

Crossword games and sudoku: anatomy of a puzzle craze



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The daily newspaper is a source of important information. It is also where one will go to in order to know the latest trends, the latest development, and the latest craze. In many major newspapers in this country one can find a crossword game and a sudoku puzzle. The former has become an important feature of news dailies while the latter is the latest puzzle craze in the recent decade. And just like any significant part of life and leisure, people will want to know more about it.

Thus, it is good to know why puzzles exist and become familiar with the past and future of puzzle games such as the crosswords and sudoku. This paper will trace the history as well as the rationale behind man's urge to create and solve puzzles. This can be done by investigating the origins of two of the most popular puzzle games in the history of mankind while at the same time trying to figure out why these games became very popular worldwide. Background In the book, *The Puzzle Instinct*, Ronald Knox was quoted as saying, "Man is a puzzle-solving animal" (Denise, 1).

This very insightful observation adds another dimension to the argument that man is far superior than other created beings. And it is true that man does not only have the advantage of speech, the written word and the ability to solve problems for he had added to this repertoire the ability to create problems so he can solve them. It is quite absurd looking at Knox's perceptive observation from the perspective of practicality. Every other creature in this planet adheres to the idea of conservation of energy and resources.

Animals and plants will not go to the trouble of creating more trouble for the sake of spending precious time and then solving their self-created problems.

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But man seems to revel in the idea that he can challenge himself and then finds it within him the ability to find the solution. There can be other reason why man would go through the process of subjecting him mind and body to stress but one thing is sure, he finds satisfaction and a level of enjoyment known only to him.

In the same book mentioned above, Danesi explained man's fondness of puzzles from the standpoint of another equally popular pastime and it is the enjoyment of mysteries as depicted in stage drama and even mystery novels. It was the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle who was the first to make a comment regarding this phenomenon: The word catharsis was used by Aristotle (384-322 B. C.) to describe the sense of emotional relief that results from watching a tragic drama on stage.

Unraveling the solution to a mystery story or to a puzzle seems to produce a kind of 'mental catharsis' since people typically feel a sense of relief from suspense when they find answers to the mystery or puzzle. For some truly mysterious reason, human beings seem to need this kind of catharsis on a regular basis – as the popularity of mysteries and puzzles across the world and across time attests (Danesi, 2). It is addictive indeed. It is now clear that man has this penchant for problem solving and this is being expressed in many different ways.

But it can also be argued that even if there is an urge to create problems and solve them, man will also find a way to make an efficient system of carrying out this goal. If this so-called “ mental catharsis” is like a drug that gives him a sense of euphoria then there must be away to access it with the least amount of effort and money involved. And so, enter the world of puzzles.
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Crosswords In The Puzzle Instinct, one will discover that it was Arthur Wynne who created the first prototype of the modern version of crossword puzzles.

Wynne was an Englishman who later immigrated to the United States in 1905. As the editor of the entertainment section of the New York World, Wynne introduced what he called a Word Cross on December 21, 1913 but because of a compositor's error it became Cross Word and the name stuck ever since (Danesi, 62). In 1924 the crossword craze hit New York when two entrepreneurial men chanced upon this new invention. Richard L. Simon and Max Lincoln Schuster decided to become publishers but still unable to land that first best-seller. It was fate that led them to the house of Simon's Aunt in January of 1924.

And they discovered that her daughter could not wait until the next Sunday to come because of the need to answer another crossword puzzle. Realizing that the visitors recently opened a publishing company on West Fifty-Seventh Street in New York she asked them if they are selling crossword puzzle books. The answer surprised everyone because apparently no one had thought of publishing one. It hit upon the two businessmen to capitalize on the new craze. In just one year Simon and Schuster's three book collection of crossword puzzles sold three-quarters of a million copies.

