

InRaiderSpect Epilogue: A Survivor is Reborn

This is a transcript of a podcast from InRetroSpect. The original audio can be found at inretrospectpodcast.com, along with many other wonderful videogaming podcasts.

Introduction: Hello, my name is Dr. Kris Darby and welcome to the show. Back in 2011 we here at InRetroSpect presented a series of shows devoted to Tomb Raider designed to commemorate the release of Square Enix and Crystal Dynamics' reboot of the franchise; however, there was a delay with the release of the game, meaning that we were unable to cover it in our special. My particular show in that series, entitled "Turning Points," took its lead from the trailer for the aforementioned game, comparing the series to a labyrinth. This came to the attention of Stella, the matriarch of tombraders.net, a site familiar to all players of the games. She kindly featured a transcription of my podcast on her site, and that was that.

Now, with the recent release of the Definitive Edition of Tomb Raider on the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, I thought it time to unearth the InRetroSpect special and to invite Stella to chat about the reboot in detail, discussing how it fits into the universe and the possible directions in which the franchise may go. Now, I don't need to tell you that there will be plenty of spoilers throughout. So if you have not played the game, I suggest you stop this recording now.

Still with me? Well, sit back and listen to the InRaiderSpect Epilogue.

[Musical interlude]

Stella: My name is Stella and I run Stella's Tomb Raider Site, and it's at tombraders.net if anybody wants to check it out. Basically it's focused on walkthroughs for the whole Tomb Raider series—everything from the little mobile games and the Game Boy Color games all the way up to the big console/PC/Macintosh releases. I try to cover everything, but it's mostly focused on walkthroughs, rather than on Lara Croft fandom and stuff like that.

How I got into Tomb Raider is sort of funny. My husband's friend lent him Tomb Raider 1, the original 1996 game, and he got stuck, and he got tired of it and he just said, "To hell with this, I'm not going to play this anymore." He threw it in the garbage, and I literally fished the game out of the garbage... [both laugh] ...and started playing back at the training level. And I was hooked because I had only ever played games like The Sims and a few text-based [games like] Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy, where you type in your answers in order to find clues and get through the game. So that was my first 3D-type gaming experience. That world was just extraordinary at that time. I hadn't seen anything like it and honestly haven't since. It's still my favorite series, and I don't really play a whole lot else.

Kris: It's really interesting. We've kind of got some interesting points of crossing there because Tomb Raider was the first game I picked up and played on the PlayStation. It was around at a friend's house and the first level in that game—we just played it for hours. We didn't really know where we were meant to be going. We were just lost in the fact that we could explore this game and run amok within it. I just absolutely fell in love with the series because of that fact.... You started your site in 1998, if that's correct.

Stella: Mm hmm. [meaning yes]

Kris: I remember going on that site in 1998 with my school friends, because there was a group of us that played Tomb Raider. It was Tomb Raider 3, I think, that we got quite stuck on. I remember in my school IT lessons I was supposed to be working but going on your site to get the walkthrough to print it out because I didn't have internet at home.

Stella: Aww! That's great! I have a few people I know today that have been with me the whole time. I may not have known it but they told me later. That's great.

Kris: It's one of those things everyone knows. It's the go-to site for all things Tomb Raider-y. I like the fact that you also mentioned Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy. It's one of the first games we ever looked at on Free Play at InRetroSpect. I think it was our game of the year actually because it is so fitting for Douglas Adams's vision. It's just wonderful to see it in a different medium, I suppose.

Stella: I haven't played that game since I originally played it, so I don't remember all the details, but it was basically—you'd get a clue and then you'd have to ask questions or say, "I go left," or "pick up this," or "examine that." It was almost impossible to beat. I mean, I didn't beat it. I looked at a couple of walkthrough sites later, but I don't think I ever got to the end of it.

Kris: So what made you have this emphasis on the walkthrough aspect of Tomb Raider as opposed to any other aspect of it?

Stella: I think originally it was because I was like you, in that I wanted to just explore everywhere and look at every section of every level, go in every corner, and try different ways of doing things. That's just the way I approach problem solving in general. I guess I'm a little anal retentive or whatever. [laughs] I want to know everything about everything. I'm not satisfied with 99% completion. And then...I was on the newsgroup alt.games.tombraider, back when newsgroups were big, before there were a whole lot of sites with message boards and things like that. People would ask questions and help each other out, and I got into that community and became a part of the back-and-forth. And I love being able to help people out. So I guess a combination of those two things: being a completionist and being somebody who wants to help other people achieve. That's how I found my focus.

