

Sam & Max

Sam is a six foot tall canine shamus with a slick suit and a tie. Max is a psychotic grinning lagomorph with a penchant for mass destruction. Together they fight crime as “Freelance Police”, investigating numerous idiotic and baffling incidents as directed by a mysterious voice known only as The Commissioner. As a cartoonish mixture of detective mysteries and flat out lunacy, Sam and Max are one of the two most recognizable heroes in adventure gaming (if one could call them heroes, anyway).

Like most good buddy comedies, the charisma derives from the interplay between the eponymous heroes. Sam has a penchant for overtly long sentences, obtuse vocabulary, and elaborate non-sequiturs, all tendencies which frustrate Max to no end. Max is completely naked but apparently stores a massive Luger pistol on his person. (“It’s none of your damn business, Sam.” he replies when asked where he hides it, which has become a running joke.) A good amount of the banter are vague references to past, unseen events, leaving the player to fill in the implications. (“We don’t go upstairs.” “Not since the accident.”) They are both technically sociopaths, but lovable sociopaths, if there were indeed such a thing. Max is violent and homicidal, and approaches mayhem with a curiously child-like glee. Sam is calm and collected, relatively speaking. He’ll occasionally try to suppress Max’s id-like tendencies, but he’s also known to flip into a violent rage, when provoked.



Our two heroes (literally) burst into the scene.

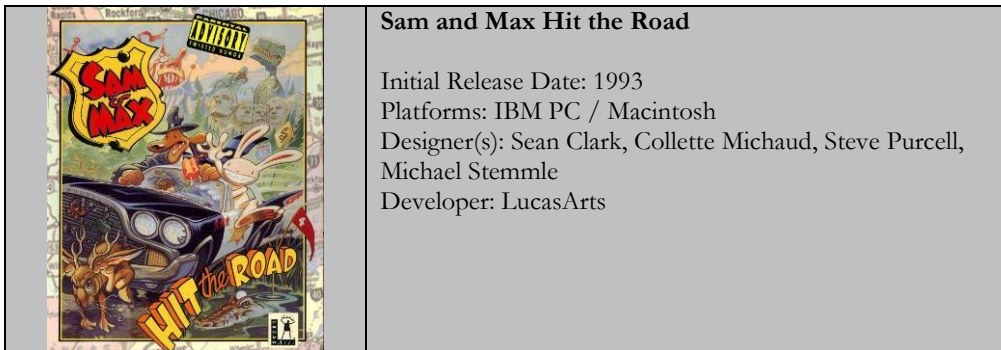
Their craziness is, of course, their main draw. While Sam and Max will regularly drive in a manner most befitting drunkards, haphazardly fire their guns at anything they remotely deem a threat, or otherwise show a complete and total disregard for the safety of both themselves and others, it’s rare that you actually see any of the violence they purport to cause. Wanton destruction of property, yes, but actual shootings and beatings? Not really. Even when Max flies off the handle and ruthlessly pummels someone senseless, the camera obscures the action, with Sam delivering wincing commentary. While the violence is essentially *Looney Tunes* knocked up a couple of levels, the general aversion to showing anything truly horrifying keeps the duo innocuous and lovable, a balancing act that’s hard to pull off with consistent hilarity.

Sam and Max live in New York City, or at least some variation on it. It’s a dilapidated cesspool filled with garbage, crime, and disingenuous advertising, although most of the cynicism is played for laughs. While the heroes exist in a world mostly filled with humans, many of its inhabitants don’t think twice about a six foot tall talking dog and a diminutive but no less bizarre grinning rabbit. Indeed, the duo is relatively normal compared to talking rats, molemen, bigfoots, gigantic cockroaches, and robotic Abraham Lincolns.

There is little restraint in their antics, and pretty much anything goes in the world of Sam and Max. Between the comic, the cartoon and the games, the two travel to the moon, fight volcano gods, befriend the devil and defeat an evil Santa Claus. They drive an old DeSoto, which can travel everywhere around the globe (and beyond) with seemingly mystical powers. (Except for the time they travel into the outer space, which they accomplish by sticking numerous matches into their exhaust pipe and lighting them.)

Sam and Max got their start as doodles by a young aspiring comic book artist named Steve Purcell. Based on some crude drawings done by his little brother, they soon starred in their own small series of independent comic books, published beginning in 1987. Shortly thereafter, Purcell found professional work doing artwork for LucasArts on *Zak McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders*. His characters quickly became popular around the office, and Max's visage can be found in many of their games. Eventually, they starred in short comics for The Adventurer, LucasArts' product catalog, thereby making them sort-of official mascots. But their big break came with *Sam and Max Hit the Road*, their first computer game, released in 1993. It was a massive hit, and in 1997, Sam & Max even starred in their own cartoon series.

Despite their relative popularity, LucasArts was never able to follow up on it. A sequel was devised several years later, but was cancelled in 2004 due to "market conditions". Shortly thereafter, Purcell re-obtained the license for his characters and hooked up with Telltale Games, a then-new studio comprised of some former LucasArts staff that focused on adventure games. Throughout three "seasons", each consisting of five-to-six episodes digitally distributed online, Telltale resurrected the brand, and brought Sam & Max back into the limelight.



There's something strange going on at the carnival! Bruno the Bigfoot has disappeared, and has kidnapped Trixie the Giraffe-Necked Girl. The owners are eager to have their sideshow attraction freaks returned to them, so Sam and Max are enlisted to hunt them down. They quickly end up following the tracks of one Conroy Bumpus, a diminutive, arrogant country music star with a penchant for hunting endangered species. Their investigations take them across the entire country, as they discover the true mystery behind Bruno's disappearance, and save the Bigfoot race in the process.

