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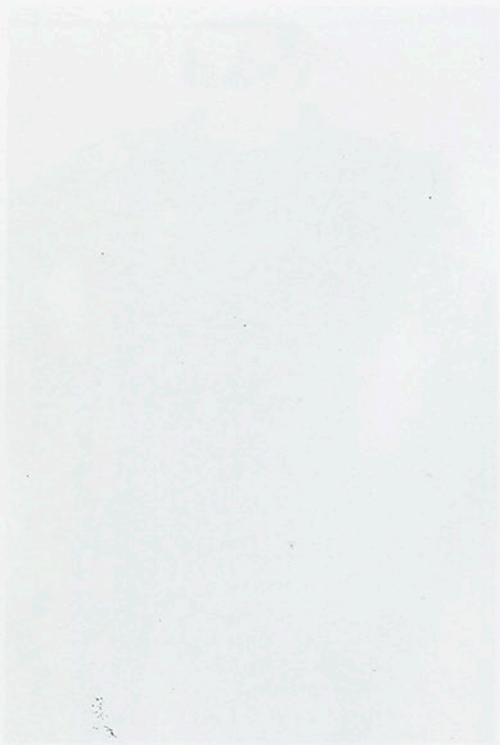
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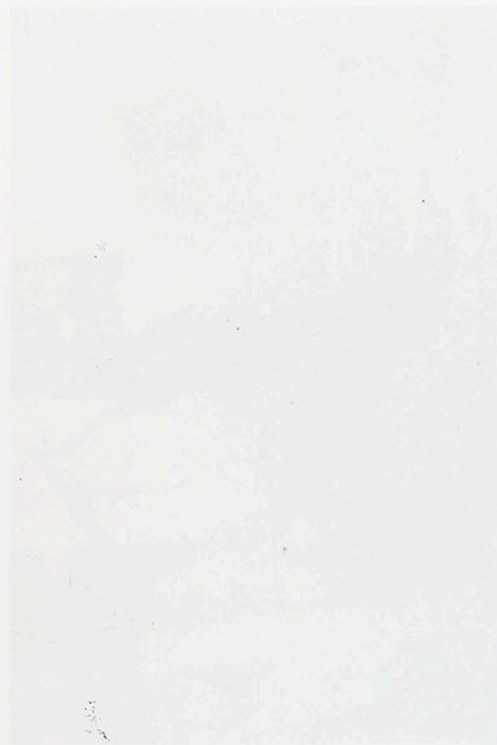












ALMOST UNREAL BROS.

A row of six photos of the Bros. (left to right: Anthony Quinn, John Huston, Paul Newman, and others) in various poses, some in costumes, some in casual wear. The photos are arranged in a horizontal row, with each photo showing a different pose or outfit. The Bros. are shown in various poses, some in costumes, some in casual wear. The photos are arranged in a horizontal row, with each photo showing a different pose or outfit.



GO-GO GIRLS =

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ALMOST UNREAL BROS.

A note on the making of *Super Mario Bros.* (1993), directed by Annabel Jankel and Rocky Morton. The film follows Mario and Luigi, two schlumpy Italian-American plumbers, as they take on the mission to rescue a princess in Dinohattan – a hidden dimension under Brooklyn where the inhabitants evolved from dinosaurs – and face deadly challenges from a terrifying lizard king.

The following material is collected from contemporary reporting on the production of *Super Mario Bros.* in *LA Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and from interviews and memoirs of the cast and crew.

I. PRIMORDIAL SOUP KITCHEN

"In 1992, production cranked into gear, and the costs ramped up. The crew began constructing a huge, elaborate set at the Ideal Cement Factory in Castle Hayne, North Carolina, a five-storey megacomplex previously used as a backdrop in *Terminator 2* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Production designer David L. Snyder, who had worked on *Blade Runner*, planned an intricate multi-level future city, dominated by neon signs and metal walkways. The set designers imagined Dinohattan as a gritty cyberpunk metropolis populated by tattooed bikers, gangsters and strippers ... dressed in leather fetish gear, fishnet tights and trenchcoats".

"When the driver turned onto Ideal Cement Road, they suddenly saw it. A huge concrete edifice of rusted catwalks and towers loomed from the Southern Gothic landscape, surrounded by burial mounds of grave and limestone quarry pits. But bent and crumpled automobiles blocked the entrance: a Plymouth Gremlin, a Ford Torino, and a police car with a bulldozer blade for a hood. Horns honked and modified engines rumbled as the crazy motorcade led them into the abandoned factory."

Producer Roland Joffé: "Dinoyork was born: an alternative reality, a kind of reverse version of contemporary America but "basically a reptilian society and therefore infinitely more brutal than our mammalian society ... we call it the *New Brutalism*."

