# Aether: Reclaiming the Lost Sky

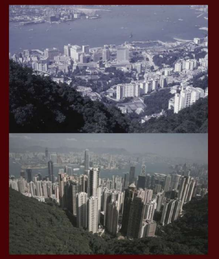
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Speculative Future Design | VR Game | Group work

An aging dome seals the skyless city, forcing complete reliance on artificial environments.
Sky deprivation drives widespread mental breakdown and a rigid hierarchy: elites view the real sky, the middle class buys simulated canopies, and the poor get low-grade artificial light. All resources go to dome maintenance and therapy, trapping citizens in a struggle for sky access within a cage of physical survival and spiritual decay.

# THE DISAPPEARING SKIES OF HONG KONG

Photo-based horizontal-vertical observation of Hong Kong: the sky consumed by city dwellers and tourists keeps shrinking.



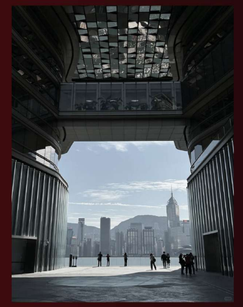
In 1927, looking down over Hong Kong



The sky-to-building ratio in high-density commercial districts.



The sky-to-building ratio in residential areas.



The sky-to-building ratio in relatively open areas.

# RESEARCH

**Reason 1** Urban expansion

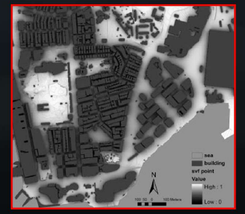
**Past Hong Kong**



7.5 millioin+
residents population

**Now Hong Kong is growing vertically into the sky**

**Current Hong Kong**



Over 70%
Proportion of countryside and natural land use

**Reason 2** Light Pollution: The Vanishing Night Sky

**Main Sources of Light Pollution:**

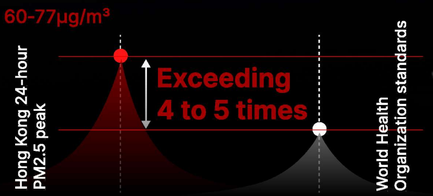
Commercial Signs
LED Screens
Facade Lighting
Harbour Lights

**Night Sky Brightness in hongkong**



**Reason 3** Air Pollution: Veiling the Sky during the day

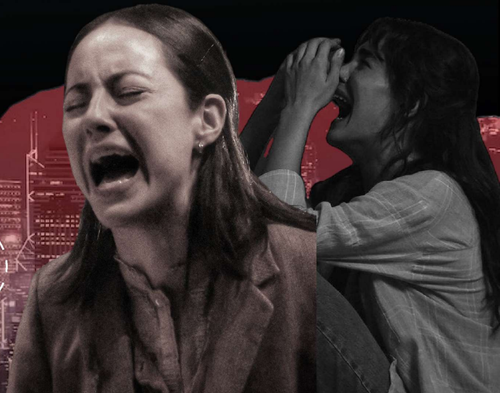
During the autumn and winter seasons under calm wind conditions, the 24-hour peak value of PM2.5 can reach 60-77 μg/m³, which is 4-5 times the 24-hour safety limit set by the World Health Organization, and the urban visibility significantly decreases.




# INFLUENCE

Repeated exposure to an environment without a sky, while one is powerless to change the situation, can give rise to the psychological phenomenon of pollution fatigue: individuals start from initial irritation and worry, gradually turning to numbness and desensitization, passively accepting the urban landscape as the daily reality, falling into a sense of powerlessness and mental exhaustion, and developing a sense of insecurity and confusion at the environmental level.

Numbness
Internal friction
Repression
Confusion
Lack of security



# QUESTIONNAIRE

66%

Respondents' feelings in urban spaces with limited visible sky areas：

Nearly 90% of respondents believe that limited visible sky area negatively affects the city.

