Castlevania : Aria of Sorrow =

Castlevania : Aria of Sorrow , released in Japan as Castlevania : Akatsuki no Enbukyoku (????????? ? ?????? ? , " Castlevania : Minuet of Dawn ") , is a side @-@ scrolling platforming video game developed and published by Konami for the Game Boy Advance . It is the third and final installment of the Castlevania series on the Game Boy Advance and was released in North America on May 6 , 2003 and in Japan on May 8 , 2003 . Producer Koji Igarashi , who had led the production teams for previous Castlevania titles , led Aria of Sorrow 's development as well . Michiru Yamane also returned to compose the music for the game alongside Takashi Yoshida and Soshiro Hokkai . Director Junichi Murakami was new to the Castlevania series .

Aria of Sorrow is set in the year 2035 , when Dracula has long been sealed away after a battle in 1999 . The plot follows the journey of Soma Cruz , a teenager granted occult power as a result of being a potential vessel of Dracula 's reincarnation , as he battles dark figures that wish to inherit the undead lord 's power . The game incorporates the same combination of elements from platform games and role @-@ playing video games as in the previous game Castlevania : Symphony of the Night . Aria of Sorrow introduces several new features to the series , such as the " Tactical Soul " system and employs a futuristic storyline in contrast to the medieval setting of many other Castlevania games .

Although Aria of Sorrow sold poorly in Japan , selling only 27 @,@ 000 units nearly one month after its release , it was commercially successful in the United States , with more than 158 @,@ 000 units sold in the three months following its release . Aria of Sorrow received praise from several video game publications , with some considering it one of the best games in the Castlevania series since Symphony of the Night . Konami released a sequel to Aria of Sorrow , titled Castlevania : Dawn of Sorrow , on August 25 , 2005 in Japan . It incorporated many elements from its predecessor , including the " Tactical Soul " system . Aria of Sorrow was re @-@ released as part of Konami 's " Konami the Best " line on November 3 , 2005 in Japan , and in a dual pack with Harmony of Dissonance , titled the Castlevania Double Pack , in North America on January 11 , 2006 .

= Gameplay = =

Aria of Sorrow features a 2D side @-@ scrolling style of gameplay where the player controls the onscreen character from a third @-@ person perspective to interact with people , objects , and enemies . Like previous games in the series and most role @-@ playing games , characters level up each time they earn a set number of experience points from defeating enemies ; each " level " gained increases the character 's statistics , thus improving their performance in battle . Statistic examples include hit points , the amount of damage a character can receive ; magic points , which determine the number of times a character can use magical attacks ; strength , the power of a character 's physical attacks ; and intelligence , the power of a character 's magical spells . Upon encountering an enemy , the player can use a variety of weapons to attack and defeat the enemy . Despite the game being set in 2035 , the available weapons are largely medieval , including swords , axes , and spears ; though a handgun is available . These weapons differ in their damage output , the range of the weapon , and the speed of the attack . Items and other accessories can be found by defeating enemies or by purchasing items from the game 's shop .

Similar to previous games in the series , Aria of Sorrow is set within Dracula 's castle , which is further subdivided into several areas that the player traverses . These areas feature different components , such as different enemies , varying terrain characteristics , and a unique piece of theme music . Similar to most platform games , progression between areas is limited by the abilities the player currently has . While the method in which the player progresses through the game is initially linear , the player 's options become more diverse as the number of character abilities increases .

= = Tactical Soul = = =

Aria of Sorrow introduces a new ability system , Tactical Soul system , to the Castlevania series . It involves absorbing the souls of enemies in order to gain additional abilities . Except for human enemies and the game 's final opponent , all souls can be absorbed by the player . The rate at which enemies ' souls are obtained varies between enemies . Players can trade souls between two Aria of Sorrow cartridges using two Game Boy Advance consoles and a link cable .

Souls provide a variety of effects , and are separated into four categories : Bullet , Guardian , Enchant , and Ability souls . The player can only have one type of Bullet , Guardian , and Enchant soul equipped at any given time . Bullet souls are Soma Cruz 's replacement for Sub Weapons in this game , and enable the player to consume a set amount of magic points to use an ability , often some form of projectile . Guardian souls provide continuous effects , including transforming into mythical creatures and summoning familiars . Guardian souls continually drain magic points so long as they are activated . Enchant souls are continuously active so long as they are equipped , and provide increases in statistics or other innate abilities ? such as the ability to walk on water . Ability souls give the player innate abilities , which are often required to traverse certain areas of the castle . Because the souls are automatically activated and stay active unless the player specifically disables them , they do not consume magic points .

