

Paper Prototype Testing Report

"The fear residues formed a key?? That's gross."

Objective & Methods

In an effort to explore the minds of potential players, I ran exploratory tests with the paper prototype of Soteria. My main goal was to try and extract as many useful design insights as possible. My approach was to allow players to have a reasonable amount of freedom while approaching the game. By doing this, I was able to take a look at what they expected from the environment and where they would explore. The test was run with 4 people, and took about an hour each. 2 of the participants were between the ages of 20-27 and were frequent gamers, the other 2 were in their early 50's and not well acquainted with video games. There were 2 male and 2 female participants. Participants were recruited via convenience sampling.

Procedure

I used the paper prototype and most of the paper tokens that were included with it to represent game elements (lantern, map, suit pieces, etc.). A small Lego Mr. Burns was used to represent the player's character, and a small Yoshi figurine was used to represent shadow creatures.

I began the tests by placing the character token on the harbor, and reading the participant the introduction narrative. After listening to the introduction and receiving their first Soteria token, players were free to navigate the environment however they wanted. When participants reached key points/areas, I would pause them, read the appropriate narrative elements or "screen effects" and allow them to react. As participants navigated the game space, I noted anything that stood out as interesting or insightful (emotional responses, odd navigation behaviors, expectations, etc.). I also had to control when and where shadow creatures were spawning to confront the player.

Because of the high level of participant freedom, some situations required me to add content and dialogue that isn't part of the current design plans for the game. For example, one participant wandered into a square within inner Soteria, and said they were "...going into this blacksmith shop that's right here to get some weapons". My response was:

Okay, the blacksmith tells you, "I've been in Soteria for longer than I can remember. She keeps us safe here, so there's just no need for weapons anymore. I bake cakes. Did you want a cake?"

**Note: For testing purposes I used only the basic type of shadow creature, and the old suit mechanic in which it consumed the player's inventory entirely*

***Note: Below, participant findings that I felt were most notable are in bold*

Interesting Findings & Quotes (by participant)

Participant 1

- After receiving the introduction narrative and being told by the tour guide that the surrounding areas are extremely dangerous, they went to the nearest square on the map and said that they were going to climb to the top of the building and look out for danger from up there.
- Participant asks if they can use a boat from the harbor to get anywhere
- (In response to the "get immunized" signs) "What's going on with those shots? It's kind of creeping me out; I wanna know more about that"
- Initially the participant ignored O'Malley's recommendations about abandoning Soteria and any tokens related to her. Participant seemed more distrusting of O'Malley than the town.
- (After collecting fear residue and receiving the sewer key) "What do I want to go in a sewer for?? Are there dreams down there?"
- (After the seeing the Toad and hearing of his alliance with Soteria) "I guess I'm just gonna talk to him, see why he's so mean"
- Strategies (in order) for confronting the Toad: 1) "I guess I'm just gonna talk to him, see why he's so mean", 2) "I'll hit him!", 3) "Okay, this time I'm just going to stand there"

Order of activity:

- "Climbed building to look out for danger"
- Initial shadow creature confrontation brought character into city
- Mapmaker
- Coffee/pastry shop
- Candle maker
- Found dreams
- Defeat by shadow creature
- Started checking the map frequently
- Found dream
- Tailor
- Collected the suit, lost inventory, and conversed with O'Malley

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- “Oh, I don’t have my map now. Well, whatever I don’t need it. I’m going to face them” – participant confronted shadow creature, but tried to run around behind him
- Collected fear residue, got key, confronted Toad

Participant 2

- After receiving the introduction narrative and being told by the tour guide that the surrounding areas are extremely dangerous, they started looking for a key to get into the city. They inspected buildings in the outskirts.
- Participant sparked a conversation with the person at the counter of the coffee shop and asked if they had heard any rumors lately. In response I had the coffee shop worker drop a hint about the existence of a mysterious cat wandering around town.
- “I want weapons. I want a weapon store so I can get weapons”
- “Will the shadow creatures kill me? I don’t want to lose the game right away by dying”
- (After receiving the lantern) “Then I’m going through each and every building and searching” – “You have to make beeps to tell me when I’m hot or cold, it’s kind of a big area to search”
- “What’s a dream card? An image from your dream? A snapshot of it? Why don’t you know this??”
- Participant asked lots of the characters for information and was clearly irritated with them not having information about how to deal with shadow creatures
- (First shadow creature approaches since the beginning of the game) “I’d frantically search my inventory for something I can do. I wish I had a weapon” – Participant got noticeably irritated and decided to just let the shadow creature overtake them because they were frustrated, which led to a false victory

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- (Second shadow creature came) The participant said that they didn't want to deal with the shadow creature confrontation so they ran away from it, and was overtaken – "now I'm annoyed"
- (Third shadow creature came) – "Fine let it come at me, I guess. Give me your fear residue"
- "So, should I keep collecting dreams? Does it say what the fear residues do? I want to know how many of these things I need so I'm not mindlessly searching for no reason"
- The participant is still searching for the suit pieces so I say, "at this point you know how to handle the shadow creatures, what makes you want to get these suit pieces?" The participant replied, "I like to finish my quests".
- (After getting the full suit, losing inventory, and getting forced into the city) – "Why? Why would I want that then? I'd be fucking pissed"
- (After conversation with O'Malley) – "I'll take it off, but why should I trust this cat? I'm taking it off because it has me stuck here!"
- "The fear residues formed a key?? That's gross"
- (Toad Confrontation) – "Well, okay? I don't have any weapons, there's nothing I can do. I guess I'll approach him." (The toad then reveals his alliance with Soteria and comes at the player) – "I can't do anything, I don't have a weapon. I can try to run away, unless that kills me here too"

