

Final Essay

Time and Space in the Five Nights at Freddy's Franchise

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INTRODUCTION

Five Nights at Freddy's (FNaF) is a popular game franchise published by Scott Cawthon. With nine games and twelve books in the franchise, the first game was released in 2014. However, this essay will mainly focus on video games. The first game places the player as a security guard starting their new career at Freddy Fazbear's Pizzeria, a magical place where children come together to celebrate birthdays, eat pizza, and watch their favorite animatronics Freddy, Bonnie, Chica, and Foxy.

During the first shift, the former night shift security guard, known as the Phone Guy by the players, trains the player through recorded voice calls. First, he demonstrates the company's policy and briefly describes the player's duties as a night guard. Further, he mentions due to technical issues, animatronics free roam at night, and their facial recognition systems do not work after hours. Therefore the animatronics identify people as endoskeletons of an animatronic, leading them to stuff the player in an empty Freddy Fazbear costume, ultimately causing death due to getting punctured by crossbeams and wires. Likewise, he tells a tragedy that happened in the pizzeria. He states, "Uh, they used to be allowed to walk around during the day too. But then there was The Bite of '87. Yeah. It is amazing that the human body can live without the frontal lobe, you know?". FNaF's cryptic and mysterious story begins with this voice line. Lastly, the Phone Guy tells the player to check where the animatronics are through security cameras and close the doors when they get too close. However, while doing so, the player has to use the power resourcefully to survive until five a.m.

FNAF introduced a new and distinct mechanic to the indie horror game genre during its release. FNAF restricts the player's movement and forces them to stand still in an office and anxiously monitor bots to survive a night instead of letting them free-roam.

Rather than being attentive to their surroundings, the player has to carefully watch the cameras and doors and be alert to the audio cues. Besides its unusual playthrough, what made FNAF so famous was not so much its unique gameplay but the mystery of the story behind it and its cryptic narrative.

This essay will analyze the FNaF franchise through Wei et al.(2010) framework and examine how utilizing time and space in a video game can enhance players' comprehension and engagement with the narrative. Through this analysis, we can gain insight into how game developers can effectively use time and space to create a more compelling and immersive story for their players.

TIME AND SPACE IN FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S

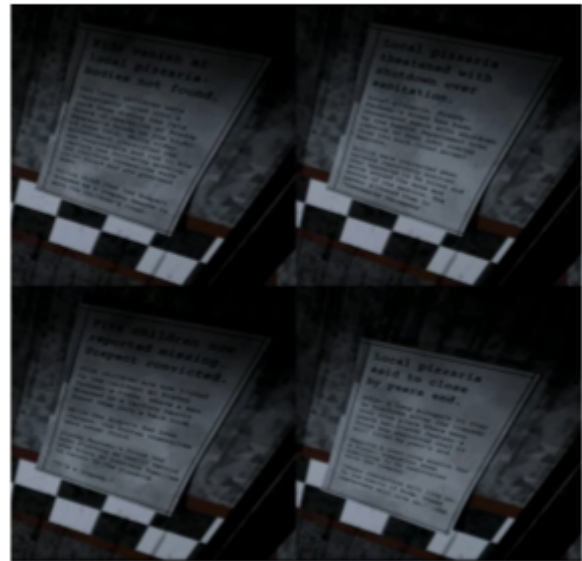
Wei et al.(2010) state that "time and space play a crucial role, not only in the process of narrative authoring but also in the process of narrative comprehension." Furthermore, narrative comprehension is heavily affected by the player's experience and how they engage with the game. Wei et al.(2010) define space in two categories; operational space and presentational space. Operational space refers to the playable environment the player can interact with. Presentational space is a non-operational space represented with verbal signs, audio, and visual signs to create a symbolic world. Likewise, Wei et al. (2010) study narrative time in three categories, order, speed, and frequency. 'Order' concerns the relation between the order of events in the presented narrative. 'Speed' refers to the relationship between the duration of events in the story and the discourse that tells the story. Lastly, 'frequency' deals with the relation between the number of times an event occurs in the game and the story. Wei et al.(2010)'s framework helps us understand how Cawthon uses time and space throughout the FNaF franchise to develop his narrative.

Cawthon typically uses presentational space to expand his story with hidden visual clues, audio cues, and easter eggs in unplayable areas. For instance, in the first game(Cawthon,2014), if the player looks at the E Hall Corner from the security cameras, they will see a paper listing the rules of the pizzeria for children to follow. Occasionally, this

paper will switch to newspaper clippings with titles such as, 'Kids vanished at the local pizzeria - bodies not found,' 'Five children reported missing. Suspect convicted,' and 'Local pizzeria said to close by year's end.'(Figure 1) This hidden clue tells one of the core pieces of the FNaFs story: that kids went missing in this pizzeria, and the restaurant will be closed due to this occurrence.

Cawthon utilizes operational space to enhance his story as well. However, he rarely uses the primary process of the game, which is surviving five nights at the pizzeria. Instead, he hides these operational spaces with easter eggs, side quests, and 2-bit Atari-style secret mini-games.

