

We played 'The Last of Us Part II'. Here's what you should know

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

What better way to escape the real-world horrors of a global pandemic, then to play a video game based on a more terrifying and stressful outbreak?

"The Last of Us Part II," launching June 19 for the PlayStation 4, drops video game players into a post-apocalyptic U.S. suffering through a cataclysmic fungal outbreak. Once thriving cities have faded, replaced with small clusters of survivors, rotting buildings, and a variety of zombie-like "infected" monsters.

The game is best described as an action survival experience. Resources are scarce, so every bullet and health pack you use carries greater value. Scouring buildings for supplies is as important as figuring out how to get past armed enemies or fast-moving zombies.

The original game, 2013's "The Last of Us," was widely praised, with many critics claiming the action adventure was the year's best video game. So, the anticipation for a sequel has been immeasurably high.

We've played "The Last of Us Part II." Here's what you need to know about the series' second chapter:

Refresh my memory: what happened during the first game? (SPOILERS)

Without giving everything away, the 2013 game takes place 20 years into the pandemic. Joel meets Ellie, a 14-year-old girl born during the outbreak, and they establish a father-daughter relationship. Joel learns Ellie has developed an immunity to this [fungal infection](#), leading the duo across the country in hopes of creating a potential cure.

Where are we now in Part II?

The game takes place five years after the conclusion of the first game. Ellie is now a young adult, living in a settlement in Jackson, Wyoming, with many others including Joel. Both Ellie and Joel, along with some other key characters from the first game, help patrol the settlement to protect from "infected" and bandits. Unlike the first game, where you play mostly as Joel, Ellie is the central character.

How good is the story?

This will sound vague in the interest of not spoiling things: Ellie is not only dealing with the ramifications of hosting a rare immunity to this infection, but is also carrying the weight of what happens at the end of the first game. Add to that the events that play out in this new installment and you start to empathize with Ellie and the hard life she has endured at such a young age.

Perhaps one of the best elements to "The Last of Us Part II" is players never feel fully removed from the narrative. Developers at studio Naughty Dog weaved non-playable cut scenes and action elegantly. If Ellie is traveling with a companion, players will get bits of the story just through conversation between characters. There's also so

much story to discover just through exploring by finding random notes and memos hidden everywhere.

What's it like to play The Last of Us Part II?

Like the first game, Part II focuses on two key elements: managing your resources and approaching your enemies with care. When crouched down, players can enter a Listen mode where outlines of "infected" or human foes appear, a visual representation of hearing footsteps or other sounds.

When you're not fighting, you are scavenging for gear and items. Players find scissors, rubbing alcohol, rags and other items which you can then craft into ammo, health kits and other important pieces of gear. There's also medicine you can find to augment your skills, and a workbench to upgrade weapons. All these tasks take time, and require a safe space. During one section, I carelessly started upgrading my hunting rifle only to get ambushed by several armed enemies.

What enemies do players face?

One of the primary forces Ellie encounters is the Washington Liberation Front, or WLF (characters refer to them as "wolves"). This militia is typically armed with weapons ranging from baseball bats to larger guns. Then there's various types of "infected," each of which require different tactics to eliminate. Runners are straightforward: they attack quickly and directly trying to claw and/or bite your face off. Clickers are slower, and find you through sound because they're blind. But the second they grab you, you're dead. There are also giant bloaters that spray choking spores.

Even though you must approach humans differently from the infected, they're both surprisingly smart. When the human enemies find you, they don't just wait you out. They will flank your position, and surround you. Beware, you will be penalized for playing recklessly.

So how good is The Last of Us Part II?

Fun is probably not the right word to describe this

[game](#). The subject matter is pretty dark, and after violent encounters, I was more relieved to have made it through than thrilled. Having said that, Naughty Dog has proven yet again they are incredible [video game](#) storytellers, instilling a sense of panic and dread in ways few games have managed.

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