MARS Design Document

MARSCRAFT is a **Shulker Survival** Minecraft server built around a Leveling system, where players earn experience through classic gameplay such as mining & farming to beat levels. Each level grants a reward that enhances a specific gameplay vector, ranging from custom armor, to tools, enchants, buildings, cosmetics, to quick minigames and more. This creates a compounding gameplay loop, as players develop their own flow and grow within a massive, custom, deep Minecraft experience.

The server is designed to stay familiar while introducing moments of surprise and discovery, giving players clear goals while allowing them to explore, develop distinct playstyles, and build personal or group projects.

Rebuild Mission

The model was previously successful from 2020-24, attracting 80000 players, an all-time server list peak of #151, and a 22% one-week retention rate. However, with the erosion of time, the server started suffering from several issues, chief among them:

- **Outdated design concepts**, some of which are cliches limited to Minecraft servers from the late 2010s/early 2020s, restrictive f2p gameplay, overexposed tech (holograms, small caps font), outdated tech, lack of gaming/MC server trends, etc.
- **Poor, untracked balancing of several features**, most features during the server's heyday were balanced via trial & error, and were not kept track of via design, and over time with new features introduced, the server's content became outdated, and designer & player understandings of gameplay were very different.
- **Lack of coherence**, the vision & features were extremely divided, it all felt like something slapped together and held together by it being Minecraft, but that didn't help wrap up the server's image and put it in a difficult position.

Gameplay

- Players **starts at a spawnpoint** and **are guided towards an exit** to enter the MARS world. Players are **warped to a cave** with a kit of decent armor and tools, with nearby exits outward.
- Ores and monsters can be found within the cave. **Mining ores or killing monsters grants experience**.
- Reach 3000 EXP and the player **levels up**. The first level grants the **"Space Pickaxe,"** a **powerful custom** Diamond Pickaxe, designed to **showcase the server's progression**.
- Players will find the "Design a Home" tool in inventory. These homes come with a **small Beetroot farm** and a book from Rak (me), welcoming players and informing them of the community.
- From starter home, hotbar menu, or farming-related level rewards, players are guided towards farming. **Farming is a key source of cash**, and a **decent source of experience**.
- At level 8, players unlock **Quests**. Objectives are based on classic Minecraft tasks such as mining ores or defeating monsters. Players receive **3 daily Quests + a Treasure Hunt**, with each completion **granting one level and crate**.
- At this stage, the core gameplay loop is established: **Mine**, **Farm**, or complete **Quests** to earn levels which give a **reward**. **Rewards** are designed to convey several effects, such as

progression, **customization**, **exaggeration**, **alternation** and more. There are other sources of cash & EXP, such as weekly Team rewards or minigames every 30 minutes.

- **Players can opt to join or lead a Team**. Team Points are earned through similar activities, as well as MARS City, where the team with the most players inside the Outpost each minute earns 15 Team Points.
- At the end of each week, **players receive rewards based on their team's performance**.

Pillars

- Survival-based gameplay: The experience draws back towards established Minecraft rules, working as a scaffold for player understanding of the server.
- Scale, depth & exploration: The experience is massive, with depth, rule breaks and room for exploration.
- Custom, exaggerated features: The experience uses its scaffolds to engage and excite players, and create an engaging effect.

Target Audience

Ordered by priority.

- Casual MC (Minecraft) players looking for new content to play & explore: These players don't necessarily enjoy MC, but they like the idea of it. They enjoy the "2 week phase", enjoy watching people play MC and make megaprojects, but feel the game is too mellow and predictable. We aim to re-contextualize everything for them, make it longer & deeper, make it remain accessible without setup (unlike modded MC), and give them something new to play and play for. The key fantasies to target are exploration and expression (which we convert into personalization in our own terms..) but we also must offer something atmospheric and fun based (examples: Survival MC, Terraria, RuneScape)
- Competitive MC players: These players tend to look for something competitive, grindy, and rewarding. They do not enjoy being overwhelmed by scale because they want something they can wrap themselves around, but they enjoy active storytelling, grinding and competition, and they can be forced into picking & choosing what fields to compete in, ranging from cash/levels to team points, back to trophies then to statistics, sometimes super competitive and intense, other times purely for show. They chase big numbers and personal best/serverwide records, and like cosmetic & armor prestige. Their grinds however must be fun if repetitive, with short/repeatable cycles, incremental rewards, and noticeable growth. While this is not a huge audience to target, they are by far the most loyal, and often dictate design considerations. (examples: Hypixel Bedwars, Grow-A-Garden, Cookie Clicker, Clash Royale)
- Cozy, slow-paced MC players: These players build, explore, and play the experience to see what it has to offer, and sometimes build projects like houses, towns and massive farms. They love the creative element of MC, and we re-contextualize it for them, give them opportunities to show it off, give them tools to play with, inspire them, and allow them to participate in their fantasies. They are motivated by: expression (personalization), relaxation, discovery. They like: customization, sandboxes, social/sharing outlets, etc. (examples: Hypixel SkyBlock, Stardew Valley, Animal Crossing)

The entry point to playing MARS is low floor, high ceiling; anybody who dedicates to MARS can thrive in it, but not everybody will reach the same heights. This means there is not much challenge to

experience or "beat" MARS, and the real challenges are ones you will come up with.

Fantasy

- While there are 7 fantasy goals below, the fantasy goals are united by a single mantra: "Developing a personalized project within a large experience"
- Depth & Exploration: Exploring a massive server with an expansive experience & well-built world. In every perimeter of MARS' primary gameplay points, there needs to be depth, surprise and room for exploration (Intrinsic)
- Survival & Classic MC: Enjoying the classic MC experience, under a new context often, while playing towards progress towards a MARS goal (Intrinsic)
- Empire & Personalization: The feeling of building an empire in Minecraft with your cash, items, reputation or group, and building something massive within the server, whether it be your character, team, build, or anything else (Intrinsic)
- Personalization: The ability to customize your character, world, and everything to create a personalized, irreplaceable experience (Intrinsic)
- Storytelling: Building stories at a small and large scale players can participate in and stories that are interesting to tell. Dynamics, competition, interactions, team-ups, towny/base building, server lore in-game and out of, and presence of history, lore and meta-lore behind server content (Extrinsic)
- Status: The OP elements of the server, server design and the competitive landscape & community, reward extreme dedication (not just effort, but alliances & style shifts) towards a goal, and the fantasy of being a top, rich player is a huge element in gameplay (Extrinsic)
- Guilding: The presence of being in a massive, maximalist, larger than life project like MARS. There are dynamics within the server, and then there's a sense of "MARS is awesome" stuff going on