

The Last of Us Part II: A Polarizing Experience

Ok, so, this was meant to be a review. It morphed into something more. While I think *The Last of Us Part II* gets far more hate than it deserves, I don't see it as a flawless masterpiece either. On a scale of one to ten, I'd give it a solid 7.5. Not groundbreaking, but certainly not the disaster that some make it out to be. My goal here isn't to declare it a godsend but to explore why it shouldn't be as hated as it is—both from my experience playing and from the way a game like this is received in today's political climate. Remember when not everything was political? Me neither.

A Quick Personal Preface

A bit about me. The older I get the more I'm turning into a Commie. Four years ago, I was involved in Black Lives Matter protests. First-generation American. Yadda, yadda. I was recently diagnosed with OCD and ADHD (dual anxiety, baby!) after years of misdiagnoses, and stepping away from social media has been a key part of keeping my mental health in check. So, yeah, working on myself made me a shitty millennial. With that in mind, let's talk about the game that, for one reason or another, has become one of the most controversial releases in recent memory.

The Story: A Bold, Flawed Journey

Despite the game's strong narrative moments, my biggest gripe is actually with the story. Surprised? "Everyone hates the story!" you say. Well, reviews for the game began to turn positive once people finished the game. For me, the story delivers, but it drags longer than necessary. I loved the Jackson and Seattle segments. The overall narrative loses momentum for me though. I would have been satisfied if it ended with Ellie staying with Dina. Or with Abby being captured. Give me a cliff-hanger here, please.

There are narrative gaps I wish were addressed. Ellie and Dina's journey to Seattle is only hinted at in a journal—why not show it? Who exactly are the Rattlers, and what's their backstory? A DLC could fill in these gaps, but as it stands, they remain unresolved. That said, my favorite aspect of the game also happens to be the one that got the most backlash.

The Controversy: Uncomfortable but Necessary

When I first played the game, I was fortunate enough to avoid spoilers. Even about *his* death. However, as I started streaming, I noticed a pattern. Some people—longtime friends included—kept making the same kind of comments.

One example: "Itty bitty titty committee." This wasn't high school. Though I got those flashbacks. It wasn't a locker room filled with hormonal rage. It was grown adults talking about why they disliked Abby. It was clear they wanted some kind of reaction, but I didn't engage.

Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance

So, I watched *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance* after smoking an incredible blunt. Which, honestly, is the only way to watch any Jim Henson-inspired project—except maybe *The Muppet Christmas Carol* because good morals are best absorbed sober. But that's beside the point.

The show's opening sequence alone will make you wish you had either more weed or had stepped up to DMT. We're introduced to Thra, a mystical world watched over by Aughra, a shamanic being obsessed with knowledge. What fascinates her most are the Gelflings—beautiful, elf-like creatures divided into different clans, each with unique strengths. Some will fight if called upon, but most just want to live their peaceful, magic-filled lives, barely thinking about the Crystal of Peace that keeps their world turning.

But Aughra's thirst for knowledge becomes her weakness—and the beginning of Thra's downfall. When the sinister Skeksis arrive, they dangle unlimited knowledge in front of her, and she takes the bait, abandoning Thra's balance for the promise of knowing all. With Aughra distracted, the Skeksis take control, declaring themselves rulers of Thra. The Gelflings, unaware of what they've lost, are slowly trapped under their rule. And, of course, a few rebellious heroes rise up to shake things up.

Enter Princess Brea of the Vapra Clan, whose relentless curiosity gets her into more trouble than she anticipates. Rian, a warrior of the Stonewood Clan, who learns the truth about the Skeksis the hard way. And Deet, the bravest Gelfling of the underground Grottan Clan, forced to journey above ground after her homeland becomes infected by the dark crystal's spreading poison.

Rian's journey is the main arc—he's the first to see how corrupt the Skeksis really are when they destroy his life and turn his own people against him. With nowhere to run, he tries to spread the truth through a technique called dream fasting, where Gelflings share memories by touching hands. Imagine that being your party trick?

Anora: A Story For The Algorithm Era

If you think 21-year-old oligarchs are the only ones with a problem playing too much *Call of Duty* while harboring resentment toward their parents, you haven't experienced the dating scene in America since at least 2010.

