32 PLAYSTATION GAMES: Every available PlayStation title tested and rated

PlayStation ■ Saturn ■ 3DO ■ Ultra 64 ■ PC CD-ROM ■ 32X ■ Jaguar ■ Arcade ■ Online

224 Pages
Special Holiday Issue

NEXT GENERATION

Leading edge computer and video games

December 1995



volume one
12

$4.99 U.S./$5.99 CAN.
12>
0 09281 02585 6

Don't panic. Our 32-page report details the pros and cons of each next generation system, page 36

SEGA SATURN: 30 games reviewed & rated for Sega's new 32-bit videogame system

Virtual Boy

Manufacturer:	**Nintendo**
Price:	**$179**
Released:	**August 21**
Origin:	**Japan**
US Sales:	**40,000**

Nintendo's new toy is aiming to create a market for itself the same way the Game Boy did six years ago. But basic games and awkward play could limit its fate to that of a passing novelty



Let's get one thing straight right from the start: This is not a virtual reality system. Created by Nintendo's design guru Gumpei Yokoi, whose past glories include hardware such as the Game Boy, the Game And Watch series, and such sterling software as *Super Metroid*, the Virtual Boy is something of a mysterious product. Unusually, it was a Nintendo product that didn't achieve a universal level of desirability prior to its launch. Conversely, the Super Famicom (Super NES) had been spoken of in hushed, sacramental tones by all within the videogaming community months before its first public airing in 1990, and even now the Ultra 64 is generating similar levels of frenzied prelaunch speculation.

What certainly didn't help Nintendo's Virtual Boy plans was the rush of opinion offered at the Virtual Boy's unveiling at last year's Shoshinkai show in Chibi, Japan. Most observations were less than optimistic, and some downright damning. The key area of criticism was its range of launch software; "uninspired" came from some of the kinder reports.

While the Virtual Boy system's 3D capability was certainly perceived as being effective, there was little Nintendo could do to disguise the shallow nature of games such as *TeleRoboxer*, a *Punch Out!!* style affair featuring robotic fighters. Worse, there was no big-name Nintendo sales vehicle among the initial



According to Gumpei Yokoi, the creator of Virtual Boy, Nintendo plans to release a shoulder-mounted Virtual Boy soon

Tech Specs: Virtual Boy

CPU: 32-bit NEC V810 operating at 10 MHz

Graphics: Scanned linear array display developed by Reflection Technology, details unclear

Sound: 16-bit stereo

Misc: Dimensions are 217 x 254 x 110 mm
Weighs 760g
Powered by 6AA batteries stored in the game controller
Accessories include an AC 100V adapter, battery charger and adjustable stand

In a nutshell: The habitually cagey Nintendo has been even more reticent to divulge too much about the technical prowess of its Virtual Boy system. This is a legacy, perhaps, of the machine's debut at the Shoshinkai show in late 1994, when it failed to make the desired favorable impression.

Unusual and innovative, the Virtual Boy can be seen as a gamble in the same way that the Game Boy was, but it's a lot harder to see the VB succeeding to the same world-conquering extent that the Game Boy did. The 3D effect generated by its fixed headset is convincing but underutilized by the first crop of titles released by Nintendo. Too much of the 3D in the first Virtual Boy games were simple shock effects – just like the effects seen in primitive 3D movies.

The Virtual Boy's controller is an intriguing creation. Its twin-handed, two joypad approach to game control is innovative and should allow for some interesting games, if designers can look beyond obvious trickery.

With the Ultra 64 commanding most of Nintendo's (and everyone else's) attention, it's hard to see the Virtual Boy getting a fair crack of the whip. Whether it will ever be more than a gaming novelty remains to be seen.

titles: Virtual Boy takes on the *Zelda* and *Metroid* themes were conspicuous by their absence at launch, and *Mario Smash* bears more resemblance to the original *Mario* arcade game then the side-scrolling plumber who has sold millions of hardware units.

