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Welcome everybody to episode number two of season two of chapter select a seasonal podcast where we bounce back and forth between a

series of games

Exploring their evolution design and legacy for this season

We are of course as you can probably tell by the name of the episode we are covering the God of War series

Today's episode is all about God of War ascension

So we're going to do a deep dive on the last game in the series that appeared on the PlayStation 3 before the reboot

I am your host Logan Moore. Joining me as always is Max Roberts. Hi Max.

Hi Logan. It's not only the last God of War game on PS3, it was the last God of War game in Greece. Yeah, before the full reboot. Yeah. And it was the last God of War game and the first God of War game to have multiplayer. Yeah, probably for good reasons.

So yeah, we're going to dive into Ascension today, which is, I don't know, let's get all the explaining stuff out of the way up front like we normally do.

Once again, the game was developed by Santa Monica Studio, which is the studio that has largely always developed the God of War franchise.

It appeared on PS3, released on March 12, 2013.

The game director was Todd Pappe.

The producer was Whitney Wade and then the lead combat designer was Jason McDonald who

had been doing combat design stuff since God of War 2, is that correct?

Yes, that is what my notes say, yeah.

And he was the lead gameplay designer on the 2018 game.

So he's been with this series for quite some time now.

The music, the composer this time around was Tyler Bates, and on Metacritic the game averaged

an 80 out of 100 overall score, which is...

- That's baffling.

- ...Baffling.

Yeah, like, we talk about this with all the episodes that we do of this show, I feel like where we're like, "Man, that's a weird Metacritic score in hindsight."

This one's especially baffling because when this came out, I don't remember anybody saying anything very good about this game.

It was just like, "Yep, it's God of War. It's another one of those."

And to see that it scored so highly is very, very surprising to me.

I was all in. I was, I mean, I was on the God of War hype train.

And I probably would have agreed with like an 80 Metacritic score in 2013, but Max today would not agree at all.

This game is, um, it's fascinating to say the least in both good and bad ways.

Yeah.

It's, uh, it's so interesting.

I could see giving it an 8 out of 10 or something like that if you're a viewer back then.

It's more the, because obviously it's an average, so that means there had to be a fair amount that

were higher than that and a fair amount that were lower than that for it to kind of sit in the middle there. Uh, yeah, I'm looking at the number of publications that gave this anywhere from a, looks like the highest score on the internet for it was a 9.6 all the way down to an 8.5 or an 8. Yeah, that's very surprising to me because, spoiler alert, I don't think this game's very good and we can get into talking about that. So, before we get into the larger discussion about the game though and what we thought and its story and combat

and things like that, our history is with this game, so I'll go, normally I'd pass it off to you but I have a very brief history with this game. I never played it so this was uh this was one of the two that I believe I had never played in the series it was this and Ghost of Sparta that I've never played. So this was a fully fresh experience for me playing it this time around

for the show. You on the other hand I know you never finished it but you did play what like three-fourths of it back in 2013? Yeah, I played, so there are 30 chapters in the game and I played up through chapter 22. Okay. So yeah, I mean I was close to the end and honestly you helped me figure this out why I stopped playing it. It's because maybe a month later or a few weeks. It would have been a couple weeks later I think, yeah. Bioshock Infinite came out and I remember buying that game too and so when I got home from a vacation I was playing God of War Ascension before vacation came home from vacation with Infinite and started playing that right away.

It would have legitimately been two weeks later.

So this came out the 12th, Bioshock Infinite was the 26th of March.

And I never went back to Ascension which, you know, wasn't good or bad at the time.

I got distracted.

It wasn't like I was crazy to come back.

- Well a game that would have its hooks in you,

I feel like you would want to go back and play.

- I also, well also I've been notorious,

especially in the high school years,

I would just bounce around games.

Like I wasn't, I didn't try to finish what I started as much like I do now.

But I was definitely, I mean Logan, I was into Ascension.

I wrote a whole preview and wrote it on the blog.

I got the collector's edition.

I went to the GameStop for the midnight launch,
and that was back in the days when they did
midnight launches, like at midnight,
before they started bumping those up.
And they actually, for whatever reason,
mall security was like,
we are locking this part of the building down at nine o'clock
and then we'll reopen it at midnight.

And they're like, you can either stay in the store
with the employees or you can leave.

And the employees let me,

So I sat trapped in a GameStop for three hours.

I was one of two people there that night
for God of War Ascension.

Everyone else was there for Starcraft 2,
Heart of the Swarm,

which is also just kind of interesting to think of people
at a GameStop for a Starcraft 2 expansion.

- Yeah.

- That's kind of funny to think about as well.

- How far we've come in less than a decade.

- Yeah.

So I was in the beta.

Yeah, I was in 2 Ascension.

And also it came with the Last of Us demo.

that wouldn't come out until...

- Which it still says on the,

it's one of the main prompts

when you get into the menu of this game.

It says, "Last of Us, Last of Us Beta," or whatever.

It's like, that's kind of bizarre.

So yeah, this came out the same day as, yeah,

"StarCraft" and "Sniper Ghost Warrior 2."

That's an interesting one.

Anyway, so yeah, you've played a little bit of this.

I have not.

So we're coming at this from slightly different perspectives

But I think we both knew, I mean we mentioned this going off the Metacritic score, but we knew coming into this one that this would maybe be one of the not as great ones in the series if we were going to play one that would be considered a stinker.

And I was, I mean to explain how I was coming at this though, I was very excited to play this one because it is not one of the ones that I have played.

I mentioned in our last episode that I was a little less thrilled to play the original God of War again because I had played it probably twice I think before we did it last time.

So I was not like super keen on returning to that one just because I knew about it.

This one I didn't know about so I was like I was legitimately anticipating playing it.

But yeah wow it's a very it's very aimless like I don't this game does not feel like

God of War at all. It's so strange to me. Off that aimless point, I kind of wrote that

it feels like the cutting room floor of like God of War 2 and 3 with maybe a little bit

of Ghost of Sparta in there. Like it's just, it's the stuff that never made it in the other

games and they kind of just glued it together. It's very mismatched, just has no purpose.