Sam & Max Hit the Road is about one of the greatest American traditions – the tourist trap. Practically anyone that's taken a road trip in the Great USA can recall any number of bizarre, inane attractions positioned on the long stretches of highway, existing to lure in unsuspecting families with promises of something truly wacky. The America portrayed in *Sam & Max Hit the Road* is filled with such attractions, usually exaggerated, but only slightly. Beyond their office in New York and the carnival, each location pays homage to various roadside disasters.

The World's Largest Ball of Twine is exactly what it sounds like. (There's a real one of these in Minnesota, but it's not quite as large, nor do you need to take a cable car to reach the top.) The World of Fish is a glorified river bed. Bumpusville is a museum dedicated to Conroy Bumpus, not too far off from similar locations in the honor of Elvis Presley and (horrifyingly

enough) Dolly Parton. The Celebrity Vegetable Museum will grow you a vegetable in the shape of any person, assuming you can provide them with a photograph. The Mystery Vortex is an enigma where the laws of physics don't seem to apply. And the glorious, breathtaking Mount Rushmore has been demoted to a bungee jumping attraction/dinosaur park. The ubiquitous roadside gas station/restaurant Stuckey's also appears in parody form as "Snuckey's", which are all (almost) spookily identical to each other and houses employees who graduate from the distinguished Snuckey University.



Max takes a no-nonsense approach to puzzle solving.

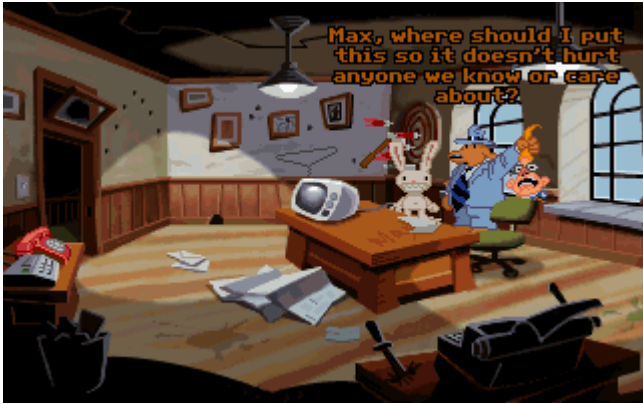
At first, there's not a whole lot of guidance, as progress is made by finding various souvenirs or brochures, which opens up new locations on the United States map. Eventually your goals become clear – the first major one involves collecting bits of Bruno's fur for a bizarre ritual concocted by the molemen, a strange hybrid race unique to the *Sam & Max* universe. Other tasks involve assembling a makeshift bigfoot costume, and finding arbitrary items to solve some kind of mystical totem pole puzzle. Like most LucasArts games, many involve finding a series of three-or-four different items, using various stuff scattered around each of the locations. One involves fetching a mood ring hidden in the World's Largest Ball of Twine, which is obtained by combining a magnet, a golf-ball retriever, and a severed hand (which once belonged to Jesse James). Despite how cracked out that sounds, the puzzles actually aren't too difficult by LucasArts standards, and the quest isn't terribly long either.

It just also might be one of the funniest games LucasArts ever produced. They've made so many winners, so it's hard to pick out one, but *Sam & Max Hit the Road* continuously hits the high notes with their dry, witty dialogue. The introduction sequence might be one of the best in the history of the medium, where they briefly discuss what to do with a ticking time bomb obtained in the earlier scene. "Max, where should I put this so it doesn't hurt anyone we know or care about?" Sam muses. "Out the window, Sam. There's nothing but strangers out there." Sure enough, he chucks out the window, where it detonates not-so-harmlessly off screen. "I sure hope there was no one on that bus." "No one we know, at least..."

Try to continuously pick up an immovable object and Sam will grow frustrated before bursting into tears, causing Max to directly threaten the player. At one point, Sam enters the world of virtual reality, rendered in extraordinarily crude polygons, a quaint reminder of how awful early 3D graphics looked. One of the best bits is a history lesson on naturalist John Muir, in the form of a song as performed by a series of mounted animal heads, complete with a blinking "Edutainment" sign.

The SCUMM interface in *Hit the Road* has been cut back a bit. The command window is gone, so the main visuals can take the full screen. All of the verbs have been condensed into five icons: "Walk", "Look", "Talk", "Get" and "Operate". Although you control Sam, Max also tags

along, and playfully pokes and prods at bits of the background. He's also useful for bits of puzzle solving. One of the first puzzles is to extract their orders from a cat, who's swallowed them for safe keeping. Just "Use" Max on the cat, and he'll pick him up, jam his hand down his throat, and chuck the useless feline to the side. The second major puzzle involves sabotaging a Tunnel of Love ride. You do this by picking up Max, dipping him in the water, and jamming him face-first into the fuse-box. He doesn't mind – afterward, he just blinks and keeps on grinning, completely unfazed, and perhaps even slightly elated.



Sam and Max's office provide a home base for all of their mayhem.


The conversation system has been changed slightly too. Instead of picking the exact lines of dialogue spoken, all options are designated by icons. There are three standard ones – a question mark, an exclamation point, and a rubber ducky, indicating a non sequitur. Further chatting will also bring up icons to discuss other topics. It works pretty well, because you're never quite sure what will come out of their mouths until you pick an option. Conversations are usually quick and to the point, though, and while the dialogue is often hilarious, it almost feels like they should be longer. One of the most entertaining characters is the swearing swami, whose expletives are censored. "Percent sign, ampersand, dollar sign." "And colon, semicolon too!" Sam and Max remarks. "What are you &#*in' doing?" the swami asks. "Swearing in longhand, asterisk-mouth." Sam replies.



The World's Largest Ball of Twine is mighty impressive.

Unlike many LucasArts games, there are numerous minigames. These take the form of a Whack-a-Rat game (just like Whack-a-Mole, of course) and Car Bomb, a variant of *Battleship* using cars. There's also a 3D driving game where you drive down the highway and make Max jump over signs. Outside of the Whack-a-Rat game, none of these are mandatory, and they're mostly just there so you can distract yourself from the main game.

