

# Thesis Documentation

**Expected Completion: March 28, 2021.**

## Thesis Proposal and Timeline

This studio thesis will use interactive fiction to explore themes of xenophobia through the metaphor as the player attempts to navigate a new life on another planet set in the distant future.

The idea is meant to give insight into some of the experiences that immigrants face when moving to a new country including a sense of wonderment and hostility from citizens. It is based on the real-life experiences of immigrants and personal experiences from living abroad. In order to create a more realistic experience, online interviews will be held to gather information about both good and bad interactions that immigrants have had in their new countries.

Since no one nation should be singled out and to prevent bilingual users from having an advantage in the game, instead of language difficulties, the alien planet will communicate through puzzles and riddles. Since it is set on another planet in the distant future, the idea of a “universal translator” will be established and “language confusion” will be based on puzzling through the society’s “riddle-based” language. Simple instruction following will represent a more elementary level of understanding while traditional puzzles will move players to a middle track and context clue answer options will allow players to move to track where they receive the most story information and see a deeper level of the alien “culture”.

Additionally, this project will work to assist players in using reading comprehension and context clues as a game mechanic. It should be possible to use

teaching methodologies to guide players into a more enriching play experience and allow them to come to conclusions and paths seemingly on their own. It will follow a typical “string of pearls” interactive fiction storylines with three parallel paths that the player can jump between as the story progresses. There will be offshoots available for players to take part in “mini-games” not necessary for the plot, but to allow players to more deeply understand their new society and to gather clues that can help them later in the game. This should be representative of making an effort to learn about and interact with the culture and people that you living with and thus gain greater knowledge of “language” and cultural norms.

The game will follow one overarching story with each level representative of comprehension. The high-level track will have a complete story allowing the user to clearly see the good and bad of their new home. Middle level will exclude certain details from the plot. It will be clear that something unsettling or upsetting might be happening, but like when you cannot comprehend a language, the player will miss out on plot points. The lowest level will follow the general story but be missing large chunks of story elements and be very elementary in its design and story. The images will follow this theme. Lowest level will have sketches only, middle will include colored designs, and highest will include basic backgrounds and colored images. The idea behind this is to give the user a visual representation that they are missing something. Ideally, it will help those in the lower levels realize that they are missing something and strive to solve more difficult puzzles allowing them to engage in a more fulfilling story.

It will be created in Twine and hosted on the web for anyone to use (either itch.io or on a WordPress site). Twine allows for creative application of story, puzzle, and images that best suit this interactive fiction. Hosting it on the web allows for the work to

be accessible to those interested in interactive fiction. Twitch.io allows works to be tagged to allow interested players to easily search for interactive fiction pieces.

Additionally, the work might be submitted to conferences such as the Electronic Literature Organization's conference or to an interactive fiction jam to reach out to a wider audience.

The first part of this project will be based heavily on research. A literature review of first-person memoirs and related works will be conducted to gain further insight into possible themes and plot points that should be included in the work. Additionally, research needs to be done into the effectiveness of interactive fiction to build empathy and the levels of engagement the medium can provide. Sketches and brainstorming will also take place during this phase of planning.

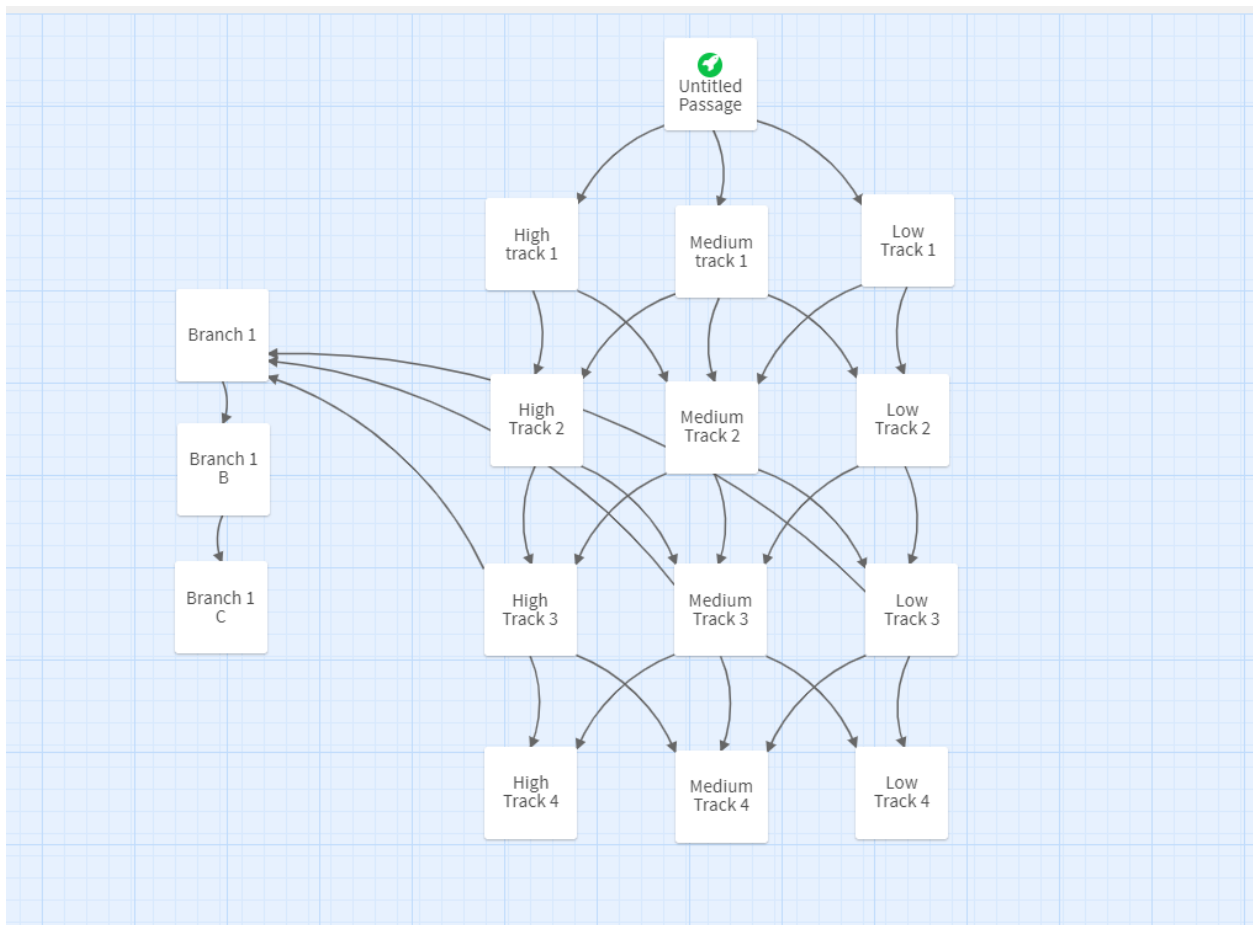
Next, the story will be outlined and vital plot points will be laid out in a logical order. This step includes creating a detailed story for the highest level and removing details to create the lower levels. While doing this, it is important to keep relevant plot points that are needed in later high story points in lower level tracks while making them appear unimportant or extraneous to the plot. Corresponding with this will be the Twine outline and layout. A basic layout will be created so that there is a visual representation of the outline of the work. Artwork will also begin in this phase and continue throughout the rest of the project.

