= Aether (video game) =

Aether is a video game designed by Edmund McMillen and Tyler Glaiel and published by Armor Games , released on September 3 , 2008 . Players control a lonely boy and an octopus @-@ like monster that the boy encounters , solving puzzles on different planets to restore them from monochrome to color . The pair travel through space by swinging on clouds and asteroids with the monster 's elongated tongue , searching other planets for life to which the boy can relate . It is also a part of The Basement Collection .

McMillen and Glaiel created the game and developed it in 14 days . Both developers expressed interest in seeing a version being released on the Wii game console through the WiiWare online service . Aether received a positive response from video game blogs for its unusual visual style and atmosphere . The single looped piece of background music received a mixed response and the controls were highlighted as an area of the game that could have been improved before release .

= = Gameplay = =

Aether is a space adventure game with washed @-@ out pastel colors and a varying soundtrack consisting of a piano , synthesizer , guitar , and percussion piece . There are four monochrome planets to explore , which have subdued hues . Players control a lonely boy from Earth and an octopus @-@ like monster he befriends . The monster 's tongue is used to propel itself and the boy through space and onto other planets . Each planet has a unique soundtrack that gets louder as you approach it . Each moon or planet exerts gravity over the player character , requiring momentum to escape from the planet 's orbit . To escape a planet , the tongue must first be latched onto a cloud floating above the planet 's surface , which can then be used to swing the player around . By propelling themselves from the initial cloud using swinging momentum , players can latch onto the next and repeat the process to leave the planet 's orbit . After reaching space the process is repeated with stars and asteroids . In space the lack of gravity causes the player to drift until the direction is changed by swinging on another object .

When travelling through space , players are drawn to a planet 's orbit once they get close . Each planet 's location is labeled with a colored marker which disappears once that planet 's puzzle is solved . The player encounters characters who can be helped if a puzzle is solved . Each planet besides Earth has its own puzzle . The monster 's ability to swing around objects is used in some of the game 's puzzles . One puzzle involves swinging on the crystals which surround the core of a hollow planet called Gravida , without swinging on the same crystal twice or breaking the chain . Solving each planet 's puzzle produces a flash of light , after which monochrome planets change to color , subdued pastel colors brighten , and the planet 's unique soundtrack becomes permanent .

The game 's plot describes a journey through a child 's emotions and anxieties . After befriending the monster , the boy leaves Earth on the creature 's back to look for life elsewhere in the galaxy . He hopes to find someone to relate to . The hollow planet Gravida 's surface is patrolled by a creature that complains of stomach pains . This larger creature is followed by several tiny creatures , some of which ride on its back . One of these smaller inhabitants has fallen into the core of Gravida . Though it is isolated and lonely , the creature consoles itself that nobody can harm it . The planet Malaisus is composed of water , with a monster identical to the player 's swimming around with a shoal of fish . The monster tells the player to leave . Planet Bibulon has two faces on opposite sides , one angry and one happy . A two @-@ faced creature travels across the surface ; one is happy and the other morose . Bibulon is orbited by four moons , each of which has differing opinions on an unnamed man or boy . When players find the planet Debasa , they discover that it is surrounded by a green fog . Gravity is very intense within the fog . Four orbiting satellites produce the fog , which has trapped two boys . Earth shrinks slightly after each planet has been completed . After restoring color to all the surrounding planets , the game is completed by returning to Earth . The Earth has shrunk until it is only slightly larger than the monster ; it is destroyed when the boy and his monster land . Both fly upwards and land on the moon , where the boy is free to craft a future of his choosing .

= = Development = =

Aether was created by Edmund McMillen and Tyler Glaiel , McMillen was a member of independent development studio Cryptic Sea and co @-@ creator of the award winning Gish . Glaiel runs his own independent studio , Glaiel Games , and develops Flash games for game and animation website Newgrounds . The game 's graphics and story were created by McMillen , while Glaiel wrote the game 's music and code . The game was developed in 14 days ; McMillen found he could " ride off " Glaiel 's inspiration and allowed the project to be completed quickly . " People being creative and taking risks with their work always is inspiring to me , honesty in art is also very inspiring , " he stated .

McMillen 's childhood experiences and fears were used for the game 's themes of loneliness , nervousness , and fear of abandonment or rejection . The boy 's journeys through space represent inward @-@ thinking and imagination , planets represent fears and the inhabitants personify McMillen 's childhood " inner demons " . He was initially unsure as to whether or not he wished to release Aether , since it was based on personal experiences and made him feel vulnerable . Glaiel created the game 's planets and gameplay , designing the layout of the planets to convey the emotions involved in the game , but he did not know which planets would ultimately be used to relate to each emotion . He felt that the game 's sense of emotion and mood was improved because development was not thoroughly planned from the outset . Both developers expressed a wish to port the game to the WiiWare service on the Wii video game console . Aether was released as part of McMillen 's game and comic compilation CD This is a Cry For Help in early November 2008 .

= = Reception = =

The game was positively received by gaming blogs , though reviewers held mixed opinions about the controls . The story was compared to The Little Prince , Antoine de Saint Exupéry 's 1943 novella . Aether 's graphics were praised by reviewers . Alec Meer of website Rock Paper Shotgun described them as " beautiful to look at " , Justin McElroy of Joystiq said the game has a " unique visual style " and described the pastel shades as attractive , and Peter Cohen of Macworld described them as a unique look composed of " cute characters with sometimes grotesque imagery " . " StaceyG " of Jay Is Games found the music relaxing and called the game " a truly compelling experience with excellent atmosphere " . Meer also enjoyed the game but found the looped piano music irritating . Nate Ralph of Wired found the game " hauntingly beautiful , if short " .

Reviewers noted that the solution to some of the puzzles were unclear , further hindered by the planets ' inhabitants , whose dialogue does not change when the planet 's puzzle is completed . The tongue propulsion physics were said to be clumsy by StaceyG , who stated that , in conjunction with the gravity exerted by planets , it is more difficult to leave planets ' surfaces than to navigate through space . Both Meer and StaceyG enjoyed the spacefaring aspect of the game , and Derek Yu of website TIGSource stated the controls " sometimes felt brilliant , at other times felt unresponsive and awkward . " Patrick Dugan of Play This Thing saw potential in the tongue @-@ swinging gameplay , noting that Aether appeared to be the first of a series . He suggested that more spatial elements , such as nebulae and black holes , would have made space flight more interesting . McMillen described Aether as " just the prelude to a larger experience " , while Yu suggested that a larger game with improved controls " could be something better than great " .

Aether received an Honorable Mention at IndieCade in 2009 .