Gumpei Yokoi believes that the system is best suited to action and puzzle games, though he says that "in the future, role-playing games and simulations will become popular." However, creating expansive and complex games such as RPGs could in itself be problematic. The Virtual Boy is designed to be used in shortish bursts. Indeed, the games have an optional auto-pause facility built into the hardware, which prevents users from overdosing, and simplistic titles such as *Galactic Pinball* consolidate the brief-dabble theory. But when you consider that Square Soft is a known licensee for the Virtual Boy, more involving, long-term games seem destined to appear as the system matures.

Third party support in general would appear to be something of an interesting point, however. Nintendo consciously avoided an "all aboard" policy during the system's infancy, with Yokoi stating that "if we allow any software publisher to develop games for our platform, there's a danger that poor-quality software will appear…we wanted to limit that danger and maintain as much control as possible."

What is of some concern is that Nintendo's machine has apparently been dismissed by some of the industry's most important players. Konami, Capcom, and Namco have so far remained uncommitted to the format, leaving the flame to be carried instead by the likes of smaller companies such as Hudson Soft, Atlus, and T&E Soft.

It is clear that Nintendo has picked up on virtual reality's burgeoning significance in electronic home entertainment. But rather than approach the challenge head on, producing a full-blown machine with a traditional, colored display and motion-tracking facility, it has opted for a novelty angle. The finished unit is certainly a striking piece of gaming hardware, designed with an air of Fisher Price flair and finished with the robusticity of a traditional Nintendo product. It stands sturdily on metal feet, and its joypad, which also holds the six AA batteries required to power the system, is comfortably designed, yet sufficiently complex to sit alongside both Sony's and Sega's designs.

The Virtual Boy's display is absolutely pin sharp, and succeeds in producing a gaming experience truly unlike anything that's gone before. At its most basic level, the 3D effect is achieved by assigning objects on screen to individual planes. The 3D varies throughout the range of launch software, but even Hudson Soft's *Panic Bomber*, a *Tetris* clone that would seem to be the least likely to demonstrate dazzling 3D, manages to produce some of the most terrific animation and effects seen on the system.

The unit carries a strong warning against being used by those under six years of age — permanent vision damage can occur

Despite housing a 32-bit CPU, the Virtual Boy really doesn't jump through any impressive



In Japan Virtual Boy games are launched with comic books (left). The battery-powered nature of the system, (with the batteries cleverly stowed away in the controller) hint that the system was initially designed to be considerably more portable than the final weight and awkwardness of the system allowed. Perhaps the shoulder-mounted edition hinted at by Mr. Yokoi will be closer to his original plans for the platform

hoops when examined on the basis of pure pixel shifting. Obviously the strain of producing two independent images simultaneously, each only slightly different, but coordinating to create a 3D effect when brought together naturally by the user's eyes, prevents any particularly advanced sprite manipulation or polygon pushing coming into play. The system's first and so far only polygonal title, *Red Alarm*, manages only a wireframe gaming environment — a concept exhausted on more conventional systems years ago and now redundant elsewhere.

The bottom line is that Virtual Boy is a product with some serious flaws. It is difficult to play for more than a few minutes without experiencing back and/or eye strain and although the unit runs on batteries, it is anything but portable. The monochrome (red) nature of the display, while, sharp, is not exactly enticing to traditional gamers. Children may be excited by the simple 3D effects, but the unit carries strong warning against being used by those under six years of age — permanent vision damage can occur.

Despite a strong promotional campaign, the unit has not done well in Japan. And convinced that US customers just "aren't getting it," Nintendo has arranged to have 20,000 units available for rent at Blockbuster (rumors that the units are Japanese returns are unconfirmed). Another problem is lack of games. There have been no new titles since the launch, reportedly due to a shortage of circuit boards. Is Nintendo playing the "artificial scarcity" game it honed with the NES? Hopefully not. While the scarcity of titles in the '80s increased demand, with the Virtual Boy, consumers may respond with an apathetic attitude if the shortage persists.

