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Quality time with the Mario Bros.; Couples can join forces to fend off baddies in modern reinventions of classic side-scrollers

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Illustrations: / Cooperative side-scrolling platform games such as New Super Mario Bros. Wii, Donkey Kong Country Returns and LittleBigPlanet 2 appeal to both men and women.;

A nice walk in the park, a quiet romantic dinner, maybe even snuggling in for a romantic comedy are some of the many activities couples often engage in.

If none of these ideas sounds appealing, you could always sit back, relax and bond while playing a video game.

It may seem like a strange suggestion but the recent industry trend of cooperative gaming, games you play with someone else while working together to accomplish goals, can be a fun and different experience for any couple looking to try something new.

Here are a few user-friendly games that even people who don't play many video games can enjoy together.

New Super Mario Bros. Wii (Wii)

Nintendo's Super Mario Bros. revival has it all, classic Mario gameplay and classic Mario graphics; it's full of Mario nostalgia. It's a modern take on a classic gaming formula with a twist; you can play with up to four people at the same time. The levels are designed in a way that forces you and whoever you're playing with to work together.

In one level, one player has to tilt platforms with the Wiimote so the other player can jump from floating platform to platform. The game is filled with interesting teamwork-oriented levels like this and although frustrating at times, it can still be a lot of fun to play. You also have the ability to pick your gaming partner up and carry them through the level unharmed; a definite way to impress your significant other in a video game.

Donkey Kong Country Returns (Wii)

Donkey Kong Country Returns has some of the most original level designs ever seen in a video game. In one level, you're running, hiding under platforms and dodging enemies while trying not to get washed away by a giant menacing tidal wave. It manages to maintain what made the original Donkey Kong franchise on the Super Nintendo such a great series but like other games in this list, puts a modern spin on it.

It's still the classic platforming action but with a new emphasis on teamwork. The entire game was built from the ground up with cooperative gameplay in mind. One player controls Donkey Kong, the other controls Diddy Kong, and each character has their

own special abilities you need to use to finish each level. One negative thing about this game is the fact that it is extremely difficult, so people new to gaming may find it too hard.

LittleBigPlanet 2 (PS3)

Personality is what makes LittleBigPlanet 2 so special; it's filled with Tim Burton-like characters and levels. It also allows you to fully customize your Sackboy, a cute potato sacklike character you play as over the course of the game. Like the other platforming games described above, LittleBigPlanet 2 follows the classic jump up and down side-scrolling style of game. It does however add a third element: you're able to walk into the background of the game as well as move forwards and backwards. with your partner and, just like in New Super Mario Bros., it heavily emphasizes teamwork. It also acts as a rather expansive amateur game development tool. Gamers can create their own levels and upload them for the world to play. This means it has unlimited replay value so you and your significant other can play for together for hours.

Rock Band 3 (Xbox 360, PS3, Wii)

In Rock Band 3 you can create a band and build it from the ground up into an international success with a special someone. The keyboard adds another instrument to the franchise and the game gives you the ability to learn how to play real songs on real instruments. The buttons on the Rockband 3 Pro Guitar act as strings that are pushed down to the frets on a normal guitar.

There is also the world tour mode where you and your partner create a band and travel around the virtual world playing songs. The game allows you to download extra songs online, so hopefully you can find music both of you enjoy playing together.

Call of Duty Black Ops (Zombie Mode) - Xbox 360, PS3

Call of Duty Black Ops isn't a game you'd usually want to play with someone who isn't familiar with gaming. Dual analog first-person shooters often have overwhelming controls that are difficult for nongamers to get used to. It's also a very violent game. If you can get past the gore and controls, Call of Duty Black Ops' Zombie Mode can be a blast to play with your partner. The two of you fight off wave after wave of increasingly vicious zombies. There's nothing like saving your loved one from the hungry

undead with a perfectly placed headshot exactly like you see in movies. How romantic is that?