

RETROSPECTIVE | Splatoon 2

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After focusing on writing reviews for over a year, I thought it would be a nice change of pace to introduce a new series on Michael's Blog. Thus, welcome to retrospectives, where I tackle every single aspect of a product in more nuanced detail compared to my reviews as I work to assess its legacy and worth, potentially delving into development history in the process. Please be aware that retrospectives will not include a score at the end and spoilers are likely to be included, however, a warning will be provided beforehand. With that out of the way, lets get to it! I hope you like this new venture as much as I enjoyed writing the inaugural retrospective for Nintendo's *Splatoon 2*.

WARNING

Spoilers follow for the entirety of the original *Splatoon*, *Splatoon 2*, and the latter's paid downloadable content the *Octo Expansion*.

Proceed at your own discretion.

Nintendo's Industry Conformity

The reveal for the original *Splatoon* holds a special place in my heart. Following a killer [Nintendo Digital Event](#) that brought with it new fighters for *Super Smash Bros. For Wii U* and

Nintendo 3DS, the marvelous re-reveal of the gorgeous *Yoshi's Woolly World*, a sequel to one of Kirby's most outlandish DS adventures, a fun minigame from *Super Mario 3D World* getting its own full adventure starring the intrepid Captain Toad, the confirmation of *Xenoblade Chronicles X* and *Mario Maker*, and even the first glimpse at what would become *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, Nintendo had all but defied expectations that year and delivered an E3 presentation worthy of dreams. The best part? All of the aforementioned games ended up achieving in their own rights as solid entries in their respective franchises. However, there is one game I left out in the presentation that stole the show. Nintendo concluded their 2014 Digital Event with the introduction of their first new intellectual property since 2001's *Pikmin: Splatoon*.

What stood out to me the most about *Splatoon's* reveal was how deeply personal it felt. Three developers stood in front of a lively aquarium tank with the biggest smiles imaginable, gushing about their new game and exchanging strategies with one another just like schoolkids on a playground. Their confidence for such an oddball concept was contagious, immediately getting rid of my initial hesitation towards *Splatoon's* central premise: a third person shooter starring a weird humanoid kid that can transform into a squid that focuses on turf coverage. My hype leading up to *Splatoon's* release in May 2015 was through the roof, to the point where every day I would come home from middle school not dreading the next lecture since it brought me one hour closer to launch. As soon as *Splatoon* hit store shelves, I was utterly ingrained into the world for the entire weekend, rising up to the Ranked Battle threshold within a day. I could have cared less about only having five maps at launch since the concept of turf coverage was so unique and enjoyable, reassured by the promise of free updates and the stellar single player campaign. Never before had I been so blown away by a game.



With a multitude of games coming out in the latter half of 2015 that pleaded for my attention, I dropped off the *Splatoon* bandwagon earlier than I wish I had in September of that

same year. However, I still adored the game having spent dozens of hours in Inkopolis, which heavily persuaded me to purchase Nintendo's newly unveiled hybrid console - the Switch - following the announcement of a sequel to *Splatoon*. While my hype for *Splatoon 2* never approached my nail-biting anticipation for the original, I was nevertheless excited and spent the exact same launch weekend in July 2017 wrapped up in the franchise all over again (yes, I was able to play Ranked within the launch weekend again, and indeed, I had a blast doing so). However, numerous red flags were raised prior to *Splatoon 2*'s launch that remained in the back of my mind while I was inking turf that weekend: the unquestionable similarity to the original, a confirmation that the newest mode, Salmon Run, would not always be available to play, and a question as to how a faithful sequel could be developed within a two year timeframe.



The answer to the last question is the central purpose of this retrospective, and given the conclusion of the final Splatfest and major post-release content, I feel now is the best time to discuss *Splatoon 2*'s strengths and weaknesses. For all of *Splatoon 2*'s successes and despite being the game with my highest amount of playtime as of this writing, rarely has a game filled me with so much frustration that I question to what extent its release was justified. Unfortunately, *Splatoon 2* does not live up to Nintendo's quality standards and stands as a depressing realization that the respected Japanese giant is conforming to the gaming industry's retaliatory practices. Place a meal from the freezer and put it into the oven for this retrospective; not only what you are about to read is lengthy and might require something to chew on, but by serving a previously frozen meal warm, you will understand the misguided design direction *Splatoon 2* takes to justify its "stay fresh" slogan.

Part I: Gameplay Mechanics

When creating a sequel to an established formula, developers face the burden of trying to innovate while maintaining the integrity of what makes a product so profound. While it may fail to significantly innovate in critical areas, the main gameplay mechanics of the original *Splatoon* were so marvelous that Nintendo made the wise decision to keep them largely unchanged in the sequel. However, the changes made are notable and make for an improved experience, the biggest of which being the lessened impact of special weapons. While they take roughly the same ink coverage to fill up, special weapons do not instantly turn the tide of battle like they did so often in the original, instead showing up slightly more frequently but covering less turf. Subsequently, matches thrive from a brisker pace that allows for every player to have an impact. Furthermore, the days of Inkstrikes that single-handedly acquire Splat Zones are thankfully long gone. Minor additions make the moment-to-moment gameplay more convenient, such as markers on ink tanks that indicate how much ink is required to use sub weapons, various interface improvements to each Ranked Battle mode such as visible ink concentrations on Splat Zones,



One scenario during gameplay where a player with an Ink Roller is trying to splat an opponent using the new Splat Dualies in kid form. From left to right on the top: The player in the center's team, time remaining in the match, the opposing team, how much ink the player has put down, the sub weapon, and then the special gauge. (Picture source: Polygon)

and how weapons correspond to each player on the screen. I especially want to applaud Nintendo for how seamlessly they translated the original *Splatoon's* GamePad functionality onto a single screen; now, the map is tied to the X button which was used for jumping in the original, allowing for far quicker glances at the current state of the match without having to avert eyes off of the screen. Super jumping to a teammate's location using the map has also been made more accessible by either pressing a

corresponding direction on the D-pad, navigating the right analog stick, or using the Switch's built-in gyro sensor.

I similarly adore how Nintendo streamlined the ability to customize clothing in *Splatoon 2*. Unlike the first game which made it so abilities were completely random to equipment, the sequel adds ability chunks that can be scrubbed off apparel and put on other clothing to match your playstyle. While adding abilities can be expensive, the fact that *Splatoon 2* now rewards a Super Sea Snail for every level that can be used as a free coupon for ability purchases is a welcome improvement. With dozens of abilities, clothing options, and even new hairstyles, player customization is far better in *Splatoon 2* than it ever was in the original, and improved mechanics make moment-to-moment gameplay more accessible than ever.