18-60 years old

60 years old and above

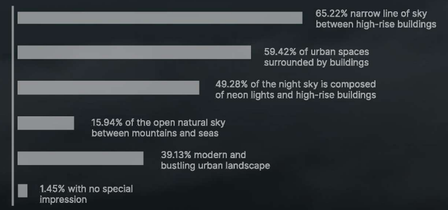
The younger generation has a stronger sense of oppression towards high-rise buildings

58% often feel oppressed and nervous

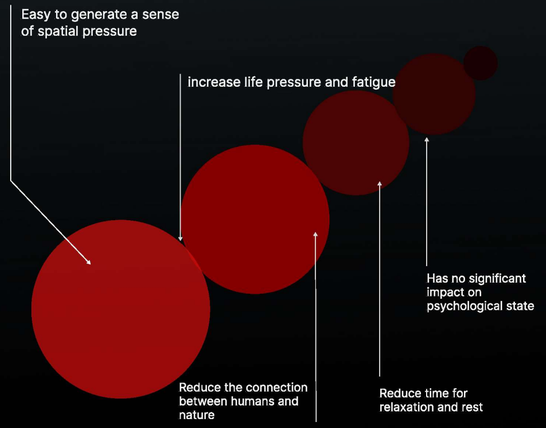
37% occasionally feel cramped in space

88%

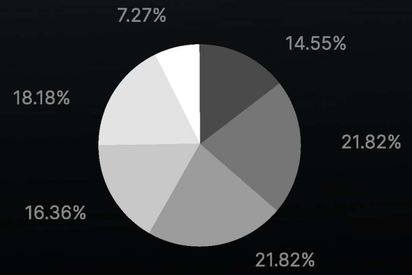
- **The dense architectural landscape dominates people's perception of the sky in Hong Kong.**




- How do respondents feel when staying in areas with limited visible sky?




- What spaces do respondents prefer to add to future urban development?




- Balance high-rise development with more natural spaces.
- Increase parks, greenery, and natural landscapes.
- Preserve open sky views by reducing building obstruction.
- Create more rest areas, public spaces, and slow-living environments.
- Integrate nature through rooftop gardens, vertical greenery, and ecological buildings.
- Maintain urban growth, commerce, and city efficiency.

# FUTURE TIMELINE

## 2110-2210

People & Sky: Skybridges at 200 meters fracture the sky, entombing the ground in dark concrete canyons under a permanent microclimate **smog**.

## 2310-2410

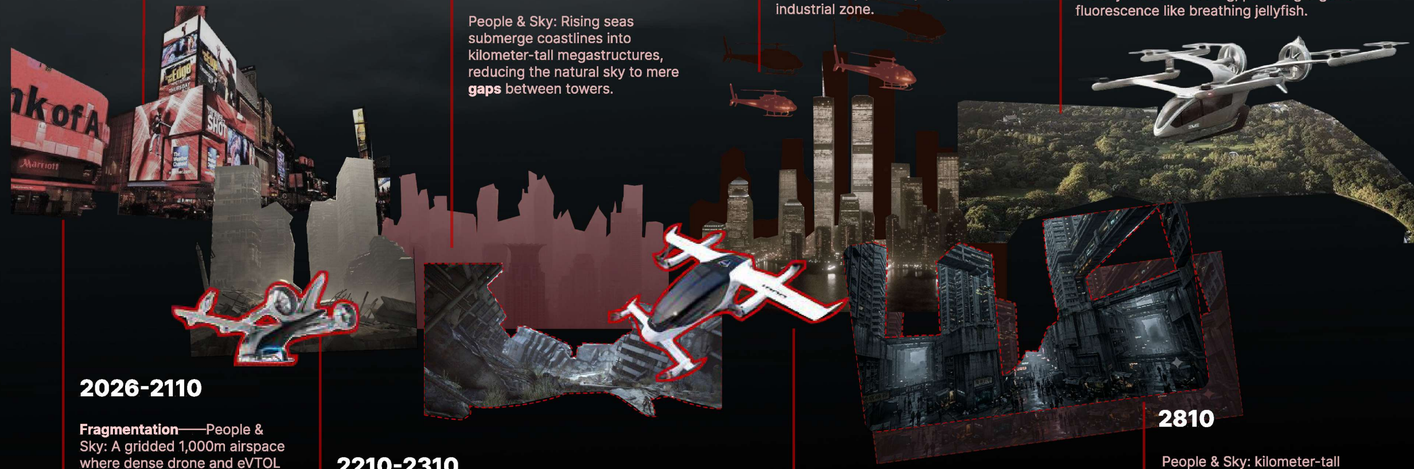
People & Sky: Rising seas submerge coastlines into kilometer-tall megastructures, reducing the natural sky to mere **gaps** between towers.

## 2410-2510

**Industrialization**——People & Sky: Extreme heat and radiation force humanity underground, leaving the sky to AI machinery and solar arrays as a purely industrial zone.

