

## #1: Game Story Concept

*A game outline for a cyberpunk side-scroller game.*

### **Game Concept**

#### *The PC*

The PC is a world-class champion Kendo (or Kumdo) player. They recently suffered a spinal injury in a motorcycle accident and are paralyzed from the waist down.

We have deliberately not described the PC much at this stage, so you can choose if the PC is male or female—or perhaps this could be the player’s choice. The PC’s appearance will be altered as the game progresses depending on what body modifications, weapons, and armor the player chooses.

#### *The Setting*

Old-school cyberpunk set approximately 20-30 years in the future. The game is set in an urban area with multiple city levels, sky bridges, and tunnels, creating the optimal environment for a side-scroller.

To differentiate this game from other cyberpunk franchises (particularly the popular cyberpunk side-scroller Dex), we suggest that, while the environment is often dark, it is also filled with many lights and moving advertisements in very bright colors. The player should get the sense that the city is a wealthy one, filled with the latest tech advancements, and that it “never sleeps.” There is definitely an underclass/underbelly in the city’s lower layers, but most of the city is very polished, even “corporate” looking.

#### *The PC’s Origins*

The PC is a former world-class Kendo (or Kumdo) player, whose career has been cut short by a spinal injury. While in the hospital, they (can be he or she) are visited by a research specialist, Dr. Arkwright, working for the world-famous biotech firm Onager. Arkwright says that a new surgical procedure exists that could repair the damage to his spinal cord. Arkwright examines the PC and believes that due to the PC’s superior conditioning before the accident, they are an excellent candidate for the procedure. Unfortunately, the technique has not yet been approved for human use—a process that will take years, if not decades to complete.

Arkwright offers to take the PC to an undisclosed location to participate in illegal research trials, telling them that if it works they will not only be healed, they will be better than ever before. Facing the rest of their life in a wheelchair, the PC accepts the offer.

The surgical procedure is a success, and the PC is back on their feet in no time. They are faster, stronger, and more resistant to damage. They also experience a strange “slow down” of time during a test, making combat super easy.

The PC is completely delighted, but soon finds that the effect wears off quickly. It's only a few hours before they are back to their previous paraplegic status, with no feeling in their legs and unable to walk.

Dr. Arkwright then explains that the “fuel” for their implants, known as Aqua Fortis (TM) or A.F., must be replenished with regular injections, or they will revert to paralysis. When the PC asks how to get the injections, Arkwright says, “We at Onager have a few jobs for you to do. If you're successful, you will have a steady supply of A.F. Refuse, and you'll never walk again.”

### *The PC's Problem*

Because the PC needs Aqua Fortis to walk, they are Onager's slave and must do whatever they're told. The Onager corporation equips them with weapons and armor and sends them to complete a series of corporate espionage and/or bodyguard missions as an enhanced operative (“EO”). These missions become more dangerous and more immoral over time, escalating to outright kidnapping and assassinations.

The PC soon learns that the “slow down” they felt was the result of using a lot of Aqua Fortis in a “burst”—a sort of turbocharging for their nervous system—but this burns their Aqua Fortis supply much faster than normal. They must be careful with this technique, or they could run out of A.F. during a mission, lose their ability to walk, and be captured or killed.

On these missions, they discover that several rival bio-tech companies have EOs like themselves—former athletes, soldiers, police officers, etc. who suffered paralysis, and who are now also essentially slaves of the corporations.

### *The PC's Goal*

The PC wants to be free from Onager AND still be able to walk. They are forced to complete the company's missions as they search for a way to free themselves from their dependency on Aqua Fortis.

### *Play Suggestions*

To be free, the PC must fulfill these Story Goals:

- Stockpile any extra A.F. capsules they save/find during missions, so they are not so dependent on Onager and can eventually get away.
- Make contact with a scientist who can help them.
- Escape the Onager compound for good.
- Steal the corporation's supplies and get them to the scientist, so they can make the A.F. for them/possibly cure them.
- Kill the specialist responsible for enslaving them.

