

*L*ara Croft Tomb Raider:

*Deep-Sea Drama*

*An Original Tomb Raider Tale by Hunter Wolfe*

*L*ara's mind was racing; her head thumping; her hands aching. It had all happened

so fast. The blown ceiling, the Destiny Machine, the sharks that had awaited her. And now, a thousand years of water and pressure collided around her, engulfing Lara in its mass yet again today. Eyes closed, she powered through each stroke furthering her towards the breach. The water was flooding into the temple faster than she thought it would.

Her oxygen tank was almost empty...

Her goggles were finally fogging up...

Her head was thumping in an attempt to register her surroundings...

And yet she remained poised and ready to face whatever it was the sea had to offer her.

And so she continued swimming and kicking upwards, the blast giving her an extra boost.

But suddenly, she was not going to make it. The thought had only momentarily crossed her mind when it embedded itself there. Lara was fearful of what her destiny held for her. She didn't want to become prisoner to the waters that surrounded her.

But she was Lara Croft.

And Lara Croft could do anything.

But this time...she wasn't so sure...

## DEEP-SEA DRAMA

TWO DAYS PREVIOUSLY...

"Oh Winston. What would I do without you, my friend?" Lara had to raise her voice over the winding-down on the seaplane propellers.

Leaning out the pilot's door, Winston said, "I think you'd manage, Ms. Croft. I simply tidy up the house for you."

"Oh, but guess again. What about Peru?" Lara replied speedily.

"One exception is to be permitted, I'd say."

"Algeria, then."

"Perhaps, but I still argue that..."

"Andorra, Malawi, Madagascar, Morocco..." Lara could've gone on with *this* list.

"Alright, Ms. Croft. I have been of assistance...occasionally."

"Very good, now if you'll help me out of this...*erm*...predicament, you can fancy yourself to an afternoon off."

"Oh Ms. Croft, I cannot do that..."

"With a lovely lady..."

"Lara, dear. It's been years since I've ever escorted a beautiful lady to-" Winston, Lara's long-time friend and elderly advisor, was now blushing.

"The park, perhaps? It's a gorgeous day after all," Lara cut in.

A rope was tossed down into the waters of the Black Sea that was held by Winston from the plane that floated nearby bobbing up and down in the dark blue waters. She had been on a mission to find an underwater cavern said to have been filled with the stolen riches of kings and queens throughout the years. Lara had found the cavern, an enormous sprawling space that hid nothing more than a few glistening stalactites and stalagmites. And yet another tall tale.

Lara grasped the rope and held on tight as Winston motioned for the pilot to bring her up. Once in the air, she climbed into the cabin and strapped into her seat, Winston handing her a headset that would allow them to communicate over the thundering of the chopper blades.

"I take it your mission was unsuccessful?"

"Just a fable. Nothing new."

"Well I'd say that it is new. And you should be thankful. It's much better than having to fight hordes of Altantean monstrosities or ice yetis in some underground Tibetan temple."

“Oh but Winston, you know how much I love a challenge.”

“Is it a challenge or a death wish you look for?” he questioned sarcastically.

“How about that park, Winston. I know a lady who lives near Wimbledon. A fine lady...” Lara threatened.

“I think you should be more concerned about yourself, at the moment. You look awfully pale.”

“Don’t worry, Winston. That’s only one of the cons of treading water for two and a half hours. I’d say I broke some sort of record there.”

They continued talking through their headsets on the way back to the mainland. They spoke of ladies, parks, a hedge that *definitely* needed trimming, and an intriguing discovery back at the manor that Lara may have just wanted to look into.

"The Destiny Chamber", Lara began, "Being a lost temple buried under the Mediterranean, once surfaced and sunken like the great city, Atlantis (Plato, 450 BC). It was here that chosen prophets during the days of Caesar traveled to in order to acquire information from the ancient Roman deities. The Destiny Chamber resides at the temple's core, an ornate room of lights where one's destiny can be foreseen.

