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Rewriting history • Page 3

Replay author Tristan Donovan on why games began with the atomic bomb.

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By Christian Donlan **Published** Tuesday, 16 November 2010

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Eurogamer: Given how splintered and diffuse the industry is now, with big releases like Call of Duty and then Facebook games, browser games, iPhone games... do you think it's even going to be possible to write the history of the next 60 years? Are games moving in too many directions?

Tristan Donovan: I think they might be. It's very hard to see these things when you're in the middle of them. That's why in the book I avoided writing about things like Facebook games. They're so new. The idea of trying to write a history of something that's still happening is crazy: it's going to be wrong in six months.

It could just be our perspective at the moment means we can't see the trend, but you may be right: it is getting so diffuse. Again, it would be like trying to write a history of music. How do you start? There's just so many forms. How do you find coherency?

It was hard enough with Replay to catch a sense of coherency towards the end. I guess in the future, you'll see histories of genres more, of various types of games. I think gaming history will have to become more specialised, just as it has with every other medium.

Eurogamer: Two final questions: pick one character from your book without whom videogame history would have been radically different, and pick one person who's perhaps a little obscure but whom you'd like people to learn a little more about.

Tristan Donovan: For the obscure person, Muriel Tramis, a French game designer. She did most of her most interesting work in the 1980s. She was the European equivalent of Roberta Williams.

She came from the French island of Martinique in the Caribbean and moved to France in the 1970s. She had an ancestry that involved slavery and she set out to make these text adventures that talked about slavery, Creole culture, and that sort of thing.

To do that in the mid-1980s, to do something so highbrow in games when we were all playing Jet Set Willy, I think that's amazing. She got recognition from the French government for her cultural impact, and it's a real shame she's not really making games anymore.

A fascinating character, and it's a shame that the language barrier made interviewing her difficult. It's incredible to see such highbrow stuff at such a primitive time, though.

Eurogamer: And now for the pivotal figure?

Tristan Donovan: I'm always tempted to go for someone that people won't expect, so I'm going to say Ray

Kassar, the much-hated chief executive at Atari. There are lots of reasons why.

Firstly, before he took over at Atari, it still wasn't a household name. The VCS was popular but it wasn't the runaway success it later became, and it was under his management that Atari and the VCS became this gigantic thing that defined the perception of videogames in the early 1980s.



Atari's Ray Kassar.

On top of that, it was his unkeen attitude towards developers that led to Atari employees quitting and forming Activision, which created the first third-party publisher. We remember Atari because of what Ray Kassar did, and not what Nolan Bushnell did.

Obviously Bushnell started the ball rolling and created the industry, but this idea of Atari, which became the model of how you run a games studio – it's all crazy and everyone stays up all night coding – that all started under Kassar's regime.

He also commercialised games under his leadership and, ultimately, didn't invest in the research and development Atari needed, which so unwittingly caused the great industry crash. There were other reasons for that, like the rise of video recorders, but it really shaped games in its own way, making the audience much more hardcore and opening the way for Nintendo.

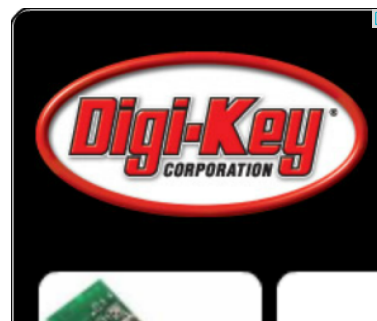
So Kassar's a much-maligned figure, but a perfectly nice man to talk to, and he was a corporate chief exec: he was there to turn Atari from a start-up into a global goliath. He did it – he couldn't sustain it – but he helped to get the whole thing started.

Tristan Donovan's *Replay: The History of Video Games* is out now, priced at £12.99. You can save yourself the price of an iPhone game if you pick it up at [Amazon](http://www.amazon.com).

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About [Christian Donlan](#)

Chris Donlan is a senior staff writer for Eurogamer. His heroes include Eugene Jarvis, Errol Morris, and Linus Van Pelt.



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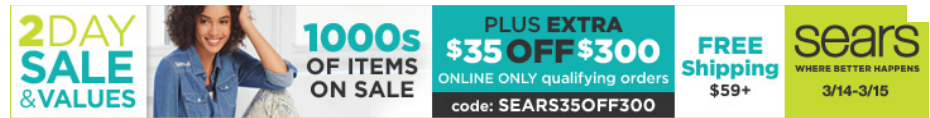


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-  [Kill_Crazy](#) , 3 years ago

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-  [InfiniteFury](#) , 3 years ago

Just checked the iBooks thingie and it's £7.99 on there. [Reply](#) 0 - [±](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)

-  [geeza2020](#) , 3 years ago

Anyone know anywhere to get a physical copy of the book cheaper than the amazon price? [Reply](#) +1 - [±](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)

-  [Ryze](#) , 3 years ago

Maze reminds me of a game called Androne, which I have on my 1984 Tandy TRS-80.

edit: No wonder I'm sick of FPS games. Been there, done that since the 80s.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5tRlzkR_9Q [Reply](#) 0 - [±](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)

-  [The Mountie](#) , 3 years ago

I'm interested. Precisely what aspects of British/European computer games are covered? Is it just a token mention of Manic Miner, or is the plethora of retro systems and games created in Europe since the early 80s detailed too?

