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Five Nights at Freddy's: **Forensic Fandom meets the Creepypasta**

Cassandra Barkman

Abstract

This article will argue the narrative of videogame horror franchise *Five Nights at Freddy's* can be understood as a combination of the fan engagement in forensic fandoms with that of the creepypasta. While each *Fight Nights at Freddy's* (*FNaF*) contains a straightforward contemporary narrative that follows the player trying to survive murderous animatronics in an enclosed environment, a dense and intentionally ambiguous overarching storyworld has been created across the franchise's many iterations. I will argue that *FNaF's* story takes advantage of embedded videogame narrative design (Jenkins; Ryan; Wood) common in horror videogames (Kirkland) to facilitate a mode of fan engagement that combines the forensic fandom experience of dissecting a complex serialised television show such as *Lost* and *Westworld* (Mittell) with the open-sourced, epistemic play often found in the online creation of creepypastas (Blank & McHeill; Balanzategui). Not only does *FNaF* deal with similar subject matter to creepypastas like the utilisation of nostalgia, temporality and the digital gothic (Balanzategui), but the ambiguous and abstract nature of its ongoing mythology encourages communities on Reddit and YouTube to collectively propose and extrapolate on fan theories in a process that combines the speculative nature of forensic fandoms with that of creepypasta story creation. *FNaF* therefore expands on understandings of forensic fan practices and how they relate to other modes of online storytelling.

Bio

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Introduction

On the 8th of August 2014, solo videogame developer Scott Cawthon released *Five Nights at Freddy's* (*FNaF*) (Scott Cawthon 2014) on PC. The point-and-click survival horror videogame was the latest in a long line of titles released by Cawthon and came in response to criticisms of his previous game *Chipper & Sons Lumber Co.* (Scott Cawthon 2013) having characters designed to be cute that instead unintentionally appear 'terrifying' and 'soulless' (Patricia Hernandez). Taking advantage of these designs, Cawthon pivoted towards making a game about being trapped in a pizzeria after dark trying to survive against, this time, intentionally 'terrifying' and 'soulless' animatronic suits.

The videogame quickly became a success, bolstered through various YouTube 'Lets Play' series that took advantage of the game's sheer difficulty and propensity for jump scares. Before 2014 ended, *Five Nights at Freddy's 2* (Scott Cawthon 2014) was released. Two more sequels followed in 2015. Fast forward to 2021 and the bona-fide franchise currently boasts ten 'main series' titles, two spin-offs, four different boardgames, two themed rides, a trilogy of novels, seven anthology books with four more on their way, a flurry of merchandise, and a long-gestating film adaptation. While Cawthon has not been the sole developer on the series for some time, he remains the creative, fiscal and legal controller of the franchise.

Betsy Brey (82) identifies three main factors for *FNaF's* initial success on YouTube: "the competing elements of humour and drama [in LetsPlay videos], the competition and challenge of the game, and the curiosity and mystery which formed a fan culture eager to create and labour for their fandom". While the first two factors also played a key role in the series' initial and ongoing success, this article will focus on the latter: the game's mystery and resulting fan responses. Since the first title onwards, the *Five Nights at Freddy's* (Scott Cawthon 2014-) series has facilitated an increasingly growing storyworld of dense and ambiguous mysteries that continues to motivate fans to unravel its web of connections and characters. Popular YouTube channel *The Game Theorists* to date has accumulated over 47 million views total across 40+ videos dedicated to dissecting the series alone.

This article argues *FNaF's* storytelling and fandom can be found at the juncture of two different concepts: Jason Mittell's (2015, 288) concept of the forensic fandom and the online, open-sourced creation of creepypastas. The narrative design of *FNaF* facilitates

highly ambiguous instances of videogame storytelling that encourages fans to 'drill' (Mittell 2012) down into the text and 'play' with the disparate fragments of narrative they find. This process combines the intense scrutiny often found in relation to complex television series with the open-sourced nature of creepypasta creation (Jessica Balanzategui). I argue this conflation positions *FNaF* as indicative of the ways online tools and fandom can blur the line between fan practices and collaborative story creation.

