

Sudoku

With a name like Sudoku, which is Japanese for “single number,” you might think it was another ancient game like Go or Shogi that has been reprinted for Westerners. But actually it’s modern and has its roots in the pages of an American magazine—a 1979 issue of *Dell Pencil Puzzles and Word Games*.

In the last year, the popularity of Sudoku puzzles has exploded in the West. Replacing crossword puzzles in a number of U.K. newspapers, it returned to America in April 2005, appearing on the pages of the *New York Post* as well as papers in Los Angeles and Chicago. It became an obsession with Japanese puzzlers a number of years ago. One website reports 600,000 copies of Sudoku magazines published each month in Japan. In the U.S., a recent issue of *Publishers*

Weekly has two Sudoku titles on its Paperback Best-seller/Trade list. Palm Central, a popular source for PDA software, lists Top SuDoKu (#1) and SuDoKu One (#4) among its best sellers.

Sudoku only looks like a number puzzle. It’s actually a test of logical reasoning and strategic thinking. The rules are simple. The initial puzzle resembles a table of cells with some already populated with numbers. You have to fill in the blanks to create nine rows and nine columns, each containing numbers 1 through 9. Each number can only appear once in each row or column. But also within each of the nine inter-

	1		4	2				5
		2		7	1		3	9
							4	
2		7	1					6
				4				
6					7	4		3
	7							
1	2		7	3		5		
3				8	2		7	

rior squares of 3x3 you must create a box with 1 through 9, again, without repeating any of the numbers. Solving the puzzle involves scanning, guessing, and what-if analysis. Try the one above with a pencil (the solution is on page 58). Then check the ultimate Sudoku website at <http://sudoku.infoforliving.com>. There you will find a number of tutorials, from the easy to the migraine-inducing, as well as interesting articles on everything from the art to the mathematics of the puzzle form. You also can download a variety of PC and PDA versions; most are inexpensive, and some are free. ■