EQUAL COOL.”

—SIMON HURLEY



like a little Mario Double Dash action in your first-person shooter,” Armstrong jokes.

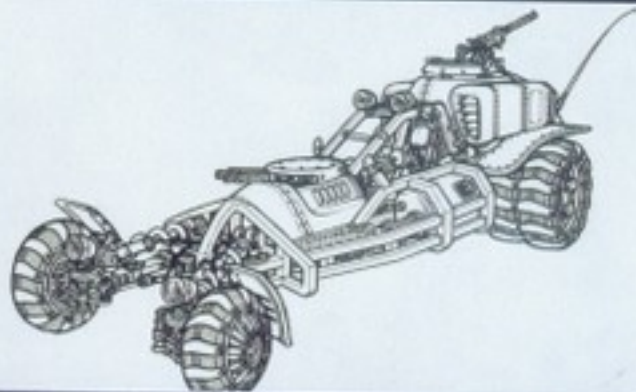
Early on, players will mostly have to rely on stealing bandit buggies, but eventually they will receive higher end models worth hanging on to. They can select the paint job or wheel type and, once again, choose from tens of thousands of turrets. We saw the basic rocket in action, and while it can take out buggies with one well-placed shot, rocket launchers take some practice to hit speeding rivals with. If you do connect, however, shards of metal and ragdoll bodies go flying in a blast of smoke and fire. Perhaps the most impressive display is the errant tires that will continue to bounce and roll until they hit a particularly sizeable bump or get run over.

Once the roaming bandits have been dealt with, Roland and Mordecai proceed towards the hive. Several aggressive rakk appear as you speed through the canyon. The hive must be close. But once you emerge from the canyon, it’s clear that the rakk don’t come from some nest stuck to a wall. A towering beast built like a trunkless elephant stomps through the plains as rakk

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INTELLIGENT DESIGN

Gearbox has enlisted famous concept artist Ron Cobb to work with the company’s internal art team to craft some of Borderlands’ futuristic vehicles. A small sample of Cobb’s resume includes designs for aliens in the cantina scene of *Star Wars*, the *Nostramo* ship in *Alien*, the Nazi Flying Wing in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and production design on *Conan the Barbarian*. The vehicle shown here is called a Salt Racer. Its front wheels are spread apart for maneuvering at slow speeds, but once you reach a high enough speed on the open salt flats they will retract in to form more of a drag racer shape.





■ Bakk fly in and out of the hive's back in a suitably disgusting manner



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 71

squirm in and out through gaping holes on its back. You stare in awe for a brief moment before this living hive turns to notice you. It unleashes an earth-rumbling roar and a rush of rakk come streaming out.

Mordecai hits the gas as you unload turret fire into the cloud of screeching rakk that's quickly approaching. The flying beasts tear at you and attempt to flip your buggy. Once the skies are mostly clear, Mordecai guns it towards the hive. It rears up to stomp you underfoot, but he swerves to safety at the last second. You take aim at the hive's eyes on one side and they explode into a goopy mess. It roars again to summon another swarm, but this time a particularly nasty bull rakk leads the pack. It swoops in and smashes into the side of your buggy, sending it cartwheeling through the plains.

You land among some rocks, but Mordecai is left exposed without cover. You run out to blast away the bull rakk and drag your comrade back to shelter. After patching him up, you toss a MIRV grenade that fragments and creates a series of explosions. This distraction gives you just enough time to hustle up to higher ground. You pick off attacking rakk while Mordecai snipes out the hive's remaining eyes. Another roar and swarm cycle ensues. Mordecai whips out a couple of pistols to stave off the angry swarm and you ready your rocket launcher to take the hive down once and for all.

We won't spoil the rest of the boss fight, but we can say that it ends with ever-increasing intensity. Just imagine battling this thing alongside three friends and a couple of vehicles. Everyone can take on different roles in the battle according to the way they've customized their character up to that point.

"Every item, all of the gear you get, all of your skills, and all of your weapons add up to providing an experience that we hope, if you're smart about it, is going to support your style," Pitchford says. "We want the styles to be really different. We want everybody to play the game the way they want to play."

Pitchford wants to walk through a crowd of enemies like the Terminator, with bullets pinging off his character while he leisurely blows goons away. Armstrong prefers to snipe everyone from a mile away and stroll through a body-littered meadow.

"So you hear Matt [Armstrong] talk about the guy he wishes he was and the guy I wish I was and how different those guys are," Pitchford says. "If we were making Doom or Quake or Half-Life or a game where you're the character, and your identity's fixed by your capabilities and your weapons and the world's very confined by that, we'd have to argue about that and one of us would win or we'd compromise. But we don't have to in this game, because I can be my guy and balance my skills to be the way I want to play, and he can be his guy. We can both exist in this game and that was the goal. However I want to play my FPS, I can do that."

But perhaps the most intriguing element of Borderlands is the uncertainty inherent in having half a million guns. After all, Gearbox is mostly working on real world guns right now. Once they throw in alien guns and all of the strange powers that go along with them, all bets are off. "It's going to freak us out," Pitchford says. "We have no idea. There's no possible way we could know all of the weapons and equipment that are capable of being generated. The only people who hate what we're doing is our test department."

"Someone's going to find the alien gun that does something ridiculous and amazing," says Armstrong. "My first reaction isn't going to be 'Oh, well that breaks the game.' My first reaction is going to be 'That is the game.' Looking for that gun is your goal." ■ ■ ■

Check out *Uncharted* for a look at Gearbox's revolutionary motion capture system that's so cutting edge Hollywood hasn't even picked up on it yet.