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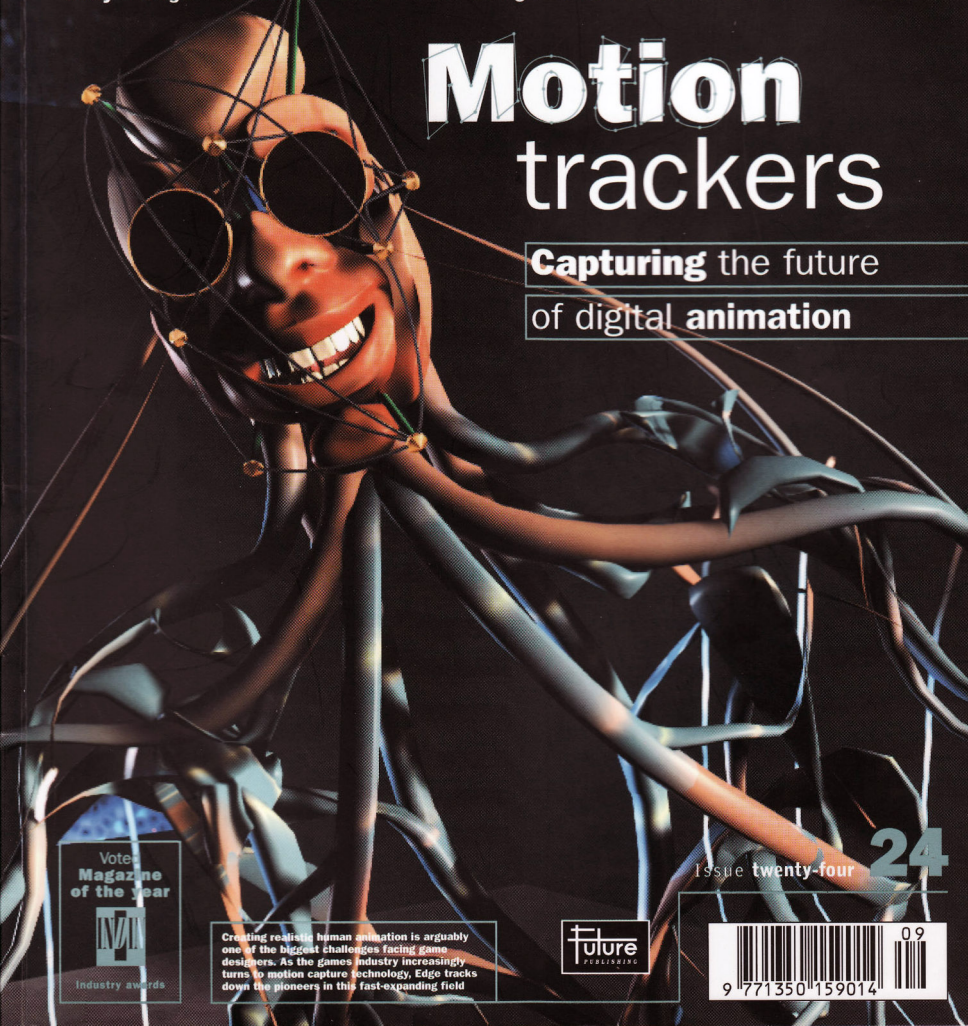
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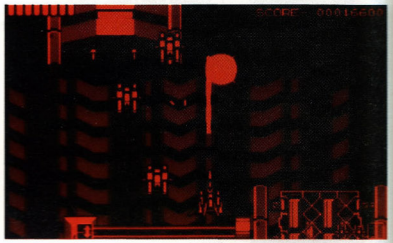
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Virtual Boy: first software revealed

Nintendo shows what its new hardware can do. But is it enough?

Now that the US release of the Ultra 64 has been pushed back well into next year, the Virtual Boy has assumed a critical importance for Nintendo. The company now has to convince a loyal Japanese and sceptical North American public that its awkwardly shaped box is more than just a gimmick.

This marketing problem is compounded by the fact that conventional publicity just won't work – blocky red images on 40-foot billboards do not equate to a successful advertising campaign. It's a 'try before you buy' product, and Nintendo knows it. That's why it's going to great lengths to have software ready for launch and to make sure the titles keep flowing. **Edge** takes a look at the early releases that will make or break the system.



Hudson Soft's *Vertical Force* uses the VB's display to create convincing parallax, allowing the player to move between planes



Zelda returns

Nintendo's Satellaview system (see Edge 19) is being used to give Japanese gamers access to a reworked version of *Zelda* (above). Owners of the SFC-based satellite technology will be allowed to download and play various stages of the game for one hour between 6pm and 7pm every Sunday for four weeks. After each session, game positions will be saved and when the final hour has elapsed the 50 highest scoring players will each be sent a free memory pack.

The new *Zelda* is based on the game originally released nine years ago on the Famicom disk system. However, there are strong rumours that Shigeru Miyamoto has a new 16bit *Zelda* nearing completion – something that would give SFC owners just cause for celebration.

Mario's Dream Tennis

Not so much a dream as a standard tennis game with cartoony artwork and a thirdperson perspective, *Mario's Dream Tennis* is neither exceptional nor the best use of the Virtual Boy's 3D technology. The player controls one of the characters from the *Mario* series on a simple scaling 3D court which has a viewpoint not unlike that in Tonkin House's early SNES title, *Super Tennis*. Lacking the dynamic in-play camera movement or large characters which might have made it a star, *Mario's Dream Tennis* looks more like an 8bit game than a 32bit one. But it has somehow become the machine's pack-in title for the US, with Nintendo obviously hoping that the Mario connection will help sales.



