

# TOMB RAIDER GAMES

## Starring

# LARA CROFT

### A Brief History

Development of the first Tomb Raider game began at Derby-based Core Design in early 1995. During an offsite 'brainstorming session' one of the ideas presented was a corridor-style game featuring a mix of exploration, action and puzzle-solving, played from a third person point of view. The project was ambitious, requiring a storyline with a strong element of adventure and a unique main character. Central to the concept was the idea of allowing this character complete freedom of movement to explore all areas of a state-of-the-art, highly detailed interactive gaming environment.

The concept was approved and the project entered its first stages. Level designers started researching and replicating locations using custom-built software, and programmers began development of a brand new game engine. A scriptwriter was hired to produce a movie-style storyline and to give the game characters their identities. And Artist Toby Gard began thinking about a main character...

Tired of the stereotypical 'macho' male characters prevalent at the time, he looked for an alternative: a credible human character who would be strong enough to overcome all difficulties presented throughout the game, yet still remain agile enough to perform intricate moves with an element of grace. A character that would captivate the player and lead him/her through an epic adventure filled with ancient tombs and deadly traps; somebody that the player could relate to, even sympathise with or feel the need to protect from danger. Gard realised that no male character could fulfil this role and so his thoughts turned towards a female capable of fulfilling all his requirements, whilst still retaining a slight element of vulnerability. The result was *Lara Croft*. Dressed in combat shorts and a tight top, Lara's fearless acrobatic stunts and proficiency with a pair of pistols soon won the hearts of company directors. She was immediately assigned her first adventure: *Tomb Raider*

By using a female character, it soon became apparent that animators could now create a whole series of graceful and fluid moves that no male character could ever perform. Whilst still retaining physical strength Lara could also be agile as a cat. There was no doubt that she was visually pleasing to look at, with statistics to rival Pamela Anderson, but at this stage Lara's personality was a blank sheet. The shaping of her personality would be crucial to her credibility as an intelligent, resourceful and independent character.

As the Tomb Raider storyline developed, so did Lara's passion for adventure. Full motion video sequences portrayed her as an inquisitive and intrepid explorer who would literally stop at nothing to achieve her goals. She was also given an aristocratic background and the means to fund her adventures, but little was known about her personal life, other than the fact that her one passion was for adventure. Unaware of the widespread popularity Lara was soon to achieve, Core Design did not need to give further thought at this stage to her personal profile.

Tomb Raider was first unveiled to the public at the US trade show, *E3*, in May 1996 followed by the *European Computer Trade Show (ECTS)* in the UK, September 1996. The game, still unfinished, attracted exceptionally high levels of interest, as did Lara Croft. Never before had such a versatile and powerful female character been featured in a computer game, let alone in the lead role.

The media interest began to build further as Eidos' marketing built up. The imaginative and extensive campaign created huge awareness of Tomb Raider amongst trade, press and consumers before, during and after launch of the first game.

The publisher's marketing team utilised a wide variety of different media and a number of creative styles including radio, billboard, bus-rear and Underground advertising. Central to all elements was a focus on the quality of the game and the dynamic appeal of Lara Croft.

Prior to Tomb Raider's release, Eidos flew 30 selected journalists out to Egypt to be given the first glimpse of the finished product as well as an opportunity to interview the principal developers behind the game in the country where Lara first raided tombs and explored pyramids. The resulting reviews critically acclaimed Tomb Raider, with average scores of over 92% across gaming press in all territories. In the process Tomb Raider gained more media coverage than any other title released in 1996.

Upon release in November, Tomb Raider entered the charts at the number one position. The game has since been re-released on budget formats: the PlayStation *Platinum* label and PC *Premier Collection* label. Sales to date have topped four million units.

In December 1996, a 30-second commercial also appeared in cinemas with the film *Star Trek: First Contact* to further heighten awareness of Tomb Raider's release. It is estimated that 2.1 million people saw the advertisement in the two weeks prior to Christmas. Adding to the kudos of the campaign, this commercial was created by the director of MTV's video of the year featuring the US band, *Smashing Pumpkins*.

Tomb Raider received many accolades from the specialist press, including *Game of the Year*, *Adventure Game of the Year* and *PlayStation Game of the Year*. Core Design itself was also recognised with awards for excellence in development.

Media coverage for Tomb Raider continued well into 1997. Lara hit the headlines of *The Times Sport* in May when Manchester United player, David James, explained his poor performance was caused by staying up too late playing Tomb Raider. Pop group *The Prodigy* blamed the delayed release of their album on time spent with Lara Croft and fans demanded another adventure from Lara.

