

CYBERDECKER – game design document

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Philosophy

Cyberdecker is a game about exploring the *datasphere* and unravelling mystery of a corporative entity holding power over human life. The core game design philosophy is:

- (1) gameplay first
- (2) embedded narrative second
- (3) [game]system that can be hacked third.

Ad. (1) gameplay is why I am interested in making this game – I want to create a compelling basic game loop (explore the *datasphere* > ATB battle system > resource gathering (exp, money) > equip and character development > different builds). Ad. (2) I want the narrative to be multilayered and open to interpretation. Yes, some parts are fixed and some event will happen, but I would like to focus on narrative hidden in the *datasphere*, in the item descriptions, in the *mise en scene*. Ad. (3) while providing a fluid character development system (like job system in some *Final Fantasy/Dragon Quest* games or *Diablo 3*) the game consists of skill-trees that can be combined to create different builds and synergies, sometimes they can feel and be overpowered.

Feature Set

- **semi-generated datasphere** (virtual world of hackable nodes)
- **ATB battle system in a cyberpunk setting**
- **embedded narrative**
- resource gathering and cyberware upgrading
- character builds
- companions

Gameworld

The premise and the situation

In a world after the apocalypse where people are tribal again while some of the technology is still operating and is known, the Datasphere is alive and well. Cities are semi-automated. You are a decker, someone who can join the stream of virtual world, explore, discover, improve, steal or even destroy whole digital systems. You are also a runner; it is your livelihood. You penetrate networks, deal with virtual AI corporations or help with securing real-life people and cities. Your long-life companion BernARD – a tiny little ball of circuits, hovering above your head and shoulders each time you need to wake up; singing awfully – is degrading. While exploring the issue with its faulty algorithms you discover a mystery of its (or even yours) origin. During your journey you will meet new companions, discover what happened with the world, destroy networks, steal corporate data, help the cities grow and most of all, you will find out who you really are...

Setting

The story is set into a standard city-based cyberpunk theme. The cities are overpopulated, highly vertical, filled with people of unequal social classes living side by side but not together. Most of us depends on a tribe. The power is divided between medical, food processing and network companies

that formed over time into a few unified global corporations. Value of human life depends on information (s)he has and/or acquired. To survive in the City – one could argue that it is no longer a city but a megalopolis, stretching over all of the Earth, covering the ground with concrete – is could be an easy task but not for those who wants to know the truth. Yes, there is a plenty of food and sustenance but if you look closely onto what companies are doing with common folks for keeping them well fed, entertained and uneducated, things will start to look odd. Add subcultural religions, faith in the Datasphere, mystery occult programmers, traditional tree-people (their goal is to grow trees again; could not achieve it in last few centuries) and Optimizers (they see human body as an energy reservoir; harvesting and transforming energy)... and you have a lot of friction.

Sub-plots:

- **What is wrong with BernARD – a little robot companion of yours?**
- **For what are fractions and religions preparing themselves? They all started to stock up...**
- **What happened that the world was destroyed?**

What is the Datasphere?

The Datasphere – virtual network (matrix) – consist of nodes and transitions in between them. While stealing and/or exploring data you will discover story bits (text, images, short video/audio files). Think a mixture of CYOA (choose your own adventure gamebooks), visual novel standard (dialogue), with branching dialogue (*Baldur's Gate, Pillars of Eternity*) and audiovisual recordings (typical audio log, terminal, emails – *Deus Ex*; videos – *Her Story*). Thus, through gameplay – choosing runs to run; exploring semi-generated data networks under time pressure – stealing data – the player will be uncovering what is going on. Gameplay => get the story bits; reconstruct from the story bits what is going on => another gameplay. Choosing companions, have discussion with them, running with them also influence the story and gameplay.

