

# HORIZON: ZERO DAWN - REWRITTEN STORY - SAMIR VEEN

Below is a short analysis of what works about *Horizon: Zero Dawn*'s, and what it's missing. Feel free to skip to the story if you just want to read that.

## Analysis

1. Aloy is the embodiment of pure and simplistic goodness. Ambitious, righteous, perfect morale compass, she succeeds at everything she tries (with the arguable exception of failing to save Rosts live, but even there she saved dozens of Nora's, far beyond anything anyone deemed possible from one single girl), and goes on to singlehandedly save the entire planet. With barely any flaws and in a world where most people are simply good or bad, and where the right and wrong choices are always obvious, doing good is barely impressive.

There are also little possibilities for what makes us feel for, pity, ache and love a human being: internal conflict, dilemma's, improvement, failing or succeeding at doing good where we doubt that we ourselves would be able to make the right choice.

2. Sylens', the game most important side character, main motivation is his quest for knowledge. While curiosity is a good character trait, it is also superfluous one: Sylens seeks knowledge for the purpose of seeking knowledge, there is no deeper motivation for seeking it. Equally, Sylens seems to be created mysterious only for the purpose of not giving away all his knowledge to the gamer the moment Aloy meets him for the first time. He obviously has a reason for not telling Aloy he created the Eclipse, but apart from that he has little inner motivation to withheld all the other information he has gathered over de decades. On the contrary: being open with Aloy would go great lengths of winning her trust and getting her on his quest for the final pieces of the puzzle, and also save him a lot of time.

3. Hades functions as the main antagonist of the story. He does not posses any other characteristics than being the embodiment of evil: it is a being with no other purpose then simply destroying the world. He's uninteresting as a character, but more importantly fails to introduce a meaningful conflict, instead making the eventual struggle of the story a flat 'save mankind' vs 'destroy the world' contrast. He feels fabricated, a superfluous evilness, born from the outdated believe that the hero needs to fight against the devil and for nothing less than to save the entire species to make her interesting. There is an after the fact attempt to hide this by making up the hard to believe failsafe story. Understandable, his existence is difficult to excuse in the world Aloy lives in, but I don't think the story needs Hades to work. Mario needs Bowser because there barely is story in the game. Aloy doesn't need Hades in a world that has story and meaning already. She needs a much more understandable, layered, less supernatural being as an antagonist. And also a struggle, an arc, a purpose that exceeds the hollow narrative of good vs evil.

I tried to rewrite the story while keeping as much of the original content of the game (characters, names, world, setting, etc.) intact. For a brief synopsis of the original setting and world building, visit: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horizon\\_Zero\\_Dawn#Synopsis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horizon_Zero_Dawn#Synopsis)

## Story

The first part of the story is majorly the same as in the original game, with a few key differences. Aloy grows up as an outcast from the Nora tribe, being mentored by fellow outcast named Rost. Aloy, just as the bullied child pines to befriend its tormentor, longs to become part of the Nora, to

belong, to be accepted, to be normal above anything else. When becoming of age, she can partake in the ancient rite-of-passage ritual called 'the Proving', if she wins this competition, the Nora will accept her as a member.

The mysterious Eclipse cult members perform an attack on the Proving before (rather than after) it is finished. Among many others, Aloy's stepfather Rost dies, but the Nora fighting with Aloy on their side manage to defeat the cultists attacking. To Aloy's horror, the Nora tribe afterwards refuse to accept her as a member, as the attack prevented the completion of the Proving. They do allow to make her a 'seeker', one that is allowed to travel beyond the borders of the realm, so she can avenge the attack and find the answers she seeks. Upon completion of her quest, she can become then become a Nora. Aloy is bitterly hurt by the Nora's initial refusal, which she views as unjust, infuriating her. She comes to believe she is special, possibly divine, born with a purpose. One day the Nora will deeply regret not honouring her birth right from the day she was born. She travels in pursuit of Olin, a diplomat from the worlds capital 'Meridian', who she found out knew about the impending attack before it happened.

