

Revealed, the real woman behind Tomb Raider Lara



GIVING LIFE TO LARA: Judith Gibbins, above, is the voice behind the sexy computer star, while model Nell McAndrew promotes her in the flesh

BY PHILIP DERBYSHIRE

SHE is the voice of the computer age's foremost sex symbol, Lara Croft - the gun-toting, scantily-clad digital heroine who has inspired a million teenage fantasies.

But the woman who speaks for the animated star of Tomb Raider, the world's biggest selling home computer game, is a far cry from her electronic alter ego.

Judith Gibbins, 36, is a single mother from a mining town, who admits she has a tough time proving her link with Lara.

And yet when Tomb Raider III, the third version of the multi-million pound game, goes on sale later this month it will once again feature the distinctive tones of Judith.

She won the part two years ago when Derby-based Core Design, whose programmers created Tomb

Raider, auditioned local actresses. No one imagined back then that the first two Tomb Raider games would sell six million copies and turn Lara into a worldwide phenomenon.

Now Judith's voice is a vital component of Lara's success story, although she admits the two don't have much in common.

Lara's fictional history includes being taught at Wimbledon High School for Girls, Gordonstoun and a Swiss finishing school. And her father is a certain Lord Hensingléy-Croft.

Judith, whose father was an army corporal, was educated at the Royal Soldiers' Daughters School in London. Lara drives a snowmobile and brandishes rocket-launchers and Uzi submachine guns. Judith drives a Ford Sierra and says her favourite weapon is her wit.

And, as every Tomb Raider fan knows, brown-eyed, brunette Lara boasts the most amazing virtual-

reality vital statistics in history - 34D-24-35. Green-eyed, blonde Judith measures 34-26-38. And, at 5ft 8ins she is one inch shorter than her computerised counterpart.

But Judith, of Ilkeston, Derbyshire, has one thing in common with Lara - travel. Like the computer heroine's physical embodiment, 24-year-old lookalike model Nell McAndrew, she goes on promotional tours.

Judith said: "I've got to be at the end of the phone whenever they want, because Tomb Raider is the top-selling game and deals are going on all the time.

"This year alone I've been to Atlanta, Montpellier and Munich for promotional events and it's brilliant fun." Judith added: "The following in the US is incredible - people believe she exists. In Atlanta I did a voice-calibrated question-and-answer session, with me sitting behind a screen showing a digital

image of Lara. Most of the questions were, 'Will you marry me?', 'Can I have a date with you?' and 'What size are your breasts?'"

Her biggest line in Tomb Raider II was probably the phrase feared by all devotees: "No, that's not right. Go back to the beginning and try again." But she has much more to say in Tomb Raider III.

Core Design spokeswoman Susie Hamilton said: "We wanted an upper-class accent with character, a strong but sweet voice, and we felt Judith's was just the right kind."

But Judith, whose 11-year-old son David is still mastering Lara's moves on his PlayStation, admitted: "My problem is that Lara has such a sexy image and the game such a high profile that people don't believe me when I say I'm her.

"They want proof, so I have to say something to convince them. 'Go back to the beginning and try again' has become my party piece."



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