The Elder Scrolls®
——— O N L I N E ———

HELLO TEAM ESO

Before we start, thank you again for engaging with us. The ESO universe has such a rich history, and we're thrilled to be considered as a partner in building and honoring that legacy whilst giving it a new take to bring the fans a new experience.

The ideal film for us, and the one we've laid out, opens with an epic fight in Morrowind. Here we see a player from the past, meet our primary villain, and introduce an exciting new class of player. As we leave the mushroom forest and establish Necrom, we begin to intertwine the world of Apocrypha and tease the character Mora. As our hero follows a funeral procession through Necrom City, they continue to weave in and out of Apocrypha. Ultimately, led into the catacombs, a trap is set by our villain. In the final battle, our hero is banished or perhaps saved to the world of Apocrypha, where they comes face to face with Mora.

To accomplish that story and since we are introducing a new player analogue, while wading into the cosmic horror genre, we love the direction of leaning into a single main character. So in our film, we not only feature them almost entirely but work to create an emotional hook for our audience to grab onto, building a stronger connection to the character and making our viewers more invested in their story.

Another overarching key is the concept of different worlds-- multiple realms. In effect, we follow the film from two different points of view, Mora's and our hero's, which in the end, come crashing together. This is another reason why having a single main character feels right because it gives us time and opens up our narrative for plenty of world-building.

The concept of melding two worlds without forcing it will take some trickery, a subtle hand, and we've already started the process of mapping it out narratively speaking. While we develop the film visually, we'll keep a close eye on that challenge (no pun intended) through art direction, cinematography, VFX, editorial, and music resulting in a stunning and exciting piece.

Ultimately though, as we lay out these new worlds, characters, and avenues for play, more than anything, we want to leave the fans with more questions than answers— driving engagement and wanting to learn more. And while we create a sense of mystery and dip into cosmic horror, we continue to deliver the epic fight sequences and strong narrative gaming fans want and expect to see.

There's plenty to touch on, so let's begin.

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TONE AND ART DIRECTION

TONE &
ART DIRECTION

We'll use the hues of the game's environments to inform the color story of our film. Deep greens with accenting red glows in Apocrypha. A different shade of jade illuminates Necrom at night, with similar red hues dotting the funeral procession for color contrast. The Catacombs, bone grey— flickering with warm torchlight as grey cloaks shuffle through. And Morrowind, an inhospitable yet colorfully subdued landscape of twisted beauty and creatures, green forests with red and yellow mushrooms, a special blending of colors with a hazy orange sun, giving way to metaphysical implications.

While our colors have to make sense with the game, the richness and fullness of those colors and how far we push them will be a critical factor in setting the mood of fantasy horror.

In addition to that, everything we put on the screen has to guide and strengthen the narrative; our use of Art Direction is no exception. Contrasting colors boost our visual fidelity and the supreme importance of details within each scene. We play with light and dark, putting dark silhouettes over brighter backgrounds and using negative fill to darken the background and allow the foreground to pop. This approach really comes into play as we blend the two worlds together; a watchful eye might carry over in the form of a smoke halo, a pattern of windows, or a wall of skulls in the catacombs.

TONE & ART DIRECTION CONT.

With all of these details working in harmony, we also want constant movement in our frames to give each picture life. Haze blowing through Necrom City, robes billowing in the wind, our camera dutching as it creeps through the catacombs, lights flickering, and backgrounds alive with movement to create a fully realized cinematic image.

Of course, just as we experience the damp nature of Necrom, we also have to capture the grimy, otherworldly aura of Apocrypha, objects, and textures that make it so profound, spongey eyeballs in unexpected places. Those juxtaposing locations, and more importantly, their minute details, exemplify what makes the ESO landscape so rich.

Without needing to get too heavy-handed, we want to give ourselves natural light sources to provide our scenes with enough suggested light, so we aren't going overly dark. We don't want to make a 'dark,' hard-to-see film, even though we explore several 'dark' environments. Our audience needs to see and experience these visuals and the same time, sense that something is lurking in the shadows.

