**Alexey Pajitnov – Creator of the best sold video game of all time**

Nowadays, with the ever-expanding ocean of beautifully rendered, high storage video games it can be hard to reminisce of a time when these games worked on a more trivial basis. The video game industry came to life in the 1970s. Widely considered the first video game, ‘Pong’ was released by Atari in 1972. The simplicity of this game is baffling when one thinks of amount of hours humans have spent playing it. The arcades of the past however have now been succeeded by game consoles which can hold hundreds of games.

Alexey Pajitnov was a Russian game designer best known for his creation of in my opinion the most famous video game on earth, Tetris. As a child Alexey would play with Pentomino toys which would come to be his inspiration in the shapes chosen for his tetronimoes(tetris pieces). He proved to be sharp minded and began his studying with applied mathematics at the Moscow Aviation Institute. He was working on speech recognition technology in the Dorodnitsyn Computing Centre where he first developed Tetris which ran on an Electronica 60 computer. A few years later he developed his lesser known sequel to Tetris, Welltris. This was an iteration of tetris where the players point of view is from below the falling blocks. The word Tetris stemmed from the combination of ‘tetra’ (four) and Alexeys favourite sport, ‘Tennis’.

The player of Tetris must align descending pieces, known as tetronimoes, into vacant spaces for as long as possible. When a horizontal line is completed, it vanishes and player is rewarded points. This continues until the playing field is full. Tetris is one of the bestselling video games of all time and a favorite of mine. The game was conceived by Alexey while he was working in the Computer Centre in the Soviet Academy of Sciences along with the the help of Dmitry Pavlovsky and Vadim Gersimov(a 16 year old programmer) on June 16th 1984. Alexey had no intention of selling it or making money from it at first, It was simply a fun project he wanted to share with his friends. Little did he know the addictive game would sprawl across the worlds continents.

Alexey was employed by the Soviet government which hindered him from seeking any royalties for his creation in Russia. It was considered property of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Elektronorgtechnica(Elorg) was the state owned company who controlled the rights to the game. Tetris was a hit in the Soviet Union but did not reach the West until two years later in 1986. Andromeda Software Ltd. were the first distributor of Tetris. Andromeda sold the Mirrorsoft the rights illegally to publish the first commercial version of Tetris in 1987. Henk Rogers was sent on behalf of Nintendo to strike a deal for the rights to a handheld version of Tetris. However both Mirrosoft and Andromeda had sent envoys to Moscow to also secure rights to the game. After a thorough grilling by the KGB and legal officials, Rogers gained the rights to Pajitnovs game. After lots of litigation issues the rights to Tetris was sold by Elorg to Nintendo for 500,000 dollars and 50 cents per cartridge sold. They packaged it and released it with the Game Boy where it went on to sell over 35 million copies. Alexey did not receive a penny for his invention however, losing out on around 40 million dollars.

Atari created an arcade version of Tetris in 1988. This conflicted with the rights Rogers had gained from Elorg and so another legal battle ensued. Atari suffered a defeat and was forced to withdraw the remaining copies of the game. Now only around 100,000 copies of the Atari version still exist. Sega also tried to follow Atari’s footsteps but quickly withdrew the game also. This version was so rare that a copy, signed by Pajitnov was priced on Ebay for 1 millions dollars.

Alexey had however gained an admirable reputation in the West for this and was regularly invited to interviews during the convoluted legal battles ensuing over the rights to Tetris. In 1990, Alexey was invited by Spectrum HoloByte to the Consumer Electronics Show. Here he became enthralled by the American way of living. He travelled through the USA’s most famous cities attending events, and being interviewed. He realized America would allow him to market his programs.

In 1991, after 35 years living in Russia, Alexey along with an entrepreneur called Vladimir Pokhilko moved to the city of Seattle in the USA. Here he worked for Spectrum HoloByte as a game designer. It wasn’t until 1996 that the rights of the now household name of Tetris was returned to Alexey. The Russian license had a 10 year expiry date. He founded the Tetris Company in this year and the company became the exclusive source of all licences to Tetris after a fee was paid to Elorg. Here Alexey with help from others established the Tetris Guidelines in order to establish consistency and standards for Tetris. Tetris games now need to attain the Authentic Tetris Game seal to be considered a Tetris game. He was finally able to claim royalties for his invention all those years ago. Alexey did not stop here however and continued working on his passion: puzzle-game development. He became employed by Microsoft after 1996 and worked on a collection of puzzle games. The most famous of his new games is called Hexic and was even included on all Xbox 360 consoles. He then moved on to work with WildSnake Software creating a line of puzzle oriented games.

In 2007, at the Game Developers Conference, Alexei was awarded the First Penguin Award. Here Tetris was recognized as the game which created the casual games industry. He received the honorary award at the LARA in Germany in 2009 as well as the Bizkaia award in 2015. In my opinion he is one of the most influential game-designers of all time.

The drama cause by the small, simple but addictive program created by Alexey with the help of his friends is a tribute to the impact a single software engineer can have. Tetris is played over 1 million times a day, in over 50 countries, in over 50 languages on more than 30 platforms. More than 125 million Tetris products have been sold worldwide. All stemming from a Russian developer looking to impress his friends at work. The Tetris Effect is a term coined from Alexeys invention, which is when people devote so much time and attention to an activity that it takes over their thoughts, mental images and dreams. I think this is a good analogy for the massive worldwide spread of the simple game which travelled across continents, breaking language barriers and entertaining people around the globe including myself.

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