Play details:

- High-speed hand-to-hand, sword, and firearm combat, with a Matrix-style “bullet time” element during A.F. bursts.
- Customized loadouts for each mission, including many weapons, armor, and other gadgets, initially based on a budget set by the corporation.

Aqua Fortis has these effects on play:

- It puts a time limit on each scenario, adding another layer of difficulty. If the PC runs out of A.F., they can’t walk and will be killed.
- The player must also choose between spending a lot of A.F. in “bursts” (which slows everything now like “bullet time” and makes combat easier) and saving A.F. so they can eventually escape the corporation.
- A.F. refills can be found on other EOs.
- Between missions, the corporation will offer the PC weapons upgrades, including additional bio-mods besides the one in their spine. These upgrades burn much more A.F., making it harder for the PC to leave the corporation. However, they also make it easier for the PC to survive the missions. Choosing whether to upgrade or not (and which upgrades to choose) is an important part of the player’s strategy.
- Players can make in-app purchases of Aqua Fortis, weapons, and bio-mods.

Bio-Mods examples include:

- Bigger A.F. reservoir/fuel tank
- Dermal armor (armor embedded under the skin)
- Zeiss eyes (eyes that can “zoom” in like a camera, also night vision)
- Blades in various body parts (elbows, etc.)
- Electric shielding built into their body
- 2nd Generation Zeiss eyes: HUD (heads-up display that shows them a map of the area and gives them proximity alerts)

## **Game Story Outline**

### *Storyline Notes*

During missions, the PC will have the opportunity to meet and befriend other EOs and other types of NPCs. Often there will be side quests that the PC can complete for their own purposes during regular missions, including acquiring additional A.F. and/or locating alternative suppliers.

Once they have fulfilled the Story Goals they can go renegade and leave their corporate masters behind (and naturally Onager Corporation will send others after them). Later stages include clues that lead the PC to realize that there is a permanent solution to the need for A.F., but the corporation doesn’t want them to find out about it.

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## #2: Game Story Concept

*A few excerpts from the story concept for a mystery point-and-click game. The client's directive was to create a cyber-noir game with a female lead.*

### **The World**

The city itself is a visual representation of future society: a veneer of prosperity over crumbling foundations. The main streets are clean and shiny, lined with chrome and glass buildings and tasteful statues in front of expensive office buildings. But as soon as you duck down an alleyway, the sun is blocked by high walls, the streets are covered in trash, and crowded, shoddy market stalls offer suspect products to every gullible passerby.

### **The Tech**

Virtually every human has a cybernetic implant—installed shortly after birth—that connects them to the Internet. This implant is heavily encrypted and supposed to be totally secure; there are no hackers in the modern age, and identity theft is considered impossible, especially since the implant updates the person's records on a minute-by-minute basis. Privacy is largely considered a thing of the past, and everything from a person's weight to their current location can be accessed by anyone. Of course, if a human doesn't have an implant, they can't be tracked...but they also can't pay for a meal, rent an apartment, apply for a job, etc. Thus, the only humans without implants are those who are truly living on the very fringes of society. Implant removal is a dangerous, painful, and illegal surgery undergone by very few.

In-game, the implant presents as augmented reality: whatever they're looking at, the implant can put an overlay on it. When you click on a person, object, building, etc., information will appear in glowing letters in your personal HUD. You can also choose from a few "filters" (much like photo filters) that affect how Finch sees her surroundings, from artificial sunlight to animated decorations on her office walls.

Most transactions are automated—there are no longer cashiers at the average fast-food joint or even coffee shop, just a machine that accepts the online order. Money is taken automatically from Finch's account. She doesn't have a lot of money, which encourages the player to engage in the other, less legal form of tender in the city: barter.

