DIVE
A Preliminary GDD

Revision: 1.0.0

This document is purely and wholly a love letter to Blackbird Interactive. I am so impressed by your work in and out of studio that I put this together as a testament to my interest in and dedication towards proving my value as an asset and member of the team. All ideas expressed are that of a professional writer, with tangential understanding of all the disciplines related to making a game. Take all my ideas beyond worldbuilding and as brainstorming and evidence of my willingness and eagerness to work interdepartmentally, as I am certain the professionals in the other aspect of game design have a better grasp of things than I do.

This is not a full GDD, but rather a start to one. Any game with a team should be a team effort, so, I will only venture into the fields outside of my own expertise with ideas, as I would want to do on a real project, as well as leave the narrative only partially developed, as I would want input from everyone on that as well. The plan is to create a cohesive concept, without digging to deep; that way it can be built up as a team effort. I am not presuming this will ever get made, but I think it is important to approach this with that mindset nonetheless.

I hope you enjoy.

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SUMMARY

ABSTRACT

Dive is a spiritual successor to the Homeworld franchise. Set in a oceanic world, it explores the other final frontier: the depths beneath the waves. Command an ever expanding fleet of submarine combat vessels and attempt to find a way home.

GENRE

Real time strategy

SCOPE

A full campaign including a branching mission structure, persistent units

CORE GAMEPLAY MECHANICS BRIEF

Traditional RTS	All the Homeworld-standard mechanics, built upon.
Mission progression	Progress through 5 acts of missions with secret objectives and side missions. Unlock the "true" ending, Starfox 64 style.
Economy	Balance a budget of ships, personnel, and materials, constantly judging how many units to send, what to build, and where to engage.

TARGETED PLATFORMS

PC	Ease of programming, no licensing fee, modding integration for longevity.

MONETIZATION/FUNDING MODEL

- Demo: Free release/Out of pocket
- Full Release: Semi-Premium title: ~$49.99
- Free DLC 1:   Multiplayer support (or that can be native?)
- Free DLC 2:   Ship/faction skin making lab (native?)
- Free DLC 3:   More secondary missions/ co-op support (native?)
- DLC 1:   Second human centered campaign (another survivor?)
- DLC 2:   Hectid centered mini campaign
- DLC 3:   Alien centered mini campaign

DETAILED PROJECT OVERVIEW

THE ELEVATOR PITCH

A spiritual successor to the Homeworld franchise, set beneath the waves of an oceanic planet. Progress through missions, produce and upgrade units, manage resources, and discover the secrets of the depths.

STORY

PROLOGUE:

A human colony ship and her escorts come to the end of their journey, arriving at the oceanic world Poseidon. Upon reaching the planet's outer orbit, a satellite network activates, shooting the colony ship down as well as most of her escorts. The general retreat order is given and the satellite continues to destroy the fleeing ships, damaging an ancient battleship (that had been set to be retired/disassembled on the surface for resources and parts). It makes planetfall and hides beneath the waves.

ACT I:

Mission 1: Search and Rescue

Faced with the prospect of a hunter killer satellite, the command crew of an ancient battleship, being forming a battle plan, realizing their ship is poorly equipped to deal with ocean depths; power must be shunted to the right systems. As they discuss their options signals from escape pods begin coming through. They recover everyone they can.

As they work, mechana-organic octopus-like creatures being attacking, attempting to take the escape pods. The frigate does not have a complement of fighters, so must enter and weather crush depth temporarily to fire on the creatures with its guns.

Units introduced:	Frigate
	Transport
Enemies introduced:	Heptids
Mechanics introduced:	Basic gameplay (movement, orders, etc.)
	Support abilities (frigate)

Inter-Mission:

Deducing the location of a crashed cruiser, the frigate moves to salvage. The journey will take 3 days, so the crew uses their time wisely.

