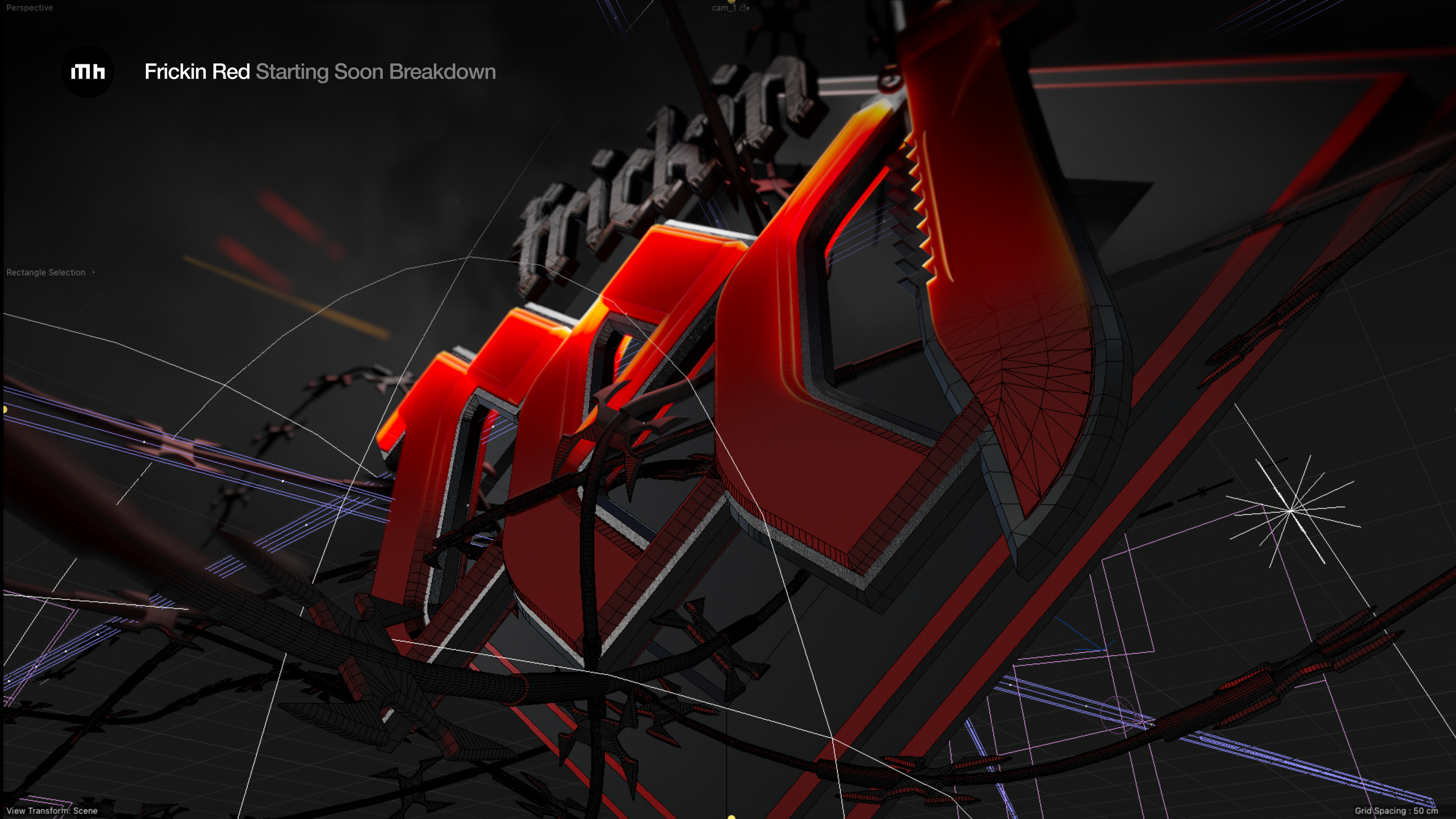
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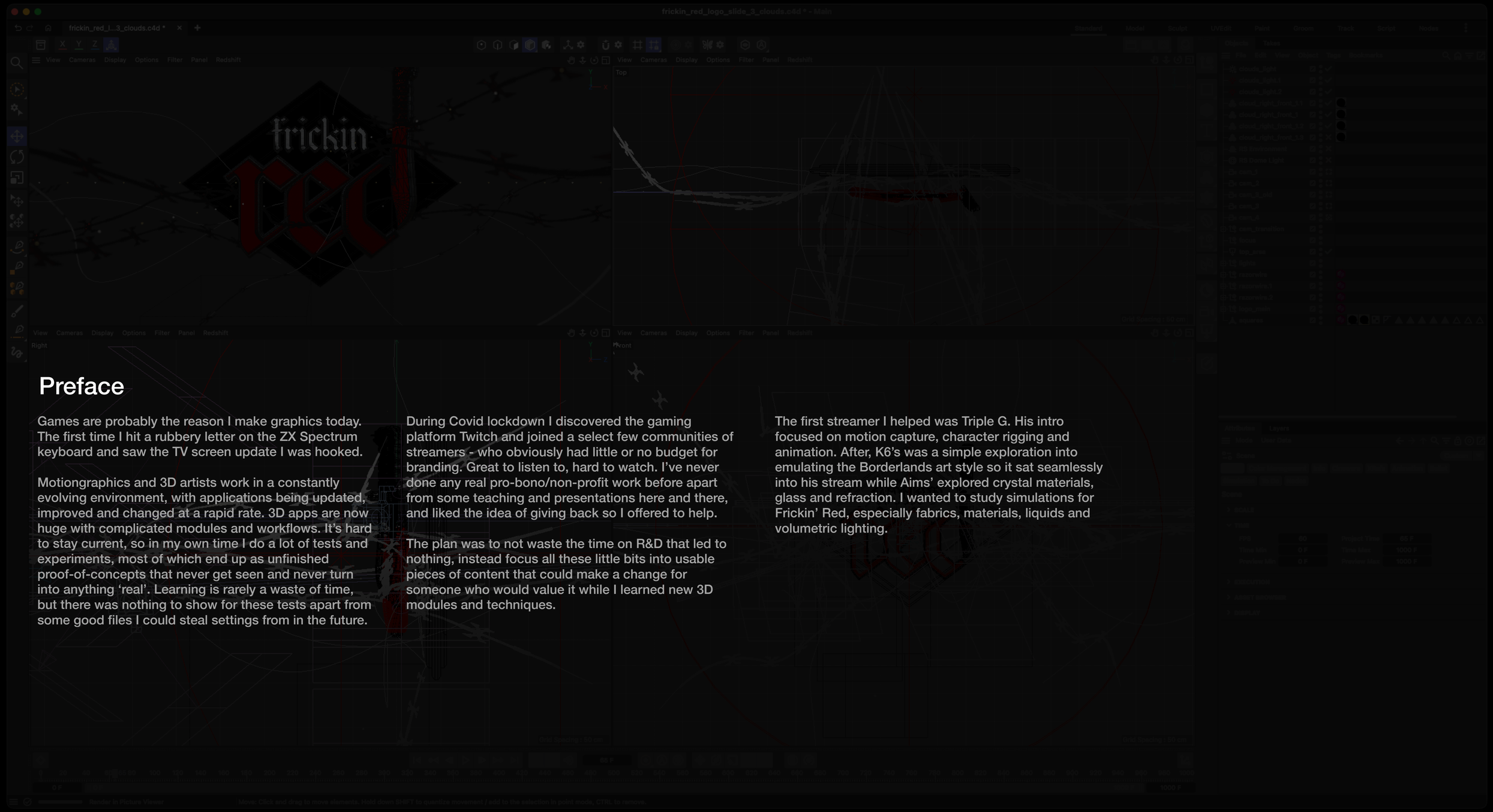


Preface

Games are probably the reason I make graphics today. The first time I hit a rubbery letter on the ZX Spectrum keyboard and saw the TV screen update I was hooked.

Motiongraphics and 3D artists work in a constantly evolving environment, with applications being updated, improved and changed at a rapid rate. 3D apps are now huge with complicated modules and workflows. It's hard to stay current, so in my own time I do a lot of tests and experiments, most of which end up as unfinished proof-of-concepts that never get seen and never turn into anything 'real'. Learning is rarely a waste of time, but there was nothing to show for these tests apart from some good files I could steal settings from in the future.

During Covid lockdown I discovered the gaming platform Twitch and joined a select few communities of streamers - who obviously had little or no budget for branding. Great to listen to, hard to watch. I've never done any real pro-bono/non-profit work before apart from some teaching and presentations here and there, and liked the idea of giving back so I offered to help.

The plan was to not waste the time on R&D that led to nothing, instead focus all these little bits into usable pieces of content that could make a change for someone who would value it while I learned new 3D modules and techniques.

The first streamer I helped was Triple G. His intro focused on motion capture, character rigging and animation. After, K6's was a simple exploration into emulating the Borderlands art style so it sat seamlessly into his stream while Aims' explored crystal materials, glass and refraction. I wanted to study simulations for Frickin' Red, especially fabrics, materials, liquids and volumetric lighting.

What is it?

Starting Soons are movies that play at the beginning of live streams to allow the viewers to gather while the streamer gets things set up. They typically run for a few minutes with music in the background. Most are simple loops of the streamer's logo or a set of pretty, looping wallpapery background graphics.

But they're an opportunity to do more. TV shows and films use their intros to add value, interest and often extend or twist meaning of the content they precede or follow. Starting Soons can do the same thing.

Because they play at the start of every stream, intros need to be re-watchable multiple times and still retain interest. I wanted to make something richer, deeper and with meaning, full of small details, in-jokes, obscure references and a nod of thanks to the team behind the scenes who help her channel.

Who is it for?

Frickin' Red is an American gamer that mostly plays survival titles such as DayZ and Red Dead Redemption. She also RPs Grand Theft Auto's Prodigy as Isabelle Romano, the no-mess hard-talking Assistant Chief of Police. She streams most days and has a small but solid following that is steadily growing.

Red initially needed a rebrand that included a logo, various banners, overlays and messaging content. I also made a starting soon movie. It was rushed out (we pushed it live the day she was appeared on the home page of Twitch) and I never liked it. It needed fixing so I remade it.

The aim

To use her logo knife as the main character in a story; to extend her brand while keeping it forefront while matching the starting music Red uses. To be more than just a sequence of pretty looping wallpaper graphics and have fun telling a story that reveals more secrets on consecutive views. It should try to engage the viewer by making them actively read and think to find out more and delve deeper. To make a film that raises questions in some way.

