

SAM & MAX: EPISODE 3—THE MOLE, THE MOB, AND THE MEATBALL

So this dog and this rabbit walk into a Mafia hideout...

PUBLISHER: Telltale Games/GameTap DEVELOPER: Telltale Games GENRE: Adventure AVAILABILITY: E-tail (www.gametap.com or <http://snm.telltalegames.com>) ESRB RATING: Not Rated MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 800MHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 215MB hard drive space MULTIPLAYER: None VERSION REVIEWED: Near-Final Downloadable

REVIEW

Y Episode No. 3 in Telltale Games' continuing *Sam & Max* point-and-click adventure series sends our favorite dog-and-rabbit detective duo undercover to infiltrate the "Toy Mafia," a crime organization made



up of 1930s-era mobsters who wear creepy, giant teddy-bear heads and yield to the whims of their Marlon Brando-esque Don.

Of course, this typically oddball plot paves the way for corny dialogue, but unlike in previous episodes, it's effortlessly funny—even sharper and punchier, and just a bit more grown-up. The only recurring joke ("Does

the carpet match the drapes?") is actually kind of lame, but the rest of the game is hysterical; every puzzle provides a good punchline, with the solutions never seeming illogical or tacked-on. Because the design goes out of its way to avoid the contrived puzzles that make most adventure games drag, the solutions themselves often feel a bit too easy. Like

we've said of previous episodes, it's "adventure-gaming lite."

And, once again, the characters and locations feel rather limited. Series regulars Sybil and Bosco return (coincidentally tied up in the Mafia's dealings), and your time gets divided between Sam and Max's usual street block and the Toy Mafia's equally small headquarters and casino. Exploration and variety take a backseat to the constant stream of jokes (an unavoidable trade-off, given the series' episodic nature). Everything else is unmitigated and unapologetic fluff—the joy is in Sam and Max's wit, after all—and seasoned adventure gamers might find the game too simple to really sink their teeth into. **•Jenn Frank**

VERDICT

+ Clever puzzles; a snappy script; a joy to play.

- Too little to explore; too easy; over too soon.

7/10

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THE SIMS 2: SEASONS

A change in the weather

PUBLISHER: EA Games DEVELOPER: Maxis GENRE: Simulation AVAILABILITY: Retail, E-tail (<http://thesims2.ea.com>) ESRB RATING: Teen MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 1.3GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 1.5GB hard drive space, *The Sims 2* MULTIPLAYER: None VERSION REVIEWED: Near-Final Reviewable

REVIEW

Y Forget *World of Warcraft*—once you fall prey to *Sims 2* addiction, you're not likely to get much else done. Did you want to take a shower today? Take the dog for a walk? Spend some time with your significant other? Too bad! You'll have your hands full doing the virtual equivalent of these things with your needy Sims, who—thanks to the new *Seasons* expansion—can now run outside to catch anything from fireflies to a cold.

Seasons goes beyond the standard cloud-watching and stargazing activities of previous *Sims 2* expansions, making weather an integral part of the game. The fun comes from watching how differently each season unfolds and how it affects your Sims: Winter helps with family bonding, spring brings romance, summer builds friendships, and fall quickens learning new skills. Sims can play in the leaves, dance in the rain, have snowball fights, or even get struck by lightning—virtual weather's never been quite this engrossing (or unpredictable). Gardening's all the rage now, too... and though it's initially tedious, a new condition



• It's like a little snow globe. Must resist...urge to shake monitor.

called "PlantSimism" bestows your Sims with some amazing agricultural talents.

According to posts on fan sites (dating back as far as 2003), plenty of *Sims* junkies have awaited meaningful weather effects since the original *Sims 2*. Yes, those fans are patient people (the amount of time it takes *Seasons* to load up is a testament to that)—and now, they finally get their day in the sun. **•Tara Nelson**



• "Yippee! It's time to play in the leaves! Then it's time for my medication!"

VERDICT

+ Reactions to varying climate make *The Sims 2* more lifelike.

- Loads slowly.

8/10

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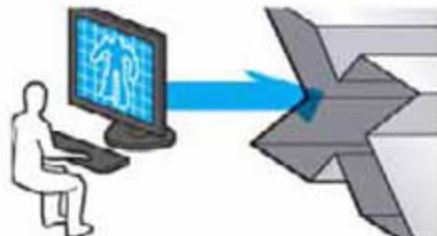
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