

Designing vulnerability, curiosity & exploration through User Research and UX Design.

Narrative exploration game

UX Researcher - UX Designer

School project - 4 months - 11-person team - Unreal - Vertical Slice



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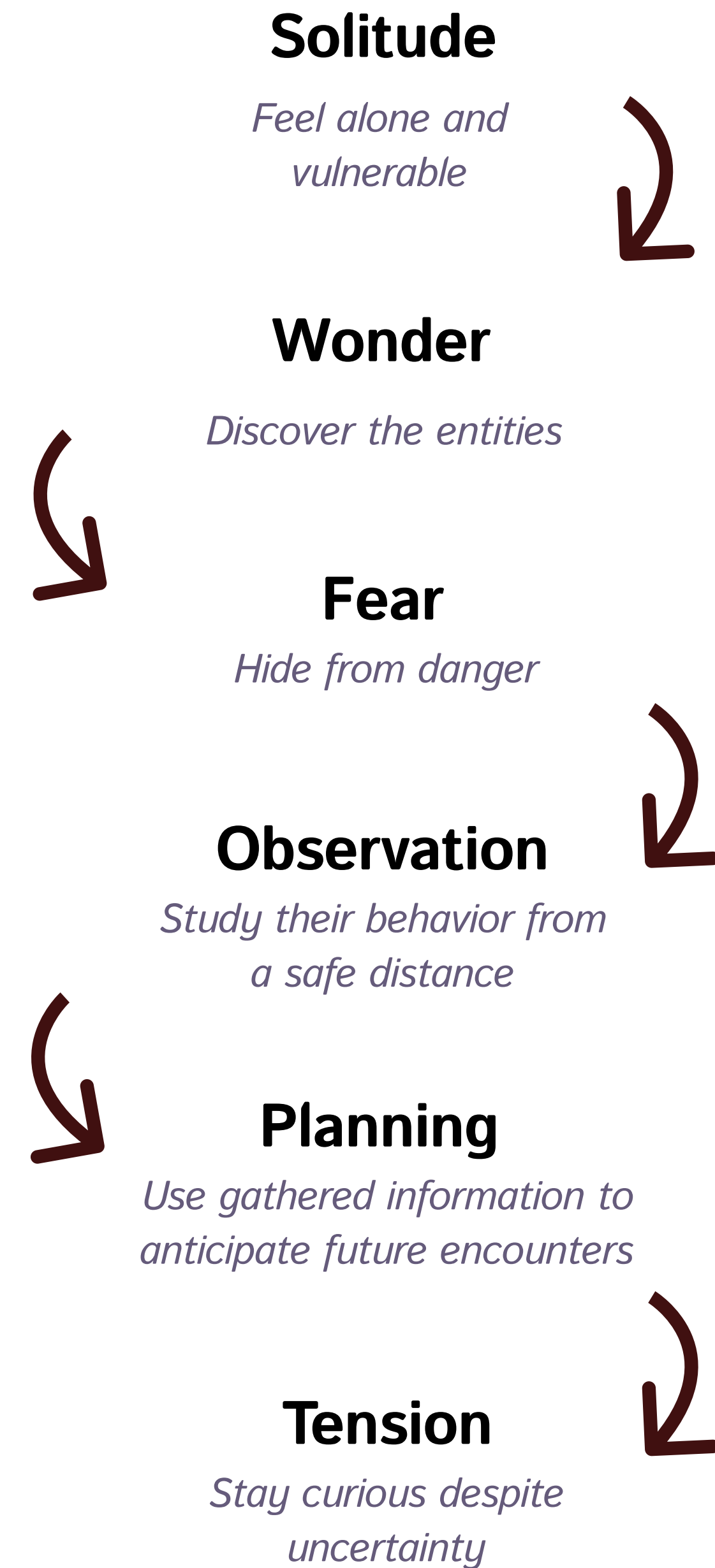


Magelis

How do you make the player feel small,
vulnerable and curious at the same time ?

Emotional goals became UX criteria that I later evaluated during playtests.

