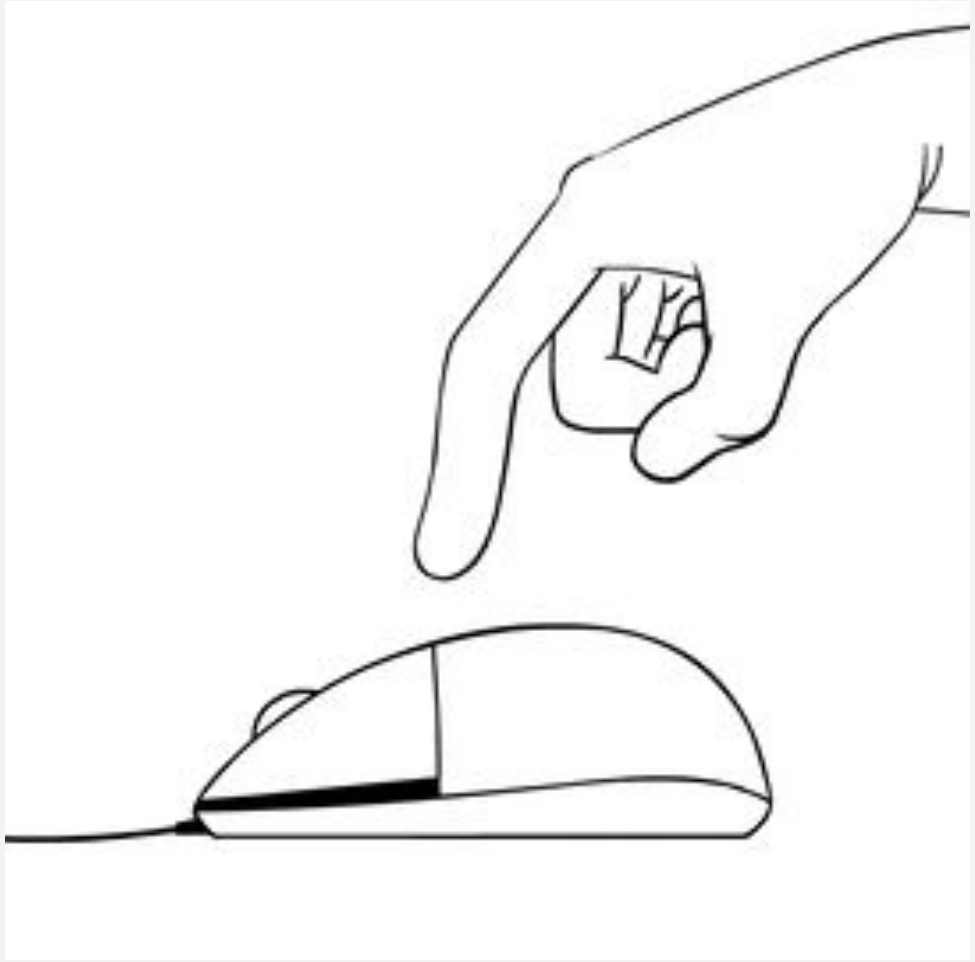
IDLE GAMES

Emily Wu
Allan Pichardo

Classification and Definition

- Also known as "incremental game" or "clicker game".
- a genre of game defined by the primary feature of its strategy: leaving the game running by itself for long periods of time.



Levels of Interactivity

- clicker
  - require higher interaction than minimalist and zero-player
- minimalist
  - reduce the number of actions
- zero-player
  - require no player involvement or limited input in the initial step of the game with no influence in gameplay

Central Poetics of Incremental games

- play less and plan more
- a form of “self-obviating” play
- reconsider “play” and “fun”

Origin of Idle Games

- A key precursor to idle games is game bots or AI agents.
- Bots, or AI agents, are automated computer players that act as if controlled by a human player.
- Games are usually designed for player interaction, but can also incorporate an AI player. This mechanism gives idle games a ground earth to be born.
- In 2002, Progress Quest, became one of the first zero-player games.