Puzzles will be added later as this takes a higher level of practice with Twine and research to create fulfilling puzzle and riddle elements. The Twine cookbook and informative texts will be heavily relied on to create an engaging play atmosphere. Some ideas for puzzles at the moment included clickthrough links, textual riddles, and countdown timers to represent certain struggles found in new language interactions (i.e.

responding “yes” to everything, forming complete sentences, trying to create a novel response with an impatient native speaker).

Lastly, further research will be done into possible conference submissions and interactive fiction jams and a short paper detailing the process will be created to summarize the project’s process and purpose. It will then be posted on a webpage to be viewed by the general public.

### Sample Twine Outline



There will be three tracks telling the same story that is determined by players' ability to solve puzzles and determine context clues. Lower tracks will contain less information as players missed details (a metaphor for not understanding a new culture). It is possible to jump between tracks.

Side-quests may be possible from any track and will give additional information and clues allowing players in a lower track to bypass the middle track or share additional information.

## Related Works

### Similar works

I like the idea of using video games for good or to make people think about their world outside of their typical experience. I also like their idea of using a game to respond to message requests that [Kind Words](#) employed.

Some actual Twine games that I thought were similar in concept (but not really in theme).

[Detritus](#) is very much based on the idea of trying to live your life and make it through normal, mundane tasks. Based on real-life experiences. I also liked the background photos.

I like the art choices in [Reprogram](#) even if the theme made me incredibly uncomfortable.

[Mangia](#) talks about the struggle of having an eating disorder and uses cuts to simplistic art as a metaphor for what the protagonist is feeling in the moment.

[Eden](#) focuses on breaking an alien who was traveling the universe out of a lab. Also the player's choices affect the outcome of the game and there are random events as well that have a lasting effect.

## Design Moodboards

# Untitled Interactive Fiction Color Board



Color ideas for travel sections of interactive fiction

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## Background Ideas

Some potential ideas for creating alien backgrounds that still look familiar using photo manipulation. These were done entirely using filters available on a smartphone and would need to be touched up in Photoshop.



