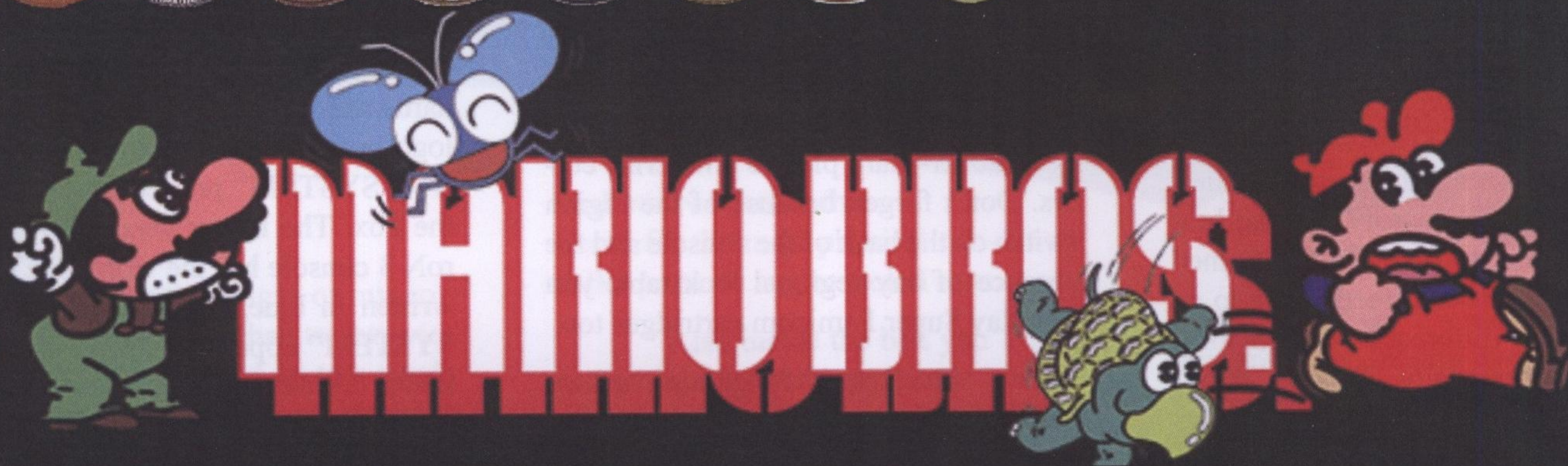


# TOKEN APPRECIATION



By Rob O' Hara

It's almost impossible for me to hear the word "Nintendo" without immediately thinking of the company's long time mascot, Mario. Mario, his brother Luigi, and their many friends and enemies were waiting in stores to greet Nintendo's latest console, the Wii U, on its launch day. As they have done on so many previous generations of consoles, the Mario Brothers once again teamed up to rescue ... ah, you know the story.

Everybody knows that Mario made his digital debut in the 1981 arcade classic Donkey Kong, but back then Mario wasn't the Mario we know today. In those days Mario was a carpenter, not a plumber, and he was known simply as "Jumpman." It wasn't until the 1983 release of Mario Bros. that Jumpman the Carpenter became Mario the Plumber. The rest, as they say, is history.