It's glued together in a lot of different ways.

Not only is the story itself kind of confusing, but the way it's told is also bizarre because they splice it up into different sections and things like that, which could make sense

and I think that would make for a fine game.

And I think it works to the game's benefit in the way that the opening chapter or couple of chapters are a little bit more exciting because it starts at the narrative height of the game and then it slows down from there. But they don't really ever flesh out why these things are happening. Like I understand why these things are happening in the game. Kratos is trying to turn against Ares and he's gotta, I guess, kill the Furies because it's very confusing honestly they don't really explain it. It is confusing. I wrote down like I don't know why I'm trying to find the Oracle like who is Orchos? Why am I doing this? And I really so it's a prequel it's one of three prequels in the God of War series and I kind of looked it up I was like because the game ends almost where it starts like Orchos dies and Kratos is like "I'm off" and he just starts walking away.

The one cool thing about the ending, I do like that they do the narrative at the very end of the game, like the voice over narrative, "And so Kratos left and he went to go fight Ares."

Because that's how the story telling is all throughout God of War 1.

But they don't do that until the very end of the game.

And so I thought that was kind of a cool touch because I think everything up until that point point, they don't do the voiceover narrative, right? Where the narrator is speaking and talking about Kratos and what he's doing and stuff?

Well there's the prologue video where you boot up the game and then Orkos is narrating a bit through some stuff. So there is narration, it's just not... darn it, I think it's Linda something. But it's not typically Gaia's voice. I looked it up because I was curious. This This game, chronologically speaking, is six months after he kills his wife and daughter. I'm like, "Alright, well that's kind of interesting.

He's taken six months."

Do you know how far away from God of War 1 it is?

Ten years.

Really?

Yes.

Between this and God of War 1 is Chains of Olympus, which is five years after Ascension.

For those ten years, he is serving Ares and the gods.

That's weird because he gets to the very end and he's like, "Oh, I will now kill Ares."

Yeah, I don't.

Narratively this game is a wash.

It doesn't further any future plot.

It doesn't bring any insight to Kratos or the world of Norse mythology except maybe that Ares banged a fury.

Nothing is enriched here for the world.

It's very pointless.

The thing that's weird too is the way they set up the storytelling from the outset is with that opening video they're like "oh before the gods and the titans there were the uh whatever the people are that created the world."

It doesn't matter like I'm looking at the plot synopsis here and it doesn't even mention it.

So like from the outset the game's like "oh okay so you've already fought the gods and three and you've also fought the titans the primordials."

So they set up that this is going to be an important thing.

Like okay, you've killed the gods and you've fought the Titans.

Why are we taking you back to a prequel?

Oh, the primordials.

But they're not in the game and nothing from them ever shows up really.

The story is very obvious that...

This is one of the things I texted you about.

It's so clear that they finished God of War 3.

like we're done cool now we can close this chapter and sony's like hey you know what sold pretty well

god of war 3 you know what we would love for you to cook up another god of war right now

it feels like this was absolutely ordered by higher ups at sony because they wanted to get

another god of war game on this system i'm curious about that because it came out three years after

God of War 3. So at the time, Sony Santa Monica was also working on another game which ended

up getting cancelled, the sci-fi game. That was one that Stig was heading up before he left.

And I almost feel like they did plan on making another God of War game just to kind of float

until they could get this sci-fi game up because they were building something new and clearly that

that didn't work out.

It just, it feels, I mean it could have been rushed.

- But even in that sense, let's say it's not a game

that PlayStation ordered, it doesn't at any point feel like

a game that the studio really wanted to make

or was like super passionate, that doesn't come through

with the game at least to me.

Because it feels-- - I don't think it comes

through in the single player.

I really-- - Maybe, yeah.

I really feel like, and I'll hit on this a few more times

'cause my notes and whatnot, but I really feel like

this was a multiplayer game first for Sony Santa Monica.

- Because we were in that point.

- And single player was an afterthought.

Or single player was adapted in light of multiplayer.

Like multiplayer shaped this whole game.

- And that would have made sense at the time

because Sony was very keen on getting
multiplayer projects like that out.

Like if you look at the things they were releasing back in that time period, there was a lot
of multiplayer stuff, both from their first party studios and from even a lot of their
indie studios.

Or not their indie studios, but they would publish indie games.

- Partnerships.

- Yeah, like Bat Princess or something like that.

It was like a wonky little multiplayer game.

Like there was a lot of things like that.

But yeah, they were doing a lot of different multiplayer things and ideas back at that
point in time.

So it would make sense if they were like, "Let's do this for God of War."

that was kind of the basis for the project but that's probably not I mean
there's a reason there's not been a God of War multiplayer game since like if
this was a thing across the whole industry though because at the time we
also had what was the Assassin's Creed game that implemented multiplayer was it
Brotherhood that did it first? Brotherhood I believe started with the
multiplayer that was cool that was a nice that was a neat multiplayer mode
but everybody was trying to do it at this point everyone was doing

- Bioshock 2 had multiplayer in it.

- And you know, Sony was also selling online passes.

That's how they were implementing the multiplayer.

- Yeah.

- Was through, you know, your game came with a code,
you redeemed the code, and that's how you got access

to the multiplayer suite, and if you didn't have that code,
you could buy it for \$10.

So they were trying to create an engaged community.

I mean, Uncharted 2 through The Last of Us
all had multiplayer.

Until recently, those servers shut down.

And Logan, the Ascension servers are still up.

- Yeah.

- I mean, we both played a little bit.

Like, this game is still running.

- Yeah, which is strange, to say the least a little bit.

- It is, it's baffling.

I wanted to, so it's really hard to get a grasp
on the multiplayer today,
because we're eight years removed from it.

and honestly joining a game now you're playing against people who clearly
want to and know how to play this game and just beat the snot out of you.

It's just not fun in that sense. So I dug up my preview from 2013.

