

**SUPER  
MARIO BROS.**

**BY LINCOLN REIGN**

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**FROM HUMBLE  
BEGINNINGS**

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**PROLOGUE**

Mid June. It was a bright, clear day, and the wind carried the cool breeze from the ocean inland. On this day, brothers Mario and Luigi took the train to the airport that would take them to America, the place their father was raised.

Luigi bounced in his seat on the train, watching city after city roll by.

"Quit bein' so nervous," Mario sighed. "Ya gonna bounce through the *seat*."

"I nevuh been on a plane Mario," Luigi chuckled. He flicked his nose and bobbed his head, his legs still bouncing. "Like, is it loud? They say newcomers should just put on headphones an shut th' ride out but like, what if it's *too* loud?"

They often went back and forth between America and Italy, but they'd only ever been by boat. Luigi had always had a fear of flying, but this time he was forcing himself to be okay with it. This time was... a little more important than the other times.

"Snuff it Luigi," Mario huffed, focusing on the magazine he'd brought. "Nevuh been either, so I wouldn't know."

"Yeah I guess tha's fair," Luigi agreed. "I mean

before y' know we'll be back on solid ground again anyway so it's not like it mattuh's."

"Yup," Mario nodded.

The train stopped and Mario and Luigi disembarked, walking the rest of the way to the airport. Passing by, Luigi got a good look at the massive planes that were waiting to carry them.

"Aaeeh... 'ey Mario?" Luigi stammered. "Tha's a pretty big chunk o' metal we'll be floatin' in, yeah?"

"Luigi I swear," Mario grunted, shaking his head. "Y' continue panicking an I'll bop y' so hard y'll be seein' stars."

"Aiight aiight," Luigi threw his hands up.

They made it to the airport and worked their way through customs. But when at last they were boarding the plane, Luigi froze yet again.

"Yea' but *Mario*," Luigi said. "What if it falls outta th' sky?"

"It won'!" Mario yelled back at him, not even turning around or stopping for a second. "Don' make me carry y' ass up there."

Luigi finally shut up, taking a good look at the outside of the plane before forcing himself to board it. He put on his noise canceling headphones and took his seat by the window. He'd hoped it would help, but as soon as they started getting into the air he passed out from fright. Mario rolled his eyes, still reading the magazine he brought.

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"Luigi," Mario huffed. "Hey Luigi!"

Luigi muttered something nonsensical as his eyes fluttered open. "Oh 'ey we landed?"

"Don' tell me I gotta carry ya ass *off* th' plane," Mario pulled Luigi out of his seat. "C'mon."

As Luigi was still waking himself up Mario started pulling their carry on luggage down from the overhead compartments. He handed Luigi's stuff to Luigi and they followed the rest of the passengers off the plane.

And thirty minutes later they were finally back on the streets of Brooklyn, baggage in tow. But since they left at eight in the morning from Rome, their nearly nine hour flight only lost them about three hours.

"I know it ain't lunch here yet," Mario chuckled. "But I'm starvin'."

"There's always Mama Mia's," Luigi suggested.

"There's *always* Mama *Mia's*!" Mario laughed.

---

After dropping off their luggage at their hotel, the Mario Brothers made their way across town to the restaurant they knew best. From pizza and pasta, to calzones and two foot sandwiches, Mama Mia's had just about anything! There were even some Japanese cuisines on the menu.

"Large Pizza," Mario ordered. "Pepperonis, sausages, olives, and mushrooms. Two cherry cokes, an garlic bread sticks."

The waitress nodded and went to the back to hand off the order as Mario returned to his seat.

Now that they were off the plane, Luigi had finally stopped bouncing. He stared out the window, watching the people walk by.

"Look on th' bright side," Mario sighed, leaning against the window. "We won' have t' go back for a while."

"Yeah," Luigi mumbled.

"So what brings you two *back* here so soon?" Mama Mia asked as she brought the brothers their food. "It's only *been* a couple months! Get homesick *already*?"

Luigi poked at the pizza, suddenly feeling less and less interested in anything the longer he didn't have something else to think about.

"Family business," Mario answered, ever so dramatically. "We' gotta be headin' out soon too."

Mama Mia smirked. "I thought the *Circus* was ya family business."

"Well eeeehhhh," Mario shrugged. "Y' know how it is."

"Just don't go gettin' up to no trouble in *my* neighborhood," Mama Mia warned as she left to tend to other customers. "I know yo *real* mama."

"Yeah," Mario sighed, forcing himself to eat even though he suddenly felt sick to his stomach. "Eat ya pizza Lu."

Luigi took a bite halfheartedly.

"Luigi," Mario said. "Y' gotta eat."

"I know," Luigi mumbled.

---

After they were done with lunch, the brothers hailed a taxi and headed off to their final destination for the day. This was the reason they came back to Brooklyn.

When the car stopped Mario stepped out, slamming the door shut behind him. Luigi however, stayed inside, looking out the window. Mario came around to the other side and knocked on Luigi's window.

"You go," Luigi said. "I think I'll just wait here."

"Mom's waitin'," Mario told him. "We're already late."

Luigi nodded, opening the door. He moved slowly, watching the ground as they walked along the pavement. The trees overhead cast heavy shadows, keeping them in the shade as the noon sun rose higher above them.

"Ey mom," Mario greeted.

"Ey mom," Luigi said, still not looking up.

Pauline smiled at them, standing up from the bench.

"Sorry we're late," Mario put his hands in his pockets, looking around. "Business, y' know?"

"I know," Pauline nodded. She looked at Luigi, but she wouldn't meet her gaze. She turned away from them, motioning for them to follow.

They continued their walk under the trees, passing by the few gardens that lined the road. And eventually they came to a final stop.

"The service is already over," Pauline said quietly.

Mario knelt down beside his father's grave. **Mario Jumpman Mario**, it read. "We should'a been here," he sighed. "Shouldn'a gone back t' Italy..."

"I'm goin' back t' th' car," Luigi stammered, wiping his eyes.

"Luigi," Pauline said. He was already walking away.

"He's been tryin' t' distract himself," Mario grunted, getting back up. "Even bein' here I still don' think he actually believes it."

"I still don't believe it myself," Pauline agreed. "It's... It's like he *can't* be gone... you know?"

"I know," Mario nodded.

They stood there in silence, reading the words on the grave over and over.

**Mario Jumpman Mario**  
**A hero, a father**  
**June 1955 - June 2013**

Finally Mario spoke, breaking the silence. "I'm sellin' the circus," he said. "Me an Luigi are stayin' here."

"You don't have to do that," Pauline said, shaking her head. "You don't have to take care of me."

"It's not that," Mario said. "That circus has caused him nothin' but trouble. If he never moved all the way t' Italy--"

"He wouldn't have met me," Pauline told him.

Mario was silent.

"What would you do here anyway?" Pauline asked. "You and Luigi always enjoyed the circus, but that's not here. Your home was always in Italy."

"Nah," Mario huffed. "Home was here, *work* was Italy. 'Sides, I've already made arrangements. We're stayin'. It's already too late t' go back on that."

Pauline nodded. "So what will you do?"

"Find work," Mario looked up at the trees. "Some'n' simple. He and I got pretty good at fixin' pipes over there, might do some'n' with that."

"Plumbing?" Pauline chuckled. "I might have a job for you already."

"Welcome t' New York," Mario laughed. He looked back down at his dad's grave and his smile faded. "Ey mom, could I get a moment alone?"

Pauline nodded. "Of course," she said. "I'll go see about Luigi."

"Yea'," Mario sighed.

Pauline left, and Mario sat down beside the grave stone. "Should'a said some'n'," he mumbled. "Gave us a warnin', let us *know*... Tellin' us t' go back t' Italy like that,

*knowin'* this was just around th' corner... You weren' even there when Lu got th' news, ya know? Th' *look* on his face?"

He took a deep breath, shaking his head. "We're gonna miss you," he said quietly. "We all are."

---

A few days passed as Mario and Luigi got situated in Brooklyn, settling on a house near enough to Pauline without seeming too overbearing. Mario had placed a bid for an old van and was only a step away from getting his license. He'd started for it on his own last time he was in Brooklyn, but continued taking classes after going back over seas where he got Luigi involved. Now that they were back all they really had to do was finalize it.

And so after a week had passed since they arrived in Brooklyn, they had everything they needed to start their new company: **The Mario Bros. Plumbing and Pest Control.**

They even had their first job! It was pretty anticlimactic, just taking apart a sink and putting it back together, but it was a job.

In the following months however they got more and more work until eventually they had to get a second van to keep up with the demand. They were both putting pipes in for new houses, tearing out pipes from old houses, cleaning up back alleys and doing the occasional odd job here and there. And as the demand for plumbers continued to increase, they became pretty well known for their excellent work.

Luigi in particular threw himself into his work, going from job to job day in and day out. Mario considered hiring new help, but one day Luigi came in with a job offer

that would make it all irrelevant.

"*Man*," Mario chuckled. "I mean we done some dirty work lately but this takes th' *cake*."

"Don' it?" Luigi grinned. "But it pays well. Like, *real* well."

Mario sat down at the small dining table, brushing some dishes aside and setting down the job offer. "I mean workin' for th' city, cleanin' the sewers... Tha's some serious work. We'll have t' get some new equipment."

"We've made more than enough to pay for that," Luigi laughed. "And besides, we'll get our money back on it within th' day!"

Mario looked over the document. "It's definitely a step up," he admitted. Then he spotted the signature at the bottom. "K.B. huh? Is that the uh, th' governor or th', what?"

"He's a representative," Luigi answered. "Top brass."

Mario raised an eyebrow. "Well aiight," he scoffed, getting up. "I'll see what I can do 'bout th' equipment, y' tell him we'll be out there first thing in th' mornin'."

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## **Prologue: From Humble Beginnings**



# THE MUSHROOM KINGDOM

---

## WORLD I

Mario readjusted his mask and lowered himself into the manhole, climbing down into the Brooklyn sewers. When he reached the bottom he looked around, then called up to Luigi to follow.

"Well yea' I see th' *problem*," Luigi scoffed.

The sewer was broken. Not in the sense that a few bricks were out of place or like pipes were burst though. There was some of that, but the problem was the large hole in the middle of the sewer, like some kind of internal drain. All the sewage was flowing right into it, but it was so dark they couldn't tell where it led.

"So clearly tha's not s'possed t' be there, yea'?" Mario huffed. "Aaight, le's get t' work."

"How's'r we s'possed to fix *that*?" Luigi exclaimed. "We didn' come down here with a ton a bricks Mario."

"But we *did* come here with pully systems," Mario countered. "We gotta see wha's down there, maybe find what caused it. Go get th' gear outta th' car."

Luigi looked into the hole before going back up. Mario took out his flashlight and squatted down next to the hole. He couldn't see anything since the light didn't seem to reach that far.

"Welp," he grunted, getting back up and putting the

light away. "Gotta start somewhere."

As he waited for Luigi he started putting some of the pipes back together. They were leaking all over the place, slicking the brick ground. The bricks themselves were all in pieces around the hole. It almost looked like a bomb went off, or like someone dropped an oversized wrecking ball straight down to the center of the earth.

When Luigi finally came back with the equipment he found Mario still looking down into the hole. "How do you want me t' set it up?" he asked, startling Mario.

"Eh," Mario looked around, trying to find something stable. He pointed to a spot along the side path that looked mostly okay. "Here's good."

They set everything up, making sure they had plenty of cable and that the line was sturdy. The gear was bolted into the ground as best as they could get it, but they were both glad there were two of them so there was someone to stand watch in case something happened. Now they just had to settle who went down.

"I mean I'm all for swimmin' in th' sewer, ya know?" Luigi grinned. "But jumpin' into bottomless pits is where I draw th' line."

"Ey but yer lighter," Mario elbowed Luigi. "Less chance of it snappin'."

"Tha's what'cha get for always orderin' a large pizza for yourself," Luigi retorted. "Alright, rock paper scissors on three."

"One, two, three!"

Mario sighed. "Aiiight I'll go."

Luigi threw his fist in the air in triumph. "I'll spot ya, just don' swing too much."

"Yea' yea'," Mario stood on the side of the hole that didn't have the waterfall of sewage going down it. "You gotta hold o' th' cable?"

"Yup," Luigi nodded.

"Aiiight here goes," Mario jumped backwards into the pit. His feet slammed against the wall, pieces of brick falling into the darkness. He reeled down slowly, calling up to Luigi ever so often just check.

After a few minutes Mario couldn't go any lower, the cable having reached it's end. "Is that all we got!?" Mario yelled up.

Faintly in the distance Luigi called back. "*Yup!*"

"Drat!" Mario swore. He pulled out his flashlight, looking down. He still couldn't see anything, the bottom being too far down. The sewage poured down behind him, but that was the least of the issues.

"How far does it go!?" Luigi shouted.

"Forevuh!" Mario shouted back. "And these mushrooms are gettin' on my *last* nerve!"

"I'ma start reelin' you back up!" Luigi told him. "Yea' hold on!" Mario yelled. He plucked a mushroom out from the bricks that had snagged the cable. "These things like to latch on! Go slow!"

Mario felt the cable tug and then he was being pulled upwards. A moment later he stopped though. "Luigi it's stuck!"

"Yea' I know!" Luigi huffed.

Mario hung in the air for a moment, and then he heard a loud *thunk!* Suddenly he dropped a couple feet.

"Ey Luigi come on!" Mario shouted. "Getta grip!"

"Ey man I'm *tryin'!*" Luigi growled.

And then something clearly broke, because Mario was falling.

"Mario!" Luigi shouted. He grabbed at the cable, but the reel started pulling him too. Then the mechanism snapped and slammed into him from behind. "Nonononono! *Nonononononono!*" The cable wrapped

around his leg and pulled him over the edge.

"Luigi!" Mario yelled as he watched him fall.

They tumbled through the darkness, unable to grab onto anything or slow their descent in the slightest.



Mario woke up in a cold pipe small enough that his knees were smashed into his face and his body was blocking the flow of water. He forced himself to move, stretching out and searching in the dark. He couldn't see anything at the moment, but it didn't sound like there was anything nearby except the slow trickling water.

"Ey Lu," Mario hissed. When nobody answered he spoke louder. "Where are ya? Luigi?!"

He heard a snorting sound like Luigi had been startled awake.

"Y' 'kay?" Mario huffed.

"Mu-yea'," Luigi sniffed, trying to get his bearings. "Where are we?"

"Don' know," Mario admitted. "Le's follow th' water an see if we can find out."

They crawled through the stream, and eventually the pipe started getting lighter. It was probably made out of copper, considering how it had turned green with age, but these pipes didn't seem like pipes he'd expected to find in Brooklyn. And when he turned the corner and saw where the light was coming from, he realized that was.

They stepped out into the burning sunlight, blinding them for a moment. When their eyes adjusted, they stood their gaping at the wide open barren land they stepped into.

The ground was mostly flat, spreading out as far as the eye could see. On the horizon they could see far away hills of green, but nearer to them were old ruins of bronze

bricks.

"Mario," Luigi said, numb. "Wh... where are we?"

"I have no idea," Mario said. He spun in place, trying to find any recognizable landmark. Finally he spotted what looked like the top of an old church. "There! We'll head that way."

They walked for what must have been at least a few hours, but they finally reached the top of the hills which were considerably taller up close. From there, they realized they'd made a mistake. It wasn't a church at all, but the top of a grand castle.

"Sweet Mama Mia," Mario gasped. "Am I dreamin'?"

"I wholeheartedly agree," Luigi nodded. "But is this *my* dream or yours?"

"Does it even mattuh?" Mario scoffed. "If we could wake up I feel like we would'a already."

"I guess," Luigi sighed. "Do we go to th' castle?"

"Any better ideas?" Mario asked.

---

The rocky ground gave way to a dirt path, leading them through the now grassy fields in front of the castle. The castle itself was massive, like nothing else they'd ever seen, but the fields were covered in speckled mushrooms making it kind of hard to walk. The mushrooms were large too-- some of them at least two feet tall-- and Luigi swore that beneath the caps he could see eyes looking back at him, but Mario assured him they were just darker spots.

