

Simply Smashing

Nearly twenty years ago Nintendo Co., Ltd. (NCL) pioneered the personal game-console industry with the introduction of the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). The home-gaming concept was not completely new, but as we learned in class, Nintendo flourished because of the ingenuity and amusement presented in its initial games. Now, with advancements in technology rendering the possibilities in video games seemingly endless, Nintendo has lost neither its genius nor humor in the creation of its interactive stories. One exemplary aspect of Nintendo's game production is the tendency to recycle objects and images. Instead of plain sequels, Nintendo reuses characters, themes, and ideas in a wide variety of games, transcending the boundaries of genre wherever possible. Far from an indication of lacking imagination, such recycling provides friendly, familiar concepts for a player to encounter in numerous settings. The unmistakable characters are far more than cartoon actors in some interactive children's plays. They are life-long friends who will accompany you on multiple adventures and journeys, learning lessons with you along the way. Many adventures and journeys have passed since Nintendo entered the industry, some of which were especially pivotal in setting the stage for Nintendo's success. A recent publication for Nintendo's latest game console, *Super Smash Bros. Melee*¹ (SSBM)(HAL Laboratories) on the GameCube, continues Nintendo's custom of reusing game concepts. Going far beyond regular concept recycling though, *Super Smash Bros. Melee* incorporates and improves upon many aspects of historically significant games, making *SSBM* a culmination and celebration of Nintendo's accomplishments and culture.

The main game-series that *Super Smash Bros. Melee* incorporates is of course *Super Mario Bros.* (1985, NES). "This game was the very first mega-hit for both Mario and the NES" (Mario Mania 18), and *SSBM* uses concepts from this original and the many products that resulted from its success. Some other 'mega-hits' included in *SSBM* are *The Legend of Zelda*, *Starfox*, *F-Zero*, and the *Mr. Game and Watch*. Many aspects of these games, such as characters, items, levels, and sounds, are evident in *SSBM*. Not only does *SSBM* include these aspects though, it also takes advantage of the increased technological capabilities provided by the GameCube and presents the old concepts through impressive new approaches. The once

¹ See Appendix A

simple three-color characters now traverse the screen showing discernable facial expressions, emitting sounds which are more words than noises, and casting shadows and reflecting light as if they were under our own sun. Although noticeably upgraded, the characters have lost none of their personalities from their ‘smashing’ debuts. From weapons and attacks taken into battle to the victory cries at the end of a match, *SSBM* pays attention to every precedent detail. In order to illustrate how these historical details make *SSBM* the “culmination and celebration” of Nintendo culture, I first will provide a brief explanation of the game itself, and then progress through some of the concept-contributing Nintendo ‘smash’ hit games, noting the improvements provided by *SSBM*. I will conclude by anecdotally correlating my own Nintendo experience with the discussed developments, illustrating how this paper is the “celebration and culmination” of my personal relationship with Nintendo culture.

Super Smash Bros. Melee provides two main modes of game play, the Melee battle² and the one player side-scrolling mode^{2A}. While side-scrolling does not take advantage of the many fighting capabilities provided in the game, it follows the paradigm set by the *Super Mario Bros.* Series. The player traverses a simple terrain while jumping on slow moving enemies along the way, and at the end of each stage encounters some enemy that must be vanquished in a greater skill intensive battle. This final battle, originally fought against the foes like Bowser in *Super Mario Bros.*^{2B}, has evolved into the Melee aspect of *SSBM*. Players are given a set of attacks, a (usually) stable stage, some helpful items that fall from the sky, and their knowledge of the unique character’s abilities with which to destroy their enemies. Up to four characters, human or computer, can play simultaneously. Because GameCube provides extreme sensitivity control, attacks differ in intensity dependant on how hard the player wields certain controls. Each time a player is hit his/her “hit percentage” increases in increments dependant on the intensity of that hit. The higher a player’s hit percentage the farther each subsequent hit propels the player, and eventually he/she will be ‘smashed’ from the stage. After this expulsion, a “life” is taken and the player is replaced on stage with zero hit percentage. The object is to be the last one standing on the stage, having knocked all foes off into the distance. As we learned at the beginning of this course, the most “addictive” video games allow players to learn the basics quickly but always have room to improve. Nintendo has always fulfilled this

^{2, 2A, 2B} See Appendix A

balance. A new *SSBM* player can start winning relatively early, but will not perfect certain skills until after hours of game play, making *SSBM* a successful game and very easy to get “hooked” on.