CINEMATOGRAPHY

CINEMATOGRAPHY

For this particular story, I want to build and utilize the concept of our two different points of view. To capture that, we combine long lenses observing our scenes with a dirty foreground to create the uncomfortable feeling of being watched— Mora's eye. And we juxtapose that with wide angles that are intimate and close with our hero protagonist, placing us right there with them, in the middle of the story; by using cinematography that creates this sort of constant pressure, we create a deeper connection. We jump between these two styles for most of our film until the end, when the two points of view meet.

Of course, in addition to this type of coverage, we'll build majestic, expansive vistas and dramatically wide interior shots to showcase these worlds properly as well as create mystery and suspense with our lens by using it to propel the narrative, to show us what's to come or where to look.

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CINEMATOGRAPHY CONT.

Within our coverage, we can figure out the right balance of how much to show or not to show Mora and possibly other monsters altogether. Still, many of our shots need to work towards the larger theme of building audience intrigue— less might be more for some.

As we touched on, we want our scenes to feel lit from existing natural lights and sources - not artificially lit or stylized with lights. There's no need to let it dominate our thinking, but our lighting needs to feel natural to be beautiful– carefully crafted by our artists. Some of this (visibility) will come through opening up the aperture, letting the natural lighting in, which gives us a more shallow depth of field, which is great for feeling but also not showing the entirety of a scene and therefore continuing to help us build mystery.

Following in the tradition of ESO films, our approach to cinematography will be nothing short of a high-end cinematic adventure- photoreal and pushing the boundaries of today's rendering capabilities.

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

FIGHT SCENES, MAGIC AND CHOREOGRAPHY

We want our fight scenes to build along with our narrative, not just action for action's sake and we want to get the most out of each scene of combat— how the fighting propels us through our story but without giving too much away. To achieve that, we start with a quick action sequence and plot point, establishing the characters, and drawing the audience in. Then, we build towards the final fight with more mystery that provides story motivation and lets us grow in intensity. From a production standpoint, we want to choreograph and film our fights in a motion-capture environment with trained actors (not just traditional mocap actors). Additionally, whoever we cast as our hero talent, should also be the actor we use the likeness for and scan for realistic emotions and performances.

Also, I want to relay the team aspect within the game, which we do in our opening battle. Having directed multiple projects with medieval combat, one thing I want to do is make the fight scenes feel interactive between the creatures and the hero and the creatures themselves. Avoid the typical one-on-one battle scenario but have combatants interact, monsters clawing and climbing on each other, crawling on the ground, rabid to get through in many ways as busy as a Peter Paul Rubens painting. I really want to explore creating almost set pieces of the action, renaissance-style compositions of conflict that are epic in scale and mood— mortals fighting against the gods.

What's also interesting and scary is the use of magic and how it maybe isn't fully understood or controlled. It can give you great power, but also failure can have significant consequences. Part of building our main character and the film's suspense is channeling this balance of power, their gaining power almost omnisciently and balancing on the edge of being in control or being controlled.

EDIT

Editing is ninety-percent deciding what not to show, especially when it comes to building mystery; we show just enough.

Here, our edit must accomplish a few key components. The first is that it needs to disappear into the film. There are cuts, sure, but the focus is not an editorial piece. Finding the right flow and pace is critical to allowing the audience to just experience our picture.

To stack onto the sense of mystery and intrigue, I love fading in and out of black. It's a great editorial tool to consider, and it also nudges us slightly into horror. This is in no way a hard and fast rule, and once the film gets moving, we'll most likely feature it less and less, but it's a good option to have on the table.

Finally, the edit will also help push the narrative concept of two worlds converging; we have a linear narrative intercut with another world observing it. We don't need to hammer down on this as much as suggest it, but as Mora views our hero and as their consciousness bleeds into Mora's domain, the right flow of edit can help emphasize that relationship growing.

DYNAMIC TRANSITIONS

We love the concept of using multiple tricks of the eye throughout our film and have written several options into our script. Of course, these can move and shift as the film develops further, but our overall approach to transitions is similar to our thinking on fight scenes. We don't want it to be a continuous trick of the eye, making it a gimmick and distracting from our world-building, narrative, and character development.

