NEW MILESTONE OR LOWEST POINT?

THE RECEPTION OF THE 2003 TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS

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The *Tomb Raider* game *The Angel of Darkness*, released in 2003, was in many ways an attempt at new paths and possibilities. There was a new game engine and a calmer storyline However, fans and experts alike radically rejected the game. The response was so devastating that the rights holders even ended the cooperation, undertook a complete reboot of the series and just managed to save the series.

But of course, *The Angel of Darkness* continues to be received to this day. This essay examines the reception of the game using the most suitable sources: early reviews, Let's Plays, fanmades, documentaries, more recent reviews, reviews after the remaster and memes. The result is that the reception may be heterogeneous in itself, but has been consistent in its fundamentally negative attitude for more than two decades.

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Great Expectations and Even Greater Disappointments[1]

Today, *The Angel of Darkness* is more or less recognised as a classic, as it is one of the earlier spin-offs in the series and attempted the difficult balancing act of new content while retaining established storylines. However, the spin-off stands out from all 24 *Tomb Raider* parts (including handhelds and mobile games). This can especially be seen in the reception, which is the subject of this essay.

The long-awaited *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness* was released in 2003. The lurid name, the extremely successful predecessors, the parallel film adaptations with Angelina Jolie released in the early 2000s, three years of development, three postponements and, last but not least, the ground-breaking success of the latest generation of consoles meant that expectations for the new *Tomb Raider* were huge.

One drop is already enormous. But there was more to come. The rights holders attempted to work with a new development studio on *The Angel of Darkness*, the game engine was also completely new and the plot was to be more in-depth. *The Angel of Darkness* was supposed to be a new chapter in the series, a kind of level-up or boost.

Nothing came of it. The collaboration with the developers ended after the spin-off, the game engine was complex and sometimes perceived as annoying and the game had a number of bugs. Although the plot showed new facets of *Lara Croft*, it seemed illogical and inconsistent with the source material. Overall, it did little to fulfil the expectations of a classic *Tomb Raider*. The reboot was met with rare unanimity by critics and fans, and the new beginning even threatened to become the end of the series. Action was taken quickly: After just a few weeks on the market, the collaboration with the developers for future instalments was terminated and a complete reboot of the *Tomb Raider* series was announced. *Tomb Raider: Legend*, released in 2006, made critics and fans happy again.
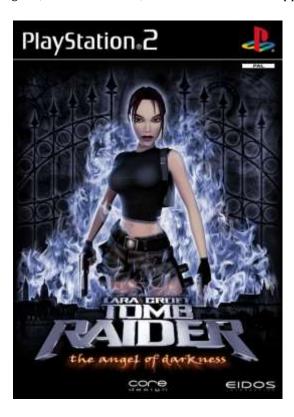

Figure 1. Cover of the PlayStation 2 version of *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*

There is a considerable gap in the academic study of the spin-off. In contrast to other spin-offs in the series, such as the oldest or most recent games, *The Angel of Darkness* has not yet received any

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[1] The author would like to thank Katrin Schmitz, his regular reader of English texts, for once again bringing this essay into linguistic form.

academic attention of its own. The highlights of scholarly work on *The Angel of Darkness* are considerations of the *Lara* portrayed in the game in comparison to other female protagonists from games, whereby the connection to *The Angel of Darkness* is actually only explained by coincidence of time: at the time of the respective study period, it was the most recent part of the series (e.g., Zaremba 2004). While, for example, the oldest parts and the two older films were the subject of research early on (e.g., Kennedy 2002), the most successful spin-off from 2013 yielded analyses of *Lara's* voice (Droumeva 2021), and the most recent part of the main series from 2018 was examined for its image of South American (Serrano 2023), studies focused on *The Angel of Darkness* are completely absent.

This essay as an article in narrative research does not attempt to fill these research gaps. Instead, it will concentrate on a few aspects of the 2003 *Tomb Raider* spin-off to provide an impetus for further study. This is worthwhile because *The Angel of Darkness* in particular shows that, firstly, even the most successful video game series can stumble, and secondly, that they can pick themselves up again and become more successful than ever.

