



MARCH 18-22, 2024 #GDC2024

# The Dark Place: Environmental World Building in ALAN WAKE II

INCLUDES GAME SPOILERS  
NAZARENO URBANO, LEAD ENVIRONMENT ARTIST ON ALAN WAKE II  
22-03-2024



# NAZARENO URBANO

Lead Environment artist on ALAN WAKE II

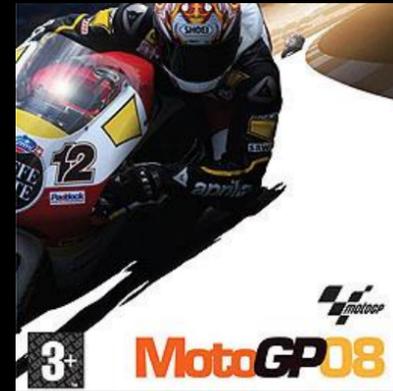
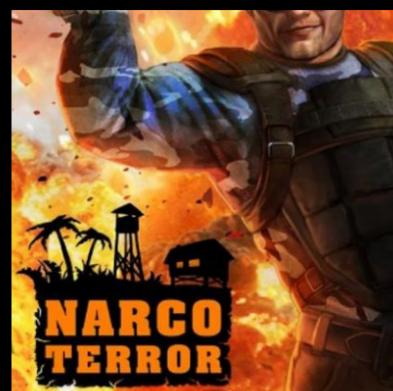


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# ESCAPE THE DARK PLACE

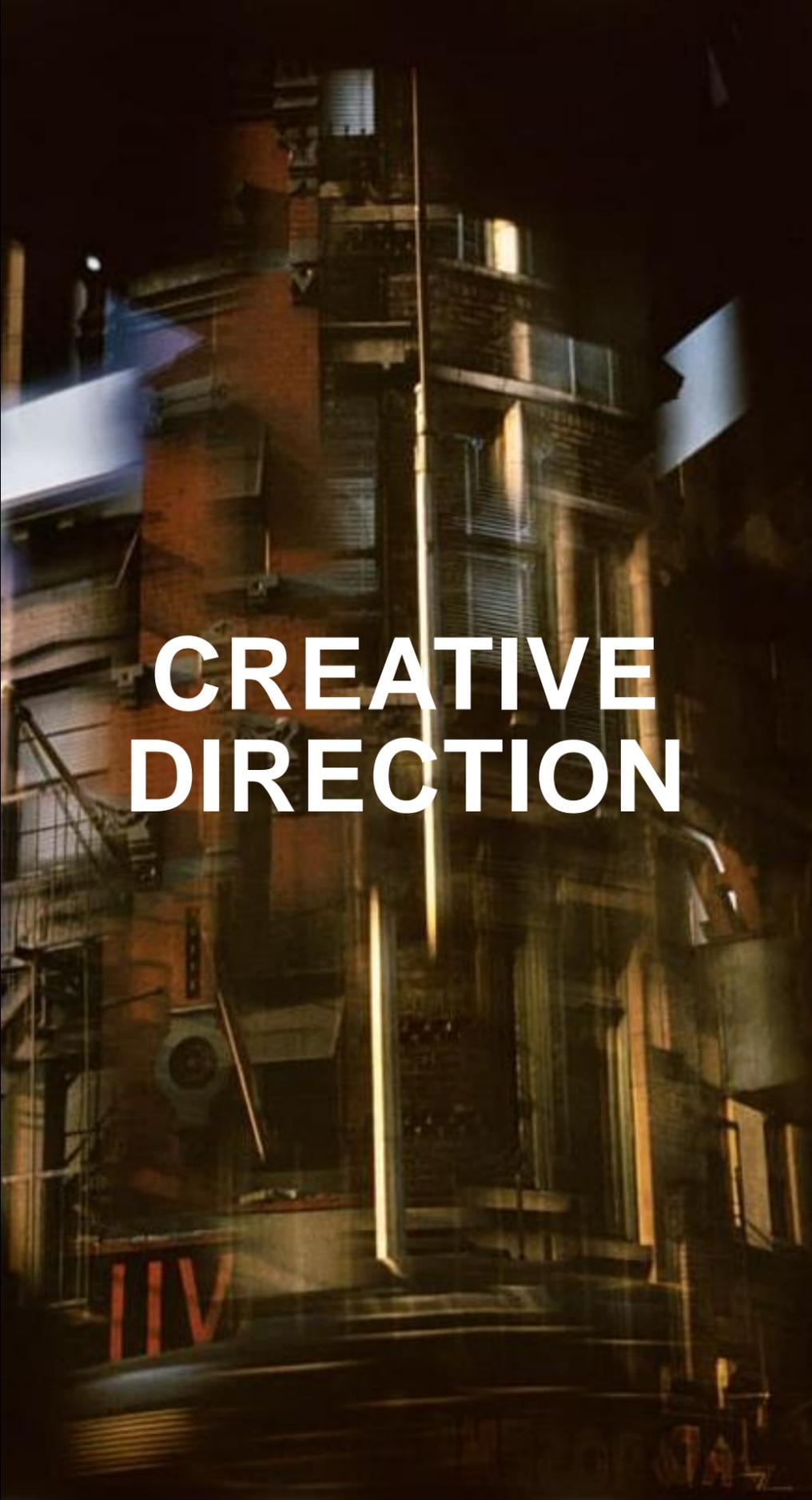


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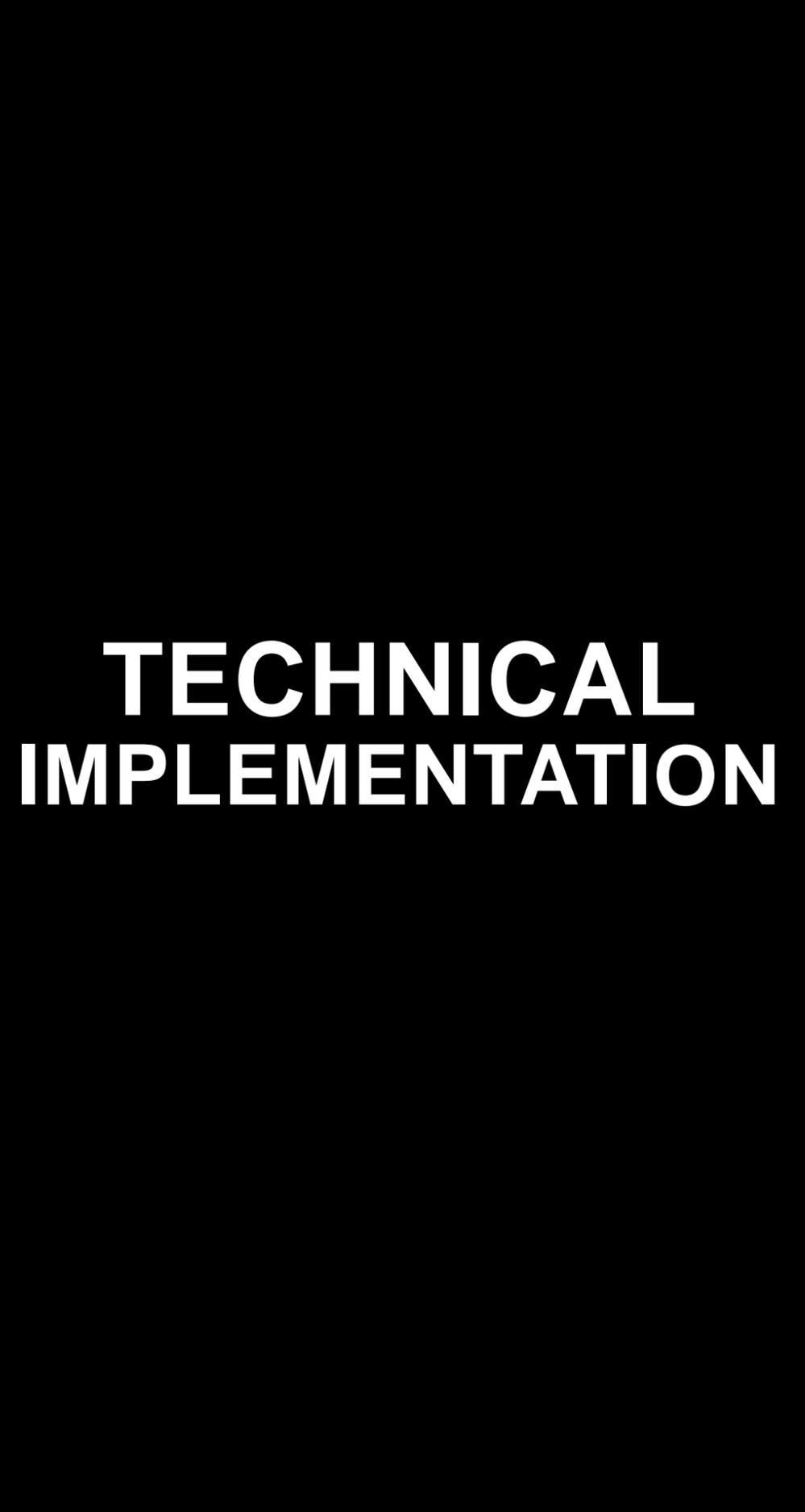
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# CREATIVE DIRECTION



# VISUAL SOLUTIONS



# TECHNICAL IMPLEMENTATION



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# CREATIVE DIRECTION

- The Story
- The Atmosphere
- The Construct
- The Nightmare

# VISUAL SOLUTIONS

- Building the atmosphere
  - Research
  - Proof of Concept
- Building the construct
  - Archetypes
- Construct made of words
  - Graffiti
  - News Papers
  - Billboard and Posters
  - Neon

# TECHNICAL IMPLEMENTATION

- Teleport
- Reality Rewriting
- Light Shifter
- Live Action
  
- Conclusion



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A man with long, dark hair and a beard is the central focus, looking directly at the viewer with a serious expression. He is wearing a dark, possibly wet, jacket. The background is a dense, dark forest with a strong red glow, likely from a flashlight or a light source. In the lower center, a woman in a purple jacket with "FBI" on the back is walking away from the viewer, holding a flashlight that illuminates the ground. The overall atmosphere is dark and ominous.

# PSYCHOLOGICAL SURVIVAL HORROR GAME



PROJECT. BIG FISH

CAULDRON LAKE PARKING

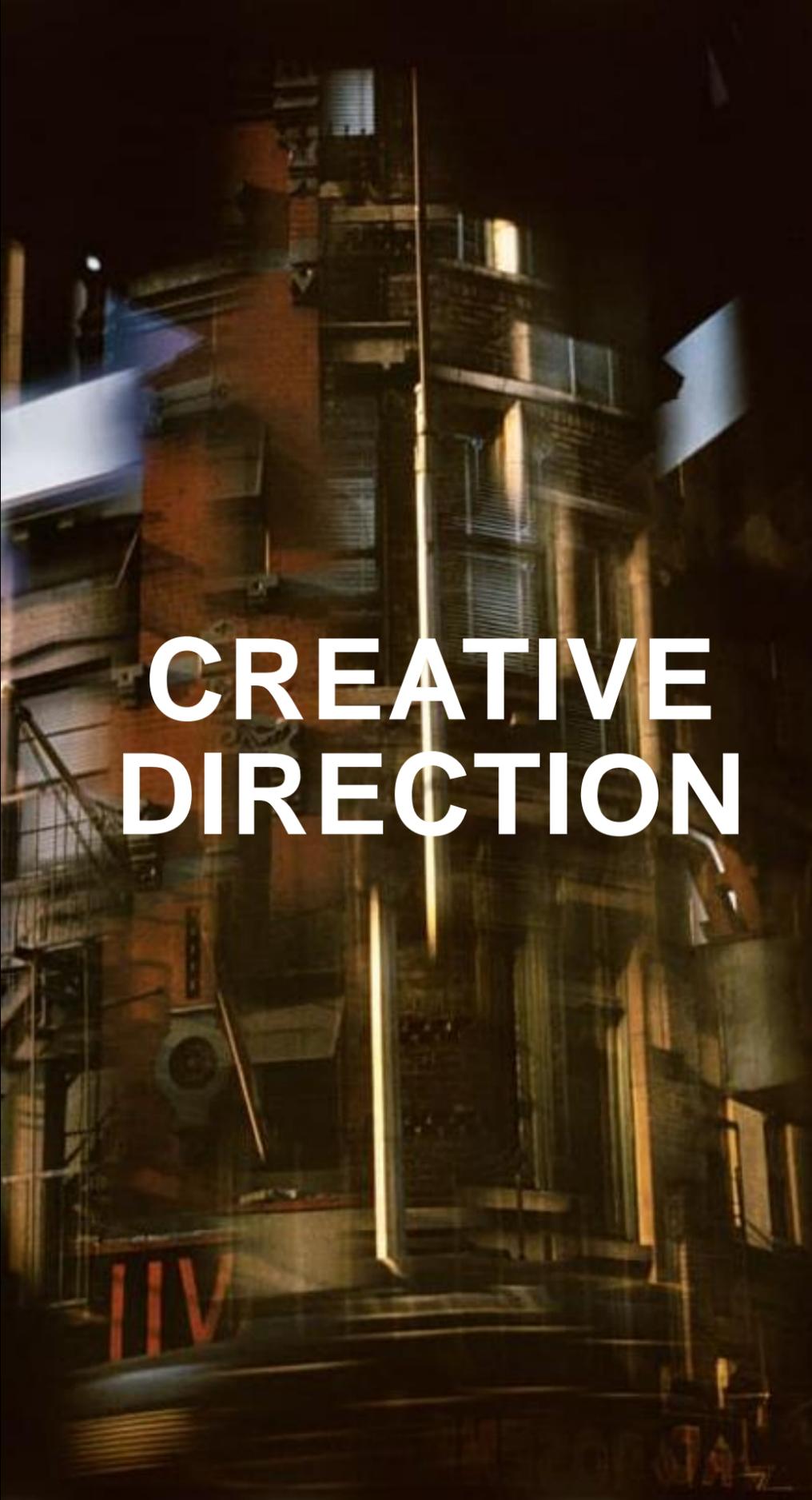
Concept Art by: Juhani Jokinen



PROJECT. BIG FISH DARK PLACE

Concept Art by: Juhani Jokinen





# CREATIVE DIRECTION



# THE STORY

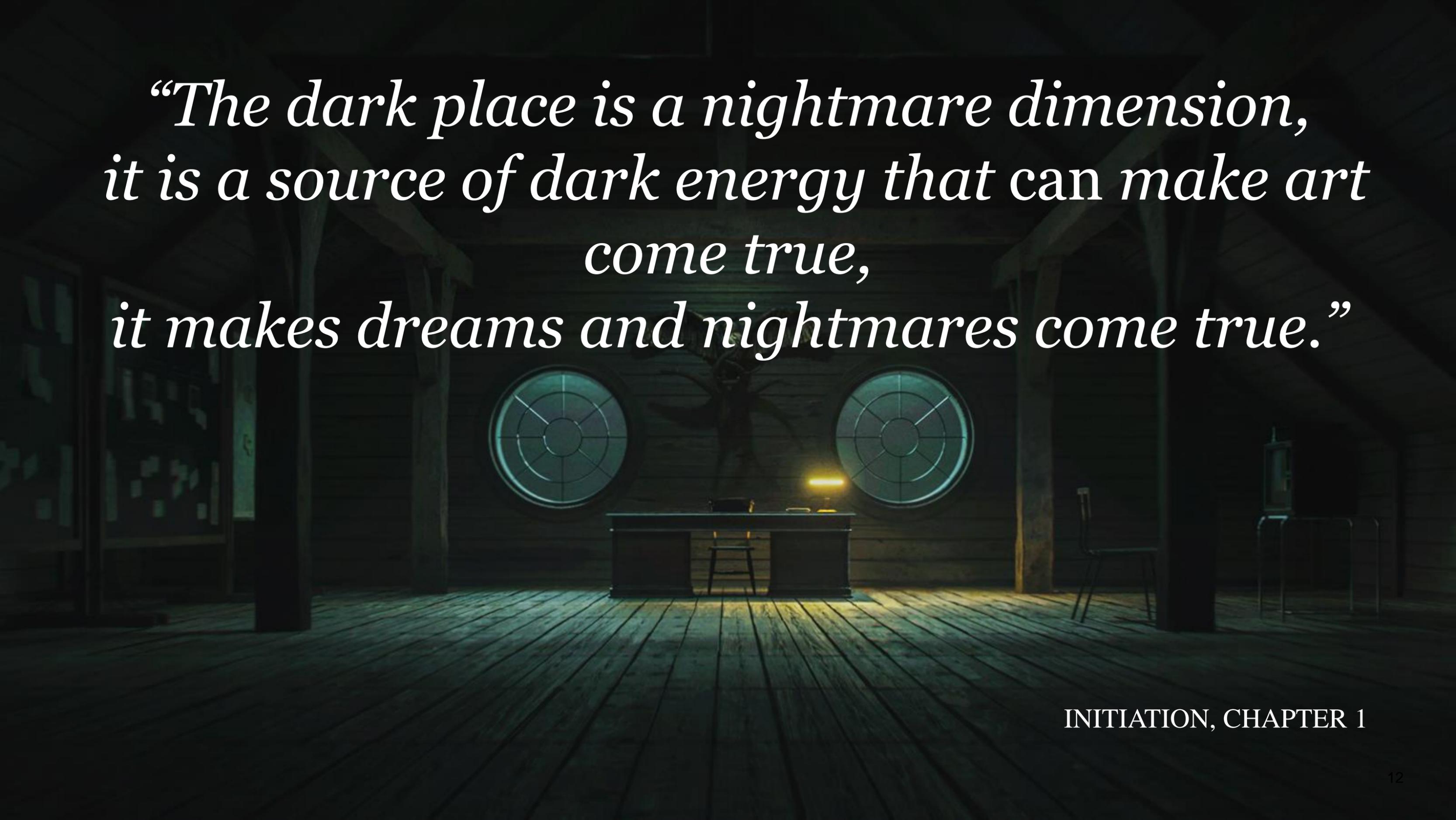


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A dark, atmospheric room with a wooden floor, a desk with a lamp, and two circular portholes. The room is dimly lit, with a warm glow from a lamp on the desk and a cool blue light from the portholes. The walls are dark and textured, and the floor is made of wide wooden planks. The overall mood is mysterious and slightly unsettling.

