

Shade Society: Web Comic

by

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Abstract

This creative thesis showcases pre-production work for a web comic project called *The Shade Society*. This thesis focuses on various aspects of pre-production involved in the creation of a story. The story itself involves research into socioeconomic stratification, social classes, the distribution of wealth, and forms of inequality that arise from such economic differences in wealth. I include world-building and concept art for the world, factions, and characters. *The Shade Society* is a study and interpretation of social theories and studies, as well as my own frustrations that I have experienced throughout my life. The story is dystopian in its foundation, so it greatly exaggerates any social classes and contemporary issues that it may be referencing. I aim to show the pain of the world and express the feelings that such a system imposes on the lives of people. The story is somewhat a piece for myself, and a body of work that allows me dive into social theories that I found interesting.

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Introduction

I started making *The Shade Society* in high school. We covered class systems such as the idea that we stratify society into varying divisions such as upper, middle, and lower class. In some instances, a working class is included between middle and lower. It was only covered briefly, but it was enough to inspire me to try worlding building for the first time. As I researched graphic novels and sociology during my time at Cleveland State Community College, the story evolved as I learned more about aspects of sociology, with most of my focus leaning toward socioeconomic stratification. My time at MTSU resulted in completely changing the goal of the story and developing the world more thoroughly. Classifying society seemed always to have exceptions, so the lines between classes blurred often. I did not feel I was qualified to say that this would be a direct comparison to the real world anymore because while the society set up initially was relevant to current social classes, the idea of a dystopian world divides people even more, so the research was still useful. Unlike the early idea I was focusing on, actual societies are complicated. I realized that social classes and class systems are not the most accurate representations of society since many factors contribute to wealth and status.

I cannot say I have a solution for economic based inequality. I realized overthrowing a government was not a simple task, and it may not be a be the best solution as those who take over could be worse. At the core, I have realized I was struggling to write the story as a revolutionary tale because I also have an inherent fear of the power governments possess. I could not imagine overthrowing a government or what would even come afterward if someone successfully did it. I could not stand in the character shoes and face the powers that they would be facing with even an ounce of the

same courage. With this realization in mind, I want to tell the stories with this fear in mind. I want to tell the story of Tobias, a guy who has lost everything and just wants to find the one man he loved.

Tobias was born in the upper-middle-class levels in the City of Governed and worked for a notable cybernetics company as an engineer. The city drafted him, and he was injured on a mission after nearly two years of service. The city only covered his basic healthcare plan when he was brought home. The basic healthcare plan only heals life-threatening wounds and necessary organs. This basic plan does not cover regrowing missing limbs, external scars, and a missing eye, which were Tobias's injuries. It is a manipulative deal between the city and the hospital where they send veterans. They offer to replace any missing limbs with cybernetics for ten more years of service in the military or as security in the city.

Tobias learns that all the funds he had before being drafted are gone, he has no home to return to, and his husband Raymond is missing. He attempts to contact Scott, his father-in-law and Governor of the City itself to find out what happened, but he is cruelly turned away by the security who control access to the upper levels before he even has the chance to try. Tobias attempts to seek answers from his own father who works at Cy.Tech; however, he is intercepted by a cyborg and he learns of his father's role in his draft. The cyborg guides him into the lower levels to protect him, unbeknownst to Tobias the cyborg is his husband Raymond. Raymond is afraid of being rejected and despises being a cyborg, so he does not reveal his identity to Tobias. They part ways in the lower levels as Raymond does not want to involve Tobias in his missions or let him find out who he is. For the rest of the story, we follow Tobias as he investigates Raymond's

disappearance and his own misfortunes. We learn about the struggles of this city through his interactions with people on his journey.

General challenges in this city include the political and moral views around cybernetics, androids, and robots. There is this constant struggle to define what makes someone human when technology is this advanced. Androids will be defined as robots that look human. The views on cybernetics have a key role in the setting. A few dominant views revolve around the idea that there is a correlation between one's humanity and one's body. The first dominant view is that replacing too much of your body causes you to lose your humanity. They often label people with 70% or more of their bodies replaced as robots, androids, or various other slang terms regardless of demonstrating free will and emotion. The next view is that one is still human if one exhibits free will and emotion. "Cyborg" is the term used by supporters and by cyborgs themselves because they feel this term acknowledges them as humans with robotic enhancements. While there are more sides to the argument, these views play a large part in the story and the world-building. There are many aspects of the world that the readers will learn about from Tobias's perspective and from the perspective of other characters in later seasons.

Process

Plot

Season 1

- The general idea is that is Tobias trying to find Raymond.
- Tobias was drafted in the name of the city, but it was secretly ordered by Cy.Tech.
- He is injured severely after two years of service, and he was returned home with nothing, and learns his husband, Raymond is missing.
- He doesn't realize he has encountered Raymond along the way as a cyborg. Raymond is afraid of being rejected and despises being a cyborg, so he does not reveal his identity to Tobias.
- He goes on a journey to find Raymond, and he meets all these other people and situations along the way who provide information and intrigue.
- As Scott is also searching for Raymond, he indirectly causes a few problems for Tobias in his search.
- He learns Cy.Tech took Raymond, and he delves further to learn what did they did.
- Upon reaching this discovery, he discovers the cyborg that he met was Raymond.
- Tobias joins Raymond in his mission to take down Cy.Tech.

Season 2

- Scott searches for Raymond. It aligns with season one but Scott's methods of searching for Raymond are different, and he has indirectly affected Tobias's search because of what he did.
- We also see the other side of interactions and decisions Tobias made.
- By having Scott's perspective, we gain a look at the upper class and more characters like Elizabeth who pull the strings in the city.
- Scott finds out about Cy.Tech's involvement in his son's disappearance and the resulting experiment
- We leave off with Scott ignoring Elizabeth's orders not to mess with Cy.Tech. She abandons him. Scott sets out on his own to destroy Cy.Tech before finding himself allied with Tobias and the others.

Season 3

- Everyone is working together or connected now, and they are facing Cy.Tech.
- They seek to expose the corruption and do something about it.
- Raymond's method is using news media, but Scott's method is through violence. Tobias is caught between the two.
- Potential for more conflicts to arise as new villains are introduced such as Elizabeth and Logos.

Prequel Potential/ Alternative Season One

- Raymond spent time searching for Tobias before he was captured by Cy.Tech and turned into an experimental super naturally powered cyborg.
- Plays out possibly from Raymond and potentially from some of the Cy. Tech villain views.

- This off branching season provides a more in-depth look into what happened to Raymond as he investigated Cy.Tech as someone from the upper class.
- It is starkly different from Tobias' investigation after he is fighting the class systems of the city.
- This might even be a proper first season instead of Tobias being season one.



Figure 1. Story boards for Cy.Tech Sequence



Figure 2. Web Comic Page All Together



Figure 3. Panel 1 for Web Comic Page



Figure 4. Panel 3 for Web Comic Page

World Building

For the longest time, I was set on making a graphic novel. I was determined just to jump in and start making storyboards. However, I found out there was so much more to the process, and I still had a lot of development to do before I could tell a solid story. If for no other reason, I needed to develop the world more so I could picture the events in the story. I pursued more research into the theories I originally found interesting, and I decided to take a step back and focus on the aspect of the story that I enjoy most, world-building.

I spent most of my time working on the world-building, outline, and storyboards. When it came to world-building, I had notebooks full of old ideas. It was all stuff that I jotted down as I produced them. I continued jotting down ideas in my outline as I began recreating everything. I kept some fundamental ideas, like the politics around cybernetics, but I completely reworked Shades from the ground up. I added ideas, reworked things, and completely scrapped others. There are many things in the world-building that may not directly come up in the story, but they were necessary for me to have planned for the world to feel more developed.