Kris: I think "completionist" is the word really, particularly with Tomb Raider and its emphasis on exploration and puzzle solving. You've got to be incredibly patient to do these puzzles. That's why I love it. I love the puzzles. It's like a huge combination lock, each level, that you have to kind of un-pick and get the right combination—whether it's a combination of jumps, a combination of levers—it's almost like a sudoku puzzle in a game. It's just that kind of brain teaser-y kind of riddle I love to solve, and invariably you have to solve it completely in order to do it justice, in order to sleep at night, I find...

Also there's a part of your site that's devoted to bugs and glitches and things that are really cool to play around with...the architecture of the game. I remember the one in Tomb Raider 3, at the manor, Croft Manor, where I think you stood facing into a corner and you'd press a series of buttons and you

suddenly appeared on the roof of the house. I remember doing that.

Stella: Yep. The infamous "corner bug." Some enterprising player, back in the day—either in Tomb Raider 1 or Tomb Raider 2...Scott McAllister—I don't even know who he is, but he's famous as a bug discoverer—found that trick. [Here I misspoke. It was actually Jason McAllister.] And if anyone wants to try it they can go on my site and search for "corner bug" or look for "useful bugs," and there's a bunch of them that you can use to get to inaccessible areas or squeeze through cracks that you shouldn't really be able to. You kind of have to be able to break the game in order to win the game.

[Lara Croft voice-over: A famous explorer once said that the extraordinary is in what we do, not who we are. I'd finally set out to make my mark, to find adventure, but instead...adventure found me.]

Kris: So, the Tomb Raider universe—because you've been with it since the beginning, like me—

Stella: Pretty much.

Kris: I know a lot of people who've come in in later periods. In terms of how it's changed throughout those 17 years, are there any high points of that particular progression, through its history, any moments where it's dropped the ball or it's gone in different directions?

Stella: Well, I think a lot of people look at *Angel of Darkness*, the sixth game, as kind of the beginning of the end—people who are classic fans.... [Both laugh.] There's a lot of rumor, stories of how development was rushed, and people didn't have time to do what they wanted to do. I wasn't there, and I'm not on the dev team, and I can't place blame. That game was kind of half baked when it was released, but still it has a huge following. A lot of fans love it.

Kris: I know, yeah. I think a lot of fans like it because of its story.

Stella: Yeah. It was an ambitious project that wasn't quite fully realized, but you can see hints of what it could've, should've, would've been. And it's still a great game. The controls are a bit crap, but what are you going to do? It's still fun to play.

Kris: It's such a change in tone really, and I think lots of fans gravitated towards—and I think also, in retrospect, why some were quite reticent about this latest reboot—because the last time Lara was taken into kind of a dark territory, she came out as this "emo" kind of person really, which is why she had almost a renaissance with *Legend* and *Anniversary*...and later *Underworld*. Trying to lean us back into that kind of direction, I suppose.

Stella: Yeah.

Kris: We talked about the gameplay, but is it something about the protagonist, Lara Croft, that draws you to this particular franchise over others?

Stella: Well, yes and no. On the one hand, as a female player it certainly helps to have a female protagonist because it's easier just to identify. But it's not like I had played lots and lots of Gordon Freeman or Quake or those kinds of things, where [the avatar] was a dude. I wasn't really into

shooters—I'm still not really into shooters—so it's not like, Oh! Epiphany! Here's a woman character! Yay! But yeah, I think the character of Lara herself is just very interesting. Being an explorer, being somebody who's sort of ruthless, somebody who you can put yourself in her place as sort of an alter ego. She's not at all like me, yet many of her qualities are things that I would aspire to, like bravery and strength and fearlessness and curiosity and all that. I think if it were the same exact game—for example, *Uncharted*—interesting. Sure. Fine. But I don't really feel drawn to it because the character doesn't really speak to me.

Kris: I think in some respects that's literally one of the reasons I love the original Tomb Raider was that she hardly ever spoke during the game.

Stella: Mm hmm. You can project your own thing, your own ideas, and interpret the character as you will because it's very open ended and they don't really define it.

Kris: Exactly, and I think that's one thing that added to the mystery of her. Even though it's a third-person game, you're totally right, everyone has this idea of what Lara Croft is really.

Stella: *My Lara. Your Lara. His Lara, her Lara...* may not necessarily be the same. It's sort of funny. With this new game there's been a lot of discussion similar to what you said about *Angel of Darkness*, about Who is this new emo Lara? Why is she whining and crying? Why is she not yet brave? You know, that sort of thing. And I think a lot of people project so much onto the silent Lara that this seems different to them, but maybe someone else has projected this thing, like maybe Lara *is* vulnerable and we just don't hear it in the game. So a lot depends on the baggage that you bring with you, as to how you judge the new iteration.

Kris: We've had 17 years of backstory. It's been quite a bold move. They've basically done what the DC universe has done recently with their *New 52* catalog, where basically they've just wiped the slate clean and started from issue 1. What do you think of the new Lara Croft—if we're going to go into this idea of *your* Lara, say?