*“The dark place is a nightmare dimension,  
it is a source of dark energy that can make art  
come true,  
it makes dreams and nightmares come true.”*

INITIATION, CHAPTER 1



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Concept Art by: Oliver Odmark



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# CREATIVE DIRECTION

# THE ATMOSPHERE



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**CREATIVE  
DIRECTION**



# SEEDY AND DANGEROUS NEW YORK



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**CREATIVE  
DIRECTION**

**BAR NEW  
YORK  
FEELS  
LIKE A BAD  
DREAM**



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# CREATIVE DIRECTION

# THE CONSTRUCT



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**CREATIVE  
DIRECTION**

**THE DARK PLACE  
IS A MENTAL  
CONSTRUCT**



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# CREATIVE DIRECTION

# THE NIGHTMARE



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**CREATIVE  
DIRECTION**

**THE HORROR  
COME TRUE**



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Concept Art by: Oliver Odmark

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# BUILDING THE ATMOSPHERE



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# RESEARCH



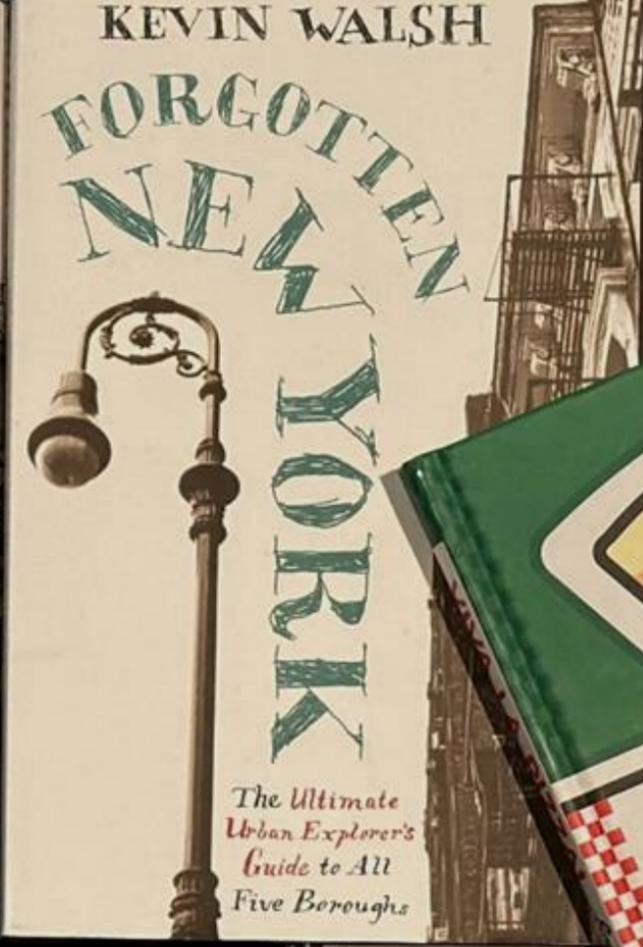
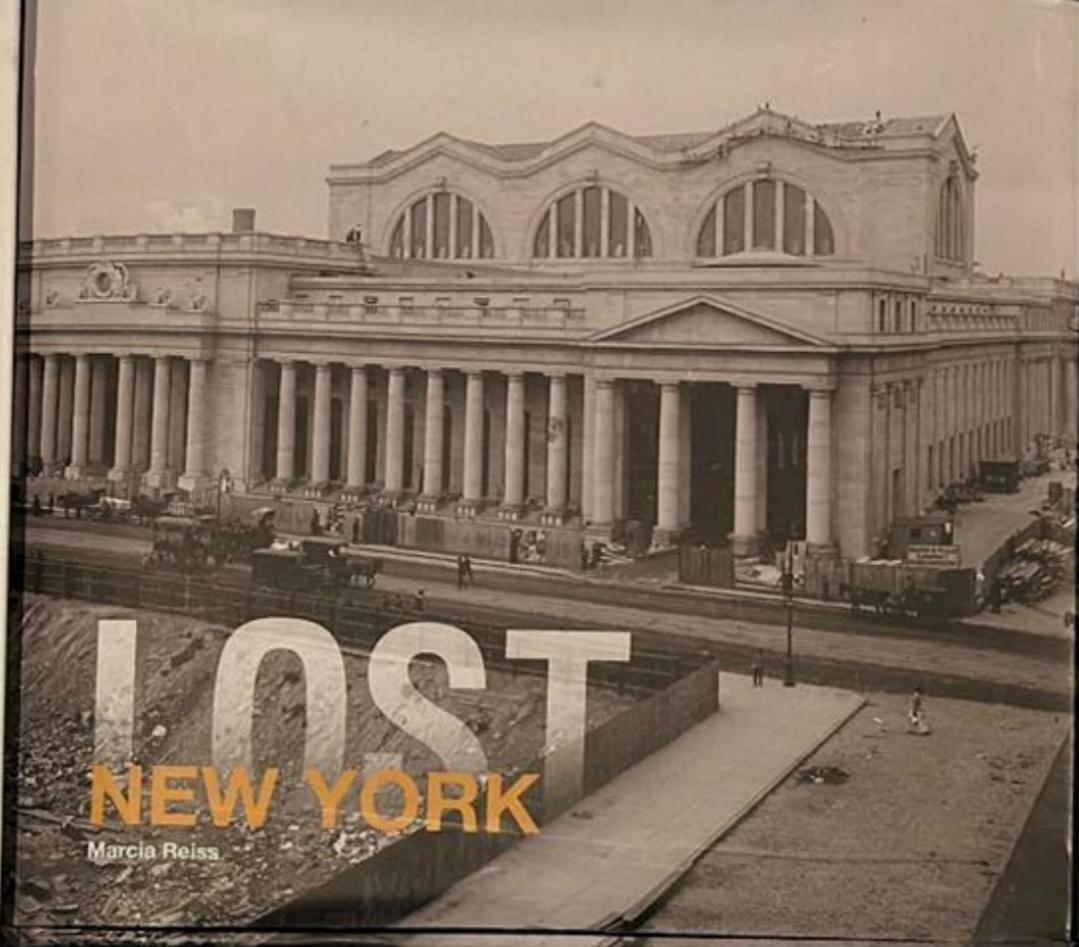
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ork



street



MARRIE BORETZ 70s 80s 90s



**THE URBAN PRISONER** Photographs by Matt Weber



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# ARCHETYPE OF A BIG CITY



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# COLLECTIVE MEMORIES OF NEW YORK



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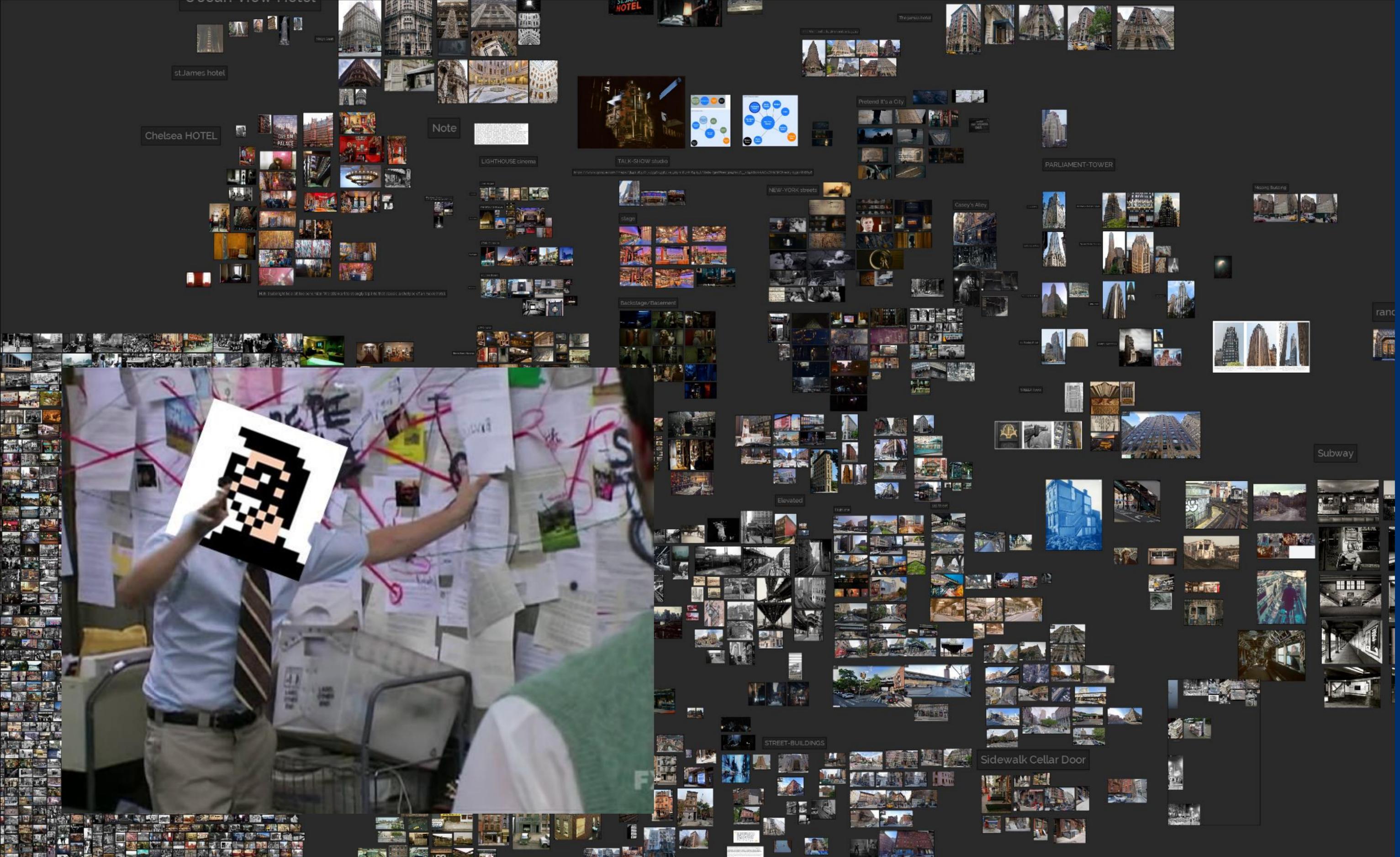


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# PROOF OF CONCEPT

Exploring atmosphere

Prototypes

Combine narrative and gameplay

*How in the world are we going to  
build The Dark Place? U\_U*



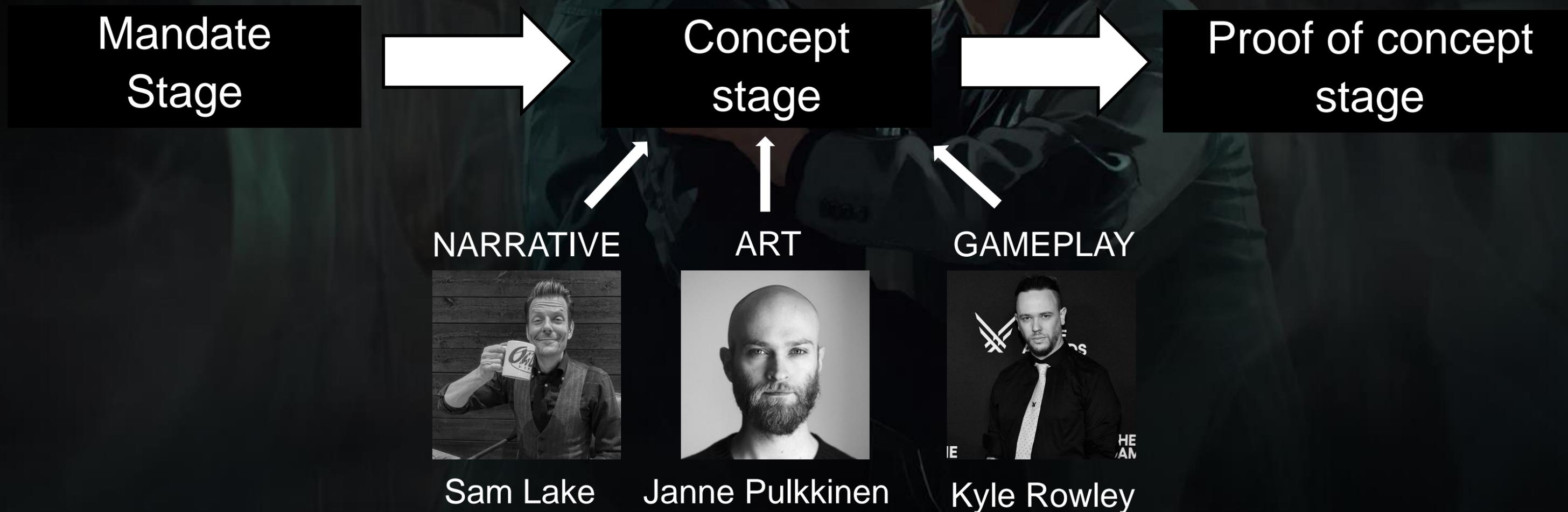
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# STAGE GATE PROCESS



Concept Art by: Oliver Odmark



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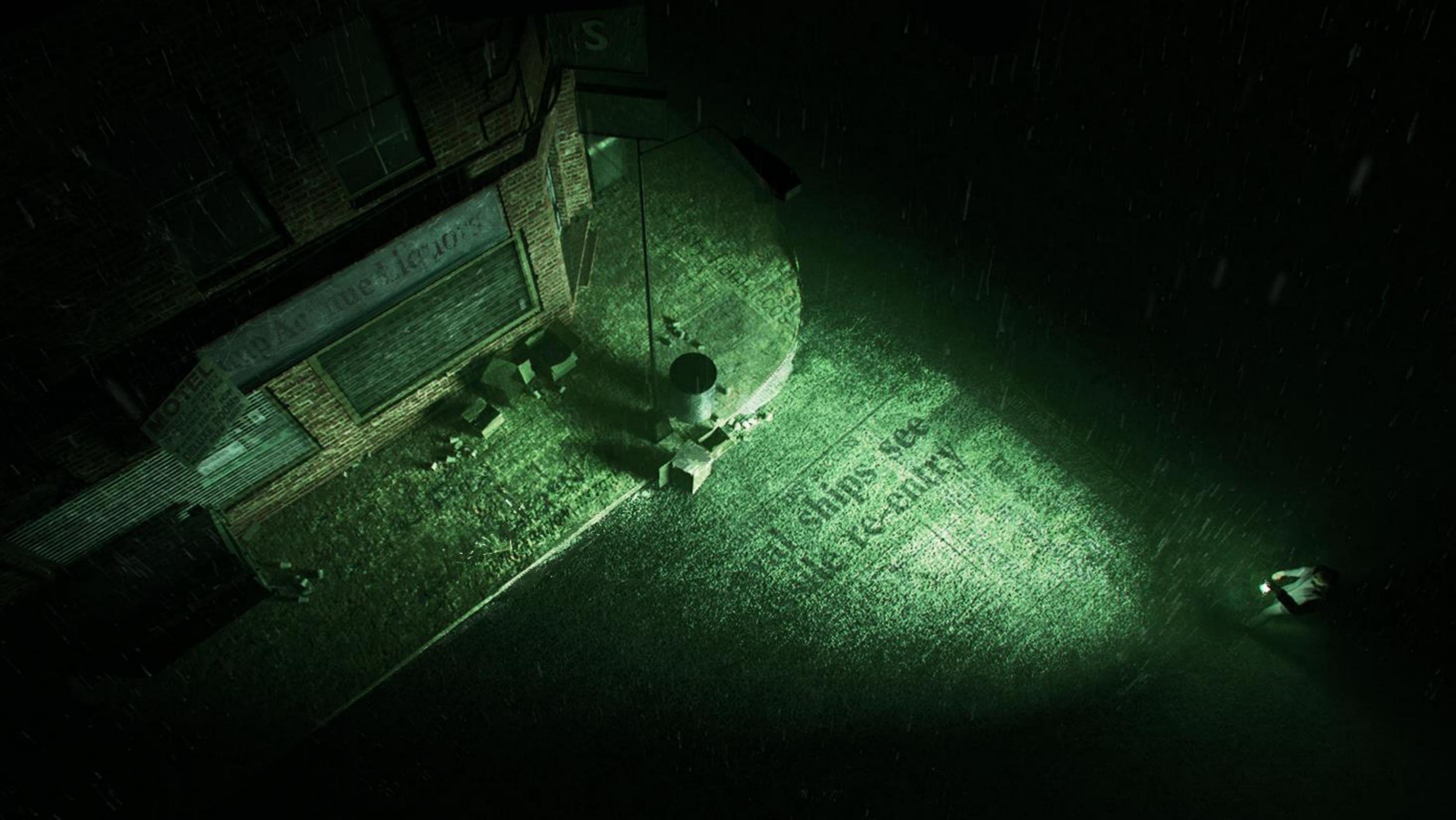