Start 00:00

End 03:23

Branding

Chapter 1 - The Murder

Chapter 2 - The Chase

Chapter 3 - Escape

Chapter 4 - The Aftermath

Chapter 5 - The End

News updates

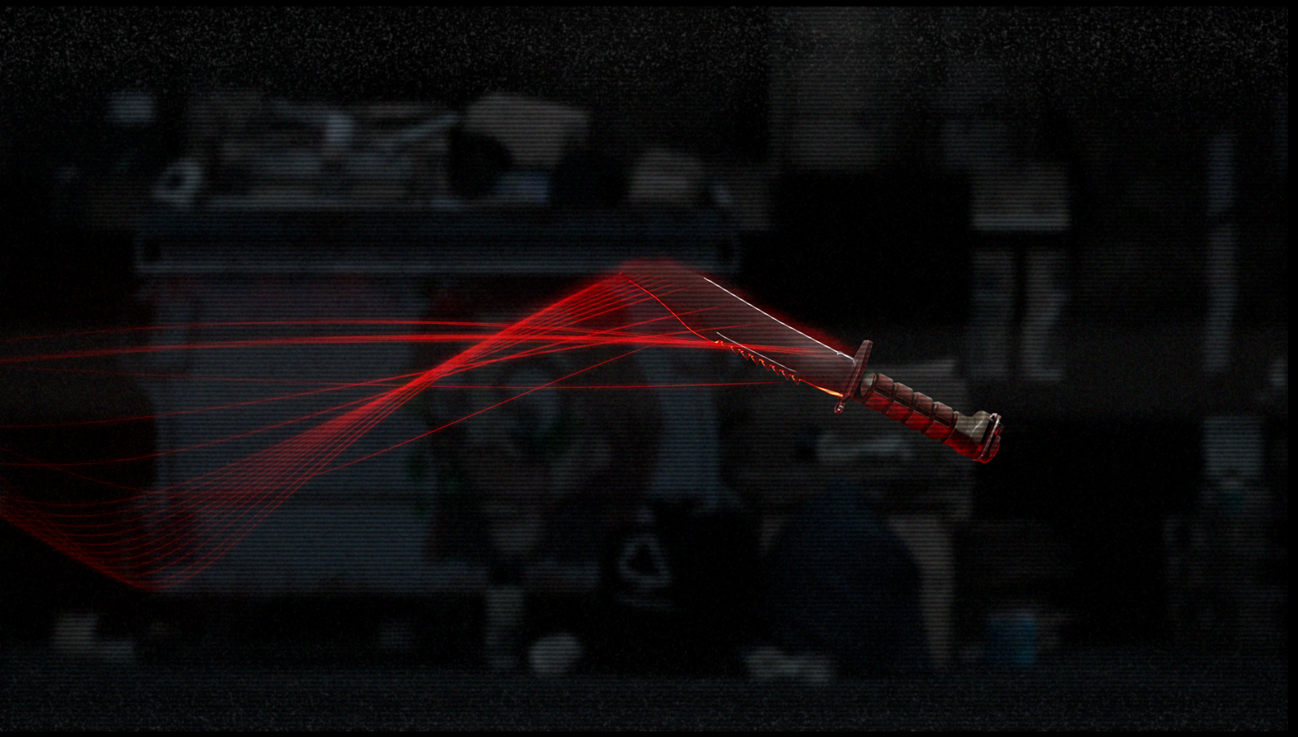
Story & structure

It unfolds in five story chapters that are punctuated by incidental sections. They mimic a typical evening's entertainment on GTA RP as LSPD's Police Captain, Isobelle Romano: the setup, the investigation, the chase, the escape, the aftermath and an epilogue.

Based in Los Santos, the GTA city, it's a murder mystery with a side helping of corporate espionage and misdirection that follows an unknown protagonist. A whodunnit that invites the viewer to be more than just a passive watcher, hopefully encouraging them to look closely at the clues and decide who is responsible for the murdered body in the back alley downtown.

Between the main chapters are branding moments using flags and the logo. An updating murder wall and live tv news feeds help describe what is going on in greater detail, expanding on the possibilities of corporate espionage and corruption. The more the viewer investigates the more they reveal the complexity of what may have happened as details they hadn't previously seen emerge. Each answer leads to more questions with contradictory information and conspiracy theories emerging. It is ultimately up to the viewer to make their own reading of the events that happened that night and to solve the clues their way.

Hopefully the viewer asks questions like: Did Red do it and flee? Was it a frame-up, or did she orchestrate the whole thing from afar? Are the police involved and what - if any - is their link to Redcorp? Who do we believe and what else don't we know?



Chapter 1 - The murder

A frickin’ knife is thrown down a back alley to start the story. As it flies past the trash we see a dumpster has a subtle Frickin’ Burp emoji graffitied on the side.

Somebody dies

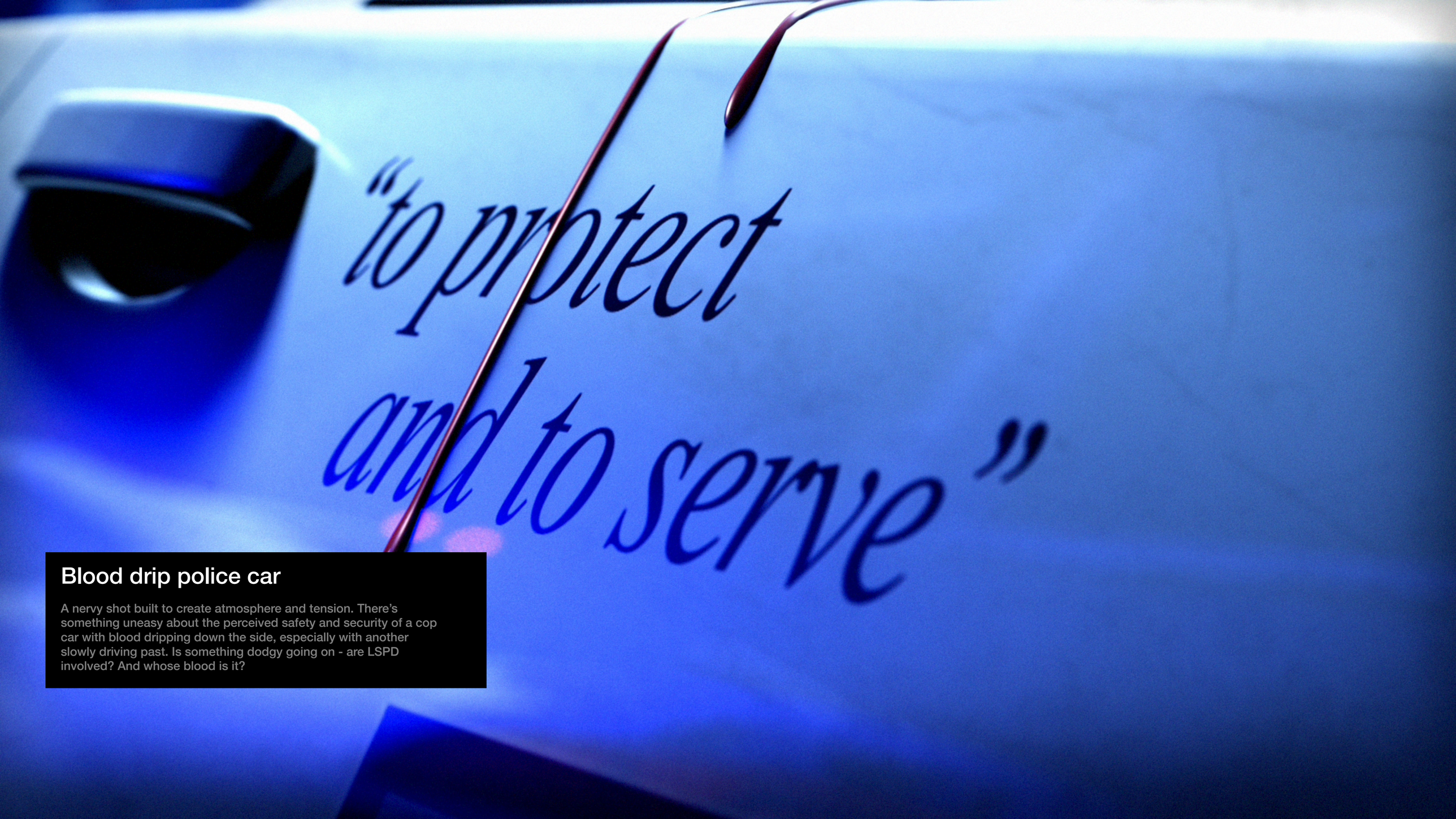
The skulls with red liquid are a metaphor of a death occurring without being overly descriptive. An element of mystery needs to be retained to keep the story interesting, and this shot sets an ominous tone without being too gory. In the original brief Red mentioned she was a big fan of horror movie art, especially movie posters, and asked if there was a way of using skulls somewhere in her branding. These are the only cuts that survived from the original starting soon movie, though they were heavily tweaked.

Somebody is watching

A cctv camera in the back alley notices. On seeing us, the camera kicks into life with 3 logos then the word ‘Redcorp’. These logos were added late and despite being a bit fake, really help wake the viewer up to smaller details popping up here and there. They were fun, so I left them in.

