

A Silverado Adventure  
Tomb Raider Fan Fiction  
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*England, Summer, 1997*

It was a hazy, muggy morning in Surrey, and with the temperature well above comfortable, it was easy to work up a sweat just standing still. It was too humid to do much of anything, much less a horseback ride.

A long swim would be better and it would certainly provide some much-needed exercise. She hadn't gotten enough of it lately and the lack of activity had left her feeling listless and rundown. Her riding outfit damp with perspiration, Lara Croft headed inside and was promptly greeted by a voice from above her.

"The mail has arrived, Miss Lara. I placed it on your desk."

She glanced up and saw her elderly butler on the balcony. "Thank you, Winston. Anything I should look at right away? I was going to go for a swim."

"Yes, Miss. There was one in particular. From America, I believe."

"Really?" She turned toward her office, taking a final swipe at her forehead, and sat down behind the big oak desk.

Winston had placed the fancy business envelope on top of the pile, and Lara's eyes widened in surprise when she read the return address. Her boredom forgotten, she tore open the envelope and leaned back in her chair.

*Dear Ms. Croft,*

*Like a lot of people, I've followed your exploits around the world. Your books and lectures about your travels have made you one of the most talked-about women of our time. Your latest book kept me reading until the early morning hours! I am writing to ask if you would care to take part in another adventure.*

*My name is Jason Trimble and I am president of Exclusive Adventures. We are building a series of theme parks around the world, and our first, Silverado, opened just recently in the United States. Unlike most theme parks, which are crowded with visitors, our goal is to cater to a small number of clients, endeavoring to give each a personal, once-in-a-lifetime experience. When the client steps into the park, he or she is completely immersed in the theme until the time they leave.*

*I'll get to the point. We want you to come to Silverado and experience it, first hand, as our guest. There are no strings attached.*

*Stay for as long as you like. If you have a good time, we'd like you to say so publicly. That will encourage other folks to find out more about us. If, for some reason, you don't have a good time, we hope you'll work with us to correct the deficiencies.*

*We know that you only play for sport, Lara, and we respect that. And that's what we want you to do: Come and play. Have a good time. When you're done, whether you like it or not, we'll make a donation in your behalf to your favorite charity, as a token of our appreciation for your time.*

*Please have a look at the enclosed brochure. Then call me at the number below. My secretary has been instructed to put your call through at once.*

*Sincerely,*

*Jason Trimble*

Lara threw the letter on the desk with a grunt. *A theme park? Not exactly my style.*

Still, it might be fun, and it would certainly be great to get out of the house for a week. She glanced at the calendar. She was scheduled to give a lecture in Denver, Colorado, soon. *Why not?*

Twenty seconds later she picked up the phone.

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With a screech of tires, the Gulfstream business jet touched down at a small, private airstrip in the desert. As Lara looked outside, she marveled again at the vast beauty of America. From the green hues of the Great Plains, the terrain had given way to the browns and oranges of the mountains and the desert.

The plane taxied to the ramp and she saw a stretch limousine waiting nearby. Whoever these people were, they did know how to do things in style. Hopefully this Silverado place would be worth a visit.

The co-pilot opened the door and lowered the steps. "Thanks for flying with us, Ms. Croft."

"You're quite welcome. I enjoyed it immensely, especially the Grand Canyon. Do you give all your guests a low level flight like that?"

The pilot smiled. "Well, let's just say we just thought you might enjoy it."

She grinned. "I did indeed. Please thank the captain for me."

When Lara stepped off the plane, a stylishly dressed, red-haired woman waited for her at the bottom of the steps.

"Hello, Ms. Croft," she said, extending her hand. "I'm Alison Kennedy, Mr. Trimble's executive assistant. Welcome to Silverado."

"Thank you. It's good to be back in America again. I especially enjoyed seeing the Grand Canyon. It's one of those places everyone should see at least once."

"Mr. Trimble extends his apologies. He's in an important meeting this morning, so he asked me to pick you up. He and the board of directors are anxious to talk with you. We have lunch planned, and then a tour of the facility."

The chauffeur got Lara's luggage and they climbed into the limousine. Once the ladies were seated comfortably in the back, the car pulled away. But it had only gone fifty feet when Lara turned quickly to her hostess.

"Stop the car."

"What?" Alison asked in surprise.

"Stop the car."

After ordering the driver to stop, Alison turned to Lara, a concerned look on her face. "What's the matter?"

"Mr. Trimble wants an honest opinion about Silverado doesn't he?"

