

NINTENDO POWER

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THE NEXT GEN

NINTENDO'S REVOLUTION HAS BEGUN

SPECIAL POST-E3 ISSUE

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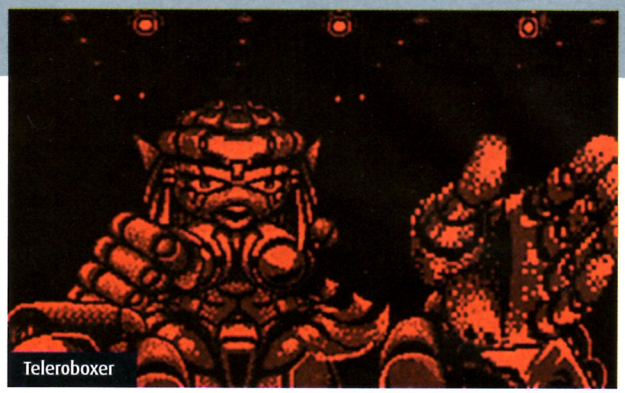
Virtual Boy

At the time of the Virtual Boy's launch, Nintendo Power called the system the "most daring gaming system in history," and indeed it was. No other video game company before or since has tried to make a home 3-D system of its type, a testament to the risks involved with releasing such an experimental piece of hardware. Developed by longtime Nintendo engineer Gunpei Yokoi, creator of the Game Boy, the Virtual Boy made its debut 10 years ago this August. This month, we celebrate the anniversary of the Virtual Boy's launch, along with Mr. Yokoi's vision and his embracing of Nintendo's commitment to innovation.


Teleroboxer

The Virtual Boy achieved its remarkable 3-D graphics through the use of two LED arrays, creating a stereoscopic environment. The effect is similar to how the old View-Master toys produced simulated 3-D pictures. The VB controller was ahead of its time, as well—its shape is eerily similar to the GCN controller. Every Virtual Boy came bundled with Mario's Tennis, one of the earliest examples of Mario's affinity for sports. Other games at launch were Galactic Pinball, Red Alarm and Teleroboxer, followed by solid titles like Mario Clash and Wario Land.

The system wasn't exactly a raving success; its debut was met by a lot of criticism, unfortunately often from people who hadn't yet played it. The gaming media was skeptical of the monochromatic images, and a $179 launch price made it a difficult sell for the mainstream. Ironically, the reason for the red-hued screen was to keep

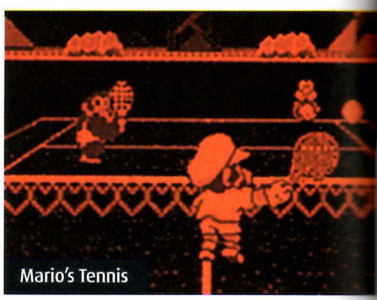


Galactic Pinball

the cost down; adding other colors would have been much more expensive. After six months of lower-than-expected sales figures, Nintendo decided to stop manufacturing the system.

While the official life of the Virtual Boy wasn't long, the continued fan support for the system shows just how much potential the hardware has. In fact, there's still a vibrant Virtual Boy community. A quick Internet search reveals an impressive number of enthusiasts dedicated to all manner of Virtual Boy topics, from game reviews and cheat codes to disassembling the hardware in order to paint the unit's shell.

There is also a strong community based on programming new games for


Mario's Tennis

the Virtual Boy—a difficult task to say the least, considering the programmers work completely without development support. Hobbyist Virtual Boy developers have even gone so far as to look for ways to add rumble and multiplayer aspects to the venerable system. (A little note to Virtual Boy owners: If your Virtual Boy is working properly, don't dive headlong into these projects. Many of the steps are dangerous to the health of your system, and the ways to fix a mangled VB are becoming fewer and fewer.)

The Virtual Boy isn't exactly a rare commodity, but good-condition systems and game collections can fetch a pretty penny on auction sites like eBay. Rare games such as Waterworld and several games that came out only in Japan bring top dollar, if they can be found at all. But bargain hunters can still find perfectly functional Virtual Boy systems on the cheap at places like used game stores and swap meets. If you come across one, pick it up and relive a part of Nintendo's rich history. —**Chris S.**

