

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

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1 Introduction

Video games have become a very popular form of entertainment. The advances in technology with powerful computers and consoles have enabled the use of high definition graphics and sounds as well as immersive, cinematic cut-scenes. However, mere graphics and visuals combined with some action do not create a video game. It needs a story that drives the action, and relatable characters to act out the story. As more women have entered the video game scene both as developers and players, the video game industry has been forced to consider what kind of stories and characters it produces. Almost half of video game players are women (ESA, 2016), and they, including me, demand strong female characters that have actual development in the games' stories.

I was not very interested in the *Tomb Raider* games until I heard that the two new games from 2013 and 2015 introduce a more humanlike and relatable Lara Croft, a female adventurer and amateur archaeologist. The games so far had showed her with a scantily dressed, unrealistically proportioned body. Thus I played the first of the two games, and enjoyed it very much. Then, as I read some reviews of the game talking about Lara Croft's development as a character, I became intrigued. They claimed that Lara Croft develops throughout the game, but provided little evidence of the psychological development of the character (see e.g. Martin, 2013; Mitchell, 2013; Petit, 2013). They mostly indicated the change in her appearance; both how it has become more realistic throughout the game series, and how it changes from neat and tidy into bloody and bruised in this game. Also the studies conducted on this particular game or the franchise as a whole concentrated more on the change in her appearance, and the advance in game mechanics than the change in her behaviour. When her behaviour was discussed, only little concrete proof was provided. I was not satisfied with that, and therefore I chose the game *Tomb Raider* as the subject of my thesis.

In this thesis I will analyse Lara Croft's dialogue in *Tomb Raider* reboot video game using content analysis. I will examine what her interaction and relationships with the game's other characters reveal about her own development throughout the game. I will also analyse how the other characters' dialogue illustrate Lara Croft' development. My aim is to provide concrete evidence of her development as a character, and also evaluate the quality of the development. First I will introduce the broader field of video game studies in section 2, and my materials and methods in section 3. In section 4 I will analyse Lara Croft's dialogue with four different characters and draw conclusions of her development from those interactions. In section 5 I will conclude my findings and provide topics for further studies.

2 Previous research

According to Frans Mäyrä (2008), a Finnish professor and video game researcher, game studies is a relatively young and multidisciplinary field, which “has become established both as a field of scientific inquiry and as a branch of knowledge that is formally taught at universities” with “its own theories, methods and terminology” (p. 4). Mäyrä talks about the so called “ludology-narratology debate”, which stemmed from the difficulty of situating game studies in the larger context of research, and determining how studies about games should be conducted (p. 8). Narratology was invented to unify the works that scholars from different disciplines were doing about narrative, and ludology is a term invented by Gonzalo Frasca (1999). According to him it means the “discipline that studies game and play activities” (as cited in Mäyrä, 2008, p. 8). The debate indicates how video games can be studied with different approaches: as entities with their own characteristics that differ significantly from traditional narratives in ludology, or as narratives with similar structures to literature and films in narratology. Due to the breadth of video game studies, there are many possible approach to research. In this section I will present some studies that have also used content analysis and are relevant to my topic.

2.1 Representation in video games

A common method in video game studies is content analysis, which I will also use in this thesis. It will be introduced in more detail in section 3. With content analysis the quality and quantity of video game characters, for instance, can be analysed. This approach reveals the difficulties of creating video game characters. In addition to all the technical aspects of creating a character, it has to be interesting to the players. The interest can easily be evoked by making the character appear pleasing to the eye, which in turn can create problems. Thus, in studies utilising content analysis, the focus is often on female characters and their portrayal. For example, Teresa Lynch, Jessica E. Tompkins, Irene I van Driel and Niki Fritz (2016) conducted a content analysis of 571 video games that feature playable female characters, released between 1983 and 2014. They discovered that while sexualisation of female characters had diminished since the 1990’s, it is still present in more recent games. Females are also more often secondary than primary characters (Lynch et al., 2016).

Dmitri Williams, Nicole Martins, Mia Consalvo and James D. Ivory (2009) studied 150 video games on nine different platforms, focusing on female and non-white characters, and the age range of all of the characters. They discovered similarly that there are less female than male characters,

and that they are more often in secondary roles. Another find was that white adult males are overrepresented while females, Hispanic, Native Americans, children and the elderly are underrepresented (Williams et al., 2009). Edward Downs and Stacy L. Smith (2009) analysed video games from the year 2003. They mention Lara Croft as an example of an oversexualised female character. However, many *Tomb Raider* games have been released since 2003, and the change in Lara Croft's portrayal has also been studied. In addition to similar findings that more recent studies have discovered, this study also took into consideration how portrayals of women in video games can affect girls and boys in real life. They found out that oversexualised female characters can cause girls self-esteem problems and eating disorders when they try to mimic them, and boys may learn that women are supposed to look like they do in video games (Downs & Smith, 2009).

As with all studies, one should be critical when contemplating the results of these studies about video games and the characters in them. Although it can be numerically proven that the amount of female characters in video games has increased, the qualitative aspect of their sexualisation is more difficult to measure. The characters' clothes and how revealing they are can be examined, as well as the characters' movements. They tell the researcher something about how sexualised the characters are, and then the results can be compared to those from previous video games to see how the sexualisation has either decreased or increased. Still, the characters' appearances do not necessarily define how successful they are as characters. In my opinion it is important to analyse their dialogue and interaction with the other characters in the game in order to conclude their quality, because nowadays the characters' sexualisation can be more discreet than a clearly revealing outfit. It can mean that the character does not develop properly throughout the game, but remains shallow and stays the same from beginning to end.