Between moments of clarity, though, and when we've entered a dreamlike state or transitioning from one realm to the next, we want to push the envelope of what we can achieve here visually. Lean into the concept of cosmic horror, but be smart in how far down the rabbit hole we go. We love all the references you've mentioned, but the magic of these transitions will truly happen once we've solidified our story and unleashed our artists on the task. We would never lock ourselves into anything at this point, but it's worth mentioning this is an area we are eager to explore.
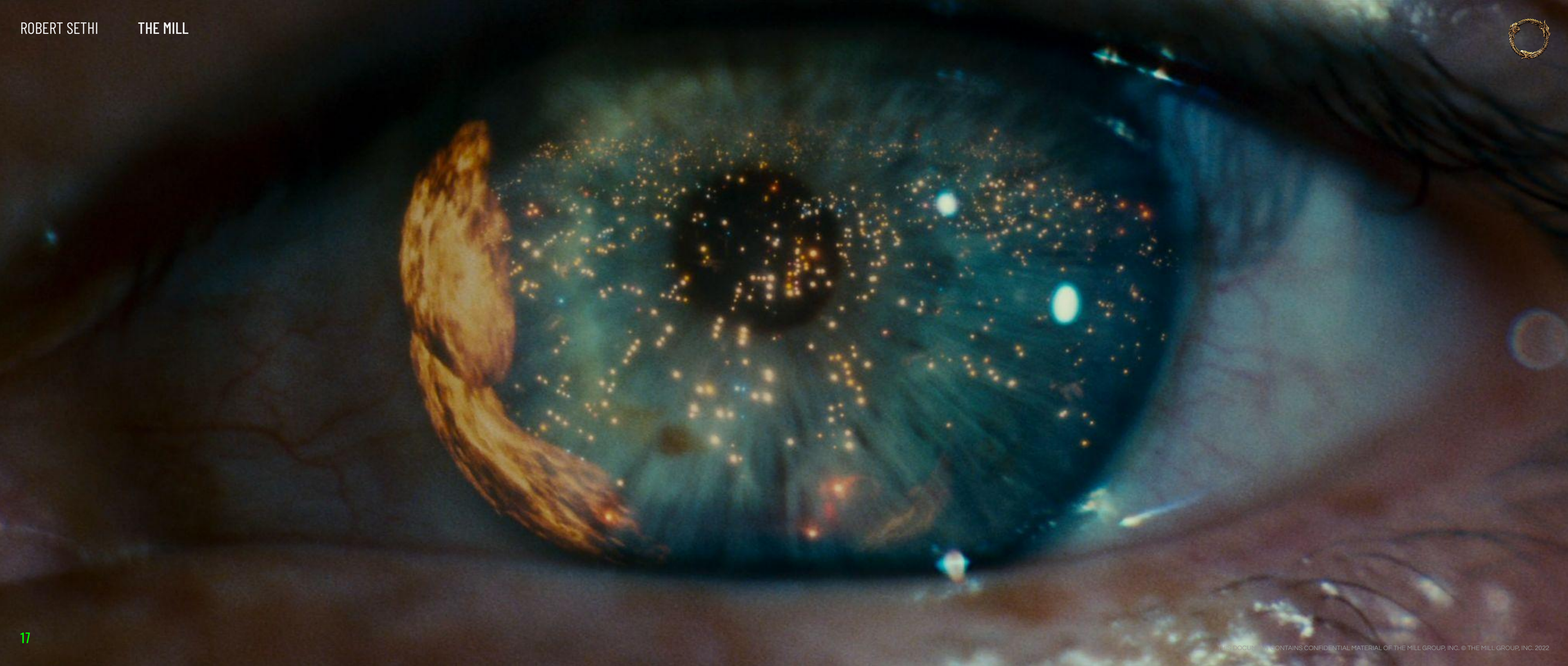
SFX AND MUSIC

For the most profound outcome, having music tailored to the needs of our film is the best path forward. To do that, we'd enlist top-notch composers we have a good relationship with, like Blake Robbins or Jo Blankenburg. It's important to go this route because our music impacts the entirety of our film, informs our edit, works with it, and helps pronounce our narrative while adding drama— accentuating all our hard work from the ground up. Working with a composer of this level and what they bring to the table gives our music an actual perspective while honing in on the exact personality we want for the piece.

