

# VITA PLAYER

ISSUE 1, NOVEMBER 2021

**SHOOT-EM-UP SPECIAL**

**Tikipod's Dugan Jackson Interviewed!**

**Evolution of Aqua Kitty**

**PS Vita arcade shooter reviews  
and more!**

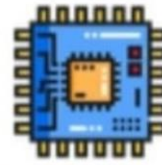


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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first issue of the Vita Player Magazine. You may be wondering why we've decided to launch a new title dedicated to the PS Vita at the end of 2021 just as the console is taking its final breath.

We launched our website back in 2012. As huge fans of the Vita we wanted to not only support fellow enthusiasts, but publishers and developers as well. With a mix of news, reviews, features and interviews the site is still going strong today. But with over 1,200 pages of content, it's not easy finding what you might want to read.

And despite the Vita ceasing production two years ago, the last physical games

trickling out next month, and new digital games ending back in July, there are still people picking up the console for the first time and discovering what the Vita has to offer.

So with this magazine we wanted to do something different. Instead of trying to bring you news about the console and its games (which we know was going to be somewhat lacking), we decided that now would be a perfect time to celebrate the Vita's legacy and its vast back catalogue as gamers old and new spend more time exploring what the console has to offer.

Each issue is going to be dedicated to a different aspect of PS Vita gaming. Some may focus on a particular genre, others will concentrate on a single publisher, and future issues... well, we'll leave those as a surprise for now. In terms of the content itself it will be a mix of updated reprints from our website (collated here for easier reading) and brand new pieces written just for this magazine.

Most importantly, we want to bring you variety. We'll bring you reviews, articles, interviews and more. Despite covering old games, we'll aim to keep things as fresh and entertaining as possible and share our love of the PS Vita with you all.

This isn't just *our* magazine though. We'd love to see your input - whether it's a review, article, reader's letters, or just for you to participate in our discussions and surveys on social media.

So with all of that said, let's dive right into this issue as we take a closer look at the arcade shoot-em-up genre...

Until next time!

Simon Plumbe, Editor

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# GAME REVIEW: AQUA KITTY: MILK MINE DEFENDER (PLAYSTATION MOBILE) by Simon Plumbe

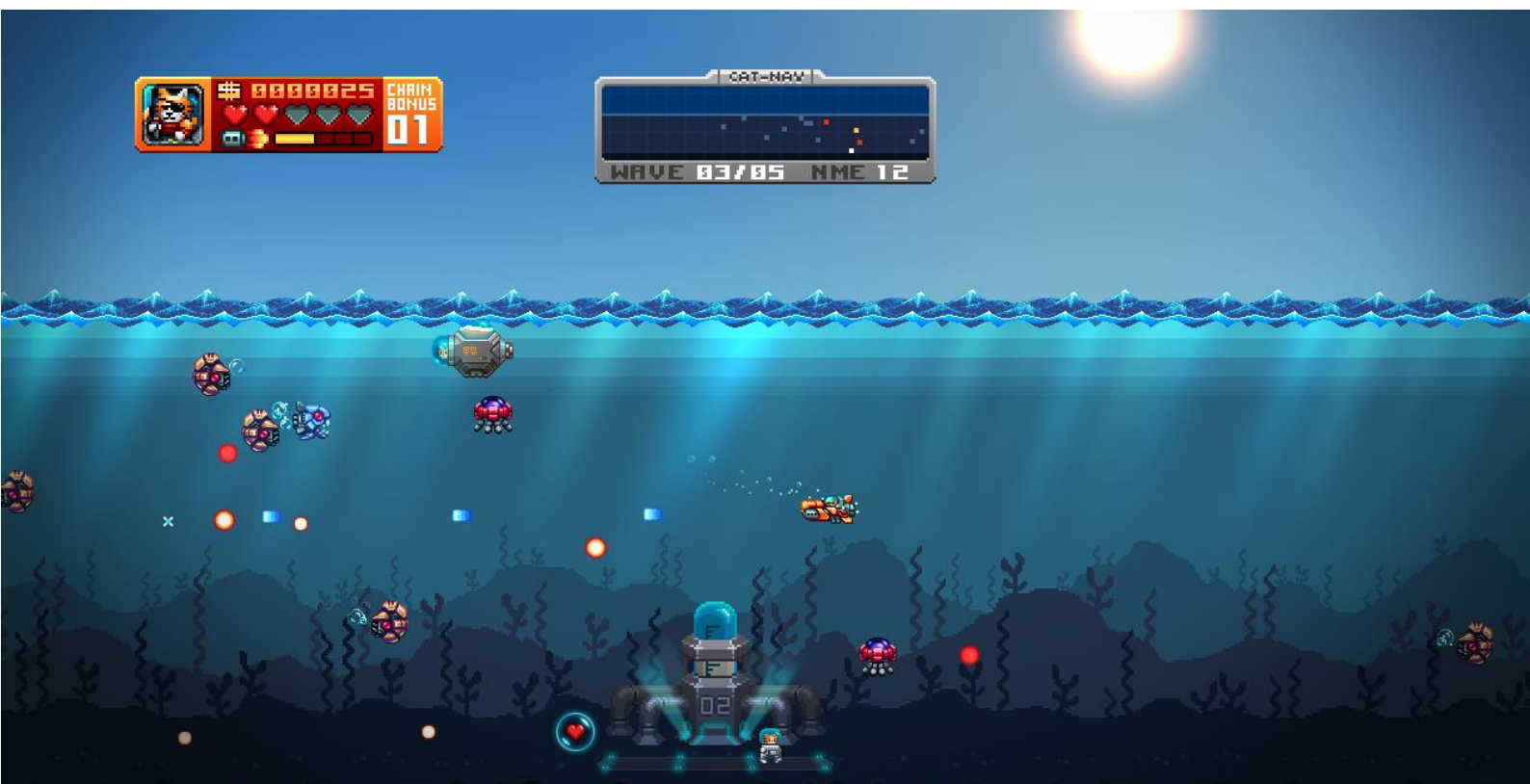
I've said a number of times before over on the Vita Player website that a large number of the smaller, low-cost games that are available for the PS Vita - either as PSP Minis or through the PlayStation Mobile platform - were likely to be remakes of existing games, simplistic puzzle games, or "tributes" to games that we are all familiar with that have been around since the dawn of video games. I certainly don't want to be derogatory of publishers who worked hard to bring us all of these games, but at times it felt as if there were some developers who went to great lengths to disguise what their games really were.

In contrast, Aqua Kitty: Milk Mine Defender comes out guns blazing and makes no false pretences about being a deep, thought-provoking game that will engage your mind and involve puzzles that will require a genius worthy of MENSA to be able to solve. Instead, it's a full-on, side-scrolling arcade shooter with its roots planted firmly and proudly in the past. The story behind the game is a little different and has a rather feline angle to it (if the game's title hadn't already given you a hint

there!). It's the future and the world is in turmoil - there's a disastrous global shortage of milk (don't ask what has happened to all of the cows, that's not explained) so all of the world's cats are left with a desperate hunt for their favourite drink...

Miraculously, a naturally-occurring source of milk has been found under the sea bed (I did say this was different) so a team of underwater specialist mining kittens have been sent to drill for this milk and collect it for all the cats of the world to enjoy. A tough enough job in itself, let alone having to overcome their inherent fear of water. But it gets worse... our brave miners are under attack from countless mechanical creatures trying to stop the mining operation so it's your job to take to the waters in a heavily armed submarine to protect them and the future of cat-kind...

So forgetting the somewhat surreal story, the game itself will be familiar to any gamer who grew up in the 80s or 90s. Basically, this is a modern interpretation of the Williams arcade classic Defender. Your submarine can move in pretty much any





direction firing at will, some of the creatures will try to capture your miners (who will meow asking for help) so you need to rescue them before it is too late, and the playing area, as you would expect wraps around so if you keep moving to the left far enough, you'll end up back where you started. The warp and bombs from Defender aren't present, but they have been replaced by a more powerful laser you can activate for limited periods of time during the game (and the power of this varies depending on how deep you are underwater), and additional powerups can be collected in later levels by destroying containers. These can include smart-bomb type weapons akin to the original Defender, additional weapon pods granting you temporary triple firepower and more besides.

To progress from one level to the next, simply destroy all of the attacking creatures while protecting your kittens. Destroy them all and you can move on. Each level forms part of an area of the sea that you are trying to mine and you can select which specific area you patrol from your map at the start of each level. Once you have cleared enough areas, you can use the map to move onto the next, choosing your route along the way. A nice touch and stops the game from becoming too linear with what is effectively a linear and limited game style.

One thing that impressed me straight away were the controls. The PlayStation Mobile range was developed to be used by a range of PlayStation-Certified mobile devices including Android powered phones, devices and tablets including the Sony Xperia series. The Vita was actually added to this list later on in October 2012 but of the earlier titles with the exception of Aqua Kitty, every game I saw used touch-screen controls for absolutely everything. Before playing this, I was concerned how a shooter was going to work using touch screen controls. I've tried playing vertically-scrolling shooters on Android phones before and uninstalled them within minutes because I've found them to be frustratingly difficult to control. I needn't have worried

though. Aqua Kitty detects what hardware it is running on and offered PS Vita owners the chance to play the game using all of the action buttons plus the D-Pad or left analogue stick for movement making it a real joy to play and control. Granted, subsequent PlayStation Mobile releases made use of physical controls, but this was one of the first to do so.

If you ever loved Defender, whether it was in the arcades or any of the home conversions, then you'll love this. Aqua Kitty has managed to faithfully capture all that was good about the original - all the frantic action, the addictive gameplay, and the heart-pumping adrenaline rush as you struggle to squeeze your submarine past all the bullets being hurled in your direction as you're trying to save that last miner make the game an absolute joy to play. You'll scream in frustration when you lose all your miners or your sub is destroyed but almost as soon as that has happened you'll be ready to start your next game to try to beat that stage, it's that addictive. In terms of the graphics and sound, the developers have all admitted that their gaming influences have come from the 8 and 16-bit era and that shaped the overall style of the game. All of the in-game graphics have been created using traditional 2D art software to create an old-school retro look reminiscent of the 16-bit era of the Amiga, Sega Megadrive and SNES and the sound is equally retro with some great chiptunes playing throughout courtesy of Electric Cafe.

The game simply oozes retro gaming quality from the visuals and sounds, to the classic 80s gameplay and has managed to capture everything that made all those old arcade games great without the need to find an endless supply of loose change! If you wanted to find a perfect way to described everything that was good about the 8-bit and 16-bit era for gaming, just look at this game and you'll understand why it's looked back on so fondly. This is a strong contender to be the best available for the PlayStation Mobile format. It's just a crying shame that the game was lost when PSM was abandoned... or was it?

# AQUA KITTYY

## MILK MINE DEFENDER DX



SAVE TO  
CLOUD



PLAY

SETTINGS

RESET GAME SAVE

CREDITS



## GAME REVIEW: AQUA KITTYY DX (PS VITA)

by Simon Plumbe

With its 16-bit graphics reminiscent of one of my all-time favourite computers, the Amiga, and gameplay inspired by the arcade classic, Defender, it's no wonder that Tikipod's PlayStation Mobile game Aqua Kitty: Milk Mine Defender made its way into our list of top PSM games on the Vita Player website. With its fast, addictive gameplay and great visuals it quickly became a personal favourite of mine. However, the folks at Tikipod weren't satisfied and as many other PSM developers decided to rework it from the ground up and turn it into a fully-fledged PS Vita and PS4 shooter...

Rather than retreading over old ground from my review of the original Aqua Kitty: Milk Mine Defender, briefly it's a 16-bit themed Defender clone with a feline styled storyline... The cats of the world are in distress as the globe's milk supply is drying up. Left with no alternative, our feline friends have to seek out new sources of their favourite beverage and to their surprise (and ours) have found a new untapped reserve underground so they set out to mine it. It's your job to protect the

kitty miners from attack as they try to grab as much milk as they can from the planet to feed the hungry moggies of the world.

If you've played the original, you'll feel right at home with the new update. The game still keeps the retro look and feel and has the same great chip soundtrack while the visuals have had a slight makeover. There is the addition now of subtle animations and background effects throughout the game and while these aren't necessary, they are a welcome bonus to the aesthetics of the game. There are also new and improved visual effects for some of the bosses that you'll encounter during the game. Nothing major overall as too much would really detract from the 16-bit styling of the game but it works well enough.

But what about the other improvements? Glory hunters will be overjoyed to know that the game now offers Leaderboard and Trophy support (the biggest drawbacks from the PlayStation Mobile version) and the user interface has been tweaked to make accessing the game and



understanding your in-game stats (lives etc) much easier to follow. It may be a minor point to many, but it does make the gameplay experience a little smoother so they're welcome additions. All too often, developers focus on the visuals and the gameplay and forget about the front end and the basics.

The final icing on the cake to many was the fact that not only is the game Cross Buy with the PS4 version but it's also Cross Save as well, accessible easily from the title screen.



As for the game itself, there are four additional levels, the addition of bosses at the end of each of the game's four main areas of play, a secondary rechargeable weapon (based on the beam weapon from R-Type) and a second "Easy" difficulty level for those of you who prefer your shoot-em-ups to go a little easier on you.

The real difference that you notice when you take a closer look at the menu is the addition of the Arcade Mode. Tikipod have added a brand new variant of the game for this update combining elements of Defender with Konami's arcade smash hit Gradius. This time, you have a range of power-ups at your disposal that you have to buy using crystals that you collect during play. Green orbs will float in the water at random in the game, destroy these and crystals will be left behind and as you collect enough of these

you'll see a choice of weapons highlighted in a list at the bottom of the screen. When your chosen weapon is highlighted, press Square to "buy" it and unleash hell on everything in your path! I have to be honest and say that I actually prefer this to the main game mode. It's still the same core game and progresses through the levels the same way but combining the Aqua Kitty structure and gameplay with Gradius' weapon system really takes the game to a whole new level.

Sadly, it's not perfect. There were occasions when I experienced some slowdown during the game. It didn't happen very often and was usually only confined to moments near to the end of levels when there were a lot of enemies on screen at once or at the end of stages when bosses were on screen alongside a large number of enemies and bullets. It didn't really spoil the game too much or detract from the game to the point that I wasn't able to react to save my own rear end when I needed to but it was irritating and because of that it's not *quite* the stunning game it could have been.

Don't get me wrong, this is a great title for the PS Vita and is certainly a game that should be high on the priority list for anyone who loves old-school arcade shooters and it's certainly got the same timeless appeal that it's PSM counterpart has so even with the slowdown problem I have no hesitation in recommending Aqua Kitty DX to everyone.



## GAME REVIEW: ASTRO AQUA KITTY (PS VITA)

by Simon Plumbe

Despite only releasing a handful of games for the system, Tikipod have been one of the Vita's strongest supporters. Their debut game Aqua Kitty: Milk Mine Defender made a splash on PlayStation Mobile and was one of the best games for the format. Releasing two games for PSM, updated native Vita ports we wondered if they could do better. Now, with their final Vita game Astro Aqua Kitty they set out to show us if they can...

expands upon the previous games considerably, turning it into a hybrid of arcade shooter and blending in RPG style character progression.

So how has the gameplay changed? Right from the start, Astro Aqua Kitty takes a different approach to its gameplay. Instead of being a straight-up shooter, a more strategic element has been added. Your craft now has a two-person crew behind it

and the game opens up with your crew selection screen. Each has their own specialist skills and abilities that will affect how your craft performs during the rest of the game so you need to choose wisely right from the start.

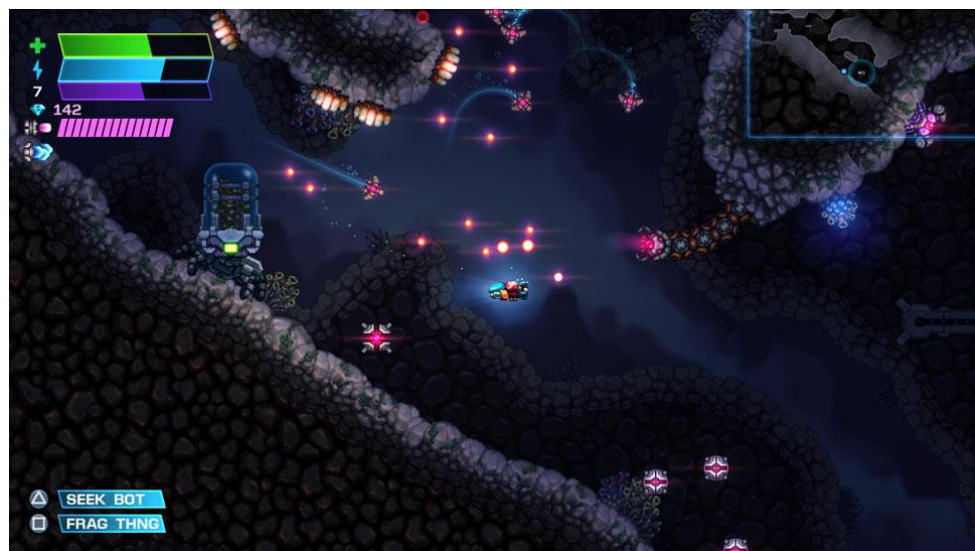
From there, you move onto the game proper and set off onto the first asteroid. As you explore you encounter various scientists around the space rock. They'll instruct you on gameplay mechanics and - most importantly - ask for help with

different tasks. These tasks will send you off exploring the asteroid, defeating more enemies, hunting for lost items and performing all manner of heroic duties. Not everything is essential to complete each asteroid but they all help...

But Astro Aqua Kitty is different. As you defeat creatures, some will randomly drop

This all-new game in the series is a departure from the Defender inspired arcade shooter. Last seen in Aqua Kitty UDX on the Nintendo Switch, this game takes the saga into space as the title suggests. The heroic felines have moved their operations from Earth and instead of searching for milk are now mining asteroids in space. Laced with valuable jewels, it seemed to be a simple enough plan... but these cavernous asteroids were flooded with water and all manner of hazards and creatures out to stop our hapless felines.