"The Great Odysseus first thought of the Trojan Horse in a dream he received in the Destiny Chamber. What exactly is inside the chamber has never been ascertained or recorded, but legend says the power of the Destiny Chamber comes not from the deities, but an artifact that only a person of the purest heart can claim.

"Richard Croft 1987." Lara closed her father's journal and turned to Winston.

"What do you think, Ms. Croft? I discovered the journal buried inside a locked drawer in your father's desk. Years ago he gave me a key stating it was for safe keeping. I stumbled upon it last week and had forgotten to inform you of it."

Lara swerved in the tech-room seat and stood up. "No problem Winston. But, how about you show me that desk?"

He took her to her father's private study, a room she was never to be in when she was a young girl. Her mother was against disrupting her father whilst in the middle of research, but Richard had never told his wife about allowing Lara to secretly visit him.

They'd talk about art and dolls, and all of the things that young English girls chattered on about.

Lara examined the desk closer. She remembered the drawer in question and, caressing it with her fingers, was reminded of how her father would sit her on his lap. And while he would talk about exotic locales and sprite animals, she'd trace the patterns of the drawer's carved wood with much interest, always pondering what contents were inside the locked space.

The key, long and golden rested atop the desk. She picked it up and turned it, a small 'click' telling her she could now peruse through the drawer's contents after so many years. Papers, faded and fresh alike littered the drawer adding an excitement to the discovery. She pulled out a small book, maybe one-hundred pages or so, the title faded away. She could just make out, 'Mediterranean Temples' on its face. The author of which was unreadable.

"Take a look through that, will you?" she asked Winston who stood behind her peering through the contents as well. She nonchalantly handed 'Mediterranean Temples' to Winston who took it carefully and dusted off the surface of the brown leather book.

A multitude of documents and reports about the Destiny Chamber lay in no particular order inside. It seems as if they had simply been thrown around as if to keep something discrete. She picked up an envelope; the Croft family seal pressed against the lip of the thin paper surface and scanned the front. There were no addresses written

on the front of the envelope. It was void of any writing at all. Lara tore the seal and opened the lid pulling out a small card, maybe four inches by four inches and made of thick, durable paper that read, '*Page 64*'.

"Winston, I think I've found something. May I see that book please?"

"Be my guest. My old eyes wouldn't have helped you one bit," he chuckled.

"Age is determined by wisdom, not wrinkles, Winston..." Lara flipped to page 64 in '*Mediterranean Temples*'. She stopped. The page was there, to her astonishment. She almost expected it to be missing, conventional for any of her adventures. In a normal case the page *would* have been missing creating another obstacle for her to overcome. But in this case, she'd been lucky. The page's heading read, '*The Destiny Chamber*'.

"Lord Croft must have left that for you as I noticed the book does not contain a Table of Contents. It wasn't customary for the time period. If you look at writers like Hemingway or Melville, you'll see exactly what I mean. Rather a nuisance for the modern reader."

"It seems this page wasn't the specific thing father wanted us to see. He should have finished the heading with, '*Side Notes by Richard Croft*'. He left us coordinates on this page scribbled at the very bottom. But not just any coordinates. From what I can tell, these lead to the middle of the Mediterranean Sea."



TODAY

Lara had her boat parked out in the calm waters of the Mediterranean Sea. The native sea gulls flew high and proud across the waters, rarely coming near the boat as they swooped down in a perfect arch, catching fish, and receding back to the skies.

She was just above the coordinates written in the book. Nothing was in sight. Around her there were no buildings, setups or people of any kind. It was only Lara, contrasting her natural surroundings. She had gear resting in her scuba cabinet. An aqua-breather allowing her to breathe underwater, a pair of anti-fogging goggles, a wet-suit designed to keep her warm in the chilly ocean depths and a waterproof pack to hold her more *dangerous* items of interest.

After a quick change on the deck, she was in her suit and had her gear packed. The Destiny Chamber was somewhere beneath her right now. She could have pondered for hours about the numerous relics that lay forgotten in the halls of the underwater temple. And the Destiny Chamber itself held millions of histories inside of its illuminated core. Pasts, presents and futures of every single person in the world.