Stella: Sure. Well, this new Lara doesn't really fit with the original mythology, but I kind of look at it as parallel-universe Lara. Like, Tomb Raider 1 through 6 Lara is one person. Tomb Raider *Legend* through *Underworld* Lara is another person, who is maybe Lara in a parallel universe, and then this new Lara is yet a third Lara, who is the way the way this same person might have come up in yet a third parallel universe. So I try not to judge any of the iterations on the merits of the previous. Does that make sense?

Kris: Yeah. It makes perfect sense. It's how I view the canon of Tomb Raider games, these separate groups, these separate eras really. I think that a reboot is justified because *Legend*, *Anniversary* and *Underworld* did feel like a neat trilogy that was all wrapped up. It felt like they'd kind of wiped the slate clean after that, so they'd justified this reboot, I suppose.

In terms of playing as Lara Croft, obviously it's a different console, it's got better graphics and better visuals. In this her movements do feel more natural....

Stella: I loved the controls. I loved the combat system. I loved the figure of Lara and how she moved in

the world, and the weight of her, and how she feels as she's moving through the world, and her tools, like the climbing axe.... Maybe I'm jumping the gun a little since you haven't really asked about it, but my only major complaint about this new game, which basically I loved—I'd call it a solid 90%—is that it was way too combat heavy for me. I thought it felt too "shooter-y" and not enough of the exploration and puzzle solving.

You were talking before about vast puzzles that you have to manipulate, things that need to be solved in a certain order, and backtracking. In order to achieve and move on to the next area you really have to do a complex series of things...and this game was a lot more linear in that respect. There were some side areas. There were the Challenge Tombs, and there were areas like Shipwreck Beach or the Mountain Village, where there was lots to explore and you could go off into side areas, but I didn't really feel like there were any places where you really had to explore far and wide to find some obscure thing or some obscure lever in order to proceed. And that to me is disappointing because I feel like that is one of the bases—one of the real foundations—of Tomb Raider. It felt good, and it was a fun game to play, but it didn't really feel so Tomb Raider-y in that respect to me.

Kris: I totally agree. When we were doing our InRaiderSpect special, one of the debates it raised was that for me, Tomb Raider is all about puzzles. They've never really got combat right in Tomb Raider up until this game actually, [but] none of the puzzles in this game are a patch on St. Francis' Folly, say, the Opera House—these incredible, elaborate puzzles, which just take you back and forth between levels, within a level, over great distances, and it's just so intricate. You're holding so much in your head. The level is mapped completely onto your retinas, into your brain, every single nook and cranny of that level. Less so with this, particularly once you've completed the game and you want to go back. It's very truncated, very fragmented, your route through the game. You can't go through it clearly because you've pretty much wrecked it.

Stella: Right. Right. Certain things no longer exist—bridges or things you need to jump over. Yeah.

Kris: Exactly. Which, whilst logical, is a little bit frustrating.

Stella: Um, definitely. I agree with that. On the other hand, I would bring up the point about the fast travel, which I think was a really nice addition. So rather than having to reload a level and play a thing in order to get all the goodies, they gave you that fast-travel option, where you could just go back—and things were different when you went back. Like the scenery was different. There were different people there. It may be a different time of day. And I thought that was very well executed. But, yeah, the puzzles individually and the puzzles as an obstacle to progression, I think, were lacking.

Kris: I highly agree. I completely agree, which is why I downloaded the full collector's edition—whatever it was called—to make sure I'd have as many puzzles as possible.

Stella: I wish they would add some more new single-player content. Oh! And that was another thing: the multi player. No interest whatsoever. Sorry. No thanks.

Kris: I've not even got it written down here. I don't really want to talk about it. [Both laugh.]

Stella: Yeah. Good. Because I don't either. I haven't played it and I'm not going to play it. I have no interest.

Kris: Oh! It's awful. It's awful.

Stella: OK. Good. Then I'm not missing anything.

[Game voice-over - Lara: I had to kill some of them. I had no choice. Roth: That can't have been easy. Lara: It's scary just how easy it was.]

Kris: But with regards to Lara, there was a sense they were really keen to distance her from being the sexualized version that you got in the previous incarnations. This is a person who.... It's not the Hollywood kind of depiction of a person. You don't see her at her most glamorous, say. For example, even compared to Nathan Drake, it's completely unglamorous, this version. It's completely divorced from that.... She undergoes horrific injuries throughout. She's swimming in blood and filth and dirt. She's scarred, she's cut, she's stabbed. She's got limbs broken, dislocated. It's incredible. You get these moments where...certain lines such as, "It's scary how easy it was" to kill someone. This idea that actually she's kind of scared of herself, and there's a sense that it's awakened within her this survival reflex. It's quite extraordinary.

