



Tetris: The Games People Play

Box Brown

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It is, perhaps, the perfect video game. Simple yet addictive, Tetris delivers an irresistible, unending puzzle that has players hooked. Play it long enough and you'll see those brightly colored geometric shapes everywhere. You'll see them in your dreams.

Alexey Pajitnov had big ideas about games. In 1984, he created Tetris in his spare time while developing software for the Soviet government. Once Tetris emerged from behind the Iron Curtain, it was an instant hit. Nintendo, Atari, Sega? game developers big and small all wanted Tetris. A bidding war was sparked, followed by clandestine trips to Moscow, backroom deals, innumerable miscommunications, and outright theft.

In this graphic novel, New York Times–bestselling author Box Brown untangles this complex history and delves deep into the role games play in art, culture, and commerce. For the first time and in unparalleled detail, *Tetris: The Games People Play* tells the true story of the world's most popular video game.

Tetris: The Games People Play Details

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Author : Box Brown

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From Reader Review Tetris: The Games People Play for online ebook

Wil Wheaton says

The story of Tetris, its creators, and its complex journey into the West is told in a beautiful graphic novel from Box Brown.

We get to meet all the people involved in the creation and distribution of the legendary game that changed the world and launched the GameBoy, and we get a little history of gaming while we're at it.

The art and color is beautiful. It's similar to Daryn Cooke's Parker books: one color shading the whole book, to great effect.

You think you know the history of Tetris, but I promise you that there's a lot you don't know. I highly recommend this to anyone who loves history, video games, or documentaries.

Matt Graupman says

I spent a lot - maybe too much - of my childhood hunched in front of the TV, madly spinning Tetris blocks on my Nintendo. I was obsessed, my brothers were obsessed, and my mom was (the most) obsessed. Box Brown's latest pop culture history comic, "Tetris: The Games People Play," proves that we weren't the only ones. What we didn't know was that this simple and addictive video game had a wild and controversial evolution.

Conceived by a Russian scientist and mathematician as a time-wasting puzzle game, a hobby really, Tetris became a hugely profitable worldwide phenomenon. Behind the scenes, however, it was a mess. I won't ruin the twists and turns of the story but it involves American, British, and Japanese electronics conglomerates, the KGB, a handful of court cases, and a plethora of shady backroom deals. Like in his Andre The Giant biography, Box Brown lovingly tells the story with simple artwork, allowing the zany story to take center stage; it's a surprisingly convoluted tale but rarely does he get bogged down with legalese (although I did sometimes struggle with remembering who worked for which company, but that's not Brown's fault).

Who knew the backstory of Tetris was so strange? I know next time I'm rotating those little tetraminos (that's the proper name for those little blocks) I won't look at the game in quite the same way... Although, if I play too much, I may end up seeing the game in my dreams (a phenomenon known as "The Tetris Effect").

Lauren says

Brown tells the fascinating - and litigious - tale of one of the most famous games in history. He begins the book looking at the concept of games/gaming over the millenia, tracing the earliest games and how they were created and played. While this section of the book was very entertaining, I wish it had been a separate book entirely - it was inserted into the story after the Tetris characters were already introduced and seemed out of place and extraneous.

MEMORIES! amirite?

Like most people in my generation in the US, I spent hours lulled by the 8-bit music and descending blocks (and the anxiety of waiting for the 4-long line to complete! ... and then it gets faster and piles up!). In my childhood and youth, I had no idea about the complicated and shady rights issues surrounding the game and it's circuitous route to the American market. New technology: gaming consoles, personal computers, handheld devices - it was a Wild West in terms of legality and intellectual property - are these consoles computers or toys? and how the hell do we classify a Gameboy? Throw in the late cold-war politics of USSR and the US with the techno boom in Japan and it made quite an interesting recipe.

Brown does a decent job explaining a technical and detailed legal dispute between Nintendo, Atari, and the Soviet government (who employed the developer of the game, Alexey Pajitnov; however, as a state employee, he had no rights to his creation) but I was still confused about the particulars and how the technology of the consoles played into it all. Perhaps one of the Tetris biographies outline it better - it is quite a challenge to show legal history and court proceedings in a graphic format!

3.5 stars for a good effort to tell a difficult story.

Great tidbit: Nintendo is an old company, founded in the 1880s! And the Japanese word *nintendo* is generally translated as "Work hard. But in the end, it's in heaven's hands."

