

aria

virtual reality concept



BRIEF

An experience aimed at recognizing, overcoming, and steering emotions

Prior to my MA program, I was working on a thesis project around creating a virtual reality experience where one would travel through the emotion of fear towards joy by “literally” moving through terrains that mirrored those emotions.

MY ROLE

user research, wireframing, visual design, and interaction design

DURATION

Spring 2016 (initial)
March - May 2019 (revised)

TOOLS

paper, procreate, sketch,
google slides

Anxiety—worries that interfere with school, work, or relationships, are common among all people.

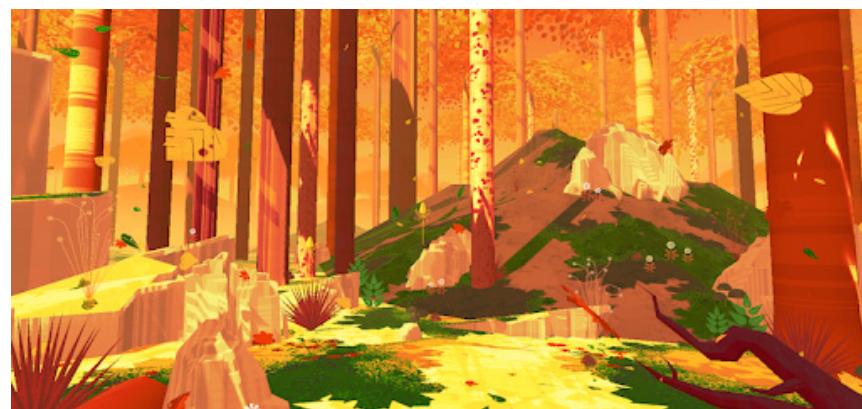
As the need for “self-care” has become more prevalent in popular culture in the U.S., the long-standing techniques for prevention & coping with anxiety have become more popular and includes:

