



CAN KRATOS GROW UP? ADDING DIMENSION TO THE NEW GOD OF WAR

NEWS | Jun 13, 2017 | by: Leo Parrilli

The very first **E3 Colosseum presentation** of 2017 was a discussion of Santa Monica Studio's newest entry in the PlayStation exclusive *God of War* franchise. As the presentation began we were greeted with a lovely piece of performance art, in which a sand artist chronicled the trials of Kratos and his family against a beautiful musical backdrop. We were then introduced to our moderator, Michele Morrow, and some of the development team, including Cory Barlog, Shannon Studstill, Jeet Shroff, and Ariel Angelotti.

The talk ended up being a compelling back and forth about many facets of the game's construction, especially if you're interested in the behind-the-scenes of how AAA games are made. What really piqued my interest was the discussion of the character of Kratos, and his reimagining as a more multi-dimensional, human figure than he has been in the past.

God Of Rage

For those of you don't know, Kratos is the penultimate incarnation of hyper masculinity in the most ridiculous sense. He's a giant, muscle-bound revenge machine who screams constantly, mercilessly slays everything in his path, and stops only to occasionally indulge certain other pleasures of the flesh.

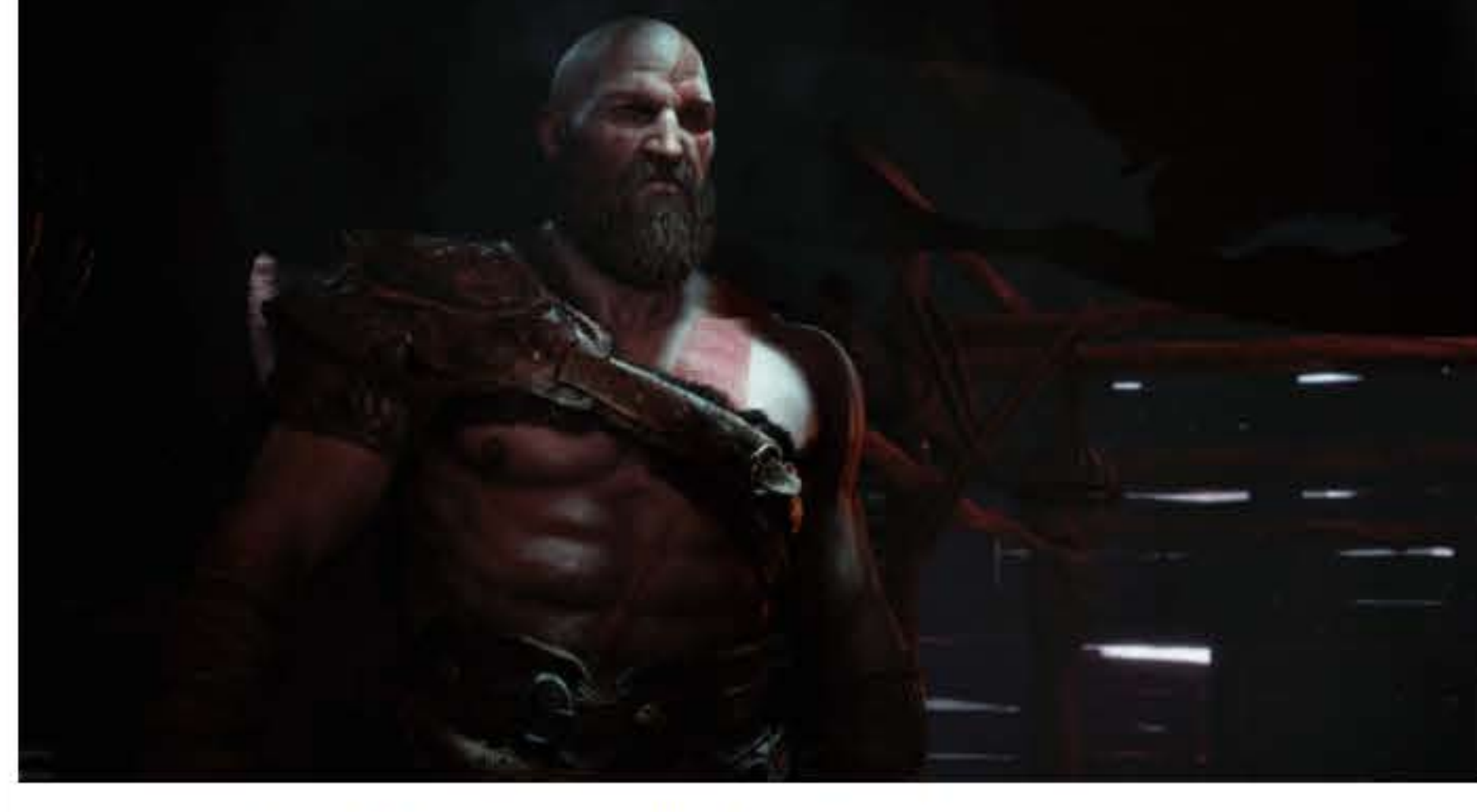


Pictured: not a poster child for mental stability.

In other words, he's a one-dimensional rage bomb, with anger used in place of any real character development. There have been efforts throughout the franchise to develop his back story, including the loss of a wife and child, but he's basically a one-note male power fantasy devoid of any complexity. And that quickly becomes dull, even when the rest of the game is very engaging.

Or at least that's what he was. With the newest *God of War*, that all might be changing.

