

Whatever I'll Watch It Season 1 Episode 19

The Last of Us (Season 2) Transcript

Alexia Arani (she/they): Hello, and welcome back everyone to the podcast. I'm very excited today to talk about season two of The Last of Us with a very special returning guest, Clarisse Hansard. And Clarisse, can you remind our audience if they somehow have missed out on our season one discussion on The Last of Us and my very first ever podcast episode on the watchmen? Can you remind us who you are? Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Clarisse: Of course. Hello! Hello! My name is Clarisse. I have been working in the video game industry for

Clarisse: close to a decade working on video game age ratings kind of like the MPA. But for games. And I think the reason that you brought me on to talk about The Last of Us season one. The first time was because that is a game that I worked on in the past and had had a very special relationship with, because it was such a big deal very excited to be back again and to continue moving through this story with all these characters. And yeah, thanks for having me.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, of course. And I brought you on because of your last of us connection, but also because I had so much fun talking The Watchmen with you. And I just wanted to talk about The Last of Us with you. Which oftentimes that's like how I figure out my podcast, guests. It's just like, who do I want to talk about this with, you know?

Alexia Arani (she/they): So yeah, I'm glad that you're here. And usually, you know, I kind of text a little bit with people before we record, but I feel like we really haven't talked about the season at all. Other than me telling you that I thought the bloaters are actually kind of cute.

Alexia Arani (she/they): That was my one hot take that I had. I couldn't wait to record. I had to share it.

Alexia Arani (she/they): So yeah, I'm excited. I don't really know where the conversation is going to go. So that's exciting. But I guess to just kind of like warm up a little bit because we haven't talked that much. I'm curious to just kind of hear, like what your feelings are about the season overall. I know that obviously, Reddit is like a cesspool. But I've just been seeing so many really harsh kinds of responses to this season. So I'm curious kind of where you fall with season two, and how you feel about it.

Clarisse: I think, going off of season one. I felt really confident that I knew what to expect out of season two in general, because season one was so faithful to the actual game content, and it became apparent more quickly than I would have expected in season two that they actually were going to be diverging from the story, and just from like the narrative beats in ways that I wasn't anticipating, even though there were some things like

Clarisse: when Ellie and Dina go on patrol together, and they go into that old shop, and then Ellie falls through the ceiling and gets into that fight. The traversal, like the exact path that they take to get inside of that building. That was just like shop for shot was so perfectly to the game that I

Clarisse: was expecting. Okay, I know what's coming. And then it turned out, I don't actually know what's coming. And one of the things that had never been certain to me from the jump, and that I've been speculating with heavily, with just my friends and coworkers was, where are they going to leave the season off, because there's just so much that happens in season in the second game that they couldn't possibly fill it all into one season of television. And sure enough they did not.

Clarisse: and at the end of this, after the end of a very, very short season, only seven episodes, in which we really only barely

Clarisse: break through the surface of what makes the season so challenging. I don't actually know how to feel.

Clarisse: I was impressed that they went, and they killed Joel as soon as they did in the show. I thought that was very, very cool to do, and to not prolong it just for the sake of allowing us to like, indulge in Pedro Pascal for even longer. But

Clarisse: there, I don't know. I've had this like tough feeling of just

Clarisse: being uncertain why things are changing or evolving in the way that they have been. I

Clarisse: I'm not the kind of person to get up in arms about a casting decision, but I really have not been crazy about the casting of Kaitlyn Dever. If I'm saying

Clarisse: as Abby, I try not to be that kind of person, but unfortunately it has had a heavy impact. I don't know how that's gonna fare in

Clarisse: season three. Because I imagine she's going to be much more prominent. But yeah, that's a big revolving doorway of saying that I have had mixed feelings. Some things were done really beautifully, and other things just kind of leave me floating in space and unsure what to think.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, okay, a few things that that made me think of I want to respond to first is kind of like the chronology of the season, like the way it's playing with time, because, like yes, it's a super short season which was frustrating and disappointing because I want more. You know, it's only seven episodes, and they're all like a neat fifty minutes. It's not like stranger things where they give us a few episodes, but they're like two hours long, or whatever.

Alexia Arani (she/they): But then it's also funny, because, like you mentioned, they killed off Joel episode two. And, like all of episode two felt like a season finale like we get the death of a major

character. We get a major battle scene. We get all this intense stuff, and then the way that the season ends kind of feels like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): maybe like, maybe like, if it's a ten season, maybe it's like the eighth episode like it feels like it's leading up to the big resolution you're gonna get

Alexia Arani (she/they): So there is something kind of funky with the timeline, with the storytelling there which, thinking about that with also like the sort of use of flashbacks as a device which isn't that different from the first season. But yeah, the timeline is just kind of interesting in this season. I can see how that could feel a little all over the place, and I understand people's frustrations with how the finale ended.

Alexia Arani (she/they): But I also do know, for a lot of the people who played the game. A lot of them predict this exactly where it would end, because it. Very obviously, signals a shift in what's happening with the story. And obviously, like, I guess, listeners, if you don't know, we're not doing any game spoilers on the podcast

Alexia Arani (she/they): I have not actually played the games myself. My partner has. So I know a couple of things that happen. But I don't totally know, like. I got things totally confused in my head, and like I didn't know that Jesse was going to die so like I knew that the Joel death was coming, but the Jesse death still surprised me.

Alexia Arani (she/they): So yeah, so yeah, the timeline of it is a little frustrating and weird. But I don't know. I think for me overall. I really enjoyed the season, especially the episodes that I took the time to rewatch where The Last of Us is kind of cute for my little polyamorous family. It was like our little Sunday tradition, you know. We get excited to watch the episode together, and everyone would like to come over. And because I often had partners who were like out of town or something. I would end up rewatching the episode with them when they came back.

Alexia Arani (she/they): And when I had the chance to like revisit episodes and kind of watch it slowly. I feel like there were all these

Alexia Arani (she/they): amazing like

Alexia Arani (she/they): like performances which I'm sure we'll talk about a lot, but I think the performances in this season were incredible. I feel like there was a lot of nuances, and like really smart little details, you know, like

Alexia Arani (she/they): Joel coming in for therapy and looking at Eugene's shoes before he goes, and sits down like all of these things that were just like really brilliantly done so, even though I might feel a little frustration with

Alexia Arani (she/they): like the season overall, like I don't know. I really enjoyed it. I thought it was like really well done, and I feel a little confused by all the

Alexia Arani (she/they): the complainers on Reddit. But sometimes Reddit just seems like a place for complainers. So.

Clarisse: Yeah, I think they're gonna find a way to complain regardless and be unsatisfied.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah. And then, this is, I don't know. Maybe it's just jumping around. But I really want to agree with you about Abby's casting. I'm curious to see what ends up happening with Kaitlyn Dever, if she like, redeems herself and buys us on for season three. But my main thing that I feel upset about is that like in the game, as you know, Abby's ripped

Alexia Arani (she/they): like she is

Alexia Arani (she/they): ripped. She has a very like non-traditional, non-feminine body. She's got huge muscles, a flat chest like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): And instead, you know, we get this very typical Hollywood representation of a very slender, framed, very feminine, traditionally attractive woman. And I just feel like there's so few opportunities for that character's body like size and shape to be on TV and on a major show like this that I just feel so disappointed that they passed up on that opportunity to cast someone who's unlikely to get a lot of casting roles. You know.

Clarisse: Which.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Kind of makes me think of like, you know, Bella Ramsey, how she's like, I think. Are they using they/them exclusively now, do you know?

Clarisse: I believe so. Yes.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Okay. So Bella Ramsey has talked about how it's been hard for them to get cast, because they're not conventionally attractive. And it's.

Alexia Arani (she/they): you know, The Last of us has shown like, what a complete loss that would be if they didn't get work, because they're such an excellent actor.

Alexia Arani (she/they): So it just sucks that they, you know, missed an opportunity to create more work for people who aren't as likely to get casted because of sexism. Basically.

Clarisse: Yeah, a thousand percent. I wish that I better understood what exactly the reason for casting Kaitlyn in place of somebody was who better fit Abby's appearance.

Clarisse: they. I don't know if you noticed in the behind the scenes of the episode. Right after Abby kills Joel, the behind the scenes pretty much the entire time. The showrunners spend the entire time kind of validating and defending. Why, they chose Caitlin for the role, how they think that she's going to be perfect for it. And

Clarisse: you know there were some people who had been concerned prior to the season, even coming out that were familiar with the game and how it progresses, and also the backlash that occurred with the game, who were concerned, that whoever the actress was that was going to play Abby in the show would be subject to an extreme amount of like vitriol, and just like

Clarisse: harmful comments. And just like really rude online backlash, the same way that the character actress in the game was.

Clarisse: And so

Clarisse: I wanted to think that perhaps that's what they were hoping to do that they were hoping to avoid, perhaps like subjecting the actress to the same thing. However,

Clarisse: I feel like the response to the show's development. For example, the response to Joel's death was received so much better by people who were unfamiliar with the game and just watching the show than it was by the like horde of gamers who had, in one way or another, perhaps like imprinted on Joel as a traditional male masculine character, or who just were extremely upset to learn that he had died.