And I thought this kind of, I'm not going to read the whole thing, there will be a link in
the show notes to it but kind of the spirit of this multiplayer was you choose a god to align
yourself with Zeus, Ares, Hades, or Poseidon and then you get different weapons there were
hammers and spears and things and swords so things that you were getting in the single
player

and the multiplayer did you actually did you pick up on the multiplayer tie-in trailer in the
the single player campaign. I did, yeah. Yeah, there's like a- He crashes in on that dude
in the prison in like chapter 3 or 4. Yep, and that's who you play as in multiplayer,
which is cute. So, you know, you're playing this and it's typical multiplayer mode, like

get the most kills or capture the flag and things like that, but then the stages would have interactive moments and you could like attack a cyclops and who got the kill. So tried to make it a very God of War inspired multiplayer, which I think ends up shaping our single player experience in combat. It is the blocking, the parrying, the stunning, the grappling, all of it I think was multiplayer first and then applied to single player. But it's, there was a multiplayer man and it's interesting and I think it's incredible that the servers are still up as of this recording.

- Yeah, they, yeah.

I don't think they've nuked them within the past week or past couple days.

- I can't wait for that blog post.

'Cause you know, I mean.

- I feel like they'll just do it though.

I don't know how vocal they'll be about it.

I think if anything, Santa Monica Studio just tweeted out.

'Cause that's kind of what Naughty Dog's been doing with.

- Well yeah, when Naughty Dog killed the PS3 servers, they killed the PS3 servers.

guys this is just happening FYI. But they gave everyone notice. They did. Clearly I mean the fact I could even get in a game clearly indicates that there's some form of a community like someone's using up the servers. Maybe I it's got to be what max? Super small. A couple hundred people if that maybe? I don't I don't disagree I just I do find it fascinating. I mean the game is so I mean once again you played this via your own PlayStation 3 and I played it via PlayStation Now. So there are easier ways to access this game via modern methods and with that in mind it makes a little bit more sense that I

guess they would keep them up in perpetuity. Plus the other thing with like Naughty Dog shutting down

their servers, there's other ways to play those games online or at least there's similar offerings like the Last of Us you can play on PS4 or Uncharted you just go play Uncharted 4.

Yeah so like there's similar experiences there's nothing else that Santa Monica Studio has done that is like this so that's probably why they were still on I would guess but uh huh but yeah.

I did I did check the the trophies there's only one multiplayer trophy but it's to complete the the multiplayer training. The tutorial, yeah. And only 20.2% of people did it. Which doesn't, like that's pretty low. I mean only a fifth of your player base is out there playing.

Yeah and that's reflective of, that's reflective of why all these games nowadays don't just get multiplayer game modes tacked on. Because the proof is in the pudding right there that people don't want this stuff. No one was a God of War fan back then that was really like,

"You know what this game needs? Multiplayer. Somebody bake this in." There was something that

Santa Monica came up with and they tried to sell everybody on it and some people enjoyed it and

some people were into the idea. But there was not really a large vocal community of people saying,

"Hey, you know what would make God of War 3 better is if they had multiplayer in it."

And that's why that stuff doesn't happen very often anymore is because people just don't play it.

Even with bigger games, like how many people... I'm curious what the stats would be like on a really, really mainstream game, like an Uncharted 4. Like what are the stats look like for the people

that... How many people that bought that game and played the story then jumped into the multiplayer?

because I'm one of those I don't know if I ever did honestly I think I played

the multiplayer a little bit but not a ton you tell me you didn't happen there

and get that plat for Uncharted 4 I mean I did at some point yeah but

Uncharted 4 continue the adventure complete the uncharted multiplayer

introduction according to PSN profiles 16.8 percent of players have done so and

that game has sold like 20 million copies I think or 15 to 20 million so of

that 15 to 20 million maybe like one or two or not one or two maybe like what two to four million somewhere in there have played the multiplayer at least to the point that it's completing that so even today and a multiplayer in that is good too mm-hmm like Naughty Dog does a good job with that so it just shows that people are not looking for these multiplayer experiences like the games that are going to find a multiplayer audience there's gonna be your Call of Duty's and your Halo's I would assume infinite will have a big audience when it releases later this year especially for furry but yeah I don't know I don't know why I part of me understands why they did just because everybody else was doing it at the time and I'm sure it was a unique challenge for the studio to come up with something I'm sure it got their creative juices flowing to a degree But yeah, in hindsight, especially seeing how the industry is now, it's like, "Wow, this is totally baffling that they did this."

And it, frankly, I could see it kind of in that line of being a creative challenge for the team.

I mean, God of War's core at that time was its combat and gameplay.

And having a multiplayer suite be the focus of the new game probably gave them a chance to really try and come up with something balanced and creative and challenging and technical.

And it's hard to say if they really succeeded on that front, because honestly I don't...

I have a hammer, I got rocked by a hammer, so maybe hammer's the meta.

Like you know, it's hard to really capture the spirit of the game at the time, but clearly wasn't the thing for God of War because they it's not in the new one yeah and likely will never be in a God of I mean unless they make I can't stand alone like it's not yeah it's not gonna happen I hundred Kratos is fall from the sky so the end of God of War one yes exactly yeah a hundred yeah a hundred people drop into Hades let's do that let's talk about the general gameplay of this one as well because I know so I know we haven't played like two and three yet in this series even though we played them before sure so we know like what those

games do in a general sense the gameplay from this one they try some different things they add some new systems and mechanics I mean obviously the Blades of Chaos are still there and it's the main way in which here fighting enemies and stuff like that but it feels very rudimentary like it feels so straightforward they put a larger emphasis on different types of Blades of Chaos attacks that you have different different styles that are aligned with different gods. There's a couple other things you can do in there, a couple different abilities, slow down time or create a clone of yourself, that sort of stuff. But especially knowing, again I don't want to compare too much to God of War 3 right now because we still haven't played that game, but I know the things God of War 3 gives you that are way more interesting and mix up combat a whole lot more and to see them go from that to this is very, not like puzzling I guess, but it just feels like a step backward in some regards. Did you feel the same way?

Yes, not to...

Again, I don't want to...

Not to harp on the multiplayer element, but they had...

They poured, it seems, a lot of the effort into multiplayer.

