CS4056 Project Proposal - LitNest

Simon Colreavy-Donnelly, CSIS, IDC, University of Limerick

1 Group Members

Annika Jungfleisch (22359923)
Aaliyah Josephs (22359885)
Mariia Maryntseva (22373535)
Leah Guilfoyle (22341056)
Yelyzaveta Dolha (22311491)

2 Introduction

There are two main mobile applications available for avid readers: Goodreads and StoryGraph. They are social cataloguing applications that allow users to search a database of books, authors, and reviews, create reading lists, book clubs, and, in the case of StoryGraph, Buddy Reads. Goodreads has been getting more and more backlash in recent years as it is owned by Amazon. This has advantages, as you can connect your Kindle to your account and access your notes and highlights through the app. However, some people have tried to cut ties with Amazon since the shift to more sustainable practices. This is where StoryGraph came into the picture. Founded by Nadia Odunayo, it gives readers an alternative to Goodreads.

I decided to pitch a new Book Tracking/ Book Buddy app to my group, as StoryGraph is not a viable alternative for me. After a year of using Goodreads and StoryGraph side by side, I decided to stop using StoryGraph. The UI is plain and counterintuitive. After a year, I still struggled to navigate the app. The only colours used are blue, black, and white, which dulled the app's interaction.

As I spend a lot of my free time designing my own physical reading journal and reading between 60 to 100 books each year, I wish for an app that allows me to track my books digitally and interact with other avid readers without supporting companies like Amazon.

As a group, we decided to go with my idea. Our main users will be readers. After brainstorming some features, scrolling through Goodreads and StoryGraph, and noting what we liked and disliked, we agreed on six main functions.

1. A Home Screen where users can see app activities from other users.
2. A Notification Centre that displays app notifications and direct messages between users.
3. A Search Page that recommends books and other users to follow.
4. Book Logging that allows users to mark a book as 'want to read', 'reading' or 'read' and rate it.
5. Buddy Reads, which allows users to add comments to pages they are reading. These comments are unlocked when other users in the Buddy Read pass the page. This will avoid spoilers and take the users' reading speed into account.
6. Book exchange option with people in your area.

3   Usability and Background Research

User Stories:

1. As a new reader, I want to be able to share my reading journey so that I can inspire others.
2. As a book enthusiast, I want to explore personalised book recommendations so that I can discover new books that align with my interests and preferences.
3. As a social reader, I want to participate in Buddy Reads and add comments to pages I'm reading so that I can engage in meaningful discussions with other readers and share insights about the book.
4. As a fast reader, I want to be able to exchange books so that I can save money and try out a wide range of genres.

Typical users include different types of readers.

Building on the user stories, a new reader would mainly use the community feed on the home page and log a book function. A book enthusiast would spend most of their time on the search page. A social reader would use the community feed and the Buddy Read function. Lastly, a fast reader would use the book exchange function within the community feed.

Usability Analysis for Goodreads and StoryGraph:

Goodreads:

Three parts of the app received criticism:
1. Searching for a user
2. Messaging other user
3. Design of reading goal pop-up

1. Searching for a user
P1 struggled to find the search option for users. He clicked on the search bar first, and after seeing no user option, he went to the extended navigation bar at the bottom. The participant asked for help after not finding the feature. This indicates a lack of intuitiveness in the search functionality. Enhancements in the search functionality are necessary to improve the user experience and streamline interactions within the app.

2. Messaging other user
The app provided a shortcut to message users, but P1 wasn't aware of this shortcut. This indicates potential issues with key features' discoverability limiting users' ability to message each other through the app. Changing the icon used for the shortcut might improve discoverability.

3. Design of reading goal pop-up
The app allows users to change their reading goals. When changing them, an iOS-specific overlay pops up, which P1 found off-putting. Consistent design elements across different platforms and the app could create a more cohesive and polished user interface.

In summary, while Goodreads demonstrates several strengths in usability and user engagement, the participant's feedback highlights notable areas for improvement. Addressing these issues can lead to a more intuitive and cohesive user experience.

