

Water and Paint

By Francisco Souki

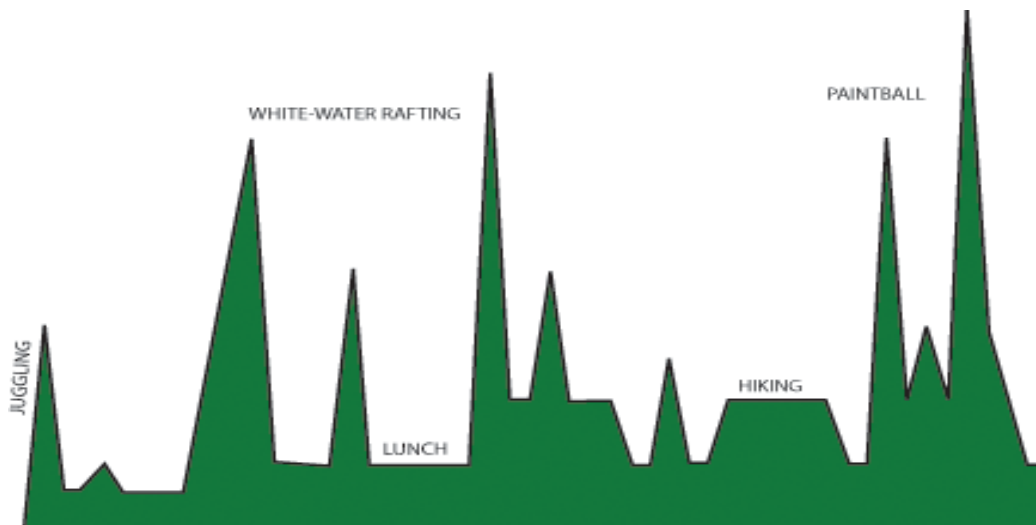
On Friday, December 19th we went on our first Adventure Module ever. Anybody would have considered that either white-water rafting or paintball was enough of an unusual experience for us to go through, but the ETC decided to send us on both (in the same day) because, well... that's the sort of thing they do.

In an attempt to assimilate what I have learned throughout the semester into my own character and personality, I have chosen to construct a document that resembles sometimes a paper, sometimes a diary and sometimes a story. It is neither, but it is at the same time all of them. It is, most importantly, the most accurate representation of how this experience is etched into my mind.

I will now explain what is to follow, with the hopes that you choose to be surprised and just skip this paragraph altogether. What you will encounter first is the Interest Curve, which is the graphic representation of the day's emotion changes. This graph is followed by a concise explanation and justification that tries to map the day's event to the graph's shape. Afterward, an explanation of four precise key moments is presented - these are moments that I feel help define the experience. The document ends with two very short stories (*Sudden non-fiction*, as some would call it), which were written as an artistic vent for some emotions that arose from the experience.

The Interest Curve

Of the things I have learned lately, perhaps the one that has found a most permanent spot in my brain to settle in is the interest curve. It's slowly becoming a habit to frame every significant experience I go through into its own interest curve. I have found myself applying the interest curve to conferences, movies, sports games and even parties. I even began thinking about the adventure module's interest curve several days before Friday. This is the interest curve I finally came up with.



I have chosen to start my interest curve for the adventure module on Thursday. The adventure module may have technically begun Friday morning, but I was already in the correct mindset the day before, when Jesse taught us how to juggle. We may not have been cruising down a distant river, but we were certainly working together, learning together and, most importantly, enjoying ourselves.

Thursday ended with a clear mind and so Friday started very early, though very relaxed. Breakfast was good enough to account for Friday's first official increase in the curve and the bus ride was quiet enough to account for a nice, flat, not-so-high plateau. Then, after some idle time, came the rafting and with it the first strong spike: it was a combination of getting my feet in the cold water, grasping control of the raft and then going immediately through - and surviving - the first rapid. The mechanic for the trip down the river was repetitive, but the thrills were high enough so that it never got boring. It consisted of rapids, followed by calm, followed by rapids, followed by calm; graph-wise it is represented as a valley followed by a peak and then lunch which, by the way, came at a point when we started feeling that maybe our stomachs were being put to too much of a test.

