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THE
CUTTING EDGE

VIRTUAL PLACES in small spaces

The Virtual Boy leads Nintendo's foray into virtual reality.

By The Whizz

When Nintendo announced the 64-bit Ultra 64 game system, most video game brainiacs figured it planned to leapfrog 32-bit technology altogether. Wrong!

The big N saw something in a Reflection – Waltham, Massachusetts-based Reflection Technology, that is – and decided to take 32-bit technology small. Now it's set to explore virtual reality with the Virtual Boy, a compact 3D game system.

The Kid's All Right

Virtual Boy is a stand-alone tabletop unit that doesn't connect to a television. The 32-bit virtual-reality (VR) system, powered by six AA batteries, is built around a RISC (reduced instruction-set computing) chip. It uses two high-resolution mirror-scanning LED (light-emitting diode) displays to produce a 3D image.

The Virtual Boy resembles a pair of ski goggles mounted on short metal legs. You set the unit on a table and simply slide your face into it. The design is meant to eliminate all external stimuli, totally immersing players in a multi-

faceted monochrome world consisting of high-resolution red images against a deep-black background.

The separate VB controller is totally unique. It sports a two-handed design consisting of double pistol grips mounted on either side of a control pad, which features four action buttons and two directional pads.

Nintendo Sees Reflection

The brains behind the Boy belong to Reflection Technology, a company that specializes in virtual-display technology. What has the company that Mario built so jazzed is Reflection Technology's patented virtual-display technology, the Scanned Linear Array (SLA). With it, Reflection displays can produce a readable image comparable to that of a 12-inch monitor – within a one-inch-square window!

The SLA is built around a

vertical column of tiny LEDs and a magnifying lens. A vibrating mirror sweeps the magnified image of the LEDs horizontally to paint a full-



The table-mounted Virtual Boy doesn't look like much, but it's what's inside that counts. Check out the complex controller.

screen image. To view the image, you put the SLA display up to your eye and look into a tiny viewfinder. Because of the high speed of the mirror and the LEDs, your eye is

fooled into seeing a single continuous image.

The same phenomenon occurs when you watch a movie. You see separate frames of moving film as a continuous animated picture rather than the individual images that comprise it.

The Boy as Toy

Nintendo of Japan is talking up the Boy big. The VB is slated for release in Japan this April at a suggested retail price of 19,800 yen (\$210). According to Nintendo, three cartridge-based games will be available at the launch, followed by two to three titles each month. At

press time, Nintendo projected that Virtual Boy sales in Japan will reach 3 million hardware units and 14 million software units by March 1996. That's a man-sized task for the little Boy. **G**

