SUPERGIANT
★ GAMES

About *Hades*

- Our fourth game
- A rogue-like whose story advances each time you die
- Designed for Early Access from the ground up
- Our first adaptation (as opposed to original IP)
- Intended to combine best aspects of our past games
- Launched in Early Access after a little over a year
- Development duration: >3 years (starting September 2017)
- Team size: approx. 20 people (growing from 12 on *Pyre*)
- Our biggest success in every measurable way
- Our **first fully-voiced game** with a big cast

VOICEOVER IN HADES

MOST VOICE LINES

ZAGREUS (8500)

HADES (1600)

TOTAL VOICE LINES
21,020

FEWEST VOICE LINES

TISIPHONE (190)

CHARON (120)

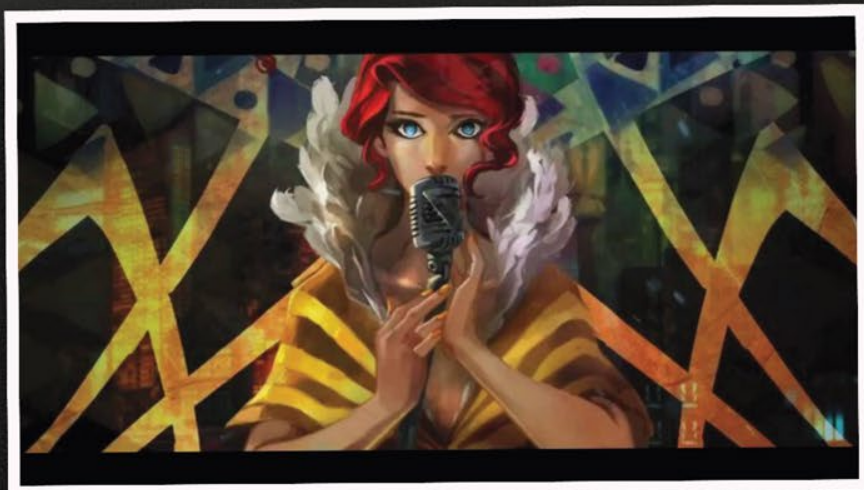### FULLY VOICED CHARACTERS
30

TOTAL WORD COUNT
305,433

HYPNOS RESPONSES TO UNIQUE DEATHS
75

BASTION
Slinger's Song

★ The Power of Voice

🔊 **Bastion** (2011) - one principal actor, Logan Cunningham, as the Narrator *(plus a guest voice for a key moment)*

🔊 **Transistor** (2014) -- one principal actor, plus two supporting actors in brief, key roles

🔊 **Pyre** (2017) -- one principal actor plus big ensemble cast speaking a 'gibberish' language to accompany a text-based story

Having pitched camp, the other exiles take a moment to unwind. Jodariel motions for you to join them.

★ Why Go 'Fully Voiced' on *Hades* ?

- Going 'fully voiced' invited many new production costs and challenges, but...

- **'Fully voiced' really helps make characters feel alive** despite limited presentation

- We suspected a strong narrative would mitigate frustration in a rogue-like

- A voiced protagonist can strongly align with the player experience

- Voiceover is a powerful tool for creating specific tone and atmosphere

- We wanted a cohesive tone with a wide range, from serious to silly

- We wanted each character to occupy a unique spot on the tonal range

Big Questions About Going 'Fully Voiced'

Non-Silent Protagonist: Risk of dissonance. How to reconcile the character's point-of-view and personality with the player?

Tone & Accent: How should the gods, ghosts, and monsters of Greek myth sound? What languages do they speak, in what accents?

Big Cast: How many characters do we need, and how do we find a bigger pool of actors who can play them? Not everyone is a BAFTA-winning actor...

Content Volume: How many voice lines do you really need to tell a story with no game-over state that can be played forever?

Production: What's our budget and localization plan? *(We won't get into this here...)*

"Now [I came] to bid farewell to Zagreus and to his sire, the hospitaler."

\-   *Aeschylus, Fragment 124*

★ Creating Zagreus

- Rooted in classical mythology, with the pros and cons of being virtually unknown
- Our first-ever 'power-fantasy' character; a 'bad-boy anti-hero' in appearance
- We wanted to subvert the trope
  - He is defiant but polite
  - He looks edgy but he is kind
  - He is physically strong but emotionally vulnerable
- We wanted to deeply understand his relationship with his father
- We needed to find his voice

Name	Story Role / Narrative Function	Summary	Race	Gender	Age	Visual Cues / Details	Sample Dialogue	Tonality Stack-Rank	Tone Reference	Expressions
MAIN CHARACTERS										
Zagreus	- Protagonist - Power-fantasy character with relatable problems	Story protagonist. Rebellious prince of darkness, grown weary of his gloomy life, following his impulse to leave the Underworld behind and find his mother (and his mortal roots).	Demigod (Chthonic / Olympian / human)	M	22	Young 'god of blood and fire'; youthful, quick-witted, and self-assured; burning laurels indicate infernal royalty.	*"Greetings, Father. My ransacking was a delight, thank you for asking. So, I'll just be on my way, again."*	1. cool 2. badass / metal 3. hot		1. Default 2. Serious 3. Scowling 4. Averted

CHARACTER: Zagreus, Son of Hades

SEX: Male   **AGE:** 22

ACTING STYLE: Flavorful fantasy saga, a la *Thor* or *Lord of the Rings*

DESCRIPTION: The anti-hero protagonist of the game; bastard son of the God of Death, he's reached a breaking point in his relationship with his overbearing father and gloom-filled life.

