



GAME DESIGN DOCUMENT

DESIGN PROJECT 01

by Srikanth Nagarajan

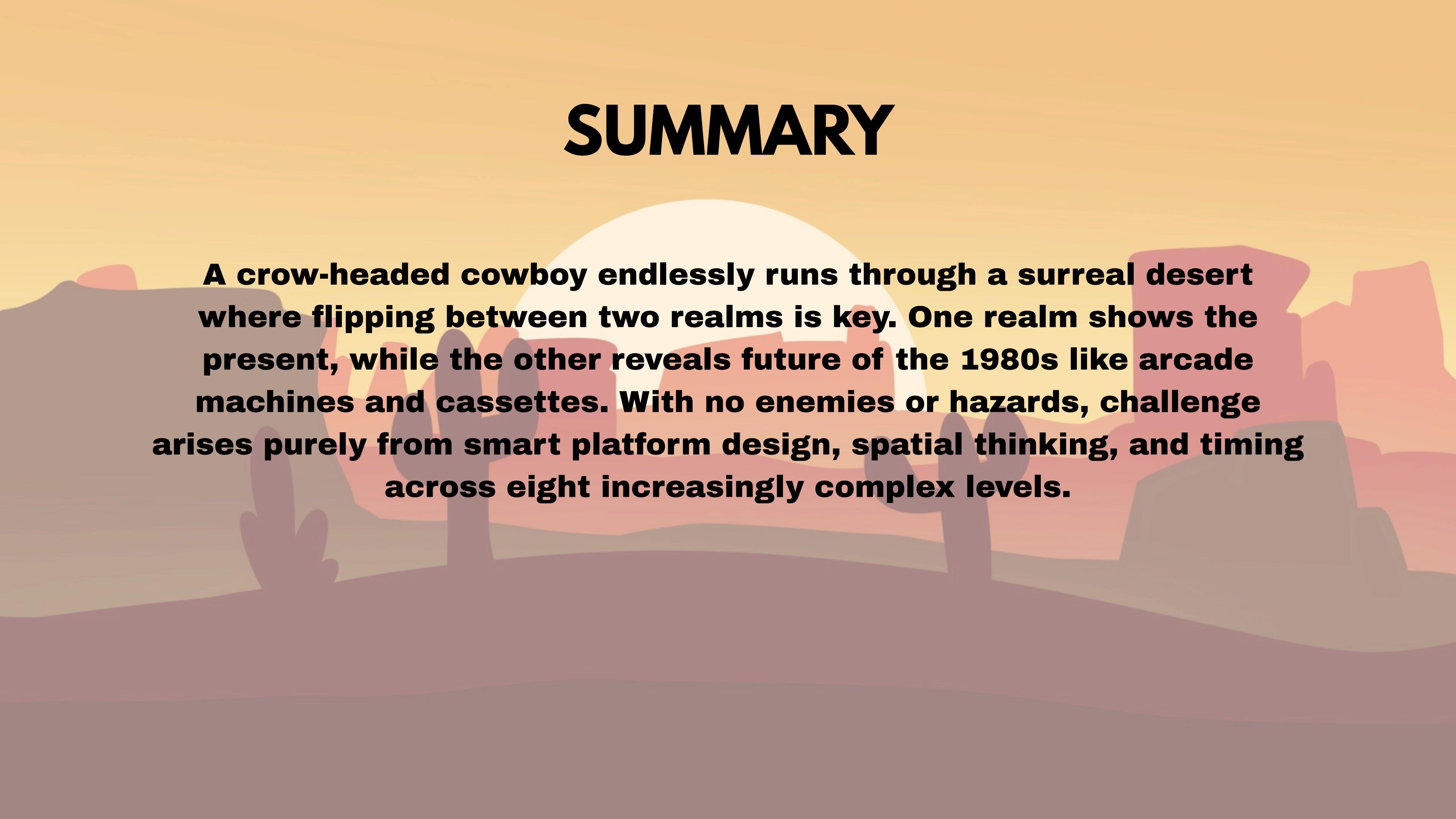
Digital Game Design | 2025
National Institute of Design, Bengaluru

CAWBOY - RIDERS OF REALMS

- Casual puzzle platformer
- PC (keyboard)
- Ages 10+
- One Liner :

A crow-headed cowboy rides across dimensions,
flipping between realities to conquer time-twisted
deserts and 80s echoes.