It's up to you and your brave crew to take a heavily armed space submarine to the asteroids, protect the scientists and miners... and maybe collect a few jewels along the way. Doing this, Astro Aqua Kitty





gems. These can be used in the shops you find around the asteroids to buy new weapons or upgrade your craft's abilities. Other gems can be picked up from mining when you destroy rocks scattered around the scenery. Additional weapons can be found in destructible cargo containers or are dropped randomly.

However, it's not just a case of buying a weapon and using it. You have a limited number of slots to add a primary and secondary weapon, and four enhancement slots to your craft. Each weapon or add-on also has a level rating. You need to reach a set ability level to be able to add them (hence the RPG element). Experience is gained as you destroy creatures and when you earn enough you increase a level. This also allows your characters to use new skills as well. So there's a lot more hidden depth than just fly and shoot.

The last Aqua Kitty games were incredibly addictive, taking all the best qualities from Defender but adding enough of a modern twist to keep them fresh. These new strategic elements that have been introduced to Astro Aqua Kitty do the same and lift it head and shoulders above your average shooter, and you've really got to think more about how you use your resources. It's no longer a case of go

exploring guns blazing. That might work for typical bullet hell shooters (even though there's plenty of that here), but now you've got to manage your weapons, ship's energy systems and a myriad of upgrades to get the most out of your craft.

Fortunately, everything can be swapped in and out as you need to. And it's a good job



too as some weapons will be better suited than others for different sections of the huge levels. The same approach applies for dealing with the bosses at the end of each asteroid. Some need an all-out assault with everything you've got, whereas others need to be dealt with using a more targeted approach where something like homing missiles will be your best bet. Fortunately, with save points scattered around the asteroids (and just before each boss) you don't have to worry about a few deaths here and there as you progress.



Even though it takes a different approach to the game, with a more exploratory story-based mechanic, it makes for a refreshing change. The action is just as frantic and will get your blood pumping as you try to keep your feline heroes alive against the odds, keeping it just as addictive as Aqua Kitty DX. But this time, with multiple challenges and side missions spread throughout each level, that can be tackled in any order you wish, the game just feels much more satisfying.

Instead of endlessly playing from one end of a level to another as you would in a traditional arcade shooter, each mission feels like a win in its own right. With some of these being optional, and the others being able to be tackled in a non-linear manner, it makes you feel as if you're in total control of the game. It all adds up to create an engaging gaming experience that you'll find almost impossible to put down.



For games of this nature, the big concern is its long-term appeal. That's not really a problem with Astro Aqua Kitty though. Even if you complete the game after exploring the eight vast levels and taking out all of the bosses, with the random distribution of weapon pickups and item availability in the store it ensures that no two runs of the game ever play the same.

So, in essence, it doesn't matter whether you've memorised the layout of all of the levels, or mastered ways to avoid the attack patterns of everything you face, having access to different weapon loadouts each time will keep the game fresh every time you start anew.

Just as with previous entries in the series, Astro Aqua Kitty looks and sounds fantastic. The 16-bit retro styling has continued from the earlier games, and the pixel art visuals from Dugan Jackson are just as striking as ever. And as before, the graphics are backed up by another fantastic chip soundtrack by Electric Cafe.

I'm a huge fan of game soundtracks in general, especially from the 8-bit and 16-bit era, and as with their previous releases Electric Cafe have made this soundtrack available from [Bandcamp](#). And as with the game itself, it's worth every penny.

One of my only real criticisms about Aqua Kitty DX was the occasional slowdown I experienced. Even though the game deserved its spot in our list of the Vita's [Top 10 Arcade Shooters](#), there were times when the game stuttered when it was busy on screen. Fortunately, this sequel has no such problems in that department. It's silky smooth throughout, no matter what's on screen or how many creatures are around trying to blow you to kitty heaven.

In fact putting this side-by-side up against the Nintendo Switch version and apart from the obvious difference in screen resolution the two are practically identical. I've swapped between both versions of the game regularly since each was released and despite being the older platform, the Vita holds its own admirably.

With this being the last PS Vita game from Tikipod then they're bowing out in style. It's an absolutely stunning game and a fitting way to close the series. The story elements blend in perfectly and don't detract at all from the arcade action and each of the levels is packed with plenty of diversity in their missions to keep you engaged throughout. It's incredibly addictive, plays like a dream and is easily one of the best shooters to grace the Vita. It's a game that no self-respecting Vita owner should be without.



# ASTRO AQUAKITTY

The Aqua Kitty cats have launched into space in an all new  
action RPG shoot-em-up adventure!

<https://tikipod.com/astroaquakitty/>

93% - TECH GAMING  
4/5 - TOUCH ARCADE  
9/10 - VITA PLAYER  
9/10 - PURE NINTENDO  
INDIE GAME CHICK  
APPROVED!



NINTENDO  
SWITCH



PS4

PSVITA



XBOX ONE



STEAM



## INTERVIEW: DUGAN JACKSON (TIKIPOD) by Simon Plumbe, Marcos Cudas

Linking in with our look at the Aqua Kitty series, Dugan Jackson - owner of Tikipod - spared some time to talk to us about the shoot-em-up series and their work on the PS Vita...

*VP: Firstly, can you tell us a bit about yourself and Tikipod?*

DJ: Hello - I have been working in game development since the late 90s, and been fortunate to work on all sorts of hardware formats from PS1 and onward (even Gizmondo!). Tikipod was setup around the time I was contracting on Gravity Crash on PS3.



*VP: You're most known amongst the Vita community for Aqua Kitty, but you've also worked for other developers as well. Can you tell us about that?*

DJ: Yep, well before setting up Tikipod I had worked at various companies who tended to make titles for publishers (rather than self-fund their own projects). And in more recent years I have worked with companies like Curve and Just Add Water in a contractor capacity.

*VP: Moving onto Aqua Kitty now... where did the idea come from and beyond the obvious arcade inspiration, what were your influences?*

DJ: The game began as a puzzle based shooter for XBLIG, we were doing it in our spare time and did not have a clear plan,

so were just experimenting about. It was a while ago so I can't exactly remember all the details of how it ended up as it did, but there were a mix of factors such as the Deepwater oil spill in the US which gave rise to the drilling/mining theme, plus Nyancat was a big thing so we tried adding cats to the mix and so on.

Amiga and PC Engine games were both an influence on the look, plus In The Hunt by Irem.

*VP: Aqua Kitty has developed something of a cult following amongst gamers. Did you ever expect it to grow the way it has from its humble beginnings on PlayStation Mobile?*

DJ: No not at all. PSM gave us an opportunity to get the game completed fast, so we were racing full tilt to just finish the game for the launch date and not really thinking beyond that.

*VP: PlayStation Mobile was used by many developers used as an introductory platform to get into the PlayStation ecosystem. How did you find it to work with?*

DJ: Again, it was a while ago so details are a bit vague now. Negatives I remember are that the tablet PSM supported had dire fill rate, and the store tab on PSVita was a bit secluded. But the staff at Sony were a huge help, and we loved being able to develop on a retail PSVita.

*VP: Do you think there's an equivalent to PSM out there anywhere else right now?*

DJ: No idea I'm afraid.

*VP: Many of its supporters compared PlayStation Mobile to the Minis range, praising it for its low-cost approach to bite-sized gaming. Do you think it could have been as successful?*

DJ: I would have loved to have seen a special boxed PSVita promoting the fact



you could develop your own games at home.

*VP: Why do you think PSM ultimately failed as a gaming platform?*

DJ: Not sure really, we didn't really keep an eye on it once we had access to proper devkits. Maybe it needed more standout titles to keep it going?



*VP: Both Aqua Kitty and Rock Boshers pay tribute in their stylings to the 8-bit and 16-bit era. Is it safe to say that you're something of an old-school gamer at heart?*

DJ: Yeah I was lucky to grow up in the era of 80s Arcades, the Speccy, Amiga and so on.

*VP: Was it that love of retro part of your decision to approach Electric Café to provide the distinctive chip music for most of your games to-date?*

DJ: I met them whilst working on a different job, they were great to work with and I had been really impressed with the audio they did. So it just made sense to give them a shout so see if they would be interested in helping out with Aqua Kitty.

*VP: You've worked with several publishers to produce limited physical releases of your games across a range of platforms. How did these come about?*

DJ: Just by emailing and asking if they were interested :D

*VP: Were there any plans to port your medieval twin-stick shooter Iron Crypticle across to the Vita at any point?*

DJ: We thought about it, but felt it was too much work and might not recoup. Plus we would have only been able to have single player mode, doing multiplayer would have been a huge task.



*VP: You shocked everyone recently with a surprise update to Astro Aqua Kitty, adding the Arcade Mode to the game effectively making it two games in one. What made you decide to add this to the game rather than releasing it as a standalone title?*

DJ: I always like games that have some extra mode or other, which is a bit different to the main game. So we made a new mode that it's a bit R-Type like in how it's a fixed path side scroller.

*VP: The Arcade Mode is much tougher than the standard game. Was that intentional?*

DJ: Yes, it's one level, but a challenge like side scrollers from the olden days. You can play by just trying to get to the end, or once more confident then try to rescue all the cats too.

Each difficulty mode adds extra enemies and hazards as well. And although it's tough, you are given several health hearts (rather than being one hit death) and can collide with walls without taking damage.

*VP: You were able to bring us Astro Aqua Kitty as your final release for the PS Vita*

*before Sony closed off submissions, but did you have plans for any further Vita games?*

DJ: No that was our final planned Vita game. We are very glad we could get it released before the cut off, as that would have been really sad if it had never come out on Vita.

*VP: Now the PS Vita isn't part of your future plans, what's next for Tikipod?*

DJ: Not entirely sure at the moment, but once we have some concrete plans we'll let folks know.

*VP: One final question... have we seen the last of the Aqua Kitty series, or will they make a return in the future?*

DJ: I am sure we will come back to the world of Aqua Kitty again sometime, not sure what sort of game it might be - but probably not a kart racer!

*VP: Thanks for your time and for all your support for the Vita community over the years!*

DJ: Not a problem, we are all very glad to be able to complete one last Vita title for everyone to enjoy.

Tikipod can be found online at [www.tikipod.com](http://www.tikipod.com) or on Twitter at [@TIKIPODltd](https://twitter.com/TIKIPODltd)

## **COMPETITION!**

### **Win a copy of Rock Boshers DX!**

Thanks to the generous folks over at Tikipod, we have a copy of the limited edition physical release of *Rock Boshers DX* to give away to one lucky reader of Vita Player Magazine!

This physical version of Rock Boshers DX was released by Limited Run Games and was limited to just 2,500 copies worldwide upon its release. The game sold out within 24 hours of going on sale and is now only available on the aftersale market.

To be in with a chance of winning, just answer the question below and email your answer to us at [contact@vitaplayer.co.uk](mailto:contact@vitaplayer.co.uk) with "Rock Boshers DX Competition" in the subject line. We'll pick a winner at random from all the correct entries received by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021 and arrange to send the game to the lucky winner.

So, to be in with a chance of winning this great game, just answer the following:

Which 8-bit computer was Rock Boshers DX inspired by?

- A. ZX Spectrum
- B. Commodore 64
- C. Amstrad CPC 464

It's open to all Vita Player Magazine readers worldwide with the exception of employees of Tikipod, Vita Player or Infinite Frontiers team members, or their family members.

Good luck!



## TIKIPOD SOFTOGRAPHY

This is a current list of the games released by Tikipod across all formats, accurate at the time of publishing.

### Digital Releases

Aqua Kitty Milk Mine Defender (PSM)  
Aqua Kitty Milk Mine Defender (Xbox 360)  
Aqua Kitty Milk Mine Defender (PC)  
Aqua Kitty Milk Mine Defender (Steam)

Aqua Kitty DX (PS Vita)  
Aqua Kitty DX (PS4)

Aqua Kitty UDX (Xbox One)  
Aqua Kitty UDX (Nintendo Switch)

Astro Aqua Kitty (PS Vita)  
Astro Aqua Kitty (PS4)  
Astro Aqua Kitty (Steam)  
Astro Aqua Kitty (Nintendo Switch)  
Astro Aqua Kitty (Xbox One)

Rock Boshers (PSM)

Rock Boshers DX (PS Vita)  
Rock Boshers DX (PS4)  
Rock Boshers DX (Steam)  
Rock Boshers DX (Nintendo Switch)

Iron Crypticle (PS4)  
Iron Crypticle (Nintendo Switch)  
Iron Crypticle (Xbox One)  
Iron Crypticle (Steam)

### Physical Releases

Aqua Kitty DX (PS Vita)  
Aqua Kitty DX (PS4)

Astro Aqua Kitty (PS Vita)

Rock Boshers DX (PS Vita)  
Rock Boshers DX (PS4)

Iron Crypticle (PS4)



## VITA PLAYER AND SUSTAINABILITY

by Simon Plumbe

When you think about geek culture, you don't immediately think about the environmental impact that your hobby might have on the world around you. But it's something that we've been thinking about more and more here at Infinite Frontiers. And we're going to be covering the subject of sustainability across all our platforms in the coming months in an extensive series of articles and special features...

While many of you only know us from either this fanzine or the Vita Player website, Infinite Frontiers has been an active organisation for over 30 years. We started back in August 1989 as a small Doctor Who fan club and since that time we've run fan clubs, conventions, produced paper and digital fanzines, websites and even software.

During that as well as evolving what we have produced, we've had to deal with the changing nature of what we create and its impact on the environment. Right from the start we produced paper fanzines - our Doctor Who club produced a small newsletter/magazine for our members, designed on an old Amstrad CPC6128 and photocopied. At its peak it was only 12 pages in size and had a relatively small print run but we sold spare copies at another local club. But 30+ years later and we *still* have some of these spares leftover...

In the 1990s, our focus was on Star Trek - running a club, convention, paper fanzines and creating The Final Frontier. This was a disk based magazine for the Amiga range of 16-bit computers. While we made this available freely, we also sold copies directly and through companies across the world. But with each issue spanning as many as five 3.5" disks and lasting for ten issues, you can imagine the resources it took up. Even with the title being copied freely across the globe, there were still

thousands of disks being used worldwide for the magazine to be circulated.

Moving on again and our biggest project in recent years has been the Transformers convention Auto Assembly, which ran from 2000-2015 and at its peak drew over 1,000 fans from all over the world to the event. A weekend celebrating the Transformers franchise with traders, fans and guests from the comic and television shows became a firm fixture on the convention circuit. One thing that we did each year was produce a series of postcards to give to all our attendees, as well as a magazine, [The Cybertronian Times](#). As the event grew in size, at our peak it meant us handing out 1,000 magazines, 1,000 self-created comics and 4,000 postcards. Despite the quality of them, it's safe to assume that not all of these were kept after the convention.



We've since shifted focus and since 2015, all our work has been done online. Three websites and our YouTube channel are



our primary outlets, all our old software is still available but only as digital downloads and we've stopped producing printed fanzines.

The Cybertronian Times continued after the convention ended but is now a free digital only release. We don't know what the readership is, but even with energy consumption requirements for hosting the file on our server it's a lot less harmful than the damage done by a printed copy.

This brings me on to our latest title - Vita Player Magazine. As soon as we announced it, we were asked if a paper version was going to happen. As much as we loved the idea of a print-based magazine dedicated to the PlayStation Vita the reality is that it's no longer a sensible move for us to think about physical fanzine production here at Infinite Frontiers.

We're not the same team we were back in 1989 or even back in the early 2000s. Our work now is targeted at a global audience and that brings new challenges. If we went down the print-based route we'd have the complications of shipping, complicated further by new tax regulations recently introduced that affect anything shipped out of the UK. That's before even considering the environmental impact of actually sending magazines around the world.

But from a production standpoint, there's still the issue of resources. Our goal with Vita Player Magazine was to produce a new issue every two months, with at least 48 pages in each. Even if we were to print this in A5 format, that's 12 sheet of paper *per copy*.

We don't know what sort of print run we would have to anticipate but based on the interest we've had online, we'd certainly look at 1,000 for a comfortable first print. 12,000 sheets of paper. But that's not the most serious point. Regardless of whatever we might print, we'd still have to *sell* those copies and have additional packing material to contend with.

There may still be a healthy fanbase for the PS Vita, but if those copies don't sell then we are stuck with magazines that will eventually be sent for recycling or just left in storage gathering dust. We faced the same problem with Auto Assembly and The Cybertronian Times. Most printers work in fixed quantities, and these rarely matched up with what we needed so we had little choice but to order more than our requirements and we've got surplus stocks dating back over a decade. They can't be resold and with no further events coming from us, these will eventually head to the local recycling centre.

So, for Vita Player Magazine and The Cybertronian Times we made the conscious decision to produce them as digital only releases. From a creative point of view digital has removed an incredible number of restrictions we had to work with in the past. We're not constrained by page counts (although we do work in multiples of four as if we were creating for print still), but we also no longer print off proof copies to test the magazines while they're in development. As the finished titles are being released as PDF files, we simply create pre-release PDFs to check as we're going along.

The finished magazines are hosted on our own server, but we make them available to download and read offline. The files are small enough to enable us to keep a large library available at all times, while keeping download times down to a minimum, saving energy usage for readers.

We know there are probably more things that we can do to improve both magazines further in the future and be even more efficient in the way they are produced and distributed. But for now, this new approach marks an exciting time for us as we move our publishing arm into the future.

## GAME REVIEW: SUPER STARDUST DELTA (PS VITA)

by Sven Harvey

From the Finish team, Housemarque, Super Stardust Delta is presented as a direct sequel to Super Stardust HD on the PS3 and its restricted cousin on the PSP, Super Stardust Portable. The product line, however, is far more venerable. The ancestor of the game is, of course, Asteroids – Atari's 1979 arcade cabinet that used a vector display.

the PS3 version is present and further refinements (even the removal of an oft-ignored weapon option) enhance the experience further with the special talents of the host hardware.

