LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE + MFA VIDEO GAME DESIGN

PORTFOLIO



GRAYSON BORCHARDT

HIGHWATER

PROJECT INFO

COMPANY: BROKEN ARROW STUDIO (TBD)

ROLE: FOUNDER AND CREATOR

LOCATION: LOS ANGELES, CA

ROLES THROUGH THE PROJECT

- CREATIVE DIRECTOR | SOLO DEVELOPER
  overall player experience, tone, pacing, and creative direction.
- LEAD NARRATIVE DESIGNER
  story, mission structure, mission timeline, and emotional themes.
- LEAD SYSTEMS DESIGNER
  core mechanics (suppression, destruction, reload behavior, squad AI)
- LEAD LEVEL DESIGNER
  mission layouts, combat spaces, player flow, environmental storytelling, and pacing.
- ENVIRONMENT ARTIST
  terrain, buildings, trenches, props, destruction spaces, and realistic battlefield environments.
- UI/UX DESIGNER
  Designed the player-facing interface and interaction flow around immersion, clarity, and minimal screen clutter. Developed diegetic systems such as the chest-rig tablet, squad information, IR strobes, weapon feedback, and survival indicators
- AI/ COMBAT DESIGNER
  Commander AI, squad AI, reinforcements, engagements, downed-state behavior, and battlefield reactions.

NARRATIVE THEMES EXPLORED

WAR IS HELL

Highwater confronts the darkest realities of war instead of avoiding them. It reminds players that every political decision to wage war is paid for by the lives of those sent to fight.

INDUSTRIALIZED HORROR

Modern warfare has transformed the battlefield into a new kind of horror. Through realistic combat and psychological tension, players learn to fear even a clear blue sky.

NO ONE IS COMING

There are no last-minute rescues or lucky escapes. Every victory is earned through the sacrifice and determination of those on the front.

DIFFERENTIATING SQUAD DESIGN BASES

SQUAD BASED DESIGN DECISIONS

101ST AIRBORNE
PARATROOPER UNIT ON THE EUROPEAN FRONT.
FOCUS ON WINTER AND FORREST ENVIRONMENTS

1ST MARINE RAIDERS
INFANTRY UNIT WITH A FOCUS ON AMPHIBIOUS ASSUALTS IN THE PACIFIC
FOCUS ON TROPICAL AND JUNGLE ENVIRONMENTS

RAIDER 8-1-7
MILITIA UNIT USING GUERILLA TACTICS ON THE HOMEFRONT
FOCUS ON BLENDING INTO URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

