

# Elden Ring DLC: Shadow of the Erdtree

I want to like this DLC. I genuinely do. There are good and bad parts to it, and while the good come close to outweighing the bad, in the end they just don't.

## Pros:

The Shadow Realm is well made and visually pleasing.

The new weapons are extremely fun.

The story is interesting and compelling, if somewhat subtle.

The negatives, however, are somewhat serious.

## The world feels empty

This one is somewhat subjective, but the open world felt empty and vacant. The original Elden Ring excelled in making the world feel alive and rewarding exploration. In this DLC, whole swathes of territory are empty or uninteresting, with nothing but the occasional scattered skull with glowing eyes to trample with your horse.

## Bosses are artificially difficult.

There are two problems with bosses in the DLC. The first is that they've overtuned. They hit too hard, they have too much health. At times you have no time to learn the bosses because you'll be dead before you've seen more than 1-2 attacks.

But the second, more problematic issue is one of poor design. From Software have clearly learned nothing from the feedback regarding the last sections of the original game. Bosses attack relentlessly, with combos of up to 10 hits allowing for very few attack windows, and then only if you're perfectly timed. At the end of this combo, they'll start another almost immediately. They're not held back by things like stamina, FP or any sort of limiting.

The hit boxes on most of these attacks are comically poor. A boss with a flaming spear can hit you with a thrust attack aimed a full 150 degrees away from you. It is as if someone asked the lead dev where the hitbox should be and they responded with "yes".

Then there's the boss movement which is, for the most part, wild and erratic, leading to more deaths through camera angles than mechanics in a lot of places. Any attempts at ranged combat miss altogether, forcing you into one specific meta: find a way to make the opponent bleed,

summon mimic tear to do it twice as fast, cheese the enemy and then go onto forums to brag "I didn't find this hard at all, l2play" which seems to be code for "I used the meta to cheese it, fluff my ego."

And on the subject of metas...

## The Miyazaki Meta is still a thing

While it's true that bosses are overtuned, so are some of the enemies. I actually enjoyed this at the start of the game. The enemies hit like trucks, but they also died quickly. It led to a fast, frenetic gameplay loop that was challenging and satisfying.

Then I progressed in the game and things rapidly fell off a cliff. Each enemy started to feel like a miniboss who required dedicated time and tactics to beat, could kill me in one combo, had infinite stamina and FP to spam their abilities with no downtime for healing or recovery, had a healthpool that required a fight of at least a minute to beat them, and gave paltry rewards when you did.

This brought everything back to what I like to call the Miyazaki Meta; the idea that it's more sensible to run through the enemies instead of engage them, pushing for a speed-run style daisy chain of one Site of Grace to the next, purely because of how frustrating it was to dump 3+ healing potions on a standard enemy, only to have another waiting around the corner.

## The level-up mechanic is terrible

The level-up mechanic, which I saw one Redditor refer to as "doohicky levelling", a completely fair term, involves wandering and exploring the world to find one of two items that makes you more powerful. That's all. With one item, you take less damage and deal more. With the second, your summons take less damage and heal more.

There's no satisfaction to this levelling scheme. The levels you built up in the main game seem to mean nothing in comparison, and your power level in the Shadow Realm has no connection to your combat skills or any time dedicated to increasing your power. Unlikely all previous From Software titles, there are set and defined limits you can reach before facing any particular boss. As such, if you're struggling against on particular boss and you've collected all the Doohickies you can, you're pretty much screwed.

## From Software learned nothing from Elden Ring endgame

Elden Ring original endgame had such a difficulty spike that, unless you were cheesing it with a katana (and lets be fair, most players were) or using something like Comet Azur to melt enemies, you were in for a rough time. It would have been, in my opinion, the best game of all time without the arbitrary turning of all enemies into mini boss damage sponges who kill you in 3 hits.

In the DLC, From Software doubled down on this mentality, and it shows.

Addendum: Post balance patch, From misses the point.

From released a balance patch. This balance patch is... comical. It increases the power of the early "leveling doohickies" you pick up and... nothing else. They attempted to address the least problematic part of their whole design, cementing the idea that they've completely lost the plot.

Has anything been done to slow down bosses from two shotting you as soon as you enter the room? Technically, yes. Now they three-shot you as soon as you enter the room. They're still problematically aggressive, leave tiny windows (and frequently none at all) for attacking or recovery, hit you with any attacks they make regardless of where you are in relation to them, and explode in AoEs that remove half of your health pool on the rare occasions they happen to miss.

Players said "I want a fair fight, and I want to have fun. Please stop kicking me in the balls." and From Software's response was "We are providing you with a cup, and will continue to kick you in the balls."

Extremely disappointing to have waited a year and a half for this.

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Revision #1

Created 24 June 2024 08:52:47 by dnr

Updated 29 June 2024 15:45:09 by dnr