

TOMB RAIDER

INTERVIEWS WITH TOMB RAIDER TEAM, JEREMY SMITH, MANAGING DIRECTOR & ADRIAN SMITH, OPERATIONS DIRECTOR.

February 1997

1. What has Tomb Raider done for Core Design as a development company?

Tomb Raider has really put Core Design on the map. We were always been respected for console development: Thunderhawk Mega-CD and then Firestorm: Thunderhawk 2 for the Saturn were both considered to be groundbreaking titles, but before TR we lacked status for our PC development. Tomb Raider has now established Core as a serious contender on this format.

Tomb Raider has gained critical acclaim all over the world - it has been the most successful title to date for both our parent company, Eidos and for us. With their backing we were able to gain the support we needed to market the game in a big way. Needless to say the proceeds from Tomb Raider have enabled us to invest in all sorts of new equipment for bigger and better results, including Tomb Raider 2.

The success that we have achieved has also made a big difference within the teams at Core - we've proved that we're capable of creating a number 1 game, so we know there's no reason why we can't do it again. We're certainly not going to rest on our laurels: teams working on new projects are already trying to beat Tomb Raider! Morale is really and there's a real buzz in the air as we await Tomb Raider 2's completion.

2. Where did the idea for Tomb Raider come from? Were you sitting around watching an Indiana Jones movie or something?

Toby Gard originally came up with a concept to create a corridor-style game featuring a third-person view. He wanted the game to have a really strong story-line, almost like a film so that's where the adventure element came in. His ideas were so ambitious that nobody thought it would work out - wrong!

"We wanted the game to be more than just another Doom clone. I conceived a way of taking a corridor-style game and introducing a main character, moving away from the first-person feel. The idea was to create a game that would look as exciting as a cartoon but would offer the same complete freedom of movement as *Ultima Underworld*." **Toby Gard**

3. How about Lara herself, was she someone's high school girlfriend? Or did she just pop into someone's head?

Pure fantasy - that's where the idea for Lara came from! We were sick and tired of the stereotypical males in computer games, and as most gamers are male, we thought they would prefer to look at a gorgeous woman rather than a macho man. Seriously though, there was yet to be a strong female games character - most are portrayed as 'trophies' to be rescued or added as 'token' females.

Lara enabled us to create a whole series of graceful moves that no male could ever perform - she's agile as a cat, tough as nails, sexy as hell and is definitely the most sought-after games character at the moment.

4. The levels in Tomb Raider are quite intricate... Did you have to develop a level editor especially for the project, or was there something in existence you were able to base it on?

The Tomb Raider level editor was written from scratch by Gavin Rummery who is now working on the sequel. The editor formed the crux of the game as it allowed the levels to be played during the design process. This was of critical importance when calculating those long death-defying jumps and falls. Once the basics of the level were sorted out, we could then place Lara in the level and play it through, making adjustments along the way. It also allowed the artists to 'fly' through the levels to make sure that everything slotted together fluidly.

5. How about the motion capture on Lara and her various adversaries... Did you stick an athletic femme in front of a camera? How was it all done?

No motion capture was used. Toby Gard's excellence in animation meant that it was actually easier not to use this facility - everything was done by hand. Toby drew reference from animals/people etc and transposed it to on-screen animation. You can expect to see even more animations in Tomb 2...

"A motion-capture system was not used. This was because, surprisingly enough, it would have inhibited Lara and would have made some of her actions look awkward. By animating Lara ourselves, she is allowed to move fluidly and far more gracefully than a motion-capture system would allow. Also, it's a hell of a lot cheaper!"

Toby Gard

6. What were the most difficult things to tackle in the making of Tomb Raider?

Probably the level editor - it took months to perfect. Also, making sure vast amount of rooms were all individual, that texture maps were as realistic as possible and that the whole thing looked authentic. Another thing was getting the balance

between fighting/adventure/puzzles sorted out so that the game stayed 'fresh' even in the later levels.

"The rooms are all texture-mapped. Once the layout for each level has been decided, the graphic artist chooses the different textures and lays them down. We have spent many months researching and collecting/designing the different textures to make the backgrounds look as authentic and interesting as possible."

