

Gameworld geopolitics and the genre of the quest

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This chapter is concerned with the relationship between contemporary geopolitics and the popular domain of digital games. Recent research has argued for greater attention to the shared materialities, economies and imaginaries of commercial games and military campaigns, especially in the context of the ‘War on Terror’. These existing analyses are, however, concerned with war-themed games to the exclusion of other game genres. These existing analyses also focus on what might be termed the ‘representational logics’¹ of games, particularly the contextualising or ‘background’ images contained within games. I argue that other genres of game, particularly action-adventure games structured around a heroic quest, might also be considered both constitutive of and constituted by contemporary geopolitics. In examining this reciprocity between games and geopolitics, I pay attention to the ways in which both are ‘more-than-representational’, involving various doings, viewings and feelings (Lorimer, 2005). Crucially, gaming and geopolitical practices draw from and add to well-established, yet dynamic, cultural genres. In what follows, I employ literary theorist John Frow’s understanding of genre as a ‘typified action’ with a complex relation to a recurring social situation; ‘the patterns of genre’, he argues, ‘are at once shaped by a type of situation and in turn shape the rhetorical actions that are performed in response to it’ (Frow, 2006: 14). Consciously or otherwise, genre is as integral to the meaning-making of political strategists and military generals as it is to game designers and players of digital games.

Cinematic and literary genres are often evoked by geopoliticians: Ronald Reagan’s aping of the speech and gestures of the ‘Western’ movie hero is a

well-noted example; Arnold Schwarzenegger's playing himself playing California's hero governor is even more involved. Similarly, game genres 'play at' geopolitics, they resonate with and profit from new technologies and ways of seeing made possible by the conduct of contemporary conflicts. The personal visual recordings of combat produced by soldiers can be seen to (re)produce the kind of doing and looking modelled by specific genres of digital games (see Power, 2007). In this chapter I introduce the concept of 'gameworld geopolitics' to refer to this generic resonance between geopolitics and gaming, as well as to an important basis for this resonance: the historical intimacy between commercial and state interests in the computation and simulation of conflict.

In the second part of the chapter I examine more closely the genre of the heroic quest in the popular game series *Tomb Raider* and in various geopolitical situations arising in the late 1990s to 2003. Reference is made to the non-state (non-soldiering) agency of three character figures: tomb raiders, mercenaries and weapons inspectors. Finally, I interrogate the affects and effects of quested-for objects across both the *Tomb Raider* series and contemporary geopolitics: the powerful game-quest talisman, the WMD and the antiquities 'looted' from the Iraqi National Museum in 2003.

Worldly games

To begin this story with an account of either games or geopolitics as discrete entities would fail to recognise their symbiotic development. Patrick Crogan argues that state interests in wargaming were the original driver of the computational technology development, noting the accelerated interchange of personnel and software between military organisations, defence contracting firms, defence-funded academic research programs and the commercial gaming and simulation industries in the mid-twentieth century (Crogan, forthcoming; see also Der Derian, 2003). Other commentators have noted more recent examples of the links between commercial games and military

agencies. For example, the US Marines, US Department of Defence, US Army and the UK Ministry of Defence have been involved in developing or modifying a number of games, including *Doom*, *Spearhead*, *Operation Internal Look*, *America's Army* and *Half-Life* (see Power, 2007; Stahl, 2006). Of these, *America's Army* has drawn particular critical interest given its explicit marketing as a 'recruitment and outreach tool' of the US Army and its enormous popularity with players (see Stahl, 2006; Power, 2007).

Hardware as well as software is routinely shared between games and military manufacturers. For instance, Roger Stahl notes that the Sony PlayStation2 console was classified by the Japanese government as a 'general purpose product related to conventional weapons' because the technology was found to be viable for use in missile guidance systems (2006: 112).² At the same time the US Military was developing a controller for a small, unmanned, reconnaissance truck that was modeled on the PlayStation2 console in line with the assumption that incoming soldiers would already be partially trained to use it (Stahl, 2006: 112; see also Power, 2007). The advantages of console familiarity go further than the shape, size, configuration and operation of the object concerned: habits of touch are intimately attuned to those of the eye, ear and human computational core, the brain.

