



The 2018 “God of War” PS4 video game by Santa Monica Studios is the eighth installment of the similarly titled franchise, and has been long awaited by fans and gaming enthusiasts alike. The classic series reboot had many people looking forward to a revitalized game with exciting combat and rebranded nostalgia, for which it certainly did not disappoint.



*“Absolute joy to play...both immersive and entertaining!”*

Continuing on the story of the main protagonist, Kratos, “God of War” juxtaposes the character’s life many years following on from the last game, in a whole new realm no less. All of the previous games were set within the collective states of Greece, with no specific reference to a specific age. During those games, players interacted with a host of monsters, creatures, and gods within the realm of Greek mythology. All of these games also saw the main character wielding two menacing-looking flaming swords that were attached by chains seared into his skin, giving him an aggressive silhouette to match his fearsome personality.

In this game however, the narrative is set somewhere entirely new, within the realm of Scandinavia, and introduces players to a few of the many Norse gods. This is no surprise, considering all of the Greek gods are supposed to be dead as a result of the old games, so it makes sense that the developers would find new ones to experiment with. It is never fully explained how Kratos got to Scandinavia, or why he was there, but we do learn quickly that not only did he make a life there, he made a new family. But his new family is on a precarious slope, as we also learn his second wife has passed away, leaving Kratos alone

with their young son, Atreus, who is unexplainably sick. For many fans familiar with game lore, this is particularly important due to the Herculean origins of the character when it came to his previous wife and child, and fans sympathize with Kratos for nearly losing not one but two families. Nevertheless, despite Atreus's illness, the two must embark on a quest to place the mother in her final resting place, a task that would prove far more complicated than one would reasonably expect, if one wasn't part-God. Another loss Kratos has suffered is the loss of his classic swords, introducing a new weapon in the form of a magical, double-handed axe with ice powers.

Together, they encounter many foes, both monster and myth alike, and get to know each other better along the way, developing an emotional bond that humanizes our main protagonist, and finally removes the term "anti-" from his classification as an "antihero". This emotional progression for our main character was an extremely satisfying evolution to watch, as it truly tackled many of the past issues and complaints players had about him, and made him more relatable to family audiences, even though this should not be recommended as a family game.

In order for this game to be a success, the developers had to overcome a litany of issues, ranging from story to gameplay, as well as be more considerate of audience reaction towards this type of game. When the original game, of the same title, was released back in 2005, the game was heralded as "one of the most violent games on the market." A title of which Santa Monica Studios has been unwilling to relinquish with the release of each succeeding game.

And violence was indeed to be had, considering that the average player would need to spend anywhere from 17-25 hours to complete the game, with up to an additional 25 hours of extra content, making it the longest game in its series. It is notable though that the length of the game does make up for some of its disappointments. One of the merits of games past was the extravagantly gory and overdone animations and foes that players experienced, of which there were many. This game did not follow through with tradition however, reusing animations with multiple enemies, and choosing instead to reskin foes based on the level of your player. And for many of the fans of the original games, it was also a disappointment that many of the take-down combinations featured in previous games were either only unlockable after a serious amount of gameplay, or not present at all. The revamped shop UI was also confusing to navigate, and many of the offered upgrades were unsubstantial compared to anything players found within the world. Finally, another consistent issue with this game, like many of its previous counterparts was the camera, which would routinely generate frames that would leave enemies or incoming fire out of frame, leaving players at a tactical disadvantage.

It is worth mentioning however that all of the faults of this game are generously outweighed by its merits. On top of the beautiful soundtrack, and visually stunning graphics, the level designs were both complex and engaging, with clear attention to detail, no matter the player type. One of the most notable successes of the game however is the lack of cinematic cuts, as developers put a lot of time into generating smooth transitions between cut scenes to interactable levels, allowing the game to appear as if it were being carried out within just one shot, becoming the first game of its caliber and pedigree to do so. The lack of loading screens left a big impression on players, and many found themselves all the more immersed in the game because of it.

Another impressive tactic developers used was the addition of Atreus, the notably present side character. Many games have used side characters both as a plot device and a combat aid, such as Naughty Dog's "The Last of Us", but "God of War" stood out among the rest of them. Atreus is

controlled by an AI, his inclusion does not provide an option for multiplayer purposes, but the AI's evolution throughout the game is realistically driven by the narrative and player choices. He is able to be upgraded throughout levels, as a combat aid, just like Kratos, and his actions and responses in combat are affected by what's happening in the story. One such example, after a significant fight between the characters of Kratos and Atreus, we actually see Atreus refuse commands in combat, choosing instead to either fight by himself or not at all. His personality expresses itself, and presents him as a stellar example of a full-game NPC.

"God of War" was an absolute joy to play, as it was both immersive and entertaining. The heartwarming narrative of the game intertwined well with the expansive gameplay, and despite its few faults, players were rewarded with an experience that has truly demonstrated itself as the worthy recipient of "Game of the Year".