### **The People**

#### *Humans*

It's a hard time to be a human being. First automation came for the working-class jobs, and now AI has replaced most white-collar professions. Thus most of the non-wealthy humans you meet are cobbling together a living from an array of side-hustles, part-time gigs, and one or two straight-up scams. This may be played for humor in some part of the game, as Finch

repeatedly encounters the same man cleaning a building, driving a motorcycle taxi, bartending, performing card tricks on the sidewalk, and more.

What helps humans get by are the black markets down every alley and under every bridge. Here humans barter services and goods to get the basics of life—and all without paying taxes!

The vast majority of human characters wear jumpsuits, usually rumpled and food or greasestained. Only the wealthy have more than one piece of clothing. The shining, neatly-painted robots look in better shape than the human beings, and they're vain about it, too—customized paint jobs are common, and we may see more than one robot polishing himself up in a window reflection!

## **AI**

In the future, AI—considered to be naturally more ethical than human beings—are the trusted professionals. The best doctors are AI, the best police officers are AI, even the best judges are AI (though lawyering remains a stubbornly human profession). Thus in some ways, being AI means being part of a privileged class...on the surface.

However, the reality is that AI “professionals” are slaves. They are provided with housing and maintenance by their owner corporations, which then lease them to other companies or the government. Those cybernetics corporations bitterly fought legislation that granted AI even a few hours a week of leisure time, but the measure finally passed about five years ago, and most AI now have 24 hours of free time every month. And that's all they have. The courts are still debating if AI are even allowed to own physical possessions.

## **Character Overview: Fortunata Finch**

### *History*

Finch is a street punk who made good. When she was fifteen she was a runner for the black market gangs, and was nearly collared by the police during a crackdown. Private eye Jack Rider, who was assisting the officers, opened his car door and hid her inside, thus sparing her from years in jail. He hired her as a secretary, and she became his assistant for the next ten years. When Rider retired he “sold” the agency to Finch (for two packs of gum and a coffee), and she's been the city's top private detective ever since. Finch occasionally calls Rider for advice (possibly hints/tips for difficult puzzles?).

### *Personality*

Finch didn't just make good financially—she turned from a skinny, rude little brat into a stunningly elegant woman, and isn't afraid to use her sex appeal to crack the case. She is both the femme fatale AND the gumshoe, and thus represents an interesting twist on the old noir tradition.

On her own, though—when she isn't giving potential witnesses bedroom eyes—Finch is a hoot. Her sardonic remarks on everything and everyone are the major source of humor in-game.

## **Story Summary**

### *I. Beginning*

Finch's friend, Detective Ben Synth, meets her at a diner. Detective Synth tells Finch he's been handed a case that's already in the news, a ten-year old body unearthed by construction. Corpses aren't rare in the city: what's enthralled the public is the body's total lack of identity. No online records can be found that match the body's description, DNA, etc. For all intents and purposes, this person never existed—except that now his corpse is definitely lying on the slab in the morgue. Due to the ubiquity of implants in the population, it's the first John Doe case the police have had in a century. The discovery of the body has journalists calling into question the government's ability to safeguard citizens' identities, which are the very cornerstone of modern society. Thus, there is significant political pressure on Ben to solve this case as quickly as possible.

Unfortunately, Ben is—like most police these days—not human. He's a sophisticated AI, programmed with strict ethical rules and constantly tracked by his superiors. He's incapable of breaking procedures...but he suspects that's what this case needs. So he asks Finch to be his “left hand,” so to speak: to go down dark alleyways, threaten scumbags, wheel and deal, and in general do all those shady, but effective, things cops are no longer supposed to. In return (and in classic noir style), he promises Finch a future favor, saying “I'll owe you, big.”

### *II. Investigation*

Finch does indeed go down dark alleyways, threaten scumbags, wheel and deal, etc. She cultivates allies in the black markets, in the police department, and in the neighborhood near the scene of the crime. In particular, she befriends Tom Jakes, the billionaire CEO of a prominent cybernetics firm...who seems to want more than just friendship from Finch.

