

Tomb Raider: The Lost City of Topaz

A custom Lara Croft's adventure by Marco Ruggieri

Background Story

The story takes place after the events of *Underworld*. Lara comes to know about the recent archaeological excavations, funded by not-well specified benefactors, in the geographic area around the volcano Etna, near the town of Zafferana Etnea, in Sicily. Officially, the excavations aim at recovering the access to old monasteries buried by lava in the past centuries. However, Lara notices that the place where the major excavations take place are close to the alleged access to the Lost City of Topaz, a legendary complex of ancient, pre-Sumerian sanctuaries in whose bowels, centuries-old documents claim the real tomb of Saint Malachy is located. In this tomb, it is believed that the original book containing the prophecies of the saint is guarded. The City of Topaz is present in many tales that span a few millennia, and it is said that several civilizations, from Sumerians to Romans, found it and left their marks in some of its buildings. However, all documents agree that nobody has been able to reach the main altar, in the core of the volcanic caves near Etna, built after the burial place of Saint Malachy was set in the city.

Given her interest in antiquities, Lara flies to the place of the excavations. But what begins as an archaeological curiosity will soon turn into a race through lava-carved tunnels, forgotten sanctuaries, and the ominous depths of the City of Topaz, where history, prophecy and danger converge.

In the tomb of Saint Malachy, Lara finds that the book of Malachy is one out of three mystical books, that exist since before humanity started walking on Earth, engraved on sacred paper by forces as old as the universe itself. She learns about the three books, of an ancient pact between the civilizations of Atlantis and Tinnos,

as well as of the potential danger of putting together the three books. In fact, ancient cuneiforms suggest that the aforementioned civilizations decided to build, and then protect, the City of Topaz, where one of the three books is hidden, and hide the remaining two books in other places. Thousands of years later, priests from Tinnos gave one of the books to Saint Malachy, asking him to protect the book. For this reason, the saint was buried in the core of Topaz after his death, and the entrance to his tomb protected by Atlanteans and Tinnos creatures.

Lara learns that the knowledge written on the three books would allow to put together and recite the chant of the spiritual resurrection, that gives permission to liminal demonic creatures to enter this world, possess people and bring torment to humanity. Consequently, if the books fell in wrong hands, it could be the beginning of the end of the worlds as we know it. As the same benefactors funding the excavations of Topaz have other active excavations in other places, Lara realizes that they found the location of the other two books. Hence, she decides to begin a new quest to get the two other books before others.

General structure of the level

The level follows an almost-linear development, with some backtracking. It begins outside, where Lara has to find the entrance to Topaz. From there, she starts a moderately long descent into the core of ancient volcanic caves and sanctuaries in Topaz, where she will have to find hidden keys and beat demigods to proceed to the next underground level. There are overall three main big areas, each one guarded by a particular boss: the **Minotaur Demigod**, the **Atlantean Centaur Demigod**, and two **Tinnos Monsters**.

The level is pretty easy, probably comparable to the Tomb of Tihocan of TR1. However, it is a bit longer than this classical level, and most important, it contains a few puzzles that initially might take time to solve. If played knowing the location of all the secrets and the solution to all the puzzles, it takes about thirty minutes to finish the level.

The level contains some combats, both against humans and monsters as well as bats. I decided to not put animals like wolves, lions and others, as I love animals and I hate to have to kill a bunch of them just to give some combat vibes to the level (in fact, putting bats was quite painful), and besides, I find that playing against mutants and monsters is quite more interesting.

It is highly recommended that the player pays attention to all the pieces of art spread in the sectors in order to solve some of the puzzles and/or survive traps. In particular for the first sector, in order to let the minotaur demigod to come out and combat him, it is necessary to interpret the mosaics in the main arena room, and translate them into Tomb Raider wisdom (the knowledge of triggers in Tomb Engine will certainly help, but is not required if some intuition is used. The player is encouraged to check the walkthrough if they cannot figure out the solution to the puzzles). In some areas it might seem that there are no clues, but actually anytime a decision has to be made, there are not-so-hidden clues. As Lara would do in a real-life situation, before taking a decision, the player should carefully observe and study the area.

Some areas are packed with activity, while others, for example the second sector, are willingly left empty to heighten the sense of loneliness in vast places touched by evil forces.

