

Why a Grounded+ Difficulty Run is the Ultimate Test of Skill in The Last of Us Part II Remastered

When I first loaded up The Last of Us Part II Remastered on my PlayStation 5, I thought I knew what I was getting into. I had finished the original version on moderate settings, taken my time with the stealth sections, and even dabbled in photo mode to capture some of Naughty Dog's stunning environmental storytelling. But the moment I selected Grounded+ difficulty, everything I thought I understood about this game evaporated. The Grounded+ difficulty run is not just a higher health bar for enemies or a tighter ammo economy. It is a fundamental shift in how the game expects you to think, move, and survive. It demands you treat every encounter like a puzzle where one misstep means death, and death means restarting from the last checkpoint with no damage run conditions still intact.

For players coming from the standard Grounded mode, the jump to Plus feels like stepping into a different genre. Enemies are relentless, their awareness is sharper, and the resources you rely on become scarce almost immediately. On the PS5 Pro, with 4K resolution and HDR cranked up, the visual clarity actually works against you in some ways. You see every drop of blood, every flicker of light on a wet street, but you also see exactly how many bullets you do not have. The DualSense controller adds another layer of tension, its haptic feedback vibrating with every near miss and every weapon upgrade you manage to secure at a workbench. It is a sensory overload that matches the narrative weight of Ellie Williams' and Abby Anderson's stories.

What Grounded+ Actually Changes

Let me break down what makes a [Grounded+ difficulty run](#) so punishing. It is not just enemy damage or your own fragility. The game tweaks multiple systems simultaneously. Listen detection is sharper, so walking through tall grass at full speed is almost always a death sentence. Enemy flanking becomes more aggressive, and their communication with each other feels more coordinated. You cannot rely on the same safe strategies from Grounded mode because the AI adapts faster and punishes hesitation.

On top of that, resources are cut significantly. You will find fewer crafting materials, fewer bullets, and fewer health kits. Every bullet you fire matters. Every bottle you throw to distract an enemy is a resource you might need later. The workbench becomes a place of desperate calculation. Do you upgrade the pistol's clip size now, or save the parts for a better silencer? With skill upgrades and weapon upgrades both competing for the same limited materials, each decision feels permanent. And in a no damage run, where even a single hit resets your progress, those choices become life or death.

Collectibles and Chronological Mode: A New Layer of Challenge

What makes this particular Grounded+ difficulty run unique is the addition of collectibles and chronological mode. Usually, when you are trying to survive every encounter without taking a scratch, you ignore optional items. But here, the goal is to find every collectible while still maintaining a no damage run. That forces you into areas you would normally avoid. You have to check every corner, every locked room, every hidden shelf. It turns each level into a high-stakes treasure hunt where a single trap or ambush can cost you everything.

Chronological mode rearranges the game's timeline so you play through events in the order they happened, rather than the original back-and-forth structure. For a Grounded+ difficulty run, this changes the pacing dramatically. You face certain encounters earlier or later than intended, sometimes with different weapon upgrades available. It makes the campaign feel fresh even for veterans, but it also introduces unpredictability. You cannot rely on muscle memory from a previous playthrough because the order of challenges is different.

The Role of Permadeath and No Damage

Some players combine Grounded+ difficulty with permadeath, where death means the entire run is over. That is a level of commitment I respect but do not personally enjoy. Instead, I opted for a no damage run without permadeath. The difference is subtle but important. Without permadeath, you can still retry encounters, but you cannot take any damage at all. One bullet graze, one infected claw, and you restart the encounter. It forces you to learn enemy patterns intimately. You start recognizing which doors the enemies will burst through, which windows they climb, and how long their patrol routes take.

The encounter design in *The Last of Us Part II Remastered* shines brightest under these conditions. Naughty Dog crafted each fight with multiple approaches, but on Grounded+ difficulty run, most of those approaches become traps. Going loud is rarely viable because you simply do not have the ammunition. Stealth is mandatory, but the AI's improved hearing means you have to move at a crawl, use distractions sparingly, and plan your route three steps ahead. I found myself using photo mode not for screenshots, but to pause the action and study enemy positions. That pause function became a tactical tool rather than a cosmetic one.



Skill Upgrades and Weapon Upgrades Under Pressure

The skill tree in this remastered version has been expanded, and with maximum upgrades available from the start of the Grounded+ difficulty run, you might think it makes things easier. It does not. Having all skills unlocked means you have no progression to look forward to, but it also means the game expects you to use every tool perfectly. You have the dodge roll, the prone crawl, the listening mode range increase. Using them well is the difference between a clean encounter and a reset.

Weapon upgrades are another matter entirely. At the workbench, you can modify your firearms with better scopes, larger magazines, and reduced sway. But resources for upgrades are still limited. You have to prioritize. Do you upgrade the hunting pistol for Abby Anderson's sections, or the silenced submachine gun for Ellie Williams' chapters? The choice depends on your playstyle, but in a Grounded+ difficulty run, there is no room for error. If you pick the wrong upgrade path, you might find yourself in a later encounter without the tools you need.

Visual Fidelity and Performance on PS5 Pro

Playing on PS5 Pro at 4K resolution with HDR enabled, the game looks breathtaking. But the higher frame rate and resolution also make the action more readable. You can see enemy animations more clearly, which helps with parry timing and dodge windows. The DualSense controller's adaptive triggers add resistance when drawing a bow or firing a heavy weapon. It grounds you in the moment. Every pull of the trigger has weight. In a no damage run, that

tactile feedback becomes part of your reaction loop. You feel when you are about to make a mistake before the visual confirms it.

I have heard some players argue that the Grounded+ difficulty run is too punishing to be enjoyable. I understand that perspective. It is not a mode for everyone. But for those who want to master every system Naughty Dog built, it is the purest expression of the game's design. The 300 percent damage multiplier to enemies? That is generous. The real threat is the environment, the AI, and your own patience. The mode strips away the safety net and asks you to earn every inch of progress.

Final Thoughts on the Grounded+ Difficulty Run

If you have not tried a Grounded+ difficulty run with all collectibles and no damage, I recommend it only if you are ready for a completely different experience. It is not the same game. It is a survival puzzle where the stakes are personal. Every encounter becomes a story you tell yourself later. The way you cleared a room full of Seraphites without making a sound, the moment you dodged a clicker's lunge by inches, the relief of finding a workbench just when your weapon is about to break. Those moments define the run.

The Last of Us Part II Remastered on PlayStation 5 is already a masterpiece of narrative and atmosphere. But the Grounded+ difficulty run transforms it into a test of skill that rewards patience, planning, and precision. Whether you play as Ellie or Abby, whether you use chronological mode or the traditional timeline, the core challenge remains the same. You against the world, with nothing but your wits and a few bullets. That is a test worth taking.