## 2610-2710

**Bioluminescence**——People & Sky: Bioengineered bioluminescent domes replace machinery, painting the sky with self-healing, pulsating organic fluorescence like breathing jellyfish.



## 2026-2110

**Fragmentation**——People & Sky: A gridded 1,000m airspace where dense drone and eVTOL traffic fragments the Northern Metropolis sky with noise and flight paths.

## 2210-2310

People & Sky: Climate domes and particle **projections** transform the sky into a 24-hour giant screen broadcasting commercial ads and government mandates.

## 2510-2610

People & Sky: An energy crisis collapses centuries of artificial light and sky domes, unveiling the long-lost **starfield** above the ruins.

## 2810

People & Sky: kilometer-tall towers collapse into plant-covered ruins under clear blue skies, blending ancient orbital debris into a **post-human** horizon.

# CONCEPTUAL PROPOSAL

- **VR Game Worldview: Reconstructing the Sky of Hong Kong in 2810**

In 2810, Hong Kong is a "Skyless City" completely encased by giant structures and aging domes, almost entirely cut off from the real sky. With air and light pollution having accumulated over centuries, natural light and native ecosystems have all but vanished, forcing humanity to rely on artificial systems for survival.

Living in this skyless environment for generations, most people have developed "Hereditary Sky Deprivation Syndrome," making mental health the greatest social crisis. To ease this deep longing for the natural sky, the city once developed a system of "sky healing pods." But now, the city without a sky is on the brink of collapse — the pods are mostly overwhelmed and broken. People must search for the few that still function, clinging to them not for healing, but for survival itself.

**Prediction 1 : Light-taint**

Lower-district residents see murky night skies tainted orange-purple by neon and digital screens.

**Prediction 2 : Canyon-like Shadows**

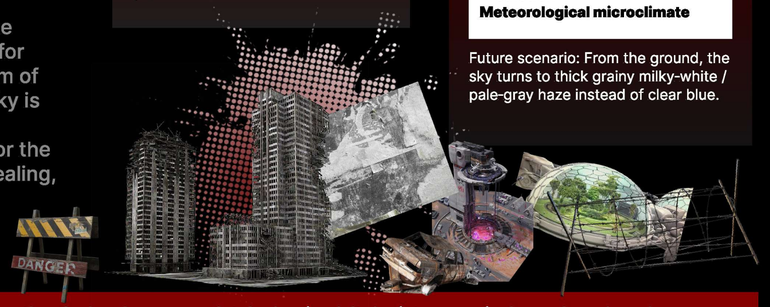
Future scenario: Dense high-rises line deep alleyways; walking through them reveals narrow slivers of sky.

**Prediction 3 : Flight-corridors**

Future scenario:Many delivery drones, surveillance aircraft & eVTOLs weave through building gaps.