Methodologically, this article is organised as a case study of reception. In individual chapters, it is based on contemporary reviews of *The Angel of Darkness* in 2003, later Let's Plays, various fanmades, hobby documentaries like video essays on *YouTube* (also about the location of *The Angel of Darkness* in the *Tomb Raider* series) and reviews up to the 2025 remaster, more recent reviews after the remaster of *The Angel of Darkness* and memes. After these five sections, a conclusion summarises the main findings and ventures an outlook for further research.

The plot of *The Angel of Darkness* is complex and much more convoluted than usual in *Tomb Raider*. It is convoluted and confusing in structure. The basic outline, however, is a classic *Tomb Raider* story: *Lara* is anchored in the real world and travelling the world as an archaeologist. In doing so, she not only dedicates herself to typical excavations, but also searches for further truths behind the mythologies, legends and supernatural events that contradict a conventional scientific understanding, usually with a supernatural opponent to defeat. In a nutshell, this spin-off is about *Lara's* race against an antagonist for tools to subjugate the world.

The spin-off picks up a few months after its predecessors, at the end of which *Lara* was buried alive during an excavation and rescued by her mentor *Werner von Croy*. She then visits him in Paris, where at the time a '*Monstrum*' is committing gruesome murders and painting occult symbols on the walls of the crime scenes with the blood of its victims. During the meeting with *Werner*, *Lara* has a blackout. When she regains consciousness, *Werner* is dead and his flat looks like a crime scene of the 'Monstrum'. *Lara* flees from the arriving police, the city now assumes that she is the wanted '*Monstrum*'. Thus, she hides and searches for the truth.

Lara reads in *Werner's* notes that he had already been expecting to die because one of his business partners is said to have commissioned various murders. Little by little, *Lara* learns more through various people, documents and clues. The business partner in question, *Eckhardt*, is looking for five works of art from the Order of *Lux Veritatis*, which emerged from the Knights Templar in the 12th century.

These works of art are called '*Obscura Paintings*' and are a kind of key. *Eckhardt* is a member of the alchemical order of the *Cabal*, which has been at enmity with the *Lux Veritatis* for centuries. As it later revealed, he was made immortal by the *Nephilim* in the 15th century so that he could help them with his alchemical skills. Six centuries later, *Eckhardt* and the *Cabal* now aim to resurrect what appears to be the last surviving *Nephilim* from a kind of deep sleep. The *Nephilim* were a mixed species of humans and angels. *Eckhardt* wants to use them to create a new race and thus establish a new world order. To wake him up, *Eckhardt* needs artefact parts that he hid five centuries earlier in the '*Obscura Paintings*'.

Lara searches for the '*Obscura Paintings*' and tries to collect them faster than *Eckhardt* in order to foil his plan. However, due to various circumstances, *Eckhardt* manages to get hold of all five works of art. He awakens the *Nephilim* and is then killed by his right-hand man *Joachim Karel*, who in turn reveals himself to be another *Nephilim* who was only using *Eckhardt*. *Lara* can kill the two *Nephilim* because the tool used to awaken them can also be used as a weapon against them.

The plot of *The Angel of Darkness* is jumbled and there are details and side quests that do not drive the plot forward. These make it difficult to understand the storyline. Here are a few examples to illustrate this:

First, the fact of an experimental *Proto-Nephilim* held by *Eckhardt* is absurd. It is weaker, more vulnerable, rabid and unoriginal. It seems easier to resurrect the 'real' *Nephilim* straight away.

Second, the introduction of a character named *Kurt Trent*, who can also be played in a few levels, not only breaks with familiar *Tomb Raider* patterns, but also fulfils no further function. The character has the same abilities as Lara, reveals no further aspects of his backstory or the mythology [that have an impact on the main quest], and is not fleshed out enough for the player to empathize or identify with him. *Kurt* is the last survivor of *Lux Veritatis*, which was wiped out by *Eckhardt*, and fights against the *Cabal*. He is irrelevant to *Lara's* plot, apart from some aid. There have always been NPCs in the *Tomb Raider* games to drive specific parts of the journey forward, and it is unclear why the studio parted with this pattern and introduced a playable character at no functional benefit.

A third issue lies with only weapon that can kill *Eckhardt*. Consisting of three shards of special crystal, they can wound and kill the alchemist. It is obvious that the antagonist in an action-adventure cannot be killed in any conventional way, but the choice of weapon is not explained within the mythology: Why does it need to be exactly three shards? Could it be more or are those the only three in existence? What is the material and why does it work? Where does it come from?

