



Lara Croft: Tomb Raider – Video game heroine becomes a global moviestar

Video transcript

IAN LIVINGSTONE:

2001 was the year that British video games hit Hollywood.

We released the first Tomb Raider back in 1996. The original idea was to have the main character as a man. But the design team felt a heroine would be better suited for the game's puzzle-solving elements.

So Lara Cruz was born; as she was originally known. Her name was changed, of course, to Lara Croft – to make her sound typically English.

Nobody really knew how gamers were going to react to her. Some saw Lara as an object of male desire. But to others she represented female empowerment – because she was independent, clever and strong.

We discovered about half of Tomb Raider's players were female.

And that first game sold a staggering 8 million copies.

Since then, there have been 11 more Tomb Raider titles. The games have brought in more than one billion dollars in revenue – something we'd never have dreamt of when we first developed the game.

But Tomb Raider – the brand – took on a life far beyond its video games roots.

Lara Croft's image began to grace magazine covers alongside A-list celebrities. Lucozade changed its name to Larazade for 3 months, and saw a significant spike in sales. The huge buzz around Lara attracted the attention of some really big players.

After negotiation, we licenced Lara Croft to Paramount Pictures. And in 2001 – Lara Croft: Tomb Raider was released starring Angelina Jolie.

It was an instant box office hit, grossing 274 million dollars in its opening weekend alone.

Here was a video game that started life as a simple sketch and became a valuable intellectual property in its own right.

A game crafted by a handful of creative Brits in a small studio in the East Midlands, had become a global phenomenon.

Today, much of the revenue generated by Tomb Raider travels overseas. The franchise was bought by a Japanese company in 2009 and the game is now made in the States.

But at the time, it proved what an enormous commercial and cultural punch a British video game could pack.

Lara Cruz concept sketches courtesy of Core Design / Eidos Interactive (now Square Enix)