Too many Americans harping on about the US games crash of '83/'84, and ignoring anything that isn't NES-related. Hopefully this book might counteract the usual narrow US-centric history of videogames.

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-  [chaywa](#) , 3 years ago

Finally something to ask the girlfriend for for Christmas, it certainly seems like a thoroughly interesting book! [Reply](#) +1 - [±](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)

-  [windflaw](#) , 3 years ago

Congratulations Tristan! Always nice to hear of a labour of love being brought to fruition. [Reply](#) +3 - [±](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)

-  [Stepharneo](#) , 3 years ago

I bought this book on a whim a month back, still haven't got around to reading it...must get around to it. [Reply](#) 0 - [±](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)

-  [RobTheBuilder](#) , 3 years ago

It's an Intel 4004, not an IBM.

Sounds a great book though. [Reply](#) +1 - [±](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)

-  [SirClive](#) , 3 years ago

Just ordered it on Amazon. Not enough of these books done outside of the US. [Reply](#) 0 - [±](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#)

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-  [HuggyAtHome](#) , 3 years ago
[@the Mountie](#)

Just finished the book - it's an excellent read and there a load of Spectrum and Amstrad references in there. A real nostalgia trip for me having owned a Philips system, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Megadrive etc. Totally recommend to anybody even partly interested in the topic, and if you are reading this you must be. [Reply](#) +5 - [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)

-  [The Mountie](#) , 3 years ago
[@Huggy](#)

Thanks for the info.

Any mention of British computers like the Oric 1, Computers Lynx, or Jupiter Ace? Or is it only the CPC and Spec that get talked about? cheers. [Reply](#) +1 - [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)

-  [silentbob](#) , 3 years ago

Read this a couple of weeks back. Can highly recommend it. [Reply](#) +1 - [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)



- [makariel](#) , 3 years ago

I need something to read for the upcoming holidays anyway 😊 [Reply](#) 0 - [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)

-  [SecretStage](#) , 3 years ago

Finished reading it aswell a couple of weeks ago, Very informative and enjoyable. Infact i might read it again in the future. [Reply](#) +1 - [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)

-  [djed](#) , 3 years ago

Nice interview but, it would also be nice with a bit of background on the author, besides the "HE WROTE A BOOK!". At the very least a link to his wikipedia page (if he has one) or something. [Reply](#) -1 - [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)

-  [HuggyAtHome](#) , 3 years ago

[@The Mountie](#)

Only in passing from what I can remember - it's still early in the book and the threads are more about the development of game design and cultural/national quirks than the hardware of the time. The Speccy / Amstrad get more of a mention because, I suspect, of their very british and rather eccentric origins. Reading about those early Spectrum days with individual coders turning out quality stuff made me look an ipod/mobile games in a different way - there are clear similarities. [Reply](#) 0 - [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)



[tdonovan](#) , 3 years ago

Thanks all for the positive comments

@The Mountie

There is a brief mention of the Oric-1, but not the Computers Lynx or Jupiter Ace. The BBC's in there though and some more obscure platforms do get a nod including France's Thomson computers and the British (and Italian) Pong consoles of the 70s.

@djed

My website's <http://www.tristandonovan.com> - it's a little out of date at the moment (and I really need to get a better photograph taken) but that might have some of the background you're after. [Reply](#) +1 [-](#) [+](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)



[Rev.StuartCampbell](#) , 3 years ago

"Fable, for example: that's definitely English, and Grand Theft Auto."

Sigh. Yes, well done England for that. Congratulations to England's David Jones, and the entire Rockstar North (England) team, working hard in the famous English cities of Dundee and Edinburgh. [Reply](#) 0 [-](#) [+](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)



[themanfromdelmonte](#) , 3 years ago

Just like to add my voice to the chorus of recommendations. Read this on my Kindle a couple of months back and it's a very enjoyable and informative read. [Reply](#) 0 [-](#) [+](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)



[The Mountie](#) , 3 years ago

[@tdonovan](#)

Hello mister author! Nice to hear some details from the source.

You mentioned the BBC Micro. Is "Exile" (1988, Superior Software) featured then? I'd say it's the most ambitious and well crafted game on that system, and possibly in a wider sense too. Peter Irvin and Jeremy Smith created a masterpiece of tight programming there!

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[tdonovan](#) , 3 years ago

[@The Mountie](#)

Exile, which I agree is utterly brilliant, sadly isn't in any of the main chapters of the book as I didn't find any evidence of it influencing subsequent games in any major way.

But it is in the gameography at the end of the book, which rounds up hundreds of historically notable games and is there because games like Exile didn't fit into the overall narrative but still deserve a mention. [Reply](#) 0 [±](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#) [Ban](#)



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