

= Aqua (Kingdom Hearts) =

Aqua (Japanese : ??? , Hepburn : Akua) , also known as Master Aqua (????? ? ??? , Masut? Akua) , is a fictional character from Square Enix 's video game franchise Kingdom Hearts . Having first made cameo appearances in the game Kingdom Hearts II , Aqua was introduced in the 2010 prequel Kingdom Hearts Birth by Sleep as one of the three protagonists . In the title , Aqua is introduced as a Keyblade @-@ wielding warrior training under Master Eraqus alongside her best friends Terra and Ventus . Following the disappearance of Master Xehanort , a comrade of Eraqus , Aqua and Terra are tasked with searching for him as while protecting the worlds from creatures known as Unversed .

Unlike Terra and Ventus , Aqua was the only protagonist from Birth by Sleep who did not have a point of reference for director Tetsuya Nomura to design from , and thus was designed from scratch . Later in the design process , Nomura became concerned that Aqua would not be a popular character , and this drove his decision to make her very distinct in her personal bravery and combat abilities . While her outfit design was based on Terra 's , her movements were chosen to distinguish her from other characters by having her specialize in magical combat . Aqua has been voiced by Megumi Toyoguchi in Japanese and Willa Holland in English . Aqua received mixed reviews from game critics , citing boring plot lines and unenthusiastic voice acting combined with weak combat skills . With fans , Aqua was well received , and is one of Kingdom Hearts most popular characters .

= = Appearances = =

Before her introduction as a main character in Kingdom Hearts : Birth by Sleep , Aqua had earlier made small appearances in the secret endings from Kingdom Hearts II and its re @-@ release , Kingdom Hearts II Final Mix . Both events depicted Terra , Ventus and Aqua fighting Xehanort and his apprentice Vanitas . Moreover , Aqua 's Keyblade and armor appear in a room from Radiant Garden in Kingdom Hearts II Final Mix , which Xemnas , the " Nobody " of Xehanort , often visits calling the armor " friend " .

In Birth by Sleep , Aqua apprentices in the Land of Departure where potential Keyblade Masters study to receive their " Mark of Mastery " . Training alongside Aqua are her friends Terra and Ventus . Aqua takes the Mark of Mastery exam along with Terra and becomes a Keyblade Master . When Xehanort goes missing , their teacher Eraqus instructs Terra and Aqua to find him while also protecting the worlds they visit from creatures known as the Unversed . Following Terra 's departure , Eraqus asks Aqua to watch over Terra to see if he succumbs to his inner darkness and also bring back Ventus who has suddenly left the world . As she travels across the worlds , Aqua starts to question Terra 's actions in the worlds , while Ventus decides not to return home until Terra is safe . When Aqua meets Yen Sid , an acquaintance of Eraqus , Aqua is told that the latter was killed by Xehanort with Terra 's assistance . Aqua then goes to the Keyblade Graveyard to face confront Terra . He explains to Aqua how Xehanort tricked him into fighting Eraqus , while Ventus reveals that Xehanort plans to use him and his apprentice Vanitas to create the ultimate weapon , a Keyblade known as the ? @-@ blade . The three are then confronted by Xehanort and Vanitas , and proceed to battle . While Terra goes to battle Xehanort , Vanitas takes possession of Ventus ' body to create the ? @-@ blade . With help from King Mickey , Yen Sid 's student , Aqua fights the possessed Ventus until the ? @-@ blade explodes . After learning that Ventus has lost his heart , Aqua locks his catatonic body in Castle Oblivion created from the ruins of the Land of the Departure with Eraqus 's Keyblade . Aqua then tracks Terra to the Radiant Garden , only to find that he has been possessed by Xehanort . In the ensuing battle , Terra 's presence manifests , causing Xehanort to unlock his own heart in the internal struggle , and having lost his essence that makes him a whole person , he falls into the Realm of Darkness . However , Aqua saves Terra 's heart by sending her armor and Keyblade with him back to Radiant Garden . But Aqua ends up trapped in the nexus of the darkness in people 's hearts called the Realm of Darkness . Sometime after the events of Kingdom Hearts II , she meets Ansem the Wise , the former ruler of Radiant Garden , at the shores of the Dark Margin , a black moon @-@ lit ocean in the Realm of Darkness , and learns

about the events that occurred in her absence regarding Sora , the new Keyblade bearer . Upon hearing Sora 's name and recognizing it as the name of the little boy she met on Destiny Islands who now possesses Ventus ' heart , Aqua sheds a tear and utters Sora 's name with renewed hope .

Birth by Sleep Final Mix , an update of Birth by Sleep , features a secret episode that slightly expands on Aqua 's time in the Realm of Darkness , battling Heartless with her master 's Keyblade .

In Kingdom Hearts Re : coded , Aqua is revealed to be one of the many people connected with Sora 's heart , causing Mickey to ask Sora to rescue them . She also makes small appearances in Kingdom Hearts 3D : Dream Drop Distance as part of Sora 's memories and in the ending where she is still at the shores of the Dark Margin .

