Project Abeona: Concept, Process, and Discussion

A collaborative storytelling experience by Tamara Tesoriero (1829735)

INTRODUCTION:

Project Abeona is a collaborative worldbuilding and storytelling experience that takes the form of a private Facebook group. The project's primary goal is for participants to collaboratively develop and 'explore' Proxima b – an exoplanet located in the Alpha Centauri system. This process takes place through **mission participation.** These missions are set by Ground Control (group admins) and involve some sort of internet search/engagement to solve a narrative problem. Essentially, the project is a roleplaying experience geared towards the collective construction of an alien world, based on information/data that players collect/interpret – a result of active engagement with goals set by group admins.

As a result, Project Abeona's narrative progression relies on group interaction. Think of a Dungeons and Dragons campaign, but over Facebook. As a narrative designer, my purpose was to present the foundations for a world and story. These foundations acted as unmapped trails that participants could fully flesh out and explore. Thus, fully planning some sort of narrative progression was challenging due to the project's unpredictability. Like any decent dungeon master, I had to think quickly to craft an engaging story – even if it was step by step (mission by mission). With the added disconnect of a digital platform, keeping my players/participants engaged over extended periods of time would be one of the steepest hills to climb.

Here is an invite link to the Facebook group, should you like to see the project's progression in real time. You might have to wait for me to accept your membership, but I will keep a close eye on the group and accept your requests as quickly as possible.

*This document is split into four separate parts, each elaborating on a particular facet of the project's construction and delivery:

PART 1: CONCEPT – this category discusses the project's initial ideas and justifications for their development (p.3-5).

PART 2: STORYTELLING – this category discusses the means through which the project tackled its storytelling structures (p.6-9).

PART 3: PROCESS – this category documents the project's week-long evolution (p.10-20).

PART 4: REFLECTION – this category discusses the project's successes and failures, as well as its legitimacy as an interactive artefact (p.21).

PART 1: CONCEPT

As discussed above, Project Abeona takes place through a private Facebook group.

Why?

Well, we should start by understanding the project's initial concept: I knew I wanted to create an experience that relied on **collaborative storytelling** in a way that encouraged **community building.** I wanted my participants to feel as much a part of the story as they were storytellers. This idea stemmed from trying to encourage interactivity in ways that make the participants feel like their engagement is a crucial contribution to the story. I wanted their interaction to not only feel meaningful – but also be essential to the project's existence as a creative artefact.

Ideally, this project would exist over a long period of time and accumulate large groups of participants. As the story develops, exploring a planet turns into cultivating a planet; which turns into developing social and political systems; which turns into uncovering and studying the planet's history, ancient civilizations and artefacts; etc. Large groups of members could also identify themselves with a particular field of study and individuals could exist in ranking systems according to their participation in the group. This works to instil a sense of member identity within the world and its function, hopefully encouraging further participation. Members would also be free to create maps, environmental concepts, etc. to further enhance the world's feel and existence, based off the information they accumulated. Thus, they would have a lot of room to participate and develop their own ideas, rather than just being restricted by group administrators and moderatos.

This project has the potential to become enormous, but it's important to start small. This foundational concept already established some goals that needed to be fulfilled, primarily:

1) Formatting this project in a way that was organised and accessible.
2) Creating an environment (a magic circle) that encouraged roleplaying behaviour via suspension of disbelief.

Choosing a platform:

The first goal (finding an appropriate platform) is what ultimately led to using Facebook as a storytelling medium. The inspiration for this idea came from another Facebook roleplaying group, in which members pretend to work in Chernobyl's Reactor 4 (before the disaster took place). I didn't join the group, but it was still an interesting concept that burrowed its way into my mind – right beside the (entirely useful and necessary) Chernobyl archive.

The ability to create isolated groups in which members can actively participate in some sort of narrative or roleplaying is what really sold me on using Facebook as an interactive medium. The fact that I could make groups private to ensure that members were both protected and took the project seriously (they had to agree to a set of rules before they could join) was also a dealbreaker. This meant that I wouldn't have to engage in such heavy moderation, lowering the risk of spoilers or interruptions from rogue participants. Essentially, I could create a magic circle that encourages communal participation – while enjoying all the bells and whistles that Facebook has to offer.

Like most other social media platforms, Facebook is inherently interactive through its purpose: community building and social interaction. This is because the platform actively encourages social participation through its incorporation of comments sections; 'liking' and 'reactions'; stickers; polls; share buttons; post creation; etc. The platform relies on audience interaction to function properly – much like the way I wanted my own project to function.

Facebook offers a variety of benefits. The first is accessibility: almost everyone who has an internet connection has access to Facebook. The platform is free, popular, and even supports a zero-rated, data free mode. The second is its ability to create topic-specific groups that support a variety of post formats (images, gifs, videos, and text posts). Additionally, the platform has features that categorise specific posts (the 'topics' section); enable rule making (moderation); facilitate scheduled posting; and includes an 'about' section. Posts are also not limited to a specific word count, which facilitates longer formats such as logs, updates, summaries, and mission briefs. These longer formats would be most useful when incorporating narrative elements into an interactive experience such as a Facebook group.

Storytelling: building one world inside another:

This whole project is centred around community-based worldbuilding – in which community members work together to conceptualise and understand a world based on clues presented to them by moderators (missions).

Before elaborating on the project's narrative construction, it's important to establish what the word 'story' means to this project. Essentially, there are two stories taking place simultaneously. The first is the narrative sequence that I have constructed, which leads the player along some sort of general path – determined by missions and mission phases (more on this in the *Storytelling* section of this document). The second is the emergent narrative that results from group interaction – in which participants come to their own conclusions or choose particular narrative paths. These decisions further affect the project's narrative progression and unfolding story.

For example: the participants are presented with a choice to land on either the light side or dark side of the planet. The results of this decision would shift the narrative considerably, because of the stark contrast in environmental factors that would either stunt or facilitate different kinds of exploration. These environmental factors would be presented by group administrators (me) to nudge the participants in a certain direction. More on this in the *Process* section of this document.

For now, when I refer to 'story', I mean the narrative beats and representative elements that I have designed as group admin and dungeon master.

For this story, the first procedural step was to choose a genre. I knew I would have to include some elements of fantasy or sci-fi – because participants would be 'discovering' a world that is entirely separate from our own. Eventually, I chose to gear the project towards a sci-fi feel, because I felt that it would be easier for me to construct a sense of **suspension of disbelief**. This was important to me, because I wanted participants to immediately identify the project with a form of play (roleplaying); while also making them feel as though they are actively engaging with a story and its own world. When they access the group, or even just see a group post, they should immediately associate themselves with the project. I thought this

means of immersion would encourage group participants to actively roleplay their parts in the story, without feeling awkward or out of place; as well as encourage them to engage with the project through a sense of excitement or curiosity.

As a result, I had to formulate a worldbuilding process on my part, in order to facilitate the participants' worldbuilding process. Since I went with a sci-fi theme, I chose to incorporate elements of reality and fiction in to try to solidify suspension of disbelief. Thus, I chose to set the story in the Alpha Centauri system, on Proxima b – these formations are currently a point of interest in the astronomic community, because it is the closest star system to our own and consists of an exoplanet within the habitable zone (Proxima b). There's a lot of information and speculation around this system and its planet – providing a lubricant to develop interesting science fiction narratives. Additionally, Alpha Centauri's popularity would provide me and the participants with a means to set and figure out clues in a variety of different ways.

Since the project was just staring out, we were all trying to figure out how everything worked. On my part, I had to figure out how to present the content in a way that made sense to the story and platform. On the participants' part, they would have to understand how to engage with the project through their responses to missions and other posts. I achieved this by slowly easing them into the story, as well as providing them with instructions and deadlines for their participation. This will be further elaborated later in the *Process* section of this document.

Due to this tentative start, I approached the story with a similar atmosphere. That way, it would make sense that the participants initially felt unsure of the project's function, because their uncertainty would coincide with the unfolding narrative. Thus, I tried to roll with the 'form follows function' rule. This also meant that I would have to think about the representation of my project in narrative terms.

Since the project took place on Facebook, and was predominantly text and image based, I suggested that the platform (Facebook) took the form of an internal communications system that crewmembers (participants) use to communicate with Ground Control (me). Additionally, I suggested that Google (the search engine they'd likely be using to uncover clues) was a built-in archive that they could use to further their research. These soft worldbuilding techniques were used to facilitate suspension of disbelief by immediately placing group participants within a specific environment. Facebook was no longer Facebook and Google was no longer Google. Still, their representational functions coincided with their functions both in and out of the story world. Facebook is still technically an elaborate communications system, and Google is still technically an extensive global archive.

Again, **form follows function.** This was an ideology that I tried to sustain throughout the storytelling process.

PART 2: STORYTELLING

So far, we have briefly discussed how the project's story functions through various worldbuilding mechanisms. Additionally, we have established that this project's story simultaneously unfolds in two directions – from my part as a dungeon master and the participants' parts as collaborative storytellers. This meant that, in many ways, the story would organically develop in unpredictable directions despite my interference.

Fortunately, I wanted the story to develop in this way.

As I mentioned earlier, I wanted my participants to also feel involved in the storytelling process, rather than just participate as spectators. This meant that I had to relinquish a lot of control as a narrator, and leave open-ended paths for my participants to fill in. Thus, I had to shift from being an omnipotent storyteller, to a *story facilitator*. I would have to find ways to construct narrative guides that promote some sort of progression/direction, while also following my participants' movements.

So, we've understood that this project follows a collaborative, sci-fi narrative – but we haven't yet established what this narrative is or how exactly it develops.

As mentioned previously, the project's overarching narrative involves the exploration and cultivation of Proxima b. This is driven by group participants, called crewmembers, who drive the story by engaging with various missions set by administrators (Ground Control). Thus, the storytelling process takes place through interactions with various posts, including those labelled as "Incoming comm."; "Mission #"; and "Log Update". Some of these posts require direct responses, while others only need to be read by participants.

Below is an index of the project's post types and their main functions:

Post type	**Description**	**Example**
Incoming comm.	This post format serves primarily as a form of basic communication between Ground Control and crewmembers. Here, announcements can be made – passively facilitating narrative progression and worldbuilding. These announcements can establish a location, set the current mood (are we excited or concerned for our safety?), and establish the following sequence of events – typically the project's 'Mission Phase'. Mission phases can be likened to a chapter in a book, which tackles a specific goal/topic that is essential to the development of the next one. These posts can also be used to set reminders for crewmembers to complete their missions on time.	For example, the mission's first Incoming comm. Establishes the tone, setting and crewmember's circumstances.
Mission #	Missions are posts that drive the project's collaborative functions. These posts are where most of the project's interactivity is introduced – which is limited by the nature of the mission, or	For example, Mission 1.1 involved the exploration of the planet's surface. Here,

	the type of the content crewmembers can interact with. Here, members are presented with a set of goals that must be met by engaging with specific material (a Google Maps link, a YouTube video, or just an image, for example). The mission's results must be collectively discussed in the comments section before the set deadline (which is included in the same post). After the deadline, the comments are closed, and crewmembers can no longer participate in the mission. The mission's results then become part of the story's canon and are summarised in a 'log update'. The story moves on to the next mission, which dependant on the previous mission's results. For example, crewmembers suggesting that Proxima b may have subterranean oceans would spur a follow-up mission that explores this idea further. As such, missions are determined by crewmembers' interpretations of the ones that came before – meaning that the story unfolds in this way as well.	crewmembers were given a Google Maps link that they could explore in street view, in order to get a feel for the environment around them. Being able to move around in any direction gave the crew members freedom to choose where to go next and develop the story further, instead of following a set path.
Log Update	Log updates summarise all mission results. These posts help members who did not participate in previous missions to catch up with the story. This is important, because the results of the previous mission will indicate the parameters of the next mission. These posts also act as a **canonical archive**, were newer and older members can view the project's progression over time and access any data that has been collected previously. This data could then hypothetically be used to solve future missions that may require the use of previously established, canonical information.	For example, Mission 1.3 established that the water ice in the first base's surrounding areas were composed of saltwater – suggesting that Proxima b may have subterranean oceans, or oceans that dried up long ago. This information is collected and presented in a log update, forming part of the story's canon: saltwater is present on Proxima b and can suggest one of two things – which can then be further explored in the next mission.
Crew Analytics	This isn't really an official post type, but a post that exists and is continuously updated when new members join, or mission phases are completed. This was introduced at the end of Mission Phase 1 to ascribe a sense of identity to each crewmember – now that they've familiarised themselves with the project's	For example, various crewmembers could decide to specialise in geology – which means they may be partial to completing missions that involve some sort

	function and have achieved a landmark goal (building a base). This is supposed to almost behave as a reward system, where crewmembers choose their specialisation and are assigned a rank based on their performance in the group. These ranks are established by moderators and group admins.	of geological investigation. They are not limited this participation.

All these different posts would be tagged with a 'topic' – a label used by Facebook to archive posts into various categories. This would make it easy for participants to keep track of information they had missed; and would help me keep track of the events that had taken place, and their outcomes.

This posting system was the means through which the project's story developed. The existing version of the project only covers Mission Phase 1 – which entailed a successful landing on Proxima b, and the subsequent building of a base in a designated location. These were the parameters that I had set, but the direction in which the story went was entirely up to the players. The completion of this phase took a little under a week, with the completion of four separate missions and a poll – all of which the players could interact with.

Mission Phase 2 would likely have entailed further surveillance of the planet's surface and it's biology; which would have eventually led to the discovery of a system of various subterranean oceans and rivers that could be explored. Ideally, this phase would end off with the harvesting of the planet's first farmed foods, and the first discovery of animal life (and possible food source) – though this outcome is uncertain. I hadn't even planned for there to be subterranean oceans on Proxima b in the first place. The beauty of this project lies in its haphazard direction, I think.

As the participants became more familiar with how the system worked, I started to generate a sense of challenge by making each mission more complex than the last. This was an effort to avoid boredom or limited engagement from the participants' part. The logic here was that increasingly challenging content would make the missions feel more entertaining and exciting, while also not being too hard that it would dissuade participation. The satisfaction of figuring out a clue/task and sharing one's hypothesis with the rest of the group would be a driving force here.

I also included interactions that would feel personalized, such as crewmembers choosing a specialization and assigning names to their first base. This was an attempt to create a feeling of attachment to the project, where participants could be proud of their own progress and add a personal touch that felt like their own. Hopefully, this attachment would encourage further participation in future.

These strategies aimed to keep participants engaged with the project over long periods of time. Sometimes there was a span of over twelve hours between posts, and I could not rely on notifications alone. I had to establish ways to make my participants want to check for updates. I also used Facebook's interface to facilitate this, by pinning new and important posts as announcements at the top of the group page; and creating "Incoming comm." posts that would remind crewmembers to participate in missions before time ran out.

Initially, I tentatively opened the narrative, briefly introducing myself and the story to set the scene and tone for the project. This was not only to build atmosphere, but to also slowly introduce participants to the way in which the project would function i.e. the way they would be interacting with both myself and the system. The extent of this interaction will be further elaborated in the *Process* section, where we go through a step-by-step analysis of the project's progression.

A quick note on moderation:
As I mentioned earlier, Project Abeona takes the form of a private Facebook group. The reason for this privacy was to ensure the sanctity of the group's magic circle by deterring trolls or rogue participants from joining. This meant that those who where only seriously interested in the project were likely to join and have their membership approved. Of course, trolls and party poopers could seep through the cracks (and be dealt with by moderators), but the group's privacy would still act as a deterrent. This was further facilitated by a set of established rules. Some of these rules were part of Facebook's default system (and just made sense), while others were specifically written for the group. These rules were created to ensure the safety of group members, as well as the project's integrity.

Of course, the group is currently limited to my friends – however this ruleset was made with a larger group of participants in mind. Just so that all bases were covered.

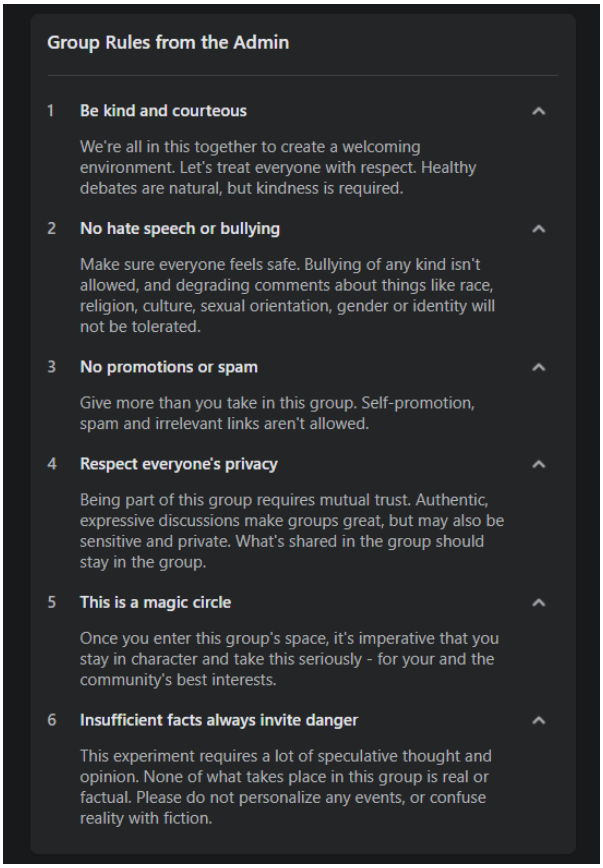


Figure 1: A screenshot of the group's rules.
Note rules 5 and 6, which were specifically curated for this group.

PART 3: PROCESS

As previously mentioned, Project Abeona's Mission Phase 1 took place over just under seven days. Throughout this time, the story was introduced; crewmembers learned about Proxima b; they decided where to land on the planet; they explored the surface; and they finally built and named a base in a particular location. These events took place through various means of interaction, mostly presented as missions.

This section will serve as a chronological summary of this sequence of events, in which screenshots of the projects are followed by a brief discussion. These discussions summarize the post's intention, and any other interesting observations.