Anora is a film about a sex worker who thinks she's lucked into her Cinderella story—by literally hitting the lottery in a younger trick who happens to be the son of Russian oligarchs. Sure, they have some things in common. She's slightly older by a few years, but still in her twenties. She's also Russian, though he has to force it out of her through manipulation. Both are seemingly facing an existential crisis—only she's so lost in hers that she fails to realize how bad he's actually crashing. Well, until it's too late.

This isn't just another romantic tragedy about a sex worker. Calling it that would be a disservice not just to the story, but to the powerful performances put on by Mikey Madison, Mark Eydelshteyn, Yura Borisov, and the entire ensemble. It's more so a film about what America's social and dating norms have devolved into—and, honestly, the world. A world where most interactions take place through screens that only tell part of a person's life. Where invisible formulas known as algorithms dictate which of those people we will actually encounter.

Our story begins in the *real* world. What some may consider the seedy underbelly of it. A strip club, where we meet the film's titular character—a young woman just trying to get by. Cognizant enough to know where she is in life, but still stunted in her growth.

Mikey Madison does a brilliant job of balancing the line between youthful ignorance and someone who's been around the block. A perfect representation of a modern woman who's been damned by society.

In the strip club, Ani—as she prefers to go by—is treating this night like just another day at work. Her clientele is the stereotype you'd expect in a comedy roast taking place in a strip club. Mostly middle-aged, lonely, and hating their lives.

She's creeped out by some, sure. Unfortunately, she seems used to it. Most women will be able to apply that to the real world, since *this* is what most men have portrayed themselves to be—intentionally or unintentionally. **Men are in crisis.**

Her fortune turns—or so it seems—when a rich client is looking for someone fluent in Russian. Rightfully, she has her guard up. He doesn't look like the typical client. But he's a client nonetheless.

His name is Ivan. Goes by Vanya. And boy, does he know how to put on a front. In this controlled environment, he's calm, cool, and charismatic. So much so that he gets Ani to put her guard down. The same way a professional catfisher online would. No matter the looks, a predator is a predator.

***The Sopranos* Finale: Where Death Would be a Gift**

I know, I know—another *Sopranos* finale theory.

What is the punishment given to one of the most villainous characters in television history? Most would say death. But what if death in *The Sopranos* is actually a gift?

A lot of people analyze the finale through the lens of Tony's supposed death—reading every clue as proof that he gets whacked before the screen cuts to black. The shady guy in the Members Only jacket. The *Godfather* reference. Tony's final meal with his family. Meadow arriving late, just in time to see her father one last time. But what if all of these clues aren't leading to Tony's death, but instead just summing up the entire show? Boring I know but bear with me. I mean nothing in this show was really *boring* anyway.

Eugene Pontecorvo & The Curse of Survival

Season 6 starts with Eugene Pontecorvo's story. A made guy, inducted alongside Christopher in Season 3, Eugene inherits a fortune and wants out. His request is denied, and he's left with no way forward. Like Tony, he struggles with depression. Unlike Tony, he ends his story quickly—by taking his own life.

Yet in a way, Eugene never really leaves the show. His presence lingers, especially in the finale when another man in a Members Only jacket appears. Many believe this figure represents payback, not just for Eugene but for everyone Tony has "taken care of" in his *members only* world.

But what if the jacket isn't about revenge? What if it's a symbol?

Eugene's arc mirrors Christopher's—both men see an escape route, both men try to take it, and both fail. The key difference? Eugene dies. Christopher doesn't—until Tony makes that choice for him.

Which brings us back to Tony.

Members Only: A Life Sentence

The Members Only jacket doesn't just symbolize Eugene. It represents, *the life itself*—the mafia.

The mafia is Tony's true prison. It's the source of his panic attacks, his paranoia, his depression. It's been with him since childhood and follows him to that final diner scene. No matter how much he tries to balance work and family, *it's always there*.

Tony never truly wanted Christopher to take over. The title of "boss" was never meant for him. The real heir to the throne—the only one who carries Tony's name—is AJ.