The first idle game (2002 by Fredricksen)

-

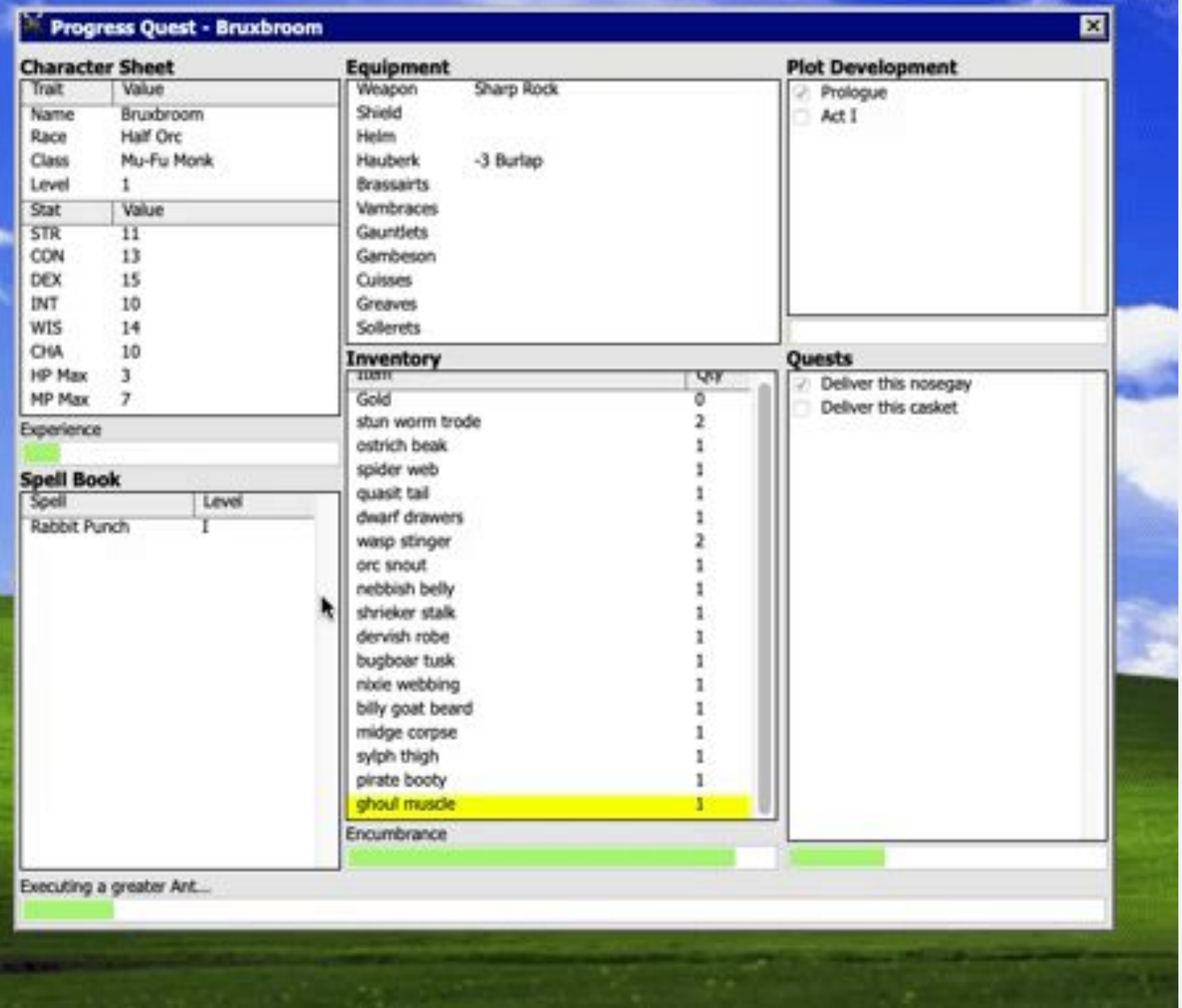
Characterization

- incentivize long-term motivation and promote desired behaviors.
- deceptively simple at first, but reveal impressive depths, including growth curves, bottlenecks, plateaus, and economic models.
- Idle games feature components of
  - strategy, decision making, long- and short-term planning, a strong sense of progression

Core Mechanics

What do you get when you take an RPG and remove the grinding and the quests?