Neil Boyd, graphic artist

"The Tomb Raider engine has 6 degrees of movement, polygonal objects and characters, dynamic light-sourcing, intelligent camera angles and dozens of other graphical effects, including haze and translucency." **Paul Douglas, programmer**

"Tomb Raider features massive gaming environments, authentic levels which have been painstakingly researched, a main character with over 4000 frames, realistic enemies, unique combat, logical puzzles..." **Toby Gard**

7. Tomb Raider has come out on PC, Saturn and PSX... was it easy working on multiple platforms, or were there headaches trying to get the same engine running on different machines?

"All three versions are as good as one another - the only limitation is the restrictions of each piece of hardware. We did have a few headaches trying to translate special effects between platforms but the actual engine wasn't too much of a problem." **Jason Gosling, programmer**

8. The 3DFX version of Tomb Raider looks utterly amazing... was this something you spent time on? Or was it just a new bunch of textures?

"Yes, I had to spend a lot of time on this version - it's like writing the game for a different piece of hardware. The actual textures remain untouched for the accelerated versions of Tomb Raider: once the code has been sorted the card does the rest." **Gavin Rummery, lead programmer**

9. Looking back at the game, is there anything you would have changed about Tomb Raider now that you've had time to think about it?

"There were lots of things that we would have liked to incorporate / change, but at the end of the day you have to draw the line somewhere when you're up against the clock. Tomb Raider 2 will feature many of the elements that we would have liked to use in the original." **Heather Gibson, graphic artist.**

10. What about things that got left out? Were there any ideas that were rejected due to a lack of practicality?

“A lot of ideas weren't used due to lack of time rather than practicality - we had a clear idea of what we wanted to achieve so there weren't really any ideas that were implemented and then turned out to be detrimental to the final product.”

Heather Gibson, graphic artist

11. You've made a lot of people happy with Tomb Raider, so the obvious question is, when will we see Tomb Raider 2?

November 1997, if all goes according to plan.

**TOMB RAIDER II
INTREVIEW WITH ADRIAN SMITH
(OPERATIONS DIRECTOR FOR CORE DESIGN)
JUNE 1997**

1. What is the plot/storyline?

Lara is looking for 'The Dagger of Xian': an artefact that is hidden in an ancient emperor's palace within the Great Wall of China.

When she arrives at The Great Wall she'll have to find her way in and then locate the doors to the emperor's palace. However, it's not as simple as opening the doors and taking the treasure... the plot will begin to unfold and will send Lara to several locations in search of clues. Locations will include Venice, Tibet and an underwater shipwreck.

2. Could you describe how a typical TR2 situation differs from a TR1 situation? What factors affect decision making now?

Differences between situations in TR. and TR2:

Lara will have more freedom to explore in TR2. This is given to her in the new climbing move. She can climb hand-over-hand as well as side-to-side, so instead of looking for ledges to jump up to and making a bee-line for those, she'll have to be looking for hand-holds in the sides of cliffs or other objects that look as if they can be scaled. Once she starts to climb up the walls she can then move across to the left or to the right to access further areas of the map.

Also we'll have the underwater combat working in TR2. Instead of swimming like hell from the underwater nasties, Lara will be able to shoot at them with her new harpoon gun.

The new lighting effects will also distinguish TR2 from TR1. Lara will be equipped with a flare in TR2. We're going to base a few puzzles around this new element. Some stages of the game will be played in complete darkness so Lara will have to rely on her flare to light the way. She can throw the flare wherever she likes e.g.. down dark shafts to see what dangers lurk below. The flare even works underwater...! Dynamic lighting means that we can get really great gun flashes each time Lara shoots - this makes a massive difference to the overall atmosphere of the game, particularly when she's shooting in darker areas. Real-time lighting will mean that by the time Lara has completed a certain stage of the game, the sun may have gone down.

3 What specifically will be different about Lara, visually and otherwise?

- Different 'outfits' for different locations.
- A more detailed model - more faces and polygons.
- Dynamic hair – her ponytail will swing / float around.
- Refined texture maps (more detail).
- Larger palette.
- Additional moves and actions such as hand-over-hand climbing and underwater combat with her new harpoon gun.

4 New puzzles?

Yes, there will be different puzzles. Wait and see...

