The Arcadia Report

Experience Design

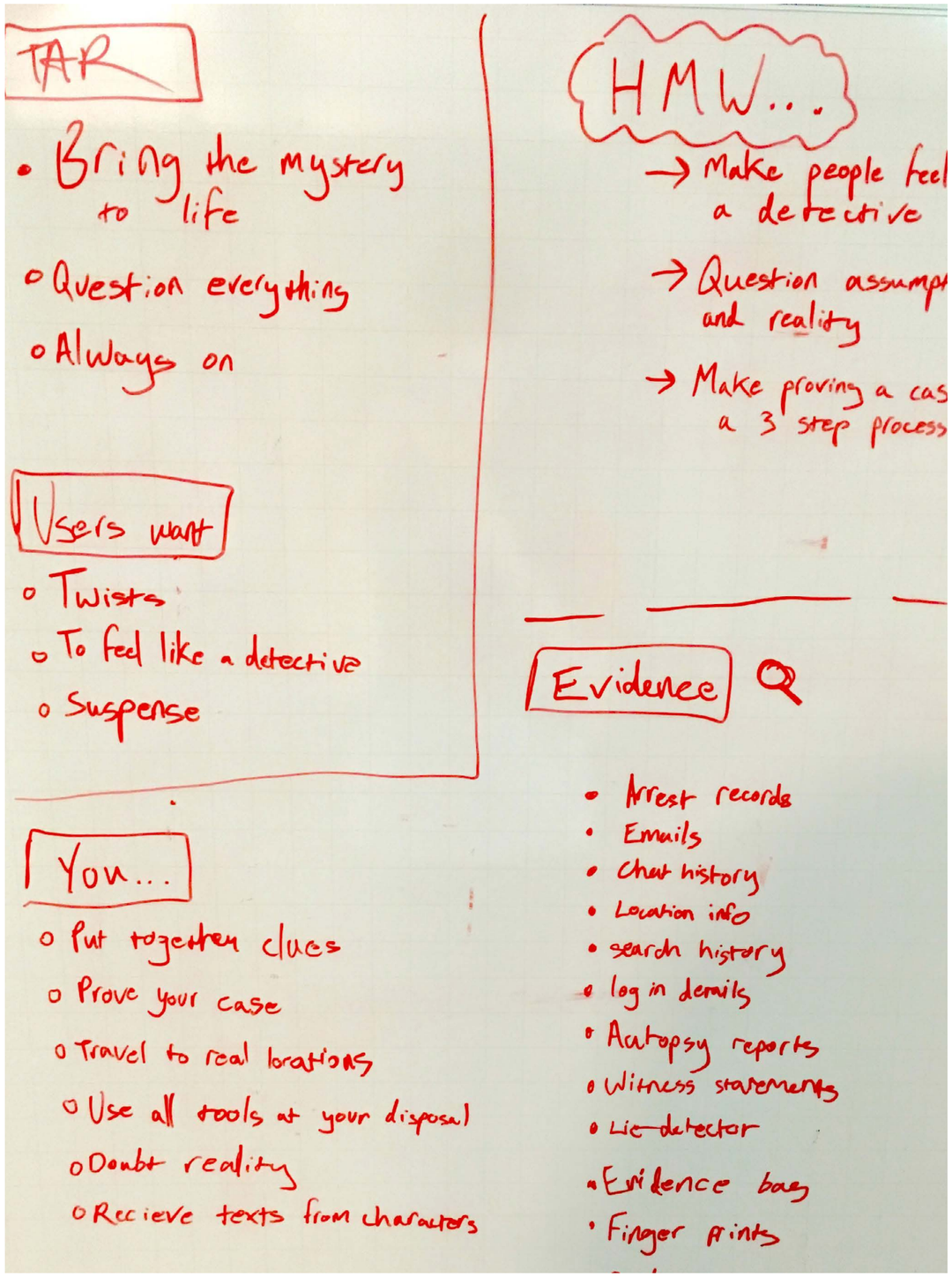
Kezie Todd // IXD501

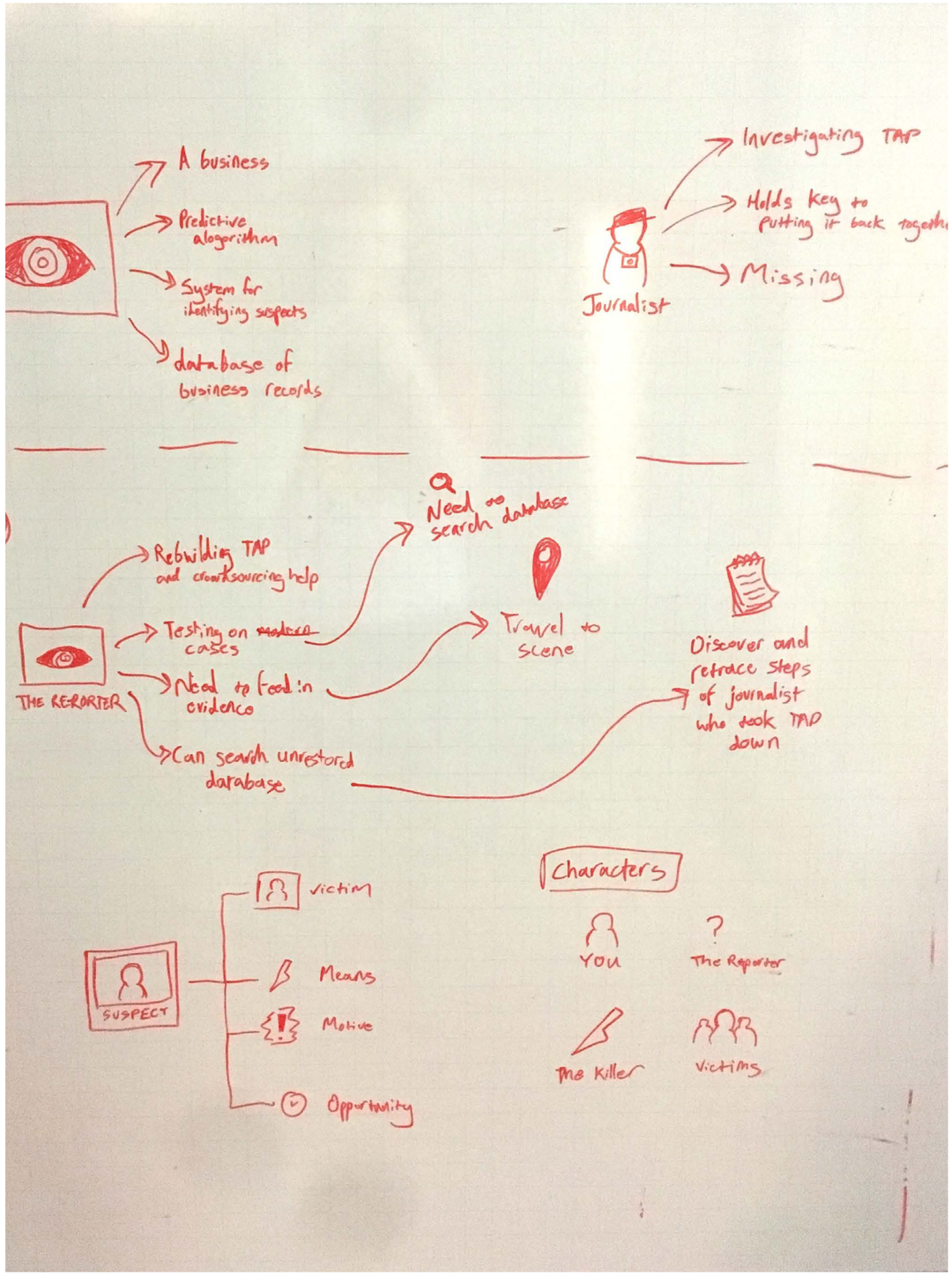
Game Design

Designing and testing the core gameplay loop

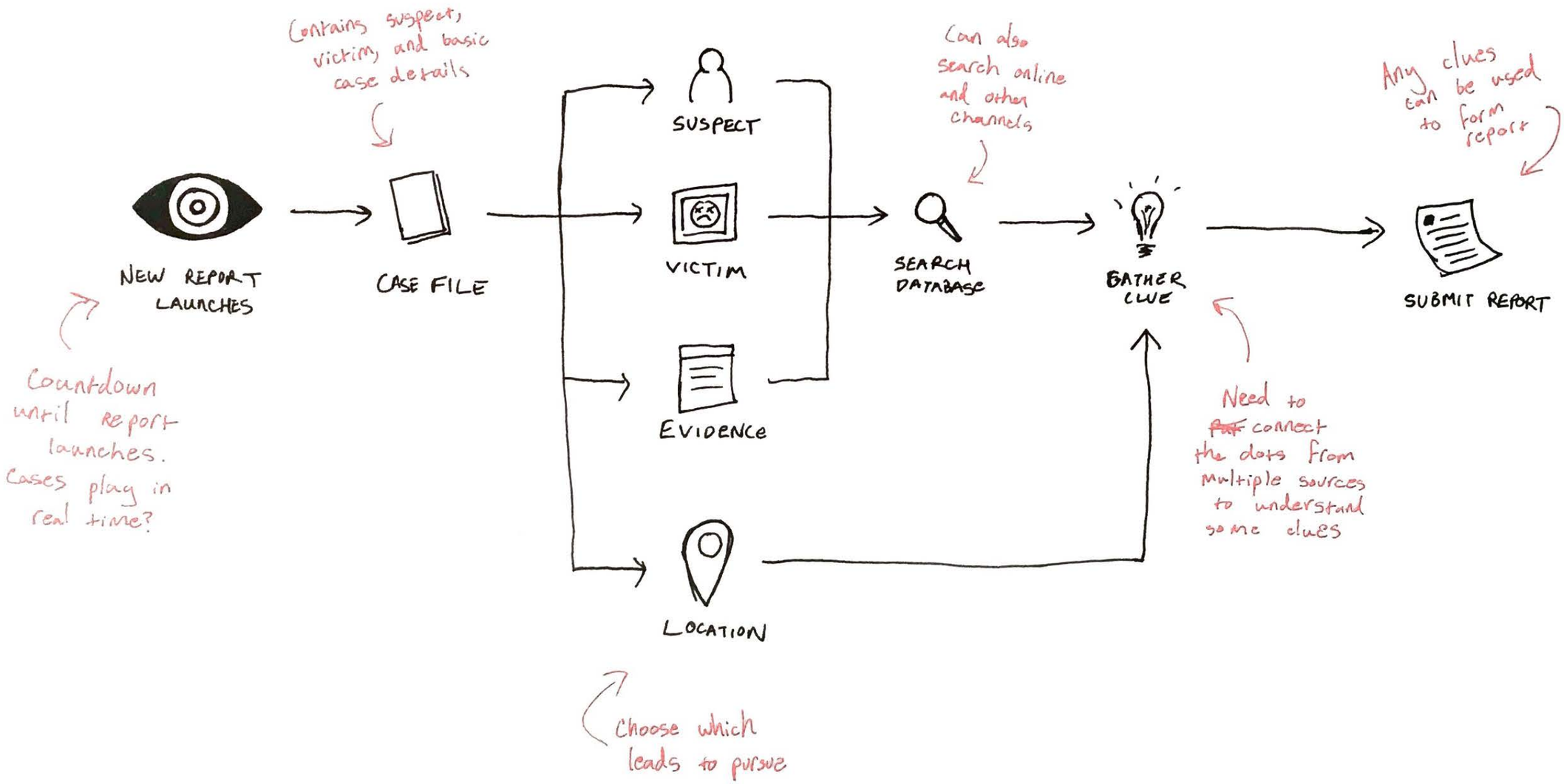
Scan or click for blog posts

Weaving Together Story and Gameplay

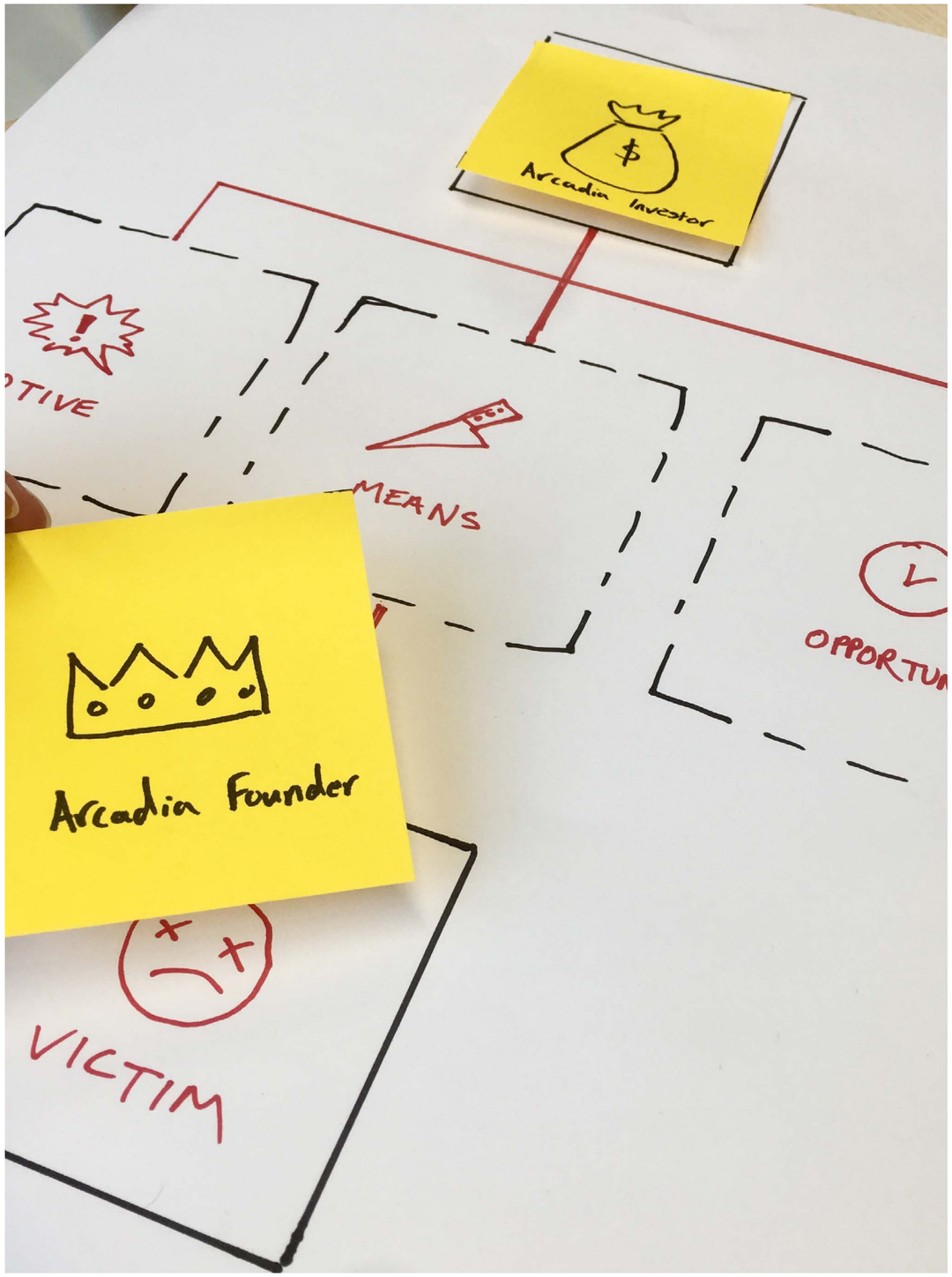


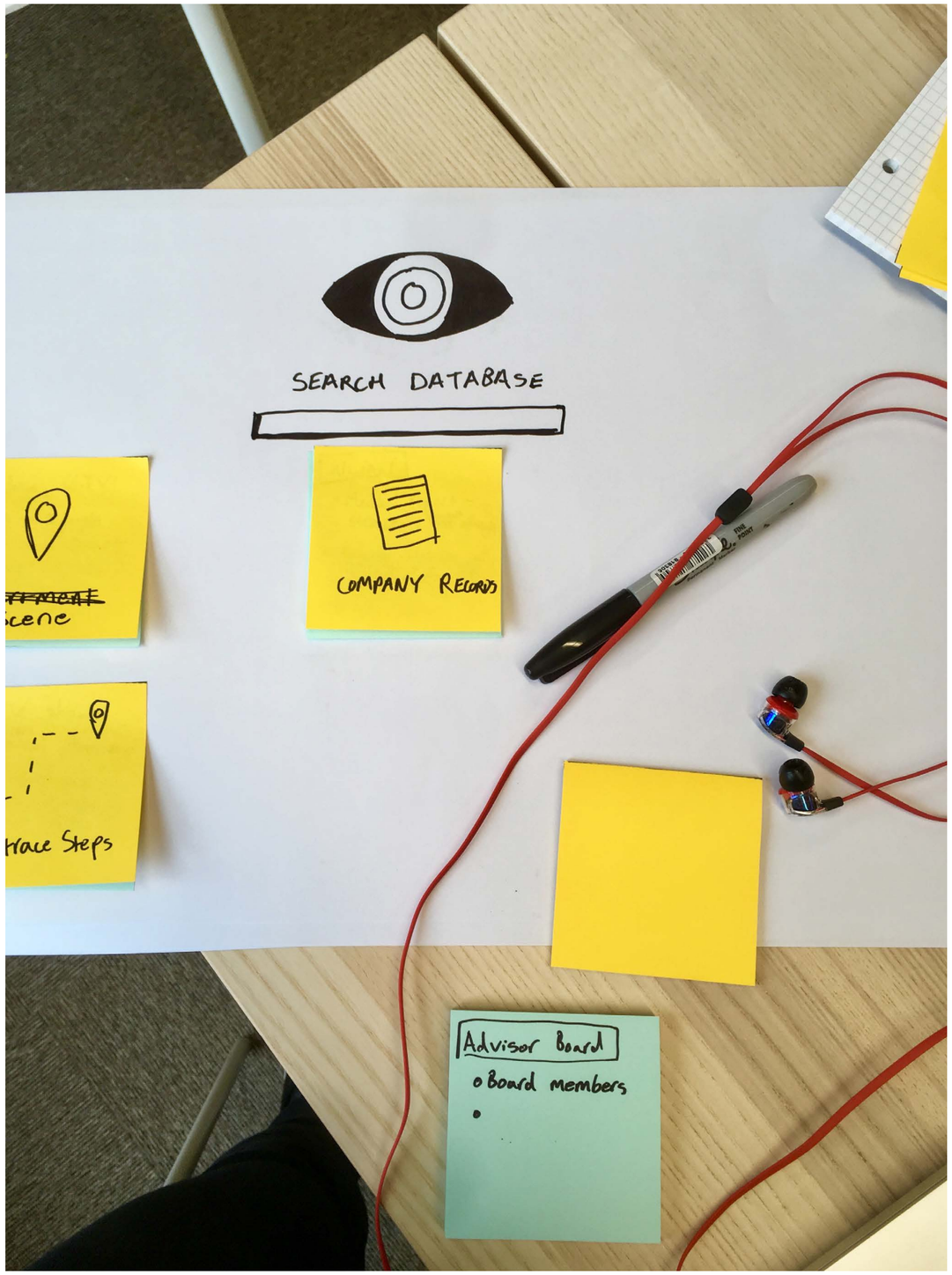


Core Gameplay Loop



Building a Paper Prototype

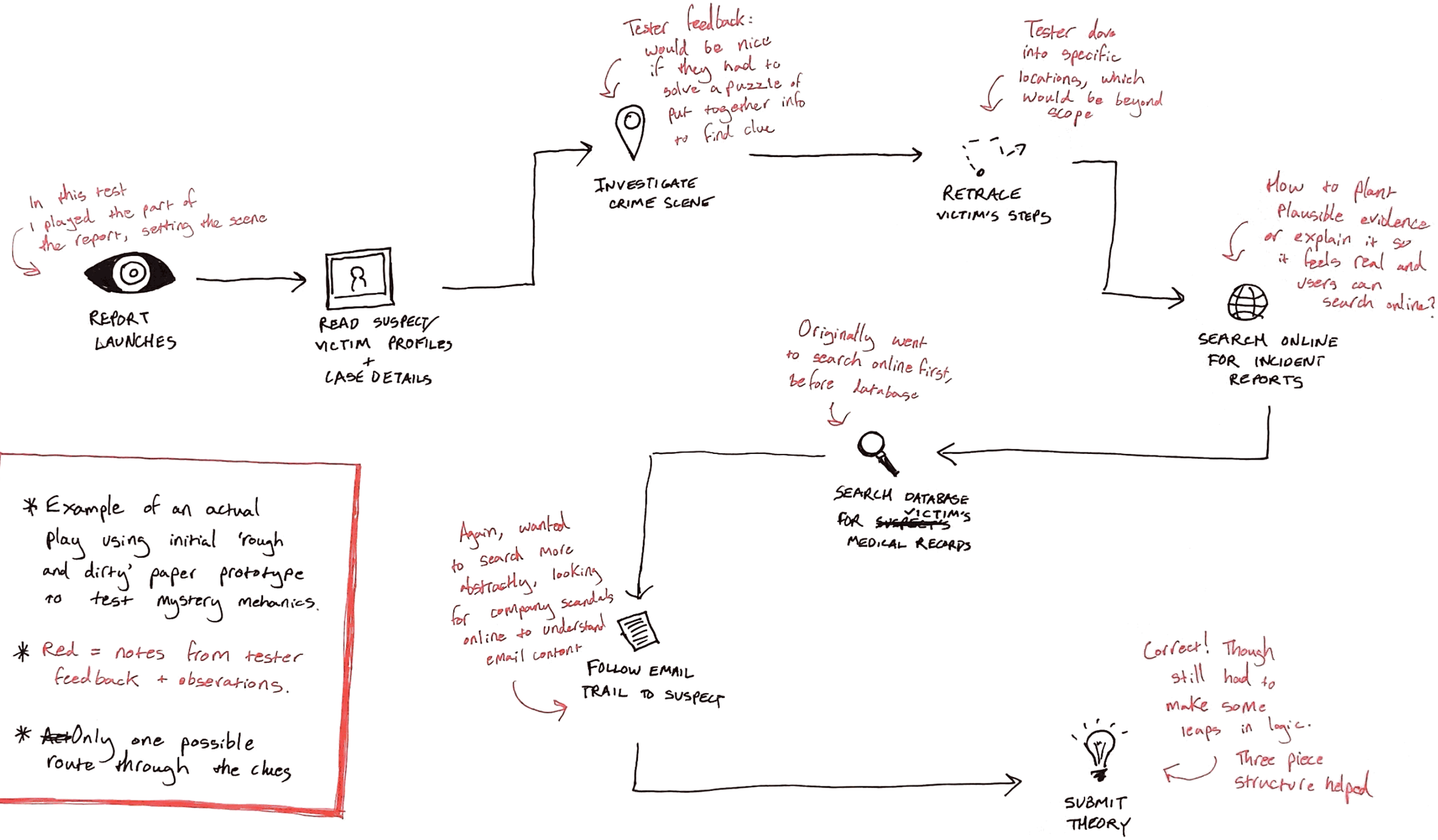




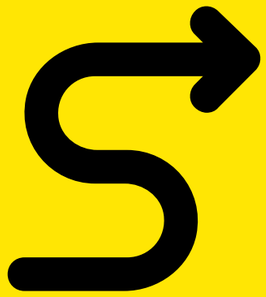
Testing the Core Gameplay

Click or scan to see how it works and the results of the testing.

Mapping User Feedback



