

Sunsetting Mall

Storyland Studios Design Challenge 2024

Carter Jones



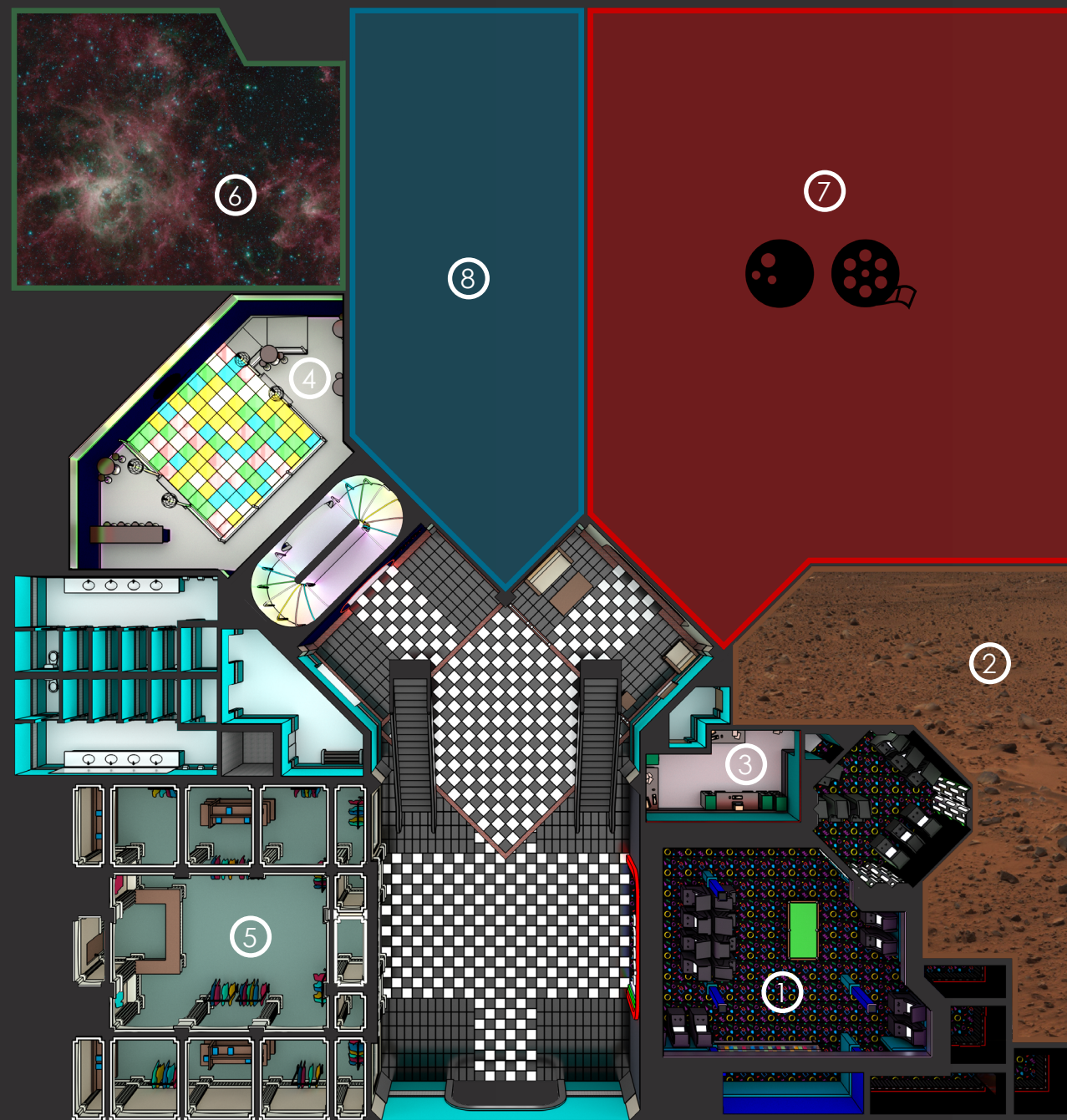
Sunsetting Mall is a new immersive theater attraction that combines nostalgia and interaction to tell an original story set in a fading shopping mall from the 80's. Through a rich cast of characters and detailed historic environments, guests discover clues and experiences that unveil the mall's strange occurrences, all stemming from the arrival of supernatural entities in 1989. Among the groups at play in this attraction are the supernatural Dupes with a strange power over their environment, the Theorists and InvestiForce who are digging into the location's secrets, and The Lost who have had their memories erased as a result of the Dupe arrival. Each character has their own story and motivation which is discovered through guest interaction with actors and the many experiences set within the shops of the mall. After discovering the origins of the Dupes, a way to remedy the memories of the Lost, and how to navigate the Dupe-corrupted environments, the story culminates in uncovering the last of the Dupe's secrets – their living home and hideaway in the dark recesses of the mall.