Clarisse: And so with this in mind, the idea that, like actually the

Clarisse: show watchers have been much more receptive to these, like very challenging narrative developments, or just like challenging nuanced characters that they could have gotten away with, and they should have pressed more heavily to have somebody who actually represented Abby as she appears in the game, for a number of reasons that I suppose I can't really go into without spoiling anything, but it just makes it much harder to sell

Clarisse: her story, if absolutely nothing else like

Clarisse: including losing out on the opportunity to really show Abby's strength as a person. For all that, she is based on this, like non-traditional, masculinized air quotes like what women's form. It just doesn't sell how much she has really pushed herself, and to what extent she was preparing to go for all of the years in between when her father is killed, and then, when she finally meets up with Joel again, it's just a real shame.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, so something. I heard that was discussed. I didn't listen to The Last of Us. Podcast like the official podcast from HBO. But Dylan shared some stuff from it, and I guess they also mentioned that they originally wanted to cast Caitlin Dever in the role of Ellie, but that she was too old at the time.

Alexia Arani (she/they): so I think that also factored into their decision to cast her as Abby, that they liked her as an actress. And you know, hopefully, it's becoming apparent already to people watching this show that they're doing sort of a mirroring thing here with Abby and Ellie. So I think there's something there for them, and how

Alexia Arani (she/they): Abby actually looks a lot like Ellie from the game, reinforcing the sort of theme of mirrors that they want us to take away from the show, so that helps me feel a little bit better about it. But my still overall takeaway is like feeling unhappy with the missed opportunity.

Clarisse: Actually.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Even though I love the actress in book smart. I love that movie. She's great in it, and I was so shocked to see her in The Last of Us, so.

Clarisse: Bunch of different roles.

Alexia Arani (she/they): All.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah. And I think I just want to build on you mentioning her strength, like not to say that, like really small people can't be physically strong, but especially like, you know the scene, the episode where she murders Joel. She goes out on patrol, and the way she's just like shivering and stuff. It just really emphasizes her just seeming so small and so weak

Alexia Arani (she/they): can like not

Alexia Arani (she/they): vibe. You know that I think we're supposed to be getting, especially with, like at the end of the season, saying that we find out that she's actually crucial to the wolves and a leader. And she's like, you know, she's supposed to have all of these skills. And I don't know. I guess we need to see what happens in Season 3. And if they do a good job of selling it and bringing us to her side.

Alexia Arani (she/they): But, all things considered, it's kind of interesting that her actress

Alexia Arani (she/they): is not getting attacked the way people were worried would happen, and that instead, that backlash is coming to Bella Ramsey this season.

Alexia Arani (she/they): which I think that's just misogyny, probably, you know, but it's just kind of weird. I don't know if you have any thoughts on that.

Clarisse: To be honest, I've kind of stopped keeping up with reactions to the show as much

Clarisse: for you

Clarisse: maybe don't have time for it or thought it might just be recycled from what it was from the game. But I'm actually not too familiar with all the hate that Bella has been receiving. Is it because they just don't.

Clarisse: because the public hasn't felt confident in Bella's performance, or what's been the issue.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, I think it's that I haven't been following it that closely. I know that they had. They put out some statements about how they had to deactivate their social media accounts and things like that. Because, yeah, I think people feel upset with the casting, with the performance that they don't look like Ellie like

Alexia Arani (she/they): which I don't know how anyone can watch this season and say, Bella Ramsey can't act like that is just absolutely ridiculous, like they, they, fucking, nailed it time and time and time again.

Clarisse: No, I've been saying that actually, quite often, because personally, I have seen a handful of people that I know, saying that they don't really think Bella's doing an excellent job. I disagree. I think the fellow has been a great casting decision. And I yeah, I don't understand where all of that vitriol comes from.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, do you know what? We don't need to give those nerds any airspace for their delusions. And it's really weird that we started with Abby. But you know, whatever we play it fast and loose here.

Alexia Arani (she/they): we'll watch it. But yeah, let's maybe get a little more centered here and kind of come back to come back to the basics, and I'm wondering if we want to start by talking about Joel Season one. We were like. We must start with Joel this time, you know. We could have started with Joel or Ellie, but I think we should return to where we began with Joel, and you know the little bit we get to see of him this season, and his arc.

Clarisse: Yeah, absolutely. Thanks.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, do you want to start? I'm just curious, like, what were your thoughts on Joel this season?

Clarisse: Well, it was hard to see him go. I was an absolute mess. During that episode I thought that that scene was really well done in a way that I

Clarisse: I guess, would expect nothing less from the showrunners to like, really drive home the impact and the heaviness of his death, and just that entire confrontation. I thought it was spectacular.

Clarisse: all of all of the heaviest Joel moments from the game hit just as hard

Clarisse: in this show this season they hit just as hard as they needed to, which I'm very grateful for, because they tell us so much. In the midst of all of this just

Clarisse: really heavy nonstop violence.

Clarisse: So I mean, whether it's the conversation on the porch. There! The last conversation that Joel and Ellie have, which was absolutely beautiful, or the flashback to Ellie's birthday at the

Clarisse: at the Space Museum.

Clarisse: I thought they were spectacularly done, I mean.

Clarisse: which. Tell me what you like. What do you have in mind in terms of what to cover about his story? Because I feel like I could just kind of ramble in a number of different directions, without guidance.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, I don't know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I guess it might be helpful to think about his arc a little bit.

Alexia Arani (she/they): So you know, of course, we. We begin the season with seeing like how much

Alexia Arani (she/they): friction there is between him and Ali, which we're kind of left to think like, oh, okay, this is like the.

Alexia Arani (she/they): This is the result of the lie that he had five years ago. And it's just been festering. And it's heartbreaking to find out that this is what's happened with them, you know.

Clarisse: Sorry. I feel like I'm losing my train of thought. Yeah, where do I want to start with Joel?

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, me, maybe

Alexia Arani (she/they): maybe before his death, maybe we can just kind of talk about how he's portrayed in the first kind of episode, and like what his life is like at Jackson Hole.

Clarisse: Sure.

Alexia Arani (she/they): All right? So, okay, so obviously, yeah, Joel's death is the thing that

Alexia Arani (she/they): is the biggest thing that happens in a storyline. And like what gets a lot of the attention. But I'm kind of curious to like, go back to kind of the first episode, and like the glimpses we get of what Joel's life looked like

Alexia Arani (she/they): before it ended so soon in Jackson Hole. And of course we find out that, like he's having this feud with feud's not the right word, but we find out that there's this rift in his relationship with Ellie.

Alexia Arani (she/they): we find out that he is. Is he a city planner? Is that what he's doing at Jackson Hole?

Clarisse: I can't recall.

Alexia Arani (she/they): In season one we found out he did like construction and stuff, and.

Clarisse: And then.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Season. He's obviously involved in planning and construction, and also like electrical engineering. I don't know

Alexia Arani (she/they): and you know he has this rift with Ellie. He's like a mentor to Dina.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I don't know. I'm like I'm throwing a lot of beats out there, but I guess just the things that stood out to me. It's that

Alexia Arani (she/they): he has this exchange with Maria, where we find out that he's like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): you know, feeling a little resistant to expanding and letting in newcomers kind of giving us glimpses of like season. One Joel, who like, keeps driving the car and is like, no, we're not picking up that family. And then, importantly, we also found out that, like he's starting therapy. So it's kind of like a lot of things. But those were kind of the main things I stood out to me about where Joel's at now. I wonder if he.

Alexia Arani (she/they): any thoughts or anything you want to add about any of those kind of character beats.

Clarisse: Yeah. The one that I guess really stands out to me is that conversation that he has with Maria which reveals so much about his kind of like fundamentally

Clarisse: isolationist, I suppose personality where he really is, and as suggested by the flashback back to his youth with Tommy and his father. He will fight.

Clarisse: you know, viciously to protect the people that he loves, but when it comes to absolutely anybody else, that's when his suspicions end up kind of

Clarisse: overtaking his ability to necessarily just do good, which we obviously see mirrored in Ali throughout the rest of the season. But

Clarisse: I appreciated

Clarisse: the, I guess, interplay of those moments where we saw Nope, that's the same old Joel. That's fundamentally a part of what validates all of these decisions, all the choices that we've seen him make throughout season one up until this point, and the way that those are really carefully balanced against the ways in which he's trying to change whether it is going into therapy, or whether it is just.

Clarisse: I believe he ultimately ends up deferring to Marie, or kind of suggesting at the end of that scene that you know you are absolutely correct.

Clarisse: or when she and her, when he and Maria are speaking at the dance right before he goes up to defend Ellie. It seems like he's very much trying harder to take to heart

Clarisse: all of the ways in which he can either speak his truth or be calm, or let gentleness in.
And

Clarisse: They were done to tremendous effect. I want to say,

Clarisse: yeah, I am having a hard time, I think.

