

Excited chatter echoes around the great hall of the Natural History Museum. The lights go down. There is a buzz of anticipation - then silence. It is very dark.

The music comes in hard. Suddenly a spotlight picks out **LARA** at the top of the stairs, packing two pistols in a classic Tomb Raider pose.

The room is plunged back into darkness and she's gone.

Right on the beat the spotlight flashes on again - now Lara's lying draped on a stair halfway down, cool and poised.

The spot flashes on another time - she's standing sideways on, lower still, one pistol aimed down into the audience - and she's gone again.

There's a burst of strobe and Lara flik-flaks across the stage, leaping off into the darkness.

Almost instantly a spotlight finds her at the top of the stairs again. She blows a kiss and steps out of the light. The spot dies as the music fades out. Darkness and silence.

JONATHAN:

Hhhhhungh! (*recognisable Lara grunt*)

HhhhUUUngh!

A spotlight picks out **JONATHAN**. He is trying to push a rather modest sized podium/plinth towards the middle of the stage. He gives another push.

JONATHAN:

Hhhhhungh!

It does not move. He shuffles wide-legged around the other side, squats down and pulls.

JONATHAN:

Hhhhhungh!

It does not move. He straightens up.

JONATHAN:

Not as easy as it looks.

He leaps behind the podium, clears his throat.

JONATHAN:

Right then! You don't need me to tell you why you are here - but I'm going to tell you anyway. We are gathered here tonight to talk about shared obsession. We are here to pay homage to the object of this obsession - I am talking about a remarkable woman. She is one of the brightest stars in the global celebrity firmament. She is rich, she is beautiful and she is unfeasibly athletic.

She is also British. And what's more she is the only woman to have given me two sore thumbs - she is, of course, the one and only Lara Croft.

Now I'm afraid Ms Croft couldn't hang around to be with us tonight. In fact, she has already left the building - by the roof. She said she had to run. She said she has to run everywhere. All the time.

And so here I am, without Lara, to welcome you - on behalf of Eidos Interactive and Core Design - to this extraordinary place. I think you'll agree it is not every night that you get to meet under the arse of a dinosaur, but this is a very special occasion. We are here to witness a dramatic evolutionary leap - a development that may have profound consequences for our society.

JONATHAN:

If our calculations are correct, in just over a month from tonight, millions of ordinary men and women, alone and in small groups, will begin to subtly change their behaviour. They will tend to gravitate indoors, lower their blinds and set their answer machines. Many will adopt the following ritual posture. (*assumes intense game posture*)

Yes, on the 20th of November, as a certain product goes on sale in retail outlets worldwide, a significant sector of the global population will ever so slightly begin to fade out of the lives of their "other friends". Certain types of people will start to stumble red-eyed into work, clutching triple espressos and mumbling - "I just had to finish the London location, okay?".

We're here tonight to give you advance warning of the release of this dangerously engrossing entertainment, the third in the best selling series, a game which has been given the imaginative title Tomb Raider Three. Don't be fooled by the low key name, the important information is, as always, written underneath. Adventures of Lara Croft.

HECKLER:

(desperate) Laaaaa!

JONATHAN:

Say it loud, friend. We all know how you feel.

Yes, its all about obsession. Let's face it Lara-mania is sweeping the globe. She's huge in America, Japan and Europe - apparently she's particularly big in Spain. She's big everywhere.

JONATHAN:

But fame hasn't spoiled her. She still does all her own stunts. And underneath it all, she's all polygons - whatever they are.

Right then, before we begin our review of the Lara years, we are obliged to show the following health and safety film. The reason? It's nutters like him (*points to heckler*) and millions of others who have spent so long with Lara that they can't tell the difference between gameplay and real life. This is a serious problem, so if you could all pay attention. Thank you.

Okay, can we run the film please . .

LIGHTS DOWN, RUN VT1: "The Trilogy".

LIGHTS UP

JONATHAN:

We have seen the effects that over exposure to Lara can have on certain thin-skulled types. But how did this global phenomena begin? Now I want to take you back now to November 1996 when it all began. In politics, John Major became the first prime minister to be in opposition before a general election. In showbiz, Mr Blobby was beginning his assault on the Christmas No1 slot.