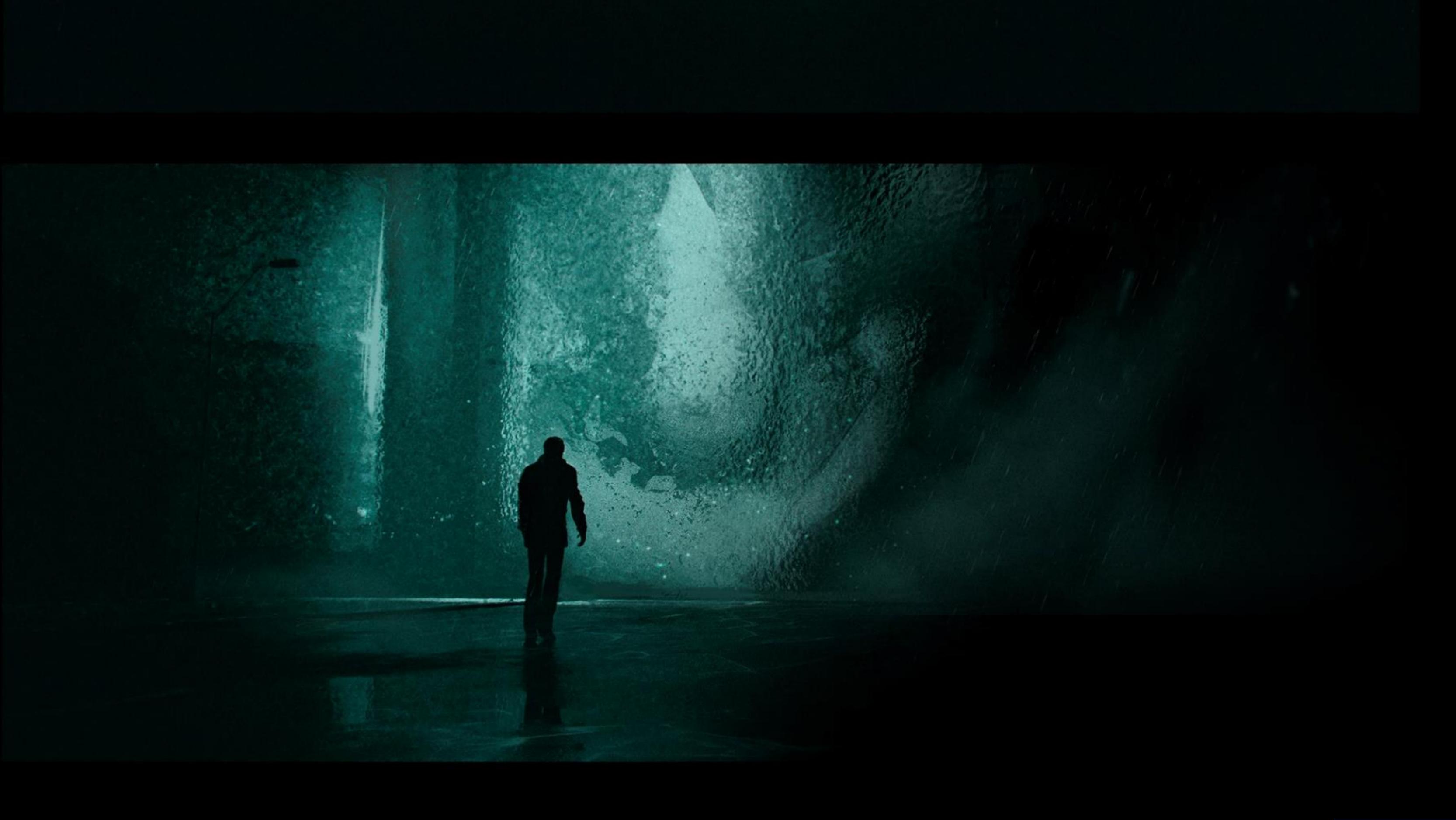
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INTERSECTION\_DP\_POC\_v1\_01









PROTOTYPE OF A DIRECTIONAL, FLOWING DARKNESS BLUR EFFECT  
A KEY BUILDING BLOCK IN ALL SUPERNATURAL EFFECTS

Prototype by: Janne Pulkkinen

# CITY INTERSECTION (proof of concept)

# LIGHT SHIFTERS

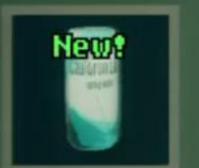


Prototypes by Tommi Saalasti

R LOOK AROUND LT RT ZOOM B EXIT

# PLOT BOARD

## CLUES



## Streets

Clues can be placed on the Plot Board in the Write's Room (B), allowing progress deeper into the Dark Place.



### CLUE LEGEND

- CORRECT
- INCORRECT
- DISCARDED

[ NEW EVIDENCE AVAILABLE ]

Prototypes by Tommi Saalasti

# Proof of concept mission



Lamp Pulse  +  causes area of effect damage.

# LEARNINGS:

- Main problems: backtracking, confusing puzzles, complex narrative
- The Dark Place was too dark :scale, proportions and silhouette.  
We need more lights.

## Main features:



### LIGHT SHIFTERS

Unstable lights that can change the environment



### REALITY REWRITE

The plot board Alan can rewrite the story and change the environment



### TELEPORTS

Enclosed environment used to teleport the player

# LEARNINGS:

- Flat city intersections **ARE BORING**, especially if the player speed is very slow
- Backtracking can be painful if the path is too long and there is no elevation

Sad Alan →



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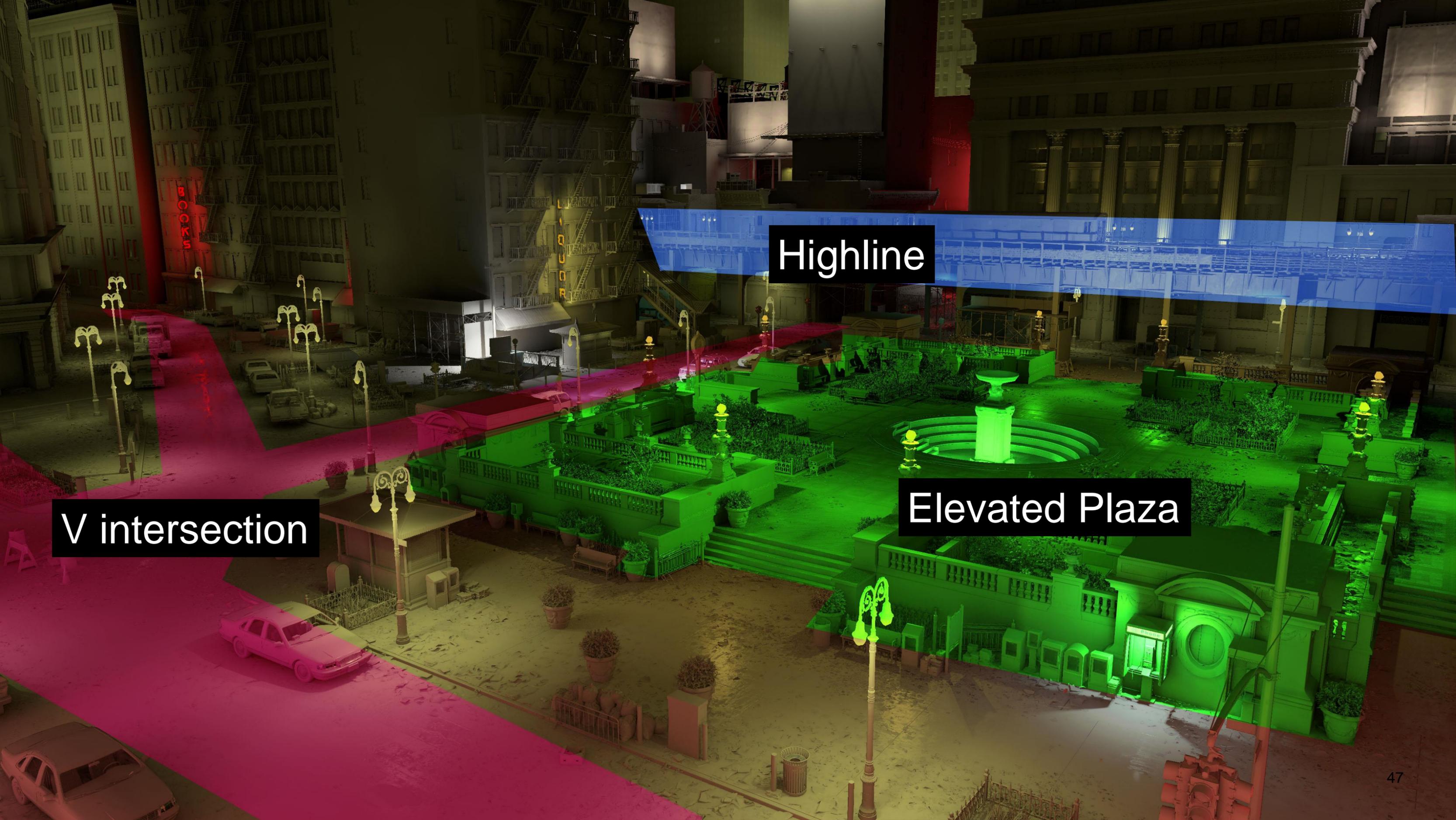


Elevated Plaza

The image shows a complex architectural model of a city street at night. A large, multi-story building with a fire escape is on the left, with a red sign that says "BOOKS" and a yellow sign that says "LIQUOR". In the center, a blue highline bridge spans across the street. Below the bridge is an elevated plaza with a central fountain, surrounded by greenery and walkways. The plaza is illuminated with green light. The street below has several cars and streetlights. The overall scene is a detailed representation of an urban environment.

Highline

Elevated Plaza

An architectural rendering of a city plaza at night. The scene is illuminated with a mix of colors: a blue highline structure spans across the top, a green elevated plaza with a central fountain and tiered seating is in the middle, and a red-paved area is on the left. Buildings with fire escapes and signs like 'BOOKS' and 'LIQUOR' are visible in the background. A yellow car is on the red-paved area, and a red traffic light is in the bottom right.

Highline

V intersection

Elevated Plaza

Rooftops

Highline

V intersection

Elevated Plaza



Cinema



Parliament Tower



Talk Show

Center Plaza



HIGH LINE

Casey Alley

Subway



Hotel

# LEARNINGS:



SHIFTER



SHIFTER



SHIFTER

Light shifters close to each other are problematic

We need better resource management



  
SHIFTER

  
SHIFTER

  
SHIFTER

  
SHIFTER

  
SHIFTER

  
SHIFTER

# LEARNINGS

- BAD for navigation/camera/collisions
- Do not scale assets

LEARNINGS:

-BAD for Combat

-GOOD for narrative/exploration



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# BUILDING THE CONSTRUCT

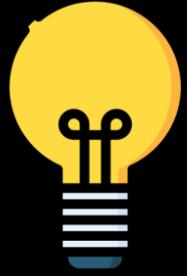


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# ARCHETYPES



The **construct** does not belong to a precise timeline.

# ARCHETYPES

Favor timeless and iconic models



# ARCHETYPES



Model by Pedro Amorim



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# ARCHETYPES



Model by Pedro Amorim



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# CONSTRUCT MADE OF WORDS



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# GRAFFITI

80s New York

The words come from Alan's mind

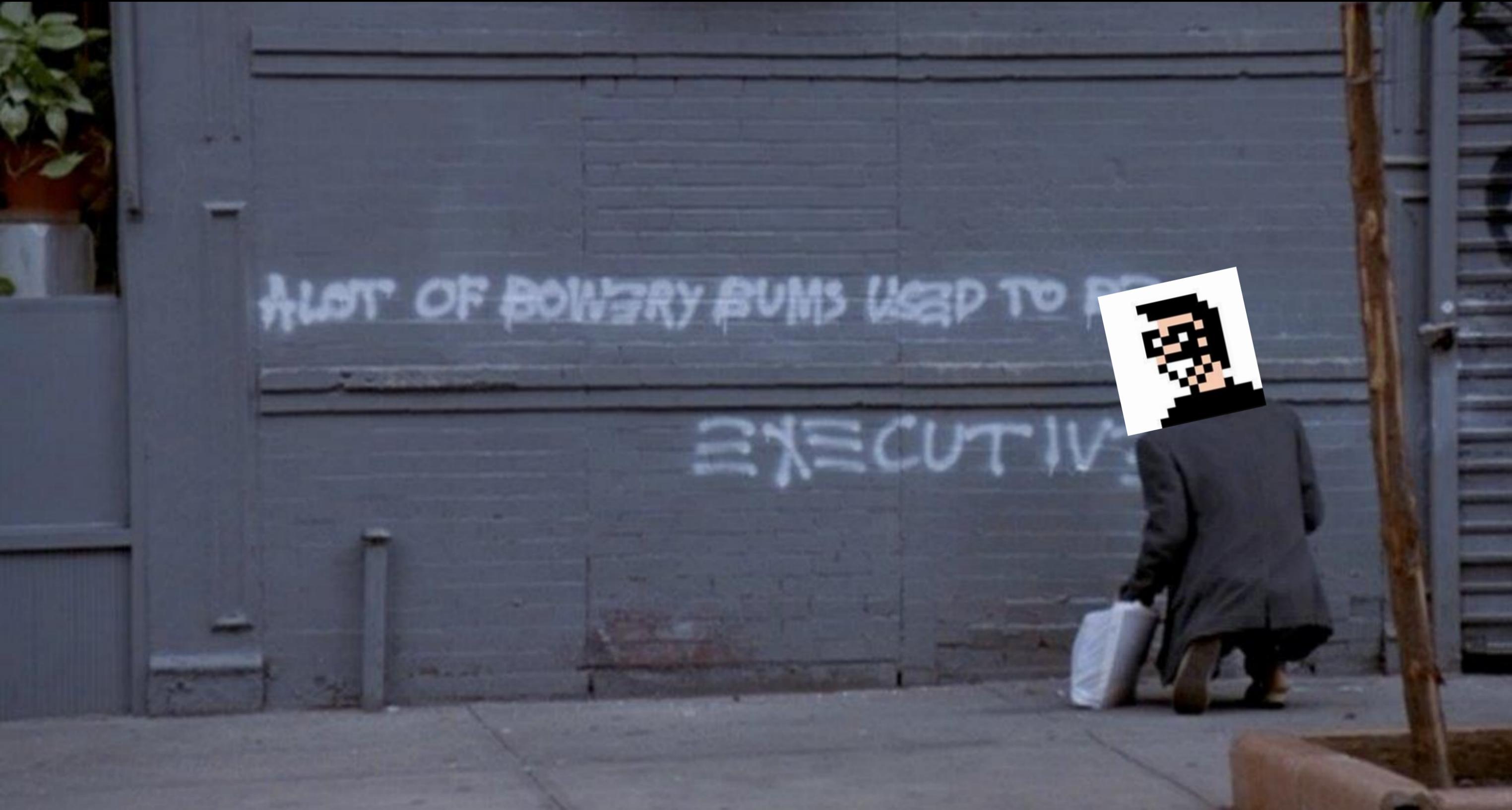


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# NO STREET ART



# NIGHTMARE GRAFFITI



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*Art is ~~not~~ a crime*



Cold Casey  
Alice  
find Alice  
Cult of the Word  
you were here  
your fault  
Return  
Initiation  
write  
don't write

you died here  
AWE  
fiction  
remember  
forget  
stop  
you lost her  
ocean  
die  
guilty

you did this  
lost  
round and  
round  
Blessed  
we see you  
you are us  
dark



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Graffiti artist: @irwin\_suimuri