= = = Additional modes = = =

Aria of Sorrow includes additional modes of play that display elements not seen in the game 's primary scenario . The New Game + option allows a player that has completed the game to replay the game with all equipment and souls the player had acquired in a previous file . Additionally , the player can opt to start the game in Hard Mode , offering the same gameplay at a higher difficulty level . Two other modes offer alternatives to the standard gameplay . Boss Rush mode involves the player facing all of the game 's bosses in quick succession , and is unlocked after the player completes the game once . Julius Mode is an additional mode of play unlocked with the same method . The player takes control of Julius Belmont , the member of the Belmont clan featured in the game .

= = Plot = =

= = = Setting = = =

Aria of Sorrow takes place in the fictional universe of the Castlevania series . The series ' premise is the conflict between the vampire hunters of the Belmont clan and the immortal vampire Dracula . Thirty @-@ six years before the start of Aria of Sorrow , Dracula was defeated once and for all by the Belmont clan , and his powers sealed into a solar eclipse . Shortly after Dracula 's death , a prophecy was made that Dracula 's reincarnation would come to his castle in 2035 and inherit all of Dracula 's powers . This prophecy acts as the driving force behind the plot of Aria of Sorrow , and is the primary motivation of the supporting characters to be present . The game takes place in Dracula 's castle , the most common setting for the series , with the castle divided into numerous areas that the player traverses over the course of the game .

= = = Characters = = =

The protagonist and primary playable character of Aria of Sorrow is Soma Cruz , a transfer student studying in Japan who possesses the " power of dominance " , which allows him to absorb the souls of monsters and use their abilities . He is initially accompanied by his childhood friend , Mina Hakuba , the daughter of the priest of the Hakuba shrine . Over the course of the game , Soma meets additional characters that aid him in his quest : Genya Arikado , an enigmatic government agent and disguise for Alucard , the son of Dracula ; Yoko Belnades , a witch and member of the Belnades clan ; J , an amnesiac man drawn to Dracula 's castle ; and Hammer , a soldier of the

United States Army ordered to investigate the events occurring at Dracula 's castle , although he abandons this mission and sets up a shop to sell Soma equipment (potions , weapons and the like) . Graham Jones , a missionary who believes he is Dracula 's reincarnation , serves as the game 's antagonist .

The characters were designed by Ayami Kojima , who had previously worked on the characters in Castlevania games such as Castlevania : Symphony of the Night and Castlevania : Harmony of Dissonance . Due to the game being set in the future , Kojima 's designs are notably more contemporary , utilizing modern clothing , in contrast to the medieval attire that characters from previous games wore .

= = = Story = = =

The story begins in the year 2035 , when Soma Cruz is visiting Japan as a transfer student and living near the Hakuba shrine . During a solar eclipse , he visits the Hakuba shrine with his childhood friend Mina Hakuba . He and Mina are then drawn into the eclipse , landing in a mysterious castle , where they meet a government agent named Genya Arikado . Arikado reveals that they are in Dracula 's castle . After a group of monsters appear and are dispatched by Arikado , one of the monsters ' souls is absorbed by Soma . Arikado explains this as the awakening of Soma 's " power of dominance " . Arikado then directs Soma to enter the castle and seek " the master 's chamber " .

As Soma proceeds through the castle , he confronts several characters , each present due to a prophecy related to Dracula 's powers . Graham Jones , a missionary that has come to the castle , befriends Soma . Graham explains the nature of the castle and reveals that Dracula , long thought to be immortal , was destroyed for good in 1999 , and that his powers will be passed down onto his reincarnation . When Soma proceeds further into the castle , he meets the witch Yoko Belnades , who is present on the orders of the Roman Catholic Church . Yoko is looking for Graham , who she believes is dangerous and the inheritor of Dracula 's powers . She clarifies the nature of Soma 's powers , revealing that they are not necessarily evil , but inherent to Soma himself . Later , Soma encounters Hammer , a member of the United States Army ordered to come to the Hakuba shrine . He has forfeited his mission , however , in favor of selling goods . He becomes Soma 's vendor , selling numerous goods to aid Soma 's mission . A mysterious man then accosts Soma , asking about the nature of Soma 's dark power . When Soma continues to converse with him , the man reveals that he has amnesia , and the only thing he remembers is his name starts with " J " .