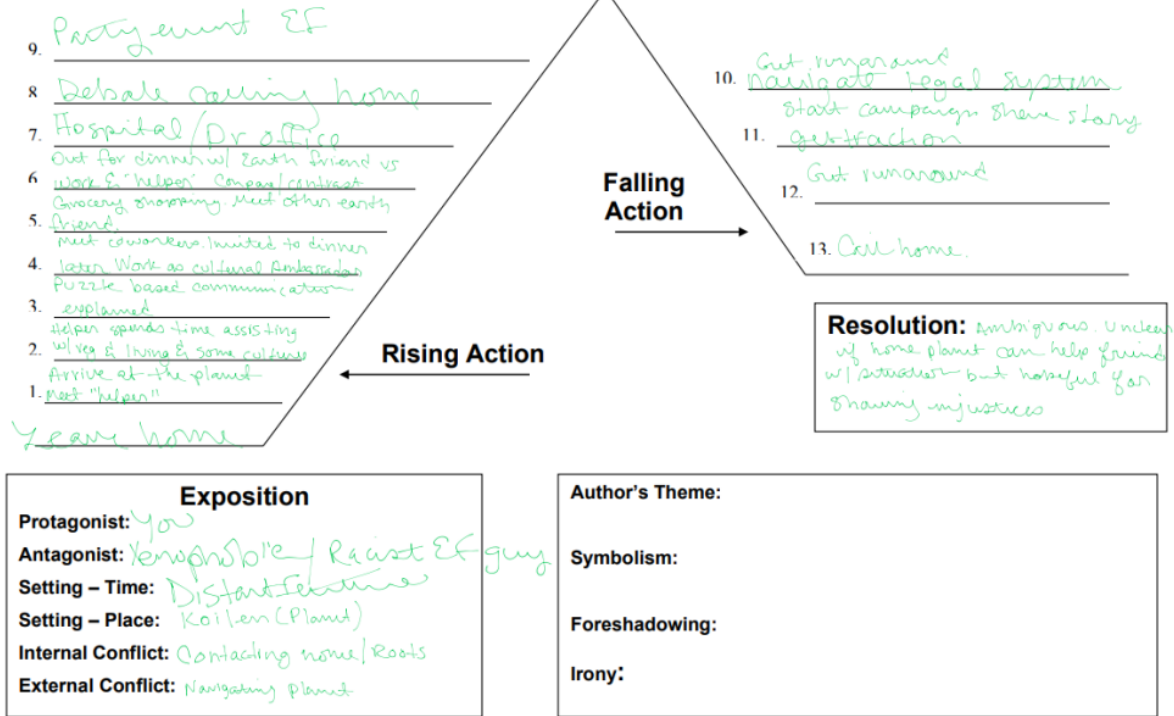






**Plot Diagram**

Plot Diagram for Unnamed HF Work

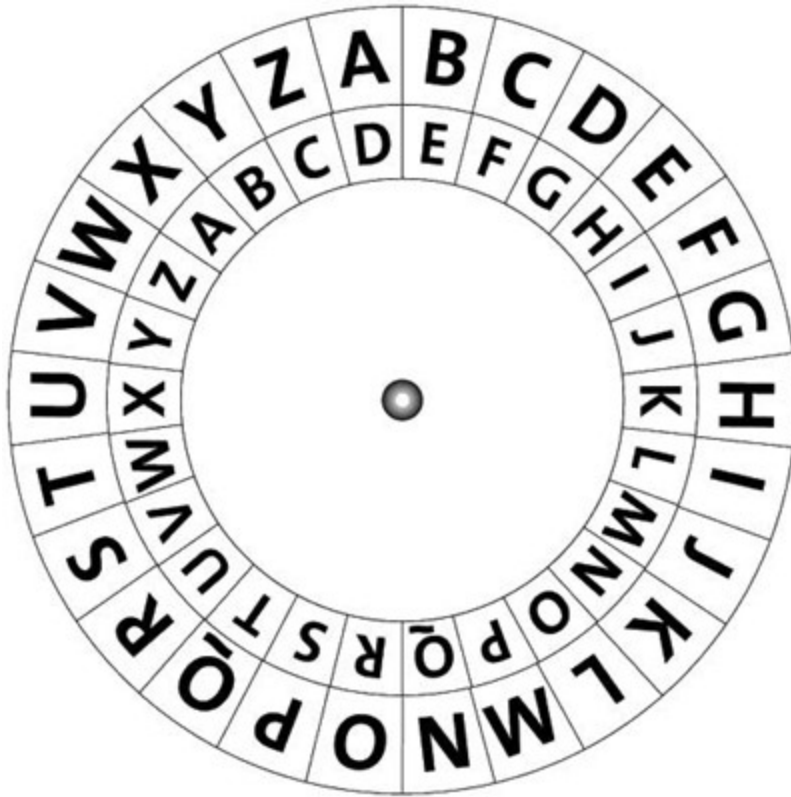


[plot-diagram-template filledDownload](#)

**Puzzles based on Codes**

Cesar shift:

Super simple and would work if I can figure out text boxes UGH



Vigenere Cipher:

This takes a keyword and you apply that to a longer text.

“The quick, brown fox jumps over the lazy dog” with cipher “code” becomes:

“Ins thath elate san esses anes ins onrp ara.”

This kind of code would be useful for keywords/phrases found in the forum.

Pigpen Cipher:

This cipher looks like tick tack toe boards, but instead you place letters from the alphabet in the sections. Would have to modify it to look more alien.