22359923 Annika Jungfleisch

<u>StoryGraph:</u>

The following parts of the app received criticism:

1. Recommendation page categories/ Advanced search settings
2. Starting a new Buddy Read
3. Adding users to a Buddy Read
4. Static appearance of app frames
5. Colour Scheme
6. App responsiveness

1. Recommendation page categories/ Advanced search settings
The app offers only a limited number of categories on its user recommendation page. Advanced search settings are available, but basic filters like a book's release year are unavailable. This indicates gaps in content categorisation and search functionalities. Increasing the number of categories or restructuring the advanced search setting could improve functionalities.

2. Starting a new Buddy Read
The app doesn't clearly indicate where to start a new buddy read. First, the user must search for the book they want to start a Buddy Read with. The button to start a Buddy Read is hidden behind the 'more' button on the book overview page. Even in the 'more' menu, it is barely visible due to the font and font size used. This negatively affects the user experience and might stop users from using the feature. Improving the discoverability and visibility of the feature is necessary to increase user interaction.

3. Adding users to a Buddy Read
Adding a user to a Buddy Read is challenging as the user needs to know the username. No profile picture or biography are shown to the user to indicate they selected the right profile. This hinders the user experience, suggesting a need for better user identification methods.

4. Static appearance of app frames
Most app frames appear static and non-interactive, which may reduce user engagement and satisfaction. Additionally, the user is quickly lost as each app frame looks the same. Diversifying app frames and highlighting interactive elements may improve user engagement.

5. Colour Scheme
The app uses a three-colour scheme: black, white, and blue. The participants' feedback on the colour scheme and minimalist design suggests that aesthetic preferences might not align with user expectations, potentially impacting the overall user experience. Introducing more or distinct colours that diversify the app's appearance is necessary to improve the user experience.

6. App responsiveness
The participant had to wait for screens to load multiple times. This may lead to user frustration and decreased engagement over time.

In summary, while StoryGraph demonstrates some usability strengths, user feedback again highlights notable areas for improvement. Addressing these issues can lead to a more user-friendly and appealing application.

The analysis of Goodreads and StoryGraph reveals significant usability challenges, ranging from difficulties searching for users to issues with starting and managing Buddy Reads. These findings underscore the importance of adhering to key usability principles such as intuitiveness, discoverability, and responsiveness in app design. By addressing these shortcomings, a new Book Tracking/Book Buddy app, as described in the introduction, emerges as highly marketable. By being aware of these usability challenges, we can ensure our app offers intuitive navigation, seamless interaction, and a visually appealing interface.

4   Technology

Tool	Purpose
Brainstorming	Brainstorming was used to identify gaps in the current app market. We aimed to develop one app idea we will explore for our High-fidelity App Prototype Design.
Wireframing on paper	Wireframing was used to organise ideas for the app's features. The goal was to clarify the project and get the group members on the same page.
Figma	Figma is a collaborative web application for interface design. Additionally, Figma's extensive library of design assets and plugins allow the well-planned creation of prototypes with interactive elements. The goal was to equally split the frames that needed to be completed and work on them collaboratively to ensure a coherent and consistent design and functional connections for prototyping.

