

Skies of Glass Feel Document

Introduction

This document contains the "feel" guidelines for our development of Skies of Glass. For more information on setting the feel for a new game, download episode 29 of Fear the Boot.

I. Realism

Skies of Glass is far from the first post-nuclear setting to be created. However, one thing every major competitor setting I'm aware of has lacked is thoughtful realism. They all include magic, half-animal mutants, super-evolved men, glowing blast sites, intelligent apes, campy societies ruled by Tina Turner, and so forth.

Skies of Glass should capture a very believable post-nuclear world. The research for this series will come from FEMA estimates, defense agencies, and textbooks -- not the video games or movies that have previously set the tone for this genre. This setting is fictional, but it should not be fantastic. The nuclear bombs and the ensuing disasters should all conform to our current scientific understanding of how such things really work. Radiation produces cancer and deformed babies, not super powers. Societies will form the way they normally do, as described by sociologists, instead of picking up bizarre, singular obsessions. Every aspect of this game should make a reader stop and say, "Yeah. It could really happen like that."

II. Suffering

Being a post-nuclear world, suffering is a major theme of the game. However, being 50 years after the bomb, the majority of this suffering is not from radiation or the other direct effects of the nukes. Instead, it comes from...

1. The loss of infrastructure. Clean water, sewer systems, industry, transportation, and electricity do not exist in most places. In the desperate years after the bomb, looting damaged them even further. The efficiency and productivity of society varies from place to place, but is generally pre-industrial. When society fell, it was not structured or trained to survive in this state, nor has it still fully adapted to it.
2. Health concerns. As a result of #1, disease and starvation are common in many places. Lingering effects of radiation poisoning can also be seen in the occasional deformity, local surges in thyroid cancer, etc.
3. The aggression of fellow man. The single greatest danger to most people are the factors listed in #2, but fellow man is a close second. Typically the dangers are lone criminals or desperate individuals that are willing to survive at someone else's expense. In some location, there are despotic governments, cults, or organized conspiracies one must contend with, and there are violent, nomadic bands that rove the world.

III. Hope

When faced with catastrophe, it's the nature of mankind to adapt, organize, and find a way forward. While suffering is an important theme of Skies of Glass, so is hope. Ultimately this game is about the struggle of humanity to grow past this nightmare. The world is full of darkness, and hope may not always be an overt theme, but it should be the quiet undercurrent of the entire series.

IV. Local Variety

Because of the decay of infrastructure, it is very difficult for governments to rule large geographic areas. Most of North America consists of small villages or lone farms that have little discernible government at all. When mankind does cluster together, the societies they build will vary radically in structure and benevolence from one place to the next. There is no singular organization that can exert absolute rule over large swaths of land without relying on the assistance of local rulers.

V. Spirit of Place

Sociologists have noted that every civilization that emerges in a given place tends to have certain common trends, since they share the exact same plants, animals, weather conditions, and so forth. This does not mean we must carbon copy existing cultures into the new setting, but just keep in mind that the ecology they share will generate some loose commonalities. A similar effect may emerge from the ruins a society exists near. For example, a society that has easy access to a military base will likely have more weapons and survival supplies than one built near a farming community.

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VI. Human Variety

There is no society on the face of the Earth where everyone is the same. Nor should there be in Skies of Glass. The people of every location should have at least a weak level of diversity.

Similarly, no society should be centered around a single, cliché theme. If there are a few working cars in one place, they should not therefore become Motor City where every single aspect of life centers around cars, people worship cars, the mayor is named Ford Lincoln, car paintings decorate the neighboring caves...you get the idea.

This is not to say there cannot be important, central aspects to societies. In real world history, plains Indians had a special regard for buffalo because of their central role in daily life. All we're asking is that such themes should not reach a level where they become a campy single-minded focus of everyone's lives.

VII. Continuity from the Pre-Bomb World

The people that built the post-bomb world are those that were around before the bomb. The setting should reflect that continuity. These people are going to draw on their own resources, skills, and cultures to find inspiration. If you want to write about New Mexico, the fact that this post-bomb society was built by Hispanic, white, and Navajo people -- predominantly Catholic or Navajo in faith -- should figure into the picture.

As with "spirit of place" this does not mean you must directly transpose our world into the game. Just be sure that if you create a society where everyone has reverted to sun worship (for example) there is some reasonable sociological path that leads up to this.

VIII. Asking the Right Questions

Skies of Glass may certainly have interesting things and places in it. However, we do not want our material to focus on "cool stuff", but instead the human element that makes the world move. In other words, we want to focus on who, where, and why -- not what.

IX. Not a Pulpit

Skies of Glass is not intended to be a platform for cheap political, religious, or anti-religious lessons. We realize politics and religion are important parts of the human experience, so by no means are these subjects off-limits. Just be sure to deal with them in a way that explores all of their depth and complexity rather than just grinding axes against real-world groups.