

Auto Chess is an online multi-player strategy chess mobile game researched by Drodos Studio and supported by Dragonest Game Studio. Its predecessor is Dota Auto Chess, a built-in game of DOTA 2 launched in January 2019. At that time, Drodos studio was composed of five persons, each doing several jobs simultaneously. The studio spent two years to develop the game, and the steam subscription exceeded two million within two weeks after the game was launched. Inspired by the great success of the client game, the studio decided to avoid the authorization of DOTA 2 and cooperate with Dragonest Game Studio to develop a standalone version, naming it Auto Chess. And the alpha version was launched on April 15, 2019.

According to Drodos Studio, not only DOTA but also leisure and amusement contribute to the success of the game. The game has features such as automatic battling, easy operation, high randomness, and high chances of turning defeat into victory. In a random battle, players will still have many pleasures even they don't compete with each other.

For each game, eight players are assigned to eight different chessboards. Each round, each player may get chess pieces to select and match different combinations so as to fight other players and AI (monster) and gain the victory by obtaining gold coins to purchase more chess pieces and improving one's combinations. Each chess piece has two attributes, and multiple attributes can have superposition effects. Three identical chess pieces can form a high star. The chess pieces are the key to win the game, while gold coins are the only resources for purchasing chess pieces and increasing available chess pieces. The economic system for the game is preset, and no player can intervene with the game by recharging.

Auto Chess has many gameplay elements such as strategic (public pool of cards, resource utilization), cards for collection and exchange (get cards from the pool to establish a set), competition (fair and impartial), and leisure.

The game features that all players use the same pool of cards. In this way, each player can form more and better chess pieces by using gold coins but also destroy the cards of any component. According to the developer, the game is similar to mahjong: the shared pool of cards = limited number of cards, focusing on the formation of certain system = the card for winning, 3 in 1 = finding a card for a pair.

The initial DOTA Chess is an RPG map made by DOTA 2 players. It was used for DOTA 2 players only. However, the easy operation and freedom make it an independent game. As a phenomenal mobile game, it is not confined to DOTA 2 platform but a perfect choice for players to play leisure mobile games. Distinctive DOTA 2 elements are removed from the game but western fantastic styles are reserved. As a mobile game transplanted from computers, it has some problems such as complicated interfaces and unclear labels. For example, for the functions on the main interface, the attributes of navigation and chess pieces use icons only; it is required to click them to read words, and the fonts are quite small as well.

Personally, I think Auto Chess is an excellent strategy game, but it has the following problems: Firstly, the prompt "All players share the pool of cards" is not apparent in the game. As a result,

new players cannot realize that other players may destroy his or her formation at the beginning, which is hard to guarantee that such players can be familiar with the game.

In addition, although a guidebook for beginners is provided to tell them that they shall “superimpose attributes and match the formation”, the skills of chess pieces cannot be seen when choosing cards. Some beginner may even fail to recognize the attribute icons of some chess pieces or fail to realize that they can read the details by pressing them long, meaning that they have to search for the formation and relevant data. The absence of guidance and short 30 seconds for decision making will affect the increase of potential players.

Thirdly, it usually takes players 40 minutes or more than one hour to play a game, which is not suitable for players’ leisure. The duration can be shortened by reducing the number of players to 4 or 6 from previous 8; or the game rules can be modified to lower the blood value of both sides so as to accelerate the pace of the game.

Fourthly, those players familiar with the game usually have their own preset formations, but the number of remaining cards in the public pool is irregular and they cannot figure out the cards for their formations.

Fifthly, the game has a setting of losing equipment after fighting the monster, but it’s inconvenient to form and drag the equipment. It’s unable to remove the equipment from chess pieces once such equipment is equipped. And the time for decision making is limited, players have to guess which equipment fits in a chess piece and they may know nothing about the formation route as well.

Sixthly, the daily tasks include socializing tasks such as “form a team for leisure”, but the game has the rule of one-to-one battle and it’s not required for one player to cooperate with others. Such tasks not only fail to meet the designer’s original intention for socializing but also cause inconveniences for players.

Besides, the game has no guidance for issuing gold coins. Players need to know that the gold coins have interests, continuous victories, continuous failures, and other extra acquisitions by themselves. As a result, such guidance can be added in the beginner model.