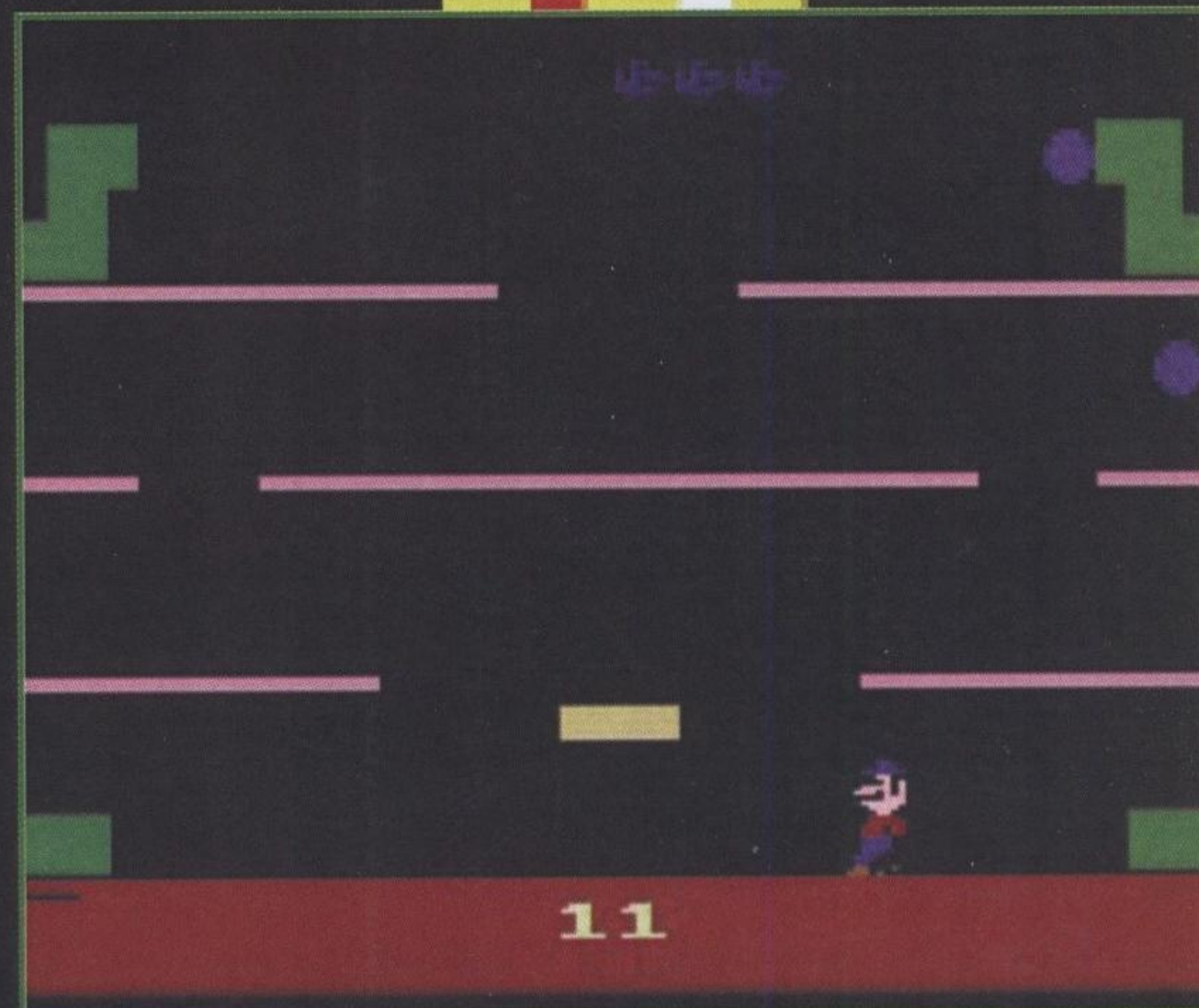
In Nintendo's Mario Bros., Mario (and, in two player mode, his brother Luigi) must defend New York City by battling a series of creatures invading the sewers beneath the city. To eliminate an enemy from the playfield Mario or Luigi must first flip them over onto their backs by hitting them from below, rendering them harmless. Levels are cleared by removing a predetermined amount of enemies, including turtles (Shellcreepers), crabs (Sidesteppers), and bugs (Fighter Flies). Subsequent levels contain more (and faster) enemies.