The Overall Setting

The Shade Society is a creative project set in the future. Earth has gone through a global disaster, which results in people living in isolated bunkers, now called cities that have expanded back to the surface. Much of the planet is still an inhospitable wasteland, and the “cities” are the only safe places. This story takes place in the City of the Governed. This city is divided into levels, each with noticeable differences in wealth and income. The city's upper levels actively discriminate against those with disabilities, lack

of wealth, and disregard for their self-made rules of high society. The lower levels suffer some of the same problems of discrimination. There are more opportunities as there are individuals and organizations who provide accessibility to those in need. In general, there are lower costs of living at lower standards of living as one descends the city's levels.

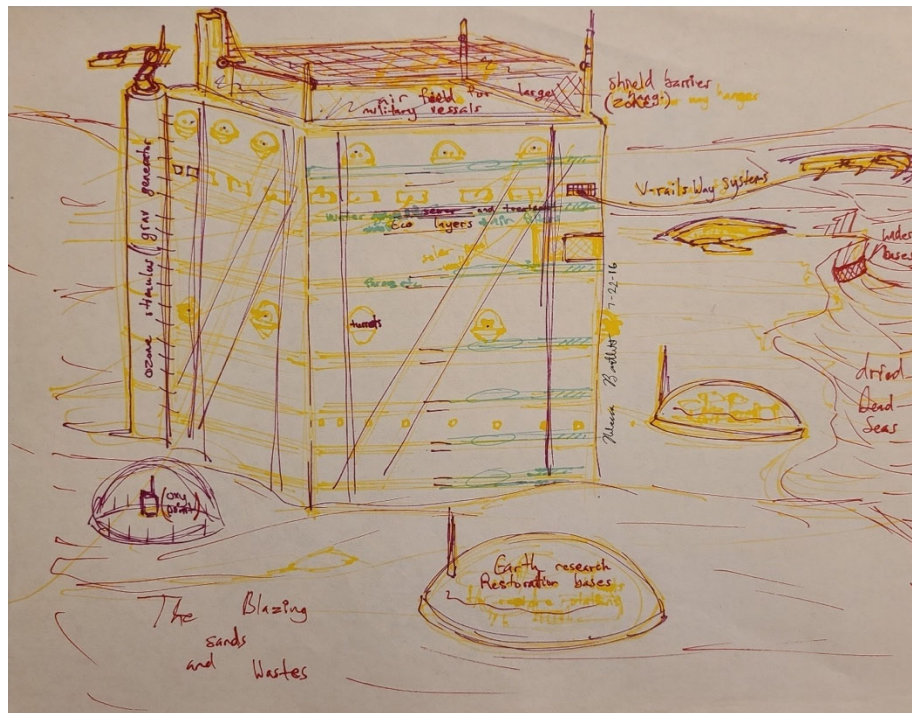


Figure 5. City of the Governed, terraforming labs, and the wasteland early concept

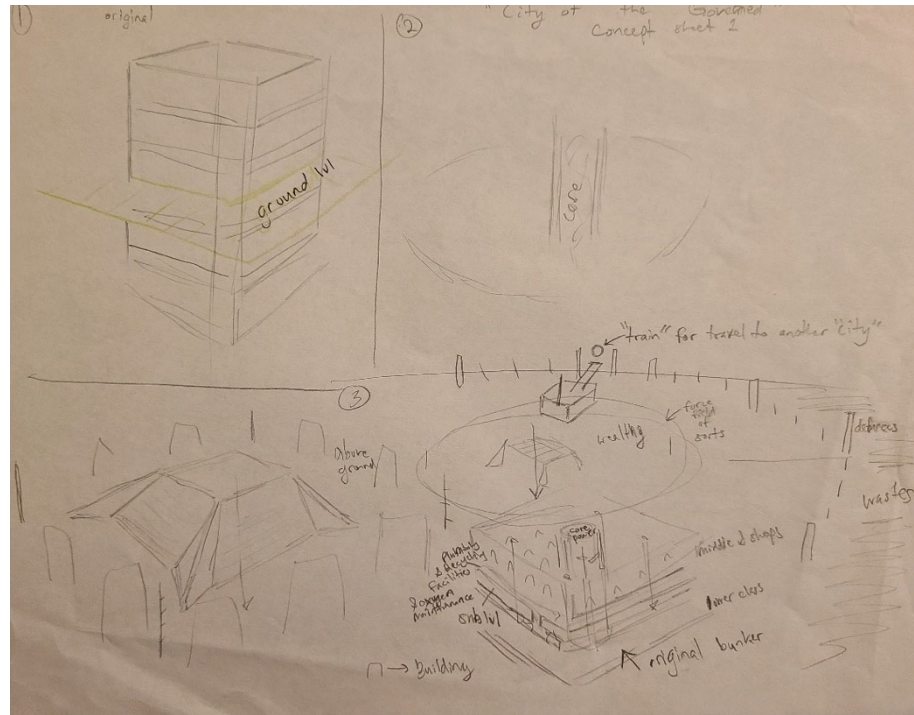


Figure 6. City of the Governed early concept 2

The Lore of Creation:

This story is set in a reality created by Titans, who represent aspects of the physical world and metaphysical concepts. The Titans created the first reality to be governed by logic and order. Every being had its life planned from birth to death. It had rules which governed how things function, such as gravity or momentum. The system worked with the Titan controlling every aspect of reality. A few of the Titans were not satisfied with the rules established by the majority as it set any Titans who would create a variation to the side. Chaos, Pathos, Life, and Death wanted this world to feel unique and believed variations were not bad. Pathos and Life tried to alter reality and break the systems in place. The Titans in favor of the system fought back. In the end, Life and Pathos were still key aspects of their cycle, so they could not be killed. Instead, they were banished from the bounds of this reality to the Nothingness Beyond which contains nothing but a link to keep them alive for the sake of representing their continuing

existence. Their direct roles in the system caused it to fall apart. Chaos took charge and implemented a new system that included her concept of free will to make a more natural system that required less management with added systems to watch over the world instead of controlling every part of it.

When Life and Pathos were banished to the Nothingness Beyond, they were driven mad and transformed into the Eldest Shadows. In a desperate attempt to create familiarity and a home, another reality was born by their sheer will and longing. It is called the Unseen World or the Illogical Reality by the other Titans. Much of the Unseen World tries to mimic the first reality; however, it is a shadow that lacks the logic and stability which was so key to developing the first reality. The result is a world that constantly changes and can be manipulated by mere will and desire.

The Shades, which are what the Shade Society is named after, were created when Death tried to reach out to Life in the other reality. The tear he created in his realm of the dead allowed Life and Pathos to mark him. The mere touch from Beyond split Death into multiple versions of himself. He could not unite the many aspects of himself to close the tear. Life and Pathos cannot travel through this tear entirely, so they decided to reach through and pull souls from Death's realm in the first reality back to their reality. The process splits the soul leaving half behind in the first reality. That half usually finds root in another human, or one of Death's aspects collects them in hopes of uniting the pieces or destroying them if they corrupt due to the lost half being destroyed. Life and Pathos added pieces of themselves to the fragmented souls they stole. They sculpted them into new beings called Shades.

About Shades

Shades are beings made by the Eldest Shadows, who used to be the Titans: Life and Pathos. They were the first beings of the Unseen World and the First Reality. Their roles in the story often play into power struggles or provide unique solutions to otherwise unsolvable problems. All Shades appear to have bodies made of shadow with a crystalized soul stone resting where a heart would usually be. The color of souls varies on the soul of the person. Various masks hide a Shade's true face, and the mask reforms over time when taken off or broken. The face under the mask ranges from extremely basic: completely blank, to exactly like their former face but shrouded in shadow, depending on how much a Shade recalls of their past life. They may even violently reject their identity and take on more monstrous faces under their masks.