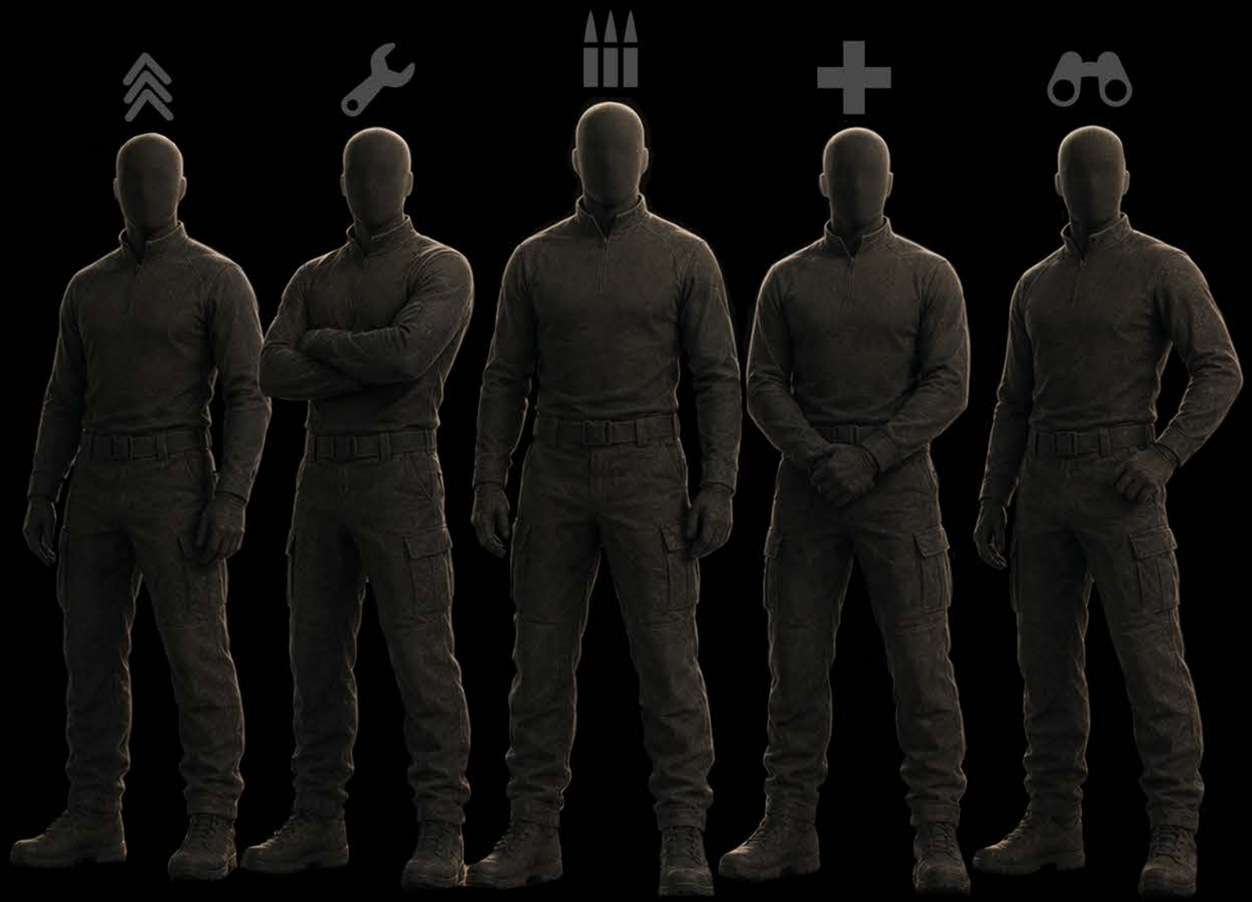
CAMO



PATCHES



ROLE SPECIFIC EQUIPMENT



RIFLEMAN
GRENADE LAUNCHERS
ANTI INFANTRY (OFFENSIVE)
SHOTGUNS
LIGHT FORTIFICATIONS

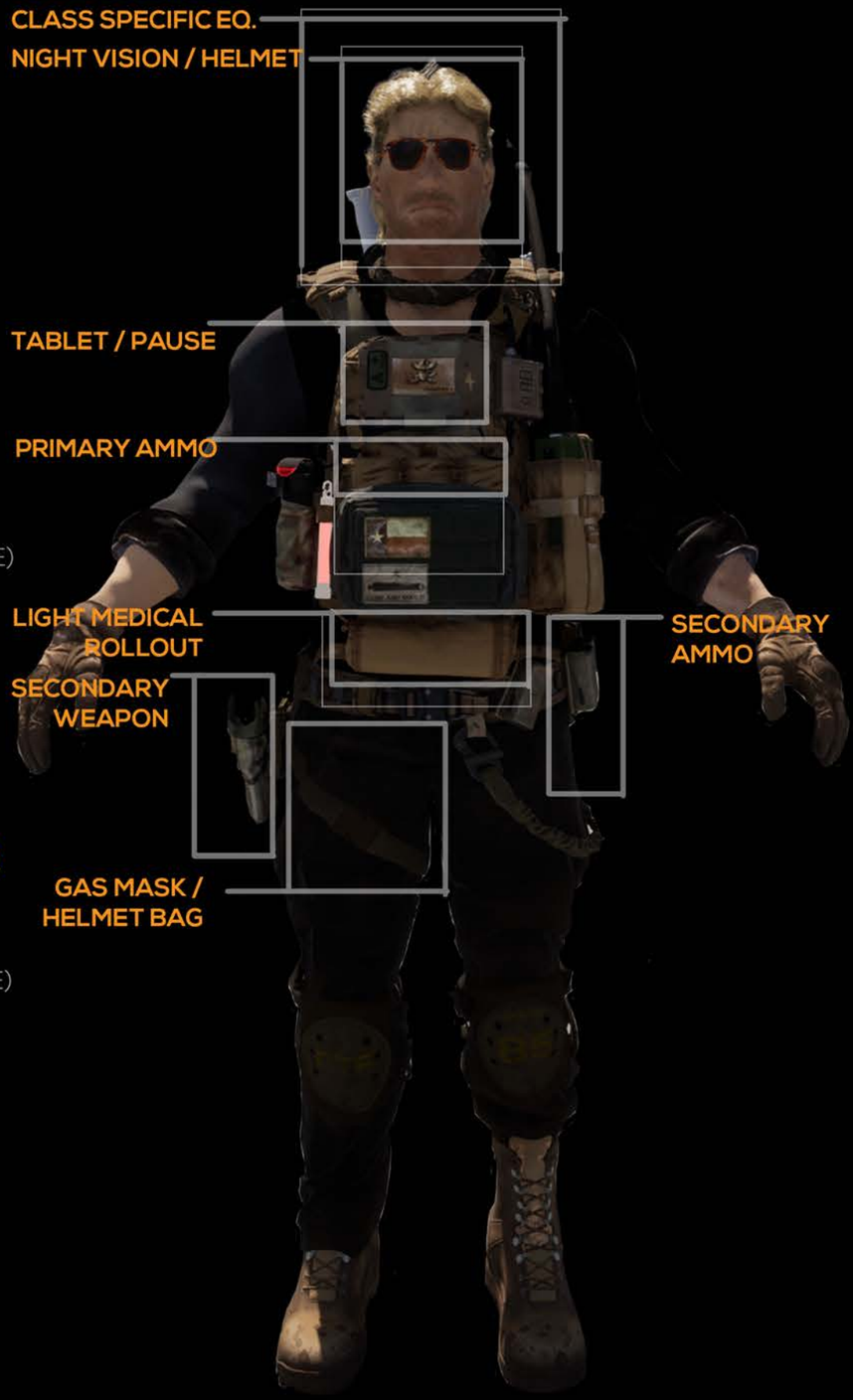
ENGINEER
ANTI ARMOR (OFFENSIVE)
ANTI ARMOR (DEFENSIVE)
DEMOLITION CHARGES
HEAVY FORTIFICATIONS

MACHINE GUNNER
AMMO
HEAVY MACHINE GUNS
TRIPOD MOUNTS
ANTI INFANTRY (DEFENSIVE)

COMBAT MEDIC
STRETCHER
IFAK
SMOKE SET
MEDICAL EVAC

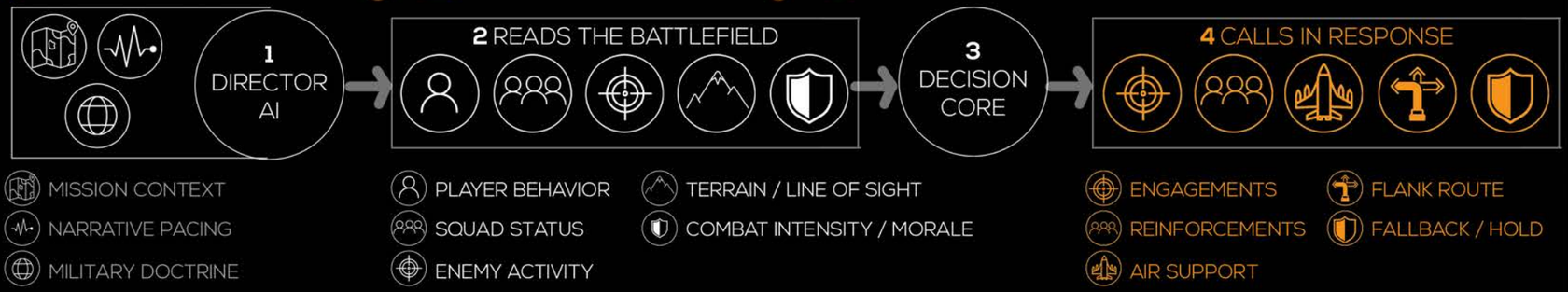
RECON / JTAC
DRONES / ANTI DRONE
ANTI ARMOR RIFLES
LASER DESIGNATOR
SPOTTING EQUIPMENT

