

Sunder

Narrative Design Document

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Logline: In a world torn apart by an aging sun and an atmosphere in constant flux, a lone survivor sets out on a perilous journey to lay a loved one's ashes to rest. Along the way, they must persevere in the face of adversity, negotiating ideologies at odds, the temptation of biomechanical augmentation, and a hostile planet that demands adaptation at any cost.

Tagline: How much can you change before you're no longer yourself?

Genre: Explorer, dystopian, Sci-Fi

Synopsis: Centuries ago, the wealthiest fled the planet, abandoning those left behind to endure a world reshaped by an unstable sun. Now, civilization is fragmented. Some have retreated underground, clinging to their humanity, while others have merged with technology, transforming into something beyond human. On the planet's surface, only the most adaptable survive.

Lorien, a lone traveler, carries the ashes of their mother across the wasteland, seeking a final resting place amidst the ruins of a forgotten world. But the journey is treacherous. Cybernetic raiders known as the Harvesters prowl the land, capturing the unaugmented and forcing them into servitude. Deep underground, the Forsaken reject all technology, preserving what little remains of unaltered humanity. And in Synapse City, the Evolved reign supreme, their bodies no longer flesh but machines of relentless efficiency.

As Lorien navigates this fractured world, they are faced with impossible choices: endure suffering to remain human, integrate with technology to survive, or surrender to evolution and become something else entirely. When an impending solar catastrophe threatens to end all life, they must decide not just how to survive but who they will become.

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Introduction

This story bible is intended as a guide to the *Sunder* franchise as it is currently developed. This document is designed to provide useful reference and resource material for the future possible development of this intellectual property (IP) as a transmedia experience that flows across multiple entertainment platforms.

Much of this IP could work well in a single medium – particularly a serialized medium such as books, comics or television – but this IP is specifically designed to lend itself to creation and distribution as a transmedia story. The later parts of this document describe one possible transmedia development strategy. This document is designed to assist creative partners working together on such distributed creation and development in creating a total franchise experience that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Note 1: there are fiction elements in this story bible unintended for inclusion in the initial *[Title]* story, but are instead meant to be revealed across multiple elements of the franchise over multiple years.

Note 2: this document includes multiple illustrations, but these are not meant to indicate any final artwork. The imagery and photography included here are only done so as gestural references, pointing towards possible directions of development or the general intended tone.

1. Overview

1.1. High-Level Concept and Franchise Positioning

Genre X+Ys

Genre X: Explorer

Genre Y: Sci-fi

Genre Z: Dystopian

Uniqueness:

Unlike many dystopian worlds existing in decay or slow decline, this world is in constant transformation. An aging sun drives extreme and unpredictable changes. There could be extreme heat one day, extreme cold the next, accompanied by atmospheric shifts that completely reshape the planet.

The atmosphere behaves unlike anything on Earth, existing in a supercritical state, thick and fluid-like due to the immense pressure of itself. Its density fluctuates in unpredictable cycles, sometimes suppressing visibility and muting sound, other times thinning to reveal the sky and briefly restoring clarity. These shifts affect everything, like temperature, movement, and survival strategies, forcing life to wildly adapt to a constantly changing environment.

Nearly all life has retreated underground, creating a multi-layered subterranean ecosystem, but the surface is not entirely lifeless. The flora and fauna that remain have evolved extreme adaptations, like photosensitivity, radiation absorption, and even the ability to alter their own biological processes, all to survive the relentless environment. Some survivors have turned to biomechanical augmentation, integrating technology into their bodies to increase their chances of survival, if only marginally. These enhancements range from atmospheric filtration systems to movement prosthetics, allowing them to survive where the planet would otherwise be too extreme for them.

Civilization still exists but has largely dissolved into small settlements. Ruins are buried beneath shifting landscapes, partially alive, fused with the bioengineered organisms that once maintained them.

Closest Competitors

Rain World

Genre X: Explorer

Genre Y: Experimental

Genre Z: Dystopian

Uniqueness:

Rain World is a deeply interconnected ecosystem where nature has fully reclaimed civilization. The world is in constant motion, food chains shifting, rainfall reforming the landscape, and no single species dominating for long. Ruins and decaying biological machinery serve as remnants of a lost civilization, now overrun by evolving wildlife. Survival depends on understanding natural cycles, as the world operates on its own logic, indifferent to those within it.

Aspects to Emulate:

- A world where nature has overtaken technology, seamlessly integrating ruins into the environment.
- An ecosystem that behaves independently, with creatures following their own survival instincts.
- A harsh, unpredictable world shaped by shifting food chains and environmental cycles.
- A constantly evolving world where no balance is permanent.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Greater biome variety and environmental contrast.
- More complex interspecies relationships beyond predation.
- More unpredictable environmental effects, such as geological shifts or seasonal changes.

- A stronger sense of organic decay and transformation over time.

Hollow Knight

Genre X: Explorer

Genre Y: Dystopian

Uniqueness:

Hollow Knight's world is a vast underground kingdom, long fallen into decay, where life still lingers in fragments. The world's collapse was not due to external forces but an internal, mysterious downfall, leaving behind ruins inhabited by remnants of its past. Despite its desolation, insects and creatures have adapted, evolving to survive in the darkness. The kingdom is dead, yet its history still shapes the world beneath layers of ruin and time.

Aspects to Emulate:

- A fallen civilization that invites exploration and discovery.
- Creatures uniquely adapted to their underground ecosystem.
- Civilization persists in fragments, with some clinging to the past and others evolving new ways of life.
- A blend of nature and architecture, where life reclaims abandoned spaces.
- A balance of beauty and decay makes the ruins feel haunting yet alive.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- More extreme forms of adaptation include symbiosis or biological-technology fusion.
- More biome diversity, shaped by past industrial efforts or geological shifts.
- Ruins that evolve dynamically over time, showing erosion or repurposing by surviving species.
- More distinct cultural and architectural shifts among civilization fragments.

Shadow of the Colossus

Genre X: Explorer

Genre Y: Dystopian

Genre Z: Mythic

A vast, hauntingly empty world where nature and ruins coexist in silence. Unlike typical dystopias, this world has already faded into myth, existing as a graveyard for forgotten civilizations and lost gods. The only inhabitants of this land are the colossus, ancient beings that are both creatures and relics, tied to the land in mysterious ways. The world is indifferent, its secrets left to be interpreted rather than told outright.

Aspects to Emulate:

- A vast, empty world that emphasizes solitude and forgotten history.
- Ruins that feel sacred, as if built for a higher purpose rather than simple habitation.
- Creatures that feel like living relics, bound to the land rather than simply existing within it.
- A quiet, reverent atmosphere that reinforces the feeling of being an intruder in a land that belongs to the past.
- Environmental storytelling through scale, where the sheer emptiness conveys loss more than words ever could.

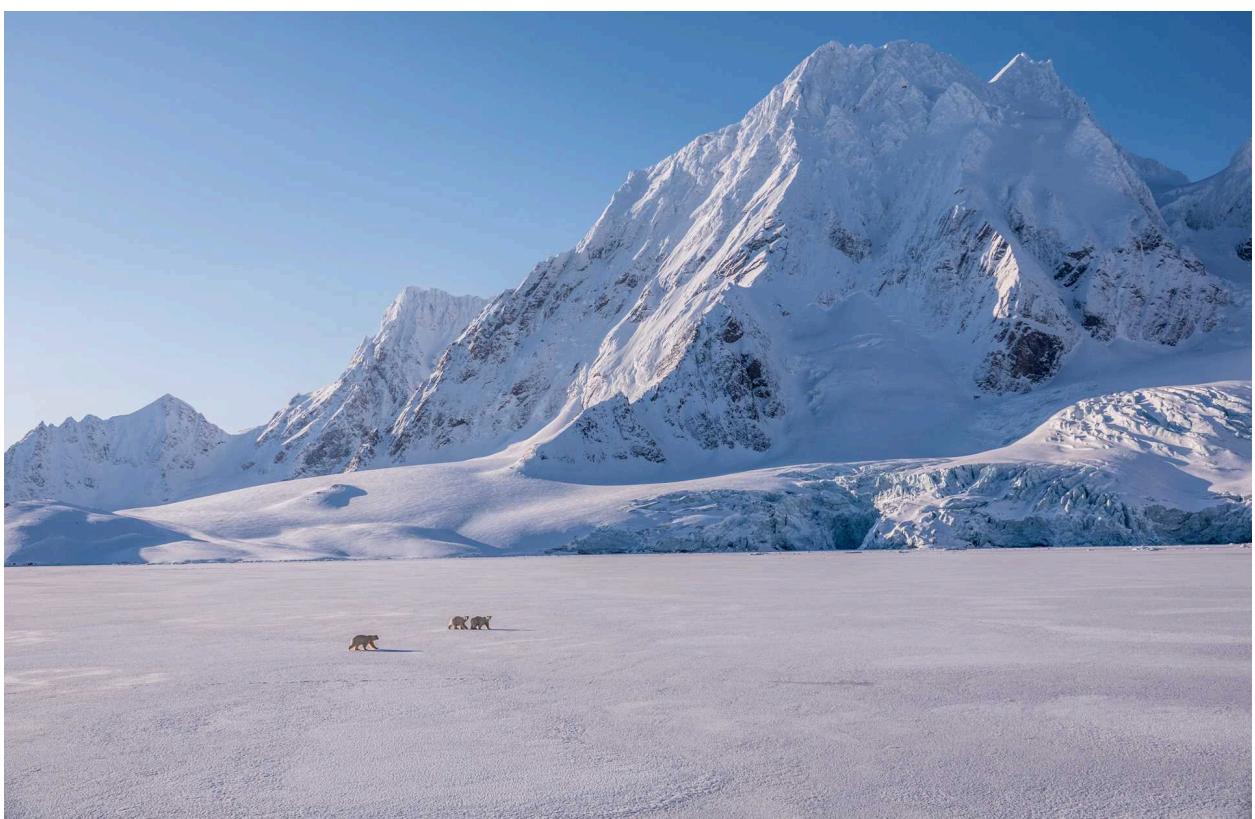
Opportunities for Improvement:

- More environmental diversity, such as shifting weather or gradual erosion.
- More small-scale life and interactions beyond the colossus to add depth.
- More visible clues about what came before, like murals or remnants with clear past functions.
- A stronger blend of nature reclaiming ruins, with creeping vines, eroded cliff-sides, or wildlife using abandoned places for shelter.
- Greater atmospheric variation, reinforcing changes in mood through lighting and environmental effects.

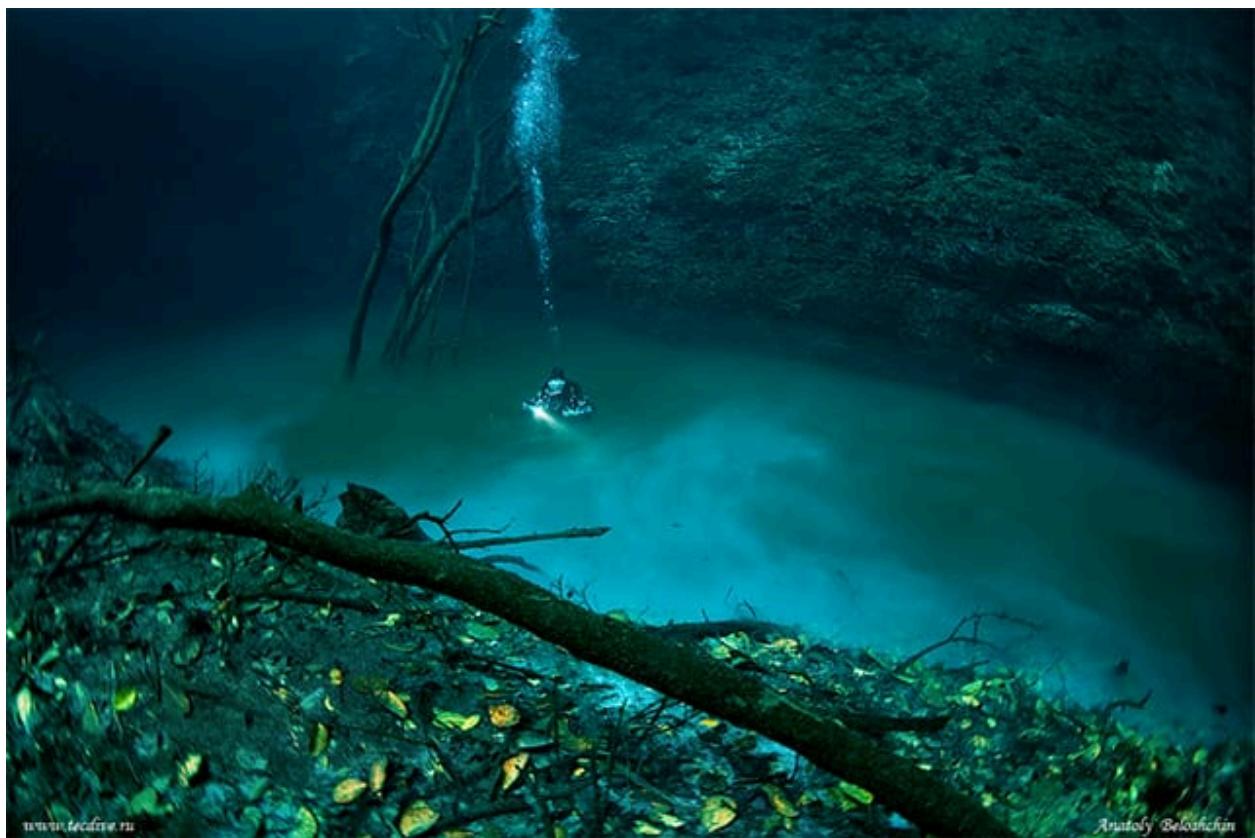
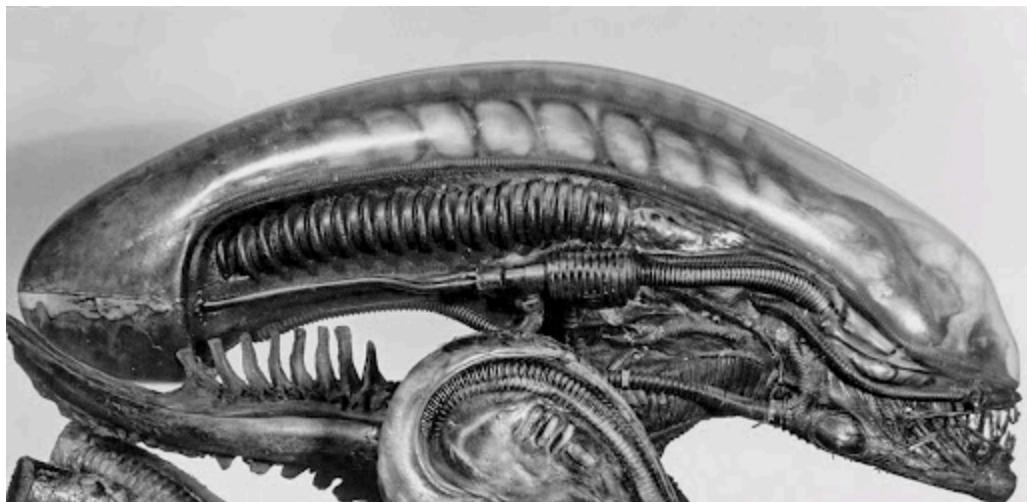
1.2. Theme

In a world where survival demands constant change, the more you endure, the less you are yourself. How much can you sacrifice before you're no longer human? Is there a point where survival itself is worse than death? When the world forces you to mutate, integrate, or suffer, the true struggle isn't just staying alive, it's fighting to remain yourself.

