Sample Concept Documentation for *Underwater Treasure Hunt Adventure*

Concept	*Beneath our waves* is an underwater treasure hunt adventure designed to promote an appreciation of our oceans and their inhabitants through exploration, discovery, and wonder. - Piloting a remote-operated vehicle, players plunder the depths of detailed 3D environments based on real-world settings and learn about the world around them through solving puzzles, hunting for treasure, and taking photos of marine life. - The core gameplay loop involves entering a new area, investigating optional points of interest (treasure, puzzles, animals), and completing a mission-specific objective. - As the player progresses, more areas and tools for deeper exploration are unlocked. - Scalability - Starting areas cater to younger children: requiring simple puzzle-solving skills and basic navigation, they reveal elementary facts about the ocean (i.e., how fish breathe underwater). - Later areas cater to older children: containing complex puzzles, non-linear navigation, and intricate knowledge about the natural world (i.e., how climate change affects the ocean levels). - Regardless of age group, the game encourages players to chart their course of adventure according to their own pace, ability, and interests. - The player is accompanied by a cast of curious characters that guides them in exploration, drops puzzle-solving hints, and provides bite-sized pieces of real-world knowledge. - It is the game's intention and hopes that as the player progresses through the game, they begin to realize that the ocean is rife with treasure, that is not only coins, goblets, and doubloons locked away in sunken ships, but also the vibrant marine life swimming all around them.
Narrative	Ever since it washed up along the shores, the Nautical Novel and its cryptic contents have been rumored to lead whoever can solve its mysteries to the greatest underwater treasures known to history. As the newly minted pilot of Remote Operated Underwater Vehicle: Extra-nautical Reconnaissance (or R.O.U.V.E.R), you are recruited by Professor Percy Fick to dive into the oceans across our world and search for clues to crack the novel's secrets. Along your way, uncover the lost relics of the sunken city of Heracleion, capture the majesty of giant manta rays gliding across the seabed on camera, and admire the splendor of a Sandfall during your adventures of the deep. You won't have to journey alone, however, aiding you on your quest are the Professor's trusty assistants: Aurora the dolphin, wily treasure hunter Drake, and expert gadgeteer Chip.

> With each discovery leading you closer to the ultimate treasure, will you head towards Treasure Cove to hunt for gold doubloons hidden away for thousands of years? Or frolic among the thousands of species hosted in the Great Barrier Reef? The path of adventure lies entirely in your hands as you grab the R.O.U.V.E.R controls and explore a new world beneath our waves!

Rationale

Given the popularity of the exploration genre amongst younger gamers, I reasoned that it should be the main focus of this adventure game, which led me away from traditional underwater video game tropes of oxygen resource management and shooting at sea monsters. I liked the idea of players controlling a remote-controlled underwater vehicle in a 3D environment with a mouse and keyboard as it felt like it would be somewhat similar to controlling its real-life counterpart.

With the genre and player interface in place, I felt I was in a good place to brain blast for ideas and understand what the game was not, to narrow down the playing field. After that, I researched possible gameplay mechanics and real-world settings and distilled what I gathered into 3 core pillars of design and 1 'log-line'. This was North Star I could fall back on should I get lost conceptualizing or the spare tank of gas I could top up from should my creative reserves run low. From there, I designed a concept and wrote a narrative that was best suited to contain the ideas, feelings, requirements, and restrictions of the assignment. Finally, I sought the opinions of the copy I wrote from respected peers, worked on the feedback I thought fit best, and completed a cycle of iteration[1].

My main focus for the next iteration would be to workshop the solution of scaling to different age groups. Although having different zones catering to specific age groups within the same game is a simple solution, younger players may become frustrated encountering advanced puzzles beyond their ability, while older players may get bored with having made to go through early foundation levels.

