

Game Narrative Review

Game Title: Super Paper Mario

Platform: Wii

Genre: 2D/3D Platformer

Release Date: April 9, 2007

Developer: Intelligent Systems

Publisher: Nintendo

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: uncertain

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Overview

When a sinister foe invades Mushroom Castle and kidnaps Princess Peach, Mario and Luigi naturally suspect their old archenemy, Bowser. Upon confronting him within his castle, the true villain, Count Bleck, reveals himself and kidnaps Luigi, Bowser, and his entire army, leaving only an unconscious Mario behind.

With the aid of the inhabitants of Flipside, a world between dimensions, Mario regains consciousness and learns of Count Bleck's sinister plot to destroy all worlds as foretold in the prophetic tome known as the Dark Prognosticus. He also learns about a second book, the Light Prognosticus, which foretells a hero who will stop this destruction. Armed with this knowledge and accompanied by a Pixl fairy named Tippi, Mario sets out on a quest to stop Count Bleck, rescue his friends and prevent the destruction of all worlds.

Characters

- **Mario** – The main protagonist of the Mario Bros. universe, Mario is a mustachioed, Italian plumber, clad in red, who frequently rises to the challenge of saving Princess Peach and the Mushroom Kingdom from various enemies. In this adventure, Mario bravely takes the role of the foretold hero who saves all worlds from destruction.
- **Luigi** – Mario's green-clad, younger brother, Luigi often serves as Mario's sidekick in rescuing the Mushroom Kingdom. Kidnapped and brainwashed by Count Bleck, Luigi finds himself fighting to stop his own brother as the intrepid Mr. L. Once Mario defeats Mr. L, Luigi comes to his senses and joins Mario on his quest to save all worlds.
- **Peach** – The stereotypical damsel in distress, Peach spends much of her time kidnapped by various villains. Once reunited with Mario, she joins the quest to stop Count Bleck's evil plot.
- **Bowser** – Though frequently found in opposition to the Mushroom Kingdom, in this adventure Mario's archenemy joins forces with Peach and the plumbers to prevent the destruction of all worlds.

- **Tippi (Timpani)** – A fairy-like Pixl, Tippi accompanies Mario and his companions on their quest. Throughout the course of the adventure, we learn that in her long forgotten past, Tippi was a girl named Timpani who was in love with a man named Blumiere. When Blumiere’s father banished Timpani to another dimension (effectively transforming her into the Pixl Tippi), Blumiere’s heart darkened with rage and he became the villainous Count Bleck.
- **Count Bleck (Blumiere)** – Driven to villainy long ago by the loss of his one true love, Count Bleck has embraced the foretold void of the Dark Prognosticus his ideal future and vowed to bring about the destruction of all worlds. He kidnaps Bowser and Peach and stages a wedding ceremony in order to create the Chaos Heart, the only artifact powerful enough to create the void.
- **Dimentio** – Introduced as one of Count Bleck’s minions, Dimentio has his own motivation for the destruction of all worlds. He believes that the possessor of the Chaos Heart at the final moment of total destruction gains the power to create a new world as he sees fit. Dimentio helps Mario and friends to defeat Count Bleck only to turn against them, taking the Chaos Heart for himself.

Breakdown

Super Paper Mario follows two related stories. The main story of Super Paper Mario, Mario’s quest for the Pure Hearts, has at its core the idea that an act of artificial love, namely the forced marriage of Peach and Bowser by Count Bleck and his minions, has the power to create the most potent destructive force in the universe, the Chaos Heart. To overcome the power of the Chaos Heart, Mario and his companions must find eight Pure Hearts, each created by an act of genuine love. This central theme is fascinating as it exalts pure motives and demonizes artificiality, suggesting that the same action can be either good or bad depending on the motivation behind it.

One of the best examples of this occurs at the end of Chapter 3: The Bitlands. At the beginning of this chapter, Tippi is kidnapped by a geeky chameleon named Francis and locked up in his fortress. Mario and his companions fight their way through the entire chapter, without the benefit of Tippi’s powers, to reach Francis’ fortress and rescue Tippi. After defeating Francis, Tippi is so grateful to Mario that her expression of gratitude creates a Pure Heart at that very moment. This event reinforces the central theme of rewarding pure motives by rewarding the hero for the selfless act of rescuing a companion, and rewarding the companion for the honest, heart-felt expression of gratitude.