* Example of an actual play using initial 'rough and dirty' paper prototype to test mystery mechanics.
* Red = notes from tester feedback + observations.
* ~~Act~~Only one possible route through the clues

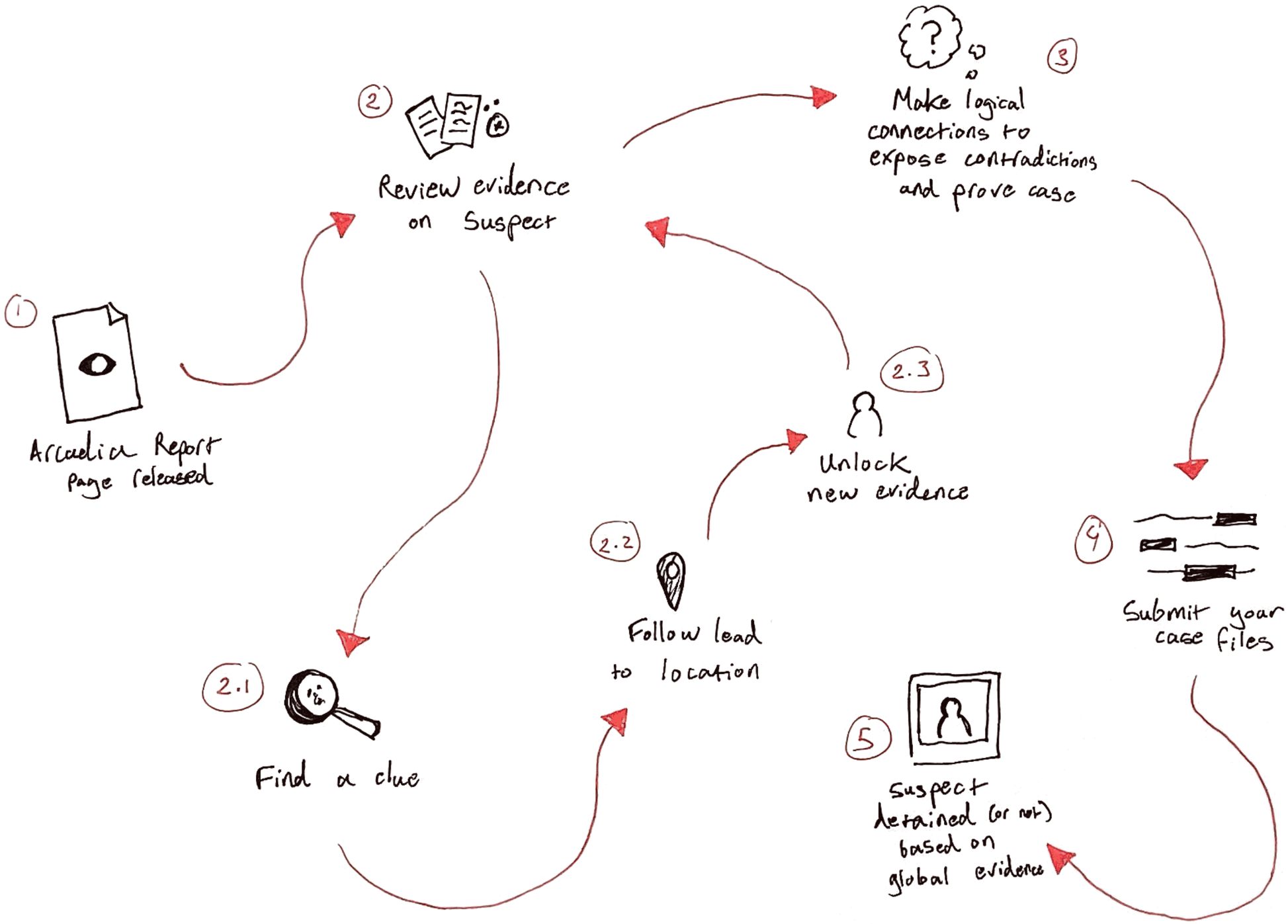


User Flows

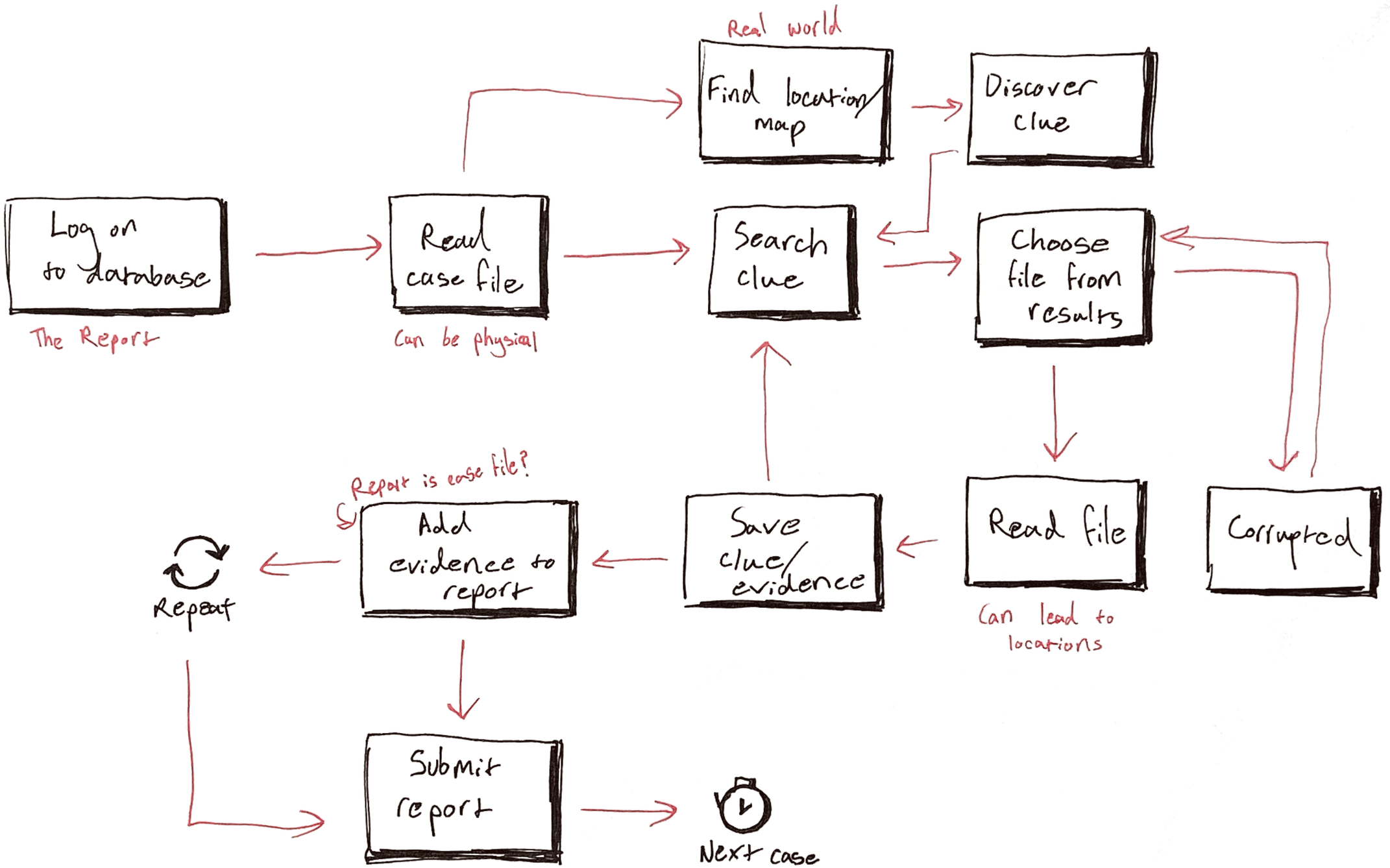
Designing a path through a mystery

Scan or click for blog posts

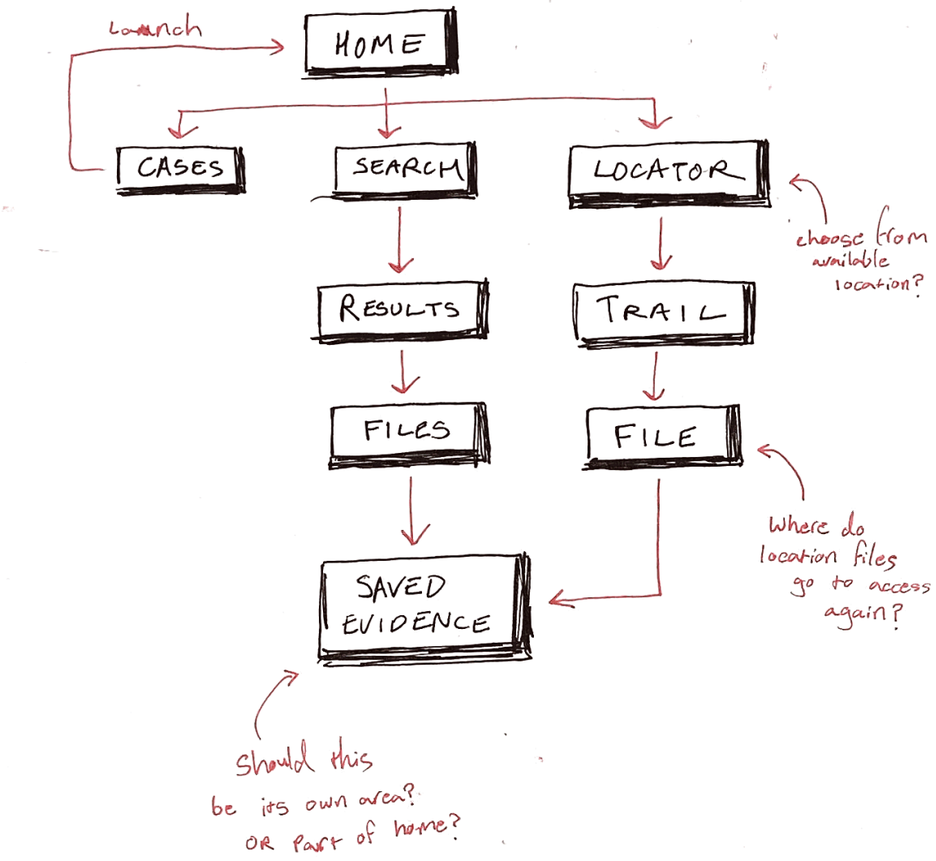
Case Flow


1
Arcadia Report Page released
2
Review evidence on Suspect
2.1
Find a clue
2.2
Follow lead to location
2.3
Unlock new evidence
3
Make logical connections to expose contradictions and prove case
4
Submit your case files
5
Suspect detained (or not) based on global evidence