In essence, you pilot a star-fighter craft, usually by the use of the left analogue stick. The activate craft weapon is fired by

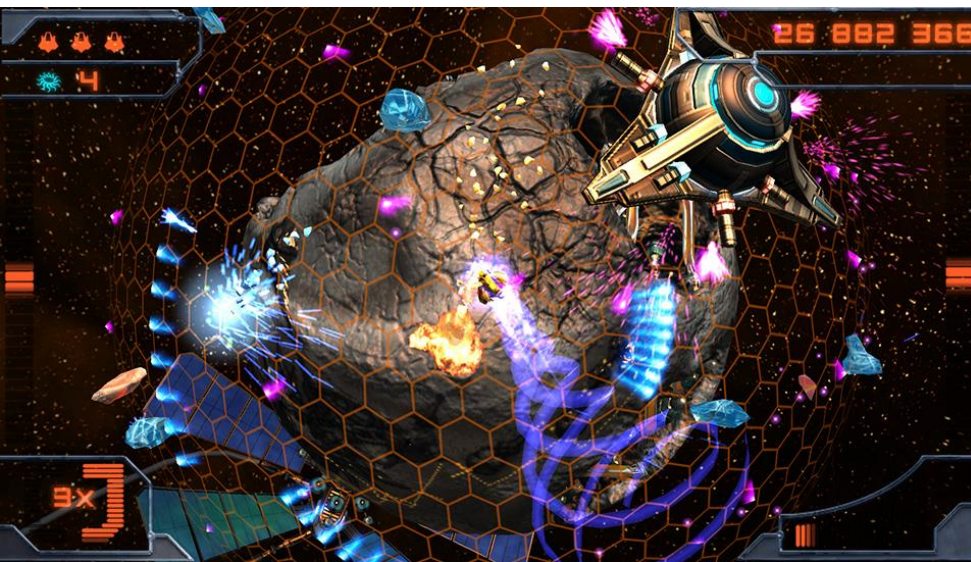
moving the right analogue in the direction you wish to unleash your hail of death. Weapon change from the fire to the ice weapon is achieved with the right shoulder button whilst an often necessary and rechargeable boost charge which takes out almost all in the crafts path can be activated sparingly with the left shoulder.

Touch the screen to unleash missiles (only three sets so don't get trigger happy), and you can always have a quick

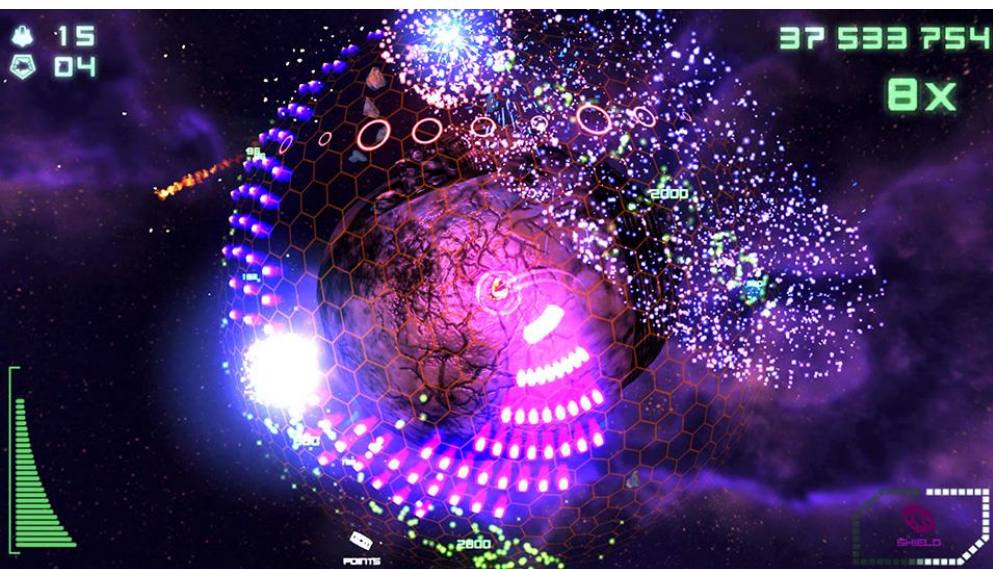
shake to let off a smart bomb, as long as you still hold one. Tilting the PS Vita alters your view of the planet you are operating over to allow sight of more of the playfield, which fortunately you can reset with the triangle button. If you have got yourself into a particularly sticky situation, with a touch of the back panel, which like Stephen Hawking hunting in a Go

Asteroid's core gameplay of shooting asteroids to break them down to smaller asteroids, then debris, then space dust formed the backbone of Stardust for the original Commodore Amiga machines. A graphically enhanced sequel, Super Stardust, on the Amiga 1200 and CD32 included special tunnel sections between main arenas, as with its predecessor. Unfortunately the tunnel "warp" sections didn't make it to the 2007 PS3 Super Stardust HD sequel, fourteen years after the initial Stardust release. Dual analogue controls did make it one of the early hits of the PlayStation Store, the necessary omission of which severely damaged the playability of the PSP version.

On PS Vita however, everything that was right in







The standard version of Super Stardust Delta presents you with two main game modes - Arcade (where you start and the beginning and work your way through the planets) and Planet (just do the one planet). However, grab the first DLC pack that launched on Vita release day, the "Advanced Starfighter Pack" and you also get Bomber (only weapons are the bombs), Endless (wave after wave of endurance test), Impact (boost only) and Twin

Gun (the analogue sticks activate a weapon each and ship movement is via motion - tilting the machine).

Compare ad, activates a black hole briefly to get rid of the annoying screen blight (along with one of your missile shots).

Tootling off around seemingly doomed planets, you take out the asteroids of various compositions threatening to rain down destruction, as well as various enemy craft and creatures. All the while you are building up a good old fashioned bonus multiplier by avoiding repeated death as you collect power ups, usually presented initially as apparently Kryptonite asteroids glowing bright green on your screen. In "proper" traditional game style you also face off against an end of level guardian at the end of each planet.

Oh, but there's more - there are mini game modes to unlock starting with Crush, where you pinch asteroids out of existence by the use of the touch screen and rear touch panel together. Disc Slide allows you to flick a blue disc to take out the screen full of bad sprites, avoid the red enemies which destroy you on touch. Orbit Bomber gives you the control of orbital cannons with the Vita's motion controls, while in Rock and Roll you literally roll a space rock around the planetary orbit collecting green bonus tokens. The final mini mode is





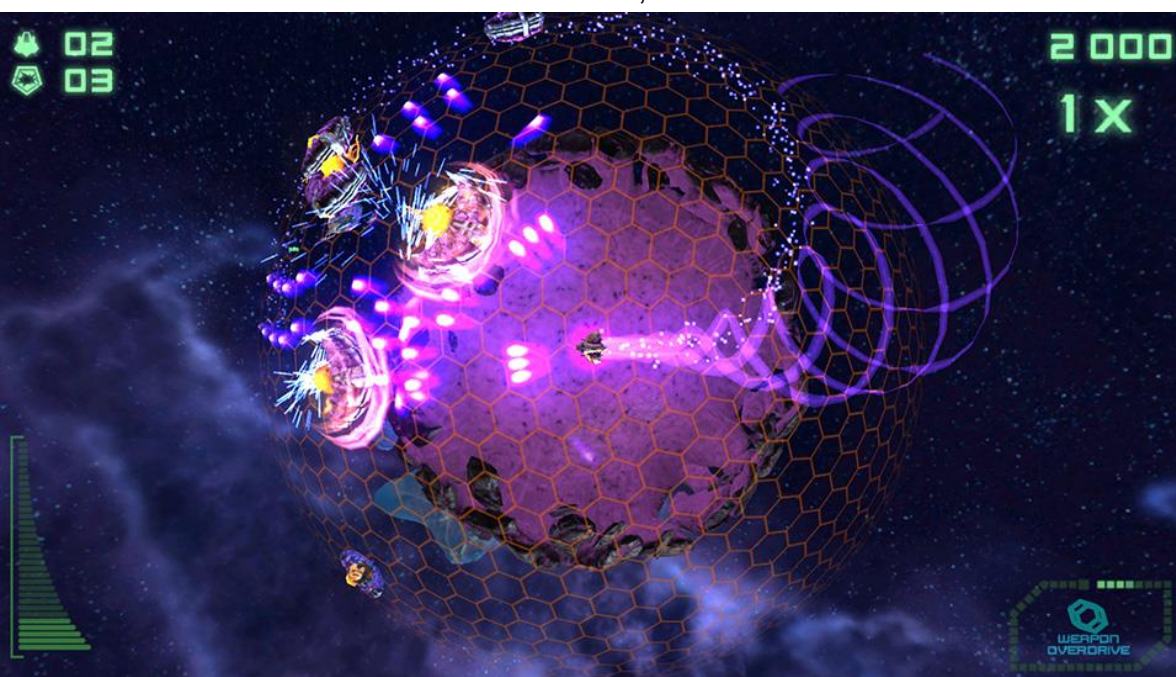


Trucker where those larger green lumps of Kryptonite are towed in by tractor beam one at a time.

Okay, now the graphics probably won't utterly astound you but are gorgeous in the right way, not to distract you, at least too much, from what you are doing. The soundtrack is equally fitting, and gives you options from Delta, Orchestral, and Arcade to a Retro set of tracks that channel the Amiga games from the 1990's. Of course, not everything is available to start with, and when the service was available,

players were able to unlock further tracks through Near interactions.

The gameplay is incredibly easy to pick up, even without the initial guidance at the beginning of the first planet, "Alena", and will keep you coming back. It is old school arcade shooting distilled to its near pure form with modern day handheld twists that only the Vita can provide, but you'll be hooked before you know it, and as a result may well sport reaction times that may aid you elsewhere.



For this kind of outlay there really is no excuse not to own this, my favourite of the series thus far, if you have any interest in space based arcade shoot 'em ups (yeah yeah I know, old terminology!).



## GAME REVIEW: ICE CREAM SURFER (PS VITA)

by Simon Plumble

Ice Cream Surfer, developed by Dolores Entertainment, crept onto the PS Vita with very little fanfare. The indie side scrolling shoot-em-up was a budget priced game and from the title alone, it left players wondering what to expect. It certainly didn't imply what type of game it was, let alone hinted at the bullet-hell shooter that awaited gamers tempted by the retro-styled game that lay before them...

to seek revenge! What ensues is a six-stage side scrolling shooter spread across different worlds with the usual end-of-level bosses to defeat, where it's down to you to save the day (and tasty treats for everyone!).

At the start you get to choose which of the five characters you want to control, which of the three difficulty levels to play at (a

welcome addition for an arcade shooter) and then you're thrown into the action and the first thing that strikes you are the retro pixel art visuals and chip soundtrack.

Now, I don't mind this for games as long as it fits, and for a tongue-in-cheek game like Ice Cream Surfer it works quite well. Controls are quite responsive albeit quite basic - a single button to fire and powerups are activated automatically as

you collect them unlike the token system used by Gradius. Each time you destroy an attacking vegetable (or other creature) a gem is dropped. Collect these and it builds up a power meter. Once this is filled you can press a second button to trigger your character's special weapon for a high power attack, but you're limited to a single

From the start, you know this isn't your typical arcade shooter. Most usually feature a clichéd storyline putting the player in control of a lone hero defending the Earth (or some similar planet) against alien invasion in a sci-fi themed space based shooter. Ice Cream Surfer couldn't be further from that trope if it tried. Instead the story centres on the hero, the aforementioned Ice Cream Surfer. He is defending the Flavor Galaxy against attack - along with his team of heroic allies - from the evil Broccoli.

Yes, you read that right... Broccoli. He's angered at the children of the known galaxy and their love of all things unhealthy, their passion for ice cream and most importantly - their loathing of vegetables. So he's assembled a veggie army



shot until you've collected enough gems to use it again.

The one thought that struck me straight away when it came to the visuals for Ice Cream Surfer was the Konami classic *Parodius*. However, despite both shooters having a comical and somewhat surreal look for the visuals, that's where the similarities end.

I really didn't quite know what to make of this. The level design doesn't seem to make a great deal of sense and neither do the creatures you encounter on them. With the storyline mentioning a vegetable army, it's bizarre to find yourself come under attack from lightbulbs and disembodied heads floating in space. I was able to make sense of the story moving from one planet to another (presumably with our heroes in search of Broccoli) but there isn't even a static screen to explain the search to progress the story. Instead, once you've got past the first frozen level, the rest start in space then transition to a planetary atmosphere until you reach that stage's boss.



give it some degree of long term appeal coupled with the varying difficulty levels.

The console versions of the game offer a two-player co-op mode which is sadly missing from the PS Vita port although it's an understandable omission. With such low sales, adding this for PSTV owners would have been an additional expense for the developers and ad-hoc multiplayer might not have been responsive enough for this type of game.

But ultimately what really lets this game down is its brevity. With just six levels and an unlimited supply of continues at your disposal you'll complete it in no time at all. As I said before, it might have similarities in the look to *Parodius*, but it doesn't hold a torch to that classic in terms of longevity or gameplay and lacks the addictive qualities of Konami's hit.

It's fun in short bursts, but nothing spectacular and if you strip away the visuals, it's really just an average shoot-em-up underneath the retro visuals.

It's relatively inexpensive, as was the limited edition physical release from Red Art Games, but it's far from the being the best example of the genre on the Vita.

I have to be honest and say that I was impressed with the diversity of each of the characters. Instead of a purely cosmetic change, each handles differently and has completely different weapons and special attacks available to them. Truthfully, with the game being so short this is essential to





## GAME REVIEW: VASARA COLLECTION (PS VITA) by Simon Plumble

I'm passionate about retro gaming - old arcade and console games in particular and I'm a keen collector of the games, systems and the Mini consoles and retro compilations. The latter are a great way to get games I missed out on when I was younger or to discover systems I missed first time around.



The Vasara Collection is one such compilation. Released by QUByte (who provided us with the copy of the game for this review) it features conversions of two classic bullet hell arcade shoot-em-ups originally released exclusively in Japan by Visco. Namely Vasara and Vasara 2, released in 2000 and 2001 respectively.

The first thing I have to say about Vasara and Vasara 2 is that they are tough... VERY tough. Bullet hell shooters aren't for the feint-hearted at the best of times, but these really are difficult and are amongst the toughest games I've played in the genre. Even getting through the regular sections of the games are difficult with everything thrown at you but the bosses are doubly so.

If you're not familiar with bullet hell shooters, it's a sub-genre of vertically or horizontally scrolling shoot-em-ups that are

traditionally split into stages, with huge bosses at the end of each stage. The name is derived - as you can see from the screenshots - from the intensity of enemy firepower that you come under. For the uninitiated it can be overwhelming at first and mastery of them is very much a case of remembering attack patterns and in the case of arcade machines, having plenty of cash at your disposal to keep the continues flowing.

Fortunately, both conversions have kept to their arcade roots in the way they function. Rather than giving players a fixed number of credits to allow them to continue once all their lives are lost, or allowing them to choose how many credits to start the game with, it uses a coin system. By using the left shoulder button, you simply add coins at the start

and more can be added throughout play as you need them - just as you would have in the arcades back in the day - giving you as many continues as you need to get through the game... and boy will you need them!

The setting for both games is rather unusual, taking place in alternate timeline of feudal Japan in the 17th century. After the death of your Emperor, a rival is





attempting to seize power using an army of robotic fighting machines. Armed with little more than a katana and a hover bike you have to battle through these hordes to stop him at all costs... With a choice of four characters, each with the own craft with differing weapons and abilities, it's just you in a battle against the odds.

As well as your traditional bullet-based attacks, you can power this up by holding down the fire button in a similar manner to R-Type, and when the fire button is released this unleashes a powerful melee attack that not only deals extra damage to everything on screen but deflects incoming bullets as well. In addition, as you would expect from a bullet hell shooter, you have a limited supply of bombs at your disposal for each life for an even more devastating attack.

