

Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door No Badge/No Shine Sprite Challenge FAQ

by Thundaka

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PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND YEAR DOOR
NO BADGE/NO SHINE SPRITE CHALLENGE FAQ
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VERSION HISTORY

v1.00: First draft. Feel free to contact me with any corrections or suggestions.

INTRODUCTION

Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door ranks as one of the weirdest games I have ever played. While minigames are a staple of the role-playing genre, not many games require them to perform basic attacks or defend yourself on the battlefield. Fewer still fight their battles on a theater stage where the audience can power you up with applause. And I can't think of any other game where the protagonist folds himself into a boat and goes sailing down a river.

Still, weird is not a bad thing. Paper Mario's bizarre battle system is surprisingly deep, as you need sharp reflexes and good planning to make full use of your strongest powers and react to your enemies' attacks. And it is hands down one of the funniest games I have played.

That said, even the most entertaining experience can wear thin with too much repetition. The game's Badge system can make Mario and his allies extremely powerful, to the point that no enemy can pose a serious challenge to you. Naturally, a skilled player could increase the challenge by abstaining from badges and relying on clever timing and inventory management. But that policy tends to shift the burden to your party members' advanced attacks, especially Fiery Jinx and Bob-ombast, and so the game remains pretty easy from start to finish.

This challenge is an entirely different beast. It has only two rules:

- 1) Never equip a badge.
- 2) Never use Shine Sprites to power up your allies.

That second rule completely transforms the experience. Besides teaching your allies their advanced attacks, Shine Sprites are responsible for most of their attack power and HP. Without them, neither Mario nor his allies can easily overpower the tougher enemies that appear late in the game. Special Attacks and items become absolutely essential to your survival, and because

both are limited you will need to become an expert at resource management.

It really should go without saying, but this challenge is not intended for first-time players. Therefore, there will be frequent SPOILERS WITHOUT WARNING throughout the guide.

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MARIO'S ARSENAL

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To triumph without power-boosting Badges or 90% of your most powerful attacks, you will need to master the resources still available to you. All the available attacks and defensive powers are listed below, with strategy notes on the best uses for each.

Paper Mario combat involves a lot of improvisation, though a good general rule is to save your items for the boss battles. Items are extremely powerful (and absolutely mandatory against many bosses), but because your inventory is small you cannot afford to constantly sling items in random battles. Fortunately, you will hardly ever need to: you can easily win most battles with your free and FP-based attacks, and if you are good at Stylish moves you should always have an Earth Tremor or Art Attack ready to wipe out the really dangerous formations.

-NOTE: The strategies in this guide ignore the existence of Superguard. This powerful defense completely neutralizes the damage from an attack, and deals an automatic point of damage in return. Unfortunately, its power is limited by the incredibly precise timing required. The strategies here assume that you rely on normal Defending instead, which in many cases is difficult enough. (If you can consistently Superguard, most of the defensive strategies listed here will be rendered irrelevant.)

I) Jump and Hammer Attacks

Most of your offense will come from Mario's basic jump and hammer attacks, much more so than in a normal game. It is assumed that you are well familiar with which enemy defenses (spikes, flight, etc.) require jump or hammer attacks specifically. If that is not the case, you are not ready for this challenge.

While not required to deal damage, every Star Power-generating attack (that is, everything except Items and Special Attacks) can be turned into a Stylish move by pressing A with the right timing. This greatly accelerates your Star Power recovery, allowing you to heal with Sweet Treat and use devastating moves like Art Attack much more liberally. The Stylish timing for each attack will be noted under its description.

-Normal Jump: It's free, it works on most enemies regardless of position, and it's available for the whole game. The basic Jump loses utility late in the game, since you'll need Spin/Spring Jump or hammer attacks to deal with your enemies' higher Defense, but it remains a great way to immobilize Koopas, Buzzy Beetles, and similar enemies throughout.

**STYLISH: Tap A a second time just after the first bounce.

-Spin Jump (2 FP): For most of the story, this attack is the absolute best offense against bosses. Only Spring Jump beats it for raw damage, and with its easier timing and low FP cost Spin Jump remains my preferred mode of

attack even then.

****STYLISH:** You have to tap A at the top of your jump, BEFORE the first hit. This can potentially lose you the second hit if you are sloppy, hurting both damage and Star Power recovery, so stay alert and tap A very soon afterwards.

-Spring Jump (4 FP): Far and away the most powerful non-Special attack in the game, dealing a massive 12 damage before Attack bonuses and Defense are factored in. Unfortunately, the difficult timing can be a major problem. Because Mario remains offscreen for several seconds, only to reappear right before the button press, it is easy to miss the button prompt and lose the essential second hit entirely. The one clue you're given is Mario's shadow on the ground; it's usually enough against small enemies, but will be completely obscured by the bodies of larger enemies. Spring Jump is absolutely devastating if you can master the timing, though if the timing is too much of a headache you can still get by with Spin Jump alone.

****STYLISH:** Just after the second bounce, as he hits the top of his final rebound.

-Normal Hammer: The hammer is the weapon of choice for prickly enemies whose defenses (spikes, flames, etc.) make jumps impossible. You will rarely use hammer attacks in boss battles, since the Spin Jump surpasses it in damage early on, but it's a helpful option for bosses who can buff their Defense or counter your jump attacks.

****STYLISH:** Tap A immediately after the hit.

-Super Hammer (2 FP): Rather than boosting raw damage, Mario's hammer upgrades allow him to damage multiple ground-bound enemies in one blow. Unfortunately, in practice Super Hammer is one of Mario's least effective attacks, as 1 damage per turn rarely makes a difference in battle.

****STYLISH:** Hit A about a second after the hit, as his spin slows down.

-Ultra Hammer (4 FP): Though still irrelevant in boss battles, Ultra Hammer can be an effective form of crowd control. 3 points of Defense-ignoring damage can easily shave off a turn or two: for example, you can eliminate multiple high-Defense Chain Chomps in just two turns by abusing Ultra Hammer plus Yoshi's Gulp.

****STYLISH:** Same as above, though trickier because he spins and decelerates faster.

II) Allies

-Goombella: For most of the game, your first partner is really only useful for the Tattle ability. Her damage output is low, so don't expect to be using her in most battles.

--Headbonk: Goombella's basic attack is functionally identical to Mario's jump. It is helpful early on against Koopas and floating enemies, though it becomes irrelevant once Yoshi joins the team.

****STYLISH:** Hit A just as she leaves the ground for the first bounce. The second hit comes very soon after, so to get the full damage (and Star Power recovery) you'll need to be quick on the trigger.

--Tattle: I find it convenient to put Goombella in the front line when entering a new area. Since Tattle permanently displays an enemy type's HP, three or four uses at the beginning of a dungeon can give you a great tactical advantage in every subsequent battle. It is also helpful in drawn-out boss fights, as it provides an easy way to tell when you can

finish the boss with an all-out offensive.

That said, there is no way to complete your Tattle Log in this challenge. Item management is a serious logistic issue in many battles, to the point that certain bosses will not allow you to waste an extra turn on a non-damaging move. (Not to mention that the toughest enemies in the Pit of 100 Trials are impossible to reach, as you would run out of items long before you could battle them.) It can be a very effective move, but it's not always the best option.

**STYLISH: Double-tap A.

-Koops: Like Goombella, your Koopa friend loses a lot of utility once Yoshi comes along. His inherent Defense stat is occasionally useful, as it allows him to subtract up to 2 damage with a successful Defend (3 if he also spent a turn on the Defend tactic) rather than the usual 1, though he also has the unique disadvantage of being incapacitated by jump attacks if he fails to defend.

--Shell Toss: Functionally identical to the starting hammer, Koops' basic attack is effective against Dry Bones, Spiky Goombas, and not much else. For a long time he is the only ally whose normal attack is immune to contact damage (Bobbery is the only other), but Yoshi's Gulp is so much better in almost any situation that he's hard to recommend in the long term.

**STYLISH: Tap A just after striking the enemy.

--Power Shell (3 FP): Power Shell's unique ability to hit every ground enemy at once can be a useful tactical tool. Gulp is still usually the better move for attacking groups, but there are times when 1 or 2 points of damage are just what you need to eliminate an enemy group without triggering their worst attacks.

**STYLISH: Tap A as soon as Koops slides to a halt, but before he leaves the shell.

-Flurry: Truth be told, I almost never use Flurry. This is partly because I don't care for her as a character, but also because in practice she serves as a substitute Goombella who is harder to control. Aside from certain parts of Chapter 2, she's just not that useful in battle.

--Body Slam: The only difference between this move and Goombella's Headbonk is that she deals her damage in a single blow, allowing her to damage targets with 1 Defense from the air. Since very few airborne enemies have any Defense, and the finicky controls make it possible to miss altogether, it's not especially impressive.

**STYLISH: Tap A the instant she lands.

--Gale Force (4 FP): This attack is an interesting option, providing an easy way to remove a large group of enemies. I don't much care for it--it doesn't give you any Star Points, and it does nothing to bosses or any enemies left behind--but it's always there if you feel the need to thin out a mob and Special Attacks aren't an option.

**STYLISH: Tap A just after your enemies have left the screen.

-Yoshi: Far and away the best ally on your roster. Defense 0 enemies are very vulnerable to his Ground Pound, and he can punish high-Defense enemies with Gulp. Aside from the odd boss with charge-up attacks, he is your go-to ally for most random encounters and almost every boss battle.

--Ground Pound: Yoshi's normal attack is twice as strong as those of your

first three allies, and just like Goombella's it will knock down aerial enemies and flip over Koopas and Buzzie Beetles. It combines especially well with Power Lift, since the damage bonus applies to each of its 4 hits. Its only real weakness is high Defense and/or contact damage, a problem that Gulp will almost always solve.

**STYLISH: Two opportunities, first as he spins in place before the first hit and again when he lands on the ground.

--Gulp (4 FP): It's difficult to overstate how powerful this move is. Gulp deals 4 damage to the two closest ground-based enemies, ignoring Defense and any of the enemy's contact defenses. You will constantly be using this move in the later dungeons. Its only shortcoming is that it misses fliers, so make sure that you knock them down first if needed.

**STYLISH: Just as the second enemy is hit, or (if only one target) when the first enemy lands on the ground.

-Vivian: Also a valuable ally, though in a different way than Yoshi. Vivian's specialty is in dodging charged attacks via Veil, a very important ability in the final battle and several of the boss battles that precede it.

--Shade Fist: This is the only non-item attack that does full damage even if you fail the minigame. However, by succeeding you will also set most enemies on fire, dealing an extra point of damage for the next two turns and putting her damage output on par with Yoshi's and Bobbery's. This is especially valuable when fighting Magikoopas and Dark Wizzerds, as the flame damage disrupts their illusion spell and shuts down their offense. (Since Bomb-type enemies explode if set on fire, you should either deliberately fail the minigame or switch her for someone else in those battles.) She can strike both airborne targets and those with spiked helmets, though she remains vulnerable to full-body spikes and fire/electric contact damage.

**STYLISH: Tap A at the end, as she rises from the ground.

--Veil (1 FP): If you can see the attack coming, you can dodge it with this move. You'll be using this a lot in the Twilight Woods, as well as any boss fight where a damage-charge attack is used. The downside is that Mario and Vivian sacrifice a turn afterwards, so be careful to save it for their most dangerous attacks.

**STYLISH: Tap A as she and Mario rise from the ground, after you've dodged the enemy attack.

-Bobbery: His 20 HP makes him the tank of the party, and he has pretty decent offense as well. While none of his attacks are quite as powerful as Gulp, he is arguably the best ally if you want to deal damage without spending FP.

--Bomb: This attack deals 4 damage in one big chunk, or 5 to flame-type enemies. It also flips over Cleft enemies, removing their Defense and spikes in addition to disabling them. Its downsides are that it will instantly detonate Bomb-type enemies (which can damage the party) and that it is limited to the same targets as the hammer.

**STYLISH: Tap A as soon as he lands.

--Bomb Squad (3 FP): I have yet to find one good use for this move. The time delay makes it largely worthless in random battles, where you want to eliminate enemies before they can damage you, and the individual hits tend to be too weak and spread out to be effective on bosses. Ignore this, and stick with his normal Bomb.

**STYLISH: Tap A just after the last of the three bombs has been tossed.

-Ms Mowz: She is the only party member you must go out of your way to collect, and there really isn't much reason to do so. Her only real advantage is the ability to ignore enemy Defense for free, and given her low damage she's hardly worth the trouble. Unless you want an extra body to absorb one or two more attacks during the final battles, I wouldn't bother recruiting her.

--Love Slap: This move deals 2 points of Defense-ignoring damage. Gulp deals twice that much to a pair of enemies, and unlike her it bypasses contact damage. Any FP saved by this move will likely be outweighed by the HP lost due to enemy attacks.

**STYLISH: Tap A after the third and final slap.

--Kiss Thief (2 FP): Steals the item that an enemy is holding, and adds it to the party's inventory. While this move has some utility--a powerful offensive item like a Shooting Star can seriously mess up the party, and a Life Shroom effectively doubles the HP of the enemy that carries it--most of the time it is more practical to simply eliminate the enemy before it can use that attack. You often won't have room in your inventory to keep the item, and wiping out the enemy will prevent both the item attack and its normal moves.

**STYLISH: Tap A at the beginning, when she starts walking toward the enemy.

III) Special Attacks

-Sweet Treat (1 Star): This simple move restores a significant amount of HP and FP for a low cost, and is thus one of the most efficient uses of Star Power in the game. Combine it with frequent Stylish attacks to rapidly refill the gauge, and this move allows you to continue winning random encounters indefinitely without consuming precious items. It also removes all status effects, a powerful benefit when facing the final boss and certain other tough battles.

-Earth Tremor (2 Stars): The best way to neutralize dangerous formations for the first half of the game. Even once you have Art Attack, it's still highly effective against groups with low HP. You can easily get 4 damage out of it every time, enough to instantly kill most early enemies and hit the fliers, and with a bit of skill you can often hit 5 or even 6 damage. (Note that enemies who hang from the ceiling can only be hit by the 6-point version.) It is the only non-item attack which can eliminate certain enemies early on, so it's a good idea to save 2 Stars for it whenever you can.

-Clock Out (2 Stars): I never use this attack, because it's almost always easier to destroy your enemies outright with Earth Tremor or Art Attack. Its Stop effect isn't fully reliable, and many of your strongest foes are entirely immune.

-Power Lift (3 Stars): A favorite choice in boss battles, since its damage boost combines very well with your powerful jump attacks. It is the most powerful offensive Special available if you can reach +3 Attack, though even +2 translates to a massive bonus for your multi-hitting moves.

-Art Attack (4 Stars): From the moment you obtain it, Art Attack is the most reliable way to win normal battles. It can reliably deal 12 damage to every enemy on the field, provided that your enemies are normal-sized, and unlike Showstopper no enemy is immune to it. The one area where it falls flat is against screen-filling bosses like the ones in the final dungeon, who cannot

be effectively encircled and damaged.

-Sweet Feast (5 Stars): While it does heal three times as much as Sweet Treat, Sweet Feast is an inefficient use of Star Power. Sweet Treat can take care of the minor HP and FP loss you'll typically sustain between encounters, and for more serious damage it's best to rely on items.

-Showstopper (2 Stars): This is one of my favorite ways to win random battles. While some enemies can resist its instant-death effect, 9 times out of 10 it is an immediate victory at half the cost of Art Attack, allowing you to use it much more frequently. Its main downsides are that (a) certain enemies are immune to it, most notably Piranha Plants and Chain Chomps, and (b) any enemies who are left behind will be undamaged.

-Supernova (6 Stars): Undeniably the most powerful attack you have access to, though also an expensive one. Its best use is against the massive bosses Art Attack can't handle, as it does a reliable 15 damage regardless of size. Still, the high Star Power cost means you can't use it very often. For this reason, the cheaper Art Attack remains the best way to win random battles even in the final dungeon.

IV) Items

The items listed here are the only ones you will need in this challenge. Any other items can safely be sold for extra coins, preferably at the first opportunity.

-Ultra Shroom (+50 HP): Together with the Life Shroom, this item is essential for your survival. The last few bosses deal out massive amounts of damage, so to survive them Mario needs something which packs a whole lot of healing into a single slot. While you can often do without if Mario's max HP is high enough, they are mandatory in the last few boss battles.

-Life Shroom (+10 HP): Since your allies' HP remains low throughout the entire game, it is not unusual for the later bosses to take out one of your allies every other turn. For this reason, the Life Shroom is very powerful: not only does it keep your allies in the fight and act as a safety net for Mario, but because it activates automatically your allies can afford to keep attacking without stopping to heal themselves every turn. The final boss in particular requires as many Life Shrooms as you can carry into battle.