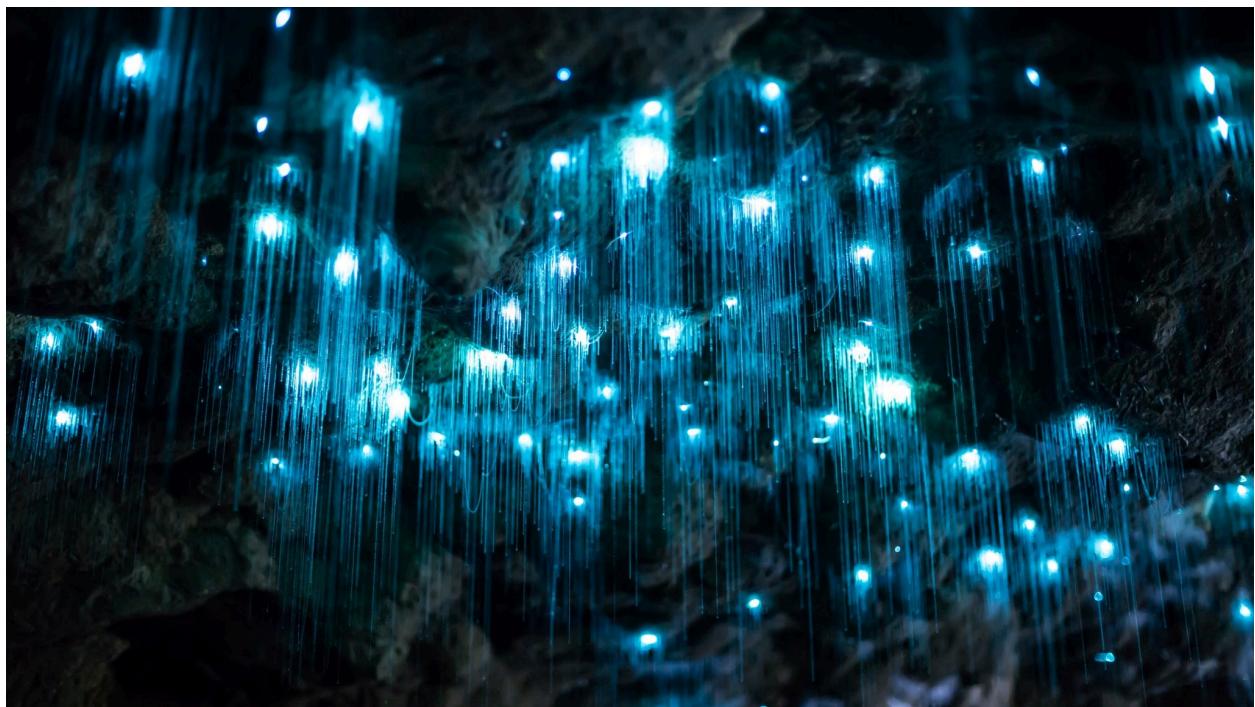
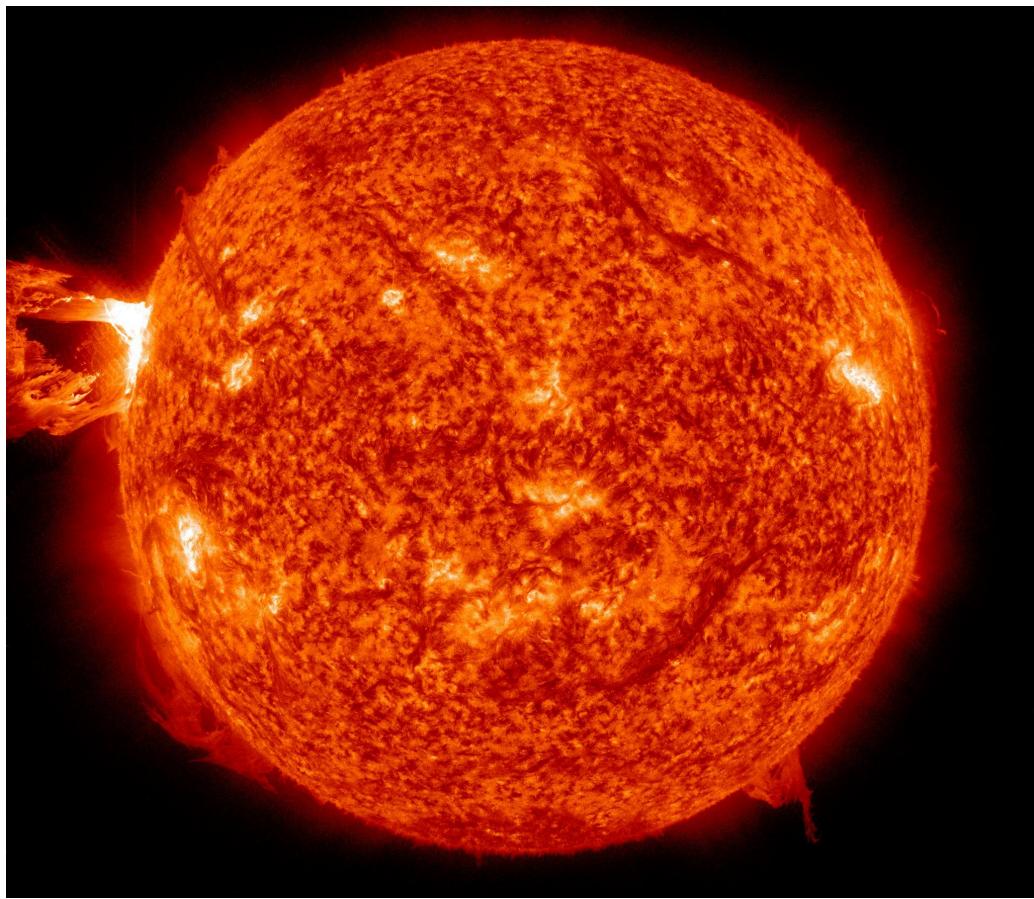
1.3. Storyworld Aesthetic











1. **Desert with trees** - Life finds a way to live in a harsh climate despite its circumstances.
2. **Arctic plane with polar bears** - Life finds a way in an extreme climate, purely due to adaptation.
3. **Ruins** - The remnants of a long-lost civilization, overtaken by time and nature.
4. **Flower growing in concrete** - Life finding a way through sheer will, even in the harshest conditions.
5. **Xenomorph bioengineering** - Organisms engineered to merge with technology, now evolved beyond their original purpose.
6. **Underwater river** - Bizarre, natural phenomena like underwater rivers and supercritical atmospheric layers, reshaping the environment.
7. **Monsoon** - Relentless, extreme weather that pushes the limits of what life can endure.
8. **Life under the arctic** - Hidden ecosystems are thriving just beneath the surface of a hostile world.
9. **Solar flare** - A cosmic event with the power to drastically alter the planet's climate and environment.
10. **Glow worm cave** - Life retreating underground, adapting to the darkness after struggling to survive above.

2. The Storyworld

2.1. Central Deviation from Reality

What if in one billion years, an aging sun causes the planet's climate to spiral into violent, unpredictable extremes, forcing the last remnants of life and civilization to either rapidly adapt or vanish with their dying world?

2.2. Rules

What's Possible

The sun's age has created a world where extreme atmospheric phenomena are both a threat and a resource. Survivors have learned to harness these extreme conditions, using knowledge of weather cycles, atmospheric shifts, and natural energy bursts to their advantage. This includes:

- Predicting storms and extreme weather patterns to navigate the environment and secure resources.
- Channeling environmental forces, like wind currents for travel, temperature shifts for preservation, or ionized storms for energy generation.
- Adapting biologically and technologically to withstand hostile conditions, integrating survival techniques into daily life.

Some individuals may develop a heightened sensitivity to changes in atmospheric conditions, allowing them to sense extreme events before they occur. This could manifest as a deep environmental awareness or a subtle, almost instinctive attunement for weather shifts, granting them an edge in survival.

Some survivors have also adapted to these extreme conditions through the use of other adaptable organisms, technological augmentation, or a hybrid of both. Some settlements have experts who modify bodies, grafting salvaged technology into survivors. These enhancements may include:

- Spring-loaded legs or prosthetics to traverse harsh landscapes.
- Atmospheric filtration implants to process toxins, extreme pressure, or unstable air.
- Magnetically reinforced limbs or exoskeletal armor to withstand extreme pressure.
- Neural links to bioengineered organisms or environmental sensors to signal weather shifts with greater accuracy.

What It Costs

Cybernetic and biomechanical enhancements do not come without cost:

- Physical Rejection – Not all bodies accept augmentation. Some experience severe autoimmune responses or outright implant failure, leading to intense pain, disfigurement, or even death.
- Physical Degradation – The human body is not meant to integrate machinery. Over time, enhancements wear down muscle tissue, cause nerve damage, or interfere with other biological processes.
- Cognitive Instability – The more a person relies on augmentation, the more their perception of self dissolves, blurring the boundary between human, machine, and environment.
- Technological Decay – All cybernetic enhancements are salvaged from a lost world. They are imperfect and will inevitably fail. Some survivors carry backup parts, while others must constantly seek repairs.
- Social Alienation – Some settlements fear those who are modified, believing augmentation dissolves what remains of a person's humanity. Others see augmentation as an essential tool for survival.

Harnessing the environment comes at a significant physical and mental toll:

- Exposure to extreme conditions wears down the body, leading to fatigue, dehydration, and long-term ailments.
- Persistent exposure to radiation or airborne toxins—released by solar flares, atmospheric shifts, or decaying structures—can lead to illness, genetic mutations, or simply death.
- Atmospheric fluctuations can overwhelm the mind, causing disorientation, cognitive fatigue, or even a loss of emotional connection as survival instincts begin to dissolve the self.
- A heightened atmospheric awareness benefits survival but begins to blur the cognitive boundary between human and environment, leaving those who rely on it to feel detached from others, even driving some mad.

Survivors must carefully balance how much of themselves they surrender to technology, knowing that once modified, they lose a piece of themselves that they can never get back.

What's Not Possible

While individuals can predict, sense, and temporarily harness atmospheric shifts, they cannot control or alter the sun itself. The destructive forces of solar flares, global storms, and the planet's eventual collapse remain unstoppable.

Additionally:

- No one can permanently reshape the atmosphere or reverse the planet's decline, meaning efforts to restore the world are ultimately futile.
- No instinct or technology can defy the fundamental laws of physics, like halting an incoming solar flare, neutralizing a storm, or altering gravity.
- Survivors can harness bursts of environmental energy, but global control (dictating climate stability) remains impossible.
- No cybernetic enhancement can fully protect against the sun's destructive forces—solar flares, global storms, and the planet's inevitable collapse remain unstoppable.
- No implant or biomechanical upgrade can reverse the planet's decay, only allowing temporary survival within it.
- No survivor can achieve immortality through augmentation; the body will still wear down, the mind will still break, and the world will still end.

2.3. Unique Verbs/Actions

Mutate

Evolve the body, mind, or survival skills to survive in an unpredictable world.

- Go through biological, psychological, or cybernetic changes to survive extreme environments, developing new survival mechanisms such as cognitive conditioning, forced mutation, or cybernetic enhancement.
- Changes may be irreversible, each mutation making survival easier but costing a piece of humanity.

Examples in gameplay:

- Radiation exposure may trigger temporary or permanent mutations.
- Cybernetic augmentations cause neurological and physiological changes.
- Survivors are forced to alter themselves to resist an unlivable atmosphere.

Integrate

Fuse with technology, bioengineered organisms, and the environment.

- Survive by fusing with technology, biomechanical implants, or even other organisms.
- Some implants simply enhance physical ability, while others blur the boundary between human and machine.
- The more you integrate, the more of yourself you lose.

Examples in gameplay:

- Install an atmospheric filtration implant to survive toxic air.
- Connect with a bioengineered creature that can signal atmospheric changes.
- Install a neural implant that creates a “Second Self,” a backup consciousness that thinks faster than you ever could, analyzes threats, and reports back. In moments of extreme stress, it can even take control, all but guaranteeing survival when hesitation would mean certain death.

Endure

Survive physical, mental, and environmental challenges through sheer will, strength, or knowledge.