Units introduced:	Fighter
Mechanics introduced:	Unit repair
	Unit production
	Research
	Tactics

Mission 2: Salvage

Deducing the location a crashed cruiser, the frigate moves to salvage what it can and search for survivors. They find heptids have already begun consuming the ship and it is noticed they are only taking components with iron.

A larger, more aggressive form of heptid leaves the ocean depths

They do find survivors, as well as useful resources. The prize, however, is an intact piece of scanning equipment.

Other Act I missions:

Progress further and begin take on more crew, gaining access to new units, meeting new enemies, upgrading the main ship, and gaining more flexibility. The final mission is a battle for the remains of the colony ship with a giant hectid, the player eventually having to choose whether to save 1-2 among the cryogenic settlers' storage (+population), the engines (+mobility), the shield module (+defense), the supply cache (+resources), or the computer cores (+research).

There is a hidden objective to deal enough damage to the attacker so that it retreats. This leads to the secret ending. One way to do this is to trick the satellite into firing on the giant hectid, another is to simply deal enough damage.

ACT II:

Act 2 centers around building up resources and advancing, with the intention of finding a way to escape. Include defending the battleship as it implements its upgrades, creating fake targets to test the satellite (which comes to be known as Charybdis). Toward the end, they discover an AI of an alien race, which leads them to begin recovering artifacts and technology from destroyed ships of other races.

ACT III:

Act 3 centers around gathering new technologies, but the Charybdis faction begins deploying automated enemy units. The player has to determine which route to take along

the planet, balancing aspects like which wrecks to prioritize and dismiss, taking time for upgrades, recovery, and unit production, and the growing threat of Charybdis.

ACT IV:

Act 4 centers on a pieced together mess of information indicating the existence of some sort of device capable of destroying the Charybdis. Following the clues leads to a device that can't destroy it, but rather leads to it's control nexus, located in sea surrounded by kilometers of reef.

ACT V:

Act 5 is getting to the nexus and disabling Charybdis.

CONCLUSION:

Humans leave, only to have another entity leave the planet too, following them.

TRUE ENDING

The secret ending, which requires a number of secret secondary missions, reveals the reason for Charybdis: it is a hunter killer ship tasked with destroying a entity the crew dubs "The Leviathan." The secret ending convinces Charybdis to shut down, only to have it reactivate once The Leviathan leaves the surface. Both Charybdis and the human fleet battle and attempt to destroy The Leviathan.

ALTERNATIVE ELEMENTS

- A second faction of humans that refuse to join and want to settle under the waves; fighting ensues over resources.
- A splinter faction of humans, allowing the player to control two or more task groups and handle missions with self-allocated units.

FACTIONS

HUMANITY

Humanity uses a fairly bog standard science fiction technology, upgrading their fleet as they encounter other technology. Their units are full range and can be modified with different upgrade trees, similar to the newer StarCraft campaigns.

THE HECTIDS

The Hectids (six arm octopi, hence hex) are an intelligent race that form the main adversarial group to the humans, making palaces and bases out of derelict ships. They utilize sonic disruption, stealth, and strangulation. They have numbers, but primitive intelligence.
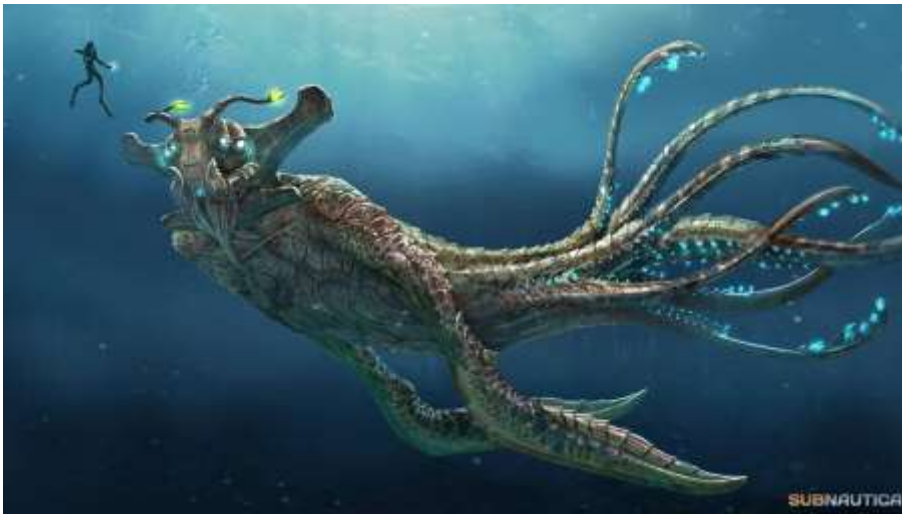
Feral Hectids

