

Hyper Light Drifter

Review by Jack Meehan

Hyper Light Drifter is an excellent video game. It offers players fast paced isometric combat, set against challenging enemies and encounters, in a beautifully realised pixel-art world teeming with intrigue. Each step you take as the Drifter is paced to perfection, with meaningful progression that makes each upgrade feel impactful and each location feel distinct from the last.

The excellence of Hyper Light Drifter lies in the four pillars of its design that work both individually and in tandem to give the player agency. These are exploration, progression, traversal and combat.

The story, while intriguing, is not one of these. It mostly takes a backseat to everything else going on in the game. There is no dialogue to be heard or lore to inundate the player with in Hyper Light Drifter, instead, players can piece together their unfolding journey to learn of what afflicts the Drifter and what became of the world they inhabit.

Hyper Light Drifter allows players to tackle each of the four regions in any order they choose. There is an intended path in each region, but Hyper Light Drifter does little to railroad players in this regard. Is a particular combat encounter too difficult? Feel free to leave and explore somewhere else, those Shamans aren't going anywhere.

And when I did return, combat encounters were half puzzle, half wild dance of destruction as I accounted for every opponent and carefully timed dashes, abilities and attacks to clear a stage.

You will spend some of your time walking and dashing from platform to platform. This aspect of the game's traversal is serviceable, but there's a lot more to discover on your travels. Hidden throughout the beautifully detailed environments are paths to new rooms, upgrades and even completely new levels. Even if you're exploring off the beaten path, you're likely progressing the main game, as you find hidden modules to help unlock the region's gated encounters.

The World of Hyper Light Drifter is so beautiful and varied that I rarely used the fast travel, opting to just trek back to the centre city, revisiting these wonderfully realised locations, seeing how far I'd come. Those moments when the view, the music and that sense of discovery all clicked was where the game really shined.

While its difficulty and ambiguity may put off some players, Hyper Light Drifter gripped me from start to finish and left me wanting more.