

Analysis of Mechanics

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Title: Touhou 6 (東方紅魔郷 ~ the Embodiment of Scarlet Devil)

Released: 2002

Author: Team Shanghai Alice

Primary Genre: danmaku

Style: cartoon

Analysis

"Touhou is about anime girls resolving arguments by throwing nukes at each other."

Touhou 6 is, like all the mainline titles, a danmaku. The term is commonly translated as 'bullet hell'. While certain general concepts like perma-death and stage progression overlap multiple genres, there isn't really a secondary genre. The Touhou franchise is archetypal, it is no exaggeration to say that it defines this genre.

The game is 2 dimensional, the player controls a single character confined to a rectangle where the entirety of gameplay takes place. The gameplay consists of evading maelstroms of enemy projectiles while attempting to land your own attacks. The game is broken up into several stages, each of which constitutes multiple waves of generic enemies followed by a boss character, with a few lines of dialogue in between. Each type of enemy, as well as each stage of a boss fight, has its own unique attack pattern. The game progresses either by defeating all enemies or by waiting out the wave timer. Contact with any attack leads to life loss. Player starts with 3 lives and can accumulate more by reaching score thresholds or collecting drops. Score is increased by collecting drops, beating stages, and grazing enemy attacks.

There is no save/load system, as due to the game's structure the length of a single run is more-or-less static at about 25 minutes. Instead there is the practice start mode, where one can play through any single stage that's already been beaten.

There are 4 difficulty levels. The only consequence of these is increased density and complexity of attacks, and a higher score multiplier.

The game is entirely skill-based. There is no strategy or luck involved, a player's proficiency depends only on knowledge of attack patterns and movement control.

Despite its name, Team Shanghai Alice has only ever had one member - ZUN. He is responsible for everything from character design and music to programming. This lends the game a peculiar style. Most sprites within the game are less than 20 pixels across, with the notable exception being character sprites displayed during stage transition dialogue. These are notoriously crude and have persisted as such into the later games. However this does not detract from the game's aesthetics. On the contrary, it meshes well with the low resolution, the simple stage backgrounds and GUI, and the midi-based soundtrack. The simplicity of sprites also complements the gameplay since there are times when the screen is filled with hundreds or even thousands of projectiles.