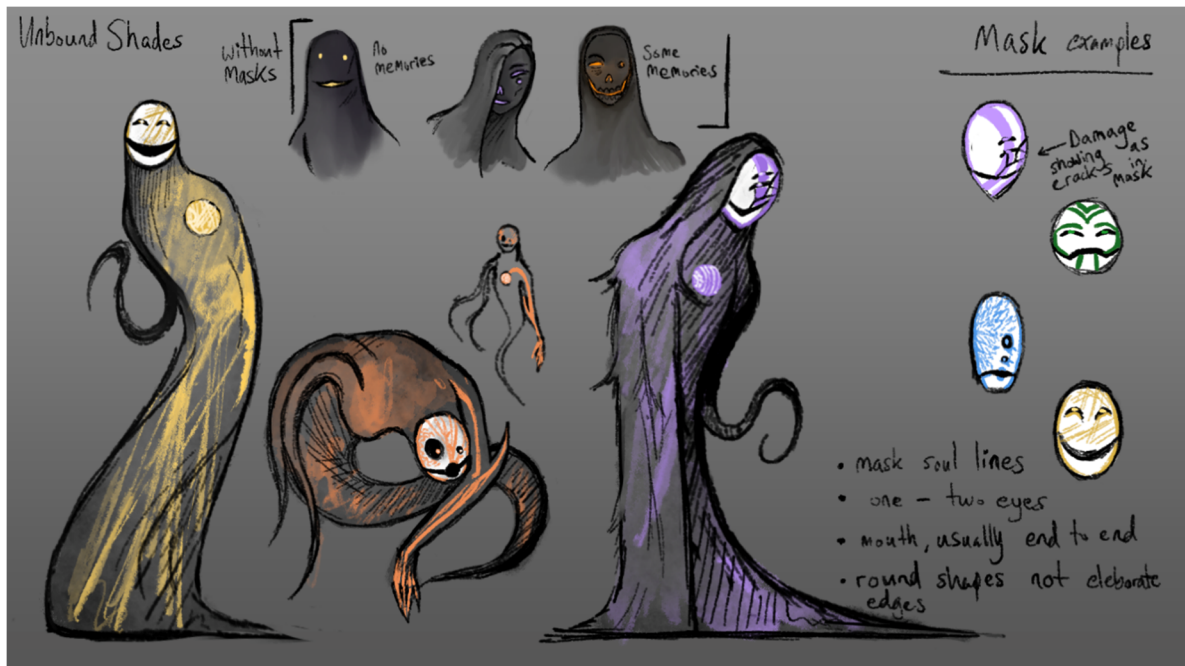


Figure 7. Unbound Shade Examples



Figure 8. Unbound Shade Examples

Unlike all the other shadow creatures that exist in the Unseen World, which are just as unstable as the reality they live in, Shades have links to both realities. Most Shades do not remember their past life entirely, but they yearn for the missing half of their soul. Shades have the choice to ignore it and continue living in the Unseen World, or they can venture to the first reality in search of their missing half. Shades may search for ages for their missing half as it moves from host to host. The most common method of rejoining with their half is bonding to the human with the missing half. While the Shade cannot merge with the soul fragment while it is a part of the human, the link allows them to feel whole while bonded. When the human dies, the Shade automatically absorbs their missing piece. Shades can also watch over the human until they die and get their piece that way, but they will not feel whole, making this option undesirable. They could find the fragment without a host if it got lost or collected by Death for safekeeping. The Shade can merge with the fragment immediately if it is found without a host. It gets tricky for

Shades, as finding their half can be difficult. They know it when they see it but only have a vague sense of direction until then. This does not account for all the creatures that hunt down souls to devour. In those cases, the Shade would need to defeat whatever devoured the fragment. Due to this, Shades may end up bonding with any human they find just to feel whole despite knowing the risks they pose to themselves and the human with whom they bond.

Shades who bond to a human (regardless of whether it was the one with a missing half) have varying degrees of willpower, which they can use to manipulate the first reality. Originally it was more like set superpowers. For example, they could grant flight to the human they bonded to or control electricity. After I developed the Unseen World, I incorporated that lore into their powers. I completely scrapped the idea of Shades granting a single set superpower. Shade powers are more like tricks that they have at their disposal. The level of tricks they can do varies depending on their connection to the two realities, whether their soul is complete, and the strength of their bond to their human. It can range from something as simple as creating an illusion of something, changing the properties of something like being wet or changing the color, or creating something from nothing. Creating something is the most difficult of the three “tricks.” The bigger the trick, the stronger the Shade needs to be. For reference, most Shades and their humans can create medium-sized illusions and change minor properties of objects, and it is rare to find a Shade and a human who can create from nothing. The 12 Immortal Shades are the main ones that can utilize the creation trick. An important note, bonded Shades lose the ability to travel to the Unseen World. The bond with the human is key to feeling

complete, allowing the Shade to grow stronger as their bond gets stronger. Shades that have not bonded can travel freely but cannot alter the First Reality.

The Corrupted are monstrous, maddened Shades with shattered souls. There are many reasons a Shade's soul could shatter. The most common cause is when a Shade bonds to a human who does not have the missing half of their soul. When the person dies, the link is cut as they pass on. The Shade slowly shatters when the link is cut in any way. Unless they find their true half before completely shattering, the Shade will turn into a Corrupted. A Shade who bonded with the matching human will attend their missing half as the person passes on, and the Shade will also be able to pass on. Corrupted are usually the result of Shades whose link to their human was broken, and for whatever reason, they could not merge with their other half before Undeath was drawn to their severed links. Undeath is an aspect of Death who went insane and believes he is Life reborn. He is personally responsible for the creation of numerous dangerous creatures, with the Corrupted being the most dangerous given that they cannot be seen by those without Shades, and they can alter reality still. The Corrupted lose all sense of self in the pursuit of feeling whole again. They seek to devour any form of life to feel whole for even a second. They accumulate souls and prevent them from passing on. They grow in strength as they trap more souls within themselves. The other aspects of Death made dolls who are called "angels" who hunt the Corrupted to free the souls trapped in the monsters. The Angels do not hunt normal Shades, but they do try to help them find their pieces should they cross paths. There is also an organization of Shade hunters who kill Shades, corrupted or otherwise, believing that they are all dangerous and have a duty to the dead

to help them pass on. The Titan, Logos, was a part of instrumenting this organization's creation.

Their purpose in the story lies in lore and creating another way for some characters to attain and keep power that might not otherwise be realistic. Their powers can help people avert odds that might otherwise seem impossible. They can also help do the impossible, where scientific reasoning might not make sense. The shades have a society of their own which correlates to actual power, granting them a higher status, with the Eldest Shade being the highest level in their society as they are the gods Life and Pathos. Those who remember their past play very important roles in helping people get ahead or even ruin both their own life and the life of the person they bonded with by vengeance for something in their past. Tobias's Shade is a piece of Raymond who seeks to better Tobias's life and show him how he could help people. Unfortunately, this Shade does not remember he is a piece of Raymond. Since Raymond is a demigod, he is an exception to the idea that all shades were people that died.

Overview

Humanity had free will, and while Shades could alter reality, what they could do was limited. Technology was still the main contributor to advancement. History followed trends surprisingly like our history, with a few exceptions due to Shades and Titans interfering. Titans even go as far as to live among humans, so they can influence them without directly controlling them. Many powerful people in this version of the world had the assistance of a shade as minor as their powers might have been. Logos and Chaos are some of the bigger manipulators. Chaos is fond of humanity as they are destructive and creative. She wormed her way into many civilizations throughout history. She eventually

takes the identity of Elizabeth and poses as one of the 12 immortals bonded to a forever Shade. She is not one of the 12 immortals but instead has her Shade as an accomplice. She was key in convincing many leaders to build the bunkers that would become the main “cities” in the current setting. In the end, Humans, Shades, and Titans all had a role in causing the apocalypse. Humanity had a lot of willpower when it came to finding ways to survive. Several Titans also decided to do more than watch as the world fell to ruin. Titans like Logos wish to reset it and return to the old system.