Fourth, the five '*Obscura Engravings*' lead Lara on her chase, but fulfil no apparent function within either the plot or the mythology. They contain clues to the five '*Obscura Paintings*', which in turn contain the artefact parts for the *Nephilim*. *Lara's* search for them generates playtime, but her starting point is not logical. If you want to hide artefact pieces in paintings and then hide these paintings as well, why would you hide their hiding place in engravings and then hide these engravings as well? If you find one painting, you will find the other painting, too. It is like a safe within a safe. Whoever cracks the first one will crack the next one, too.

In sum, the plot of *The Angel of Darkness* is convoluted and leaves the player with unanswered questions and plot holes. Of course, a game about supernatural events cannot be explained with earthly logic. But even when measured against the game's own in-game standards, events such as the '*Obscura Engravings*' make little sense.

Critics and Fans in Rare Agreement

As explained, the contemporary reviews are analysed first, then the Let's Plays, followed by the fanmades, documentaries and more recent reviews, then the reviews after the remaster and finally the memes. There is an enormous wealth of sources in all categories. However, for reasons of space alone, not all of them can be evaluated here. Still, the evidence presented here has been carefully selected to give an impression of the total quantity analysed. However, it would be an attractive undertaking for a particularly extensive essay or even a small monograph to discuss this these secondary sources in detail.

Reviews: Story Good, Graphics Okay, Gameplay Frustrating

The contemporary reviews show a remarkable equivalence in their assessments of individual aspects of the game. Basically, the plot was declared appealing, the graphics were rated mediocre and the gameplay was labelled disastrous. Apart from a few outliers, the review scores were regularly between 40 and 60 per cent. Measured against the mass of releases, this may already seem bad, but for a prestigious series like *Tomb Raider*, such ratings are abysmal.

The plot still came out best, perhaps precisely because *The Angel of Darkness* was able to tie in with its successful predecessors in terms of content despite its various plot holes. Many elements were criticised, such as the poor dubbing which undermined the integrity of the plot. But the plot as such stood out positively. *Eurogamer*, for example, noted:

'The storyline and scripting is certainly a cut above most gaming fodder [...]. It probably sounds like typical gaming fodder, but the scenes are lavish, interesting and don't outstay their welcome, unlike many action adventures with illusions of cinematic grandeur.' (Reed 2003)

In this respect, the storyline stood out as the best-received part of the game. The reasons are largely similar. According to *GameSpot*, for example:

'The story of The Angel of Darkness unfolds gradually and in different ways, such as when Lara happens upon important documents, during dialogue between Lara and other characters, and in stylish cinematic cutscenes using the game's 3D engine. [...] The interesting story is probably the biggest motivating factor for you to keep struggling to make progress in the game.' (Kasavin 2003)

Reactions to the graphics were mediocre. Generally, it was emphasised that surfaces and people are smoother, the lighting is brighter and there is much more detail overall than in the predecessors. However, the negative outweighed the positive in the reviews. The many bugs in particular provoked negative reviews. In *GameRevolution*, for example, it was said pointedly:

'[T]here are still graphical glitches and players will notice a variety of clipping errors and a good amount of slow down, at times almost like playing the game in slow motion.' (GameRevolution 2003)

These delay problems in particular were received negatively. *Honestgamers*, for example, wrote:

'Another thing is that the game has some pretty bad slowdown problems. When I say 'pretty bad,' I mean that they manifest in just about every level where there's a lot of detail (even in cutscenes sometimes), and the game slows down enough that it takes about three seconds for the PS2 to register a button press. Come on, guys, how long have you been working on this game?' (kieran 2003)

The gameplay, was discussed more negatively. Camera work, unwilling and confusing controls, delayed and outdated control options were repeatedly emphasised. What might have less of an impact in other game genres must have a fatal effect on the gaming experience in an action-adventure game. This is especially true for *Tomb Raider*, where reactions in seconds and very precise movements are often required. In terms of gameplay, the criticism was mainly directed at the coarseness and imprecision, which was neither contemporary nor helpful in a game like *Tomb Raider*. This was expressed particularly drastically on *GamesRadar*:

'Walk forwards onto a staircase and as the view changes you'll often find yourself wandering back across the screen the way you just came. This effect is magnified as the running, walking and sidestep functions are now controlled on the left-hand stick and toggled with R1. Turning on the spot is also equally impossible and lining yourself up quickly for a timed jump is frustration itself. Add in the problem of the fixed cameras and simply scooping up a packet of ammo becomes akin to parallel-parking the Titanic.' (GamesRadar 2003)

Even well-meaning reviewers such as those at *IGN* couldn't help but notice the minimal progress in gameplay and the considerable steps backwards from its predecessors to *The Angel of Darkness*, even though other series and standalone games in the early 2000s were making rapid progress in terms of mechanics:

'But despite all this, controlling Lara is only millimeters more progressive than games from the previous series, and that's being generous. Simple things such as opening doors and climbing through a window can be a real chore, because of Core's reliance on the grid-based system. And despite several hours honing my skills jumping and shimmying, Lara's lack of fluidity, rigid set of moves, and Core's desire to retain the series' clunky, awkward mechanics brings on genuine frustration and disappointment. It's 2003, for God's sake!' (Perry 2003)

Naturally, reviews of new releases are always under pressure to be reviewed quickly, just a few weeks after publication, so that many details or aspects receive less attention than in subsequent years. This is also the case with the reviews here. Although bugs such as the game's lag problems were noted, they were not as strongly emphasised as they were later on. Either way, the contemporary

reviews strike a similar note: the plot was received positively, the graphics with mixed feelings, the gameplay negatively.

Let's Plays: Playing through Bugs

The Let's Plays analysed here only included those that were still playing the original version of *The Angel of Darkness*, not the technically and graphically improved version of the 2025 remaster. When selecting two Let's Plays of *The Angel of Darkness* on *YouTube*, for example, the question of a qualitatively justified selection arises. The most and third most frequently viewed Let's Plays were selected here: At the time of selection, these were 321,610 for a playlist (Rahmschnitzel 2016), 318,721 views for an overall video (Kawaii Games 2019) and 255,125 (TailsGaming 2014). The second most frequent had to be omitted because the player refrains from any reactions in the form of video or audio. It should also be noted that the game was played in English, but the commentaries (for both) are in German. However, both commentators provide English subtitles.[2]

Quantitatively selecting all of them would go beyond the scope of this essay, but would be suitable for a more extensive article or even a small monograph. The same applies to the use of other platforms beyond *YouTube*. *YouTube* was chosen here simply because of its unique size and reach.

In terms of content, the Let's Plays are generally unanimous in their assessment of *The Angel of Darkness* and share the positive and negative reactions of the contemporary reviews, but also complain about including complaints about the numerous bugs. A general problem that is repeatedly raised in the Let's Plays (with increasing displeasure) is the imprecise controls. Although similar to those of the predecessors, they are no longer up to date, too spongy and too complicated: 'The control with the mouse is terrible', which is why the commentator only tries to play with the keyboard, to name just one example (Rahmschnitzel 2016, 1, 7:31–7:34). Such clunky handling in a *Tomb Raider* game naturally becomes particularly problematic when something has to be done quickly and precisely, such as when *Lara* only ever has a fraction of a second between a protective position on the ground and an upright stance to defeat the enemy in a boss fight:

> 'Like I said, I have no idea who would come up with something like that or how something like that could be waved through, that something like that could work, that it's good enough for the game to include it here. I think it's safe to say that someone hasn't done that much testing. That's just the problem [...] that you can have as a creative person, as a game developer: that if you know the solution to a problem, then it all seems logical and realistic [...]. However, if you don't know it, you have to make sure or the programmer has to make sure, the inventor, that you can solve it logically.' (Rahmschnitzel 2016, 20, 2:27–3:15)

This can be particularly grueling with obvious bugs that also endanger the game state. One example is 'falling out' of one level into the next, where the game world is gone or black, but sequences can still start. The only solution is to call up the last manual save point. Of course, the player does not immediately recognise this misconstruction as a bug:

> 'Apparently we've fallen out of the game. I want to go to the menu. I can't get into the menu. Thank you, game, I need to restart you. Oh, a sign of life. Huh? Huh? Haha. Um, I'll see you in the next episode. I hope it works out a bit better then'. (Rahmschnitzel 2016, 33, 17:13–17:42)

In addition to purely technical bugs that hinder the player's progress, there were also many small bugs that stood out negatively. One example is just one of many: If you zoom in too close on *Lara's* head with the camera view, the view often switches from her face or the back of her head to an internal view of her face and especially her eyes. This can look unfinished, but above all it can be off-putting during complicated jumps or shooting battles: 'What are the chances or did you plan it that way? The player will definitely want to know what Lara looks like on the inside' (TailsGaming 2014, 22, 4:15–4:31).

