



STARVING FOR AIR

AARON KUTHOOR

SETH ROYSTON

MILES ESGUERRA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	2
2. The Story	3
a. Setting	
b. Characters	
c. Themes	
d. Plot Arcs	
3. Gameplay	13
a. Description	
b. Mockup	
4. Story Moment Sample	15
a. Description	
b. Mockup	

INTRODUCTION

NOTHING ABOVE.



NOTHING BELOW.

Such is the life of the **Kim family**. Wake up, breathe in plumes of thick, dark smoke, and glide through the day as if you were a ghost. The Kim siblings have always been haunted by misfortune. Abandoned by their parents for reasons unknown to them, the elder **Soo-hee** has taken on the duty of shielding young **Jung-hee** from the harsh realities they face.

Taking place years later in the same universe as Bong Joon-Ho's *Parasite*, ***Starving for Air*** explores class divisions and the struggles that exist within them. The rich and poor have a deeply personal, direct relationship— no one has clean hands, everyone is a leech. In order to survive, someone has to be stepped on. Soo-hee knows this well and has played the game of life among the lower class for as long as they can remember. Hopping from job to job, the elder sibling has always fought for the right to survive in a city that drowns out any cries for help.

Now Soo-hee is presented with a seemingly golden opportunity— an old friend that had made it big offers up a job in a factory owned by an incredibly successful company near the Kim home. Paying enough to make rent, close enough to keep an eye on Jung-hee, what more could you ask for?

As Soo-hee quickly learns, money changes everything.

The life of the remaining Kim family is pulled apart at the seams even further as Soo-hee unearths the dirty history of the city and people around them. Stability of the family comes first, but how can you provide it when yours is slipping away?

THE STORY

SETTING



South Korea — Like *Parasite*, *Starving for Air* is set in South Korea's capital, Seoul. As its capital, the city is filled with the glamor and elegance that capital would give, especially as the center of a country with the 4th largest economy. But Seoul holds a secret, like many big and rich cities, there are always people who slip through the cracks. While South Korea is seen as one of the most equal cities in terms of wealth equality, the divide between the higher and lower classes increases with the middle class ever slowly dissolving. Slum-like apartments known as semi-basement apartments or Banjihwas are common within Seoul. One such apartment is where **Soo-hee** and **Jung-hee** live.

Home — Despite being a semi-basement apartment, with shoddy wifi and lights that sometimes don't work, Soo-hee and Jung-hee are able to find happiness in each other's company. The home acts as a base for the player. It is a location to save progress, check on Jung-hee, and rest after stressful days at your workplace. The location is meant to show the closeness of the siblings but also the disparity of their situation. Their home is comforting but not comfortable, warm but dark. It's a cramped place where they try to make the best of their situation.





Neighborhood – Their home is found in Ahyeon-dong, a poor neighborhood near downtown Seoul. Before and after work, you are able to explore the neighborhood. During this time, you are able to buy food for yourself and your sister, go get drinks either alone or with friends and coworkers and do other similar activities that would help you and your sister, be relaxing or forward selfish plots. While the neighborhood is poor, it is thriving with life and joy. It is dirty, gritty, and disheveled but you can see old people playing Baduk/Go amongst themselves, others playing Jegichagi. People try to make the best of what they have. Despite this, you will always see drunks pissing in every corner, trash everywhere, and potholes on the sidewalk and roads. As much as people try to make do, they ignore the fact that they haven't escaped the environment they are in and the chances that they do are slim.



Factory – Soo-hee's job is within **Park Consolidations'** main factory. It is a tough and oppressive area in which everyone, including Soo-hee, slaves away for hours to barely make ends meet. It's a very dull and gray area with choking air due to machinery and constant smoke breaks. It's here where you will act out their job through gameplay as well as investigations to help further their progress in their career. You are able to meet coworkers to befriend or antagonize in the break area.



Boss' office – Park Consolidations' office is a recurring area that you will visit as you must go there whenever you see the boss. He is never seen outside of it. While being the same size as Soo-hee's apartment, it is more lavish, clearly different from the rest of the factory, with more custom care and decor. It's a reflection of the boss' vanity as well as his display of immense wealth.