DEMEANOR: Sardonic, defiant, rebellious, at times brooding; always expecting the worst, yet there's a glimmer of hope in him.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND: Zagreus, in many ways, is not so different from other children growing up in broken homes. But, the ways in which he's different are significant. For one thing, he was born and raised in the well-appointed and opulent House of Hades, with the God of Death himself for a father and a mentor. For another thing, he's immortal. But, being one-quarter human means he can experience human pain, even an inkling of the agony of death, although not even the agony of death is enough to take him far enough far enough away from house and home. One dark day, Zagreus learns something of the circumstances of how his father met (and abducted) his half-mortal mother, and this becomes a breaking point. He severs ties with his father, and sets out to fight his way to the surface of Earth, where perhaps he can reconnect with his other half. His is a seemingly impossible task; he is slain repeatedly along the way, yet is deathless, like his father. Soon, some of the other gods take notice of his plight, and begin to lend him their support…

RELATIONSHIP TO PLAYER: The player assumes direct control over this character, while fighting through the Greek Underworld toward its surface, and while inevitably failing in these attempts and winding up back at home (grown stronger, though, for the next outing).

FLAWS: Somewhat naïve to the ways of the world; limited social contact with others, so a bit prone to talking to himself, instead; young and impetuous, somewhat careless and nihilistic. His relationship with his father is broken perhaps beyond repair. He feels lied to and imprisoned.

SPEECH PATTERN: Well-spoken, somewhat soft-spoken, quick, breezy, prone to talking under-his-breath. Often terse. Dry and sardonic, modulating slightly when he's amused, typically by his own predicament.
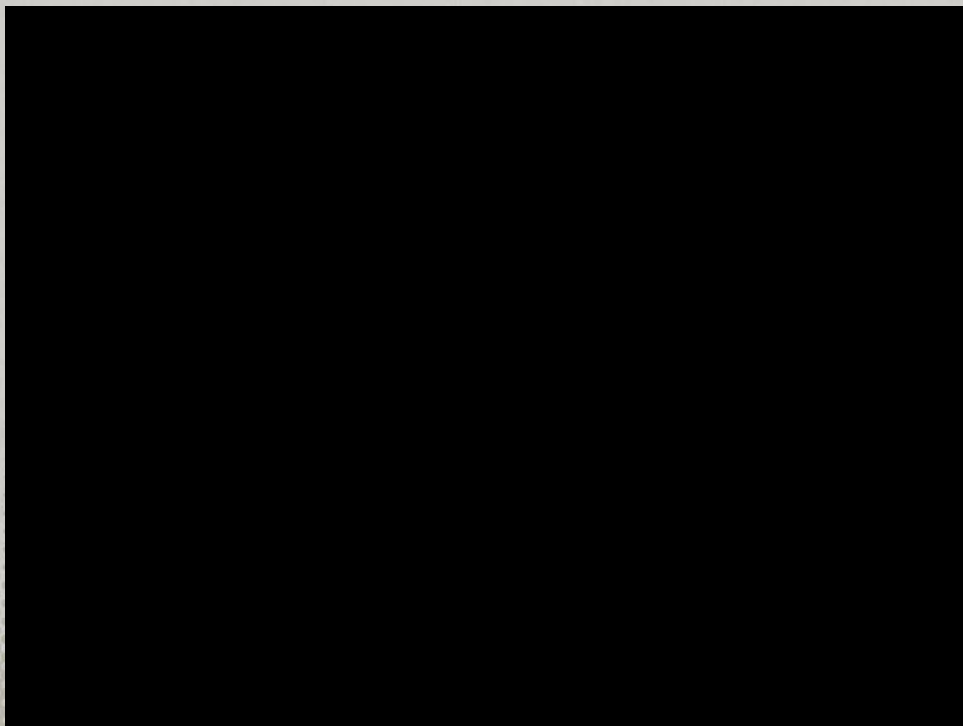
ACCENT: British accent preferred if it feels natural (specifically, the 'historic Western fantasy' accent a la Lord of the Rings, Rome, Thor, Game of Thrones, and others).