2.2 Studying the *Tomb Raider* franchise

In addition to being mentioned in broader studies about video games, the *Tomb Raider* games alone have also been studied, with focus often on Lara Croft's appearance and development in the franchise. A study by Helen W. Kennedy (2002) focuses on Lara Croft as a female protagonist among males in video games. Her focus is on Lara Croft's looks and how she is designed to be viewed by men. She examines the relationship between the (assumedly male) player and Lara Croft. Although her study did not include Lara Croft's own possible development as a character, it has been later examined in other studies. For example, Hye-Won Han and Se-Jin Song (2014) studied how Lara Croft is characterised and how her portrayal changes in the franchise's history. Their

study included the reboot game which I am analysing in this thesis. They concluded that although Lara Croft's appearance has changed into more realistic, she is still not a true female hero because she needs men to save her (Han & Song, 2014). This can be discussed further, because one might argue that even heroes can receive help from others without it decreasing their own strength.

Esther McCallum-Stewart (2014) also studied the change in Lara Croft's appearance from the first game in 1996 to the 2013 reboot. She examined both how Lara Croft herself has changed throughout the series, and how players have reacted to it. She found out that some regard Lara Croft as a bad role model because of her sexualised appearance, but many players, including females, can like her as a character despite that (McCallum-Stewart, 2014). This shows that the mere appearance of the characters does not define how the players react to them. McCallum-Stewart mentioned Lara Croft's development in the reboot game, but she did not analyse it very thoroughly with examples from the dialogue. The reboot game has been studied also by Kimmo Markkanen (2016) in his bachelor's thesis. He studied the storytelling in the game and how well it relates to the "Hero's Journey" template of Joseph Campbell's monomyth. He also studied Lara Croft's development, but more from the overall narrative's point of view than by focusing on the dialogue.

Although extensive research had been conducted on female representation on video games both in general and in the *Tomb Raider* franchise, as this chapter has shown, Felix Schröter and Jan-Noël Thon (2014) point out that the video game characters themselves have been studied surprisingly little. They say that video game characters are usually seen in their relation to the player, or as representations of real life phenomena, not as entities that can be studied in isolation. Their study introduced how character development can be studied by examining the characters' appearance and speech (Schröter & Thon, 2014). In this thesis I will focus on the speech in the form of video game dialogue because it has not been studied from this game in this way before. I think it is a very important aspect when contemplating the character's overall quality and development.

3 Data and method

In this section I will introduce *Tomb Raider*, the reboot video game that I will be studying in this thesis. I will also present my method, content analysis, and how it will be utilised in analysing the data.

3.1 *Tomb Raider* reboot video game

Tomb Raider is a third-person action-adventure video game developed by Crystal Dynamics and published by Square Enix, released in 2013 for Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. An updated version with improved graphics and some added downloadable content, titled *Tomb Raider: Definitive Edition* was released in 2014 for Xbox One and PlayStation 4. This is the version I have played and analysed. The dialogue is same in both versions. The game is the tenth instalment and the second reboot of the 21-year-old franchise. The game being a reboot means that it establishes a new origin and storyline for the characters. Lara Croft has been compared to Nathan Drake of Naughty Dog's *Uncharted* series, and Indiana Jones (see e.g. Petit, 2013). The game has received positive reviews, with critics praising especially its combat, Lara Croft's development, and Camilla Luddington's portrayal and performance of her (see e.g. Macdonald, 2013; Miller, 2013; Splechta, 2013; Taljonick, 2014). In 2015 a sequel, *Rise of the Tomb Raider*, was released, and the third instalment will be released in either 2017 or 2018.

Tomb Raider tells the story of Lara Croft, a 21-year-old aspiring archaeologist on her first adventure. She sails with a diverse crew on the *Endurance*, and their aim is to find the lost kingdom of Yamatai, east of Japan. Lara is the game's protagonist and the only playable character. Other characters include Samantha "Sam" Nishimura, Lara's friend from university; Conrad Roth, the ship's captain; Alex Weiss, a technician on the ship; Dr James Whitman, the lead archaeologist of the expedition, and also crew members Joslin Reyes, Jonah Maiava and Angus "Grim" Grimaldi.

The game begins when the *Endurance* is hit by a storm in Dragon's Triangle, a notorious part of the sea, and shipwrecked on a mysterious island that turns out to be Yamatai. The island is inhabited by a malevolent cult of survivors from previous shipwrecks, who worship an ancient Sun Queen, Himiko, and call themselves the Solarii brotherhood. Their leader is a ruthless man called Mathias, who has been trying to discover a way to escape the island for decades. He is the game's main antagonist.

As the story progresses, Lara discovers that the island is cursed by Himiko's soul trapped in a decaying body, preventing anyone from leaving the island by creating storms. The Solarii's solution is to transfer Himiko's soul into a new body, but no woman so far has been suitable, until Sam, who is Himiko's descendant. Sam is kidnapped by the Solarii, and Lara has to save her from them, twice. While trying to save Sam and survive on the island Lara has to hunt for food and kill a man for the first time. Many crew members die on the island, and Lara has to learn to survive without them and live with the sense of guilt.

3.2 Content analysis and the dialogue

The data in this thesis consists of the dialogue in the video game *Tomb Raider*. I collected it from a YouTube video made by a user called Gamer's Little Playground (2014). The video contains the game's cut-scenes and other parts with dialogue. When analysing the dialogue, I used content analysis. It is a tool for analysis to reveal similarities, connections and themes in the material. Content analysis proceeds in certain steps, first of which is to collect the data (University of Leicester, 2009). I did it by watching the video and writing down the dialogue. The video contained the original subtitles from the game, which made the process easier as I did not have to transcribe the dialogue. The second step is to read through the data again and categorise it based on the themes found. I divided the dialogue into sections depending on who Lara was interacting with. Then third step is to analyse the categories and identify links between them. As my topic is Lara's development, I analysed the different sections to find evidence of it. The interaction between her and four of the game's other character proved to be most interesting, so I limited my analysis on those four sections. The fourth step is to describe the findings, which I will do in section 4. After that the final step is to interpret the findings more thoroughly to reveal the larger phenomenon, i.e. Lara's development as a character, based on themes I found from the sections of dialogue. I will discuss it at the end of section 4 and in section 5.