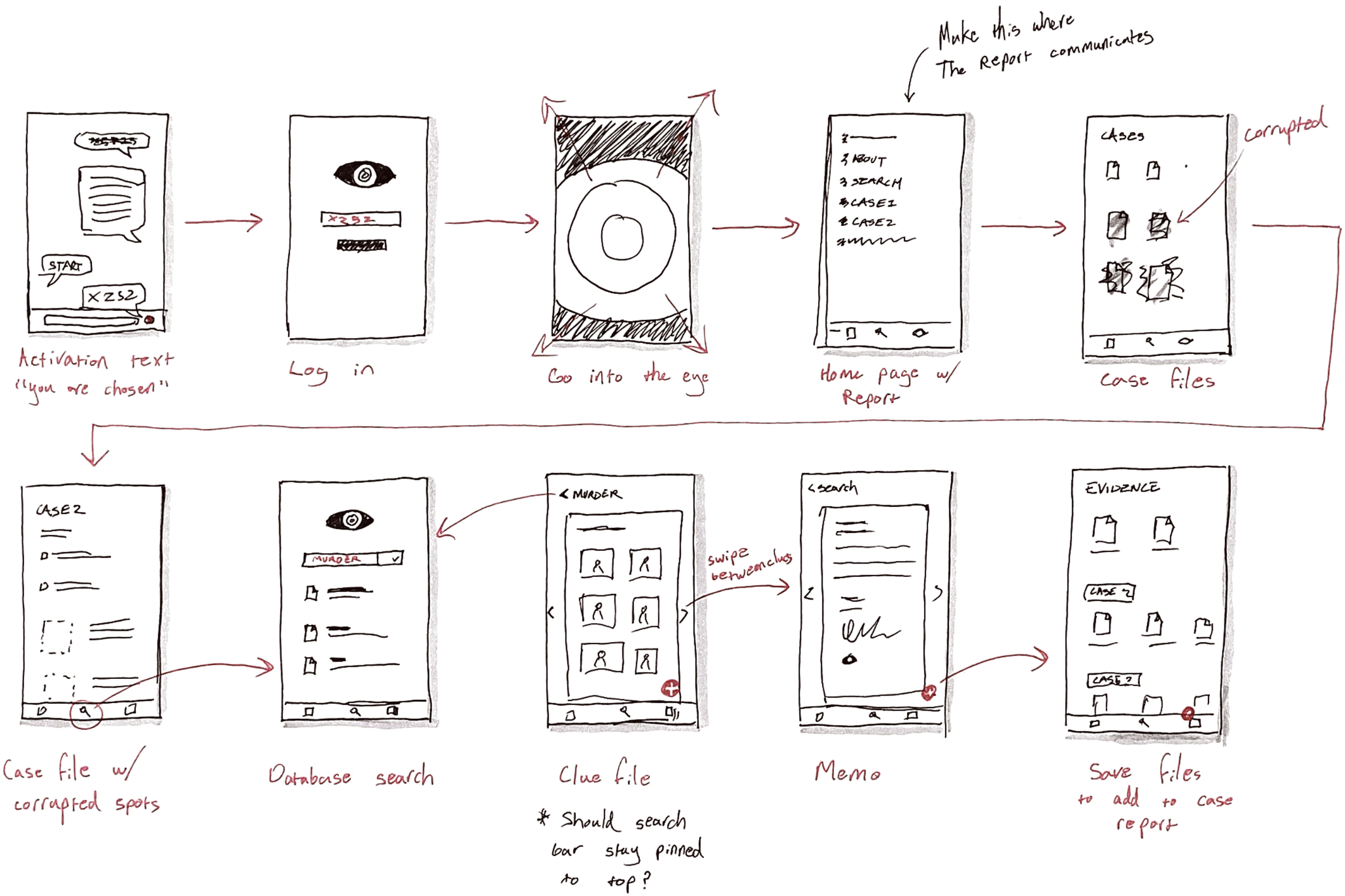
User Flow


Real world
Find location/ map
Discover clue
Log on to database
Real case file
Search clue
Choose file from results
The Report
Can be physical
Report is case file?
Add evidence to report
Save clue/ evidence
Read file
Corrupted
Can lead to locations
Repeat
Submit report
Next case

Flowing Through Information Architecture

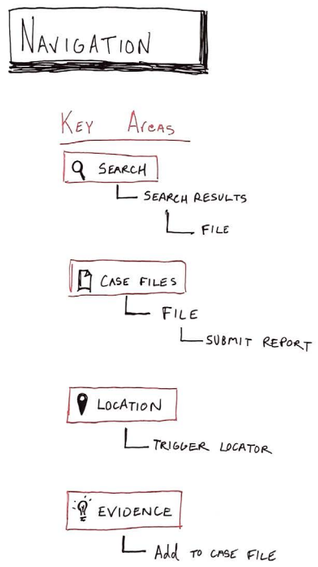


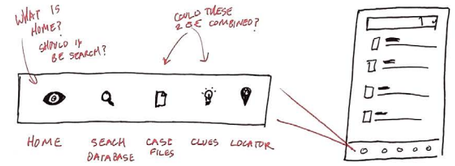
First Story Board



Sketching the Flow

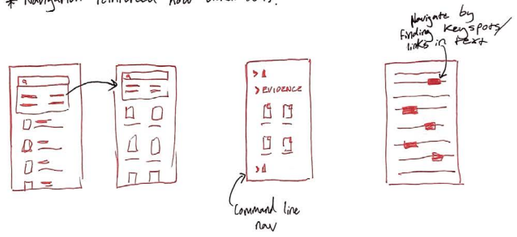
Navigation





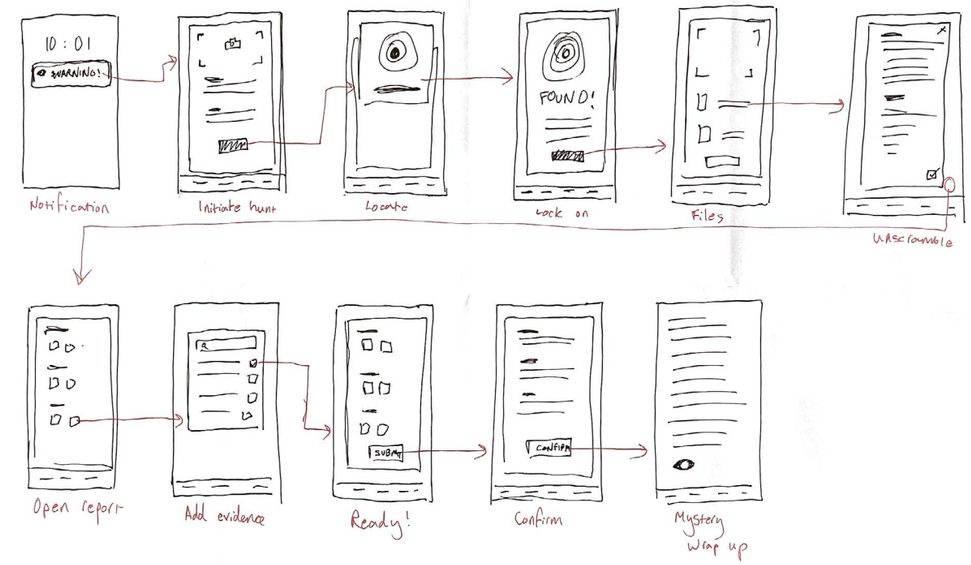
What if...?

* Everything revolved around search?
* Nav/actions are text/command based?
* What if there was no nav?
* Navigation reinforced how broken db is?



Story Prototype

Real time suspect clue



Connected Prototype

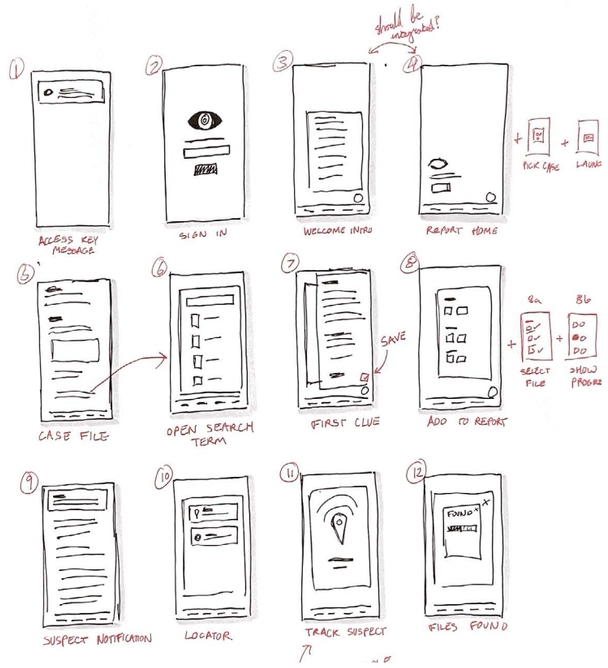
Key Narrative

* Be the detective
* Get sucked into the mystery
* Exploring a corrupted system
* Invading reality

Key Areas

* Starting up Arcadia
* The case file/mystery
* Unlocking a location
* Adding a clue
* Search database
* Submit a report
* Track suspect
* Message from Killer

What if for demo this is how location is unlocked?



MVP Plotting

Minimum ~~Viable~~ Valuable Product

* Case file
* A location → Just one type?
* A search term
* A Report → Can be simplified to one file?
* Onboarding

MVP Requirements

Intro
* Introduce story
* Teach system
* Hook people
* Case file physical?

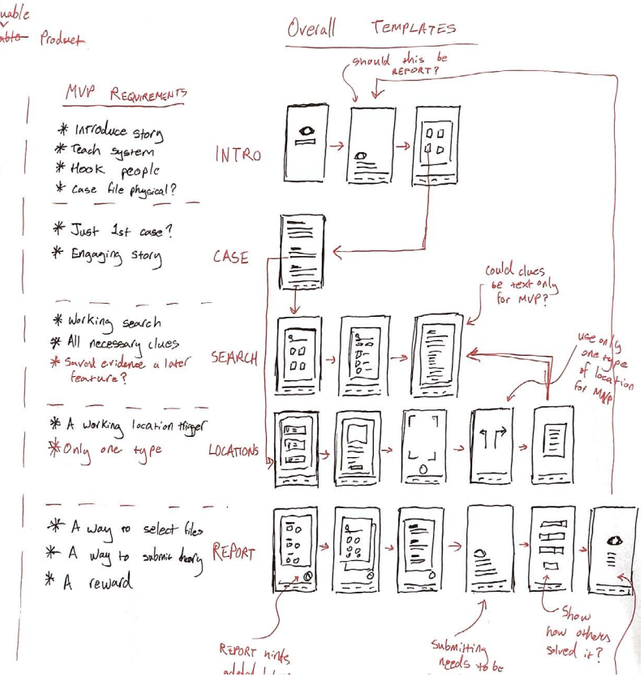
Case
* Just 1st case?
* Engaging story

Search
* Working search
* All necessary clues
* Saved evidence a later feature?

Locations
* A working location trigger
* Only one type

Report
* A way to select files
* A way to submit theory
* A reward

Overall Templates



Visual Design

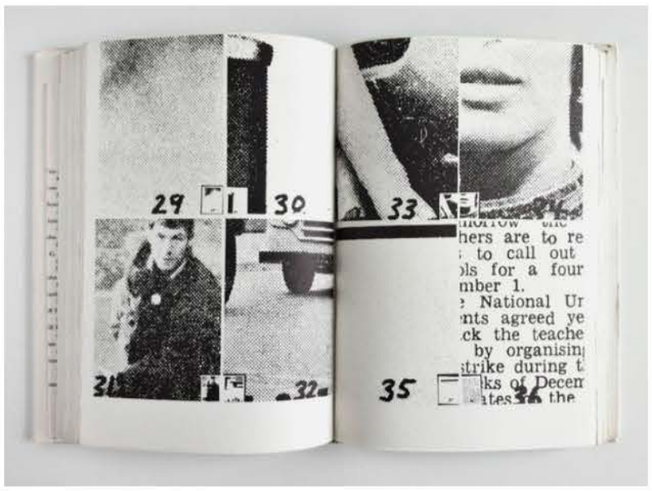
Designing the style and experience of a corrupted database

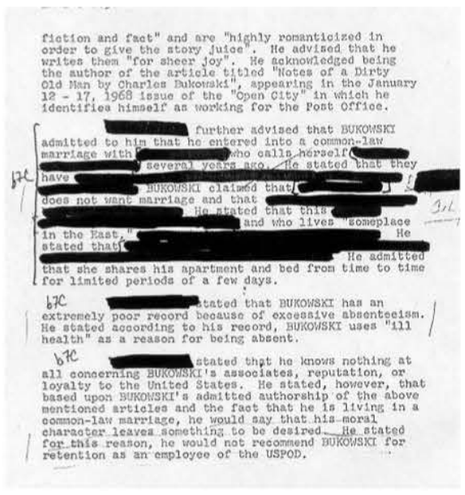
Scan or click for blog posts

Original Moodboard

“If Josef Müller-Brockmann ran a startup in the dot com bubble”

The original moodboard for a corrupted database under a sleek corporate shell, exploring a more found footage concept. Scan or click to view the whole moodboard.





fiction and fact" and are "highly romanticized in order to give the story juice". He advised that he writes them "for sheer joy". He acknowledged being the author of the article titled "Notes of a Dirty Old Man by Charles Bukowski", appearing in the January 12 - 17, 1968 issue of the "Open City" in which he identifies himself as working for the Post Office.

[redacted] further advised that BUKOWSKI admitted to him that he entered into a common-law marriage with [redacted] who calls herself [redacted] several years ago. He stated that they have [redacted] BUKOWSKI claimed that [redacted] does not want marriage and that [redacted] He stated that this [redacted] and who lives "someplace in the East." He stated that [redacted] He admitted that she shares his apartment and bed from time to time for limited periods of a few days.