A More Human Kratos

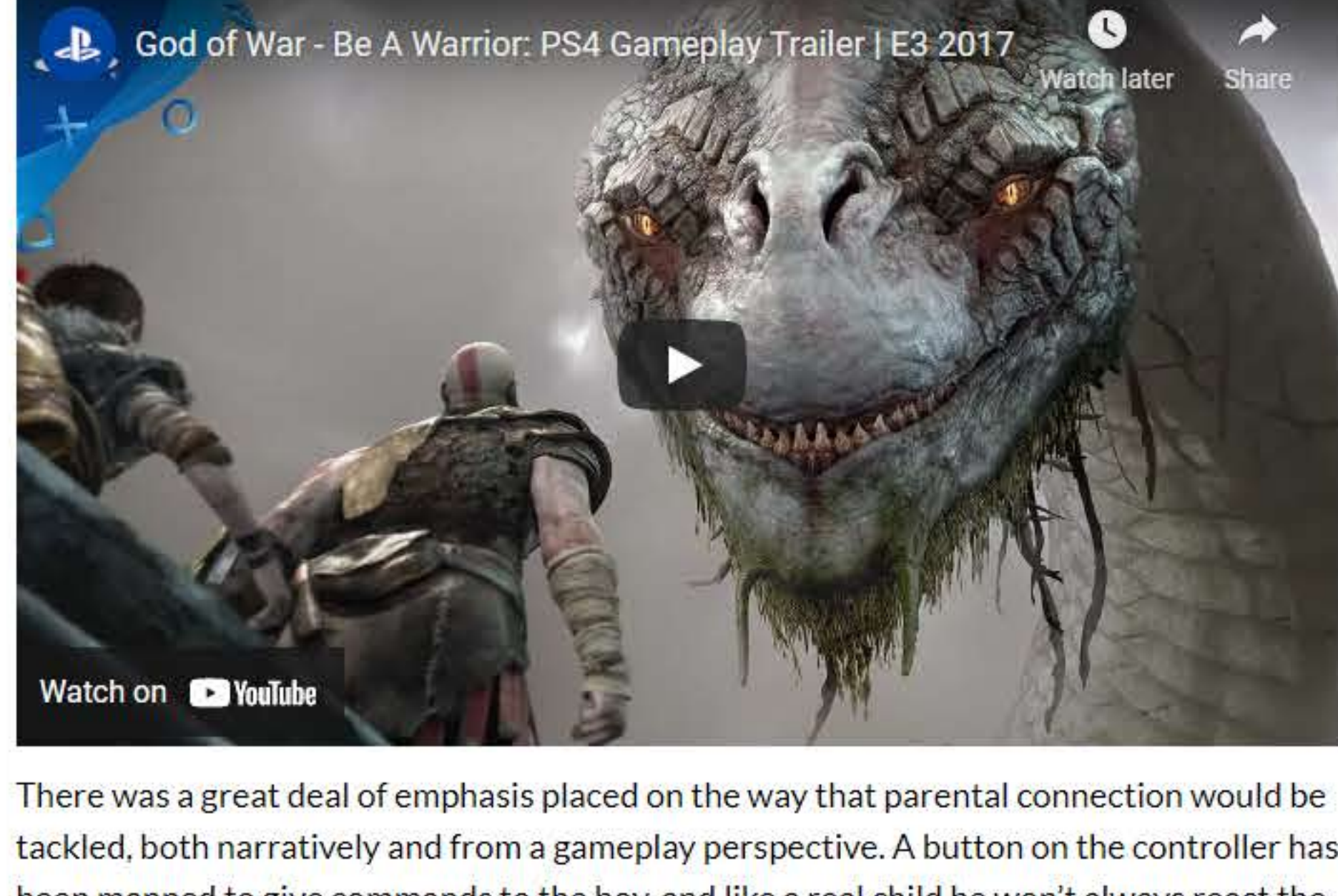


A more mature Kratos. You can tell by the beard.

Cory Barlog, the director of the newest entry, had some very interesting things to say about that one dimensionality. He touched on a variety of interesting subjects throughout the discussion, but he focused on the inclusion of Kratos' son in the game as a particularly important insight into the enigmatic killing machine.

The newest game is a reinvention of sorts, and has made some substantial changes to the *God of War* formula. Santa Monica Studios changed the setting and the pantheon from Greek to Norse, replaced the famous Blades of Chaos with a more utilitarian axe, and added an additional controllable character in the form of Kratos' son.