4 Analysis

In this section I will analyse the dialogue between Lara and four different characters: Conrad Roth, Samantha “Sam” Nishimura, Alex Weiss and Dr James Whitman. I chose these four characters because in my opinion they have the biggest roles in the game in addition to Lara. They also have enough dialogue with her so that proper conclusions can be drawn. There are also other characters in the game, for example the main antagonist Mathias and his henchmen, and Jonah, Reyes and Grim, who belong to the crew of the *Endurance*. They have only smaller parts in the game, and I do not consider them as important to Lara’s development as the four characters I chose. In each subsection I will analyse the dialogue between Lara and one of the four characters. Then I will conclude Lara’s development based on the findings in those four subsections. The analysis shows that Lara’s interaction with each character reveals a different aspect of her development.

4.1 Lara and Roth – from a follower to a leader

One of the most important secondary characters in the game is Conrad Roth. He is a friend of Lara’s late father, Lord Croft. Because he was a very absent father, Roth has been a father figure to Lara. It became apparent when analysing the dialogue between them. They have a special relationship which reveals how Lara grows as a person. Extract 1 shows an important aspect of Lara and Roth’s interaction, which is that Roth is the only one to whom Lara tells about her fears and insecurities.

Extract 1.

Roth: Easy, easy. Are you okay? What happened?

Lara: I remember the beach... then it went black and I woke up in a cave... There was this crazy man, Roth... and a dead body.

Gamer’s Little Playground (2014, 0:17:18)

In extract 1 Roth is the one to inquire Lara about her condition and not the other way around. Lara’s response is fragmentary, which shows that she is frightened. Extract 2 is somewhat similar because there, too, Roth is the one to ask Lara about her condition and she answers.

Extract 2.

Roth: I can see smoke coming from the old ruins, are you okay?

Lara: Oh god... Roth, I’m in trouble. They’re killing people.

Roth: What? Who?

Lara: Men... I don't know why... I had to kill some of them. I had no choice...

Roth: That can't have been easy.

Lara: It's scary just how easy it was.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 0:31:00)

Extracts 2, similarly as extract 1, shows that Lara confides in Roth, who is worried about her, asking her questions. Lara tells him what happened just as it happened. She is not afraid to appear weak in Roth's eyes, because she admits that she is in trouble. She describes how she had to kill for the first time and she is clearly shocked from the experience, as can be expected. Nonetheless, Lara already shows signs that her experiences on the island have begun to affect her, because she says that killing people was easier than she thought. Her reaction to killing being surprisingly easy scares even herself.

For comparison, extract 3 shows how Roth answers to Lara when she asks him about his condition. In it Lara finds Roth while he is being attacked by a pair of wolves. Roth shoots at them but they escape with his food pack, which also contains first aid supplies. Roth's leg is badly injured and he is very weak.

Extract 3.

Lara: Sorry. They did a real number on your leg.

Roth: Nah. Looks worse than it is.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 0:32:19)

Unlike Lara, who describes elaborately what has happened to her and how she feels about it, Roth tries to conceal his injuries and dismiss them. He does not want to appear weak in Lara's eyes. Thus he is characterised as a strong leader and mentor while Lara needs help from him, although Lara is the one to help him in this situation. Roth loses consciousness and Lara retrieves his food pack and binds his wounds. Then she climbs to a high radio tower to transmit an SOS. She manages to contact a pilot who had been searching for them since Roth sent a distress call from the *Endurance*. The pilot tries to land but a lightning hits the plane and it crashes on the island. Lara sees the pilot landing with a parachute and tries to save him, but Mathias's men kill him before she reaches him. Extract 4 shows that Lara blames herself for the crash and the pilot's death and seeks consolation from Roth, speaking again in a fragmentary way she often uses when talking to him. Roth comforts Lara and keeps calm, reassuring her that they will find another way off the island.

Extract 4.

Lara: One moment they were fine... the next... there was this storm. It came out of nowhere...

Roth: It's not your fault, Lara.

Lara: I called them here, Roth.

Roth: Hey, we'll find another way.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 0:53:58)

After that they hear that the co-pilot from the plane is still alive, and Lara wants to save him. Roth disagrees, but now Lara has more confidence to defy him, as extract 5 shows.

Extract 5.

Lara: Damn it, he can't hear me. I have to get to him.

Roth: No.

Lara: His signal's just over there.

Roth: We've got our own people to worry about. We'll need to regroup as soon as they find Sam.

Lara: I can't just leave him out there alone. I need to get to him. -- I can't choose to let him die, Roth.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 0:54:24)

Here Roth thinks about his own crew, but Lara wants to save the co-pilot. She wants to do what she thinks is right although she has to disagree with Roth. She goes to save the co-pilot, but again the enemies kill him before she manages to save him. Then Lara faces many difficulties: she has to escape from the enemies and make her way down a mountain, which she does carried by a river and falling with a parachute. Extract 6 shows how differently she speaks to Roth after that.

Extract 6.

Lara: Roth, can you hear me? Roth?

Roth: Lara! Are you okay?

Lara: I'm fine.

Roth: You don't sound fine to me.

Lara: I'm fine, Roth.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 1:10:35)

Although Lara begins the conversation, Roth is the one to inquire about her health, as has become customary of him. Lara's answer, conversely, is different from what has been shown thus far. It

resembles Roth's style of answering: covering up problems instead of rambling on about all that has happened. Roth is clearly not used to this kind of behaviour from Lara, because he questions her answer so that she has to repeat herself. This shows how Lara's experiences on the island have begun to toughen her. She is not as much of a little girl seeking consolation from her father figure any more.

