

# Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: Uncharted 2, Among Thieves  
Platform: PS3  
Genre: Third Person Action Shooter  
Release Date: October 13, 2009  
Developer: Naughty Dog  
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment  
Creative Director: Amy Hennig  
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## Overview

Uncharted 2, like its predecessor, is a huge step in the direction of immersive and breathtaking narrative in games. It tells the tale of an unlikely hero named Nathan Drake, who, through his struggles, failures, and triumphs saves the world from a power hungry tyrant. Drake evolves through his dealings with a wide array of characters, each with a unique personality and role in his quest. Not only is a very well done character design used to add depth and believability to Drake's journey, but Uncharted 2 also uses the real life mystery of the voyage of Marco Polo from China in 1292 to immerse the player with the possibility that his tale could be true.

Uncharted 2 adds excitement and wonder through the diversity of its settings. One moment the player is infiltrating a museum, and the next he is doing hard time in a Turkish prison because of a friend's betrayal. The plot twists and exploration of such a diverse landscape only add to the immersion and enjoyment the player feels.

## Characters

Every character in Uncharted 2 is as complex as Nathan Drake himself, from the main protagonist Zoran Lazarevic, to Drake's fearless guide through the mountains, Tenzin. Even the enemies the player encounters throughout the game each have a different behavior pattern and feel. The early enemies are more likely to run for cover, where the more heavily armored enemies later in the game have much more confidence and charge and shout at the player.

- Nathan Drake – Drake is the main protagonist of Uncharted 2. His character diamond is designed to make him as appealing to the player as possible and he is, for the most part, the typical hero archetype. Drake has imperfections, and doesn't always make the right decision, but he is a strong, caring and loyal individual. I perceive his character diamond as involving above average looks, cunning, loyalty and some uncanny ability to find a way out of every situation.
- Zoran Lazarevic – Lazarevic is the main antagonist of Uncharted 2. He is the classic shadow. An overpowering warlord with world domination at his core. Lazarevic is not Drake's intellectual equal, but he makes up for it with his commanding presence and unbreakable resolve.
- Harry Flynn – Harry plays the role of the trickster from the first time he is introduced to the player by getting Drake involved in his planned betrayal of his current employer. He gives off an untrustworthy vibe throughout the game until he finally betrays Nathan Drake and confirms the player's suspicions. The player is eventually introduced to Lazarevic by following Harry's trail.

- Elena Fisher – Elena returns as the eager journalist looking for a groundbreaking story and once again she gets absorbed into Drake’s adventure to save the planet. Her honest and trustworthy demeanor keeps Drake on the right path.
- Chloe Frazer – Chloe is a new companion to the series who plays many different roles. She begins the adventure as a loyal companion and lover to Nathan Drake however, after realizing Drake’s noble intentions to save the world and after becoming jealous over the feelings Drake still has for Elena Fisher, Chloe shows her shape shifter characteristics by changing back to Lazarevic’s side. Though Chloe double-crosses almost every main character in the story, she never loses her base feelings for Drake, or her compassion for doing the right thing.
- Karl Schafer – Though Drake does not meet Karl until half way through the story, Karl provides Drake with key information and guidance necessary to the completion of his journey. Karl is the only mentor that arises in Uncharted 2.
- Tenzin – Tenzin helps Drake through the mountain passage to the gateway of Shambhala. Though Tenzin speaks a different language, the player can tell that he is a righteous and trustworthy ally.

## Breakdown

Uncharted 2 is the new frontier in interactive storytelling. It takes games to a place where only movies and books have gone before. Naughty Dog’s ability to use every aspect of the game to immerse the player in Nathan Drake’s world is second to none. Every character in Uncharted 2 not only fits its archetype perfectly, but each has their own premise, unique quirks and distinguishable traits that make the characters relatable and believable. A perfect example of this is given in the first short cut scene when Drake is approached by Harry with the job proposal.

Harry explains that he has been hired by an unnamed person to steal a lamp from an exhibit in an Islamic museum. Drake is adamant about his unwillingness to accept the proposal; however, Harry knows of Drake's disdain for this particular museum and comes prepared. In his trickster nature, Harry pretends to know nothing of the true reason for his employer's interest in the lamp. By doing this, Harry allows Drake to discover the possibility that the lamp holds the key to discovering the lost fleet of Marco Polo. This makes Drake feel empowered which leads him to believe that the mission will fail without him. The realization that he could be the sole reason for the discovery of the century, coupled with the pride of knowing he figured out that which Harry couldn't push Drake to accept the opportunity of a new treasure hunt.

In just one short scene several dimensions of every character is revealed. Initially, Drake is firm in his refusal to get involved but he shows a vulnerability when it comes to the thrill and possibility of treasure. He shows his principals, likes, dislikes, sense of adventure, and much more. Harry also shows his personality in several ways. He comes across as a likable and naïve person, when in reality he is deceiving and manipulative.