- Learning Relaxation Strategies
- Mindfulness
- Exercise, Healthy Diet, and Rest
- Awareness and Identifying Triggers
- Supportive Friendships and Family
- Contact and Therapy

Existing work that inspired and challenged me:



Deep VR is a meditative psychoactive VR experience. Users move through it with their breath instead of touch controllers or gaze. It's focused on exploration with no explicit rewards, first person, and set entirely underwater.



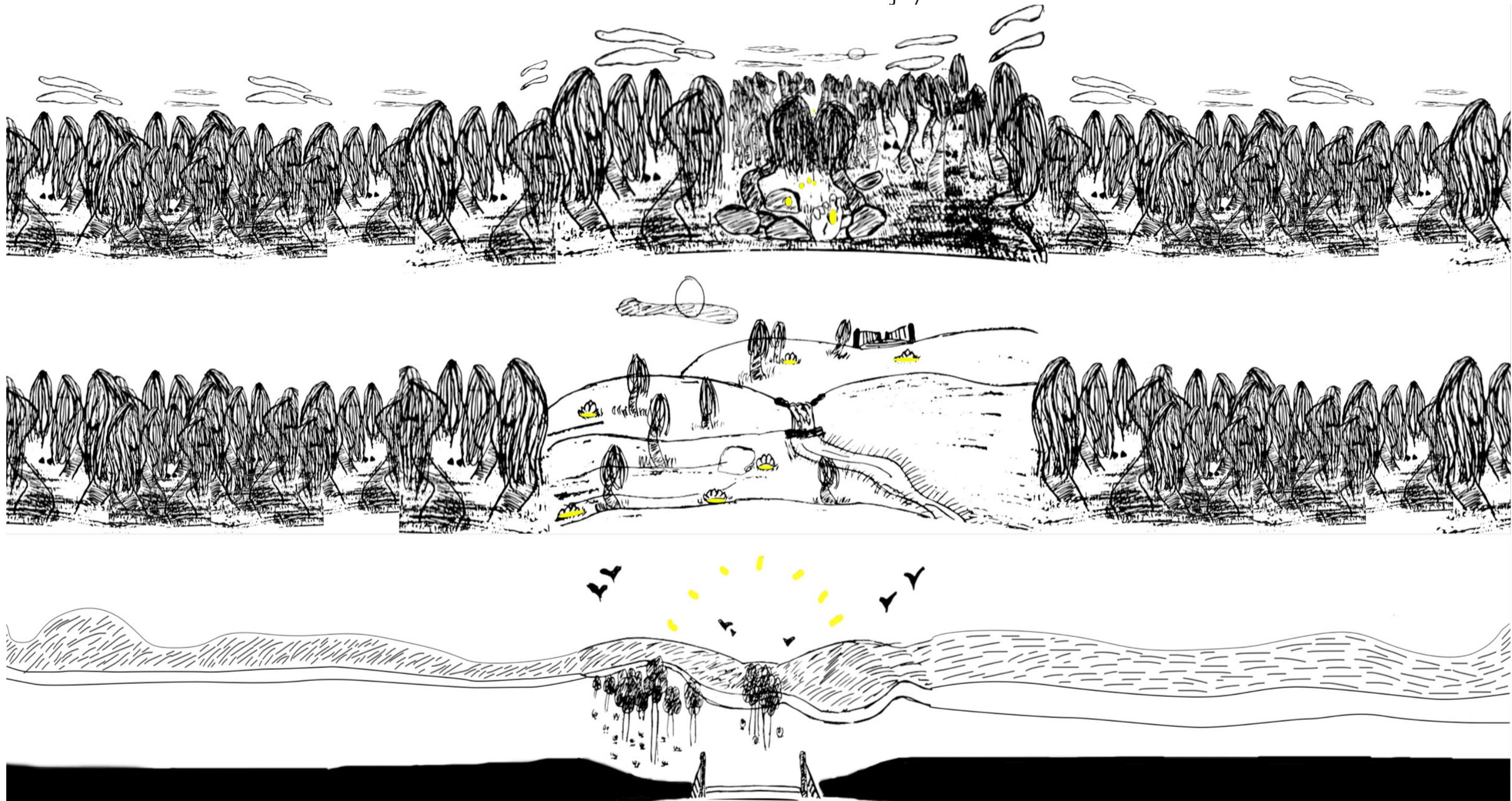
The Turning Forest is an interactive virtual reality fairytale for all ages. It utilizes spatial sound, free range of movement, various environments to travel, and is experienced in the third person.