Players are introduced into the world of *Splatoon 2* in an easily digestible tutorial that covers the basic gameplay mechanics. From the start, players can shoot ink in any direction using the right stick, motion controls, or a combination of the two, and can switch from humanoid to squid form with the press of a button. Moving around in squid form is significantly faster only when Inklings dive into their ink, allowing for enemy flanks or strategic last-minute turf coverage since squid form is largely hidden to opponents. Moreover, *Splatoon's* sublime sense of locomotion remains unrivaled to most games I have played, with the seamlessness of transitioning from a kid to a squid and moving around in ink never getting old. Similarly, *Splatoon's* central concept of prioritizing turf coverage remains ingenious with its incredible accessibility and strategic possibility.

Following the competent tutorial, players Super Jump into Inkopolis Square - the hub of *Splatoon 2* and current center of Inkling life. Likely serving as influence for its name, Inkopolis Square takes heavy inspiration from New York City's Times Square, with a gargantuan building littered with screens staring in front surrounded by a litany of shops and advertisements that might as well be ones for Disney for Hershey given the location similarity. Also, there are Inklings. Lots and lots of Inklings. I love the sense of community in Inkopolis Square, with the ability to post public messages and view gameplay statistics for recent players you have encountered adding to the feeling that Inkopolis is a living, breathing world. However, the

inability to post messages without a social media account feels like a needless restriction, and I wish there was an option to simply post drawings without tying them to Twitter or Facebook. Also, while Inkopolis Square takes heavy inspiration from Inkopolis Plaza before it, I vastly prefer the layout of the former since it does not take as long to walk between locations and is much more vibrant than the Plaza ever was.



The Square's many shops and their respective owners add to the appeal of the area, especially the sea anemone Aunt Flow and her hilariously rude Clownfish Craymond who operate the hat shop, and the clothing store owner Jelfonzo who speaks in wildly outdated yet refreshingly enjoyable Shakespearean. However, one character that remains just as bothersome in the sequel is the ammunition store's owner Sheldon, who rambles on and on about different weapons to the point where there is a button that makes him speak faster, except that option is nowhere near as quick as mashing the A button. Often I would avoid entering the shop after weeks of not playing to not have to deal with his tangents, making it so a simple skip option for his dialogue would have alleviated my frustration. Additionally, while I appreciate how the humongous weapon variety caters to every playstyle, many of them feel too similar to each other.



To elaborate, every weapon in the *Splatoon* series comes with a sub and special ability that cannot be taken off, thus Nintendo developed the same weapons with different sub and special abilities to open up strategic possibilities. However, having so many weapons to

choose from makes searching through menus to find a specific firearm a chore even with various search filters enabled, and also makes matches more chaotic when I still see new weapons seemingly every time I boot up the game. I wish Nintendo could have come up with a solution to focus *Splatoon's* arsenal while at the same time catering to different playstyles instead of presenting dozens of similar options at the player.

While the new shop owners are memorable, the biggest new personalities to the Inkopolis universe are Pearl and Marina, the members of the hit new band “Off the Hook”. You will see Off the Hook every time the game boots up chatting about the available maps and modes, and they serve as a perfectly suitable, albeit similar, replacement to the original *Splatoon's* Squid Sisters. However, their funny dialogue does not excuse the fact that their often minute-long conversations are unskippable. After going through roughly thirty seconds to get to the title screen, it is a serious hindrance having to sit through Off the Hook’s mumbo jumbo when all I want to do is play with friends. Although loading might appear to be the central issue, that is likely not the case since the loading icon visible in the rest of the game is absent from Off the Hook’s dialogue and only appears afterward, and Inkopolis Square appears fully rendered as soon as the title screen appears. Moreover, a skip button would have again mitigated the issue



Pearl (Left) and Marina (Right) hosting the Inkopolis News and talking about the stage selection. For me and many other players, these serve as glorified “mash the A button” cinematics. (Picture source: Reddit)

and if Nintendo was so intent on making Pearl and Marina’s dialogue heard, they could make it so players can communicate with them in the Square. In conclusion, while *Splatoon's* gameplay mechanics remain fresh with welcome improvements that make the experience more accessible, a lack of skip options in Sheldon’s store and most annoyingly in the intro serves as a relic of the original’s weaknesses and sometimes makes me not want to play *Splatoon 2* all together -

even the main single player campaign.

Part II: Single Player Campaign - Octo Canyon

I was elated when I found out that the original *Splatoon* would ship with a single player, and Nintendo delivered on creating a unique and satisfying adventure. Given my praise for *Splatoon 2*'s minimally altered mechanics, it might come as a shock that I strongly dislike the sequel's single player campaign's conservative approach. Frankly, the few changes that Octo Canyon implements are too insubstantial and flawed that the entire adventure I questioned whether I was playing a sequel.

Splatoon 2's narrative serves as the biggest disappointment of the single player. Prior to launch, Nintendo marketed Octo Canyon as a story with a grim tone unlike the original, potentially delving into themes unseen in their games. Callie of the Squid Sisters has gone



The Squid Sisters Stories leading up to *Splatoon 2*'s release raised expectations for an evocative narrative that Octo Canyon did not end up delivering on. (Picture source: Nintendo)

missing after losing the final Splatfest of the original game to her colleague Marie, the latter of which seeks Agent 4's help to find her since the previous hero Agent 3 and leader Cap'n Cuttlefish are off on another mission. Aside from the opening cutscene and ending cinematic, there is little to gain out of the plot and all that falls between are predictable beats borrowed from the original, going as far as to mimic the wireless transmission calls signifying that villain DJ Octavio has escaped captivity once again. Often I do not like to fantasize in writing, but Octo Canyon's story leaves so much to be

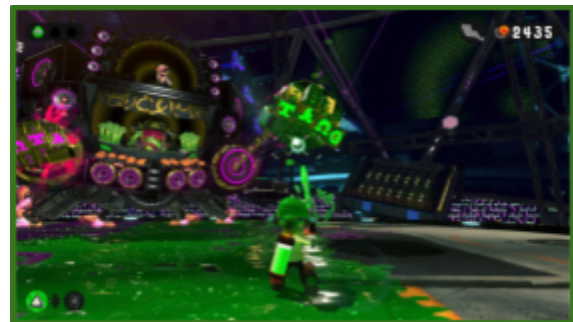
desired that I ponder how Nintendo did not implement more effective plot points. Imagine a tale revolving around Callie's depression believing that Marie had left her, so Callie turns to the Octarian army to combat the Inkling society that abandoned her and Marie ultimately convinces her of the value of friendship and everyone works to finally defeat DJ Octavio. Instead, what is presented is a barebones excuse for a story that revolves around mind control and kidnapping that yearns to be more than it is. It does not help that it feels like the plot could have easily

shifted regardless of the result of the final Splatfest, making me cautious of what could happen in a future installment.