Our team was formed by Theresa, Goutham, Cory, Matt and Garth - our Captain. We had been rowing in sync thanks to a rowing chant and felt we were doing particularly well. Right after lunch, though, we hit a rock that sent Cory and Matt flying through the air and into the river. We managed to pull them out before they got more than just a couple bruises and, even though we had been proud of not having any casualties yet, we definitely felt that the incident pulled us closer together. Afterward, the rapids kept coming in the same predictable cadence and kept me enthralled until, right before the end, the sound of a train broke my concentration and brought my mindset back to civilization. A quick race through the last rapid helped the team squeeze the last possible ounce of excitement out of our loyal raft.

After getting out of our freezing clothes (and into warmer ones) some of us decided to take a hike through the park to make time before our turn to play paintball came. The park was gorgeous, though I have decided to depict the hike in the graph as a flat line, mainly because of the calming sensation I got out of it. We had a chance to go down to the shore of the river we had just conquered. We also passed a place marked as the worn down foundations of an ancient hotel - that area had a kind of particular aura to it, of the kind that makes you wonder if humans have some kind of underdeveloped supernatural sense. In retrospect I realized that, hadn't it been for the hiking, the interest curve (and myself) might have collapsed from over-excitement.

I was very interested in experiencing paintball because I wanted to come in contact with a side of me that rarely comes up, the one tied to war and primal instincts. I find the awkwardness with which I held the gun as a symbol of my being in a setting where I didn't completely belong, although I enjoyed the paintball experience very much and would definitely do it again. Our playing time was divided into three matches, and we were divided into two teams. Midway through the first match I found myself running through bushes and taking cover behind trees and stopped to think about what I was doing for a couple of seconds. I marveled at the way that technology and entertainment have made it possible for a bunch of twenty-somethings to simulate war and some of the emotions tied to it, and was surprised to

find myself so much into an experience that seemed so far from what I would usually enjoy. When our team won the first match, I was proud of myself for not getting shot.

The second match came and went in a foggy haze, literally. I must wear corrective glasses to find my way through my own house and since I also had to wear a facemask to avoid potential paint-induced injuries, I found quickly enough that both of those items don't combine very well. I spent most of the second match covering behind a tree, trying to unfog both my glasses and facemask and not having any luck with either. I finally got shot in the back and was so disoriented that it took me a while to find my way off the playing ground.

I was prepared for a similarly disastrous third match and at first was not disappointed. Through the woods, I could hear Ben's unanswered cries of "fogged mask!" echoing my thoughts. I had advanced a bit into the field, but was getting ready to call it quits when I remembered one of the referees telling us that even a player with no bullets left could make himself useful. I decided to wait, shooting at anything that moved sorta-kinda towards me and (I think) even taking someone out. When it got to the point where all I could see were fuzzy shapes, Michael landed behind the same tree I was in. I realized he had no bullets left and so offered my gun in exchange for his; he looked at me, puzzled, and so I explained. He pointed out that the flag we were supposed to get was just a tree away from us and so I went to get it while he gave me cover. I could not believe it when I had the thing in my hands. He tried to steer me into taking it to the target spot, but my near-blindness proved to be too much of a challenge. I ended up getting shot and handing the flag to him, which he took straight to victory. I learned more lessons than I could have ever imagined from those paintball games. I would later tell the tale to anyone that would listen.

From paintball we went to an uneventful dinner and then to an equally uneventful ride home, which felt absolutely rewarding in its uneventfulness. Then, at home, the day ended the only way it could have: with ten hours of sleep.

The Moments

An experience is made of a string of moments. None of these moments are dispensable, but there are certainly some that stand out more than the others; maybe because they're particular highs, maybe because they're particular lows, maybe because of something completely different. I have chosen four moments that I think were key in the crafting of my personal experience. These are the moments that I think will live the longest as memories.

Moment #1: Getting my feet wet.

It was a combination of temperature and excitement. It was also my own way of challenging the river, of letting it know that I would not hesitate to get in it. Even though I am a very calculating person, I have found that jumping straight into things without hesitation is sometimes the best strategy, so I decided to get both my feet in the cold water as soon as possible to get our raft into motion. The cold sensation that rushed through my body energized me and put me in the right mindset. I believe I will not forget it anytime soon.