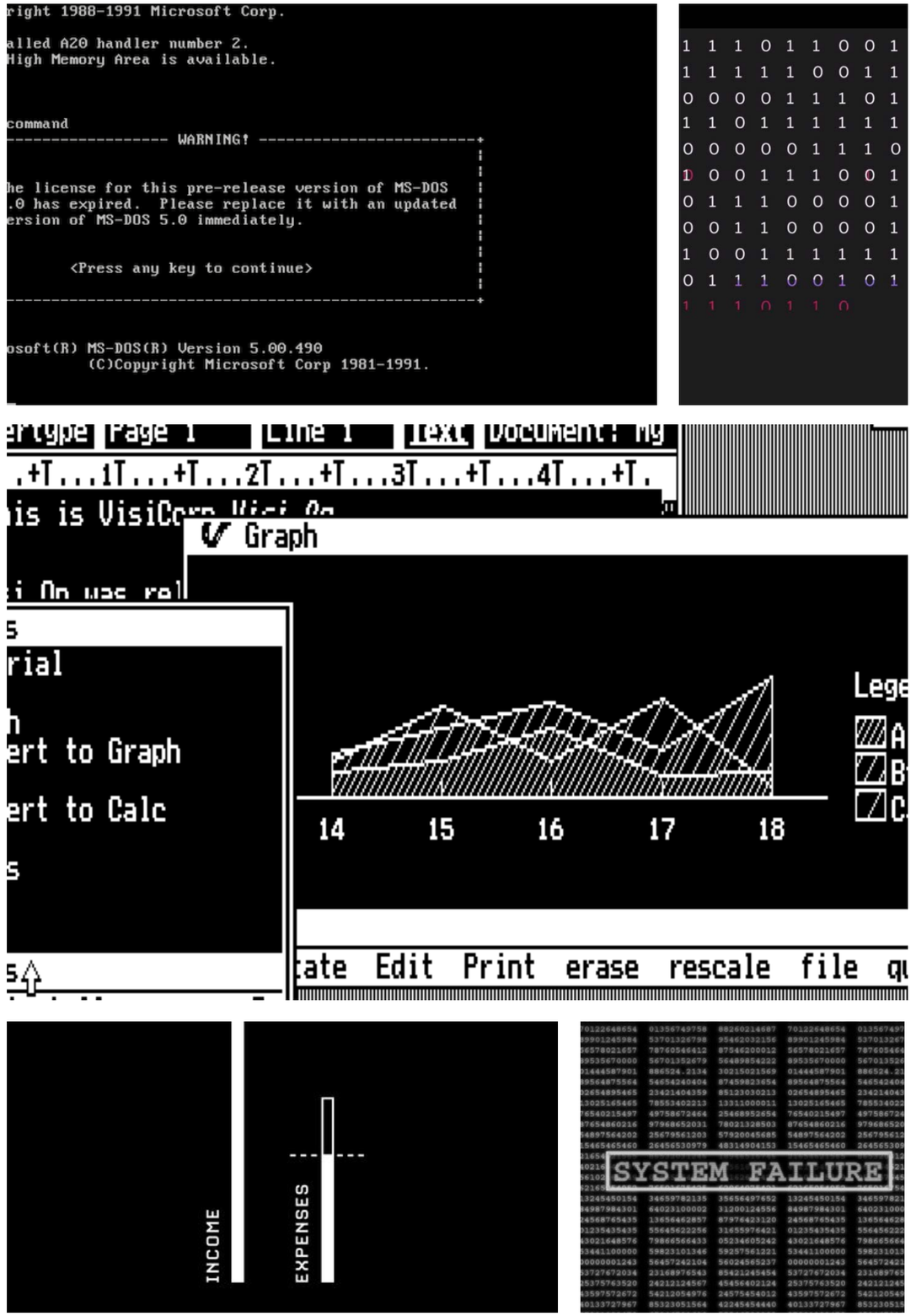
b7C [redacted] stated that BUKOWSKI has an extremely poor record because of excessive absenteeism. He stated according to his record, BUKOWSKI uses "ill health" as a reason for being absent.

b7C [redacted] stated that he knows nothing at all concerning BUKOWSKI's associates, reputation, or loyalty to the United States. He stated, however, that based upon BUKOWSKI's admitted authorship of the above mentioned articles and the fact that he is living in a common-law marriage, he would say that his moral character leaves something to be desired. He stated for this reason, he would not recommend BUKOWSKI for retention as an employee of the USPOD.

UI Visual Grammar

Inspirations

- MS-DOS
- Corrupted files
- Glitches
- 90s Silicon Valley
- Command Line Interfaces
- Monochromatic Minimalism



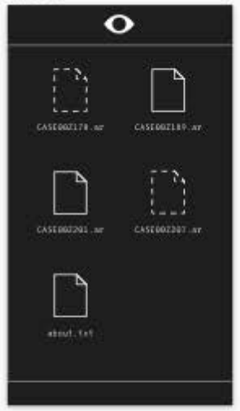
Style Iterations (1/3)

The Report, the interface itself, is a central character. It should feel like a part of the mystery, not a mere container for it.

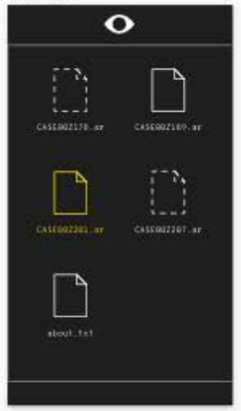
Style Iterations (2/3)

enter

files-1



files-1a

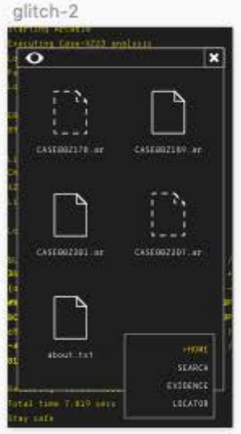


files-2

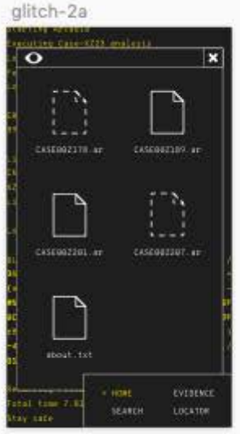
files-2a

glitch-1

glitch-2



glitch-2a



glitch-3

glitch-3a

glitch-4

glitch-4a

text-1

text-1a

text-1b

text-1c

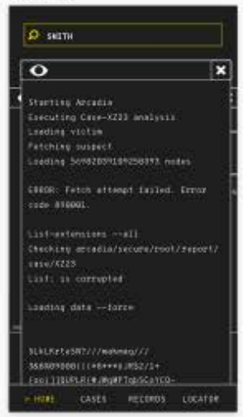
Style Iterations (3/3)

text-1

text-1a

text-1b

text-1c

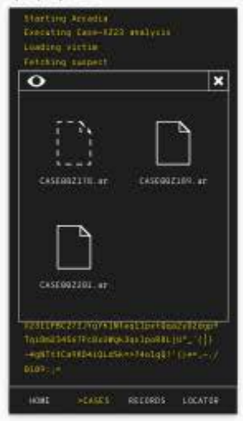


popup-1

popup-1a

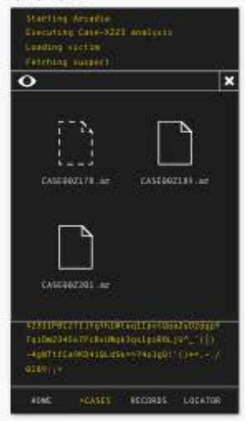
popup-2

popup-2a



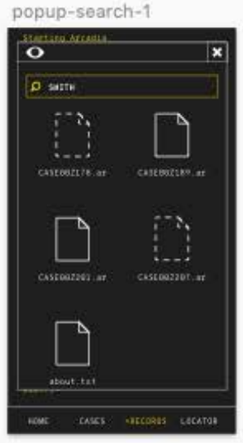
popup-2b

popup-3



popup-4

popup-search-1



popup-search-2

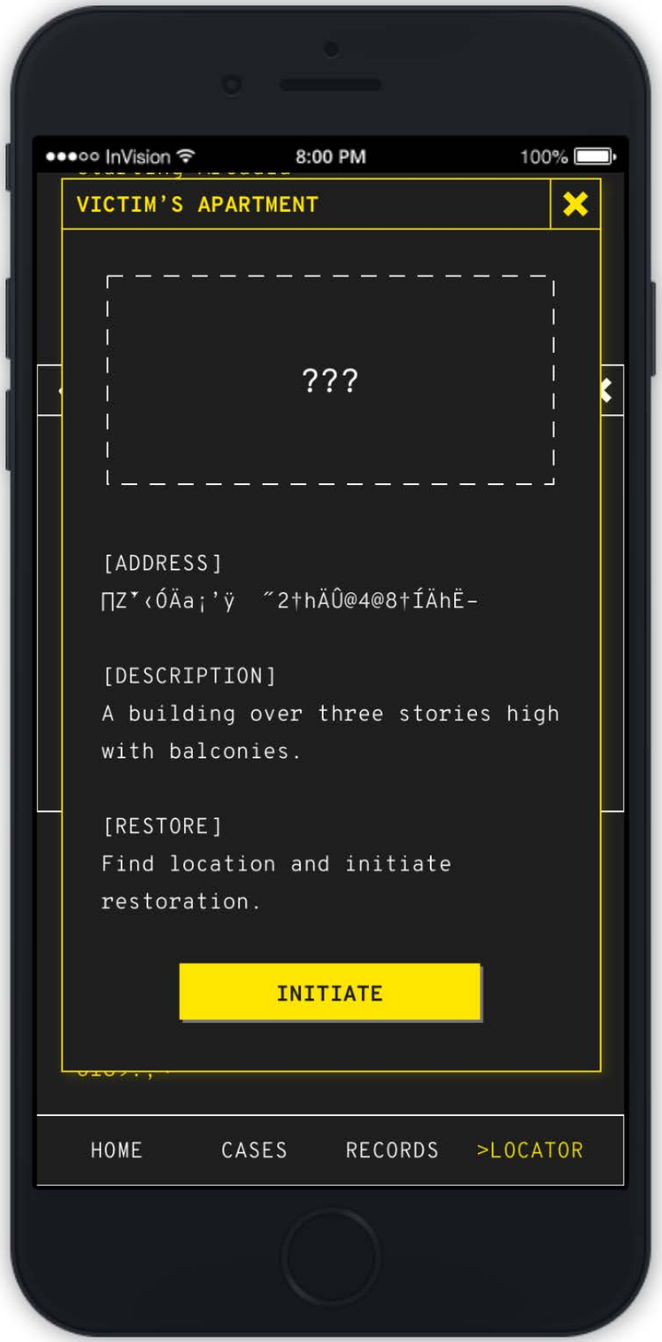
popup-search-2a

popup-search-2b

Style Test Prototype

Prototype 2: Style Test

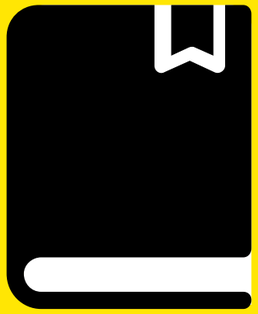
- The first digital prototype, the goal was to test the visual design in context and see how users respond.
- Click or scan to try it for yourself.



Iteration Based on Feedback

Responding to Feedback:

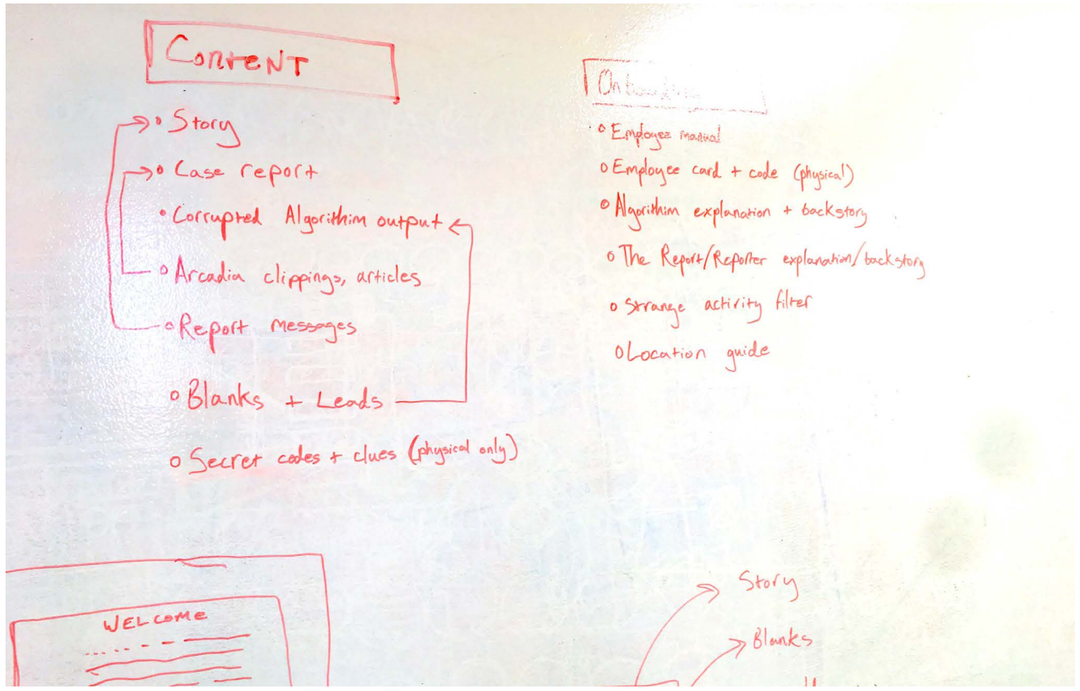
- Indicating corrupted images are a photograph.
- Making text hierarchy clearer
- “I can hear the sound of the keys!”

