

Sam & Max

Ah Telltale, perhaps the greatest game company you've never heard of.

Founded by ex Lucasarts staff, this small outfit have managed to pull off what so many other companies have failed at. What I'm referring to is episodic gaming, that's games that run like a TV show, giving the viewer/player new episodes on a frequent basis. This is where many developers fall down (hands up those still waiting for Episode 3 of Half Life 2, the first being released back in 2006) but Telltale seem to succeed each time. The model they use is releasing an episode a month, while this might be more of a wait than next week's Doctor Who, it works well, giving gamers of all abilities a chance to spend the 4-5 hours required to complete the episode and eagerly await the next.

This season begins with cinematic, or at least televisual flair. Introducing you to the game in a style reminiscent to that of the Twilight Zone series (look it up, kids) and sets the scene in which we find our heroes. Sam, the fedora-wearing dog and Max, his psychotic lagomorphic chum find themselves incarcerated by the villainous space-gorilla Skun-ka'pe, leaving you the player to find a way out and begin your adventure. Confused? Yeah, I was too, but stay with it and things will calm down and start to make sense, or at least become clearer.

Anyone whose played any of the previous Sam & Max titles will have to adjust themselves to a brand new control scheme, which is perhaps perfect for those who predominantly play action games but is somewhat daunting for those of us used to the simplicity of the point and click interface of the earlier games. You will get to grips with it but if you're anything like me by the end of the episode you do still find it somewhat uncomfortable and that you are fighting the interface

much more than should be necessary in what is still an adventure game.

Graphically this is the best season yet, with lots of detailed textures and a much higher polygon count. Sadly, like the majority of console games produced by Telltale, the frame rate does glitch upon occasion, but nowhere near as bad as some of their earlier releases, as anyone that has played CSI: Hard Evidence on the Wii can tell. Lip sync is still not perfect but has come on leaps and bounds since Season 1 as have the expressions the characters are capable of.



(Photo courtesy of Telltale)

For those who haven't twigged, this series is a comedy and Episode One has its share of laughs however the humour is certainly lower-brow than it has been up until now and depending on your sense of humour this may be a good or bad thing. Suffice to say there are plenty of gags regarding the titular Penal Zone, for better or worse.

Gameplay is fun, once you get used to the controls, however if this is the first episode you've ever played some things might leave you feeling you're missing a gag or wondering why particular characters exist. That being said, this is part of the appeal of Sam & Max; you are thrown in to their world head first and the best thing to do is enjoy it for what it is.

From a technical standpoint this is probably the best game that Telltale has ever made, however it comes at a schizophrenic time for the company. Having found success in the console market, they are straying from the formula of earlier PC based titles. Although this may be a good business decision it is a turn off to many of their fans who prefer a simpler game interface and don't want such convoluted controls, which may make sense from a console game perspective but don't do many favours for those playing the game on OS X

or Windows. With that in mind this could be an important season for the company to see how players take to a very different control scheme.

However, more than graphics and controls make a game, and here Sam & Max shines. Once again it has brilliant voice acting, a terrific score by go-to sound guy Jared Emerson-Johnson and razor sharp writing. The puzzles in the game are a little more abstract than in previous releases, but help is given in two different ways. There are audio clues which will play if you seem to be wondering about without purpose, but these can get on your nerves if they pop up frequently so can thankfully be turned off. What works far better is Max develops a power for seeing into the future and you can use this gift to give you hints as to what needs to be done. As for story, it's rather difficult to talk about. Is it funny? For sure! Does it tell it well? It's too early to say. Previous seasons of Sam & Max have been separate adventures each episode with a vague over-arching plot. This one however is telling a bigger story and Episode One is simply the introduction. From this point of view it does a good job, giving you a sense of place and gets you interacting with others in the cast.



(Photo courtesy of Telltale)

On the whole the episode does a good job of setting up the story, the characters are enjoyable and the locations well rendered. The control scheme is the biggest issue I have with the game and although I'll see this season through I can see a future where I'm not downloading the latest Telltale game the moment it's released and as much as I respect the company for its strides forward in interactive narrative gaming it may be a future that holds a little less interest for an old skool gamer like me.

You can watch the Telltale trailer [here](#)

Season 3 – The Devil's Playhouse

Episode One: The Penal Zone

Developer/Publisher: Telltale Games

Review copy: PS3 (via PSN)

Also available for: iPad, Mac and PC

Link:

<http://www.telltalegames.com/samandmax/thedevilsplayhouse>

Hello!

Ladies and Gentlemen these are exciting times. We now have a Games Reporter!