With regard to games images, geographers have argued that war-themed games assist in representing particular places and types of spaces (cities, desert landscapes) as little more than receiving points for US military ordnance (Gregory in Graham, 2005: 6). Games images are undoubtedly simplistic depictions of the world, and renderings of some worlds are more aggressively simplistic than others (see Graham, 2004, 2005; Gregory, 2008). In attempting to move beyond such analyses, to account for what Carter and McCormack refer to as 'the non-representational quality of images', I have elsewhere reviewed work on the development of digital games as part of a discussion of a new kind of geopolitical visibility (Hughes, 2007). My interest there was in what kind of 'looking' is modelled or afforded by digital games, and what this might tell us about the wider visibility of contemporary conflicts. I drew on Stahl's argument that a new visibility was evident in the

2003 invasion of Iraq. Stahl (2006) contrasts the 'televised media spectacle' of the 1991 Operation Desert Storm with a newer, 'interactive' mode of the coverage of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 symbolised by the 'countdown clock' that appeared on news broadcasters screens in anticipation of the invasion. Stahl refers to this shift as the supplanting of 'the sedative of the spectacle' with 'the stimulant of gametime'³ (Stahl, 2006: 120). Several aspects of this shift toward an interactive or, as I prefer, an anticipatory visuality, have attracted critical comment. As a part of this new visuality, many contemporary war-themed games require the player themselves to remain invisible, conducting 'secret missions out of sight and out of mind' (Stahl, 2006: 119). In these and other games, the secrecy of the (usually militarised) mission is guaranteed only by invisibility. Other aspects of anticipatory visuality are a constant state of alertness, expectation of attack and pre-emptive action (manifesting as a 'shoot-first' or 'mashing'⁴ approach). The looking of the 'first-person-shooter' or the 'virtual citizen-soldier' (Stahl, 2006) is intimately attuned to movement through the gameworld. Often more rapid than an equivalent embodied movement (through the non-gameworld), this looking-moving-feeling is also productive of a particular kind of space. Looking-moving-feeling in this way produces space after space of increasingly difficult engagements and violent actions. For war-themed and contemporary action-adventure games, this practice of 'anticipatory looking' (and rapid response) arguably matters more than the player's game strategy, experience-level and dexterity in manoeuvring their avatar through the gameworld.

Thinking about the kind of looking that occurs within digital games, as additional to games images, shifts an analysis way from the familiar argument that games are simply poor, partial, or distorting representations of the world. Games are 'methectic'⁵, rather than mimetic or figurative (Harrison in Huizinga, 1998: 15): they do not mirror but instead participate or partake in the world, functioning as a 'helping out of [an] action' (Marett in Huizinga, 1944: 15). The playing out of an idea, plan or an operation is not the same as rendering, observing or engaging with an image, though images may of course be employed. As Ben Anderson notes of strategic gaming in the 1950s and 1960s, it is not that such war games 'represented' the future but that their

organisation of (simulated) space created a certain quality of experience in which unknown events could be *felt* (Anderson, forthcoming). Examining contemporary digital war games, Marcus Power speaks to this more-than-visual operation of games when he claims that some games provide ‘a space of cyberdeterrence’ where it is possible to ‘play through the anxieties that attend uncertain times and new configurations of power’ (Power, 2007: 271). Sean Carter and Derek McCormack’s exploration of film as an affective assemblage is also useful for further thinking on games (see Carter and McCormack, 2006; this volume). Pertinent to analyses of games — especially those war-themed or action-adventure games routinely decried as simply mirroring or replicating extant ideological positions — is Carter and McCormack’s argument that ‘the participation of images in processes of contagion, amplification and resonance does not necessarily involve the transmission of anything like a “message”’ (Carter and McCormack, this volume). Games are no more conducive of ‘messages’ than any other visual medium. Although film remains largely impervious to the doing and feeling of the viewer, and games unfolds immediately, variously and interactively depending on players’ embodied responses, neither experience is pre-determined or determining.

Somewhat paradoxically, interactivity has been given all sorts of determining powers in games analysis. Although a high degree of interaction between bodies and machines is facilitated by contemporary games, these embodied responses only ever register as translations into recognisable, computable input (just as responses to other visual media must undergo some form of translation and input, not necessarily computational, into the world). Tempering the more hyperbolic claims made about interactivity, it can be noted that interactivity:

consist of selections (rather than choices) that have been anticipated by the game designers. ... This pre-programming is implanted at a number of levels: technologically, in the capacities and valences of the machines players access; [and] culturally, in the nature of the scenarios and storylines chosen for development (Kline et al. 2003: 19).

Croghan also cautions against the hype of interactivity, arguing that games allow for a ‘playing with the illusion of control, control, that is, of the model’s

illusion of a more complex system' (Crogan, forthcoming). Along with James Newman, Crogan argues that one plays a computer game to learn how to 'think like a computer'. Mastery of the experiential whole of a game demands a synthesis perspective — taking in action, location, scenario — such that the gameworld can be managed to resolve game challenges (Newman in Crogan, forthcoming). Games offer a form of affective immersion in which 'one can play out mastery of the indeterminate through a game of mastery over the model' (Crogan, forthcoming). In this sense the popular hysteria about violent games producing violent players misses the mark: it is not violent feelings but the violence *of feeling* — the affective intensities of playing gameworlds — that arguably intoxicates players. The 'selections' of game designers, and the 'thinking' (like a computer) and 'managing' (the gameworld) performed by players, are all part of an anticipatory visuality that delivers something felt and celebrated as mastery.