Stylistically, I'm leaning toward tracks somewhere between Dead Can Dance - 'ACT II: The Mountain,' and Wardruna - 'Lyfjaberg,' but with a bit more edge-- music that features strong rhythmic melodies laced with drumming percussions and chanting. Woven into that type of soundscape— a heroic theme that builds, it would be interesting to layer in a mood of horror and suspense, especially during slower, more nuanced moments. As much as we visually transcend worlds and realms, so does the music without becoming a chaotic mess.

Our treatment of SFX stays in line with great cinema and the established ESO world and we'd love to work with a true SFX artist like Charles Deenen at Source Sound. Everything sound in our film is influenced by reality; swords clashing, crumbling stones, and footsteps running all happen spatially and realistically— and here, there are a lot of fun opportunities for sounds that we've begun to explore in our initial script. What's also exciting about this project is that we are blending and bending between two worlds at times, so that overflow event of sound will be a unique challenge for an SFX artist to explore.

▶ **Wardruna - 'Lyfjaberg'**   ▶ **Dead Can Dance - 'ACT II: The Mountain'**

NARRATIVE APPROACH

Well, here we are, the meat of it all. Apologies for saving this block of text to the end (well, right before the first take on a script), but we wanted to touch on the concepts we've started to explore in the narrative and our approach to capturing all the needs and asks of the project with a compelling narrative.

We want to give gaming fans and fans of the franchise what they want, but not necessarily what they might expect. So, while we'll feature epic fight scenes, we'll do so strategically to give us time to do more character work and not fatigue our audience or our resources by trying to cram in too much fighting. Because, in the end, we want them to connect to our new player class, build mystery that gets them to ask questions, and we can't achieve that if we're constantly locked into huge battles with tidy endings.

In this film, our hero also transcends and exists in two realms simultaneously, collectively across four vignettes. We've started an early exploration of 'how' and 'when' that happens while allowing the story to flow and not getting too tied up in the specifics. Creating the question of whether they exists simultaneously in Apocrypha, or is it Mora's sight viewing them and therefore ushering them into that world. To relay this question visually, we must allow for some time to explore that connection and, in a sense, give them new abilities from those abstract encounters.

We feature a primary villain, Torvisard, throughout the narrative to keep our story trackable without getting lost in transcendental moments. We also create a misdirect for Mora by implying they could be the principal villain, but it's more about asking the question than stating it as fact.

All that being said, the narrative we've laid out is the first go and can be tweaked, manipulated, characters and locations swapped out, etc. The main essence we really want to keep, though, and build on is the intercutting between different realms until they become one in the final scene as our hero and Mora meet with an epic cliffhanger-- are they a villain? Ultimately, as we've mentioned, the goal is to create questions, not give answers, to leave fans and newcomers not only wanting to see more but to dive into the game and find their own version of the truth.

How we achieve that might look something like this:

STORY

EXT. MORROWIND - DUSK

In shadows cast by giant mushrooms, bathed in the warm low-hanging evening light, a brutal and unflinching fight is underway. A fierce Viking warrior the fans have come to know and love is on the brink of defeat, overrun by a surge of Hushed. They pounce on him, trying to pull him down into the pile of dead, as a cloaked figure, the puppet master of this horde, watches from safety, manipulating a black book with an intricate black sigil on its cover.

Our Viking musters all his strength, struggling to stay on his feet, and just as pulled down into the hungry mass of beings, a flash of magic sends bodies of the Hushed flying. Fighting through a small opening, a new player reaches out their hand to help our Viking up. A new class of player, a new character to this world: Oberon, a cunning and fierce dark elf. We sense history between them, this isn't the first time one has saved the other.

With another burst of magic Oberon shields them from another wave of Hushed. Now fighting together in a balletic sequence of combat featuring magic and steel, they cut through the minions, turning their attention on the hooded commander.

Now forced to fight, the cloaked figure's skill with magic and with sword is too great, and in a swift attack - counter-attack, he dispatches our hero with a magical burst and mortally skewers our Viking with his blade.

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EXT. MORROWIND - DUSK - CONT.

Twisting the steel deeper as he manipulates the book with his boney red hand, we reveal Torvisard. With a stern look, the horned warlock and the book evaporate from the scene, leaving Oberon to tend to a dying friend.