VOICE REFERENCE: [Tom Hiddleston as Loki in *Thor*](#)
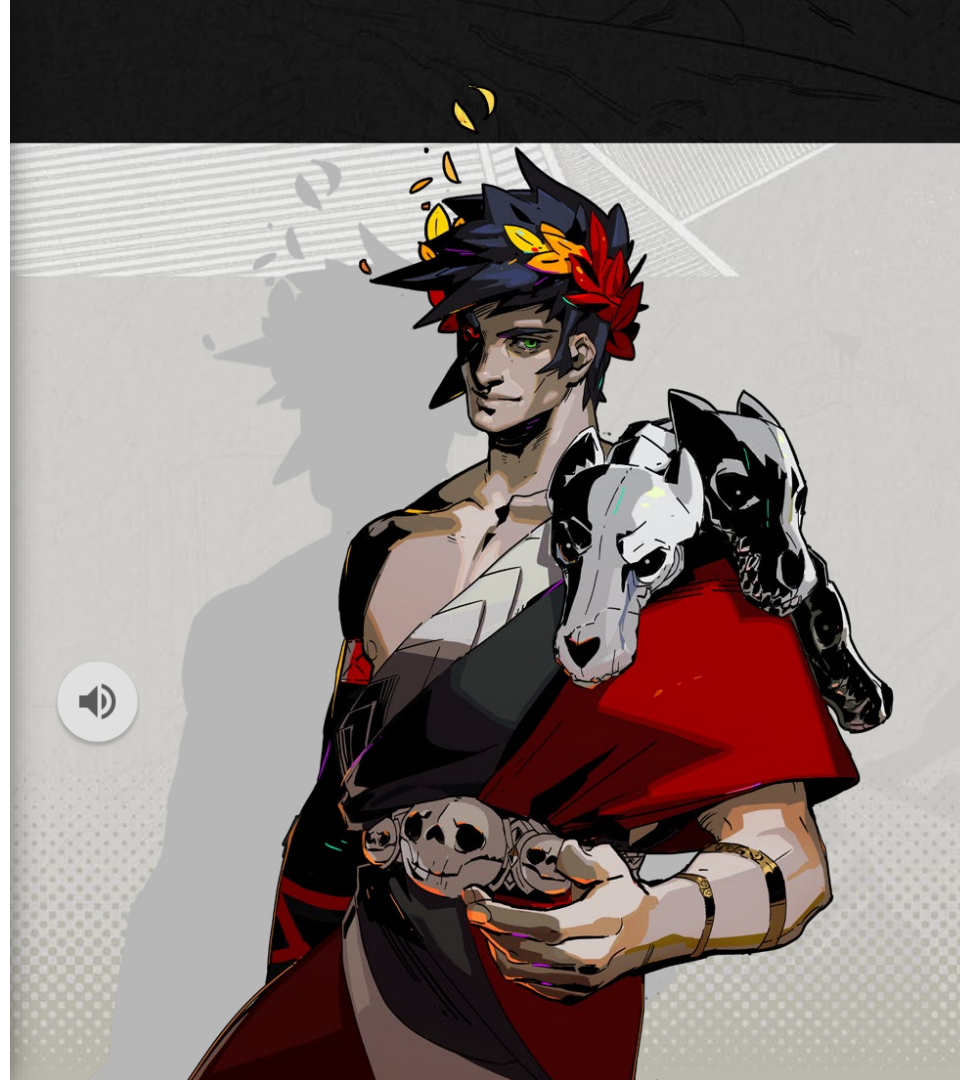
★ Putting It All Together

★ Identifying the Supporting Cast

- Identify 'must-haves' inherent to the concept
  - *The Olympians are expected and must be delivered on; we will need most but not all*
  - *The Underworld setting implies characters such as Cerberus, Charon, and Sisyphus*
  - *Each character should be distinct in their tone, personality, and relationships*

- Consider what else can add to the specificity of the setting and support tonal goals
  - *The House of Hades is like a place of business; who works there, doing what?*
  - *Zagreus is a prince with a bad relationship with his father; who raised him?*
  - *Zagreus is an attractive young man; has he been involved with anyone?*

- Identify tonal gaps
  - *The character of Hades creates an oppressive vibe; how to undercut that?*

- Consider how many characters are welcome & needed

- Consider production reality and constraints *(how much can you really do?)*

★ Assembling the Full Cast of 30

- Our early prototypes included Zagreus, Hades, Cerberus, Achilles, Nyx, Hypnos, Dusa, Skelly, and the Storyteller
- We quickly added Olympians: Athena, Zeus, Poseidon, Artemis, Ares, and Aphrodite
- Olympians inspired by 'awkward Thanksgiving dinner with extended family' archetypes
- These early characters all felt 'good enough' in early tests that they all stuck!
- We introduced the remaining characters throughout Early Access
- Some were not originally planned and grew out of Early Access (e.g. Alecto, Patroclus)
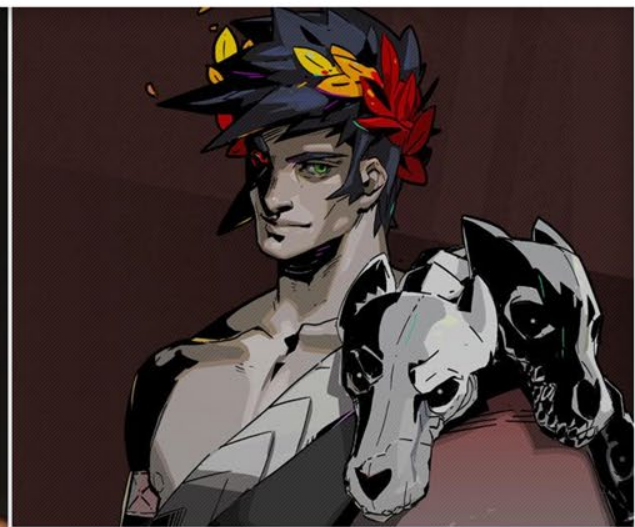
⭐ Getting Auditions

- **Actor outreach:**
  - ○ Recommendations from anyone we trusted
  - ○ Scouring #voiceacting on Twitter & other sources online
 - ○ Cold-emailing actors who seemed promising

- **Evaluation criteria:**
  - ○ Unique characterization, relative to our existing cast?
  - ○ Believable/natural delivery
  - ○ Accent believability
  - ○ Understanding of the text
  - ○ Does it meet/exceed our expectations for the character?