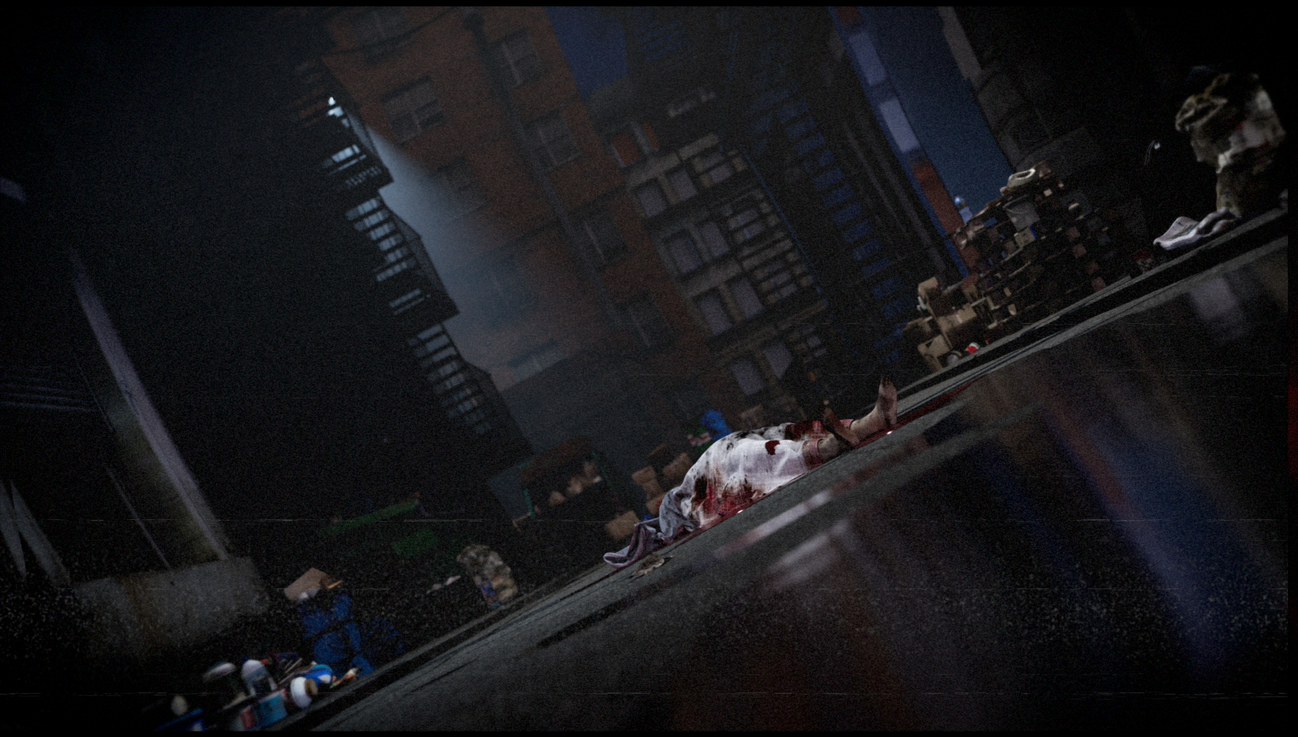
Exhibit A

The murder has been committed, the knife now has a red ribbon attached to the handle and has been dumped in a dark corner. A pool of blood grows from beneath it, signifying recent use. Whether the scan-line is from the cctv camera is unclear, but it introduces the surveillance theme.



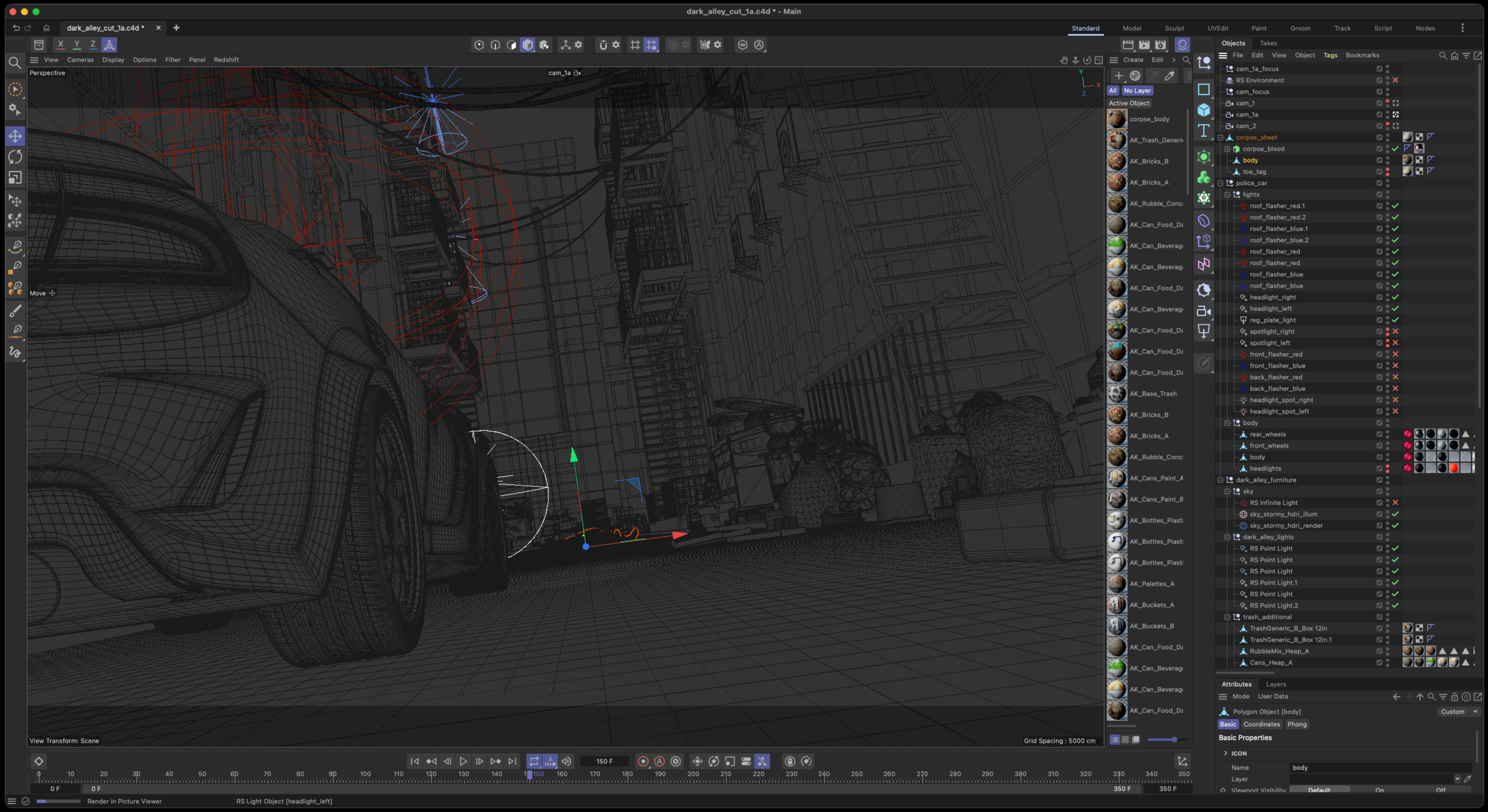
Blood drip police car

A nervy shot built to create atmosphere and tension. There's something uneasy about the perceived safety and security of a cop car with blood dripping down the side, especially with another slowly driving past. Is something dodgy going on - are LSPD involved? And whose blood is it?



The back alley body

A body in a dark back alley is illuminated by a spotlight then the headlights of an approaching police car. The registration plates of the police cars always allow some fun and in the story there are 3, GOT U, DAPOPO and FIVE OH. Red approved these before the 3d textures were built. Creatively the idea here was to show the body briefly while using the police's flashing red and blue lights to illuminate the environment.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spotlight_right
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back_flasher_blue
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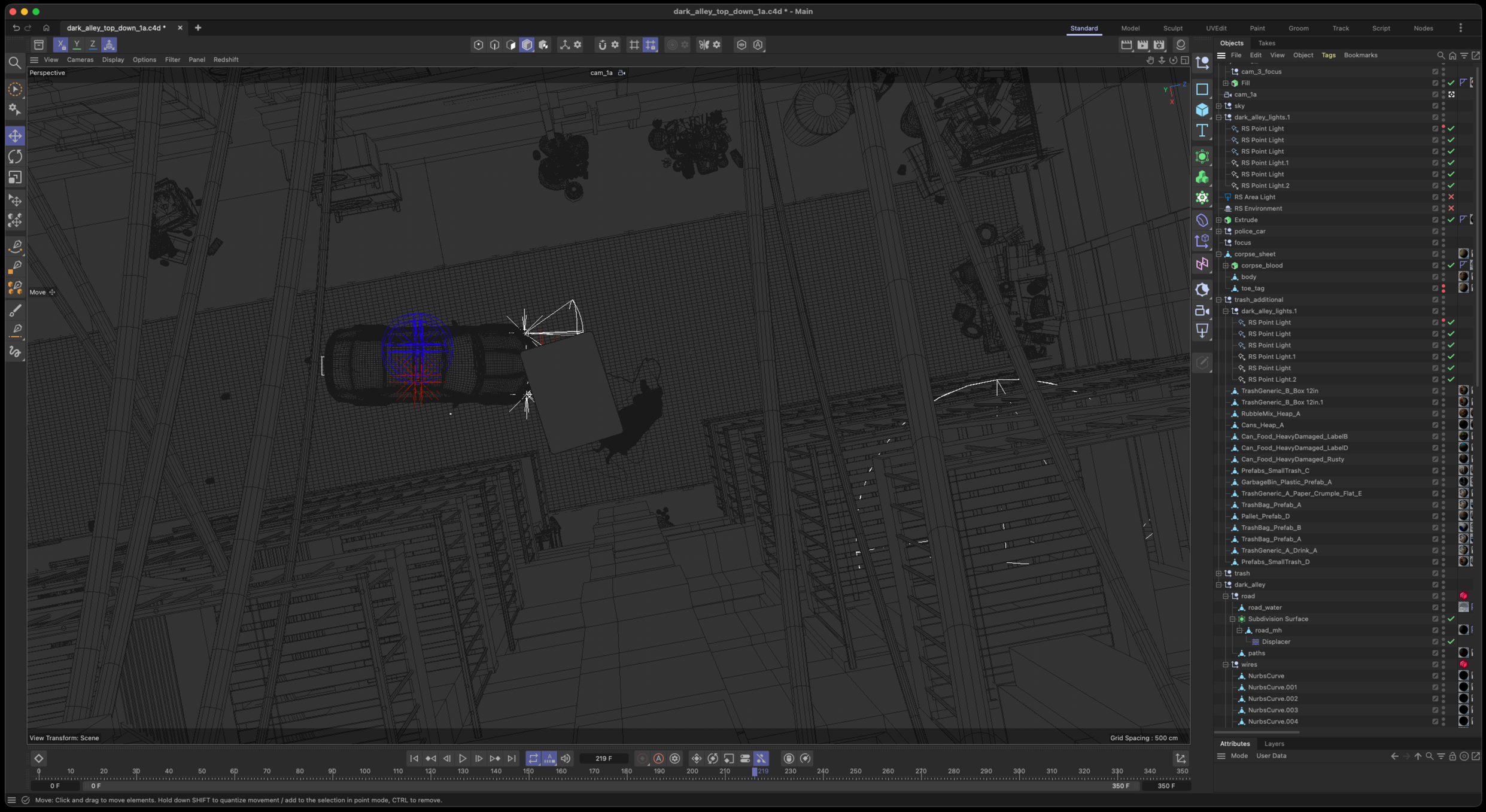
That’s quite a drop