Clarisse: talking about this without jumping around a whole bunch around.

Clarisse: But the flashback that happens with him and Ellie and Eugene, in which he like breaks this very heavy promise that he has made to not just Ellie, but to Eugene, and then, you know, succeeds in really like hurting Gail, and which explains so much about their kind of fraught relationship after the fact.

Clarisse: I don't.

Clarisse: I don't know. It's a beautiful.

Clarisse: challenging way to set up this person who ultimately, like all of us as viewers, have come to really love and come to understand, even if we can't defend what he's doing or saying, and

Clarisse: I don't know all of the additions that were made, whether it's the inclusion of Joel's or the inclusion of Eugene's story, or the inclusion of this like childhood flashback with Tommy. I think they all do a lot to service. The

Clarisse: the ways in which Joel's character and Ellie's character are ultimately mirrored throughout the entire show, and I mean Abby as well to be fair.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, I love the whole. I was gonna say, introduction of Eugene, in jail

Alexia Arani (she/they): I love the inclusion of Eugene, and Gail with his storyline in particular, because I think for me when they started up. Season 2, and we saw where he was at with Ellie. I was heartbroken like. Wait have they been? Has it been like this since he lied like for five years have they been estranged? So I think it was a really smart like. I appreciate that they weren't estranged for that entire time. I appreciate the way that, like that, lie slowly like, grew in significance.

Alexia Arani (she/they): And I think it was a really smart storytelling device to have him be put in a similar situation, and to see how readily he lies like it just comes so easy to him. And that whole situation, I think, is really interesting, because, like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): You know, I think some people could defend his decision making, like he's prioritizing the safety of the community. But it also seems like, you know, they have an entire, well established, well-armed community. Joel is very skilled. I do not think it would have been difficult for him to have restrained Eugene and brought him back to honor. His last wish, like it, seems completely doable, and it was just so frustrating to see him just lie to Ellie again.

Clarisse: And then in the scene with Gail. It's interesting because it's like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): He goes above and beyond in that lie with Gail like he does so much like it's so extra. And it's just so frustrating. And I loved the inclusion, like you mentioned, of the insight about his childhood. And seeing where his need to be a protector comes from, as well as the fact that, like his dad, was abusive, and also a cop which makes me think about the ways that Joel has internalized.

Alexia Arani (she/they): This sort of hero savior mindset, but also that sort of authoritarian cop mindset of like he knows what's best. He doesn't have to get collaboration, or input from anyone else. He's almost a little totalitarian, you know, and how he goes about.

Clarisse: The decision.

Alexia Arani (she/they): And so it's so fucking, frustrating, but it makes so much sense with his character.

Clarisse: Immensely, especially knowing that

Clarisse: had he been in Gail's position, for example, he would have absolutely never tolerated hearing that I don't know. Tommy could be brought back to him, or that somebody that he loved could be brought back to him to say their final words like it would have been a completely different situation, and we know that he understands that right. We know that he understands the complexity of like

Clarisse: emotional human attachments in this post-apocalyptic environment in which, like life, is just so fragile, and people can disappear at the drop of a hat.

Alexia Arani (she/they): All right.

Clarisse: It was. Yeah, nothing, nothing short of infuriating.

Clarisse: that entire sequence. And I think it was that much harder. And as you were saying, the way that he goes above and beyond in that lie, to say, you know, he was brave. He wasn't scared only to have Ellie jump forth with the truth to hear. You know, I think

Clarisse: anybody's worst nightmare, which is that their loved one, in their final moments were like terrified and like pleading to see you know, their spouse like the person that they care for. I

Clarisse: wouldn't wish that on anyone. So at the same time I understand why he would say those things to attempt to bring Gail peace. It's also like you knew you knew that you could have handled that

Clarisse: that you could have handled that situation in the event that Eugene suddenly started to turn in that moment and to choose not to, just for the sake of

Clarisse: I don't know, just for the sake of

Clarisse: exerting his, his strength, exerting his power, or his influence, or just like being the person to make a decision. Doesn't, doesn't sit right.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Hmm, yeah. Kind of related to Eugene and Gail. I'm

Alexia Arani (she/they): I'm really interested in Gail's character. I kind of want to get into her, but

Alexia Arani (she/they): kind of tying it back to Joel. Their therapy scene in the first episode was, I thought, so extraordinary it completely blew my mind, especially when I rewatched it the second time. Like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): It was my first time watching it. It was just so tense like I was filled with so much tension and confusion and dread, and like, you know, you're kind of like who the fuck is. This woman? What a terrible therapist! And then you get like the slow reveal that she actually is trying to help, and that she's being honest and being vulnerable as a way of modeling to him. That, hey, you! I'm doing the hard thing and being honest, you can do it, too, you know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): And I just thought that whole thing was so extraordinarily acted, and I? Oh, my God! It's just so good like I, you know there's a number of standout jewel moments in the season for me, but I think that, like the therapy scene with Gail.

Alexia Arani (she/they): the porch scene with Ellie, which I'm sure we'll get into more. And then, of course, just like various moments in the flashback. But that therapy scene just really jumped out at me at being so incredibly acted.

Clarisse: I agree it was beautiful, and then I think it may not be until we actually get the Eugene Flashback several episodes later. We realize that that sequence between Joel and Eugene had only happened perhaps four months or five, like not very long prior to his therapy session, in which you know, Gail readily admits, like I can't. I can't. Fucking stand you, but

Clarisse: it just like

Clarisse: really drives home running counter to again to like Joel's kind of sense of isolation, and his refusal to, you know, let new people into Jackson and his just, you know, his insistence on safeguarding his loved ones and nobody else. The extent to which people in this community really do have to rely on each other, even if they can't stand each other, even if they're harboring such like terrible resentments as you killed my husband and didn't let me say goodbye that

Clarisse: even within a handful of months like Gail is back out there, and she's offering her services to the people of Jackson, and that includes Joel, that no matter what, no matter what, has transpired between them. These people still need each other, and they still need to be there for one another, which means needing to put these things aside. And that was not something that Joel could do very much, even if we see him trying to do that at the beginning of season two.

Clarisse: Obviously it's short lived, and he doesn't really get that chance to really change.

Alexia Arani (she/they): This is okay. You're making. You're making me think of this theme that I saw a lot in this season. Around the way I would understand it is kind of like transformative versus like transformative justice versus kind of like carceral punishment.

Alexia Arani (she/they): where

Alexia Arani (she/they): I think, Gail Maria, we can probably put Jesse in this camp as well, and, like the whole community, is really like

Alexia Arani (she/they): organized in this transformative justice model, where it's about mutual aid like people have to depend on each other like, hey, this person, you know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): didn't let me say goodbye to my dying husband, and yet I'm still gonna have his back, and like do therapy for him. Right?

Alexia Arani (she/they): Versus this sort of like carceral punishment model, which is very much Joel, which is very much, Ellie, which is very much, Abby, right? These characters, who are like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): you know, reduce people to the worst thing that they've done are not trusting. Want to see people punished and want to get revenge.

Alexia Arani (she/they): And yeah, just kind of out of sorts with the community. But I appreciate you bringing Gail into that because I hadn't really seen Gail as an extension of her community in that way. But that makes sense to me.

Clarisse: Hello!

Alexia Arani (she/they): And I just love the idea of like, what does it look like to be a therapist in the Apocalypse as well.

Clarisse: Totally right. No, she's so honest and so just transparent about like, I'm not doing okay, either. When she's speaking to Tommy shortly after. I think, after the community vote to not go in pursuit of Abby and her group. She's like, and Tommy's like, you know. How do you even manage this, and she's like, well, everybody here needs a therapist, and like I do, too, and I don't get one like I'm just an alcoholic, and she's.

Clarisse: You know, she's kind of rough around the edges. She's not afraid to be frank, and obviously we see that she has been through an enormous amount, through enormous amount herself.

Clarisse: And yet here she is, showing up and really doing the work to like. Be there for everybody.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah. So I kind of mentioned it just in passing.

Alexia Arani (she/they): But the porch scene

Alexia Arani (she/they): I don't even know that I have that much to say about it, and probably everyone already knows this. But it's just. It has to be said that, just like Pedro Pascal, just completely blew me away in that scene like it was just

Alexia Arani (she/they): unbelievably extraordinary, acting the way that he, like portrays like overwhelming guilt and shame, and

Alexia Arani (she/they): like he almost inhabits this like this childlike sort of and.

Alexia Arani (she/they): You know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I don't know. I just have. It's just so good. I just can't. We can't record this without just acknowledging that it was like, damn! I really want him and Bella Ramsey to get nominations for their performances this season. Just fucking incredible.