5 How busy is TR2 compared to TR1 - has the pace of the game changed? How so?

The pace of the game hasn't really changed. We know from the success of TR1 that the combination of different elements (exploration, puzzles and combat) works really well as it stands. Lara will, however, encounter far more human baddies in TR2. The baddies will also be far more intelligent than those in TR1 so she'll have a lot of ducking and diving to do.

6. What gameplay features will be included to make playing through the game a second time worthwhile? (Time released code, reward for speedy/accurate performance, etc)

There are, as in the original game, a certain number of secrets scattered throughout the levels. At the end of each stage you will be presented with a statistics screen telling you just how many of them you found. I would be very surprised if you were able to find them all first time!

There will also be a less linear feel to TR2. In other words this time you will actually be able to visit rooms that you may have missed during earlier attempts.

7. What kind of visual changes can we expect?

The new lighting effects will distinguish Tomb 2 from Tomb 1. Lara will be equipped with a flare in TR2. We're going to base a few puzzles around this new element. Some stages of the game will be played in complete darkness so Lara will have to rely on her flare to light the way. She can throw the flare wherever she likes e.g. down dark shafts to see what dangers lurk below. The flare even works underwater...! Dynamic lighting means that we can get really great gun flashes each time Lara shoots - this makes a massive difference to the overall atmosphere of the game, particularly when she's shooting in darker areas. Real-time lighting will mean that by the time Lara has completed a certain stage of the game, the sun may have gone down.

8. The Saturn version has been 'dropped'. Could the Saturn support TR2, since it is proving to handle Quake pretty well?

The development of TR2 leads simultaneously on PC and PSX. We felt that in the time we had available to us that we would not be able to do justice to the Saturn as the game would undoubtedly take longer to develop on this platform. We would not wish to release a sub-standard product on the Saturn.

9. Any gossip on Nintendo 64 Tomb Raider? Ple-ee-ee-ase! Please.

None whatsoever!

10. Which graphics accelerators does TR2 support. Are you limiting the PSX version in comparison, or will both versions be pretty much identical?

TR2 will support all major 3D cards as it will incorporate direct X drivers. The PC and PSX versions will be identical in terms of gameplay and SFX etc.

11. Tell us about the Tomb Raider movie. Who's playing Lara?

We are currently talking to a few people about the movie. However, we have no definite plans at the moment... Who's playing Lara? No idea yet!

Which technical feature are you most proud of in TR2.

We are very proud of all the technical enhancements made to TR2, however, probably the most noticeable will be the dynamic lighting additions. The lighting, as I am sure you will agree, really does add depth and realism to TR2.

12. How many TR2 features have been suggested by fans, and what are they?

Through the many official and unofficial TR websites there have been literally hundreds of suggestions. A great deal of them were ideas that we had been playing around with ourselves: For example, Lara now has a number of costume changes and moves throughout TR2. It's almost impossible to site examples of fans' ideas being specifically incorporated, needless to say we read with great interest any suggestions that are made.

13. Which criticisms hurt the most about TR1 - how far have you gone out of your way to tighten the gameplay with respect to these criticisms?

In all areas of development we have looked to enhance and generally improve the feel of TR2. We were aware of certain minor technical problems in the first game and we feel that we have now successfully addressed all of the known problems simply by enhancing the engine and therefore the 3D system etc. For example, clipping and tight spaced camera angles.

14. Please give examples of how the vehicles are involved – how drastically do they affect the gameplay environment?

There are certain elements of the game that we wish to keep under wraps just for a little longer – looks like you've just found one!

15. Any advance information of what kind of soundtrack we can expect? Any major record company tie-ins, famous recording artists, that type of thing?

The soundtrack for TR2 will be produced at Core Design by Nathan McCree, the artist who wrote the original TR score. He'll be composing in a similar dramatic orchestral style with plenty of atmospheric pieces that'll hopefully give you a few goosebumps.

16. Anything else you want to tell your fans at this stage, without ruining any surprises? Actually, why not ruin a few surprises while we're here?

Yes, there is something: there are elements of the game that are so secret that we're not going to tell anyone about them at all. Ever. You'll just have to play the finished game.

