

FPC FILES

E M E R Y

YOU CAN'T SAVE THE WORLD ALONE.



THESIS DEFENSE SPRING 2022 | ASPEN WILLOWS

ARTIST STATEMENT



Aspen Willows is a character-focused illustrator who has spent most of his life on the bestest, Westest coast.

His light-hearted, yet sometimes disturbing work is steeped in a love of mystery and mythos, employing striking, dramatic imagery to create narratively tangible works. He draws on a childhood adoration for all things strange and supernatural which influences his works with dramatic and absurdist elements.

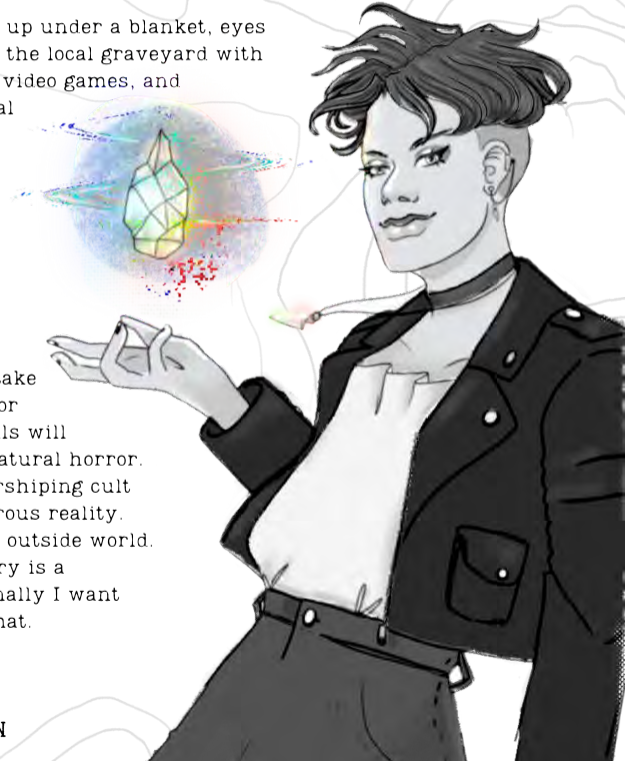
Willows has a range of life experience, from musical theatre actor to autopsy technician but is currently working and studying in beautiful, damp, Portland, Oregon with his fiance and two pets. He holds a BFA in Illustration from PNCA and plans to pursue teaching in higher education.

THESIS PROPOSAL

The lights don't work since the storm knocked out the power, so there are candles placed around the living room. The sliding door is open and the chill of the air tickles at your skin. The sky comes alive with lightning, casting shadows onto the Monopoly board we've gathered around, and then explodes in a deep rumble of thunder. You are safe here, inside with this board game; and for just a moment, you don't have to think about the storm outside, you only have to worry about rolling the dice. This memory, or an approximation of it, is something many of us share; and with it, we share a common nostalgia for board games. FPC Files: Emery is a 2-4 player board game that emphasizes the need for cooperation and sharing of resources in an 80's queer, supernatural horror scenario. Players will choose one of 6 unique characters and will be required to work together to complete one of 4 different objectives to save the world.

My love for horror, suspense, and the New Weird goes back to my childhood. I would watch X-Files with my dad curled up under a blanket, eyes wide with fascination at the unknown. In my teens, I fancied myself a ghost hunter and spent nights skulking around the local graveyard with a camera. And in my young adulthood, I explored ways to immerse myself in new horror experiences like board games, video games, and virtual reality. Humans have been playing board games for thousands of years, with the oldest playable game, The Royal Game of Ur, being over 4,600 years old. We have used these games to pass time, to entertain, to wager, and to gather. And when we were all stuck inside, this time not from a storm but a pandemic, board games were there for us again. The board games market saw a 20% increase in sales during the COVID-19 lockdown, and a single independent board game, Frosthaven, raised a staggering 12 million dollars on Kickstarter. As pandemic restrictions separated us for our safety, we had to find different ways to socially connect. Roleplaying board games like Dungeons and Dragons brought people together online, puzzles and classic board games brought families together. And for those of us who share that nostalgic memory of childhood bliss, it reminds us of a time when things weren't so scary.

FPC Files: Emery is influenced by the New Weird genre with such examples as X-Files, Resident Evil, and Control. New Weird pushes at the boundaries of horror and explores them in unique, sometimes uncomfortable ways. I want to take the excitement of the unknown, the fascination with the strange and unseen, and the tingling sensation of a good horror story that I love so dearly and make a board game. Influenced by the style of comic books and graphic novels, the visuals will be line-heavy and have high contrast. This intensity will help contribute to players' experience of high-stakes, supernatural horror. The fictional Pacific Northwest town Emery has seen its share of strange, unexplainable events but when the death worshipping cult The Chosen of Vexarius set up camp on the outskirts of town, things quickly shift from quirky paranormality to dangerous reality. The game is set in the late '90s, where a lack of modern technology has players trapped and isolated from help from the outside world. Players will have to work together to complete the chosen objective before their sanity or time runs out. FPC Files: Emery is a challenging game of cooperation and teamwork, and just as in real-life no one person can save the world alone. Functionally I want to blend my love of storytelling, world-building, code-cracking, and tactile interaction with the classic board game format.

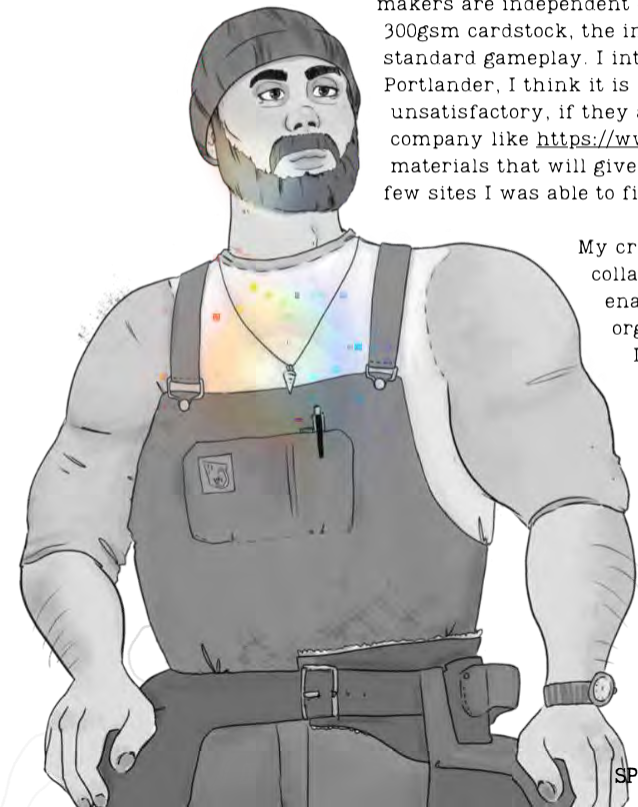


The final project will culminate in a fully realized board game that is ready for playtesting. Alongside the board itself, I will develop pieces that exist off the board like character cards, event cards, tools/weapons cards, ally cards, objective cards, a partially illustrated rule book, as well as custom casted dice. Each of these card types will feature front and back monochrome illustrations. A common issue with action and narrative board games of this nature is requiring an enormous amount of space to fully lay out the game setup. FPC Files: Emery will be mostly self-contained insofar as the only cards off of the board are the character cards and player's inventory.