CENTRAL CHARACTERS

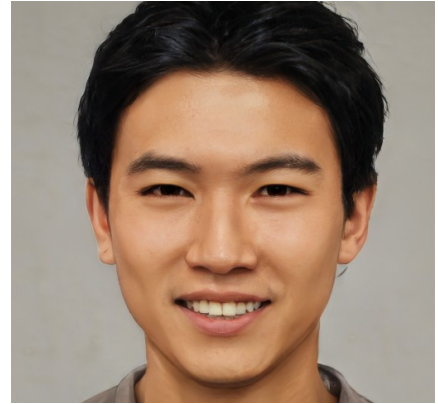
KIM SOO-HEE is the struggling protagonist of this story. You embody Soo-hee and determine the majority of their traits— gender, personality, stats, etc. There will always be one thing coursing through their veins, though: the ultimate need to survive for Jung-hee, their younger sister. The responsibilities that come with being the adult in the household weigh heavy on Soo-hee’s shoulders, to the point that they forget that they have a right to life, too. It is up to you to determine their fate.



KIM JUNG-HEE is the cheerful, optimistic half of the Kim household. Don’t let the smiles fool you, though. Underneath the bright exterior is a child wounded by her parent’s abandonment and chronic poverty. Fresh off of her 13th birthday, Jung-hee is preparing to enter middle school within the next year. Kids can get *ruthless*, especially in the district that she lives in. Her light is growing dimmer each day she has to face the cold truth— no one could care less what happens to poor families like hers.



CHOI JAE-HO is the highschool friend of Soo-hee. After graduation, he landed a full-ride scholarship to a highly-regarded university in Seoul. As if his life were some sort of movie, Jae-ho graduated with honors and began working as a representative for the biggest manufacturing company in South Korea. With his newfound authority, he figured he would reach out a helping hand to an old friend.



PARK SANG-YOUNG is a boss that rules the Seoul business world with an iron fist. Known for always getting his way, Mr. Park uses every tool in his kit to guarantee whatever he considers the “positive” outcome. Whether that means seducing the CEO of a rival company or tearing down entire neighborhoods for factory development, he stops at nothing to ensure the success of his company, Park Consolidations. For many, he is as untouchable as a god sitting at the peak of Mount Olympus.

SOON KI-SEON is a busy personal assistant attached to his boss’s hip. If Mr. Park is the sniper, Ki-seon is the bullet. Not much is known about his past, but as for his present— there is not a single worker in Park Consolidations that doesn’t shrink at the sound of his light footsteps coming towards them. He will stop at nothing to prove himself to authority and holds transparent disdain for anyone that comes between him and his advancement.



OTHER CHARACTERS



You will meet a wide cast of **minor characters** as you explore the factory, neighborhood, and more. Many will be pre-designed with a certain rate of appearance when the run of the game starts. For example, you may meet a co-worker in the factory in your second run that you wouldn't meet on your second. While not as important to the narrative as the central cast, these side characters create unique dynamics within the workplace and alter how difficult it is to achieve growth and advancement within the company.

In a form of **online connectivity**, players can submit their own Soo-hee builds to stand in as one of these minor characters within the playthroughs of other players. They can choose to receive other player's character builds in their own factory as well. These "Soo-hee's" will appear with randomly generated appearances and names, but will factor in the personality and stats developed by other players as an increased challenge.



NARRATIVE THEMES

Like *Parasite*, the themes of *Starving for Air* are a key part of the story, being reflected within the world, characters, and overall product.



Greed:

Taking hold of people and changing them to go against their original morals with the promise of wealth and more.

Class Discrimination:

The divide between the rich and poor and how this causes false senses of superiority, leading to unfair treatment. Smell is a key motif, being a clear indicator of disdain and difference between the upper and lower class.



Proximity to Wealth:

The idea of being close to wealth is always there as well as how far you are from ever reaching that point. Breathing and air quality is a motif with this theme, where areas of wealth are physically easier to breathe in and the factory, an area filled with low-income individuals, is much harder to breathe in.