If I had to summarize Octo Canyon in one category, I would describe the similarly barebones final battle that pales in comparison to its predecessor. For reference, DJ Octavio's fight in the original *Splatoon* is among the greatest final bosses I have played, successfully incorporating literally every mechanic seen throughout the adventure into a challenging and memorable experience. Very rarely has a moment in a game had me grinning from ear to ear, and the entirety of DJ Octavio's roughly ten-minute battle stands as a testament to Nintendo's creative prosperity. Therefore, throughout *Splatoon 2's* campaign, I was leaning on an excellent final boss to at least add heft to the adventure. Instead, it all comes crashing down starting with the bosses' introduction. Unsurprisingly, DJ Octavio is the main baddie and has mind control over Callie hoping it will help to end the Inklings threat, and he pilots the same spaceship as before. Whereas the original game's final boss takes place across a multitude of differently shaped platforms, *Splatoon 2's* occurs in a generic circular arena not unlike many previous boss battles, and the entire first phase consists of a mundane bomb rush as Octavio utilizes the same punch attacks from the original that Agent 4

propels back. Marie is introduced in the second phase to rid Callie of her mind control and Sheldon air drops a rainmaker to finish off Octavio, except the battle does not improve. While fighting with a Rainmaker is fun at first, being limited to an infinite grind rail and the imprecise jumps that come with it makes for a similarly mundane and often frustrating last half of the fight. Frankly,

Octo Canyon's final boss seems like a prototype of the original with even fewer attacks, and I was elated to finish it as a result. Add to that an unquestionably similar ending to the original with the an Inkopolis News show proclaiming the return of the Great Zapfish, and credits where you ink the screen to reveal the names of the developers, the final boss symbolizes the overall



DJ Octavio's boss fight in Octo Canyon is an embarrassment when compared to his previous iteration. (Picture source: Escapist Magazine)

similarity found in Octo Canyon that disappointed. And the worst part? The Inklings trap DJ Octavio in the same snowglobe from which he escaped in the first game, making me wonder whether the Inklings are really that ignorant or that they simply do not care what happens next - it surely seems as through Nintendon't.

However, I want to make it clear that I enjoyed Octo Canyon overall, even if it remains too similar to its predecessor. One of the many things Octo Canyon executes correctly is that it serves much better as a tutorial by utilizing many different weapon types throughout the campaign ranging from the standard Hero Shot all the way to the Splat Brella. Each level relies on an often fun central gimmick that in typical Nintendo fashion escalates over the course of the stage until the player masters the mechanic. One of my favorite new additions are the grind rails, which make ink rails look boring by comparison with the ability to shoot on top of them, alongside the added benefit of increased locomotion and simply how awesome Agent 3 looks riding on top of one. Maze-like levels where players have to search for Zapfish pieces are also a highlight alongside a majority of the Splat Charger levels. I mean, who would not like blowing up an ink-filled blimp with precise aiming?! Additionally, every level includes a hidden Sunken Scroll that leads to interesting lore, as well as a hidden Sardinium that players use to upgrade weapons through a satisfying progression system. Boss fights serve as a similar motivation to finish the campaign, providing challenging albeit too short encounters that are constantly creative and humorous with their designs and Marie's respective dialogue. The only boss I found issue with aside from the final boss had to be the fourth world's fight, the Octo Shower, which is among the few levels that use the Splat Charger ineffectively by necessitating insane reaction times as the boss gets quicker with each phase.

However, while each level can be played with any weapon, they lose most of their enjoyment when switching to unintentionally designed weaponry. Playing a stage intended for the Slobberer with a Splat Charger just feels wrong and does not



A look at world four of Octo Canyon, Slimeskin Garrison. While the fleshed out hub worlds add more fun to exploration, they do not significantly improve the experience over the original Splatoon.

(Picture source: Escapist Magazine)

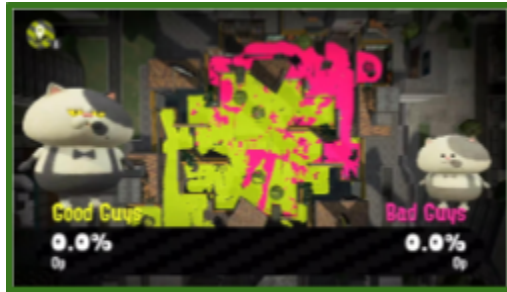
incentivize repeat level playthroughs. Also, the higher concentration of weapons do not consequently increase playtime, making it so Octo Canyon suffers the same fate as its older sibling by being far too short, clocking in at roughly six hours. Especially considering the numerous level concepts that feel like they could have used another level to maximize their potential, the campaign ends far earlier than it should, like a train bursting at high speed than breaking at a roadblock. Even the more fleshed out hub worlds do not feel different enough from the original to impact enjoyment, and while discovering level entrances remains satisfying, I could not unshackle the feeling that I was just playing the original game all over again.

Furthermore, in a world without the original *Splatoon*'s excellent Octo Valley, *Splatoon 2*'s campaign would prosper from creative level design. But a lacking narrative, flawed weapon type implementation, and serious lack of innovation prevent it from achieving greatness. I truly cannot understate how disappointing the final boss and ending were, and I hope Nintendo improves upon Octo Canyon in the next single player to make that experience one of a kind. In the meantime, there is a fun multiplayer component to consistently experiment with.

Part III: Multiplayer - Regular Battle (Turf War)

Just like Octo Canyon, there are very few gameplay criticisms I have for *Splatoon 2*'s multiplayer, and it remains the best aspect of the game. The premiere mode of the *Splatoon* franchise, and also my favorite, has always been Turf War, which puts two teams of four against each other to see which team can end up with the most ink coverage by the end of the match. For how chaotic and approachable Turf War is, it always has me coming back for more. The focus on turf coverage allows for players regardless of experience to make an impact and similarly opens up numerous options for strategy, such as going into the opponent's base to drive them away from teammates or hiding in your ink to outflank them. I cannot help but applaud how *Splatoon* is among the few family friendly shooters in the market not only from its colorful aesthetic, but

also how imprecise aiming does not instantly spell defeat like in most other shooters since the ground is still being inked. Eliminations do matter and can often spell victory if a team kill occurs towards the end of the match, but the ever changing layout of the map makes it so players must stand on their toes at all times and only go for splats if the reward is justified. Furthermore, the three-minute time frame of Turf War feels just right, allowing for briskly paced, addictive matches where every second matters. I cannot count the amount of times I have said I would play



At the end of every Turf War, Judd (Left) and Lil' Judd (Right) count the percentage of the map covered by each color to declare the winning team. (Picture source: Reddit)

“just one more game” only for it to be a lengthy struggle to get off the chair two hours later. That’s just how enjoyable Turf War is.

If it were not for memorable and intricately designed maps, *Splatoon 2*’s multiplayer would flounder, but that is not the case. Given how much of an emphasis is put inside the Inklings universe how much of a big deal Turf Wars are, I adore how each map adds a sense of believability to the world while never feeling forced.

