



# Hades

by Supergiant Games

Paul Long

## Overview

Founded in 2009 by Amir Rao and Gavin Simon, Supergiant Games quickly became a staple of the roguelike genre. Developing and publishing their games, Supergiant cemented their place in the industry with 'Bastion', and while they have branched out with games like 'Pyre', it has been in the dungeon-crawling roguelike genre where they have flourished, releasing 'Hades' in 2020 after two years of early access to universal acclaim.

'Hades' is set in the Greek underworld and follows the story of Zagreus as he embarks on his quest to escape the underworld, the realm of his father Hades. Travelling through four main areas filled with procedurally generated rooms of enemies and boons, Zagreus attempts to leave the underworld behind for the home of his mother Persephone, the overworld.

This game is aimed at people 18yrs+ who enjoy fast-paced action/adventure games with a compelling story in an engrossing world. It caters to all manner of gamers as progress can be saved after each room and save files are compatible between PC and Steam releases allowing for bite-sized gaming in a portable or more traditional style.

## **Rules/Geography**

### **Game State:**

Elements of Hades change depending on what the player has done. Characters will be present or not sometimes randomly, sometimes based on actions taken on the previous run. In the House of Hades, characters will be present with certain dialogue options depending on who you defeated/were beaten by/ met on the previous run.

### **Outcome Valorization:**

Completing the game earns the player new dialogue options, rewards, gameplay changes and a record of the time taken to complete it. Dying earns (often mocking) dialogue options.

### **Operational Rules:**

These rules are simple: defeat all enemies to reach the end.

### **Constitutive:**

Each enemy has health which must be reduced from max to zero

### **Implicit:**

The player cannot walk through walls or other objects and will take damage if the environment they're in is hostile (e.g., lava/acid).

Hades uses the third person perspective with a fixed map for each room, how much of which is displayed at a time is fixed and depends on the player location.

Hades has a very unique hand-drawn graphical style, combining 2D character sprites with 3D environments.

Time is inconsequential in the underworld; however, the passage of time can be seen from the changes in character relationships, interactions and the permanent upgrades unlocked.

## **Balance, Challenge**

Hades can be an incredibly challenging yet rewarding experience. Initially, the player starts with 50 health, some of which is deducted each time they are hit. You progress you collect resources allowing you to increase health and unlock new keepsakes. Keepsakes are gifted by NPCs in return for giving them gifts of nectar and ambrosia and can have a huge impact on player choice. These can be changed at the beginning of each area (Tartarus, Asphodel, Elysium and Styx).

Darkness is the main currency for progressing your character. It unlocks for well-timed upgrades allowing the player to progress smoothly. I enjoyed this aspect of the game a lot, while always challenging it always felt doable, never overwhelming. Resource collection

never felt tedious as it happened naturally and the player is given options as to which room they want to enter after completing one, each of which has a different reward.

Jesse Schell's Lens of Skill vs. Chance is particularly applicable here. A run can be made much easier depending on which boons and buffs the player is gifted/buys throughout the run, all of which are randomly generated.

## **Flow**

Hades offers a consistent and steady feeling of progression. The game consists of different worlds containing a number of short encounters followed by a boss battle. Changes in relationships based on character choices and progression also contribute to the flow of the game along with powerups purchased and weapons unlocked.

"The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses" by Jesse Schell addresses various aspects of video games, particularly what makes them engaging and enjoyable. Short, high intensity battles keep players engaged while the consistent character developments and story progression are very enjoyable.

"Flow in Video Games: Why It Happens and How to Control It" by Dmitri Williams explores how to control the flow of a game. This is accomplished in Hades by the limited interactions and resources collected during each run.

"A Theory of Fun for Game Design" by Raph Koster allows for glimpses into the satisfying combat process in Hades, providing an overall fun experience.

## **Level Design**

### **House of Hades:**

The House of Hades is the main safe area where the player converses with characters and purchases upgrades. The NPCs and dialogue options in the level change based on your previous runs.

### **Main Combat Areas:**

During the game the player passes through Tartarus, Asphodel, Elysium and Styx. Each room is randomly generated with the exception of boss battles (boss battles are sometimes changed based on a variety of factors including player choice and randomness).

