

VIRTUAL BOY, ARCADE GAMES, AND MORE

ALTHOUGH IT may seem as if Nintendo rose from the ashes of the video game bust of the early 1980s, the company had a long history in the entertainment business both in Japan and in North America. Prior to releasing home video game consoles, Nintendo experienced success with its arcade games and its handheld Game & Watch series. The Donkey Kong arcade game (released in 1981 and designed by Shigeru Miyamoto) is one of the most storied in gaming history, and in spite of the limited graphics and gameplay offered by Game & Watch, the dual-screened units were notable precursors of both the Game Boy and the Nintendo DS.

During the Nintendo Power era, two significant Nintendo video game systems were launched—one for arcades and one for homes—but uncharacteristically for Nintendo each met with only limited success. Nintendo Power reported on both the Ultra 64 arcade system and the Virtual Boy during their active lifetimes, so we would be remiss to not mention them in this special edition.

The N64-based Ultra 64 arcade system was a way to link the home console and arcade markets by offering both arcade and home versions of games. The Rare-developed Killer Instinct is the most famous example (and Killer Instinct 2 was later released, though for arcades only), but Midway also offered a home version of Cruis'n USA based on its arcade game. Unfortunately, between the increasing power of home consoles and their potential to create far greater revenues than arcade machines, big changes were in store for the arcade business. Even though Killer Instinct enjoyed some success as a quarter muncher, it wasn't enough to keep this effort alive for long.

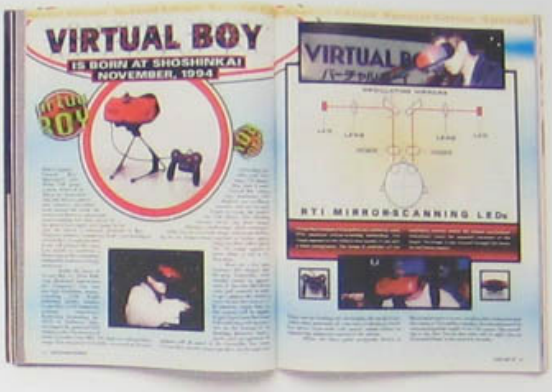
The Virtual Boy may be the most curious video game system ever to have been released. The tabletop unit employed red LEDs and oscillating mirrors to generate 3-D graphics on two screens housed inside a light-blocking, face-hugging unit. Although the 3-D spatial presentation was quite good, not many games were released for the system.

Several disk-based system add-ons should also be noted here. One, the 64DD, was released only in Japan; it provided a read-and-write magnetic-disk player for N64, but it came late in the console's life cycle and garnered little support from Nintendo or other publishers. Only a handful of games were ever available for the 64DD, and many that had been planned for it, such as EarthBound 64, never materialized at all.

KILLER INSTINCT 2, RELEASED 1996, NINTENDO AND MIDWAY

Killer Instinct was successful enough in the arcade to warrant an arcade sequel. It added several new competitors—Tusk, Kim Wu, Maya, and Gargos—and a number of new controls and features such as Combo Breakers and Super Moves. Developed at Rare, Killer Instinct 2, like its predecessor, featured beautiful prerendered graphics and impressive special effects. Killer Instinct Gold for N64 was the home-console version of the game. VOLUME 81, FEBRUARY 1996





VIRTUAL BOY DEBUT

The Virtual Boy was rolled out for its first public appearance at Nintendo's Shoshinkai event in Tokyo in November 1994. NP readers got a quick course in technology and optics as we tried to explain what the Virtual Boy was and how it worked. Unfortunately, no screenshots were available at the time. The difficulty of showcasing the system's 3-D graphics may have doomed the Virtual Boy to an early retirement.

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VIRTUAL BOY GAMES

Nintendo Power reported on several titles for the Virtual Boy, including Teleroboxer, Galactic Pinball, Red Alarm, Mario Clash, Panic Bomber, Vertical Force, and Waterworld. The first screen shots (although not shown in 3-D, of course) appeared in NP's pages in glorious black and red.

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NESTER'S FUNKY BOWLING, RELEASED FEBRUARY 1996, NINTENDO

As the author of the long-running Howard & Nester and Nester's Adventures comic strips that appeared in Nintendo Power, I was as surprised as anyone to learn that our beloved braggart was going to star in his own video game. The fact that Nintendo Power's mascot was appearing in a Virtual Boy game hardly dampened my excitement, and the fact that I almost always got dizzy playing Virtual Boy games just made me consider how much of a challenge playing the title was going to be. One of the cool features in Nester's Funky Bowling was its Practice mode, which allowed players to set up the pins in any formation to practice difficult shots.

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