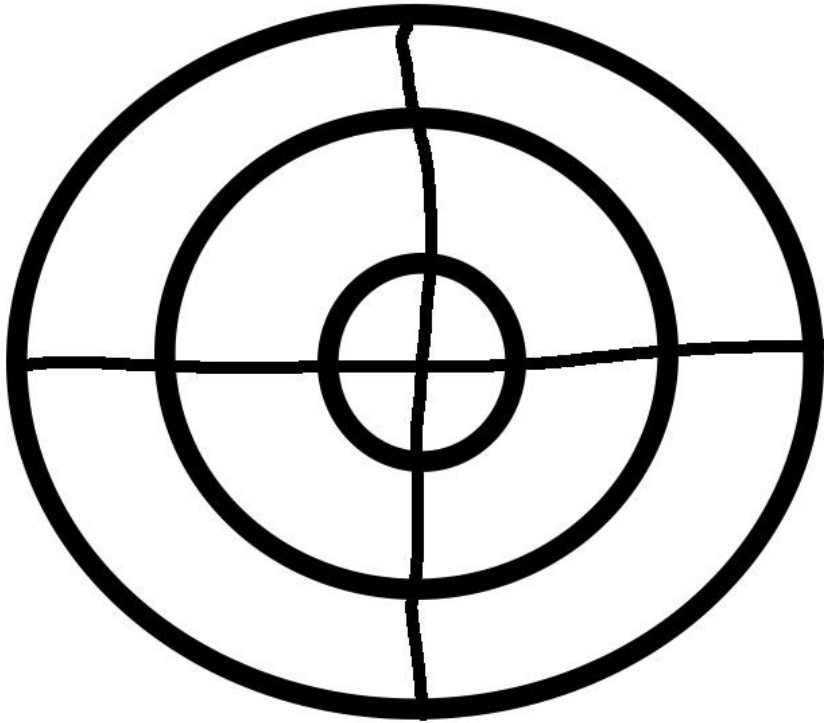
Again, this would be helpful as a “forum post” at an earlier point in the story where someone discusses the “art” of the planet.

A	B	C
D	E	F
G	H	I

J.	K.	L.
M.	N.	O.
P.	Q.	R.

	S	
T		U
	V	

	W	
X.	.	Y.
	Z	



Letters to number: A=1 B=2 and so on.

This is a more simplistic code that might be best used as a middle difficulty code. It's very easy to determine what it is and also very easy to copy paste the text into an automatic translator. Still fun.

Pinhole cipher: This would be a translation from a physical code. People used to send notes and use a pin to punch holes over certain letters to spell out a code. This one was easily replicated in Twine using bold/italics. Again, though. How to use a text box?

Stenography: This can be replicated with hidden text (which I also failed to replicate in my Twine practice despite the cookbook and sugarcube macros) OR by setting the text to be the same color as the background. It would show up if highlighted. Maybe both?

Backwards: Simple, but effective way to make things more complicated.

Riddles:

This one would be difficult to make "alien" but I could potentially come up with some in-game reason why riddles are translated to something that a human would understand. They are very, very tied to culture.

Puns: Similar to the riddle issue, but more believable.

## **Input Text Twine Sample**

Password is "thesis2020" [Here](#)

### **Some ideas from reading *How Games Move Us***

Include an engaging NPC. One that is from the alien planet and another immigrant friend?

Possible "network" in the form of a webforum for other immigrants to the planet. Leave questions on the page (from a list because I am Struggling with the text and paragraph boxes) that can be linked to on the regular story. This way it looks like the player is getting social interaction from others dealing with their situation. They can ask for or add advice. This would also be a really good place to hide context clues.

Art idea: Make sure that text and body language make sense. If a character is aggressive, be sure that their language and posture are aggressive.

The chance to make choices which affect the narrative are IMPORTANT.

Play into ideas about childhood and nostalgia. What are some universal experiences?

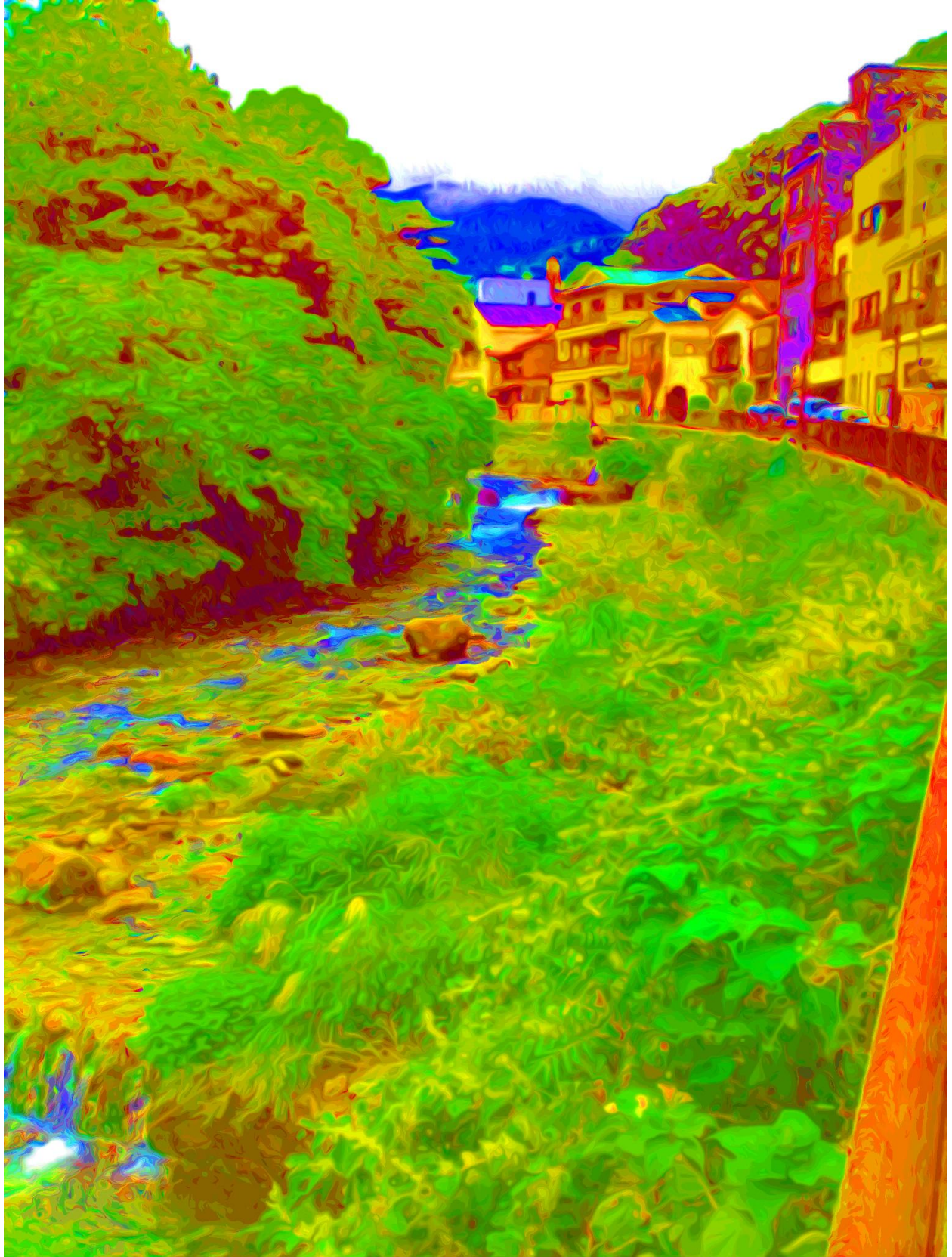
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Some more nuanced photo manipulation using photoshop. The busier pictures are easier to manipulate into alien landscapes. Landscapes with a lot of sky should be avoided.