**Prediction 4 : Meteorological microclimate**

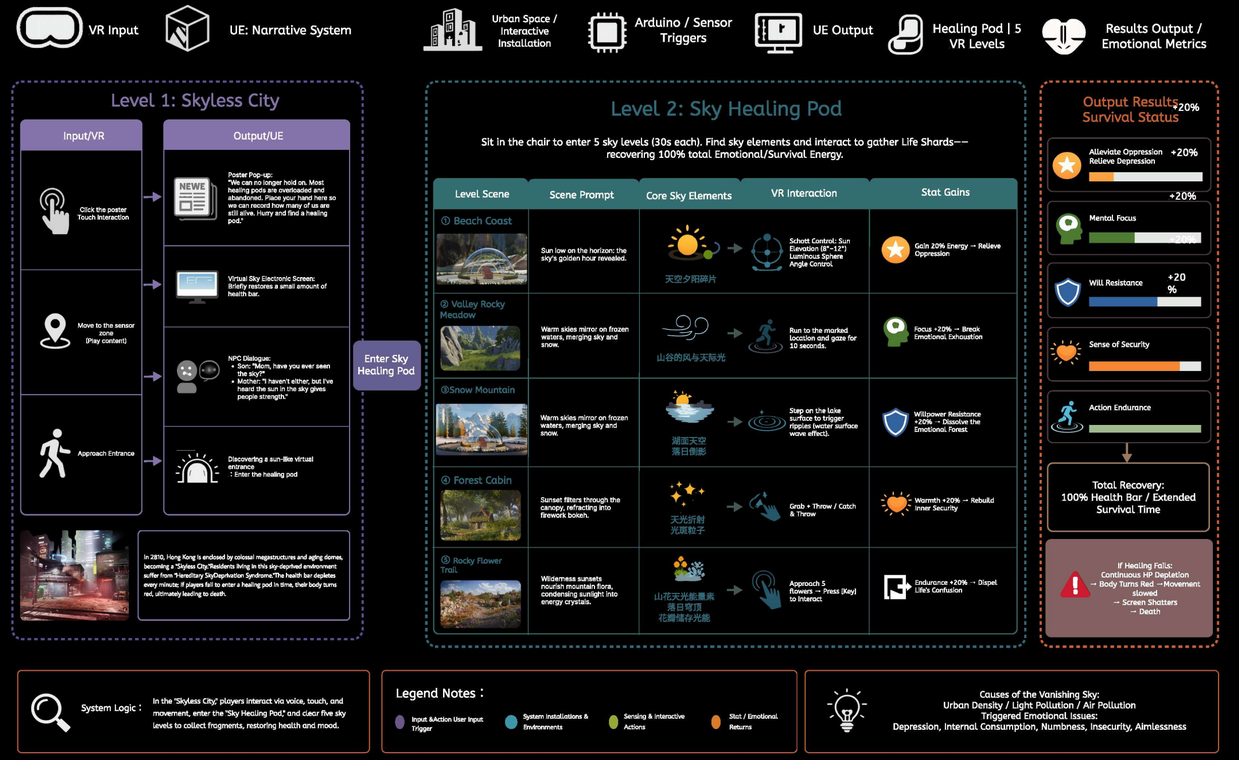
Future scenario: From the ground, the sky turns to thick grainy milky-white / pale-gray haze instead of clear blue.




**Design Purpose:**

This design creates a fictional future Hong Kong where the sky has been completely deprived. It depicts a survival paradox where humans can only obtain the sky through virtual and mechanical means. Through this extreme scenario, the work provokes public awareness of the present situation.

# INTERACTION LOGIC DIAGRAM

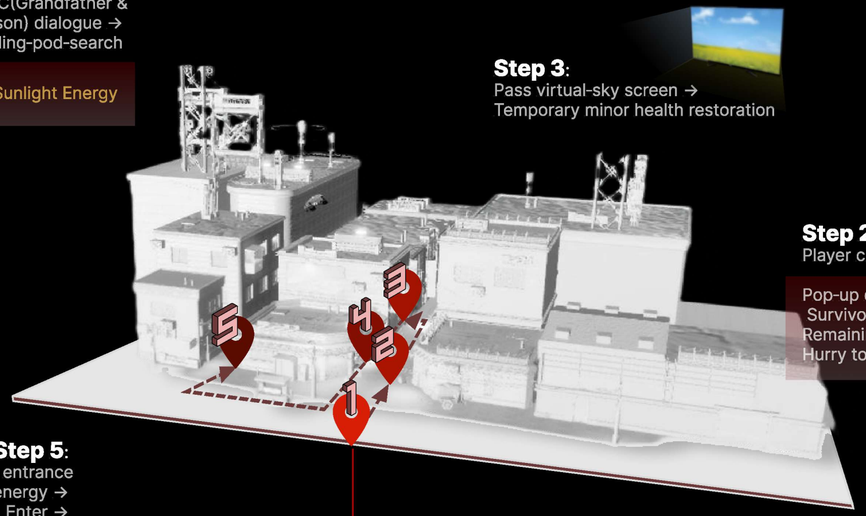


# LEVEL 1: EXPLORING THE "SKYLESS CITY"

- **Player Identity: A Hong Kong resident suffering from "Hereditary Sky Deprivation Syndrome."**

**Step 4**:
After NPC(Grandfather & Grandson) dialogue →
Gain healing-pod-search

Clue: Sunlight Energy




**Step 3**:
Pass virtual-sky screen →
Temporary minor health restoration

**Step 2**:
Player clicks poster →

Pop-up displays:
Survivors: 375
Remaining Healing Pods: **
Hurry to locate a healing pod.

**Step 5**:
Find virtual entrance radiating sunlight energy →
Enter →
Player survives

If not found within 1 minute, the player dies.

