

Regarding the Hogwarts Legacy Boycott – Should outside issues have so much power over the games themselves?

Hogwarts Legacy is one of the most anticipated video games of the last three years; being announced in September of 2020, it received massive media coverage and huge reactions from long-time fans of the Harry Potter series as well as newcomers to the franchise alike. The concept of being able to create one's own character in a fully interactive and realistic rendering of the Wizarding World universe was almost too much to bear. Fans of the series could live out their lifelong fantasies of being a brave and bold member of the Gryffindor house. A sinister, cunning member of the Slytherin house or an intelligent, witty member of the Ravenclaw house. That was about it because no one was going to be choosing Hufflepuff.

This was such a huge deal to fans of the series and gamers alike as this was to be the first major new instalment to the gaming side of the Wizarding World in over a decade, boasting the pristine prestige of modern graphics and next-gen hardware.

However, what came shortly after the game's announcement was not terribly difficult to predict. The game, being set in the magical world of Harry Potter, meant that the rights and profits belonged to one woman, JK Rowling.

Rowling's views

Whilst nearly everyone who has any interest in Hogwarts Legacy will have heard about the issues caused by Rowling, in a nutshell, the titular author utilised her Twitter platform with over 14 million followers to spread views that were considered to be transphobic, and in the years following said incident has continued to double down on her rhetoric. This, in turn, has precipitated many avid fans of her work to evaluate their love for the series.

Rowling's outspoken views on transgender people have made her a fairly large symbol of bigotry and transphobia for many groups on one side of the political spectrum whilst also being seen as a truth-speaking saviour to groups on the opposite side. Whilst Hogwarts Legacy developers Avalanche Software confirmed that Rowling had nothing to do with the game, the rights still belonged to her, and thus, she would still be in receipt of the profits.

Whether or not one should agree with the views Rowling puts forth is frankly irrelevant as this situation perhaps highlights a larger issue within the world of video games and the ways they link to real-world situations, issues, and politics. Should the controversies that surround video games have such massive effects on whether or not people can play them?

Other Controversies

One need only take a look at the many other controversies that have plagued the video game world in recent years. The scandal of Activision Blizzard and their alleged treatment of female employees. Reports of rampant sexual harassment, as well as the fact that only 20% of the entire workforce was female, with all executive positions being held by white males. Bethesda and their alleged non-payment of Mick Gordon for his creation of the music of Doom Eternal, and even more recently, Squanch Games and the allegations of Justin Roiland's domestic violence.

The existence of shady dealings and dirty deeds behind the scenes of video games feels like it has existed since the dawn of time, when the first Pacman ate its first fruit or when the first Space Invader fired its first laser. But when people lined up in arcades to play games, their minds weren't

focused on the views and actions of those who made the games but rather on the fun to be had from the games themselves. Whilst it is the general consensus that it is a positive thing that the public is more aware now of game development behind the curtain, and so can decide whether or not to support a game based on their own moral or political standpoints, it could also be argued that the sheer power public opinion on outside issues has over whether or not a video game does well take away from what the core concept of what a video game is.

YouTube personality 'The Act Man' took to Twitter to highlight possible hypocrisy in the views that buying Hogwarts Legacy supports transphobia, quoting Twitch and Twitter user Will Overgard's video.

"By buying this video game, you support transphobic values", replying with, "I say this as the metal in my cellphone used to record this video was mined by child slave labour." (@TheActMan_YT) This very clearly being a rather sarcastic, morbid indictment of the communities that have chosen to stand against the game.

The Future

From the current landscape of the video game world and the way in which controversies have shaped people's views on whether to support certain video games or not it can't be denied that online communities supporting boycotts of video games has created a rhetoric of 'if you play this game, you're supporting this or that'. The decision on if this is a positive is up to each individual but it is a phenomenon that does affect every gamer as it brings up an issue gamers have not had to ponder before. When deciding to buy a game the question is no longer just 'will this be fun for me?' but rather 'is it morally good for me to buy this game?'

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