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Layout



1

Arcade

Nostalgic arcade cabinets fill this busy space with lights and noise. It is here guests can witness the corruptive effects of the Dupes firsthand in the VR Booths or can discover InvestiForce's hidden surveillance room.

2

VR Planet

After stepping into what seems an enclosed VR Booth, a wall opens up, letting guests explore this "VR" planet. Here, the Dupe's tech distortion is seen with glitches and unsettling features creating an alien environment.

3

Surveillance Room

In this hideout, tucked behind an arcade cabinet, the research and truth of InvestiForce is discovered. They have been monitoring the whole mall and have even found a way to temporarily restore The Lost's memories.

4

Club 2000

With fun music and a glowing dance floor, Club 2000 was once a prime-feature of the mall. In the present though, Judie Pop is its sole inhabitant, living in a past long gone. Here she recounts what little is remembered of her life.

5

Sunsetting Gifts

Not directly tied to any story developments, this gift shop both serves as an in-universe hangout and as the attraction's merchandise location. Guests can buy an assortment of clothes, gifts, and other souvenirs here.

6

Dupe Forest

Accessible from the second floor's Showrooms, the Dupe Forest is the nexus of their activity. As the current major reveal of the story, the Dupes live here in nests suspended from tree-like structures living inside the mall.

7

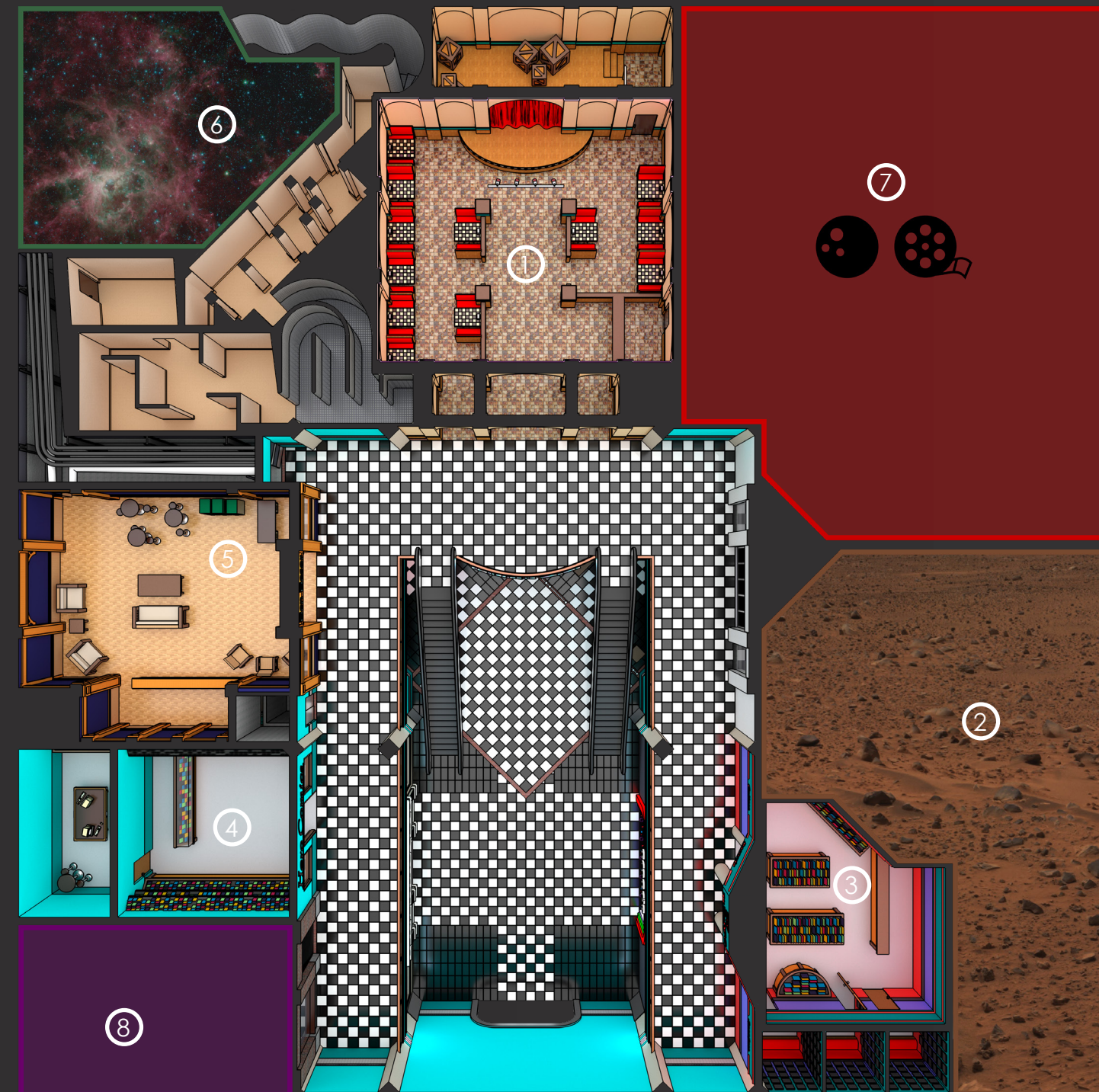
Expansion Plot A

This area marked for future expansion can house a major two-floor story addition. This could take the form of a bowling alley or movie theater, with the main plot revolving around InvestiForce's interest in the mall's secrets.

8

Staff + Storage

Centrally located next to the atrium, this space provides rest areas for staff between character routes. It also creates a storage space for larger props, seasonal decorations, and merchandise for Sunsetting Gifts.



1 Presley Pig's Pizza

In this pizzeria, the animatronic mascot has begun glitching out due to the Dupe's influence. As it roams out of its programmed bounds, it rambles a supernatural story about the Dupe's origins and how they came to the mall.

5 Den Decor

This seemingly normal store hides a secret in its back Showrooms. The reality of this hidden labyrinth has become distorted, and the space becomes more strange as you progress, eventually ending at the heart of the Dupe plot.

2 VR Planet

