

Tetris (film)

Tetris is a 2023 biographical thriller film based on true events around the race to license and patent the video game *Tetris* from Russia in the late 1980s during the Cold War. It was directed by Jon S. Baird and written by Noah Pink. The film stars Taron Egerton, Nikita Efremov, Sofia Lebedeva, and Anthony Boyle.

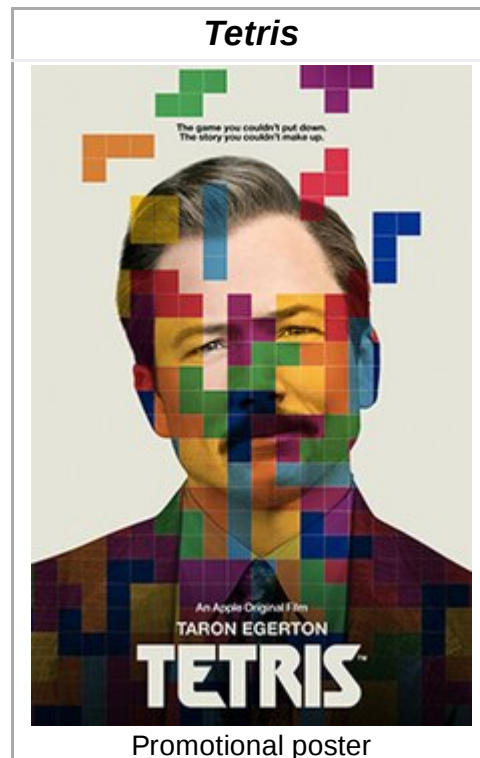
Tetris premiered at the SXSW Film Festival on March 15, 2023, and was released on March 31, by Apple TV+. The film received generally positive reviews from critics.

Plot

In 1988, at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Henk Rogers of Bullet-Proof Software becomes enamored with the game Tetris, created by Soviet programmer Alexey Pajitnov, who works for government-owned ELORG in the Soviet Union. Rogers explains to a bank manager that Robert Stein of Andromeda Software obtained the worldwide licensing rights to *Tetris* from ELORG and signed a contract with media tycoon Robert Maxwell and his son, Mirrorsoft CEO Kevin Maxwell, allowing them to distribute *Tetris* in exchange for game royalties. Meanwhile, the Mirrorsoft representative at CES sells Rogers the *Tetris* rights in Japan for PC, console, and arcade.

Rogers meets with Nintendo CEO Hiroshi Yamauchi and proposes a partnership to produce *Tetris* for the Nintendo Famicom and arcade machines. Shortly after beginning production, Rogers receives a call from Kevin, explaining that the arcade rights have already been promised to Sega. Rogers returns to Yamauchi, asking for his residuals in advance. Instead, he is sent to the Nintendo of America headquarters in Seattle, and shown Nintendo's upcoming handheld device, the Game Boy, due to be released with Super Mario Land. Rogers convinces President Minoru Arakawa and senior VP Howard Lincoln to package it with *Tetris* instead and promises to obtain the handheld licensing rights.

Rogers travels to meet with the Maxwells in London, who tell him that Stein retains all worldwide licensing rights. Rogers offers Stein \$25,000 for the worldwide handheld rights, which he accepts. Later, however, Arakawa and Lincoln call Rogers explaining that



Directed by	<u>Jon S. Baird</u>
Written by	<u>Noah Pink</u>
Produced by	<u>Matthew Vaughn</u> <u>Gillian Berrie</u> <u>Claudia Schiffer</u> <u>Len Blavatnik</u> <u>Gregor Cameron</u>
Starring	<u>Taron Egerton</u> <u>Nikita Efremov</u> <u>Sofia Lebedeva</u> <u>Anthony Boyle</u>
Cinematography	<u>Alwin Küchler</u>
Edited by	<u>Martin Walsh</u> <u>Colin Goudie</u> <u>Ben Mills</u>
Music by	<u>Lorne Balfe</u>

Stein has now promised the handheld rights to Atari for \$100,000. Rogers decides to travel to Moscow and secure the handheld rights himself.

