

MARIO'S TIME MACHINE

GENRE(S): Educational

AVAILABLE ON: MAC, PC, NES, SNES

DEVELOPED BY: Knowledge Adventure (MAC, PC), Radical Entertainment (NES), The Software Toolworks (SNES)

PUBLISHED BY: The Software Toolworks

RELEASED: 1993 (MAC, PC, SNES)

Mario's Time Machine pisses me off for about a million and one reasons, one of those being its very title. It's basically my two favourite things in fantasy and fiction: Mario, and a time machine. Behind this title of magnificent potential, lurks another ridiculous, infinitely boring educational tool poorly disguised as a Mario game. What you should know right off the bat, is that the SNES and NES games are completely different from each other, apart from the fact that they're both terrible. Once again, the SNES "version" was shat out first, so we'll start with that.

In 1993, Bowser builds a time machine named the Timulator. He uses the Timulator to steal artifacts of historical importance all across time, to build history's greatest museum. Mario storms Bowser's castle to retrieve these items and return them to their rightful places in time before history is irreversibly changed. ...The odd thing here is, that whoever came up with this dumbass script never stopped to think that if history was to be changed, these artifacts would hold no value in the present day whatsoever. If Bowser's agenda is to build the greatest museum of all time, I'd say he's off to a bad start.

What should not come as a huge surprise is that most of the audiovisuals that actually have the slightest to do with the Mario franchise are ripped straight off *Super Mario World*. What does come across somewhat surprising is that the game actually looks and sounds pretty good, altogether. The soundtrack is once again a collection of repetitive remixes of *Super Mario World* tunes, but at least there's more than one. With at least something going in the right direction, one could almost imagine we have a decent educational Mario game here. Luckily this illusion is short lived, as the game begins its whole new

approach to being ridiculous in its first minutes.

Way back in my original reviews of both games, I myself adapted an approach that was completely different that I had ever done before, or after, and I still think it's the best way to go over *Mario's Time Machine*: a play-by-play commentary that covers about the first 45 minutes of gameplay.

After I make the difficult decision of pressing Start, I'm taken straight into Bowser's castle. All of the artifacts on the first floor are laid right in front of me on pedestals. I guess I can just pick up an item and go. First up is an apple. Probably Isaac Newton's apple. Makes one wonder, doesn't it? How much field work and unnecessary calculations did Bowser need to do to pick the exact apple? Whatever, let's just take it. Nothing happens. The thing I notice at this point is that the controls are all messed up, so it might be good to take a little time to see what each button does.

I press the R button, and a book opens, blatantly giving me the exact time and place I should go to, and telling me all about Isaac Newton, but with blank spaces. I guess I have no choice but to come up with the right words from a list that apparently covers the whole game since there's also stuff about Julius Caesar and Mozart and whonot. It's going rather well, but numbers are not my strong suit. I jumble one spot enough times to have the book close on me. What happens then? Nothing. I open the book again to get another three chances. What exactly was the point of having three tries? All the words are still in, just that one number is missing, and eventually I find the right one, it's not like there are many logical choices anyway. The blank spaces are now filled, and a chime plays. The first thing that enters my mind next is: how in the hell was I supposed to know the right answers? Granted, most of it was easy enough to figure out by logic alone, but just to be sure I don't have to rip my balls out of frustration in the future, it would be nice to know where I should look for the answers. The second thing: what the hell was that chime all about? Nothing happened. Well, it's clear that the game isn't the least cryptic tale around, so I'll just keep pressing buttons. Holy hell, a time machine! Now we're talking. I still have the apple, so I'm hot wiring the DeLorean and heading to Cambridge, 1687.

What follows is a surfing minigame with the poorest Mode 7 sequencing ever seen. There's a creeping feeling that this isn't going to be fun, and it most certainly is not. Your objective is to gather ten mushrooms, and beware of spikes along the way, since they reset your mushroom meter. The biggest problem here is that the Mode 7 twitches and flickers so bad, both the mushrooms and the spikes keep appearing, disappearing and re-appearing on the screen like an epileptic's nightmare. Ergo, the mushrooms are unnecessarily hard to collect, and the spikes unnecessarily hard to dodge. Well, I finally have the ten mushrooms... but then what? There's no way out of the level but the whirlpool, and that takes you back to the castle. After doing the sequence for three or four times, I'm almost ready to throw in the towel. I don't have a fucking clue what to do. Then I see it: 1687... Before Christ. Yup. Let's try this again. 1687, Anno Domini. Back to the surfboard. Ten mushrooms, into the whirlpool, and I'm finally in fucking Cambridge.

Still remember the book I told you about? Good. First, I have absolutely no idea what to do here. It's just the university courtyard, with one path leading to a garden. Well, gardens have apples, let's go there. The screen cuts to a first-person view and I see a pixelated Isaac Newton standing in the middle of the garden. It's a beautiful day. The sun is shining, flowers are blooming, and Isaac Newton tells me to fuck off. Hmm. What's wrong with this picture? I try to offer him the apple over and over again, and he just wants to be left alone or something. I don't know why, but my thoughts go to the book. I read it again, there's nothing out of the ordinary, all the stuff is still in place, and no clue could help me 'cause the guy won't even talk to me.

