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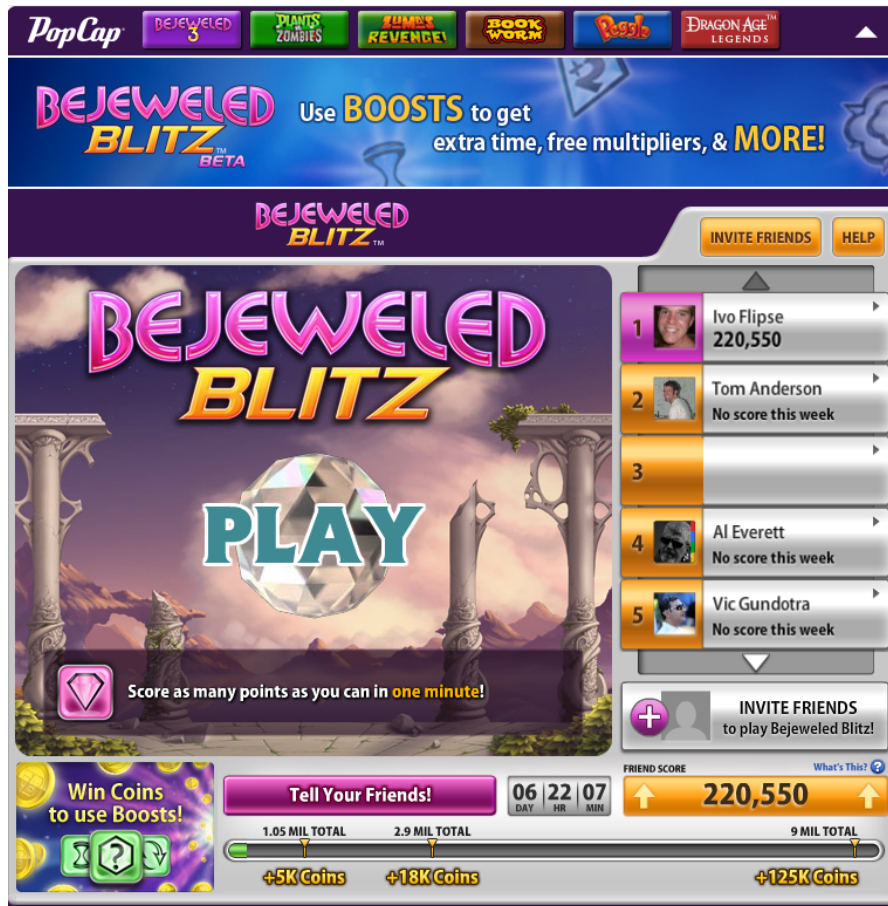
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Games for Google Plus!

First a confession: I never played games on Facebook, just because I found them all annoying and I generally don't use Facebook a lot anyway. I'm a Google fanboy though, so I'm on Google Plus a lot more. When Games for Google launch, I decided to give them all a try and see what I'd make of them.

As a first remark, I listen to music all day long and I **hate** it when in-browser games start playing annoying tunes. Worst of all: every game hides their mute button in another place and they don't always seem to work right of the bat. On top of it all, they forget my sound settings when I get back... -1 so far!

Bejeweled Blitz



I'm a great fan of Bejeweled, especially because I can turn off my mind and simply play a bit. Or so I thought... Bejeweled Blitz is like the vanilla Bejeweled on steroids, every game lasts only 60 seconds and there are no other modes available. Talk about a bummer. The starting screen also looks very crowded: there's a PopCap banner on top, there's a Blitz banner with offers underneath it, people from your circles who played the game on the right and some score tracker at the bottom. Only a tiny part of the screen is reserved for what it's all about: Bejeweled.



The first thing in Blitz you have to do is pick Boosts. These supposedly give you a small boost (no sh*t Sherlock) but they come at a small price. They last you for three rounds. The boosts you can get are:

- Mystery Gem: Puts a random special gem on the board at the beginning of the game
- Detonator: Detonates all special gems on the board. Usable once per game.
- Scrambler: Scrambles all gems on the board. Usable twice per game.
- +5 Seconds: Adds 5 seconds to the end of the game.
- Bonus Multiplier: Puts a multiplier on the board at the start of the game.

Of all the boosts I like the +5 seconds and bonus multiplier most. The latter enables you to quickly level up your multiplier, while the other gives you a small time bonus and hopefully score some additional points.



That x2 you see indicates you get a bonus for that combination and it increases with every shape you get rid off. I think the glowing shape in the bottom right comes from whenever you get 4 or more in a row and they explode when you make a combo with them. Those with a coin on them (the two yellow ones) give you extra coins to buy boosts. All in all, I think its just confusing and highly based on luck with the placement of the multipliers and the shapes required to use them.