Stella: I don't know whether I would have chosen a reboot if it were me at the helm, but I think, having made that choice, they did a good job in starting out with an undeveloped character and developing her. And you can see the evolution as she got tougher, and you can see, through the things she said, like the quote that you mentioned, and then on the beach when Reyes is sort of berating her for letting the other character, Alex, die.... "People who are caught around you," [Reyes] says, "don't have a very high survival rate." And Lara says, "Better keep your distance, then." You can see a little of that snark from the original character start to emerge, little by little, and by the end obviously she's take-charge. And, again I would say, the only ball that was dropped...is the way the character evolves just verbally and psychologically doesn't really fit with all the many murders that have gone on up to that point. [Both laugh.] It's like, "it was scary how easy it was," and now let's kill 400 more guys. [Both laugh.] The story and the action don't really proceed in parallel, I guess is what I'm trying to get at.

Kris: It's like RoboCop....yeah. I must admit, I did kind of ride that wave. Particularly when you get the grenade launcher attachment.

Stella: Well, the weapon mechanics and the fighting mechanics are so brilliant. It's just so very well executed, the way the bow works, the way the other weapons work, and it's like, sure, you want blow some stuff up. That's great. But is this really the way the story goes? I don't know. I guess it's a minor complaint, but it's a complaint I've heard a lot, and it's something that I agree with.

In the older Tomb Raider games, sure, she would kill people. People would die. Lara would leave a trail of bodies, but they were a variety of enemies. There were wolves and bats, and it kind of escalated slowly. Like she didn't step onto the first level and start gunning down museum guards. That wasn't until the fourth or fifth level. [Both laugh.]

Kris: I know. And you're kind of thinking what of this is a survival mechanism that's hardwired into

her? And which is just this cold-blooded....?

Stella: She's a psychopath, yeah, or a sociopath, I guess. [Laughs.]

[Roth voice-over: You can do it, Lara. After all, you're a Croft.]

Kris: OK, so moving from Lara to the relationship she has with other characters. I think for the first time really, they tried to do it with *Legend* and through *Anniversary* to *Underworld*, we've got more of a fleshed out set of characters for Lara to work with. Particularly the character of Roth, I thought, was very interesting. We've had this mentor role before, taken up by Von Croy towards the end of the first era of games, who was an archaeologist. And this time, we've got somebody who's just a survivalist, a person who's trained in teaching survival techniques. That sets the tone, I think, for this game, as opposed to the other one, where her mentor/father figure was very much rooted in archaeology. This one it's all about survival, and the archaeology is something she learned in school. There's a clear divorce that she brings together and embodies—this kind of Indiana Jones figure—which I thought was particularly interesting.

Stella: I agree. That is an interesting point. I didn't really think about it that way. As far as the character of Roth, I thought he was interesting and pretty well developed for a minor, NPC-type guy. And I cried. I cry every time the bad thing happens to him, and I guess I shouldn't spoil it. So, they've done a good job in that respect. The Von Croy thing always kind of creeped me out because he was always a little bit of a pedo. [Laughs.] Like the way his relationship was with Lara, he was always kind of smarmy and a little weird, and she was a little too flirty with him. I liked the way they set up Lara and Roth's relationship as a real father-daughter, comrades-in-arms type of thing.

Kris: Definitely. Also, the relationship between Reyes and Roth as well. What did you make of the diary/journal kind of extracts that you'd happen upon?

Stella: I think that was one of the best things about the game, honestly. The whole story of Hoshi, the handmaiden. I thought that was awesome. That was so well written and just really touching.

Kris: I love the anachronisms...the overlaps...

Stella: Yeah, finding lots of different things from lots of different eras. The World War II people and then the older documents and then her crewmates'. Very well done. I liked that.

Kris: It was interesting, though, one thing I didn't think about is she comes across as almost a bit of a snoop. She's reading these personal journals....

Stella: Yeah, like Alex's diary about her, and Reyes's diary about her. Yeah. And it also makes you want to find all the collectibles. You're going to get more story if you go off the beaten path and try to find all these things. You can play through and get a shallow version—the combat-heavy version [both laugh]—but if you go off the beaten path and find all these things, listen to the recordings, and read the diaries, you'll get the full picture.

Kris: And it becomes this strata of history, the contemporary and very ancient, they're all kind of

interweaving with one another....

Stella: Yeah, and you find them at intervals so you're not getting one story in one level. You get them all throughout the game, little by little.

Kris: I must admit I did feel sorry for the character of Alex, who basically sacrificed himself for what looked to be a spanner and a screwdriver.