PALER MOBROO RIS
KLYN LON DON BEVE
PA S RLYHILL

MIXED FRUIT COBBLER

"But it wasn't just directors Rocky Morton and Annabel Jankel's desire to put their own creative stamp on Super Mario Bros. that doomed it. Instead, their approach and its strangely literal interpretation of the game's biology was cobbled together atop a pile of other possible futures. After Nintendo sold the movie rights to independent producers Jake Eberts and Roland Joffé (*The Mission*) in Oct. 1990 – swayed by their more adult take on the material – the movie went through a dizzying cycle of conceptualization and reconceptualization, passing through the hands of nine screenwriters over seven scripts."

DRAIN MAN

An early idea for the movie involved a ring lost in a drain and that's how the plumbers get involved in the under-dimension of Brooklyn. The first screenplay was written by Oscar-winning screenwriter Barry Morrow, his story followed the American-Italian brothers Mario and Luigi on an existential trip so similar to Morrow's earlier *Rain Man*, that production named the script *Drain Man*.

WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON

"Two weeks into the shoot, screenwriter Ed Solomon got another call. 'I had done as much as I could do with the script and felt like it was at least coherent,' he said. 'It had cohesive characters and an interesting story. When I got down there, director Rocky Morton had cut it up with a bunch of other stuff he liked from other drafts and a bunch of new stuff – literally chopped it into pieces and taped it together.'

There was no through line. On set, there was also a sense that nothing was certain. The production designers and special FX people didn't know what they were building, the actors had arrived and they didn't know what they were playing. There was just a general sense of 'What the fuck is going on?'"

THE HYDRA OF LERNA

"A little while into the planned 10-week shoot, the LA Times sent journalist Richard Stayton to write a set report. It was the first indication to the wider industry that things were going awry. He found a cast and crew simmering with resentment over rewrites and production changes. They had nicknamed Jankel and Morton The Hydra, because there were so many heads giving orders, according to Stayton."

"To produce this film will require the patience of a saint, the obsession of a madman and a warrior's stamina."

BURSTING PIPES

"When shooting started, directors Morton and Jankel tried to salvage what they could of the story. Pages were rewritten on a daily basis. It got to the point where the actors didn't bother reading the new pages, knowing full well that more would likely follow before the clapperboard clapped. The general atmosphere on set was totally anarchic."

"In trailers squatting on the swampy ground, the day's script changes are being tossed, unread, into drawers. Why bother to read the latest rewrites? sigh Dennis Hopper and co-star Bob Hoskins.

"The directors won't give interviews?" Hopper says in his air-conditioned trailer, after being informed of the directors' decision not to talk to the press about their work. "That's the smartest thing I've heard from them. That's the only intelligent thing I've heard that they've really actually done."

"Rockabell" -- the cast and crew's dismissive moniker for directors Rocky Morton and Annabel Jankel. "Rocky and Annabel, the Flying Squirrel Show" is another nickname; "The Hydra" is yet a third. First there's two heads on this snake telling you what to do, explains Hopper, then four, then eight heads."

II. INTERDIMENSIONAL CASTING

I got a feelin' we ain't in Brooklyn no more.

DYSFUNCTIONAL BROS

Barry Morrow's Drain Man script established Mario as the dense but sweet elder brother ("at least 35") and Luigi ("around 22") as the horny younger sibling. Together they form a dysfunctional bro relationship, always already under the pressure of a failing family enterprise: Super Mario Bros. plumbing.

THE LAWS OF PLUMBING

John Leguizamo, who played Luigi: "What do I know about plumbing? – Well, we spent two days with a plumber. He told us the three laws of plumbing: Hot water on the right; fecal matter travels downhill on a 45-degree slant; and your boss is a son of a bitch."

A BRO IS A BRO IS A BRO

Leguizamo said in his memoirs that the only good thing that came out of the movie was that he started dating the actress Samantha Mathis who played against him as the cute paleontologist Daisy.

Leguizamo said he stole Mathis from Nicholas Cage and then River Phoenix stole Mathis from Leguizamo. When they were dating (Leguizamo and Mathis) he wanted to give her an expensive necklace but his dog ate it. He gave his dog a laxative to retrieve the necklace and give it to Mathis. In his autobiography he fantasizes about her still wearing the necklace and likens her to a "heist movie" because "she likes to get stolen."

MILD SENSATIONS

According to Leguizamo, Bob Hoskins (who played Mario) kept pouring shot glasses of scotch for them in between scenes, calling it the "mild sensation". Leguizamo and Hoskins got wasted before a scene with the Super Mario Bros. van and Leguizamo shut the van door on Hoskins' hand and broke one of his fingers.