The slippage between gameworlds and other worlds is facilitated by the scaling-up to a more complex situation of this anticipatory viewing and the sense of mastery engendered by playing a pre-programmed model. In gameworld geopolitics the affective states associated with anticipatory viewing and mastery of the model are transposed to the scale and sphere of the global indeterminate. In introducing the chapter, it was suggested that 'gameworld geopolitics' refers in part to the historical intimacy between commercial and state interests in computer simulations, an intimacy that has been explored further in this section. 'Gameworld geopolitics' can also be seen as a particular subset of geopolitical representations, practices and affects that participate in (and yet deny the illusory nature of) the practiced simulation and the simulated world. Moreover, these representations, practices and affects are configured through particular genres; I want in particular to examine the genre of the quest.

The genre of the quest

In his comprehensive examination of genre, John Frow establishes that:

far from being mere 'stylistic' devices, genres create effects of reality and truth which are central to the different ways the world is understood in the writing of history, philosophy or science, or in painting, or in everyday talk (Frow, 2006: 19).

Frow also argues that genre is itself anticipatory or future-orientated, inasmuch as genre defines a set of expectations that guide engagement with a text, broadly defined (Frow, 2006: 104). Digital games mobilise specific genres — often those borrowed from the realms of writing, television and film — to various future-orientated ends. Genres thus guarantee and extend the commercial popularity of particular games, they initiate players' expectations about particular forms of gameplay and character sets, and they structure and heighten gaming affects (see Carr, 2003; King and Krzywinska, 2006: 54-59). Generic games are thus doubly-anticipatory: while genre itself allows for anticipation, the game as simulation, as previously noted, is not a reflective experience but an anticipatory one, demanding extensive temporal immersion and experimentation. Contemporary geopolitics, in its intensified engagement with simulation, also participates in this doubly-anticipatory field. As in games, generic 'effects of reality and truth' in the writing and practice of global space come with expectations about forms of conduct, character sets and affective experiences. Such expectations are crucial to the legitimacy and futures of particular global actions and administrations.

Of course, multiple genres are at work in contemporary geopolitics: the oral genres of sermon, military command and reminiscence, the literary genres of allegory, drama, melodrama, political satire and science fiction and, arguably, the legal genres of case and cross-examination, to name only a few. As genres are transacted across different contexts, they potentially comment on, reflect or parody both context and genre, while nonetheless bringing with them 'some of the force of [their] initial function' (Frow, 2006: 17). The focus for my remaining discussion is a popular genre of contemporary geopolitics and

digital games, indeed the exemplary genre of gameworld geopolitics: the genre of the heroic quest.

The oral tradition of heroic quests first appeared in the twelfth century and:

sought to rehabilitate the passing feudal order by integrating its values into the new centralized monarchy ... These stories ... define the ideal knight as the aristocratic warrior subject ... From this feudal origin, Arthurian romance develops into a religious genre ... later Grail romances devalue the court in favour of religious authority. [They redefine] knighthood in terms not of physical prowess but spiritual prowess, a development that, not surprisingly corresponds to the crusades and the Church's attempts to control an increasingly unruly secular authority (Aronstein, 1995: 4-5).

Susan Aronstein provides a perceptive reading of the *Indiana Jones* film trilogy (Paramount Pictures, 1981, 1984, 1989) in terms of their detailed fidelity to what she identifies as the 'recuperative politics' of the Arthurian quest. She further argues that the quest genre is, both historically and thematically, an ideal vehicle for reintroducing or redefining a positive vision of authority in times of crisis. Aronstein is not alone in drawing connections between the figure of Indiana Jones and the crises that threatened (and crises threatened by) the Reagan administration (see Kellner and Ryan, 1987). While Indiana was obviously a darling of 1980s 'Reaganite entertainment', critics were divided as to whether he was a paternal saviour, a dashing colonial adventurer, a superhero, or a democrat (see Aronstein, 1995: 26). Analyses of more recent developments in the geopolitical cultures of the US-led 'coalition of the willing' have also drawn attention to the emergence to an ideal figure, that of the 'professional Western warrior' (Dalby, 2008), the active agent of what Bush unguardedly termed 'a crusade' in 2001.

