Riley Clark Thesis Portfolio

Fall Thesis 2022

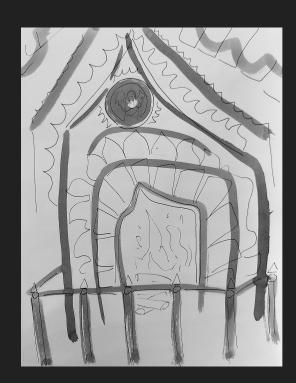
Artist Statement

Riley Clark is a Portland-based artist who studied at Pacific Northwest College of Art. He enjoys creating dark yet cute illustrations that play with the push and pull of neon colors. Many of them can be defined as, "Lisa Frank, but make it Goth", with their bold colors and lines that resemble make-believe creatures with bodies of rabbits or cats. He also enjoys creating artwork on the other side of the spectrum that contains heavy ink work and dark colors with melancholy emotions and darker subject matter, usually used for his storytelling in his comics and manga.

Riley first took a passion for art through some of his favorite children's books, such as "The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear", "Is Your Mama a Llama?", and "The Velveteen Rabbit". Through these books, Riley was inspired to replicate detailed creations about animals and their experiences through life and their personal turmoils. Personifying animals with very human interactions and experiences have given Riley new ways to view the world around him and how everything can be connected to another, even through life or death.

Through his detailed creatures with intricate backgrounds of life and experiences, he wishes to share the truth of emotions with no barriers. Using the materials of watercolor, ink, and digital Riley hopes to print these ideas out in the physical formats of his own Children's books and Manga.

Through the interweavings of life and death, love and fear - how they have impacted my life in many different ways and continue to impact it, has given me a different perspective than some. With ever-fleeting life and the fear that others distill in us and the fear of losing such embodiments that were meant to protect us or be there for us in some way, has driven a lot of my inspiration for this project. For my thesis, I will create an 80-page graphic novel, illustrated in black and white through ink and decisive, hand-drawn lines. Creating a sense of emotion within the characters and atmosphere with deep blacks accentuating the feeling of entrapment and fear. The story will focus on two captives of one city, both tormented by their fathers and bound to the commands and oppressed by such men. Through the story, these two captives will meet each other unexpectedly and will start to form a bond that is seen as a protective friendship. However, as things progress in their lives, they realize that the feelings they hold for each other are much more than a friendship. As their attraction grows, the fathers keep them farther away from one another but this doesn't seem to stop them from still wishing to be in each other's arms.



Firstly, growing up. I never stayed in one place for long and my family was constantly moving from one place to another. By the time I was 12, I had already lived in 14 different houses/apartments. This type of constant moving around made me feel numb or unattached to my surroundings or my peers at school at times. Which gave me an overall emotion of feeling a continual loss and I learned to not make many connections with others because there would be no point as I would later have to leave them without saying goodbye most times. Secondly, growing up, I have experienced the passing of many family members. While not being able to attend any type of funeral I would still hear the stories of how they passed away, with every detail and usually through the means of suicide. My only family members now consist of my mother, my younger brother, and two cousins who I have not seen or heard anything about since I was 16 years old. Thirdly, growing up in a Christian household and the beliefs and ideas that are spread as to how one should act or think, felt controlling and as if I had no freedom or voice for myself. Feeling this type of control over one's life that is not your own, creates a type of feeling of insecurity of yourself and the concept that one is just not enough. Making it hard to create meaningful connections with others or to feel that others could be trusted. And lastly, dealing with difficult family members and areas of abuse from them, mentally and physically, has created a type of fear for the ones I'm meant to love. When discussing the concepts of love and fear and how they conflict with one's emotions as to how something should be but is not, and never will be, truly does eat away at a person.

These are all concepts from my personal experiences that I wish to delve deeper into in understanding and vocalizing to others. As a way of finding my voice again after so many years of feeling trapped and to share it through the vessels of these two captives. They will be used to replicate my own two sides of me as a person along with my thoughts and feelings. One being more sweet and kind, frightened, but doesn't let it show or let these emotions get the better of them. The other is more cold and distant, yet loving and wishing to take care of others but knows the cost of doing so causing them to be skeptical of others. This body of work will be my voice and my own experiences showing through as they are intertwined with my inspirations from other work that I have digested over time.

