

# URU

## Re-imagined

### Game Proposal

By Yali

Uru has enormous potential to break the mould of current MMO trends. While the market is flooded with theme park MMOs that behave far too often as online single-player games, Uru is one of the few games that has challenged norms in the realm of online gameplay. I will begin by listing several key factors that made Uru stand apart from its competitors in 2003 and continue to make it so even today:

Key differences:

1. No levelling system.
2. Live actor driven storyline.
3. Player influenced story content.
4. No economy
5. No combat
6. Story/gameplay content delivered in real time throughout game's lifespan
7. Persistent environment

I believe most of these factors are what make Uru a likely candidate to offset the theme park dominated market. However some adjustments are needed to ensure that the game provides replay value. This brings me to one key point: The major factor affecting Uru's success is not that it makes use of unlikely gameplay concepts, but rather the fact that as it is built as a traditional Myst game, it lacks replay value. Once a player has completed a certain group of ages, there is seldom left to do until the next update.

I will now outline all the major points that will encompass a modernized and re-imagined Uru.  
To begin:

### **STORY:**

- Players will begin in the Cleft as was originally intended, but rather than collect journey cloths and enter the tree, they will descend into the tunnels and journey as a group to the city. This initial level will act as one major introductory dungeon, providing players with an initial working KI, a Relto book (with no other links on the age present, except a Nexus book back to the tunnels) and story content through journals. Once the players have reached D'ni, they will be thrust into the main story.

- The main story is about the rebuilding of the D'ni Civilization by the players. Added to the mix will be the remaining D'ni survivors who will begin by visiting and lightly re-colonizing the Cavern. These D'ni survivors will be half AI NPCs and half live player-actors. The D'ni citizens will provide a liaison between the human explorers who are not of D'ni blood and the original inhabitants, as to allow for the spiritual reconstruction of their civilization.

- The main story will focus around the conflict between the D'ni people, the human explorers and the Bahro, who intend to conquer the D'ni civilization entirely. A third wheel to the conflict will be thrust in as well: this being the Moeity civilization of Rivenese survivors. The Moeity, under the auspices of a new leader, wish to forge their own empire by learning the art. Players will be given a choice to aide and/or fully side with one of these opposing forces.

- Those who wish to support the human/explorer effort to rebuild the city may find themselves helping the DRC or joining the Maintainers Guild to support the release of new ages.

- Those who wish to side with the Bahro may find themselves privy to new mysterious ages and will be able to join up with other like minded players to conduct devious plots to undermine the rebuilding effort.

- Those who side with the D'ni will protect the last bastion of D'ni civilization on Releeshahn against the Bahro and also make decisions concerning D'ni's involvement with the both the DRC and the Moeity.

- Finally those who side with the Moeity will be able to rise up the ranks of Moeity society and learn the Art, much against the D'ni's wishes, to expand Moeity domination over the multiverse.

## **FACTIONS:**

There will be 4 main factions or what I call "Factions Lite". These factions are a little less clear cut as the player is not restricted to a factions' set rules when joining said faction. Players may even undermine one faction in order to help another faction that they have also secretly joined. Joining factions is not an overly rigid process. One must speak to an actor-played character or NPC of that particular faction and mention one's wishes to join.

- The DRC: The DRC is a group of independent human archaeologists and intellectuals who wish to control and restore the D'ni society. They are in charge of releasing approved Ages and new areas of the city. The DRC is run by Dr. Watson, a D'ni scholar and intellectual who wishes to control and oversee the rebirth of the city according to his views on restoration. The DRC also have internal political struggles, from the corporate minded Kate, the outcast Douglas Sharper and the ambitious and scientifically minded Kodama and Laxman. Players who join this faction will be privy to the politics within the DRC and will be encouraged by the DRC actors to approve and inspect ages. Players with enough age creation skills will also be allowed to "restore" D'ni ages to for release within the city. The players with the most opportunistic edge will rise through the DRC ranks and acquire more wealth. Players with enough status and seniority in the DRC could technically run the city on the same level as the actor-played characters that are in charge of the DRC itself. Players may also influence the story in both positive and negative ways for the faction they work for. For example, a player may wish to secretly undermine the DRC efforts by fooling the actor-played characters into making unwise decisions, however since actor-played characters are not NPCs, they may themselves dupe players as well.