The story is set long after the apocalypse that left most of the earth's surface like a wasteland. It is far enough after the apocalypse that “cities” have emerged once more. They are created by those who survived in bunkers and various other sanctuaries that expanded back to the surface. “Cities” in this setting are larger than how we define cities today. They have self-sustaining societies with their own governments. It might be more accurate to call them independent states or small nations. There was general agreement by most of these places that they liked identifying as cities rather than trying to recover the past alliances and territories from the eras before. They also reserve the potential to unite by referring to themselves as such.

Most of the Earth is still a haunted wasteland claimed only by the monsters of Undeath. Reclaiming areas plagued by monsters is difficult. No one city wanted the sole responsibility of clearing the wasteland, so they established a treaty between cities. They could work together to reclaim wastelands from the monsters and attempt to terraform them as neutral ground. Once enough land is reclaimed, they would distribute it equally. This idea of equal distribution is brought up often as some cities feel they deserve more

for their efforts. It was put in place solely to prevent corporations and more militant cities from claiming the majority in the future.

The Greying

To top off an already awful societal system, there is also a bioweapon that randomly targets people. Called “Greying,” it slowly shuts down the body until the host dies due any numerous organ failures. It was seemingly designed to mimic a natural death, but it slowed limb function and targeted organs so persistently that surgeons discovered it was not a natural disease. Even with the advances of the healthcare systems in this story, they are no match for this Grey Weapon. The only option for people suffering from the Greying was to become a cyborg, as this bioweapon was never designed to target the brain. The Greying is still referred to as a disease or affliction by most people.

For context, this bioweapon was meant to target specific individuals for assassinations as discretely as possible by causing organ failures of varying kinds. It was controlled by an ai who was taken and hidden away by a madman on the weapons team who was under the belief that the ai loved him. The weapon fails at being discrete, given it was a prototype. Key identifying symptoms is the slow unnatural greying of one’s skin and numbness as parts of the body shut down. The encroaching apocalypse prevented the teams from locating the ai, and their efforts to disable the main lab that produced the weapons the ai controls were cut short. The Scarlett City housed one of the surviving scientists who sought to stop the ai, but that city fell to a variety of diseases and other bioweapons with the scientist among the many victims.

Tobias is not affected by the Greying, but he encounters people in the story who are. Stopping the Greying is not a main goal currently for this story, but it could become important in a different series in the same world or a later season of this series. It would open the series to expanding to other cities in order to find any information on the weapon. The Greying is a constant fear for all class levels as the ai had no bias in who it targets, and mankind's only option thus far is to become a cyborg to survive it. The Greying has a significant impact on the cyborg rights movement as many of those who are cyborgs did so out in order to survive. Jib Inno is a notable figure who is affected by the Greying, and it drove him to funding full body cybernetic research.

Cybernetics:

Cybernetics is one of many big topics that drive some characters in the story. There are opposing groups on the stance of cybernetics. There are factions of protesters, both for or against cybernetics, who divided themselves into violent and nonviolent protesters. These protesters are notable people with and without cybernetic and those with enough to qualify as cyborgs. An exclusive cyborg group of nonviolent protesters split into a small extremist group, and the peaceful members join the nonviolent protesters. They are religious fanatics such as those who worship this age as the dawn of machine evolution and the opposing idea that these robotic humanoids are demons. Neutral groups who do not lean in any direction are also present.

The invisible boundary of humanity

There is a percentage that the general population uses to determine if someone just has cybernetics or if they have replaced so much of themselves that they are no longer human. It was originally created as an excuse to figure out why doing such a

procedure was uncommon; however, the financial reasons alone are the biggest reason most people do not pursue this option, even if they are in dire need due to Greying.

I had a friend mention the Ship of Theseus when I explained the idea of an imagined line that people avoid when getting cybernetics in my story. It was the idea of whether a ship would still be the same if identical pieces replaced all its original pieces. These ideals are like a generalization of views, and I do not believe every person's belief will lie where they are for the same reason. The first general view would be the belief that those who crossed this line are no longer human and those who believe this refer to them as robots or machines. Allies and those who are cybernetically enhanced themselves, coined the term Cyborg as they felt the term cyborg embraces that mechanical nature while acknowledging they are different from robots. I would think that some people with cybernetics even hate that term, but generally, the view is that it is a respectable identity for those who like being a cyborg and want a label for themselves. There are even groups of fanatics who call themselves the Evolved in favor of cybernetics. The number of actual cyborgs is not common in the story's current time, and the struggle for establishing fair treatment is just picking up in the story as more and more people turn to cybernetics to survive the Greying.

Cybernetic Corporations

The leading company in cybernetics is Cy.Tech. They originally focused on military and security cybernetics, but they have moved on to include cybernetics for daily lives and specialized work tasks as well. Cy.Tech has gained so much power that it established a small private city consisting solely of Cy.Tech employees and their families. Rosy Rednetics is a mostly high-end brand that focuses on the aesthetic of its

product from a fashion perspective, and they are popular among the wealthy. Cyber Collar Cybernetics is a brand known for being affordable but not lasting or appealing. Despite selling at a lower price range, it is still a stretch for most lower-level people to afford. D4rk_M4rket is the last of the main brands. This company works solely in the shadows. They only sell in the lower levels. They make fake versions of other brand cybernetics, create military-grade cybernetics, and fence stolen official cybernetics. They also deal in forged registration records, their most purchased product.

There are several notable groups involved in the cybernetics scene on the social level, which play a role in the story more directly than the brands do. The Cyborg Rights Alliance protests peacefully for cyborgs to be treated as people, not machines. They want their rights to be protected from discrimination that arises from people treating them as if they were robots. A subgroup emerged from this group when a protest went disastrously wrong and ended up as a massacre of many cybernetically enhanced individuals. The protest's leader survived and founded a new group of extremists who felt the need to resort to violence to be heard. Their actions often create more problems for the Alliance. There's also a gang in the lower levels, the Metal Reapers. They have risen to prominence among the people at that level. Their leader supplies people with makeshift cybernetics. Despite the group's past, they have become beloved among those in the lower levels because they went from being a gang that profited from fear to a source of hope. This change was caused by Wekesa, a prominent character in the story. Wekesa took control of the group by force and used it to create the change he wanted to see. He interacts with Tobias frequently for his knowledge of cybernetics.

The Media Portrayals

Media is represented by corporate-funded news, government-funded news, and freelancers or even bloggers. Some freelancers report to stations with their stories rather than self-publicize. Small independent podcasters and small news stations are common. Corporations bought out nearly all the big stations and the remaining big stations are affiliated with government figures. They are used to keep up the propaganda that encourages the twisted ideas of striving to be better than others as a motivator, whether through physical means, status, or skill. They essentially publicize an incredibly skewed version of the American Dream. Their version involves finding any way possible to be better than someone else so you can feel good about the level at which you belong. The smaller groups are mostly free to criticize, promote, and protest. Individual creators have become the stars of news, drama, and information as they cater to specific groups. These creators are responsible for self-researching and can easily have wrong information even if they aim to be unbiased, factual news sources. There are sources who strive for neutral news and those with agendas. Their relevance to the story lies in how the conflicts are portrayed and Raymond's direct involvement as a journalist.

Characters

Tobias Lock, Main Character

Background:

Tobias lived in the Upper Middle Districts in the City of the Governed. He is the son of Dr. Vein Lock. They both worked for Cy. Tech. His father, however, is not a real inventor but a thief who eventually tricked Tobias into being drafted so he could take Tobias's work. Tobias's work included trying to create more bio-organic cybernetics. He wanted to lower the rejection rate of cybernetic implementation. When Tobias created this work, cybernetics existed, but they had a high rate of rejection and death in implementation. He thought if he mixed artificially created organic parts with the cybernetics, the rejection chances of cybernetics would drop significantly. The usual purpose of cybernetics is that they are mechanical and replaceable, so he opted to make a single BioCyber organ that would attempt to relieve the sources of usual cybernetic implementation failures. His most notable work, which was stolen, was the build for a BioCyber Heart, which had a high success rate in tested animals. When this piece was implemented, it enhanced the host's heart. It prepares the rest of the body for the stress and changes implementing the cybernetics will cause, as well as provides a better base to accept multiple strenuous cybernetics. Tobias's work significantly lowered rejection rates.

