

Issue Five



March 2021

Welcome to the Cave Special



Hello there and welcome to issue five of Shoot You Sir! And as you can see above, this issue is a Cave Special. The developers that have given so much to our favoured genre. There can't be many shoot-em-up fanatics who haven't heard of them. In fact, most of you will already know quite a bit about Cave. Let's hope there is something in this issue, that adds to that knowledge. Please read on and enjoy. Happy gaming.

SHOOTER NEWS



Making its way to Nintendo switch, Maiden & Spell is a bullet based, anime witch game, previously released on PC and STEAM. The game itself veers away from traditional SHMUP territory and into the realm of one on one versus bullet hell games. All the ensemble within the game are female, anime characters, original right? Aesthetically the game looks decent, everything is

colourful and sharp and sprite designs are well animated. What makes this game stand out from similar one-on-one shoot em ups, is the fact that there are no melee attacks. Everything is bullets and lasers, making it look like it is much more inspired by Danmaku bullet hell games than anything else. The story: In search of a mysterious jewel, a group of adventurers plunge the depths of what is rumoured to be the most dangerous dungeon in the world: the vast abyss, known as the great circle. To their surprise, they find the dungeon mostly devoid of monsters and housing the ruins of a civilisation, of a long forgotten world and the lost city of the kingdom of stars... The game appears to be played on a mix of 2D and 3D backgrounds, both a mix of stationery and moving environments. These appear to be non-distracting, as it very much seems like a bullet hell game, so your focus will need to be on enemy patterns and strategies for defeating them.

The game features: Online Multiplayer, Eight Characters, Versus Mode, Story Mode (arcade mode if you will), Training mode and Extras, including soundtrack. I can see the online multiplayer appealing to some people, but I would have thought the vast number of SHMUP players really couldn't care less about this feature, which is ever trying to be forced into the genre by developers. However, I can see it working well within the context of a one vs one shooter, as it is not too dissimilar to a fighting game: the competition is what makes it fun.

Xbox 360

Game Review

By Graham Pike

Akai Katana Shin

赤い刀 真



Akai Katana (Red Sword) is another bullet-hell shooter, by Cave and was released on August 20th 2010, on the CAVE CV1000D arcade system. The Xbox 360 port, Akai Katana Shin (Red Sword True), was released on May 26th 2011 in Japan. Rising Star Games did the American and European releases on May 15th 2012. This was the fourth horizontal shmup from Cave, coming after Progear and Death Smiles I & II. After the gothic wackiness of the two Death Smiles games, Akai Katana returns to Cave's more usual stomping ground, with a militaristic back drop. Set in an alternate, early 20th century, this horizontal blaster is kind of retro-futuristic. W.W.2 meets anime magic. Akai Katana Shin has three variations (modes) on the main game, which are Origin, Slash and Climax. The two, new modes include higher-res



graphics, a new stage with an extra boss, "Nazuna Ayase", replay saving and online leaderboards. There are also Score attack and Training modes. You can adjust this very glamorous shooter to full screen and to my mind, this beauty deserves to be seen in it's full screen glory. It is just so full of colour, detail and stylish, yet old school, animation. The game flies over urban and open landscapes and you even go under water briefly, which is one of my favourite backdrops. The multitude of enemy

sprites are large, being beautifully designed and executed. They come in the form of aircraft, tanks, gun turrets and even ships. The bosses are mostly other, high powered humanoids, who often summon huge, mechanical war craft, through mighty portals.

You control your aircraft with the 8-way joystick, and four buttons. Tapping A (Defense Mode) fires the main weapon. Holding the A button down (Attack Mode) causes a stronger, special attack, depending on which aircraft you chose but also slows the craft down. The B button lets loose your bomb. The C button is an auto-fire button, being the equivalent of rapidly tapping the A button. The D button shifts you between "Fighter" and "Phantom" modes.





Review cont.....