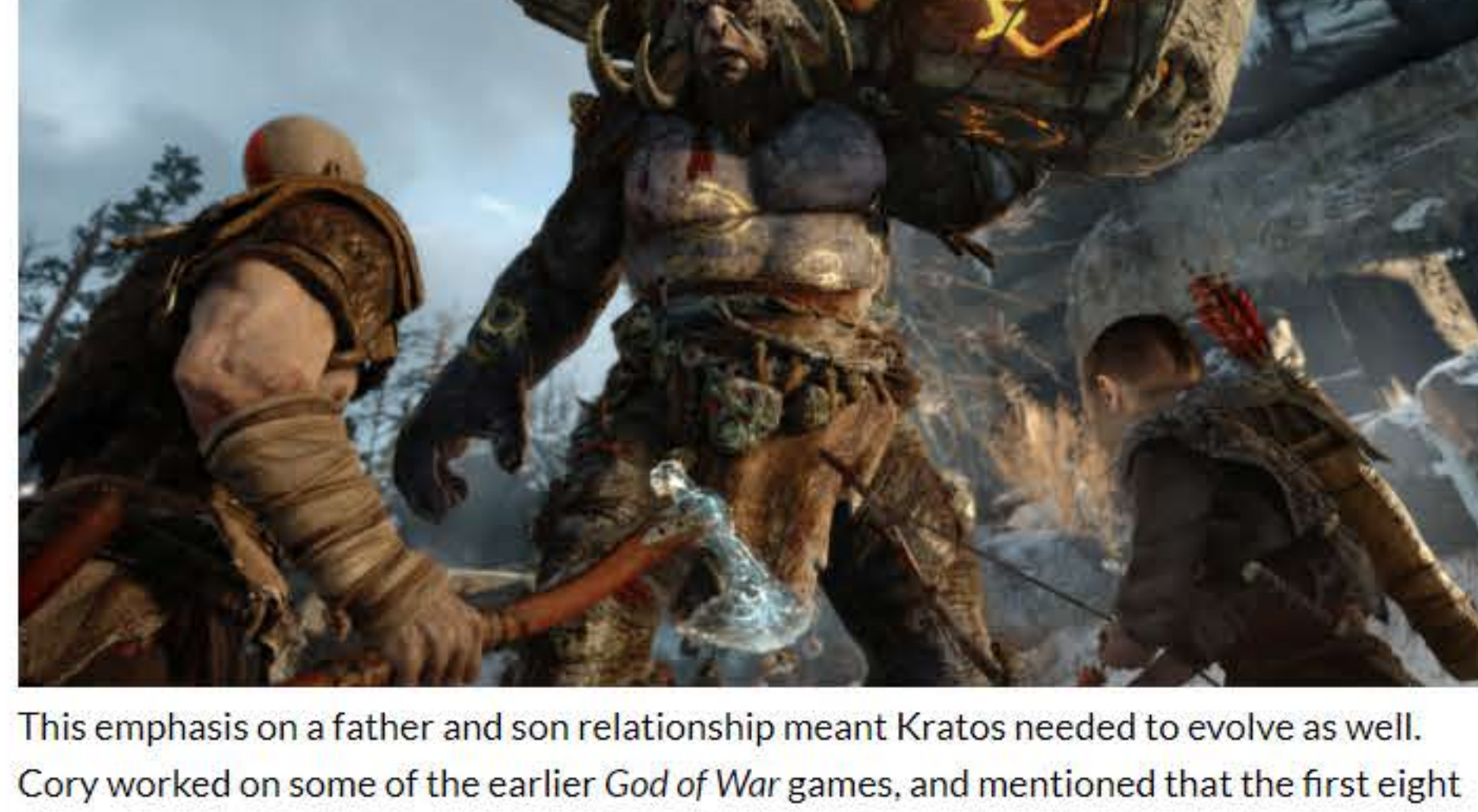
You can get a taste of the new direction in this E3 trailer.



There was a great deal of emphasis placed on the way that parental connection would be tackled, both narratively and from a gameplay perspective. A button on the controller has been mapped to give commands to the boy, and like a real child he won't always react the way we expect. Cory drew parallels to his own experiences as a father in constructing this dynamic relationship, and everyone from the studio seemed to think of the progression of the AI of the young boy as sort of like watching a child they had all raised together.

It was a touching sentiment, but also a fascinating insight into the uncharted territory Kratos and his son are exploring in the snow-covered north.