Alison blinked. "Of course, but—"

"Then I have to arrive like everyone else, not in a limousine. How many people know I'm coming?"

"Uh, just Mr. Trimble and the board. Maybe a few others at the office, people who made your travel arrangements."

Tell Mr. Trimble that I have to go incognito. It's the only way I'll get the same experience as everyone else."

"But—"

Lara held up her hand. "Just tell him what I said. It has to be this way if the board wants an honest report. I would be happy to meet with them after my adventure."

For a few seconds Alison was silent. Finally she nodded. "There's another plane due soon with more guests. If you want to wait here, you can ride with them in the van."

Lara opened the door. "Right then. I'm off to go adventuring."

"I'm usually at the Silverado Hotel every day," Alison called after her. "Contact me if you need anything."

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Three quarters of an hour later, the passenger van carrying Lara and two other guests pulled up in front of a good-sized adobe building. It was apparently a railroad station, for several weather-beaten freight cars sat on a sidetrack nearby. The track from the station stretched to the south, into a line of nearby hills.

Lara followed the others inside and they were shown into a small, but comfortable meeting room. A half-dozen people were already seated, bringing the group to nine in all.

A big man, dressed as a cowboy, came in right behind them. "Howdy, folks," he said with a smile as he pulled off his big hat. "Welcome to your Silverado Adventure. My name's Slim. Silverado itself is about four miles down the track. You'll be takin' the train down there in just a spell.

"This place is Reception Station. Once you leave here, the year is 1880 and your adventure begins. Where you're going life will be pretty much like it was back then."

As he talked, Lara glanced around the room. The guests were a mixed group, including two couples in their fifties. Two young men in their late twenties, a young woman of twenty-five, and a handsome, blond-haired man in his thirties rounded out the group.

"When you registered," Slim continued, "each of you selected a stage name. From now on, you'll be known only by that handle." He retrieved a cardboard box from a nearby table, and held up a plastic nametag.

This nametag must be worn at all times. It identifies you as a guest." He glanced down at the nametag. "Who's Wild Bill Hickock?"

One of the older men raised his hand. Slim handed him a nametag and a badge. "Good luck, Marshall Hickock."

"How about Belle Starr?"

Hickock's wife raised her hand and Slim laughed. "That's good. A lawman married to a lady outlaw."

He lifted another nametag from the box. "How about Little Britches?"

The young woman raised her hand.

"Welcome, Miss Britches," Slim said, handing her the nametag. "Silverado's got two banks, if you feel lucky. Just don't get caught. It's a hangin' offense."

Little Britches grinned. "I don't aim to get caught, Slim. If we meet in Silverado, just make sure you walk around me. Savvy?"

Lara laughed along with everyone else. *This is going to be fun.*

"Belle Star and Little Britches were well-known female outlaws in the late 1800's," Slim told the group. "Should be an interesting week with the two of them around here."

He picked up another nametag. "Well, with all these outlaws running around loose, we need another lawman. Who's Wyatt Earp?"

The handsome blond man raised his hand, accepting the nametag and his badge. Lara glanced at him more closely. *He looks like Kevin Costner in 'Dances with Wolves'.*

"Just be careful, Marshal Earp," Slim was saying. "You and Marshal Hickock are likely to have your hands full."

"Shouldn't be too bad, Slim," replied Wyatt. "First thing I'm gonna do when I get off the train is arrest Miss Britches over there. Outta be peaceful after that."

Little Britches shot to her feet, an angry look on her face. "Try it, and you're a dead man, Wyatt!"

Everybody laughed, and Little Britches suddenly looked embarrassed and sat down, her face red.

"Who's Annie Oakley?"

Lara raised her hand.

"Here you go, Miss Annie," said Slim, handing her the nametag.

"You're just as pretty as your namesake."

Lara blushed. The real Annie was beautiful...except for all those long skirts and petticoats she wore. Ugh.

Quickly Slim passed out the rest of the nametags. The other couple had chosen Doc Holiday and Emily Peters. The two young men were John Wesley Hardin and Billy the Kid.

"Now in just a minute, each of you is goin' to a dressin' room. You'll leave all your modern clothes and gadgets there." He grinned. "Don't take an iphone or a DVD player down to Silverado, folks. You're likely to get arrested just fer carryin' one.

"When you get to the dressin' room, you'll find your new clothes. Remember the form you filled out when you registered with your sizes and such? You should find everything you requested in your room. If not, just let us know and we'll fix you up right away."