From the sports venues of Humpback Pump Track and Goby Arena, to the oddly realistic ship Manta Maria, to the amusement park Wahoo World, all the way to a literal shopping center within MakoMart, the stage creativity still impresses. While I wish more of the twenty-three maps included elements from the single player, with grind rails feeling absent in particular, each one is meticulously designed with varied geometry and scenery that makes them stand out. I also want to commend the developers on the decision to make each map relatively small and symmetrical since it suits the frantic nature of a *Splatoon* match. My favorite map is Musselforge Fitness since it masterfully adheres to the small but densely packed design principals that I love about the *Splatoon* series. Musselforge is also filled with details such as Jellyfish on treadmills and weightlifting sets that strengthen the fitness center theme. Additionally, each of the returning maps from the original game have received a fresh coat of paint that allow them to similarly stand out. Alongside revamped



Musselforge Fitness’ incredible theming and dense design make it stand out during multiplayer battles. (Picture source: Splatoon Wiki)

audio and visuals, layouts in maps such as Port Mackerel have been transformed to make them a pleasure to play over the original, and maps that were not yearning for improvement such as Blackbelly Skatepark or Kelp Dome thankfully remain mostly the same. The only stage I dislike is Moray Towers; not only has it received little improvement since the original, but it still feels unbalanced towards Charger weapons, often making it a chore to play.

Aside from imbalances present on Moray Towers, however, each weapon type feels viable and different. I consistently enjoy experimenting with my arsenal, especially in Ranked modes where variety is instrumental to victory, and the unique physics and play styles among weapons is stellar, ranging from Ink Rollers which can be flung or literally put on top of enemies to get a satisfying splat, to the similarly amazing Slosers or Splat Brellas. Yes, you can wield an umbrella and yes, it is every bit as outstanding as it sounds.

While Turf Wars unfortunately lack a Ranked mode option, they feel incredibly competitive during special in-game events called Splatfests. Splatfests follow Turf War rules, except every player must pick a side beforehand, such as choosing ketchup over mayo, past over future, or order over chaos, and every match is counted to declare a winner. While some of the contests are questionable (ketchup vs. mayo really should have been ketchup vs. mustard), I love how Splatfests feel like a celebration, with player-created posts decorating Inkopolis Square and adding to the sense of community, alongside Inklings rocking out to Off the Hook's stage performance. *Splatoon 2* introduced Shifty Stations to coincide with each Splatfest, which are maps not found in normal rotation, which is easy to tell given the experimental nature of their layouts. However, I like how they utilize concepts from the single player, and for a one-day offering Shifty Stations add just the right amount of intrigue to motivate playing each event. Now that *Splatoon 2*'s Splatfests have concluded, I can say that I tried to choose the less popular side for every event since it makes matches far more frequent against the other side, whereas picking the popular team will lead to lobbies taking minutes to enter a match. However, not only is popularity not visible prior to picking a side, but it counts towards the overall Splatfest results

that, while nowhere near as convoluted as the original game's scoring system, still begs the question as to why match win rate is not the determining factor.

Aside from poor Splatfest scoring, another system *Splatoon 2* borrows from its predecessor is its terrible online infrastructure. More games than I can count have ended in a communication error, and trying to play with friends is like pulling teeth since friend lobbies cannot be created for Turf War unlike in *League Battle* and *Salmon Run*, making it so players must click on their friends' icon while they in their match for a hope that they will enter their lobby or else they will have to wait until someone drops out, which often takes several matches. Even worse, *Splatoon 2* does not utilize its terrific [tournament-style spectator mode](#) while

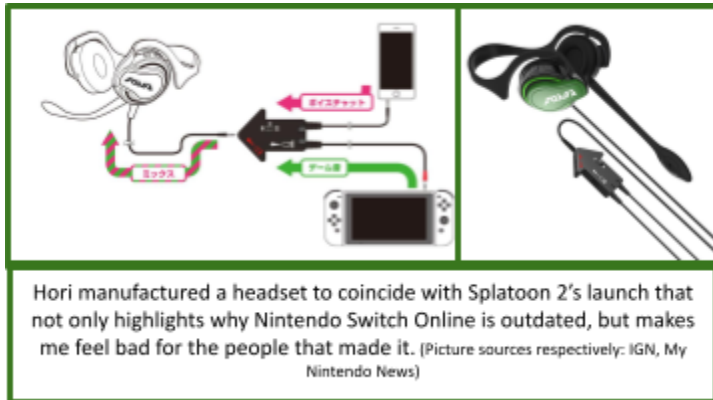


waiting for friends, leaving players looking at a timer for the duration of their friend's match. When going into games alone, a similar boredom sets in with nothing to do while waiting except push buttons to alter the music, in stark contrast to the amazingly addicting *Squid Jump* from the previous game that whisked away time. While I understand that *Squid Jump* was created to enjoy on the GamePad, I have no doubt Nintendo could have implemented a similar minigame on the big screen given the seamless transition from two-screens to one-screen in *Splatoon 2*. Additionally,

the timer in the corner of the screen while waiting for matches is about the most useless feature Nintendo has put in a game since it resets for no apparent reason, making players unable to leave lobbies for minutes.

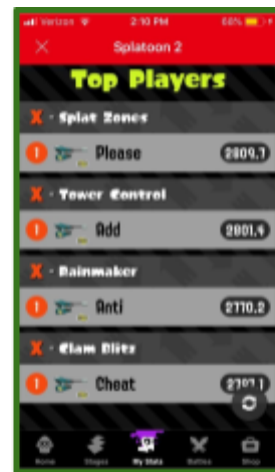
However, the most baffling online decision has to be the lack of save data cloud support. Nintendo has stated that the reason they do not implement the feature in *Splatoon 2* is to avoid cheating, and while a big issue that the community has risen against, that does not explain why Nintendo has the feature in other premiere online titles prone to cheating such as *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* and *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe*. In a rational world, however, cloud saves being banned

for cheating is utterly ridiculous given how it is a response to a minority of players' experiences and how companies with larger install bases such as Microsoft and Sony seldom have such issues. It's almost like Nintendo is admitting that their online is a relic of a bygone era, especially if the convoluted use of the Switch Online app is any implication given how voice chat is



operated, and makes me feel ashamed for paying twenty dollars a year for online to support a company that is so readily living in the past. Also, as one of the major selling points of Switch Online, lacking cloud save support in *Splatoon 2* - one of Nintendo's biggest titles - reeks of misleading marketing.

