C.A.R.R.I.E.'S STATION

A game concept by Amanda Sharkey

Demo video: https://youtu.be/Sc5XnBKhUOE

Overview

Introduction

Research hubs like this one shouldn't scare you. You're a seasoned space explorer who has spent years traversing through the empty vacuum of outer space. Looting abandoned space stations is your forte, and you've become callous to the ominous solitude of shelled out vessels. But this place? No, this is a different kind of empty. Your sources report that the scientists who once used this lab are long gone, yet there's a deep feeling in your gut that you aren't alone. The creaking of rusted metal floors from your cautious steps are interrupted by the deep hum of a machine powering on. You turn around to shine your light on the source of the sound, but there's nothing except the same dilapidated hall you had just passed through. Suddenly, a ubiquitous voice speaks:

"WELCOME TO THE PROXIMA CENTAURI DEEP SPACE LABORATORY. I AM YOUR COMPUTER AID FOR RESEARCH AND RESCUE INITIATIVE EFFORTS. DUE TO PROTOCOL 3019 I CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO LEAVE. THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION."

Concept

C.A.R.R.I.E.'s Station is a sci-fi 2D puzzle platformer. It follows Mari, a daring interstellar rogue who must escape a deserted space station, the Proxima Centauri Deep Space Laboratory (PCDSL) that has been taken over by a corrupt AI named C.A.R.R.I.E. While Mari was expecting to explore this place for valuable treasures and technology to sell, she is now in a life or death situation. By searching the station's decrepit and dangerous halls, Mari has to find a way to shut down C.A.R.R.I.E. before C.A.R.R.I.E. can shut down her. Within PCDSL lies instructions on how to escape as well as clues about its past that Mari must uncover and piece together.

While it is dark and mysterious, *C.A.R.R.I.E.'s Station* is far from a jump-scare indusing horror game. Its underlying narrative is uncovered by the player throughout the game, and it is designed to build more suspense and anticipation than fear.

Gameplay

The game is a 2D side-scroller platformer. In each level, the player is collecting clues that will eventually help them shut down C.A.R.R.I.E. while avoiding traps and obstacles. There are obstacles controlled by C.A.R.R.I.E such as falling platforms, spiky blocks, and turret shooters as well as puzzle-based obstacles required to navigate through the station like finding/turning on switches and decoding messages.

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Sequence of Events

1 Mari arrives at PCDSL and begins to explore as if it were any other job

2 C.A.R.R.I.E. awakens, trapping and threatening Mari

3 Mari searches the main observatory for a way out. In there she finds a map of station with the central control room boldly circled

4 She makes her way towards the central control room, but is stopped when C.A.R.R.I.E. locks the door

5 Mari must travel throughout the station to reach the control room, overcoming obstacles and traps C.A.R.R.I.E. sends after her

6 C.A.R.R.I.E. explains that all data on every computer in the station is controlled by them, so Mari begins hunting for paper research logs to get clues

7 In the scientists' quarters, Mari finds a room with a bunch of scattered papers explaining a code that will completely shut C.A.R.R.I.E. down

8 Mari reaches the central control room, and C.A.R.R.I.E.'s "face" appears on a giant monitor ready to stop her at any cost

**9** Mari uses C.A.R.R.I.E.'s own attacks against their hardware to stop them physically

10 On the way to activate the shut down code, C.A.R.R.I.E., now defenseless, pleads for their life

11 Mari enters the code regardless, killing C.A.R.R.I.E. and allowing herself to escape

Level design concept from demo game
(first draft to explore layout possibilities)

KEY:

C.A.R.R.I.E.'s
Station

Amanda Sharkey
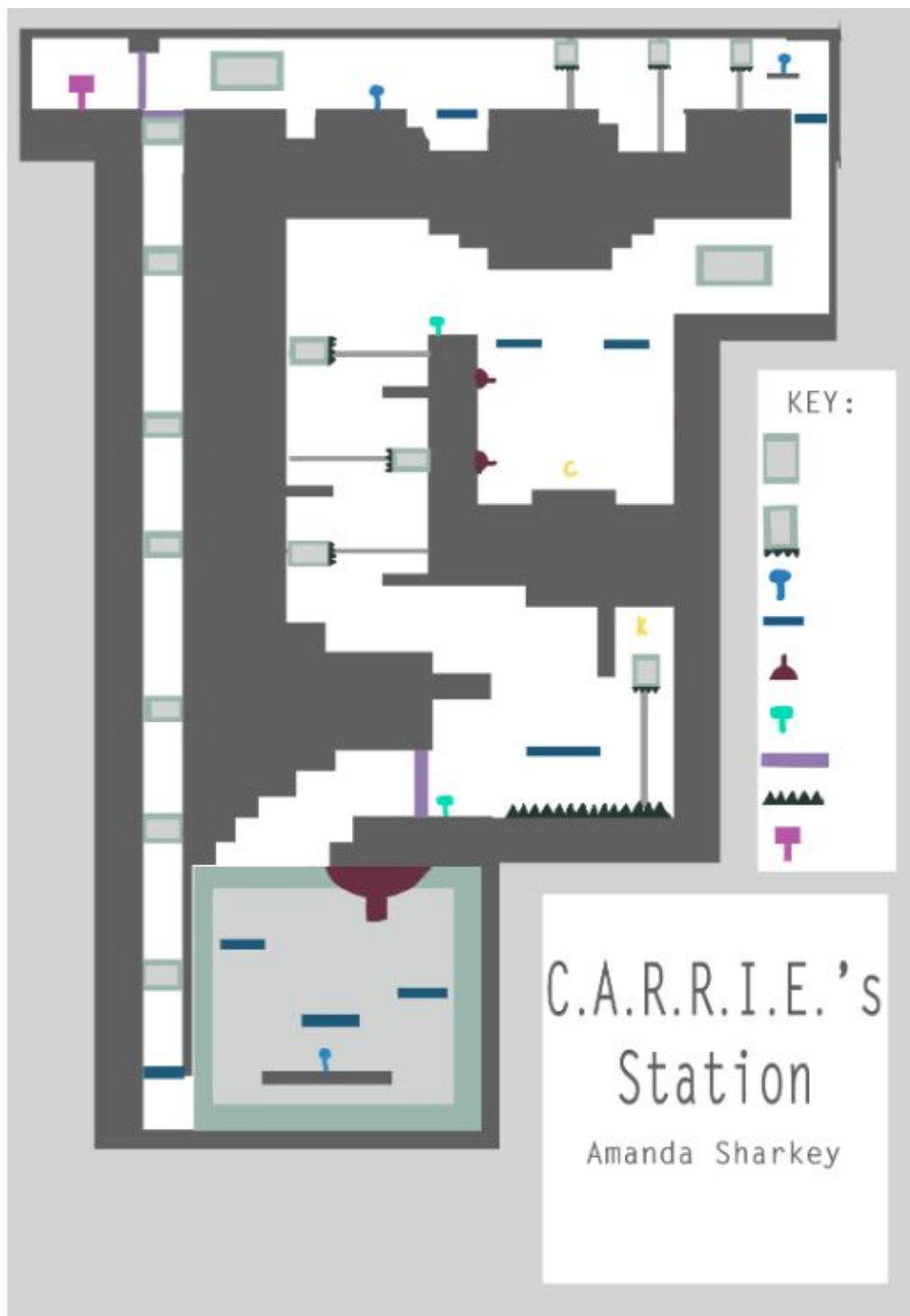
Characters

Mari- *The player character*. Mari is an Indiana Jones- type treasure hunter. She travels through outer space in hopes of finding loot to sell and riches to be gained. However, Mari is a little too confident at times, and her daring escapades sometimes prove more dangerous than the reward is worth. Her bright, neon palette is meant to contrast against the dull, neutral tones of the PCDSL. Her flashy accessories even emit a subtle glow that can be seen as she explores dark areas. With the way Mari dresses and speaks, players can easily see her bubbly yet naive personality.