As our hero rushes to the Viking's side in we boom up through the forest to reveal the iconic landscape of Morrowind– massive creatures roam the hillsides while an erupting volcano spews ash into the sky. As we notice the sun setting behind Necrom city in the distance, our frame begins to fade, as it does, the twisted treetops of Morrowind forest form the shape of an eye.

Fade to Black:

Fade up Logos Against Black:

BETHESDA SOFTWORKS

ZENIMAX ONLINE STUDIOS

A ripple of water washes over the Zenimax Online Studio title card as it fades...

Transition to:

INT. APOCRYPHA - ABSTRACT

An eye, fully submerged in dark liquid, opens.

Transition to:

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EXT. NECROM CITY - NIGHT

The green haze and lights of Necrom City emerge from the shadows, an eerie vista in the shape of an all-seeing eye. On the busy city street, we find Oberon lingering on the edge of a great procession- the countless windows of the city peering down.

Closing their eyes, and suspending their mind. In a vision, a flash of red horns flickers into view, spiking through the black book.

Opening their eyes, the same sigil is inscribed on the coffin as the hooded pallbearers pass by. Oberon begins to stalk the procession from the shadows, passing a beggar. Tracking them, the beating drums and chimes engulf the scene. Our two worlds start to overlap. The dark elf enters a trance-like state but isn't fully aware; we stay tight on our hero as the geometry of Necrom City melds into...

Transition to:

INT. APOCRYPHA - ABSTRACT

...Oberon walking at the same pace, but now the towering cathedrals of Apocrypha swell behind– architecture alive with power and knowledge, small wisps of energy containing ancient Daedric spells, and symbology flow through our hero's being.

We cut to an abstract shot in the green mist of another eye-opening with similar markings, followed by a heavy tentacle slithering across an ancient, inscribed floor.

A quick flashing wide reveals a brutal land filled with gargantuan fossils and pools of green toxic ooze— rivers flowing upwards and hulking giants on the horizon.

Cut to:

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EXT. NECROM CITY - NIGHT

Oberon moves through the streets, trailing them but not drawing attention; passing the same beggar again the world bends, walls warping as if a spell is manipulating the dark elf's senses. On a nearby balcony made of bone, Torvisard watches, setting a trap.

Passing by seances and rituals calling out to the land of the dead, our two worlds intersect again as Oberon is pulled into a dreamlike state.

Cut to:

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INT. APOCRYPHA - ABSTRACT

The tentacles move with urgency and we reveal a multitude of eyes, opening and closing, looking in all directions at once.

Cut to:

INT. NECROM CITY CATACOMBS - NIGHT

Inside the vast burial chamber, the procession comes to a halt. Our hero, now blending in with them, glances around anxiously as two massive stone doors slam shut.

We reveal Torisard on a perch. Locking eyes with Oberon he waves his devil-like hand, and the mass of hooded worshipers pull away from our hero in unison, with military precision. Lowering their hoods they are all mimics of Torvisard.

Oberon's eyes widen, readying for a fight.

Cut to:

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INT. APOCRYPHA - ABSTRACT

A reflection of our hero, sword drawn, down in the catacombs, glistens on the lens, but the image goes blurry, enveloped by a ghostly haze.

Cut back to:

INT. CATACOMBS

Our hero fends off a large crowd of clones as they move to the altar and the body lying in state. As the dark elf fights off the horde, the corpse rises- an undead variant of Torvisard. Just as the undead wizard is resurrected though, Oberon cuts it down. Using the burial altar as the high ground our hero fights them off. The numbers are relentless, the sheer volume oppressive, as they surround the altar, arms outstretched they crawl over one another, like Hieronymus Bosch depicting hell.

As Oberon's pinned in a nearly impossible position, the walls of the catacombs give way to spires of books, the worlds intermingle as the dark elf summons a powerful form of magic. Sending a shockwave through the crowd and turning the tide, cutting down mimics with magical bursts and relentless swordsmanship.

Now, with most of the clones defeated, Torvisard goes on the offensive. Oberon, though, has developed newly found power and absorbs the punishment, cutting closer and closer. Torvisard makes a desperate move by summoning power from the Black book. Weakening himself but sending a seismic blast at our hero. The dark elf matches it though with an equally powerful stream of energy.