There is no side story about Ersä and Dervahl. Aloy is let into the world capital Meridian upon arrival, which, being so used to rejection her entire life, thrills her. She marvels at Meridian's beauty and might, at the merchants not scampering at her. At the people not being exactly nice to her, but indifferent, treating her as yet another stranger they don't care about, which is the nicest Aloy has ever been treated. She swears that after she completes her quest, she will reject her Nora membership, humiliate them, leave the sacred lands forever and settle in Meridian.

In the assault on Rockwreath Olin is killed in the fighting, there seem to be no Eclipse left, Aloy presumes that means her quest is finished. The hovering questions: where Olin got a focus, why the Eclipse attacked, who the woman that resembles her is, will probably forever remain unanswered. Here Sylens, who helped Aloy by disabling the Eclipse focusses, introduces himself. He is not cold and mysterious but a kind, warm hearted and open intellectual. Made an outcast from the Carja at a young age for seeking answers where they deemed it sacrilegious. Both decades long outcasts and rejects, convinced they are actually superior to those who rejected them, Aloy and Sylens instantly connect. He convinces Aloy that there is a much bigger story here, one he has been researching for years, a world beneath the surface that holds answers not only to Aloy's practical questions but maybe, he believes, to the biggest questions of all: those about the origin and purpose of life, of man and machine. Together, with his knowledge and Aloy's skills, they might have a shot at unravelling these mysteries and enrich the entire populace with its invaluable lessons. Forever ensuring for Aloy not only a place of acceptance, but of reverence and honour.

Aloy marvels at this noble and meaningful quest she might undertake, a true purpose after all. Though unconsciously it is the prospect of turning from an outcast to a revered celebrity that truly drives her.

She travels and explores Faro's original office at Makers End and consequentially the Grave-Hoard. Sylens tell her about his workshop at Gaia Prime's location where he is thrilled to find that Aloy can enter the door. All the info Aloy finds inside Gaia Prime gives some insight, but is insufficient in putting together a timeline of events.

Sylens suggests that the Eclipse might hold the data that will grant Aloy access to the cradle that the Nora worship as their deity. Weary of all the knowledge Sylens possesses about the Eclipse she confronts him, and he shamefully admits to founding the cult. He abused the religious superstition of many a tribe member to found a cult that could help him dig up ancient relics and machines, assist him in venturing to places he would be unable to reach alone. If it soothed their zealous souls to think they were performing sacred work, what was the harm in lying to them? He never meant for them to cause any harm. But after years of stoking their fanaticism, they became too judgmental about the world to handle. Sylens was ousted as their leader, and beyond his reach they grew into a

violent, bloodthirsty cult. But there are still those within the cult that seek Sylens return as their leader. Maybe with Aloys help they could force an uprising, reinstate Sylens as the Eclipse's leader, he could introduce them to the truth and he could use them for good again, an army that fights for knowledge rather than for harm. And grab the codes needed for Aloy to enter the cradle in the meantime.

The uprising and the consequential fighting is bloody but eventually successful. Upon ascending to the leadership Sylens refuses to tell his followers everything they have uncovered at once, he claims they would not accept it, the Eclipse would either turn violent or would collapse. The truth can only be accepted when introduced slowly, but he promises that he will eventually work towards that goal. Reluctantly, Aloy has to agree with his vision.

They venture towards the sacred lands, where the Nora refuse to grant them access. With the Eclipse, man and machines, on their side they brute force their way to the mountain. The Nora resistance is no match for them, although many die. For the first time Aloy fights along side the machines she has battled throughout the game.

The information Aloy finds in the cradle proves her fears: she is a clone of Sobec born from an artificial womb, the same place that apparently also raised humans into their twenties before letting them out. Although the Apollo program is offline, confirming what she found inside Gaia prime. She ventures towards the last piece of the puzzle: the Shadow Carja capital of Sundom. On her way out of the Nora land, being disgusted by the destruction she helped create, Aloy is horrified to find that her wish has come true: the Nora indeed deeply regret casting her out, if they hadn't, many dead Nora would probably still be alive.

Aloy and the Eclipse takeover Sundom from the Shadow Carja. And although the violence and bloodshed disgust Aloy. The cruel, bloodthirsty and deeply corrupted nature of the Shadow Carja, which is now gone after so many decades, is able to convince her she is probably still doing the right thing, if only barely.

At the orbital launch site Aloy and Sylens finally learn the full truth about Enduring Victory, Zero Dawn, and mankind's fate a millennium ago.