It is both interesting and amazing to see just how many



Arcade

Commodore 64

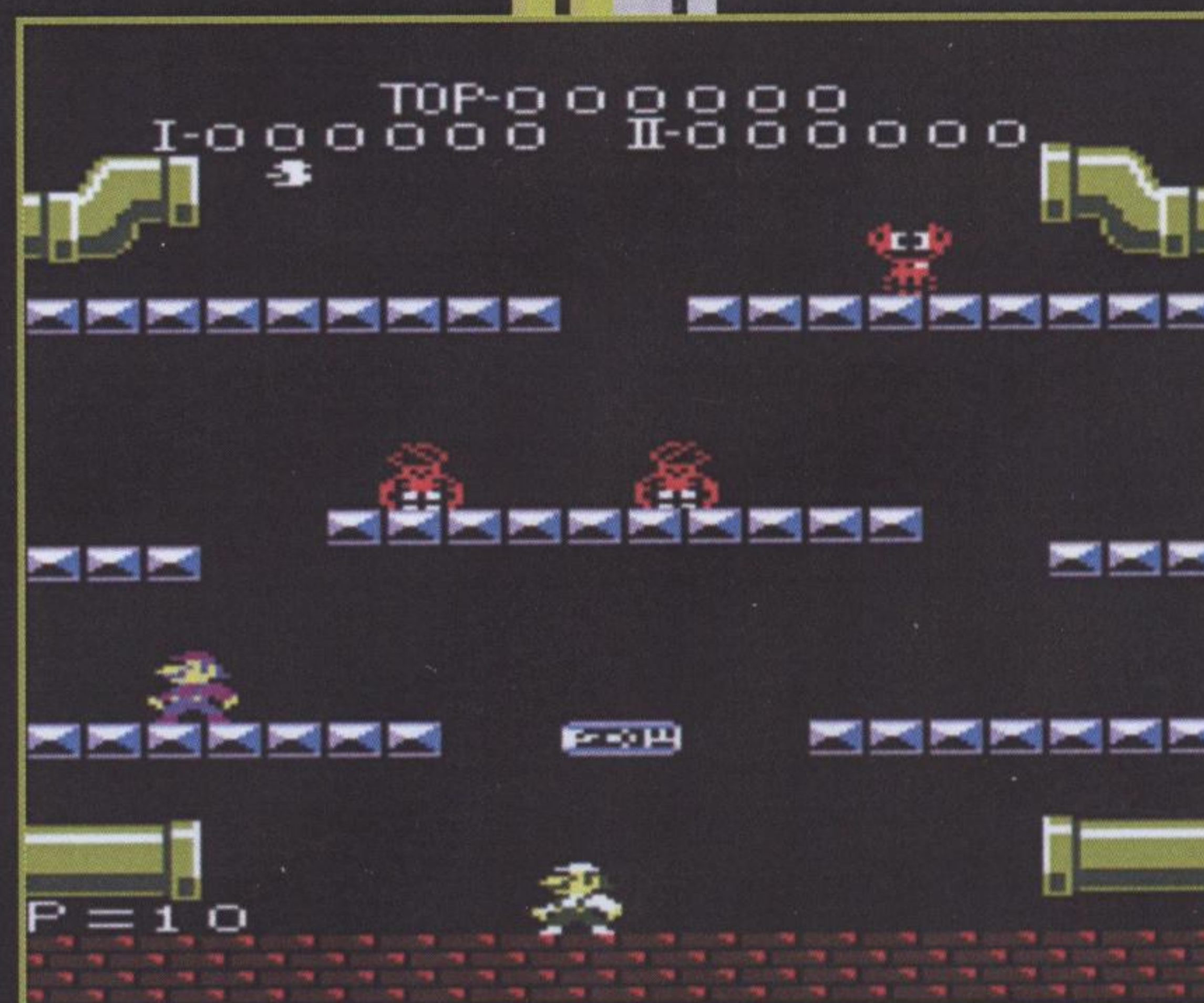
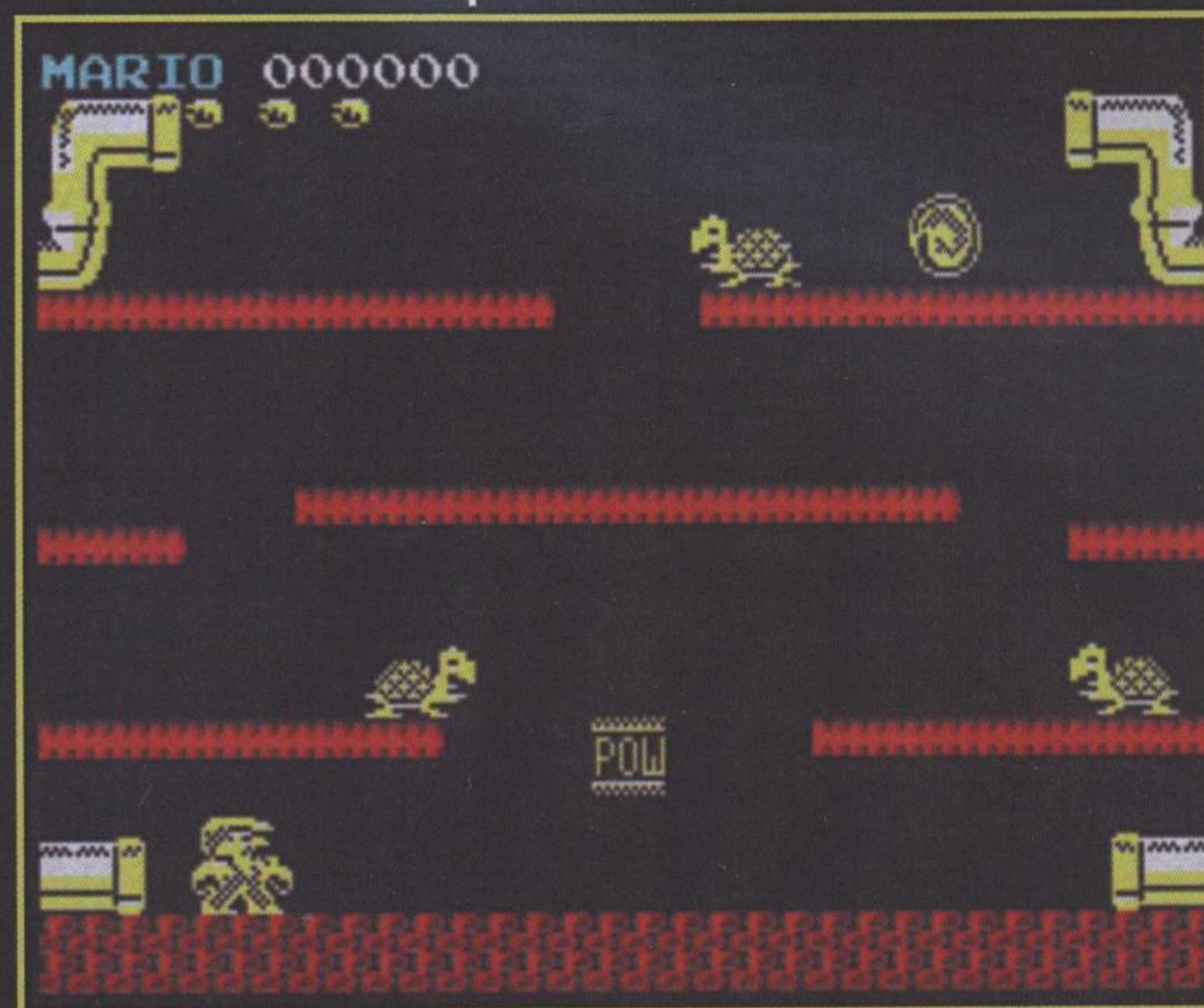