And what future might it hold for her? It was a question she occasionally questioned. She constantly put herself in life or death situations. Any moment, she could be struck dead without a second thought. Was this her future? Or maybe the future in which she died of natural cause?      Maybe she'd live her life for forty more years and then pass into the next world. Only time would tell.

The cool water jolted her brain into the present as she dove off her boat in a perfect swan dive formation. She was under the depths of the Mediterranean Sea, surrounded by a lack of sea creatures.

Why was there a lack of sea creatures?

A loud thumping in the water unnerved Lara. She twisted around in the water...

...only to be greeted by a shark, swimming with its jaws wide open and a thirst in its throat. It looked hungry, too. Its eyes were menacing and its jaws chomped down rapidly as it approached. Lara's eyes widened instantaneously upon seeing the mighty creature. With a quickening speed, Lara kicked out to the right wading to her left a foot or so.

The shark billowed right past her going about fifty feet, then curving in a 'u' form to swim back at Lara. Sharks were creatures of habit, Lara recalled. They could easily adapt to their prey's occasional victories, followed by a retaliation that often ended drastically.

But Lara was not one for the drastic. Her intent was staying in one piece as she descended for the Destiny Chamber. And now the shark was darting towards her once more, its pectoral fins tucked in tight allowing for more maneuverability, but less speed.

Lara, ready for action, prepared herself for the presiding danger. Her arms spread out perpendicular to her shoulders; her legs together, knees slightly bent; her

back curved ever so slightly to avoid a paralyzing impact if what she was going to try failed.

A ten foot gap was all that separated her and the beast now. Lara retained her form, and then, as the shark opened its mouth wide to consume its delicious catch of the day, she kicked out with her legs countering the pressure of the hit back at the shark. Through her feet, she could feel small components of the shark's frame cracking or shattering completely. The maneuver was one she'd learned in Taiwan years before, studying aquatic life with a group of the locals. As money was uncommon in their area, they had learned of ways to attack a shark without use of weapons. It was a long and hard practice, but Lara had eventually mastered the routine.

The shark, wounded, opened wide its pectoral fins, turning in the water and racing away as fast as it could carry itself. *Those sharks are always a pleasure*, Lara thought.

She then proceeded to the dark depths of the Mediterranean Sea.

The process by which one explores the ocean floor is generally a long and strenuous expedition. Most archaeologists and oceanographers would traverse to the bottom of their selected body of water in a mini-submarine or some sort of contraption that keeps them away from the water. The oddest scenario would be a group of people exploring together without a mini-sub. But Lara was bold, and ever the one for a challenge. And when Lara noticed the gaping doorway in the side of a great rock wall,

she knew that if she'd been outside of the water, or with a team of explorers, she'd have not enjoyed it as much as she did now.

The Temple of the Destiny Chamber was in front of her, only a kilometer or two away. Coral brushed up against the entrance which consisted of a semicircle stone surface and two monolithic pillars on either side of a shattered doorway. The water had brushed away Grecian runes that lined the pillars, and seaweed had uprooted several of the large stone blocks that composed the crafted ground.

Lara swam forward and examined what runes were left. No words could be made out. Disappointed at a chance to read from history itself, Lara averted the monoliths and gazed into the darkness of the abyssal entrance. She pulled out a green glow stick, cracked it with her other hand and shook it until it lit up the surrounding area. She noted the broken stone doors that lay shattered inside the corridor.

Suddenly, Lara was immersed in another world. The silence of the deep and the green glow that casted upon the ancient structures added to the effect pulling Lara in further into the world of ancient Greece and destinies untold. She could only imagine what the Destiny Chamber, if it was still intact, would show her...

Anxious now, Lara swam forward into the Temple of the Destiny Chamber leaving behind her world once more.

The dark corridors that led her deeper into the sunken temple would have been impossible to navigate without her handy LCD lights that shone on the submerged corridor walls casting a silvery glow about the ruins. She'd already disposed of the dud glow stick. Lara had hoped that the temple would have only been partially submerged, but her wishes were in vein. From the observations she'd noted while swimming through the ancient stone halls, there were no air bubbles that would allow her to take off her mask and mini-tank. Her tank would have a mere hour more before she'd have to begin the ascent back to the surface. She didn't have unlimited ammo, you know.

