CLOSE TO THE SUN

ARTBOOK
Approaching The Helios

This was an early key piece of concept art that helped us establish the mood we wanted to strike right from the start. Mysterious and ominous but without a clear cause for concern.
Two titans chiseled into the rear of the ship that open the gates. In Greek mythology, Helios is the personification of the Sun, and our version of Tesla wanted to bring the power generation of the sun to earth.
The Helios leaving port

Unfinished concept art that was aimed at capturing the era in which it was constructed. We wanted to contrast the “futuristic” nature of the Helios with the times it was built in.
Another earlier concept of the Helios leaving port, back then the Helios was smaller and much more resembled the Titanic.
THE HELIOS

One of the first definitive versions of the ship. The Helios would change in small details over time, but this was the first time we felt that the Helios had arrived.
SKETCHES OF THE HELIOS

Another early sketch of the general shape of the Helios. The six shapes on the top of the ship were to be power stations that distributed power to the ship based on technology from the “Weather Department” aboard.
The Automated Shuttle

We spent an inordinate amount of time to get the first in-game versions of this shuttle to feel right. If we couldn’t get this smaller environment to feel good, it would be damning for the rest of the Helios. It took many iterations and we learned a lot before finally landing on something that worked.
An early mood concept in which the automated shuttles looked differently from our final design.
Early on, we wanted the lights of the Helios to be mistaken for stars in the sky. That’s the scale we wanted to convey.
CONSTRUCTION OF THE HELIOS

Go big or go home. The train on the lower left really helps sell the audacious size of the Helios. We wanted to really sell the idea of the Helios being built as a new wonder of the world to rival any other construction in history.
**HARBOR SKETCHES**

Notepad drawings on the logistics of accepting automated shuttles from all over the world and how to effectively store them aboard the Helios.
When it became apparent that the Helios harbor would have immense vertical space, we wanted to utilize that space for shuttle storage. The top left shows one early idea of that which we expanded upon later.
We wanted to foreshadow the Helios rail system in the hangar itself, but never got that far in our iterations. The idea would be that automated shuttles carrying cargo would automatically dock near the internal railway, while automated shuttles carrying personnel would dock more centrally.
As our ideas began to solidify, so too did the scale. Yet the docks would grow even further once the environments were re-created in engine.
EMERGENCY EVACUATION SUBMARINE

We wanted the most technologically advanced pieces of machinery to come from the mind of Tesla himself. This being his personal submarine had to look sufficiently advanced to match his cutting edge intellect.
ARRIVAL OF ROSE

This concept, more than any others, became our common touchstone on what we wanted “Close to the Sun” to be. It captures the grandeur of the Helios, the mystery of Wardenclyffe, and the determination of Rose.
In greek mythology, Prometheus defies the gods and grants fire to mankind. As punishment for his transgression he is chained to a rock to be tormented for all of eternity. In “Close to the Sun”, Nikola Tesla sees himself as a modern day Prometheus, attempting to grant a new kind of fire to mankind and thus uplift humanity as a result.
SECURITY INTERIORS

We wanted the security offices to capture a sort of film-noir/detective atmosphere, so old wood had to make an entrance and contrast itself to the mostly metallic harbor. The purpose of the security department was to protect the Helios from sabotage and espionage.
APARTMENTS ARCHITECTURE

The apartments aboard the Helios were one of the more challenging areas to find an appropriate layout and architecture for. Breakthrough finally came from a street in Milan, “Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II”.

HELIOS RAIL CARRIAGE

Creating a believable rail system aboard a ship the size of the Helios took time. We knew we didn’t want normal trains, but something to further accentuate the Helios as a place unlike any other. Having the carriage descend from the elevated railtracks felt like something both interesting and unique enough to fit the Helios.
One of the many casualties of development time was the beautiful glass “Rail Station Entrance” sign. We always loved the way the suspended rail cart hangs in the center of the pathway, framing the entire doorway.
We never got around to creating rail carts designed for transportation of goods, such as the ones depicted in this concept. But the rail system and its tunnels were supposed to be the guts of the Helios, transporting not only goods, but carrying heavy duty cables and pipes to move resources from one end of the Helios to another.
Too Late

