

Game Concept

The player awakens under a radiant sun, half-buried in golden dunes, with no memory of how they got there. A soft voice, distant yet familiar, whispers in the wind: "You must gather what you've lost to find the path forward."

This desert is no ordinary place—it's a manifestation of the protagonist's inner world, shaped by memories, fears, and dreams. The backpack, lost somewhere in this surreal landscape, contains metaphoric tools essential for emotional survival and growth—like _Resilience, Clarity, Compassion, and Grounding. The landscape is quite foggy because this level represents the middle space between consciousness and unconsciousness; like a brain fog.

As the player traverses shifting sands, ancient ruins, and mirage-like oases, they encounter symbolic obstacles representing mental health challenges—foggy winds of confusion, mirage illusions of self-doubt, and cliffs of emotional fatigue.

The goal of Level 1: Find the backpack, scattered in pieces across the terrain. Each piece is found by confronting a small challenge related to an emotional theme (e.g., calming an overthinking mind, recognizing inner strength, or overcoming the fear of failure).

Backpack Concept: The Satchel of Self

The backpack represents the protagonist's sense of identity and internal resources. It's fragmented across the level, and as Solen collects each piece, it unlocks emotional tools and restores bits of their memory or abilities. When fully assembled, the backpack becomes a modular inventory system for mental-health-related abilities.

Requirements

The level must continue the ongoing confusion and chaos of the environment.

The player must collect the backpack at the end of the level

The player must have a dialogue with the way finder that explains the lore and the environment.

The player is introduced to the way finder and gameplay mechanics

The player must be in possession of all parts of the backpack before they can finish the level

Goals

The player should have opportunities to master the new mechanics.

The goal of this level is to introduce the player to the environment and transition from the opening narrative/video setup.

The level should impose a feeling of melancholy and slight confusion.

Game Context

In this section you should include the greater gameplay context for the level, including important and relevant information about levels prior to and after this level._

This is the first level of the game.

Setting

The entire level takes place within the sandy dunes of the sandy paradise. It is meant to be somewhat of a dry landscape like a desert. It also takes place in the middle time of day when day turns into night.

Time

This entire level mid-day into night in summer or spring.

Metrics

Within this first level there are not any major metrics differences for right now.

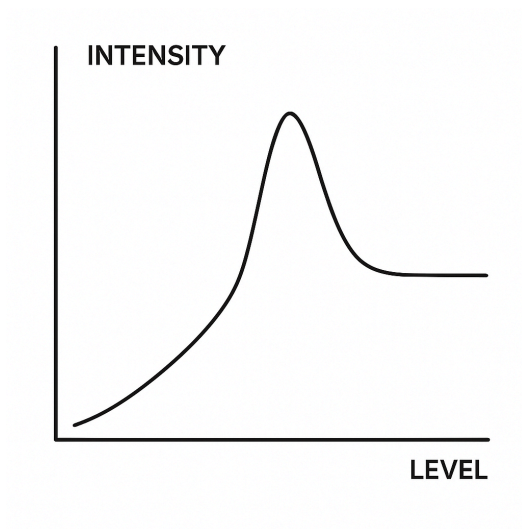
World

No major changes to the world

Items

The player will be obtaining pieces of the backpack throughout the level

Beat Chart



The beginning of the level is calm and the challenges progressively get more difficult as the player gets closer to the backpack

Explicit

The Player must talk with the Wayfinder and they will explain to them the lore of the land and direct them on their way to each challenge

The Player must be informed of their gifts and abilities (mechanics are introduced here).

Implicit

The Wayfinder should be helping the character to understand where to go and what to do.==

There should be ongoing sand in the air

All mini challenges reveal more lore and direct the character on their path towards the backpack

Pieces of the backpack are at every mini challenge==

Final Challenge/Boss Fight

The last challenge is the biggest and similar to a boss fight in order to get the full backpack and finish the level

Narrative diagram

In a complete Level Design Document, you might have a narrative diagram for the level. That is out of scope for this course, so this section can be left blank._

- See Appendix A, Narrative

Dialogue

In a complete Level Design Document, you might have a complete script for the different dialogues in the level. That is out of scope for this course, so this section can be left blank._