Figure 1
Newspaper Clippings



Note. From DoctorHadi1987. (2022, March 12). *FNaF 1 All Secrets & Easter Eggs* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9IKtFLud78>

Figure 2
Fruity Maze



Note. From Father. (2017, December 8). *FNaF 6 - Secret Minigame - Fruity Maze Arcade Springtrap Easter Egg (Freddy Fazbear's Pizzeria)* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jW02SGibGX0>

For example, in Freddy Fazbear's Pizzeria Simulator(Cawthon, 2017), the player can buy and play arcade games for their pizzeria. Fruity Maze, one of the arcade games, is a Pacman-like maze game. After the player beats it once, they can unlock a secret level. The power-ups are replaced with dead dogs at this level, and the music slows down(Figure 2). If the player plays it again, the game becomes more distorted and broken. Additionally, the player can

see a sad reflection of a girl and a man in a Spring Bonnie costume. The music continues to slow down, and the playable character in the arcade game leaves blood puddles behind as

Figure 3
The End of the Fruity Maze



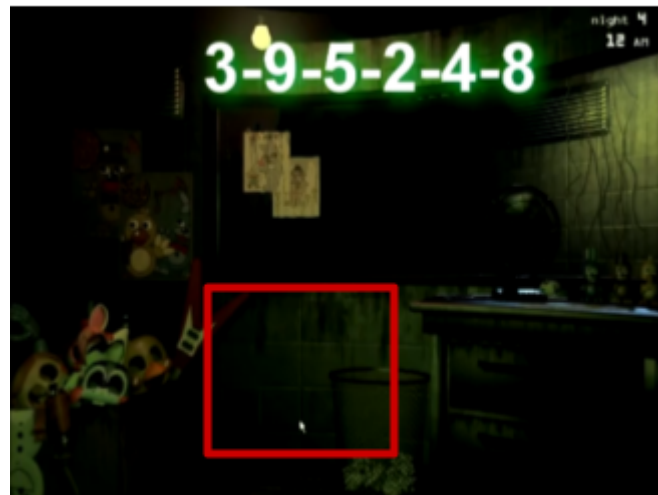
Note. From Father. (2017, December 8). *FNAF 6 - Secret Minigame - Fruity Maze Arcade Springtrap Easter Egg (Freddy Fazbear's Pizzeria)* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jW02SGibGX0>

she walks. In the last stage, the player will run out of time no matter what. Then the player sees lines of text on the screen representing the conversation between the man in the costume and the girl. 'He is not really dead...Follow me.' the man says, referring to her dog, and the game ends (Figure 3).

In another instance, during the first run of FNaF 3(Cawthon, 2015), players are usually confronted with the 'Bad Ending' screen.

To get the 'Good Ending,' the players must find easter eggs to complete the mini-games and get a good ending in these mini-games. For example, to unlock one of the mini-games called 'Stage01,' the player must enter a code that is discoverable from the previous night to the clickable wall tiles like a dial-pad-type configuration on Night 4 (Figure 4). In this mini-game, the player controls the character 'Golden Freddy.' Upon triggering the game, if the player plays the mini-game normally, they will attain the 'Bad Ending' for the mini-game and the 'Bad Ending' at the end. Therefore, to complete the game as it was intended, the player has to glitch through multiple walls and doors to get to a crying child(Figure 5). After finding the crying child, Golden Freddy will give the child a cake, and the game will end there(Figure 6).

Figure 4
Dialpad on the wall tiles



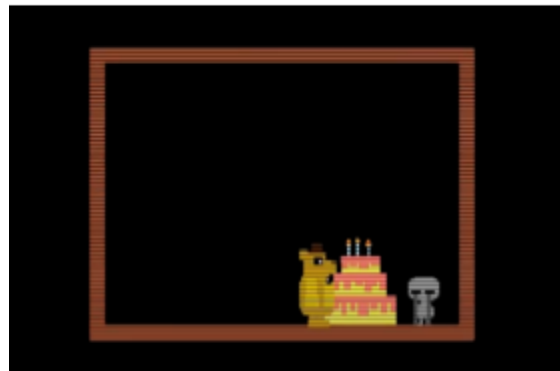
Note. From FAZEDIE56. (2015, March 21). *Five Nights At Freddy's 3 Golden Freddy Minigame* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fY50NFAmEUU>

Figure 5
Golden Freddy Glitching Through the Walls



Note.From FAZEDIE56. (2015, March 21). Five Nights At Freddy's 3 Golden Freddy Minigame [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fY50NFAmEuu>

Figure 6
Golden Freddy with the Crying Child



Note.From FAZEDIE56. (2015, March 21). Five Nights At Freddy's 3 Golden Freddy Minigame [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fY50NFAmEuu>

The speed of FNaF's gameplay is relatively fast-paced. Each five-hour night is around two to three minutes of gameplay, adding more intensity to its anxiety-inducing environment. Thus, the player is likely to miss the hidden clues and easter eggs scattered throughout the game their first time, making frequency a crucial aspect of FNaF's storytelling. Cawthon relies heavily on the repetition and replayability of the game to reveal its narrative. The player might not buy the arcade machine on their first run, and even if they do, they might play it only once and miss a crucial piece of the story. The clickable tiles on the wall may go unnoticed, and the player may need to play the game again or multiple times to uncover all the secrets, significantly changing the player's perception of the story.