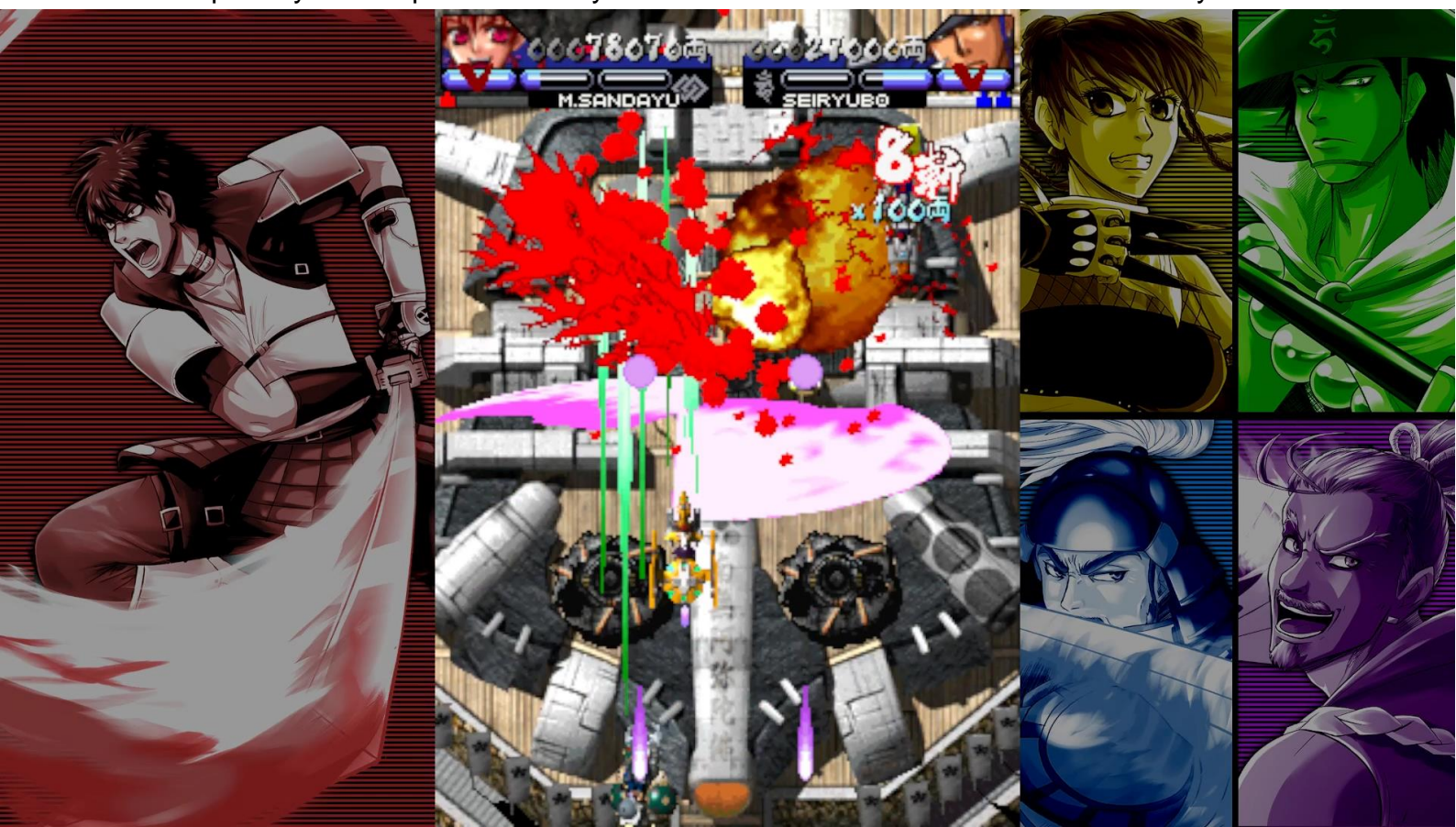
The final attack on offer, and this is where the games get their name, is the Vasara attack. A more powerful version of the melee attack and activated in the same way, these are charged up by collecting crystals that are dropped by your adversaries as they are destroyed. Once the meter is complete you can unleash a deadly attack.

All-important powerups can be picked up that improve your weapon. Unusually

compared with similar games, these are dropped quite frequently so you can upgrade your weapons a maximum of four times. You soon realise why the powerups are available so readily though, as you'll lose lives faster than you can count, so grab them while you can!

Less than half of the screen is used up with the game itself. The rest is used with artwork depicting characters from the respective game that you are playing. Unlike some arcade ports available, there's no option to stretch the screen display to fill the PS Vita's screen, although it does offer what it refers to as a Tate mode. This rotates the screen through 90 degrees and fills the screen. While it's of no use to console owners or those playing the Vita version on the PSTV, it works well on the Vita itself with the controls being remapped slightly to use the right analogue stick for movement and minor changes to the button layout to fire the various weapons.

In terms of the games themselves, obviously the visuals can't be compared to what we see from today's games but to be honest for games of that era in the arcades they weren't really pushing the boundaries of what was possible either. Both games were based on the 32 RISC SSV hardware but compared to games released by Sega and Namco of the same time they looked





somewhat dated. As 2D shooters both games looked great, although Vasara 2 has the edge. There are signs of hardware scaling giving the backgrounds a slight impression of depth to them although it's quite subtle.

Sound is great for both with loud, punchy sound effects, and great soundtracks running throughout. Although the speech seems somewhat subdued with the rest of the sound overpowering it. Whether this is down to the PS Vita port or the arcade originals I don't know but it didn't spoil the experience at all.

One thing that is common to both games is the multiplayer mode. Both titles had two-player coop modes in the arcades making the game *slightly* easier and for those of you fortunate enough to own a PlayStation TV, not only is the Vasara Collection compatible with the microconsole, but it also allows for two players simultaneously. Each player can use either a DualShock 3 or DualShock 4 controller and both players share the same set of credits, although these can be added to continually as needed.

The only downside I found in this mode is really a follow-on from the single player. In the standard game, collisions with enemy ships don't destroy you as you would expect in a typical shoot-em-up. Instead, pressing fire while in immediate proximity will cause physical damage to the enemy craft and will either push them or your own craft back. Vasara is the only game in the genre where I've seen this used but it also causes a problem.

Instead of causing damage when colliding when you cross paths, both players can nudge each other on screen. This can cause quite serious problems when there is a lot of action on screen as players can quite literally push each other into enemy bullets. It adds an unnecessary complication to what is an already difficult game forcing players to concentrate on avoiding each other as well as the intense firepower they come under.

Unfortunately, it's not something that can be corrected in a patch without changing the very nature of the game being a feature of the arcade originals and is one of the only things that disappointed. Hopefully it won't cause too many arguments when you play because the two-player mode is where the Vasara Collection really shines and it's immense fun and takes what it already a good game and makes it great, regardless of your gaming ability.



Unlike the console ports there are just the two games here and not the procedurally generated Timeless mode. This full screen 3D HD update would have been a welcome addition to what is already a great package and I'm not sure why it was omitted. Perhaps QByte felt that the multiplayer aspect of this mode was an integral part to the experience and with that only being possible on the PSTV, the extra development cost for something that was only going to be available to a handful of Vita owners was too great.

All that aside, both games play like a dream. They're addictive, action-packed and ideal for those eager for an arcade-fuelled adrenaline rush. Of the two I prefer the first with its more traditional weapon/bomb system but there's no faulting the package overall. It's superb value for money for arcade junkies and anyone who loves a good shoot-em-up. It shines as a two player game, but it's still immense fun as a single player game, even if it is one of the hardest games you'll play on the Vita! Just be prepared for lots of sleepless nights as you try to master this one!

## VITA PLAYER READERS FORUM

### TOP PS VITA ARCADE SHOOT-EM-UPS

We recently asked our followers on Twitter what they thought were the best arcade shoot-em-ups on the PS Vita and why. This was what they had to say...

*"Darius Burst. No doubt. Longest and most addictive of all shoot em up on psvita"*  
@oviwan73

*"For me it would have to be Riddled corpses ex for now. That's the main one I've thoroughly enjoyed so far."*  
@Yuusha\_Anime

*"Geometry Wars 3! It has multiplayer, multiple diverse modes, it's very pretty (even better than it looked on 360)"*  
@NeoTechni

*"Almost certainly Velocity 2x... But if you want a fan service option then definitely Gal Gun Double Peace"*  
@Yoshihir00

*"Velocity 2X - such hypnotic gameplay, warping and weaving around the environment. An excellent soundtrack which I couldn't resist buying on vinyl..."*  
@Pixelated\_Ben

*"Gradius Gaiden via PSP Gradius collection. Gates of Thunder via Japanese PSN account. Vita specific I ploughed a lot of time into Pixeljunk Shooter Ultimate."*  
@Jimgamer8

*"Resogun and Super Stardust Delta for sure."*  
@Deathwatch0885

*"Velocity was amazing, Super Stardust Delta, Big Sky Infinity..."*  
@breakXedge

*"Dariusburst"*  
@Leocolt\_HPR

*"For PSvita best shump is a tough question. Super Stardust Delta was an amazing game, but started on PS3, Super*

*Hydora is awesome but late in its life cycle, SoldnerX2 might be the best in mid life, but it has so many remakes and collections from PSP too that can't be left out. SineMora...also a re-release... Does Velocity count...sort of...not really. I personally would go with Super Hydora, its a love letter to classic shumps like Gradius, Life Force and Darius with new twists and an awesome soundtrack."*  
@RetroTechx

*"Luftrausers and it's endless replayability and one-more-go draw win for me every time!"*  
@GeckoFodder

*"Velocity 2X by FuturLab"*  
@psp2roundup

*"Resogun."*  
@scot\_shot

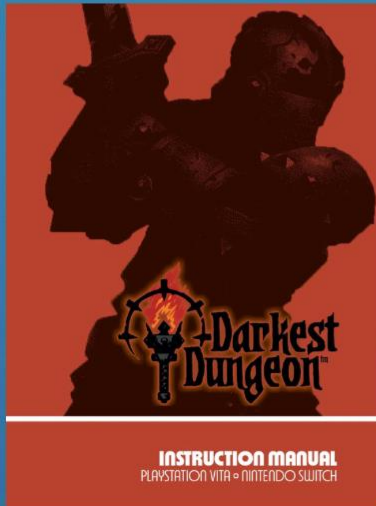
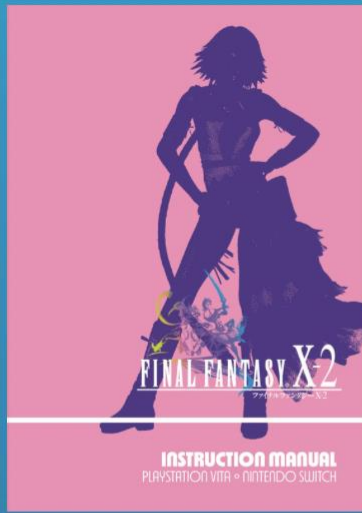
*"Scribble Shooter"*  
@rtid75

*"TxK, more shooters should be hardcore raves!"*  
@psp2roundup

*"Gunslugs"*  
@CameronParkin

Well, that's what our Twitter followers thought but what about you? Join us in the discussion at  
[https://twitter.com/Vita\\_Player](https://twitter.com/Vita_Player)





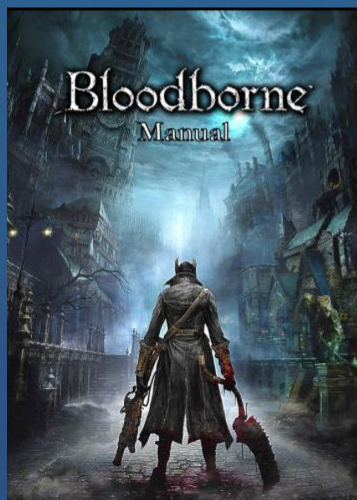
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## GAME REVIEW: RESOGUN (PS VITA) by Simon Plumbe

When it was first unveiled to the public, the PS4 made a lot of promises to gamers, leading us to believe that we were going to witness a new era of gaming. Many were disappointed at first wave of games released, but one title that didn't disappoint was Resogun - the first on the platform from Housemarque, developers of the Super Stardust series and Dead Nation.

With their pedigree it's no wonder that Resogun was going to be an instant classic - Housemarque was formed out of two hardened Amiga development studios known for pushing the hardware and getting the most out of the system (Terramarque and Bloodhouse) so it was only natural that their talent continued onto current gen systems.

Despite the PS Vita having a stunning version of Super Stardust and Dead Nation, there were doubts when it was announced that we were going to be treated to a port of Resogun. With its particle-intensive effects people wondered just how the Vita was going to cope. With the coding duties being handed over to

Climax Studios, who previously produced Smart As... and handled the impressive Vita port of the aforementioned Dead Nation, the question still remained whether Resogun would actually work on the PS Vita...

Resogun itself, as with most games from Housemarque, isn't entirely an original concept. At its heart, Resogun is an update of the Williams arcade classic Defender albeit a *lot* prettier. The core gameplay remains the same - flying over an alien landscape protecting humans from attack and being kidnapped in your trusty fighter using the weapons at your disposal, aided by a limited supply of smart bombs to get you out of trouble when things get a little too intense, coupled with a booster to move you around the landscape in short bursts at high speed and to avoid danger.

Resogun expands on this adding weapon upgrades, a wide range of aliens intent on wiping out you and the humans under your protection, vast end-of-level bosses, all





wrapped up with stunning 3D graphics and breathtaking explosions and visual effects.

Moving on from the basics, the game builds on the Defender theme by adopting a twin-stick approach for the control of your fighter. The left stick controls movement and the right stick controls firing making for incredibly precise action and although in principle this *should* make the game easier than Defender it doesn't, it just refines the gameplay and makes it far more responsive. The thrust and bomb functions are still there but the boosters are limited and need recharging between use. A new element is introduced here as they can now be used to destroy advancing enemy craft simply by flying into them at high speed and as you can change direction in mid-boost it's possible to annihilate vast waves of aliens with a single use!

The final main update on the weapons front is the Overdrive mode. As you destroy each alien craft, what can be described as small green pellets are left behind. Collect these and your overdrive meter charges up. You can unleash this at the tap of a button and an incredibly powerful beam of energy fires from your ship filling the screen destroying

everything in its path. Devastating to most aliens you'll encounter and an essential tool when you're up against the end of level bosses...

There are three ships to choose from, each with their own characteristics in terms of agility, overdrive power levels and weapon types and these can be upgraded as you play. Unlike most shooters, you don't lose your upgrades when you lose a life which is a godsend because without a fully upgraded ship you will have absolutely no chance whatsoever of completing the game as aliens get progressively tougher throughout and a *lot* harder to kill!

What really sets Resogun apart from Defender is the way you have to protect the humans under your guardianship. Rather than being left stranded on the landscape below you, they start off held captive in a series of cells spread throughout the level. To release them you need to eliminate specific waves of aliens that will appear during the stage. Destroy all of them successfully and one of the humans will be released. You've then got to get to them, pick them up and fly them to one of the pods flying overhead before they are captured. Fail to destroy the alien

attack wave or lose a life while carrying the human in your charge and they're lost forever. The more you rescue, the higher your score bonus will be at the end of each level.

The new twists to the gameplay mechanics add rather than detract from the addictive nature of the original and it's just as maddeningly compelling as the original smash hit from Williams. No matter which of the difficulty setting you choose to play on for a more hardcore or relaxed gaming session, it will give you an incredible adrenaline rush and the choice of ships on offer provide plenty of variety in the game and breathe extra longevity into what is essentially a simple game. Upon completion on a chosen difficulty level, the strategy you need to employ to play the game changes dramatically just by altering the ship you choose, and changing the difficulty level alters this yet again once the bosses evolve adding further depth to the game.



I can't continue without talking about how the game looks and this was the biggest selling point of the PS4 original. The PS4 version was celebrated for its use of lavish particle effects for its explosions and stunning effects, with almost everything on screen - ships, landscapes and bosses - being constructed from thousands of small cubes resulting in the PS4's hardware being pushed to manipulate an astonishing

number of 3D objects simultaneously at breakneck speed. Surely there was no way that the PS Vita could replicate that...? Well astonishingly it has managed to do so admirably. The 3D backgrounds look absolutely gorgeous and rotate smoothly but it's the rest of the visuals that really stand out.

The background is embellished with weather and lighting effects that bring the game world to life, and these only serve to showcase how superbly crafted this port is. Because the main game runs so well, all of this extra window dressing is testament to how much the developers were able to squeeze out of the Vita. Once you start playing you really do appreciate all of the work that has gone into its development. There's no let-up in the pace of the game and no sign of slowdown for one moment no matter how much is on screen at any time - whether there are dozens of ships (bearing in mind just how many objects there actually are on screen) or how lavish

the explosions and visual effects are, the game looks utterly breathtaking and is one of the best looking games on the PS Vita. Period.

While there may not be a great deal of diversity in the backgrounds, there is a wide range of aliens to encounter, coupled with some gigantic end-of-level bosses that fill the screen that really do take your breath away while playing. It's hard not to be distracted by the way Resogun looks. One thing I will say before I finish with the visuals is that the screenshots here, despite being official press images from Sony, certainly *don't* do the game justice. And while Resogun on the PS Vita looks absolutely remarkable, wait until you see it on the PSTV! That's on another level completely.



Players are well served when it comes to multi-system support. The game is Cross Buy on the PS Vita, PS3 and PS4 and if you grabbed Resogun on PlayStation Plus when it was first released, you were automatically given the PS Vita and PS3 versions free from the start. Sadly none of the DLC produced for the PS4 version was ported over despite being hinted at on the main menu, but this is just a minor gripe.

Cross Save is supported between the PS Vita and PS3 editions (the lack of PS4 support here makes sense with the additional functionality in the PS4 version) but as for the rest of the game... Both the PS3 and Vita version offer online Co-Op Multiplayer although sadly it is not Cross Play compatible but the PS Vita version *does* offer ad-hoc Co-Op Multiplayer in addition to the online Multiplayer.

While it was a fun experience, online play did prove to be one of the game's achilles heels. Understandably this is dependent on the speed of your internet connection but I found that whether you used wi-fi or the ethernet connection of the PlayStation TV it bore little difference on the game and I found that both were subject to performance issues. Don't get me wrong, I loved playing it online and it didn't spoil the game, but it meant that the game certainly wasn't anywhere near the smooth arcade experience that it is in single player mode. You'll still be able to have fun playing the game online but don't expect the online experience that you'll get from games like Killzone: Mercenary.

In contrast, the online mode on the PS3 version experienced none of this lag despite running on the same home network so I can only attribute the connection problems to the PS Vita version of the game itself. At the same time, if the connection to your co-op partner is terminated for any reason, rather than allowing the game to continue as a

single player game, it simply ends and you're presented with a Game Over message.

Also, I found the game to be a lot shorter than I expected and after completing the game, the ending was something of an anti-climax. I was expecting more than just five levels to the game and after completing the final stage I was left underwhelmed at the ending. All that was displayed was the standard end-of-level stats screen followed by a text-based screen with a congratulatory message before the credits started to roll. No real fanfare to speak of and I felt somewhat let down. There are several difficulty levels on offer extending the life of the game and as I mentioned the different characteristics of the three ships provides further gameplay variety, but once you've completed the game once, there isn't anything new to see. Granted, it's addictive gameplay will keep you coming back for more as all good arcade shooters do, but it becomes a case of "nothing new to see here".

Regardless of all of this, Resogun is *still* one of the best shooters to grace the PS Vita. Whether you are playing it for the first time, or sailing through your 100th run-through you'll get the same adrenaline rush every time and you'll never fail to be amazed by the game's breathtaking visuals, addictive gameplay, heart-stopping action. This really is a game that needs to be a part of every Vita owner's collection.