Example: Megaera, the Fury

- The game's first boss was a big opportunity to tie a lot of things together (rogue-like with narrative continuity)
- High-scope character; one of the only non-optional characters and she appears in multiple contexts
- Characterization should evolve over the course of the game
- Player's own relationship to her should evolve over the course of the game
- We didn't have an actress in our network who felt right for the part
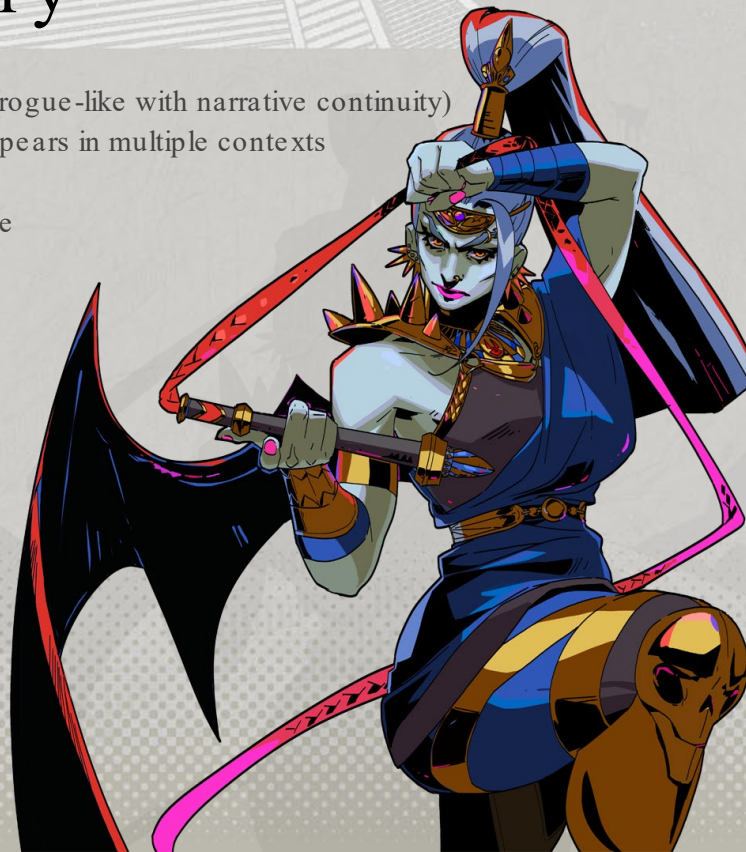
CHARACTER: Megaera the Fury

SEX: Female   **AGE:** 32 (in appearance)

DESCRIPTION: Underworld torturer-demon. Dark dominatrix type, brutal and hard-living. Takes her job seriously.

CHARACTERIZATION: Intimidating, domineering, no-nonsense, cold. Essentially the chief warden in a maximum security prison.

RELATIONSHIP TO PLAYER: An antagonist standing in the player's way; but also a rival, and someone with a long-dormant intimate connection to the player character.

(tone reference only)

FLAWS: She mistakes her commitment to her work for a moral code, and is filled with internal turmoil.

SPEECH PATTERN: Tense, husky, through clenched teeth. Enunciated. Flat, showing little emotion.

ACCENT: Unaccented / 'American'.

VOICE REFERENCE: Charlize Theron (Imperator Furiosa) from *Mad Max: Fury Road*

SAMPLE SPEECH:
"Your Father sent me. All in all, I'd rather be on your bad side than his. You can turn back like a good little man, or I can send you home the painful way. What'll it be?"
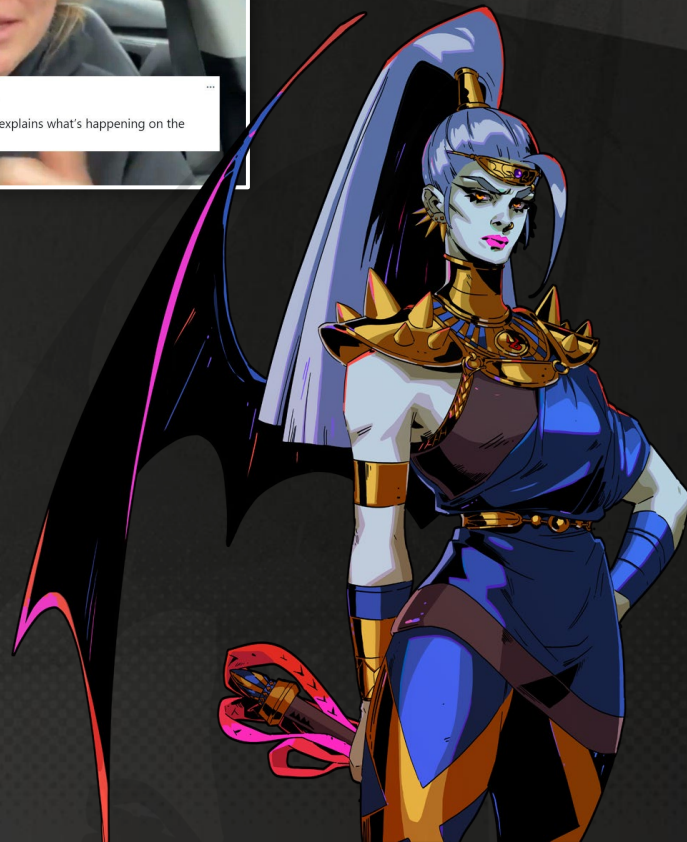
"Ever stubborn, aren't you. Perhaps my whip might make you reconsider whatever it is that you're attempting here."

