

# THE SUPER MARIO BROS. MOVIE

**WRITTEN BY:** Matthew Fogel

**DIRECTED BY:** Aaron Horvath & Michael Jelenic

**STARRING (VO):** Chris Pratt, Anya Taylor-Joy, Charlie Day, Jack Black, Keegan-Michael Key, Seth Rogen, Fred Armisen, Kevin Michael Richardson, Charles Martinet, Sebastian Maniscalco

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## PLOT OUTLINE

Struggling to get their own independent company up and going, New York plumbers Mario and Luigi look into a massive flooding in the heart of Brooklyn. They find a mysterious pipeline underground, which sucks the brothers into another, fantastical dimension, in which they get separated. Luigi ends up in the Dark Land, at the mercy of its psychotic lord Bowser, while Mario explores the peaceful Mushroom Kingdom, seeking the aid of its warrior princess to rescue his brother.

## IN REVIEW

However this review was meant to proceed, or end, let me say one thing: finally. With such high production values, history's greatest video game icon at its core, AND, most importantly, just SOME common sense from the film makers regarding what they're doing, *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* is a film that just cannot go totally wrong. Sure, anything is better than the last feature film to star Mario and Luigi, but I assure you, this film is more than just mere compensation for one of the worst movies ever made. As to whether it stands up to Pixar or DreamWorks' best – that very much depends on what you expect from the film. I'll admit that this is very hard for me, 'cause I would've loved this film 'til the very end if it was released in the stead of the "original" 30 years ago. It's cluttered with easter eggs for adults who lived through Mario Mania; unfortunately, these flashbacks make up for about 90% of what the film has to offer to adults. Even with guys like Jack Black (who still steals the show), Chris Pratt and Seth Rogen leading the very impressive voice cast, the film oddly lacks the grit, subliminally dirty puns and geniously written dialogue that have made these films so easy for children and adults alike to enjoy since Pixar got its start in 1995. In other words, *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* is a love letter to fans – which got lost in the mail and ended up in the hands of their kids.

To drive the nail of being a film strictly for kids who couldn't care less for the subtle allusions hidden around every corner even deeper, *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* is a very simply written, simply spoken film with surprisingly lame comedy. It has its moments; as I said, Jack Black's Bowser steals the show even if he's not fully allowed to improvise in his usual style. Also, the plot runs at 500 MPH, to prevent kids from getting bored or irritated. Hell, I noticed for a fact that you could get something from the fridge and miss out on something crucial. It moves that fast. Also, since the rest of the movie tramples on at such

a speed, the *Mario Kart*-inspired chase scene seems to last forever although it really isn't that lengthy at all. The pacing of the film is generally very conflicted, and it feels like a few important plot-related questions are left completely unanswered, or rather, sacrificed, to grant your kids a good, flashy and colourful show they won't stop talking about for the next couple of years.

This is starting to sound like I really dislike the film as what it is, and that's not true at all. Even if I didn't get as much out of it as I expected, I respect it for a number of reasons. Let's start with something easy: the 80's vibe. The first act of the movie, in particular, pays tons of homage to all things 80's; most of all arcade and retro gaming, naturally, 80's TV, and 80's music. Bonnie Tyler's "Holding Out for a Hero" has been used in countless adventure films and TV shows to the point it has started to annoy me, but here it works, once again. A-ha's "Take on Me" makes an impromptu appearance and I love it. The film is like a living timeline of Mario: it starts with this said 80's vibe, then introduces elements from the middle, and goes on for the rest of the time combining these elements with stuff introduced during the last 20 years. As for the major allusions to some specific games: well, it starts like a combination of *Mario Bros.* (the arcade game), *Super Mario Bros.* and just a bit of *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Then we bounce around between *Donkey Kong Country* (the newer games in particular), *Mario Kart* and *Super Mario 3D World*. It's quite a ride indeed. Again, it might be a bit hard to keep up with it, but that's what rewatching the film with your kids – over and over and over again – is for.

One thing I cannot ignore about this film, and for this, the makers truly deserve praise, is the unique characterization of everyone. Luigi is perhaps the only character in the whole film who doesn't differ from his video game counterpart in any outstanding capacity; his long-time fear of and affiliation with ghosts and monsters is duly noted, and his cowardice in general is a major plot device. Mario is extremely brave and unrelenting, especially when it comes to his love for his little brother and willingness to stand by him – but, he's also small in size and utterly incompetent, and therefore considered hopeless against Bowser and his armies. The real hero of Mushroom Kingdom, initially, is none other than the usual damsel in distress – Princess Peach. While expectedly taking on her usual role and flirting with Mario towards the end, she starts out as Mario's mentor and the one to point out his flaws in a very strict and honest tone. I love that, and I also love how finally, after almost 40 years, my first true love gets a (tease of a) backstory, which implies something I have candidly theorized for a long time. Toad draws most inspiration from Captain Toad, who's been around since *Super Mario Galaxy* – complete with his famous catchphrase "Time for adventure!" - but this one's actually open for adventure unlike his coward of a counterpart, to the point of being stupid in his bravery.

Cranky Kong takes a strange turn from being a brutally rude, senile ape to the perhaps rude, but very much capable and noble king of Kongs. Donkey Kong, on the other hand, is just what you'd expect from

him once he got fleshed out with proper voice acting and a sense of humanity; an egotistical bastard who prides himself in being the strongest and most famous person in all of the kingdoms, and just won't accept any type of loss.

Finally, we get to Bowser. My favourite video game antagonist of all time is played by none other than my favourite comedian and one of my favourite musicians of all time, Jack friggin' Black. When I started watching this film, I decided I was not going to cut any slack to Jack Black; if it wouldn't work, then it simply wouldn't work, no harm done. JB, well known as an avid gamer and a Mario fan, makes the most out of his restricted role and simply BECOMES Bowser, even throwing in a bit of that Jables swag – from Tenacious D – in Bowser's simply AMAZING love song to Princess Peach, an 80's power ballad just as generic and cheesy as it can get. You simply will not leave this film without that song stuck in your head; remember to stick around for the mid-credits' reprisal! Bowser's motives and obsession with Princess Peach have been implied since day one, most strictly in *Super Mario Galaxy* and *Super Mario Odyssey*, while in this film he's a pure, delusional psycho stalker who seems to believe his life, power and wealth have no meaning without Peach, and he's willing to do absolutely anything to unite with his "one true love". Except, of course, act decent – and come to terms with the fact that genocide isn't perhaps the best place to start when you're trying to impress someone. His character reminds me a lot of Jeff Goldblum's Grandmaster in *Thor: Ragnarok*, not sure if this was intentional or not but the same vibe is there.

Not just Bowser, all of these characterizations are brought to life brilliantly by a host of excellent voice actors, once again within the limits they are given. Chris Pratt as Mario, Seth Rogen as Donkey Kong and Anya Taylor-Joy as Peach all deserve praise for their takes on their respective scripts, even if the grit to bring the film to that next level, fit for all ages, is missing. Instead of sticking to their friendly and simple Cartoon Network background, I think directors Horvath and Jelenic should've spent a little more time looking into films and franchises such as *Shrek* and *Toy Story* to slow down the pace and improve the dialogue without having to deny anything crucial from their obvious target audience. I definitely want more of this, with said improvements; I'm not sure how long this specific film will hold up.

## 6.8