



Uncharted: The Fourth Labyrinth

By Christopher Golden

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The official novel of Naughty Dog's award-winning videogame franchise!

In the ancient world there was a myth about a king, a treasure, and a hellish labyrinth. Now the doors to that hell are open once again.

Nathan Drake, treasure hunter and risk taker, has been called to New York City by the man who taught him everything about the “antiquities acquisition business.” Victor Sullivan needs Drake’s help. Sully’s old friend, a world-famous archaeologist, has just been found murdered in Manhattan. Dodging assassins, Drake, Sully, and the dead man’s daughter, Jada Hzujak, race from New York to underground excavations in Egypt and Greece. Their goal: to unravel an ancient myth of alchemy, look for three long-lost labyrinths, and find the astonishing discovery that got Jada’s father killed. It appears that a fourth labyrinth was built in another land and another culture—and within it lies a key to unmatched wealth and power. An army of terrifying lost warriors guards this underground maze. So does a monster. And what lies beyond—if Drake can live long enough to reach it—is both a treasure and a poison, a paradise and a hell.

Welcome to The Fourth Labyrinth.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Christopher Golden is the award-winning *New York Times* bestselling author of, among other books, *Snowblind*, *The Myth Hunters*, *Wildwood Road*, *The Boys Are Back in Town*, and *Of Saints and Shadows*. His first novel with Mike Mignola, *Baltimore, or, The Steadfast Tin Soldier and the Vampire*, was the launch pad for the cult favorite comic book series *Baltimore*. He has also edited short-story anthologies and written comic books, videogames, screenplays, online animated series, and a network television pilot. Golden was born and raised in Massachusetts, where he lives with his family.

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Tropical birds scattered as Drake veered the Jeep onto an old rutted track, snapping branches and tearing away vines, plowing through the rain forest with killers in pursuit, bullets flying, a gorgeous but pouty girl in the passenger's seat, and a bitch of a headache. With only one of his arms on the wheel, the Jeep slewed to the left, and the pouty girl screamed as he forced the vehicle back onto the trail just before they would have crashed into a felled tree.

Nathan Drake was beginning to hate the jungle.

He glanced in the rearview mirror an instant before a bullet shattered it, forcing him to risk glancing back over his shoulder. There were three vehicles in pursuit, a lumbering truck that had fallen to the rear and two Jeeps just like the one he was driving; which made sense considering that this one had been parked next to them when he'd stolen it.

The jungle had closed in around them, a wild tangle of rain forest the people of Ecuador called El Oriente, which seemed to him a pretty ordinary-sounding name for a place full of things that could kill you--like brutal sons of bitches employed by pissed-off South American drug lords.

The rutted track he'd taken forced the three vehicles into single file; which was good since it meant only one carload of them could be shooting at him at any given time. Bullets tore at leaves and cracked branches, the Jeep juddered up and down, rattling his teeth, and Drake kept his head down.

"This is your idea of a rescue?" the girl shouted.

He glanced at her wide eyes and her pretty mouth and her soft skin the color of cinnamon and decided he didn't like cinnamon. It ruined a good piece of toast as far as he was concerned.

"What the hell makes you think this is a rescue?" he snapped.

She blanched a little at that, and then her eyes narrowed. "Maybe the fact that here you are, rescuing me."

Drake laughed, but then his smile vanished as he heard bullets plink into the metal rear of the Jeep. The spare tire bolted to the back blew, but that was a damn sight better than losing one of the tires he was actually using.

"Does this look like a rescue?" he asked. "You're along for the ride by accident, sweetheart."

In truth, it hadn't been entirely by accident. He'd infiltrated the rain forest compound where Ramon Valdez tended to hide out from the rest of the world, running his drug cartel from a place so remote that nobody wanted to go hunting for him there. No one with half a brain, Drake thought. That hadn't stopped him from tracking Valdez down twice in three years.

He didn't like jobs that involved outright theft, for reasons that were best explained by the situation unfolding around him that very moment. But in the case of Ramon Valdez, he'd made an exception because he had a prior claim on the item he'd been hired to steal. He'd stolen it once before.

The girl had been a wrinkle in his plan. He'd found her trussed up in Valdez's bedroom and had intended to leave her there until her efforts to free herself gave him the idea that maybe she wasn't a willing participant in her bondage. That had complicated matters significantly, because timing was vital to his plan. For a few seconds he had tried to persuade himself that he wouldn't regret leaving her there--that her struggle was some kind of playacting she'd rehearsed for Valdez's benefit--but as he had started to walk away, he'd known he was lying to himself. Drake knew a prisoner when he saw one.

