

Analysis of Mechanics

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Title: Super Mario Galaxy

Released: 2007

Author: Nintendo EAD Tokyo

Primary Genre: Platformer

Secondary Genre: Action-adventure

Style: Cartoon, Fantasy

Analysis

After two preceding 3D Mario platformer entries in the series, Galaxy switched from mostly open world formula used by Super Mario 64 and Sunshine to more traditional approach along previous games from history with level based structure. Story as usual is very light and the game relies on the actual gameplay. Still the game manages to capture the cosmic essence and feel of adventure thanks to its tightly scripted introduction and atmospheric music right from the start. The common antagonist Bowser kidnaps Peach, and Mario is left once again to save her, this time across vast space.

The focus of the game resolves around travelling through space and its planets across galaxies, which are accessed by multiple domes located on the Comet Observatory, commanded by Rosalina, that functions as the main hub. The individual planets are then travelled across with the help of Launch Stars for longer distances, thematically fitting transportation mechanisms, like stems or worms, or simple jumps for short distances. The biggest emphasis in the game is put on gravitational mechanics, which fit into the space environment, despite being rarely utilized in games. Apart from traditional actions like jumping and stomping enemies, Mario has also gained Spin attack enabled by the Luma star, while still encountering various power-ups, well known ones like Fire or Ice flowers, and new ones like Bee or Boo mushrooms.

Individual levels representing missions lead to the Power Stars that are the main collectible of the game and essential to advance. Most galaxies have either six or one mission and eventually lead to the main boss galaxy of the given dome whose reward is always a Grand Star, enabling access to another dome. Star Bits, another collectible, are found throughout the gameplay and can be used for creating certain galaxies when fed to Hungry Lumas, but also shooting enemies with a pointer. Mario has typically three health bars and taking damage removes one, which can be replenished by collecting a coin.

Level design of the game can be divided into two main categories of the planets based on gravity, planetoidal and downward pulling. The galaxies are often combination of both. All the planets come in unique shapes and sizes, and the biggest differentiator are their individual themes. The planetoidal planets have their gravity concentrated inside them, so the movement around them is typically free without the worry of falling down, the exception being ones with a black hole in their center. The downward pulling planets are more traditional approach to platformers, explained by black holes located below and pulling towards them. The camera is locked and moves in its set paths. All the galaxies vary greatly in their themes and aesthetics, like the first Good Egg Galaxy resolving around grassy and industrial planets, Honeyhive Galaxy with forested theme, or Space Junk Galaxy focusing on space debris.

Many of the enemies are returning ones from history of the series, like the most known Goombas, Piranha Plants, or Bullet Bills, while some are new, like Octoombas that charge their attacks, Octoguy who shoots rocks, or Topmums that spin. There are various boss enemies across the galaxies, like Dino Piranha resembling dinosaur plant, rock ghost Bouldergeist, or the main ones Bowser and son Bowser Jr. alternating fights in the end of each dome.

The challenge is present in the form of combination of platforming aspects and enemies encounters, and even though the game is structured into the levels across galaxies, put together they feel cohesive. The space atmosphere is emphasized not only by the environments resolving around various themes applied to space, details like synchronization system for sound effects, but also the real orchestral soundtrack that gives distinct and unique feel, enhancing the impression of cosmic adventure and making the entire game experience complete.