



CYBERPUNK 2077: PHANTOM LIBERTY

CD PROJEKT RED: *Cyberpunk 2077: Phantom Liberty* (PC version). [digital game]. Warsaw : CD Projekt, 2023.

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Video game developer and publisher CD Projekt Red is responsible for the hugely popular digital game series *The Witcher*¹, as well as *Cyberpunk 2077*². It is true that the release of the second-mentioned game was marred by countless technical bugs that blighted the experience for many players. However, it seems that those times are long behind us and gamers have forgotten about the initial shortcomings of the title. This is evidenced by the sales that were largely spurred by the release of the anime series *Cyberpunk: Edgerunners*³ and the recently released downloadable content (DLC) titled *Cyberpunk 2077: Phantom Liberty*. As of October 5, 2023, over 25 million copies of the base game and over three million copies of the DLC have been sold.

The graphics of this work enhance the authenticity of the entire action role-playing game (RPG) from a first-person perspective. Detailed textures on characters' faces and objects such as weapons, clothing and vehicles, including their interiors, encourage immersive gameplay and enhance the player's experience and emotions. Equally impressive is the spectacular ray tracing, teeming with various reflections and highlights that few titles can boast at a similar level. The new expansion also brought a lot of new features including new car missions, airdrops, side quests, skills and abilities. New items have also been added including weapons, cyberware, cars, fashion accessories and missile launchers for vehicles. All of these elements fit into the overall cyberpunk universe concept, adding to the atmosphere. This task was also fulfilled by the soundtrack, which worked very well with the player's feelings and managed to evoke the right mood, whether it was a heated battle with enemies or an emotional conversation.

The most impressive part, which significantly enriched the whole story, was a new geographical area called Dogtown. This setting for the main story of the new DLC showcases a wicked world full of corruption and mobsters shaking hands with politicians and journalists. The aforementioned cyberpunk setting is a stark reminder of the criticism of consumer society that has driven humans – cyborgs – to a constant urge to technically improve their bodies in order to maintain a competitive edge in this declining world. In a similar way, one can think of social media on our mobile phones, which can be seen as extensions of the human body. If individuals do not monitor the content disseminated through the media, they feel as if they are left out or as if they are missing out on something. The digital game – whether basic or DLC – is also criticising the big tech companies, which are able to do almost anything to increase their profits. In a similar vein, we can think, for example, of the relentless development of artificial intelligence, in which

1 CD PROJEKT RED: *The Witcher (series)*. [digital game]. New York, NY, Warsaw : Atari, CD Projekt, 2007-2015.

2 CD PROJEKT RED: *Cyberpunk 2077*. [digital game]. Warsaw : CD Projekt, 2020.

3 JAKI, R., PONDsmith, M. (Created by): *Cyberpunk: Edgerunners (series)*. [VOD]. Los Gatos, CA : Netflix, 2022.

companies such as Google, Microsoft and OpenAI are currently investing billions of dollars. Concerns about AI are also reflected in the narrative of the new DLC, which suggests in places that AI is controlling some phenomena in the universe. AI in game also 'infects' one of the unplayable characters, which also points to concerns about the implications of artificial intelligence development in the real world.

The main story of Phantom Liberty is spearheaded by the character of Solomon Reed, played by actor Idris Elba, and Johnny Silverhand, portrayed by Keanu Reeves, who has also returned. However, other characters that the player interacts with are also important, such as Songbird, Rosalind Myers or Kurt Hansen. The creators also put a lot of emphasis on dialogue. The way the different characters interact and how they are portrayed also adds to the authenticity of everything that happens on screen. While going through a new story revolving around saving more than one life, the player has the chance to bump into familiar faces from the base game, exchange a few words with them and find out what news they have. As a result, the player builds up a certain relationship with the non-playable characters, gets to know them and decides, for example, whether or not they like them, or identifies with them. Based on that, they can make decisions, which brings us to the third and very important part of the whole DLC.

It is the player who has control over the entire course of the game to a large extent (predetermined, of course, by the creators). As we mentioned, it's the player who decides who to trust and who not to trust, who to help, and how the entire story of the Phantom Liberty DLC will ultimately play out. In doing so, they are often faced with a controversy that could be simplified as follows: will they help the corrupt corporate system or the individual who rebels against it? Will they be a rebel and resist the system, or will they submit to the 'fat cats'? The answer to this question is sought by the player themselves. Significant in this respect are the aforementioned dialogues and the free choice of replicas that allow for a deep experience of role-play. Compared to Bethesda Game Studios' singleplayer RPG *Starfield*⁴, which offers the player an open world to the point of essentially losing themselves in it, the Phantom Liberty DLC is a truly balanced experience. Its direction is determined by the player, albeit on a much smaller imaginary map of the playable world. On the figurative other pole stands, for example, a game from a slightly different genre, specifically a survival horror game – *Alan Wake 2*⁵ by Remedy Entertainment, which could be seen as more of an interactive movie precisely because of the lack of choices.

In general, the DLC Phantom Liberty discusses existential themes and focuses on the search for the meaning of life in a chaotic world. The player, as the main character "V", is faced with several complex dilemmas that will ultimately affect how the story ends – as the plot has multiple endings. Interestingly, there is no happy medium in the story of the expansion to appease each party depicted in this bittersweet story. In an attempt to please everyone, the freedom the protagonist so desires eventually slips through their fingers like a phantom.

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