9 HAVES

3:10 PM

YOU ARE

AROUND

AROUND

AROUND

WE SEE

ALICE

ALICE  
FINED

IMITATION

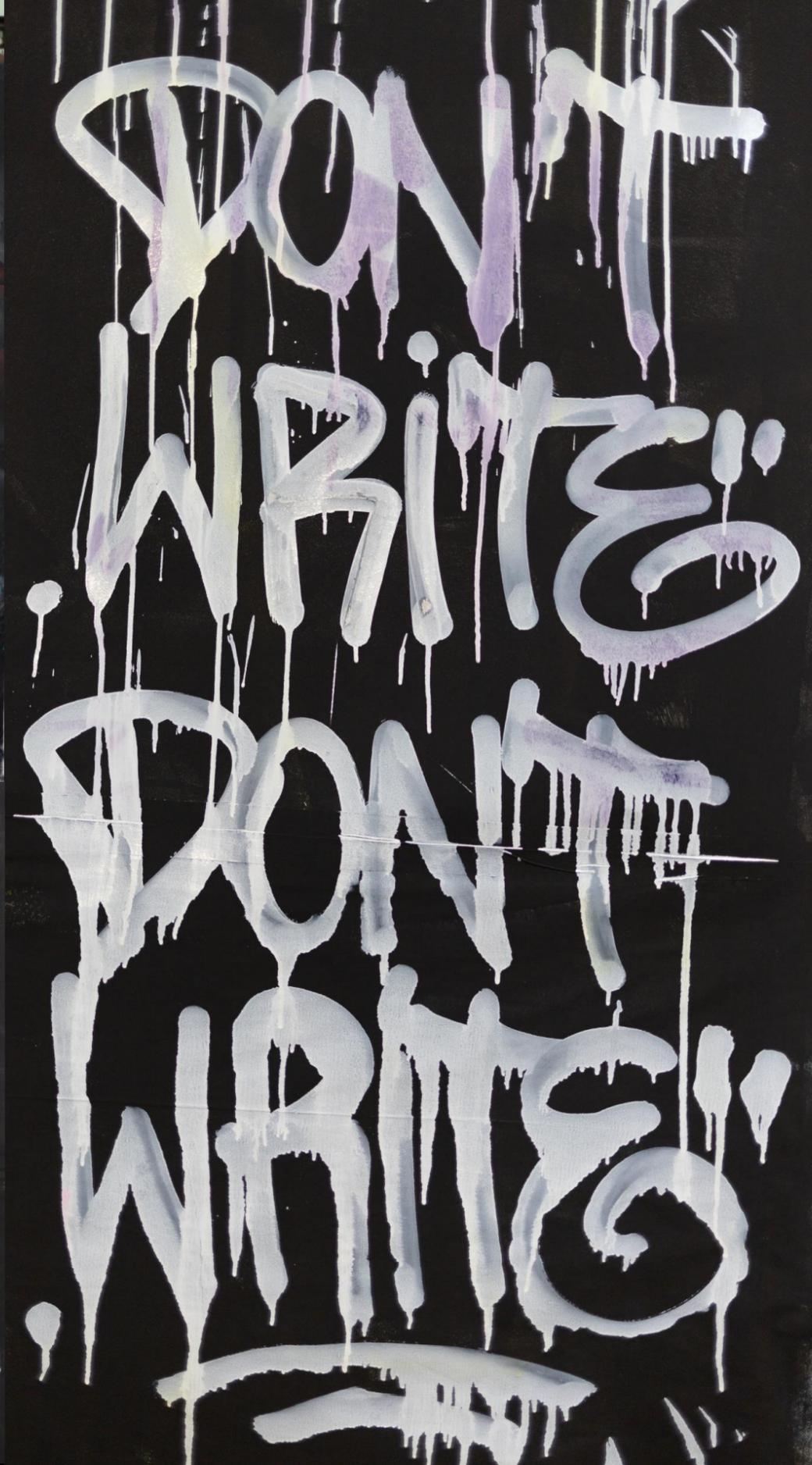
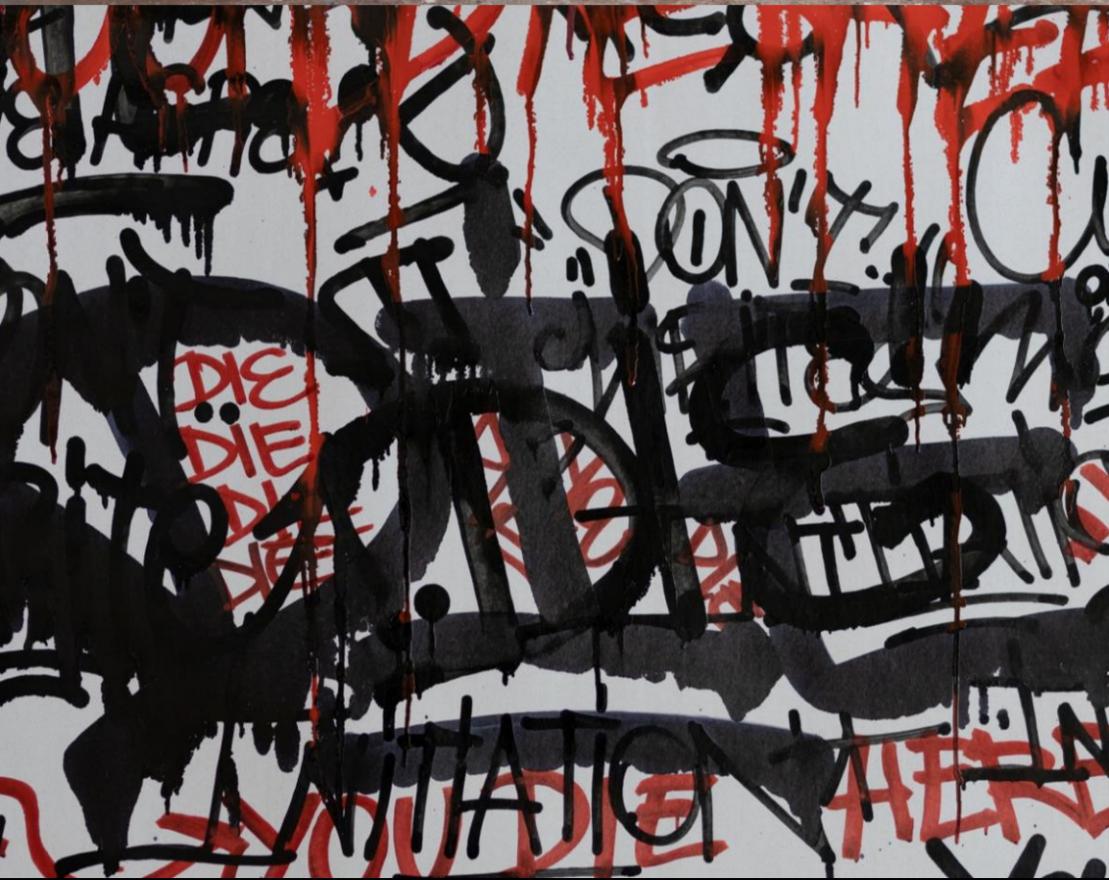
WRITE WRITE WRITE

CH

WRITE WRITE WRITE

ALICE

ALICE  
FINED

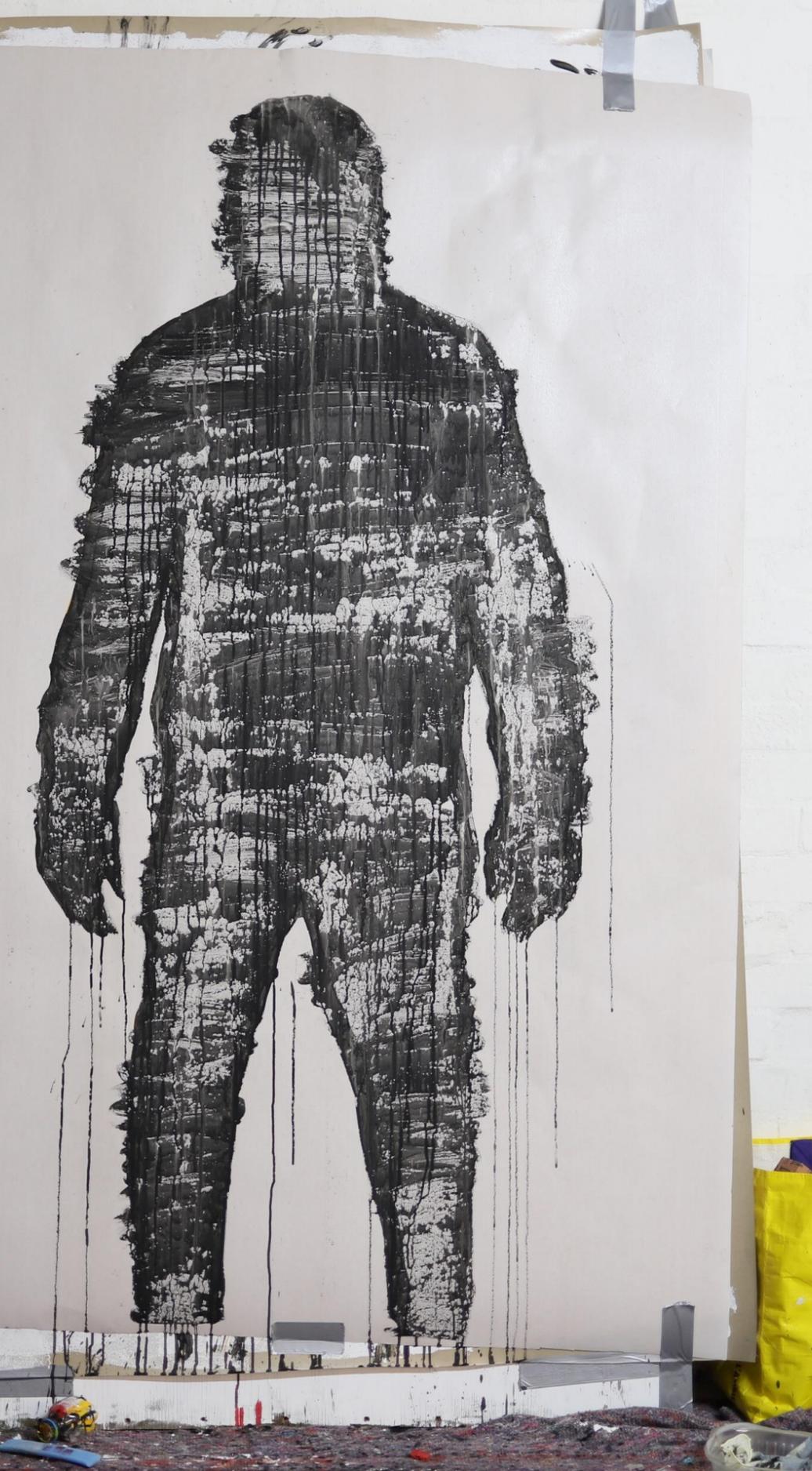


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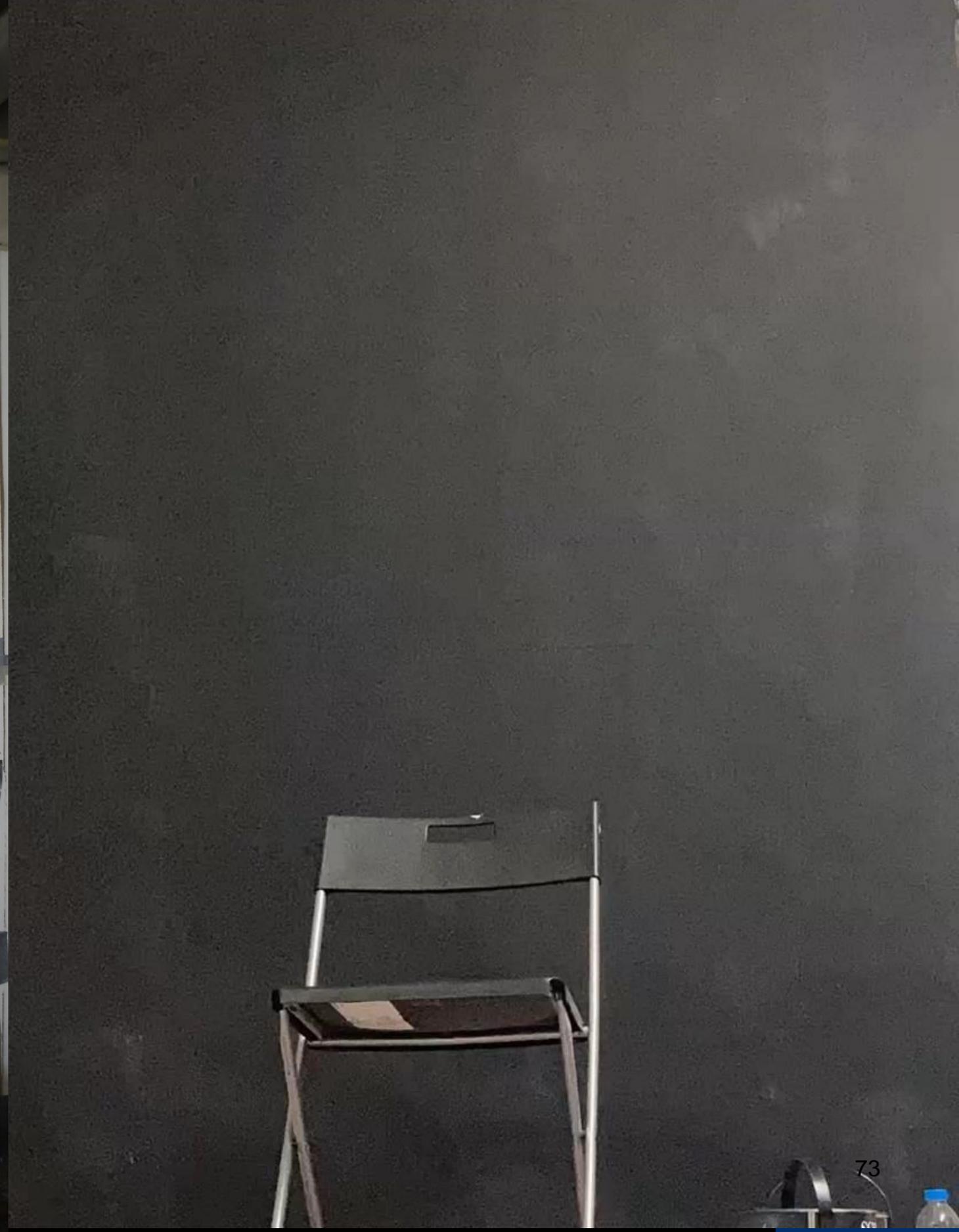
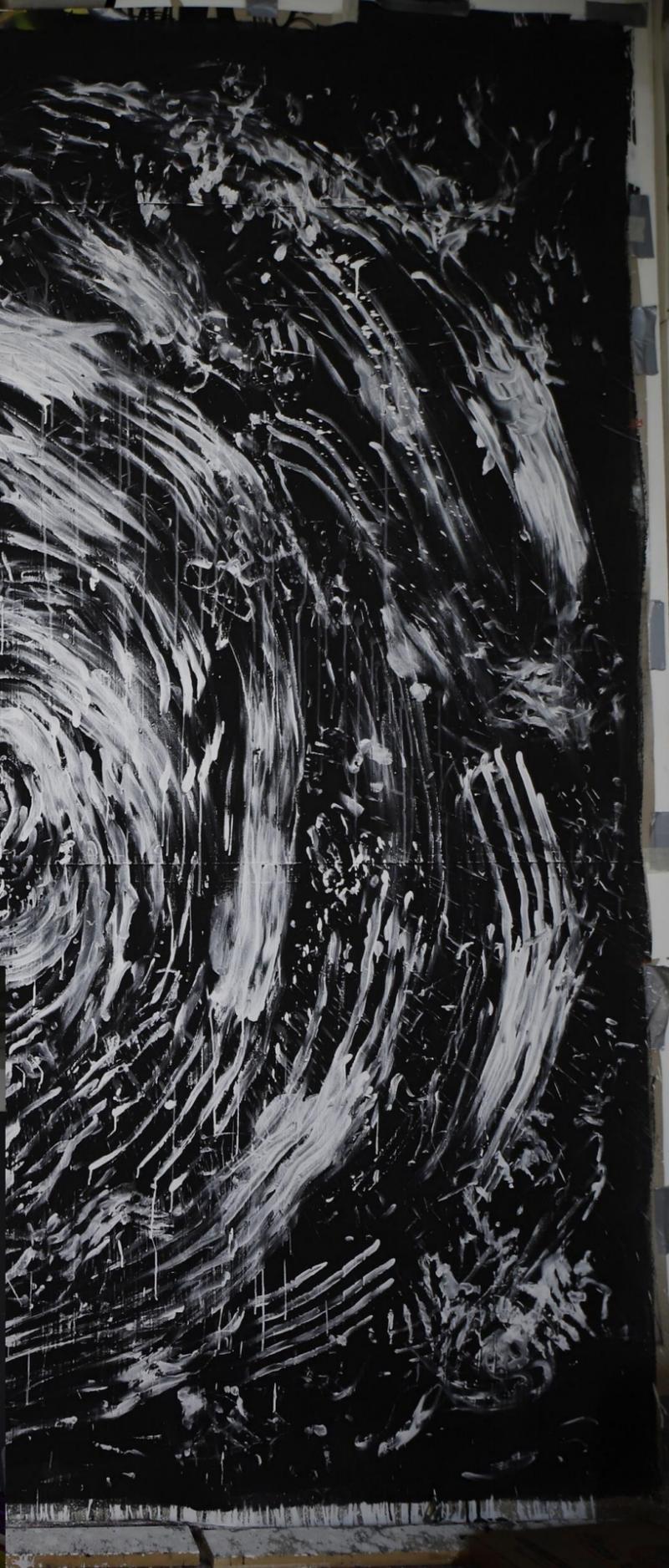
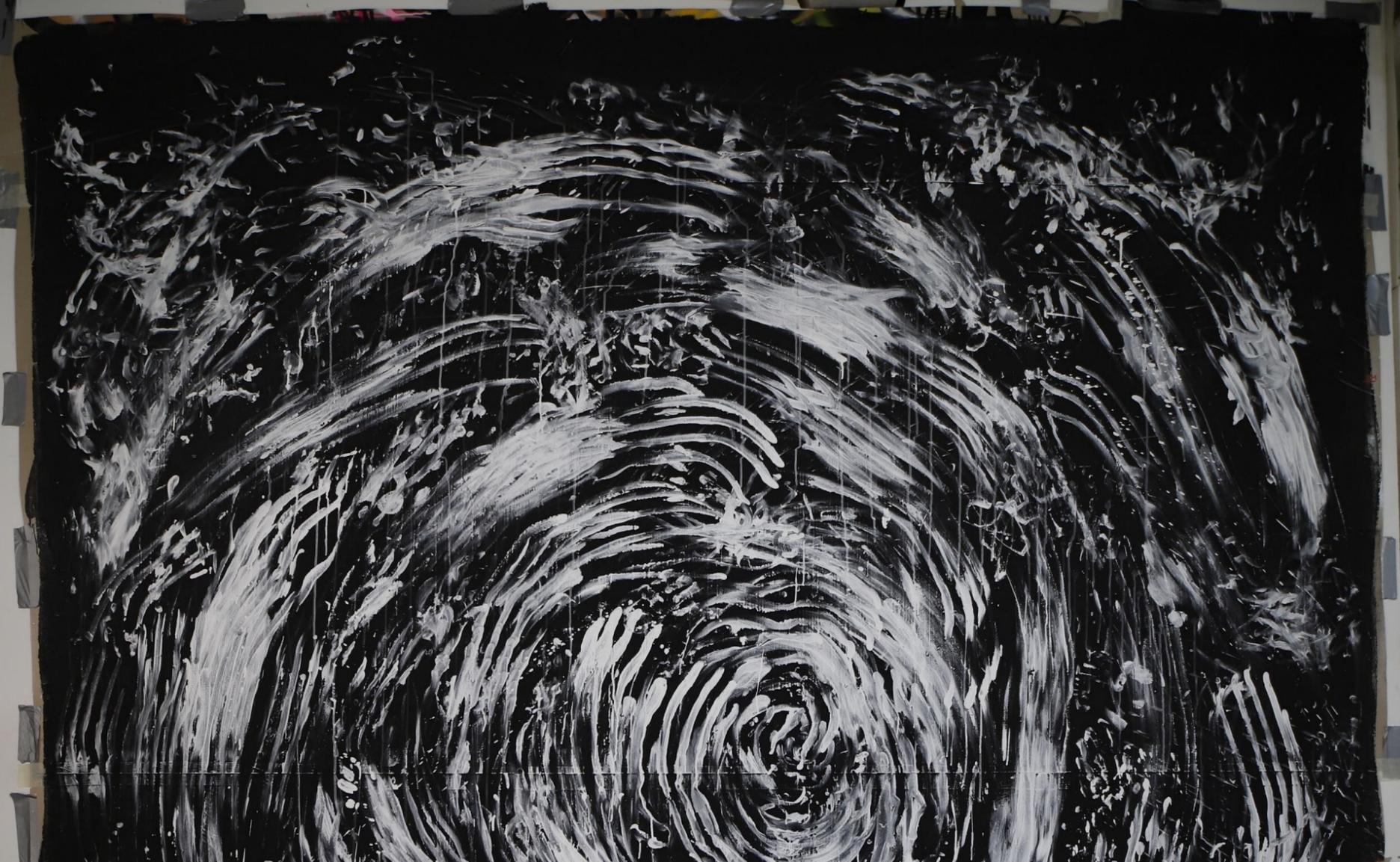