The Virtual Boy is a quirky machine, but it must be kept in mind that it isn't intended to compete in a market currently saturated with both PlayStation and Saturn. Is this Nintendo's 32X? Time will tell. Nintendo's marketing genius is well known, and the Game Boy succeeded despite exceedingly lackluster technology. But it is worth noting that there is no *Tetris*, yet, for the Virtual Boy. What the system desperately needs, of course, is the product of Shigeru Miyamoto, but with his Ultra 64 commitments, it could well be some time before his groundbreaking work graces those red lenses.

ng

Virtual Boy Ratings

Processing Power	★★
Existing Software Library	★
Third Party Support	★
Marketing Muscle	★★★
Future Prognosis	★★
Overall	★★

Key Software

Picking the five key games for the Virtual Boy is pretty easy, since there are only six games available right now for the system. Nintendo claims there will be 11 titles available by the holiday, but sources say that at least some of those titles have been delayed. If you're looking for 8-bit style action with 3D effects, look no further.

Mario Smash

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo

Bearing more in common with the old *Mario Bros.* arcade game than the *Super Mario* platform games — *Mario Smash* features play mechanics that look a little like *Bug!*. Smash turtles, collect coins, and relive those arcade days of yesteryear. This is the only Virtual Boy title in which the 3D elements really change the gameplay appreciably.

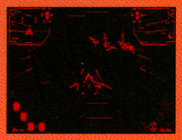


The graphics in *Mario Smash* offer pure gaming nostalgia

Red Alarm

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo

It tried to be *Star Fox 3D*, but *Red Alarm* doesn't come close. Working doubletime to produce two visual images doesn't leave much processing power to shade polygons, which leaves *Red Alarm* with confusing wireframes. If this is as good as the Virtual Boy can do with polygons, Nintendo should stick to bit-maps.

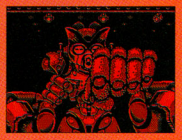


Wire frame graphics (a la 80s PC games) are back in vogue

TeleRoboxer

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo

Take *Mike Tyson's Punch Out!* for the NES. Change all the colors to shades of red. Make all the characters robots to skirt the violence issue, put in a Virtual Boy development system and shake. The 3D works OK here, with the fists looking like cardboard cut-outs coming toward you. If you really want a solid game for the Virtual Boy, this could be the one.

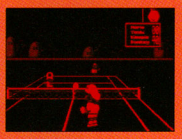


Comin' at ya. It's *PunchOut! '95*, aka *TeleRoboxer*

Mario's Dream Tennis

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo

One of the best games out for the Virtual Boy, this one adds the 3D spin to Nintendo's original *Tennis* for the NES. Play as Donkey Kong, Mario, Princess Toadstool, or others from *Mario* pipeland. The gameplay is enticing and while the 3D is well integrated, we defy anyone to play this with one eye closed and enjoy it any less.



***Mario Dream Tennis*, one of the best VB games on offer**

Virtual League Baseball

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo

The first third party game for the Virtual Boy, this features much less "cute" graphics than the Nintendo efforts. This is a fairly enjoyable one-player baseball game, and the Virtual Boy's innovative pad works well with it. The 3D seems more like an afterthought than anything else, but it does add an interesting element to the game.



The first third party game in the US is surprisingly fun

I played tennis with a toad. I was set adrift in the



Virtual Boy presents more games from the Third Dimension. Stick your head in Virtual Boy and you won't be the same when you pull it out. The action comes at you from places you've never dreamed of. See things you've never seen before like Red Alarm,™





Teleroboxer,™ Galactic Pinball,™ Wario Land,™ and included with every Virtual Boy, Mario's Tennis.™ And more titles to come.