## GAME REVIEW: RIDDLED CORPSES EX (PS VITA)

By Marcos Cotas

I love what COWCAT and Diabolical Mind have going on. I really liked Xenon Valkyrie+ on Vita (which has just seen a physical release via Limited Run Games), and I'm pleased to say that, apart from a few repetition issues, Riddled Corpses EX is just as fun.

There's not really that much of a story going on, and that's something that does not seem to preoccupy Diabolical Mind. It's a basic zombie apocalypse, save others type of affair that hankers back to a simpler era in gaming. While it may not be everyone's cup of tea, this minimalist, retro theme is something that permeates the whole game (much as it did with Xenon Valkyrie+).

Another thing this particular Diabolical Mind release and its older sibling have in common is killer gameplay. Yes, it's another 8-bit inspired rogue-like game, but instead of being a platformer, it's a twin-stick shooter. Where you kill zombies. Now, I know it sounds drab, and like I said, it may not be for everyone, but they have done such an amazing job at making the

game feel fun, that you forget about its lack of originality and simply enjoy what is, undeniably, a very well executed game.

You start with a single character choice at the lowest possible level (level 1), and advance through waves and waves of zombies, collecting gold, and using said gold to upgrade your character and unlock other characters as you play along. While the formula is great, it does mean that you'll thread the same scenarios quite a few times. This does mean that you'll get better at using environmental hazards strategically, but it also means that it gets a bit stale. Thankfully, the leveling up system is balanced well enough that once you're on the brink of giving up due to playing the same part once again, you finally beat a stage and move onto the next (selectable) stage.

Another hallmark of Diabolical Mind games is the soundtrack, and Riddled Corpses EX is no exception: the killer chiptunes will make for deadly companions on your quest to kill zombies, zombie dogs, zombie this and zombie that. Again, the fact that



you'll repeat stages quite a few times until you win means you'll almost reach the point of wanting to mute the track you've heard 10 or 20 times before. But, alas, almost... and not quite. Add to this the fact that you can switch between a chiptunes soundtrack and a more modern electronic one, and you've got quite a lot of choice in the tunes department.

There's plenty of content and replayability here also, with an Arcade mode (where it's point-based and you don't collect gold) and a Survival mode (in which you must last for as long as possible). Sadly, the Story, Arcade and Survival modes all share the same stages, music and characters, so while there seems to be a lot of content here (and there kind of is), it's somewhat limited by the fact that you'll do basically the same thing with the same characters in the same places, only with slightly different objectives



Having said that, I think this is another little gem of a game. In the context under which it's released, I think it's nothing short of great: it's an affordable rogue-like twin-stick shooter, with great 8-bit presentation and a decent amount of content. Sure, it does get somewhat repetitive sometimes, but if you're a fan of the genre, you'll get a hell of a lot of bang for your buck here. Had this been released on the Genesis back in the day, we might not have to play Sonic games on a Nintendo console.







## GAME REVIEW: VELOCITY 2X (PS VITA)

by Simon Plumbe

Futurlab's Velocity series has been around on PlayStation systems for quite some time, making its debut on the PSP with the original Velocity as part of the Minis range. The time-attack vertically scrolling action shooter garnered a cult following, enough to warrant a dedicated PS Vita update several years later.

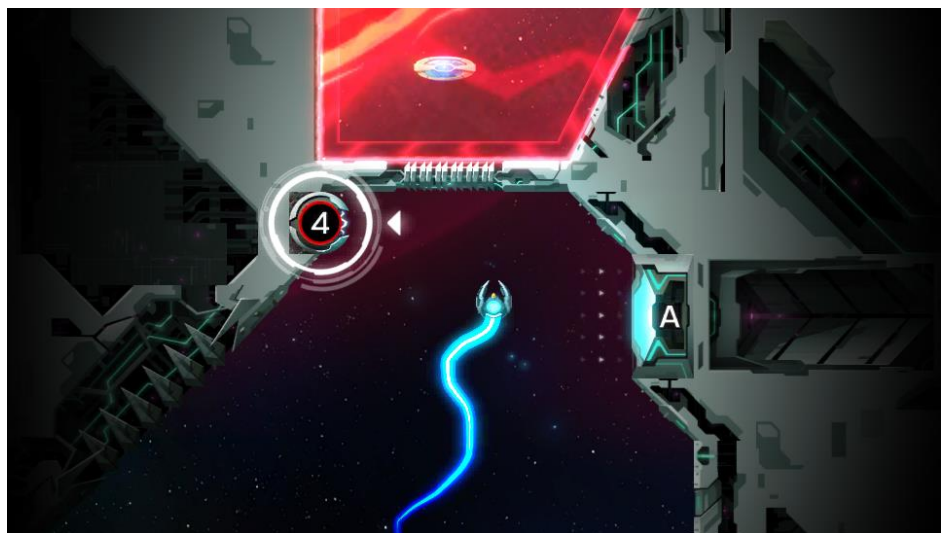
Velocity Ultra gave the PSP game a complete makeover, with all the graphics getting a complete reworking to fit the Vita's significantly higher screen resolution. The gameplay, while having some tweaks, was left relatively untouched though. But Futurlab weren't done with their classic and decided to have one final stab at the series, but this time overhauling the game completely with Velocity 2X.

Futurlab went back to the drawing board to create a sequel to the original rather than the previous HD update before. Taking the game a step further and to deliver a genuinely new experience for gamers, this time Velocity 2X has

brought gamers a fusion of two genres, wrapped up in an ongoing story-driven game, while still delivering the high-speed gameplay the series is famous for.

The story kicks off with our female protagonist being revealed. Kidnapped by an alien race, stranded on the other side of the galaxy. Knowing nothing about herself or where she is she escapes captivity and the game starts in the first of the space based sequences...

These are timed vertically scrolling stages







What these screens don't show are the stunning lighting effects throughout - every shot and every explosion all illuminate their surroundings and it enhances the game no end. Throw in some meaty sound effects and a superb music score and it all adds up to a well rounded package on the aesthetic front. But how well does it play?

In short brilliantly. Each of the gameplay elements would work well as a standalone game in its own right. They're each as addictive as the other, and they're perfectly paced so you don't get bored of either. They're challenging but not frustratingly so but with enough replay factor with the rating system so you'll want to come back until you get a perfect score on each stage.

based on the original Velocity games. It's a race to the end of each stage as fast as possible, destroying obstacles, collecting objects en route, using the ship's speed and teleportation abilities to navigate the areas ahead of you while destroying anything in your path.

At the end of each you're awarded medals based on your speed and performance and this rating will decide whether the next of the vast 50 stages is unlocked.

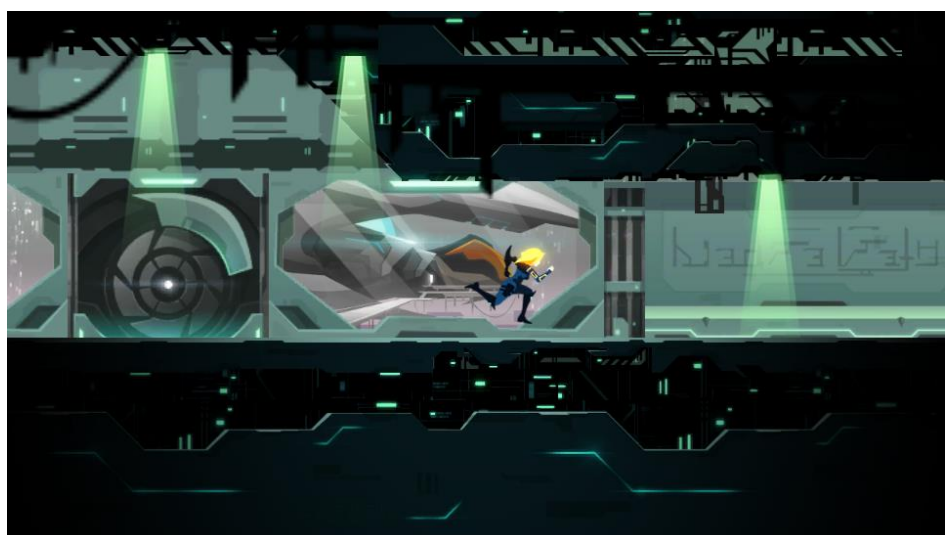
After a few stages, the game is turned on its head completely. The action shifts *inside* the space-based structures you fly through and transforms into a Metroidvania style platform shooter. Taking the game's heroine on foot, the game moves to puzzle based action as you have to get to the end of each stage, shooting your way along, navigating platforms, obstacles, collecting gems and using more of your newly discovered abilities.

Again, you're rated on your performance at the end of each stage but alternating between modes keeps the game fresh throughout. Each stage has its own objectives that need to be met, so no two are alike so the game is incredibly diverse, far more than any other shooter on the Vita.

Visually it's incredibly stylish. Both modes look great and run at a silky smooth 60 frames a second.

The fact that the levels are designed so you can replay any you've already completed without having to replay the entire game makes it easy to dip in and out without having to play the whole game makes it ideal for shorter gameplay sessions as well as longer gaming giving you more flexibility as well.

While it's not a traditional arcade shooter in the same sense that most are that we've covered in this issue, it's a blend of styles that will appeal to most and it's one of the best examples of both that you'll find on the Vita. A timeless classic.



## GAME REVIEW: TXK (PS VITA)

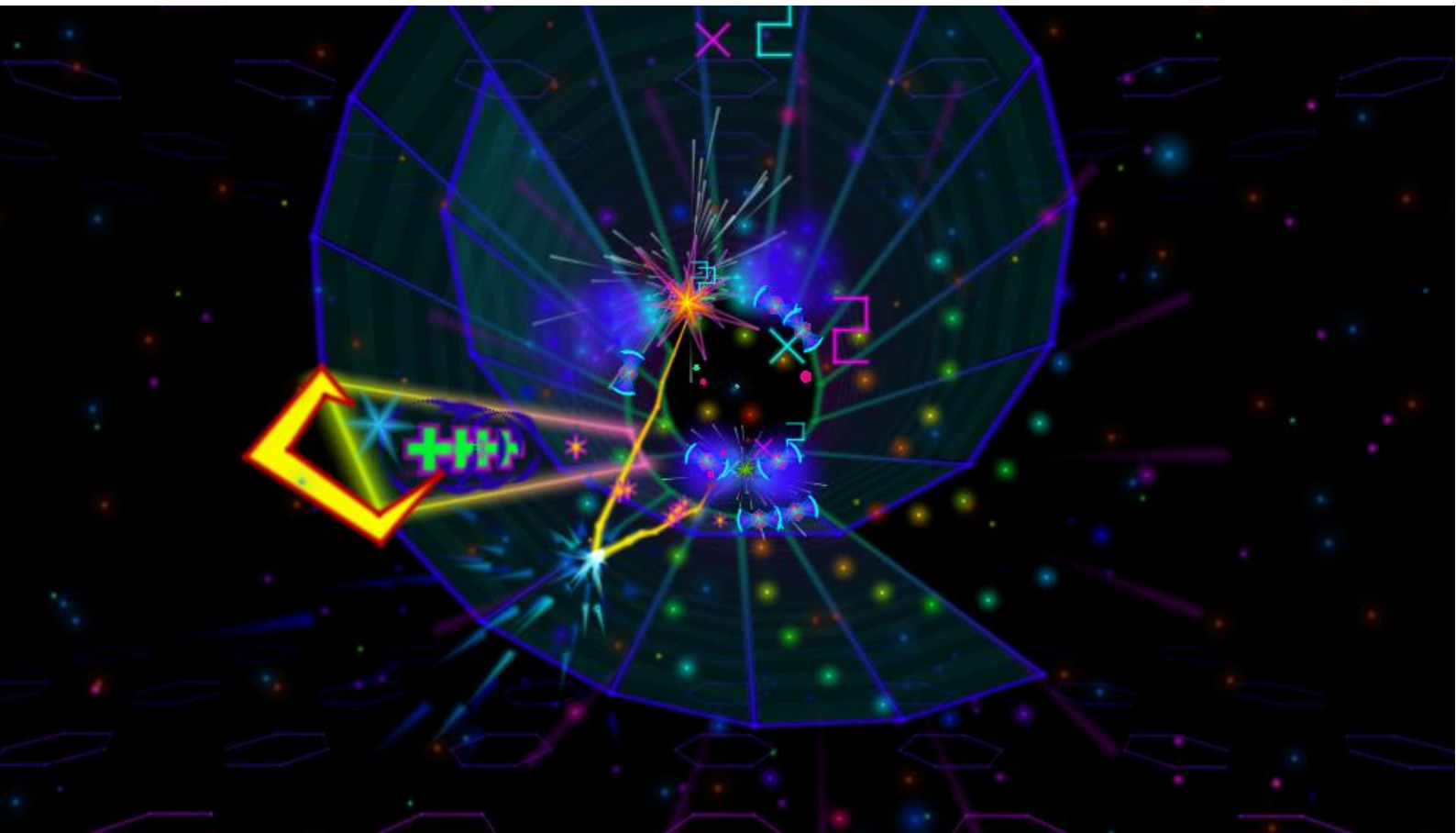
By Simon Plumbe

There aren't many developers and publishers around today that were in business when the video games industry as we know it started back in the 80s. Companies like Activision and Electronic Arts are still going but many either didn't learn to adapt and change with the times or were swallowed up by larger companies. As for the smaller publishers and developers, most of those went by the wayside many moons ago. Not Llamasoft though. Legendary programmer Jeff Minter has been writing games since the early 80s on almost every home computer format imaginable and has been responsible for an incredible range of classic, yet somewhat surreal arcade shooters and some of the best games to grace home formats. Sheep, goats, camels and other hairy animals may have been the staple content for many, but you were always guaranteed a good game.

Well over 30 years after Jeff Minter's first game Llamasoft moved away from a foray into iOS territory with their first and sadly only game for the PS Vita. A spiritual successor to their Atari Jaguar hit Tempest 2000, but could the magic still be there...?

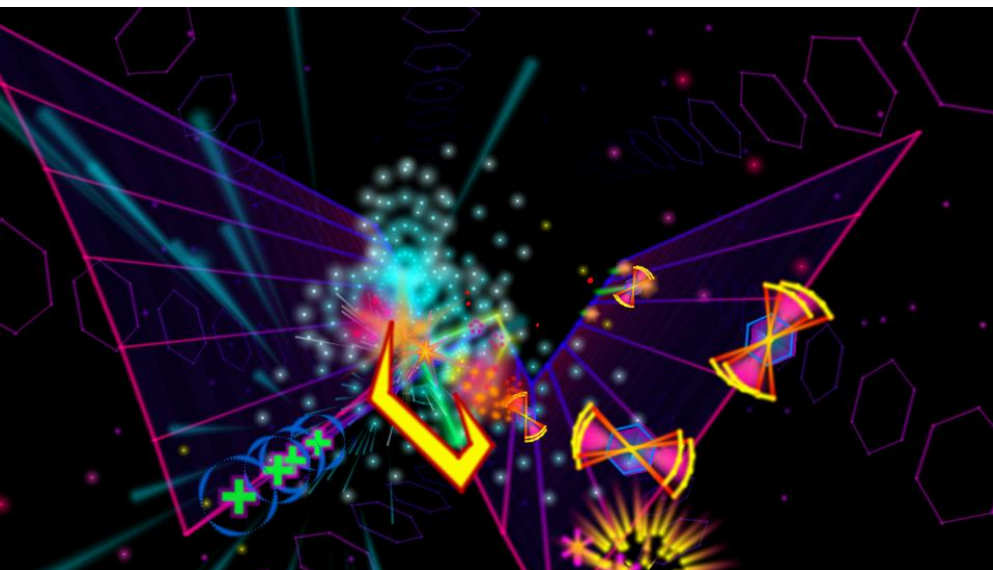
I say spiritual successor to Tempest 2000 but I have to stress that TxK *isn't* Tempest. It has no connection to Tempest, bears no resemblance to Tempest, isn't a sequel to Tempest, isn't a follow-up to Tempest, Tempest 2000, or a variation on Tempest or anything like that. The fact that it's a tunnel shooter that just *happens* to look like Tempest (as many games have before it) and has been developed by Jeff Minter and Ivan Zorzin who wrote the *definitive* game in the Tempest series officially for Atari with Tempest 2000 is *irrelevant* but you didn't read that or were able to make the obvious connections for yourselves.

Okay, now that we have a clear understanding on what TxK is or isn't, this game reminds me of why I love games so much and why I hold on to my gaming roots so firmly as someone who grew up playing games in the 80s. While many people talk about how great games are today looking at titles like The Last Of Us, God Of War, Grand Theft Auto, Final Fantasy and so on, the old arcade classics are truly timeless. There's no denying that the old classics have genuinely everlasting appeal. The true testimony to that are the seemingly never-ending number of clones,





remakes and new "interpretations" of these old classics that still continue to be made decades after the release of the originals. Despite being released back in 1976, Breakout still has clones being released



today, albeit ones based more on Taito's updated version Arkanoid from 1986. Namco themselves have revisited Pac Man countless times in the home and arcades, and Atari did the same with Tempest (didn't I say I wasn't going to mention that one?).

For those of us with Sony systems, we've seen more than a few remakes as well. Super Stardust Delta is essentially an update of Asteroids. For those of you old enough to remember the Amiga original, that one is truer to the arcade original version of Asteroids, whereas the PS3 and Vita versions simply added the 3D planetary model and adapted the game into a twin stick shooter instead. As for the PS4, Resogun is little more than Defender with a makeover. That doesn't mean that they're not fantastic games, but it only serves to show that the 80s gameplay has stood the test of time remarkably well.

So that brings me onto TxK... if you've never played a tunnel shooter like this before, the gameplay

itself is incredibly simple. In TxK you control a claw-like ship that rests at the top of a tunnel, each level taking the form of a different geometric shape. at the bottom of this tunnel different creatures are heading

towards you up the tunnel aiming to make their way to the top. All you have to do (as if it's *really* going to be **that** simple!) is to destroy all of them before they reach the top and then progress to the next level. Okay, it's not quite that easy... there are a range of creatures in the tunnels, increasing in numbers and speed as you progress through the levels and while things start off at a relatively relaxed pace, it's not long before they start to shoot back at you, and if they do reach

the top of the tunnel then you're really in trouble as they start to follow you around the rim pursuing you to your certain death...

