

Entropy's Super Mario Level

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When Janice and I started Entropy, we specifically wanted to create a venue where people would feel as comfortable talking about *Super Mario Brothers* and *Silent Hill* as they would *Ulysses* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. We wanted to encompass gaming, film, comics, literature, scripts, and pretty much anything that anyone would want to write about. I think a big part of the motivation was personal dissatisfaction that I had separate sites where I'd have to send my gaming, comics, literary, and artistic writing. There wasn't one umbrella against the acid rain of monadism. Entropy would be an odd, but fun, balancing act on a tightrope of potential literary oblivion, hoping not to alienate those who didn't enjoy 8-bit musings alongside their dose of pop culture, subversive book reviews, and poetic shenanigans.

But I never thought I could compose an essay about writing, starting a magazine, and the theme of Entropy through designing a level in *Super Mario Maker*. *Super Mario Maker* is like all your childhood fantasy toys scooped up into one bucket for you to play with in the sandbox of your dreams (this analogy only works if, like me, you could barely afford a handful of toys, enviously looking at the rich kids who had everything).

In *Maker*, you marvel, gawk, laugh, play then get to creating. Every level uploaded on the network is a work of art, a story if you will. Some art is clunky and bad. Others are quirky and eclectically strange, verging on the sublime. There are the refined, the beautiful, the showy (some of the automatic levels people have designed are amazing), the nostalgic, and the convoluted. The stories range from, get to the other side of this trap-filled hell world, to existential loneliness in the face of a neverending pit. I'll admit, some of my initial levels are ridiculously hard to the point where I was angry at myself for having made them (not to mention my wife who tested them for me and was not happy with me).

The concept behind my Entropy level is a sort of mad amalgam describing my mixed feelings towards the struggles inherent in both writing a novel and starting a magazine. Huge clutters of chaos, koopas, and goombas. Me, foolishly thinking I had an invincibility star to help me race through everything, only to crash into a flotilla of foes that leave me in a quagmire of my own creation. I'd brewed together this disaster of a level and now I was stuck. I'm glad *Super Mario Maker* forces you to finish your own levels before you can upload them. I had to spend a few hours tweaking each of the levels so that they wouldn't be impossible. A couple deleted enemies, a few updated terrain, and some subtle changes in placement turned an impossible level into a feasibly frustrating feat. It's kind of like editing a story or tweaking a magazine. You can't simply state, I don't care if nobody else gets it, at least, not if you want to share it with the public.



Super Mario Maker is hours and hours of joy. You can create in the 8-bit original, upgrade to the SMB3 style, make a *Super Mario World* 16-bit jump, and even go into the 3D terrain of the new *Super Mario* games. It's a ramp ranging from classical writing to post-modernism.

Some people have complained about the limited toolset as it's spread out over a few days. For those who are eager to get their hands on the full suite, there are easy workarounds. I personally liked the limits because they forced me to work within the canvas I had and get familiar with the tools. There are some subtle differences with the original games, and the lack of a checkpoint can be frustrating. That only sets the burden on the designer to both challenge and yet give enough help so they can finish the level. Often, the difference is a mushroom or an additional road piece.

I plan on writing levels as expressions of themes I've contemplated. I hope to make a *Super Mario Maker* film in the vein of *Entropy*. Not all of us are Miyamoto's. *Mario Maker* gives us the freedom not to be.