



JASON GARMAN

FULL PROJECT CASE STUDY BY MARIO NEVADO.ART

REFLECTIONS IN THE BARYK

REFLECTIONS IN THE DARK

A Horror-Noir by Jason Garman

Complete Book Cover Design & Branding Case Study

Art Direction, Illustration & Design by Mario Nevado Art

<https://marionevado.art> · 2026

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MARIO NEVADO ART

COVER ARTS FOR MUSIC, EDITORIAL AND FILM.

REFLECTIONS IN THE DARK A Horror Noir by Jason Garman Cover Art Brief Proposal by Mario Nevado Art February 3rd, 2026

CLIENT BRIEF SUMMARY

“Reflections in the Dark is a supernatural noir set in Chicago. It follows Maria Voss, a homicide detective, and Reed Ashland, a former philosophy professor whose life has unraveled. Their investigation into a series of mirror-related deaths leads them into a metaphysical dimension known as the Elsewhere Fold — a surreal realm where memory, identity, and reality blur. The story blends grounded crime investigation with psychological horror, dream logic, and a moody, atmospheric surrealism.”

Cover mood & direction:

I’m aiming for something atmospheric and surreal rather than literal. Some themes and imagery central to the tone include:

- *Mirrors, reflections, or fractured glass*
- *A sense of doubling or misaligned identity*
- *Noir sensibilities with subtle supernatural undertones*
- *A mood of unease, shadow, and quiet dreamlike intrusion*
- *Chicago elements are optional — mood matters more than location*

Core visual ideas I’m leaning toward:

- *A figure partially reflected (or mis-reflected)*
- *A fragmented or distorted face in a mirror*
- *A noir silhouette with something “off” intruding from the edge*
- *Imagery that subtly suggests being watched*

1.- ANALYSIS FROM CLIENT’S FULL DOCUMENTATION

- **Main colors** present in the book: Grey, black, dark blue and brown, with hints of Chicago streetlights (neon pink, turquoise and yellow), crimson red (blood, crimes).

- **Narrative core: Identity** when it's no longer trustable: What happens when you cannot trust what you know or "see" about yourself anymore
 - Reflections that don't match: *Doppelgänger, black eyes, rain: mirror puddles*
 - Broken time: 3:33
 - Memory that lies: *Grandfather's clock, deformed, bleeding upwards: "The clock measures memory, not time"*
 - Duality: *Reality Vs The Fold*
 - Loss that changes perception: *Reed's daughter, Voss' ring?*
 - Body as something that doesn't belong to itself anymore
 - Shattered
 - Impossible shadow
 - Frozen gesture
 - Broken people = Broken glass
 - Mirrors = Doors (door symbol in mirror/victims, circuit diagrams)
 - Doors= Threshold between worlds/realities/dreams

- **Notable images in the book:**
 - Mr. Morrow: Tall, distorted figure with an antique telephone for a head
 - Grandfather's clock bleeding ink upwards, distorted
 - Wisdom knot
 - "Door symbol" used by the assassin, resembles a pair of open doors
 - 3:33
 - *"Please, remain fictional until further notice"*
- Client request: avoidance of literal interpretations.

Artist proposal: present the book as an "artifact": the readers mustn't understand the cover, but distrust it or be deceived by it. They are being watched by the book itself.

2.- MARKET STUDY

Before moving into final design decisions, I did a quick visual scan of the current noir / psychological thriller market, mainly to understand what's being done over and over again... and what I very consciously want to avoid.

Most covers in this space lean on the same familiar formulas: anonymous silhouettes walking into fog or rain, desaturated blue/grey palettes, cracked-glass textures as a literal "broken mind" metaphor, close-up eyes, or ultra-minimal typographic covers that usually only work once the author is already well known. They're safe solutions, but the market is completely saturated with them.



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With *Reflections in the Dark*, my goal is to move away from that visual comfort zone. Not because those codes don't work, but because they would flatten what makes this story distinctive. Here, "reflection" isn't a mirror in a literal sense, it's a threshold: between identities, realities, memory and loss. The cover needs to suggest that idea, not explain it.

Therefore, my visual approach will rely on the following foundations:

- Create a visual metaphor
- built around controlled color contrast instead of full monochrome
- using the human figure as a portal or presence, not a character portrait
- closer in spirit to Lynchian/Lake logic than to generic crime thrillers

There are also already several books and films using this exact title, most of them relying on very predictable noir or horror imagery. That makes it even more important for the cover to have a strong, unmistakable visual identity so it stands out on shelves and on-line marketplace thumbnails.

In short, the intention isn't to compete within established genre clichés, but to create an image that feels unsettling, poetic and memorable, and that better reflects the kind of experience this novel offers that is unique to the rest.

Title Searchability Audit: As part of the market research process, a title searchability review was conducted. Multiple existing publications and films share the title Reflections in the Dark. This finding

reinforces the strategic importance of a visually distinctive cover to ensure immediate differentiation in search results, recommendation algorithms, and retail browsing environments — a consideration factored into the visual direction of this proposal.

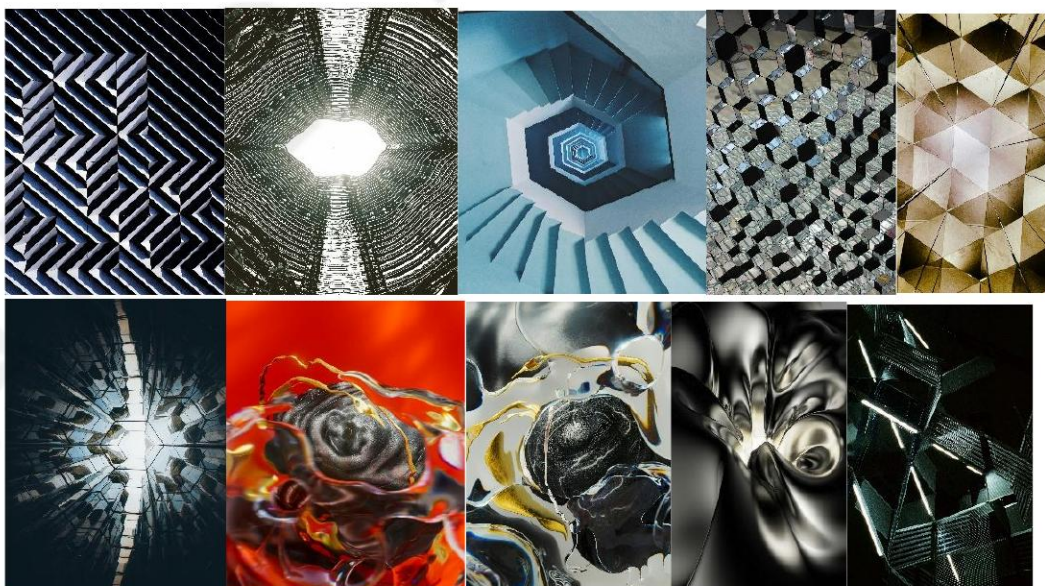
3.- MOOD BOARD

Collection of visual references akin to story or thematic elements for consideration (or avoidance)

- Mirror, Glass, Reflections



- The Elsewhere Fold



Reference images sourced from royalty-free platforms (Pexels, Unsplash, Pixabay).