-Jammin' Jelly (+50 FP): If you need to recover FP during a boss battle, you'll want it in a highly concentrated dose like this. There are only two times when I found it necessary (in the final battle and in the Grodus/Bowser battle that directly precedes it), though in both cases it was an essential investment.

-Power Punch (+2 Attack): A powerful item in boss battles, adding as much as 12 total damage to Mario's jump attacks. (The size increase radically alters the timing of your attacks, making it a liability if you are careless.) Even so, I rarely equip them. Power Lift serves the same role even more effectively, and in most boss battles you'll get better mileage by equipping Life Shrooms or Shooting Stars in their place.

-Thunder Bolt (5 damage): Effective against early-game bosses, and not much else. While its damage is high for that part of the game, an item which only damages one target is not really worth the space it takes up in your inventory.

-HP Drain (5 damage+healing): Like the Thunder Bolt, except it also provides

healing equivalent to a basic Mushroom. Fantastic if you get one before Hooktail, worthless otherwise.

-POW Block (2 damage): Surprisingly useful. This item flips Koopas, Clefts, and Buzzies onto their backs, an ability that is otherwise only available via Badges, and is thus quite effective against the more powerful breeds of those species. It is notable for being the one item you are required to use in any playthrough, as no other form of offense can possibly take down the Bristles in Chapter 1.

-Fire Flower (3 damage): While it won't see much use beyond Chapter 2 or so, this common item is highly effective in the early part of the game when your offense is still weak. A single Fire Flower can win many of the early battles outright, and even when it doesn't it speeds them up quite nicely. Just don't use them on Clefts or Buzzies, whose tough shells nullify fire.

-Ice Storm (3 damage): Similar to the Fire Flower, except that it bypasses fire immunity and has a chance of freezing its targets. Frozen enemies are immobilized for a few turns, and take an extra point of damage when they break free. I prefer Thunder Rages or Shooting Stars for their higher damage, but Ice Storms remain a viable option throughout the entire game.

-Thunder Rage (5 damage): One of the better items for random encounters. Its damage is enough to win many random encounters, no enemy is innately immune to it, and they are buyable as early as Chapter 4. You'll want several of these in areas with Spiky Parabuzzies.

-Earth Quake (5 damage): An inferior version of Thunder Rage which misses flying enemies, and doesn't even flip enemies the way the POW Block does. Aside from maybe the first trip through the Twilight Woods, when you don't yet have unlimited Thunder Rages, it's not worth the item slot.

-Shooting Star (6 damage): A strictly superior version of Thunder Rage. Once you can buy them, trade in all your Thunder Rages for these.

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WALKTHROUGH

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I. Prologue: A Rogue's Welcome

-Useful items: Fire Flower

-Enemies: Goomba/Paragoomba - HP 2, Attack 1, Defense 0
 Spiky Goomba - HP 2, Attack 2, Defense 0
 Spinia - HP 3, Attack 1, Defense 0

Step off the boat, walk around, and within a few seconds you'll pratfall into your first boss battle.

BOSS BATTLE: Lord Crump
HP 5, Attack 1, Defense 0
-Difficulty: 0/10

It's mathematically impossible to lose this battle. Do be sure to defend against his attacks, so you don't have to heal once the fight is done.

After making your escape, Goombella joins you as your first teammate. Yay!

Before heading to Frankly's house on the east side of town, I strongly suggest you do two things. First, try heading to the west side. You'll run into Zess Tee and step on her contact lens, prompting her to block the entrance to that part of town until you buy a new one. (This lady sure knows how to hold a grudge.) You can do this at any time prior to the start of Chapter 3, but if you wait until the last minute it will be a lot less convenient.

Second, enter the Toads' shop. After talking to the owner and placing an order for a replacement lens, spend all your coins on Sleepy Sheep. You should have 12 of the things, plus a free Mushroom as a bonus, all of which should be stored away. You'll be very glad you did when you reach Petalburg.

As soon as you enter the east side you will be bum-rushed by a pickpocket, who swipes half your coins. If you followed my advice this will only result in a 2-coin loss, as the rest of your wealth is stored in ovine form. Walk into the second house to meet the professor and begin the expedition down to the Thousand Year Door. Both Frankly and Goombella will encourage you to equip the new Power Smash badge. Resist the peer pressure, and continue right to encounter a gang of Goombas.

EVENT BATTLE: Goomba, Spiky Goomba, Paragoomba
-Difficulty: 1/10

Since you'll be encountering these guys frequently throughout the game, I suggest the following: put Goombella in front, and have her Tattle on each enemy before Mario eliminates it with his jump or hammer. Only the Spiky Goomba will do any damage if you defend properly, so take him out first.

Continue deeper into the sewers. You'll mostly encounter Goomba variants, though close to the Cursed Chest you'll meet some Spinias as well. Practice opening each battle with a First Strike attack, particularly against the Spinias (who try to beat you to the punch with an attack of their own). I would also suggest that you practice triggering Stylish attacks as often as possible. Although they're not relevant yet, the massive Star Power refill they provide is a huge asset from Chapter 2 on. There's a Mushroom in the first ? block down the pipe, and a Fire Flower in the second. The Mushroom isn't really useful (though you can exchange it for a VERY useful item at the start of Chapter 4), but it's well worth it to collect Fire Flowers for an upcoming boss battle.

Jump on the button, climb the stairs, grab the key, and use it to release the demon and (*shiver*) be turned into a paper airplane. It's a short trip to the Thousand-Year Door from there. Once you arrive, you gain the invaluable Sweet Treat and are whisked back to the surface. Go through Frankly's tutorial if you like (you are fully healed if you do), then return to the sewers once more. Now that you can glide onto the ledge on the far right, you can head to the rightmost screen and finally open the path to the first Crystal Star.

BOSS BATTLE: Blooper
HP 12, Attack 1, Defense 0 (Tentacles: HP 3)
-Difficulty: 1/10

Before you can begin wearing down Blooper's HP, you have to take out both

tentacles. I suggest skipping Tattle and having both Mario and Goombella go crazy with jumps, as that way you'll only have to defend against one tentacle slap before he falls down. (Due to the nature of the challenge, you won't have anywhere near a full Tattle Log by game's end. It's best to reserve Tattle for the enemies you'll be encountering more than once, and to focus on maximizing damage in boss battles.)

He won't attack for two turns after falling down, giving you plenty of time to wear down his health. None of his attacks inflict damage if you defend properly, but the timing for his ink blast can be difficult. You can recover your health with Sweet Treat, though the odds that you'll even need to before he dies are pretty slim.

II. Chapter 1: Castle and Dragon

-Useful items: Fire Flower x2, POW Block x2, Life Shroom

-Enemies:

- Goomba
- Paragoomba
- Spiky Goomba
- Koopa Troopa - HP 4, Attack 2, Defense 1
- Koopa Paratroopa - HP 4, Attack 2, Defense 1
- Cleft - HP 2, Attack 1, Defense 2
- Bristle - HP 2, Attack 1, Defense 4
- Cleft - HP 2, Attack 2, Defense 2
- Fuzzy - HP 3, Attack 1, Defense 0
- Dry Bones - HP 1, Attack 2, Defense 1

Welcome to Petal Meadows, the scenic gateway to Petalburg. Only the three Goomba variants appear on the route, though in much larger numbers than you found in Rogueport. Try to take out the Spiky Goombas as quickly as possible, and you should take little to no damage from the other ones. You will likely hit Level 2 somewhere along the way. Since you're not spending FP or using Badges, your first two or three levels should be focused on raising Mario's HP. Given what's waiting for you at the end of the chapter, it's important that Mario have plenty of HP to spare. Make sure to pick up the Fire Flower in the ? block just before you enter Petalburg proper.

By the way: While in battle, keep your eyes open for valuable items. Every so often, a member of the audience will toss an item onstage to help Mario and his partner. While these items are usually pretty weak--Honey Shrooms, Courage Shells, etc.--occasionally they'll give you a really rare and valuable offensive item. If a member of the audience has a Thunder Bolt, Thunder Rage, Earth Tremor, HP Drain, or Shooting Star, stand there for a moment and wait for them to deliver it. Each of those items will save you a full round in the Hooktail battle, making the whole ordeal much easier. (It is also possible to win such an item by killing an enemy who carries it, though this early in the game it's unlikely you'll find any enemies carrying those dangerous items.)

Once in town, your first stop should be the Petalburg item shop. Sell any otherwise useless items, then retrieve the Sleepy Sheep from storage and sell those as well. Keep at least one Mushroom in storage, as you can redeem it for a far better item a few hours from now. You'll get 120 coins for your trouble (an excellent return on your 96-coin investment), more than enough to take care of all your item needs for the near future.

For right now I suggest you purchase a POW Block. Then head to the second screen, talk to the Mayor in his pink house, and continue through the gate to

visit the Shwonk Fortress. Make sure to check your email as you exit Petalburg, as doing so is the only way to prevent the obnoxious multi-page reminder message from reappearing when you're emailed in the future.

Along the way you'll meet the first Koopa Troopas. Getting a First Strike jump on these guys is a priority: not only will it prevent them from striking Mario first, but it will also allow Mario to flip them over before his first turn. Since flipping them over causes them to lose two turns and drop to 0 Defense, Mario and Goombella can keep a large group of them perpetually disabled just by repeatedly jumping. This is an excellent battle to use Sweet Treat, should the need arise, as long as you've whittled them down to the last enemy. Be sure to collect the POW Block from the first ? block on the path.

Inside the first room, you'll run into two seriously tough monsters.

EVENT BATTLE: Cleft x2
-Difficulty: 2/10

Their 2 Defense is a problem, as you have neither Power Smash nor damaging Special Attacks to break through it. Your only option is to use a POW Block, which will eliminate them both in one hit.

Continue forward. There is a Fire Flower in the next ? block, and one more POW Block in the second-to-last bush before you reach the next room. Don't even try for a First Strike there, as you will take damage if you do.

EVENT BATTLE: Bristle x2
-Difficulty: 2/10

Not only do they have high Defense like the Clefts, but you can't even attempt a direct attack: the spikes on their heads prevent jumps, and they'll swat you away before you get close enough for a hammer strike. Items are completely mandatory here, though fortunately that POW Block renders them just as harmless as the Clefts.

One more screen awaits, with one more Fire Flower in the final ? block. Use the save block, then go forward to challenge the guardian to a quiz. While you can probably win the quiz without too much difficulty, I personally prefer to forfeit it. Upon failing the quiz the guardian will unleash 4 Spiky Clefts on you, which at your low level will net you a massive windfall of Star Points. (You'll need to have purchased the extra POW Block I suggested to defeat them.) Either way, the guardian begrudgingly opens the pipe to the sewer.

Once down there, you'll run into lots of Fuzzies. Their HP drain is less of a problem than you'd think--one attack each from Mario and Goombella will still finish them, regardless of whether they've healed--but because the defend timing is so difficult you're likely to take a lot of damage while you're down here. (You want to press A as the Fuzzy is stretching out during its second "suck" animation.) Still, Sweet Treat should be more than sufficient for any damage you do take. Once you have both Stone Keys, a boss will appear next to the return pipe.

BOSS BATTLE: Gold Fuzzy

HP 10, Attack 1, Defense 0

-Difficulty: 2/10

Thankfully the Gold Fuzzy doesn't drain your HP (it head-bonks you like a Goomba instead), so it is a lot easier to defend against than its brethren.

Once its HP falls to 6 or below, the Gold Fuzzy summons a crowd of regular Fuzzies to join the fight. The crowd of Fuzzies has high HP and adds several extra attacks per round, each of which must be defended seperately, so it's in your best interest to delay them from appearing. An easy way to do this is to have Goombella Tattle (or Appeal, or Defend) in the first round while Mario attacks, then have both attack in the second round. This way you only have to survive one round of regular Fuzzy attacks before the Gold Fuzzy falls, at which point the crowd disperses.

You can finally reach Hooktail's castle. It is essential that you make a detour back to the Petalburg shop on the way there. Buy enough Fire Flowers to fill 9 of your item slots, leaving the last slot free (in case you win a better item in battle).

You'll meet Koops on the west side of town. He is a valuable ally in many ways: his Power Shell is the first move that can hit the whole enemy party at once, he ignores spikes, and his field attack is one of the easiest ways to trigger a First Strike. He cannot hit flying enemies or flip over Koopa Troopas the way that Goombella can, though, and since you'll encounter more of them than spiked enemies Goombella is probably the better ally for the time being. I'd suggest upgrading your FP to 10 when you gain your next level (so Koops can use up to three Power Shells between Sweet Treats, instead of just one), though after that I would continue focusing on HP upgrades.

Use both of the Stone Keys, open the pipe with Koops's help, and enter the castle. The room past the moat is full of Koopas, many of whom can fly, so Goombella is still essential. (Getting a First Strike jump on the Paratroopas can be tricky, given how fast they move, but it is important that you try.) That said, you really do want to switch to Koops before triggering the next boss battle by the dungeon cells.

EVENT BATTLE: Red Bones

HP 5, Attack 3, Defense 1

-Difficulty: 3/10

Take out the Dull Bones in front of him right away with Power Shell. On any given turn, Red Bones will either toss a bone at a character (potentially flipping and disabling Koops if he does not defend) or build a new Dull Bones in front of him. Just keep on chipping away 1 HP at a time with the hammer and shell attacks, and before long he will fall.

Keep Koops in front in the next room, as his Power Shell will continue to be effective against the Dull Bones you'll meet ahead. Beyond there, it's a judgment call which ally stays in front. I would use Goombella when there are Koopas and Paragoombas onscreen, and Koops when you see Spiky Goombas and Dull Bones. There is a fairly even mix of enemies through the remainder of the castle, so expect to switch allies a lot.

Eventually you'll use Koops to slip into a barred-off prison cell, at which point your only means of escape is to collect the Mystery Key from the maze

of spikes. Deliver the key, and you'll be cursed to... turn paper-thin when you hold down a button. (The horror!) Doing so allows you to exit the cell, return to the dungeon area for the key, and then ascend the elevator. After much more exploration and key-collecting of this sort, you will eventually ascend an elevator and meet Ms. Mowz, world-renowned lady thief, for the first time. Grab the key in the second chest from the right. After you do, there is one more vital item to collect. Step back onto the catwalk you took to get there, and walk upward to fall off the left side. You will land on a platform with a trampoline. Use your new curse to walk through the bars, and collect the Life Shroom. With all 10 item slots filled, you are officially prepared for the boss battle.

Continue climbing the tower, use the recovery block if necessary, and save your game. At this point Mario should be Level 5, with 25 HP and 10 FP. If your inventory is filled to the brim with Fire Flowers as I suggested, you should be in decent shape for what is to come.

BOSS BATTLE: Hooktail

HP 20/10, Attack 5, Defense 1

-Difficulty: 5/10

Believe it or not, this early boss is one of the toughest endurance tests in the challenge. Because you can't lower her stats with Attack FX G, and you can't boost Mario's damage with Power Smash and the like, attacking normally is a losing proposition. Her attacks would tear through your HP long before you could chip through her health 1 HP at a time. Items are the only approach that give you a real chance at victory, and even then you have to use your inventory space very efficiently.

For the first 3 rounds, Mario and Koops must do nothing but toss Fire Flowers. This will leave Hooktail with 2 HP after her third attack, just enough for them to trigger the next dialogue with one more hammer and shell attack. (If you managed to collect a Thunder Bolt, Thunder Rage, HP Drain, or Shooting Star, the extra damage will eliminate the fourth round entirely.) Don't accept her bargain, and she will use her turn to recover HP instead of attack. At that point it only takes two more rounds: Mario and Koops both toss Fire Flowers in the first round, then one tosses a Fire Flower and the other uses a regular attack to finish her.

When all is said and done, this strategy only requires you to survive 4 attacks. Chances are good that no healing will be necessary: Mario has more than enough HP to survive even if he fails to defend, and so long as he stays in back Koops is only vulnerable to the breath attack. And even in the worst-case scenario (Hooktail uses nothing but breath attacks), the Life Shroom will auto-revive Koops and allow him to keep fighting.

Koops gets the happy ending he deserves, and Mario gets the devastating Earth Tremor attack. Huzzah!

III. Chapter 1 Epilogue

After playing through the Peach and Bowser interludes, the party will return to Petalburg. Return to the shop, then buy two Fire Flowers and at least 6 POW Blocks. This will also net you a free Ice Storm, a critical item for the next chapter. You can afford more items, if you'd like a simple way to deal with difficult-to-damage encounters, but that is enough to take care of your needs. Store away the POW Blocks, then continue west back to Rogueport.