Sam & Max Hit the Road is such a brilliant little game. It's filled with fantastic attention to detail, and practically every dryly delivered line is eminently quotable. The voice acting is stellar, the bright cartoonish graphics are beautiful, and the bouncy nightclub jazz soundtrack feels strangely fitting. In other words, it's a true classic.

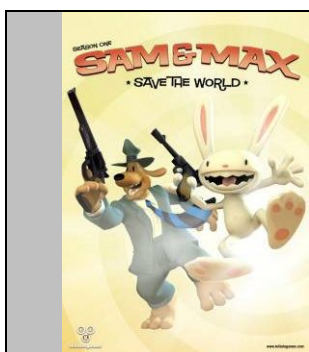
	<p>Sam and Max: Freelance Police</p> <p>Initial Release Date: Never (cancelled) Platforms: None Designer(s): Michael Stemmler Developer: LucasArts</p>
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Things were awful for adventure gaming at the turn of the 21st century. LucasArts' brilliant *Grim Fandango* underperformed and *Escape from Monkey Island* didn't particularly go over well with fans. There were a number of projects in development after these, all of which would eventually be cancelled, including an *Indiana Jones* game, two attempts at a *Full Throttle* sequel, and sadly, a new *Sam & Max* game.



One of the few screenshots of the cancelled Sam & Max game.

While the other games had run into development issues, *Sam & Max: Freelance Police* had apparently been going quite well, until LucasArts suddenly pulled the plug in 2004. Their reasoning was typical of the time – the brass didn't think that the marketplace could sustain an adventure game, and would continue to churn out crappy *Star Wars* games instead. All that exists are a handful of screenshots showing the new 3D graphics and some small notes about the story. It was to contain six smaller stories held together by one larger plot, the nature of which was never revealed. While fans were heartbroken at the news, it eventually spurred some of the designers to form Telltale Games, who would obtain the *Sam & Max* license for themselves and continue the legacy.



Season One: Sam and Max Save the World

Initial Release Date: 2006

Platforms: IBM PC / Xbox 360 / Wii

Designer(s): Brendan Q. Ferguson, David Grossman, Steve Purcell, Charles Jordan, Jeff Lester, Heather Lee Logas

Developer: Telltale Games

The cancellation of *Sam & Max: Freelance Police* was seen as a tremendous blow to the adventure gaming market, which by 2004 was subsisting almost solely on indie games and low budget European-developed titles. However in 2005, Dan Connors, Kevin Bruner and Troy Molander founded Telltale Games, with the eventual intention of creating new adventure games. Eventually, an opportunity arose – the rights to *Sam & Max* had reverted back to Steve Purcell, so Telltale purchased the rights for themselves and began to develop a new series starring the duo. However, since they were still a small company and adventure games were risky business, they decided to adopt an episodic model – each month, a small portion of the game would become available to download, with the full game spread over the course of six months. All six episodes would form what would eventually become known as *Season One: Sam and Max Save the World*.

Like the concept for the cancelled *Freelance Police* game, *Season One* features six distinct, largely standalone stories, held together loosely by the recurring threat of hypnosis. As such, there's not much plot development, at least until the end when the big baddie is revealed. You could probably get away with playing them in any order (except the final episode), because outside of a few small elements, there's not much that carries over from episode to episode.

In order to develop each episode in a timely manner, the Telltale games reuse many assets, with each mission starting at Sam & Max's headquarters, branching out into their neighborhood, and then reaching out further to a unique location. In addition to their office, there are two stores to visit on their block. One is Bosco's Inconvenience Store, which had previously made an appearance in *Hit the Road*, although you couldn't actually see the interior or talk to the proprietor. You can walk inside this time and gaze on the horror of disgusting hot dogs and artificial cheese. Bosco is now a pretty major character, an affable but paranoid wacko who develops increasingly complicated security schemes and changes his persona from episode to episode – while he's "normal" in the first episode, he tries to be British in the second episode (complete with monocle), French in the third, and so forth. His disguises are flimsy and his fake accents are ridiculously bad, much to Sam and Max's amusement. Despite his insanity, he's also a talented inventor, and will nearly always have some kind of device that's vital to progression, even though it's usually some hastily MacGuyvered piece of crap sold at an exorbitant price.

On the other side of the road is Sybil, a young woman who constantly reinvents her store every episode. She starts off as a psychiatrist, and then eventually moves into professional witnessing (which is as odd as it sounds) and product beta testing. Like Bosco, her Career of the Week will always prove to be in some way relevant to the case at hand.

The first episode, *Culture Shock*, acts as an introduction to the reborn series, to acclimate both old fans and newcomers to Sam & Max's neighborhood. The area has come under assault by The Soda Poppers, a group of former child stars who have become low quality vandals, spray painting the neighborhood with the visage of Brady Culture, an afro-wearing guru who promotes Eye-Bo, a unique type of ocular exercise. Sam and Max quickly realize that the diminutive duo is being hypnotized, although they themselves are invulnerable – Sam is protected by his hat, and Max's obtuse biology simply renders it ineffective. After figuring out a

method to break the subject free of their hypnotism – smashing them on the head seems to work – they track down Brady and confront him.

The second episode, *Situation: Comedy*, involves an Oprah-esque talk show host named Myra who has, literally, held her audience (and her viewers) captive via hypnosis. In order to break onto the set, Sam and Max need to star in a series of other unrelated TV shows in order to prove their credentials. The two get a starring role in *Midtown Cowboys*, a thoroughly stupid show about two cowboys living in Manhattan who need to hide their cow from their landlord. Also, their landlord is a talking chicken. This episode also introduces the flamboyantly cheerful Hugh Bliss, leader of Prismotology, a religion/cult who follow the colors of the rainbow, as well as Philo Pennyworth, the aforementioned talking chicken who’s actually a trained Shakespearean actor slumming it on network television.