Deliverables included in the final work will consist of: a partially illustrated 8x5.5 inch rule book, a quad fold 27x23 inch illustrated folding pressed cardboard game board, 7 decks of 60 illustrated 2.5x3.5 inch cardstock cards, 6 6x3.5 inch player character cardstock cards, a set of resin polyhedral dice including 6 d6's, 1 d20, 1 d2, as well as 25 0.5x0.5 inch cardboard character and tracking tokens. The container for this project will be a lined chipboard box measuring 13.5x11.5x3 inches, to organize the game board, cards, rules, and pieces. These final deliverables sizes are subject to change based upon the availability of materials and shipping as most custom game board makers are independent companies, many of which have been majorly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The cards will be made of a sturdy 300gsm cardstock, the industry standard, and sealed with an aqueous ink to prevent staining, accidental creasing, or other wear incurred by standard gameplay. I intend to find companies who use recycled materials, so as not to further contribute to plastic waste and landfills. As a Portlander, I think it is important to print the board, cards, and box through a local printer, to keep local money local. But if the results are unsatisfactory, if they are unable to provide the tools I need, or unable to complete the printing in time I will use an independent online company like <https://www.boardgamesmaker.com/>. This company has been creating board games for 35 years and has industry-standard materials that will give my final project a refined, professional feeling. While BGS.com doesn't offer recycled materials, BGS.com is one of the few sites I was able to find that doesn't have a minimum order quantity of 1500 or more.

My creative influences have changed over the years, but one thing that has stuck with me since I was a pre-teen is the collaborative writing project SCP, which stands for Secure. Contain. Protect. Ever since I saw my first SCP article, I was enamored with it; in part thanks to my father's hyper-conspiratorial thinking. I loved the idea of a silent, powerful organization of people who contained anomalous threats, who protected the average people, like you and me. I love horror, I love thrillers, I love scary things! This checked a lot of boxes for me, and it did for a lot of others, too. Currently, there are nearly 6,600 unique, individual entries from users all over the world, as well as 4,200 short stories. The SCP project is available to read in 15 languages and has 14 global branches. As of now, there are 32 video games either completed or in development as well as a two-volume comic available in Japanese and English. These numbers don't factor into other projects that SCP has inspired, like the incredibly popular video game Control (2019) which has won multiple awards from multiple organizations. Control takes inspiration from the SCP project and expands upon it further with a sprawling world for players to explore. The narrative isn't spoon-fed to you, and it is up to the player to piece together what is happening in The Oldest House through audio logs, inter-office emails, and scattered documents. While not everyone's favorite vehicle of storytelling, I very much enjoy a hands-off approach - insofar as I like putting the mystery together myself.

This project brings together all the skills I have learned during my time here at PNCA: character design, iconography, page design, creative writing, and my harnessing of narrative. With all of these tools, and my desire to create fun, immersive games this is a project I know I will put all of myself into.



As it stands, the strongest pieces in my portfolio and the ones I enjoy working on the most are works involving Emery. Working on this project for my thesis will allow me to deepen and expand the world through the development of characters, locations, and scenarios. In my artist statement and application to PNCA, I spoke about how I wanted to create worlds for others to lose themselves in, as I was able to lose myself in the media I spoke about above. I want to be able to create that escape for another person, who finds something about my work that resonates deeply with them. And with this project, I will be one step closer to doing that.

For me, board games hold a very special, very important place in my heart. Not only do they bring us together, but they can entertain, they can educate, they can fascinate, and inspire. FPC Files: Emery is not only deeply personal to my past, and growth as an artist, but it has the potential to connect with others in the same way the works I mentioned above connected with me.

Using my love for horror, the supernatural, and my uniquely queer perspective I will create an experience that adults will want to revisit, and roll the dice once more.





ABSTRACT

FPC Files: Emery is a two to four player board game in the vein of Arkham Horror, or Camp Grizzly, focused on cooperation, coordination, and sharing of resources.

FPC Files: Emery's main objective is stopping a death worshipping cult, The Chosen of Vexarius, before they can summon their planet-eating god. Players will assume the roles of townspeople working desperately to save each other, their town, and the world.

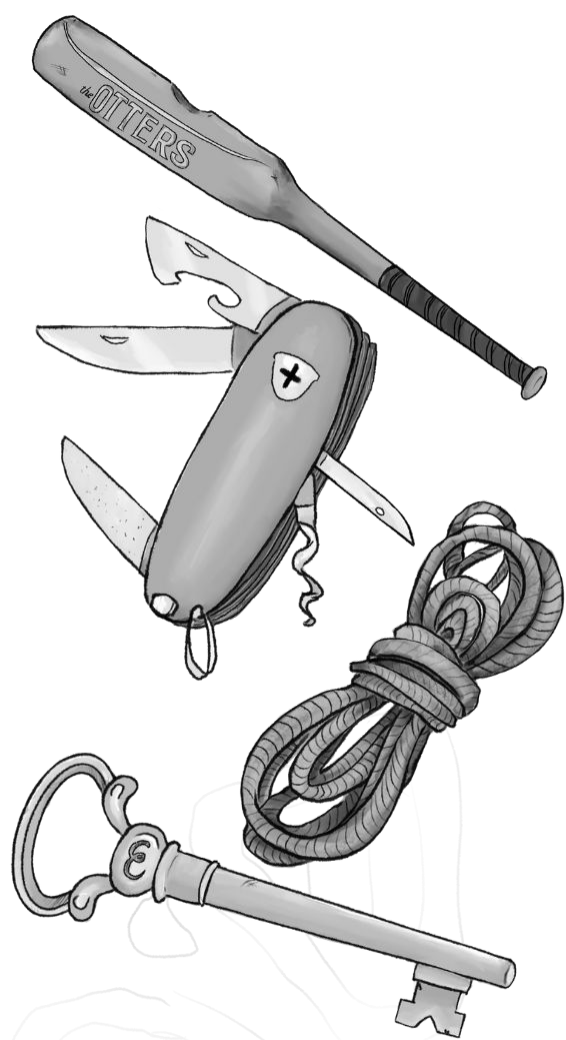
Players are encouraged to step into the role of the character they have selected to play, to think like they might, to act like they might act. Players will complete one of four unique objectives by moving through the world, fighting enemies, and gathering tools, weapons, and allies before the death meter reaches 100.

ORAL

Good afternoon everyone! Thank you all very much for attending my thesis defense. It feels surreal that I'm finally here, standing at this podium preparing to tell you all about my thesis. I remember attending my first presentation during focus week as a foundation student. It was an impressive installed sculpture work in the B10 basement. As I sat and listened I kept thinking about how I was expected to do this and how I had no idea how I was going to pull off an entire thesis project. But now, here I am on the other side of something I was thought I incapable of doing.

Before I begin, I wanted to bring something to everyone's attention. Shortly after my presentation, I will be hosting the inaugural playtesting session of FPC Files: Emery. Many of you have expressed your interest to me, and I know more still may be interested. but as I will explain there are only 4 possible slots in a game, and for tonight, only 3 available. At the entrance of the room, there are raffle tickets. After my presentation, and after my panel have deliberated, we will re-enter this room to draw the raffle. I will pull three tickets, and those people are welcome to join us to playtest. Others are welcome to stay and look at the work as well! If you are interested but didn't get a ticket on the way in, please remain seated. There will be time between the end of my presentation and the drawing of the raffle. One more thing, there was a sign in the window with content warnings but I wanted to take a moment to address it before I begin just in case someone didn't see it. This project and presentation has themes of death, violence, and murder. If any of these topics would upset you, I ask that you are kind to yourself, and do what you think is right to put yourself first.

