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FEATURES

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SNOOD ALERT: Procrastination ahead

■ Snood is a downloadable distraction that is gaining steam in the world of video games

By Anne Le Chevallier
Oregon Daily Emerald

Attention: Students prone to procrastination or concerned about their GPAs should not read this under any circumstances.

With the television, telephone and AOL Instant Messenger a click away, many University students have tools of procrastination readily available. However, a new, downloadable distraction is infesting college campuses.

The name of the game is Snood, and the reason Snood is popular, said sophomore Rob Dunne, is because it's simple and free.

"You don't have to think too much," said Dunne, who was introduced to the game by his fraternity brother last year.

Dunne quickly found Snood consuming. When he should have been writing papers, he played Snood.

"A game turned into three or four or five games," the business and political science major said. "Then it's 11 (p.m.), and I didn't have anything done."

CIS major Cooter Harrison, who was introduced to Snood by the same person who initiated Dunne, said, "It's addicting. You just can't stop playing."

Procrastination, it seems, was the game's original intent.

Snood's creator, David Dobson, started writing the game in 1996 to avoid working on his Ph.D. Now Dobson has a degree, and Snood has a Web site, a store, a new Game Boy Advance game and more than 10,000 registered users. Even Snood candy and a Snood TV show are plausible, said Dobson, a geology instructor at Guilford College in Greensboro, N.C.

Dobson, who said he is surprised by Snood's popularity, said the game is silly and meaningless. But like its predecessor, Tetris, and the many variations of it since being developed, he said, Snood "gives people pleasure."

To win, players must free all of the "snoods" at the top of the screen by launching other snoods at them. There are different colors of snoods, and when the player links three snoods of the same color together, those snoods — and all of the snoods below them — fall off the screen, earning the player points.

However, the player must use snoods carefully because every snood launched increases the danger meter. When the meter fills to the top, the whole playing field moves downward. If the snoods reach the bottom of the screen, the game is over. As the difficulty increases — from levels "Child" to "Evil" — the sizes of the snoods decrease and more fill the screen.

Although Snood is therapeutic for some, losing games can cause additional stress. For those who downloaded the free, fully functional version from www.snood.com, frustration can be aimed at the short, cheesy poems that appear on the screen after every five games, begging the player to register.

If ending the Snood poetry is not reason enough to register, for $14.95 players can access all difficulty levels, design their own puzzles, download others' designs and compete in puzzle tournaments. However, with all these added features, students who do purchase the total Snood package might not write their papers at all.

The creator did point out that Snood has uses beyond procrastination. Dobson said he has received mail from people claiming that Snood has helped them stop smoking and lose weight. Teachers use Snood to help their special-education students with color matching. Stroke victims use the game to practice motor skills. Because Snood has unlimited reaction time, older adults play, too. Dobson said grandparents like Snood because it is one of the few games they can play with their grandchildren and win.

Dobson said some people claim to have lost their boyfriend or girlfriend because of Snood. The creator, on the other hand, found Snood romance. "I wrote my first game for my wife," he said, "so she didn't have to go to video arcades." Now, he said, "we play tournaments, and she always beats me."

Although Dobson does not play daily anymore, he said he occasionally enters the Snood time vortex.

"Every once in a while," he said, "I realize it is 3:30 in the morning, my contacts are crusty and I really should have gone to bed long ago."

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Couple's fate predicted in sweet 'Serendipity'

By Jack Beeson
The Maneater (U. Missouri)

(U-WIRE) COLUMBIA, Mo. – OK, to all the people who walked out of the theaters with tears in their eyes, yes, "Serendipity" is a heart-warming film with an ending and plot enjoyable to everyone. With that out of the way, "Serendipity" is basically an unoriginal story line with totally predictable results.

The film is the adventure of Jonathan (John Cusack) and Sara (Kate Beckinsale), two beautiful young people who meet in the holiday rush at Bloomingdale's while trying to buy the same pair of black gloves. This leads them to have a drink together at a little shop (named, of course, Serendipity), engage in flirtatious conversation and develop an obvious crush on each other.

There are only two problems with this disgustingly sweet, budding romance. First, both Jonathan and Sara have significant others. Second, Sara is completely convinced that if they're meant to be together, then fate will make it so.

Following this belief, she writes her name and number on a book and sells it to a used bookstore while Jonathan jots down his digits on a $5 bill, which he promptly donates. The motive: One day fate will place these items in the other person's hands, proving that their love is meant to be.

The rest of the film is a frustrating, teeth-gritting comedy of errors in which they come close to finding each other only to have that oh-so-predictable timing mess everything up.

John Cusack is awesome in his role as the diligent pursuer. Adding to the movie's hilarity are Molly Shannon, of "Saturday Night Live," as Sara's quirky best friend and Eugene Levy, also known as the dad from "American Pie," as a humorously overzealous Bloomingdale's salesclerk. With this comic team in action, no movie can go wrong. And make no mistake, it's the actors who make "Serendipity" a worthy experience.

Too bad the same can't be said for the plot. In the classic "turn-around-you-idiot, she/he's-right-there" theme usually seen in horror flicks, "Serendipity" never once surprises. The story has a very "Sliding Doors" feel, only happier.

Yeah, this is a palatable, funny and without a doubt crowd-pleasing movie, but there's still something to be said for good, old-fashioned originality, which seems to be disappearing more and more in today's filmmaking.

"Serendipity's" one saving grace is the sheer innocence the film portrays. The human in me did like the little shenanigans that paved the way for this couple to live happily ever after.

I also must admit that even though I knew what was going to happen, I still found myself writhing from the excruciatingly funny close calls. I was cheering along with everyone else and praying for a similar case of "Serendipity" to lead me to true love.

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