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INFORMATION









YOU LOST HER

OUT OF THE WORD

COLD CASEY

STOP

WRITE WRITE WE SEE YOU

CAUTION  
WET FLOOR

FIND

YOU LOST HER

CRATCH PATCH

OPEN OCEAN

FORGE

BARK DARK

NO MORE

WE SEE

OUT



**D** **O** **N** **T** Sleep St &  
Again Av

Identify the  
is on the map  
**You may  
not be  
the only  
"You"  
out there**  
W

the only  
not be

**D O N T** Sleep St & Again Av

CRACK  
BITE

YOU  
LOS

Identify the  
in the map  
**You may  
not be  
the only  
"You"  
out there**  
W

the only  
not be



# NEWSPAPERS



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## PARLIAMENT TOWER TO BE DEMOLISHED



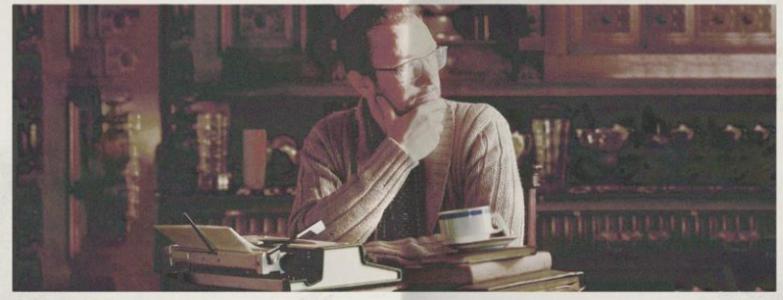
Art deco landmark torn down Parliament tower condemned

## SHOWBIZ NEWS

NEW YORK'S BREAKING ENTERTAINMENT NEWS

### ZANE CULT CLASSIC IN THEATERS

## WRITER'S MONTH



## CRIME WRITER TURNS TO HORROR

META NARRATIVE

# THE HARD BOILED DIET

Page 12

## Night Owl News

Saturday, April 29, 2022 HI 41° LO 38

READ MORE ON PAGE 13

# MURDERER STALKS SHADOWS

Murder Cult Rumors Spread

READ MORE ON P...

# WAKEUP NEW YORK

# DARK DAYS AHEAD

Column on page 20

Column on page 20

READ MORE ON PAGE 9

## Coffee's health benefits

READ MORE ON PAGE 15



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# BILLBOARDS AND POSTERS



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Hey New York,  
Your subway  
is now better  
than ever!

Come see our newly-renovated  
stations and cleaner amenities!



A forbidden play  
brought to life.

# THE CULT

An unforgettable immersive  
theater experience.

See it live at  
**OCEANVIEW HOTEL**

THE HEAT OF THE MURDER WAS LIKE  
A CROWN BURNING ON HIS BROW.

A DARK PLACE FILMS PRESENTS

# YÖTÖN YÖ

A THOMAS SEINE FILM      BASED ON A NOVEL BY VEIKKO ALÉN

STARRING ALEKSI KESÄ    BABA JAKALA    ILMARI HUOTARI    AHTI  
THOMAS SEINE    VEIKKO ALÉN    MUSIKKI AHTI AND THE JANITORS

MURHAN POLTE KUIN KRUUNU  
LOIMUAA, OTSALLAAN.

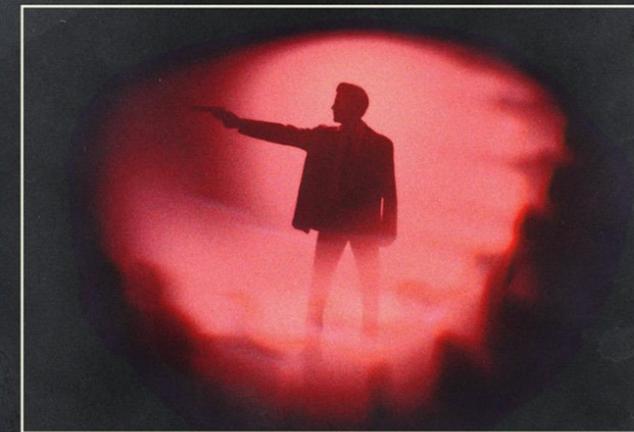
ELOKUVAHITTO  
PIMEÄ PAIKKA ESITTÄÄ

# NIGHTLESS NIGHT

THOMAS SEINE -ELOKUVA      PERUSTUU VEIKKO ALÉNIN KIRJAAN

ALEKSI KESÄ    BABA JAKALA    ILMARI HUOTARI    AHTI  
THOMAS SEINE    VEIKKO ALÉN    MUSIKKI AHTI AND THE JANITORS

Bullets, Bodies  
and Bourbon



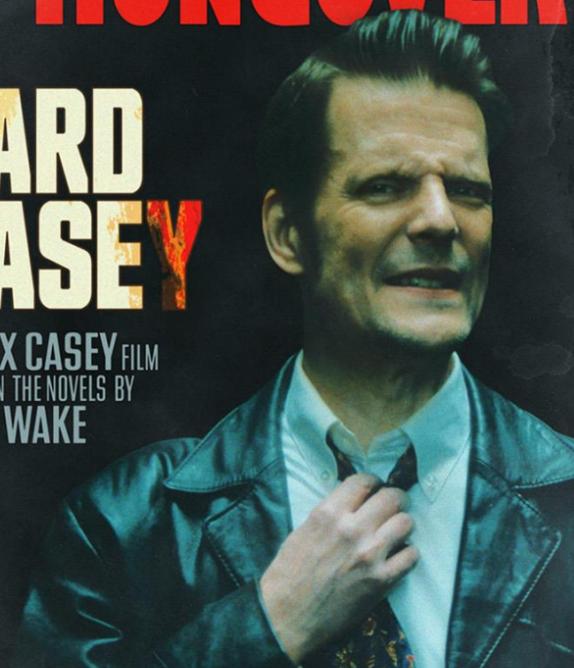
AN ALEX CASEY FILM  
**WORST CASEY**

BASED ON THE NOVELS BY ALAN WAKE

# HARDBOILED & HUNGOVER

# HARD CASEY

AN ALEX CASEY FILM  
BASED ON THE NOVELS BY  
ALAN WAKE



It's a Cold Day in HELL

# COLD CASEY

AN ALEX CASEY FILM  
BASED ON THE NOVELS BY ALAN WAKE

WE'RE NEVER  
OUT OF  
**YOUR WAY!**

OCEANVIEW  
HOTEL

OCEANVIEW HOTEL | NEW YORK, NY

Hey New York,  
Your subway  
is now better  
than ever!

Come see our newly-renovated  
stations and cleaner amenities!



There's No  
Closing the Door  
on Past Sins

# CLOSED CASEY

AN ALEX CASEY FILM - BASED ON THE NOVELS BY ALAN WAKE

Graphics design by Laine & Hallami



ART HOME  
CLASSICS ARE  
FOREVER

POET'S CLASSICS ARE FOREVER!

It's a Cold Day in HELL

THE HEAT OF THE MURDER WAS LIKE A CROWN BURNING ON HIS BROW.

**NIGHTLESS NIGHT**

A DARK PLACE FILMS PRESENTS

A THOMAS SEINE FILM

BASED ON A NOVEL BY VEIKKO ALÉN

STARRING: ALEKSI KESA, BABA JAKALA, ILMARI HUOTARI, AHTI

MUSIC BY AHTI AND THE JANITORS

CRATCHIT

**COLD CASE**

AN ALEX CASEY FILM

BASED ON THE NOVELS BY ALAN WAKE

CRATCHIT

CA

AN AL

BASED ON THE

It's a Col

STUP

CA

AN AL

BASED ON THE





**FOLLOWING A  
TYPICAL  
NIGHTMARE  
PATTERN.**

I was late.  
Desperately  
trying to reach  
my destination.



**A LIGHTHOUSE.**  
FOR SOME URGENT REASON  
**I COULDN'T REMEMBER.**  
I'D BEEN DRIVING TOO FAST  
DOWN A COASTAL ROAD TO GET THERE.

**I UNDERSTOOD**

**WHAT I HAD TO DO NOW.**

I KNEW HOW TO WRITE THE ENDING  
TO DEPARTURE. THERE IS LIGHT  
AND THERE IS DARKNESS.

THERE'S GUILT AND THERE'S ATONEMENT. BUT THE  
SCALES ALWAYS NEED TO BALANCE. EVERYTHING HAS A  
PRICE. THERE'S A LONG JOURNEY THROUGH THE NIGHT  
BACK TO THE LIGHT.

**IT'S NOT A LAKE, IT'S AN OCEAN.**



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# NEON SIGNS



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Lighting Artist: George Phillips