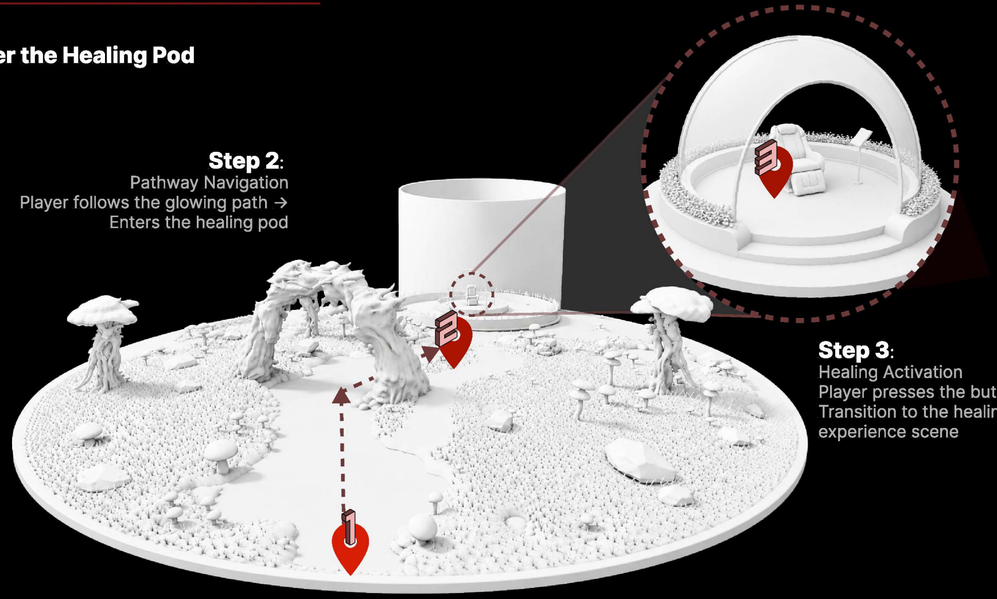
**Step 1**:
Player Spawn Point
Player enters game →
Health bar depletes to 0% within 1 min



# LEVEL 2: ENTERING THE HEALING POD

- **There are a total of five levels. Each level interacts with the sky to obtain spiritual energy from the sky.**
  **Each level lasts for 60 seconds.**

**Enter the Healing Pod**



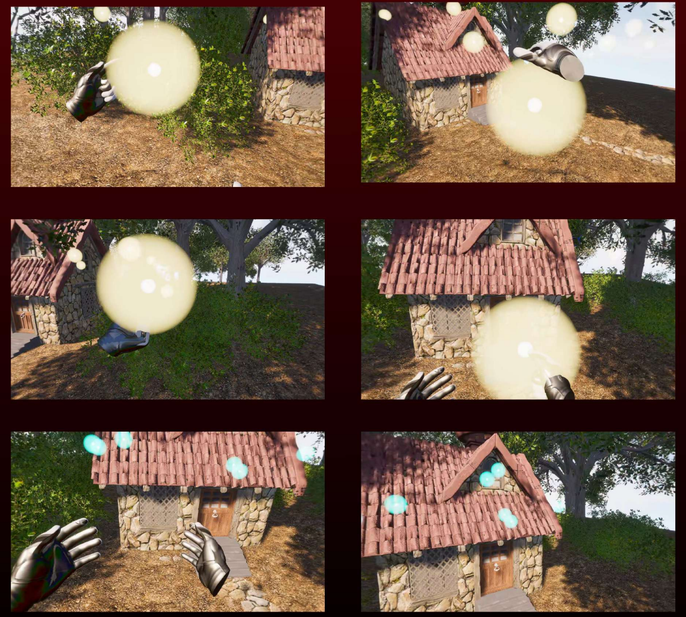
**Step 2**:
Pathway Navigation
Player follows the glowing path →
Enters the healing pod

**Step 3**:
Healing Activation
Player presses the button →
Transition to the healing experience scene

**Step 1**:
Healing Pod Area
Player clicks the sunlight energy →
Teleport to the healing pod area

- **Five Experience Scenes**

**Forest Cabin (Rebuild Inner Security)**



The sunset shines through gaps in the forest canopy, creating floating, flowing sky-light particles.Players catch floating sky-light particles and throw 5 of them into the cabin. Completing the task grants 20% Inner Warmth, helping rebuild a sense of security.

