

May 6th 2009

Does Lara Croft Need a Makeover?

Tomb Raider fans are split on where Lara Croft goes next.



by [Patrick Klepek](#)



Whether she likes it or not, Lara Croft's getting a makeover. It doesn't matter if we're talking about the Tomb Raider video games or movies (goodbye Angelina Jolie, hello Megan Fox?) -- the old Lara Croft is being asked to quietly leave the premises.

But does she need to?

Publisher Eidos Interactive was unhappy with the sales performance of Tomb Raider: Underworld last year. They're not abandoning the Tomb Raider franchise, but the next time we see her, she'll definitely be different, claims the publisher.

"We need to look at everything, as we develop the next game," said Eidos chief financial officer Robert Bren [to Times Online](#) in January. "Look at how Batman changed successfully, from the rather sad character of the Michael Keaton era to the noir style of The Dark Knight."



The evolution of Lara Croft.

The franchise underwent a critical and commercial revival after developer Crystal Dynamics was handed the keys to the Tomb Raider series, rebooting Lara with 2006's well-received Tomb Raider: Legend. Not all Tomb Raider fans think Crystal Dynamics' decisions moved the series in the right direction, though.

"Fans of the original series love these games for the dynamic and original storylines, but most importantly, the character," said eight-year Tomb Raider fan fiction writer Katie Fleming. "Lara is irreplaceable and I believe when Crystal Dynamics created a new history for her, the series lost a lot of fans. Why fix something that isn't broken?"

Fleming is not alone. In fact, there's an interesting disconnect between the popular perception that Crystal Dynamics was just what the franchise needed and what hardcore Lara fans actually want. You might be hard pressed to call some of these people Tomb Raider fans -- they're Lara diehards.

"It [Tomb Raider Underworld] was predictable," said 20-year-old 3D artist and Lara's Community founder Ash Kaprielov to us. "Bringing back the original biography would be the best in my opinion. Lara was really an independent person in those, not some emo-like orphan that tries to find her mother in order to have personal fulfillment [sic]. The original games were more interesting, this I can tell because I re-played Tomb Raider 2 soon after I finished Underworld and compared."

The recommendations of these hardcore Lara fans run contrary to most critical responses to Underworld, which often asked if Crystal Dynamics has spent too much time sticking to the Tomb Raider roots and not enough making it their own thing. If Eidos' comments are any indication, more of the same isn't what's coming next.

Eidos didn't respond to a request for an interview to talk about the future of Tomb Raider, but even Eric Lindstrom, creative director of Underworld, isn't sure what the company will do next. He won't have any influence on it, either; Lindstrom was one of 30 employees laid off at Crystal Dynamics in January.

"I feel that even though Lara has attributes that appeal to males, the games don't pander to a male audience," said Lindstrom on the Tomb Raider Forums. "Look at all the other games out there with female heroes, and look at their bustlines and what they are (barely) wearing. My lead designer Harley (a woman) agrees that Tomb Raider is not a gender specific game, and research shows that it appeals to female gamers very well."

The future of Tomb Raider seems intrinsically tied to Lara, but here's a radical concept: what if the next Tomb Raider game featured a new character? Would people be willing to play a Tomb Raider game without its star adventurer?

"Would I play Tomb Raider if originally it didn't star Lara Croft? I'd say absolutely," explained Fleming. "Now if you were to ask me if they wanted to change the character I'd

say absolutely not. Lara is Tomb Raider. In fact, she is so prominent in our minds that they cut off her head for the box art of the latest game. People know who she is, and there is a direct correlation between Tomb Raider and Lara."

The "old" Lara Croft is still with us for the time being, though. Eidos recently released "Lara's Shadow" and "Beneath The Ashes," two downloadable episodes for Underworld produced exclusively for the Xbox 360 version of the game. Maybe "Lara's Shadow," featuring Lara's doppelganger, gives us a hint at a newer, darker Lara in the next game. It will be a few years before we find out, though.

If the next Tomb Raider game were in your hands, what would you do with it?