Atari 2600

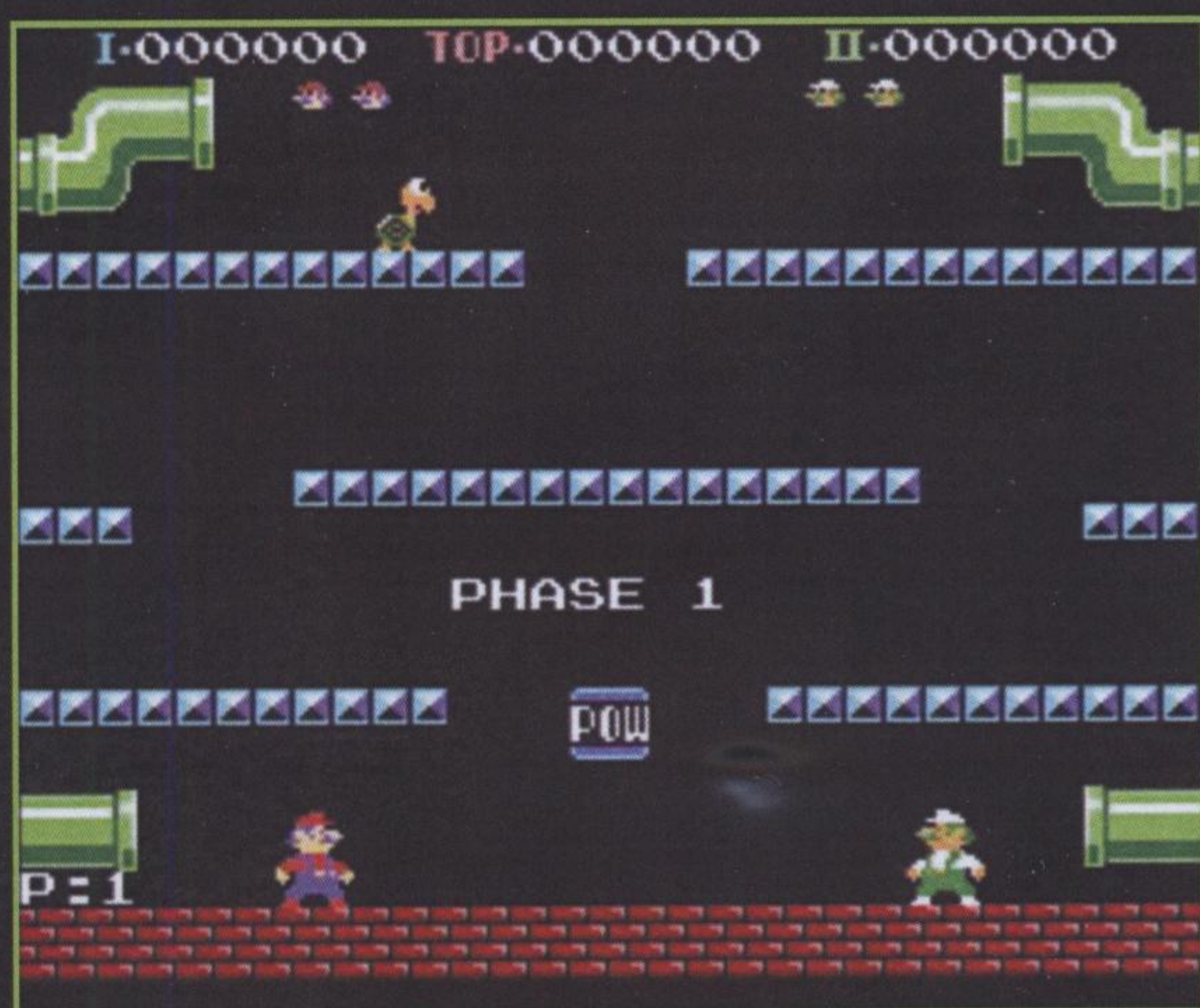
of the basic elements from a game released 30 years ago remain a part of the “Super Marioverse.” Besides the obvious inclusion of Mario and Luigi, you have enemy turtles (the predecessor to Koopas) and the concept of hitting enemies from underneath in order to flip them upside-down. Along with the turtles, Sidesteppers would also later appear in both Mario Kart and Super Mario Advance, and Fighter Flies also make an appearance in Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga. Additionally in Mario Bros. we see the debut of green plumbing pipes, fireballs, and collectible bonus coins -- all things Nintendo gamers would be seeing for the next 30 years.

