Masters of Doom: How Two Guys Created an Empire and Transformed Pop Culture

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Masters of Doom: How Two Guys Created an Empire and Transformed Pop Culture David Kushner "To my taste, the greatest American myth of cosmogenesis features the maladjusted, antisocial, genius teenage boy who, in the insular laboratory of his own bedroom, invents the universe from scratch. **Masters of Doom** is a particularly inspired rendition. Dave Kushner chronicles the saga of video game virtuosi Carmack and Romero with terrific brio. This is a page-turning, mythopoeic cyber-soap opera about two glamorous geek geniuses—and it should be read while scarfing down pepperoni pizza and swilling Diet Coke, with Queens of the Stone Age cranked up all the way." —**Mark Leyner**, author of **I Smell Esther Williams**

Masters of Doom is the amazing true story of the Lennon and McCartney of video games: John Carmack and John Romero. Together, they ruled big business. They transformed popular culture. And they provoked a national controversy. More than anything, they lived a unique and rollicking American Dream, escaping the broken homes of their youth to co-create the most notoriously successful game franchises in history—Doom and Quake—until the games they made tore them apart.

Americans spend more money on video games than on movie tickets. **Masters of Doom** is the first book to chronicle this industry's greatest story, written by one of the medium's leading observers. David Kushner takes readers inside the rags-to-riches adventure of two rebellious entrepreneurs who came of age to shape a generation. The vivid portrait reveals why their games are so violent and why their immersion in their brilliantly designed fantasy worlds offered them solace. And it shows how they channeled their fury and imagination into products that are a formative influence on our culture, from MTV to the Internet to Columbine. This is a story of friendship and betrayal, commerce and artistry—a powerful and compassionate account of what it's like to be young, driven, and wildly creative.

From the Hardcover edition.

Masters of Doom: How Two Guys Created an Empire and Transformed Pop Culture Details

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From Reader Review Masters of Doom: How Two Guys Created an Empire and Transformed Pop Culture for online ebook

Egor Mikhaylov says

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Abhay Rana says

An amazing account of the two Johns. I was obviously more bent towards Carmack, him being a programmer, but this book beautifully highlights the ups and lows of the journey. It leaves you waiting for more, and I wish to hear more of this story. Even though it focuses mainly on the two Johns, this book is not a biography. Rather it is an account of the Silicon Valley Gaming & Startup Scene in the 80-90s. I would go so far ahead to label this as a "startup-book", with two entrepreneurs making it big time.

The book doesn't end on much of a high note, ending with the launch of Quake III Team Arena and Carmack firing his rockets. It would be awesome if the author came up with a DLC for the book with more chapters covering what both of them have done in the past 13 years.

DaViD´82 says

Though people felt like they were working without direction, at the same time no one wanted really to be told what to do.

Steve Jobs a Steve Wozniak. John Romero a John Carmack. Je až neuv??itelné, jak moc se p?íb?hy t?chto dvou dvojic shodují. V obou p?ípadech povahov? zcela odlišní géniové, kte?í se nejprve p?es problematické dospívání dají „v garáži" osudov? dohromady, dlouho se nebývale dopl?ují jako jing a jang, p?etvo?í tak své odv?tví od základ? a vyd?lají p?i tom milióny/miliardy, aby postupn? jejich neslu?itelné povahy, rozporuplné arogantní chování v??i okolí i sob? samým dalo vzniknout trhlinám, které nelze zacelit. Taková

vývojá?ská antická tragédie, u které však nemusíte o hrách ?i vývoji v?d?t ale lautr nic.

Autor totiž jde na ságu „dvou John?" chyt?e p?es osobní rovinu jejich povah spíše než technickou stránku p?elomovosti Carmackových enginových kód? ?i vypiplanosti Romerova gamedesignu. Je to p?íb?h problémových kluk? na cest? za slávou, sny a nesmrtelností. Autor z?stává nestranný a tak pln? pochopíte, pro? je jeden považován za rocknrollovou hv?zdu herního vývoje, druhý za programátorskou legendu, pro? je fanoušci milují i pro? jim mnozí kolegové ?i nejbližší nemohou p?ijít na jméno. Skv?le se tu kloubí momenty, kdy máte pocit, že jste s t?mi kluky v plechovkami zane?ád?ném kanclu pozd? v noci sžíraní pochybnostmi nad vlastním produktem, stejn? jako vás vždy a znovu šokuje jejich arogantní a svi?ácké chování v??i fyzickým i právnickým osobám. Nejlepší je, že se to ?te jako drama, ale p?itom jde o tvrdou roky rešeršovanou a pe?livou novina?inu.

