

SUPER MARIO BROS.

GENRE(S): Platformer

AVAILABLE ON: Arcade, GBA, NES

DEVELOPED BY: Nintendo

PUBLISHED BY: Nintendo

RELEASED: September 13, 1985 (NES)

Shigeru Miyamoto once said, that everything he did for *Donkey Kong* and all that came in between, most importantly *Mario Bros.*, was practice for "the real thing". Perceiving child-like fantasy and innovation as the most important key elements of making an entertaining video game, and having such a good feeling about the character of Mario and his versatility, Miyamoto finally created *Super Mario Bros.*. Related to the previous *Mario Bros.* game by name and that alone, *Super Mario Bros.* changed the world, literally, saving the home video game industry and paving the way not only for a triumphant mega-franchise, but a glorious future for hundreds of followers to come. *Super Mario Bros.* cannot be revered enough.

New York's finest plumbers, Mario and his brother Luigi, somehow wind up in the magical world of Mushroom Kingdom, to find its inhabitants (talking mushrooms) in grief over their dear Princess Toadstool (a human), who has been kidnapped by the evil turtle, King Koopa, and his Koopa Troopas. Armed with their inhuman jumping abilities, knowledge of sewage systems (it's a surprisingly complex network here), and taste for special mushrooms which give them superpowers, Mario and Luigi set out to rescue the Princess and restore peace to Mushroom Kingdom. ...And creators Shigeru Miyamoto and Takashi Tezuka were absolutely sober coming up with this stuff, I'm sure.

I'll lay it straight down: *Super Mario Bros.* was the one game that started all this for me. It was not the first game I ever played, but certainly the first I ever found myself hooked on. There are so many good childhood memories here, which still flow like a river five seconds into the game even today. Now, going into a game almost as old as myself is very often a gamble, whether it's something I already know or

something I'm playing for the first time. If I'm playing an '85 game for the first time in this day and age, there's bound to be some unnecessary critique in accordance to human nature. If I'm playing a familiar game, it might be so much worse than my memory serves, and the illusion stored in my memory is broken forever. *Super Mario Bros.* is a whole different story. It's not only the single most important platformer ever made, it's still so damn good, just as good as its measly capacity allows it to be, and surely an entertaining experience even if you're playing it for the first time.

Absolutely everyone who has ever played video games, knows this one, but I'll go on assuming you've spent the last four decades living under a rock. *Super Mario Bros.* is a side-scrolling platformer, one of the first and most definitely the most influential of its kind. You play as Mario – if you have a friend to play with, he/she plays as Luigi. There are a total of eight worlds to conquer, with five different types of levels: regular overworld levels, underground levels fitted into much tighter spaces, sky levels that are unstable and full of pits, underwater levels, and finally, the dreaded castle levels which serve as the boss arenas of the game. In writing, it really isn't all that far from the Mario games that came soon OR long after, now is it?

Each world in the game is pretty much the same as far as general progression goes, but each world also brings a new enemy type and other new challenges to the table. King Koopa (much better known as Bowser) serves as the boss in each world, although the first seven Kings are actually fakes, whose true forms are revealed if you defeat them using fireballs. The much more common method of defeating the boss is jumping over 'em and smashing an axe into the bridge they so scarily walk back and forth on. Fighting the real thing isn't any different, but of course the challenge increases by other means with each boss encounter, for example an inconveniently placed row of bricks hovering in the air and blocking your jump, or a seemingly endless stock of hammers flying at you in addition to the usual fireballs.

Luckily, you are not alone with your puny size and one health point to spare, either. There's quite an array of power-ups for you to enjoy, with the first – and most iconic – item presenting itself about three seconds

into the game: the Super Mushroom, which allows Mario to grow into three times his usual size, making movement much easier and more controlled, and granting an extra health point. When in Super Mario mode, the next power-up will be the Fire Flower, which doesn't add up to the health points but gives Mario the ability to throw fireballs – which are essential against certain types of enemies and work against King Koopa as well – but if he's hit by anything, it's back to plain little Mario with no in-betweens. Then we have Starman – a rare item with its very own theme music – that allows Mario to ram through any enemies in his path just by touching them, for a few glorious seconds. Last, the rarest item in the game: the 1-Up Mushroom, which comes in two different colours, but is still easily distinguishable from the standard ones, and literally gives you an extra life – as does collecting a total of 100 coins.

That's about all for the core gameplay, so let's take a look at the tech. Since *Super Mario Bros.* was one of the first side-scrollers, of this caliber at the very least, reverse scrolling was perhaps never even considered, or considered unnecessary, or just not seen possible at that point of time. Although perhaps seen as a technical flaw since it was incorporated in many games released in the near future, it actually serves the game, I think; I used to be so proud of myself when I first discovered a way to get that hidden 1-Up in the early goings of World 1-1, AND make it down the previous pipe on the same run. You know what I'm talking about, I'm sure.

The cavalcade of different enemies – apart from having just one boss character – is quite impressive. Goomba, Lakitu – complete with his "kids", the Spinies – Buzzy Beetle, Bullet Bill, the Hammer Bros., Cheep Cheep and Blooper all make their debuts here, and of course, Koopa Troopas, previously known as Shellcreepers in *Mario Bros.* make their return. Here you can already jump on Beetles and Koopas and use their remaining shells as weapons – quite damn impressive.

As for the controls, you couldn't ask for better precision and execution in 1985, period. Remember the terrible controls of *Donkey Kong* and *Mario Bros.*? Flush 'em. We've got adjustable, precise jumps, a freakin' sprint button, and smooth basic movement with absolutely no delay – and all of these hugely

important qualities support each other throughout the line, guaranteeing an entertaining experience for old timers and the kids they're bringing into their childhood favourites, decades later.

Its legendary musical themes, written by Koji Kondo and remixed from here to the galaxy throughout the years, are just the icing on top of the cake. There's no way in hell I'm giving out a final rating for respect and the game's importance alone, instead I'm giving it an honest rating of how I see the game TODAY, how it is and how it compares – and it's still quite the grade. In reality, you can just forget about the rating. You know the game, you will want your kids or even grandkids to know the game. *Super Mario Bros.* is a timeless classic, perhaps the most iconic piece of home video entertainment ever made, and nothing will ever change that.

8.0