Various Let's Plays are known to win over their audience through the uniqueness of the commentators, for example in the way they comment or their emotionality. In the Let's Plays for *The*

Angel of Darkness, they are all fundamentally similar in their assessment of the game: the plot is good, the technical realisation poor.

Fanmades, Documentaries and Younger Reviews: Honouring the Willingness to Experiment

More recent reviews before the remaster of 2025 as well as fanmades and documentaries, caused the negative reception of *The Angel of Darkness* to diverge even further. Here are three factually representative examples of all three forms of reception.

As is so often the case, fanmades were also created for *The Angel of Darkness* because the fan community was dissatisfied with the material presented. One example of this is a self-named *Angel of Darkness 1.5* by a developer duo, which was created on their own initiative in 2021. It is still in development, as the two are working on it as a hobby on the side. But the project already attracted attention in 2021. *PCGamesN*, for example, said:

> 'The remake […] is being worked on by developer Julian Guba (aka FreakRaider) and Lara character model creator Konrad Majewski. The pair are using Unreal Engine 4 to completely remake the most maligned of all the Tomb Raider games […]. FreakRaider has been tinkering with the engine for over five years now but apparently the current version has only been in development about six months, and it sounds like the developers are nearly ready to properly reveal it. The new video released reveals Konrad's highly detailed Lara Croft model, with 150,000 polygons, subsurface scattering, 4K textures, and realistic hair shading.' (Capel 2021)

In fact, the duo diligently post further videos, usually lasting half a minute, in which Lara can be seen outside of cutscenes. The graphics are remarkably polished. However, there is still no sign of the *PCGamesN* prediction that a release could be imminent. The last glimpse of a more or less finished section dates from March 2023, the last update to date from February 2025.[3]

Documentaries like video essays by content creators have always expressed themselves in a similar way to reviews and Let's Plays. As with the fanmades, their creation is an expression of the continued reception of a game that was remembered despite or because of its technical weaknesses. The most successful documentary in terms of views considers the two worst in his opinion *Tomb Raider*. In addition to *The Angel of Darkness*, the direct predecessor of the main series and the handheld predecessor are similarly bad, although nowhere near as bad. *The Angel of Darkness* is even introduced with clear and drastic words: 'The Holy Grail of shitty Tomb Raider games, 'Angel of Darkness'! It was so bad, it killed the studio making it and nearly killed the whole franchise!' (Cinemassacre 2018, 5:45–5:57)

The problems of the spin-off were all addressed and categorised in a humorous or satirical way. The list is long. From plot holes, the very civil character for the series to the mixture of relapses to the last manual save points with (bug-related) constant game deaths:

> 'Save after every puzzle, save after every enemy, and save after every jump! And the jumping … you would think, since this is PS2, the controls would be better than PS1! But you'd be wrong. They're extremely clunky, and that's the reason why you die so much. (Cinemassacre 2018, 6:48–7:10)

Of course, the list of technical shortcomings in *The Angel of Darkness* is long. Many of these were less pronounced in early reviews, which is why it is worth taking a look at later reactions to the game. Contemporary reviews are obviously under pressure to be published quickly in order to be able to react to the game as quickly as possible after release. Many things therefore only become clear after some time, repeated play or a certain amount of opportunity for comparison.

For this reason, the list of technical shortcomings in reactions to the game after the contemporary reviews was also much more extensive, although these could significantly impair the gaming experience. These included, for example, the underexposure of the game (which simply did not allow

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[3] See on X: Julian Guba (FreakRaider) (@realfreakraider) / X

the player to get a proper overview of the terrain), the large amount of small glitches (such as slipping on jumping platforms) or the constant loading of individual areas ('You turn into an alley – load. You walk up a staircase – load. You walk from one end of the street to another? Load! Load! Load! Load! Too many fuckin' loads!' [Cinemassacre 2018, 9:52–10:06]).