It's not all doom and gloom though. You start off with some limitations to your ship. As with most old-school shooters, you can only fire so many shots at a time, but plenty of power-ups appear throughout the game and collecting these can upgrade your weapons, increase your rate of fire, extra lives, give you bonus points (and after all, that's what TxK is all about) and then there's my personal favourite, the AI Droid. This provides you with a drone that

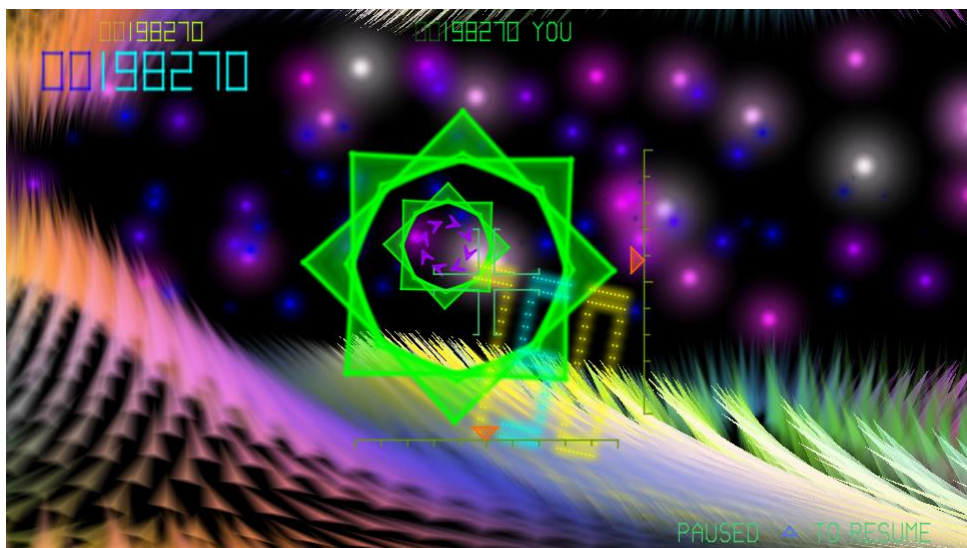


follows you around the top of the tunnel shooting creatures down and trying its hardest to protect you from anything that is out to destroy you. And if you still need help after all of that, there are two more you can make use of...

The Jump power up does exactly what it says on the tin - once this is enabled you can literally jump off the top of the tunnel for a few brief seconds allowing you to shoot down onto the top of the rim, reaching targets you normally would have been able to reach. If you haven't managed to get that, you can make use of the smart bomb at your disposal to destroy everything on screen. You only get one of these to use per level so you need to use them wisely but they're replenished at the start of each level.

Playing TxK is an absolute dream. It's a joy to control and whether you use the analogue stick or d-pad, moving your ship is simplicity in itself. All you have to do is move left and right to move along the tunnel, X to shoot, circle or the touch screen for the smart bombs, the right shoulder button to jump and the left shoulder button (in conjunction with the direction buttons) to "lean" into the lanes to shoot targets that have reached the top of the tunnel if you don't have powerups to help. It doesn't always get them depending on your rate of fire, but it's a technique that might just save your neck a few times if you can master it!

The only other controls you need to worry about are for the bonus stages between levels. This takes the form of a series of rings that appear on screen and you have you steer a spark through these. The closer the spark is to the centre of the rings the more points you score. This can be controlled using the left analogue stick or the Vita's motion sensors and works well either way although using the tilt functions of the Vita is incredibly responsive and feels so natural that you'll find yourself preferring this to any other



method of play. Every so many levels, this bonus game switches to another similar game where you're faced with travelling through a series of green rings hurtling towards you. This time you have to navigate your way through them... and it's tougher than it sounds. It's not essential that you complete these bonus rounds, but they make a great diversion from the action.

The difficulty curve is set perfectly and while the earlier levels ease you into the game gradually it picks up but not to the point where you feel frustrated at any point. It's incredible quick and easy to pick up and within a matter of moments you'll know everything that you need to know to play TxK... mastering the game is a completely different thing altogether though but that's the real beauty of it. It's a game that you'll be able to enjoy and get the same amount of fun out of it whether you're a hardened gamer and trophy hunter wanting to completely demolish the game or a casual arcade game lover just wanting a new shoot-em-up to enjoy and be able to spend time enjoying and having fun playing. It harks back to the days when games were designed to be played and where fun was the primary reason for playing them.

TxK is pure arcade action at its finest and there is nothing in this game that isn't there for a reason. The action doesn't let up for a moment but there's never an instant where you feel that the game has punished you unfairly when you've lost a life or you've



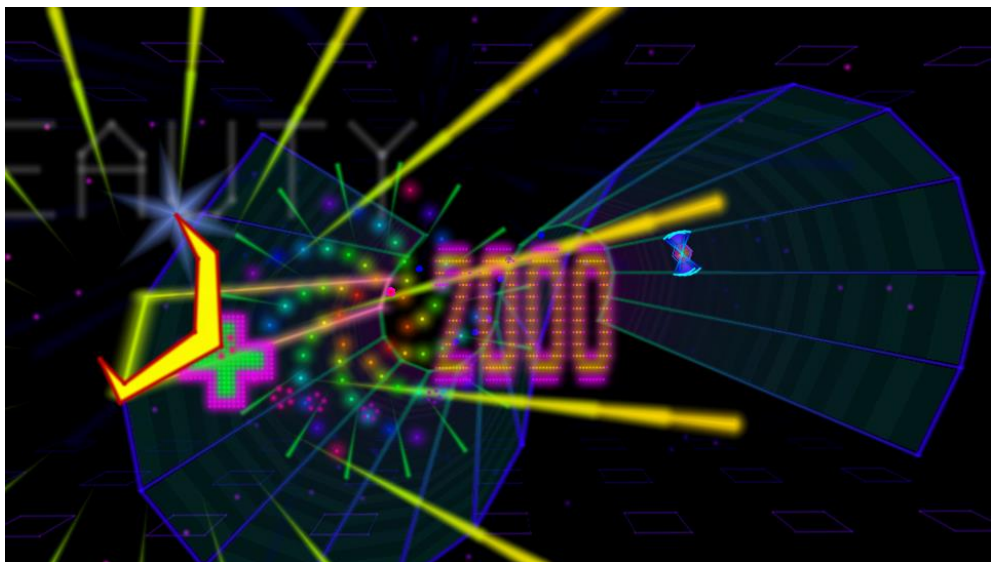
come to the end of a game - you know that your progression and performance in the game is completely within your control at all times and when you manage to set a new high score, or get that little bit further than you have before, there's no doubt in your mind that it's because *you're* getting better as a player.

There are three main game modes on offer in TxK. Pure Mode is a straight-up mode where you play through the game from start to finish (hopefully!). Classic Mode follows the same format but allows you to choose the level you start at. One thing that is unique here is that TxK stores your progress as you play and remembers your best performance on **every** level in the game in Pure Mode. What this means is that you can start any level in Classic Mode with the number of lives and starting score from your personal best allowing you to continue towards achieving a personal best score. The final mode is Survival and it's a non-stop ride through the game's levels... without the added benefit of extra lives, meaning that you're forced to make every shot and every powerup count.

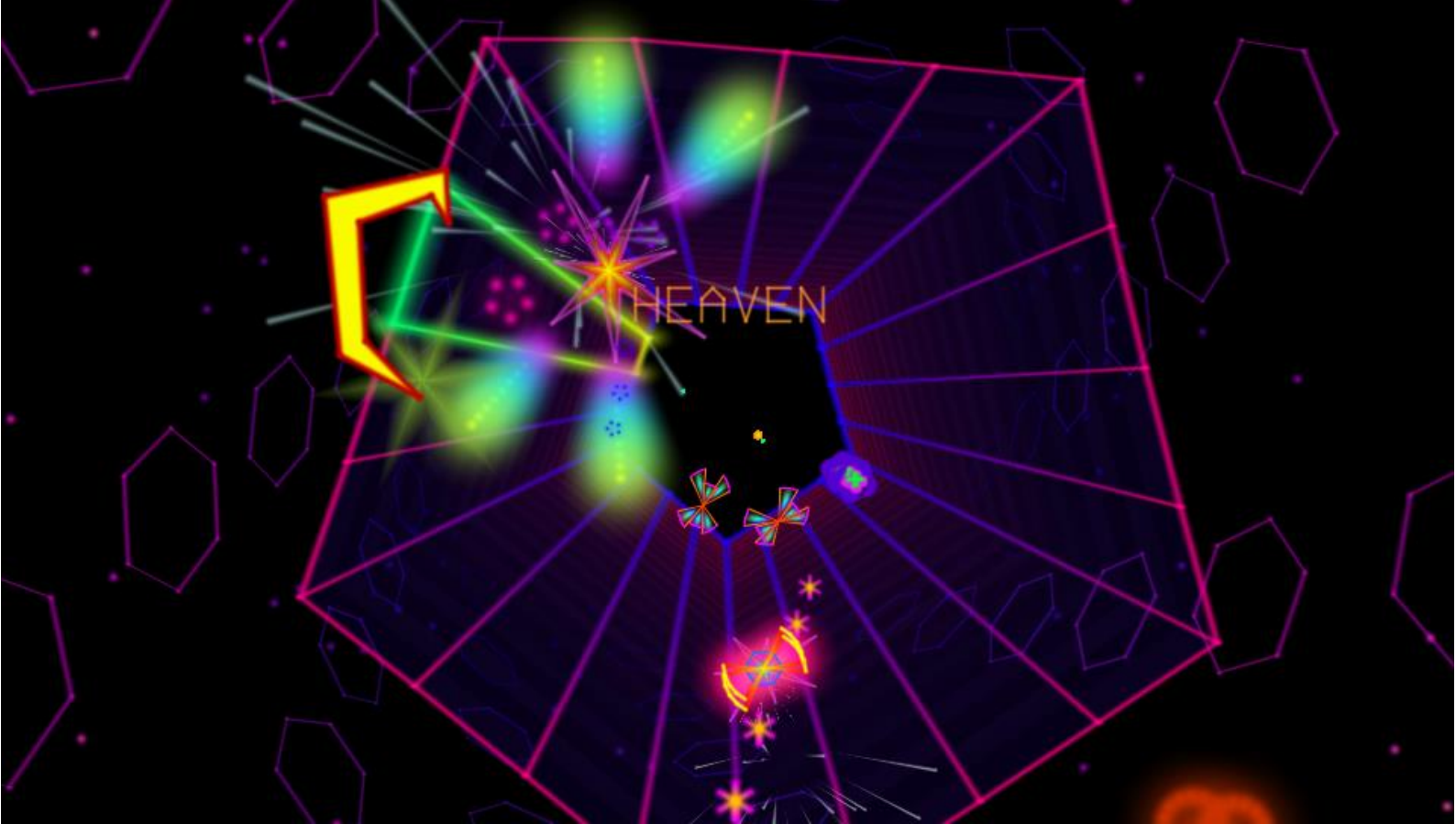
One thing I really loved about the game is the way it treats the players. When you lose a life colliding with any of the creatures in the game, you still have a chance to save yourself from dying if you have any smart bombs at your disposal. The screen pauses for a moment and if you tap the circle button or touch screen to unleash the smart bomb, it will destroy everything on screen and effectively stop your imminent destruction. It doesn't stop there though. Unlike other shoot-em-ups, you don't lose any of your powerups when you lose a life, and there's none of this nonsense of being sent back to checkpoints or back to the beginning of the current level - you just carry on from where you are... so if you're destroyed with just one last enemy to destroy to complete a level then that's all you've got left to defeat

when you start your next life. It may only seem like a minor point, but there's nothing more frustrating than being close to the end of a level and then being sent back to the start just because you make a tiny error of judgement while playing.

But there's even more to it than that. To balance the gameplay further, all of your powerups are reset at the start of each level - the only things you carry forward from one level to the next are your score and remaining lives. While this may seem unfair at first, it really adds an extra dimension to the game and means that you really have to learn to play the game properly to beat each level rather than depending on powerups to do all the hard work for you. With levels getting increasingly difficult, it makes each win all the more satisfying as a result.



So that's the game itself but what does it look and sound like? In typical Llamasoft fashion TxK is a visual treat. It's a psychedelic explosion on the brain that will tease and tantalise both your eyes and ears in ways you could never imagine. The visuals are awash with colour, neon effects, explosions and particles weaving in and out of every nook and crevice that the Vita's screen can provide. There never appears to be any pixel on the screen unused, but you are drawn deeper and deeper into the game's abstract world as you play. Running at a fabulous 60fps with no slowdown at any point, you're left speechless at just how much is going on.



Sound is just as hypnotic with a stunning techno / electronic soundtrack throughout. No matter what your musical tastes are, the vast 18 pieces of music fit the game perfectly and drive the game's pace along even more than the gameplay does on its own. That would be enough in itself if it wasn't enhanced further with ample 80s inspired arcade sound effects, speech... and a few farmyard animal effects thrown in for good measure (well it *is* a Llamasoft game!). What really astonished me with the music is that all of the composers donated their music to the game free of charge out of a love of Llamasoft games. As a thankyou, the complete soundtrack has been released for purchase with the proceeds going to the composers and it's very much a worthy purchase.

TxK is more than just a game - it's a unique gaming experience. The Vita's OLED screen is really put to fantastic use and shows just why it makes a difference for serious gaming, but playing it normally still doesn't do it justice. Turn off the lights, plug in your favourite pair of headphones, crank up the volume and you're in for a completely new game altogether. It's a breathtaking journey and gives you an incredible adrenaline rush as you play and it's the best way to experience what

programmers Jeff Minter and Ivan Zorzin have so lovingly created. It takes what is already an astonishingly playable and addictive game to the next level and gives you a game like nothing you have played before. And I really can't put into words how the game looks, feels and plays when running on the PlayStation TV - that just elevates the quality of the game even further.

There's no doubt in my mind that this is one of, if not the best game to grace the PlayStation Vita and whether you're looking for an arcade game to play for lengthy gaming sessions or something to pick up and play for quick five minute blasts between anything else, you won't find a more finely-tuned, polished and more compelling shoot-em-up on any format. Quite simply, in TxK Jeff Minter has accomplished the impossible and created the **perfect** arcade shooter and there's no better compliment I can give than that and this is a game that must be a part of every Vita owner's collection.



## GAME REVIEW: ULTRATRON (PS VITA)

By Sven Harvey

In their follow up to Titan Attacks, Puppy Games released their re-imagining of RoboTron 2084 on the PC in 2013 but granted the rights to Curve Digital, who have brought many games to the PS Vita, for console releases.

(so keep out of the way of where they are likely to spawn next!). Complete a level and you are awarded with a multiplier upgrade to help that score mount faster, but taking a single shot or collision on the next level deactivates the multiplier and you are back to basic 1X scoring.

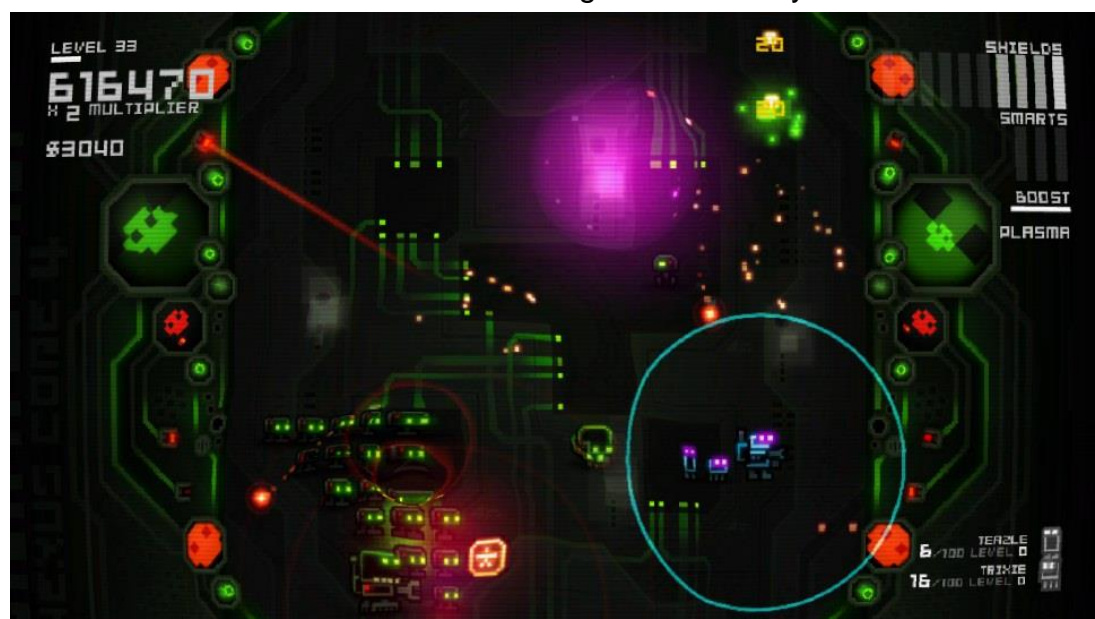
Each destroyed bad guy leaves a "dot" behind (which is actually a coin as such, and bigger amounts of cash do look more coin like as they are larger), which you need to hurry to pick up as they fade with (not much) time. Occasionally upgrades such as external drones with their own firepower turn up to aid you in your quest for vengeance.



The game is a twin stick shooter, with the left stick being movement and the right giving you a full 360 degree arc of fire around your character sprite - the last remaining humanoid droid, following the death of the last real human. Your mission being to avenge the human race by destroying their killers, the evil killer robots. The storyline is as retro as the game is.