Order of activity

- Looked for key into town
- Conversed with apothecary
- Coffee shop visit (got coffee and asked questions)
- Mapmaker visit
- Candle maker visit
- Finds dreams in sketchy rings
- Confused about what dreams/fear residue are for, and how many?
- Collects suit, loses inventory, converses with O'Malley
- Gets key from fear residue
- Confronts toad

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Participant 3

- (To clue participants and help them find dreams, I'd tell them that their lantern was shimmering and made a distinctive sound. This quote is this participant's response) – "What? It's making noise? So, it's going out then?" (The player then brought the lantern back to the candle maker, only to realize it was working fine)
- (Collects first dream card) – "So, I have to collect a bunch of these? How do I win?"
- (First encounter with shadow creature after beginning) – "I dunno, run away!" (After respawning) – "So, I need to get some powers aye?"
- After visiting the tailor, the player immediately starts to collect the suit pieces
- (After conversation with O'Malley, the player confronts a shadow creature) – "Well, I'm not running away, I guess I'll run toward him"
- (After getting fear residue) – "...and those do...what?"
- (After conversing with Toad and hearing of the alliance with Soteria) – "I don't like the sound of this, I guess I'm gonna leave"
- Participant starts to ask town people how to find dreams, and how many to get. I gave the residents this response, "dreams? When you have a city protected by the goddess of safety, what do you need dreams for? Just stay in the city with us." The participant responded with, "maybe that frog guy was telling the truth, I think there's a conspiracy here. These people are creeping me out".

Order of Activity:

- Mapmaker
- Coffee Shop (bought a coffee and danish)
- Candle maker
- Found dreams
- Tailor, collected suit, O'Malley interaction, removed suit
- Collected fear residues
- Confronted Toad, but ran away
- Returned after conversations with residents and stood ground against the Toad

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Participant 4

- (For the first shadow creature confrontation after receiving token from the tour guide) – “I’ll just run away, I wanna hang onto my power-ups”. Player was then defeated by the shadow creature, and used the token on the next confrontation. Player was not pleased about being forced to use the token to get away.
- (After getting in the town) – “How am I supposed to know how to find dreams? I guess I’ll talk to the mapmaker.”
- The participant ventures out with only the lantern, and was overtaken by shadow creatures twice. “Guess I’m dead again...I’m going into this blacksmith shop that’s right here to get some weapons”. My response to this was, “*Okay, the blacksmith tells you, “I’ve been in Soteria for longer than I can remember. She keeps us safe here, so there’s just no need for weapons anymore. I bake cakes. Did you want a cake?”*”
- Participant gets the map and checks it routinely for the location of the shadow creatures. Uses map to find tailor in the sketchy area, and immediately starts collecting suit pieces.
- This participant was the only one that seemed to understand the meaning behind what the tailor did. His response to being stuck in the city with no inventory – “So that’s how the suit is keeps me safe? Real cute. Unequip.”
- (After O’Malley told the participant that standing and facing shadow creatures was the only way to win the participant approaches one) – “Okay, I’ll kick him”, “Jump on him”, “Press the action button?” (The participant then runs away because his techniques were ineffective. He was noticeable irritated by this, and started to think the cat lied to him. The participant figured it out in their next confrontation with shadow creature)
- After collecting enough fear residues, the player immediately confronts the toad and handles it in the same fashion as the shadow creatures. When I say that’s the end of the game, the participant proposed that it shouldn’t end there because he needed to help the citizens of Soteria. The participant recommended that there should be some type of puzzle with the 4 giant torches that were in the city. After solving the puzzle, the Soteria statue would

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be destroyed and the light from the torches would extend out into the sketchy areas and restore those areas entirely.

- (After playing, the participant questioned how the game will be fun after players understand how to confront shadow creatures) – “The idea of the game is really cool, but what happens once somebody figures out that you only have to stand there. I don’t think it’s going to be fun for people to do that.

Order of Activity

- Initially runs away from shadow creature despite having token
- Visits map maker
- Gets overtaken by multiple shadow creatures and I inform player that there isn’t enough light them to find dreams effectively
- Visits candle maker
- Finds dreams
- Pays dream for Map
- Visits tailor, collects suit, O’Malley conversation, removes suit
- Confronts shadow creature and ran, then confronted and stayed
- Finds dreams until fear residue was collected, and then confronted Toad

My Takeaways

- None of the participants visited the Soteria Memorabilia store, this could be because the name sounded trivial compared to places with obvious value like “mapmaker”
- It seemed like all of the participants really wanted there to be more obvious goals and win conditions. They wanted to know how many dreams they needed and what they would do. The same goes for fear residues. They wanted information and feedback.
- All of the players gravitated towards collecting the suit pieces right away. I think this happens because it was the one thing they were presented with that had obvious goals and positions on the map. They knew that this tailor wants to help them and these specific objects were needed, whereas with the dreams, they were just kind of collecting them because I said that’s what they’re in Soteria to do.

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