Yet another inconvenient feature that returns from the original game is the map rotation. To elaborate, every two hours the two maps in Regular, League, and Ranked Battle change and are the only maps playable during that time interval. While this is a noticeable improvement from the four hour interval of the original game, I believe the map rotation should be replaced entirely in favor of a voting system akin to most shooters or selection should become completely random. While I can see the rotation being beneficial to professionals, having only two maps to play makes *Splatoon 2* lack variety at any given minute and only encourages me to play when I like the stage selection. Needless to say, having Moray Towers in a certain rotation makes me stay as far away as possible from that mode for two hours. By extension, I would also get rid of the mode rotation for Ranked which cycles through either Splat Zones, Tower Control, Rainmaker, or Clam Blitz to let



One courageous player hacked the Nintendo Switch Online app to give Nintendo a blunt notice of the numerous cheaters present in Splatoon 2's lobbies. While the mobile application hacker received a ban, his bravery sings strong in Splatoon fan's hearts such as myself. (Picture source: Reddit)

the player play any mode at any time. While I anticipate some less popular modes would have longer queue times, it is nevertheless an improvement that would stimulate variety into *Splatoon 2* and simultaneously remove the need for Pearl and Marina's introduction cinematic.

Additionally, the recon feature, which restricts experimenting on stages to only the ones during that rotation, could be augmented to allow any stage to be available at any time. In conclusion, Turf War remains fun but a lacking online infrastructure diminishes motivation to play it.

Part IV: Multiplayer - Ranked Battle

While I simply enjoy the shorter length and less competitive nature of Turf War over Ranked, I still have a lot of fun every time I enter a Ranked match. Given that Ranked Battle unlocks after reaching level ten, it ensures that players have experience with *Splatoon 2* having spent roughly six hours with it. Each of the four Ranked modes now has its own ranking system ranging from C to X, which serves far better as a way to judge player skills. Ranks go up upon enough match victories, and can even go up by an entire letter grade for stellar performances. However, sometimes when I feel like I have an unstoppable game, my rank rises only a little bit, so either I am hallucinating and simply stink at *Splatoon 2* or the algorithm for rankings needs improvement. But I seldom have had an issue being paired with teammates of my rank, and I always feel as though I make an impact. Thankfully, map layouts are slightly tweaked to adhere to each of the four modes, such as added slopes to Starfish Mainstage in Rainmaker to decrease traversal time. While my least favorite mode is Splat Zones which tasks players with covering a

small portion of the map like many other

shooters, resulting in its generic feel, it is a

testament to the enjoyment of Ranked that I still

enjoy Splat Zones. After Splat Zones my

favorite modes are Rainmaker then Clam Blitz.

Rainmaker has players try to destroy a barrier



The creativity and fun of Clam Blitz makes me wish there were more new Ranked modes in *Splatoon 2*. (Picture source: Nintendo)

protecting the powerful Rainmaker weapon and bring it into the other teams side capture the flag style, except not only does holding the Rainmaker limit mobility, it also highlights the wielder's location on the map and leaves that player incredibly vulnerable, especially when taking into account the weapon's long fire rate. Clam Blitz is the only new ranked mode in *Splatoon 2*, and revolves around collecting clams scattered throughout the map. Upon finding ten clams, the player receives a football that must be thrown at the opponent's goal to leave it open for attack, and the team that either scores one hundred points first or ends the match with the most amount of points emerges victorious. Furthermore, Clam Blitz stands as an amazingly unique addition to *Splatoon 2* that makes me wish there were more new modes like it.

However, my favorite mode remains Tower Control. Having to stand on a platform the size of an in-game car yields just the right amount of chaos into matches that has often had me laughing in amusement for every single elimination that takes place. Being the lone person on the tower and having to fend for yourself is especially fun, providing a non stop adrenaline rush that keeps me coming back to the mode in search for another comeback victory. In conclusion, while online connectivity issues similarly plague Ranked Battle, it remains enjoyable and scratches a competitive itch that might be beneficial after a long day at work, and the aforementioned League Battles provide an easy way to play with friends unlike Turf War. Although I wish there were more new multiplayer modes, I believe the developers viewed *Splatoon 2's* Salmon Run as that alternative, for better and worse.

Part V: Salmon Run

If there is any justification as to why *Splatoon 2* should be considered a sequel, its Salmon Run: Nintendo's answer to popular horde modes. Salmon Run tasks players with surviving three waves of enemies while simultaneously collecting golden eggs, which are obtained from bosses, to proceed to the next round. If the quota for golden eggs is not met or

everyone dies before time runs out, its game over, and Grizzco's boss will scold you for it. From a gameplay perspective, I absolutely love Salmon Run. Following an effective tutorial, I was immediately applying to work for Grizzco with the wonderful teamwork incentives that make every wave feel endlessly satisfying to conquer. Especially considering Salmon Run's challenge, finally conquering a tsunami of enemies unleashes a pure adrenaline rush that is unrivaled in most games. I want to give special attention to the stupendous enemies and their respective designs, which range from the standard chum to the myriad of bosses such as the giant Steel Eel all the way to the missile-firing Flyfish. Every single enemy animates beautifully and are easily recognizable on the battlefield, allowing for tactics to be memorized in order to trounce them. The various conditions that change stages on a wave-by-wave basis similarly inject chaos and creativity into battles, such as dense fog that limits visibility, giant ink cannons that appear when dealing with larger opposition, and the changing tide levels that can even reveal rare map parts. Moreover, aside from some frustrating conditions that feel skewed towards foes, most notably the rushing zombie chum where one hit likely spells doom or the giant instant-kill Grizzlers, and the lacking stage variety, Salmon Run is constantly enjoyable. However, every stage, much like the multiplayer, is wholly unique and I still feel like I am discovering different ways to traverse them with every match, even if I wish there were more. I similarly like Salmon Run's random weapon selection, which not only makes matches all the more hectic, but encourages experimentation with weapons in multiplayer that I would otherwise believe not befitting of my playstyle. And much like the rest of *Splatoon 2*, Salmon Run is made even more enjoyable with a friend, which is made incredibly easy through the use of a League Battle-like lobby. I similarly appreciate how if someone leaves during a match egg quotas decrease to account for fewer players, even if the time limit remains the biggest enemy.