Meanwhile, up in Derby, Core Design had just completed a revolutionary new game . . .

LIGHTS DOWN. RUN VT2 - Tomb Raider 1 game footage.

JONATHAN (NARRATING)

Ah, takes you back, eh?

This is the moment my passion for Lara Croft began.

That body, that cheeky eyebrow said it all.

Here was a woman could do anything -

run all the time without getting tired . . .

. . . climb, leap . . .

. . . dive, hold her breath for long periods,

operate heavy machinery underwater . . .

And whatever she did - she did it in style.

Okay, so she had a rather aggressive attitude to wildlife . . .

. . . nice shot! . . . but then the wildlife tended to feel the same way about her.

Lara could go with the flow
- and she had no fear.

And when it came to the men in her life, she knew there was only one way to treat 'em.

This woman was strong - Hhhungh! - and determined.

Watching this two years on, it is easy to forget the impact it had at the time.

Tomb Raider was a quantum leap ahead of anything else.

It was revolutionary, cutting edge stuff - the first game to give you control of a character and give you freedom to move through extensive and intricate domains.

Easy to forget how pointy her breasts were too.

But there was more to Lara than mere physique. In Tomb Raider you needed brains as well as brawn.

And Lara was loaded with both.

Ah, this is one of my favourite bits -

- wait for it wait for it.

Unnnngh (imitates her squeal).

LIGHTS UP

JONATHAN:

Of course, she really did turn to gold. Word of mouth turned Tomb Raider One into a phenomenon on the way to wracking up sales of more than three million units.

This success made Lara Croft a household name. Here was the world's first virtual star, looking cool on the cover of *The Face*, showing the world what she could do on CNN . . .

Then, a year later, before she'd even been away, she was back - in Tomb Raider Two!

Lets take another brisk trot down memory lane with Lara Croft.

LIGHTS DOWN. RUN TRII FOOTAGE

JONATHAN (NARRATING)

Remember this? From the moment Lara landed under the Great Wall of China you knew this was going to be bigger and slicker than you deserved.

This time, there was scenery - with several levels set in exterior locations for the first time.

And Lara had been working on her dives, adding a bit of pike and twist.

She was as fast on her feet as ever, and this time she had some new moves.

She had given Madonna the pointy bra back.

And picked up some new toys - like the flares.
Notice the clever dynamic lighting there? - that
was new.

She now featured a fully animated ponytail.

There were some familiar faces in the wildlife
department - and familiar ways of dealing with
them.

There were new ways of getting around.

There were new weapons and new places to try
them out in - like Venice.

But Lara is very focused when she's working

- nice glass effect -

no time to stop and take in the sights.

Lara herself was improved - now she could tread
water and pant . . .

And, of course, she could now drive.

The speedboat was Lara's first ever vehicle -

- although you wouldn't know it the way she drives.

In Tomb Raider II there was much more action.

There were many more baddies

- some with dogs -

and these baddies were smarter, more persistent
and harder to kill.

Whatever way you look at it, Tomb Raider II, with its enhanced games engine, was faster and slicker and just more fun.

Look at that - I could never do that!

Remember to breath. You know you've played too much Tomb Raider when you start holding your breath too!

We liked the westuit, we liked the groovy interiors and the dynamic lighting effects.

Lara was as down to earth as ever . . .

. . . but every now and then she would give in to temptation and show off what she could really do.

The final levels were truly awesome - in one there was ice, malicious eagles . . .

. . . avalanches,

baddies galore and of course - the skidooo!

That's right run 'em over.

Will she, will she, will she?

Yes she will!

If you can't reach for your guns what do you do?
Drive on through.

And even though there was more of a focus on action in TRII, the game was still true to the original, with it's atmosphere of mystery and mythology.

Just time for a last dive. Lara Croft - maximum score! Ten points.

LIGHTS UP

JONATHAN:

Tomb Raider 2 made a big splash. It holds the record as the fastest-selling game in history - and sales stand at more than four million copies and counting.

In the months after it came out, something strange started to happen. Little by little Lara seemed to becoming real, doing all the things that real celebrities do.

On top of the magazine covers and TV appearances, Lara now had more fan websites than many on Hollywood's A list - at the last count there were more than a hundred virtual shrines created by her ardent - and in some cases rather too ardent - fans.

It goes without saying that she's about to launch her own fashion range. And next year, she's agreed to star in a big-budget movie. I suppose it's only a matter of time before she invites photographers from Hello! into her Mansion.

Where can she go from here? Is Tomb Raider Three going to be a bit like the tricky third album - or will it triumph in style? Well, lets see . . .

LIGHTS DOWN, SMOKE EFFECTS, FLASHING LIGHTS.

RUN TRIII FOOTAGE - 30 second Sting.

LIGHTS UP

JONATHAN:

If Tomb Raider one was the plucky low budget breakthrough and Tomb Raider Two a leap beyond, then Tomb Raider III is quite simply in a class of its own.

Tomb Raider 3 takes the best parts of both previous games - the puzzle-solving and exploration of the first, the action and vehicles of the second - and combines them and improves on them to create a new benchmark for the games industry.

It looks better - better sets, better lighting and better special effects.

The baddies are smarter - improved AI means they just won't go away until you blast 'em.

Lara is better - new moves, new weapons, new vehicles, new outfits - very important.

The gameplay is better - there is more than one way to get through the levels now.

AND it is faster - with a spanking new games engine.

Phew! Now, let's take a more detailed look at what is going to keep millions of men, women and children very busy for the next few months . . .

RUN TR3 VIDEO

JONATHAN (narrating)

Ah, India!

Location one - the first of five.

Its' lush - and there's some new wildlife

Oy! He's got your medipack, Lara! They tell me is a Macak monkey - it was a macak.

Yes, in Tomb Raider 3, the wildlife is still out to get her - new weapons help.

Note the new lighting effects - and the smoking guns.

Shoot the tiger, Lara.

I know it looks a bit gratuitous, but just wait . . .

Yes, piranha's - you've got to distract them somehow.

Look out, Lara - cobra!

Off to the South Pacific

- a chance to enjoy another delicious new light effect . . .

- to meet indigenous peoples - and fight them . . .

- and to mount and master the Quad Bike - one of five new vehicles in all.

These little critters - they're called Compys - will follow you around, nipping at your ankles, unless - nice new flame effect there!

Rex is faster, smarter and harder to kill this time round.

Lara still has the best moves - this new one is the monkey swing.

Off now to London - where it's raining, of course. This is what the new landscape system can do

- we are talking detailed architecture.
- richer interiors
- such as St Paul's

And rounder, smoother surfaces. Nice catsuit,
Lara.

Aldwych tube station.

Its after hours as you can see. No commuters, no
dossers
- just a very persistent man with a fiery torch.

Down in the sewers, Lara gets to use this handy
underwater propulsion unit.

Note the ripple effect on the water - no expense
spared.

Look she can crawl

The Nevada level - Area 51. Very nonchalant
about the alien corpses, there, Lara.

Lara can now also hide - a key feature of the
improved artificial intelligence.

The downside - the baddies are smarter too. They
will go after her.

Yep, there's a couple more down there Lara. I
think you better go and get 'em.

One. Two.

Get out of there Laaaraaa!

Improved puffer jackets on these Antarctic level
baddies.

And door to door salesmen offering free samples
of a new perfume.

Lara has her own range merchandise. So, no
thank you!

Do you ever get the feeling that everything is out
to get you?

Lara does.

You will need all of Lara's new moves to solve the
puzzles that stand in Lara's way.

Another great new water effect -one for the
connoisseur. And another.

The repertoire of new vehicles includes this kayak.

She learnt to do this on holiday in Wales

A key innovation with Tomb Raider 3 is that you
can play the middle three levels in any order you
like - before you take on the final level and the
ultimate tests of skill

- and courage

Good thing he was only a minor deity!

LIGHTS UP

JONATHAN:

So there you have it. November 20th. Tomb Raider
Three. Bigger, slicker, smarter and more fun.

HECKLER:

Laaaraaaa!

JONATHAN:

And, yes, more Lara.

Would someone please take him away?

Burly guards drag the Heckler from the audience.

JONATHAN:

That's it from me. Please stay, enjoy this remarkable setting and a glass or two on Lara. As for me, I have to run. Everywhere. All the time.

He runs around the stage in Lara mode and off the stage.

LIGHTS TO CANAPE.