Waiting & Self-Play



Progress Quest (2002)

Tabletop RPG Simulator

A “fire and forget RPG”[1].

Generate a character.

Watch a campaign unfold in real-time.

Story and events are narrated to the user.

Modern idle games can self-play, but revolve around one quantity or resource type that the player must accumulate in order to get more resources.

Clicking & Resource Management

Cookie Clicker (2013)

First true “incremental” game.

Click to generate cookies.

Use accumulated cookies to buy faster ways of producing cookies.

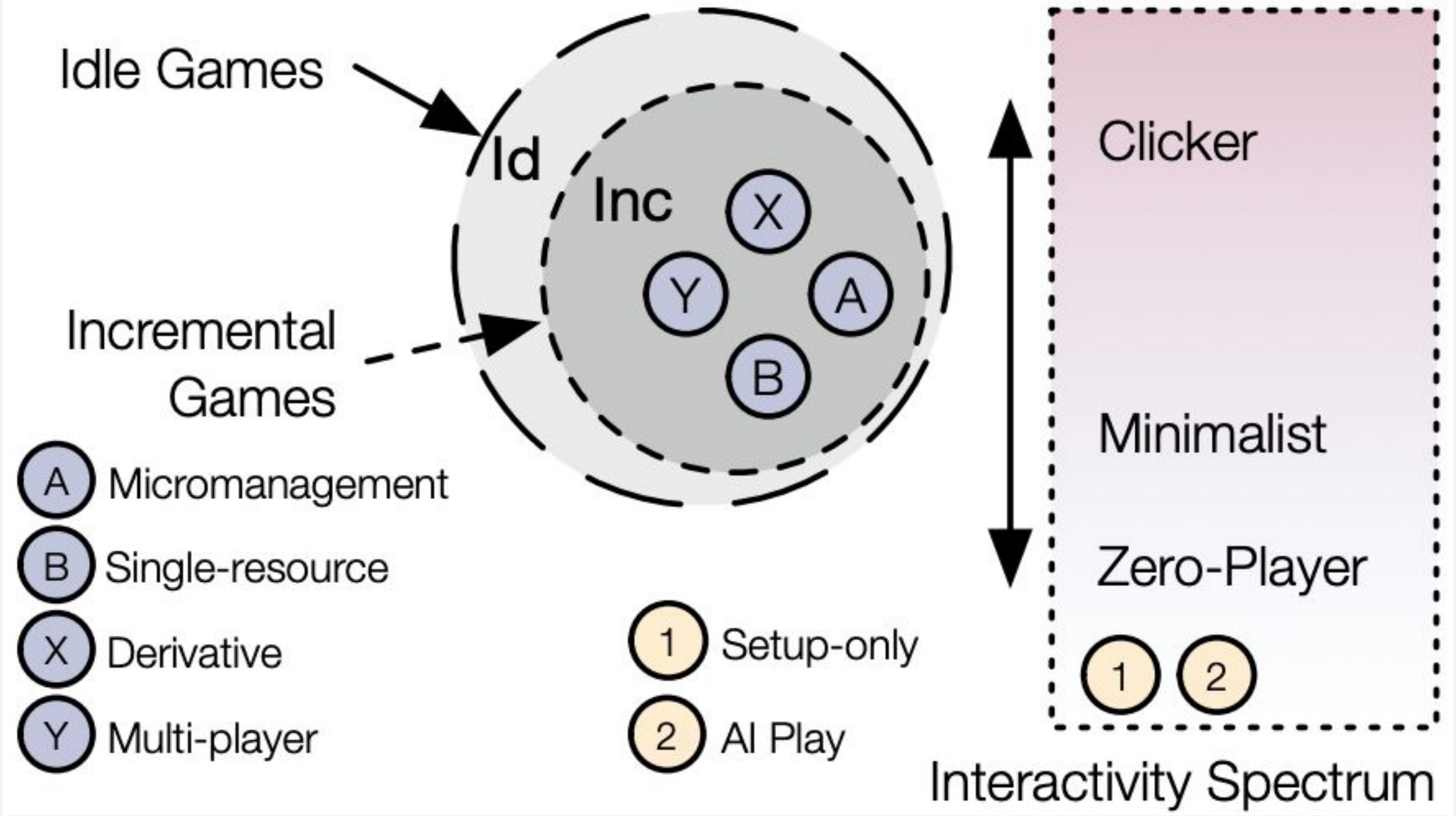
Self-plays when the player is AFK.

