

16 April 2006

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[Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend](#)

She's back with an appetite for succes

When we say Lara Croft, the good old days of fantasies with pixel based characters come right back. She will be remembered for a long time even if we won't remember the actual games. Let's face it, the only thing that comes to mind when we think about Tomb Rider is an obscure patch that made her run naked around the levels. It doesn't matter that the game design and puzzle were so frustrating that even the most calm gamer would scream in the emptiness of his room (boys that were playing with Lara didn't have any girlfriends). She troubled our nights and dreams, first with her streamlined body, running nude in the moonlight (I hope you realize this is fiction, not a real memory... or at least a part of it) and then she haunted us in our nightmares with increasingly worse games. The last game tore away the last feeling we had for her. I truly believed "Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness" to be the last nail in her coffin. What came next took me completely by surprise. Imagine Lara rising from the grave just as beautiful like the day I put her there. Not a wrinkle on her face and not a day older. Just the way I remembered her, except she had a lot more polygons (if you know what I mean). And without any further ado, I give you Lara Croft.

Story: Like any ass-kicking detective with such a gorgeous body she needed a quest to fit her stature. Eidos and Chrystal Dynamics couldn't give her something unimportant and to be honest most of the important things have already been found by different fictional characters (mostly by Indiana Jones). So we got the Holy Chalice, The Lost Ark, The Tomb of the last Chinese Emperor ... you name it, Indy has done it. They could give her an ancient city or treasure. This had to be so important that people's eyebrows would lift at the sound of it and interested hums would break the silence. This is how she came to search for Excalibur or the sword in the stone (even if it's in fact a terrible mistake to confuse the two of them), King's Arthur weapon imbued with great power and, as some say, healing properties. This sword travels the world in different forms and myths and, in fact, Lara is unaware that the sword she was searching in the beginning in an old Bolivian temple is in fact the one and only Excalibur. Of course, like any great artifact of enormous power in this small Universe, the sword is broken in several parts so that no one would be able to use it again; however, the parts are hidden in conspicuous locations so everyone can find them using two guns and a nice pair of legs. Fortunately for us we have someone matching that description and we are not afraid to use her. The story takes us first, like I said, to Bolivia, then Peru. A cool feature that I always enjoyed is the memory-level-flashbacks. In this way we can play with Lara when she is still in her twenties but not old enough to use guns. Here we find out how she loses all her friends, including a young girl that drowns (apparently) and that will return later as Lara's arch enemy, Amanda Evert. A few details about her mother and the way she (supposedly) died after a terrible plane crash in South America are revealed and are in fact the link for the next game in the series. I don't think it's necessary to say that all these pieces, Excalibur, Lara's mom and Amanda, are somehow connected and will keep you long enough interested to find out what really happened. On top of all this family drama, you (or she) will have to battle a small army and the ruthless Yakuza that apparently is not what it used to be anymore. **Concept:** This is not a blend of different genres like most of the games that come out these days but more like a genre defining one. This is a pure third person action adventure with the stress placed on action. You got guns, grenades, slow-motion, jumping, acrobatics and summersaults; all these are performed by a beautiful English girl with very few clothes on. What more could you ask for? **Gameplay:** I know this could sound weird, but from a present point of view Lara used to be very clumsy. I remember very specifically that she used to make very slow turns, especially when she ran

and this is the first feature I tried. I was very relieved to find her much more athletic but equally sexy. I can go even go as far as saying that this is nothing like the old Tomb Riders and that practically this is a brand new gameplay model and it's all for the better. The game is divided in eight levels (plus the Croft manor which has to be unlocked after a series of missions) that covers pretty much the whole world: Bolivia (Tiwanaku), Peru, Japan (Tokyo), Africa (Ghana), Russia (Kazakhstan), England (Cornwall) and the Himalayas (Nepal). I can't forget mentioning the obvious clichés that plague the weather choices for this locations, but enough is enough: I can't remember to have played a game where it's not snowing in Russia and Nepal, it's not raining in England and Africa and to see Tokyo in the day time (yes, I know it has nothing to do with the weather but it falls in the same category). With this important aspect out of the way we can now focus on the gameplay. You can even consider the game to be a mix of two separate ones. First we have the climbing-problem-solving-part which makes about 70 percent of the game depending on how fast you "get" the subterfuge that enables you to defeat the end-level boss. At the end of each level you will find a human or some entity that is capable of "receiving" a lot more bullets than the average boss. If I can accept that you can't take down a 30 meter multi-headed hydra using nothing but pistols, I see no reason why a puny Yakuza boss can take the same amount. I'm sure that none of you will find the platform jumping difficult. It's easy and, at the same time, very graceful. It's almost a pleasure to watch Lara work, jumping from one cliff to another, exiting lakes with water dripping from her clothes (thank God for pixel shader 2.0). I found myself admiring the somersaults even if they are just a little too difficult to execute and the way she springs upwards with one hand stretched through the air makes you think she's not going to reach the other side. I have nothing but praise for this part. I can't say the same thing for the other 30 percent which makes up Tomb Raider, because it's hard for me to accept such a warrior character. I believe Eidos wanted to make it somewhat similar with the movies and they gave her combat agility that would make Max Payne jealous. She can do all sorts of tricks but I find the choice of the producers to be at least odd; all her moves, except for jumping, have to be done while she is running towards the enemy. If I were in a fire fight with ruthless mercenaries I would be running away from them. In any case, even with this disadvantage, we can't really speak of an AI. They are there so you can kill them in many different ways and just because they are firing it's not a reason to get panicked. As long as you are moving you don't have to worry about anything. Honestly I would have enjoyed a lot more puzzles and a lot less fighting.

Video: The graphics revolves around Lara Croft. I have nothing but appreciation for the guys at Eidos because they have made a great job in rebuilding this landmark game. It's powered by a beautiful engine but... as there is always a but, until this day no one has learned that using jpeg images as backgrounds is sloppy and an insult to the buyer. I can also understand that this is a port (and a very successful one), but I fail to see why they aren't trying harder to optimize for the PC. I felt like playing a beta featuring some obvious low resolution textures, problems with the depth of field option and a setting that made me regret not owning a next-gen console. In the video menu there is a tab called "Enable Next-Gen something". Once activated it should give me the feeling of an Xbox 360 but I only get the feeling of a poor man because there is no way a medium computer will run with this option enabled. Except these particular problems, the engine is great and performs quite well. I can say only this: the effect of pixel shader 2.0 on wet skin is the right choice.

Sound: One of the reasons I'm going to remember this edition of Tomb Raider is a sound-related problem. Don't get me wrong, the sound is almost flawless but its implementation is at least dubious. Remember the bosses I've told you about? They have only two or three phrases in their vocabulary, which they repeat over and over again giving the player an extra motivation for killing them, a "just shut up and die already" kind of feeling. The weapons are reasonably well modulated and the voice of Keeley Hawes is right on the money. You have to keep in mind that the voice of Lara doesn't belong to the new model that portrait her in real life, Karima Adebibe (not a bad choice if you ask me).

Conclusion: I think it is safe to

say that this is the best Tomb Raider I have ever played, but it leaves room for a lot of improvement. I enjoyed playing even if some bosses were quite frustrating and made me sometimes want to quit and send a warm message Eidos' way. I firmly believe that we are witnessing the birth of a new franchise that has nothing to do with the past and which looks on to the future with high hopes.