One of the early concepts of Rose reaching her sister, back when Rose had vibrantly red hair.
THEATER SKETCHES

Early versions of the theater had the stage curtains closed, and the idea was that the curtains would open as the player approached, revealing corpses suspended from above.
Theater Sketches

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The theater was the area in which our artists could express the Art Noveau style without too many strings attached. Creating the private balconies and general auditorium space went through multiple iterations as the sheer amount of things visible at any one point in time put considerable strain on the performance of the game.
The Storm in a Teacup studio is located in Rome, Italy. So when the decision on what play to feature on the Helios stage, it was simply too tempting of an opportunity not to include our Roman heritage.
Early drafts of the garden area aboard the Helios featured vastly more overgrowth and nature-gone-wild. A gas leak of potent growth stimuli used aboard the Helios would have allowed nature to take over. However, as often is the case with ambitious ideas, the intensity of nature-gone-wild in the gardens had to be scaled back.
One of the ideas we wanted to chase was having Ada be placed underneath a tree symbolizing the biblical Tree of Knowledge, thus allowing Ada to find rest and peace near something that was so strongly associated with her, knowledge. We also played around with the idea of Isaac Newton’s famous apple falling, but time constraints prevented us from fully exploiting these symbolic aspirations.
In the Greek mythology, Icarus was given wings by his father Daedalus, and was warned not to fly too close to the sun or the wings would melt. But the excitement of flight caused Icarus to leave caution behind, flying much too high. The wings melted, and Icarus crashed to the sea. Aboard the Helios, the excitement of scientific discovery caused the scientists to throw caution to the wind, ultimately causing them to sink to the sea.
When first prototyping Close to the Sun, we were planning on having the game focus more on puzzles and problem solving. To help the player with these challenges, we were planning on equipping the player with a “Tesla Tool” that would allow the player to transmit energy wirelessly and thereby navigate the Helios better. We settled on the tool highlighted as “G” here, as that one was the least weapon-like, yet also had some interesting and clear moving parts.
UTILITY HOLSTER

Nothing says “I’m a scientist!” better than a holster for your equation notebooks. The holster quickly became fashionable aboard the Helios as the standard Wardenclyffe uniform lacked any functional pockets.
The difficulties of keeping Rose vulnerable while still holding what most players would consider a weapon (together with other concerns) led to the Tesla Tool eventually being cut from production. It limited our gameplay possibilities, but allowed us to focus on polishing what was already a large project for our small studio.
THE TESLA TOWER

The tower aboard the Helios was built to transmit electricity wirelessly across vast distances, something that the real Nikola Tesla tried to accomplish with his Wardenclyffe Tower. The Tesla Tower aboard the Helios was built to extend up into the air to further increase its range and also isolate the sensitive machinery from interference of other machinery aboard the Helios.
We knew we wanted to sell the player on the construction effort and importance of the Tesla Tower aboard the Helios itself, so creating a rail station in proximity to the Tower seemed like a good idea. The idea was that the station was primarily industrial in nature, focused on handling vast quantities of machines, material and tools more so than people. This would also give us good control over what the player would see in an impressive “arrival scene” when arriving in the rail cart. However, timing of dialogue and the requirement for new rail station modules put a hold on those plans.
Deep in the bowels of the Helios stands one of its primary ways of distributing power throughout the ship. We had wished for a more widespread usage of Tesla coils throughout the Helios, but this set piece served to quench much of that thirst.
DISTRIBUTION CENTER

Aubrey’s headquarter. We wanted the buildings to visibly act as large Faraday cages, absorbing the pulses coming from the malfunctioning distribution coil.
The CORE Reactor