"Perhaps persistence will pay off for both of us. Come, then!!"

"Tsch. The prodigal son returns.... Everyone's saying I went easy on you."

"Look, I've a reputation to uphold. You get past me again like that, you best go all the way. Now, leave me be, and don't think you'll be so lucky next we meet out there."

"That's what you get."

Avalon Penrose
@avalonpenrose

a normal person explains what's happening on the stock market:

Casting Process

- Create casting sides
  - A great tool to quickly align on a character even before casting
  - Sometimes we have character art, other times we don't
- Can we cast this character internally?
  - Casting Hades, Storyteller, Achilles, and Poseidon (EASY!)
  - Casting Zagreus (not as easy; unexpected)
  - Hypnos and Orpheus (and Cerberus!) were also internal
- Get reads from our network of actors
- Reach out to actors outside our pool where needed
- Evaluate auditions; test our favorites in-game & gather feedback
- Vet the casting choices with a larger group
- We cast a part! Schedule the first recording and go from there

★ Writing Process

- Game structure and goals around reactivity created no shortage of content ideas

- Regular recording deadlines provided useful motivation and constraints

- Early Access development provided a useful framework of incremental updates

- Writing done primarily in Google Sheets or directly into game data via Sublime Text

- Wrote tons of variations for 'barks' w/ specific context

- Outlined the story early, keeping it high-level

★ Writing Process, Cont.

| Thanatos	ID	Context	Sentiment/Notes	Reference Line (Comes First)	Line	Notes by GK
Integrated	Thanatos_0186				You.	
Integrated	Thanatos_0187				It's you.	
Integrated	Thanatos_0188		Dry acknowledgement		Well, well.	
Integrated	Thanatos_0189	**On Approach -** Relationship Improved	Like above, but less standoffish		You all right?	
Integrated	Thanatos_0190				You OK?	
Integrated	Thanatos_0191		Empathetic; he knows you died.		Sorry, Zag.	
Integrated	Thanatos_0192		Sardonic.		Welcome home.	
Integrated	Thanatos_0193				Hey Zag.	
Integrated	Thanatos_0194				Hey.	
Integrated	Thanatos_0195	**First Appearance Conversation**	Generally here, Thanatos feels like he's having to bail his flunky friend (Zagreus) out of a bind. He's frustrated, and caught between his duty and his feelings.		You left, without so much as telling me goodbye. I suppose you knew I'd catch up with you sooner or later, is that it? No escaping death, and all?	
Integrated	Thanatos_0196	follows previous	Feeling the sting of his friend bailing on him.	Zag: 'I left when I had to. I have to do this, Than.'	That's more motivation than I've ever heard from you. Well, if you won't say it, I'll say it. Goodbye, Zagreus.	
Integrated	Thanatos_0197	**Field Conversation 01**			I've got to hand it to you, Zag. You're easy to track down. The shades of Tartarus are beginning to fear you even more than your Lord Father.	
Integrated	Thanatos_0198	follows previous		Zag: 'Oh they won't fear me once they get to know me.'	I'm not so sure about that. Even I'm beginning to fear you, I think. Seems I don't know you as well as I thought.	
Integrated	Thanatos_0199	**Field Conversation 02**			What's with the look? You had your hands full, now you don't thanks to me... Tsch, seems I'm left to thanking myself, since you're too proud to do it.	
Integrated	Thanatos_0200	**Field Conversation 03**	Insinuated mockery.		You seemed a little winded, there, no? Not even close to the surface, yet, either.	**condition: low health, biome depth**
Integrated	Thanatos_0201	follows previous		Zag: 'Thanks for the vote of confidence there, Than.'	You're very welcome. Now, I'd better get back, before Lord Hades catches on to this.	
					Listen to me. I don't know how else to put this, but, I want you to come home.	

★ Recording

- Recording the actor
  - Two or more takes, pre-slate, pick the winner
- Editing the "selects" and numbering them
  - Brad to the rescue!