- The Bahro: The Bahro are the powerful former slaves of the D'ni. They wish to totally eclipse the D'ni Empire and the rebuilding effort in order to take control and dominate the multiverse. Players who join the Bahro will need to be deviously minded and will be required to undermine the other two factions in order to overtake the D'ni world. Players in this faction will be capable of linking at will and will also be capable of flying on a bahro's back to conduct attacks. Players will be encouraged by bahro characters and npcs to secretly undermine other faction's efforts. However this choice is up to the individual player's discretion as to how much, little, or if any at all they wish to undermine the other

two factions. Players in this faction will be also able to visit private Bahro ages where the Bahro live and gather in swarms to plan their attacks and secret plots.

- The Moeity: The Moeity is what happens to a primitive culture when it is introduced to the art. The Moeity who live on Tay have long lived by the D'ni's side, having been freed from Gehn's wrath by Atrus' wife Katran and delivered to their new home. However, Katran is now long gone and an ambitious new leader has taken over the nascent Moeity homeland. This new leader, observing the conflict between the D'ni, humans and the Bahro, sees an opportunity to give the art to her people and expand their civilization to other ages, creating a Moeity Empire. Players who join this faction will be given an up-close-and-personal interaction with Moeity society which is both brutal and primitive. Players with age writing skills will be recruited to write ages to expand the Moeity Empire. Players may also conduct shady deals with other factions to expand their own faction's power, or at the same time, seek to secretly undermine other factions... or do the same to their very own. Players who side with the Moeity will be given a home on Tay and traditional Moeity gear and weapons. Players will be able to rise through the ranks of Moeity society and earn wealth.

- The D'ni (on Releeshahn): Players who join the D'ni faction are opposed to the Moeity Empire's growth and are wary of the DRC's agenda in the Cavern. The D'ni faction allows the player to protect the Age of Releeshahn from the Bahro invasions, as well as deal with the growing Moeity Empire and the unsure agenda of the DRC. The D'ni faction is led by Atrus and will have close ties with the D'ni Guilds in the Cavern.

Factions showcase a lot of gray areas morally. The DRC may be on the explorer's side in terms of restoration, but may be biased towards one particular agenda or viewpoint. The Moeity may be strong and fraternal but may also be harsh towards its own members and have an unhealthy penchant for acquiring new ages, emulating the pride of the ancient D'ni. Finally, the Bahro may seem the most evil but may also be the least convoluted in terms of their agenda and the most organized and goal driven.

## **PLAYER ECONOMY:**

One of Uru's major failing points was in regards to replay value. Once an age was complete, content could not arrive fast enough to sustain players' interest after all the puzzle solving was done. One way to fix this is through a player driven economy. Player driven economies foster replay value because no matter how much new content is available, acquiring status and wealth is both motivating and rewarding. Games like Skyrim and Oblivion are perfect examples of this process, where the sheer pleasure of playing the game is attained by dungeon trekking and adventuring in order to acquire gold. Such gold enables the player to buy house or some other major game item, which further immerses the player in the simulation of the game meta-narrative.

- To begin, one major change will be the addition of an inventory as well as interactive objects in the game world. Crates, chests, bags, and exposed objects can now be used and taken by the player. Crates, boxes, chests and bags may also contain ingredients, objects, tools or other assorted items a player can collect. Exposed objects can also be taken. A player bag can hold double the amount of objects than without one.

- When arriving in D'ni, players will find D'ni inhabitants re-occupying the city. Many of these will be AI driven NPCs and some will be actor driven characters. These D'ni survivors will allow players to train with them to acquire a craft. Some will be shopkeepers who can train players to sell goods in a

D'ni shop, and by doing so, earn a wage from said D'ni character. Other D'ni characters may train explorers as blacksmiths, stone workers or ship sailors. Blacksmiths will be able to earn a wage by creating weapons and tools for the repopulation effort. Stone workers will be able to craft sculptures and reliefs for redecorating the city or to be sold to players for housing projects. Ship sailors will be able to earn a wage by ferrying players from Ae-Gura to the city proper or to other islands or districts, except for secluded hoods.