Games players of Edinburgh we give you..... Mr Phil Cobley. Phil is a computer gamer. This is a unique thing in the Edinburgh Reporter world so we hope you like him! Nobody else here understands what he does.....

We asked him to introduce himself to you....So here he is!



I've been playing games for longer than I dare to admit and am interested in interactive media in varying forms. I finished university with a BA in Multimedia and had the pleasure whilst there of giving a talk to the students studying Game Design. Not always interested in the Next Big Thing, I have a passion for retro games as much as I do the latest releases.

My favourite game of all time is probably Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge, which I am looking forward to being re-released this summer, but I have a love of all narrative based games.

Each week I probably spend close to 20 hours playing games, as well as reading about them, attempting to design my own and oversee young people gaming at work.

I can't say I always like the direction the industry chooses to go in, but I'm hanging on in there and think now is a very exciting time in the world of gaming. With consoles like the Wii and devices such as the iPhone bringing us new ways to experience games I think the best is truly yet to come.

So here we are, the first column on The Edinburgh Reporter devoted to the world of gaming. Until the opportunity popped up, I hadn't really thought too much about writing a game blog, but the moment the thought took me I was enthralled. What I hope to bring is a slightly different perspective than the average game blog; looking to the past as well as the present and future of the industry.

Neither a hard core nor casual gamer, I have little interest in games like Modern Warfare 2 and there's only so much time I can spend on Brain Training, I rest somewhere in between; looking for fun games, immersive experiences, beautiful presentation and great storytelling.

I'm hoping that this will be a space that can appeal to a wide audience, from those of you who have a passing interest in easy to pick up games to anyone wanting to work in the games industry and everyone in-between.

As well as reviewing some of the latest games (and perhaps even some older ones) I want this to be relevant to Edinburgh and hope to get some features together in the not too distant future that are specific to gaming in this city.

So...

Welcome, enjoy your stay and let me know what you think.

Sacred Heart go climbing

They will meet with Dr Gerry McPartlin, a retired GP from Applecross who has seized on a huge challenge to raise funds for L'Arche, an ecumenical, international charity for people with learning disabilities.

Dr McPartlin is undertaking a sponsored ascent of all 283 Munros involving climbing over 400,000 feet and walking more than 1,000 miles. He started at the beginning of April and is on schedule having already climbed over 100 Munros. He is on target to finish his quest at the beginning of July. He is delighted to have the Penicuik schoolchildren and 2SCOTS battalion to be with him and support him on his way.

The funds that Gerry raises will go towards a L'Arche fund set up in memory of a very close friend and much-loved priest, Monsignor David Gemmell who touched the hearts of so many. Fr David died suddenly on 6 March 2008 when in Barcelona to support Celtic Football Club. He had been for more than 10 years the Administrator at St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh and chaplain to Penicuik Primary School for a number of years.

The Fund will be used to support the building of a third L'Arche home in Edinburgh to be named in Fr David's memory and to help establish the new L'Arche community, at Nyahururu, in Kenya.

Hannah McGill Director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival speaks!

What does Hannah look for in a film that may open or close the Festival?

Hannah McGill: It's a combination of factors and a degree of instinct! It is very important for both events that it's a film that we all believe in, and one that has a degree of anticipation attached to it so that the audience and press are excited. It's often a film that is in a slightly more conventional register than some of the Festival, as the Opening and Closing Galas are for broad audiences, not just hardcore film geeks; also they're celebratory occasions so very testing or extreme content isn't necessarily appropriate (even though we welcome it elsewhere!). For opening, it's nice where possible to have a Scottish or Edinburgh connection, as with *Hallam Foe* in '07 or *The Illusionist* this year – though that isn't a requirement. And both nights it's important that the director and/or other talent from the film can be around to walk the red carpet.

How does one get a film into the festival?

HM: We have an open submissions process from October through to March, through which anyone can send us a film, in exchange for a small fee. Those submissions are all viewed by at least one of the programming team, usually more, and discussed between us. We also view films year-round either at other festivals or by arrangement with filmmakers, sales agents and distributors. We are always interested to hear of films that are being made that might suit the Festival, whatever their scale of production, and there are staff in the office all year to respond to queries.

Will there be an opportunity to review the films screened by the EIFF by entering a competition this year again?

HM: That competition was arranged by sponsors and it isn't being repeated this particular year I'm afraid. There will, however, be the opportunity for web members to post comments and reviews of films on the website. Keep an eye on our e-bulletins for details of other exciting competitions.

I guess my question has to be why leave it so late to issue the programme and then launch ticket sales? From a purely personal point of view I get married on 5th June and then will be away on honeymoon – returning by the start of the festival – so this gives me very very little time to get my own list sorted out and tickets bought.