Using the two captives as vessels of myself and as representation to my own two sides with all the emotions and experiences I have gone through. I wish to tie these together to what I feel currently and what I have felt in the past as a way of finding my voice again. Due to these feelings I have and with some certain aspects as to how these characters will be revealed in the story as being something more than just human, both of these characters will be using they/them pronouns. While I use he/him pronouns, to show the representation of both my masculine and feminine sides and to replicate an aspect of unknowing, using they/them pronouns for them I find to be effective. While both of them will have "male" bodies genetically I will still focus on adding feminine features to them and the concept of not being "complete" in a sense.

To achieve the described effect, I will Draw in a more anime style where eyes are exaggerated and facial features are softened to change the appearance to be more ambiguous such as in shojo styles will be effective throughout the drawings for this body of work.

For this project, I will be making an 80-page story, this will not include title cover pages and the intro pages. The title cover pages will be illustrated in color as will be the front and back cover. The intro pages will consist of words about the book and small doodles and slight information about the characters. All pages will be hand-drawn in ink on either a fine-toothed watercolor paper or bristol. The pages will be scanned into a digital format and will have screen tones added to them for extra shading and effects. The finished concept will be the size of a standard manga book, which is 5 inches by 7.5 inches. This project will be used as an example of my work and will be presented to future clients. I wish to have this made into a physical copy and to have it be published in the future as I want it to be shared with others. I would also like to continue the story once I finish this book, as I feel that there is much more to tell through this work.



Currently, my influences derive from many different types of manga that I have read over the years. First is Fake, written and illustrated by Sanami Matoh. I enjoy this body of work as the story is only seven volumes, yet the entire time the two characters spend their time building up feelings for each other. From the first book to the very last one, there's a gentle friendship that grows into love and when coming to the last book, the two have come to fully trust each other and give in to their desires of one another. Another great body of work that has influenced me is Durarara!! by Ryongo Narita, this book is about a huge cast of characters who all live in one city. These characters go through their lives and unknowingly at times, affect and influence other characters and their actions. Each book shifts its perspective and changes to a different character or group of characters, showing how one event in one day affected everyone. Because of this, it may take one to two books of reading to get to the full story of one day. A third influence would be Finder by Ayano Yamane, this book focuses on two characters who live in a big city together. One character is a photographer for a newspaper, who one night sees and takes pictures of something he shouldn't have. This then causes a ripple effect in his life as he then becomes trapped in an underground Yakuza circle and intertwined in the love interest of one of the leaders. All of these are great stories and have influenced me in how the story will be told, how background characters will affect others or be affected by the main characters, how the city aspect will work into the story, and how to tell the connection of the love between the two main characters.

I work primarily in ink already and I enjoy drawing by hand. Doing this project will not only connect me back with what I love but will also strengthen my sense of control and power over the medium. To help me better understand what it is that I wish to do and how to do it well. This project will be used as a springboard for my future endeavors and will show the growth of my skills in ink. I'm also fond of watercolors and colored ink with these being the main sources of color in my current works. Using ink and bright colors, I like to delve into art that explores grotesque curiosities. Such as brightly colored rabbits with gore aspects added in or creating strange mashups of different creatures put together. My current portfolio features such drawings along with some of my darker ink work featuring people and an assortment of gothic depictions. This graphic novel will be a great way to combine my current work with my future work into a more idealized focal point for my overall portfolio. This project will be a body of work that will show my self-expression and experiences with life and death. How these aspects have influenced and changed my emotions into states of love and fear. Such depictions will be shown through the vessels of two captives within the story, both of who use they/them pronouns and show different sides of myself. These characters will undergo the drought of fear and finding love among a city of death, hoping to find the freedom of life within another and together. This will be my voice coming through and regaining its control over the past and sharing with others as to how not everyone is alone and there are better days, as I have come to find out myself.