Quests or crusades form the basis of many action-adventure and role-playing games. The traditional quest — an oral account of the many tasks and ordeals of a hero's journey — has a loose episodic structure that is particularly suited to games (King and Krzywinska, 2006: 49). In quest games — such as the hugely popular *EverQuest*, *Primal* and *Tomb Raider* games — the quest destination is often less emphasised than the quest journey such that 'the majority of attention is devoted to the performance of the particular gameplay

tasks required for progression' (King and Krzywinska, 2006: 49). Quests generally present a subject at a moment of realisation, the realisation that a central, patriarchal authority provides her or him with 'an encyclopaedia of desire, a locus of representations to which [she/he] wishes to be called' (Kolker in Aronstein, 1996: 6). The journey of the hero begins with this moment of 'being hailed', marking the advent of righteous action. Such feudal conviction is apparent in the statements of recent geopolitical figures: witness George Bush complimenting Tony Blair in the wake of the invasion of Iraq by reference to his 'great ability, deep conviction and steady courage'.⁶ Media and diplomatic commentators also attested to the 'moral certainty' and 'strong religious conviction' of Bush and Blair, suggesting that 'both of them, although [in] different ways, are driven by very strong principles and notions of faith' (D'Ancoma, 2003; Meyer, 2003). Some accounting for the popularity of quest games and the geopolitical quest comes with this simple yet powerful mechanism: the 'hailing' of a subject. This practice of 'hailing' has the potential to overspill the interiority of the gameworld and affectively engage the player, politician or citizen. It is also the starting point for the *Tomb Raider* game series to which I now turn, as a specific example of the quest genre and/as geopolitics.

***Tomb Raider* and the search for WMD**

Tomb Raider is one of the most successful action-adventure genre games ever released. It is considered a 'third-person shooter' game in the sense that the player plays as the main character and heroine Lara Croft, but Lara also remains within the player's view. Originally developed by the Core Design group and first published in 1996 by the UK company EIDOS, it is estimated that 500 million dollars have now been spent on 21 million take-home Lara Crofts across seven versions of the game (Matrix, 2006: 128).⁷ EIDOS, together with game's current developers, Crystal Dynamics, continue to enjoy success with the 2007 release: *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*. The intended *Anniversary* release date of 2006 was meant to mark the tenth birthday of the game. Despite this one-year delay, *Anniversary* has been well received,

testifying to Lara's continued popularity and the perhaps the interest of a new generation of *Tomb Raider* fans. A new edition, *Tomb Raider: Underworld* is planned for release in 2009.

When the original *Tomb Raider* was released in 1996, Lara appeared in far wider marketing and cultural domains than was common for game avatars of her time. Lara's cross-over into media, advertising and eventually film domains was apparently fuelled by her superior appearance. The game's graphics and animations were more sophisticated than those of any other game then available. But Lara was superior in other ways too. What Lara did and how Lara looked made her hugely popular with players. For her female fans especially, she embodied the post-feminist 'grrrl power' attitude of her time. She was strong, self-reliant, intelligent and willing to actively and aggressively pursue her desires. Some critics disagreed, and decried Lara is a sexualised cyberbimbo. Lara appeared to revel in both forms of attention. As *Face* magazine put it, Lara was 'bigger than Pammy, wiser than Yoda'.⁸ Lara is and has always been multiple, not only multiply-mediated but, in the hands of her fans, she is playable in quite different ways.

Like other games, *Tomb Raider* offers a form of anticipatory viewing and affective immersion: training in movement command sequences and the curious experience of third-person narcissism (being and admiring Lara simultaneously) are especially key. To be immersed in the playing of a game, to inhabit 'the country of the half-second delay [of human reaction time]' (Thrift, 2004: 67), is also to pursue a certain sort of erotic relation. Such techno-eroticism is variously defined as:

the pleasure of the cyborg myth, the seduction of symbiosis and potent fusions ... is the holding power of the machine and the screen, the seductive interface between humans and their computers ... [b]ased on virtual interdependence, trust, and even love ... we become passionately attached to our machines (Matrix, 2006: 121).

In the case of Lara, this passionate attachment is generally misrecognised as desire for the figure of Lara. The question of desire for 'pixel vixens' like Lara is one that has long exercised feminist critics. The standard debate is captured

in titles such as: ‘Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo?’ (Kennedy, 2002) and ‘Does Lara Croft wear fake polygons?’ (Schleiner, 2001). As Sidney Matrix argues, this either/or debate largely misses the point. Lara’s ‘hook’ lies not in her disproportionate curves, but in human-machine coupling, a ‘the seductive and intimate connection that is pre-requisite for keeping digital capitalism online’ (Matrix, 2006). Gameworld geopolitics is not immune from the pleasures and pitfalls of techno-eroticism, rather the seductive and intimate connection of body and machine is part of the sense of mastery engendered by gaming, and in this way a pre-requisite for keeping digital conflict online.