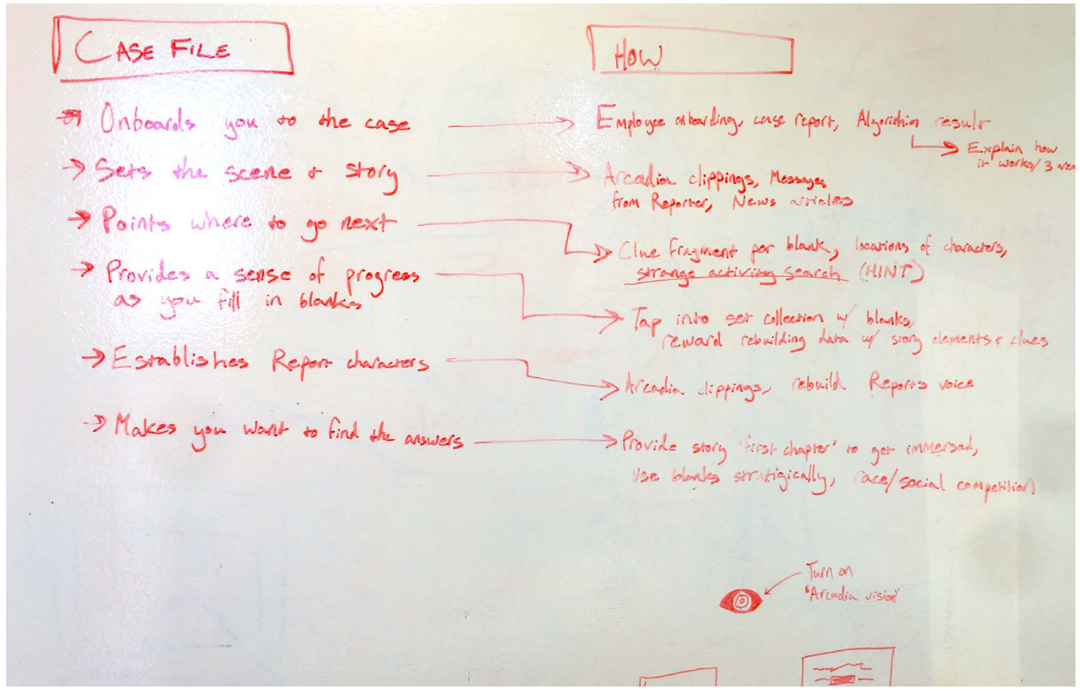


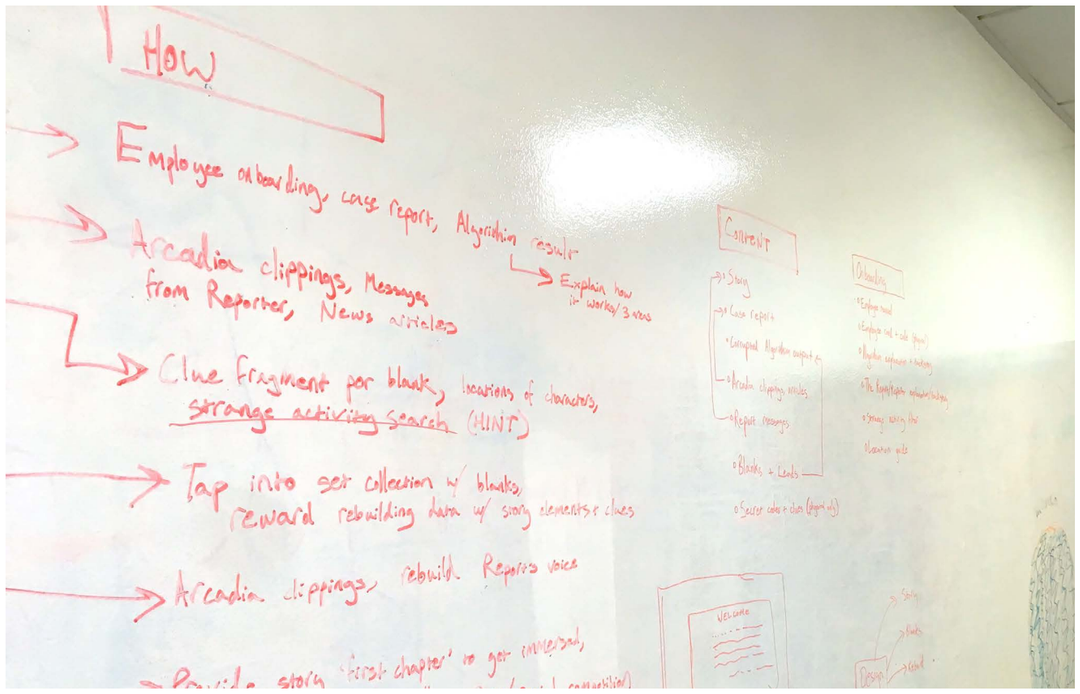
Case File

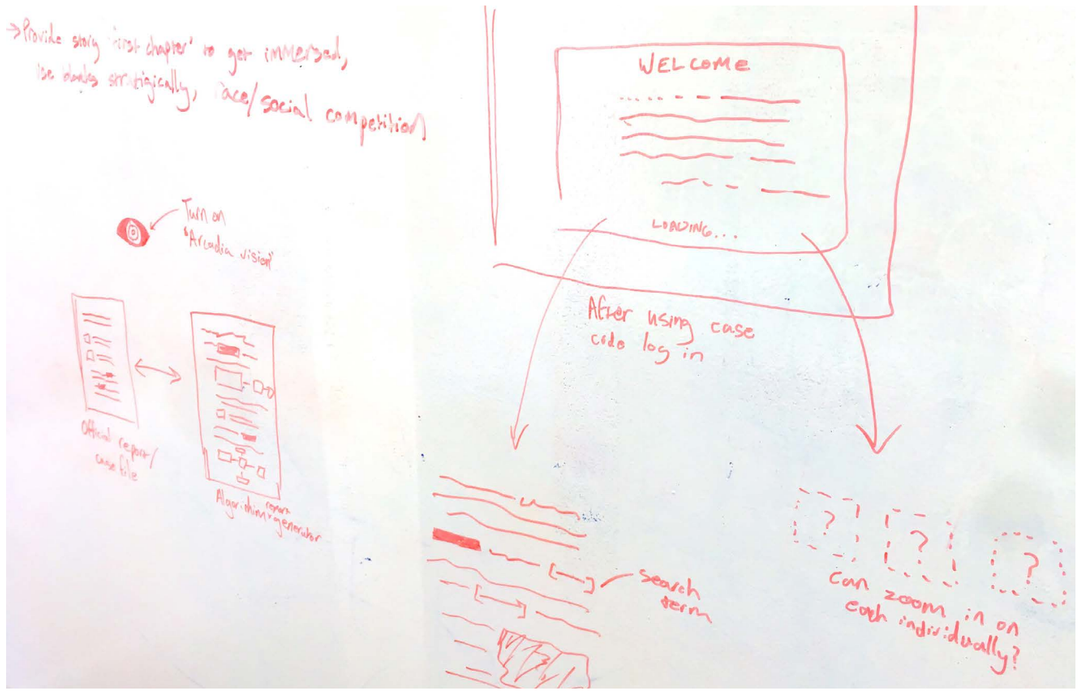
Designing the central hub of The Arcadia Report

Brainstorming All Things Case Files





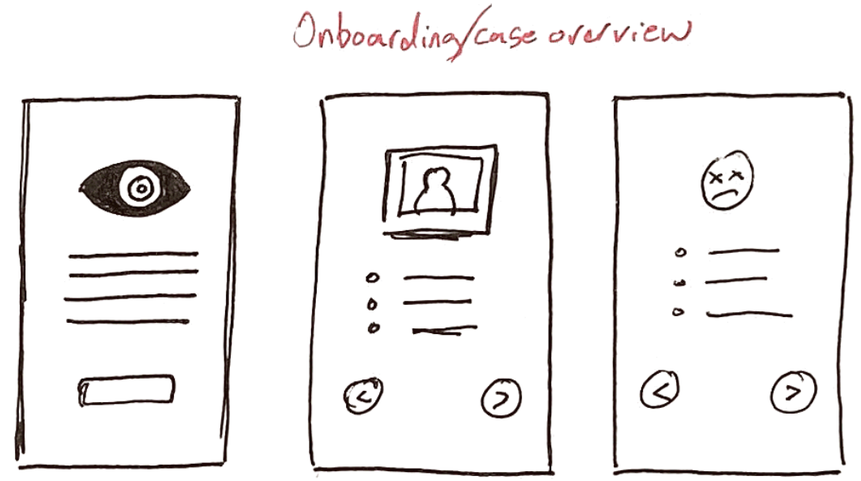


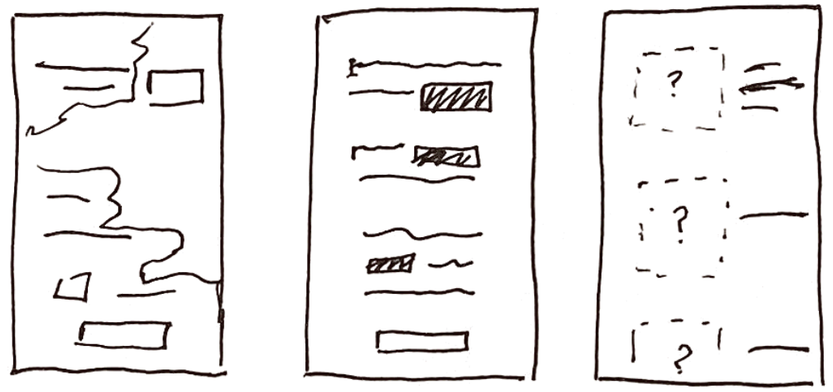


Case File Requirements

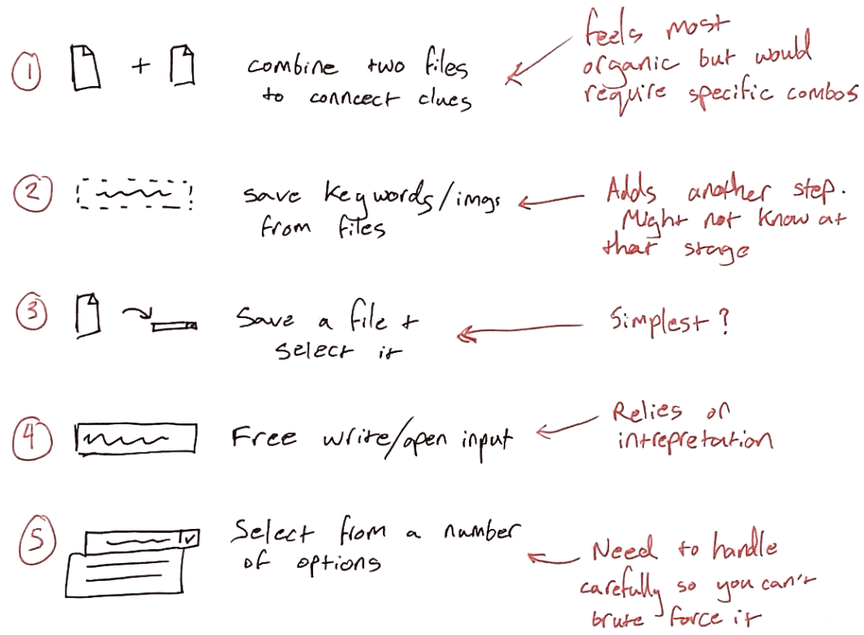
A Case File Should...

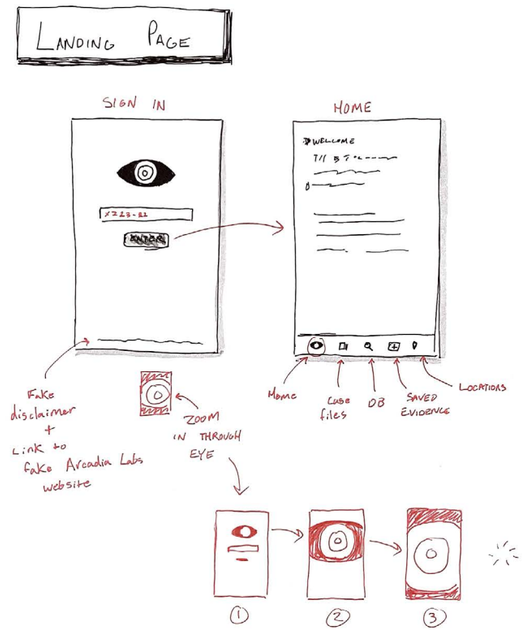
- Set the scene and introduce the case
- Establish The Report's character
- Make you want to find the answers
- Provide clear next steps
- Introduce locations
- Reward thorough investigation

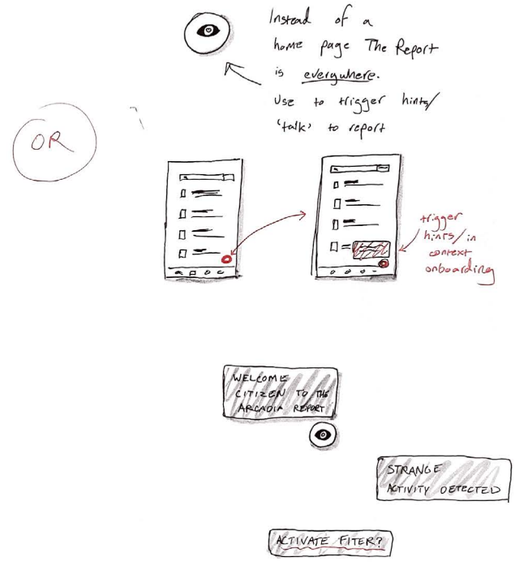


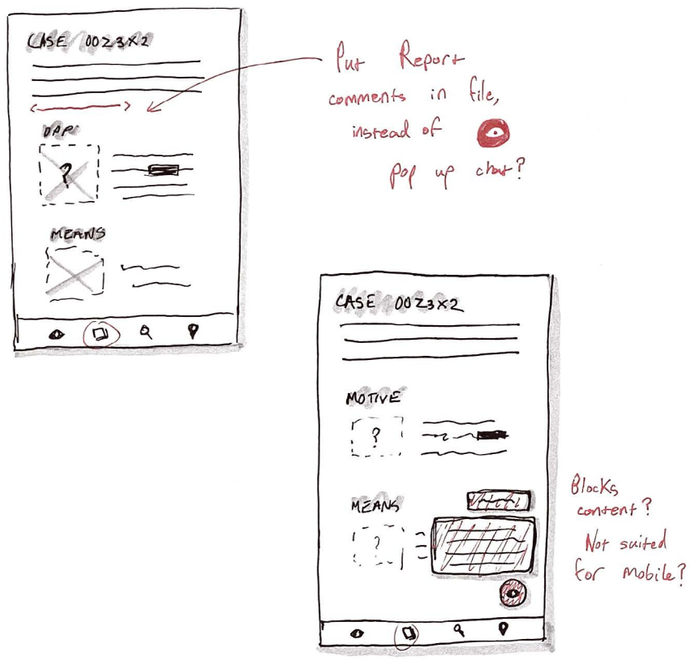


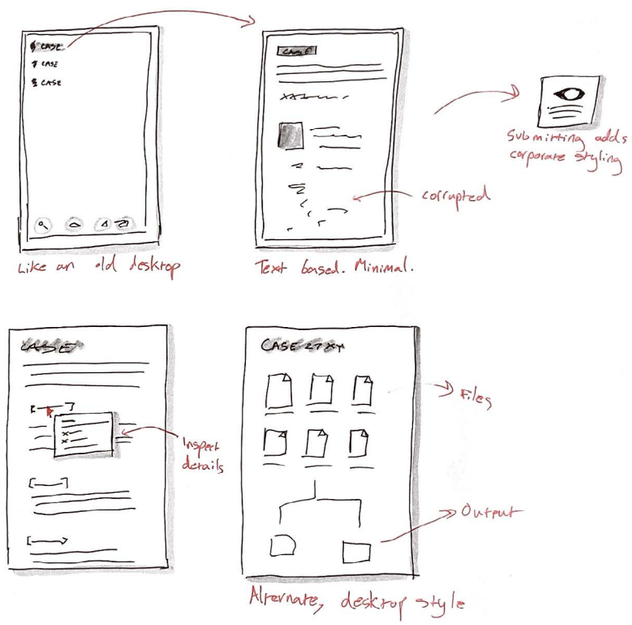
Case File Sketching (1/2)