After that Lara goes to save Sam. On her way she meets Grim, who is held by the enemies. He sacrifices himself so that Lara does not have to surrender to them. Lara also saves Reyes, Alex and Jonah who had been captured. Finally, she reaches Mathias who is performing a fire ritual to Sam in order to determine whether she is the chosen one for Himiko's soul, which she proves to be. Mathias takes Sam to the throne room, where Lara saves her. They are separated, and outside the palace Roth takes Lara to a helicopter with him, but Lara forces the pilot to land because she knows that they cannot leave yet. It causes the helicopter to crash, killing the pilot. Then Mathias and his men attack them. He throws an axe towards them and Roth shields Lara from it, receiving the fatal blow. Thus, Roth's desire to protect Lara is the death of him. Although Lara has become more independent and tough already, when Roth dies she is not afraid to appear weak. It shows how much he meant to her. In extract 7 she is beside dying Roth.

Extract 7.

Lara: Roth... Roth... I can't do this without you.

Roth: I'm sorry, Lara. I'm sorry. You can do this. You're a Croft.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 1:36:57)

She claims that she cannot survive without Roth although she has already managed to do things she was afraid to do at first. But she had Roth to guide her before and now she has to learn to survive without his help. Roth comforts Lara and says that she will survive because she is a Croft. He does not say that Lara will survive because she has already shown proof of being able to take care of herself, but because she is the daughter of a famous explorer. Perhaps this shows that Roth is so used to regarding Lara as someone he has to protect that he cannot see how Lara has changed during their time on the island.

4.2 Lara and Sam – the hero saves the princess

Samantha “Sam” Nishimura is Lara’s best friend. They met at the university where Sam studied filmmaking and Lara archaeology, and they graduated at the same time. Despite them having quite different personalities, as Lara is more of a bookworm and Sam a lively party girl, they are practically inseparable.

An analysis of Lara and Sam’s dialogue revealed interesting dynamics between them. For example, while Lara can tell Roth everything and in their relationship he is the stronger one, Sam and Lara’s relationship is quite the opposite. Sam talks to Lara as Lara talks to Roth, in a way that reveals her insecurities, while Lara is the stronger one who comforts her. In extract 8 Sam has been kidnapped by the Solarii but she has managed to steal a radio from a guard and contact Lara.

Extract 8.

Sam: I’ve been kidnapped.

Lara: What? Where are you?

Sam: I don’t know... some old Japanese palace. They keep talking about a “fire ritual”. Lara, I’m fucking terrified. Shit, someone’s coming. I’ve got to hide this thing.

Gamer’s Little Playground (2014, 1:03:42)

Here Sam is the one in trouble and Lara asks her a question. Sam’s answer shows how afraid she is and how she does not really know what is happening. She is not hiding anything from Lara; she tells her everything she knows and what has happened. Extract 9 is somewhat similar. In it Lara and Sam are talking again while Lara is making her way to Sam to save her.

Extract 9.

Lara: I’m here, Sam. Are you okay?

Sam: What do they want with me, Lara? A fire ritual? This is so fucked up!

Lara: Listen, I’m coming to get you. I’m going to get you out of there!

Sam: Please, please help me, Lara.

Lara: I promise. I promise, Sam.

Gamer’s Little Playground (2014, 1:04:28)

Extract 9 shows again that Sam is very afraid and that Lara is the one to reassure her. She is very determined to save Sam, who is pleading Lara to save her, repeating the word ‘please’. Lara

promises her that she will, also using repetition with “I promise. I promise”. Thus, although with Roth Lara is the weaker one, with Sam she is the stronger one in the relationship.

Extract 10 shows Lara reunited with Sam, after the fire ritual proved that Sam is the chosen one and Mathias with his henchmen took her to the throne room for safekeeping before the final ritual can be completed.

Extract 10.

Sam: Lara! Oh my god, you're here. I was beginning to think I was going crazy.

Lara: It's okay, it's okay... It's going to be okay. My weapons!

Sam: How are we ever going to get out of here?

Lara: We need to leave before he [Mathias] comes back.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 1:29:13)

In extract 10 Lara consoles Sam again and reassures her that everything will be alright, using repetition here, too: “it's okay, it's okay”. Sam is again able to admit how afraid she was. She relies on Lara to create an escape plan. Lara does not hesitate, but knows immediately what to do. She also sees her weapons that Mathias had confiscated when he captured her during the fire ritual. At this point she is not afraid to use weapons and kill to save herself and the others. This is also metatext that advances the game's plot by telling the player that now the weapons are available again. Sam's turns serve both as indicating Lara's role as the one to make decisions, and in telling the player what to do next. When saving Sam, she is focused on getting them out of there: there is no time to panic. When they begin their escape, burning timber falls from the ceiling, blocking Lara's way and separating her from Sam. Sam starts to panic, unlike Lara who remains calm and knows what to do, and instructs Sam, as extract 11 shows.

Extract 11.

Sam: Lara! Lara!

Lara: Keep going, Sam! I'll find another way out.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 1:29:56)

While Sam and Lara are separated, Lara reunites with Roth and they meet Mathias and his men, and then Roth dies. Extract 12 shows how after that Sam is the only one of the crew to comfort Lara. Lara cannot leave his mentor's side yet so the others leave her be.

Extract 12.

Sam: Are you okay, Lara?

--

Lara: I can't leave him yet...

Sam: You know where we'll be. Come down when you're ready. We won't go anywhere without you.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 1:37:47)

Extract 12 shows how Sam asks Lara how she is and comforts her. Sam and Lara are always there for each other when one of them needs reassurance. Throughout the game's story they promise each other things: Lara that she will save Sam, who promises that she will not leave Lara.

In extract 13 Lara is heading towards the beach where the others are, and she tells Sam about her suspicions that escaping the island will not be possible yet.

Extract 13.

Lara: I should be there soon... I need to tell you something.

Sam: What's going on?

Lara: I don't think we can leave this island... something is keeping us here. I have to go back to the monastery.

Sam: Are you sure?

