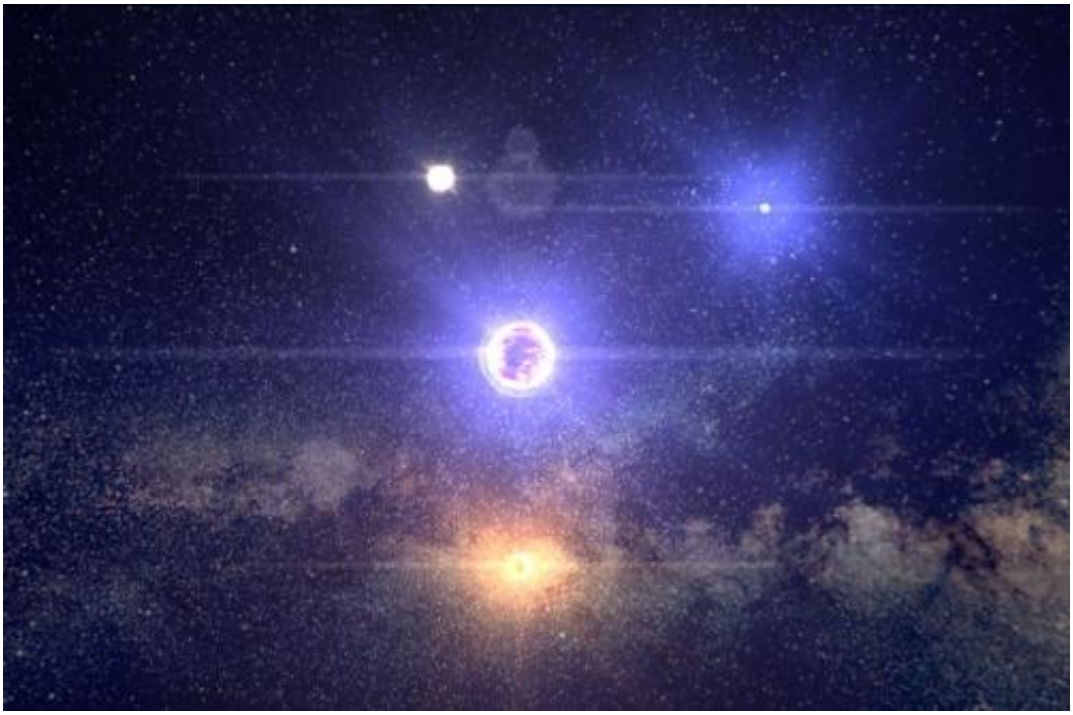
Explore the stellar neighborhood with new Milky Way visualization

November 15 2012, by Nancy Atkinson



Screenshot from 100,000 Stars.

Want to explore the Milky Way? A new visualization tool from Google called 100,000 Stars lets you take a tour of our cosmic neighborhood, and with a few clicks of your mouse you can zoom in, out and around and do a little learning along the way. Zoom in to learn the names of some of the closest stars; click on the names to find out more information about them.

Playing with it is great fun, and I've been experimenting with it for a while. The most important caveat about 100,000 Stars is that you need to run it in Chrome. It's from the Chrome Experiment team, and it uses imagery and data from NASA and ESA, but the majority of what you are seeing are artist's renditions.

The best way to get started is to click on the Take the Tour in the upper left hand corner.

But if you just want to zoom in, you can see the closest stars to us. The Sun is in the middle, and if you zoom in even further, you'll see the Oort Cloud. Keep zooming in to find the planetary orbits (I was struck by how much zooming had to be done to get to the planets, giving a sense of scale).

It includes some nifty spacey-like music (provided by Sam Hulick, who video game fans may recognize as a composer for the popular space adventure series, Mass Effect) but if you'd rather explore in silence, hit your mute button.

What I enjoyed the most is moving my mouse up and down to see the 3-D effect of how everything fits together, providing a sense of the cosmic web that holds our universe together.

Source: Universe Today