SUMMARY

A crow-headed cowboy is running through a surreal desert landscape. He wears a cowboy hat and vest, and carries a guitar case. The background features stylized, colorful rock formations in shades of yellow, orange, and red under a clear blue sky.

A crow-headed cowboy endlessly runs through a surreal desert where flipping between two realms is key. One realm shows the present, while the other reveals future of the 1980s like arcade machines and cassettes. With no enemies or hazards, challenge arises purely from smart platform design, spatial thinking, and timing across eight increasingly complex levels.

RESEARCH PROCESS

WEEK 1

Went through the materials provided

- **Hero's Journey (17 Stages)**
- **Old Man's Journey**
- **What remains of Edith Finch**
- **Watchmen (Comic)**

Started Observations in the surroundings

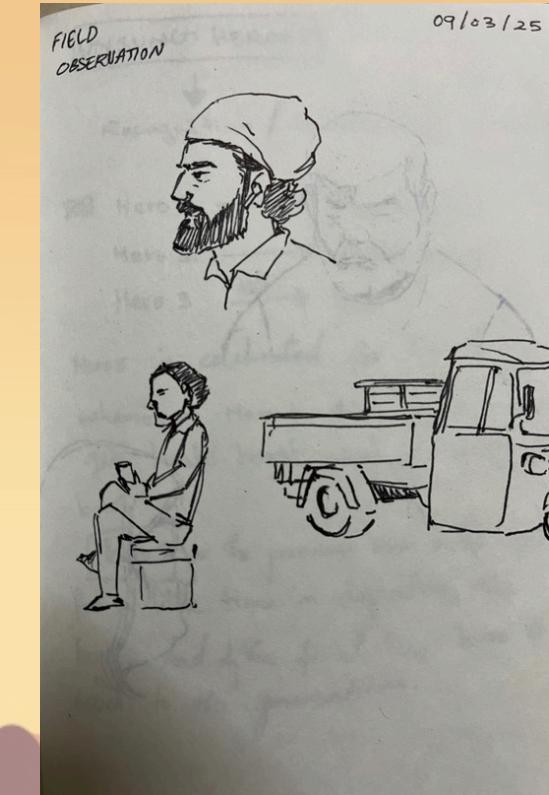
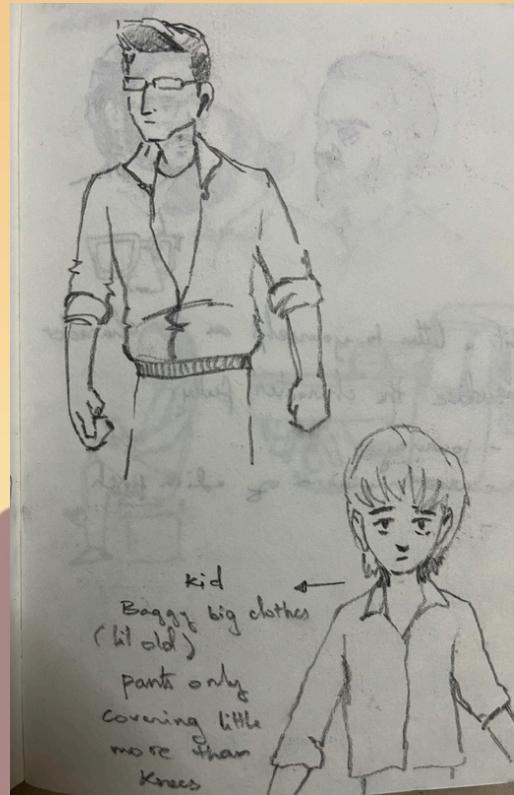
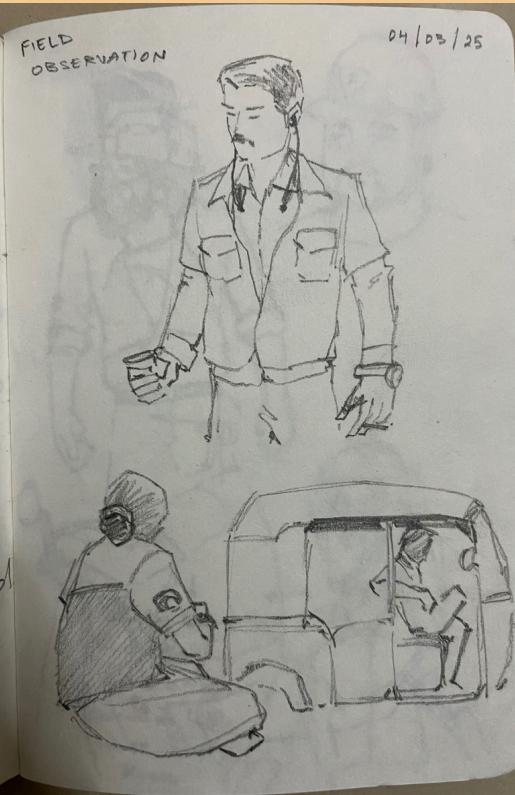
- **People**
- **Behaviours**