5   Design and Development Process

Firstly, we met as a group to brainstorm app ideas. Everyone was to come up with at least one idea. We presented our ideas during the meeting and decided on the Buddy Read app I presented. We called our app LitNest, a combination of Literary and Nest. We chose this as our app allows readers to nest and collate their books. Additionally, we started wireframing the frames and discussed features the app should have during this meeting.
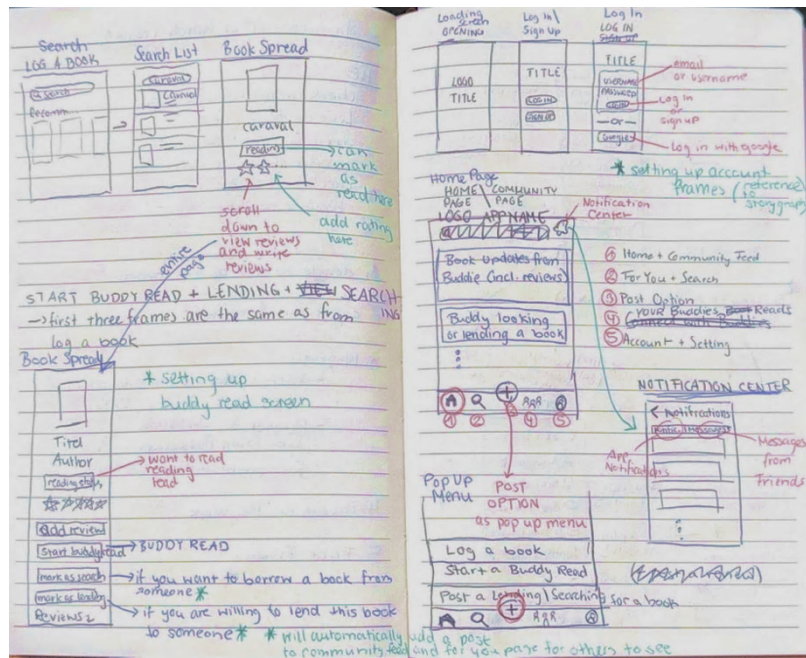
Wireframing Page 1
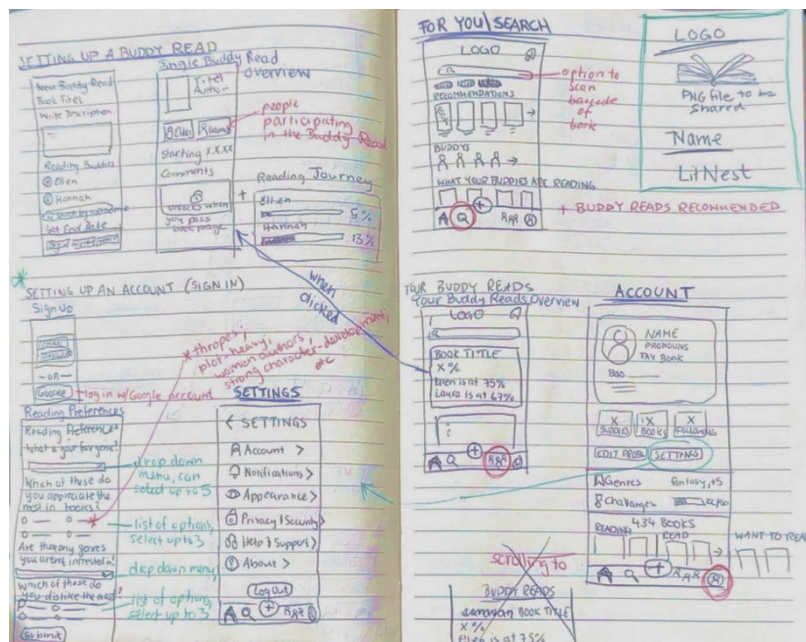
Wireframing Page 2

We met a second time to finish the wireframing and decide on the app's logo and colour scheme. For the colour scheme, we took inspiration from the second half of our app name, Nest.


Colour Scheme Inspiration

LitNest Logo (designed by me using Procreate)

Afterwards, we created our Figma file. First, I made the components for everyone to use. The components included the rating system, drop-down menu, book listing, navigation bar, and header. Furthermore, I made a reference area that included the colour scheme, logo, account names, profile pictures, and book covers. Having this system in place ensured that the app design was consistent. After creating the components and making an example frame for everyone to copy, the group started working on their frame designs, orienting themselves on the reference area and components.