HM: Congratulations on your wedding! We do appreciate that this is a much later cut-off and will inconvenience some people. The decision was taken to allow us more time to make the programme as strong as it can be. Previously we locked off and announced the programme and opened the box office unusually early for a film festival – this change does bring us into line with most other events of our sort. While our earlier schedule did give the audience more time to plan, it also resulted in us having to lose a lot of films, because so many sales and release decisions are made around and as a result of Cannes. For ease of booking tickets will be available to buy online and in-person at the Filmhouse from noon on 3 June.

Will the mystery film be back?

We always leave the option of a surprise film so it may be reinstated if the right film comes along.

Huge congratulations on the success of last years fest. I particularly loved Moon and Fish Tank. Given the brilliant success of so many EIFF films from the 2009 event, does that give you more access and bargaining power to get some films or people along to this and future year's fests that you might not have been able?

HM: Thank you for your kind words. We had a great year last year and yes, any success stories do help us out the following year. So keep telling all your friends! Moon and Fish Tank were internationally lauded, but we're also thrilled with

slow-burners like *Let The Right One In*, which is still winning awards after we held its UK premiere in 2008; small ones like the documentary *No Greater Love*, which we world-premiered last year and which was just released to excellent reviews; and unexpected breakouts like the wonderful Irish animation *The Secret of Kells*, which got an Oscar nomination.

The film business is hard to predict and control, and you can never get every single film you want just because of release patterns and talent availability. But we have strong support from the industry and the audience, and a strong international brand, so we present a good case when we're negotiating. Filmmakers who've had a great time here are also brilliant ambassadors.

Can you tell me whether EIFF is likely to consider returning to the Edinburgh Festival calendar in August?

HM: I'm sorry that you're in this situation. I do understand the challenge that our June dates pose to people from elsewhere who want to attend EIFF as well as August events. Unfortunately in August Edinburgh certainly was and remains stretched for facilities and resources – in terms of, for instance, hotel space, physical space in the city and coverage space in the arts press. It was very difficult for us to accommodate our guests and to be reactive or imaginative in terms of venue space and entertainment.

EIFF simply had no room to grow in August, and was losing out on local attendees who were having to choose between events – as well as Edinburgh people who leave the city in August. In August we were also in a very dead month for the European film industry; and we were inconveniently close to the London Film Festival. As our audience is strongly local, and the film industry is our professional context, these factors were strong arguments for change.

While it was not an easy decision, and certain loyal audience members like yourself unfortunately lost out, in fact our attendance and press profile have risen since the move, so it is unlikely we will be changing back any time soon. However, we do have plans to work more with the other Edinburgh

Festivals on film elements in their programmes; and our partner cinema Filmhouse is open for business with special seasons during that period. I hope that you can still get a film fix whilst in Edinburgh in August. Or perhaps you could alternate between June and August...?

Toy Story in 3D!



How lucky are we! This will be the first screening outside the US where it opens on June 18th.

Anyone who has seen Toy Story and Toy Story 2 will know that it will be essential viewing. It will be fun to rediscover Woody and Buzz Lightyear as well as the cowgirl Jessie.

There are new voices behind the third Toy Story, including Timothy Dalton as the new character Mr Pricklepants.....one can only imagine!

Andy is going off to college in this film and so the toys future is up for grabs – by a number of new little people. It is 15 years since Toy Story was released.

The EIFF director Hannah McGill is very excited indeed about the news. She said:-“I’m excited about Toy Story 3 on so many levels. It’s fantastic to continue our relationship with Pixar. It’s a great thrill to have a key 3D film in the Festival, and to be able to provide such a treat for our younger audience members.”

Sorry? Who said anything about the younger audience? It will be all of us adults who long to get tickets for this event!

Tickets go on sale on 3 June at midday....get them if you can!

The Ghost

It left a very unsatisfactory sense of wondering where the plot really was. The idea was there but it seemed the filmmakers had given up resolving all the issues and had decided that the ending would simply have to do, rather than working it out properly.

Brosnan rather disappointingly looks too much like Blair and Olivia Williams does actually resemble Cherie (from a distance with your eyes half-closed).

Kim Cattrall just plays the same character as she did in Sex and The City, so no change there.

The best part of the film is the story behind it, how Polanski had to edit most of it on his laptop in a prison cell. This time Robert Harris has rather disappointed with his story, which is a shame given his past record.

Amusing but only for about half the running time....What did you think?

