



Supergiant's Hades Might Well Be King of the Underworld

By **Samuel Horti** on 07 Jan 2019 at 12:04PM

“Well, time to go get killed again” might not be the most obviously inspiring start to any dungeon run. But for Zagreus, the hero of Supergiant Games’ new roguelike *Hades*, death is progress.

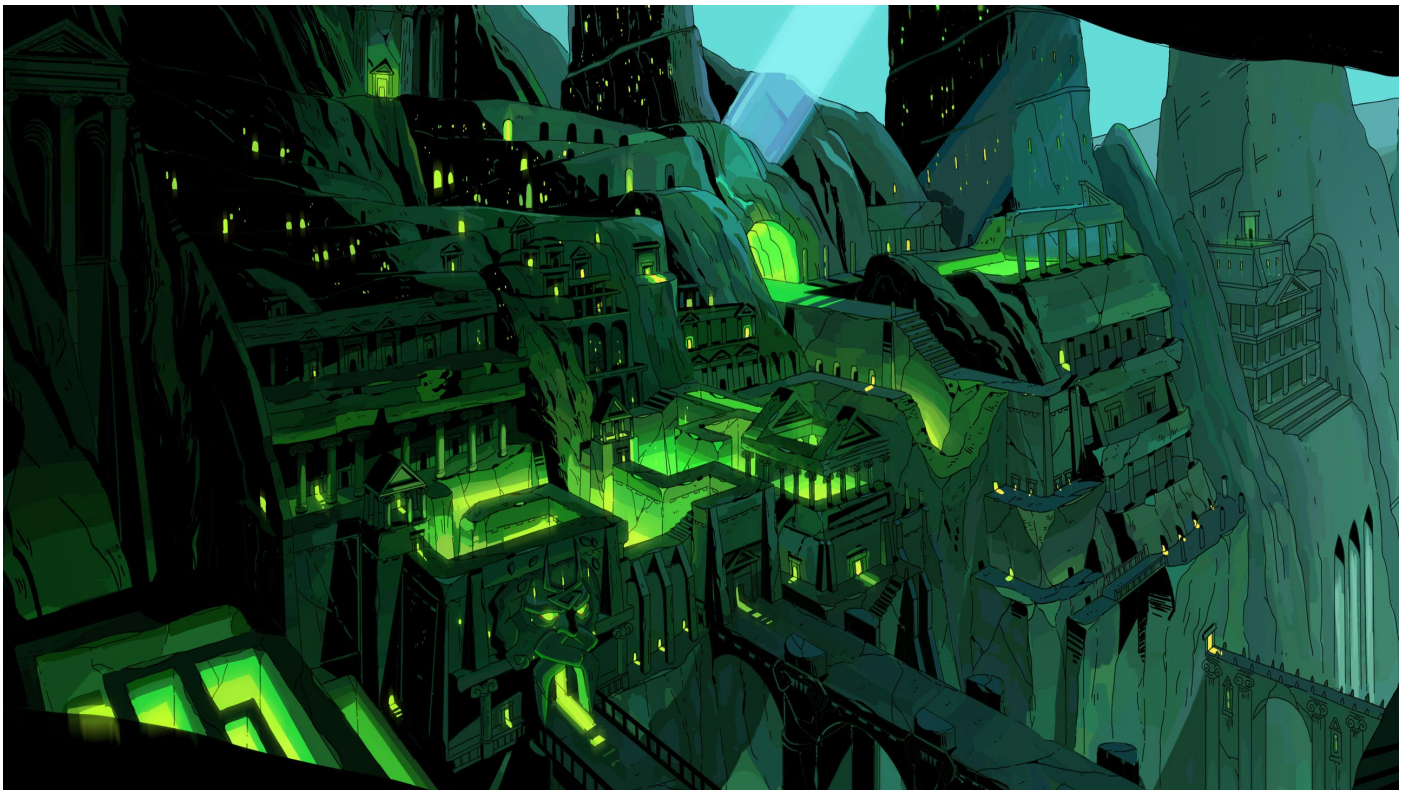
Every time a demon clobbers him, Zagreus returns home with purple gems to spend on skill upgrades, keys to unlock weapons, ambrosia to gift to his mentor Achilles, and divine trinkets that boost his abilities in the next run. You stare into a magic mirror to build your strength, pick up a new spear, and venture into another randomised series of dungeon rooms, better equipped than before. Once you’re in that loop, you don’t want to leave it.





