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# Puzzle Axe Combines Jigsaw Puzzles, Medieval Weaponry

Posted by [Jared Rosen](#) × April 26, 2013 at 2:11 am

I never really liked jigsaw puzzles. When I was in college, they became a sort of Olympic sport for shut-ins, a number of my less active friends filling the space between okcupid dates and emotional breakdowns with 180 piece pictures of rabbits. A group of them would excitedly compare their collections over coffee, going into great detail when it came to laminating the finished board and whether or not to frame. Some can still get pretty into it. The only difference is that now I grimace on the inside. That's called empathy.

My main issue was that I didn't want to sit in the same spot for ten hours building a baby duck out of cardboard. Virtual jigsaw puzzles have helped, but if they're done wrong (and they often are), the entire segment can become a confusing mess of piece rotation and layer switching. I waited patiently for the day when jigsaw could be engaging and fun as more than once-or-twice gimmick, and was granted the smartphone as a token of my patience.

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Unfortunately, nobody ever seized on the iOS jigsaw market. At least not in a way where anybody was paying any real attention.



Then, on the last day of GDC, in the last hour of my attendance before driving home, a small team of developers who missed a meeting ran into me under the stairs. They had an iOS game they wanted to show me (as developers often do), and it looked suspiciously like a jigsaw puzzle with nifty art.

"Do you like puzzles?" they asked.

"Yes," I lied.

Their game was [Puzzle Axe](#), a gorgeous puzzle game that uses the touchscreen to assemble various jigsaws together in order to advance a cartoony story. The king, who is about to step down, wants to select an heir based on a trial of bravery. His son Andylion steps up to the plate when a monster attacks, seizing the namesake Puzzle Axe in order to shatter and rebuild it into a friendlier creature. He then sails off to parts unknown to find adventure and possibly a girlfriend. Cue puzzles.

The main mechanics of Puzzle Axe are simple: you build puzzles by moving pieces around with the touchscreen. You can preassemble pieces before playing them in the larger board, as well as slide them around the screen with your finger if you're feeling like cheesing your way through the levels. Most, if not all, of the jigsaws have weird shapes, which I was told was meant as a way to throw off long-time puzzle fans and keep the gameplay fresh. The game also likes to alter the way you build puzzles, sometimes presenting a static image you have to shatter and rebuild into a brighter version. The more epic boards are five or six screens tall, some of them timed. On top of the puzzle junkie round-up is a nice series of musical rhythm games, which range in difficulty from simple tone-matching to organizing complex musical arrangements with colored tiles.

It's all meant to keep the player engaged – and it works. In conjunction with the absolutely gorgeous art of every puzzle and cutscene, the play is engaging and snappy, without ever becoming too dry. Even the longer puzzles only take about ten minutes, which is more than enough time to enjoy the gorgeous artwork that begins to manifest as you put each piece in place. The musical level I played was a little more difficult, but still an interesting way to approach breaking up the main gameplay elements without alienating the player. I was told there are even more level variants as you progress further into the game, which I was surprisingly happy about.

Puzzle Axe is a game that (finally) understands the iOS when it comes to traditional tabletop puzzles. It's simple, clean and fun, with the added bonus of having a very kid friendly storyline (all of the cutscenes are fully voiced and animated), so it can double as an educational tool for parents. Yet it also has enough depth of play to keep a fogey like me entertained through half a dozen levels without a break, which must have been awkward for the team to watch as I failed to engage them on any level during the second jig.

It looks like my friends in the puzzle league are going to have something very exciting headed their way in the next few months. If Puzzle Axe keeps up the level of quality I saw on the convention floor, so does everyone else.