Dependency and Parasitism:

The idea that individuals use the success and ability of others to boost themselves to places they don't deserve. Soo-hee hurts and uses others to raise their own position while Mr. Park exploits people desperate for money for labor.





Class Infighting:

The lack of class solidarity is why so much exploitation can occur and rather than wanting to fix the situation, it becomes a race of who can get out first.

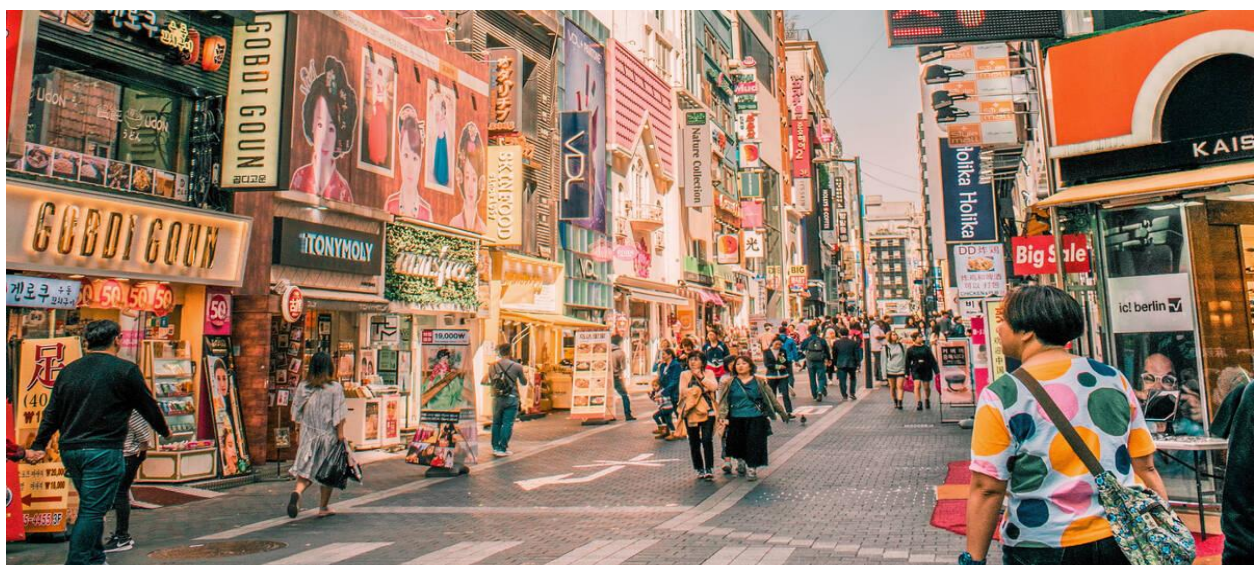
Deception, Manipulation, and Secrecy:

Not only are these concepts a key mechanic, but are also a consistent element of a lot of characters within the story as they all step on others for self-gain.



Family:

The relationship with the parents caused the issues that began the story and the relationship with the sister is what allows Soo-hee to continue.



PLOT ARCS

The game is split into **X** sections. While they all blend in terms to theming, the distinction between them is how far Soo-hee has traveled within their arc.



Opening

After character creation the game opens in Soo-hee's home. Their parents having abandoned them one day, Soo-hee and Jung-hee struggle to live a basic life. Soo-hee's motivations are established, especially their desire to protect and care for their sister. Choi Jae-ho, a friend of Soo-hee's from high school, visits. Having landed a high position at a manufacturing facility, he offers to give a referral to Soo-hee to help get a job.

Entering the factory

Upon entering the factory, you meet Soo-hee's coworkers, including their new boss. The work is immediately hard and demeaning. Some coworkers are friendly to Soo-hee in the beginning, but others are obviously only trying to get a better position than the start. You can choose to befriend or antagonize any of these coworkers yourself. During your time at the factory, and continuing throughout the game, randomized story and workplace events take place: workplace accidents, illness, a flood in your home. One day, Soo-hee comes home and Jung-hee is sobbing. She was being bullied by kids at her new school, and because those kids come from rich families, nothing came of it.