The greatest concept-contributor to *SSBM* is definitely the *Super Mario Bros.* series. Beyond the title and modes of game play, many characters, items, stages, and even sounds are borrowed from these timeless classics. The debuts of these characters are as follows: Mario and Donkey Kong in *Donkey Kong* (1981 arcade, 1986 NES), Luigi in *Mario Bros.* (1983 Arcade, 1986 NES), Bowser, Princess Peach, and Toad in *Super Mario Bros.* (1985 NES), Dr. Mario in *Dr. Mario* (1990 NES), and Yoshi in *Super Mario World* (1991 SNES) (Mario Mania 6). Since their debuts these characters have been on many journeys and adventures, and they now enter the Super Smash Bros. Melee arena looking vibrant and ready to battle. They are also armed to the teeth with many familiar moves and attacks from previous games. Mario uses his fireballs, bestowed to him in *Super Mario Bros.*, to ward off advancing enemies. He has kept his flight cape³, initially from *Super Mario World*, and uses it to “reflect projectile attacks and spin enemies around”^{3A} (*SSBM* manual 36). He remembers the “Mario Tornado,” a move used to “engulf opponents in a high-speed spin,” which he was also taught in *Super Mario World* (*SSBM* manual 36). Beyond these special attacks, Mario wields those familiar feet and heavy fists that have been crushing enemies for twenty years. Luigi, although slightly taller than Mario, has always imitated his brother’s fighting techniques. *SSBM* is no different except that some of his attack intensities do not correlate with Mario’s. A notable difference between the brothers’ movement is their jumping ability and ground friction. *Super Mario Bros. 2* pioneered the idea of choosing from characters with “special strengths that were best used in particular areas,”^{3B} and was also the first game to give Luigi a lofty jump and looser footing on the ground compared to Mario (Mario Mania 20). These changes were permanent and are reflected in *SSBM*. Dr. Mario’s attacks, like Luigi’s, are the same as Mario’s with different intensities. However, Dr. Mario does not have his own unique movement style, being the same size as Mario. Princess Peach, first playable in *Super Mario Bros. 2*, also retains characteristics from that classic, such as pulling vegetables from the ground and floating horizontally through the air. Toad, the princess’ lifelong friend who also made his ‘playable’ debut in *Super Mario Bros. 2*, is now in her pocket ready to be pulled out and counter enemy attacks. When Mario first meets Yoshi^{3C} (breaks him out of an egg) in *Super Mario World*, Yoshi exclaims, “Hooray!

^{3, 3B, 3C} See Appendix A

Thank you for rescuing me. My name is Yoshi. On my way to rescue my friends. Bowser trapped me in that egg” (Player’s guide 8). Those unforgettable spotted green eggs, henceforth known as Yoshi’s eggs, have become his key weapons in *SSBM*. He throws eggs at enemies, turns himself into an egg and rolls over enemies, or even swallows enemies and lays them out as eggs. Although he also uses his head to knock enemies around, Yoshi is never afraid to break a L-egg. Bowser incorporates the many dangers in Mario’s worlds. Fire, a common obstacle found in Bowser’s many castles, spews out of his mouth and onto unsuspecting enemies. His sheer size is also an effective weapon, as Mario has always had to dodge and dive away from his slow but strong attacks. The “Bowser Bomb,” a move reminiscent of Bowser’s fighting technique at the end of *Super Mario World*, incorporates Bowser falling from the sky and a lot of pain. Last and certainly not least of the Mario friends is Donkey Kong. Like Bowser, the power behind his massive body is his main weapon. He learned “Spinning Kong” in *Donkey Kong Country* (SNES, 1994), his side-scrolling debut, extending his arms, spinning, and battering all enemies in his large radius. That sums up the recycled attacks and moves from the *Super Mario Bros.* series, now on to other aspects borrowed from these games.