Return down the pipe to revisit the Thousand Year Door, have the conversation with Frankly, and open the path to the Boggly Woods. Note that if you followed my advice regarding Zess Tee it is now possible to visit the west side of Rogueport, and buy Life Shrooms/Thunder Bolts in the shop there. I wouldn't recommend buying either just yet, due to your limited inventory space, but it is good to have options.

Make sure that you have the Ice Storm and both Fire Flowers in your inventory, along with any POW Blocks for random encounters, before you start the next chapter. If you still have the Life Shroom from Hooktail's castle, I would equip that as well. I suggest leaving at least two item slots empty for the majority of the game, to leave room for useful goodies tossed by the audience and/or won in battle.

IV. Chapter 2: The Great Boggly Tree

-Useful items: Power Punch, Ultra Shroom, Thunder Rage

-Enemies:

Cleft	
Pale Piranha	- HP 4, Attack 2, Defense 0
Dark Puff	- HP 3, Attack 2, Defense 0
X-Naut	- HP 4, Attack 3, Defense 0
Yux	- HP 3, Attack 2, Defense 0
Pider	- HP 5, Attack 2, Defense 0

The encounters here are a real pain, a fact that will become obvious as soon as you encounter your first Cleft. While his damage is nothing to write home about, his 2 Defense makes him impossible to defeat with normal attacks. There are two ways to take him out: use an item (other than Fire Flowers), or use the Earth Tremor Special Attack. Since your inventory space is limited, and Earth Tremor is rechargeable and capable of one-shotting any Pale Piranhas as well, I strongly recommend the latter. Consistently performing Stylish attacks is an easy way to quickly recharge your Star Power, though there will likely be times when you have to Appeal for a few turns to fully refill and unleash Earth Tremor. Needless to say, Koops is the better ally here: his shell can damage the Pale Piranhas, and by putting him in front and defending well you can eliminate all damage.

Punio leads you to the sealed-off tree, and then to Flurry's house. I recommend keeping Goombella in the battles ahead. You want to take out the Pale Puffs before they can charge themselves with electricity and unleash their lightning attack, a task that is much easier if both Mario and Goombella can damage them. You can potentially take them down with Koops' shell or the hammer after they are charged, but only if they stay at/move down to ground level and are in front. If a Pale Puff is charged and in the air, your only options are a 4+ Earth Tremor (the 1-3 damage versions won't reach him) or accepting the spell damage. Once the Pale Puffs are gone, you have plenty of time to switch in Koops and deal with the other enemies.

Double-check that you have the necessary items before talking to Flurry, since you won't be able to return to a shop until you win the next boss battle. I suggest that you exit the house, then re-enter after the cutscene to save. (Otherwise you will have to sit through the cutscene again if you die in battle.) Head west to meet and throw down with the Shadow Sirens, switching in Goombella before the battle starts.

BOSS BATTLE: Shadow Sirens

Vivian: HP 10, Attack 1, Defense 0

Marilyn: HP 12, Attack 2, Defense 0
Beldam: HP 9, Attack 1, Defense 0
-Difficulty: 4/10

As with Hooktail, smart item use is absolutely essential to your survival. The Shadow Sirens deal a whole lot of damage, way more than your weak party could survive if you fought them one at a time, which is why those multi-hitting items are so important.

Begin by having Mario toss the Ice Storm, while Goombella Tattles on Beldam. In addition to damaging all three Sirens, the Ice Storm has a decent chance of freezing one or more of them. This is especially useful for Beldam, who can freeze you in kind with Blizzard if you do not defend well. Assuming that neither team member is frozen, you can toss two more Fire Flowers in the next round to finish her off.

If Marilyn was frozen, you can Tattle her and finish her with a jump in the same round. If not, I suggest Tattling her, finishing Vivian, and then eliminating her with two more attacks in the next round. Both Beldam and Marilyn reappear in a later, much more difficult battle, so by Tattling them now you'll be able to track their HP then without sacrificing a turn. (Vivian does not reappear, so don't bother Tattling her.)

With Flurry's necklace in hand, you can return to her house and finally recruit her as an ally. While her field ability will see plenty of use through the rest of the chapter, I rarely find her useful in battle. That said, if you're inclined to use her she can fill much the same niche as Goombella does.

Return to the tree, expose the secret entrance, and head inside for your first encounter with the villainous X-Nauts. I suggest Tattling one of them once his partner is dead, as you'll run into a whole lot of these guys throughout the game. Save and then travel up to the top layer, fighting X-Nauts as you go. It's a good idea to keep either Goombella or Flurry as your ally, as you'll need jumps to take down the Yuxes before they can set up their impenetrable barriers and drag the battle out. (If you plan to Tattle them, wait until all other enemies are defeated before you do so.) Be sure to grab the Power Punch, which is hiding in the rightmost bush at the top of the second pipe. The Puni Elder is up top, waiting on the Blue Key to set her free.

After one brief encounter, the key in the treasure room will be yours. Make sure to pick up the Ultra Shroom in the far left chest as well. After some friendly upbraiding, the Elder rallies the 11 free Punis to your cause. With the Punis and their Orb in tow you can reveal the pipe that leads to the other side of the locked door, which in turn leads you to the gap that Flurry must blow them across. Before following them, make sure to drop to the lower level and pick up the Thunder Rage in the far right bush.

Stay to the right as you exit the pipe, and your Punis will do battle with a small squad of Jabbis. To turn the battle in your favor, use Flurry's breath to disorient the Jabbis and give your troops an easy chance to gang up on them. Enter the hole created by your scouting party to reach the chest with the Red Key, which will unlock the remaining 90 Punis on the top floor.

Before recruiting the rest of them, though, I suggest you take out the Piders infesting the upper path. These creepy crawlies will cause your Punis to panic and run off the edge, a major nuisance when you're trying to lead them all in the same direction, so it's best to take care of them before you have

to lead the whole crowd across. I suggest using Koops to trigger a First Strike from the safety of the ledge, as it is difficult for Mario to reach them directly. Battles with them tend to be slow: they often come in large groups, and their 5 HP ensures that each of them will take more than one round to kill. If your Earth Tremor timing is good, this would be an ideal place to use that move.

(Note that there is a secret item shop on the lower level, hidden behind an illusory wall that Flurry can blow away. This shop is your first renewable source of Ice Storms, which can be useful in a few battles during Chapter 3. While you can certainly survive without them, they're a good item to save for a rainy day.)

Return to the top of the tree to release the rest of the Punis. Don't worry if you leave some behind on the lower level, as the Elder will instantly teleport them back if you ask nicely. Float the whole crowd across with Flurry once more, then take the pipe down and head all the way across the walkway to conquer the main force of Jabbis. Once again, Flurry's breath will tip the battle heavily in your favor.

Beyond the Jabbi stronghold is another Orb slot, which you can use to open another pipe leading to a hidden lower level. You might encounter some Clefts down here, so keep Earth Tremor at the ready. You know the drill from here: Get the Punis trapped in the cage, hit the blocks in the Blue Key room, collect the invaluable Super Boots, and use a Spin Jump plus Flurry's breath to help all the Punis break free.

Your life becomes so much easier with the Super Boots on your feet. They instantly double your jump damage, allowing you to eliminate the X-Nauts and Yuxes in one attack, and with the extra boost from Spin Jump you can even one-shot those irritating Piders. If you haven't already, start investing in FP upgrades as you level up. It's a good idea to keep your max HP and max FP roughly balanced for most of the game (at least until you hit 50 FP or so), as you'll be relying VERY heavily on Spin Jump in almost every boss battle going forward.

Keep using Spin Jump and the Puni Orb to progress deeper into the tree, and eventually you will arrive at the bottom-most chamber containing the Crystal Star. At that point Crump will snatch it, and just for giggles will set off a time bomb. Don't worry too much about the timer: you can win every battle on the path, use the save block, and make it to the boss battle before the countdown is even halfway done.

BOSS BATTLE: Magnus von Grapple

HP 20, Attack 2, Defense 1 (Fists: HP 2, Attack 5, Defense 0)

-Difficulty: 3/10

Aside from his rocket fists, this is a pretty simple battle. Simply have Mario use Spin Jump on Magnus every safe turn while his ally attacks. Goombella is free to Tattle him if you like, though due to his Defense she can't damage the main body.

This is the one battle in the game where I deliberately rely on Flurry. She combines Goombella's ability to swat down the fists with Koops' raw damage. She can also potentially blow them out of the battle with Gale Force, though since the ability is unpredictable I would only resort to it in a true emergency. (Fire Flowers and a high-value Earth Tremor are options as well, though I don't recommend either.) Chances are good you won't even need to heal, though as long as you promptly eliminate the fists Sweet Treat can

easily keep pace with his damage.

The X-Naut invaders are expelled from the tree, and Mario gains a new Crystal Star. Viva la revolucion!

V. Chapter 2 Epilogue

The Bowser interlude is amazing. 'Nuff said.

Once you've brought the star back to the door and checked in with Frankly, Mario will be making a brief trip into the murky world of organized crime. (If you somehow forgot to talk to Zess Tee until now, you'll need to leave Rogueport again for the Contact Lens to arrive.) Buy a Dried Shroom and then a Dizzy Dial at the Westside shop, then tell the shopkeeper that your must... er, favorite color is yellow. Talk to Don Pianta upstairs, speak to Frankie and Francesca at the docks, and return for your complimentary blimp tickets.

And that's it. You'll want to buy at least three Life Shrooms at the Westside shop, and equip a handful of offensive items--mainly POW Blocks, though Ice Storms are handy if you have them--before boarding the blimp to Glitzville.

VI. Chapter 3 - Of Glitz and Glory

-Useful items: None

-Enemies:

Goomba	
Dull Bones	
Bristle	
Fuzzy	
KP Koopa	- HP 4, Attack 2, Defense 1
KP Paratroopa	- HP 4, Attack 2, Defense 1
Pokey	- HP 4, Attack 3, Defense 0
Spiny	- HP 3, Attack 3, Defense 3
Lakitu	- HP 5, Attack 2, Defense 0
Bandit	- HP 5, Attack 2, Defense 0
Big Bandit	- HP 8, Attack 3, Defense 0
Hyper Bald Cleft	- HP 3, Attack 3, Defense 2
Bob-om	- HP 4, Attack 2, Defense 1
Iron Cleft	- HP 6, Attack 4, Defense N/A
Red Spike Top	- HP 5, Attack 3, Defense 5
Shady Koopa	- HP 8, Attack 3, Defense 1
Shady Paratroopa	- HP 8, Attack 3, Defense 1
Green Fuzzy	- HP 5, Attack 3, Defense 0
Flower Fuzzy	- HP 6, Attack 3, Defense 0
Red Magikoopa	- HP 7, Attack 4, Defense 0
White Magikoopa	- HP 7, Attack 4, Defense 0
Green Magikoopa	- HP 7, Attack 4, Defense 0
Dark Crow	- HP 20, Attack 6, Defense 0
Hammer Bro	- HP 7, Attack 4, Defense 1
Boomerang Bro	- HP 7, Attack 2, Defense 1
Fire Bro	- HP 7, Attack 3, Defense 1
Red Chomp	- HP 6, Attack 5, Defense 3
Dark Koopatrol	- HP 25, Attack 5, Defense 2

Walk through a few story events, and eventually Mario will enter the arena as a minor league fighter. The bed in the locker room provides free HP and FP recovery between matches, though your Star Power remains limited to what you

can recover in battle. The condition for the first battle is always "Appeal to the crowd once." Pick Koops as your partner.

RANK 19 BATTLE: Goomba Bros (Goomba x5)

-Difficulty: 1/10

Poor sports that they are, the Goomba Bros open with an ambush. (This can potentially flip over Koops, so be sure to defend.) Still, they're as easy to eliminate as any Goombas. Have Mario use Appeal--you cannot advance to the next rank unless you do--and Koops eliminate them all with Power Shell.

You win the battle, and advance a rank to face a new opponent. Every battle that follows will be assigned a random victory condition from the following list:

- Appeal to the crowd 1/3 times.
- Win in 5 rounds or less.
- Take less than 20 HP of damage.
- Take damage at least 3/5 times.
- Wait 3 rounds before attacking.
- Do not use Mario's jump.
- Do not use Mario's hammer.
- Do not have Mario attack at all.
- Do not change allies.
- Do not have your ally attack at all. (Tattle does not count as an attack.)
- Do not spend any FP.
- Do not use any items.
- Do not use any Special Attacks.
- Use at least one Special Attack.

To advance in rank and face new opponents, you must win each battle while satisfying the victory condition. While you keep your current rank and the Star Points you earned regardless of how you win, you will never complete the chapter unless you go along with Grubba's gimmicks. (The only way to lose rank is to lose the battle AND ignore Grubba's conditions.) Thus it's helpful to keep multiple strategies in mind for each battle, in case your favored mode of attack is unavailable.

Thankfully, the next battle should be easy regardless of the victory condition. Pick Goombella as your partner.

RANK 18 BATTLE: The KP Koopas (KP Koopa x2, KP Parakoopa)

-Difficulty: 2/10

They are functionally identical to normal Koopas, and thus can be eliminated in exactly the same way.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No jump/No Mario attacks: Either condition will drag out the battle, as Mario's jumps deal most of your damage and are essential for keeping the Koopas incapacitated. Still, their damage is low enough that proper Defending will keep you alive as long as necessary.

**No ally attacks: Much like the above, though with the Spin Jump available you can still take out an enemy every round.

Keep Koops as your partner for the next several battles. Few of the enemies here are encountered outside of the Glitz Pit, so Tattle is unnecessary.

RANK 17 BATTLE: The Pokey Triplets (Pokey x3)

-Difficulty: 3/10

A combination of the hammer and Koops' Power Shell can eliminate all three by the second round. Their damage massively increases if reduced to just the head, so speed is essential.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No ally attacks: Without Power Shell, it will take way too long for Mario's weak hammer to eliminate all three of them. A 4 Earth Tremor is your best bet, though the Earth Quake item (purchasable at the shop) is also an option.

**Wait 3 rounds: This condition is a major problem in any battle with high-Attack enemies, especially when facing several at a time. I would seriously consider ignoring it. That said, the ideal approach for this condition is the same in every battle: have Mario use the Defend tactic for all three turns, stopping only to recover with Sweet Treat when HP falls too low, then begin attacking on the fourth.

RANK 16 BATTLE: The Dead Bones (Dull Bones x3)

-Difficulty: 1/10

Easy, easy. A single Power Shell will win the battle in one shot.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No ally attacks: Mario will have to kill them one at a time, though since their damage is still low it won't be too much of a burden.

It would be a good idea to put a few powerful offensive items in your inventory before registering for the next battle.

RANK 15 BATTLE: Spike Storm (Spiny x2, Lakitu)

-Difficulty: 5/10

And suddenly it gets nasty. This is a miserable battle: All three enemies deal high damage, the Spinies are difficult to damage even before they turn invincible, and if you wait too long the Lakitu can create more Spinies. For the sake of your sanity, you REALLY want to win with a 5 Earth Tremor in the first round. (3 damage is enough to kill the Spinies, but the Lakitu can still mess things up if it gets a turn.)

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No special attacks/No Mario attacks: The only other way to eliminate the Spinies at this point is with items, which you would need to equip prior to registering for battle. POW Blocks, Ice Storms (buyable in the Great Boggly Tree), and Earth Quakes (buyable at the shop outside) are all effective, although Earth Quakes will not reach the Lakitu. A Thunder Rage or Shooting Star can win the battle instantly, but you will likely have greater need for

them in Chapter 4.

****Wait 3 rounds:** As with the Pokeys, you would likely be in pretty poor shape when the fourth round starts. Unfortunately, since both Special Attacks and items are limited you do still have a compelling reason to win the battle the first time. Do your best to minimize damage taken, and make sure that neither Spiny is rolled into an invincible ball when you finally use Earth Tremor.

****Take damage 3 times:** The Spinies' invulnerability make this almost as tricky. You could Defend for one round and win with a 5+ Earth Tremor, and hope that none of the Spinies go invulnerable in the first round. Or you could eliminate them and weaken the Lakitu with a 4 Earth Tremor, and Appeal for several rounds while the Lakitu attacks. You'll need a second Earth Tremor if any Spinies are spawned in that time, though Appeal should take care of that for you.

At this point, King K will suggest that you check out the hot dog stand outside. Take his advice, and you will meet a very important bouncy/sleepy egg. After you've recruited the egg onto your team, check into the item shop and store all your items away. You don't want to risk losing one of your hard-earned items in the next battle.

