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History of Games

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Banjo-Kazooie – The Behemoth of Collect-A-Thons

The genre style of collect-a-thon gaming is almost completely nonexistent in the world of gaming today. There aren't many new gamers from the Gamecube generation onwards that even know what the term means, let alone name some great games that featured and were molded by this genre. The collect-a-thon genre consisted of games which had a large hub world, and multiple levels, or sub-worlds, for the player to explore. Within each of these worlds were different objectives, or missions, that the player could do in order to further achieve through the main story of the game. They could range from collecting 100 of a common item, to fighting bosses, to even explorations to just find hidden trinkets that would help the player progress.

These games were extremely popular during the third console generation, primarily on the Nintendo 64. Among the top of these games were titles such as Super Mario 64, Conker's Bad Fur Day, Jak and Daxter, and Banjo-Kazooie. Nintendo was the supreme king of collect-a-thon games, mainly with developer Rareware games in hand. Super Mario 64, developed by Nintendo, was the main game that started the genre, but when most people talk about the greatest collect-a-thon games, Banjo-Kazooie is almost always the first game mentioned and is almost always at the top.

Story

The story of the game revolves around the main character, Banjo(pictured below), a honey bear, and his best friend Kazooie(pictured below), a red crested breegull trying to save Banjo's sister, Tooty, from the evil witch Gruntilda, who kidnapped Tooty in order to steal her beauty and become the fairest in all the land. With the help of Mumbo Jumbo, a shaman, and Bottles the mole, Banjo sets out in order to rescue Tooty and overcome the numerous trials to be found within Gruntilda's Lair.



Gameplay

The gameplay in the beginning has the same smoothness and similarity in controls that are found in the immensely popular, Super Mario 64. It is clear to see how Banjo-Kazooie was inspired from this game in numerous ways. The main place where this game branches into its own endeavors and creative routes begin with the various move upgrades found within the game. The player can find Bottles scattered throughout the various worlds to learn new moves from him. These range from a higher jump, to faster movement, new attacks, and even flight

with Kazooie! That makes the gameplay elevate into something that becomes completely unique, and it even deepens more with the various forms Banjo can change into with the help of Mumbo Jumbo the shaman. These consistently expanding moves and additions to the gameplay help push it to becoming a completely unique experience unlike most games.

One would probably expect that all of the variety can be confusing for the player, but there is rarely, if ever, a time where it feels like the gameplay becomes too inconsistent or confusing. All of the controls are completely tight and responsive, and the layout works perfectly for the game. The beauty in the gameplay is the difficulty increase and how it never gets to a point where it feels like it is unfair for the player. Each death feels like it's the players fault, and not the games, and in the gaming world of today, that can often be a problem and it's extremely unfortunate.

The platforming sections within each world are done extremely well, and expand with the scale of difficulty nearly perfectly. The first area where you start, although not the central hub of the game, is a well-crafted tutorial that is optional, so you can skip it and get straight into the action if you so choose. The tutorial stage is done very well, and then once the player enters Gruntilda's Lair, that's when the game begins to take all that you are learning and test how well you can use it.

The main flaw seen through the gameplay is that if you leave a level, things you already did within it, particularly containing the music notes, get reset. So, for example, if you have 90 notes, and you leave the level or lose a life, you have to collect those 90 notes all over again and it can be very frustrating, although this is fixed in the xbox live arcade version of the game.

Levels

All of the levels within Gruntilda's Lair have different missions and objectives within them. This was seen in Super Mario 64, but the main difference is that you can do them all at once, with the exception of some where you will have to come back later with upgrades. Once you collect a Jiggy (10 scattered throughout each level with different methods to obtain each one) you continue through the level and you leave the level once you're ready. You have to collect these in order to open access to new levels, and you have to collect notes (100 scattered through each level) in order to access further areas in Gruntilda's Lair. Gruntilda's Lair even has jiggies that you can get through special means. Finding every collectible in the game is very difficult, but it never feels like a chore because you don't have to find everything in order to beat the game. Each level has a different theme, and they are all drastically unique from each other while also very well designed. The levels range from winter wonderlands, to swamps, to a haunted mansion, and that's just scratching the surface.



Graphics

The graphics in Banjo-Kazooie, are some of the best graphics to be seen on the console. The textures are all vibrant and colorful, and every single level is a beauty to look at no matter how cheerful or dark the level may be. The style of the game fits incredibly well for the graphics capability of the time, and it still looks good today. It is hard to believe that the sequel, Banjo-Tooie, is even better to look at with more clear and sharp images and polygons. The power of the graphics seen within this game are even more amazing when you can fly through a level and see it as a whole without any slowdown. It's incredibly impressive to **see** how well they did with this game's graphics processing when compared to numerous other games of the time.

Sound

Grant Kirkhope, the composer of the soundtrack for Banjo-Kazooie, did an amazing job creating songs and sound effects for the game. Each level's soundtrack fits the level's theme phenomenally well, and it heavily increases the immersion effect the game has. Some of the sound effects do sound a bit choppy and strange, but for the time, they were really intuitive.

Overall

Banjo-Kazooie has a phenomenal presentation to it, with the overall story of the game being very engaging for a large majority of players. There might be players who will find the game to look too cute and cheerful to give it a chance, but those that are open to it are in for a great experience within the game. The graphics are amazing for the Nintendo 64. Rareware outdid themselves by coming up with a system through their texture rendering to surpass the

limitations already set by the console. Their stellar use of their system is what makes Banjo-Kazooie one of the best looking games on the console. The sound is top notch. The sounds for every character, along with the stellar soundtrack combine to make a beautiful sounding game. Grant Kirkhope took it one step further by adding variations to the music based on what the player was doing, for example transitioning from walking to swimming or to flying, and in some areas to just tip-toeing. The gameplay is tight and extremely responsive. It feels satisfying to do things within the game, whether it be fighting enemies and bosses, or even just picking up items and hearing the little jingles that go with it. The transformations further increase the uniqueness of the gameplay and allow the gameplay to further vary and change the pace for the player.

Finally, the overall story of the game is great, but at the end of the day, the game is mainly meant for one play through, two if you didn't get it 100% the first time and are up to the challenge. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, though. It has become one of the greatest platformer games of all time, and there are countless people who continue to play this game over and over to this day, excited for the experience it brings. There are a few short comings, such as the lack of replay value, and the minor gripes about how the game saves the progress you make within levels, but these are almost nothing when compared to the nearly endless list of positives seen through the game. It came to become a titan among its own genre, and is still seen as one of the greatest games of all time through its nearly flawless overall presentation. To this day fans are still searching for a spiritual successor for this game that they are so nostalgic for, and the continued fan-base for this series shows how much of an impact that it has had on

gaming as a whole. It's close to a masterpiece, and is a game that every avid gamer should experience one way or another.