

Tomb Raider – The Next Generation

Project Outline

Mission Statement

To take the Lara Croft franchise beyond current technology and game play standards on next generation platforms.

Technical Overview

Starting from the ground up, the game is being developed with an open architecture for multiple platforms, to enable the ease of platform porting and expandability for further iteration of titles. Current platforms expected to ship on are Playstation 2, X Box and high end PC's.

Features

The will refresh at 60 frame per sec (fps), which will allow for a much improved visual and responsive experience for the player, compared to the previous titles which have all refreshed at 30fps.

Improved visual fidelity will be achieved in part by the use of multi pass textures. These will allow the reproduction of realistic lighting, shadows and surface detail representation. Surface detail to include, but not limited to, reflection, refraction, bump map, real-time shadows and under water caustics. Polygonal models will have an increased level of detail approximately ten fold what has previously been possible.

Game environment and character detail will be further realized by the inclusion of real-time cloth, examples of which are a curtain blowing in the wind or character clothing.

Characters will be fully soft skinned; this will create a greater level of realism, to further this muscle flexing and facial expression will be created by the use of a combination of hyper patches and morphs. Inverse Kinematics (IK) will be used to override the character animation, to link fluidly between states, enabling us to give the player more interaction with the game environment. Control will be analogue, this allows for a smooth transition between player actions. This gives the player finer control.

Game play will be controlled via a custom scripting language. This will simplify the task of implementing game play detail, enabling level designers the freedom and ability to implement their own elements. This spreads the workload for game play detail evenly through out the team. In addition this allows total flexibility for this and future iterations.

The Game

On its original release in 1996, Tomb Raider had a big impact on the games market. Next Generation will have to have a similar effect on its release.

Tomb Raider Next Generation will of course bring a level of detail not seen in the game before, this goes without saying. The new platforms will push all new games (from any developer worth their weight in salt) to a greater level of detail and complexity. So this alone is not enough, it would be too easy to take the old game and to merely throw more polygons at it!

A past tendency for Tomb Raider has been huge sprawling levels that seem a little lifeless. We want to bring a level of interaction that truly conveys the sense of a real place with vibrant characters populating it. This will involve generally smaller environments with more animations and much more to do within them. At the same time however, occasional larger areas will be used to provide the cinematic grandeur that has always been a part of the Tomb Raider franchise.

Story FMV's and Cut-Scene's will be replaced by more fluid and interactive sequences flowing from the gameplay and character interaction, so story will be told and evolve throughout the game rather than just at isolated intervals.

Backgrounds will react to Lara, for example the fronds of a large palm will bend as she pushes past. Much more of what she encounters should be for her to manipulate, be it push, shoot, pickup, stand on, burn or whatever. Big environmental changes like flooding, burning or exploding areas always had to occur whilst Lara was somewhere else, now we will be able to see them happen.

A myriad of characters will populate the areas Lara visits and she will be able to talk to many of them. They will perhaps provide useful information or mislead her, so the player will have to decide whom to trust. Small missions could be undertaken from characters, to gain their help in Lara's greater quest.

Lara herself will possess more life like attributes, with variations on standard moves, and also developing skillset that improves with experience and reflects the direction in which the player pushes her.

She will have a far more fluid control system, generally less regimented and block based, with animations blending to give a far more intuitive response.

She will talk a lot more (full facial morphing), even to the extent of commenting on what she encounters which could provide hints for the player.

Health will be linked to her performance and regained from more diverse sources than just medi-packs.

Combat will change completely, always the weakest aspect of Tomb Raider. It will be used more sparingly, involving more stealth and tactical elements, reloading of weapons and no unlimited ammo.

When an enemy engages Lara they will not just stand and shoot, or run toward her. So no more 'Benny Hill' style shoot and chase antics. Combat situations will utilize the area they are staged in, even being impactive within the environments.

Equally Lara herself will have more tricks like being able to independently equip and target each arm, strafing, ducking behind objects, and hand to hand combat

Back in 1996 everyone was thrilled by the fact that on the cusp of a technological leap, they could suddenly run around and explore three-dimensional tombs, solving puzzles, fighting and controlling a very appealing and well-drawn character. Lara seems to appeal more than ever, so in turn she now needs a greater world to explore.

Possible Story Synopsis

The story will be concerned with the search for the most famed lost city of all, El Dorado, Lara, having retired from adventure after nearly losing her life in Egypt, has become an academic, a researcher in archeology at the British Museum. Her Friend and Colleague, Sam Swanson, returns from an expedition to the Andes with a golden box that he asks her to examine for him, a task that will be the first step on Lara's road back to Tomb Raiding. Whilst studying the box, alone at her desk in the museum, Lara is attacked by various supernatural beasties and is chased around the empty museum. On escaping she has to track down her friend Sam to his flat, to find it turned upside down and her friend dying, who will tell her she has to go to Peru to solve the mystery of what the box leads to and to find out who has attacked her and him. He gives her certain clues to help her in her quest.

Lara flies to Peru and makes her way to the ancient Incan capital of Cuzco, where she will meet her main adversaries, the Pizzaros, a Spanish family who are descended from a Conquistador and whose family obsession for generations has been the search for the city of El Dorado. They have in their employ evil Shamen who use their mystic powers to this end (hence the weird goings on in London). They want the golden box in Lara's possession. Lara will have to avoid them and make her way to an address that Sam has given her in the slums of the city, where she will meet a shaman who will take her back in time to see the city in the time of the Inca's and the conquistadors, and to see an Incan priest hide an artifact, the staff of the Inca's first emperor, Manco Capac, somewhere in the city. Lara will have to use her knowledge of the city as it was in the 15th century and as it is now (the old Incan structures are still visible today beneath the colonial architecture of the Spanish) to find it. The staff will open the box to reveal a makette of Machu Pichu, the Incan city lost for centuries in the mountains, the model showing details of the city as it was in its pomp. Lara must go there and use the model to gain entrance to the undiscovered caverns underneath the mountain, where she will be directed to the entrance of El Dorado, deep in the Amazonian jungle.

Lara has to then make her way down the river on a tramp steamer, which is to let her off at a village that is to be her starting point for her entrance to the “green hell”. The crew of the steamer is in the pay of the Pizzaros and Lara will have to fight them sometime during the journey. Once she has entered the jungle Lara will have to fight her way through all the dangers of the jungle, both real and supernatural, her path taking her the jungle bottom to the tree canopy high up in the air.

Eventually she will find the hidden doorway to the hidden city, open it, and enter. Deep underground she will have to dive into underground rapids that will take her further down into the bowels of the earth, to sluice her out into an underground lake on whose shores lies the lost city. Lara must swim to it and enter the city, and make her way to the center, having to solve various puzzles and traps on the way, traps designed to keep intruders out. To Lara’s bemusement the city doesn’t appear to be made of gold as legend suggests, magnificent though it is. At the center of the city there is a pyramid to which Lara must gain entrance. Inside she will discover the secret of the city that the conquistadors had misunderstood, that it is not the city that that Incas thought was valuable, rather what it was built to house, a machine that they felt was too powerful to fall into the hands of their conquerors, a machine that harnessed the power of the sun itself. However, at that point the Pizzaros burst in, having allowed Lara to lead them to their goal. Taking Lara prisoner, they try to remove the machine, an unfortunate act as this precipitates the destruction of the city. Lara must escape from the Pizzaros and out of the city before the earth swallows it, and her, up.