

## Nostalgia with a Vengeance: “New Super Mario Bros. Wii”

Written by Luke Hamilton

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Since his 1981 debut in *Donkey Kong*, Mario has been a staple of the platforming genre, but in recent years he's branched out, taking on go-kart racing and fighting tournaments with other Nintendo characters, for instance. In *New Super Mario Bros. Wii*, the original magic that caught our attention decades ago returns, along with the sadistic difficulty some have come to love and hate.

Princess Peach is celebrating her birthday when she's kidnapped by Bowser's eight kids. Why she doesn't have more security after being snatched up a couple dozen times is beyond me, but once again Mario jumps to the rescue on a journey that takes him across eight worlds of pure platforming madness.

Joining in with the trend of remaking classic games, *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* uses 2D gameplay with 3D characters and environments in a sharp package. The graphics don't look as good on a high-definition TV as in standard definition, though; there's a bit more pixelation on

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character models. The music hits all the right notes with the same charm and mystic vibes from the originals, with spooky tempos underground, cheery melodies running through the fields, and an epic lead-in running through a Koopa castle to do battle with the level boss. It looks good and sounds wonderful.

The game takes ideas from previous *Super Mario* games (not including the spin-off titles such as tennis and kart racing) and melds them with great results. Playing involves turning the Wii remote on its side and using it like an original NES controller. Worlds can be traversed and stages can be selected similar to *Super Mario Bros. 3* ; players have techniques like the triple jump and ground pound from *Super Mario 64* ; and secret warp pipes can take you to further worlds like in the original *Super Mario Bros* . It's the first time these ideas have been blended, and it's a great combination that delivers old-school fun.



Out of the gate, the levels are fairly straightforward and give players some time to ease in to the running and jumping controls while learning the finer aspects of the game. Once you get to about the third world, though, playtime's over. Some levels will blitz you with constant hazards and enemies, while some coat the ground with ice and make movement exceedingly difficult without some preparation.

It's the difficulty spike that left me excited every time I came back to play. With more games these days getting easier as you play -- with character upgrades and save points to record your progress -- Mario can only be beaten with skill and the occasional grace of luck. I enjoy a challenge, and it's a true point of pride being able to say I beat a Mario game, completing every level without using shortcuts such as warp pipes.

The game is not without mercy, though, with a new feature branded by Nintendo as the "Super Guide." If you die eight times in a row in a single course, a green block appears that allows players to access the Super Guide. When activated, Mario's brother Luigi steps in under the computer's control and goes through the level for you, showing you how it can be completed.

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Players can jump in anytime and take control of Luigi if desired and complete the level beyond the point they had trouble with, or just let the level complete itself and move on to the next one. It's a good tool for inexperienced players to learn the ins and outs of the Mario style.

A new feature added to the series is cooperative play with up to four players. What makes it special is that players can be added or removed without having to restart the game.

Players form a team that can include Mario, Luigi, and a pair of Toadstool people. Having four players run through a level of *Mario* simultaneously equals one thing: chaos, and lots of it. Players can cooperate and go through a level together, but most times it turns into a riot of attempting to off each other and steal all the power-ups for oneself.

It's actually pretty fun, and obviously expected with the optional "Free Mode" that lets players compete for higher ranks by collecting more points, coins, and enemy kills than their friends. A lack of online play is disappointing, but with all the chaos multiplayer brings, no way to communicate with other players through the Wii online, and people that just enjoy being jerks, it's to be expected. Because the game requires so much precision in the platforming, it's better to cut the feature than ruin the experience.

To be honest, I wrote *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* off when I first heard about it, thinking it wasn't going to be anything special, just an excuse for Nintendo to abuse the franchise. I'm eating those words now, though, as it's the first Wii game in months that makes me compulsively use the system. This is a winner worth every penny.

*New Super Mario Bros. Wii is now available on Nintendo Wii for \$49.95. For this review, the author played through the main game and played around with multiplayer modes.*