

# From Game Consoles to the Big Screen:

*Are Video Game Adaptations Getting Better?*



Photo/illustration compilation of a variety of video game adaptations, featuring Sonic the Hedgehog. Illustration Source: Vulture. Photo Source: Universal Pictures, Capcom, Paramount Pictures, Warner Bros, Midway, Buena Vista Pictures, Sony Pictures Releasing and Core Design

If you asked a kid off the street today what their current favorite movie was, chances are they'd tell you it's Sonic. It may not be the most popular answer, but kids across the country share a love for the movie based on a 30-year-old game.

If you walk into a room of young adults and ask what their favorite current TV show was, you would likely not be shocked to hear someone reply The Last of Us.

The one thing both of these incredibly popular fictional powerhouses have in common is they both came, initially, from a video game. The first Sonic game, Sonic the Hedgehog, was released in 1991 for the Sega Genesis while the original game for The Last of Us game out on the PlayStation 3 in 2013.

They are so widespread that you could be a fan of either of them and still have no idea what the source material was. But 20 years ago, this was unfathomable.

## History

Video games have existed for as long as most of us have been alive. If you reach back far enough, you'll find they technically originated in the 1950s in a format we'd hesitate to call a video game today.

For our purposes, we will start in the 1980s, the birthplace of the NES, also known as the Nintendo Entertainment System. The NES was many things, and in a time of growth for technology, it allowed new things to be explored and exposed to the general public. But perhaps the most influential thing the NES did was facilitate the birth and development of a very special game, Super Mario Bros.

Mario games transcend generations in a special way many other bits of media could only hope to do. And for all its popularity, it was gifted something no other video game had been before - a movie.

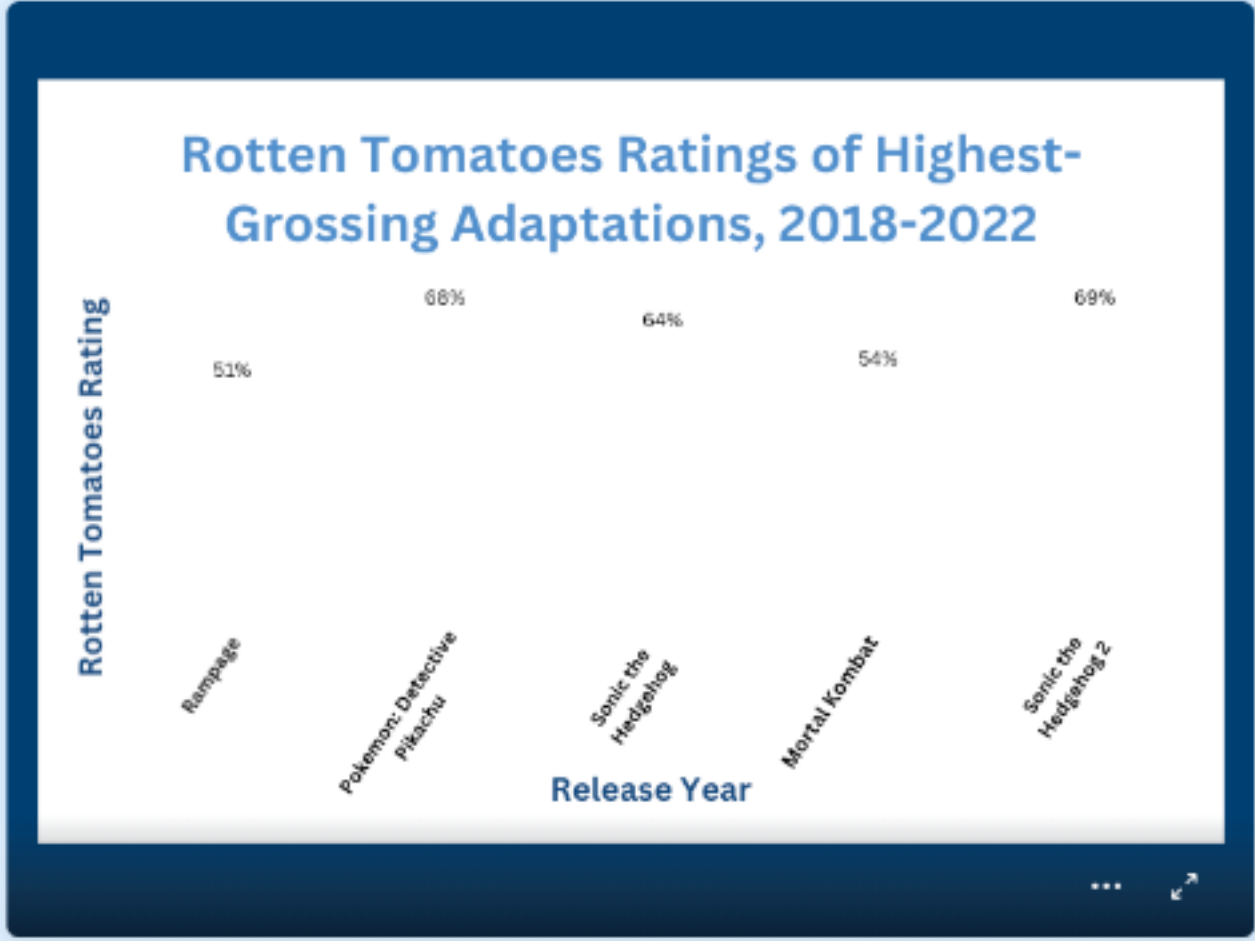
The Super Mario Bros movie, which came out in 1993, is widely regarded as a terrible movie, having received a Rotten Tomatoes Score of only 29%, but this set up a trend for the next 25 years.