Finding Your True Self is a meditation simulation with Dr. Deepak Chopra, a specialist in ayurvedic medicine. It uses audio to guide the user's interaction.

The Dark Forest, Bridge to Joy, and Waves of Joy

The user will move through three major scenes linearly starting from the Dark Forest and ending at the Waves of Joy.



The Dark Forest (1/3)

Within each scene are aspects of the environment that the user can respond to and interact with—the weather, sounds, their thoughts, and objects.

“Crooked” Trees
trees that leaves sway eerily in the wind and bark chips off at the touch

Lurking eyes
eyes that blink and follow you in the distance

Sitting rock
sit and think about where you are and where you’re going



Glowing lights
light particles that guide you along through the forest

Virtual hands
users can use their hands to interact with other scene elements, triggering animations and events



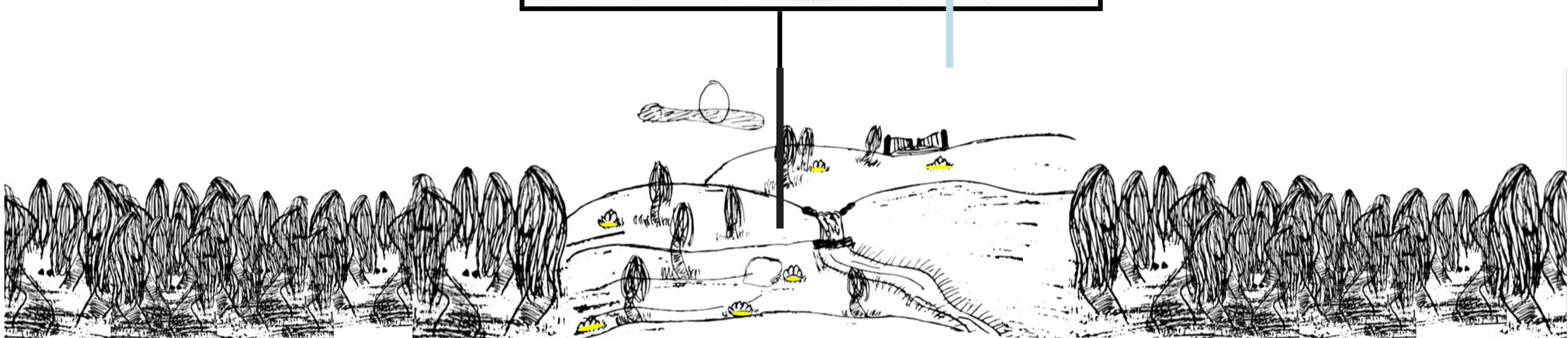
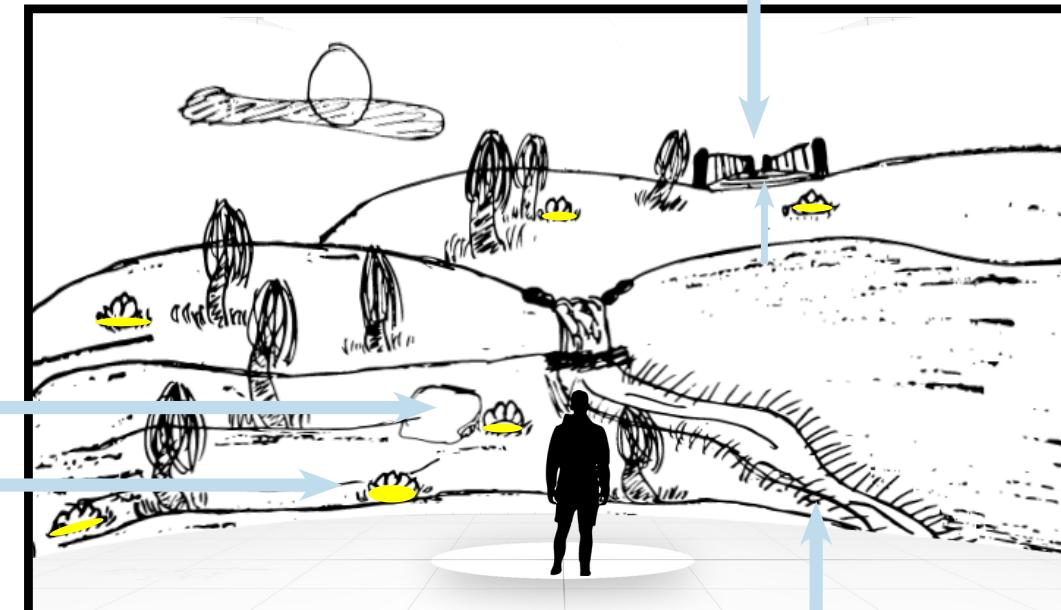
The Bridge to Joy (2/3)

Within each scene are aspects of the environment that the user can respond to and interact with—the weather, sounds, their thoughts, and objects.

Sitting rock
sit and think about where you are and where you're going

Guide flower
flowers that stick out to you on your path forward

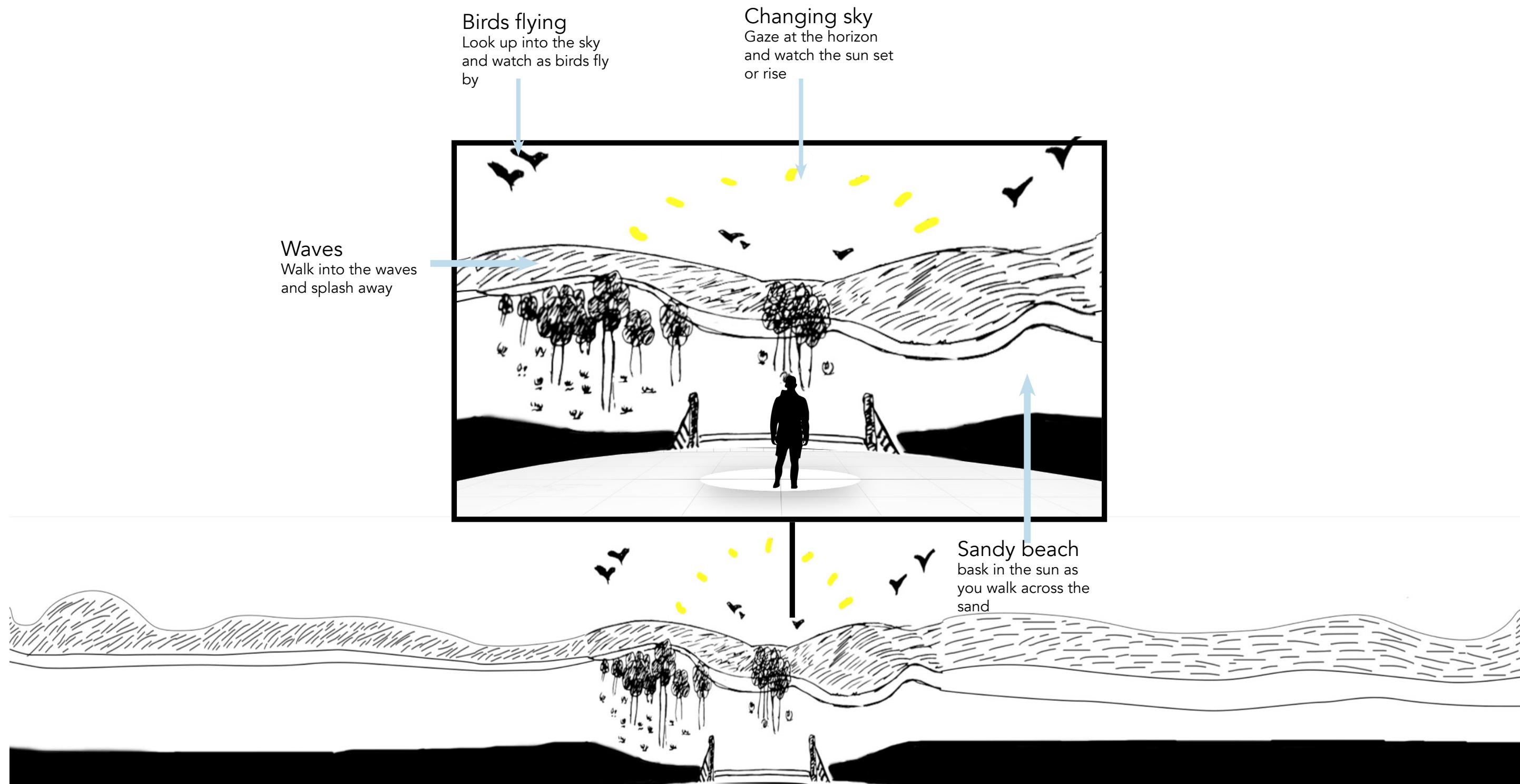
Bridge to joy
bridge that creaks and sways as you cross to the other side



SCENE ELEMENTS

The Waves of Joy (3/3)

Within each scene are aspects of the environment that the user can respond to and interact with—the weather, sounds, their thoughts, and objects.



For whom is Aria being designed?

The user falls between the ages of 22 to 37 years old, is familiar with anxiety and stress—even considers it a regular aspect of life, and wishes to have a clearer visualization of peaceful places when meditating.

To better understand my target audience, I conducted eight audience interviews. I've highlighted the results of two of those interviews here.



Natalia is very new to VR, but is open to trying new technology and to the idea of an experience that speaks to anxiety relief.

- Has viewed VR gameplay online
- Would try VR but thinks equipment is costly
- Likes to retreat from triggers to draw

Nadya has used the Oculus Go to play a game once and would try VR again if free. Her anxiety leads her to play games, read, or watch tv to procrastinate.

- Knew about some VR titles through E3
- Graduate school is her main stressor

Meet Carlos, a 28-year-old consultant who travels for work.

Carlos has been with his consulting firm for two years now and recently was promoted. Before the promotion, most of his travel was domestic. Now Carlos takes more international trips; though culturally rewarding, they're often back to back and mentally demanding. Far away from home and without friends and family near to remind him that stress will pass, Carlos has tried other various methods to alleviate the stress—meditation, yoga, listening to motivational speakers and podcasts on the go, etc.

Those methods have their benefits, but recently they've felt burdensome to execute. Carlos wants to try a method that feels like a getaway itself and can help him to unpack the feelings that are throwing off his routine.

“ I travel for work, and it can be stressful flying 12+ hour flights several times a month. I never really feel settled wherever I am because of the jet lag. Work just always comes first.”



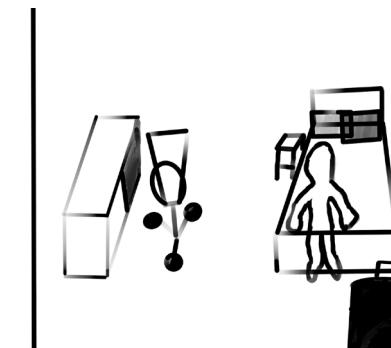
Why can't I unwind?