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3 DJ Music

This music store has lost its rhythm as a result of the Dupe corruption. Here, guests can use the audio booths to uncover a coded message in the music, leading towards the Dupe's hideout in the back Showrooms of Den Decor.

7 Expansion Plot A

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4 Hero Comics

This geek-haven has been converted into the base of operations for the Theorists. From the backroom reserved for their "tabletop club", this group investigates the mall, often running into conflict with InvestiForce and their approach.

8 Expansion Plot B

A smaller space for future expansion, this area would be used for another venue to add a subplot to the story. Potential ideas for this location could include an exercise studio, movie rental store, or security office.



Characters

Dupes

The Dupes are supernatural beings that reside within the depths of the mall. Their sudden arrival in 1989 set off the mysteries lingering today.

They have a corruptive effect wherever they roam, causing spaces to become unfamiliar and technology to distort, all while mimicking the appearance of humans.

Presley Pig



The performing mascot of Presley Pig's Pizza, this robot has been corrupted by the Dupes, causing it to act up. When this corruption causes it to miss a performance, it can be found wandering the mall, causing issues for residents, investigators, and guests, all the while leaving behind clues to solving the Dupes' origins.

Cleo



As one of the original arrivals in 1989, Cleo must protect the secret of their presence. She patrols the mall, doing routine wipes on The Lost and trying to prevent InvestiForce and Theorists from uncovering the truth. Wherever she goes, environments are disrupted and technology glitches out, creating evidence towards the Dupes' presence.

The Lost

The original inhabitants of the mall, this group has stories to tell - at least, if they could remember anything from the last 40+ years. As original witnesses to the Dupes arrival, their memories are erased frequently to hide the secret, causing this group to still believe it is 1989.

Judie Pop

Forgotten 80's music sensation Julie Pop is resident of the mall's dance club. After her hit 1988 single, "Sodie Pop", she seemed to vanish from the public eye, falling victim to the Dupe's memory erasure. She lingers in the club waiting for her next performance, with dancing and singing as the only things she can still recall from her old life.