For brevity's sake I focus my analysis on the narrative design of the initial few videogames in the series and the narrative interpretations they afford. From there, I relate their narrative devices to common videogame storytelling techniques and identify how they position the player in the role of the detective. This form of engagement is then contrasted with the characteristics of the forensic fandom and how Mittell (2015, 288) describes fans 'drilling down' into a text to understand its complexity. I then relate *FNaF* as a series to the internet folklore storytelling style of the creepypasta, both through its subject matter and the way fan theories get disseminated across the internet akin to the way creepypastas are iterated and adjusted on through their retelling. Finally, the forensic fandom and the creepypasta are brought together through the characteristics of diegetic understimulation and collaborative storytelling. *FNaF* therefore represents an insightful case study into the overlaps between a form of fandom engagement and the online processes of folkloric storytelling.

The First Night at Freddy's

Five Nights at Freddy's follows Mike Schmidt, a newly hired a night security guard at fictional family pizza restaurant Freddy Fazbear's Pizza. Via voicemails left by Mike's predecessor, the player is told various aspects of Fazbear's history, including the fact the restaurant's four animatronic characters roam the hallways at night supposedly because their servomotors will lock up if made immobile for too long. He also warns that if Mike/the player were to encounter an animatronic, they would be mistaken for an animatronic exoskeleton and stuffed into a spare costume, killing them in the process. This sets up the stakes for the actual gameplay: the player must survive from midnight to 6am five nights in a row by keeping track of the four animatronics and managing limited electrical power to

turn lights on and shut doors to keep them away. Completing all five nights unlocks an even more difficult sixth night and completing that unlocks a seventh custom night that allows the player to adjust the AI difficulty of the animatronic characters. Mike's predecessor is seemingly killed recording the fourth voicemail, and once Mike completes the seventh custom night he is unceremoniously fired.

The way *FNaF* predominantly tells its story is both through the audio the player listens to each night, and via space. One of the more frequently identified means of videogame storytelling is through the embedding of narrative within a game space directly. The most cited instance of this comes from Henry Jenkins' (126) and his concept of the embedded narrative that turns the player into a form of detective parsing out clues 'embedded' in the environment.

> To continue with the detective example, one can imagine the game designer developing two kinds of narratives – one relatively unstructured and controlled by the player as they explore the game space and unlock its secrets; the other prestructured but embedded within the mise-en-scene awaiting discovery. The game world becomes a kind of information space, a memory palace.

Embedded narratives have also been discussed under various related terms, ranging from mystery games (Marie-Laure Ryan 352), the gnoseological plot (Britta Neitzel 235) and story exploration games (Hannah Wood 24). What each theory articulates is a narrative that exists across two temporalities: the contemporary experience of the player - in *FNaF's* case, Mike the security guard's experience - and a narrative awaiting discovery in the game's past. This past is discoverable akin to a mystery, scattered and fragmented across various semiotic textual elements that players can observe and piece together.

Horror games are especially enamoured with this storytelling method. Ewan Kirkland (67) while discussing the survival horror game genre notes the tendency for their spaces to be:

> Littered with narrative fragments in the form of newspaper articles, lab reports, photographs, diaries, audio cassettes, painted portraits and computer logs… In survival horror, everyone, it seems – research assistants, academics, mercenaries – keeps a journal.

While the game space of *FNaF* is limited, especially compared to the series' Kirkland discusses like *Resident Evil* (Capcom 1996-) and *Silent Hill* (Konami 1999-2014), a similar attention to embedding narrative in remediated fragments is present. While the player is unable to move from their location in the security booth, they can view other parts of the restaurant through cameras. Expanding the space's storytelling capacity is the fact that environmental details in the restaurant frequently and randomly change, revealing different newspaper clippings and semiotic clues that hint towards previous events in the storyworld. Notable in these clippings, and mentioned in the voicemails, is the incident known as the 'Bite of '87' during which an animatronic reportedly destroyed the frontal lobe of a child, leaving them in a vegetative state and ruining the reputation of the restaurant. Other important plot details include a man using one the animatronic suits to lure five children into a back room before killing them, and that the restaurant is set to close at the end of the year.

However, the way *FNaF* details these past events through various fragments creates numerous ambiguous narrative gaps. This is bolstered by other inexplicable narrative details in the first game: the constantly shifting game space, the repeated motif of the words 'it's me' on the security feed and walls, and the presence of a fifth animatronic known as 'Golden Freddy' that only appears after triggering a certain sequence of events and crashes the game if it kills the player. While the narrative experience of the player as Mike the security guard remains coherent and linear, it acts as a lens through which a second highly ambiguous and fragmented level of narrative exists – a narrative that arguably contributed to *FNaF's* early success by facilitating a 'forensic fandom' dedicated to solving its many mysteries.

