| **An Interview with Phil Campbell** |
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|  | *-- by Brian Chew**Philip Campbell is the designer behind Tomb Raider Gold and Tomb Raider II Gold. He is based at Eidos San Francisco. We recently asked him a few questions, and he kindly responded.* |
| **TRTG:** | We at the Tomb Raiders Traveler's Guide (TRTG) have long been advocates of a good background story behind any game. It looks like you and your team have come up with an intriguing and solid backplot for Tomb Raider II Gold: Golden Mask. There's no question from the details you've provided in your press releases why Lara is headed for Alaska. We're looking forward to seeing how the story unfolds! |
| **Phil Campbell:** | I've been a visitor [to TRTG] for a long time, and love your carefully crafted backstories. It's hard to get over a story, especially with no cut scenes, but I do write out a complete overview when I pitch the new levels. I will try to keep you informed as the game progresses, but I can't give away the whole story now. To date, I've tried to keep everyone aware of the background with press releases etc... |
| **TRTG:** | We realize that you and Vicky Arnold, script-writer for Tomb Raider I, II and III, are limited by time and resources in terms of presenting a long background story in-game, but we're wondering if there will be any FMVs or cut-scenes appearing in TR2 Gold? |
| **Phil:** | We actually storyboarded cut-scenes this time, but the time pressure has just not made it feasible to do the FMV work. We only have 3 months for this entire project, and the guys at Core are busy on other projects. I think we will try to release the storyboards (rough though they may be!) on our website. We made a deliberate effort to flesh out my Golden Mask story as much as possible - even to the extent of having a real one fabricated for the competition. You'll find that Tornarsuk is a specific type of Inuit spirit god, and this inspired the whole reincarnation scenario.Originally Lara was just going for the gold - we realised that this was too mercenary for her, and decided to add a 'spiritual' side to the quest. We made a deliberate effort to change the load screen so that we would present the player with a number of clues, all relating to the back story. The collage of this screen obscures the total content of these 'clues' (a good thing), but the newspaper actually has a whole article on the secret wartime base, and the blueprint really is a Russian version of a partial map of level 1! Melnikov island is fictional, but we know which island we picked to represent it! (Actually NOT the one circled in lipstick!) As the story unfolds, I hope it will be clear what is happening story-wise... |
| **TRTG:** | It looks like some of the storyboards have been released on the "[Designer Diary](http://www.tombraider.com/tr2gold/designer.html)" section of the TR2 Gold site! Could you tell us why Lara was in Tibet in the proposed opening sequence for Golden Mask? |
| **Phil:** | This is the jumping off point from Tomb Raider 2 - she first learns of the island when she is in Tibet during TR2. Obviously she finishes off her TR2 adventure before collecting all the clues for her Golden Mask adventure. There is a strong tie-in to Tibet. You should discover this further into the game! Wait 'til you see the long lost end-game cut-scene storyboard. Of course we can't publish it yet - we were very disappointed not to have the time to do it. |
| **TRTG:** | Will we ever be able to see the full copy of the May 24,1945 newspaper article and blueprints on the introductory screen? Will these images be available in-game or show up on the [Designer Diary](http://www.tombraider.com/tr2gold/designer.html)? |
| **Phil:** | Should be - also the manual will show a little more... |
| **TRTG:** | Glad to see Lara has finally made contact with something Russian -- that's one of the major countries/cultures of the world she hasn't visited yet. |
| **Phil:** | We wanted to portray Stalinist Russia, circa the end of World War II. The idea that our wartime allies, Russia, was 'taking advantage' and doing something expansionist in US owned Alaska even before the end of the war appealed to me. I liked the idea of a 'national no-man's-land' up there, and I wanted to set up something that wasn't purely American. Of course, there have always been rumors of Russian gold and the like, so I liked the idea of setting up the idea of a second 'Gold Rush' - only a more covert Cold War type of rush! Now, a third wave of gold hungry enthusiasts arrive - the mercenaries Lara must face... |
| **TRTG:** | Although we know it's "just a game", and that Tomb Raider is not really meant for younger kids, we were a bit concerned regarding no obvious motivation (moral or otherwise) for Lara to go after the Dagger of Xian in TR2. This could leave Lara looking like a cold-blooded killer who is willing to kill anyone/anything in her way of obtaining ancient artifacts. |
| **Phil:** | We definitely do NOT want Lara to appear mercenary - hers is a noble quest to find a remarkable ancient artifact. However, we like the idea that the *player playing Lara* is *very* mercenary, in his/her quest to find all the gold secrets - nice little double motivation there, if you don't think about it too hard! The A.V.A.L.A.N.C.H.E mercenaries are very mercenary - they are trying to find the lost gold. |