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Mapping

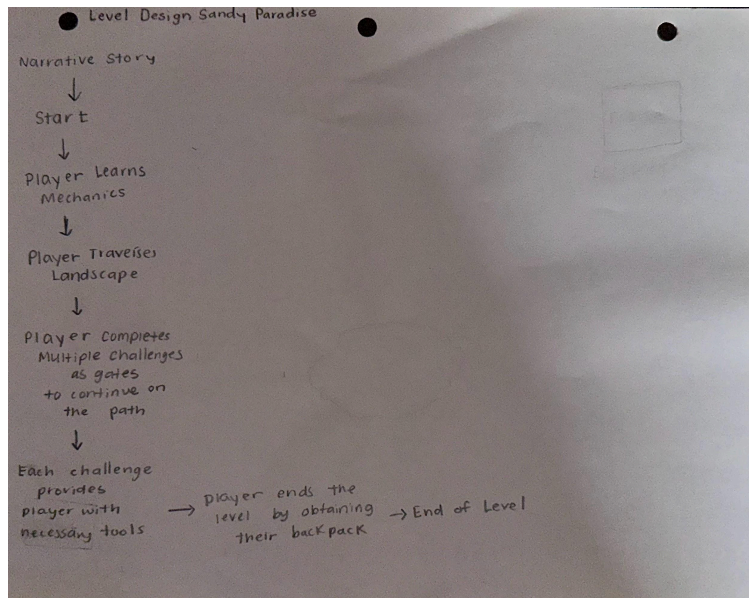
Pathing Diagram

In this section you should create a pathing diagram, indicating the main nodes, zones, and pathways the players can traverse in the level.

This level consists of 5 different mini challenges from the beginning to end, but for the purpose of this course I will probably only have time to design one of the mini challenges within this level

Beat	Title	Purpose	Gameplay/Emotion
1	Awakening in the Dunes	Establish setting and player state	Exploration, curiosity, slight disorientation
2	Whispers in the Wind	Introduce Serasheen (the wayfinder creature)	Comfort, guidance, first light puzzle
3	Mirage of Memory (Pools)	Trigger environmental flashbacks or inner voice	Mystery, reflection, connection to mental health
4	Trial of Echoes	Light puzzle, overcome inner doubt symbols	Small victory, thematic challenge

5	Ascent to the Fossil Bridge <i>(or other chosen elevated landmark)</i>	Midpoint revelation, backpack sighted	Hope, renewed energy, increased stakes
6	The Crossing	Environmental hazard (wind, shifting dunes, illusions)	Tension, perseverance
7	The Backpack	Emotional payoff; inventory re-acquired	Relief, empowerment
8	A New Horizon	Serasheen signals a distant landmark	Anticipation, resolve to move forward



Landmarks

The Shifting Dunes: For this course this is the mini challenge that I focused on the most. My aim was to animate the dunes so that they are shifting. The coding for this was challenging. I would love any input if anyone is experienced in animation in unreal. This challenge represents the mental health challenge of calming an overthinking mind.

The Shifting Dunes: A maze-like intro area teaching movement, exploration, and trust in intuition.

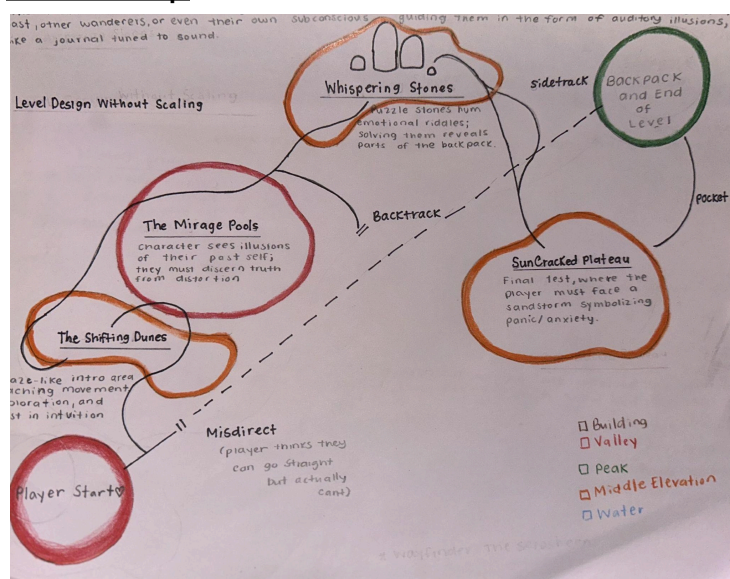
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The Mirage Pools: Where Solen sees illusions of their past self; they must discern truth from distortion.

The Whispering Stones: Puzzle stones that hum emotional riddles; solving them reveals parts of the backpack.

The Sun-Cracked Plateau: The final test, where the player must face a sandstorm symbolizing panic/anxiety.

Level Map



Challenges & Rewards

This level will have 3 mini challenges and 1 final challenge that is somewhat like a boss fight however it is with a sandstorm. The reward at the end of the challenge is the backpack that the character needs to complete the level.

Encounters

Encounters are interactions that may or may not lead to combat or rewards, but do not have combat in them.

Every major landmark has a mini challenge up until the last landmark which is the biggest challenge.

Puzzles

Puzzles are challenges that require mental deduction, and generally do not include combat._

The Whispering Stones will be the most challenging puzzle aspect of this level.

Combat

No combat as of right now - maybe some slight combat at the sandstorm, but this is more of a puzzle/adventure game

Rewards

Rewards are pieces of the backpack and backpack at the end of the level