FPC Files: Emery is a two to four-player board game in the vein of Arkham Horror, or Camp Grizzly, focused on cooperation, coordination, and sharing of resources. FPC Files: Emery's main objective is stopping a death-worshipping cult, The Chosen of Vexarius, before they can summon their planet-eating god. Players will assume the roles of townspeople working desperately to save each other, their town, and the world. Players are encouraged to step into the role of the character they have selected to play, to think like they might, to act like they might act. Players will complete one of four unique objectives by moving through the world, fighting enemies, and gathering tools, weapons, and allies before the death meter reaches 100. FPCF:E is a fresh take on the cooperative horror TTG experience, with an all queer cast, and is the starting point for introducing my creative world The Emery Universe.



Since its establishment in 1921, The Foundation of Paranatural Control has been keeping tabs on all happenings of paranormal or supernatural anomalies in the United States. The Foundation of Paranatural Control has continued its service to the American people in complete secrecy, keeping them safe from extra-dimensional threats of all kinds. Some of the cataloged entities are harmless, and others are potentially world-ending. The FPC are the keepers of all unusual, paranormal, and supernatural secrets, and like any three-letter bureaucratic government organization, they are by no means the good guys. The FPC has bases all over the United States, all disguised as innocuous offices, warehouses, and sites of industry among other things. Their early adoption of technology and sometimes unethical use of anomalous creatures, materials, and scientific methods have allowed the FPC to develop technology beyond what would be possible in the 1990s.

I have chosen the 1990s time period because to me it evokes the most nostalgia. I was born in 92, so I caught the tail end of the 90's. My childhood was full of constantly shifting and changing technology. One year for Christmas, I was gifted a Walkman, a chunky, portable CD player with an affinity for skipping, and by the time the next Christmas rolled around, MP3 players were what everyone wanted. I watched thumb drives and SD cards quintuple in size, amazed at how quickly things were changing. To me, I have a deep, albeit foggy connection to these older technologies. And for me, clunky, ancient hardware isn't a waste. It's a reminder of how far we have come technologically. This thesis project not only operates as a board game but as a thematic, narrative capsule of a Pacific Northwest town where extreme paranormal events take place.

As a gay, transgender man I have spent most of my life knowing that I was other. I didn't fit into the cisgender, heterosexual binary and I didn't see any characters who were like me that weren't written off as jokes, or swiftly killed after their sexuality or gender was revealed. We live in a world with the active agenda of silencing or outright erasing queer people from any and all narratives. Only in the last few years have the visibility of queer and trans people increased, even though queer and trans folks have been around since the beginning of time. It is only through flooding media with positive, affirming support for queer and trans individuals that we can begin to make a true difference. I believe it is our responsibility as artists, creators, and academics with access to change the canon to propel our way of thinking forward, to push us towards the future we all want to see. The hard work of breaking down pre-established ideas of what it means to be gay, trans, or queer isn't to be borne alone; there are thousands of queer artists working actively to redefine and potentially shatter the binary. My work will contribute to that ever-important task of remaking and reimaging our world into a more inclusive and diverse one.

My queer horror isn't grand sacrifices. It isn't queerbaiting. It isn't upon consumers of it to read the subtext for traces of queerness. My queer horror is simply: there are queer people experiencing horror in the same sort of no-strings-attached way that cisgender, heterosexual characters are frequently allowed without question. Their queerness is not what drives them to be a part of this game, scenario, or world; their orientation isn't a matter of plot, it's a matter of fact.

These should read as characters that are queer, but their whole character isn't being the femme, butch, or fag. My desire is to create characters whose entire personality isn't based on their sexuality, orientation, or presentation, but it is undoubtedly a part of who they are. They are quick-witted, adaptable, loyal, powerful, resourceful, enthusiastic, people (who happen to be queer). They are so much more than their label in the heteronormative, cis-gentric binary. If there is one thing I want to avoid in this and all my future works it's homonormative stereotypes. So, while I want to make it clear this game is about, (and admittedly designed for) queer people, these characters are anything but stereotypes.



KIMBERLY STEELE
CHEER CAPTAIN

⊕ 1d4 +2

POPULAR:
Kimberly may draw an additional card from all RED color decks.

If an **A** or a **B** is pulled this way, you may draw again.

If Kimberly is with her girlfriend, Alyssa, each player may take an additional turn in combat.

ALYSSA HORNE
CLASS PRESIDENT

⊕ 1d4 +2

ACADEMIC:
Once per turn, you may draw an additional color deck card.

If a **C** was pulled this way, you may draw again. This ability only triggers once per turn.

If Alyssa is with her girlfriend Kimberly, she may reactivate her ability once.

For example, Emery High's pride and joy, Kimberly Steele has been a superstar in just about everything she's put her mind to. After spending a year as the track team's top sprinter, she decided to try her hand at soccer, where she helped bring the Otters to nationals. This year, she's set her sights on cheer, where she's already been elevated to captain. Kimberly is good at just about everything, everything except keeping her cool around Alyssa. She spotted her at a rally one day and was never able to get her out of her head. The two have spent a lot of time together, and have grown to be not only lovebirds but best friends. Together, they're an unstoppable team.

I have engaged with TTG and TTRPG nearly every day for the past six years. Between listening to live-play podcasts, planning and running my sessions, and the creation of this thesis project it has become such a huge part of my life that it's hard to imagine a time when I was without it. The D&D books on my shelf are so bursting with incredible (if sometimes clumsily worded) LGBTQ+ content that I simply don't remember a time when D&D wasn't the queer playground it is today. Role-play has been an integral part of self-discovery and self-acceptance in many queer people's coming out, mine included. And while this game isn't the classic RPG, takes elements from RPGs and uses them in new, unique ways.

Weird Fiction began seeing popularity in the early 19th century, and as the genre developed with works like Bram Stokers Dracula and the Cthulhu Mythos; this kind of fiction saw a resurgence in popularity in the late 80-90s and forward with works like The Thing by John Carpenter, The X-Files Series and took on the moniker New Weird. New Weird began to push at the boundaries of horror and science fiction, delving into uncomfortable, sometimes unfathomable spaces. And from my love of Weird Fiction and New Weird works, I began the conception of a world that combined my favorite elements of my favorite stories. It was from this that TEU was created, and along with it the FPC. The idea for this world has been percolating in my head for the last six years.

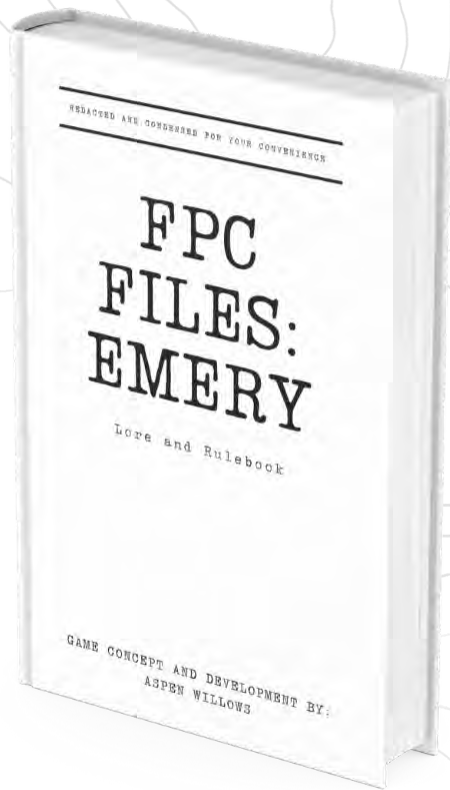
Between pieces of improvisational creative writing, a comic book script, countless pieces of art, and now the distillation of all of that into my thesis, TEU has been my passion project almost exclusively for the entirety of my time at PNCA. Every piece of art I create can, or does exist in TEU, which has allowed me to flesh out this world in ways I simply wouldn't have been capable of in the short time of this BFA thesis project. In my freshman year, I created two small video projects that exist in TEU, and feature operations of the FPC specifically. In my sophomore year, I created a faux-D&D style rulebook with creatures that are now included in FPCFE. By my junior year, I had decided on my thesis direction and continued to create work that existed exclusively inside TEU. And during my junior year, I ran a session of Monster of the Week, a TTRPG inspired by the monster-of-the-week media format popular in the early aughts with titles like Buffy: The Vampire Slayer, and The X-Files. I recorded, arranged, and edited the audio from one of our sessions into an hour-long, listenable, podcast-like format. Then, a book creation project in my Junior Design & Image class pushed my worldbuilding and creation of tactile, interactable materials to new heights.

