The Making of Cyberpunk 2077's Keanu-tastic trailer

CD Projekt Red's *Cyberpunk 2077* is one of 2020's most highly-anticipated games. The game's E3 trailer – recent winner of a Webby award – has racked up millions of views and is quickly becoming one of the most successful game trailers of all time.

Its success rides upon the incredibly slick CG, intense action, gripping narrative, and a surprise guest ending with a cyber-enhanced Keanu Reeves.

[embedded content]

The creative brains behind the trailer are housed in the acclaimed Swedish VFX studio, . With years of industry experience, the studio is one of the VFX and animation scene's top players, completing projects such as Overkill's *The Walking Dead, Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan* and *Blood and Truth*, and boasting its very own state-of-the-art motion capture studio to boot. An impressive team of 140 people worked on the *Cyberpunk 2077* trailer across a total of 5 months.

We were able to speak with several key members of the trailer's production team, director, Fredrik Löfberg, art director Mikael Widegren, and lead character artist Jonas Skoog, breaking down the expertise behind the trailer's success.

Building a partnership

One of the studio's recent celebrated projects is its cinematic work for Overkill's *The Walking Dead*. A prime example of the studio's celebrated work, its notability helped kickstart a working relationship with CD Projekt Red.

“After finishing this project (Overkill’s *The Walking Dead),* I wrote to one of the Cinematic Directors at CDPR (CD Projekt Red) to relay how much of a fan I was – I loved *The Witcher*’s cinematics – and explained that I had a lot of respect for his work. He wrote back to say he felt the same about us! He loved the walking dead cinematics too and reflected the same respect back,” said Fredrik Löfberg.

[embedded content]

“We became friends off the back of this conversation, and within three weeks, we flew over to Warsaw, Poland, to meet the team and see the studio; we got a great reception from the team, it was really touching. Because we had this mutual respect and friendship, we were selected to work on the E3 trailer,” continued Fredrik.

Check out the trailer breakdown above.

Kickstarting production

[embedded content]

With collaboration between the two studios at the heart of the project, the team at Goodbye Kansas was given plenty of creative freedom – even in the initial phases. A strong narrative became integral to the writing process and just like when creating a short film, script and art direction set the scene. The greatest challenge was hitting the strict deadline for the upcoming E3 conference…

“We had to hit the ground running – E3 was a definite deadline so we had to move quickly. We looked at some in-game clips and substance files, and then made a plan to get characters into the pipeline in the quickest and most efficient way possible,” explained Jonas Skoog.

“We massaged the script, storyboard, and pre-vis to figure out the movie. We wanted to find the rhythm and beats in the story and find ways to make it as emotionally engaging and exciting as possible, leading up to the big reveal at the end,” said Mikael Widegren.

Part of the brief for the artistic direction came from visual references provided by CDPR, both from other films and scenic environments. The challenge for Goodbye Kansas came in marrying the references with the urban and surreal world of *Cyberpunk*.

“The first point of reference was *Blade Runner*, but the *Cyberpunk* universe has a lot more elements to it. The

Cyberpunk world isn’t quite as dark visually – it contains a lot of colour with vibrant textures. So, the end result was part *Blade Runner* and part sun-bleached California/*Miami Vice*. There’s some *Ghost in the Shell* influence in there too,” explained Mikael.

Creating the lead character V

Despite being a short cinematic advertising the much larger game, the trailer’s central character, V, was vital to its success, engaging audiences with an almost tragic, anti-hero storyline. The progression of the trailer and the subsequent climactic ending are both anchored around the perspective of V, making him integral to the trailer’s production.

“The character was totally fictional and was originally sculpted by CDPR, we just added more high-frequency details and vamped it up for cinematic production. Since V is the lead character and the game was still in development, there were many changes during production. That made it hard to have a solid plan – clothing, and materials changed for example,” explained Jonas.

“To apply some of these visual changes, we used this cool hair shader in V-ray. We also used multi-channel XYZ displacement maps from a scan of a face-mould which matches the pores perfectly,” continued Jonas.

Another notable character in the trailer is the cigar-smokin’ DEX, the villain that attempts to rob V. Like V, the team used a broad range of techniques and software to achieve the final design.

“We used an approach based on the in-game model but expanded upon it to achieve a more cinematic standard. We sped up the process by cutting the character in two. The hair and shading were completed by our VFX supervisor and the animation team completed the cloth sim, rigging, and balanced shading,” said Jonas.

“There are many pieces that are all really essential in making it come together. It’s only when all the pieces are fully

matched that you get a great result.”

55 million views!

The incredible number of people watching the trailer has exceeded 55 million, an almost unprecedented number, and completely unexpected from the team.

“It’s kind of hard to grasp. It’s a humbling experience to get such appreciation after releasing this trailer. We’re gamers ourselves, so we love this title and the company behind it. We’re really looking forward to the main release,” said Jonas.

“Something as popular as this gets super-dissected. The YouTube community is amazing at getting super-detailed into working out what it all meant, breaking down every second and finding meaning that we hadn’t even thought of. It’s amazing to have your work analysed to this level. ” added Mikael.

“We were excited but nervous, the hype for the trailer was HUGE. It was a big responsibility but we have a great team here who pulled off a really great job,” said Fredrik.

Cyberpunk 2077 is set for release on PC and Playstation and Xbox consoles, November 19th, 2020. Watch

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