

= Ellie ( The Last of Us ) =

Ellie is a fictional character in the 2013 video game *The Last of Us*. In the game, the character Joel is tasked with escorting Ellie across a post-apocalyptic United States in an attempt to create a potential cure against an infection to which Ellie is immune. While players briefly assume control of Ellie for a portion of the game, the computer's artificial intelligence primarily controls her actions, often assisting in combat by attacking or identifying enemies. Ellie reappeared as the sole playable character in the downloadable content prequel campaign, *The Last of Us: Left Behind*, in which she spends time with her friend Riley. She was played by Ashley Johnson, who provided the voice and motion capture for the character. Ellie is also the main character in the comic book prequel, *The Last of Us: American Dreams*, wherein she befriends Riley and has her first encounter with the rebel group Fireflies.

Ellie was created by Neil Druckmann, the creative director and writer of *The Last of Us*. Inspired by a mute character proposed for *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*, Druckmann created Ellie as a strong female character with a close relationship with Joel; throughout the game's development, the relationship between Ellie and Joel was the central focus, with all other elements developed around it. Johnson inspired aspects of Ellie's personality, prompting Druckmann to make her more active in fighting off hostile enemies. Naughty Dog also redesigned Ellie's appearance during the development of the game to more closely resemble Johnson. However, comparisons have also been made with actress Ellen Page.

The character has been well received by critics, with Ellie's relationship with Joel most frequently being the subject of praise. The strength and complexity of Ellie's character and its subversion of the damsel in distress stereotype have also been commended. Ellie's role in *Left Behind*'s plot has prompted some social commentary within the industry, with coverage focusing on a scene depicting LGBT themes. Both the character and Johnson's performance received numerous awards and nominations, and have regularly been placed favorably in polls and lists.

= = Character design = =

Creative director Neil Druckmann designed Ellie as a counterpart to Joel, the game's main playable character. She was also intended to demonstrate that a character bond could be created entirely through gameplay. Druckmann described the game as a coming of age story for Ellie, in which she adopts the qualities of a survivor. Ashley Johnson was chosen to portray Ellie in *The Last of Us* shortly after her auditions; the development team felt that she suitably fit the role, particularly when acting alongside Troy Baker, who portrayed Joel. Johnson contributed greatly to the development of the character, convincing Druckmann to re-write Ellie in a stronger manner, and able to fight off hostile enemies. The character's performances were mostly recorded using motion capture technology; approximately 85 % of the game's animations were recorded using motion capture, with remaining audio elements recorded later in a studio. When portraying Ellie, Johnson faced challenges in performing "disturbing" scenes that made her feel uncomfortable. Johnson felt that video games rarely feature strong female characters such as Ellie, and expressed her excitement to portray the role for this reason.

The development team felt that establishing Ellie's physical appearance was "critical"; they figured that she needed to appear young enough to make her relationship with Joel—who is aged in his 40's—believable, but old enough to be credible as a resourceful teenager capable of surviving. A redesign of Ellie's physical appearance was publicized in May 2012; Druckmann stated that the change was to make her look more similar to Johnson. Prior to the redesign, comparisons were made between Ellie and actress Ellen Page; in June 2013, Page accused Naughty Dog of "ripping off [her] likeness". The team felt that Ellie was important for the game's marketing; Druckmann said that, when asked to move the image of Ellie from the front of the game's packaging to the back, "everyone at Naughty Dog just flat-out refused".

When questioned about the inspiration for Ellie as a gameplay feature, Druckmann recalled when he and game director Bruce Straley brainstormed ideas for *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* (2009).

One of their ideas was a sequence with a mute female character whose role was to summon Nathan Drake , Uncharted 's main character , and briefly accompany him throughout the sequence ; Druckmann felt this created a " beautiful " relationship through gameplay alone . Though this concept was scrapped for Uncharted 2 , the idea was raised when discussing a new project , ultimately inspiring the character of Ellie . The addition of Ellie as artificial intelligence was a major contributor to the game engine . The team intentionally added a feature in which Ellie remains close to Joel , to avoid being conceived by players as a " burden " . Programmer Max Dyckhoff stated that , when working on Ellie as artificial intelligence , he imagined her experiences throughout the game 's events in an attempt to achieve realism . Druckmann also felt inspired by wars that took place in Syria and Afghanistan when creating Ellie ; he felt that conflict was a familiarity to the children in those countries , which is similar to Ellie 's view . During the Winter segment of the game , players assume control of Ellie . The developers assured that this change , as well as the knowledge of Ellie 's immunity , was kept secret prior to the game 's release , to surprise players .

= = Attributes = =

Ellie is characterized by her roughened , messy appearance and behavior , as well as her emotional trauma , which is accentuated after her encounter with David . Having lost many people in her life , she suffers from severe monophobia and survivor 's guilt . This resulted in her becoming a very hardened person ; she uses violence without hesitation and frequently swears . Ellie also feels worthless , to a suicidal extent in which she believes her life is a burden and her death would be beneficial for others . While she shows initiative , she is not as adept at survival as Joel , being somewhat impulsive and naïve , and unable to swim . Following the release of Left Behind , in which Ellie kisses her friend Riley , Druckmann stated that he wrote Ellie as a homosexual character , though preferred to leave her sexuality subjective to the player 's opinion .