Thus, while at first glance quest genre games like *Tomb Raider* may appear to be less directly aligned with the exigencies of the ‘military-industrial-media-entertainment-network’ (Der Derian, 2001). The wet, quiet, subterranean and often unpopulated spaces of *Tomb Raider* are a far representational cry from the dry, urban or desert spaces of current war-themed games. The game is structured around a quest for objects, not the defeat of enemy forces. Given these specificities, it would be easy to assume that *Tomb Raider* is unconcerned with the production of what Stahl (2006) terms the ‘virtual citizen-soldier’. But what remains on offer is a coupling with the computations of conflict. *Tomb Raider* invites a different game experience and a different kind of ‘helping out’ of the actions of gameworld geopolitics: participation in solitary, non-state agency and the effects and affects associated with talismanic objects.

Private violence

Much has been made of the imperial politics of *Tomb Raider* (see Breger, 2008), but Lara is perhaps more feudal than she is imperial. She is unmistakably aristocratic in her accent, interests and familial background. Her father is an English peer, and her home an estate. Aristocrats are feudal residues, not imperial agents; their money and power stems from inherited lands and titles, not trade, bureaucracy or capital investment. As such they are

leisured figures, free to pursue idiosyncratic interests, profiting where they may. From the outset, Lara's character and interests were conceived in decidedly exploitative and individualistic terms. An early development document for the game states that she is:

a modern-day adventurer and procurer of rare artefacts which she relieves from Johnny foreigner with the gay abandon of a five year old stealing mars bars [sic] from the corner shop. She then sells the heritage of these countries for profit, and perverse xenophobic pleasure (Toby Gard/ Tomb Raider Development Team, 1995).

Tomb raiders — procurers of rare artefacts — have a rich and peculiar legacy. Unlike waging war, tomb raiding is typically the pursuit of mercenaries, renegades, connoisseurs, archaeologists, scholars and other non-state agents.⁹ On the official game site, Lara is even referred to as an 'archaeologist-mercenary'.¹⁰ In literary and cinematic representations, archaeologists of tombs are highly unstable figures. They must maintain careful moral distance from the 'grave robbers' with whom they are often in competition: grave-robbers are parasitic, anarchic and ignorant. Indiana Jones — on whom Lara was modelled¹¹ — and Lara are, rather, experts with superhuman drive. Both Lara and Indy are reluctant renegades, transient tomb raiders.¹² They may act on behalf of a state or state institution (like a museum), but private interests more often enlist their services and it is their independent resourcefulness that allows them to work as they do. Generally-speaking, some form of crisis demands that they travel to an exotic locale, solve the riddles of ancient or iconic sites, beat a path through the bodies of any resistant human and non-human residents, and encounter the powerful object before it is encountered by evil-doing competition.¹³

Figures like Lara and Indiana must steal objects because stealing occurs. Such a rationale participates in a realist geopolitical culture, where actors are self-interested and all means of maximising a states' security and power, even if those means are held in common with the enemy or antithetical group, are legitimate practice. Theirs is the pre-emptive steal, the steal that anticipates stealing, a recurrent theme of the genre. This take-it-and-run action is measured out in the gameworld when the player must 'pick up' objects —

ammunition, keys to puzzles and various ‘rewards’ — to safely and profitably progress from one space or level to another. The action is more straightforwardly figured at various culminations of gameplay where central, talismanic objects become available for the taking. At times tomb raiders are assisted by native informant-type characters, in other cases by glamorous offshoots (in *Tomb Raider Legend*, for example, Lara maintains radio contact with a team of assistants). On the whole, however, tomb raiders are lone figures, operating in the interstices of the law and social order. For the most part, this suspension of law and social order is explained in terms of a ‘lost civilisation’ that leaves only its material traces: objects now dangerous because they have been forgotten by those who created them. As it is in contemporary geopolitics for Western nations seeking dangerous weapons in Other places, the forgetting of these Othered objects is proportionate not to the demise of an ancient order or defunct regime but to an unwillingness to acknowledge the Self in their production.

The heroic, non-state agency of Lara resonates in two additional figures: the mercenary for hire and the weapons inspector. The mercenary may at times work for or identify with a nation-state, but he or she is not a member of the national armed services in a straightforward sense, and arguably draws agency precisely from a being outside the codes of conduct and rules (both legal and cultural) that states are subject to (see Chesterman and Lehnardt, 2007). The weapons inspector is a figure whose expertise with specific objects (and their traces and trappings) is what brings them into play. The weapons inspector works for an international regime and according to multilateral dictates, albeit it with significant national interests at stake. Though perhaps not in the muscular fashion of Indy and Lara, the weapons inspector is charged with finding, recognising and neutralising a dangerous object in an exotic locale, while avoiding a great many obstacles along the way. It is to the talismanic objects prized by such figures I now turn.