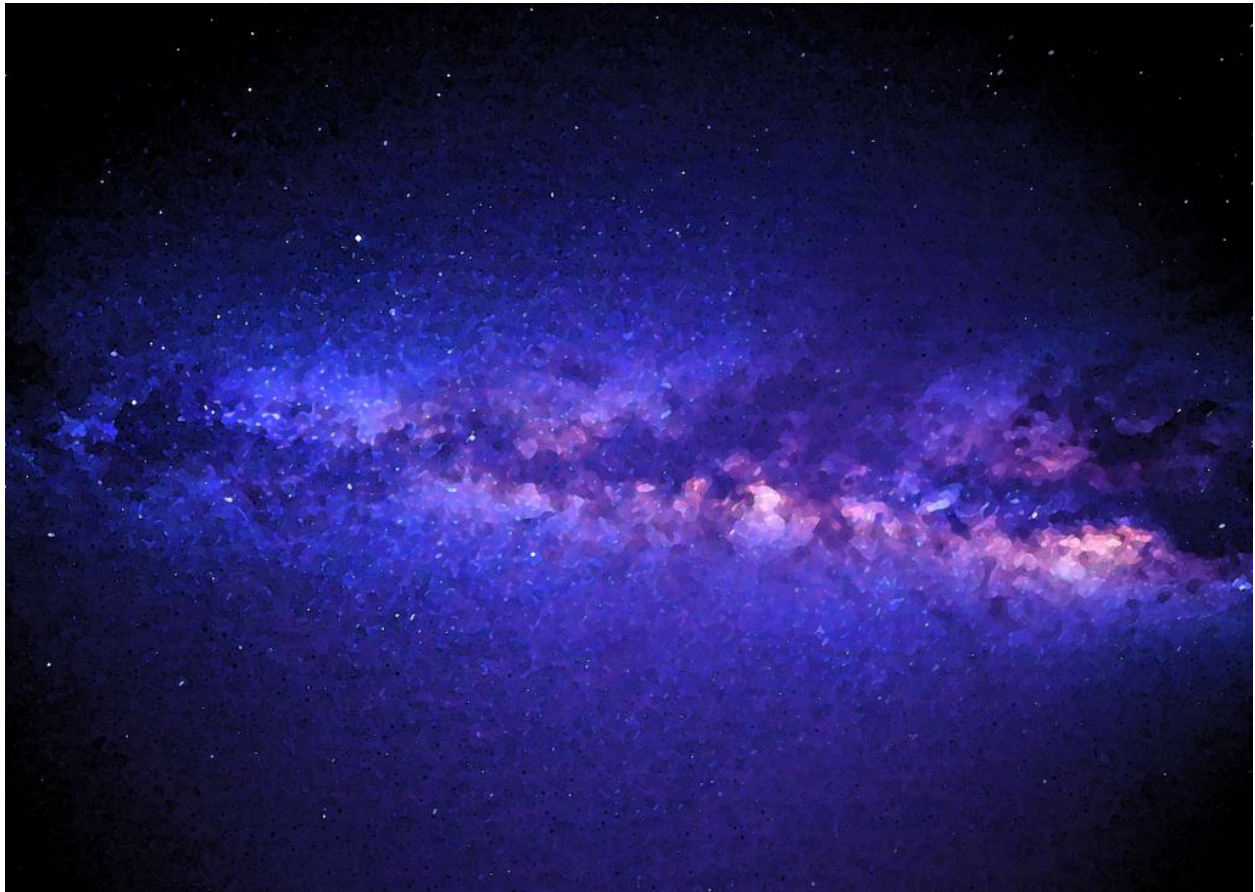
The [prototype](#) is available on itch.io for now. Password is thesis2020.