Sarah Jo

As the comic book shop owner, Sarah hosts the Theorist's "tabletop club" in the back room. As one of The Lost, Theorists frequently ask her questions and attempt tests to find out more about Dupes. Unfortunately, due to the memory wipes and an overall uncaring attitude, it is difficult to get information from her.



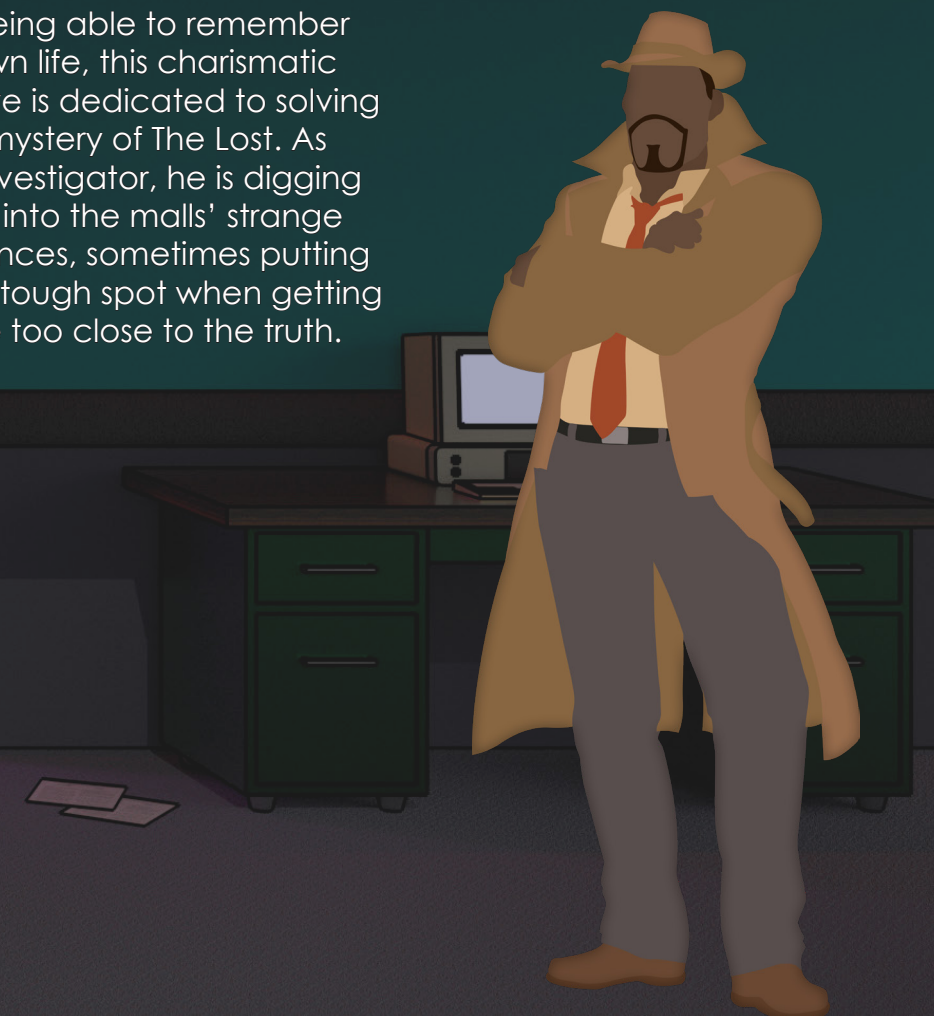
InvestiForce

A private investigation force sent to solve the issues arising from Sunsetting Mall, this faction is mainly concerned with discovering the truth of the invasion and unlocking the secrets of the Dupe's powers over reality to the benefit of their powerful employer.



Detective Glenpool

Not being able to remember his own life, this charismatic detective is dedicated to solving the mystery of The Lost. As lead investigator, he is digging deep into the malls' strange occurrences, sometimes putting him in a tough spot when getting a little too close to the truth.



Theorists

This ragtag band of investigators is often overlooked for their “outrageous” conspiracies, but they are the ones truly trying to discover the Dupe plot and restore order to the mall. Operating out of their base in the comic book shop, they dig into the mall’s secrets, enlisting the help of guests to gather information and solve mysteries.