“I think what draws people in is simply the idea of accumulating large amounts of things over time — cookies, gold coins, experience... As the players gain more stuff, they feel less and less like quitting because they'd have wasted all the time they've invested into it. As with MMOs though, there almost always comes a moment of ‘sudden clarity’ where the player realizes how pointless it all is, and decide to leave the game”[2]

-Orteil

If idle games are “pointless” and play themselves, can they really be considered games?

Pirate Puppet's bakery
2.591 million cookies
per second : 3,868
v. 2.019
Options
Stats
News : chocolate mines found to cause earthquakes
People come from very far away to get a taste of your cookies.
Info
Legacy
Achievement unlocked
Cookie monster
Achievement unlocked
Builder
Achievement unlocked
Fledgling bakery
Achievement unlocked
Production chain
Achievement unlocked
Mouse wheel
Cursor
Grandma
Farm
Mine
Factory
Bank
???
???



Source: Playing to Wait: A Taxonomy of Idle Games

Mine Defense (2014)

Incorporates idle elements such as unsupervised progression.

Micromanagement.

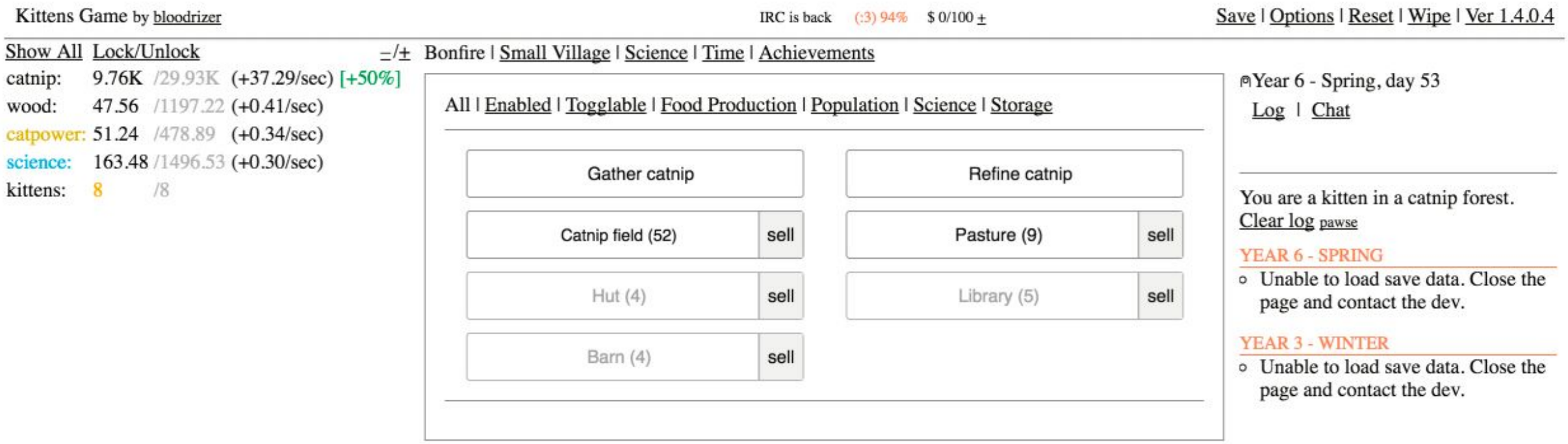
Tower defense clicker.