I created seven separate folders mocking the appearance of top-secret government materials, all containing original short stories and illustrations. These folders established the naming conventions that are present in FPCFE, as well as established the tonality for the rest of my work, which I have begun calling lighthearted horror. I have some of those files here today, as a kind of homage to the beginning of this project. Some of you may have interacted with them before the presentation, and I welcome those who haven't to engage with them after the presentation.

Creating the rulebook was the first step I took in making FPCFE. Moving forward without any sense of rules felt like trying to build a home on the idea of a foundation. I knew that the entire project would be doomed to fail if there wasn't some sense of what the game would be. In my experience and years of playing board games, I know that the more complicated a board game's level of entry, the less likely people are to: 1. Stick out a full game, or 2. Ever play it again. The denial of a board game's purpose is never felt more heavily as it is when a layer of dust has formed on its surface. A game like that has failed its most basic of tasks: to entertain. For obvious reasons, this is what I'd like to avoid.

I began playing board games like Camp Grizzly, Arkham Horror, Dead of Winter, and TIME Stories critically, keeping the rulebooks with me at all times and using every opportunity to double-check what the rules said. As I played, though, I began to notice that doing this was tedious at best, and mind-numbingly boring at worst. Arkham Horror, one of the biggest influences on FPCFE, as I mentioned earlier, is infamous in the TTG community because of its long setup and playtime. It takes between thirty to sixty minutes to set up the game, and full games can take anywhere from 120-240 minutes. It also has an Everest-like learning curve which can only be mediated if another player already knows how to play, or if one is able to find a video of someone else playing to reference. TIME Stories and Dead of Winter, other influences on FPCFE, both have complicated rules but once a full round has been completed the player is able to better understand exactly how the game is played, instead of burying their nose into the rules. The standalone in simplicity is Camp Grizzly. Setup is quick, less than ten minutes, and games last around sixty minutes. Despite this simplicity, the game is fun and engaging the entire time. Because the rules flow so smoothly, and gameplay has so few hiccups, there are few moments where the player is bored or confused.

The main goal of this game is to save the world. But it isn't something that can be done alone. Earlier I gave you the back-of-the-box pitch, but now I would like to go into more detail about the gameplay itself. FPC Files: Emery is a cooperative, horror board game with an all queer cast in which players must travel around the city of Emery, OR gathering tools, weapons, health items, and allies to complete the objective they have selected to save the world. Along their way, they will encounter enemies: humans, horrors, and anomalies. The humans are the cultists, The Chosen of Vexarius. The members of this death worshipping cult have pledged their lives, and the lives of all humans to their deity, Vexarius. Their ancient god floats through the cosmos consuming planets and galaxies alike, becoming more bloated and powerful with each one devoured. Vexarius, or PE-OHORIZON as it is classified with the FPC, resembles a swirling black hole, but with a horrific, ever-watchful eye at its center. This isn't the first time the FPC has dealt with PE-OHORIZON. In fact, at one time it was classified as a World-Ending-Event. Now, there have been countermeasures put into place so whenever a fanatical follower of the ancient god gets a little too interested in summoning it, the FPC can react with speed and efficiency. Any, and all death sates Vexarius and pulls it closer to the source of whatever is ending life. The Chosen have decided that now is the time to bring forth their god to fully devour the planet once and for all. At least then humanity can serve a greater purpose as a part of Vexarius.



The other enemies are monsters, and are classed into two distinct groups. Horrors, and Anomalies. Horrors are classified by the FPC as entities whose presence is known to disorient, confuse, enrage, or otherwise manipulate a person's mental status. Horrors are not hunters and are not typically responsible for the death of a human, but they are opportunistic predators. Horrors have also been recorded speaking with humans in certain instances. The FPC has concluded through testing and containment that a certain level of sentience is present in horrors. Anomalies are creatures that have yet to be successfully contained by the FPC and are not yet fully understood. This is either due to their elusive nature, ability to manipulate reality, or recent appearance on our plane. They share a similar effect to horrors, looking at them can cause great distress, and sometimes even drive a person mad. Anomalies do, however, classify as hunters and have been shown to attack humans and animals indiscriminately. Unlike horrors, anomalies have not been shown to harbor sentience, but this claim requires further investigation and research by the FPC. Arguably the biggest threat to the players, Beloved Han, is also a member of the Chosen of Vexarius, but he works a little differently.

The Chosen believe death by Han's blade is akin to rising to sainthood; so much so that when Han was instructed to kill his own father by the cult elder, the man wept tears of joy that turned to blood. Han's father told the boy that he would be honored to be slain by his blessed hand. Now, after years of this behavior, Han has become bloodthirsty and unhinged, Han will take the life of anyone, for any reason. Han is only shuffled into the decks after a certain level of death has been reached. This is what adjusts the difficulty of the game and what signifies. By adding in Han earlier, players run the risk of encountering him without having weapons to arm themselves with. Adding Han in later gives the players the opportunity to collect some helpful items and allies before they run into him.

The creation of the playable characters for FPCF:E happened all at different times, and were eventually chosen because of their standout personality types or the potential for gameplay archetypes. I spent time both building backstory and creating future narratives; an answer to why these characters are working as a team. Aiden and Alder got their roots from a Monster of the Week TTRPG session I ran with a small group of people. Alyssa and Kimberly existed as names and archetypes of NPCs in TEU. All of their designs were influenced by both queer fashions, as well as late 90's themes. FPCF:E takes place in the summer of 1998, so I made sure to make my character design take into consideration both the time period and the fashion of the region. Alyssa draws much of her design, attributes, and personality from a character that I created in my SP21 Character Design class. They both have distinctive features and long dark hair; they are also both highly intelligent, adaptable, and strong. Beloved Han was also conceived in the same class, and his design has remained relatively similar, only with adjustments to his clothing and facial features.

The looming threat, and potential cause of the end of the world of FPCF:E, Vexarius, was also conceived in this class. Vexarius' design has remained relatively similar and is meant to resemble the Lovecraftian God, Azathoth, whose bloated corpse floats through the endless cosmos. The method of image creation for FPCF:E is multidisciplinary, including digital painting and inking, collage, as well as scanned in traditional watercolor, acrylic paint, ink, and pencil. The combination of these methods allows me to create a unique, previously unseen aesthetic in the Tabletop game world. The main software used for the creation of this body of work is Procreate, which I run on my iPad Pro as well as Adobe Photoshop, InDesign, Illustrator, and Clip Studio Paint. I used all of these in combination for the digital compilation and creation of my pieces. The glitch effect that traces through the entirety of the project is achieved through Procreate. I used a combination of different glitch types including artificialing, signal and divergence to achieve the final look. My work is primarily black and white, with gray tones and the occasional pop of color.





I enjoy this style because of the old style aesthetic that it can reproduce. Since most of my work takes place in the not so distant past, using these colors helps evoke that retro/vintage feeling that many viewers associate with the 80-90's. While I wanted to remain faithful to my developed style, I wanted to push myself to use as much color as possible. While not wholly responsible for keeping players involved, it is more visually pleasing to have something colorful to lose yourself in while you are waiting for your turn, or for events in the game to play out. The tactile elements of FPC:E are of equal importance to the images themselves.