Thesis Abstract

A story of two captives caught in a dystopian city and how they fight for freedom. Sorensai our main protagonist is caught in between the grasp of his father's clutches and being a part of the industry's "entertainment". He has tried to escape many times all to end in failure, slowly breaking down his will and leaving him to accept his fate of death within the city. Shakai, our second protagonist is heir to the city after his father passes, in the meantime he is taught to act and think just the way his father does. Shakai grows a disdain towards his father and how he treats the people of the city, but finds himself to be very weak against his father's power and actions. Leaving him no choice but to obey and go with the flow. These two protagonists are held against their will by their father's own ambitions and power, through a chance encounter at a party, they meet one another. Through this meeting they form a bond together that begins as a friendship and later evolves into a codependency with feelings of attraction and conflict. The two harbor one another and shoulder each other's hardships, only to come together to form a master plan of escaping this city one day. But, will their bond for one another be strong enough? Or, will their father's get in the way and get rid of them for good?

- Title Slide
- Welcome Slide

Gunthrell is a graphic novel about two young boys who reside within a dystopian gothic city and through a chance encounter, they bring a type of calming solace to one another. Today's work features the first chapter of this story and how it was built along with finished pages and an idealized text. This body of work has become very personal to me as the two protagonists are meant to be mirror images of myself with my emotions and certain experiences I have had in life. This book is meant to be used as a coping mechanism for myself and for others who may have gone through similar aspects. Such aspects consist of religion, controlled environments, absent parents, abuse, emotional dread, and depressive episodes.

Going forward there is a Content Warning for mentions and depictions of such topics along with blood, imprisonment, and sexual assault.

If anyone needs the time to step out now or later on in the presentation then please do so as you are more than welcome to.

- Story Concept Slide
- Gunthrell Intro

When creating this project I first thought of a general space as to where these emotions could take place. I thought of a city that was corrupt, filled with greed and human desire - so much so that its people had lost sight of individuality and empathy. Death became an everyday occurance and those of only worthy status were preserved.

Next slide

It was within this city that I found it suitable for the story I wished to tell of my two protagonists and captives who would reside in and encounter each other.

Next Slide

This was the general basis I had created for the protagonists and their story of escape and fight for life, freedom, and love. Would they win it all only to lose it in the end?

Study Art

Once figuring out these general ideas of a story the next step was to design and understand what this type of environment would look like. How these two characters would interact within it and how it would reflect on their emotions. As this story was purely made from the idea of these characters and how they help one another, I wanted to best reflect that in a city where it always felt like night and that felt as if it could crumble down on top of you at any given moment. To accentuate the type of fear and anxiety of these two characters, I wanted the reader to truly feel it as well and to feel as if the dark pages within this book would suck them in.

Next Slide

Using the aforementioned concept as my basis, I began to look up grim looking churches and cathedrals within the gothic era of architecture and took in account the different eras of renewal and how some of the most minute details were changed over time with different perspectives.

Next Slide

Many of these early drawings and depictions were quite loose and gestural as I was testing out the components that build up these structures and finding out which aspect could change without taking away the general idea of a church. Testing out pillar shapes and windows, I squished and squashed them, bending them to see how far they could go.

Next Slide

I tested out the arches and roofs of these buildings as well and tried to give them bestial elements. For a time I wondered how strong these buildings could be if they too were alive in some way and if their doorways should depict hungry jowls of fearsome monsters. But later on in the process I found it wiser to give this aspect to some of the more "important" buildings and to make the rest, the houses of the civilians - to depict a type of deadness - empty husks of the people who inhabit them.

Next Slide

After working on the buildings themselves, I then moved onto the environment itself and how these buildings would look inside a grim space that was filled with red dread.

Next Slide

I experimented more with how these buildings were constructed and how they gave a type of feeling that brought the colors and area around them more to life.

Next slide

Moving further along I began to test out these spaces with some figures. At this point I was testing out with the four wise men who are in charge of the council and take care of the graveyard, along with some civilians.

Next slide

I was curious as to what type of foliage would work best for this project, at first I was in love with the idea of there being big trees and wrapping ivy among the buildings. But later on ditched this (though not completely) as I felt like this made the environment feel ethereal in a way and made it feel too full of life. I decided to later on go with stone and dark grass. These trees were moved to the space around the mountain that the city rests upon and the vines do show up very sparsely among some of the older buildings.

Character Concept Slide

Now that I have played around with the environment, it was time to go back to the characters that I had first created for the general premise of this story, Shakai and Sorensai. I wished to flush them out further and to add to their design.

This was also the time that I used to come up with the two main antagonists - Sylvester and Rometh along with further pushing the idea of the four wise men and what general civilians would look like.

