



STORY BY IAN VAN ORDEN
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In March of 2016, many in the gaming world waited expectantly for the release of the newest installment in the Dark Souls series. Between Dark Souls and its sequel, released several years before, the series had taken the gaming world by storm and many titles were being released that were heavily influenced by what was quickly becoming an iconic franchise.

On March 15, just days before the Japanese release of Dark Souls III, one such game was quietly released by Ska Studios, a small game developer comprised of only two members— James and Michelle Silva.

Called Salt and Sanctuary, the game was a love letter to the larger series, with many gameplay elements heavily based on the Souls games.

Featuring a 2D format, Salt and Sanctuary plays very similarly to both the Souls games as well as some of the recent handheld titles released in the Castlevania franchise. Visually, the game sports a dark aesthetic with beautifully hand drawn visuals.

The majority of the games' combat is designed very similarly to the Souls series with the player having the choice

to use a variety of weapon types. Though the majority of the weapons are close range martial weapons, including daggers, spears, greatswords and reapers (scythes,) the game also includes bows, pistols, wands and staves for those that seek ranged alternatives.

Although developed by a small team, each of the weapon types feature unique and surprisingly deep combat with each type granted its own strengths and weaknesses. The player is able to equip two weapons simultaneously switching between the two with a press of a button.

As the player explores the games' various regions, they will encounter a huge variety of enemies ranging from small, soldier-like enemies to giant monsters that act as some of the games' brutal bosses. Like Dark Souls, many of the boss fights ask the player to memorize attack patterns in order to defeat them – a process that is likely to require a death or two before defeating some of the game's more difficult enemies.

Death too is handled in a way

reminiscent of the Souls franchise. As the player progresses and defeats enemies, they acquire the game's currency, salt, which is used the same way souls are used in Dark Souls, allowing the player to redeem salt to level up or alternatively to purchase new items and gear from vendors. If you die, though, your salt is dropped where you fall, allowing you to reclaim your lost currency if you can make it back to that spot. If you die once more on your way to retrieve the salt. However, it is lost for good.

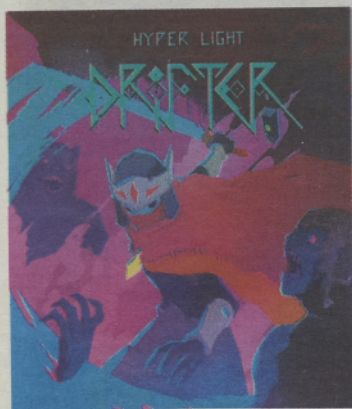
Perhaps not the most noticeable aspect of the game, the background music perfectly captures the desired tone adding positively to nearly every scene.

For any that enjoy the difficulty or aesthetic of the Souls games, Salt and Sanctuary is a must play. The depth of combat, dark aesthetic and the potential for rage-inducing losses all come together to form the perfect love letter to the Souls franchise.

Top: Salt and Sanctuary poster and art from official game art.
Bottom: Hyper Light Drifter poster and sprite from official game art.



STORY BY MASON CRAWLEY
REPORTER



Made as a love letter to Nintendo fans, this kickstarter darling is not for everyone, and I think that's a good thing. This game pays homage to the Gameboy era of classics like Link to the Past, and Metroid: Zero Mission, while still bringing a whole lot of innovation and style.

You play as a Drifter, who's capable of ninja-like dashes and flurries of sword and gun combos. This Drifter is ill with a strange disease, and the only way of curing it is to venture to the most dangerous parts of a dream-like futuristic world with the intent of reactivating long forgotten technology.

This game touts an amazing soundtrack,

gorgeous pixel art and animation as well as fast and intense gameplay. This game is not easy. You will die. A lot. However, as you begin to practice the mechanics of dashing, sword combos and gun play, and weaving it altogether, the experience is unlike any other.

The difficulty is brutal. However the Drifter is given many tools to use and mastering them takes hours of gameplay. Once you find your groove, slicing, dicing, shooting, and exploding monsters on a quest for survival has never felt better.

The story of Hyper Light Drifter is sparse, as there is no dialogue at all. Imagery is used

to convey almost everything in the world and this may be off-putting for some. I played this one almost purely for gameplay, although the loose narrative did leave me with some interesting thoughts to ponder and interpret on my own.

I would recommend this to anyone looking for a challenging, nostalgic and original gaming experience.