*Figma Components*   *References within Figma File*
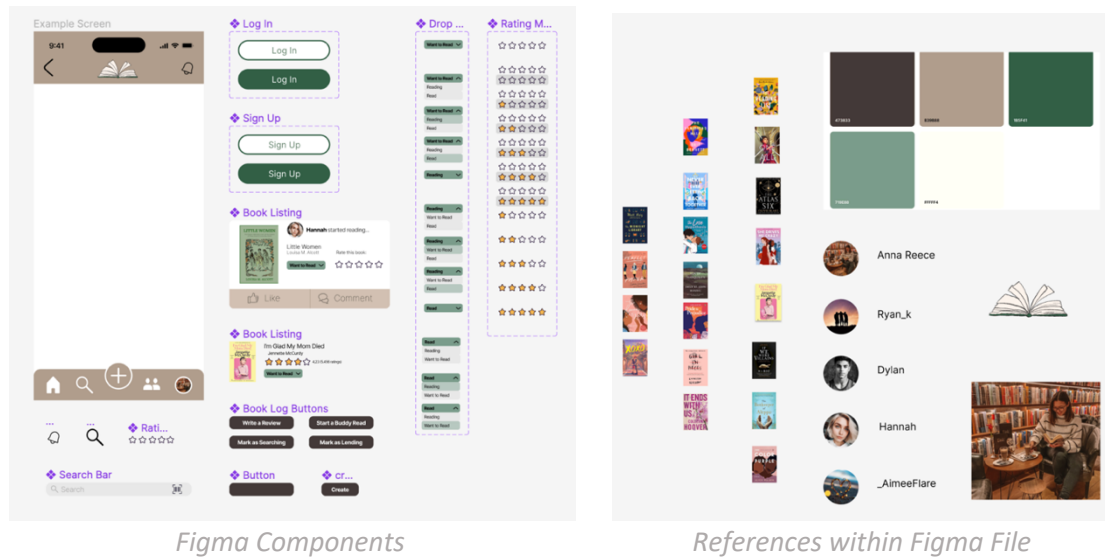
We set up another meeting to discuss open questions, consistency errors and prototyping connections. During this meeting, we finished our Figma prototype.

Besides the pop-up menu overlay, I designed eight frames in the final Figma file. All are linked to the pop-up menu, with one connected to the Buddy Read frames from Yelyzaveta. The transition to Yelyzaveta's Buddy Reads frame was created by setting up the prototype interaction as 'after delay'. This ensures the user gets feedback when clicking the button but does not need to click it again to open the next frame.
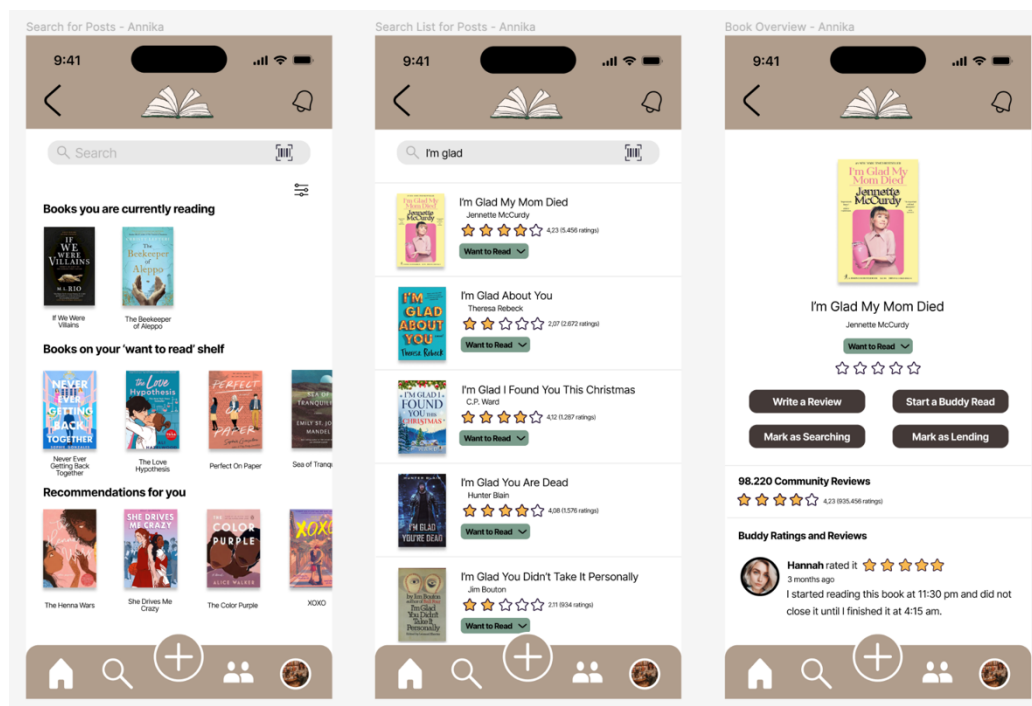