CHARACTER BASE AND DIEGETIC EQUIPMENT

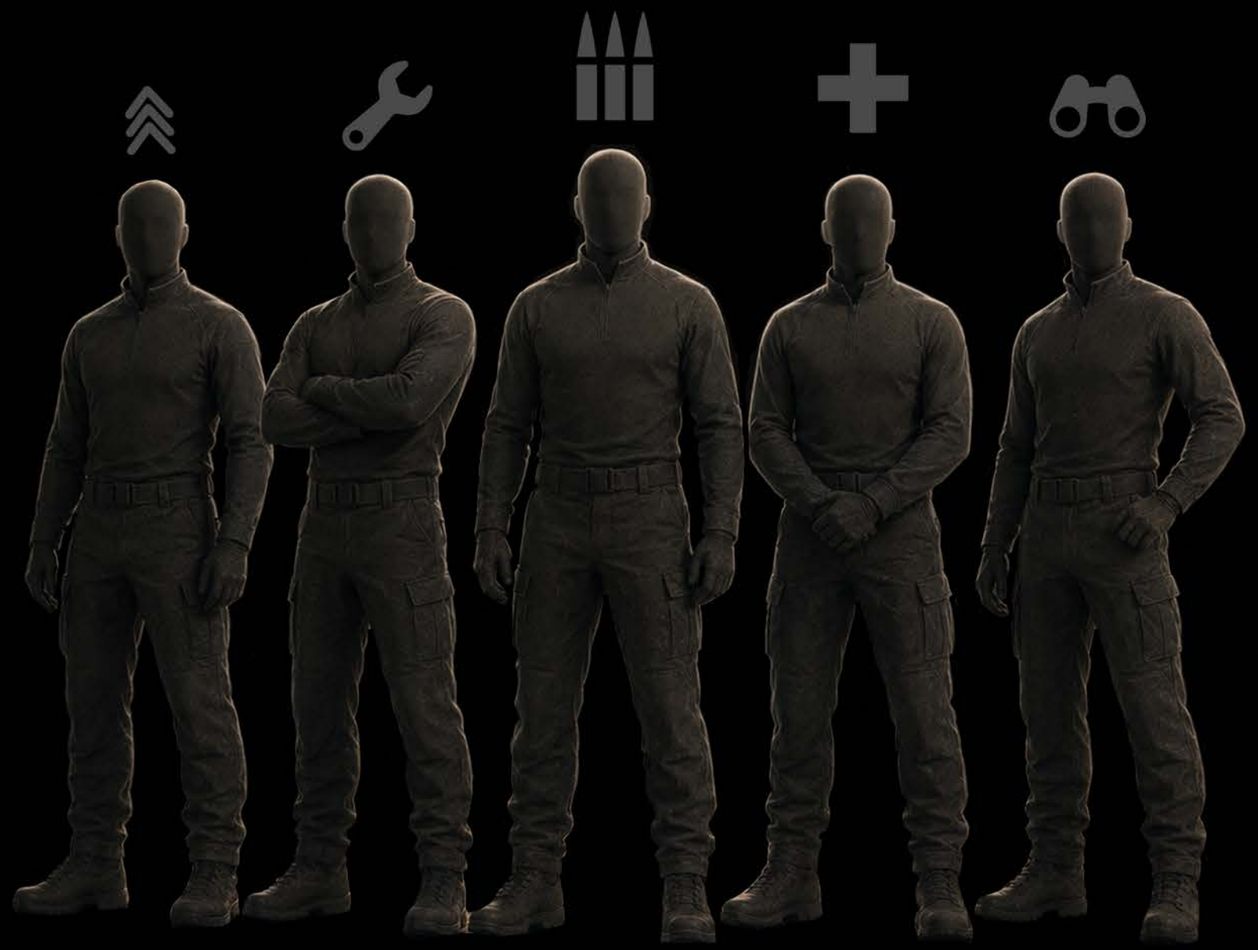


AI DESIGN OVERVIEW
ADAPTING DIRECTOR AI FOR REALISTIC ENGAGEMENTS

1 OBSERVE WATCHES BATTLE UNFOLD → **2 DECIDE** EVALUATES SITUATION → **3 ACT** TRIGGERS NEEDED RESULT



AI ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



RIFLEMAN
FIRE + MANEUVER
ROOM CLEARING
ESCORT + SECURITY
GAP FILLING

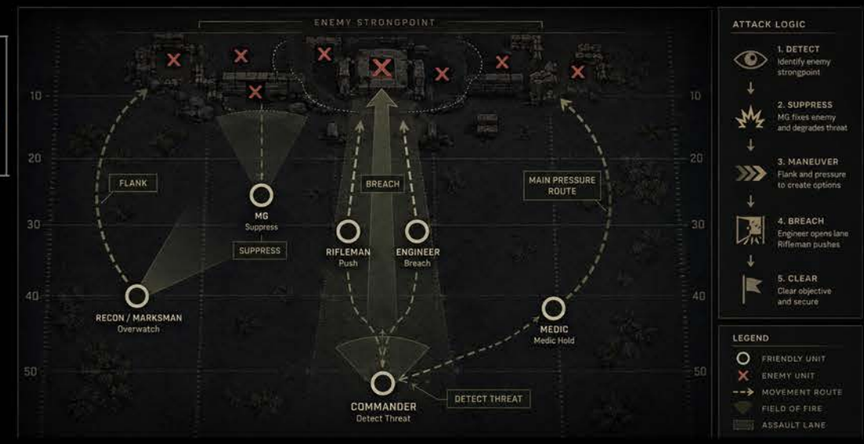
ENGINEER
BREACH AND REDUCE DEFENSES
FIELD REPAIRS
ROUTE CLEARING

MACHINE GUNNER
ENEMY SUPPRESSION
STRONGPOINT ANCHOR
SECTOR DENIAL
COVERING WITHDRAWL

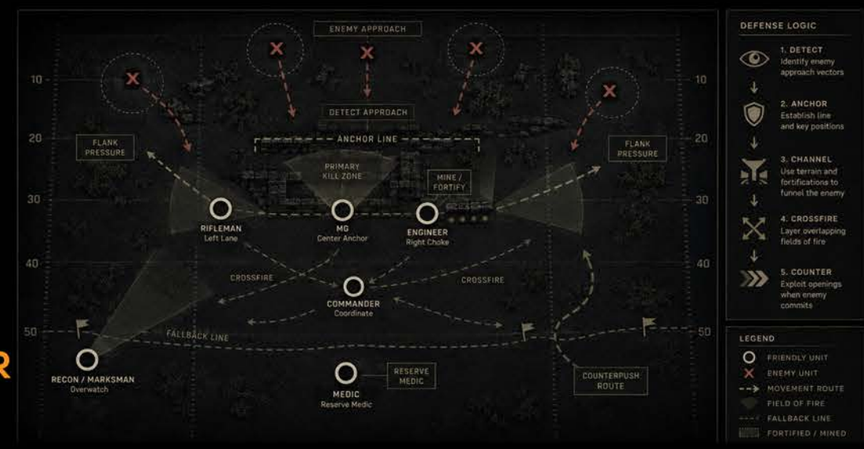
COMBAT MEDIC
TRIAGE + STABILIZE CASUALTIES
CCP ESTABLISHMENT
MEDEVAC / CASEVAC

RECON / JTAC
SPOTTING + DRONES
TARGET MARKING
SUPPORT CALL REQUEST
AMBUSH SETUP

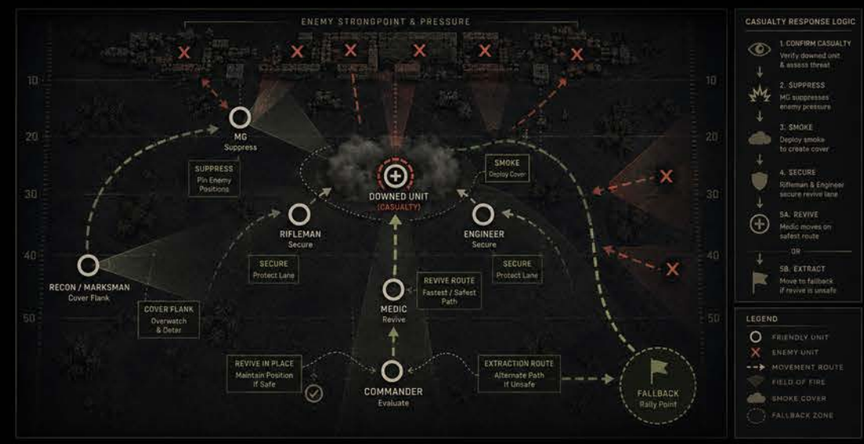
BASE AI MANEUVERS
ATTACKING EXAMPLE



DEFENSIVE EXAMPLE



MAN DOWN EXAMPLE



PILLARS OF LEVEL DESIGN



MATERIAL BASED TOTAL DESTRUCTION

Material-based destruction, where concrete, glass, and wood break apart and degrade differently under fire so every structure tells the story of the fight that happened in it

CINEMATIC INTENSITY

Cinematic Intensity, where scripted beats and environmental staging turn each sector into a set-piece worth remembering





FRONTLINE EXHAUSTION

Frontline exhaustion, where the slow, grinding rhythm of urban block-by-block advance makes every meter gained feel earned and costly.