OCEANVIEW  
HOTEL





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# THE NIGHTMARE

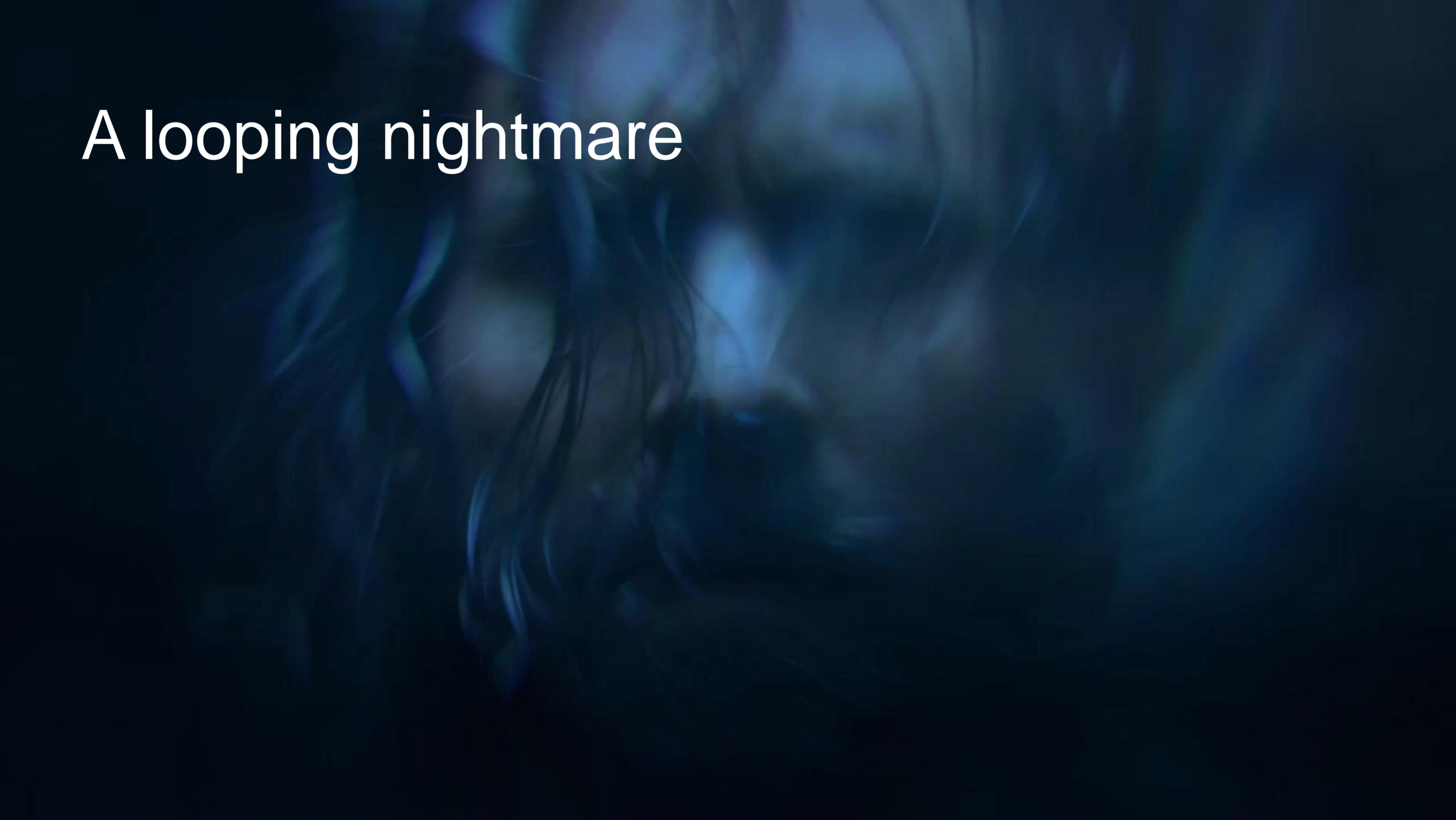


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A looping nightmare

# Rewriting reality

BALLROOM

PLOT BOARD 

 6/20  
95

 5 

Buildings appear on each loop



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PROJECT: BIG FISH

OCEANVIEW HOTEL

Concept Art by: Juhani Jokinen



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PROJECT: BIG FISH

OCEANVIEW HOTEL

Concept Art by: Juhani Jokinen

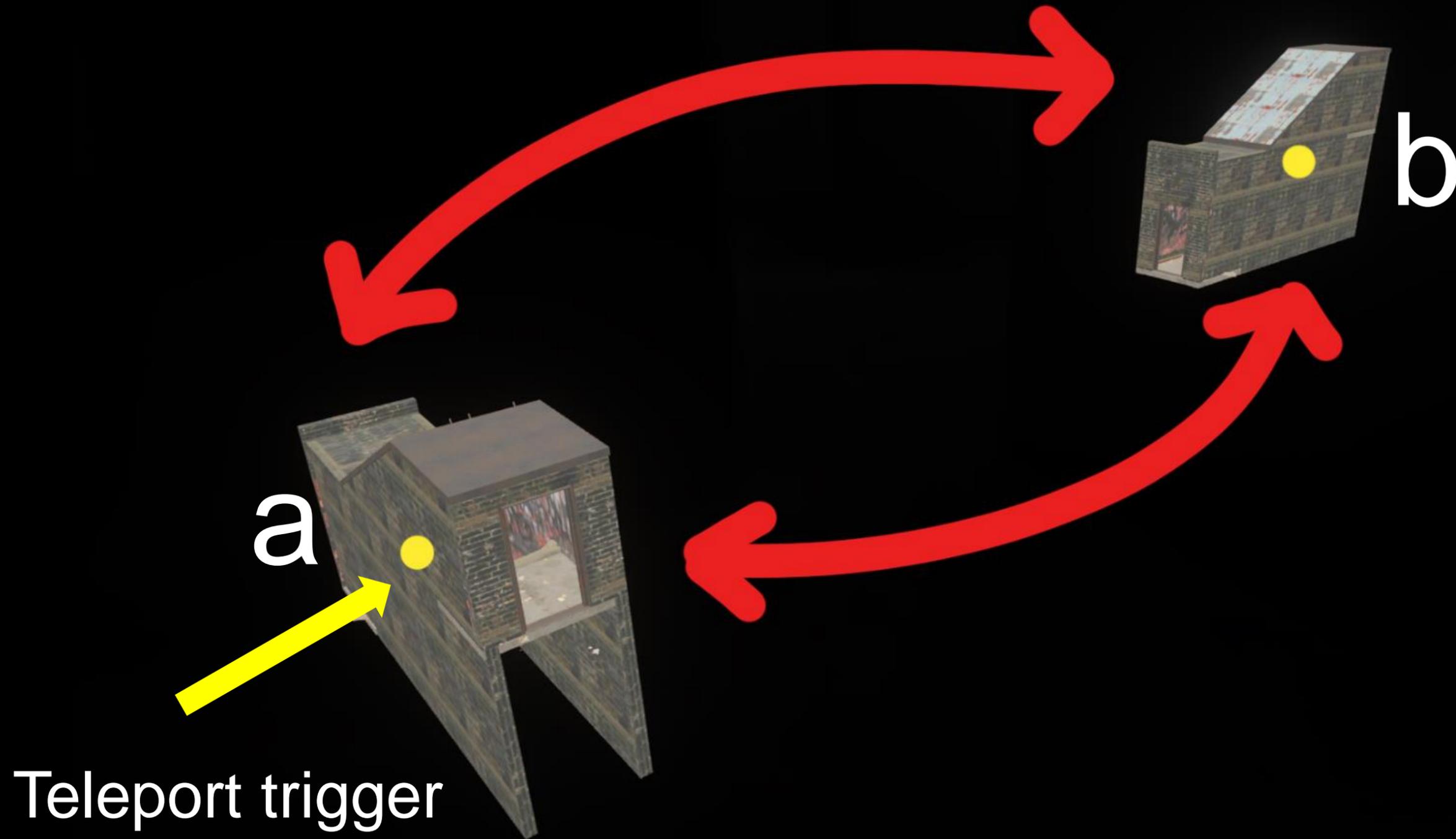
# SEAMLESS TELEPORTS



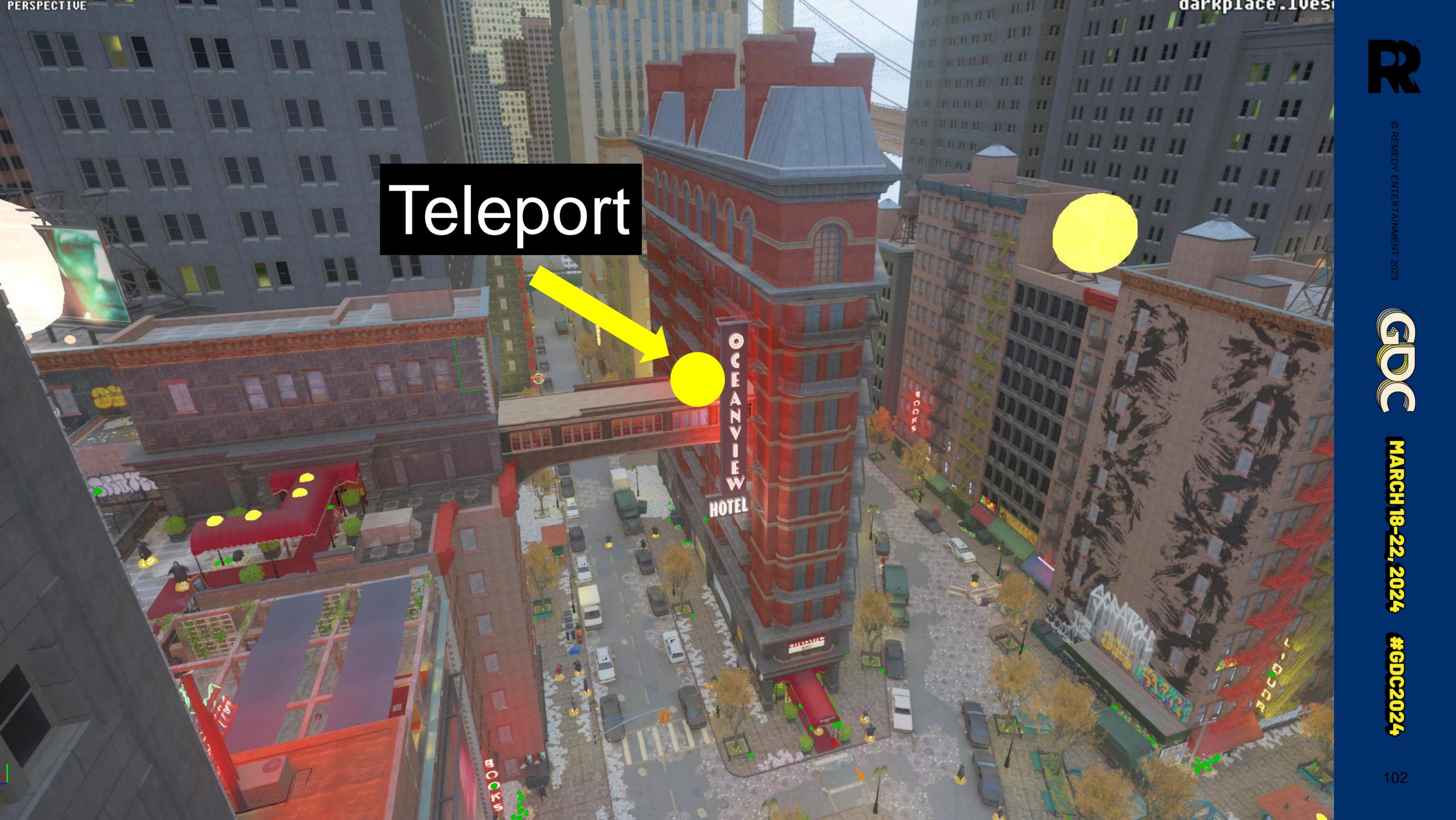
# SEAMLESS TELEPORTS



# TECHNICAL SETUP



Teleport



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# TELEPORT USED AS LEVEL TRANSITION



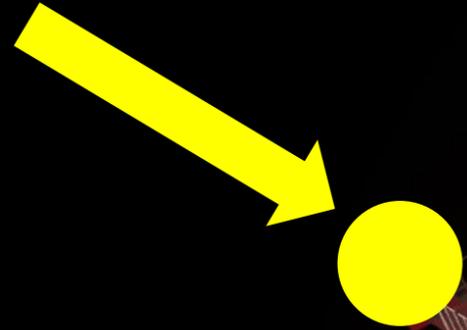
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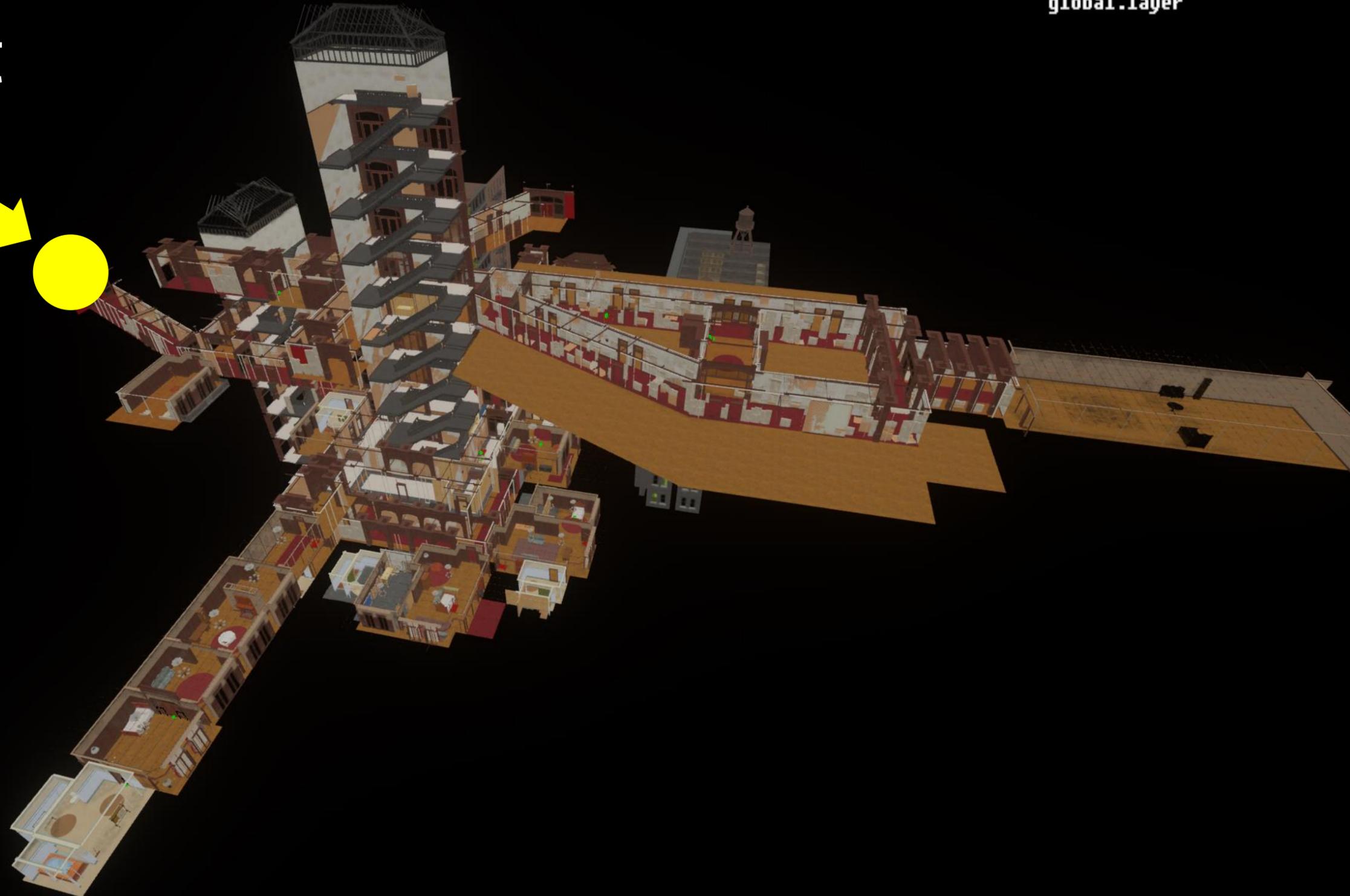
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Teleport



global.layer



# LEARNINGS FROM SEAMLESS TELEPORT



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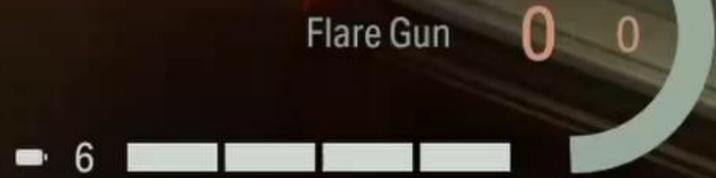
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Good for creating looping environments

The feature require a lot of iteration and bugfix

Video showing bugs





# REALITY REWRITING

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# REALITY REWRITING

# TECHNICAL SETUP

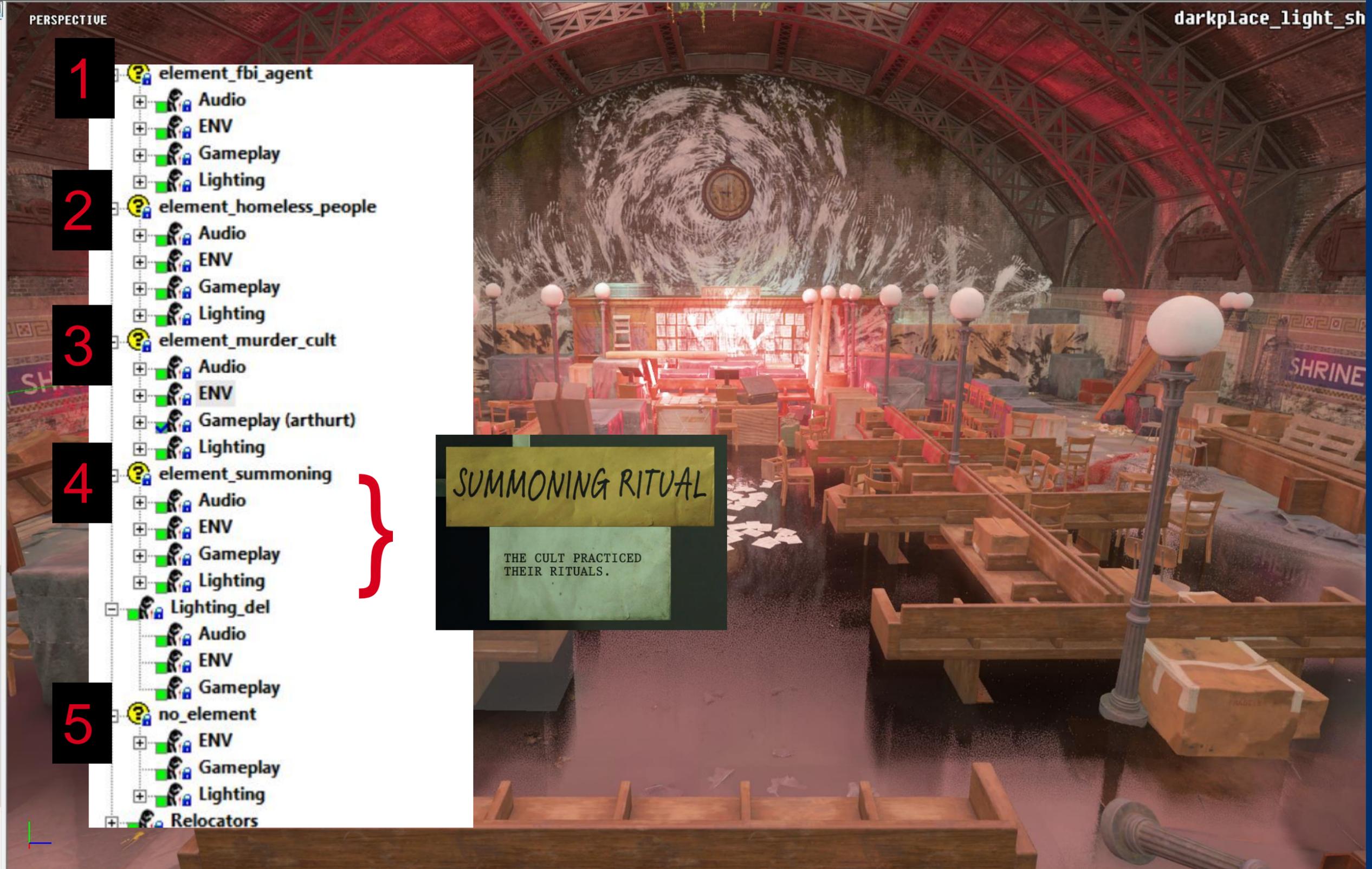
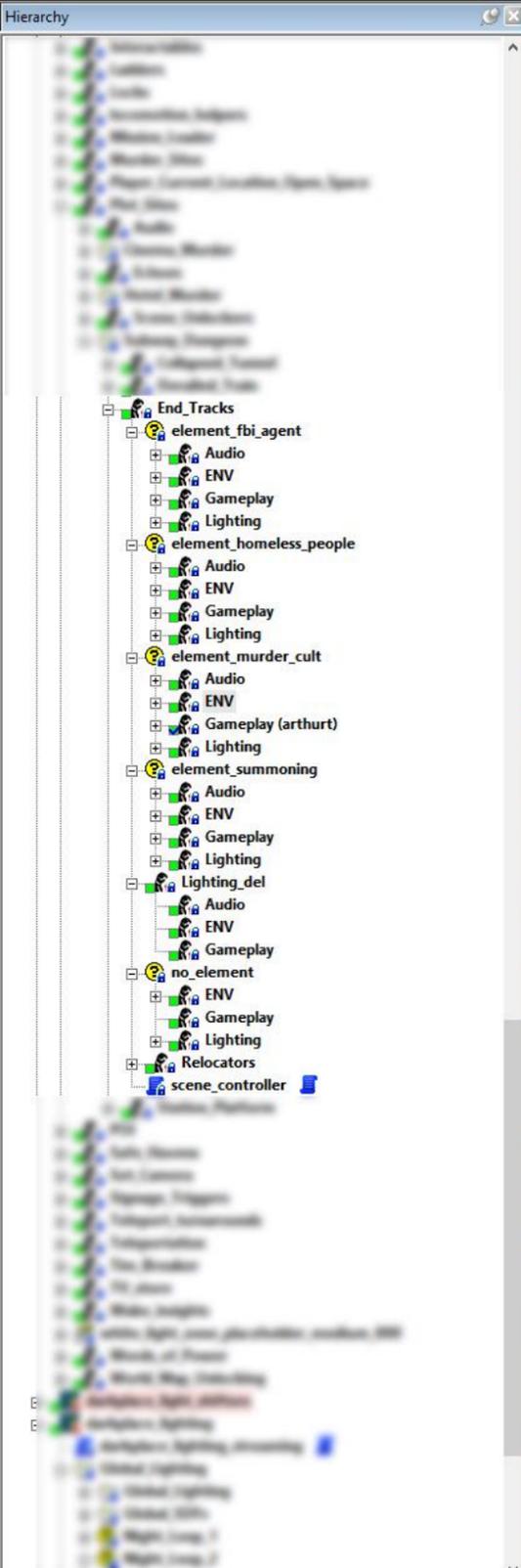


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PERSPECTIVE

darkplace\_light\_sh

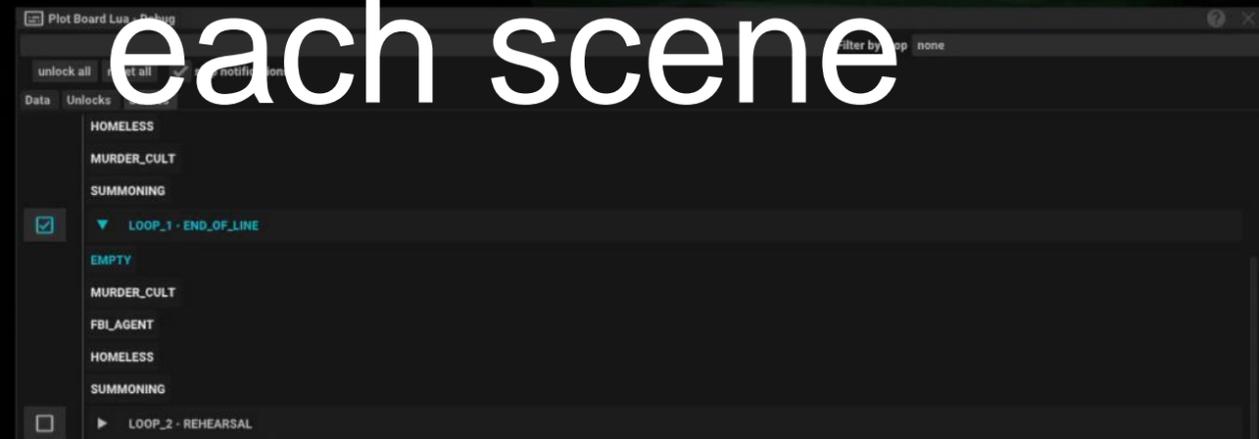
- 1 ? element\_fbi\_agent
  - + Audio
  - + ENV
  - + Gameplay
  - + Lighting
- 2 ? element\_homeless\_people
  - + Audio
  - + ENV
  - + Gameplay
  - + Lighting
- 3 ? element\_murder\_cult
  - + Audio
  - + ENV
  - + Gameplay (arthurt)
  - + Lighting
- 4 ? element\_summoning
  - + Audio
  - + ENV
  - + Gameplay (arthurt)
  - + Lighting
- 5 ? no\_element
  - + Audio
  - + ENV
  - + Gameplay
  - + Lighting
  - + Relocators

SUMMONING RITUAL

THE CULT PRACTICED THEIR RITUALS.

