

New handheld puzzle games fun, addictive

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What's great about puzzle games is that there's no real commitment and no story line. But beware of the addictive nature of handheld puzzle games that you can take anywhere -- it's easy to jump in, but getting back out is another story. Here's a look at two of the latest:

'Polarium'

"Polarium," for the Nintendo DS: When it comes to puzzle games, the common thread always seems to be matching. Whether it's colors, patterns, symbols, fruits, vegetables or Snoods, get three or more in a row and you're set.

With Nintendo's "Polarium," even though you're either turning black tiles white or white tiles black, there's a lot more to this puzzle. Using a stylus and the touch-sensitive screen of the Nintendo DS handheld unit, players flip black-and-white tiles to eliminate an entire row, column or block of tiles.

In Challenge Mode, players have a limited amount of time to match and eliminate tiles, while lines of various tiled patterns continue to fall, adding to your job.

But, the best part of the game isn't the Challenge Mode, it's the Puzzle Mode, where your job is to take a set pattern of tiles and eliminate it with one fell swoop of your stylus.

The game has 100 built-in puzzles, but you have the option of creating your own and trading mind-bending puzzles with friends via Wi-Fi.

This "E-rated" title is available for \$30 on Nintendo DS. It could be more aesthetically pleasing, but will add hours of head-scratching puzzles to your arsenal.

'Mercury'

"Archer MacLean's Mercury," for the PlayStation Portable: There's something strikingly familiar about this game, circa Atari 1984. Still "Mercury," does a lot more than "Marble Madness" could ever do.

The premise has been done many times before -- take an object and maneuver your way through obstacles and moving platforms to get to the end of the level without falling off the edge.

But in "Mercury," from Ignition Entertainment, liquid mercury is a lot harder to maneuver than a solid marble. The game uses an engine that calculates realistic reactions of liquid mercury -- including splitting into one or more wayward blobs -- based on player movements.

Players tilt levels to move the blobs through ramps, mazes, pile-drivers, mercury-munchers and all sorts of other moving obstacles. The goal is to reach the end of each of the 72 levels within a specified amount of time and with a specified amount of mercury left.

Players also have to make their way through each level by spray-painting the mercury different colors to make it through same-colored gates. As the levels progress, blobs need to be combined to create new colors.

This \$40, "E-rated" title is graphically stunning for a puzzle game and provides an addictive addition to the PSP lineup.

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