Clarisse: Yeah, a thousand percent can't agree more. I mean in a similar vein not to jump around too much, but can't really help it the

Clarisse: birthday flashback when they are in that space. Pod. Hello! Language, and after Ellie has listened to the recording, and she just opens her eyes to look over him, and the only thing that he says is in this, like a very quiet little voice, he says, I do. Okay. Question mark, and that, like

Clarisse: it drives home that exact kind of it's almost this, like childlike desire to just do

Clarisse: write and be good to the people that he loves, and sometimes it like, manifests really, beautifully and very honestly, and a lot of times it manifests with

Clarisse: instead his, you know, his rage and his like anger and willingness to do whatever it takes, whether it's good or bad, and we see that in both of those moments he's just completely breaking down on the porch, and finally, speaking this truth, which we saw just before, that he was absolutely not able to say out loud

Clarisse: And just, you know.

Clarisse: wanting to continue this relationship with kind of the most important person in his life, and understanding

Clarisse: clearly that if he didn't get that chance it's because of what he did, and he knows that he's guilty. And yet he just wants to do okay by her and by Tommy, and by whoever else. It's heartbreaking, heartbreaking.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I know, and it's oh, and it's so heartbreaking! That's their last interaction. And you know he's trying to be a good dad, and he's like she's tired. Let her sleep in, and then, like that decision is what you know robs her of more time with him that the next time she sees him is when he dies.

Clarisse: Yeah.

Alexia Arani (she/they): It's so tragic!

Clarisse: Yeah.

Clarisse: I was a mess. During that scene I was. I was an absolute mess, just crying little eyes out. Couldn't help it, but they were fantastic, they deserve noms at least.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Okay, I feel like we should move on to Ellie soon, because she's really the focus of the season. But I'll just say my last kind of like

Alexia Arani (she/they): favorite. I guess there's a couple. But I guess my last favorite sort of Joel moment. I love him, like implying that Ellie's got a crush on Jesse, and he's just like he's like, I know these things like, just as like it was really sweet. You know, we see these frustrating things, but I just love seeing like what a dad he is, you know, like that moment, and like I think there's a scene where he's just kind of like blabbing on about like power tools or something to Ellie

Alexia Arani (she/they): does not care like. It's just really sweet to see him in his dad era, you know.

Clarisse: Yeah.

Alexia Arani (she/they): like still the same old Joel still making some of the same mistakes. But it's like Dad era, Joel, you know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I love it.

Clarisse: Yeah, let's talk about Ellie. I'm sure that Joel will come back up because they are two peas in a pod.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, yes, they are a bonded pair.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Oh, Ellie.

Clarisse: Yup, my thoughts exactly.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, I mean.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I think so much of it to me can kind of be boiled down to just like dude. She's just fucking 19.

Clarisse: You know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I don't know a lot about it for me. Feels like that, but some of it not.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I guess it's not fair to put it all on age, but like

Alexia Arani (she/they): a lot of it, just feels like the recklessness of youth, you know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Or I'm thinking like in particular, like, you know, seeing how laid back

Alexia Arani (she/they): she and Dina both were when they're on patrol, and they're just like not listening. And they're just like zooming on ahead and like it just shows so much like immaturity, you know.

Clarisse: And she said.

Alexia Arani (she/they): So reckless throughout the whole. What I've been referring to is like her revenge tour, you know, like wanting.

Clarisse: To jump.

Alexia Arani (she/they): From hiding to try to save one seraphite randomly when there's all these other important things going on, or you know, as people have picked apart on the Internet, but

like the ways that, like Ellie and Dina, are having very loud conversations, walking down the middle of Seattle and broad daylight, and just like all of these things that I think just show that she's just really immature.

Alexia Arani (she/they): immature with a gun.

Alexia Arani (she/they): It's yeah. I don't know. It's just frustrating.

Clarisse: Yeah, yeah, in a lot of ways like knowing what we know about how she has lived to this point, and all the things that she's just experienced as a child growing up in this kind of environment, I mean, for any of them. This could be true, right. But for Ellie, specifically, we've seen so much of like from season one onward of just the things that she's had to endure, and it makes sense. Why, she would be

Clarisse: as angry as she is. It seems

Clarisse: not that it would be how a kid would necessarily naturally evolve in this kind of world, right? Because, like Jesse isn't necessarily the same way, even if he is a couple of years older. If I'm not mistaken. However,

Clarisse: that like carelessness, I think that that idea that both she and Dina have that they're kind of just.

Clarisse: I don't know that they haven't really accepted the extent to which, like harm can come to them. And so, as a result, they treat all of this, whether it's patrol or navigating through Seattle with kind of like a lot of just like recklessness. And this not really thinking about what might happen next, or what might result from their actions, is

Clarisse: it seems so natural for a 19-year-old like you're saying, and then, at the same time, it's unbelievable how quickly it catches up with all of them, which is.

Clarisse: of course, kind of the point that we are being

Clarisse: guided to see is how fast this kind of you know.

Clarisse: this attitude towards violence or revenge, or an eye for an eye can play out. But yeah.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I think, Jesse, definitely. I don't know what their ages are actually supposed to be, but he does seem much older. I think, especially in the finale. It felt like he was such a foil to Ellie.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Where, you know he was. This reasonable, mature adult, while she just looked like such a reckless child next to him. And a moment that kind of like contrasted that a lot for me like I absolutely loved. I mean we should get into the whole episode like I absolutely loved the whole.

Alexia Arani (she/they): sorry! Let me look up. What episode? It was really quick.

Clarisse: Okay.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I think we'll need to talk about Episode 4 in more depth, which is the one that was like really focused on Ellie and Dina's relationship, because there's a lot, I want to talk

about with that. But in that episode, she has the line where she's like, you know, I'm going to be a dad which I like loved. It was like so funny and cute, and felt so like realistically like kind of gay to me. But that felt like such a contrast to me with Jesse in the finale. Who's like, I'm going to be a father

Alexia Arani (she/they): and like

Alexia Arani (she/they): using that to motivate these decisions of prioritizing, like caring for Dina and Tommy and getting home. And just like that. Contrast to me between like, I'm going to be a dad. And it being this sort of like jokey kind of cute thing, kind of detached from reality, doesn't seem to be taking on like the like. The responsibility that actually entails, and like the responsibility that she should have for Dina.

Clarisse: Versus like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Jesse, who's very anchored to that obligation, and that understanding, it just became so clear to me what a huge gap there was between the two of them.

Clarisse: Totally, and Jesse alludes to it. I think, in that last, in the season finale in which, you know, he's kind of saying when he's telling Ellie the story of the girl who came into town, who, he, you know, fell in love with very quickly, and then she offered for him to come with her to Mexico, and he couldn't do it, because, he said, the people around me in Jackson are the people who have raised me. They've been there for me, and I can't, just, you know, walk away from that.

Clarisse: We don't know fully, but that story suggests to me that Jesse may have

Clarisse: maybe had a greater amount of community throughout, much more of his life, even if he's only even if you were the same age as Ellie, or perhaps only like two years older, that that amount of kind of community care would create such an enormous rift between how they react.

Clarisse: whether in anger or with a more like rational and like grounded approach, just because, again, Ellie's been offer like operating from this place of, you know, survival instinct, and nobody is there for me, except for me, like I don't trust anybody like. It's just me against the world, whereas Jesse has had very much the opposite of. He's had, you know. He knows what it means to need to think about more than just yourself, and to act in the greater interest of everybody else.

Clarisse: which perhaps has necessarily made him much less combative and much more

Clarisse: slow to act, which is not something that Ellie has gotten at all, which is not something that you know Joel had either.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah.

Clarisse: Okay.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, it's like the age plus, of course, like the traumatizing experiences that you know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): some like. Not that everyone responds to trauma the same, but some people can respond to trauma by increased like recklessness. You know.

Clarisse: Jim.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Might also be the case with Dina.

Clarisse: But I just felt I felt so frustrated in that moment, like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): You know she kind of has a moment with Dina, where she's like, you know, when they first discover all of the Seraphites who are like bloodied up in a pile, and they're just walking down the streets, and she's like, what the hell are we doing like? We need to go back. You're pregnant. And then, you know, she has this interaction with Dina, and then she's like, I want to keep going like I was so fucking frustrated with her in that moment.

Alexia Arani (she/they): and then the other like over the top. Ridiculous moment is the fucking, capsizing in the boat and miraculously washing ashore.

Alexia Arani (she/they): and how.

Alexia Arani (she/they): having that whole weird, fair fight interaction and then going back out. It was just like, Girl, what the fuck are you doing like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): What's that with her?

Clarisse: Yep, yeah, totally. Because immediately before that when she first returns from

Clarisse: just having gone after Nora, and she's in that dressing room with Dina, and Dina's asking, you know, like, Are you? Gonna tell me what happens? And it's when Ellie finally admits like, hey, these people came after Joel because he killed all of them. He killed all of like their people, just to save me. And Dina in that moment has this realization of like.

Clarisse: oh, we're not just going after like bloodthirsty maniacs who have, who just killed Joel for no reason like they may have thought that it was just this random act of violence, but instead.

Clarisse: these people very much had a reason to want to get to him, and not only did they get to him, but then they let Ellie live, and then they went on their way. And yet here we are going after them. One of them is already dead. It's not clear how many of the group are going to be taken out during this like hunt for Abby?

