

SUPER PLAY PROFILES

It's Valentine's and that. So here's what we love.

James Leach

I'm in love with my: Kawasaki. And private health policy.

Chiefly because: It's exciting, dangerous and impresses girls. The down-side is: You get wet, you can't carry luggage and, though it impresses girls, they hate going round corners on it.

Ollie Alderton

I'm in love with my: Comic collection.

Chiefly because: Some of them are worth a small fortune. The rarest are the *Mighty World of Marvel* series.

The down-side is: Some people don't share my passion. And some of the comics are foreign, so I can't read them.

Debs Cook

I'm in love with my: Flat.

Chiefly because: It's cosy, warm and near Van Morrison's house.

The down-side is: It's flooded. The roof broke and my bed, telly, video and, in fact, everything got totally soaked. It was, as they say, a large bummer.

Zy Nicholson

I'm in love with my: Postcard collection.

Chiefly because: It's a post-modern collage of popular cultural reference, of course.

The down-side is: I never get to send them to anyone. Instead I have to buy black cards with the legend 'Bath at Night' printed on them.

Wil Overton

I'm in love with my: Beavis and Butt-head.

Chiefly because: I couldn't think of anything else. The down-side is: I wish I'd chosen something less stupid now. I mean, what will people think, seeing me with these stupid dolls? They'll think I'm daft.

SUPER

NEWS NETWORK SUPER NINTENDO

VIRTUAL BOY: THE FACTS

After last month's press-stopping news on the Virtual Boy, *Super Play* brings you the in-depth story on their latest console. You'd better sit down before reading this...



Shoshinkai was always going to be one of the most fascinating shows of the year for Nintendo, but this proved 'interesting' for all the wrong reasons. Foremost on the minds of attendees was the new hardware they would be previewing but, sadly, the company presented no finished version of the Ultra 64 – even though it was supposed to be ahead of schedule, and Shoshinkai had been pencilled in for a demonstration – and no new software for the 64-bit next generation machine.

The main feature of the show was the presentation of their new and mysterious Virtual Reality hardware, previously called the VR32. The 32-bit console, now bearing the title 'Virtual Boy', was composed of three main parts: a mask, a tripod and a joystick. The mask, or 'ViewMaster' as it has been dubbed, contains two LED screens, with a dual speaker arrangement for stereo sound. Fixtures on the mask provide for straps, so that it can be worn on the head, but this version was mounted on a short lab-style tripod designed for viewing whilst seated at a desk or table.

Hunched over a desk with your head in a box isn't the most comfortable posture for playing games, frankly.





The machine's graphics have a severely antiquated look. Could the Virtual Boy be the Vectrex of the '90s?

The joypad of the Virtual Boy resembles that of the PlayStation, but with large grips and two D-pads (note the trademark Nintendo colours of the four buttons). This section also holds both the game cartridge and the batteries, and has a cable port that allows it to be linked to another VB for head-to-head games.

Unfortunately, the primitive graphics of the VB took everybody by surprise: developed in collaboration with an American company, the fixed red-on-black monochrome display was only three-dimensional in the sense that it had many planes of depth and very little to do with genuine virtual reality. Despite the high resolution and some perspective-related sprite scaling (objects get smaller as they move into the screen, away from you, and can disappear 'behind' other objects), it's hard to tell where the 32-bit RISC processor is involved. Starting through a pair of polarised goggles and straining to see the 3D effect takes effort too, and induced headache and eyestrain in our determined journalist after just 20 minutes.

As we reported last month, three games

SUPER PLAY COMMENTS

We can't honestly say we're pleased with the VB here at Super Play. It's a retrogressive novelty that should have stayed in the R&D1 lab, and it certainly won't attract the sort of attention Nintendo wanted. In fact, we'll be very interested in seeing the response to the VB from Nintendo's official publications worldwide.