- Previous work from my own body of work partially related to these subjects



I'm not interested in using these references literally, but in the logic behind them: distortion, repetition, fragmentation, and the feeling that something familiar has shifted slightly out of place.

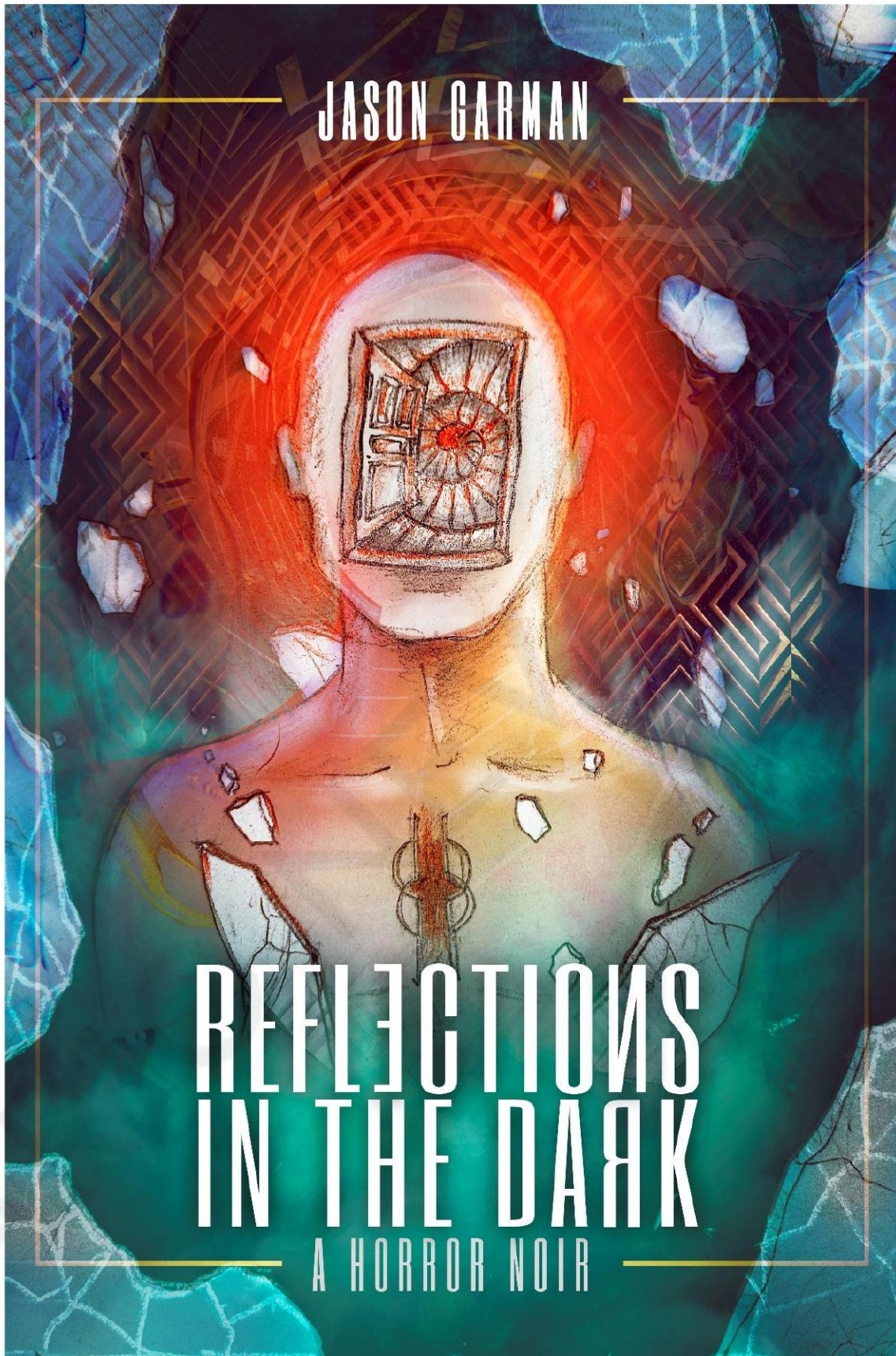
From there, my goal is to build a symbolic image. A figure that works as a threshold instead of a portrait, a face that opens, and visual elements that suggest pressure, intrusion, and instability rather than action, just as the work referenced from my portfolio here, that I think can serve as a good starting point.

The following cover drafts come directly from this approach, translating these references into a small set of visual proposals that focus on mood, metaphor, and atmosphere rather than illustrating plot points.

4.- SKETCH PROPOSAL



Raw original pencil sketch



Sketch with color, FX, typography and layout study.

5.- COVER DRAFT ANALYSIS

1. The "Book as an Artifact" Concept

This proposal treats the cover not as a mere illustration, but as a narrative object. The central silhouette acts as a **direct proxy for the reader**, transforming the cover into a mirror. The shattered glass in the corners signifies that the reader is looking through a **broken looking glass**, discovering their own reflection within the *Elsewhere Fold*. This creates an immediate, unsettling connection between the audience and the metaphysical mystery of the book. Moreover, readers might come to this realization midway through the journey, having an *eureka!* moment that will dig them deeper into the reading.

2. Composition & Focal Point

- **The Eye of the Fold:** The circular staircase, taken from Reed's "dream", serves as the primary focal point. It functions as a metaphorical "eye" that watches the observer, echoing the story's core theme of being observed, as well as the entrance to the *Elsewhere Fold*.
- **Structural Patterns & Branding:** The *Elsewhere Fold* is depicted using a distinct geometric pattern (inspired by the uncanny pattern designs of the Overlook hotel from *The Shining*, The Oldest House from *Control* and the Black Lodge from *Twin Peaks*). This is designed to be a **branding anchor**: a recurring visual element that can be implemented across the spine, back cover, promo materials, bookmarks and merch, and even future entries in a potential series to create a cohesive and recognizable franchise identity.

