

## Video Game Review: New Hollywood Connection of ‘Retro City Rampage’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 11, 2013 - 5:55pm

- [D3Publisher](#) [2]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [3]
- [Paul Meekin](#) [4]
- [Retro City Rampage](#) [5]
- [Video Game Review](#) [6]
- [XBLA](#) [7]
- [Xbox 360](#) [8]

CHICAGO – I’ve been gaming for two and a half decades. If I think about it, I haven’t even been potty trained that long. I played games before I rode a bike, kissed my first girl, danced my first jig, or wrote my first word. A controller is as familiar to my hands as a rifle to a rifleman. Because of this, I’m intimately acquainted with video game lore; the princess being in another castle, that guard in “Metal Gear Solid” who “feels asleep”, the hollow and oddly chilling whisper of the “Mario Brothers 3” warp whistle (and accompanying tornado), and the nearly limitless list goes on and on. “Retro City Rampage” — a thoroughly enjoyable top-down open-world sandbox game using 8-bit NES style graphics — is fluent in game lore from the 8-bit era.



And I mean fluent. Sure, using a retro graphical style is nothing new these days. Besides “Retro City Rampage”, “Fez”, “Megaman 9” (and 10), “Cave Story” and the so-pretentious-I-shopped-at-whole-foods-for-a-week-after-playing-it “Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP”, among others, have all used sprite-based graphics to varying degrees of success. However, “Retro City Rampage” does things a bit differently, drawing (more or less) from the same 64-color palette that the NES had, which is really quite neat for the geekiest game fans among us.

In addition to its authentic 8-bit presentation (including an upwards-of-12 graphic filters that allow you to pick your console style of choice), the entirety of “Retro City Rampage” rings true to the kind of experience you’d typically have with an NES game circa 1986 or so. There’s a delightfully chip-tuned soundtrack and almost every nuance and graphical pun in “Retro City Rampage” has its origins in the 8-bit games of old. To name a few...The convenience store is owned by the trainer from “Punch Out”. There’s another store called “Skate n’ Buy”. At one point you’re forced to deliver porno on a bike a la “Paperboy”. You can get a grappling hook just like the one in “Bionic Commando”. For “Mega Man” fans, the game takes place in the year 20XX. Oh, and, the guns and ammo shop is run by Solid F’n Snake - giving things a quasi “Who Framed Roger Rabbit” vibe.



Retro City Rampage  
Photo credit: D3Publisher

It’s obvious a lot of love went into creating a game that feels authentic to that time period — bullets fly and disappear, there are strategically placed spelling errors (Congradualtions!), and the game-play simply feels like an old NES game, punishing difficulty and all, which is ironic considering “Retro City Rampage”’s main gameplay style wasn’t popularized until 1997 with the release of “Grand Theft Auto”.



"Retro City Rampage"'s gameplay is pretty typical "GTA" fare; get in cars, mow down citizens, catch the ire of the police, complete missions, etc. Doing typical "GTA" things in an 8-bit world is a delight, and the game makes a few cute references to how "GTA" would have been handled during that era in gaming — you "borrow" cars instead of steal them, slain enemies turn into coins, and you can get drunk off "milk" to name a few. More than a few staples of your standard "GTA" experience make the transition, including car customization, nitro-boost, races, and mini-games are all here in full force.



Retro City Rampage  
Photo credit: D3Publisher

The best "GTA"-clones tend to come loaded with atmosphere enhancing mini-games, and other assorted distractions to break up the driving, running, and gunning. "Red Dead Redemption" had you playing liar's dice and hold em' poker in old timey saloons. "Sleeping Dogs" had you doing Karaoke, and learning Kung-Fu in a Hong Kong Dojo. "Retro City Rampage" is no different — letting you play "demakes" of popular indie games "Bit.Trip", "Super Meat Boy", "Splosion Man", as well as tongue-in-cheek, in-engine playable homages to "Frogger", "The Legend Of Zelda" "Metal Gear", and "Paperboy". The variety is pretty impressive. While technically "Retro City Rampage" may just be a few coats of paint on a game play engine we're all familiar with by now. I'm fairly certain "Retro City Rampage" is the first game to play it entirely for yuks and mostly succeed.

