

FOR US

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Tagline: It's time.

Short – One Line:

A couple chase a mysterious device they believe will help them escape their pursuers, but they find that there's more to the device—and their pursuers—than they could possibly imagine.

Synopsis:

A cryptic note on a matchbook sends Ralph and Alice to a seedy waterfront bar. Close behind, two shadowy figures stalk them through city streets. Believing that a mysterious device hidden in the back room is their best hope for escape, Alice takes the stage, hoping an unexpected torch song will distract everyone in the bar long enough for Ralph to break in and steal the device. But just as Ralph cracks the locks on their prize, the dark pursuers rush in, revealing that there's more to the story than either Ralph or Alice could have imagined.

Shot entirely on green screen, "For Us" presents a 1940s film noir tale of intrigue, drawing stylistic inspiration from classics like *Kiss Me Deadly* with its dark shadows, menacing characters, and moody atmosphere. But the story speaks the narrative language of modern science fiction, resonating with a powerful climax that provokes essential questions: what's really motivating the main characters? What's their real connection to their pursuers, and what's so important about the device they're so eager to find?

Additional Info/About the Film

Science Fiction vs. Film Noir: The story and the song

Though it was always meant to be a science fiction project, “For Us” was originally conceived with a futuristic style, complete with high-tech weaponry and military characters. But during a brainstorming session, the film’s co-writer and assistant director mentioned that the story seemed naturally to lend itself to film noir, and thus became the world of “For Us.”

The original two military characters became Ralph, a hard-nosed detective, and Alice, a lounge singer. The military base turned into a seedy waterfront bar. Ralph’s role was easy to conjure up from the film noir lexicon. But since Alice needed to be just as influential in this story as her partner, special attention had to be paid so she would become neither a damsel in distress nor a femme fatale. After a few days of deliberation, the filmmakers decided that Alice’s power would come from her willingness to put herself directly between Ralph and the pursuers.

By distracting everyone with a song, she would essentially become a human shield for Ralph, allowing him to retrieve the mysterious device from the back room. Once the story had been solidified and the song had been written, the basic elements were in place. The crew then began focusing on the visual style of the film.

Production Design and Visual Style

Science fiction elements remained in the story and in the device itself, but the choice to make the project a film noir required a unique marriage of styles.

Period elements—weapons, clothes, a pocket watch—were borrowed from the 1930s-40s, and precise accuracy mattered only insofar as the piece “felt” like it came from that era. The metal case holding the device, however, was intentionally selected to look futuristic, adding mystery to the device by removing it from the context of the time period where the story took place.

Initially, the film was to be shot completely in black and white, with minimal digital effects and a one-day shooting schedule. But after production was delayed several months, the filmmakers decided to shoot the project on green screen to make scheduling easier. Though this presented new challenges, it also resulted in further refinement of the already stylized black-and-white look. Now, instead of purely black and white, characters and elements could be selectively desaturated to call attention to a particular person, element, or moment in time. Through most of the film, for example, the characters are given only a hint of color while the backgrounds are completely desaturated. However, when Alice sings, she’s acting as Ralph’s “protector,” and therefore rendered in full color, with oversaturated reds on both her dress and the curtain behind her.

Technology and Production Workflow

Using the technologies of green screen and motion tracking allowed the director complete freedom to create the movie's dark atmosphere and exaggerated film noir style. A completely fabricated universe was the best conceptual fit for the story, as the characters' own sense of time and space are shattered in the movie's final moments. It also added ultimate flexibility in scheduling; actors could be shot on completely different days and composited in post-production.

But green screen production also proved to be a huge challenge for the cast and crew, as scenes had to be performed and lit with few real-world reference points. In some cases actors had to completely visualize where the other characters and objects were in a scene with no real point of reference. Digital background elements had to be created to match the film's lighting, and each performance had to be directed so that the final shots appeared seamless.

But all in all the choices made during the course of production led to a more believable, stylistic world that served both the story and the visual style of the film.

With its science-fiction twist, its dark shadows and moody atmosphere, its signature song, and the choice to shoot on green screen, the world of "For Us" is a compelling blend of story and styles that takes audiences somewhere they've never been before.