3. Technical Execution & Visual Impact

- **Defying Genre Tropes:** While noir often relies on monochromatic palettes, this design uses an **uncanny combination of reds and greens** with iridescent accents of violet and blue, taken from the nightlife streetlights of the city. This "chromatic tension" is a strategic choice to make the book **stand out on the shelves**, moving away from genre clichés to grab the reader's attention through a regal yet otherworldly aesthetic, akin to the supernatural tones of the story.
- **Atmospheric Detail:** Volumetric fog isolates the focal point, while a sleek, golden vector frame unifies the composition. This replaces a literal mirror frame to keep the design modern and elegant.
- **Subliminal Typography:** The elongated sans-serif typeface ties to noir and thriller genres, and includes subtly reflected letters (almost imperceptible at first) to reinforce the feeling of a "misaligned reality" upon a second look.
- **Skillset for final design:** 3D (main figure, fog); photography (glass, staircase/door) and painting to bring everything together.

6. CONSIDERATIONS & ADAPTABILITY

I. Creative Flexibility & Identity

- **Character Definition:** While the current draft uses a "blank" character to act as a reader proxy, we can easily adapt this to represent Voss or Reed by adding specific identity markers (clothing, hair, or jewelry).
- **Symbolism:** I have placed a *Wisdom Knot* as a placeholder on the chest, but this can be replaced with the "door symbol" or removed entirely during the rendering phase if it compromises the composition's clarity.
- **The Threshold:** If the door imagery feels too literal we can pivot to a more surreal approach, such as a void or aperture within the figure's head leading to the staircase.

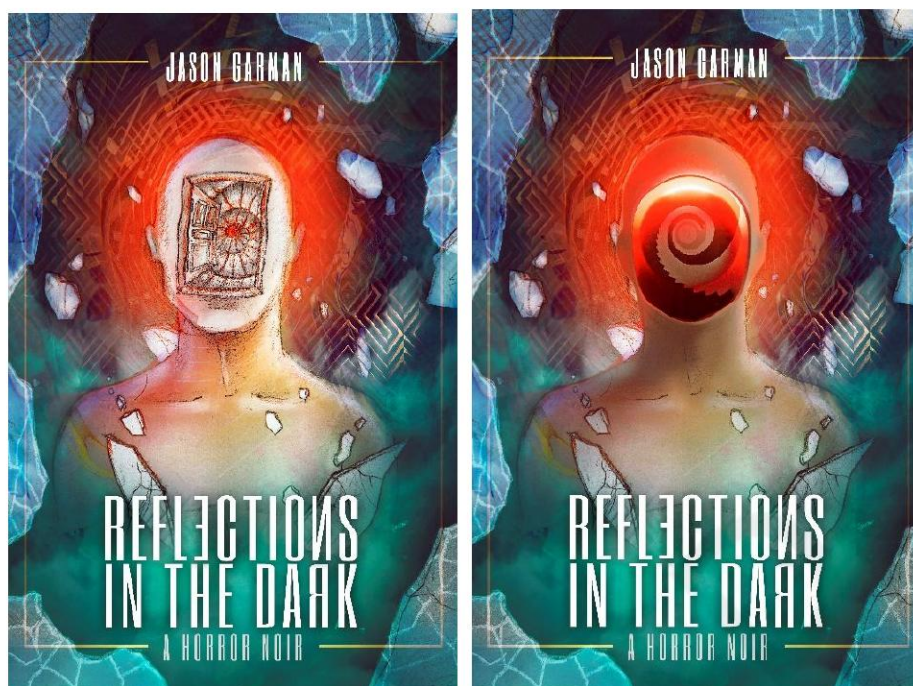
II. Technical Recommendations

- **Gaze & Impact:** I strongly recommend maintaining the character's direct gaze toward the reader. A profile view would significantly weaken the "mirror" concept and the psychological connection intended.
- **Compositional Balance:** To avoid "overkilling" the design, I suggest keeping the glass shards empty. Adding detailed scenes or reflections within the shards (as tempting as that might be) would clutter the focal point and diminish the overall tension.
- **Lighting & Atmosphere:** The final artwork will be significantly darker than this structural sketch. The character will be revealed through a primary red light source and subtle secondary rim lighting to add volume and enhance the surreal, noir-inspired mystery.

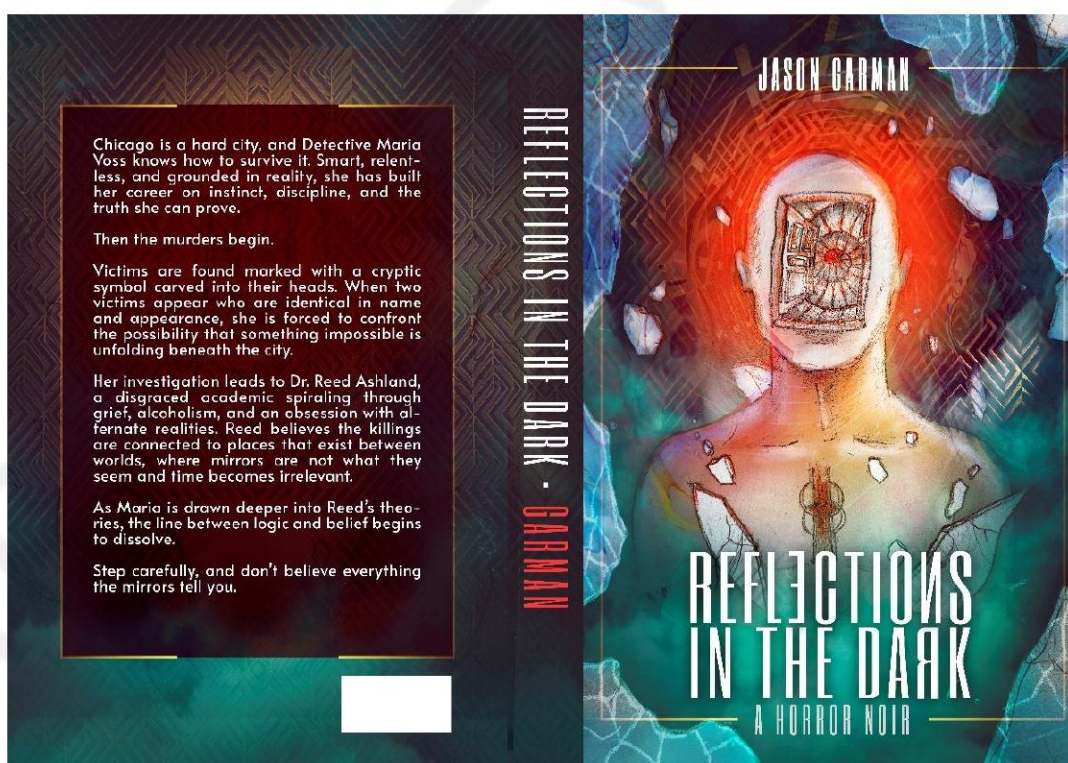
III. Moving Forward

- **Evolution of the Draft:** These sketches serve to establish composition and tone. As we move into final rendering, I allow the piece to "talk", meaning that while the structure remains, the image might ask for textures and color nuances as an evolution to better serve the atmosphere. If any major changes might occur, we will review them together before changing anything.
- **Streamlining:** If you feel the combination of these elements is too dense, the design is modular enough to be streamlined without losing its core message.