Lara: Yes, Sam. I need you to keep this to yourself for now. I'm going to help Reyes fix that boat, but then I'm taking it inland.

Sam: Lara... I don't know about this...

Lara: Just trust me – it's the only way.

Sam: Alright... you be careful.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 1:42:01)

It shows that Lara trusts Sam very much because she tells her something she does not want anyone else to know yet. Now that Roth is not there for Lara to confide in, she tells Sam everything that is on her mind. She is not helpless, though, but has a plan she wants to complete. Sam doubts her at first, but Lara stays determined and convinces Sam. Although Sam has doubts about Lara's plan, she does not argue with Lara, but agrees with her and wants her to be careful. This exchange further establishes Lara's role as the story's hero, who can trust only certain people, and who has to find the solutions on her own.

After that she is reunited with Reyes, Jonah and Sam on the beach, and Whitman arrives there later, too. Lara helps them with fixing the boat and goes back to the *Endurance* because Alex has gone there to retrieve tools for Reyes, and Lara does not think that he can do it alone. When Lara goes to explore an old monastery after that, Sam is kidnapped again and Lara has to go and save her once more. Mathias uses Sam in a ritual in which Himiko's soul is transferred to her body, which Mathias hopes will stop the curse and allow them to leave the island. Lara fights her way to Sam and finally reaches her and disrupts the ritual. Sam is weak from the ordeal and Lara holds her in her arms. Extract 14 shows their final conversation in the game.

Extract 14.

Lara: Sam! Oh, Sam, thank god.

Sam: Urgg... wha? Lara... what's happening?

Lara: Shhh... shhh... I'm here, you're safe now. It's okay... it's okay.

Sam: You saved me... I knew you would.

Lara: I made you a promise. Let's get you home.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 2:17:32)

It shows again how Lara has saved Sam and then reassures her. It also shows the trust between them because Sam knew that Lara would save her since Lara made her a promise, of which Lara reminds her. Lara has become the hero who fulfilled her promise and saved her friend, showing that not only is she capable of taking care of herself, but her best friend, too. Although Lara lost other close members of the crew and felt guilty of them dying, she was able to save at least Sam. This is also a 'coming of age' narrative because Lara is the hero who saves 'the princess', and after that she is not the same person any more. She has finally shown her capabilities and earned her role as the hero.

4.3 Lara and Alex – a deathly pursuit of love

Alex Weiss is a 24-year-old electrical engineer and hacker who serves as a technician on the *Endurance*. He and Lara did not know each other before the expedition, but during their time together he developed a small crush on Lara.

It is interesting how Lara does not seem to want to show any weakness around Alex, unlike with Roth. When Lara has to climb the high radio tower to transmit an SOS so that they can escape the island, she has help via radio from Alex in extract 15.

Extract 15.

Lara: The console's a wreck.

Alex: Damn it. Well, unless you see a Radio Shack around, you're going to have to patch in manually through the maintenance panel.

Lara: Okay, that sounds simple enough.

Alex: Yeah, well uh... You're going to have to find it first. On those old towers they installed the panels high up, I mean way high up.

Lara: Climbing again. Great.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 0:44:29)

Extract 15 above shows how Lara receives directions from Alex, who seems a bit hesitant because he knows that it will not be an easy task. Lara's answers are simple and short, not showing any weakness or hesitation towards the task ahead. It shows that she is not afraid, but instead seems annoyed that she has to climb again. In regarding the game, it shows that in fact, Lara does not talk very much, but her development is revealed especially in the turns of the other characters. At this point of the game Alex has not yet witnessed Lara's skills, so perhaps he doubts whether Lara is capable of completing the mission, because he explains the instructions at length. In extract 16 Lara has reached the top of the tower and starts to broadcast the SOS.

Extract 16.

Lara: Alex?

Alex: Lara.

Lara: I'm at the panel.

Alex: Okay... The tower should boost the signal from the transmitter.

Lara: Okay.

Alex: Alright, find the emergency channel and get a clear signal on your radio before you broadcast the SOS. Hey, we got everything crossed for you down here, L.C.

Lara: Thank you.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 0:48:03)

Alex sends her instructions, and also wishes her luck. Lara's answers are short and contain only necessary information; a simple "thank you" to Alex's wishes of good luck. She does not sound panicky or afraid; she is focused and ready to complete the task. Even if she was afraid or unsure, she does not let it show. This happens on the same point of the game where Lara still talks to Roth in an unsure way, but with Alex she answers briefly and without much emotion. She then manages to broadcast the SOS and get an answer from a pilot nearby, who had received the distress call Roth sent when the storm hit the *Endurance*, and had been searching for them. The pilot instructs her to create a visual sign of their exact location. Alex congratulates her in extract 17.

Extract 17.

Alex: Lara Croft, you are my hero! Hey, you know, Reyes actually just cracked a smile!

Lara, to herself: Right. Need a signal. A fire. Fuel. Flames. I can do that.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 0:49:21)

He calls Lara his hero, which can be an indication of his appreciative crush on her. He is very delighted that Lara succeeded, saying that even Reyes is proud of her. Lara does not thank Alex for his words and advice from before. Instead, she is already forming a plan of how to point out their location to the pilot, which is also metatext to tell the player what to do next. When Alex hears about the crash he talks with Lara and tries to console her in extract 18.

Extract 18.

Alex: Hey Lara – Roth told us about the plane. Don't worry, there's got to be another way off this rock, right?

Lara: I hope so. Any sign of Sam?

Alex: We've tracked her to some old Japanese palace.

Lara: I don't like the sound of that.

Alex: Hey, don't worry, she's probably... Just... sightseeing.