The order of the main operation of FNaF is relatively linear. The player has to survive five nights; if they do, they win the game. However, story-wise, the franchise is released non-chronologically. For instance, Five Nights at Freddy's 4(Cawthon, 2015) takes place in 1983(the date can be seen in a mini-game), and Five Nights at Freddy's 2(Cawthon,2014) takes place in 1987(the date can be seen in the end-game salary paycheck). Conclusively Cawthon's non-chronological and cryptic storytelling through operational and

representational space with fast-paced gameplay creates a sense of temporal uncertainty and ambiguity.

Herman(2002) calls this ambiguity "fuzzy temporality," described as "temporal sequencing that is strategically inexact, making it difficult or even impossible to assign narrated events a fixed or even fixable position along the timeline in the storyworld." He states this type of narration can be a tool for the interpreter to strategize for linearizing, narrativizing, and cognizing actions and events. And it forces the interpreter to rethink the story's scope and limits and cues them to reconstruct. Herman's(2002) idea of fuzzy temporality not only brings light to traditional literature but sheds light on the world of video games, specifically in terms of immersion and agency. Game designers often make the narrative interactive by giving the player agency in the story's direction.

However, Cawthon approaches agency from a different angle. The FNaF franchise does not offer any agency in its main gameplay. However, it provides agency for the player in how much they want to discover and how they make logic of the narrative. The clues Cawthon spreads throughout the game encourage players' curiosity and incentivize them to piece the lore together, giving them agency in narrative authoring.

The fuzzy temporality of FNaF makes the video game franchise more personal, allowing players to relate to the story and characters a lot more, which enhances the horror aspect of the game, making it more creepy and uniquely immersing the player. Additionally, the ambiguous temporality of the game makes the narration of the game adaptable to different kinds of creative media. Thus, a fan community emerged where everyone chimed in to dissect the story together, add to the story with their take, and make fan art, fan music, and fan games, recording gameplay videos.

FNAF'S INFLUENCE ON THE GAMING WORLD

With thousands of players worldwide curious about the truth behind the story of FNaF, an immense and tight community has emerged around the game. The Five Nights at Freddy's subreddit has almost five thousand users sharing theories, fanart, video, and photo edits. In addition, thousands of YouTube channels, particularly The Game Theorists, are trying to curate the story logically to share with its fans with theory videos that get millions of views. Together they figured out that the owner of the pizzeria, William Afton, also known as 'Purple Guy,' had murdered several children and hid their bodies inside the animatronic suits. Later, the souls of the children haunt Afton by possessing the animatronics. The fans also figured out other parts of the story, such as how Afton's family died, what happened to Afton after killing the children, and to the pizzeria after the tragedies occurred, etc. Finally, many music artists like The Living Tombstone incorporate the game's lore into their songs. "We've been all alone, stuck in our little zone since 1987," sings The Living Tombstone(2014) referring to the kids' souls haunting the animatronics.

Additionally, it inspired a lot of indie game developers. There are so many fan games of FNaF out there that it is considered another genre as 'Five Nights At Freddy's' in one of the biggest indie game platforms, GameJolt. Further, it popularized the subgenre of 'mascot genre' immensely, inspiring the development of the games such as Baldi's Basics, Bendy and the Ink Machine, Poppy's Playtime, and Garten of BanBan. Definitely, FNaF had a vital influence on the indie horror game genre.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Five Nights at Freddy's captured the hearts and minds of gamers worldwide due to its unique gameplay mechanics and cryptic narrative. It has provided players an immersive experience that keeps them engaged and immersed in the plot. The use of time and space in the game, as demonstrated through Wei et al.(2010)'s framework, creates a rich and complex story that expands beyond the operational space of the game. Furthermore, the utilization of presentational space, hidden clues, and the inclusion of easter eggs and side quests enhances the narrative. Lastly, the intricate use of order, frequency, and speed adds depth to the narrative creating a sense of temporal uncertainty and mystery for the player and giving them the incentive to be a detective and agency in narrative authoring. Consequently, FNaF became a piece of history in the indie horror game genre, with thousands of fans still active in the community.

In addition to mechanics, FNaF demonstrates that attention to time and space can be just as crucial in drawing players into a game's world. While the confined environment creates a sense of unease, the intricate lore creates a sense of mystery and intrigue and gives the player ownership over the game's story. FNaF is an intriguing case study of how cryptic narratology and fuzzy temporality may be used to improve gameplay, enhance horror, and produce a more engaging player experience. As a result, game designers and scholars can better understand how games can be designed to deliver various sorts of immersion and how a story can be incorporated into gameplay in unique and innovative ways by analyzing the many strategies utilized in FNaF.

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