Live in exile in depths of the trenches.

CHARYBDIS CONSTRUCTS

Are deployed in progressively greater numbers, attempting to destroy the humans. The Hectids fear them and will lead them to humans, presumably because if the humans fall, the constructs will assume the mission is complete.

MINOR ALIEN FACTIONS

These factions are leftovers from downed ships, including defensive turrets, AI piloted ships, and other aspects that have not been consumed by the Hectids.

Crystal based?
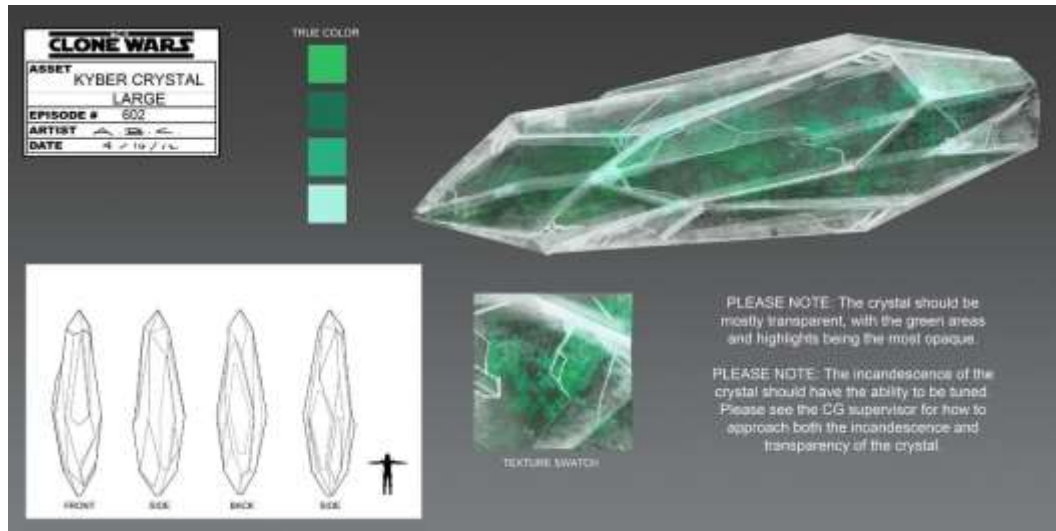
THE LEVIATHAN

The Leviathan is its own entity, but can control other factions units via Flood-like (Halo) domination and hacking. The Hectids pay it tribute, sacrificing members to keep The Leviathan satisfied.

GLOBAL MECHANICS

OVERWORLD MECHANICS

Route Control

Unlike a traditional RTS, the player will choose secondary missions to take after a certain point while on route to the next story missions. Non-story missions can be done or ignored.

Real real time strategy

Units are created outside of battle, each one taking a certain amount of time, as does researching upgrades, repairs, and other aspects.

This, while a departure from the original series, would also serve to distance it. Fixed unit multiplayer would be interesting, with a "fast build" option for traditionalists.

Mechcommander 2 used this concept to superb effect, albeit with a lower unit count.

