

A hypothetical open world fantasy game in the vein of the mainline Bethesda franchises.

OPENING SCENE AND TUTORIAL MISSION OUTLINE:

A foreign world in which water is the only currency faces a catastrophic alien invasion that threatens an extinction-level event. Outline by Stimson Snead

TUTORIAL AREA, the mine.

(Morgan is not a silent protagonist. While she rarely speaks, the player is privy to her narrated inner monologue.)

If you put a gun to her head, Morgan still couldn't have described anything special about the dig site above her. Nothing marked it as different from the other dozen failures that year or from the endless plains of pale ash that covered every field, mountain, and dry lake bed she'd ever known. Yet as she and Corin descended into the tunnel beneath the dead earth, she already missed the surface.

She stooped as earth above became earth below, moving deeper into the opened passageway. Behind them, the excavators waited, hungry to learn if their weeks of labor had finally meant something. She would rather have been up there with them in the light, but she was Corin's lead spelunker. She couldn't recall how that became her role or when she began to hate it. Complaints would have to wait.

Corin's enthusiasm was a vacuum, dragging her and the rest of the crew downward. They crouched and scrambled over broken stone just to keep pace.

(Learning the movement mechanics.)

Corin lifted a hand and halted them.

"Well?" he asked, though he knew. Everyone could smell it already. They could feel it on their skin. The damp heaviness in the air.

Moisture.

Excitement flickered through the group. Morgan felt it as well, unwilling to admit it.

They moved until they reached a pit. The electric lamps vanished into the depth without meaning. Morgan didn't wait. She tossed a stone as casually as she could. She had far too much time to regret the flourish before the sound returned.

A deep, wet plop.

"Rig up!" Corin barked. The order was meant for her. She suited up beside him.

(Introduce inventory management screen)

The motions were automatic. She checked the lines. She pretended not to hesitate before swinging out over the pit and dangling beside him.

(Introduce rappelling, the second major movement mechanic.)

The descent stretched forever. The terror wasn't stepping into darkness. The terror was watching the light above shrink from sun to star to memory. Once, they stopped and pressed their faces to the wet stone. They licked it. A small fortune already. But not the prize.

Another stone fell. Another splash far beneath.

Corin had waited his whole life for this. He meant well but had never been the guardian she

needed, and his obsession with finding a Water-Well had consumed her late teens and twenties. She was shaped by his pursuit. She was the tool he took everywhere. He knew it. He promised the world once this was over, once he had what he deserved.

Hanging there beside him was the closest he would ever come to delivering on that promise.

The gunshots cut through the cavern and the ropes jerked them upward. Screams followed. Not the screams of their crew. The screams of raiders.

Water Raiders had found them. They had stalked the dig and waited for the moment of victory. Now they would take everything and leave corpses as payment.

Corin understood before she did. He swung toward her, grabbed her rope, and cut it.

His expression of apology would be the last gift he could give.

She fell down into the dark.

Down into the water.

The cold hit her like a fist. The impact knocked her breath loose. She floated beneath the surface, weightless and stunned. The experience felt impossible. Then panic returned and she clawed her way up. No one knew how to swim well in a world without water. She slapped at the surface until she found the cavern wall.

(Only shallow water is passable in gameplay.)

She paused, drinking deeply. Even in terror, the novelty was too powerful to ignore. Energy pulsed through her.

(Introduce healing mechanics)

Lights approached. Raiders lowered down the ropes meant for Corin. Their lamps revealed the cavern. Vast. Deep. Exactly the treasure Corin believed existed. Now stolen.

They scanned the water. One unhooked. He searched the walls on foot.

(Introduce stealth mechanics.)

He neared her when the cavern shook with a blast so violent she felt it behind her teeth. The man hanging above fell. His rope snapped and his skull broke against stone.

The surviving raider turned, torch catching her silhouette. Instinct shoved them into motion. He lunged. A second blast tore through the cavern. Screams above shifted again. Not fear of battle. Fear of something that shouldn't exist.

A fissure split open beside them. A narrow way out.

They ran.

The raider wedged halfway through. Morgan drove her body into him and forced him forward. He dragged her through the next opening. Survival, nothing else.

Light waited ahead.

When they reached the surface, Morgan saw the Ashfields again. That endless monotony of gray was beautiful now. No green could have comforted her more.

Then she saw the sky.

A machine. A heaving heart of metal. Larger than any *landship*. Suspended above the dig. A hose of skin-covered metal plunged downward, sprouting tendrils that impaled workers and raiders

alike. Their bodies drained, pumped upward into the vessel.

Then silence. Bodies crumbled. The hose retracted. The ship vanished.

The raider forgot she existed. He staggered forward and fell to his knees, reaching for the shattered remains of someone he knew. Someone he had celebrated with minutes ago. Morgan hadn't forgotten anything, however. Not Corin. Not the raiders. Not their knives and bullets waiting for her if she survived this.

She brought the stone down on his skull. Clean and hard.

It takes a long time before she comes back to herself. Cleaning the blood from her fingers in the ash, an almost routine act of muscle memory.

Everyone was gone. She was alone.

The world she knew had ended twice over. There was a new power in the water wars, something she didn't understand, and that no one would ever believe until it was too late. Older, stranger, and thirsty beyond comprehension.

So Morgan ran.

Trying to outrun time, and her own visions of what had begun.