Salmon Run's reward system provides yet another incentive to play. As players advance through the many Salmon Run rankings - from interns all the way to professional - challenge and pay grade subsequently increase, and every one-hundred points



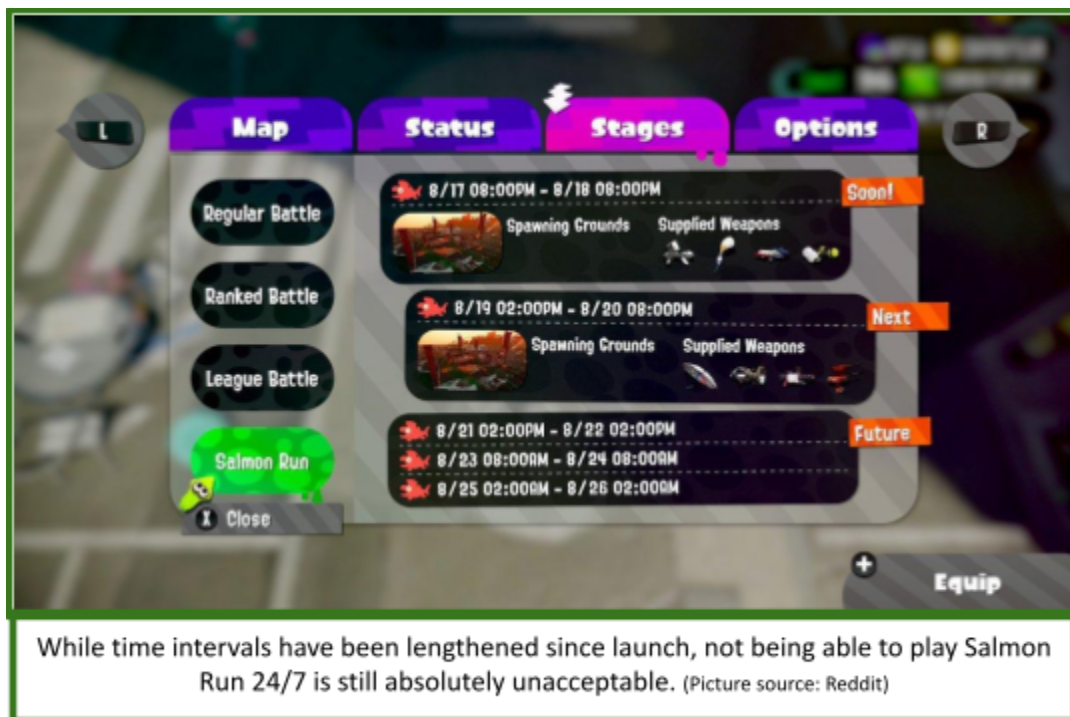
Splatoon 2's version of a horde mode, Salmon Run, is an amazingly fun and chaotic challenge that rewards strategic planning. (Picture source: Paste Magazine)

acquired rewards useful items such as ability tickets, currency, Salmon Run specific clothing, and more. However, it is bothersome that rewards are not immediately collected, requiring players to visit the desk outside the Salmon Run entrance that takes several seconds to load. Thankfully, once you leave Salmon Run it now teleports you right next to the desk when at launch it brought you to the center of the Square, but it is nevertheless an issue that should be improved.

I want to reiterate that I adore Salmon Run's gameplay and reward systems since what I am about to say might come off as brash otherwise. For all the genius gameplay decisions Salmon Run incorporates, it includes the worst decision I have ever seen in a Nintendo product: it cannot be played all the time and is instead restricted to irregular, prescribed time intervals. Even though availability has been increased to only have a few hours of downtime each day unlike the twelve-hour breaks that occurred at launch, Salmon Run's lack of availability is nevertheless an anti-consumer decision that I struggle to believe was implemented for justified reasons, especially considering Salmon Run's prominence in the [April 2017 Nintendo Direct](#) and back of the box advertising.

Imagine you are a multiplayer shooter fan, even if you are disinterested in the genre. How would you react if Activision banned *Call of Duty's* signature multiplayer for twelve hours a day? Blizzard's *Overwatch*? What if Epic shut down *Fortnite's* battle royale mode for an entire evening, leaving only *Save the World* open? You would likely be frustrated given your restrained schedule, dictated by school or work, rendering it impossible to play certain modes since they are not available when you finally have time to relax. The last example is notable in particular, since *Save the World* is technically *Fortnite's* signature mode but the battle royale is where the cash flows, much like how *Splatoon 2's* Salmon Run is a complementary mode to multiplayer. While *Splatoon 2's* multiplayer has a significantly bigger component for the overall product compared to *Fortnite's* *Save the World*, I cannot envision how limiting any mode's availability makes business sense, let alone a popular one such as Salmon Run. According to a Kotaku UK interview with one of the few western developers at Nintendo Kyoto, the philosophy Japanese

companies use is that “everything is tailored. ‘We’re making this thing for you, and this is how we think this thing is better enjoyed’. This is why, in *Splatoon*, the maps rotate every couple of hours. And the modes change. And we’re pretty confident this is how the game should be enjoyed”, which is a misguided business culture when companies should cater to the consumer. Even with paying twenty dollars a year for online, I am not allowed to play arguably the most enjoyable and brilliant mode ever seen in the *Splatoon* series, which stands a criminal shame and not only the biggest reason I would not consider *Splatoon 2* a faithful sequel, but the rationale I use to deter people from buying the game since anti-consumer practices such as this cannot be allowed to continue. Imagine my disappointment when I sit through a two-minute unskippable intro cutscene waiting to play Salmon Run only to see it unavailable for the next six hours. Truly a shame.



Part VI: Octo Expansion

Hopefully to compensate for the dull Octo Canyon, Nintendo released the first paid downloadable content for the *Splatoon* franchise in the form of the single-player *Octo Expansion*, which made a stellar first impression in the [March 2018 Nintendo Direct](#), standing out amidst the sea of screams that came with the initial reveal of Super Smash Bros. Ultimate. The *Octo Expansion* portrayed a sense of atmosphere and intrigue that Octo Canyon lacked, looking as if it would continue Nintendo's amazing dlc track record. If anything, the *Octo*



Imagine the horror Agent 8 must have felt when she woke up to see this image of Cap'n Cuttlefish looming over her. (Picture Source: USGamer)

Expansion cements to me that at least *Splatoon 2*'s single player component was rushed, since it blows Octo Canyon out of the water.

The *Octo Expansion* stars Agent 8, an Octoling who wakes with amnesia only to find herself stuck in Inkopolis' massive subway system the Deepsea Metro. It turns out this was the mission Marie alluded to that Cap'n Cuttlefish and Agent 3 were on, since the former

shows up right at the beginning to help Agent 8 escape by collecting each of the four "things" that the telephone from the introduction claims will lead them to the "promised land". To do so, Agent 8 must go through a multitude of test facilities. Like *New Super Mario Bros. U*'s paid downloadable adventure *New Super Luigi U*, each stage in the *Octo Expansion* is much shorter than the original but presents a greater challenge. However, no stage is tough enough to stop *Octo Expansion*'s brisk pace given the liberal checkpoint placement within each.