ALTERNATES AND EXTRA CONTENT



Alternative takes on the draft: with no chest symbol / hole instead of door (rough 3D approximation)



(Very) Rough layout design proposal, showing possible uses for the Elsewhere Fold pattern

Closing Notes

The following proposal reflects a thorough analysis of the brief, the manuscript, and the current market landscape. It is conceived as a living document, a starting point for creative dialogue rather than a final directive. The core concept, compositional structure, and branding strategy can be refined, adapted, or reconsidered based on feedback.

The design direction presented here represents what is considered the strongest visual and commercial approach for this title, balancing genre credibility with distinctive market differentiation. All elements remain open for discussion to ensure the final cover aligns with the author's vision.

The proposal is modular by design. Individual elements (symbolism, figure treatment, typographic approach, pattern usage) can be adjusted independently without compromising the integrity of the overall concept, as long as core compositional and readability principles are maintained.

Feedback and observations are welcome at any stage of the process.

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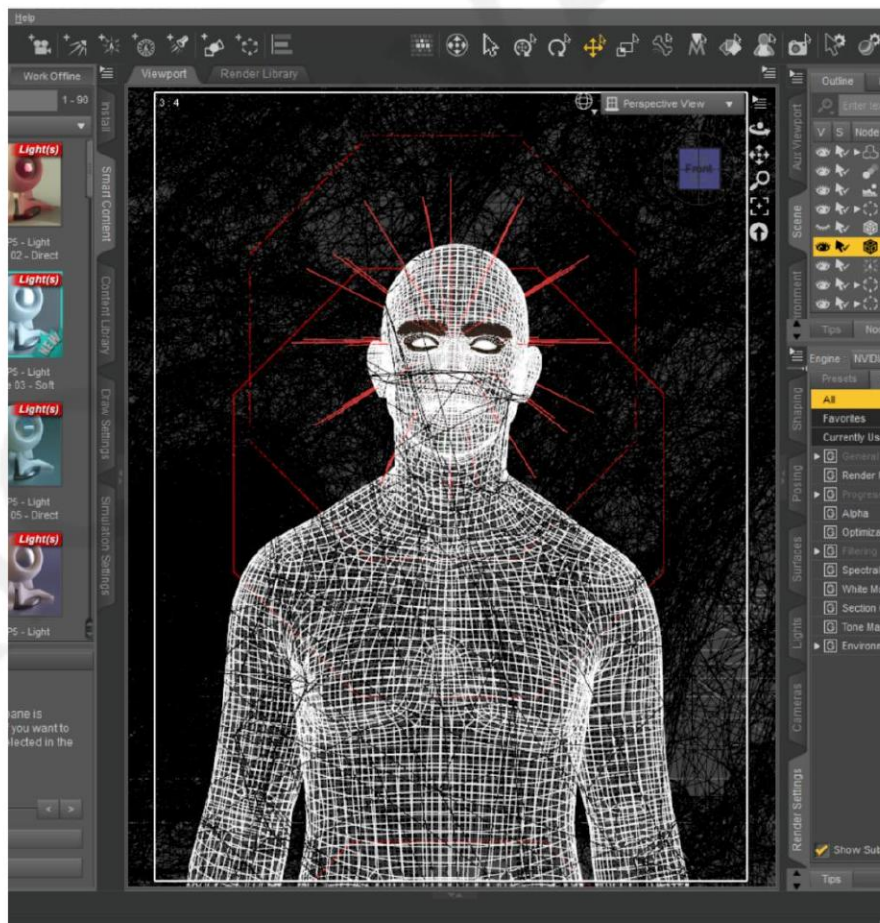
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COVER ARTS FOR MUSIC, EDITORIAL AND FILM.

REFLECTIONS IN THE DARK A Horror Noir by Jason Garman

Cover Art 3D early drafts by Mario Nevado Art
February 9th 2026

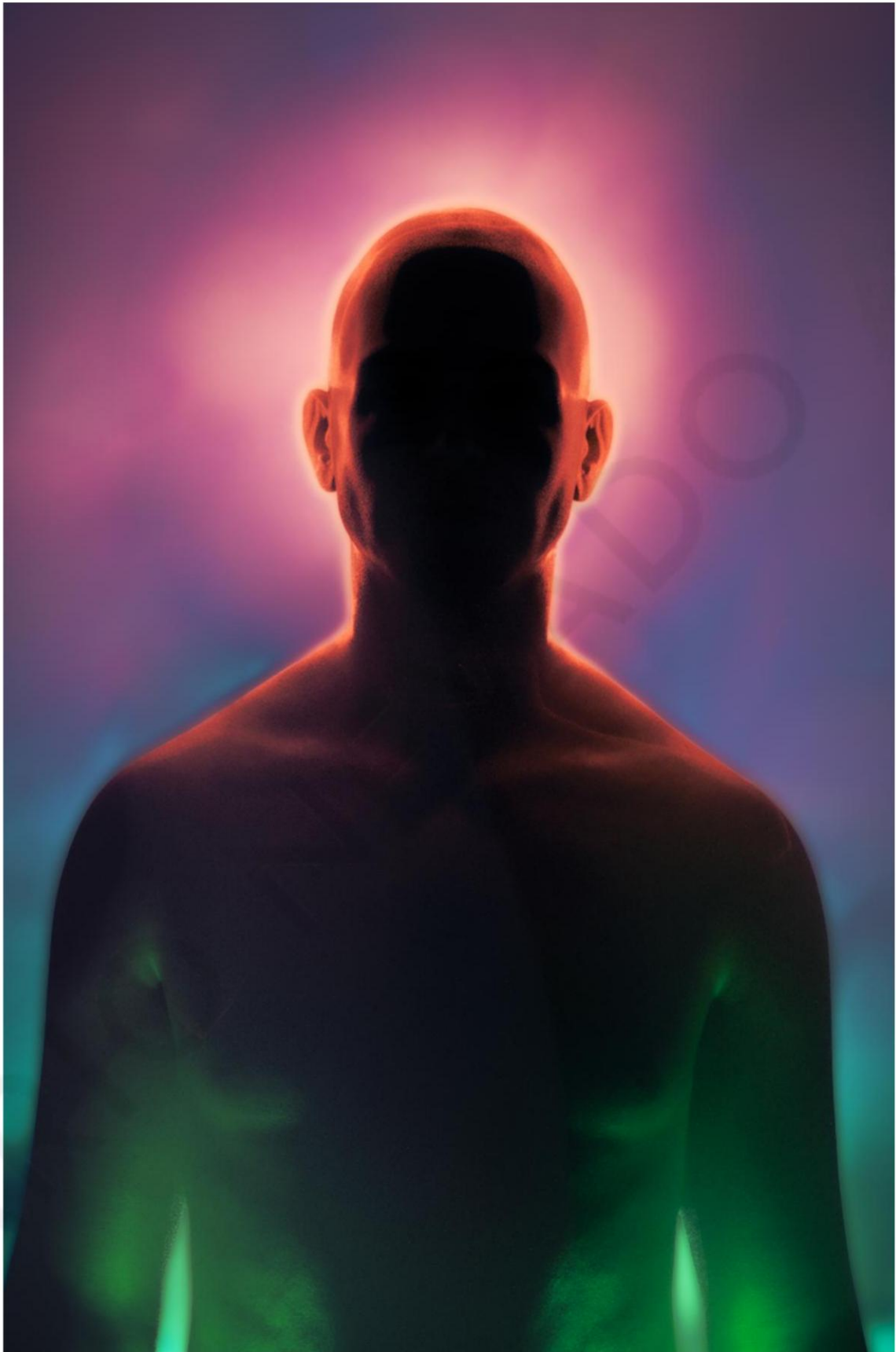
This document provides an early-stage visual preview of the 3D development phase for the cover artwork. At this stage, the focus is on establishing the main figure, lighting setup, and overall atmospheric direction. Secondary elements (broken mirror, glass shards, pattern integration, etc) will be incorporated in subsequent production stages.



