

First Level Analysis

Baldur's Gate 3 first section analysis



Introduction

Baldur's Gate 3 is a story-rich, strategy, party-based RPG developed by Larian Studios set in the world of Dungeons & Dragons where players' choices profoundly shape the tale they will experience.

This report will demonstrate how Larian Studios successfully introduces players to an enormous quantity of content and possibilities thanks to intuitive mechanics and complete freedom for players to experiment. Also setting a clear goal for players' journey from the beginning.

Larian Studios developed both a welcoming first section for the genre's newcomers and a challenging one for more experienced players. Everything is done with clever use of an understandable and thorough design that leaves nothing to chance unless you need to roll your d20!

Title Screen

The first thing that new players see when starting the game is a welcoming and peaceful screen main screen that portrays a hill view of a sunny and calm port city, boats floating slowly in the bay, birds singing, dogs barking in the distance, the statue of a noble figure oversees the city from the hill. Players are invited to press a button to continue.

This first screen wants to give a small sample of the grandiosity and the history of the places where the game will take place, in addition to prompting the player's first interaction giving the player some time to soak in the atmosphere without thinking about creating a new file, control settings, difficulty level, and so on.

Main Menu

After pressing the quickest key you prefer to continue, the scene transitions underground, showing explorers descending through an enormous door ornated by an inauspicious skull.

Here is shown the main menu and grandiose and adventurous music starts to play, alluding to dark mysteries beneath the peaceful environment that the player just saw and at epic adventures that await players.

After selecting "New Game," the player can choose the difficulty between Explorer, Balanced, Tactician, and Honour. Each difficulty shows a representative image to hint at the increasing danger and a short description.

First sequence and character creation

The first cutscene

The new game starts with a cutscene showing a scene from the player's character's point of view. The player's character, now on "Tav", is trapped inside a pod and is watching someone getting infected with a parasite by one of the aliens. The alien then comes towards Tav and proceeds to infect Tav too.

The cut scene gives context to the first section of the game and the situation Tav is in trapped with an alien worm inside the brain. This sequence creates a clear distinction between enemies (ship's controllers) and allies (prisoners).

Character Creation

At this point, welcomed by a voice saying "Who are you?", players immediately understand that they are going to create their avatar and enter the character creation. *Baldur's Gate 3* character creation is rich in details, but this report will tackle only some bits.

In the character creation screen, the music suggests a calm and peaceful atmosphere, and the avatar itself is placed in a relaxing environment surrounded by plants, flowers, and a waterfall anticipating possible scenery that the player will encounter in the future.

These elements contribute to creating a time bubble detached from the story events just presented where there is no urgency, anxiety, or time restriction. Players can relax and spend as much time as they want to tweak their character stats and appearance with the clear design intention to make the long time passed on this screen as pleasing as possible.

The character creation UI with the vast amount of information can be overwhelming for players not accustomed to the game mechanics and D&D rules. To balance this overwhelming sensation the UI constantly shows commands and tooltips trying to guide players through choices but sometimes resulting in more confusion for unexperienced players.

After the character creation players must create another character called "The Guardian". This character's name suggests that will protect the player during the player's journey. The Guardian's avatar, during creation, is placed in some sort of alternative dimension, suggesting to players that this character will be connected to outer realms, space, or even dreams. The game lets players customize this character with the clear intent to let players better bond with it from the very beginning.

Second cutscene

After character creation, a second cutscene plays that set up the first area and objective for the player. This cutscene shows the nautiloid invading a city and abducting citizens trapping them in pods similar to the Tav. Meanwhile, the ship is being attacked by warriors of the same race as the other prisoners mounting dragons. The creature guiding the nautiloid tries to escape these attacks using some sort of organic technology that makes the nautiloid teleport to other locations. Due to an explosion inside the prisoner's chamber, the other prisoner frees herself. The dragons follow the nautiloid through portals until the nautiloid ends up wrongly in a hellish place where a storm of demons attacks the ship.

This cutscene can show many things to the player in a short amount of time. It shows:

- How these creatures abduct victims, and how they can move through realms at great speed
- These creatures have enemies that actively pursue them, and one of them is trapped with Tav
- An advanced organic console to control the ship
- Events that bring the Tav to freedom
- The setting of the first area, is completely on fire and assaulted by demons

Welcome to the Nautiloid

In this section is reported the very first approach that players will have with the game and how the game manages their learning stage.