Each level essentially consists of a box within which the evil robots appear - usually in swarms in the corners, at least to start with, and all you have to do is destroy them with your upgradeable gun. As you progress your targets require more on-target shots to be taken out. As you take out the bad guys more spawn - and you have to be careful as they can spawn where you are

In keeping with Titan Attacks, at the end of each level, you have the opportunity to spend collected cash on upgrades of various types in the "Omnico Shop-o-matic". The upgrades range from extra shields to "dot munchers", drone repairs and EMP shocks, and again aid your mission to defeat each game area and the bosses you are tasked to take down - leiunitas, Bellum, Lues and Letum, Ten levels of shooting are between you and





that appears as if from nowhere that's has seemingly melted into the background. Black and purple bad guy sprites on a black and purple background don't exactly enamour you to a game that's already rather unforgiving. There are some special effects as if to make it look and feel even more like it's in an old arcade cabinet - fortunately these can be switched off in the options menu as they just become tiring rather quickly.

each boss battle making 40 levels - but once completed the game continues with the difficulty ramped up. The usual level type is also broken up on occasion by challenge levels which require a little more concentration, and the player soon becomes thankful for some of the upgrades they have managed to carry over.

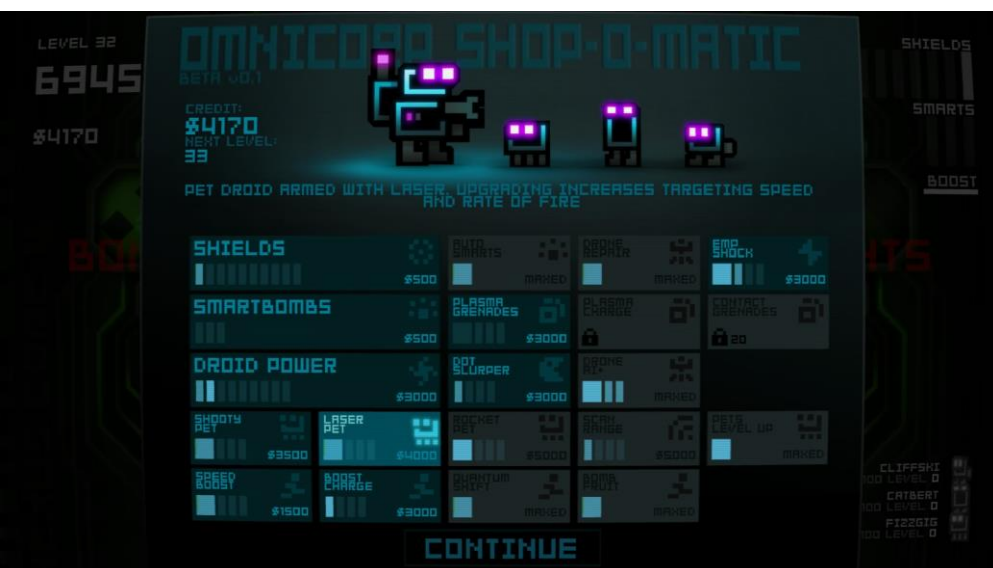
The graphics are appropriately 8-bit in design, but obviously not 8-bit in actuality otherwise the main sprite would be an assembly of a few pixels, but the complete aesthetic is supported by the music and sound effects which are similarly 1980's/early arcade gamey in feel.

It is a fast and frantic shooter, that is without doubt, but the choice of colour palette isn't the best meaning that on occasion it's a bit too easy to lose track of what's on screen, especially when it's a bit frantic - and all too often there's a bad guy

Retro it is, in feel, in looks and in gameplay style, and essentially it offers an early arcade game experience with a lick of paint and a shop added, just as Titan Attacks did. It's fun in small doses, and does certainly have that just one more go appeal of games from the era it hails from, but there's nothing new here... but then, that's not the point, is it?

Available on Cross Buy across the PS Vita, PS4 and the PS3, the price is fair and with Cross Save at least you can switch between the PS Vita, PS3 and/or PS4 to "complete" the game - though it may not take you all that long to take out those four boss-bots.

Ultratron is a fair release - you pay your money and get exactly what it says on the tin, but there really isn't anything about it that screams must buy. It's a polished re-imagining, but it falls short of being as much fun as Titan Attacks, for instance, for my taste. If you want a fast paced retro shooter, though, Ultratron is competent and aside from the odd niggle (like the colour palette), it may well be what you are after.





## GAME REVIEW: SKY FORCE ANNIVERSARY (PS VITA) by Simon Plumbe

While I love most game genres on the Vita, as you can probably guess from reading this fanzine, I keep coming back to arcade games and more specifically retro or retro styled games. Whether it's my age that influences that I don't know but it certainly drew me to the Minis title [Sky Force](#) that I reviewed a while ago on our site.



As I mentioned in that review, the original game was released in 2004 but in 2014 a new version was released to celebrate the game's 10th Anniversary with new features, a graphical overhaul and major enhancements, aptly named *Sky Force 2014*. This was finally ported to PlayStation platforms as *Sky Force Anniversary* both as a digital and limited edition physical release (courtesy of Limited Run Games) but is it any good?

Unlike many "updates", developers Infinite Dreams made the decision to offer significantly more than just cosmetic changes to the game. It's far more than just new music and enhanced visuals and the game was completely reworked from the group up and this is evident from the moment you start playing. Instead of being taken to the main menu, you are thrust right into the action and in the middle of an incredibly hectic level. It's no

ordinary part of the game though as you quickly find out. You're talked through your mission by characters encouraging you along but you quickly find that your ship is woefully underpowered and you are heavily outgunned... and you don't survive very long. At this point you begin to wonder if the game is set to be a LOT tougher than the original. But all is not what it seems...

That opening salvo is little more than an interactive intro sequence to the game and then you're taken to the main menu. As with its predecessor you can alter the sound settings, view the developer credits, take advantage of the welcome addition of the Cross Save facility. You can also check the high scores and leaderboards and your in-

game statistics (if you like that sort of thing) or just jump right into the game itself.

Now this is where things really change. The basic game remains the same - it's a vertically scrolling bullet-hell shooter. However, the game mechanics have been overhauled to give you a completely new game experience altogether. It's still a case of surviving, destroying as many

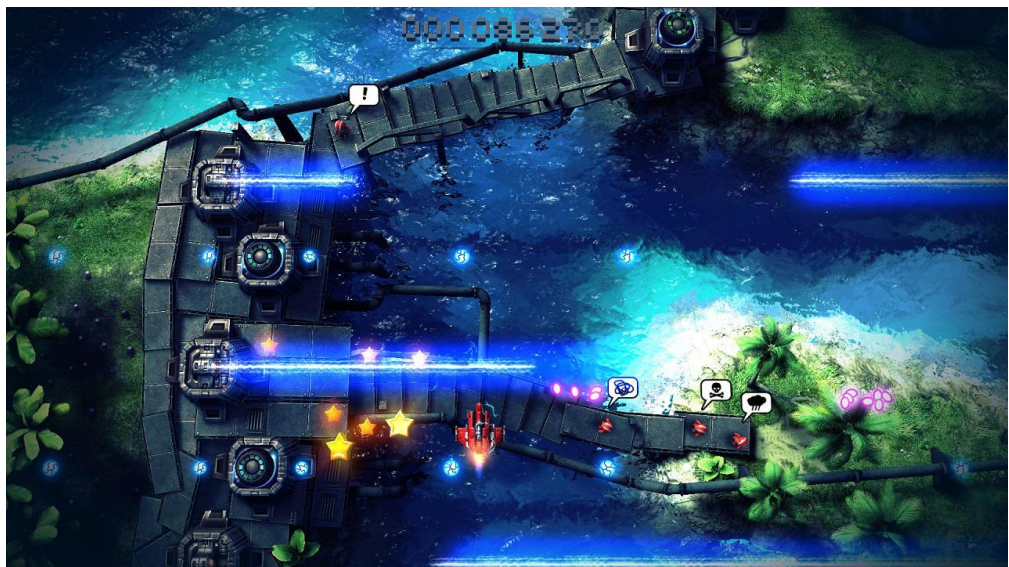




enemy craft as possible and reaching the end of each level to destroy the bosses, but it's what happens between that has changed dramatically.

The first thing you notice are the power-ups. Instead of collecting these and boosting your weapons significantly, the only real effect they have is to increase the rate of fire of your weapons (there are others that appear albeit rarely but these are mainly special limited use weapons). This may seem puzzling for a retro-styled shoot-em-up, but this is where the collectible stars come in to play that make a welcome return from the first game. These are now more important than ever as they're no longer just nice pickups for collecting extra points. Now they're used as currency that you spend in the hangar that you can visit between levels. Instead of being allocated powerups automatically, now you have to purchase them but it's not a great loss because there are now a lot more on offer with plenty of upgrades available for each.

The system works quite well - there are 8 basic power ups, each of which need to be purchased to unlock and activate them. Once purchased, they can then be enhanced using more stars making them more powerful or effective. Unlike the previous game, you only have one life but



you can buy health upgrades and a shield to help you survive that little bit longer!

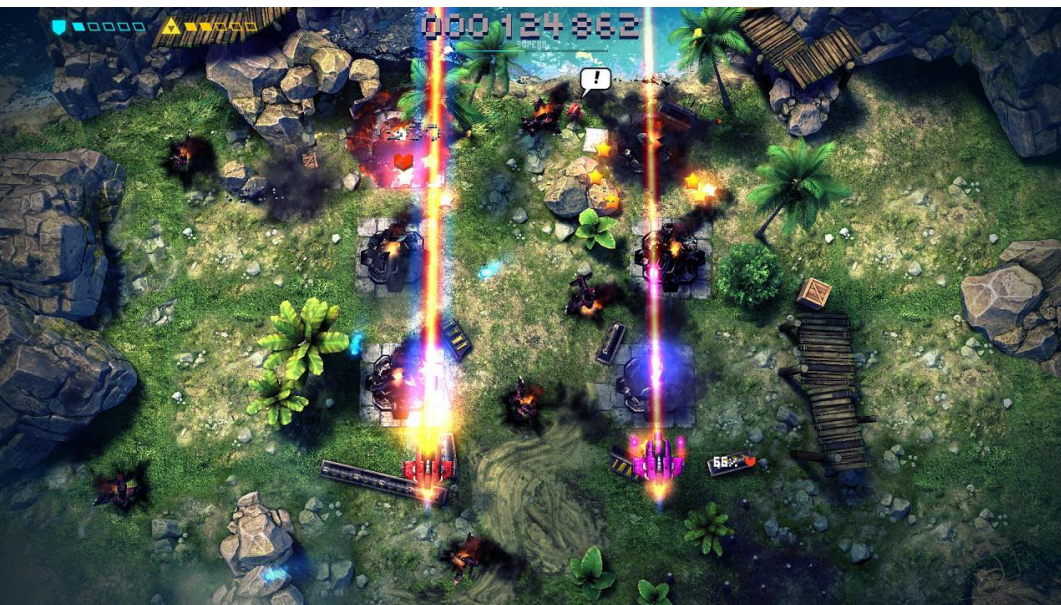
The humans are still there who need rescuing but again this has been changed. Instead of just flying straight over them, now a cable is suspended from your ship and it takes a few seconds to rescue each one. Upgrades are available to speed this up or to extend the range of your cable making rescues easier but it just adds yet another twist to the game and another nice touch, especially when you look at the next new element to the game... Level Objectives.

Each of the nine levels has four main objectives that you need to try to achieve in addition to completing the level and defeating the boss. They vary in difficulty from defeating a target percentage of enemies, to collecting a certain number of stars or rescuing all of the humans on the

level you are tackling. Each cleared objective earns you a medal and to progress through the levels you need to earn a minimum number of medals as well as completing the previous levels. Fortunately, you can go back and replay levels in any order - essential as you'll want to earn as many stars as you can and upgrade your ship as much as possible.







the standards set by that but Sky Force Anniversary has certainly put up one hell of a fight. It delivers on all fronts and manages to offer enough addictive gameplay to keep even the most cynical of arcade addicts happy.

With all of the objectives to achieve, hidden secrets to be uncovered and online tournaments there's plenty of extra content to keep you

That's the basic game done, but that's not all there is to it. There are a lot of hidden secrets to keep you coming back for more, even if you think you have seen everything that it has to offer. Appearing randomly through play are Cards. These unlock additional abilities for your ship that are activated automatically and there are 22 of these to find during play. For the PlayStation purists, there are leaderboards and trophies, and further online features in the form of weekly tournaments that take place (these are unlocked once you complete level 3) and the ability to play online with friends although I haven't been able to test this feature out.

Visually the game looks absolutely stunning. Everything is now in full 3D and it really brings the visuals to life. Despite the increase in detail compared to the PSP incarnation, it doesn't seem to put the Vita under any strain at all and it handles the game beautifully. It looks and plays like a dream (even more so with the extra bonus that the automatic firing that was present on the original has now been removed so this is now back under player control) and it just looks and sounds perfect and would be right at home in a modern arcade.

Is Sky Force Anniversary the most perfect shoot-em-up to grace the PS Vita? Not quite. I have to be honest and say that I'd still reserve that honour for Llamasoft's TxK and I don't think any game will match

coming back to the game long after you've completed it as well, not to mention the leaderboards so you can keep challenging your friends to beat their high scores, just like the old days in the arcades. And for those of you who do love chasing trophies, there are plenty of those to give the game even more lasting appeal. What more could you ask for?

This is so much more than a HD remake as so many games are that have come before it. It's a total reworking of the original that has taken everything that was great about Sky Force and enhanced and improved on it in almost every way. Even though it is now triple the price of the original Minis release it is worth every penny and the new features and enhancements add a whole new level of depth to the game. I really can't fault this and Infinite Dreams have managed to turn a great game into an essential purchase. Simply one of the best shoot-em-ups to grace the PS Vita.

## GAME REVIEW: PLATYPUS (PSP)

by Simon Plumbe

*Taking a break from the PS Vita games for a moment, we look at this overlook PSP game that sadly never made it outside of the US, either as a physical or digital release...*



Growing up in the formative days of the video games industry really helped me gain an appreciation of the importance of gameplay over aesthetics and I was brought up in an era where games didn't need protracted storylines to be good - something that a lot of developers (and gamers) have lost in recent years. To me, I'd rather play a game with simplistic gameplay mechanics and something that can be picked up and played with little need to refer to a manual, and something that can be enjoyed by players of all ages. It's no wonder then that I'm drawn more to retro gaming and games that have been inspired by or are based on ones I enjoyed as a child and that's what immediately lured me to the 2002 shooter Platypus.

The first thing that hits you when loading Platypus are its graphics. Now I know I mentioned at the start that visuals *aren't* important in a game, but in this instance it's the graphics that became the main selling point of Platypus ahead of its playability or anything else and if I am

completely honest it was its unique look that drew me to it in the first place.

I was never really a huge gamer when it came to the PC (bear with me while I digress for a moment here). Granted, I picked up as many Star Trek and Star Wars titles as I could but other than that it was pretty limited. I was old school and my interest was only really grabbed by the occasional retro-inspired arcade game and that's when I spotted Platypus. I'd already bought some digital games before through a few of the larger distributors and then this came along. It was nothing like anything

I'd seen before. Designer Anthony Flack had taken the tried and tested side-scrolling shoot-em-up genre and added something genuinely new to it. All of the graphics were constructed from clay models. Even if the game was going to be an average shooter, I knew that I *had* to try it to see if it was any good...

I won't go into all of the ins and outs surrounding the game and its distribution as there is a rather sad tale behind. Being quite a young developer at the time, Anthony sold the all the rights to it completely to the publisher and its sales and success have made the publisher and subsequent re-sellers a substantial amount of money while Anthony... let's just say not so much and his career in the industry had been a lot more limited although he did re-acquire the rights to the game in 2019.

But back to Platypus... It's a basic bullet hell shooter and there's no plot to speak of - shoot everything that moves, get to the end of each stage, progress to the next,





defeat the boss and the end of each world and move on to the next.

Powerups are provided by destroying complete waves of specific craft that attack you during the game. Doing so will drop a coloured star. Collecting this will give you 20 second use of a new weapon which can be anything from missiles to three-way fire or a high velocity cannon. Shooting the star will cycle through different weapons and collecting more stars will extend the time available. Once that time runs out it's back to your basic gun. Things start easily enough but the action picks up to quite a frantic level as you're assaulted from all angles with everything on screen firing at you and swarming all over you spewing plasticine bullet hell from all sides giving even the most hardened gamer a real challenge.

Despite its small screen, the PSP version of the game that was released in 2006 holds up remarkably well compared to the PC original, and the graphics still look superb. Every detail - from the hand-moulded background, the ship, the explosions... every last detail still looks superb and moves at a blinding pace with no slowdown although as you'd expect there's some blurring but that's more of a

technical issue because of the PSPs LCD screen rather than based on the consoles technical performance at delivering the game's graphics.

Apart from the graphics, one thing that may strike a lot of gamers is the soundtrack as well. Instead of having music composed especially for the game, all of the music here has been licenced, presumably to keep the budget down but in this case it works brilliantly and for me was another highlight of the game. All of the tracks featured are modern re-workings of tracks taken from Commodore 64 games, licensed from albums released by [C64audio.com](http://C64audio.com). Composed by some of the true greats on the Commodore 64 including Martin Galway and Rob Hubbard, this really is a superb soundtrack and for me is the best part of Platypus.

Any of you who pick Platypus up and who grew up with the C64 will recognise at least a few of the tracks in the game, and - as many others have said - it delivers a fantastic soundtrack that suits the game remarkably well. It's such a shame that more developers haven't turned to classics from the 80s for their music as they could certainly do far worse.

Having focused on the PS Vita as my primary console for almost a decade, going back to using a PSP was strange and it did take a little while to adjust to the controls. While Platypus uses both the d-pad and thumb stick, analogue is the most responsive of the two and gives you much better control over the game. Sorry but d-pads just weren't designed for arcade shoot-em-ups!