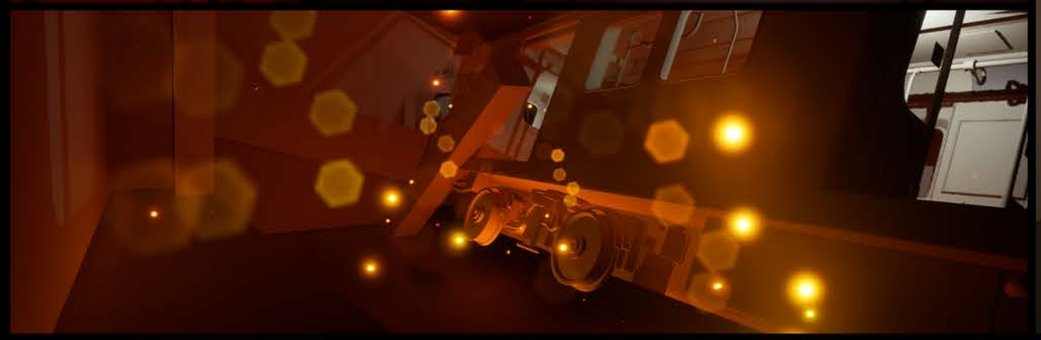
INITIAL LEVEL SKETCHING AND PLANNING









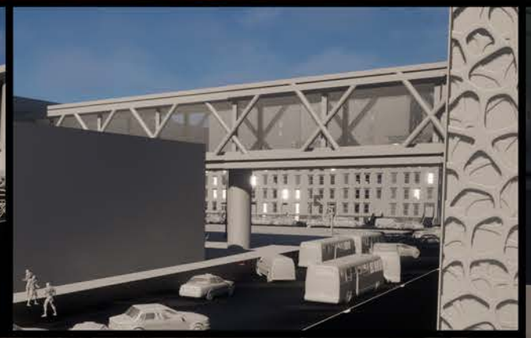




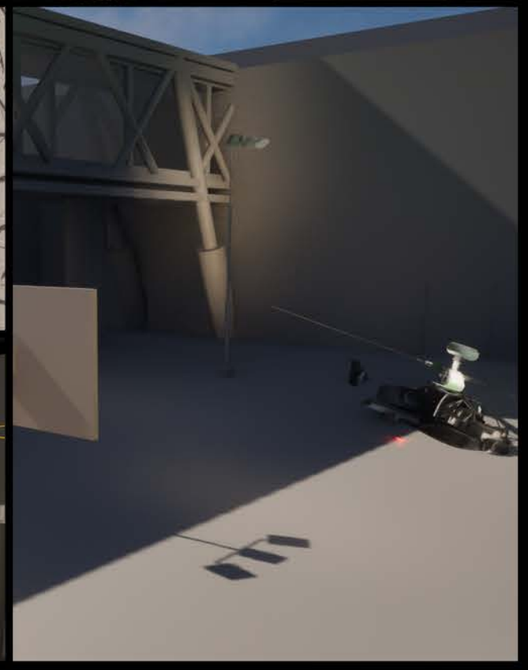












MIYAKO HOTEL- AN ADVENTURE GAME

PROJECT INFO

COMPANY: NEW YORK FILM ACADEMY

ROLE: SOLO GAME DESIGNER / LEAD LEVEL DESIGNER

LOCATION: LOS ANGELES, CA

CORE CONCEPT BEHIND THE GAME

CAN WE TURN ARCHITECTURAL RENDERINGS INTO **A MEMERABLE EXPERIENCE FOR THE USER**

IMAGE RENDERINGS CAN'T SHOW
FLOW
EXPERIENCE

VIDEO RENDERINGS CAN'T SHOW
FULL SCOPE OF DESIGN
UNIQUE USER EXPERIENCE

VIDEO GAMES EXCEL AT
USER FLOW
UNIQUE USER EXPERIENCE
FREEDOM TO INTERACT
FULL SCOPE OF A DESIGN

ROLES THROUGH THE PROJECT

- CREATIVE DIRECTOR | SOLO DEVELOPER
  overall player experience, tone, pacing, and creative direction.
- LEAD NARRATIVE DESIGNER
  story, mission structure, mission timeline, and emotional themes.
- LEAD SYSTEMS DESIGNER
  core mechanics (suppression, destruction, reload behavior, squad AI)
- LEAD LEVEL DESIGNER
  mission layouts, combat spaces, player flow, environmental storytelling, and pacing.
- ENVIRONMENT ARTIST
  terrain, buildings, trenches, props, destruction spaces, and realistic battlefield environments.
- UI/UX DESIGNER
  Designed the player-facing interface and interaction flow around immersion, clarity, and minimal screen clutter. Developed diegetic systems such as the chest-rig tablet, squad information, IR strobes, weapon feedback, and survival indicators
- LEAD PROGRAMMER
  Commander AI, squad AI, reinforcements, engagements, downed-state behavior, and battlefield reactions.



PROJECT TIMELINE
2 WEEKS









FINAL MIYAKO DESIGN

REFER TO NEXT PROJECT

MIYAKO HYBRID HOTEL

PROJECT INFO

COMPANY: SWA GROUP

ROLE: PROJECT MANAGER

LOCATION: PLANO, TX

PROJECT GOAL:

ROLES THROUGH THE PROJECT

- PROJECT MANAGER
  coordinated with design team, overseeing project scope, schedule, and deliverables from initial concept through construction documentation.
- LEAD LANDSCAPE DESIGNER
  developed the design concept and spatial strategy

