Echo Nexus

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Game Summary

High-level Concept:

Echo Nexus is a tactical terminal-based RPG set in the cyberpunk ruins of Neo-Eden, a city torn between megacorporate control and underground resistance. Players take on the role of a rogue operative infected with a nanite virus, navigating tactical turn-based combat, procedural exploration, and a decaying body mechanic where death permanently weakens the protagonist. The game combines strategic survival, faction politics (without complex dialogues), and lore-rich worldbuilding through environmental storytelling.

Key Pillars:

- **Tactical Depth:** Positioning, implants, and drones dictate combat outcomes.
- **Consequences of Decay:** Death forces rebirth into weaker clones/android bodies, forcing adaptive playstyles.
- **Faction Dynamics:** Reputation shifts via actions, not dialogues (e.g., destroying a lab pleases Echo, angering Horizon BioTech).
- **Lore Through Mechanics:** The virus, cloning, and AI consciousness are woven into gameplay (e.g., "memory fragments" unlock story via item descriptions).

Unique Features:

- Clone/Android Rebirth System:
    - Death respawns the player in a new body (clone or android shell) with randomized bonuses/defects (e.g., "Damaged Power Core: +25% damage, but 10% chance to self-destruct when using abilities").
    - Permanent stat decay (HP, speed) with each death, offset by unlocking risky "Mutation" upgrades.

- Action-Driven Faction System:
  - Reputation changes via mission choices (e.g., "Sell stolen data to Techno-Bands" vs. "Destroy it to sabotage Horizon").
  - Factions dynamically alter world state (e.g., high Echo rep unlocks safehouses; high Horizon rep grants experimental implants).
- Procedural Event System:
  - Short, impactful choices during exploration: "A derelict drone offers to join you. [Recruit] [Scrap for parts] [Reprogram it to attack nearby enemies]."
  - Events adapt to player stats (e.g., low health triggers "Emergency Stimulant" option).
- Terminal-Based Immersion:
  - Minimal UI: ASCII-style maps, text logs, and audio snippets (e.g., distorted voicemails from Horizon scientists).
  - Lore delivered via item descriptions, anomaly scans, and cryptic terminal entries.
- Tactical Drone Combat:
  - Deploy drones for hacking, healing, or kamikaze attacks.
  - Enemy AI adapts to player tactics (e.g., Horizon drones switch to anti-hacking protocols after you breach their systems).

Target Platforms

- **Primary:** PC (optimized for terminal/console interfaces)
- **Stretch Goals:**
  - Linux/macOS compatibility
  - Controller support for menu navigation (retro-style cursor inputs)

Business Model

Core Strategy: Premium Paid Release with optional cosmetic/quality-of-life DLCs.

- **Monetization Details:**
  - **Base Game:** Full story, core mechanics, and procedural content.
  - **DLC Ideas:**
    - "Nexus Archives" : New factions, implants, and lore deep dives.
    - "Terminal Customization Pack": UI themes (e.g., "Retro Green CRT," "Horizon Corporate Interface").
  - **Free Updates:**
    - New procedural events, difficulty modes (e.g., "Ironman Mode" with permadeath).

Target Audience:

- Indie RPG enthusiasts, tactical gameplay fans, and players seeking narrative depth without heavy dialogue.

- Niche appeals for terminal-based/ASCII art game lovers.

Game Overview

Theme / Setting / Genre

- **Theme**: Survival in a decaying cyberpunk world where corporate greed clashes with rebellion. The player's body is a fragile vessel, and morality is a luxury.
- **Setting:**
  - **Neo-Eden:** A sprawling, vertically stratified city. Upper levels feature neon-lit corporate zones, while the depths are a labyrinth of abandoned labs and anarchist enclaves.
  - **Key Locations:**
    - *Horizon BioTech Spire:* A towering HQ with adaptive security drones.
    - *Echo's Undercity:* Hidden tunnels filled with hacked terminals and black-market traders.
    - *The Anomaly Zone:* A procedurally generated wasteland corrupted by unstable nanites.
- **Genre**: Tactical roguelike RPG with survival elements (terminal-based interface).

