

MARIO BROS.

GENRE(S): Arcade, Platformer

AVAILABLE ON: Amstrad CPC, Arcade, Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 7800, Atari 8-bit, C64, GBA, NES, PC-8000, ZX Spectrum

DEVELOPED BY: Nintendo

PUBLISHED BY: Nintendo, Ocean Software (Amstrad CPC, ZX Spectrum), Atari (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 7800, Atari 8-bit, C64), Westside Soft House (PC-8000)

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After debuting in 1981's *Donkey Kong*, then serving as the lead villain in the sequel, Mario was pulled out of the big ape's shadow by his creator Shigeru Miyamoto, who wanted to develop the character further according to the collective of visions he had as to how to make him stand out even better. He re-envisioned Mario as kind of a superhuman character, who could jump unbelievably high (in accordance to his original name Jumpman) and withstand a fall from any height. He wanted a simple, fun, two-player arcade game; the only problem was coming up with an avatar for the second player. The solution soon came in the form of Mario's younger brother Luigi – who was basically a green-hued palette swap of Mario – and from there, the game began taking small steps into a direction very familiar to the present day's old timers and kids alike. This is *Mario Bros.*, in all of its simplicity.

New York City's top plumbers Mario and Luigi are called in to dive into the city's sewage system and eradicate the strange vermin crawling through its tunnels, ranging from insects to landcrabs and turtles.

I was just as crazy about *Super Mario Bros. 3* as any of the kids in my neighborhood, but the one thing that made the game even better was the chance to play *Mario Bros.* when my best friend came over for the weekends. You couldn't even access the game without a second player, and that's the first thing you should know about *Mario Bros.* - it just isn't a single-player game. This also brings us to another issue: if *Mario Bros.* was included as a secret minigame in such an early game that was already jam-packed for an NES cartridge, how much gameplay value could it possibly have as a stand-alone game? Not too much, I'm

afraid; a home version of *Mario Bros.* was a product of capitalism, it never had a long-standing chance as a console game since after the launch of the 8-bit systems, games started improving at a very rapid pace. *Mario Bros.* was just one of the many simple arcade conversions that were trampled by the near-future potential of home video gaming itself, namely by its 1985 successor.

Unlike in the later iterations released as minigames within several Mario titles, you have the chance to go at the game alone, but that's mental suicide – get yourself a partner for a quick tryout. *Mario Bros.* is essentially a two player's battle for points and survival. It's a single-screen arcade platformer, where you must collect coins and defeat as many enemies as you can from the set amount coming out of the sewage pipes, and advance to the next "phase" where the enemies are faster and tougher, and more deadly fireballs start flying across the screen. This goes on until one of you kicks the bucket. It's really that simple. There's a bonus round where your only goal is to collect coins.

You can't really sabotage the other player per se, but you can strategize a little bit by using the POW tile in the middle of the screen. With this tile, you're able to stun every enemy on the screen that have their feet on the ground. From there, it's easy pickings for whoever happens to be closer to the enemy cluster. There are a total of four enemy types, including a very early version of Koopa Troopa, named the Shellcreeper. You can't jump on any enemies, not even these; you must punch the floor beneath all enemies to stun them, then go around and kick 'em off the screen.

There's not much music here – not much of a surprise there – and the controls are absolutely terrible to begin with, but! Just wait until you get to a phase where you meet the last enemy – named "Slipice" - that literally turns each platform it touches into ice. You know that particular element from later Mario games and other platformers? If you want to experience slippery platforms at their absolute worst, you've come to the right place.

Mario Bros. is still a fun minigame for two players, but as a stand-alone game cartridge, it's absolutely

worthless to all but the most dedicated Mario fans, and well of course, collectors. Looking at all the exclusive stuff Nintendo already had when they launched the NES, one can't help but wonder why they bothered to port this game from the arcades. Even *Donkey Kong's* home port had more substance. The weirdest thing about the port is that it was released in North America several months AFTER *Super Mario Bros.*. Talk about a scam.

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