

= Aquaria (video game) =

Aquaria is a 2D sidescrolling action @-@ adventure computer game designed by Alec Holowka and Derek Yu , who together form the independent game company Bit Blot , which developed and originally published the game . After more than two years of development , the game was released in 2007 for Windows . A Macintosh port was released in 2008 by Ambrosia Software , and an updated version of the game was released on Steam that same year . A Linux version of the game was released as part of the Humble Indie Bundle collection in 2010 , and a version for the iPad was released on November 2 , 2011 . More recently , an Android port of the game was released as part of the Humble Bundle with Android 6 collection in June 2013 . In 2009 , the Aquaria soundtrack album was made available for sale . It includes all of the music in the game as well as a new nine @-@ minute vocal track and a few remixes .

The game follows Naija , a mermaid @-@ like woman , as she explores the underwater world of Aquaria . Along her journey , she learns about both the history of the world and her own past . The gameplay focuses on a combination of swimming , singing and combat , through which Naija can interact with the world . Naija 's songs can move items , affect plants and animals , and change her physical appearance into other forms . These forms have different abilities , such as firing projectiles at hostile creatures or passing through barriers inaccessible to her in her natural form .

Reviews of the game were generally positive . Critics focused primarily on the visuals , music and atmosphere as particularly praiseworthy . Additional positive comments were made about the controls and gameplay , while critiques centered on the map system and a limited variety of objectives . The game won the Seumas McNally Grand Prize from the Independent Games Festival in March 2007 .

= = Gameplay = =

Aquaria is a 2D sidescrolling action @-@ adventure game , heavily focused on exploration and puzzle @-@ solving , with non @-@ linear gameplay . The player controls Naija , a lone underwater dweller ; although similar to a human woman , Naija also has several fish @-@ like qualities , such as the ability to breathe underwater and propel herself quickly with webbed feet . The game , originally only available for personal computers , was designed to be primarily controlled solely through the mouse , though it can also be controlled with a keyboard or Xbox 360 controller . The player directs Naija through an underwater world composed of several distinct regions , ranging from caves to underwater ruins to sunlit oases . These areas are filled with plant and animal life , which can be hostile , friendly , or neutral towards her . Hostile plants and animals can hurt Naija , reducing her health meter , by touching her or firing projectiles at her .

In general , Naija cannot interact directly with objects in the world . Instead , the majority of actions are accomplished through singing short tunes . The player does this by selecting a series of notes displayed in a circle of eight choices in the correct order . Each note corresponds with a different color . Singing notes affects plants and objects of the same color as the note , while singing the tunes , once learned through the plot , can lift objects , create a shield around Naija , or change Naija into different " forms " which have different appearances and unique abilities critical to overcoming the various challenges and obstacles found in the game . The specific tones that are played when the player selects a note can subtly change in different regions , matching the background music . The default form , or " normal form " , is the only one in which Naija can sing , and is the only one where her appearance is modifiable by the player by having Naija wear costumes found throughout the game .

Other forms , which can only be used once found in @-@ game , are the " energy form " , in which Naija can shoot projectiles to attack enemy creatures , " beast form " , which allows Naija to swim faster through the water and eat small fish to restore health , and " nature form " , in which Naija can shoot seeds that produce flowers and spiky plants that can harm other creatures . In this form , Naija is not harmed by thorns on any plants . The player can also learn the " sun form " , which allows Naija to give off light in dark regions , " spirit form " , which allows the player to move to specific

locations marked by blue crystals without time passing , " fish form " , where Naija turns into a small , fast fish , and " dual form " , found at the end of the game , which allows Naija and another character named Li who is met late in the game 's plot to merge , with actions taken by one affecting the other .

While exploring the world , Naija can collect various ingredients from interaction with plants and animals , mainly by combating her foes . These ingredients can be used to cook dishes , which have varying effects on Naija . The most common effects are healing and enhancing various characteristics such as speed and defense , but there are some more exotic dishes which grant her new abilities . The player can learn new recipes by collecting new dishes directly , but can also learn them by combining ingredients without first knowing the recipe .