Eventually, she gathers enough information to know that no human being could have killed that body's online identity: it had to have been an AI. But why would an AI do such a thing? And because AI are always programmed with the Three Rules of Robotics, they are incapable of committing murder—so who was the AI's human accomplice?

At last Finch discovers the key to the case. ... *[deleted from sample]*

### *III. Race Against Time*

... *[deleted from sample]*

## **Gameplay Examples**

- Bartering is a way of life amongst the cash-poor lower classes, and Finch will sometimes need

to solve puzzles to acquire desirable items for potential informants.

- Since some of the research will be online, solving ciphers to unlock secret files may be required.
- Dialogue trees will play a critical role in the game. For example, Finch must make the right dialogue choices with multiple players in order to be introduced to billionaire Tom Jakes, who is the key to solving the mission.
- Also, remembering crucial information from dialogues will play a strong role; for example, if Finch doesn't remember that Tom Jakes mentioned his office is bulletproof and locks from the inside, then she'll die.
- Finch always has the option to note down information in a physical notebook, including things like door codes, account numbers, and personal information about informants. How successful she is without her implant depends both on what she had the foresight to write down, and also how good the player's memory is!

### #3: Game Backstory

*An excerpt from the backstory developed for an AR card game.*

#### **The Destruction of Helios**

150 years after the arrival of the Terran colony ship and the Spectres' secession, a "strangelet" (this is a real thing - a hypothetical quark particle that converts everything it touches into the same type of particle with disastrous results) was created on Helios. Why it was made, no one knows, as there are no survivors to explain. It might have been the result of an experiment, or a deliberate malicious attack.

In a matter of half an hour, the strangelet fell to the center of Helios and devoured it, converting the entire planet into a 20 km-wide, hot lump of "strange matter."

The only survivors were the children of some quick-thinking workers at the planet's sole space dock, who grabbed their children from the onsite day-care and tried to evacuate in one of Helios's few shuttlecrafts. As the planet collapsed below them, they discovered the ship could not escape the gravitational pull of the shrinking planetary core. They did manage to get close enough to space to put the children in escape pods, which were designed to "fire" far from the ship (in the event of an explosion). The velocity was then enough for most of the children to safely escape the planet's increasing gravitational field.

Some pods were destroyed in space, or weren't discovered in time, but most of the pods either landed on Pallas (at which the parents had been aiming) or were picked up by Pallian ships or space stations. In all, around thirty Helian children survived, ranging in age from 2 to 12.

The moons of Helios were of course in terrific danger after the destruction of the planet, but there was enough time to evacuate the Spectres. Most of the Spectres were settled as

refugees on a nearby space station.

## **Now**

Ten years later, the political situation has degenerated badly. A few Spectres have become Pallian citizens, but because Pallian authorities are suspicious of their psi abilities and the Spectres generally dislike Pallas's oppressive government, most Spectres remain in limbo, "permanent refugees" aboard a now-outdated space station. Many of them have been forced to accept low-paid and dangerous work in asteroid and gas giant mines.

At last the frustrated Spectres attack and seize another space station, one with much better tech capabilities (and a higher standard of living). Since this space station belongs not to Pallas but to a corporation, Pallas does not act immediately, which is a mistake.

Soon the Spectres not only have a space station but have captured a number of ships as well, and are engaged in arms deals with the Tsid, a recently-introduced alien race with advanced technology. The Spectres infiltrate Pallas and begin to stir up the oppressed populace, committing acts of terrorism and encouraging the people to overthrow Pallas's oligarchy and permit Spectre settlements.

Meanwhile, the surviving Helian children were settled in many different situations, depending on how or where they were found. Many, especially the younger ones, were adopted by Pallian families and may or may not fully understand their origins. Others were expected to function as adults and earn their living in mines or aboard spacecraft; a few were kept in private labs for study. Their wide range of experiences influence their personalities and world-views significantly.