RAGE HOPPING

"I didn't even know it was a game," Bob Hoskins says to the interviewer. "It was my kids that told me. They said 'What's your next film', and I said 'Super Mario Bros.'"

"Oh, that's the game!"

"Oh, oh, what?"

"Yeah, here, and this is you!"

"And I saw this thing jumping up and down and thought ... (pause)

'I used to play King Lear.'"

KOOPA KINO

Danny DeVito turned down Mario and Nintendo rejected Tom Hanks as Luigi, while Michael Keaton and Arnold Schwarzenegger each turned down King Koopa.

"Samantha Mathis (Princess Daisy) saw the movie once – "That was enough ... I will say we had an extraordinary press junket in Japan. They sent John Leguizamo, Bob Hoskins and myself. It must have been hosted partly by Nintendo. We were there for over two weeks. I remember being in an old temple in Tokyo with Bob and John, and there were Buddhist monks praying for the success of the film."

III. DE-EVOLUTION OR EXTINCTION

"Devolution is the notion that species can revert to supposedly more primitive forms over time. In Super Mario Bros. the notion of devolution is best represented by the Goomba henchmen of the evil King Koopa. Extinction is the notion of a dying out of a species."

SOMEBODY ELSE'S DINNER

"The plot of this family-oriented movie about vicious reptilian sociopaths is -- like the game -- simple. Producer Roland Joffé described the Super Mario Bros. game as "a food chain game -- it tells us we're all just somebody else's dinner"

FASCIST PINHEADS

"The creature design team abandoned the Super Mario game's Goomba villains -- walking shiitake mushrooms -- and replaced them with an army of ... dino humanoids with oversized bodies ... The fanged mushroom goombas became towering, broad-shouldered, scaly pinheads in fascist uniforms."

Someone is in the process of devolution and out comes a Goomba.

THERE IS NO MOTHER

Tight shot of a black and white photograph of the bros' dad -- a working man's face, proud, stubborn, with a curly moustache. The picture is flanked by two framed citations for excellence in plumbing.

"It's no accident that Nintendo player's guide *Mario Mania* boasts that the Italian-American plumber has "a heart of gold valves and spigots."

TRUST THE FUNGUS

"The fungus has become a rival ... The fungus is taking over. What had once been a minor element in the video game now dangles, brown and ominous, from every corner of the sets."

POST-HIPSTER RUIN

"New York has entered a state of intense decay. A giant fungus crawls across the city, feeding on brick and mortar. The Hudson River has become a dusty plain, and what's left of Manhattan -- five seedy blocks surrounding the plundered towers of the World Trade Center -- has turned into an eerie universe of reptiles and con men."

"... a seedy, claustrophobic, hostile but oddly invigorating New York City ... for reptiles and dinosaurs as well as plumbers ... filled with vendors that sell blood tonics, knife salesmen, soapbox preachers and eternally broken cash machines."

Tighten 'em nuts, not loosen 'em.

THE STENCH

"After principal photography wrapped, the directors returned to LA to discover that various cast members had spoken to the LA Times. The story ran on the front page of the paper's Calendar section and contained a lurid catalogue of complaints about the directors and accusations that the movie was a total car wreck. When Morton arrived at the editing suite he found he'd been locked out, but there was worse to come.

"CAA (one of Hollywood's leading talent agencies) dumped us immediately," he remembers. "We couldn't get an agent. No scripts would come. We couldn't get meetings. Literally, the phones stopped ringing. It all was because of that front page article. Everyone reads Calendar in LA. Nobody wanted to touch us. We were like lepers in Hollywood. Still to this day I have projects and I call up the managers and agents to try and represent it and they say 'You did Super Mario Bros.? Oh God...' It was like 20 years ago, but it's still there. What can you do?"

MUSHROOM EMPIRE

The possibility of a coming Mario spin off empire is dependent on the success or failure of the 2023 release of the untitled Mario animated film.

"In May 2021, Nintendo announced interest in producing more animated films based on its IP if the Mario film is successful.

**SON OF A
SCANDI
PLUMBER**

The following November, reports emerged that Illumination was developing a Donkey Kong spin-off film, with Seth Rogen set to reprise his role. In February 2022, Charlie Day expressed interest in doing a Luigi's Mansion movie."

The soundtrack for Super Mario Bros., released on May 10, 1993, by Capitol Records, featured a song from Roxette called *Almost Unreal*, which was released as a single. The music video featured scenes from the film and a de-evolution theme. *Almost Unreal* was originally written for the film *Hocus Pocus*, but ended up attached to the Super Mario film instead. This change angered Roxette co-founder Per Gessle.

Super Mario Bros.
By Annabel Jankel & Rocky Morton
1993
104 min
35mm
1.85 : 1
Dolby Digital

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MARIO

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