RANK 14 BATTLE: The Hand-It-Overs (Bandit x2, Big Bandit x2)
-Difficulty: 4/10

The Bandits will attempt to steal a coin every round (a successful Defend prevents this), and when successful will run away on their next turn. The Big Bandits attempt to do the same with your items, though if you emptied your inventory like I suggested they will never steal anything and never run away. One Power Shell plus two Spin Jumps will be enough to eliminate both Big Bandits in the first two rounds, and assuming they didn't steal from you and run away you can mop up the remaining two Bandits in the third round.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

****No FP used:** Focus on defeating the front Bandit first (you can do this within the first round), then work your way forward. While it's possible to defeat all four this way if you Defend well, you will take a whole lot of damage in the process.

****No jump:** Similar to the above, except that you will have to abuse Power Shell much more. I suggest just using Earth Tremor to save time and cut down on the damage you take.

****No Mario attacks:** This one is a real slog, as it takes three rounds of attacking for Koops to finish one of the Bandits. I would strongly consider ignoring the condition and steeling yourself for a rematch.

****Wait 3 rounds:** The same as above, since you'll be taking even more damage and have to Defend accurately for even longer.

RANK 13 BATTLE: The Mind-Bogglers (Pale Piranha, Pider, Dark Puff)
-Difficulty: 2/10

Enjoy this easy battle while you can. You can win this in two rounds: Mario

takes out the Dark Puff with a normal jump and the Pider with a Spin Jump, while Koops eliminates the Pale Piranha with two attacks.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No jump/No Mario attacks: You could try hitting multiple targets with Power Shell, but since both the Pider and Pale Puff can float out of his reach it's not the best option. If just the jump is forbidden, I'd try hitting them with a 4+ Earth Tremor. If all Mario's attacks are forbidden, there are only two practical options: have your ally use an item, or win normally and hope for an easier rematch.

RANK 12 BATTLE: The Bob-Omb Squad (Bob-Omb x4)

-Difficulty: 3/10

While the Bob-Omb's don't deal much damage initially, you have to be very careful about how you fight them. Damage them once, and they light their fuse. When their turn comes, or if they are hit with a second attack, they explode for 5 damage. (You do not earn Star Points if they perform their suicide attack, though it still counts as a victory after the battle.) The only safe approach is to eliminate them one at a time, with a hammer+shell combo.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No hammer: Be sure to only bounce ONCE by failing the minigame, as the second bounce will immediately detonate the bomb and deal full damage to Mario. Use Koops' shell to safely eliminate them.

**No Mario attacks/No ally attacks: In both cases, you have no way to kill them without being hit by the explosion. Good thing Mario has plenty of HP to absorb the damage.

Now would be a good time to return to the shop and reequip your items.

RANK 11 BATTLE: The Punk Rocks (Hyper Bald Cleft x3)

-Difficulty: 2/10

In addition to the usual methods of killing Clefts (Earth Tremor and items), you can also damage this type directly with Spin Jump. I don't recommend it, though, since even one of them can dish out a horrifying amount of damage when charged. It is better to either toss a POW Block (which flips them for two turns) and finish them with Power Shell, or eliminate them outright with Earth Tremor or an Ice Storm.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**Wait 3 rounds: I hope you've been investing in those HP bonuses. Each Hyper Bald Cleft can power itself up to a massive 8 Strength, so Mario can potentially take up to 18 damage--more if he defends poorly--during those three rounds.

**Take damage 3 times: While not quite as bad as above, this can still get dangerous depending on how many of them choose to charge up on their first turn. Definitely have Mario Defend first, and consider using a POW Block (which flips them over without killing them) if more than one of them

charge up.

If you didn't do so already, make sure to recruit the egg from the hot dog stand. Anyway, you finally get your shot at the major league, which runs straight through the Iron Adonis Twins. Unfortunately, their impenetrable Defense neutralizes everything you can throw their way, even items and Special Attacks, so you have no choice but to run away. Do still follow the fight condition Grubba gives you, if at all possible: Your rank stays the same if you do, but fleeing AND violating the condition will lose you a rank and force you to defeat another minor league team before you get another shot at the twins.

After forfeiting the match, you'll find that your little egg friend has hatched into a baby dinosaur. And none too soon, because Yoshi is a complete game-changer. His base damage is twice as high as your other allies, and Gulp finally provides a convenient way to deal with the high-Defense opponents who have been such a drain on your Star Power and items. Such as two hard-headed jerks who richly deserve their comeuppance.

RANK 10 BATTLE: The Iron Harriers (Iron Cleft x2)

-Difficulty: 3/10

Two Gulps will win the battle easily. Keep Yoshi in the back row, and their attacks will not be a problem.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No FP use/No ally attacks: Yes, both of these are occasionally given as conditions. Since you can only win with Gulp, it's not much of a choice: Beat them as you normally would, and prepare to do the same in the next battle.

**Wait 3 rounds: The twins dish out a ton of damage, so definitely have Mario use the Defend tactic. Even with perfect timing, Mario will still take at least 24 points of damage over the course of the battle; if your timing is less than perfect, a few Sweet Treats may be required.

You advance to the major leagues, where most of the really nasty opponents are. Unless stated otherwise, assume that Yoshi is your partner for all of the following battles. I strongly suggest keeping Yoshi in back at all times, as his low HP makes it difficult for him to survive the attacks your powerful enemies will send his way.

RANK 9 BATTLE: The Tiny Spinies (Red Spike Top x2)

-Difficulty: 3/10

My recommended approach is the same as for the Iron Harriers: Have Yoshi use Gulp twice, while Mario Defends in front.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No FP use/No ally attacks: Without Gulp, you have two options. The first is a 5+ Earth Tremor. The second is items. You can either use a POW Block and finish them while they're briefly flipped over, or use two Ice Storms or a Thunder Rage to eliminate them outright. I'd recommend the first approach; while Star Power takes a while to regain, its infinite renewability offers a

substantial advantage over your more limited items.

Make sure that you have at least one POW Block before the next battle.

RANK 8 BATTLE: The Poker Faces (Bristle x2)

-Difficulty: 2/10

POW Blocks are still the best option. You can use a 2+ Earth Tremor if you get the no item condition, though otherwise I would save your Star Power for the much tougher battle that follows. (Gulp doesn't work, sadly, since Yoshi will get slapped away before he can get close.) Either way, this battle is no challenge.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**Take damage 3 times: Since their Attack is so low, you need to actively avoid defending when they attack. Simply wait two rounds, then finish them on the third.

Your secret admirer tells you to visit Podler's bar out in the main square. Go there, and Podler passes along their gift: The mighty Super Hammer, which doubles your hammer damage and grants Mario a multi-target, Defense-ignoring attack. (For one point of damage, granted, but even that can be useful at times.) You are also asked to do a little smash-and-grab reconnaissance in the minor league locker room before you start the next battle. Your improved hammer power will really come in handy here.

RANK 7 BATTLE: The Shellshockers (Shady Koopa x2, Shady Paratroopa)

-Difficulty: 6/10

Tread carefully here. Unlike every other Koopa type, you do NOT want to flip them on their backs: the slide they use while flipped over is much more painful than their normal attack, and hits both Mario and his ally. (Their Defense is lowered as normal, but that benefit is only worth it if you can eliminate them on the same turn.) This is one of the best places to use Earth Tremor: A 5+ attack will allow Yoshi to immediately eliminate one of the Shady Paratroopas, and a Spin Jump on the Paratroopa plus one more Ground Pound will win the battle in the second round, without flipping anyone over.

If you don't have sufficient Star Power coming in, or the fight condition forbids it, you'll need to rely on the hammer and Gulp for your damage. I suggest eliminating the Shady Paratroopa in the first round, grounding it with Spin Jump and finishing it with Ground Pound. After that, a Super Hammer plus Gulp will weaken the front two enough for each of them to fall to a normal attack in the third round.

Unless you are given a trivial condition, I suggest ignoring it on the first attempt. You'll need a minimum of 8 FP and 11 HP (for Mario) in the battle that follows.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No FP use: Only feasible with a high-value Earth Tremor. Besides Gulp, Yoshi's Ground Pound is the only attack that can do significant damage--and it can only be safely used when the Shady Koopas are down to 3 HP or less.

****No jump attacks:** The only tricky part is grounding the Shady Paratroopa without triggering the slide attack. Wait until the front two are down, and then deliberately fail Yoshi's minigame to bump him down without flipping him over. From there, a combination of hammer and Gulp attacks will finish him off.

****No hammer attacks:** Focus on eliminating one per round, using the tactic listed for the Shady Paratroopa in the main strategy.

****No Mario attacks:** I would seriously consider ignoring this. Without Mario attacking, Yoshi will need to do the following: Eliminate the front pair with two Gulps, fail the Ground Pound minigame to ground the Shady Paratroopa safely, and then finish it with two more Gulps. That's five rounds, during which Mario will take a whole lot of extra damage.

****No ally attacks:** A 5+ Earth Tremor is the only reasonable way to win here. If you can manage that, you can take out one enemy in each of the next rounds; otherwise you're looking at a minimum of SEVEN rounds and 10 attacks, which even a high-HP Mario may have difficulty surviving.

The Iron Adonis Twins rudely interrupt your victory celebration to take revenge on you. Defeat them with two Gulps as you did before, and they will once again slink off the stage in defeat. Rest and prepare for the next battle.

RANK 6 BATTLE: The Fuzz (Fuzzy, Green Fuzzy, Flower Fuzzy)
-Difficulty: 3/10

They're not too bad. I suggest you eliminate the Green Fuzzy first, as it does the most damage and can multiply itself when the Fuzzy in front is eliminated. The Flower Fuzzy can wait until the second round, after which it will use a lightning spell on both characters. (One Spin Jump can eliminate each of them, as can a pair of normal jumps from Mario and Yoshi.) Mopping up the final Fuzzy is a trivial task.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

****Wait 3 rounds:** The Green Fuzzy makes this problematic, as there's a decent chance each round that it will spin off a new Green Fuzzy who will also need to be eliminated. At that point only a 5+ Earth Tremor can take them out quickly, as their rapid healing becomes a big problem otherwise.

****No jump attacks:** Mario's Super Hammer plus Gulp will eliminate the Fuzzy and Green Fuzzy before they can attack, and weaken the Flower Fuzzy enough to easily finish it in the next round.

****No Mario attacks:** Abuse Gulp to kingdom come, and you can win within three rounds. The battle will last an extra round if the Green Fuzzy reproduces itself right away, but you can deal with that.

Definitely save before registering for the next battle. I strongly recommend carrying in at least one Power Punch, as it will greatly speed up the boss that follows and probably save you some Life Shrooms. A fan will send you a cake before the next battle, which fully restores your Star Power.

RANK 5 BATTLE: The Magikoopa Masters (Red Magikoopa, White Magikoopa, Green

Magikoopa)

-Difficulty: 6/10

Each of these guys will make your life difficult in a different way: Red can raise Attack and Defense, White can heal damage, and Green floats off the ground and can both electrify targets (preventing jump attacks) and make them invisible (preventing all damage). And if any of them start the round as the last one standing, they will summon illusory clones to prevent you from finishing them off. It doesn't help that their magic attacks are just as likely to target either character, which can cost you a Life Shroom.

As in Round 7, I strongly suggest that you ignore the fight condition the first time. A fairly tough boss follows, and you want to save as much HP and FP as possible for that battle. (This also means you don't have time to Tattle.) A pair of jumps from Mario and Yoshi will allow you to eliminate one Magikoopa per round. Definitely remove the Green one in the first round, as his status effects can make it impossible for you to damage his friends. After that, I would attack both Red and White once. While Red's Defense boost (which will require Gulp) and White's full heal can make this difficult, it's well worth it to prevent the obnoxious clone attack which would otherwise slow down the battle. If the clone attack is used, you need to strike the real one with a hit-all attack. Power Shell is the easiest option, though Earth Tremor or an item can also get the job done.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No jump attacks: You'll need to eliminate them in order, front to back, and rely heavily on Gulp. There's a greater risk of Green's status effects screwing you over, but you can't do much about it. Make sure that Yoshi grounds the Green Magikoopa in the second round, as you're pretty much screwed if he uses the clone attack while floating.

**No Mario attacks: As usual, this condition leaves you in a bind. The best you can do is abuse Gulp liberally, and hope that their invisibility/healing/floating don't combine in a way that completely screws you over.

**No ally attacks: Once again, Earth Tremor is essential. It can't one-shot anyone, but at 4+ it will weaken them enough to pick off the survivors one at a time. As above, it's very much down to luck that their combined support spells don't end up making this unwinnable.

**Wait 3 rounds: This condition combines the worst aspects of all the conditions above. They have plenty of time to buff themselves, AND plenty of time to wear down your party. If ever there was a condition to ignore, this would be it.

No sooner have you won the battle than Bowser makes a surprise entrance, and jumps onstage to give you a thrashing.

BOSS BATTLE: Bowser

HP 30, Attack 3, Defense 1

-Difficulty: 4/10

It's probably worth it to Tattle him now, both to track his current HP and so you don't have to in Chapter 8. Spin Jump is definitely your best attack, especially combined with a Power Punch, which boosts it up to a massive 8 damage per attack). The size increase from the Power Punch does change the animation, which can mess up the timing, but it's still well worth it. (I

wouldn't bother trying a Stylish attack, since the risk of losing the second hit is too great.) Gulp is also quite effective, though at 4 FP per use it chews through your power pretty fast.

While he's not the worst opponent you've faced, Bowser does have some nasty tricks up his sleeve. His bite attack can poison Mario, dealing an extra point of damage for multiple turns, and his ground pound can either remove Mario's jump/hammer attacks or completely prevent your ally from attacking. (While the hammer's 3 damage is still decent, it benefits far less from Power Punch than Spin Jump will.) Both effects can be prevented if you defend properly, and can be cured with Sweet Treat as well. He can also damage both characters with his flame breath.

Just keep pounding away, and before long Bowser will fall. If you used a Power Punch, you probably won't need any Life Shrooms.

Whew, that was an ordeal. Definitely save your game and rest after that.

RANK 4 BATTLE: Craw Daddy (Dark Craw)

-Difficulty: 5/10

This guy's spear hurts. A LOT. While most of his attacks will be directed toward Mario, who can deal with the damage, he does occasionally throw a spear at his squishier allies. The best you can do is hit him with the hammer while Yoshi uses Gulp, Defend well, and hope that the battle ends before a Life Shroom becomes necessary.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No FP use: Replace Yoshi with Koops as your ally. Otherwise the battle plays identically.

**No hammer/No Mario attacks/No ally attacks: In all cases, the battle boils down to 5 rounds of either Gulp or hammer abuse, while the other party member uses the Defend tactic. If you do choose to follow these conditions, definitely give the designated attacker a Power Punch to improve their damage output and shave a round off the battle.

**Wait 3 rounds: Because the battle takes a while to begin with, I would strongly suggest ignoring this condition. The Star Points you earn are ample compensation for repeating the fight, and if you go along with the condition I can almost guarantee that it will take plenty of Sweet Treats and/or items to stay alive.

A great deal of errand-running follows: First to the phone booth in the main square, then to an abandoned storage room, and from there to a hidden staircase leading to air vents above Grubba's office. Such mystery. Anyway, back to combat. Put Koops in your party before the next battle.

RANK 3 BATTLE: Hamma, Bamma, and Flare (Hammer Bro, Boomerang Bro, Fire Bro)

-Difficulty: 6/10

Not a fan of this one. All of these guys hit hard and can strike either character, though the Boomerang Bro is the worst: his boomerang hits both Mario and his teammate twice, and you have to defend each pass separately. But you can't just focus on dishing out damage, because at 3 HP and below

each of them gains a devastating new multi-hit attack that will leave you in a world of pain.

To avoid their multi-hitting attacks, you must tread carefully. Have Mario use a normal Jump on the Boomerang Bro and Koops use Power Shell in the first round. (As you've likely noticed, they are the only Koopas who cannot be flipped over by any means.) Mario can then eliminate the Boomerang Bro with Spin Jump while Koops further weakens everyone with another Power Shell. One more Spin Jump and shell attack will take out the Hammer Bro as well, leaving the Fire Bro to fall in the third round. Needless to say, you won't have time to Tattle here.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No FP use: Have Mario and Koops soften up the Hammer and Boomerang Bros with their attacks in the first two rounds, then unleash a 5+ Earth Tremor in the second round. The Fire Bro will still go berserk when his turn comes around, but with just him left it should be survivable.