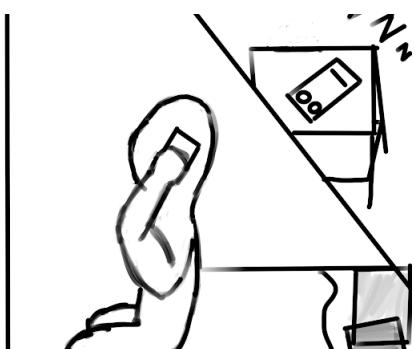
Carlos is on his fourth flight this month. He slept in advance of the flight, but he still feels drained.



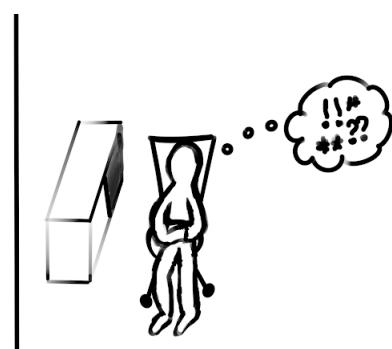
With little time to settle in to his new surroundings, he's off to work, leading presentations and putting in a full work day.



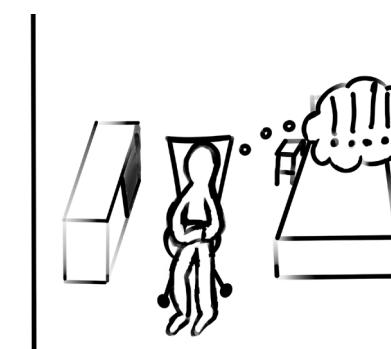
Off from work for the day, he heads to his hotel. He doesn't unpack much since he's tired.



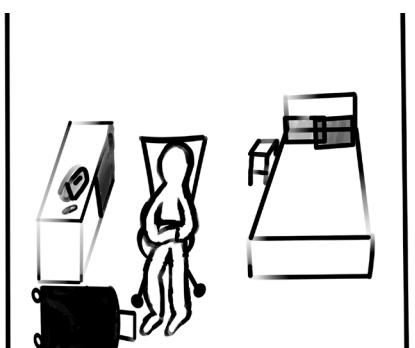
He tries to call a few friends to check in, but realizes that they're asleep due to the time zone. He tries to go to sleep himself.



Restless, he can't sleep. Getting up, he thinks of things to do that might make him comfortable. He tries to meditate.



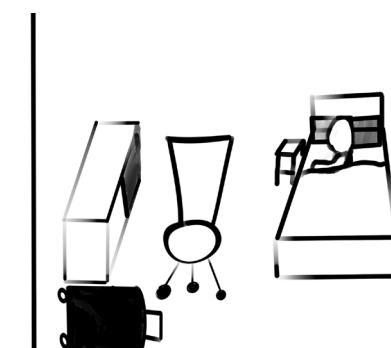
Meditating reminds him of tasks and other inconveniences. He would normally push through it, but his energy is off.



Passing on meditation, Carlos pulls out his Oculus Go. On a recommendation from a friend, he had downloaded an experience called **aria**. Maybe he'll try it now.



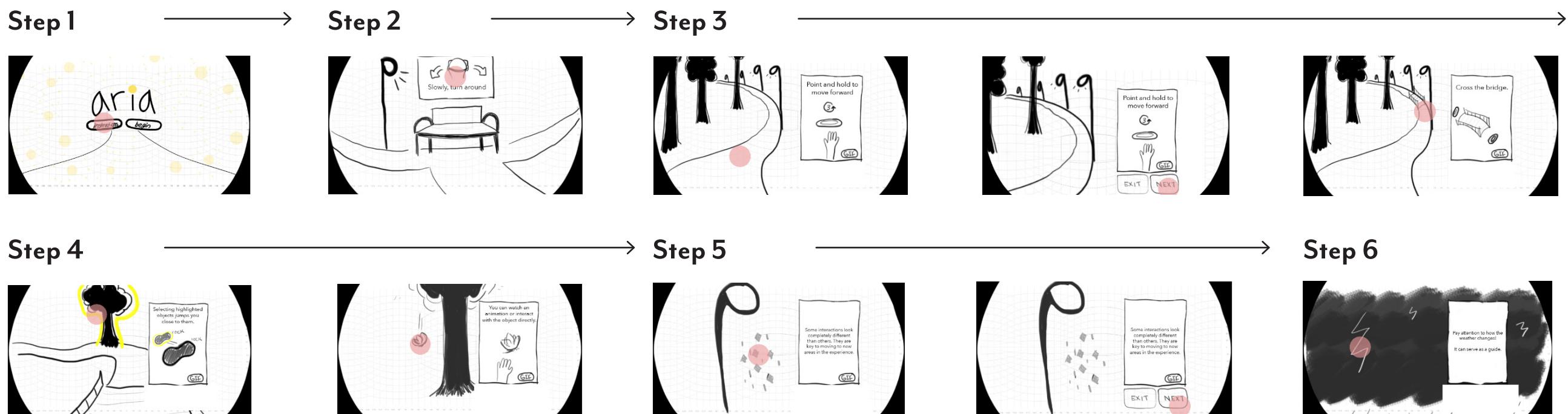
Carlos sits comfortably in a swivel desk chair, puts on his headset and begins the experience.