And what better way to get people ready for multiplayer than to have them use the same combat system in the single player.

And so you see an emphasis on alternate weapons, which does happen throughout the God of War games.

Particularly like in Ghost of Sparta, and God of War III and II have some alternate weapons to a certain degree.

but not like this where you've got five types and they have different strengths and weaknesses, kind of like a rock paper scissors kind of chart there. Magic is nowhere near what it

looks like in God of War 1 where you have a single bar and different abilities that kind of revolve around using that bar up. This is, if you max it out, a four use magic bar, so just four chunks, and each spell, cast, whatever you want to call it, is one chunk of it.

And with that comes those different elemental types in the blades.

So the blades stay the same but the elements you use and types of attacks you throw change from Ares to Zeus to Hades and Poseidon.

So it's this core four, which are the four that you pledge allegiance to in the multiplayer.

So it's all tied together and you don't even unlock magic for three of the four.

This was going to be the big thing I was going to bring up.

It's like till you max those out.

The only magic you could have for most of the game is the Ares type which throws like a fireball in the enemy and then blows up a little bit.

That was the thing that was very baffling to me about this is that they're giving you these abilities but they're not really, they don't do anything until you upgrade them and And when you compare it to God of War 1, God of War 1, Poseidon's Fury was like this AOE type attack. Hades was the spirits. Lightning was essentially like a bow, like you could have range. Like it allowed you to mix up and alternate your play style to handle certain combat situations. And here it just felt like... All the magic attacks are pretty AOE. Yeah, and not... I guess the most powerful one I felt was either Ares or Hades. Yeah, those Those are the two I use the most.

It just... it didn't incentivize me to use the magic.

The alternate weapons, I really like the... it's not a hammer, but the giant sledge baseball bat looking slugger thing.

I liked that the most.

The sling I would not want to pick up.

The shield was eh.

The shield was okay.

The sword I didn't care for.

was the one I didn't really like at all honestly.

- Yeah.

- I didn't feel like it chained well

together with other attacks.

- Yeah, and then the Javelin was only a limited use item.

- Yeah.

- So it just, they definitely tried,

but I ended up just sticking with the blades

as much as possible.

- Yep.

- The blades are great.

Still, even when it was 2005 to 2013,

I mean the blades were still good eight years later.

- They're still good now, even though they're different.

still good today. So yeah I mean overall I found it to be a very underwhelming

combat system in a general sense. I did find it to be the most, from what I

remember, maybe we'll rediscover here, most combo heavy. Like they really wanted

you to come up with combos and chains of like grapple, throw, slam. Well and it was

also very, this was one of my other problems with it though is that it was

very... the combat system was somewhat reliant on you building up your, what was it, your
rage meter?

Yes.

I think that's what it was.

Because that unlocked new moves.

Because that unlocked other abilities that you could use, yeah.

But you couldn't ever really take a hit or else it would, I mean it wouldn't get knocked down all the way but somewhat.

And some of the enemies you fight later on like deflect a lot of things you can try, you try to do to them, so you're right.

I did feel like the early stages of the game really encourage you to "Hey, mix in your grapples, mix in this, mix in that, blah blah blah blah blah."

But you get to a point later in the game where you're facing enemies that don't even allow you to do that, and then you are just flailing your chains around as much as humanly possible, depending on the situation, or you're just spamming your magic attacks.

I feel like the enemies as the game progressed really didn't encourage you to fight in the same way that you may have done so in the early hours.

Which was a bizarre choice.

I think an enemy that really encapsulates that is those elemental giant warriors.

Big suits of armor come down and they'd either be one of the elements that you have. straight up invincible for certain sections. Yeah, when they switch to like their heavy attack.

And no matter what you do, like so you, you just have to run around and dodge it. Yeah, and in an action game what you want to do is hit and counter and be powerful. And this was like,

you've got to run away. And I just waited out, which is so frustrating because you,

you were in the flow of just hitting him and then he's entered, they enter this phase and suddenly

you have to run, you're on the defensive suddenly.

And that's not a fun feeling,

especially when you're Kratos, you know, this powerful,

literally powerful character that makes you feel cool.

- The other thing that really bothered me,

and this was something else I texted you about,

specifically when I was doing the trial

of Archimedes section, which is abysmal.

It's probably one of the worst things I've ever seen in any God of War game that I can remember.

- Really quick, we played on hard, we both got the plat.

so we were definitely, maybe we can talk about the difficulty balancing later but please continue.

The thing that really started to reveal itself to me during that section though is that too many of the enemies in this game also don't get staggered when you hit them which kind of annoy me.

Like a lot of the common enemies, a lot of the ones that are humanoid in nature, they will get staggered if you hit them so that you can kind of pull off a full combo or whatever which I think it should allow for because the game is putting so many enemies on the screen at once that you're not going to be able to hit them all at the same time and stagger them all more often than not.

So there's always going to be, like your back's always going to be exposed or whatever in the first place.

But some of the later enemies that you start to run across, you will attack them and it will just straight up not do anything to them.

Like they don't act like it's even, nothing's happening to them.

So you're trying to pull off these combos and get into a flow and deal some damage and they're just still attacking you through it or still doing various moves.

The one thing that really annoyed me with the trial section with the Gorgons is that they could just grab you anytime they felt like it and there was, to my knowledge, there was no way to avoid that.

Like I would try to parry it, I would try to...

My understanding is that parrying is the only way but I found the timing for the parrying to be impossible to like really learn, understand, I couldn't find it.

The parry's bizarre like because you have to get in your block stance and then you have to press X but then there's like a second, a full second between when you do it and when he actually like- Well that would explain why I never was able to do it.

I thought you just had to hit L1.

No you have to hit X.

When like at the time you know kind of like a- so that explains why I never did it.

You have to hit L1 and you have to hit X and it brings up like a shield around him.

But there was always a delay for, and this wasn't a PS Now thing, because nothing else in the game felt like this to me.

But there was always like a half second to a full second delay between when you would press X and he would actually pull up the shield.

So you would have to really, really read.