In January 1997 Core Design began the creation of *Tomb Raider II* a sequel designed to surpass Lara's first adventure. The game featured many technical innovations and improvements, and also introduced a variety of vehicles for Lara to use. As well as a brand new storyline, new moves, outfits and weapons, the game featured exterior locations for the first time.

Marketing throughout 1997 continued to promote Tomb Raider as an ongoing and highly prestigious brand. The Tomb Raider II campaign saw interest levels in the Tomb Raider series escalate to a new high and Lara Croft became firmly established as a major star in her own right.

Early in the year Core Design were approached by super-group *U2* who requested exclusive footage of Lara in action, to be played on their 'Jumbotron' video screen during the *PopMart* Tour. Huge Lara fans, the famous group not only wanted Lara to accompany them on stage, but also played the game on the tour bus.

Offers also flooded in from major sportswear, soft drinks and cosmetics companies for licensing deals and product endorsements. Lara Croft was even offered a contract from a top modelling agency, but Eidos were careful in their selection process, fully aware that over-exposure at this stage could lead to dilution of the franchise.

Deals were signed with comic publisher *Top Cow* and toy manufacturer *Toy Biz* in the US. *Top Cow* produced a special issue of their *Witchblade* comic featuring Lara Croft with it's principal character, Sara. The issue was an immediate sell out and instantly became a collectors item, as did the Lara Croft action figure produced by *Toy Biz* which featured on the front cover of no 1. toy magazine *ToyFare*.

Due to such widespread interest, a *Lara Croft Style Guide* was produced by Core Design. The document details Lara's background, her character profile and vital statistics, as well as giving precise details for her accessories and outfits, down to the Pantone reference for her bootlaces.

Sustained interest from the media resulted in *The Face* publishing an extensive and unprecedented feature in June 1997, giving insight into Tomb Raider and it's central icon. Lara posed in designer outfits for this article and also appeared on the front cover. This was the first time *The Face* had featured a non-human character on its cover and allowed the image to interrupt its masthead.

Once magazine went on sale, levels of interest in Tomb Raider and Lara Croft began to escalate further, resulting in extraordinarily high levels of media coverage from television, radio, national papers, mainstream magazines and gaming press. Lara appeared on the front covers of prestigious publications such as *The Daily Telegraph's* Sunday Magazine, *The Times 'Connected' Magazine*, *Melody Maker* and *FHM*. Articles in *Newsweek*, *Rolling Stone* and *Time* documented her creation and rise to fame and *MTV* proposed Lara as a potential host. Eidos Directors were interviewed by UK TV stations, as well as *CNN* and many European TV channels, giving their opinions about the phenomenon Tomb Raider was becoming and more importantly, where Lara would take them next.

Tomb Raider II was again showcased at the ECTS and E3 industry trade shows. Promotional model *Rhona Mitra* stepped into Lara's costume and made guest appearances, resulting in the Eidos stand being mobbed by crazed fans!

Tomb Raider, Eidos Interactive and Core Design were nominated for 11 of the 1997 ECTS awards, the industry's equivalent of the Oscars. It was a triumphant night for Lara Croft, Core and Eidos as they swept the board, winning no less than 8 awards including *Game of the Year*, *PC Game of The Year*, *Publisher of the Year*, *Developer of the Year* and the highly coveted *CTW Gold Marketing Award*.

Tomb Raider II was branded the most anticipated sequel of the year during the months before its release. The media were in no doubt that the game had even more to offer than its predecessor - this was reflected by the phenomenal level of media coverage and also by the outstanding review scores that averaged even higher than Tomb Raider's.

Tomb Raider II was released in November 1997, accompanied by a worldwide television advertising campaign. Sales figures for the sequel easily surpassed its predecessor, with record-breaking day one shipments and the game became the fastest selling title in the industry's history. Due to exceptional performance at full price, Tomb Raider II has yet to be released on budget labels.

Aware that Lara Croft was now the most famous digital icon worldwide, the need was recognised to begin work on a 3D 'Virtual Lara' character for television appearances, commercials and other promotional activities. Core Design teamed up with production studios, allowing them to adapt the 3D Lara model in ways that would allow her to move and speak in real-time, even appear on live television chat shows. The latter is still in development.