10-15 minutes later, Carlos decides to stop using the experience. Seemingly calmer and less distracted, he feels ready to go to sleep.

USER TASK ONE

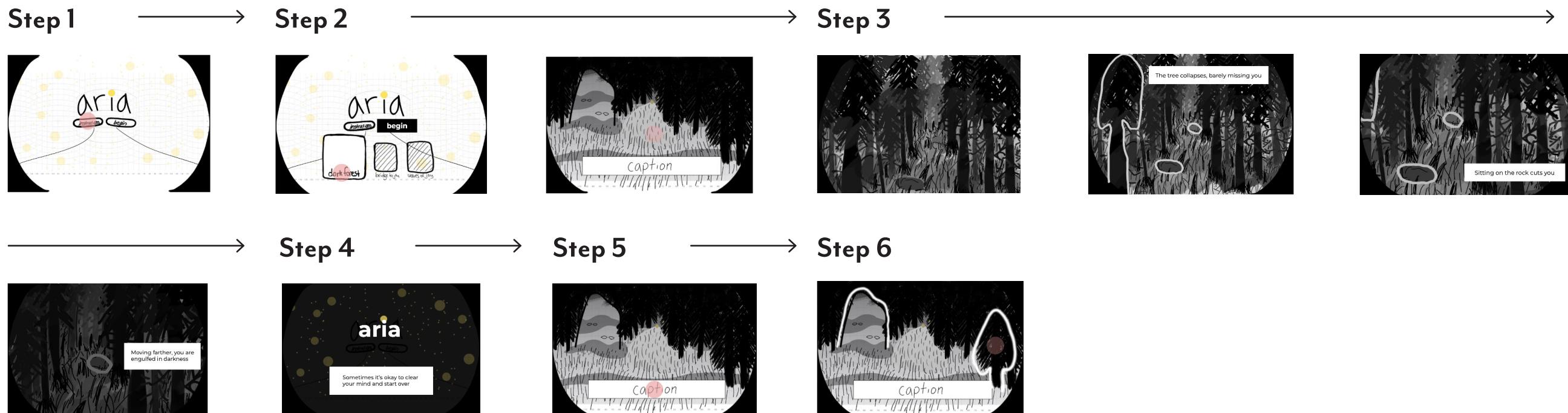
Carlos learns how to move, interact with objects, and navigate from the tutorial.



1. Select “instructions” on the home screen.
2. Follow the instructions to orient yourself.
3. Follow the instructions to move around
4. Follow the instructions to interact with objects
5. Learn how to clear an area to move on
6. Learn how to avoid getting lost
7. Exit back to the title screen

USER TASK TWO

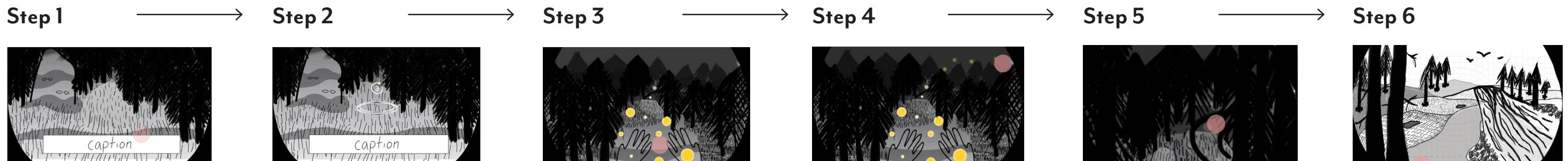
Carlos learns about fear in the Dark Forest.



1. Select “instructions” on the home screen.
2. Follow the instructions to orient yourself.
3. Follow the instructions to move around
4. Follow the instructions to interact with objects
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7. Exit back to the title screen

USER TASK THREE

Find the key interaction in the forest which opens the path to the Bridge to Joy.