Gaming, historically, has not done comedy - particularly parody of itself - well. Sure, some games have been mighty funny ("Borderlands 2", "The Simpsons Game" and "Metal Gear Solid 2" had their moments), but anytime a game has attempted to directly parody the tropes and conventions of a particular genre, the game would inevitably shove its digital foot in it's mouth. Just because a game knows - and points out - that sending me on a fetch quest is derivative and boring, doesn't make said fetch quest any less derivative and boring. Even the critically lauded "Spec Ops: The Line" has claimed it's deliberately not fun to play - which, newsflash, isn't okay - and saying it with pride only makes it less okay.

Which is why I officially became a fan of "Retro City Rampage" during one of those infamous "tail the car" missions. You've seen this before in every open world game in existence - follow the car, go slowly, don't lose it, but don't let it see you, either. Normally there's a "tail meter" and a "sight meter" that you need to keep in balance. At best, these sorts of missions are boring, and at worst - incredibly frustrating. "Retro City Rampage" slyly parodies this by alerting you that it's time for the "boring tailing" mission, then changes up the structure by forcing you to stop for coffee every few blocks in order to stay awake long enough to complete the tail - thus making a monotonous mission pretty funny - replacing the "sight" meter with a snooze meter that consistently drains. Later in the game you're required to go from one end of the map to another to pick up a "Legend of Zelda"-esque sword and shield, and after a little dialogue along the lines of "How do you expect me to pad this game to 40 hours unless I make you drive back here" you're promptly whisked away by a chuckle inducing warp-whistle-esque tornado.



Retro City Rampage  
Photo credit: D3Publisher

\*That\*, guys and gals, is how you parody a genre convention. It's in these moments that I'm fairly certain the man behind "Retro City

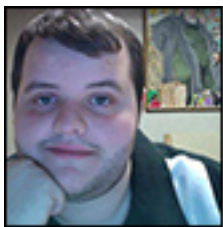
Rampage" is an auteur not unlike that of Seth MacFarlane or "Airplane" Director David Zucker. The gags come quick and from all directions, and if one or two of them don't particularly grab you, rest assured there's four or five more coming in the next couple of minutes to tickle your funny bone. There are lots of good gags, but, alas, the writing of the main narrative leaves a bit to be desired.

While the jokes come fast and furious, and the visual references to other media of the time are frequent and delightful and an excellent nostalgia trip, the erratic nature of the narrative can take you out of the game. Is it a satire of genre conventions? Is it rallying against the evils of big-name publishers' treatment of Indie game studios? Is it a love letter to 8-bit games and the 80's at large? Well, the answer is yes. It wants to be all things to all people, and the narrative loses focus because of it. One moment you're desperately trying to fix a Delorean so you can make it back to your own time, the next you're involved with fighting "Jester", a stand in for a popular Batman villain, and the next you're taking on the game-industry machine at large. It jumps around so frequently that it becomes difficult to really understand what is going on narratively.

So, the story is more "Cool World" (over the top, indulgent, confusing) than "Who Framed Roger Rabbit" (charming, nostalgic, straightforward) which is a shame, yes, but that's what sequels are for - and if you're hardcore into gaming culture, you'd probably enjoy it a great deal regardless of it's structural failings. Ultimately the narrative is torn between satire, parody, and homage, yet again reminding me of a Seth Macfarlane project, "Ted", where the flaws in the story are glaring only because the rest of the experience was largely excellent and superlatively creative.

Personally, I enjoyed every second of "Retro City Rampage" - it gave me a unique sandbox in which to play and an ocean of nostalgia in which to swim. Does the game stand on its own for a gamer who's never touched an NES controller? I think so. The gameplay is varied, the graphics charming, and experience heartwarming in a hard to pinpoint sort of way. It's obvious every pixel of "Retro City Rampage" was a passion project, because there's no other way a game this bizarrely enjoyable would find it's way to release if it wasn't. At its core it's a lovely parody of "GTA" cranked up to 11, with quality gameplay, and tons of jokes, and whether it's 1986, 2012, or 20XX, that should be enough for anybody.

*"Retro City Rampage" was released by D3Publisher and developed by VBlank Entertainment. It was released for the XBLA on the Xbox 360 on January 2, 2013 and is also available for the PC, PS3 and PlayStation Vita.*



By [PAUL MEEKIN](#) [9]  
Video Game Critic  
[HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com)

**Source URL (retrieved on Apr 19 2024 - 9:53am):**

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/21032/video-game-review-new-hollywood-connection-of-retro-city-rampage>

#### Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/briantt>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/d3publisher>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/paul-meekin>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/retro-city-rampage>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/video-game-review>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/xbla>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/xbox-360>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAUL>