

Playtest 7

Friday April 15th

Goals

Testing the tutorial sequence out on players

First introduction of album UI/dynamic audio/other UI + mechanical updates

Questions

Does the player feel like they get enough instructions on how to interact with the world, so that they can safely self-guide to the next piece of the puzzle?

Does the UI and integrated pieces feel smooth enough to the player so that the player can easily understand what's going on and learn as they progress?

Does the atmosphere give the proper impressions of the experience without distracting the player too much from the game's narrative and mechanics?

Set up

Grad Lab, computers are dependent on who shows up

Wren, David, Alfie

Notes

Wren Notes:

Test 1, played before:

Confused by intro video

Tricked by left over photo, should have gotten rid of it wooo

Recognized previous photos, so went looking and then remembered intro video for album

Looks for buildings vaguely like the fair sign photo

Pathless before they found the city sign

Now understands album after trial and error

Onto the archway that r* didn't like, we'll see if this is hard mode station or not

The one way signs don't seem to be very apparent for directing,

Got the archway, match up was a little finicky

Wandering the house yard, has the last 3 photos in their hand

Bug with the chair (and maybe the door/logs) where Stephanie's text doesn't pop up :(

Sound fx for photo matching scared them on the first one, maybe ease more into it?

Test 2, blind playtest:

Understood the instructions given in the video

Did not catch the first sign tho, got caught on the gate, now lost in the world
Looking through album items, has the chair up and ready to go
Figured out the sign photo as #1 without assistance, watching the subtitles, reverted it bc why not
Looking around for the next station
Grabbing the gate in good old let me iiiin fashion (ie lost)
Got the rock arch!
Abandoned his bestie the chair photo and hasn't visited the yard yet
Chair bestie! After getting the locked icon
Found the chair after a little wandering, hasn't expressed any frustration yet and for good reason
Optimizes gameplay by only having one photo in hand at any time
I think I know why the bug happens with the text and can fix it tomorrow

Photo in hand but not out > buzzing is quieter but noticeable enough to recognize that you have the photo

Test 3, Pulkit:

Beeline for doors

Knows previous build enough to recognize old photos, but not that he can't access where those old photos are

People like alleyways

Examining the old photos while outside complex

Need like a max of 3 in hand icon for when people click things, confusing when you can't grab other photos

After a bit of wandering, notices sign and matching to photo

Success, might get the next one now that he recognizes the new image

Wandering while the subtitles play out

Needed assistance figuring out next step, hint was he has a photo and figured it out quickly from there

Now in familiar territory, skipped chair I think

Yup now has to retrace steps in yard

Forgot which door he has to unlock

Staring at the hat? Or the subtitles? Not sure??

Test 4, semi-blind:

Stuck on the first picture, gate

Wandering aimlessly, looking for more actiony sections of the game than we went for Imao
She's literally doing the LET ME IIIN meme with this gate and hellbent on breaking it down somehow

Has she been playing Assassin's creed she's looking for scalable walls

Told her the first photo isn't real I think and she brushed it off, now trying the first photo

We left the "Kill Me" tutorial test in and it thankfully doesn't show up bc of the bug

Knows [SOMETHING IDK WHAT I WAS GONNA WRITE]

Asked for help, got her to the first puzzle and hopefully the limited information guides her on like it did everyone else? But also she's 12 so

Slow going, which is refreshing from the speedrunners that keep coming in here

Is lost on the rock arch tho, maybe need more guidance to that spot? Maybe an overt circle of the pennant string??

Definitely a completionist rather than a runner

Has equipped the right photo, still going around looking

She's figured it out after a long walk

Im dancing behind her

Now she knows what to do, just took a little bit of time searching for the spot and knowing which photo it is

Will need more level encouragement for sure

Same thought process as her mom for sure lol

Angling glow needs some kind of introduction, she's testing it out and nothing is happening

She found an alleyway oops

She's literally diggin through each cranny for the results lmao

Needs a key, which is what I assumed by this point, Key is not noticeable at all

Gave hint, took it and started blocking the door in NO

DID IT YAAY

Erika has commented on her sitting in this seat for so long lmao

Test 5, blind Carter age 5:

No notes because he's never played on a pc before

"Why isn't there any music"

"I like how the windows look like pants"

"Oy"

"Why is the S not Slow"

HE CHEERED WHEN HE GOT THE KEY AND HAD SOMEWHERE TO USE IT

David Notes:

1. Album

- a. Starting photo (gate) is irrelevant to gameplay
 - i. Remove gate photo from album
- b. Most relevant photos are on the second page of the album
 - i. Organize photos in roughly chronological order relative to their use
 - ii. **Starting photo must be the first station they encounter**
- c. Arrow buttons for turning pages are hard to see
 - i. Darken these to make them stand out from the background
- d. Players did not know how to use the album menu
 - i. Tell players how they must have between one and three selected
- e. Players easily forgot the specifics of the dialogue shared after a swap
 - i. Include a transcript (summarized or not) in the album after a photo is used

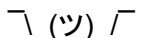
2. Photo Swap/Stations

- a. Players attempted switching back and forth despite no content requiring it
 - i. Remove this feature because we do not actively use it
- b. Players confused when they could not move while holding up a photo at a station
 - i. Tell players that they become locked in place when they are in the right spot and hold up the photo - tell them their next goal is to get the correct angle
- c. Pulsing visual not correctly synced with station hitbox
 - i. Check radii and hitboxes in the editor - problem might be trying to match a circular radius with a rectangular hitbox
- d. Archway station - not recognizable from the photo
 - i. Consider brightening it up, adding additional framing elements, or leading the player more directly to it via breadcrumbs

3. Intro Sequence

- a. Starting location has them easily walk past the view of the apartments and the street fair sign (6 out of 8-ish missed the sign completely)
 - i. Change cutscene sequence as follows: The player walks up to the gate, notes that it's shut tight and that they must find a different way into the courtyard. Turn around to see the fair sign with the relevant photo in their hand
- b. Players unsure of how to use the photos
 - i. Prompt the player to return to the spot the photo in their hand was taken from and hold it up there to align it with its surroundings
 - 1. Do not remove this text until the swap happens
- c. Players were unaware that they could pick up certain items
 - i. Tell them that they can do this - perhaps prompt them to look for the key that was in the chair photo

4. Item inspection

- a. "Use" command is too ambiguous
 - i. 