- When building ages in age creation software, players will be able to add wildlife, aggressive wildlife, sentient inhabitants and resources (eg. Plants, stone, crates, chests, containers with products, etc.) Players will then be able to grab these resources in-game by either killing said wildlife or harvesting other resources from the environment or from placed containers. Players will then be able to gain wealth by selling these products or using crafting to create more elaborate products (eg. A pie vs. raw meat and plants or a D'ni instrument vs. raw wood and metal)

- Choosing a guild or faction will allow players to gain wealth from both NPCs and actor-played characters. By aiding the DRC in age restoration, either by creating an official D'ni age in age creation software, or by inspecting ages or making political decisions within the DRC, the player will ultimately gain much more wealth and prestige. High ranking members of factions may make enough wealth to afford a larger player house in a neighbourhood or, in some extreme cases, for the best opportunists the ability to even own a private D'ni island (with the exception of K'veer and Katha Island). This prospect of being both wealthy and influential in the D'ni world will foster healthy competitive player dynamics.

- Joining a major guild will also provide benefits in this light as well. Maintainers will be paid by D'ni overseers to control peace in the city and install infrastructure across the ages as well as in the Cavern. Cartographers will be paid by both the DRC and traditional D'ni cartographers to create the best map projects to be used in game. Greeters will be paid a large sum to welcome new explorers to the city as well as provide KI upgrades and, with the help of maintainers, moderate player conflicts. Writers will be given prestige and payment by D'ni characters when creating beautiful or innovative ages. This will motivate players to learn age creation.

## **COMBAT:**

This may seem like an odd addition to the franchise, but there are many benefits that come from its inclusion as well as compromises to it in light of the series' history.

Combat will be a lot like what was showcased in Portal: used lightly and with essential story backing its motivation. There will be no grinding or mindless combat-for-combat-sake. Rather, combat will be emphasized as something that occurs rarely and is impacting to the player in a major way rather than as a repetitive game trope.

- Combat will be necessary for faction conflict as it provides legitimacy to the conflict at hand.

- Players will be able to acquire D'ni weapons such as daggers, fire marble guns, spears and swords.

- Players have a high risk of going to jail if combat is engaged with another player, especially if both players are of the same faction.

- The Maintainers, under the supervision of D'ni characters, will run a secret prison on Gahreesen where

those who have attacked another player will be placed in a walled off cell for a duration of time, but only if found. This will discourage griefing.

- Players can not die permanently as Yeesha saves the player's soul in a Bahro cave if a player is struck down. However, each time the same player is saved by Yeesha, it also drains them. In order to regain full strength, players must eat.

- Combat is more useful against wildlife within the various ages. Some creatures may be hostile. There may even be danger lurking in the orange lake of D'ni and such attacks may be unscripted. Players ferrying across the lake may need to have a trusty dagger by their side.

- The whole game will showcase a much muted form of PvP and PvE mix. As badly performed PvP has dire consequences for the offender, it will be more muted and intra-faction combat will be frowned upon (although some may still get away with it). This fear associated with PvP will keep it restrained and more focused towards the opposing factions.

## **PUZZLES AND ADVENTURE:**

- With our inventory in mind, players will be able to own rope, firemarble flashlights and other tools for adventuring.

- All initial Uru Ages and then some will be released at launch and will be non-instanced.

- Each section of Kadish Tolesa's parcourse will reset to allow players to solve the puzzles in groups rather than alone through instancing.

- Teledahn will have most of its other areas fully explorable at launch.

- The initial journey to free a bahro will be irrelevant and as such, journeys will be used in ages to save one's location in an age's map.

- New ages should focus on group puzzle solving rather than solo experience as instancing will be nulled.

- Age writers will be encouraged to roleplay their own characters and build ages that reveal through puzzles the personality or mysteries of their characters.

- Areas like K'veer will be contained story/puzzle driven. For example, players will be able to explore and uncover the history of the island through the objects and journals left behind that reveal information about characters such as Gehn, Veovis or Lord Rakeri. Gehn's study on the top floor of K'veer may hold a key to a closet that contains his clothes and journals. Rakeri's lab may be usable to perform experiments or to craft. Veovis' bedroom may contain his prized possessions and journals.

- Never must one underestimate the fun of mechanical based puzzles. Levers may open doors that give access to secret rooms, bedrooms or control rooms. Herein, there may be other levers or buttons that activate other areas of an age or in D'ni. Bridges may be raised or lowered and gates may be locked, opened or shut. For example: a pillow may hide a key to a closet that may contain a chest with another key. This second key may open two possible doors, and one of these doors may lead nowhere. The

door it does open is the dud, but lying on the ground in the false passageway may be a note that gives instructions on where to find a secret lever that opens the other door, etc.