The fad began to move across America and the world. But just like any other success stories, the crossword did not become an instant success from the first Wynne model. It took the perseverance and genius of Margaret Petherbridge, later Margaret Farrar, a history student from Smith College who apprenticed in the same New York World who began to create accurate and challenging puzzles with correct clues and clever combination of words.
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Gradually, the crossword puzzle continued to evolve into the familiar black and white boxes. Sudoku

In *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives*, Marcel Danesi pointed out that despite the Japanese sounding name, sudoku was invented in the United States in 1979 and given the name, number place but there is no documentation to ascertain who invented the game. In 1984, an editor of a Japanese magazine stumbled upon this so-called number place puzzle and changed its name to sudoku which means single number and incorporated it into his magazine. Within a single year sudoku craze hit Japan and every major Japanese newspaper carried the new puzzle.

But the evolution did not end there, in 1979 Wayne Gould, a retired judge from New Zealand saw a sudoku puzzle and began to create his own version of the numbers game and eventually he convinced the Times of London to print them. And as they say the rest is history. On the other hand, Pamela Dase contends that the origins of sudoku can be traced back even further than 1979. And she wrote, “ It actually has its roots in Latin Squares. Latin Squares were taken from the work of Swiss mathematician Leonhard Euler. He lived from 1707 to 1783. A Latin Square is a square grid that contains sets of different symbols repeated.

The cells of the grid contain each symbol only once and the symbol can appear only once in each row and column ... Sudoko puzzles are really Latin Squares that have some of the symbols already filled in, and you have to fill in the rest” (Dase, 5). The following describes the recent reincarnation of the Latin Squares. The game has now evolved further in order to adapt to the 21st century and so it is not only made available in newspaper, books and <https://assignbuster.com/crossword-games-and-sudoku-anatomy-of-a-puzzle-craze/>

magazines but also on electronic handheld games and the interactive games on the World Wide Web.

In its present form, “ Sudoku is a logic puzzle. Each puzzle has one or more mini-grids. Each mini grid has boxes that are arranged in rows and columns ... The objective of Sudoku is to fill in all the boxes of the puzzle using only the given hints. Each column, row, and mini-grid must have each picture, letter, or number only once (Erdman, 4). This type of game is entertaining and challenging. And because from time to time players are stuck books that allegedly helps those who in a gridlock are selling like hotcakes too.

Conclusion

It is hard to find a newspaper without the popular crossword puzzle or the equally challenging sudoku. The popularity of these puzzles is the result of the mental challenge that it offer to its subscribers. For the crossword games are particularly attractive to those who find it fun to spend their time learning a few words or increasing their vocabulary. The clues are there but sometimes even giving parts of the answer by leaving a few letters in the grid boxes and the phrases found beneath the boxes are not enough to solve it. This made this game challenging.

It takes work to finish one but once completed that “ catharsis” described previously will surely comes as a relief. The same goes for sudoku. Its design and rules appeal to those who are in love with numbers. It is easy for a mathematician, a math major or even someone who relish a good mental challenge to be trapped within its grasp never letting them go unless they finished one or two sudoku puzzles. And so it has become a part of daily life

to find crossword puzzles as well as sudoku games within the pages of newspapers. Why is it then significant to know that crosswords and sudokus can be found in newspapers?

The content of major dailies, newspapers that reach a wide audience can be used as a gauge for popular culture. If a being from another planet wishes to understand modern day humans then they only have to purchase a few major newspaper and then they will have instant access to what makes this planet turn on its axis. The visitors from outer space will find that love, money, food, clothes, and shelter are important items in man's to do list but they will be surprised to find puzzle games as a common denominator in some of the world's major publications.

Based on the preceding discussion a puzzle at its most basic form is a mental problem. It is a problem that is not connected to the need for love, money, food, clothes, and shelter. In other words solving this mental challenge will not make one fall in love, it will not generate money – in fact one has to shell out some precious bucks to get hold of a good puzzle game – and yet people from all over the world are into this problem solving exercise.

At first it may be pointless until Aristotle provided an insight that allowed modern readers the capability to understand this urge. Knox was one hundred percent correct when he said that man is a puzzle solving animal. And so the history of mankind is filled with mental games, puzzles that seems to taunt him to rise above his normal abilities and sharpened that hidden talent of problem solving.