The animated statue of Abraham Lincoln proves to be a mighty political opponent.

In the third episode, *The Mob, The Mole, and the Meatball*, Sam and Max follow-up on a lead from the last episode, wherein they learned that Myra’s audience was hypnotized by a stuffed teddy bear on her desk. This bear is traced back to the Toy Mafia, a crime organization which runs an incredibly bright and cheery casino. Here, you get to break the soul of a shady gambler through a series of “Yo Mama” jokes. The catch is, Sam only knows the beginnings of the insults, while Max only knows the endings, so you need to use both of their skills for full effect. It’s a segment that falls flat, because there’s a sparse amount of responses, making it all too easy.

The fourth episode, *Abe Lincoln Must Die!*, brings Sam & Max to the White House, to investigate a series of bizarre laws passed by the President of the United States, including one that requires group hugging at all sporting events. With a bit of effort, they learn that the Commander-in-Chief is, quite literally, a puppet. In an emergency election, the statue of Abraham Lincoln from the Lincoln Memorial leaves his chair and begins to start campaigning, but he too appears to be in cahoots with the hypnotizing scheme. To combat this menace, Max runs for president himself, and must ruin Lincoln’s speeches so he gives upsetting answers to various national issues. Once Max gets elected, the evil Lincoln goes crazy and starts rampaging through the streets. Not only that, but North and South (and the newly formed West) Dakota have declared war on each other over the possession of Mt. Rushmore, making Max’s opening days quite troublesome.

Sam and Max take on the Internet in the fifth episode, *Reality 2.0*, where the denizens of the planet have been enslaved by a new virtual reality simulator, which creates a parallel version of the neighborhood in cyberspace. Here we meet the “Computer Obsolescence Prevention Society”, otherwise known as the COPS. This group includes Bluster Blaster, an ‘80s arcade machine who speaks entirely in angry exclamations and was inspired by the game *Simstar*; Bob

Bell, an automated telephone answering system who sounds suspiciously like Mr. Moviefone; Curt, an old Osbourne-1 who speaks with a voice synthesis unit and has a fondness of overtly technical terminology; and Chippy, a *Pong* machine who can only speak in bleeps or bloops. Together, they control various aspects of Reality 2.0, and can be messed with to hack the parameters of Sam and Max's avatars. This episode features tons of geek humor, as you need to gather coins *Super Mario Bros.*-style to buy stuff from Bosco, who has gotten hooked on RPGs and dubbed himself a half-elf. You also get roped into a few turn-based RPG battles (including one against a slime, a nod to *Dragon Quest*) and find a save point that looks suspiciously like the floating multi-sided ball things from *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*. In the final segment, Sam and Max find themselves inside a text adventure (although navigation is determined by picking selections from a menu) as virtual reality crumbles around them, which is written in the typically deadpan Infocom style.



Like the comics and the cartoon show, Sam & Max eventually end up on the moon.

The final chapter, *Bright Side of the Moon*, finds all the plot threads loosely coming together, as Sam and Max travel to the moon, where the big bad has set up his fortress. Here you'll find several old characters, all of whom have also fled into outer space to find fulfillment. Here, Max's vices will be separated from his person, and take on troublesome physical forms. This leaves the real Max as a listless shadow of his former self, so Sam needs to reassemble all of the parts of his buddy before the final showdown.

Beyond the episodic nature of the series, numerous aspects are significantly different from its LucasArts incarnation. The interface uses a single-icon cursor for all actions, although there are tons of hotspots to interact with and comment on, so at least it doesn't feel as barren as most modern adventure games. The dialogue system is more direct, with the exact lines of dialogue to choose. Max isn't used for puzzles any more, and in fact, usually just gets in the way, causing Sam to knock him into the sky and land harmlessly seconds later. In a few instances, he can also join in conversations with unique dialogue options. There are also a few arcade-style driving sequences, although they're mostly used for simple puzzles, and are quite easy.

Perhaps the biggest change is the emphasis on story, dialogue and characterization. In *Hit the Road*, outside of Sam and Max, none of the secondary characters played any real role beyond acting as signposts. While the dialogue there was quick and snappy, it's much more drawn out in the Telltale games. It offers substantially more characterization and storytelling, but the writing is often inconsistent, resulting in lots of blathering or jokes that just plain aren't funny. In general, the dialogue just isn't as dry nor as witty as *Hit the Road*. There tends to be too much reliance on things that are conceptually amusing, like the Soda Poppers (washed up ex-child stars, isn't that just crazy?!?), and they end up totally beating the joke into the ground with little

payoff. This is because there are usually something like half a dozen designers that worked on the season altogether, which accounts for some of the differences. The voice work is generally excellent, although Sam and Max have completely new voice actors (Max’s even changes again after the first episode) and they just aren’t quite as good. Like the cartoon series, Sam’s actor can’t quite pull off the more sarcastic lines, and Max is missing his vaguely Brooklyn-ish accent.



Graphically, the Telltale Sam & Max looks a lot like the cancelled Freelance Police game.

While it takes a few episodes for *Season One* to find its footing – it’s not until *Abe Lincoln Must Die!* that Telltale really finds their voice and does something really worthy of the characters – but it’s still a great start. However, the later seasons are substantially improved, making this one seem weaker in comparison. In addition to the PC release, *Season One* was published on the Xbox Live Arcade and as a physical release on the Wii. Neither are worthwhile – it’s tough to control the Xbox version, and the Wii version is quite glitchy, with a choppy framerate and dialogue that gets clipped off at the end of lines.