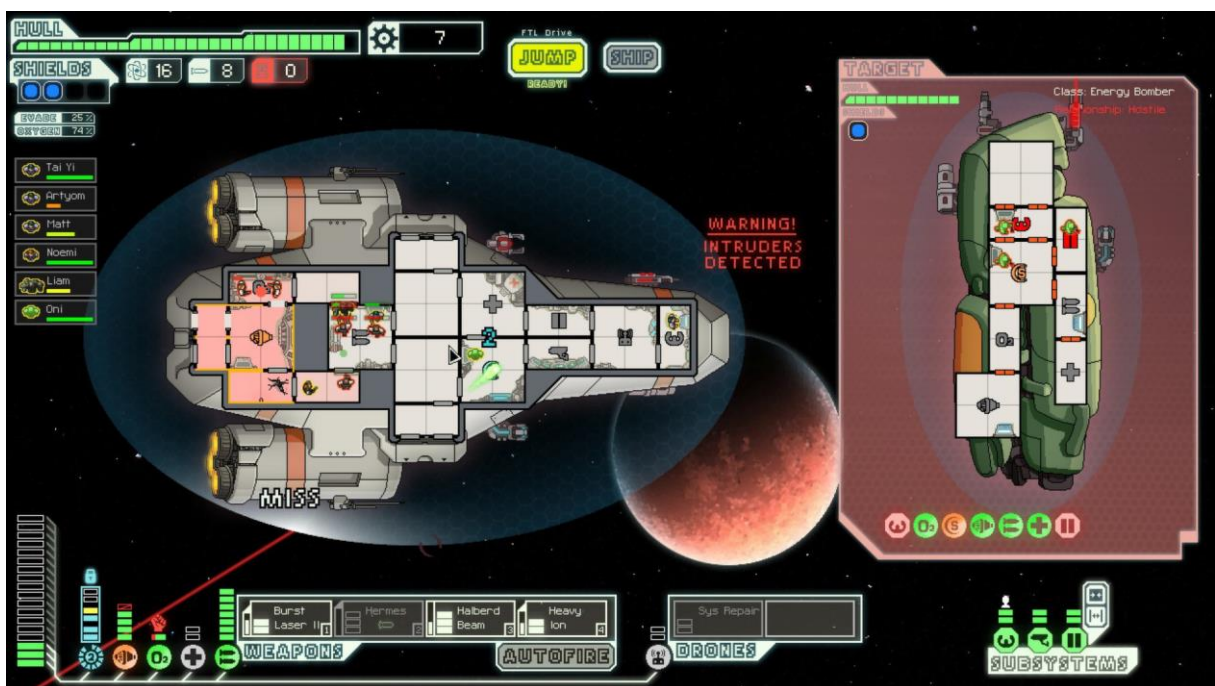
Engine / tools / development

First there will be a paper based prototype of the battle system (without the Action Time Battle mechanic, even though a time can be implemented (see board game *Space Race*)). Second a lot of playtesting and a lot of excel spreadsheets with items, skills and cyberware. Third a digital prototype of battle system with ATB implemented (without art). Then a digital prototype of a story progression (CYOA like, but with a topology (map, nodes, chapters)). I think I will converge to the Unity because I have most experience (not much) with that engine. It also depends on the art style that is right now purposefully undetermined (2D/3D/mixture/stylization...). The game is designed for PC.