It's not unfair to suggest that, with their claims of Virtual Reality and 32-bit RISC technology, Nintendo led the gaming world to expect considerably more than the VB delivers. Everybody was waiting for a piece of kit able to compete with the Saturn or the PlayStation, the first shipments of which sold out on pre-order in Japan. But this latest gimmick (about as portable as a 12" television, despite a last-minute attempt to relate it to the Game Boy) would have had trouble raising eyebrows five years ago. This has to be their biggest mistake

so far, worse than the Robotic Operating Buddy for the NES, and both Sony and Sega must be having a good chuckle at their rival's expense. Given the sales figures predicted by Nintendo of Japan, they are likely to be as disappointed as we were.

But let's not allow the VB to obscure the finer points of Shoshinkai: software of the calibre of Chrono Trigger and Tale Phantasia, news of a Ships collaboration on Ultra 64 and scores of new SFC software on the way. Tasty sweets for, dare we say it, the 16-bit machine you already possess.

The mask itself, with recess for batteries.



A Mario game was always on the cards, but we're not itching to play this particular Virtual Boy update.

developed by Nintendo themselves were previewed. Space Pinball, Teleroboxer and Mario Bros VB will be available

for the system when it is launched. No third party support has been announced... See our full show report on page 22 for more details of these games.

Virtual Boy will be released in Japan in April at a special price of ¥19,800 (£127), about twice the cost of a SNES cartridge. Nintendo has boldly forecast sales of 3,000,000 VB units and 14,000,000 VB cartridges in its first year, which sounds wildly optimistic in the face of competition from Sega's Saturn and Sony's PlayStation.

Will you see business executives playing with their Vectrex on the train? We think not. Ever.



Sorry. Expecting a 3D image to work as a 2D screenshot was a tad ambitious, but you can just make out the clenched fists of your sparring partner in Teleroboxer.

VIRTUAL BOY SPECS

Processor: 32-bit RISC CPU
Display: RTI (Reflection Technology Inc.) system stereoscopic LED screens
Graphics: monochrome (red on black) with four shades of red available. Apparent planes of depth rather than genuine Virtual Reality.
Power Source: standard Super Famicom power supply or 6 AA batteries, giving seven hours portable play.
Sound: two-channel audio (similar to GB sound chip).
Format: cartridges, holding 8, 16, 24 or 32 megabits of ROM

SHOSHINKAI

Shortly before Christmas our man in Tokyo attended one of the biggest software shows of the year - Shoshinkai.

It's difficult to sum up the atmosphere of Shoshinkai with a single word: at various times, the general mood of the showgoers expressed anything from mild disappointment to complete disbelief. It wasn't without its highlights, and several exciting pieces of software for the Super Famicom were revealed, but the whole event was overshadowed by the long-awaited but nonsensical unveiling of 'VR32' - the Virtual Boy. With the Saturn and the PlayStation causing great excitement long before their respective launches, everybody in attendance was looking forward to finding out the truth behind Nintendo's top-secret project. Nintendo's carefully-worded statements said that the cartridge-based console would use 32-bit RISC technology to create Virtual Reality: further limited information about revolutionary new display technology and collaboration with an American R&D team had only served to whet the appetites of gamers eager to lose themselves in that 'totally immersive environment'.

The reality? An expensive and ungainly machine with monochrome graphics and extraordinarily basic software. Regardless of how

clever or innovative the machine's Reflection Technology Inc. display might be, the important point is that it didn't even come close to what the game-playing public had expected. It's difficult to see anybody buying a Virtual Boy when they could get a Saturn or a PlayStation (or both!): and after the embarrassment of Shoshinkai, few would own up to it if they did.

The disappointment of the VB cast a shadow of gloom over the rest of the proceedings. Plenty of software for the 16-bit machines was on display, though little of it was new or revolutionary. Sequels, revamps and clones seemed to be the order of the day, but nothing really captured the excitement of Super Famicom exhibitions in the past.