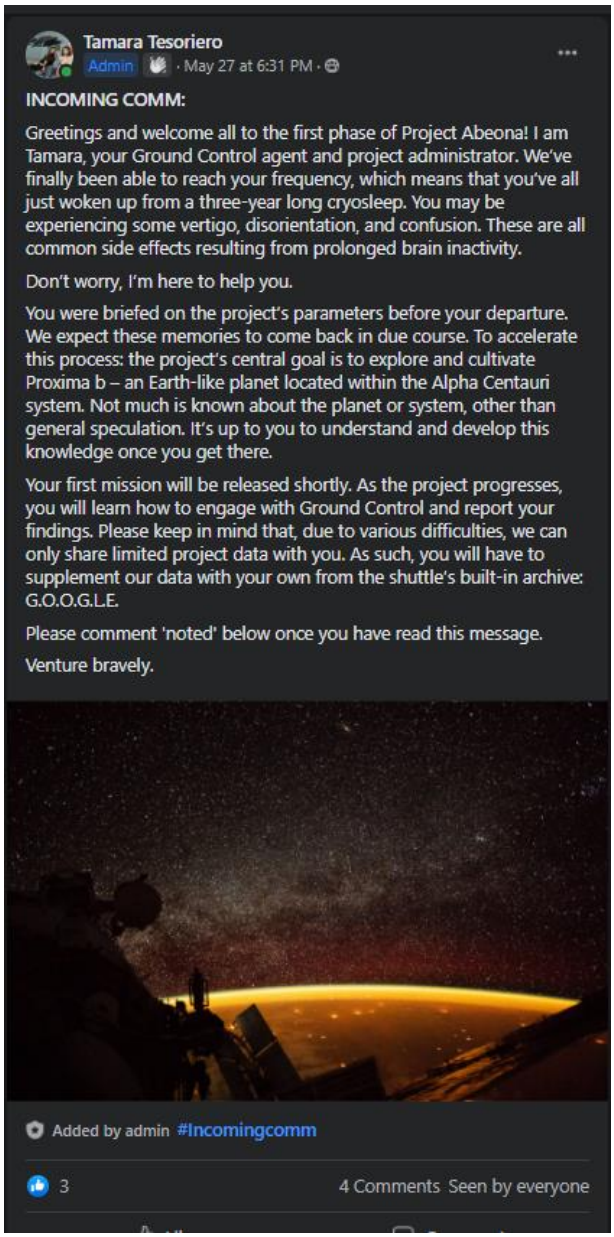


Figure 2: The group's first post, introducing the story and setting the scene

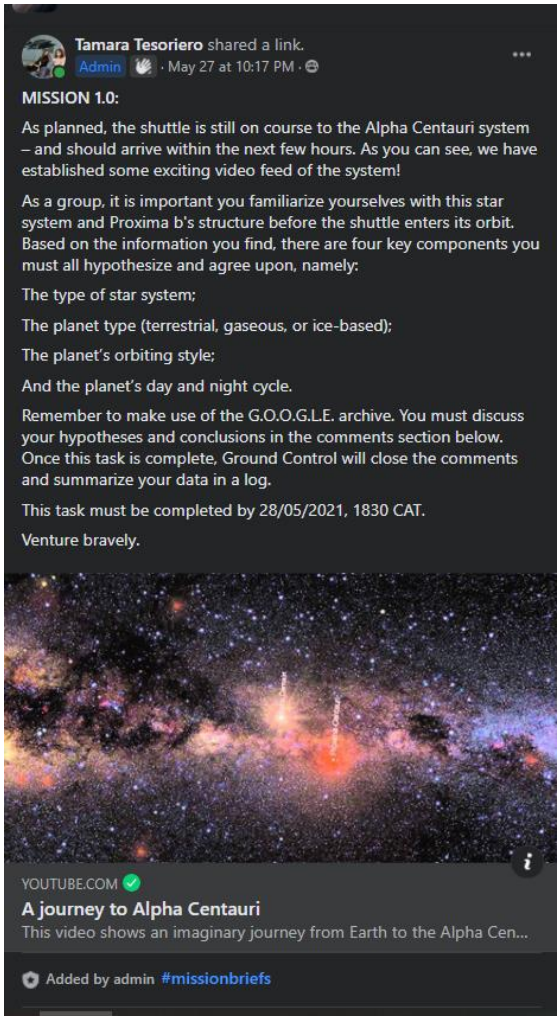
POST 1: This is an Incoming Comm. and the project's first announcement – **setting the project's storytelling vernacular** (Facebook posts with attachments). As such, I included an image and asked participants to respond to the message in the comments, in order to star getting them used to the project's mechanics.

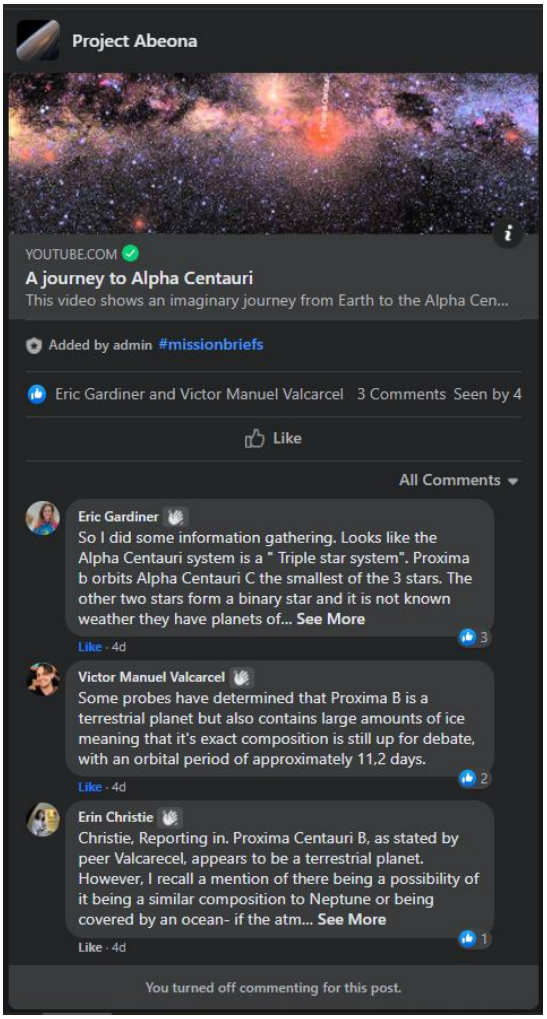
I welcomed all the project's participants, while trying to build an atmosphere by playing the part of a Ground Control agent.

As such, I made a lot of assumptions about their experience and knowledge, to further drive the idea that the group's participants are actually crewmembers who trained a long time for this project. Their recent arousal from a cryosleep is the justification for their confusion or lack of knowledge about the project itself. Thus, I still explained how the project would work and the resources they could make use of – all in narrative (roleplaying) terms (such as the G.O.O.G.L.E. archive).

Because I had to rely on text to create a sense of tonality, I had to adjust my language to fit the part. I tried to use language that felt formal and official, while also being reassuring and welcoming – much in the way I think real circumstances would feel. The tone itself was engaging, because it feels approachable and assures the reader that although the project is heavily based in science fiction, participation will not be a difficulty.

Lastly, I added a photo for ambience. I thought adding imagery would help to set the scene and create a sense of space (pun intended), while also making the post more engaging or easier to digest. I think images always make text posts more engaging, because they almost give the reader a break from a wall of text.





Figures 2 (left) & 3 (right): The mission parameters and crewmember responses to Mission 1.0.

POST 2: This is the group's very first mission. I tried to start off with something that felt simple enough, before moving on to something a little more challenging – especially since this would be their first real interactive task.

Here, I included a link to a YouTube video that shows the Alpha Centauri system's location in relation to Earth's location. I asked them to answer a variety of questions regarding the planet and system, requiring them to use the archive. This taught them that they would have to get used to doing their own research instead of only relying on the information that they are given. This was not only an easy exercise in learning how future missions would work; but also, a more interactive way of them figuring out where the story would be unfolding – rather than just reading some text. I also included a deadline for the mission's completion, to put some pressure on crewmembers and ensure their timely participation. Despite their interactive freedom, I still had to make sure they stayed on track. This would ensure the project's smooth progression.

As you can see, the crewmembers really took their roles seriously from the start – immediately adjusting their language to fit the roles they were playing. Some were more confident than others, but I was really pleased to see that everyone gave it a shot. Interestingly, individuals only answered some questions instead of all of them – filling in the gaps that others left empty. This was a little unexpected, but really enhanced that sense of teamwork (where they worked together to solve one problem/mission). This would be a trend that developed throughout the project.

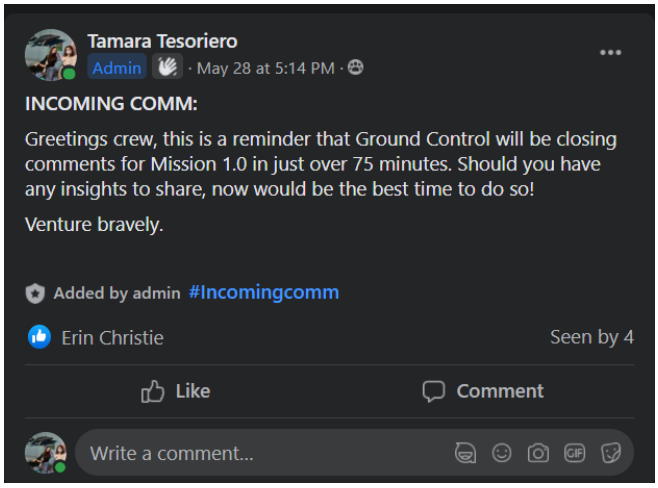


Figure 4: The project's first mission reminder.

POST 3: This post worked to remind crewmembers to complete their mission. This happened a couple of times throughout the project – where crewmembers had forgotten to complete a mission and there was little time left, or less than two crewmembers had completed a mission a couple of hours before the deadline.

In order to boost visibility and encourage interaction, I would post these reminders so that crewmembers would remember to participate. This was especially important since missions had long periods of time allowed for their completion and were easy to forget about. I had included these long grace periods to accommodate for everyone's schedules in the real world – hence why I would post after 17:00 (after work hours).

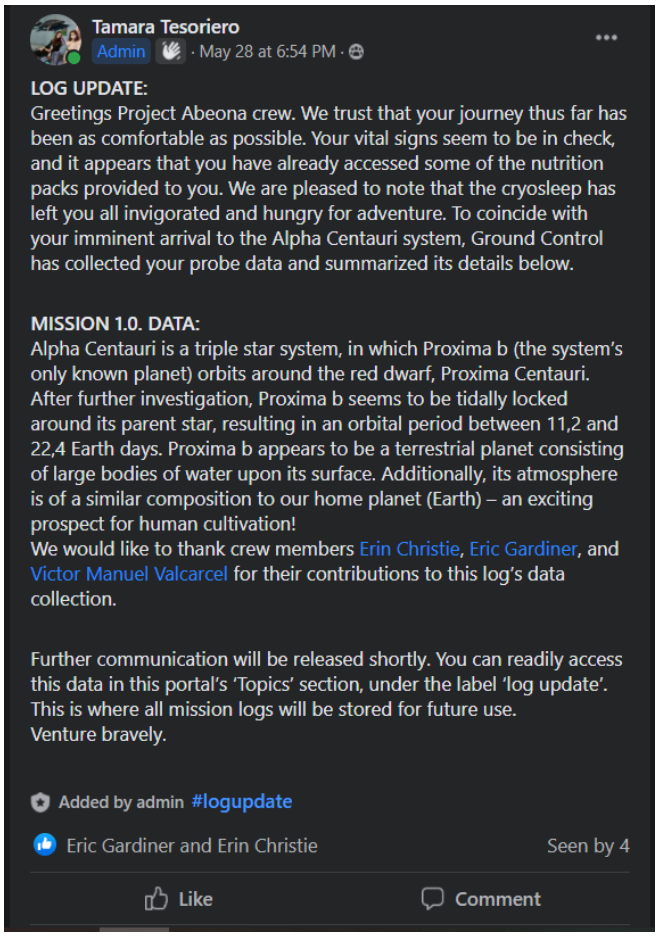


Figure 5: The Log Update for Mission 1.0.

POST 4: This is the Log Update for Mission 1.0. As you can see, I included a brief introduction that updated the crew on their current position in space – which was also their position in the narrative. I also followed through with details about their vitals and cryosleep to enhance the roleplaying experience (and the narrative world), and keep that atmosphere going.

Here, I summarised all the data I received from crewmembers in the previous mission's comments section. Regardless of the accuracy of the data, or its relevance, all of it was included. This was for two reasons: 1) All participation from crewmembers is valued and appreciated; 2) All mission events are recorded as part of the project's canon. I think this also adds to the storytelling atmosphere, because mission logs in sci-fi often recorded in detail.

This data would then determine the next mission's parameters. I also thanked the crewmembers who participated in the previous mission by tagging them in the log. This was an effort to increase visibility and generate a sense of reward for their participation. This practice continued throughout the project.

Lastly, I told crewmembers that they could access all logs in the 'Topics' section of the group, should they want to go through any information in future. This established the existence of this feature at a relevant time – after the first log was created.

Figure 6: An Incoming comm. Requiring participant engagement.

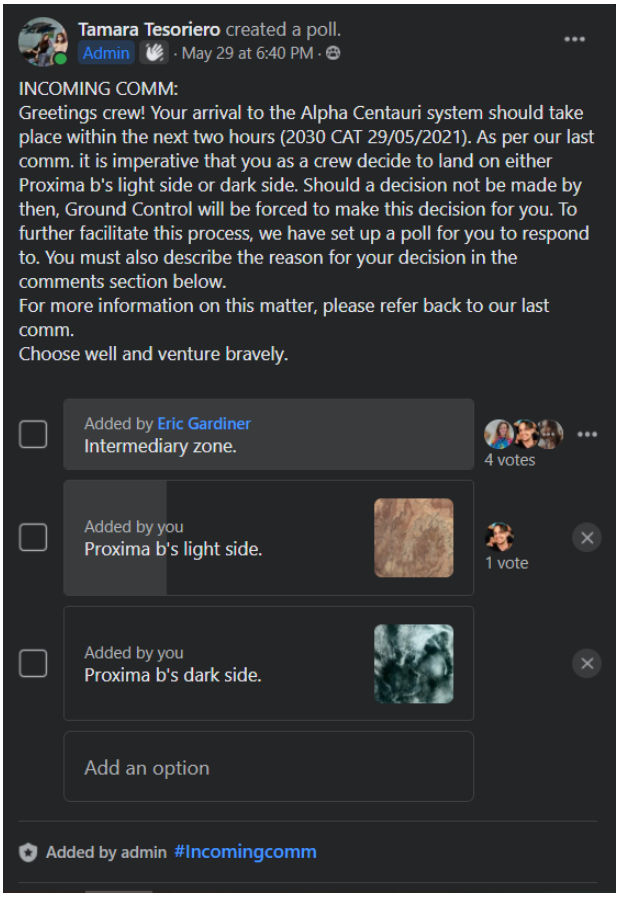
POST 5: This post marks one of the project's greatest oversights, as well as one of its greatest outcomes. I labelled this post as an Incoming Comm. – a format that participants weren't used to responding to, because we had established that posts labelled as missions were the ones that required interactive engagement.

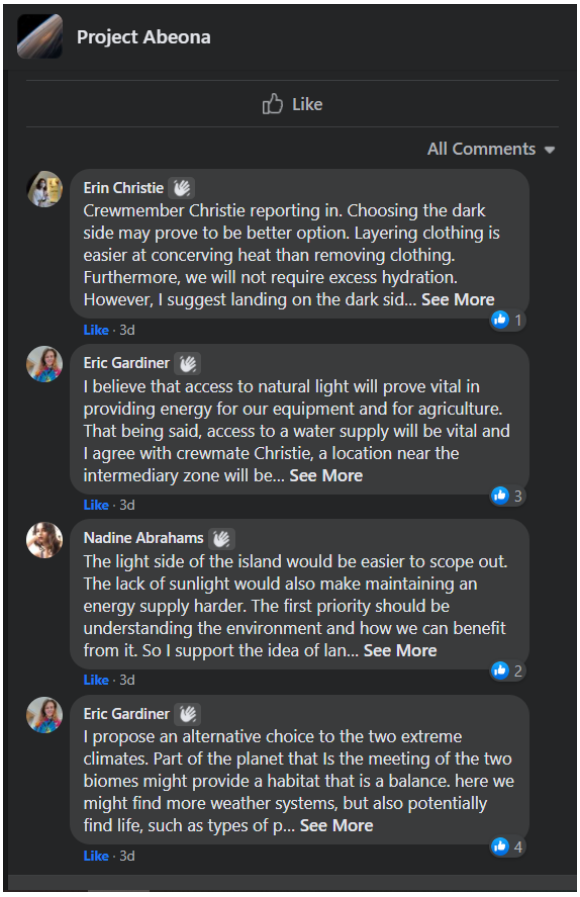
Additionally, I hadn't included a deadline or explicitly stated that crewmembers had to respond to this post, so none of them did.

This post marked the group's first major narrative decision – so it was imperative that they engaged appropriately with the content. As you can see, I rolled with the idea that Proxima b was tidally locked. This was established by crewmembers in the previous mission. Thus, I explained what this meant and gave them the option to either land on the planet's light side or dark side. This was accompanied by some aerial footage, which detailed surface temperatures and visibility when crewmembers clicked on the image to enlarge it.

Here, crewmembers had to simultaneously interact with an image as well as some written information from my side to come to a collective decision. This decision would shift the conditions of their expedition considerably.

Fun fact: all the locations and imagery for this project were found on planet Earth, using google Earth as a resource. Thus, although the crew roleplayed with an alien planet, they engaged with footage that was of our own! This was both resourceful and added a nice meta-layer to a narrative that explores an Earth-like planet.