- Players should be highly encouraged by game mechanics to dress in D'ni fashion. The majority of player items including clothing should reflect D'ni culture. This will strongly reinforce the idea that the D'ni city is being reborn.

### **RELEESHAHN:**

Releeshahn will be the main sandbox age where the majority of the D'ni survivors live. This age should be revealed after launch and have a build up around it. Players will be able to meet Atrus and receive council from the D'ni as well as Atrus himself.

- The age will be threatened by waves of Bahro attacks. A dark cloud of Bahro will swarm over the distant ocean, approaching ever closer to the mainland.
- Reaching this age will be done through a secret series of puzzles on Katha island that will reset after the last explorer links out so as to provide personalized puzzle gameplay for accessing the Age.
- The age will feature a library which will be opened in sections.
- Most of the D'ni living here will be advanced AI NPCs so as to provide a sense of a living breathing civilization.
- This Age will provide the explorers with a 4<sup>th</sup> faction: the Releeshahn D'ni. Joining the D'ni faction allows the player to protect the D'ni civilization from the Bahro while also negotiating with the growing Moeity Empire and the phantom threat of the DRC project.
- This Age will be a hotbed of historical, story driven areas.

### **GROWTH:**

At launch the explorable game world should be the ENTIRE city of D'ni, encompassing the City proper, the islands and Ae'Gura.

- The area should be non-instanced and fully explorable in one world space.
- Boats can be individually sailed/rowed across the lake while ferries can be used to transport groups... for a price.

All the initial Uru Ages should be present:

- All Ages are non-instanced and are open to anyone who wishes to link in. The traditional Uru Ages should be available in the Ae'Gura library.
- All environments are persistent. Whatever a player changes in the game world remains until it is altered by another player. (Eg. If one player decides to shut off power to Gahreesen, then it affects the whole age until another player changes that variable) Players can shut off explorable areas for others if they wish to do so or if they wish to hinder another faction, however any player can go through the ages and open up new sections by completing puzzles.

Starting at launch the following ages should be made available:

- Teledahn – with fully explorable new sections of the map (as seen in Sharper’s office)
- Gahreesen
- Eder Kemo
- Eder Gira
- Kadish Tolesa – with added story area known as Kadish’s house (Which will provide personal/emotional backstory to Kadish’s character).
- Minkata
- Eder Delin
- Eder Tsogal
- Er’Cana
- Ahnonay Cathedral
- Ahnonay
- Nexus
- Kahlo
- Jalak Dador
- The Pod Age
- Laki
- Noloben
- Direbo (sans Bahro pedestals)
- Todelmer

### **D’ni:**

The journey to D’ni including the tunnels, the Great Shaft and the fore-caverns will be fully explorable. The entranceway to D’ni will be grand as it prepares the player for the majesty of the Cavern.

- The path to D’ni will be as described in the book of Atrus with flowing carvings and patterns made of metal and stone leading the way to the Cavern.
- The fore-caverns will contain large industrial machinery used to power up the main Cavern and the adjacent caverns. Players will have to figure out how to power the city and open the fans.
- Airships much like the one seen in Voltaic could be used as transportation to get from one cavern to another.
- The entranceway or arch to the main D’ni cavern should be grand and perfectly sum up the sense of grandeur the City represents.
- D’ni in and of itself will be already partially restored. Tokotah alley, for example, should appear more as it did in Stephane Martiniere’s concept piece – fit with glowing firemarbles, signs and rich décor of all kinds.