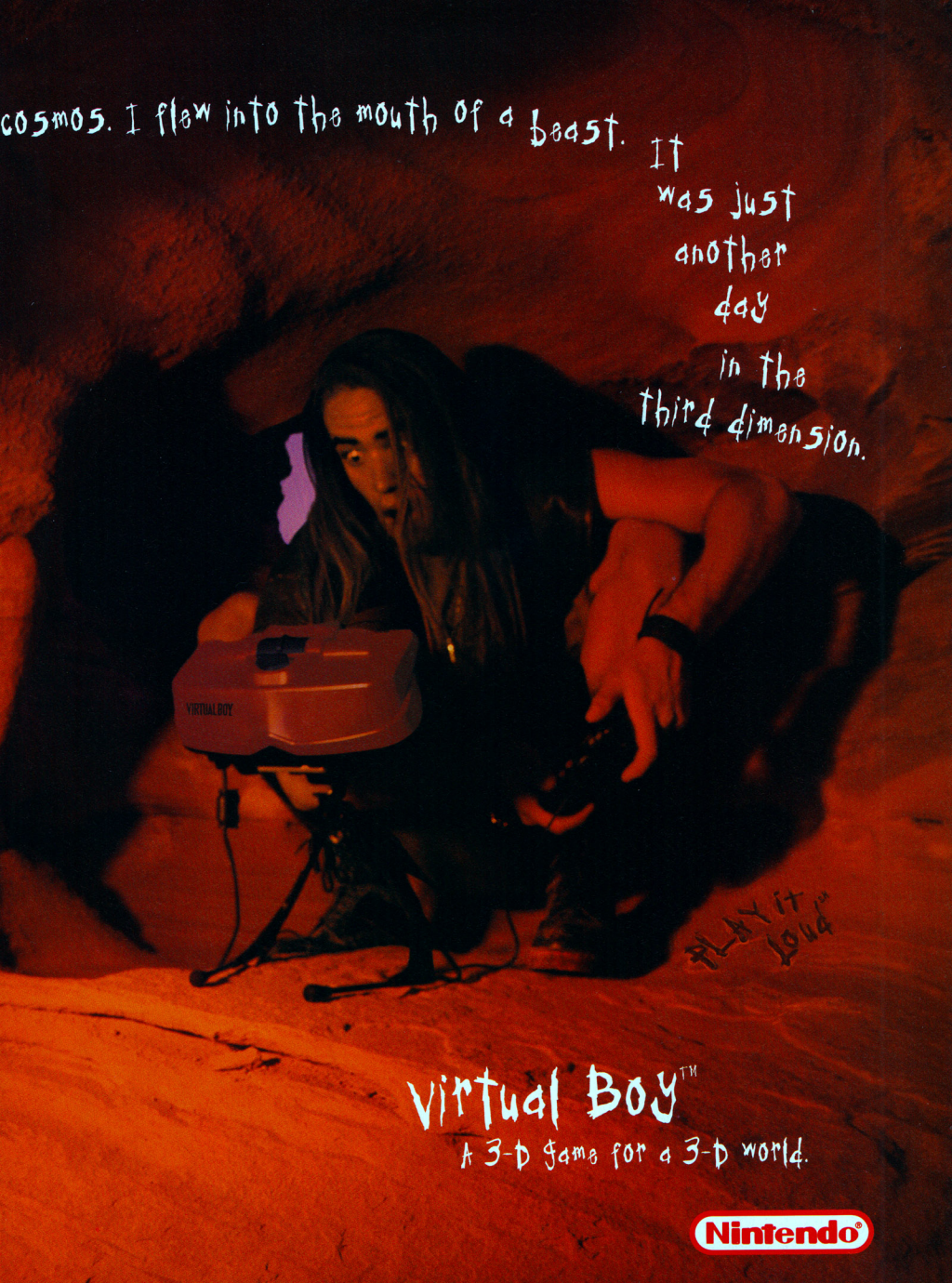
Jump into the Third Dimension and see what it feels like to be inside the game.



KIDS TO ADULTS
AGES 6+

AOL@keyword: NOA
www.nintendo.com

System includes Mario's Tennis. Other games sold separately. Batteries not included. © 1995 Nintendo of America Inc. ™ and ® are trademarks of Nintendo of America Inc. Red Alarm™ ™ and © 1995 T&E Soft Inc. Licensed to Nintendo.


cosmos. I flew into the mouth of a beast.
It was just another day in the third dimension.
VIRTUAL BOY
PLAY IT LOUD
Virtual Boy™
A 3-D game for a 3-D world.
Nintendo®



Finally, baseball without the chili dog farts.