In the top left of the play screen are segmented gold bars, representing your lives left. The green bar to the right is your Energy Gauge. Collecting energy items from enemies causes the gauge to fill, allowing the player to transform into Phantom Mode. When you are hit, you lose a gold bar but in recompense, the green Energy gauge goes up. The "B" icons, as you will have guessed, shows how many bombs you have

left. Phantom Mode has a higher attack power than the fighter plane and can repulse incoming enemy bullets and laser attacks. There is some talking with the game's bosses but it's spoken in Japanese, with no translation. The inter-stage art work is again, very strong, with fullscreen anime styled stills. Yes, this game is very glamorously presented. Graphically I'd say Akai Katana is every bit as good as Death Smiles. Although obviously, the style is very different. The backdrops are fairly conventional, Cave stuff



wits. Add the transforming between normal and phantom modes and you are in shooter heaven. And it all becomes second nature, very quickly. This is a very dynamic shmup. The attention to detail in all aspects of this game, is outstanding. Even little details, like when you pause the game and get the little menu, there are pink cherry blossom leaves floating down the screen. Just one of so many artistic features that show how much Cave care.

This is a real shooters game. Where as Death

Smiles goes all the way, to draw in players of all tastes. Akai Katana is far more geared to the old school, hard-core, traditional shoot-em-up fans. It's a real pleasure to play and experience. In fact it came in at number three, in my all time, top five shooters. And deservedly so.



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SCORES

Graphics: 19 Sound: 18
Control: 18 Fun: 19
Lastability: 18 OVERALL: 92%

Game Review

By Slyeessar

PS4



Ever thought: I want a Cyber styled Cave shooter, with disco music? Well, Cave have you covered. In fact, so do M2 and their shock triggers team. Dangun Feveron (Don-Gan Fever-Ron) not only has a cool name, but a funk disco music soundtrack and colour visuals. The game has a unique scoring system, along with destroying enemies, you will see people (cyborgs?) in red or yellow circles, dropping down the screen when you destroy enemy ships. Saving or collecting these adds to your cyborg counter base score. This system is referred to the 'SOS' system.

If I had to describe the visuals -and lets face it, it's part of my role here at Shoot You Sir - I would say the game has a very similar aesthetic to ESP.Ra.De but instead of anime type characters you are in space, shooting other ships. So it basically looks like Raiden or the like, with ESPRADE graphics. You are able to play this game in

local co-op mode, always a plus.

I love me some disco music and it really suits the game a lot more than I anticipated. M2 has thrown in a bunch of soundtracks for you to switch between, helping to add to the replay-ability. It also helps to build the atmosphere of the game, which is a fairly light hearted affair. The announcer is a lot more active in this game than any other SHMUP I have played and throws hip liners at you when you achieve something during gameplay e.g. obtaining a large number on the cyborg counter - more on this later. Shots SFX are quite loud, so it may be worth turning down just a tad if you want to hear the music on the busier stages of the game, but it does not walk over the music and does have a satisfying ear-feel, *phrase coined*.

A really interesting mechanic of the game is, it not only allows you to chose your ship and type of focus/ bomb attack but it also allows you to choose the speed of you aircraft. It gives you four choices from Slow, Medium, Fast and Very fast, indicated by a gauge. The disappointing thing here is that the slow setting is basically normal speed for your average SHMUP, and the faster settings getting a bit silly, and making the controls feel very loose indeed. This is something I wonder if M2 could have tightened up, making the range of speeds more usable. I get the impression the idea was to have you whizzing around the screen to funky disco music but I find it quite distracting. But then again, I also do not enjoy playing SHMUPs with a PS4 controller. So it may be that the level up from Slow is fine for lovers of the PS4 controller.



The three ships you get are very different from each other, a thin, red column an orange medium spread and a blue, 3-way, wider spread. The choice of bombs goes from a focus beam, slow homing missiles, that move up the screen and a charged shot attack, that spirals blue bullets around you to form a circle and when the button is released, fires a massive energy blast up the screen, from where your spaceship is positioned. Pressing the bomb attack brings in some night fever-esque dance graphics clearing the screen of bullets and deals a bit of damage. When your ship is destroyed (3 lives per credit), and you use a credit, you get to re-choose which ship, shot, and speed you are using. This is handy if you want to shift your play-style, mid game.