Design by Marissa Yelenik. Source: Rotten Tomatoes

From 1993 to 2015, the trend of video-game-adapted movies continued, with each of the highest-grossing movies for the year failing time and time again. Until something incredible happened. Somewhere between the failure of Hitman Agent 47 in 2015 and the incredible success of Sonic the Hedgehog in 2020, a shift occurred.

Now, the highest-grossing movies from the last five years have all received over 50% scores on Rotten Tomatoes.



Design by Marissa Yelenik. Source: Rotten Tomatoes

But these movies are, primarily, children's movies. Although 2018's Rampage received a rating of PG-13 and 2021's Mortal Kombat was rated R, the movies that really did well were the ones marketed to and intended for children.

So, have adaptations marketed to adults improved?

## TV Shows

To answer how adult-oriented content has changed, let's take a look at 2023's The Last of Us adaption, rated MA (meaning it is intended for an audience of 17 years old and up).



The Last of Us TV show and video game side by side. Source: TV Line

adapting some of the plot to be more palatable for a more general audience and more cohesive with the second game - which had not been planned until well after the release of the first game.

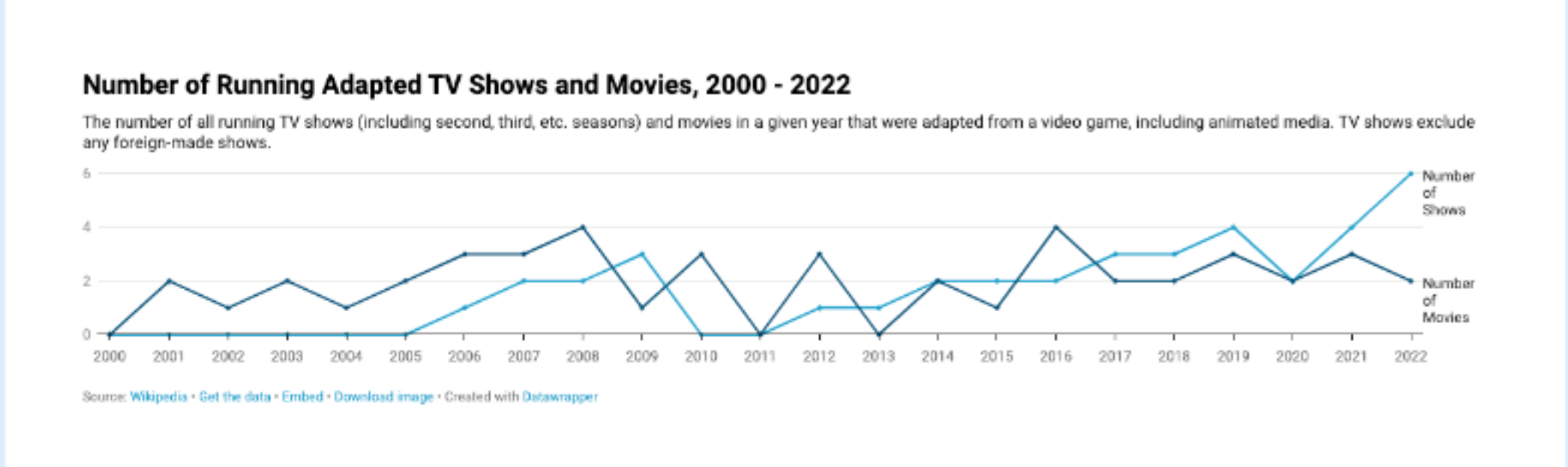
The show not only outweighed all other TV show premieres - excluding House of the Dragon, which rode on the coattails of the powerhouse that is Game of Thrones - but it also experienced a 76.9% increase in viewership between its premiere and finale, as displayed by data on [TV Series Finale](#). House of the Dragon experienced a decrease in viewership from its first to last episode.



Design by Marissa Yelenik

With a Rotten Tomatoes Score of a whopping 96% (and an audience score of 89%) the show can certainly be considered a success.

While video game to TV shows are a relatively recent development, with the industry typically sticking to movies, it's clear the time and care put into them is not overlooked. And with these increased ratings comes more attempts to be the next big show. In the past two years alone the number video game to TV shows running has spiked, while movies have stayed between two and three releases per year since 2017.



For a show like The Last of Us, it's clear one of the reasons it was able to do so well was the respect the show carried for the original game. The director of The Last of Us chose not only to pull certain scenes line-for-line from the game, but directly include the co-creator of the games - Neil Druckmann.

As time has passed, video game adaptations have gone from generalized movies with a random name slapped onto them to generate buzz to pieces of media that genuinely attempt to play to the strengths of cinema and develop an ongoing plot and story while including fanservice. As this continues the demand for these works has increased and begun to include mainstream viewers who can enjoy a plot they never would have been exposed to otherwise. While some works may lose some of their original magic in the shift to the big screen and streaming sites alike, the continued improvement in this genre allows audiences to hold hope for the future.