Soma meets Graham again , and questions him on Yoko 's suspicions . Graham claims he will receive Dracula 's powers , believing himself to be Dracula as he was born on the day Dracula was slain . Graham inquires as to the nature of Soma 's powers , to which Soma responds that he has " the power to rule , " causing Graham to panic and flee . Concerned , Soma confides this incident to Yoko , who recommends that Soma join her in stopping Graham . As Soma proceeds further through the castle , he comes upon a scene of Graham stabbing Yoko with a knife . Graham retreats , and Yoko warns Soma of Graham 's power . Arikado arrives , promises Soma he will look after Yoko , and demands that Soma pursue Graham . Soma meets " J " again , who reveals he is Julius Belmont , the man who defeated Dracula in 1999 . As he leaves , he remarks that he knows something about the current situation , but does not elaborate .

Soma ascends to the castle 's keep and confronts Graham in the throne room . Although Soma 's sole desire is to leave the castle , Graham is convinced that Soma must be killed for absorbing the souls of the castle 's monsters . Soma manages to defeat Graham , even after Graham uses his newfound powers to assume a demonic form . As Graham falls in defeat , Soma absorbs his powers , and realizes he is Dracula 's reincarnation . Arikado arrives and reveals a way for Soma to save himself by halting the flow of chaos into the castle . Soma proceeds to the Chaotic Realm , but Julius attacks him , believing that Soma is Dracula . Julius allows Soma to defeat him , as he sensed Soma 's soul fighting against Dracula 's influence . Before he leaves , Soma elicits a promise from Julius to kill him if he fully becomes Dracula . Soma travels through the Chaotic Realm and finally locates the source of chaos . Soma manages to defeat the manifestation of chaos and is sent congratulations by Yoko , Hammer , Julius , and Arikado . Soma awakens back in the Hakuba

Shrine with Mina , pleased that the conflict is over .

= = Development = =

Aria of Sorrow was first unveiled at a press conference in San Francisco by executive producer Koji Igarashi on January 16 , 2003 . Igarashi had worked on previous Castlevania games such as Castlevania : Symphony of the Night and Castlevania : Harmony of Dissonance . Aria of Sorrow was placed in production alongside Harmony of Dissonance , resulting in both games sharing similar programming engines and gameplay elements . Aria of Sorrow 's Ability souls , for example , provide the protagonist with innate abilities like the Relic items in Harmony of Dissonance . Nevertheless , Igarashi claimed he wished to try a " different route " for the series with Aria of Sorrow via placing the game in a futuristic setting . Ayami Kojima , who had previously collaborated with Igarashi on the designs for the characters of Symphony of the Night and Harmony of Dissonance , was brought into the project . Following the " different route " motif , the character designs were made more contemporary , using modern clothing over the more medieval look of the previous Castlevania installments . In developing the game 's back story , Igarashi partially based it on Nostradamus 's prediction of a " big evil lord in 1999 " and the 1999 solar eclipse in Eastern Europe .

One of Igarashi 's prominent concerns during development was addressing the criticism expressed concerning Harmony of Dissonance . Igarashi noted that the music in Harmony of Dissonance had not been well received and Michiru Yamane , who had previously worked on the acclaimed music for Symphony of the Night , was hired in order to compose for Aria of Sorrow . The development team worked on the game 's audio cycles , as well as delegating more cartridge space and processor cycles for the sound . Maintaining the visual quality of Harmony of Dissonance was a chief objective during development , as many reviewers had felt that Harmony of Dissonance had excelled in graphics at the cost of the audio . Furthermore , the staff tried to improve the series ' gameplay system while retaining fan @-@ favorite elements . Certain aspects that were missing in Harmony of Dissonance , such as hidden rooms , were incorporated into Aria of Sorrow . Igarashi added Soul trading via a link cable to assist players with collecting every soul in the game , which he believed would be cumbersome to accomplish alone .

= = Reception = =

Aria of Sorrow has received favorable reviews from several video game publications , with many comparing it to Castlevania : Symphony of the Night , widely considered the best game in the Castlevania series . Famitsu , considered to be one of the most respected video game news magazines in Japan , gave Aria of Sorrow a 36 / 40 , the highest score any game in the Castlevania series has received from Famitsu . It was rated by Nintendo Power as the 22nd best game made on a Nintendo System in their Top 200 Games list . In Japan , the game sold only 27 @,@ 000 units one month after its release , considered to be a poor showing for a major video game franchise . Conversely , the game was significantly more successful in the United States , with more than 158 @,@ 000 units in sales three months after its release .