- Survive radiation, pressure shifts, atmospheric instability, and predation through skill and strength.
- Survivors rely on instinct, experience, and the ability to withstand suffering rather than overreliance on external modifications.

Examples in gameplay:

- Withstand a solar flare's intense heat and radiation by planning and finding shelter.
- Resist the urge to integrate impulsively, surviving through natural endurance and intelligence.
- Navigate a shifting landscape, using knowledge of the environment to stay alive.

2.4. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Much of how this world differs from our own can be seen through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, as outlined below.

Basic Needs: Physiological

Food

- The extreme and unpredictable climate makes traditional agriculture nearly impossible.

Instead, food sources are split between:

- Subterranean farming: Forsaken settlements cultivate fungus, algae, and bioluminescent plant life in underground caverns. Some crops are bioengineered to withstand erratic conditions and even filter polluted air and poisonous gasses. These crops do not contain all of the essential nutrients that a person needs. Some settlements will attempt to raise livestock to supplement this, but homogenized livestock has longsince died out, making this very challenging.
- Predatory scavenging: Survivors and some Forsaken settlements hunt wildlife to get the essential nutrients that plants and fungus cannot provide. These creatures have evolved extreme survival traits, including rapid reproduction, hibernation during extreme conditions, toxin production, bioluminescence, and many unexpected and deadly survival tactics.
- Synthetic consumption: The Evolved rely heavily on a supply of lab-grown food and raw nutrient infusions. Some modifications allow direct nutrient absorption from the environment, raw energy, fuel, or biomass, eliminating the need for traditional eating. Some essential nutrients and minerals have become rare, meaning only the most wealthy Evolved can afford them.
- Fermentation and preservation: With food being highly seasonal and unpredictable, fermentation, dehydration, and other preservation methods are crucial for survival, especially for Survivors.

Water

- The supercritical atmosphere means that uncontaminated liquid water on the surface is essentially non-existent. Different groups adapt in distinct ways:
 - Condensation Harvesting: Underground settlements use vast condensation traps to extract water from atmospheric shifts, particularly during cooling cycles when humidity condenses.
 - Biological Filtration: Most communities integrate symbiotic organisms capable of filtering toxins from liquid and gaseous sources. These creatures either reside in reservoirs or are raised for consumption to provide internal purification.
 - Cybernetic Adaptation: Most Evolved use augmented internal filtration systems, allowing them to consume otherwise toxic or irradiated water safely.
 - Ice Falls: During extreme cold, water in the atmosphere will freeze to ice, falling in large chunks. This ice will be relatively pure but will still need a level of filtration after melting. Survivors and surface villages will take advantage of this occasional Ice Fall to stock up on ice to last them until the next freezing event.
 - Bio-purification: Some surface plants will filter polluted water before returning the water to the soil. This leads to underground reservoirs of mostly purified water.
 - Driftbeests: Survivors and some Forsaken will utilize the water collection and purification reservoirs in Driftbeests as emergency water supplies.

Transport

- Extreme Weather Navigation: Travel is inherently dangerous due to constant environmental shifts. Survivors rely on predictive models and environmental knowledge to time their movements carefully.
- Biomechanical Mounts: Some settlements and Survivors utilize engineered creatures that can withstand intense weather patterns, guiding them through shifting landscapes.
- Magnetically Reinforced Exosuits: The Evolved use powered exoskeletons to traverse unstable terrain and resist pressure shifts.

- Underground Networks: Many settlements rely on vast tunnel systems, some man-made, some geological, and others dug by burrowing creatures.
- Driftbeests: Survivors and some Forsaken utilize Driftbeests for transportation on the surface, especially when the weather is harsh.

Reproduction

- The harsh conditions have led to declining fertility rates and extreme infant mortality outside of Synapse City.
- The Forsaken continue traditional reproduction but suffer high infant loss rates due to environmental hazards and lack of medical advancements.
- The Evolved supplement reproduction with genetic modification and artificial wombs to ensure survival.
- Crossbreeding with Engineered Organisms: In rare cases, genetic splicing has led to hybrid offspring with enhanced environmental resistance, though these individuals are often treated as abominations, inferior to The Evolved, but outcast by The Forsaken.

Basic Needs: Safety

Shelter

- Underground settlements: The majority of civilization exists beneath the surface, in layered cavern networks that offer effective but not absolute insulation from the extreme conditions on the surface.
- Bunkers: There are bunkers on the surface, in case of extreme weather, but they are old and unreliable, making them a last resort..
- Synapse City: The Evolved live in a massive, technologically advanced city, largely sealed from the outside world, where artificial climate control ensures stability.
- Driftbeests: Survivors and some Forsaken utilize Driftbeests for temporary mobile shelter on the surface. Under the most extreme conditions, some Driftbeests will burrow underground, while others will fly or even submerge themselves in the toxic sea. Some are

just large enough for one person, while others could carry an entire village. As they age, some Driftbeests have been known to mutate, endangering those who seek shelter.

Clothing

- Survival Gear: Almost all clothing is highly functional and designed for protection against both heat and cold. Most materials are resistant to radiation and chemical exposure.
- Adaptive Materials: The Evolved use clothing embedded with micro-reactive fibers that adjust insulation based on external temperatures.
- Nanocrystal Fabric: A special type of fabric embedded with nanocrystals is capable of reacting to its environment to provide the wearer with adaptive camouflage.
- Exoskeletal Armor: Very wealthy individuals in Synapse City forego clothing, instead displaying their cybernetic enhancements, showcasing both status and power.

Offense

- Common weapons
 - Survivors: Most use improvised weapons such as bone blades and scavenged firearms, but some scavengers possess ancient relics of great power.
 - The Forsaken: They use rudimentary yet effective poison-based weapons and projectiles.
 - The Evolved: They use advanced energy weapons and cybernetic enhancements like retractable blades and sonic disruptors, as well as neural implants like the "Second Self" that can react almost instantaneously.
 - Environmental Warfare: Leveraging the environment as a weapon, such as timing attacks with acid rain, hyperstorms, solar flares, stratospheric tides, atmospheric collapse, suffocating fog, or earthquakes.
- Tactics
 - Adaptive Combat: Weaponry and fighting styles change depending on atmospheric conditions, as low-pressure zones reduce projectile effectiveness, while high pressure increases kinetic force.

- Cybernetic Combat Systems: Those with “Second Self” implants have predictive dodging, targeting overlays, and even distributed consciousness to process threats instantly.
- Organic Integration: Some use creatures as living weapons, like bioengineered organisms that inject toxins, allow for greater mobility, provide projectiles, or act as shields.
- Stealth
 - Nanocrystals: Small crystals woven into materials to manipulate surrounding light waves for camouflage.
 - Sound Dampening: Mechanisms that reduce or redirect sound, allowing silent movement. It could be cybernetic or biological.
 - Biological Traps: Distant ancestors of the sundew, pitcher plant, bladderwort, corpse flower, hydnora, bromeliad, triantha, and venus fly trap are used as natural traps for many forsaken villages.

Defense

- Armor
 - Survivors: Bioengineered reactive armor that hardens upon impact and chemically treated clothing resistant to radiation.
 - The Forsaken: Traditional armor woven from durable organic materials, self-healing fibers, and toxin-neutralizing skin treatments.
 - The Evolved: Adaptive armor that shifts density based on incoming threats, plating underneath the skin to withstand attacks, and energy shielding integrated into cybernetics.
- Tactics
 - Neural Override: Anti-augmentation tech that disrupts most cybernetics, causing temporary system overloads.
 - Bioengineered Guardians: Some settlements utilize large, engineered organisms that act as living walls against intruders.

- Nanocrystals: Small crystals woven into building materials, manipulating surrounding light waves for camouflage.
 - Biological Traps: Distant ancestors of the sundew, pitcher plant, bladderwort, corpse flower, hydnora, bromeliad, triantha, and venus fly trap are used as a natural hidden defense for many forsaken villages.
- Defense against augmentation
 - EMP Based Weapons: Designed to disable cybernetic enemies momentarily.
 - Atmospheric Disruptors: Emits pressure disturbances that interfere with the accuracy of cybernetics.
 - Bioengineered Fog: Spores or particles that corrode synthetic material, heavily disrupting augmentation.

Psychological Needs: Belongingness and Love

Religion/Beliefs

- Some worship the aging sun and extreme environment as the result of a divine force, interpreting weather patterns as omens.
- The Forsaken believe that resisting augmentation is a spiritual duty, preserving what remains of humanity.
- The Evolved see cybernetic enhancement as ascension, moving beyond biological limitations into a higher existence.
- Survivors have a deep connection to the environment, believing that everything has a connection to the universe, which is more spiritual than religious.

Community

- Communities are shaped by their philosophy on augmentation and survival.
- Forsaken villages are tightly knit but cautious of outsiders, fearing contamination by augmented individuals.

- Synapse City exists in a multi-layered bubble, with social standing dictated by the extent of one's modifications.
- Forsaken settlements often have close relations with each other, built around the sharing of knowledge, trade, and support in dire times.

Family

- Family structures vary based on survival needs.
- Forsaken families are traditional, focusing on maintaining human connection.
- Most Evolved are born synthetically through bioengineered reproduction. Children don't typically have parents but are raised in group homes and institutions. Children who are born naturally are sent to camps unless hidden.
- Most Survivors who have children will raise their child as a couple, then when the child is prepared for survival, they will all go their separate ways. Some choose to stay as a couple but typically will still send their child away to fend for themselves. Others choose not to reproduce at all, viewing the world as too harsh to bring life into.

Government

- The Forsaken – Socialist Council System
 - Each settlement is governed by an elected council responsible for drafting policies and resolving disputes.
 - All major decisions require a two-thirds vote from all citizens.
 - Seasonal Assemblies: Once per season, clusters of settlements gather to discuss the state of the world, hold elections, and coordinate efforts for mutual survival.
 - Citizenship Requirements: Every individual must contribute by fulfilling a role within the community in exchange for equal access to food, shelter, and protection.
 - Anti-Augmentation Laws: The Forsaken strictly prohibit cybernetic enhancements, seeing them as a threat to humanity's survival and identity.
 - Law and Punishment: Exile is the most severe punishment, often reserved for those who violate communal laws, including augmentation.

- Synapse City – Authoritarian Technocracy
 - Caste System: The city is governed by an elite class of cybernetically enhanced individuals, ranked according to their Node.
 - Meritocracy of Strength: Power is determined by duels between Evolved, where anyone can challenge a higher-ranked individual for their position.
 - Hive Mind: Individuals of Node 4 and above can override the neural implants of lower-ranked Evolved, creating a hive-mind structure.
 - Surveillance State: Constant monitoring ensures compliance with the city's rigid hierarchy.
 - Law and Punishment: Crimes or failure to augment result in demotion or exile to the Null Node, stripping individuals of all rights and augments.

Psychological Needs: Esteem

Social Classes

- The Forsaken – Status through Purity and Knowledge
 - Equality by Principle: While there is an elected council, all members of The Forsaken society are considered equal.
 - Respect Earned by Survival Knowledge: The more attuned a person is to the environment through understanding weather patterns, resource locations, and survival techniques, the higher their social respect.
 - Augmented Individuals are Outcasts: Any cybernetic modification leads to exile, as enhancements are viewed as a violation of human integrity.
- Synapse City – Status through Augmentation
 - Your rank in society is determined by your Node.
 - The only way to ascend is to challenge and defeat higher-ranked individuals in sanctioned duels.
 - The lowest ranked individuals (Nodes 7-9) live under strict surveillance, debt, and control, unable to afford cybernetic enhancements to move up the ranks.

- Power is not just in stature, as those at the top can remotely override and control the neural implants of lower Nodes.

Economics

- Survivors and Forsaken don't have any currency, instead operating on a barter system of technology, food, water, services, and survival resources.
- Synapse City operates on credits, a digital, government-distributed currency. These credits are earned at a fixed rate for some occupations; for others, it's commission. For those in the lowest three Nodes, it's nearly impossible to stay out of debt, considering the price of food and shelter. Because of this, it's very rare for these people to be able to afford augmentations, cementing them in the lower Nodes.

Government Tiers

- Instead of strict tiers, the Forsaken assign functional roles to maintain communal survival. Every individual must contribute:
 - Hunters/Gatherers – Track wildlife, forage, and navigate environmental hazards.
 - Engineers – Maintain underground shelters, craft tools, and repair scavenged technology.
 - Mediators – Resolve disputes and guide the Seasonal Assemblies.
 - Elders and Teachers – Preserve history, oral traditions, and survival knowledge.
- Synapse City – The Nine Nodes
 1. Apex Node – The supreme ruler, a singular cybernetic entity with absolute hive mind control over all Evolved. Seen as godlike.
 2. Overseer Node – Enforces the Apex Node's will, overseeing genetic evolution, societal order, and systemic functions.
 3. Architect Node – Leads technological and genetic advancements, designing new cybernetic enhancements and governing augmentation policies.
 4. Sentinel Node – The military enforcers of Synapse City, enhanced for combat, responsible for protecting the city's hierarchy.

5. Weaver Node – Scientists, engineers, and cybernetic specialists who maintain infrastructure and intelligence networks.
6. Operator Node – The general workforce, handling production, maintenance, and logistics. Constantly monitored and controlled.
7. Dissonant Node – Individuals considered mentally unstable, rebellious, or inefficient. Subjected to psychological reprogramming.
8. Aberrant Node – Genetic defects, cybernetic failures, and those deemed physically or mentally unfit. Used for dangerous experiments or forced labor.
9. Null Node – The lowest class, consisting of exiles, criminals, and failures. Stripped of rights and sent to labor camps or cast into the wastelands.