Locked in an epic battle of magic, the convergence of the force is unfathomable. Reaching its apex an impossible lightwave rips through our frame.
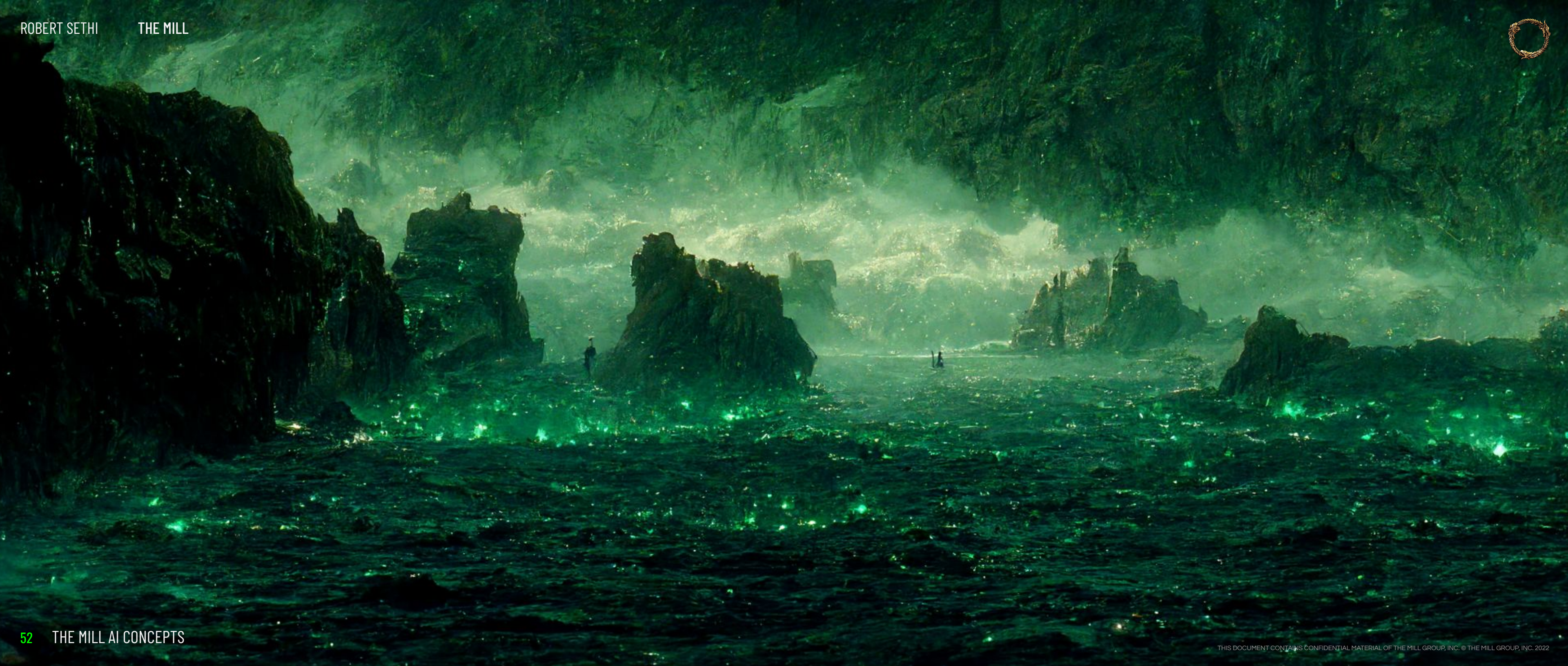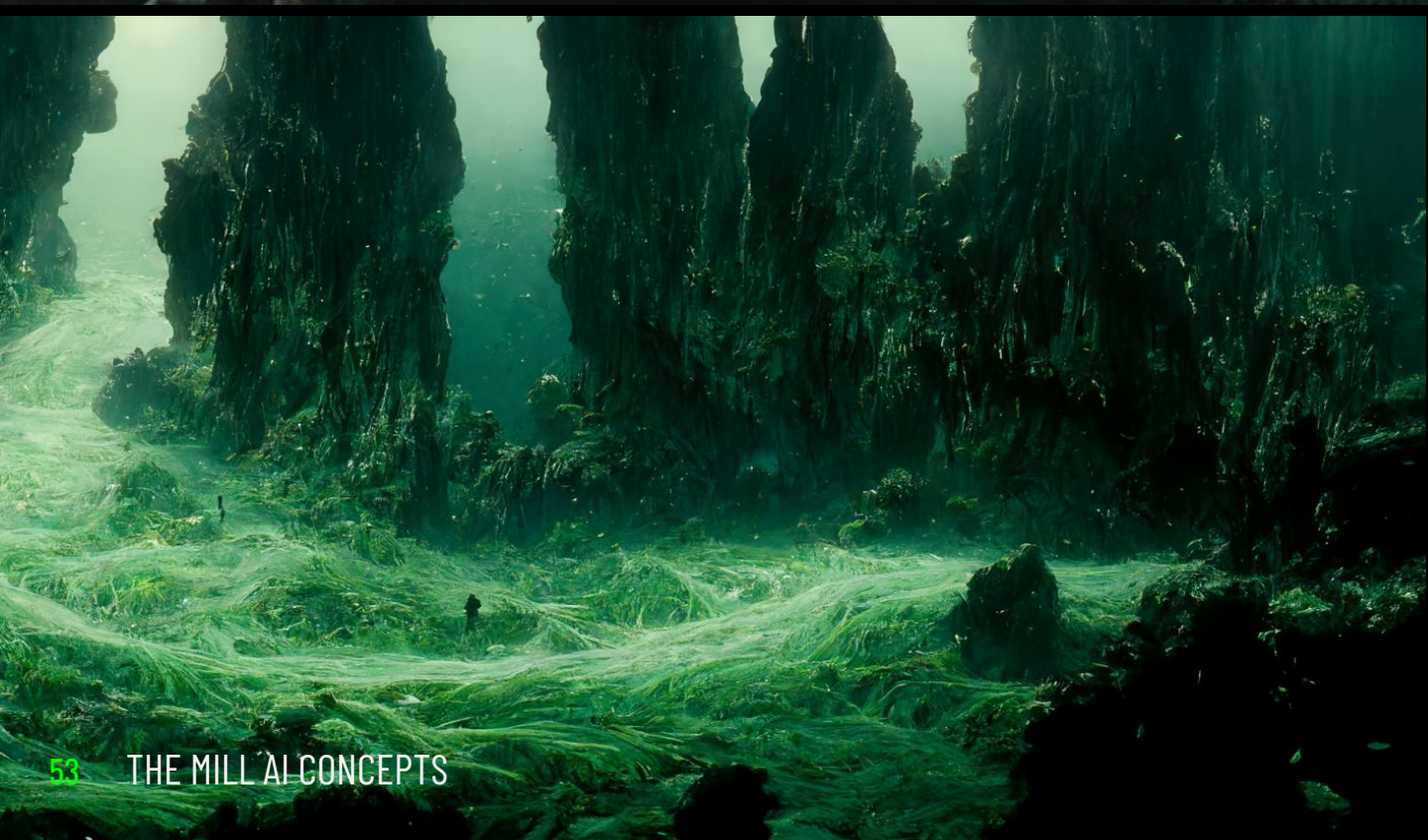
EXT. APOCRYPHA

