

Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: The Last of Us Part II

Platform: Playstation 4 and Playstation 5

Genre: Third-person shooter, stealth

Release Date: June 19, 2020

Developer: Naughty Dog

Publisher: Sony Interactive Entertainment

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Neil Druckmann

Overview

The Last of Us Part II takes place in a post-apocalyptic America. A fungus called Cordyceps has mutated to control humans, creating zombie-like creatures known as infected which destroyed all order and splintered the world into warring factions. In the game, a teenage girl's father figure, Joel, is brutally killed, and she sets out on a mission to avenge his murderer. This takes her down a dark path of death and destruction where she must question how much she's willing to pay to achieve her vengeance.

Characters

- **The Fireflies** – A terrorist organization who fought for their vision of a better future. Although they were violent, they were optimistic and had the greatest progress towards a vaccine for the infection. However, they were forced to disband and are now scattered across America.
- **The Infected** – Former humans controlled by a fungus known as the Cordyceps. They hunt and kill mindlessly in an attempt to infect others.
- **The Washington Liberation Front (WLF)** – An incredibly well-organized militant organization which controls much of Seattle.
- **The Seraphites (Scars)** – A large faction at war with the WLF over control of Seattle. Driven by the strict principles of their religion, which is predicated on the writings of a prophet. They have a well-developed society on an island near Seattle.
- **Ellie** – The player character for most of the game and the only known person who is immune from the infection. Ellie grew up with the Fireflies and was shaped by the traumas of the post-apocalyptic world. When she was 14, the Fireflies hired Joel to smuggle her across America so that she could be used for development of

- a vaccine. During that journey, Joel and Ellie became very close, and now they live like father and daughter in the town of Jackson.
- **Joel** – The player character for most of the first game. Joel lost his daughter at the beginning of the outbreak, then lived as a mercenary for many years. In this time, he became hardened and selfish, only looking out for his own well-being and killing remorselessly. Now, his relationship with Ellie has made him kinder and brought back his humanity.
 - **Abby** – The player character for part of the second game. Abby is a former Firefly whose dad was killed by Joel during the first game. Now, she is an accomplished WLF soldier with incredible strength and prowess in battle. She is often too loyal, and as a result she operates more as a mindless killing machine than an empathetic human. She still hates Joel for what he did and will stop at nothing to get revenge.
 - **Tommy** – Joel's brother, who formerly worked with him as a mercenary. Fed up with that brutal lifestyle, he became a Firefly and disconnected with Joel for many years. Eventually, he quit the Fireflies to run the town of Jackson with his wife Maria.
 - **Dina** – Ellie's girlfriend. charming, kind, and supportive of Ellie throughout her journey.
 - **Jesse** – Ellie's friend, Dina's ex-boyfriend, and the biological father of her child.
 - **Owen** – A former Firefly and Abby's closest friend. Empathetic and understanding towards Scars, he defects from the WLF and plans to join the movement to reform the Fireflies.
 - **Lev** – A defected Seraphite boy who was disowned for coming out as transgender.

Breakdown

Before breaking down *The Last of Us Part II*, it is critical to understand its predecessor, 2013's *The Last of Us*. Although it covers many themes, to me the *Last of Us* is really about understanding others. Joel and Ellie initially resent each other, but they eventually learn to love each other. The world is defined by brutal factions which can't understand each other and resort exclusively to violence to solve problems. This theme is epitomized by the game's climax. Joel has spent months smuggling Ellie across the United States so the Fireflies can use her immunity to develop a vaccine for the infection, but he ultimately realizes that the operation they plan to perform upon her will be fatal. The player must then control Joel as he battles through the hospital in an attempt to save her, eventually facing the surgeon who is preparing to operate on (and in doing so kill) Ellie. At this moment, the game forces the player to kill that surgeon. That lack of choice is incredibly stark; most of *The Last of Us*' encounters can be completed in many different ways, yet in this moment the game takes away all choice and demands that the player understand Joel. On a purely intellectual level, it would be completely evil to kill the doctor. One life would be saved, but the possibility of a vaccine would be lost forever. However, the game needs the player to understand Joel as a broken man who has lost a

daughter before and refuses to lose one again, so it forces them to pull the trigger and end mankind's chances at a vaccine.

In my opinion, the best sequels capture the essence of their predecessor and present it in a new and creative way. This is why *The Last of Us II* succeeds so greatly to me; its narrative is wholly imbued with the concepts of understanding and empathy, and it expands on them in unbelievably powerful ways.

