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By: Andrei Dumitrescu, Games Editor



New Super Mario Bros. Wii
Nintendo

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Italian star power

Having the Mario name in videogaming is like having the Channel brand in fashion: you can actually slap it on an average product and still get bigger sales than other companies that try to put together a best selling perfume or aim to create the definitive 2D platforming experience.

Rivals cannot even hope to compete when the product itself has a lot of well crafted mechanics and also delivers a heavy load of nostalgia to those who have been in love with Mario and his running and jumping ways ever since they were 6.

I'm firmly in this category and although my love for Nintendo and Mario has been severely diminished by Super Mario Galaxy and its contrived attempt at expanding to the stars, I still believe New Super Mario Bros. for the Nintendo Wii is a worthy title with a solid foundation, great looking characters, mostly cool level design, which is a blast in single player and slightly confounding, yet enjoyable after a while in multiplayer. Just don't forget to get as close as possible to the mind set of your early childhood before popping the disc in the Wii drive.

In addition to the upgraded graphics of the Nintendo Wii and the new control scheme, which uses the Wiimote and the Nunchuk very well, the fresh Mario experience benefits from some pretty nice additions.

There are the new multiplayer capabilities, detailed further in the review, but also the integration of the Super Guide feature that Shigeru Miyamoto has been talking about so much. It basically means that once a player fails to get through a level enough times, Luigi will pop up and run through it in the proper way, showing how it needs to be done without actually spoiling any of the secrets. Players are able to choose to skip that level after the Super Guide is activated.

*High up
Cold spell*

Gameplay

All you need to do in order to get through New Super Mario Bros. Wii is to run and jump. A little spatial awareness also helps, as does a bit of math to figure out where you can lose and where you can gain some lives. The basics of the game are as simple as they were 20 years ago but Nintendo has added an extra layer of encounters and complexities to spice things up a bit.

The three fresh suits offered are an Ice Suit, which allows for enemies to be frozen and then destroyed by breaking the ice (it's fun to use this one in the watery levels and see what happens), the Penguin Suit, which can only be described by using the Fight Club reference "Slide" and the Propeller Suit that allows Mario to escape from the game space (and don't press too many keys; otherwise, you won't be sure where you land). They are fun by themselves but the game is not changed in any fundamental way by them, except for

reaching some hard to get places for coins and upgrades.

Other changes are made to the overland map, where Toads can be seen as trapped in one level and rescued for a reward and where roaming enemies can be encountered, going into a mini boss fight that can get the player some upgrades or lives. There are also Star Coins, which can be redeemed for some hint movies but they often feel like a bit of cheating, considering that all they reveal can also be seen on your own.

Turns out bad

Motion control

Graphics and audio

The developers at Nintendo really tried hard to update the look in order to make it more appealing for those with big screen television sets and it has paid off. Mario has never looked better in 2D and one could argue that even Super Mario Galaxy is a tad worse looking, paying the price for its move to three dimensions and space flight. The details are as crisp as the hardware allows it, the overland map looks impressive and there is attention paid to every character, every landscape, every animation. The colors could have been just a bit brighter in certain areas but that's about the only observation that can be leveled at the looks of New Super Mario Bros. Wii.

The sound is another plus. It's just as bright and sunny as you remember it, with the same old themes that have been tattooed into the inner ear of most players. The direction is clearer and there are some nice changes of pace. The only real annoyance is the excited little shouts Mario seems to be forced to let out any time he completes or enters a stage.

Multiplayer

One of the big selling points for New Super Mario Bros. Wii has been the fact that as long as you have four Wiimotes laying around unused, you can get three friends playing the game at the same time. There are three possibilities here: join the others in the single player experience in order to get to Peach, getting into a Free Mode run of a course, which ranks players based on the amount of coins they get and the enemies they take out of the picture or start a Coin Battle that boils down to getting as many coins as possible to win.

All the modes are fun but the game gets pretty crowded when the four players (Mario, Luigi, the Blue Toad and the Yellow Toad) are on the screen, competing to get coins or to get to that koopa, which needs to be stomped on. The single player game works best when tackled in the two-player mode and there is some beautiful potential for grieving when more players are in the game. Not as much fun cooperatively as Battle City for the Nintendo Entertainment City but definitely an interesting addition to the Mario gameplay universe.

Conclusion

It's all about nostalgia with New Super Mario Bros. for the Nintendo Wii. If the characters and their exploits have dominated your younger years and then you left them for more complex, violent or narrative driven titles, the new game is a perfect way to reconnect and share some of the fond memories again. It's also perfect to bring an updated Mario adventure to those who have never experienced the magic in the first place. It's also very engaging, if not always fun and a bit too chaotic, in multiplayer. Nintendo has done a great job at expanding the appeal of the title to a wider array of gamers while keeping its soul

firmly in place.

But where New Super Mario Bros. for the Wii fails is in the eyes of those who want Mario to do something entirely new, now that he is almost 27 (or 25, depending on how you count). Maybe these are the natural limits of the character and of the mechanics associated with him. Maybe Nintendo should refrain from any modernization attempt and just reissue the games it has already created with small improvements, like new suits, more multiplayer options, better designed areas or more game modes. Maybe it should also try a total reinvention and see how that sits with fans and critics. Either way, New Super Mario Bros. is the best the company can offer when it comes to 2D platforming with a multiplayer twist.