From black, Oberon lands on a dense shoreline. Megaliths and massive fossils dot the horizon; luminous green oceans send sprays shooting upwards to the clouds while ominous creatures roam the expanse.

It is nearly beyond comprehension, nearly driving our hero to the brink of madness as towering mind-terrors approach from the horizon.

Racing across the desolate and torturous landscape, Oberon sees what looks like a way out, a massive stone staircase and temple with burning caldrons of fire. Hurrying up the steps, the ground begins to tremble and break apart, giving way to green ocean waters that come rushing in like rapids- stone, soil, books, and ocean exploding all around.

EXT. APOCRYPHA

Oberon turns to run but falls. Looking back to the temple, Mora emerges, obliterating the structure and closing in. Back on their feet, a giant tentacle slithers towards our hero. Lifting over them and twisting, a large eyeball opens up from within as a lighting storm illuminates the entire scene now in an epic wide.

We see Mora in its entirety, the giant tentacle dwarfing the dark elf, only a small portion of the great keeper of knowledge. Just as the sheer scale sets in we...

Smash Cut to:

End Card

End Button: A weakened Torvisard passes the black book to an unknown hand.

ORIGINAL CONCEPTS PRODUCED BY THE MILL

SCRIPT FOLLOW UP

As we're all well aware, this script is a first go, but we do like where it's headed. But, for the sake of exploration, let's dive into some of the details where collaboration and understanding the client's needs can win the day while also looking at our initial thinking.

Jumping off, we opted to include Bjorn, the Viking, in the opening to stamp our place firmly in the ESO world. We wanted to spring right into the action and didn't want any confusion about where we are. Also, we opted for a legacy character so as not to introduce two new characters: concurrent with our HERO concept + saving the new character class for a big reveal.

Sticking with that opening scene, we killed off the companion as an emotional narrative motivator-- another reason for Bjorn and an additional plot instigator of the book. The same person who killed our hero's friend also possesses a sacred text.

But if the desire is to feature more companions to relay the team fighting aspect of the game. In that case, we could shift the opening to have Oberon's companion survive the attack by Torvisard or introduce a new companion further along in the narrative to keep the emotional hook intact.

Our preferred choice is to remain focused on a single character after the opening but could work on other pathways to feature additional sidekicks. The one area we'd warn against that, with the current script, is that when our hero finds Mora, and enters Apocrypha, they're solo.

Also, if the film is getting long, i.e., the opening fight, we can slim down our shot selection and make it feel like part of Mora's test. Or, just feature our new player being watched by Torvisard and Mora as we swoop our camera through Morrowind and reveal Necrom in the distance. We prefer to open on a fight and pull the viewer in, but sometimes compromises must be made.

And along a similar line of thinking, we can always scale down our battles or come up with alternate monsters to face. In our final battle with Torvisard, we opted to feature a bit of eye trickery and magic with Torvisard turning the congregation into sword and magic-wielding clones, without knowing how far that strays from the game. But, we could create a similar conflict by having Torvisard manipulate the worshipers into a Mind-Terror, another key monster, or even a giant monster combined of the entire progression, a beast made of 20 men with multiple arms and razor-sharp horns. We can push it and take it as far as we want, and like many things at this stage, collaboration is key!

TEASER

We think of our teaser as MORE than just a lift, even though it will be content harvested from our Trailer 1 film. We treat it as a film in its own right, carefully constructed editorially as we start and continue to create questions for our audience. Based on our current narrative, our teaser could play out over a few shots.

We'd like to open with our sweeping wide of Morrowind, revealing Necrom in the distance, before cutting to an abstract series of shots featuring tentacles, monsters, and a sacred seal. This imagery, followed by a flurry of close-up fighting action, creates the concept that a new force is threatening the world, and you are fighting to save it. Not only that but we should ever-so-slighting hint at the possibility of a new player character. The more abstract, mysterious, and bombastic the shots we choose for our teaser, the better.

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THOUGHTS ON TRAILER 2

Obviously, we want to be creative partners first and foremost, so our initial take on the narrative can and should be tweaked and scrutinized until we find the right… everything, but we love the concept of creating more questions than answers— especially for films like these. We've seen this strategy have enormous success and fan engagement with our most recent Star Wars Trailer for Jedi: Survivor.

So, while we should answer some of the questions posed in Trailer 1, in our second film, we should continue to leave the audience wanting to gain more insight into the world and where the story is going. To truly find out, they have to play for themselves.

A NOTE ON IMAGERY

Crafting a film like this, as you know, takes inspiration and creativity from a myriad of artists and thinkers. Some of that skill is on display in our deck, but we've only really begun to scratch the surface. As you can see, we have created bespoke styleframes, specifically for the epic finale of our film; the meeting between Oberon and Mora, but our other images come from references and image-generating AI.

We wanted to mention this because we direct and art direct the imagery produced by AI, informing the process, but we can only take the visuals so far– it is truly just a guide for our artists to follow. While it is a fantastic new tool at our disposal, especially for a world as exciting and ethereal as this, only with our artists can we find the perfect frame, angle, textures, and finishing look that does this project justice.

THE MILL AI CONCEPTS

THANK YOU

We could not be more excited about the prospect of working together again. The creative is epic and builds on such a cool legacy, and we truly hope to be a part of building this world with you. It was great working with everyone on the last Rocket League film, so let's get the band back together!

Sincerely,

Rob