The game begins nearly immediately after its predecessor. Joel and Ellie have returned to the town of Jackson, which is run by Joel's brother Tommy, where they now live relatively peacefully. Joel gives Ellie a guitar he made for her and says he'll start teaching her how to play. This scene's heartwarming nature establishes that although Joel and Ellie's relationship has certainly been shaken up, it remains intact. The game then immediately cuts to five years later. Ellie and Joel are now fully integrated into the community at Jackson, although their relationship appears to have weakened considerably; Ellie is reluctant to talk about Joel, and they don't interact at all in the opening hours of the game. Ellie teams up with Dina, her new girlfriend, to patrol the nearby mountains for infected.

The game then surprisingly cuts to an entirely new character, named Abby, who is traveling through the mountains near Jackson with a group of friends. Their intentions are unclear, but Abby mentions that they're looking for somebody. As she goes to scout out the path ahead, a sudden blizzard brings hordes of infected and forces her to run for her life. In a moment of intense need, she runs into Joel and Tommy, who save her from the horde. Joel's actions here exemplify how his character has changed since the beginning of the first game; he might have once been skeptical and cruel towards strangers, although he is now willing to lend a hand in a perilous situation. Abby, Joel, and Tommy flee on horseback, ultimately taking shelter in the abandoned mansion occupied by Abby's crew. Once they are safe inside, Tommy introduces Joel and himself. Suddenly, Abby becomes hostile, shooting Joel in the knee as the others restrain Tommy. Without explanation, Abby grabs a golf club and begins brutally beating Joel. Yet, before this scene can end, the game suddenly cuts back to Ellie, who realizes Joel has gone missing in the snowstorm. She tracks him to the abandoned mansion, although she is caught off guard and disarmed. Then, Abby's friends hold Ellie to the ground as Abby beats Joel to death.

The way the player's control shifts throughout this sequence punctuates the player's rage towards Abby in this moment. As the player controls Abby, they gain a sense for her desperate situation and thus see Joel as a hero when he saves her. Then, when the game switches back to Ellie's perspective, the experience is even more desperate. The player and Ellie alike are rushing to save Joel from his horrifying fate, and the sense that they may yet have some control causes the tension to rise. This also provides some time for the player to process what is going on and makes Joel's demise even more frustrating. This all comes together to make the player's blood boil with rage and gets them completely on board when Ellie decides to track down and kill Abby for what she's done.

The game, however, does not want to immediately pay off this rage. Instead, it forces the player to follow along as Ellie mourns Joel's death and fights for permission to pursue his murderers. Eventually, Tommy goes on his own to hunt down Abby, which gets Ellie and Dina permission to catch up to him and provide assistance. The game then

jumps to many months later, where Ellie and Dina have tracked Abby to Seattle. The text “Seattle Day 1” appears on screen, setting the stage for the time-hopping that the game will do later on. The player must then methodically climb walls, search for supplies, and open gates as they work their way into the city. The gameplay opens up in these sections, allowing the player to take their time and get comfortable with the systems. Notably, however, nothing about this segment directly pays off the player’s rage towards Abby. The game wants the player to feel worn out and frustrated by this adventure. It wants them to know that Ellie’s revenge won’t be quick and easy.

The game also uses this time to flesh out the relationship between Ellie and Dina. Their relationship is very cute and they clearly love each other a fair bit. This positions Dina as an alternative to revenge; Ellie could always give up her mission and live a happy life with Dina. This conundrum is only deepened when Dina reveals that she’s pregnant, since Ellie has even more to lose. This section of the game also begins to develop the WLF, the group which controls much of Seattle and to which Abby belongs. The player can observe their power and control through graffiti, notes, and an abundance of abandoned equipment. Ellie and Dina eventually find some WLF who appear to have been tortured by Tommy. Knowing they’re on the right track and not far behind him, they proceed further into the city.

In their first direct confrontation with the WLF, Ellie is captured and nearly killed. Dina helps her break free, but to escape they must kill many WLF. Notably, in this first engagement, Ellie is placed in a situation where she has no other option but to kill WLF. However, Ellie’s actions steadily become harder and harder to justify. For a significant portion of the game, she tracks and kills each member of the group who helped Abby kill Joel. The lengths to which she goes grow more extreme, and the entire game grows more chaotic accordingly. This is where the player’s relationship with Ellie begins to become more complicated. On one hand, the more chaotic and brutal battles are more fun, so the player is likely excited by her rash decision making. However, Ellie’s brutality is hard to watch and puts the moral valence of her quest into question. Where the game once wanted the player align with Ellie’s hate for Abby, it now wants them to question whether her actions are worth it. Overall, this ordeal gets quite exhausting. The game’s slow pacing and brutal gameplay makes the player feel how costly this quest is, both on Ellie’s mental state and on the lives of WLF.