FROM INITIAL SKETCHES TO FINAL SITE PLAN

JAPANESE DESIGN WITH A TEXAS TWIST





SITE ANALYSIS & AREAS OF FOCUS

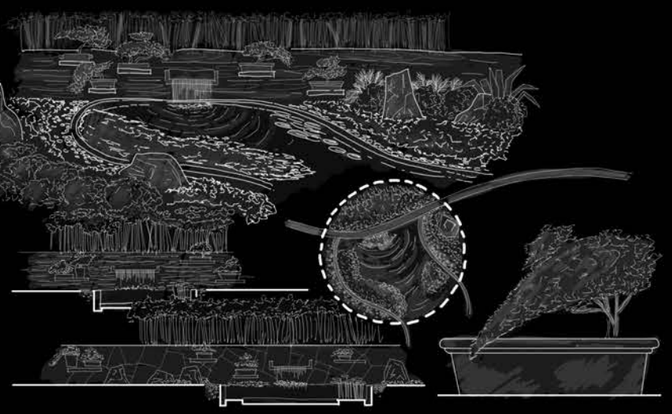


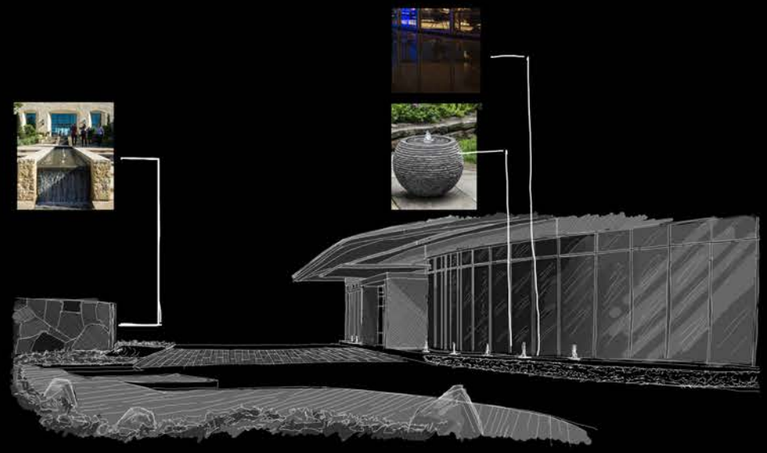
USER MOVEMENT & SPACES OF THE CROWD



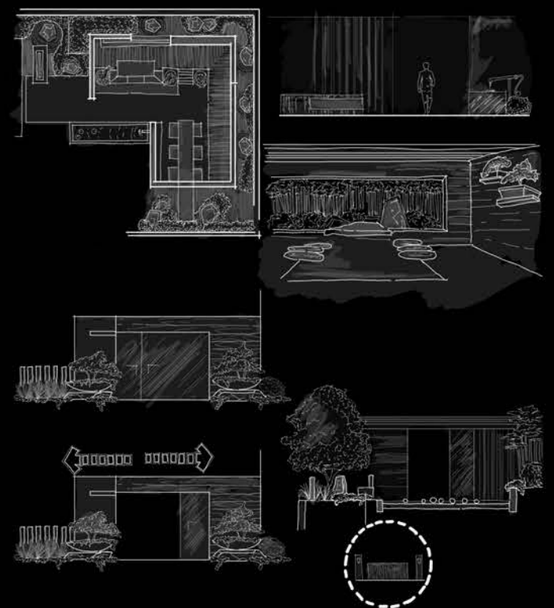
POINTS OF INTEREST AND TARGET VIEWS

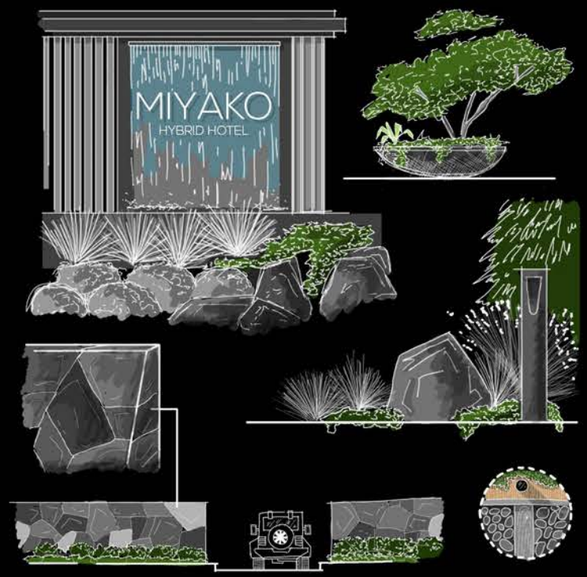






ORIGINAL CONCEPT SKETCHES

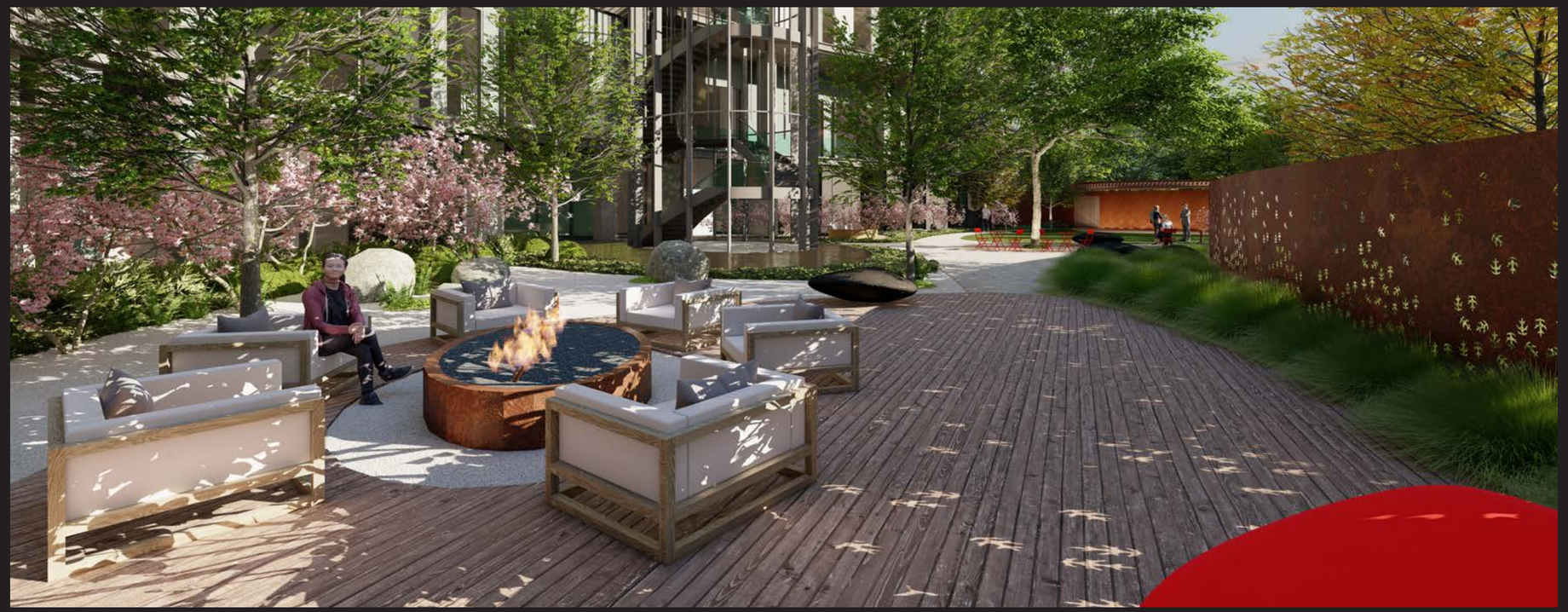




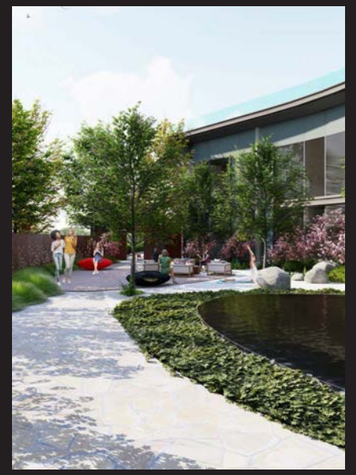




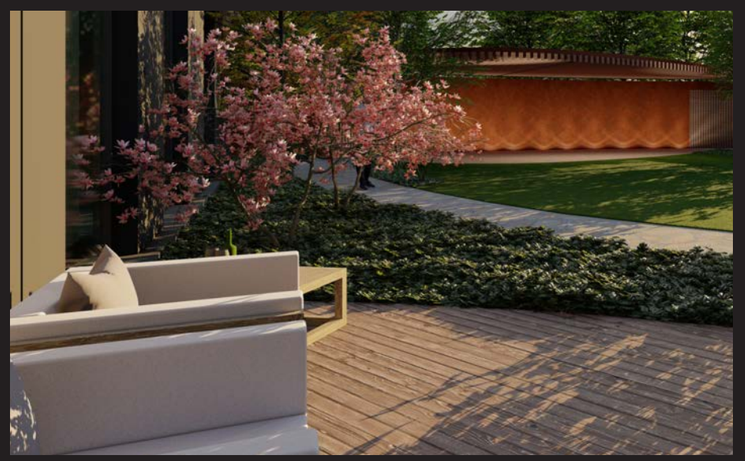














CREATING NARRATIVE THROUGH WORLD-BUILDING

ROLES THROUGH PROJECT

- **LEAD LEVEL DESIGNER**
  structured the game's levels to tell story through layout and pacing, mirroring the Veil of Artemis and the Abyss of Othrys so players recognize a space before they understand why
- **LEAD ENVIRONMENTAL ARTIST**
  hand-illustrated every environment in Photoshop, using color, lighting, and atmosphere to carry the narrative