Repairs (an idea)

An interesting concept would be permanent vs. repairable damage. Permanent damage is what it says, critical damage that permanently reduces the ship's health or abilities. The player can choose to repair a ship and keep letting those detractors add up, or choose a full re-fabrication, taking a far longer time to build a new ship from scratch.

Resources

There are two types of resources:

- Material: A generic, physical material used to build and repair units.
- Officers: The command personnel in the units. Each unit has a number of officers, who gain experience and benefit the units they are in. Officers can be hot swapped in and out of units, an example being to have the best officers serve in difficult missions, while brining up reserves on easier ones.

Unit Upgrades

By finding artifacts and observing enemies, research is opened up to improve unit deigns. Once a topic is research a unit can be improved. This is not instigations, however, and units will have to be upgraded in the battleship.

Unit Specializations

Sometimes upgrades will be incompatible with one another; the player will have to choose. That said, this is on a unit by unit basis and both can be fielded.

Tactics

To help make up for the shortcomings of dealing with a user interface, players can implement unit tactics, which units will undertake (based on officer experience) when certain conditions are met. Examples:

- Move to back of group, but continue engaging when reduced to below 75% health.
- Retreat to beyond enemy weapons range reduced to below 50% health.
- Retreat to battleship when below 25% health
- When shield depletes, use other ship shield as cover.
- Other things such as complex escort procedures, unit formations, and others.

These can be implemented as global, unit-type-specific, or individual tactics. They also must be implemented pre-mission, although training simulations can be run.

Battleship upgrades

The battleship can be upgraded in a branching tree of different fashions, including something that more suits the role of a carrier, stealth ship, dreadnaught, or monitor. It can also take a secondary role, focusing on research, production, or habitation.

Active Sympathy

As the ranking officer of the expedition, will you choose to enact military discipline to ensure safety, or run a campaign of hope. Will you yield to a ranking civilian leader when he or she is rescued, enact martial law, or find some peaceful medium. Your choices matter and will affect how the game plays out.

BATTLE MECHANICS

Homeworld-Inspired Controls

The basic setup will be heavily inspired by the first two Homeworld games as subaquatic combat more resembles space combat than land. There are elements from Deserts of Kharak to implement as well, such as line of sight near the ocean floor, subsystems, and unit size affecting terrain accessibility (especially in reefs and wrecks).

Range Physics

Impeded by water, space weapons will have to be adapted and then upgraded as technology is discovered.

Unit parings

Units can be paired in certain ways. For instance, torpedo boat with incredible range can pair with a scout so that the torpedoes can be blind fired without putting that sub in danger.

Crush and Citing Depths

Because of story reasons, a player does not want to get too close to the surface (Charybdis) can spot the fleet and initiate a timer for orbital bombardment and/or a Charybdis construct assault. Because of physics reasons, the player will also not want to move units too deep into the water, as pressure will rise rapidly. There are plenty of story mechanics to play on this.

"Bullet time commands"

While impractical in multiplayer, a soft counter to the difficulty of controlling units for non-RTS fanatics will cut the difficulty, without compromising the require mental skill. Allowing a significant slowing of time to enter commands might help this. An alternative is integrated macros.

Elevation

Because of the nature of the game, a new, efficient means to deal with the up/down aspect of play will have to be devised. It is already implemented in Homeworld, but it may have to be altered, as this is a more critical aspect of play.

Shockwaves

Heavy weapons and explosions may send other ships off course or cause damage in an of themselves. Mines or bombs might be devastating, but beware, Charybdis is watching.

Terrain

There will be certain terrain features underwater, allowing for Deserts of Kharak-like movement concealment, but other features as well.

- Targeting silt on the ocean floor with engines or weapons can create concealing clouds; this can be used as stealth or be dangerous in sneak situations

- Upper units get aided by gravity and targeting, similar to Deserts of Kharak
- Currents can affect movement speeds, weapon trajectories, or other aspects. Firing at a target down current will make your projectiles hit harder (moderately, anyway) and theirs weaker; it will also offer more time to shoot down incoming torpedoes.
- Temperatures (arctic regions or volcanic activity) can affect performance of shields, propulsion, or even stealth.
- Unusually clear water may mean a timed mission as Charybdis approaches, or murky waters offer an unusual low depth mission that restricts ship size.