Stejn? jako jste v p?ípad? Social Network nemuseli chápat kódování, v p?ípad? Jobsova životopisu rozum?t designu ?i být fanoušek Apple produkt?, tak tady nemusíte o Id Software znát ani to, že existují. A pokud k tomu všemu p?eci jen znáte/hráli jste Keena, Wolfa, Quakea, hrávali jste na školní síti v rámci výuky potají Dooma (schovaného v adresá?i Rozvrh apod.) ?i máte n?jaký vztah k tvorb? Ion Stormu, tak tím lépe, protože to jde opravdu pod pokli?ku. A díky ?asovému odstupu, kdy již doty?ní nemají zábrany mluvit otev?en?, se dozvíte více než v t?ch nejlepších „filmech o filmu". Snad jediná výtka je spíše povzdych, že díky roku vzniku by to cht?lo aktualizovanou verzi pokrývající i období po roce 2005, které je z pohledu kariér t?ch dvou nemén? zajímavé.

Andrew says

A hell of a good read, especially if you grew up playing id games and/or have a background in computer programming. The story has all the elements of a great Greek tragedy: the unlikely rise to success of two heroes, and the tragic flaw in each of them that ruins it. I wonder how many stories there are like this throughout the history of the business: Romero and Carmack, Jobs and Wozniak, Zuckerberg and Saverin, etc. It seems like a pattern that repeats itself: two friends that together propel each other to greatness, but whose success inevitably drives them apart. I'm sure the author takes a certain amount of creative license in telling the story, but it feels well-researched and factually grounded. I'd guess the honest truth of what happened during those days is all but lost, because all the key players have rewritten it in their heads several times over. So it's all a matter of perspective at this point.

The only complainant I have with the book is that the author doesn't really make much of an effort at a conclusion. One could say that's because the story is still being told, but he could have tried to tie everything together by spending a final chapter looking back at where they started, or making closing observations on the character of each man. It's not an enormous flaw in the book, but it does leave the reader without a real sense of closure. Thankfully we have Wikipedia to use as a constantly updated epilogue.

Brad Feld says

Incredible origin story of id Software

I love origin stories. Many are shallow or overly dramatic in an effort to tell a story rather than capture the essence of what happened and why it was so important. This one totally nailed it.

Jury Razumau says

"Pizza" is mentioned 39 times. "Render" and "polygon" combined for 19. Would you read a book about Beethoven that only mentions how great were his symphonies and how everyone loved them without ever talking about what exactly made them great (and probably not even discussing Fidelio's plot)? So what exactly were Carmack's innovations in game engines? Oh, he was very smart and worked a lot; now let's talk instead about his Ferrari (have I already mentioned that his office was full of pizza boxes?).

Mark Sanchez says

There aren't many specific details from this book that I want to remember.

The dynamic between the two John's and the employer at which they met is interesting: the stealing the computers at night, working on company time, releasing a game behind his back, after all that being offered a deal by their old employer to finance their new company (he must have seen they were going places), and him having to take back that offer because of his other employees.

The fact that that the games were written by so few people is impressive.

It was neat that Deus Ex (a game I like a lot) was created by the functional branch of a very dysfunctional company (Romero's Ion Storm, which he founded after leaving Id and which was a typical tech bubble company).

Overall though, there aren't many specifics to take away and the overall lessons/themes were already known to me and, I think, pervasive in tech culture before this books creation. Those themes being that 10x the people doesn't entail 10x the work, that you should keep development cycles short and focus on shipping, and that being a good programmer doesn't mean you'll be a good manager. (Well, I don't know how pervasive the last lesson was before this book, but the others proceeded it with XP and maybe Agile).

Also, I was hoping for more details about the game development - that is the technical structure of the games, more details about the revelations had when creating them, etc. In general this book feels like a long magazine article - in talks about the personalities and events as caricatures but it never really delves into anything.

It's easy to see why Carmack is beloved by the community on Hacker News, etc. He seems awesome and presumably had some great incites (that I wish were talked about more in the book). I get the impression that Romero and others were lucky in that they got to use Carmack's engines which were the real driving force behind the games' success. The book tries to be diplomatic and say Romero's experimentation and finding out what was possible with the engines was also very important, but, I mean, what else is the book going to say? The authors not going to just screw his interview subject so he had to say something.

I binge read the book in <24 hours so it clearly isn't that bad. I wish there were more books about the development of pieces of software. With that said, there just isn't much takeaway from this one.