Chuck Crimson



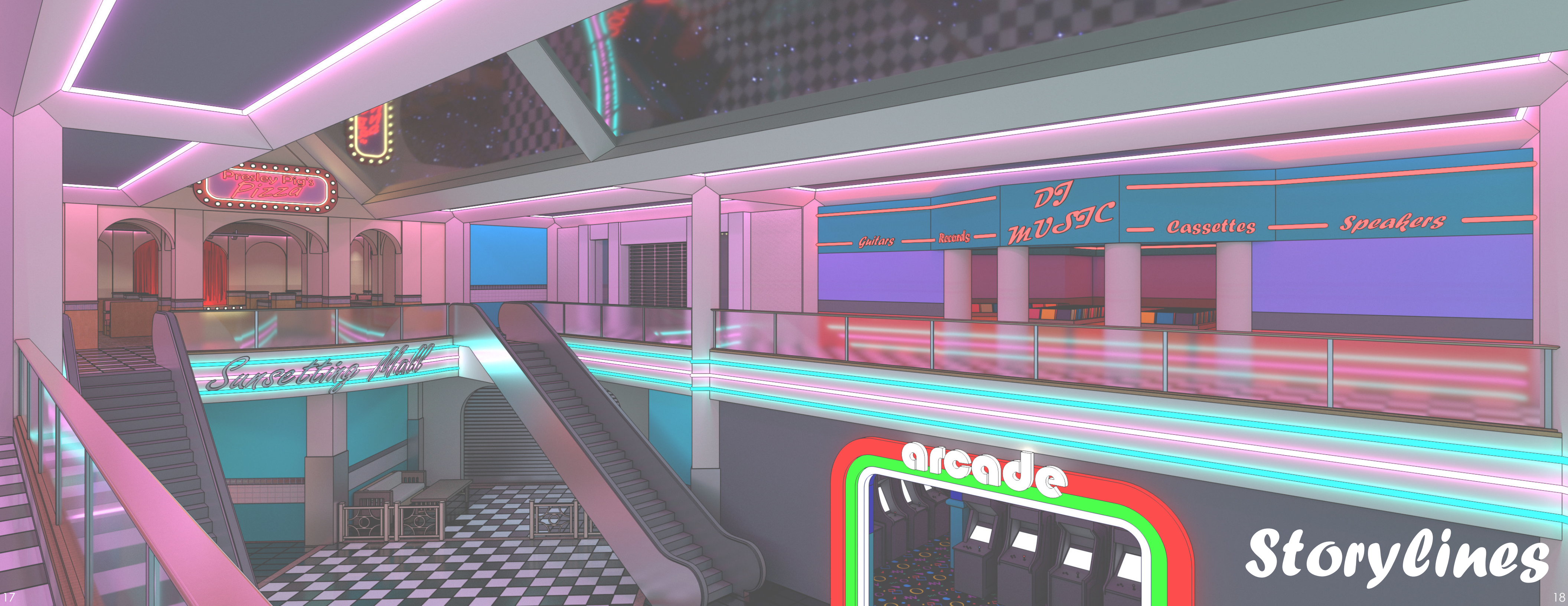
Considered the leader of the group, Chuck keeps an eye on the mall and creates devices that help the Theorists detect and counteract the Dupes' influence.

Though his commitment to the cause is undeniable, his motivations are clouded - even his real name is a secret. He just chose this one because it “sounded like a superhero”.

Sam Pines



Sam is the perfect companion to any plan the Theorists come up with. Always willing to lend a hand and offer up information to help the cause, they are the perfect person to introduce newcomers to the mall's more hidden truths.



First Encounters

Forgotten Memories

Interacting with the regular inhabitants of the mall, they all seem a little strange, thinking it is 1989 and not knowing anything of the past forty years. They also have no idea about the mysteries surrounding the place, despite being here all the time. What could have happened for them to forget everything about the past and themselves?

Glitched Amusement

Trying out the arcade's premier attraction, the VR booths, you are transported into an alien world. Everything seems so realistic! Although strange happenings pervade the game, with unsettling glitches and distorted environments seemingly corrupting the experience. What is causing all of these errors?

Recruitment

While exploring, you come across others trying to solve the mysteries of the mall, the Theorists and Detective Glenpool. Each tell you a bit about what is going on and encourage you to join them in search of answers. Each recommend places and characters you should look more into for information about these "Dupes" causing trouble.

Digging Deeper

Phrase of the Day

On the recommendation of Glenpool or through exploration of the space, you find a hidden passage behind an arcade machine, leading to what looks to be a surveillance room. In here, you find out about Glenpool's employer, InvestiForce, and their methods of briefly returning memories to the lost through saying a certain phrase.