The vastness and diversity of each setting also adds to the scope of the adventure. Nathan Drake is climbing mountains, traversing jungles, exploring ancient tombs and discovers the lost city of Shambhala all in his epic quest to stop the tyrant Lazarvevic from finding the Chintamani stone and taking over the world. The inclusion of real settings, along with that of imaginative and breathtaking mythic settings makes the player feel like what they are doing could happen which adds a tremendous amount of immersion for player.

The plot is also very well done. Drake starts off thinking he and his friends are betraying some rich benefactor, when really he himself is being played. Chloe starts the story as one of the

accomplices to the museum heist. Later, she helps Drake escape from prison, at which point she explains her involvement with Harry and Lazarevic. At this point she is betraying Lazarevic by putting Drake back on their trail. Shortly after Chloe rescues Drake, she is driven to betrayal once again when Drake's unrelenting good nature and her jealousy over the relationship between Drake and Elena prove too much for her to bear. Eventually her deep feelings cause her to double cross Lazarevic again. This is only part of the story between Drake and Chloe but demonstrates the complex and deep character development that goes into everyone in the story. The interactions between Drake and the other characters in the game are nearly all this complex and are all as interesting. This amount of diversity in the plot shows Naughty Dog's ability to develop a compelling story in a game.

## **Strongest Element**

I believe the strongest element of the narrative in Uncharted 2 to be the personalities Naughty Dog gave to each individual. Throughout the story, the characters are constantly interacting like normal people. Making smart comments to each other, joking at inappropriate times, and cheering each other on when things look grim. A lot of the script is actually improvised by actors doing motion capture for the cut scenes, but the characters also talk to each other while the player is playing. This gives yet another feeling of realism to the characters which adds to the player immersion. An example of this is when Chloe is first introduced to Elena. In the first Uncharted, Elena is Drake's companion and eventually they become romantically involved while Chloe has been Drake's companion up to this point in Uncharted 2. Chloe and Elena realize the situation and Elena introduces herself as last year's model. These subtle jokes are strewn throughout Uncharted 2 and add immensely to the entertainment value.

## Unsuccessful Element

Nathan Drake always finds himself in impossible situations and is always able to escape. This is the cornerstone of a good hero's journey, however, the scope of some of these feats are inconsistent with its otherwise realistic feel. These feats feel more like comic book events than narrow escapes. I understand it is a game and anything is possible, but the game does so much to stay believable, that some of these challenges feel out of place. Near the beginning of the game, the player is outrunning a helicopter by traversing the rooftops of the city. Then the player survives being trapped inside a huge hotel while it plummets to the ground. These events fit within the scope of believability because of the way it was handled and because of the setting. The immersion is lost however, when the player is scaling the monolithic mechanism hidden in the Himalayas. Even with the tale of the Chintamani stone, monsters, and Shambhala, this feels out of place.

## Highlight

The highlight of the story comes near the end when Drake, Elena and Chloe find the Chintamani stone. They quickly realize that it is not a giant sapphire like they thought, but a metaphor for the resin from the tree of life. When they realize the treasure they had been searching for is not really a valuable stone but something capable of granting immortality, they decide it was kept secret for a reason and Drake determines the only course of action is to stop Lazarevic. Just as the player thinks the only thing left to do is stop Lazarevic, Elena is brought near death by a grenade. This adds one last twist in a race against time to save the world and now his friend.

## Critical Reception

The critical reception to Uncharted 2 has been tremendous. Aside from the amazing reviews that all include the gameplay and voice acting, the story is actually a major part of most reviews which is uncommon for most games. Almost the first full page of IGN.com's review of Uncharted 2 is on the narrative and character development in the game. "A fantastically told story." and "The great storytelling extends to the character development.." were among their comments. Metacritic.com has reviews from many different sources and all of them gave at least a ninety out of one hundred and about twenty percent made some mention of a great story.

## Lessons

- Strong character design and development as well as realistic character interaction can create a believable and immersive experience.
- Inconsistency in the realism of your story can affect immersion. .
- The gap between interactivity and storytelling isn't only bridged by allowing the player to make decisions that affect the outcome. It can also be handled with an integration of short cut scenes along with immersive characters and settings.

## Summation

Uncharted 2 proves that through the use of the fundamental techniques of writing a good narrative story, games can also be a conduit for creative writing. There is more than just gameplay that contribute to a good game. If Uncharted 2 did not have such an extensive and involving story, it would have been just another generic third person shooter. I predict that more and more games will catch on to the importance of a good story and as a result, archetypes,

character development, premise, plot and all other fundamental elements of strong narrative architecture will all become an integral part of video game development.