

How to Make a “hit” in Game Derivative Film and Television Works and Feed Back to the Original Game —— Taking “Cyberpunk Edgerunners” as an Example

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Abstract: Using the game-derived drama “CYBERPUNK EDGERUNNERS” as a case, this paper explores the maximization of the feed back effect of game-derived films and TV series on games from the aspects of the relationship between the film and television industry and the game industry, the communication between the two companies before production, the plot arrangement and the way of publicity, etc. Thereby building an efficient cooperation mode between film and television companies and game developers.

Keywords: Game derivative drama; Cyberpunk Edgerunners; Cross-border cooperation IP value

1. An overview of Game-Derived Drama

A game-derived Drama is a series that is created based on a particular game. Such series often take the story, characters, Settings and other elements of the game, and present them in TV series, film, animation or other formats. A game spin-off can bring a new perspective and experience to players, and it can also appeal to non-gamers.

The adaptation of video game intellectual property (IP) into film and television animation has been around since as early as 1982. However, the derivative animation stories of this period were weak, mainly serving as supplements to the game’s storyline. To flesh out the game’s backstory and settings, other media such as TV, movies, newspapers, and magazines were used to promote the game. Early game-derived film and television works were constrained by the limited technology and production methods of the time. As a result, their content and image quality no longer meet the promotional needs of the game itself, and some derivative films and TV series have become notorious as “the disreputable history” .for their deviation from the original storyline. However, with the continuous improvement of the film and television animation industry, more and more excellent game adaptations are emerging rapidly. These adaptations boast higher production values and more faithful storytelling, helping to enhance the popularity of the game IP among audiences.

2. Factor analysis for the success of CYBERPUNK EDGERUNNERS

Cyberpunk Edgerunners is an animated drama series adapted from the popular cyberpunk game, Cyberpunk 2077. It stands as a successful example of a game-derived animation in recent years. This project was greenlit in 2017 and was launched on Netflix on September 13, 2022, as a co-production between CD PROJEKT RED (the production company of Cyberpunk 2077) and Trigger Inc. (the production company of the animated series).

The show’s world-building closely aligns with the original game, delving into core cyberpunk themes such as the relationship between individuals and society, the impact of technology on humanity, and the future outlook. Its narrative style and visual aesthetic capture the essence of the genre, making it an engaging and authentic addition to the Cyberpunk franchise

The spin-off animation Cyberpunk Edgerunners has garnered an impressive score of 9 points on Douban and 8 points on IMDb, which are the testaments to its high-quality animation and successful publicity planning. The ~~textbook~~ co-production model between CD PROJEKT RED and Trigger serves as a typical example for other teams and companies seeking to create game spin-offs.

This article will analyze the success of Cyberpunk Edgerunners from various perspectives, exploring the strategic insights that game spin-offs can offer to the original IP. By doing so, we hope to shed light on how game adaptations can bring benefits to the original game while providing fresh perspectives and experiences to audiences.

2.1 Reasons for facilitating the cooperation between Trigger and CD PROJEKT RED

One of the most crucial factors that determines the success of a derivative work is choosing the most appropriate animation production company to collaborate with. In the realm of cyberpunk-themed content, Japan is second only to the United States in terms of exporting cyberpunk culture. Japan has a rich and longstanding history of cyberpunk culture, making it a natural choice for producing high-quality cyberpunk spin-offs.

The project leader of Cyberpunk Edgerunners explained in an interview: “I believe that in the cyberpunk genre, you can see the influence of Japanese animation in virtually any film or television work. That’s why we chose to work with Japanese studios, out of respect for the genre and its cultural roots.” By selecting a Japanese animation production company, the team behind Cyberpunk Edgerunners was able to tap into the expertise and experience of a culture that has long been steeped in cyberpunk aesthetics and philosophy. This, in turn, contributed to the high-quality production values and rich world-building that Cyberpunk Edgerunners is known for.

2.1.1 Look for the most suitable animation production style

Originating from the Eastern context, Trigger’s representative works incorporate many Western cultural elements, which have been highly praised by audiences in Europe and America. Compared to other animation production companies, Trigger has shown an ability to adapt original works from different cultural contexts. This was one of the key reasons why CD PROJEKT RED ultimately chose to collaborate with this Japanese animation company. Trigger is skilled in creating stunning animated visuals, exaggerated character designs, and thrilling battle scenes. Their style perfectly aligns with the story that CD PROJEKT RED wants to tell.

