

SUPER MARIO LAND 2: 6 GOLDEN COINS

GENRE(S): Platformer

AVAILABLE ON: GB

DEVELOPED BY: Nintendo

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Super Mario World had marked the last traditional Mario platformer for years to come, as Shigeru Miyamoto wanted to pursue all kinds of different ways he could utilize the character and the universe created around him, as well as the new technology at hand. Nintendo saw another opportunity here to once again have Gunpei Yokoi and his team work on a new *Super Mario Land* game for the Game Boy. Having seen the Game Boy come a long way after the release of the first game, Yokoi's team created a consciously strange, but notably more ambitious and elaborate platformer than its predecessor, and succeeded in not only making an honestly good game, but also giving birth to a whole new villain who has become a beloved mainstay in the Mario universe.

As Mario returns from Sarasaland, he discovers that an old acquaintance of his, an evil and greedy caricature of himself named Wario, has taken over Mario's private island and his castle. Mario sets out to collect the six golden coins needed to open the castle gates, which are scattered in different parts of the island, and kick the squatter out of his home.

While *Super Mario Land* felt like a quick and effortless port of *Super Mario Bros.*, spliced with some shoot 'em up action and a half-assed plot seemingly influenced by *Spaceballs*, *Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins* is a carefully crafted, innovative platformer. It's still trippy, for sure, but its unique strange being reminds me of our *Super Mario Bros. 2* in a positive way; it doesn't matter if it's dumb or silly, it's a fun game and technologically speaking, a huge step forward from its predecessor. The only thing these two games really have in common – besides the assumption they were designed on hard drugs – is that there

are at least two different ways to exit each level: one for a simple finish and one for a bonus minigame. The shoot 'em up stages are taken out of the fray completely, and replaced with other kinds of special stages that give and take. As far as the Game Boy had come at this point, there were some limitations to the hardware they could never break.

After finishing the introductory stage of the game, you are given the freedom to travel anywhere in Mario Land and take on the different parts of the island – called "zones" – in any order you wish. You can also stop by a bonus dome any time you wish, as long as you have the money to play. Although there are some certain types of really challenging level designs – anti-gravity and underwater levels are the first to come to mind, absolutely no ice though – the game never really gets harder as a whole, with the one exception being the final castle, which isn't really as "difficult" in the core sense of the word, as it is lengthy and intolerant of mistakes made at ANY point, including the final boss fight. Well, just like in the case of the first *Super Mario Land* game, though, you shouldn't worry about running out of extra lives; patience might be a precious commodity when it comes to the endgame.

The classic power-ups have reverted back to a better form. The Fire Flower is still useless against a whole array of enemies, but at least the fireballs have a standard trajectory and constantly shooting forward can save you from a lot of small nuisances in hectic levels that occasionally suffer from framerate problems (those limitations I mentioned). The invincibility granted by Starman lasts much less time, but if you manage to defeat five enemies in that time, the fifth and each subsequent enemy defeated turns into an extra life. Like I said, don't worry about extra lives here. There's a new exclusive power-up in the game, called the Magic Carrot, which, not so surprisingly, turns Mario into Bunny Mario. Don't mock it 'til you've tried it; this flight mechanic (yup) doesn't require any momentum, and you'll be able to glide indefinitely with a very small dip in altitude every few seconds. The downside to it, as well as just about to every moment Mario's feet are not on the ground for one reason or another, is an occasional button lag caused by something else the Game Boy unsuccessfully attempts to process at the same time.

Reaching out past its technical flaws, what we see here is a truly unique Mario title, and a really fun Game Boy-exclusive that paved the way for one of the system's best overall games, as well as a new main character that could afford being as unimaginably weird as possible without alienating anyone who took this stuff seriously.

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