= = Appearances = =

In the comic book series American Dreams , it is told that Ellie lost her mother at birth and grew up in an orphanage . She later went to a military boarding school in the Boston quarantine zone , where she befriended Riley Abel , a fellow rebel who protected her from bullies . During the events of Left Behind , which takes place several weeks before the beginning of The Last of Us , Riley returns to Ellie after a long absence and tells her that she had joined the Fireflies , a revolutionary militia group . While spending time together at an abandoned shopping mall near the quarantine zone , Riley reveals that she is about to be posted to another city , and Ellie hesitantly supports her decisions . When Ellie pleads for Riley to stay , the latter abandons her Firefly pendant . In response , Ellie impulsively kisses her , which Riley returns . Drawn by the noise of their activities , the Infected pursue Ellie and Riley ; the two attempt to escape , but are bitten . They consider suicide , but choose to spend their final hours together . However , Ellie survives the infection and seeks help from Marlene , the leader of the Fireflies , who agrees to escort Ellie in order to find a cure due to her immunity . Marlene is later wounded , and early in The Last of Us , tasks smugglers Joel and Tess to escort Ellie ; Tess dies early on during the journey .

Initially annoyed by Joel 's surliness , Ellie begins to feel a strong attachment to him . However , upon learning that he intends to leave her with his brother Tommy and return to Boston , she runs away , and later confronts Joel , demanding that he not abandon her . This strengthens the bond between them , and they continue on their journey . After experiencing a traumatizing encounter in the Winter , in which Ellie is nearly raped and murdered by a band of cannibals and their leader David , she becomes withdrawn and introverted . When Joel finally gets her to the Fireflies , it is discovered that an operation on Ellie is required to remove the mutant strain of the Cordyceps fungus growing on her brain , which may be used to create a vaccine ; the operation will likely kill her . While she is being prepared for surgery , Joel kills Marlene and the Fireflies , makes his way to the operating room , and carries Ellie to safety . As she was unconscious during the battle , Ellie is unaware of what had transpired . As they leave the hospital , Joel lies about the events , telling her

that the Fireflies had found many other subjects , and had stopped looking for a cure . Ellie later confronts him about it , admitting her survivor 's guilt and demanding to know the truth . When he reassures her that he is telling the truth , she replies with " Okay " .

= = Reception = =

Ellie 's character received generally positive feedback . Jason Killingsworth of Edge praised Ellie 's complexity and commended Naughty Dog for not having made her " a subordinate ... precocious teen girl that Joel must babysit " . Ashley Reed and Andy Hartup of GamesRadar named Ellie one of the " most inspirational female characters in games " , writing that she is " one of the most modern , realistic characters ever designed " . Eurogamer 's Ellie Gibson commended the character 's strength and vulnerability , praising the game 's subversion of the damsel in distress cliché . GamesRadar listed Ellie among the best characters of the video game generation , stating that her courage exceeds that of most male characters . IGN 's Greg Miller compared Ellie to Elizabeth from BioShock Infinite ( 2013 ) , and felt that the former was a " much more rounded out , full @-@ fledged " character . Conversely , Game Informer 's Kimberley Wallace felt that the game focused too much on Joel , " hardly capitalizing on Ellie 's importance " , and Chris Suellentrop of The New York Times judged that Ellie is cast " in a secondary , more subordinate role " .

Critics praised the relationship between Ellie and Joel . Matt Helgeson of Game Informer wrote that the relationship was " poignant " and " well @-@ drawn " , Joystiq 's Richard Mitchell found it " genuine " and emotional , and IGN 's Colin Moriarty identified it as a highlight of the game . Eurogamer 's Oli Welsh felt the characters were developed with " real patience and skill " . Philip Kollar of Polygon found the relationship was assisted by the game 's optional conversations . Wallace of Game Informer named Joel and Ellie one of the " best gaming duos of 2013 " , appreciating their interest in protecting each other . Game Informer 's Kyle Hilliard compared Joel and Ellie 's relationship to that of the Prince and Erika from Prince of Persia ( 2008 ) , writing that both duos deeply care for one another , and praised the " emotional crescendo " in The Last of Us , which he judged had not been achieved in Prince of Persia . PlayStation Official Magazine 's David Meikleham named Joel and Ellie the best characters in a PlayStation 3 game .

Following the release of The Last of Us : Left Behind , Ellie 's relationship with Riley was commended by reviewers . GameSpot 's Tom Mc Shea felt new appreciation for Ellie by seeing her actions around Riley . The Daily Telegraph 's Tim Martin praised the characters ' interactions , and Eurogamer 's Stace Harman felt that Left Behind improves the understanding of Joel and Ellie 's relationship . Kotaku 's Kirk Hamilton described Ellie and Riley 's kiss as " video gaming 's latest breakthrough moment " , declaring it " a big deal " . Keza MacDonald of IGN wrote that the kiss was " so beautiful and natural and funny that [ she ] was left dumbstruck " . IGN 's Luke Karmali questioned Naughty Dog 's motivation behind the kiss , noting the " bait @-@ and @-@ switch " in which they made players care for the character before revealing her sexuality , but ultimately dismissed this and commended their handling of Ellie 's sexuality and the subtlety of the writing .

The character of Ellie won year @-@ end awards , including Best New Character from Hardcore Gamer and Most Valuable Character at the SXSW Gaming Awards for Left Behind ; she received a nomination for Best Character from Destructoid . Ashley Johnson 's performance also received various accolades : Performer at the 10th and 11th British Academy Video Games Awards , Outstanding Character Performance the 17th Annual DICE Awards , Best Voice Actress at the Spike VGX 2013 , and Best Performer from The Daily Telegraph .