A hidden character in the game - Uo Poko - is a yellow cat character, that shoots out purple stars. It controls rather wildly, and makes the most annoying sound I have heard from a SHMUP character when you fire its shots. I'm going to be totally honest, I do not know how you get this character, as it is not selectable and the few times I have used it, was after losing a credit, when it





GAME REVIEW CONTINUED

able to do this (and I am sure there's plenty of how to videos on-line), you will have to pay for the game using a Japanese voucher code or a credit card. This came costs roughly £30 or 4070 yen. I am unsure why M2 did not decide to release a physical version of the game, as it would have sold well. Granted, it would likely not be as popular as Ketsui Deathtiny of Battle Garegga but it still is worth playing. Enough to show that this game warranted a special port by M2 shock triggers team but not enough to show us western SHMUP fans that we can obtain a physical copy that everyone can enjoy. I know M2 have an alright relationship with limited run games, so maybe one day...



SCORES

Graphics: 17
Sound: 18
Control: 16
Fun: 18
Lastability: 15

Overall: 84%

appears randomly. This happened a lot when I first played the game but hasn't happened in some time. Maybe if you are doing really badly, the game spams you with this character?

D. Feveron may not have controls as tight as other cave games but it certainly is one of the flashiest looking games in their arsenal. The character and personality of this game are likely the main ingredient as to why you should own this game. It's not as serious as DoDonPachi and it's not as nice looking as a Mushihimesama title but it brings it's own WTF factor, that makes it's flaired trousers and hairy chest, sporting a gold chain, above the rest. The border wallpapers are cool and the Shot Triggers information always looks very baddass, when you watch a replay or someone else playing.

It's at this point I have to disappoint readers, by stating this is only available via a Japanese PS4 account and although anyone is



The game is in Japanese, but there's enough English to get by. And the M2 options and gadget are the same as Battle Garegga. So overall, at least in a playability sense, it is rather accessible. This game is for anyone that is happy to spend the time to go and download it, which ultimately doesn't take that long. It's no DoDonPachi game but there is a challenge to be had, and there's a super easy mode. It's a fun title to say the least and it plays well, as much as you would expect from a Cave game. I personally feel it rates higher than Guwange but does not quite reach the heights of ESP RA.DE. or Ketsui Deathtiny. Hopefully that will help people pin down this more elusive game, in regard to whether or not it is worth the hassle of getting it.

GAME OVER

M2



LETS FOCUS ON A DEVELOPER



Founded by former video game developers Toaplan in 1994, Computer Art Visual Entertainment, or CAVE, has become renowned in the Shoot 'Em Up community for their contribution to the genre. Indeed, many hail CAVE as one of the founders of the 'Bullet Hell' subgenre, which has become a prominent component of many a SHUMP in recent years. It all started from Toaplan, formed in 1979, with its gaming division established by former Orca and Crux members. This evolved throughout the 1980's, with several changes to team members, culminating in CEO Yoshiyuki Kiyomoto stepping down, and Taizo Hayahi taking over. It was during this time period that Toaplan aided Raizing (now Eighting) during the development of Sorcer Striker, which has become a well-known SHMUP in its own right. Toaplan's last game was Snow Bros 2 - With New Elves, a 2D platform puzzle arcade game. Enter CAVE, founded June 14th, 1994. The first game they developed was Othello Derby, a curious arcade version of the board game Othello, in which you attempt to change all of the counters on the board to your designated colour. Funnily enough, I recommend trying the board game Othello, as it is a good game and I have fond memories playing this as a child, with my father.

In May 1995, Cave released their first official Shoot Em Up: DonPachi. This was published by Atlus, who requested that the game be released as a Toaplan-eque shooter. The game is now



looked back critically as a 'Creative Failure', and differs somewhat from the 5 CAVE sequels, and the single sequel by IGS published by Capcom.

Later in 1997, CAVE developed what would later be hailed as one of the best arcade SHMUPS ever made: DoDonPachi. DDP introduced new gameplay elements, and an updated story on the original CAVE release of DonPachi. Later, this game and its sequels would come to be heralded as one of the more hardcore, shoot em up series ever made, which many other developers would seek to emulate or clone, making the DoDonPachi series one of the most influential the genre has seen to date. For now, enough about DDP, as I will do a special article on this series of games in a future issue, however it would be remiss of me not to bring this important series up.