Increasing Desperation

Soo-hee starts to weigh whether or not their initial ideals are worth not having a comfortable life. Why should you suffer more than others when you can easily be happier, when your sister could be happier? With this new found resolution to change their situation, Soo-hee begins snooping more, eavesdropping, stealing sensitive information to use as blackmail, and other tactics. With every step, Soo-hee's status within the factory and the company itself increases. More events, both scripted and random, occur to Soo-hee and Jung-hee (i.e. flooding that destroys their home, school troubles with Jung-hee, etc). After reaching a point where Soo-hee turns on nearly every co-worker, friends included, Park Sang-Young notices their increase of status and sees them as a reliable worker to be trusted.



Struggle with Soon Ki-seon

This culminates in a struggle with Soon Ki-seon, who Soo-hee is about to replace as favorite. During it, Ki-seon is killed accidentally. This is a turning point in Soo-hee's morals, and this event is detailed further later in this document.

Emotional void

As the *de facto* new boss's favorite, Soo-hee replaces Ki-seon in many capacities. Soo-hee is by now willing to do anything to achieve wealth, and begins formulating different plans to remove Park Sang-young and replace him. Jung-hee notices this change in her sibling's mentality and is increasingly worried about Soo-hee. At the same time, her school life becomes bad enough that she stops going to school entirely. This drives Soo-hee to even further heights of desperation and moral panic.



An End

As the story reaches its conclusion, it can end in one of **4** ways:

- As Soo-hee continues their climb for wealth, Jung-hee can no longer sympathize with her older sibling. She begins to actively despise them as she can't understand what they have become, culminating in her leaving home in hopes of finding their parents. Soo-hee eventually gets to a point where they get a better job, but they never see Jung-hee ever again.
- Soo-hee fails to support both themselves and Jung-hee both financially and emotionally. As they fail to make new connections and friends to have support, they turn to loan sharks in desperation, and lose their livelihood entirely.
- Soo-hee never leaves the system, becoming another cog in the machine, to be used until they can't work anymore. Jung-hee eventually joins them at the job.
- Soo-hee, much past far gone by this point, is investigated for the murders of multiple members of the Park Consolidations community. As the pressure builds, they enter hiding, Jung-hee getting caught in the crossfire of legal warfare. She is taken away by the state as Soo-hee is given the death penalty and rots in prison until their day comes.

