

Super Mario Bros R & A Example

The Great Giana Sisters (C64)

First, we will investigate the most shameless ripoff of Super Mario Bros ever created: “The Great Giana sisters”. Yes, shameless ripoffs date back to 1987, far before the iPhone. Not only was the game a platformer that featured two siblings, but the game’s first level layout was nearly identical to Mario Bros, the game stole many of Mario’s power-ups, and it even had goomba enemies (with ears in an attempt to set them apart). Rather than discussing the NUMEROUS similarities to SMB (so many that it had to be removed from sale), there are subtle yet important differences that, in my opinion, doesn’t bring The Great Giana Sisters to the level of greatness we see in SMB.

Right away, you will notice the controls are a lot more clunky. Pressing the C64 button will only allow you to jump if you also are aiming up on the controller. This was probably due to the fact that the C64 only had one button; however, this is important to mention as we are in the age of the smartphone. Despite the fact the game was done all with a single button, it definitely feels a lot less responsive than the SMB controls. Additionally, the player is a lot more “floaty” when jumping around. Although this made landing on enemies a tad easier, the core feel of the game was far less satisfying. Another minor change that took away from the good feel and pace present in SMB was the fact that jumping on Goombas didn’t result in a bounce. This, combined with the floaty jumping and inability to run fast results in a lackluster feel to the game even when doing well (this is even obvious when comparing speed runs of both games).

Another mechanical issue was the fact that you fell twice as fast when walking off edges than when falling after a jump. This resulted in many prediction errors when attempting to

squash enemies, and took a while for me to even realize this and adjust. When jumping upward and hitting blocks, enemies on top of them didn't die like in SMB. Personally, this made sense to me and didn't take away a lot from the game; however, this was extra satisfying in SMB, and many small details like this help take a game from average to awesome. From a technical perspective, the collision detection was off, resulting in the ability to "float" when close to edges, the inability to jump up narrow passages without extreme precision, and frustrating deaths on enemies.

Finally, let's take a look at juice and aesthetics. In Super Mario Bros, when you get a mushroom you nearly double in size, lending to the fact that you are stronger (can crush bricks). In TGGS, you simply get a messy hairdo. This really doesn't reveal much about your new ability, and is hardly noticeable. Additionally, when you get the "thunderbolt" power-up there is no noticeable change in the character as compared to mario's flower power. Numerous responsive details and juice are lacking in TGGS, ultimately leading to a less satisfactory experience.

Alex Kidd in Miracle World (SMS)

Alex Kidd is often compared to Super Mario Bros not because it was a direct rip off like The Great Giana Sisters, but because it was Sega's direct response to Super Mario Bros. However, these games are vastly different aside from both being platformers released within a year of one another.

Unlike Super Mario Bros, in Alex Kidd you punch enemies and blocks rather than jumping on and under them. As you can imagine, this created an entirely different flow to the gameplay. It allowed for more puzzle like elements to be designed with the bricks as you decided what order to punch them out. This resulted in more precise and calculated gameplay,

that contrasted quite a bit with Super Mario Bros. Like TGGs, the jumping was a bit more floaty and the gameplay slower; however this worked much better in Alex Kidd's gameplay style.

Alex the Kidd ultimately had a lot more going on than Super Mario Bros and introduced many features that would later be incorporated into SMB3. There was a large variety in gameplay including a bike, helicopter, boat, and more. There were multiple power-ups accessible by a menu, flight power-ups, interesting mini-games, and a map of the outer world. Additionally, the gold you collected was more than just points, and could be used to buy things! These were some nice features that added to the game. However, despite all of this Alex Kidd felt all over the place compared to SMB, and in my opinion tried to do too much resulting in less quality game design. The beauty of SMB is far more subtle, and lies in the fact that simple elements were used in a masterful way to create an enjoyable experience through enemy placement and level design. More is not always better, and can complicate design and result in a less tuned experience. Another thing I found odd (but humorous) was the fact that boss fights were a game of Rock Paper Scissors that is purely luck based. Sure you might get a good laugh out of this, but I personally love a good boss fight, and am super frustrated when losing to chance and am forced to play again just to learn an enemy's RPS strategy!

Ultimately, SMB's ability to focus on a few core elements and utilize them to create an extremely well designed game outshines Alex Kidd's variety in gameplay and adventure when it comes to the gameplay experience.

Kid Chameleon (Mega Drive/Genesis)

Although not as popular as Alex Kidd, Kid Chameleon is the closest thing to a Mario game you will get from Sega. Because it was released in 1992, it had a few Mario games to pull ideas from and incorporate into the gameplay. The premise of the game is the main character

uses masks to transform into different characters in order to use various abilities. So what elements did Kid Chameleon take from SMB, and which did it decide to leave behind?

Right off the bat many similarities are obvious: you jump on enemies to kill them, and you break blocks with your head, and can collect power-ups that pop out. However, differences are also painfully obvious: control in the air during a jump feels more limited (along with the inability to short hop well), controls less tight, and levels more stretched out and half hazardedly put together. The camera work combined with more vertical level designs at times also feels off, resulting in enemy damage that can barely be predicted, and ultimately leading to frustration. In the game you do have three (or more) health points as compared to Mario's one hit die (unless big). It definitely feels necessary, but only because without it I would probably curse the game out of existence from how often I felt unfairly damaged due to bad design, or because getting damaged was needed to learn new mechanics (for example, why can't the Rhino Suit that breaks through walls damage certain enemies?!?).

The varied suits (9 as opposed to just two in the original SMB) that grant you different abilities are a nice changeup, but don't introduce any decision making as the game will feed you the correct mask at the needed time. Additionally, unlike Mario's suits being very versatile and skill based, these feel more directed powerful as they have more specific use cases.

Despite coming years after SMB, it feels less polished overall, and lacks needed visual responsive feedback and juice. For example, I reached a teleporter type thing and struggled with it for a few minutes until I finally realized I needed to simply standstill for a bit for it to activate. However, there was NO visual feedback helping illustrate this at all.

Kid Chameleon definitely had a nice pace to it that felt fun once I got the hang of the controls, but the lack of depth and care when it came to implementing each piece of the game stands out to me, and makes the experience far less enjoyable than SMB.