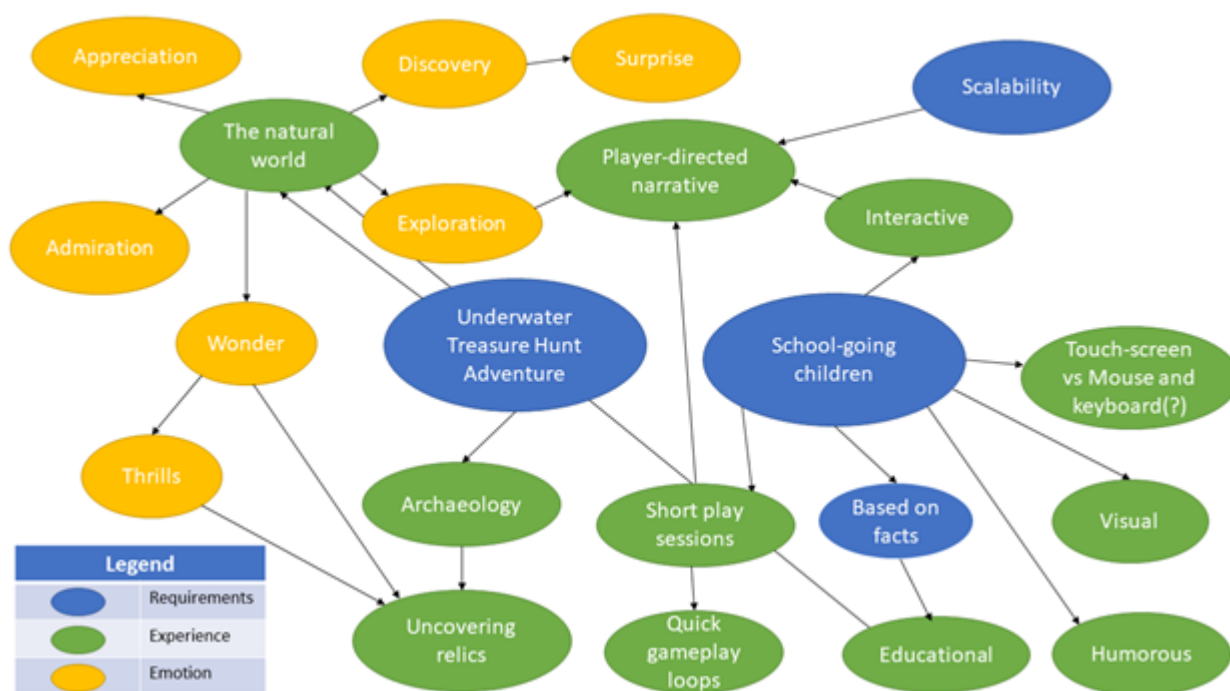[1] A process further detailed below

Approach
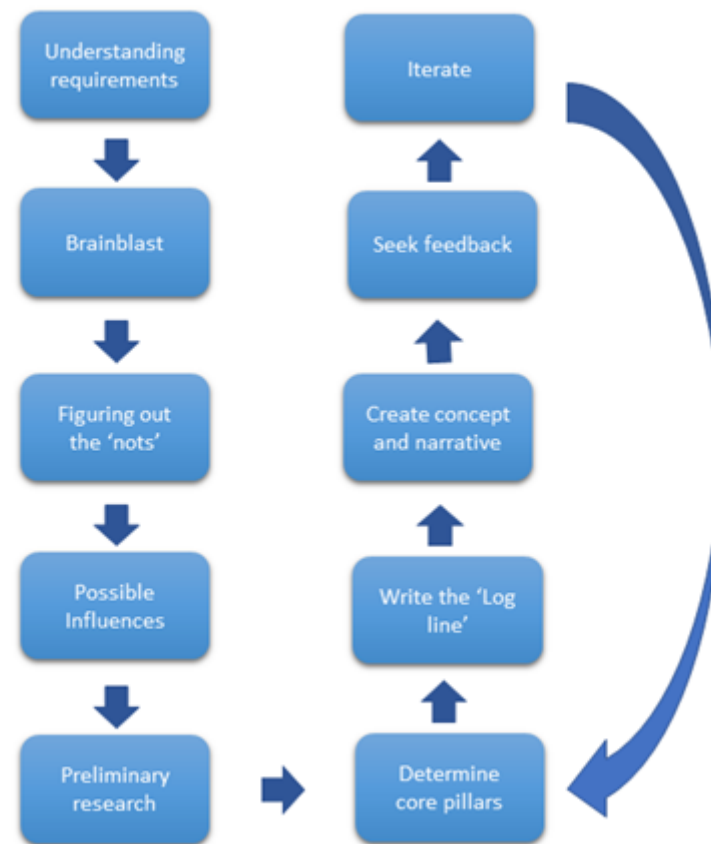
Requirements
- Genre: Underwater treasure hunt adventure
- Platform: PC
- Target audience: School-going children
- Turnaround: 1-2 hours

Brain blast

What I think the game is not

- A traditional adventure video game
  - Having mechanics like oxygen supply and upgrades to your wetsuit or fighting sea monsters would detract from the focus of exploration and discovery.
- A linear narrative
  - Again, with exploration as a focus, players should not be told step by step where to go and what to do, but rather allowed to carve out their path of adventure.
- A VR experience
  - With a large target demographic of school children, using a VR headset to experience the world of the game could alienate many potential players due to the limitations of its form (motion sickness) and accessibility (pricey hardware).
- Multiple games each catered to a different age group
  - The assignment called for a simple solution for accessibility between groups of users and creating multiple games would be unnecessarily resource-intensive.