Stella: Yeah. Definitely. [Whimpers.] And then there was Steph, the one who didn't survive. You saw her in the first trailer and then you saw her strung up in the first cave. She's in the multi-player, but you don't really know anything about her—who she was or whether she had a personality or aspirations. Poor Steph.

Kris: Yeah. Wow.

Stella: Look into that if you haven't already. She's the girl in the multi-player with the yellow top, and she's the first body in the cave when Lara escapes from the Scavenger's Den. You see her strung up on the altar with the candles. In the first trailer, called "Turning Point," oddly enough—we've talked about that before—Lara refers to her as Steph. She says, "Oh, Steph! What happened to you?" or something like that. There were obviously a few characters that didn't make the final cut and maybe someday we'll know more about them—or maybe we won't.

[NOTE: I apologize. Here I misspoke. It wasn't the "Turning Point" trailer at all but the "[Crossroads](#)" one. Lara mentions Steph at 0:41 and 1:56. There's also an entry about her on the [Tomb Raider Wiki](#).

[Lara voice-over: OK. Here goes....]

Kris: OK, so moving from the characters' relationships to the game itself, this idea of setting it in a single location. The closest we came to this before was in *The Last Revelation*, where most if not all of the levels were set in Egypt. What did it feel like for you having the entire game set in one location, almost happening in real time?

Stella: I think that was a really, really good design choice. First of all, there's enough variety in the levels—and because of the freaky weather phenomena, that whole thing being part of the storyline, and the fact that there were so many different things, from the hot, oppressive Geothermal Cavern level to the snow on top of the radio tower and all that—it felt varied enough that it didn't seem like you were in the same place the whole time. Yet it was compact, and you could move around, and you could see on the world map all the different places and how really tightly knit they were. When you did your previous InRaiderSpect episode about the labyrinths and turning points, I thought of that often as I played this game. Because you do backtrack. You go forward, you come back, you explore a new area and then you see it from a different angle later in the game. That definitely came into play here, and I thought it was very well done.

Kris: I just loved the logic. It was so logical, more so than any of the other Tomb Raider games in the sense that—what infuriated me sometimes was that you'd think sometimes, what it is about this ancient civilization that caused them to design something where there's this convenient pole here?

Whereas, the level design here was really well done and orchestrated so everything felt natural and fluid, from every rope swing to every plank—the bridge as it was falling apart. You felt yourself clutching at it as you were climbing up and it felt entirely fluid and natural in that regard.

I love the idea of it just being set on an island. There's something nice and symbolic about that. It reminded me of the famous stories with islands—everything from *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Robinson Crusoe*, to *Lost*. This island will forever be the place where a survivor was born...a tomb raider was born.

Stella: Yeah. The crucible. Exactly.

Kris: It's all encapsulated in this one place, and I really like that as an idea. I thought it was a wonderful metaphor for Lara Croft's journey, as it were.

One thing I always thought a bit odd was how come there are no female islanders?

Stella: Yeah, I don't know. I guess they either pass the trials or they don't. When they get tried, they don't survive and that's it.

Kris: I don't know whether that was something on purpose, to place an emphasis on the female characters, like Himiko and Lara and Sam and Reyes, these particular people. Maybe the possibility of gunning down female islanders perhaps didn't appeal to them as much as a group of shouting men. I found that quite interesting.

Stella: Developing a strong female energy, sort of in opposition to this brutish, caveman-style civilization. She's more civilized. She's come from this place. She's kind of a duck out of water but she has to fight her way....

[Lara voice-over: Oh, God! What's going on here? Wait! I can use that bow.]

Kris: So in terms of the art style as well, one thing that was really impressed upon me was the esthetic of this game, its overall look and feel.

Stella: Yes. It's beautiful. It's gorgeous, very well designed.

Kris: Oh, yeah. And very distinct texture, everything from the grimy, sinister, quite horrific butchery of places to the gorgeous vistas.

Stella: Lots of good contrast: darks and lights, different times of day, different weather. So much attention [to detail]. If you look at the Definitive Edition—I haven't played the whole thing, but I've seen a few people playing it; I've seen the screenshots—and they've done a lot, even more, with the weather. Mist, wind, light reflecting off things. It's just gorgeous!

Kris: That sequence where you're traveling down on the gondola through the mist, I just thought was superb. And at the beginning, where you emerge out of that hole...and the sun...and the titles come up....

Stella: She's gasping. She's reborn out of the earth and she's gasping. She's freshly ejected from the womb into this harsh world. [Laughs.] Yet it's beautiful. Yeah. Yeah.

Kris: There's a similar shot to that. Have you seen the film called *The Descent*?

Stella: Yeah. It's got women who are on a nature retreat, spelunking or something? Yeah. I saw that.

Kris: Yeah, that's it. There's a very similar shot to that. Her emerging from a hole....