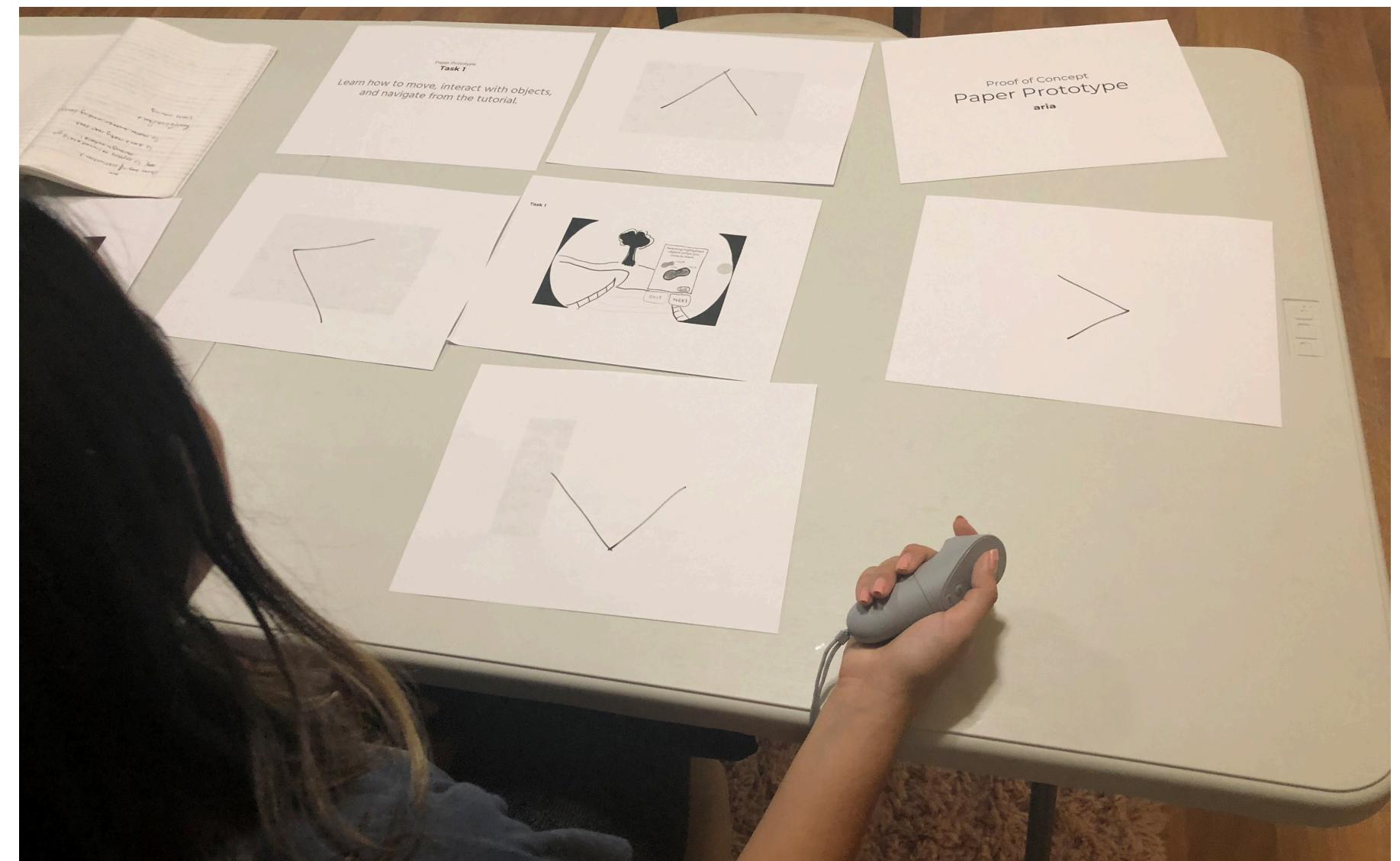


1. Explore the surrounding area.
2. Move towards the flashing lights up ahead.
3. Interact and play with the lights.
4. Watch the lights trail off showing a path.
5. Move towards the new path.
6. Find a new landscape at the end of the path.

Paper Prototyping

Natalia approached the experience entirely like a game and not as an experience to just take in until the end of the second task. She showed that she wanted more interactions.

Especially since the intended ambience provided by music, sound, & color was limited because of the medium, Natalia relied heavily on interactions as motivation. Clearer directions and UI could also be improved upon.

