

Frantix Review

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It's perhaps fair to summarise that Frantix wasn't too well received by the gaming press; reviews so far have been luke warm at best. Rather than jump on the bandwagon though, we thought we'd give this budget title a fair crack of the whip and have spent many hours hammering away at the d-pad and scratching our heads at the puzzles it presents. Read our full review to see why we think that sometimes less is more...

Frantix is amongst the first budget releases for the PSP retailing for about half the price of a typical blockbuster title. Does that make it a cut price bargain or a cut down puzzler though? Before we get into the nitty gritty let's take a quick look at the features..

Key Features

- 3D puzzle-solving adventure for the PSP system
- 150 Challenging Levels
- Hazards a plenty from lava to quick sand and tricky traps, various enemies with different attributes.
- quick-paced gameplay
- Challenging puzzles to test even the best puzzle-solving enthusiasts
- Unlockable worlds, levels and characters

Frantix is made up of 6 worlds, or themes. The first one, Tutorialandia, doesn't present puzzles as such, it's more of a tutorial explaining the games various pick-ups, enemies and features.

The final level, Chubbchubbs, is based on Characters made famous in a cartoon short from Sony Pictures called The Chubb Chubbs.

Some of the locations and the characters you will come across in Frantix, like the Ale-E Inn, Meeper and Boris, are featured in the Chubb Chubbs movie.

In 2002 The Chubb Chubbs was the Academy Award winner for Best Short Film (animated). Spread across these worlds are over 150 levels of puzzling and sometimes frantic action. Levels and worlds (and characters) are unlocked by collecting gems from each level. If you collect the gems within a preset time, you earn a gold gem.

Early in the game completing the levels is not really a problem. Although there is a time limit on every mission early on there is ample time to solve a simple puzzle, collect all the gems and find the exit portal. However, to complete the level within record time and collect the gold gem is not so easy - even early on.

This brings the game tremendous balance, and I think this is where previous reviewers have perhaps overlooked this aspect and marked the game down. Racing through the levels is not difficult early on, the real challenge with the early levels is in winning those gold gems - and that really is a challenge. First of all you need to figure out how to complete the level, then you need to do it within the gold gem time. More often than not, this means refining the method you used to complete the level initially and making sure every single move your character makes is efficient with not a single step in the wrong direction.

On one level the gold gem time is 11.00 seconds, for what seemed like hours I was completing the mission in 11.27 seconds, or 11.10 seconds, until finally I did in 11.00 exactly, and won that elusive gold gem. Frantix rewards careful analytical thought and nimbleness of finger. And that brings us on to the controls...

Frantix has simplicity down to a fine art with the controls. In frantix all your concentration will be on figuring out the puzzle at hand, not which key to be pressing, and after playing Coded Arms for a while, that is refreshing! The only controls required are to move your character up, down, left or right - that's it. To do this you can use the d-pad, or the analog stick. They both work well, although my own preference was definitely for the d-pad. The analog stick was handy for pulling blocks however, as the required movement for that is to push, then quickly pull by keying the opposite direction.

As your tally of collected gems increases, so more levels are unlocked, and new worlds become available. The worlds are designed so as to be quite different from each other and provide a change in eye candy from the previous world which is refreshing. The puzzles obviously become much harder. At times you'll probably find yourself unable to progress until you successfully collect gems from levels that have you foxed. Luckily at pspguides.net we have already published an extensive Frantix Guide to help you solve levels, and do it in gold gem winning times.

Much of the time the puzzles will have you scratching your head, as the levels are small there are only so many things to try, but still the solution is tricky to find. One thing is for sure, the answer is always staring you in the face, and when you see it, it's like winning a trophy on race day. And that is exactly how a puzzler should be. The puzzles are clever, and obvious once you know how.

Due to it's simplicity we can see why it was released as a budget title, however that does not in our opinion make this a cut down puzzler. Frantix has tremendous balance and a well worked learning curve. It becomes very addictive as you try to figure out the most efficient way to complete levels, after figuring out the solution in the first place. It's got me hooked, even to the point I've put the award winning GripShift to the side, and that's saying something!

One last thing, and we also touched on this in our GripShift review, is that Frantix rules when it comes to burst gameplay.

You can play a game of Frantix when you only have 4 minutes to spare, or when you have 1 hour to spare. The levels are small and most have target times of less than a minute making it a great pick up and play game.

To summerise we think the main stream press got it wrong with Frantix, and so does every gamer I've seen comment on this title. Once you've played it for a while, you will not want to give it up! Frantix is a recommended puzzler for your PSP, enjoy!