

Kalin's Farmville Game Ideas

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<http://kalinbooks.com/2010/farmville-game-idea/>

Last week, after countless automated requests from Facebook friends, I finally found myself playing (and subsequently addicted to) Farmville. My first thought, naturally, was "I coulda built this game myself!" and since then my imagination has been running wild with ideas for Farmville ripoff games I could build in Flash. I've always wanted to build web games, though my one hangup has been the fact that I can't make things look good. I can write code and make it functional, but actually making a successful game on my own would be nearly impossible because I don't have any visual artistic skill. However, these days if I came up with a good idea and a good implementation, I could afford to invest some of my own money and hire an artist.

Unfortunately, I have two other programming projects as well as fifteen or twenty different writing pieces I'm currently working on and on top of that, laziness still pervades my soul, so I probably won't get around to these ideas.

But I thought my Facebook game ideas were pretty cool so I figured I'd outline them here and see if others think they'd be as cool as I do.

My first idea has the same basic form as Farmville except you are building an underground lair in a side scrolling view instead of a farm in overhead view. At first the terrain of your area would be auto-generated to form a basic platformer game level. You would then buy industries, mines and businesses instead of crops and animals and place them anywhere in your lair. You would also have a spaceship/airplane that you would fly through your level and use to collect the income from your businesses and money-making items in the level.

Then, instead of farm decorations, you would buy turrets, enemies and other obstacles for your level, then you would invite your friends to bring their ship from their own lair and play your level. You could then get a bonus if your level is able to destroy your friend's ship, or they would get a bonus if they were able to complete your level.

Everything would be upgradable, of course. I could take ideas from numerous other side scrolling plane shooting games and let people buy special weapons and defenses for their ship, perhaps letting them switch out ship components between levels. Boss characters could exist at the end of the levels as well, as again, could be upgraded or perhaps improved through an experience-point system.

The key to the success of this game would be similar to Farmville: it would rely heavily on the Facebook social aspect, giving players bonuses for dragging their friends into the game and relentlessly harass people with free special items. The other key, of course, would be the variety of quality graphics, allowing people to fully customize their level. I would need a good cartoonist or two to pump out countless good-looking graphics. For me, that's the biggest stumbling block.

My other idea was fairly similar: you start with your 'farm'. This one is overhead view and the grid is laid out just like in Farmville. This time, however, you start with automatically generated terrain like mountains and rivers which sit on your grid in the same way Farmville objects sit on their grid in Farmville. Then you buy mining operations, industry and businesses and place them in your land, these items behaving similarly to the money making items in Farmville. You would then need to tend to them in the same way you do your Farmville farm.

But then the important part of this game is buying soldiers, tanks, planes, artillery, transports, ships, etc. You can place them anywhere on your 'farm', ready to attack or defend. Then you invite your friends to do combat with your military. If they agree, a battle instance is created and a copy of your land and assets is created, but with your friend's land tacked on right next to it. The armies then do battle, which may take a few hours to a few weeks to complete.

While in a battle instance, your pieces would have a set movement distance per unit of time. For example, a tank might gain

the ability to move 40 pixels every six hours. Once you move it all 40 pixels you'll have to wait until it's ready to move again. Once you get within range of your enemy's army, you could begin firing. Different pieces would have different firing power and different ranges. They could also be set to automatically attack if an enemy moves within range. The number and frequency of shots would of course be limited based on the piece.

This kind of battle would be good for people who want to play against each other but are not online at the same time or can only play for short sessions throughout the day. However, there could be an option where, when you are done moving everything you want to move, you can hit a 'done - skip ahead' button, then if your opponent agrees and hits the same button on their turn, both parties will have their movement numbers replenished, easily turning this into a turn-based game.

More than two players could be involved in a single battle. In fact, I believe dozens or more players could be involved in a single battle, each adding their own battlefield onto all the others, without causing any notable performance issues. At the same time, a single player could be involved in numerous different battle instances, since the destruction from the battles would not be permanent.

On top of this main idea, I could add all sorts of other gameplay elements. I was thinking of a skill system similar to EVE Online where your skills continue training when you're offline. There could be a system of alliances, so the battles are not 'every man for himself'. Then there could even be cities, perhaps represented as an icon on the map, but then you could drive into them, opening up another area where you could buy decorations, buildings, money-making industries etc. However, your enemies could, of course, come in and attack that city. And as well as your city, you could upgrade your landscape, buying bigger, more interesting mountains and forests and moving rivers, though I'm not sure how that would work from a story perspective--perhaps God rewards you for killing your enemies or something.

But for now these are just a couple ideas floating around in my head. Maybe I'll start on one of them if I find myself unemployed again, but until then I still need to get the last of the kinks worked out of my WordPress PDF creation plugin so I can post it to the community.

I also need to keep working on a program I'm building in the Appcelerator/Titanium platform, called "Batch Rename" which gives an interface which creates a script that's kinda similar to SQL that can parse through a directory and rename, move, delete or copy any files it finds based on regular expression (regex) code. This is probably a lot more useful than any Farmville knockoff, as I actually came across a situation yesterday where I would have used it.