2.1.2 The choice between capital investment and time

Before the Cyberpunk fringe walker project, CD PROJEKT RED had successfully collaborated with Netflix on a live-action spin-off. However, due to the high cost of producing a live-action spin-off after the release of Cyberpunk 2077, CD PROJEKT RED opted for a relatively cheaper animation option. Trigger’s level of expertise and artistic style were deemed really suitable for the needs of the company, making them the best partner for the project.

2.1.3 Unique “rim lighting” production technology and rich resources to help the cooperation

Ultra Super Pictures, the parent company of Trigger, provided funding for a digital studio that enabled the use of the exclusive Rim Lighting technology in two-dimensional animation. This technology was a significant factor in CD PROJEKT RED’s decision to collaborate with Trigger. Rim lighting is a type of lighting used in visual projects to accentuate the three-dimensional aspects of a subject. In the cyberpunk genre, green and pink neon lights frequently appear in the scene and around the characters, and auxiliary lighting in animation can enhance the picture’s atmosphere and give it a more elevated feel. Additionally, it can help characters stand out and add more drama to the visual effects, making it particularly suited to the cyberpunk worldview.

2.2 Difficulties and problems of both parties in the process of cooperation

2.2.1 Language barrier and the equation of time

After the development of this game spin-off has been approved, close communication between the two teams is essential. In most cases, game companies opt to create spin-offs with domestic companies, as it is easier to establish effective communication channels. However, the two companies responsible for developing Cyberpunk are based in Poland and Japan, respectively, which presents significant language and time zone differences that hinder communication.

2.2.2 The debate on the production scheme of game derivative film and television

The production of the game derivative works is not simply about copying the scenes and stories in the game into the animation. For “How should we describe the City of Night?” this question, the animation and the game’s expression form is completely different. Therefore, in order to catch the audience’s eye in a short period of time, the derivative animation needs to adapt and dramatize the characters and stories. In the end, Trigger’s tough attitude and argument in the meeting led CD PROJEKT RED to make concessions, allowing Trigger to rearrange the script and add a new and attractive character, “Rebecca”. The broadcast of the animation also proved the success of the adaptation. Rebecca became one of the most attractive and discussed characters in the whole animated series, becoming the finishing touch of the whole spin-off work.

2.3 Use game material to assist in the derivative series production

To create a more faithful animation of the derivative, game producers often need to provide extensive support during the

production process, including restoring some scenes and details from the original game. During the development of Cyberpunk Walker, CD PROJEKT RED, the company behind the game “Cyberpunk 2077,” shared their top-secret game ontology files with the production team of Trigger. This allowed the team to gain a more accurate and detailed understanding of the game world, enabling them to create a stronger sense of immersion for players. Thanks to CD Projekt RED’s early transfer of a wealth of game materials, the elements such as the interface, cityscape, transportation, and weapons used by cyberpunk users could be unified in the animation.

3. Game-Derived Drama’s feedback to the original game PLN

3.1 Derivative drama broadcast and reputation drive sales of original game

In the days after cyberpunk EDGERUNNERS began broadcasting, original game CD PROJEKT RED reported sales of 245 Millions PLN ,in the third quarter of 2022, up 70% year on year; the net revenue was 98.704 million PLN , up 504% year on year.^[2]

3.2 Cross-border linkage becomes a booster for the sales of original games

With the help of the high popularity and traffic of animation, CD PROJEKT RED timely carries out in-depth publicity and cross-border linkage among games, animation and platforms to attract players to buy and log in the game.

3.3 “Second creation” maintains a lasting focus

After the broadcast of the derivative animation, the fluctuating design of the plot attracted many audiences to create twice on the video websites led by Bilibili(The largest pop-up video site in China) and YouTube, which sustained a lasting attention for CYBERPUNK 2077.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the benefits of producing high-quality Game-Derived Drama are manifold and diverse. Game companies seeking to establish a complete IP industry chain and expand their reach across the industry must increase investment in Game-Derived Drama and engage in long-term, in-depth collaborations with derivative drama producers. As an increasing number of game makers enter the market, Game-Derived Drama is poised for explosive growth. However, to differentiate themselves from other derivative works and achieve success, producers must meticulously refine their works, understand the interests of their audience, and broaden their audience without alienating existing players. By following these strategies, Game-Derived Drama can become the next “hot style.”

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