The game also uses this section to explore Ellie’s relationship with Joel. Each night when Ellie goes to sleep, the player sees a flashback. The first of these three flashbacks is an incredibly sweet scene where Joel takes Ellie to a ruined museum for her birthday. This scene reminds the player how much Ellie and Joel loved each other, and hence feeds their hatred of Abby. The next flashback is similar, although it ends on a tense note. Ellie asks Joel what really happened at the Fireflies’ hospital, and Joel perpetuates his lie. However, Ellie sees straight through it this time and decides to look into what actually happened. In the final flashback, the player sees that Ellie returned to the hospital and uncovered the truth. Understandably, she is infuriated with Joel; not only did he lie to her repeatedly, but he killed the world’s chances for a vaccine. These flashbacks remind the player how evil Joel really was to begin with, further putting into question how worthwhile his revenge is. However, they also demonstrate Ellie’s

hypocrisy. She hated Joel for the violence he committed to save her, but she is now going to similar lengths just to avenge him.

Ellie's cruelty comes to its peak in "Seattle Day 3". The player must control her as she traverses the roaring white-water rivers which have overtaken Seattle's streets, battles the most advanced forms of infected, and engages in the largest and most challenging battles. This day ends when Ellie tracks and kills Owen, who was opposed to the way Abby killed Joel and convinced the group to spare Ellie. She also kills Mel, who Ellie later realizes is pregnant. This finally makes Ellie realize her mission is too cruel to continue. She reunites with Tommy, with whom she reluctantly decides to return to Jackson without searching further for Abby.

At this point, the game is intentionally unsatisfying. It knows that the player wants to avenge Joel, but it also wants the player to understand that the cost of that goal is simply too great to justify. But, as Ellie, Dina, Jesse (their friend and the biological father of Dina's unborn child), and Tommy prepare to leave Seattle, Abby breaks into their hideout and confronts them. She pins Tommy to the ground, kills Jesse, and disarms Ellie. In a traditional three-act structure, this would mark the beginning of the third act, where the main characters find themselves in the worst possible situation and must fight their way back in an epic conclusion. But *The Last of Us II* doesn't want the player to feel excited or exhilarated by Ellie's success. It instead wants them to understand and empathize, even in the most impossible situation. Thus, the game cuts away from this climactic scene.

The player must then play through Abby's story. It turns out that her dad was the surgeon that Joel (and thus the player) killed in the first game to save Ellie, and Abby killed Joel as revenge for that. After a flashback reveals this information to the player, they most likely expect that the game will cut back to the confrontation with Ellie now that they've learned Abby's basic motivations. But again, that would be too simple. The game doesn't just expect the player to accept Abby as a shallow hero who was in the right all along. Instead, the text "Seattle Day 1" appears on screen, indicating that the player will now experience the three days in which Ellie murders all Abby's friends from Abby's perspective.

Throughout this extensive gameplay sequence, Abby becomes a deep character with flaws and complex relationships. She is often cold and obsessive, prioritizing the WLF and her own gain over others. This is shown through her relationship with one of the most important characters in her story, Owen. He is more compassionate and understanding than Abby, although he cares much less about authority and resents his role in the WLF. Abby and Owen appear to have some ongoing romantic tension, although they never quite manage a full-on relationship.

Abby's story is also prominently defined by the Seraphites (also called the Scars), a faction at war with the WLF. The Scars' actions are based around their own religion and they communicate through whistles, although beyond that aesthetic layer they are functionally quite similar to the WLF. Owen sees this reality and empathizes with the Scars, but Abby does not; she hates them and kills mercilessly.