Self-Fulfillment Needs: Arts + Cultures

Visual Arts

- The Forsaken view art as a means of preserving unmodified humanity. Their sculptures, paintings, and tattoos depict ancestral traditions, natural landscapes, and unaltered human forms. Their work is often minimalist but deeply symbolic, representing resilience in the face of a world that demands change.
- Underground settlements incorporate bioluminescent pigments and living materials into their art, crafting murals that glow and shift with time, sometimes even responding to touch or sound.
- Survivors and raiders mark their history and territory with scavenged materials, creating temporary, often aggressive graffiti or crude effigies to warn outsiders of danger.
- The Evolved see art as a luxury, forbidding the creation and consumption of it unless it serves a clear function or the individual resides in Node 3 or above. Those in Nodes 7 and below have been known to engage in art, although illegal, as they already don't fit the Evolved's societal norms. Some augment their own bodies as living art, embedding displays or cybernetic tattoos that react to stimuli, but most art is graffiti or other street art, largely done in protest of the rule of the upper Nodes. However, if caught producing art, this is

treated as a serious crime. In contrast, the upper Nodes treat art as a mark of refinement, their pieces often doubling as status symbols and technological showcases. Sculptures shift with the observer's presence, and paintings reconfigure themselves based on environmental factors. Some works include living beings and even individuals from the lower ranks. They are treated as objects in these displays.

Language and Literature

- The Forsaken hold onto traditional spoken language, relying on oral storytelling, song, and written records to pass down history. Their stories are filled with warnings about augmentation and parables of human endurance.
- Forsaken and Survivors maintain a mix of old world languages, refusing to forget their heritage. The Forsaken have pieced together lost texts and constructed hybrid dialects from what survived the collapse.
- Sign language and coded gestures are common among Survivors, allowing for silent communication in dangerous environments where noise could attract threats.
- Survivors who have mastered the environment have been known to write guidebooks to pass their teachings down to future generations even after they are long past.
- The Evolved communicate almost exclusively via their neural implants. The main exception to this is when an Evolved needs to speak to an Evolved of higher ranking, in which case they are unable to speak through neural link and must speak orally. The other exception to this is when an Evolved must speak to a Survivor or Forsaken, as in almost all cases, they will not have a neural link. Evolved often integrate machine language into their neural speech as their links can quickly interpret the meaning behind it. This allows them to convey complex information extremely quickly. Only the upper 3 Nodes are permitted to indulge themselves in literature without a direct purpose. It is illegal for the lower ranks to commit leisurely acts such as reading a text without permission, though there are illegal markets for those seeking to read.

Music

- The Forsaken maintain traditional instruments such as bone flutes, hand drums, and stringed instruments crafted from natural materials. Their music is deeply tied to their way of life. It's rhythmic and grounding, reinforcing their connection to the past and the land they inhabit. Some Forsaken who reside underground develop echo-based music that is unique to their settlements, with melodies and harmonies that rely on the natural acoustics of their caverns, creating songs that cannot be fully replicated outside their origin. These pieces are often haunting, carrying a deep, reverberating quality that lingers in the darkness. Other settlements use music as a form of protection, keeping a steady drumming through the night to deter predators and ward off threats, the sound a warning woven into their survival.
- The Evolved are not permitted to indulge in music unless they belong to the upper three Nodes, where it exists as a controlled luxury. In these privileged circles, music is often synthetic and algorithmically tailored to the listener, designed more as a curated experience than an organic art form. It is primarily consumed in high-end clubs, where it serves as a backdrop to social status and indulgence rather than art to connect to on a personal level. In contrast, the lower Nodes harbor illegal underground clubs where raw, rebellious music thrives, being gritty, unpolished, and often infused with distorted beats and hacked together sound systems. These gatherings are dangerous, both for the musicians and their audience, as discovery means severe punishment, reinforcing the Evolved's strict control over self-expression.

Gameplay

- The Forsaken treat games as a means of reinforcing tradition and survival skills. Hunting competitions test stealth, endurance, and knowledge of the land, while music and storytelling contests serve as both cultural preservation and a way to pass down survival wisdom. Groups of settlements hold Olympic-style endurance challenges, pushing competitors to their physical and mental limits to prove resilience in an unforgiving world,

as well as to flex the strength of their tribe. But winning is not just about pride; it is a sign of capability, ensuring one's place within the community.

- Among the top three Nodes, games are a controlled luxury, often used as a display of intellectual prowess. Their strategy games are intricate, requiring deep knowledge of probability, resource management, and deception. Competitions often hold real stakes, influencing political decisions or even social standing. Those in the lower Nodes, however, are restricted to occupation-based virtual reality training simulations, reinforcing their function within the rigid system. Any form of recreational gaming outside of this is illegal. Yet, in hidden corners, illicit gaming thrives. Underground clubs host everything from high-stakes gambling games to competitive augmentation duels, where cybernetically enhanced fighters push their bodies to the limit. These battles, often a mix of skill, technology, and desperation, test modifications in ways that sanctioned Evolved society would never permit. The discovery of such activities leads to severe punishment, but the thrill and temptation of winning credits keep the games alive.
- Survivors raise their children with games designed to sharpen their instincts. Puzzle games mimic real challenges, like navigating unstable tunnels, deciphering ancient ruins, and harnessing natural resources to create shelter or tools. These games are not just play, but training for the dangers of their world and preparation for survival alone.

Self-Fulfillment Needs: Self-Actualization

Mastery

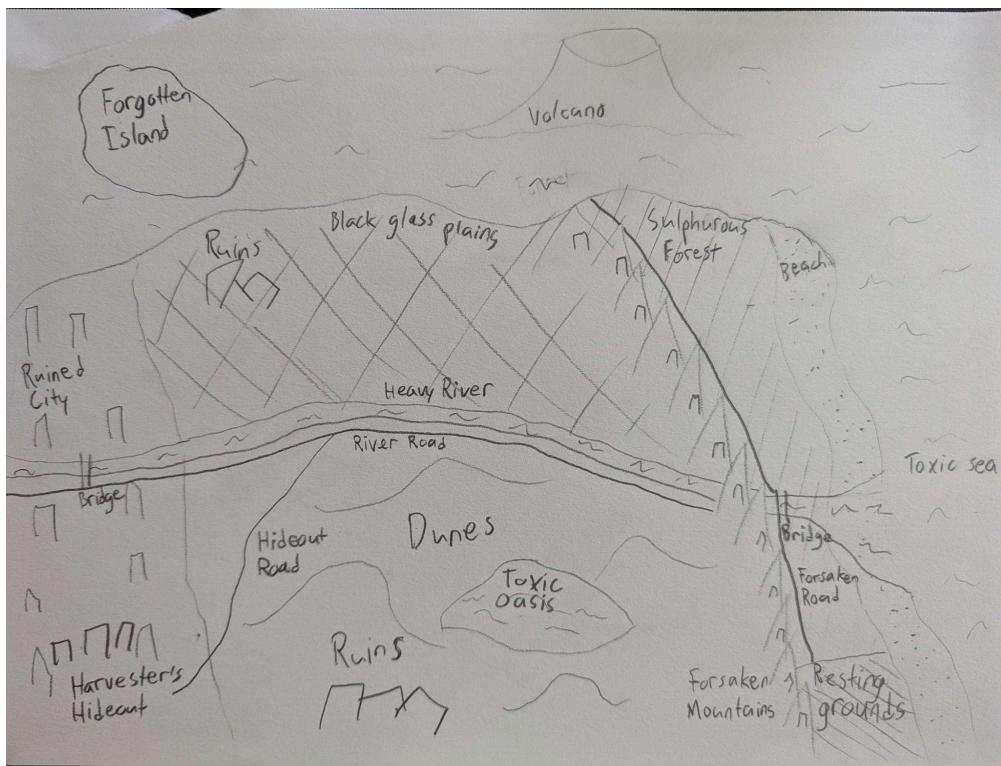
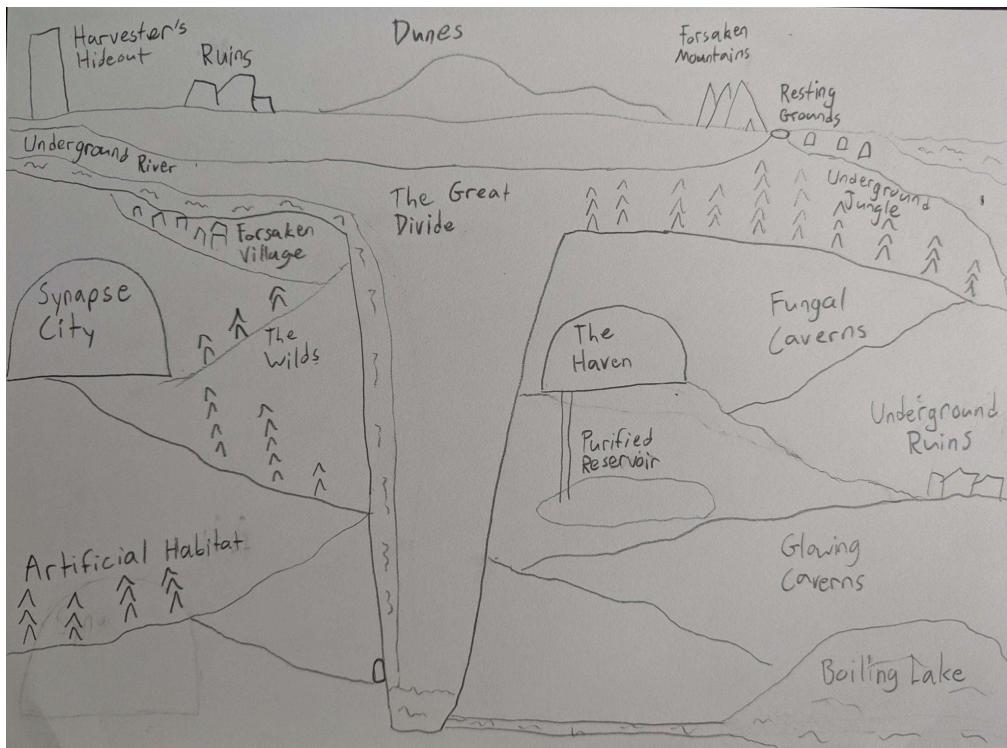
- Survivors achieve mastery of the environment through sheer will, experience, and a deep understanding of the planet's chaotic conditions. They are attuned to the cycles of the sun and, in turn, the atmosphere, reading the subtle shifts in temperature, pressure, and wind patterns to anticipate deadly changes before they occur. Their mastery is not one of control but of adaptation and learning how to move with the world rather than against it.
 - How They Attain Mastery:

- Instinct and Experience: Survivors develop their skills over years of harsh trial and error, learning how to track storms, locate resources, and navigate shifting landscapes.
 - Physical and Mental Conditioning: They push their bodies to the limit, enduring starvation, dehydration, and radiation exposure while developing mental resilience against despair and isolation.
- What They Do with Their Mastery:
 - Guides and Mentors: The most skilled Survivors often become mentors, teaching others how to navigate the world without an overreliance on technology. These masters will often write guidebooks to pass down their knowledge.
 - Wanderers and Storytellers: Some travel between settlements, sharing knowledge and preserving history, ensuring that vital survival techniques are never lost.
- Limits of Survivor Mastery:
 - They cannot control or manipulate the environment, only predict and adapt to it.
 - Their knowledge is passed down orally and through guidebooks, meaning if a master dies and their work is lost, their wisdom may be lost, too.
- The Forsaken achieve mastery of the self by rejecting all forms of augmentation, believing that true mastery lies in the preservation of the human spirit and body. They train to withstand the brutal conditions of their world without reliance on technology, practicing extreme self-discipline and resilience. Their mastery is not about overcoming the environment but about proving that humanity can still endure it in its purest form.
 - How They Attain Mastery:
 - Spiritual and Physical Discipline: The Forsaken undergo rigorous physical and mental conditioning, enduring extreme temperatures, hunger, and deprivation to strengthen their resolve.

- Meditation and Control: Many Forsaken develop an almost supernatural ability to control their own bodily processes, slowing their heart rate, resisting pain, and maintaining clarity in the face of suffering.
 - Training and Teaching: Masters among the Forsaken perfect their training, uphold tradition, and finally mentor the next generation.
- What They Do with Their Mastery:
 - Council Members: The wisest and strongest of the Forsaken are elected the spiritual and political leaders of their settlements, guiding their people with wisdom passed down through generations.
 - Ritualistic Warriors: Some become warriors who defend their communities from raiders, augmented invaders, and natural threats, using their knowledge of terrain and nature to level the playing field against technologically superior foes.
 - Preservers of Humanity: Above all, the Forsaken see their mastery as a testament to what humanity was before augmentation, serving as living proof that survival without modification is still possible.
- Limits of Forsaken Mastery:
 - They refuse technology, even when it could save their lives, making them increasingly vulnerable to the world's harsh changes.
 - Their mastery only holds as long as they remain a group, meaning a master could not survive on their own.
 - Their resistance to change makes them vulnerable to new threats, as they refuse to adapt beyond their traditional methods.
- For the Evolved, mastery is not achieved through endurance or tradition but through augmentation. They believe the human body is a limitation that must be overcome, and true mastery lies in the seamless integration of technology and biology. Those who ascend to the highest ranks of Synapse City cease to be human, reshaped into unnaturally intelligent, physically superior beings.
 - How They Attain Mastery:

- Cybernetic Enhancement: They replace organic flesh with advanced prosthetics, enhance their brains with neural implants, and optimize their bodies to survive any environmental condition.
 - Cognitive Implants: The most advanced Evolved possess implants that allow them to process information at impossible speeds, predicting outcomes and reactions before they happen.
 - Strategy Optimization: Those in the upper Nodes of Synapse City hone their augmentations for combat, becoming deadly and precise, able to analyze and execute battle strategies in milliseconds, prepared for any potential challenger from the lower ranks.
- What They Do with Their Mastery:
 - The Upper Nodes of Synapse City: The most augmented individuals ascend to leadership roles, controlling the city's power structures with ruthless efficiency.
 - Enforcers and Elite Warriors: Many high-ranking Evolved serve as enforcers, ensuring that any threats to their position in the Nodes are eliminated before they arise.
 - Scientists and Innovators: Some push the limits of human augmentation, developing new implants, AI integrations, and genetic modifications to further refine their species.
 - Limits of Evolved Mastery:
 - Their dependence on technology means that if their systems fail, they are left vulnerable and incapable of survival.
 - The more they augment, the more they lose their original humanity, with some reaching a point where they no longer experience emotions or organic thought.
 - They are locked in a hierarchy where only the strongest enhancements matter, meaning those who fall behind are quickly discarded or repurposed.