Lara: You're a terrible liar, Alex. You have to be careful in there. Good luck.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 0:55:32)

Although when talking to Roth Lara admitted that she felt guilty for the crash, she does not say so to Alex, but immediately asks about Sam in extract 18. Lara does not understand Alex's jokes, but simply wishes him luck. Thus Lara is characterised as rather humourless, and although she cares about Alex's wellbeing, she is not very emotional about it. Then Alex, Reyes and Jonah are captured in a cage, and Lara saves them after the incident with Grim. When Lara reaches them, Alex is very impressed.

Extract 19.

Alex: That was bad-ass Lara! How the hell did you get in here?

Lara: I had some help...

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 1:22:48)

Lara's mind is on Grim, so her answer to Alex is not very enthusiastic. She does not acknowledge Alex's praises or tell him exactly what happened. She does not want him to see the effects Grim's

death had on her. Lara saves the others from the cage and they head to the beach while Lara goes on to look for Sam.

Alex's plan of getting Lara's attention is to retrieve tools for Reyes from the shipwrecked *Endurance* so that they can repair the old boat and escape the island. It is a dangerous task because the ship is swarming with Mathias's men, and after the shipwreck it has become a dangerous environment. Alex is so eager to impress Lara that he does not want any help from her on his endeavour, which can be seen in extract 20.

Extract 20.

Alex: Alright, I'm on it.

Reyes: Lara is heading your way. You should wait for her.

Alex: Lara...? No, no I got this. I'm heading in. Going radio silent.

Lara, to herself: Alex... what are you doing?

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 1:49:01)

Lara hears Alex and Reyes's conversation, and cannot understand why Alex wants to go there alone without help, taking a huge risk. She is more rational whereas Alex does dangerous things in order to get her attention. With Roth and Grim dying, Lara has seen how dangerous the island is and does not want anyone else to die for her. Finally, Lara makes her way to the *Endurance* and finds Alex there. His leg is pinned under some debris, and enemies are shooting at them. Alex realises that both of them cannot survive, so he wants to sacrifice himself so that Lara can escape with the tools.

Extract 21.

Lara: Oh Alex... You got the tools...

Alex: Finally, I impress you!

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 1:52:01)

Alex is sad because he knows that he cannot survive, but he acknowledges that at least he managed to impress Lara after all. Extract 22 shows that Lara is hesitant to leave Alex behind. She might not understand his jokes or be interested in him, but he is a crew member and friend, and she does not want him to die.

Extract 22.

Alex: I'm not going to make it out, Lara. Take the tools.

Lara: Not without you.

Alex: How often does a guy like me get to be a hero?

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 1:52:26)

Alex tries to see the positive side of the situation: he will be a hero because he sacrificed himself, and that although he will die, he will have managed to impress Lara. When Lara leaves, she gives a chaste kiss on Alex's cheek as an indication of friendship and sadness for its end.

4.4 Lara and Whitman – from a sceptic into a believer

Dr James Whitman is the lead archaeologist on the *Endurance*. He is determined to find Yamatai to boost his failing career of a cancelled television show and a divorce. He is an ambitious and self-centred man, which Lara later learns. She used to admire him, but on the island he shows his true colours.

Chronologically, the first scene with Whitman is from a video on Sam's camera, which can be seen in extract 23. In it Lara tries to convince the others that by continuing further east they will find Yamatai. The others may doubt her at first but do not dismiss her ideas, whereas Whitman opposes her openly.

Extract 23.

Whitman: How can you suggest I'm not serious about this expedition, Lara? It's not just Sam's family funding us, I've put my savings on the line too.

--

Lara: That's precisely why we should push east, not west.

Whitman: No one believes Yama... No one believes Yamatai's that far east. The books simply don't support it!

--

Lara: I've talked to Roth about this. There's no point in following in other people's footsteps, Dr. Whitman.

Whitman: I refuse to bet my reputation on your hunch! I'm the lead archaeologist here.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 0:13:09)

Extract 23 shows that Whitman is only thinking about money he has invested in the expedition. Lara tries to convince him of her theory but Whitman does not believe her. Although Lara justifies her claims with Roth's authority, Whitman belittles her by calling her research a "hunch" and

emphasising his own position as the lead archaeologist. This conversation shows that Lara and Whitman had disagreements even before the shipwreck.

After Lara escaped from the caves she was caught in a bear trap. Reyes saves her, and she, Whitman, Jonah and Alex decide to split up to look for Sam and Roth. Whitman offers to go with Lara. She is still weak and cannot continue immediately. Extract 24 shows Whitman telling Lara to sit by the campfire while he goes to explore their surroundings.

Extract 24.

Whitman: You going to be okay?

Lara: Yes. I probably just need to rest for a few minutes.

Whitman: You sit, uh... you sit here. I'll uh <clears throat> I'll check up ahead.

Lara: Okay.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 0:23.40)

Here Whitman inquires Lara's condition, but it is not because he is genuinely interested in her wellbeing, but more to ensure if she can be left alone while he goes on to investigate. Unlike Lara, Roth and Sam who are concerned about each other's condition, Whitman only thinks about himself and his own research. Lara answers Whitman honestly, neither downplaying her injuries nor exaggerating them. Although Whitman's hesitating way of speaking makes him sound untrustworthy, Lara seems to trust him. She might not like him much, but he has not proven to be unreliable yet.

Whitman finds a large gate and summons Lara to investigate it with him. The gate is covered in paintings by the survivors on the island. Extract 25 reveals many interesting aspects about Lara and Whitman's relationship.

Extract 25.

Whitman: That female figure on the gate. Given the age of the symbols, it could be the Sun Queen...

Lara: Himiko? Are you sure you're not channeling Sam, Dr. Whitman?

Whitman: Well, there's no doubt, Himiko had power. Some say shamanistic. Elemental!

Lara: A woman wields that much power and sooner or later it gets called witchcraft!

Whitman: We shouldn't discount anything, even what may seem to us, irrational. We still have much to learn about the world.

Lara: You sound like my father...

Whitman: It could be one hell of a story, Lara.

