

RETRO REARVIEW: MARIO



I figured it's been a while since I've done one of these, I thought I'd do another one. And since today's the 25th Anniversary of the original NES' Super Mario Bros. release on the Nintendo Entertainment System all the way back in 1985, I thought I'd make him the focus of my latest retrospective. So hit the jump to travel down the warp pipe and begin your journey into the Mushroom Kingdom!

Our story starts in the early 80s, 1981 to be specific. Nintendo was just starting to get into videogames in the arcade (but what you may not know is they've been around since the 1800s as a playing card company producing Japanese 'Hanafuda' playing cards.) Namco's 'Pac-Man' was literally eating up 100yen coins left and right. Nintendo wanted to come up with someone like that whom they could call their own.

Enter 'Jumpman' the star of what Nintendo would hope be a huge hit Donkey Kong (Interesting

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to note the arcade hardware they used in Donkey Kong was the same as a previous title, a space shooter called 'Radar Scope' which didn't fare as well as Namco's Galaxian did in arcades.)

Originally Nintendo wanted to use the classic cartoon character 'Popeye' in this game, but licensing issues got in the way. (Nintendo would later release 'Popeye' in his own game a year later in 1982.) Sadly that wasn't the end of Nintendo's legal troubles, as Universal Studios actually filed suit against Nintendo because the whole thing sounded way too much like their own King Kong movie.

Despite all the legal troubles, Donkey Kong cleaned up in arcades. Later the sequel Donkey Kong Junior was released in 1982, and this was the first game where the character was officially known as Mario (after their warehouse's landlord, Mario Segali).

Mario would later go on to co-star with his brother Luigi (no word on where his name came from, sadly) in the arcade game Mario Bros. which may just be one of the few Mario titles that allowed multiple players to play at the same time.

Speaking of titles Mario's appeared in... well let's just say he's made a few appearances in the 25 years. But the list is so massive, I think it would be easier to spotlight the games you might not know about:

- Mario Bros. Special (PC-8801, 1984) - Did you know there was actually a version of Super Mario Bros. for the PC-8801 (an older Japanese personal computer) that was officially licensed by Nintendo? (and Hudson) [Here](#) is some youtube footage of the game in action.
- Punch-Ball Mario Bros. (PC-8801, 1984) - As if a special version of SMB wasn't enough, there was also a special version of the original Mario Bros, but both players are also armed with these 'punch-ball' things that make the game a lot more interesting. At least from the looks of this [video](#), anyway.
- All Night Nippon Super Mario Bros. (Famicom Disk, 1986) - This was a limited edition version of SMB that was released for the Japanese Famicom Disk System addon. All Night Nippon was a Japanese radio show and this version of SMB featured altered sprites to look like Japanese pop idols.
- Mario Bros. Returns (Famicom Disk, 1988) - a special Japan-only version of Mario Bros. but this one also had little extra cutscenes in it.
- Mario Bros. Classic (NES, 1993) - Admittedly I've only played a ROM of this, but it's pretty cool. A damn near arcade-perfect home version of the Mario Bros. arcade game which was only

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released in PAL territories (the UK/Europe), this version even had the enemy intro videos that played before some levels! If you can track it down, check it out!

- Mario & Wario (Super Famicom, 1993) - Another Japan-only release, this one was notable because it was developed by Game Freak, who later went on to create the 'Pocket Monsters' series in Japan.

- Hotel Mario (CD-i, 1994) - Sadly, much like the Zelda titles that appeared on the CD-i, this was probably one of Mario's rare low points in his 25 year legacy.

- Wrecking Crew '98 (Super Famicom, 1998) - Apparently the Super Famicom lasted for a long time in Japan, as evident by this late-90s release. An update to the early 80s Famicom/NES release, this version featured updated 16-bit graphics and music.

- Dance Dance Revolution With MARIO/DDR: Mario MIX (GameCube, 2005) - You thought I was going to skip this one? You don't know me at all, in that case! Anyway Mario puts on his dancing shoes in this GameCube exclusive title. (*In a related bit of trivia, there was actually a 'Mario Medley' that appeared in one of Konami's Pop'n Music titles. Naturally as the only home versions of Pop'n Music at the time were on the Playstation 2, the song had no chance of ever seeing an appearance on a home console.*)

So Mario has had a long list of titles. But if you asked me to pick a favorite, I really don't know if I could. I mean New Super Mario Bros. Wii was great (if a bit lacking in the secret worlds department)... Super Mario Galaxy was good, but I never managed to finish it. Or, do I go with the original with its pure simplicity and rock-solid gameplay? And what about Super Mario Bros. 3? Even without the 90 minute commercial that was The Wizard, it's still an amazing game and arguably one of the greatest videogames of all time.

So I can't really answer that. But I guess that just goes to show you just how many great games the Mario series has given us through its 25 years since that first time you've ever stomped on a goomba in SMB on NES, or even if you've popped a quarter into 'Donkey Kong' or 'Mario Bros' in the arcade nearly three decades ago. I hope you've enjoyed my look at the long history of Mario's appearances in videogames. Thanks for the memories, Mario and here's to another 25 years of stomping on goombas and saving the princess!