

## The Last of Us Episode 3: A Moment of Peace

*The Last of Us*, based upon the game of the same name, first aired 15th January 2023. It follows Joel, a disgruntled smuggler, who's tasked with taking Ellie, a young girl with a huge secret, through a post-apocalyptic world. However, episode 3 strays from this story. The third episode of the HBO show follows Bill - a redneck doomsday prepper - and Frank - a survivor who finds his way to Bill's compound. They fall in love and for a moment we feel at peace.

*The Last of Us* show takes several sections to show the peace within the apocalypse. These are also found in the game, however, whole sections are dedicated to giving these moments, giving them large amounts of screentime. But take this with a grain of salt, as these moments don't last and most times have sad endings which brings the audience right back into the bleakness of the apocalypse. The show uses Bill and Frank - as well as Ellie and Riley in episode 7 - to portray how there are silver linings in the apocalypse, even if they are thin and don't last long.

### Synopsis

The episode begins with Ellie and Joel, who come across a disturbing scene of piled up dead bodies; we later learn that these people were evacuated. We get a look at the bleakness of the apocalypse and how people died not just from the infection but also from the chaos that it brought it about. This is the first time Ellie is seeing what happened at the beginning of the apocalypse, and through her eyes we discover this too. This extends beyond this scene and to all of the show.

We then cut back to 2003. The apocalypse has just begun, everyone is being evacuated. Bill is hiding. A soldier knocks on the door however there's no answer, instead Bill is in his basement, which is filled with firearms, a CCTV system and enough food for any disaster. He is left alone in the town and begins to set up his apocalyptic wonderland. It's now 2007. Bill is alerted when one of his traps is set off. He goes to see what it is, thinking it's one of the infected, however, it's a man. His name is Frank, and he convinces Bill to let him in for lunch. Frank - after dinner - notices his piano, and plays *Long Long Time* by Linda Ronstadt. Bill then plays it, however more gently. After which, Frank and Bill make love and begin to fall in love.

From then on we follow Frank and Bill through almost two decades of love. They endure raids, tiny strawberries and plenty of wine. During this time, they meet Joel and Tess, who become reluctant smuggling partners. We cut to 2023, Frank is visibly ill, and is running out of medicine. Frank decides he wants to die. He's ill and cannot help Bill survive. They enjoy one last meal where Frank has a glass of wine, laced with sleeping pills that'll kill him. Little does he know that Bill has also drunk the wine. They go to bed together, and die together.

Now, we are caught up to Joel and Ellie's story, who come to Bill and Frank's home. They find the letter from Bill, who tells Joel to keep Tess safe, a poignant reminder of episode two ending (where Tess dies). The letter also tells them not to go into the bedroom. They take a truck and some supplies. The episode ends with a shot of the bedroom's open window.

Throughout the episode, there are different moments which highlight how an apocalypse - for some - can be a paradise. From strawberries to open windows, the episode is filled with denotative and connotative meanings which add to the moments of peace throughout the episode.

### **How does it differ from the game?**

Whilst, the HBO show should be able to exist without comparison to the game, it's also important for the context of this analysis. The game of the same name was released in 2013 developed by Naughty Dog. The HBO show is mostly a faithful adaptation, as one of the writers is Neil Druckmann - the co-creator of *The Last of Us* game. However, sometimes the show does differ and this episode is a good example.

Firstly, we don't see or know how Bill and Frank meet in the game. They are also not explicitly said to be a couple, although many fans have speculated that they were, given other LGBTQ+ representations. These are minor things but where the show really differs is in the portrayal of Bill and Frank's relationship.

Frank - in the game - does not get ill but rather gets so sick of Bill that he leaves. He steals from Bill but is bitten by an infected and so hangs himself so he doesn't turn. This shows the more bleak sides of the apocalypse rather than the warm, loving relationship that Bill and Frank have in the show. Whilst, their relationship is rocky - at times, ultimately, they live and die by each other's sides.

