

y Brian Forté

loorTiles is played on a 10 by 8 or 6 by 6 grid on which you place the Floor Tiles of the game's title. Each tile is made up of four triangles and each triangle can bear a different colour or pattern (patterns substitute for colours on screens displaying less than 8-bits per pixel).

You score points each time you place a tile on the board, with more points being scored per tile the faster you place them down. The real trick, however, is to make the tiles disappear as you place them on the board, since the game is over once the board is filled with tiles. To make a tile disappear you must arrange that it is surrounded by tiles with matching colours touching on at least three sides. If you can manage to surround a tile with matching colours on all four sides, not only does the surrounded tile disappear, so do the four 'surrounding' tiles.

In a neat, and oftentimes frustrating, twist whenever a tile disappears the adjacent tiles turn 90°, sometimes setting off a chain reaction of disappearing tiles but mostly ruining the hard work done in preparing other tiles for 'just the right tile.'

asier to play than it is to describe, FloorTiles takes about twenty seconds to grasp. Like all good games, however, it can be played almost forever, with successive games offering the chance to improve the multiple skills involved in playing the game well.

It is also a game playable by children as well as adults. My two (Simon, 7, and Hannah, 9, as of this writing) found it frustrating at first since they tended to spend too long deciding where to put each tile, which can end up in the game deciding for you. After coming to grips with the playing conditions, however, they took to the game with enthusiasm and both are now within sight of getting their names onto the high score list.

FloorTiles isn't chock full of 3-D rendered images nor does it sport a surround-sound 16-bit stereo soundtrack. However, if your favourite games engage the cerebrum more than they engage the adrenal medulla, FloorTiles is well worth a closer look.

Pros

- Very easy to learn, but challenging to master.
- Playable on almost any Mac.
- Suitable for all ages except the very youngest.

Cons

- Addictive and prone to cause reviewers to miss their deadlines.
- Players with grey-scale screens must remember to set their screens to black & white before launching the game (unless they enjoy the challenge of playing the game with shades of grey instead of patterns).

In first appearances, Snavely (or 'Snavely!'—the author isn't consistent in this regard) is simply a stylish and clever variation on the old arcade game 'Snake.' Like the old classic, you control a snake moving around a small board.

That's where the resemblance ends, however. For a start there are two snakes to control, not one. As well there are no goodies to eat and no walls to bang into: instead the object of the game is to get the snakes to cross paths so they can lay eggs while making sure they don't wander off the relatively small playing area.

If you can manage to keep the two snakes in the ring and crossing paths for long enough you will eventually lay enough eggs to produce a 'snake hole.' To advance to the next level you must get both snakes through the hole.

On the first level, things are made a little more difficult by the growing profusion of eggs—it takes twenty eggs to get the snake hole to appear on level one—since the snakes won't travel over them and have the disconcerting habit of turning towards the edges of the playing area to avoid them.

On all subsequent levels 'Thingies,' which appear at random intervals and are different at each level, enter the game. Some of the Thingies are helpful (eg the Snack on level three which can keep one of your snakes occupied for a time. Some, however, are distinctly unhelpful (eg the Stomper which wanders around level two crushing your eggs).

Playing the game solo can be rather frustrating since keeping both snakes in play and getting them to cross paths requires rather more hand-eye co-ordination than most of us possess. What saves the game, and in fact turns it into something of a masterpiece, is its two-player mode.

With one player using the mouse and the other using the keyboard, Snavely turns into one of the best two-player games I've ever played. It requires both players to work together, plan their strategies together and take their turns in the 'spotlight' at different moments in the game.

No cakewalk for a pair of adults, Snavely is not too difficult for school-age kids and is a more than welcome alternative to both the 'shoot-'em-ups' which parents may feel uneasy about and the 'edutainment' which kids often feel are just work-pills coated in sugar.

My own pair have quickly decided Snavely is their favourite game and, for the moment, it has ended one of the more tiresome arguments we have in our household—the ‘who’s turn on the computer is it’ discussion which almost invariably ends with Dad declaring ‘If you can’t decide without fighting neither of you will get a go!’.

Snavely’s author, Karl Bunker, also wrote FloorTiles—reviews above—and, while that is an excellent game, Snavely is in a league of its own: colourful, noisy, challenging and fun, Snavely deserves a place in the ‘Games’ folder of any Mac used by kids.

Pros

- Excellent two-player game, particularly suited for children
- Easy to learn but challenging to master
- Requires and encourages teamwork

Cons

- Can be frustrating to play solo, especially for younger players
- Behaves properly in the Mac’s co-operative multi-tasking environment but writes its own colour tables to the CLUT on 8-bit screens, producing garish effects when you switch it to the background

Questions or comments? Want us to review a particular shareware or free game? Contact me at: zmacbrian@eworld.com