Visual inspiration came from real world experimental fusion reactors. In comparison to other aspects of the Helios, the CORE reactor is fairly modest in size, despite being the most powerful piece of machinery aboard. We wanted it to be a product of brilliance from Ada instead of using scale to bend nature to human will.
Nothing was off-limits when it came to research aboard the Helios, and given the various departments aboard we wanted to be sure we covered a lot of ground with our environmental storytelling. The blackboards were a good way we could communicate the purpose of an area at a glance, without the player having to stop and read too much.
Piezoelectricity is a real way of acquiring electricity from mechanical stress on materials. In the world of Close to the Sun, Aubrey King developed a device that utilized precisely this technique.
We had initial plans to build Tesla’s “Mobile Death-Ray Platform” as a set piece aboard the Helios, but it remained one out of many avenues we didn’t have time to fully explore.
EXOTIC ENERGY DISSIPATER

As Tesla arrives to save Rose, he uses a device to remove exotic energy and along with it, the monsters chasing Rose. We kept sliding too close to “Ghostbusters” when developing concepts for the device, but ended up with something suitably electricity focused and “Tesla-esque”.
KEYCARDS

Ideally we wanted to use the bottom of the keycards to communicate what department it belonged to, what it opened and who it belonged to. But the object in-game naturally was much too small for us to use the tiny bottom space effectively.
The tug of war between clarity and style required multiple iterations on most of these assets. It was imperative that these devices felt natural for the player, while they still had to seem like they belonged in the environment around them.
CLEANING CART

It is deceptively difficult to make something as mundane as a cleaning cart look both classy and functional. It had to be both coherent with the art-style of the Helios while also add that little touch of human everyday life.
PNEUMATIC TUBE MESSAGES

A network of tubes behind the walls aboard the Helios ferries capsules from one section of the ship to another. We wanted the early security offices to also function as a sort of censor, confiscating messages that would reveal too much of a departments scientific progress.
Cold Maker

Vending machines of various kinds were meant to fill hallways aboard the Helios, but most never got built.
WEATHER EXPERIMENTS

Using high altitude balloons, the Weather Department aboard the Helios were able to convert wind-power and pressure changes into electricity. None of these (and a multitude of other) experiments panned out as an effective means to power the Helios, resulting in the dismantling of the Weather Department in favor of The Physics Department, led by Ada Archer.
POWER-SOURCE UNIT

Instructions on how to use the machine were initially planned to be written on the machine itself, but the text would be too small to be of any effective use, so we had to issue a separate plaque with the instructions for them to be easily readable.
HELIOS FLOOR SIGNS

We could have simply thrown flyers on the floor with the “Authorized personnel only” message, or attached them flatly to walls, but the small effort of creating dedicated floor signs to house these messages added a whole new authenticity to the world that wasn’t there before. These small and anonymous assets are worth so much more for immersion than what one first assume.
**MASQUERADE MASKS**

The annual masquerade ball aboard the Helios was an event for scientists and Wardenclyffe employees from all the various departments to mingle and enjoy themselves without rank or prestige getting in the way. Rumor has it that Tesla himself often used this event to get a better feel for what his employees really thought about the whole Helios endeavour.
How does one possibly capture the intelligence of someone like a fully actualized Nikola Tesla in mere writing? Impossible. After going back and forth on the topic we ultimately decided to simply focus on the narrative beats we wanted to highlight through Nikola Tesla’s perspective instead of attempting to further emphasize something that should have been fairly clear by this point: That Tesla is really really smart.
Out of the many unexplored avenues of research we wanted to dive into, the “Ball Lightning” phenomenon stood out most clearly. It is a widely reported but poorly understood event that is surrounded in mystique, perfect for the scientists aboard the Helios to exploit. Regrettably, it remains as a mere blueprint, for now...
One of the many reasons we wanted the Tower to extend upwards was because the Tower isn’t visible in the many profile images of the Helios. That’s because the Tower would be contracted and covered within the ship itself for easy maintenance.
TESLA TOWER PROJECT #3

Mechanical stairs
Nikola Tesla

Tesla was known to be a rather “dapper” or “fancy” dresser. He famously enjoyed the company of poets and artists during the peak of his career, establishing a long-lasting friendship with Mark Twain among others.
AUBREY KING

He was once the lead scientists of the Weather Department aboard the Helios. He has now fallen from grace and serves down in the machine halls, far from the glory of research. This demotion has not only taken a toll on his mental health, but his physical one as well.
ADA AND ROSE ARCHER