5. Dialogue

- ~~a. Several characters introduced immediately with little to no visuals/voices to tie them to~~
 - ~~i. We know voice acting would add a lot here, but time.~~
- ~~b. Their silhouettes disappear after the swap and when the talking begins, disconnecting the voices from the speakers~~
 - ~~i. Again, voice acting would help, but time.~~
- ~~c. A lot of dialogue between the first and second stations—it does not finish by the time the player gets to the second station~~

6. Items

- a. Key is too hard to see (and blocked by a flower after the swap happens)
 - i. Idk make it bigger? Big key
 - ii. Do something about the flower
 - iii. Prop it up on the chair's back

Alfie Notes:

Only took notes about opinions, didn't record who the player was.

1. Struggle with the first station
2. Album has a UI update bug
3. Player keep pressing WASD without using mouse, need to advise player to turn
4. C exiting inspection is weird
5. Inventory has a display bug
6. Story needs more context
7. Clues more obvious in the photos
8. Initial video was confusing
9. Didn't know they have to open album
10. Subtitle background doesn't go away (maybe empty lines were being read)
11. Hand icon cause confusion
12. Album UI more responsive
13. Can't empty hand
14. UI & Pause menu layer issue
15. Pulse frequency change not obvious enough
16. "Who are these people?"
17. Indicating being "done" with a station
18. Subtitle too long and big
19. Really want to listen to dialogues
20. Key needs to shine
21. Room too dark
22. Lerp lock movement creates confusion
23. Cutscene skip
24. Trying to use Esc to turn off other UI
25. Player don't walk, runs all the time
26. Trying to drag photo out of album
27. Door station is misaligned
28. First time player didn't interact with the door
29. Didn't try to use mouse during inspection
30. More short and condensed dialogue?

Observation Results

Players got lost pretty quickly when thrown into the game, some of them understood the intro video sequence enough to know what their general controls were but not their general objectives or where to go from the beginning. Usually once they got a prompt from the playtester to look through the album and/or remembered that the album existed, they would connect one of the photos to the city fair sign. The alleyway section was a lot more complicated for them than that though, and they would wander until either the “ghost light” caught their eye or they got another prompt for the album from the playtester. Players also wanted a bit more control as to what they could do, such as control over how many photos they carried or progression paths on their journey.

Results from Survey

More people felt in control of their exploration this time around

The key is still very hidden, might need something to help them detect it more, the prompt at the door helps but they don't realize the key came back with the chair

Alleyway photo was the hardest, but people felt relieved when they solved it. Lighting changes to help and also light up different parts of the world?

Someone wants more hats

Remove the gate image

Subtitles were confusing for some people, single lines aren't their thing or too much too quickly
UI issues (album isn't clear on the max 3 photos, gotta click on a photo to put it away feeling clunky, inventory isn't recognizable)

People love the visual environment, but don't like the inventory and subtitles :(

Lot more confusion felt while playing this round, lots of loneliness and curiosity and nostalgia too but more confusion and trapped than we want

Eye Spy is a common trend still

Still tedious to line things up completely, people like the play area even if they think it's a little small they wanted more to wander around,

Combined Results

Overall, players liked the improvements made to the game this time around. They felt more in control of their progression, like the puzzles were less frustrating to solve, and that the aesthetics were more in line with the overall abandonment of the game. The overall impression is still a game of 3D I Spy.

Some things remained the same for a good number of players, however, including the key item being generally elusive to the player's knowledge until they got to the locked door, and then the location of which is still unknown. The lighting issues in the game still confused players in certain areas, but were also used as assists in others for aligning the alleyway image to the world. The subtitles were still clunky to people, the inventory and album systems were unfamiliar

even to people who have played games in general before, there was still a level of tedium that people didn't like in matching the photos up to the environment.

We have plans to adjust the key so that it's more visible to the players rather than blending in with the chair, and to move the subtitles around a bit to see if the placement of them was what intruded on the player's experience (along with slight rewrites to improve the player knowledge). The latter topics, being that of the album, inventory, and tedium of the photo interactions, are currently out of scope and out of mind as we work towards a final build for Imagine.

New additions were taken in with mixed reviews: The intro sequence helped some people, was an intrusion to others, and just a confusing lack of knowledge to many. The new puzzles were easier for players to miss when wandering the area, and because their photos start on the second page of photographs they get lost even more. They reported feeling clever when they figured it out, which meant the payoff was well worth the struggle. The issue seems to be just guiding them to those spots, and that could hopefully be achieved by precise placement of items and dialogue prompts that direct the player to the album for another image.

As for the intro sequence, there's not a whole lot that can be changed as we can't guarantee that the player will look down and see toy blocks and think "ah that means a button" and not "I should press T (versus TAB)" for instance.