

# KNOWLEDGE AND FANTASY IN LARA CROFT

## CONCEPTIONS OF HISTORY IN TOMB RAIDER (2013)

Dr. Daniel Meis, University of Koblenz

In the video game *Tomb Raider (2013)*, the characters exhibit varying and developing conceptions of history. These differ more in detail than in principle. The movement from a strict adherence to scientifically proven facts to an openness to the truth of myths and supernatural phenomena is widespread among the characters. Such a conception of history is precisely what characterises the icon *Lara Croft* in its reception as such. In *Tomb Raider (2013)*, players only know the *Lara* who was open to mythologies and the supernatural. The 2013 reboot of the series, however, shows for the first time how *Lara* develops from a conventional scientist to an explorer of scientific frontiers. For the archaeologist *Lara*, this automatically goes hand in hand with a new conception of history. This article demonstrates the transformation of conceptions of history using all characters in *Tomb Raider (2013)*.

**Keywords:** Lara Croft, Tomb Raider, history, conception of history, action-adventure game

**Paper DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.48341/nt4v-0933>

**Format:** Peer-Review

## Introduction: 'A famous explorer once said that the extraordinary is in what we do, not who we are'<sup>1</sup>

Almost everything was new: the series got a reboot, the story was retold from the beginning, even the appearance of the protagonist was changed. *Tomb Raider (2013)* was not only the new beginning of one of the most popular video game series. It was also a reinvention. The game engine by Crystal Dynamic tried new ground, the gameplay was characterised by unusual details, and the occasional (self-)exaggeration and irony of earlier offshoots was stylishly grounded. The always strong *Lara Croft*, who could not be frightened by anything, was now portrayed as a young, vulnerable woman who first had to go through hell on earth to become the strong symbol she is known as within. In the process, the historical image of the *Lara* portrayed changed fundamentally. It expanded from the strict image of the scientific archaeologist to one open to the supernatural and mythologies. This applies equally to all the characters portrayed in the game.

The phenomenon of conceptions of history has often been the subject of academic research. It is difficult to provide a standardised definition for a conception of history. This is due on the one hand to the interdisciplinary nature of it, and on the other (and often overlooked) to the strongly national-historically centred super-categories of the philosophy of history, within which narratives, legends and, of course, conceptions of history usually originate.<sup>2</sup>

This essay is based on a common historiographical definition of historical images developed by a German historian:

'A conception of history is the stabilised structure of the considered or unconsidered historical ideas of a person or a group. The content of a conception of history is concrete and narratively retrievable. It is formed individually and collectively by adopting and modifying as well as concerning oneself with/dealing with other relevant conceptions of history. The economic, political, religious and ethnic environments are significant factors. Conceptions of history serve to simplify orientation in time and to stabilise identity. They can be revised and instrumentalised through individual and social experience as well as through education or propaganda. While historical consciousness manifests itself in the complex mental operations of interpreting the past, experiencing the present and expecting the future, the conception of history appears as a more or less fixed body of supposedly certain historical knowledge.' (Demantowsky 2006, 82)<sup>3</sup>

In a nutshell, a historical image can also be described as 'a metaphor for established ideas and interpretations of the past with a deep temporal horizon' (Jeismann 2002, 13). Analysing the conceptions of history of certain actors, groups, societies, classes or institutions can therefore provide information about the world view and the derivation of the understanding of the present.

*Tomb Raider (2013)* is particularly suitable for analysing historical images for various reasons. Because in this 17th instalment of the series (including handhelds and mobile games), which so far has 24 titles, there are an unusually large number of juxtaposed historical images, even by *Lara Croft* standards. These will be presented, analysed and examined here. It should be made clear that there are basically two possibilities when analysing conceptions of history in games: on the one hand, the conceptions of the game itself, that is the image conveyed and created by the producers, and on the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Lara Croft's* first sentence in the trailer: IGN, 2011. The author would like to thank Katrin Schmitz, his regular reader of English texts, for once again bringing this essay into linguistic form.

<sup>2</sup> Hence certain linguistic confusions surrounding common translations of the term, which go far beyond the usual translation problems. The English version used here, 'conception of history', ist noch am ehesten vergleichbar mit dem deutschen "Geschichtsbild" ou la «vision d'histoire» en français.

<sup>3</sup> In original: 'Unter einem Geschichtsbild versteht man das stabilisierte Gefüge der reflektierten oder auch unreflektierten historischen Vorstellungen einer Person oder einer Gruppe. Ein Geschichtsbild ist inhaltlich konkret und narrativ abrufbar. Es bildet sich individuell wie kollektiv durch Übernahme und Modifikation von und Auseinandersetzung mit anderen relevanten Geschichtsbildern heraus. Die wirtschaftlichen, politischen, religiösen und ethnischen Umwelten stellen wesentliche Wirkfaktoren dar. Geschichtsbilder dienen der vereinfachten Orientierung in der Zeit und der Stabilisierung von Identität. Sie sind durch individuelle und soziale Erfahrung sowie durch Bildung oder Propaganda sowohl revisionsfähig als auch instrumentalisierbar. Während das Geschichtsbewusstsein sich in den komplexen mentalen Operationen der Vergangenheitsdeutung, Gegenwartserfahrung und Zukunftserwartung manifestiert, zeigt sich das Geschichtsbild als ein mehr oder minder fixer Bestand vermeintlich sicheren historischen Wissens.'

other hand, the conceptions of the fictional characters in the game's plot. This article explores the latter.

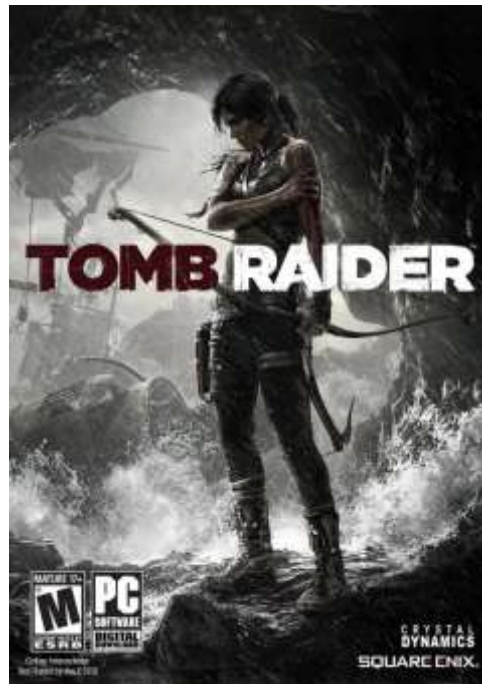


Figure 1. Cover of *Tomb Raider* (2013).

## Preliminary Remarks and Thoughts on Methodology and Theory

To date, there are several pieces in the research literature on the 2013 spin-off. The *Tomb Raider* series may be one of the best-known series, but even with the very popular series, the research to date is very unevenly distributed. This may have something to do with the young age of Game Studies in the history of science. The state of research about the *Tomb Raider* series is simply unsatisfactory in this respect. The *Tomb Raider* series is similar in principle, but the 2013 instalment stands out somewhat. In contrast to other instalments in the series, this one has already been researched in several studies. Of course, there are still plenty of gaps in the research, especially when it comes to the phenomenon of conceptions of history analysed here.