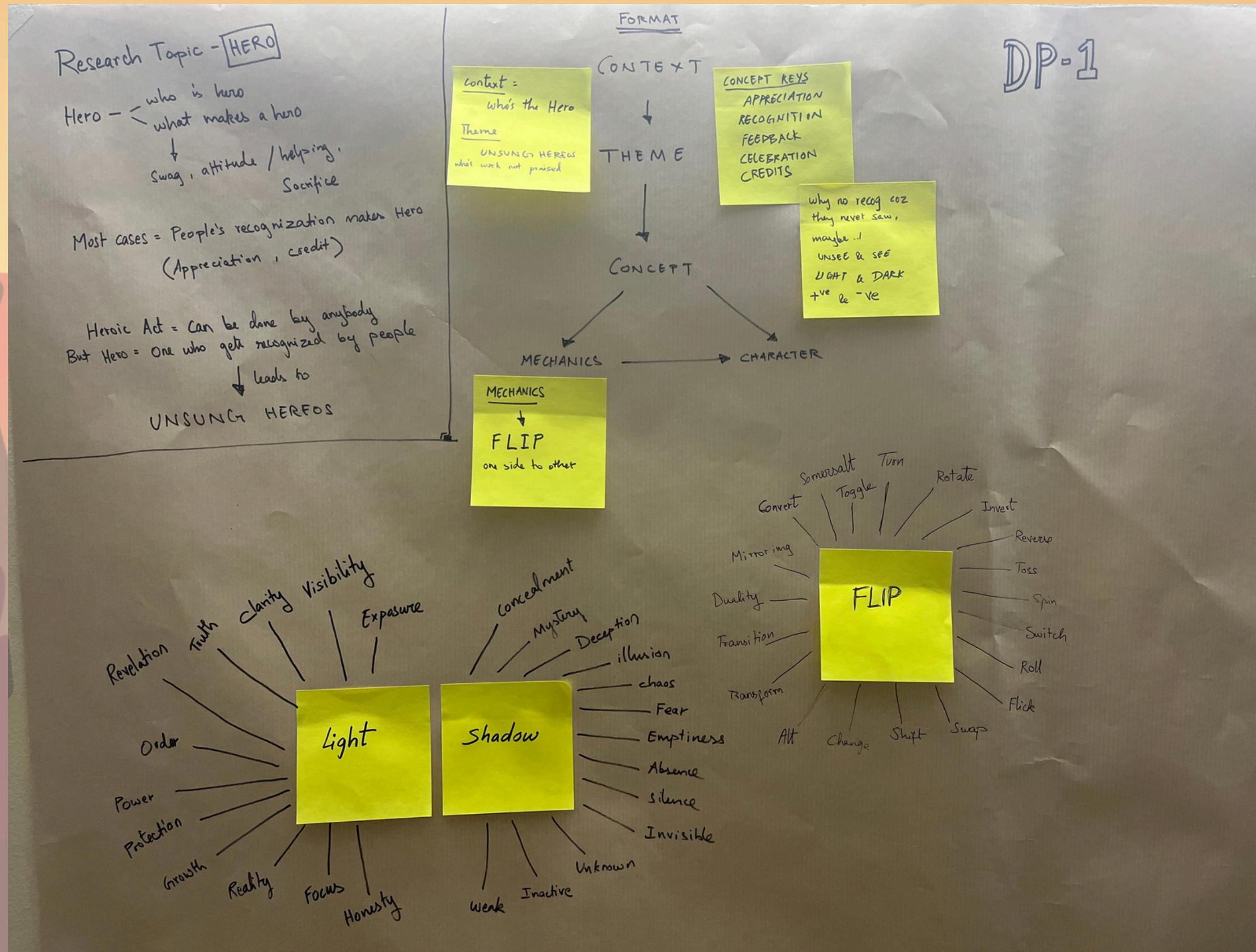
What Remains of
Edith Finch



OBSERVATION



WEEK 2



WEEK 2 ANALYSIS

By the end of Week 1, I finalized the theme as "Unsung Heroes." Through discussions and reflections, we abstracted this theme into three core keywords: recognition, appreciation, and feedback. These keywords capture the essence of acknowledging the silent contributions of individuals whose efforts often go unnoticed, emphasizing the importance of valuing their work and creating systems that offer meaningful responses to their impact.