# LEARNINGS

- Required concept art support
- All the permutations are custom
- Scope increases for all the crafts
- We scoped down and prioritize each scene



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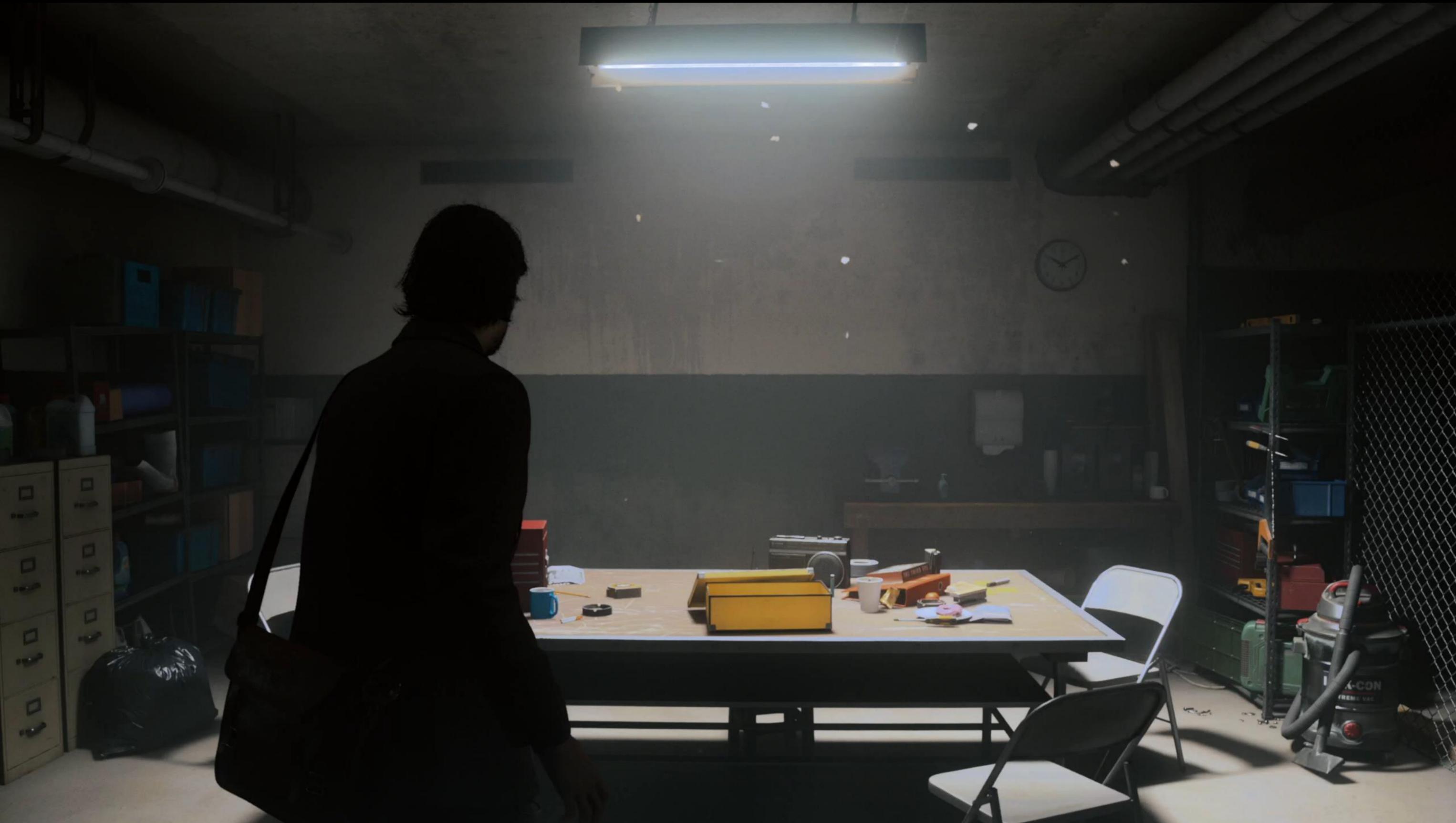


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A dimly lit office scene. In the foreground, the dark silhouette of a person stands with their back to the camera, looking towards a desk. The desk is illuminated by a single overhead light fixture, casting a warm glow. On the desk, there is a laptop, several coffee cups, and other small items. In the background, there are shelves with books and a metal shelving unit. The overall atmosphere is quiet and focused.

# LIGHT SHIFTERS



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Art Director



It is not just a door



Created a lot of different prototypes. Failed multiple times.

Level Designer

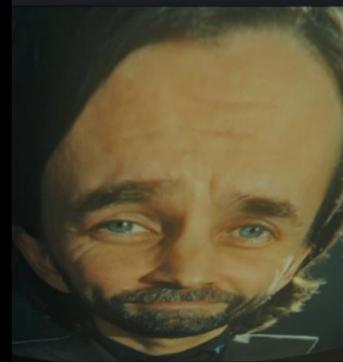


Most of the initial design are a door appearing



Asked Concept Artist to save us. We created custom concepts for some of the scenes

Lighting Artist



I can't just put a light on a door

Game Design/UR



Player does not understand this light is important, they are stuck



Shifters are the only blinking lights in The Dark Place. UI and audio helpers to improve guidance and visibility.

# PAIN

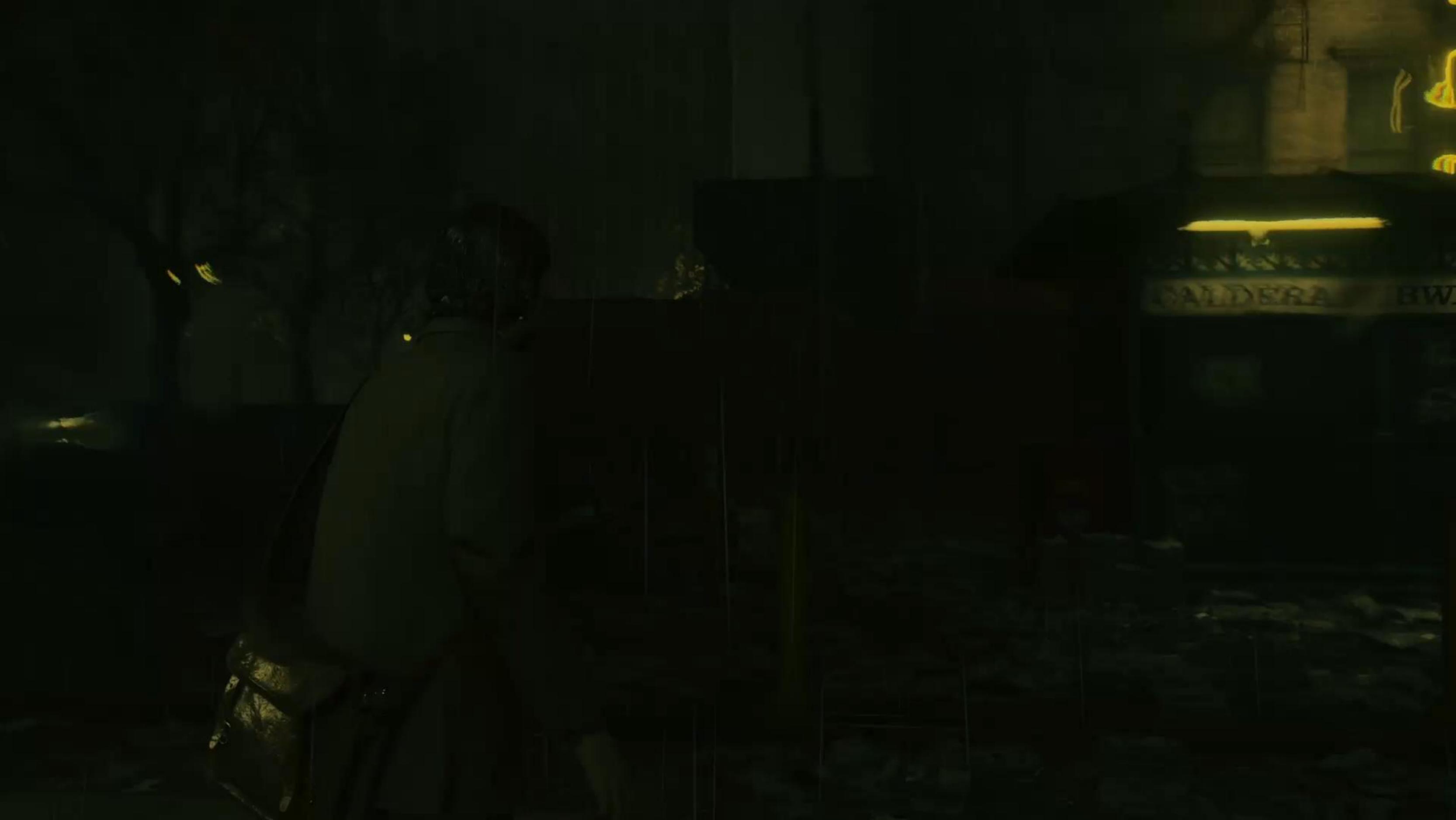


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# LIGHTING HIERARCHY

Lighting team:  
Damian Stempniewski  
George Phillips  
Andrea Migliazza



Neon signs to help guidance,  
Dim intensity and colored

Dimmer accent lights



Gameplay lights = pure color, brighter than other lights



COLLAPSED TUNNEL

PLOT BOARD 

# LEARNINGS

- Constant collaboration between design, lighting, env art and audio
- Require a lot of iteration
- Hard to debug, they all comes with a different problems

Video showing bugs



# ~~CREATIVE DIRECTION~~

- ~~The Story~~
- ~~The Atmosphere~~
- ~~The Construct~~
- ~~The Nightmare~~

# ~~VISUAL SOLUTIONS~~

- ~~Building the atmosphere~~
  - ~~Research~~
  - ~~Proof of Concept~~
- ~~Building the construct~~
  - ~~Archetypes~~
  - 
  - ~~Construct made of words~~
    - ~~Graffiti~~
    - ~~News Papers~~
    - ~~Billboard and Posters~~
    - ~~Neon~~

# ~~TECHNICAL IMPLEMENTATION~~

- ~~Teleport~~
- ~~Reality Rewriting~~
- ~~Light Shifter~~
- **Live Action** 
- Conclusion



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# LIVE ACTION



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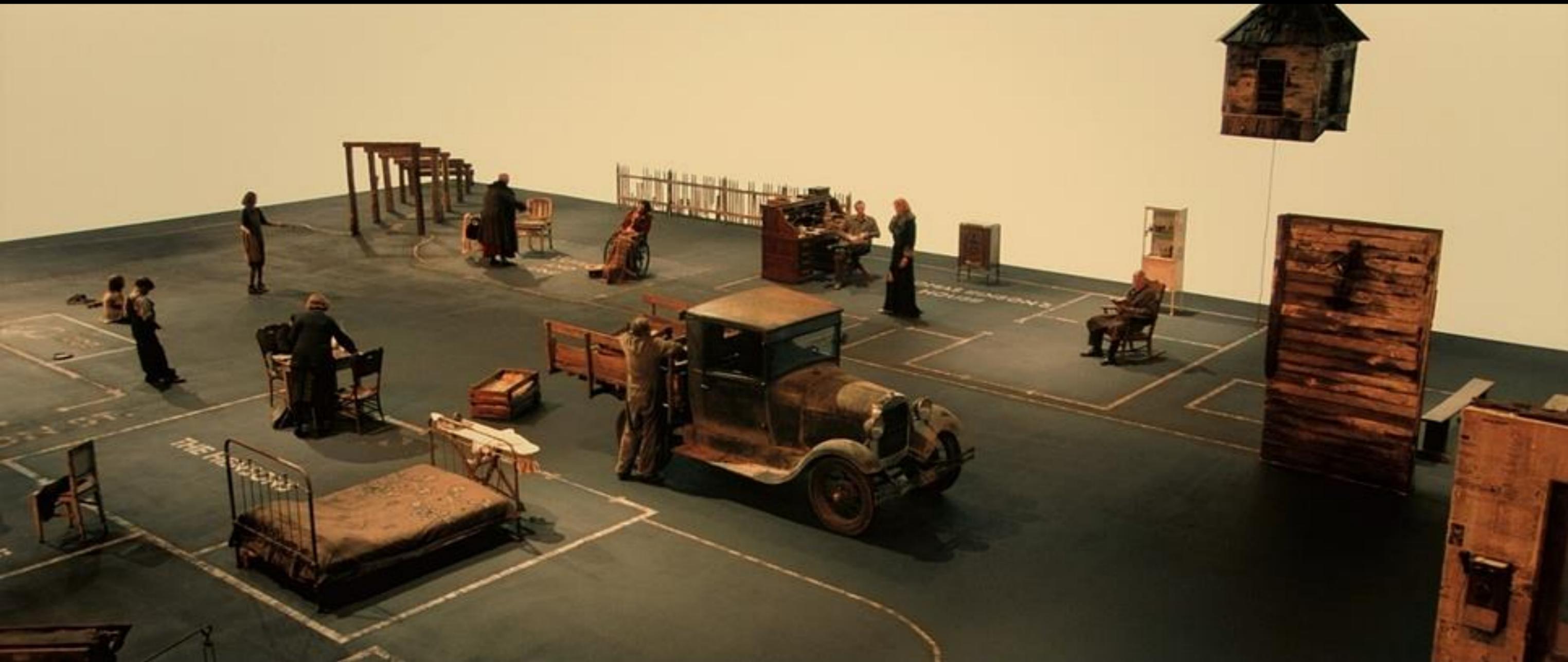
665





Concept Art by: Juhani Jokinen





Movie reference: Dogville  
Lars von Trier



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# PROJECTIONS TECHNICAL SET UP