After being drafted, Tobias learned from other governed forces what it is like at the other levels. He learned how to fight but mainly served as their engineer and repairman in the field for nearly two years. He has a run-in with supposedly rebel forces that live in the In-Between, and he is severely injured. A wound that would usually be

fatal is reversed by the Shade that bonded to him, allowing him to survive until his squad found him. He returned to the City of Governed to find his work stolen, his home destroyed, and his husband missing.

Personality:

Tobias was a good guy. Intelligent and somewhat sweet. He was optimistic and a loyal member of the City of the Governed. After he was drafted, he learned to be calculated and cold when the time called for it. He became paranoid after numerous incidents in the In-Between zones, and this paranoia was worsened when he returned home to learn his own father stole his life's work. He has an ever-increasing sense of desperation as he learns he cannot find any work with his disability (the city is highly discriminatory). He finds himself drifting lower into the districts and learning about the living conditions of the lower levels. His sense of optimism is the only thing that keeps him relentlessly pushing onward. He has this desire that has always persisted in wanting to help others, even though he is suffering.



Figure 9. Tobias 1



Figure 10. Tobias 2

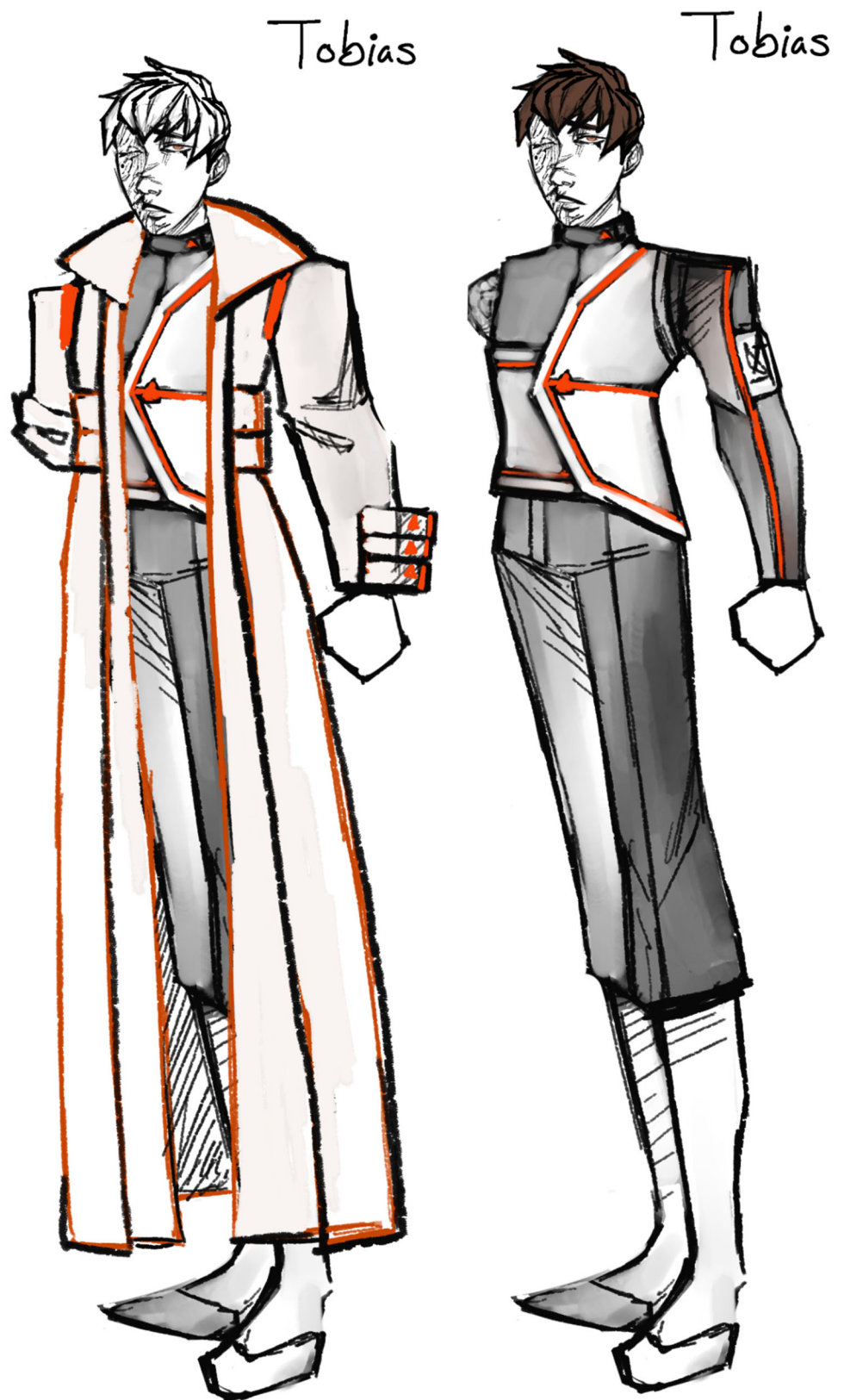


Figure 11. Tobias 3



Figure 12. Tobias and Raymond

Jib Inno, CEO of Cy.Tech

Personality

Jib is analytic, charismatic, and driven. He regards using force and science as the best ways to solve any problem. He is not a scientist himself, but he believes if he throws enough people and money at a problem, he can find a way to fix it. When he was affected by Greying, he became erratic and desperate in his desire to attain immortality. He threw out any regard for the lives of others, and he created secret labs in the wastelands that conducted inhumane experiments.

Notes:

Jib is the head of Cy.Tech. He took the company from simply producing weapons to rebranding and becoming the lead security cybernetics company. Until Tobias's heart design was stolen, most people could not get heavy security cybernetics, but after Tobias's work was implemented, they rose in power and popularity. Unfortunately, Jib Inno is suffering from Greying.

When he learned of shades, he leapt at the opportunity to scour the earth for one of these immortals in hopes of stealing their spot in the 12 without needing cybernetics. He had to give up his search when his Greying progressed to near-fatal stages, and he had to become a cyborg. After becoming a cyborg, he began his aggressive funding to attain a new form of immortality as a true machine.

He is one of the few who believe machines are the next step in evolution. His project Immortal is one that seeks to replace the entirety of the human body, mind included. While full-body cybernetics exists, they have not dared to emulate or upload human consciousness. Instead, they typically treasure the human brain as the last

sanctuary of a person's personality and soul. To get rid of that last piece of the body is to forgo humanity completely. Jib does not care for humanity. Instead, he aims to create a perfected ai of himself or find a way to upload consciousness.



Figure 13. Jib Inno

Vein Lock, Tobias's Father

Personality:

Vein, father to Tobias, was born in the City of the Arena. He was never the strongest physically, so he used any means necessary to fight his way up the levels. This progress includes anything from lying, cheating, stealing, and even murder. He avoids spilling blood himself if he can. He eventually escaped the City of the Arena because he was purchased by Jib Inno to be used as a spy. Jib hired him to gather intel, and Vein was very good at it. Vein eventually made his way up by stealing the research of numerous scientists who turned up missing. The kind of stuff would take Cy.Tech to the top of cybernetics. He presented it to Jib with the condition that he must pose as a scientist. Vein is smart to an extent, but he ended up profiting more on the backs of others rather than furthering his understanding of the research he was slapping his name on. He currently sits as the head of research, and his achievement gives him a high position in society. He is willing to do anything to keep that power he has now, including stealing from his son and having him drafted to get him out of the way in the least inconvenient way they have available.

Vein

Concept 1



Concept 2

from City of
Blood.