It was like you had to do this way, not exactly when they were attacking, you had to like anticipate at a full second ahead and make sure that you were right on time.

But anyway, and I would do that to some of the Gorgons with some of their attacks, but it wasn't like that with the grabs.

So they could just grab you at any point and you couldn't do anything.

And anyway, yeah, there were just some enemies in the game, when you are attacking them, they are not getting shook from the fact that you're attacking them and then when they attack you in turn it can like stun you and then you're just getting wailed upon by whatever the heck is attacking you.

It just didn't feel properly balanced.

I don't know. Again, we beat the game and it was fine eventually. There were too many sections in this game where I just got backed into a corner and enemies would just start attacking me and I couldn't do anything because the game won't let you attack because you stagger or get stunned or whatever and you can't attack through that. Which is fine.

You're more vulnerable to being stunned than the enemies are. It's not a balance of power there. And you know like for some of the trophy like some of the trophy stuff I went back to my original save to just finish clean up a couple of things like the slide through Apollo's arm and things like that. That was annoying. Yeah that wasn't very fun but the um you know those combat encounters that I would play on normal were an absolute mindless breeze. Yeah. And so it just there was no balance there in hard mode for sure and I can only imagine what Titan mode which is unlocked after you beat the game would even feel like I just I can't imagine that it must all rely on that parry timing that you were talking about probably because if you pull that off it does a ton of damage so and it's really helpful if you do that and speaking of timing I found the dodge says I'm not to not feel good. God of War 1 felt great but those elemental soldiers again, they, one of them, I think the fire one, would send down like three fireballs in a row and I'd roll and dodge the first two but every time on the third one I'd get hit and it's because his roll animation was so long. Like this, to like get out of this roll and Logan can see me but I'm like waving myself around. He just, the role did not feel good which made it a poor defensive option. And then when the game forces you to go on defense in every encounter at some point, especially against big enemies, you're just, you can't win those situations. Yeah, the role, the dodge roll and the parry maneuver, both the animations on them are either too long, or they take too long to implement. Like this is a fast action game. Like you want, when you input a command you want it to happen relatively quickly. And that was the big thing that kept annoying me with this game is that it felt like all that stuff took, you'd use the right stick to dodge somewhere and it took a half second to a full second until he actually did it. Yeah. And it just, yeah for how fast, in some action games that's fine like your Dark Souls or something because that's kind of how Dark Souls is. You'll do your dodge and you'll take a little bit of time depending on how much armor you're carrying and things like that. But in this the whole game is fast and you need to be able to do

those things quickly. I felt like I struggled with the game a little bit less so because I was playing it poorly and more so because I had to adapt to weird things like that. Because I was using the moves that they gave you, but it was more so that I had to learn to adapt to how those moves in practice actually function and work if that makes any sense. It just didn't feel as responsive and satisfying, especially coming off of God of War 1. From what I recall, the other games too, I'm actually super fascinated when we get to God of War 3 because that's the closest to this in design.

Yeah because I remember God of War 3 feeling 10 times better too.

So to go from that to, I guess my memory of that into this.

But again, last time I played God of War 3 was...

I'm excited to see how that shakes out.

Yeah I haven't played God of War 3 in 6 or 7, 8 years so I don't know if that'll be the same.

I don't know if it'll still ring true but I guess we'll see.

What did you think of, we've talked a lot about the actual mechanics of combat, but what did you think of the enemies and bosses?

So one thing I guess I would say about this game that I liked was the kill animations of a lot of the enemies.

They looked cooler than some of the other ones, like cutting open an elephant's head and his brain spills out.

That's kind of fun.

That's awesome.

But I also felt like the game was too, and this says a lot because it's a God of War game, I felt like it was too QTE heavy.

Like to almost a crazy degree.

Like even some of the things that it was prompting me to do QTEs for, like the slides is a good example.

You'd get to the end of the slide when you would need to jump and it would prompt you to press X.

It's like yeah, okay, I know I see it's ending.

But maybe that was just to make that more clear that you were about to run off the ledge or something.

I don't know.

I felt like there was too many QTEs though in the game for sure there was instances where it would all of a sudden prompt me to press a button and I totally wasn't ready for it and I'm like "Whoa!

Oh, okay!" and I would die and I would have to restart because it just didn't seem like that type of area or that type of section where they would do that.

Are you talking about like the Gorgons for example?

When you press circle to grab the Gorgon you almost engage in a mini-aim of slash slash slash dodge the blast are you talking about that or no like actual like things that seemed like cutscenes that all suddenly like go press a button it's like whoa okay um one instance of that I remember was like with uh the snakes when you're trying to get those to to move around or whatever

like you jump onto the side of one and you're like gliding along you're you're like riding it and then it makes you jump to another one but it didn't really convey that that was something anyway bottom line I died on that that's one instance of that that I can remember at least the enemy designs and stuff I thought were pretty cool though a lot of it was more you know you still got your cyclopes in this and you got your dogs I guess but they mix in some different types of enemies the bugs and the elephants and the gorgons are a little bit different in this one as well. They look more like cobras which is kind of cool but.

I got an Egyptian vibe from this game. A little bit yeah.

Like they're some of the enemy types I mean we're not saying that cats were walking around here like

to fight us but just like the elephant and the beetles. Yeah. Even the satyr generals

like they just looked a bit leaner, more streamlined. It was interesting and we know in hindsight, I mean actually from like God of War 1 and 2, other mythologies were thought about. And Egyptian

was like the other option between Norse, like where 2018 was going to go and they ended up going the Norse route. So it was interesting to kind of pick up on some of those design choices here in this game so many, you know, almost a decade ago. Oh my gosh, it'll be nine in a few months.

I know. I know. We're old, it turns out.

What about the bosses?

Um, I didn't really like most of the bosses in the game, honestly. Final Boss is terrible.

It's just total garbage, honestly.

