



Escaping Through The Death Stranding 2

When escapism becomes an emotional reckoning with death, fatherhood, and the brutal truth that love inevitably carries grief

WARNING – SPOILERS AHEAD FOR BOTH DEATH STRANDING GAMES

You can see what I had to say about the first game here:

[Escaping Through The Death Stranding](#)

Few videogames have ever reached into my real life the way Death Stranding did. What began as digital escapism in Hideo Kojima's fractured world became something far more intimate than just simply delivering packages – especially after I became a father.

My wife saw how much the game meant to me. She's even observed that how I used to rock my daughter to sleep is incredibly similar to how Sam would rock Lou to calm her in the game; more evidence of videogames translating into positive behaviours for me in reality.

By the time Death Stranding 2 released, I wasn't just in a position to return to Sam Porter Bridges' journey. I would be returning as a man with far more to lose.

On my birthday I was treated to a copy of Death Stranding 2: On The Beach. I unwrapped it, eager to continue the story of Sam and Lou – the latter now being a toddler. The cover is a stunning ode to fathers everywhere, with Lou facing Sam, as he

- with eyes closed - is giving her a loving kiss on the forehead. I was already living through Sam before playing.

As soon as the first opportunity arose, I popped the disk into my PS5 - my wife locked in by my side to watch the adventure unfold (A pastime throughout our entire relationship, providing many canonical moments for us).

The opening sequences are pure bliss. BJ Thomas' "Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head", plays as Sam and Lou are seen embracing the peaceful life of preppers, living safe in a shelter away from the BT's and Timefall.

Sam has clearly found his life's meaning; being a father - much like me.

There are moments of gameplay where you have Lou strapped to your chest, reminiscent of the BB pod that she was once confined to - and also of the baby Bjorn I carry my daughter in when we go out on adventures.

I'm in gaming heaven. It's like I get to enjoy even more time with my daughter after she goes down for a nap or to bed. Escapism becomes even more meaningful when it feels like an extension of all the important and positive things in your life.

Suddenly, a sense of malaise came over me. A foreboding.

This game is after all called Death Stranding.. Death is everywhere, and no character is off limits.

I turn to my wife after briefly looking at my daughter sleeping on her lap - noticing the similarities between her and Lou.

Half-laughing and half-serious, I say;

"I really hope they don't kill this kid.."

My wife didn't laugh. Her look gave away a concern. As if she knew I'd already stepped too far into the game. Not as a player, but as a father. It was the kind of concern reserved for someone already too emotionally invested.

She knows me too well...

She reached for her phone silently.

I continued playing, just waiting for her to say what I dreaded.

Her face went pale and I didn't need to ask. But I did anyway.

"... They kill Lou, don't they?"

She nodded. No words needed.

That was when the game stopped being escapism. It stopped being an extension of my real self. It instead turned into a countdown. A doom counter for when the moment would come that we would be confronted with Lou's death.

I kept playing. Knowing. Waiting.

Every step now felt heavier. Every delivery felt almost pointless.

Then. It finally happened. The tragedy. One that although it was only a digital scene made up of pixels in a fictional world, hit no different than losing someone *real* in this one.

The crying broke me first. The silence that followed finished the job.

I could feel the pain rise up in the back of my throat.

Lou's lifeless body on the floor wasn't just a fictional death. It was mine and every parent's unspoken nightmare.

I concluded playing for the day.

That night, my wife and I both held our daughter closer.

I couldn't sleep. The melancholic melody of Woodkid's 'Are You There?' - the soundtrack that played as Lou died - kept floating around my mind, as images kept lingering of Lou's lifeless body, accompanied with her echoed cries.

I looked at my daughter, and was faced with a brutal fact I hadn't allowed myself to think before.

One day, she's going to die. Not right now, and hopefully not until old age. But it will happen.

That little light in my life, that brings with it such warmth and comfort, will someday go out. An inescapable end.

Despite her health being strong, and the advancements of medical science in the age she has been birthed into, life is unpredictable and children sadly die all the time.

Six years of trying. One attempt of IVF. After all the waiting, our miracle had finally arrived.

It made her life feel even more fragile.

I felt sick. The illusion of permanence was shattered, and I knew after this realisation, I wouldn't be the same. It seems that parenthood has fooled me into believing love equals safety. It doesn't.

Love is no protection from inevitable loss. It is merely what makes loss unbearable.

I mourned Lou for days as if she were my own daughter - yet, because it's a videogame (and a weird one at that) - I couldn't help but hope that somehow she wasn't dead. That she would come back.

In a game where the lands of the dead and living are connected together via a strand, surely it could be possible she survived. There could be a chance.

I was clearly still in some sort of grieving for the pixels. Denial coming right as expected. I found myself continuing with the game but quietly bargaining with death to give her back - much as I have done, and continue to do with the loved ones I have lost.

Interestingly, the game uses Lou's death as a way to keep you playing. It plays on your denial - teasing you with ideas that there is some grand meaning to why she died. As if it was always necessary. Few creators are willing to weaponise player attachment with such emotional precision as Kojima.

Following Lou's death, we see Sam witness hand prints go towards her old BB pod... and he sees a ghostly apparition within - but it feels like a hallucination that the game doesn't want to admit yet.

I can't help but notice, however, that everything still feels *off*. Every character I meet makes comments like; "why are you carrying an empty pod?"

As the story unfolded, the game weaponised grief itself - feeding denial, false hope and bargaining in much the same way real mourning does.

Sam panics when what he believes to be Lou in his pod, begins to shift and change - worrying that something is wrong with her. He consults the crew.

"There's nothing in there Sam..." the crew tell him. The pod has been empty this entire time. The Lou he has been seeing and who I have been experiencing, was indeed just an apparition.

She's gone.

The next scene broke me more as a father. Sam crying alone in the shower. Breaking down. The water barely hiding the tears.

It's a scene that goes on long enough to make you feel uncomfortable, but the right amount for you to feel the weight of the loss.

It feels painfully familiar. It's not heroic. It's not cinematic. It's simply a visual of the unbearable grief we all feel after losing someone we love.

Too many people in this world have had to accept the death of a child. Nothing about that fact will ever feel fair - it's best we accept that it never will.

Death Stranding may in its first outing, have taught me responsibility, but this game is touching on something far more raw. It's highlighting that death doesn't discriminate, and that life is not guaranteed to anyone - with age being no exception.

At the end of our responsible undertakings, the burden is ultimately lifted through loss. Those that we love, are always destined to die.

Mortality offers no fair arrangement. We either mourn those we love, or we become the ones mourned. There is no third option.

Those we leave behind carry on whilst we miss out on everything that comes *after*.

Accepting mortality is already hard enough for most humans - accepting that there are two sides to it even more so; leave them behind, or be left behind. There is no other outcome when the bell tolls.

My daughter may end up being the one grieving me as I have feared grieving her. I would prefer me to go first, but the reality of leaving her behind is a pill that is hard to swallow - and a thought I certainly will struggle to welcome on my death bed.

Regardless of all the pain I felt playing this game - and the brutal truths it forced me to face - I adored the whole experience. Death Stranding 2 did not in any way comfort me. It did something, however, far more valuable. It forced me to accept that every embrace, every laugh, every bedtime, every precious ordinary moment carries an invisible price.

Loving deeply means we eventually have to trade it for grief. Whether we lose or are the ones lost - love remains the constant. It is indeed the sacrifice we make at the end of the journey to honour having had it in the first place.

One day, one of us will have to let the other go.

That is the unavoidable burden of love.

But if grief is the final price we pay for having loved deeply, then it will always be worth the cost.

Doc