A board game is a wholly interactive experience and requires a physical connection to the board and the pieces. For the box, I took black illustration board and drew out the shape of the desired width and length. I scored, cut, snapped, and taped the box together myself, then wrapped it with gaffer tape to give it a clean look. The gaffer tape does stick slightly, so opening the box at this point in it's development is a little more complicated than I would like. For the wrap of the box I printed the images on the 406 production printer, then used Best-Test paper cement and a soft-edge scraper to push the paper-cement around under the print to ensure full contact and adhesion. The board and character card printing was outsourced to an online merchant, Boardgamesmaker.com, which gave them a sleek, professional look that I will seek to replicate in further development and creation of the game. The board is made of a 2mm 100% recycled chipboard wrapped in 128gsm art paper, then sealed with a gloss laminate. It measures 20x24 inches and is cut quad-fold to fold down to 12x10 inches. The character cards, also printed by Boardgamesmaker.com, are printed on FSC-certified professional standard cardstock. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is a nonprofit organization that works to ensure that future generations have forests; the FSC sets standards for responsible growing practices and land management. The Color deck cards were sent off to print to an online merchant at the beginning of March. I finished them, and sent them off very early in an effort to avoid any shipping issues or complications.

Unfortunately, a week ago I received an email that my package was lost. Both the merchant and the USPS didn't have a clue where it was. It was crushing, since the color decks are a major part of the game, and it can't be played without them. I wouldn't say that if I were doing this process over that I would want the cards to be lost again, but having them turn up lost only days before I was set to defend my project did have an unforeseen benefit. I was able to get a taste of what future printing errors might be like. If I plan on mass-producing this game, problems like this will happen, and they will happen on a much larger scale. But it isn't all nihilism and somber lessons learned. Because this happened last minute I was able to see what I was capable of, and really put my problem-solving skills to the test. I had found out on Wednesday that my cards were lost, and by Friday I had figured out a local printer who could print my cards last minute, Copyman. And while they aren't the industry standard for board games, and there are minor defects in printing I am happy to have them, and from a local printer no less. Working with local printers has been eye-opening to me, and helped me understand what actually goes into printing a multi-piece project like this one. And even though it has arguably been the source of the most stress for me, the complications and errors allowed me to keep local money local which is a win-win for everyone.



The health and sanity sliders alongside the character cards were sourced from Thingiverse, an online repository of user-created 3d files. The file was modeled by user CreativeMechanics on the site, then uploaded for all people to download and print for free. I am, admittedly an enormous nerd. I love all kinds of technology, and how they can interact and intersect with not only my daily life, but my practice as an artist. I am lucky enough to own my own 3D printer, so I was able to make the prints myself. They were printed on an Anycubic Photon Mono, using Anycubic 3D printing UV sensitive resin in the color clear. The printing of the sliders took roughly an hour, and they were allowed to drip for another hour before they were removed from the printing plate. After removal from the printing plate, they were washed in an alcohol bath for roughly five minutes to remove any excess, uncured resin. Once the pieces were cleaned, they were put through an additional curing process, rotating slowly under 405nm UV light for roughly ten minutes. Before the resin fully hardened, I snipped the platforms and supports from the pieces and left them to cure for 24 hours. After letting them fully cure, I dip-dyed them in SigWong alcohol ink in the colors scarlet and sapphire blue. I then left them to dry on an absorbent paper towel, which soaked up any excess alcohol ink. I followed the same method with the death counter after purchasing the custom 3d file from ManticoreArtificer on Etsy. This particular counter was intended for use in any kind of TTG where counting is a requirement, which made it an easy choice for the death counter.

The first player token, which gets passed around between players during gameplay is also tech-driven. After rubber stamping and using gold embossing powder to heat-set the design I placed the paper inside this 45mm plastic housing, and along with it an NFC tag. NFC stands for near-field communication and is a capability most modern smartphones have. Upon contact with the NFC tag, your smart device will give you a prompt to go to a website. Currently, it links to the page on my website that discusses the game, but I plan for the final first player token to link to a PDF of the game rulebook for easy access.



Horror is not new to Tabletop Games or Tabletop Roleplaying Games. One of the biggest influences on gameplay for this board game is Arkham Horror which was released originally in 1989. FPCF:E is influenced and enriched by the New Weird genre with examples such as X-Files, and The Cthulhu Mythos. New Weird pushes at the boundaries of horror and explores them in unique, sometimes uncomfortable ways. The X-Files has had a marked, lasting impact on my interests as well as my creative practice: both written and visual. For those who haven't seen it, it is a weekly series where two FBI agents confront terrors and strange anomalies alike. I credit most of my interest in the paranormal and supernatural to my early introduction to this show and grappling with the idea of lonely sentience in the universe. FPCF:E and TEU borrow themes from the FBI, CIA, and other omnipresent, shady, three-letter government organizations. Walking the line between harmless conspiracy theories, to large-reaching government control, the FPC and TEU operate in a world where paranormal and supernatural occurrences are not only possible, they are part of daily life.

The Call of Cthulhu games, like Arkham Horror and Elder Sign have been instrumental in the creation of the rules for FPCF:E. These somewhat infamous board games are known in the TTG community for their complicated playstyle and long setup and playtimes.



YOU

CAN'T

SAVE

THE

WORLD

ALONE

But, despite how hair-tearing the titles can be, it is undeniable how much fun these games are to play. The fun in Call of Cthulhu is present, but it can be spread out over the long playtime, which can make it feel tedious and long-winded at times. Because of this, I wanted to challenge myself to distill the essence of the Call of Cthulhu games into something more easily digestible to the average game player. A game that is challenging, but not gatekept by complex rules and excessive game pieces.

The visuals are influenced by the style of comic books and graphic novels, reminiscent of the works of Junji Ito. This intensity of line and high contrast will help contribute to players' experience of high-stakes, supernatural horror. I have also taken inspiration from the visuals of the media I expressed above, like X-files. FPCF:E undoubtedly lives visually in the realm of comic books, or graphic novels. FPCF:E also lives in the realm of the style of Western animation, which can evoke a nostalgic feeling for those of us who grew up watching Saturday morning cartoons.

I want to take the excitement of the unknown, the fascination with the strange and unseen, and the tingling sensation of a good horror story that I love so dearly and distill it into a playable, interactable experience. Functionally blending my love and unique way of storytelling, worldbuilding, problem-solving, and tactile interaction will carve out a spot for this type of game in the canon. Through the process of creation, I have had multiple parties express their interest and desire to play the game. This is incredibly encouraging! Knowing that people are interested in the game when it is still very much in a larval state is all any creator could ask for, and I am eager to get to the point where my game can be purchased by horror fans and board game fans alike. But, FPCF:E is by no means finished, and has just entered into the playtesting phase of its lifespan.

Now, the game is planned to live in the realm of cooperative, multiplayer board games like the ones I mentioned before. It will live alongside them in both community and audience: the nerds who are into horror but want something a little different. This game also has opportunities for expansion in the way of card packs that include new characters, allies, monsters, and objectives while retaining the same board. This will allow for replayability and expandability in ways that comparative media can't. After extensive playtesting, I plan to fund the game on Kickstarter, or another crowd fundraising platform.

During the playtesting phase of its creation, I will also be running a Discord server where anyone who is interested in following the game or joining a growing community of queer gamers is welcome.

For those of you who got a takeaway bag, there is a skeleton key inside with a tag attached to it. If you have a smartphone, you can open your camera app and hold the tag in the viewfinder.