Played more games with better aesthetic than some of the earlier ones I looked at. [Babyface](#) was recommended and while I don't think I'll be using sound, I liked the way the links were formatted and the use of photos as links.

Additionally, some informal interviews were taken with people who have lived outside of their home country:

[interviewabroadDownload](#)

A downloadable version of the story prototype is available at [itch.io](#). password:thesis2020

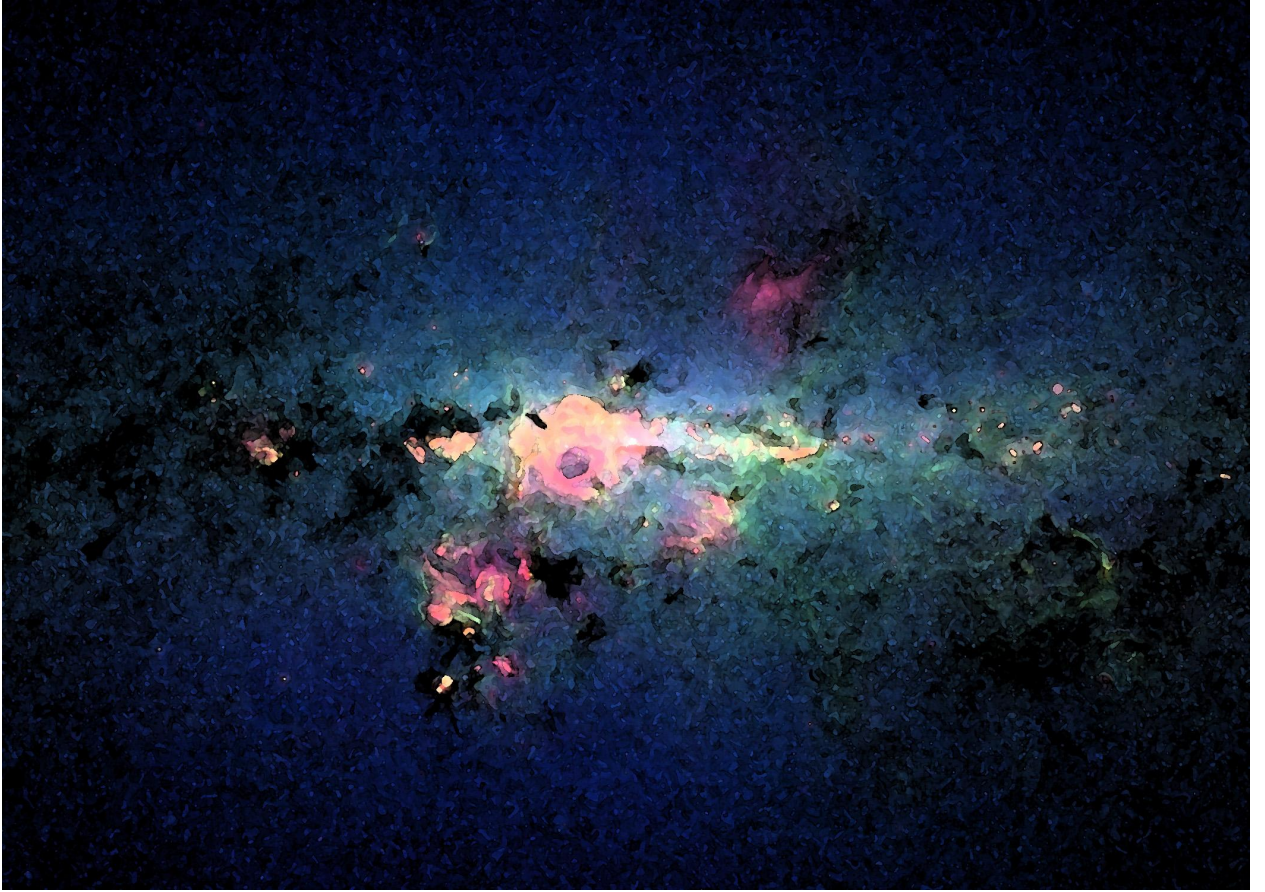


Images to make the work look more organic than images taken directly from the web. Going with a Impressionist inspired look. It works for the messiness of the story too and how you need to take a different approach to get the full picture.