**No jump attacks: Mario hits the Hammer Bro with a hammer strike of his own, while Yoshi Defends. Open with a Gulp in the second round to remove the Hammer Bro and allow Mario to finish the Boomerang Bro, narrowly avoiding the multi-hit attacks of both. Repeat for the Fire Bro, and you're home free.

**No Mario attacks: Don't even bother. Gulp is the only ally attack that is remotely effective by itself, and because you can't avoid triggering the multi-hit phase you are guaranteed to lose some Life Shrooms in the process.

**No ally attacks: Once again, don't even bother. Mario might be able to avoid the multi-hit attacks with clever use of Spin Jump (deliberately failing the second hit initially, then succeeding at it), but their normal attacks already do way too much damage during the 6 rounds you must survive.

**Wait 3 rounds: Ouch. Rest assured that you will take A LOT of damage during the 4 rounds the Boomerang Bro is alive, much of it directed toward your ally. The Defend tactic and Koops' inherent Defense help a lot, but even with those plus Sweet Treat it will be a close thing.

After registering for the next battle, Jolene will bring in another cake from another "admirer." DON'T eat this one, or you will suffer in the next battle.

RANK 2 BATTLE: Chomp Country (Red Chomp)

-Difficulty: 3/10

In practice, the Red Chomp is extremely similar to the Iron Clefts: he has high-impenetrable Defense and hits very hard, but will fall easily to two Gulps. Have Mario Defend while Yoshi does so.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No FP use/No ally attacks: A perfect 6 Earth Tremor can eliminate him in one shot. If you perform less than perfectly (very likely), take off the last few HP with an item.

If you were wise and left it alone, the Shady Koopa steals the (secretly poisoned) cake and is found rolling on the floor in agony. Serves him right.

Make sure that you have at least two POW Blocks (4 if you're paranoid) before you register for the next battle.

RANK 1 BATTLE: The Koopinotor (Dark Koopatrol)

-Difficulty: 3/10

On the face of it, the Dark Koopatrol would seem like the nastiest opponent yet. His spiked armor makes him difficult to damage directly, he's got a ton of HP and Attack power, and at any time he can charge up and hit both characters with an incredibly painful slide attack.

However, like all Koopas he is highly vulnerable to the POW Block. One use of this item, and he stays flipped over for the next 3 rounds. Mario and Yoshi are free to wail on him while he spends the battle flailing his legs helplessly. Use another POW Block when he rights himself, and this battle will be a piece of cake.

-PROBLEM CONDITIONS:

**No Mario attacks/No ally attacks: Both are manageable, but because your damage output is cut in half you will probably need 3 or 4 POW Blocks instead of just two.

**No items: If you get this condition on your first attempt, just run away. Between his huge damage output and troublesome armor, which blunts every attack besides Gulp, it is very likely that the Koopinotor will kill your ally at some point. (If there are any Life Shrooms in your inventory, they will auto-activate and cause you to fail the condition anyway.) It is certain that Mario will take plenty of damage, much more than Sweet Treat can heal back. POW Blocks are one of the cheaper items out there, certainly cheaper than Life Shrooms, so don't be shy about withdrawing some more from the store if the need arises.

**Wait 3 rounds/Take damage 3 times: Both conditions potentially expose you to a ton of damage, especially the latter. (The charged slide attack does a massive 10 damage to the party, so your ally needs to have full health AND defend properly to avoid using a Life Shroom.) Thankfully, after the condition is met you can keep him flipped over for the rest of the battle.

Your mysterious email contact gives you one more task: Uncover the hidden key behind the lobby posters, and use it to uncover a disturbing mystery hidden in the storage room. Egads!

Only the championship match remains. While the fight condition is the same every time--use a Special Attack--you no longer need to follow it to advance the story. Be absolutely certain that you have at least one damage-dealing item before you save and initiate the pre-fight walkabout.

CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH: Rawk Hawk

HP 40, Attack 3, Defense 0

-Difficulty: 3/10

For the guy at the top of the rankings, Rawk Hawk really isn't that tough. His damage output is no worse than most of the other major league foes, and with no real defenses you can absolutely tear him apart with Spin Jump and Ground Pound.

The only kind of difficult part comes near the end, when he hangs from the ceiling and shakes a bunch of forks (??) out of the rafters. The attack itself doesn't do a lot of damage, but while he's up there none of your normal attacks can hit him. Fortunately, any offensive item will hit him, as will a 5+ Earth Tremor. This will knock him down to the ground, allowing you to make short work of him as before.

Finally, at long last, the belt--and bedroom--of the champion is yours! Yes! If you spent any Star Power, your new bed will fully restore it.

DO NOT advance the plot until you've restocked your inventory with at least 3 Life Shrooms. I'd also stock two Power Punches, plus the Ultra Shroom just in case, but the Life Shrooms are most important. After the scene with Grubba his guards will block both exits from the Pit, preventing you from returning to the shop. Save once you've confirmed that you're ready, then head into the Arena.

BOSS BATTLE: Macho Grubba
HP 60, Attack 4, Defense 0
-Difficulty: 4/10

This guy is all about power-ups. He starts by granting himself double turns for a while. He always uses the first of those turns to either boost his Attack, boost his Defense, or make himself dodgy (so your attacks have a high chance to automatically miss), and the second to attack. Some of his attacks can hit both Mario and his partner at once, which is why the Life Shrooms are so important.

However, for all that he's really not too bad with the right items. Move your ally to the front and have them use Power Punch right before Macho Grubba uses the extra-turn boost, as this will allow three powered-up Spin Jumps per item instead of just two. Macho Grubba's Defense bonus can slow you down, so keep Yoshi on the field to contribute with Gulp.

Once Grubba falls, you gain the third Crystal Star plus Power Lift, a superb power-up which will prove potent against many bosses. And Jolene enjoys a heartfelt family reunion. That's a wrap!

VII. Chapter 3 Interlude

-Enemies: Spania - HP 3, Attack 1, Defense 0

Before you board the return flight to Rogueport, make sure you have at least two Power Punches in your inventory. Return to Rogueport's west side, fall through the grate, and use Yoshi to reach the ledge with the pipe to Twilight Town. I suggest relying on Koops in the battles down here, which feature a new opponent in Spania (basically just Spinia with a spike on its head). Proceed down to the door through the Pit of 100 Trials, and let Frankly know of your difficulties with the pipe. He directs you to Darkly in the alleyway just left of his house, who clears the way to the next chapter.

Be absolutely certain that you have all the items you will need going in to Chapter 4. I strongly advise you to carry a Mushroom, at least three Life Shrooms, and any strong offensive items you have left. (Thunder Rages and Shooting Stars are best, though Ice Storms and Earth Quakes are effective substitutes. You can buy more Earth Quakes in the Glitzville shop.) Leave

at least two slots open to collect new items. You can't backtrack for most of the chapter, so if you don't come in prepared you can screw yourself over big time.

VIII. Chapter 4 - For Pigs The Bell Tolls

-Useful items: Shooting Star, Jammin' Jelly, Earth Quake, Life Shroom, Ultra Shroom

-Enemies: Hyper Goomba	- HP 8, Attack 2, Defense 0
Hyper Paragoomba	- HP 8, Attack 2, Defense 0
Hyper Spiky Goomba	- HP 8, Attack 3, Defense 0
Crazee Dayzee	- HP 7, Attack 2, Defense 0
Amazy Dayzee	- HP 20, Attack 20, Defense 1
Hyper Cleft	- HP 4, Attack 3, Defense 3
Boo	- HP 7, Attack 3, Defense 0
Swooper	- HP 6, Attack 3, Defense 0
Buzzy Beetle	- HP 5, Attack 3, Defense 4
Spike Top	- HP 5, Attack 3, Defense 4

After some running around (and serendipitous piggification), you gain access to the trail outside of town. Before you leave town, be sure to enter the leftmost house on the second screen. The woman inside asks for some food to take care of her starving family, and will reward you with a valuable Shooting Star. A basic Mushroom is enough to satisfy her, though you must have it on hand: she turns into a pig at the end of the conversation, so you only get one shot at the item.

This place is going to suck. The next screen is lousy with Hyper Goombas, whose charge attacks raise their damage to frankly unreasonable levels. Once they are Tattled, keep Yoshi in the party. Your best bet is to weaken them all in the first round, so that if any of them charge you can kill them before they get their boosted attack off, and only Yoshi's Ground Pound and Gulp deal enough damage to make that happen. (Expect to spend a lot of FP on Gulp, particularly against the spiked ones.) I highly suggest triggering a First Strike in each battle, as this gives you the best chance of weakening all of them before they begin charging. If you haven't been practicing Stylish moves up until now, you should absolutely start. You'll need a lot of Star Power, both for Sweet Treat recovery and the occasional Earth Tremor, and only Stylish attacks provide the rapid recovery you need without slowing down your offense.

At the end of the trail you'll find a key stuck behind a log, which you'll need Koops to reach. Pick it up, as well as the Black Key hidden in the shed, then visit the shop in Twilight Town. You can now open the locked room, where you'll find a Cursed Chest who inflicts you with the terrible curse of folding into a tube and rolling under barriers. (Land sakes alive!) Save and walk down the trail again, then roll under the log and blow away the haystack to gain access to the Twilight Woods.

This place is horrible. In addition to the already-awful Hyper Goombas, you also meet Crazee Dayzees, irritating flower enemies who can put your characters to sleep and will randomly run away from battle. To Defend and block the sleep effect you must press A on the final note of their 8-note song. It is essential that you master the timing, as falling asleep in most battles is a death sentence. You'll also meet Hyper Clefts, who combine the Hyper Goombas' charge attacks with high Defense for a double dose of irritation. Thankfully their HP is low, so you can reliably eliminate them with Gulp or a 4+ Earth Tremor. (The hammer can do 1 damage to them, but most of the time that won't be nearly good enough.)

And as if they weren't bad enough, on rare occasions they'll be joined by an Amazy Dayzee. The Amazy is the strongest enemy in the game, period: Its song is a guaranteed kill on your ally and a likely kill on Mario, especially since it can still put you to sleep, and its HP is high enough to almost guarantee it will escape before you can kill it. Needless to say, RUN AWAY if you ever encounter one. You'll lose some coins and may need to backtrack (depending on your position), but that inconvenience is nothing next to the pain one of those infernal flowers can inflict. Be sure to hit the ? block on the way for an Earth Tremor.

Assuming that you survived the woods, you'll find yourself in the Creepy Steeple. Before venturing into the mansion, I suggest you jump down the well next to the save point and Tattle the Buzzy Beetles and Spike Tops you find down there. It will make your life just a little easier on the second trip.

Once in the mansion, you'll find all the exits blocked by Boos. To proceed you must push the Boo statue, unlocking a hidden pit that connects to a hallway with a chest. (If you plan to use Zess T.'s ability to combine ingredients later, definitely pick up the Cookbook from the hidden room accessible via tube form. You don't lose much by ignoring it, though.) Open the chest, and 200 Boos will rush out. Guess correctly, and they will give you an Ultra Shroom. Make room in your inventory for it--it is gone forever if you leave the room--and head back upstairs.

Unfortunately, the Boos play a new prank: Stay in the main hall too long, and eventually the Boos will dogpile you and boot you out of the Steeple. You can get rid of them with the Super Hammer spin, though this will also trigger an optional boss fight and require you to survive more enemy encounters. Or you can just minimize your time in the main hall and rush straight for the story boss. I will warn you, though: If you plan to fight the optional boss, you would be wise to do so before moving the story along.

BOSS BATTLE: Atomic Boo
HP 40, Attack 4, Defense 0
-Difficulty: 3/10

He's nowhere near as scary as his size would suggest. His attack power is nothing special, and chances are good he will spend several turns doing nothing at all. The only real danger is Confusion, which can sabotage your turns and screw you over if left untreated. Either Defend well to prevent it, or use Sweet Treat to cure it.

After that, the Boos wandering the Cathedral will trigger battles just like any other enemy. Focus on killing one before moving on to the next, as their invisibility can drag things out otherwise.

You'll need to travel down one of the side hallways to reach the stairs, which will most likely require an encounter with the Swoopers. Each Swooper begins the battle hanging from the ceiling, where neither ground attacks nor jumps can reach it, and will stay there until you can inflict damage. There are only two ways to do so at the moment: Trigger a perfect 6 Earth Tremor, or hit them with an item. For once, I recommend the item: Earth Tremor leaves you with nothing but lost time and Star Power if you mess up at all, and it is really easy to mistime your button presses in the last sequence.

Once you reach the stairs, it's a simple matter of collecting the key and opening the locked door. Head up the stairs to meet a boss.

BOSS BATTLE: ????

HP 40, Attack 4, Defense 0

-Difficulty: 3/10

Even easier than Atomic Boo, since he can't inflict status effects. I recommend Tattling in the first round, as you will fight this boss another two times. He does use a move where he scans Mario and copies his moveset, but he isn't significantly scarier afterwards. I wouldn't bother with Power Lift: he is easy enough without it, and odds are you'll need that Star Power for what comes afterwards.

The party regains the Crystal Star! Huh, that was kind of quick. Save your game, and...

Wait...

Ah crap.

That's right: Mario is stuck in the Creepy Steeple by himself, separated from the nearest civilization by several of the nastiest encounters in the entire game. Regardless of his max HP, he simply cannot kill his enemies quickly enough to have a reasonable shot at survival. While Earth Tremor and his offensive items can help for a while (particularly against the Hyper Clefts), the only approach which is likely to get him all the way back to Twilight Town is running away. It may hurt your pride (and wallet) a little, but it beats going through half a dozen encounters only to get slapped in the face with a Game Over.

After what will feel like an eternity of fleeing, you will run into the imposter just outside of Twilight Town. He forces you into a battle which you cannot win, though oddly enough he cannot damage you either. Your only option is to Flee, which will take you straight back into the town.

As luck would have it, Vivian is in town and in just the right mood to return the favor to a kind stranger. After recruiting her, head to the far right edge of the village and eavesdrop on the crows hanging out there for a clue. (If you forget this, you may be forced to make two extra trips through the dangerous woods.) Although you can't return to Rogueport, you CAN rest at the inn and buy items at the shop. This shop now sells Life Shrooms and Thunder Rages, both incredibly valuable for the tough encounters out there, so be sure to restock and save before leaving the town.

One more encounter with the imposter just outside of town, and the two of them make a return trip to the Steeple. The basic strategy is the same as the first run, though her Veil move provides an easy way to survive if two or three Hyper Goombas decide to charge at once. As before, run like hell if you ever meet an Amazy Dayzee.

After saving at the Steeple, it's time to jump into the well. To cross the basin, you'll have to battle a large number of Buzzy Beetles and Spike Tops. The regular Buzzies will fall easily to a jump+punch combo. But the Spike Tops are a problem: you can't jump on them, their Defense neutralizes your other attacks, and Vivian can't even inflict burn damage. If even one Spike Top appears in the current formation, you should try for a 5-damage Earth Tremor. (You can use an item if you screw up Earth Tremor, but otherwise I would rely on your Star Power.) To minimize damage, I suggest you stick to the far left and trigger First Strikes with your hammer. It won't inflict

damage, but you will prevent their opening attack and earn yourself a little Star Power in the bargain.

You'll take a brief break from combat. Vivian's field ability allows you to access a new area, where you'll roll around as a paper tube to gain access to a hidden room. Inside you'll find a chest containing the letter "P," as well as a bird who reveals the imposter's name. Be absolutely sure that you've gotten both, as you really do not want to miss one and have to backtrack yet another time through the woods. Return outside through the Steeple foyer, and save your progress once again.

Walk back through the woods for a fourth time, fighting cautiously every step of the way, and you can finally confront the creep. He immediately runs back to the Steeple, though, requiring a fifth (and final, thank God) pass through the woods. Which leaves you with a difficult choice: Do you return to town, or backtrack straight to the woods? The former will let you save your progress and recover at the inn, but will also respawn all the Hyper Goombas on the first screen and add even more time to your final trip. Choose wisely.

FINALLY, after a frankly ridiculous number of encounters in those godawful woods, Mario and Vivian return to the Steeple for the last time. Note how easily Vivian's punch neutralizes the otherwise obnoxious Swoopers. Climb the stairs, save one last time, and bring this long and tiring chapter to an end.

BOSS BATTLE: Doopliss
HP 40, Attack 4, Defense 0
-Difficulty: 3/10

Largely the same as the first encounter, though now he is joined by Goombella. Thankfully she is just as weak as when she fought by your side, so if you Defend well you can nullify her damage. Be sure to ignore her and focus all your attacks on Doopliss: Every time an ally falls he switches them out for someone new, and the other allies (especially Yoshi) are much more painful than she is.