After each room the player is faced with a choice of different doors that offer new rewards. Chaos pacts also appear randomly offering a boon in return for a temporary challenge increase.

Each area has a different array of enemies and environmental hazards (e.g., lava, traps, area of effect attacks etc.) as well as following a consistent area theme.

Rooms also have the potential to spawn chests offering extra reward for another challenge, Thanatos can randomly appear to do the same. Chiron can spawn in a room offering different items to purchase with coin from that run for helping ease the run.

At the beginning of each area a room spawns where the player can buy/sell items, receive free health and change the active keepsake.

### **Final Area:**

This area is a key part of the story and a reward for the player beating the game.

## **MDA Breakdown**

### **Mechanics:**

#### **Combat**

Attacks are incredibly varied. There are six options of weapons offering unique attacks. For example, the sword offers a slash and a slam attack, the spear offers a jab and a throw, the gun offers automatic fire with a bomb special with the drawback of reloading. The cast mechanic is another ranged attack independent of weapon choice and gets stuck in an enemy for a certain time on impact.

Dash allows the player to avoid attacks and cross hazardous areas without taking damage when used properly.

Boons can upgrade every form of combat mechanic.

#### **Exploration**

The player navigates from room to room within the areas, interacting with objects/characters (chests, traps etc.) all while collecting resources used on the run and for more permanent upgrades and character development.

#### **Upgrades**

The Mirror of Night offers permanent character upgrades in return for Darkness collected on runs.

Weapons are also unlocked over time based on the number of runs completed as well as new weapons Aspects in return for Titan Blood (earned for defeating bosses with the weapon for the first time or on higher heat runs).

## **Dynamics:**

### **Skill Development**

As the player becomes more proficient in combat and navigation, they can progress further in the story. The wide range of weapons and boons keep this combat fresh and exciting.

### **Adapting**

The game difficulty shifts through changes in biome, options to choose harder rooms for better rewards, and adding the 'Heat' element to a run after beating the game allowing for a significant challenge increase.

Players must adapt to these challenges by experimenting with boons, keepsakes, and Mirror of Night upgrades to find a playstyle that suits them.

### **Decision Making**

The player must tactically choose boons and abilities which compliment each other or a run is significantly more difficult.

Choices regarding rooms and chests must also be taken into account. Chests offer great rewards but can be detrimental to a run overall. The same can be said of harder room choices however the rewards gleamed from these rooms can be significantly better than they otherwise would be.

## **Aesthetics:**

### **Accomplishment**

The room/biome system creates a fantastic incremental sense of accomplishment keeping the player engaged. The player doesn't need to beat the game to feel a sense of accomplishment after a run, they could beat a new boss, develop a relationship with a character, or just collect more resources to feel they accomplished something on the run.

### **Immersion**

Players are immediately immersed in the world of Greek mythology, surrounded by iconic characters shown in new lights or from different perspectives. The games' art design, soundtrack and comprehensive narrative contribute heavily to this.

## **Narrative**

Hades explores the themes of family, identity, and rebellion. Zagreus is first shown as an arrogant teen defying his father attempting to carve a path to a new life. However, as the player interacts with more NPCs you begin to see Zagreus as a much more rounded

character showing compassion for all and attempting to deepen relationships and connections.

Further in the story, Zagreus' true motivations for attempting his escape are revealed. Not only that, but in true roguelike fashion, Zagreus makes discoveries at the traditional end of the game to motivate him event further to escape again and again.

As well as Zagreus, most other characters are rounded and developed. Hades is a primary example. For a long time, he seems quite one-dimensional in his distain for Zagreus and his escape attempts, however as you progress his motivations are revealed and character is developed through further interaction.

The novel "Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media" by Marie-Laure Ryan discusses non-linear storytelling which is particularly relevant here as the story is told through snippets of character interaction and updated codex and diary entries following progress.

## **References**

"A Theory of Fun for Game Design" by Raph Koster

"Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media" by Marie-Laure Ryan

"The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses" by Jesse Schell

"Flow in Video Games: Why It Happens and How to Control It" by Dmitri Williams