We pan up the side of a building away from the body. We see the police car has 420 on the roof, Red’s RP character, Isabelle Romano’s badge number. As we climb the building a Tarot card falls into frame. This shot is a nod to the first page of Alan Moore’s graphic novel, Watchmen, which uses the whole of the first page to slide up a building. Rorscharch’s smiley badge has been swapped for the Tarot card. The question is, who dropped it? Was it us?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TrashGeneric_B_Box 12in.1
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TrashGeneric_A_Drink_A
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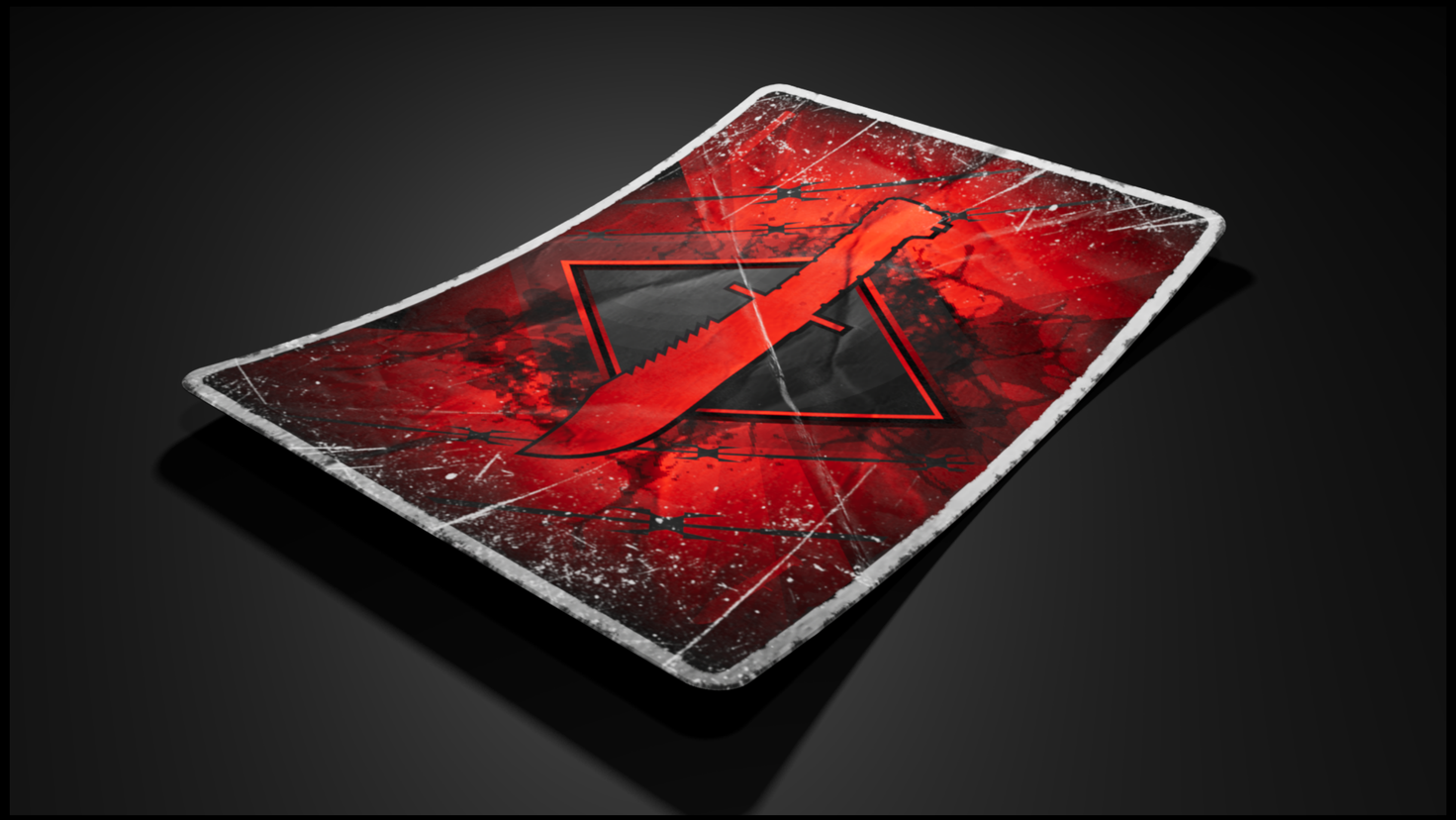

The tarot card

Artwork for the front and back sides of the tarot card. Above are vector files, to the right is the 3d object.

Murder summary

We close the intro, the scene is set; the Tarot card is near the body, the police are on the scene and the mystery begins. At the end of the clip we cut away just as the police car door opens, as the lyrics kick in with ‘You’ve never met someone like me’ and the logo is seen for the first time.

dark_alley_cut_3a_v2.c4d * - Main
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TrashGeneric_A_Drink_A
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AK_Can_Food_Dam
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Move: Click and drag to move elements. Hold down SHIFT to quantize movement / add to the selection in point mode, CTRL to remove.

Logo

Now and again the back alley murder mystery is punctuated by Red's logo and brand black razor wire. The 90s CRT screen effect is used to suggest we're watching some old technology, or a piece of surveillance footage.

Splash

Another cut that came from the original starting soon movie, the first test made with simulated liquids. Used as a visual break in the storytelling. It is also the artwork used for her Twitch and Kick banners, so ties in well with the still image artwork.

Police pass the tower

As chapter 1 ends we’re introduced to the red flag. Used as a pause between story cuts it ripples in a breeze carrying embers. As the police cars pass the flag turns from the monotone grey into the full spectrum, suggesting Red is influencing the environment around her, interacting with the city.

Murder board 1

The newspapers are used to help recap the story but more importantly expand and contextualise what could be happening. Red helped find a suitable back alley in-game so we could be accurate geographically; the map on the wall is from the game, with the murder crosses where the newspaper describes. The police photographs were made by re-shooting two stills of the scene from different angles and adding a forensics sign to signify the investigation is underway. It seems as though the police are remaining tight lipped about recent events, and the photos were leaked on a gaming forum...

LOS SANTOS' MOST READ NEWSPAPER

25 March 2028

BODY FOUND IN BACK ALLEY

Gaming Forum Leaks Photos of Downtown Back Alley Murder Corpse and Knife

A badly harmed body was reportedly found downtown Los Santos last night. Police were alerted to the scene by an anonymous phone call sometime before 10pm.

South Rockford Drive to the corner of Palamino Avenue is still cordened off with a massive LSPD presence making this location the most likely spot as the scene of the crime.

What We Know So Far

Details are currently sketchy as the police remain silent during the ongoing investigation despite some details having been leaked in a curious thread on a public gaming forum. The Streamer involved can't be named for legal reasons.

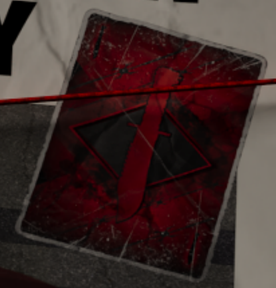
What appears to be the body of a male, probably in his late 20s was found badly mutilated, wrapped in an old white sack cloth and dumped in plain sight in a dark back alley.

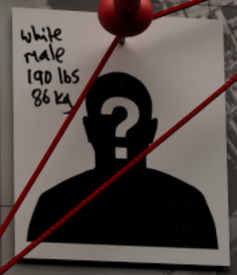
Next to it on the ground was a Tarot-style playing card with an emblem that closely resembles the knife on the Redcorp logo. Whether it was placed there on purpose is as yet unknown.

A matching knife - also a similar shape to that seen in the Redcorp logo - was found three blocks away with a blood soaked ribbon attached.

The investigation continues.

The Knife found three blocks away from the scene. Forensics are testing the DNAa for a match





body

the knife

calling card

BACK ALLEY MURD MYSTERY DEEPENS

Police Find 'No Link' Between Occult Card and Body

Recent analysis of the Back Alley Tarot-styled playing card has apparently produced no leads, LSPD have reported after days of silence.

"After many separate lines of investigation we have not ascertained who or where the calling card found at the murder scene came from. Foresnic results provided no new avenues of inquiry - no fingerprints or DNA traces were found. Owing to this, Los Santos PD has concluded that the card is not related to the Back Alley Murder.

When pressed, LSPD refused to give a direct answer as to whether they had investigated Redcorp or not.

But was the card a message, and if so what was it saying?

Links to Something Occult

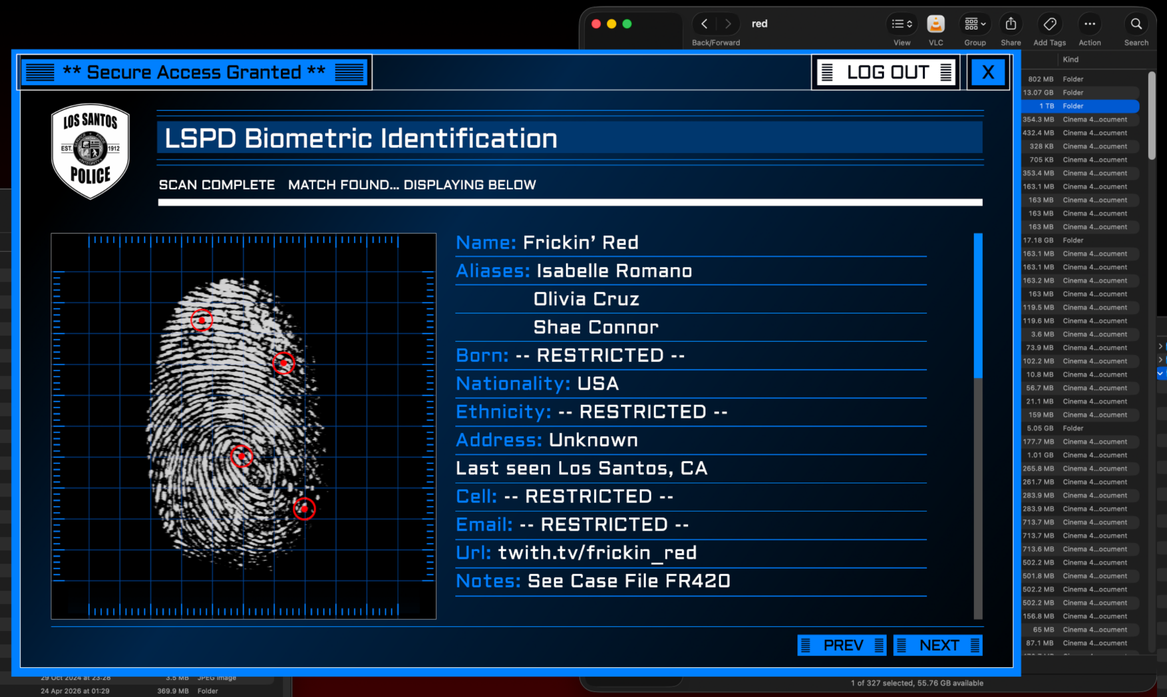
Tarot is synonymous with fortune telling and divination but it's history has often delved into more occult activities, sometimes manifesting in voodoo and dark magic. While many dismiss these as fantasy or hokum, an increasing amount of people living off-grid in makeshift communities seem to be developing almost cultish tendencies and practices.

