

What Classic Video Game Was The First True Platform Game?.

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What Classic Video Game Was The First True Platform Game? This is a question that has intrigued gamers, historians, and developers alike for decades. The genre of platform gaming, characterized by jumping between platforms, avoiding obstacles, and navigating complex levels, has become a cornerstone of modern video game design. While many titles contributed to its evolution, there is a strong consensus among enthusiasts and experts about which game truly pioneered the genre. In this comprehensive exploration, we will delve into the origins of platform games, identify the earliest titles, and analyze what makes a game qualify as a "true" platform game.

The Origins of Platform Gaming

The Predecessors and Influences

Before the advent of dedicated platform games, early arcade and computer games featured elements that would later define the genre. Some early titles included:

- Donkey Kong (1981): While primarily an arcade action game, it introduced the concept of jumping over obstacles and climbing structures.
- Jungle Hunt (1982): Featured climbing and swinging elements, but lacked the precise platforming mechanics.
- Pac-Land (1984): An important step forward, offering side-scrolling adventure with platform-like elements.

Despite these innovations, the gameplay was often limited or integrated into broader genres.

The Birth of Dedicated Platform Games

The transition from these earlier titles to dedicated platformers was marked by the desire to create a pure platforming experience—emphasizing jumping, precise movement, and level design centered on navigating vertical and horizontal spaces.

The Pioneering Game: Donkey Kong (1981)

Why Donkey Kong Is Not Usually Considered the First True Platform Game

Though Donkey Kong laid the groundwork with its vertical climbing and jumping mechanics, it was primarily categorized as an arcade action game. Its gameplay centered around avoiding obstacles and defeating enemies, with less focus on navigating a continuous, multi-layered environment typical of later platformers.

Key Features of Donkey Kong

- Vertical climbing segments
- Jumping over obstacles
- Limited level design complexity
- Player controls to avoid hazards

While innovative, it lacked the fluidity and level-based progression that would define subsequent platform games.

The First True Platform Game: Super Mario Bros. (1985)

Introducing the Genre-Defining Title

Arguably, the most influential and widely recognized game that established the platform genre is Super Mario Bros. developed by Nintendo for the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). Released in 1985, it revolutionized game design and set the standards for what a platform game should be.

Why Super Mario Bros. Is Considered the First True Platform Game

Super Mario Bros. combined several elements that define the genre:

- Level-based progression: Distinct worlds and stages that players advance through sequentially.
- Precise jumping mechanics: Intuitive controls allowing players to jump on enemies or over obstacles.
- Vertical and horizontal navigation: Levels designed with multiple layers, platforms, and elevations.
- Obstacle and enemy placement: Challenging yet fair placement that required skill and timing.

- Power-ups and items: Enhancing gameplay dynamics and player strategy.
- Seamless scrolling gameplay: Continuous environment movement, creating a sense of exploration.

This game epitomized the platformer genre, inspiring countless titles and establishing core gameplay mechanics still used today.

Other Early Platformers and Their Contributions

Mario Bros. (1983)

Before Super Mario Bros., Nintendo released Mario Bros., a game featuring Mario and Luigi in a single-screen platform environment where players defeated enemies by flipping them over. Although simpler, it introduced cooperative play and enemy interaction that influenced later platformers.

Pitfall! (1982)

Developed by Activision and designed by David Crane, Pitfall! featured a side-scrolling platform adventure where players navigated jungles, avoided hazards, and collected treasures. It was one of the first games to feature a continuous scrolling world, setting a precedent for platform game design.

Jump Bug (1981)

An earlier, lesser-known title for the Atari 2600, Jump Bug involved navigating a character across platforms to reach goals. It showcased basic platform mechanics but lacked the depth and polish of later titles.

Defining Characteristics of a "True" Platform Game

To understand what makes a game the first true platformer, it's essential to identify key features:

1. Platform Navigation: The game involves jumping between discrete platforms or surfaces.
2. Level Progression: Structured levels or worlds that players complete sequentially.
3. Precise Control Mechanics: Controls that allow for accurate jumping, falling, and movement.
4. Obstacle and Enemy Interaction: Incorporating elements that challenge the player's timing and skill.
5. Vertical and Horizontal Movement: Ability to move freely across different elevations and directions.

6. Progressive Difficulty: Levels designed to increase in challenge as players advance.
7. Design Focused on Jumping and Climbing: Core gameplay revolves around these actions.

By these criteria, Super Mario Bros. clearly embodies the essence of a true platform game, whereas earlier titles laid important groundwork but did not fully realize the genre's potential.

The Evolution of Platform Games After Super Mario Bros.