- Storms can not only affect currents and waves, but also block Charybdis' view.

- Kelp/organic life hazards

- Plenty of possibilities; oceans are wonderful playgrounds.

UNITS

Unit hierarchy, role, and other aspects will take heavy influence from all the games in the Homeworld series, adapted to make sense in the ocean, of course.

Ideas:

- A "grappler" ship, that uses tractor beams to hold ships still; uses arms to tear apart small enemies
- Cruise missile subs; useful for hitting enemies from the air, where they do not expect; useful sometimes, but useless when Charybdis is above, so building it is an unreliable investment.

UPGRADE TREE

It would follow a similar path of simple upgrades based on progression, but also a definite core of depth tolerance for story missions in deep sea trenches and cave networks.

UNLOCKING UNITS

This would have a similar trend.

MUSIC

Homeworld's soundtracks are masterpieces, ever adding to the atmosphere and soul of the game. This game would depart from the wonderful Middle Eastern inspired music in favor of something just as driving, but distinct. In game music could also be muted and subdued depending on the mission depth, conveying a real sense of underwater.

PRESENTATION OF SCALE

One thing that the Homeworld series did fantastically well is present just how small or large everything is. Whether it is the massive vehicles of Kharak shown as small before the ship wrecks, or the monstrous ships of Homeworld 2 suddenly made tiny in the final battle of the game with a planet in the background, the player felt a sense of epicenes. While this is smaller scale, a planet is still huge and oceans are immense; recapturing this sense would be critical to maintaining that feel.

ANIMATION

Another Homeworld staple, the semi-visual comic style would look incredible in shades of blue.

CHARACTERS

THE CAPTAIN

A captain looking to retire to this world and this was his last assignment.

THE XO

A young XO taking a coveted position to learn from a master before he retires

THE CHIEF SCIENTIST

An older xenologist with interest in the planet; potential semi-love interest with the captain. Rescued at the colony ship along with most of the others.

THE GENIUS

Heads up research and upgrades.

THE CHIEF MECHANIC

Builds everything

OTHER CHIEFS OF STAFF

MISC. CHARACTERS LOST IN THE INTRO

LEVIATHAN/THE A.I.

CHARYBDIS (NON-SPEAKING)

CERTAIN HECTIDS (NON-SPEAKING)

SETTINGS

PLANET (AS A WHOLE)

REEFS

DEPTHS

INTERESTING ALIEN FORMATIONS

HECTID CITIES

WRECKS

ICE REALMS (IF NOT SALTY SEA)

A plankton like creature that feeds on salt might account for this.

LUMINESCENT CREATURES

MONOLITHS

Large, levitating, glowing monoliths in a sea of dark water and still sand to make the human ships feel small.

LEVEL DESIGN

A lot of focus on making the ocean feel oceanic, but for the lesser important missions, a single model meant to be salvaged can be rotated to artificially provide different vantage

points. A silt settlement simulator could also help this, as well as an organic Hectid city builder.

UI

Again, heavily influenced by Homeworld

BALANCING

Obviously needed; to be determined. Hard RTS counter triangles to be added when units are fleshed out.

REFERENCES

HOMEWORLD

Every aspect to be considered.

MECHCOMMANDER 2

Idea of persistent, individual units with unique layouts and pilots. It doesn't need to be taken quite so far, but that adds another layer to the strategy.

In game encyclopedia; see Metroid Prime

STARCRAFT 2 EXPANSIONS

The implantation of unit variations

Monstrous unique enemies

METROID PRIME

A robust in game encyclopedia with entries as species are discovered. Weapons added too.