Just doesn't make sense.

make a bit of sense. There's also a Fury lady who's like "Oh I can change reality" or I guess it was the other one who could like change reality and can change the way things looked but uh or maybe they could all do that I don't know because the one who started doing that was not the one in the cutscene that was pretending to be his wife anyway. She explodes into a giant kraken basically which doesn't make a lick of sense. That fight was bad. Even outside of that though, I don't know, some of them were okay. The dude with the two heads on him with the time amulet, that was okay, I guess, but it was also kind of annoying how they mixed in some platforming and you gotta avoid falling to your death in certain instances. The one thing that I mentioned before though that I did appreciate about the game is that it was pretty forgiving with checkpoints because some of these fights are pretty darn long. And if I was tasked with beating them from start to finish that would have been a... I probably would have restarted on easy or something like that. So yeah, it was... I think most of the bosses are not too shabby, but none of them really stand out as being ones that I necessarily loved, if that makes sense. I didn't think most of them were bad outside of the final

one, but everything else really didn't make a mark on me. Especially compared to some of the other boss fights from some of the other games that I definitely think about when I think about this series.

I... I'm actually quite disappointed in thinking about it. It actually reminds me a lot of God of War 1 which didn't really only had two to speak of you know Ares and the giant metal bull and then the Kraken at the beginning of the game or Hydra I should say kind of interesting that those two sort of related but really Ascension reuses a lot of boss fights between the Furies.

Yeah.

Because the game opens up and you kill the first Fury wasn't Megara or Tisiphone and

I only know these names because of Hades by Supergiant now so I know more about the Furies

because of that game than Ascension. Anyway, you kill it, but then because the game's in a flashback,

you fight her again twice. And then the middle one you fight numerous times. And then the last one

you only fight at the final boss fight. So I really wasn't a fan of reusing the Furies over and over again, especially knowing that I had already killed one of them in the opening hour of the game. Yeah, they kept showing back up and I was like, "Wait, what is going on?" Like, I knew they were jumping around in time, but it was still like, "What point in time are we in now?"

I forget are we yeah. And then like you said the prophet guy Pollux and Caster. So that was an interesting fight at least two phases kind of one was more physical one was more magical. Yeah. And

then the there's some like dragon arm like the head of concrete or whatever it was called the arm to start the game. Honestly I think that's the coolest fight in the game. Yeah. Because of the scale and spectacle of it. But really, you only fight, I guess, the three Furies and the

Prophet guy. And when you think of, again, we have some context, but just when you think of God of

War, two and three, there are a lot of boss fights in those games. I mean, they're essentially boss

fight games and I feel like I guess we have to even 2018 may not have as many boss fights but it's definitely more memorable I think the opening boss fight of that game is one of the best boss fights probably yeah like that's immediately iconic and yes just like there are fewer boss fights in that game but the ones they include are great but there's also the dragon and then the brothers, Mignon and

Yeah.

Yeah. Like there's them and it's just and then the final fight it their way this was actually really disappointed I was looking forward to this game because of it's a ps3 game so bigger spectacle more all this stuff and I remember the opening of the game yeah it turns out really the

high highlight of boss fights was the beginning of the game and the rest kind of just petered out

The final fight, super big spectacle, narratively makes no sense, was a cakewalk, like it just felt weird.

"Attack this giant tentacle repeatedly." Okay?

Yeah, it just... they did not nail the boss fights, which I think is so essential to God of War's identity.

I guess the one other aspect of God of War that's pretty... pretty much in all the games.

Did the puzzles do anything for you really in this one?

Most of them really did it for me.

There were some cool sections, like once you got the time amulet thing, I mean there were some...

I think that was a cool idea but I don't know how much they really did with it.

I don't know.

Like the puzzles that are here, I wouldn't have wanted them to be any harder or more difficult, I guess is what I'm saying.

I wouldn't have wanted anything more intricate than what they gave us.

But also what was there I didn't really like

like I figured out what to do and most of them and it was just

Kind of plotting to actually do that

But then again, maybe that's most puzzles and a lot of games if I'm being honest. It was so

They're very one-dimensional in the sense like the time amulet that you get in the Delphi temple

You or the smoke I guess the fog or whatever they have to breathe. Oh, yeah. Yeah every solution is

find a crack in the door and break it so you can go through this hole or

Like do something in the future that impacts the past or vice versa do something in the past that will impact the future year

Yeah, like they didn't

Go deeper or flesh it out

And by the time I will say by the time they exhausted pretty much the fundamentals of it

You moved on and you never went back to it

Except for maybe a couple of times

I did not care for the the time why me ones where you had to like stop halfway through yeah, I hated those

Because you never solved it on your own in the game would always just say oh you prompt you and do it

Yep, like you so what was the point of it?

then the the clone or like the

The stand-in again very always just very simple hold a lever

stand on a button like

There was no it was actually way cooler in combat like being able to send it out to fight other things

So I wish there was more

But it just was flat the coolest part of that implementation

I thought was like that you could use that to like shake off buffs

but they only introduced that in the final boss fight of the whole game because she would shoot you with the

Black tar stuff or whatever and then you could like create a clone and the clone would like be the one that take that hit

or whatever and you could continue on.

I don't know how it really worked in practice but I just know that that was like a way to like...

Yeah it didn't make any sense to me at all.

It was just a way to cleanse yourself of the goop that was on you.

But yeah it doesn't make much sense because he's using the thing to create a clone of himself.

He's not using it to stand in for him I guess.

I don't know.

It's a video game.

I guess they can change the rules on the fly.

Let's talk about some aesthetic stuff before we wrap it up here.

The music do much for you in this one?

I was trying to pay more attention to it this time around and see if there's anything that would really stick with me, but nope.

That just kind of felt like, "Let's hit those same sort of beats we've been hitting in the series up to this point.