As the third installment of the Castlevania series on the Game Boy Advance , many reviewers made note of the game 's differences as versus its predecessors , Castlevania : Circle of the Moon and Castlevania : Harmony of Dissonance , with many considering it the definitive Castlevania game for the Game Boy Advance . GameSpy noted that Aria of Sorrow " managed to get just about everything right " as versus its predecessors , and lauded it as " the best portable Castlevania game yet created . " RPGFan claimed that Aria of Sorrow " [showcased] the true art of game development : to adapt and change as necessary yet remain consistent . " RPGamer considered Aria of Sorrow one of the best games ever released for the Game Boy Advance .

In 2007 IGN ranked it as the second best Game Boy Advance game of all time . Game Informer 's Tim Turi ranked it among the best Castlevania games on the Game Boy Advance . He praised its gameplay and visuals for setting a standard for future Castlevania games . GameZone ranked it as

the seventh best Castlevania title and the best of the Game Boy Advance Castlevania titles .

The gameplay , specifically the Tactical Soul system , was a frequent subject of acclaim among reviewers . RPGFan called the Tactical Soul system " addictively [sic] fun " , and GameSpot lauded the simplicity and depth of the gameplay . RPGamer considered the gameplay " one hundred percent solid , " lauding the game 's controls and interaction with enemies , as well as the Tactical Soul system . RPGFan asserted that the game had " a chance to be the most revered installment of the series , hardly caught in the shadow of Symphony of the Night like its predecessors . " The game 's length and difficulty were brought into question by several reviewers . GameSpot noted that a single play through the game would only last ten hours , and that the player grew " practically unstoppable " over the course of the game . RPGamer echoed this assessment , deriding the fact that the game " never [offered] much of a challenge " , but noted that the " simplistic fun " of the gameplay rectified this .

The game 's graphics and audio were widely praised by reviewers . RPGFan extolled the game 's environments as " gorgeous and well layered , " and noted while the game did not achieve the level of graphical quality set by Symphony of the Night , it " made a damn good attempt at it . " GameSpy called the graphics " crisp , clear and colorful , " with " good animation on easily viewable sprites . " GameSpy additionally noted that the game 's audio , a particularly lambasted feature of Harmony of Dissonance , was " fitting and well @-@ composed . " Prior to the game 's release , IGN commented that the music was " pretty darn good . " GameSpot , although labeling the music as " mostly forgettable , " noted that it was far better than the audio of Harmony of Dissonance , and celebrated the individual audio used for enemies .

In terms of storyline and characters , RPGamer welcomed the characters ' depth , and the emphasis placed into the personalities and development of supporting characters , asserting that previous Castlevania games ignored the development of the supporting characters in exchange for concentrating on the protagonist . IGN called the game 's ending " incredibly unfulfilling and disappointing , " but lauded the change from the conventional plot of a Castlevania game , in which a member of the Belmont clan defeats Dracula with the aid of a host of supporting characters . GameSpy criticized the presence of a " weak female who needs protection " and an " effeminate @-@ looking man who does all the slaying " as stereotypical Castlevania elements , but noted that the " powerful and compelling scenario " the game had was the best in the series since Symphony of the Night .

= = Sequel and re @-@ release = =

Due to the success of Aria of Sorrow , the production of Castlevania : Dawn of Sorrow , a rare sequel in the Castlevania series , was announced on January 6 , 2005 . In an interview , Koji Igarashi noted that he felt that the Tactical Soul system used in Aria of Sorrow , as well as the storyline with Soma Cruz , were a waste to use in only one game , and contributed to his desire to make a sequel . As such , the Tactical Soul system was reintroduced in Dawn of Sorrow , as well as several new developments , such as an anime character design , as Ayami Kojima was not part of the production staff for Dawn of Sorrow . Though Aria of Sorrow was successful , its sales figures failed to meet expectations and prompted the switch to anime @-@ style designs . In 2005 , Igarashi expressed a desire to develop a game centered on the battle between Julius Belmont and Dracula , but commented that the project would be dependent on available production time . Aria of Sorrow was re @-@ released in both Japan and in the United States . On November 3 , 2005 , it was re @-@ released as part of Konami 's " Konami the Best " line in Japan . Aria of Sorrow was re @-@ released , along with Harmony of Dissonance , in the Castlevania : Double Pack in North America on January 11 , 2006 .