Brandon says

Box Brown came onto my radar when he released his graphic novel treatment about the life of Andre The Giant. While I've yet to read it, the critical acclaim he received for his work at the time made me want to seek out his other writings. Unfortunately, Box Brown, along with several other things, seemed to have moved to that corner of my mind covered in cobwebs - until this weekend when I spotted his follow-up to the Andre book, *Tetris: The Games People Play*.

I really enjoyed this, which isn't a surprise considering one of my all-time favorite books is Blake J. Harris' *Console Wars* - the story of the war between video game moguls Nintendo and Sega for gaming supremacy. *Tetris: The Games People Play* tells of the behind-the-scenes courtroom battle between gaming publishers looking to secure the rights to what would become one of the biggest video games in the world.

Tetris' creation came near the end of The Cold War, when Russian culture was very much a mystery to the West. When Alexey Pajitnov's addictive puzzler escaped the Iron Curtain, it was already a guaranteed curiosity to gamers. The drama that would unfold had me devour this in only two sittings. From the difficulty of negotiating a deal with a creator from a communist nation, to the struggling rights acquisition in regards to the rise of the original Nintendo Entertainment System (PC rights v. home console rights) to the dramatic courtroom battle that held the fate of so many lives and careers.

By adding in "the games people play" as a part of the book's title, Brown justifies the first part of the book that details a somewhat streamlined history of gaming. However, the truth is I could have done without it. The main story is interesting enough without a history lesson tacked on at the beginning. This is honestly just a minor complaint though.

This being my first exposure to Box Brown, I really dug the art style. It seemed like a mixture of Herge (Tin

Tin) and Darwyn Cooke's Parker adaptations (one color with varying shades) that combined to craft a sort of minimalist style that I felt worked well with the subject matter.

Having finished this, I'm looking forward to picking up Andre The Giant: Life & Legend as well as the recently released Is This Guy For Real? (Andy Kaufman bio) sooner rather than later.

Raeleen Lemay says

I never knew there was so much controversy around the creation of Tetris! An interesting read, if a bit dry at times.

Brahm says

Found on Neil Pasricha's newsletter. A beautiful graphic novel (is it a "novel" if it is a true story?) about the development of Tetris, its complicated escape from the USSR, and the ensuing confusion about who owned the rights. There's also a fair bit of Nintendo history, since they ultimately ended up with the rights for handheld, which raised Tetris to stratospheric popularity levels.

I loved this story but agree with other reviewers that it's heavy on the rights ownership aspect; a bit litigious. This is a perfect book to borrow from the library, read in an hour, and return with NO RAGRETS.

Tetris DX for GameBoy Color is my favourite video game of all time. It's my "desert island game, assuming the island has an unlimited supply of AA batteries. In the late 90s I'd play for hours and got very familiar with the "Tetris effect" - when I closed my eyes to fall asleep, I could play another game of Tetris behind my eyelids.

A few years ago I found my GameBoy and picked up Tetris again. After a couple false starts I played the best game of my life - I'd doubled my age and doubled my all time high score. Still got it!

This book is an appeal to nostalgia and if you're a Tetris superfan, I think you'll love it for that reason. If you have never played Tetris behind your eyelids, I'd skip this one.

Robert says

Hard to make corporate licensing battles interesting, but they try.

Sam Quixote says

We've all played Tetris and enjoyed its blocky goodness (until the pieces start coming down too quickly and that damn long piece won't appear and it's game over, man, GAME OVER!!!). Box Brown's Tetris: The Games People Play tells its origin story and unfortunately it's not nearly as fun.

For a book ostensibly about Tetris, it takes it's sweet time getting around to talking about it! It's 70 pages before we meet Alexey Pajitnov, the Russian creator of Tetris. Up 'til then there's a truncated history of games from ancient times to modern and the company background of Nintendo. It's slightly interesting but feels totally unnecessary. Nintendo was a popular format for Tetris, especially when paired with the Gameboy, though the game appeared on a number of consoles and we don't get the history of Atari or arcade machines!

The thirty pages(!) of seeing Alexey develop his idea of a modified electronic version of the Russian puzzle game, Pentominoes, was compelling and informative. Then from page 100 until the end 150 pages later the book becomes a dreary catalogue of the rights battles over Tetris. First one businessman owns them, then another, then one boring businessman owns the American rights but not the Japanese, and on and on - who fucking cares?!