Your phone should automatically pick up the QR code and link you to my website. There, you can find information on how to join the discord and stay up to date with the progression of the game, as well as potentially be involved in playtesting sessions. From there, depending on the success and demand, I would be thrilled for the game to exist in a physical game store, on the shelf next to other horror games, or other LGBT content. Local Game Stores like Mox and Guardian Games would be obvious choices, but I could also see the game living in certain areas of Powells' or other bookstores.

FPCF:E is the culmination of years of worldbuilding, character development, and creative writing. It was my job this semester to start creating the visual language for TEU, and set my project up for successful future growth. I know I have a long way to go, and since we're just beginning the playtesting phase, that FPCF:E won't be sealed up in plastic and on a shelf any time soon. But that's okay. As someone who came back to college later in my life, who is about to turn 30, I know things are just getting started. I'm just so excited about where things go.

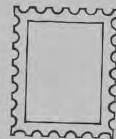
I wanted to thank my thesis mentor, Zack Rau, for all of his help in keeping me on track and sane this semester. From the first day, we met back in Digital Media Strategies you have always pushed me to be a better, more confident person. I would also like to thank all of my illustration classmates and fellow thesis students for their critique and support of my project. Without your kind and critical eye, I wouldn't have been able to create a body of work of this magnitude. To my family, who couldn't be here for my defense but have been by my side through everything else. And lastly, to my fiance. From picking up all the chores around the house so I could focus, to holding me when things went wrong. You're such an incredible person, and I sometimes think you might be more enthusiastic about my work than I am. I'm not sure where this thesis project would have ended up without your unwavering support. So, thank you. I will now open the floor up to questions from the panel.



Lacey's 10th Birthday

♥ at Lacey's party.
it us in Emery soon!

kind you.
RATION



@awillowsart

CREATIVE BRIEF

PRODUCT VISION

FPC Files: Emery is a thematic cooperative board game for two to four players that emphasizes the need for cooperation and sharing of resources in a 90's queer, supernatural horror universe. My final deliverable was a fully realized board game that will be ready for play-testing. FPC Files: Emery is a turn-based, cooperative multiplayer board game with an all queer cast.

METHODS & MATERIALS

The main method of creation for this project was Procreate, which was run on my iPad Pro. It is through Procreate that I was able to create the digital glitch effect that traces through the work. I also used other programs to compile and edit my work including the Adobe Creative Suite: InDesign, Photoshop, Illustrator, and Bridge. The physical printing of the pieces is a combination of self-printed pieces, and pieces outsourced to professional printers in the board game industry.

COMPARATIVE MEDIA

For research on rule design, I referenced the following materials: Camp Grizzly, Arkham Horror, and Dead of Winter. The television series X-Files and the video game Control were hugely influential on visuals, as well as the style of comic books and visual novels. The narrative was inspired by the well-established themes in western horror, as well as the New Weird Genre.

MARKETPLACE APPLICATION

The game lives in the realm of cooperative, multiplayer board games like the ones I mentioned before. It lives alongside them in both community and audience, the nerds who are into horror but want something a little different. This game will be able to exist alongside other young-adult games; the box recommends a 14+ age.

AUDIENCE

The intended audience for this game is broad, as many board games are. But, it would appeal most to other queer people who like horror, monsters, and tabletop gaming. Because of the intersection of topics, however, this is a game that has something for every kind of game player.



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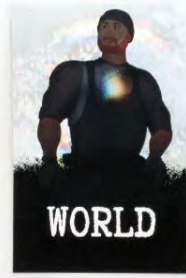
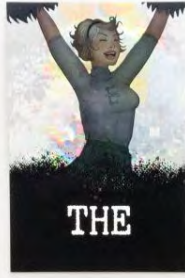
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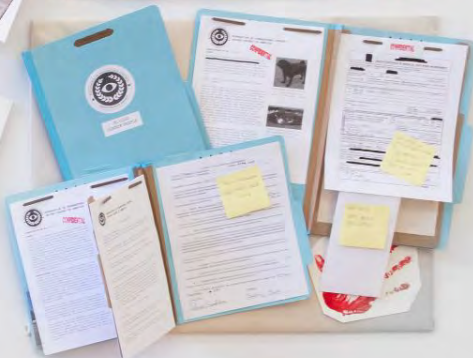
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<p>12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1</p>	<p>ALDER HIGHTREE HANDYMAN</p>  <p>⊕ 1d4 +3</p> <p>PUT IT ON MY TAB: Alder draws two cards from any BLUE deck location. If a  is pulled from any color deck he may draw again.</p> <p>If Alder is with his husband, Aiden, Alder may search the deck for a specific card, add it to his inventory. Then, shuffle the deck.</p>	<p>18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1</p>	<p>14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1</p>	<p>AIDEN HIGHTREE THE MAGE</p>  <p>⊕ 1d4 +2</p> <p>SPELLBOOK: Once per round of combat, you may flip a d2. If heads, Aiden performs one of two actions: Cast any level 2 spell, lose -1 Cast any level 2 spell, lose -1</p> <p>If tails, -1</p> <p>If Aiden is with his husband Alder, Aiden may ignore the loss of / from his Spellbook result.</p>	<p>14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1</p>
<p>14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1</p>	<p>ALYSSA HORNE CLASS PRESIDENT</p>  <p>⊕ 1d4 +1</p> <p>ACADEMIC: Once per turn, you may draw an additional color deck card.</p> <p>If a  was pulled this way, you may draw again. This ability only triggers once per turn.</p> <p>If Alyssa is with her girlfriend Kimberly, she may reactivate her ability once.</p>	<p>16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1</p>	<p>14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1</p>	<p>KIMBERLY STEELE CHEER CAPTAIN</p>  <p>⊕ 1d4 +2</p> <p>POPULAR: Kimberly may draw an additional card from all RED color decks.</p> <p>If an  or a  is pulled this way, you may draw again.</p> <p>If Kimberly is with her girlfriend, Alyssa, each player may take an additional turn in combat.</p>	<p>12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1</p>

<p>RIPLEY GAVERN SECRET KEEPER</p>  <p>If a player with RIPLEY would take loss, flip 1d2. If heads, ignore loss. Knows FPC Codes.</p>	<p>ED NEWMAN PSYCHIATRIST</p>  <p>At the end of the turn, all players with ED gain +1. Knows FPC Codes.</p>
<p>JULIE FLORES CAMP COUNSELOR</p>  <p>Players with JULIE can teleport to FOREST OUTPOST and CAMPGROUNDS. Gain a first aid kit.</p>	<p>STEVE WILLIAM MAYOR OF EMERY</p>  <p>Players with MAYOR STEVE can teleport to CITY HALL. Gain a Skeleton Key. Knows FPC Codes.</p>

<p>PE-511 ANOMALY</p>  <p>-1 to all targets. -1 to one target.</p>	<p>PE-20H ANOMALY</p>  <p>-2 to all targets. -2 to one target.</p>
<p>PE-01S HORROR</p>  <p>-1 to all targets. Highest sanity player flip 1d2. 1 - nothing happens 2 - discard a item at random</p>	<p>PE-35A HORROR</p>  <p>-2 to all targets. Highest sanity player flip 1d2. 1 - nothing happens 2 - discard a item at random</p>