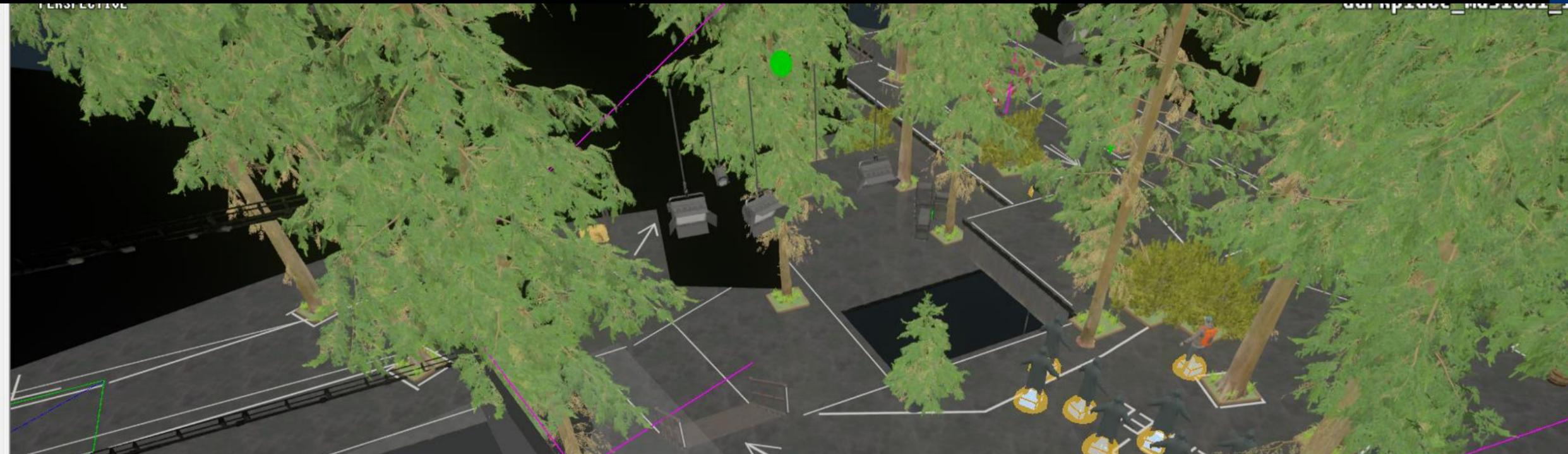
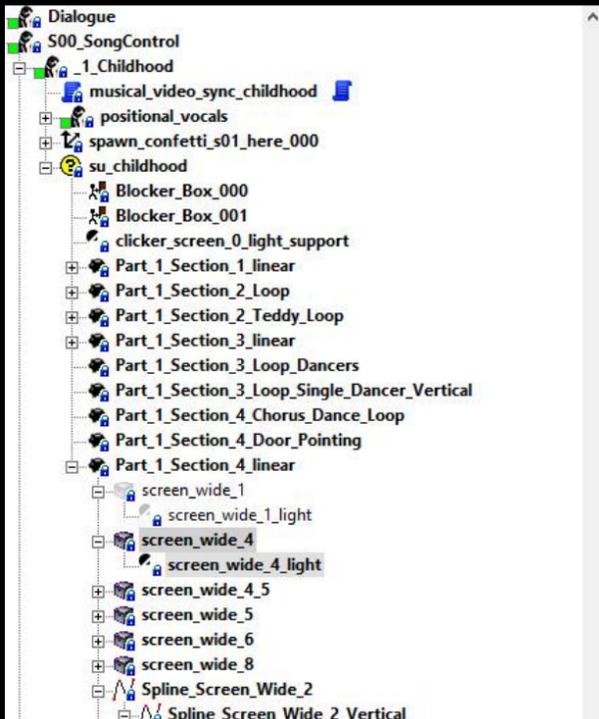
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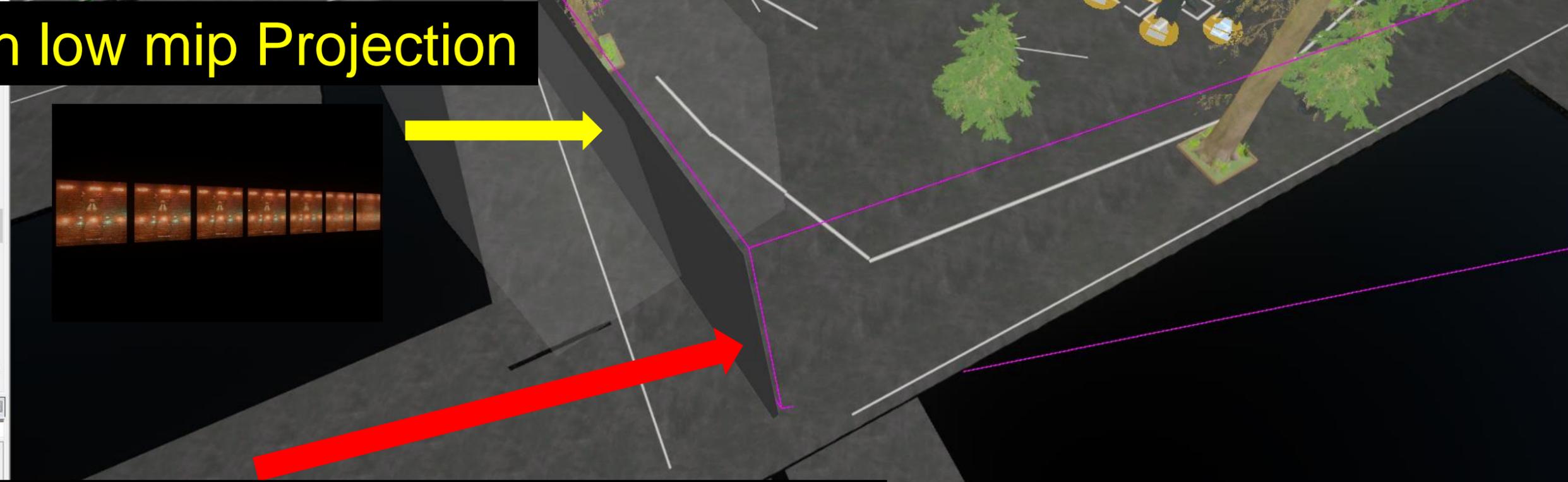
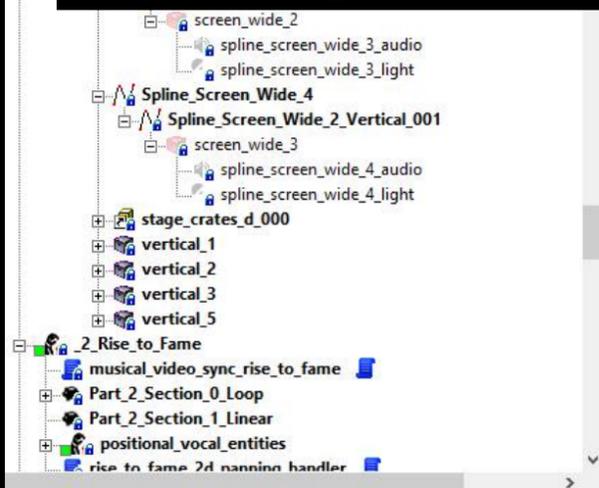
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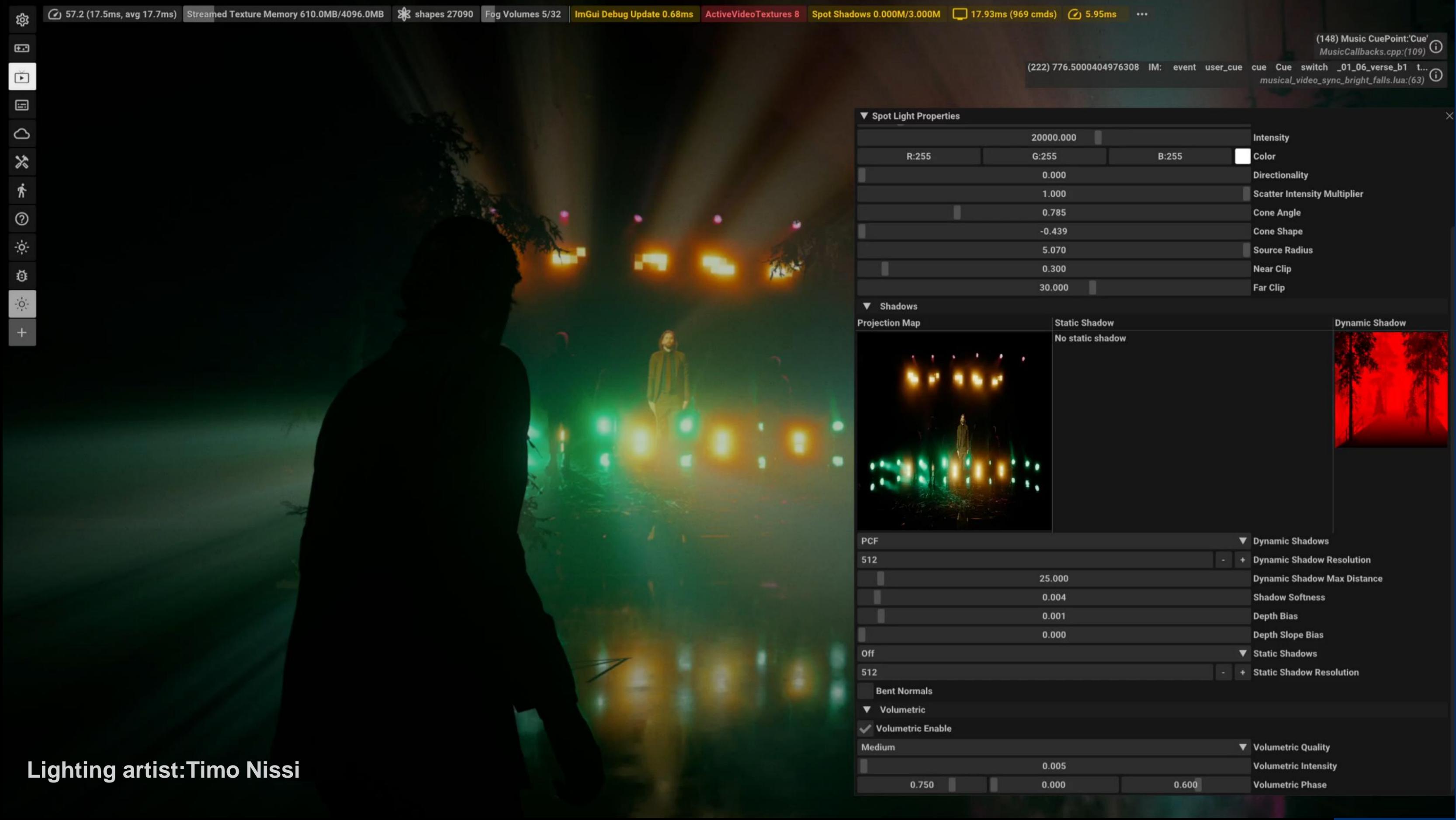
126



Spotlight with low mip Projection



Cube with emissive videotexture material



57.2 (17.5ms, avg 17.7ms) Streamed Texture Memory 610.0MB/4096.0MB shapes 27090 Fog Volumes 5/32 ImGui Debug Update 0.68ms ActiveVideoTextures 8 Spot Shadows 0.000M/3.000M 17.93ms (969 cmds) 5.95ms ...

(148) Music CuePoint:'Cue'  
MusicCallbacks.cpp:(109)  
(222) 776.5000404976308 IM: event user\_cue cue Cue switch \_01\_06\_verse\_b1 t...  
musical\_video\_sync\_bright\_falls.lua:(63)

**Spot Light Properties**

20000.000 Intensity

R:255 G:255 B:255 Color

0.000 Directionality

1.000 Scatter Intensity Multiplier

0.785 Cone Angle

-0.439 Cone Shape

5.070 Source Radius

0.300 Near Clip

30.000 Far Clip

---

**Shadows**

Projection Map	Static Shadow	Dynamic Shadow
	No static shadow	

PCF Dynamic Shadows

512 - + Dynamic Shadow Resolution

25.000 Dynamic Shadow Max Distance

0.004 Shadow Softness

0.001 Depth Bias

0.000 Depth Slope Bias

Off Static Shadows

512 - + Static Shadow Resolution

Bent Normals

**Volumetric**

Volumetric Enable

Medium Volumetric Quality

0.005 Volumetric Intensity

0.750 0.000 0.600 Volumetric Phase

Lighting artist:Timo Nissi

#THEGAMEAWARDS



# LEARNINGS

-3D set in game and the live action needs to match

-Build first the game environment and then let the live action crew recreate that on set.



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# LEARNINGS (FROM QUANTUM BREAK)



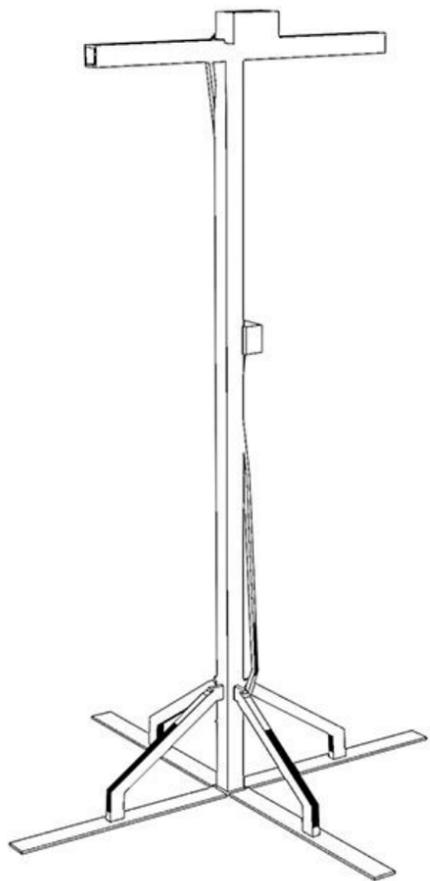
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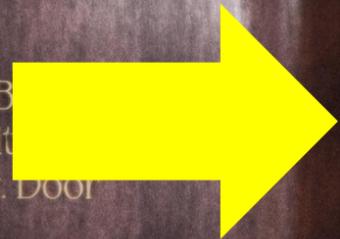
## MÅNARK



...O MEN ON EITHER SIDE OF YOU?

# REAL LIFE WHITE-BOX!

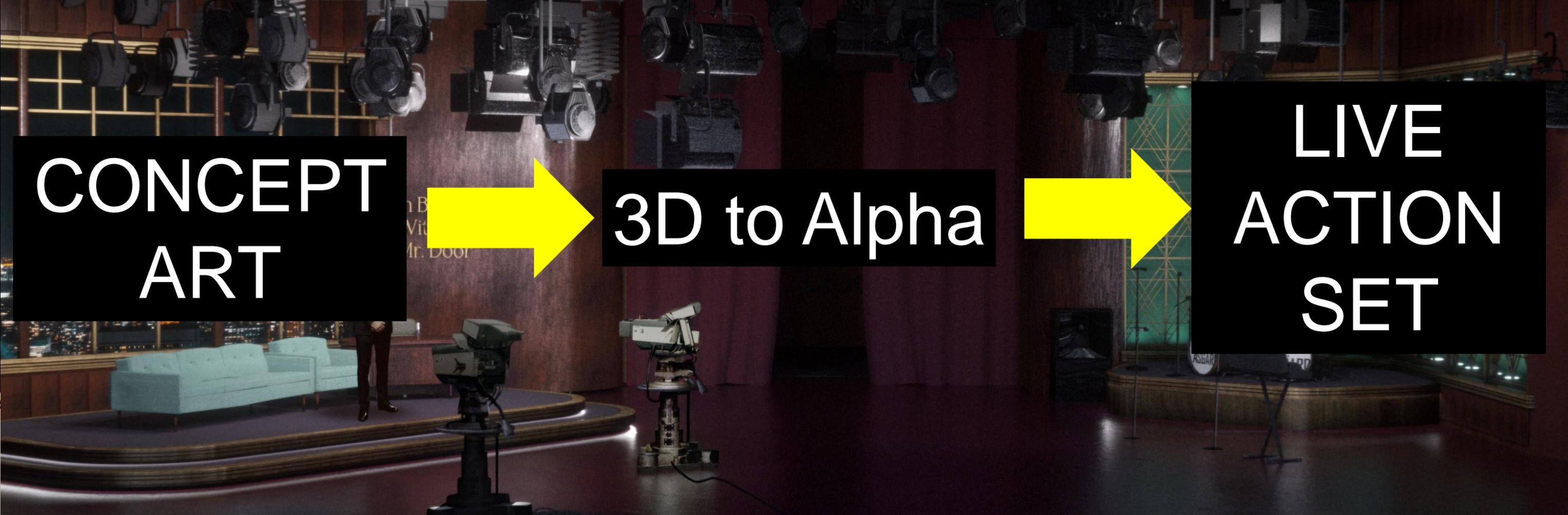
CONCEPT  
ART



3D to Alpha



LIVE  
ACTION  
SET



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# CREATIVE DIRECTION

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- The Construct
- The Nightmare

# VISUAL SOLUTIONS

- Building the atmosphere
  - Research
  - Proof of Concept
- Building the construct
  - Archetypes
- Construct made of words
  - Graffiti
  - News Papers
  - Billboard and Posters
  - Neon

# TECHNICAL IMPLEMENTATION

- Teleport
- Reality Rewriting
- Light Shifter
- Live Action

- Conclusion



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# FIND THE LIGHTS



## THE STORY

Let the story inspire you



## ARCHETYPE

Place built from memories  
Words with deeper meaning  
Subjective reality



## ATMOSPHERE

Noir crime city  
Echo of New York  
Dark and grimy



## EXPERIENCE

Horror story  
Looping environments  
Trapped paranoia

# BIGGEST LIGHTS



*ALAN WAKE II environment art team*



Truth



Compassion



Tolerance

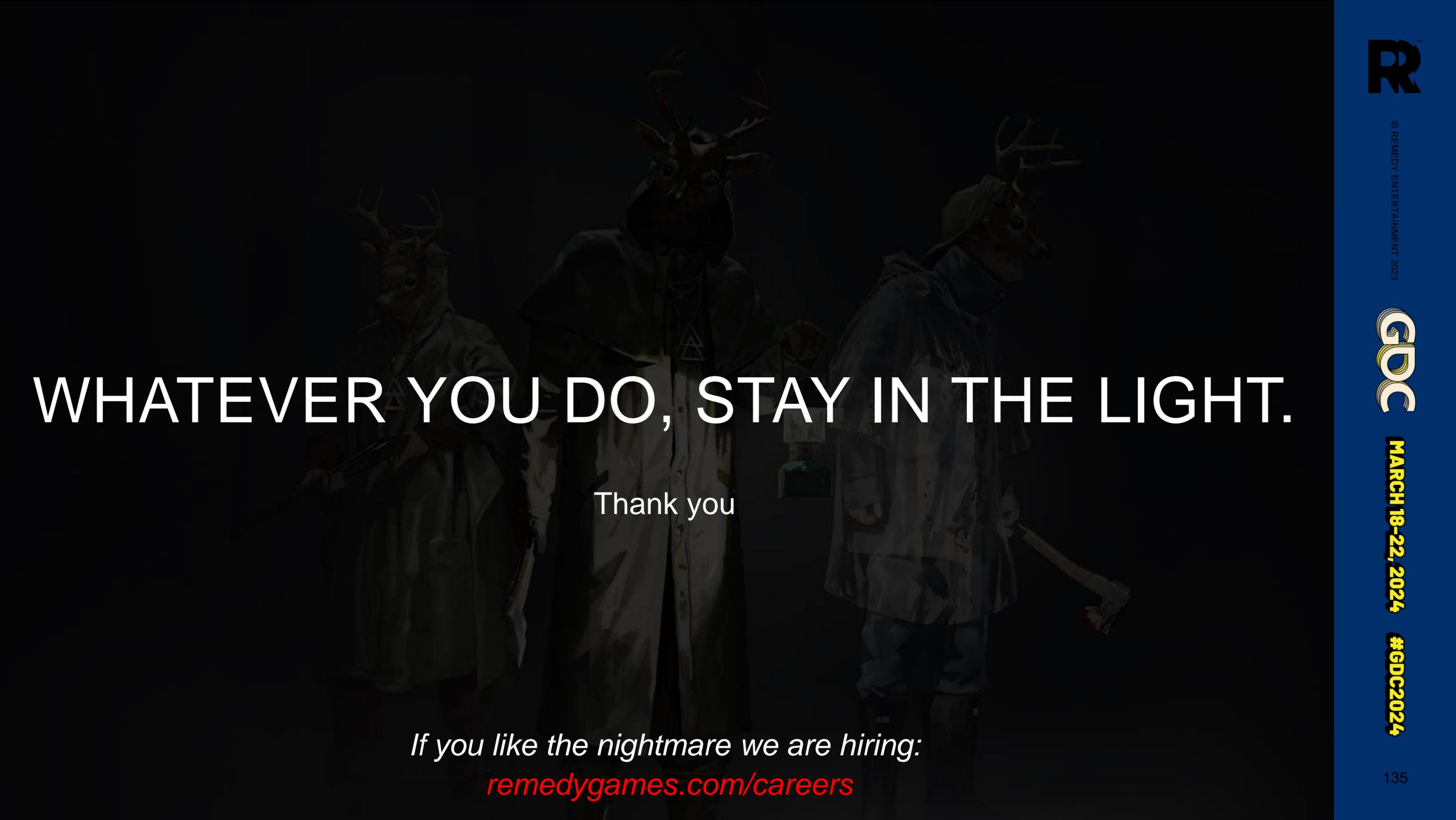


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The background of the slide features three characters with deer heads, dressed in trench coats, standing in a dark environment. The central character is slightly more prominent than the two flanking it. The overall tone is dark and mysterious.

WHATEVER YOU DO, STAY IN THE LIGHT.

Thank you

*If you like the nightmare we are hiring:*  
[remedygames.com/careers](https://remedygames.com/careers)



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RR

# ATTRIBUTIONS:

## Movies:

- Taxi Driver 1976 Director: Martin Scorsese

## Books:

- Lost new York: Marcia Reiss
- Forgotten New York: Kevin Walsh
- Viva La Pizza: the art of pizza boxes: Scott Wiener
- The Urbano Prisoner Matt Weber
- Store Front: The Disappearing Face of New York James T Murray (Author),  
Karla L Murray (Author)
- Street of new york teNeues MENDO
- New York City Carrie Boretz
- Berenice Abbott photofile Thames&Hudson
- New York in Color Ernst Haas
- Joker 2019 Director: Todd Phillips
- Games:
- -Quantum Break