Moment #2: Matt and Cory fall from the raft.

Even though up to that point we were proud of our team for not having lost anybody to the river, we came closer together when Cory and Matt actually fell. It was them who fell, but it could have been any of us. It didn't make us feel bad about ourselves; on the other hand, it made us appreciate the experience a lot more. The journey through the river would have been incomplete without this moment.

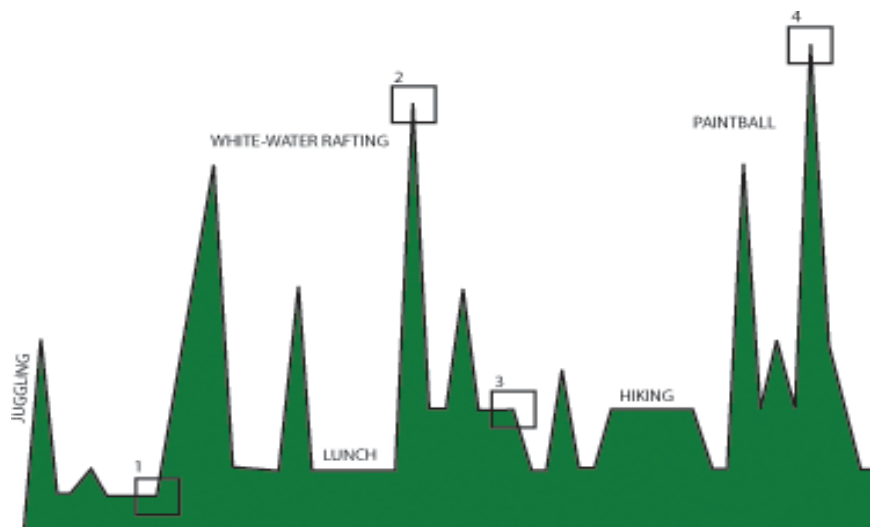
Moment #3: The train back to reality.

From the moment I got on the raft, I felt transported to a far away land inhabited only by the river and us. Trees surrounded us everywhere, and even the bridge over the river didn't manage to register as an unusual object. What broke the spell, though, was the mechanical sound of a train right before our last rapid. A quick glance towards the source of the sound quickly revealed a highway with passing cars, and so the magical stream of water became just a river, and our weapons mundane ores.

Moment #4: The blind man gets the flag.

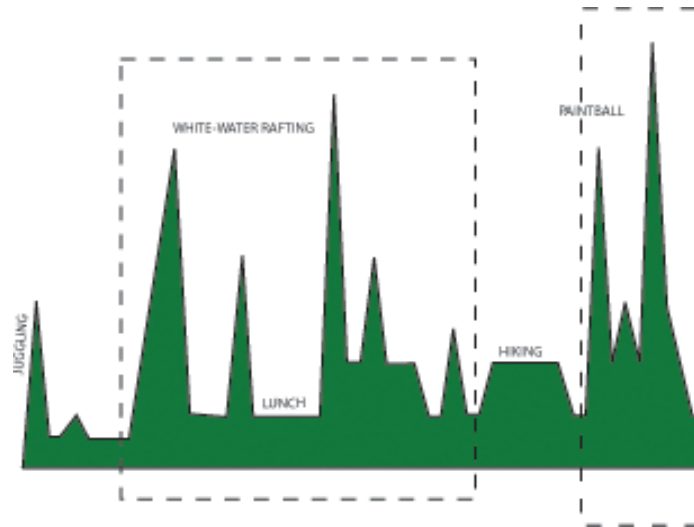
In a sea of fog, I managed to follow Mike's directions and get the flag. Other soldiers had been taken out in their attempts to do what I now, partially blind, did so easily. I even had a chance to feel around for it until I found it, and it was when I pulled it closer to me that I realized this was the only way it could have happened. At the precise moment where I decided my luck could afford to be pushed a bit more, I took a shot to the back and left the pitch with a smile on my face.

I have mapped these moments into the interest curve.