The relevant studies on *Tomb Raider* (2013) come from various academic disciplines, but are less likely to be located in game studies itself. There is also a wide range of content. An essay on the game as a whole, its design and its location in the series (Dherman 2023) appears to be the most important. An unavoidable contribution from media studies deals with narratives in the spin-off (Menezes 2022), which suggests a certain proximity to the present contribution, but actually operates more from the perspective of media studies rather than history, including terminology. An examination of the character development of the protagonists in the game is also very relevant, as it shows the emergence of the classic *Lara* for the first time (Paananen 2017).

Inner-game subtexts against the portrayal of the first *Tomb Raider* from 1996 instalment in this 2013 reboot of the series have also been addressed (Bezio 2016), as has *Lara's* 2013 voice as a woman for the purpose of atmospheric and gender-specific underpainting (Droumeva 2021). In addition, *Tomb Raider* (2013) occasionally appears in comparative character studies, for example on the evolution of *Lara* throughout the series (Meneu Sanahuja 2023) or on representation and trauma in selected games (Kuznetsov 2017). There are also some analyses on detailed questions.

This article focuses on an area of the spin-off that has received surprisingly little attention to date. This is because every game in the *Tomb Raider* series is profoundly characterised by a preoccupation

with history, as the protagonist *Lara* is an archaeologist working in a transdisciplinary manner in the broadest sense: active worldwide, on the move in the scientific, popular cultural and also dubious field of research, freed from the paralysing cabals of the bureaucracy of state or third-party funded research.

In the 2013 *Tomb Raider* examined here, several epochs of world history are also compressed together: from the third century AD to the present day. However, it is not only the depiction of the many epochs that shows different images of history. The characters also differ greatly in their views of history and develop these further in the game's plot. The best example is the protagonist herself. In the course of the game, *Lara* gradually moves from being a strictly scientific archaeologist to becoming more and more open to mythologies and 'parascientific' approaches.

This is the topic of this essay. It examines the historical images of the characters in the game. It touches on knowledge and fantasy, from which the characters' images of history are fed, and on which other images are portrayed in the game. Despite all the differences in detail, it can be observed that in most cases there is a kind of movement from a supposedly purely facts-orientated approach to a facts-orientation with an openness to the transcendental. This in turn touches on essential questions of science: what is science and when does it become science?

From this perspective, *Tomb Raider (2013)* offers a remarkable impetus for scientific reflection on a meta-level. Paraphrasing Herbert Grönemeyer's 'When is a man a man?', we can ask, 'When is a scientific discipline a scientific discipline?' This question has been asked again and again in the history of science and still exists today in relation to some disciplines. Physics, for example – undeniably a science – had to slowly emerge from philosophy over the course of 2,100 years, developing the natural sciences from the humanities in the process. A science is essentially what other sciences recognise as such, whereby the standard usually consists of the maxim that experiments, arguments and the like must be objective, repeatable, comprehensible and transparent.

New disciplines therefore always have a hard time, if only because they first have to be recognised by disciplines that cannot (fully) grasp and understand the new ideas with their existing methods alone: in suam rem incidere, how can new methods be developed if only old methods can be used as a benchmark? This is a much deeper problem in science than it might appear at first glance. While game studies and queer studies are slowly emerging and being recognised as disciplines in their own right, the many disciplines of the so-called 'pseudosciences' (more accurate in German: 'Parawissenschaften'), for example, are not succeeding in doing so.<sup>4</sup> The reason is relatively simple: the possibilities to verify, reproduce and repeat are simply not given with the latter. However, this is precisely the contradiction between the neutral openness of scientific results and the subjectivity of knowledge: we are convinced that sounds exist because we can hear them, measure them and even feel them at high volumes. If we could not hear, measure or feel them, they would still be there. Plato's allegory of the cave is an early demonstration of this argument.

This is also the case with the understanding of science and therefore the conceptions of history in *Tomb Raider (2013)*. *Lara* thinks strictly in the categories of her academic discipline and refuses to allow other perspectives – in this case the mythological component – into her thinking. As a result of the events in the game, this openness softens. The protagonist and the many other characters in the game show more and more openness to mythological interjections and interpretations. As an archaeologist, this is directly reflected in *Lara's* conception of history. Her scientific-mythological world view is based on a mixture of these events in the game.

The plot of the game is designed to do just that. *Tomb Raider (2013)* is a reboot of the series and tells for the first time in detail how *Lara* became the strong, self-confident, adventurous explorer we have known since the first instalment in 1996. At the beginning of the story in 2013, the young archaeologist, who is now 'only' 21 years old, is on a scientific expedition on the high seas near Japan with a large team. They want to find the Japanese kingdom of Yamatai of the legendary Sun Queen

---

<sup>4</sup> In addition, there are the various borderline areas of science that cannot be labelled as parasciences, but have already dared to take major steps away from conventional science. These borderline areas also have a difficult time, not least because they attempt unusual approaches in terms of methodology and theoretical foundation that have not yet been recognised in their original disciplines or are completely new. A commendable example of this scientific openness is the 'PeriLog' series published by Logos Verlag in Berlin.

*Himiko*.<sup>5</sup> Near the suspected island kingdom, the team is shipwrecked and washes up on an uncharted island. There they find masses of stranded ships, crashed aeroplanes, ruins and dwellings dating back two millennia. Attacked by strangers on the island and decimated by murder and kidnapping, the survivors try to save their people and escape from the island.

Leaving is not that easy. Mysterious storms arise whenever stranded people try to escape and strand ships and aeroplanes that get too close. In addition, there are other inexplicable events, including five or six metre-tall immortal samurai warriors (the *Oni*). For a long time, everyone involved tries to explain and understand what they have seen in the conventional way. But little by little, their experiences convince them that mystical events are just as real as their own scientific findings. The escape from the island is only made possible after a thoughtful engagement with these supernatural mythologies: according to them, it is the former Queen *Himiko* of Yamatai whose supernatural abilities create the storms in order to protect the kingdom, especially by stranding women and preventing them from escaping.

This is because *Himiko* is not bound to a single human body and, over the centuries, repeatedly takes on the powers of the earthly bodies of stranded women who are distantly related to her through rituals. When the earthly time of these transferred physical powers comes to an end, *Himiko* survives as a kind of mummy of herself. However, she can no longer act as a human and rule, manage and deal with things, but 'only' influence nature, such as the storms. Her people of Yamatai died out, but with the help of her supernatural powers, her guards and soldiers were able to survive and continue to serve her. The phenomenon of the unnatural storms remained inexplicable to both stranded people and expeditions over the course of time, and the kingdom of Yamatai became a legend shrouded in legend due to its undetectability and the rumours of the queen's supernatural phenomena.

In addition to *Lara's* team members, there are other people on the island. Some of the other stranded people have been living there for decades at the time of *Tomb Raider (2013)*. Their leader, *Father Mathias*, has gradually uncovered the secret of the island and hopes to appease the queen by offering her a new body so that he can leave the island with her permission. In order to test the kinship, a kind of first ritual is required in which unrelated women die. *Father Mathias* rules dictatorially over other stranded people who call themselves *Solarii*. Newly stranded people have the choice to join. If they refuse, they are killed; if they accept, they must undergo a harsh initiation among other willing people, including starvation, cannibalism and the destruction of everything human within them. The *Solarii* feed on nature and flotsam and jetsam, live in old barracks and bunkers, and all want to get off the island.