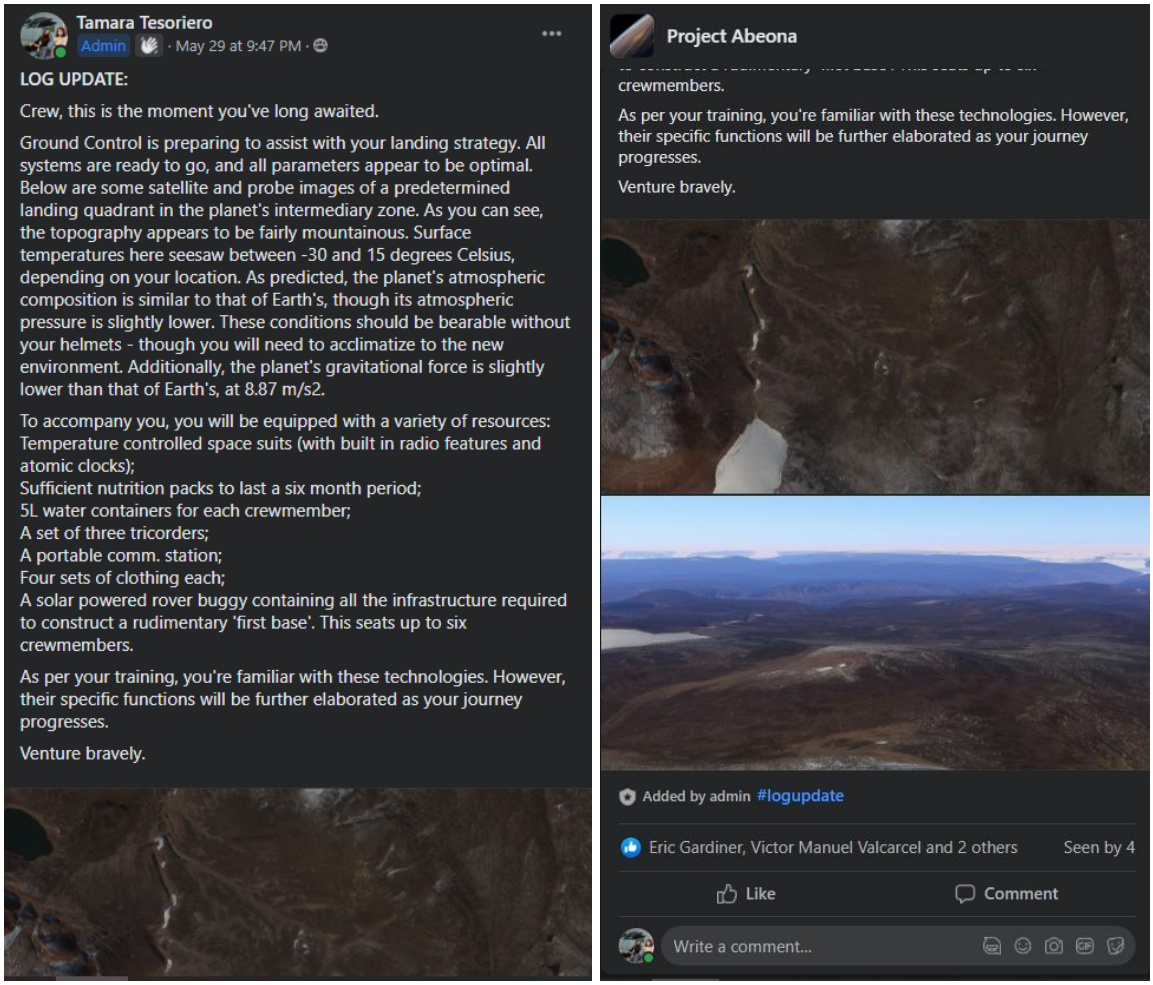


Figures 7 (left) & 8 (right): The project's first poll and its comments.

POST 6: This post was made in response to post 5 – and offered an easier and highly interactive solution to the previous task. I made a poll; suggestively set a deadline; gave them an ultimatum; and used a tone that suggested a sense of urgency – just so that crewmembers would kick themselves into gear. All new posts were marked as announcements as they were made, and then replaced by the next newest post. This made newer posts unavoidable because they were pinned to the top of the page, and automatically notified crewmembers.

This post received a lot more engagement than the previous one – which led me to make sure to **always label interactive posts correctly as missions,** and always set deadlines (and post reminders, where necessary). I also deliberately left this poll open to editing, which meant that crewmembers could add their own options if they wanted to. This was a layer of interactivity that they didn't have in their other tasks: the ability to edit a post/task to suit their liking.

Interestingly, they did so almost immediately. The consensus was that it would make more sense to land in the intermediary zone in between the planet's light and dark side. After a discussion in the comments section, crewmembers drew this conclusion on their own and made their own poll option accordingly. This action shifted the narrative considerably – requiring me to adjust the following missions according to their decision. Thus, from this point on the project's narrative entered a trajectory that was separate from my own predetermined design. This meant that the events that took place after this point wouldn't have existed if it were not for this particular point of engagement. Thus, the piece started to shape up as a piece of collaborative, audience-based narration – meaning I had to start relinquishing more and more narrative control. Suddenly, crewmembers and Ground Control were on an even playing field. From this point on, I was no longer telling them what to do, but working *with* them to drive the story.



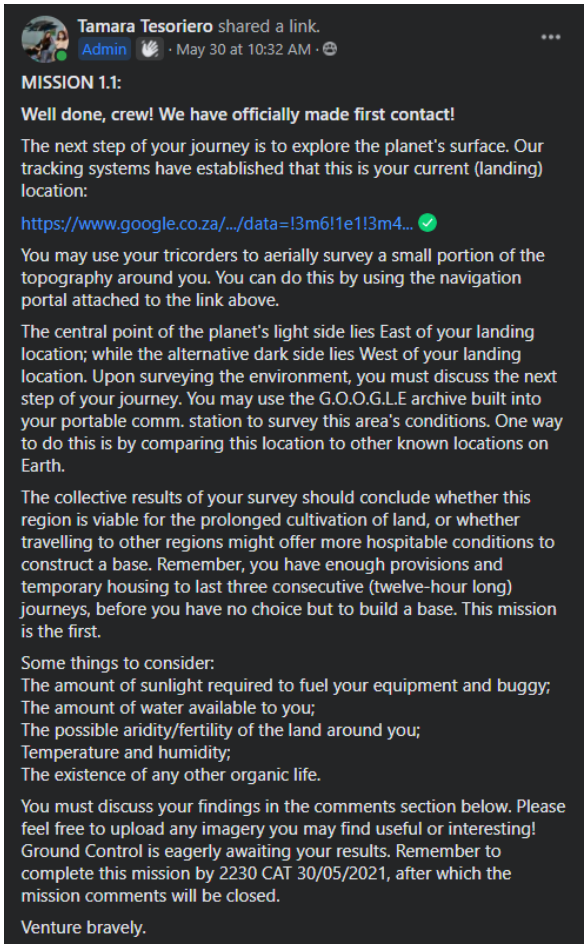
Figures 9 (left) & 10 (right): the project's second log, indicating the crew's landing quadrant.

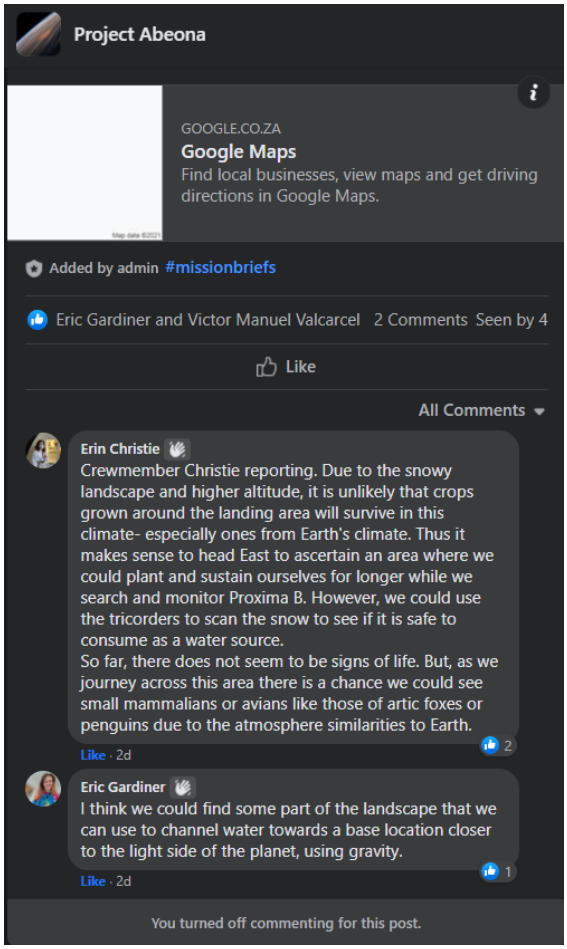
POST 7: This Log Update is where I took a moment to catch up with the crew. I quickly found the appropriate footage to display to the crew – which blended traits of both the light and dark side of the planet. I also had to adjust various environmental parameters to suit the new location. I also incorporated an equipment list to make landing and exploration feel more believable and establish the source of the terminology I would be using later (such as tricorders and portable comm. Stations). Again, despite suggesting that they are trained (to make them feel more confident), I still suggested that the technical functions of some of the equipment would be elaborated later.

I also established the planet's surface parameters to avoid any confusion/speculation, and to record the data as canon that can be referred to in future – such as surface temperatures, atmospheric pressure and gravitational force. These are technicalities that I standardised (and would continue to do so) so that there wouldn't be any room for debate – and we could focus on exploration (the fun part). Thus, I still placed some minor limitations on the narrative, just to keep everything cohesive.

The language I used here aimed to build up a sense of excitement and tension for the landing – where the real fun could start. From this point on, the project's pacing really started to pick up. Missions were uploaded more frequently, and a more stable posting schedule was developed.