Vivian will abandon Mario for the first few turns, but eventually will have a change of heart and rejoin you for good. Use Power Lift when she does, and the two of you will destroy him in short order.

About. Freaking. Time. You win the Crystal Star (for real this time), earn the godly Art Attack, and bring this seemingly endless chapter to a satisfying close.

IX. Chapter 4 Interlude

After another amusing Bowser section, Mario and company return from Twilight Town and make their way back to the Thousand Year Door. You now have the option to recruit Ms. Mowz, if you so desire. She provides two main assets: her Love Slap automatically ignores enemy Defense, while Kiss Thief allows her to swipe an enemy's item and add it to the inventory. Personally, I rarely bother. Her slap suffers all the limitations of Gulp and does a fraction of the damage, rendering the FP savings moot. And while an enemy carrying a Shooting Star or Stopwatch can be significantly more dangerous, it is usually just as easy to kill the enemy before it can use the item. (Not to mention that the item is lost if your inventory is already full.) Still,

having an extra body to absorb damage in the final battles could be worthwhile by itself.

She leaves a posting on the eastside job board, asking for help in recovering a rare badge. She will meet you on the roof of the badge shop, and tell you that the badge is in Hooktail's Castle. Specifically, it's in the high tower where you fought Hooktail, hidden in the center of the chamber. Use Flurry's breath to reveal the chest, and you can return it to Ms. Mowz so she'll join the party.

The next Crystal Star will require you to sail through dangerous waters, which means that you must recruit a legendary navigator from Rogueport's east end. And that means you have to deal with Gus, a local thug who guards the eastern gate, by either paying his toll or defeating him in combat. (His moves are identical to Craw Daddy from Chapter 3, though he has far less attack power.) Both options are trivial at this point, so do whichever you prefer.

Once Gus is removed, you can cross the river with Yoshi and enter Bobbery's chimney in paper tube mode. Assuming you've spoken to Flavio and Podley previously, Podley will now give you Scarlett's letter. Have Bobbery read it, and you can finally head to Keelhaul Key. You won't be able to return for a while, so make sure you have at least 2 Thunder Rages and 2 Life Shrooms (either equipped or stored in the shop) before you leave.

X. Chapter 5 - The Key to Pirates

-Useful items: Thunder Rage

-Enemies: Green Fuzzy

Flower Fuzzy

Putrid Piranha - HP 8, Attack 3, Defense 0

Ember - HP 8, Attack 3, Defense 0

Lava Bubble - HP 6, Attack 4, Defense 0

Bullet Bill - HP 2, Attack 4, Defense 1

Bill Blaster - HP 5, Attack 0, Defense 2

Parabuzzy - HP 5, Attack 3, Defense 4

Bulky Bob-omb - HP 6, Attack 2, Defense 1

Long story short: You wash up on the beach, and almost immediately have to fight a trio of Embers.

EVENT BATTLE: Ember x3

-Difficulty: 3/10

This battle is an ideal place to test your new Art Attack. If you do choose to take them head-on, I would rely on the hammer plus Gulp to eliminate them quickly. They inflict a lot of damage, especially if you get set on fire. I suggest switching in Goombella when you're down to the last one, as you will encounter plenty more in the secret cove.

Remember that there is an inn right on the beach, so you can recover your Star Power afterwards. As usual, leave some space in your inventory. At least one free slot is required to continue the story, and you never know what items you might collect from the audience.

The first screen of the jungle is infested with Fuzzies. Always target the Green Fuzzies first: They inflict direct HP damage, and if left alive they

can multiply to drag out the battle. The Pink Fuzzies' FP drain is much less obnoxious, though you still want to kill them before they use the spell attack on their second turn. The battles on the second screen are a little more obnoxious: the Putrid Piranhas have high HP and Attack, and can inflict even more damage via poison if you don't defend well. You can still handle them with a combination of the hammer and Gulp, though when you encounter three at once Art Attack will save you a lot of trouble.

After climbing a little to progress, Bobbery will sacrifice himself to allow the crew time to escape. Head back toward him, defeat the Embers he was fighting (Art Attack once again works beautifully), and knock him down to hear his last request. On the way back to the beach, you'll need to slip into the pipe beneath the bridge. Whack the tree for a Coconut, which you will carry back with you. (Remember to pick up the Thunder Rage at the top level of the jungle as well.) It will take two-and-a-half round trips through the jungle to progress: one to exchange the Coconut for Bobbery's cherished Chuckola Cola and bring it back, one to revive Bobbery and bring him back to Flavio, and a shorter trip to open the cavern with Flavio's skull gem. If you haven't already, check that you have at least two Thunder Rages and two Life Shrooms equipped for the next boss battle. Bobbery does well against the Putrid Piranhas in the jungle, though Yoshi still beats him for sheer damage output.

Inside the cave, you'll run into lots of Embers and Lava Bubbles. Their damage is high, so you want to be using Art Attack as often as possible. While it's recharging, a combination of the hammer and either Gulp (when FP is high) or Bomb (when FP is low) is best. Sneak past the spike gauntlet with Vivian, and you will be confronted with a stream of Bullet Bills. Either hit them first or dodge them with Vivian, until you can get close enough to hit the Blasters that fire them. The Bill encounters do provide an easy opportunity to refill your Star Power, which can help with the main battle.

EVENT BATTLE: Bill Blaster x2
-Difficulty: 4/10

If you don't bother Tattling, you can win the battle right away with a First Strike: The opening hammer plus Gulp will destroy the first Blaster, and Mario's follow-up hammer attack will finish the second. Otherwise, Art Attack is borderline mandatory. You definitely need to eliminate the first one right away, as otherwise you'll be stuck swatting down Bullet Bills forever.

Trek deeper into the cave, and before long you'll run into a swarm (flock?) of Parabuzzies. With either Goombella or Yoshi, these guys are easy: Just keep bouncing on them to flip them over, and they'll never get the chance to attack. You'll also meet the Bulky Bob-ombs, who work differently from most enemies: rather than attacking directly, they light their fuses and then spend the next four rounds buffing themselves before finally blowing up. Their slow buildup gives you plenty of time to safely eliminate them--Gulp is especially good for bypassing their Defense boost--though it is very important that you NOT attack with Vivian or Bobbery. Either ally will cause the Bulky Bob-omb to prematurely detonate, an especially painful prospect if several of them are present.

A great deal of spelunking follows. There is a hallway full of spikes to be crossed in paper tube mode, a long hallway with two more pairs of Bill Blasters, and at the end of it the fourth and final Cursed Chest. Collect

the Black Key from the Ember, and you'll be cursed to sail the waters as a paper boat. (Heavens to... okay, that's enough of that.) Collect the gate crank to open a new path, and you can sneak past the rolling waves to finally reach the ship graveyard at the end of the cave. And after some 2D platforming and a good bit of gliding, you finally reach the end of the cave, and with it the ship of the dreaded pirate Cortez. Make sure to save and heal before entering the ship.

BOSS BATTLE: Cortez

HP 20/20/20, Attack 4, Defense 1 (Weapons: HP 4)

-Difficulty: 4/10

The first two phases are pretty harmless, and will end quickly if you combine Spin Jump with Power Lift. The only real danger comes from the third phase, when he animates multiple weapons to attack you. You must take out all four weapons pronto, as their combined damage is frankly ridiculous. Hence the Thunder Rages, which will neatly take them all out and deal nice damage to Cortez himself. Just keep up the offensive, toss a second Thunder Rage when he revives the weapons toward the end, and you should survive just fine.

You gain a new Crystal Star and the Sweet Feast special attack, though this time your health and Star Power aren't refilled. Turns out there's a reason for that: The chapter isn't really done, not just yet. As soon as you bust through the wall with Bobbery, the island is ambushed by a heavily armed X-Naut battleship.

Fortunately, you still have free access to the camp before the next battle starts. The inn will restore any spent Star Power, and you can retrieve any items you need from the ship. (As usual, you want a few Life Shrooms in your inventory.) Do so, save again outside the ship, then talk to Cortez to lead an assault on the uppity X-Naut commander.

BOSS BATTLE: Crump

HP 30/30, Attack 3, Defense 0 (X-Naut horde: HP 6/10, Attack 5, Defense 0)

-Difficulty: 5/10

First things first: Eliminate the X-Naut dogpile in front of Crump with a Spin Jump, so they can't bother you for a while. Crump himself only uses basic jump attacks, so you won't suffer too much damage in the first phase.

When his HP falls to zero, he will quickly run offstage to fully heal himself. Worse, a horde of X-Nauts spawn in front of him. Every turn, Crump will ride the dogpile to deal serious damage to both party members, in addition to his normal attacks. And even if you eliminate them--only possible if both Mario and his ally focus on them--they will be replaced with more guys at the start of the next turn. The only feasible strategy is to ignore them and accept the damage, instead focusing on eliminating Crump quickly. You'll use up one or two Life Shrooms when your ally loses their HP, but at this point it's not a big deal.

Mario and the pirates win, and the chapter is brought to a close.

XI. Chapter 5 Interlude

-Enemies: Hammer Bro

Magikoopa - HP 7, Attack 4, Defense 0
Koopatrol - HP 6, Attack 4, Defense 2

Cortez graciously ferries the team back to Rogueport. The trip back to the door is significantly more dangerous now, as the Goomba encounters are replaced with the far deadlier Magikoopas, Koopatrols, and Hammer Bros. They can be pretty dangerous in the first encounter, where you'll likely be tattling them to save you trouble in future encounters, though once you have done so you can use the same strategy for almost all these battles: open with a First Strike from the hammer, move Yoshi to the front for Gulp, and finish the second opponent with another hammer strike. (I would suggest Art Attack for groups of three, but those are pretty rare.)

Don't forget that each of the new enemies has a gimmick to work around. Magikoopa summons clones to misdirect you when they are the last enemy standing (though the burn from Vivian's Shade Fist neutralizes it). Hammer Bro goes berserk with multi-hitting attacks at 3 HP or below. And Koopatrol can hit the party for 6 damage, charge up for even more damage, retreat into his shell to become invincible, or even call a second Koopatrol into battle. He especially is a very dangerous opponent, even without his spikes and formidable Defense, so you don't want to give him a turn if it can be avoided.

Upon returning to the door and Frankly's house, it's time to ask Don Pianta for train tickets. The process is a little more involved than last time, though. After speaking to his henchmen, you'll need to have Cortez take you back to Keelhaul Key, where the happy couple is taking their honeymoon. They'll ask you to locate Francesca's missing ring, but not before putting you through a thumb-destroying button-mashing segment. The ring itself is at the far end of the jungle, near the palm tree where Bobbery joined the party. Give it back to them, join them on the return voyage, and they'll finally revive her heartbroken dad in an unapologetically sappy family reunion.

There's not much else to do once you have the tickets. So long as you have a few Life Shrooms and at least one Power Punch and Shooting Star, either equipped or stored in shops, you should be good for the entire next chapter.

XII. Chapter 6 - 3 Days of Excess

-Useful items: Thunder Rage

-Enemies: Goomba

Ruff Puff	- HP 7, Attack 4, Defense 0
Poison Pokey	- HP 8, Attack 4, Defense 0
Spiky Parabuzzy	- HP 5, Attack 3, Defense 4
Dark Boo	- HP 8, Attack 5, Defense 0

This chapter is easily the slowest in the entire game. The story features no combat at all until late into the second day, instead choosing to play a pastiche of the detective genre. Here's the short, short version: Hate mail, crumb trail, conductor fanboy, Vivian peekaboo, DON'T READ IT, Vivian again, whack the sunglasses. Got it? Good.

The fun part starts once the train gets to Riverside Station, and is stuck there due to a raised drawbridge. You'll want at least 3 Thunder Rages, which as luck would have it are sold in the train's souvenir shop. First on the agenda is grabbing the key to the door that leads outside. On the way upstairs, you'll run into a handful of Ruff Puffs. Much like their weaker cousins in the Boggly Woods, they charge themselves with electricity before

unleashing a painful lightning spell. Yoshi is ideal for them, as he can either Ground Pound them in the air or Gulp them when they are charged with electricity on the ground. The key itself is a bit above them, past a tricky gear "bridge" that requires clever timing and a set of rotating platforms which will require Koops' talents.

Once outside, you'll run into a whole lot of Poison Pokeys. These guys do a lot of damage, and since they tend to come in large groups they can be very dangerous opponents. Eliminate them with Art Attack whenever you get the chance, and otherwise use Gulp and Super Hammer to take them out as quickly as possible. (Super Hammer deals 3 damage when it targets them, rather than the usual 1.) Jump on top of the yellow block near the first Poison Pokey, and you can access an invisible block containing an extra Thunder Rage. You'll need Flurry to remove the papers that cover the doors to the lower part of the station.

Just inside the doors you meet the Spiky Parabuzzy, one of the most obnoxious enemies in the game. While its attacks are nothing unusual, it is unique in that none of your standard attacks can damage it: the spike on its back prevents jump attacks, it is out of hammer/shell/Gulp/bombing range, and his heavy Defense and immunity to fire neutralizes Vivian's punch. Aside from the slow and very difficult Superguard, there are only two ways to kill them: Special Attacks and items. Art Attack alone could take care of them, if you are willing to Appeal constantly and deal with their damage, but that approach gets incredibly tedious very quickly. That is why I recommend bringing multiple Thunder Rages. Each one is an instant victory, saving you lots of time and leaving your Star Power gauge intact for the next Poison Pokey battle, and they are easily replaced the next time you visit a shop.

The way forward is through a narrow slit to the left, accessible via tube form, though I would eliminate the Poison Pokeys on the bottom floor before you do so. Navigate your way through the vertical maze, keeping to the left as much as possible, and you will land in the raised area on the far left. Deal with the last Spiky Parabuzzies, then walk through the door to deal with some... Goombas? Well, at least these pushovers are a refreshing change of pace. The hidden staircase revealed by the switches leads to a chest, which holds a long-overdue and very powerful upgrade: The Ultra Boots! In addition to a big damage boost and improved mobility, they also provide you with the incredibly strong (and incredibly finicky) Spring Jump attack.

Grab the elevator key behind the fence, backtrack through the now-empty station, take the elevator down, and use the switches to lower the drawbridge and clear the way forward for the train. And finally, you can return to your cabin for some well-deserved rest.

Of course, things are a lot less peaceful when you wake up in the morning. The train gets swarmed by Smorgs as soon as you talk to the conductor, and you must backtrack all the way to the caboose to climb outside and eliminate them. The item shop is still open, so if you need to grab any Life Shrooms/Power Punches/Thunder Rages you can do so now. If you still have a Shooting Star, make sure it is in your inventory.

BOSS BATTLE: Smorg

HP 50, Attack 6/10, Defense 1 (Tentacles: HP 4, Pincher: 6 HP)

-Difficulty: 7/10

This abomination hits like a truck, and between its large HP pool and the regenerating tentacles that shield its core you're bound to take a whole lot of damage. Count your lucky stars that you have Life Shrooms on your side.

Start by having your ally give a Power Punch to Mario, while he powers them both up with Power Lift. (Yoshi is a good choice, as a +2 or +3 Attack bonus boosts his Ground Pound more than Vivian's or Bobbery's single-hit attacks.) Open the second round with a Thunder Rage, taking out the tentacles and exposing its vulnerable core, and Mario will have two rounds to use his powered-up stomp on the boss. The size change from the Power Punch will drastically alter the timing for Spin Jump, so you must rely on your eyes rather than just muscle memory, but the extra damage is well worth it. Don't even try to trigger the Stylish version, as you cannot risk missing the second hit of either Spin Jump.

If done well, you can take off over half his health during those two turns. Unfortunately, on its next turn the Smorg will regenerate into its "pincer" form and immediately attack. And this form HURTS: it deals a massive 10 damage to both party members, and he'll repeat this move every turn, so it's essential that he not get any more turns beyond that. If you have a Shooting Star in your inventory, have your ally toss it to immediately expose the core; otherwise Mario will need to take it out with Spin Jump. If you don't screw up the timing, one more round of attacks will be all you need to finish it off for good.

NOTE: While Spring Jump does a lot more damage than Spin Jump, using it here is a dicey proposition at best. This is likely the first chance you've had to use it, giving you no opportunity to practice beforehand. And Spring Jump's timing is VERY finicky, more so than any other attack available to you. Given its high FP cost, and the real danger of losing the crucial second hit entirely, it's a dangerous gamble in a difficult boss battle like this one.

If you can consistently succeed at the timing, Spring Jump is the best source of damage in every remaining boss battle. (You may need more Jammin' Jellies to compensate for the higher FP cost, but the Life Shrooms and Ultra Shrooms you save will make up for it.) Otherwise, you're better off ignoring it and continuing to rely on Spin Jump.

