





orking on *The Last of Us* for the past three and a half years has been an intense journey for me and the entire team at Naughty Dog. From the initial concept, through the creation of the characters and storyline, to the final technical tweaks that we are wrapping up now, I feel as though we too have trekked across the fictional world of the game with our protagonists, Joei and Ellie – felt their losses, their fears, their triumphs. As I play through the near-finished game now, I realize that, even when the situation is at its bleakest, when the heroes could not be more alone, Joel and Ellie – and, without question, the player as well – are accompanied by another character – one who does not speak, but communicates perhaps better than any other: the beautiful, haunting musical score crafted by composer Gustavo Santaolalla.

Early in the planning stages for *The Last of Us*, we created a folder on our local network and began dumping tracks into it – cues from film scores, songs – music that we felt accurately represented the style and emotion of the story. When it came time to begin the process of selecting a composer for the game, we looked back into the folder and realized that most of the tracks were composed by Gustavo Santaolalial

We met with Gustavo and presented a detailed description of the story and characters. We emphasized the idea that, while many of the themes we deal with in *The Last of Us* are very dark, there is a certain beauty to the world of the game as well. Gustavo's score, which features guitar-dominated themes backed by sparse orchestra, balances these two elements wonderfully. From the first piece of music he delivered, which accompanied our debut teaser-trailer for the game, we were blown away.

From there, it was an iterative process. Gustavo and I would meet every few months. I would show him developing parts of the game, and he would play for



me the themes he had been working on. As development progressed and he saw how we were implementing his music into the game, he would make tweaks here and there to the melody or instrumentation to better suit the scene.

Conversely, I would listen to Gustavo's music as I fleshed out the script, finding inspiration in the tone of one piece or the structure of another. There are several moments in the game where we decided to remove dialogue and sound effects altogether, allowing the music to do the storytelling. Gustavo's compositions convey such emotion and draw such distinct connections between characters and events, we were able to rely less on dialogue in certain instances, resulting in story moments that are all the more impactful.

From a writer's perspective, it's a pretty incredible feeling to come up with an idea, craft a story, and then have an amazing artist like Gustavo interpret the material and have it surprise you. At that point, you see the story through fresh eyes – or in this case, fresh ears – and it continues to inspire you as you work on the project for so many years.

As I listen to this soundtrack album, I go through a whole emotional spectrum. I associate these musical moments with characters that have lived with me for years now. I feel the loss of a certain individual, or a moment of beauty after a savage encounter. My favorite piece is "The Path (A New Beginning)," which plays over the final moment of the game. For me, this piece of music represents the culmination of not only Ellie and Joel's journey, but the journey of the entire team that has gone through many hardships to craft a truly special experience with *The Last of Us.* I can't help but get emotional when I listen to it.

I hope you feel the same.

Neil Druckmann
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