<p>CULTIST DEVOTED</p> <p>2</p>  <p>-2 ♥ to one target. "I've given everything to Vexarius. And now, I'll give him your life."</p>	<p>CULTIST FANATIC</p> <p>4</p>  <p>-2 ♥ to all targets. "Why are you fighting this? Can't you hear him?"</p>	<p>BELoved HAN SPEAKER OF VEXARIUS</p> <p>10</p>  <p>-2 ♥ to all targets. BLOODLUST If Han's attack lands, take an additional -1 ♥ if you are below max health.</p>
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<p>UNEARTHLY ENCOUNTER</p> <p>TWO MEN IN BLACK SUITS AND SUNGLASSES ARE WALKING AROUND TOWN DEMANDING PEOPLE SHOW THEM IDENTIFICATION. SOMETHING FEELS OFF ABOUT THEM, AND THEIR SUITS HANG LOOSE IN STRANGE PLACES ON THEIR BODIES.</p> <p>PLAYERS MUST ABANDON 1 ♥ AND 1 🔧 TO KEEP THE STRANGE MEN DISTRACTED. IF THEY DO NOT, TOWNSPEOPLE BEGIN GOING MISSING. (ROLL 2D4 TO DETERMINE THE TOTAL.)</p>	<p>OVERWHELMED</p> <p>TOO MANY CULTISTS, NOT ENOUGH WEAPONS.</p> <p>PLAYERS MUST SACRIFICE 2 🔪 TO ARM THE PEOPLE AND HANDLE THE CULTIST THREAT. IF THEY DO NOT, 5 TOWNSFOLK DIE AND THE PLAYERS TAKE -1 ♥ / -1 🍄</p>	<p>LOOK AWAY!</p> <p>A HORROR HAS APPEARED AND THREATENS TO DESTROY EVERYONE'S SANITY. PLAYERS MUST SACRIFICE 1 📺 IF THEY DO NOT, 5 TOWNSFOLK DIE, AND PLAYERS TAKE -2 🍄</p>	<p>IN THE TREES</p> <p>REBORN GOES AT THE SKI LODGE HAVE STARTED GOING MISSING IN THE MOUNTAINS. RANGERS HAVE ONLY BEEN ABLE TO RECOVER THEIR BLOODY, SHREDDED CLOTHES. SOMETHING IS CLEARLY HUNGRY. PLAYERS CAN CHOOSE TO TAKE -2 ♥ / -2 🍄 TO KILL THE MONSTER IN THE WOODS. IF THEY DON'T, WHATEVER IS IN THE WOODS CONTINUES ITS FEAST. (ROLL 1D6 TO DETERMINE THE TOTAL)</p>	<p>DIRTY WATER</p> <p>TOXIC, SENTIENT SLUDGE IS COZZING OUT OF EVERY FAUCET IN EMBERY. PLAYERS MUST SACRIFICE 2 🔧 TO FIX THE LEAKS. IF THEY DO NOT, X TOWNSFOLK ARE CONSUMED IN ITS SLOW-MOVING SPREAD. (ROLL 1D6 TO DETERMINE THE TOTAL.)</p>
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5 ITEM CATEGORIES

- Weapons
- ~~Education~~ Readings
- ~~Food~~ Anomalous
- Medicine
- Tools

ALLY ~~2*~~ Special

30 common, ~~2*~~ ²⁵ unique, 20 ally

Common weapons: (6)

- Survival knife +1 ATK
- hammer +1 ATK
- Shovel +2 ATK
- crowbar +2 ATK
- baseball bat +2 ATK
- 2x4 w/nails +1 ATK

Common readings: (6) (3 book, 3 spell)

- magazine +1S +1 attack
- comic +2S +1 health
- novel +3S +1 (your choice)

Medicine: (6)

- bandage +1 health
- Splint +2 health
- alcohol wipes +1 health
- medicated bandage +2 health
- bottled water +1 health
- Painkillers +2 health

Tools: (6)

- Simple key
- lockpick
- ammo (universal)
- rope
- crowbar
- pocket knife

Common anomalies: (6) ALL SINGLE USE!

- ever-present bookmark
- bitter drink
- creepy bobblehead
- untearable plastic bag
- glowing crystal
- ~~shifting book~~
- empty book

Unique weapons: (5)

- Chainsaw
- 9mm
- Katana
- ritual dagger
- Fireaxe

Unique readings (5)

- occult text + 2S
 - FPC File + ~~1S~~ -1S, Gain advantage on ATK
 - ~~stopwatch~~ +2 ATK
 - ~~stopwatch~~ +2 health
 - Choice of +2 health + 2 ATK
- } only once

Unique medicine (5)

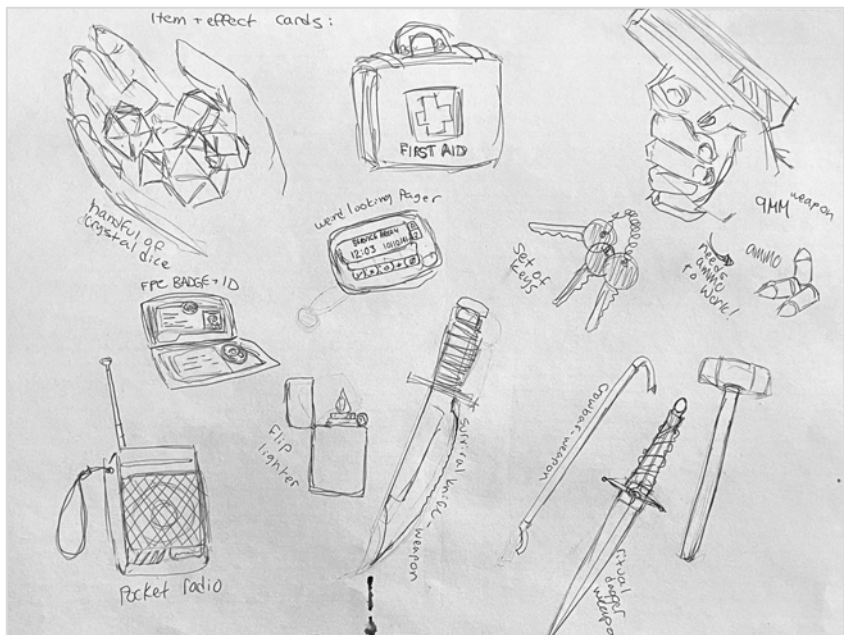
- green herb
- Sanity Pills
- adrenaline
- First aid kit
- Splint

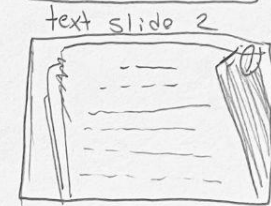
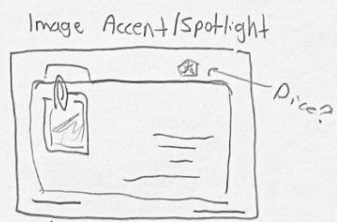
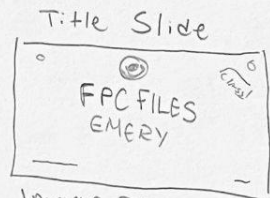
Unique tools: (5)

- keyring full of keys
- FPC badge
- weird pager
- Personal radio
- titanium lockpick

SINGLE USE

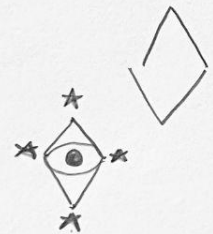
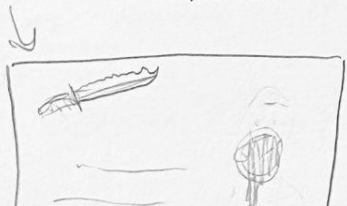






- Theme: Classified Documents/Dossier
- actual laid out, printed documents arranged - photographed.
 - Why? the final deliverable will be tactile, so it makes sense to present it this way.
 - top down view of a "researcher's" desk. Messy, but purposeful.
 - Create the grit + tone of project w/ the images, Or just views of documents
 - "official" government document look. 1920x1080
 - "maybe I shouldn't be looking" ↳ thrilling!

this slide design can be used for sketchwork + visual development



- "Don't be 'too much'"
 - ↳ don't overwhelm
 - find a balance between what I want to show.
- find the balance between words + visuals.