Processing & Rendering

- Creating the sounds for each character through processing
  - Chaos example (video)
  - Render ("bounce") takes all at once with baked in processing
- Audio files are checked into the depot for integration
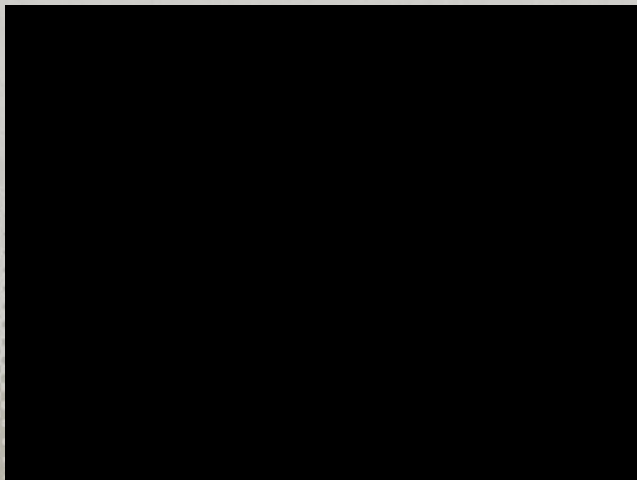
⭐ Technical Considerations

- Naming conventions
  - Thousands of files to organize!
  - Optimized for searchability
  - "Name_0002" We knew we needed a thousands place…
  - Can't have over 10k lines in a single spreadsheet
- File Management
  - One big giant VO folder for .WAV files
  - Single FMOD template cue per character
- Memory
 - Streaming vs. loaded into memory

★ Integration
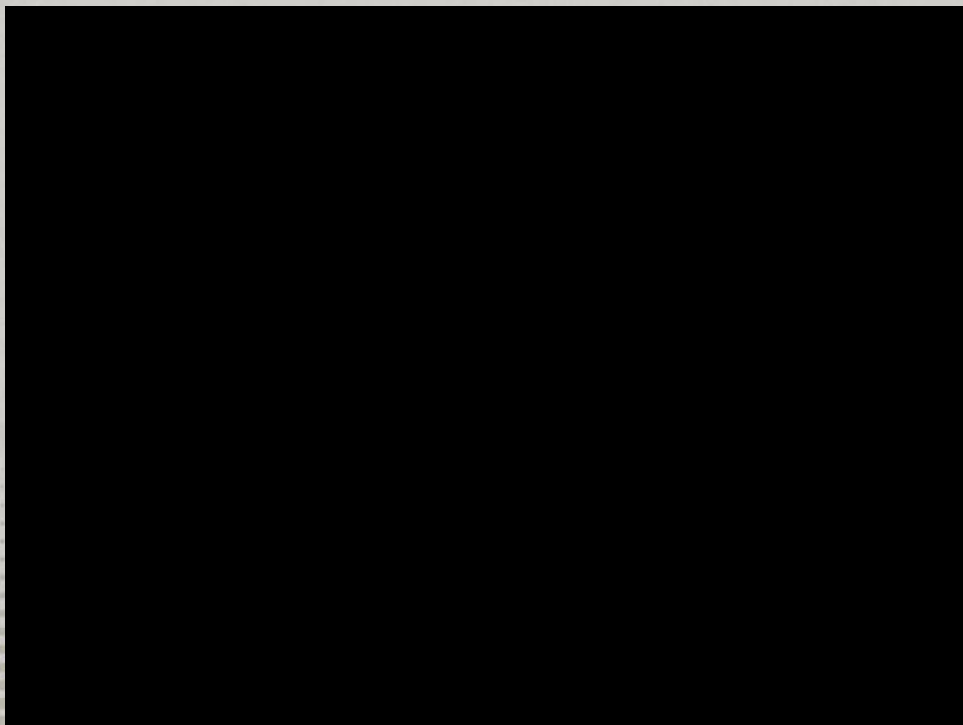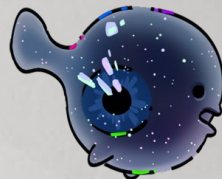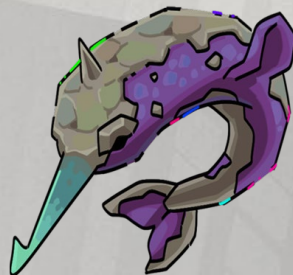
```
UsedRerollPanelVoiceLines =
{
    {

        RandomRemaining = true,
        PreLineWait = 0.3,
        CooldownTime = 12,

        -- How about a different set of choices?
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_3912" },
        -- How about a different set of choices, then.
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_3913" },
        -- Hmm, let's see what else.
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_3914" },
        -- Any other blessings, maybe?
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_3915", RequiredScreenOpen = "BoonMenu" },
