

Exchange Rates for Zynga

by Ann Bogle

I had intended to spend \$110 at FarmVille but have spent \$250—\$110 because that is how much I won playing blackjack outside Hinckley, Minnesota, where I went with Peter for a weekend in '96 or '97. In my honesty or fastidiousness I adjusted our winnings (\$220 or \$110 split) for the speeding ticket Peter got crossing the Wisconsin state line in his oversized red Japanese sports car I called the “sports Buick.” When he was pulled, I had not been thinking of speed. He had once been a cop himself: I watched as he placed his hands carefully on the steering wheel, separated and displayed, and tweezed his driver license from his shirt pocket with two fingers.

The night before, we had “won” at slot machines then jumped on the hotel bed (WCCO was our sponsor), too giddy to wait until morning when we were sure we would win again. Morning came and we sauntered from the hotel to the casino to lose at automated poker. We went to the gift shop. I adjusted for silver wire blue beaded dream catcher earrings and a carton of American Spirits turquoise. By four, we were at the bar side by side slumped over gin and tonics gone almost still. The bartender suggested Wisconsin, the trading post casino where we ended up turning it at blackjack.

“Mood swing,” Peter said, radio-style, confidentially.

I have the eerie feeling that I half-wrote that story but can't remember where I parted with it. Raconteurs shine when their stories find you. They know it when you shine.

When farming started in September, I thought of gambling, of my childhood best friend's marriage ruined due to gambling, and of farming as a trope for living in the Midwest. Could I ruin a marriage farming at Facebook? Yes, but if Peter were here, we'd be going somewhere, not stuck to a computer.

As with the trouble with gambling, I managed to spend beyond my self-suggested limit at the farm while farming and wanting to do little else. It became a chase for “money” (numbers like rubles),

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following a weeks-long passion for the perfect placement of each tiny animal, tree, and length of virtual fence.

I compared that to writing, while I worked. I thought it was nicer to “farm” than to write because there is no need to offer opinions when I farm, only to reveal biases in landscaping, my version of it: not contemporary but traditional.

In virtual farming, there is no chance of real money, only the risk of spending it.

70,600 FarmVille coins or 240 FarmVille bills can be had via PayPal for \$40 if you can't or don't wish to wait for trees, animals, and crops to develop. A farmer can make it without spending real money, but there are incentives to buy.

In an email claim to Zynga, I wrote, “On December 7, I bought 595 FV bills for \$100 USD. I bought 28 gumdrop trees for 560 FV bills or about \$94 USD. I sold 12 gumdrop trees immediately for 12,500 coins a piece and kept 16 gumdrop trees to display on my farm. Since that time, the resale value of the gumdrop trees has inexplicably and without notice dropped to 3,000 coins a piece.” I asked for a clarification and price adjustment. I wanted them to know that I could track exchange rates for all four kinds of currency and points at FarmVille. I had lost a hedge arch (that joined the blue barnyard to the sheep pen) and wanted replacement coins for that. Zynga replied that the answers to my questions could be found in the FAQ. I had read the FAQ and the TOS. Now I wait and watch for news of lawsuits I had read about but ignored for the sake and pleasure of farming.

With 60 million daily users, Zynga (run by a group of male inventors) had failed to produce a FarmVille flag for India, leading to worldwide protest and instatement of a flag. (Zynga has yet to produce a flag for Sweden or coats of arms for Scotland, either.)

What had I expected, given the tinny dialect: “howdy, partner!” “reckon so” and “cowpoke” crap, as if makers at Zynga hadn't heard a snow farmer speak.

“Hypogynormous ruble.”

Terms of Service at FarmVille require users to link to the FarmVille or Zynga websites in Internet references to them.

Dec. 13 at 9 a.m. Zynga writes, “We have credited you 114,000 coins to your farmville [sic] account for the gumdrop trees you have sold. Your current coins balance is now 598,385. Thank you for your patience.”

I need no credit for the 12 gumdrop trees I sold but for the 16 gumdrop trees I have yet to sell. Zynga will still owe the price difference for four trees (38,000 coins or \$21.53 USD).

Dec. 15 at 8 a.m. Zynga writes, “Thank you for contacting Zynga. We have credited you 38,000 coins to your farmville [sic] account for the 4 gumdrop trees you have sold. Your current coins balance is now 742,568. Thank you for your patience.”

Once or even before the Christmas tree is out of the courtyard, I can purchase the greenhouse (100,000 coins) and sell the manor (10,000 coins) in exchange for the lodge (800,000 coins) or the villa (one million coins). *Then* what? The villa is the top.

The future is not ours to see, que sera, sera.