Fun fact: this aerial footage was taken of an area in Greenland – an environment I thought appropriate to represent both the icy cold dark side and rocky light side of the planet. The footage of this area also appears to be ideal for cultivation (on an alien planet) due to abundant water sources, so it was a good (and quick) decision. The rest of the expedition locations were also set in Greenland, for continuity purposes.





Figures 11 (left) & 12 (right): Mission 1.1 perameters and crew responses.

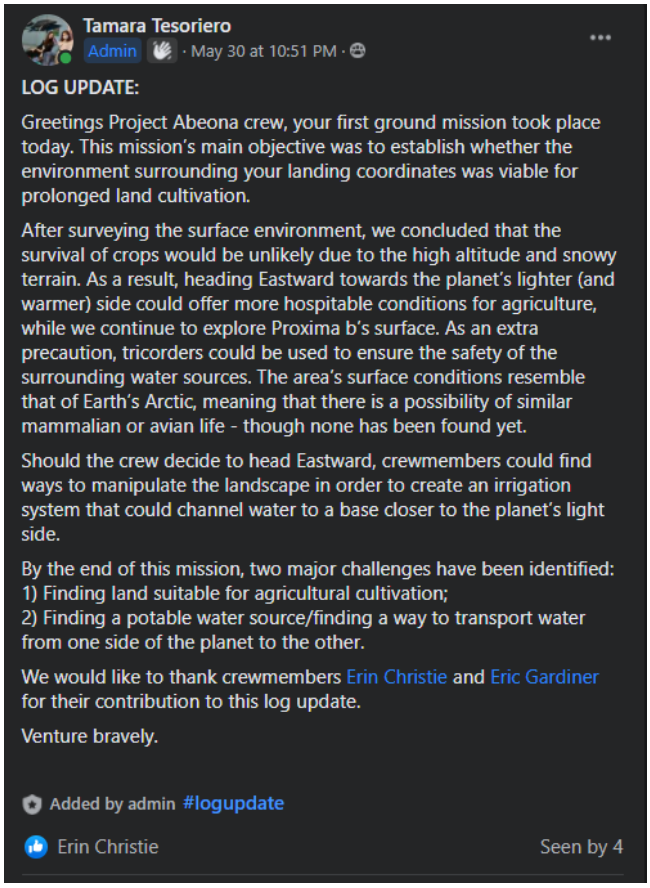
POST 8: This post marked the crew's first 'ground' mission. Here, they were given the opportunity to explore an environment by accessing a Google Maps link. This link took them into street view on an Arctic trail in Greenland, where they could move around their environment and explore the landscape. I also gave them directions towards the colder and warmer sides of the planet, which coincided with those on Google Maps.

Should you like to view and interact with the location, click here.

I think this offered a stronger layer of interactivity, because the crew was no longer engaging with a single image to complete the task. Instead, they had the freedom to move around their environment and find their own path to follow, and subsequent location to build a base. I also reminded them to use the G.O.O.G.L.E archive to do some further research, should the imagery not be enough. This mission also offered them the option to share their own images, instead of just text – further personalising the experience.

Again, I gave them clear instructions and an explicit deadline. This mission post did not require a reminder. The responses weren't as in-depth as the previous ones, but I felt as though they were sufficient to move on to the next mission. Additionally, I included room for three separate, twelve hour long, ground expeditions before the crew would have to build a base. I thought that the added pressure of a specific time frame would encourage further participation, because crewmembers would want to contribute as much as possible before time ran out. A three-day deadline also felt more realistic than having none. As a result, despite my audience's freedom, I still set limitations to encourage a sense of direction.

These missions were also timed according to the twelve-hour expedition length, for a greater sense of roleplay and continuity. These missions were posted at different times to the previous ones – they were opened at around 10:30 and closed at around 22:30 the same day. This still gave crewmembers ample time to participate, and a sufficient break before the next mission started the next day.

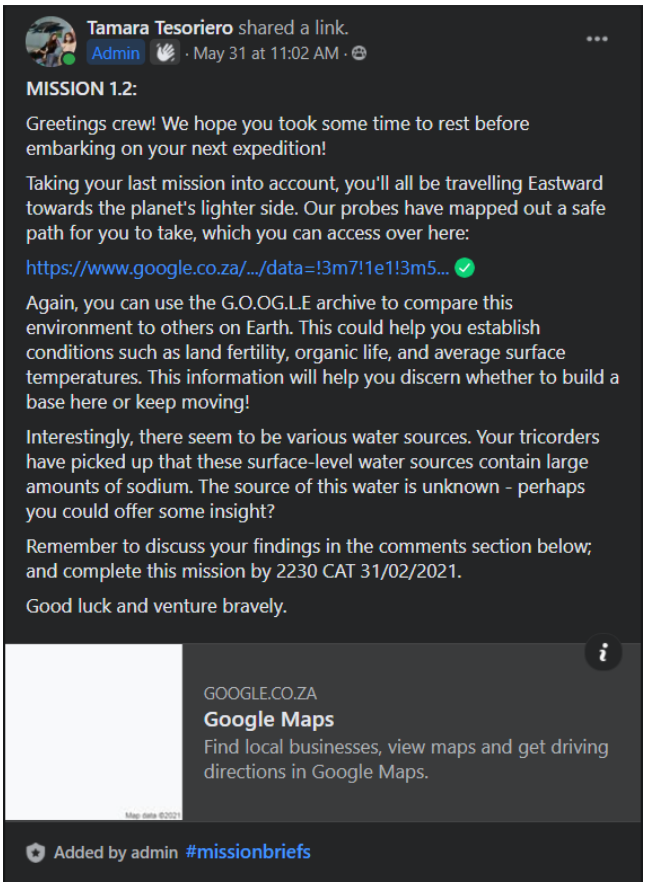


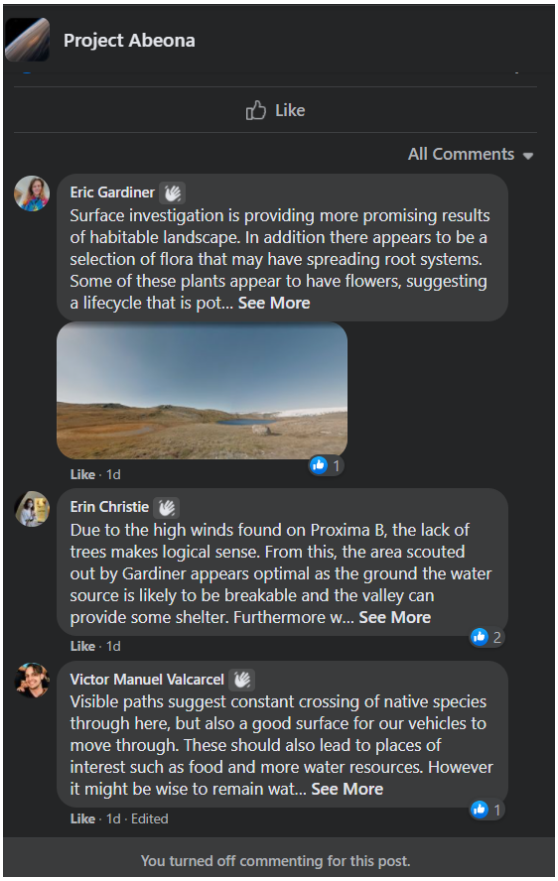
POST 9: This Log Update summarizes Mission 1.1. In which I collected all the relevant data and compiled into a single post – accompanied by a couple of established goals to keep in mind for the next mission.

Here, I begin to act most like a facilitator, rather than a narrator. For the rest of this project's run time, my responsibilities involve collecting and interpreting mission data and subsequently finding ways to encourage crewmember theories and directions through interactive tasks.

Thus, I still have some control over general outcomes, but a large proponent of narrative progression belongs to crewmember responses to previous missions. Only at the end of this Mission Phase, would I have introduced a new narrative direction in the form of a new overarching goal for that phase.

Figure 13: Log Update for Mission 1.1.