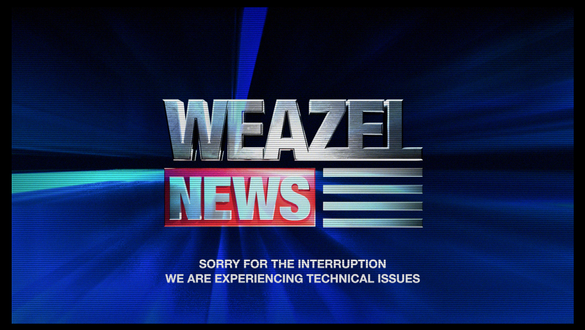
Is the card be a message from a darker, more mysterious source?

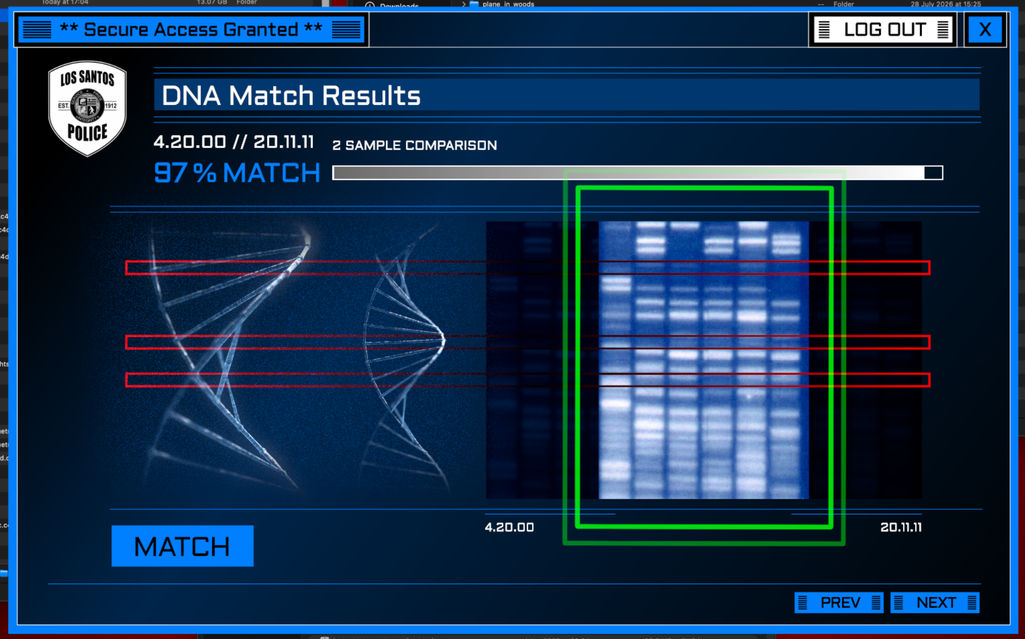
The Back Alley Murder card

A hacker watches

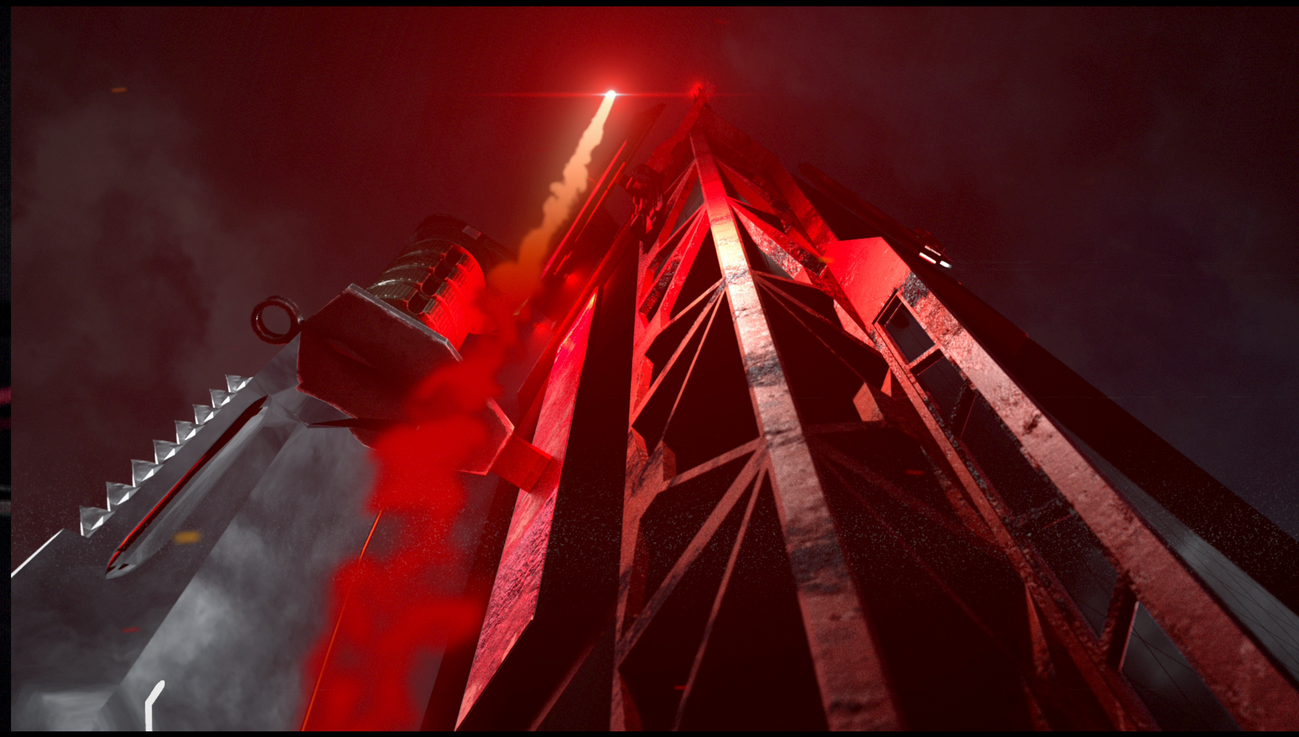
Somewhere dark, we notice someone is smoking while hacking the LSPD database and station cctv as the camera tilts up. Resembling a multi-screen setup a streamer would use, the screens show they are researching the back alley murder - and they've come across something interesting...







The lower screen displays the DNA from the knife (sample number 4.20.00) matches another individual's (sample 20.11.11). Strangely, both sample numbers are linked to 42. The upper screen shows a fingerprint matching a person with many aliases and redacted information. Weazel news is also offline reporting technical difficulties. The backgrounds are simply screenshots of my desktop with the folders of work used to make the intro and this document open.
The Frickin ashtray with a joint in it helps create a sense of depth by adding a foreground element.



Chapter 2 - The chase

To kick off the chase chapter we see a red flare shoot up the side of a skyscraper with a massive knife on the side. This is a reference to the FPS shooter, ARC Raiders where a flare is jettisoned on player death.

Heli takeoff

The flare descends in the distance as LSPD respond by sending a heli to the scene. I asked Red which two letters she'd like on the bottom as we could have some fun with it. Options were XX, NO, 50, 420, 710, EZ, GG, LG, 1UP.

Chiron chase

The chase is on. A red Bugatti Chiron is being tailed by the cops through the downtown streets. Hypercars aren't cheap, so whoever is driving it must be involved with something serious or on an industrial scale.

Mods shops

The mods have been given shops to match their logos as we zip down the street.

Chase to tower heli

The chase continues down the main street, the heli diverts away from the Chiron and up to the red skyscraper. The Spy Who Loved Me's wasp-like yellow and black helicopter chasing the Lotus is a great scene and I wanted to reference it somehow. Heli's chasing cars is always fun. In a nod to the film I used a yellow and black colour scheme for the rotor blades.

LIVE
DOWNTOWN LOS SANTOS
Heli news
An airborn live newsfeed pulls back from a massive roof-mounted flipped Japanese character aka, which translates as red. For an unknown reason LSPD copters are swarming around it. According to the ticker-tape news report, the police are claiming the back alley body's DNA has returned an inconclusive result, which contradicts the information we saw on the streamer setup earlier.
WEAZEL NEWS
BREAKING NEWS
7:30 Local Time
s Circle Redcorp Tower ... Back Alley Body DNA Match 'Inconclusive' ... LSPD Helicopters Circl

