

The Narrative of God of War (2018)

The story of God of War (2018) is one that balances grandiose mythological conflict with a seemingly simple yet relentlessly difficult father-son relationship. In a way, Kratos is the perfect candidate to write a redemption/fatherhood story arc about. A demigod who slaughtered countless humans, monsters, and gods being thrust into the role of single father to a young, curious boy makes for one ironic yet deeply compelling narrative. The fact that someone as powerful and experienced as Kratos struggles with the most basic aspects of fatherhood, such as putting his hand on his son's shoulder to show that he is proud of his actions makes us as flawed humans feel less insecure about our own shortcomings, almost as if to say, "Well, maybe I'm not doing that poorly myself."

The theme of the volatile cycle of abusive parents and vengeful children is central to the Norse God of War saga. We have three main examples in Kratos and Atreus, Freya and Baldur, and in 2018 specifically, Zeus and Kratos. In Ragnarök, Odin and Thor replace Zeus and Kratos as the third type of parental relationship. We are left with a messy spectrum of parent child relationships. On one side, you have the overprotective parent and resentful child in Freya and Baldur. Freya, while meaning well, cast a spell on Baldur after learning from a prophecy that he would die a needless death. She prevents him from dying and feeling any pain, but this turns him against her and causes his death indirectly. On the opposite side of the triangle, you have Zeus and Kratos. Zeus had zero empathy or respect for his son, only using him when convenient and downright torturing him when there was no use for him. This, of course, results in Kratos becoming supremely vengeful, causing him to commit patricide in the most brutal and consequential fashion. And then there is the beating heart of the narrative, the relationship between Kratos and Atreus.

Kratos is neither overbearing nor abusive to Atreus. He is simply detached. He fears that any involvement in his son's life will only cause anger, pain, and violence, as that is all he knew in his previous life. After the treatment Kratos received from his own father, it would be easy to simply pass that same pain and trauma onto his own son, like many would, including Thor. It would be the most simple thing to do; continue the cycle. However, thanks to the unwavering support from his late wife Faye, Kratos makes a choice that quite literally changes the future of the nine realms. He chooses to be better. He chooses to end the cycle of violence among parent and child, not just in his own relationship, but Freya and Baldur's as well. Additionally, Kratos desires so deeply to do right by his son after he was manipulated into killing his first child, his daughter Calliope by a malicious Ares. The trauma from his previous life causes nothing but overwhelming fear when approached with the idea of attempting fatherhood again, but he perseveres. This trichotomy of juxtaposing relationships perfectly encapsulates for the audience one of the game's biggest themes. Aided by a fantastic supporting cast, God of War tells an incredibly powerful story about one man's path to redemption, and its sequel only improves on this foundation to tell my personal favorite story of all time. By the time the credits roll, you've experienced a masterfully written, scored, and acted story about a tortured soul learning to be a flawed but loving father, as well as a good man and peaceful god for the first time in his thousand year life.