Rise of the Genre

Following the success of Super Mario Bros., the platform genre expanded rapidly, influencing countless titles across arcade, console, and computer systems:

- Sonic the Hedgehog (1991): Introduced faster-paced gameplay and scrolling levels.
- Mega Man series (1987 onwards): Combined platforming with shooting mechanics.
- Castlevania (1986): Merged action-adventure elements with platform gameplay.
- Doom and other FPS titles: While not traditional platformers, they included platforming segments and inspired hybrid genres.

Modern Platforming Games

Today, platformers continue to evolve with innovations like 3D environments, physics-based mechanics, and indie titles that pay homage to classic gameplay.

Conclusion: The Legacy of the First True Platform Game

The question of which classic video game was the first true platform game is best answered with Super Mario Bros. (1985). While earlier titles like Donkey Kong, Pitfall!, and Mario Bros. contributed significantly to the genre's development, it was Super Mario Bros. that codified the core mechanics, level design, and gameplay philosophy that define platform gaming to this day.

Key Takeaways:

- Super Mario Bros. set the standard for platformers with its seamless level design, precise controls, and engaging gameplay.
- Earlier games introduced elements of jumping and obstacle navigation but lacked the comprehensive design of a "true" platform game.
- The evolution of the genre was a cumulative process, but Super Mario Bros. remains the pivotal title that launched platform gaming into mainstream popularity.

In summary, the legacy of Super Mario Bros. endures because it transformed simple mechanics into a cohesive, challenging, and highly entertaining genre, inspiring generations of game developers and players worldwide.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is considered the first true platform video game?

The first true platform video game is widely regarded as 'Donkey Kong,' released in 1981 by Nintendo.

Why is 'Donkey Kong' credited as the first platform game?

Because it introduced the core mechanics of jumping between platforms and navigating obstacles, establishing the foundation of the platform genre.

Which character from 'Donkey Kong' became an iconic video game hero?

Mario, originally called Jumpman, became the protagonist and an iconic figure in gaming history.

What gameplay elements define a platform game?

Platform games primarily involve navigating characters through levels by jumping across platforms, avoiding enemies, and overcoming obstacles.

Did 'Donkey Kong' influence later platform games?

Yes, it heavily influenced the development of future platformers like 'Super Mario Bros.' and helped shape the genre's mechanics.

Are there any earlier games that resemble platformers before 'Donkey Kong'?

While some earlier arcade games featured jumping or navigation, 'Donkey Kong' is recognized as the first to fully implement the platformer genre's core gameplay.

How did 'Donkey Kong' impact the video game industry?

It popularized the platform genre, introduced a memorable character, and demonstrated the potential for storytelling and gameplay in arcade games.

What technological advancements enabled 'Donkey Kong' to be considered a pioneering platform game?

Its use of multi-level layouts, scrolling screens, and character control mechanics set new standards for arcade gameplay.

Is 'Donkey Kong' still relevant in modern gaming?

Yes, it remains a classic and influential game, often referenced in modern game design and preserved as a fundamental part of gaming history.

Additional Resources

What Classic Video Game Was The First True Platform Game?

In the vast universe of video game history, few genres have captured the imagination and enduring appeal of platform games. Characterized by their emphasis on jumping, climbing, and navigating through obstacle-laden environments, platform games have become a cornerstone of interactive entertainment. Yet, when asked, "What classic video game was the first true platform game?" the answer isn't as straightforward as one might think. The origins of platform gaming are intertwined with technological innovations, game design evolution, and pioneering developers. This article delves into the roots of platform gaming, examining which game truly pioneered the genre and how it set the stage for the countless titles that followed.

The Evolution of Video Game Genres and the Birth of Platforming

Before exploring the first true platform game, it's essential to understand the gaming landscape prior to the genre's emergence. In the early 1970s and early 1980s, arcade titles and simple console games primarily focused on high scores, maze navigation, or shooting mechanics. The concept of character movement through a scrolling environment was nascent, often limited by hardware capabilities.

However, as technology advanced, developers sought to create more engaging and dynamic gameplay experiences. The desire for characters to traverse complex terrains, jump across gaps, and overcome obstacles gave rise to a new style of game design that would eventually crystallize as "platforming." But which game truly marked the beginning of this genre?

Early Precursors: The Foundations of Platforming

While pinpointing the first true platform game requires clarity, several early titles laid the groundwork for the genre's development.

1. Donkey Kong (1981)

Developed by Nintendo and directed by Shigeru Miyamoto, Donkey Kong is often cited as a pivotal title in video game history. It introduced the concept of a character navigating through different levels filled with obstacles, ladders, and moving platforms, all while avoiding enemies. The game's protagonist, Jumpman (later known as Mario), must rescue a damsel in distress from the titular ape.

Significance: Donkey Kong is notable for its multi-level design and the character's ability to ascend and descend structures, which foreshadows platforming mechanics. However, its primary gameplay centered around reaching the top of the screen and avoiding hazards rather than continuous scrolling or precise jumping mechanics.