= = Plot = =

As the game opens , Naija has lost almost all of her memories , and is unaware of the world outside of her home as she " lives as a simple creature " . The player is told this in voice @-@ over narrations in the form of a story told by a future Naija . These narrations serve as the primary source of information about Naija throughout the game , though there are occasional cutscenes . After being confronted by a shadowy figure and being shown a series of flashbacks she does not understand , Naija awakens . Feeling loneliness as the only member of her species , Naija decides to explore the world around her . As the player explores , Naija discovers more and more about the history of the world , " Aquaria " , and about her own past . The player is not forced to go through the plotline in a set sequence . The only limiting factor is physical barriers such as areas that can only be accessed by using a specific form . Combinations of these physical limitations place some plot elements later in the game . The narrative for the majority of the game is centered on Naija 's exploration of a series of ruined civilizations that she finds , each with a large monster in them . These civilizations make up the different regions of the game .

Towards the end of the game , Naija discovers that all of the ruined civilizations she has found throughout the game were destroyed by a god , " the Creator " , who was jealous of the rising power of that civilization or of their gods . The powerful monsters she has found and defeated in each region were once the gods of that civilization . Each of these civilizations had a unique power , symbolized by the form that Naija learns after defeating their former gods . Along with Li , a human diver from the land she meets at the top of the ocean , Naija then descends to the bottom of the sea to confront the god . There she discovers that the Creator fell into the ocean as a child , and bonded with an ancient spirit to gain god @-@ like powers . He then created Aquaria , threading a verse of a lullaby his mother had sung to him throughout , the only part of the song he remembers . The melody of this song , the " verse " , is what allows Naija to sing songs that affect the world around her ; parts of the melody can be heard in different forms in the songs within the game 's soundtrack .

The Creator , after creating Aquaria , created a series of civilizations , making a new one in turn when each one was destroyed . The Creator kidnaps Li , with whom Naija has fallen in love , and she attacks the Creator to get him back . The player defeats the god as the final boss of the game , and returns home with Li . In the epilogue , Naija is shown with Li and their child . If the player has found all of Naija 's memories by discovering places she remembers , they reveal that the shadowy figure at the beginning of the game was her mother , Mia . Mia was made by the Creator and had the ability , like Naija , to use the different powers of all of the civilizations . She fled the Creator , and hid herself and Naija among several communities in succession ; after the destruction of the last one she erased Naija 's memory so that she would find out the history of Aquaria on her own and defeat the Creator . In the extended epilogue shown if the player has found all of the memories , Mia appears , telling Naija that the two of them can conquer the civilisations above the water . After Naija refuses , Mia kidnaps her , and vanishes ; the extended epilogue ends with Lucien , Naija and Li 's son , leaving to find her . If the player has not found all of the memories , the epilogue instead ends with Naija asking the player to find out about her past , and revealing that the narration of the game was intended to be heard by her son .

= = Development = =

Aquaria was developed by Derek Yu and Alec Holowka over the course of two years , off of a concept that Holowka had thought of a year prior . Yu was the lead artist , and Holowka handled the programming and audio components . Both designers had previously worked in video games ; Yu had made several freeware games , including I 'm O.K with Holowka and others , while Holowka had worked for several video game start @-@ ups , none of which had ever gotten a game published . Some additional work on the game , including some level design and scripting for some enemies , was done by Brandon McCartin . Holowka and Yu officially formed the studio Bit Blot to back the game a week before submitting it to the 2007 Independent Games Festival . The name of the studio is intended to represent a fusion of art and technology . Aquaria is the studio 's only game . Both members of the team continue to make video games , but are not doing so as a partnership ; Holowka went on to form a separate team called Infinite Ammo , and Yu went back to working on freeware games and various ports of Spelunky .

The initial prototype of the game had styling similar to a text @-@ based role @-@ playing game , with a large open world and many sub @-@ quests . After moving towards " multiple @-@ choice text answers " and a complicated gameplay system , the team decided to simplify the game and set the 2007 Independent Games Festival as a deadline to complete everything . With this time pressure , they forced themselves to cut out a lot of what they felt was unneeded complexity , bringing the game to its core . After removing many of what they decided were extraneous elements they then added back in the cooking system , which they felt fit well with the rest of the game , as well as a map system . They then developed the game world and story in a roughly linear manner , creating basic designs of each region and then coming back to fill in details . They felt that this allowed them to create interesting ideas at the beginning of the game and then fill them out and resolve them at the end . One of these ideas was that of the " verse " ; Holowka realized partway through development that he had been using the same twelve @-@ note sequence transposed into different keys throughout the music , and realized that the idea of a pervasive musical theme to the world fit with the story . The game also includes a level and animation editor ; several mods have been made for the game .