After the end of the cutscene, the game shows the Tav pod opening and the game gives control to the players, hinting at the next objective: escape from the Nautiloid.

At this point players have a clear view of the situation, the ship is collapsing, everything is on fire, they have been infected by some parasite, and they need to escape!

Baldur's Gate 3 is a playground

One of Baldur's Gate 3 strengths is letting players have complete freedom to experiment and discover things without strictly guiding them. Each new important discovery is supported with tutorials that can freeze the game if they are essential for the game progression or just show on the side of the screen as a visible tooltip. Players have always access to tooltips and descriptions for everything present in the game and controls are always on screen in the noninvasive HUD.



Baldur's Gate 3 - Larian Studios - https://www.ign.com/wikis/baldurs-gate-3/Prologue:_Escape_the_Nautiloid

The game immediately shows a tutorial for movement. Hovering over objects will highlight them, suggesting the main action linked to that object (closed golden chest for never-opened containers, gears for interaction, and so on). The initial small section alone contains objects scattered around to examine or collect, dead bodies to loot, chests to open, and a gap to perform and practice jumps. Players quickly also find out that they can essentially perform almost every action in the game with their cursor or one button, flagging a location for movement or hovering over objects to interact with them like looting a body, opening chests, collecting items, examining them, attack, set on fire, and so on.



Baldur's Gate 3 - Larian Studios - https://www.ign.com/wikis/baldurs-gate-3/Prologue:_Escape_the_Nautiloid

In this first area, players can't get hurt, there's fire but it can't hurt players. The only form of damage is a dialogue choice that the player can make interacting with an object, curiosity killed the cat! However the damage is not lethal, and a healing fountain that can heal Tav endlessly is placed in the area providing a completely safe space to experiment.

Choices are significant

In this first section, as anticipated before, players will come across one of the main features and strengths of *Baldur's Gate 3*: meaningful choices. The game highly values players' agency and autonomy giving high worth to their choices. Players' choices resonate within the game with some echoing through the whole story and shaping it.

For example in this very first section players face dialogs with choices that show how rewarding or punishing some of them can be, resulting in damaging explosions or really strong companions that can help them.



Baldur's Gate 3 dialog choices - <https://saturshot.substack.com/p/companion-morality-and-player-choice>

Skill checks

Some choices are “protected” by skill checks. These skill checks are a mechanic imported from D&D and consist of the throw of a 20-faced die. Players need to meet a certain score to pass the skill check, otherwise, the skill check is considered failed and the chosen action cannot be performed. These failures can go from failing to read a magic scroll to causing a massive explosion using the wrong words during a negotiation.