Aqua is slated to be the protagonist of Kingdom Hearts 0 @.@ 2 Birth by Sleep -A fragmentary passage- , which is part of Kingdom Hearts HD 2 @.@ 8 Final Chapter Prologue . This new chapter is a prologue to the events of Kingdom Hearts III , which heavily expands on her time in the Realm of Darkness .

= = Creation and development = =

For Aqua 's unnamed first appearance in the secret ending of Kingdom Hearts II , director Tetsuya Nomura stated he did not design her appearance , but had instead focused on what her story would be . While unwilling say who the character was , Nomura pointed that this new character scenes , along with Terra 's and Ventus ' scenes occurred prior to the events from the first game . Following the release of Kingdom Hearts II Final Mix , Nomura revealed more details about Aqua such as a connection with the character Xemnas . Nomura also revealed her name as said by the Lingering Sentiment in Kingdom Hearts II Final Mix and explained that her name follows the " water " theme brought by Kairi 's name . However , a connection with Kairi was not intended , but rather with the series ' main characters whose names bear various themes .

In contrast to Terra and Ventus , Aqua did not have a reference point for the characters design , leading Nomura to create a completely new character from scratch . Her outfit was based on Terra 's Japanese @-@ inspired clothes which are meant to expand the student @-@ and @-@ teacher bond shown in the game . Aqua 's outfit was altered three times during the game 's development . Nomura felt the open back of Aqua 's outfit presented at the Tokyo Game Show 2009 was too revealing and modified the design to be more conservative . As with Terra and Ventus , the making of Aqua 's outfit created issues for Nomura like how she would be able to summon her armor . To remedy this , an " X " was added to her clothes as a means to activate her armor . When designing Aqua , Nomura was worried the character would be unpopular due to her weak connection with other Kingdom Hearts characters . This led to a push to make the character distinctly " strong " , which Nomura also did with Xion for Kingdom Hearts 358 / 2 Days but in a different way . While Xion was also a " brave girl " , Nomura wanted to retain Aquas feminine qualities along with her strength . After design was completed , Nomura was still unsure how Aqua would be received . After release however , Nomura noted her popularity with fans , and referenced Megumi Toyoguchi 's work as her voice actress as one of the reasons . Toyoguchi had already worked with Nomura in Final Fantasy X @-@ 2 voicing Paine , one of the game 's protagonists . While Toyoguchi used a low tone with Paine , she used tone closer to her original voice when voicing Aqua , which Nomura praised .

From the beginning of Kingdom Hearts : Birth by Sleeps development , the staff decided its story would have three plot lines centered around three different characters with Aqua 's being the last one written . The original ending of Aqua 's storyline showed her trapped in the Realm of Darkness , but that part was moved to the game 's " Last Episode " playthrough in order to keep the game from being too negative in tone . In terms of gameplay , Aqua was designed to be a character gamers would take some getting used to , and recommended them use her as the last one in order to understand the game 's story better , as he points that scenario with the intention that Aqua would be the last character to leave the Land of Departure . The staff developed her movements to reflect her personality as a serious and dignified young woman .

= = Reception = =

Aqua 's character has received mixed response from video game publications with initial comments focused on her brief appearance in Kingdom Hearts II . Writing for GamesRadar , Chris Antista commented that he did not understand the importance of Aqua and the other characters being briefly featured in Kingdom Hearts II , and only later was their importance explored at the end of Birth by Sleep . Prior to Aqua 's appearance in Birth by Sleep 's trailers , 1UP.com 's Jeremy Parish stated that fans speculated that the character would be male . Having played a demo from Birth by Sleep as Aqua in the E3 2010 , Ryan Clements from IGN enjoyed her character due to her gameplay mechanics .

While reviewing Birth by Sleep , Adam Ghigiino from PALGN criticizing her " idealistic " dialogues , finding them repetitive . PlayStation LifeStyle 's Thomas Williams found the trio as welcome additions to the franchise , finding their stories enjoyable even though the three travel to the same worlds . Kevin VanOrd from GameSpot gave praise to Aqua 's character , based on her personality , how it counterparts Ventus ' as well as Holland 's voice acting . 1UP.com 's Steve Watts found Aqua 's gameplay as the weakest from all the three characters as in contrast to Ventus and Terra , she specializes in magic techniques which are weak during the game 's start . On the other hand , Bob Miur from Destructoid found it appealing due to how it contrast previous fighting styles seen in the Kingdom Hearts series . Aqua 's story was also found less entertaining than Ventus ' , but also less predictable than Terra 's . Following Square 's advice of using Aqua as the last playable GameInformer writer Bryan Vore liked how her actions were played with Ventus ' and Terra 's . However , Bore still cited Aqua 's playthrough as repetitive if played as the last one , and also said its plot was weakest from all of them . Alongside Ventus and Terra , X @-@ Play found Aqua similar to the protagonists from Kingdom Hearts with her being compared with Kairi . In contrast to Van Ord , RPGFan 's Ashton Liu found Aqua 's voice " bored for almost the whole game " , citing how it is notable when comparing her with other voice actors such as Mark Hamill and Leonard Nimoy . In an ASCII Media Works poll , Aqua was voted as the twelfth most popular video game character from 2010 . In a Famitsu poll from 2011 , Aqua was voted as the fourth most popular Kingdom Hearts character .