Visual & Thematic Inspirations

Similar Media:

- Games:
  - Zenless Zone Zero (neo-noir aesthetics), XCOM 2 (tactical combat), Disco Elysium (lore-rich environment).
  - Darkest Dungeon (body decay mechanics), FTL (procedural events).
- Movies/TV:
  - Blade Runner 2049 (corporate dystopia), Ghost in the Shell (cybernetic themes).
- Books:
  - Neuromancer (corpo intrigue), Altered Carbon (body-swapping).

Core Gameplay Mechanics

1. Tactical Combat:
   a. Turn-based battles with action points, cover systems, and environmental hazards (e.g., acid leaks, EMP traps).
   b. Inspired by: XCOM , Into the Breach .
   c. Unique Twist: Drones can be hacked mid-battle to turn against enemies.
2. Clone/Android System:
   a. Respawn in new bodies with randomized traits (e.g., "Rusted Joints: -1 movement, +20% repair efficiency").

b. Inspired by: Darkest Dungeon (stress/death mechanics), NieR: Automata (android bodies).

c. Unique Twist: Each clone's "memory corruption" alters available dialogue options (no traditional branching dialogues).

3. Procedural Exploration:

a. Dynamic events with binary choices (e.g., "A rogue AI offers to guide you. [Trust] [Destroy].").

b. Inspired by: FTL , Sunless Sea .

c. Unique Twist: Events adapt to your current implants (e.g., a hacking event fails if your "Neural Overload" debuff is active).

4. Faction Reputation via Actions:

a. Destroying Horizon property boosts Echo rep; selling stolen tech to Techno-Bands unlocks black-market gear.

b. Inspired by: Fallout: New Vegas (faction dynamics), Deus Ex (consequential choices).

c. Unique Twist: High rep with opposing factions triggers "betrayal events" (e.g., Echo demands you sabotage a Horizon ally).

What's New/Different vs. Similar Games

Feature	Echo Nexus	Similar Games
Death System	Permanent stat decay + randomized clone traits (no full permadeath).	Darkest Dungeon(permadeath/quirks).
Narrative Delivery	Lore via item scans, terminal logs, and anomaly research (no NPC dialogues).	Disco Elysium(environmental storytelling).
Faction Interactions	Reputation shifts via gameplay choices, not dialogue trees.	Fallout: New Vegas(dialogue-driven rep).
Combat Utility	Drones with hacking/support roles (not just damage dealers).	XCOM(utility soldiers like Specialists).

Push Notifications

In-Game Alerts:

- Critical status effects (e.g., "VIRUS THRESHOLD REACHED: Body functions deteriorating").
- Faction updates (e.g., "HORIZON BIO TECH ISSUES A BOUNTY ON YOUR HEAD").
- Procedural event triggers (e.g., "ANOMALY DETECTED IN SECTOR 7: INVESTIGATE?").

Story and Gameplay

Story

Premise:

"You are Subject 13, an artificial being created by Horizon BioTech. After a failed sabotage mission, your body is infected with a nanite virus that corrupts both flesh and machine. To survive, you must navigate Neo-Eden's factions, scavenge unstable technology, and decide whether to trust your creators… or burn everything down."

Narrative Delivery:

- No Cutscenes/Talking Heads: Story is told through:
  - **Environmental Clues**: Abandoned labs with corrupted data logs (e.g., "Terminal Log 42: 'The clones are rebelling. Initiate purge protocol.'").
  - **Item Descriptions**: Implants and weapons hint at Horizon's experiments (e.g., "This drone's AI core repeats one phrase: 'Error 451: Subject 13 must not escape.'").
  - **Dynamic Reputation**: Faction reactions reflect your choices (e.g., Echo leaves encrypted messages praising your sabotage efforts).
  - **Memory Fragments**: Unlocked by scanning anomalies (e.g., "Fragment 7: A blurred memory of your creation. A scientist whispers: 'It's learning too fast.'").

Core Gameplay

Explore Neo-Eden Zones → 2. Engage in Tactical Combat → 3. Manage Virus/Clones → 4. Interact with Factions → 5. Upgrade Gear/Implants → REPEAT

Breakdown:

1. Exploration:
   a. Procedurally generated zones (e.g., "Abandoned Factory," "Horizon Data Vault").
   b. Events: Loot, hazards, recruitable drones, faction-specific encounters.
2. Combat:
   a. Turn-based battles with action points, cover, and drone tactics.
   b. Enemies: Adaptive AI (e.g., hackers target your implants, drones swarm weak positions).