C.A.R.R.I.E.- The Computer Aid for Research and Rescue Initiative Efforts. Once built to assist the scientists at Proxima Centauri Deep Space Laboratory, this AI became too intelligent, coming to the conclusion that they should have complete control in order to produce the most efficient results. C.A.R.R.I.E. turned psychotic and trapped the scientists in the station, either killing them in the process or letting them starve and die on their own. Upon Mari's arrival, they are re-awakened and believe she should suffer the same fate as the previous inhabitants of PCDSL.

Competitive Analysis and Influences

C.A.R.R.I.E.'s Station is very reminiscent of the *Portal* games in terms of genre and motifs. Both games center around escaping an abandoned laboratory with an evil AI following the player. Another aspect that adds to their similarity is the solitude players experience having their protagonist be the only living or active character. However, this game takes on a slightly darker tone with its graphics and overall mood. C.A.R.R.I.E. has less humorous quirks than Glados or Wheatly, and more suspense builds as Mari needs to be constantly vigilant.

As a 2D puzzle platformer/side-scroller, *C.A.R.R.I.E.'s Station* has a similar feel to games like Limbo and Oxenfree. They are more stylistically similar than mechanically similar, and this game takes inspiration from their unique art/graphics and ability to tell a somewhat dark and thrilling story in this style of game.

Development

Platform and Controls

This game is developed for PC and intended to be sold on Steam and the Epic Games Store. It uses A/D, right/left arrow keys, and the spacebar for movement and jumping. W and the up arrow are used to pick up and inspect items. When the player has to enter codes or text, it will require the use of the keyboard. Having to type in text may limit the game's ability to be remastered for consoles, however it's not an impossible mechanic to work around.

Scope
If *C.A.R.R.I.E.'s Station* were to be fully produced at an indie studio with a small group of developers, it could cost anywhere around $50K depending on the length the dev team thinks will best fit the game. However if it were produced as a student game, cost would significantly decrease. Unity is an ideal engine to develop this game, especially when considering it would be free (assuming the developers aren't making more than $100K a year). However what would be saved in production costs would be lost in quality. Much of the budget goes into ensuring that the game has significant in playtime and hiring high quality artists, and this isn't always guaranteed with low budget games.

My Role in Development
I would assume the role of producer and creative director. One of my greatest strengths is that I am a jack of many trades. Being familiar with game design, game programming, art, narrative design, and even the business of games is a crucial trait of a leader in game development. It also allows me to clearly communicate with my team, making it easier to convey ideas to both technical thinkers like programmers and creative thinkers like artists.

Challenges
Creating a series of unique, fun, and rewarding puzzle platformer levels is quite challenging. Difficulty scaling for puzzles is not as simple as giving monsters more lives, and it's very easy to make levels either too simple or too complicated. Level designers working on this game have to know the psychology of players very well in order to ensure each section introduces something new, valuable, and engaging.

Audience

Target Audience
This game is targeted towards teens, young adults, and adults who are interested in more narrative based games. *C.A.R.R.I.E.'s Station* is filled with observation investigation, so it's not designed for the mainstream action-packed FPS player. Players who would enjoy the game get just as much gratification from solving a tough puzzle as they would slaying a big bad evil guy. Having players unravel a quality and immersive narrative as they explore the and designing mechanics that are unique and reflect the story make *C.A.R.R.I.E.'s Station* a worthwhile experience.

Delivering on the Experience

In order to deliver to the audience, the dev team needs to set a reasonable scope. When the idea for a narrative driven indie game arises, it's very easy to get carried away. If the team tries to bite off more than we can chew, the game will be rushed, messy, and superficial. Because *C.A.R.R.I.E.'s Station* is reliant on it's audience wanting to explore all the details, going for quality over quantity in terms of content is needed.

Marketing and Promotion

For an indie game like this, one of the best ways to promote itself is through social media. Assuming this the dev team's first published game, we will have to exploit any networking relationships and clout we have. A retweet or review from online influencers goes far in this age of social media. I have connections with the Classic Tetris community, and could easily get free promotion from the former and current Classic Tetris World Champions. Even though Tetris is a completely different game, any sort of exposure to the video game community is useful. Having a well produced trailer to share is important too, as it will help the target audience know that *C.A.R.R.I.E.'s Station* is a game they will want to play.