Short Stories

Two short stories are presented in the subsequent pages. These stories are a very personal way of looking into the most emotional aspects of the Adventure Module. I have mapped in the interest curve the two time-spans in which the stories take place.



This story began the moment I broke the river's surface with my left foot. This story began before you started reading because that saves you the trouble of having to ease into it. That day, I broke the river's surface without thinking it twice and let the chilly water send a shock through my body because that, then and there, saved me trouble of easing into white-water rafting.

Yo-ho

by Francisco Souki

Every raft but ours was facing the right way. We all found ourselves - we would later confess - thinking that this randomly assembled team was destined to fail. We had been in the raft for roughly three minutes and already our sense of coordination was proving to be our worst enemy. Our Captain, though, did his job well.

The Captain of raft number six hundred had something in his favor: he had a pre-established position of authority. He played his part beautifully: instead of showing off his superiority, he led his men as an equal to them; that, in turn, gave him an unspoken authority that strengthened our team's interactions.

After spiraling hopelessly for several minutes, the Captain made what would prove to be his most important decision. We had been flirting with the idea of implementing a rowing chant ever since the instructor had pointed out that coordination was the key; we were all hesitant because of what I would assume was just plain fear of ridicule. The Captain proposed "Row-ho" - the crew counter-proposed "Yo-ho" in honor of the *International Speak as a Pirate Day*. In that moment, our team developed spirit.

At first we embraced the rowing chant solely for its functionality. We droned a monotonous "Yo-ho, Yo-ho" through the first rapid, which came and went almost unnoticed because of the mere confusion of not being sure of what a rapid actually was. To know one is in a rapid, I learned, one must experience the rapid. And so, after the rapid came the calm, and with it the realization first of survival - then of success.

As the river twisted and turned, our team started developing personality. Raft six hundred became the vessel through which *Team Yo-ho* slowly overtook the Yough river, and each of the crew members became a gear in a well-oiled machine. Other rafts would hear us call our war cry from a distance and proceed to stare at us with a mix of disbelief and something that resembled respect. Raft and crew became a single entity, and as such we overcame the river's best attempts to overturn us.

At lunch time, we would tell anyone who was interested how we were wet by our own choice, not the river's. When the group guide announced we would be skipping a rapid because it might be too much for some teams, we searched each other's eyes in the crowd and exchanged looks of mild disappointment.

We theorized later that if we had stayed true to our *Yo-ho*, we might have not lost two passengers to the river right after lunch. We pulled them out of the water quickly enough. They re-entered the raft along with a deep silence that reflected our thoughtfulness. None of us really knew what had happened. I was the one who saw it best: we slammed side-first into a rock. I had a split-second to act and chose to

position myself safely; I still wonder why I didn't shout out a warning. I don't feel guilty about it, neither do I feel proud. I just wonder.

Every rowing movement tightened the bond that kept the team together. Our arms where the team's arms; our voices the team's voice. Every good experience was positive for the six of us, as every bad experience was so for all of us too.

If you ask any of us how it went, you should get almost identical answers.

If you ask for any of the team members' names, we will say that that's not important. We all respond to *Team Yo-ho*.

Winning Condition

by Francisco Souki

Left, right, everywhere - all fog. A haze of colors made dull by the dying sunlight and, in my hand, a gun loaded with paint-filled spheres. Disorientation has gotten the better of me, and the red flag I'm supposed to find could be anywhere by now. "Red" isn't a concept I can really grasp at the moment.

My participation in this is completely voluntary and I consider ending it abruptly, but finally decide against it for the sake of experience. I feel a body slide into cover beside me. I sense his gun dropping to the ground and offer mine as replacement. He takes the gift from the blind man. Then, it all unfolds.

The man becomes my eyes, and I his hands. He urges me forward and I run, weaponless, into the next cover spot. He explains that the flag is at arm's reach. My arms, his arms. I reach into the fog and wave my hand until it hits cloth. I have the flag now.

The point where the flag must be dropped is marked bright orange. It could be three feet from me, and I still wouldn't be able to see it. He points in its general direction: it's a straight line from here to glory. At the very moment when I become certain that I cannot fail, I feel the sting in my back.

I'm out. I give the flag to him. I can see now. We have won.