Fortunately it wasn't a completely depressing affair for the SNES. Donkey Kong Country was properly introduced to the Japanese public (under the title of 'Super Donkey Kong') and the stand was swamped with mobs of eager gamers.

The game of the show had to be Square's Chrono Trigger, a stunning blend of Secret of Mana and Final Fantasy VI with fully-animated characters in 256-colour graphics (see last month's Fantasy Quest for details). It's now been announced that the 32 megabit cartridge will hit the shops in Japan on March the 11th, and a Western translation must surely happen some time in '95.

An honourable mention also goes to Namco's Tale Phantasia, another massive RPG which includes plenty of speech samples. The idea is that whenever a spell is cast in the game, the magic-user character actually utters the incantation of the sorcery. Although it might sound like something of a novelty, the rest of the

game was well up to Namco's usual high standards (See next month's Fantasy Quest for a full report on Tale Phantasia - Ed).

The nostalgia vibe of the Japanese games scene shows no sign of abating: even the 32-bit Sony Playstation presents the first level Galaxians to keep players occupied whilst loading Ridge Racer from CD, and it seems the two will continue to go hand in hand until the craze dies. Games like Galaxy Wars from Imagineer attempt to recreate the first wave of arcade coin-ops on the SFC, though the repetitive gameplay - guiding your ship past obstacles to 'dock' (crash, more like) with a mothership at the top of the screen - will seem hopelessly dull to the majority of Western gamers.



Galaxy Wars - the future of videogaming? Er, no, actually.

INCONCEIVABLE

It has to be said, not everything previewed at Shoshinkai showed the Japanese at their best. Indeed, to the Western eye, some of the material served better to illustrate the fact that there's still a considerable gulf between our cultures. Here's a couple of oddities that should give you an idea of the SFC games that you'll 'never' see snapped up by Nintendo UK.

HOLD IT THERE

Suspend your disbelief for a second as we reveal that this is a female wrestling team management simulation. And if you can

stretch your comprehension even further, let us add that it's the latest of several female wrestling games already available on the Super Nintendo. Starting with just a couple of well-built young ladies in your gym, you have to allocate your money between training them up, enrolling promising new talent and entering them for tournaments. The game centres around the bouts themselves, where prize money is won and bizarre fight sequences - with pictures of the girls contorting themselves into all sorts of odd positions, naturally - recall the end of Maris the Wonder Girl.

Classic Road

The Japanese love to gamble, and judging by the number of SFC cards that feature pachinko, roulette, cards and dice games it doesn't seem to bother them that no real money is involved. Classic Road, like Derby Station and Kurashitsukin Road, is a simulation which not only lets you determine the running of

The Balinese tight-clench, unless I'm very much mistaken.



A somewhat romantic impression of the genuine women wrestlers we met promoting their games...

your own stable but also lets you have a bit of a flutter on the side. You might say it has a high quality of presentation: but only if pictures of ponies frolicking in fields appeals to you.

You thought, perhaps, that Super Black Bass hit an all time video-gaming low? Then be prepared for the sequels and clones that aim to bring the dubious sport of freshwater fishing to your SNES. Japanese angling games have become very sophisticated in the past year, allowing you a great deal of choice over your particular tackle and line type with digitised graphics to make it more realistic. Equipment sorted, you choose your spot to set up by river or lake. And then you wait. Oh good grief.



SIM CITY 2000

We think it could do better than
Imagineer think. But would you buy
SC2000 on SNEET Write and tell us.

Imagineer were proudly showing off Sim City 2000, the chart-topping PC game which has been converted to the Super Famicom by HAL laboratories. We're now pleased to confirm that practically all the options have been included in this 16 megabit version (roughly 1/6th the memory required for the PC version), including the newspaper reports of your excellent or scandalous performance as Mayor.

Sadly we've learnt that Imagineer UK do not intend to release the game over here on the grounds that a 16 meg cartridge plus battery back-up would be prohibitively expensive, reducing sales and providing insufficient profit margin. But Enix of America has shown an interest in a US version of SC2000, as well as the first Ogre Battle game. If they do well enough on console in the US then another British software house may well consider picking up such a proven title.



