

SPECIAL FEATURE

Mario is by far the most popular videogame character in the World. Having appeared in a whole range of superb games, he's achieved superstar status! But where does he come from? Well, his origins have become shrouded in mystery...

But one story says that Mario is actually based on a real-life character - a short, fat Italian plumber who was the landlord of one of the Nintendo games designers when he was staying in New York! Whether or not this is true is another thing - the designer of all the original Mario games, Shigeru Miyamoto won't confirm or deny the rumour!

Since his first videogame appearance in the 1980 arcade hit Donkey Kong, Mario has gone from strength to strength, starring in a string of coin-ops and going on to appear in his own series of Nintendo carts alongside his brother Luigi, as well as making guest appearances in a variety of other games!

In fact, he's become so popular that there are now Mario TV cartoons, an entire Mario TV show and, coming soon, a Mario movie written by Barry Morrow (who scripted Rain Man) and starring Danny Devito as the man himself! Where will it end?

DONKEY KONG: THE BEGINNING

Mario's videogame debut was way back in 1980 in a strange-sounding coin-op called Donkey Kong. In it the intrepid hero in red dungarees has to rescue a girl who has been kidnapped and whisked to the top of an unfinished skyscraper by a giant King Kong-sized gorilla. There are four screens of platform action, and the idea is to clamber up to the top of each screen within the time limit by avoiding the many hazards! Although it's a simple game by today's standards, twelve years ago it took the arcade world by storm!

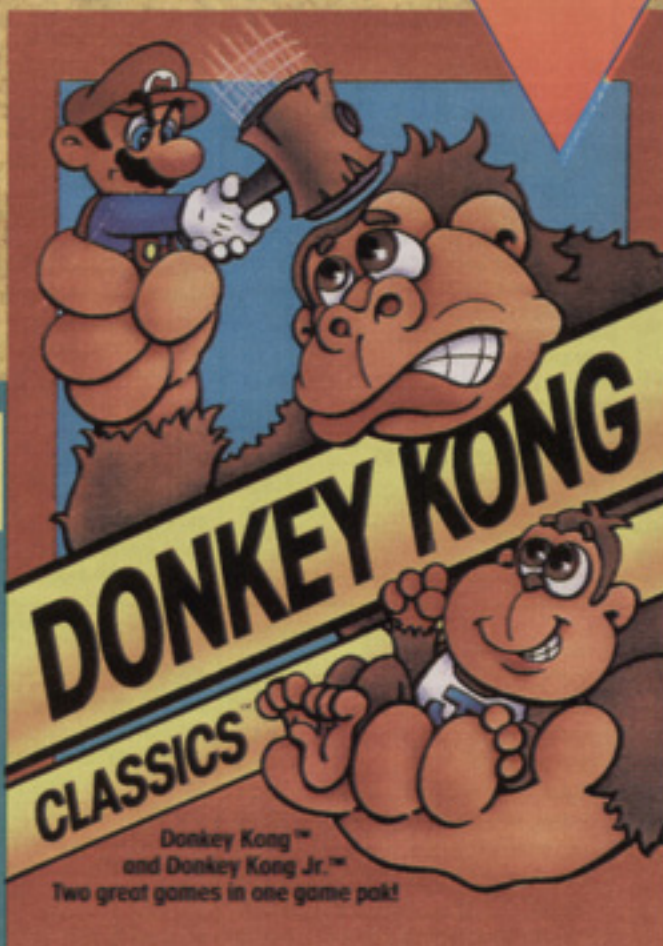
MARIO TURNS BAD

A year later a sequel was spawned. Donkey Kong Jr was the name of the game and this time Mario played the bad guy (the one and only time he has ever been cast as a baddie). The hero is Donkey Kong Jr, a baby King Kong clambering through four levels of platform action and rescue his dad, Donkey Kong, who has been caged by evil Mario! It was another great game, and another runaway success.

SHOOT THAT MONKEY ASS

Donkey Kong III followed next. It's another four-stage game, this time featuring rather limited shooting-style action in which Mario blasts bees, wasps and Kong

THE HISTORY OF MARIO



himself (in the backside!) in an attempt to drive him off the top of the screen. It was treated as a bit of a novelty, but didn't have the addictive action of the previous two games.

THE LAST AND FINAL DONKEY

Finally, in 1984 came Donkey Kong IV, a return to the traditional platform and ladders action of the original with Mario scrambling up ramps to defeat Kong. During its testing period it wasn't deemed sophisticated enough to wow punters, and the machine never made mass circulation. But was that the end of Mario? No - that was only the beginning...





HAND-HELD MARIO

During the early 1980's, before Nintendo invented the NES, they produced a series of hand-held LCD machines called Game 'n' Watch. And who better to appear in the best ones but their most famous coin-op star, Mario. Some of these very limited games are still available today - Donkey Kong, Super Mario Bros.

MARIO BROS INC

Mario bounced back from his Donkey Kong IV failure (long-lost brother Luigi in tow) in a coin-op called Mario Bros. It's a one or two-player game in which the brothers patrol a series of platform screens and attempt to clear it of baddies which include turtles, flies,

crabs and snowmen, which emerge from pipes. First of all the baddies are punched by jumping up at them from a platform below. A successful hit stuns them, and they are then destroyed by jumping up to their level and kicking them over. It might sound

a bit dull, but it's a truly excellent game, especially in two-player mode where there's potential for some amazing battles!