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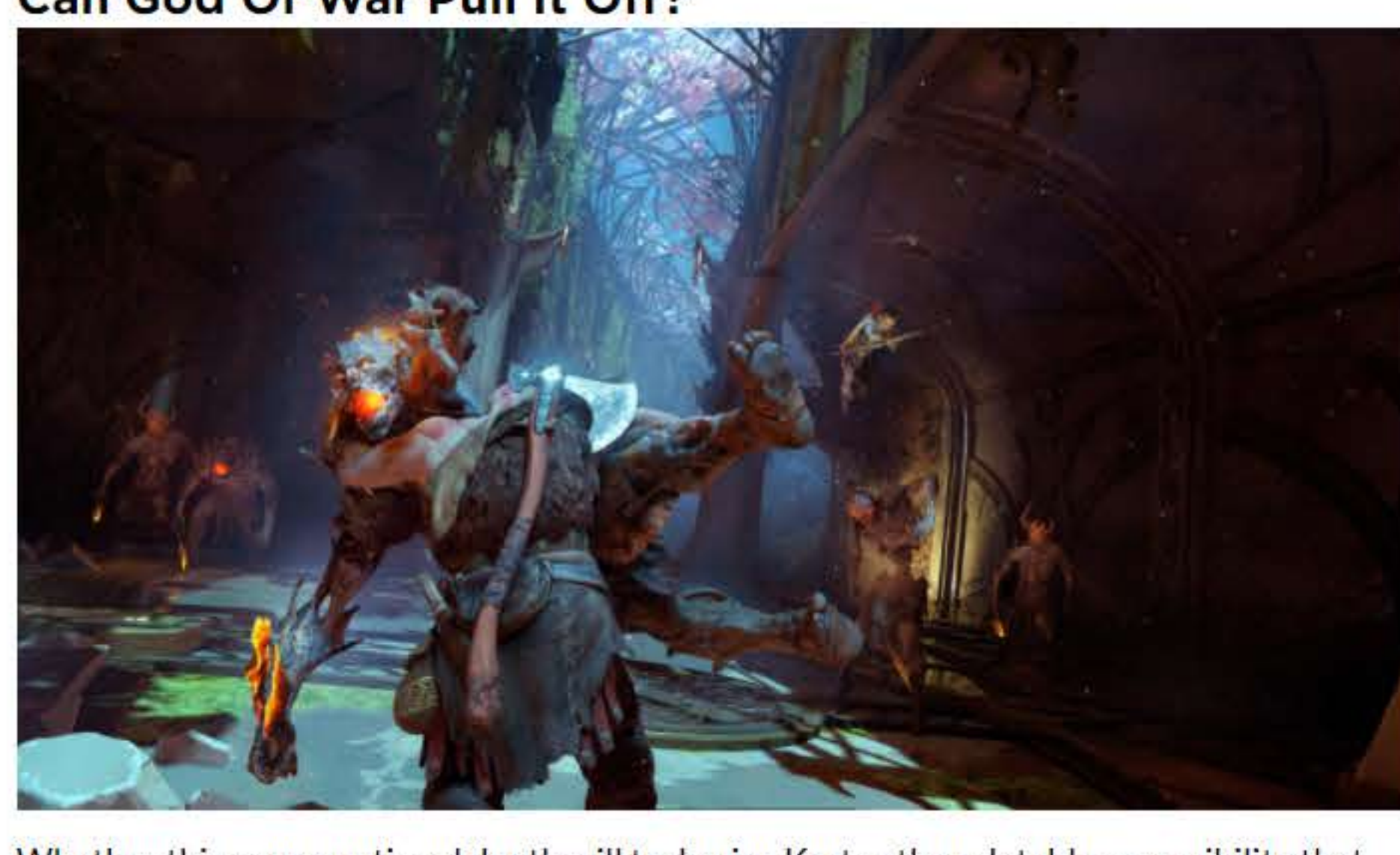


This emphasis on a father and son relationship meant Kratos needed to evolve as well. Cory worked on some of the earlier *God of War* games, and mentioned that the first eight Kratos stories (including various mobile titles) acted as an introduction to the character, not his entire arc.

He said that Kratos still has places to go, and that the character is only getting started on his emotional journey. The angry, screaming archetype was only the beginning of a far more complex person we are only now getting to know.

Giving Kratos a son and a much more grounded set of concerns could be a wonderful way to explore that new emotional complexity. This, in addition to more tempered writing, a new voice for Kratos in Christopher Judge, and a more cinematic method of delivering the narrative, could make him a character far more compelling than he's ever been before.

Can God Of War Pull It Off?



Whether this new emotional depth will truly give Kratos the relatable accessibility that good stories require from their protagonists remains to be seen, but I applaud the effort. I love the *God of War* series, but the main character has always been an underdeveloped void in an otherwise explosive splatter of violent creativity. Here's hoping that the new *God of War* retains what makes the franchise so delightfully engaging, while also exploring subtle intricacies of character development we're starting to expect from AAA games.

After seeing the discussion at E3 2017, I'm very confident Santa Monica Studios can strike that balance, and I'm very excited about meeting a new, more mature Kratos.

As long as he still kills everything around him and slaughters the Gods by the dozens. And screams from time to time. Some things should never change.

You can watch the full panel below.



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