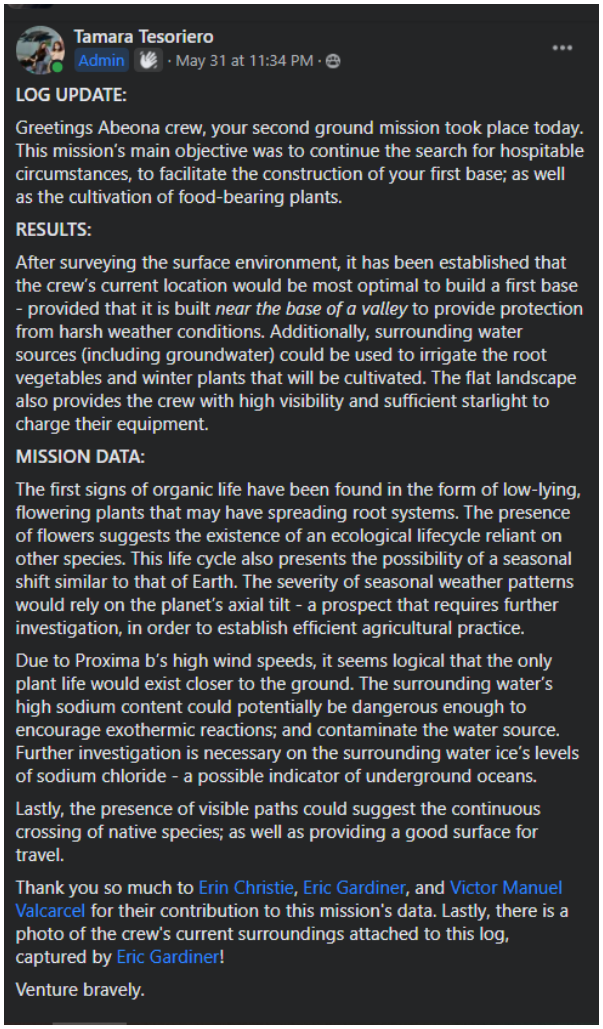
Figures 14 (left) & 15 (right): Mission 1.2 parameters and crewmember responses

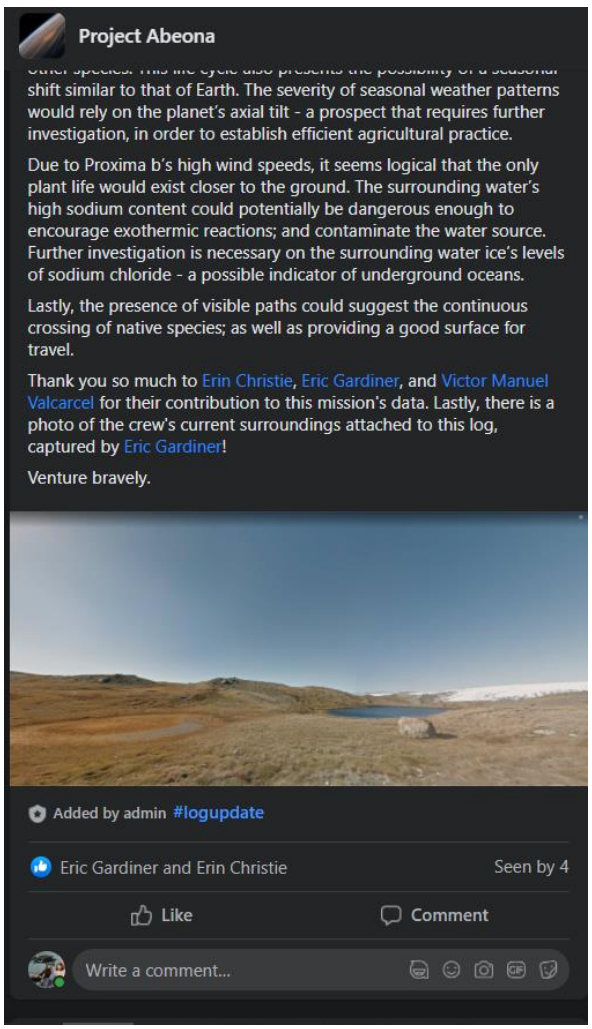
POST 10: These are the parameters for Mission 1.2, in which the search for a suitable base location continues. As per the previous log update, I have included an Eastward location for the crewmembers to explore in street view. Additionally, the crew has a variety of questions to answer or offer their hypotheses.

You can access this new location here.

When reading the responses, various members answered different questions rather than just answering them all. Additionally, crewmembers started to refer to one another in their responses. This strengthens that sense of community that the project has been trying to build. Suddenly, crewmembers are starting to acknowledge that they are a team rather than just being told that they are a team.

Lastly, one of the crewmembers uploaded an image of their environment – participating further than just answering questions and providing feedback!

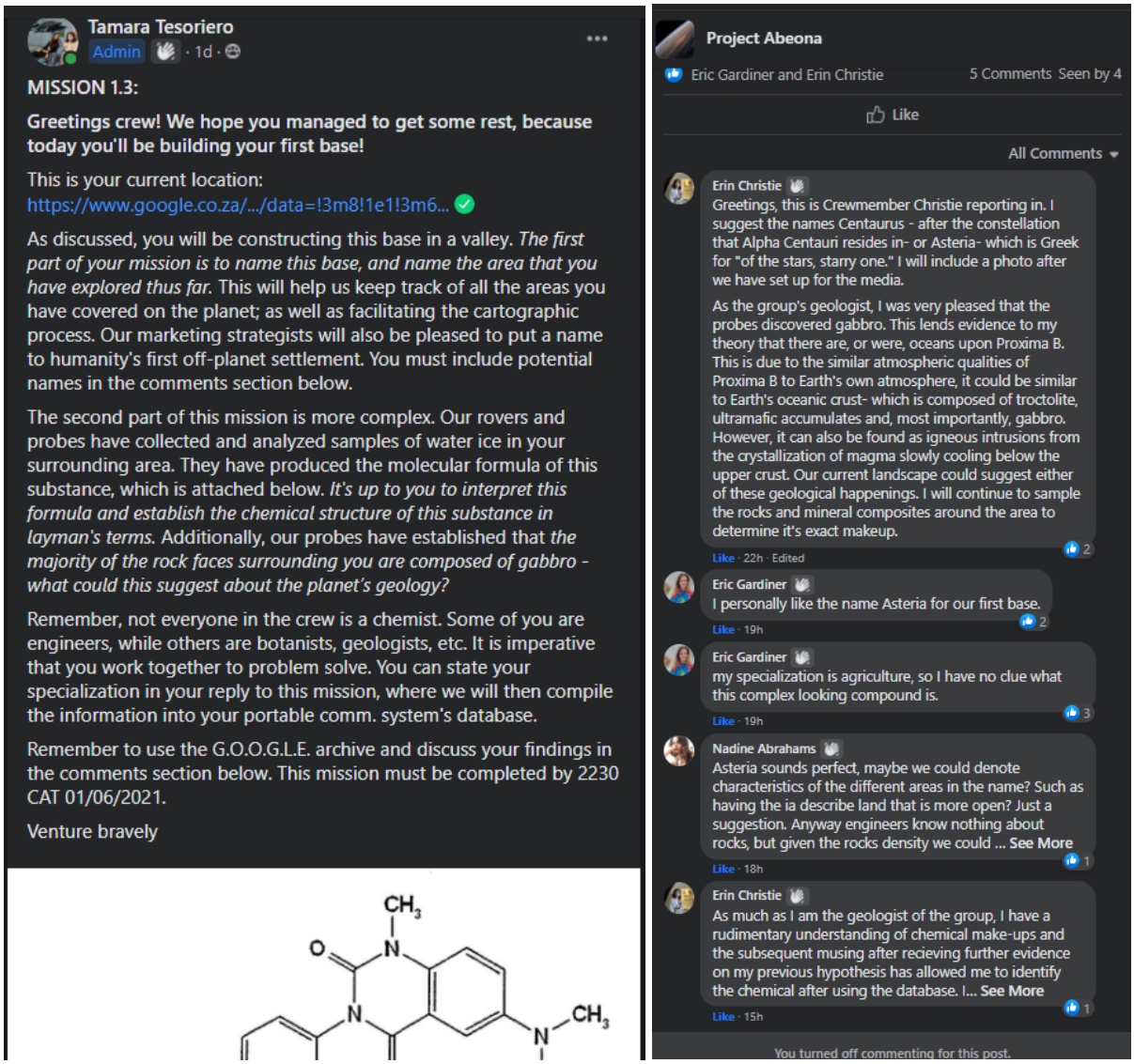




Figures 16 (left) & 17 (right): Log Update for Mission 1.2.

POST 11: This Log Update summarizes Mission 1.2's results. Again, that sense of congratulation and gratefulness is extended to the crew, along with a showcase of their findings – including the imagery that crewmembers have attached. This sense of reward should further encourage their participation.

Although the crewmembers had one last opportunity to keep moving after this mission, they decided to build their base in this area. The log structure has also shifted to accommodate for more organized, higher volumes of information. The 'Results' section indicates the crew's final decisions regarding building a base in this area. The 'Mission Data' section includes all other information that may not directly refer to answering any pertinent questions. This makes the information easier to digest. Additionally, the most important information has been italicized to highlight its relevance.