| **TRTG:** | One of the things we originally liked about TR1 was that there wasn't too much killing humans, and when Lara did, it seemed to be in self-defense. We know she's just a fictional character, and obviously she must have a few idiosyncrasies to be out there blasting endangered animals. But, I guess if you're spending that much time with her, you'd like to think she's a nicer person... |
| **Phil:** | Obviously, in TR2 Gold there is a rival organization she is fighting - A.V.A.L.A.N.C.H.E. They are humans, but they are thoroughly evil!!! Not only do they have the longest acronym in the world, they haven't got a clue what it means! We will have no immoral killing, save for Lara's tradition of the odd endangered animal - of course we don't agree with this, but you know, all the animals she fights have "gone bad", are rabid, evil, renegade ... endangered animals, and as such do not present Lara with a moral dilemma!Lara actually has allies in this game that can help her a lot - they also guide her to different places, and by level 3 and 4, the player may realise that all is not what it seems. We wanted to expand on the simple relationship that Lara had with the monks in TR2. We show the allies perform various acts that may or may not alter the motivations of Lara and the player...sorry to be so cryptic! |
| **TRTG:** | We did appreciate your comments that were published with the Tomb Raider Gold: Shadow of the Cat/Unfinished Business levels that let us know that Lara was hunting for the secret of the cat statue/eliminating the remaining Atlantean mutant threat respectively. However, we hope you don't mind that we did take the liberty of creating some "fan fiction" to fill out a little bit more of a background story to these two adventures. |
| **Phil:** | As I said before, I really liked these....In doing UB I was limited to settings from the original game - it was only during the cat levels that we realised we could add new textures. Atlantis WAS indeed a return to clear out the remaining baddies, and was originally intended to be released as 'expert' levels. They should have come before the cat levels on the disk and you should have started the cat levels with no inventory. I had completed the Atlantis levels at Core, and when I got back to Eidos San Francisco, I pitched a short story about Lara and the cat statue she passed in TR1. We realised we would have time to get two more levels done, so I enlisted the help of Rebecca Shearin (our senior artist) and we created as many new textures as we could in the time given. We were actually finished with the levels long before we eventually released them.*(TRTG editors note: We did realize that Phil meant for the Unfinished Business levels to occur right after the last Atlantis level from TR1, but we eventually decided to come up with a background story that would be consistent with the order the Shadow of the Cat/Unfinished Business levels were presented on the TR Gold CD.)* |
| **TRTG:** | Rich Morton, lead level designer for Tomb Raider III, confirmed to us that the gold idol found in Lara's treasure room in the TR3 training level is an "inside joke" that is a mix between Mike Schmitt's face and the gold idol Indiana Jones found in Raiders of the Lost Ark. However, we at the Traveler's Guide are guessing that it could also represent the Golden Mask of Tornarsuk! Is this a possibility? |
| **Phil:** | No, but we're always trying to get Mike into our games! Mike was the inspiration for "Schmitty's leap" in the first cat level (the bridge where the first 'cat transformation' took place). In fact, when we were testing the levels we would use a "Mike Schmitt at E3" texture map on rooms we hadn't finished. I hope the mask will appear in later treasure rooms - if Lara DOES, in fact, manage to lay her hands on it! TR3 and it's treasure room was long published before I even wrote "The Golden Mask of Tornarsuk"... |
| **TRTG:** | In Rich's reply, he mentioned the other artifact in Lara's treasure room is the "IRIS". Is it possible that TR3 Gold will feature Lara's adventure searching for the Iris? |
| **Phil:** | Good idea! - I've actually written another game pitch (not TR) which features a computer called I.R.I.S., and is all about the afterimage, double vision, twin realities, virtual bi-focals etc. etc. |
| **TRTG:** | The original press release from Core stated there is a secret 5th level, but since then, we've seen that the press release was revised to mention only four new levels. Is there still a possibility of a 5th secret level? (We as TR fans sure don't mind if you do publish a fifth level :-) |
| **Phil:** | No there isn't. We are just looking into a way of making entering the competition more interesting ... |
| **TRTG:** | What is the competition? |
| **Phil:** | The competition will be for a Golden Mask - it will be open only to those who buy the game. The Mask will be one of many items in some great prize packages... |