WEEK 2 ANALYSIS

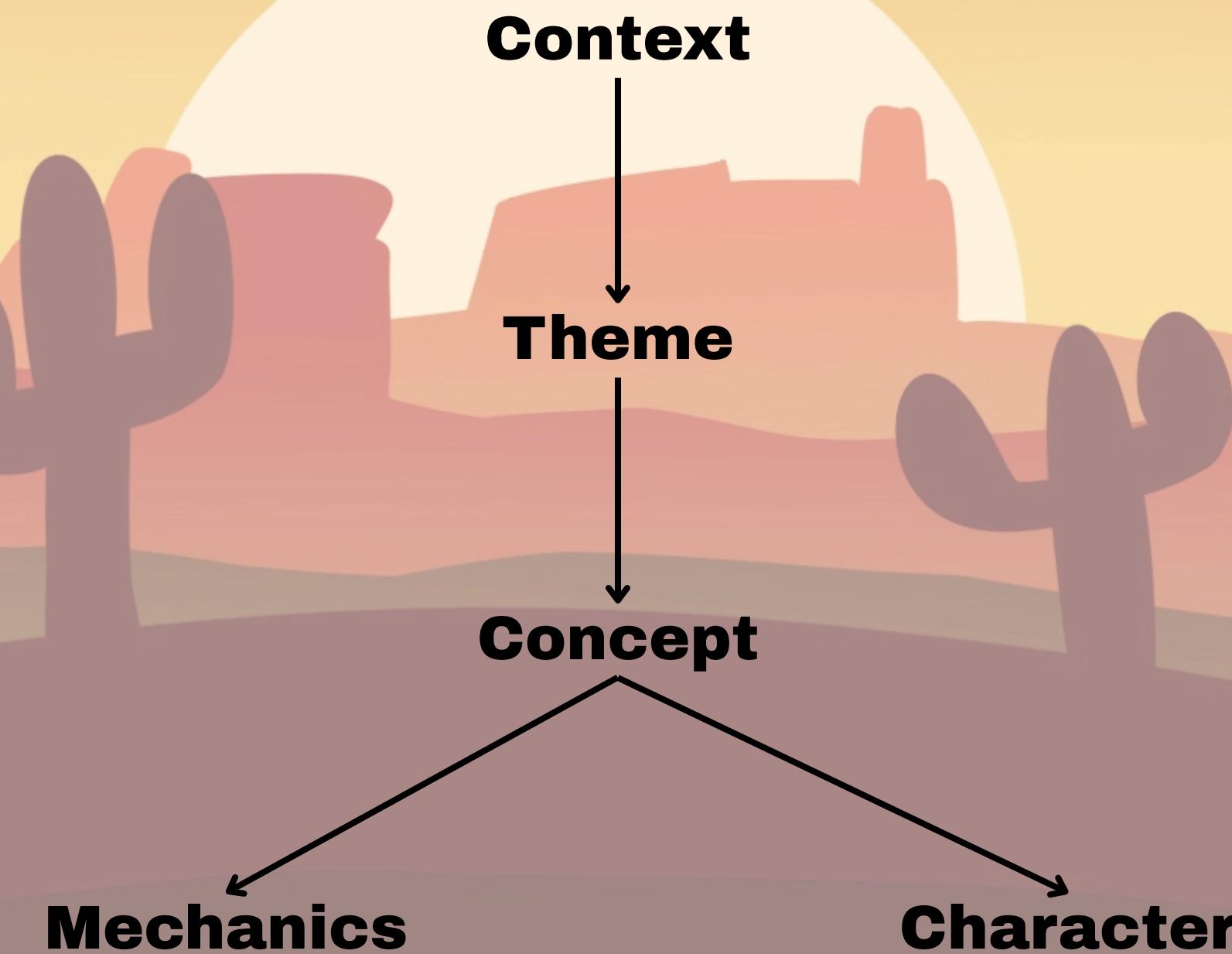
Deconstructing the keywords

Building on the keywords—recognition, appreciation, and feedback—brainstormed potential mechanics that could embody these ideas.