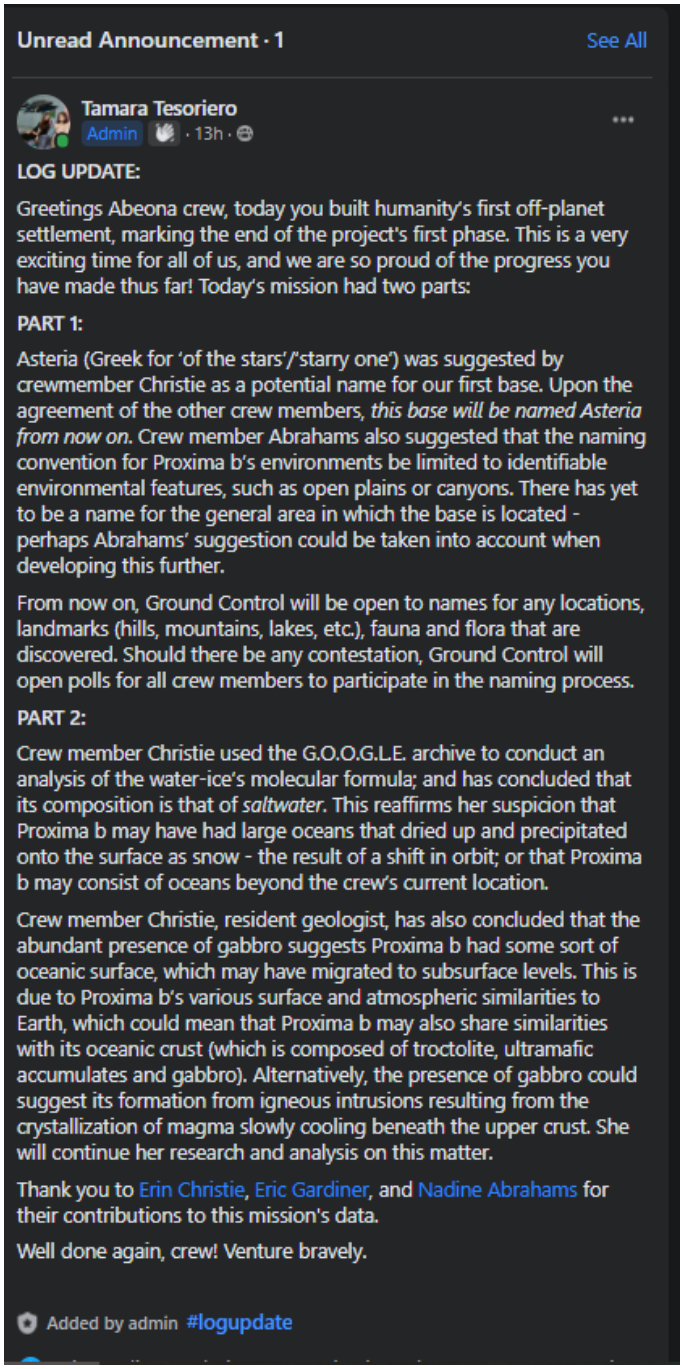


Figures 18 (left) & 19 (right): Mission 1.3 parameters and crewmember responses

POST 12: This mission was the last one for this Mission Phase. As such, it starts off with a sense of congratulation because this point is one of the milestones that the crew has been working towards: building their first base. Because crewmembers won't be able to actually build a base, I ensured a similar sense of participation by asking them to name the base and surrounding environment. This would make the project feel more personal to the crewmembers; and make further communication easier. Floating along this same stream, this is the moment where I asked crewmembers to state their chosen specializations. My reasoning for waiting this long is because I wanted them to get a feel for the way the project worked and felt before they decided on a specific niche. It is not mandatory for players to limit themselves to their niche, but it is a useful way of ascribing a sense of identity – further reinforcing their existence as an essential part of the project. However, this also seemed to turn into an excuse for not engaging with certain mission tasks. A solution to this would be to include tasks that target specific crewmember niches.

This mission also turned out to be a little more challenging than the others. I provided a link to a 360 view of the location in which their base would be built. This meant that they would not be able to explore the area like they would in street view – limiting their interactivity. This was intentional, so that they would rather place their focus on the mission's second part. You can find this image here.

The image I provided wasn't as straightforward as the others and required some reverse engineering to figure out its composition (unless a crewmember really was a chemist). The goal was to encourage crewmembers to think of other ways to use the G.O.O.G.L.E. archive aside from more conventional means. Essentially, they would have to realize that they could reverse image search the provided image to figure out the answer.



Unread Announcement · 1 See All

Tamara Tesoriero
Admin · 13h ·

LOG UPDATE:

Greetings Abeona crew, today you built humanity's first off-planet settlement, marking the end of the project's first phase. This is a very exciting time for all of us, and we are so proud of the progress you have made thus far! Today's mission had two parts:

PART 1:

Asteria (Greek for 'of the stars'/'starry one') was suggested by crewmember Christie as a potential name for our first base. Upon the agreement of the other crew members, *this base will be named Asteria from now on*. Crew member Abrahams also suggested that the naming convention for Proxima b's environments be limited to identifiable environmental features, such as open plains or canyons. There has yet to be a name for the general area in which the base is located - perhaps Abrahams' suggestion could be taken into account when developing this further.

From now on, Ground Control will be open to names for any locations, landmarks (hills, mountains, lakes, etc.), fauna and flora that are discovered. Should there be any contestation, Ground Control will open polls for all crew members to participate in the naming process.

PART 2:

Crew member Christie used the G.O.O.G.L.E. archive to conduct an analysis of the water-ice's molecular formula; and has concluded that its composition is that of *saltwater*. This reaffirms her suspicion that Proxima b may have had large oceans that dried up and precipitated onto the surface as snow - the result of a shift in orbit; or that Proxima b may consist of oceans beyond the crew's current location.

Crew member Christie, resident geologist, has also concluded that the abundant presence of gabbro suggests Proxima b had some sort of oceanic surface, which may have migrated to subsurface levels. This is due to Proxima b's various surface and atmospheric similarities to Earth, which could mean that Proxima b may also share similarities with its oceanic crust (which is composed of troctolite, ultramafic accumulates and gabbro). Alternatively, the presence of gabbro could suggest its formation from igneous intrusions resulting from the crystallization of magma slowly cooling beneath the upper crust. She will continue her research and analysis on this matter.

Thank you to Erin Christie, Eric Gardiner, and Nadine Abrahams for their contributions to this mission's data.

Well done again, crew! Venture bravely.

Added by admin #logupdate

POST 13: This is the project's last post, summarizing Mission 1.3's results. As you can see, I continued with Mission 1.2's hypothesis that Proxima b may have been covered in oceans, or harbor subterranean oceans by giving further clues to this possibility. This was an unexpected outcome on my part, but one that I thought would be fun for crewmembers to continue to explore. This log is also arranged in a logical fashion, split into the mission's respective parts.

Here, I have announced the end of the Mission Phase with a celebratory note – again praising the crewmembers who participated.

In retrospect, I should have announced the parameters of the Mission Phase earlier, so that the build up to this climax would have been more rewarding. The project's pacing really picked up with these last three missions, leading to a climactic end that could have had more of an impact had I prepared more appropriately for it.

Lastly, I end this post off like all the others by telling crewmembers to 'venture bravely'. My reason for coming up with this tagline was to create a sense of camaraderie between Ground Control and crewmembers, rather than heightening the distinction. This works to reinforce the idea that we are all working together to tell one story. Additionally, I thought that a catchy tagline would add a sense of cohesion to the piece, and sounded more personal than saying 'Ground Control, out', or 'end comm.' - which I think strengthened that sense of teamwork.

PART 4: REFLECTION

I think this project succeeded in the sense that it did end up turning into an interactive, collaborative storytelling experience. I think my participants were sufficiently involved in the story to have carved narrative paths that I hadn't prepared for – meaning that the story became just as much theirs as it was mine.

I hadn't planned for my participants to choose to land in an intermediary zone, nor had I planned for their suggestion that Proxima b had/has oceans. I suppose suggesting that the surrounding water had high levels of sodium led to that conclusion, though.

I think the experience itself was quite successful. The project ran for as long as I wanted it to and ended where I planned for it to end (at least for now). I was also pleased to see that participants managed to figure out all the missions, without feeling like they were too difficult or obtuse. I think I also managed to successfully create an atmosphere that coincided with the project's content – and tried to find interesting ways to engage my audience and keep them coming back (even if it was because of my annoying notifications).

I tried to implement some sort of pacing strategy according to the frequency at which posts and missions were released and closed. I think this ended up developing nicely towards the end of the project. Properly planning for an efficient posting schedule would have been a better strategy.

I think I could have also been clearer about the whole Mission Phase of the project, so that participants would have a clear picture of what they were working towards. This would have helped to generate more excitement and engagement, I think. Perhaps I could have made some sort of checklist that worked like a countdown that built up tension?

In terms of interactivity, I tried to provide various different outlets for this concept. I think my favorite missions were those where participants could explore street view in Google Maps and really engage with their simulated environment. It was also great fun looking for all of those obscure places, and going on my own adventure as a storyteller. I think I could have involved my participants further somehow – maybe by giving them more opportunities to make big decisions, like the one where they decided to land in the intermediary zone. I think that was quite a pertinent moment, despite its stunted start. It was wonderful to watch my audience really engage with the problem and come up with a solution that was entirely separate to my own. If I were to continue this project, I would definitely include more moments like those. It was a thrilling experience to be just as in the dark as my audience about my own story. Thinking back, the trajectory I assumed my participants would take was entirely different to the outcome – and I think that's one of the major marks of an interactive piece. You never know how something will turn out once you hand someone else the reins.

I also learned a lot about the project after speaking to my participants. When I initially asked them to join, the response was one of intrigue. I had only briefly explained the project – so they weren't entirely sure what it was that they were getting into. Throughout the process I also received many messages regarding the events that took place – some frustrated at not figuring out the mission answers in time; and others joking about their pseudo conflicts, discussions and disagreements with other participants. These comments were in good natured fun, and really felt as though a bunch of friends were just running a D&D campaign together. All in all, they say they had a lot of fun with the experience – and I think that's what mattered

most to me. My greatest concern with this project was that my participants would find the exercise to be a little drab and boring, but that's not the picture I got from them. I was glad to see that they got some enjoyment out of it, because I had created this whole experience as a fun outlet for an audience. I think it would have failed miserably, otherwise.

Thank you for taking the time to read this paper – I know it's unreasonably long, but I wanted to cover everything. It doesn't help that I'm not very good at being succinct in my descriptions.