

HB0's *The Last of Us* had to speed up Abby's reveal

In *The Last of Us Part II*, it takes a long time before players understand just who Abby is. A new character introduced as both an antagonist and protagonist, Abby is locked in a violent game of revenge with Ellie, but her reasoning and history don't become clear until around midway through the game, when players actually take control of her as a character.

When the team behind the HBO adaptation of *The Last of Us* started thinking about introducing her for the show's second season, they realized they didn't have that same amount of time.

"When we put out *The Last of Us Part II*, you have the entire story and you decide how you want to pace it out," co-creator Neil Druckmann, who was also the writer and director on both games, tells *The Verge*. "Here we're putting out episodes week by week, which are roughly an hour long. If we were to wait as much as we did in the game to reveal certain things, our viewers might have to wait a very, very long time – longer than we were comfortable with."

That means parts of her story were moved up. In the premiere episode of season 2, it's a lot clearer from the start why Abby (Kaitlyn Dever) has tracked down Joel (Pedro Pascal) and Ellie (Bella Ramsey) to the relatively safe community of Jackson and why she has revenge on her mind.

According to Druckmann, this change for Abby wasn't just done for pacing reasons. It was also because of how viewers will see this new character in a noninteractive format.

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“When you play a character, you immediately connect with them,” he says. “In *The Last of Us Part I*, when you are playing as [Joel’s daughter] Sarah, you didn’t have to spend a lot of time with her to really care about her, because you were her. Likewise in game two, it was the same thing with Abby. We were able to keep certain things a mystery for much longer, because you were playing as Abby, trying to keep her alive, fighting the infected. We don’t have that in the show. So we needed something else – through drama, through backstory – to get you to sympathize with her. That’s where we pulled certain events up in the story, in terms of when we reveal them.”

The other key part in creating that connection, according to show co-creator Craig Mazin, was finding the right actor in Dever. Abby is a tricky role because, depending on where you are in the story, you’re likely to either hate her or sympathize with her (that also becomes true of Ellie as the story progresses). That contradiction is core to how viewers are supposed to see and relate to her.

“She is the kind of actor that will make people connect to Abby in a way that is really quick and very convincing, and therefore confusing,” Mazin says of Dever as Abby. “We are going to struggle to figure out who we’re supposed to be rooting for, which is kind of the point.”

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