Tokotah Alley at launch (Concept by Stephane Martinieri)

- Ae’Gura will be significantly larger, containing a large harbour fit with vessels.
  - The J’taeri district will be accessible via tunnels and will contain many elegant D’ni mansions and private guild buildings. Those with enough status or gold may purchase such homes. The J’taeri district will also feature a second library as described in the Book of Atrus.
  - The City proper will be a haven for businesses, majestic courtyards, grand city avenues and towering sculptures of D’ni Kings and guildsmen.
  - K’veer will be a mainly story driven area and will make use of strong visual storytelling to tell the story of Gehn, Veovis and his family and the fall of D’ni.
  - The D’ni Lake should be fully lit as to entice new players into the splendour of the city.
- At launch there will be frequent visits by the DRC and D’ni characters that will entice players into creating story content and choosing sides. Bahro swarms will be numerous within the Cavern.
  - Age creation software should be released with launch and should be fairly easy to use, utilizing both preset-mode and free-form mode where one can choose pre-made customizations for an age and be able to fully modify the age from then on.
  - Company released ages along with fan Ages through both the DRC and the Guild of Writers should keep content coming at a steady stream until the revealing of Releeshahn at the 3 month mark.
  - Releeshahn will be opened up in portions from the 3<sup>rd</sup> month to the 7<sup>th</sup> month where it will be finalized as a large open sandbox environment.

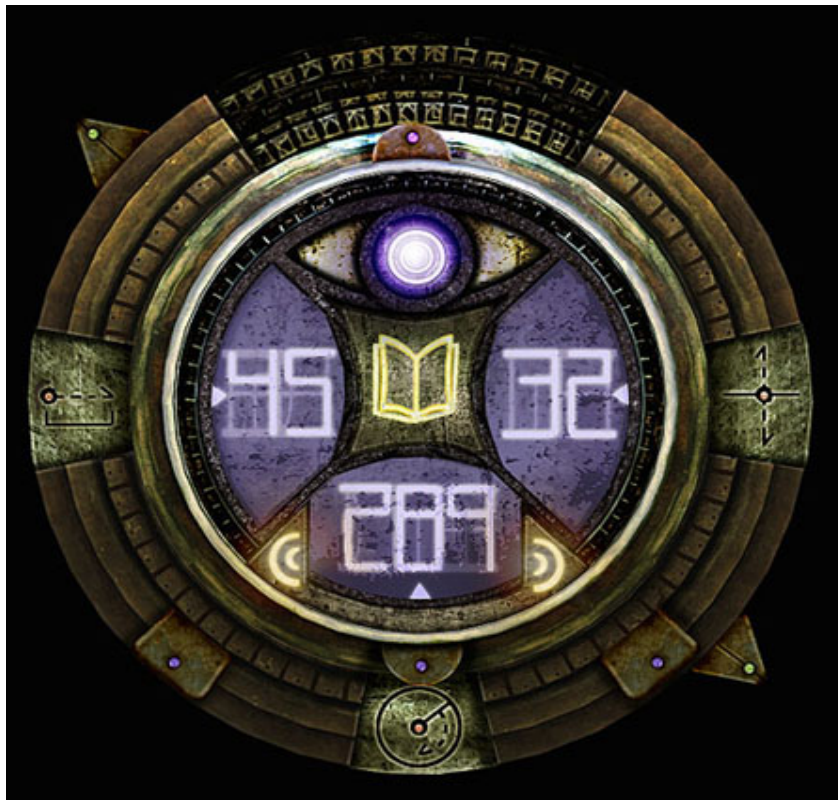


- Tay should be revealed in the 4<sup>th</sup> month and prior to this the Moeity should make their presence known as of the release of Releeshahn.
- By the 4<sup>th</sup> month, all factions should be in place.
- The story will ultimately depend entirely on the players as a group. Actors can interact with the players and provide choices, but the players' decisions as a whole entity will decide the outcome of the D'ni civilization, the Bahro and the Moeity.

## **THE KI:**

There are various forms of KIs that one can acquire throughout Uru's gameplay. The initial KI that is given to the player in the initial Descent area is very similar to Uru's current KI. It can perform chat, collect markers, take pictures and have a buddy and neighbour list. However, one element that should be implemented is a scroll bar to facilitate easier navigation.

When one enters D'ni, there will be D'ni NPCs that will direct new players to the Greeter's head office. The head office will consist of a large marble room with a circular desk at its center. Here, five high ranking Greeters sit and have access to the player database and will greet new players and offer them various versions of KIs. The second model will be given to newcomers for free. This model will look more akin to this depiction:



KI Version 2 Concept (Art by Josh Staub)

This KI will have cartography capabilities allowing players to locate buddies or neighbours in an age or in the City. It will have a more extensive interface that will be cleaner and more streamlined. This new interface will be able to store larger images, audio and even some video. It will also categorize players, NPCS and actors in light of what faction a player leans towards.