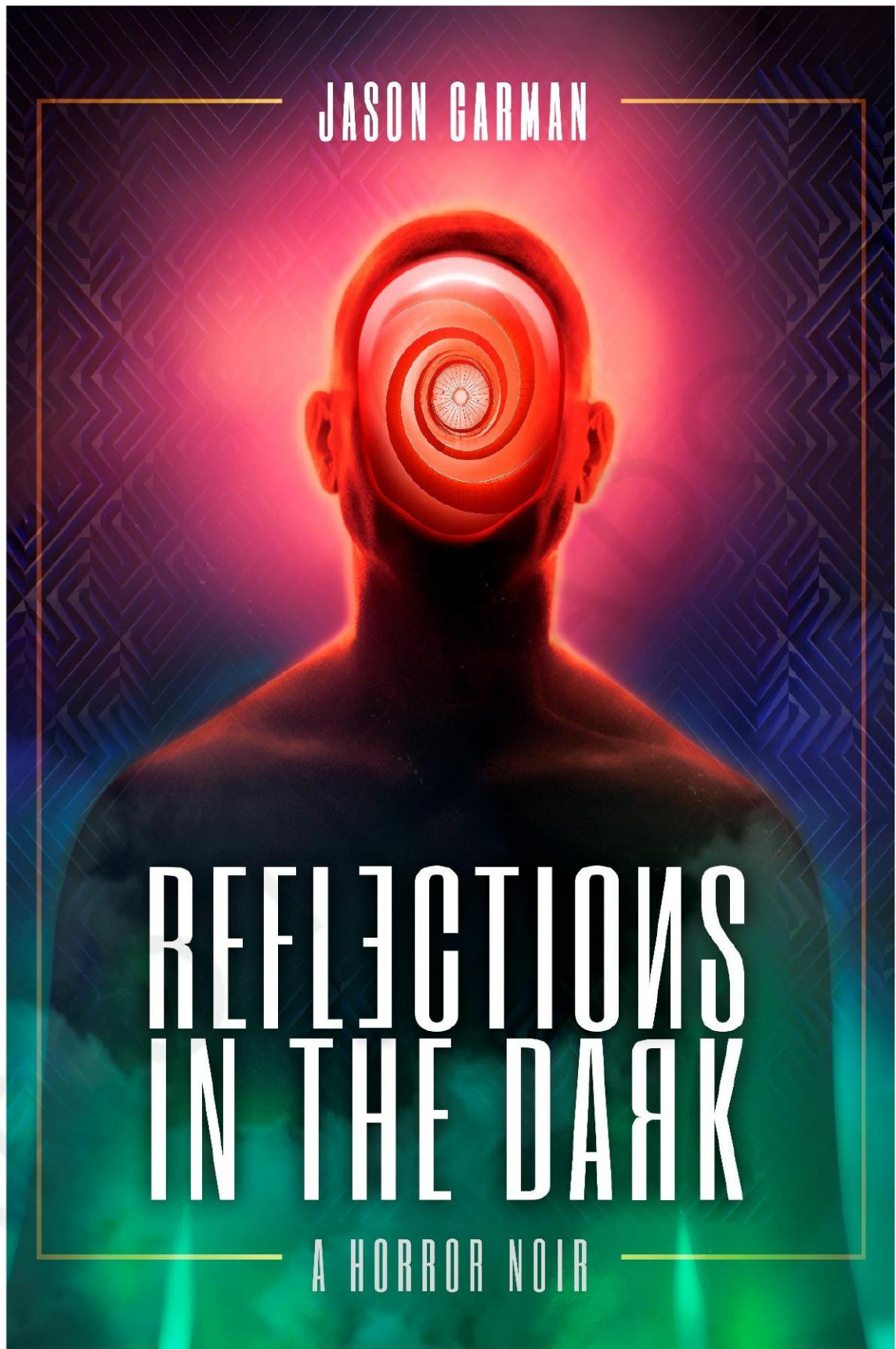
Screenshot from Daz Studio where I am creating the main scene. In the image above, you can see the meshes for the main character in white, lighting rigs in red, and volumetric fog in black.



Raw 3D render preview.



Edited 3D render in Photoshop.



Edited 3D render + layout.

The 3D foundation is now established and ready for review. The current direction, featuring a void rather than a door treatment for the figure's head, is considered the stronger compositional choice, particularly given the planned inclusion of the door symbol on the chest. Both options will be developed in parallel for comparative evaluation.

The overall atmosphere, lighting direction, and color temperature are progressing in line with the approved concept direction. Feedback at this stage is welcome before proceeding to the final Photoshop production phase.

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MARIO NEVADO ART

COVER ARTS FOR MUSIC, EDITORIAL AND FILM.

REFLECTIONS IN THE DARK A Horror Noir by Jason Garman

Final Illustration, Design and Layout by Mario Nevado Art
March 6th 2026

This document presents the complete visual project for Reflections in the Dark — final cover artwork, typography, pattern design, and full book layout. The deliverables are faithful to the approved concept direction and have been developed to function across all publication formats.

MAIN ARTWORK

The final artwork for the cover is 100% faithful to the draft, and depicts a central figure seen through a breaking looking glass. On the technical side, the main figure was created in 3D; the glass is a mixture of 2D design and hand painting; and texturing comes from photographic archive. Final touches and detailing were rendered by hand painting over the composition. The final result is bold, enigmatic and magnetic, inviting the reader directly into the Elsewhere Fold.