Cy. Tech
Gold level
Employee

Head of
Research

Figure 14. Vein

Raymond Lock

Background:

Raymond is the son of Scott and Elizabeth. He was born in the City of Governed. He was a journalist who reported to one of the political news stations that sided against the Governor, his own father. He is the type to laser focus on whatever story he is digging into, but he'll drop it the moment Tobias asks him to. He had little regard for his own safety when snooping, and it was a stark reminder to have Tobias worry about him when he got home. Without Tobias, he let down his guard when searching for answers.

Special Notes:

Later in the story, Raymond became an experimental cyborg while recklessly investigating Cy. Tech. He was driven to become a vigilante reporter after his official journalist career ended when he went into hiding. He wants the city to change, and he still believes the news is the best way. He despises his new form and takes immense efforts to keep his identity hidden and avoid being seen entirely. His former journalistic skills have been put into use as he provides most of his evidence to the Black Market to report in his stead. Jib Inno and Vein became his biggest targets after he learned about their involvement in drafting Tobias, but they have been untouchable because they are equipped to combat his stealth capabilities. Raymond had no way to contact Tobias in the wastelands, and he feared Tobias was dead for the two years he was gone.

Design Notes:

Raymond underwent a redesign. I felt he should look more like his father, so I changed his face. He wears a demon mask when sulking about the city. He is immensely uncomfortable with his cybernetics taking great efforts to avoid people as often as

possible. In every encounter with Tobias until Tobias confronts him, he hides his face in fear of the chance of rejection. The only people who know his real identity at this point are a select few allies and the heads of Cy.Tech.