Clarisse: Where Dina has this realization of like, we need to go home, because suddenly I understand why they did what they did. And I'm calling into question in a way that Ellie is, too, because Ellie says, what if Nora didn't get what she deserved. And then

Clarisse: Dina has this realization that

Clarisse: she kind of gets where they were coming from, and that this entire journey may not be worth it. And yet, moments later, Ellie's back out on her merry way, just

Clarisse: kind of blinded by this desire for revenge.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I felt a little confused by that like scene or exchange, though I think because I feel like it was meant to kind of mirror like Ellie's omission, was meant to like mirror.

Joel's like lying and not sharing information with Ellie, like she's doing the same thing. But I do remember Dina saying, like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): you know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): even if Joel did something bad, he doesn't deserve that like nobody does. I guess I'm I guess I'm what I don't remember, is like, did Ellie ever actually flat out, lie and say she doesn't know why it happened.

Clarisse: I am not entirely sure, either. I think, that

Clarisse: she had avoided the question in one way or another, and something that wasn't entirely clear to me either again, because the show diverges in some ways from the actual game is in that moment, during Ellie's confrontation with Nora, in which Nora says like, hey, you know that he killed everybody just to save you right?

Clarisse: It's not actually clear

Clarisse: whether Ellie already knew that for sure, or if she was just finally having her suspicions confirmed, because obviously she had already been wondering about this gap in her knowledge from when she was taken by

Clarisse: by the fireflies for the surgery in the game.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Sorry to interrupt, but I'm like, but she did know for sure, because she had the porch conversation with Joel.

Clarisse: Oh, you know what you're absolutely correct. Yes.

Alexia Arani (she/they): But you're correct that the but the way the storytelling set it up in that moment.

Clarisse: We didn't know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): And then they went back.

Clarisse: I won't do.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Gave us information that she did, which makes it even more brutal, and fucked up right.

Clarisse: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Clarisse: yeah. I if I recall correctly which is such a shame that I don't, I don't. I think that Ellie had managed to avoid telling Dina the full truth of it until that exact moment, which was something that Gail could spot immediately. I think it was in the episode after the not Tribunal, but the community meeting in

Clarisse: after the WLF. Tommy's talking to Gail, and he's wondering, you know, like Gail like, what do you think about Ellie, and she's like she's a liar. Ellie's absolutely lying, she's not. She's

not doing this for everybody, which is how Ellie positioned it very much that it's not just about doing this for her doing it for Joel, but it's for the best interest of the community, which is decidedly untrue, and

Clarisse: a lot of ways.

Clarisse: Ellie knows this. It's clear that she knows this, otherwise why wouldn't she tell somebody as close to her, and who operates in such a similarly kind of like

Clarisse: reckless manner as Dina the truth up until this final hour, when they're kind of, you know, really reckoning with how much danger they're in.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, that's a good point, I'm like, you know, even if Dina had been like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): no one deserves this like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): yeah. She obviously Ellie's still leaving out huge important information that she should have been more forthcoming with. So

Alexia Arani (she/they): yeah, I can see that parallel, even if it's not exactly the same.

Clarisse: I really had an issue, though with.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Like, I understand part of the point of Gail's character is to show how she's also like fucked up in this world, and the things she's been through and having to be a therapist in this situation. But I don't know. I was really struggling with, like her lines around.

Alexia Arani (she/they): you know, saying that Ellie, like can't be saved, and saying that, like she and Joel are side by side. It wasn't nature versus nurture like it's not Joel's influence.

Alexia Arani (she/they): and like, I can kind of understand some people can't be saved in the sense that, like you can't talk sense into some people. You have to let them go through their own journey and make their own mistakes and learn. But I almost feel like she was kind of like kind of felt like she was saying, like Ellie's like a monster, and I don't know it. Kind of felt like this sort of like foreshadowing to like Ellie's capable of bad things, and they're gonna happen this season. But it didn't quite feel earned to me, or like believable that Gail would have that perspective of Ellie based on

Alexia Arani (she/they): like who she's been in this community like, I was kind of struggling with that, because.

Alexia Arani (she/they): like we didn't see like Ellie's brutality until really, she murdered Nora, so I don't know that kind of took me out. I had a hard time with Gail, saying that I felt a little like heavy handed writers just trying to like plant seeds to let us know that, like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): you know, Ally's capable of doing bad things.

Clarisse: Sure. No, that's a that's a really good point, and something that I also felt was kind of harsh watching it in the moment I had chalked it up to kind of

Clarisse: kales cynicism, I

Clarisse: in some levels. And you know, obviously again, she wants to help people, but also has been through so much and just like recognizes

Clarisse: faults in others in a way that either may or may not be appropriate to speak on. I don't think that she either had the.

Clarisse: you know, the necessary foresight to predict that Ellie would turn into this monster like you're saying. But I do wonder whether it's a conclusion that she could jump to in some ways just seeing the extent to which Ellie has been like a very combative force throughout her time in Jackson. Whether that is just never listening to others, or, you know, like wanting to have her own way about going on patrol or doing what she wants to do.

Clarisse: I would imagine that hints of that had definitely shown during Ellie's time in Jackson, even if we don't get to see it. But do I think that it's a fair thing for this therapist to be saying about a 19-year-old, kid. No, no, not at all. Not necessarily.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, it felt a little clunky to me, even though I think you're right. I'm sure that she showed ways of being selfish and not community oriented like that's that was kind of hinted at throughout the season from Jesse and other comments that she clearly doesn't.

Alexia Arani (she/they): hasn't fully integrated and is not a community-oriented person.

Alexia Arani (she/they): which kind of mirrors back to like season one when she was a part of Fedra. We knew that she had been like

Alexia Arani (she/they): like a troublemaker. She got in trouble a lot, so I imagine that might have continued.

Clarisse: Do you think that? Do you think that Gail

Clarisse: believed in Joel's capacity for change? Because obviously she makes this confession to him about how much she hates him.

Clarisse: in a moment during which she's framing it, as I want you to see that we can have these hard conversations, and that you can push forward and move forward. But also

Clarisse: there could have just been a level of opportunism in that moment on her birthday. She's having something to drink. She doesn't really feel like hiding it anymore. It could have also been to some extent just a veiled opportunity for her to just say, you know what I just want to tell you this like I can't stand you for what you did. But do you think that she actually believed that Joel could change as a person knowing what she knows about him.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I think that she was invested in giving him a chance, you know, like I didn't read that scene as her just getting things off her chest. I think she really was

Alexia Arani (she/they): modeling the vulnerability that she is encouraging him to express.

Clarisse: I didn't read it as malintent, either, but I guess that's why I'm wondering, because it seems strange for her to have such a strong position about Ellie as a child or as a teenager, and not have that same position towards Joel who.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah.

Clarisse: Full grown adult, and quote unquote, you know, becomes more cemented in his personage as he grows older, and becomes even less likely to change.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Well, especially because Ellie's the one who told her the truth, which that made that whole thing ring extra. Not true to me, because, like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): you know, Ellie is the one who interrupted and said, That's not true. This is what actually happened. So even if Gail, like, avoided Ellie, or had hard feelings about that happening. You think she would have maybe, some appreciation or respect for Ellie of

Alexia Arani (she/they): not wanting her to be lied to so.

Clarisse: Yeah.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, I don't know. I just

Alexia Arani (she/they): yeah. I'm not sure I can fully articulate it, but

Alexia Arani (she/they): I think I'm just kind of

Alexia Arani (she/they): I don't know. I think I'm kind of struggling. I think I'm just kind of struggling a bit with like Ellie's characterization. And her.

Alexia Arani (she/they): her impulsivity, her recklessness, her abandoning the people she cares about for revenge. I guess I'm just

Alexia Arani (she/they): yeah. I guess I'm just like not sure that I see how that totally makes sense with the other aspects of her character, or like

Alexia Arani (she/they): like. I'm not sure that I've seen like I guess, like I feel like in season one, you know she like watches Joel kill someone, and she looks excited by it, and that's like supposed to give us like some hints of things to come. But

Alexia Arani (she/they): I guess I just didn't feel like it was that developed. Maybe.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I don't know. I'm not sure.

Clarisse: I,

Clarisse: you know I actually, so I've lamented the extent to which it turns out, I have forgot the exact order in which things transpire in the game in spite of how much time I've spent with the game while I was watching this season. But I do recall when I was playing both games, that I

Clarisse: it made sense to me why, she would turn out this way for the most part, which is not to say that I struggled any less with it. I actually found myself throughout most of game wishing that I didn't have to play as Ellie and wishing that I didn't have to progress in her story because I just like, did not. I felt sick to my stomach with what we, as the player, were being forced to do through her.