3. Survival Systems:
    a. Virus Progression: Periodic stat penalties (e.g., "-10% accuracy when virus >50%").
    b. Clone Rebirth: Respawn with randomized traits after death.
4. Faction Interaction:
    a. Reputation via actions (e.g., destroying Horizon property boosts Echo rep).
    b. Faction-specific vendors and quests (e.g., Techno-Bands sell illegal drone parts)
5. Progression:
    a. Implant upgrades (trade-offs: +damage but +virus risk).
    b. Drone customization (scout, combat, hacker classes).

Meta-Games

1. **Clone/Android System**
   Death → New Clone Activated → Random Trait Assigned → Virus Progression +10% → Adapt Playstyle

   Traits Examples:
   - "Synthetic Heart: +20% HP, but medkits heal 50% less."
   - "Overclocked CPU: Hacking success +30%, but 15% chance to crash mid-combat."

2. **Virus Mutation System**
   Virus Threshold Reached → Choose Mutation → Permanent Stat Shift → Unlock New Ability

   Mutation Choices:
   - "Metabolic Surge: +2 speed, but virus spreads 15% faster."
   - "Nanite Shielding: Immune to radiation, but implants decay twice as fast."

3. **Faction Reputation Web**
   Action → Reputation Shift → Unlocks/Blocks Content → World State Changes

   Examples:
   - High Echo rep → Safehouses with free repairs.
   - High Horizon rep → Access to corporate-tier implants.
   - Mixed rep → Trigger "Purge" events (both factions hunt you).

User Interface / Screens

All screens are terminal-style, using ASCII art, monospace fonts, and minimal color (neon green/yellow/red on black).

1. Main Menu

```
 _____
|######## ECHO NEXUS #######|
|_____|
| [1] Resume Game
| [2] New Game
| [3] Load Clone Backup
| [4] Terminal Customization
| [5] Settings
| [6] Credits
| [7] Exit
|_____|
```

Connections:

1/2/3: → Gameplay Screen

4: → Customization Store

5: → Settings Popup

6: → Credits Screen

2. Gameplay Screen

```
 _____
|HEALTH: [|||||    ] 50%
|VIRUS:  [|||||    ] 50%
|_____|
|MAP:
|#######@........##      |
|##....$..........#      |
|_____|
| [W/A/S/D] Move
| [I] Inventory
| [C] Combat Log
| [ESC] Menu
|_____|
```

Connections:

ESC: → Main Menu

I: → Inventory Screen

C: → Combat Log

3. Inventory Screen

```
 _____
|------ INVENTORY ---------|
|1. Plasma Cutter (50% dmg)
|2. [HACKED] Drone Core
|3. Stabilizer Serum (2x)
|4. Clone Backup Chip
|_____|
| [1-4] Equip/Use
| [B] Back to HUD
|_____|
```

Connections:

B: → Gameplay Screen

4. Combat log

```
 _____
|--- COMBAT LOG -----------|
|Turn 3:
|> YOU: Hacked enemy drone!
|> DRONE-77: Self-destruct!
|> VIRUS: +10% corruption
|_____|
| [B] Back to HUD
|_____|
```

Connections:

B: → Gameplay Screen

5. Death Screen

```
 _____
|####### CRITICAL ERROR ####|
|BODY TERMINATED.
|VIRUS PROGRESSION: 70%
```

|REMAINING CLONES: 2
|_____|
| [R] Reinitialize Clone
| [M] Main Menu
|_____|

Connections:

R: → Gameplay Screen (new clone)

M: → Main Menu

6. Procedural Event Popup

_____
|!!!!! ANOMALY DETECTED !!!!!|
|A corrupted terminal hums.
| [HACK] (50% success)
| [DESTROY] (guaranteed)
| [IGNORE]
|_____|

Connections:

Choices: → Update world state → Return to Gameplay Screen

7. Faction Reputation Screen (accessed via pause menu)

_____
|---- FACTION STATUS ------|
|HORIZON: [|||] 30%
|ECHO: [|||||] 50%
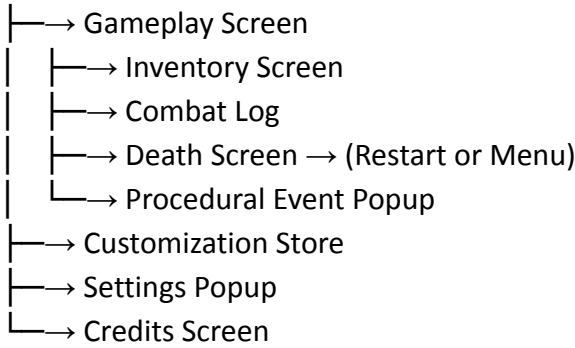|TECHNO: [||] 20%
|_____|
| [B] Back
|_____|

8. Customization Store (DLC)

_____
|--- TERMINAL SKINS -------|
|1. Retro CRT Green ($0.99)
|2. Horizon Corporate
|3. Echo Anarchy Theme
|_____|
| [1/2/3] Purchase

| [B] Back to Menu
|_____|

Master:

Main Menu
```
├──→ Gameplay Screen
│    ├──→ Inventory Screen
│    ├──→ Combat Log
│    ├──→ Death Screen → (Restart or Menu)
│    └──→ Procedural Event Popup
├──→ Customization Store
├──→ Settings Popup
└──→ Credits Screen
```

UI Design Notes

- **Terminal Size**: Fixed 80x24 character window for consistency.
- **Color Coding:**
    - Red: Critical warnings (e.g., virus spikes).
    - Yellow: Item pickups/neutral events.
    - Green: Positive effects (e.g., healed).
- **Audio Cues:** Beeps for menu navigation, static bursts during anomalies.

Levels

Number of Levels/Zones

- **5 Core Zones**: Each represents a layer of Neo-Eden, increasing in difficulty and complexity.
- **Procedural Generation:** Within each zone, layouts, enemies, and events are randomized, but theme and difficulty scaling are fixed .
- **Progression**: Zones unlock sequentially (e.g., completing the Outskirts opens access to the Industrial Ruins).

How Zones Vary

ZONE	KEY FEATURE
1. Outskirts	Basic enemies (scavengers, low-tier drones), minimal hazards.

2. Industrial Ruins	Collapsible floors, toxic waste pools, mid-tier enemies (Horizon guards).
3. Techno-Band Lair	Hacking puzzles, traps, elite hacker enemies.
4. Horizon Spire	High-security drones, timed door puzzles, boss fights.
5. Anomaly Core	Gravity distortions, unstable nanite storms, final boss (Horizon's AI core).

Example: Beginner Level (Outskirts)

Theme: Derelict suburbs on Neo-Eden's surface.

Gameplay Features:

- **Enemies**: Scavengers (melee), basic drones (low accuracy).
- **Hazards**: None (simple navigation).
- **Loot**: Basic medkits, low-tier implants (e.g., "Rusty Blades" for +1 damage).
- **Events**:
  "A scavenger offers to trade a medkit for your rations. [Accept] [Refuse] [Threaten]."

Example: Complex Level (Anomaly Core)

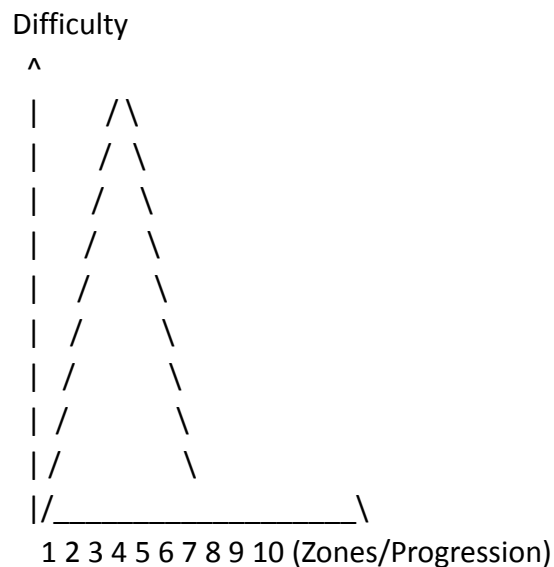**Theme**: A collapsing dimension warped by nanites.