Upon arrival in Moscow, he hires a young woman named Sasha as his interpreter, and despite her warnings, enters the ELORG offices. On showing a Famicom copy of Tetris to ELORG chairman Nikolai Belikov, Rogers is told that his copy is "illegal," as ELORG has only released the PC rights to Stein and not rights to video game consoles. A meeting is arranged to discuss the rights.

At the first meeting, Rogers meets Alexey Pajitnov. Pajitnov reluctantly invites Rogers back to his apartment, where they strike up a fast friendship. Rogers helps Pajitnov improve the game's mechanics, and Pajitnov takes Rogers to a nightclub in Moscow. A woman says that Estonia is rebelling against the Soviet Union and that change is coming.

Rogers, Stein, and Kevin each separately meet with Belikov to negotiate the rights. Rogers explains to Belikov that Stein exploited the original contract's language, which did not define a PC, so that he could also sell the rights to video game consoles. Rogers advises Belikov to define a PC as a device with a keyboard, monitor, and disk drive. Belikov drafts a new contract with Stein that increases the ELORG's PC royalties and also includes the definition of a PC. Eager to discuss handheld rights, Stein signs the revised contract without noticing the new language.

Valentin Trifonov, head of the Department of Foreign Trade of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, grows interested in the negotiations and involves the KGB to ensure he can profit from *Tetris*' potential sales. The KGB threatens Rogers, Pajitnov, and their families. Mirrorsoft offers the rights to distribute its catalog of encyclopedias to ELORG as well as the promise of \$1 million cash in exchange for handheld rights to Tetris. Belikov drafts a letter of intent to sell Tetris handheld rights to Mirrorsoft on the condition that the \$1 million is received within a week. Pajitnov faxes the letter to Rogers, showing that Mirrorsoft will *only* obtain the rights to *Tetris* if they pay by the deadline, which they fail to do. Nintendo tells Rogers that Atari has released their version of Tetris, but Rogers tells them they don't have the rights, and urges Lincoln and Arakawa to come to Moscow.

In a last-ditch effort to obtain the rights, Robert and Kevin Maxwell visit Mikhael Gorbachev, leader of the Soviet Union, to warn him against selling the game to capitalist interests. Gorbachev dismisses their concerns, but on hearing about Trifonov's interest in *Tetris*, orders his guards to surveil him.

Nintendo offers \$5 million to ELORG for console and handheld rights, which ELORG accepts. Lincoln, Arakawa, and Rogers have to leave Moscow with the paperwork to finalize the deal. Maxwell, desperate to stop them, agrees to give Trifonov 50% ownership of *Tetris* if he can intercept Rogers. After a car chase to the airport, the three board a plane, and Trifonov is arrested by Sasha, revealed as a KGB agent.

Production companies	<u>Apple Studios</u> <u>Marv Studios</u> <u>AI Film</u> Unigram
Distributed by	<u>Apple TV+</u>
Release dates	March 15, 2023 (SXSW) March 31, 2023 (United States)
Running time	118 minutes ^[1]
Countries	United Kingdom United States
Language	English
Budget	\$80 million ^[2]

Rogers returns to Tokyo, and *Tetris* releases in the West to huge success. Just before the Soviet Union's collapse, Rogers flies Pajitnov's family to the United States. An epilogue explains that Rogers and Pajitnov went on to start The Tetris Company and remain good friends.