Forensic Fandoms and Freddy

Forensic fandom is a concept defined by Mittell (2012, n.p.) in relation to what he calls 'complex television'. As he describes, "since the late 1990s, dozens of television series have broadened the possibilities available to small-screen storytellers to embrace increased seriality, hyperconscious narrative techniques such as voice-over narration and playful

chronology, and deliberate ambiguity and confusion". This deliberate ambiguity in televisual storytelling creates a mode of engagement he describes as 'drillability':

> [Complex television] encourage a mode of forensic fandom that invites viewers to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story and its telling. Such programs create magnets for engagement, drawing viewers into story worlds and urging them to drill down and discover more.

Mittell specifically discusses it in relation to complex series *Lost* (ABC 2004-2010) and its related fan wiki Lostpedia: "Lostpedians come together to decode episodes to theorise possible explanations, to play paratextual games, and to drawn connections among the broad range of episodes, transmedia extensions, and external cultural references". Forensic fandom and drillability is not a new concept, with Mittell (2012, n.p.) noting its existence in relation to serialised soap operas and sporting leagues that similarly encourage intense fan engagement and detail orientation, but contemporary complex television and the ability to take advantage of digital tools and forums has accelerated its presence around other media forms.

The parallels between *FNaF's* fan narrative engagement and forensic fandoms are overt. While the complexity of *FNaF's* storytelling manifests differently compared to television due the affordances of the videogame medium, the impact is similar: creating a central narrative experience that encourages fans to 'drill down' into the text to discover secrets and resolve narrative gaps collaboratively. These fans come together on similar forums, whether that be YouTube, the *FNaF* subreddit which at the time of writing has 254,000 subscribers, and various fan wikis that collate different fan theories and rumours together. Each game has seen a wide variety of fan theories emerge from the game's intentionally disparate narrative details, and the franchise's ability to facilitate a forensic fandom only accelerated when the storyworld became serialised across multiple entries or 'episodes'.

Five Nights at Freddy's 2 was released only three months after the original *FNaF* and follows a similar premise to the first game. The player takes control of a night security guard at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza and is instructed over the phone by an unknown employee each night to give advice and exposit some of the restaurant's backstory. The gameplay remains similar too, with the player having to survive from 12am to 6am while being hunted by

wandering animatronics, including remodelled versions of the four from the original game as well as several new additions. *FNaF 2* also introduces a new source of ambiguous narrativity in the form of rudimentary 'Atari-style' minigames that have a chance of playing every time the player is killed and involve acting out supposedly key events from the restaurant's past.

At the end of the game's fifth night, the player receives a cheque for their work that reveals the year to be 1987, thereby revealing *FNaF 2* as a prequel to the first game that takes place before the 'Bite of '87'. This represents the first foregrounding of the serialised connections between each game, a trend that would continue through *Five Nights at Freddy's 3* (Scott Cawthon 2015) being set thirty years after the first game and *Five Nights at Freddy's 4* (Scott Cawthon 2015) taking place first chronologically. *FNaF 2* also represents a further expansion of the first game's storyworld through clarifying some details while also introducing new ambiguities, such as the significance of two added animatronics dubbed 'the Puppet' and 'Balloon Boy'.

From *FNaF 2,* the series' storyworld continued to increase in breadth, with each new instalment contributing to and perpetuating the presence of a forensic fandom dedicated to piecing its disparate details into a coherent and overarching narrative. As Brey (84) describes, "the story is difficult to follow, hard to understand, indefinite and contentious; curated, conjected and collected by fans on wikis and in fan games rather than clearly created within the series and its spin-offs". This indeterminate storyworld has only been accentuated by creator Scott Cawthon, who has frequently made paratextual contributions via Reddit comments under his account 'u/animdude', engaging with *The Game Theorists'* YouTube channel, and hinting at future reveals through updates to his personal website (Dylan Siegler, 2017a; 2017b).

Contradictory details between games have also been an ongoing source of debate, implying a nebulous fluidity to the lore of the series and a potential lack of organisation or coherency behind the scenes. However, these contradictory details are less important than the engagement they facilitate. As Brey (84) describes, "it is easy to dismiss these struggles as caused by a lack of organisation on Cawthon's part, [but] authorial intention is less relevant to the discussion than is the community storytelling that occurs perhaps because of the lack of clarity". Whether these narrative contradictions are intentionally designed or not, they

continue to perpetuate and motivate the forensic fandom around the series, encouraging fans to further 'drill down' into the games to resolve their inherent inconsistencies.