Murder board 2

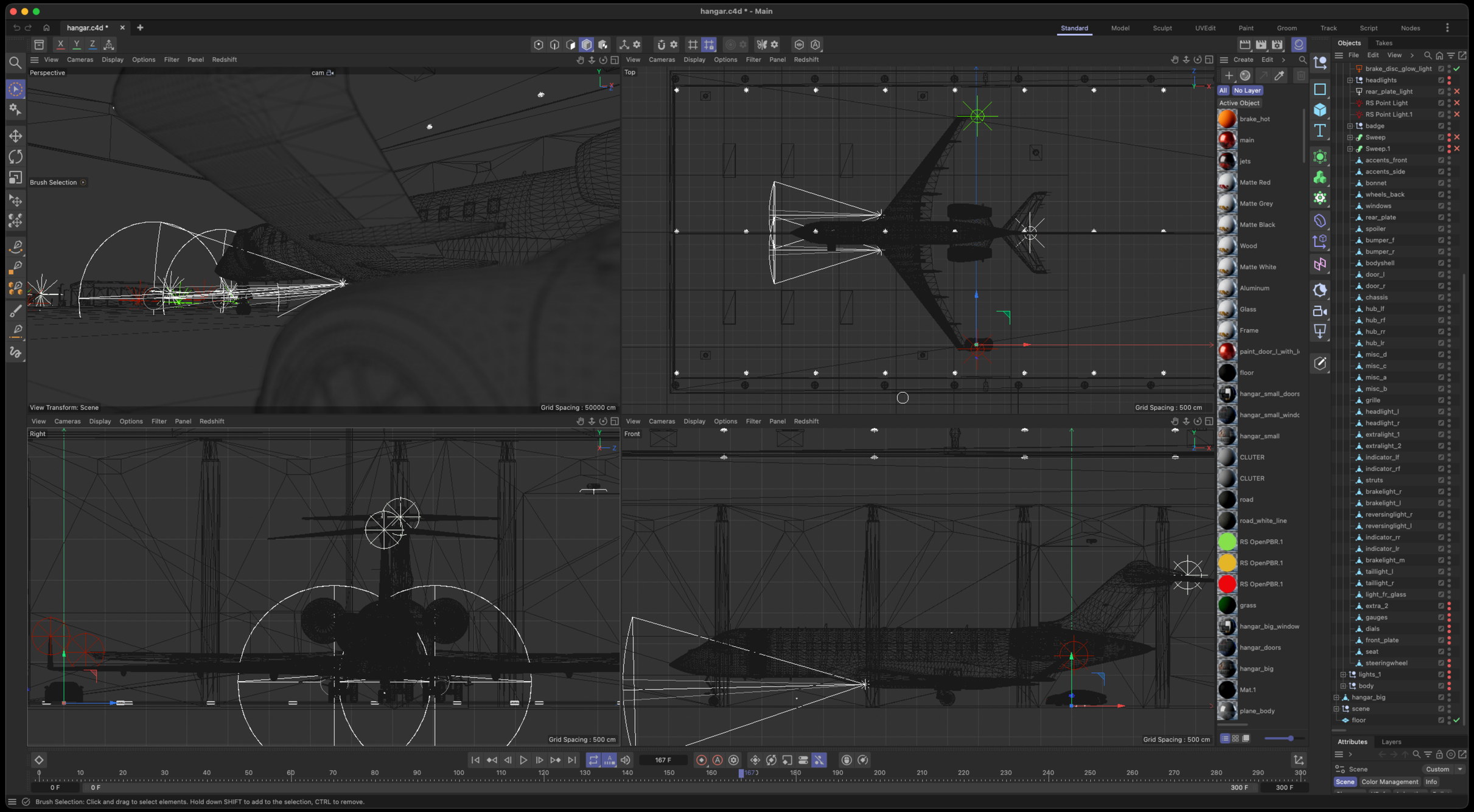
The media circus continues and it's getting out of hand. As more has happened, whoever's building the murder wall has been busy. It now introduces accusations of corporate espionage and the public conspiracy theories that are circling. The newspaper mentions public distrust in the police due to accusations of corruption while giving us some lore on the Red corporation and what it specializes in; security and surveillance equipment, linking us back to the cctv at the start. Is Redcorp involved in the murder? Are they paying off the LSPD? Is it a frame-up?

Chapter 3 - Escape

Los Santos International Airport had to feature somewhere, so the red Chiron smashes through a set of gates and heads to the hangars. Nobody's on its tail and judging by the speed they're going they're still in a bit of a hurry.

Hangar

Swapping over cars somewhere discrete in order to lose LSPD is a common GTA theme. Here we see the Redcorp jet, FR700, leaving the hangar. Whoever got on the plane wasn't hanging around; the disc brakes are still cooling as the jet's door closes mid-taxi. Before our focus the shifts to the plane we briefly see a closeup of the Japanese-style drift logos on the side of the Chiron, each of which is a fake logo for Red's stream mods. Just as drift cars are 'powered by' their modifications, Red's stream is powered by her moderators.


hangar.c4d * - Main
Standard
Model
Sculpt
UVEdit
Paint
Groom
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Nodes
Perspective
Top
Right
Front
Brush Selection
View Transform: Scene
Grid Spacing : 50000 cm
Grid Spacing : 500 cm
Objects
Takes
Attributes
Layers
Brush Selection: Click and drag to select elements. Hold down SHIFT to add to the selection, CTRL to remove.

Runway takeoff

This shot was built to see if I could make a convincing heat haze on the back of the jets. The red jet gets away, but it’s close and we close chapter 3 as the music lifts before we see Red’s logo again with the lyrics matching.

frick in

Chapter 4 - Aftermath

I’ve always wanted to try making a convincing 3d explosion with rippling flame inside, so I made Redcorp explode after the escape. As it does, the massive knife on its side is blown away and falls to the ground... But who triggered the detonation? Is it a case of misdirection, a cover-up? Was it for revenge? A mutiny? Corporate espionage? Or someone covering their tracks?

Perspective
Move
View Transform: Scene
Grid Spacing : 5000 cm

Fallout

Los Santos has fallen into an almost post-apocalyptic state. Only the fallen knife from Redcorp Tower remains among the rubble and someone has tied a huge red ribbon to it, the same as that found in the back alley.

Biohazard

Post-apocalyptic environments are common for survival games; the end of the world is a tough place to be. Zombies and biohazards are common themes in some holocaust games Red plays, so this clip acts as a quick break between chapters while referencing these streams.

POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS
LIVE
DOWNTOWN LOS SANTOS
Post blast news
Weazel News is in the thick of it still, reporting on the destruction that followed the explosion. Seems like the blast left something hazardous in the air, too, making a difficult situation somehow worse. This scene helps the zombie apocalypse / end of world theme settle for a moment. The Los Santos chapters end.
WEAZEL NEWS
DOWNTOWN BLAST LATEST
01:30 Local Time
ntown Los Santos ... Redcorp Explosion Feared Toxic ... Chaos in Downtown Los Santos ...

Chapter 5 - Epilogue

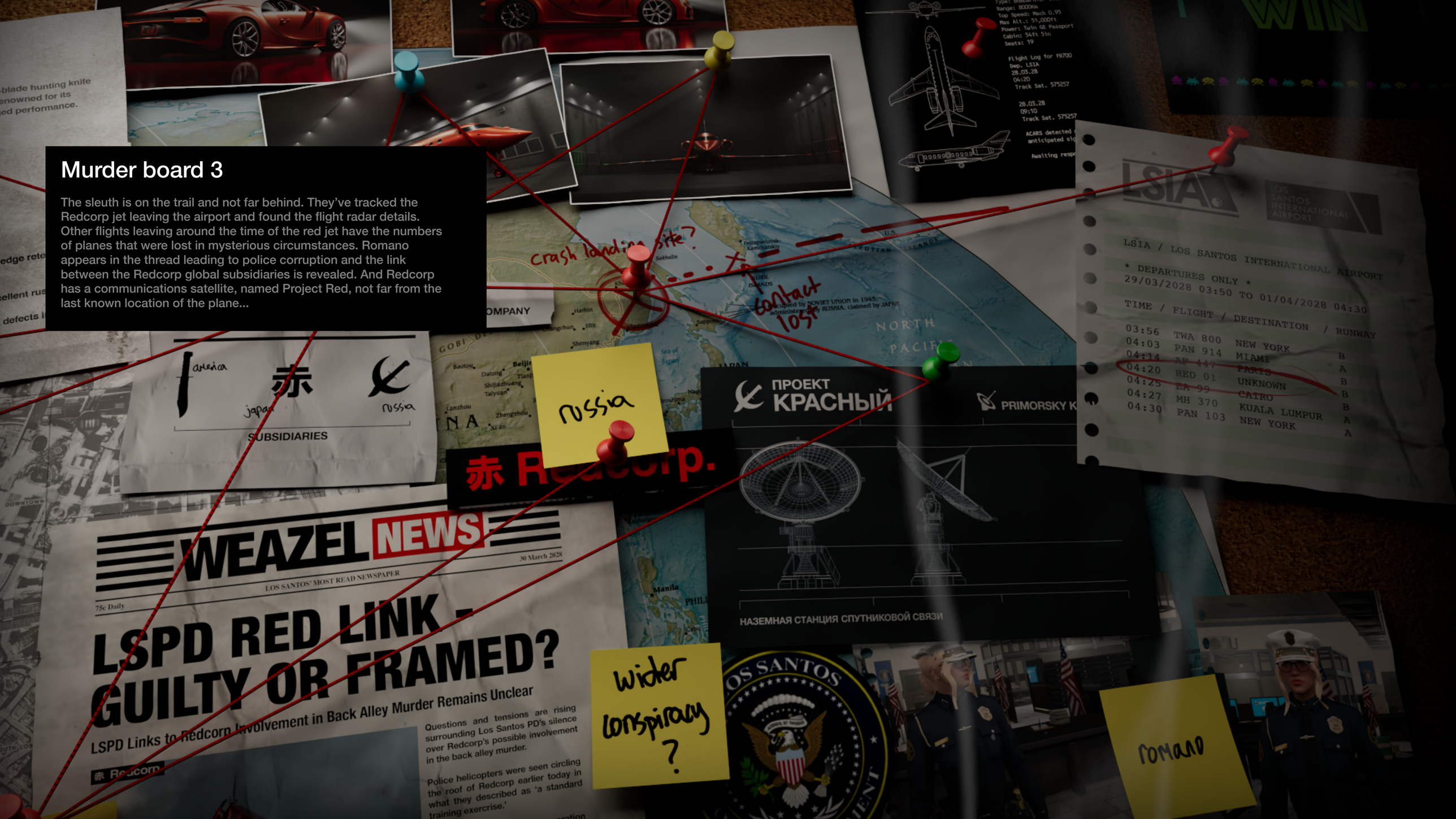
The flag is used to introduce a new palette of cold, winter blues as the embers change to snow. In the background a massive satellite dish slowly rotates, looking up to the heavens.