2.5. Map



- Three Key Locations
 - Synapse City – A cybernetic metropolis where augmentation dictates social hierarchy. The most advanced, heavily modified individuals govern the city, while the lower-ranked struggle to survive, forcibly modified and put to work.
 - The Great Divide – A massive chasm splitting the land, serving as both a physical and symbolic divide between ideologies. It represents the rift between The Haven and The Evolved + The Forsaken.
 - The Haven – A hidden refuge for exiles, outcasts, and those who refuse Synapse City's control but are also rejected by The Forsaken due to their augments. It is a fragile, independent settlement, constantly under threat from both major factions.
- Three Mysterious Locations
 - Shimmering Caverns – Deep underground, these luminescent caves pulse with an eerie glow. Some say they are home to bioluminescent organisms, while others whisper of ancient, bioengineered horrors lurking in the depths.
 - Rusted Titan's Rest (Underground Ruins) – A place rumored to house the remnants of a failed augmentation experiment, a massive, sentient biomechanical organism that was sealed away and forgotten. Few who enter ever return.
 - Forgotten Island – An isolated landmass in the Toxic Sea, shrouded in mystery. Legends speak of lost technology, abandoned experiments, and survivors who have lost their humanity.

2.6. Timeline

300 B.E. (Before Exodus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Velmaran scientists confirm that their sun is aging unpredictably, leading to increasing instability. Projections indicate that in a few thousand years, the planet will become uninhabitable. Global panic ensues. Colonization programs and radical climate stabilization projects begin. Conflicts emerge, with some believing the planet can be saved while others insist on abandoning it.
0 A.E. (After Exodus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Great Exodus: Three fleets of massive colony ships depart Velmara, each heading for a different star system, seeking a habitable world. They leave a promise that one day, they will return for those who remain. Future civilizations begin counting time from this event, marking it as Year 0 A.E.
300-500 A.E.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No surviving records explain this period. Only ruins, inexplicable artifacts, and bioengineered horrors remain. Theories range from failed climate stabilization projects to internal wars or a catastrophic solar event. Myths and fragmented logs reference a Great Vanishing, where entire populations disappeared without a trace. Some believe an unknown force took them. Others suspect humanity itself was altered beyond recognition.
900 A.E.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solar instability reaches a breaking point, triggering violent climate shifts. The first atmospheric collapse is recorded, with air becoming thick and fluid-like, suffocating surface dwellers. The majority of civilization retreats underground, forming fragmented, isolated societies. The planet, now nearly unrecognizable, is renamed Solivorne, a world abandoned by its creators.
1300-1400 A.E.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A dark era where major underground civilizations collapse mysteriously. Ruins show evidence of highly advanced societies that vanished overnight, with no signs of war or struggle. The few surviving records mention a Silent Plague, a condition that caused its victims to isolate themselves until death. Its origins remain unknown, fueling paranoia and superstition among the remaining settlements.

1600 A.E.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A group of cyberneticists and scientists build Synapse City, a utopian project meant to defy nature's will. • Over centuries, the city grows into a rigid, technocratic caste system based on augmentation levels. • Those who fully integrate with technology become the ruling class. • Those unwilling or unable to augment are exiled or enslaved as laborers.
2100 A.E.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whispers of an event erased from history called The Null Node Uprising emerge. • Encrypted records mention mass disappearances, a failed revolution, and a total memory rewrite of all Evolved by the Prime Node. • Some claim the Prime Node rewrote history simply to maintain control. Others say something far worse was buried.
2300 A.E.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solar instability reaches an all-time high, with rumors of an imminent solar event that could end life. • Survivors intercept strange transmissions, hinting at the return of the lost colony fleet. • Most dismiss them as myths, but a sense of hope spreads through Solivorne.
2301 A.E.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Exodus Fleet returns, but their arrival is met with chaos. • Before they can establish order, an unknown force attacks the ship, rendering it inoperable. • The fleet's crew, now stranded, struggle to determine whether the attack came from The Evolved, The Forsaken, or something else entirely. • Synapse City declares the colonists a threat to their dominion, leading to an immediate and violent confrontation. • The colonists, once saviors, are now fugitives in a war for survival.
2321 A.E.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After twenty years of brutal war, the colonists, aided by The Forsaken, rogue Evolved who have betrayed their people, and Survivors, hold off the Evolved long enough to repair their ship. • They make a final evacuation, taking all who wish to come, including some from Synapse City's lower caste. • Bested, the Evolved watch as the last remnants of old humanity escape, cursing revenge. • Solivorne is left behind, its fate now fully in the hands of the Evolved.

2.7. Character Types

Survivors

Survivors are self-reliant wanderers, navigating the desolate land through sheer determination, instinct, and an acute awareness of their surroundings. Unlike The Forsaken, who reject augmentation out of ideology, or The Evolved, who rely on cybernetics, Survivors adapt through skill, knowledge, and a unique attunement to the environment.

They have an uncanny ability to read weather patterns, sense environmental shifts, and track the flow of resources, skills that allow them to endure where others would perish. This connection to the land makes them exceptional hunters, guides, and survivalists, often capable of predicting storms, locating scarce water sources, or sensing dangers before they emerge.

Survivors avoid augmentation unless absolutely necessary, valuing their humanity and sense of self over cybernetic enhancements. While rare, they are often well known in small settlements due to their unique skill sets, resourcefulness, and hardened resilience. They exist outside the conflict between The Forsaken and The Evolved, carving out their own path in an unforgiving world.

The Forsaken (The Devolved)

The Forsaken are small, scattered villages of people who reject all forms of cybernetic enhancement, believing augmentation strips away what remains of humanity. Among them, modification is more than just taboo, it's a crime against the self. They cling to natural survival, even as the world becomes increasingly inhospitable.

Their numbers are dwindling, and survival is a constant struggle, as they lack the technology and efficiency of The Evolved. Despite this, they see themselves as the last true humans, willing to suffer to preserve their identity.

The Evolved (The Hollow)

The Evolved are the majority of what remains of humanity, residing within Synapse City, a cybernetic metropolis where progress and enhancement dictate status. They embrace augmentation, seeing it as the only way forward in an increasingly uninhabitable world.

To The Evolved, flesh is outdated, a weakness to be overcome. Many see The Forsaken as stubborn relics, clinging to an obsolete way of life, while Survivors are dismissed as irrational loners. Within Synapse City, the quantity, quality, and visibility of enhancements often determine a person's social standing.

Character Type Relationship Chart

	Survivors	The Forsaken (The Devolved)	The Evolved (The Hollow)
Survivors	Survivors view each other with quiet respect, recognizing their shared hardships but preferring solitude. While they may trade or interact occasionally, they rarely form close bonds.	Survivors sympathize with The Forsaken but see their beliefs as too extreme. They understand the desire to hold on to humanity and the toll augmentation takes on the self, but they believe some level of adaptation is necessary.	Survivors distrust The Evolved. While they acknowledge the need to persist at all costs, they believe The Evolved have lost sight of what it means to be human, surrendering pieces of themselves too easily.
The Forsaken	The Forsaken generally welcome Survivors, but with caution. Survivors are accepted as long as they have minimal augmentation. Too many modifications may lead to rejection or exile.	The Forsaken view themselves as the last true humans, rejecting cybernetic enhancement as a violation of their very identity. They see their suffering as a necessary cost of preserving humanity.	The Forsaken harbor deep contempt for The Evolved. They call them The Hollow, believing that the moment they integrated with technology, they gave up their humanity.
The Evolved	The Evolved are typically indifferent or	The Evolved view The Forsaken as primitive	While The Evolved see themselves as

	<p>dismissive of Survivors. They see them as stubborn and inefficient, refusing to embrace the next step in human progress. Depending on their level of enhancement, some Survivors might even be considered Devolved by The Evolved.</p>	<p>fools, refusing to accept the reality of a world that demands adaptation. They call them The Devolved, seeing their rejection of augmentation as a rejection of progress and survival itself.</p>	<p>superior to The Devolved, status within Synapse City is dictated by the extent of one's augmentations. Those with more advanced modifications hold greater status and influence.</p>
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3. The Story

3.1. Simple-Story

Act I

- Lorien's loved one has died. Carrying their ashes, they set out to fulfill a final promise, reaching the last known resting grounds.
- Then, the Harvesters find them.
 - Cybernetic raiders capture the unaugmented to forcibly modify and sell them into labor, mercenary work, or experimentation. Lorien fights back but is overwhelmed, beaten, and dragged to an augmentation lab and locked into a cell. They witness captives being surgically modified, limbs severed, and minds altered.
 - Before Lorien's turn, a burrowing Strandbeest disrupts the lab, creating a tear right through the middle of their cell. Harvesters come to restrain Lorien, so they have no choice but to take a leap of faith.
- Lorien lands in an underground river and is tossed around by the current, being knocked unconscious.
- Lorien awakens in a Forsaken village, a hidden settlement of those who reject augmentation. They were found by a healer and nursed back to health.
- They are warned: "If you augment, you can never return." Here, Lorien meets Ephraim, a quiet but knowledgeable member of the Forsaken. Though a trusted villager, Ephraim secretly possesses a deep knowledge of cybernetics, as they used to run an underground shop in Synapse City. He offers guidance and companionship, becoming Lorien's primary ally.
- The path forward is blocked by an impossible chasm. Two options remain:
 - They can venture into the Depths, crossing the chasm at its base through ancient ruins, enduring natural dangers and remnants of lost technology.
 - Or they can go to Synapse City to obtain an enhancement that would allow them to traverse the chasm's uppermost edge.

- Ephraim offers a crude augmentation to increase Lorien's chances of survival, but with unknown consequences. They must choose:
 - They can refuse augmentation, enduring pain and weakness
 - Or accept the crude augmentation gaining an advantage now but risk future consequences.

Act II

- Path 1 – The Depths
 - Ephraim guides Lorien deeper into the ruins beneath the surface, revealing more of the lost civilization. Along the way, Lorien faces several trials, each presenting the option to augment for survival:
 - A boiling underground lake – Crossing requires timing geothermal shifts or installing a heat-resistant augmentation.
 - A bioluminescent jungle – Carnivorous plant-like organisms and predators lurk, but a modification to heighten Lorien's senses could help.
 - A heavy river – A vast, dense, liquid current that swallows ruins whole, only escapable with enhanced mobility.
 - The Silent Ruins – Lorien explores forgotten runes, learning of an old war.
 - Vorrin, the leader of the Harvesters, the one responsible for Lorien's mother's death tracks Lorien down. Lorien must choose:
 - Flee into the ruins – Something else lurks in the dark.
 - Fight and spare him – If Lorien has moderate augmentation, they can overpower him without killing, preserving Lorien's innocence.
 - Fight and execute him – If Lorien is heavily augmented, they can finish him with ease, damaging Lorien's soul.
 - At the base of the chasm, Lorien finds a dangerous crossing. Then, they must travel back up toward the surface.
- Path 2 – Synapse City

- Lorien arrives at Synapse City, a cybernetic metropolis where augmentation is survival and status. The unaugmented are seen as obsolete. Here, Lorien meets Drae, a citizen from the Dissonant Node who teaches them how to navigate the city. Crude but street-smart, Drae helps Lorien understand the system.
- Lorien has two options:
 - Incite a rebellion and escape – Lorien gains the trust of the lower class, starting a Node-wide uprising. With Drae's help, they fight their way out and leave together.
 - Lorien learns the ins and outs of the lower three Nodes, growing sympathetic to their struggle.
 - They witness firsthand how the lower Nodes are exploited and discarded, with the most heavily augmented forced into labor camps or neural reprogramming.
 - Drae introduces Lorien to an underground network of rebels, a fractured movement that has tried and failed to rise before.
 - Lorien becomes a symbol of resistance, whether by leading from the shadows or taking a more direct role.
 - In retaliation, Synapse City deploys brutal enforcers, hunting them down as they attempt to escape.
 - A final choice looms: Lorien can sacrifice personal safety for the rebellion's survival or flee with Drae, leaving the fight behind.
 - Rise through the Nodes, climbing the hierarchy through combat with Drae at their side. Each battle demanding heavier modifications.
 - Aleris, a high-ranking member of the Architect Node, becomes Lorien's final opponent.
 - Aleris sees augmentation as art, treating people as unfinished sculptures to be "perfected."
 - If Lorien is unaugmented or lightly modified, Aleris fixates on them as a "blank canvas," seeking to forcibly augment them.

- If captured, Lorien will undergo forced augmentation, experiencing loss of control over their own body and mind.
- Drae warns Lorien of Aleris's Living Gallery, a laboratory filled with grotesquely modified victims, some still conscious but trapped in unrecognizable forms.
- The final duel against Aleris tests not just strength but Lorien's sense of identity. Can they still resist the lure of augmentation, or have they already gone too far?
- With the right augmentation, the chasm is no longer an obstacle. Lorien is soon able to reach the surface.

Act III

- A massive solar flare is coming. An immense, unpredictable burst that will reshape the land, all but destroying the atmosphere and irradiating the land.
- Lorien must say goodbye to anyone with them, as visiting the resting grounds is something they must do alone.
- Lorien finds a Driftbeest to travel in to get to the resting grounds.
- Then, the Harvesters find Lorien one last time.
 - If Lorien is unaugmented or lightly modified, they still want Lorien as a resource.
 - Lorien must fight for their life to escape alive
 - If Lorien is heavily augmented, they fear Lorien, realizing they have been surpassed.
 - Lorien can hear a remnant of their own humanity and listen to it, sparing the Harvesters.
 - Lorien's inner plea is met with apathy. Lorien slaughters the Harvesters in cold blood.