The actual development of the game as well as some other details like the phenomenal cultural impact it had and the sad fate of Alexey's friend who helped him make Tetris, Vlad (who went nuts, murdered his family and committed suicide), were fascinating. But too much of this overly-long book, documenting the tedious squabbling of suits over a product none of them created, was an utter snoozefest to read. At least it has a happy ending with Alexey finally receiving royalties for the game he made – 12 years afterwards but better late than never, eh?

Unless you're interested in the pedantic legal wrangling behind Tetris, don't bother with this one.

Sesana says

Missed opportunities. The actual story of Tetris, how it was made, the rights struggle, and all that happened after is interesting and complicated enough on their own. There was no real need to bring in an overview of Nintendo's playing card days, or an examination of cave paintings. And it was missing the detail that was needed to make sense of a fairly complex rights issue. But it's a really good story, and when Brown does concentrate on what's important, it's a good read. The art is relatively simple, but it works.

Jenny says

I learned a lot about Tetris; for example I had no idea it came out of Russia during the Cold War and that there were so many lawsuits surrounding it. This graphic novel was interesting, but the artwork was not to my taste.

Popsugar 2019-A Book Revolving Around a Puzzle or a Game

somuchreading says

Αυτ? τα βιβλ?α/κ?μικς/?τι are my jam.

To Tetris: The Games People Play εξερουν? το ξεκ?νημα των video games και κυρ?ως το

σημαντικότερο όλων, το Tetris [fight me].

Η περιπλοκή ιστορία του παιχνιδιού, που αφορά μεταξὺ άλλων τις διπλωματικές σχέσεις των 2 υπερδυνάμεων του 20ού αιώνα και 3 από τις ιστορικότερες εταιρίες του χάρου, δεν είναι κάτι που δεν ξέρα. Τα 80s και τα 90s έχουν δώσει στα video games φανταστικές ιστορίες και αυτό είναι ένα θέμα που με ενδιαφέρει πολύ.

Παράλλα αυτό το κείμενο κατ'εφευα να περισει από τις επαρχίες των βιντεοπαιχνιδιών, να μπει στο μυαλό του δημιουργού του Tetris, να μιλήσει για τους ανθρώπους που ασχολήθηκαν με αυτό κατ'τη διάρκεια 2 δεκαετιών και να αναπαραστήσει με ζωντανία το μπερδεμένο bidding war που στήθηκε γύρω από τα δικαιώματα του παιχνιδιού.

Κι όλα αυτό με μορφοσχέδιο και χρώματα, σε ένα βιβλίο που πραγματικά χαίρομαι να έχω στην βιβλιοθήκη μου. Win-win κατάσταση, θα λέγαμε. Τώρα θα θέλα παρακαλώ να γίνει σειρά ετοτο, να βγουν και οι ιστορίες άλλων σπουδαίων παιχνιδιών. Άλα, πμέ, τσοπ τσοπ.

Tetris: The Games People Play: ★★½

First Second Books says

Box does it again—an enthralling nonfiction work about another 1980s pop culture icon... TETRIS!

Making a book brought back a lot of nostalgia for all of us here at :01 and Box it is always a pleasure working with Box!

David Schaafsma says

Full disclosure: I am not a (video) gamer and read this because it was at my library in the new graphic novels section and because it had Box Brown's name on it. I like his sweet attractive artwork and I liked his Andre the Giant quite a bit.

The history of psychology of games and gaming undergird this work, as the subtitle makes clear. And then you learn how Tetris emerged out of this, and lots of controversies about it, which I don't care about in the least, but it seems thorough and will appeal to Tetris fans. The style of the artwork here is the appeal for me. He almost makes me care about a video game! :) Sorry, no offense to serious gamers, including those in my present household who know this game.

Peter Derk says

I'm convinced there's a really interesting story in here, but I got really bogged down in who owned which rights to which versions of Tetris. Alexey, who invented Tetris, seems like a great guy who was willing to give up financial reward to see this great thing he made flourish. That's pretty inspiring. He made this thing that was so good that it HAD to be shared with the world, even if it meant that he wouldn't get rich off it while other people did.

But, as a book, there's just a lot of rights and contracts and maneuvering, and I didn't find those parts of the story to be high interest. It seemed to be more about the business of Tetris than the game or games in general, and a little bit about Nintendo history which has been covered pretty thoroughly in a number of other titles.

I like Box Brown's work a lot, and I appreciate that he took on this topic. For me, it just didn't quite hit the sweet spot.

MariNaomi says

Oh my god, I had no idea this story was so nuts!