Clarisse: But it does

Clarisse: makes sense, I think, just because we see how strong-willed Ellie has always been, how rebellious, how kind of like

Clarisse: Curious about violence, if you want to say like intrigued by it, certainly not turned off by it, and then also by her kind of

Clarisse: lack of

Clarisse: regard, I suppose, for her own life, which only becomes stronger after she feels like her life. Purpose was taken from her because Joel rescued her. I think it

Clarisse: kind of solidified for me. Why, she would move through the world in this manner, because ultimately, she's not really seeing

Clarisse: greater purpose behind anything. She is ultimately seeking her own, seeking to validate or make sense of or make easier all of the things that have transpired in her life. Personally, because she feels like everything is basically devoid of meaning, and I think

Clarisse: the absence of meaning, or the absence of

Clarisse: finding reasons for taking care of those around you, or of yourself, or like acting with self-preservation in mind, can just kind of lead to being completely overpowered by

Clarisse: these moments, like Joel's death, or this quest for revenge that become kind of the only thing that matters, because in her mind nothing else actually matters. So what else? Like? What does some more violence mean? What does some revenge mean? What do some more deaths mean when you know she ultimately doesn't actually believe in very much at all?

Alexia Arani (she/they): That makes a lot of sense. Yeah, that makes sense to me.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I will say I did love the way that

Alexia Arani (she/they): the scene of her killing Nora. How that was done

Alexia Arani (she/they): between like well, first of all, like I mean, we could like I feel like I should name just the amazing, fucking incredible set design, for like this entire season. It was like unbelievable.

Alexia Arani (she/they): You know what

Alexia Arani (she/they): so like. You know the way that they built out all the cordyceps in the basement, and the walking up and like that was all beautifully done and so cool.

Alexia Arani (she/they): and then, like the red lighting, was like it gave kind of like a sort of shining like the shining effect. It also was like very stranger things to me, but I love the way that

was all shot. And then the decision, of course, to have her basically beat Nora mirroring the way that, like Abby, beat Joel, you know, with like holding an object kind of a similar shape.

Alexia Arani (she/they): and Bella Ramsey's facial expressions like it was all really well done. Although I felt very, and I kind of want to talk about like the queerness and stuff with Ellie and with the season it was really well done, and I felt I don't know if you felt this way, but I felt like really disturbed by this, just like kind of

Alexia Arani (she/they): like queer on queer violence, like I don't know if no, I don't know if Nora is established as queer in the show or not, but I immediately clock her and read her as a queer character, so there was just something like extra disturbing to me about like this young, like queer person, like violently killing another queer person like in this world, in which there are so few of them. And

Alexia Arani (she/they): I think it was. Maybe I don't know. Maybe it was episode before, or something. But, like, you know, Dina and Ellie ride by the pride flag, and they both have no.

Clarisse: You know what I mean?

Alexia Arani (she/they): And yeah, there was just something that like really hurt my heart with that scene, and like thinking about that.

Clarisse: Yeah, I mean, you make a really good point, I think passively. I had also Claude Nora as queer, but it was not something that I was actively thinking about in that moment.

Clarisse: it! She doesn't seem

Clarisse: outwardly queer in the game, but not that that matters very much, but it really does kind of drive home this like there's so much that Ellie and Dina do not know right like here they are as like openly queer characters who, like Ellie's, established in her queerness for at least a couple of years at this point. But not.

Clarisse: It's not necessarily an identity to her right. It's not. It's not a community that she feels a part of, or that she might feel like, inclined to protect or to bring less harm to it is

Clarisse: not even secondary or tertiary. It just isn't a factor in her mind at all. These are just people who either have done you

Clarisse: done right by you or done wrong by you. And so, yeah, it's a yeah. It's disturbing.

Alexia Arani (she/they): yeah, I guess on a lighter note with Ellie also, because we've just been kind of talking about how frustrating she is.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I do especially, you know the episode that I referenced earlier. I think it was episode four.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I do love. How like kind of unapologetically like woman centered and like queer centered the show is and has been from season one. You know. We're like Season one. We got breakout episodes entirely dedicated to just like queer love stories. And I think for me, I kind of want to pull up my notes for the episode in particular, because there were just like a number of things that I loved.

Alexia Arani (she/they): But like this is such a small thing. But, like, you know, beginning of the episode, like Ellie and Dina are scavenging, basically, and Dina comes across like yeast

infection like medication, you know. She's asking Ellie like, hey, you got a yeast infection, and Ellie's like not yet. Give it time, like I just fucking love that exchange so much like it. Just kind of felt like something that would come out of like Broad City, you know, like

Alexia Arani (she/they): it just felt like really realistic humor to me between like young, queer women. And I you don't expect to hear about like yeast exchanges like yeast infections on an apocalyptic story like something like this, you know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): And I just loved like those beats like that that are just like really leaning into the fact that like this is a story about women. And we're gonna like, talk about things that concern women, you know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): And then that's the same episode where you know, they trot past the pride flag which they don't recognize. And of course, later, like Dina's coming out story, where we haven't talked about Dina yet, but you know kind of getting there where, you know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I don't think she uses the word bisexual. They probably don't even have that terminology. But we find out that she likes girls, and she's had these feelings for a long time, but basically ended up having to go like back in the closet because it wasn't

Alexia Arani (she/they): accepted. And like her mom, you know, kind of told her like, no, no, you like boys, and that whole exchange, like that whole exchange, just felt so real, and it was so good. And, you know, like I mentioned before, I kind of loved Ellie's joke of like, oh, shit! I'm going to be a dad like, because it just felt so real. It feels so queer like

Alexia Arani (she/they): that whole episode like, I think I ended my notes on that episode just saying, this episode is for the gays, with a bunch of exclamation marks like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Be really happy.

Clarisse: Yeah, no, those are. Those are extremely precious moments. I think it's of the places where the show really shines as compared to

Clarisse: the game, because the game is very

Clarisse: masculine. It seems like such an umbrella term that really doesn't do it justice. But there is no attention paid to women in the world, or even queerness, as much to the extent that it is in the show, and I appreciate how much space they made for these like queer love stories for these like there's that scene in season, one where Ellie goes and

Clarisse: is like grabbing a box of tampons when she's like out on a like a scavenger with Joel, and

Clarisse: all of these moments the like, the yeast infection conversation, like all of them, just like make a lot of sense like they don't feel forced. They don't feel

Clarisse: I don't know. They don't feel like afterthoughts. They just feel like very necessary and very sensible parts of the story that show so much about the world. And it's a beautiful. It's a beautiful difference, I think again, because of how

Clarisse: the like fan base around TLOU initially, and you know the like. The fan culture surrounding Joel. Was this very heavily male dominated scene, which is why, like all of these

Clarisse: men, quite frankly took so seriously what Abby does to Joel, and how Abby looks as this like non-traditional idea of what a woman must look like, and they just made it very, very, very clear how much they hated this. And then there were also.

Clarisse: you know, like fringe, but still relevant and disturbing conversations that were had between the TV remaster, the tea, one remaster and the original release of the game on PlayStation. Because Ellie's child character is made to appear like less

Clarisse: glam bodied for lack of a better term than she is in the original game, which is like, yeah, she's a kid. But people were like, how come Ellie is not. I'm trying to screw around and being like she was hotter in the original game

Clarisse: kind of what the sentiment was, and it was gross. It is gross, resoundingly so it was again. It's just like really nice to see, like some like attention paid to all of the women in this world in a way that

Clarisse: I don't know. It was very just like real and sweet and organic.

Alexia Arani (she/they): yeah. I also loved the exchange when Dina's basically kind of telling Ellie that she's like brave or Dina's like, you know, not. Everyone's as brave as you are in terms of why she didn't come out sooner. And Ellie's just like I'm not brave. I'm just obvious.

Clarisse: And I just.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Like, I'm just like how many like Butch, like queer women, or how many like it just feels like such a real exchange. I feel like a lot of people have had that exact conversation, you know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): It was just really good. I just felt I don't know. I really felt like they wrote that episode for us

Alexia Arani (she/they): which then again makes like the violence against Nora, feel extra like painful, at least for me. I was kind of really basking in some queer joy. That episode but also knowing that any joy they give us in the show. They're also gonna like, Rip away pretty quickly.

Clarisse: Okay.

Clarisse: Ain't that the truth? Yeah.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Do you mind if we take a quick break? I think I want to use the bathroom and maybe get some more water.

Clarisse: Yeah, for sure.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Okay, I'm just gonna pause my recording

Alexia Arani (she/they): me just test that. My microphone's working. Okay, it is okay.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I think the other like realistic Barcelo, stereotypical, gay thing for me with the two of them was the fact that, like they went from like fucking for the first time to like family planning

Alexia Arani (she/they): like, I'm going to be a dad. And it was just like, wow, this is like the most extreme apocalyptic form of U-hauling that I have ever seen.

Clarisse: Yeah, no, totally. Totally. Some things remain true, no matter what the circumstances.

Clarisse: because, even like Dina and Jesse's relationship, despite how many times they'd been on and off again had not seemed to progress in such a manner, perhaps because she

Clarisse: I don't know, liked him less, or she had said that she saw just that it wasn't gonna work out. But yeah, between Ellie and Dina, it's just kind of this immediate like. All right, this is forever.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, which I do know that a difference between the game which I don't think, this is a big deal to share from my understanding in the game when they kiss at the New Year's dance. That's like it. They're like a couple right. They like.

