

Some people in the office suggested that my next blog should be about how a simple conversation with Toby Gard resulted in a torn ligament, a splint on my left hand for three weeks, and ongoing physical therapy probably until we're done with the game. But seeing as I can't explain the cinematic I was acting out without spoiling the story, not to mention that the explanation makes me look pretty stupid, and you really just want to hear about the game and not my work-related injuries anyway, I'll instead talk about one of our new features: Player Tailoring.

There are three aspects of Player Tailoring, as follows:

The first aspect is about immersion. You can separately choose to display or hide the following types of meta-information: whether reticules appear on enemies during combat, whether helper buttons appear when interactions are possible, and whether training panels appear telling you how to perform new mechanics. Some people like having meta-information displayed to keep things moving along, and some people dislike the intrusion these meta-displays represent. Both types of players can have what they want.

The second aspect is about physical challenges. Rather than having a single difficulty setting (though the game does start out with one that you can fine tune later) there are multiple settings to tailor the action elements of the game. You can set how healthy enemies are (how much damage kills them), how healthy Lara is (how much damage it takes to kill her), how much ammunition you can carry, and how quickly you have to react to saving grabs when you lose your grip.

The reason these are broken out separately is because players define challenge differently, and everyone is interested in different types of play. For example, some players love puzzles but don't like fighting so much, so now they can turn down the health of enemies, not because they aren't up to the challenge of stronger enemies, but because they want to de-emphasize the role of combat in the experience and blow through it more quickly – just a burst of excitement and then back to the exploration and puzzles. But those people who want less life-threatening combat don't necessarily want an easy time exploring so they don't want a free pass with respect to making saving grabs or taking falling damage. By adjusting these four settings independently, players can adjust their experience with respect to action and danger to their taste.

The third aspect is about mental challenges. At any point a player can call up Field Assistance and hear Lara give a hint or a task. A hint tells you, among all the different things in front of you, which would be a fruitful area to focus on. A task is something you can do that will advance you some amount. There is no concept of "When will my next hint be available?" because anytime you ask for assistance, Lara will always tell you to do something you haven't yet done.

Why is this feature important? Just like I talked about for combat, people define and seek out challenges differently. Some people like exploring and fighting and puzzles, but if they're struggling with a puzzle, they're ready to get the answer from a FAQ file on the Internet and get moving again. Why not make that feature available in an intelligent way, in the game fiction, where you don't have to worry about reading a bunch of other spoilers while looking for the one you want? Not only does this feature support people who want the Tomb Raider experience but light on the puzzles, it's good for the puzzle hounds because if it weren't for Field Assistance, there's no way we could have included so many elaborate and complex puzzles.

So by giving players the ability to control the display of meta-information, change the difficulty of individual game elements and not the game as a whole, and to access puzzle help when they wish without penalty, a whole lot of people will have a lot more fun, without anyone's choices affecting the experiences of other players. That's what Player Tailoring is about, and why it's the way of the future.

Oh, the one thing the game will not tell you is how to get anywhere. Field Assistance will tell you what to do but not where to go or how to climb there. That's up to you. Good thing Lara has a sonar device in her PDA, which you can use to map out the ruins in detail and help you navigate.

That is, if you want to. :)

Cheers,

Eric