The items in *SSBM* definitely make game play more interesting, quickly changing the odds at any moment in the game. One of the first items to ever appear in front of Mario is the green shell⁴ on the backs of Shellcreepers in *Mario Bros.* (Mario Mania 7). But he would not be able to use them until *Super Mario Bros.* when he could knock the Koopa Troopas^{4A} (descendants of Shellcreepers) out of their shells and then kick the shells one direction (Mario Mania 13). Although they provided great projectiles from then on, Mario could not pick them up and carry them, as players do in *SSBM*, until *Super Mario World*. Items taken from *Super Mario Bros.* include the fire flower, starman, red shells, and power mushrooms. While the fire flower initially gave Mario the power to throw fireballs, he can always do that in *SSBM*, so players now use the fire flower as a flame-thrower (until it runs out of fuel). Starman’s usefulness, making the player invincible for a limited amount of time, has never changed. Red shells^{4B}, a descendant of green shells, first appeared on flying Koopa Troopas and had no different functionality from green shells. *Super Mario Kart* (1992 SNES) was the first game to create this difference, making the green shell a ballistic projectile (straight path) and the red shell a homing projectile, and this difference remains in *SSBM*. Power

^{4,4A,4B} See Appendix A

mushrooms usually make a player bigger (faster in *Super Mario Kart*), but *SSBM* also has poison mushrooms that make a player smaller, an idea also pioneered in *Super Mario Kart*. These sometimes-unexpected size changes turn the tables quickly because *SSBM* makes power proportional to size. The hammer was first seen in *Super Mario Bros. 3*, being wielded by Hammer Brothers, Koopa Troopas-evolved who walk on their hind legs and use tools. The hammers they threw at Mario were small but painful, and the hammer in *SSBM* is large and even more painful. Players with this item are nearly untouchable and knock out enemies with the greatest of ease. The barrel-cannon, possibly the oldest rooting and my personal favorite *SSBM* item, derives from the barrels thrown by Donkey Kong at Mario in *Donkey Kong*. The actual barrel-cannon, first seen in *Donkey Kong Country*, was a moving barrel that shot Kong out like a cannonball. In *SSBM*, an enemy who falls into this item must watch the rotating arrow carefully to determine an angle of ejection before the barrel rolls off the stage. Nintendo was very creative in its continuations of these items. While some items evolved based on the increased technological capabilities and potential for more fun, others have retained their timeless qualities and will forever remain in Mario's worlds.

Levels are the icing on the cake of concepts reused from old games. The levels taken from the *Super Mario Bros.* series are "Mushroom Kingdom," "Mushroom Kingdom 2," "Rainbow Cruise," and "Kongo Jungle." "Mushroom Kingdom"⁵ is a scene from *Super Mario Bros.* that includes the appropriate background music from level 1-1 of that game. The background contains familiar objects like large green warp pipes^{5A}, koopa troopas, moving clouds, an end-level pole and castle, and large mushroom platforms. Fighting takes place on the same type of terrain from *Super Mario Bros.*, including breakable bricks that even make the same breaking sound as in the original. Question mark blocks can also be broken to yield items. "Mushroom Kingdom 2" is expectedly a scene from *Super Mario Bros. 2* and also plays theme music from the first level of that game. Some familiar objects in the background are cherries in the sky, vegetables in the ground, and waterfalls in the backdrop. Birdo, an annoying egg spitting character from *Super Mario Bros. 2*, appears occasionally to shoot some eggs over players' heads. "Rainbow Cruise" takes place mostly on a flying pirate ship, a concept begun in *Super Mario Bros. 3*, which Mario would plunder in order to reach Bowser's children. The music is also the same as in the original stage. "Kongo

^{5, 5A} See Appendix A

Jungle” comes right out of *Donkey Kong Country* and also contains the appropriate music. In addition to the similar looking background, this stage also has a helpful barrel that moves to the left and right side of the screen underneath the floor, providing a similar safety net as in the original.

