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Hades: From Game to Manga

Hades is a 2020 game created by the indie studio Supergiant Games that was incredibly well received by both players and game critics. The narrative follows Zagreus, the son of Hades, who repeatedly attempts to escape from the Underworld after discovering that his birth mother Persephone is in the mortal realm. The game is split into two sections: combat, and character interactions and story development. The former entails battling through the Underworld using a variety of weapons, upgrades, and abilities. Each “run” culminates in a battle against Hades, after which Zagreus is free to visit the outside world. At the end of each run, either through death or returning from the overworld, Zagreus returns to the House of Hades and begins the process again. Most of the character interactions take place in the House between these runs, as characters comment on Zagreus’ progress and their own subplots; and they have a lot to say; even after my 100 hours playing the game, there has been no repeated dialogue. This provides a lot of great source material for its manga adaptation, which, for the most part, captures the essence of the original game in its new medium.

Aside from the art style, the characters are nearly exactly the same as in the original. Their designs were referenced from the game’s art, and since this is an illustrated medium, they are easy to recreate exactly. While the art style itself is different, the detail of the game’s art is upheld for the most part. Furthermore, their dialogue is taken directly from the game. In this sense, the characters are virtually unchanged and are faithful to the original source material. For readers who have played the game, they are easy recognizable, and they represent the originals well for new readers. Because the characters and scenarios are taken directly from the game, this

manga retains the general tone and aesthetics of the game and well reflects its core components in terms of a narrative experience.

Additionally, this adaptation does a good job of providing context for readers that are unfamiliar with the game. The original game throws you into the world with little exposition, and the player is left to discover its lore and characters as they play. However, given the short length of the manga, there is not enough content to allow the reader to take their time, and some context must be given to account for this. The small, introductory descriptions throughout the manga, for example, help us get a better grasp of the characters; even though this does not really exist in the original game, it is certainly necessary in order to better understand this short narrative. The manga also makes use of the game's narrator. Their original role was usually to describe different settings and help provide some exposition, especially in the flashback scene. They are used similarly in the adaptation; their narration in the flashback scene is used verbatim, and they help to describe events that otherwise would not make sense in a purely visual medium. The only part that is left without context is the ending, which depicts of Zagreus' experiences in the underworld. This is mostly left as a bonus for readers who have played the game, since it references mechanics and events that would take too long to explain for the very little significance it has in the manga as a whole. Overall, the manga is sufficiently accessible to those who have no prior experience with the game.

The main downfall of this manga adaptation is simply the overwhelming amount of content in the source material, as well as the ordering of that content. What this manga can cover is only a slice of the game experience and focuses heavily on character interactions rather than combat; since combat is such a huge component of the original game and is often what attracts people to the game in the first place, it should have a greater role in this adaptation. The

complexities and unique mechanics of combat are not explained or depicted at all, except for a small reference at the end to the “boon” system, which gives the player different abilities. However, without previous knowledge of the game, this would likely be lost on the reader. This adaptation would thus better represent the game if it included more emphasis on combat elements. Moreover, the character interactions themselves are fairly limited; we only get a glimpse at who most of these characters are, let alone the many other minor characters that are beloved in the game but not included in the manga. With its short length, it would be difficult to provide a full scope of how character interactions happen in the game, and there is no sense of what a larger character development arc would look like. Nevertheless, it still captures the charm of the game’s characters, even though we only get short dialogue from each.

This manga also does not, and perhaps cannot, provide the “customized” experience of the game. Depending on how an individual player performs in combat, the types and timing of scenarios, conversations, and battles may change. However, manga is a static medium; the author decides when and how the reader will experience certain scenes. In this adaptation, the order does make sense, and is certainly a possible set of events that might occur in the game. Still, it is unable to capture the sense of an “individual experience”. That said, that kind of experience might be less important in a manga form, where the main emphasis is on a narrative. Since the player does not need “skill” to interact with manga, there’s no real reason the content needs to be adjusted for an individual. While this adaptation does lose a quality that improves the original game, it still succeeds in achieving its primary goal, which is depicting a narrative.

As a whole, this manga achieves its goal in providing an introduction to the world, gameplay, and narrative of *Hades*. There are certainly places to improve, such as better representing the balance of combat and narrative and making sure that everything is legible

without any previous experience with the game, and there are some limitations of the manga medium itself. Still, it captures the overall spirit of the game and its characters through a small slice of the game's events. Given such a huge and non-linear game, this manga does an effective job of translating the narrative and gameplay into a short-form, non-interactive medium.