Clarisse: Yeah, pretty much. Pretty much.

Clarisse: The show goes to greater lengths to like really cement their relationship. And the ways in which it just like makes sense for their characters to end up together. But it it's kind of it all happens off screen. We don't see it as much.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Okay? Because, yeah, in the show, they make the decision, or like they kiss. And then Dina does the sort of like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): seems like she's kind of like walking backwards, you know, and like their first night together when they're on their revenge tour. You know, she's kind of I don't know. She's just kind of being a little flighty and like kind of leading on Ellie. And Ellie doesn't know what's going on, which that kind of confused me a bit because I felt like

Alexia Arani (she/they): Dina. Seems like someone who's so confident and so like centered, and who she is that I was surprised. But then, I think later, when we get her sort of coming out story, it makes a lot more sense that. And it's like so real for so many bi people, you know that it can just be like hard to come to terms with the feelings that you're that you're having, and of course, coming out is not maybe just going to be this immediate, overnight thing for her.

Clarisse: -

Alexia Arani (she/they): Also sorry. I feel like I'm jumping around, but I just have to like name like, what a chaotic, bisexual moment you know where she's.

Alexia Arani (she/they): and then they fuck. I was just like this is this is peak, chaotic, bisexual, like, Oh.

Alexia Arani (she/they): but I yeah, I don't know. How do you feel about Ellie and Dina's like relationship? How do you feel about the two of them together?

Clarisse: Well, I have loved it. I really appreciated even that first of them going on patrol together, and the way that they're just like behaviors. And they're like

Clarisse: playfulness around. Something. So quote, unquote, serious is just always at the forefront. I appreciate that they like take the effort. Yeah, to like frame. Why, they just make

sense as a pair. I think that their relationship has been really lovely to see play out. I know that some people have been perhaps dissatisfied with Dina's casting as well.

Clarisse: What

Clarisse: for appearance reasons, however, I think that it was a great casting decision. I don't know the name of the actress who plays Dina.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Said.

Clarisse: Isabella Merced. There we go. Thank you. I think she's been doing fantastic, and I really appreciate, just like how

Clarisse: lively and kind of out there and take no shit. Dina is throughout this entire season. And then, yeah, I think it's really well framed against that. You know. That moment of uncertainty in which she's just like I have feelings for Ellie. I don't really know how to see them through, because we do finally get to see her be vulnerable in a way that it doesn't seem like she is, for I don't know the first several episodes.

Alexia Arani (she/they): yeah, I agree, I love that early patrol scene and I'm, always just so captivated by Bella, Ramsey's performance. But like, you know, when Dina makes the pun, and you can just see like Ellie is so smitten but trying to play it cool like I love that. And then the parts were like. Dina is like mimicking, like killing and stabbing and like fighting.

Alexia Arani (she/they): It's just all

Alexia Arani (she/they): like it's just really cute. It's really funny they make such a good pair. I love the way that Dina like. In some ways we could say that she like kind of enables and reinforces some of Ellie's flaws, but she also balances her in such an important way. You know where, like Ellie's gonna sneak out. And Dina's like, okay, did you bring this? Did you bring that like. Did you think through these issues? She's fucking, triangulating shit like fucking woman in stem out here in the Apocalypse, like.

Alexia Arani (she/they): oh, my God! Yeah, she's such a cool character, and I'm really curious to see what's gonna happen with her moving forward with Jesse's death and Ellie's confession. I don't really know what to expect. This is somewhere. This is one of those areas where I don't really remember what happens in the game. So.

Alexia Arani (she/they): My dog is moving around. I'm gonna take her out of my room. Sorry. Give me just a second.

Clarisse: No worries!

Clarisse: Oh.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Okay. I'm here.

Clarisse: I had some sirens police sirens passing by in the distance. I don't think they came through on the call, but they may be in my recording, but they're

Clarisse: gone now, so we should be good.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Okay.

Clarisse: Okay.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, I don't. I was just talking about

Alexia Arani (she/they): liking their relationship. I don't know if you had anything to add, or I can save more and transition us

Alexia Arani (she/they): or no, I was saying, I'm wondering what's gonna happen with Dina in season three.

Clarisse: Yeah, I don't feel entirely certain about what's gonna happen, either. Obviously.

Clarisse: I kind of know, based on the game. However, again, because they've taken so many liberties this season. I wouldn't be surprised if maybe some details change, and obviously we have more space to dedicate to

Clarisse: Dina processing Jesse's death, which I hope they will take that space

Clarisse: so I'm curious to see how it plays out.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Is there anything else you want to say about Ellie or Ellie and Dina's relationship together.

Clarisse: Hmm!

Clarisse: Nothing is coming to me at the moment, but I wouldn't be surprised if it weasels its way back in if we're talking.

Alexia Arani (she/they): This is kind of going back again, but also, like La Dina moments, I love their first kiss. That whole scene was done so beautifully, and that is a scene that I remember clearly watching in the game. I think it was a moment when Dylan was like, come over here and watch this

Alexia Arani (she/they): which, if I'm remembering correctly, I think it's like almost like shot for shot, like done the same.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Oh, but yeah, it's just so beautiful.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I think, for me. With this show I revisited our season. One episode kind of in preparation for this, and I was talking about in season one. How The Last of Us is really like a story about human love and connection in an apocalyptic setting.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I feel like season two kind of diverges from that where season one, I think, brings in a lot more of the focus on violence, whether it be between people or with the infected. But it's the sort of moments that are focused on like the love and connection, the sort of human relationship aspect to me that are like the strongest in this season. And yeah, that whole first kiss scene was so well done.

Alexia Arani (she/they): you know, really showing Joel's saviorism again that he, like, comes in and like punches out that guy. I forgot his name.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Which sorry kind of tangent, but on that something I was like writing in my notes.

Alexia Arani (she/they): It was just like, of course it was the fucking like homophobic ex-cop guy was like the one guy who ended up being Ellie's like unlikely ally who was like, Yeah, revenge, defend the community like

Alexia Arani (she/they): it was just fine, very like Post 9-11, like bush era, just like

Alexia Arani (she/they): Made a lot of sense to me. It's like fuck. This guy.

Clarisse: I recall thinking the exact same thing. I was rewatching that that episode recently. And I was like,

Clarisse: yeah, no, it just it fits.

Alexia Arani (she/they): But yeah, I sorry. Going back. I agree with you. I think Isabella Merced is doing such a good job. The love in her eyes when she's watching Ellie seeing the song in the record store.

Clarisse: So.

Alexia Arani (she/they): A beautiful performance.

Clarisse: And so.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Well done. I'm surprised that you've heard criticism, because I have only seen, like intense celebration of Isabella Merced.

Alexia Arani (she/they): kind of to the extent where again it brings up for me like she's doing an incredible job, and she deserves the praise, but it just feels interesting to me that she's like the actress is gorgeous and super femme, and I would argue even more femme than the character was in the game, and it just kind of feels, classic and sexist that she's getting so much praise, and Bella's getting like shitted on when they're both excellent actors.

Clarisse: Totally. I mean to be fair. I kind of stopped keeping up with criticism fairly early on. So I think I was curious to see reactions after like episode two. But then, beyond that, I was like, I don't really care what people are saying. So it could be that those criticisms have in large part dissolved as they, you know, as everybody got through the rest of the season, and so how well she was doing. But I completely agree. I think, the developer said. It's really knocked it out of the park.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, I mean, all of all of the performances, like, I don't know when I really break it down and think about it like, I think this I loved the season. I think it was excellent, like. I think the performances were outstanding. I think all of like the set design was incredible, and I kind of like I don't know. It might be kind of cool to even talk about some of the like violence, like some of the fight scenes like. Weirdly enough, I kind of think that, like one of my favorite parts of the whole season.

Alexia Arani (she/they): I can't remember which episode it was. But it's basically when Dina and Ellie have to face off against all of the stalkers.

Alexia Arani (she/they): So there's like this very classic sort of horror film sequence of them like walking down this really creepy, fucking hallway. This is when they're in the warehouse walking down the hallway, and it was so scary, and it was so well done. And then I, fucking, loved the reveal where it's like, you see, one stalker, and they're kind of like they're scared. They're building up the anticipation of what they're gonna do. Then the reveal that there's, there's, and there's more like, I just thought that whole scene was like

Alexia Arani (she/they): so well done, and I loved it, and like I am a bit of a horror nerd, and I love the zombie genre so like, I really kind of appreciated getting some really good horror elements in this season.

Clarisse: Yeah, I felt the same way about the

Clarisse: early in the season. When Abby is in Wyoming, and they have the kind of like the

Clarisse: the backstory about. Why, suddenly, these undead are kind of amassing in a pile underneath the snow, and just like staying dormant up until they like sense movement on the ground above, I found that absolutely terrifying. And the suggestion that if I'm not mistaken, the suggestion that because these

Clarisse: like cordyceps or like

Clarisse: I don't know. Mycelial networks is that what you would call them are kind of.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Thank you.