Next slide

In this first slide I have illustrations of the environment being pushed further along with shadowy figures that are meant to represent the common civilians. As they do not play a vital part in the story and are more of bystanders - the shadowy feel of them is justified. As this is how they are perceived by the antagonists, beings that are ther and that take up space but don't do much than that. When civilians do "step out of the shadows" that is when they are perceived as threats to the main characters.

Next slide

Up next I have the four wise men and their designs. While they all look eerily the same, there are very slight differences among them such as height, beard size, and symbol among their hats. These characters are in charge of enforcing the laws that are distilled upon the city by Sylvester and are considered as the city's council as they also help him address any issues among the city and its inhabitants. They are also in charge of the city's graveyards and the remains of worthy individuals that are placed there, this graveyard is located on the other side of the city underneath a giant cross that is engraved with the commandments of Slyvester. While these characters do not show up in the first chapter of this book, they are still a vital part to the story and do make an appearance in the later chapters.

Next slide

This is Sylvester himself, he is the ruler of the city and the father of Shakai. He enforces his cruel and sadistic commands onto his people through direct contact or even through subtle geographical and architectural choices. The city of Gunthrell is atop a large mountain with a flat top, there is only one passageway which you can scale down safely - all other ways could bring sudden death with how steep and rocky the place is. Surrounding the mountain is a dense forest that has extensive overgrowth and at times fearsome beasts who feast upon trespassers. Past this forest are sudden cliffs and a roaring ocean, making all transport and trade being done either through experienced sailors and boats or through air travel. With this type of environment, Sylvester has knowingly cut off all of his people from the outside world and has made it easier to control them. There is also the aspect of how each house is built, each civilian house sits upon either side of the city's main path with all doors and windows facing outward and toward the castle-church that Slyvester resides in, known as the "Holy Towers". Atop each house is a cross that signifies the inhabitants loyalty and obedience to their ruler. Each house is meant to look the same as a way to strip away their individuality and self will.

Next slide

Slyvester is also known to be a shapeshifter as he can take parts of his shadowy body and either create numerous minions under his control known as "Shades" or can contort his body into the form of different animals and beasts which he uses at times to distill fear and power into those who defy him.

While he can do both actions at the same time, his transformations will become more physical and powerful the less Shades he has out.

Next slide

This here is Rometh who is the father of Sorensai, he is the leader of one of the most leading "entertainment industries' 'of Gunthrell. Meaning he works through making and supplying people for the pleasure of others within the city. When creating him I was intrigued by the concept of a classical clown and how the general fear of them was conceived on how they could be sadistic and lack the capacity for any type of empathy of conscience or wrong or right. While he holds power among those within his "industry" he is still under Slyvester's thumb and bends to every command he makes.

Next slide

And finally, here is Shakai and Sorensai. Both characters are under the influence and power of their fathers and have very little room to be themselves or to think of there being something better outside the city. While Sorensai has made a handful of escapes, each one was extremely difficult to execute and each ended in failure which has led him to hold very little faith in himself and the concept of ever leaving. He has come to, over time, accept his fate and the fact that he will die here within this city of darkness. Sorensai is represented with shoulder length sandy hair and a small frame along with sad doe-like eyes.

Shakai is held under the expectations and power of his father Sylvester as he is meant to take on his father's throne when he passes, yet he is appalled by this as even though he is not pure of heart himself - he does not find himself agreeing with the ways of his father. He is able to distinguish wrong from right and carries around his own self shame and guilt of actions he has done through his father's wishes. Shakai is represented with long black hair, a sturdy frame with broad shoulders and cold-piercing eyes.

Next slide

These two characters have a chance encounter through a party that is being held by Sylvester at the holy towers. Sorensai is brought there as a part of the "entertainment" and Shakai is required to attend as he lives there and must welcome the visitors, however when done welcoming everyone and when no one is paying attention to him - he sneaks off to the second floor where he finds Sorensai. These two characters share a brief conversation that later on leads to them becoming a type of protection and solace for one another that later one blooms into friendship and conflicted feelings of attraction.

Next slide

Through the numerous actions of these two characters and their environment around them, they come to plan an ultimate attempt for escape. Through the story, they face obstacles together that deter their plans and their time together, they face off each one and find a way, but will they truly win in the end and escape from the confines that hold them within?