The series' subject matter, fan practices and ambiguities however have also drawn comparisons with another form of horror digital storytelling, that of the creepypasta. Hernandez (n.p.) while trying to explain the game's ongoing success suggests "people hear about how scary the games are, and they can't help but want to see what the fuss is about. Creepypastas spread much in the same way". Brey (84) similarly suggests "the plot of the game's overarching narrative is arguably impossible to map out in a linear timeline, not unlike other Internet storytelling forms and folklore, such as Slenderman stories and other creepypastas". My next section will engage with these comparisons more critically by discussing the characteristics of the creepypasta and relating it to *FNaF.* I argue that, while there remain fundamental differences, *FNaF* represents many of the same thematic concerns of creepypastas and even possesses a similar 'claim to authenticity' via comparisons to real events. This forms the basis for bringing the forensic fandom and creepypasta together in how both are motivated by diegetic understimulation and collaborative storytelling.

Internet Folklore and Freddy

Jessica Balanzategui (188) traces the origins of creepypastas to the imageboard website 4chan and the concept of copypastas (a combination of 'copy' and 'paste'), content with "viral potential that is copied and pasted across numerous websites". Creepypastas, or copypastas with horror or gothic content, have been around since 2007 (Austin Considine n.p.). Balanzategui (189) compares creepypastas to folkloric storytelling traditions, describing it as an extension of "the practices of oral folk culture into the digital age". The most popular and well-known instance of a creepypasta is the Slender Man, likely due to the tragic crime in 2014 that resulted in mainstream media attention (Shira Chess and Eric Newsom 1), but there exists a long list of creepypasta stories that have found viral and mainstream success such as 'Smile Dog' and 'Candle Cove'.

Creepypastas often possess several key characteristics both in their subject matter and dissemination. While the origins of *FNaF* is clearly delineated from the online dissemination

of creepypastas, there are numerous parallels that can be drawn between both the game's content and online discourse. Beginning with content, Balanzategui (192) describes a subgenre of creepypasta she terms the 'digital gothic' that "deploys a consideration of the processes of nostalgia, troubled memory and the uncanny to interrogate the dialectic tensions between childhood and adulthood, and between current and obsolete media technologies". It connects childhood and adulthood as well as new and old media forms in a "fraught interplay between digital analogue aesthetics, narrative traditions and communicative modes" (193). Balanzategui uses 'Candle Cove' as an example in how it pivots on 'uncanny nostalgia' by taking the form of a faintly remembered and horrifying television series from the 1980s. The creepypasta is notable both for its subject matter and supposed claims for authenticity, with Balanzategui (2019, p. 195) describing it as positioning the reader in an "unsettled slip-zone between factual and fictional possibilities".

FNaF similarly embodies many of the thematic interests of the digital gothic. Freddy Fazbear's Pizza is based on the US restaurant chain 'Chuck E. Cheese Pizzeria', a comparison made overt via the franchise's similar use of animatronics to entertain children. Freddy Fazbear's represents a 'haunted nostalgia' for Chuck E. Cheese by twisting a remembered place for children into a literally haunted location in which many horrifying incidents such as the bite of '87, the murder of five children in the back room and more occur. It also possesses a similar preoccupation with obsolete media through the animatronics themselves, a relic now uncanny in their artificial lifelikeness. The Atari-style minigames from *FNaF 2* are also clearly reminiscent of a similar fixation with haunted nostalgia and childhood by using the pixelated images of videogame consoles in the 80s to depict horrific events in a family-friendly setting.

What is also notable for *FNaF's* connection to creepypastas and the digital gothic is the way the first game was approached with tenuous claims to authenticity. The first video about *FNaF* on popular YouTube channel *The Game Theorists* has over 26 million views at the time of writing and argues the first game is based off a horrifying shooting at a Chuck E. Cheese in Aurora, Colorado in 1993. The video outlines many parallels, ranging from Freddy Fazbear's Pizzeria clearly being inspired by Chuck E. Cheese, *FNaF 1* taking place in the early 90s, and the number of victims being identical to the number of animatronics. It ultimately suggests Mike the security guard is analogous with the original shooter, with the animatronics

representing the haunting machinations of his crime. This reading is accentuated by the various subjective and 'dreamlike' environmental details in the game, such as its constantly changing game space and the fifth animatronic, Golden Freddy, who appears like a ghostly hallucination and kicks the player from the game when it attacks.