While my current record 340.000 I score much less than that most of the time. I actually have no idea how I even got that high and I hate the fact that skill doesn't really help with this game. So while Bejeweled remains addictive, this one gets a -1 for me.

Dragons of Atlantis

In Dragons of Atlantis you have to build a city from the ground up, leveling up your buildings with the purpose of building a grand army to help attack Atlantis. So much for the plot, we all know it all boils down to mind numbingly clicking to level up stuff, while waiting for them to complete.



Honestly, I don't really know what I like about these games, because after you figure out how to build a strong army, most of the fun is gone. Either way, I'm not at that stage **yet**, so I'll keep clicking away for now.



I tried to attack my neighboring forrest (I'm the largest building in the middle), but the Cannibals took my troops head. Guess I should blame my appointed General Tom for that one...



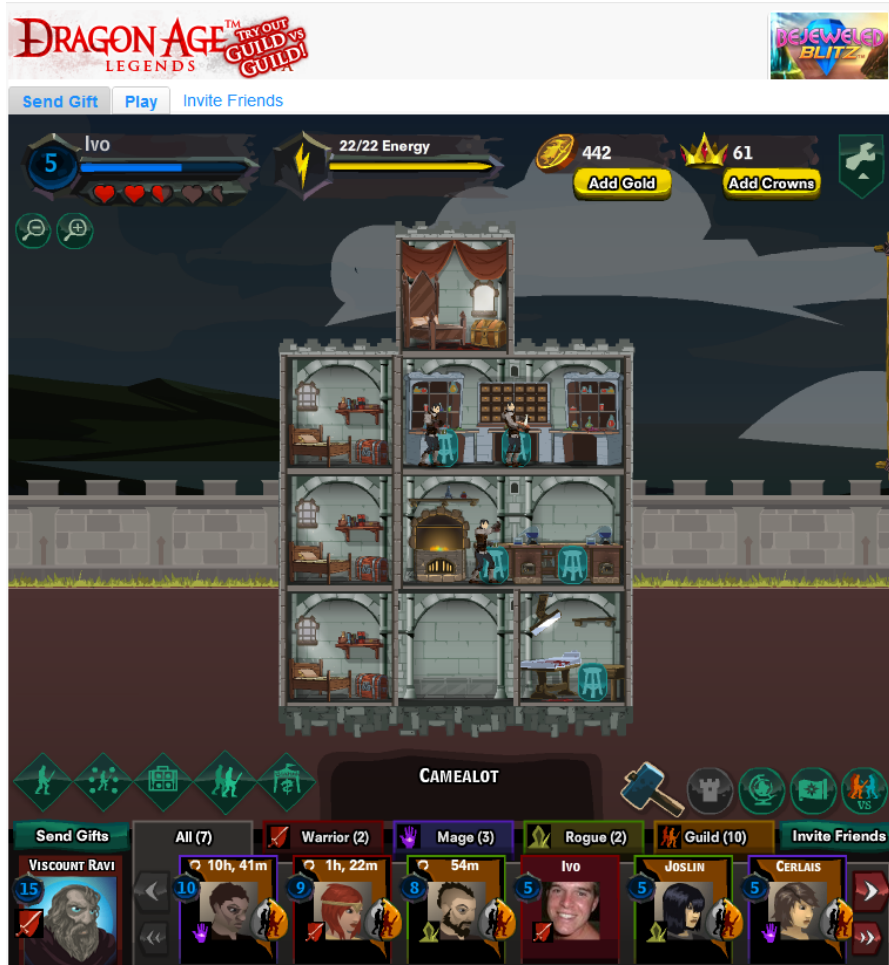
Currently I'm upgrading my resource fields so I'll be able to keep upgrading my others buildings without having to worry whether I have enough wood or iron. As the title says, the goals is to raise an army of dragons, but as you can see mine doesn't exactly look impressive...



Anyway, you guys will have to wait a while longer until I've build a bigger army before I can give my full review of Dragons of Atlantis, but a +1 so far.

Dragon Age Legends

I actually never got to play Dragon Age, but assuming its just another hack and slash RPG, I thought and give it a go. The game starts by letting you build a castle, here you hire workers to make you potions, bombs and other consumables. Adding rooms costs money, as does making the consumables and leveling them up. Everything is geared towards slowly letting you progress, else there wasn't much of a challenge.



At the bottom you see your guild, though by default its filled with a bunch of NPCs. Later on when you invite your friends they'll start populating the bottom as well. You can only recruit them for one fight after which depending on their injuries they get a cooldown.



Next you need to pick your next fight, though there isn't much choice and the story was so thin I missed it completely. Basically you click on the sword and axe icon and the fighting begins. Now you need to choose your party for the fight, I generally pick one higher level and one lower level one. That way I don't end up trying to win a fight with two level 4's and wasting potions, while the next fight with a level 8 and 9 turns out to be a breeze.