A full run of what is currently an early access build (**exclusive to the Epic Store**) consists of 27 rooms of varying layouts and enemy types. One might be full of spike traps, energy beam turrets, and pink spirits with hefty clubs, the next will house rows of pillars and a pair of mini-bosses that run around throwing bombs. Events between rooms are randomised, too – after you’ve cleared one you might be offered a time trial that rewards quickly killing waves of enemies, or visit a shop where you can spend gold on damage buffs and healing items.

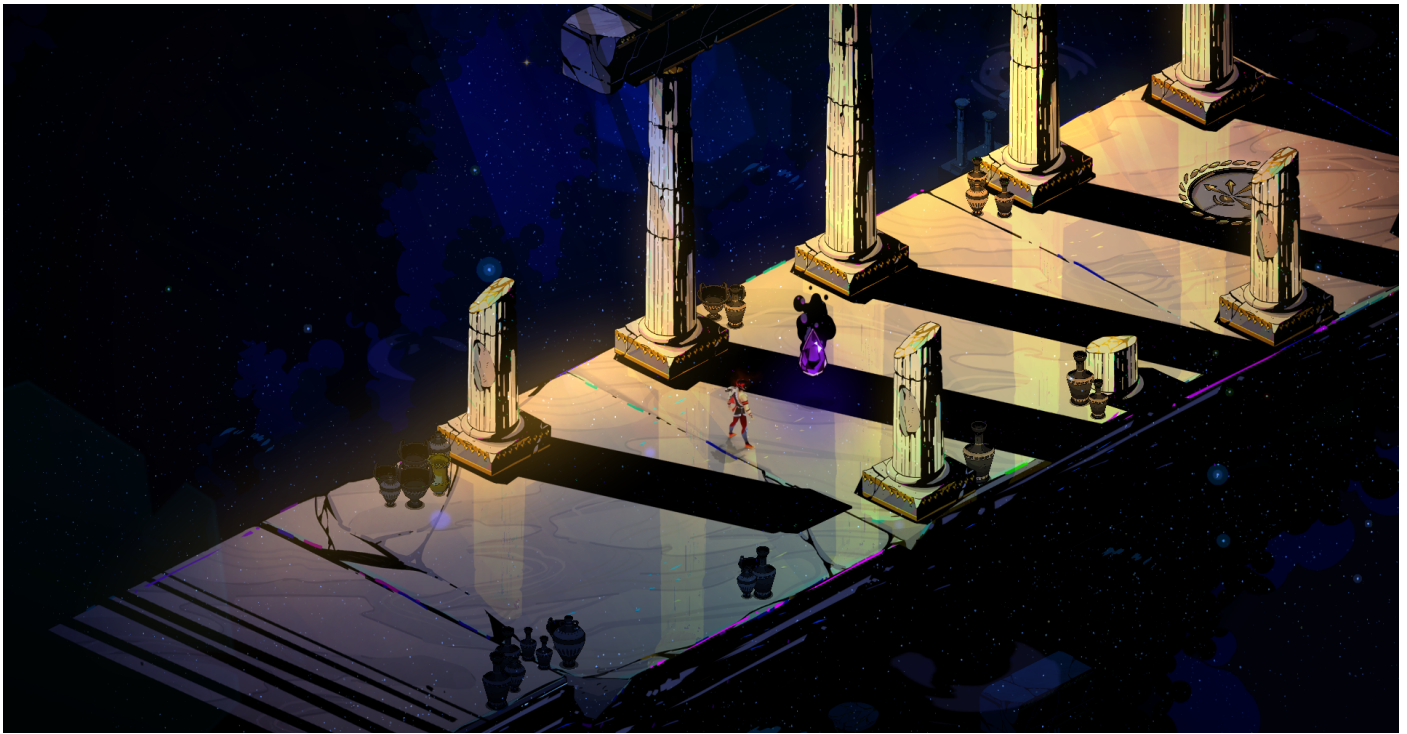
Zagreus’s attacks come with flashy special effects that lend them real weight. Once you’ve upgraded his equipment and skills – primary weapon, special ability, dash and a projectile ‘cast’ – you can rip through a room dodging enemies, firing lightning bolts, and deflecting blows. He soon begins to feel like the god he is.