Gameplay Features:

- **Enemies**:
  - **Phase Drones:** Teleport during combat.
  - **Nanite Swarms**: Deal virus damage over time.
- **Hazards:**
  - Gravity wells (randomly pull units into melee range).
  - Nanite storms (randomly corrupt implants).
- **Loot:** Legendary implants (e.g., "Quantum Core: +50% hacking speed, but 20% virus surge").
- **Boss Fight:**
  "Horizon's AI Core"
  - **Mechanics:**
    - Spawns repair drones mid-battle.
    - Shields phase in/out based on virus level.
    - Final phase: Nanite storm activates permanently.

Level Difficulty Curve

```
Difficulty
 ^
 |     /\
 |    /  \
 |   /    \
 |   /     \
 |  /       \
 | /         \
 | /          \
 | /           \
 |/             \
 |/_____\
    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Zones/Progression)
```

Breakdown:
1. Zones 1–3 (Rising Curve): Steady difficulty increase as players learn mechanics.
2. Zone 4 (Boss Peak): First major boss fight (Horizon Spire).
3. Zone 5 (Drop): Post-boss breather with puzzles and moderate enemies.
4. Zones 6–8 (Rising Again): New mechanics (e.g., nanite storms, hacking minigames).
5. Zone 9 (Final Boss Peak): Anomaly Core battle.
6. Zone 10 (Endgame Drop): Optional lore exploration with minimal combat.

Key Design Notes
- **Procedural Tweaks**: Higher zones have denser enemy spawns and harsher environmental effects.
- **Clone System Tie-In**: Later zones inflict harsher virus penalties, forcing reliance on risky mutations.
- **Faction Influence:** High rep with Techno-Bands unlocks shortcuts in later zones.

Level Design Tools

1. Procedural Generation Engine
Purpose: Automate zone creation while allowing designers to define rulesets for themes, difficulty, and loot.
Tool Workflow:
- **Zone Configuration Files (JSON):**

Designers specify parameters for each zone (e.g., enemy spawn rates, hazard density, loot tables).

```
{
 "zone": "Industrial Ruins",
 "min_enemy_spawn": 3,
 "max_enemy_spawn": 6,
 "hazards": ["collapsing_floor", "toxic_waste"],
 "loot_table": ["medkit", "rusted_blades", "hijacked_drone"]
}
```

- **Algorithmic Generation:**
  - **Map Layout:** Uses a grid-based system with weighted randomization (e.g., 70% corridors, 30% open rooms).
  - **Event Placement:** Procedural events (e.g., "HACKED TERMINAL") are assigned to rooms based on zone rules.
- **Real-Time Testing:**
  - **Console Commands:**
    - generate_zone IndustrialRuins — Regenerates the zone instantly.
    - spawn_enemy HorizonGuard — Tests specific enemy placements.

2. Manual Override Tools

Purpose: Allow designers to handcraft critical areas (e.g., boss fights, lore-rich rooms).
Features:
- ASCII Map Editor:
  - Drag-and-drop interface to place walls (#), hazards (~), and NPCs (@).
- Event Scripting:
  - Define custom triggers (e.g., "When player steps on X, spawn 3 Phase Drones").

3. Playtesting Suite

Purpose: Track balance and player experience.
Components:
- Difficulty Metrics:
  - Tracks player deaths, virus progression, and clone usage per zone.
  - Alerts designers if a zone's death rate exceeds 70% (indicating imbalance).
- Debug Overlay:

- ○ Displays real-time stats (e.g., enemy AI decisions, procedural seed, virus timer).
  - ● Speedrun Mode:
    - ○ Auto-plays the game using AI to simulate 100+ runs, highlighting choke points.

4. Integration with Core Systems

How It Works:

1. Designer Input:
   a. Define zone parameters → Generate base layout → Place manual overrides.
2. Testing Loop:
   a. Playtest → Analyze metrics → Adjust JSON/config → Regenerate.
3. Final Output:
   a. Polished zones with consistent theme + procedural variety.

Example: Designing the "Anomaly Core" Boss Fight

1. **Manual Setup:**
   a. Place boss arena (H for Horizon AI Core) and gravity wells (%).
      ```
      #########
      #%.....%#
      #.......#
      #...H...#
      #########
      ```
2. **Procedural Tweaks:**
   a. Set nanite_storm event to 100% chance post-phase 2.
3. **Testing:**
   a. Use simulate_boss_fight command to trial 20 AI vs. player scenarios.