

# Designing vulnerability, curiosity & exploration through GUR and UX Design

Game User Researcher - UX Design - Prototyping

A narrative exploration game where players investigate mysterious entities in a post apocalyptic city, relying on observation and planning to survive

11-person team - Unreal - Vertical Slice



le cnam  
enjmin



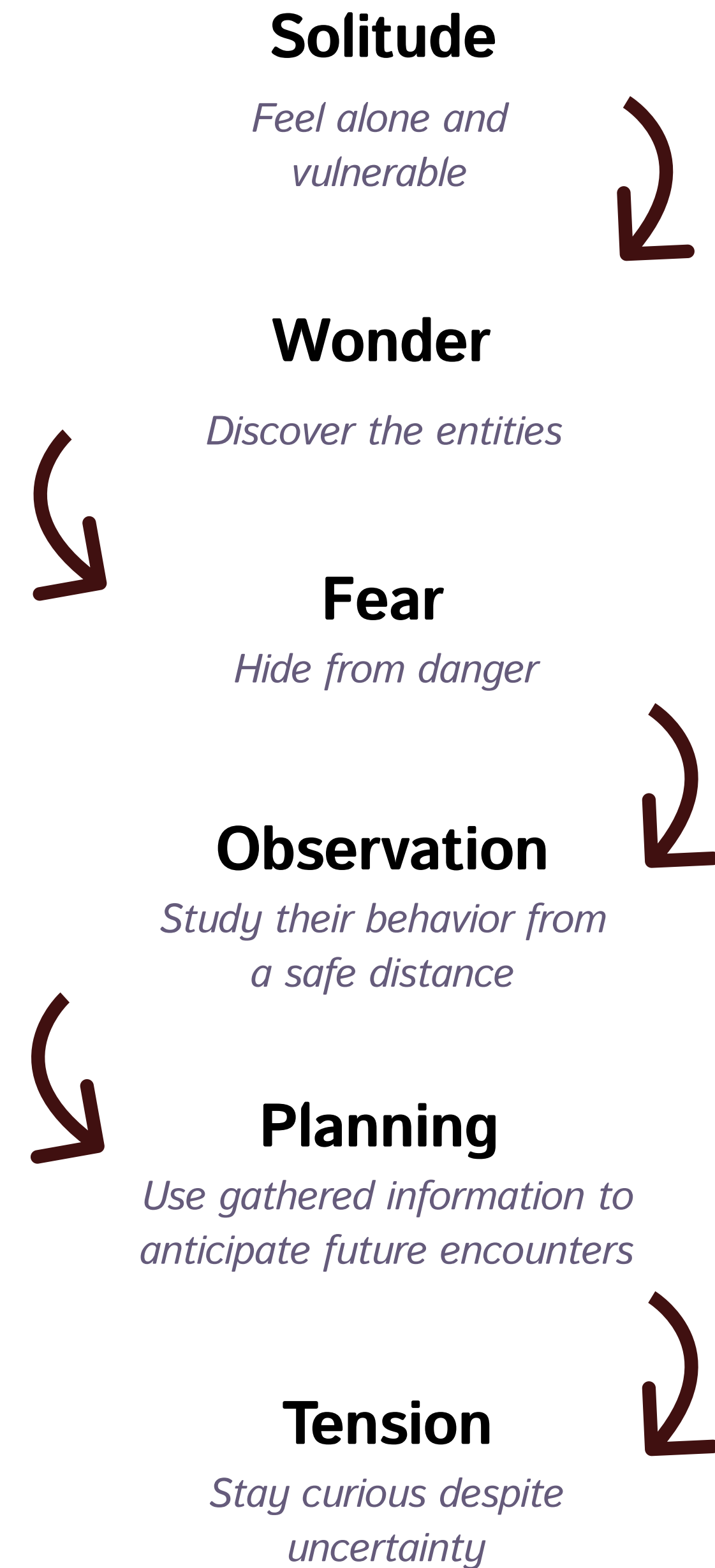