This exploration led me to refine my core mechanics into light & shadow and flip, representing the contrast between visibility and obscurity. These mechanics metaphorically reflect how unsung heroes often operate in the shadows and the shift that occurs when their contributions are finally recognized.

MY PROCESS

Refining the observation



OTHER CONCEPTS PITCHED

WEEK 3

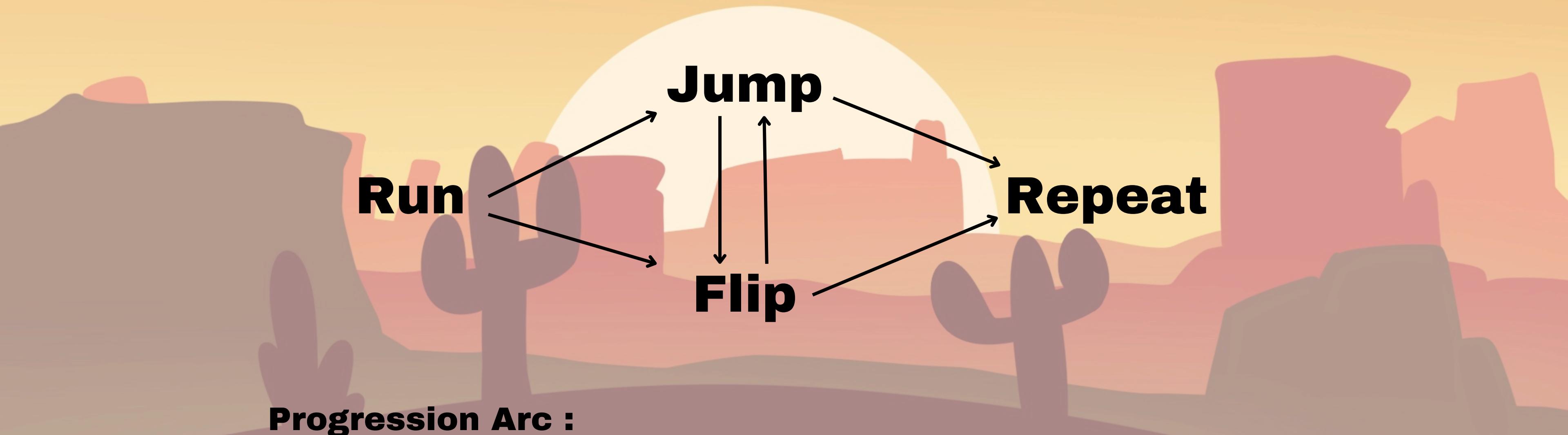
- **Anti virus as a hero, operating behind the system while being ignored by the user**
- **Navigating through comic book panels by flipping them and making them overlap**
- **Player separate their shadow and use it to interact with the environment to overcome the obstacle**
- **Magnetic Flip - player changes their polarity to navigate**
- **Mirror world - use your other personality to overcome obstacles**
- **Perspective Shift - Platforming to Top down and Vice Versa**
- **Shadow Perspective - Use light to make shadows switch to 2.5D and navigate through levels**
- **Team of Heroes - but only person who lands the final hit on enemy gets all the credits and recognition**

GAMEPLAY



The character auto-runs with controls limited to Jump (Spacebar) and Flip (Z). The Flip reveals hidden paths in another realm, often essential for survival. No enemies, no restart — just spatial puzzle-solving and timing.

LOOPS AND ARCS



Progression Arc :

Gradual increase in difficulty through level layout, anti-flip tiles, camera rotation, and trigger platforms.

GAME SYSTEM

- **Auto-runner mechanic with a Flip (Z) to switch realities and Jump (Spacebar).**
- **Anti-flip tiles (from level 5)**
- **Camera shifts (level 7)**
- **Triggered platforms (level 8)**
- **No hazards or enemies.**