In the end, the salvation of all worlds comes through a final act of genuine love. When Count Bleck realizes that Tippi is his long lost love Timpani, he loses his desire for the void. Unfortunately, Dimentio interferes and makes sure that there is no way to stop the power of the Chaos Heart. What Dimentio had not counted on was the power of genuine love. The marriage of Count Bleck and Tippi, together with the power of the eight Pure Hearts, destroys the Chaos Heart and seals the void, saving all worlds from destruction.

Strongest Element

In between chapters of Mario's quest for the Pure Hearts, a second story tells, at first obliquely but with growing clarity, of the lovers Timpani and Blumiere. Their tale is a sad one. Though they are deeply in love, Blumiere's father disapproves of Timpani and banishes her to another dimension. This single act drives Blumiere to become Count Bleck and seek the destruction of all worlds and the peace of the void beyond. This is a very powerful plot device as it gives Count Bleck, an otherwise soulless, evil character, an aspect of humanity to which we can relate. The villain becomes, in a sense, a victim as well, reminding us to look for the good in even the worst of our own enemies.

Unsuccessful Element

In contrast to the tragically multifaceted villainy of Count Bleck, the character of Dimentio lacks significant depth. Dimentio first appears as one of Count Bleck's minions, standing in direct opposition to the hero. As Mario approaches the final confrontation with Count Bleck, Dimentio changes his allegiance, siding with Mario in his fight against the Count. Once the threat of Count Bleck is out of the way, Dimentio reveals his true colors and once again stands in opposition to Mario and company. While on the surface this appears to be a double-reversal on the part of Dimentio, his character actually remains static throughout the story. Dimentio's true motivation is pride and vanity manifest in his desire to destroy all worlds and remake them in his own image. Compared to the depth of the other central characters, Dimentio comes across as ironically one-dimensional and artificial.

Highlight

Having defeated Count Bleck in the climactic battle to save all worlds, he pleads with the heroes to end his life but Tippi asks them to spare him. This poignant moment of Tippi's compassion regardless of all that Count Bleck has done is the truly heartwarming climax of the story – the triumph of genuine love over destruction.

Critical Reception

Overall, Super Paper Mario received great scores from game critics. Matt Casamassina of IGN gave the game an overall 8.9 out of 10, praising the story but wishing there were less reading required. "The writing is well-crafted and humorous, but there is so much to read that it actually interrupts the flow of the game." (Casamassina, 2007) Gamespot's, Ricardo Torres gave an 8.8 out of 10 saying, "Super Paper Mario's humorous story, accessible gameplay, inventive design, cool visual style, and impressive amount of content give it an undeniable charm." (Torres, 2007) Steve Wysowski at Console Monster praises Super Paper Mario as "an amazingly unique and incredibly deep adventure," giving the game a score of 92 out of 100. (Wysowski, 2007) Overall, critics enjoyed the game and enjoyed the story, though the presentation of the story felt awkward at times due to the volumes of text used to convey the plot.

Lessons

- An otherwise purely evil antagonist gains a lot of depth through a tragic back-story describing their descent into villainy. This is the case of Count Bleck in Super Paper Mario. His drive to destroy all worlds stems from the tragic loss of Timpani, his one true love.
- A character who repeatedly changes allegiance feels shallow unless their choice to change sides accompanies a motivating change within the character itself. Dimentio fits this mold, as his character's motivation, though hidden from the player, remains constant over the course of the game, even though he changes sides two or three times.
- In a game where the player has a choice of party members, introducing each character separately through the narrative allows the player to learn each character's abilities naturally. The player can change characters at almost any time during play, but knowing which character is best suited to a given task requires the player to gain familiarity with all characters. Super Paper Mario does this in a way that integrates well with the plot and feels very natural.

Summation

As an action platformer, Super Paper Mario may seem a strange choice for writing analysis, even considering the role-playing elements of the Paper Mario franchise. People find it noteworthy for bending of the dimensional barrier between two- and three-dimensional platformers, and only mention the plot in passing if at all. The depth of the central characters of Tippi/Timpani and Count Bleck/Blumiere and the narrative approach of interwoven back-story make Super Paper Mario truly compelling.

Works Cited

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