"What were you doing there, anyway?" he asked, jerking the wheel to the right.

"Vacation," she said bitterly in that aren't-you-a-dumbass tone young women seemed to perfect so early.
"What do you think?"

"Not really the question," Drake said.

A burst of gunfire tore up the trees to his left; the last few bullets stitched the side of the Jeep and then blew out a taillight. A macaw exploded in midflight in a bullet-riddled burst of blood and feathers.

"Maybe you should focus on driving?" the girl asked, panic in her eyes as she ducked lower in her seat.
"How can you be so calm?"

"Oh, this isn't calm," Drake said, twisting the wheel to veer around a felled tree. The Jeep rumbled over brush and roots and sideswiped a giant kapok tree. "This is me terrified. I can tell by the white knuckles and the way my jaw hurts from clenching."

The girl glanced at his hands on the wheel. She must have noted the whiteness of his knuckles, because she went a shade paler than before.

"You going to tell me who you are?" Drake demanded.

"My father really didn't send you?" she asked.

Her disappointment softened him as much as a guy driving through the jungle pursued by people trying to kill him could be softened. He saw the split-trunk tree he'd been watching for, the only kind of landmark that could be expected out here, and cut the wheel to the left, crashing the Jeep through a curtain of hanging vines and onto a trail that had been trodden by hooves but rarely by tires. The Jeep bucked like crazy; it felt like it would shake apart in his hands, leaving him sitting on the driver's seat and holding the steering wheel with no car around him.

"Sorry, kid. I don't have a clue what you're talking about."

She lifted her chin, trying too late to hide her withered hope. "My name is Alex Munoz. My father is mayor of Guayaquil. He's been fighting a war against drugs in the city, and he can't be bought."

She said this proudly, and Drake didn't blame her. For the mayor of a major South American city to take on the drug cartels, he had to be either courageous as hell or absolutely nuts. Alex didn't have to tell him the rest of the story, either. Beautiful girl, no more than nineteen, bound and gagged in a drug lord's bedroom? She had been a hostage, a negotiating tactic, and probably about to become the victim of something worse.

How do I get into these things? Drake thought.

But then, it wasn't Alex Munoz's fault that he was being shot at. Sure, untying her and getting her out of the compound had given him away and slowed him down, but it had been a risky plan to begin with, and in his experience risky plans almost always ended up in him being shot at--and sometimes actually shot.

"So if Papa didn't send you, who are you?" Alex asked, her pouty look returning. "What are you going to do with me?"

Drake ignored the second question. If there was anything he'd learned over the years, it was that while running for his life with a woman at his side, it was best never to tell her you didn't have a plan. "My name's Drake. Nate Drake."

If she got the James Bond reference in his delivery, she didn't let on. "What is this?" Alex asked. "What did you do to make Valdez so angry?"

Drake gestured to the backseat. "See that?"

When Alex glanced into the back, Drake knew what she would see. The staff was wrapped in burlap kept tight by strips of duct tape. The burlap had come from the poppy farm on the other side of the compound from Valdez's house. Drake had brought the duct tape himself. He'd managed to get the display case in Valdez's study open without setting off any alarms, had bagged and tagged the staff, and had been making his exit when he glanced into the bedroom and saw the girl with the cinnamon skin. The rest was dumbass history.

"I see it," Alex said.

"Have you heard of the Dawn Tavern?"

"Are you talking about a bar or Pacariqtambo? The place of origin? Or are you talking about the lost colony?"

"You know the story?" Drake said, glad he didn't have to explain. Just the fact that they were having this conversation was absurd enough, but he figured it was better than her screaming at him not to let her die or him cursing himself out for coming down here in the first place.

"Of course," Alex sniffed. "I go to university."

Great, Drake thought. The only brat in the jungle, and she's in my Jeep.

In Incan myth, Pacariqtambo was a cave from which the first people had emerged into the world. One of those brothers and sisters was a guy named Ayar Manco who carried a golden staff that was supposed to indicate where his people should build the first Incan city. Legend said that he'd changed his name and founded the city of Cuzco, that he and his sisters had built the first Incan homes with their bare hands. To many people in the region, the story was more history than legend, which meant that the discovery three years ago of the ruins of a lost colony--supposedly an offshoot of those original Incans, going all the way back to Ayar Manco--had stirred up a serious controversy. A local tribe whose people claimed to have known about the lost colony all along insisted that the ruins were the real and actual Pacariqtambo, that after being betrayed by his siblings, Ayar Manco had returned to the cave of his birth with his wife and children and founded this hidden village. The public argument about what was real and what was myth had been raging ever since.