"After you get dressed, go down to the armory, and draw yourself a weapon if you want to carry one. It's up to you. We got everything from a derringer to a sawed-off double. Take your pick. Or not, as you wish. Ladies, I'd take at least a derringer if I were you. Silverado is a tough town, and you never know who you might run into.

"By the way, don't even think about takin' no real guns. If you do, you're outta Silverado. No refund either." He pulled a pistol from the holster at his side. "Looks real, don't it? That's cause it is. But it's been modified to shoot a special blank round, made so as not to hurt anybody, even up

close." He turned the weapon over. "See this little tube under the barrel? It's a tiny, low-powered laser. Power supply's in the handle. "

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Lara chuckled as she glanced at herself in the mirror. The brown pants were tucked into her cowboy boots, and the coarse, heavy shirt was a little snug, but it would do. A flat-brimmed hat topped her head, and a long neckerchief circled her neck. Her auburn hair hung in two long pigtailed. She'd picked that idea from the 1950's TV show about Annie.

She shook her head with a grin. *Incognito, right?*

Turning, she picked up the gunbelt. Lara was never one to spare expenses when it came to looking cool, and the belt was beautiful, with intricate carving in the leather and a silver conch on each holster. She tied the leather thongs of the holsters around her pants and checked the mirror. Not exactly what the real Annie would wear. But then the real Annie wouldn't have robbed a bank, either.

Lara stepped into the hall and pulled the door closed behind her. The rest of her clothes would be delivered to her room in the hotel. All she had to do was get there alive. Feeling a little naked without her guns, she followed the sign toward the armory.

She heard voices ahead of her and followed the sound, eventually finding the long counter near the back of the building. Several people were already in line and Lara smiled when she saw Little Britches. She wanted to talk to her about a bank and—

"Hold it right there, Miss Annie," said a quiet voice behind her. Something hard poked her in the back. "Get your hands up, you're under arrest."

Lara stopped and lifted her hands. "Whatever for?"

"I dunno," replied the voice, and the blond-haired Kevin Costner look-alike stepped up beside her, a grin on his face. "I'll try real hard to think of something. Might be the only chance I'll get."

Lara lowered her hands with a look of disgust. He didn't even have a gun. He'd used the knuckle of his finger. "Be so kind as to keep your hands to yourself, Mr. Earp," she replied disdainfully. "I would surely dislike having to shoot an officer of the law."

Wyatt pulled back as if she'd slapped him. "Aw, now ma'am, I'll try real hard not to be scared." He looked her up and down. "But, you know, you don't look all that dangerous to me." He tipped his hat and turned toward the counter.

Lara clenched her fists, sure her face was red with embarrassment. Everyone in line must have heard the exchange, for several were chuckling. She vowed to repay Mr. Wyatt Earp in full. He'll look good locked in his own jail.

She joined the line just as Wild Bill Hickock turned away from the counter. He was stylishly dressed, but Lara could see the gunbelt under his long coat. He'd also selected a double-barreled shotgun to go with his pistols.

"Afternoon, Marshal," she said with a smile. "That's a real cannon you got there."

Hickock grinned and patted the shotgun. "I don't believe in takin' chances. Know what I mean?"

She nodded. "Be so kind as to not point it at me. Blanks or no blanks, I don't care to look into the business end of that thing."

He smiled, almost like a father would to a small child. "No problem, Miss Annie. You just stay on the right side of the law and we won't have any trouble." He leaned in a little closer. "Don't worry about Wyatt, either. I'll make sure he stays in line."

"I beg your pardon?" she hissed. "I don't need a man to watch out for me. I can take care of myself, thank you very much."

If Hickock was surprised, he didn't show it. "Yes, ma'am. I'm sure you can. But I don't see eyes in the back of that pretty head of yours.

Remember that." He chuckled and turned away, leaving Lara fuming.

Little Britches stepped away from the counter, stuffing cartridges into her revolver. Britches was a honey blonde, several inches shorter than Lara and dressed in similar manner. She was wearing a fast-draw rig, strapped securely to her right leg. Finished loading, she snapped the gate shut and back-flipped the pistol into her holster.

*Oh, boy. A real gunslick.*

"Britches?" she asked as the woman passed her. The girl glanced over at Lara and automatically looked down.

"Nice rig."

"Thank you," Lara replied. "Could you wait for me a moment? I'd like to talk with you."

Britches grinned. "It wouldn't be about a certain marshal, would it?"

Lara nodded. "And about making money."

"Yeah?" The young woman leaned against the wall. "For that, I'll wait all day."