As the focal point of the illustration, a portal is found instead of a face in the character, showing a radial staircase that goes beyond the unknown. Given its shape and perspective, it goes both inwards but also outwards, mimicking Escher's impossible architectures. The lighting behind adds tension, drama and immediately draws the eye attention, trapping the reader into the trippy scene inside the character's head.

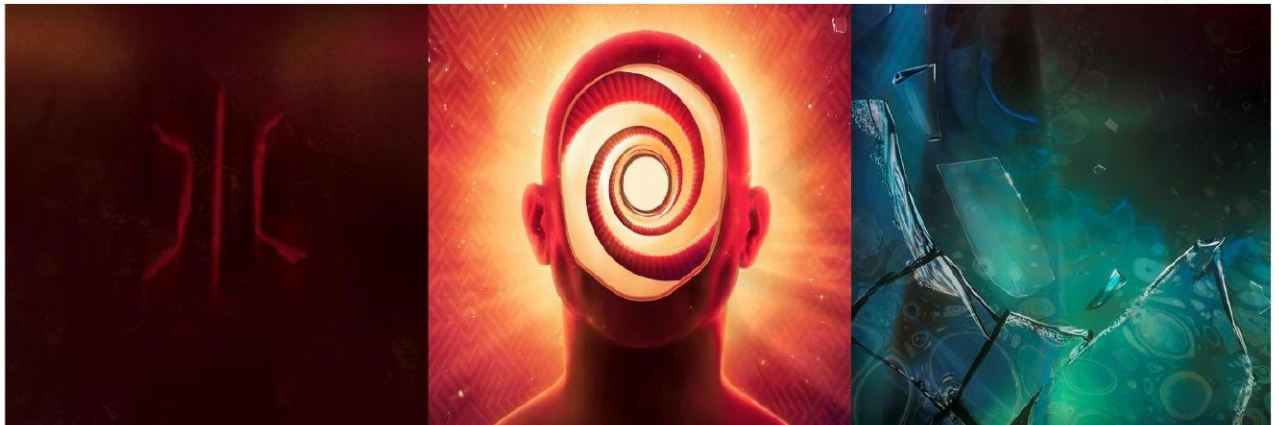
Colors have been treated as originally intended, with a strong focus in bold, dark reds to depict danger and aggression, that turn into warm violets before blending into the bottom area, filled with icy blues and greens that psychologically tie to death and mystery. Overall, the chromatic combination mixes effectively two moods, offering a complex and layered sensation streamlined by the centered and hieratic main composition.



To frame and anchor everything, the glass has been designed with special care, with hundreds of shards slowly drifting from the foreground to the background, creating a sense of depth while keeping the subtle balance of not distracting from the main focal point.

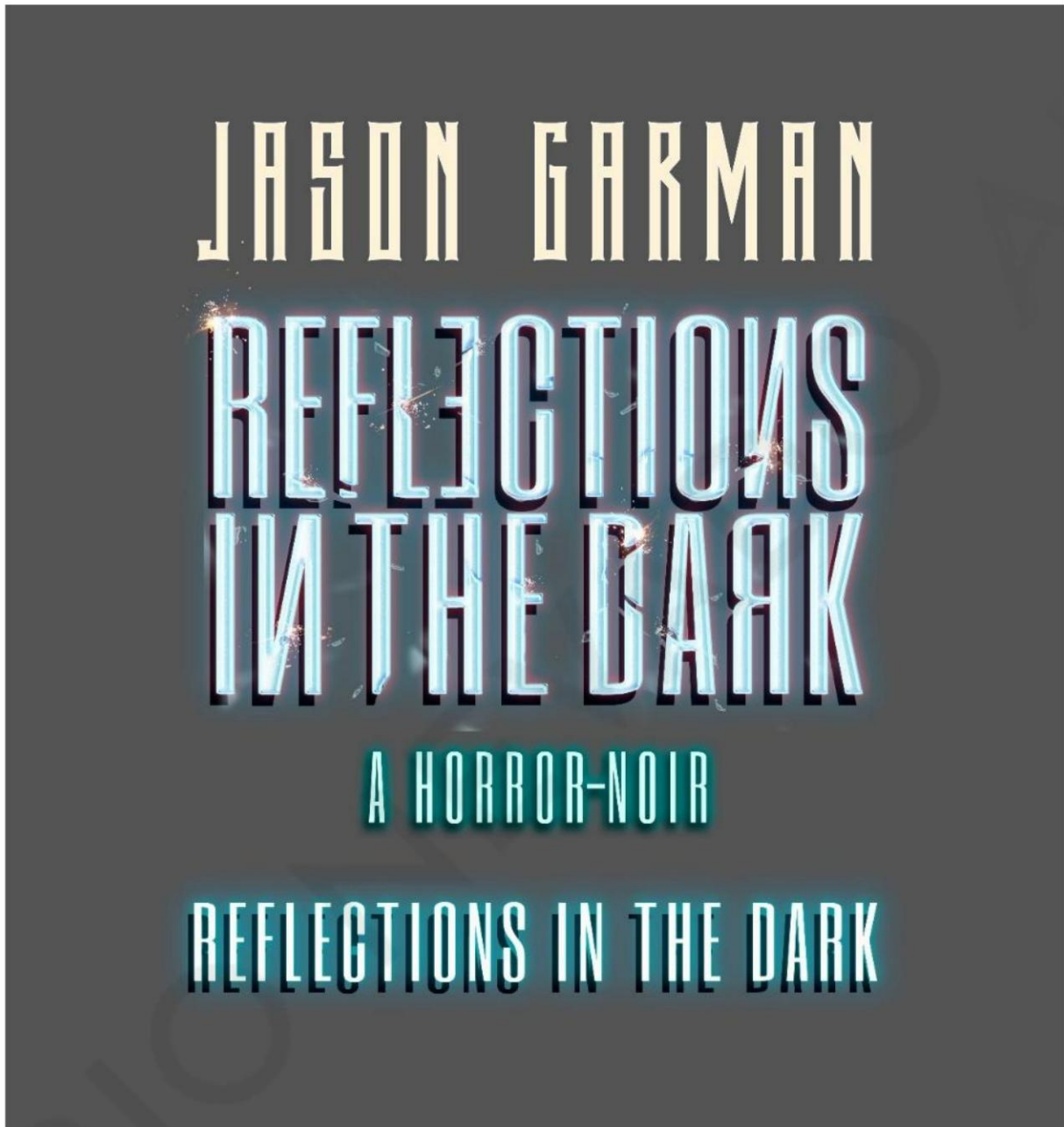
The Elsewhere Fold Pattern can be seen in perspective in the background, helping to guide the eye while adding an extra otherworldly and strange touch to the scene.