German production studio, *SZM*, gave Lara Croft her first 'virtual' appearance in a pop video by top German group *Die Ärzte*. The video featured Lara throughout, chasing, shooting at and fighting with members of the band. The single rocketed to the number one position, where it remained for several weeks. The technology involved in the production of the video required both motion-capture and post-production work.

Once the video was aired on *MTV*, levels of interest in Lara Croft again began to peak and a whole new range of marketing proposals flooded in, including several offers from companies keen to secure rights to a live action movie. A licensing deal for *Tomb Raider: The Movie* was signed with Paramount and the search began for the right script. The movie is due for release late 1999. Further details to be confirmed.

In early 1998, Core began work on a third game to complete the Tomb Raider Trilogy. With a new development team, fresh ideas were injected and the game engine was overhauled to allow for a vast number of technical improvements which gave the game more speed, more detail, a new structure and an even greater sense of realism. Level design was also re-addressed and a new system capable of creating more intricate structures was created. Lara's new moves included a crawl and a sprint, her wardrobe expanded and she was presented with new weapons and vehicles to try out as well as new enemies to overcome and puzzles to solve.

Once again the game was previewed at E3 and ECTS. Model, *Nell McAndrew*, was cast as the latest embodiment of Lara Croft and patiently posed for photographs in a costume made almost entirely of rubber. This Eidos E3 stand also featured a huge screen on which *Virtual Lara* appeared at set intervals. *SZM* had now developed the technology to allow members of the audience to ask Lara a question and receive a completely spontaneous response. Crowds of fans gathered in their masses to ask Lara about her next adventure, her wildest fantasies... and the size of her chest.

Despite reserved opinions from the media during early stages of development, it soon became apparent that *Tomb Raider III* was a more than worthy sequel. Once again Lara graced the front covers of the majority of gaming magazines and speculation mounted whether Tomb Raider III would live up to the hype.

Proving to be the most popular 'Lara' yet, Nell McAndrew accompanied the Tomb Raider III official tour throughout September, October and November, visiting major territories such as France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia and the US as well as many locations in the UK. Exposure was phenomenal with numerous national television features, radio interviews, photo shoots and public appearances, to the point where an armed police guard had to be provided to control crowds in Madrid.

As the PR campaign continued, a press launch for Tomb Raider III was planned to further demonstrate its innovation and improvement over the previous games. In October 1998, celebrity presenter *Jonathan Ross* hosted the event in the Great Hall of London's *Natural History Museum*. Comparisons were drawn between the three titles and key features of the third game were clearly illustrated to an audience of national, mainstream and specialist media. The evening was a resounding success, resulting in further features that suggested Tomb Raider III was looking even better than Tomb Raider II.

Marketing activity also perpetuated and an official range of merchandise became available to fans for the first time. Designed and manufactured exclusively for Eidos by *Animal Promotions Ltd*, the 'LARA ©' range features a variety of clothing and accessories. To compliment the range, a further selection of items such as posters, mouse-mats and even life-size Laras are available from the catalogue or from the official website.

In the US, author *Douglas Coupland's* fascination with Lara Croft prompted him to produce '*Lara's Book*' – an insightful collection of imagery and text relating to the digital icon. *Sony* used Lara Croft for PlayStation hardware advertising and *Playmates Toys* in the US were granted a license to produce the official Lara Croft action figure, now available at retail. *Top Cow* was also given permission to produce a second Tomb Raider/*Witchblade* comic.

In France, car manufacturer *SEAT* employed the talents of *Ex Machina* to produce an animated Lara Croft to feature in their television advertisements. In the UK *Marks and Spencers* brought out a range of Tomb Raider III merchandise in time for Christmas and *Sony Europe* also featured Lara Croft in their TV advertisements for PlayStation hardware.

One of the greatest accolades for Core Design was announced in November 1998: both Tomb Raider I and Tomb Raider II were granted *Millennium Products* status by the *Design Council* after Tony Blair challenged businesses to demonstrate that Britain is the creative powerhouse of the world. The news was announced by Trade and Industry Secretary *Peter Mandelson* at the CBI Conference in Birmingham on Monday, 2 November. After his speech, Mr Mandelson then moved to the *Millennium Product* stand to present awards to five handpicked recipients. Core Design was among those to be personally presented with an award.

