

# SUPER MARIO BROS. 3

**GENRE(S):** Platformer

**AVAILABLE ON:** Arcade, NES

**DEVELOPED BY:** Nintendo

**PUBLISHED BY:** Nintendo

**RELEASED:** October 23, 1988

Released in Japan literally weeks after the U.S. release of *Super Mario Bros. 2*, *Super Mario Bros. 3* was made specifically to push the Nintendo Entertainment System to its very limits, practically setting the development of a new home console system in motion; there was simply no way the NES could do better. Even though the game's release in the U.S. was delayed all the way to early 1990, and in Europe, to late 1991, it was hailed around the world as a masterpiece well ahead of its time – the game that absolutely everyone wanted to play. *Super Mario Bros. 3* was Mario's final break into superstardom, and stands as the greatest 8-bit video game ever made.

Bowser and his seven children – the Koopalings – invade Mushroom Kingdom and steal the magic wands held by its seven kings, turning them into animals in the process. Princess Toadstool summons Mario and Luigi to retrieve the magic wands and help her restore order, but is soon kidnapped by Bowser and taken to his castle in the Dark World. The Princess assures the brothers her rescue can wait until the kings are back to themselves and Mushroom Kingdom is safe, and so they embark on an epic journey through the seven realms.

To put it simply, *Super Mario Bros. 3* is the most singled-out giant step forward in video game history. Calling it stronger, better and faster than its predecessors, or anything else seen on the NES in the past or the future is an understatement. The game is one giant pile of great and diverse platformer design, filled to the brim with colourful, stunning visuals, a whole gallery of different enemies to contend with, secrets, minigames, you name it. It's a technical marvel to behold, even today it's hard to sink in that the game is

37 years old. I could stop right here, but my pride won't allow it. Nor does my obsession to talk about it some more.

I'll tell you right now, there is no other game I've played more than *Super Mario Bros. 3* in all of history. I could name a couple of games from this very same franchise that I hold even more dear, but every time I'm asked about my favourite Mario game or especially the game I've spent the most time with throughout my whole life, that's got to be *Super Mario Bros. 3*. It's the first game on my mind, every time – all the time. It's strange, and at the same time, all natural.

*Super Mario Bros. 3* was released in Europe just a moment or two after I got an NES. My next door neighbor and I had somewhat of a friendly rivalry over getting the game (I was 7 and he was 8 years old at the time). He was very eager to either borrow the game to me – about an hour at a time, during lunchtime – or play it WITH me, as long as I didn't get two or three levels further than him. That was the breakpoint. That was when he suddenly got sleepy and all that. No, *Super Mario Bros. 3* has no checkpoints or save points, as big as the game is – that's probably my main point here between all that nostalgia... and very likely the only thing wrong with the original NES game. As much as I hate to admit it, later versions of the game have somewhat left the original, physical article for dead, for reasons solely concerning quality of life. Anyway, we're not here to discuss how much better the game is to play on the Nintendo Switch, for example, we're here to discuss the game itself.

From the very moment you start the game, you will be overwhelmed with excitement over the massive steps forward the game takes from its actual predecessor. Instead of linear progressing from level to level, through worlds comprised of sets of four levels each, you are treated to eight different world maps – each with different themes, some with more levels than the last; shortcuts, mini-levels, minigames and secrets galore. The first map – known as Grass World – is the starting point to help you get comfy; all of the game's very basic elements are showcased in a one-screen map that can easily be completed in a matter of minutes. Then come Desert World, Water World, Giant World, Cloud World, Ice World (ewwww), Pipe

World, and finally, Dark World, all of which bring more complexity into world navigation, and of course, general gameplay, in a progressive manner. At the end of each of the first seven maps, you're to infiltrate an airship captained by one of Bowser's children, kick their ass, steal back the magic wand and turn the ruler of the region back to his former self. Bowser sits back in his castle in the Dark World, behind a whole barrage of surreal, devilish levels which could might as well automatically feed you your hard-earned power-ups. Speaking of which.

Each screen of the game is actually at least twice larger than you can actually see. There is very often life above the upper edge of the screen. How to get there? Well, it's in the cover art; Mario can fly. By consuming a Magic Leaf, which is the very basic new power-up of the game and the standard for every new power-up since, Mario grows a raccoon's tail which he can flap to gain some altitude after gaining enough momentum by sprinting. It's the only new power-up in the game that appears in the field, but there are much more power-ups and special items that can be stocked into your inventory, which you can only use on the world map.

The rare Tanooki Suit and P-Wing are upgrades to the Magic Leaf. With the Tanooki Suit on, Mario is not only able to fly in the same manner, but he can also morph into a stone statue to avoid damage, and by morphing while you jump, you destroy any enemy that happens to be below you. The P-Wing allows infinite momentum, which means you can simply fly out of bounds through any level set in an open space. The Frog Suit is specifically designed for use in the Water World; makes swimming much faster and flexible, but your movement on land is clumsy and clunky at best. The Hammer Suit and the Goomba's Shoe are the rarest power-ups in the bunch; the Hammer Suit graces Mario with the ability to throw hammers, and the Shoe allows him to cross any hazardous land unharmed. There are four more items, which are not power-ups per se; the Music Box allows you to put any Hammer Bros. prowling for you on the world map to sleep, allowing you safe passage past them. The Magic Cloud allows you to pass any normal level, once; if you die in the next, you'll be forced to take on the last. The Sledgehammer allows you to break giant boulders on the world map to create shortcuts and/or find secrets. Finally, the well-

hidden Magic Whistle can be used to travel to a warp zone. Remember how warp zones in *Super Mario Bros.* made it possible to beat the game in a minimal time by actually completing just a few worlds? It's the same thing here; all of the three Magic Whistles can be found from the first two maps of the game, and when you find all three, you can easily travel all the way to the Dark World after actually completing one and a half maps of the game. I'm not encouraging rookies to cheat, I'm just saying there are ways to beat the original game comfortably, albeit not the most honorably.

Then, we go to the enemy cavalcade, which is absolutely impossible and gratuitous to document in full because there are so many different variations. All of the enemies from *Super Mario Bros.* re-emerge, alongside supercharged versions of themselves, and are joined by future series stalwarts such as Thwomp, Boo, and Monty Mole. The Koopalings – who are named after famous musicians, mostly from the rock genre, including Lemmy and Wendy O. Koopa – all have different palettes and progressively more difficult attack patterns, but fighting them is always the same, this is the one point where *Super Mario Bros. 3* doesn't stray too far from its predecessor. Same goes for Boom Boom, Bowser's simpleton of a lackey who appears as a mini-boss in each world; the only thing that changes about him throughout the course of the game is that at one point, hitting him once causes him to grow wings, which he usually doesn't have time to use to his advantage since he's so easy to put down. Oh well, when did the magic of Mario ever depend on boss fights? Maybe those many fights against Bowser, sure, and here we already have a quite unique fight considering the times; your purpose is to use Bowser's own strength and size against him without touching him at all.

Playing and most of all beating *Super Mario Bros. 3* honestly and in consistently good spirits without the chance to save present is most definitely pain, but beautiful pain once you genuinely have time on your hands, or if you give the original game a time-friendly, much safer and leaner go on Nintendo Switch Online. If you're pure at heart and accept no substitutes for blowing the dust off the old game pack, go right ahead and do that. Either way, you will find that you still love this game. *Super Mario Bros. 3* is a timeless masterpiece of the 8-bit era.