The chapter isn't over, but at least the toughest part is done. Rest in your train car one last time, then walk to the Poshley Sanctuary so Pennington can escort you inside. (If you have fewer than 4 Thunder Rages left, make sure to buy some more from the train shop.) Use Spring Jump and airplane mode to reveal the warp pipe leading to the real sanctuary behind the painting.

This area is infested with Dark Boos, who can turn invisible like their Creepy Steeple brethren, but since Spin Jump is an instant kill they are still pretty easy. Eliminate as many of them as you like--they reward you with plenty of Star Points--and claim the Crystal Star to learn the Showstopper attack. Save your progress, walk out the front door, and this chapter is over.

XIII. Chapter 6 Interlude

-Useful items: Strange Sack

-Enemies: Spinia

Spania

Dull Bones

Fuzzy

Cleft

Pokey

Dark Puff
Pider
Bandit
Lakitu
Bob-omb
Boo
Hyper Cleft
Parabuzzy
Shady Koopa
Flower Fuzzy
Bulky Bob-omb
Lava Bubble
Poison Pokey
Spiky Parabuzzy
Gloomba - HP 7, Attack 3, Defense 0
Paragloomba - HP 7, Attack 3, Defense 0
Spiky Gloomba - HP 7, Attack 4, Defense 0
Dark Koopa - HP 8, Attack 4, Defense 2
Dark Paratroopa - HP 8, Attack 4, Defense 2

Unlike most of the interludes, you have plenty to do this time around. First, and most urgently, return to Rogueport's central square. There is a large treasure chest near the Eastside entrance, which you can knock down to ground level with a Spring Jump. Open it to collect the Ultra Hammer, your final weapon upgrade, as well as an unexpectedly tender moment with tutorial girl Toadette.

With your arsenal fully upgraded, you're ready to tackle the Pit of 100 Trials. Or at least the first half, which gives you the all-important Strange Sack. There is no way you'll get through the final dungeon (and its many item-draining bosses) without expanding your inventory, so you'll have to do this eventually.

Before venturing into the Pit, you'll want 4 Thunder Rages, 3 Life Shrooms, and 1 Ultra Shroom in your inventory. You may wish to spend your hard-earned coins now, as well: You will likely earn several hundred coins on the lower floors, and any earned past 999 will be wasted. I recommend the Deepdown Depot, found in the central part of the sewers (accessed by blowing up a pillar with Bobbery). They sell Ultra Shrooms, Jammin' Jellies, and Gold Bars (if you'd like to save most of those coins for future use), all of which are effective ways to cash in your coins.

Use the save block near the Thousand Year Door, then return to the Pit's entrance pipe via airplane mode. You'll encounter the same sets of enemies in every set of 10 floors. Here are my general strategies:

-Floors 1 to 9: The only significant enemies are the Gloombas, whose high HP requires coordinated attacks from Mario and his ally. The other enemies are all ground-bound with 3 HP or less, and can thus be removed with a single Ultra Hammer spin.

-Floors 11 to 19: The flying Paragloombas are joined by lots of weak enemies from the Boggly Woods. Still easy, though you may need the occasional Sweet Treat to heal.

-Floors 21 to 29: The enemies get stronger and more durable, and their defenses start to be an issue. (Boo's invisibility in particular is an annoyance, so you would be wise to target them first when they appear.) You will need to use Sweet Treat more often, though the Star Power from your

attacks should easily cover the cost.

-Floors 31 to 39: Remember the obnoxious Shady Koopas from the Glitz Pit? They're back, and just as irritating as ever. Your new Showstopper special attack will handily destroy the larger groups, and at half the cost of Art Attack it is a lot easier to recover from. Be careful not to confuse them with the purple-shelled Dark Koopas, who you should take out the usual (i.e., stompy) way.

-Floors 41 to 49: Most of these floors have a chance of featuring a Spiky Parabuzzy, a creature you may remember for its infuriating near-invulnerability. You may encounter as few as 1 or as many as 7, depending on your luck, but every time you meet one you will need either Showstopper, Art Attack, or a Thunder Rage to get rid of it. I tend to favor Showstopper for its low cost, though it's worth remembering that any Spiky Parabuzzies left alive (there is a 5% chance of this) will require an additional Special Attack or item to finish them. You will encounter many of the more powerful enemies from the Pirates' Grotto and Riverside Station as well, so high damage output becomes really important.

Once you've collected the Strange Sack, you are done with this place. (The odds of a Game Over increase exponentially with every set of floors cleared, with no useful reward aside from the Star Points and coins they drop, so it would be foolish to risk losing all that time by venturing deeper.) All that is left is to take the Crystal Star to the door, have two last conversations with Frankly, and head for the final Star. Unfortunately, to trigger the second conversation you must leave Frankly's house and wait for a while before returning. I recommend visiting the Westside or Twilight Town shops, and spend your new windfall on Life Shrooms.

After the second conversation, drop through the Westside grate next to the Twilight Town pipe. Destroy the block with your new Ultra Hammer, and step into the pipe to visit Fahr Outpost.

XIV. Chapter 7 - Mario Shoots the Moon

-Useful items: Ultra Shroom

-Enemies: X-Naut

Yux

Ice Puff - HP 9, Attack 4, Defense 0

Frost Piranha - HP 10, Attack 5, Defense 0

Moon Cleft - HP 6, Attack 5, Defense 5

Z-Yux - HP 7, Attack 4, Defense 0

Elite X-Naut - HP 10, Attack 5, Defense 1

X-Naut PhD - HP 9, Attack 4, Defense 0

X-Yux - HP 10, Attack 3, Defense 1

To reach the outpost you'll have to cross through an arctic wasteland area, which is populated by Ice Puffs and Frost Piranhas. The Ice Puffs aren't so bad, as they will fall to a perfect Spin Jump or a combined assault from Mario and Yoshi. The Frost Piranhas are pretty awful, though: their damage and HP are very high, every attack has a chance to freeze if you don't defend well, and they are entirely immune to Showstopper. If you run into one or two, Gulp and Mario's hammer will get the job done (though you must defend well). For the dangerous groups of 4, Art Attack is an absolute necessity.

Bring out Bobbery when you arrive, so he can browbeat the mayor into sharing what's needed to reactivate the cannon. The first part isn't so bad: You

need to revisit Goldbob in Poshley Heights, and get his written permission to fire the cannon. (This will require a return trip past the Puffs and Piranhas, so make sure you rest if necessary.) To shorten the commute I suggest returning to the Rogueport sewers, breaking the giant blocks with the Ultra Hammer, and taking the newly accessible pipes there. After a sufficient display of generosity, Goldbob will give you the required letter.

The second part is probably the most tedious section of the entire game. You have to track down General White, who will lead you in circles through nearly every area in the game. The first two stops are Petalburg and Keelhaul Key, easily accessible from the warp pipes, but after that you must leave the sewers so you can take the airship to Glitzville. As soon as you speak to Podler the bartender you'll immediately head back the way you came, then revisit the Great Boggly Tree (probably via the shortcut pipes), then backtrack up the sewers to Twilight Town. You FINALLY return the way you came to Fahr Outpost, killing everything on the trail one last time, to find the general taking a power nap on the far right side of town. Stomp on him for a while, as payback for the wild goose chase he made you endure, and eventually he will be up and about.

Before you talk to General White again, I highly advise that you visit the shop. The Northwinds Market sells Shooting Stars, the most powerful offensive item available to you. To ensure your inventory is as effective as possible, you should sell all your Thunder Rages and replace them with Shooting Stars.

Once you speak to him, a long cutscene begins which concludes with Mario landing on the moon. Things are pretty quiet on the first two screens, where your only opponents are Moon Clefs. Their Attack and Defense is painfully high, and they frequently come in groups of 4 or 5, but their middling HP takes away much of the danger. I like to keep Bobbery as my partner. By triggering a First Strike with the Ultra Hammer spin (easy if you take advantage of the crater edges) you can remove all but the front Moon Cleft in the first round, and flip that one over for the next two turns.

Things get a little more difficult on the next screen, where you encounter Z-Yuxes for the first time. They generate Mini-Z-Yuxes every turn that block damage, just like their weaker brethren, but these ones hit a lot harder and can heal if you don't finish them quickly. They also have a bad habit of ambushing you with a shot from across the screen, making it difficult for Mario to avoid damage altogether. Finish them in the first turn whenever possible, because the battle tends to drag out once the first Mini-Z-Yux shows up.

Once you've cleared out the Z-Yuxes, Bobbery can break a boulder in the middle of the screen to reveal a pipe. Walk into the newly revealed fortress to face off with two Elite X-Nauts, the toughest troops they have. Their HP and Defense ensures you won't take them out in the first turn, not without a Special Attack, so you can expect to take a few heavy hits.

Save your progress, then journey to the far end of the floor and trot through a simple tile maze to collect the first elevator key. If you like, you can now return to Rogueport and restock on items via a teleporter on sub-level 2. Otherwise, visit sub-level 1 and head right. (The access code is in the rightmost room on sub-level 2, if you've forgotten it.) A stone guardian waits for you there, standing guard over the second elevator key, and as in Chapter 1 he challenges you to a quiz. Unlike Chapter 1, you have a strong incentive to win the quiz: If you fail, he spawns a pair of very powerful X-Yuxes. There is no way you'll survive without an Art Attack in the first round, and the Star Points aren't impressive enough to make it worth the

cost.

With both elevator keys, you now have the run of the base. The end of the level lies through the locked door on the right side of sub-level 3, which requires three key cards. The electrified rooms on the left end of sub-levels 2 and 3 each have one card (you'll need Yoshi and precise timing to reach both), as does Grodus's room on the right side of sub-level 2. The card in Grodus's room is guarded by a single X-Yux. A First Strike will allow you to take him down with Spin Jump, though otherwise I would rely on Art Attack: it generates two Mini-X-Yuxes every round, and its beams will repeatedly paralyze Mario and his partner via Stop, so you're pretty much screwed if it gets a turn.

On the lower levels you'll run into X-Naut PhDs, who hurt your party and heal their allies with chemicals. Thankfully, a perfect Spin Jump will kill one in a single shot. The encounters down here are full of X-Naut PhDs, Z-Yuxes, and the formidable Elite X-Nauts, often in large groups, so unless you're willing to use a lot of healing items you'll want to make frequent use of Showstopper/Art Attack. You will fight the weaker X-Nauts and Yuxes as well, which should provide you time to recharge your Star Power via Stylish moves and Appeal.

After you've done the runaround and opened the door, you'll find yourself in a factory area full of conveyor belts and moving platforms. Sneak under the barrier with Vivian, take out the X-Naut PhD, then ride the elevator and take the warp pipe to the 2-D platform area in the background. While this area isn't especially dangerous, it still punishes you for poor platforming: every time you miss a jump, you're forced to trek all the way back to the start of the room and ride the platforms back to where you were. Pick up the Ultra Shroom from the high platform on the far left, and otherwise do your best to reach the second warp pipe without falling. This will bring you to a platform a little below the exit. From there you can ride some moving platforms to a bonkable block, which reveals a staircase up to the boss arena.

Of course, before you can actually open the door you'll need to glide down to a much lower platform, so you can grab the final keycard. Eliminate the Z-Yux on the floor, then use the save block and recovery block just in case. (It's a good idea to Appeal until your Star Power is refilled in the Z-Yux battle.) You need at least 3 Life Shrooms, 3 Shooting Stars/Thunder Rages, and 1 Ultra Shroom for the battle that follows. (In a pinch, you can always use the teleporter on sub-level 2.) Once you're ready, backtrack to the beginning and climb/glide your way to the exit one last time.

BOSS BATTLE: Magnus von Grapple v2.0

HP 70, Attack 6, Defense 2

(Fists: HP 5, Attack 9, Defense 1)

-Difficulty: 6/10

This upgraded model is nothing like the pushover you fought in Chapter 2. He hits HARD, often against both characters, and it takes a whole lot of punishment to tear through his massive HP and Defense.

The basic strategy is simple enough: Boost your offense via Power Lift, then wear him down via Spin/Spring Jump. When he shoots out his rocket fists, have your ally destroy them with a Shooting Star right away. They cannot be reliably one-shotted with normal attacks (and are far too deadly to be left alone), and in any case Mario's focus must be dealing maximum damage to the body.

The damage he inflicts will quickly chew through your items, particularly Life Shrooms for your allies, so I really hope you stocked up properly. His "audience cannon" is particularly painful, dealing 25-35 damage depending on how well you defend. Still, as long as you have Life Shrooms you can survive and keep dishing out your own damage. It will be a slow and grueling victory, but ultimately a simple one.

XIV. Chapter 7 Interlude

One last Bowser interlude, and Mario and company teleport back to the Rogueport sewers. It's a short walk from there to the final dungeon, though before you can enter you absolutely need to properly stock your inventory.

Your item stock should look like this: 2 Ultra Shrooms, 4 Shooting Stars, 10 Life Shrooms, and four empty spaces for the items you will pick up beyond the door. The gauntlet of deadly bosses you are to face will drain your inventory quickly, and failing to prepare appropriately will force a repeat journey through the longest and deadliest dungeon you will face in this game.

When you are certain that you are ready, return to the Thousand Year Door one last time. The door opens, and the real challenge begins.

XV. Chapter 8 - The Thousand Year Door

-Useful items: Life Shroom x3, Ultra Shroom x3, Jammin' Jelly x3, Shooting Star x3, Thunder Rage

-Enemies:

Swoopula	- HP 9, Attack 4, Defense 0
Dry Bones	- HP 8, Attack 5, Defense 2
Dark Bones	- HP 20, Attack 5, Defense 2
Dark Wizzerd	- HP 10, Attack 5, Defense 2
Chain Chomp	- HP 7, Attack 6, Defense 5
Phantom Ember	- HP 10, Attack 5, Defense 0
Bombshell Bill	- HP 3, Attack 6, Defense 2
Bombshell Bill Blaster	- HP 10, Attack 0, Defense 4

Welcome to the Palace of Shadow. This place is filled to bursting with deadly traps and puzzles, to say nothing of the random encounters. You will have to fight through dozens of the deadliest enemies in the game, many of whom can kill your weaker allies in two hits. And you will have to do so WITHOUT using items. To complete the dungeon in one shot (which I highly recommend) you must save every item for the bosses, especially the all-important Life Shrooms. Be extra careful to never put your ally in front mid-battle, as it is far too easy for them to die that way.

That said, the random encounters aren't terrible if you make full use of your arsenal. Ultra Hammer/Spin Jump plus Yoshi's Gulp are enough to whittle most battles down to one or two enemies in the first round, especially if you land a First Strike. Art Attack remains a guaranteed victory, and Showstopper is nearly as reliable for half the cost. You will consume lots of FP and Star Power in the process, but if you can consistently pull off Stylish moves you should be able to recover Star Power as fast as you spend it. (Sweet Treat will take care of your HP and FP recovery needs, though you need to wait for a safe moment to use it. You would be wise to wait until only one enemy remains, and if possible to weaken them to the point that Mario's ally can finish them on their own.)

Things start out pretty quietly. The first battles are against Swoopulas,

who typically only appear one or two at a time and can be one-shotted by a perfect Spin Jump. They can steal back some HP with their attacks, but even so they are the easiest opponent you will meet here. Make sure to grab the Shooting Star from the ? block when you enter the door at the bottom of the stairs.

The challenge escalates a bit at the big staircase, as you face the tougher Dry Bones. Between their higher Attack power, tougher defenses, and irritating ability to build more Dry Bones, they require a far more aggressive offense to survive. Dodge the projectiles the Dry Bones throw in the field, and always, always get a First Strike with your hammer. The groups of three will fall quickly to a hammer+Gulp assault, while the groups of four are best finished via Showstopper/Art Attack.

The hallway at the bottom is guarded by Bombshell Bill Blasters, who operate like their little brothers on Keelhaul Key. Sneak past the Bills with Vivian and/or First Strikes, so you can destroy the Blasters with Art Attack. I wouldn't recommend relying on direct attacks: the Blasters' high HP and Defense ensures it will take multiple rounds to take down each, all while you swat down the Bills each cannon continues to fire.

Once that threat is dealt with, you must sneak your way past a hall of spike traps and a bridge of fire traps. Appropriately enough, that is where you meet the first Phantom Ember. They have higher HP and Attack than the ones from Chapter 5, but the same basic strategies apply. (Try to get your Star Power as close to full as you can for the next battle.) Continue into the big cathedral-like room, where your path will run through the Dark Bones, most powerful of the zombie Koopas. Chase it through the crowd of Dry Bones minions, and a miniboss battle will commence.