### **The Piano**

After their first dinner, Frank walks over to the piano, saying he'd been looking at it the whole dinner. He begins to play *Long Long Time* by Linda Ronstadt in a lively manner. Bill looks uncomfortable and at times almost in pain. He stops Frank from playing mid-song and Frank gestures from him to play. He does so reluctantly and when he plays it's soft and gentle. By the end, Frank is nearly in tears, and asks 'who's the girl?', to which Bill replies, 'there is no girl.' Frank places a hand on his shoulder and says 'I know' before they kiss.

Already, we see the relationship dynamic between the two forming. Frank - like his piano playing - is lively and doesn't care if it's perfect as long as he's enjoying it. Whereas, Bill is more held back preferring to play gently and emotively. Not to say that Frank isn't emotional because he is, however he is more open in terms of his emotions whereas Bill is more closed off. This leads to moments of big emotional vulnerability rather than a continuous stream of it.

The song itself, *Long Long Time*, is about unrequited love. The idea that you love someone so much but they never became a partner or lover. The song choice is significant as Bill hints that he has never been with a man and that there is no girl in the picture. It's implied that Bill has

never really admitted that he loved anyone, however, that's not to say that he doesn't feel love for others.

A piano also can represent unity. An idyllic form of family image could be described as them all gathering around a piano, and singing together. Whilst Bill and Frank do not have a family, they represent a union. Throughout the episode, even when times are rough for them, as said earlier their relationship is not perfect, they remain united. This is very different from the game, where Frank, before hanging himself, writes a note about how much he hates Bill's guts. This scene highlights how Frank and Bill are united, despite their differences. Whilst Bill tells Frank to stop, he then shows him his own version, rather than getting angry and making him leave.

### **Growing Strawberries**

Skip forward to 2013, Frank and Bill meet Tess and Joel. Frank trades some guns with Tess in exchange for strawberry seeds. Frank leads Bill to the strawberry patch and he covers his eyes. Again, this is Bill showing his vulnerability and Frank leading him forward, in the same way that they play the piano. When Bill sees the strawberries he breaks out into giggles. This is strange to the audience who are used to Bill's sour demeanour which suddenly changes. As they try the strawberries, a soft guitar melody plays in the background. Again, Bill breaks out into giggles, because of the taste. Not only is this a luxury in a world where sweet, fresh things are scarce but also because it was Frank who put them there. Bill and Frank create a moment of peace in the sweetness of the strawberries, and again they are both allowed to be vulnerable in this moment.

Bill apologises for getting older faster than Frank, to which Frank replies 'I like you older. Older means we're still here.' Bill, still looking sad, says 'I was never afraid before you showed up.' They kiss as the sun shines through the bushes. They are both vulnerable at this moment, and for once, Frank does not have anything to say back to Bill but instead chooses to stay quiet and wordlessly shows his love. The pure romance here makes the audience forget the world these characters are living in. The lines are referencing the apocalypse but function with or without it. The idea of fear over someone is probably something that Bill loathes at first, but has grown to love it because he loves Frank. Frank is just grateful to be alive and together. These sentiments transcend the apocalyptic setting, and give us a moment of peace, where the characters and the audience can forget about the world beyond Bill's walls.

### **The Glass of Wine**

Now this is the last scene where we see both of the characters alive. Frank is gravely ill, he is going to die soon and they both know this although Bill is at first unwilling to accept it. Frank has asked him to make him dinner - like the one they had when they first met - then in his last glass of wine, put enough sleeping pills in to kill him.

Both Bill and Frank are dressed up in their finest clothes, the table is made up, with candles in the centre. It's warm and intimate, the scene is very quiet, neither speaking much at first. The

first line is 'Will it be enough?'. Bill assures Frank, and we see how far Bill will go for Frank, even mixing drugs into his wine so that he may die peacefully. Frank drinks the whole glass, then Bill mirrors him. Frank looks at the bottle and realises there was already drugs in the bottle, which Bill confirms. Bill says that, 'This isn't the tragic suicide at the end of the play. I'm old. I'm satisfied. And you were my purpose.' Frank doesn't condone this, he says he should be furious but 'from an objective point of view, it's incredibly romantic.' They laugh, however, tears are brimming in their eyes. Bill takes Frank to bed. We see them go into the room and close the door.