"Mushrooms don' have eyes Lu," Mario chuckled.

"Brooklyn pipes don' lead to Middle Earth Mario," Luigi corrected.

Mario dropped his already forced smile and stared

up at the castle doors at the end of the long marble bridge. "You think anybody's home?"

"I'd hate to have come all this way for nothin'," Luigi sighed. "That was a lotta walkin'."

They continued across the bridge, finally knocking on the door. They could hear it echo from inside, like knocking on a large bell the noise just kept going. After a moment they tried again, then after a couple moments they gave up. Clearly no one was going to answer.

So they turned back the other way-

"*HOLY--!!*" Luigi jumped backwards, slamming his back against the door. Mario just stood there gawking.

Covering the bridge... were mushrooms, all looking back at them. The mushrooms stared, unblinking, but clearly alive, shifting awkwardly like they were afraid to speak.

"Middle Earth huh?" Mario mumbled. "Yeah... yeah that'd be it..."

Mario stepped up and every mushroom took a several steps back. "Hi," Mario said, giving a little wave. "I'm Mario, this is my brother Luigi."

"Ma-ri-o," the mushrooms said in unison. "Lu-i-gi."

Mario and Luigi paled.

"Well go figure," Mario huffed. "They speak English. What're the odds?"

Luigi finally stepped closer. "Are these the people of this place?" he whispered to Mario. "Where *are* we?"

"You are in the Mushroom Kingdom."

Mario and Luigi almost jumped out of their skin, flipping around to see an elderly man standing in the great castle doors. For such a large and echo-y structure, those doors were deadly silent... or maybe Mario and Luigi were just preoccupied with the talking mushrooms.

The man standing in the doorway looked ancient;

hunched over on a cane, long red cloak draped over his shoulders, starch white beard trailing to the floor. But the crown on his head told them all they needed to know.

"Welcome to my home," the Mushroom King smiled. "Come inside." He turned from them and started back through the grand hall.

Mario and Luigi followed, feeling dazed. It *had* to be a dream! There's no way some hole under Brooklyn could lead them all the way out here! And yet, it all felt so real... they couldn't believe it, but they couldn't prove they *weren't* there...

So they followed him all the way to the throne room. There, the King took his seat, letting his cane fall to the ground and taking a shaky breath. "Now," the King said in a low rumble. "What brings you here, on this day of all days?"

"We fell through a hole," Luigi said blankly. "But-uh... well-"

"We come from a place called Brooklyn," Mario said. "Y'know it?"

"I have never heard of this land," the King admitted. "Though there are many worlds with many places I've never seen... what I ask is why you are *here*?"

"Well tha's just it," Mario answered. "We didn' exactly come here by choice, ya know?"

"What did you mean by worlds?" Luigi asked.

Mario bit his tongue. He'd glanced right over that.

"There are nine worlds in all," the King explained. "I doubt you are from this world, so I'll assume you are from the one world which is not associated with the other eight." He held up his hand to stop them from asking anymore questions. "There are eight worlds that are part of my rule. The ninth is a land we've allowed to remain separate, as it was long ago occupied by another people

much like ourselves. However, there is another Kingdom that has risen in recent years, one which fights back against my rule... They..."

The King fell silent.

"Look," Mario said. "I'm not even gonna pretend t' understand all this, it's a little much for me. If you could just tell us how t' get home-"

"We require your assistance," said one of the mushrooms from behind them. A few had followed them in from outside, but this mushroom looked to have been here the whole time. It looked older than the rest, a rusty brown color, and it walked passed the Mario brothers to stand beside the King. "I understand you did not mean to come here but you could not have picked a more opportune time."

"We cannot ask them for this," the King hissed. "It is not their fight."

"We need all the help we can get," the older mushroom said. He turned to the Mario brothers. "My name is Toadsworth, of the Toadstool people. I am advisor to the King and as advisor I advise him to seek your help."

"Toadsworth-"

"Our King is old," Toadsworth said. "He would take care of this himself were he still in his younger years, but this is something that must be taken care of immediately. Will you help us?"

"I-what!?" Mario chuckled. "Yer kinda pullin' me around here!"

"Yeah, one minute we're in Brooklyn and the next yer tellin' us we're on another planet and y' need help with... what?" Luigi spun in place, finally taking it all in. "This is insane Mario, *actually* insane." He looked back up to the King. "What exactly is it y' need our help with?"

Toadsworth looked up at the King, and the King

turned away. He thought for a moment, but finally headed Toadsworth's advise. "One day the peaceful kingdom of the mushroom people was invaded by the Koopa, a tribe of turtles famous for their black magic. The quiet, peace-loving mushroom people were turned into mere stones, bricks and even field horse-hair plants, and the mushroom kingdom fell into ruin."

The King hung his head, so Toadsworth continued for him.

"The only one who can undo the magic spell on the mushroom people and return them to their normal selves is the Princess Toadstool, the daughter of the mushroom King. Unfortunately, she is presently in the hands of the great Koopa turtle King."

He was silent for a moment, letting that sink in.

"Please help us," Toadsworth said sadly. "There are so few of us left..."

Mario and Luigi gave each other troubled looks before turning back to the King. "Give us a second," Mario said, pulling Luigi aside.

They walked to the side of the room, standing by a wall with a large tapestry of a mushroom hanging above them.

"What are we *doin'* Mario?" Luigi sighed.

"I have no idea," Mario admitted. "This isn't the kinda thing I wanna be thrown into... But, it's not like we can just, ya know, *\*kst\**..." He jabbed his thumb over his shoulder.

"I guess," Luigi nodded, leaning against the wall. "So... do we help?"

"Do we gotta choice?" Mario asked. "Even if we didn', would we be able to get home? No... I think we gotta fix this. Besides, if we walked away now..."

"Yeah," Luigi stared at his feet. "I-I ain't like..." he

started bouncing again. "But like-What if-Would...? ... Okay." He kicked off the wall, crossing his arms and pacing. "I mean, it can' be that hard right?"

"It's just a turtle an a princess," Mario grinned. "Simple as that. We get her back, bring her home, and then they help us, yea'?"

"Yea'," Luigi nodded. They shook hands on it and returned to the King.

"Aiight," Mario said. "What do we gotta do?"

The King perked up, staring wide eyed down at them. "You... you will help us?"

"Yea'," Mario grinned. "How hard could it be?"

---

## **World 1: The Mushroom Kingdom**



# THE WILDS

---

## WORLD 2

*"I pray this will be an easy task," the King clarified. "But what I ask of you... if it were as easy as simply bringing her back I would have already done it."*

*"Stop discouraging them!" Toadsworth warned.*

*The King nodded, but held his gaze firm, looking each of the Mario Brothers in the eye. "I do not mean to discourage you," he sighed. "But I can't let you go without a fair warning."*

*"Just tell us this much," Mario said. "If we save yer daughter, you'll send us back home, yea'?"*

*"Yes," the King promised.*

*"Then we gotta deal," Luigi grinned, cracking his knuckles. "Where do we go from here?"*

*"Toadsworth will take you through the first warpzone," the King answered. "From there, you will enter a realm called the Wilds. It was the last to fall to King Koopa's reign, so his minions will be waiting for you, but it should not be much of a challenge yet. Though, the deeper you go into enemy territory, the more difficult your journey will become.*

*"Be weary, Mario Brothers," the King said before sending them off. "May luck be on your side. I hope you were gifted to us for a reason..."*

Mario and Luigi stepped out of the stone fortress and into a new world. It looked similar to the first, but the flat rocky ground was a little more uneven and didn't go on for as long. The green hills around them were closer, and there were far more destroyed ruins scattered around them.

When they first came here Mario and Luigi had assumed the ruins were made of simple stone, but knowing what they knew now... all those bricks, every one of them was a sentient mushroom person...

At first Mario thought it might just be another place on the same world as the one they just left, but he would've only believed it if he hadn't lived through what just happened.

"Tha's teleportation," Luigi huffed, breathless as he looked around. "I mean... *man!* That was, that... ya know? I don' even... man..."

The portal that took them here, the set up of Toads-- what the mushroom people called themselves-- all guarding the portal, and the large fortress that the portal was kept in... Toadsworth had said it could lead them to any of the nine worlds, one of them being home, Earth, but that this was the world that held the princess.

"I wish you the best of luck," Toadsworth grinned. "I've taken you a little bit farther from the castle King Koopa's holed himself up in-- should give you time to get used to how things work around here without *throwing* you in the deep end. Er, so to speak."

"I'm familiar with th' term," Mario nodded, still a little light headed from the teleportation. "Aiiight, so are you comin' with us?"

Toadsworth gave them a sad look. "Regrettably... no. I'm afraid I, like our King, am getting too old for this adventurer's lifestyle. Were I but a few years younger..." He shook his head. "But there's no time for that now. You *must*

rescue the princess, and bring her back here to undo this dark magic! You haven't time to waste!"

"What're we waitin' for?" Luigi said, stepping towards the closest ruins.

"Yea'," Mario nodded, watching Toadsworth go back through the fortress door. Lights flickered from the portal just out of sight, and then Mario turned away. "Hold up!" he called to Luigi.

They walked through the crumbling brick ruins, large blocks of bronze half buried in the ground. The low winds swept the dirt and sand around their feet, but with it was carried the smell of the ocean, or some kind of large body of water.

When they came to the top of the hill passed those ruins, the scarce grass disappeared and opened up to the sandy beaches that made up the shore to a great lake. Across it, on the horizon, they could see land. And just beyond that; the castle.

"Won' be long now," Mario huffed. "I can see their flag from here."

"Ey Mario," Luigi grunted, squinting his eyes to see the horizon better. "There's a lotta movement back there. Kinda looks like..."

Mario realized what he was saying, and gave a heavy sigh. "Yeah," he nodded. "And he was hopin' it'd be easy."

On the other side of the lake, just passed the shore... an army marched towards the waters. They were no more than specks in the distance, but they were there.

"I wonder what they look like," Luigi chuckled. "Talkin' turtles with black magic... Nah, I betcha they got swords, yea'?"

"Hff, yea'," Mario agreed. "Turtles with swords, bo staffs, sais and nunchakus."

"Yea' yea'," Luigi shook his head. "But serious..." He paused for a moment, looking down at himself. "Ey Mario...?"

"Yeah?" Mario asked.

"How do we fight an army without swords?" Luigi asked. "Or like, a gun or some'n'?"

Mario smiled. "This here is a kingdom of toadstools," he laughed. "And we're goin' t' fight some turtles. They might have magic, but they can' be *that* difficult t' fight. One good punt an th' rest'll go runnin'."

Luigi considered that. "True," he nodded. "True."

"Th' problem now," Mario sighed. "Is gettin' across this lake."

They looked at the large pool of water blocking their path.

"Yea'," Luigi agreed. "Tha's a problem."

Looking in either direction there was no obvious way around it, but there wasn't anything they could use as a boat either. Luigi eventually sat down by the water, dipping his feet in.

"They don' expect us t' *swim* across do they?" Luigi huffed. "I mean... tha's quite a swim."

"...This ain't our planet, yea'?" Mario asked.

"I guess not," Luigi answered, looking up at him.

Mario crouched down by the water and tucked his feet back... then he pushed off the ground and threw himself in the water. Luigi just laughed, shaking his head.

"What're ya doin'?"

Mario bobbed his head above the water. "Well, th' way I figure, if this world has talkin' mushrooms and black magic turtles, what if th' water don' work th' way it does on *our* world?"

Luigi narrowed his eyes. "Are you askin' if we can breathe underwatah?"

"Yea!" Mario laughed.

"Go ahead!" Luigi chuckled. "Makes about as much sense as anythin' else. Just don' expect me to drag yer body out when y' don' come up."

Mario shrugged, then dropped beneath the waves.

A minute passed... then another... then another...

Luigi looked into the water, unable to see anything through the reflective blue surface. "Ey Mario!" he called. "Y' aiight down there!?"

After another minute Luigi was about to go in after him when suddenly Mario popped out of the water and sat back down on the beach. He was soaking wet but he didn't look like he'd been drowning.

"Lu," he smiled. "We can breathe underwater here."

Luigi stared at the water. "... No friggin' way..."

"Aiight," Mario chuckled, getting back on his feet. "Le's go!" He jumped back in the water, dropping like a rock.

Luigi was still a little hesitant, but he eventually followed. He held his breath as his head went below the waves, and looked around at the crazy underwater world they stepped into. Little squids bounced around and large fish that looked like they had wings for flippers swam beside them. He'd never been to the great coral reef, but he expected this is what it would look like.

"Quit oogling," Mario elbowed him. His words were distorted by the water, but it was clear they were able to talk.

Luigi finally let go of his breath, feeling light headed. "Wow," he mumbled. "So uh, that way?" He pointed forwards, towards the other shore.

"Yea'," Mario nodded. "That way."

Part of them still wanted to float near to the surface because that's what you'd do on earth so you can come up

for air, but as they got used to breathing underwater they allowed themselves to go deeper and deeper. The lake wasn't particularly deep, the light from surface being plenty enough for them to see the bottom, but it definitely wasn't shallow either.

Standing at the bottom, all the round winged fish at the top were still pretty far away. The squids floated just above their heads, but so long as the brothers didn't anger them they were harmless.

And then suddenly it was over.

Mario kicked off the lake bed and swam up to the surface. Luigi looked around a bit as he followed, wondering how many places like this there were in all nine worlds. With so many different planets they could visit... he had no idea what it was he expected.

"Y' good?" Mario asked as they crawled onto shore.

"Yea'," Luigi nodded, shaking himself off. "Just wonderin'... what uh..."

Mario saw the sad look on his brother's face. "Wonderin' what dad would think, yea'?"

Luigi nodded.

"He sure did have some crazy stories," Mario laughed. "But he'd pro'bly just walk away from this one."

Luigi smiled faintly. "Yea'... yea' pro'bly."

"C'mon," Mario said. "Let's go see what this army o' turtles looks like."

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The army had been a little further away than they'd expected, staying just beyond a range of hills they'd been able to see behind from the higher point on the other side of the lake. Staying low to the ground and making it over that hill range however, showed them that *nothing* they'd seen

had been what they'd expected.

The Toads had explained to them that the enemy was made up of evil black magic turtles called Koopa, but this...

"Maybe they're th' good guys too?" Luigi asked. "Like, th' mushroom people of *this* world?"

Mario looked out at the wandering brown mushrooms. They didn't look like the toads. Toads looked kind of like small people with mushroom capped heads and strange mushroom skin, tiny black eyes and thin mouths. These things were like short mushrooms with wobbly feet, angry glares and toothy frowns all around.

"They don' look too happy," Mario countered. "I don' think they're on our side."

"I guess," Luigi agreed, taking another moment to see what Mario saw. "So how do we get around 'em?"

Mario looked passed the field of angry mushrooms and eyed the castle on the other side. It was a red brick fortress, almost as impressive as the King's Castle on the other world. But Mario and Luigi knew what those red bricks were; more compressed Toads... This King Koopa was using the corpses of his enemies as shields.

"I don' think these guys are messin' around," Mario hissed. "So neither should we."

"But Mario I told you!" Luigi hissed back. "We don' have any weapons!"

"Neither do they," Mario grinned. "Le's do Papa Jumpman proud."

Mario hurdled over the hill top, startling the mushrooms that were nearest. They glared at him and charged forward, snapping their toothy mouths.

"Ya'll are *creeps!*" Mario said, shoving one away. They weren't too big, about the same size as the Toads, and they were light too. "Get out of the way."

Luigi frowned, but followed Mario's lead. To his surprise, the angry mushrooms *were* fairly weak. Even when one finally got a bite in, it was more like a small dog nipping at his arm. "Like pugs!" Luigi laughed. "Look kinda mad, but small and harmless."

"So if this is all tha's in our way," Mario grinned. "I can' *wait t'* see this King Koopa creep."