Possible influences (or the design choices I'd like to 'borrow')

- Forgotten waters
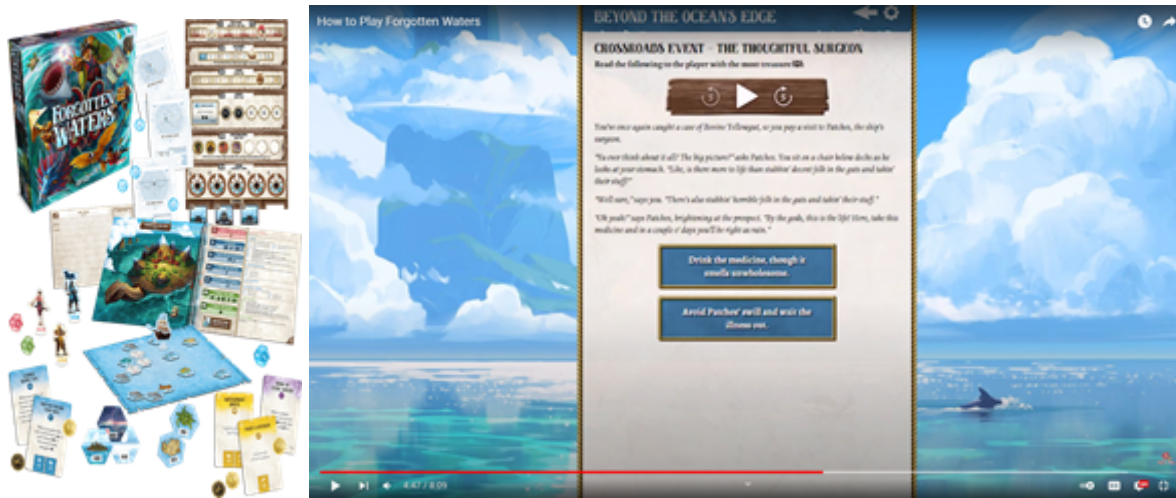
Narrative design: A coopetitive, player-driven narrative adventure board game where each pirate on the ship hunts for treasure and decides on story moments for the whole crew to experience through its associated smartphone app. After some dice-rolling gameplay, the adventure book directs the player to enter a serial number into the app, where a story beat is revealed, and where the player can make interactive choices. Also, a possible game design influence to take bearing from, should the project want to scale to multiplayer.

- Bioshock

Player experience: The first-person, role-playing series focuses on environmental storytelling and exploration to get players engaged with the world its developers had created. Set pieces to take artistic/experiential influences[2] can be from the first game's opening sequence or the second game's underwater traversal segments.

---

[2] Albeit in a lighter tone

- Outer Wilds
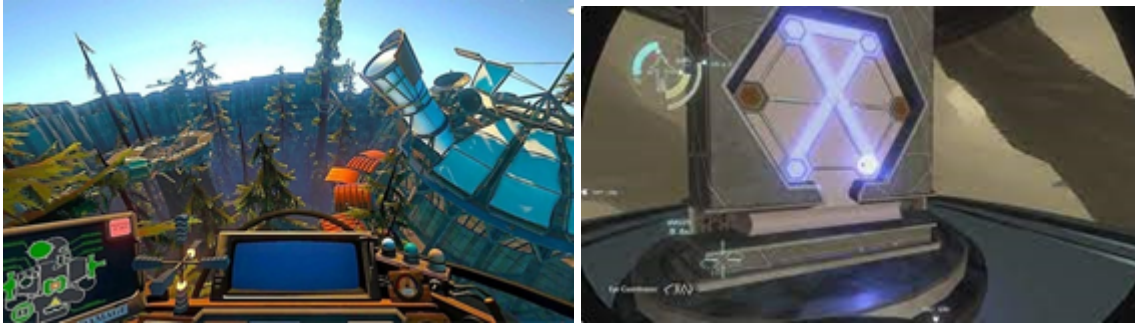
Game design: This Metroidvania-like adventure game fills the player with wonder and discovery as they spelunk alien planets and solve puzzles through a simple and clear gameplay loop.

Additional influences

-Pokémon Snap
-Breath of the Wild
-Subnautica
-Animal Crossing
-Apex Legends

Possible settings based on real-world locations

Heracleion

Ancient Egyptian port-city weakened by natural causes and lost to the Mediterranean Sea is rife with sunken statues, jewels, and ceramics.

Possible learning content: Environmental forces (soil liquefaction, earthquakes, tsunamis, rising sea levels), ancient mythology (Egyptian and Greek), and archaeology (coins, ceramics, statues).

Possible mission objective: Unravel the mystery of the sunken city.

Cocos Island

Also known as Treasure Cove Island, this island in the Indian Ocean and its surroundings were rumored to house millions of dollars of treasure. It is also home to an enormous number of underwater species.

Possible learning content: Marine life (urchin, sharks, manta rays, sea turtles, and dolphins) and flora (kelp, corals, and anemones)

Possible mission objective: Navigate your way to the remains of the SMS Emden.

Cabo San Lucas

Formed between the friction of tectonic plates, this Sandfall is a natural phenomenon and is located between the waters of the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Cortez.

Possible learning content: Geology (underwater currents and tectonic plates) and marine life (barracuda, octopi, and black coral).

Possible mission objective: Learn about the origin and formation of a Sandfall.

Core pillars of design

- Experiential: Visually evocative and driven by the player's curiosity and exploration.

- Educational: Teaching players about the natural world beneath our oceans.

- Accessible: Players are encouraged to progress at their own pace and ability.

Logline

Beneath our waves is an underwater treasure hunt adventure designed to promote an appreciation of our oceans and their inhabitants through exploration, discovery, and wonder.