Finally, the carved door symbol has been added to the chest as if it were a fresh wound. I've taken the freedom to redesign it to make it more fitting within the illustration's core language, by making it more open and mysterious.



The end result places a question mark where the brain expects to see a face, creating an uncanny perceptive tension by placing a mystery exactly where the brain wants information. This establishes the core of the narrative without giving away any details, by making the reader ask several questions and inviting them to find the answers inside.

TYPOGRAPHY



For typography, I have used elongated sans-serif fonts such as Six Caps and Futura, reminiscing of classical noir and thriller tropes that will help tie the out-of-the-box main artwork into the genre.

For the main title, some of the letters appear mirrored as a meta-commentary as well as a nice easter egg.

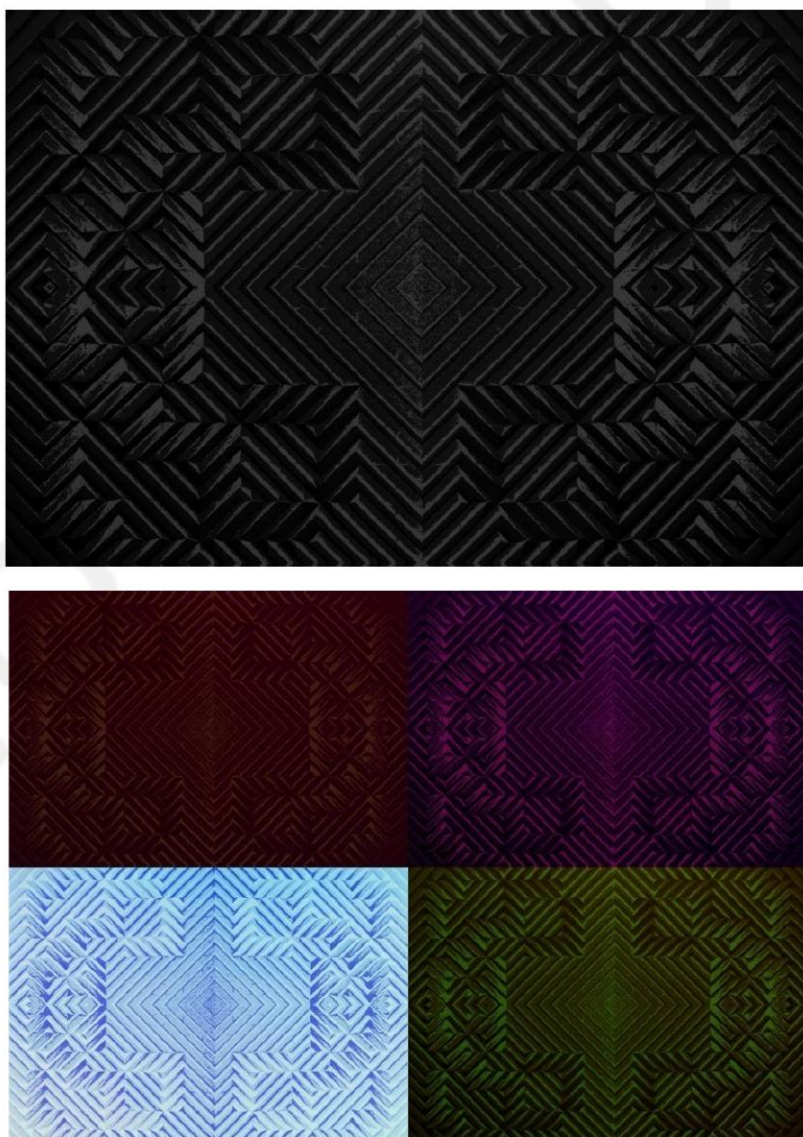
Inspired by nightlife Chicago street lights, I have treated the main title as a breaking neon sign, with subtle sparking details where the text is cracking. Similar glowing effects have also been applied to the main titles throughout the whole design to keep coherence and aesthetic consistency across the full layout.

PATTERN DESIGN

Inspired by some supernatural thrillers such as *Twin Peaks*, *Control* and *The Shining*, I have tried to capture the surreal, otherworldly essence of the Elsewhere Fold into a simple, replicable and seamless pattern that can be used across the book's full layout, but also in any promotional materials, merch (bookmarks!), websites or even future entries, shall this story become a series.

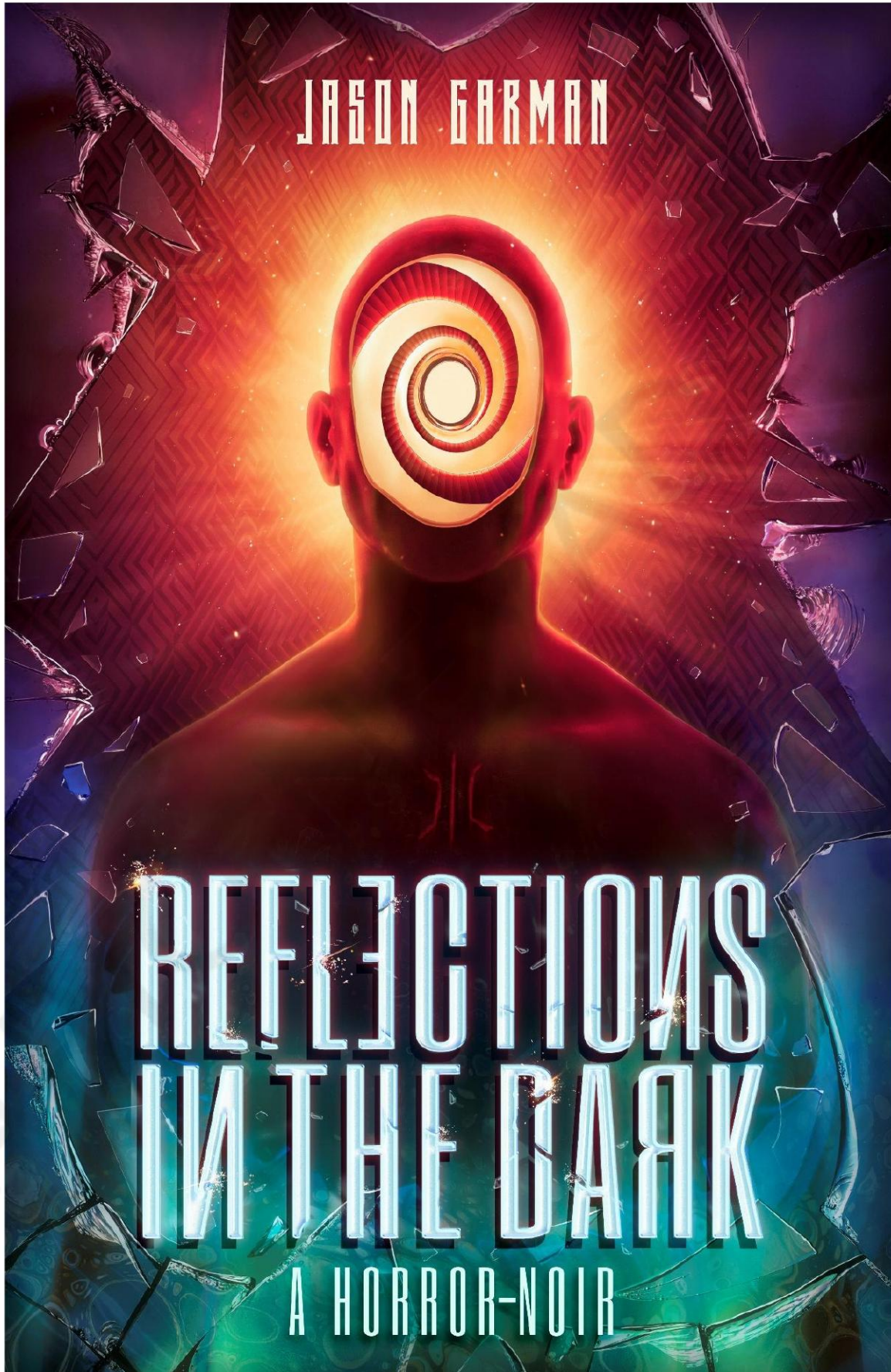
The design shows a geometrical pattern that tames a chaotic combination of parallel lines into a trippy, almost hypnotic arrangement akin to the surreal nature of the Elsewhere Fold. Also, the pattern mirrors itself as it spreads throughout, keeping the design true to the core of the story and serving as another meta reference.