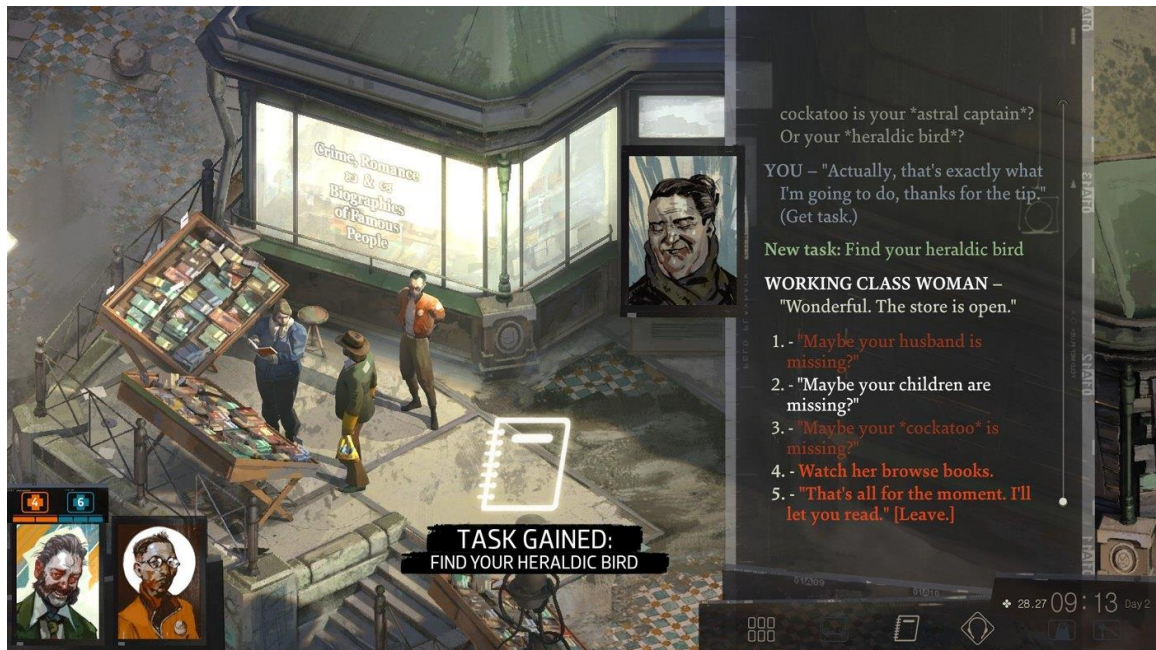
Examples of visuals / UI

The game consists of 3 basic gameplay_UI phases: (1) battle system, (2) story progression, (3) menu system (shop, upgrade, character build)

Battle system – overhead view of the enemy / its parts; enemy details (top); enemy/node (centre), skills (bottom), timers (both on the enemy, on the skills); see *Shadowrun* and *FTL* below



Story progression – mainly text based dialogue with static images/illustrations of what is happening in the background (maybe with a few simple animations). You can choose your answers with numbers and or clicking the mouse. See *Disco Elysium* and *Baldur's Gate*.