Mario Bros. was a success in arcades, and like most other successful arcade titles of that time it was quickly ported to most of the popular 8-bit machines of the time, including consoles (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 7800, and NES) and computers (Amstrad CPC, Atari 8-bit, Commodore 64, and ZX Spectrum). Throughout the years, Mario Bros. has been released many times as a mini-game within other games, including Super Mario Bros. 3 on the original NES, Super Mario Advance and Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga on the Game Boy Advance, and even as a Virtual Console game

## Spectrum



## Atari 7800



## Nes

on the Wii. The game was so popular that unofficial versions were released for the Apple II, IBM PC, BBC Micro, and a homebrew version for the ColecoVision was released in 2009.

Port qualities vary largely based on the technical abilities of the host systems. Graphically, the Atari 2600 version is at the bottom of the pile, with giant green blocks replacing the arcade’s pipes and a sea of red across the bottom where bricks used to be. More annoying is the fact that the ability to bump the other player into the air has been removed, one of the most fun (or annoying, depending on whether you were the bumper or the bumpee) aspects of the original game. The Amstrad and Spectrum versions feature more detailed graphics with better animation, but each one is limited to four-color palettes (two of which are black and white).

While most of the other versions are passable, the best three ports are in my opinion the ones that appear on the Atari 7800, Commodore 64, and NES. Each of these versions capture all the major facets of the original game, along with the original’s physics. Many of the other versions do a poor job of emulating such things as Mario’s jumping arc or the way critters drop between levels, straying away from the game play of the original.

In 2005, Namco released a combination arcade game that included Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong Junior, and the original Mario Bros. in a single machine. One interesting thing about this machine is that it includes vertical monitors, because both Donkey Kong and Donkey Kong Junior were vertical games. Mario Bros., however, was originally a horizontal game. To compensate for this change, the game’s code in this version of Mario Bros. has been modified slightly to make everything fit on a vertical screen.

While Mario technically made his debut in Donkey Kong, I tend to think more of what and how we think about Mario and his brother came from this game. (And yes, since these are the Mario Bros., and their names are Mario and Luigi, that technically makes Mario’s full name “Mario Mario” and Luigi’s name “Luigi Mario”.) Although from a gameplay standpoint Mario Bros. may be simpler than most modern games, you should definitely seek out a copy for your system of choice and give it a chance. Your local plumber’s union, and the citizens of New York City, will thank you.