**INTERVIEW WITH VICKY ARNOLD
TOMB RAIDER 2 SCRIPT-WRITER**

1. Did you let your imagination go more in Tomb Raider 2 than in Tomb Raider?

Did you put things in Tomb 2 that you couldn't put in the previous version because the engine couldn't allow it? Do you have any examples of this?

The best bit has been the variety of locations and being able to play Lara in exterior environments. This opened up more potential for her travels and the types of situations she gets tangled in - like hitching a ride on the roof of a mini-sub before being thrown off amongst the sharks. For me it means that the FMVs and gameplay can gel more fluidly.

Also, more human characters within the game means more conflicts - in which not everyone is working for each other.

2. Where do you get all your inspiration – books and movies?

It's impossible to remember what comes from where most of the time! At the initial stages of the project, everyone is keen with ideas and the story drawn out is based very much around what the team want to see working in the game.

No actual plot-lines have been copied for the story of either Tomb 1 or 2, although obviously the Indiana Jones trilogy was dropped into the VCR a good few times. Another worn-out video of mine is Mad Max 2 – its visual impact is unrivaled and the kind of in-your-face action that FMVs need. Leone's Spaghetti Westerns are also a favourite – for their landscapes, sparse dialogue, humour and gunplay. And of course Clint Eastwood.

The undeterred British politeness of Wesley in The Princess Bride helped shape the voice of Lara - as did Benton Frasier from Due South. I love his character. The difference though lies in attitude under stress...while Frasier tells stories about his grandmother, Lara will pull guns to illustrate a point.

Books are totally different things – they can have very loose structures and more complex/subtle ideas because the time available for backstory/plot/character development is huge. But I reckon a bit of Jack London brutality and Tim Cahill's reckless travels are good stimulants for the action adventure genre...

3. What are the difficulties you have to deal with when you write a script?

Avoiding plot holes: A game story is broken up into very short level-links - keeping the revelations of a large plot leaking out at all the right times can be hard. Just a thread of the story is told to send Lara from one location to another - preferably in the most stunt-crazy way... Dumping a load of verbal info within scenes is just clumsy and boring. Tomb 1 was helped by the fact that the artefact was split into three pieces while in Tomb 2, Lara's journey is more progressional.

The short screen time is all you have in which to tell a story with a strong history surrounding the game's artefact and an involving chase for it in present day.

4. How did the story of Tomb Raider 2 begin? Did someone say to you: "We'd like to see Lara in China or in Tibet? We'd like to watch her meet these monsters? We'd like to make her fight against a shark?" When you write a script, do you always write it from the beginning to the end or do things

change by the time you're writing it (e.g. : you started the story in Venice and finally decided to start it in China after a few weeks)?

Tomb 2 began yes, with the idea of China – it provided a useful backdrop of myths and legends to tamper with. Then the other locations were decided on - I liked the idea of starting and ending in the same place: like a circular plot. In this way, Lara has to go all around the globe and back again to get what she first set out for – it shows her tenacity as an adventurer.

Things change constantly within the script because changes in the game often affect it. I write it up as a treatment first – a brief of each of the scenes - which is easier to make structural changes to than a whole script. Eventually it all drops into place.

5. Describe your work with the team: how often do you see them? How does it work: do you take all their ideas and try to put them in the game?

At the start I work extremely closely with the team. The levels are decided first and then I base the story ideas around them. These ideas are everyone's – e.g.: Heather wanted to use China, Gavin liked the idea of a type of cult... Structure is most important at this stage or else it could go all over the place. It's also important that the feel of the story is in keeping with the genre.

Keeping track of any changes within the game is essential because Lara interacts with her environment so much. I like to know what things will look like and what resources could be available to her so as to cram as much action and Lara-style into every scene.

6. What's the most difficult part in the job?

Starting with not much on the paper.

7. When you're done, does the script look like a book we can read?

Scripts, by their nature, have totally different layouts to books and are visually orientated. But the basic idea of them is the same – they should be a good read.

8. Is it part of your job to describe each character, their attitude and look, to help the developers?

No, the artists design the characters – how they look, walk, kill etc. I let the characters speak a bit and further their attitude by showing how they respond to more complex predicaments within the FMVs.