

The Emotional Weight of Ellie and Abby Gameplay in The Last of Us Part II

A Story Told Through Combat and Stealth

The Last of Us Part II is a game that asks a lot from its players. Not just in terms of skill, but in emotional endurance. The most talked-about aspect of the game, and the one that has sparked countless discussions, is the dual perspective structure. You spend a significant portion of the game controlling Ellie, hunting for justice or revenge. Then, the narrative flips and you take control of Abby, the character you have been trained to see as the enemy. This design choice is not a gimmick. It is a deliberate, uncomfortable storytelling mechanism that forces you to confront your own biases. The way this plays out moment to moment is best understood through the lens of Ellie and Abby gameplay, which is where the game's real genius lies.

I have played through the game twice now, and each time I am struck by how mechanically similar the two characters are, yet how different they feel. Both are agile, lethal, and resourceful. Both can craft silencers, throw bricks, and sneak through tall grass. But the context of who you are playing as at any given moment changes the entire tone of a firefight. When you control Ellie, her movements feel desperate and angry. The animations are sharp, almost feral. When you control Abby, her movements are heavier, more deliberate. She is a larger character, built for power, and her combat reflects that. This isn't just a skin swap. The game's designers tuned the feel of each character to match their personality and the player's emotional state.

Gunplay and Stealth: Two Sides of the Same Coin

On the surface, the combat in The Last of Us Part II is a refined version of the first game. You have a dodge button, you can go prone, and the enemy AI is significantly smarter. But the real innovation is how the game uses these systems to tell a story. The [ellie and abby gameplay](#) loop forces you to become efficient at murder, and then it makes you sit with that efficiency. There is a moment early in the game, during a section in Seattle, where you are moving through a hospital turned into a war zone. You are Ellie, and you are hunting down members of the WLF. The game gives you a silenced SMG and a bow. You pick off guards from a distance, feeling competent and powerful. Later, you play as Abby in the same area, and you see the aftermath of that encounter from the other side. You find notes from the soldiers you killed, hear their conversations. It is a gut punch, and it works because the gameplay is identical in quality and intensity for both characters.

I remember one specific encounter in the game's midpoint. I was playing as Abby, trying to navigate through a flooded office building. I could hear enemies talking about a dog they had

lost. I was tense, hiding behind a desk, waiting for the patrol to pass. I decided to go non-lethal, knocking out a guard instead of killing him. The game doesn't penalize you for this, but it also doesn't reward you with a trophy. It just lets the moment sit. This is a direct result of the game's commitment to making both characters feel human. The Ellie and Abby gameplay is not about which character is better in a fight. It is about how you, the player, reconcile the violence you are committing with the person you are controlling.

The Level Design and Player Agency

One of the smartest decisions Naughty Dog made was to make the levels open-ended enough for multiple approaches, but tight enough to maintain narrative pressure. As Ellie, levels are often vertical. You climb scaffolding, swing across gaps, and drop down on enemies from above. This matches her smaller frame and her desperate, acrobatic style. As Abby, levels are more grounded. You smash through doors, climb up ledges with raw strength, and engage enemies in close quarters. The level design subtly teaches you how to play each character. It is a masterclass in environmental storytelling.

There is a section in the game where you play as Abby in a massive skyscraper called the Sky Bridge. You have to cross a narrow beam hundreds of feet in the air while enemies shoot at you from windows. The wind is blowing, the beam is slick with rain, and one wrong step means death. I have never felt more vulnerable in a game than in that moment. Yet, because I had been playing as Abby for several hours by that point, I felt a strange sense of confidence. I knew her movement, her rhythm. The game had trained me to trust her, even though my brain still wanted to see her as the villain. That is the power of this dual perspective done right.

Violence and Its Aftermath

Critics of the game often point to the violence as excessive or gratuitous. But I would argue that the violence is necessary. The game is about the cycle of revenge, and it refuses to let you feel good about the kills you make. There is no satisfying thwack of a headshot like in other shooters. Instead, enemies scream out the names of their friends. Dogs whimper when you shoot them. The game forces you to watch the life drain out of your enemies, and then it makes you play as a character who has to live with that guilt.

I recall a specific sequence late in the game where you play as Ellie in a theater. The fight is brutal. You are out of ammo, low on health, and the enemy is relentless. You end up stabbing a woman in the neck with a piece of glass. The animation is sickening. Ellie just stands there for a second, breathing hard. I felt sick. I had to put the controller down. That moment would not have landed if the game had not spent dozens of hours building up the emotional stakes through the gameplay itself. The combat is not a break from the story. It is the story.

Learning to Play Your Enemy

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the game is that it forces you to play as Abby for an extended period, even after you have committed to hating her. The game makes you learn her skills, upgrade her weapons, and care about her survival. This is a bold design choice, and it does not work for every player. But for those who stick with it, the payoff is immense. You start to notice the parallels between Abby and Ellie. Both are driven by love and loss. Both are capable of terrible things. The game never excuses either character's actions. It simply asks you to understand.

I remember the first time I played as Abby and had to fight a group of infected in a dark tunnel. I was still angry at her. I wanted to fail. But my survival instincts kicked in. I started dodging, shooting, crafting bombs. I found myself enjoying the challenge. Then I caught myself. I was having fun playing as the character I was supposed to hate. That cognitive dissonance is exactly what the game is going for. It is not comfortable, but it is honest. The gameplay mechanics are so solid that they override your narrative biases, and that is a rare feat in any medium.

Replayability and Perspective Shifts

I have talked to many players who say they enjoyed the game more on a second playthrough, precisely because they knew the twist. Knowing that you will eventually play as Abby allows you to pay attention to the details in Ellie's sections. You notice the graffiti, the notes, the way the WLF soldiers talk about their leader. The game rewards repeat playthroughs because the Ellie and Abby gameplay is layered. The first time, you are reacting emotionally. The second time, you are analyzing the craft.

There is a moment in the game's opening hours, when you are exploring a house in Jackson, Wyoming. You find a note from a character named Boris, who talks about a dog he used to own. It seems like a throwaway detail. But later, when you play as Abby, you meet that dog. You see it alive, happy, and well cared for. The game does not call attention to this connection. It trusts you to find it. That kind of subtlety is only possible because the gameplay is consistent enough to support it. You are not jumping between wildly different genres. You are walking the same world, seeing it from two pairs of eyes.

Final Thoughts on a Divisive Masterpiece

The Last of Us Part II will always be a game people argue about. Some hate the story structure. Some love it. But I think everyone can agree that the gameplay is exceptional. The way Naughty Dog blended stealth, shooting, and survival mechanics with a narrative that asks difficult questions is something the industry rarely attempts. The Ellie and Abby gameplay is not just

about combat. It is about empathy, about seeing the humanity in your enemy, and about the cost of violence. It is a game that stays with you long after you have put the controller down.

If you are the kind of player who values narrative that challenges your assumptions, and you can handle some truly brutal moments, this game is worth your time. Just be prepared to feel uncomfortable. That is the point.