In a female member of *Lara's* team, the *Solarii* find a descendant of *Himiko* through a first ritual. During the second, main ritual to acquire the body, *Himiko's* mummy is destroyed with her spirit inside. The survivors of the team can now flee the island without being killed by a storm or driven back to the island. For *Lara*, a new period of searching for answers to the inexplicable questions of the world begins. She now takes her cue from her father, who repeatedly tried to teach her to be open to the inexplicable.

The narrative structure of the plot relies heavily on the player's own thinking. There is no narrator, especially not an omniscient one. The plot and its individual aspects are only revealed to the player through *Lara* as a homodiegetic narrator in a correspondence between narrative and plot. However, as the protagonist, *Lara* naturally does not know everything about her plot and, above all, she comments very little on what is happening. The player has to draw their own conclusions from the events in which they are involved as *Lara* on the one hand, and from the completely unrelated documents and artefacts from the past 2,000 years on the other, which *Lara* finds piece by piece on the island. Such a narrative structure is typical of *Tomb Raider*. However, it is also much more complicated than in other major video game series. In *Call of Duty* there is a retrospective narrator in the form of the protagonist, in *Grand Theft Auto* a kind of rough direction with missions that build on

---

<sup>5</sup> As always with *Tomb Raider*, the game mixes popular legends and myths with real historical places, events and people, from the Louvre Museum to, in this case, Yamatai.

each other – but in *Tomb Raider* the player is left to their own pondering the progress and context of the plot.

While *Lara's* conception of history changes radically, she also changes fundamentally as a person. On the one hand, this has to do with her conception of history. At the end of the story, she says to herself that her father was always right to be open to myths, sagas, legends and the supernatural. On the other hand, the gentle, reserved woman only becomes the hardened, self-confident icon she became in popular culture as a result of the events on the island. She is injured often on the island: she cuts herself on stones, rocks, wood and plants, wild animals attack her, she falls hard on the ground, slides down precipices, the islanders try to wound and kill her several times and much more. During the story, her body is covered in wounds and blood, rain and water only wipe away the dirt and blood, but the scars remain. At the end of the story, her arms are completely cut up.

In addition, she is forced not only to passively endure injuries for her own survival and that of her team, but also to actively use violence herself. She is still shocked at the sight of the first corpses. The first death of an opponent shocks her. During her first kill in battle, she sobs and is completely beside herself, almost collapsing. But little by little she becomes a cold-blooded killer, is amazed at how easy her first kills were and still tries to make peace with her enemies for a while. Her stomach also needs to be filled. *Lara* becomes a hunter-gatherer. Campfires have to be lit, wounds tended, weapons repaired and strengthened. At the same time – she continues to be an archaeologist – *Lara* investigates the secrets of the island's past: old temples, houses abandoned for centuries, reinforced concrete bunkers from the Second World War.

This is how players first realise *Lara's* path to becoming the person they know her as. While she emphasises in the first parts of the story that she is not a Croft like her father – an adventurous archaeologist open to the supernatural – she gradually develops in exactly this direction. The allusions go so far as to introduce her famous use and trademark of two pistols at once in the final minutes of the game. *Tomb Raider (2013)* became the most successful spin-off in the series not only because of its character as a reboot, but also because of the excellent realisation of the gameplay, the atmosphere of the game environment including the (incidentally highly successful and specially composed) music and the emotional depth. The next instalment in the main series was therefore released immediately after the end of the story, and a film adaptation with the same basic idea was even made in 2018.

The reception to the game was and still is extremely positive. Not only did *Tomb Raider (2013)* win numerous awards and regularly scored over 90 per cent in votes. Rather, reviews also cited the refreshing reboot of the series, the characterisation of *Lara*, the intensity of the gaming experience and the wealth of detail in the puzzles, open world and plot alternatives. The highly successful soundtrack added to this, and the fact that this reboot is the first to show in detail the development of the young, self-doubting and slightly vulnerable young woman into a tough, unyielding and self-confident woman excited fans. Nine years after its release and six new instalments in the meantime, Game Rant has noted that 'it still has a lot to offer to gamers seeking an immersive single-player experience' (Grzymkowski 2022). As a result of the changed depiction of the development of *Lara's* personality, the scientists were also given new material to analyse. Last but not least, feminisation, sexualisation and gender roles in general were presented differently in *Tomb Raider (2013)*. This also changed the public image of *Lara* (MacCallum-Stewart 2014).

The fact that there are so many parallel histories in *Tomb Raider (2013)* is not least due to the special setting of the story. It is about a remote island that is difficult to find and impossible to escape, and where this has been the case for almost 2,000 years. In this analysis, the historical images are determined on the basis of their historical sources in the game. These sources include the characters and their conversations, 42 artefacts that can be found, seven secret tombs and a total of 54 documents in the form of diaries, notes and more. This essay primarily uses the documents and conversations.

The further structure of the following explanations is based on the characters in the game. *Lara* as the protagonist is given her own chapter. Her surviving team members (*Angus 'Grim' Grimaldi*, *Jonah Maiava*, *Samantha 'Sam' Nishimura*, *Joslin Reyes*, *Conrad Roth*, *Alex Weiss*, *James Whitman*) are analysed in a further chapter. This is followed by a chapter focussing on the group of *Solarii*, who are led by the antagonist (*Father Mathias*). The final chapter presents the other characters, including some survivors of earlier strandings who are not *Solarii*. Finally, this essay concludes its findings.

## Changes in the Conceptions of History: ‘Something isn’t right about this place’<sup>6</sup>

### Heroine and Protagonist: *Lara Croft*

Most of the time, the player is alone with *Lara*. The team members are only travelling with her occasionally, communicate with her by radio, are injured, tinker with the boat to escape, are themselves kidnapped and more. This constellation alone automatically places *Lara* at the centre of the action. Not only does she have to save her kidnapped friend *Sam* from the ritual and free her, she also has to rescue other team members, send out a radio signal, fight numerous *Solarii*, collect fruit and hunt animals, fight wild animals, tend to her wounds, climb, slide, fall and run. The plot has been deliberately designed so that the player can focus entirely on *Lara* instead of diverting their attention to other characters too much. The balance between a confusing number of characters with little characterisation and a focus on the main character was struck almost perfectly in *Tomb Raider (2013)*.

As already mentioned in regard to the other titles in the series, players were used to experiencing the already ‘finished’ *Lara*. Occasional flashbacks to her childhood and teenage days conveyed a very early onset of the strong, self-confident and self-assured personality as which *Lara* entered pop culture. In *Tomb Raider (2013)*, on the other hand, *Lara* is still a self-doubting, reserved version of herself at the beginning. Only the events on the island mould her into the version she is known as. This includes a high pain tolerance, an inner calm, sarcasm, a cold-bloodedness towards opponents and the ability to survive when she is completely thrown back on her own resources and nature. But her new conception of history is also a decisive factor.

