eview by Marc Messer

Title: Tomb Raider II
Developer: Aspyr Media
Price: $49
Contact Info: http://www.aspyr.com
Genre: 3D Adventure/Shooter Game
System Requirements: Mac OS 7.5.3 or later, 80 MHz Power PC (100 MHz recommended), 16 MB RAM (24 MB recommended), 4x CD-ROM (8x recommended); optimized for 3Dfx and RAVE graphics accelerator cards.

ll This Work Just for a Dagger?

But this isn't just any dagger… it's the Dagger of Xian, and it possesses the power of the dragon. More importantly, when you drive the dagger into your heart, you become the dragon. You are Lara Croft, and to complete your quest, you will travel to Tibet, China, and Venice. Along the way, you'll meet "Warrior Monks, Yetis, jaguars, great white sharks, killer eels, rabid Dobermans, and more" (according to Aspyr Media). But Lara is agile and very skilled. Her talents will be needed to overcome all of the obstacles she will face.

ameplay

Tomb Raider II is different from many other 3D action/adventure games in that it isn't limited to a few choice movements or skills. Aside from walking and jumping, Tomb Raider II incorporates rolling, climbing, swimming, and speedboat/snowmobile operation. Lara must navigate through caves, towers, fortresses, underwater caverns, and booby-trapped (no pun intended) mazes to find the dagger. The ever-changing environment makes TombRaider an interesting, challenging game.

ontrols

Lara is very flexible, to say the least. To control her, you primarily use the number pad to move her forward, backward, side to side, around, and even into a quick 180˚ roll. The space bar pulls out the chosen weapon (or use keys 1-6 on the keyboard for a specific weapon) and the command key fires. The control key — the action key — is the most versatile. It allows you to climb, pick up items, unlock and open doors, and use vehicles. The number pad 0 also functions as a look key. By holding it down, your perspective moves to one immediately behind Lara's head. You then just use the other number pad keys to look around without moving. The keys mentioned are described as "User Keys" in the control window. Sure, you can customize your own keys (and TombRaider II will warn you about duplicated keys), but most gamers probably won't need to change the control scheme very much.

One of the best things in Tomb Raider II is the training session. At any time, you can go to Lara's home (stop thinking that!). You see, Lara has set up an obstacle course (with instruction from Lara herself) for you to hone your skills. Trust me, you'll need it. It takes a little bit of time to learn how to jump certain distances safely, swim effectively, and, in general, not die quickly. Lara's home is also a nice place to look around. You can walk around the finely landscaped courtyard or go inside and see how well she lives. Take a swim in the pool, listen to some music, or take a look in the freezer. All of this is in the guise of learning how to control her!

ffects

What can I say? Amazing. Tomb Raider II takes advantage of 3Dfx and RAVE graphics accelerators to yield excellent 3D effects. Your view is from behind/over the shoulder of Lara (not a bad view at all) so, unlike first-person shooters, you actually see her change weapons, attack animals, open doors, and jump. The camera swings around her in delayed fashion so that

very quick movements don't completely disorient you. Also, the camera cannot be located within solid objects, so if Lara is backed up to a wall, your view will be from her side. It takes a while to adjust to the camera, but you'll get used to it eventually. You'll have to.

The graphics are very nice, with very scenic backgrounds and fairly detailed surroundings. However, the rock and natural surfaces stand out as patterns with the edges of the squares being pretty obvious. Lara's movement, and the movement of the other creatures, seems pretty realistic as well.

 particularly liked how gamers can switch from RAVE to 3Dfx to software rendering as well as how gamers can adjust most other graphical aspects (screen size, resolution, texturing) just by using F-keys. This made it quite easy to see how the game would perform with and without hardware acceleration and allowed me to achieve the best performance from my system.

The sound effects in Tomb Raider II are realistic and are great for cluing you in to what is about to happen. Tomb Raider II is a game with lots of wild animals, unstable ground, and poisonous spiders — hearing them coming is a good thing. All sound effects are in stereo, so you've got a pretty good idea of where they're coming from. The background sounds (whistling wind, flowing water, etc.) help bring you into the game. All around (literally), the sound effects are excellent.

eapons 'n' Stuff

Lara begins her mission with two pistols (with unlimited ammo) and a shotgun. Along the way, she'll pick up flares, more weapons, ammo, medipacks, and other unique items. These objects can be accessed by hitting the escape key and selecting them from a menu which rotates — the item nearest you is the currently selected one.

When you have your weapon out, you cannot use the action key for your hands. This means that Lara must put her toys away before climbing or opening doors. Lara will automatically center her aim on a threatening object, awaiting your choice to fire. She will keep firing in that direction until you release the fire key, and then she'll re-center on another target if one is present. While this method isn't nearly as complex as most first-person shooters in which your accuracy depends on your own aim, your accuracy in TRII depends on your firing strategy and your ability to move away from the target and not fall over the edge of a cliff at the same time. Interesting trade-off, no?

ntangibles

I mentioned the unique menu with the rotating selection. Although this is unusual, the design is implemented consistently throughout the game. Once you know how to use the menu, it's easy. A statistics screen is also available from the main menu ring, and it displays how well you are doing on the current level.

Tomb Raider II's instruction booklet is inside the CD's jewel case. The storyline is vaguely described, but the manual contains in-depth coverage regarding movement and gameplay. Overall, I found the manual useful.

Performance could not really be tested as the overall requirements are pretty low by today's gaming standards. Using a 6500/300, I achieved good framerates in software rendering mode and in 3Dfx mode with a Voodoo1 card. Gameplay was very fluid all around.

Conclusion

If you enjoy unique adventure games that require skill, you'll love Tomb Raider II. The overall uniqueness in the movement of Lara Croft and variation of gameplay from other shooter/adventure games sets this one apart. This game requires that you be quick on your feet, errr, keys and skilled in how you control Lara. It also requires that you notice everything around you to find clues and watch out for traps. Summed, all of these qualities make Tomb Raider II worthy of 4 stars out of 5. I look forward to the future release of Tomb Raider Gold for the Mac and hopefully Tomb Raider III as well. Screenshots from the game can be found on the Apple Wizards website at http://applewizards.net/TRII/ .

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