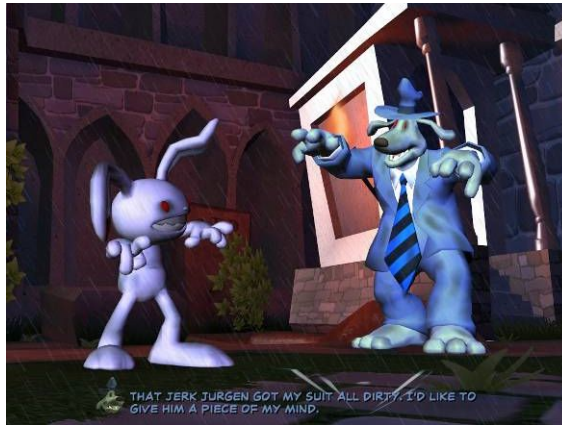
	<p>Season Two: Sam and Max Beyond Time and Space</p> <p>Initial Release Date: 2008 Platforms: IBM PC / Xbox 360 / Wii / Macintosh Designer(s): Brendan Q. Ferguson, David Grossman, Heather Lee Logas, Charles Jordan, Ian Dallas, Jeff Lester, Steve Purcell Developer: Telltale Games</p>
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Season Two of Telltale’s *Sam and Max* series, retroactively named *Beyond Time and Space*, is much the same as the first. It features five episodes instead of six, and it focuses on various supernatural occurrences – demonic possession, vampires and zombies, alien conspiracies, and so forth – all loosely tied together. From a technical standpoint, it allows widescreen support, but little has changed otherwise. You’ll also see some familiar faces – Bosco is still running his convenience store, and Sybil can be found courting the head of Abraham Lincoln. The COPS have also taken up residence on the block, operating a body shop called Pimp le Car.

The second season also introduces two new (-ish) characters. Flint Paper, who showed up in the comics and appeared off-screen in *Hit the Road*, is Sam and Max's next door neighbor, who happens to be hard-boiled (albeit rather friendly) private detective. And Stinky is the proprietor of the local diner, a rather shapely young aqua haired woman who inherited the place (and her name) from her mysteriously absent grandfather. She's a pathological liar, as well as an appalling cook, and numerous suspicions are raised about her murdering the real Stinky. (You can find her scrubbing a blood stain from the counter, yelling "Out, damn spot!")

Like in the previous episodes, you'll usually visit some far off location and need to make return trips to the home block for various important items. It's still formulaic, but at least the framework and characters have changed up a bit, so it feels fresher. All of the episodes are also introduced with a nonsensical "based on" quote on the title card, much like the comic books.

Ice Station Zebra (Based on the obscure holiday penny dreadful "Sam & Max in the Case of the Frostbitten Protuberance") begins with the neighborhood being terrorized by a gigantic robot who has a thing for misquoting '80s pop music. After disposing of him, Max uncovers a terrible secret – the lumbering monstrosity was a misguided Christmas gift sent by none other than Santa Claus itself. A quick jaunt to the North Pole reveals that Saint Nick has gone stark raving mad, having barricaded himself in his room and holding his elves hostage at gunpoint. To complete this episode you'll need to go on a *Christmas Carol*-esque journey through time, using the past, present and future to manipulate the rat Jimmy Two-Teeth and his son Tim, who has a terminal case of Tourette's Syndrome. There's also a rather brilliant *Punch-Out!!* homage as a minigame, complete with a near replica of the original music and sound effects.



Sam and Max end up as zombies in the third episode of season two.

Moai Better Blues (Based on the unfinished teleplay "Sam & Max Jump in a Triangle") kicks off with Sam and Max, along with Sybil and Abe, being sucked into the Bermuda Triangle – apparently they're halfway-sentient portals rather than an actual place – and transported to Easter Island. It's here where they discover the Fountain of Youth, along with a number of historical characters that have mysteriously disappeared – Amelia Earhart, Glenn Miller and Jimmy Hoffa. They've all become addicted to the water of the fountain, and have thus reverted into talking babies. Sam & Max need to lightly drink from the fountain to solve a puzzle or two, temporarily turning them into precocious youths. The ultimate goal is to stop the explosion of a local volcano, which you'll need to do by convincing a tribe of sea gorillas that Max is their true High Priest, and not the dead goldfish they are currently worshipping.

In *Night of the Raving Dead* (Based on the heretical apocrypha "Sam & Max Meet a Guy Who Sucks"), zombies have been unleashed over the globe, and their source is traced to a castle in Stuttgart, Germany. Sources indicate this place is named "The Zombie Factory", but that's not

literal, and it's more of a dance club for the undead. Its lord is a vampire named Jurgen, an effeminate goth who gets his powers from his sense of style, and bears more than a passing resemblance to Sacha Baron Cohen's Brüno character. After ruining Jurgen's cool (in the process partaking in another shooting of *Midtown Cowboys*, which is mysteriously popular in Germany), the duo are unceremoniously murdered (complete with a *Resident Evil*-style "YOU HAVE DIED" blood splatter) and are cursed to wander the world as zombies. The rest of the episode is spent reuniting Sam and Max's souls with their corporeal bodies, and destroying Jurgen for good.



The Time Mariachis are pretty bizarre, even for a Sam & Max game.

The fourth chapter, *Chariot of the Dogs* (Based on the best selling addle-brained musings of noted aliens-made-all-our-stuff theorist Erich Von Dannyohday), picks up with Sam and Max being abducted by a mysterious spaceship. They run into Bosco, who, as it turns out, was completely justified in his absurd paranoia, and has been captured by a mysterious entity called T.H.E.M. He has also been turned into a half-cow. He can only be saved by time traveling through the ages, where they run into Bosco's mom and cause a *Back to the Future*-style paradox which threatens his existence. Time travel was used to an extent in earlier segments, but here it's the crux of the episode. While potentially comparable to *Day of the Tentacle*, in *Chariot of the Dogs*, it's a bit too convoluted, especially when it comes to dealing with Sam and Max's alternate selves. Once all of that confusion is cleared up, Sam and Max have to deal with the Time Mariachis, the owners of the ship, who have formed a pact with Hell to deliver souls into the afterlife in exchange for the ability to warp through time and sing birthday songs. These games have always been quite surreal, but when it comes to the events of this episode, the story becomes head-scratchingly weird.