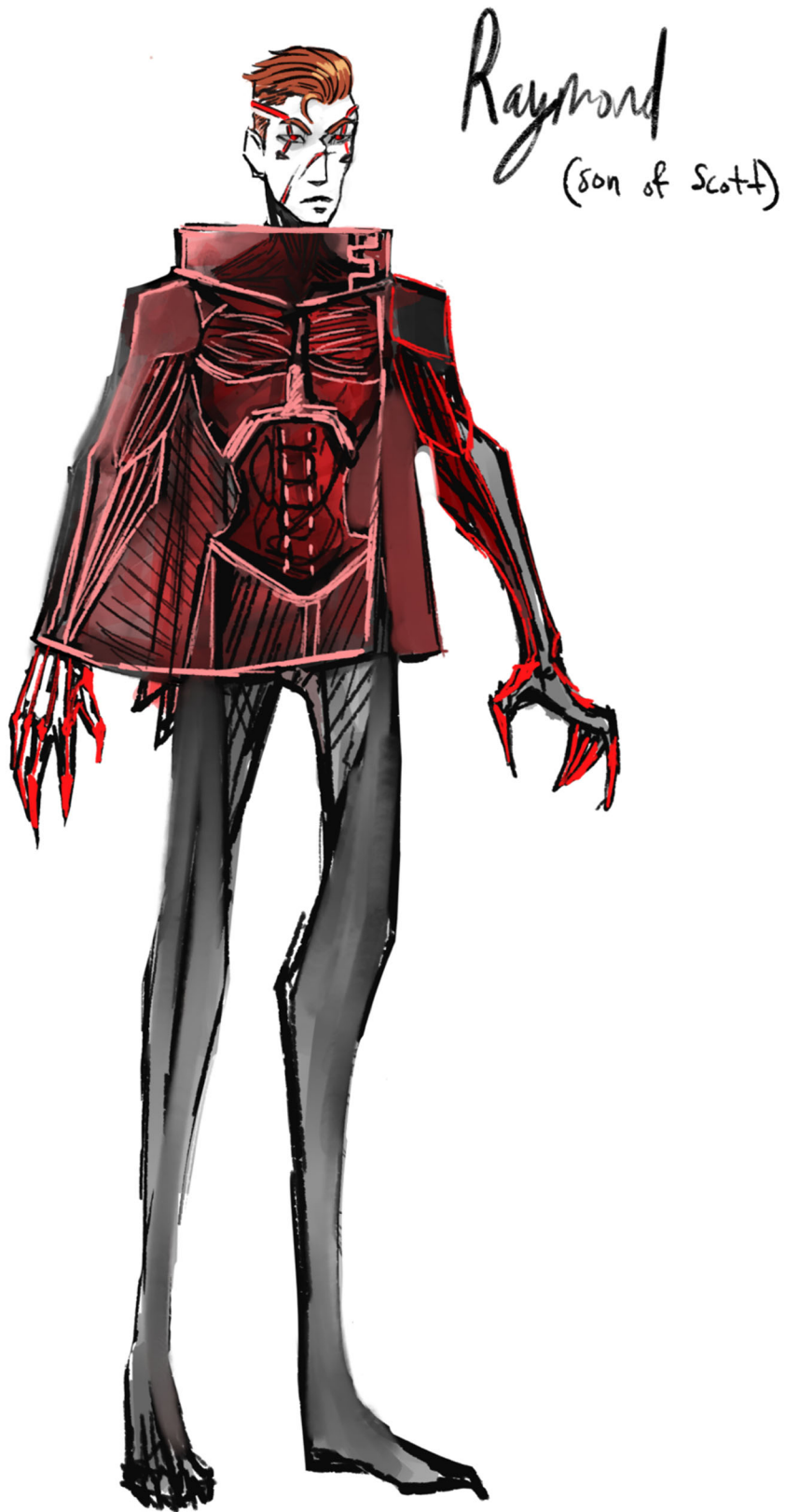


Figure 15. Raymond 1



Figure 16. Raymond 2

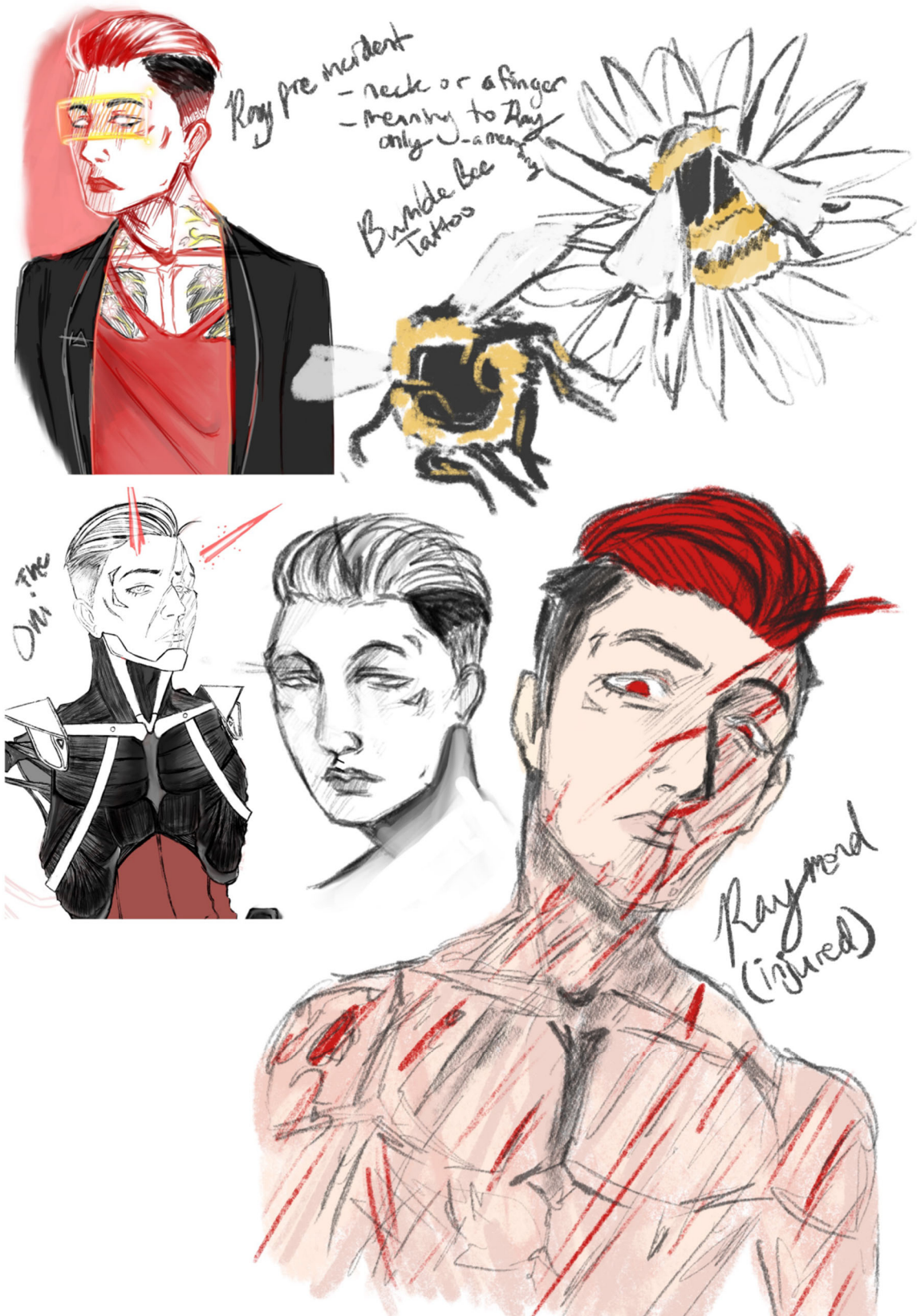


Figure 17. Raymond 3



Figure 18. Raymond Redesign

Scott Smith, The Governor and Hero of The City

Personality:

Scott was born during the medieval ages as the son of a blacksmith. He has a twin brother Rye. They have a lengthy backstory regarding how Scott came to hate Rye and how they share the same Shade. Neither one can hurt the other, or they will both be harmed.

Scott is the governor of the City of the Governed. He desperately wants to be seen as a hero; more specifically, he wants to be seen as a knight. He listens to Elizabeth's every command and suggestion as he trusts her completely to guide him in the right direction. He has lived since the medieval era and witnessed many falls of kingdoms, nations, and the end of the world, as well as the dawn of a new one. For the longest time, he obeyed Elizabeth's every order, believing it was the right thing to do. He has blind

loyalty to her that has lasted for thousands of years. There is no real love between the two, but there is a powerful dynamic between a tyrannical queen and her loyal knight.

Scott's growth comes when Raymond goes missing some time after Tobias, his son-in-law, was drafted. It was something Elizabeth had no interest in investigating after Scott brought it up. Despite her command to leave it be, Scott decides to look into Raymond's disappearance himself. He violently pursues information which leads Tobias to dead ends if Scott got to someone first. Scott's discovery of Cy.Tech's involvement in both Tobias and Raymond's lives, as well as Elizabeth's lack of empathy, sparks a true rage in him that causes him to finally break his tie to Elizabeth and target Cy.Tech on his own.

Scott

also
showcase
his Noble
(fashion line
loosely
based on
historic wear)



Figure 19. Scott

Elizabeth Smith, the Titan of Chaos

Personality:

Elizabeth is the Titan of Chaos. Chaos is not necessarily an aspect of the Illogical realm, but she had the closest connection to it before order was broken. She represents all that is random or impulsive and violent. In the original system, the only role she was permitted was the random calculations for creating diversity. She understood she could have a much grander role if living beings had choices instead of following Logic's calculated commands for their entire lives. After the breaking of the old system, she has adopted various human forms and enjoyed living amongst humans. She views herself as the true patron and goddess of humankind and free will. She would argue that she was the reason that all creatures have free will. She derives the utmost pleasure in inspiring chaos and violence and offering choices to humans that lead to unpredictable outcomes. She has been known to shapeshift and play any role needed to incite wars, for which she derived the most pleasure for centuries. She once argued that if humans were to cause their end, then that is how it should be because it was their decisions that led to it; however, when the end came, she was too fond of living among humans. She played a key role in saving millions of humans by creating these bunkers that would later become the cities in the story.

She currently enjoys a luxurious life in the City of the Governed, with Scott acting as her public figure, husband, and personal puppet. However, she still enjoys inciting chaos and manipulating the people of this city. She has several ongoing plots that keep the city divided, and she plays a role in the establishment of segregated classes by wealth and status. She benefitted more by keeping the city divided by levels instead of allowing

freedom to travel up or down. She cares very little for any actual differences in humans. Instead, she delights in the conflict and struggles she created by propagating the belief that greater wealth in her city means you are better than everyone who is poorer. Despite the pleasure she once derived from war, she is fonder of controlled chaos. She is greatly opposed to a war with Cy.Tech, and she would easily abandon Scott and take his position as governor if it meant keeping her city running how she has created it.

On another note, she has several children in the city. Raymond is the only child she raised directly, while the others were treated more like social experiments. If they provided her entertainment by being unpredictable, she would reward them in different ways just to see what they would do next. Raymond has a distant relationship with her due to her detached nature. None of her children know that they are not entirely human as they appear human, except for Raymond, who learned of his demigod blood when he almost died in the Cy.Tech experiments.



Figure 20. Chaos/Elizabeth

Rye Smith

Personality:

Twin brother to Scott. He is the leader of the rebellion that opposes the City of the Governed. He believes Scott is under a spell and that Elizabeth is the true evil. He often calls her a witch. He aims to help the city by overthrowing Scott and Elizabeth. He started the rebellion as a final attempt to try and stop her. He does not promote his ulterior motive to save Scott to his group, nor that his death would kill them both. He is strong-willed and stubborn. His group resides in a secret base in the wastelands. He is one of the 12 immortals bound to a Forever Shade. There is an odd link to Scott and Rye; if either of them dies, the other does too.