The rest of the way was like a walk in the park. They reached the fortress, standing beside the flag that waved above them.

"Well tha's strange," Mario huffed.

"What is?" Luigi asked.

Mario lowered the flag and showed Luigi what he meant. "Eh's a mushroom, Luigi," Mario explained. "Th' same mushroom... that was in th' Mushroom King's Castle..."

"Well, it's an invadin' force," Luigi answered. "Makes sense actually. 'Specially if this is a world they only recently concurred ya know? They ain' exactly gonna care what flag's on their door so long as it's their door."

Mario looked at the flag. "I guess that makes sense."

"What I don' get is th' mushroom bricks surroundin' th' fortress," Luigi continued. "If they had time for that then they should'a replaced the flag too."

"Exactly," Mario growled. "Either way, *some'n'* don' make sense."

"Yea'," Luigi agreed, staring at the castle doors. "Too late t' turn back?"

"Yup."

"You could go without me though."

"Nope."

"Yea', kinda figured."

"C'mon Lu."

Luigi followed Mario into the fortress, the great doors slamming them into a pitch-black silence.

"Well that can' be good," Mario sighed.

Luckily the darkness only lasted a moment. Torches flickered on all at once as if some kind of motion sensor had been tripped. The light lit up the grey stone interior of the castle, a frayed red carpet leading down the long hall.

It ended at a rounded wooden door, a dragon head carved in stone mounted above it. Something about it looked familiar, but they couldn't quite place it.

Stepping through however, the familiarity of a dragon head was the least of their problems. They entered what looked to have once been a grand foyer, but the center of the room had been hollowed out... and filled with lava. Only thin paths of crumbling floor were left going around the pit, and all other doors in the room were cordoned off but on the other side were stairs leading to the only door not blocked.

"Yea' I'm not doin' that," Luigi chuckled. "Tha's uh... tha's too much for me. Talkin' mushrooms, sure. Black magic turtles, sure. Breathin' under water, definitely. But evil castle's filled with lava? I feel tha's a step in th' wrong direction."

"Ey! We played *'the floor is lava'* as kids!" Mario assured him, slapping him on the back. "Jus' walk around th' edge and we'll be around in no time!"

Mario started across, keeping an eye on his feet and his back to the wall. Luigi followed Mario's lead, only stepping where Mario stepped. He couldn't help but stare at the fires that leapt up at them, bubbles of lava that burst at the surface, throwing sparks in all directions.

Mario shook Luigi back to his senses, which only startled him and made him nearly fall into the lava. "We're on th' other side!" Mario hissed. "C'mon."

Luigi looked away from the lava. He'd wondered before what the other worlds could hold after realizing here they could breathe underwater, but now he wondered what kind of terrible things the other worlds held as well. Castles filled with lava were things you only see in stories... to actually be there in real life was just... too much.

"I said c'mon!" Mario told him.

"Yea'," Luigi tore his gaze away from the lava and followed Mario up the stairs.

They opened the door at the top and entered an even darker chamber than the hall they started in. There were only two torches lit, both next to the door they stepped through. But on the other side of the room there appeared another small light source.

As soon as they realized the light wasn't just getting bigger but was quickly barreling towards them, Mario and Luigi dodged to either side of the hall.

"Was that *fire!*?" Luigi exclaimed. "Like, a *ball o' fire!*?"

"Yea," Mario huffed. "I don' think those dragon heads were just for decoration."

Mario charged forward, staying low and to the walls. Luigi followed behind him, keeping head down. More balls of fire flew through the hall, most of them crashing and exploding behind them but some hit the walls or ceiling. It was like whatever was back there was just throwing fire in random directions, not caring what it hit.

Or it was trying to hit everything...

"Stay here," Mario whispered, shoving Luigi behind one of the many columns that lined the walls. "I'm gonna run ahead, and draw it's attention. Yer gonna sneak up behind it and surprise it, and then I'll attack!"

"We don' know how big this thing is," Luigi warned. "Could be *huge!*"

"Then we'll improvise!" Mario ducked out of cover and ran straight down the middle of the hall.

A ball of fire blasted towards him but he jumped over it, rolling across the ground and continuing his charge. The next shot came flying at his face and he ducked, sliding on his knees before coming to a stop at the edge of a wooden bridge.

Below the bridge was another pit like in the foyer; a great big hole filled with lava. The lava was lower though, casting only a little light on the things above it. Namely, the bridge... and the dragon on the other side.

It looked like some kind of demon turtle. Large green shell with spikes, flaming red hair, scaly green skin, and wicked fangs. It was a large dragon, wide and low, but it was obviously all muscle.

This had to be King Koopa.

"Yea' punchin' this thing might not've been th' smartest idea," Mario realized.

King Koopa roared, startling Mario, before blasting another ball of fire in his direction. Mario rolled out of the way, but he wouldn't be able to dodge like that forever if he wanted to get closer. There wasn't a whole lot of room on that bridge.

"Ey ugly!" Luigi yelled from behind Mario. "Ovuh here!"

King Koopa looked up at Luigi and sent out another ball of fire.

Using that opportunity to his advantage, Mario darted across the bridge. He jumped, grabbed King Koopa's horns, and launched himself over him. As he crashed into the ground King Koopa spun around.

One more blast and Mario jumped. The explosion sent Mario rocketing upwards, but it was also close enough to King Koopa that it sent him reeling back as well. The

large turtle dragon stumbled onto the bridge, but he was too big to balance properly like an elephant on a tightrope.

So when Mario and Luigi grabbed either end and tilted it, King Koopa fell right into the lava below. He reached for the bridge, but he was falling too fast.

But then something happened that Mario and Luigi hadn't expected. Instead of just boiling, or burning to a crisp... the King Koopa simply *poofed* into a simple turtle. And then that tiny turtle fell into the lava, disappearing beneath the boiling bubbles.

"That... wasn't right," Luigi mumbled.

"Was their King really just a turtle usin' magic t' make himself bigger?" Mario asked.

"Dunno," Luigi answered.

"...Well," Mario said, turning to look at the door behind him. "Le's do what we came here for."

"Yea'," Luigi nodded, hurrying across the bridge.

The creaked open the door and stepped into yet another nearly pitch black room. On the wall was a single torch, and directly beneath it...

"Wha'?" Mario gasped.

"Tha's..." Luigi shook his head.

The Toad looked up at them, clearly wounded. A faint smile widened on his face. "I... I'm saved!" he exclaimed.

Mario dropped down the ledge into the room. "Come on, let's get'chya outta here."

"Dy'have any idea where th' princess is?" Luigi asked.

"Thank you," the Toad said as Mario helped him to his feet. "But, our princess is in another castle."

Mario looked up at Luigi, and they both understood.

This... this was *not* going to be as easy as they'd hoped.



# THE SHADOW LANDS

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## WORLD 3

Mario and Luigi helped the wounded Toad back to the Mushroom King's castle. Once there, Toadsworth took the injured prisoner to heal him and Mario and Luigi confronted the King.

They demanded answers, wanting to know why things didn't add up.

"I understand you wanting the full story," the King said sadly. "I admit... I had hoped that this would be easy, that you *could* simply defeat this age old enemy of mine and rescue my daughter... but I suppose I knew he would be one step ahead of me."

"Just start from th' beginnin' this time," Mario said. "And this already doesn't make sense, so stop holdin' back."

"Very well," the King nodded. "I'll start with our Kingdom, the Mushroom Kingdom. It is almost as ancient as the worlds it rules, as mushrooms and fungi are the dominant races on almost all of them. I'm certain there is something similar to our kind even on *your* planet."

"We got mushrooms, sure," Mario huffed. "But they ain't sentient."

"Not all mushroom kind is," the King agreed. "And not all mushroom kind are kind hearted either. I'm sure you've seen them, the Goombas. Brown toned mushrooms with sharp teeth and rabid eyes... Monsters, they are... nothing more. On other worlds there mushrooms just as cruel if not worse, but we, the Toadstool people, have

turned these worlds, those under the Mushroom Kingdom's rule, into civilized planets. I told you before that there were nine in total, the eight I oversee, and yours which was left alone... but I lied. There are many planets, many worlds which spawn many vicious creatures.

"One such creature, is the Koopa," the King shifted in his seat and lowered his voice. The way he glanced around the room without moving his head was like he expected others to overhear him, but not that he wanted to keep his words a secret, only that he didn't want to frighten his people what else he had to say. "Their leader, their King... he has turned many of our people into mere bricks as I have said before, but it is more than that. For years he has tormented our people, taking them and breaking them like toys... the *lucky* ones are turned to stone... some make it back alive... the poor souls..."

The King fell silent, suddenly lost in thought.

"...Are y' expectin' th' same fate for yer daughter?" Luigi asked solemnly.

The King looked down to him and nodded, eyes heavy. "I am terrified for her... but I have no idea where he could be keeping her. I have searched for her... I have failed for so long, always... always just a step..."

He could barely speak anymore, his words small and choked as he shook. The frail old man could've once been a great King, but it was clear much time had passed since then. All that was left was a tired father worried for his child, and unable to do a thing about it.

And that look on the King's face-- the tears in his eyes and the clenched jaw as he forced himself not to fall apart-- told Mario his questions didn't matter. The flags and the fortresses built with Toadstool bricks could be explained away, the strange creatures would just be another roadblock, and anything else they came across would just

be something else these people have been fighting for a long time.

But Mario still had one question.

"King Koopa," Mario said quietly. "Who is he? We think we defeated him, but... at th' last second he turned into just an ordinary turtle. Was that really all he was?"

The King shook his head, trying to recompose himself. "No," he choked. "No, I'm sorry. He can reshape others in his i-image... I have faced many of his clones, but he himself continues to elude me..."

Once again he fell silent and Mario and Luigi were left standing there before him. A heavy silence seemed to keep any of them from moving.

*"What are you standing around for?"* Mario could hear his father ask. *"Get back to work."*

"Yea'," Mario huffed, gritting his teeth. he stepped forward. "So he wasn' where we went. Where would we have t' look next?"

"Y' said that last world was on th' edge o' th' Mushroom Kingdom," Luigi stated. "What about th' world King Koopa started on? Which world is that?"

"That is a world we do not have access to," the Mushroom King answered. "You would have to work your way straight through every world, working your way all the way to his main fortress."

"Then tha's what we do," Mario nodded. "We got through the first simple enough, an now that we have an idea of what to expect... the rest should be as easy as pie."

"Right!" Luigi nodded.

They started to turn back out of the castle to head to the Warp Zone, but the King stopped them. "Hold," he said. "I have one last thing to offer you."

The King motioned for Toadsworth-- who had reentered the room-- to step forward. "A gift to you, as you

are a gift to our people."

Toadsworth held in his arms, a chest. He opened it and showed Mario and Luigi its contents. "These are an ancient magic," Toadsworth explained. "Native to only a few remote places on only a few of our eight-er, nine worlds. They are called Fire Flowers."

Mario slowly raised a hand, but Toadsworth pulled back. "Careful," he warned. "While their magic is easy to use, it is easy to lose as well. It is quick to activate, but takes much focus to keep. Should you lose that focus, the ability will dissipate. Use these when you need them, there are enough for you to use these powers three times each."

Mario took the chest as Toadsworth closed it. He noticed the folded straps that fell from behind it and slung it over his shoulder. It didn't feel heavy exactly, especially not after having already gotten used to carrying around pest control gear day in and day out.

"We'll be careful," Mario promised.

"Y' don' suppose we could have a test run?" Luigi asked. "Maybe get used to usin' magic before throwin' ourselves back into it?"

Toadsworth shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he answered. "They are not as abundant as they once were. We're hoping they will be restored along with our kind with the return of the princess."

Mario and Luigi nodded. "I guess we'll just have t' work with what we got," Mario told Luigi.

"I guess," Luigi agreed.

"We'll be back in no time," Mario promised. "Y' won' even know we're gone."

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The Mario brothers made the trek back through the Wilds, reaching the Warp Zone just beyond the castle.

From there a helpful Toad directed them towards the next world locked under King Koopa's territory; the Shadow Lands. The Toad explained to them how to operate the machines that activated the Warp Zones, and repeated the path they would have to take.

And then they stepped through the portal. From here on out, until they reached wherever the princess was being kept, they were on their own.

When they exited the portal they realized the Toads weren't lying when they said it would be dark. Apparently this planet had no sun, it's heat coming from the planet's large core. The sky was pitch black, and the only lights came from the trees which gave off a white glow.

"Whoa," was about all Luigi could say.

"Those other worlds could'a still been Earth," Mario mumbled, looking around. "But this is somethin' else..."

"Yea'," Luigi nodded. "But... more bricks."

They looked at the piles of broken bricks, most of them several times taller than either of the brothers. Here, there were so many of them it was hard to believe each one used to be a Toad. There were enough bricks to populate New York.

It must've been some kingdom...

"World three o' eight," Mario said, moving ahead. "This King Koopa's already runnin' outta places t' hide."

"I guess," Luigi said, following.

Mario moved around the brick piles. He didn't want to step on any of them, but most of the time they blocked the way. Walking over pile after pile though he realized they were probably just going to go on forever...

"We should take a rest," Mario suggested. "We've been goin' at it for a while, I'm beat." He sat down at the bottom of a pile of bricks.

Luigi took a seat next to him. "Well a planet tha's

neveh seen day would be th' perfect place t' sleep."

Mario gave him a look. "Well *that* sounded morbid."

Luigi went over what he said in his head before trying to correct himself. "I just mean mornin's neveh comin'! So like, y' don' have t' worry about gettin' up cause it's just always night... an I can' make this sound any bettah can I?"

"Nope," Mario chuckled. "Get some sleep."

"Yea'," Luigi laid against the dirt staring up at the stars and the glowing pedals that floated off the trees. "This place sure is great though, ain' it..."

Mario was already snoring. Luigi figured he'd been more tired than he let on, and followed suit.



As soon as he woke up, Luigi panicked. He glanced at his watch, and then groaned in annoyance as he remembered that he didn't check it before going to sleep. With no sun rising there was no way to tell how much time had passed.

And yet that was already the least of his problems.

Luigi went stock still as he saw the turtle head peek over a brick stack in front of him. It disappeared in an instant and Luigi shook Mario awake.

"Get up!" Luigi hissed. "Some'n' saw us!"

Mario mumbled something, trying to wake up. "Yup, I-yup... Wha?" He rubbed his eyes, looking around.

"We gotta move," Luigi said. "One o' them turtle things... the Koopa, saw us."

"Whoa what?" Mario jumped to his feet. "What did it do?"

"I think it was just a scout," Luigi answered. "Came

t' th' edge of the bricks an then walked back th' way it came."

"Aaight, we'll go around," Mario nodded. "C'mon." He kept low to the ground, moving around the bricks.

They glanced around corners, just to see if anything was out of sight. Eventually they had to come to a full stop though, several Koopas gathering only a few yards away. They all huddled around, not knowing the Mario brothers were right behind them. They were close enough that Mario and Luigi could get a good look at what they truly were.

Turtles would've been the best way they would have described them, but they were anything but ordinary. They walked on two legs, their scaly yellow skin twisted and wrinkled. They looked more like goblins out of a Rankin Bass cartoon than anything else. Horrible monstrosities brought to life.

And yet Mario smiled at it anyway.

He pulled Luigi aside and made sure they were out of ear shot. "Look at how short those things are!" he whispered. "A few bops on th' head an we're home free! They don' stand a chance, 'ey!"

"But Mario those are Koopas," Luigi countered. "Not turtles. These things know magic. Y' think we could just 'bop 'em on th' head' an move on?"

"Yup," Mario answered blankly. "Easy peasy."

Luigi looked over his shoulder, fully expecting one of them to be looking back at him. For some reason... they seemed horribly familiar... almost as familiar as that dragon. "There's just... some'n' about these guys I don' like..."

"We got plenty o' reason t' hate 'em," Mario nodded. "Let's make this quick."

