

DoDonPachi Dai-Ou-Jou

Review by TheSAMMIES

"The Ninth Circle Of Bullet Hell"

Dodonpachi Dai-Ou-Jou, is the third game in Cave's Donpachi series. The name roughly translates to Angry Leader Bee: Blissful Death. It has the distinction of being possibly one of the hardest arcade games ever, maybe even to a ludicrous degree. I usually don't count difficulty against games unless it's due to poor design, but Dodonpachi 3 is simply too much. Yes, it does play fair, but when only a small percentage of gamers on Earth are going to even see the final boss, let alone defeat him, then it kind of reduces the game's appeal by a lot. You should only play this thing if you're up for a real challenge, like a serious challenge that will take years of dedication to complete. Otherwise, this game will only frustrate you.

Story- The Donpachi series has always had one of the worst stories in gaming. There is always a plot twist that says that you've been fighting your friends all along and that the bad guys have duped you. It's stupid and the hero falls for it every time in every game. This game is not an exception. You do in fact kill your friends in the first loop without knowing it and your hero gets duped again. It's painful to read at times.

You play as a pilot on the Dodonpachi Squadron, an elite group of futuristic fighter pilots that really should not command the amount of respect they have. For being considered saviors of the world, they sure do kill innocent people a lot! None of this is brought up in the story, by the way. Anyway, you never get to see the pilot's face. He's supposed to be you, the player, so his face is cropped out in all of the official art. Some hentai games pull this exact same trick.

The story also introduced elemental dolls, robot girl copilots that can soup up your ship. You get three of them, Shotia, Leinyan, and Exy. They're all weird robot girls with metal chords hanging off of them and detachable heads. Shotia is emotionless, which means that it's supposed to be extra special when she smiles. She's cool and calculated, tending to think things through, preferring a logical approach to problems over panache. Haven't we seen someone like this before? She dresses like in the "gothic loli" fashion that I think looks horrible. Leinyan has an extra special devotion to you. She loves you, always wants to be with you, and will kill for you. So, basically she acts like a serial killer that also wants to be your clingy girlfriend. She doesn't approve of the war she's fighting and would rather be a robot nurse than a robot soldier. She's supposed to resemble a fancy Chinese waitress or something. Exy is the sad and depressed robot girl. She is partially aware of how disposable she is as a robot, cries to herself a lot, and just doesn't care. She doesn't care if she dies, she doesn't care if you die, and just sees the whole world as a cruel and meaningless place. She doesn't wear much, only a bra and a miniskirt. Yeah, they made the emotionally unstable girl the fanservice character too.

So, are you noticing something about the story? It has a lot of parallel with bishoujo or "pretty girl" games. This was Cave's first step on their road to moe land. Not that I mind. A little bit of Moe can be good every now and then. To be fair, the elemental dolls aren't nearly as bad as Deathsmiles, where you can tell the characters were designed specifically to make otakus feel funny in their pants. All of the copilots in Dodonpachi 3 are meant to be some kind of fantasy girl. Shotia is cold and emotionless. You're supposed to get her to open up and be more human. Leinyan is obvious, she can't get her mind off of you. Exy is a borderline nihilist and some guys love the idea of trying to comfort someone who's sad and make them feel better. The story doesn't exactly go in those specific directions. Just look at the endings and you'll see that there are a few twists in there. Well... It's not like a lot of people are even going to see the endings. We'll get to that later.

Dodonpachi 3 isn't the kind of game that you play for the story, by the way. As stupid as everything is, at least Cave tried and went the extra mile when making this thing. Donpachi barely even had a story to begin with, and while Dodonpachi 3 isn't exactly Shakespeare, it at least tries to have a narrative.

Presentation- A lot of Cave's game from around Dodonpachi 3's time looked a little ugly and Dodonpachi 3 is no exception. Backgrounds range from dark and muddy to repetitive and boring. Sprites are small, prerendered, and while they are detailed, they don't look very good. Bosses have a lot of detail and moving parts. Some of them look great and they really are the graphical high point of this game. Unfortunately, you'll probably see more glowing bright blue and pink bullets than actual graphics. Dodonpachi 3 is a bullet hell style game, so the screen will usually be too busy and hectic for you to really enjoy the good parts of the graphics.

The music is a mixed bag. Some of the level themes are great and sound both beautiful and intense. Most of it is loud rock music with awesome drums. Other songs are just painful to listen to. The very first song that plays when you start up the first stage is just terrible, a horrible way to start up a game. You would think that a game's first level would showcase some of its best music. Nope, instead you get some kind of moaning opera singer bellowing nonsense while slow paced techno plays. The whole "opera singer" thing worked for Darius Gaiden, but it does not work here. Other than that, the music is pretty good.

Gameplay- Let's get this out of the way. Dodonpachi 3 is a super hard game. It's so hard that it took six whole months after its release for the very first person to finally complete it. That's not to say that the game's impossible, just incredibly difficult, almost to a ludicrous degree. There is a such thing as "too hard" and this game right here is a perfect example of it. There are two loops to conquer in this game, along with a secret final boss that will give you hell. The first loop is hard, but not too bad. You can probably beat it if you practice enough. The second loop is insane. I quit when I couldn't beat the first level of that second loop. I found it pointless to go on because the game was kicking my ass that badly. No one is going to see the real ending to this game.

You get two different ships to select from, a red one that's fast and a green one that's slow, but a better bullet spread. As usual for Cave games, you tap the shoot button to shoot and you can hold it down to fire your laser. Your choice of copilot also affects performance. Shotia gives you a lot of bombs and powers up your shots. It makes sense because she's logical and wants to ensure the mission's success. Leinyan powers up your lasers and gives you a medium amount of bombs. Exy gives you hardly any bombs and has strong shots and lasers. It makes sense here too, because Exy doesn't care if she lives or dies, so she's not going to be thinking of her own protection. For an easy way to remember which character does what, Shotia has the word "shot" right there in her name, Leinyan's name sounds kind of like "laser", and Exy means "expert".

New to the Dodonpachi series are hypers. You can collect them and activate them by bombing. When you use a hyper, your ship gets super powerful and your combos go haywire. It's a great way to burn through stronger enemies, annoying minibosses, and finishing level bosses. Hypers can be extended to last longer and carry over from level to level, which should make exploiting the game's scoring loads of fun for anyone who cares. Hypers are activated by hitting the bomb button and clear all bullets onscreen when you use them, so they are effectively better than bombs if used right.

Dodonpachi 3 is a fun game, but its brutal difficulty really gets in the way of everything. It's sad when a game has to be played in short bursts because it's getting so frustrating. Bosses are the worst here. They have huge health bars, take forever to defeat, and like to spam the same attacks over and over again. If you're up for a challenge and think hard games are fun, go ahead and play this thing. It's just that there are far more rewarding arcade shmups out there that are far less frustrating.

Cool Fact- This game had a "Black Label" rerelease that tones down the difficulty and gives you more hypers. Unless you're a real hardcore dude who eats games like this for breakfast, you should probably play the Black Label version instead. It's included in most of the console ports, but those can get expensive.

Also Try- How about some Cave games that are actually possible to complete? Try Espgaluda and Akai Katana. Both of those are much easier and better designed. If you're some kind of god reading this, go play Image Fight. I'm convinced that game is impossible. If you think Dodonpachi 3 isn't hard enough, try that.

Reviewer's Score: 7/10 | **Originally Posted:** 10/17/13

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GameFAQs : <http://www.gamefaqs.com/arcade/577837-dodonpachi-dai-ou-jou/reviews/review-155927>