Tomb Raider and Lara's Croft's reputation for excellence in the field of computer science was further enhanced by Minister for Science, *Lord Sainsbury*, in his speech of November 30<sup>th</sup> 1998 at the Social Market Foundation. Entitled '*Science and the Knowledge Economy*' the speech referred to the need to improve the image of British science abroad. As an example of modern scientific excellence, Lord Sainsbury alluded to Lara Croft and the Tomb Raider series: '*... so I want recognised examples of our technological innovation and excellence such as Lara Croft of EIDOS' Tomb Raider games or the McLaren racing car to become ambassadors for British Scientific Excellence. We must get the message across that we are still a force to be reckoned with.*'

Recognising the importance of Tomb Raider III during the Christmas retail period, another television advertisement was produced for broadcast from late November until early January. Other marketing activities included radio, specialist and lifestyle magazine advertising, Bus rears and a range of innovative point-of-sale materials for retail.

Reviews for Tomb Raider III were again outstanding. Tomb Raider III was announced as the best game of the series yet and coverage surpassed that of its predecessors. Released in November 1998, the game topped the charts and has achieved sales of over six million units to date.

In April 1999, Lara Croft was signed up for her first major UK promotional deal - Lucozade Energy (the UK's Number One energy drink) and Eidos announced an exclusive deal and Lara took the leading role for the brand's television and print advertising campaign.

Lara's action-packed lifestyle, positive attitude and dynamic appeal made her the number one choice to star in the new advertising. The computer-generated television advertisement was broadcast extensively on both satellite and terrestrial channels in the UK and Ireland for a three month period, sparking yet another wave of interest in the cyber heroine.

Peter Harding, Category Director for the Lucozade brand commented, "... *the association with Lara Croft is the perfect way to take the brand forward. With her undeniable appeal, she symbolises a character and image that our consumers will appreciate.*"

Jeremy Heath-Smith, Managing Director for Core Design Limited, added, "*The Lucozade Energy brand is a great match for Lara's lifestyle and targets the age-range of the majority of her fans. We're delighted to be working with Lucozade Energy for this new campaign.*"

Eidos once again exhibited at E3 in May 1999. Held in Los Angeles, the exhibition was a tremendous success for the publisher, despite the lack of a new Tomb Raider game on display. Rumours regarding the development of a fourth game were confirmed during E3, although details were kept firmly under wraps at this stage.

The publisher did however, announce a new piece of software at E3 in the shape of Lara Weller – the new official Lara Croft look-a-like model. Lara Weller replaced Nell McAndrew, her contract having expired in April.

By June 1999 worldwide sales for all three Tomb Raider approached 16 million units and speculation about the fourth game was rife, the publisher still remaining secretive about its content.

Tomb Raider II: Golden Mask, part of the Eidos Premier (budget) range was released June 1999 for the PC. The pack featured the original Tomb Raider II plus five extra levels, upon which an exclusive competition was based. Players had the opportunity to win a replica Golden Mask, of which only xx were created.... Golden Mask entered the PC Budget charts at the number x position.

The first official news of the fourth instalment in the series was finally announced in July. Entitled 'Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation', the game had begun development back in the spring of 1998, enabling programmers to completely redesign the game engine and make fundamental changes. The next Tomb Raider would offer more than ever before, boasting a brand new traditional inventory system, even higher levels of detail, all-new puzzle mechanisms and a new Lara Croft model capable of performing more moves and stunts than ever before.

Set entirely in Egypt, the game marked a departure from the traditional globe-trotting format and focused on a tightly-woven storyline featuring mythology and the alignment of the stars at the Millennium. The objective was to draw the player into the most atmospheric and detailed tomb-raiding environment yet, allowing new puzzles and gameplay to provide a new challenge for both die-hard fans and new users alike.

Specialist press began to immediately report on Last Revelation's progress and despite being the fourth in the series, interest levels began to escalate once more. Careful release of information sustained interest and a shroud of secrecy surrounded several mysterious elements of the game. Rumoured to feature a 16 year old Lara Croft, a love interest and a

victorious arch-enemy, press speculated whether that this would indeed be Lara's final adventure.

ECTS also rang the changes for Eidos. Taking a decision not to participate with a major stand at the show, the publisher held a Buyer's Conference in its place in order to give detailed, individual presentations to its most important customers. Last Revelation was showcased as Eidos' major title for 1999.

To reinforce the popularity of Lara Croft and the Tomb Raider franchise, The Times approached Eidos with an unprecedented opportunity: a six week promotion running from December to January 2000, covering millennium issues of the paper.

Update on movie

New Lara C range

Updated 08/06/99