In dialogues and monologues as well as her diary entries and the camera footage of the ship voyage in her luggage, *Lara* stubbornly adheres to the established principles of science at the beginning of the story. This is shown clearly for the first time in a flashback. On the first night on the island, *Lara* has not yet found the other team members and is sitting alone by a campfire. She takes her camcorder out of her bag and watches footage of the ship. In the scene shown, *Sam* is in charge of the camera and visits *Lara*, who is working at her desk in her cabin. *Sam* looks relaxed, films *Lara* and then herself in the mirror:

‘Here’s the soon-to-be world-famous archaeologist, Lara Croft, in her native habitat. She’s on the hunt for the lost kingdom of Yamatai, home to the fabulous Himiko, mystical Sun Queen ... And ancestor of yours [Sam] truly.’

*Lara* interrupts her and looks up briefly from her desk: ‘Sam ... this is serious.’ *Sam*’s laconic answer: ‘Oh sweetie, I know. I’m just trying to lighten the mood here. Everyone’s so on edge! What are you so worried about?’ (Videogmz, 2022 15:24–15:50)

It becomes much clearer the first time she meets a team member. *Lara* finds *Sam* again, who has been helped by a man who has been stranded on the island for some time. Only later does the player realise that this is *Father Mathias*, who kidnaps *Sam* for the ritual after *Lara* has fallen asleep. The three of them sit around the campfire and wait for the rest of the team, with whom they have arranged to meet by radio. The conversation around the fire is symptomatic of *Lara*’s position at the beginning of the story:

*Father Mathias*: Sam here was just telling me about the Sun Queen [Himiko].

*Sam*: Right, Himiko!

*Father Mathias*: Can you tell me more? I’m intrigued.

*Sam*: Well, believe it or not, a couple thousand years ago, Queen Himiko pretty much ran things in Japan.

*Lara*: She loves telling this story ...

---

<sup>6</sup> The same Let’s Play is always used here to verify the quotations: Videogmz, 2022, here 27:53–27:56.

*Sam:* Himiko was beautiful, enigmatic ... But also ruthless and powerful! Legend says she also had shamanistic powers.

*Lara:* And this is where she loses me.

*Father Mathias:* Well, there's always some truth to myths.

*Sam:* She commanded an army of Samurai warriors, her magnificent Stormguard. They rode the very winds into battle, laying waste to all who opposed them. They say the sun rose at Himiko's command and she ruled everything its rays touched from the mountains to the sea and beyond.

*Father Mathias:* But what happened to her...? (Videogmz 2022, 32:33–33:34)

At this point, *Lara* falls asleep and later wakes up alone. She remains closed off to supernatural explanations for a long time, for example, when she is confronted with *Whitman*<sup>7</sup>. As *Whitman* walks up an ancient staircase through an equally ancient gate, the two archaeologists talk about his findings on the stone walls that the island must be *Himiko's* Yamatai. *Whitman* begins to talk about the myths surrounding *Himiko*, emphasising, 'there's no doubt, Himiko had power. Some say shamanistic. Elemental!', whereupon *Lara* points out, 'A woman wields that much power and sooner or later it gets called witchcraft!' (Videogmz 2022, 58:55–59:11) Even when they both agree that they have indeed found Yamatai, they still disagree on how to evaluate it. *Whitman* compares the find with Atlantis, but *Lara* objects: 'But this is real, Dr. Whitman. We're not standing on a myth.' (Videogmz 2022, 59:44–59:50)

It is only the supernatural events on the island, which cannot be explained in any conventional way, that change *Lara's* attitude. At first, she tries to resist it. Documents such as those of a diplomat from *Himiko's* own lifetime leave her unmoved, as do other documents from survivors, for example. *Lara* rationalizes the gaps in logic: The diplomat's reports are almost two thousand years old and soaked in *Himiko's* reputation as well as the superstitions of the time. *Father Mathias's* diary entries are merely evidence of the mental state of someone who had been stranded for decades and had gone mad as a result. And even the notes of a *Solarii* only speak of a madman who unconditionally obeys the cult leader *Father Mathias*. These are all examples of *Lara's* way of coping with the unknown by trying to explain it rationally.

However, the moment in which she observes the targeted 'attack' of a storm is a significant turning point. *Lara* climbs the highest radio tower on the island, once built by the Japanese during the Second World War. She now wants to make contact with the outside world via the emergency frequency. She manages to speak to a rescue plane which has been searching for the team since the distress signal from the sinking ship. At the request of the aeroplane, *Lara* sets off in search of a signal and ends up igniting old oil tanks, which burn brightly. The plane actually heads for the island. However, despite the sunny weather, a storm comes out of nowhere and is so violent that the plane loses control and crashes onto the island. At the next campfire, *Lara* writes in her diary:

'I can't get it out of my head. A storm that came out of nowhere, out of a clear sky, and brought down a plane. It's not rational. You know it's not rational, *Lara*. There must be some explanation, I ... I just don't know what it is yet.' (Videogmz 2022, 2:28:48–2:30:02)

She is now even looking for the fault in herself, thinking that she should have looked for a better landing point.

However, it is events such as these that affect *Lara's* own reputation, her own experience, which slowly change her attitude. Although she tries to defend herself against irrational explanations, she gradually gives up this resistance. The decisive example of this is the first conscious sight of a five to six metre-tall *Oni*, whose field of vision she narrowly escapes. She describes her impression to her diary around the campfire:

'Just when I thought things couldn't get any worse. What were those things in the monastery? They were dressed like the Stormguard, and the sounds they made, almost ... inhuman. Shit, just listen to

---

<sup>7</sup> The short names used in the running text are used as they are presented in the game. The use of first names and surnames for the purpose of address expresses rank relations and gender images.



yourself, Lara. You sound like Dad. It's like they're the remnants of some lost civilization. Okay, now I really sound like Dad. All I know is they killed those men [some *Solarii*], and I have a feeling they wouldn't hesitate to kill me, too.' (Videogmz 2022, 3:15:14–3:15:48)

After *Lara* has recognised the existence of *Himiko's* supernatural abilities and the connection between their effects, she still grapples with categories of madness and sanity. The team is now pinning their hopes on a rescue helicopter (which is later destroyed in another storm, like all means of transport), but *Lara* is certain that this will not help them either:

'Madness. That's what this place is. Mathias thinks Himiko's spirit is keeping us here. That's not possible ... it's not possible. But he's so beyond crazy that maybe he's come right back round to some kind of sane. The helicopter isn't our way off. You know that, Lara – in your gut. I have to warn the others. If we board it, we're dead.' (Videogmz 2022, 4:41:24–4:41:52)

It takes time, but *Lara* gradually gives up her resistance to recognising the supernatural, and from the middle of the story she repeatedly says clearly that they cannot leave the island because something is holding them there. Towards the end of the story, when she once again confronts *Father Mathias*, she speaks openly about the danger of *Himiko*. Her words give the player a hint that *Lara* would prefer to survive on the island rather than *Himiko* receiving a new body and being able to rule again without restrictions for a human life: 'Himiko's dangerous, Mathias. She's angry, she's vengeful and she has real power' (Videogmz 2022, 8:21:01–8:21:08). Of course, *Father Mathias*, who has been looking to appease *Himiko* for three decades, knows this just as well as *Lara*. But be that as it may, *Lara* now accepts the supernatural *Himiko* as real, as existing, as real.