Let's throw that main theme in there a whole bunch and yeah, some window dressing around

Like I can't think of a single song in this game outside of a main theme that I can think of it all to be honest

when I was playing the game we took you and I went in the game with the same mentality of

Pitt like really trying like pick up on the music here

And I think we did that because of our discussion around the music and God of War one

So I came in pretty intentional like you you can hum the theme the only song that I noticed during the gameplay

Was this song that played in the furnace and you could hear with the beat and maybe it's not even in the song

Maybe it was just an environmental sound effect. But with the beat you could hear like a hammer on an anvil like yeah

Tomlinson, I was like that's kind of cool incorporating those sounds into the music. I

Did go back after the game

This soundtrack is available on

Apple music and Spotify it was actually part of the game if you down pre-ordered it or whatever

So I listened to the soundtrack and I had three songs that I wrote down

Ghost of Kira, which is the first village that you go through

Has that Egyptian desert vibe to it that I brought up earlier, which I thought was interesting. So that was kind of

cool to hear later and then

Warriors truth is the God of War one theme, you know kind of amplified up a little bit and then

The rest of them some sounded cool like Temple Carnage, but I couldn't tell you when it played

I guess it played in a temple. So maybe the

Prophet I don't know. Yeah, just like isn't iconic

there are some like if there are some tracks that I remember from other games in this series and

we'll get to those when we get to those but

The score in some of the moments from the other games is way more bombastic

and I feel like it really matches the moment quite well in some of the big

scenes that are memorable from these games. Yeah, I just I can't think of

anything from this game that said with me. Like I said, I was trying to pay

closer attention this time so we would have I would have something to say about

it this time around. One more thing about the music. So again, you know, I'm

really trying to think about it and it reminded me of this video which will be

the show notes. It's from Every Frame a Painting. Are you familiar with that YouTube channel?

No.

It's the cinematic breakdown kind of guy. He used to make a lot of really cool videos.

It doesn't do them anymore, but they're great. And one of the last videos that they made was, it was called the Marvel Symphonic Universe. And he asked different people around, he's like, "Can you sing me a song from Indiana Jones, James Bond, Star Wars?" Obviously, everyone can do that.

And then he ends with the stinger, "Can you give me a song from the MCU?" And no one can do it.

And then he goes into this whole thing of like why that happens and how these types of decisions

are made and part of it was the music is just meant to be in the background and not noticed.

Essentially it was to a certain degree. It is meant to literally match what you were

seen on screen and the emotions you're supposed to feel but not stand out. It is it is unintentional

in that regard and I feel like especially this game that was the goal was for it to

complement and not be unique and stand out like they already had the God of War formula

at this point like it was just like do this again. I really feel like they were trying

emulate the first game a lot which is why they kept folding in that main theme so much. At least

I feel like that was very prominent. Maybe that was more prominent towards the end but I can't

I can't recall anything. Sorry Tyler Bates, I apologize. Final thing, final thing before we

close up here. Visual wise, I feel like this game looks like crap. I really do. I think this game

looks terrible. I know it's a PS3 game and I know it's a little bit old and I'm sure I'm being more

harsher on it in retrospect because I've gotten used to 4k and all this other fancy stuff over

the past few years. I feel like this game looks washed the heck out. Like it looks so

devoid of color. I don't know if you felt the same way but I too...

Yeah, just very very washed out. It looks like there was like a white filter placed over a

a lot of stuff in this game. It's like the inverse of a Snyder movie. So yeah, I don't

know, again, especially by comparison to what I'm remembering from 3-2, which I feel like

has a fair amount of good color mixing in it in the different sections of that game.

This game just did not feel like that at all to me. It very much reflects the box art,

I feel like. Oh god, don't get me started on this old box art thing. I mean does it not though?
Like

I feel like the box art was like very bright and white and yellowy and I feel like the most of the color palette in this game is of that same style. Yeah it's just it's very washy. Again it's yellows and whites, very bright colors. It's not dark in any sense.

Yeah, but I feel like that was reflected in even a lot of like, some of the boss designs and some of the character designs and things like that. Like, I like the opening hand monster thing you were talking about, whatever that's called, I forget. But I feel like that looks awful too. Like, I think its design is cool, but I think the way it actually looks in game with its character model was not great.

- Yeah, it's definitely not the most iconic.

It just doesn't stand out, like just visually,

- Even by comparison to the first game that we just played,

I feel like that game had a way,

it had way more going on at way different areas of the game, whether it be going to the underworld or going to--

- And the environments were memorable,

they were different colors and bright

or dark and had different designs and this,

- Everything just feels very same.

- You know, it actually, it felt almost too realistic

to a certain degree.

Like it, like they tried to make God of War grounded in a way instead of being more mythological and fantasy form.

I guess the closest really you get to is maybe at the top of the Apollo statue where you go through time and it's like,

it looks different and it's cool and gold and stuff.

- Yeah.

This game, fun fact, is technically, like on a technical level, the worst visually God of War game.

It is 720p instead of 1080, and it is an uncapped framerate that rarely goes above 30.

It is just, it is a really bad framerate time.

I was actually quite jarred by it coming through.

Even, I was looking it up here very briefly, even God of War 3, so an earlier PS3 game, uncapped frame rate but seems to be based off this Digital Foundry video pretty consistently in the mid 40s to 50s.

So it's even a higher frame rate there.

And God of War 3, as we'll get to, definitely has a better, I think, visual design than this.

what happened to the single player game,

but this 720p is not running all that great.

It's just, it's a bummer.

Sure, the PSP games run on PSP,

but those were remastered for PS3

and they run at 1080, 60.

So it's actually quite disappointing,

both on a technical and visual design element.

- One quick thing I wanted to mention,

just 'cause I thought it was funny,

'cause I had the Wikipedia page here

pulled out next to me just to get some, which is what we normally do when we do these. Anyway,

the final line of like the intro of Ascension on the Wikipedia page, it says, "Essentience

sold less than its predecessors and received no awards, but it did receive several nominations, including outstanding achievement in video game writing at the Writers Guild of America

video game awards. What? What? Huh? What? Must have been a weak year. Must have not had any

good stories to pull from with The Last of Us and Bioshock Infinite. Okay. I'm being sarcastic.