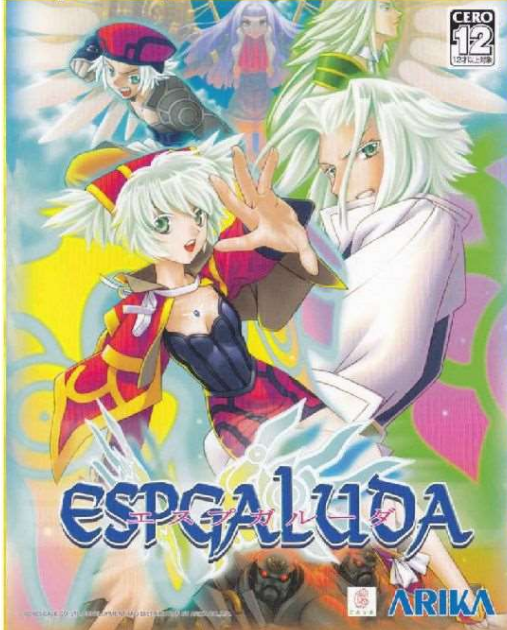
The late 90's was an important time for cave, as their CAVE 68000 arcade machine saw several strong releases, including: DonPachi, DoDonPachi, ESP.Ra.De, Dangun Feveron, & Guwange. All of these games have been ported to home consoles at several points, with the Sega Saturn and PSX receiving DonPachi & DoDonPachi ports. Readers will be more familiar with the M2 Shot trigger ports of ESP.Ra.De and Dangun



Feveron. Xbox 360 and Xbox One owners alone have the privilege of being able to pick up Guwange on the xbox live store. Of course, if you are a PC gamer, these games will be available via emulation or subscription service and the like.

FOCUS ON A DEVELOPER continued - CAVE

During this time period, CAVE also developed (and Capcom published) Steep Slope Sliders on Sega Saturn, a generally well received snowboarding game. They also developed three big games between 2002 and 2003 on the PGM (poly game master arcade system board), which was built to rival SNK's Neo Geo MVS arcade machine. These big three were: DoDonPachi DaiOuJou, Ketsui: Kizuna Jigoku Tachi, and Espgaluda. All three would later be ported, with DDP DOJ and Ketsui receiving their own cult followings.



The late 90's and early 2000's may have been an important time for CAVE in regard to evolution, but 2004-2012 may be considered the most prolific and consistent time period for their SHMUP releases.

These would be released on arcade machines: CAVE CV1000B, CV1000D, Cave PC & CV1000D respectively, with games published via AMI. Indeed, AMI would go on to publish all CAVE arcade games during this time period, except for Akai Katana & DoDonPachi SaidDaiOuJou, which were published by CAVE themselves.

2004 saw the release of another cult SHMUP: Mushihime-sama (aka Bug Princess). This game is far removed from the aircraft based shooters of the time, featuring forest environments of different kinds, and a magnitude of bugs and insects.

The difficulty level of this game was fairly hardcore, with its visuals being rather deceiving. A sequel to this game Mushihimesama Futari would be released in 2006.



Between 2004 and 2006, CAVE released Espgaluda II, Ibara



Kuro, Pink Sweets, and Mushihimesama Futari (mentioned above). All of which would later be ported to home consoles. It must also be noted that during the late 90's and early 2000's, CAVE also developed several non-SHMUP games for home consoles. I have already mentioned Steep Slope Sliders on Sega Saturn, but some of the other releases are: Delisoba Deluxe, Touge: King the Spirits 1 & 2, Peak Performance, Nrick'N Snowboarder, Touge Max 2, Touge Max G, Yanya Cabalista: City Skater, a couple of Nintendo DS releases in the late 00's, and Nin2-Jump & Instant Brain on the Xbox 360.

2007-2012 marked the final five years for CAVE as an arcade developer, releasing some of their strongest titles during this time period. Death Smiles released in 2007 and was later ported to Xbox 360 (and PS4/PS5, Xbox One Series, & Nintendo Switch in 2021). Death Smiles is a horizontal scrolling SHMUP with anime-gothic graphics,

tight gameplay and providing a tough overall experience.