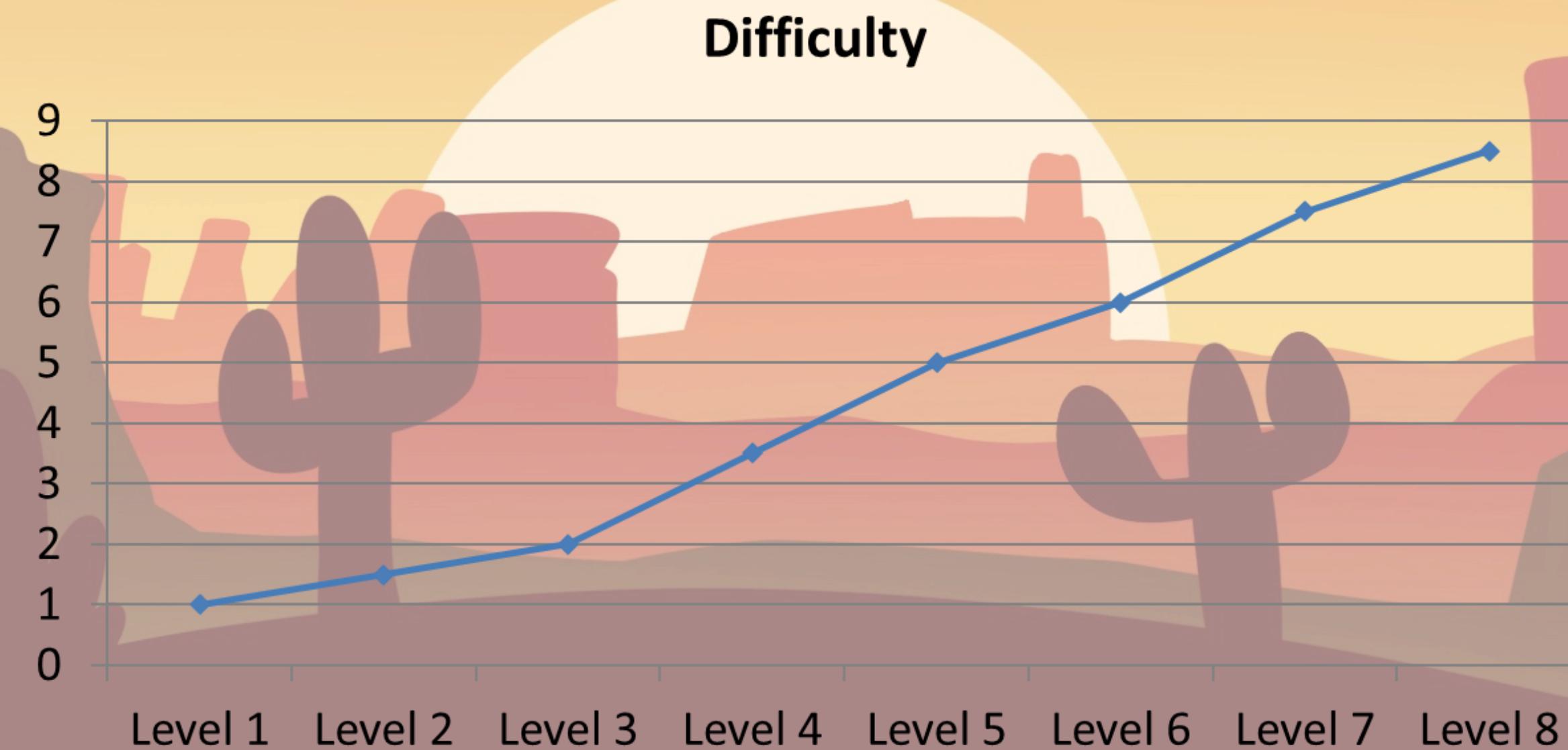
LEVEL DESIGN

- **Level 1–4:** Learn core mechanics and flip logic.
- **Level 5–6:** Introduce anti-flip zones.
- **Level 7:** Vertical camera shift.
- **Level 8:** Triggered platforms responding to proximity.

BEAT CHART

LEVEL	NEW MECHANIC	DESCRIPTION
1	Jump intro (Precision)	Learn to jump through simple gaps
2	Timing the Flips	Cross the whole level without a single jump
3	Flip and Jump together	Using combinations of Flips and Jumps to clear the level
4	Tight Gaps	Space narrows, need sharper control
5	Anti Flip	Certain Areas lock Flip ability
6	Mixed Zones	Alternating anti flip + tight spaces
7	Camera Rotation	Camera Rotates - up is now forward
8	Triggered Platforms	Platforms move when near, fast decisions

PACING GRAPH



CONTENT

- **Visuals: Western desert + silhouetted platforms**
- **Flip shows 80s props**
- **Audio: Wild West theme (all levels)**
- **Flip has 8-bit SFX**
- **Minimal UI**
- **No combat**