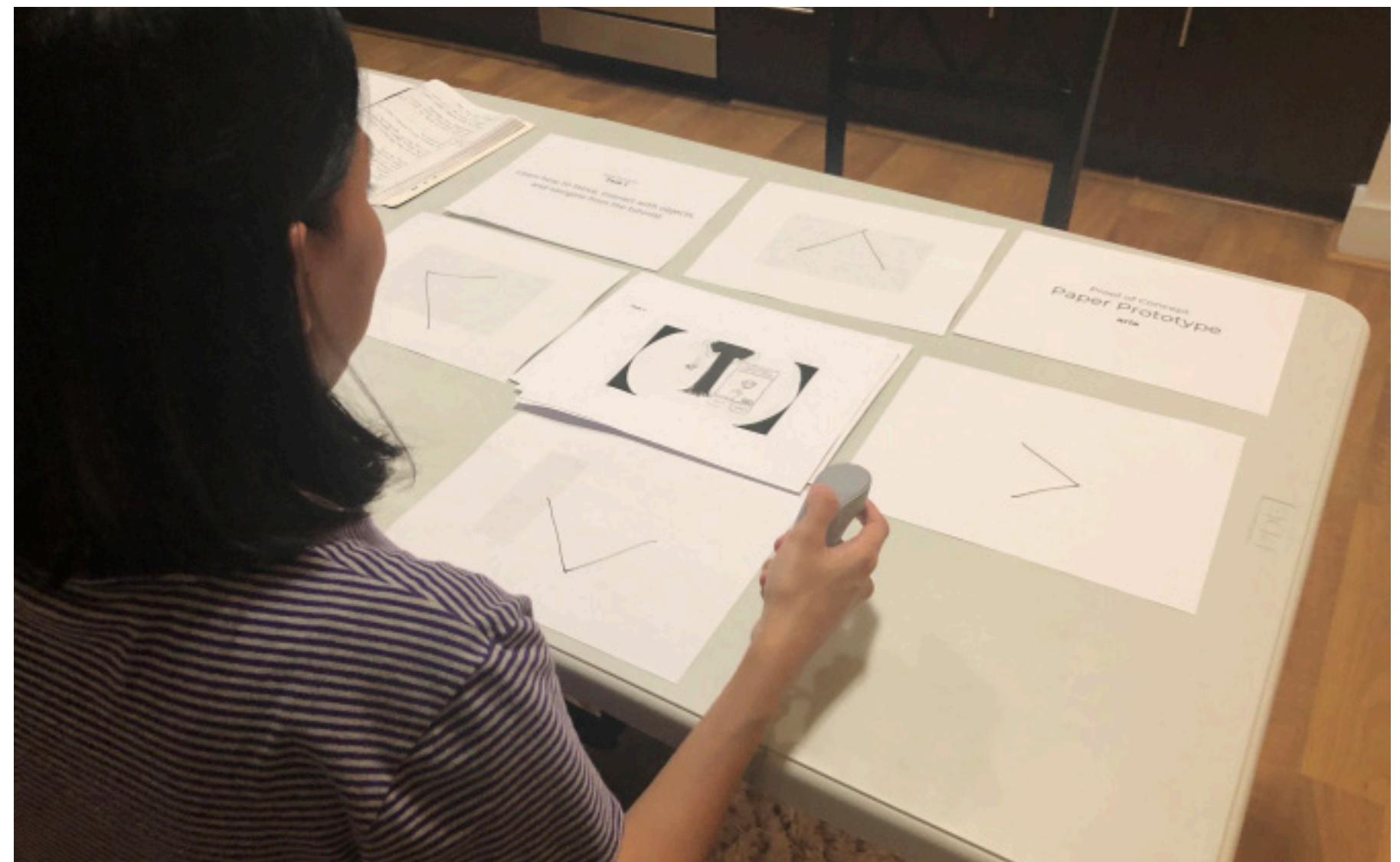


Natalia, 24, undergraduate student, illustrator, gamer

Paper Prototyping

Nadya was more willing to explore the surrounding area and blind. She initially skipped through the tutorial's tasks in order to read all of the instructions first before attempting the tasks.

She approached this with confidence in her ability to learn behaviors quickly, even though this is for a medium she rarely uses. She was open to interact with what was noticeably interactable, and was not frustrated by their amount.



Nadya, 27, graduate student, 3D Animator, avid reader