Lara: Not if we don't live to tell it.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 0:25.49)

Whitman is enthusiastic about their findings and immediately thinks that it could be Himiko, but Lara doubts it. It shows that Whitman believes that Himiko was real and that she really had supernatural powers. Lara does not believe it, but thinks that it is a case of people disapproving of a woman leader and belittling her skills. Lara seems somewhat annoyed that Whitman believes Sam's stories easily while she herself does not believe in the supernatural. Lara says that Whitman sounds like her father because he does not ignore the possibility of supernatural elements and says that they still have much to learn about the world. This is an important part because at the end of the game Lara has had to change her mind and she admits that her father was right about supernatural phenomena. Extract 25 shows also how dissimilar their attitudes towards the expedition are. Whitman thinks about what they can gain from the island, while Lara is focused on survival.

After getting through the gate they are surrounded by Mathias's men. Extract shows 26 how Whitman immediately surrenders, whereas Lara would rather have tried to shoot at them and escape. She cannot believe how Whitman trusts them. At this point Lara has not killed anyone yet, but she would rather at least try to escape instead of giving up so easily.

Extract 26.

Lara: They can't be trusted! You still have a gun.

Whitman: I don't want any trouble. -- We'll come. -- But I insist that afterwards, you take us to whoever's in charge!

Lara: What are you doing? No!

Whitman: I'm handling this. -- Just... just go along with them, Lara. Do... do whatever they say.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 0:27:07)

Whitman thinks that the men will listen to reason and that he and Lara should obey them. Lara does not trust strange men and it hardly crosses her mind to try and make deals with them as Whitman does. He says that he is handling the situation by letting the men take them away because he thinks that he will be able to convince their leader to their side. Lara does not want to surrender, so one of the men binds her hands behind her back and takes her away from Whitman, who is taken to Mathias in another direction.

Lara makes her first kill by shooting her captor, and then shoots her way into freedom. When she finally reaches the palace while looking for Sam, she encounters Whitman. Extract 27 shows the distrust Lara is starting to feel towards him, and again illustrates their different opinions on surviving on the island.

Extract 27.

Whitman: Lara, you're alive.

Lara: So are you... I mean, are you okay? What happened?

Whitman: Once they stopped seeing me as a threat, they let me move about almost freely!

Lara: Did you know the others were captured?

Whitman: Yes, yes... Sam's in there, but I couldn't free her without a weapon. The Solarii are an anthropological marvel, Lara!

Lara: They're insane murderers, Dr. Whitman! We need to get our people out of here.

Whitman: Of course, of course. I'll keep a look out here... you... You call me when it's safe.

Gamer's Little Playground (2014, 1:27:04)

They do not seem to be delighted, but rather surprised to see each other alive, especially since Whitman had been alone with Mathias and his men for a long time. Lara saves the awkward situation by asking Whitman what had happened. Whitman tells how he gained Mathias's and his men's trust, but Lara is already thinking about the others and how Whitman did not try to save them. Whitman makes an excuse of not saving Sam and then enthuses over the Solarii, who seem to be more important to him than his own crew, while Lara is more rational about their survival. Whitman offers to guard her when she goes to save Sam, but his hesitation shows that he is plotting something. Whitman betrays Lara by fetching Mathias to her, proving Lara's suspicions about him correct.

After Lara has saved Sam and they are at the beach, Whitman appears running towards them. He makes it seem as if he was chased by Mathias's men and the others believe him, but Lara is suspicious and wonders why there are no pursuers in sight.

Extract 28.

Whitman: I must've scared them off. Feel like I've run for miles.

Lara: And you've barely broken a sweat.

Whitman: Must be fitter than I thought.

Lara: You could've led them straight to us... Like you did back at the palace.

Whitman: That's not how it was, Lara. Th-they... they caught me while you were getting Sam. -- They said it was the only way they'd let you and the others live. I-I tried to warn you!

Extract 28 shows how Lara has no trust for Whitman left, and she wants to expose his betrayal to the others. He tries to make excuses but Lara does not believe him. Whitman makes it seem as though he had no choice in whether the men would chase Lara and Sam or not, and that he supposedly tried to warn them. He talks inconsistently and hesitantly, which makes it even harder to believe him. After that Whitman's fate is to die while escorting Sam to the final ritual with Mathias.

4.5 Lara's development – from a frightened girl into a killer

In this subsection I will discuss the themes I found as I analysed the dialogue, and conclude Lara's development based on them. The themes I found in Lara's relationships are strength, trust, affection, guilt and acceptance.

With Roth, Lara grows from a frightened girl in the shadow of her mentor, into a survivor who has to manage on her own, and the leader of the rest of the crew. As the dialogue between them showed, at first she is very reliant of Roth, needing him to save her and guide her. Important themes here are strength and trust: Lara trust Roth to help her, and Roth is the stronger one. She is not completely helpless, though, because she also helps Roth by binding his wounds, and she becomes stronger. When she gains more confidence she has the courage to do what she deems right regardless of what Roth thinks, when she wants to save the co-pilot, and when she forces the helicopter to land. Although Lara became stronger and more independent, Roth's death was still a shock for her, and she needed some time alone to recover from it, which reveals the theme of guilt. The guilt about Roth's death spurs Lara to become stronger and trust herself, and save the others.

With Sam Lara accepts her role as the hero. In their relationship, too, trust is a crucial element. After Roth's death Sam is the only one Lara trusts completely, because she tells her things she does not tell the others. Even in the beginning of the game it was hard for Lara to trust new people, unlike for Sam, who is very naïve compared to Lara. Lara does not trust Mathias, and she is the first one to become suspicious of Whitman. Trusting people becomes even harder for her, because she loses so many people she cares about, and she almost loses her best friend, Sam. Another theme in their relationship is affection, because Sam is very important to Lara, who is very protective towards her. The dialogue between Lara and Sam is also a coming-of-age narrative, in which Lara

discovers her skills and uses them to save the 'damsel in distress' in the end. The affection between Lara and Sam is so strong that it could be even argued that their relationship is a romantic one.