In the final battle against numerous opponents and, of course, *Father Mathias*, *Lara* destroys *Himiko's* mummy during the ritual. The storms stop. She carries the injured *Sam* to the beach, where the last two survivors of the increasingly decimated team have repaired a boat. As they sail out and are picked up by a large ship, *Lara's* thoughts are played back to the player:

'I've been so blind ... so naive. For years I resented my father, doubted him like the rest. But he was right about so much. I just wish I could tell him that now. There are so many mysteries that I once dismissed as mere stories. But the line between our myths and truth is fragile and blurry. I need to find answers. I must understand.' (Videogmz 2022, 8:36:21–8:36:53)

In the last scene, she says to herself that she is not going home. She is holding her father's notebook in her hands. The *Lara* for whom the *Tomb Raider* games became famous, is now on her way from one supernatural adventure to the next from *Tomb Raider (2013)*. With this changed version of herself comes a new conception of history, starting from the scientific foundation of the archaeologist and open-mindedly extending into the world of myths, legends and sagas.

### **Divers are put together: The surviving Team Members**

*Lara's* team members are still relatively numerous at the beginning of the story. In flashbacks to the time on the ship, there are no fewer than eight people plus an unclear number of workers like *Liam*. They all survive the break-up of the ship in the storm off the island, but are then severely decimated by the *Solarii*: *Grim* is ostensibly killed just as he and *Lara* fall down on the ground in battle (it turns out in the next *Tomb Raider* that he survived the fall into the mountain canyons), *Roth* sacrifices himself for *Lara* when they are both attacked, *Alex* is badly injured in an accident and sacrifices himself when the *Solarii* arrive to help *Lara* escape, *Liam* is captured by the *Solarii* and shot while trying to escape, *Whitman* turns traitor and dies in the service of *Father Mathias*. *Sam*, *Reyes* and *Jonah* survive, but are scarred by the ordeal, especially *Sam*.

The composition of the team is no coincidence. The grandfatherly-looking *Grim* is a helmsman and was already in the service of *Lara's* parents, accompanied her father on adventurous research trips and is completely loyal to *Lara*. *Roth* is a friend and, in *Lara's* own words, a 'surrogate father'. He is a survivalist and therefore *Lara's* father's right-hand man and later best friend on his travels. After the *Crofts'* death, he became even more devoted to *Lara* than he already was.

*Jonah* is the ship's cook and a close friend of *Lara's*. *Reyes* is responsible for security issues and is very gruff. *Sam* has an affinity to media and takes her care of filming; her family also finances large parts of the research trips and earns money from documentaries. She is easy-going and gets on very well with *Lara*. *Alex* is an electrician and flirts with *Lara*, who doesn't seem averse to the idea. *Whitman* is the very arrogant leader of the research expedition and is already several career levels above *Lara*. He would prefer to devote himself solely to scientific matters and doesn't like human interaction, but has to stand in front of *Sam's* camera for the sake of research funding. The worker *Liam*, who only appears briefly, is shot by the *Solarii*, as are at least two other workers on the ship, without any further characterisation.

The origins of those involved are also revealing. The majority are English and white. However, *Sam* has Japanese-Portuguese ancestors and can therefore translate (after all, the team is in Japanese waters). *Jonah* is Hawaiian, *Reyes* is of Latin American descent. *Roth* is US-American and *Grim* is Scottish, but both have been travelling with the English *Crofts* for decades.

There are a few questions with the team members' conceptions of history. *Lara* only becomes convinced of the existence of the supernatural after she experiences it for herself several times. The team members, on the other hand, sometimes see the storms, but never have comparative perspectives on the weather changes. With the exception of *Sam* and *Whitman* they also never encounter the *Oni*. Furthermore, unlike other games in the series, *Lara* does not yet have the authority to be believed unconditionally at the time of the game's plot.

Wanting to work out the team members' conceptions of history also means dividing these secondary characters into those that are portrayed more closely and those that are not. *Liam* and the other workers, for example, are almost a homage to the classic NPC. They are portrayed in such a characterless way that analysing their historical image comes to nothing.

It becomes more complicated with someone like *Roth*. From his role at *Lara's* father's side, it can be assumed that he shares a similar conception of history. However, the sources in the game do not reveal anything about this. Whenever he speaks or appears, topics other than the supernatural nature of the island are more important to discuss. The same applies to *Grim*. It can be taken for granted that he, like *Roth*, is open to the supernatural, as he travelled with *Lara's* father for decades and even talks about his sighting of the Loch Ness monster in Scotland at the beginning of the story on the ship.

*Reyes* and *Jonah* as well as *Sam*, get more screen time, which provides at least starting points to their storylines. The former doesn't let the supernatural get to her. When *Lara* tries to explain to the others in the middle of the story that they are being mystically kept on the island by a 'thing', for example, *Reyes* gets angry and responds: 'Some "thing"? Lara, you need sleep.' (Videogmz 2022, 5:29:45–5:29:52) *Alex*, for his part, gets relatively little screen time. In response to *Reyes'* reaction and later, however, he rejects the suspicion of supernatural activities: 'Look, I'll be the first admit that I usually go in for the weird stuff – but this place is off the charts.' (Videogmz 2022, 5:29:52–5:29:56) In the same vein *Jonah* says: 'All I know is that we can't use logic to understand this place. I know you [*Lara*] think your instincts are a weakness – but they're a strength. Trust them.' (Videogmz 2022, 5:30:04–5:30:17) According to their notes, all three characters remain in these positions later on and do not move away from them.

*Sam* is a special case. The fact that she is open to the legends surrounding *Himiko* is shown frequently. The first case is the scene already mentioned here for *Lara* herself from *Lara's* ship's cabin. The fact that *Sam* increasingly believes in the truth of the legends from the beginning of the game is also shown to the player several times later on. The fact that *Sam* is then abducted as *Himiko's* descendant, subjected to the first ritual and imprisoned for the second ritual is clear. On the way, she is exposed to the views of the *Solarii*, faces the *Oni* and survives the ritual that defies the laws of physics. *Sam* does not express it so clearly, but her reactions suggest that she believes in the supernatural.

*Whitman* is another special case. He thinks in strictly conventional scientific terms, but is open to the inexplicable. What the younger archaeologist *Lara* rejects in a dialogue, the older archaeologist *Whitman* immediately identifies as possible truth at the beginning of the story: 'We shouldn't discount anything, even what may seem to us irrational. We still have much to learn about the world.' (Videogmz

2022, 59:09–59:18) With all the other evidence in favour of *Himiko*, the supernatural and Yamatai, *Whitman* is even more convinced than he already was. However, it is not only the passion of the scientist that speaks from him, but also the monetary prospects of the find, as he himself underlines several times. *Whitman* is soon captured by the *Solarii*, but manages to convince them, and *Father Mathias* in particular, that he is not a threat to their endeavour, but rather wants to be part of it.

The traitor soon becomes a spy who finds his way back to the team with excuses and keeps his eyes open for the *Solarii* until *Father Mathias* uses him as bait for the *Oni* and thus kills him. Either way, *Whitman* is the one of the original team who is the most open to changing his conception of history. The inscriptions, stone images, statues and finally the *Solarii* quickly convince him of the supernatural. However, the fact that *Whitman* of all people is the highest-ranking, most experienced and most successful scientist of the crew opens up room for interpretation. Was *Whitman*, as an experienced scientist, perhaps simply closer to unravelling the mystery of the island than anyone else when he showed openness to new, previously misunderstood and inexplicable things, even if they contradicted the methods of his discipline? Was he not simply practising open-ended research, while others like *Lara* closed their minds to anything that could not immediately be explained in the conventional way?