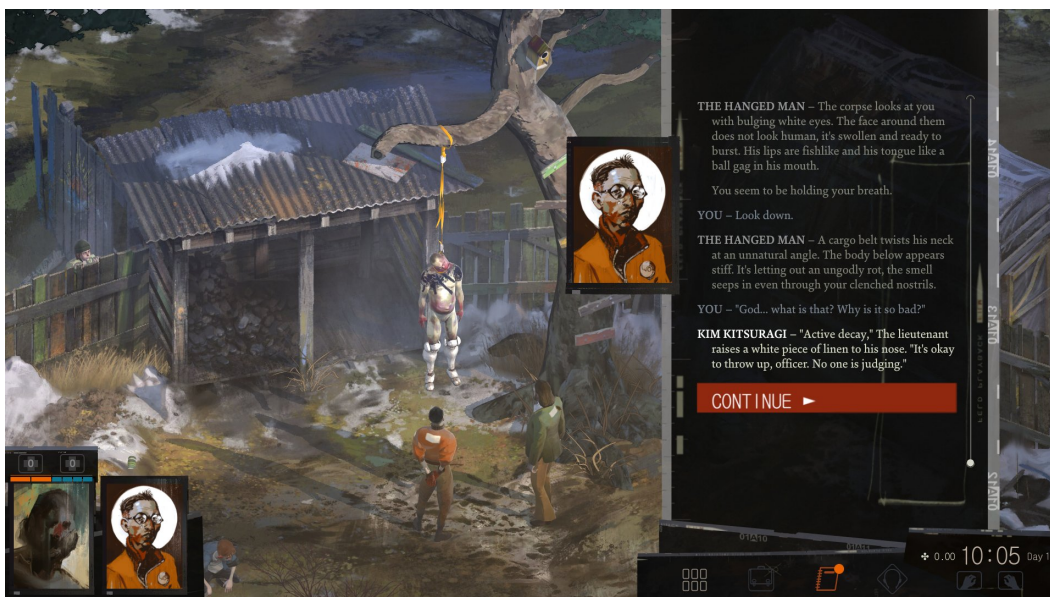


GAMEPLAY

Starving for Air is a job management simulator and investigative RPG in which the player uses both sweet words and blackmail to work their way up from a menial blue-collar job towards the management position of their well-off boss. The narrative is told through dialogue and narration by the protagonist, and pivotal plot moments are presented in cutscenes. A typical playthrough of the game will take approximately 20 hours to complete. *Starving for Air* will be released for PC and home console.

The game utilizes **in-game time cycles** through phases of Morning, Afternoon, Evening, and Night. Time moves forward by specific actions the player takes. Morning and Afternoon move forward by working. The player may choose what to do in the Evening, either investigating coworkers, going to events with them, or tending to Jung-hee. The Night phase moves forward when the player goes to sleep.

The main view, where the player navigates around the world during these phases, is in a 3D isometric perspective similar to that in *Disco Elysium*. Interacting with objects brings up a dialogue box with a piece of narration describing the object and possible actions. Interacting with characters brings up a similar dialogue box, but with a portrait of the currently speaking character.



Example of POV, from *Disco Elysium* (2019)

When the player **works**, the screen becomes a view of their task. This task is a microgame that changes depending on the player's current position in the factory. All such microgames are difficult and stressful, and also represent menial, demeaning labor. Climbing the ladder within the workplace holds a promise of getting better tasks, but this promise is not satisfyingly fulfilled.

Some other interactions, such as **investigation**, bring up a similar screen to the task view. Generally this is a close up of the area the player is investigating, such as a coworker's locker. They can often use what they find in this view against another coworker, in order to grasp the next highest rung in the ladder.



Example of zoom-in microgame tasks, via Gas Station Simulator (2021)

The actions the player takes results in different amounts of money they can spend, as well as different levels of trust with each of their coworkers and their sister. While the former is visible by the player and directly affects what they can afford for themselves and their sister, the latter is apparent only in the narrative. However, both are crucial in deciding what path the story ultimately takes.

STORY MOMENT SAMPLE

The player has just found and taken crucial evidence that they can use to replace Soon Ki-seon as the boss's favorite, once and for all. When they leave the building, they trigger a cutscene. Ki-seon is leaning against a rail waiting for Soo-hee.

KI-SEON: I saw you in there earlier. Snooping around in a place I thought I'd hidden pretty well, rifling through things you shouldn't be looking at.

SOO-HEE: ...

KI-SEON: And what should I do knowing that, ah? What should I do knowing that the weasel knows something so problematic? I've been watching you, you know. I've seen how you work, how you sweet-talk and blackmail everyone unlucky enough to get acquainted with you. And now you thought you'd do the same thing with me. Well, I'm not going to let that happen. I'm going to become the owner of this place one day, and I'm not going to let some selfish asshole like you get in the way of that.

SOO-HEE: Don't call me selfish. You don't know what I'm working for.

KI-SEON: And you know me so well, huh? You think I have no problems? That I don't need my livelihood? You've never given a thought to why everyone else is here working the same crappy job as you. Despicable. That won't happen now.

Ki-seon takes a step towards Soo-hee, moving into the light. Though his voice has been clear, desperation is written on his face.

KI-SEON: You have it, right? Give it to me.

As Soo-hee hesitates, Ki-seon lunges forward.

KI-SEON: Give it to me! Now!

A short scuffle ensues. Ki-seon tries to knock Soo-hee over, while Soo-hee tries to get past him. Soo-hee shoves Ki-seon hard, and he tumbles over the railing, falling onto the street a dozen meters below.

The player has the choice of either trying to forge a suicide note or simply running away. Either way, they are not implicated.

This is a major turning point in the tone of the game. From here Soo-hee, transformed by guilt, loses a grip on what is morally right, and much darker options start appearing over the next segments of the game. The only object that remains is taking Park Sang-Young's place as the owner.