A sequel was later released in 2009, and also found a port to the consoles mentioned above. CAVE's farewell to SHMUP fans came in 2012, when they released DoDonPachi SaiDaiOuJou (Maximum Death). This marked the sixth entry in the series, and allowed CAVE to finish on a high, with one of the best looking SHMUPs





FOCUS ON A DEVELOPER CONTINUED AGAIN

you are likely to see, and one of the toughest you will likely ever play. This was later ported onto Xbox 360 the following year. Although CAVE stopped developing games at this point, it should be noted that a large number of their games have been ported to consoles between 2013 and 2021. The earlier ports being on Xbox 360 and PS3, and more notably in recent years by M2's very capable team, to modern consoles. In fact, M2's Shock Triggers Team have done very good jobs porting ESP.Ra.De, Dangun Feveron, and Ketsui Deathtiny, very successfully, to recent Gen consoles. A lot of people will refer to certain bullet hell games as 'Cave-like' or 'Cave-esque', which goes to show that CAVE's particular style and influence is rather prominent across the genre.



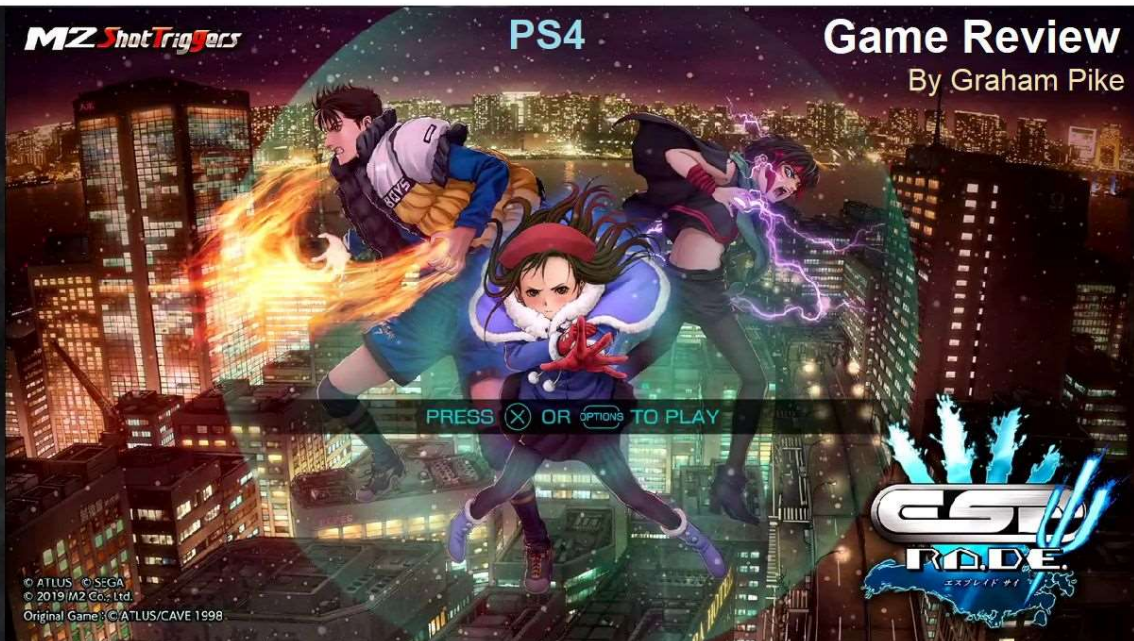
A more in depth look would see this described as good graphics, tight controls, and very specific waves of enemy bullet patterns, in interesting and unique designs that require some memorisation to navigate, especially if you are looking for a 1CC play through. A lot of comparison of mechanics in CAVE games have also been emulated or cloned by developers, making it an easy way to describe something almost 'tangible' that other SHMUP players will quickly understand about the game. Notably, the visuals or mechanics found in a DoDonPachi game.

Ultimately, you cannot escape CAVE games when it comes to SHMUPS, even if you are not a fan of the way they play. This would severely limit your choice though, as I mentioned above, as a lot of developers have emulated different parts of CAVE titles over the years. Most notable games that come to mind are Crimson Clover, and Rolling Gunner (the second one is cheating a bit!).