The game was developed to be able to be controlled by the player with only the mouse , after it was suggested by Yu 's father . The developers felt that this control scheme forced them to make the gameplay fluid and easy to grasp , though they also added the option to control the game with a keyboard or Xbox 360 controller . Yu and Holowka considered the " hallmark " of exploratory games to be a sense of loneliness , which they made a part of the narrative , but also wanted the player to get a sense of Naija 's character . To that end , they used voice @-@ overs to demonstrate to the player what Naija was feeling during key points of the game . The voice of Naija was performed by Jenna Sharpe , who was chosen after auditioning several other voice actresses . She additionally sang the vocals for one song on the soundtrack , " Lost to the Waves " . She also sang a nine @-@ minute vocal piece , " Fear the Dark " , especially for the release of the Aquaria soundtrack album , which was published by Bit Blot on November 14 , 2009 . The album features 50 tracks on two discs , including all of the music in the game as well as the new vocal track and a few remixes .

The game was released for Windows computers on December 7 , 2007 . A patch was later released which added new functionality to the in @-@ game map , added widescreen support , and tweaked several game settings . A Macintosh port was released November 12 , 2008 , courtesy of Ambrosia Software . The game was released on Steam on December 15 , 2008 ; it included the addition of 27 Steam Achievements . A Linux version of the game was developed by Ryan C. Gordon in 2009 ; an open beta ran until February 6 , 2010 , and the Linux version of the game was released as part of the Humble Indie Bundle . The source code for the game 's engine was released under the GNU General Public License on June 3 , 2010 . A modified version was released on the iPad on November 2 , 2011 . This version , which includes touchscreen support and changes to the way the map works , was created by Andrew Church , who was approached to do the port by Holowka after he did an unofficial PlayStation Portable source port .

= = Reception = =

Aquaria was the Seumas McNally Grand Prize winner of the 2007 Independent Games Festival , and was also a finalist in the categories of Design Innovation , Excellence in Visual Art , and Excellence in Audio . The festival praised the game 's " fluid controls , unique , non @-@ linear gameplay , and vibrant hand @-@ drawn storybook @-@ style graphics " . The game received praise from many different reviewers ; Cam Shea of IGN called it " a stunning effort from such a small team " , Richard Naik of GameCritics called it " an extremely high @-@ quality product " and a fine example of the side @-@ scroller genre , while Chris Dahlen of The A.V. Club termed it " not so much a retro adventure as a fresh take on everything that made the old 2D adventures great " . Praise for the game was centered primarily on its visuals and atmosphere . Hyper 's Tim Henderson commended the game for " a rare and genuine sense of exploration , wonder and discovery " . A review by Scott Colbourne from The Globe and Mail termed Aquaria " drop @-@ dead beautiful " with a " deep and affecting story " and summarized it as " a game you can get comfortably lost in " .

Other reviewers , such as Tom Bramwell of Eurogamer and Chris Holt of Macworld echoed the praises for the graphics and atmosphere , while Craig Pearson of PC Gamer UK added praises for the music and voiceovers and Suzie Ochs of MacLife praised the music and story . Other praises for the game came for its control scheme and for the gameplay mechanics , with Holt calling out the cooking system as worthy of praise . Though noting that the visuals and presentation of the game would be the first thing that players noticed , Nathan Cocks of PC PowerPlay claimed that " from a design standpoint , Aquaria is a triumph , " with the right amount of complexity and level design that is " spot on " .

Several reviewers , such as Bramwell and Holt , criticized the map system present in the initial version of the game as being confusing and difficult . Other reviewers had different concerns , such as Henderson , who critiqued the initial release version for " lack of widescreen support and being occasionally fiddly " , or Naik , who felt that the control scheme was not as intuitive when using an Xbox 360 controller . Shea and Pearson felt that the game could have used more puzzles or a wider variety of quests and objectives to balance out the exploration and combat . They did not feel , though , that these downsides compared to the game 's positives , with Pearson stating that " the good far outweighs what are , essentially , niggles . "