Ahhhh, yes. The boys of summer. Leaning in. Taking their cuts. And blasting you out of the park with those long, foul floaters they get from stadium food. Phew-ee. Good thing there's Virtual League Baseball™— with big league pitching, slugging and fielding in bigger-than-life 3D. You can choose from 18 world-class teams. Set your own pitching rotation. Pick your DH. And play Single Game, All Star or Pennant Race modes. Catch this, too: It's the only ball game good enough to play in the Virtual Boy ball park. So don't just sit there waiting to hurl. Slide into the store, and give it a crack.

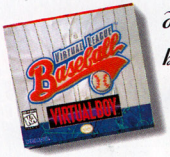


Nice screen shot, huh?



Cool 3D Graphics





KEMCO®

Virtual League Baseball is a trademark of Kemco America, Inc. ©1995 Kemco America, Inc. Nintendo, Virtual Boy and the Official Seals are trademarks of Nintendo of America Inc. ©1995 Nintendo of America Inc.

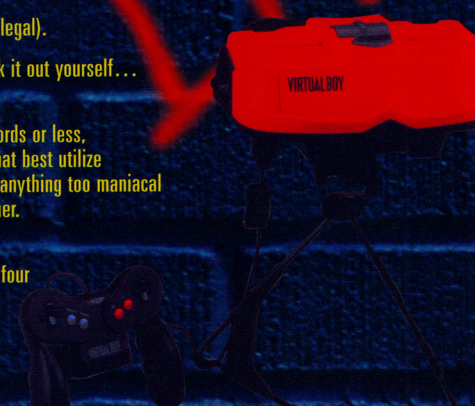
The company That has always been revoluTionizing video game play now reveals a new dimension in gaming – VirTual Boy™

CONTEST! WIN A VIRTUAL BOY!

LOOK INTO IT!

Virtual Boy, Nintendo's 32-bit video game system features phase linear array technology (extra-fancy sounding, but it really applies), digital stereo sound, two high-resolution visual displays (one each for the right and left sides of your brain), and 3D graphics that totally immerse you in the game. Coming soon: stereo headphones and Game Link® for head-to-head action (sounds almost illegal).

Virtual Boy is "virtually" incredible, but don't take our work for it, check it out yourself...



The ConTesT

We want you to develop a game for the Virtual Boy system! In 100 words or less, describe the game's objective, characters if applicable, and elements that best utilize Virtual Boy's awsome features. Be creative as possible – but don't do anything too maniacal or dirty! It should be something that appeals to the above average gamer.

The Prizes

Three winners will each receive a Virtual Boy video game system and four distinguished Virtual Boy games:

- Red Alarm™
- Telero Boxer™
- Mario Clash™
- Galactic Pinball™

NEXT GENERATION

VIRTUAL BOY

Nintendo®

ConTesT Rules:

To Enter: Virtual Boy is for game players 7 years and older. No entry can be made if under the age of 7. Submit your legible story on 8 1/2" x 11" paper to: Virtual Boy Contest, Imagine Publishing, Inc., 1350 Old Bayshore Hwy, Suite 210, Burlingame, CA 94010. Be sure to include your name, phone number, and address! One entry per person. Entries must arrive no later than 1/31/96. Eligibility: This contest is open to all U.S. residents, except employees and immediate family members of Nintendo and Imagine Publishing, Inc., their affiliates, subsidiaries, sales representatives, distributors, advertising agencies, promotional agencies, printers, blah, blah, blah. Selection: Winners will be selected by 2/15/96 and notified by mail or phone. No purchase necessary.

© 1995 Nintendo of America Inc. ™ and ® are trademarks of Nintendo of America. Virtual Boy system includes Mario's Tennis. Batteries not included. Red Alarm™: ™ and © 1995 T & E Soft Inc. Licensed to Nintendo.