Red Alarm

The Virtual Boy's thirdperson blaster combines *Starfox* with *Tempest 2000* to create some of the best vector polygon effects and 3D surrealism in console gaming. Piloting a starfighter through hovering, immersive wireframe worlds, the player eliminates fixed and moving targets with multiple weapons, with audiovisual treats keeping the gameplay exciting. Even acceleration and turning become brief learning experiences with the two-joypad VB controller, helping *Red Alarm* to transcend the 'been there, done that' feeling from the start. The most immersive experience to be had on the Virtual Boy so far.

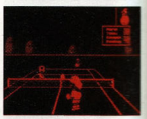
Mario Clash

Mario Clash places you in a 3D single-screen room reminiscent of the original *Mario Brothers* game, apart from the new perspective – the top platforms are in the distance while the bottom ones are closer to the eye lenses. Picking up where *Mario Brothers* left off, it has Mario grabbing enemies and hurling them at each other, with some token 3D effects here and there. Increased speed adds to the challenge, but the game's longterm depth and value remain in question.

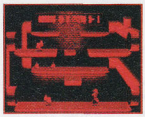
Galactic Pinball

With four standard pinball machines and hidden bonus levels, *Galactic Pinball* is one of the better Virtual Boy titles. It combines fundamentally sound pinball action with shooting bonus scenes and trick-shot elements, and also offers a wide variety of impressive →



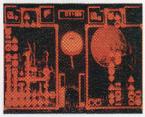


***Mario's Dream Tennis* (above) and 3D blaster *Red Alarm* (top) – one of the titles that makes relatively good use of the Virtual Boy's 3D display. But will consumers regard dismiss VB as simply a 'red Game Boy'?**









From top: *Mario Clash* is a 3D variation on the original *Mario Bros*; *Galactic Pinball* has five tables and realistic ball movement; T&E Soft's *VR Golf* should sell well in the US; Hudson's *Panic Bomber* is the token puzzle game

→ 3D effects. Floating objects inside the four machines' tilted-perspective shells create a unique 3D hovering sensation, and the gameplay is fun from the word go.

VR Golf
A variant on the now-standard thirdperson-perspective T&E Soft golf software on Super NES, 3DO and Saturn – which in the past has included Pebble Beach, Augusta and Masters courses – but this time with more 3D land texturing and floating icons. Not especially immersive – and indeed the first game to feature entirely red 'greens' – but a solid golf title nonetheless.

TeleRoboxer
After *Punch-Out!* and its sequel, one might reasonably expect more from Nintendo than this. Throw away *Punch-Out!*'s human opponents in favour of clunky robots, reduce the charm factor by 50 per cent and add some slight 3D depth effects, and you've got *TeleRoboxer*. Use of the Virtual Boy's sprite scaling ability is limited to hokey 3D punches and mature players might find the action teetering dangerously close to one of those punchbag games you find in arcades, but younger players will probably appreciate the clatter. Clearly not the game it might have been with more Nintendo in-house spark, *TeleRoboxer* is no-frills 3D boxing at its most uninspired.

Panic Bomber
Hudson's *Tetris*-style theme is more notable for its use of floating background images than anything dramatically 3D about the gameplay, but an impressive introduction and good use of parallax helps keep this puzzle game memorable.

Vertical Force
An overhead shooter reminiscent of *GunHed* and *Super Star Soldier*, Hudson Soft's *Vertical Force* allows the player to fight in two layers (high up and low down). 3D parallax scrolling and enemies at different depths are the game's only noteworthy 'virtual' features, but the tried and tested *Star Soldier* play formula and boss characters give it a solid foundation.

Virtual League Baseball
Kemco's entry is a standard SNES-style baseball game with 'multiple 3D gameplay viewpoints', twoplayer compatibility and 20 teams (with 'realistic player stats'). Although the game doesn't look mindblowing compared to some of the baseball action on the Saturn, it's adequate for what it is: a low-cost, rushed Virtual Boy baseball game.

Multinational companies rarely take risks without good cause, and Nintendo obviously believes the Virtual Boy is a viable product. Although the first crop of games appears to contain more novelty value than hardcore gameplay, it's too early to pass judgement on the system's future. Remember, they said the Game Boy would never catch on...

Advertainment

In which Edge studies the art of videogames marketing. This month: Sega goes ape on Japanese TV

Sega and Sony's tooth-and-claw struggle for domination of the Japanese high street has spilled over into the arena of TV advertising. In an effort to sway potential PlayStation punters in the direction of Saturn, Sega Japan recently ran a commercial depicting two chimpanzees abandoning their primal instincts in favour of videogames. Is Sega playing fair, or is this just monkey business?

Company: **Sega**
Product: **Saturn**
Date: **May 1995**
Origin: **Japan**





1 Two chimps, one called Segal and the other Anthony (very subtle), are playing with their new consoles. The games onscreen are just about visible: Segal is enjoying *Virtua Fighter*, while Anthony finds himself passing the time with Namco's PlayStation shooter, *Starblade*. 2 Suddenly, having decided that the PlayStation is boring, Anthony gets up, switches off, and wanders away, leaving Segal all alone with his Saturn. 3 Segal glances over briefly but doesn't follow because, of course, he's too engrossed in *Virtua Fighter*. The moral? *Starblade* isn't a patch on *Virtua Fighter*. Strange how Sega didn't pick *Tekken*...