

Video Game Reviews: 'Viva Pinata' not just for hard-core gardeners

by Jeb_Haught

Game: "Viva Pinata"

Publisher: Microsoft

System: Microsoft Xbox 360

Cost: \$60

ESRB rating: E

Review rating: 3 stars

'VIVA PINATA' - Tending a garden on Pinata Island attracts a variety of live pinatas CNS Photo courtesy of Microsoft. KEEP SWINGING - 'Viva Pinata' is quite addictive. Who would have known that maintaining a virtual garden would be so rewarding? CNS Photo courtesy of Microsoft. 'THE GRIM ADVENTURES OF BILLY AND MANDY' - 'The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy' bring the TV cartoon fun to the Nintendo Wii. CNS Photo courtesy of Midway. SIBLING TROUBLE - Unlike most games based on TV programs and movies, 'The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy' forgoes the usual adventure, instead settling on arena fighting. CNS Photo courtesy of Midway. When I heard that Microsoft was making a "gardening simulation" video game featuring pinata creatures that frolic to and fro, I thought, "How incredibly uninteresting."

That changed once I started playing the surprisingly addictive "Viva Pinata." Who would have known that maintaining a virtual garden would be so rewarding? The player starts out as a new gardener on Pinata Island and must create a personalized garden. Using a cyber-shovel, players replace hard dirt with grass and then sow seeds to grow plants and flowers.

When a certain percentage of the garden is grass, the first live pinata appears and decides to hang out in this attractive new setting. As more and more criteria are met, such as growing certain plants, maintaining a constant food supply and creating a small pond, additional pinatas will visit your garden and take up residence. Now the player has to decide how to keep them happy in the garden and hope that, through pinata romance, some additions are born.

The innovative world of "Viva Pinata" is bright and colorful, featuring some of the best-looking graphics of any Xbox 360 title. The amount of detail in the foliage and the pinatas themselves is nothing short of stunning.

But don't let the kiddie graphics fool you, as juggling the responsibilities of keeping a productive garden can be very complex. Players can trade pinatas with other players online as well as try to get their pinatas on the leader boards, but I would have liked additional online features.

While "Viva Pinata" may not be for everyone, it's sure to bring out the hidden green thumb in any player.

Game: "The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy"

Publisher: Midway

System: Nintendo Wii

Cost: \$30

ESRB rating: E

Review rating: 2 1/2 stars

Ask parents what they think is the strangest animated program they watch with their children, and the answer from many will be "The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy."

This oddball cartoon appeals to both young and old, which is why Midway decided to create a game called - you guessed it - "The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy."

Unlike most games based on TV programs and movies, this title forgoes the usual adventure, instead settling on arena fighting. My question is, whose brilliant idea was it to limit players to only three attack maneuvers when other fighting games have dozens? Even adventure games have more moves to offer.

However, combat becomes more interesting when the game adds weapons, most of which are actually fairly clever in their design. There are standards such as spiked clubs and swords, but several are more interesting, such as a gun that transforms opponents into chickens. Overall, the weapon designs are interesting enough to help make up for the combat's lack of depth.

Even though each level is attractive and cleverly designed, with traps and gun turrets to activate, it can't cover for the shallow game play for long.

In the end, "The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy" is a fun diversion for short durations, but pales in comparison to other games of its type.

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RATING KEY

4 stars - Must have

3 stars - Pretty good

2 stars - So-so

1 star - Don't waste your time

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Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)

E: Everyone

T: Teen (13 and older)

E10-plus: (Everyone 10 and older)

M: Mature (17 and older)

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