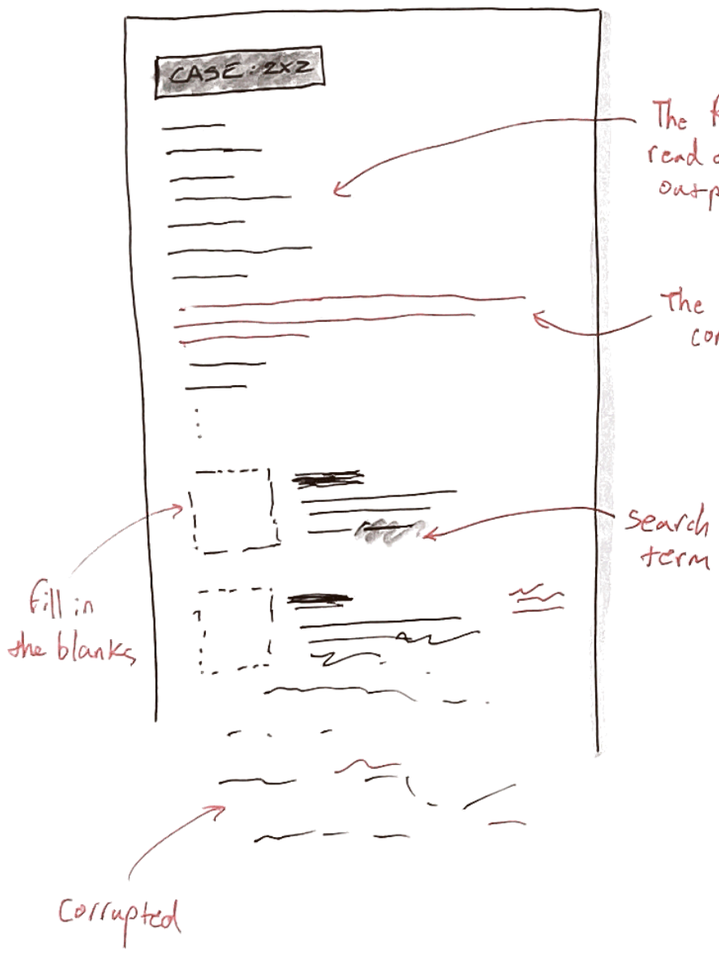


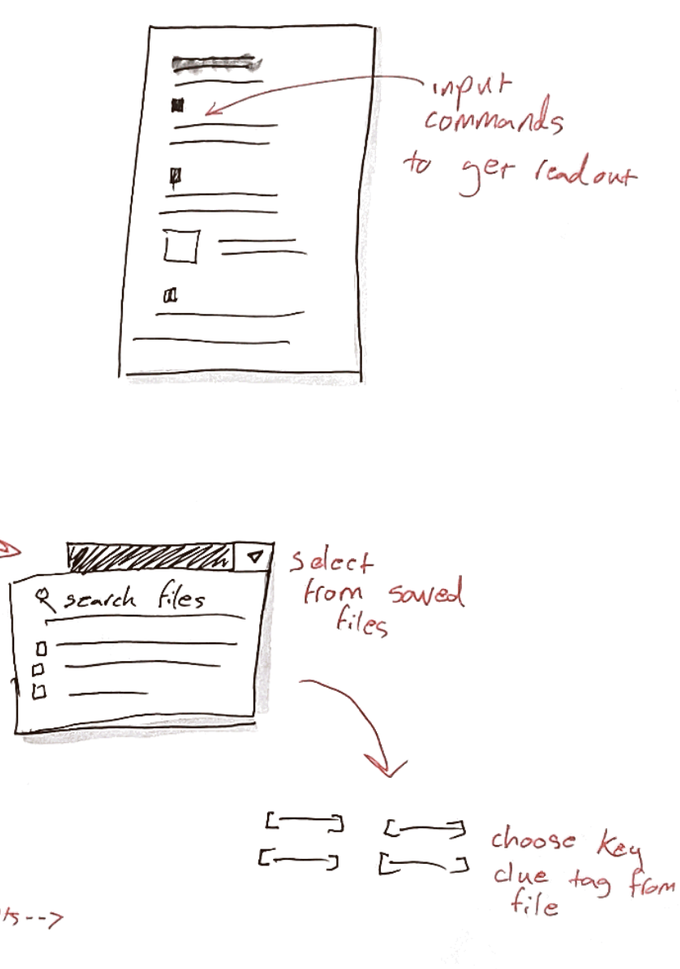






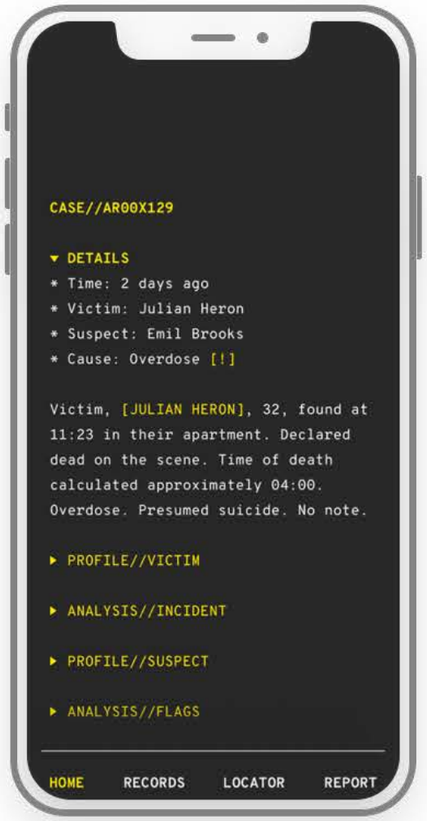
Case File Sketching (2/2)

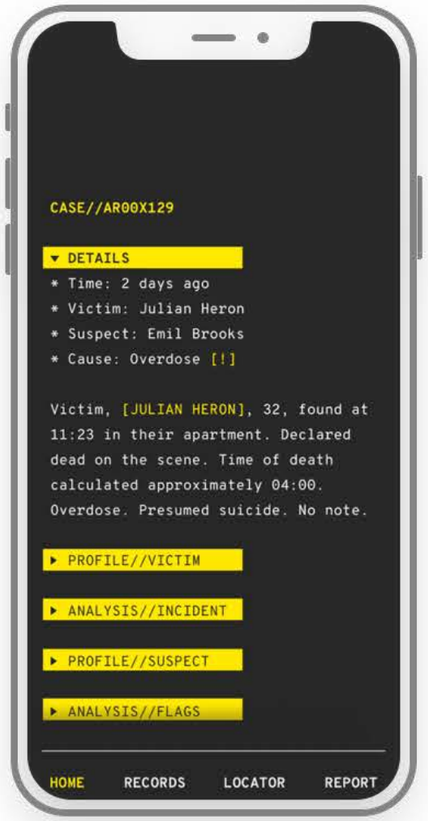


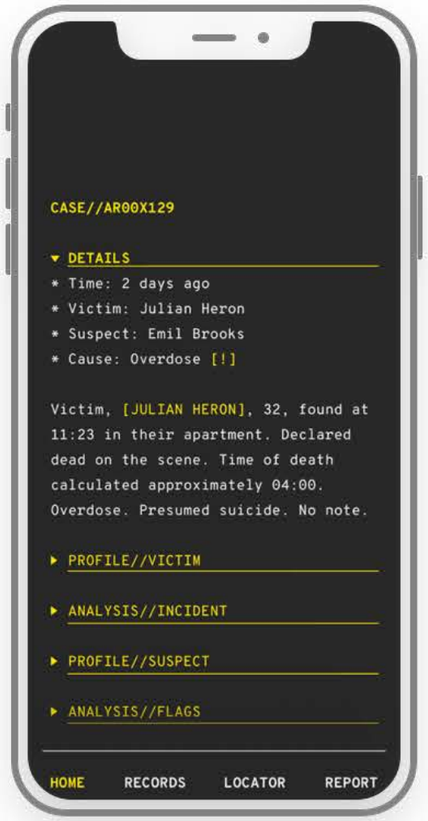


Iteration Based on User Testing

Displaying all the text at once proved off putting and more difficult to parse while testing with users. In A/B testing of collapsing sections versus displaying all, the accordian design won with 100% of users.







Users' Choice

Locations

Transforming your city into an escape room

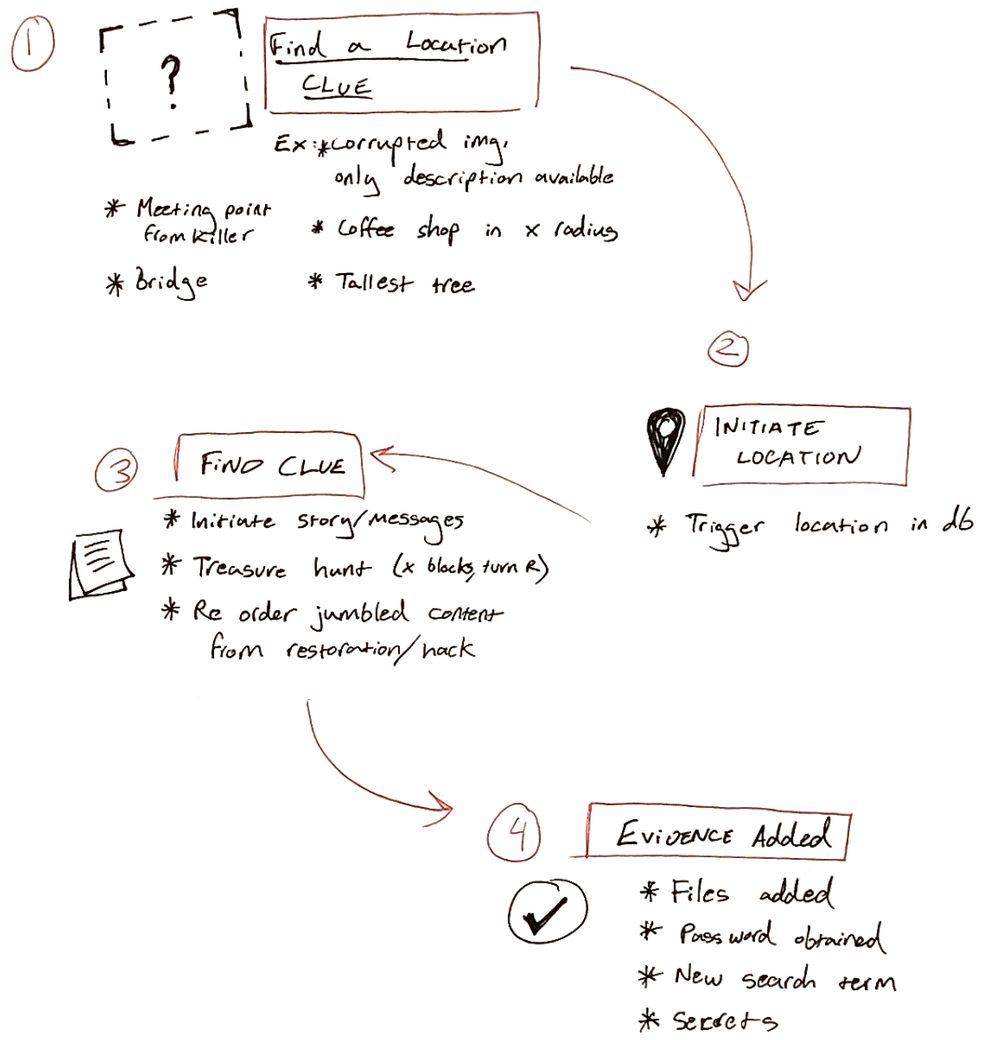
Location System (1/2)

Users should feel...

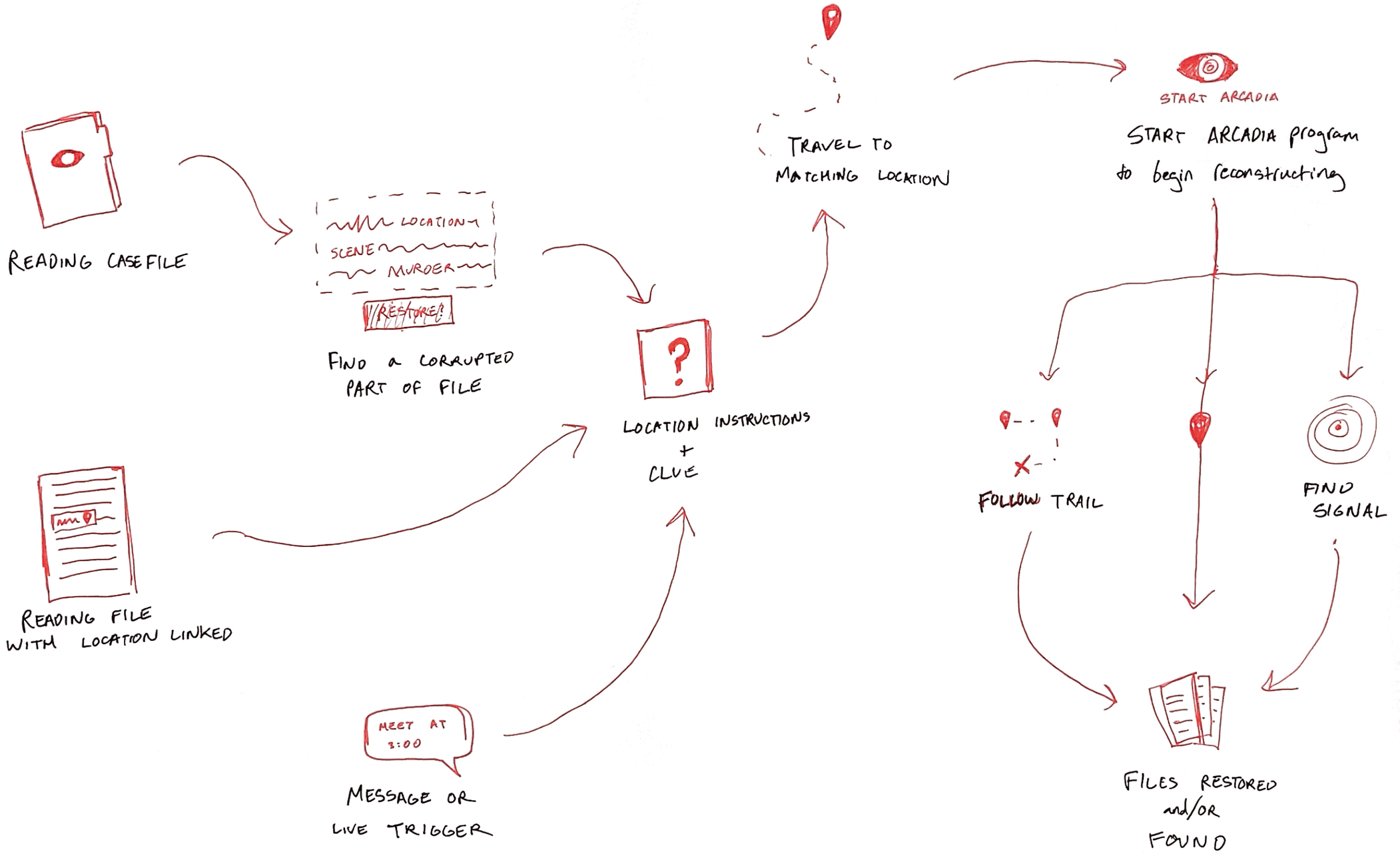
- Like it's real
- Part of a treasure hunt
- Like you're smart
- Like you've discovered something new and exciting

Locations should be...

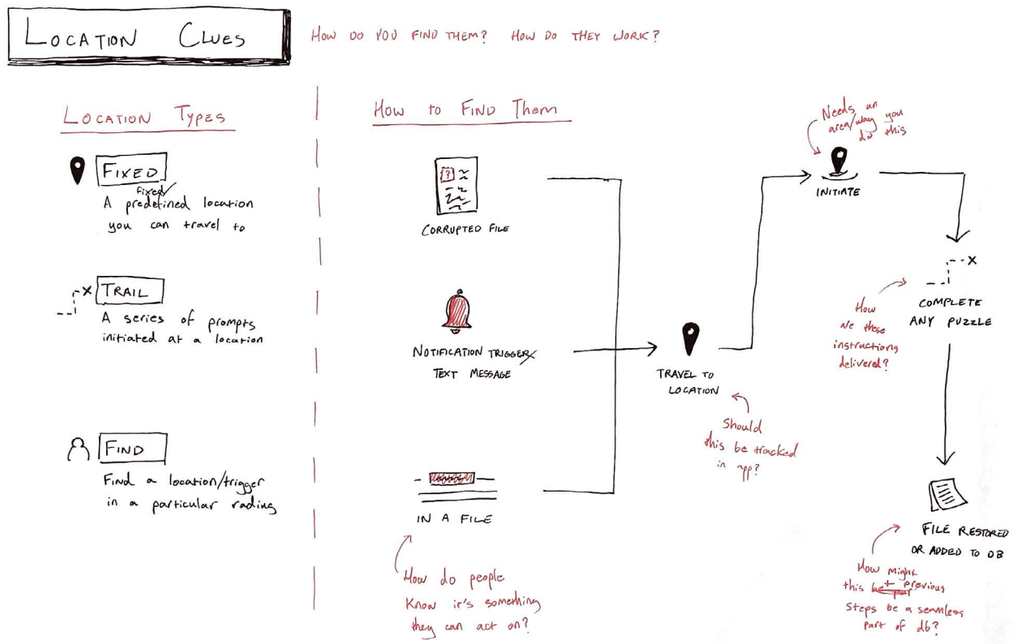
- Logical part of the mystery
- Part of a larger puzzle
- A fun quest to find
- A place you can go with friends
- A rewarding hunt to complete