        -- Hate to be ungrateful here...
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_3916" },
        -- Erm, got anything else?
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_3917" },
        -- How about some other Boons instead.
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_3918", RequiredScreenOpen = "BoonMenu" },
        -- Hey, got anything else?
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_3919" },
        -- Any other Boons for me?
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_3920", RequiredScreenOpen = "BoonMenu" },
        -- I would like none of these.
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_3921" },
        -- What else we got.
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_1222" },
        -- What else we got?
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_1223" },
        -- Not what I need right now.
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_1227" },
        -- Mmm, no thanks.
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_1230" },
        -- Something else.
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_1234" },
        -- Let's see what else.
        { Cue = "/VO/ZagreusField_3405" },
```
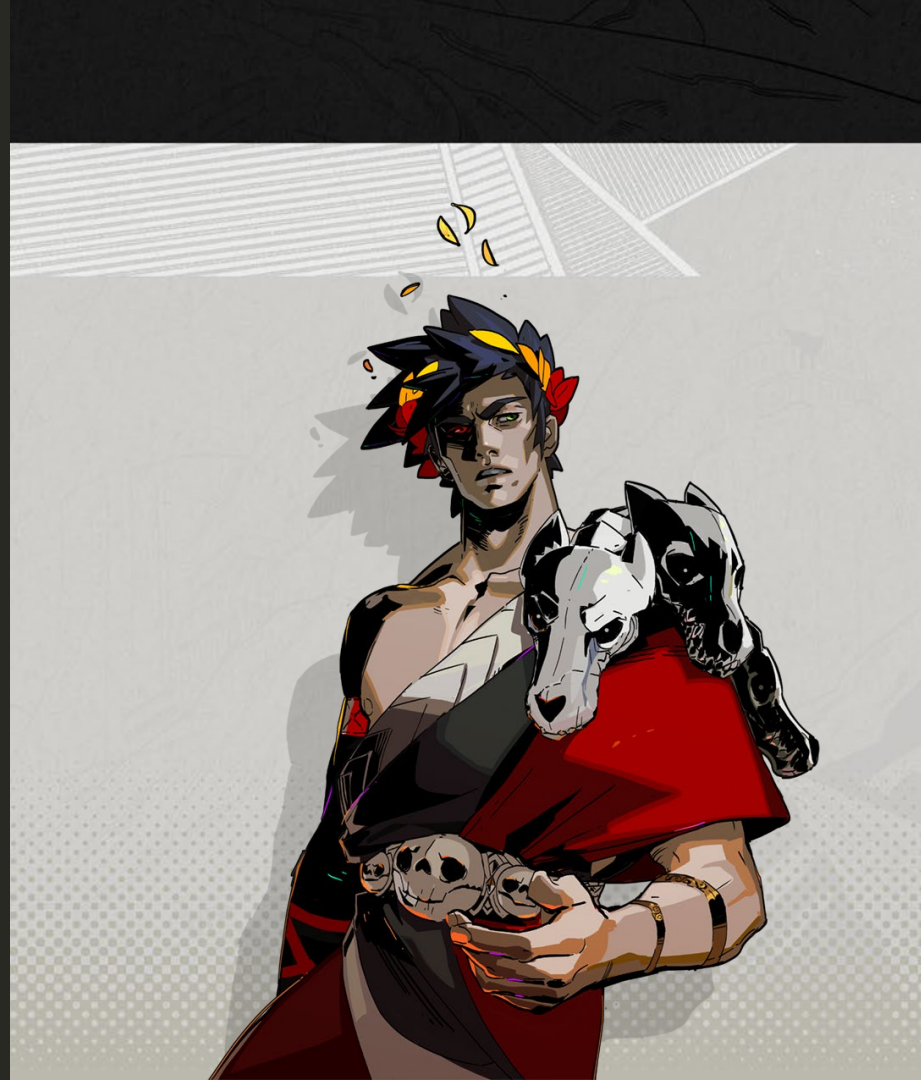
⭐ Feedback Gathering

