

Hand Holding in Video Games: How much is too much?

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Every video game ever made has had to hold your hands in some way or another. Whether it was through tutorials or constant textual jargon, even a game like *Dark Souls* gave you some clues as to where you were supposed to go next. But do AAA games take this measure a little too far or are 34 different status bars and constant pop ups a sure fire way to success?

Great examples of minimal handholding off the top of my head include *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*, *Shadow of the Colossus*, *Portal*, *The Witness*, *Cuphead* and the aforementioned *Souls* series. These games leave the player to tackle most objectives with what they already know about the game world and its mechanics. So would any of the games above be memorable if they came with a map or a difficulty setting or an objective tracker? Obviously not but safe for a couple of people, not a lot have played these games and for good reason.

Most AAA games however are more HUDs and UI than the actual games themselves. The *Assassins Creed* series, *The Witcher* series, *GTA* are all notorious examples of this. While most of these games allow you to disable the HUD, the question is why aren't they designed in a way so we can play them without feeling



like the game is telling us what to do? This isn't even the worst kind of hand holding, it's just the most prevalent. Constant text pop ups reminding you of your objective or each piece of dialogue directing you towards your next destination, now those are the real annoyances.

A game like *Shadow of the Colossus* takes care of the map problem very well. It allows you to use the beaming light from Wander's sword to guide you towards the next boss battle. The lack of HUDs in that game is astounding and it's no wonder that it's hailed as one of the

most immersive experiences in gaming. Another game devoid of HUDs and clear objective markers is *The Witness*. It's an open world puzzle game and it has literally no explanations attached to it. The game pulls you into its beautiful environment whilst you solve puzzles and traverse through its philosophically challenging world.

Let's assume a *Dark Souls* game where each NPC you talk to or each item description you read was out to point you in the right direction. *Dark Souls* is a brilliant example of the no hand holding

model because of how little the game has to do with stats, mechanics and directions. But it's not the perfect example given how convoluted it can get at times. A great experience is when a game implicitly holds your hands while making the game about the world you are soaking in. The clear winner of this kind of immersive experience is *God of War*. Out of the box, it has all the trappings of being a game that will hold your hand. But even with two sidekicks accompanying you, it never feels like they are directing you. The only forms of direction you get are the golden markers on your compass. The game doesn't pause for a second to tell you how to fight a boss. Atreus doesn't shout out hints at you either. It's all built into the game design, with cleverly placed dialogues and a streamlined world design.

I think it's fair to say that it's not as much a fault to AAA games than it is a fault with general game designs. The open world adventure model calls for objective markers and 16x12 maps off to the side. Survival games and puzzle games need difficulty setting sliders and *Assassins Creed* needs constant notification pop ups. But despite all that, the games which don't hold your hand leave you with a more accomplished state of self and leave you with your own unique take on the games themselves.

UNCHARTED LIVE-ACTION FANFILM

Video game movie done right

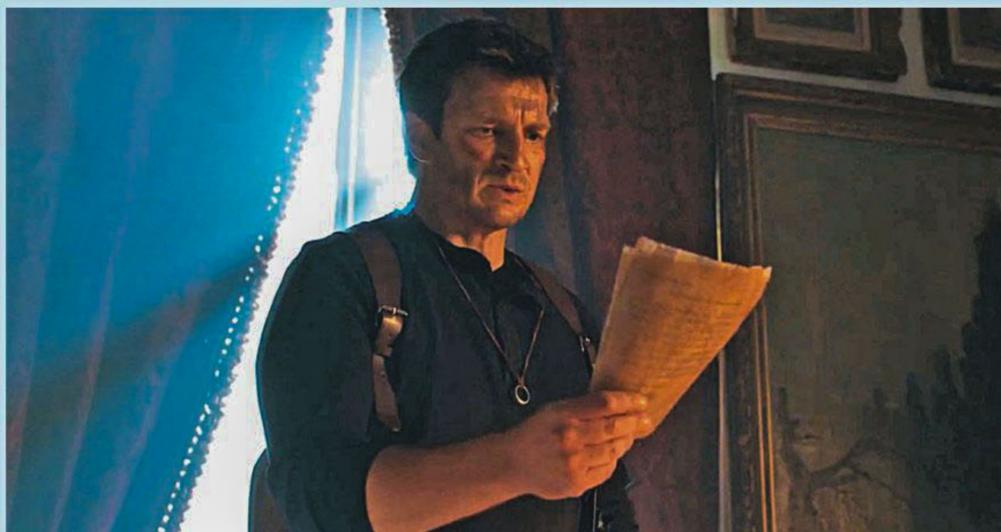
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Renowned actor Nathan Fillion has always been the undisputed choice by gamers all over the world as the live-action Nathan Drake. Being a fan of the franchise himself, Fillion has been strongly campaigning to be cast as the fan-favourite adventurer. Recently, he took matters into his own hands and together with his friend and film director Allan Ungar, he produced a 15-minute live action film. The film was uploaded on Ungar's YouTube channel on July 16.

Instead of recreating the games, the film creates its own story set in Baja Peninsula, Mexico. Nathan Drake has been captured by a group of thugs who believe he has stolen an invaluable artefact. Nathan continues to deny stealing the artefact and cracks hilarious one-liners while being tortured. Later it is revealed that Nathan intentionally got himself captured so that he can steal some letters by Afonso de Albuquerque, the famous Portuguese conqueror, from the mansion he's being held in. Nathan manages to break himself free and subdue the thugs around him. He collects the letters but has to escape quickly since reinforcements have arrived. This

ensues a shootout between the thugs and Nathan who is trying to buy some time for Sullivan to arrive with the escape vehicle. After escaping successfully, Nathan is seen talking with Sully and Elena and planning their next adventure in the Philippines.

Being an unofficial fan film, time



and budget were major constraints in the making of this film. However, that did not stop the film from achieving what it wanted to. The film captures the essence of the franchise down to every last detail. All *Uncharted* games start with a quote from an adventurer. The

film also plays homage to this by starting with a quote from Afonso de Albuquerque, whose bracelet is the artefact in question. The transitions between "cutsenes" and action scenes have also been handled gracefully. During these transitions, the camera slowly pans to Nathan's back and the

cinematic letterboxes disappear just like they would in the games. The camera also repeatedly zooms in and out to imitate the aiming mechanic from the games. The production design in this film has also been excellent since we get to see exact replicas of items from

the games such as Nathan's beige pants or Sully's red 4-wheeler.

Neil Druckmann, the director of the first three *Uncharted* games, has said that for an *Uncharted* movie to be successful it needs to get the relationships between the characters right. Though we only get to see the relationship between Nathan and Sully in this film, we can clearly see that the filmmakers have kept Druckmann's statement in mind. The highlight of this film has to be Nathan Fillion himself who delivers what is undoubtedly the most accurate live-action portrayal of a videogame character ever. He manages to perfectly mimic Drake's personality, facial expressions and movements.

Historically, video game movies have suffered from poor plots, deviation from the source material and inaccurate casting. This 15-minute film breaks the cycle by coming up with a plot that retains its uniqueness while staying true to the source material and also by putting great care into the casting and production design.

Nony Khondaker is an introvert who complements his non-existent social life with video games, Netflix and a whole lot of ice-cream. Send him memes and cat videos to cheer him up at fb.com/NonyKhondaker