The crunchy combat means I’d recommend it even if it was just an action game. But it’s the story, told with the flourishes you’d expect from the team behind *Bastion*, *Transistor* and *Pyre*, that has me most intrigued as to how this game and world will develop. Zagreus is tired of lingering with the dead and longs for Olympus, where the other gods (Zeus, Athena, Aphrodite, etc) hang out. But his father, Hades, doesn’t want him to leave, and calls on the creatures of the underworld to block his path.

Crumbs of story are served between deaths. Every time you return home, all the characters have something new to say: Achilles offers words of encouragement, your father mocks, and Hypnos, the embodiment of sleep, comments on whichever enemy last killed you. Zagreus breaks the fourth wall by listening to the narrator, which leads to some funny interplay. Early on, the narrator accidentally spills a secret about Zagreus’s mother. He tries to cover it up, but it’s too late. “Way to spoil the surprise, old man,” says the tongue-in-cheek Zagreus. This is no simple retread of a few classic myths.





The dialogue rarely tells you anything significant, but fleshes out Zagreus's past and occasionally hints at something bigger to come. A character might mention a locked room in the house and then, a few deaths later, that room will be open. Next time you return, you'll watch a cutscene that sheds light on the family's relationships with the gods on Olympus. It hasn't given away much about the big-picture plot, but the glimpses make me want to find out more, and I still talk to every character when I die, just in case they're ready to reveal something important.

Between deaths, when not talking to NPCs you'll be levelling up Zagreus. During each run you collect purple gems called Darkness, which can be spent on attributes – one gives you a chance to recover a portion of any damage you take by counter-attacking straight after, while another will increase the number of dashes you string together.

You start with a sword but later unlock a bow, a spear, and a shield. Each changes how you approach the next run: the bow is slow-firing but, if you release your arrow with the correct timing, deals lots of damage. The spear's primary attack is weak, but the fact you can throw it at faraway enemies with your special ability makes it versatile.

