The PlayStation Vita still rules

The entire time I was playing *Final Fantasy VII Rebirth* — the second part of a planned trilogy of *FF7* remakes — I couldn't stop thinking about replaying the first game from 1997. When the credits rolled on *Rebirth*, I had a difficult decision to make: *how* to play the original? There is no shortage of options. The game has been ported to most modern platforms, and I still have the original PlayStation discs (all three of them). But ultimately I decided on a beloved but oft-forgotten piece of video game hardware, the PlayStation Vita. And you know what? This little thing still absolutely rules.

My rekindled love affair with the Vita started because of *FF7*, and I've been been making my through the game in fits and starts. But it has also blossomed from there. I had forgotten not only how good the handheld is for playing classic games, particularly timesinks like RPGs, but also how many excellent indies it had. *Sound Shapes* remains one of the best music games ever made, and the likes of *Hotline Miami*, *Bastion*, and *Fez* are ideally suited for the Vita. I've reacquainted myself with games like the post-apocalyptic strategy of *Tokyo Jungle Mobile* and the streamlined skateboarding action of the first *OlliOlli*.

All of these games feel right on the Vita because Sony absolutely nailed the hardware. It's small and light, as a handheld should be, but it doesn't trade that off for functionality. It has all of the sticks and buttons you'd expect of a PlayStation device, and — aside from those sticks being a touch on the tiny side — it handles like a PlayStation controller. It even includes a touchscreen for the few games

that really take advantage of it, like the soccer game *Passing Time*. It’s basically the design of a Switch before the Switch existed, but sturdier because it’s a solid device. It’s the ideal compromise between comfort and performance.

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Even now, in what could perhaps be described as a golden age for handhelds — see: the Playdate, Analogue Pocket, Steam Deck (and its clones), as well as the Switch — the Vita still stands out in this regard. The only thing that really comes close is the Switch Lite because of how it shrunk down and solidified the original design. But if I want to play a bunch of different games on the go, including ones that require a traditional control scheme, the Vita has once again become my go-to. Lately, I’ve been playing *Lumines: Electronic Symphony* during bouts on an exercise bike, and it’s hard to imagine doing that comfortably while lugging around a Steam Deck.

Of course, there are drawbacks to using a Vita in the year 2024. Mainly, that has to do with getting new games. Vita isn’t exactly a viable platform for modern developers, and even snatching up old (physical) releases can be tough. I see plenty of Nintendo DS games whenever I go thrifting, but a Vita cartridge is a rare sight, and while you can buy digital games on the Vita’s store, Sony has made the process more tedious than it should be. Still, it was worth the effort of fumbling around in various menus so that I could purchase *Parasite Eve*, which I’m planning to play right after *FF7*. Unfortunately, the classic games are mostly straight ports without any of the quality-of-life tweaks found in modern rereleases.

Really, the Vita is a good lesson that just because a company has moved on from a gaming platform, it doesn’t mean you have to. Nothing about the hardware or its games feels particularly

dated. And since there are plenty of Vita games I never got around to, along with older PSone games I've been meaning to replay, I'm not hurting for choice. In just a few weeks, I've built up quite the queue; after *Parasite Eve*, my list includes the original *Suikoden* and *Persona* games. These aren't games that are exclusive to the Vita — they just feel better there.

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