2. Pitfall! (1982)

Developed by Activision and designed by David Crane, Pitfall! is a side-scrolling adventure where the player controls Pitfall Harry, navigating through jungle environments filled with pits, crocodiles, and swinging vines.

Significance: It's often regarded as one of the earliest side-scrolling action-adventure games with a continuous scrolling environment, emphasizing jumping and obstacle navigation. Yet, the game's focus was more on exploration and timing than on the refined platforming mechanics of later titles.

The Definitive Breakthrough: Super Mario Bros. (1985)

While earlier titles contributed to the conceptual foundation, the game widely recognized as establishing the modern platform genre is Nintendo's Super Mario Bros. (1985).

The Innovation of Super Mario Bros.

Developed by Nintendo for the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), Super Mario Bros. revolutionized the gaming industry with its tight controls, inventive level design, and the introduction of scrolling environments. It set a new standard for what platform games could be.

- Precise Jumping Mechanics: The game's responsive controls allowed players to master complex jumps and maneuvers, making platforming feel both challenging and rewarding.
- Scrolling Levels: Unlike earlier games that were confined to single screens, Super Mario Bros. featured continuous side-scrolling levels, allowing for more dynamic exploration.
- Level Design: Each of the game's worlds contained multiple levels with varying challenges, encouraging players to develop skills like timing, precision, and strategic movement.
- Character Movement: The game emphasized vertical and horizontal navigation, with players jumping onto platforms, over gaps, and across enemies—a core aspect of modern platforming.

Super Mario Bros. isn't just influential because it was popular; it fundamentally defined the core mechanics and style of platform games that persist to this day.

What Makes a “True” Platform Game?

To understand why Super Mario Bros. is considered the first true platform game, it's important to clarify what defines the genre:

- Character Navigation Through Obstacles: The core mechanic involves precise movement, especially jumping, to traverse the environment.
- Level Design with Platforms and Gaps: Levels are composed of various platforms, gaps, and obstacles requiring skillful navigation.
- Scrolling Environments: The game features continuous movement through levels rather than static screens.
- Progression and Difficulty: Challenges escalate as players advance, requiring mastery of jumping, timing, and environmental awareness.

While earlier titles contributed elements, Super Mario Bros. combined these features into a cohesive, polished experience that became the blueprint for the genre.

The Impact and Legacy of Super Mario Bros.

The significance of Super Mario Bros. extends beyond its gameplay mechanics:

- Commercial Success: It sold over 40 million copies worldwide, making it one of the best-selling video games of all time.
- Genre Standardization: It established conventions for platformers, such as power-ups, hidden secrets, and enemy placement.
- Inspiration for Future Titles: From Sonic the Hedgehog to Mega Man and Rayman, countless games drew inspiration from its design principles.
- Cultural Impact: It helped popularize the platform genre globally, influencing game design and player expectations.

The Debate: Are There Contenders for the First?

Despite the widespread recognition of Super Mario Bros. as the first true platform game, some enthusiasts and historians point to other titles or argue that earlier games contained essential elements.

Other Notable Contenders:

- Donkey Kong Jr. (1982): A sequel to Donkey Kong, featuring platform-style gameplay.

- Jump Bug (1981): An arcade game where the character jumps onto platforms in a scrolling environment.
- Miner 2049er (1982): An early side-scrolling platform game with exploration and obstacle navigation.

However, these titles either lacked the seamless scrolling mechanics, refined controls, or level design sophistication that Super Mario Bros. introduced, which is why they are often considered precursors rather than the definitive first.

The Broader Context: The Evolution Beyond Super Mario Bros.

While Super Mario Bros. is recognized as the first true platform game, the genre has evolved tremendously since 1985.

- Innovations in Mechanics: Titles like Sonic the Hedgehog (1991) introduced speed-based gameplay, while Mega Man (1987) emphasized precise shooting and platforming.
- Diverse Subgenres: From puzzle-platformers like Limbo to metroidvania titles like Hollow Knight, the genre has expanded.
- 3D Platformers: The transition to three-dimensional environments, exemplified by Super Mario 64 (1996), revolutionized gameplay paradigms.

Despite these innovations, the core principles established by Super Mario Bros. remain central to the genre's identity.

Conclusion: The First True Platform Game

In summation, while the evolution of platform gaming involved numerous titles contributing foundational elements, Nintendo's Super Mario Bros. (1985) is widely regarded as the first true platform game. Its innovative use of scrolling environments, precise control mechanics, and inventive level design set the standard for the genre. It transformed simple obstacle navigation into a refined art form, inspiring countless developers and shaping the future of video gaming.

Understanding this lineage not only enriches our appreciation for classic titles but also highlights the importance of technological and design innovations that continue to influence the gaming industry today. Whether reminiscing about the golden age of 8-bit consoles or exploring modern platformers, the legacy of Super Mario Bros. endures as the quintessential pioneer of the genre.

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