Frames 1 to 3

I started my frame design by copying the example screen. Then, I added the components I needed, e.g., the search bar. Furthermore, I added the book covers from a file on my computer that I used for my physical book journal mentioned in the introduction.
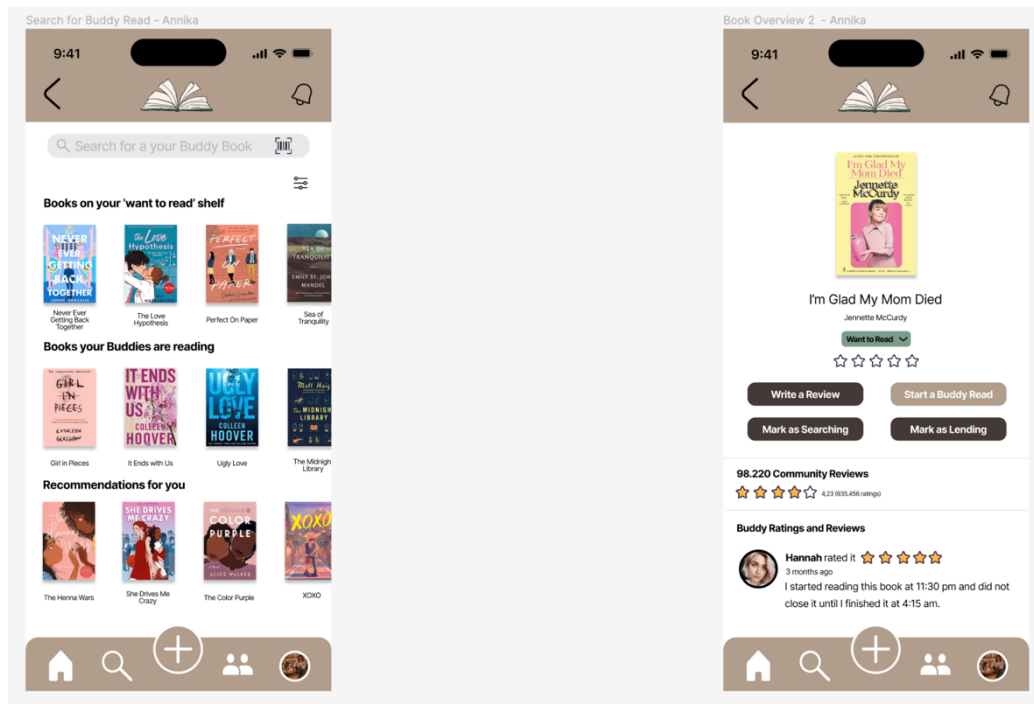
Frames 4 and 5

