

Toby Guard

Inventor, creator, guardian ... Mr. Guard takes a few moments of his time to answer some fans questions ...

Where and how did your passion for gaming begin?

It began at a very early age. I've loved gaming for many, many years and so you can imagine I really enjoy what I do now. Gaming has become huge with some games making more money than even blockbuster movies. Plus with new next-gen technology we can now offer consumers even better games with near photo-realistic graphics, almost like an interactive movie. I'm personally loving this next-gen gaming revolution and I think gaming is going to continue to be a large part of my life, probably forever.

Where and how was the concept of Lara born?

I was working at Core at the time. I'd seen in the mid-1990s the rise of girl power throughout society. You had strong independent women in the media at the time such as the Spice Girls and Neneh Cherry and there was a definite feeling of camaraderie amongst women throughout the UK at least. Our original idea was to cast a male character, an explorer in the mould of Indiana Jones, but then I thought it would be more interesting to make the main character a woman. We came up with a character called Lara Cruz but the name didn't sound English enough so we finally settled on Lara Croft. Nobody had really cast a female lead character in gaming at the time so it was a real risk that we were taking. It turned out to be a risk well worth taking as she was universally embraced and the game went on to become a massive success, beyond even our wildest dreams.

How do you feel Tomb Raider as a game progressed after you left? A lot of fans were disappointed with Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness do you understand why this happened?

I think Core did a great job. They consistently

made great Tomb Raider games for many years. Angel Of Darkness was obviously not too well received and some think it did some damage to the Tomb Raider franchise, but everyone can make mistakes and it wouldn't be fair to Core to remember them for that game alone. With Angel Of Darkness, I think the game had a really tight deadline and the development team were rushed. Also Lara spent much of the game wandering around cities and I think fans felt that Lara had forgotten what she was good at, namely tomb raiding. That said, I think with Legend and now Anniversary we've given the fans what they want and there's a new vibrance among the online community and a genuine excitement for what's to come next.

Did you expect Tomb Raider to be as successful as it has been over the past decade?

Of course we expected it to be successful but we never thought it would be as huge as it is. I mean, who would? The series to date has sold more than 32 million copies across all formats and we've also had two huge Hollywood blockbuster movies starring Angelina Jolie. Lara is now not only a gaming icon but also a cultural phenomenon and the future just continues to look really bright for her.

Have you played all the games yourself and if you had to choose your favourite level which one would it be?

I've played pretty much all of them. If I had to pick my favourite moment, it would have to be the T-Rex fight from the very first Tomb Raider, and now featuring in Tomb Raider: Anniversary. This was something that nobody expected and marked one of the first intense 3D action gaming experiences ever. In Anniversary we've been able to do so much more, with the benefit of 10 years of gaming technology, and now it's better than

ever before.

Have you played any of the many Custom Levels that are out there, if so do any stand out in particular for you?

I've not actually. I have however heard that there's some great material out there on the web and I've been meaning to check it all out online. I've been so busy with Anniversary and even now, just when you think you'll have a break, we've kicked off on Tomb Raider 8 so my time is pretty tied up again but I'm loving it.

The feeling of deja-vu must have been tremendous, but how did it feel to be invited to work on Tomb Raider: Anniversary?

Definitely working on Anniversary did hark me back to my time at Core on the original game 10 years ago. I have so many happy memories from that time that it was a pleasure to come back and re-imagine the very first adventure of Lara Croft. I'd already worked on Tomb Raider: Legend so I knew the Crystal Dynamics team really well and to be honest, it's been such a great experience and I'm so happy with the end product. To my mind, Anniversary is the best Tomb Raider yet and from what I've heard, the reviews that are coming in show that it's not just us who love this game.

Emily Britt recently referred to you as 'Lara's Guardian', could you reveal a little more about this role?

That's very flattering of her to say that. Well, I guess in some ways I could be called Lara's Guardian in that I designed the original character of Lara Croft and am quite protective of her development. Coming back to work on Tomb Raider with Legend and

now Anniversary has been so rewarding. I'm so proud of the Lara Croft character and it's great to be back looking after her and taking her forward into another ten years at the top of her game.

If you could change one thing about Lara what would it be (of course we know she is perfect but humour us)?

Talk about a tough question. I can't really say because if there's something I want to change there's a good chance I could actually do it seeing as I work on the games. I don't know, maybe in the next game I could make her fall madly in love with a dashing young developer by the name of Mr. Gard. No, seriously, I think she's pretty much perfect.

How would you like to see Lara evolve further, and do you think she has a future in tomorrow's gaming world?

Lara is here to stay, that's for sure. She's already survived ten years of gaming and is going stronger than ever. Personally I'd like to see Lara maintaining her position as one of the gaming A-list and marching into the next-gen area with style. The work we're doing on the next Tomb Raider game, exclusively for next-gen consoles, is looking fantastic and I think it's going to blow everyone away. Watch this space!

Tombraiderinc would like to thank Toby for taking the time to give us this exclusive interview.