A few minutes later, Lara stepped up to the counter. The eyes of the man behind the counter widened a bit when he saw fancy gunbelt Lara was

wearing, but he didn't say a word, he simply handed her a pair of pearl-handled revolvers.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"How about an Uzi?" she replied, trying to keep a straight face.

"A what?"

"An Uzi. Short-barrel, automatic weapon."

"I dunno what yore talkin' about, ma'am," he drawled. "Ain't no such thing in 1880."

"No M-16 or MP-5 then?"

He laughed. "Nope. How about a Winchester '73?"

"Thanks, but I'll pass, but I will take six boxes of shells."

His smile disappeared. "Six? Whatcha gonna do, start a war?"

Lara kept a straight face. "Of course, sir. Why else would I come here?" The corners of her mouth quivering a bit, she turned away from the counter, drew one of her new revolvers, and started loading it.

"You must be from England," Little Britches said as Lara joined her.

Again Lara kept a straight face. "Whatever makes you say that?"

The blond girl blushed. "Oh, sorry, it's just that your accent."

Lara laughed and touched her lightly on the arm. "I'm teasing. Yes, I'm from the U.K. I live in Surrey, not too far from London. And you?"

"San Diego."

Lara smiled. "Ah, one of those 'California Girls' that the Beach Boys sing about, is that correct?"

Little Britches grinned. "Yes. But we're not all beach bunnies, you know."

They walked out onto the station platform, and Lara sensed a spirit of adventure in her young companion. They agreed the bank should be robbed at their earliest opportunity.

Just down the platform, Lara saw Earp and Hickock talking. Both men were looking in their direction.

"I think we're gonna have trouble with those two," Britches said, following Lara's glance. "They'd like nothing better than to throw us in jail."

"You're right," agreed Lara. "Maybe we should enlist Belle Starr and a couple of the others. Make one of those outlaw groups, just like the Daltons or the Jesse James gang."

Britches glanced in her direction. "I can see you've done your homework."

"I only had a week to get ready," Lara replied. "Wasn't much time, but I did do some reading, and I watched a couple of John Wayne westerns. I even attended a meeting of a fast draw club."

The blonde woman's eyes widened. "You did?"

Lara nodded. "I learned just enough to realize I'm slow. Have you been doing it a long time?"

"Five years. My dad was into it, and I sorta picked it up from him. I placed second last summer in my division."

A train whistle interrupted their conversation, and soon an old-fashioned steam locomotive pulled into the station. Behind the engine and coal tender were a freight car, two coaches and a caboose. Slim ushered everyone into the first passenger car.

"A final word, folks," he said after they were seated. "Once this train leaves the station, your adventure begins. When you get to Silverado, you're liable to encounter most anybody. Some are guests who got here over the last couple of days. Others are part of our permanent staff. No way for you to tell the difference."

He shook his head. "Personally, I think you're all fools for wantin' to go down there. The Spade gang is holed up in these parts. They done killed three marshals already this week. If you want to stay alive, you oughta stick together. The only law in town when you get there is the sheriff and these two lawmen you got sittin' right here. If they get killed, there ain't no cop on the corner to go runnin' to. Give 'em a hand if they need it.

"Your weapons are keyed to your nametag. If the gun is more than five feet from the nametag it won't fire. If you get shot, your nametag will glow red and your weapon will be disabled.

He turned toward the door. "Well, good luck. Hopefully you won't get killed too often. The record so far is only getting killed four times. For most folks it's ten times." He grinned. "Life is hard."

Slim stepped down from the train and waved to the engineer. A blast of the locomotive's whistle answered, and with a slight jerk, the train pulled out. Slim watched the train cross over a small stream, then turned to the station agent.

Let 'em know, Barney."

The agent opened his telegraph key and sent a message, warning Silverado the train was on its way.

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Down at the end of the station platform, a maintenance worker watched the train head down the track. As it turned south toward Silverado, he climbed into his truck and headed for the dumpster. It was a short drive, but instead of getting out of the truck to empty the trash, he pulled out a cell phone and punched in a series of numbers.

"Dugan, sir," he told the party on the other end. "She's here all right. No doubt about it." He listened. "No sir, I don't think she'll be any problem. I can snatch her whenever you're ready." He listened a further moment. "Yes, sir. I understand. I'll be waiting."

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[Coming up in chapter two: Lara, Britches and the other guests ride the train to Silverado, but they're only halfway when the train is ambushed by the Spade gang. Caught by completely by surprise, they'll have to fight for their 'lives.']

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