



• From left: Amelia Earhart, D.B. Cooper, and the Lindbergh baby.

# SAM & MAX: EPISODE 2X02—MOAI BETTER BLUES

So this dog and this rabbit walk into the Bermuda Triangle...

PUBLISHER: Telltale Games/GameTap DEVELOPER: Telltale Games GENRE: Adventure AVAILABILITY: E-tail (www.telltalegames.com or www.gametap.com) ESRB RATING: Teen  
MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 1.5GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 274MB hard drive space MULTIPLAYER: None VERSION REVIEWED: Near-Final Reviewable

## REVIEW

Deep within the Bermuda Triangle, a diaper-wearing baby version of Glenn Miller sips tropical drinks and searches for a hip new sound for his next big single, to be distributed via conch shell for the locals...who happen to be giant, depressed stone Easter Island heads. I'm not sure if that's funny, but it sure is *odd*—a running theme in *Moai Better Blues*, the eighth episode of Telltale Games' *Sam & Max* adventure serial. I've loved a few of these *Sam & Max* episodes to death (*Abe Lincoln Must Die!* and season two starter *Ice Station Santa* in particular), but *Moai's* sense of humor made me say "Huh?" as much as "Ha!"

### D. B. COOPER, EH?

The setup is, of course, completely silly: Former queen of Canada *Sybil* is being chased by a triangular interdimensional portal, which leads to Easter Island, which is inhabited by a trio of talking stone heads (each imbued with different elemental powers) and three Sea Monkeys with three tasks for the detective duo. As with most *Sam & Max* episodes, three is the magic number—and in one joke, the game openly admits its Kabbalistic obsession (though lead designer Dave Grossman says it has less to do with comedy's "rule of three" and more to do with manageable puzzle structure).

The oddest thing is the seeming number of narrative dead ends. Cast regular Jimmy Two-Teeth sets up a new home...but nothing really comes of it. At one point, convenience-store-owner-turned-conspiracy-nut Bosco simply vanishes (though *Moai's* ending—stay past the credits—suggests a later episode may explain this). The baby versions of Amelia Earhart, D. B. Cooper (yeah, I had to Wikipedia him, too), and the Lindbergh baby (yes, the baby version of a baby) act as mere set decoration, which would be fine if they were funny...but as with baby Glenn Miller, I mostly found their presence odd. While a few dialogue

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exchanges are laugh-out-loud funny (this is *Sam & Max*, after all) and a few moments are certain to make series fans grin ear-to-ear, *Moai* settles too often on mere weirdness as its punchline. And *Moai's* story—symptomatic of second episodes, I suppose—doesn't really do much to clue you into the season's overall plot.

### TRIANGULATION

While the writing's miss ratio is a bit higher than most past episodes, the puzzles are some of the smartest in the series yet. Unlike *Santa*—which had a couple head-scratchers that left me thinking Telltale may have taken *Season One* was too easy!—criticisms a bit too seriously—*Moai* has a near-perfect rhythm of perplexity and "aha!" (I never once had to resort to the series' new built-in hint system). Cartoon logic rules, and I'm always impressed when incidental artifacts from previous episodes act as central puzzle pieces later.

But even a *Sam & Max* misstep isn't a stumble, and Telltale still practices the lost art of adventure games with aplomb. This is a series to treasure, even if *Moai* feels like it belongs in a "Lost Episodes" compilation—somewhere in the Bermuda Triangle, no doubt. • Sean Molloy

### VERDICT

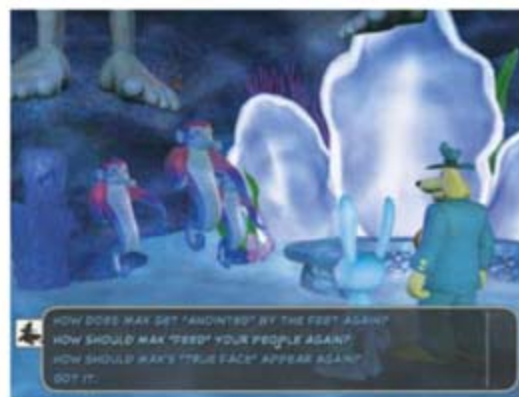
❑ Puzzles are better and smarter than usual.

❑ Not quite as hilarious as usual.

7/10

GOOD

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• *Moai* could've done without this surfing minigame. Hint: Use the keyboard, not the mouse.

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