Abby spends her first day trying to find Owen, who has mysteriously shot one of the WLF's own soldiers and disappeared. Abby knows he'll hide out at the aquarium, so she sneaks out to try to talk some reason into him. Throughout all of this, the player

controls Abby and experiences her prowess in battle. Her melee attacks are significantly stronger than Ellie's and the WLF's extensive arsenal means that she has much greater firepower at her disposal. This makes Abby's combat more action-packed than Ellie's, which is critical to keeping the player engaged throughout this lengthy sequence that is largely disconnected from Ellie's story. On her journey to the aquarium, Abby is captured by the Scars and only survives because she is saved by two young defectors, Lev and Yara. Abby eventually reaches Owen, where he explains that he's done working for the WLF and wants to sail to Santa Barbara where the Fireflies are supposedly reforming. They get into a heated fight over this which ends when Owen criticizes Abby for having killed Joel.

Abby clearly gains some kind of new ambition from this exchange. She dreams of Yara and Lev hanging on nooses in a forest, and wakes up knowing that she needs to help them. Upon reuniting with them, she discovers that Yara's arm has compartment syndrome and must be amputated. Owen's ex-girlfriend, Mel, is a doctor who offers to do the operation, although she needs medical supplies to do so safely. Lev offers to guide Abby through the Scars' network of high-up bridges to quickly reach the hospital and find the necessary supplies. Thus, Abby and Lev embark on an excursion which lasts many real-life hours, through which they show their fears and flaws and grow closer together. Lev teaches Abby about the ways of the Scars, helping her understand a society she had previously unquestionably hated. Abby also reveals her fear of heights, which breaks down her typically stone-cold exterior as they traverse the precarious bridges suspended between Seattle's skyscrapers. The sheer scale of this simple excursion makes the player buy into Abby's character and her protectiveness over Lev. At some point, the player is bound to forget about Ellie and just get caught up in Abby's drama. Eventually, she prevails and returns with Lev to the aquarium, where Mel safely amputates Yara's arm.

Abby's experience with Lev and Yara makes her realize the malevolence of the WLF, so she decides to sail to Santa Barbara with Owen, Lev, and Yara. However, upon learning that the WLF are planning a major attack on the Scars' island, Lev steals Abby's boat and goes straight to the battle in an attempt to save his mother. Abby and Yara decide to go after him, knowing his mother will never leave and afraid he may get caught in the battle. Much like the excursion to the hospital, this is a significant ordeal – Abby and Yara travel to the harbor, find a boat, travel to the island, sneak across the island, and ultimately find Lev. Yet, the battle has just begun and now they're stuck in the middle of it. Abby becomes a target of the WLF when they discover she's helping Scars, so she experiences their destructive power firsthand as she escapes through the fiery battlefield. Yara is killed during the escape, but Lev and Abby survive.

After all this chaos, Abby returns only to find Owen and Mel dead at the hands of Ellie. Abby had just nearly escaped to a better life with Owen, but Ellie swooped in at the last possible moment and ruined that. Enraged, Abby tracks Ellie back to her hideout and the game finally catches up to the confrontation it cut away from earlier. The narrative now steps into an area of incredible moral ambiguity. On one hand, Ellie is clearly in the wrong. She killed countless innocent people in pursuit of Abby, who the player has most likely grown to like and understand on some level. Plus, although Abby is still evil for having killed Joel, the player now knows why and sees that she has begun to change. On

the other hand, the player is certainly quite attached to Ellie. The game's first act made the player vehemently hate Abby for what she did to Joel, and although Ellie's revenge mission may have gone too far, she's now given up and intends to return to Jackson to live peacefully with Dina.

At this point, the game has an opportunity to resolve happily. It's crystal clear that both characters would be better off if they simply didn't fight. But at this moment, both characters feel an intense hate towards each other, and the game needs the player to understand that. So, however hard it might be, the game forces the player to control Abby as she fights Ellie. This is brutal, not just visually but emotionally. The player must experience the horrifying consequences of their violence in real time as they attempt to kill someone they have a deep connection with. Abby ultimately gains the upper hand in this battle, and as she prepares to finish off Ellie and Dina in a fit of rage, Lev simply calls Abby's name. Just looking at Lev, an innocent child who she would've killed indiscriminately mere days ago, Abby realizes what the player has known all along: Ellie and Dina are real people, and although she will never experience their story like the player has, it couldn't be worth it to murder them.

The story picks up months later. Abby and Lev have sailed to Santa Barbara to search for Fireflies while Ellie and Dina live in a cute farmhouse where they're raising Dina's baby. This could be the melancholic ending where both parties have decided violence isn't the best option, but yet again, it's not that simple. Ellie still experiences PTSD from Joel's death, and it's clear she can't accept that Abby gets to live. Tommy visits Ellie to deliver rumors about Abby's whereabouts, and Ellie feels compelled to go after her. The game's final segment, where Ellie tracks Abby through Santa Barbara, is truly exhausting. The story feels like it has ended twice, yet it keeps on going. This makes the player experience Ellie's pain. Her mission is not glorious; it is draining and grotesque and ultimately void of any meaning, and the game's structure communicates that through its apparent endlessness.