Stella: I suspect there was some influence there. I don't know for sure but....

Kris: Yeah. [Both laugh.] And I love the end level, the Ziggurat. You look at it from a distance and you can see where you've got to go....

Stella: Yeah. That reminded me a bit of the old games. You can see your ultimate goal in the distance and how am I going to get there with the tools I have? Oh! That was another thing I wanted to mention: the business of "gear gating." Like where she doesn't have the climbing axe at first and then she gets it. She doesn't have rope arrows at first and then she gets them. Then it brings all these new areas into accessibility. Like you couldn't reach here, now you can. I thought that was extremely well done.

Kris: And again it felt logical, and I loved how elemental this stuff was. It felt so raw and kind of primitive. You're starting off with a handmade bow and arrow, a rudimentary axe that you've made yourself, and building on that, modifying that. You felt like a survivor doing it...and learning these particular skills, such as foraging and animal instinct....

Stella: Right. And what should I choose first? Will I be OK if I choose this and I don't choose that? Yeah.

Kris: I found that fantastic.

[Lara voice-over: Ugh! I hate tombs!]

Kris: With regards to its relationship to the originals, did you get a sense that it was trying to distance itself from the original universe?

Stella: Yes and no. I have mixed feelings about that. I think they did strive to make Lara, as you said at first, less sexy—not that she's not attractive, but less of a sex icon and more of a real person—like somebody you might actually know. Yes in that respect and no in that they put in a few little nods to the old players. Things like the GPS secret. When you find the last one, you hear the chime that's the traditional Tomb Raider secret chime. I don't know if you found all your items.

Kris: Aaahhh!

Stella: And then Lara says, in the new Lara's voice, "Ah-ha!" like she said in *Tomb Raider II* when she

would find a secret.

Kris: Oh! Fantastic!

Stella: So, there are a few things like that if you keep your eyes open.

Kris: That's strange because I've got 100% and I must have forgotten that because it was a while ago since I played it.

Stella: Are you playing it on PC or a console?

Kris: Console.

Stella: Oh, because I was going to say I'd send you a save file and you could watch it again. [Both laugh.] But when you find the last GPS secret, you hear "cha-ching!" and Lara goes, "Ah-ha!" [Giggles.]

Kris: I love that. And also there were several sections where—they didn't linger on it too long—after Roth's demise, she picks up his dual pistols.

Stella: Mmm hmm. Yep. That was another one.

Kris: And at the end when the camera looks up she's holding the two pistols and it's that classic silhouette of Lara Croft that we all know and love.

Stella: Right. We remember that. That strikes a chord.

Kris: Exactly. They kind of flirted with the originals in that regard. It's a game that's not set in Egypt—it's got nothing to do with Egypt—and that quote she says, "I hate tombs," which I loved.

Stella: Yeah. A lot of people apparently don't understand the concept of irony. So they were all irate, like, "What do you mean she doesn't like tombs!?" [Laughs.]

Kris: Oh, dear!

Stella: Never mind that she says, "I hate tombs," and then the next thing she does is she starts looking and reading the inscriptions and being totally fascinated by the whole thing. Yeah.

Kris: I know some people have found it quite jarring how she goes from doing, as you say, this mammoth killing thing to, "Ooh! What's this?"

Stella: Yeah. Oh! [Both laugh.]

Kris: I quite like that because it's the sense that, yes, she's a survivalist, but she's also passionate about archaeology....

Stella: Really interested. Yeah. Definitely. And, you know, feeling sort of overwhelmed but also

fascinated. Exactly.

Kris: And the ethical ramifications of what she does. Unlike the character of Whitman, who starts off as being the lead archaeologist. He's pretending to be the adventure-archaeologist. He's not really. It's all a lie. It's all artifice. It's all captured on camera; whereas she's the real survival-archaeologist, the one who goes out there into the unknown to find these lost treasures, but she's very sensitive to them, I think.

Stella: Mmm hmm. [agrees]

Kris: Did you get a sense that this game was trying to be an anti-*Uncharted* or trying to divorce itself from *Uncharted*, a very popular platformer?

Stella: I have not played the *Uncharted* games, I have to say, because I don't own a PlayStation. So everything I know about them is based on second-hand information, having watched some videos, and read about it. So I don't really know for sure. I've heard some comparisons, like in terms of the way the action is structured, the number of interactive cut scenes, and things like that. People were saying it's *more* like *Uncharted*. But I don't know. That's an interesting point that you brought up, but I'm not sure.

Kris: The point I was going to make is that I actually prefer the action in *Tomb Raider* because it felt less Hollywood-ized. Obviously it stretches credulity in terms of the action sequences, but they're so well done. They just go to the point where if they went one step further, they'd take you into the ridiculous, which *Uncharted* happily embraces. This kind of highly Hollywood-ized....

