

The art of being an art director in modern video games

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A significant portion of my high school days revolved around playing PlayStation 2 with my friends, with one of my favourite titles at that time being 'God of War 2'. Depicting the gorey adventures of the fictional Greek god Kratos, the God of War series have been a mainstay in PlayStation consoles for many years. The latest addition to the series, God of War Ragnarök, was released earlier this month on November 9, and, in the credits, you will see the name of a Bangladeshi who worked as an Art Director in this high-budget video game.

Tanvir M. N. Islam, a Fine Arts graduate from University of Development Alternative in Bangladesh, is a veteran in the field of digital modelling and character design. With over 20 years of experience in the industry, Tanvir currently works as an Art Director at Keywords Canada Holdings Inc., an outsourcing company that produces game art, assets and models for big-budget video game companies. As a digital sculptor, Tanvir is proficient at creating interactive models and environmental assets for video games.

His long portfolio consists of working as an Art Director in Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Warrior, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1 + 2, Call of Duty: Black Ops 4 and Sniper Elite 5: France. In the Star Wars game, he art directed the characters Bogdo, bog rat and bane back spider and many other environmental, vehicle and animated creature assets. He has also worked in creating 3D models for LEGO.

So what does the work of an Art Director in an AAA game like God of War entail? As an Art Director, Tanvir is responsible for editing, approving and finalising character designs, assets, props and environment that will be used in the

main game. According to Tanvir, his work maintains a streamlined process, which follows a strict pipeline guided by the head studio in charge of releasing the final version of the game, which in this case, is Santa Monica Studio, the studio behind the God of War video game series.

When working with Santa Monica Studio, Tanvir had to follow a timeline to ensure his team can finish the work on time. As the Art Director in charge of his studio, Tanvir sets the initial pipeline and assigns team members to work on specific assignments. He then has to sync his thoughts with the Art Director at Santa Monica to ensure a

timely completion. He is also responsible for hiring the right personnel for the job, ensuring that junior artists have the right guidance to pick up the work fast.

When asked for advice for aspiring artists, he said, "The only real obstacle in this field is yourself. If you put in enough time and dedication, you can excel." Tanvir believes that in modern times, there are resources available everywhere that can help young professionals reach their goals quicker. The challenge is to apply oneself. "There are graphics software and YouTube tutorials that can always help you. Have the right composition knowledge, colour sense and the 'eye of the artist'. Show these in your portfolio and you should be fine," he adds.

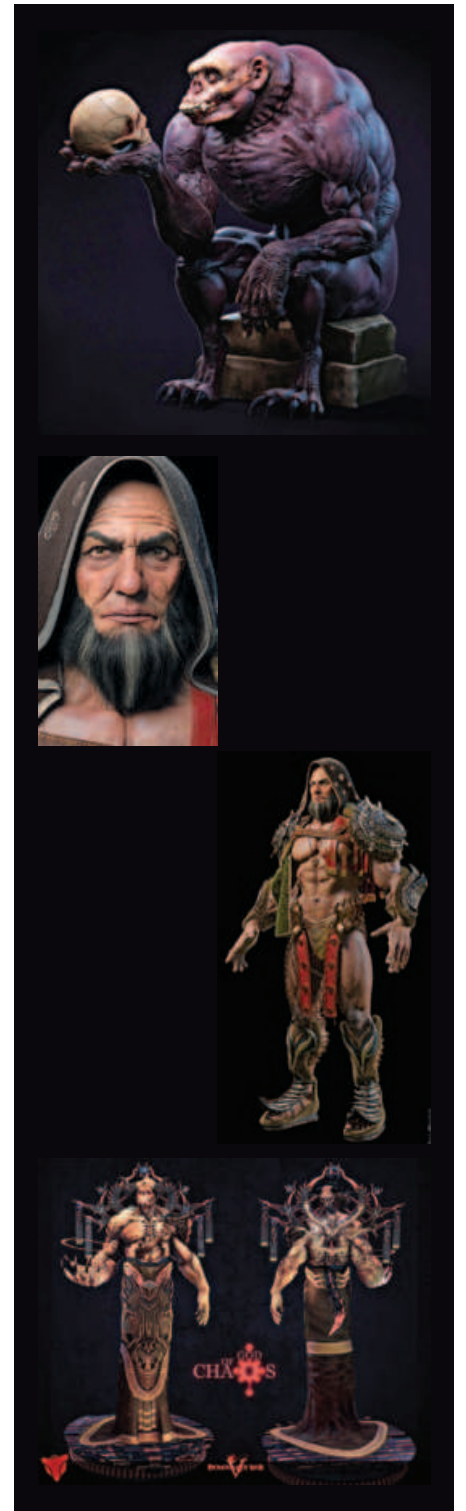
As per his everyday job as an Art Director, Tanvir's work begins when the head company, in this case Santa Monica Studio, sends Tanvir and his team a rough concept of the desired character design and/or environmental asset. Tanvir then has to interpret how the rough ideas of a 2D design can be converted to a 3D model.

"For example," says Tanvir, "if we are asked to make a character that looks like an oak tree, we have to start by first researching what an oak tree looks and feels like." He says that as the overseeing Art Director, he has to find out additional details such as the exterior of the design, if the surface is rough or soft, or if the real-life object shows specific movement traits that could be converted to a 3D environment.

After a long process of trial and error, which includes several art submissions, rejects, redos and approvals, Tanvir finalises the requested pieces of character models and assets and sends them to Santa Monica. Tanvir notes that he and his team are not explicitly told by Santa Monica where their created models and assets will be used in the final version of the game. "It doesn't quite matter if my team doesn't know where our model will be used, since our primary concern is always with how the design looks, not where it will be in the final game," states Tanvir.

Tanvir's favourite part about working on God of War was helping build the iconic Greek characters in a reimagined Norse setting. Since working on character models for video games requires a lot of guesswork, Tanvir admits that his previous experiences help him tremendously in this day-to-day grind to produce memorable and awe-inspiring character designs.

Nonetheless, Tanvir believes that his job as an Art Director is not just a job, it's a 24/7 passion project. Even outside office hours, he feels the need to research, discuss and find new sources of inspiration and knowledge to further enhance his artistic capabilities. Even when hanging out with friends on weekends, he will spend his time talking about art. He believes passion and dedication are essential for anyone looking towards pouring their life into the pursuit of art.



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