There is no denying the consistency and quality of the releases from this developer, as even their less well known titles have a big cult following, and still hold to qualities found in all their games. Anyone looking to try one of CAVE's games, provided they have access to recent gen consoles, should check out ESP.Ra.De or Ketsui Deathtiny. Anyone looking to find where the bulk of their library can be found, I would suggest a Japanese Xbox 360, as a lot of their titles from the 00's have been released on this console. A gentle reminder that Death Smiles 1 & 2 are getting a remaster for Nintendo Switch, PS4/5 and Xbox Live, so keep your eyes peeled! Hopefully this article was not too comprehensive for readers, but when it comes to CAVE, it is a story worth documenting.





Oh yes, another TATE screen, vertical shooter from the masters, at Cave. With this game only getting a release in Japan thus far, one of the first things you'll notice is that 90% of the menu information is in Japanese. So if you want to explore every aspect of this many optioned game and don't read the language, there will be a lot of trial and error.



Another initial notice is that the main loading of ESP RA.DE. is pretty lengthy. But once the wait is over, you are greeted with a nice still, of the game's three main characters. I think this is the first shmup that Cave did, with the hero sprites being humanoid, rather than jets or space ships. The three main characters here are a man, a young woman-guy (not quite sure) and a girl. Their shots and specials are quite different, which adds to the fun. I think the man is the best to use, although the girl seems the most powerful of the three.

The first menu choices are mostly in English and offer two game mode bundles. The first has Arcade, AC Challenge and AC Osarai, The second and one I tend to favour, has Arcade Plus, which is as the Arcade mode, with a few tweaks, including rectification of the odd, "boss milking" scoring, in the original Arcade game, which apparently put a lot of players off. This bundle also has Super Easy, for a quick and fun blast though the whole game. And lastly Custom, in which you really modify this game to your hearts desire, once you've negotiated all the foreign text, of course. You can even change the size of the hit area, on your hero sprite. Make it as tiny as you can and try to get that little bit further. I have tried most of these modes but now mostly stick to Arcade Plus, for the real deal and occasionally have a romp through Super Easy. Which despite it's name, still requires some concentration and gaming skills. Although I can appreciate the value of all the customisation available, I tend to prefer a game as the developer intended.



Like most TATE screen shmups, the middle third of the screen is your play area, with the left and right thirds being jam packed with all sorts of game data, that you only really have time to view, when at the quiet sections, at the start and end of a stage. Also like many others, you start with two continues but these go up the more times you play through the game. And this game really does play excellent-ly. The enemies firepower patterns are familiar and this kind of gives you confidence, to negotiate them. You have a focus and Spread shot, a Barrier/ Bomb that you can charge up by holding down the button, for more blast power.



Game Review cont....



And there's a Special Shot, that recharges nice and quickly for regular use and boy do you need it. Although this game does have an overall feel, similar to Ketsui Deathtiny, it plays quite differently, with a lot of larger enemies throughout each stage and a score system that revolves around getting those larger foes with your special shot and then scything through the cannon fodder, with your main shots. This is actually a lot of fun.

Graphics are in the old school, 2D arcade style and are rather on a par with Ketsui Deathtiny, being well coloured and detailed. Although overall I would say that I like ESP RA.DE's graphics a little better. They seem more

colourful, literally and in style and have more variety. The music is also good, in that Japanese, arcade, shmup style of J-pop, rock and electronica. It's not up there with the music in games like Darius Gaiden, Death Smiles or Raiden V D.C. but it definitely adds to the feel of the game and helps draw you in. The SFX do sound dated and although OK, are really nothing special.



The game controls really well, with your hero sprite moving very smoothly and accurately. All of your attacks are easily performed and so if things do go wrong, it's down to you. This isn't the hardest of Cave's shooters but it is one hell of a challenge. And best of all, is really is a lot of fun to play. There's just enough tactics required but also your reaction and dodging skills can often get you out of a scrape. It only takes a short while to grasp all that is going on in this game and it's not long before your urge to just stay in one peice is accompanied by an urge to get that higher score and bathe in the glow of shoot-em-up satisfaction.