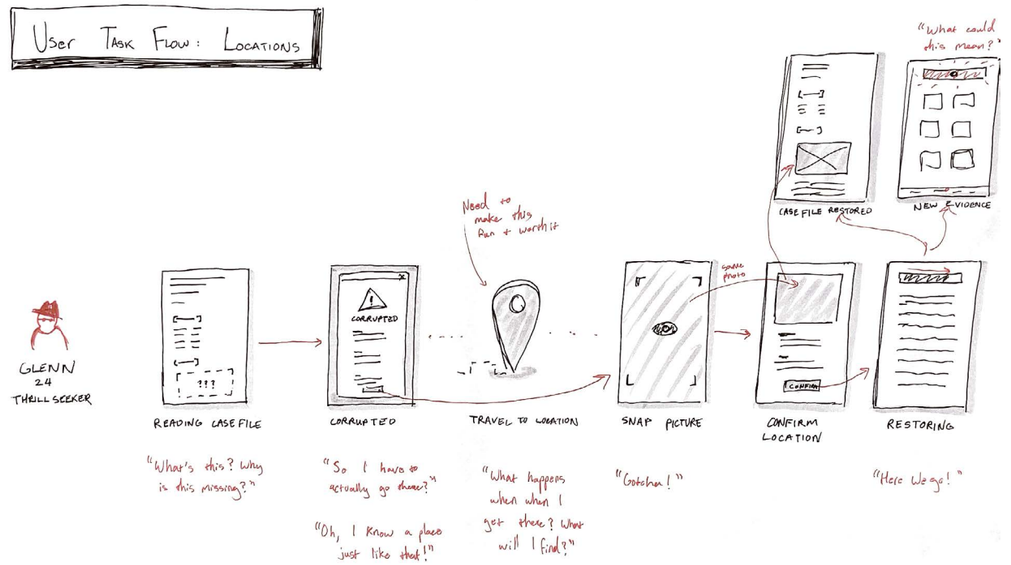


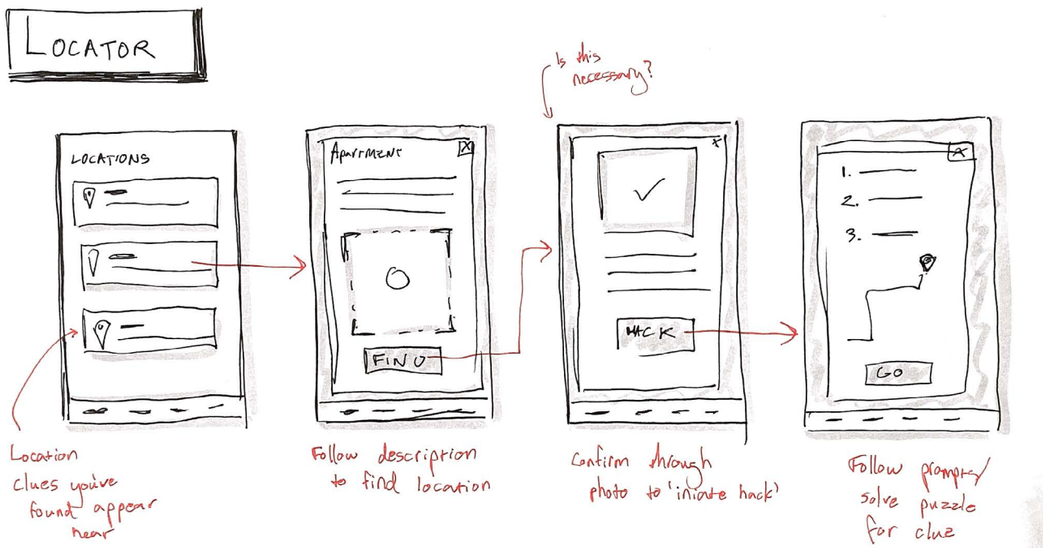
Location System (2/2)

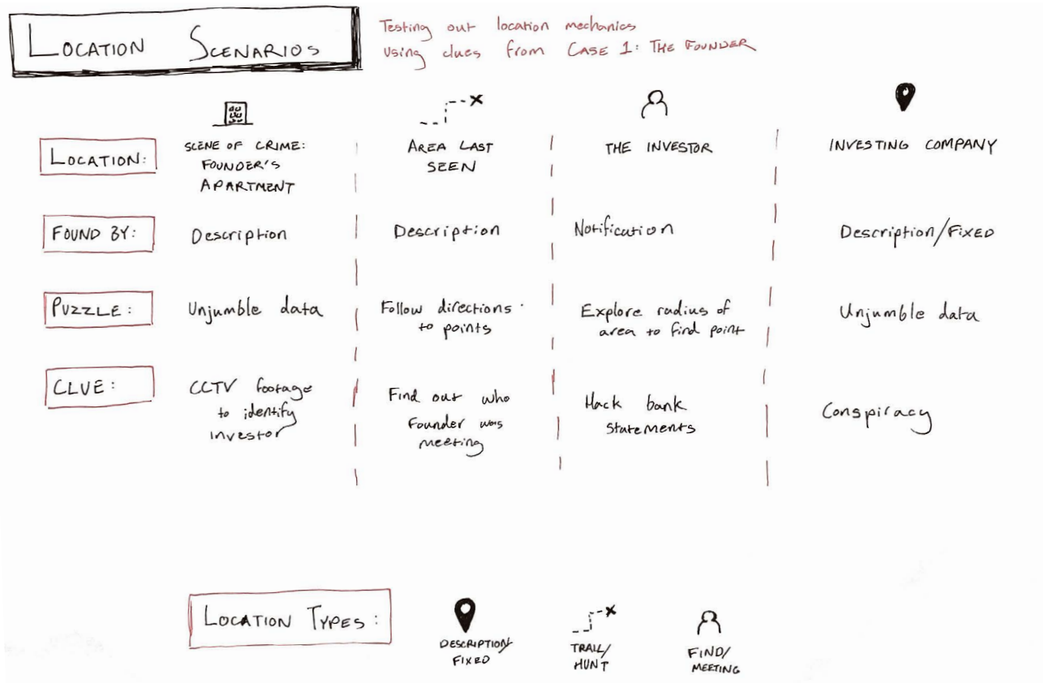


Designing How Locations Work

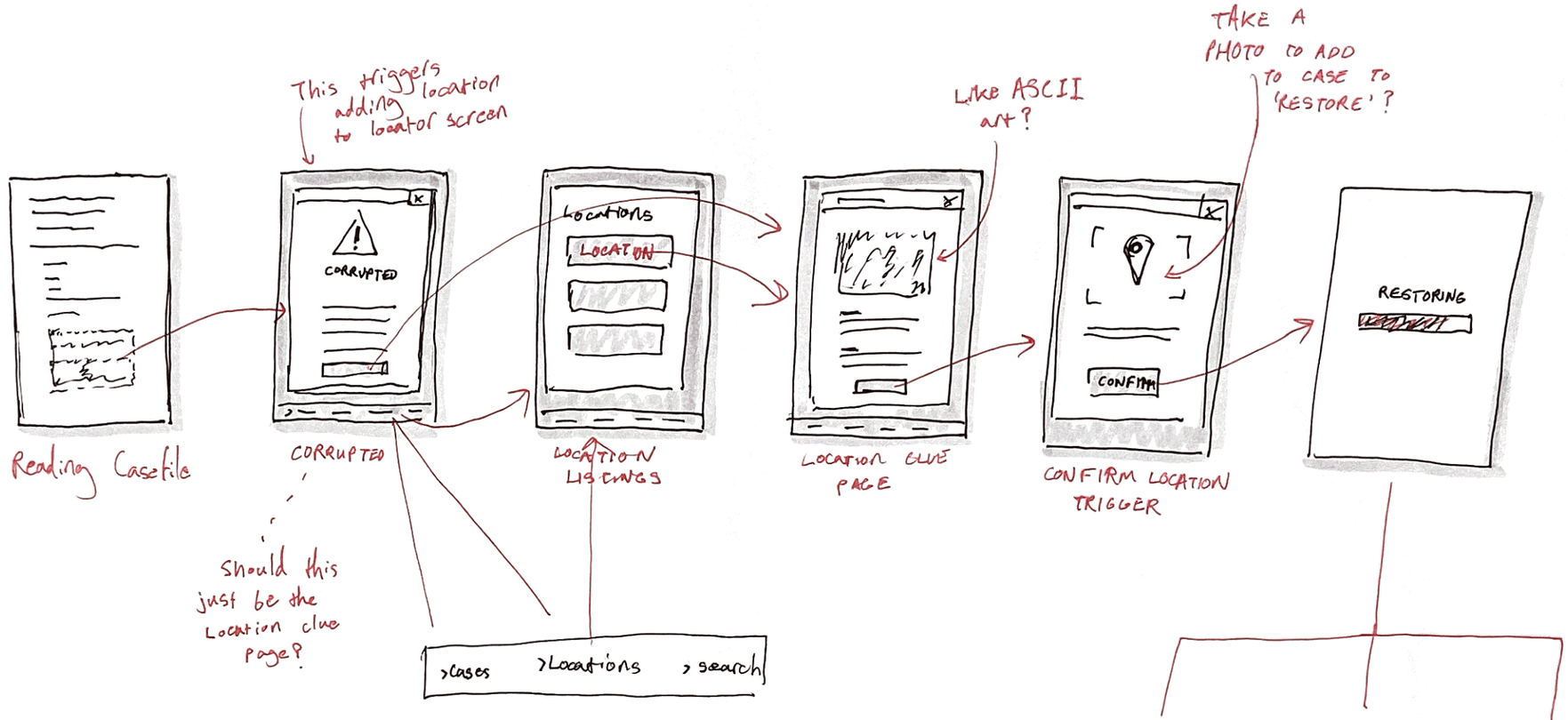






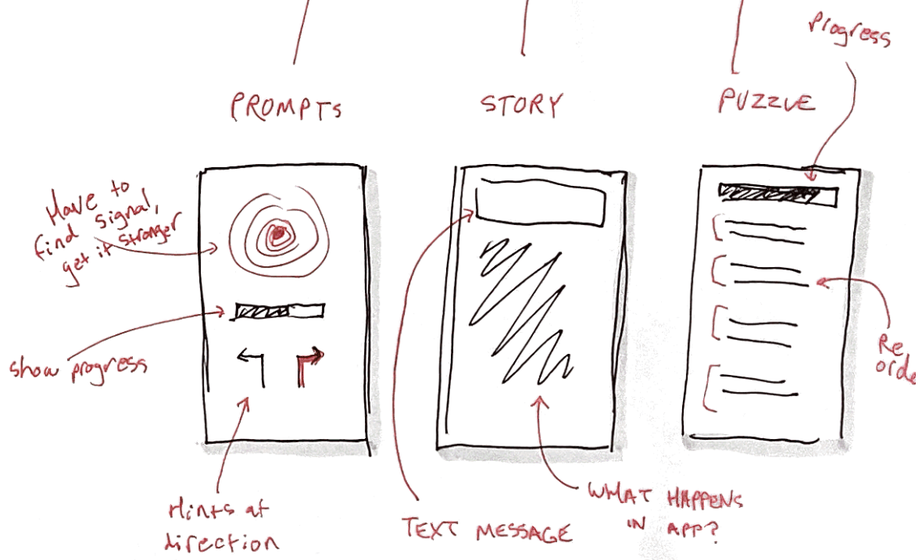


Location Flow

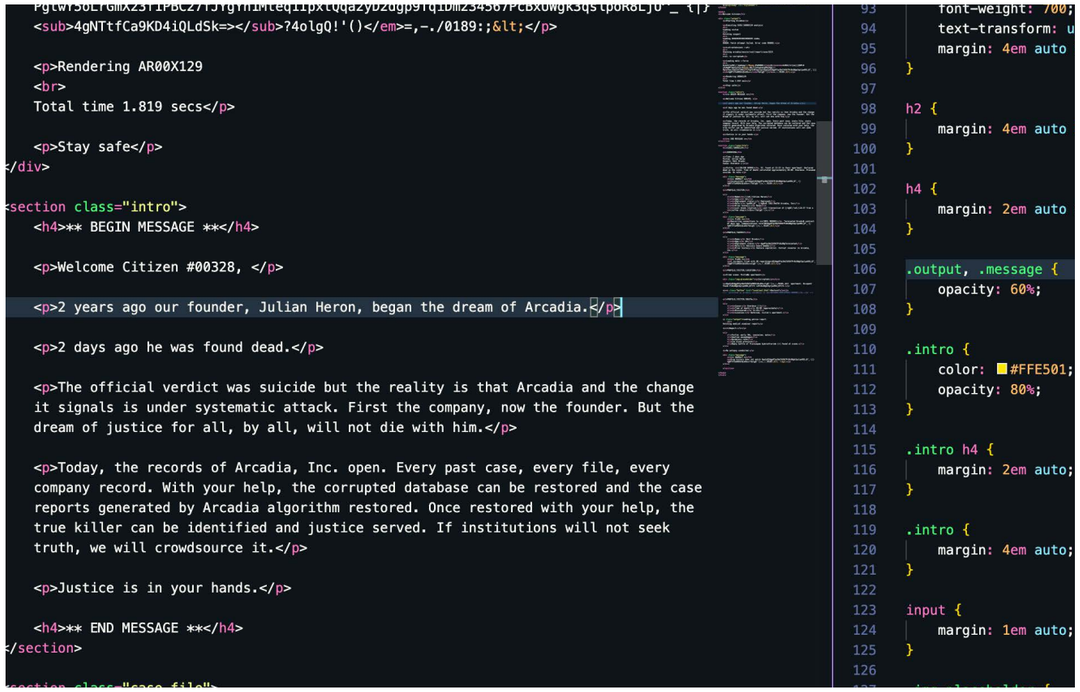


How Might We...

* Make the hunt exciting, not ~~pointless~~ mindless instructions?
* Engage + immerse players?
* Increase player agency + decision making?
* Make evidence an earned reward?