Before Luigi could stop him, Mario vaulted over the pile of bricks, startling the Koopas. One stumbled

backwards and Mario kicked the closest one in the face. Luigi forced himself to follow Mario's lead, jumping over the bricks and bringing his foot down on the one that had already fallen. It tucked itself into it's shell before Luigi's foot hit, and the impact shot the shell straight across the ground.

It took out another two Koopas, leaving only one left. That one Mario really did just bop on the head.

All the Koopas were in their shells and on their backs, either injured or hiding. Clearly they weren't going to be much of a threat.

"Hff, yea'," Mario brushed himself off, walking away. "Black magic."

Luigi followed, but he kept one eye behind him just in case. "I... I really thought they'd put up more of a fight."

"I did too t' be honest!" Mario chuckled. "But... I'm startin' t' think there's only one Koopa that has any magic."

"*King* Koopa..." Luigi nodded. "... I wonder what he'll be like-- when we find him, I mean."

"Yea'," Mario agreed. "I hope he'll put up more of a challenge."

Luigi could tell Mario was joking, but that didn't make him feel any better.



Judging only by their watches, their journey had taken roughly twelve hours. The Warp Zones were usually kept close to the ruling castles on each world, but they were kept far enough that should an invading force use the Warp Zones against them the Toads would be able to escape in time.

The Koopas just happened to be faster.

But at least now, finally, they reached the castle of

this world. There were plenty of Koopas between it and them though, but in the last day they'd gotten used to beating them. Luigi had even got over confronting them, realizing they were as easy to push away as the Goombas.

The castle was once again covered in the redish brown Toad bricks, it's interior made of grey stone. The same red carpet led them down the same dimly lit hall... but from there things changed.

This castle was grander than the last, old chandeliers dangling above them, torn tapestry barely hanging on to the walls. It was similar to the last, but also more like the castle that still stood on the last world of the Mushroom Kingdom. The more they looked at it, the more obvious it was that this place used to be as great as the Mushroom King's last remaining castle.

And just as well, the more they looked at it the worse it seemed. Everything was broken, thrown around, cracked or shattered...

"It looks like th' Beast's castle," Luigi huffed. "From-"

"Yea' yea'," Mario nodded. "Le's just hope Belle is still in th' dungeon."

Not only were there still lava pits blocking their path this time, but there were also things still on fire. Broken furniture lay scattered around different rooms, fires burning in the wood. Luckily they were headed for the throne room to confront this castle's King Koopa clone, so they only had to move in a straight line.

That being said, considering the lava pits were still in their way walking in a straight line wasn't exactly easy.

"I wonder what those flowers do," Luigi said. "Like, they're called Fire Flowers. Do they give us fire magic? Or do they make us impervious t' fire?"

Mario stared blankly dead ahead. "... I forgot t' ask,"

he sighed.

"Well le's hope we don' have t' figure it out ourselves," Luigi chuckled.

The fires flickered around them as they hopped over the lava filled pits. At least this time it wasn't some great hole that took up an entire room, but the floors around the smaller holes were still crumbling. Often times they had to put their full weight forward to keep from tilting back.

But the door to the throne room was just as close as it had been last time. Now, all they had to worry about was King Koopa, or another clone. They hoped it would be the real King this time, so they could defeat him and get the princess back as soon as possible, but part of them knew it wasn't going to be him.

And when they stepped into the room and looked down the dark hall, they saw they were right. Standing on the bridge above another pit of lava was the large, green-shelled, red haired, yellow skinned dragon staring back at them, a fire building in it's throat.

"Do we wanna use the Fire Flowers?" Luigi asked. "This guy looks a little bigger than th' last one."

"Does," Mario nodded. "But look; same rickety bridge. If we can topple this guy like the last one-"

He was interrupted by a fire ball exploding behind him, ripping the door away.

Mario and Luigi stood stock still, trying to get over the brief heart attack. Luckily King Koopa missed, but only barely.

"Move!" Mario shouted as another fire ball was launched at them. They dove in different directions, hiding behind the pillars that lined the walls.

"He can' shoot 'em that fast," Luigi said. "Let him attack, then we run, yea'?"

Mario nodded and ducked his head out. Another fire

ball was closing in and he pulled away. The second it passed they jumped out and ran down the hall. When the next fire ball was close enough they hid behind the pillars again.

"Like real intense Red Light Green Light!" Mario laughed, out of breath.

"I nevuh did like those games, ya know?" Luigi retorted. "Red Light Green Light, th' Floor is Lava... I always hated 'em..."

"Yea' they don' sound like much fun anymore do they?" Mario agreed. He peeked around the pillar and as the next fire ball passed they ran.

King Koopa charged another fire ball, but Mario had already jumped. He put his full weight into pushing the dragon turtle back. And when he was staggering, Mario tossed Luigi him. Then King Koopa roared in anger and blasted a fire ball straight down.

The bridge caught fire.

Luigi was already close enough to the other side that he could jump to safety, but Mario had been in the center of the bridge with King Koopa.

Thinking on his feet, Mario knew King Koopa would drop faster. He waited a fraction of a second, then used the turtle's head as a stepping stone and jumped off of him, throwing himself back up to the other side of the pit. As Mario tumbled to the ground, King Koopa went up in flames in the lava below.

... And it was another clone. A puff of smoke revealed a hunched over turtle with a black shell, but it was quickly swallowed by the lava.

"So glad we grew up in a circus," Mario huffed, laying flat on his back for a moment.

"Doin' flips and tumbles come in handy I guess," Luigi agreed.

Mario stared at the ceiling. "We need t' keep moving." He grunted as he pushed himself up. Behind them was the door that would lead them to either the Princess, another Toad prisoner, or an empty chamber.

They opened the door, and stared down at the Toad that lay crumbled against the wall.

Once again the Princess was in another castle.

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### **World 3: The Shadow Lands**



# **THE LAUGHING CLOUDS**

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## **WORLD 4**

The rescued Toad thanked them for their help. Luckily he wasn't as injured as the last one, and was able to assist them in using the next Warp Zone. After the Mario brothers were through to the next world, the Toad took the Warp Zone back to the Mushroom Kingdom. Before they left however, the Toad gave them a warning.

"This next world is native to some pretty strange creatures!" the Toad chirped. "The Piranha Plants and Buzzy Beetles are especially dangerous, but it's the Lakitu you need to watch out for!"

"Lakitu?" Mario and Luigi asked.

"It's a mischievous creature," Toad explained. "It throws spiny turtles down at you from it's cloud! They don't follow King Koopas reign, they just like causing trouble! You need to be careful."

The promised to heed the Toad's words and then stepped through the portal.

When they reached the other side however, Mario didn't seem to have meant that promise. "Mischievous Lakitu?" he laughed. "I get th' feeling these things're like, Japanese myths. What d'you think?"

"Outta all th' things we've seen," Luigi said. "*This* is what y' choose not t' believe?"

"Dragons? Sure. Talking mushrooms? Of course. But y' can' sit on a cloud Luigi."

"Y' can' breathe underwater Mario."

Mario jabbed a finger in Luigi's face, and then with the most serious expression said; "Those Lakitu are absolutely real an we're screwed."

"Yup," Luigi nodded.

They both turned their attention to the sky, watching the puffy clouds overhead. The strange thing, they realized, was that most of the worlds looked pretty much the same. Green rolling hills, piles of mushroom bricks with horse hair plants planted around them, clear blue skies with white clouds. For the most part, their own world wouldn't be too out of place here.

The only one that was wildly different so far were the Shadow Lands. The rest of the worlds all seemed to be similar enough that if you lined them all up next to each other you probably couldn't tell the difference.

That just made them wonder though; Where were the cities? Sure the people were turned to bricks, but the buildings should've been left behind, right? Or, are parts of the ruins-- the piles of bricks-- also their homes? Were the Toads just now indistinguishable from the homes they once lived in?

"Mario look out!"

Luigi shoved Mario to the side as a ball made of what looked like steel spikes crashed down between them. Mario had spaced out and hadn't seen it coming, even though it was roughly the size of the Koopas they'd seen before.

Looking up again they still couldn't see anything; it was like the ball of spikes just fell out of nowhere.

"D'jyou see where it came from!?" Luigi hissed.

"Nope," Mario shook his head, glancing at every cloud in the sky. "I don' see *anything*!"

And then they heard the laughing. It was like a chattering sound that echoed from the air... followed by the

ball of steel and spikes popping open. An angry looking turtle face snapped out at them, crawling towards them.

"It's not movin' fast but that jaw looks like it'd hurt," Mario growled, backing away. "Le's get outta here.

They walked briskly the other direction, Mario keeping an eye above them and Luigi watching out behind them. Neither of them paying attention to the ground however, allowed for the Piranha Plants to sneak up on them.

One of them got their teeth around Luigi's leg before they even knew what happened. He yelped, kicking it away and rubbing at the wound. At the same time, Mario punched the Piranha plant in the face. Or at least it's faceless head.

It was basically an overgrown Venus Flytrap; large round head, sharp teeth, thorny vines. But this thing looked different from the Flytrap Mario knew from Earth. It's head looked swollen, red, and the way it moved made it look sentient. It was like it was watching them, even without eyes.

"Outta all th' worlds we've been t'," Luigi groaned. "Which is *not* some'n' I ever thought I'd say by th' way-- I hate this one th' most."

"I agree," Mario stomped the head of the Piranha Plant again. "Le's just get outta here before some'n' else--"

**\*CRACK!!\***

Lightning struck the ground, sending Mario and Luigi flying in opposite directions. Mario landed on the prickly vines, but he couldn't see were Luigi ended up.

"Luigi!" Mario shouted. "Where'd y'-?"

**\*CRACK!!\***

Another lightning bolt hit the ground at Mario's feet, lighting the vines on fire. At first he tried to put the flames out, but they only seemed to grow, soon making a

wall of fire right in front of him. He couldn't get to Luigi anymore, and the fire was still spreading, getting closer to him as the Piranha Plants snapped at him

So he clutched his hand around the box he carried, and opened it. Inside were the six Fire Flowers; three for him, three for Luigi. He took the first of his.

Its magic activated all on its own, and for a moment the flower glowed in his hand. Then his hand was glowing, then the rest of him was glowing. In an instant he felt his body heat up, like he had fire inside of him.

It faded quickly, the light. The heat however, stayed, though it didn't burn exactly. It was more like having just taken a bite of something hot.

"Le's hope this makes me fire proof," Mario muttered.

He leapt into the flames, charging forward.

And when he came out the other side completely unharmed, he took a moment to laugh at how ridiculously over powered this new ability was. "*Man!* If I had a few of these back home..."

He shook his head, hurrying after where his brother must have landed. Lightning bolts struck the ground behind him as he ran, but he couldn't even feel their heat with the fire still burning inside him. The force of the impact would push him forward each time, but it was never enough to knock him off his feet.

Sliding down a brick pile he found Luigi laying unconscious at the bottom.

"C'mon man!" Mario grunted, hoisting Luigi into a sitting position. He smacked him. "Wake up!"

Luigi muttered something incoherently, blinking rapidly. "Huh?"

"We gotta move," Mario grunted, getting his brother on his feet. "Those things're comin' after... us...?"

He looked around, his eyes darting between the clouds and the fire.

The fire had started to die down, and there was nothing coming out of the clouds. Passed the flames the Piranha Plants only watched them, but the lightning had stopped completely.

Just when he thought it seemed safe however, he heard them laughing again. Mario grit his teeth, ready to run. Luigi didn't seem entirely stable, but at least he was at attention.

Yet, only a moment later, the laughing faded into the distance.

... The Lakitu had had their fun, and now they were leaving.

Mario took a deep breath and sighed with relief, taking a seat. Luigi followed suit, thudding to the ground.

"That wasn't very fun," Luigi huffed, staring up at the sky from on his back.

"Ey," Mario agreed. He looked down at himself, the fire in his stomach having faded as well. The Fire Flower's magic was gone. If he wanted it back he'd have to use another flower.

"How did it feel?" Luigi asked. "Th' Fire Flower?"

"Strange," Mario answered. "I don't even think I could explain it, y'd just have t' do it yourself t' figure it out."

"Well, le's hope that time won't come soon, yea'?"

"Yea'," Mario nodded. "We'll rest for a moment, check yer head. When we're ready we'll keep movin'."



Mario wasn't exactly a doctor, but as far as he could tell Luigi seemed okay. A bit of bruising on the side of his forehead, but nothing really serious. At the very least, Luigi

was up for walking still, partially just to get as far away from the Lakitu though.

Agreeing that getting away from the Lakitu and Piranha Plants was a good idea, Mario decided to let Luigi lead the way. This was mainly so Mario could keep an eye on him, but Luigi didn't seem to notice, he was more focused on looking around now that there wasn't anything attacking them.

As dangerous as this world was compared to the last few, it was equally as amazing as well. Luigi didn't mind getting to see it all first this time.

The many Piranha Plants that sprouted up around the area were fairly harmless so long as they were far enough away, so were the Goombas that seemed to live on this world. Just as well, the Lakitu seemed to have disappeared for good, the laughing long gone now with the spiny beetles they'd drop and the lightning they'd throw. But none of that really mattered once they got to the canyons.

Great big gaps in the land separated them from their destination. Sometimes they were small enough to jump across, but more often than not they had to backtrack to find ways around the gaps. At the very least, it was more of an obstacle than a problem, and eventually they arrived at the front doors of the next fortress.

"Eh... Mario," Luigi said, staring up at the fortress. "This one looks a lot bigger than th' last few."

It was massive; at least three times bigger than the others. Only the bottom floor seemed to be covered in Toadstool bricks, the rest of it being made of large silver stones. Torches flickered in the windows, and banners with a new mark hung over the side of every wall. It was the head of the dragon they'd faced three times now; King Koopa.

"Flashy," Mario grunted. "Must've finally cornered him. No way this isn't him."

"I guess," Luigi agreed, still staring in awe at the sight of the fortress. To be honest, he was surprised they were allowed to just walk inside unopposed.

There were no troops to greet them at the door, and no troops waiting to ambush them inside. Their footsteps echoed through the halls of the castle as they made their way forward. It was just as massive inside as it was outside, but they weren't here for exploration. So long as this place followed the same general pattern of having the throne room be a straight shot from the front door, the rest of the castle didn't matter.

That being said, every fortress seemed to have more and more damage the deeper they went. From lava pits to raging fires, scattered bones and broken furniture, the whole place was a death trap. Knowing that, it shouldn't have been that much of a surprise that there were no troops inside, and even if they *were* there once, well... those bones had to belong to someone.

The point being; this time the throne room was completely blocked off from the inside. They managed to reach the door, but after that there just wasn't a hallway anymore. The walls were cracked, the ceiling was falling down, and there wasn't anything left of the floor. Below them was just darkness, not even lava.

"Well, tha's disheartenin'," Mario sighed, staring into the abyss.

"Yeeaaaa'..." Luigi looked across to the other side of the room. It didn't look like there was anything that far in regards to platforms, but there was at least what looked like a torch on the farthest wall. "I don' see a way through that..."

Mario looked at the tapestry with King Koopa's

face. "Think those could hold us?"

"Y' want t' climb a flag?" Luigi scoffed.

"As long as it's bolted in it'd be fine, yea'?"

"Nope," Luigi answered. "It'll rip, we'll die, an mom's gonna be pissed."

"It won' *rip*," Mario argued. "It'll hold, cause it's made out of some kinda super-material tha's stronger than steel."

Luigi just stared blankly at Mario. "... *What!?*"

"Well if we can breathe underwater and turtles can turn into dragons and throw lightnin' from the skies and flowers give us magical powers, then why can' their fabric be stronger than ours?"

"Because we have nothin' t' base that on," Luigi said flatly. "I mean y' took a gamble on th' water thing already, an y' got *lucky* that paid off. Everythin' else we've been told directly or seen with our own eyes. Y' can't honestly believe that y' can just *decide* things are diff'rent."

Mario shrugged. "Well whatever. I still think it'll hold."

"I'm not tellin' mom we lost *two* Marios."