The current hallway she was in stretched on straight in one direction; small piles of rubble and ruined walls littered the rocky floor; ancient oak doors either shut tight under the water pressure or broken and missing large chunks of wood, lined what decent walls were left. This was the main chamber, Lara noted. It would lead her to the Destiny Chamber in no time.

The floor abruptly went from straight to ascending. A set of ruined stairs ascended into a wide chamber twenty meters ahead. Lara kicked faster, her muscles burning from the strenuous expedition.

She was excited to see the Destiny Chamber and to finish the work her father had once tried to do himself. Or maybe it was all in false hope. Maybe the Destiny Chamber was ruined and worn-down like the rest of the ancient temple.

And yet Lara persisted. She had never once left an ancient site without the answer she was looking for. There was no turning back from this now. She was so close.

And then she saw it.

She had arrived at the temple's core without too much difficulty. At the top of the stairs was a final miniscule stretch of hallway that emptied into the wide chamber. It was a big circular room, probably once a tower. Small odds and ends lay in no particular order around the room. A short and wide rectangular pillar composed completely of stone rose from the ground a few feet in the center.

The top of the chamber was even more interesting. A caged barrier was erected between her and the space above. Metal rods lined it, forming small squares no human could pass through. Above the cage was a visible pocket of air.

The surface.

Lara gazed up to see something shining brightly above, suspended from the tower's ceiling and looming far above over the surface.

And then the worst happened.

She had triggered a trap of sorts. She didn't know how, or what she had done, but a series of spikes spat out from small holes in the chamber walls and split the water as they blazed towards Lara.

She reacted with a covetable agility, kicking up and swiping her arms to divide the water. But she was not fast enough. One of the spikes made contact with her backpack. Suddenly, bubbles formed around her. Her mini-tank had been breached and her oxygen supply was slowly diminishing.

After momentarily cursing herself for not being fast enough, Lara proceeded down towards the bottom of the chamber to the square pillar.

Lara, with a burst of adrenaline kicked faster and approached the pillar's top. On it was built a lever contraption of sorts. It was a small rod made of a uniquely crafted wood attached to a semicircle base. A gap between the semicircle allowed it to be pulled or pushed.

Her air was escaping faster and faster.

She grabbed the handles and yanked with all of her might. The lever, by chance, fell forward and the room came to life. The cage doors up top were slowly opening receding back into slits in the wall. The pillar she had been on began to ascend upwards in the water. As the pillar grew, small spouts appeared on the pillar's sides.

Lara saw the pillar top heading for the surface. And something told her it was going up the glimmering light. She managed to grab hold of the edge of the pillar and before she knew it, she was above water, and the pillar continued upward. The small spouts began to pour water from an internal piping system that filtered the water below.

Spikes were being shot towards her again. This time, there was no escaping them. They were firing rapidly from the walls a few meters up, colliding with the pillar and then falling, smashed, into the depths below. Lara speedily shimmied across the edge of the escalating pillar and swung herself around to the perpendicular side, avoiding the spikes entirely.

A sudden jolt almost sent Lara down into the waters which were now a hundred feet below her. She could see something down there that was *not* pleasant.

Sharks.

The word bit her thoughts like the sharks would have loved to do to her. But she had more pressing matters to deal with. The glimmering light was now at its brightest. Lara vaulted atop the pillar and gazed at what she saw before her.

It was the Destiny Chamber.

The pillar had stopped by a platform built into the towering walls. She pressed down on it with her foot, to make sure it wouldn't collapse when she walked on it, and then continued forward. On the platform, three giant gold rings had been built into each other forming a giant sphere. The inside faces of the rings glowed a bright golden color. Precious jewels were embedded around the rings. A bright white light shined down from some unidentifiable source above.

Lara walked towards the mystical Destiny Machine.



