'Uncharted 4' creators plot Nathan Drake's last hurrah

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This image provided by Sony Computer Entertainment America shows a scene from the video game, "Uncharted 4: A Thief's End," releasing on April 26, 2016. (Sony Computer Entertainment America via AP)

The creators of "Uncharted 4"—much like cliff-diving, treasure-hunting series protagonist Nathan Drake—aren't afraid to take a few risks.

With the release of "Uncharted 4: A Thief's End" on April 26, directors Neil Druckmann and Bruce Straley are ending the smart-alecky fortune hunter's story at the peak of the franchise's popularity. Since the release

of the original "Uncharted: Drake's Fortune" in 2007, publisher Sony has sold more than 21 million copies of the "Uncharted" series.

"It's time," said Druckmann during a recent visit to developer Naughty Dog's offices. "Sometimes, a character just lets you know it's time to move on. For me, that was part of the intrigue of coming back to this world. You never see something successful in the industry end. It usually just fizzles out."

After working on the first pair of "Uncharted" games and the apocalyptic saga "The Last of Us," Druckmann and Straley were brought onto "Uncharted 4" after "Uncharted 3" directors Amy Hennig and Justin Richmond departed the studio. Druckmann said the game's story changed "100 percent" when they took over the project, the first new "Uncharted" installment for the PlayStation 4.

"This is the biggest, most ambitious 'Uncharted'—let alone game—that Naughty Dog has ever endeavored to take on," said Straley. "We want to do this justice. We want it to be a mind-blowing, eye-popping, sweaty-palms adventure. Everybody is bleeding out of their eye sockets to make it come together. We want to make sure Drake is sent off properly."

"Uncharted 4" finds Drake (played by Nolan North) retired from his continent-hopping career until his thought-to-be-dead brother Sam (Troy Baker) shows up seeking his help. Their reunion puts Drake's relationship with journalist Elena Fisher (Emily Rose) in jeopardy. ("If you're done lying to me, then you should stop lying to yourself," she cautions him in the game's most recent trailer.) For the developers, the introduction of Drake's long-lost brother provided them with a unique storytelling opportunity.

"It's a way for us to get into Drake's past," said Druckmann. "This is someone who knows things about Nathan Drake that no one else knows.

We're flashing back to when the two brothers were young. They haven't seen each other for 15 years. It's a way for us to lure Nate back into the world of adventure. As they go further, we'll explore their differences."

The daring decree to conclude Drake's tale isn't the only bold choice made by the Naughty Dog team. The creators also controversially cast a white actress to portray a black villain in "Uncharted 4."

On-screen, Drake's adversary Nadine Ross looks like a black South African private military contractor. However, she's portrayed in the real world with a vocal- and motion-capture performance by Caucasian actress Laura Bailey, who worked with a dialect coach on a South African accent and was cast before developers finalized the character's look.

"The easy thing to do at that point to avoid any controversy would've been to say, 'Let's make her white,'" said Druckmann. "No one would've questioned it or knew there was another option. Instead, we moved forward with the concept for this really strong character of color that you don't see often in a game with this person we already cast who was great in this role."

Druckmann said "it just felt right" when Bailey's performance and the designers' visuals were merged together on-screen. Conversely, Druckmann said they also cast a black actor to portray a white character before his appearance was locked down, although he declined to specify the actor or role.

"It probably won't be revealed until the game is out," he said.

The release of "Uncharted 4" will mark the end of a rollicking journey that began over eight years ago when Druckmann and Straley worked on the first "Uncharted" entry. As soon as "Uncharted 4" is shipped,

Druckmann has his own adventure planned.

"I promised my daughter I would take her to Disneyland," he said. "That's what I'm going to do."

More information: www.unchartedthegame.com

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