SPECIAL FEATURE

MARIO GETS SUPER

In 1985 Mario starred in his biggest and most successful game yet - Super Mario Bros. The scrolling platform game concept was pushed to its limits as Mario battled through eight huge levels, each split into four sub-levels on the way to rescue Princess Toadstool and her friend Mushroom from the clutches of the evil Koopa and his clan. The game was a revelation. Packed with hidden features, superb graphics, one of the catchiest soundtracks of all time and sporting superlative gameplay, Japanese players went Mario bonkers! Over 20,000,000 cartridges were sold and Mario became an instant superstar. Exactly the same thing happened in America when the game and the NES machine was released in 1987 - another 23,000,000 copies of the game were sold and Mario became a household name!

THE SEQUEL

With Mario fever sweeping the world, Super Mario Bros II was released in 1987 and again sold millions. Featuring four different characters, Mario, Luigi, Princess Toadstool and Mushroom, the player once more had to battle against the evil Koopa and his army of evil meanies! The gameplay is very similar to the original Super Mario, but has new twists and tweaks, such as being able to pick up and throw objects and baddies! But the best bit in the entire game is the fantastic end-game sequence - one of the finest yet seen in any videogame!



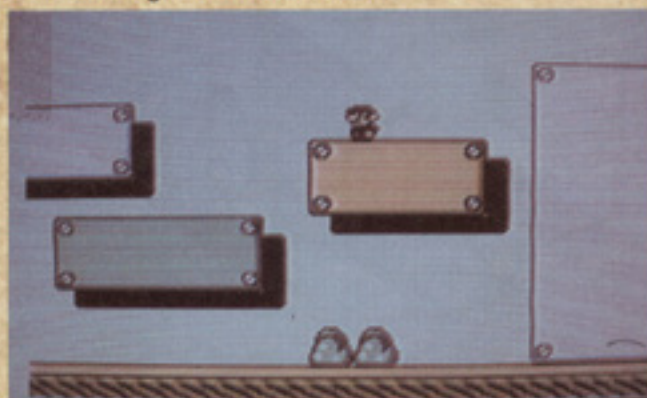
DOCTORIN' THE MARIO

In 1990 Mario starred in his most unusual game yet. Released on both NES and Gameboy, Dr Mario surprised the world. It isn't a scrolling platform game. Far from it - it's a puzzle game that plays like a kind of cross between Tetris and Columns. And it's just as addictive too (the NES version scored 88% and the Gameboy version scored 87% when they were reviewed in issue 5).



THREE TIMES LUCKY

The third in the Super Mario series is out at the end of this month, and it's the best NES game yet! Special hardware chips are incorporated into the game cartridge to give more memory, extra colours and better sound than a normal Nintendo game! And, as you can see from the review over the page, the end result is a stunner, with more levels, more baddies and more secret items than ever before! But where does Mario go from here? Well...



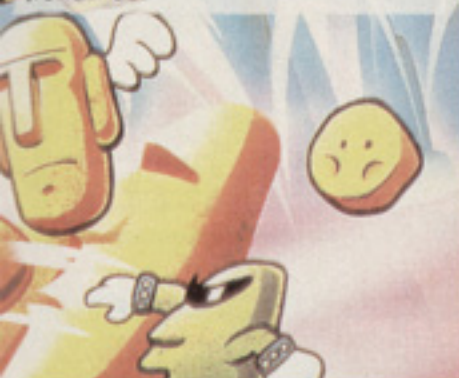
SUPER MARIO FOUR OF COURSE!

As owners of Super Famicoms will tell you, the first game to appear on that machine was Super Mario 4, and it's utterly amazing! Incorporating a huge 96 levels (nearly half of them secret), and sporting fab graphics and sound, it's tough, challenging and mega-addictive. If you want to play Mario 4 you have to buy a specially imported Super Famicom - however, if you're prepared to wait, it's reckoned that the machine will be officially available in September next year.



MINI MARIO

Mario's next appearance was in 1989 in one of the first games to appear on the newly-released Gameboy. Spread over 12 levels, Super Marioland is similar in concept to the original Super Mario game, but has new twists in the form of mini-shoot 'em up sections. It was another instant hit and has sold over 5,000,000 copies worldwide!



STRANGE MARIO FACT

If you're thinking that Donkey Kong is a bit of a weird name for a game starring a giant ape, you're right. The game should have been called Monkey Kong, but a

mis-type on a fax from Nintendo of Japan to American coin-op distributors resulted in the US companies making artwork and adverts for a game called Donkey Kong! Rather than re-do all the artwork and running a load of new adverts, Nintendo simply changed the title screen of the game!

MARIO TRIVIA

Over 38,000,000 Mario games have been sold in the US alone:

- Super Mario Bros: 23,000,000
- Super Mario Bros II: 4,000,000
- Super Mario III: 7,700,000
- Super Marioland: 1,900,000
- Dr Mario: 1,800,000

MARIO THE GUEST STAR

As well as appearing in a whole load of his own games, Mario has guest starred in many more. Check out Nintendo Tennis and you'll see Mario sitting in the umpire's chair. Who swings the clubs in NES and Gameboy Golf? Why, Mario of course. He's also the referee in Mike Tyson's Super Punch Out!! and stars alongside



Luigi in the brilliant Wrecking Crew. He also makes cameo appearances in Pinball, Alleyway and Tetris. Can you find him anywhere else?



MARIO PRODUCTS

There are over 300 different Mario products available in the USA, ranging from drinking glasses and writing paper to sleeping bags and bicycles! Here's a little selection from the Nintendo catalogue...