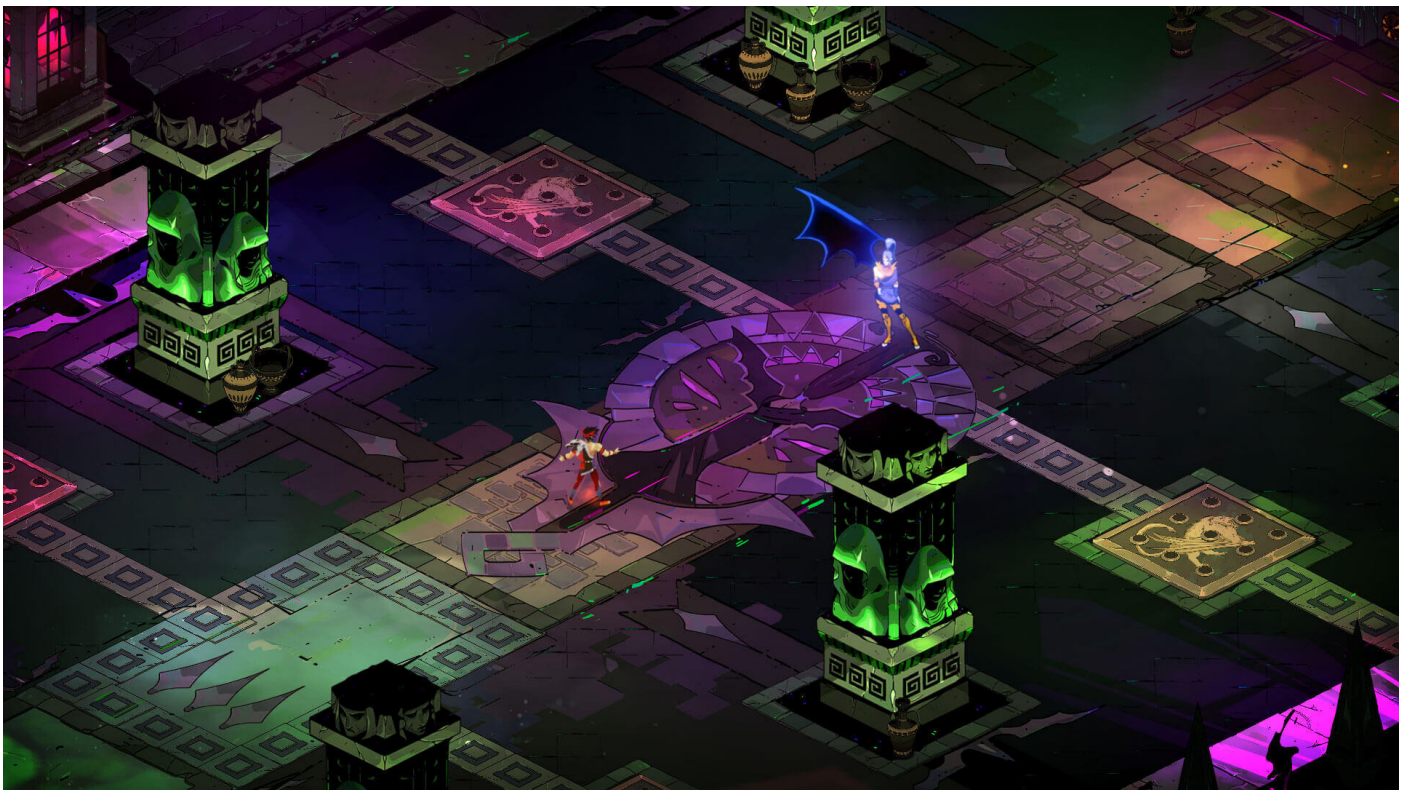




Customisation extends into your run, too. Clearing each room nets you a reward, and these slowly combine to shape your build. Rewards include 'boons', which are gifts from the gods that will improve an ability. One of Zeus's boons will deal lightning damage at the beginning and end of your dash, whereas one of Athena's will add 'reflect' to your primary attack.

You can receive multiple boons from the gods or, with the right rewards, enhance existing boons. In one of my favourite runs I grabbed Zeus's lightning dash and powered it up at every opportunity. By the end the dash was my main damage dealer, and I just zipped around zapping everything surrounding me.

The character build element to this is that, before each room, you're told which reward lies ahead, and most of the time can pick between multiple rooms. So you can ignore boons from the gods and prioritise rewards that increase your HP, or concentrate on powerful weapon upgrades that push a specific playstyle: one memorable run included a bow upgrade that made it deal 2x damage, but only at very long range, which basically made me a sniper.



Your choices before a run combo with abilities you pick up during it. The above example involving Zeus's lightning boost worked well because I'd already spend Darkness on upgrading my dash. You can refund all Darkness between runs, and I keep finding new items and boons that make me want to change the way I set Zagreus up for my next attempt. These layers of customisation mean that *Hades* still feels fresh more than 50 runs in.

As with any early access game, *Hades* has flaws. The right-click 'cast' ability, which fires a lone red projectile at an enemy, is boring as it stands, and not interesting enough as a basic ability. It's the same at the start of every run and, after you fire it, it stays on an enemy's body until you kill them, at which point you can pick it up again.