### **Rulers of the Island: The *Solarii* and *Father Mathias***

*Father Mathias* and his *Solarii* display the classic behaviour of a cult, a sect, perhaps even a religion that is relatively isolated from outside influences. The player only gradually discovers their goal, their views and how they live together from their notes, from conversations undercover and finally from dialogues with *Father Mathias*. Their leader, *Father Mathias*, was once one survivor among others. However, while his comrades tried to escape and died in the storms, he deliberately stayed behind. *Lara* finds an account of this in one of his diary entries, which date back 32 years:

'I am alone now. The rest of them are dead. This is for the best. I watched from the cliffs as their make-shift boat was tossed and turned by the storms. The clouds looked like a hand upon the water, desperately clawing at their doomed boat. None survived the wrath of the storm.

I observed it carefully - the storm was localized and sudden. And just as suddenly it was gone. And this is the most interesting detail: it didn't seem random. I sensed... emotion, something deliberate. I don't know what's happening on this island. Not yet. But if I ever hope to escape, I must understand this phenomenon. Now my real work begins.' (Videogmz 2022, 2:07:04–2:07:59)

Little by little, *Father Mathias* gains further insights into the island, *Himiko*, the *Oni* and the weather occurrences. He must have gleaned the information about the ritual from the stone images in *Himiko's* tomb chamber, for example, from which *Lara* also understands the ritual.

After two years of avoiding other stranded people, *Father Mathias* therefore decides to found the *Solarii*, which eventually grow to a three-digit number:

'I must fully control this island. So I will gather a small group of loyal followers. They must understand power and the need to organize. But more importantly, they cannot hesitate to kill or use violence. It will be part of their life here. They will need structure and purpose and work. But when this island is mine, I will discover the true secret of the storms.' (Videogmz 2022, 2:13:27–2:14:10)

Another four years later *Father Mathias* writes:

'My patience has been rewarded. At long last, I have my lieutenants, my enforcers of the way. The storms brought me exactly the men I need to begin building the *Solarii* Brotherhood. Strong of body, weak of will. They were broken in the storms, weakened and vulnerable. And I raised them up again. Now they serve me, and through me ... her. The Sun Queen. She is showing me the way. She has always shown me the way. I cannot deny what I have seen. And soon, neither will they. She is everywhere on this island! But ... the *Solarii* Brotherhood must grow. We will recruit as many as we can. I will draft laws, create a code for them to live by. And they will build for the Sun Queen while I search for the key.' (Videogmz 2022, 4:18:00–4:01:21)

And the *Solarii* comply. *Father Mathias*' right-hand man *Nikolai* writes down some notes over the years, which *Lara* finds. He expresses himself openly and drastically.

'Mathias might be insane, but he's smart and dangerous. He knows things about this island. I believe he's our only chance of ever getting out of here. Mathias keeps us happy. We control the guns and the food. Anything the storms bring to this island is ours and we decide the fate of any new survivors. Any who defy us are killed. We're masters of this fucked up prison.' (Videogmz 2022, 1:57:19–1:57:59)

*Nikolai* writes down at one point exactly how this happens. His descriptions make it clear to the player why the *Solarii* are so brutal:

'Initiation to the brotherhood is brutal. We need to destroy their humanity, so that they in turn can be inhumane. New recruits are thrown into the depths of the caverns and left to starve and fend for themselves for days... sometimes weeks. Those who make it out alive are welcomed with open arms. I still can't explain what kind of power Mathias has tapped into, but I don't care anymore. We're never getting off his goddamned island – some days I'm convinced we're all in hell already. God knows with the things we've done ... we might as well be.' (Videogmz 2022, 4:40:22–4:41:17)

In contrast to *Father Mathias*, *Nikolai* obviously still needs some time to recognise the supernatural, as can be seen from his notes:

'Mathias has us look for physically strong men for the brotherhood ... but none too smart. They must be willing to take orders and work. Any who question or resist are immediately killed. And the women ... Mathias decides their fate. Most are sacrificed to the dark walkers ... but some are chosen for the ritual. We put up with this insane ceremony. Some brothers are even starting to believe in it. Something clearly controls the storms around this cursed island and it will never let us leave. Father Mathias claims to speak to it ... her. This Sun Queen spirit, or whatever it is. I don't know what to believe. I'm just doing what I can to survive.' (Videogmz 2022, 3:47:06–3:47:53)

He sticks to this attitude for a long time.

Other *Solarii* are less stringent, but ultimately not the leader's right-hand man either. They are not in *Nikolai*'s position. *Lara* overhears several of their conversations in the course of the story. Most of them just want to get off the island and live in civilisation again. In return, they subordinate themselves, and believing in the supernatural nature of *Himiko* is not difficult for them anyway when they see the *Oni*. They are not allowed to get too close to the *Oni* either, as they make no distinction between *Himiko*'s enemies and people like the *Solarii* who want to facilitate the ritual for her. But the *Solarii* know about the *Oni* and Yamatai's story, even if they are less interested in the details. Time and again, they stop each other from talking too much about it and underline that they shouldn't talk about it.

The average *Solarii*'s conception of history beyond the leader *Father Mathias* and his right-hand man *Nikolai* is strongly determined by three factors: firstly, they are all stranded people who just want to get away and therefore submit to *Father Mathias* and his views, as they deem him their best shot at escaping. Secondly, they themselves see the supernatural events on the island. Thirdly, recalcitrant stranded people are eliminated so that only like-minded people survive and become *Solarii*.

### Special cases: The Other Characters

Apart from the categories mentioned (protagonist, crew, *Solarii*), only the special cases remain: the diplomat, the general, *Hoshi*, the Scavenger, the Japanese during the Second World War and the *Trinity* organisation. The nameless *diplomat* lived in *Himiko*'s time, was seconded from China and left behind some notes, which *Lara* finds scattered around the island. The equally nameless *Scavenger* only makes a brief appearance shortly after the stranding. He abducts *Lara* into his cave, but she manages to escape. He dies in the process. The general is *Himiko*'s general and the only man allowed to get close to her. *Hoshi* was chosen as *Himiko*'s first successor, but in practice this only amounts to the ritual and *Himiko* taking over *Hoshi*'s life.

All of these characters receive little screen time, but provide ample sources to focus on their history. The first three stem from *Himiko*'s time, whose information is preserved in ten Ancient Scrolls. These

contain personal information and *Lara* finds them all over the island. The fourth, the *Scavenger*, lives in the present of the game and left a personal impression on *Lara*, but no written sources. The Japanese from the Second World War were on the island 70 decades before *Lara*, *Trinity* sometime after *Father Mathias* began building the *Solarii*.

The *diplomat* was sent as a diplomat, but was meant to serve as a spy and troublemaker. The scrolls provide *Lara* with the only contemporary view of *Himiko* in written language. The basic tone is the same in all of them. The unnamed diplomat always warns against *Himiko*, warns against underestimating her and confirms the legends about *Himiko*'s supernatural powers. He also gives insights into everyday life in Yamatai, the attitudes of the population and more.