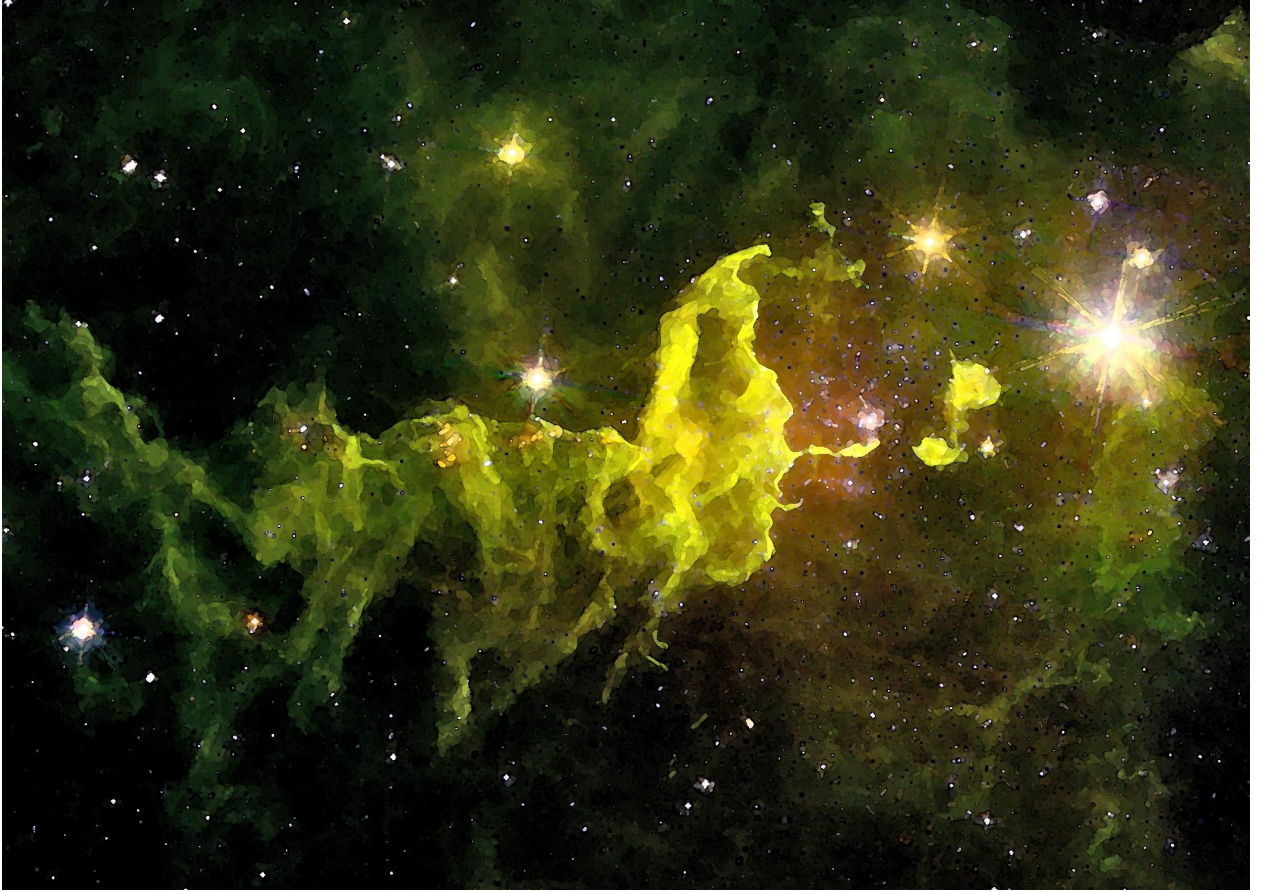
Still available at <https://rittermi.itch.io/thesis-prototype> password: thesis2020



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More background images for the story. I opted for a space theme with a more impressionist/pointillism technique. I feel like this represents one of the themes. From far away, everything seems clear and good. Up close, you can see some of the more complexity of the story's universe.








Welcome to the Eoghan Group, \$name!

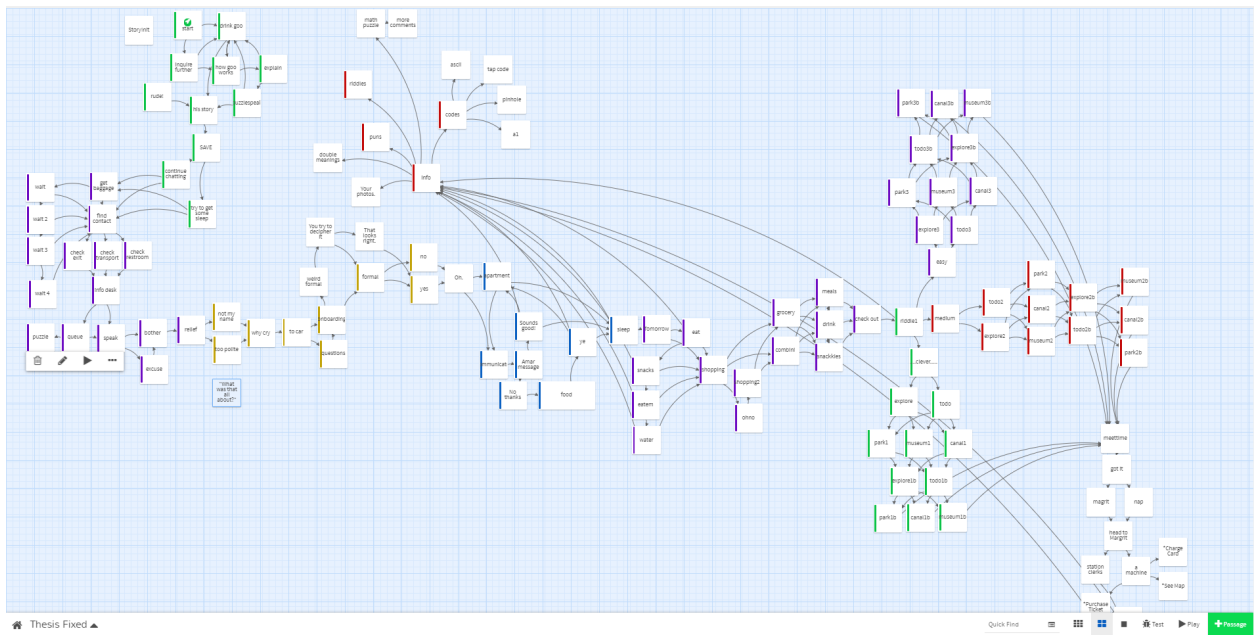
We appreciate you helping our company in spreading the importance of alien diversity and culture. Our services help prepare the Köllan public to become comfortable with alien species before visiting foreign planets either for business, learning, or pleasure. We know that you will be a impressive asset as you share your knowledge of Earth and its peoples. Orientation starts soon! So come absolutely prepared! come next cycle!