She hopped inside of the three golden rings sitting in the smallest, innermost one. While observing the rings, and waiting for something to happen, the process began. Ancient powers from the Destiny Machine began to work on Lara. Her eyes went white and her body fell limp to the floor. She was in her world no longer.

She was in Croft Manor, sitting in the parlor in her favorite chair. A tray on the stand beside her had a fresh cup of steaming cocoa that called out to her. Winston was in a chair opposite her. He sipped his cup of cocoa and then continued to gaze around the room; at the big clock that ticked away on the wall; the carpet dirtied and needing a cleaning later on.

“Winston?” she asked. “Where am I? What is this?”

He responded, “This is your destiny, Lara.”

“My destiny? Sitting at home with a cup of hot cocoa and a warm fire? What about exciting travels and lost pyramids and such?”

“My dear, you talk as if you haven’t already raided *every* single tomb in the world. You’re retired, my dear. Don’t you remember?” Lara was beginning to get lost. Why was Winston acting so strange?

“Retired? What do you mean I raided every...What?” This was turning bizarre. Lara quickly downed the warm cup of hot cocoa and then set it back on the tray hoping it would relax her a bit.

“So this must be it...” Winston muttered to himself. “Lara, you told me I’d have to tell you of this one day. You must be the Lara from the past. You’re inside the Destiny Machine right now. Aren’t you?”

Lara couldn’t reply.

“Hundreds of years ago, you stepped foot inside the Destiny Machine and saw this conversation between you and I. I am supposed to tell you that you go on to have discovered *every* artifact ever recorded in history. You live forever, my dear.”

“Wait. I live forever?!” Lara quickly examined her features. Her soft hands were not wrinkled! With a hand to her head, she felt the smooth texture of her brunette-colored hair. Attempting to be discrete, she examined her chest to see if what Winston said was true.

And Winston looked the same as well! His whitened hair and wrinkled skin. His same skinny body covered with the same suit and jacket that he wore all the time. His polished brown shoes were the ones Lara had gotten for him so many years ago.

“My Lara, you will understand soon. But what I can tell you is this: hundreds of years ago, you stepped foot into the Destiny Machine. After you stepped inside, and held this conversation with me, you find the secret to eternal life. I cannot tell you what or where this secret is... The Lara in the future says it would rupture the time-space continuum or something of that nature. But you will find it, and you will share it with me. And we will live together for the rest of time raiding tombs and cutting those hedges out front. Your destiny, Lara, is to live forever. And so you shall. And so you inevitably will.”

She awoke with a start. The water from the pillar spouts had risen high up into the chamber. Three shark fins swirled around the platform.

Lara's guns were already locked and loaded. She fired towards the first shark. It roared under the water and then receded down. She fired at the second and third simultaneously. Both turned over in the water dead.

She pulled out a grenade she'd been saving. Pulling the cap off, she threw it expertly into the air. It exploded as it hit the tower room. Rock and water fell around Lara. The Mediterranean Sea began to flood the Destiny Chamber. Lara checked the mini-tanks PSI to see how much air she had left. Three minutes, it read.

The water from above and below met and Lara was engulfed by water once more. As the tower filled to the top, Lara began to swim and kick as fast as she possibly could. Through her peripherals, she noted several more sharks swimming lustfully after her. The tower suddenly opened, now exposed to the sea floor, and Lara escaped through the newly-blown hole.

She twisted in the water to face the sharks. Firing madly, she killed two at one time, but the third took twice as much ammo to pierce its skin. Then she pulled out one last grenade. Attaching her pack to it, her pistols held in one hand, she pulled off the cap and released it.

It sunk into the Mediterranean Sea. Once it hit the bottom, an explosion shook the world sealing the hole into the Destiny Chamber and blasting Lara skywards.

And when Lara breached the surface of the Mediterranean Sea, and her boat was there waiting for her, she pulled herself up and threw herself flat on the boat's ground. She peeled off her goggles and oxygen pack, now empty, and peered into the sky through sore eyes.

"Lara Croft," she said to herself. "I hope you enjoyed *that* because you will be doing it for a long time!"