

'Free Guy' Doesn't Play Around When It Comes to Delivering a Good Time

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on August 13, 2021 - 6:43pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Playing video games is one of the single most infuriating experiences that I continue to put myself through. One of my few masochistic traits emerge whenever I boot up my PC or PS4, and that's because I always feel the need to play every game on the most difficult setting. This leads to a seemingly endless cycle of fighting, killing, dying, and then starting all over and trying again. Einstein said it best when he gave us his definition of what constitutes "insanity," and if he were alive today he would likely diagnose my attempt to beat any *Dark Souls* game on the hardest difficulty as just that. There's a great level of satisfaction in beating that cycle and reaching the end, which is something video game-influenced film *Free Guy* knows a thing or two about.

Whether it's an Indie or Triple-A level game, the substance will always outshine the visual elements. In this film's case, they have plenty of both to spare. Together, director Shawn Levy and writers Matt Lieberman and Zak Penn, blend their respective talents in such a skillful way that this story feels layered with both comedy and heart. There is a surprising amount of nuance involved considering the filmmakers have to juggle two worlds and several character arcs. That is not to say that the storylines are anything next-gen worthy, but we get more than we expect from this Ryan Reynolds-produced feature, considering what we got with the last film he was the lead in, *Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard*. One of the most gratifying elements of the film was how accurately they crafted a live-action version of an open-world video game. It was obviously oversimplified so as to not alienate people who don't play video games, but at no moment does it talk down to the veteran gamers.



Photo credit: 20th Century Studios

The attention to detail in blending the game's world with the real world was filled with background jokes that kept you from fully realizing just how long this film really is. Gags like characters running into walls like they're trying to go through them, jumping in place nonstop, and even the player-favorite gesture of tea-bagging. The visual style felt reminiscent of *Ready Player One*, but instead of trying to cram pop culture references down our digital throats, *Free Guy* peppers them throughout for maximum effect, so when you encounter some of the major cameos and references, they do a superhero landing rather than a belly flop. The inclusion of existing technology gives us an added layer of realism, especially since many of us don't need the in-game glasses to experience gaming when we already have several AR games within phone's reach.

In video games, accuracy is everything so it makes sense that the same logic would apply to the hit rate of the comedy. This is yet another vehicle for Ryan Reynolds to showcase his charm and wit, likely delivering many of the best one-liners as improv. The problem with his films typically comes in the form of relying solely on Reynolds to bring all the humor instead of setting and building up moments for him to deliver devastating *Deadpool*-like humor. Luckily, this wasn't too much of a problem, especially since he can share the screen with seasoned comedians like Lil Rel Howery and Taika Waititi. This is still very much Reynolds' world, but in this case, we're just happy to be living in it.



Photo credit: 20th Century Studios

The laughs, like the story, are solid, but the true draw to this tale is the layer of pathos that keeps us invested in this world. There is a decently

developed love triangle between Ryan Reynolds', Jodie Comer's, and Joe Kerry's characters. This very easily could have taken the otaku/*Her*-esque route where our love for technology becomes our LOVE for technology, but it never submerges itself into that taboo. Not to say that having a virtual relationship with an AI that looks like Ryan Reynolds would ever be a bad thing, but it becomes questionable when you consider that the relationship would technically be between mother and child. We are at least given a better message to compensate for that, and it revolves around the nature of gaming these days.

Many are still dealing with the problems of GamerGate, and with more information coming out about the abused staff at major video game developer Activision Blizzard, this film's message is exceedingly timely. *Free Guy* both pokes fun at and spotlights the toxicity that has taken over several gaming communities. This includes the toxic culture that exists at the very places where these games originate, likely contributing to this vicious cycle. The film takes a soft stance by reminding veteran gamers of what made them fall in love with gaming to begin with, and that's the (non-violent) sense of wonder and exploration of a world with unlimited potential and possibilities. Although their take is far less than scathing as it should be, it suits this summer popcorn flick just fine.

"Free Guy" in theaters on August 13th. Featuring Ryan Reynolds, Lil Rel Howery, Jodie Comer, Joe Kerry, Utkarsh Ambudkar, Taika Waititi, and Channing Tatum. Directed by Shawn Levy. Written by Matt Lieberman and Zak Penn. Rated "PG-13"



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By [JON ESPINO](#) [23]
Film & Television Show Critic
[HollywoodChicago.com](#)
jon@hollywoodchicago.com [22]

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