Brian says

I decided to read this book based on seeing its title on the library shelves. Like many (most?) gamers of a certain age, I grew up with games from id software and its various offshoots, but until reading *Masters of Doom*, I hadn't realized how completely they had dominated my gaming background. Commander Keen; Duke Nukem (the side-scrolling platformer, not the FPS); the various Epic Megagames games like Solar Winds, Jill of the Jungle, ZZT, Dare to Dream, Ken's Labyrinth, and One Must Fall 2097; Rise of the Triad; Blake Stone: Aliens of Gold; and of course, Wolfenstein 3D and Doom, filled hundreds--honestly, probably thousands--of hours as a child. Most of them I got as shareware, through those shareware distribution discs that were everywhere in the mid-90s, and apparently that's another innovation that I can trace back to that cluster of companies. I owe a lot of my childhood gaming memories to the two men depicted here.

I also had forgotten just how much innovation PC gaming required back in the late 80s and early 90s. Now, in the midst of a decade-long period where PCs are the superior technical gaming platform due to stagnating console specs, where people can actually make a serious argument that Watch_Dogs was downgraded on PC in order to avoid showing up consoles, it's hard to remember that once it was simply impossible for computers to replicate feats that consoles did routinely. It's kind of astonishing nowadays that Carmack had to come up with a technical workaround just to allow the kind of side-scrolling on PC that Nintendo games routinely performed, and the various innovations were really interesting to read about.

That's the good part. Now, the parts that annoyed me.

The primary problem I have with *Masters of Doom* is that John Romero and John Carmack come across as thoroughly unlikeable people. Under the Kirk-Spock Theory of Dual Interpersonal Relationships, Romero is the Kirk and Carmack is the Spock. Romero apparently had a hard time committing to any one game for any length of time, preferring to chat to the press and wallow in the benefits of riches. He also comes across as a 90s version of the brogrammer, screaming obscenities at fellow employees while playing deathmatch with them, smashing monitors, keyboards, and mice when losing games, and letting the office devolve into a squalor of diet Coke cans and pizza boxes. Not to mention abandoning multiple marriages before turning 30. I've heard it said that nowadays you can make all the money you want by building your company around letting young white men avoid any of the responsibilities of adulthood, and Romero comes across as precisely the kind of customer that gives companies like this one their revenue stream.

Carmack, in contrast, is apparently an uber-programming savant who is incapable of understanding how human interaction works. He's perfectly willing to spend days or weeks sequestered in his office working on his next [hacked together/elegantly implemented] (choose as appropriate) graphics innovation, but he ends conversation in midsentence, has no sense of tact, and has a coldly utilitarian philosophy toward other people, where as soon as they are no longer of use to him he backstabs them or simply leaves them out in the cold. His response to office discord was just to vanish into his office or start coming in during nights to completely ignore it, which just let it fester until it exploded, and that's when he wasn't deciding that an employee had lived out their usefulness and firing them with no warning.

I keep saying "apparently" there because I'm not sure how accurate the book is. There are a lot of sources and interviews listed in the back, but the story slots far too well into the archetypical American tragic success story for me to be sure how much is pure truth and how much was massaged to fit the narrative. Two people come from troubled backgrounds, but through sheer grit, hard work, dedication, and ~~a lot of luck~~even more

hard work manage to rise above their pasts and, spending long days and nights with their noses to the grindstone, fulfill their dreams and make it big. Soon, however, success starts to go to their head, and their once-strong partnership begins to fray at the seams. Increasing tension drives them apart, and it's soon clear that neither one alone is even half as good as the two of them were together. Then...

...well, they aren't dead yet, so the classic ending of reconciliation and catharsis can't come next. Instead, the book ends with a schmaltzy scene of Carmack having car trouble after a deathmatch tournament and Romero stepping in with jumper cables. D'awww.

Or something like that, anyway. The whole thing seems way too pat for me to do more than glance at it suspiciously, and coupled with the distaste I felt for both Carmack and Romero's behavior during the book, I spent most of it just shaking my head and hoping for the next scene of a technical challenge that needed to be overcome.

For the narrative and content I'd give it two stars, plus one for the warm, happy glow of nostalgia I felt while reading about 90s gaming. I do seem to be in the minority opinion on this one, though, so maybe other people read the portrayal of the Two Johns differently than I do or have less of a problem with unlikeable protagonists.