Mario didn't respond to that for a long time. He just kept staring at the tapestry and the black pit in front of him. Neither seemed like viable options for moving forward, but Mario...

Finally admitted he was wrong on this one.

"Aiight Lu," Mario sighed, turning away from the pit. "Le's look for another way around."

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It took longer than they would've liked, but after a few hours of exploring the massive fortress, they finally found what seemed to be a way to the throne room. It

wasn't the *right* way to get there-- several walls had to be broken through-- but at least they made it.

And when they arrived...

... They found yet another King Koopa clone waiting for them.

It was clearly a clone, mindless like the others. It looked angrier, sure, but it was most definitely not the real King.

They stared down at it from a balcony above the throne room, and Mario had to force himself to remain silent until they had a plan. The clone was standing at the edge of what was left of the throne room floor, the pit from the hallway reaching this far.

"We need t' lure it away from th' door," Luigi whispered. "Any ideas?"

Mario thought, leaning over the railing. "No," he huffed. "I don' think he'd just jump into th' pit on his- *WHOA!!*"

The railing collapsed under Mario, drawing the attention of the King clone and causing Mario to fall. Luigi tried to grab at him, but he was too slow.

Mario toppled over the edge, and used all his strength to push himself towards the dragon. King Koopa Klone grabbed Mario out of the air, but Mario had been moving too fast.

His speed combined with his weight was enough to lurch King Koopa Klone forward. One hand grabbing the edge of the platform, Mario tugged as the dragon was still off balance.

It sent the clone over the edge, allowing Mario to climb back up to safety. He lay flat on his back, trying to catch his breath and not die of a heart attack.

Luigi looked down at him. "Y' aiight?"

"Fan-friggin'-tastic," Mario huffed. "Le's check..."

Check on the princess."

Luigi nodded. "Y' do that, I'll look for a way for t' get back up here."

"Good idea," Mario grunted, wobbling to his feet.

Mario stepped into the back room, dropping down onto the lowered floor below. "'Ey princess? Y' in 'ere?"

"N-no," a frightened voice chirped. "S-she was moved somewhere else. I was put here in h-her place. I'm sorry, but the princess is in another castle."

"Yea'," Mario slumped to the ground. "Kinda figured."

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## **Chapter 4: The Laughing Clouds**



# **THE UNDERGROUND**

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## **WORLD 5**

Another castle done, another clone defeated, another Toad saved, but still no sign of the princess. It was clear now by what this Toad explained to them that King Koopa is aware of the Mario Brothers movements and is placing Toads in each castle just to taunt them.

That being said, King Koopa also seemed to be letting them come. He wasn't trying to stop them, save for the trial of each clone just to slow them down.

King Koopa was definitely holed up in his last fortress on the farthest world. They just had to keep pressing on in the hopes that they would make it there.

Of course, this was easier said than done.

Every new world seemed to have it's own creatures, or it's own versions of previous creatures. On one hand it made sense, considering Earth had dangers indigenous only to that world, but on the other hand, Mario and Luigi were getting a little tired of having to figure what that world has exactly before being able to continue.

Just once they'd have liked to simply walk through one of the world's lands from the Warp Zone to the fortress and then the next Warp Zone. And though this time they were walking through empty rolling hills of red rock, they knew it was only deceptively quiet. If the last four worlds had taught them anything it's that you can't sit still without something jumping out at you.

Then again, they learned that lesson back in

Brooklyn a long time ago.

Even though it was early morning when they arrived on this new world, time never synced up properly between worlds. So while here it was morning, on the world they left it was late afternoon. This meant they skipped night altogether, and desperately needed sleep. They weren't going to fight any monsters with suitcases under their eyes.

So Mario took first watch, picking apart the craggy ground. Every crack seemed to go down through the earth for miles, but they were no more than centimeters in width, each stone connecting to the rest somewhere below the light's reach.

And then suddenly Mario realized just how bored he was, describing the *ground* to himself. He got up and stretched. Luigi was still sound asleep, so Mario wasn't going to wake him, but it didn't look like there was anything for miles around.

He started for the top of the nearest hill to get a better vantage point. Keeping an eye on Luigi, Mario scanned the horizon. There were a few trees with white leaves scattered around, but nothing actually harmful. Coming up empty *again*, he slid back down and returned to his seat in the shade of the hill.

*I guess this world's just, empty?* Mario thought.

Luigi rolled over onto his back, opening his eyes to stare up at the sky. "What time is it?"

"Almost noon, I think?" Mario answered, looking up. "Must be a smaller planet, considerin' it's only been a few hours since sunrise."

"Shorter days," Luigi said, getting to his feet. "Well... I think I'm rested enough. You should get some sle--"

Both of them suddenly went on high alert, staring at

the ground under Luigi's feet. It had cracked as soon as he stood up.

"Maybe it's fine," Mario shrugged. "Just take a slow step forward-- *\*CRACK!!\**-- *Luigi!!*"

Mario reached for Luigi as the ground gave way. He was able to grab Luigi's arm before he fell too far, but then the ground broke under Mario as well.

In an instant they were falling into the darkness deep below.



Legions of Koopas filled the wide stone halls of the castle, torches flickering above them. They stood guard before the throne room, and parted as the grand doors in front of them opened. Light from the outside crept in for a moment before the doors were shut again, returning the interior of the castle to darkness.

An older Koopa made his way through the hall, leaning on his staff. He may have looked weak, seemed almost crippled, but his magic was some of the most powerful in the eight worlds of the Mushroom Kingdom. No Koopas bothered to aide him as this wizard made his way to the throne room, instead they closed ranks behind him as he passed, returning to their posts.

And the wizard reached the throne room, and shut the door. There were no troops in this room, only the lone hulking figure that sat upon the too-small throne.

"My King," the wizard bowed.

King Koopa regarded him, before returning his attention passed him, to the door. "... Is he close behind you?"

"Not close enough," the wizard admitted. "These worlds may prove too difficult for the brothers after all."

"... No," King Koopa hissed. "The moment you underestimate him... that will be the moment he wins..." He looked the wizard dead in the eye. "These brothers would have crawled through hell itself for each other, as *children*... No... They will show themselves here, in *my* castle... And they will bow to me... And I will take *their* lives... Before they can take *mine*."

"Of course," the wizard grinned. "My apologies."

King Koopa returned his gaze to the door, waiting for his rivals to return.

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Mario was woken by a Goomba gnawing on his shoulder. He shoved it away, then noticed the horrible shade of purplish blue the Goomba was. Clearly it hadn't seen the sun... ever, in its entire life. Its family probably hadn't seen the sun for generations.

Taking a look around, he saw a lot more Goombas, and even stone structures. It looked like there used to be buildings down here, small green pipes running along the cave walls, connecting houses to the ground and going up towards the darkness above them.

And then it hit him; of *course* the structures were underground! These were *Mushroom* people! Most of them probably grew better in darker places. That explained why he rarely saw anything resembling buildings on the surface of most worlds, they probably had undergrounds as well where their people came from.

The people here however, were just like all the rest. King Koopa's magic had affected those even this far down, turning them to bricks. The only mushrooms down here now were the small ones that grew with the moss, the underground Goombas which Mario called Gloombas, and

the scattered glowing mushrooms that shed minimal light on the area.

Of everything he could see however, he quickly realized he couldn't find Luigi.

"Ey Lu!" Mario shouted. "Where'd y' go!?"

Luigi popped his head out from behind a crumbling wall. "Eyyy!" he laughed. "Y' woke up. I was lookin' around an I started findin' some stuff."

"Like what?" Mario asked, walking over to him.

"Look at this," Luigi said, handing him a book. "It's one o' th' few I found intact, but it talks 'bout th' medicinal properties of th' local mushrooms. Every mushroom seems t' have it's own magic dependin' on it's species, an some are even indigenous t' a few other worlds as well. This book only lists the eight worlds of the Mushroom Kingdom, but I wouldn' be surprised if somewhere on our world were mushrooms similar t' at least a few o' 'em."

"That..." Mario said. "Is insane." He handed the book back to Luigi. "Or at least it *would* be, if I hadn' already used one o' those Fire Flowers. Plants are magic, huh? ... Jesus, wait'll Mom gets a load o' this."

"Right?" Luigi scoffed. "Ah, she'd go crazy..." He looked down at the book, wondering what the full extent of these magical shroom's powers were.

"Well hold on t' that," Mario told him, stepping away from the ruins. "We need t' focus on findin' a way out."

"Right," Luigi nodded. He tucked the book into his overalls and followed Mario.

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Seventeen dead ends later and they finally accepted that there wasn't just going to be an open path out of these caves. So far all they found were piles of bricks, herds of

Gloombas, and ruined houses with very little left inside them.

Judging by the looks of it, this place had been overtaken a long time ago. At this point, they wondered if getting the princess back would even fix the problem, since even she could bring her people back, they'd have nothing left anyway.

Still, that was yet another problem they'd worry about later.

For now, they settled on finding a way up the pipes. They were the only thing either of them could think of that might take them back to the surface. Deciding climbing inside one was safer than climbing outside, they looked for the biggest pipe they could find, eventually arriving at a wide maintenance pipe.

Most likely it was an exhaust pipe. They couldn't see any machines that it would've been hooked to, but any large piping like that would otherwise be used for sewers, and they were clearly in a village. This meant there was probably something else below them, but that wasn't their concern. They were going up, not down.

They searched around the smashed in room that the pipe was connected to and eventually found an entry hatch. It wasn't very big, but at least it opened. Considering the state of everything else, they were worried it might've been rusted shut.

As soon as they stepped inside the ground beneath them started rising.

"Should'a just gone here first," Mario huffed, crossing his arms and watching upwards as the pipe flew down passed them "If we'd known it was just an elevator..."

"Right?" Luigi chuckled. "Ah well, next time we get trapped in a box cave we'll just start checkin' th' pipes."

Mario shook his head, already never wanting to see

another sewer ever again.

The platform stopped, and another hatch opened up to daylight. It blinded them momentarily, and when they turned back around the pipe had disappeared! It was like they stepped out of the ground itself.

"Did th' ground seal shut?" Luigi asked.

"Maybe th' door just looks like th' rock," Mario suggested. "I mean 'ey, so long as th' roof don' cave in, this a good way t' keep people out."

"True," Luigi agreed. He looked around, covering his eyes from the early morning sun. "We missed night again."

"And I still nevuh slept," Mario said, laying down. "You're on lookout."

"Didn' y' sleep down in th' tunnel?" Luigi asked.

"Tha's a concussion Lu," Mario corrected, pulling his hat over his eyes. "*This* is a nap."



Luigi spent the next hour or so reading and re-reading the book he took on mushrooms. By the time Mario finally got up, Luigi had memorized at least twenty pages, and could identify half the mushrooms by their spots, color, and size.

And then the whole rest of the way to the fortress Luigi ranted about his findings.

"Plenty o' 'em are meant for medicinal purposes," Luigi said excitedly, flipping through the pages. "But some o' 'em supposedly make y' *bigger!*"

"Bigger?" Mario asked. "Like fat?"

"No idea," Luigi grinned, looking only at the book. "I haven' exactly gotten that far. But th' contents table at th' beginning lists 'em as 'Mega Mushrooms' an th' glossary

makes a ton o' references t' it in relation t' only th' other supernatural flora, unrelated t' medicinal stuff."

Mario was inclined to believe just about anything at this point, but mushrooms that made you big seemed like a totally random thing. He wondered how and why something like that could even exist.

"Ya know I'm startin' t' think *I'm* on shrooms," Mario joked. "Considerin' th' acid trip I've been on th' past few days."

Luigi nodded his agreement, completely understanding. "Yea' no kiddin'. I wouldn't believe half th' stuff we'd seen if I wasn't absolutely positive I wasn't on drugs."

Mario stopped at the end of a hill, Luigi stopping beside him.

"Still no army," Mario muttered, mostly to himself. "He really is just... waitin' for us."

"Well le's not keep him or th' princess any longer."

Mario nodded and they headed for the fortress.

"Unopposed," Luigi said, opening the doors. "Again."

"No, no," Mario countered, pointing down the hall. "I see a Goomba."

The Goomba waddled back and forth, looking utterly lost. It looked harmless for the most part, more curious than anything.

"Come on," Mario said, leading the way.

"When we get t' th' throne room," Luigi pulled out the book again, flipping to a specific page. "There's this thing on Fire Flowers I want to try, since I haven't used one of 'em yet."

"If I wasn't allowed t' use th' tapestry t' swing across th' chasm, y' don't get t' jump int' a pit o' lava."

"No no no!" Luigi grinned. "I got somethin' way

better than that!"

He kept one eye on the ground in front of him and the eye on his book. He wanted to make sure he knew exactly what he was doing before he attempted it. A lot of the book's pages were completely destroyed a long time ago just because of how old it was, so some of the information on the Fire Flower was missing, but it gave him enough to go off of. At least, it *seemed* simple enough.

And when they finally arrived at the throne room, Luigi tucked the book away and asked for his Fire Flower.

"I hope you know what you're doin'," Mario said.

"I am," Luigi smiled. He held the Fire Flower in his palm. "Okay..." It glowed, melting into his hand. He closed his fist as his body began to glow, a white hot heat spreading through him.

Mario had been right, it *was* a difficult to explain what it was like. The best he could think of was it being like his insides were on fire, but he couldn't feel it, or like he was he was holding a warm blanket he'd just pulled out of the dryer... but it was also on fire.

"Wow," was all Luigi managed to say.

"Right!?" Mario laughed. "Not a bad feelin', just... not somethin' we have a word for I guess."

"Aiight, le's see if this works." Luigi smiled. He kicked open the door, and down the hall stood the King Koopa Klone of this world.

The dragon roared at him, but Luigi charged forward. King Koopa threw a fireball, hurling it down the hall.

"Luigi duck!" Mario shouted.

"Watch this!" Luigi jumped at the fireball, and punched it.

The fireball broke his hand, sending him flying backwards. Luigi managed to alter the trajectory of the

fireball slightly, but the fireball was stronger. Luigi crashed into the ground, losing the Fire Flower's power instantly.

"You okay man?" Mario asked, getting him on his feet and pulling him out of the line of fire.

Luigi rubbed his head, looking at his injured hand. "Okay, so... movin' fire is diffrent from stationary fire. I'm guessin' that since th' fire itself didn' do anything, it's more th' force of th' fire than anythin' else."

"Fair, but yer gonna sit this one out," Mario told him. "Let your hand heal."

Luigi looked disappointingly at his fingers. "Man... I was *gonna* do somethin' cool."

"Like what?" Mario asked.

"Well th' book said y' could shoot fireballs out o' yer own," Luigi explained. "Y' can gather th' heat in yer hand, an throw it."

Mario's eyes went wide. "No joke?" he scoffed. "Serious?"

"Serious," Luigi nodded.

Mario opened the box, four Fire Flowers left. "Well tha's worth a test."

"If it works I get t' do it next time," Luigi said firmly. "Since I found outabout it."

"Consider me a test subject then," Mario said. "And if it doesn' work, nevuh attempt it anyway." He stepped back into King Koopa's sight. "Kids, don' try this at home."

He activated his second Fire Flower and started running. Unlike Luigi, Mario dodged the fireballs that came flying at him. And as he ran he held his hand at his side, and fire easily gathered in the palm of his hand, lighting at his fingertips.

Toadsworth had said the Fire Flower's magic was easy to use, but Mario was actually surprised at *how* easy it was.

Then as soon as he was close enough, Mario hurled the fireball at King Koopa's head.

The turtle dragon was caught off guard, and it was clear it had taken some damage. So Mario made another fireball, and threw one after another, each one slamming into King Koopa's head.

King Koopa fell to the ground, and reverted back to it's original form... a Lakitu.

Mario jumped back. As difficult as it usually was to fight a King Koopa Klone, Mario did *not* like Lakitu.

The Lakitu however, mistook Mario's momentary lapse in courage as an act of mercy. The Lakitu formed a cloud beneath itself and hovered in the air. It eyed Mario for a moment, before laughing that creepy chattering laugh they all seemed to share.