More recent reviews between the first wave of reviews for the 2003 release and the 2025 remaster also came to further conclusions. These reviews were primarily published in response to the announcement of the remaster. From this perspective, new expectations arose and old memories were awakened, which were put to the test anew with the original game. For example at *PCGamesN*:

> 'Critics at the time were impressed by the game's story, environments, and graphics, but its controls, camera, and combat system were a pain – not to mention the bugs. Angel of Darkness tried some new things though, including some RPG elements like dialogue choices with NPCs and a stamina bar. The stamina bar resulted in many dropping to their deaths unnecessarily during jumps, but the ability to chat with some intriguing characters added extra depth to the adventure. In no other Tomb Raider game would you be told to 'Move along Ma Chere!' as you explore a Parisian Ghetto – who needs tombs anyway? If you didn't like Angel of Darkness' storyline, the remaster won't do much to help that, but we're hoping technical and visual improvements iron out some of the mechanical issues. Fortunately, the entire trilogy will let you play with modern controls, which should allow for smoother character and camera movement that's more akin to the rebooted series.' (Hood 2024)

Expectations were raised, but they were also cautiously set: can the worst *Tomb Raider* ever be that much better? The remaster of 2025 had yet to prove it.

Reviews After the Remaster: Finally Playable

The reviews of the remaster discussed all three games that were released together as a remaster, so *The Angel of Darkness* together with its two predecessors. Nevertheless, all three parts received extensive coverage in the reviews. There were also a number of reviews that focussed on the remaster of *The Angel of Darkness*. Both forms, those of the three remasters together and those for *The Angel of Darkness* alone, came to negative judgments. However, the problems were already predetermined, as was also noted in the reviews:

> 'So, when game developer Aspyr announced that it was remastering the rest of the classic Tomb Raider saga, including Angel of Darkness, I was instantly intrigued. The Tomb Raider 1–3 Remaster from last year is an almost perfect example of a remaster, focusing on updated visuals, quality of life improvements, and modern controls for new audiences. But how do you remaster an unfinished game like Angel of Darkness that was panned for clunky controls, a convoluted storyline, and broken features? I was eager to find out, so when my review copy of Tomb Raider 4–6 Remastered landed in my inbox, I instantly went straight to AoD to see what had (or hadn't) improved.' (Bowden 2024)

Among other things, the improved, rounded graphics, the smoother, more logical, intuitive movements and the resolution of problems such as severe underexposure were praised. But so many problems remained unsolved that his conclusion was still more negative than positive:

> 'Updated map and object textures are good, but there's room for improvement here. There are also still bugs that I'd like to see fixed with future updates. Overall, the game does an excellent job at restoring cut content where possible, and fixes issues like player movement and story continuity which really do enhance the quality of this classic Tomb Raider game. Unfortunately, the remaster can't help the fact that this game is chronically unfinished. Aspyr has done its best to fix the game up for a modern audience, but there's only so much you can do when half the game is outright missing. I love Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness, and I appreciate this remaster too. But sometimes you have to call a spade a spade, and that's not the remasters' fault.' (Bowden 2024)

It could now be debated whether *The Angel of Darkness* could have been technically rounded off with more time, more funding or more fundamental work. Perhaps this is the case. But with such a technically complex game, the effort involved would have been extreme. Whether it would have paid off in purely economic terms is questionable at the current price of € 29.99 for the three remastered parts. In this respect, *The Angel of Darkness* remained negatively viewed in the 2025 reviews, even though the efforts and achievements were honoured.

Memes: In-game Logic is for Beginners

In purely quantitative terms, *The Angel of Darkness* seems to have received very little attention in memes compared to other Tomb Raider games. Other games are more in the foreground, especially the oldest and most recent instalments. Some memes are nevertheless virulent, especially on *Instagram*, *X* and *Reddit*. Most of them allude to plot holes in the storyline, a few to the role of the spin-off in the series. Below is an example of each.