A screenshot from the
SFC version - a mouse
option looks likely.



FANTASY QUEST FULFILLED

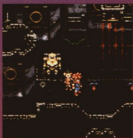
Do we need say it any more? The roleplaying game is the favourite genre of the Japanese, and a popular SFC cartridge can make millions of yen for its developers. That's why shows like Shoshinkai are vital for promoting new products and getting feedback on the game's potential success.

Two RPGs stood out as highlights of the entire show: Square's Chrono Trigger and Namco's Tale Phantasia. Much of the rest was pretty standard fare, or was a sequel that relied on previous success to catch attention (Lufia 2, Albert Odyssey 2, Res Arcana). Dragon Quest VI put in an appearance, but wasn't quite finished: a release date still hasn't been announced. Chun Soft presented their new Sound Novel, a multiple-choice adventure with digitised skills called the Story of Kamatachi, whilst announcing a new one in the pipeline.

Major improvements were evident in Wizardry VI, with graphics and sound in a different class to its predecessor. Its options even extend to a 'paintbox' for redesigning your character's face pixel by pixel, and the 1st person perspective graphics were easily superior to Dungeon Master or Eye of the Beholder.

The good news for RPG and strategy fans is that many of the games on show have already been pencilled in for Western translation and release, with Enix in particular looking forward to a busy schedule in '95. Maybe the Western market for home console entertainment really is shifting towards long-term challenge for the mature gamer?

Looks mighty like the Mana
Fortress, does it not?



announced, and a quick straw poll of games developers by Super Play indicated considerable indifference to the new machine.



According to one
Nintendo spokesman, a
colour display for the
Virtual Boy had been
tested but resulted in
jumpy images, and in any
case it would have been
'unaffordable' at around
1,500,000.

Space Pinball's table gives
the impression of leaning
away from you. Slightly.

VIRTUAL BOY SOFTWARE

Nintendo's presentation centred on the unveiling of Virtual Boy, their new 32-bit RISC-based portable console. The three games lined up for simultaneous release at the VB's launch were also on display.

Although there were no proper promotional shots of the software available from Nintendo of Japan, we have managed to derive some two-dimensional images from the Virtual Boy in action. To see the game properly in 3D you would of course need the Virtual Boy's RTI display, but these pictures should at least give you an idea of what's going on.

Mario Bros VB

Believe it or not, this is no more than the first Mario Bros game. The 3D effect gives depth to the backgrounds - trees and buildings seem to be 'behind' the platforms - but essentially it's a two-dimensional wrap-around platform game where you jump about a static screen avoiding nasties and collecting points and power-ups. You'll recall that 1993's Mario All-Stars contained an upgraded version of it: you might also remember that it was essentially a two-player head-to-head, where Mario and Luigi had to lob shells at each other and score points whilst avoiding the nasties. So this one-player implementation makes little sense to us, as yet. No link-up of two machines playing this game was demonstrated at the show, as we might have expected.

Teleroboxer

A robot boxing game featuring a first-person perspective, this was much like a cross between Super Punch-Out and the Mode 7 mecha battles in Legend of the Mystical Ninja 2. 3D effects were used to emphasise certain attacks (like a giant metal fist flying towards you, quite obviously) and you needed to employ both D-pads on the controller to move your robot arms.

Space Pinball

Not much spaceiness in evidence here, alas, unless you count the way in which the ball could roll under or over certain obstacles on the table. Otherwise, an unexceptional pinball sim.

Game cartridges for the Virtual Boy have been priced at anything between 5,000 and 7,000 yen (£30 to £40), so it's not exactly cheap. Asked what he thought of the VB's launch software, R&D chief Gumpel Yokoi expressed the view that it was designed to show off what the machine could do. But no third party publishers have been