Then it flew off, freed of King Koopa's spell.

"I wonder if th' rest of them-"

"Don'," Mario cut Luigi off. "I do *not* want t' think about... that..." He turned to the other end of the throne room. "Besides, we've gotta do what we came here for."

"Yea'," Luigi nodded, looking at his hand. "Another Toad saved."

Mario looked at his own hands, feeling the heat in them. So long as he just kept the powers in mind, they didn't seem to run out. If he just continued to focus, he wouldn't have to use his last Fire Flower.

*I wonder if th' real King Koopa will be that easy,* Mario thought.

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## **World 5: The Underground**



# THE MONOCHROME

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## WORLD 6

Mario and Luigi stepped out of the Warp Zone and into the next world. Once again it looked similar to the others they'd already traveled through, just a new land. The difference in this world was the strange grey tone everything seemed to take half a mile away from the Warp Zone, like they'd stepped into some kind of old black and white movie. Even the dust in the air made everything look a little grainy.

"Ey, look," Mario said, pointing to the sky as the last light of the sun fell behind the horizon. "Night."

"Yea' but we already *slept*," Luigi sighed. "I mean, at least we won' have a sun beatin' down on us th' whole way though."

"Yea' I know," Mario agreed. "An besides, we've gotta stay movin' anyway. This is world six o' eight. We'll be on this King Koopa's ass in no time, an get that princess back home so *we* can go home."

Luigi nodded and they started walking through the night. Just like the rest of the worlds, this one was mostly uneventful. It was a lot of broken land with a lot of scattered bricks. Every now and then they crossed paths with a Goomba or a Koopa, but the just seemed to be either minding their own business, or watching the Mario Brothers out of fear. There didn't seem to be any indigenous creatures on any planet didn't seem scared, but it was clear that the Goombas and Koopas were working

for King Koopa.

They didn't come across very many other life forms, but the Goombas and Koopas remained the same. They were the only constant on every planet, which just proved they were King Koopa's forces that were stationed here to keep away the Toads. Best Mario could figure though was that they weren't exactly military forces, but rather something like guard dogs, or some other kind of deterrent. They weren't here to attack, just scare the Toads away.

That meant that Mario and Luigi just had to stay a fair distance away from them and keep watch at night, but otherwise had nothing to fear. King Koopa was fighting the Toads, but even though he knew now that the Mario Brothers were here for him he hadn't prepared for them in advance. All they needed to do was keep making it through these last few worlds, and confront King Koopa at the end.

Suddenly Luigi stopped, dropping to his knees in front of a low cliff.

"We *can* make it over this ya know," Mario chuckled. "It's only like, a foot an a half off-"

"Look!" Luigi exclaimed, pulling a mushroom out of the crevice at the base of the cliff. "This is one o' those healin' mushrooms!" He pulled out his book just to make sure, but everything matched up.

"Yea' but how do you use it?" Mario asked. "Is it like the Fire Flower or is it supposed to be eaten?"

Luigi read through the text again, looking for a description on activation. Finally, as he was still reading, he just crushed it in his hand.

"Wait was that what-?"

"An there y' go," Luigi stood up, looking at his hand. "Even my head feels better."

"You said yer head wasn' hurtin' anymore anyway," Mario grumbled.

"I uh, yea' I lied about that, sorry." Luigi pocketed the book again, looking to see if there were more mushrooms they could carry for later. "Doesn' look like there's more..."

Mario started looking as well, eventually pulling one out of a crack a little farther away. "Is this one?"

Luigi looked at it. "Yup," he grinned. "That'll come in handy. See any more?"

Mario looked around again. "Nah I think tha's it."

"Well, keep an eye out," Luigi said. "The more we have, the better."

Mario put the mushroom with the last of the Fire Flowers. They were down to three. They both wasted one, but Mario still had his second one active. So long as he kept his focus on it, it seemed to just last forever.

"Yea'," Mario nodded. "An let me know if we run into any o' those Mega Mushrooms. I wanna see what they do."

"Me too," Luigi agreed. "They've got red caps with white spots, black spots around the base."

"Got it," Mario said. "Shouldn' be too hard t' find in a place where everythin' else is grey."

"Seriously," Luigi scoffed, hopping up onto the cliff.

They carried on their way, watching the ground for any covered mushrooms. The healing mushrooms were white with pinkish spots, so they were going to be harder to find anyway. That being said, Toadsworth didn't seem to be lying about the shortage of magical flora. Life itself seemed to be stripped away from every planet, and at this point it was clearly getting worse the closer they got to King Koopa.

Mario wasn't sure if this world was *supposed* to be grey, considering every now and then they found small

patches of green grass growing out of the dead grey dirt. It almost looked like some kind of ash, as if everything here had just been burned to the ground, only the Toad bricks remaining.

Not wanting to think about it anymore, Mario shoved the thoughts out of his head and opened the doors to the massive grey castle.



It was about as un-challenging as always. Parts of the building were falling apart or missing altogether, things were on fire, and there were random pits of lava everywhere, but it was never anything they couldn't handle. In fact, the more they did this the easier it seemed to get.

And when they got to the throne room and Luigi used his second Fire Flower, things only got easier. Together they used their powers to defeat the clone, turning it back into the strange turtle creature that they figured inhabit this world. It scampered off passed them, and the Mario Brothers freed the Toad from the cell beyond.

After that they sent the Toad home and powered on the Warp Zone to jump to the next planet.

But Mario didn't step through.

"Ey wha'ssa mattuh?"

Mario looked at the large circular portal. It reminded him of the Stargates from Stargate, but a solid structure without any kind of carvings. The whole thing was green, the same old copper material that all the pipes were made of. All the portals were the same, but Mario hadn't really thought much about it.

"Clearly there was one on *our* world, yea'?" Mario asked.

"Yea'?"

"Well first of all, I'm pretty sure these things inspired th' Stargate series," Mario said. "But that means they don' belong to th' Mushroom Kingdom, since our world ain't apart of 'em. So, wouldn' there be these Warp Zones on othuh worlds too?"

Luigi stared into the portal. "... I guess," he agreed. "Y' plannin' on goin' somewhere else?"

Mario shrugged. "Just sayin'."

They flipped the switch, set it up how Toadsworth taught them, and opened the portal to the seventh world of the Mushroom Kingdom. It would be the last world before their confrontation with King Koopa.

"C'mon," Mario said, stepping through.

"Right behind ya," Luigi nodded.

---

King Koopa kept his watch on the door, his wizard's crystal ball sitting on a table beside him. It showed him the Mario Brothers and their progress. They were getting closer.

"I *must* ask, my King," the wizard hissed. "Why do you not just let them come here? Why do you slow them down if you are already prepared for their arrival?"

"I told you," King Koopa growled. "Do not underestimate them... They are powerful, more powerful than even *you* could know... you've told me as much. They will come to me, but I will not have them at full strength. If *I* am to fight in such a weakened state, then so must they."

"But why not just let the troops do their jobs?" the wizard. "My King, sometimes you make no sen-"

"Fool!" King Koopa roared, startling the old wizard. "I must see them suffer before me! I will take their lives myself!"

He remained still on his throne, glaring at the door with such a rigid intensity he looked to be like stone. Cold and unmoving.

"... Very well," the wizard nodded. "I will leave things to you." He remained silent as well, keeping an eye on the brothers as they crossed into the next world.

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## **World 6: The Monochrome**



# **THE WELCOME MAT**

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## **WORLD 7**

Mario and Luigi stepped out of the Warp Zone only to come face to face with a large cannon. It didn't look like any cannon they'd ever seen, considering it looked to fire from both ends.

Neither of them were experts in combustion, but having both ends open in a cannon seemed like a bad idea.

"Y' think it works?" Luigi asked.

Mario walked up to it and thumped the top of it while standing to the side. The cannon spit out a large shell with a painted face. It flew a few feet before crashing to the ground, but it definitely didn't launch very hard.

"Well I have two theories," Mario started. "Either this cannon is th' worst cannon in history because o' poor design, or..."

"Or?" Luigi asked when Mario wouldn't continue.

"Or," Mario sighed. "This is just another scare tactic, t' keep th' remainin' Toad forces at bay."

Luigi looked at the cannon. "Well, it doesn' look like a mistake."

"No," Mario agreed. "No it does not."

They kept walking, passing more dysfunctional cannons. If they got too close they'd fire, but that just told them they were set off by proximity. So long as the brothers kept their distance, they had nothing to worry about.

After the initial shock of those cannons however,

Mario noticed something strange. *This* world... seemed relatively untouched.

There were no Toads or other animals to speak of, but the land itself seemed fine. Clear blue sky, tall green grass swaying in the breeze. It was calm here... Too calm.

"Some'n's up," Mario huffed, stopping at the top of a hill overlooking a clear lake. "This place's downright peaceful, an I don' buy it for a *second*."

"Yea'," Luigi crossed his arms, also looking at the still waters. "It almost looked like every world was gettin' worse, but here... We could be back in the Mushroom Kingdom."

"We've technically been in th' Mushroom Kingdom this whole time," Mario corrected. "But I get what'cha meant."

"What'd'ya thinks at th' end o' this one?"

"Same as th' rest; some poor creature turned into another clone. I doubt th' King would want t' cut this short, he *is* expectin' us after all."

"Maybe," Luigi nodded. "Or maybe this time we get lucky?"

"Nope," Mario started down the hill.

"Yea'," Luigi sighed, disappointed. "Didn' think so."



They walked around the edge of the lake, along the beaches. Large red fish swam beside them, jumping above the surface from time to time, and trees swayed above them, rustling in the wind. Even as they reached the other side all remained peaceful.

Then they arrived at an open field that seemed to stretch out beyond the horizon. Even this was void of life. No bugs, no Goombas, no Koopas, no nothing. There was

nothing but the wind at their backs, seeming to push them forward.

So they carried on, at last standing in front of the large stone fortress that was this world's castle. Inside was almost untouched, dust and ash settled on the floor but the furniture was still intact and the walls weren't collapsing. But once again, there was nothing living inside.

"Aiight what th' hell?" Mario suddenly huffed, standing rigid outside the throne room. The door was still shut. "Where *is* everything?"

Luigi shrugged. "I dunno," he sighed. "But I don't like it."

"Not at all," Mario growled. "If we go in there an there's still nothin'..."

"Wouldn't that be a *good* thing though?" Luigi asked.

"I dunno," Mario answered, reached for the door. "But clearly we missed some'n'."

He opened the doors and looked down the hall. It was lined with torches, all the way to the back throne where the King Koopa clone was supposed to be sitting in. Instead, there was nothing, just like every where else.

"We missed some'n'," Mario growled.

"Yea' this looks like a trap," Luigi agreed. "Now what?"

Mario walked down the hall and kicked the throne. He looked up at the ceiling, expecting something to drop down on him, but nothing happened.

"Tha's it?" Luigi asked, standing next to him.

"Tha's it," Mario glared at the throne. "It's some kinda joke. Nothin' more."

Mario walked passed the throne and towards the cell door behind it. Looking inside confirmed what he expected; there was no Princess, of course, but there was no

Toad either.

"All this way for nothin'?" Luigi muttered.

"Yup," Mario slammed the door, walking back. "C'mon. That just leaves one world left."

Luigi glanced around the throne room again, just trying to make sure he didn't actually miss something. Clearly there wasn't anything here, but there was a heavy uneasy feeling still weighing over both of them.

It felt like a message, Luigi decided. King Koopa was saying something, and Luigi thought he figured it out.

There really was nothing left. No more road blocks, no more games, no more diversions or jokes, there was nothing left but King Koopa himself. He was saying he was ready, and they needed to be ready too. The end was coming, and this silence said it all.

---

Mario and Luigi made their way back out of the fortress and to the next Warp Zone. It was quiet the whole way there, as expected, but when they finally reached the Warp Zone the brothers froze. There, in front of the Warp Zone, was the last thing they expected to see.

At first they simply stared at it, but after a minute...

"... Ha," Mario shook his head. "... Ha... ha... hahahahahahahaha!!"

Luigi glanced sideways at him. "'Ey Mario?"

"This," Mario laughed. "This is th' funniest, *stupidest* thing I have *ever* seen!"

Luigi looked down at the thing sitting in front of the Warp Zone. "Looks more like an insult t' me."

"C'mon," Mario grinned. "Clearly he's waitin'."

Mario stepped over the welcome mat, entering the portal to the final world of the Mushroom Kingdom.

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"And so they have arrived," King Koopa said, watching through the crystal ball. "Everything is in place?"

"Yes of course," the wizard bowed. "As promised."

"...Good," King Koopa shifted to sit more comfortably in his throne. "Let the game begin."

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## **World 7: The Welcome Mat**



# **THE FINAL BOSS**

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## **WORLD 8**

There was a slight breeze in the air as Mario and Luigi stepped out of the bunker fortress that held the last Warp Zone. Before them was a world much the same as the rest, with horse hair plants and loose scattered bricks across a field of mostly red rocks. But this world had something they hadn't faced before...

"An there it is," Mario sighed, putting his hands in his pockets.

"He really was ready for us," Luigi agreed.

In front of them, was an army. Thousands of Koopas holding spears and hammers, spikes on their shells and helmets.

"I don' s'pose they'll just step aside yea'?" Luigi asked.

Mario stepped forward and in an instant every Koopa had their spears pointed at them. He raised his hands. "We're here t' see yer King," he shouted, loud enough that at least most of the nearby ones could hear him. "Let us pass!"

They all started moving forward.

"We have t' fight through this?" Luigi mumbled.

"We've still got our Fire Flowers active," Mario said. "Plus a healin' shroom, an two more flowers."

"They have an army," Luigi countered. "An spears."

Mario charged a fire ball in his hand. "This's yer only warnin'!" he shouted.

They continued advancing.

"Well there we go I guess." He threw his fireball, blasting one of the Koopas. The rest of the army rushed forward, but Mario blasted fire at them and jumped back. Luigi however was reeling away from the spears.

"Mario we don' got trainin' for this!" Luigi yelled.

"Nope!" Mario agreed. "Just start shootin'!"

They kept firing shots at the Koopa, but there were so many of them their attacks basically did nothing. They couldn't hold them all off at the same time, and they were advancing more forcefully by the second.

Eventually, Mario and Luigi were pinned with their backs to the Warp Zone fortress. Spear tips were pressed against them. They continued trying to fight back, but a hammer flung at Mario's head forced him to lose concentration momentarily, and his powers dissipated just like that.

Luigi tried to block another attack from striking Mario, but the thrown spear ended up slashing across Luigi's arm, and still hit Mario's shoulder. Luigi lost his magic then as well, and then both of them were pinned, injured, and defenseless.

"I don' s'pose we could talk this out?" Mario grunted.

They were struck to the sides of their heads, knocked unconscious.

---

Mario woke first and found himself being drug across the ground on his knees. Luigi was beside him, still asleep.

In front of them was the biggest castle they'd ever seen. It was easily twice or even three times the size of the

palace the Mushroom King remained in. But this castle was made of black stone, instead of the usual grey stone. Around it's base however were the Toad stones stacked in a long wall all the way around. The grand front doors were carved with King Koopa's face, and on every battlement hung King Koopa's flag.

The whole thing looked ancient, as if this castle had been here forever. Most likely it had been, and this was the only castle King Koopa truly controlled. All the others had been captured and taken over, but this was his land now. *This* world, belonged to him.

"Ey Lu," Mario whispered. He was smacked by the Koopas dragging him. Mario decided to stay quiet, but kept an eye on his brother.

The grand doors were opened, the sound echoing through the inner halls of the castle. And filling those halls were more Koopa troops, each armed to the beak. They parted, and Mario and Luigi were carried through the hall until they were thrown onto the ground in front of the throne room door.

"Gee thanks," Mario spat, sitting up. "Ey Lu, wake up."