Stella: Mmm hmm. Campy. Etcetera.

Kris: Yeah. Which I love, this summer blockbuster, popcorn kind of game.

Stella: I think it's good that *Tomb Raider* did not go all the way there. For obvious reasons, like you don't want to be a copycat, but also it just doesn't feel "*Tomb Raider*."

Kris: No. I think that some wonderful moments, which have just got this wonderful emotional undercurrent flowing through them. You're not just taking part in a fantastic set piece. That climb up the ziggurat at the end has got all the weight of her struggle from beginning to here. You really feel it. As I said earlier, in those moments [such as] where you get the grenade launcher, and she's like, "I'm coming for you, you bastards!" And it feels great. They're running away from her.

Stella: "She's just one girl. She's kicking our asses!" [Both laugh.]

Kris: It's brilliant. I loved it for that. There are echoes here of the '70s film *I Spit on Your Grave*.

Stella: Right. Right.

Kris: But also *Apocalypse Now*, when you're on the boat going up river into this mysterious place, Mathias taking on the role of Kurtz.

Stella: Again, the only major thing I would change was the amount of combat, which I thought was way too much, the variety of enemies—like smelly dude after smelly dude after smelly dude. What happened to bats and wolves and, you know, gradual escalation? And I would like to have seen more of the supernatural element. And I suspect that we may in the next one.

Kris: That's interesting because I didn't mind actually. It toed the line quite well, I thought. There was a sense that there was the supernatural there....

Stella: They paced it very well. Like when she first shows up, she's a complete disbeliever in anything supernatural. She kind of scoffs at Sam's stories about the Sun Queen. "This is where she loses me," when she starts talking about the mystical, woo-woo type stuff. [Both laugh.] And then, by the end, she's fully on board. Like, this has been a freaky thing, and my father was right, and I want to know more. I like that.

Kris: That's a common theme of the whole game, isn't it? This idea of myth versus reality. One of the reasons you get the feeling she's distanced herself from her father is because of the stories he told that she didn't believe. There's this logical head on her shoulders. She's unwilling to suspend her disbelief with regards to this until she's thrown into a situation where logic has to go out the window because what she's seeing before her just defies all logic. And you're right, how it paces it, these freak weather occurrences....

Stella: She comes out of the building onto that bridge area and it's snowing, and she's like, "Hmm...what's going on? This is not normal." And then it just goes downhill—uphill and downhill—from there.

Kris: And it's this whole idea of pathetic fallacy, they call it in drama, where in a lot of symbolist plays they'd use the weather to get a sense of what the narrative would be like. If there was a huge storm outside, you'd know that something heated would happen, or something highly paced or very stressful would occur. If it was a calm, sunny day, you knew that something nice would occur. It really used that well.

Stella: They did a good job with that and the changes as she came up and down the hill, in and out of the different levels. The beautiful, sunny Cliffside Village and then down onto Shipwreck Beach. You could see the clouds parting and the sun coming out. Yeah. Exactly.

Kris: So this idea then that actually her journey to become a survivor, a tomb raider, is also for the first time to appreciate her father and to want to follow him almost, in his pursuits. This whole idea of Roth perpetuating this quote, "You're a Croft," and what does it mean to be a Croft. She says, "I'm not that kind of Croft." What does that mean? It's this legacy that's passed down to her that she has to kind of learn. I think the next games in the series, I suppose, looking ahead, will continue with that journey of what it is to be a Croft.

Stella: No doubt. Maybe she is that kind of Croft after all, and we'll find out how....

[Lara voice-over: For years I resented my father, doubted him like the rest, but he was right about so

much. I just wish I could tell him that now. There are so many mysteries that I once dismissed as mere stories, but the line between our myths and truth is fragile and blurry. I need to find answers. I must understand.]

Kris: So looking ahead then, what do you think we can expect from the next game in the series, the sequel to Tomb Raider? Because we know they're working on one.

Stella: Well, they gave a few hints at the end, where she's on the boat and she's looking at her journal—or her dad's journal, I guess it is—and you see a few little clues. And everybody on the internet has gone wild speculating about what could happen next, where she'll go next. I don't know.

I hope that it's interesting. I hope that there are more supernatural elements. I hope that the combat is a little less of a major player and that the puzzle solving and the environmental action are played up more, or at least as much as in this game. I want to get lost. When I play Tomb Raider, I like to get lost. As great as this game was, and as epic as the action was, I didn't really get lost. That wasn't something that happened to me. Part of it was well-implemented in-game help—like when you press your Survival Instinct, you can see where you're supposed to go next—but I kind of like getting lost. Is that weird?