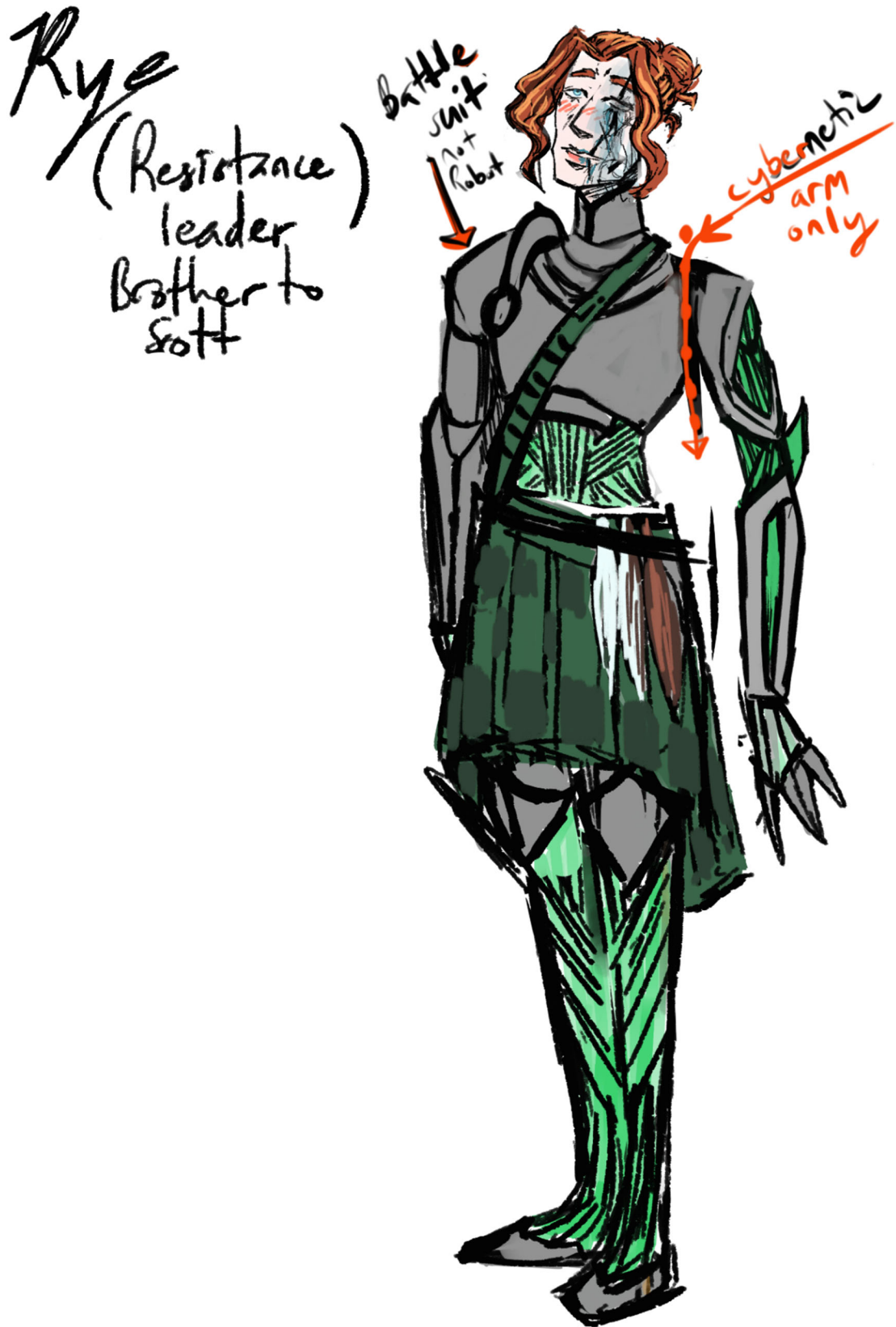


Figure 21. Rye

Logos

Personality:

Logos was the previous king of the Titans. He fell from grace when his system fell apart after Life and Pathos tried to destroy reality. The other Titans lost faith in his ability to rule, and they turned to Chaos for leadership. Despite being the Titan of Logic, he was forced to embody the ideals of the illogical as well. While Chaos might have been an ideal god, she acted with randomness and free will, letting the universe choose Logo to embody law and the lack thereof. Logos' mind was split in two the moment the first Shade entered the First Reality. He changes between Logos and Illogical. Logos still despises free will, Shades, and anything else that plays a role in defying the system and natural laws of nature.

He created an organization called The Order. The thought of persuading humans annoys him, but he finds using reason to manipulate humans somewhat entertaining. It is possible in part because of the piece of Illogical that he even considers such tactics and enjoys them. They hunt Shades and anything else from the Unseen World. There are times when Logos comes under immense strain whenever anything does not go his way. Illogical takes over, and he becomes all the worse aspects of himself. The distaste that restrains him from breaking his rules is lifted. He takes on the features of the Illogical reality, not necessarily representing Chaos, but instead, he bends his own rules to accomplish his goals. The very thing he despises is a part of him, and his hate for it usually brings him back to balance.



Figure 22. Logos

Conclusion

What did I learn?

For the longest time, I looked at social classes without knowing much else about social and behavioral sciences. While I still like the idea of a dystopian story based on social classes, it has become much more involved as I learned about the complicated layers within the study of societal structures. Social classes are one form of classification that typically uses wealth, education, or income as factors for grouping. Groups are commonly divided into the upper, middle, and lower classes, with inconsistent theories on the divisions of the sub-classes of those main three. Course Hero (2022) was the general resource I used to get familiar with the topic. They have the working class as one of the main four before the lower class. I felt slightly put off by the concept of calling one group the working class. It was likely not meant to be taken that way, but I consciously decided I preferred to stick to the main three with the usual idea of dividing each of those into more sublevels.

The idea of socioeconomic stratification became important to my work as I found Wendy Bottero's work (2005). Bottero explained that social stratification is essentially the pattern of inequality that persists over generations. She defined stratification further in this definition which stood out to me, "Stratification is concerned with how some have more freedom and choice than others. Money, power or influence give those who possess them greater control over the external forces which affect us all, and open doors which might otherwise be closed" (Bottero, 2005). Additionally, Bottero states that social class and status are stratification factors. The general idea is that those in the same group are more likely to interact with others of the same group calling this differential association.

This separation leads to the idea that the lack of interaction partially derives from how each social class lives. The various groups do not interact in ways that form the close-knit ties that allow social mobility. For my story, I wish to lead back to the idea that some doors are not open for those who lack the funds to open them. If one cannot afford to interact with wealthy people, one will have a harder time establishing themselves amongst that social class. This idea is like the terms Old Money and New Money. Even when someone attains the wealth to be considered upper class, they may not gain the social status to receive the same connections as others.

The idea of class separation was further supported in research done by Leo et al. (2016), in which they gathered data that supported the idea of interaction of social classes being higher amongst those of the same class as well as including data on how groups tend to live in similar areas of wealth. This definition led me to be interested in the concept of social mobility. Social mobility is the ability to change one's social standing in a social class. I found one economic review that did studies on mobility, and as far as I could understand, the trend of someone's wealth, income, and savings will affect their social mobility.

I also found concepts such as the distribution of wealth. It did initially lead to dissatisfaction with the 1%. I realized that if I view this from different perspectives, I cannot generalize everyone in that group. To some degree, that difference in wealth angers me. I do not intend to make every upper-class individual in the story some evil figure. I am also not stepping down from the fact that sometimes people in power can be bad people who got there because they did bad things. Scott would be an example of someone who wants to do good. Jib is genuinely cruel, but he would be just as cruel even

if he were within the lower-class levels. I could see his character being ruthless and running a gang. As my research continued, I was unsure how much I should rely on social theories as a base for my story setting. I questioned how poorly it comes across that I generalize these ideas in the world-building portion of my project. I learned that class systems are a theory that, if compared to real life, will not entirely line up. I did decide that I felt it was important enough that these things could lay down a foundation, but they are not the entire house.

Future Plans

I have more characters and plans that have not made it to the refinement stage and concept art. All the characters presented in this thesis are the ones who will make it into the final version. Additional areas of research are in-depth studies of the American healthcare systems. I was not able to get to this due to not properly understanding much of the terminology that many sources used. Those aspects of the story are based purely on my own experiences as my family has struggled to pay large medical bills for emergency care and the later expensive medications that are needed. We live with a fear that we cannot afford the care we need to remain healthy.

This project will help me immensely in the future as I develop the story further and utilize the concepts, research, and world-building I have done thus far. The research I have done has taken my story so much further in terms of considering the complexities of society and people in general. I completely redid my story at several points and decided to focus on world-building in the end because of how influential the research became to the project. I wanted more depth to the story I was telling. Comparatively, the story went from being, “the upper class hates the lower class, and that’s why they oppress them,” to

having legitimate villains who created these divisions to separate people and varying groups of people who just do not interact with other, not necessarily out of an ill will, but because they do not live lives where they would ever meet. There is propaganda in the story that encourages the belief in an “American Dream” and is based on encouraging those in lower classes not to give up and to congratulate those at higher levels. It provides the hope of social mobility without actualizing social mobility.

I felt some concern as I was writing a lot about the world's social groups and majority ideals. I would like to acknowledge that, like real people, there would not be many characters who would match a lot of the generalizations I have in the world-building section. I essentially have planned a lot of general groups and views, but acknowledge that all these things, especially the social classes, are not clear-cut and views shift or lie in-between. Keeping that in mind will help the story too.

This project took on more meaning as time went on. I even changed from thinking this would be a graphic novel in its final form to leaning towards a webcomic because webcomics are more accessible, and I can afford to self-publish the story that way when I am ready. I suppose my goal of living a life with enough money to work a job I like is much different from the goals of Jib Inno, in my story, who has money and desires immortality. Immortality is not a plausible goal for me, but it might be the next step for a man who has raised an entire corporate military power.

It matters so much to me that this story feels like an actual place with a story to tell despite the dystopian nature. I enjoyed learning about all the intricate ways social interaction, social classes, and environments sculpt how lives are affected. The whole story includes views from multiple people instead of just one; however the first season

will focus on Tobias's journey. We only really experience one journey in our lives, and our experiences are unique. The circumstances we are born into can affect how hard it might be to reach our dreams. They might even affect the shape our dream takes.

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