Finished pages

Through the building of this story there were many changes and renditions made to the storyboard and the content that each page would hold in ways to best convey certain emotions and fear among Shakai and Sorensai. In all pages throughout the story they are hand drawn with a dip pen and later on scanned into photoshop where deep reds were added. These spots of red are meant to signify what aspects in each panel gave Sorensai or Shakai fear in certain moments or people.

Next slide

Here is the finished artwork for the cover on the left and the first opening page on the right. When creating the cover I wanted to convey a type of power and fear that was being pressed upon Sorensai. In the lineup of the characters, I have sorensai at the very bottom of the page, above him is Rometh then the four wise men, then sylvester, and then Shakai. Through this depiction of levels with the characters we are able to see how sorensai views them and how he views those with power above him. While Shakai is above Slyvester he is also restrained to a cross - signifying that even though he could fight back he cannot do so at this time as he is still under the control of another. Behind the characters is The Holy Towers and a pitch black night, even further pushing the idea of control and a loss of hope. It was made through all traditional mediums with ink, watercolor, and acrylic. All other pages were made hand drawn with ink and a dip pen but the red was added in through photoshop.

When creating the right image I wanted to have a full page image that could first welcome the viewer into the world and show The Holy Towers in the distance with the houses of the civilians lined about along the pathway. Conveying the welcoming feeling of dread and uneasiness, night blankets the city and the red moon sits high upon the sky with two ravens dancing around it as they screech out into the night. The pathway through the city is colored red and shows the depiction of a red river silently flowing through the city full of the inhabitants' sins and those who die from daily oppression and pain.

Next slide

In this left image we see the empty confinements of a prisoner with a deadly red glow within. The moon outside has become more pure than that of the contents within and creates a white light to show the gleam of chains and cuffs. A raven has flown down to the open window of the cell and peaks its curious head in with an intriguing smile as the city is shown behind it. This page represents the confines of Sorensai and how he has just escaped, leaving the heavy restaurants behind.

Within the image on the right a shadowy presence is seen filling up the space within the cell in the top left panel. This shadow has red piercing eyes and has even scared the raven away, leaving a small black feather in its scurry. Moving to the next panel we get a closeup of this figure with the shadows swirling around them and their red eyes burning through the darkness. This is Rometh and he has just been made aware of sorensai's escape, he tells his men to find him and in the lower last image he adds in to send the hounds as we see Sorensai's shadow escape down the mountain path.

Next slide

In these two images, the tone of the story picks up as a chase begins where the men of Rometh and dogs hunt Sorensai down through the forest so that they may capture him and bring him back. To the left the camera pans out again to show the city atop the large mountain and the long pathway that seeps down it, Sorensai's silhouette seen making headway into the forest. He pants with heavy breaths as he pushes his legs to carry him faster through the foliage and to his freedom. A raven swoops through the night air and screeches once more, announcing the warning of fear and death.

Within the right image a man of Rometh is seen instructing the hounds into the night and having them hunt down the scent of the escapee. With such speed, the fearsome beasts burst through the forest with their bared fangs and sharp claws, tearing through anything that stands in their way.

Storyboard scenes

Talk through the story as it appears on the screen.

Influences

Influences for this project consist of other books and dark media that I have read and experienced over the years.

Firstly being the Secrets of Kell, especially the viking scene. This city is enveloped in a large wall
that the people work diligently to grow larger each day to help protect them from a future viking
attack.

- Later on in the story when the inevitable attack is made, the story switches from warm greens and ghostly blues to dreadful reds and harsh ink textures. The vikings take away any type of peace and comfort that the city's inhabitants once had. The way this city is constructed also inspired me with its unique perspective and house layout.
- Second being CastIvania with the strong religious references throughout the dilapidated architecture
 and the strong story within this world where trusting others is dangerous and many humans have
 been corrupted to a darker side of desire and hatred.
- Third, being the anime Durarara!! with its string story-telling and deep connections with each member within the city - showing how one action can affect the lives of many
- Next is the Arrival by Shaun Tan with its textured pages that cover a topic of an individual trying to find his place and home among a new land in a successful way so that he may bring his family to live with him one day. As they are refugees escaping from a mystical force that has brought fearsome beasts upon their world. This book uses no words to tell its story and relies only on images and the perception of the viewer which I find powerful and in many of my pages I have found it more useful to use only pictures without context.
- Lastly, is Finder by Ayano Yamane which follows the story of two men whose lives become
 intertwined through the vents of their city. These two men hold attraction and find peace among one
 another which further pushes their relationship.