Lara and Alex's relationship is in a way very traditional, because Alex as a man is the one pursuing the woman, Lara. What is not so traditional, is how Lara does not show any interest in Alex other than as a friend. Alex's attempts at getting Lara's attention serve only to reinforce Lara's role as a hero who saves the others. Unfortunately, Lara is not able to save Alex, which resembles the typical narrative of a male hero who loses his female love interest in order for the story to progress, which is inverted in this game. In *Tomb Raider* Alex's death serves as further motivation for Lara to succeed in solving the island's mystery. Alex is yet another man Lara loses in the game, showing her how she cannot save everyone however hard she tries. The theme of guilt is important in their relationship. With every death Lara feels guiltier and has to accept her inability at saving the others at the same time she discovers her skills and becomes tougher and stronger. Lara wants to appear strong in Alex's eyes, and Alex admires her strength. The theme of trust in their relationship appears as the lack of it, because Lara does not trust Alex's decisions and that he will survive on his own. Alex feels romantic affection towards Lara, who only regards him as a friend. Lara tries to save him because of her role as the hero, and because she has become stronger and does not want to lose any more people she cares about.

There is not much trust in Lara and Whitman's relationship. In the beginning of the game Whitman already dismisses Lara's ideas, but Lara still has some trust for him. During the game she learns that Whitman cannot be trusted. There is not much affection either, but the theme of strength can be seen. While Whitman is weak and lured by evil, Lara remains strong and wants to do what is right. Another theme is acceptance. During Lara's interaction with Whitman she accepts her father's teachings. She says that Whitman reminds her of her father because he wants to explore the island and the cult there, and because he does not dismiss the existence of supernatural phenomena. In the beginning of the game the denial of supernatural elements is clear in Lara and Whitman's conversations. During the game, however, Lara witnesses many supernatural happenings, which force her to start believing in them. In that way she becomes more like her father.

5 Conclusion

In this final section of the thesis I will discuss and conclude my findings, and also provide suggestions for further research on the topic. The purpose of this thesis is to examine how the development of Lara Croft's character can be seen in the dialogue of the video game *Tomb Raider*. The dialogue between Lara Croft and four other characters that appeared to be the most important was analysed using content analysis. It revealed important themes that recurred in interaction between the different characters. These themes revealed differences in the relationships Lara Croft has with the different characters, and how she herself changes throughout the game's story. The conclusion is that the character of Lara Croft develops during the game and it can be seen in her dialogue with different characters in the game.

When beginning analysing the dialogue, the presumption was that Lara Croft's development as a character could be seen especially in her own speech. As the analysis progressed, it was surprising to see that the other characters' turns were at least as important or even more important to her development than her own turns, which were often quite short reactions to the other characters' turns, such as questions. It was common that the dialogue was metatext about what is happening in the video game and what will happen next, to guide the player how to proceed. As the dialogue was from a video game, it was to be expected. In my opinion the metatext and dialogue that illustrates character development were successfully balanced. The dialogue provides clues for the player, but manages also to reveal dynamics between characters and how they change as the story progresses.

As stated in the previous section, Lara Croft develops from a frightened and inexperienced girl into a survivor and a hero who is willing to do anything to save her friends. The dialogue between her and the other four characters revealed how afraid she was in the beginning, relying on help from the them. In the course of the game, she became more independent in her decisions, taking more responsibility in helping and saving the others. Her friends' deaths forced her to learn how to survive on her own, and provided her motivation to solve the island's mystery. Her horrible experiences there made her more withdrawn than in the beginning of the game, and also made her accustomed to killing. Thus, one could argue that the development portrayed in this kind of violent shooter-type video games is not always very positive. The main character Lara Croft does learn how to survive on her own, but she becomes a ruthless murderer in the process.

The plausibility of the game's timespan can also be questioned. The game's events take place in the span of merely a few days, and it could be argued that such big changes in one's character are not realistic in such a short time. Although the laws of real life do not always apply in video games, and the realism of video games in general can be questioned, I think it is important that the characters develop somehow during the game instead of remaining the same despite the challenges they face. I think Lara Croft's development throughout the game was portrayed successfully in her speech. This development, although fictional, can show to the players that they can learn from their mistakes and become stronger and more independent. Even though Lara Croft is a violent character, as a young woman who learns to survive on her own as the hero of her own story, she can be empowering to especially female players.

The analysis of dialogue and character development revealed also what kind of relationships Lara Croft has with the other characters, and it would be interesting to study them further. For example, Lara Croft and Sam's friendship is fascinating. They show very much affection towards each other, and some fans have been eager to interpret that they are in a romantic relationship. It could be studied further with queer-theory to see whether it fits the heteronormative framework. Similar approach could be used also in analysing Lara Croft's relationship with Roth and Alex. As was shown in chapter 4, in Lara Croft and Roth's relationship she is at least in the beginning the weak girl who needs help from the stronger man. With Alex she is the stronger one instead, and tries to save the weaker one. Feminist approach could also be used when analysing these relationships further to see how women and men are portrayed in them and if they promote gender equality.

The difficulty of analysing video game characters is, especially with playable characters, to examine the characters as their own entities, not as representations of the player in the game. This thesis shows that although video game dialogue has not been studied much, analysing it is possible, and can reveal for example the main character's development in addition to advancing the plot. Studying video game dialogue can reveal problems in representation in the same way as the kind of studies presented in section 2, when representations of different groups of characters were examined numerically. When studying the dialogue, the characters themselves can be analysed as well as their relationships with other characters, in addition to studying the characters' gender and appearance as in previous studies. The characters and their relationships can prove to be shallow, stereotypical or offensive. When we become more aware of the problems with video game characters and their development, changes can be made towards better and more multidimensional characters, and I think the makers of this game have succeeded in Lara Croft's development.

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