Clarisse: Going moving through pipes so as to better be aware of like where humans may be. I really appreciated that just kind of like development in the science of all of it, because I recall one of the things just being. It was immediately striking, obviously. And they knew this as well, because it's how the show opens in season. One. But this conversation about like how this would have even happened, and how it would have developed from cordyceps to begin with.

Clarisse: seeing this kind of gradual evolution from season, one to season two of like, how they're getting smarter, how they're responding to like

Clarisse: become better predators to be fucking, frightening.

Clarisse: Yes.

Alexia Arani (she/they): That cordyceps pipes thing that also is very stranger things to me, like the hive mind, and like stepping.

Clarisse: On the vines.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Which I don't know if this is real. But I was reading somewhere that The Last of Us, the video game was partially an inspiration for stranger things, and then it also kind of seems like the show is kind of maybe taking inspiration from stranger things. It's like an interesting feedback loop.

Clarisse: Interesting. I hadn't heard that, and I also haven't really watched stranger things, so I'm not sure.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Okay.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Also. The subway scene, I thought, was so cool. I loved that where I was like. That's where I would have died right there, because, like, there's no way I would.

Clarisse: Call for that.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Tiny little hole to get into the subway. I'm just like that would have been it for me it would have been like, no, thank you. Sorry. Take me, wolves.

Clarisse: Yeah, I've often said that in like an apocalyptic scenario such as this, specifically as it pertains to zombies, but probably in other senses, too. I don't think that my will to survive is all that strong. I think that in a lot of ways, even encountering like, let's say, like a horde of undead for the first time would rattle me so deeply that I might just like lose all

Clarisse: all sense of desire to persevere. But yeah, there are plenty of moments in this season where I'm just like no, no, thanks, I think I'm good. I would drop off at this point. Just kind of accept my fate. I'm done.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Oh, my gosh! Also the part where

Alexia Arani (she/they): When Abby basically awakes the horde, and that that is

Alexia Arani (she/they): is collapsing in on her, and she's crawling, and all of the infected oh, my God! That was so scary and fucked up.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Okay.

Alexia Arani (she/they): we kind of touched. We talked about Joel. Ellie got into Eugene and Gail. We talked about Dina a little bit. We kind of touched on Jesse. I'm wondering like for these other like major characters. Is there anything you wanted to discuss about any of them? Or do we kind of want to zoom out to some of the larger world building of this season in terms of like the wolves and the Seraphites, and a little bit we get to know about Abby's crew.

Clarisse: The one thing that comes to mind. I don't have necessarily like thoughts to unpack about it in a huge way, but one of my favorite

Clarisse: scenes in this entire season was definitely I don't remember what episode it was, the episode that opens with Isaac giving this. Actually, I guess he has two of them giving this monologue about how he had always hoped to finally own these like really nice hands. And he's just going off. And then we, you know, we zoom out, and we realize that he's in the midst of like very brutally torturing a seraphite to death.

Clarisse: I just thought that that scene was spectacular in a way that

Clarisse: I mean I don't want to call it human, because it's happening during something very inhumane, but I just appreciated that kind of exposition about what he loved and what he cared about before

Clarisse: you know the world went to hell. And then, I guess, in a similar vein, thinking back to it now when we get that flashback of him going off with the militia and meeting up with meeting up

with the fireflies for the first time, and then just blowing up his entire patrol car and saving that one guy who seemed like maybe he had his chance of, you know.

Clarisse: having a more human attitude towards survival instinct and those who were daring to go against the militia, I thought they were very great examples of his character. I just like loved those moments.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Okay? So this is maybe not the most important question. But that scene you're talking about where Isaac basically betrays Fedra.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Was he joining the fireflies? Or was that the WLF in their early years.

Clarisse: I?

Clarisse: Oh, fuck! See, I'm ashamed! This escapes me.

Alexia Arani (she/they): It's okay. It's okay. I it could be either. I'm not sure. But I at least interpreted that scene as him joining the WLF. And like this, the beginning of his storyline with the with the wolves. But I also know that, like the fireflies, had a stronghold, and then kind of died out so they could have merged. I don't really know.

Clarisse: Yeah, I God, I wish I wasn't so murky on the like timeline of events, but I suppose it would make more sense for it to be the WLF, because he's not hugely aged down or anything, and we understand like quite a few years have passed. However.

Clarisse: yeah, I think I just I kind of just went with. It was him joining the fireflies, but it had no, because the fireflies had been in pretty heavy opposition, like physical opposition to Fedra as well, so

Clarisse: I don't know I'm inclined to say that you're right, and that it is the WLF. But I am not.

Clarisse: I don't know.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, I mean it. It could be either. If it is the WLF which I think it, I think it would make sense. If it works, I feel like it's kind of mirroring what we get in season. One of like this sort of story of like

Alexia Arani (she/they): the sort of like institutional, like corruption, you know, where, like, the fireflies are like trying to do a good thing. But we discussed this in season one like the issues with their approaches, where, you know, they wanted to kill Ellie. And like all these things, and kind of similar with WLF like with Isaac's character, we're seeing that he is like

Alexia Arani (she/they): very much opposed this authoritarianism of Fedra and the inhumanity of Fedra. And he's leaving because he believes in something better. And then we see how they have become

Alexia Arani (she/they): just the same, if not worse than Fedra, and how they are now, you know, responding to the Seraphites.

Alexia Arani (she/they): So I think the show does so much it does mirroring all the time, like I feel like, that's a classic kind of thing the show does and does so well. But yeah, I think Isaac's really interesting.

Alexia Arani (she/they): and I love that cold open

Clarisse: With.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Him killing all those Federal agents. I thought that was so well done. It's really good.

Clarisse: Other major characters. I don't. I'm not sure I no huge

Clarisse: sentiments. I don't think I think they're all doing quite well like anybody that we haven't discussed whether it's like Tommy or Maria. I think both of their characters have been spectacular. I think that Isaac's character was great. Obviously, Nora, Nora, Mel.

Clarisse: Oh, and, Abby, we don't get the opportunity to really see them throughout this first season.

Clarisse: But everyone else that we do get to see. I thought that they were.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Interesting.

Clarisse: Very well represented.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, I'm not. I'm not sure how much we can say necessarily about the wolves and the Seraphites. Yet I think more of that conversation will happen after season comes out.

Alexia Arani (she/they): But I'm just yeah. I think I just feel excited. I just feel excited and interested to learn a lot more about what is up with them. In particular, the Seraphites, because the wolves maybe there'll be more depth there, but it kind of seems like the classic story of like an insurrectionist group

Alexia Arani (she/they): trying to get rid of a dictatorship and then just like reifying it themselves. But the Seraphites are really interesting, and I don't remember much about them, so I'm really curious to find out what's up with the Prophet. What's up with like the facial markings.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, I'm just excited, but I don't know if there's anything that jumped out to you about kind of their conflict or the representation in this season that you wanted to talk about.

Clarisse: I'm gonna say no, just because I don't trust that I can't accidentally that I won't accidentally say something that I shouldn't about

Clarisse: the presumed events of season three. But I'm with you on just being very curious to see, because again, we have so much more space to let these stories really play out that I am interested to see like what they choose to do with that, and how we choose to, you know.

Clarisse: develop more of a relationship with, I mean, whether it's the WLF or the Seraphites.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Was there anything else that you wanted to talk about today?

Clarisse: Not that I can think of.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Okay.

Clarisse: Yeah.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Well, I feel like that's a place to wrap up. But before we close out the episode, a little behind the scenes, if y'all follow me on Instagram. You already know that I like never, ever post, and a big part of it is like fuck Meta, you know, fuck tech.

Alexia Arani (she/they): So I'm really tempted to just delete my Instagram altogether, because I only ever post just to promote an episode.

Alexia Arani (she/they): So I don't know just on that note like, you know, this podcast. Is very DIY, like, I do all the audio editing and production by myself. I pay \$ a month to pay, to have it hosted on all the platform streaming things

Alexia Arani (she/they): and going off Instagram. It's just even more like just my tiny, self-led project. So yeah, it just means a lot. If folks share the podcast you know. So if you listen to the episode, if you enjoy any aspect of it, just like, send it to whoever you know, who watches The Last of Us or who enjoys TV podcasts

Alexia Arani (she/they): means a lot to me, to always get my little listener updates and to see that people are like, still, somehow finding the podcast and listening to it. Even when I do nothing to promote it is amazing. So if folks can just keep doing that. I'd really appreciate. It definitely gives me inspiration to keep doing this and keep releasing more episodes

Alexia Arani (she/they): Soon. Yeah. So yeah, thanks for listening. Please keep sharing. It means a lot. And, Clarisse, thank you so much for being here your third time on the pod. I love it. I hope we can make it four, maybe even five.

Clarisse: Totally.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Yeah, thank you.

Alexia Arani (she/they): Thank you so much.

Alexia Arani (she/they): And yeah, please share the podcast. Please leave me a review, rate it five stars that all really helps, and until then take care.

Clarisse: Bye, y'all thanks. Y'all.