

SUPER MARIO WORLD

GENRE(S): Platformer

AVAILABLE ON: Arcade, SNES

DEVELOPED BY: Nintendo

PUBLISHED BY: Nintendo

RELEASED: November 21, 1990 (SNES)

By the end of the 1980's, console gaming had risen from its early grave with a burning vengeance, fueled further by consumers' overwhelming demand for bigger and better hardware, mainly to receive a more authentic arcade experience in their living rooms to compensate for the high prices of retail games. Sega put out their first 16-bit home system in 1988, which set a few things in motion back at camp Nintendo. Sales of the NES were clearly on the slide after the arrival of the Mega Drive system, and although development of the Game Boy was nearly finished, with just about guaranteed financial success, it was clear Nintendo needed to act fast with the development of a true successor to the Nintendo Entertainment System. Nintendo had something Sega didn't have at that time: a stalwart hero whose name and face had already become – in a relatively short time, I might add – synonymous with quality gaming. There was no question as to who would lead Nintendo into the new age. Right off the heels of the 8-bit masterpiece *Super Mario Bros. 3*, which actually hadn't even been globally released, producer Shigeru Miyamoto and director Takashi Tezuka went to town with a game Nintendo didn't want to call something as plain and feeble as *Super Mario Bros. 4*. No, this dinosaur's called *Super Mario World*. Trust me: you won't forget it.

Just a short while after their latest trek through Mushroom Kingdom, Mario and Luigi go on vacation as sponsored by the accompanying Princess Toadstool, to a cozy, fascinating resort filled with prehistoric mystique, called Dinosaur Land. Unbeknownst to the whole trio, Bowser has a lair hidden beneath its waters, and he's taken upon himself to capture Dinosaur Land's friendly dinosaurs for no apparent reason besides his own twisted amusement. When the Princess is kidnapped as well, the brothers decide

to postpone their vacation to save all of Bowser's prisoners and drive him and his children out of Dinosaur Land for good.

Like its latest 8-bit predecessor, *Super Mario World* is another one of those titles that really makes it hard to determine what exactly is the greatest Mario game of all time. Let's start with something that's real: they were in a world of hurry when they made this game. They didn't rightly know what they were doing. They had no real grip on the technology, no real template for a 16-bit platformer, even less for a game that was outright mandated to not only be a quality game – of course – but also, a *Super Mario Bros. 3* killer, and as a bundled launch title, that one game that would justify the purchase of a whole new system at a time the NES was still popular on a global scale. Despite capitalism inches away from taking enormous bites out of their asses throughout the game's development, Miyamoto and Tezuka's team pulled through, delivering a wildly better game than anyone could've hoped for. Almost exactly 35 years after the game's release, I finally completed 100% of *Super Mario World*, and it is still an amazing game, which I actually like to think as one of the reasons I've been a gamer for so long.

There are six different "worlds" in this game, but now they all come together on one single world map: Yoshi's Island, Donut Plains, Vanilla Dome, Forest of Illusion, Chocolate Island and finally, the Valley of Bowser. In the between, are some extra levels that don't really have a hub to call home, and then, for the first time in a long traditional line, Star World and Special World. Although extra-hard levels like these are usually unlocked after beating the game, these are a little different. Entrances to Star World are hidden all around the world map, usually behind hidden alternative exits from standard levels. Now, the Star World levels aren't hard at all, they're something more like leftover ideas re-designed as pseudo-puzzles; you have to find the hidden exit from each level to be able to proceed through the world, and finally, enter Special World – which is just merciless. Don't expect a grand prize for being able to whip it through Special; the end result is funny, in a Nintendo sort of way, but the whole series of levels wasn't made for anything else but to provide the player with an ultimate challenge in the confines of what they had.

Speaking of confinements, it's true that *Super Mario World* isn't the most technologically superior Super Nintendo game there is. When it comes to audiovisuals alone, *F-Zero* already outmanaged *Super Mario World*, and these two games were released on the same day... but when it comes to gameplay, *Super Mario World* retains all of the quality that *Super Mario Bros. 3* brought to the table, one-upping many of the basic elements, bringing in a vast host of completely new stuff to once again set the new one notably apart from everything that came before.

The inventory screen is gone, as well as the trillion different items and their variations. *Super Mario World* throws back to a simpler time, making the few power-ups themselves better than before. The Super Cape replaces the Magic Leaf, and provides a similar flight mechanic, only this one is more under the player's control. Once airborne, Mario's flight time depends on how well you can handle and maintain his flight – in the best case, you can fly through a whole level. There's even a certain hidden exit that requires you to pull off an extremely fast, risky and elaborate cape trick – there's a well known easy way out, but this is how the developers planned it, and the idea is quite damn impressive. Apart from the cape, only the classics are in. The Mushrooms, the Fire Flower, Starman. They're all we need. ...Well, maybe not all.

The biggest game changer in *Super Mario World* is undoubtedly Yoshi, the debuting friendly dinosaur companion who has since become a legend of his own. When riding Yoshi, you can jump on just about anything except straight spikes, and eat most enemies – eating Koopa Troopas of certain colours gives Yoshi temporary special abilities. On the downside, Yoshi doesn't offer much tactical advantage in special levels such as automatic side-scrollers or underwater levels – hell, basically anywhere that isn't set on solid ground – and he can't enter buildings.

Just as in *Super Mario Bros. 3*, nearly every region in Dinosaur Land is overseen by one of Bowser's children, and a recurring miniboss. Well, at least this time the boss fights are a little different from each other, but repetitive enough to still not shine as the Mario franchise's greatest strength, and the miniboss

fight – against an angry triceratops quartet called "Reznor", as homage to then-rising rock star Trent Reznor – are 100% identical to each other. It's the world itself that makes the game so fun, as well as the joy of discovery when it comes to its many secrets. Oh, and naturally, its high quality as a platformer.

That last sentence is everything you need besides the name of the game to know what you've got here. Sure, better Mario games have been made. Is it as much of a step forward as *Super Mario Bros. 3*? Hell, no, but neither is any other game in existence. Considering everything that went on in the background, as well as the fact that over a half of the game was developed out of thin air with very little guidelines to follow, mostly based on what made the 8-bit games so good, I'd say *Super Mario World* remains nothing less than a fucking triumph.

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