Ellie eventually finds Abby and Lev enslaved by a group who controls Santa Barbara. Abby is in an unrecognizable state – her hair has been sheared off, she is covered in cuts and bruises, and her bulky figure has been reduced to a far more meager one. Ellie is not in great shape herself – she's been stabbed in the stomach and her journey has clearly left her fatigued. Abby doesn't want to fight, but Ellie still needs revenge so that she can finally feel at peace. In this moment, the story has grown so perfectly ambiguous that a player could reasonably pick any side. But as Ellie holds a knife at Lev's throat and forces Abby to fight, the player must understand the trauma that Ellie has experienced. They are obliged to take switchblade swings blocked only by Abby's arms and mash square to hold Abby's head underwater as she flails her arms desperately.

In this final moment of violence, Joel's face appears in Ellie's mind. In this single moment, Ellie finally has some epiphany which makes her release Abby. This is left so ambiguous that each player could find their own reason why Ellie decides not to kill Abby in this moment. As Abby and Lev boat into the distance in pursuit of something new, Ellie is left broken and alone. She returns to her farmhouse and Dina is gone. As she goes through her belongings, she finds the guitar that Joel gave her at the beginning of the game. This triggers a flashback which, at least to me, explains why Ellie let Abby go

(see "Highlight"). Ellie then leaves the guitar, taking only a small bag of things as she walks away from the house. The player can only hope that Ellie and Abby alike are going towards something better as the credits roll.

Strongest Element

The Last of Us II masterfully expands upon the themes of understanding and empathy explored in the first game. Abby's story is all about understanding; she gains empathy for the Scars after meeting Yara and Lev, thus realizing that she doesn't want to fight for the WLF anymore. Lev is ousted from the Seraphites because he cannot be understood. Ellie's story is defined by a lack of understanding. She only grows more and more vicious throughout the game, and she even misunderstands what will bring peace to her own mind (see "Highlight"). And, most importantly, the player must understand these characters every step of the way, pushing the buttons which progress their stories, for better and for worse.

Unsuccessful Element

The game cuts straight from the unresolved confrontation between Ellie and Abby to Abby's entire story. This leaves the player with the hanging question of how that scene will play out. This is partially effective, since the player will want to see how this conflict resolves so they'll be motivated to complete Abby's story. However, that is ultimately a hollow motivation which leads the player astray; if the player's real motivation for playing Abby's story is to see what happens to Ellie, they'll rush through it. Plus, it'll be more and more frustrating as they come to realize Abby's section lasts roughly seven hours – that's a long time to wait just to see how one scene ends. I think that this made many players miss the finer details of Abby's story since they were so focused on getting back to Ellie's. However, Abby's story is full of complex characters and dramatic situations, making it plenty compelling on its own. If Ellie's story had simply ended before her confrontation with Abby, this issue would be circumvented. Ellie's story would have supposedly concluded with her return to Jackson and the player would likely be excited by the prospect of viewing the game's events through a different perspective. The beginning of Abby's section could also be restructured. Currently, it begins with roughly 30 minutes of backstory and world building before the player sees any combat. However, if it began with Abby's action-packed gameplay, the player would have an immediate reason to continue playing her story.

Highlight

In that final moment where Ellie decides to let Abby live, she sees Joel in her mind. More specifically, she sees a shot from the game's final flashback, which implies that she's actually remembering that specific moment. On the surface, this flashback is just a cute final reminder of the relationship Joel and Ellie once had. Yet, to me it's the

perfect explanation why Ellie let Abby go. In the flashback, Joel expresses that he's happy for Ellie to have Dina. Their conversation also touches on how protective Joel is of Ellie. In this way, Joel is telling future Ellie that he wouldn't want her to go on this reckless revenge mission in his name. Instead, he'd want her to live happily with Dina. The flashback also ends with Ellie saying that she'd like to forgive Joel for saving her from the Fireflies. This, too, is a message to her future self. She needs to realize that people are not defined by their single most heinous act, and just as Joel can be forgiven for killing the Fireflies, Abby can be forgiven for killing Joel. Instead of mindlessly killing to drown her regrets, Ellie decides to remember what Joel really wanted for her: a peaceful life, full of love and free from the senseless violence that defined him.