The main design is easily adaptable and allows for a number of variations depending on the situation and media, making it ideal in terms of branding as a foundational design asset moving forward.

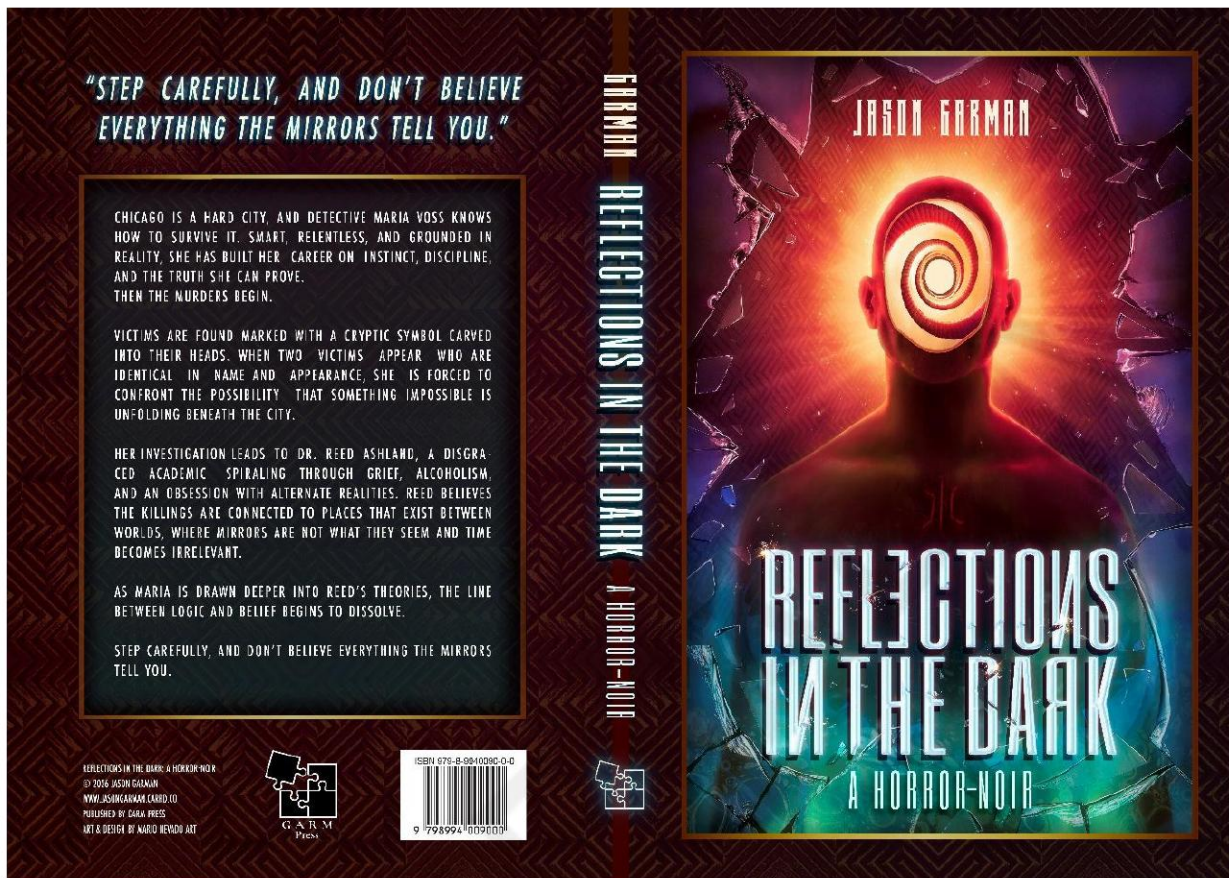


Possible variations.

COVER ART



FULL LAYOUT



The final book design mixes mystery, surrealism and noir sensitivities with a contemporary visual twist by adding a powerful, bursting color palette. I'm sure will make the book stand out in shelves, thumbnails and the genre itself.

Here, I would like to point out two liberties that I've taken:

- 1- I have designed a neon-like ideogram of the Garm Press logo to be used on the spine, more consistent with logo treatment in editorial industry standards.
- 2- I have also added a logline at the top of the back cover. Not only it serves as a hook for the reader, it also helps the whole layout composition to stay balanced. I've taken the last sentence of your blurb (I think it sums up very well the core of the novel), but by all means, send me the one you would use!

Final Thoughts on Market Positioning:

The design intentionally stands out from traditional noir covers through bold color usage while maintaining genre credibility through typography and design elements. In a market saturated with monochromatic designs, this cover will immediately catch the eye on both physical shelves and online thumbnails, appealing to readers of weird fiction and psychological noir alike.

The complete visual package is presented for final review and approval. All files will be prepared in print-ready and web-ready formats upon confirmation. Technical specifications, file formats, and any outstanding adjustments can be discussed at this stage.

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COMMISSION YOUR BOOK COVER DESIGN



I'm Mario Nevado — I read manuscripts, I study markets, I lose sleep over color palettes — and then I build covers that make your story impossible to walk past.

Every cover I design starts with the same question: what makes this story impossible to ignore? If you need that answer on your next release — *I've got you covered.*

<https://www.marionevado.art/freelance-cover-artist>

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