—— STORYTELLING THROUGH LEVEL DESIGN

Mirroring environments so the player recognizes a space before they understand why — reinforcing that Artemis is guiding Lykaios even when she isn't present.





SPARTAN COUNTRYSIDE



SPARTAN COUNTRYSIDE AFTER DIVINE INTERVENTION



THE ABYSS OF OTHRYS

GAMEPLAY HUD OVERLAY





THE VEIL OF ARTEMIS



ARTEMIS GODDESS OF THE HUNT AND PROTECTOR THE WILD



THE HESPERIAN GROVE

● VEIL OF ARTEMIS

TONE — PEACE & GUIDANCE

Biophilic shrines and temples scattered through the mist

Soft, ethereal divine glow echoes Artemis' colors

Same layout Lykaios will later meet in the Abyss

SAME STRUCTURAL LAYOUT

● ABYSS OF OTHRYS

TONE — DECAY & WAR

Twisted roots and crumbling ancient structures

Vibrant flora faded to ash under Kronos' power

Same glow now struggles against the encroaching dark

COLOR ARC

PEACE — soft, bright countryside

WAR — Fog of War, Ares' shadow

—— STORYTELLING THROUGH LEVEL DESIGN

Turning fridge compartments into distinct cultures and ecosystems, each carrying a piece of Chef Macaroni's journey back to his love of cooking.

● FREEZER

ICY & ISOLATING

Frozen tundra ecosystem

Rogue ingredients test survival

● CONDIMENT TOWERS

VIBRANT & CHAOTIC

Towering skyline of condiment jars

Neon glow guides platforming routes

● TAKEOUT CITYSCAPE

FAMILIAR & NOSTALGIC

Miniature culinary metropolis

Echoes the life Chef Macaroni left behind

NARRATIVE INTEGRATION

The same story and theme are embedded in every world Chef Macaroni explores, however different they look