Critical Reception

The Last of Us II had a glowing critical reception. It received numerous perfect scores, often being called a masterpiece, and went on to win Game of the Year, Best Game Direction, and Best Narrative at The Game Awards 2020. The game it set out to play with players' hearts clearly worked; In his 10/10 review for God is a Geek, Adam Cook writes, "I've never felt so conflicted over something a game has shown me, or asked me to do. I was pressing buttons and not wanting to press buttons, and there are multiple moments that left me desperate, begging for anything but that to happen... but it does". In his 10/10 review for IGN, Jonathan Dornbrush says, "It takes a deft hand to write characters like this; those I wanted the best for even if they were doing despicable things. Some of the choices the characters made in Part 2 delighted me, others frustrated me, but I always wanted them to be better, and stronger, and see the goodness in themselves. In this regard, they felt incredibly human". In these quotes, it's clear to see how well received this game's narrative was. It was widely praised for its authentic characters, bold plot, and thrilling emotional rollercoaster.

However, the game did receive lots of negative feedback as well. Although this mostly came from angry fans, a handful of reputable critics didn't love the game. In a 65/100 review for Cultured Vultures, Jimmy Donellan writes, "The Last of Us Part II shamelessly tries to guilt trip you for killing [a dog] in a QTE that you have no choice but to indulge in". In my opinion, this critique (and countless others like it) are somewhat misguided. To say that this moment with the dog is a shameless guilt trip is to reduce its depth – the player needs to kill the dog because otherwise it will kill them. Through this lens, this moment is less of a shameless guilt trip and more of a demonstration of the cost of Ellie's revenge. In a more general sense, the game doesn't just hammer home a simple point; instead, it presents complex characters in difficult situations and forces the player to see those situations through.

Lessons

- It seems that games as a medium are always trying to maximize player choice, whether through build diversity in an MMO or meaningful choices in a story. However, The Last of Us II intentionally takes choices from the player to great

effect. As I've already discussed at length, the game forces the player to act as the characters would. The simple fact that the player doesn't have any agency reframes the entire story and makes the gameplay tie back into the overarching narrative theme of understanding others. The broader lesson here is that choice is a tool, and where it is or is not given can significantly effects on how the player experiences the story.

- Former Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aimé once posed the rhetorical question, "If it's not fun, why bother?" (GameSpot, 2:14). The Last of Us Part II goes against the ideology implied by this quote, proving that games can be great without being fun. The game certainly doesn't prioritize fun – its pacing is frustrating and slow, its violence is hard to watch, and its gameplay scenarios strive to make the player uncomfortable. However, these unfriendly elements come together to make a game that challenges the player on an emotional level and provides a superbly deep narrative. Understandably, many players bounced off this concept of a game that isn't exclusively fun, although to most critics The Last of Us II was a revelation which pushed the boundaries of what AAA games could be.
- In the same vein, The Last of Us II proved that in many ways, gaming culture isn't prepared for games which aren't designed to be fun. Gamers are so used to designers prioritizing their positive experience that the negative experiences created by The Last of Us II were often taken the wrong way. In my opinion, this explains lots of the fan backlash and review bombing which occurred upon the game's release. For example, the game uses Joel's death to create an immense amount of anger within players. Instead of appreciating that emotion as an attribute of the game, many players criticized the game for making them angry. The Last of Us II shows that in a medium which so often prioritizes the players, gamers en masse aren't quite ready to accept more mature and challenging experiences.

Summation

It is incredible to me that The Last of Us Part II exists. It is a flagship title with some of the greatest polish, detail, and visual fidelity of any game, but its narrative takes genuine risks and pushes boundaries in ways only indie games often dare to do. Its narrative is not only fundamentally well-constructed with deep characters and a compelling plot, but it breaks new ground and challenges players to feel things they haven't felt before. In this sense, I'm surprised that it succeeded commercially. According to a GameRant article from September 2020, The Last of Us II was the third best-selling PlayStation 4 game and the PlayStation 4 game completed by the highest percentage of owners. That second statistic is particularly surprising given how dull its pacing is at times, although it just goes to show how effective its narrative is at pulling the player into its increasingly chaotic chain of events. Thus, the biggest lesson to learn from this game is that risks pay off. In a world where live service games and annual franchises seem to

dominate the market, The Last of Us Part II is a beacon of hope which proves that truly new and creative games can succeed.

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