Luigi had already started waking after hitting the ground, but hearing Mario snap at him made him lurch sideways, startled. "What th'?" he looked around at all the armored Koopas, and that was enough to wake him up completely. "Mario... is this...?"

"Yup," Mario sighed, getting to his feet. "Th' final boss."

Luigi stood. "Th' box with th' Fire Flowers," he hissed. "Y' don' still have it?"

"Nope," Mario answered. "An I think they want us t' open th' door for 'em."

All the Koopas backed away, but they kept their

spears trained on Mario and Luigi. The brothers were meant to open the doors themselves.

"I guess this is it," Mario said, grabbing the handle of one of the doors.

"I guess so," Luigi nodded, grabbing the handle to the other door.

They pushed the doors open, and the light from the hall crept into the throne room. Torches lined the circular chamber, and sitting in the center of it was the real King Koopa. And he was far more menacing than his clones.

His clones had been green scaled, red haired, turtle dragons. But this thing was... The true King was massive, twice the size of his clones. But, there was something off about him. He had sickly blue scales, yellowed hair, and shackles all the way up his arms and around his neck.

"It is clear by your expression... You do not recognize me," King Koopa hissed. He sounded exactly as you'd expect a dragon to sound-- it sounded like it belonged to the last thing you were going to see before you died. "I'd hoped my clones would serve as a reminder to you... But it seems you need another hint..."

King Koopa forced himself to stand, his heavy feet thudding against the floor. "I have long since shed the green scales of youth... but I assure you... I am the same beast you knew back then."

"... Beast?" Mario mumbled. The clones had looked familiar since the first one they saw, but they'd been so busy dealing with whatever each world had to throw at them that they never really put much thought into it. "... We've met you before...?"

"When we were children," King Koopa said. "We journeyed side by side to defeat my future self... and yet... even though I swore I would not become that monster... I received a prophesy telling of your return... The fallen

children, come to take my throne..."

"Take your throne?" Mario scoffed.

"We don' even *know* you!" Luigi argued. "We didn' wanna be here in th' *first* place!"

"Whoever told ya that prophesy lied," Mario growled. "We're just here for th' princess, t' bring back her people."

"I could care less for the princess," King Koopa said, starting to walk closer. "I let her live in case she became of use... but it seems she's unnecessary..."

"Doesn' have t' be this way," Mario said, the Koopas prodding them and pushing them towards their King. "Y' can keep your throne, we-"

"No," King Koopa hissed. "It must end like this... Because you are young, at the beginning of your years... while I reach the end of mine. I will destroy you..."

Mario and Luigi were pinned again and King Koopa was only getting closer. They just needed to stall him long enough to come up with a plan.

"Who are you!?" Luigi growled. "Whatever grudge y' have against us, we don' even know *why*!"

King Koopa lumbered towards them. "I... am your King," he roared. "I... am your demise... I... am Bowser!"

And then the name finally clicked. Some small memory sparked in the back of Mario's mind. "'Ey Lu... we know this guy."

"What!?" Luigi exclaimed.

"I don' think y' were there," Mario explained quickly. "When we were young, *real* young, he helped us fight some'n'... But... we were on the same side... what changed?"

"You changed!" Bowser roared, slamming his fist into the ground. He walked towards them on all fours, each fist each foot cracking the stone floor and even like this he

still towered over them. "You deceived me! Lied to me!... You betrayed me..."

"No we haven't!" Mario argued.

"We haven' done *anythin'*!" Luigi shouted. "What are you talkin' about!? What is going on!?"

Bowser stood over them, just his head bigger than either of them. He could eat them whole if he wanted. "Years ago... you came to me... and tried to kill me... So I have brought you here, from a time before then, to do the same to you what you attempted to do to me."

"So we haven' done what yer mad at us for!?" Luigi barked. "How is *that* fair!?"

"Wait," Mario muttered. "King Bowser... K.B." He looked at Luigi. "He really did bring us here. That job back Brooklyn, it wasn' real. It was a ploy t' get us *here*." He looked back at Bowser. "This was all for us... just some game with no good ending..."

"And you finally understand," Bowser hissed. "Good."

He roared, the force knocking both brothers down as well as slamming the doors shut. Then as soon as Mario was back on his feet, Bowser slammed a hand into him, smashing him against the doors.

"Mario!" Luigi shouted.

"I will deal with *you* in a moment," Bowser rumbled, swatting away Luigi with his tail. He returned his attention to Mario who struggled in Bowser's grip. "None of this went how you thought it would... did it?"

"Not... *ERGH!* Particularly..."

"I will enjoy... tearing you limb from limb," Bowser slammed Mario into the ground, crushing him. He could hear the small man's ribs cracking.

"M-Mario!" Luigi shouted, trying to get up. "H-hold on!"

Bowser let go of Mario, then slammed his fist down on top of him.

"*MARIO!!*"

Bowser pried Mario off the ground, blood spilling out of his wounds. There was no way he could have survived that attack... and judging by the blank expression on his face... he didn't.

"M-Ma... No..." Luigi felt breathless, barely able to stand. "What... what did you do?"

"I've taken his life," Bowser answered, dropping Mario's shattered body back onto the ground. "Now... you will join him."

Luigi stumbled away, but suddenly he was on his back. He'd run into something, but there was nothing there.

"You don't get to run," the wizard hissed, holding his staff in front of him. "This fight isn't finished yet."

Him Luigi recognized. A faded face in his memory, and a name. "Kamek," Luigi hissed. "I... I remember you."

"You freed me once," Kamek said kindly. "When you were but a child..." His expression turned sour, angry, but excited all at the same time. "You *really* shouldn't have!"

Bowser grabbed hold of Luigi, lifting him into the air with ease.

Luigi struggled as his brother had done, squirming in Bowser's grasp. *This is the end*, he thought. *Game over!*

"Goodbye," Bowser hissed.

*Wait!* Luigi's arms were pinned behind his back, and he realized he had one last move. "Wait!" he shouted before Bowser could crush him.

Bowser stopped for only a moment, but it was all Luigi needed. He grabbed the book from out of his overalls and forced his hand out through Bowser's fingers. Without taking even a moment to think or aim, he threw the book.

It hit Bowser in the eye.

"AAGH!!" Bowser roared, his hand twitching.

Luigi slipped out and ran in the opposite direction.

"Not so fast!" Kamek shouted.

Another invisible wall blocked Luigi, so Luigi turned and ran alongside it. He rushed towards Kamek, and another wall came up in front of him.

Taking a leap of faith, and hoping the walls were low enough, he kicked off the side wall to kick off the wall between him and Kamek. He reached up and managed to grab the invisible edge to the side wall, lifting himself over. As soon as he hit the ground he kept running.

"Being in a circus really came in handy!" Luigi screamed, smashing his fist into Kamek's face.

Kamek stumbled to the ground, letting go of his staff.

Luigi picked it up off the ground, and whacked Kamek in the head with it. He lay still, and Luigi turned back to Bowser.

"... You *fool*," Bowser spat. "You will pay for-"

"*Shut up!!*" Luigi screamed, aiming the wand at him. He had no idea what the staff could do, but he didn't care. He was angry, *furios* and that seemed to work just fine.

A blast of energy fired from the wand, exploding into Bowser. It sent him skidding backwards, but he was still on his feet.

"*You will pay for what'chya did t' my brother!*" Luigi fired again, this time the shot exploded in Bowser's face, flipping him onto his back. "*Burn you bastard!!*" He fired again, sending Bowser spinning on his back and crashing into a wall.

Luigi lowered the staff, not realizing how much strength it took to use.

"You... are... weak," Bowser huffed, shaking as he stood. "You... do not... have the power to defeat me."

Luigi looked at the staff. "No, I guess I don'," he agreed. Then he looked at the cell door behind the throne. "But I know someone who *does*."

Bowser realized too late what Luigi was doing. He stomped towards him, already sluggish, and couldn't stop Luigi from opening the door.

Luigi dropped into the cell. "Princess!" he shouted. "Y' in here!"

There, in the darkness, a figure moved. He heard the chains shifting.

"Sorry that this didn' go as planned," Luigi said quickly, dropping down beside her. "But I need yer help." He broke the chains with the staff, and offered the princess his hand.

He could barely see her, but he felt her weight as he helped her to her feet.

"Are ya okay t' move?" Luigi asked, looking over his shoulder at the door.

"Yes," the princess answered. "Is King Bowser..."

"Right outside," Luigi answered, pulling her to the door. "I was told you had powers, some kind of magic. Maybe you could use this better than I could." He handed her Kamek's staff.

The princess took the staff and looked up at the open cell door. "Yes. I can use this. Those chains blocked my abilities... but now that I am free."

Bowser watched as Luigi and the princess stepped out of the cell. "Congratulations," he hissed. "You freed the princess... it will do you no good... You will still die by my hand."

"I think not," the princess said firmly, aiming the staff at him. "You are a cruel being... now it is time to put

you to rest."

Bowser snarled, and the princess charged the staff's power.

"This is the end for *you*," the princess proclaimed. Then she turned the staff on Kamek. "You've poisoned his mind for *far* too long."

With a single blast, Kamek disintegrated. There was nothing left but a few scattered ashes.

"Whoa," Luigi mumbled.

"*NO!!*" Bowser roared, stomping towards the princess. "*I'll get you for that!!*"

"No you won't," the princess said sweetly.

Suddenly Bowser was on his knees, sapped of all his energy. "W-what... have you done?"

The princess walked to him, resting a hand on his head. She ruffled his hair. "It's time for you to sleep," she told him. "You've been fighting yourself for a long time, you're tired." She smiled as Bowser lay on the ground, eyelids growing heavy. "It's okay. You can sleep now. Be at peace."

Luigi stood next to her, watching as Bowser slowly tucked his arms and legs into his shell. Then his head went inside and there was a moment where his breathing slowed... and then it stopped.

"Goodbye, King Bowser," the princess bowed. "May we meet again under better circumstances."

Luigi was dumbfounded. That power... whatever the princess had done... "That was... more than he deserved."

"Perhaps," the princess nodded, patting Bowser's cold shell. "But it was Kamek at fault here. As a child... all Bowser wanted was friends. I'm sad to say this is where his life lead him, so I couldn't let him suffer anymore. This was his end, but he wasn't going to die alone, unloved."

Once again Luigi was breathless. There was so

much kindness, sincerity, in the princess's words, that he too felt sorry for Bowser. "I... I don'... I..."

The princess finally looked at him, and Luigi realized something odd about her. Before he could voice his thoughts however, she walked passed him.

"Now, let's do something about your brother." She stood over Mario.

"Can y'... can y' fix him?" Luigi asked, unable to believe that was even remotely possible.

"Of course!" the princess smiled. "Nothing to it." She raised her hand over Mario, and a warm glow enclosed around him. When it faded, Mario was laying face up on the ground, blinking the light away.

"Wh-what happened?" Mario mumbled. "Bowser... he..."

"M-Mario," Luigi sobbed, dropping to his knees. "Yer okay!" He hugged Mario tight, shaking.

"Ey, Luigi, get ahold o' yerself," Mario muttered. "Did Bowser...?"

"King Bowser succeeded in defeating you," the princess explained. "But even here his powers are no match for mine."

Mario stared wide eyed up at the princess. "Princess Toadstool," Mario gasped. "But... but... yer *Human!*?"

Princess Toadstool smiled brightly. "Let's go home, shall we?"

Luigi helped Mario to his feet, but Mario couldn't keep his eyes off the princess. "Uh-ruh, er... Thank you, princess."

"Thank *you*, Mario and Luigi," the princess bowed. "Your quest is over."

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## World 8: The Final Boss



Mario, Luigi, and Princess Toadstool from world to world. The princess used her magic and heal her worlds, reversing King Bowser's dark spell. The Toads returned from their bricks in great numbers, happy to move about freely again. Color returned to each world, until finally they returned to the first world of the Mushroom Kingdom, and stood before the King.

This world too returned to it's former glory, Toads happily cheering in the throne room and through the halls in and the courtyards of the castle. They set to putting their world back in working order, but Mario, Luigi, and the princess stood before the King.

"Thank you," the King sobbed as his daughter came to greet him at last. "Thank you brave heroes for returning my daughter to me! For saving my people! For everything! Thank you so much!" The King was in tears, holding his daughter in his arms.

"Don' worry 'bout it," Mario bowed. "Yer daughter did most o' th' hard work in th' end anyway."

Princess Toadstool pulled away from the King. "I could not have healed our lands without you freeing me. You were brave to travel through those worlds unknown to you, and face a King of such power. You have my thanks as well." She bowed to them, smiling just as kindly as ever.

"You asked for me to return you home," the King said. "I can do this, but tell me; is there *anything* else you

desire? For you, I would grant it."

Mario and Luigi looked at each other, but they'd already decided what they wanted. They turned back to the King.

"We, really just wanna go home, yer highness," Mario said.

"It's been a long trip," Luigi agreed. "An we got a mother t' get back to."

The King smiled. "Very well," he laughed. "But if I could ask you more thing of you. "He stood from his chair, leaning on his staff. The princess helped him down and he stood before the Mario brothers. "Join us for the festivities tonight. You've earned a bit of celebration."

Mario and Luigi looked at each again before looking back down to the Mushroom King. "That," Luigi said. "I think we can do."



The celebrations ran deep into the night, with lots of singing and dancing and twinkling magical lights floating through the air. It was like nothing the Mario brothers had ever seen, but while Luigi was in the middle of it all, dancing with the little Toads around the bonfire in the middle of the town square, Mario sat down with the King.

"I do have one last question," Mario said, watching the princess join in on the dancing. "All the people here are mushrooms, yerself included."

The King smiled. "You wish to know why my daughter looks more like *your* kind."

Mario nodded.

"It was a long time ago," the King explained. "It was the oddest thing... A *stork*, carried her to me... Landed on my castle's doorstep, and pecked at the door." He shook

his head, smiling at the memory. "I answered, and there it was, a sack in it's beak. Her tiny head popped out and I... Heh, well... I have no idea where she came from, but her eyes were so much like her mother's... So much like my wife's, that is to say... She never knew the woman who would've been her mother."

"Say no more," Mario said, seeing that that side of the memory was more painful. "So for all you know, she *could* be Human."

"Yes," the King nodded, watching his daughter dance. She took Luigi by the arm and started spinning around him. "But she's more than that... She is every kind thought in the galaxy. She is joy, and happiness, and all things good. She... she will make a good leader for her people."

Mario felt a shiver run up his spine. The way he'd said that, sounded so final. "You..." he didn't want to say what he was thinking.

"I want this night to be special for her," the King said, forcing himself to stand. "...See to it... that it is, please."

"Ey King!" Mario hissed.

The mushroom King was already walking away, disappearing into the crowd of Toads. He shouldn't have vanished so quickly, but Mario lost sight of him.

Then Princess Toadstool was walking over to him. "Where did my father go?" she asked, looking around. "I saw him here a moment ago."

"Yea'," Mario sighed. "Ah, he turned in for the night. Said not to wait up for him."

"Oh," Princess Toadstool looked at the dancing Toads. "I see."

"C'mon," Mario said, taking her arm, smiling. "I haven't danced enough yet."

She smiled back, walking back to the bonfire with him.

From afar, on a hill out of reach of the fire's light, the King stood, watching over his people one last time. "Farewell, my daughter. Good luck. I'm sure you can count on these heroes to come to your aid, should you ever need it." He sat his crown on the top of the hill, and lay his staff beside it. Then he walked off into the distance.

The princess looked up to that hill, unable to see anything through the darkness of night, but somehow, she had a feeling. A sharp pain in her heart. *Goodbye, father*, she thought. *I'll be okay.*



For the first time in a long time the brothers had a good night's sleep on real beds. When they woke the festivities were over, the Mushroom Kingdom going back to repairs. But for them, for the brothers, it was finally time to return home.

They stood in front of the Warp Zone, looking at the dormant portal.

"It's been a real pleasure," Mario chuckled, not sure what else to say. He never was good at goodbyes himself. "I guess we'll see y' around, yea'?"

Princess Toadstool nodded.

