Video Game Review: 'Pixel People' Pleases Passively

Submitted by BrianTT [1] on February 13, 2013 - 3:35pm

- HollywoodChicago.com Content [2]
- iOS [3]
- Paul Meekin [4]
- Pixel People [5]
- Video Game Review [6]

CHICAGO – What happens when you combine the city building of "Sim City", the art-style of "Pocket Planes" and the pointless, but still somehow fascinating Commodore 64 game, "Little Computer People"? Well, despite a fairly hard-bitten premise involving the destruction of the world as we know it, and the daunting task of rebuilding it via cloning and splicing of human genetics, you get "Pixel People," a new free-to-play city-building iOS game that's adorable as it is compelling.

With the premise out of the way, the game beings properly once you place your first house - your pixel people need a place to live, after all. From there you take clones and combine two skills to create a third - which is the game's main draw. It's charming the way "Pixel People" breaks down the human condition into such simple, yet true, terms. If you combine a "Writer" and a "Dreamer" you get a "Poet" (that naturally occupies a cafe). An "Architect" and an "Artist" gives you an "Interior Designer". "Detective" and "Writer" gives you a "Reporter", "Athlete" and "Sheriff" yields you a "Coach" and so on. there's literally a 150 combinations, and if you're the type to wonder what makes up the character of the human soul, you'll find much delight in the combinations and their associated punny names - The calligrapher named Otto Graph had me chuckling in public.

Pixel People
Photo credit: LambdaMu

Pixel People is not unlike that of a model train set. You'll grow incredibly attached to your city. You built it, after-all. Every house, every road, every place of business becomes etched into your mind, and the beautiful high-res, retro, art style makes every new discovery pop. You'll remember where you were the day you placed your photo studio, when your sports stadium finally finished construction, the weather on the day you moved Town Hall, in addition to remembering the location of pretty much every building you place.

But despite its many charms, I struggle to call "Pixel People" a game. Sure, you interact with it, and you can do well and poorly at maintaining your city's growth, but there's very little at stake here, and very little pressure to succeed - meaning "Pixel People" feels a lot like tending to some sort of bizarre, industrious garden. Not that there's anything wrong with that. Gardening is a pastime that rewards time and patience and a nurturing diligence, all of which translate pretty well into the landscape of passive interactive media. You have to click buildings after they run out of "energy" in order for them to continue producing cash, little hearts pop up that you can click and hold in order to gain various cash, and adorable animal bonuses, and money, literally, grows on trees. You're tending to this city to watch it grow, but the problem is, well, gardens at least blossom.

Pixel People
Photo credit: LambdaMu

Quite frankly, despite the aforementioned charm, nothing happens in your "Pixel People" town. "Sim City" and "The Sims" are classics is because you nurture both your people *and* their actions. I'm not saying "Pixel People" needs to include a fail state or a difficulty level, but tangible things need to happen in this city you already feel incredibly attached too, if developer LambdaMu wants it to achieve the greatness that is currently barely escaping it. The Stadium needs to have games that give you extra money. The players there should buy lamborghinis from the car dealership, and the TV station should do commercials for both. That seems complicated to program, sure, but it could accomplished very easily using its default graphical style, and give you simple option choices that further enhance your gameplay. Having these charming characters visually interact in memorable ways is the brass ring here. I want to build my town and want it prosper socially as well as financially - I want it to feel alive, otherwise I end up feeling silly that I'm spending all my time keeping an eye on a fictional town filled with completely static citizens.

But despite that flaw, "Pixel People" is an absolutely phenomenal time-waster that will cost you exactly 0 dollars, and it's worth every penny. It's pleasant, addicting, cute, funny, and the splicing together of citizens via personality traits is endlessly fascinating. While it isn't really a *game* in the most standard sense of the word, and the city itself is lacking in some interactive elements that would truly send it over the top, there are exactly 150 reasons to give "Pixel People" a chance.

"Pixel People" is now available for iOS.
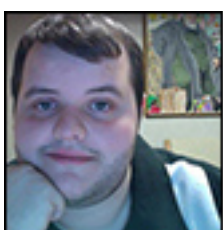
By **PAUL MEEKIN** [7]
Video Game Critic
HollywoodChicago.com

[7] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAUL