

INTERVIEW WITH TOMB RAIDER III PRODUCER, RICHARD MORTON

Could you tell us your name and what is your position within Core Design.

Richard Morton, Level designer

As soon as Tomb Raider III was announced, it has found itself in the centre of attention of gaming community. Of course, gamers would like to know what will the third coming bring new. We have heard something about improved graphics engine, new reflection systems, moving water surfaces. Could you explain us in terms understandable to our regular reader what will this mean in reality?

Well, the level editor system has been dramatically improved – instead of using a grid system, we can now use triangles on the maps. This means that we can now create more organic shapes as well as domes, arches etc. The maps themselves no longer need to be as flat – we can have rocky surface and a lot more detail within the environments. Also, we have improved the texture palette – this means that surface will be much more detailed and realistic.

The game engine has been completely overhauled so that the game will be faster, smoother and there will be no more clipping!

As for the water, yes we now have a very realistic transparency and reflection system. The water will actually ripple as well as reflecting the light. The shore-lines are also smoother and the water actually gets lighter in the shallow areas.

Another improvement is the lighting system – we now have multi-coloured, dynamic lighting – which means that the game will be far more atmospheric and the shading on Lara much more realistic.

We have also added weather effects such as rain, snow and mist – these certainly add even more realism. Another thing is the fact that the levels will get dark as sunset approaches. Also, Lara will now leave footprints in the snow and sand. The actual sound of her steps will also change, depending on the type of surface she is travelling across.

The save game system will also change: on 'easy' you can save whenever you like but on 'hard', the game will use the crystals, as in Tomb Raider I. The player will be able to collect these crystals and use them like an inventory item – so you need to make sure you find all the crystals or you won't be able to save. We'll give the player a few crystals to start with – just to make life a little easier!

We know Lara will live in 5 new levels – India, London, Nevada, South Pacific Islands and Antarctic Island. Could you tell us more about these?

Well, not too much since we need to keep some secrets! Lara will start in India – here she will get a clue as to what the adventure's all about. She will find an artefact... and will then find out that there are 3 more to collect! The next 3 levels – London, Nevada and the South Pacific can be played in any order you like. The final level is the Antarctic.

Of course, we are all also dying to see what new weapons will Lara carry and in what will you dress her up. Please bring a light of knowledge to our lives regarding this matter. Also, please please let us know what weapons will you introduce and which vehicles will we be able to drive around?

New weapons? Well Lara will have desert eagle guns, a grenade launcher and a rocket launcher, as well as the standard weapons you saw in Tomb Raider II. Since we have added a new particle

system to the game, the weapons will now give off smoke when fired, and you'll see very realistic gun-fire, flames and explosions. We even have separate animations for underwater explosions. When Lara fires bullets, you'll see the empty cartridges flipping out of the magazine too! The grenade and rocket launcher do not lock-on automatically, so Lara will be able to fire these at anything she likes.

New outfits? Yes, of course she has a couple: in London she'll wear combat pants and a very sexy cropped-top. In the antarctic she'll need some very warm clothes but we haven't quite decided on the items just yet. Other outfits are yet to be finalised.

As for the vehicles, well, one for one of the levels, you'll be in a canoe nearly all the time, fighting your way through rapids and very strong currents – exciting! Other vehicles will include a quad bike, and underwater propulsion engine (like on James Bond) and a jeep-type car. There might be a couple more that we'd like to keep secret... We'll still also have the deathslide, as in Tomb raider II, but you might also see other stunts such as a parachute jump or a base jump.

Will Tomb Raider 3 have more adventure parts than part 2?

Yes, there will be more adventure in this game than in Tomb Raider II. It'll be a 50-50 balance between action and adventure so it's a bit more like the first game really. We want to get back to the thrills of discovering really beautiful areas and also to include more exploration. The new landscapes plus Lara's new moves will make the exploration a lot more exciting than the previous 2 games

We would also like to find out what new enemies will she face on her quest and what does mean that they will have »vastly improved AI system«?

Lara will encounter a whole new range of enemies such as snakes, monkeys, piranha fish, vultures, hyenas, jelly fish, dragons and whales... to name but a few! There will also be quite a wide range of human characters in the game. All enemies will have vastly improved AI – we have one programmer who is working specifically on this. Instead of just running around, the enemies will each have a variety of attack and defence patterns. For example, when you first see the monkeys, they will run away... when they come back they'll be a bit more brave.. until you have to shoot to get rid of them. When you first shoot, they'll run away in ... but they'll be back again!

Other animals might run away if you shoot at them, but some of them may become more aggressive. Shoals of fish will swim around Lara in the water – unless they're piranhas– in that case they'll nibble on her! The whole AI system is a massive improvement and will definitely make life a lot harder for Lara...

Of course you are carefully looking after your competition. What do you think of some kind of LucasArts' »copying« your game in new Indiana Jones game? Also, are there any other games in development which could come close to Adventures of Lara Croft (i.e. Outcast)?

The only game that is close at the moment is The Infernal Machine – yes, it does look a lot like TombRaider and the character looks great too. But we now have 3 Tomb Raider games and we've learnt a lot over the past few years so we're confident that our experience will make TRIII the best!

You have announced a new game structure, which will enable player to choose an order in which to play levels. Will there be any difference between levels if we play for example London first and then India or if we choose India and after that London?

Yes, there will be a difference depending on the order in which you play these levels – there will be disadvantages and advantages depending on the order in which you play these levels, but it will even itself out.

Any other surprises, like were vehicles in part two – maybe introduction of civilians or anything similar?

Yes, lots of surprises... that are secret!!! You'll have to play the whole game to find out more.

When we had an interview last year, you have said that all Tomb Raider team would rather see an animated Tomb Raider movie than a real one. As now, the contract for movie rights is signed, which actress would you put in role of Lara Croft?

Well, we would probably prefer to see somebody who is unknown at the moment – that way the public won't have any preconceptions about Lara's character. If we used somebody like Liz Hurley or Sandra Bullock, people might get the wrong idea about Lara's character. But it's really up to the movie company to make the decision.

Of course and animated movie would be ideal, but the time and the expense would prevent us from doing this right now.