

Sirius Anomaly Mission - RPG Videogame

IN250 - Final Art Project - Juan Diaz - Prof. Henebry

Artist Statement:

[LINK](#)

Ever since I was young, I have been very interested in stories of exploration, ships leaving harbor, crews sailing into spaces to still be filled in maps, and people who take the risk as pioneers to go to uncharted places and become explorers for the greater good. As I became older, this fascination went from oceans and jungles to space, where missions and turning light readings into knowledge were the norm. This project takes that lifelong interest and attempts to express it through an interactive story about an investigation of the strange light of Sirius.

The project is a short narrative videogame built in RPG Maker MV, acting as a teaser of what could later become a complete videogame. The player follows Wulf, a field scientist stationed on an orbital outpost near Sirius. Inspired by the character Beowulf from Larry Niven's novel 'Neutron Star', and in turn inspired by the original character from the English poem. At the beginning, Wulf wakes up in a cramped crew cabin. The space station chief, Dr. Voss calls him to a briefing room where the mood is tense. Dr Voss makes clear that he does not know what is happening. Simply explains clearly to the crew the data, deep, irregular, non-periodic dips in the brightness of Sirius which can't be explained by reading errors or a normal transit. From there the player walks the corridor to the launching area with his crew, lifelong friends, then boards a small ship and travels outward to watch the star more closely. The story consists of conversations, scenes of the space around them, and a distant view of Sirius partly dimmed by an enormous ring structure. The game ends on "To be continued," leaving the phenomenon deliberately unresolved and open for a future continuation.

The inspiration from the story comes from two real celestial objects in our galaxy, the first one being the Sirius binary system and the second being Tabby's Star. Sirius A is the main star, bright and stable, whereas Sirius B is its white dwarf companion. The strange dimming in the story is inspired from Tabby's Star, whose asymmetric brightness dips has led to debates about possible dust and even megastructures. In the briefing and ship dialogue, Dr Voss attempts

to use real astronomical terms such as flux, light curves and photometry. The images shown during the flight, a ringed dwarf planet, and a pack of 'space whales' form part of the creativity and imaginary component of the story. Finally, Sirius, shown with a fragmented ring of dark segments, introduces a mystery that leaves the player looking for an answer.

Artistically, the game follows a retro pixel-art style. I believe that Pixel art has an abstract nature that helps illustrate science fiction, since the player can fill in details with their imagination, similarly as astronomers reconstruct information from incomplete data. I designed throughout the semester the backgrounds for each key location, the bedroom, corridor, meeting room, launching area, interior of the ship and characters. Similarly, the game mainly uses an array of blue, grey and white colors to transmit the shining light of their neighboring blue star.

The game follows a simple linear structure, so as to not overwhelm the player with too complex topics or an array of options. The tension lies in not knowing, the fear of not knowing what is dimming the star, and the responsibility of going to look anyway. Similarly, the three main characters embody different reactions to the unknown. Dr. Voss is cautious and data-driven, refusing to name what he cannot yet understand. Chuck is anxious and frightened, embodying the true fear of the unknown, whereas James acts more calmly and shows his excitement. Wulf's reaction is goal oriented and not easily distracted. The final shot of Sirius with an incomplete dark ring implies the existence of a construction or structure, but it is ambiguous. Science, and particularly astrophysics, rarely offers a decisive explanation where everything is explained. I wanted the player to step away with the same mixture of interest and frustration that comes from reading about an unresolved mystery like Tabby's Star. Somewhere where something is clearly happening, and we must live with partial information.

This project is my attempt to unite two kinds of exploration I care about, the outward exploration of stars and the universe, as well as the inward discovery of how we react to the unknown. The goal of putting the viewer in control of Wulf, making him part of conversations, and stare out a dimming star, is to create the feeling of being on the edge of a groundbreaking discovery. Whether the cause turns out to be dust or something stranger and inexplicable, the journey itself and the questions it raises are the true subject of this artistic project.