I run around the courtyard like an idiot pressing every button until I realize that the X button is the dialogue button, and I need to go door to door to talk to different NPC's. Talking to them, I realize that they are the ones with the information for the book. A startling thought that I went to the book way too early crosses my mind, but then I digress: hell, at least I don't have to do it later or even listen to these assholes speak. Dialogue in this game is as boring as it's ever been in an educational game, and there's

LOTS of it. You know what's strange? These people speak of Isaac Newton as though he's already discovered the laws of gravity, even though we're here to make that possible in the first place. I feel so numb.

Well, the NPC's give me some sort of sidequests and I'm guessing I must help them out, by delivering key items from person A to person B. How very exciting, especially since you have to discuss everything available with person B to be able to offer him/her the item in your possession. Eventually, everyone's been delivered whatever it was they wanted, everyone's told me everything they know and then some, and one of the guys specifically tells me to go to Isaac Newton. Finally! So, I go back to the garden. It's still a beautiful day. The sun is shining, flowers are blooming, and Isaac Newton still tells me to fuck off. What the fuck is going on, seriously? I've done everything I possibly can, and am at my wit's end. I just can't figure it out, so I use the time machine to leave. I go to another place in time, and learn something very valuable concerning gameplay. Seeing all shades of red, I finish that stage, then return to shove that apple right up Newton's ass. You know what the problem was? The book, just as I nearly called it.

The problem is that the book's blank spaces need to be filled for you to be able to return the item. Yeah, they *were* filled. Filling up the blank spaces *before* going into the corresponding time and place to get the clues to do it triggers a glitch that makes that stage impossible to finish for the time being. What that means in this case is that you need to leave the stage, return the item to the pedestal, then finish any other stage. This resets the book. So, in other words, I filled up the blank spaces in the beginning of the game for absolutely nothing. I didn't even have any clues, I believe I'd deserve an award. Even doing those damn half-assed sidequests isn't completely necessary, you just need to fill in the gaps in the book at the right time. Now you do get punished for three mistakes, by the way. If you jumble a single blank space three times, you have to do the current stage all over again, complete with the minigame.

To be fair, the whole thing with the book was partly my own fault, so I cannot criticize the game too much, but surely it's stupid and ridiculous to not be able to finish a stage if you don't do everything in the exact

order the game is programmed to follow. Besides, there's plenty left for me to hate about this game. How about the dumb-as-rocks and ugly-as-fuck minigame which you have to play at least once before being able to enter a stage and it never changes? Or the simple fact that the entire game is hellishly boring? Sure, it has some educational value this time around, at least in comparison to *Mario Is Missing!*, and the NES title. There are some really interesting facts here and there, but just slapping a caricature of Mario onto this interactive history tour doesn't make it any more interesting as a video game experience, or those facts any more interesting to read.

Time for an epilogue. I've finally made it to the end. I've passed the three floors and been getting ready to whoop Bowser's scaly ass in another unremarkable boss fight for the unremarkable ages, and do away with this game forever. I enter Bowser's hall, and he... leaves. Mario stands before Bowser's empty throne in just as much disbelief as the player, and Bowser is shown enjoying the sand and sun on some faraway beach like some creep that has just pulled off the most outrageous robbery in history. In a way, he did. This "game" itself is a fucking robbery.

After I twisted my own ears for hours to merely stay awake, putting up with its dry humour and working my ass off to pick up actual information amidst all that garbage, I find it particularly insulting when the game tells me to try again and play quicker, to get to the true ending. I'm guessing a score of 10,000 would do the trick, and the only bit that slowed me down and kept me from that score was that mess with Isaac. Otherwise, I played real quick. I didn't really bother with the dialogue, I found it very easy to pick up certain keywords to get the book filled up properly. Will I go for the happy ending? I don't believe this game has one. So no.

Let's take a quick look at some of my best laughs with *Mario's Time Machine* for the SNES before I finally wrap this up. Vienna, 1824 – the Beethoven stage. The music store clerk's obviously in need of glasses. I go to a hotel and I have no idea what the owner wants. I accidentally offer him a copy of Beethoven's 9th, which is the key item in that stage and he says that it doesn't have enough cultural value. Well, that's a

laugh in itself, but the item he wants is a backscratcher. Now there's cultural value for you! In turn, he offers a monocle. I rush back to the music store, but the clerk doesn't want the monocle. He just went on and on about his eyesight and always losing his glasses. Well, again, you don't really need to do all this shit. Oh and the fact that Ludwig van Beethoven was almost completely deaf by 1824 doesn't matter at all. He hears Mario's speech just fine.

The game force feeds us a cheap, terrible joke in just about every turn, such as "I'm having a Hamburger for lunch". In this case, the NPC means that there's a guy from Hamburg coming over for lunch, and doesn't understand why Mario finds it funny, 'cause we're in 15th century Germany, BUT immediately addresses Mario as "herr plumber". I wonder how many plumbers there were back at that time, exactly. Or 47 years before Christ.

This review has got to come to a head at some point. In a twisted way, I'm grateful games like *Mario's Time Machine* were made 'cause they're God damn fun to destroy. In all honesty, at least it's better than the NES game – this one at least has very slight educational value, whereas the other one's just trash.

5.0