**Without weapons, the player relies on observation and
planning to understand entities that are much larger and
more powerful than them.**

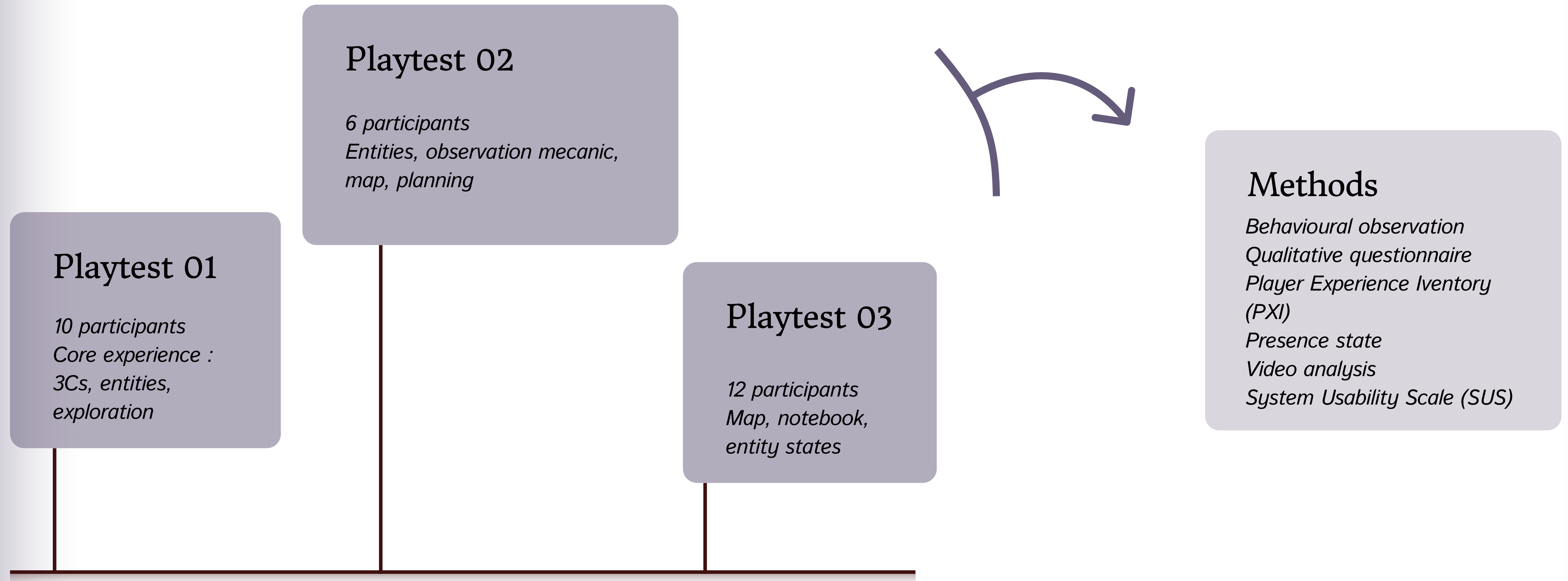


From Design intent to research questions

I translated our emotional intentions into observable player behaviors.

Experience goal	Expected behaviour	Research question
<i>Feel vulnerable</i>	<i>Hide / flee / hesitate</i>	<i>Do players understand the danger of entities ?</i>
<i>Be curious about entities</i>	<i>Look / observe / approach</i>	<i>Do they use observation to learn their behaviour ?</i>
<i>Plan their route</i>	<i>Check map / choose paths</i>	<i>Does the map support planning ?</i>
<i>Learn entity patterns</i>	<i>Re-observe / anticipate</i>	<i>Do entity patterns create enough uncertainty ?</i>

An iterative research approach



i Findings were therefore interpreted in context rather than treated as representative user research

What players revealed

Core experience

Players already behaving like observers

INSIGHT 01 :

Players frequently looked up at entities and used secondary paths to avoid them.

- *The curiosity and avoidance loop was emerging naturally.*

So --> Preserve this behaviour and strengthen the reasons to observe.

INSIGHT 02 :

Players could react to entities, but proximity did not always produce a strong enough physical reaction.

- *Fear needed to be communicated through the player's senses, not only through the entity itself*

So --> Add stronger proximity feedback (spatialised audio, visual disturbance effect)

INSIGHT 03 :

Players understood the map, but did not systematically use it or its markers.

- *The map was understandable, but the information it provided was not yet compelling enough to become part of the player's routine.*

So --> Make discovered information visible and remove unnecessary tools. -flashing map icon, cut markers from vertical slice scope)

INSIGHT 04 :

Once players understood an entity's movement pattern, encounters became easier to anticipate.