**BAY (Relieve Emotional Pressure)**



Players adjust the sun to an angle of 8°–12° to trigger the golden sunset and collect a Sky Fragment. Completing the task grants 20% Energy, helping relieve feelings of oppression.

**Valley (Restore Mental Focus)**



Players reach a designated point in the valley and gaze at the sky for 10 seconds, experiencing the mountain wind.Completing the task grants 20% Mental Focus, helping reduce overthinking.

**Snow Mountain (Overcome Emotional Numbness)**



The sunset reflects across the frozen lake. Players step on the surface to create ripples. Completing the task grants 20% Mental Resilience, helping ease emotional numbness.

**Wildflower Plateau (Regain Motivation)**

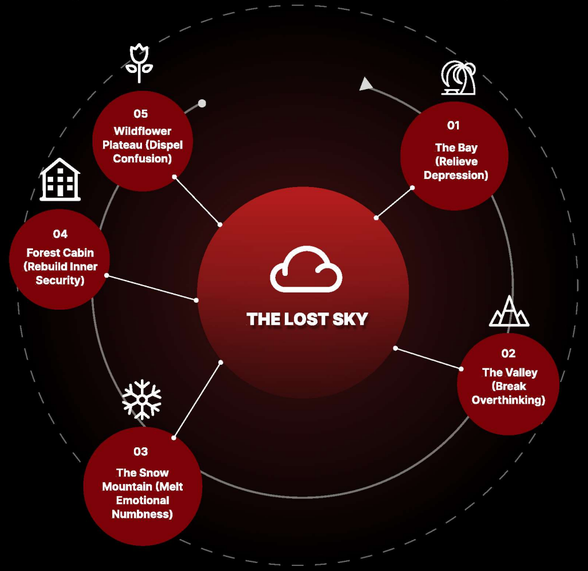


Players explore the sunset-covered wilderness and collect sky energy from 5 glowing flowers. Completing the task grants 20% Stamina, helping restore motivation and direction.