In the final episode, *What's New, Beelzebub?* (Based on the heartwarming holiday sestina "Sam & Max Meet the Father of Lies"), Sam and Max enter Hell in search of Bosco's soul. It's not exactly filled with the fire and brimstone that one usually pictures, as Hell is actually closer to a corporate office, complete with a cubicle farm. It's far from pleasant, for the most part – every day is Monday and the clock is perpetually stuck at 4:59. And Satan, while still a scary and imposing guy, is too busy running the bureaucracy that is the afterlife, and just doesn't have the time to be properly evil. Here Sam and Max meet numerous past villains, some of whom are actually quite happy in their positions as the damned. Rather shockingly, our heroes discover a shrine erected in their honor, where they find the souls of those who have perished due to their reckless behavior. In addition to Bosco, there are a handful of others, including their DeSoto, who are trapped in their own personal hells. After rescuing them, Sam and Max get damned themselves and need to escape from their own nightmares. At the same time, Satan himself is

fired from his position as Lord of the Underworld by an even more nefarious villain, and so Sam and Max must come to his rescue.



Hell, a Limited Liability Company.

Overall, *Season Two* is a substantial improvement over the first one, if mostly because it's more consistent, and doesn't take nearly as long to reach an appropriate level of funny. In addition to the standard PC release, it can also be found in downloadable form on the Xbox Live marketplace, and as a retail release for the Wii. While the Wii port is a step above the first one, as it fixes the dialogue glitches, it still has some performance issues, and is best avoided.

	<p>Sam and Max Season 3: The Devil's Playhouse</p> <p>Initial Release Date: 2010 Platforms: IBM PC / PlayStation 3 / iPad Designer(s): Charles Jordan, Andy Hartzell, Michael Stemmler, Joe Pinney, Brendan Q. Ferguson, David Grossman Developer: Telltale Games</p>
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The Devil's Playhouse marks a further evolution for the Telltale *Sam & Max* seasons. Although still consisting of five episodes, they tell a continuous story rather than dealing with unrelated incidents connected only by vague recurring themes. This time it revolves around a legendary artifact called The Devil's Toybox, which is sought by various entities for a number of reasons. Of course due to the episodic nature, the story runs off on various tangents as they concentrate on the villains and their plans in each episode, but it's also far more cohesive than either previous season. Each episode also ends with a cliffhanger which leads directly into the next.

There's also far less repetition, as the routine has been broken quite a bit. While the exterior of Sam and Max's office still plays a recurring role in the story, it's no longer the hub of each episode, and the scenery is usually entirely different from case to case. You no longer need to visit Sybil or Bosco or the COPS every episode – in fact, these characters only play small roles in the story, if they even appear at all. (Bosco is completely absent.) Instead of just spoofing various movie titles, it parodies various motion picture genres. One plays with old-time

adventure flicks. Another takes a page from detective noir. Homages are also made to zombie and kaiju films. Some characters are still re-used, but it's less much inappropriate than some of Telltale's other games.

In addition to the change in structure, the third season brings about some enhancements to the engine. The visuals have been improved, although not substantially, and are set to widescreen regardless of your monitor size. The interface has been changed to the one found in *Tales of Monkey Island*, where you control Sam using the keyboard and use the mouse cursor to interact with stuff. The dialogue system has been yanked from *Mass Effect*, with a radial menu that features various topics, rather than explicit lines of dialogue. Many of these seem to make it more playable on a console, although it functions well enough on the computer.

Max also has newfound access to a variety of psychic powers. "Future Vision" lets you peek a few moments forward in time. It is not merely a hint function, because most of the time, its usage is mandatory to figure out what you're supposed to be doing. In one early example, if you use Future Vision on Flint, you'll see him get murdered by an axe. Just give him a helmet to protect him, and you're set. Obviously, this puzzle makes no sense unless you've used this skill. "Ventriloquism" allows you to project your voice into different characters or objects. Not technically a psychic power, Sam remarks, but a useful skill nonetheless. "Teleportation" lets you visit any location with a phone, as long as you have its number. It's mostly used to speed transitions between locations, although there are a few puzzles involving it as well. "Mind Reading" is obvious enough. "Rhinoplasty" gives you a piece of silly putty, which you can use to copy an item and make Max transform into it

So many of the puzzles (and extra gags) are focused on the psychic powers that they become the crux of the gameplay. Most of their usage is remarkably clever, since many of them provide clues without solving the puzzle outright, and it's up to the player to interpret them. For all of its ingenuity, though, certain puzzles are a bit overused, especially when it comes to the Rhinoplasty skill. The specific powers vary from episode to episode, gaining some and losing some as appropriate.

Each chapter is introduced by the Narrator, who explains the scenario much like Rod Serling from *The Twilight Zone*, with a pinch of Bela Lugosi's "god" character from various Ed Wood movies. His scenes are entirely in black and white, except for the red rose on his lapel. They're gloriously cheesy and melodramatic, and the way this frame story ties into the main plot is one of the most brilliant moments of the Telltale seasons.



Sameth and Maximus meet up with the baby Amelia Earhart.

The first chapter, *The Penal Zone* (Based on the classic instructional video "How to Use Your New SM-301 Industrial Strength Dehumidifier"), introduces the world to Skun-ka'pe. (It's pronounced "skun-KAH-pay", although the heroes just call him "Skunkape".) He's a space

gorilla who happens to be a toy collector. His goal? To find the Devil's Toybox, a mysterious artifact filled with items which hold various psychic powers. Of course, Max gets a hold of them instead, which is the cause for hijinx. In an interesting twist, the introduction to the chapter finds Sam and Max captured by Skun-ka'pe, but this is merely a vision of the future told by Max's powers. Once returned to the present, the heroes are already well aware of the threats presented to them, and try to avoid them. Naturally, things don't quite work out as planned.