- *Planning should reduce uncertainty, not eliminate it.*

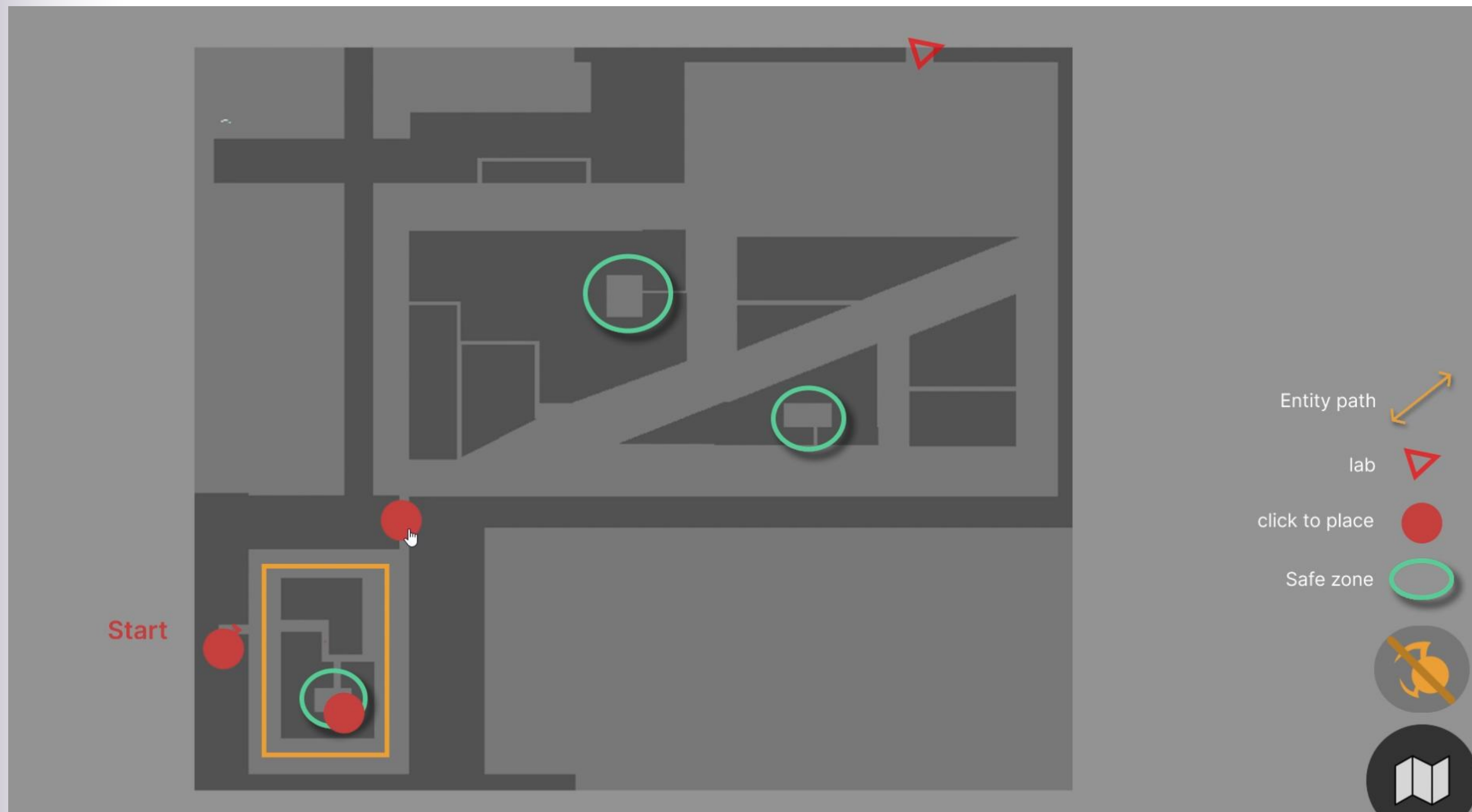
So --> Add diversity to entity routes and behaviors (less linear trajectories, routes crossing above buildings)

OUTCOME :

The core behaviour was emerging, but the experience needed stronger feedback and more meaningful planning.

Testing the map before implementation

I used Figma to simulate a system that did not yet exist in the game : **THE MAP**



During playtest, I manually updated the map according to what the player discovered during the session.

The prototype simulated :

- *Street layout*
- *Entity routes*
- *Discovered information*
- *Markers*

Markers would help players externalise information and reduce mental load.

What I wanted to test

Could players use the map to understand what they had discovered and plan their next movements ?