Every test facility stars a certain gimmick much like Octo Canyon's stages, except they are much wackier, whether it be piloting an Inkjet all the way to the goal or not taking a hit for

thirty seconds. While some concepts in Octo Canyon are not fleshed out enough, the *Octo Expansion* not only constantly recycles concepts, but many lack enjoyment whatsoever. Although I enjoyed myself guiding an eight



Stages in the Octo Expansion revolve around unique gimmicks such as this one where Agent 8 has to shoot twenty enemies before the time limit reaches zero. While some concepts are overused, I still had fun in the Deepsea Metro.

ball to the end of a stage for the first time, by the fourth time it loses it appeal. Having to meticulously hit dozens of boxes to form a shape where one imprecise shot spells defeat is similarly tedious, alongside the disappointment that comes with all the bosses except for the final battle being taken from Octo Canyon. While new conditions make these battles enjoyable, the hallmark of *Splatoon's* single player has always been the imaginative bosses, thus reusing them comes off as an ineffective way to add more stages. Furthermore, even with more stages than Octo Canyon, the *Octo Expansion* cannot shake the length issue that has plagued the *Splatoon* series; clocking in at roughly seven hours, the expansion is far too short, especially considering the reliance on overused mechanics. Therefore, more unique stages would have bolstered playtime and made Agent 8's journey truly wonderful, since many of the stages included are already incredibly satisfying to play.

Where the *Octo Expansion* fundamentally suffers is in its point-based progression system. To elaborate, every time the player beats a stage, they are rewarded with a prescribed amount of points that are used to enter other test facilities, thereby advancing the narrative. However, points are single use, meaning that if you die repeatedly on a stage you will have to pay to enter again for a hope at victory. While this never became a problem for me, I can see *Octo Expansion's* challenge steering away less experienced players for reasons that frankly belong back in the arcade era. Not only am I against the use of lives when checkpoints serve as a better replacement, but why the point system was not removed in favor of a traditional level system is beyond me. Even C.Q. Cumber, the subway conductor, knows the points are useless since he just gives them to you as a completion reward and simply says goodbye, and even if points are used to unlock ability chunks at a vending machine, that risks having to replay levels on future playthroughs since there is no file selection system.

On a brighter note, Nintendo nailed the art direction and atmosphere in the *Octo Expansion*. The metro vibe is masterfully executed, resulting in me gazing out from the rails to spot unique marine life within each



Agent 8's CQ-80 device can be used to access the stage selection screen, read unlockable conversations, view Mem Cakes, or change settings. (Picture source: IGN)

subway track, constantly wondering what exactly happened to separate the Deepsea Metro from Inkopolis. The sponge-like Mem Cakes received upon completing all the test facilities in a track, effectively each world, serve just as interesting a role as the Sunken Scrolls from Octo Canyon, providing lore except in rhyme, and even contain blissful elastic physics. While Mem Cakes serve as a way for Agent 8 to regain her memory, so too do the conversations he/she can look at on their CQ-80 device, which is similar to a cell phone and serves as the central mechanism for visiting stages. These conversations with Callie, Marie, and Cap'n Cuttlefish often had me chuckling with their imitation of modern society's dialect, and they also serve as a way to break up the gameplay by delving into Off the Hook's backstory.

However, the secondary cast lacks the same amount of character development. Little is implied as to why Iso Padre, the Isopod who gives Agent 8 Mem Cakes, rides the subway let alone why C.Q. Cumber kills Agent 8 every time he/she fails a task. Even the main antagonist lacks enough exposition to justify his actions. To elaborate, it turns out the four "things"



The many unique creatures encountered on the Deepsea Metro are interesting to meet. However, none of their backstories are fleshed out enough to warrant why they ride the subway. (Picture source: Sick Critic)

collected throughout the adventure are pieces of a blender that the telephone from the beginning, now revealed to be Commander Tartar, uses to obtain the genetics of successful test subjects in order to create a perfect race that could rival his creator's humanity. According to Tartar, Inklings just did not cut it, and thus wishes to obliterate Inkopolis, but not enough explanation is given as to how Tartar became so hardened against Inklings society, making his character feel out of place. A flashback depicting his creator's

vision for humanity and how Inklings so readily went against his wants would have gone a long way towards building Tartar's arch and deepening the expansion's appeal. The same applies to secondary characters such as Iso Padre and C.Q. Cumber.

Thankfully, Commander Tartar's final boss fight obliterates Octo Canyon's and stands as an amazing conclusion to the experience. Where it truly sets itself apart is through the buildup that exponentially increases in the final hour of the game, as Agent 3 emerges to help allentate the blender and leaves a hole in the ceiling for Agent 8 to escape. What follows is a nail-biting climb to the surface where every level has its own unique mechanic, ranging from stealth to bounce pads. A mind-controlled Agent 3 emerges just prior to reaching the surface and a long battle ensues with a stupendous remix of *Splattack* from the original. While climbing the facility, you might take notice of how each level is named after a human body part. Upon defeating Agent 3, lo and beyond, a hulking human sculpture emerges from the water - the first glimpse of humanity in several thousand years following their extinction. Tartar headquarters himself in an eye, preparing a laser to fire directly at Inkopolis, and it's up to Agent 8 and co. to stop him. To my utter disbelief, the final battle ingeniously takes the form of a Turf War, where Marina fire bombs that Agent 8 must ink to cover Tartar and restrain him from using solar energy to fire the beam. The final battle is intense, challenging, fun, and memorable with Off the Hook's excellent *Fly Octo Fly* playing alongside the backdrop of Inkopolis, and the three-minute Turf War has surprisingly dark undertones for a Nintendo game. I mean, the game over screen during this battle is about as terrifying as *Zelda II* with Inkopolis Square being eradicated by the laser. I was filled with glee upon witnessing the cherry on top of it all: Pearl screaming into a Killer Wail, a special ability absent from the sequel, to eliminate Tartar for exactly 888.8% damage.

While I cannot say it surpasses the amazement of DJ Octavio's first battle, *Octo Expansion's* final boss easily comes close and stands as one of Nintendo's best final bosses by connecting the entire *Splatoon 2* experience together with an ultimate Turf War battle, and is well worth the seven hour journey alone. Moreover, I would recommend the *Octo Expansion* to fans of the *Splatoon* franchise or anyone let down by Octo Canyon, since it serves as the campaign the sequel should have launched

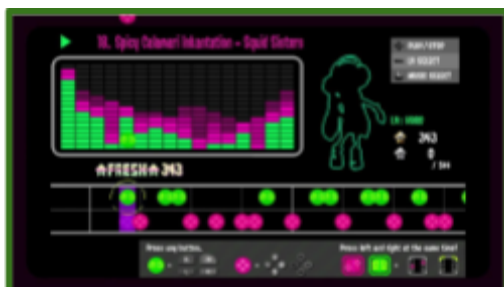


The setting of Octo Expansion's final boss instantly elevates the fight over Octo Canyon's, and thankfully, the Turf War against Commander Tartar is incredibly satisfying. (Picture source: Know Your Meme)

with a unique structure and refreshing narrative, that despite its qualms, leaves a strong impact.

