

How 'Uncharted 4' Fails Nathan Drake

By Phil Hornshaw

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At first, you think maybe Nathan Drake is finally going to learn something from all this...

We're deep into the fourth and ostensibly final game of the Uncharted series—at least the last with protagonist Nate in the lead role—and it looks like maybe he's finally realizing his adrenaline-addled treasure-chasing mercenary killing gunshot-dodging lifestyle is maybe not that great.

That's the story Uncharted 4 tries (and fails) to tell, anyway. It starts with a domesticated Nate living life away from the globe-trotting fortune seeker game, after having discovered and subsequently lost three separate amazing treasures and one fabled city in the previous games.

Of course, Nate is wistful for the good of days when he would race a scary murderer and his hired goons to an amazing pile of gold or something, only to find out that the last people who made it here all turned into zombies, and then the whole place falls into a sinkhole.

Then, Nate's long-lost brother Sam, who we've never ever heard of, shows up and quickly convinces Nate to go looking for a pirate treasure the pair were after some 17 years ago.

By the way, during this conversation, Nate and Sam talk basically all night and it's only hours after Sam's reappearance that Nate even thinks to mention he's married.

NATE DRAKE, GIANT MANCHILD



So Nate enlists cultural artifact theft mentor Sully, lies liberally to Elena because he's "given up that life," and sets off to track down the hidden treasure of pirate Captain Henry Avery.

It should be noted that Nate is in mortal danger the entire time, but nothing that 1) he can't handle, and 2) that he hasn't gone through before with his wife.

But, you know, character development or something.

Elena shows up and confronts Nate, but his marriage crumbling before his eyes for no better reason than he's acting like a 14-year-old isn't enough to stop him.

After some more twists, a semi-falling out with Sam, and nearly drowning, Elena shows up on a jungle pirate island to save Nate's life by way of plot convenience.

Nate Drake's getting divorced, y'all.

Or at least, that's the way it seems. There are definitely some personal conflicts that need to be worked out here!

Hold up a second, though. Not so fast. This is a video game, after all.

THEN IT ALL TOTALLY COLLAPSES



At a key moment, Uncharted 4 drops a flashback chapter into the game in which Nate and Sam, as children, break into a well-to-do home in search of journals belonging to their dead mother.

The last letter suggests the damage the adventurer's choices did to her loved ones—her husband grew sick and died, and her son wants nothing to do with her because she chose obsession over family.

It's a poignant moment in the game, when a young Nate Drake sees the consequences of his later actions, right there in front of him.

Or it would in any other story. But in Uncharted 4, it's not Nate reading those notes, it's you.

And that's the trouble with Uncharted 4 in one handy example. Nate never learns anything. After the reunion with Elena she basically just forgives him—or rather, their conflict more or less evaporates.

Same goes for Nate's trouble with Sam, the obsessed liar who dragged him back into the life into which he secretly wanted to return.

Uncharted 4 totally flubs the most important part of its story: the resolutions of the conflicts between these characters.

It's Elena who solves Nate's conflict. She buys the salvage company. She gives him permission to go back to the semi-adventurer lifestyle.

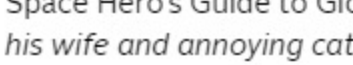
Nate just sulks.

Uncharted 4 brings Nate Drake's story to a close, but it doesn't give him an arc. Nate never learns anything from what's happened to him.

Despite all its efforts, Uncharted 4 is an incomplete story. Elena acts as a deus ex machina to resolve Nate's conflicts so he doesn't have to do it himself.

Phil Hornshaw is a freelance writer and the co-author of So You Created a Wormhole: The Time Traveler's Guide to Time Travel and The Space Hero's Guide to Glory.

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