I added vertical and horizontal scrolling by grouping the items I wanted to include in the scrolling behaviour. Then, a frame selection was made for the grouped items, the frame was resized, and clip content was turned on. Lastly, a vertical or horizontal overflow behaviour was added. I also added the scrolling behaviour on Mariia's search page frame. For the search list frame, I included the drop-down menus I previously created.
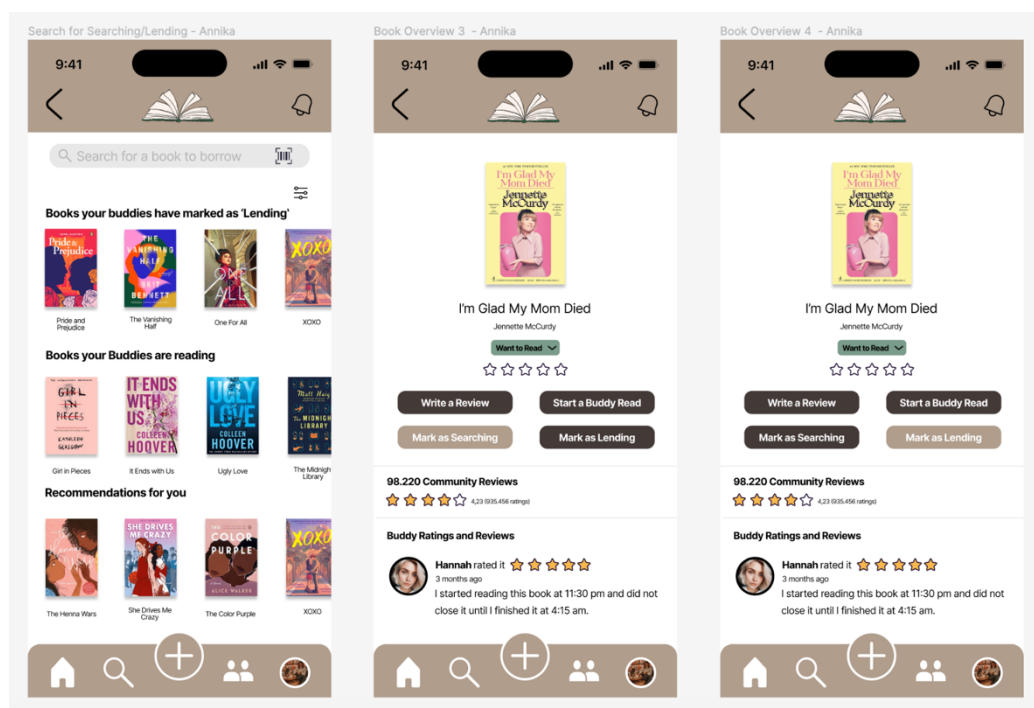

Frames 6 and 8

The drop-down menu was created by designing the menu options, making this a component and adding a variant property to this component. Then, I added as many variants as needed for the specific drop-down menu.

The overlay menu was created by making a new frame the size of the menu, designing it, and connecting it to the navigation bar component in the prototype tab. There, the interaction was set to open the overlay instantly. The overlay settings were set to bottom centre, closed when clicking outside, and a black background with 25% opacity was added.

I created and developed most of the prototyping connections and re-examined that everything aligned and the connections worked.
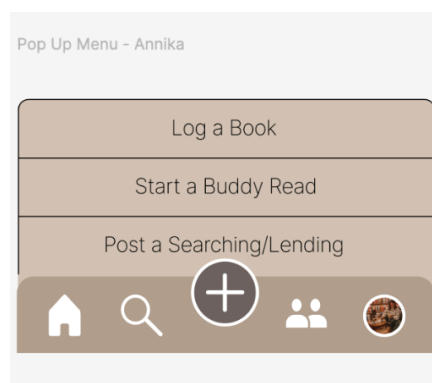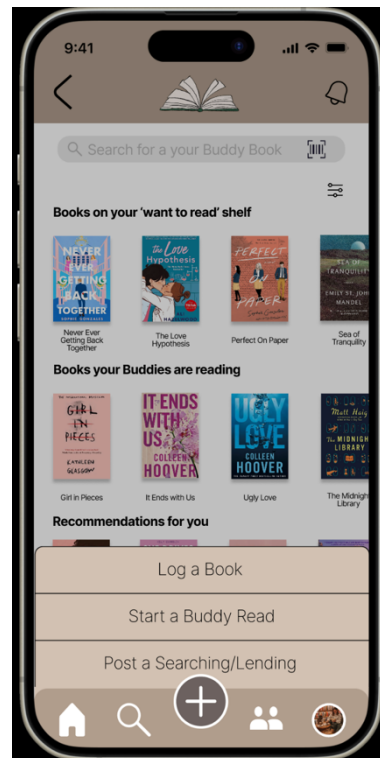
Pop-Up Menu　　　　　*Pop-Up Menu as Overlay*

Linked below is the Figma file. It is set to give editing access to anyone with access to the link.