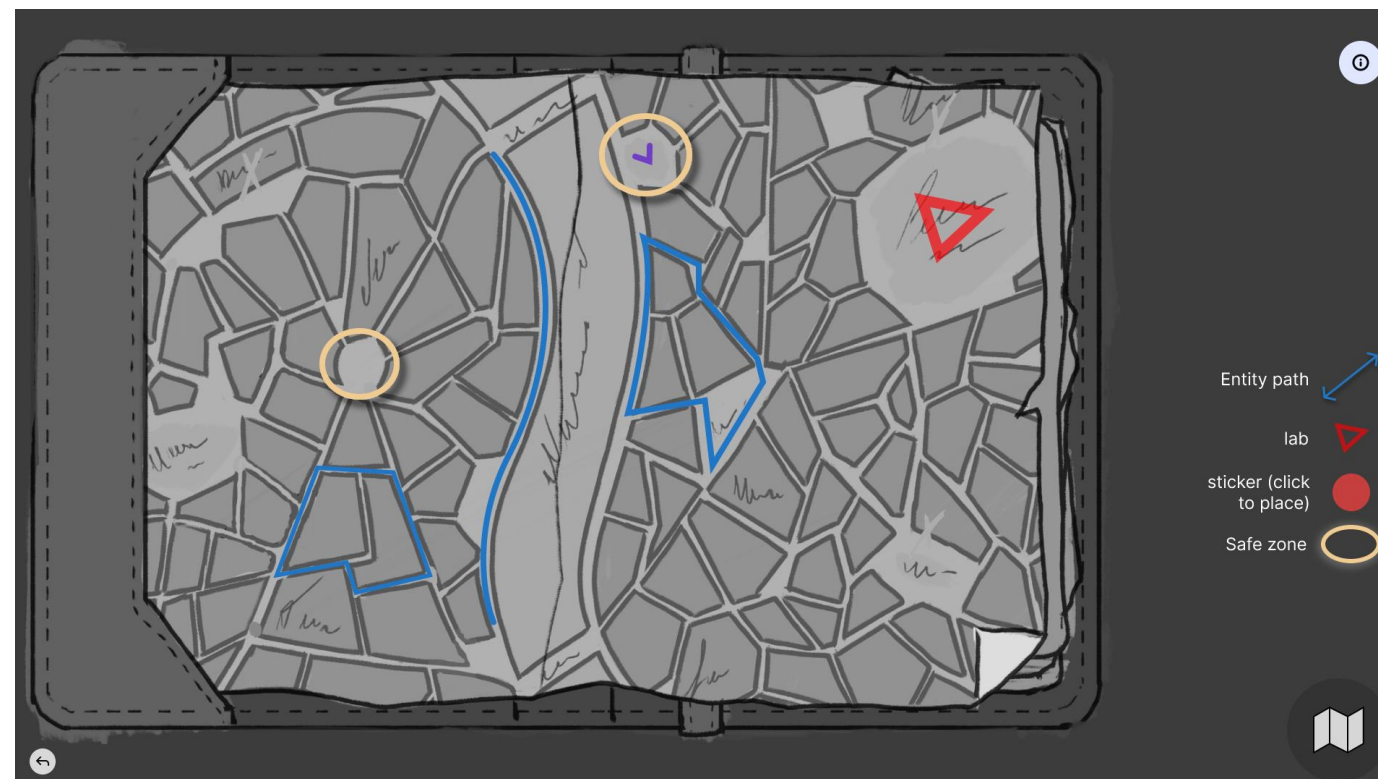
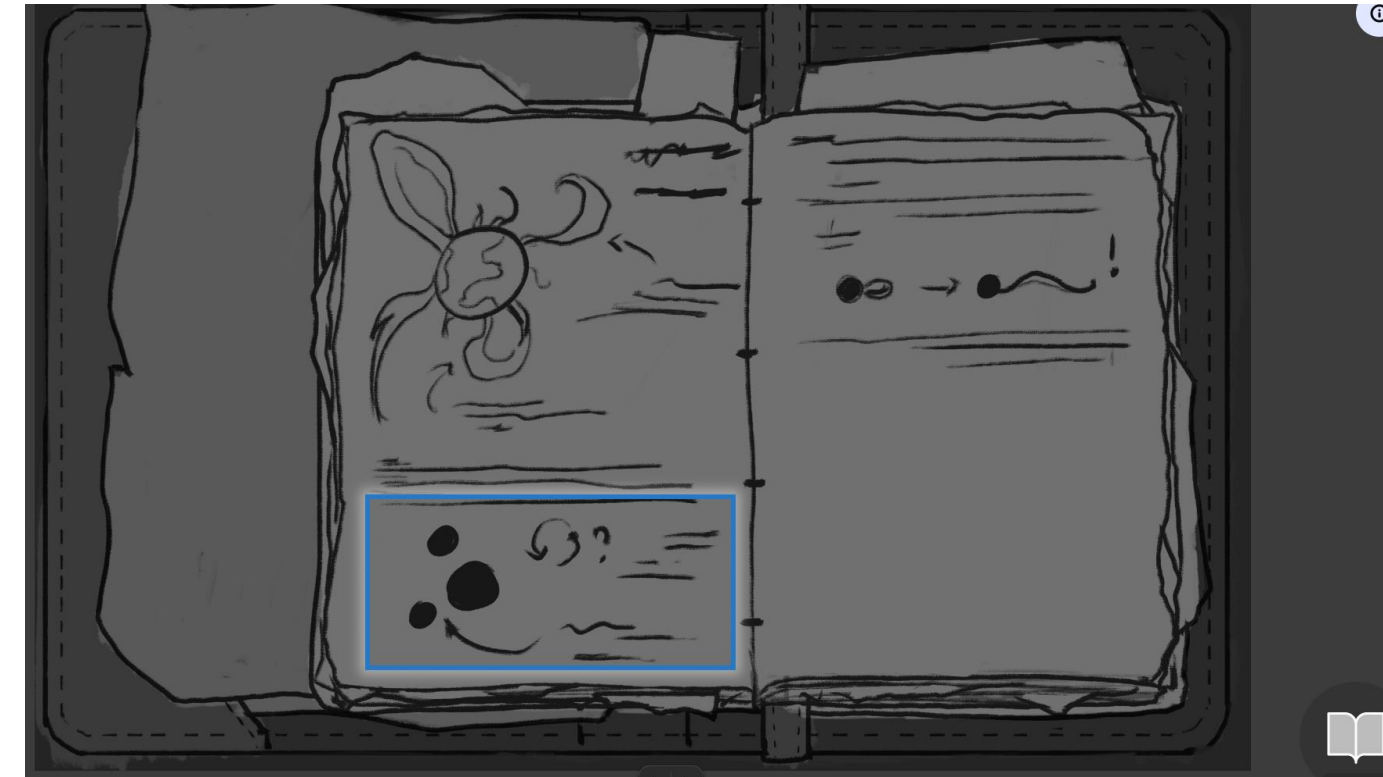
What I observed

