

= Flow (video game) =

Flow (stylized as fLOW) is an indie video game created by Jenova Chen and Nicholas Clark . Originally released as a free Flash game in 2006 to accompany Chen 's master 's thesis , it was reworked into a 2007 PlayStation 3 game by his development studio , thatgamecompany . SuperVillain Studios released a PlayStation Portable version of the game in 2008 , and PlayStation 4 and PlayStation Vita versions in 2013 . In Flow , the player navigates a series of two @-@ dimensional (2D) planes with an aquatic microorganism that evolves by consuming other microorganisms . The game 's design is based on Chen 's research into dynamic difficulty adjustment at the University of Southern California 's Interactive Media Division , and on psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi 's theoretical concept of mental immersion or flow .

The Flash version of Flow received 100 @, @ 000 downloads within its first two weeks of release , and had been played over 3 @. @ 5 million times by 2008 . Its PlayStation 3 re @-@ release was the most downloaded game on the PlayStation Network in 2007 , and won the Best Downloadable Game award at the 2008 Game Developers Choice Awards . It was nominated for awards by the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences and the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) . Reviewers praised Flow 's visual and audio appeal , but noted the simplicity of its gameplay ; several considered it to be more of an art piece than a game .

= = Gameplay = =

In Flow , the player guides a small , multi @-@ segmented worm- or snake @-@ like creature through an aquatic environment . There are no menus or guidelines ; the game begins immediately . The game world , which is viewed from a top @-@ down perspective , consists of two @-@ dimensional planes stacked vertically upon each other . A blurred version of the layer below appears in the background of each plane . Planes contain organisms of varying sizes ; the player 's creature automatically attempts to consume them when they are nearby . The majority of these creatures are non @-@ confrontational , and are composed of cells that increase the number of segments in the player 's creature when eaten . All planes , except for the highest and lowest , contain two specially colored organisms that move the player 's creature up or down one plane when touched .

Certain planes feature aggressive , multi @-@ segmented creatures that perish when all of their segments are eaten by the player 's creature ; however , they can eat segments of the player 's creature to regrow their own . These creatures release many cells upon death , which can restore the health of the player 's creature , temporarily increase the size of its mouth , or cause it to sprout decorative protrusions . Players are not required to eat these or any other organisms ; they may travel to higher or lower planes at any time . Being defeated by aggressive creatures does not result in death , but causes the player 's creature to float to a higher plane . In the Flash version , the player can replay the game with a jellyfish @-@ like organism by defeating an aggressive creature on the bottom plane . If the player reaches the bottom again , the creature there is their original worm @-@ like creature , and defeating it starts the game over as that organism .

= = PlayStation versions = = =

The PlayStation 3 version of Flow features enhanced visuals and three additional playable organisms : one that can move with a short burst of speed , one that can paralyze other creatures , and one that lunges toward its prey 's weak point . The worm creature from the original game was given the ability to move faster , while the jellyfish may now create a vortex to attract small creatures . These special moves are activated by hitting any button on the controller . When the player reaches the bottom plane with each creature , the next creature type is unlocked and becomes selectable at the beginning of the game . The PlayStation 3 version features a multiplayer mode for up to four players ; a game in progress can be joined at any time , players may play different creatures if they desire so . The PlayStation Portable version contains all of the features introduced by PlayStation 3 version , but reduces the size of each plane . On November 20 , 2007 , the

PlayStation 3 version received an add @-@ on pack that allows players joining a multiplayer game to select their creatures . The pack also includes new enemies , food types , and a playable creature with a shield ability .

= = Development = =

Flow was originally developed as part of Jenova Chen 's master 's thesis for the Interactive Media Program at the University of Southern California 's School of Cinematic Arts . His thesis was on the concept of dynamic difficulty adjustment (DDA) , wherein a game adjusts its reactions to a player based on the past and present actions of that player . He illustrated his ideas with Flow , which he created in collaboration with Nicholas Clark . Chen implemented DDA by causing the player to change the game 's difficulty subconsciously ; he allowed players to dive between planes at will , and provided the option of eating or not eating any creature . Players may decide to rush downwards , or to grow stronger before attacking powerful opponents . Chen described Flow as " a simple game . It 's the simplest test of active DDA . " Another influence on the game was psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi 's work on flow , wherein a person fully immerses themselves in an activity and gains a feeling of energized focus . To achieve this state , the person or player must have control over the activity ; Chen believed that his DDA theory gave players the control necessary to achieve flow while playing .

