

6 June 2008

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[Super Mario Galaxy](#)

Save the princess, save the galaxy

It's Super Mario as you've never seen Super Mario before. Seriously, who would have thought that he would make it among the stars when he appeared, back in the Stone Age of gaming, alongside a barrel-jumping gorilla. I'd guess no one.

Not even game developers were thinking so far into the future back then. Nowadays, sure, you'll hear people saying things like "We want to make this a trilogy that runs for six years," but when games were few and far in between, all a game maker had on its mind was to come up with one great game, not set up with a franchise. But Mario turned into a franchise, spawning numerous titles over the year, most of them good, some of them bad. It might be suffering from a bit of character fatigue, but Super Mario Galaxy manages to capture the Mario in Mario.

Concept

Normally, I'd call this part of the review the "Story" part, but you all know the story behind Mario and his adventures. That Princess Peach, who seems to be cuter every times she makes an appearance in a game, gets herself kidnapped again and, of course, Mario has to go out and save her. I bet you could guess who took her even if you've never played a Mario game before in your life. Yes, it was Bowser. Only now, the twist is that the kidnapping is of galactic proportions. Bowser has an UFO-like spaceship with which he takes Peach and leaves Mario stranded.

Bowser has a plan of creating a new sun and then rule the galaxy with Peach as his Leya slave girl. I am not kidding. Unfortunately, he did not count on Mario teaming up with Rosalina, who is the keeper of the Comet Observatory, to make his plans history. This is the basic premise of the game and after the not too long introductory sequence that familiarizes the player with the Wiimote and Nunchuk based controls, the player is free to explore the game world and have fun with the wide array of mini-games that Super Mario Galaxy offers. You eventually get to confront Bowser and save Peach but do take your time, as this game offers much more than you might think.

The Galaxy

The stars

Gameplay

Mario is one cool dude. If I could do half of what he does, I would totally quit my day job. The guy jumps on enemies to take them out and can also spin like crazy to stun them or to break crystals. The dizzying movement alone would make me a superior human being. The ability to jump from small planet to small planet could also come in handy.

The idea is that gameplay is nice and varied. The central area of the game is the Comet Observatory (when it comes to names, Nintendo displays precious little imagination). There are six domes in the observatory and each dome houses galaxies that you can explore. The idea is to collect stars so that new areas become available and then collect more stars. I haven't done it, but apparently there are exactly 242 Power Stars that can be collected through normal means in the game. Once you get them, you can take pictures of the score and then brag about it on the boards, fan boy.

For the normal gamer, who is more interested in having fun than in completing games, the challenges are interesting and varied. You need to jump, navigate, run, spin around like crazy and perform all manner of tricks to beat your enemies and get the stars. The game is so 3D it's sometimes a little overwhelming. I swear you can get motion sickness if you move too quickly and too much around on the smaller planetoids. This, in fact, is one of my main gripes with the game - the fact that the celestial bodies are small. It might have been better to make some of them larger and place longer quests on them. But there's definite variety when it comes to the environments, the challenges and the enemies you face.

One thing that might annoy some gamers is the comets, which are designed to make the player replay some of the areas already played, but with a twist. For example, there's one that forces you to replay an area within a time limit, which is manageable. Unfortunately, there's also one which forces you to replay a zone with only one point of health left and without any health inducing coins, which can lead to a lot of frustration and judicious use of various swear words.

Speaking of what Mario can do, you need to see how he launches himself again after hitting a wall. And, of course, there are some transformations too. Most of them felt a bit forced in the context. Bee makes you behave like a bee, as you fly and stick to honey covered surfaces, while Boo makes you a Mario ghost, allowing you to go through walls. Somebody better call the Ghostbusters, 'cause Mario is standing in the middle of my living room!

All in all, there's enough variety in the game to keep a platform addicted gamer occupied for weeks. And Mario, even if an old chap, holds up well when confronted with a Bowser that threatens to remake the galaxy in his own despicable image.

Platforming to get the Princess
Flying around

Visuals and audio

This is a Wii title, let's not forget that. After playing Grand Theft Auto IV on the Xbox 360, you approach Wii games with a bit of fear, the fear that the gameplay will be affected by the graphics quality. But Super Mario Galaxy doesn't look bad. The fact that the whole concept is rooted in cartoon characters, that have changed little since the days of the first consoles, helps a lot.

There are some things that are gorgeous. The animations of the stars that power Mario through space, towards distant planets and the animation of Mario flying are very well done. There's a clear graphical consistency within the game, with nothing out of place. Even the pink covered monsters seem OK and at home in the world of Super Mario Galaxy. Of course, there's no fancy lighting and no lens flare, but that does not in any way diminish the value of the gameplay.

That's one of the great achievements of the Nintendo Wii. It does not pack a hardware punch but it packs in all the necessary tools to take the mind of the player off the need for hardware punch. Designers can concentrate on movement and on control so varied and natural that the graphic element does not matter one bit when you play games like Super Mario Galaxy.

The sounds are also well done, even if a bit childish for my personal taste. Certain sounds, like the ones made when collecting stars, got on my fragile nerves after a while, unlike the continuous gunfire sounds from first person shooter which I can tolerate for any length of time. The music is an orchestral score that manages to underline beautifully the important moments and fights of the game. It changes continuously and underlines the various worlds through which the player makes his way in his search for Peach (who as always is in that last elusive castle).

Multiplayer

It would have been hard to include competitive multiplayer in the game, as it is mainly a single player adventure modeled after the old Mario games. Those seeking multiplayer action powered by the extended Mario cast can look for Super Smash Mario Brawl and have fun using that title.

But there's an interesting co-op mechanic in Super Mario Galaxy. A second player can join in the game by picking up a Wiimote and hunting for star bits on the screen. He does not need the Nunchuk and his role is a bit limited, because he can only collect stars, stop some of the enemies on screen and help the character jump higher.

Conclusion

Get this game. Show it to your kids. They're gonna love it. If you haven't got any kids, try to see past the cartoon exterior, into the heart of this well conceived platform game that will make you reminisce with friends about those days, back in the late '80's, when you played Mario for the first time and you moved the controller in the hope that it would make the on-screen character jump faster. The age-old question of whether you can jump past the pole is very likely to also come up during this kind of discussion. And you have Super Mario Galaxy to thank for that particular element of geek sub-culture being brought back from the dead.

With good graphics, a very satisfying control scheme and enough Power Stars to collect to last you at least a month of medium intensity gaming, Super Mario Galaxy breathes a sort of new life into the character and the franchise by bringing it to proper 3D in an interesting

way. And, yes, I found myself moving the Wiimote while playing the game just to make Mario move better. Which does not work. And, no, you can't jump past the flag. Although my brother says that he's done it when no one was around.