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MOOD ARC

FREEZER — icy & isolating

TOWERS — neon & vibrant

CITYSCAPE — warm & nostalgic

INTRO TO 3D MODELING

PROJECT NAME- ODST x GHOST CROSSOVER

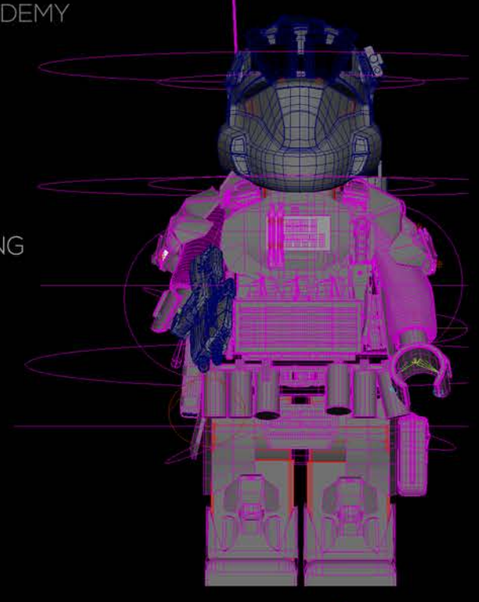
COMPANY: NEW YORK FILM ACADEMY

ROLE: 3D ARTIST

LOCATION: LOS ANGELOS, CA

PROJECT GOAL

LEARNING THE BASICS OF MAYA BY CREATING
A LEGO CHARACTER



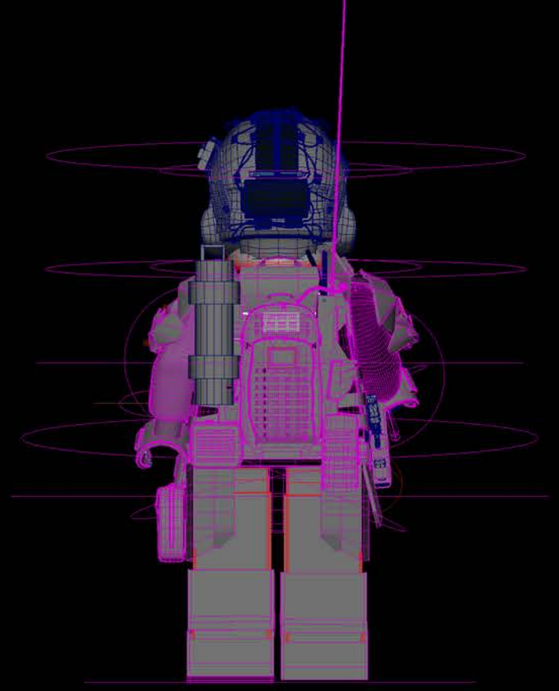
FRONT VIEW- FACES



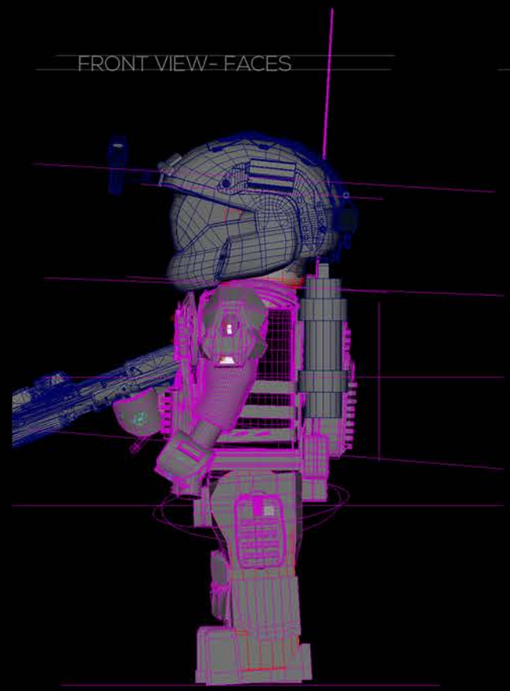
FRONT VIEW - ODST HELMET



ODST LEGO ARMOR



BACK SIDE- FACES



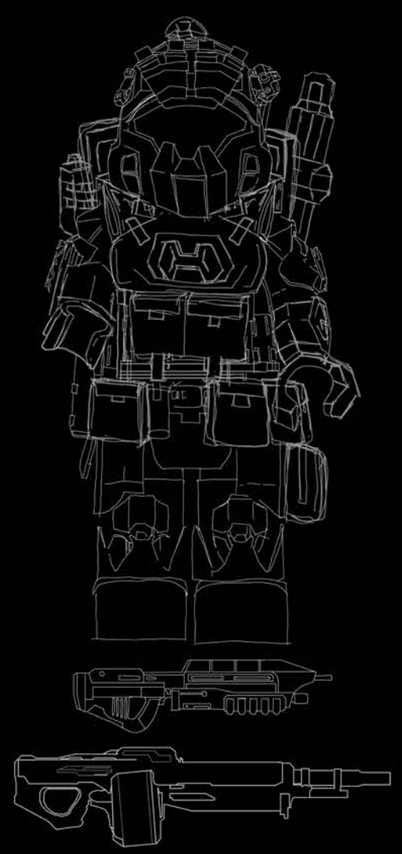
LEFT SIDE- FACES



FRONT VIEW- GHOST MASK

DESIGNING FOR MULTIPLE ROLES

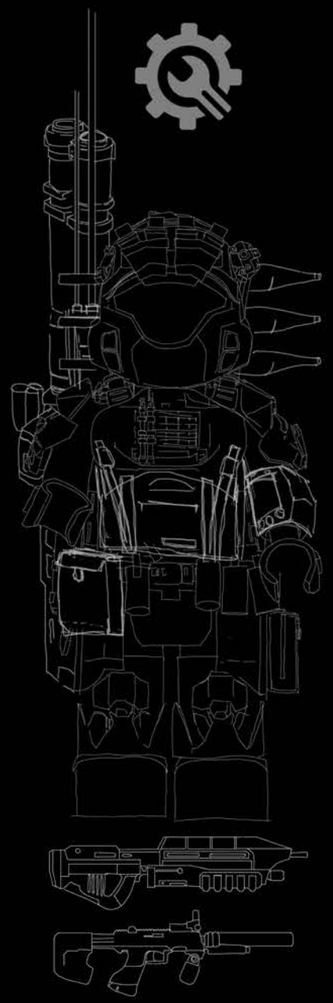
MACHINE GUNNER



CHANGES TO MAKE

The Machine Gunner represents the heavy support class, similar to Battlefield's Support role. This variation includes reinforced chest and shoulder armor, deployable cover barriers mounted on the back, and a belt fed machine gun with additional squad ammunition stored across the torso and hips. The bulkier silhouette communicates durability and sustained firepower, grounding the sci fi armor in realistic heavy infantry logic.

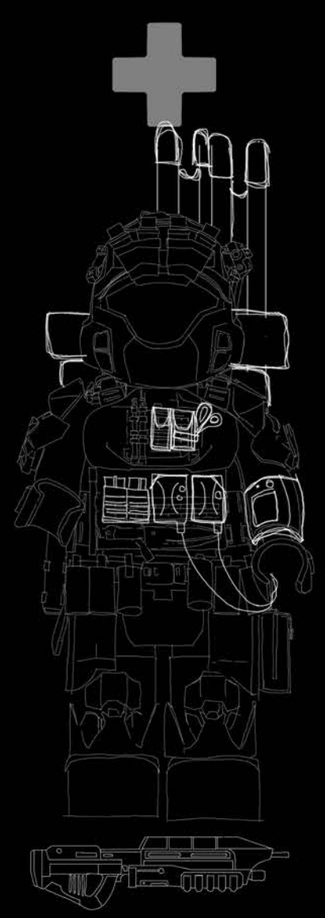
COMBAT ENGINEER



CHANGES TO MAKE

The Combat Engineer reflects a hybrid of Battlefield's Engineer and gadget specialist roles. This version carries a large tactical tablet for drone deployment and battlefield scanning, along with a rocket launcher, anti personnel mines, and explosive charges for vehicle and structure denial. Equipped with both an assault rifle and SMG, the engineer reads as adaptable and equipment focused, with added utility pouches and reinforced gloves to visually emphasize their technical function.

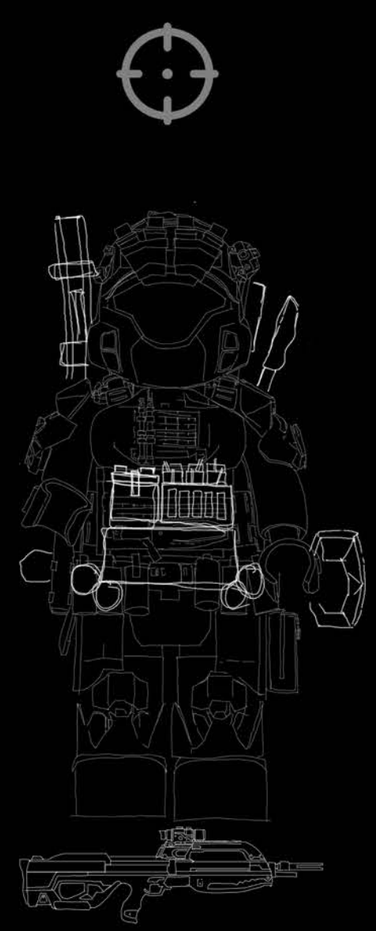
COMBAT MEDIC



CHANGES TO MAKE

The Combat Medic variation draws directly from Battlefield's Medic class, built around survivability and squad sustainment. This version carries a standard assault rifle but features chest mounted defibrillators, a compact stretcher system mounted on the back, and wrist armor modified with a vitals monitoring interface. The cleaner front profile paired with visible medical tools creates an immediate readability while reinforcing the grounded realism of a darker ODST experience.

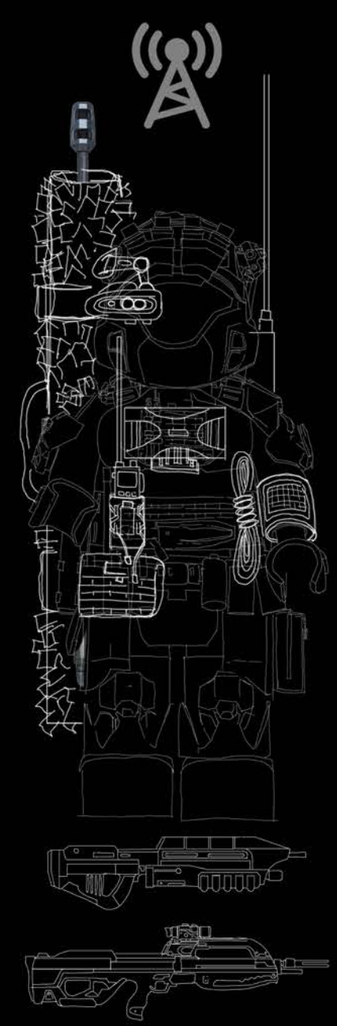
RIFLEMAN



CHANGES TO MAKE

The Rifleman serves as the adaptable backbone of the squad, similar to Battlefield's Assault class. Armed with a battle rifle and supported by breaching equipment such as a sledgehammer, bolt cutters, C4, and a shotgun, this version emphasizes versatility in both ranged combat and close quarters engagement. The gear layout balances aggression and utility, reinforcing the idea of a flexible frontline infantry operator.