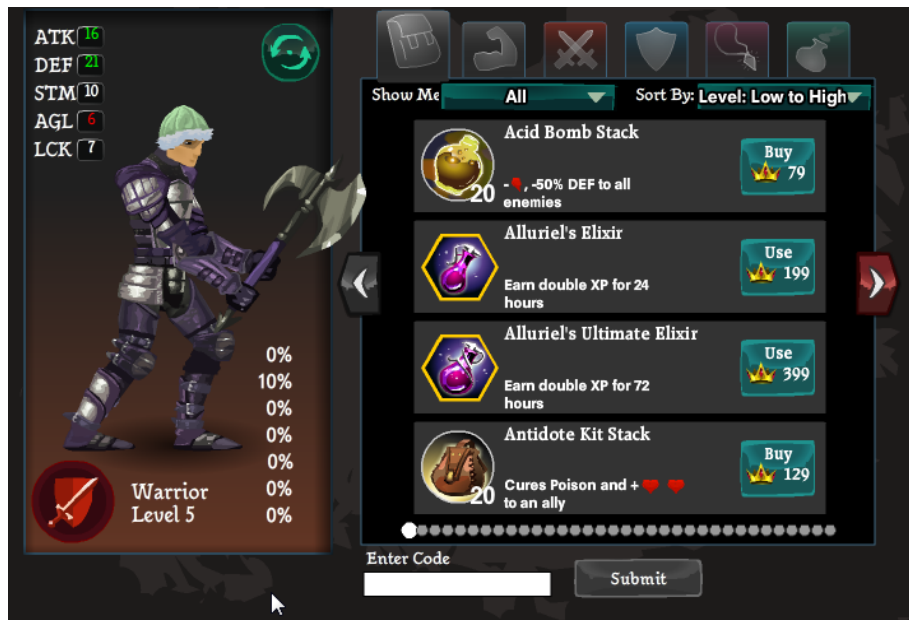


When starting the game you get to choose one of three classes. I picked Warrior rather than Mage for a change, because I had how I was always dependent on mana potions. The other class is a Rogue or some pussy shooting arrows. Its probably best to combine them all when picking your party members as that plays out well against the strengths and weaknesses of your opponents.



When you get select an opponent, you get options to use bombs on him and use regular or

special attacks on him. The latter often costs mana and deals more damage or has side-effects like draining mana from mages or slowing them down. After you defeat them all you get what every RPG is about: **the loot!**



So far I haven't gotten any gear that really stands out (no purples!), apart from the silly hat. There's also a shop, but rather than using the League of Legends Free to Play system, this one only lets you buy gear with Crowns. While these are earned in-game, they are most likely aimed to sell credits, which is also apparent from the lack of options to buy things with large amounts of gold. Sadly, as soon as you start meeting up with stronger opponents (or rather more) the turn-based fighting started to turn me off. Making the fighting feel more like a chore than a nice way to pwn my enemies. So overall this game is a +0 to me.

Zynga Poker

I can be short about this game. The rounds pass far too slow for my liking, I don't really care that I'm playing against other players if they AFK or take so long to decide whether to Call, Check or Fold.



The game annoyingly tries to get me to annoy my Circles with invites and the UI is very crowded. I mean what the hell?!? Its just a poker game, what's all this crap on the side with Gift Shop and a flashing ad to buy more chips. Way to go Zynga, its clear you're more focused on making cash than making a pleasing UI.



So while I know a ton of people may like Poker and Zynga games, I give this one a -1

Edgeworld

Edgeworld is a sci-fi tower defense game., where you have to build a base, gather resources and train units to destroy your opponents bases, while protecting your own with cannons. Here's what my base looked like when starting the game.



You have several missions which are all based on similar themes: level up your buildings, train 10 troops of type X, attack an enemy of level X, you get the idea.



The fights are pretty 'static' you can only tell the computer where to deploy your troops, but there's no real way to tell them what to attack. This will lead to silly situations where they finish destroying a building, while the cannon is happily blasting them into the afterlife. You can get attacked by fellow players or by the computer.



When they blast away half your base, like they just did with mine. They will automatically start repairing afterwards with no penalty, other than not being able to interact with them until they are fully repaired.



Either way, I'm a Tower Defense junkie, so this game get's a +1 from me.

City of Wonders

In City of Wonders you have to build your own little city with three distinct specializations: trade, military and cultural. You specialize by building things like walls and an armory for military, vineyard and market for trade and a school and opera building for cultural.



To grow your city you need to gain and please citizens, you gain money by trading and if you don't want to get raided continuously, you'll have to do some amount of defending. By researching you can help advance your city in the direction you want.



