

Playdom Combines City-Building, Quests and Nature in Treetopia on Facebook

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The folks over at Playdom have launched a brand new title of the tribal, tree-hugging, city-building variety: The serene new Facebook application Treetopia.

At first glance, Treetopia is a city builder, but its premise and a number of mechanics make this particular title much more interesting than many of the watered down SimCity clones. In short, the objective is to save Treetopia and guide your own personal tribe of nature-conscious people to becoming a flourishing society beneath the canopy of a great tree.

The game goes beyond city-building, incorporating characters in quests to create a deeper gaming experience.

Of course, any semblance of storyline is a bit vague and tends to get lost and/or overshadowed by other features of the game. Players start out with a mere two villagers, the homes in which they live, and two fire pits. Here's how it works: Each villager will move about your virtual space doing work, of some sort, that is based on the buildings you have present. The fire pits, for example, produce an in-game currency called "beads," and as tribe members tend to them, small amounts of beads can be collected by the player.

Quest SupportHowever, there is much more to Treetopia than just this. Each home increases your overall tribe population, and the more people you have, the more money your tribe can generate. As an added bonus, as the player increases their population, the great tree within their virtual space grows larger and more fantastic — vaguely reminiscent of the tree in the movie Avatar. This aspect of the game isn't necessary to have, but it is a nice stylistic choice that really does add to that whole "one with nature" feel the game has to it.

In addition to villagers earning beads, users will also need to construct different buildings that produce greater quantities of beads as well as stone and wood. Over X amount of time, each structure will accumulate a maximum amount of resources it can produce that the player can then collect in one lump sum. Curiously, it appears this income is independent to the small bits of resources your working villagers produce.

As level and income increase, the player will then be able to construct warrior, mage, healer, and shielder “quest support” buildings. Now, these do not produce resources per say, but offensive and defensive villagers used within Treetopia’s more unique questing mechanic.

Treetopia Quests While building structures and collecting revenue earns experience, the primary means of leveling comes from doing quests. Once level three is acquired, your villagers can venture out into the world and complete various text based quests that reveal a bit more about the world of Treetopia and supposedly some semblance of story. Unfortunately, since the quests are repeated so many times, many text screens get skipped over, and any story is lost.

Nevertheless, each quest has various steps within it and random events. For example, to undertake journey into the desert, the user might need to have X amount of beads, wood, and stone. However, random events such as storms may occur, forcing you to “take shelter” and use extra resources to survive. Should you have insufficient amounts, the quest will fail. Furthermore, if you do not have some of the noted warrior buildings to produce warrior villagers, you can also fail (due to sickness, beasts, etc.), but this is actually where some cool social features come into play.

By default, the game gives you a computer played neighbor, but as your friends play and build out their own villages, their warriors, mages, and healers can come to your aid, automatically, during quests in order to help you succeed. Now, with the computer controlled village, this isn’t really necessary early on, but as one levels up and gets more resource intensive quests, it is probably a safe assumption that more quest support classes may be needed. Combine that with the fact that physical real estate within each player’s virtual space is a bit limited, then friends become very important.

Plant Monsters Other than helping with quests, friends can also visit each others’ villages themselves to help out there as well. You see, your villager’s productivity is not only limited by population but how happy they are. Unlike other games of this ilk, decorations play no role in this, but rather it is the presence of plant-like monsters that periodically sprout up. When they do, the non-player characters will remain hiding in their houses and either the player or a friend must click to remove them. Of course, this leads to minor monetary rewards, but interestingly enough will get your friend’s village back up to speed and even allow you to collect the extra resources it produces (not the big chunks that structures produce after X amount of time though).

In addition to game play, the overall atmosphere and visual style of Treetopia is fantastic as well. From the almost mystical sounding tribal music to a saturated, cel-shaded style, to even the ability to moderately customize your male and female villagers, it’s a game that successfully nails the style and mood it is seeking.

Frankly, Treetopia is a wonderful game, and while it incorporates features that have been done before it, it does so in a much more interesting fashion. Furthermore, with its appealing aesthetics, well-done social integration, and just overall quality it makes for a very refreshing change in an every expanding sea of remakes and imitators. That said, there is probably some other similar game somewhere around the internet, but for what it's worth, after about 9000 farming games, Treetopia feels very unique and comes highly recommended.