

Whether you loved the games or not, most people can't deny the tremendous influence that the *Tomb Raider* series holds on today's culture and society. Released in October 1996, *Tomb Raider* by Eidos Interactive and Core Design Ltd. revolutionized the 3D game industry. Not only was it a 3D game, but it also offered something the PC gaming community had not seen before – a third-person shooter with gameplay elements drawn from 2D platform games and an unforgettable heroine, Lara Croft. Lara Croft enjoys fame that many celebrities merely dream of, having over 4,000 Internet homepages dedicated to her, appearing in music videos, comic books, and on June 15th, 2001, she will be on the silver screen. Centering around this phenomenon, we journey into a case history of *Tomb Raider*: a story of its beginnings, the people behind the game, its authority over computer game design, and finally, the technological, business, and cultural influences it possesses over today's society.

Tomb Raider: The Creators

In the midst of the electronics and digital entertainment boom of the mid-80s, cities, such as Manchester and Liverpool, England became centers for all that was hot and new. Novel job descriptions of computer game designer lured young, talented programmers worldwide to try their luck in a budding field that promised to shape the future. From this mayhem, a bright star emerged. His name was Jeremy Smith. Filled with inspiration and backed by nine years of industry experience, Smith teamed up with an ambitious group of developers from Gremlin Graphics, a small company in nearby Derby, England, and founded Core Design in 1988. As president and single sales and

marketing professional of this newly-found software development company, Jeremy Smith was set to lead his team to greatness.

Over the next ten years, Core Design aimed for quality instead of quantity of games and only produced a handful of titles. This led to Core's lack of fame outside the middle England region. From a small, ambitious programming studio (the two floors of a roomy townhouse), Smith sought dedicated team members--the first being his own brother, Adrian (then pursuing a career selling computer-design systems). Working together, the two brothers combined their leadership skills and brought the company to a worldwide entertainment business with the help of game creators Andy Green, Robert Toone, Terry Lloyd, and Chris Shrigley. Instead of publishing under its own logo, Core limited itself to the conception and developments of technically demanding games. Also, marketing was left primarily to other companies, so as a behind-the-scenes power, the recognition of Core's talent was delayed.

Core's first best seller happened in 1989 and was an adventure game called *Rick Dangerous*, which might as well have been named *Tomb Raider*. In a Mayan temple setting, the hero of the game, Rick Dangerous, jumped over ruin grates, fought temple guards and explored deadly labyrinths filled with magical artifacts. The ambiance and movements such as running, jumping, battling, crawling and climbing were similar between the 10-year predecessor and its modern counterpart. However, unlike *Tomb Raider*, the game had a typical 2D side scrolling adventure and non-continuous run and jump movements in a fixed screen.

After *Rick Dangerous*, Core continued to work hard to produce technologically sound games which unfortunately, earned small profits. In 1990, Core began marketing

games under its own name and created titles such as *Thunderhawk*, a flight simulation game and *Jaguar XJ220*, Core's first racing game on the Amiga. Before the world took notice of Core, insiders discovered the technical potential of the small developer after seeing their work in these games. Sega, the Japanese video game giant most successful in Europe, became Core's first international partner in 1993. Core began developing for the new Sega Mega CD system and with games like *Thunderhawk*, Core blew away the international programming competition and earned worldwide recognition. Following their work with Sega, other Japanese companies like JVC (Victor Company of Japan, Ltd.) formed partnerships with Core. For the JVC game system Wondermega, Core created *Wonderdog*, which was strangely only marketed in Japan where the game sales went horribly, with an audience that could not relate to the English-speaking characters. Despite an over-abundance of talent, Core Design could not sustain itself financially with the sales of these games. Unfortunately, this was largely due to the failure of the consoles in which they developed for. In Europe, *Thunderhawk* sold about 300,000 units, which happened to be a huge hit for the system, but months later, the hardware was essentially dead. Jeremy Smith said, "The Mega CD was a disaster! We were lucky that *Thunderhawk* was out when there were hardly any other Mega CD games." As a consequence of the financial trouble resulting from unstable hardware, English gaming publisher and distributor CentreGold took over Core Design in 1994.

Meanwhile in London, Eidos Interactive slowly made its way into the gaming industry. Founded in 1990, Eidos began its roots in the field of video compression technology. At the time, the firm was barely known, even to industry insiders until 1995, when the company moved into the entertainment software market with the acquisition of