Cast

- Taron Egerton as Henk Rogers
- Nikita Yefremov as Alexey Pajitnov
- Sofia Lebedeva as Sasha
- Anthony Boyle as Kevin Maxwell
- Ben Miles as Howard Lincoln
- Ken Yamamura as Minoru Arakawa
- Igor Grabuzov as Valentin Trifonov
- Oleg Shtefanko as Nikolai Belikov
- Ayane Nagabuchi as Akemi Rogers
- Rick Yune as Eddie (credited as bank manager)
- Roger Allam as Robert Maxwell
- Toby Jones as Robert Stein
- Togo Igawa as Hiroshi Yamauchi
- Matthew Marsh as Mikhail Gorbachev
- Ieva Andrejevaite as Nina Pajitnov
- Kanon Narumi as Maya Rogers

Production

In July 2020, it was reported that a biopic was being made about the making of *Tetris*, which would delve into the legal battles that took place during the Cold War over ownership of the game, with Jon S. Baird directing and Taron Egerton cast to portray the game publisher Henk Rogers.^[3] Egerton confirmed this report in an August 2020 interview, explaining that the film would mirror a tone similar to *The Social Network*.^[4] In November 2020, Apple TV+ acquired the film.^[5]

Filming began in Glasgow in December 2020, including Glasgow Prestwick Airport on the Ayrshire coast.^[6] In February 2021, filming took place in Aberdeen at locations including the University of Aberdeen's Zoology Building, which was used as the headquarters of Soviet firm Elorg,^[7] and Seamount Court^[8] which was used for several scenes. Filming took place for 7 days in and around the former (RAF) military base at Balado in Perth & Kinross; particularly internal scenes for a quasi-military backdrop. Production then returned to Glasgow for a few days, before wrapping in early March 2021.^{[9][10]} Reshoots took place in 2022, and the film's release was planned for later in the year.^[11]

In a 2023 interview, [Alexey Pajitnov](#) admitted that the film "didn't make an actual biography or an actual recreation of what actually happened", but that was "close enough and very right emotionally and spiritually".^[12]

Music

Release

The film premiered at the [SXSW Film Festival](#) on March 15, 2023.^[13] It premiered on Apple TV+ on March 31, 2023.^[14] According to a [Samba TV](#) research panel of 3.1 million smart television households who tuned in for at least one minute, *Tetris* drew in 88,000 viewers in its first two days.^[15]

Reception

Critical response

On the [review aggregator](#) website [Rotten Tomatoes](#), 81% of 187 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 6.7/10. The website's consensus reads: "While it's nowhere near as addictive or fast-paced as the game, *Tetris* offers a fun, fizzy account of the story behind an 8-bit classic."^[16] [Metacritic](#), which uses a [weighted average](#), assigned the film a score of 61 out of 100, based on 36 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews.^[17]

Accolades

Tetris received nominations for Best Music and Best Action/Thriller TrailerByte for a Feature Film at the 2023 [Golden Trailer Awards](#).^{[18][19]} Egerton was nominated for Best Actor at the [6th Hollywood Critics Association Midseason Film Awards](#).^[20]

Lawsuit

In August 2023, [Dan Ackerman](#),^[21] the chief editor of *Gizmodo*, sued Apple for "illegally copying" his 2016 book *The Tetris Effect: The Game That Hypnotized the World*. Ackerman is asking the court for monetary damages of \$4.8 million, which is 6% of the film's \$80 million production budget.^[2]

Historical accuracy

In an interview prior to the film's release, Henk Rogers said that both he and Alexey Pajitnov reviewed the script and made suggestions. However, Rogers noted, "It's a Hollywood script, a movie. It's not about history so a lot of [what's in the movie] never happened." There were events in the movie that did transpire in real life. For instance, Rogers notes that he did convince Nintendo to bundle *Tetris* in with the Game Boy at launch in place of *Super Mario Land*. Rogers emphasized that the producers wanted to "capture the darkness and the brooding" that he felt during his time trying to get the rights to *Tetris* in then-Soviet

Russia. He continued, "They tried their best to accept our changes when they had to do with authenticity. But when it started getting into [creative flourishes like] the car chase and all that, it was like 'OK, now it's all them.' We couldn't change anything."^[22]

See also

- *Tetris: The Games People Play*: 2016 graphic novel on the same topic
- More information about his ethnic background, education, career, and Russian adventure can be found in a long interview by Sramana Mitra.^[23]

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External links

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