

# REVIEW (FILM)

## *FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S (2023)—LOSING INTERACTION IN FILM ADAPTATIONS*

Chloe Rankin, RMIT University

From indie game to YouTube to the big screen, *Five Nights at Freddy's* (dir. Tammi, 2023) represents the logical progression of entertainment in the age of social media. It follows the character Mike Schmidt who, desperate for work, takes on a security guard position at the abandoned restaurant *Freddy Fazbear's Pizzeria*. Mark is tasked with keeping intruders out of the venue overnight, but quickly learns that the bigger threat is the animatronics already inside.

As games gain popularity through Let's Play streamers—YouTuber's who record playthroughs of video games—Hollywood finds itself with both a treasure grove of material and an existing fanbase to draw upon. In particular, the *Five Nights at Freddy's* horror game boasted 15 million views across YouTube within 24 hours of its initial release and was a top seller in the weeks that followed (Major, 2015). Its ongoing popularity, fan game iterations, and YouTube fame made it an obvious choice for a movie franchise.

Despite the significant amount of lore available and known to avid fans, *Five Nights at Freddy's* has a strong standalone presence as a horror film and is an entertaining movie in its own right. Actor Josh Hutcherson did a fantastic job at depicting the nuances of Mark's struggles; we watch him struggle with the trauma of losing his younger brother, the responsibility of caring for his younger sister while defending his guardianship, and of course, unpacking the mystery of *Freddy Fazbear's Pizzeria* (2017).

Perhaps the biggest shortfall of the live action can be seen in the animatronics themselves and speaks to the lost interaction element found in the original games. Live action videogames are still a fairly new phenomenon, and they've received mixed ratings. One of the earliest videogame to screen adaptations was Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros* (dirs. Jankel, Morton, 1993) —an objective box office flop (Picard & Fandango, 2008). The forced perspective in the original *Five Nights at Freddy's* game arguably created dread as it positioned the player physically inferior to the animatronics. The interactivity meant that the user had to actively engage with their fear. In the film, the perspective could not be mimicked—and at times, the expressions of the animatronics appeared somewhat cartoonish or comical. This could be a result of the director's vision or of personal preference. It could also represent an inherent weakness in transmedia storytelling—a term defined by Henry Jenkins as the expansion of a story shared across different mediums (Ryan, 2015).

In all, *Five Nights at Freddy's* was entertaining and well performed. Regardless of how the film might be received by critics, it represents the evolution of transmedia and adaptive storytelling, and the role that YouTube will undoubtedly play in future cinema.

## REFERENCES

Ryan, M. L. (2015). Transmedia Storytelling: Industry Buzzword or New Narrative Experience?. *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, 7(2), 1-19.

Picard, M., & Fandango, G. (2008). Video games and their relationship with other media. *The video game explosion: A history from Pong to Playstation and beyond*, 293-300.

Major, N. L. (2015). *Online stars and the new audience: How YouTube creators curate and maintain communities*. University of California, Irvine.

*Five Nights at Freddy's 2023*, film, dir. Emma Tammi, Universal Pictures

*Super Mario Bros* 1993, film, dirs. Anabel Jankel, Rocky Morton, Walt Disney Studios