Now for the annoying parts: you better have a lot of friends on Google+ joining in, because you're severely rate limited if you don't have any. I currently can't expand my base or build my awesome hanging gardens due to a lack of Allies. Allies are also a great way of getting free treats and easy trading, so I'm out of luck there as well. The game also has some annoyingly blinking things on the side drawing your attention to things to spend your in-game credits on, which probably is their way of making money of the game. Sadly they don't let any chance pass by to remind me of some offer to speed things up, even if I've dismissed it a hundred times...



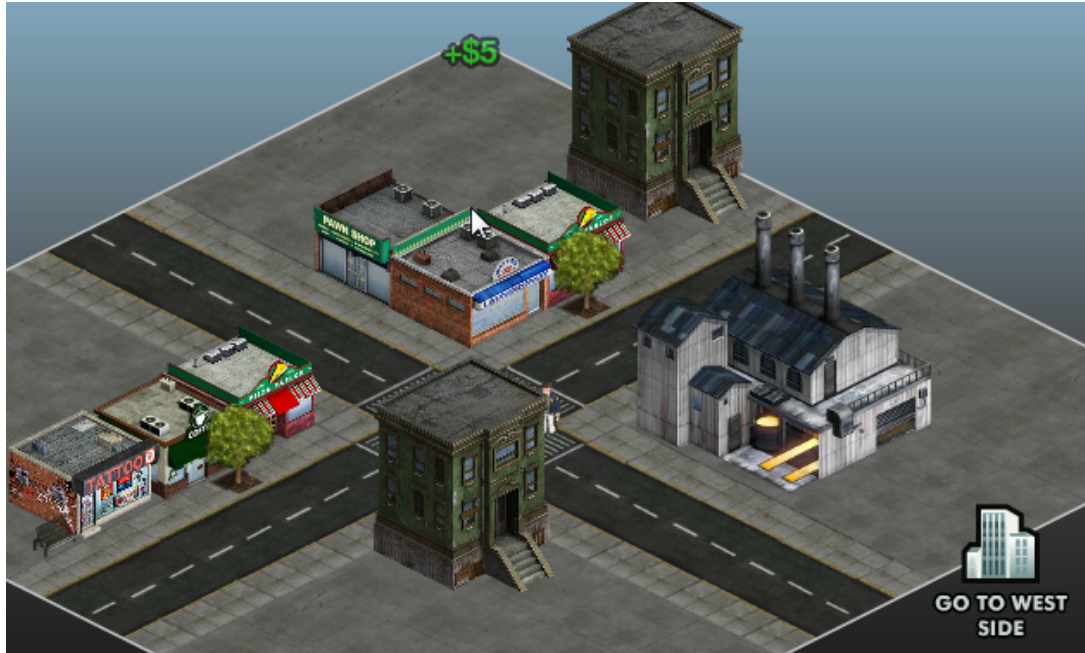
Still I like my little town (must be like all those people playing Farmville/Cityville), so this game gets a +1 and now go add me as an Ally already!

Crime City

Here's the Google Plus version of Mafia Wars: Crime City. You have to perform all the typical Mafia-like crimes: mobbing people, robbing stores and fighting rivals.



To do certain jobs, you need to buy weapons and other gear, which will also aid you when fighting Rivals. When you complete a job, you gain cash, experience and random items which you can use to complete 'sets' that unlock special items or simply more cash.



You also have to build your own Hood, where you build income and defense buildings. While its tempting to build a lot of income buildings (like a Pizzeria), remember that others can try and rob you as well, so you better protect yourself. Like all the other games, Crime City relies on you getting your friends to join. This is fairly important if you want to progress, because there are 'Boss Fights' which are nearly impossible to pass without a larger mob. Also without a large mob behind you, you're vulnerable to attacks from Rivals.



Still, the game requires you to come back far too often to be enjoyable just during short breaks, so while it doesn't suck, I'm not a huge fan either. So this one ends up with a +0 as well.

Closing thoughts

Other than these social games being a time sink of the scale of World of Warcraft, the quality is all over the place. This probably depends on who you ask, I'm sure some of the games I disliked will entice others, so feel free to disagree.

Ivo

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What's probably best is how Google+ keeps Gaming updates out of the regular stream. You'll only see Gaming updates on the Games tab. Currently there's only a small batch of games, but I'm sure it will grow exponentially when Google+ hits mainstream.

Also for all the talk about Circles, this concept apparently hasn't arrived at the game developers yet. None of the games let me simply broadcast an invite to the game to one of my Circles. I'm happy that the invites don't clutter the stream, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't support Google+'s main feature.

My overall opinion is basically: great if you like the games, but if you don't think you'll like them, it's probably better to wait for the upcoming blockbuster season. If you're a Facebook veteran, there's no reason to migrate unless all your friends are over here.