Mortified at all that cruelty that seems to be inherent to human existence, Aloy doubts if they will be able to make the tribes believe and understand the true history of the world. Sylens argues that if they won't they will make them, they can take Meridian and do away with the old order of tribalism, stupidity and overzealous destructive religion that made them both outcasts and caused so much harm: the wars, the red raids, the sacrifices. He sketches a truly beautiful vision of a society with knowledge, peace, truth, science and justice is at its core, one they could create. Aloy retorts that it was a power-hungry man with a words full of knowledge, science and peace that caused the apocalypse 1000 years ago.

Saddened by her refusal to join him, Sylens remarks that he can take Meridian without her. But when he does, with or without Aloy, and created the new world, there will always be a safe and honored spot for Aloy in it. As he is no vicious dictator who holds grudges, just a princeps, who truly wishes the best world for everyone. Aloy tells him he doesn't seek knowledge, he only seeks power, knowledge is just his weapon. The story about peace, science and justice is just a way to convince himself his power hunger is justified, not much different then the shamans and priests with their religions. She will not stand idle aside, she will use all the information she knows about the machines, about Sylens attacks, to assist Meridian, and defend it with her life.

Aloy realizes some questions still aren't answered: why is Aloy a clone of Sobec, while all others were created out of two parents? Why did the cradle create one more human, centuries after it completed its tasks? Why did it bring her out as a baby, rather than raising her inside the nurturing facility like all other people bred there? She ventures out once more to the sacred mountain, and deep inside, in the code logs of the facility, she finds the horrible truth:

19 years ago, frustrated with his inability to access the doors of Zero Dawn's facilities, Sylens managed to access the Cradles software, and ordered it to create a clone of Elizabeth Sobec, with the idea of using her to finally gain access. For years Sylens thought the Nora had killed her upon birth. Only when Olins focus picked her up he realized she had survived. The Eclipse, no longer under Sylens control, also picked her up, and set out to kill her before Sylens could get to her. She indeed was born with a preordained purpose: to be a key, a tool to open a couple of doors.

Sylens ventures out to parley one last time with Aloy in person to find her depressed, broken and furious at his actions. He is surprisingly understanding and admits that although her creation sounds cold and cruel it has its origin in a noble purpose: to seek knowledge. And being born out of a good hearted purpose is more than many in this world can claim. She is human as anyone else, nobody is defined at birth, it's our actions that make us who we are. She has become an astonishing young woman: smart, just, strong, noble hearted. It's in her grasp to create a better world, and doing good for others is the only true value any man or woman can aspire to.

Flattered by his words and compliments, Aloy almost joins Sylens, but ultimately refuses, failing to believe that a better world can come from a bloodied powerdriven coup in which many will perish. Sylens is saddened and states that she fights on the side that just as well might lose, while, if she joined him, they for sure would come out victorious. She might be convinced that her actions are morally just, but not joining him will only result in a prolonged fight in which many more will die. He wishes her peace. As he walks away Aloy lingers for a moment, then pulls out her sharpshot bow aims for his back and fires. She misses. Stunned by her cowardly actions Sylens sprints off, Aloy fires more shots, but fails to hit him as he flees.

Sylens does attack Meridian with the Eclipse and corrupted machines in the final great battle of the game but ultimately loses to Aloy and the city's defenses. She seeks him out in the ravages of the battle, disarms him and he surrenders. Beaten, he asks if she will at least enrich mankind with the truth and the ancient technologies that might benefit all. Aloy doubts the world of the ancients was any better than this one. Technology didn't bring them more peace in the end, only more effective destruction. Maybe it is not bad men, but mankind itself that is bound for hatred, for cruelty, for lies. So what will she do? She doesn't know, embittered by the Carja, the Nora, by herself, her naive hopes and dreams perished. Maybe set off, live somewhere quiet, alone. An outcast after all, Sylens remarks. An outcast indeed. Sylens expects Aloy to kill him but she refuses, he is banned for life from all civilization already, his army is gone. He is no threat, wasn't it knowledge what he sought, not power? He has that hasn't he? Go enjoy it somewhere where nobody is bothered by it. This is too much for him. He attacks her barehanded, by which she is forced to penetrate him with her spear.