I am no shmup expert and I surely haven’t played all of them, but there are a lot of things that I found in ESP Galuda that I think Cave did right and many others often get wrong. Sometimes they are little details, but put all together they make a very solid shmup and you can see why Cave is a veteran shmup developer. This can be seen as a list of “Do’s”, after you read the “Don’ts”: <http://shmups.system11.org/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=36231>

1- Readability.

* a common annoying thing with shmup is to give the player a huge laser beam or tons of flashy bullets that fill the whole screen. At the end of the day, you cannot even distinguish the enemy bullets because your view is already crowded with your own shots.

Instead, Galuda gives a green laser that not only has a unique color in the game, but that is not too big, yet just wide enough to seem powerful and have a nice spread.

* At the opposite side, all enemy bullets share the same color: blue. Therefore they are very easy to read: everything blue is enemy bullets, and everything not blue is not enemy bullets. Sometimes they all turn violet (kakusei mode) or red (overmode) but they still share the same neat color which is very different from the bullets of the player and cannot get mixed up with the background in any circumstance.

2- Incoming enemies awareness (shadows): another mistake they avoid is enemies appearing instantly from the screen border. In many games they would pop in quickly and kill you without any notice. Here, Galuda found a very smart way of providing awareness of incoming enemies: you can see their shadow on the ground just before they are flying in. This is not only a useful gameplay feedback that avoids unfair and frustrating deaths, this is also a solution that wraps up nicely with the game universe (flying angels) and doesn’t even look like a feedback, because it all seems natural, flying stuff projects shadows, right? But that’s what it is, a feedback, and they avoided to put an ugly warning icon or any interface bullshit.

2- Scoring system: 2nd layer of gameplay, life-length

3- Hit feedback (yellow shader): enemies are blinking yellow when they get hit. The blink feedback here is perfect, because the enemies will most of the time be in your periphical view (top of the screen) and that movement catches the eye greatly in the periphical view, therefore the blinking seems like a movement and you won’t miss that information.

The color mask upon hitting is a quite classic way to feedback collisions, but again this combines with other readibility factors: because the sprite itself gives the feedback that it is hit, they don’t need to add in huge explosions at every impact, and that saves screen pollution with all sorts of visual effects that decrease game readibility. Also the color yellow cannot be mistaken with another color used in the chromatic code of the game (blue/violet/red for enemy bullets, green for player bullets, yellow for target hits). That also gives you information about when the boss start to actually get hit by your shots (they are immune to collision when they are first introduced).

4- Awakening timer on the character

5- Sound feedback for near-to-death boss

6- Most enemy shots are target-seeking, meaning that they are aiming at your current position. If you try moving in circle, you can notice all guns pointing at your direction at any time. Actually they even need to be aligned before firing, which means you can move in circle around them and they won’t be able to shoot because they lose aligment all the time.

Target-seeking is great because it obliges the player to move constantly, which makes the game never boring, because you can never just sit and hold the “fire” button, you need to dodge constantly.

It also allows “bullet herding” gameplay which consists in straffing at the slowest speed possible from one side of the screen to the other to keep dodging within a hair a huge mass of bullets aiming at you. This is fun gameplay that requires just a bit of skill but feels very rewarding.

7. Releasing the “fire” button gives you a speed bonus

This adds to the previous point. When pressing fire you have a speed malus. This obliges you to sometimes release the button to move faster and avoid a big cluster of bullets.

8- Bullets do not change speed or trajectory, or pop out new bullets. What you see if what you get.

Wrong:

* Full power after a new continue: give same power instead (not increased power)

Conclusion:

What you see if what you get.

What you get is what you see.