(The film is known as The Ghost Writer in the US)

The Cameo

Otherwise go to the Cameo website by clicking [here](#)



FESTIVAL THEATRE TO HOST FILM FESTIVAL PREMIERES

The Scottish Government is funding the installation of new digital cinema facilities at Festival Theatre Edinburgh which will enable it to host major film premieres. It will be able to screen 35 mm film, providing a flexible facility for showing a variety of film formats.

Work starts immediately to ensure that the 1600 seat theatre is ready for the Edinburgh International Film Festival this June.

Culture Minister Fiona Hyslop said:

“This project will put Edinburgh firmly in the spotlight as a venue for movie premieres, and enhance Scotland’s digital cinematic offering.

“The new cinema facilities will be ready for this year’s Edinburgh International Film Festival, showcasing the venue to a worldwide audience of film distributors, while providing a fantastic new venue for film fanatics in Scotland.

“The Festival Theatre is already an established venue for theatre, music, dance and opera. The addition of cinema facilities will extend and enrich the theatre’s programming capability.”

John Stalker, Chief Executive of Festival City Theatres Trust, said:

“We are so excited. Together with our soon to be constructed rehearsal facility, the installation of digital cinema completes the original vision and ambition for the Festival Theatre to be Scotland’s pre-eminent national centre for the

creative arts.

“We look forward to working with the Edinburgh International Film Festival, providing it with an elegant and dramatic setting for its red carpet events, screenings and premieres. Throughout the year we also hope to enrich our programme with unique film presentations as well as ultimately broadcasting work performed at the Festival Theatre to other venues around Scotland and beyond. “This is a unique opportunity for the City and for Scotland and we are thrilled that the Festival Theatre is to play such a central role in the future of the Film Festival.”

Hannah McGill, Artistic Director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival said:

“We at EIFF are tremendously excited to add the spectacular Festival Theatre to our list of valued venue partners throughout the city. This is a terrific boost for the Festival and for Edinburgh’s standing in the world of film.”

Ken Hay, Chief Executive of Scottish Screen, said:

“This is fantastic news. The Edinburgh International Film Festival is the UK’s premier film festival. Creating Scotland’s largest digital cinema in Edinburgh will provide the festival with an excellent red carpet venue and give audiences a superb experience.”

Food Inc



Frieda Morrison the former presenter of The Potting Shed chaired the session when all present expressed their shock at

the contents of the film and their hopes that this would not happen here in the UK. The food industry in the US was shown to be run by two or three major corporations who direct the way that their farmers run their businesses.

FOOD INC

‘You are what you eat!’

We have heard it all before. Supermarkets appear to have a great variety of food from a wide variety of sources, but is that really true or has globalisation affected our food chain as well as our economy? Do we really know where our food comes from?

On 17 February 2010 a film is being shown in Edinburgh which you really should not miss if you care about what you eat. Food Inc explores the food we buy and eat. According to the film’s official website www.foodincmovie.com our food has been radically transformed, and that is not all good news for us the consumer. Frieda Morrison, the well respected broadcaster, will be on hand after the film to head up a discussion centred round our dependence on processed food and how that might be altered.

Frieda says:-‘I remember reading about the amount of water it takes to make a beefburger – and according to a European Commission report, within the EU, the food we eat represents nearly a third of our climate footprint as consumers, and yet the food debate and the energy that is wasted in our food production hasn’t reached centre stage in the climate debate, nor has the impact on our diet-related ill health been measured that much, with the patterns of food production. I am really looking forward to the event on the 17th and hearing what the audience has to say after watching the film.’

Food Inc shows how in the US a handful of corporations control the nation’s food supply. Though the companies try to maintain the myth that food still comes from farms with red barns and

white picket fences, food is actually raised on massive “factory farms” and processed in mega industrial plants. The animals grow fatter faster and are designed to fit the machines that slaughter them. Tomatoes are bred to be shipped without bruising and to stay edible for months. The system is highly productive, and Americans are spending less on food than ever before. But, at what cost?

Cattle are given feed that their bodies are not biologically designed to digest, resulting in new strains of E. coli bacteria, which sickens roughly 73,000 Americans annually. And because of the high proliferation of processed foods derived from corn, Americans are facing epidemic levels of diabetes among adults and alarming increases in obesity, especially among children.

Food, Inc. illustrates the dangers of a food system controlled by powerful corporations that don't want you to see, to think about or to criticise how our food is made. The film reveals how complicated and compromised the once simple process of growing crops and raising livestock to feed ourselves and our families has become. But, it also reminds us that despite what appears to be at times a hopeless situation, each of us still has the ability to vote on this issue every day – at breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The Soil Association is the official charity partner of the new Oscar-tipped documentary and through their partnership they are promoting the solutions that organic systems offer, particularly in the UK. They hope that the more people see this film, the more people will understand the work of the Soil Association, a non-profit organisation founded in 1946 by a group of farmers, scientists and nutritionists who observed a direct connection between farming practice and plant, animal, human and environmental health.