Some traps are visible, while most of the traps I have included are willingly not easy to spot, and all of them are lethal. These include spikes, deadly floors, jumps into the infinite below and into pools of lava. In some areas, a step on the wrong tile causes death (but if clues are observed, it should be quite easy to find the safe walks to the next area).

Engine

The level has been built via the Tomb Editor, version 1.9.1, with the new Tomb Engine (TEN) and customized lua functions for most of the events. This allowed me to texture each tile with 256x256 textures, as well as split 1024x1024 and 1024x1536 textures into more tiles to compose large mosaics on some walls. Moreover, I have been able to make mortal the minotaur demigod from TR4, add custom health bars for the bosses, link music events to life/death of actors in the scene, introduce many volume events linked to scripted functions, and so on.

Lara's Moves

The moves of Lara are the standard TR4 ones, plus ledge jumps. The latters are necessary to complete some of the parkours in the first area of the level, while in the remaining two areas they can be used at discretion of the player.

Weapons and Medikits

In the level, Lara starts with her classic twin pistols. Meanwhile, she collects ammo for the shotgun and the uzi. She gets the shotgun in the second sector of the level, while the uzi is part of the third secret.

Initially there are three small and one large medikits. Within the level, I have added a fair amount of medikits.

Secrets

There are **four** secrets in the level. Two of them are fairly simple to obtain, and before the level ends, they can always be recovered. One of them can also be recovered before the level ends, but if the player does not move things properly, some decent amount of backtracking will be necessary to get it. Finally, the fourth one is tricky, as the player can easily finish the level without entering the area that contains the secret.

Future Improvements

In next versions of the level I plan to add some custom Lara's audio as well as a couple of fmv. I also plan to expand a bit the third sector adding a few more traps. Moreover, I plan to revisit the lights and retexture some areas, and add a few more 3D objects to enrich some areas of the level. I also have an idea for adding a fifth secret.

Future Levels

I have already started to work on the next level for expanding the lore introduced by the present level, whose core will take place in the catacombs below the San Francesco d'Assisi church in Matera, where Lara will find the access to a hidden underground area connected to the bowels of the Purgatorio church and find the book Lacrimosa.

Credits

I could have not completed this level without the support of the community of TR level makers, particularly for the material found on TRSearch. The outfit of Lara is the AoD one included in the Anniversary Outfits for TEN by THOR2010. I have also included the custom swimming animations made by DHermogenes. For the water animations I have used the Next-Gen Water V2 by Heckler89. Some sounds of Lara have been taken by those of Nicobass, distributed on TRSearch by CircusBabyGallerySL. Other sounds have been borrowed from another package distributed by the Legend pack of CircusBabyGallerySL. Centaur, TR4 Demigod, Winged mutants, TR4 bats and Tinnos monster wads have been downloaded from the TEN official website. The wall lever has been obtained from the Tibet set distributed by GHOST_5002Z. The skybox has been taken by the set published by Heckler89 on TRSearch. For a complete list of links see the Resources section below.

The first audio track in the level is taken from the default audio files distributed with the TEN and the Tomb Editor. All the others tracks of the soundtrack are free-to-use, royalty-free tracks and have been downloaded from Pixabay.

Credits are due to the Tomb Editor Telegram group by Emanuele Di Bari, for the numerous suggestions and technical helps.

Finally, all credit goes to Crystal Dynamics as the original creator of Lara Croft's magnum and footsteps sounds, here adapted and made available by CircusBabyGallerySL on TRSearch.

Disclaimer

The level and all contents of this zip archive are provided **free of charge** as a **fan-made** creation. Any commercial use or resale is **strictly prohibited**, while free redistribution is only allowed with the prior written permission of the author.

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During all testing, the game has never caused any issues on the computers used. However, the author accepts no responsibility for any potential problems, malfunctions, or damage that this level or its files may cause to the user's computer or software.

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Resources Links

<https://www.trsearch.org/item/6132>

<https://www.trsearch.org/item/6048>

<https://www.trsearch.org/item/6207>

<https://www.trsearch.org/item/4834>

<https://www.trsearch.org/item/4968>

<https://www.trsearch.org/item/6234>

<https://www.trsearch.org/item/6219>

<https://tombengine.com/docs/resource-downloads/>

<https://tombengine.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/@emaraiderchannel>