Compared to some of the other chapters, *The Penal Zone* is relatively restrained, at least as restrained as one can get when combating tyrannical intergalactic apes. Most of the chapter involves driving around the city and figuring out the various mechanisms of Skun-ka'pe's spaceship. The eventual goal is to damn the villain to the Penal Zone, an alternate dimension used to punish and contain intergalactic threats. This naturally leads to some juvenile but reasonably funny jokes. ("Not only did I defeat Sam & Max, but I took care of the Penal Zone in one stroke!" Skun-ka'pe proclaims, much to Max's bemusement.)

The Tomb of Sammun-Mak (Based on the scandalous 19th Century zoetrope "The Lady Visits Her Chiropractor") takes place after banishing Skun-ka'pe to the Penal Zone. Sam and Max discover a pair of skeletons in the basement of their office building. They look suspiciously like the duo, with Sam grappling Max's neck. Clearly disturbed, they find a projector with four film reels, which recount the exploits of their great-grandfathers, Sameth and Maximus. This old-timey partnership look and act much like their descendents, except Sameth has a mustache and Maximus actually wears clothes. Together, they must uncover the *Riddle of the Sphunx*, a cheesy stageshow led by the suspicious Monsieur Paperwaite. This eventually leads them to the Tomb of the Sammun-Mak in Egypt, where they need to steal the Devil's Toybox and make it sure it arrives safely back home in New York.

In the meantime, they need to deal with the mole people, who are positioned as a mish-mash of various ethnic groups. They are the guardians of the tombs, technically making them Egyptians, but their accents make them sound like Eastern-Europeans. They also have the power to inflict curses, which is actually mandatory for certain puzzles. Many characters from prior games have been reused, which feels a little bit lazy. Santa Claus reappears as Mr. Kringle, the maleficent toy mogul, although interacting with his goofy legion of elves is amusing, as you get to visit their ghetto in "New Arctic Circle". Also appearing is Baby Amelia Earhart from *Moai Better Blues*, for no real reason, and Jurgen, back in his pre-vampire days.



They stole Max's brain! And when that happens, there's hell to pay.

This episode uses a unique gimmick, in that the storyline is not entirely linear. Each "act" is encapsulated on one of the four reels, and you actually begin in the middle of the third one. However, you need to change reels in order to get necessary information from previous parts of the plot. For example, when trying to escape from the tomb, Sameth and Maximus need to

decode some hieroglyphics. They don't know how to do this, but upon transporting back to an earlier reel, they can question one of the mole people for the answer. Naturally, the fourth reel is the epilogue, and can only be properly completed once you've finished the first three. Not only it is remarkably innovative, but it's also the first real time you can actually "die" in a *Sam & Max* game. If you screw up, though, Sam and Max simply rewind the film in the present day, allowing you to immediately redo your actions.

The third episode is entitled *They Stole Max's Brain!* (Based on the similarly-titled novel by Jane Austen). During the finale of the Sammum-Mak film, Sam sneaks off to take a bathroom break. He returns to find Max's lifeless body, with his head unzipped and his brain stolen. Going completely unhinged, Sam goes on a rampage around town, browbeating various witnesses to figure out the location of the perpetrators. This film noir parody takes the form of an elaborate dialogue puzzle, where Sam can threaten or accuse the questionees at various points in their monologues, getting them to spill more information. These truths can then be used to call out other witnesses, as you slowly piece together the truth. (It's also somewhat similar to the courtroom scenes in Capcom's *Ace Attorney* scenes.) During these interrogations, there's also an option labeled "Noir", which will prompt Sam to meander off into a darkly cheesy metaphor. This section is awesome, if only to see the normally straight-laced Sam charge on an anger-fueled frenzy, verbally pummeling the poor schmucks that get in his way.



The narrator ties together the whole story rather brilliantly.

The trail eventually leads to the Museum of Almost Natural History, where Skun-ka'pe, who has escaped from the Penal Zone, and Paperwaite, who is now immortal, are fighting over possession of the Devil's Toybox, using Max's psychic brain to unlock its secrets. However, they briefly ally their powers against Sam, their common enemy. At this point, Sam discovers the preserved brain of an ancient pharaoh – Sammum-Mak, of course – and uses it to reanimate Max's body. They manage to overtake Skun-ka'pe and Paperwaite, only for Sammum-Mak to take control of the toybox and use it to enslave the city through his brainwashing powers. The only one unaffected is Max, still separated from his body and merely a brain in a jar strapped to Sam's back. It's up to their strained partnership to connect with the underground resistance, knock everyone back into their senses, and take down the deluded psychic pharaoh. This episode also introduces two new characters – Sal, a rather genial giant cockroach who sounds a lot like Patrick Warburton, and Hubert Q. Tourist, a perpetually confused European (you guessed it) tourist with a penchant for peppering his speech with German-sounding gibberish.

They Stole Max's Brain! has been criticized by gamers for playing too much with the dynamic between the heroes. Max is completely missing from the first act, while Sammum-Mak takes his place in the second. They share some commonalities, mostly in their delight for violence, but something doesn't feel right, and Sam is clearly disturbed. And in the third act, Max isn't fully

able to interact with Sam, due to his zombified status. While it removes some of the familiarity, in the end it actually works to strengthen the bond between the two. It shows how much the duo depends on each other, as both are clearly ill at ease without the other's presence.