April says

First off, Wil Wheaton, one of the nerd gods narrates Masters Of Doom by David Kushner, so I just had to have it and listen to it. I also figured that Masters Of Doom would be a welcome change of pace – as it's non-fiction about video gaming. I went in hoping for something a bit similar in tone and geekery as Ready Player One, which actually was kind of a false expectation, yet in all honesty that is exactly why I put this audiobook on my Audible app. Also, I totally used to have Doom but was awful at it, so I like reading books about people who excel in gaming.
Read the rest of my review here

Ignacio says

Dos protagonistas, unas personalidades y habilidades complementarias, un pequeño grupo a su alrededor, los duros inicios, el éxito juego a juego, las tensiones crecientes, los roces, la explosión... Ya porque fuera fácil o porque consigue hacerlo fácil, el relato de Kushner sobre cómo unos don nadies dieron la vuelta a la industria de los videojuegos e impulsaron un fenómeno social cotidiano hoy en día resulta modélico, tanto en la estructura como en el retrato de las personas y el discurso de su exposición. Nadie que esté mínimamente interesado en los entresijos de la creación de videojuegos debiera perderse este auge y caída de dos enfants terribles en el que apenas echo en falta algo de material gráfico de acompañamiento.

Andrew Scarella says

I liked this book a lot more than I thought I was going to. I grew up playing computer games in the 90's and enjoyed hearing the "behind-the-scenes" stories of how some of my favorite games were made. My only complaint was an abrupt ending, I wanted to read more about Carmack and Romero and what they are up to

now. Are they friends? Do they work together at all? If you played any video game in the 1990's, you will thoroughly enjoy this book.

Victor says

Very interesting and inspiring book on the ups and downs of the geniuses and the different personalities behind the game. The team dynamics and issues with the development cycle, the conflicts between business and development, they are all real.

I would definitely recommend this read to any developers, not just game developers. It's a fun and addictive read :)

Rob says

Executive Summary: This book is what I wish Console Wars: Sega, Nintendo, and the Battle that Defined a Generation would have been. As a huge fan of id games growing up, and a software developer this book really worked for me, but will probably be too slow for many people.

Audio book: I was doubly excited to do this book when I saw that Wil Wheaton was the narrator. He's a perfect fit for this book. He also does more accents and voices than I'm used to. Overall an excellent job.

 Full Review
Doom along with a few other games defined my childhood and shaped my future in a way than the Nintendo games I played before them never quite did. PC games made me fall in love with the computer. It made me look at them as more than just game machines. I wanted to know how they work. I wanted to master them. John Carmack was one of my heroes. I wanted to make PC games for a living.

As with most childhood dreams, they rarely work out as planned. I did go on to be a software developer, just not for games. I am one of those Application developers the two Johns both loathed to be relegated to. I decided I'd rather play games than spend long hours making them. I'm grateful that they never gave up on the idea however.

I loved that this book not only got into the guys who made some of my favorite and inspiration games, but also quite a bit about the software process itself. No he didn't get super technical and talk about algorithms (much), but he did give insight to time, and skills and some of the big leaps John Carmack made along the way to cement his and Romero's names in history.

I will say that the software process stuff that I loved may have a negative effect on the casual gamer or even the more hardcore Doom/id fans that don't always have an interest in "how the sausage is made".

I think Mr. Kusher does an excellent job of balancing facts and dialogue in a way that you feel you're along for the ride without feeling like he's just making up conversations to fill pages which was my main issue with Console Wars.

Overall I though this book was quite excellent, but it won't be for everyone.

Willian Molinari says

I love this book. The two Johns created an empire by using the engineering capabilities of Carmack with the enthusiasm and ideas of Romero.

There are some other thoughts to put on this book. The two Johns are doing great and creating amazing games following the startup way of life, relying on junk food and diet coke. Everything was balanced, they had a committed engineer that are addicted to create new things and pursue really hard challenges. But they also had a good game designer that are eager to test the new advances in technology and create the most awesome game in the world.

When the two Johns decided to split, the two sides suffered. And the same situation happens a lot in companies these days. Sometimes we have an awesome engineer that can't spread the awesome tools he is creating. The same situation occurs when we have an average programmer that bring people together and encourage everyone to create and use the tools that are being created, but are not so awesome.

By creating a team with these complimentary profiles it is possible to generate awesome things as DOOM was at the time it was created.

Dan says

The true story of John Carmack and John Romero and how they created Id software and became the most prolific computer game designers in the 1990s.

The story describes how two misfit geeks were able to follow their passion of games and through hard work were able to make impressive advances in game technology and get rich at it as well. It also shows the ravages of arrogance on business and how letting ego come into play can destroy friendships and companies.

The story uses an extended metaphor for the company with a dungeons and dragons campaign that the main characters were playing.

This book is very interesting. The writing style is journalistic and simple. This works, because the book is a quick read. The story is great, and the author does an excellent job of giving a human element to the story by describing the lives of the most important Id programmers and designers.

I read this book because I was a big fan of Id software and the games that it produced. Also, I had just started a job in the computer industry and I still had some sort of romantic notions of what it would be like.