This theory has never been confirmed by Cawthon nor does it explain the events of its many sequels, but the more significant point to take from such a claim is the implicit desire to connect *FNaF* to something authentic, to blur the boundaries between the fictional and factual to clarify its ambiguities. The allusions *FNaF* makes to real and nostalgic elements ties into the digital gothic both through similar thematic interests and how it, in the case of *The Game Theorist,* elicits a desire to connect it to reality. In making these connections, I do not attempt to disregard the many notable differences between *FNaF* and the creepyasta, most notably being its narrativity emerging from a commercial videogame as opposed to anonymous blog posts, but I do argue there is a similar preoccupation with nostalgia, old media forms and claims to authenticity in both.

This theory video as an example of a fan contributing to and reinterpreting *FNaF* as a text also alludes to the means through which the series is also affiliated with the dissemination of creepypastas. As Balanzategui (190) argues, "creepypasta stories usually have origin points in single-authored narratives, videos or images, as does the Slenderman … yet, locating these origin points often becomes very difficult once a creepypasta story becomes viral in part because the original creator was either pseudonymous or anonymous". As Chess and Newsom (102) also note, "being the original source for a text is not privileged – the creepypasta community expects stories to be shared, cut and pasted, and passed around online without a clear record of authorship". Creepypastas are thus nebulously authored narratives, spread digitally and reinterpreted and readjusted as they move from one site and user to the next.

While *FNaF* as a central and thus privileged text inevitably changes how this process of dissemination works, the way fans contribute to and expand the series' lore through fan theories that spread and change across the internet are not dissimilar in form to the way creepypastas disseminate. For the rest of this article, I explore how this overlap combines the practices of forensic fandoms and creepypastas into a fan community that participates in a form of collaborative storytelling while still being invested in a central text. Critical to

this overlap is how *FNaF* takes advantage of diegetic understimulation to create stories riddled with gaps that get filled and contributed to by a collaborative network of fans who, in doing so, are essentially writing a form of creepypasta based on an original text.

Forensic Fans, Creepypastas, and Freddy

As already outlined, *FNaF* takes advantage of videogame storytelling practices to create a highly ambiguous and fragmented narrative that the player is incentivised to piece together. Central to *FNaF's* forensic fandom is narrative gaps – unanswered questions or intentional holes in the storyworld. Each new title satisfies some narrative gaps while adding others in a perpetual process of piecing together a jigsaw that is growing increasingly larger. I argue that *FNaF's* approach to storytelling can be surmised under the description of diegetic understimulation: intentionally providing limited or partial information regarding the series' diegesis or world. Diegetic understimulation has been discussed in relation to both complex cinema (Miklós Kiss and Steven Willemsen 45) and complex television (Mittell 2015 4) before and describes films and shows that neglect redundant exposition in favour of complex narrative innovations.

Diegetic understimulation is arguably also part of the appeal of creepypastas. Gabe Cohn (n.p.) outlines the origins and legacy of the Slender Man in the *New York Times* and through various interviews concludes that "Slender Man is scary not because of what you know about him but because of what you don't know". Creators of web series about the Slender Man describe him as "ambiguous" and a "trifecta of unknowables", with Cohn referring to him as a "blank canvas for our fears but also for online storytelling". The origin of the Slender Man is a post in the Something Awful forums back in 2009 by Eric Knudsen under the pseudonym Victor Surge that only includes a single doctored image and a short text excerpt. From there, the character was expanded on and contributed to by various other posters on Something Awful, often through inserting the character into other images across history. The first webseries based on the Slender Man came later than month from film student Troy Wagner who saw the posts and created a series titled 'Marble Hornets'. When asked about Slender Man's appeal as a subject for a webseries, Wagner said "it was the fact that it was vague… I think that's why people jumped on it". 'Marble Hornets' was the first of

many adaptations of the Slender Man 'mythos', but its initial inspiration speaks to the narrative characteristics of early creepypastas. The 'vagueness' and ambiguity of the original blog post allowed for a process of expansion and collaboration by subsequent posters and creators, expanding the original text into a complex digital network of collaborative storytelling.