Players understood the map, but markers were not used as Level Design was restricted.

Player discovers entity → Update figma map → Player uses new information

Turning a prototype into a research tool

I turned the prototype into a controlled interactive scenario to test comprehension.



Why change the prototype ?

The second iteration was designed for remote testing, where I needed to evaluate whether players understood the role of each information system.

- *What do you think the notebook is used for ?*
- *What happens when you discover new information ?*

OUTCOME

Users mostly understood the role of each information system.

System Usability Scale (SUS) score : 66,5 → Acceptable range

The prototype became a research instrument : it allowed me to test the UX before implementation.

Read → Click → Discover information → Update notebook → Check map

Teaching the game without breaking immersion

Players need to learn that observation is their main survival tool, without turning the experience into a conventional tutorial

Movement → Camera → Entity → Observation → Notebook → Map

Hide

Understand danger

Discover

Record information

Move

Learn basic moves

Observe

Study behaviour from safety

Plan

Use knowledge to anticipate

One mechanic at a time

Introduce mechanics progressively to avoid cognitive overload.

Learn through context

Introduce each mechanic when it becomes meaningful to the player's situation.

Preserve curiosity

Let the first encounters create questions before providing all the answers.

From insights to design changes

Playtest insight

Players tended to look left, then right when leaving an alley.

This gave us the opportunity to control where the first important information appeared.

Design decision

Place the Welder on the right side of the player's field of view.

This placement was designed to create surprise while keeping the metro (the safe zone) visible as the player's destination.

Guiding attention

Lighting

The environment directs the player's gaze toward relevant information.

Sound

Spatialised feedback communicates proximity and danger.

Visual feedback

Disturbance increases as the player gets closer to an entity.

Environmental layout

The level design controls what the player can see and when.

The goal was not to explain the mechanic but to make the player discover why they need it.

UX Design

Onboarding flow & information progression

Game/Narrative Design

Narartive and gameplay progression

Level Design

Player route & encounter placement

Art/Sound

Lighting & sensory feedback

My impact on Below Their Sight

I combined research and UX Design to iteratively refine the player experience.

Built an iterative GUR process

*Playtests - Behavioural observation -
qualitative & quantitative analysis -
actionable recommendations*

Designed and tested core player-facing systems

*Figma prototyping - map & notebook -
Onboarding - Information hierarchy*

Turned findings into concrete changes

*feedback systems - entity patterns -
onboarding - level design*

Translated research into cross-disciplinary design decisions

*Game design - Narrative Design - Level
Design - Art - Sound - Management*