Dr Eleanor Logan, Head of Soil Association Scotland said :-
'Eric Schlosser who is co-producer of the film is very aware

of the work that the Soil Association does in the UK and asked if we would like to be official charity partner in the UK. Since the film is highlighting what we have been campaigning about around food it is a perfect match for us and an unbelievable opportunity to get the issues discussed in the mainstream. As we have seen so far, the film has got people talking about where our food comes from and how feed ourselves in very accessible ways. At the end of the film there are a list of things people can do to take control – including campaigning for change and buying local food from local producers. All things we advocate.'

Today the Soil Association is the UK's leading organic organisation, with over 200 staff based in Bristol and Edinburgh and working as certification inspectors across the country. The Soil Association is a charity, reliant on donations and on the support of its members and the public to carry out its work.

For information on why organic matters its best to go to the website

In case you don't make it along to the film then here are some of the facts from Food, Inc.

In the 1970s, the top five beef packers controlled about 25% of the market. Today, the top four control more than 80% of the market.

In the 1970s, there were thousands of slaughterhouses producing the majority of beef sold. Today, we have only 13.

In 1998, the USDA implemented microbial testing for salmonella and E. coli 0157h7 so that if a plant repeatedly failed these tests, the USDA could shut down the plant. After being taken to court by the meat and poultry associations, the USDA no longer has that power.

In 1972, the FDA conducted 50,000 food safety inspections. In 2006, the FDA conducted only 9,164.

During the Bush administration, the head of the FDA was the former executive VP of the National Food Processors

Association.

During the Bush administration, the chief of staff at the USDA was the former chief lobbyist for the beef industry in Washington.

Prior to renaming itself an agribusiness company, Monsanto was a chemical company that produced, among other things, DDT and Agent Orange.

In 1996 when it introduced Round-Up Ready Soybeans, Monsanto controlled only 2% of the U.S. soybean market. Now, over 90% of soybeans in the U.S. contain Monsanto's patented gene.

Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas was an attorney at Monsanto from 1976 to 1979. After his appointment to the Supreme Court, Justice Thomas wrote the majority opinion in a case that helped Monsanto enforce its seed patents.

The average chicken farmer invests over \$500,000 and makes only \$18,000 a year.

32,000 hogs a day are killed in Smithfield Hog Processing Plant in Tar Heel, N.C, which is the largest slaughterhouse in the world.

The average American eats over 200 lbs. of meat a year.

30% of the land in the U.S. is used for planting corn.

The modern supermarket now has, on average, 47,000 products, the majority of which is being produced by only a handful of food companies.

70% of processed foods have some genetically modified ingredient.

SB63 Consumer Right to Know measure requiring all food derived from cloned animals to be labeled as such passed the California state legislature before being vetoed in 2007 by Governor Schwarzenegger, who said that he couldn't sign a bill that pre-empted federal law.

Corn products include: ketchup, cheese, Twinkies, batteries, peanut butter, Cheez-Its, salad dressings, Coke, jelly, Sweet & Low, syrup, juice, Kool-Aid, charcoal, diapers, Motrin, meat and fast food.

Corn, which is the main ingredient in animal feed, is also used as a food additive. Those products commonly include:

Cellulose, Xylitol, Maltodextrin, Ethylene, Gluten, Fibersol-2, Citrus Cloud Emulsion, Inositol, Fructose, Calcium Stearate, Saccharin, Sucrose, Sorbital, High Fructose Corn Syrup, Citric Acid, Di-glycerides, Semolina, Sorbic Acid, Alpha Tocopherol, Ethyl Lactate, Polydextrose, Xanthan Gum, White Vinegar, Ethyl Acetate, Fumaric Acid, Ascorbic Acid, Baking Powder, Zein, Vanilla Extract, Margarine, and Starch.

1 in 3 Americans born after 2000 will contract early onset diabetes; Among minorities, the rate will be 1 in 2.

E. coli and Salmonella outbreaks have become more frequent in America, whether it be from spinach or jalapenos. In 2007, there were 73,000 people sickened from the E. coli virus.

Organics is the fastest growing food segment, increasing 20% annually.

Stop press – [Edinburgh International Film Festival](#) – tickets go on sale on 3 June 2010 – mark this date in your diary!