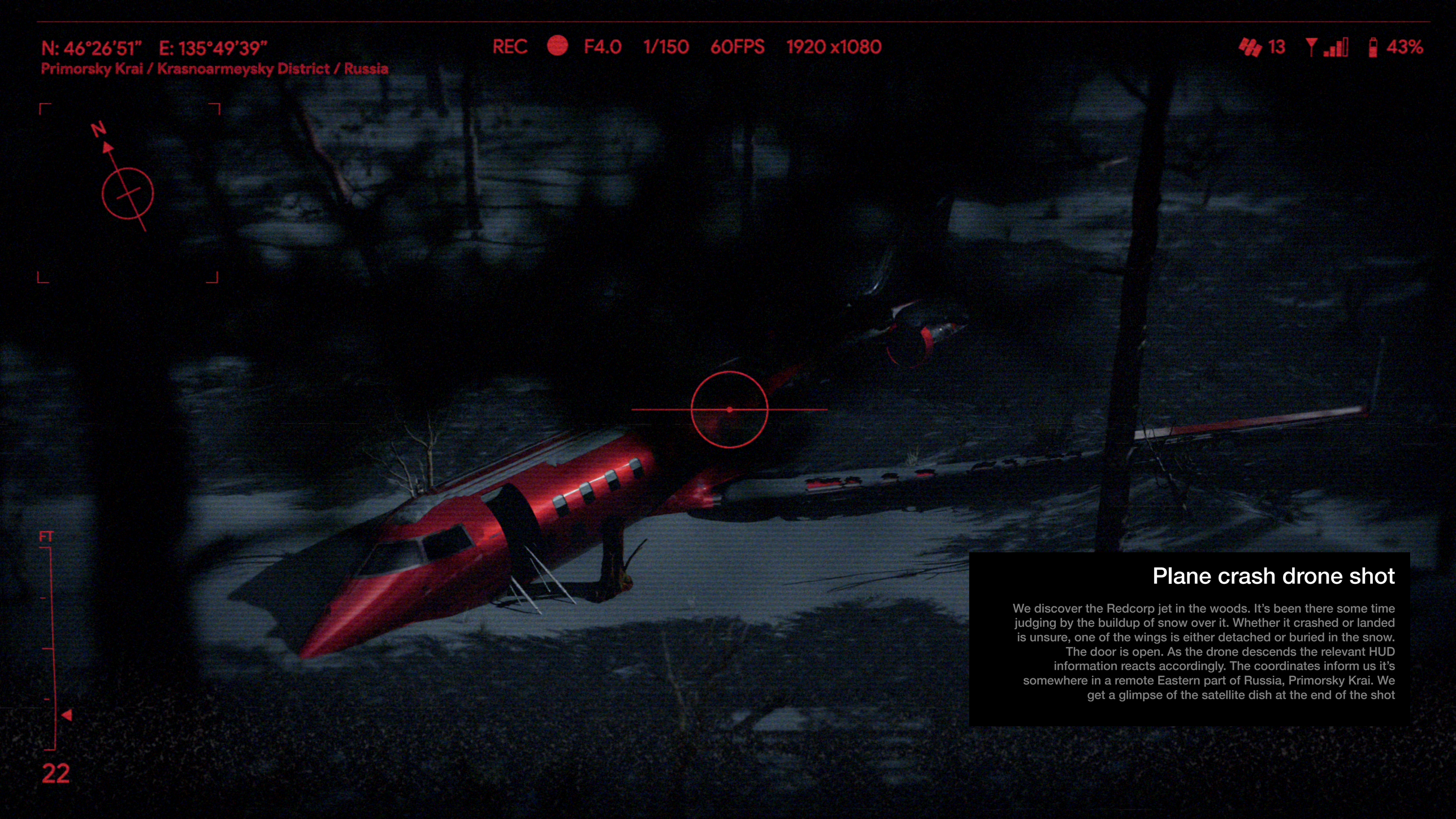
Missing plane

FR700 is lost on the radar. Last ping it was approaching the Russian border, coming in over Kamchatka. This destination was chosen solely because I think the word Kamchatka sounds funny. The plane information matches the 3d model used, and the plane left LSIA at 4:20 in the morning. Did it crash, or just turn its transponder off?

Murder board 3

The sleuth is on the trail and not far behind. They've tracked the Redcorp jet leaving the airport and found the flight radar details. Other flights leaving around the time of the red jet have the numbers of planes that were lost in mysterious circumstances. Romano appears in the thread leading to police corruption and the link between the Redcorp global subsidiaries is revealed. And Redcorp has a communications satellite, named Project Red, not far from the last known location of the plane...





Plane crash drone shot

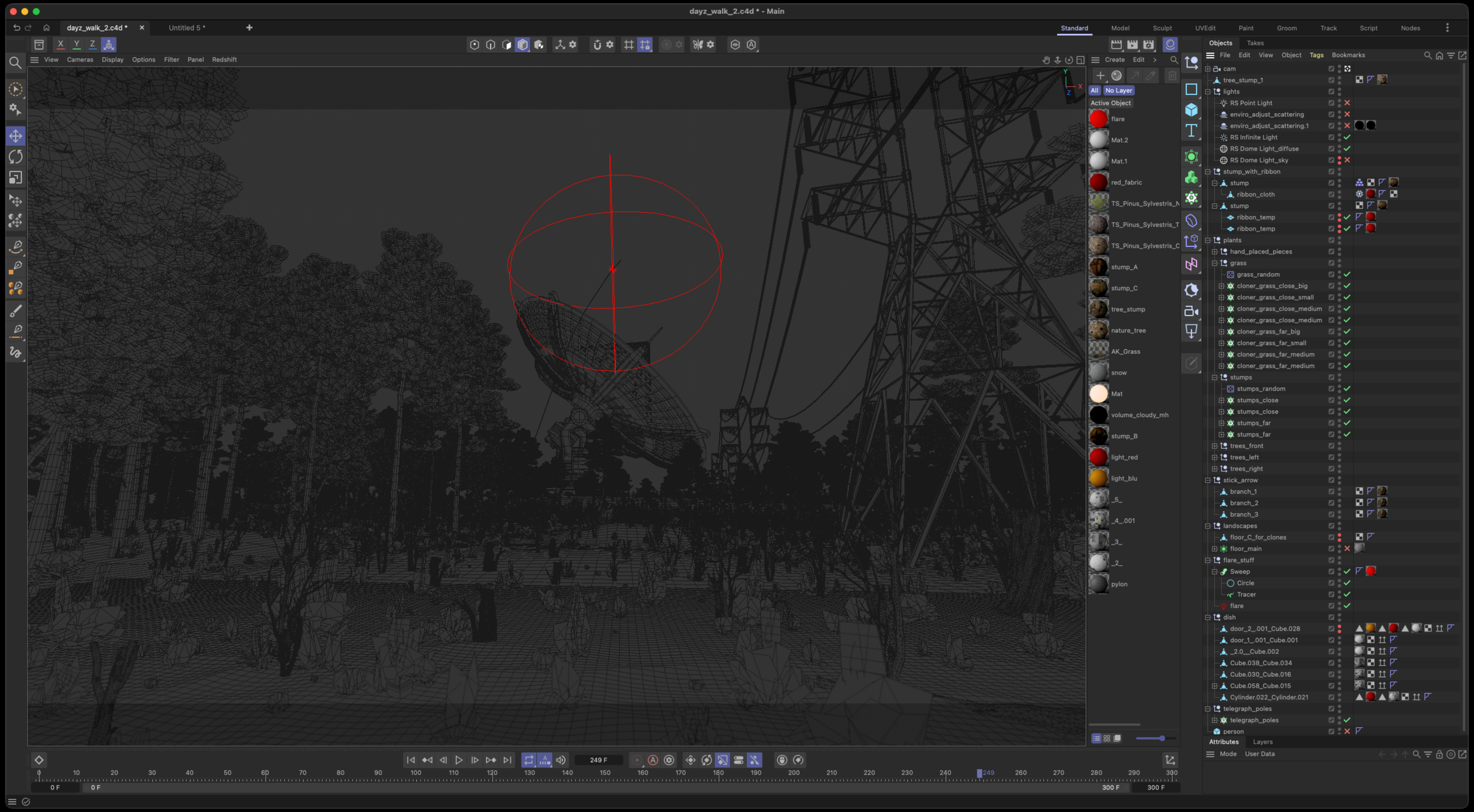
We discover the Redcorp jet in the woods. It's been there some time judging by the buildup of snow over it. Whether it crashed or landed is unsure, one of the wings is either detached or buried in the snow. The door is open. As the drone descends the relevant HUD information reacts accordingly. The coordinates inform us it's somewhere in a remote Eastern part of Russia, Primorsky Krai. We get a glimpse of the satellite dish at the end of the shot

Survival / hunting

A joining scene of the knife being thrown, similar to the opening shot but with the urban environment changed to a rural setting. The back alley murderer is still alive, and at it again.

Dayz wilderness walk

The environment is getting colder and darker to create a sense of isolation reminiscent of the DayZ RP Red enjoys. We slowly trudge through the Russian wilderness' deep snow following Hansel and Gretel style breadcrumbs; a red ribbon draped over a tree stump becomes illuminated by a flashlight beam which then reveals a makeshift stick arrow directing us to follow the telegraph poles on the right, a common Dayz trope. As we look up a red flare illuminates our destination, the huge satellite dish in the distance.


dayz_walk_2.c4d * - Main
dayz_walk_2.c4d *
Untitled 5 *
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Model
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Track
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Nodes
View
Cameras
Display
Options
Filter
Panel
Redshift
Create
Edit
All
No Layer
Active Object
flare
Mat.2
Mat.1
red_fabric
TS_Pinus_Sylvestris_N
TS_Pinus_Sylvestris_T
TS_Pinus_Sylvestris_C
stump_A
stump_C
tree_stump
nature_tree
AK_Grass
snow
Mat
volume_cloudy_mh
stump_B
light_red
light_blu
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_4_.001
_3_
_2_
pylon
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Takes
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View
Object
Tags
Bookmarks
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RS Point Light
enviro_adjust_scattering
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RS Infinite Light
RS Dome Light_diffuse
RS Dome Light_sky
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stump
ribbon_cloth
stump
ribbon_temp
ribbon_temp
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hand_placed_pieces
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cloner_grass_far_big
cloner_grass_far_small
cloner_grass_far_medium
cloner_grass_far_medium
stumps
stumps_random
stumps_close
stumps_close
stumps_far
stumps_far
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trees_left
trees_right
stick_arrow
branch_1
branch_2
branch_3
landscapes
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floor_main
flare_stuff
Sweep
Circle
Tracer
flare
dish
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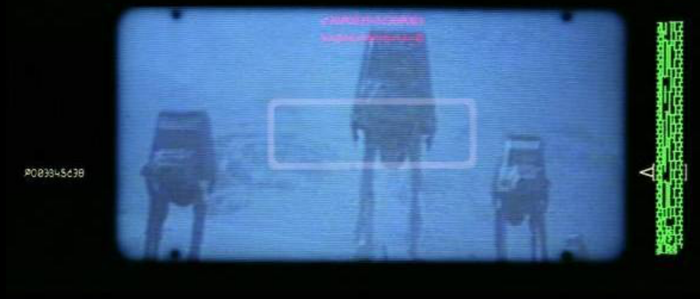
door_1_.001_Cube.001
_2.0__Cube.002
Cube.038_Cube.034
Cube.030_Cube.016
Cube.058_Cube.015
Cylinder.022_Cylinder.021
telegraph_poles
telegraph_poles
person
Attributes
Layers
Mode
User Data
249 F
0 F
0 F
300 F
300 F