While Mario and his friends may seem like the only contributors to *Super Smash Brothers: Melee*, there are definitely other Nintendo “smash” hits represented in the game. From *The Legend of Zelda* series we are given the characters Link, Zelda, Ganondorf, and Young Link. Link enters battle with the same arsenal he had in the original. His sword is mightier than it has ever been, although he cannot ‘shoot’ it forward as in the original. He is at no loss for projectiles though. He still has his boomerang from the original and has picked up a bow and arrow along the way. His bombs, which were useful for “blowing holes in weakened walls and floors” (and in short supply) in the original, can now be pulled out at whim and hurled at enemies (Player’s Guide 79). Also from this game we see the stages “Hyrule Temple”, inspired by the Land of Hyrule, and “Termina Great Bay”, which plays the background music from the original.

From *Starfox* comes Fox and Falco, two Ace pilots from Corneria with similar attacks reminiscent of their dog fighting techniques. *Starfox* was the first game for the SNES to feature the FX chip, which allowed for the “smooth, fast polygon graphics that made the game famous” (Struder). They are appropriately the fastest characters in the game, with attacks like the “Fox Illusion, ” which features Fox (or Falco) dashing so quickly past an enemy that he/she hits the ground before being able to raise a fist. They are also armed with a “Blaster” which emits similar shots to the blasters on their A-Wings (fighter planes). Stages contributed by *Starfox* are “Lylat System Corneria” and “Venom”. The fighting takes place on top of an A-Wing in both stages, from a side perspective in “Corneria” and from the front in “Venom.” Also, the background of “Termina Great Bay” features an evil faced moon from *Starfox* that warps players to a special stage when shot.

F-Zero adds the character Falcon and the stages “Mute City” and “Big Blue” into the *SSBM* mix. In *F-Zero*, Falcon is driver of Blue Falcon, an “all-round sturdy racer with a tough shell” (Player’s Guide 121). This description fits Falcon well in *SSBM*, as he is one of the hardest players to defeat. “Mute City” and “Big Blue” are also two of the hardest stages to play on because they are constantly moving and changing. They both take place on an actual *F-Zero* track, with racers visibly racing in the background

while players fight. In “Mute City” the platform sometimes lays on the track and players can be hit by passing racers, in “Big Blue” the fighting actually takes place on top of the racers and the players must keep from falling onto the track and being left behind.

Mr. Game and Watch is definitely the oldest character in the *SSBM* arena, coming from *Game & Watch* (1981), “a video game the size of a calculator, with a tiny digital clock in the corner” (Sheff 28). Being a two dimensional digital character in the world polygons is not easy for him, being so light and easily tossed about. But what he lacks in mass he makes up for in power, easily transforming his limbs into deadly weapons. His moves and attacks are accompanied by the same beep-like sounds from his debut, and he rings like a watch alarm when smashed from a stage. He is right at home on the stage “Flat Zone” which happens to be the smallest stage in *SSBM*. This also digital-looking realm contains many characteristics from the original *Game & Watch*, such as disappearing and reappearing floors, falling hazards, and even the actual *Game & Watch* controls in the periphery.