See you soon!

test

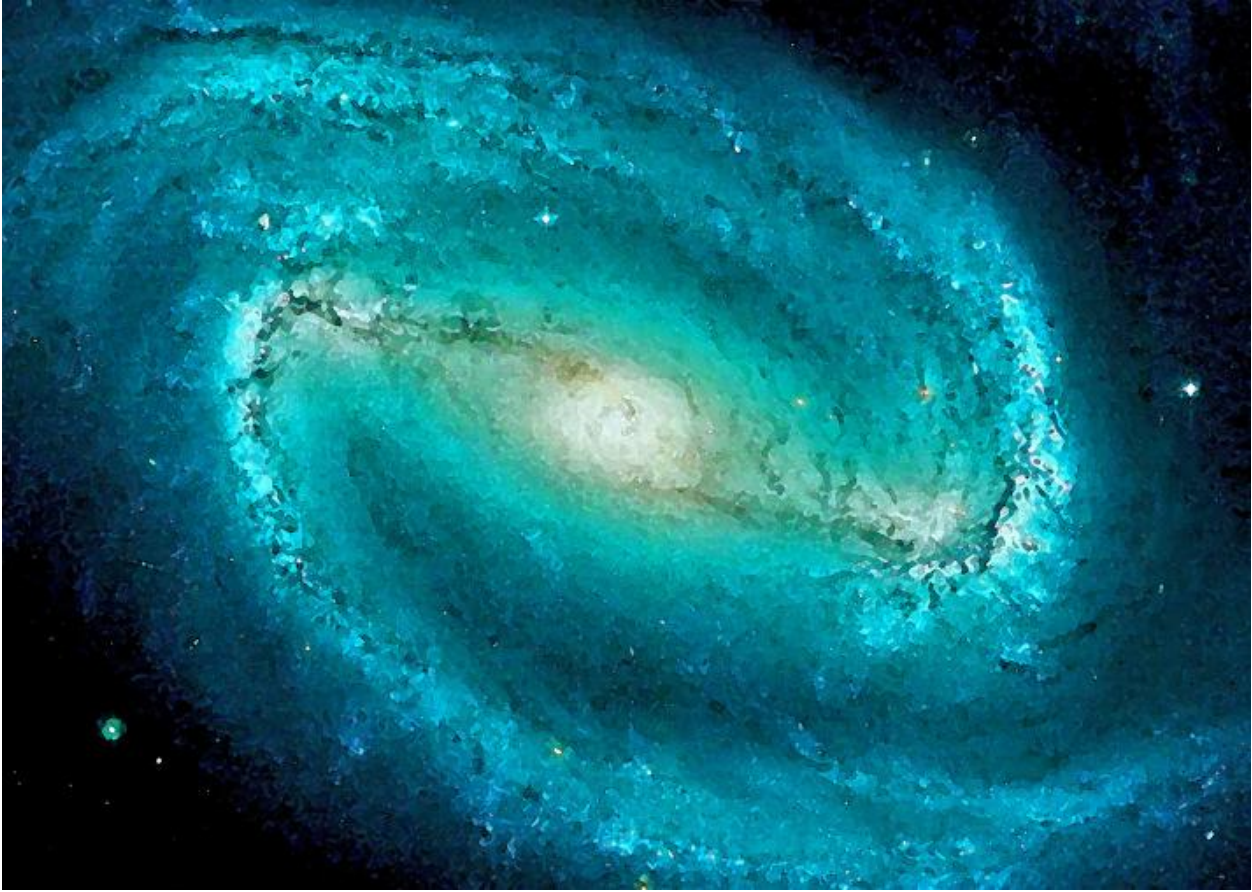
Yamilleth pipes in "If there's a code, ignore spaces."  
You try to decipher it





The text needs opacity added behind it for clarity still. Some examples of partial story layout and text input puzzle.





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You select the game with a click and mess around with a keyboard game on your communicator while you wait.



A group of Kollians enter.  
Someone clears their throat.

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The craft slows to a stop in front of a high-rise apartment building. The area is fairly crowded, but there are mountains in the distance.

Yamileth takes you up to the sixth floor and leads you to your new home.


You step inside to find a small studio apartment. There isn't much to it, but it'll do for now.

"It's getting late. You have your communicator, right? You can use it to get some groceries in the morning."

You thank her for her help and bid her goodnight.

"Oh, not a problem! I've got to get home. My son has music lessons early tomorrow morning. Goodnight!"

Check communicator  
Explore apartment



# STORY DONE!!!!

Needs a title page, more proofing, shortened passages, and a restart at the end.

Playable game: <https://rittermi.itch.io/thesisplay> password: thesis2020

Downloadable game: <https://rittermi.itch.io/okayforreal> password: thesis2020