"Three years ago, Valdez hired me to lead a team into Pacariqtambo and bring back whatever artifacts we could find. But what he really wanted was the golden staff of Ayar Manco. After I brought it to him, he decided he'd rather kill me than pay me. I barely got out of Ecuador with my life."

Alex looked at him like he was crazy. "So you decided to steal it back?"

Drake laughed. "Are you nuts? Valdez eats guys like me for breakfast. No, I figured I was lucky to still be breathing. But the Cuiqawa--the tribe that made those claims about Ayar Manco? They figure they're probably his closest descendants, so the staff should be theirs. They hired me to get it back."

"And you took the job? After Valdez almost killed you?"

"A guy's gotta work," Drake said. "And hey, Valdez went back on a deal. That just doesn't sit right, y' know? I figured the least I could do was annoy him a little."

They held on as the Jeep dropped into a streambed, splashed through, and roared up the other side. The guns had gone quiet, and Drake took a moment to hope Valdez's goons had given up the chase. Then one of the pursuing Jeeps burst through the vines behind them, and he realized he should have known better. It was never that easy.

"Hey," Drake said, glancing at Alex as he drove, a fresh burst of gunfire blasting the trees off to his left. "Do you think your father's offering a reward for your safe return?"

She stared at him. "You said this wasn't a rescue."

"No," Drake replied, "I don't think I did. And anyway, it's a moot point, isn't it? I mean, once a guy's actually done the rescuing--"

"You haven't rescued me!" she shouted as a bullet shattered the rearview mirror on her side, showering her hair in shards of glass and metal.

"Well," Drake said. "Not yet."

He aimed the Jeep at a gap in the trees that looked too narrow, but they roared through with inches to spare on either side. Alex swore at him and covered her head, then looked up in blinking astonishment that they had not crashed even as Drake floored the gas pedal and the tires spun clods of damp earth into their wake. For a few seconds the clatter of gunfire ceased again, and as they passed through a strangely uniform alley of

trees and vines, the hush of the rain forest embraced them, muffling their engine noise.

The Jeep hit a rise, then topped it, and the tires spun without traction for a heartbeat before touching down in a small clearing. Stiff-armed, Drake kept the wheel steady over the rough terrain, but they had run out of room. Thick brush bordered the clearing, and trees grew close and leaned together, conspiratorially close. The only way out was the way Drake had driven in, and Valdez's gunmen were right behind them.

"Oh, my God, we're dead!" Alex cried.

Drake drove full tilt toward the far side of the clearing, the trees rushing toward them. At the last second, he cut the wheel to the right and hit the brake, causing the Jeep to fishtail and then shudder to a stop. The engine kicked and died, ticking with the heat of its exertion.

"Put your hands up," he said.

Alex glanced at him in confusion. "What?"

Drake threw his gun on the floor of the Jeep and climbed out, raising his arms in surrender. "If you don't want to get shot, put your damn hands up!"

The first of the pursuing vehicles roared into the clearing. Several shots rang out, but Drake started shouting out his surrender in both English and Spanish, lifting his hands higher to show he meant it. He stepped away from the Jeep as Alex finally put up her hands and slipped out, imitating him as best she could. She had started to cry.

Drake thought it was a bad idea to smile, but he had to struggle to keep a straight face. Fear did that to him. He figured Valdez had ordered his thugs to retrieve the girl and the staff of Ayar Manco, and it seemed pretty damn likely that he'd ordered them to kill the thief who had stolen both--which would be him--but he thought surrender would confuse them. Hoped it would, anyway.

The second carload of killers arrived in the clearing as the first came to a shuddering stop twenty feet away from him, their weapons trained on him and Alex. The big truck would be lumbering along somewhere behind. In one of those vehicles would be the guy in charge, some bastard smarter than the other bastards, and in their moment of confusion the killers would wait for him to make the call. If Drake was surrendering, did that mean they should take him back to Valdez alive, or were they still supposed to shoot him?

While they were waiting, they climbed out of the two Jeeps, all of them shouting, spreading out in a circle around Drake and the crying girl, who didn't seem to understand that they would take her alive to preserve her value as a hostage. Or maybe that was why she was crying, Drake thought. Maybe being taken alive scared her more than dying.

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