Ending 1 – The Forsaken (little augmentation)

- Lorien lays their mother's ashes to rest.
- They have remained human, unbroken by the temptation of augmentation.
- As the solar flare erupts, their bodies fail, heavily injured from the fight.

- They will not last much longer, but they have preserved what mattered most.

Ending 2 – The Survivor (balance of augmentation)

- Lorien lays their mother's ashes to rest but hesitates. Their hands are part metal, part flesh.
- They have survived, but at what cost?
- As the flare erupts, they embrace their past, present, and future.
- They are not broken, not whole—but still alive, and not without their humanity.
- They step forward, ready for what comes next.

Ending 3 – The Evolved (indulgence in augmentation)

- Ending 3A – The Evolved (spared the Harvesters)
 - Lorien arrives at the resting grounds, spreading their mother's ashes.
 - They are unsure why they need to do this, but they carry on regardless, listening to the voice in their head.
 - Lorien may no longer be human, but their time spent human will not be for nothing.
- Ending 3B – The Evolved (killed the Harvesters)
 - The solar flare erupts, and Lorien does not flinch. The heat should be unbearable, but they no longer feel heat.
 - They look down at the ashes and realize they feel nothing at all.
 - They have forgotten why they came here in the first place.
 - The past is irrelevant. The world is irrelevant. They walk into the storm, eternal, unstoppable, and empty.

3.2. Super-Story

Act I - The Exodus and the Forgotten World

Long ago, the inhabitants of Velmara faced an undeniable truth: their sun was dying. It was known that climate instability would spiral out of control, turning the world into an unpredictable, inhospitable wasteland. To survive, the three wealthiest and most scientifically advanced nations constructed colossal Exodus ships and left the planet, each heading to different star systems, promising to return for those left behind. But centuries passed, and all hope for the Exodus Fleet to return was lost.

The abandoned civilization adapted as best it could. Some retreated underground, clinging to human traditions and resisting augmentation. Others embraced biomechanical integration, modifying their bodies to endure the extreme conditions. Over generations, they evolved into two distinct groups: The Forsaken, who rejected technology to preserve their humanity, and The Evolved, who became cybernetically enhanced and lived in Synapse City. Meanwhile, scattered individuals, known simply as Survivors, navigated the desolation alone, bound to neither side.

But the sun continued to age, and the planet (eventually renamed Solivorne)'s transformation was far from over.

Act II - A War of Survival and Identity

As the centuries wore on, tensions between The Forsaken and The Evolved escalated. The Evolved, seeing augmentation as the only viable future, sought to assimilate or eradicate those who refused to change. The Forsaken resisted, determined to endure on their own terms, even as their numbers dwindled. Meanwhile, the Survivors witnessed both sides slipping further into extremism, searching for a middle path that could balance adaptation with identity.

Then, the Exodus Fleet returned.

But their arrival was not the salvation many had hoped for. Before they could establish order, the fleet was attacked by an unknown force, leaving their ships crippled and their crew stranded on the very world they had once abandoned. The Evolved saw them as a threat to their dominion, The

Forsaken viewed them as intruders, and the Survivors questioned whether they were even human anymore.

As war broke out, an even greater catastrophe loomed on the horizon. A solar flare of unprecedented magnitude, one that could end life on Solivorne entirely. Before it was too late, they would have to adapt, escape, or die.

Act III - The Final Choice

The war between The Evolved, The Forsaken, the Exodus Colonists, and the unaligned Survivors reaches a boiling point as the solar flare approaches. With time running out, they must make a desperate choice:

- The Forsaken seek to endure the flare underground, refusing all cybernetic intervention.
- The Evolved attempt to modify their bodies to withstand the coming cataclysm, seeing it as the ultimate test of their augmented superiority.
- The Exodus Colonists try to repair their ship and flee once more, offering passage to those willing to leave the world behind.
- The Survivors, caught in the middle, must decide: will they cling to humanity, embrace augmentation, escape, or accept the inevitable?

The final decision shapes the fate of Solivorne and its people. Some may escape, some may evolve beyond recognition, and some may perish, leaving only ruins behind. But whatever path is taken, one truth remains: nothing can stop the sun from dying.

Whether this is the end or the beginning of something new depends on who survives.

3.3. Side-Stories

Side Story 1 - The Connected Child

In a Forsaken settlement deep underground, a child named Nira was born with an uncanny ability—she could hear the shifts in the supercritical atmosphere long before they became storms. The elders of the settlement dismissed it as nonsense at first, but after she predicted an atmospheric collapse that saved an entire expedition, they began to listen. Some saw her as a prophet, while others feared her supernatural power, too close to becoming something beyond human.

As she grew, her ability sharpened. She could feel the vibrations of the planet's slow death, the pulse of the sun as it flared, and the whispers of unseen forces moving through the ruins. She became both revered and isolated, her warnings keeping her people safe but setting her apart. One night, a group of Forsaken elders decided it was too dangerous to let her live. They believed that no human was that in tune with the world, that she was not human. Before they could act, Nira vanished, leaving behind only a cryptic message: "I am not the first. I will not be the last. The wind will take me where it must."

Years later, a Survivor spoke of a lone figure standing in the open as an atmospheric tide rolled in, the pressure crushing everything in its path. Yet, as the storm passed, she remained unscathed. Some say she evolved beyond what the Forsaken feared. Others say she became part of the world itself.

This story highlights the planet's unpredictable atmosphere as more than just an environmental hazard but as an entity that shapes the people who live within it. It also reinforces the Forsakens' rigid belief in maintaining human purity, even at the cost of their own survival.

Side Story 2 - The Rusted Titan

Deep beneath Synapse City, in the forgotten layers of the old world, there is a chamber where the Evolved do not tread. Here, abandoned augmentation projects, failed prototypes, and The Hollow

are left to rot. It is said that among the ruins, something shifts. A writhing mass consisting of every agonized being that was discarded here, guarded by a biomechanical warform from an era before Synapse City's hierarchy was fully established. For some reason, it felt the need to protect these lost souls. It is called the Rusted Titan.

Once, it was an experimental project meant to merge human consciousness with machine on an unprecedented scale, but something went wrong. The Titan refused to obey, its mind fractured between what it was and what it had been. Deemed a failure, it was sealed away, too dangerous to be destroyed. Over the years, people have spoken of a voice in the ruins, calling out in broken speech, asking questions with no known answer. "What is my name? What was I before?"

One day, the Titan will rise from the depths with an army of all those who were wronged by The Evolved. When it does, it will seek its creators, demanding to know the answers to its impossible questions.

This story reinforces the Evolved's pursuit of augmentation as a double-edged sword, an endless attempt to surpass the human form that risks erasing identity altogether. It also suggests that the discarded past of Synapse City may rise again in ways its rulers are unprepared for.

Side Story 3 - The Traitor

The Forsaken tell stories of their greatest traitor. They do not speak his name.

He was born underground in a Forsaken village, raised on the belief that augmentation was a sickness. He watched as his village was raided by the Enforcers of Synapse City, tearing apart his people to harvest bodies for the lower Nodes. His sister was taken that day, screaming as they ripped her away. When he found her years later, she was something else, something engineered, programmed, and obedient. She did not recognize him. She was no longer herself.

That day, he made a choice. If augmentation had stolen her humanity, then he would drown Synapse City in its own corruption. He walked into the city and let the machines take him. First, a simple implant—an ID chip, to survive. Then, a strength modification, to fight. A neural link to think faster.

With each change, he climbed the ranks, tearing through challengers in the Node duels. He rose from nothing to Sentinel Node, keeping citizens in line, unrecognizable from his former self.

At last, he stood among the ranks of the Overseer Node. He should have felt victory, as he finally had the power to make changes, but a realization clawed at him. He was no longer the boy from the village. The Forsaken were right: the more you augment, the less you are yourself. He had lost everything, even the purpose that had brought him here. So when he struck down the Apex Node, he rewrote the system, took the throne, and became the new god of Synapse City. Some say he rules with absolute precision, with even less humanity than his predecessor. Others whisper that he is searching for a way back to the self he once knew, though he knows, deep down, that no path remains.

The Forsaken tell stories of their greatest traitor. They do not speak his name. But the Evolved? They call him their savior.

This story forces a confrontation with the themes of identity and augmentation. It expands on Synapse City's brutal hierarchy, showing that even a Forsaken can rise, but not without sacrificing their humanity. It also presents a difficult truth, that revenge, even when fully realized, can leave a person emptier than they were before. This adds depth to the core conflict of Sunder and sophisticates the audience's understanding of both the Forsaken and the Evolved.

4. Heroes

4.1. Protagonist

Background

Lorien was born into a world that is constantly in motion. A Survivor, one of the few to walk on the surface. They grew up in the wastelands, where the land itself is as unpredictable as the people who inhabit it. Lorien's father passed away when they were young. Lorien spent the first 17 years of their life travelling with their mother, but soon, per tradition, they would have to part.

But before Lorien set off on their own, their mother was taken by the Harvesters, cybernetic raiders who forcibly modify the unaugmented and sell them into labor or mercenary work. Though Lorien managed to escape, they have carried the weight of their mother's fate ever since. Their mother resisted, resulting in her getting shot and killed. Her body was no longer useful to the Harvesters. She was left to rot, but Lorien came back for her, honoring her with a pyre. Now, Lorien embarks on a journey to fulfill a final promise, to lay her ashes to rest in a sacred resting ground.

Lorien's world is one of isolation. They have spent their life travelling silently, navigating the ruins and extremes of a world that does not care whether they live or die. Though they have no affinity for Synapse City and its obsession with augmentation, they also know the Forsaken are clinging to a past that no longer exists. Survival is all that matters, and Lorien will do what it takes to endure, even if it means stepping closer to a line they swore they'd never cross.

Personality

Alignment: Neutral Good

Lorien is quiet, determined, and fiercely independent. Their survival has always relied on their ability to adapt and endure, but that does not mean they are without conviction. They have a strong sense of purpose, even if it is only driven by personal grief. Lorien has spent so much time isolated

from others that they struggle with trust, wary of both The Forsaken and Evolved. They find it easier to bond with creatures, as opposed to other people who have ulterior motives.

While pragmatic, they are not without empathy. They understand suffering on a deep level and are not above helping those in need. However, they also recognize the brutal reality of the world, knowing when to walk away, when to fight, and when to sacrifice. Lorien does not waste words or gestures, but every action they take is deliberate. Whether they remain human or become something else entirely depends on the choices they make.

Desires

Lorien's primary goal is to fulfill their mother's final wish: to lay her ashes to rest in the last known resting grounds. This journey is as much about closure as it is about survival. It is a chance to accept the past, carrying it forward into the future, or allowing their journey to come to an end.

As they travel, their motivations become complicated. They are faced with choices that force them to reconsider their beliefs about humanity, augmentation, and what it truly means to survive. Do they cling to their identity, rejecting all modifications against reason? Do they embrace augmentation, selling pieces of themselves for power? Or do they attempt to walk the solitary line between both worlds, never fully belonging to either?

Abilities

Lorien possesses no supernatural talents, no inherent gifts. Their strength comes from a life spent navigating a harsh and unpredictable world. Their skills include:

- Environmental Awareness: Lorien can read the land, sensing atmospheric shifts before they occur. This allows them to predict dangerous weather, locate shelter, and avoid natural hazards.
- Combat: Lorien is resourceful and capable in battle. They were trained by their mother in martial arts and taught to have immense patience, waiting for the exact moment to strike. Lorien uses whatever is at their disposal, typically improvised weapons and firearms, though they do carry a knife.

- Survival Instincts: Lorien can track prey, mentally map and navigate ruins, and endure the harshest conditions without relying on advanced technology.
- Stealth and Agility: Years of evading Harvesters, predators, and the elements taught Lorien to move unseen and adapt to any challenge.

If they choose to embrace augmentation, their abilities may expand, granting them heightened physical strength, enhanced senses, or even biomechanical enhancements that push them beyond human limits.

Weaknesses

- Physical Limitations: Without augmentation, Lorien remains fully human, susceptible to injury, exhaustion, and environmental hazards.
- Distrust: A life of reliance on no one but their mother has left them reluctant to trust others, making it difficult to form alliances or accept help when needed.
- Identity Conflict: The more they augment, the more they risk losing themselves. The choice between survival and preserving their humanity is a constant struggle.
- Moral Dilemma: As they journey through this world, Lorien must decide what lines they are willing to cross. Are they willing to kill to survive? Are they willing to give up pieces of themselves to become stronger? These choices weigh heavily, shaping their arc.

Arc

Lorien's journey is one of identity and transformation.

- Beginning: Lorien begins as a hardened survivor with a single focus in their quest to lay their mother to rest. They distrust both the Forsaken and the Evolved, preferring to navigate the world alone. They believe in survival above all else, trying to resist the over-reliance on augmentation and other ideologies that dominate Solivorne.
- Middle: Throughout their journey, Lorien is forced to make impossible choices. As they endure difficult challenges, are tempted by augmentation, and must deal with the loss of everything they once knew, they begin to question their own beliefs. The line between humanity and augmentation blurs as they struggle to understand what survival truly means.

- End: Depending on the player's choices, Lorien's arc can take multiple paths:
 - The Forsaken Ending: Lorien rejects augmentation entirely, remaining human to the end. They suffer greatly for this choice but preserve their identity, even if it means facing death.
 - The Survivor Ending: Lorien finds a balance between augmentation and humanity, using technology as a tool without losing their sense of self. They learn that survival is not just about enduring but about choosing when to hold on and when to let go.
 - The Evolved Ending: Lorien fully embraces augmentation, becoming something beyond human. Whether they retain any piece of their former self depends on the extent of their transformation and critical decisions.

Each ending reflects a different perspective on survival, identity, and change. Lorien's journey is not about saving the world, it's about deciding who they are in the face of a world that demands adaptation at any cost in exchange for survival.

