

SUPER MARIO LAND

GENRE(S): Platformer

AVAILABLE ON: GB

DEVELOPED BY: Nintendo

PUBLISHED BY: Nintendo

RELEASED: April 21, 1989

On the 21st of April, 1989, Nintendo introduced Game Boy to the world, along with four launch titles – a mahjong adaptation, an arcade variant and a port of a classic sports title for the NES, and finally, no less than Mario's handheld debut, *Super Mario Land*. This game is most known for being the very first Mario game without any involvement by the character's creator Shigeru Miyamoto; instead, it was developed by a team overseen by Miyamoto's mentor and close friend Gunpei Yokoi. While the game is somewhat reminiscent of Mario's first outing as Super Mario, its thematics are very different. To this day, this game remains a cult favourite among Mario fans, but it is indeed an utter oddball.

An alien warlord by the name of Tatanga invades the peaceful Sarasaland and kidnaps Princess Daisy to force her hand in marriage. Mario sets out on a quick journey to confront Tatanga in the kingdom of Chai and rescue Daisy.

So, aliens. How about that? When you first start up the game, it looks just like *Super Mario Bros.*, just in black and white, but it doesn't stay that way for long. The music is new, but feels familiar. From the classic Kondo tunes, only a heavily modified version of the *Super Mario Bros.* overworld theme remains; even the Starman tune is changed, which is really odd... though not nearly as odd as the rest of the game. The overall design is a confusing mix of Japanese folklore, Egyptian mythology and Spaceballs. The most important question here, naturally, is: is the game any fun?

Sure, but it is very short and easy. There are only four worlds in the game: Birabuto, Muda, Easton, and

Chai. They all have three stages each, and unlike in *Super Mario Bros.*, there's no certain order to the stage types. Halfway through the quest, and at the very end, Mario jumps in the cockpit of a sub or Sky Pop ship to blast everything in sight in genuine *Gradius* style. As odd as it sounds, these levels are actually pretty fun, probably the best stuff the game has to offer; the least repetitive, for damn sure.

The standard over- and underworld levels are comprised of roughly five to six different platformer scenes, mixed and repeated over and over again as if anyone wouldn't notice. On the bright side, each level also has roughly five or six checkpoints, including boss levels. Every level has two exits; if you make it to the top exit, you're rewarded with a minigame for extra lives, same goes for defeating a boss. Unless you consider poor collision detection and the occasional invisible walls worse than kryptonite, you'll never run out of lives during the 45-minute course of the game.

General gameplay, yeah well. It's a Game Boy launch title. It could definitely be worse, but like I said, the lack of proper collision detection and invisible walls are real problems. The controls are quite fluid, but for example the Fire Flower power-up is completely useless; the fireballs have a really weird trajectory. Also, whenever you get hit, thus lose any power-up, there's just this tiny, faint sound to indicate that you're on your last legs; Mario and Super Mario don't differ all that much in size. It's short, and easy, yes, but full of small rocks of discomfort that have the potential to come raining down on your neck.

Despite resembling more of a Mario clone or even a drug-addled spinoff of *Giana Sisters* rather than an authentic Nintendo product, and the many frustrations packed into such a short and repetitive run, *Super Mario Land* is decent, light entertainment as long as it lasts.

6.8