"An 'ey," Luigi added. "If yer ever in th' neighborhood, feel free t' stop by."

"Likewise," Princess Toadstool smiled. "Perhaps one day I *will* visit your world."

"Which reminds me," Mario said. "There was no Warp Zone on our world. How *would* we get back here?"

The princess tilted her head. "There was no Warp Zone portal?"

"Nope," Mario said. "Just a great big hole in th' ground."

Princess Toadstool nodded, and laid a hand on the Warp Zone. It seemed to shimmer, reflecting nonexistent light. "There," she said. "A portal has opened on your world. Now you can travel safely too and from any of our worlds."

"Just like that?" Luigi gasped in amazement.

"Just like that," the princess laughed.

"Well," Mario huffed, holding out his hand to the princess. "I guess tha's our cue. Goodbye for now, Princess Toadstool."

"Peach," she smiled. "Princess *Peach*. Have you been calling me by my family name this whole time?"

Mario stammered.

"Well, uh," Luigi rubbed his neck. "We uh... we didn' know yer first name."

Princess Peach giggled, turning away from them. "Farewell, Mario brothers," she said, walking back out of the fortress. "Happy travels."

"Yea'," Mario mumbled, watching her leave. "See y' around."

They activated the Warp Zone, and stepped on through to their own world, leaving this life of crazy adventures behind.

---

They spent the rest of the day back home, going over in detail on that happened to them and telling the whole story to their mother. She didn't believe a word of it, but at the same time she *did*. They told her about every world, each a brand new planet no Human has ever seen. They told her about all the strange creatures they saw, like

the Goombas and Koopas and Lakitu and Piranha Plants. And then they told her about King Bowser, and the evil manipulator Kamek. They only detail they left out was how brutally Bowser had crushed Mario to death. That wasn't something a mother needed to hear.

And when they were done with their story, Pauline got a certain look in her eyes. That sort of thousand-yard-stare she had when her mind suddenly went to a far off place.

"Well, that honestly tops your father's story," Pauline chuckled.

"Yea'," Luigi laughed. "I mean he had some crazy ones, but nothin' like this."

Pauline shook her head. "I don't mean stories from his time in the circus," she said. She leaned back in her seat, folding her hands in her lap. "I think it's time I tell you about a little friend we once had. A gorilla, named Donkey Kong."

And so Pauline went over the adventure their father had had. His battle against Mayor Colepepper, his friendship with Donkey Kong, all the falling buildings he'd survived, and finally the island of civilized gorillas they used to visit before the twins were born. To the brothers, the whole thing sounded insane. Their father going up against something that was basically Italian mobsters? No, he went up against what was *exactly* Italian mobsters.

"That... tha's enough for me today," Mario chuckled, getting up. He cracked his back and straightened up. "I think... I'm gonna turn in for th' night."

"This is all a lot to take in," Pauline agreed. "A portal to other worlds... I wonder if that's where that castle came from..."

"Castle?" Luigi asked.

"There more t' that story?" Mario asked.

"Oh!" Pauline laughed. "I forgot all about it... But, I suppose that might be a story for another time."

"Nope," Mario said, sitting back down. "No better time than now."

"I thought y' were tired," Luigi joked, punching Mario's arm.

"I woke up," Mario said. "Spill it. What about a castle?"

Pauline took a deep breath, then told them about the castle that appeared in the sky, and the stork that rescued the brothers from that castle. She didn't know much about the details, but she knew that if it hadn't been for that stork the brothers wouldn't be here today.

"Stork..." Mario narrowed his eyes. Then suddenly he got up and left the room.

"Wha- Mario?" Luigi called, still sitting at the table in the kitchen with Pauline.

Mario came back into the room, carrying a picture frame. He sat it in front of Pauline. "Is this th' stork?" he asked.

"Yes," Pauline smiled, picking up the picture. "In truth... I suppose... if there were ever a time to say it..."

"We were brought t' you by this stork," Mario said for her.

"What!?" Luigi scoffed. "Mario, tha's cartoon stuff."

"Mario's right," Pauline corrected.

"*What!?*" Luigi scoffed harder.

"Same as th' princess," Mario said numbly. "She was brought t' th' King by stork... I wonder... if that means something."

Pauline looked at the picture again before handing it back to Mario. "Maybe it does," she said. "Or maybe it doesn't. Honestly so much insanity happens in our lives, it's

hard to keep track of it all sometimes."

"True," Luigi agreed, resting his head on the table. "We were adopted an our parents are storks."

"No," Mario huffed. "But it *does* raise a lot o' questions. Only problem is I have *no* idea who t' ask 'em to."

"I don't think that's something you'll *ever* find answers to," Pauline told him. "For now..." She got up. "Get some sleep. It's been a long couple of days for you two it seems."

Mario nodded, looking at the picture. "Yea'."

And with that, the day was over. Finally back home, finally done with the bizarrry of the Mushroom Kingdom, the Mario brothers turned in for the night, ready to sleep in their own beds.

Mario looked out his window, watching the streets of Brooklyn speed by in the night. "Ah home," Mario chuckled. "Loud and obnoxious home." He flicked off the light, and crawled into bed.

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## **World 9: Home**



# **DOKI DOKI MARIO BROS.**

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## **INTERMISSION**

*Mario had a strange dream.*

*He dreamt of a long, long stairway leading up to a door. As soon as the door opened, he was confronted with a world he had never seen before spreading out as far as his eyes could see.*

*When he strained his ears to listen, he heard a faint voice saying "Welcome to 'Subcon', the land of dreams. We have been cursed by Wart and we are completely under his evil spell. Was have been awaiting your arrival. Please defeat Wart and return Subcon to its natural state. The curse Wart has put on you in the real world will not have any effect upon you here. Remember, Wart hates vegetables. Please help us!"*

*At the same this was heard, a bolt of lightning flashed before Mario's eyes. Stunned, Mario lost his footing and tumbled upside down. He woke with a start to find himself sitting up in his bed.*

*To clear his head, Mario talked to Luigi, Toad, and Princess about the strange dream he had. They decided to go to a nearby mountain for a picnic. After arriving at the picnic area and looking at the scenery, they see a small cave nearby.*

*When they enter this cave, to their great surprise, there's a stairway leading up, up and up. It is exactly like the one Mario saw in his dream. They all walk together up the stairs and at the top, find a door just like the one in*

*Mario's dream.*

*When Mario and his friends, in fear, open the door, to their surprise, the world that he saw in his dream spreads out before them!....*

---

*The lights came on, shining bright on the stage. The crowd clapped and cheered, and the curtains were raised. There stood four actors, ready and willing to play whatever the audience demanded.*

*Mario! Average jumping power in almost all situations. But, the height he can jump decreases a little when he is carrying an item.*

*Luigi! He can jump the highest and can go much farther but he jumps slowly. When he has an item, his power decreases more than Mario.*

*Toad! He has the least jumping power. But since he has lifting power, the height he can jump and the speed he can run does not change even if he is carrying an item.*

*Princess Toadstool! She is No.3 in jumping power. When you hold down the A button, she can float in the air for about 1.5sec. Her jumping power decreases quite a bit when she is carrying an item.*

*The spotlight fell on each of them in turn, before finally landing on Mario. The others left the stage and Mario took a bow as the audience applauded.*

*But then the trap door beneath him opened up, and the show began.*

---

*Mario fell through the air, landing on top of a mountain. He jumped down the mountainside, moving from*

cliff to cliff. Upon reaching the bottom he continued on his way through the tall grassy hills, fighting creatures in masks and dinosaurs that spit eggs at him. At the end of those hills he found a cave, and inside was a mouse throwing bombs. Mario defeated the Mouser, using his bombs against him! Then he continued into the next world.

A desert, filled with bones of great snake like creatures that were hundreds of meters long. In order to gain access to the pyramids there, he needed the keys from the shrinking jars. This angered the masks inside of the jars, but Mario moved quickly, escaping them! Once inside the Pyramids, he dug his way through the sand and into the caverns below. There he found the three headed snake and defeated it by throwing the smaller snakes at it. Then he continued into the next world.

The glistening oasis, a land of sprawling hills and sandy beaches with rivers and falls flowing through it all. A majestic sight to be sure, but there was evil abound! He traversed this oasis, flying over them with the help of a magic carpet, eventually making it to a dungeon. The cellar went deep underground, and at the end of it... Mouser had returned! Mario defeated him the same way, then he continued into the next world.

A land of freezing ice and endless ocean is where he was now. Fighting masked figures on rolling cannons, Mario took a rocket ship to the higher mountains. He continued his ascension into the sky where he walked on frozen clouds until he found a floating door. It led him back down to the surface where the whales helped him find the ice cave that took him to the snow covered castle where the villainous fire ball demon was hiding. After his swift defeat, Mario continued into the next world.

He arrived in the Midnight Garden, a world covered in darkness. He walked through the neon grass

plains, and through the glowing caves, and up the vine covered mountain. After falling into a pit of jagged rocks, Mario fought his way back out through the mountain and through more glowing caves. Reaching the great towering trees, he fought the rock throwing crab that had been hiding in his fortress. With that taken care of, Mario continued into the next world.

Another desert, but this one was filled with more snakes and quicksand than you could shake a magic potion at. He made his way to the canyons where he had to bomb through walls to continue, and eventually came out on the other side and climbed the sky vines back into the clouds where he found the flying pyramid. There he fought another three headed snake, and continued into the last world.

It was a roman city in the sky, no ground to speak of. He flew on the backs of birds and took a rocket ship to the higher clouds. There, he found the small house that directed him to the evil Wart's grand castle. Conveyor belts and chains let him move about, but the many sparking balls and creatures in masks blocked his way. He fought tooth and nail to survive, but eventually he made it to the top.

The villainous King Frog, Wart, stood before Mario in the last chamber of his temple. Without giving Mario a chance to think, Wart spit acid bubbles, but Mario remembered what the voice had told him. Mario threw vegetables at Wart, each veggie making Wart sicker and sicker until he could no longer fight. The frog turned grey and then Wart was at last defeated! The plug was pulled on the shrinking jar that entrapped the people of Subcon, and they were freed!

The crowd cheered and clapped for the actors as they all came back on stage. The four of them bowed as Wart's body was carried off and destroyed.

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Luigi shook his head in disbelief. "That... well, yea' I mean after the crap we went through," he rubbed his head. "Tha's a crazy dream Mario."

"Ain' it?" Mario chuckled. "But that insanity gave me an *idea*." He got up and pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket before sitting back down. He showed the paper to Luigi. "What'd'ya think?"

Luigi raised an eyebrow, staring at the drawing. "An what is this s'posed to be?"

"Well, in all o' that crazy, one thing stood out," Mario pointed to the drawing. "Th' whole *stage* aspect Lu! I mean, we've *got* th' experience from th' circus, I think we could really do some'n' here!"

"You wanna turn our adventure through th' Mushroom Kingdom," Luigi clarified. "Into a Broadway play?"

"Yup!" Mario said proudly, crossing his arms and grinning like a madman. "An 'ey, since we can go back t' their world too, maybe the Princess herself would like to come and play her part!"

Luigi actually laughed at that. "I think a Princess has got bettuh things t' do than dick around stage, ya know."

"Yea' I know," Mario chuckled. "Just a thought though."

Luigi looked at the drawing again. The curtains draped around the edge of the wide stage, Mario, Luigi, a Toad, and the Princess all standing in line... and the flashy sign above them.

"*Super* Mario Bros.," Luigi sighed, nodding. "Gotta nice ring to it."



# **LET THE SHOW BEGIN!**

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## **CHAPTER 0**

Soon, the Mario Brothers had gotten back to work with their day job, plumbing, but Mario spent every second of his free time writing. He plotted out exactly how he wanted this new version of the story to go, changing a few things to keep it interesting to viewers.

It was hard, but the first step was admitting just how kind of boring and predictable his adventure had been through the Mushroom Kingdom. They-- for the most part-- knew exactly what it was they were going to be up against before they had to face it.

So, with Luigi's help, the brothers replaced the King Koopa Klonas with Kid Koopas. Bowser's children; Larry, Morton Jr., Wendy, Iggy, Lemmy, and Ludwig. And instead of them just standing guard in an empty castle with a few traps, he decided that in addition to the Kid Koopas there would be *eight* Mushroom Kings, each with a magical wand that had been stolen. The Mushroom Kings used to watch over each world, but King Bowser had stolen each King's wand and given them to his children, from there, the children turned each King into a random animal.

Now it was Mario and Luigi's job to set things right! The Princess calls on them for aide, bringing them to her world. But after each of the Kid Koopas had been defeated, then the Princess was kidnapped by Bowser. And in a final battle between the Mario Bros. and King Koopa, the evil Bowser is defeated and the Princess is saved!

And at last, the script was finished.

Mario sent it to an editor to look over it and flesh things out, and then he submitted it. Almost immediately however, it was rejected for being too high of a production cost for the outlandish ideas, and an equally risk percentage. The critics of Broadway just didn't feel something like this could be done *and* taken seriously.

So... regrettably, Mario and Luigi rebranded the whole thing. No longer was the story of Mario and Luigi an epic fantasy, but instead... and action-comedy. They upped the quirk factor, agreed to let the feel of it be a bit more cartoony, and even settled on a way that would bring down production costs. But the critics weren't sold on it until they met the Brothers in person.

There, they won the critics over with jokes and lunch, and eventually convinced them to pick up the play and give it a shot. Not before they took one joke too far however.

Somewhere in the midst of the conversation, them being from Italy came up, and they were asked if they could do the accent. They could, and then they made that cartoony as well, and *that* is what convinced them.

Within a few months they started seeing ads all over New York for the show **Super Mario Bros.**

It was marketed towards mostly children and younger audiences, but with all the hype the Brothers didn't seem to care. And besides, they'd even gone back to the Mushroom Kingdom when they were casting and asked the Princess if she'd like to come play her own part.

Needless to say, she was more than excited to visit Earth.

And before they knew it, the day had come for the first showing to start...

And it was, of course, met with *resounding* success!

They were a hit! Within days the Mario Bros. were a household name in New York and they eventually had to hire an entire second cast so they could do the show more often. More people came to the shows that featured the *actual* Mario Bros., but still, a second show cast helped boost ratings *through the roof!*

It wasn't longer after that that they quit their jobs as plumbers. They were back in show business, and every time they were on stage, looking out at that crowd full of cheering fans with mama Pauline sitting in the front row... they knew they'd done their dad proud.

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**Director: Shigeru Miyamoto**  
**Assistant Director: Takashi Tezuka**  
**Original Music: Koji Kondo**  
**Executive Producer: Hiroshi Yamauchi**  
**Novelization: Lincoln Reign**

---

Three months had passed, and Mario and Luigi had done the show twelve times now, the B-Cast having done it about seven or eight times. But this time, as the A-Cast took their bows at the end of the play, they noticed a few specific audience members in the front row that looked kind of out of place.

After the show and when people were filing out of the theater, those strangers were the only ones that remained.

The Princess had already gone on her own to return home and the rest of the crew were busy with their own end of day work, so Mario and Luigi greeted them themselves.

"Some'n' we can help y' with?" Mario grinned, holding his hand out.

One of the strangers shook Mario's hand, the other man held out a folder.

"We are representatives of Nezumi Production Studios," the first man said. "We have *quite* the offer for you."

Mario looked at the folder. "... Whoa," he handed it off to Luigi. "Tha's... tha's a *lotta* cash..."

Luigi's eyes went so wide they might've popped out of his head. "Yea'... I-w... It's... Whoa."

"Yup," Mario nodded. "So what's th' offer?"

"We saw the B-Cast last night," the other man said. "We think they can carry on without you."

"But *you*," the first man said. "Something about you says you're ready for the big leagues."

"But wha's th' *offer*?" Mario pressed.

"Isn't it obvious?" the other man asked.

The first looked Mario square in the eye. "We want to turn this play, into a movie. The Super Mario Bros., on the *big* screen."

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## Chapter 0: Let the Show Begin!