5. Villains

5.1. Vorrin - The Harvester King

Background

Vorrin leads the Harvesters, a ruthless band of cybernetic bandits who capture unaugmented individuals to forcibly modify and sell them into labor, mercenary work, or experimentation in Synapse City. Once a promising bioengineer in Synapse City, Vorrin was exiled after a failed augmentation experiment resulted in the user going mad and murdering hundreds. Rather than dying in the wasteland, he adapted, starting a business built on scavenged technology and human suffering.

Vorrin sees himself as a necessary evil in a cruel world, providing a sort of twisted order in the chaos. He is infamous for his methodical cruelty, often experimenting with his prisoners before augmenting and selling them off. He wears scavenged armor combined with grotesque augmentations that have replaced almost all of his original body.

Personality

Alignment: Lawful Evil

Vorrin is calculating, pragmatic, and ruthless. He values efficiency above all else, not hesitating to sacrifice anyone or anything to maintain his power. Though he presents himself as a pragmatic leader, there is a deep bitterness in him, a resentment toward Synapse City for throwing him away like the people he now harvests.

Despite his cruelty, Vorrin has an odd sense of loyalty to those who prove themselves useful. He respects strength and intelligence, sometimes offering his enemies a place among the Harvesters if they can prove themselves useful. Those who refuse his offer rarely live to regret it.

Desires

Vorrin wants control. He sees himself as the only one strong enough to create order in the chaotic and twisted world. To him, augmentation is not a choice but a necessary step in evolution, and those who resist it are weak. His goal is to rule over the wasteland with an army of modified warriors, ensuring survival through brutal efficiency. He aspires to eventually cut ties with Synapse City, becoming fully self-reliant.

Abilities

- **Tactical Genius:** Vorrin is a master strategist, always two steps ahead of his enemies.
- **Cybernetic Enhancements:** His extensive augmentations allow him to enhance his endurance, speed, strength, and reaction time.
- **Hive Mind Bypass:** Vorrin possesses an illegal, modified neural link, allowing him to seize control of augmentations from Nodes 4 and below, forcing lower-ranked Evolved into submission.
- **Combat:** Vorrin fights with a variety of weapons, like energy rifles, retractable arm blades, and even EMPs, which only his subordinates and his augments are resistant to.

Weaknesses

- **Over Reliance on Augmentations:** His extensive cybernetic modifications require constant maintenance. If disrupted, his systems can overheat or malfunction.
- **Arrogance:** Vorrin underestimates those who lack powerful augmentations, dismissing them as weak.
- **Isolation:** His rule is largely built on fear, meaning his forces are loyal only as long as he remains the strongest. A moment of weakness could turn his subordinates against him.

Arc

Throughout the story, Vorrin becomes obsessed with Lorien, seeing their resistance to augmentation as both a challenge and an insult. Depending on Lorien's choices, Vorrin's fate varies:

- If Lorien remains unaugmented, Vorrin becomes mad, seeing them as a symbol of resistance. He fights to destroy them, but his reliance on technology ultimately fails him.
- If Lorien augments strategically, Vorrin respects them as an adversary but refuses to yield, leading to a final battle where Vorrin is inevitably bested, forcing him to retreat.
- If Lorien fully embraces augmentation, Vorrin offers them a place at his side, seeing them as a worthy successor. Lorien will reject this, overpowering Vorrin in battle, either sparing or ending Vorrin's life.

5.2. Aleris - The Sculptor of Flesh

Background

Aleris is a member of the high-ranking Architect Node in Synapse City, responsible for designing and enforcing the city's augmentation policies. To Aleris, flesh is a material, something to be reshaped, refined, and perfected. Their laboratory, known as The Living Gallery, is filled with grotesquely modified individuals. Some are failed experiments, while others are masterpieces of Aleris's artistry.

Aleris sees themselves as an artist, sculpting humanity into something greater. To them, those who refuse augmentation are blank canvases, wasted potential. They take a particular interest in Lorien, fascinated by their approach to modification.

Personality

Alignment: Chaotic Evil

Aleris is eccentric, theatrical, and overall unhinged. They speak in a grandiose manner, treating conversations like performances. While deceptively charming, their detached view of humanity makes them horrifyingly unpredictable. They do not kill out of malice or pleasure, but rather out of a twisted sense of artistry or curiosity, experimenting with different mediums.

Desires

Aleris wants to create the perfect being. They want to push augmentation beyond mere survival, into an era where individuality is irrelevant and only their vision of perfection remains. They view their art as a necessary evolution, completely ignorant of their subject's humanity.

Abilities

- Full Control: Aleris fights with surgical tools optimized for precision, able to slice and mutilate their victims with complete accuracy and intention.
- Self-reconstructing Body: Their body contains self-repairing nanites, allowing them to recover from injuries at an alarming rate.
- Neural Infiltration: Aleris can send signals to neural implants, distorting perception and inducing madness.
- Biomechanical Extensions: Their body can reshape itself mid-combat, forming additional weaponized limbs.

Weaknesses

- Perfectionist: Aleris is easily distracted by their desire to "improve" their opponents, playing with them, giving openings for attack.
- Fragile Physique: While enhanced, they are not built for brute strength and rely on agility and deception.
- Overconfidence: Aleris genuinely believes they are untouchable, underestimating those who do not fit their vision of perfection.

Arc

As Lorien encounters Aleris, their relationship changes based on Lorien's choices:

- If Lorien remains unaugmented, Aleris sees them as a perfect canvas, determined to make them their ultimate masterpiece.

- If Lorien has moderate augmentation, Aleris becomes intrigued, considering them an "unfinished work."
- If Lorien fully embraces augmentation, Aleris views them as a rival artist.

Aleris's fate is tied to Lorien's path:

- If Lorien resists augmentation plays along with Aleris' pursuit of perfection, they can use Aleris' own obsessions against them, overthrowing them from within using Aleris' own "art".
- If partially augmented, Lorien challenges Aleris; they outsmart and beat Aleris in combat, but not before Aleris administers an irreversible augmentation to Lorien's body.
- If Lorien is fully augmented, they best Aleris in combat with ease. Aleris falls, believing that they have finally witnessed true perfection.

6. Allies

6.1. Ephraim - The Retired Cyberneticist

Background

Ephraim was once a brilliant cyberneticist in the Dissonant Node of Synapse City, a prodigy specializing in augmentation repairs and illegal modifications for those who couldn't afford the city's strict upgrade policies. But when he uncovered classified research on neural overrides, technology that could forcefully rewrite a person's thoughts, he realized the city's ambitions were far darker than he had ever imagined. Attempting to leak the information, he was caught and forced into exile. Now, he lives among the Forsaken, concealing his past, offering his mechanical knowledge only in secret to those he deems worthy.

Personality

Alignment: Neutral Good

Ephraim is analytical and cautious, always thinking two steps ahead. He distrusts authority and augmentation, despite his expertise in it. Though he comes across as cold and pragmatic, he genuinely cares about people but refuses to let his emotions cloud his judgment. He carries a deep guilt for his role in Synapse City's augmentation industry and compensates by helping the Forsaken in their resistance.

Desires

Ephraim wants to atone for the harm he contributed to in Synapse City. He aspires to dismantle its control over augmentation and free those enslaved by the system. However, he also fears that his knowledge is dangerous and could be misused, making him hesitant to share too much.

Abilities

- Cybernetic Expertise: Can repair or sabotage augmentations, granting advantages in encounters with The Evolved.
- Mechanical Ingenuity: Able to craft crude but effective survival tools from scrap.
- Tactician: Plans ambushes and traps, using his intelligence rather than brute force.

Weaknesses

- Self Doubt: He struggles with guilt over his past, making him indecisive at crucial moments.
- Physical Vulnerability: Unlike most of Solivorne, Ephraim is not a fighter, relying on his mind rather than physical strength.
- Distrust of Technology: He refuses to use high-level augmentation, even when it could save his life.

Arc

- At the start, Ephraim is unwilling to fully trust Lorien, fearing they may be another lost cause in a broken world.
- Through their journey, he begins to believe that not all technology is evil and that survival and identity can coexist.
- By the end, he either reclaims his lost knowledge to fight Synapse City's tyranny or accepts a life in exile, choosing to hold on to what remains of natural humanity.

6.2. Drae - The Rebel

Background

Born into Synapse City's lower ranks, Drae grew up in the Dissonant Node, where those deemed inefficient are discarded. As a child, he witnessed his older brother get taken for neural reprogramming, returning as a lifeless husk, obedient to the city's rule. Fueled by rage, Drae dedicated his life to resisting the system from within, operating as a smuggler and rebel in the

underground slums of the city. He is skilled in deception, theft, and tight combat, using quick reflexes and a sharp mind to stay ahead of the authorities.

Personality

Alignment: Chaotic Good

Charismatic, reckless, and always quick with a joke, Drae thrives in high-stakes situations. He believes in fighting back, even when the odds are impossible, but struggles with the weight of leadership. Though independent, he values loyalty and despises betrayal above all else.

Desires

Drae wants to dismantle the Node system and give the lower castes a fighting chance. He believes Synapse City is a machine that feeds on its own people, and his dream is to burn it down. However, he is torn between revolution and the desire to simply run away from it all.

Abilities

- Stealth and Deception: Expert at moving undetected, pickpocketing, and disguising himself.
- Combat Reflexes: Quick on his feet, able to dodge attacks and strike with precision.
- Persuasion: Skilled in manipulation, fast talking his way out of conflicts, or rallying people to his cause.

Weaknesses

- Impulsive: Often acts without thinking, which can lead to dangerous situations.
- Short Term Thinker: Focuses on immediate survival over long term strategy.
- Haunted by Guilt: He feels responsible for those he's lost along the way, leading to moments of hesitation.

Arc

- Initially, Drae is focused only on small, immediate acts of defiance, unwilling to commit to a greater cause.

- Through his journey with Lorien, he realizes that change requires more than rebellion; it requires sacrifice and leadership.
- By the end, he either leads a full-scale uprising against Synapse City or walks away, accepting that not all battles can be won.

6.3. Valka - The Outlier

Background

Valka was once one of the Harvesters' deadliest warriors, raised on brutality and trained to see people as nothing more than parts to be harvested. But after witnessing a child taken and torn apart to install augments and sell, something inside her broke. She turned against her own kind, killing her unit and fleeing into the wasteland. Now hunted as a traitor, she wanders the land as a Survivor, seeking redemption through the execution of those she once called allies.

Personality

Alignment: Chaotic Neutral

Valka is brutal, unpredictable, and deeply conflicted. She struggles with her past, unsure if she deserves redemption. While she has little patience for philosophy or morality, she does believe in personal codes. She fights for those who cannot fight for themselves, even if she doesn't always believe they deserve saving.

Desires

Valka wants to destroy the Harvesters and erase the horror she once helped create. But beyond revenge, she searches for meaning in a world where survival is all that matters. She is unsure if she can ever be more than a killer.

Abilities

- Ruthless Execution: Exceptionally strong and fast, a master of close-range combat.

- Augmentation: Unlike the Forsaken, she has been augmented since before she can remember. This grants her a major combat and survival edge over the unaugmented.
- Survival Instincts: Skilled tracker and hunter, and can endure extreme conditions.

Weaknesses

- Reckless: Will charge into danger without backup.
- Struggles with Morality: She is not a hero; she kills because it's all she knows.
- Haunted by Her Past: Her greatest fear is that she can never be anything more than a killer.

Arc

- At first, Valka sees herself as irredeemable, fighting only to settle old scores.
- Over time, she meets and bonds with Lorien, forcing her to confront the possibility that change is possible.
- In the end, she either dies destroying the Harvesters or chooses to live, learning that survival is not just about violence but about personal growth.

7. Organizations

7.1. The Haven

A hidden refuge for those who have fled Synapse City but are unwelcome among the Forsaken due to their augmentations. The Haven is a fragile community of exiles and former rebels who seek freedom from the Node hierarchy without fully abandoning their cybernetic enhancements. They live in scavenged ruins and underground shelters, using salvaged technology to survive without reliance on Synapse City's infrastructure. While united by a shared rejection of Synapse City's control, tensions arise over how much augmentation should be used, some wishing to use their enhancements only for survival, while others see them as tools to strike back at the city that cast them out. Constantly hunted by Synapse City and distrusted by the Forsaken, The Haven struggles to remain hidden while fighting to define its own identity.

Notable Member(s):

- Ephraim – A former cyberneticist who now helps the Forsaken resist augmentation and provides Haven with technological expertise and repairs in secret.

7.2. The Resistance

A growing underground movement within Synapse City's lower Nodes, The Resistance seeks to dismantle the oppressive Node hierarchy and free those enslaved by forced augmentation. The lower classes who are stripped of rights, trapped in debt, and modified against their will live under constant surveillance, with rebellion being nearly impossible. Yet, small cells operate in secret, modifying neural implants, smuggling contraband, and sabotaging key infrastructure. Many believe in a future where augmentation is a choice rather than a mandate, but some, fueled by hatred, seek to burn Synapse City to the ground. Their greatest challenge is uniting under a single cause before they are crushed by the city's enforcers.

Notable Member(s):

- Drae – A charismatic smuggler in the Dissonant Node, trying to unite the fractured movement.
- Ephraim – Though exiled, his cybernetic expertise is still sought after by The Resistance.

7.3. The Harvesters

A ruthless group of cybernetic bandits who capture unaugmented individuals to forcibly modify and sell into labor, mercenary work, or experimentation. They operate in the wastelands, targeting Forsaken settlements and lone travelers. Though they supply Synapse City with slaves and scrapped augments, they remain independent, driven by profit and survival rather than ideology. Many Harvesters are heavily modified, often with crude or grotesque enhancements. Their leader, Vorrin, envisions them as the dominant force outside Synapse City, an army of augmented warriors ruling the wastelands.

Notable Member(s):

- Vorrin – The Harvester King, a former bioengineer turned brutal warlord.
- Valka – Once one of their deadliest warriors, now their most hunted traitor.