Actually, the *diplomat* seems to have a conception of history that is strictly devoid of the supernatural. His astonishment at the verification of *Himiko*'s psychic abilities is enormous. The same applies to the gender roles of his time. The *diplomat* finds it remarkable that *Himiko* is a woman and that the only man in her immediate environment is her general. Even at their first meeting, he realises that *Himiko* must be mysterious and extremely powerful, and that people at home have underestimated *Himiko*.

However, in the scrolls, the *diplomat* only gradually realises what he has come across. For example, on an illegal journey out of the palace to mingle with the Yamatai people, he writes:

'Rumors abound of the Queen's communion with the spiritual world. They say she commands the sun and the rain, that her lands are abundant by her will alone. This is certainly nonsense, but what can be the cause of such whispers? Is this how she controls her people, by engaging their primitive superstitions?

I saw absolute reverence in their eyes when they spoke of her, yet I also sensed fear. Her people are treated with fairness, taxed reasonably and are well protected by her Stormguard. No wonder some of them even pray to her!

It's as if she were more than just a Queen to them.' (Videogmz 2022, 1:43:34–1:44:30)

The *diplomat*'s last note speaks of his desire to leave the island:

'It is time for me to leave this accursed island. I have seen enough of Yamatai. I cannot explain the power the Sun Queen wields, but it is not of this earthly plane.

As I suspected, she knew my intent the moment I set foot on this island. She has manipulated me, toyed with me to see what information I would seek, but she always knew. If I am allowed to leave this place alive, I must warn my lord, warn him that we should avoid Yamatai at all costs. If we wish access to her seas, we should pay any tributes she requires, but we should never cross the Sun Queen. To do so would lead to our ruin.

Of the other things I have seen... those dark horrors, I can never speak of again.' (Videogmz 2022, 2:56:35–2:57:19)

Whether the *diplomat* was able to leave the island is doubtful. But if he was allowed to, he may well be one of, if not the chief multiplier of *Himiko*'s reputation and the legends surrounding Yamatai.

The nameless *general* is a different case. He is the only man in *Himiko*'s inner circle and represents and leads the *Stormguard*: 'first Stormguard and General of your armies, I will serve you unconditionally'. His conception of history is barely discernible from his three Ancient Scrolls, written as notes, but the self-evidence of his picture is clear from his words:

'The enemy fleet that sails to our shore will be the last to ever attempt an invasion of our beloved Yamatai. The rage of our great Sun Queen will raise up a mighty storm and we will ride forth upon the winds to destroy them.

But when we emerge victorious, we will not stop. A new day will dawn as our Queen's light will reach across the ocean to touch all lands. While we of Yamatai bask in the warmth of her grace, those who

oppose us will burn.' (Videogmz 2022, 5:43:05–5:43:49)

The same applies to the first ritual that Himiko intended to perform. The nameless *general* is not in the least bothered by the supernatural nature of the ritual, to him it is completely natural that his queen 'lives a half-life, a soul in a decaying body', and that '[s]he rages [now] in storms which will never abate while her soul is tied to this earth.'

*Hoshi's*, like the general, lived with *Himiko* on Yamatai and was in her immediate vicinity as a priestess. *Himiko* adopted *Hoshi*, making the priestess her designated successor. *Hoshi* was honoured, especially as it served the queen and gave her own family a higher position. *Hoshi* was the second most powerful person in Yamatai after *Himiko*, was trained on a broad basis and specifically prepared to take over the reigns. However, it slowly became clear to her that many people were reserved towards her and were obviously hiding something from her. Moreover, the queen's caring behaviour ('she constantly gazes upon my features as if ... as if she's looking at her own reflection') became suspicious to her, and she eventually dreaded the day of the succession. After decades, *Himiko* had become so old that she now initiated the handover of power. However, *Hoshi* now discovered the function of the ritual, namely that it was not an enthronement procedure but a transfer of physical powers.

*Hoshi* stabbed herself shortly before the ritual. She was not concerned with avoiding the abuse of her body, but rather with containing the ageing *Himiko*:

'None will ever believe what I now know to be the truth. A twisted evil beyond imagining lives within the Sun Queen. An evil that hungers for more than just the land and seas of Yamatai. This madness cannot continue!

So I go to the chamber, armed with the stolen dagger of her Stormguard General. By the time he realizes what I have done, it will be too late. For the sake of Yamatai, and all the priestesses that would follow me ... I must die.' (Videogmz 2022, 8:16:17–8:16:59)

The lightness and casualness of the mention of the storms and also the non-mention of the queen's special supernatural abilities speak of a clear conception of history by *Hoshi*: for her, *Himiko's* supernatural streak was completely normal.

There is still the *Scavenger* to consider. There were no documents or major conversations about him. *Lara* only mentions him to the team members in a few words. In this respect, the cave dweller must be viewed exclusively from the scenes associated with him (Videogmz 2022, 2:08–9:33). *Lara* wakes up on the beach after being stranded at the beginning of the story and sees her team members a little way off. She is knocked down and wakes up tied upside down in a cave. There are several corpses, flotsam and jetsam, rubbish and lamps. *Lara* manages to free herself and tries to escape from the cave. The *Scavenger* notices this and tries to prevent her from doing so until he is crushed by a collapsing hole in the cave.

The *Scavenger's* motives, origins and attitudes can only be deduced indirectly. For example, he repeatedly tries to make *Lara* realise that he wants to help in a way that is difficult to understand ('Help you!'). Not only his language problems, but also his unkempt appearance and at least a mid-double-digit number of corpses in his cave suggest that he has been in isolation for a long time.

He hasn't joined the *Solarii*, but he doesn't move freely on the island either. His cave is his place of retreat: he cannot escape from the island because of the storms, and he cannot live freely on the island because of the *Solarii*. one consequence of this is that he cannot bury or dispose of the corpses on the island because this would attract the attention of the *Solarii*.

The only question that remains is why he has kidnapped *Lara* and refuses to release her just as presumably the other people whose tied-up corpses and badly injured skeletons litter the cave. A few possible explanations are: first, the *Scavenger* fears the *Solarii* and tries to bring newly stranded people into his cave, keep them tied up until they believe him, and only kills them if they want to leave the cave and could betray him by revealing his hiding spot. Second, he is a serial killer who happens to be stranded on a mystical island. Third, he only became a serial killer because of the island.

Either way, the *Scavenger's* story is not explicitly presented, but it is open to interpretation. He has evidently accepted that he cannot get off the island because the mysterious storms are preventing him from doing so. With the supernatural storms in front of him and the murderous *Solarii* behind him, he decides to live as a hermit in the cave.

This leaves the *Japanese from the Second World War*. They came with soldiers and scientists to research the mysterious storms and utilise them for military purposes. They also brought a lot of material to the island, built bunkers, research facilities, accommodation and more. The legends surrounding the island attracted them, and they were soon convinced that they were true.

