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The world of interactive entertainment is growing at an unprecedented rate. As more heavyweight players enter the arena, games development is finally getting the backing it deserves. But one thing is holding it back: a lack of people with the necessary skills. If you've ever wanted to get into the games industry, turn to page 54

future
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Virtual Boy meets muted reception

Nintendo's 3D console has failed to excite Japanese gamers

it is...

Nintendo UK, or rather the entity formerly known as Nintendo UK. The big N has decided to axe over 140 jobs and replace its UK subsidiary with a new distribution partner and a small management staff

On July 21, Nintendo launched its new 32bit console in Japan, where, typically, queues form outside stores on the day of a new hardware launch and stocks sell out quickly. However, Virtual Boy was greeted with little of the fanatical enthusiasm associated with Japanese videogaming, and, more unusually, there was no first-day sell-out.

Perhaps sales were adversely affected by the middling quality of the games – unlike every other major Nintendo hardware launch, there was no *Super Mario* game and nothing of the calibre of *F-Zero*, *Pilotwings* or *Tetris*. Of the five VB titles onsale, T&E Soft's wireframe shoot 'em up *Red Alarm* and Nintendo's own *Galactic Pinball* make best use of the 3D effect – surely the machine's only real selling point. Hudson's *Panic Bomber*, a blend of *Tetris* and *Puyo Puyo*, plays well enough, but it's a 2D game with only a smattering of 3D window dressing.

Mario's Tennis – presumably the lead title of the five – is a standard tennis game with a fairly effective 3D court. Most disappointing, though, is *TeleRoboxer*, which plays like a tired old NES game.

Cosmetically, the Virtual Boy is an appealing, sturdy little unit mounted on black metal legs and powered by six AA batteries stored in the strange-looking controller. The headset – very

reminiscent of a pair of *Star Wars* binoculars – has a soft neoprene eyeshade which can be detached for cleaning. The controller itself is well designed, fitting snugly into the hands, with twin Game Boy-style D-pads under each thumb, two buttons next to each pad and two buttons on the bottom underneath the D-pads.

There's no denying that the Virtual Boy has great novelty value, but the basic demands of the console on the player will ultimately limit its appeal.



Virtual Boy failed to sell out on launch in Japan, and the initial titles are far from outstanding, reinforcing doubts about its viability

The playing position – hunched over a table, with head and neck fixed – is awkward, and staring into the machine's red lenses for any length of time is a strain. Nintendo was obviously well aware of these limitations as an automatic pause function is built in, interrupting play at certain times to give the player a much-needed screen break. The often grating sound – which is no real improvement on the Game Boy's – is another feature that may deter potential players.

With no big-name games in the pipeline and Nintendo now clearly focusing its attention on the Ultra 64, the Virtual Boy could be in for a rough time in the run-up to Christmas. However, it shouldn't be forgotten that, with the Game Boy, the company successfully created a new market for itself. And, as the secrecy surrounding the Ultra 64 and SNES products like *Yoshi's Island* has proved, you can never tell what the tight-lipped Nintendo has up its sleeve.

3DO hits rocky patch

The 3DO Company suffered a set-back recently when Japanese consumer electronics giant Toshiba axed its plans to use 3DO technology in a car navigation system. Toshiba's decision (which was due to 'changes in the market environment') caused 3DO's stock price to drop 13 per cent from \$13 5/8 to \$11 5/8.

The fortunes of The 3DO Company have always been something of a rollercoaster. While its revenues tripled in fiscal year March 1995, the company has suffered losses of \$46.3 million and \$51.4 million for 1995 and 1994 respectively. On a more positive note, however, the company recently secured a \$16.6 million cash injection from institutional investors.



The Virtual Boy has already spawned a one-off magazine in Japan from ASCII, called Virtual Boy Tsushin (from the same stable as Famicom Tsushin)