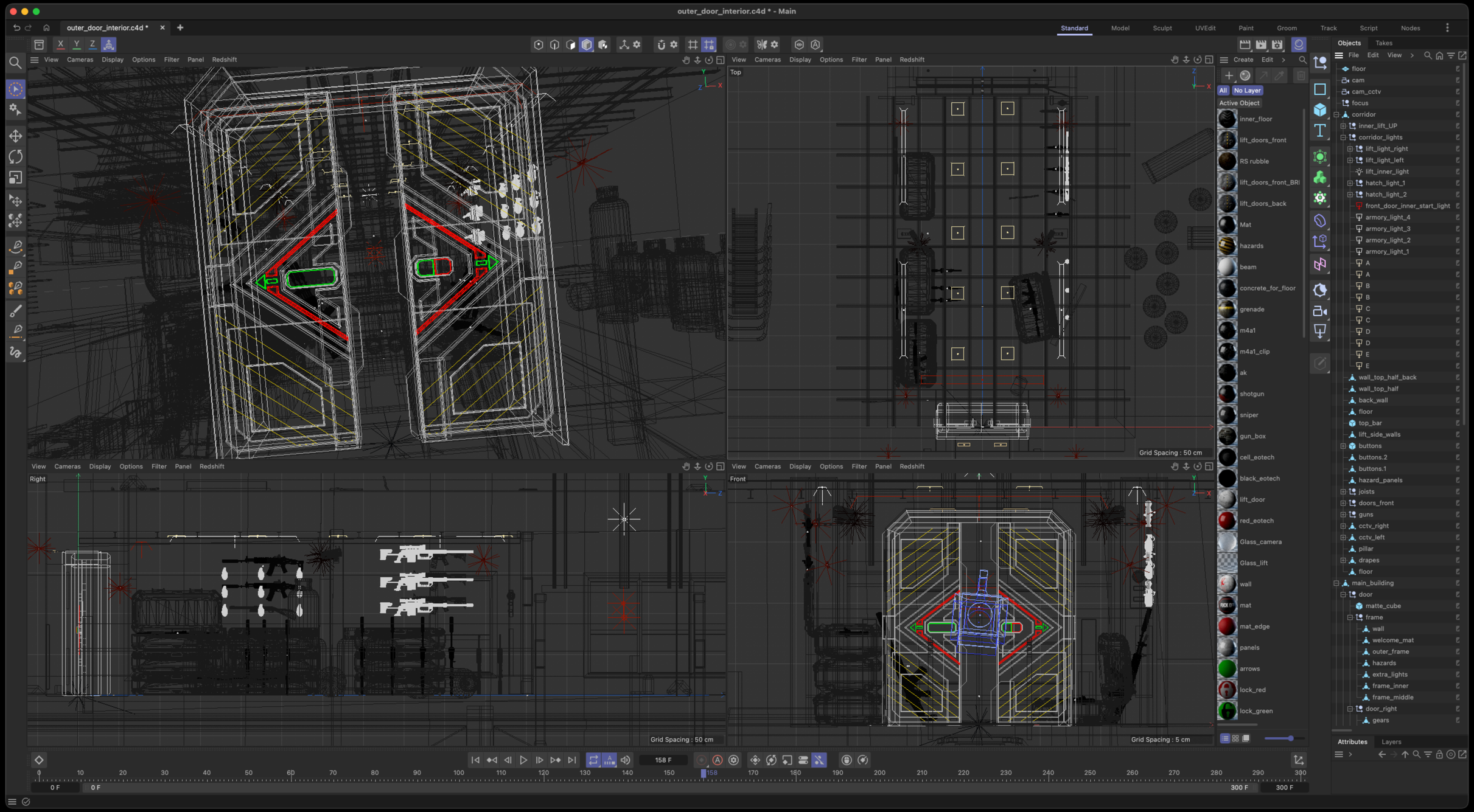
Hoth binoculars

We’re at the satellite dish and looking for the entrance. Red’s a Star Wars fan, so this shot allowed me to make some digital binoculars like those seen in The Empire Strikes Back’s snowy Hoth scenes. Seen from a first-person perspective we zoom out to reveal the dish then zoom in on the entrance for continuity to the next scene.



Base entrance

This scene connects the cold outside exterior with a warmer interior. As we climb the stairs the heavy industrial door before us magically unlocks and opens, inviting us inside. Someone has anticipated our arrival. Next to the door in big red text is the Russian translation of ‘Project Red’, and the wall has the mods’ logos painted on them. Maybe they’ve all been here and signed their names. Top left someone has written ‘The Shit Place’ in red. Same name as Frickin Red’s hangout on discord. Coincidence? Options for the text on the doormat we briefly see were given to red, and she chose her favourite.


outer_door_interior.c4d * - Main
outer_door_interior.c4d *
Standard
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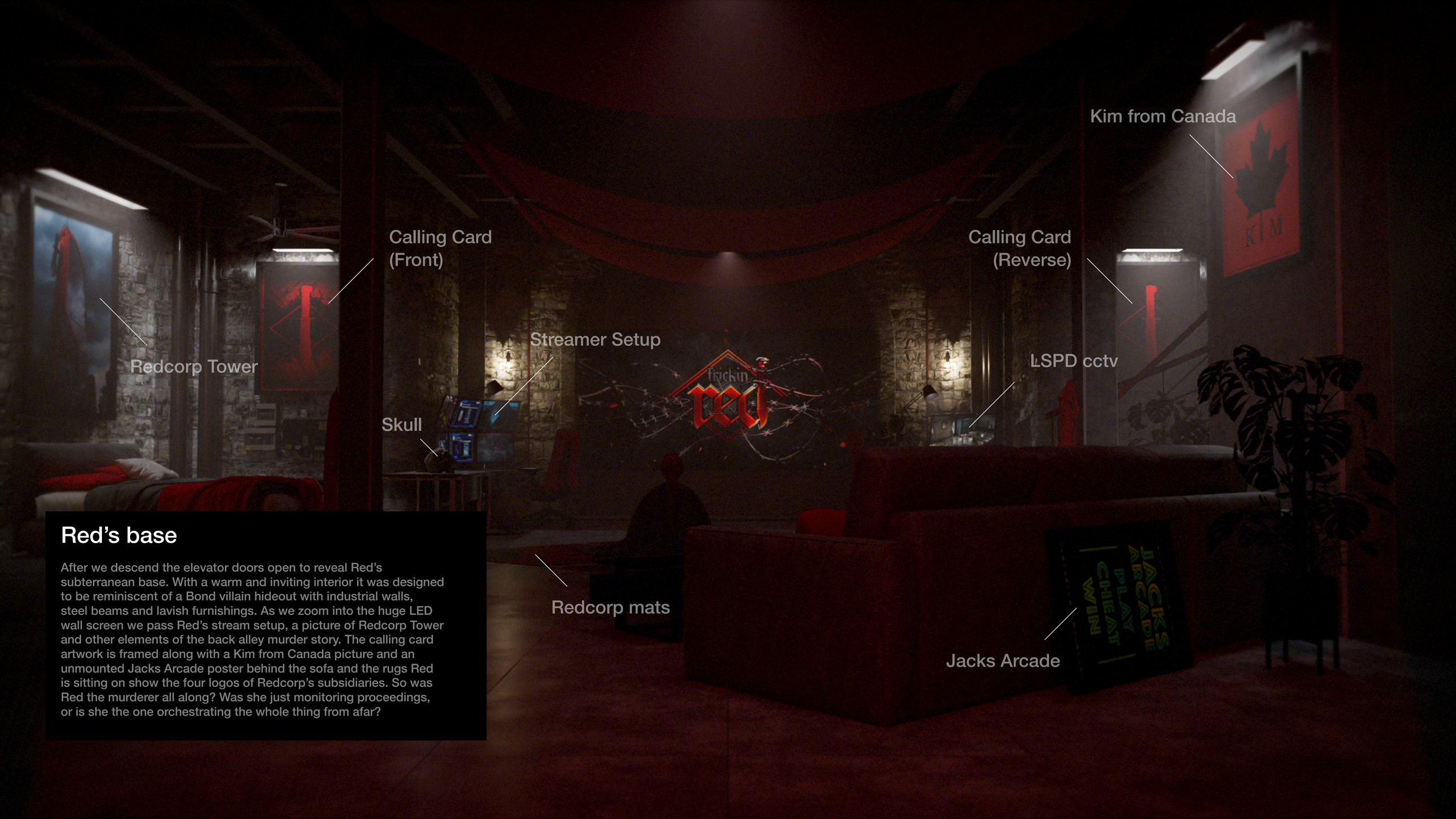
Options
Filter
Panel
Redshift
Top
Right
Front
Grid Spacing : 50 cm
Grid Spacing : 5 cm
Objects
Takes
File
Edit
View
Create
All
No Layer
Active Object
inner_floor
lift_doors_front
RS rubble
lift_doors_front_BRI
lift_doors_back
Mat
hazards
beam
concrete_for_floor
grenade
m4a1
m4a1_clip
ak
shotgun
sniper
gun_box
cell_eotech
black_eotech
lift_door
red_eotech
Glass_camera
Glass_lift
wall
mat
mat_edge
panels
arrows
lock_red
lock_green
floor
cam
cam_cctv
focus
corridor
inner_lift_UP
corridor_lights
lift_light_right
lift_light_left
lift_inner_light
hatch_light_1
hatch_light_2
front_door_inner_start_light
armory_light_4
armory_light_3
armory_light_2
armory_light_1
wall_top_half_back
wall_top_half
back_wall
top_bar
lift_side_walls
buttons
buttons.2
buttons.1
hazard_panels
joists
doors_front
guns
cctv_right
cctv_left
pillar
drapes
main_building
door
matte_cube
frame
welcome_mat
outer_frame
extra_lights
frame_inner
frame_middle
door_right
gears
Attributes
Layers
158 F
0 F
300 F

Vestibule / armoury

The vestibule linking the outside world to Red's base was built more as an armoury than a reception area. If it was a game it would be the loadout screen. This enabled it to be covered in gun racks, boxes, grenades and ammunition scattered across the floor to reflect her less frequent first-person shooter streams. As the door opens we feel a contrast from the cold, blue wintry exterior to a warmer space that introduces the more welcoming lighting and architectural cues such as rock interior of the base we see in the final shot.



Red's base

After we descend the elevator doors open to reveal Red's subterranean base. With a warm and inviting interior it was designed to be reminiscent of a Bond villain hideout with industrial walls, steel beams and lavish furnishings. As we zoom into the huge LED wall screen we pass Red's stream setup, a picture of Redcorp Tower and other elements of the back alley murder story. The calling card artwork is framed along with a Kim from Canada picture and an unmounted Jacks Arcade poster behind the sofa and the rugs Red is sitting on show the four logos of Redcorp's subsidiaries. So was Red the murderer all along? Was she just monitoring proceedings, or is she the one orchestrating the whole thing from afar?

frickin
red

bunker_open_3.c4d * - Main
Standard
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Grid Spacing : 50000 cm
Grid Spacing : 50 cm
Material
Objects
Takes
Attributes
Layers
Move: Click and drag to move elements. Hold down SHIFT to quantize movement / add to the selection in point mode, CTRL to remove.

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red

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