Magelis



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.**

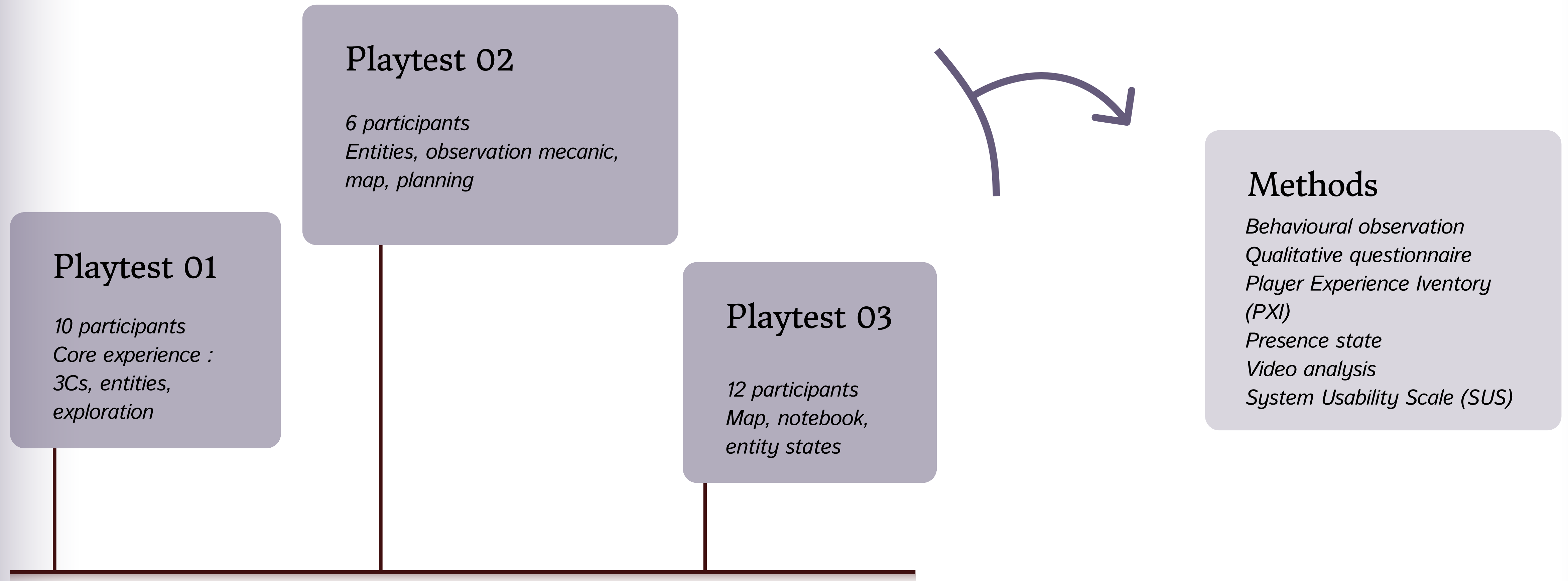


# From Design intent to research questions

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.*

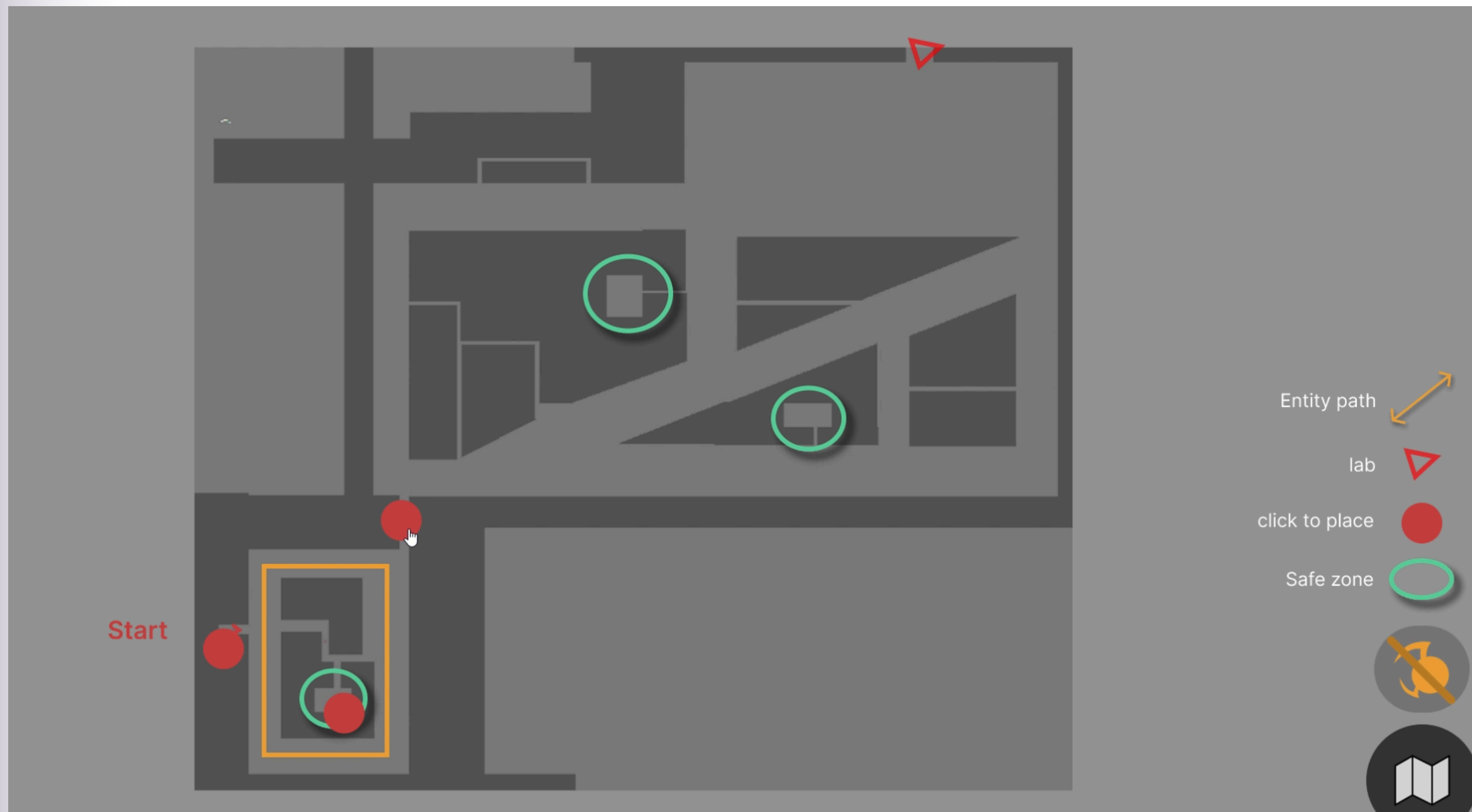
*So --> Add diversity to entity routes and behaviors (less linear trajectories, routes crossing above buildings)*