This is a great game but sadly it does have a couple of minor flaws that stop it from being an essential purchase. With such a great soundtrack it's a glaring omission in the options page to be able to have at least some form of volume controls for the music and sound effects. As it is, the only option offered is whether or not to have the music on or off. When action is frantic on screen and player bullets are flying around the screen, the sound effects drown out the wonderful score and it almost makes you wonder why money was spent on licensing music that can't be heard.

The controls aren't quite as responsive as I remember them to be as well. Maybe I'm used to playing games with the Vita's analogue sticks now or its superior d-pad but it simply doesn't "feel" as easy to handle as it should do and during play you feel more often than not that you lose lives

because of frustration with the controls rather than your own ineptitude. As good as the analogue control is, it's not *quite* as good as it could be but maybe I'm being harsh on what is really a design issue with the PSPs hardware rather than the game itself.

It's still a fun shoot-em-up, looks great and will certainly provide you with a big challenge to keep you coming back for more. The ability to start at any stage that you've unlocked is an added bonus so you don't have to fight through the early ones if you don't want helps to prolong the game and cut out unnecessary frustration for those who struggled to get to later levels in the first place!

Sadly, as I said at the start, this was a US exclusive title for the PSP both as a UMD and digital release (and unfortunately isn't available as a legacy title for the PS Vita either) so you might need to hunt around to find a copy, but it's worth putting the effort in to look out for one.





## GAME REVIEW: SINE MORA (PS VITA)

by Simon Plumbe

Making its debut on the Xbox 360 at the beginning of 2012, Sine Mora slipped out onto the PS Vita and PS3 at the end of that year with little fanfare. A digital-only release, the game had the potential to be one of the Vita's early AAA titles but instead was left as a hidden gem that many overlooked...

a staggering 50 different combinations of weapons at your disposal there's plenty of diversity in the gameplay. But what makes Sine Mora stand out when it comes to the gameplay mechanics is the time manipulation function.

This is something that you can only use a finite number of times during the game but when things get particularly hectic on screen, at a touch of a button everything on screen slows down. Your ship and all your weapons still function normally, but everything else runs in slow motion giving you much needed breathing room. It can be a real life-saver during some of the tougher bosses and it's something I've never seen before.

Describing itself as a diesel-punk shooter, the side-scrolling shoot-em-up is one of those rarities that features a story-driven narrative that adds to the gameplay rather than seems to be just tagged onto the game for the sake of it. I won't spoil it here for any of you who decide to delve into the game, but it helps guide the player seamlessly through the game's massive seven levels that are on offer.

All of the usual bullet hell shoot-em-up tick boxes are there - lavish visuals, huge bosses, powerups, smart bombs and with

There are several difficulty levels to make the game as accessible as possible to even the most casual of gamers, and while this has been released on a wide range of platforms this PS Vita port has been updated and tweaked specifically for the handheld.

In our case, there's a new character added to the game (also present in the PS3 port), touch controls, and unlockable bonuses including an art gallery. But whether it's







something of a gimmick, it looks so good that it's worth getting the game just to experience the 3D effect!

Sound is equally impressive, with a stunning soundtrack composed by Akira Yamaoka, who was the sound designer for Silent Hill. He's not the

new game modes, additional levels or something else completely all of the versions have their own individuality. Where the PS Vita comes into its own is in the graphics department.

This may come as something of a surprise to many, but the little handheld has a trick up its sleeve where Sine Mora is concerned. When playing the game normally it looks absolutely incredible, delivering some of the most astonishing graphics you will see in a side-scrolling shooter on the Vita. But then, on closer inspection on the main menu you discover a hidden option for a *new* graphics mode that turns the game on its head completely...

It's time to hunt through your drawers and take a trip back to the 1980s as Sine Mora gives players a stereoscopic 3D mode! You'll need a pair of red/blue 3D glasses (the sort that were given away with comics and magazines back in the day), but once you've got them on, you're in for a treat. Sine Mora springs to life in 3D as the game leaps right out of the Vita's screen - ships fly towards you, the scenery feels as if there's real depth to it while the graphics show no sign of slowdown or reduction in definition.

While the 3D isn't to everyone's taste it looks truly remarkable and it's amazing to see this being delivered by the Vita. I have to be honest and say that while it is

only creative talent behind the game with an impressive track record though as the end of level bosses were designed by renowned anime creator Mahiro Maeda, who has a string of impressive titles to his name.

But none of that matters if the game isn't fun to play. It is an enjoyable shooter, and the time manipulation feature adds an innovative twist, but it's not quite enough to lift it above being another good-looking shooter. Truthfully, it's the graphics that are the high point of what is really an above average game.

It has to be said that the difficulty on later stages may be off-putting for some. This is a tough game and it's certainly not one for those of you looking for a more relaxing shooter. There's no getting away from the fact that it's one of the best looking in the genre and certainly most innovative, but at least from the Vita's point of view the gimmick is more of a selling point than the strength of the game itself.







## GAME REVIEW: SÖLDNER-X 2: FINAL PROTOTYPE (PS VITA)

by Simon Plumble

I can remember the first time I saw Söldner-X 2: Final Prototype. SideQuest Studios' side scrolling shooter was making waves on the PS3 and after enjoying the first in the series, it was a no-brainer that I had to pick up the sequel as well.

Featuring 10 huge and visually-diverse levels, the bullet-hell shooter had me hooked. With a choice of ships on offer, a great selection of powerups and impressive high power attacks, it ticked all the boxes I was looking for in a perfect arcade shooter. That was enhanced further with the stunning visuals and superb soundtrack throughout, from the epic score to great sound effects. There was nothing not to love about the game.

So it was something of a shock to learn that it was coming to the PS Vita. If I'm honest, like most others at the time I had doubts about the Vita port. With the amount going on in the game, despite the Vita's

capabilities I didn't really think the portable could handle it, or if it could what compromises would be made to get it to run?

On a technical level first, this reminded me so much of all of the initial hype that surrounded the Vita when it was first launched. We were promised console quality gameplay - in essence a portable PS3. While some of the early releases did deliver on that promise, few lived up to their PS3 counterparts.





We needn't have worried when it came to Söldner-X 2 though. This was identical to the original in every way - sound, graphics, presentation and most importantly it still retained the incredible 60fps performance the console version was renowned for. This looked like a dream, even more so on the PSTV where it looked like a real console game.

But technical proficiency doesn't matter if the gameplay isn't up to scratch. Fortunately Söldner-X 2 doesn't disappoint. Right from the second the game loads for the first time (and it's blindingly fast for a Vita game) and you're thrown straight into the action you're drawn into the addictive gameplay.

While you're mesmerised by the visuals and may find yourself distracted at first as you take it all in, you'll quickly find that you won't be able to waste time admiring the scenery for too long. Pause for too long and you'll become space dust - the action comes at you thick and fast - just the way a bullet hell shooter should be.

But Söldner-X 2 is far deeper than you realise as you play. Instead of simply flying through each level, collecting powerups and taking out each boss, how *well* you do it matters too. In addition to the basic



scoring system, there's a points bonus multiplier system in place as well as rankings awarded as you complete each level, providing an added incentive to replay the game in the same way the Devil May Cry series did on consoles so successfully.

Online Leaderboards add to this element even more allowing you to challenge your friends or other players around the world, and as with most Vita games it's got plenty of Trophies to aim for as well as in this case these are brand new for the Vita port so if you've played the PS3 version before expect some new challenges.

This is probably one of the best side-scrolling shooters to land on the Vita. It looks incredible, has plenty of variety, the action never lets up for a second and it's remarkable value for money. As an added

bonus the digital version offers Cross Buy support with the PS3.

Two limited edition physical releases were also produced - one by Limited Run Games and a second by Eastasiasoft.





# WHAT MAKES A GOOD ARCADE SHOOT-EM-UP?

by Simon Plumbe

We've only scratched the surface looking at the arcade shoot-em-up genre on the PS Vita in this issue. There are so many great games that we haven't been able to feature that we're going to have to revisit this topic at a later date. We know what great games (and some of the not-so-great games) are out there, but what makes a good arcade shooter?

While there's no "how to" guide when it comes to making a perfect game in the genre, here's our rundown of some of the features we think are crucial for any game that should be in anyone's collection...

## High Scores

It might seem like an obvious thing to include, but these games owe their origins to the arcade classics of the 80s and 90s. We couldn't take the cabinets home so the best we could hope for was to amass great scores and leave our mark on the high score tables and challenge other players.

We need that challenge to ourselves and - if online leaderboards exist - to our friends as well. Being able to beat a game is one thing, but being able to return to it to beat *yourself* is something else altogether.

## Level Variety

This can either be through the attack waves, background visuals, adversaries, or bosses. Regardless, each level needs to feel and play differently to the one before it to some degree so boredom doesn't set in too quickly.

## Power-Ups

Now it could be argued that a couple of the all-time classics don't have weapon upgrade systems and they're not lacking because of it. But power-ups add a strategic element to the best shooters. When the going gets tough you're faced with the added dilemma of chasing after

weapons or tokens, or just trying to stay alive.

Sometimes you'll need that weapon to get past the end of level boss, but if you're down to your last life, is it really worth the risk?

## High Frame Rate

PC gamers have a tendency to obsess over framerates in games and it's something that is frequently used in arguments over what systems are better when debating with console owners. But truthfully when it comes to arcade shoot-em-ups, they have to be as fast and smooth as possible so players can react instantly to what is on screen.

While some genres can get away with slower screen updates (regardless of the system the game is running on), this is an unforgiving genre and the last thing you want is to be knee-deep in a bullet hell shooter only to find yourself waiting for the visuals to catch up with your game input!

## Fast Action

Above all else, the most important part of an arcade shoot-em-up is that the game delivers fast action gameplay. If it's slow, methodical and gives you ample time to think about everything that you do, then it's not going to get the adrenaline flowing.

## Pick-Up-And-Play Gameplay

The last thing you want when it comes to arcade action is to wade through a hefty manual or tutorial before you can play it. We want games that we can dive straight into without any foreknowledge and get stuck right into the action!

\*\*\*

Think we missed anything out? Drop us a line to our letters page!

## READER'S LETTERS

This may be the first issue of Vita Player Magazine, but we've already had the first letter in from our readers...

\* \* \*

Hello fellow  
Vita Islanders,

So, I would like to share my experience with the Vita. I bought my Vita in mid-2020, I know I was late (very late) to the party. Due to everything being shut off the past year, I had some time to spare and finally found a good deal on a used PS Vita (Series 1000). In the short amount of time, I owned a Vita I have already amassed a sizeable backlog. And that's a testament to the number of great games on the system. "Vita having no games" jokes belong to r/agedlikemilk. Although, I am a new resident of the Vita Island I have been following the system for quite a while via. youtube and blogs.

Majority of my library is digital, since physical Vita games are very hard to come by nowadays (that's completely on me for being so late), and those sold online have risen in prices quite a bit, turns out Sony almost shutting down the PSN store didn't help either. For others late to the party like me, I would like to suggest prioritizing the games you want based on whether the games are exclusive to Vita or not. Get the exclusives first.

We can (and we do) blame Sony for lots of the things that went wrong with the system like the decision to go with the proprietary memory cards, locking the 3G models to a specific carrier and lack of support for Vita, to name a few. But Sony did make an incredible handheld which was ahead of it's time and rectified all of the issues users had with the PSP. And if they ever decide to make another handheld (fingers

crossed) I hope they support it better (fingers crossed, again).

But the best thing about the Vita is the great community (the games are "meh", just kidding). The Vita community kept it alive for so long and even after so many years we are still rejoicing and talking about this handheld.

I would like to end my letter by thanking some awesome members of the Vita community who got me interested in everything Vita. First, I would like to start with thanking Vita Player for taking this amazing initiative. Thanks to all the awesome youtubers, 2 Old 4 Gaming (Check out his books on Vita), Food4dogs and PSVita at 2am, to name a few, for continuously making videos about the Vita. Also thank you to all the indie game developers who supported Vita for so long. Lastly thanks to all the residents of Vita Island for making this community so welcoming and worthwhile.

Vita means life.

Thanks and regards,

S2KM

*First, we want to thank you for your support for the magazine - it's people like you and the rest of the PS Vita community that make doing this magazine and our website worth all the effort.*

*There's never a bad time to become a PS Vita owner although I can't agree more with you about the price of games right now, and even more so when it comes to the limited edition physical titles. I've been picking up a lot of older titles I missed first time around thanks to a local store and it's been costing me a small fortune!*

*You're definitely taking the best approach when it comes to getting games at the moment. There are a lot of great games out there that are not only exclusive to the PS Vita, but are also digital only. We were*





*lucky this year to get a reprieve with the PlayStation Store being kept online but it's only a matter of time before these games are taken from us forever so I'd definitely grab these while you can.*

*As far as Sony is concerned, I don't think any of us will ever understand their logic when it comes to the Vita. There isn't one single factor that contributed to the console's failure to make a major impact on the market despite the potential that it had. Truthfully it's something we could discuss until the end of time and we'd still never understand why Sony treated the console the way they did, but it was never down to just one or two factors. Sadly I think the poor sales have all but guaranteed that we'll never see another handheld from them.*

*You're right about the community though. It hasn't mattered how hard the market has tried over the years to kill off the Vita, the fans and developers rallied around to keep it going. Whether its been smaller developers who kept porting games, publishers like Eastasiasoft bringing us physical releases right to the end, or the homebrew community pushing the Vita's hardware to extend its lifespan long after Sony abandoned it.*

*Not to mention the fans coming together, forcing Sony to backtrack on their decision to close the store back in July. I think we're a pretty amazing group when we pull together!*

*Simon*

\* \* \*

We've love to see YOUR letters in future issues whether it's the magazine itself, the theme we're covering in that issue or Vita gaming in general. Just email them to us at [contact@vitaplayer.co.uk](mailto:contact@vitaplayer.co.uk) with "Vita Player Magazine Letters Page" in the subject and the Star Letter published in each issue will win a mystery sealed PS Vita game!

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### Screenshots

All screenshots are the copyright of their respective developers/publishers. Where possible they have been taken from the PS Vita version of the game, but in some cases they may have been sourced from other versions. However, all images are from official press sources or provided directly by the publisher or developer.

Next issue we'll be taking a special look at Racing Games.

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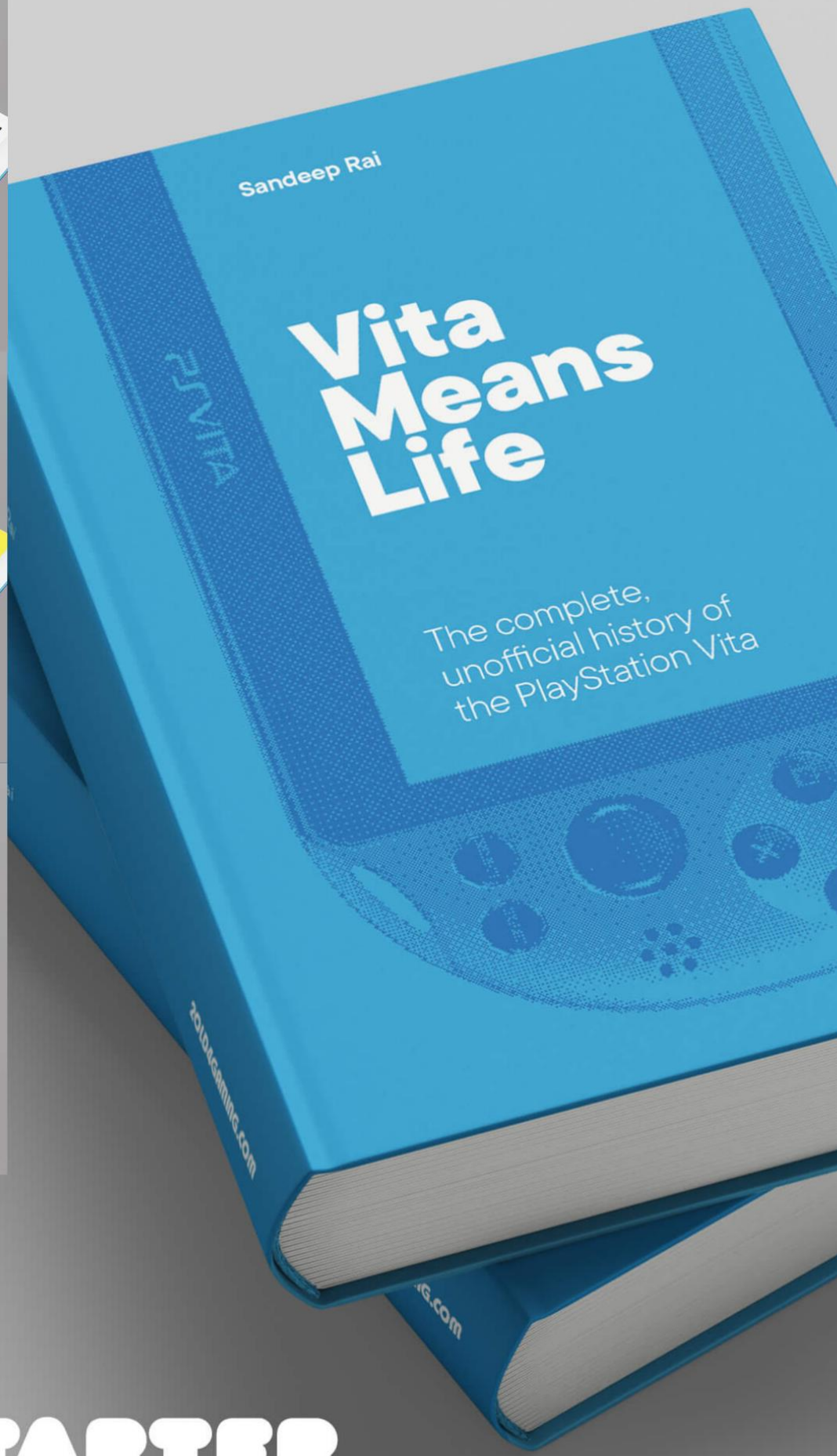
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