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by Vicki Salemi

In this epic adventure, Academy Award winner ANGELINA JOLIE reprises her role as Lara Croft, who explores an underwater temple in search of the mythological Pandora's Box. Once she secures the legendary artifact, it's stolen by a villainous leader. Lara's mission is to recover the box before an evil mastermind gets his hands on it to construct a weapon of catastrophic possibilities.

This sequel to the 2001 video game adaptation propels Lara throughout the world on a spectacular journey that takes her to exotic places such as Hong Kong, Kenya, Tanzania, Greece, and The Great Wall of China. The filming itself was quite daring, since they went to various places including the Mountain of God -- a live volcano in Tanzania, and filmed among wildlife in Kenya with leopards, zebras, cheetahs, giraffes, buffaloes, and antelope! And not only does Lara travel, she also sky dives, jet skis, parachutes, rides a horse sidesaddle, and drops headfirst hanging onto a rope 150 feet over a cliff!

What is remarkable is that Jolie wanted to do most of these stunts herself. "If you have the opportunity to be trained and learn a new skill and do something you've never done before, it's a great opportunity. I'm an adrenaline junkie. If you're going to take this woman's name and pretend you can play her, then you should be able to back it with something."



The movie's director, Jan De Bont, whose previous credits include *Speed* and *Twister*, confesses Jolie was so eager to perform her own stunts that he drew the line when she wanted to jump off the International Financial Center Tower in Hong Kong, approximately 1000 feet above the ground! "It was just not going to happen," he chuckles. Preparing for Croft's role consisted of two and a half months of boot camp-type training: Weight training, kick

boxing, rifle drilling, jet skiing, and horseback riding. "It's like being part of some army circus thing," Jolie describes.

DJIMON HOUNSOU, who plays Kosa, Lara's friend from college, mentions the toughest stunt he had was driving a Jeep across rugged terrain in Africa where Lara skydives through the air and lands in the vehicle. "I can drive, and I can avoid trees," he quips. He also indicates Jolie as a person with "a beautiful soul." During filming, he recalls, she built a well so the local Pokot tribe had easier access to water, and she also visited orphanages while on location.

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As it turns out, Jolie wasn't completely satisfied with the first *Tomb Raider* movie. She agreed to return as Lara Croft if certain changes were made such as a more realistic body image and giving the character more depth. "In this film she's more real woman and less 'video vixen.' She's proportioned as far as I'm concerned. I wanted to show her character and what she was made of. "

De Bont agrees: "The difference between this movie and the first is she's pro-active and initiates things -- she has more power. You cannot make a real action hero without showing all sides, including vulnerability." In this flick, don't be surprised when you see Lara beaten up a little, only propelling her to fight harder. Dean Georgaris, the screenwriter, explains, "Lara is a really compelling character -- like peeling an onion -- you see some layers of who she is for real." Adds Lloyd Levin, producer, "This character really is a role model who makes decisions and stands behind them. Lara Croft is real and intelligent and multidimensional, independent, and in charge of her life."

Jolie also views Lara Croft as a role model for teens. "Croft is a good guy, and she's a good friend and she fights for what she believes in. If the movie simply inspires people to take care of themselves physically or to travel the world, I think that's a wonderful thing."



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Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life free falls into theaters on July 25th. It is rated PG-13.
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Images courtesy of Paramount Pictures