

The world ended. The details are fuzzy - it's been a few hundred years - but the best picture that can be pieced together centers around the **Singularity**. The point beyond which technological, biological, and cultural evolution cannot be accurately predicted in a meaningful way. Whatever happened caused a lot of radiation, so a limited nuclear exchange almost certainly occurred. But the big thing to take away from it was that the world was once much more populated.

Now there are maybe 20 million people on the entire planet. Most are tucked away, safe and warm in their gilded cages. The **Arcologies**, practically self-contained, self-sufficient city-states ruled each by their own local hyper-scale corporate entity, also known as a **Hypercorp**. Nations and cultures from the old world don't exist anymore. Buried in bunkers and vaults, whatever survived the holocaust with the strength and resources to rebuild were corporate in nature.

To entertain their employees/slaves/breeding stock they created (or coopted?) what remained of the old data network. People get bored when they live in a bunker, so a surprising amount of time and energy was invested in creating a means to escape it - at least in a virtual sense. What do you make when you have all the time in the world, a relatively intact high-speed data network, and a million bored people? You make a game. You make **THE Game**.

If it had a name, it's long forgotten. Maybe it was a bunch of different things a long time ago that grew together. They're constantly expanding it; updating old assets, overwriting zones, or formatting wild zones to link to the existing **Domains**. There's the *Unbound Metro*, *Checkerboard Junction*, the *Welkin Atoll*, *Ebonsberg*, the *Stellar Sonata*, and more. Each one typed to a **Genre** - each one a pocket world full of quests and monsters and drama and adventure.

Everything is done in the Game. Business and commerce, dating, education, any creative pursuit. Why exist in the shitty closet you call an apartment when you can plug in and escape? Sure, you have to work in the Game, too - the **Gold** you get is tithed to your employer, and you get a portion of it back. Have to fuel the **Meat** somehow. That's what the "real" world is called. The Meat.

It looks so perfect, doesn't it? What a great story! The world ended, the bad guys all burned up, and now we have this great new Game to play and a world to rebuild!

Bullshit.

They play in their own prison, and call it paradise. They live and breathe and fuck in a broken world, and the only thing that keeps them sane is an oversaturated children's toy. The world is not saved. It teters on a knife's fucking edge between enlightenment and eternal servitude, and for some reason the most powerful people alive are jumping like mad up and down on one side.

We know the truth - that we know nothing. We see the world for what it really is; a planet still reeling from a near-fatal blow, the ruins of human civilization reduced to little more than trellises for vines and trees. Arcologies like hives of glass, steel and concrete, anchored to the least radioactive places that could be found. Each one filled to overflowing with deluded, desperate people trying to survive in a world that should have ended three hundred years ago. And governed by a handful of people who have the unimaginable gall to be greedy in a world created by that very same greed.

We are liberators. We are warriors. We woke up one morning and realized the world we had been born into was not sustainable. Our rebellious natures fostered in secret. We denied the gamification of life and

culture - we turned down offers for XP boosts and damage buffs if we bought this product or talked to only these people. We endured the debuffs when we left the well-worn trails (and even the decoy wilderness beyond them) to explore what truly lay beyond the horizon.

We were found, and given a choice - the same choice you are now presented with. Drink from the **Grail** and be transformed. Endure pain like you've never realized for the privilege to fight and die in the shadows. Dive into the digital sewer - the SubNet - and risk life and limb and sanity to hack and crack society and its masters and its puppets for the barest sliver of hope that you can tip the scales.

Another Singularity is coming. We know that. The Hypercorps know that. We fight them so that when the day comes it will not be their corporate mandate that is imprinted upon whatever comes after. We fight so we can save everyone - literally the entire human race - from control. We are artists and pyromaniacs and trolls and explorers. We fight and we run in the Meat as often as we do in the Game. There is no truly safe place. And we do it all on a timer.

It's not enough to be enlightened. The gap between your brain and the digital world must be bridged - the **Gear** you were born with won't cut it. It doesn't have the bandwidth, the connections, the juice. We install new hardware inside of you - bleeding-edge. Updates can make it last, but the brain can only endure so much. Three years, maybe four, and that's it. That's all the time you get to change the world.

Impossible? Maybe. But if you had a whole *bunch* of crazy fuckers like us, then it becomes possible. Infrastructure. Networks. Social circles. We call ourselves **Guilds**. The *Analysts*, scholars and oracles, the *Artists*, half-mad creators, the *Barbarians*, sophisticated and iconoclastic trend-setters, the *Burners* who seek to cleanse the cruft with riotous fire, the *Libertines* who find the world to be the biggest joke of them all, and the *Mercurials*, who's long sojourns into the deep wilds return strange weapons and truths.

We differ. We quarrel amongst ourselves. But in the end, we are soldiers for the same cause. We are those who refuse the world as it is, and dare to see the world as it could be. Our time is so very, very short, but in those brief moments we shine like stars. We will be the beacons for a better tomorrow.

What is your choice?