As with all ships, the landing was accompanied by storms and a stranding, and later members of the expedition disappeared from time to time. Shortly after discovering the *general's* burial chamber, which took months, the Japanese encountered the *Oni* for the first time, as one soldier later wrote:

'Soon after we discovered the tomb, they came, the Oni, First the lights went out. Then... then the screaming started. Was it us or them? That horrible sound, it still rings in my head. They wore the armor of my ancestors... they, they cut us down with ancient blades. Gunfire, shouting, blood. We couldn't stop them. Everything turned to chaos. And then silence. They were gone. Why did they leave? Why didn't they kill us all? Captain Osaka is in command now. We... we are leaving the base, but not the island. We're heading inland, to the Monastery. There is no other way. We must follow the Oni, all of us, If we can't control the star, we must destroy it. But I know... we... we're all going to die.' (Videogmz 2022, 7:36:47–7:37:55)

One of the surviving scientists was now certain that the information from the burial chamber could provide the explanation to the weather conditions. But instead of a manual for the storms that he had hoped for, things turned out differently. The expedition members tried to enter the chamber and were surprised by the *Stormguard*:

'We never... never had a chance. They were waiting for us, hundreds of them. We never even made it to the sacred chamber. From the beginning, we were doomed. And now I wait for my ancestors to take me. I can hear them. The Oni are killing my brothers, eating them, consuming their souls. So much death. I'm the Last one. What is my fate? Will I become one of them? Ancestors hear me. Please, take me away from this, before the Oni come for me. Please take me to the afterlife. Let me die in peace.' (Videogmz 2022, 8:11:19–8:12:06)

All in all, the members of the expedition were obviously aware of the supernatural nature of the island; if they weren't convinced of it from the start, they were convinced at the latest when they saw the burial chamber of each of the *Oni*.

*Trinity*, for its part, is barely tangible. Only two documents mention the organisation. One is a telegram that essentially announces the failure of an exploratory mission. The second is a longer note:

'I was sent here to investigate a new threat to Trinity's interests on this island. When I arrived, I discovered Mathias and his *Solarii* Cult. I believed then that Mathias could never acquire the Star Phenomenon, but I was wrong. I should have killed him when I had the chance, but now it's too late. I've been compromised and mortally wounded, my mission incomplete. My time is short. If you've deciphered the numbers and found this stash, then you must be my replacement. Kill Mathias! He's close to reawakening the enemy that has long lain dormant. This cannot be allowed to happen.' (Videogmz 2022, 7:45:22–7:45:29)

The fact that the report speaks without qualification of the 'reawakening the enemy that has long lain dormant', speaks of a conception of history that proves to be open to mythologies.

## Conclusion

The conceptions of history in *Tomb Raider (2013)* are very similar in their development. Whether *Lara* herself, her team members or the *Solarii*: in their early days on the island, most of them do not believe in the supernatural, sticking strictly to science, conventional wisdom and history, which denies

the existence of the supernatural. Even the unusual events, such as *Himiko's* storms, most of the characters in the game try to explain in a conventional way. Most of them are only 'convinced' when they see the *Oni*, the storms and the ruins with their own eyes. Only a few, like *Reyes*, stubbornly adhere to their initial conception of history.

For the first time in the series, *Tomb Raider (2013)* allows the player to see and experience how the strong, self-confident heroine *Lara*, who is open to mythologies, became the woman as who she went down in pop culture and video game history. In other instalments of the series, it was repeatedly mentioned and sometimes even depicted that even as a child she occasionally accompanied her father, who introduced her to the truthfulness of the supernatural. What remained untold until *Tomb Raider (2013)* was just when the tipping point was reached, how the transformation took place, in other words: how *Lara* changed from a reserved young archaeologist working exclusively according to the scientific method to the strong explorer who believes in the supernatural.

Several questions about the game remain unanswered. What this article aimed to investigate for the conceptions of history of the characters in the game can be explored in general for the transported conceptions of history of the spin-off. *Lara's* new conception of history in the game could also be compared directly with other parts of the series, especially with the various reboots. It also seems worthwhile to compare the change in *Lara's* storyline in the game with the change in her storyline in the third *Tomb Raider* film from 2018. After all, this film is loosely based on the game released in 2013. Either way, there are plenty of further research questions about *Tomb Raider (2013)*. Particularly given the current importance of video games in commercial, social, historical and historicising terms, an in-depth examination of the 2013 spin-off of the series seems fruitful.

## About the Author

DANIEL MEIS is historian and works at University of Koblenz and the Geschichtsbüro Cologne. Before Koblenz he worked at Universities of Düsseldorf, Bonn and Stuttgart. He studied at Universities of Wuppertal, Hagen and Bonn, and was awarded his doctorate at Bonn. In January 2025 he submitted his habilitation at Koblenz. His main areas include Media History and Game Studies. One of his current projects together with colleagues is an anthology about the GTA series.

## References

- Bezio, K.M.S. (2016). Artifacts of Empire: Orientalism and Inner-Texts in *Tomb Raider (2013)*. In C. Duret & C.M. Pons (Eds.), *Contemporary Research on Intertextuality in Video Games* (pp. 189–208).
- Demantowsky, M. (2006). Geschichtsbild. In U. Mayer, H.-J. Pandel, G. Schneider & B. Schönemann (Eds.), *Wörterbuch Geschichtsdidaktik* (pp. 82–83).
- Dherman, C. (2023). *Tomb Raider – A Case Study in the Design of Game Narrative*. Medium. [Tomb Raider — A Case Study in the Design of Game Narrative | by Christopher Dherman | Medium](#)
- Droumeva, M. (2021). Performing Fragility: Re-sounding the Gendered Hero in the Voice of Lara Croft. In J. Baron, J. Fleeger & S.W. Lerner (Eds.), *Media Ventriloquism: How Audiovisual Technologies Transform the Voice-Body Relationship* (pp. 157–172).
- Grzymkowski, M. (2022). *Tomb Raider: 8 Things That Have Aged Well About The 2013 Game*. Game Rant. [Tomb Raider: Things That Have Aged Well About The 2013 Game](#)
- IGN (2011). *Tomb Raider: Official Trailer (E3 2011)*. YouTube. [Tomb Raider: Official Trailer \(E3 2011\) - YouTube](#)
- Jeismann, K.-E. (2002). Geschichtsbilder: Zeitdeutung und Zukunftsperspektive. *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 51/52 (pp. 13–22).
- Kuznetsov, E. (2017). *Trauma in Games: Narrativizing Denied Agency, Ludonarrative Dissonance and Empathy Play*. University of Alberta.
- MacCallum-Stewart, E. (2014). "Take That, Bitches!" Refiguring Lara Croft in Feminist Game Narratives. *Game Studies*, 14/11. [Game Studies - "Take That, Bitches!" Refiguring Lara Croft in Feminist Game Narratives](#)
- Meneu Sanahuja, I. (2023). *Tomb Raider. La evolución de Lara Croft en la saga de videojuegos*. Universitat Politècnica de València.
- Menezes, H.R.P. (2022). A Narrativa nos Videogames e a Experiência de Jogo em *Tomb Raider (2013)*. In J.C.P. de Melo & C.A.G. Madeira (Eds.), *Anais Estendidos do XXI Simpósio Brasileiro de Jogos e Entretenimento Digital (SBGames 2022)* (pp. 1–10).
- Paananen, A. (2017). *The development of the character of Lara Croft as manifested in the dialogue between her and other characters in the Tomb Raider reboot video game*. University of Oulu.
- Videogmz (2022). *Tomb Raider 2013 100% Walkthrough (Hard Difficulty and All Collectibles)*. YouTube. [Tomb Raider 2013 100% Walkthrough \(Hard Difficulty and All Collectibles\) - YouTube](#)