One game that contributed significantly to the actual concept of *SSBM* is *Super Mario Kart*. While *Super Mario Bros. 2* was the first game to allow for character choosing based on strengths and weaknesses, *Super Mario Kart* enhanced this concept into a multi-player scenario where familiar characters battled each other in an unfamiliar setting. The concept of Mario and his friends taking a break from their day jobs to have a little fun on the racetrack was novel and addictive. As Volume 41 of *Nintendo Power* (1992) states, “Kart mania is spreading and has invaded the realm of Super Mario World” (83). Characters were given strengths and weaknesses based on already established characteristics that we still see in *SSBM*, such as Bowser and Donkey Kong being the slowest accelerating but most powerful (fastest) racers. Items taken out of their original context added new odds-changing capabilities. Many of these item-evolutions pioneered by *Super Mario Kart* are reflected in *SSMB*, such as the difference between green and red shells and the invention of poison mushrooms (which made the racer so small that he could be flattened by other racers). Racing circuits had names and terrain that resembled original stages that Mario traversed in his side-scrolling adventures, a concept definitely adopted by *SSBM*. In all concepts of game play, *Super Mario Kart* set a paradigm for success that *Super Smash Bros. Melee* emulates and improves upon.

Games like *Super Mario Kart* and *Super Smash Bros. Melee* are difficult to create a typical explanatory story for. *Super Mario Kart* makes little effort to explain why the characters are racing beyond

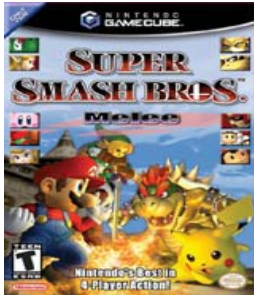
their motivation to win trophies. *SSBM* goes further in this endeavor, but not very far, showing the player some context for why the characters are in the *SSBM* arena. The opening of the game shows a chess piece-like rendition of Mario being thrown into the air, followed by “Nintendo All-Stars in”... “Super Smash Bros. Melee.” The significance of the chess piece character is shown when a one-player game is completed with a certain character. An image of this character in the form of a chess piece is shown falling from the sky. He/she lands amongst the other characters that have completed this mode and the player may admire his/her progress in the game. Looking past these characters one realizes that they are sitting on the floor of what looks like family room. On the shelves in the background can be seen a TV, NES, SNES, N64, and multiple Game Boys, making it even harder to forget where these characters came from.

The number of “historical” concepts incorporated by *Super Smash Bros. Melee* goes far beyond what I have discussed in this paper. Beyond characters, stages, and items, *SSBM* presents players with trophies that represent some aspect of Nintendo culture from days of yore. After collecting a trophy, a player can access a special “trophy case” to read about the significance of each trophy. These trophies, in addition to the many historical aspects discussed in this paper, show that *SSBM* loudly and clearly celebrates the Nintendo culture that it is built upon. While Nintendo will certainly continue to produce such significant games, *SSBM* is also the culmination of games already created because it incorporates more games and more aspects of these games than any other Nintendo production. The basis for such a celebration and culmination comes from the success of Mario and his friends. I was fortunate enough to be born in 1982 and become part of the initial success that Nintendo claimed through the NES. Mario was a source of entertainment and confidence for me, and also my very first video game-friend. I would pester my parents to keep on top of new releases, and I vividly remember the smell and joy of opening new game-cartridge boxes. As I grew older so did Mario, and I eventually became more interested in girls and violence. While I fondly remembered my days spent with the pudgy plumber, I never expected to rekindle my relationship with him in college. My roommate’s GameCube gave me the opportunity to experience a childhood love through a noticeably improved means. Playing *SSBM* was like reconnecting with long-lost childhood friends. I could analyze the game from a more adult perspective though, and therefore I learned to really appreciate the creativity and ingenuity involved in creating such a work of art. I know that *SSBM* this may be the last Mario game that I ever get really into (until I have kids), and I could not have picked a

more appropriate game. Much of the historical information in this paper has come straight from my brain, and I have enjoyed writing it thoroughly. This process has been my own personal celebration and culmination of the relationship between Mario and myself. My generation is full of people who share this sentiment and while younger players may not understand certain allusions to early games, I am definitely well versed in the Pokemon contributions. Nintendo has once again successfully created a game that all ages can truly love. This newest success was engendered, ingeniously, by celebrating and culminating Nintendo's previous successes.

Appendix A

1.



2.



2A.



2B.



3.



3A.



3B.



3C



4.



4A.



4B.



5.



5A.



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