The three, main characters, that are your shooting sprites are varied enough to keep you coming back for a lot more. And when you defeat the second, final boss (if that makes sense) on the last stage, "Alice Master", you get her added to your character choice. Which is a good thing because she is pretty powerful and kind of wacky-cool, in that anime style. So overall there is a lot to get your teeth into here. If you like a tough, vertically scrolling, TATE screen, 2D, arcade shoot-em-up, I can't see why you wouldn't want to give this classy game a try.



SCORES

Graphics: 17 Sound: 15

Control: 20 Fun: 19

Lastability: 19 OVERALL: 90%



**Pink
Sweets**



**XBOX
360**

Game Review
By Slyellesar

Pink Sweets is the sequel to Ibara, the PS2 port of which fetches a rather high price tag online, these days. Pink Sweets released in arcades in Japan in 2006 and found itself ported to Xbox 360 in a compilation bundle along with Muchi Muchi Pork. These two games are quite the Pick 'N Mix of games; Pink Sweets being your more traditional like, aircraft shooter and Muchi Muchi Pork being a ham-fisted cute 'em up. Puns..... Yes we have them.

Graphically, Pink Sweets is superior to Muchi Muchi Pork, with beautifully designed backgrounds, visually sharper sprites, and less swine based visual puns. Pink Sweets has a less saturated colour palate than Muchi Muchi Pork, with more contrast, but is by no means dull. The 'war of the roses' meets shoot 'em up, seems to be what the devs have gone for here and it certainly works. It works at least with the environments that is, as some of the aircraft designs do feel somewhat out of place. The first boss you encounter is a very cool, colourful robot, which looks fantastic, but also feels somewhat out of place with the aesthetics. But hell, it's still not as whacky as Muchi Muchi Pork! Both games are Vertical with a third of the screen game-



play area but both still choose to have boxes and imagery appear over this area, during play. This is most annoying, even if it is in keeping with the game.

The sound effects of the shots fired in this game, sound a tad weak and don't fill you with the same joy the explosions in Raiden V DC give you. Thus making it much less of a lolly-pop and much more of a suppository, when it comes to SFX. The game has a fairly repetitive soundtrack but it's rather upbeat and suits the game.

The game has a rather cool mechanic: when you are not holding down the shoot button for rapid fire, it charges a shot. You can then tap the shoot button to fire, which is rather quality street. Other than that the controls are standard and manoeuvring does not feel sloppy and is a little



tighter than Muchi Muchi Pork. This game feels much more old fashioned than some of the other Cave offerings and a lot of people refer to this game as a 'Raizing' influenced game, harking back to pre-Cave times. One is easily fooled into feeling like this is more of a 90's SHMUP with prettier graphics, rather than a mid 00's beast. In terms of power ups, there are several different types you can pick up that change the shot type of your aircraft, but each character retains their overall look in terms of shots fired. For example, if you are firing green lasers then they stay green, if you fire red lance-like bullets they remain with this theme. This, like Raiden, allows you to choose the type of shot on the fly. which is a nice touch.

So this box of Roses will be a decent addition to any ones collection and there is enjoyment to be had. It is not the first game I would recommend to someone getting a Japanese Xbox 360 but it is by no means the remaining pile of unloved liqourice, at the bottom of a packet of Bassett's own All-sorts, either. I am sure fans of Ibara would like this game a lot, as we gamers tend to want to play sequels of beloved games and some do consider Ibara a cult classic.

This game will continue to be played, despite the bundle it comes in being so obscenely priced these days, for what you get. Once again, anyone on PC will likely be able to access this without having a hole burned in their pockets. Anyone wanting this



for their 360 should buy it soon before the price sky rockets even higher. That reminds me, what the hell happened to the size of waggon wheels? And why does buying a Freddo now mean I have to get a second mortgage on the house? It's all a bunch of mint humbugs if you ask me. Puns: We eat them.



SCORES

**Graphics: 17 Sound: 14 Control: 15
Fun : 16 Lastability: 15 OVERALL: 77%**