| **TRTG:** | Finally, we know you are limited to the TR2 engine in terms of creating environments and new enemies for Lara in TR2 Gold. However, I think you've done a remarkable job creating the Cold War level from scratch and making the enemies original and consistent with the environment. A pleasant surprise was that you were able to combine the sharks from the sunken ship levels, with the snowmobile from the Tibetan Foothills level, with the monks from the Barkhang Monastery level! |
| **Phil:** | Thanks - we were still restricted, but we were able to do a lot more this time. We don't have any programmers on the team, and must rely on the busy guys at Core to help us sort programming issues out. We have been able to add a lot more textures this time, and Reb has created some great new looks - from Level 2 onward you will see more and more differences. We like to find quirky things about the editor that we can exploit (much like the 'statue' enemies in Atlantis and the cat levels), and this time we found a few things (like the transparencies in the crystal rooms) we could do differently. We couldn't change the AI, but basically, from an overview of the content of TR2 I see what my 'kit of parts' is like, and design accordingly. Look out for a couple of old 'friends' from TR1! |
| **TRTG:** | If you are able to use enemies from different parts of the game, could we suggest that you include the boat from the Venice levels in a future level? How about reintroducing the tigers that were in the China levels as non-extinct sabretooth tigers? |
| **Phil:** | Well, we hesitated over the bald eagles, and who sez the boat isn't in there somewhere!? |
| **TRTG:** | Will there be any changes to the downloadable levels in the final retail version of TR2 Gold? E.g., some textures, obstacles, and sounds (e.g. adding Lara's "Aha")? |
| **Phil:** | I just discovered why the "Aha" sound was missing, and it's in! It's a real minefield, I feel like part programmer, part sound guy, part designer ... I guess that's a Project Leader's lot! Anyway - all the levels are being constantly tweaked, and we are getting a lot of help from Core getting it all to fit together.... |
| **TRTG:** | We thought the first level of TR2 Gold, "The Cold War" was fantastic! As with the TR1 Gold/Unfinished Business levels, once again, you've come up with fresh and original gameplay in a huge and very satisfying level which keeps up the quality and tradition found in the previous TR games. |
| **Phil:** | Thanks for your comments - they gave us a real morale boost AND go a long way to helping my superiors decide to do a TR3 Gold! |
| **TRTG:** | Finally, a big thanks from us to yourself and Core/Eidos for generously giving TR fans the new TR2 Gold levels free of charge! We know that these levels are a "labor of love" for you, and the quality shows. |
| **Phil:** | Thanks. We really appreciate it - I started as Art Director on other projects here, and it was really my enjoyment of TR as a fan that lead to me getting involved. It HAS to be a labor of love - Mike and the rest of us must constantly test and re-test these levels every day as we create them. We try to do what we can, with the restrictions we have, and it's all part of the equation that these levels are available free - we really DO want to give something back to our loyal fans! (Hey, nothing wrong with a bit of business, though - wait till you see the beautiful new box!). |
| **TRTG:** | What color is the box? |
| **Phil:** | The box is foil covered (super-sexy) and is generally white. I didn't want gold this time ... wanted more of an 'Alaskan' feel. |
| **TRTG:** | What is Mike Schmitt's role in this project? |
| **Phil:** | Mike is the US Producer for all Core games. He's been working with them since the early days ... he keeps us on schedule! I think he enjoys the experience of having the development team actually in the office. Unfortunately for him, he has to deal with me everyday - and my pathetic requests of "Are ye playin' me levels???" (bad Irish accent). We, the team of me, Reb and new-boy Kris, love to make up place names named after him in the levels, and some day we will feature him as a character in the game. |
| **TRTG:** | It's unfortunate that sometimes, the most vocal fans are also the most negative about Core/Eidos efforts, but we'd like you to know there are a lot of fans that appreciate your time and effort, and we can attest that you do listen and respond to the fans. |
| **Phil:** | When I have time I try to respond - I really hate hearing the standard "Core don't care about this", or "Eidos, the big faceless publisher..." etc. Granted this is a business - but you guys buy our games, we MUST respect your opinions. As a designer, the 'public interface' helps me to refine and perfect the designs I'm creating...Releasing levels on the net is a nerve-wracking business! - Kris, Rebecca and I sit here like nervous mothers watching our children on the swings ... or something like that! My five month-old daughter Charlotte is my muse and inspiration - I realise I've been working on TR2 Gold almost as long as she's been alive!*A big thanks to Phil for taking the time to answer our questions! For a further interview with Phil and Mike Schmitt, see* [*Theresa's Tomb Raider(s) site*](http://www.tombraiders.com/tr2gold/AprilInterview/Interview.htm)*.* |