Rogue Technology

Hearing of the mall pizzeria's robot mascot acting up has brought you to eavesdropping on its strange ramblings. You overhear it telling the story of a group of supernatural beings that came to inhabit the mall after their previous home was destroyed during its development. Among this group is that Cleo character and... Detective Glenpool?

Resolutions

Family Reunion

Using the code phrase on members of The Lost returns their memories to them for a moment, letting them share an account of the Dupe invasion in 1989. Speaking to Judie reveals her forgotten son, Chuck, who has spent all this time with the Theorists trying to find a way to reunite with his mother. You finally bring peace to this once-separated family.

Mistaken Identity

Now knowing Glenpool's true identity, you break the news to him. He is a Dupe who, in a memory wipe gone wrong, forgot himself. Conflicted, he asks you to use the code phrase on him to see what he remembers. Seeing the damage they have caused, he sides with the humans, revealing the location of the Dupe's hideout for you to explore.

Messages in Melodies

While searching for clues to solve the Dupe mystery, you enter the music store, where all the songs have become corrupted by off-beats. With the aid of decoding resources you gained from the Theorists or InvestiForce, you enter an audio booth and uncover the hidden message in those off-beats, leading to the Dupe hideout in the Showrooms.

Finale

The Belly of the Beast

With all the knowledge you have gained, you head to the Den Decor furniture shop. Going beyond the main room into the back Showrooms, you encounter increasingly bizarre and unnatural spaces. Walls are deformed, everything takes on a stale condition, corridors lead to dead ends, bathroom tiles break into strange geometries, and columns are placed randomly about the room.

Finally, reaching a snaking staircase down, you find the living home of the Dupes. Blackened tendrils shoot up from the ground, with teardrop-shaped nests hanging from the offshoots. A light inside tells you the Dupes are present. Are they watching you now? Will they let you leave with this knowledge?

You wander the space, knowing all the mall's problems stem from this spot here. Both wonder and terror encapsulate you within the dark heart of Sunsetting Mall.



Logistics

Purpose

With the world continuing to move towards online shopping and the steady decline of public spaces for people to meet in, shopping malls are steadily falling into memory. With this project, malls can have a new experience to draw in customers, themed around their own history with a creative twist.

This attraction is uniquely situated to meet the demands of current audiences who desire immersive experiences that go beyond simple thrills. With a rich story and characters, guests will be talking about the project both on-location and off, contributing to a community that theorises on the latest developments and tries to piece together the story. Leaning into this concept and using an Augmented Reality Game (ARG) to expand the attraction universe can engage this audience wherever they are at, leading to a memorable experience that begins long before ever stepping foot on location.

Operations

This attraction provides many positions for a variety of employees, including actors, retail, maintenance, custodial, and productions staff. Each of the front-of-house individuals are encouraged to lean into the story being told by creating their own in-universe characters to fit in with the existing ones and overall narrative. This encourages employees to have fun with their positions, and it enhances the guest's immersion within the environment.

While this proposal outlines a regular operating day at the attraction, there is plenty of potential for expansion beyond this concept. Given Sunsetting Mall's environment, seasonal activities and private events can also operate, introducing more ways for guests to engage with the experience and providing an additional revenue source.

Environment

With Sunsetting Mall being an adaptive reuse project for the anchor store location of malls, construction and the environmental impact associated with it would be at a minimum. Because of the project's historic period approach, set design costs both financially and environmentally can be reduced by reusing existing props and materials. Additionally, because of the large surface area of anchor store roofs, this creates a great opportunity for harvesting solar energy, a concept that could prove to benefit shopping centers everywhere.

Each of these factors combine to reduce the negative impact this project could have on the environment while also finding ways to reduce consumption in the long term.

Adaptation

An immediate benefit of the concept is the ability to scale according to space requirements. With various stores and venues included in the project package, operator's can easily adjust the included experiences to fit their site. This also applies to demographics, as offerings can be easily tailored to the local audience. The stores and activities within the mall can be adapted to products of the local culture or to better fit the types of experiences that audience enjoys.

This also benefits maintenance and refurbishment, as the compartmental mall approach allows for quick closure of one section without interfering with the rest of the experience. Changing the offerings available will not mean a lengthy loss of revenue for operators.