Adds new mechanics such as tower defense elements such as: enemies, structures, and crafting.

Hybrid.

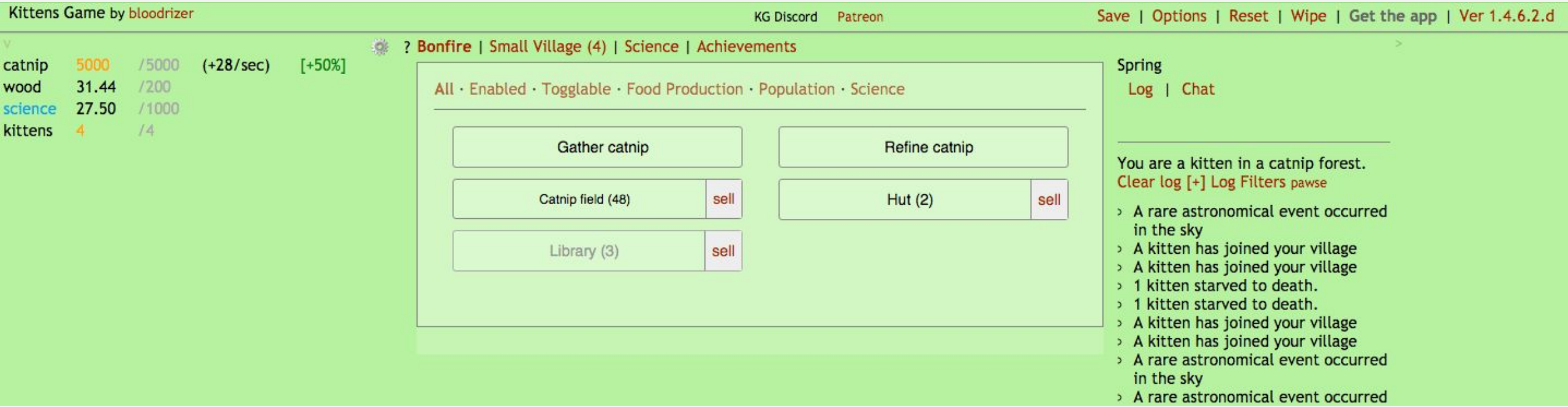
Kittens (2014) By Bloodrizer

Over 400,000 play sessions on Kongregate (2017) and Bloodrizer mobile apps (2017).



28 hours of playing Kittens

https://bloodrizer.ru/games/kittens/#



Summary

Idle games genre is vastly diverse

- Completely self-playing experiences
- Extreme micromanagement
- Potential for deep play

Large community of players:

https://www.reddit.com/r/incremental_games/

Large collection of free browser-based games:

https://www.kongregate.com/incremental-games

References

[1] Progress Quest Manual - http://progressquest.com/info.php

[2] The cult of the cookie clicker: When is a game not a game? - https://www.polygon.com/2013/9/30/4786780/the-cult-of-the-cookie-clicker-when-is-a-game-not-a-game

[3] Playing to Wait: A Taxonomy of Idle Games - https://pixl.nmsu.edu/files/2018/02/2018-chi-idle.pdf

[4] Idle Games, Everything You Need to Know! -https://mobilefreetoplay.com/idle-games-everything-you-need-to-know/

[5] The Pleasure of Playing Less - https://ndownloader.figshare.com/files/12212813