#### 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**

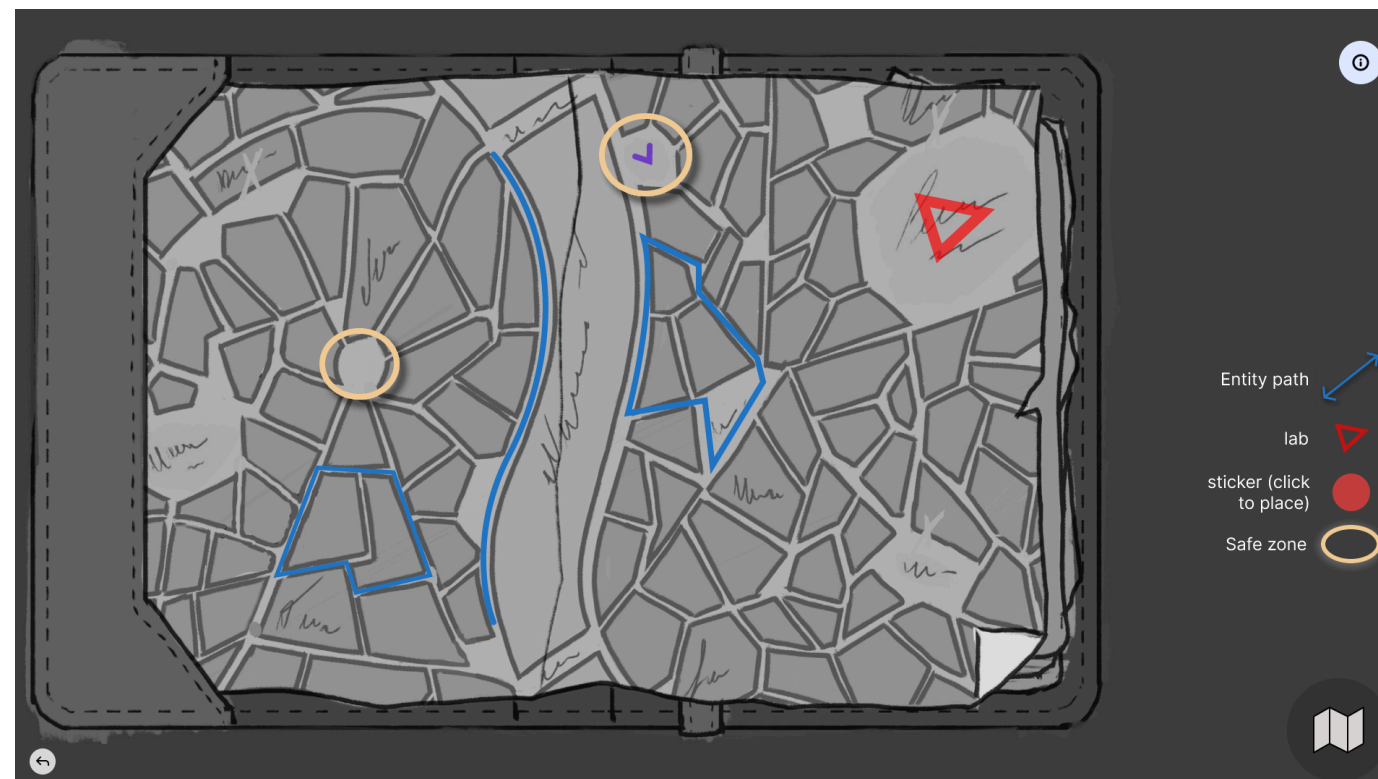
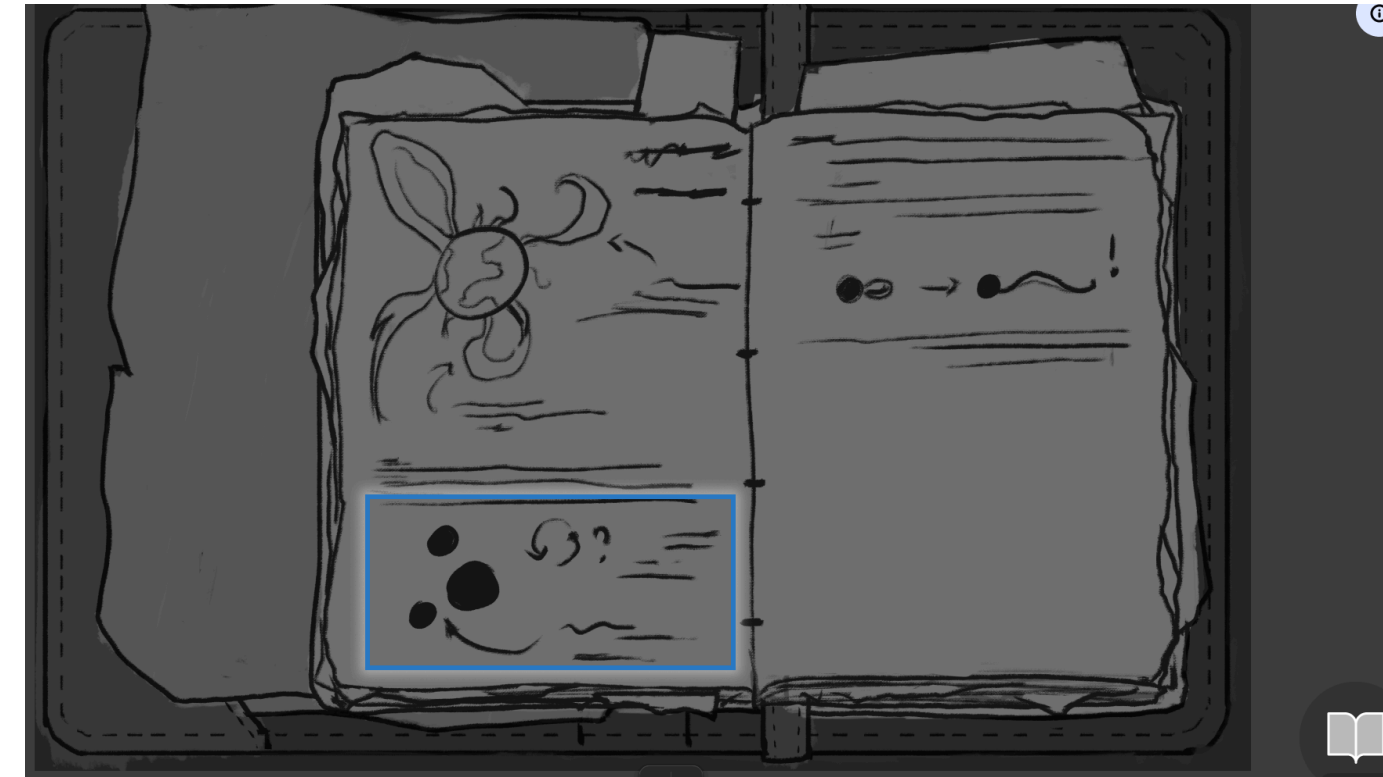
*Players understood the map, but markers were not used as Level Design was restricted.*

**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*