Talismanic objects

While much has changed across the six *Tomb Raider* editions, the kind of talismanic object that lies at the heart of the game has altered little. In the first *Tomb Raider* (and in the *Anniversary* version) Lara must find the Scion of the lost city of Atlantis, in *Tomb Raider II* Lara is on the trail of the Dagger of Xian, the Infada Stone in *III* and so on. In the next edition, the as yet unreleased *Tomb Raider: Underworld*, Lara finds that the root of all world mythology leads back to the European Norse, and that she will need ‘Thor’s Hammer’ if she is to ‘to kill a god’.¹⁴ Lara’s quested-for objects are most often weapons, many with citations to various geopolitical realities: ‘Xian’ is not only identifiably ‘Chinese’ as the name of the last Emperor of the Han Dynasty, but also the name given to a nuclear bomber, the Xian H-6, developed and used by the Chinese Liberation People’s Army and Air Force in the 1950s and 1960s. ‘Atlantis’ is a clichéd site of geopolitical parable: an island-state whose naval power and extensive geopolitical reach could not prevent it from disappearing without trace. The ‘Infada Stone’ of *Tomb Raider III* — the game was released in 1998/ 1999 — undoubtedly references the First Intifada or ‘war of stones’, the Palestinian uprising and ensuing conflict of 1987 to 1993. ‘Thor’ was the name given to the first US intermediate range ballistic missile, later deployed by the UK. Again, these correspondences are not concerned to transmit a ‘message’. Rather these correspondences are generic, generative and often less than conscious. My argument is that Lara’s worldly quest is to seek out the weapons and talismans of contemporary geopolitics. Playing Lara is a ‘helping out’ of the actions associated with geopolitical quests. Her talismans measure out the dangerous objects of international discord: the ‘smoking gun’¹⁵ of terrorist complicity, the Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD), the biological agent and the fissile substance. Like the Scion of Atlantis and Thor’s Hammer, these objects have the power to affect an event so terrible that only the most heroic, those of purest motive, can be trusted with the task of their neutralisation.

From BAFTA Awards to Lucozade sales, Lara was claimed as a home-grown late 1990s British phenomenon. One of the most important geopolitical

contexts for the emergence of Lara was Britain's involvement in the United Nation's search for WMD. Experts, along with agents of various states and supra-state bodies, were engaged in a very high-profile quest for the talismanic object of the time, the WMD. In this way, gameworld geopolitics was arguably inaugurated by a quest, not by an invasion. Following the end of the 1991 Gulf War, the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) was established by the United Nations with the aim of ensuring Iraq's compliance in the production and use of weapons of mass destruction. UNSCOM supervised the destruction of weapons and weapons facilities throughout the 1990s. Controversy arose in 1998 when the Iraqi government levelled accusations that UNSCOM was US intelligence operatives' Trojan horse of choice. What was envisaged as an independent, international commission for arms control became an organisation that, simultaneous to its tracking of weapons, netted additional intelligence for interested nation-states, particularly the US, Britain and Israel. With the inspectors removed from Iraq, the US and Britain undertook bombing raids that 'did not respect any boundaries between the weapons sites claimed as the provocation for the attacks and sites associated with the regime itself' (Wright, 1999).

In Britain, the saga of weapons inspections took an additional and tragic turn in light of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. David Kelly, an experienced weapons inspector and long-time member of UNSCOM, participated anonymously in a May 2003 interview with a BBC journalist about the Blair government's intelligence 'dossier' on Iraqi WMD. He voiced concerns about the dossier, and intimated that 'the 45-minute claim' (a claim that Iraq was capable of firing biological and chemical weapons within 45 minutes of an order to do so) had been included in the dossier at the behest of Blair's own director of communications. When aired, the BBC report caused significant controversy and Kelly was eventually called to appear before a televised sitting of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. Two days after this appearance, Kelly took his own life.