On *Reddit*, user *TheMustangFanboi_98* posted the following meme in the *r/TombRaider subreddit:*
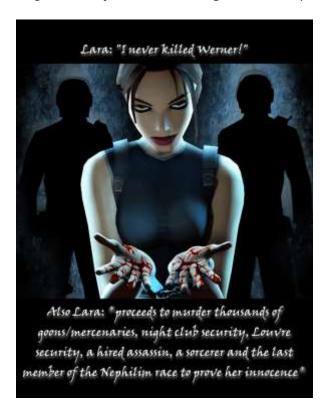

Figure 2. Meme by *TheMustangFanboi_98*

The words "Lara: I never killed Werner!" can be read at the top of the picture. In the centre of the picture, around the focus of the visual axes, is *Lara* herself, breaking through the fourth wall with her hands covered in blood and her head tilted downwards, smirking slightly. At the bottom of the picture is a long piece of lettering:

> 'Also Lara: *proceeds to murder thousands of goons/mercenaries, night club security, Louvre security, a hired assassin, a arcoerer and the last member of the Nephilim race to prove her innocence*

After arranging the contents of this meme, the viewer's gaze should first wander to *Lara* or the upper crotch. Either way, one of the first pieces of information in the meme is *Lara's* statement in quotation marks that she did not kill her mentor *Werner*. The viewer's gaze wanders (again) to *Lara* herself, who has *someone's* blood on her hands and looks ambiguously at the viewer, while she herself in the game actually has no memory of the events surrounding *Werner's* death. In the last part of the meme, the viewer is then given a long list of all the things *Lara* does to prove her innocence. According to the meme, she kills masses of people to prove her innocence for a single murder.

Of course, this is an obvious plot hole of the game. Many memes about *The Angel of Darkness* play with such holes. As much as the plot has been praised in reviews, fanmades and more, the deep plot holes have always been criticised.

The following meme plays with other elements. Created on *imgflip* and posted by user *Dublinlad3740*, it takes as its template the widely used 'You Guys Always Act Like You're Better Than Me' from the animated sitcom *Family Guy*:

Figure 3. Meme by *Dublinlad3740*

In the scene depicted in the template, *Meg*, who is shown in the upper part of the picture, confronts her parents and her older brother with the accusation that the three of them always behave as if they are superior to her. Appropriately, *Meg* is angry and wearing everyday clothes, while the other three are relaxed and dressed in evening wear. Based on this ironic juxtaposition, the template is used a lot to point out ironic or satirical principles.

It's the same here. *Meg* is overwritten with 'Tomb Raider Angel of Darkness', so identified with it according to meme practice. The other three, on the other hand, are titled with the first three *Tomb Raider* parts, albeit not with the correct titles, but according to the semi-official count. The juxtaposition of the template for *The Angel of Darkness* is therefore very low-threshold: *The Angel of Darkness* stands in stark contrast to the first three parts of the series, which are received as classics. *The Angel of Darkness*, on the other hand, is far behind them.

Memes have a number of functions, from ironising to disseminating information. In the case of *The Angel of Darkness*, it seems to be the former in qualitative terms, but in quantitative terms it is in no way comparable with the dissemination of the other *Tomb Raider* instalments in memes.

Conclusion

Overall, the reception of *The Angel of Darkness* is sometimes heterogeneous and multi-voiced within itself, but transport an overall negative perception of the game. This judgment persists over time. The *Tomb Raider* spin-off has not aged well, nor has it been significantly better received due to its remaster. It is recognised as a legitimate *Tomb Raider* game, but at the same time it is typically classified as the worst part, which almost caused the entire series to fail.

The most balanced reviews are still the contemporary ones from 2003. They at least highlight the positive aspects of the story, while other aspects are deemed average to poor. However, later Let's

Plays, fanmades and other media forms hardly find anything good to say about the story. Even later reviews for the remaster or memes hardly differentiate between a good story and bad gameplay.

This essay is both a contribution to the nearly three decades of *Tomb Raider* scholarship and a pioneering work on *The Angel of Darkness*. As little attention as the game has received in comparison to the other spin-offs, little research has been done on it. This should change as it offers a promising approach to questions of video game history, reception, conceptions of history, the challenges of console transitions, the role of demand in video games, and much more.

Regardless, it is not expected that the reception of *The Angel of Darkness* will change dramatically in the next few years. With the technically inadequate remaster, the development of *The Angel of Darkness* has reached its end – at least as far as we know now – and compared to later titles, the story could not generate much excitement. Of course, the original developers were under pressure: three years of development, a successful film adaptation, a new game every year, a new console generation, and multiple delays. Even in the light of the reception history, to say whether more time would have solved the issues would be speculation. The story, the graphics, and the gameplay were all evaluated negatively. The rights holders have learned from this. Scholars can only evaluate it neutrally. The fans and critics who have been criticising the game harshly for two decades should also try to learn from this.

About the Author

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