Part VII: Presentation and Release Schedule

If there is a single aspect of *Splatoon 2* that I struggle to find any faults with, it's the presentation. Inkopolis is simply gorgeous, oozing with color at every second portraying a sense of invitation in stark contrast to many modern shooters. Animations similarly ooze with vibrancy and personality, alongside the clothing options and overall aesthetic that contribute to the eighties vibe. I want to especially commend the ink texture, which has somehow been revamped from the original game to be absolutely breathtaking. Likely because the insane glitter-like texture from the single player offerings would reduce multiplayer performance, the effect is absent from multiplayer, but the ink still looks incredibly realistic. In terms of performance, *Splatoon 2* runs at a solid sixty frames per second across both docked and handheld modes except in the Square where performance is reduced to thirty frames per second, and even with games that result in communication errors, frame rate dips are hardly noticeable. Nintendo's programming wizards likely achieved this through the use of a dynamic resolution, which reduces pixel count to maintain a steady frame rate. Moreover, even two years after its launch, I cannot help but be impressed how such a beautiful game is playable on a handheld system. The only minor issue I have with the presentation is the font style, which is much more angular than the original and nowhere near as bubbly or inviting, making me wonder why Nintendo did not just stick to the style set by its predecessor.



While unavailable to play while waiting for matches, *Splatoon 2* has a minigame called Squid Beatz where players can jam out to the great tunes from the game while aiming for high scores. (Picture source: Bagel the Bagel)

Splatoon 2 controls well across docked and handheld modes, and the ability to set individual sensitivities for at home and on-the-go play is a nice inclusion.

Splatoon's motion controls remain the gold standard for console shooters, providing a level of precision just shy

of mouse and keyboard. Also, the option to restrict certain colors in multiplayer returns from the original game, and remains a wonderful accessibility feature that will aid many players with color blindness. The audio design deserves a special mention for creating a sense of uniqueness among each weapon and providing an immense sense of satisfaction whenever you land a splat on an opponent. Compositions are similarly great, providing rock tunes that provide an adrenaline rush during battle. While the soundtrack doesn't quite reach the brilliance of the original and many tracks are overused in both campaigns, it is nevertheless enjoyable and *Octo Expansion's* remixes are a particular highlight. *Splatoon 2* provides a style unlike any other shooter in its soundtrack, even going as far to include in-game bands, that makes the inarticulate dialect in Inkopolis stand out all the more amazingly. I also love how *Splatoon 2* has fixed in-match communication over the original game. While “Booyah!” is still relegated to pressing down on the D-pad to inform teammates of an amazing accomplishment, up on the D-pad has been thankfully replaced with “This way” to lure players to your location instead of the cryptic “C’mon!” from the original.

Another feature *Splatoon 2* unfortunately lacks like its predecessor is split-screen multiplayer, which would make playing with friends more convenient and is something I hope they implement in a future iteration, alongside improved amiibo functionality since snapping selfies with amiibo companions and playing slightly remixed single player stages is simply too dull. Also, I believe Nintendo became arrogant in terms of *Splatoon 2's* content roadmap. Having only five maps for the original's launch was largely acceptable given the newly introduced concept of turf coverage. By the time *Splatoon 2* launched, the concept was still enjoyable, but that does not compensate for the lack of content at launch with only eight maps, two of which were revamped from the original, a lacking single player, and a meager two Salmon Run maps. While the game has made up for its lackluster release over the span of two years, no product should launch half-baked and become finished later. Moreover, Nintendo should have released *Splatoon 2* with a handful more maps for both multiplayer and Salmon Run, which it seemed perfectly capable of considering how data-miners found out that many future maps were present

on the day-one software (Source: Eurogamer). However, a perplexing content roadmap does not undermine *Splatoon 2*'s incredible presentation and gameplay.

Finale: The True Turf War

For a franchise with the tagline of “stay fresh” that single handedly invested me into the shooter genre, *Splatoon 2* comes across as a processed meal that requires a four-hundred degree oven to enjoy. Almost every single aspect of the sequel abides by the same principle, not significantly innovating the *Splatoon* franchise and coming off as a rushed product. Do I blame Nintendo for releasing *Splatoon 2* when they did? From a marketing standpoint, no. Having the biggest new property on the Wii U released so quickly into the Switch's lifespan gave a signal that the Japanese giant was going to end their release droughts of the eighth generation, and having a multiplayer game as big as *Splatoon* sold the idea of Nintendo's hybrid console. But never, ever, should a game release at the expense of quality; a weak single player, terrible online infrastructure, unavailable signature modes, and lack of content is what *Splatoon 2* implemented to release when it did. Furthermore, *Splatoon 2* is not the Nintendo sequel that the franchise deserves, living in the shadow of the original and repeating its mistakes while simultaneously failing to innovate in significant ways. I still love *Splatoon 2*'s addicting gameplay, presentation, and am constantly impressed with the ingeniousness of Salmon Run and the refreshingly unique *Octo Expansion*, but cannot recommend it out of fear that the Big N will become a shadow of its former self with rushed products that adhere to anti-consumer practices. If Salmon Run became always available, the intro cinematic could be skipped, and least importantly the map rotation was removed, I would recommend the game but still complain about its lack of innovation. And given how it took one year for the ability to switch weapons in Turf War without exiting the lobby, I have little faith that those wishes will come true.



Maybe one day the Splatoon series will gain this discontinued sign of Nintendo's quality standards, as the original deserved but the sequel does not.
(Picture Source: Old School Gamer Magazine)

While anything that comes out of public relations is incredibly hard to trust, Nintendo has stated that *Splatoon 3* is not currently in production, which I desperately hope is the case in order to give those future developers time to implement significant improvements to the series that make it an iteration worth celebrating (Source: Nintendo Wire). Chaos emerging victorious in *Splatoon 2*'s final splatfest against order could make for an interesting story premise in *Splatoon 3* that has more narrative depth than Octo Canyon, and the Switch has seen fundamental reinventions of key Nintendo franchises since *Splatoon 2*'s release that gives me hope that the next game will impress me the same way as the original. I still adore Nintendo despite my myriad issues with *Splatoon 2* because they are the company that catalyzed my love of gaming and by extension, my love of writing, but I believe it is paramount to speak out when you believe someone is going down the wrong path, which is what I fear out of the Kyoto-based company. When I look at Nintendo, I still see the lovable and smiling faces that greeted me in *Splatoon*'s initial reveal and developers who truly love and want to elevate their craft, except they sit behind corporate executives who have little knowledge of the industry. Moreover, in order to prosper, publishers must look to the future and not the past, just like the Inklings moved to Inkopolis Square from Inkopolis Plaza since that was where society was heading. *Splatoon* showed that Nintendo has what it takes to go towards the future, and hopefully they learn from *Splatoon 2*'s mistakes to impress gamers just like they did in May 2015. Afterall, if there is any company on Earth that can innovate, its Nintendo. Inkopolis is counting on it.

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