The exposure and debasement of Kelly, his death, and the public responses that followed, including numerous films, investigative reports and conspiracy

theories, say something of the heroism with which he was identified. Kelly was a dedicated and experienced national public servant who had served international disarmament causes in the former USSR and Iraq. He was also a present-day knight of sorts: a companion of the Order of St Michael and St George, the sixth-most senior of Britain chivalric orders and one reserved for members of the British Diplomatic Service and those who render service to UK interests overseas. The Order bears the motto '*Auspicium melioris ævi*', 'token of a better age'. Seen as an embodiment of a better and more principled political age, Kelly in death 'transform[ed] a range of disgruntlements into a profound sense that the [British] government had shown itself to be morally and politically bankrupt' (Gerty, 2004).¹⁶ This 'profound sense' can be seen as a form of affective resistance to British domestic and foreign policy practices, a resistance that suggests that a knight's heroism may transcend and thus diminish the central authority that he or she ostensibly serves.

The search for WMD was explicitly discussed by geopolitical figures in terms of a difficult quest: in the lead up to invasion the British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw wrote that 'the chance that 300, or even 3,000, inspectors could criss-cross a country the size of France and successfully track down substances capable of being produced in an ordinary living room is absurd', thus emphasising the quest territory as large and the questing heroes as few (Straw, 2003). After the commencement of invasion he re-iterated this difficulty: '[w]hether or not we are able to find one third of one petrol tanker in a country twice the size of France remains to be seen' (Straw, 29 April 2003). In this reference to a possible store of Iraqi anthrax, Straw exaggerated Iraq's land area by incorrectly stating that it was twice that of France. As others have argued, in the lead up to the invasion it had become imperative to *not* find WMD such that the search for such objects remained ongoing and the case for war could be strengthened (see Luke this volume). In this situation, 'the closer the inspectors got to finding any Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and having them destroyed (or proved non-existent) the more panic — not relief — this caused in Washington' (Kiernan, 2003: 847). As has been noted, in his persuasion for invasion address to the UN Security Council on 5 February 2003, Colin Powell employed the authoritative visuality

of Microsoft PowerPoint. But Powell also waved his own talismanic object at members: a vial containing 'less than a teaspoon full' of model anthrax. While the vial was charged with the danger 'out there', Powell also brought home the affects associated with this danger by the conflation of the vial with the humble teaspoon, and by reminding his audience of the domestic anthrax attacks of 2001. He stated that this small amount of anthrax had 'forced several hundred people to undergo emergency medical treatment and killed two postal workers' in 2001, and concluded that the equivalent of 'tens upon tens upon tens of thousands of teaspoons' of dry anthrax were estimated by UNSCOM to be in Saddam Hussein's store (Powell, 2003). In gameworld geopolitics, threat as continual and imminent is constantly visualised and materialised, albeit in changing modes and forms. The RETORT collective identifies this situation as 'permanent war' and refers to the American empire as a 'machine' that is 'normalised' and '[kept] running' by the repeated use of military force (RETORT, 2005: 81-82). Where once international accord was threatened by a passing crisis or conflict, conflict is now briefly threatened by the end of stimulation: a geopolitical 'game over'.

As the game ran on and the quest for Iraqi WMD became overshadowed by the invasion of Iraq, media reports emerged of the looting of the Iraqi National Museum. Stories of hundreds of thousands of stolen ancient artefacts jostled for media time amidst accounts of key areas of Baghdad being taken and live footage of air strikes on the capital. These initial reports of stolen artefacts were later exposed as gross exaggerations. Some explanation for the exaggeration and prominence of these reports is found in the long-standing generic distinction between the hero and the grave robber. The anarchic, opportunistic thief in the tomb — as all around Baghdad was becoming a grave — provided a perfect foil to the heroism of US and allied forces. The objects themselves were spoken of in terms of the antiquity of human occupation of the region, the ancient 'Cradle of Civilisation', to which Saddam's Iraq could be unfavourably compared.

The case of the 'looting' of the Iraqi National Museum demonstrates something of the 'helping out' of the action (of military invasion) that *Tomb*

Raider provides. The museum objects themselves resonated with the emotions associated with the search for Iraqi WMD: anxiety that these objects had been removed and that they remained unseen, frustration that their locations were unknown (and suspicion that they might have already been moved across national borders with the help of sympathetic intermediaries) and narcissistic aggression in the charge that ‘humanity’ was the loser. Speaking more broadly about Iraqi archaeological sites, Atwood gives voice to this anxiety and dismay, this not knowing:

When ancient sites are excavated carefully and methodically by trained archaeologists, all of humanity can gain an understanding into how these societies lived ... When those sites are ransacked by looters, all that knowledge is lost (Atwood, 2004: 9).