Figma File

I recorded a walkthrough of LitNest. A few aspects should be noted to expand on the video. When the user sets up a new Buddy Read, the 'create' button is greyed out and not interactive until the user has filled out all the information needed.

Furthermore, all the return buttons are prototyped. The walkthrough showcases this at the end, but it is difficult to follow as the viewer cannot see the finger clicking through the app.

Linked below is my walkthrough recording of LitNest.

Walkthrough Figma Recording
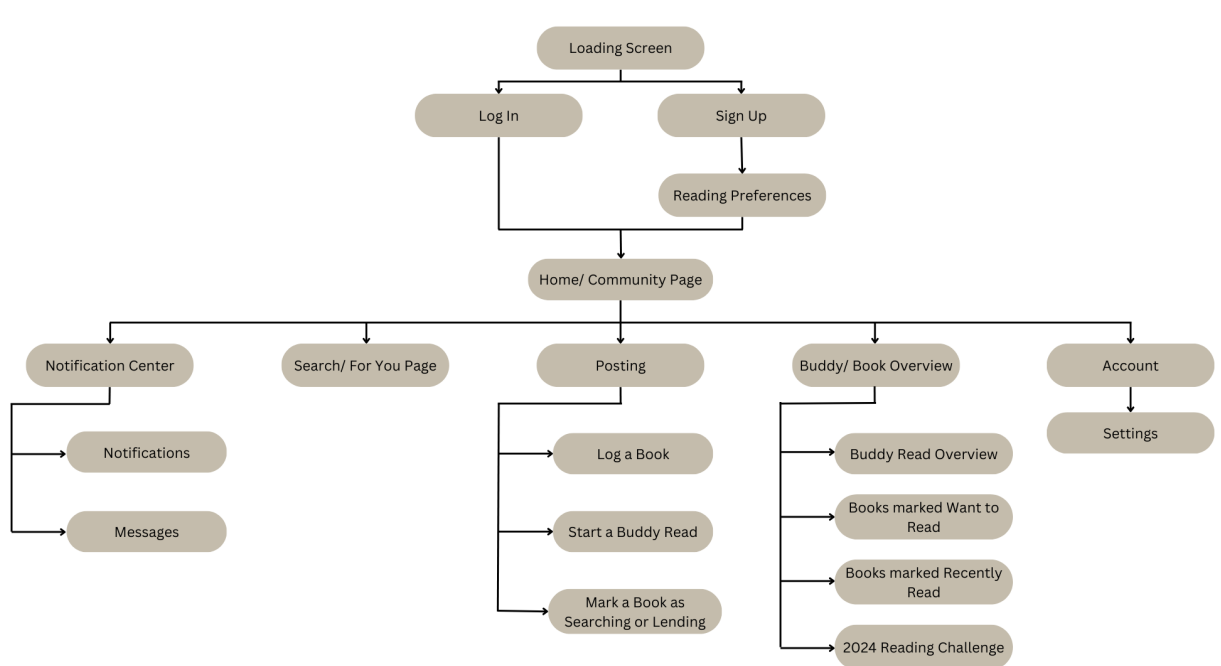
Simplified Navigation Map of LitNest

How does the user navigate through the app?

After logging in or signing up, the user is forwarded to the home page. The user is given an error message if they do not fill out all the information needed to log in or sign up. The error message informs them what is missing and highlights the text inputs that must be filled out. This aligns with the Usability Heuristic 9: Help Users Recognise, Diagnose and Recover from Errors. From there, they can access almost every feature within the app with one click. The navigation bar is the main navigation feature in the app. It gives the user five options, including the home page, to choose from while also serving as a status update on where the user is within the app. This aligns with the Usability Heuristic 1: Visibility of System Status.

