

SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND

GENRE(S): Platformer

AVAILABLE ON: SNES

DEVELOPED BY: Nintendo

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As someone who grew up in the 1990's, to whom time moved slower, I never realized how rapidly the video game market kept changing, in regards to both supply and demand. Commercially speaking, classic Mario was starting to get old; I even recall an old article that described Nintendo losing hope over their own franchises, which had been sidelined by much more interesting characters and games, not to mention bigger and better technology on the market preceding the upcoming SNES successor, and used Mario as a prime example of a fad gone bad. Even the developers themselves were close to losing hope to create that one more masterpiece of a 16-bit platformer, especially to follow on the heels of such a massive hit and technological breakthrough as *Donkey Kong Country* – which was developed at the same time – turned out to be.

Shigeru Miyamoto urged the project to go forward, and challenged Yoshi creator Shigefumi Hino to come up with an idea that would place Yoshi in a larger role and finally grant him his own show, so to speak, but also pay respect to the franchise it all started from. The end result: one of the finest games from the SNES' twilight years. Although the game is called *Super Mario World*, this was by all means Yoshi's time to shine; this time Mario's the one along for the ride. Welcome to the original escort mission, supported by state-of-the-art graphics of its very own kind, incredible design and a whole new approach to what intense platforming action actually means.

A stork carrying two babies to Mushroom Kingdom is attacked by Kamek, a heinous court magician of the Koopa clan, who is in search for playmates for his young master Bowser. Kamek is able to capture Baby

Luigi, while Baby Mario disappears in the scuffle and lands on the back of a Yoshi on Yoshi's Island. The Yoshi clan decides to find Mario's missing brother and deliver both children to their worried parents.

Let's start with the audiovisuals of the game, 'cause after 30 years, the graphics and sound are what people remember this game best – and in one certain case, worst – by. The graphical style of the game is amazing in all of its post-*DKC* boldness. First of all, since *Yoshi's Island* was already far along its production when *Donkey Kong Country* came out, having been developed within a thick veil of secrecy in another part of the world, it was never imagined to have CGI graphics, let alone Rare's patented ACM tech in use. The game is completely hand-drawn, and utilizes the Super FX2 chip to enable real-time 2D and 3D effects, being the first game to do that. Secondly, there's no lag, not even the occasional twitch. The music is absolutely great, with Koji Kondo returning to great form, delivering no less than perhaps his best solo soundtrack in the whole franchise, but the sound effects turn more dastardly on the go, with the worst – yet not the only horrible – sound in the whole game undoubtedly being Mario's cry for help.

That comment about Mario is as good introduction as any to what this game is all about. It certainly isn't a very traditional game, so forget everything you knew about Mario, *Super Mario World* in particular. It doesn't matter what they named the game – everyone knows it better as *Yoshi's Island* anyway – it's a *Super Mario* game in name alone, and has basically nothing to do with its predecessor. Karma's a bitch, I'd say; they had already put out three Yoshi games which had basically nothing to do with Yoshi.

The primary mission of the Yoshis (yes, the YoshiS) is to travel through the five different regions of Yoshi's Island, find a path to Bowser's Dark Land hidden somewhere in the clouds, reunite the Mario Bros. and kick Kamek and his royally spoiled brat's asses in the process. Some of the first things you might notice about the gameplay: there's no HUD of any kind. That also means that there's no time limit, no constantly visible scoreboard, no power-ups as you knew them. Just a Mario timer that shows up whenever Mario is captured (uggggh), or if you stand still long enough. All of the regions have certain themes, as always, two bosses each. This is the first game in Mario history the developers actually put effort into all of the boss

fight. Every fight is different, and they all look incredible – just wait 'til the final confrontation with Bowser. Yes, Bowser's still the final boss just as he should be, even if Kamek is considered the main villain of the game.

I mentioned there are no power-ups in the traditional sense, and that's mainly because Yoshi himself is invincible against all enemies, and in his basic repertoire, we have one: a hover jump, which gives him a little boost over ledges not quite reachable by a normal jump, and enables him to glide for a short while. Two: the ability to spawn eggs out of nearly everything he eats, and use them as projectiles against enemies or solve environmental puzzles. Three: the ability to pound the ground – passed to Mario in later games. Four: the ability to morph into different vehicles at set locations. Well, lastly, since this is a "Mario game", they couldn't have made the baby completely helpless, so by consuming a rare Starman, Yoshi ejects his little bundle of trouble, who then dons the classic Super Cape and becomes Super Baby, running through everything in his caffeine-fueled way. Once the effect wears off, he returns to his usual, ignorant and loud self, who you must protect from all danger at all costs.

So, while Yoshi is indeed physically equipped against everything but spikes, lava, pits, and all that, any contact with anything remotely dangerous will flip Mario straight off his back, and initially you have ten seconds to retrieve him before he is captured by a Snifit patrol. You can increase the timer to 30 seconds within each level by collecting Stars, and if you manage to keep those 30 Stars up 'til the end of the level, you're one small step closer to completing 100% of the game. Let's go over the other collectibles and how they all change the game.

Super Mario World's greatest joy and the key to 100% was finding all those secret exits. *Yoshi's Island* is a huge game spread onto multiple levels of both the horizontal and vertical variety. Since there's no time limit, you can, and are encouraged to, explore every corner and even every seemingly empty airspace in every level. This is challenging to the mind, 'cause there's a fair amount of levels that were designed as frustrating mazes, from standard ones all the way to the boss levels. The same rules apply to both types;

there are three main collectibles in each level of the game. 30 Stars, 20 Red Coins, and five Flowers. I already went over the Stars, but I'll add that you can find them anywhere, even use clever and well-timed tricks to gather them all on most occasions. The Red Coins are hidden throughout the levels among standard ones, and hidden inside special eggs on some very rare occasions; you can use a special item to spot them immediately, but you will also probably learn to see them without it, their presence is hinted by a very faint reddish glow. The Flowers are hidden the best; they can be found just about anywhere, from the most secluded corners at that, but they are also the easiest to spot once you're close enough. Collecting all five Flowers treats you with another gift, namely the highest chance to win at the final gate of each level, and receive access to a random minigame for either extra lives or helpful items.

There's a host of minigames hidden within the levels as well, hidden almost just as good as the regular collectibles, but I won't go into them, 'cause I find them somewhat distracting, especially going to great lengths to find them just for a chance to snag more extra lives which you have plenty to begin with. However, on the other hand, *Yoshi's Island* is far from an easy game, and you will undoubtedly lose a lot of those lives, which brings us to the Special levels. Special carries over from *Super Mario World* – the most wrecking nightmares usually do. Every region in this game has a Special level, and to gain access to it, you need to collect a total of 100 points from every level in the respective region. From the very beginning, these levels will show you absolutely no mercy; they take the game's most challenging mechanics and setpieces, and blend them into a satanic stew. To compensate for these levels' ultra-high difficulty, getting perfect points from each region also unlocks a minigame arena where you can grind for a basically infinite amount of extra lives.

Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island is a beautiful platformer, a brilliant showcase of the SNES' power during the final truly glorious days of its cycle. It has its dull and somewhat empty moments, and at times, frustration turns to all-out anger, all because some of the levels carry on a bit too long, even if you're not in the mood to explore, and Mario's a pain in the ass 98% of the time. Apart from these two outstanding grievances I have had with this game for 30 years, I really can't think of another problem I have with the

game. Ending up the last 2D Mario platformer made in over a decade went on to raise its value even higher than it initially was.

9.3