



FILM: **TETRIS**

FDG RATING: 3.2 ☺☺☺○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Jon S Baird: *director*
Taron Egerton: *actor, Henk Rogers*
Nikita Efremov: *actor, Alexey Pajitnov*

DATE: July 23, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **TETRIS**

Even if we weren't into video games, most of us remember the popularity of the 1972 video game Pong and the 1990s Game Boy. But only a couple of us were familiar with the 1980s game, Tetris. The 2023 biographical thriller film, Tetris, chronicles the race to license and patent the game which was hugely popular in Russia. Created by Soviet programmer Alexey Pajitnov, who works for government owned ELORG in the Soviet Union, the game captured the interest of Henk Rogers of Bullet-Proof Software, when he was marketing his newest game at the big Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

What follows is an almost obsessive whirlwind sequence of meetings around the world with business tycoons at iconic media companies such as Atari and Nintendo and finally with the Chairman of ELOG in Russia, and repeated attempted negotiations as Rogers tries to gain licensing/distribution rights in some form on some platform so that he can reap the rewards the game is sure to generate. Russia was not interested in monetizing Tetris. Pajitnov had created the game based on his fascination with a childhood puzzle and was surprised at how his colleagues became addicted to playing the game.

Rogers was definitely a risk taker, willing to risk everything, and a bit naïve about the competitive intricacies of technology deals.

One discussion participant who in the 1980s had found the game riveting, even though it's design was simple, was captivated by the nostalgia of the film. (The goal of the game is to prevent the blocks from stacking up to the top of the screen for as long as possible.) Others enjoyed the light-heartedness and liked how cartoonish game snippets were cleverly interspersed into the story. They were much needed interludes between the intense negotiation scenes. But some thought the cartoon element was just too silly.

The characters were definitely stereotypes and well-acted. Locations and settings were also stereotypes, especially the ultra-fancy Nintendo offices. Several discussion participants thought the historical drama was brilliantly scripted chronicling an incredible journey through the tricky technology business universe of licensing/ownership/royalties. Who owns licensing rights to each dissected aspect of the monetization of the game in which countries? The KGB also got involved. An interesting comment was that the pace was almost like a stage farce as characters are rushing between rooms in the foreboding Soviet building.

One discussion participant who grew up in Russia noted that the sense of paranoia was very poignant and accurate. The film is also sprinkled with humor poking fun at the Russians and also at the budding entrepreneurs. We liked the feel-good ending as Rogers frantically has to leave Moscow, makes it back to Tokyo, flies home, and flies Pajitnov's family to the United States. Tetris releases in the West, becoming a huge success just before the Soviet Union's collapse. After a significant period of publication by Nintendo, the rights reverted to Pajitnov in 1996, who with Henk Rogers, co-founded the Tetris Company to manage licensing. Finally, Pajitnov was allowed to collect royalties from his game.

Even though most of us were not video gamers, the film was enjoyed by many but a few had no interest in the story and thought the plot was too convoluted. A couple high scores were eaten up by low and middle range scores, leaving Tetris an opportunistic 3.2 on a scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!
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