JTAC



CHANGES TO MAKE

The JTAC functions as a recon and overwatch hybrid, combining elements of Battlefield's Recon class with forward air control responsibilities. Equipped with a sniper rifle, radar equipment, deployable traps, and helmet modifications for enhanced targeting and surveillance, this variation visually reads as the squad's intelligence and fire support specialist. A chest mounted tactical tablet allows for coordination of orbital drops and strike calls, blending Halo's sci fi scale with the grounded command and control systems seen in modern military operations.

GRAYSON BORCHARDT



PHONE: 817. 709. 9202

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

E-MAIL: grayson.borchardt@outlook.com

EDUCATION -

I earned my B.S. in Landscape Architecture from Texas Tech University, where I built a strong foundation in commercial and residential design, construction documentation, grading, and large scale site planning. My work blended technical precision with artistic vision, combining digital workflows and hand rendering to shape environments that told stories through space.

After graduating in 2020, I worked full time at LJA Engineering before transitioning to SWA Group, where I contributed to complex, large scale projects and developed experience in coordination, leadership, and execution. Across these roles and additional residential contracting work, I focused on designing immersive physical environments that balanced form, function, and emotion.

I have since earned my Master's in Video Game Design from New York Film Academy in Burbank, where I specialized in level design, world building, and environmental storytelling with a primary focus on first person shooters. I work extensively in Unreal Engine, blueprint systems, and C#, building playable spaces that emphasize flow, tension, player psychology, and cinematic immersion. My goal is to merge my background in real world environmental design with interactive systems to craft grounded, believable, and emotionally impactful game worlds.

ABOUT MYSELF -

I was born and raised in Fort Worth, Texas, where my fascination with immersive spaces began long before I understood what design truly was. Places like the Fort Worth Water Gardens and Sundance Square showed me how environments could transport people, shift emotion, and create memory. A visit to Washington, D.C. in high school solidified that understanding as I experienced firsthand how landscape and architecture can evoke reverence, reflection, and power.

At the same time, video games were shaping my imagination. From the first PlayStation to late night clan battles in Halo 3 and Call of Duty, I was drawn to the worlds as much as the gameplay. I recreated scenes with Legos, studied level layouts subconsciously, and became fascinated with how space, pacing, and sightlines could generate emotion and tension.

As a Division I athlete, injuries forced me to step away from competition, including a broken elbow and fractures in both hips. During those periods, games became more than entertainment. They became an escape and a source of connection. When Call of Duty: Warzone launched in 2020, it reunited my closest friends during the isolation of the pandemic. That experience reinforced what I already believed. Games create spaces where people connect, compete, and find meaning.

Today, my focus is on designing first person shooter experiences that combine grounded realism, environmental storytelling, and strong spatial flow. I want to build worlds that feel lived in, authentic, and emotionally charged.

INTERESTS -

My background in landscape architecture instilled a deep respect for resilience and sustainability. Witnessing the devastation of the British Virgin Islands during the 2017 hurricane season reinforced my belief in designing environments that respond to real world forces. Studying in West Texas further shaped my perspective on conservation and the responsibility designers carry when shaping landscapes.

The games that inspired me growing up, including Medal of Honor, Assassin's Creed, The Elder Scrolls, and Fallout, showed me that interactive worlds can preserve history, explore morality, and immerse players in powerful narratives. I have long admired figures such as Audie Murphy, whose story of courage and sacrifice represents the kind of human depth I hope to honor through interactive storytelling.

My goal in AAA development is to design first person shooter worlds that feel authentic in their geography, believable in their systems, and meaningful in their narrative weight. I bring the discipline of a trained environmental designer, the technical capability of a gameplay focused developer, and the personal drive of someone who has experienced firsthand how powerful immersive worlds can be.

I am committed to building environments that do more than look compelling. I want them to move players, challenge them, and stay with them long after they put the controller down.

GRAYSON BORCHARDT
gr.borchardt@student.nyfa.edu | Linkdin: Grayson Borchardt | 817.709.9202

Education
New York Film Academy – Burbank, CA (Graduated December 2025)
M.A. in Video Game Design

Texas Tech University – Lubbock, TX (Graduated 2020)
B.S. in Landscape Architecture

Game Design Experience
Game Design Studio I – Skewerlicious | Systems Designer & Environment Artist | CA
- Contributed to system design and narrative structure for a 2D stylized art game.
- Designed and illustrated background environments supporting tone, pacing, and story progression.
- Collaborated in cross disciplinary team pipeline from concept through playable prototype.

Game Design Studio II – Aquatoss | Systems Designer & Environment Artist | CA
- Reimagined a classic water ring toy into a cozy puzzle experience inspired by match style progression systems.
- Designed core gameplay systems governing ring physics, progression loops, and reward mechanics.
- Created and implemented a stylized 3D underwater reef environment in Unity.
- Focused on player feedback systems, readability, and relaxing environmental tone.

Game Design Studio III – Greener Pastures | Game Designer & Environment Artist | CA
- Designed and modeled the player island hub, floating town, and environmental assets for a hybrid 2D and 3D world.
- Built and implemented 3D environments in Unity, integrating lighting, materials, and animated elements.
- Coded environmental systems including swimming fish AI and ambient underwater effects to enhance immersion.
- Translated lessons from prior projects into improved world cohesion, performance optimization, and pipeline efficiency.

Game Design Studio IV – Demon Lord's Dance Castle | Game Designer & Level Designer | CA
- Designed a hybrid tower defense and rhythm combat game centered on player created pathing systems.
- Developed modular tile variants and board layouts for both defense and dance battle phases.
- Established cohesive gothic hell kingdom art direction through 2D asset creation and UI layout design.
- Balanced gameplay systems governing enemy flow, tile placement logic, and difficulty scaling.

Highwater | Creator and Lead Designer | CA
- Designed and prototyped a narrative driven first person shooter set in a near future occupied Texas.
- Built graybox and final environment spaces in Unreal Engine focusing on combat flow, sightlines, and environmental storytelling.
- Implemented gameplay systems using Blueprint and C#, integrating AI behavior, mission scripting, and level progression logic.
- Developed immersive world building rooted in realistic geography, architecture, and emotional narrative pacing.
- Directed creative vision, level iteration, and environmental art pipeline from concept to playable vertical slice.

Landscape Architecture Experience
SWA Group, Dallas, TX (October 2022 – October 2023)
Landscape Architect
- Led projects in a project manager capacity for university and hospitality designs.
- Developed concept packages, hand graphics, and high-end commercial design solutions.
- Created and reviewed construction documents for project submittals.

LJA Engineering, McKinney, TX (July 2020 – May 2025)
Landscape Designer
- Responsible for designs, hand graphics, and concept packages for commercial clients.
- Developed 3D models in SketchUp and Lumion.
- Created and reviewed construction documents for submittals.

Skills

Game Design & Development
Unreal Engine (In Progress)
Unity (In Progress)
Visual Studio

3D Modeling & Rendering
Maya
Blender
SketchUp
Lumion

Architecture & Engineering Software
Civil 3D
AutoCAD
Revit
Adobe Creative Suite
Photoshop
Illustrator
InDesign
Audition
Paint

Hand Rendering & Graphics
Concept Sketching
Site Plans
Elevations

Project Management & Technical Skills
Team Leadership
Client Presentations
Construction Documents
Budgeting & Scheduling
Creating Office Standards