

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Reliving the 90's

By Dennis Chin

The pioneers of third person open world games steps up in a big way with their latest installment, filling it with new features, tons of mini games, and especially with an amazing epic narrative as well. This is definitely the best game of the *Grand Theft Auto* series. Each GTA game takes place in a specific time period, and does an outstanding job depicting the history and culture of that period. Grand Theft Auto: Vice City took place in the 1980's, while this time, San Andreas takes place in the early 1990's.

Like the previous GTA games, *San Andreas* takes place in a fictional city, modeled after U.S. real life counterparts. Liberty City from *Grand Theft Auto III* was modeled after New York City, while Vice City from *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* was modeled after Miami. The latest installment is set in 1992, and takes place on the west coast in the state of San Andreas, which modeled after California. It consists of three cities: players start off in the city of Los Santos, which is based on Los Angeles and consists a mixture of the ritzy downtown areas and gang based ghettos of South Central in Ganton, which is based from the Los Angeles gang suburb of Compton. San Fierro is based on San Francisco, which reproduces the city's hilly terrain, foggy weather and the Golden Gate Bridge. The game's third level is Las Venturas, which takes on Las Vegas, complete with the famous strip of hotels and casinos, and the surrounding desert. So, there's so much more to explore in the game, as you're traveling on the road in between cities and back.

San Andreas also captures the look and feel of the gangsta world of the early 90's with corrupt cops, gang territories, and racial gangs. It also manages to tie in popular culture at the time, such as fashion, technology, cars and music. The music features a superb soundtrack of songs that were popular at the time, such as Boyz II Men's "Motownphilly" and Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg's duet of "Nuthin' but a G Thang" (which is great to play when you're driving a lowrider down Los Santos), and many popular rap songs, fitting the urban theme of the game.

The game's usual features like the open world environment, stealing cars, outrunning the cops, and beating up people are still there, along with the same mechanics, but some new stand out features are introduced. One feature is where the player can perform drive-by shootings. Another new feature is the territory takeover, where players recruit gang members who follow you to the rival gang's territory and killing the enemies. As mentioned, this game is loaded with mini games, ranging from playing pool, 8-bit console video games, to the casino games at Las Venturas.

The story centers on Carl "CJ" Johnson, who just returned home to Los Santos after spending three years in Liberty City. His mother was killed by the Ballas, CJ's rival gang. CJ's gang is the Grove Street Families, where he reunites with his fellow members, and hopes to bring the gang back to their glory days, as they have fallen apart in the last five years.

The inspiration for *San Andreas* comes from early 1990's gangsta films such as *Boyz 'N the Hood* and *Menace II Society*, but also mirrors the events of the historic 1992 Los Angeles Riots. Both are coming of age stories, revolving around young African American characters, living the life of being plagued by frequent crime, violence, drug use and

struggle on the streets of South Central Los Angeles. Both were released at a time when 'hood' or 'gangsta' themed movies were popular, due to the events of the Los Angeles Riots.

The Los Angeles Riots occurred from the Rodney King incident, where four Caucasian male cops were caught on tape beating up Rodney King, an African American motorist. The four cops were then acquitted by a predominately Caucasian jury. This move would spark race riots, as thousands of people flooded the streets and began the chaos of looting, assaulting, arson and murder. The riots would last 6 days.

The game features racial gangs from Hispanic, Korean, to African-American. Coincidentally, those were the same racial gangs that took part in the riots. Just 13 days after the Rodney King beating, a Korean-American shop owner shot and killed a 15 year old black girl, as she accused her of shoplifting. This incident angered the African American community and raised the tensions between them and all Asian American communities, and was another point that would eventually lead to the riots. It also led to many Korean and Asian owned stores being major targets during the riots, as they all came together to defend their territories, much like in the game where rival gangs will invade the Groove Street Families' hood, and you have to come to the rescue to defend the territory.

There's even a scene in the game, parallel to the trial acquittal, where corrupt police officer, Frank Tenpenny is acquitted by the courts for his crimes. It then sparks the next level of the game, which are the city riots. When on the streets, you see all the rival gangs beating and killing one another; people setting fires, looting, and vandalism in the shops. Many buildings were destroyed and car explosions occurred. All this captures the visuals of the riots of the real life event. Many songs, movies, TV shows, and including this game, made reference or touched on the subject in the aftermath of the riots. This game depicts the incident and the events leading up to it very well.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is the best and most fun game of the series, packed with a great story, and manages to tie along modern history with it. What's also neat is that it also ties in with the timeline of the GTA universe by adding in cameos from other GTA games, such as Claude, the protagonist from GTA III. There is so much to discover, and so many things to do in the game that it'll keep you playing for hours. It exceeds beyond expectations from the previous installments. *San Andreas* captures the look and feel of the early 90's so well in great detail that it will make you feel nostalgic again.