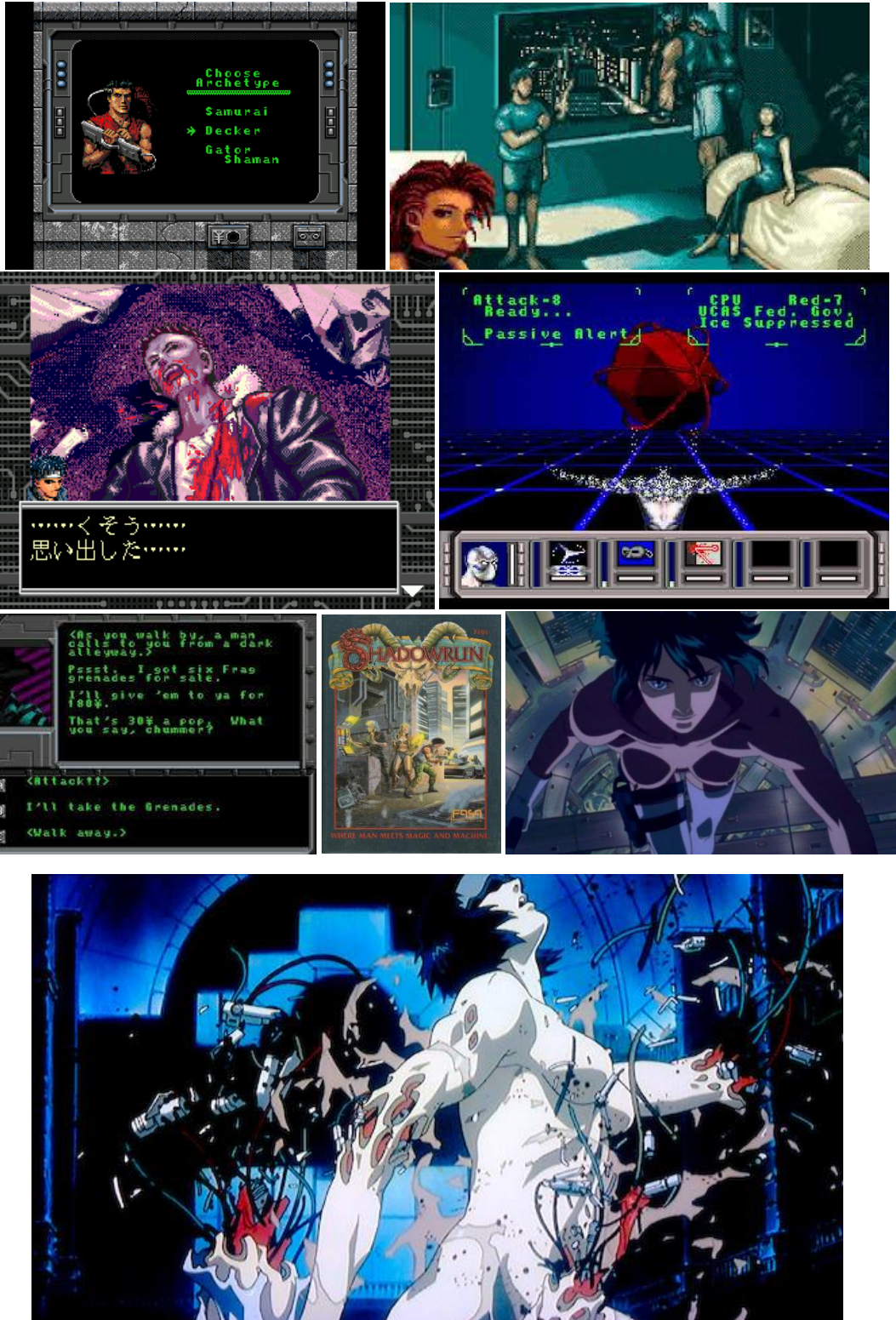


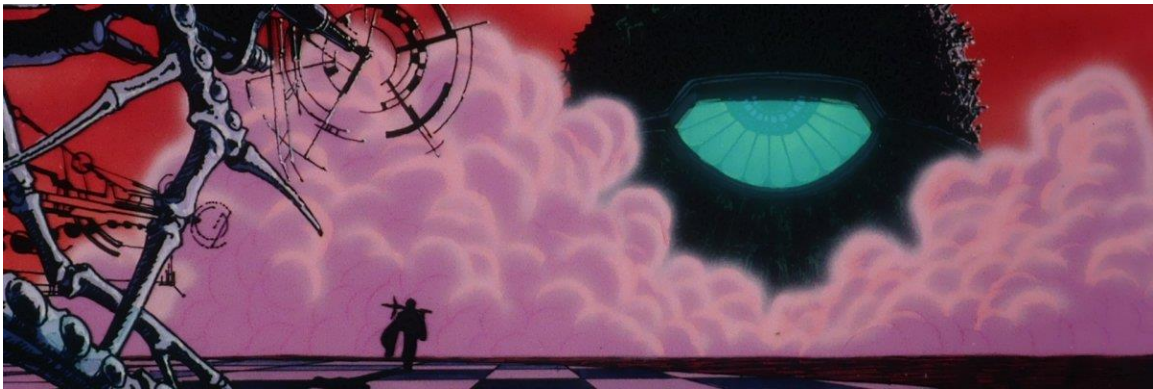
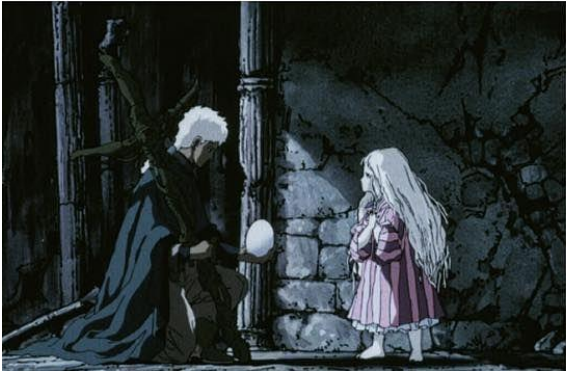
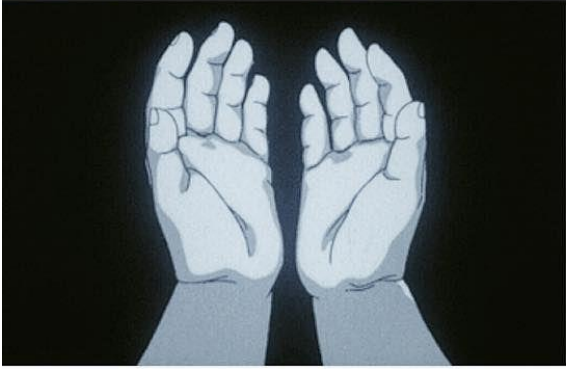
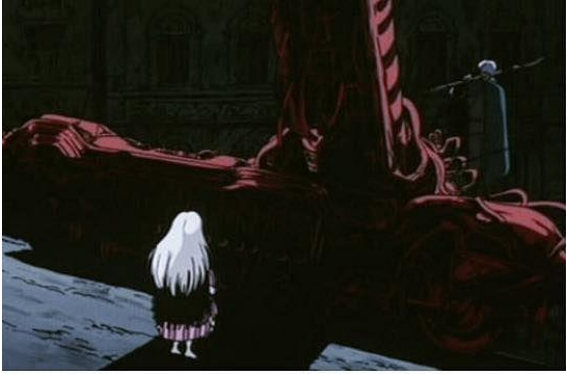
Menu system – visually simple, mostly text based and spreadsheet-like. See *FFVIII* and *Dark Souls* reference, both have limitations, but in general I would go for text based simplicity.



Overall aesthetics (visual, audio experience)

The game aims for genre standards / tropes with color pallet (aka green hack matrix like but bleaker) with a slight detour to not-limiting flesh, gore and hardware and chip aesthetic. References *Shadowrun* (Genesis, SegaMega CD), *Ghost in The Shell*. Lastly with the inclination to embedded narrative the symbolic richness and a space for interpretation would by a design pillar for art direction, thus symbolism, minimalism, slowness and enigmatic meanings (see reference *Angel's Egg* below).





Rules, mechanics, systems, goals

- Story simple non-linear dialogue with (fake) choices and menu-based movement in the world (gamebook/MUD style).
 - Explore semi-generated node networks; some quest related.
 - Movement between nodes can be called ride-troughs.
- **Fights are in the theme of hacking real-time. It is a mixture of:**
 - time-based strategy choice (abilities with fill up timer; standard JRPG Action Battle System – similar to *FTL: Faster Than Light*) and
 - skill-based avatar positioning and bullet dodging (moving the avatar from left to right; it implies the *Audiosurf / Guitar Hero* game mechanic / UI visuals).
- **Improvements menu-based item buying/selling**
 - Character development – skills (passive, active), experience, levels, attributes
 - Equipment – cyberware (for hacking), software, body, boots, hands, head, accessories
 - Items – consumables outside/inside of a battle, resources, quest items
- **Goals**
 - To fix your robot companion
 - To explore the datasphere
 - To find out, what happened with the world before the apocalypse
 - To crack up the mystery behind powerful corporations / religions
 - To survive and escape the semi-automated city