The other option available to the user is the notification centre. The notification centre is an overlay, allowing the user to exit it easily by clicking outside the overlay frame. If the user wants to continue, they can choose between viewing the app notifications or direct messages from other users. These are easy to exit by pressing the return arrow or using the navigation bar.

As mentioned previously, the navigation bar consists of five buttons. The first button is the Home page, which the app defaults to after logging In. Users can scroll through updates from their buddies, comment or like the update, add books to their shelves or rate them.

From there, the user might want to search for a specific book or buddy, another user on the app. The second button on the navigation bar, the Search Page, allows the user to scroll through book and buddy recommendations and search for specific books or users/buddies.

The third button on the navigation bar opens a pop-up menu. The user can choose between three options: logging a book, starting a new buddy read, or marking a book as searching or lending. All of these options bring the user to Discover pages with search bars. Each Discover page is tailored to the specific feature chosen.

From each Discover page, the user can reach a book overview. Here, the user can also write a review and read other buddies' reviews.

The user can set up a Buddy Read from the' Start a Buddy Read' button in the pop-up menu or the book overview.

The fourth button on the navigation bar allows the user to see an overview of the books they want to read, have recently read, are in their 2024 reading challenge, and all the Buddy Reads they are currently participating in.

Lastly, the fifth button on the navigation bar reveals the account overview, including a profile picture, name, pronouns, favourite book, biography, and other details related to the overall account. When scrolling downwards, the user can see all the books they have read and all the books they want to read. The user can access the app's settings and log out from here.
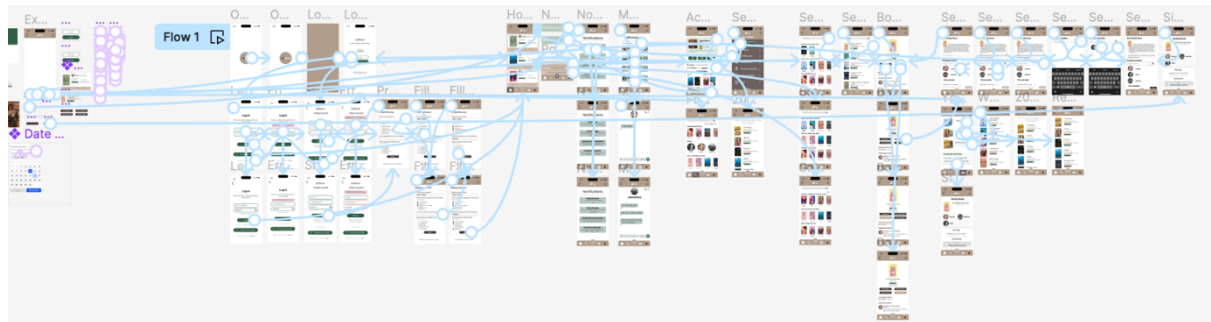
6   Conclusion

Overall, the project went very well. I extended my Figma knowledge and increased my skill level in this domain. I learned how to incorporate scrolling behaviour into my Figma prototypes and how to create overlays, components, and drop-down menus. The drop-down menus took me the longest to master. I created many iterations and spent about five hours continually enhancing my proficiency in developing them.

One of the obstacles we encountered was making the design consistent and coherent. By creating a colour scheme and components, we overcame this. Another obstacle was the notification centre.

The issue with the notification centre was that the return button always returned the user to the home screen and not the previous screen the user was on. As it wasn't manageable to make different notification centre frames for every frame that was supposed to have access to it, I proposed making it an overlay similar to the pop-up menu. This way, the user could quickly return to their previous screen by clicking out of the overlay.

One thing I would have done differently during the preparation stage is to make a list of books that our user wants to read, has already read and is currently reading. One of the things that took the most time in our third meeting was exchanging book covers across different frames because one person had put a book as 'want to read' when another had classified it as 'currently reading'.

If I could expand the project, I would add more details to some frames and extend the search page to give the user more tailored recommendations.

Overall, I am pleased with our end product and believe we created the best version possible with our current skill levels.