Kris: No, it's not weird at all. I'm exactly the same. It's important to get lost in games. *Tomb Raider II*, I can run around Venice for weeks. I just love it. I just love the possibilities.

Stella: There's a keyhole here that opens a door five miles away.

Kris: Exactly. [Both laugh.]

Stella: It doesn't make any sense but it's still fun. There's got to be a way to implement that type of feeling in a more logical way. And if I could do it, I'd be a rich game designer. [Laughs.] But I'm hoping for more of that in the future.

Kris: Do you think we'll ever return to Croft Manor?

Stella: Hmm...I don't know. They've set up her backstory a little differently. Apparently she has money but she's decided not to touch it until her parents are found, or if they ever turn up. It's kind of open ended. I'm not sure whether there is a Croft Manor. I guess we'll find out.

Kris: Are there any characters in this current game you could foresee seeing in future installments?

Stella: I don't know. It seems like she's ready to start a new chapter. A lot of people like Sam and want to see her again. I don't feel a specifically strong attachment to Sam.

That sort of takes me back to the idea of the ending. I wanted to ask you a question, which was what you thought of the ending and whether you found it satisfying? I don't know if you noticed my blog post a while back. I wrote about [how] on one of the podcasts [the developers] talked about having had an original ending, in which Sam was possessed by the Sun Queen and Lara had to sacrifice her in order to save everybody else. Then they changed that because the players who playtested the game

found it to be emotionally unsatisfying. So, I don't know. I don't think I would have been in agreement with that. I kind of like the idea of the ultimate sacrifice. Like Roth says, you don't know about sacrifice; you only know about loss. I feel like if they had implemented that original ending she would have really understood the concept of sacrifice—having to sacrifice your best friend in order to escape and save everybody else—and I think that would have had a lot more emotional impact and character building.

Kris: I agree because, again, the island would take on even more significance for Lara, and also it could have lent itself to some sort of future sequel akin to what they did with Lara Croft's mother in *Tomb Raider: Legend*. This person who's lost but actually is caught in this liminal state between life and death.

Stella: Right. That could be interesting!

Kris: So, I agree. I think I would have preferred that original ending. It would have been quite a bold move actually.

Stella: I thought so.

Kris: And further taken it away from *Uncharted 3*, which I think was confronted with a similar situation but didn't act on it. So that would have further distanced [Tomb Raider] from [Uncharted]. And that wouldn't have affected that last scene, where she's on the boat.

Stella: No, I don't think so. I think it would have made it even more powerful, honestly.

Kris: I'm not going home.

Stella: Because sacrifice...that's a *real* sacrifice. I must kill my best friend, or allow her to be taken over by this force, in order to save everybody else and to save myself. So there's some guilt there, and then there's some triumph there, and it's a real mixed bag—a complicated set of emotions—not just a cut scene where you gun down the bad guy. [Laughs.] You know, you didn't even really get to fight Mathias. You just pressed the buttons and then it was over. I thought that was kind of a letdown.

Kris: I'm terrible because I don't like boss battles. I hate boss battles. So avoiding Mathias was just a nice relief for me because that was entirely a quick time event.

Stella: It seemed odd though. I mean, didn't it seem kind of discordant to you, to have so much combat leading up to that, gradually training Lara to be more and more tough, and handle more and more enemies, and then the final battle is not even a battle? I was a little disappointed.

Kris: I suppose I agree. I like the idea that she shoots him with the two pistols.

Stella: Yeah, that was good.

Kris: It's almost like her first kill as a tomb raider, the tomb raider we know.

Stella: Sure. Could they have done that as an actual combat mechanic, though? I don't know. I guess it would have involved more coding, but I think it would have been more satisfying.

Kris: It's almost as if we're leading up to a battle with Mathias. We keep seeing him. It felt a bit clunky those instances where you'd see him with Sam and then something would happen where you'd get split up from them. Repeatedly. And then you don't actually end up engaging him in the final...

Stella: Yeah. They were building it and it never finally came to fruition. OK. So, mixed review on the ending. [Both laugh.] But I liked that last scene, where she's on the boat. She's looking forward and she's not going home. She's decided.

[Game music outro.]

Kris: Well that brings the definitive end to InRaiderSpect. Thank you, Stella, for joining me and getting me through *Tomb Raider III* all those years ago. And thank you, listener, for tuning in. If you've liked what you've heard or want to make suggestions about where you think Tomb Raider is going, then let us know at inretrospectpodcast.com. You can find us on [Facebook](#), Twitter [@inretweetspect](#), and [Stitcher Radio](#). The best thing you can do is go over to iTunes, subscribe, and leave us a cheeky, 5-star rating. We'd really appreciate it.

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Until next month, bye!

[Lara voice-over: "I'm not going home." Followed by swelling theme music.]