In *Beyond the Alley of the Dolls* (Loosely based on the forbidden scrimshaw carvings of Bob Keeshan), the city is overrun by an army of Sam clones, all clad in only their undies. Shackled up in Stinky's Diner and attempting to defend themselves a la any number of zombie flicks, the duo find a secret lab underground with hundreds of cloned Sams. The conspiracy takes further twists, culminating in a battle on the Statue of Liberty. This episode introduces Yog-Soggoth, a Cthulhu-like entity from a different dimension. While he once sought to become the lord of humanity, he's cooled off a bit since then, and is more than content to simply find his way home. He's also in a weakened state, as he only exists as a tumor in the chest of one of the other characters. Yog-Soggoth aids in your quest to avert the resurrection of his son, Junior, whose attitude towards humanity may not be as pleasant as his own.

In the final chapter, *The City That Never Sleeps* (Based on the Cherished '80s Adult Film, "Totally Into Max"), Junior's seed has accidentally been fused with Max, turning him into a gigantic Lovecraftian monster and unleashing a Godzilla-like spree across New York City. He feeds off the dreams of the populace, so none of them can fall asleep, hence the title. This episode sees the return of characters who were missing from previous episodes, including Sybil (now very pregnant with Abraham Lincoln's child) and Mr. Featherly, although Bosco is still absent. The cast gets together to formulate a plan to get inside Max's gigantic belly, which involves turning the DeSoto into an enormous corndog.

Max's interior is far from the typical biological setting, as each of his major organs has been redone to look like the interior of a '70s household. You need to gain control of his motor functions in order to access his brain and put a stop to everything, but all of the psychic powers that you've used previously are now being used against you. Indeed, this is another odd chapter, since Max technically isn't part of your gang. Little flaming apparitions of him float around and provide similar commentary, but the psychic powers are no longer at your disposal, and the puzzles are relegated to the standard inventory and dialogue types.

This chapter feels tacked on, because the main storyline involving the Devil's Toybox is finished up at the end of the fourth episode. Instead, it feels like more of an epilogue to use returning characters and finish the arcs of the existing ones. It's also hard to hold much against it, because it's an excellent chapter. There are a lot of great jokes, especially the storeroom, which holds memories from both the previous Telltale games and the LucasArts adventure. And some of the best sight gags in *Sam & Max* comes from the satirical signs and products – this one has a box of "Oops, Diabetes!" breakfast cereal. Max also has a library of story ideas, which is represented as a series of records. In addition to the one needed to solve a puzzle, there are also a few really goofy ones, like the Flint Paper fan fiction and a historical thriller involving Eli Whitney, inventor of the cotton gin.

The finale also explains the title, which has nothing to do with the devil Satan (although he does make an appearance). It's a reference to an old saying, with a bit of a twist – if idle hands are the devil's play thing, then an idle mind is the devil's playhouse. The ending is also surprisingly heartfelt. Like *Tales of Monkey Island*, Telltale introduces a significant amount of drama to the story, adding quite a bit of depth to a series which has rarely been more than an incredibly silly cartoon.

While the tone is ultimately far, far removed from the sardonic, happy-go-lucky shenanigans of the original LucasArts games, *The Devil's Playhouse* is an incredibly well-written, well-crafted series of adventures, and easily one of Telltale's best.

The Comics

Most of Sam and Max's original adventures are contained in the anthology *Sam & Max Surfin' the Highway*. This includes several chapters of the original comic, as well as some of the works

Steve Purcell created for *The Adventurer*, the LucasArts catalog. These often put Sam & Max in the role of various other Lucasfilm properties, with amusing results.

Sam and Max: Freelance Police – The Animated Cartoon

Sam & Max also found themselves subject of a cartoon series, produced by Canadian studio Nelvana. Airing in 1997 on Fox networks, the season includes a total of thirteen episodes, most consisting of two ten-minute stories. Steve Purcell was actively involved in the project, and even scripted a few episodes.

Of course, Sam & Max were originally meant for adults, and some of the duo’s antics have been toned down to make it suitable for children’s programming. Max isn’t sociopathic anymore so much as lovably weird, and Sam loses some of his dry edginess in favor of flat-out goofiness. Most of their pseudo-elocuent vocabulary was also toned down to understandable levels. Their handguns have been ditched for being too realistic, but they’ve been allowed to keep some of the crazier weapons, like rocket launchers and flamethrowers. Perhaps to make the program more relatable, there’s also a new character known as The Geek, an incredibly intelligent young girl who works as Sam & Max’s inventor. Thankfully, her presence is minimal. Unfortunately, the voice actors from *Hit the Road* were unable to reprise their roles, and the new guys, while tolerable, sound a little bit too wacky.



Sam and Max still cause plenty of violence in their cartoon.

While it’s substantially bowdlerized compared to its original incarnations, it still captures much of its madcap insanity. One of the earlier episodes is based on a comic story, “Bad Day on the Moon”, where they launch their DeSoto into space to take on a roach menace. In other episodes, Sam & Max are stalked by the fanboy Lorne, their self-appointed “Friend for Life”, who even gets his own stupid little jingle. They also meet up with Granny Ruth, Sam’s take-no-guff grandmother who also runs a maximum security prison. The team occasionally faces off against various super villains, including Mack Salmon, a criminal with a fishbowl for a head (who was also briefly in the comics), and they even get entangled in the marital woes of Zeus and Hera. Other aspects remain faithful to the comics, include the preoccupation with rats, sasquatches, and molemen. And similar to Warner Bros. cartoons like *Animaniacs*, there are plenty of movie parodies that only adults would fully understand, and both Sam & Max are quite cognizant of the fourth wall.

While *Sam & Max: Freelance Police* probably would’ve worked better as a primetime cartoon (or at least something on Adult Swim, although that didn’t exist back in 1997), as a cartoon aimed for kids, it’s pretty decent. The entire series was released on DVD in 2008 to capitalize on the popularity of the Telltale *Sam & Max* games.