8. Places

8.1. Synapse City

Synapse City is the center of human augmentation, a towering cybernetic metropolis ruled by a strict caste system. The higher one's augmentation quality, the higher one's social standing. The city operates on a brutal meritocracy, where power is earned through combat, technological advancements, and ruthless politics. The Overseer Node enforces its will through relentless surveillance, neural overrides, and control of the Enforcer Node, ensuring that rebellion is stamped out before it can take root. While its elite live in luxury, the lower-ranked Nodes exist in a dystopian nightmare of debt, servitude, and forced augmentation. It is a city built on the promise of evolution, but beneath its bioengineered vision of perfection lies a system designed to strip away all traces of what once made its people human.

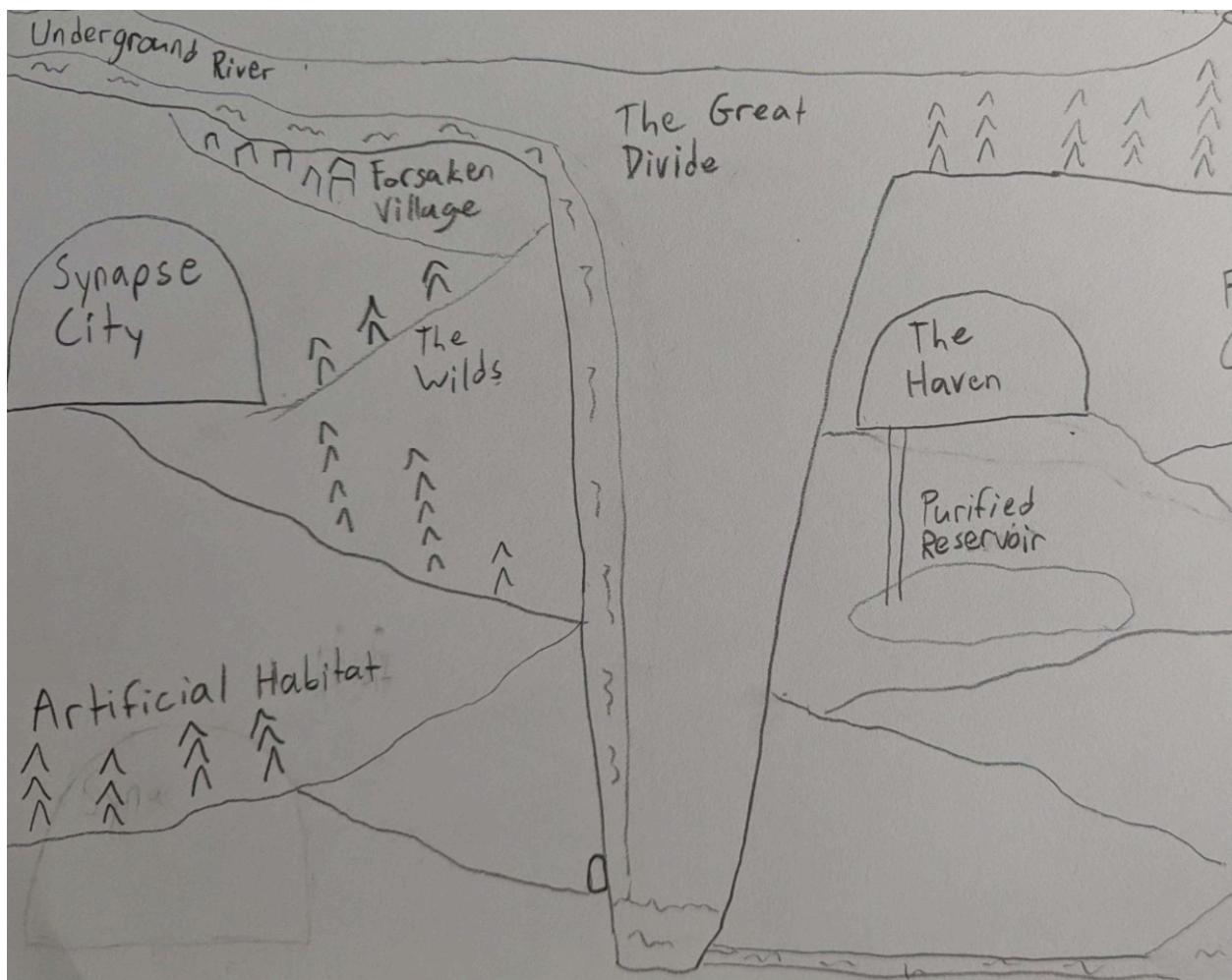
8.2. The Great Divide

The Great Divide is a colossal chasm stretching for miles, a scar upon the world that marks the boundary between The Haven and The Evolved + The Forsaken. Some believe it was formed by a massive seismic event, while others speak of an ancient war that tore the land apart. The divide is nearly impossible to cross, with sheer cliffs, volatile winds, and unpredictable pressure shifts that can crush the unprepared. Unless extreme measures are taken with cybernetic augmentation, it seems impossible to cross. However, hidden pathways and underground tunnels offer treacherous routes for those desperate enough to attempt the journey. The Forsaken are the only ones known to traverse these treacherous passages, except for those exiled from Synapse City, searching for The Haven. Most perish long before they can find their way.

8.3. The Haven

The Haven is a fragile sanctuary hidden within the ruins of a forgotten settlement, sheltering those who refuse to conform to either The Forsaken's rigid rejection of augmentation or The Evolved's

oppressive forced enhancement. It is a settlement built from scavenged materials, where people rely on ingenuity, collaboration, and determination to survive. Despite its precarious existence, The Haven is a place of hope for those seeking freedom from the conflicts that consume the world. It remains constantly under threat, with Synapse City viewing it as a breeding ground for rebellion and The Forsaken distrusting those who bear modifications. The Haven's people must always be ready to flee, defend, or negotiate for their survival, knowing that their fragile peace could be shattered at any moment.



9. Artifacts

9.1. Notable Weapons

Synapse Lance

A weapon favored by high-ranking Evolved enforcers, the Synapse Lance generates an electric pulse that disrupts neural implants, temporarily disabling cybernetic enhancements and leaving victims vulnerable. The lance's edge can be superheated to slice through armor and flesh with surgical precision.

Resonance Bolt

- A firearm that fires condensed sonic pulses, designed for use in low-pressure environments where traditional projectiles fail. It is used by the Resistance for its ability to disable cybernetic enemies without causing excessive collateral damage.

9.2. Notable Wearables

Voidshroud Cloak

A fabric embedded with nanocrystals that bend light, rendering the wearer nearly invisible under most conditions. Originally developed for reconnaissance in Synapse City, it is now used by Survivors and Forsaken to evade detection from both deadly creatures and people.

Gecko Gloves

Augmented gloves used by scavengers, enhancing grip strength and dexterity. Equipped with microfilament fibers capable of cutting through debris and climbing unstable surfaces, they are an essential tool for navigating the shifting terrain of Solivorne.

9.3. Items

Atmospheric Compass

A navigation device that reacts to atmospheric shifts, allowing users to predict environmental hazards and locate safe pathways. A rare relic from the first efforts to control the atmosphere, these compasses are highly sought after by any who spend time on the surface.

Second Self

A highly illegal neural augmentation that creates a backup consciousness capable of processing threats, reacting faster than human instincts, and even temporarily overriding control of the host's body in moments of extreme danger. The more one relies on it, the more blurred the line between the original self and the implant becomes. There have been known cases where the Second Self has taken full control of its host, causing mass destruction in Solivorne.

Solar Shard

A fragment of an ancient, unknown energy source, said to store immense amounts of solar radiation. The Evolved believe it holds the key to surviving the planet's final solar flare.

9.4. Vehicles

Driftbeest

Massive biomechanical creatures that roam the wastelands, originally bioengineered as autonomous water transporters for a dying world. They provide a natural form of environmental resistance by allowing their rider to enter an organic cavity within their body, shielding them from extreme conditions. Some burrow underground during storms, some submerge in the sea, while others take flight to escape dangerous weather patterns.

Sandpiercer

A sleek, quadrupedal creature built for rapid traversal across desert terrain, capable of supporting only a single rider. It offers its rider environmental protection by temporarily encasing them in a pressurized membrane, shielding against radiation, extreme heat, and dust storms. Sandpiercers are rare and difficult to tame, requiring a deep bond between rider and beast.

10. Bestiary

10.1. Driftbeests

Driftbeests, massive biomechanical creatures who roam the wastelands, have long, segmented legs designed to traverse unstable terrain. Originally bioengineered as autonomous water transporters for a dying world, they have since evolved independently, adapting to the unpredictable climate. They collect, store, and transport purified water within their internal reservoirs, gathered by Filtering Organisms that extract moisture from the thick atmosphere, in return spreading their seed. Some burrow underground during extreme weather, some submerge in the sea, while others take flight, riding wind currents to new territories.

10.2. Giant Jellyfish

Colossal, translucent beings that drift through the upper layers of the supercritical atmosphere, feeding on microscopic airborne organisms and absorbing ionized radiation. Though their origins are uncertain, some theorize they were bioengineered to assist with atmospheric stabilization before escaping into the wild. Their slow, undulating movements give an illusion of grace, but they are dangerously unpredictable, descending with atmospheric collapse. When they fall, their weight and tendrils crush everything below, leaving behind pools of bioluminescent residue, which some survivors harvest for medicinal and energy-rich applications.

10.3. Filtering Organisms

These sponge-like organisms act as natural respirators and water purifiers, filtering toxins, heavy metals, and pollutants from both air and liquid sources. Likely designed as part of early terraforming efforts, they have since spread and evolved beyond their initial purpose. They thrive on symbiosis, often latching onto Driftbeests, where they exchange purified water for transport and reproduction. Some settlements cultivate them in underground reservoirs, attaching them to irrigation systems to ensure a clean water supply. Anyone who ventures out onto the surface takes

Filtering Organisms with them, fixing them as respirators. Though invaluable, their lifespans are short, requiring frequent replacement.

10.4. Bioluminescent Carnivorous Plants

Flourishing in underground caverns, these luminescent flora lure prey with hypnotic light patterns before ensnaring them in tendrils coated with paralytic enzymes. Some, like the Stalk Maw, resemble towering vines with gaping, petal-lined maws that snap shut around anything that disturbs them. Others, like the Hollow Lantern, secrete a hallucinogenic mist, tricking prey into walking straight into their Lanterns before digesting them. Evidence suggests that some strains were originally bioengineered as part of subterranean farming initiatives before adapting into lethal forms. Some Forsaken settlements utilize both their poison properties and their bioluminescence, cautiously harvesting their glowing sap for navigation and ritualistic purposes.

10.5. Sandpiercers

A sleek, quadrupedal creature built for rapid traversal across desert terrain, capable of supporting only a single rider. It offers its rider environmental protection by temporarily encasing them in a pressurized membrane, shielding against radiation, extreme heat, and dust storms. Sandpiercers are rare and difficult to tame, requiring a deep bond between rider and beast.

11. Sample Reference Materials

11.1. Games

Rain World

A world where nature has reclaimed civilization, creatures follow their own survival instincts, and environmental cycles are unpredictable, creating an ecosystem that exists independent of the player's will.

Shadow of the Colossus

A vast, desolate landscape filled with the ruins of a lost civilization, where environmental storytelling and solitude play a key role in immersing the player.

Hollow Knight

A deeply atmospheric, interconnected world where life persists in the shadows of something greater, blending themes of survival, decay, and adaptation.

Don't Starve

A game centered on managing limited resources, adapting to a hostile world that is constantly in motion, and surviving through knowledge and ingenuity rather than direct strength.

11.2. Movies

Dune

A harsh, resource-scarce world where survival depends on understanding the extreme environment, and power dynamics are deeply tied to adaptation and control.

Annihilation

A world where natural laws break down, life mutates unpredictably, and identity itself is blurred by transformation.

Mad Max

A post-apocalyptic wasteland shaped by extreme resource scarcity and war, with a focus on survival, technology repurposed from ruin, and the constant struggle to retain one's humanity despite brutality.

11.3. Television

Cyberpunk Edgerunners

A world where augmentation is both a gift and a curse, pushing individuals to their limits while stripping away pieces of their humanity

Scavengers Reign

A surreal, beautifully dangerous world where every organism is shaped by its extreme environment, creating a living, breathing ecosystem that dictates survival.

The Expanse

A story where extreme environments dictate every aspect of human survival and where politics, technology, and adaptation intertwine.

11.4. Books

The Search for WondLa

A coming-of-age story set in an alien world filled with strange ecosystems, unknown dangers, and a protagonist who navigates an unfamiliar landscape while questioning their origins.

The Road

A bleak, post-apocalyptic journey of survival, where the struggle to retain humanity in a dying world is as much an internal battle as it is a physical one

Blame!

A dystopian world dominated by towering, unknowable megastructures, where cybernetic entities and humanity struggle for survival in a reality they no longer fully understand.

11.5. Comics

Biomega

A world where biological horror, cybernetic augmentation, and a hostile environment create a sense of constant dread and transformation.

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind

A story of an ecological apocalypse where what's left of humanity lives in fear of a world that has adapted without them.

11.6. Music

Rain World Soundtrack

A melancholic, atmospheric soundtrack that reflects the loneliness, mystery, and unpredictability of an ecosystem that doesn't care whether you survive.

Erik Satie - Gymnopédie No.1

A haunting, reflective piano piece that evokes feelings of solitude, loss, and quiet contemplation.

One Shot Soundtrack

A mix of ambient and melancholic tones that convey a deep, surreal connection between the protagonist and the dying world around them.

About the Author

Dylan Kendall is a software developer and storyteller pursuing a double major in Computer Science and Software Engineering. While aiming for a career in tech at companies like NVIDIA, he remains passionate about game development, particularly in environmental storytelling and world-building. Currently developing his own game engine, he seeks to merge technical expertise with narrative design, crafting immersive, atmospheric experiences. His project, Sunder, explores themes of adaptation and identity in a dystopian world shaped by extreme climate shifts. Overambitious and relentlessly creative, he often bites off more than he can chew but thrives on pushing the boundaries of interactive storytelling, blending design, technology, and narrative to create unique, compelling, player-driven experiences.