CHARACTER DESIGN



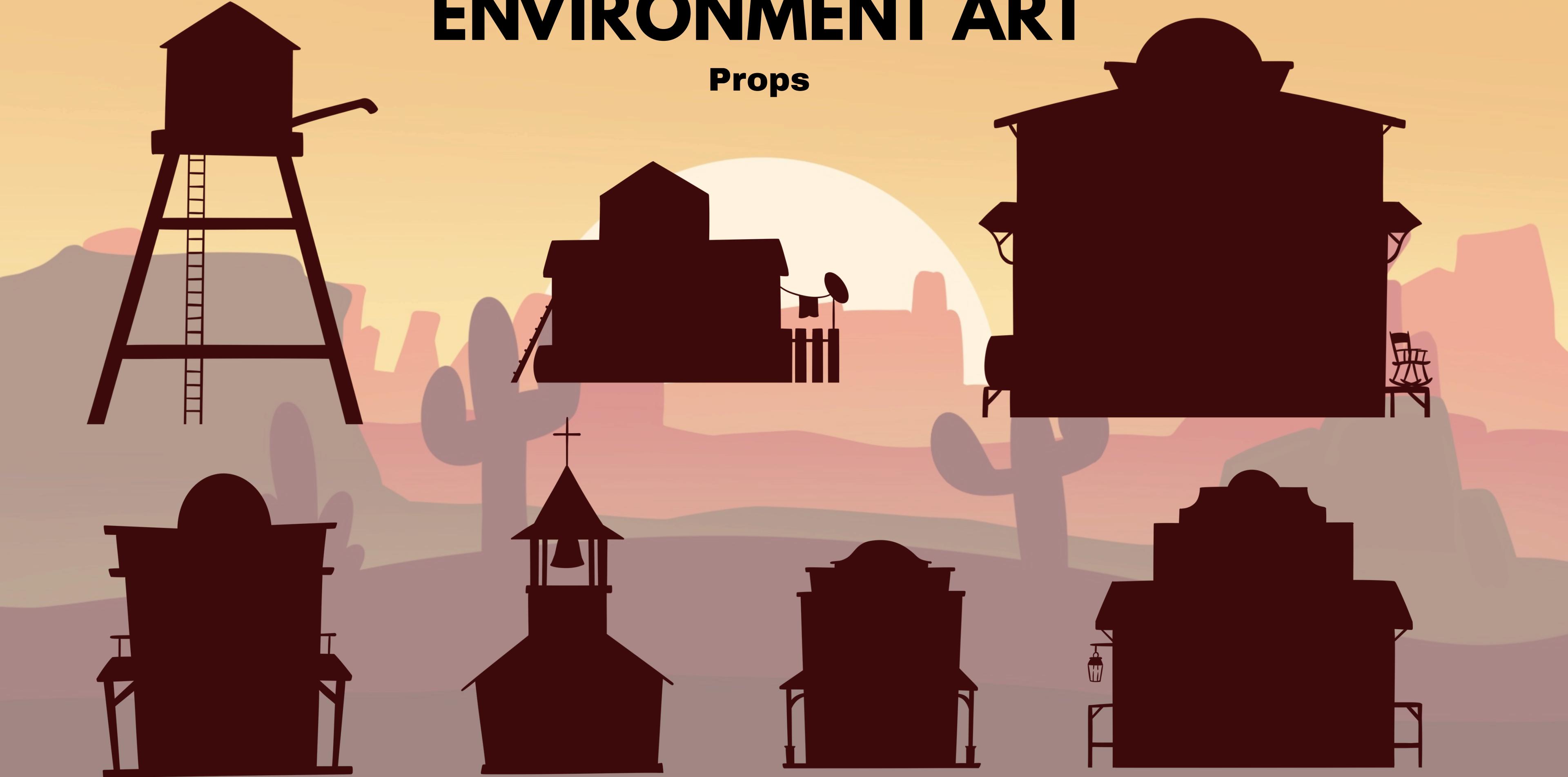
ENVIRONMENT ART

Background



ENVIRONMENT ART

Props



ENVIRONMENT ART

Background Characters



ENVIRONMENT ART

Flipped Reality Props



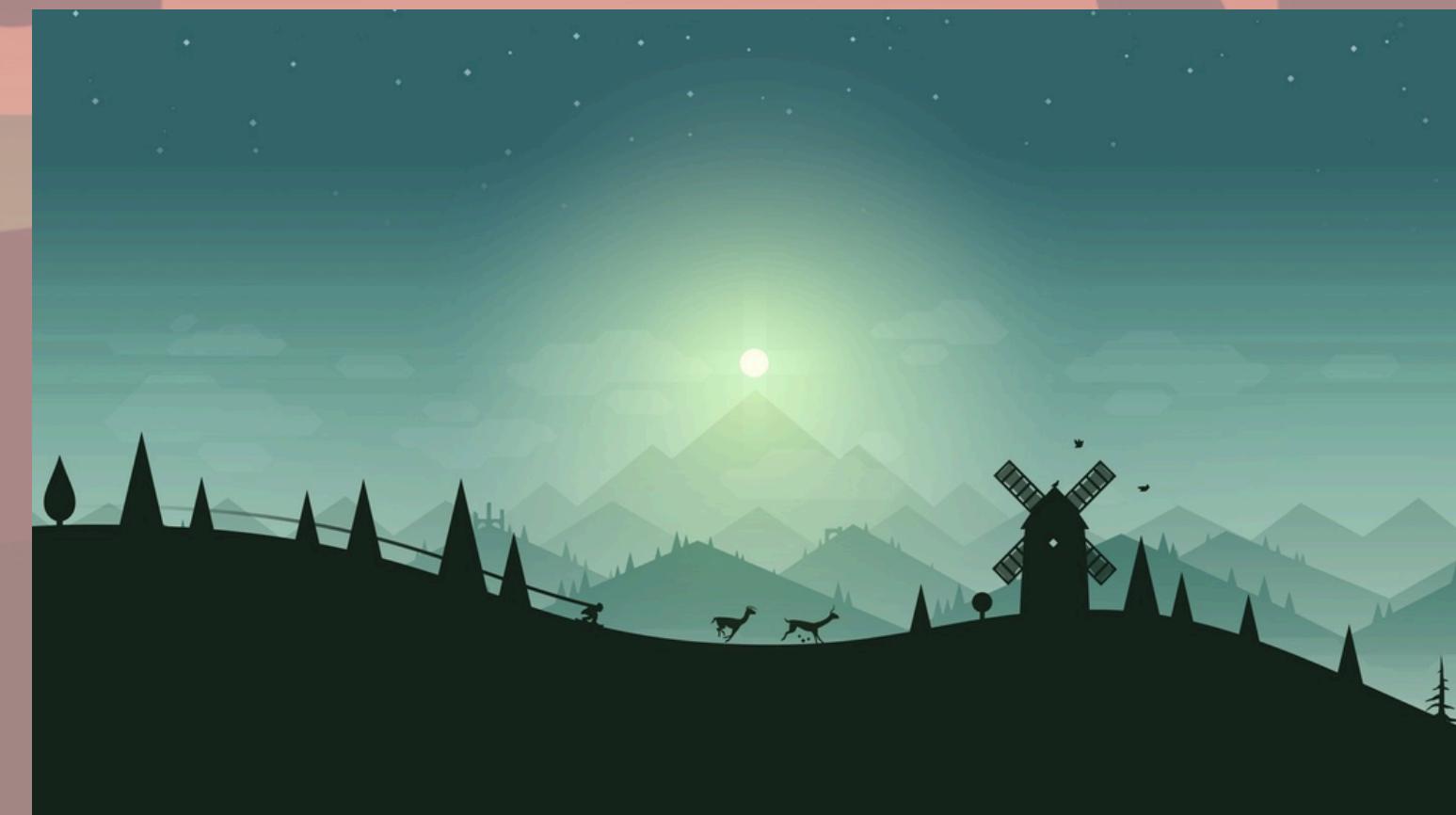
GAME VISUALS

Inspiration :



GAME VISUALS

Inspiration :



REFLECTIONS

This project explores how constraint-based level design — without enemies — can shape challenge and fun. The flip mechanic provided multiple spatial layers for puzzles

SCOPE

- **Playable Demo: 8 levels**
- **All Mechanics Implemented: Jump, Flip, Anti-flip tiles, Camera change, Triggered platforms**
- **Polish Level: Minimal UI, tight controls, consistent visual tone**
- **Cutscene/Narration: Optional for future builds**

POSITION ON PLAY



The game is a reflective, rhythm-based platformer about perception and duality. Not about combat — but clarity, timing, and understanding shifting worlds



THANK YOU.