

Shogun Showdown makes you feel like a genius by showing you the future

Shogun Showdown sometimes breaks my brain. The new deckbuilding roguelike is all about tactics, and a key part of the game is that you can always see what the enemies plan to do next. Every once in a while, that gets me in a quandary where I know I'll lose. But when things click into place and I clear everyone out in one fell swoop, I feel like a strategic genius.

In the game, which just left early access, you're constantly trying to position your character across a small level to either attack your foes or dodge their moves. As you play, you can upgrade your "tiles" (think: cards) to improve their damage, add perks like freezing ice, or lower their cooldown so that you can use them more frequently. You're also able to stack up to three tiles so that, with one press of the attack button, you send off a salvo of moves to take out a bunch of bad guys at once.

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Since you can see what the enemies will do, you're constantly strategizing about whether to move in to strike or if you need to back off to stay alive. It can get complex, and sometimes it feels like I have to galaxy brain each move to survive difficult rounds. The strategizing is all worth it when you

pull off a series of attacks that clear the battlefield.

Here's an example of how it comes together. Playing as the starter character, called the Wanderer, I start with a pair of swords that can simultaneously hit the spaces to my left and right as well as an arrow that can fire across the level. With some strategic maneuvering, I can set up the Wanderer so that she strikes a baddie that's behind her and then shoots an arrow in front of her to eliminate all the dangers on the map.

During each run, you'll have opportunities to improve your tiles, pick up new ones, and shop for upgrades. Sure, those are all familiar roguelike trappings, but with a little planning, you can make some extraordinarily powerful tiles. For my first winning run, I upgraded an arrow tile so it had high damage and no cooldown, meaning I was firing off arrows without breaking a sweat.

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dark: [>a: hover]: text-gray-bd dark: [>a: hover]: shadow-underline-gray [>a]: shadow-underline-gray-63 dark: [>a]: text-gray-bd dark: [>a]: shadow-underline-gray">Image: Goblinz Publishing

As you play, you'll also collect skulls that can be used to unlock things like new tiles and more things to buy at item shops. Spending those skulls quickly adds variety to each run, and I don't think I've doubled up on a build yet. Once, I went all in on a dragon punch move that sent enemies flying into each other, and while it didn't get me a win, I loved punching bad guys across levels to open up space.

I'm still early in the game, and I've only unlocked one of four additional characters, so there's still a lot for me to see. As you clear runs, you can also play through harder "days" with added challenges like tougher enemies or fewer item drops.

Even though I'm working through bigger games like *Astro Bot*

and a long-in-the-works *Mass Effect* trilogy playthrough, I keep coming back to *Shogun Showdown*; it's just too much fun to experiment with the game's many weapons and strategies. Maybe it's time for me to try that dragon punch build again – or stumble into something completely unexpected.

Shogun Showdown is available now on PC, Nintendo Switch, PlayStation, and Xbox.

<https://www.theverge.com/2024/9/15/24243908/shogun-showdown-review>