This scene is rather poignant. On one hand, it's tragic as these lovers both ultimately commit suicide and die together. However, this - like Frank points out - is very romantic and actually gives them a happy ending. The scene, unlike Tess' death in the previous episode, is peaceful. It's not something so sudden and shocking and more importantly, both of them choose this, which is something which can't be said for most of the deaths in the show. The fact we don't see them die is also significant. The show gives them privacy so they can die intimately together without us watching. Whilst we witness the very intimate final meal, they are left to die together. There is no violence and no dramatic death, just the closing of the door, like the closing of a book. Again, it's peaceful and calm.

### **The Letter**

The letter that Bill left is addressed to Joel, and starts with a request that they don't go into the bedroom, as whilst the house doesn't smell due to an open window, that their bodies would not be a nice sight. He goes on to write that Joel is welcome to take anything. 'I used to hate the world,' he writes, 'And I was happy when everyone died. But I was wrong, because there was one person worth saving. That's what I did. I saved him then I protected him. That's why men like you and me are here. We have a job to do and God help any motherfuckers who stand in our way. I leave you all my weapons and equipment, use them to keep Tess safe.'

This is where the peace breaks and we come back into the horrible bleakness of the world. Tess - who is already dead - is Joel's equivalent of Frank to Bill, but she did not have a choice in her death. Joel did not have time to grow old with her. The fact that Ellie can't finish reading out the letter shows the pain. Joel leaves the house and re-reads the letter before scrunching it up. This sequence is similar to one in the game. When Joel gives Bill the note which Frank wrote before killing himself, he reads it and scrunches it up. Whilst it's not a perfect parallel, it shows how the series deals with grief and the bleakness of the world. Joel - and Bill's game counterpart - could not protect the ones they loved, they were not given a moment of peace before their deaths. With Sarah, they were trying to escape town before she was shot and Tess acts as a distraction so that Ellie and Joel could escape the infected. The moment of peace is destroyed by this reminder of Tess.

### **The Window**

The final shot of the episode is the open window of Bill and Frank's home. Outside of the window we can see Ellie and Joel drive away as *Long Long Time* plays out. This shot is a callback to the open screen of the game. Craig Marzin explained in an article with Deadline that: "As a player, I just always loved the start screen in *The Last of Us*, looking at this window and how peaceful it was, even though the world is not peaceful, and what happens to these characters isn't peaceful." This is true within the show and acts as a peaceful ending to the episode, the world seems still, just like it was when Bill and Frank ate strawberries or their eventual suicide, and marks the end of their story. The window, being so still, is a reminder that they are also the same, whereas Joel and Ellie are moving onwards.

Craig Marzin also points out how the energy of them is still there. It's their house and they are still in it, even if they're not alive. It symbolises their love and how it will always be eternal in that house. Just behind the camera are their bodies but we don't see them. The episode does not have the gore - aside from a few moments - to earn that shot. We are only gently reminded of them being there - mostly through Bill's letter, which says the window is open. Instead of their bodies, we are given one final peaceful moment as the song that brought them together plays as the credits roll.

## **Conclusion**

All in all, the episode is a tear-jerker for many as it sets itself apart from the apocalypse in many ways. Aside from a few moments, the episode is mostly just focused on the relationship between Bill and Frank, which develops very naturally, some may even say that it mirrors some tropes from romantic films such as the meet-cute. They don't bond due to Frank or Bill saving one another in some dramatic fashion but they save each other over time. As Bill says, Frank was his purpose, not some mission or quest but rather his whole life, and that in this world is rather beautiful. Joel and Ellie similarly go on this journey, however, whilst initially Joel is motivated by the deal he's made with the fireflies and then because of Tess' death, he grows to love her and realises that she has to become his purpose.

## **Sources**

<https://deadline.com/2023/01/the-last-us-interview-neil-druckmann-craig-mazin-nick-offerman-murray-bartlett-pedro-pascal-1235242560/>