Marketplace application

As for this project, with the amount of work I have done, I plan to pitch it to several publishing companies for it to be picked up. This body of work does contain certain material which make it aimed for a mature audience of 18 and up, and it is constructed as a graphic novel.

- The companies I am aiming for, but are not limited to, are Dark Horse Comics, Epic Comics, Fantagraphics, Kodansha, Vertigo Comics, Lezin, and possibly Webtoon.
- Ending Slide

This project has been beneficial to me in the ways of coping and reflecting on past experiences. I plan to make this project a book that people will find on the shelves of their bookstore, using its content as a way that other people can pull from for their own growth and coping. Gunthrell is a graphic novel that covers the story of two young boys who live within a dystopian gothic city that inhabits a cruel environment, this is how they find one another bringing solace and hope. This is their story of how they fight to survive, proving that the darkness is not the end, that faith in one another can bring peace.

I would like to thank everyone for coming to see and experience this body of work
with me and for taking in the content of it all. I would like to now open the space up
for the panel to ask any questions they may have.

Creative Brief

Project Vision

Captive is a graphic novel about two young boys who navigate their lives within a gothic inspired dystopian city known as Gunthrell. Both of these characters are trapped within the city, bound to the power and control of their fathers. One, Shakai, is son to the ruler of Gunthrell and is the next predecessor of such power. Shakai is seen only to be obedient and to fulfill all tasks the way his father would and preparing him for his "fated life". The other, Sorensai, was born into a form of human trafficking that has run rampant within the city and has become legalized by those in power, leaving Sorensai helpless and hopeless. These two characters later on interact and form a strong bond with one another that becomes inseparable. Together they help each other cope and provide a form of safety and comfort. This graphic novel is meant to speak to some past trauma and emotions of myself and is used as a way of coping that has become therapeutic for me. This graphic novel is a statement as to how there is always something worth living for, that there is hope and light, even when none is visible at the time. A statement that one can indeed fight back and live the life that they deserve.

Creative Brief

<u>Audience</u>

Considering the Content of *Captive*, it is for a mature audience of 18+. Within that age group, I see it being read and enjoyed by people who are into tense graphic novels and others who enjoy BL content. I wish for this graphic novel to be accessible to other people who struggle with trauma and finding worth and/or happiness as I want this to be a statement that all can enjoy and pull from. I wish for it to be as helpful as it is to me to others, for them to use it in a way of their own coping mechanisms.

Methods & Materials

Using ink to create my imagery, the lines are bold and dark. When later scanned and transferred over to photoshop, red washes are added to the panels and pages which is meant to help highlight certain details and create a more menacing and brooding mood. Adding textures to the washes along with organic textures from the ink all help to create a higher sense of tension during specific scenes and smoother red washes are reserved for a few softer scenes.

Creative Brief

Comparative Media

As for design and inspiration for some storytelling aspects and artwork; *Captive* pulls from the movie *The Secret of Kells* with an expansive city that holds its main characters as captives and is later raided by vikings, never truly being the safe place or home that the main protagonist had hoped for. The dramatic colors and unique perspective from this film has inspired the use of such components with *Captive*. *Castlevania*, the Netflix series, with demons and vampires who run rampant in a broken land has also inspired landscapes and the emotions of human greed and corruption within *Captive*. Other similar media to *Captive* include, but are not limited to, *Vampire Knight* by Matsuri Hino, *Durarara!!* By Ryohgo Narita, and *Monster* by Naoki Urasawa.

Marketplace Application

I am interested in sending *Captive* off to publishers, yet considering *Captive*'s content, finding the correct publishers who may be comfortable with the content does not offer many to choose from. Currently I'm looking at Dark Horse Comics, Epic Comics, Fantagraphics, Kodansha, Vertigo Comics, and I have even thought of publishing it myself online through Lezin, Webtoon, or some other online comic sharing space.

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Documentation





Documentation





Documentation



Thesis Journal





Thesis Journal







Thesis Journal