The game was released in March 2006 , after two months of development ? during which Chen and Clark taught themselves Flash programming . The game 's source code was later released in 2009 . The game 's score was composed by Austin Wintory . A PlayStation 3 version was announced for the PlayStation Store in May of that year , and was released in February 2007 . Chen had graduated by that point , and had founded Thatgamecompany , which handled the conversion to the PlayStation 3 ; Nicholas Clark was one of the employees and served as the game version 's designer . Impressed by Flow , Sony provided Thatgamecompany with finances , supplies , and additional staff , and offered them a three @-@ game contract ; the PlayStation 3 version of Flow was the first of these . Chen originally believed that the conversion could be completed in four months , and that it would be ready for the November 2006 launch of the PlayStation Network . However , when it was finally released in February 2007 , it did not include " half of the original design " .

A version for the PlayStation Portable , developed by SuperVillain Studios , was released in March 2008 . The company coded it from scratch , as the PlayStation 3 version 's code and art were too platform @-@ specific to reuse . The add @-@ on pack for the PlayStation 3 version was also developed by SuperVillain . Thatgamecompany was not involved in the development of either project beyond a design influence and art direction role , as they were creating their next title , Flower . Sony Santa Monica created ports of the PlayStation 3 game for the PlayStation 4 and PlayStation Vita , which were published in November 2013 to correspond with the release of the PlayStation 4 . Although no album of music specifically for Flow has been released , in 2012 Austin Wintory released Journey Bonus Bundle as a download @-@ only album on Bandcamp , containing variations on themes from Flow and Journey , a 2012 PlayStation 3 game by Thatgamecompany .

= = Reception = =

The Flash version of Flow received 100 @,@ 000 downloads within its first two weeks of release . By July 2006 , it had been downloaded over 650 @,@ 000 times ; by February 2008 , it had been played over 3 @.@ 5 million times . Its PlayStation 3 re @-@ release was the most downloaded game on the PlayStation Network in 2007 . Flow received the 2008 Game Developers Choice Awards nominations for the Innovation Award and Best Debut , and was presented with Best Downloadable Game . The game was nominated for the Best Downloadable Game of the Year award at the 2008 Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences Interactive Achievement Awards , and for the Best Innovation award at the 2007 British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) awards . Its music garnered nominations for Best Interactive Score and Most Innovative Use of

Audio from the Game Audio Network Guild , and won composer Austin Wintory the Rookie of the Year award . Flow was a finalist at the 2007 Slamdance Guerrilla Games Competition , but withdrew along with several other finalists after Super Columbine Massacre RPG ! was removed from the competition . In 2011 it was chosen through a public vote out of an initial selection of 240 to be one of 80 games showcased in a 2012 exhibit at the Smithsonian American Art Museum titled " The Art of Video Games " .

Flow received mixed reviews from critics , who focused on the game 's PlayStation versions . The visuals and presentation were among its most praised elements , with IGN 's Chris Roper calling them " one of Flow 's greatest strengths " . Alex Navarro of GameSpot agreed , saying that it was " hard to argue with those aesthetics " ; he lauded the use of color , the designs of the creatures , and the dynamic soundtrack . Will Freeman of VideoGamer.com called it " attractive and stylish " , which made the game " immensely satisfying to toy with " . Richard Leadbetter of Eurogamer claimed that the game 's main purpose was to " look pretty " and " sound cool " .

Reviewers were mixed in their opinions on the gameplay ; Roper said that " simply see [ing] what 's next " was enjoyable , but acknowledged that the game 's activities were limited beyond this aspect . Leadbetter went further , saying that Flow " feels like a tech demo in many ways " , and that its small amount of gameplay existed primarily " to act as a tour guide " through the visuals and audio . Freeman said that " it would not be unfair to describe Flow as empty and without substance . " Navarro concluded that Flow was enjoyable for the few hours needed to complete it , but that it lacked " a lasting gameplay experience " ; he attributed this to the game 's " heavy emphasis on aesthetics over gameplay " . Luke Mitchell of PALGN , however , felt that " anything more complicated would take away from the friendly nature of an experience of this type . "

Reviewers found the game to be largely unchallenging . Roper stated that " there really isn 't any sort of a challenge here " , particularly due to the player character 's inability to die ; Leadbetter summed up the game 's difficulty as " negligible " . However , when reviewing the PlayStation Portable version of the game , Justin Calvart of GameSpot took the view that " the game 's difficulty masterfully scales to match your skill level " , so that it does not become overly " frantic or frustrating " . Reviewers were universally dismissive of the multiplayer mode , with Calvart saying that " whatever it is , it 's not good " . Leadbetter called the PlayStation 3 version 's multiplayer " little more than an afterthought " , while Navarro said that it " doesn 't add a lick of depth to the experience " .

Overall , reviewers saw Flow as being more akin to an art piece than a game . Navarro called it an " arty piece of gaming " , and complimentarily said that it had the " vibe of an art @-@ school project " . Leadbetter believed that it was more of an experiment than a traditional game , and described it as a " trippy ornament " . Freeman called it the PlayStation 3 's " first art @-@ house title " . Roper summarized Flow as " not so much a game as it is an experience " , and Mitchell claimed that it " tries to do something entirely unique and experimental , and on that level , it succeeds " .