ALDER SMYTHE



AIDEN HIGHTREE



DR. LIZBETH TERY



AGENT SHARPE



KIMBERLY STEELE



ALYSSA HORNE

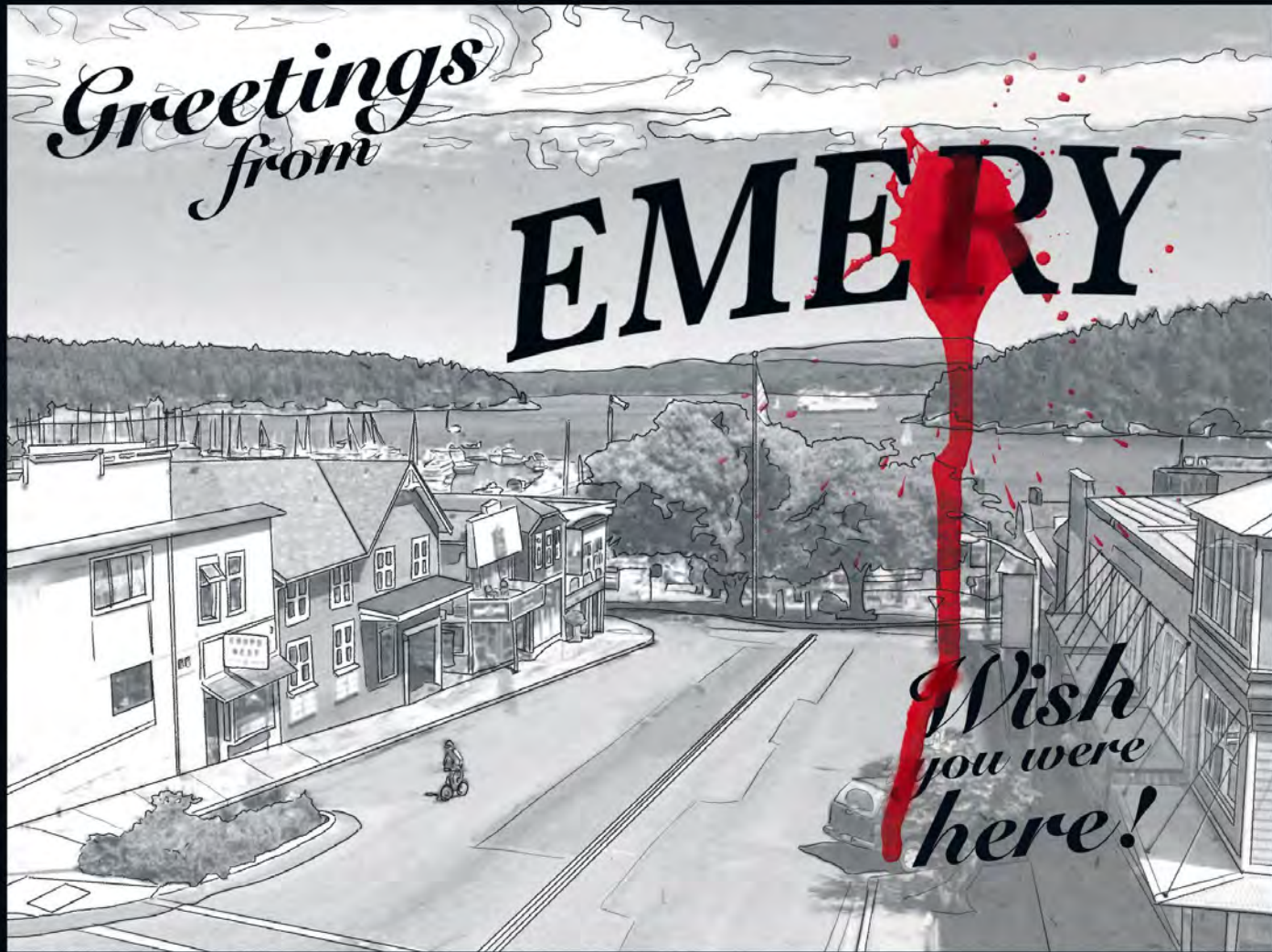


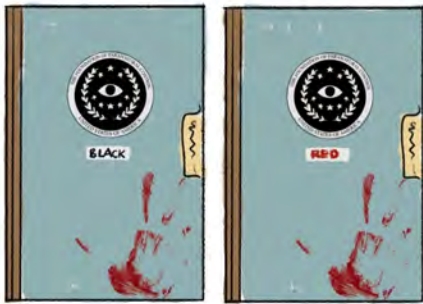
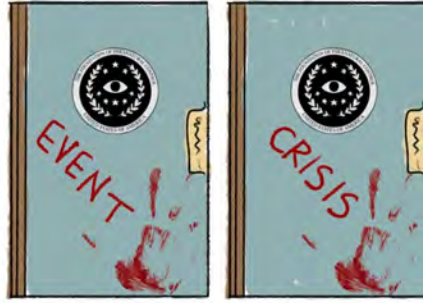


*Greetings
from*

EMERY

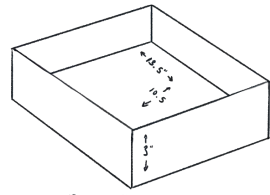
*Wish
you were
here!*



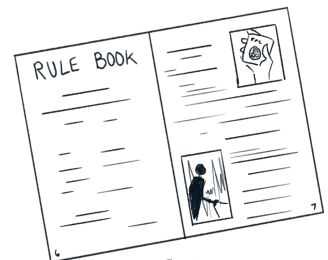


CHARACTER CARD

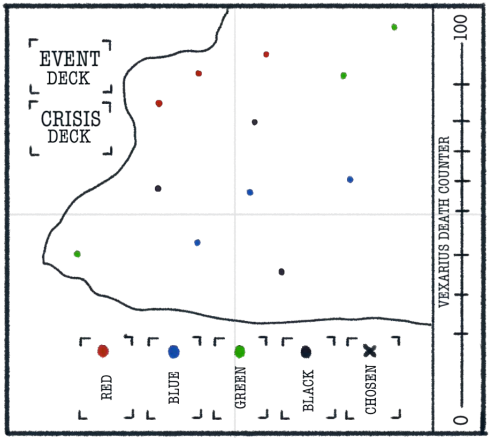
ITEM CARD



BOX: 13.5x11.5x3
LINED CHIPBOARD

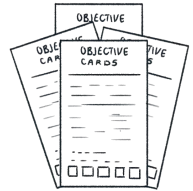


8.5x5.5" RULE BOOK
80LB TEXT PAPER



CHARACTER CARD

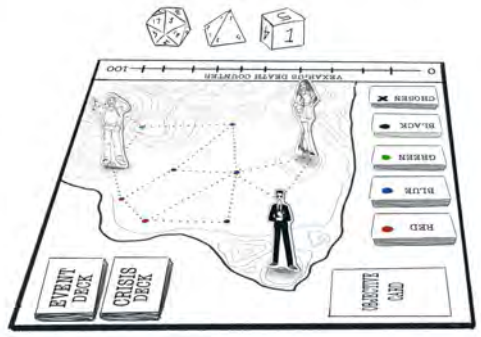
ITEM CARD



OBJECTIVE CARDS 6x3.5"
300 GSM CARDSTOCK

CHARACTER CARD

ITEM CARD





YOU
CAN'T
SAVE
THE
WORLD
ALONE