It’s a great time to start playing Dead Cells

This week, the indie roguelike *Dead Cells* got a massive *Castlevania*-themed expansion, the game’s fourth paid DLC. After years of wanting to play *Dead Cells*, I’ve finally started in earnest, but I feared I would be overwhelmed by everything that had come before. Turns out that I had nothing to worry about: *Dead Cells* is smartly designed so that newcomers can jump in and have a blast without already knowing about the game’s worlds, weapons, or mysteries.

As a 2D action game, it’s pretty easy to grasp the basics of *Dead Cells*. You’ll explore rooms, collect weapons, and use your arsenal to defeat various enemies that are out to get you. The roguelike elements of the game mean that you’ll frequently stumble upon new and better weapons while running between familiar but randomized locations in each biome.

Everything from the game’s expansions — both free and paid — slots cleanly into that structure. If you want to just go to the first *Castlevania* zone, for example, you’ll be able to find the entrance right from the starting biome after your initial few runs. Other expansion biomes are also woven seamlessly into the game’s world. Beyond the *Castlevania* levels, I couldn’t tell you which aren’t included in the base game; they all feel like natural fits.

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Dead Cells has a huge variety of weapons, but it doesn’t feel overwhelming to learn them. At the start of the game, you’ll

only have access to a lowly sword, bow, and shield, but you'll quickly find new weapons during your runs or pick up blueprints for weapons that you can unlock later. That all means you'll grow your weapon pool over time instead of trying to sort through every option at once. I've already started to gravitate toward some favorites, like the sword and gun from *Hyper Light Drifter*.

You read that right — *Castlevania* isn't the only game series to show up in *Dead Cells.* There have so far been two free updates adding weapons and character skins from renowned indie title like *Hollow Knight* and *Hotline Miami*, and you often find the gear through clever nods to the original games. (I was absolutely tickled when I ran into the giant whale-like monster from *Slay the Spire*.) All those extra weapons and skins, in addition to what's included with the main game and the paid DLC, mean that there is a *lot* to unlock, so there's always something to strive for.

Dead Cells is known for being a tough game, and for me, it's lived up to that pedigree. But I'm a glutton for punishment, so if you want to play the game without as much frustration, *Dead Cells* recently got a robust Assist Mode in a free update that lets you do things like reveal the full map and adjust enemy health. And if you want to always run with a certain set of weapons or parameters, you can build custom games with specific equipment and options.

I've had my eye on *Dead Cells* for years because it seemed like the perfect combination of many of my favorite games, but I had been turned off by the vast amount of *stuff* added to it over time. Now, I know all those additions are just more delightful secrets, locations, and awesome weapons for me to unearth as I attempt run after run. And even if you don't have the paid expansions (or are playing on mobile, which doesn't have the *Castlevania* DLC just yet), the free things added since the game's 2018 official launch are welcome improvements that make the game much more approachable.

https://www.theverge.com/23634280/dead-cells-return-to-castlevania-expansion-dlc-start-playing