EVENT BATTLE: Dark Bones, Dry Bones x4
-Difficulty: 5/10

Open with Art Attack to remove the Dry Bones backing their leader. Since the Dry Bones will quickly revive, and Dark Bones has a significant chance of building another one on his first turn, it is easiest to finish them off with a second Art Attack. I would Tattle on the Dark Bones, since you will meet him again later in the dungeon.

Beyond the locked door is another staircase, this one with Blasters on the top and bottom and lots of Phantom Embers in between. Pick up the Ultra Shroom at the very top of the stairs, and fight your way through them as normal.

Fight or run through the next wide-open room, navigate through the torch maze puzzle, and you will end up in an open courtyard area guarded by a pair of Chain Chomps. These terrors have the highest Defense in the game, coupled with high HP and Attack, and are immune to fire and Showstopper. Thankfully, you can easily hit them with a First Strike spin from the Ultra Hammer. Ultra Hammer plus Gulp will be enough to eliminate one of them immediately, and up to three in the first two rounds. (This strategy can be thwarted by the odd Chain Chomp carrying a Defend Plus badge, which nullifies your hammer damage and prevents it from being launched back. In that case you should either rely on Art Attack, or have Mario defend while Yoshi does all the damage.)

While there is plenty to do in this place, most of it can wait until after the next boss battle. Exit to the right, and you will march down a long

corridor filled with enemies. The first encounter introduces you to the Dark Wizzerd. He operates much like Magikoopa, shooting magic lasers and summoning illusory copies when he is alone, though his high Defense and HP make it unlikely he'll fall in the first turn. However, he is highly vulnerable to Vivian's Shade Fist when alone: the burn damage will destroy his copies, and since he keeps trying to summon them he will no longer attack you. You will meet a Chain Chomp in the second hallway (don't rush, or he may ambush you), nobody in the third, and two Phantom Embers in the final hall. Do your best to recover any Star Power you've lost, and run back through the now-cleared halls to hit the recovery block in the courtyard. Then return and save. The first of five epic boss battles begins now, and you want to be in peak fighting shape.

BOSS BATTLE: Gloomtail
HP 80, Attack 8, Defense 2
-Difficulty: 7/10

If you thought Magnus was difficult, Gloomtail will be a nightmare. He has the highest Attack power of any boss, can inflict plenty of extra damage via Poison, and gets even more dangerous late in the battle. Add in the extra attacks needed due to high Defense, and winning this battle becomes an epic struggle.

That said, it is possible to complete it without using any items. You'll need to switch your allies frequently, but it is very doable. (For details, see the note below.)

The new Supernova attack does the best damage, even with Star Power cost factored in, and should be Mario's first move. From there, he should focus on chipping away 5 HP at a time with Spin Jump, while his allies deal additional damage or Appeal. Proper Defend timing is important, both to control the damage and prevent the gradual drain of Poison. His Earthquake stomp deals 10 damage, potentially one-shotting your most fragile allies, so its Defend timing is especially important.

The really interesting part starts below 30 HP, when he drastically raises his Attack via Charge. If Vivian is not yet in the party, use Mario's turn to switch her in. She needs to be ready with Veil every time he charges, to dodge the incredibly painful Mega Breath, so keep her in the party for the rest of the battle. Just keep chipping away with Spin Jump and Shade Fist (the burn damage really adds up over time), use a second Supernova if you get the Star Power, and eventually the great dragon will fall.

--NOTE ON ALLIES: At this late stage in the game, Mario's partners can be a liability in boss fights. Their damage is far lower than Mario's, especially against high-Defense bosses like this one, and without Shine Sprites most of them will be knocked out in two (or at most three) hits. And when your partner falls and is revived every other attack, it will chew through your limited Life Shroom supply VERY fast.

However, there are a lot of them. Between the six of them (seven with Ms. Mowz), they can absorb up to 9 (or 11) hits, even from an endgame boss like this, before Life Shrooms are required. To do this you must switch your allies frequently, possibly a few times in a row if the boss is especially aggressive, which will prevent them from supporting Mario with items or their own attacks. But since most of your offense comes from Mario anyway, the items you save make it well worth the trouble. To ensure your inventory lasts through the whole dungeon, I HIGHLY recommend exploiting this trick to

at least some extent.

In the Gloomtail battle, I like to start with Goombella (for Tattle). Bobbery has the best HP and Attack power, so he is a good second choice. Save Vivian for last, so she's ready when the Mega Breath phase comes around.

Before leaving this room, go to the far right wall and blast through the crack with Bobbery. You will find a hidden Ultra Shroom and Jammin' Jelly inside. These items are lost forever after you clear the Riddle Tower and lower the stairs, so clear enough space in your inventory to grab them both.

Back in the Chomp courtyard, Bobbery will blow open the warp pipes that allow you to access the two boat panels. Access the Riddle Tower, and use Gloomtail's Star Key to reveal the pedestals that open the way forward. Seven of the keys are simple puzzle-solving exercises, while the eighth requires you to defeat a roomful of Bone zombies in order. I strongly recommend refilling your Star Power, either by leveling up or with Appeal/Stylish attacks in battle, before you collect that key, as this will be your last opportunity to do so before the next boss. The Dark Bones remains a dangerous opponent even by itself (doubly so if it builds a Dry Bones for backup), so attack aggressively with Gulp and be ready to switch allies if he wears down Yoshi too much.

After activating all the pedestals, the floor in the east hallway drops and a path is revealed into the depths of the dungeon. Hit the recovery block if needed, put Yoshi in the party, save, and once again steel yourself for battle. You are assaulted by the new Shadow Sirens, whose vastly increased power will put you in a world of hurt.

BOSS BATTLE: Shadow Sirens

Dopliss: HP 40, Attack 6, Defense 0

Marilyn: HP 40, Attack 7, Defense 0

Beldam: HP 30, Attack 5, Defense 0

-Difficulty: 8/10

While none of the Sirens are individually comparable to Gloomtail, the three of them together are more than strong enough to rip through your party like paper. Dopliss and especially Marilyn can dish out plenty of damage, but the real threat is Beldam. In addition to potentially freezing you with Blizzard, she can flat-out take away turns from a party member with her Slow spell. If left alive, she can also give her allies double turns or boost their Attack, poison or shrink your party members, and generally cripple you in ways that go beyond raw damage. For you to have any chance she must fall, FAST.

Open with Power Lift. Shoot for +3 Attack if at all possible, though +2 is good enough to get the job done. Immediately use Ground Pound on Beldam. What happens next depends on Beldam's first move. If both Mario and Yoshi are left alive and able to act in the second round, you can take her out then and there. Otherwise, just continue stomping on Beldam until she falls.

With her out of the way, Marilyn is your next priority. Use Art Attack on her and Dopliss after Power Lift wears off, then abuse Gulp and Spin Jump to do as much damage as possible. Ignore her charge attack, as you'll ultimately take less damage by defeating her quickly. (She is extra-dangerous if Beldam uses the extra-turn buff on her, as she likes to charge up and then immediately blast the party with her thunder.)

Unlike Gloomtail, you're guaranteed to lose a few items in the course of this battle. You can expect to spend two or three Life Shrooms even if things go smoothly (more if Beldam incapacitates you), and Mario will probably need an Ultra Shroom before Marilyn is defeated.

Thankfully, the battle is a cakewalk once it's just Doopliss. He has no special tricks, beyond his questionably useful copycat spell, and if you switch your allies promptly you won't lose any more Life Shrooms. Just deal with him like you would any low-Defense enemy, and you will be fine.

With the Shadow Sirens neutralized, you can take the newly revealed stairs into the depths of the palace. After eliminating the Dark Wizzerd, hit the ? block to collect a Thunder Rage.

The tunnels that follow are filled to bursting with puzzles that demand use of nearly every ability you've learned throughout the story, and often require good timing and reflexes besides. You'll also run into dozens of the dangerous enemies you encountered early in the dungeon, most notably the Dark Wizzerd and Chain Chomp. Watch every step carefully, use the strategies you've already learned to safely eliminate each enemy, and you should be able to blaze ahead without losing any further items.

As you forge your way forward, stay alert for the valuable Life Shrooms. You will find three between here and the next boss fight: One is in a block at the top of the big spinning wheel, another is in the room to the left of said wheel, and the third is on top of a pillar accessed via airplane mode near the end. You can also find two Shooting Stars. One is in the bottom left corner of the room with the big wheel, and the other on top of a pedestal reachable via an airplane panel. (The last Life Shroom and Shooting Star can both be reached via Yoshi's flutter kick, starting from the platform where you collected the key.) Collect as many as you can hold, and do your best to keep your Star Power full as you clear out the final room.

The next two bosses are fought back-to-back, making for a real marathon that will tax your resources and your skills. (You can save several items if you enter with 70 to 99 Star Points, though it's by no means required.) Hit the recovery block, put Bobbery in your party, and save. Go through the door and take the stairs to begin.

BOSS BATTLE: Sir Grodus

HP 50, Attack 7, Defense 1

(Grodus-X: HP 3, Attack 4, Defense 0)

-Difficulty: 6/10

Grodus's attack power is high, like every boss here, but it's nothing you haven't seen before. He can sometimes burn or freeze you, so defend well. The real issue is the Grodus-X's that surround him. He starts off invulnerable thanks to the four he enters with. He also regenerates two more every turn, raising his Defense to 3, and if left alone they will attack independently and then restore Grodus' invulnerability.

The only way to keep the little buggers out of the way is to use an item every turn, before Mario attacks. Move Bobbery to the front on the first turn, and have him break the shield with a Thunder Rage. (Since he is invulnerable anyway, it is just as effective as a Shooting Star.) Now that Grodus is vulnerable, Mario can punish him with a Spin Jump. Repeat the cycle next turn with a Shooting Star, lowering his Defense to raise Spin Jump's damage, and rinse and repeat.

If you have 70 to 99 Star Points, move Mario to the front in the second round and have him use Supernova. Besides dealing extra damage and potentially winning a round early, it will save you Shooting Stars. These items can be very valuable in the final battle, so the more you can afford to save the better.

That's it, basically. Grodus will occasionally buff himself with the Counter effect (switch to the hammer if he does) or make himself Dodgy (possibly dragging out the battle an extra round), but if you follow this simple pattern Grodus will fall within four or five rounds.

BOSS BATTLE: Bowser and Kammy Koopa
Bowser: HP 70, Attack 7, Defense 2
Kammy Koopa: HP 50, Attack 5, Defense 0
-Difficulty: 7/10

In the happy event that you gained a level from Grodus, both Mario and Bobbery will be fully healed and his Star Power will refill. Otherwise, they will be as worn out as they were at the end of the last battle.

Open with Supernova, then switch in Yoshi. Your first priority is taking out Kammy, to remove her healing as well as the obnoxious support effects she uses on herself and Bowser. Start by knocking her off the broom, then eliminating her quickly with Spin Jump and Gulp. Thankfully she's squishy by endgame boss standards, so it should only take a few turns of focused attack to eliminate her.

Once it's just Bowser, you can start switching allies to save Life Shrooms. He hits like a truck, as expected, but as long as you keep attacking it's just a matter of wearing through his heavy Defense to victory. (As always, use Supernova again when your Star Power refills far enough.) Expect to spend a few Life Shrooms, at least one Ultra Shroom, and maybe a Jammin' Jelly in the process.

Continue through the door, grab the Ultra Shroom and Jammin' Jelly on the stairs, and stop at the save point. Before you start the final battle, you need to take a close look at your inventory. The final boss is by far the longest and toughest endurance test you will face, and if you come in poorly equipped she will wear you down to nothing. Worse, both stages of the final battle are preceded by endless lengthy cutscenes, which you will have to re-watch in their entirety if you lose.

You need at least 2 Ultra Shrooms, 1 Jammin' Jelly, and 7+ Life Shrooms to survive the final boss and win the game. Shooting Stars are also very valuable, as each one can save up to 2 Life Shrooms and significantly shorten the battle if used intelligently, but having a solid stash of Life Shrooms is paramount. (There is one more Shooting Star on a pedestal, two rooms to the left of the previous boss battle, which I highly recommend collecting.)

If you have all those items in your inventory, you are good to go. If not, the only way to win the game is to backtrack all the way outside the palace, restock on items, and return the way you came. Though not difficult, this is tedious as hell: All the enemy encounters respawn when you leave the dungeon, so just returning to where you left off will take nearly as long as the first pass through the dungeon.

When you are ready, put Goombella in your party and save. It's time to

finish this fight for good.

BOSS BATTLE: Shadow Queen, Part 1

HP 150, Attack 7, Defense 0

-Difficulty: 8/10

Her starting form is small enough that you can effectively damage her with Art Attack. Have Mario use it on his first two turns, while Goombella uses Tattle. Conserving your Life Shrooms is more important now than it's ever been, so be ready to change partners as often as necessary.

The Shadow Queen hits hard to start with, and has lots of nasty ways to twist the knife. She frequently uses a Power Lift-style move which adds 3 to her Attack and Defense, and since it lasts for two attacks you cannot completely bypass it with Veil. Her toxic breath inflicts Poison and Confusion, and the tricky Defend timing makes it difficult to avoid catching them. (If anyone gets Confused, remove it with Sweet Treat ASAP. You cannot afford to waste turns letting your characters attack each other.) And later in the battle she can summon a legion of Dead Hands, who strike multiple times and attack independently from her, or even charge again after Power Lift for an extra-deadly explosion of shadow. Be wary if she uses Power Lift while the Dead Hands are out, as it doubles the damage of their multi-hitting attacks.

For the most part, you will attack the same way as always: Mario uses Spin Jump most turns, while his partner deals what damage they can and switches out when their HP gets low. You have a lot more freedom to switch out your allies in this phase, so take advantage of it as much as possible to save on Life Shrooms.

The good news is that you only need to bring her below 90 HP to end this phase of the battle. The Shadow Queen assumes her true demonic form and is rendered completely invulnerable. I recommend switching in Vivian at that point. To progress on to the next phase, you must attempt at least one attack every round for the next three rounds. Two Sweet Treats in a row should keep the party alive long enough to end the standoff.

At this point, another very long cutscene commences. Peach releases a burst of rejuvenating energy at its end, fully recovering the entire party, and shatters the Shadow Queen's invulnerability. Time to banish this witch for good.

BOSS BATTLE: Shadow Queen, Part 2

HP 150, Attack 7, Defense 1

(Hands: HP 5, Attack 7, Defense 0)

-Difficulty: 10/10

The first three rounds are incredibly cathartic. Mario opens with Supernova, dealing major damage to the body and removing the health-sucking hands, and then he and Bobbery continue pummeling the body. After your third successful normal attack, the recovery slots will automatically come up and align on the Shine Sprite icon, fully refilling your health and Star Power once more. Blast her with one more Supernova when the hands reappear, and the real struggle begins.

Probably the most aggravating part of the whole battle is the hands. Each hand has a 50/50 chance of using the drain spell, restoring a bunch of HP to the body, while the Shadow Queen continues using her normal attacks. This health drain drastically slows down the battle, which is extremely dangerous

given your limited inventory. This is where your surplus Shooting Stars prove their worth. Toss one directly after the hands regenerate to reduce her to just one attack per round and eliminate the HP recovery for a few turns, drastically speeding things up. (Supernova can serve the same role, if your Star Power refills enough to use it.) While the Dead Hands do plenty of damage on their own, the absence of HP drain makes them a lot less dangerous.

The Shadow Queen still uses all the attacks from the first phase, with the toxic breath's Confusion remaining a serious hazard. Her new favorite move, though, is the charge-up, which always precedes her lethal Black Wave attack. The first time she charges up, have Mario switch Vivian in (if she isn't there already) and use Veil to dodge the blast. You should keep her in for the rest of the battle, as Black Wave remains a common move for the rest of the battle. Putting Vivian in front will give you the advantage if the hands regenerate before Black Wave, allowing Mario to destroy them before they have a chance to drain you, though it also draws many more attacks toward Vivian.

And that's the battle in a nutshell. Keep attacking with Spin Jump and Shade Fist, and have Vivian use the Ultra Shrooms when necessary. Things really slow down when you run out of Shooting Stars and can no longer stop the HP drain, so keep up an aggressive offense and do your best to defend well every time. So long as you came in with enough Life Shrooms, Mario and Vivian will both survive long enough to finally vanquish her.

Yes! After the epic struggle it took to get there, the ending cutscenes and the credits will be the most beautiful thing you've ever seen. Sit back and enjoy them, my friend. You've earned it.

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