



# VIVA PIÑATA

Candy land

PUBLISHER: Microsoft DEVELOPER: Rare GENRE: Strategy AVAILABILITY: Retail Box ESRB RATING: Everyone  
 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 1.8GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 10GB hard drive space (gamepad recommended) MULTIPLAYER: None VERSION REVIEWED: Retail Box

## REVIEW

**Y** Picture yourself in a colorful, fresh world of papier-mâché. Piñata animals with tasty names thrive among exotic plants. Even better: Money is made of chocolate, and the worst villains are the ones who break piñatas. Welcome to the offbeat world of strategy/sim game (and Xbox 360 port) *Viva Piñata*.

Long ago, Jardinero—the best gardener on Piñata Island—retired, leaving his garden abandoned until it became a mess. As the new gardener, it's your duty to fill those dirt-covered boots by growing fabulous plants, attracting cool piñatas to live and romance in your garden, and keeping away the nasty Sours. As the less-than-encouraging Jardinero himself often comments, this is harder than it seems (my self-esteem took a hit from remarks such as "You are now an Expert Gardener. I myself reached that goal in my first day in the garden."). The farther you progress, the more of the story you unlock; the "Storybook" feature lets you access chapters of the story from your handy-dandy Journal without interfering with your gardening. The odd story forms a good foundation, but it isn't so involved that it overwhelms the gameplay.

To play, you can either use an Xbox 360 controller or a mouse and keyboard. The mouse/keyboard felt very awkward, as if I were playing a console game with PC controls. The 360 controller's smooth layout is definitely preferable.

### TIME SINK

Once you get past the control issues, *Viva Piñata* is very addictive. I frequently found myself getting so absorbed in the game that a couple of hours would pass, during which I'd forget all about my homework (just ask my mother). As long as you have a goal to accomplish, it's hard to stop—and it's pretty tough to *not* have any goals. You can always find another piñata to tame or romance, another plant to grow, and so on. Don't get over-



GET TISSUES, TOO: IT'S HARD NOT TO GET TEARY WHEN A SYRUPENT EATS YOUR MOUSEMALLOW.

whelmed if a lot of things happen too quickly at the beginning; at the time, it bothered me...but later, I found that this gave me more freedom and challenges with my garden. Occasionally, I *would* get bored or frustrated for chunks of time, but that was when I knew it was time to take a break. My main problem was that romancing the piñatas (this leads to the creation of new piñatas) felt confusing; At the beginning, it's easy...but later, the piñatas start getting pickier and refuse to romance, even those in happy moods and with all their requirements completed.

Overall, *Viva Piñata* is a must for the "Sims generation," the 9-to-13-ish kids who don't enjoy violent games—they'll definitely fall in love with the piñatas. If you get *Viva Piñata* for your kids, make sure to get tissues, too; it's hard not to get teary when a Syrupent eats your Mousemallow. Also, adults shouldn't dismiss this as a "kiddie game," as you might be surprised at how much strategy's involved. *Viva Piñata* is a great escape from both standard violent games *and* reality.

• Sarah Jaisser Green



• So cute and colorful, it hurts.

### VERDICT

- Very addictive; deceptively strategy-oriented.
- Wonky mouse/keyboard controls scream "plug in a gamepad already!"

8/10

GOOD



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