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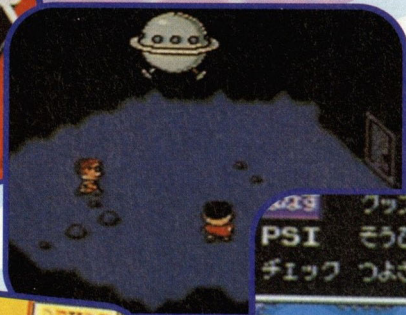
VIRTUAL BOY

Nintendo's much maligned Virtual Boy is due to go on sale in Japan and America this month for the equivalent of roughly \$250, although a release date for both here and the UK is yet to be announced. A number of changes have been made to the pre-production models shown at the Shoshinkai show in Japan and at the Summer CES, most notably the addition of a shoulder mounted harness which, along with the six AA sized batteries that power it, takes the Virtual Boy off the desktop and into the realm of portability.

Two new games were shown at the CES, another Mario game which actually appears to use the Virtual Boy's 3D-ish capabilities - Mario must move between the foreground and background to progress. The other new title appeared to be a Starwing game, which could be rather good. However, the number of third party developers signed up is still few, with Hudson Soft and Square Soft being the most notable, although Nintendo has only been offering development kits to companies which it feels are capable of producing top-notch software.



MOTHER!



One of the strangest Japanese RPGs is the bizarre Mother 2, which was mentioned a few months ago in these very pages. Well, we're mentioning it again because it's being translated into English in preparation for release in America with the new name of Earthbound.

The first thing you'll notice about Earthbound/Mother 2 is the bland looking

graphics. In fact it looks like a NES game and, at 24 Mbits, you may be wondering why. It's not because the artists have been lazy, though, it's because Earthbound has such a huge playing area and it really is the mother of all RPGs! Forget Secret Of Mana's mere 70 odd hours of gameplay, Earthbound will probably take weeks of constant playing to finish!

The story is a surreal blend of school children and aliens, with some of the weirdest characters you'll ever meet. The game is full of off beat Japanese humour, although sadly much of this will probably be 'Americanised' in the translation. Still, the game was hugely popular in Japan and should do well in

the States, too, as RPG fever seems to have finally taken hold of the beat 'em up obsessed Yanks. With any luck a Pal version will be produced for the Poms and us Aussies, so keep your fingers crossed.