- Playtested internally at key milestones (especially before Early Access)

- Early Access -- we read every piece of feedback

- Early Access feedback "protected" the characters

- Early Access feedback helped shore up confidence in tone

- Iterated on small stuff, fleshed out the characters a bunch

- Example: **Lava** vs. **Magma**

🔊   🔊

Production in a Nutshell

- Wrote the story almost like a serial, with the Early Access launch serving as the 'pilot'
- Story was outlined early, but we mostly wrote only what we were about to implement
- Darren "soloed" 99% of the recording sessions, giving Greg more time to write
- Darren also served as frontline feedback-giver on writing; we would tweak on the spot
- Brad edited the recording sessions, Darren bounced all the lines, Greg integrated
- Regularly playing, watching streams, and reading feedback inspired reactive moments
- We consistently tried to make time for small "unimportant" moments and voice lines
- *Further info*: The System Behind Hades' Astounding Dialogue

[youtube.com/c/PeopleMakeGames]
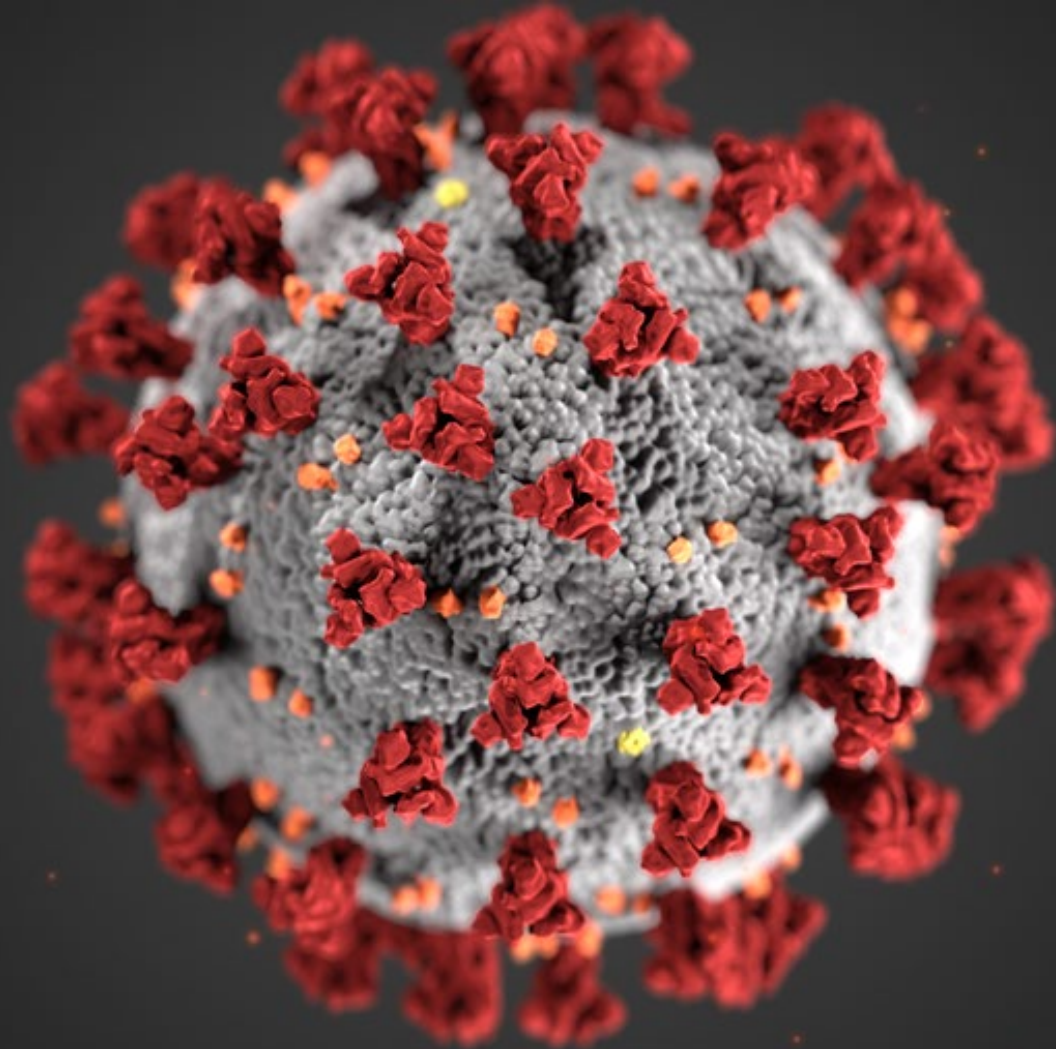
Production Challenges

- Growing Scope
  - The more we added to the game, the more contexts needed highly specific VO
  - Positive feedback on characters made us want to do more with them
  - Localization! 🙀 *(This was its own highly involved process.)*
- Early Access Development
  - The next big update was always around the corner
  - Pressure to 'get it right the first time' on story, despite Early Access
  - Community's nonstop feedback & desire for more new content
  - Frequent recording sessions (*up to 3 or 4 per week!*)

⭐ Production Challenges, Cont.

- Global Pandemic
  - About ⅔ through the game's production, ALL VO recording became remote
  - We sent the actors basic USB mics and directed remotely
    - Logan used this mic for all of Pyre!
  - Matched "fancy mic sound" the best we could in post
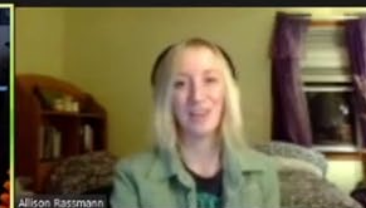   - Editing out noise, EQ, compression, the works
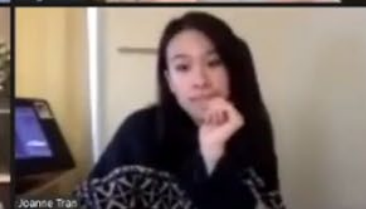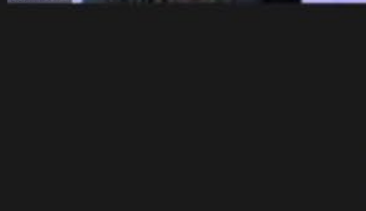
⭐ In Conclusion

- ⬤ **Key wins:**
    - ○ High volume of well-received voiceover
    - ○ Early Access helped catch gaps or inconsistencies in writing/VO quality
    - ○ Large and varied cast felt 'alive' despite limited presentation

- ⬤ **Opportunities for improvement:**
    - ○ More sonic consistency across the cast
    - ○ Streamline casting process for external actors
    - ○ Better file organization, improved priority system on story events

- ⬤ **Other lessons learned:**
    - ○ Regular recurring sessions (marathon) > All at once (sprint)
    - ○ *Early Access works for narrative games!*