Saying more than he knows, Atwood continues by intoning that ‘[l]ooting robs a country of its heritage, but, even worse, it destroys everyone’s ability to know about the past’ (Atwood, 2004: 9). The generic drama of ‘looting’ so fixed upon in media reports also amplified the sense that law and social order had entirely broken down in Baghdad (but also inferred that this was not entirely the Coalition’s doing), undoubtedly assisting other actions to be taken by both residents and incoming forces and for these actions to go unseen. Much of the visual footage that accompanied the reports provided an ‘eyewitness’ looking-moving view of the cavernous interior space of the museum, with hand-held cameras wobbling over broken display cases and scattered glass, naked plinths and vestiges of artefacts. This gameplay view seemed to scan the scene for clues or reward objects hidden amongst the debris of violent encounter in hope of an indication for the incoming raiders of where to next.

Rather than understanding games as ideologically-driven attempts to mirror the world, gaming ought to be understood as type of practice that participates in the world. In this chapter, I have suggested that games should be seen neither as predictably or dangerously prescriptive, nor as unprecedented and radically ‘interactive’ cultural forms. Genre, as a typified action, allows geopolitical power to be played out in games, and games carry with them some

of the force of their original operation into the conduct of geopolitics. Both contemporary geopolitics and digital games facilitate anticipatory viewing and transact the illusion of mastery over the model to wider domains. I have specifically argued that the *Tomb Raider* game series offers players (and non-players) participation in mercenary rather than militarised agency. In this sense *Tomb Raider* and similar action-adventure games diverge from much of the current suite of war-themed games, but not from a constitutive role in global conflict. In mobilising the quest genre, a genre that works affectively to reinstall support for a central authority in times of crisis, *Tomb Raider* measures out a generic form of geopolitics made up of solitary, technocratic, object-focussed and objectifying play.

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¹ See Carter and McCormack, this volume.

² Accordingly, the Japanese government applied export controls on PlayStation2 requiring that a special license be obtained by distributors (Stahl, 2006: 112).

³ The term 'gametime' was coined by Crogan (2003) to refer to the way in which the 'anticipatory impulse' of gaming closes the temporal gap between experience and history. Stahl (2006: 119) further argues that 'gametime collapses the temporal space between real world events and the ability to 'play' them, fostering a news environment that approaches real-time interactivity'.

⁴ 'Mashing' refers to a console technique that involves pressing multiple buttons simultaneously or in rapid succession to overcome a difficult gameplay situation.

⁵ From the Greek word *μέθεξις*, meaning participation, partaking of, to take part in something. Plat.

⁶ Bush quoted in BBC news report, 8 April 2003. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/2928235.stm, accessed 11 November 2008.

⁷ *The Independent* put the figure sold at 'more than 30 million' in February 2007. Accessed November 5 2008 at:

http://news.independent.co.uk/world/science_technology/article2141636.ece

⁸ This statement appeared on the front cover of *Face Magazine*, June 1997.

⁹ In his famous account of the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen the archaeologist Howard Carter writes of the ancient Egyptian grave-robbers he holds in contempt. Roger Atwood (2004) reiterates this distinction between archaeologists and grave-robbers, also with contempt, vis-à-vis contemporary sites, including those of post-invasion Iraq.

¹⁰ <http://www.tombraider.com/legend/other/main.html>, *Tomb Raider II*, in 'History', via 'Game Info', accessed 10 April 2007. Lara also fights mercenaries, such as the group staked out in the Aleutian Islands in *Tomb Raider II Gold*, see http://au.gamespot.com/features/tombraider_hist/p4_04.html, accessed 13 September 2008.

¹¹ In interviews released with the DVD edition of the first *Tomb Raider* film, EIDOS game developers talk of the deliberate styling of Lara as female Indiana. For them, gender was as much a question of product differentiation (Lara had to be a new take on Indy) as it was a play for pubescent market-share (see Breger, 2008).

¹² In the first *Indiana Jones* film we meet Indy in university class behaving according to the social and sexual norms of the academy. In the face of the threat that Nazism

poses to 'global' Christian heritage, he is compelled to become a tomb raider himself. Similarly, throughout the *Tomb Raider* games Lara finds herself pitted against various characters who want the objects she seeks for their own sinister purposes.

¹³ Lara is not a scholar in an institutional sense, but does possess extensive knowledge of ancient artefacts.

¹⁴ Accessed 14 September 2008 at:

<http://au.gamespot.com/ps3/action/tombraider8/video/6197367/tomb-raider-underworld-official-movie-1>

¹⁵ Talk of pre-emptive action leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq often involved repeated use of the 'smoking gun' metaphor. While 'smoking' denotes a shot already fired, the gun's subsequent prominence in the rhetorics of the ensuing conflict arguably makes it a more dangerous weapon than any possessed by Iraq.

¹⁶ In an email to a friend sent on the day of his death, Kelly refers to 'many dark actors playing games' (BBC News, 19 July 2003). Accessed 5 November 2008 at:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/3080795.stm