I argue the original Slender Man, and creepypastas more generally, thrive on diegetic understimulation. Providing minimal narrative information allows subsequent contributors to fill those gaps and expand upon the original mythology in novel directions. The same process of contribution arguably occurs in *FNaF's* forensic fandom. Fan theorists function as subsequent authors that 'step in' to contribute to and resolve the intense diegetic understimulation of *FNaF's* storyworld, filling gaps and expanding on the original games. Fan theories are also often picked up by other fans and spread like copypastas across wikis, Reddit and YouTube while constantly being added to and adjusted. The storyworld of *FNaF* is thus made up of a combination of central texts and fan speculation intertwined together in an ever-expanding complex narrative.

In arguing that *FNaF* facilitates a combination of forensic fandom and creepypasta practices, I necessarily must acknowledge conflicting elements between the two. Most notable is the question of authorship – whereas creepypastas frequently disregard the privileging of original authorship, Scott Cawthon from the series' inception has been perceived as the sole 'showrunner/author' at the series' centre. Fan theories are frequently defined in relation to him and his intentions, attempting to 'finish' a narrative initially started by him. This implicit hierarchy between fan theories and core 'canon' is alluded to by Mittell's (2009 5) analysis of fan wiki for complex series *Lost,* Lostpedia, and its policy to break pages into either "canon, semicanon, and noncanon". This implies that "ultimate authority rests with the authors, both creative and industrial – if it comes out via ABC or from the mouths of producers, it is canonical". The intensified ambiguity of *FNaF's* storytelling means that definitive statements as to what is 'canon' are far less frequent, but there are several instances of subsequent instalments confirming or denying previously popular fan theories.

However, it can also be argued that *FNaF's* implicit narrative hierarchy is made more fluid due to the more collaborative relationship Cawthon has facilitated with the community through his ongoing engagement, reddit posts and comments on fan theories. The most

overt example of this more fluid dynamic is best surmised by the official *Freddy Files* (Cawthon 2019) handbook for the series that officially acknowledges the presence and significance of fan theories to the franchise without actively confirming or denying them, perhaps making them what Lostpedia refers to as 'semicanon'. However, this example does illustrate the potential for tension in this fluid hierarchy, especially regarding labour and the potential for exploitation (Brey 73). Though it is not within this article's scope to consider this point further, Cawthon has previously accidentally used fan art to promote one of his games, an incident that is challenging in its exploitative potential while also being illustrative of how intertwined 'official' and 'fan' content tends to be.

I should also clarify that this dynamic between forensic fandoms and creepypasta storytelling is far from exclusive to *FNaF* in videogames – *Bendy and the Ink Machine* (Kindly Beast 2017-2018) and its episodic release is another serialised horror example – but it does remain one of the most successful 'indie' game franchises in recent memory and thus an illustrative example of a series that both facilitates and blurs together different fan practices. There are also numerous other precedents to both its storytelling and method of fan engagement across other media and fandoms such as the complex television series discussed by Mittell (2015) as well as the tendency to expand upon established storyworlds through fan fiction practices. Indeed, fan games that remix and add new characters to the *FNaF* mythos are common and a key part of wider fan engagement beyond theorisation (Brey). However, I would argue that *FNaF's* culture of fan theories typically remains distinct from fan fiction and these fan games in how they respond directly to the narrative challenges posed by the original texts as opposed to simply adding to them, but it is a parallel that should still be acknowledged.

Conclusion

Five Nights at Freddy's may have come out of nowhere in 2014 and its continued longevity can be attributed to several factors, but it is also undeniable that its challenging and fan-engaging storyworld remains a key part of that success. The foundation for the storyworld, the original videogames, utilise the affordances of videogame storytelling to create highly ambiguous and fragmented narratives that leave multiple gaps that are subsequently filled

in and expanded on by a collective and collaborative community. This community possesses the characteristics of both Mittell's (2012; 2015) forensic fandom, as well as the thematic and dissemination tendencies of the online mode of storytelling known as the creepypasta (Balanzategui; Chess & Newsom).

While forensic fandoms are not a new phenomenon, recent decades have led to the creation of digital tools that facilitate new fan practices, and *FNaF* is arguably a continuation of this trend. Its forensic fandom has transitioned to the point of creating their own narratives to fill in the stories of the games, expanding them outwards toward new directions and possibilities. It has also begun to further blur the boundaries between traditional commercial narratives and the various fan contributions they afford. *Five Nights at Freddy's* therefore represents a combination of forensic fandom practices and collaborative and open-sourced creepypasta storytelling, creating a game series and fandom that are interwoven together through an ever-expanding complex storyworld.

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