Both Archer sisters are driven and successful women in their respective fields, and both are named after flowers (Ada being a type of orchid). They are the daughters of Violet Archer who died in a preventable research accident when they were both very young. This spurred Ada to find out why from a scientific angle, and Rose to find out why from a poor safety standards angle. Ada would become a renowned scientist, and Rose a formidable journalist.
EVA

Super early concept from the first months of prototyping. Back then we didn’t have the story fleshed out yet, so we only knew that we would have an ally aboard the ship who got the temporary name Eva.
Aubrey’s admiration for Tesla was no secret, whether it was mutual is another question altogether.
Ada Archer

She went through many iterations visually, but always stayed the same character-wise. Her outfit was meant to reflect that she was more than just a theoretical scientist. Ada was a practical scientist and could get her hands dirty with the best of them. She not only built the receiver, but in early versions of the game script also modified a Tesla Tool for the player to use.
LUDWIG OSTROG
A talented surgeon who wrestled with inner demons. Aboard the Helios, it appears he had finally gained some measure of control over the beast inside. He had left Whitechapel behind, and the murders of Jack the Ripper had hence mysteriously stopped. But once exposed to “EXO” aboard the Helios, there is no keeping the beast at bay any longer...
LUDWIG & TORCH

Early versions of Ludwig had him stalking the corridors with detached limbs as torches. The player would see him coming in the distance, holding a dismembered arm or leg up high, engulfed in flames.
TEMPORAL ANOMALY

At one stage in development the monsters were to have different phases. One early in which they were not quite fully shifted into our dimension, where they were mostly light and energy, slow and difficult to discern. Over time the monster would sync up better with our dimension and be able to move faster and do harm.
FARADAY DISTRICT
LAUNDRY SCHEDULE

- Monday ——— Alpha Quarter
- Tuesday ——— Beta Quarter
- Wednesday — Delta & Epsilon Quarters
- Thursday — Sigma & Gamma Quarters
- Friday ——— Lambda & Zeta Quarters
- Saturday ——— Reservations Only
- Sunday ———— Closed

In case of questions & reservations, please contact your district representative.

MIDNIGHT - LIGHTS OUT

NO DEBATES PAST MIDNIGHT! ARGUING OVER THE LIMITATIONS OF FOURIER TRANSFORMATIONS CAN WAIT.
NO NEED TO BOTHER THE REST OF THE DISTRICT. KEEP YOUR LIVELY DEBATES AND DISCUSSIONS TO THEIR DESIGNATED HALLS AND HOURS.

*CONTINUED DISTURBANCES WILL BE REPORTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SECURITY AS IS PROTOCOL.
**THE HELIOS BROCHURE**

We wanted to create a real travel brochure, one that you could hold in your hand and read about The Helios in all its glory. But such real world luxuries had to be put aside as the game itself always and rightfully demanded our undivided attention.
HUMANITARIAN, INVENTOR, LEADER

We often jokingly referred our version of Tesla to be the Elon of that era. A pioneering, billionaire, philanthropist aboard a scientific ship gone bad. It was important to us to sell our version of Nikola Tesla as a force of nature on a global scale, famous not only aboard the Helios, but in the world around as well.
ACROBATIC NIKOLA

Tesla's ideas were sometimes so ahead of their time, that they didn't seem to make much sense in their present day. This frustration to sometimes understand Tesla is depicted by an anonymous Helios sketch artist, with Tesla balancing on chairs for no apparent reason to the confusion of any onlooker.
PEACEFUL AND NEUTRAL

That the shadows on the ocean floor happen to be a map of the world is one of the details that often is overlooked. The anchor is rooted to the map, while the Helios up above sails on, unbound, unattached, uncommitted to that old world.
All of the developers in the Storm in a Teacup team got featured on an in-game poster, sketch, or note. Not all are still with the studio, but they are all forever immortalized within the work they accomplished together in Close to the Sun.
Part of a narrative thread that we wanted to expand upon was the department rivalries aboard the Helios. Early brainstorming sessions had an underground fight club going on aboard, allowing the scientists to let out some steam from being trapped aboard a ship for months at a time. The idea eventually landed as organized boxing matches between department representatives.