

The Last of Us ripped off the Band-aid

If you've played both *The Last of Us* games and are watching along with the show, there's a pretty strong chance you've been waiting to see how the HBO series approaches a very particular moment – and wondering if that moment has been changed at all for TV. Well, it didn't take too long to find out.

The second episode of season 2 just aired, and *The Last of Us*' creators made sure to rip the bandage right off. And not only did they not tone things down, they somehow made things even more intense, while also using the moment as a chance to further expand this post-apocalyptic world.

Obviously, there will be spoilers to follow for *The Last of Us*, which cover both the second game and the show up through episode 2 of the second season. To make sure you don't see this pivotal spoiler, here is another photo of Pedro Pascal as Joel Miller in the show. Don't scroll past him if you don't want to be spoiled on a major development.

Image: HBO

OK, so, yes, *that* happened. The inciting incident in *The Last of Us*' second chapter, the one that sends Ellie on a ceaseless and questionable quest for revenge, is Joel's death at the hands (and golf club, and shotgun) of Abby. In the game, it was a brutal sequence that involved watching helplessly as the protagonist of the first game was tortured and murdered, viewed through the eyes of his surrogate daughter Ellie, who is the playable lead in *The Last of Us Part II*.

That brutality hasn't been lessened for the HBO show. In fact, it feels even harsher in live action, particularly when Joel is played by such a charming guy like Pascal. Functionally, the scene plays out largely the same as it did in *The Last of Part II*, as do the moments leading up to it. There are some small changes, like how the characters are paired up when things go down, but the outcome is the same. Which is all to say that it's wince-inducing, full of blood, screams, and tears.

What the show does add, though, is an entirely new storyline, one that manages to ratchet up the intensity to an interesting new degree. While Joel is being kidnapped and tortured, and a massive snowstorm is brewing, the show introduces another wrinkle: an absolutely gigantic group of infected who descend upon Jackson, the relatively safe town where Joel and Ellie have been living.

It adds a new layer of desperation to the moment, as – prior to realizing he's been ensnared in a trap – Joel is singularly focused on racing to get back and help his community. In fact, one of the reasons he is OK partnering up with a stranger like Abby in the first place is the promise of weapons and reinforcements.

Image: HBO

This new narrative thread is part of the show's attempt to expand the story of *The Last of Us* beyond just its main characters. In the game, players saw things solely from Ellie's perspective, so there wasn't any real focus on the town. But in the show, there are multiple viewpoints and, thus, more opportunities to flesh out the world. Jackson plays a big part of that; in the episode you see the townsfolk using every tool at their disposal to fend off the attack, and the

devastation to the town afterwards is very clear. This addition makes the moment feel larger than Joel and Ellie, while also adding an extra layer of tension and violence to an already tense and violent scene.

As co-creator Neil Druckmann, a writer and director on both the game and the show, explained to me ahead of season 2: “One of the things we were able to do in the show that we couldn’t do much of in the game was get to know Jackson as a community, and understand what’s at stake here, what are the threats from the outside.”

Yes, the moment will likely be a huge shock for those coming in unaware, as it’s rare that such a pivotal character is killed off in a TV show like this. But much like the infamous Red Wedding in *Game of Thrones*, for the many people who already knew what was coming, they can now relax and watch the show without wondering how it’s going to approach the death sequence, or if it was going to approach it at all.

Well, relax *a little* – this is still *The Last of Us*.

<https://www.theverge.com/tv/651902/the-last-of-us-season-2-joe>
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