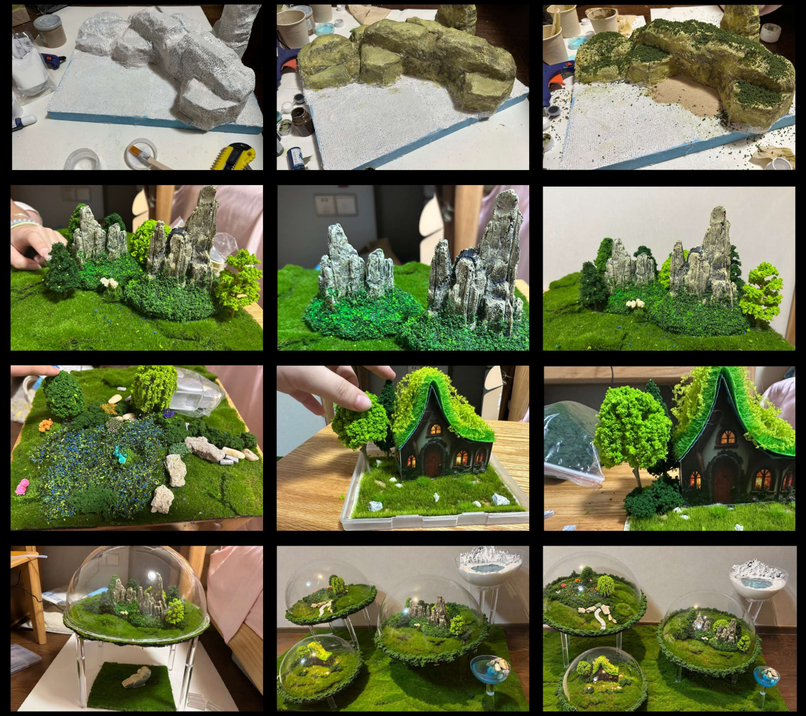
# PHYSICAL DEVICE

## Design Purpose

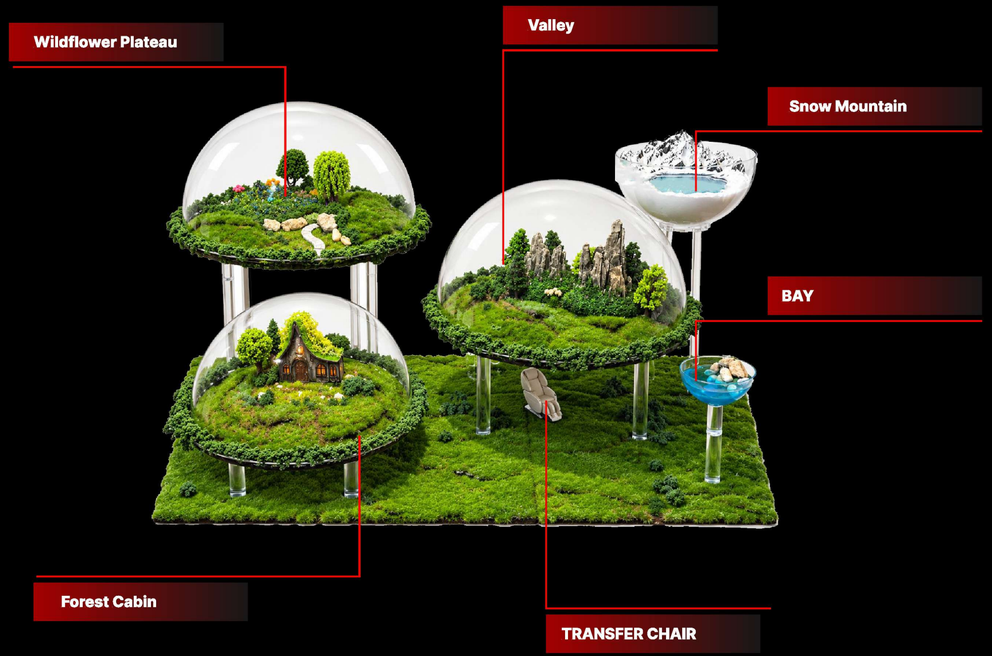
We connect the physical installation with Level 2 to transform the concept of “sky loss” into an immersive healing journey. By creating five natural healing scenes, players can experience different emotional recoveries through light, sound, and environmental interactions, rebuilding the connection between humans and the lost sky.




## Production Process



## Final Effect



# FINAL VISUAL EFFECT

- **Production Process**





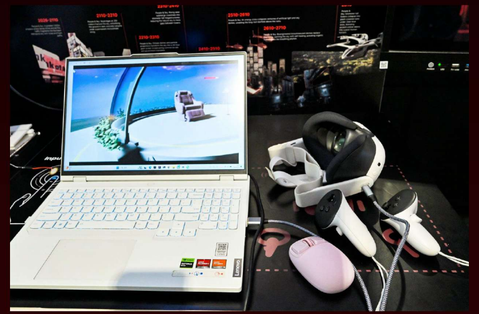
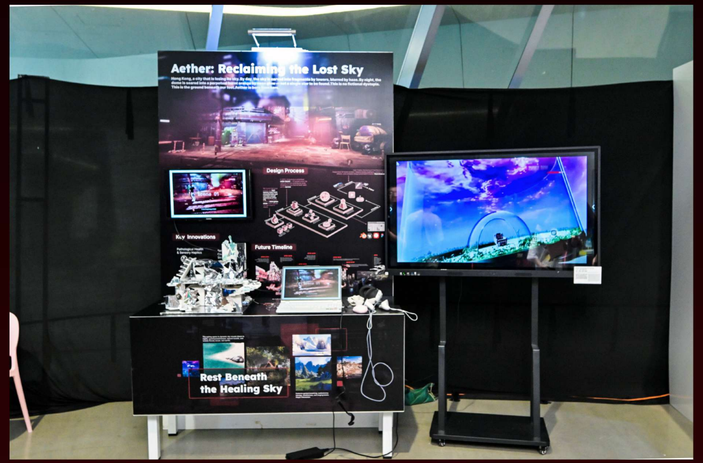



- **Complete Exhibition Panel**








# FEEDBACK



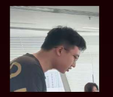
You should better integrate the physical installation with Level 2 to better demonstrate its healing properties.



Used to high-rises and crowded spaces, I found natural landscapes crucial for emotional recovery after experiencing the healing pod.



The project integrates futuristic cities, mental health and natural environments, delivering a complete conceptual expression.



This project reminds us that futuristic urban design must address human psychological needs, not merely space-use efficiency.

- **Reflection**

We should further integrate the physical installation with the VR healing experience, creating a stronger emotional connection. We should also enhance the interaction design to better demonstrate how natural elements can support psychological recovery and improve urban living experiences.