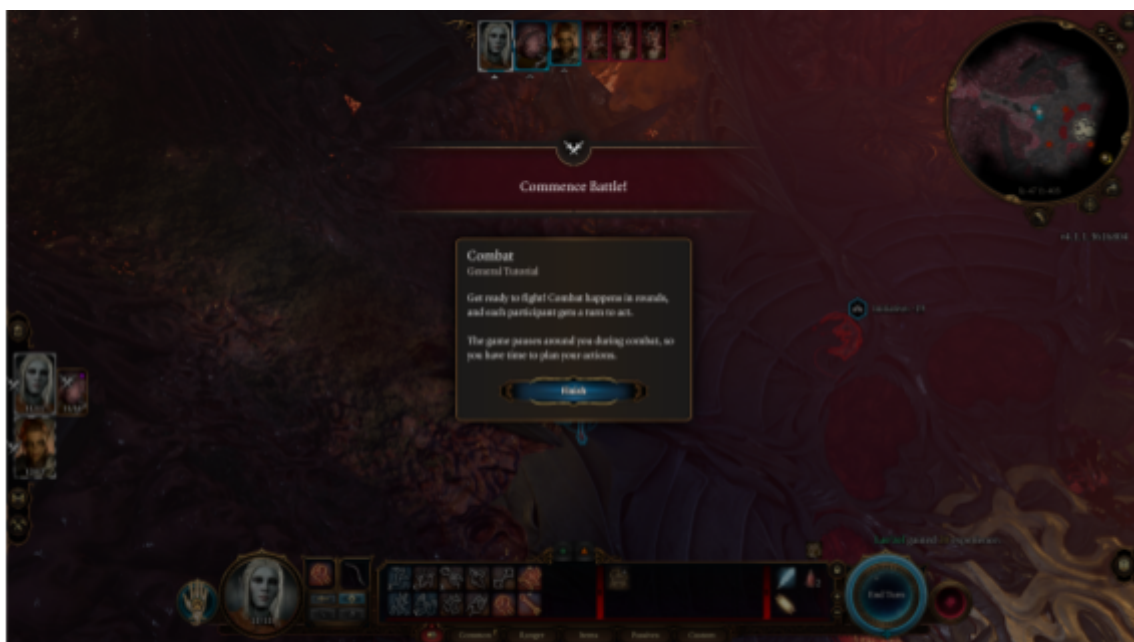
Companions

Players soon meet the character that has been infected with them during the cutscene, their first companion Lae'zel. Companions are playable characters that will join players in their journey, and have background stories and side quests that blend with the main story. Players can switch control between Tav and these companions anytime.

The encounter with this first companion and having her join your team is inevitable contrary to the second companion that the player can encounter which is optional.

Players' first battle

Immediately after adding this very powerful companion to the party, players face their first turn battle: a small group of 3 imps. During this battle, some actions are suggested by the game. Every action has a visible impact on the enemies and the environment with intuitive effects. Player fantasy and experimentation play a strong role in every battle they will face and this comes out even from this first battle. Throwing fire on the ground will set the ground on fire for a short period, attacking enemies makes them bleed leaving puddles of blood on the ground, and so on. Each attack gives satisfying feedback and each kill rewards players with exp and loot pushing players into engaging combat knowing they will receive bountiful rewards from it.



Baldur's Gate 3 first battle - https://www.ign.com/wikis/baldurs-gate-3/Prologue:_Escape_the_Nautiloid

Each character can perform one action and one bonus action each turn, these actions can be simply attacking an enemy with a melee or ranged weapon, hiding in the shadows, dashing, or throwing things, or pushing enemies.

This first battle is designed to give a large margin for error to players and constitutes the first small step in the complex combat system. Imps are weak enemies equipped with weak weapons, in addition, Lae'zel is hard to hit for enemies and hits very hard! Players can fail this fight only by not doing anything for a lot of turns.

What is waiting outside

On the Nautiloid players have a small sample of what the game will reserve for them. In this first section, they will need to investigate, reconnect pieces of information scattered around, find keys to open chests, and make choices, some with brutal immediate results, some with consequences for the later story progression (none of them irreparable). The whole level is a practice field where players safely try things out without time limits, escalating both exploration and, at the end of this small section, battles too. The whole setting of the ship being attacked and set on fire serves the purpose of giving objective and tension to the player in an unwelcoming and unfamiliar territory but without the concrete pressure of a time constraint.

“Connect the transponder”

Once players are done with exploration, guided by a quest mark, they can head to their freedom. Unfortunately, to reach their objective, they must face one final battle on the Nautiloid. This battle will test their skill and strategy putting time constraints and tougher enemies against them.

One very tough enemy is busy fighting a temporarily allied NPC, while this enemy is being distracted, players must fight through small groups of enemies that stand between them and a “transponder” to escape the ship before enemy reinforcement arrival signaled by a turn countdown. Here players understand that they can approach fights in various ways and that character levels have a big impact on fights. Players quickly understand that they can't always win all battles unless they use their cunning!



Baldur's Gate 3 Commander Zhalk battle - <https://www.gamerguides.com>

Conclusion

The Larian Studios title is a deep and articulate experience that can overwhelm players with its vast content and endless possibilities. The game introduces players to the game with a prologue chapter where players can experiment with the ramping content in a safe environment, grasp the main mechanics, and put their hands on a highly complex combat system. In Baldur's Gate 3 players will continue to discover, learn, practice, and master throughout the whole gameplay experience and this process is the main part of the experience itself. Players can always examine and analyze their surroundings, and available actions and commands are always visible to them never leaving them guessing what they need to do to perform certain things. Players just need to come up with the idea to do those things!

The Baldur's Gate 3 prologue section delivers the whole game philosophy and experience: discovery, freedom, and autonomy to shape a unique story for each player.



Baldur's Gate 3 - A stockpile of nukes - <https://ackadia.com>