No, I'm being sarcastic. But like that's really funny. 2013 was a god tier year for that. Yeah,

it's very funny to see that that would have been nominated alongside those other games. Those other

games surely were the winners. I notice how people think the story of Infinite is trash. I still like

like this story. But I like it too. I guess wrapping up here, God of War Ascension. Not

a great God of War game. I feel like it just feels so weird. It feels so uninspired in

a lot of ways. I feel like the play...I do agree that the aspects that were probably

the most inspired with this game came with the multiplayer. But then they just slapped

this quick story together that was just very clear that they needed to not do another Greek

game and they did another Greek game and they did another prequel. And I guess the one thing

I didn't mention before too is that it doesn't even feel like Kratos is in this game sometimes.

It just feels like you're controlling a man who has chain blades and he's running around

'Cause he barely talks in this game.

Like, he is so devoid of any sort of character or usual traits of Kratos,

like he's not even screaming in this game very much.

He doesn't do anything.

He's just kind of guy with weapons fighting monsters and stuff.

Like, he only talks a couple times throughout the whole game.

- I totally agree with you.

and actually I found this line from the God of War fandom wiki page. Kind of interesting,

I think it's reflective of it. It's basically, he's talking about he's killed his wife and child.

"However, Kratos, enraged and saddened by the accidental killing, became a self-pitying recluse,

unable to forgive himself for his crime, and adamantly vowing never to serve Ares again."

So Kratos is clearly depressed and he's not out to kill Ares yet as we learn because he takes 10 years to actually get to that point apparently.

Why is he depressed?

Because he doesn't even remember until the very end.

And he's like "Oh I killed my family!

No!"

Yeah it's just he's clearly quiet and it's not...

It's because I don't think they had anything to explore his character with and that's the

problem is that by the time they got to 3 I feel like they had fully fleshed out his arc

and by going back and doing this I feel like they didn't want to

potentially undo anything that they felt like they had closed the book on with 3. So they're like

okay we'll go back and we'll do a prequel but we can't mix up too much because we like where he's

in a good spot further down the road and we don't want to undo that somehow with a pre-yeah it's

It's very, I almost would have been more fine if this game was totally just a God of War game where he's like, "Yo, Ares, I'm rocking with you.

Let's go kill some people."

Like that would have been 10 times better if you were just like a brutal, murderous

Kratos who is a very much not good guy when you play as him.

That could have been interesting.

I think that this game, when I think about this game now, you know, the initial stuff

like, "Oh, it's a multiplayer, haha, wow, what a... not a great idea for God of War."

This game, I think, really, really, really put the pressure on what would become God of War 2018.

Yeah, for them to reboot it.

Like this really prompted us to be like, "Okay, stop.

You need to do something else."

But, yeah, it really... and that pressure ultimately paid off, you know?

And we'll talk about it when we get to 2018, but the fact that it is all canonical, it is all tied together, like they didn't restart, they didn't scratch everything and just say new Kratos, new world, like everything connects.

Even this.

Even God of War Betrayal, the mobile game, which I want to play but you don't want to.

And I respect that.

But in this game, almost, again hindsight's 20/20, but without this game, God of War 2018 still would have been an achievement, but I feel like it is more so because this is what preceded it.

And I kind of like that, you know?

Yeah.

Yeah.

It's a, I don't know, as a whole this is an, it's an interesting entry in the larger series.

It's one that was not the best by any means but I think it also allowed them to kind of go back to the drawing board.

So I think in some senses it's, I don't think they would have done another Greek game after this regardless of it.

I think it could have been more successful than even like three or better well received and I still don't think they would have done another Greek game after this, but this game being pretty bland and dismal I think really did push them in the right direction for the reboot.

So by that account it's probably important but not important in the way that you would think.

Yes.

So yeah.

Did you have anything else you wanted to say about Ascension here?

It's a fascinating game.

It's one of the three prequels.

Two more left.

Yeah, and it's just a game stuck in time, especially when the servers get shut off.

It will always be a part of God of War, but it won't necessarily be the most fondest one.

It's very much the one that I think is the least favorite in the series, to be honest.

Even more so than the handheld games.

Because I don't think people dislike those necessarily.

They're a little smaller in scale because they had to be on the PlayStation Portable, PSP baby.

But I think people like those games more and those were more well received.

This is the one that people look back on and they're like, "Eh, no.

Don't really like this one."

And so it seems like our consensus is pretty similar now nearly, like you said, eight, nine years later.

But yeah, cool.

That does it for Episode 2 of Chapter Select here.

So we will be back next time around with episode 3 which is going to be on God of War 2.

So we are doing the second entry in the series which is widely considered one of the best.

We'll see if that still holds up 15 years later.

When did that come out, 2005 or 6?

I think 6 honestly.

No, 2005 was the first game.

Okay.

I think 6 then.

I think 4 was the first game, if I'm correct.

We just did an episode on it, buddy.

2005.

It was 2005?

Was God of War 1.

Yeah.

So wait, when did this-- God of War 2 came out in 2007.

That was, wow.

March 13th, which is the same present for some reason.

A lot of these games came out in March.

That's very surprising for some reason.

I don't know why.

I knew that game came out after the PlayStation 3, but I thought it came out--

I thought it came out before and the ps3 launch. I forgot that it straight up launched after the ps2

Yes

Shuhei Yoshida anywho I made that call the quarry the first quarry bar log game

That'll be so that'll be what we do next time and we will have a guest on that episode as well

If you would like a tease in that regard

So we'll have a third person joining us to talk through God of War 2 and see how we feel about it all these

All these years later, uh until that time though. I thank you for listening to this episode if you want to keep following along with us

You can follow max and myself on Twitter. I am at more man 12

Max is at max roberts 1 4 3 you can also follow the show now on twitter at chapter select, right?

We did get that. Yep. We got a cool we did. Thank you for the man who gave us that at

Because I know we had to ask for that so at chapter select you can also follow the podcast down will be tweeting out

When things go live and future updates and things like that

But yeah, that should be everything for this episode

And we'll see you back here next time with episode 3 until then have a good
Evening week, whatever it might be and we'll see you soon. Bye
adios

Chapter Select is a max frequency production.

This episode was research produced and edited by me, Max Roberts.

Season 2 is hosted by Logan Moore and myself, and it's all about God of War.

For more on this season, go to chapterselect.com/season2.

To check out previous seasons, go to chapterselect.com.