You only carry one by default, which isn't enough for it to feel useful. Pairing it with a boon will change what it does, transforming it into a homing blast, for example, but that requires you to forgo boosts to your other, more

reliable weapons. You can also spend Darkness back at base to start with more casts but, again, that means not investing in your other abilities. During early access I'd hope to see the casting idea expanded, perhaps with new casts that can be swapped between runs, which would sync with how the weapons and abilities are structured and lengthen the list of cool item combos.



Most enemies are fun to fight, including the two bosses at set points, and all have unique behaviours. Some still need a bit of work, like the small burial urns that move around dropping proximity mines, which could potentially be a threat but for some reason usually hide in the corner (and are easily picked off with a ranged attack).

But these wrinkles aside, the difficulty feels well-judged. *Hades* is tough, and anecdotally players are taking between 25 and 50 runs to beat the two bosses. That might sound a lot, but your ability to switch loadouts and level up between runs means death is rarely frustrating, and the next go will always feel different. You're forever pushing forward, each failure making you stronger, and in that way it even makes determination as big a part of your success as skill.

Thanks to a constant stream of new dialogue, *Hades*' story carries that same momentum. Developer Supergiant says it will work for the next two years adding new items, enemies and, most importantly for me, fleshing out Zagreus's story. But even going on this early build of the game, *Hades* has the potential to be the best thing this studio has done.

Tags: [hot](#) [pc](#) [kotaku uk](#) [games](#)



Samuel Horti

You May Like

Sponsored Links

If you like to play, this game is a must-have

Taonga: the tropical farm

If Your Dog Licks Its Paws (Do This Every Day)

Dr. Marty

QUIZ: Are You a True DIY Electrician?

QuizGriz

In the Resident Evil 2 Remake, Leon's Backstory Has Been Cleaned Up

Starlink's First Big Update Adds a Lot of Boring Stuff

27 Perfectly Timed Sports Moments

Parentz Talk

by Taboola

0
SHARES



2
COMMENTS [VIEW & COMMENT](#) ▼

JOIN THE DISCUSSION

2 Comments

Kotaku UK

1 Login ▼

Recommend

Tweet

Share

Sort by Best ▼



Join the discussion...

LOG IN WITH



OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS (?)

Name



Baldrick86 • 2 days ago



My favourite developer in my favourite genre. Waiting for the console port will be difficult.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Mike Langlois • 3 days ago

So basically an incremental game with a story? Count me in.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

[Subscribe](#) [Add Disqus to your site](#)[Add Disqus](#)[Add](#) [Disqus' Privacy Policy](#)[Privacy Policy](#)[Privacy Policy](#)[Privacy Policy](#)

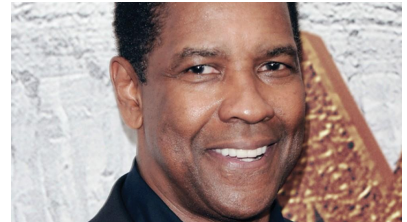
DISQUS

Sponsored

TIMELESS TOP BEATS

Sad News For Denzel Washington

[Learn More](#)



[Read More](#)

[Report ad](#)

KOTAKU | UK



POPULAR TAGS

[UK Stories](#) | [News](#) | [In Depth](#) | [Humour](#) | [Xbox](#) | [PlayStation](#) | [Nintendo](#) | [PC](#)
[Just Games](#) | [Kotaku East](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Virtual Reality](#) | [Japan](#) | [Mobile Gaming](#)
[Indie](#) | [Weird](#) | [Reviews](#) | [E3](#) | [Artwork](#) | [Watch This](#) | [Want](#)

GET IN TOUCH

[Contact us](#)

[Send us a tip](#)

[About us](#)

INTERNATIONAL [Kotaku US](#) | [Kotaku Japan](#) | [Kotaku Australia](#) | [Kotaku Brazil](#)

OUR NETWORK [Gizmodo UK](#) | [Lifehacker UK](#) | [GamesRadar+](#)