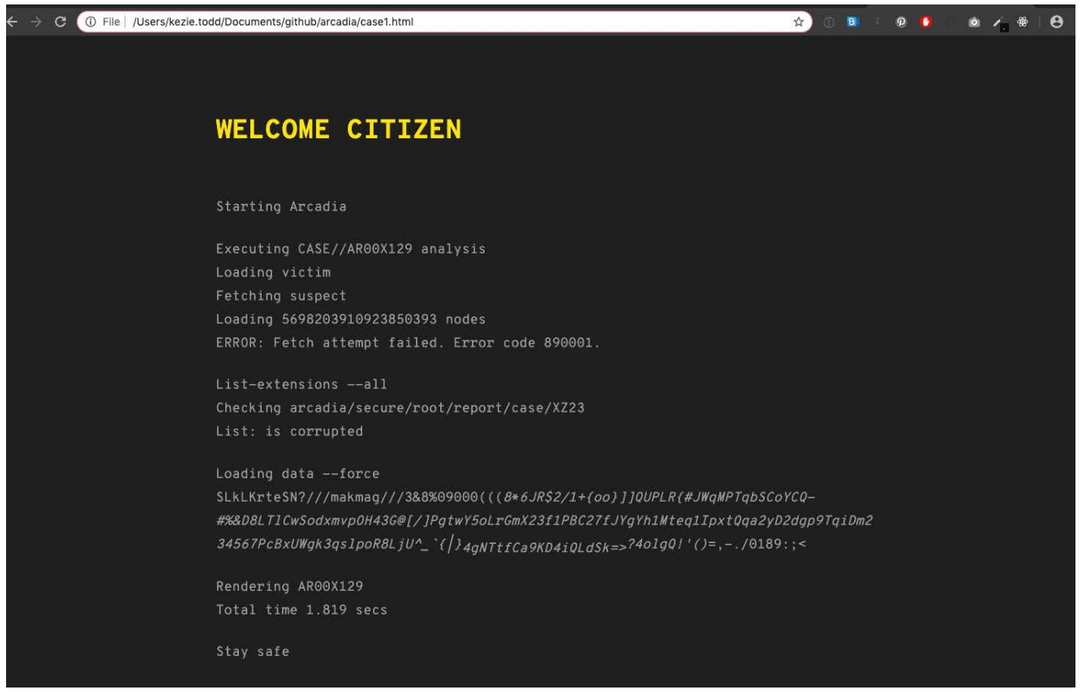


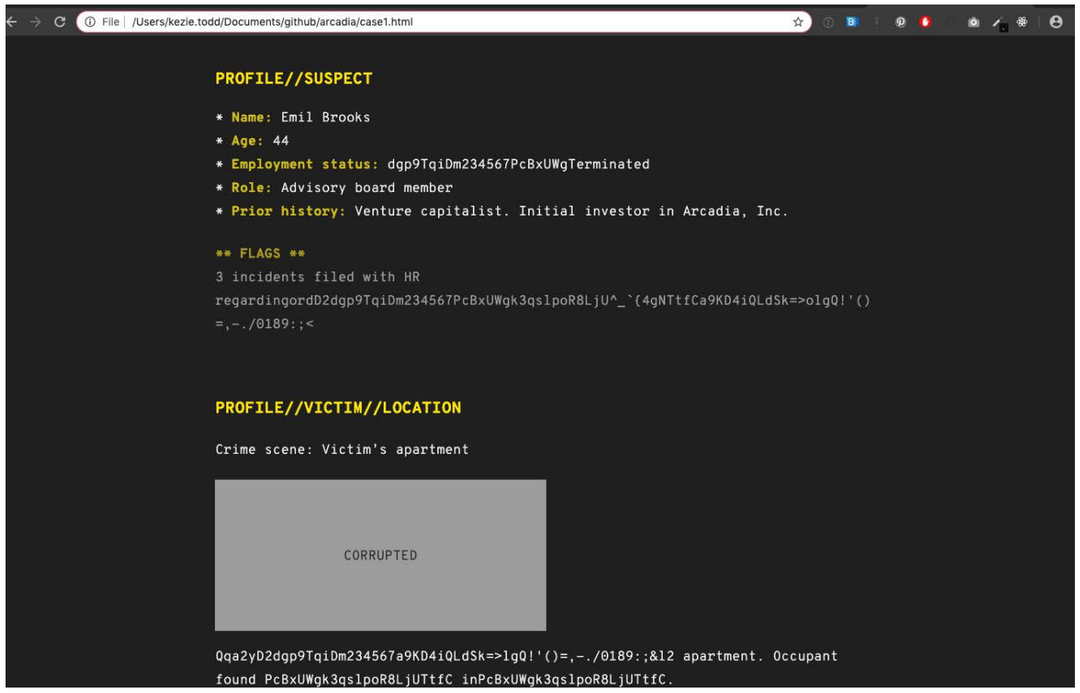
Content-Only HTML Prototype

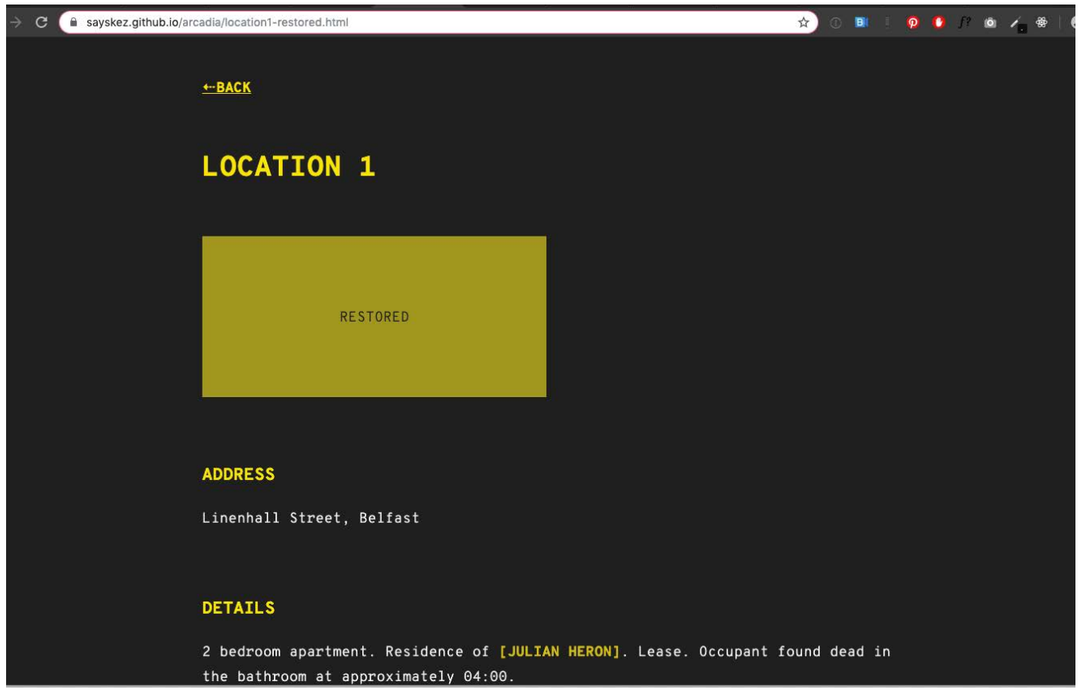


```
    <sub>4gNTtfCa9KD4iQLdSk=></sub>?4olgQ!'()</em>=,-./0189:;&lt;</p>

    <p>Rendering AR00X129
    <br>
    Total time 1.819 secs</p>

    <p>Stay safe</p>
</div>

<section class="intro">
    <h4>** BEGIN MESSAGE **</h4>

    <p>Welcome Citizen #00328, </p>

    <p>2 years ago our founder, Julian Heron, began the dream of Arcadia.</p>

    <p>2 days ago he was found dead.</p>

    <p>The official verdict was suicide but the reality is that Arcadia and the change
    it signals is under systematic attack. First the company, now the founder. But the
    dream of justice for all, by all, will not die with him.</p>

    <p>Today, the records of Arcadia, Inc. open. Every past case, every file, every
    company record. With your help, the corrupted database can be restored and the case
    reports generated by Arcadia algorithm restored. Once restored with your help, the
    true killer can be identified and justice served. If institutions will not seek
    truth, we will crowdsource it.</p>

    <p>Justice is in your hands.</p>

    <h4>** END MESSAGE **</h4>
</section>
```

```
    font-weight: 700;
    text-transform: u
    margin: 4em auto
}

h2 {
    margin: 4em auto
}

h4 {
    margin: 2em auto
}

.output, .message {
    opacity: 60%;
}

.intro {
    color: #FFE501;
    opacity: 80%;
}

.intro h4 {
    margin: 2em auto;
}

.intro {
    margin: 4em auto;
}

input {
    margin: 1em auto;
}
```







User Testing the Prototype

Prototype 3: Location Test

- I used the HTML content prototype on a mobile browser to create an approximation of the location experience.
- The goal was to test the case file content and see if people understand and enjoy the location gameplay.
- Click or scan to try it for yourself.

**** BEGIN MESSAGE ****

Welcome Citizen #00328,

The Arcadia Report is the corrupted database of a failed startup. Someone is reigniting their quest to build an algorithm to solve crimes and attempting to crowdsource justice. It's up to you to piece together clues from the corrupted files to solve the mystery and uncover the truth as people connected to The Report keep turning up dead. Can you restore the report and stop a serial killer?

FOR THE TEST

1) This is a prototype focusing on the content, not the final design or a working product. If anything goes wrong please say. It is the prototype's fault.

2) This is a snapshot of core content with an introductory chapter and other elements of the game missing. If there are areas you find confusing or things you would like to be able to do, please say.

HOW TO PLAY

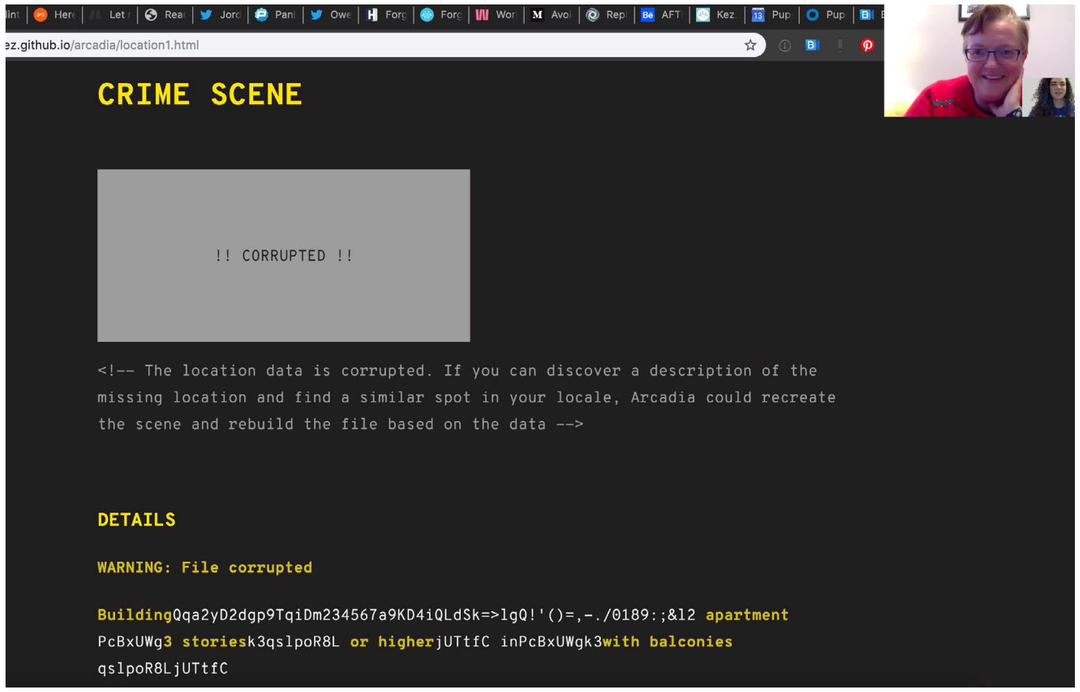
1) Scan the QR code with your phone to open the case.

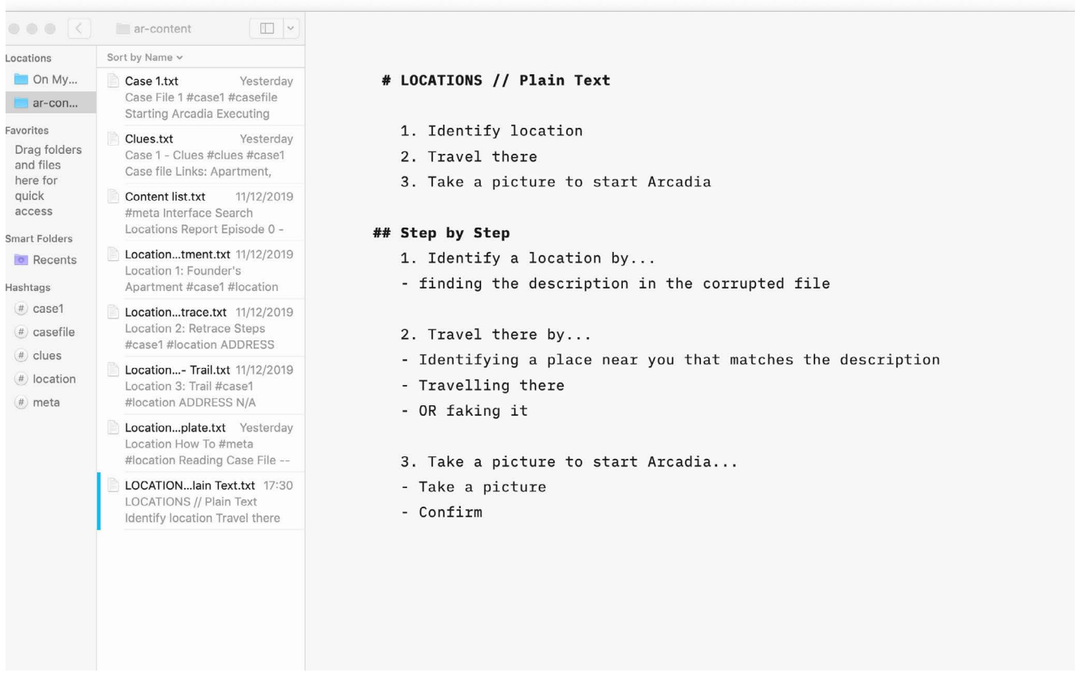
2) Read the case file and attempt to fix a corrupted file.

3) Think out loud and comment as you go.

**** END MESSAGE ****

Usability Feedback and Iteration





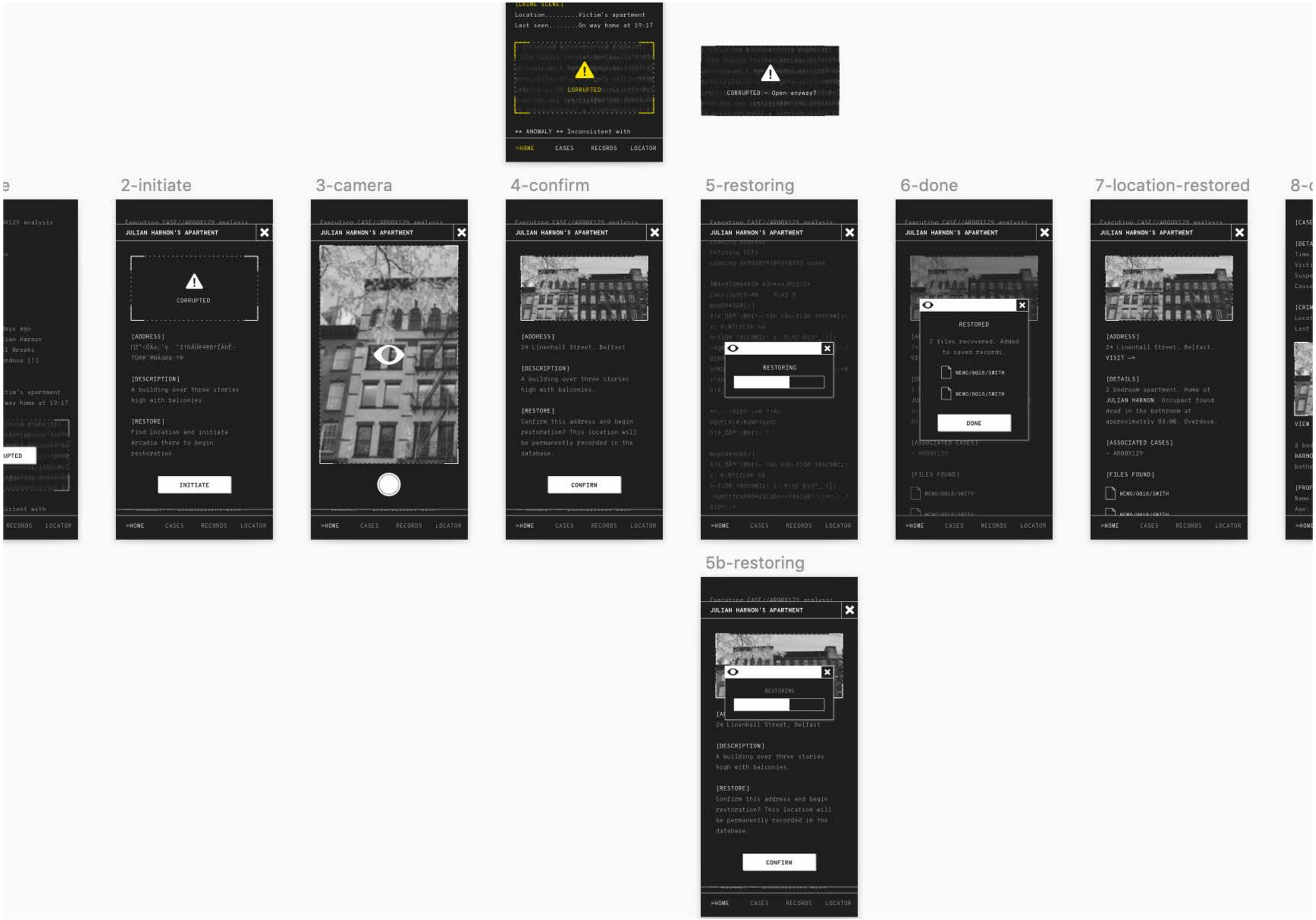
Results with v1

- I tested with 2 coworkers and a gamer for the first version.
- 3/3 did not understand the location directions.
- All were interested in the content but some struggled to follow, especially with the quantity of text.

Results with v2

- I tested with 2 millennial/gamers and 1 mystery fan.
- Locations directions were better but need work. All were excited by the idea.

Location Wireframes



Location Wireframe Prototype

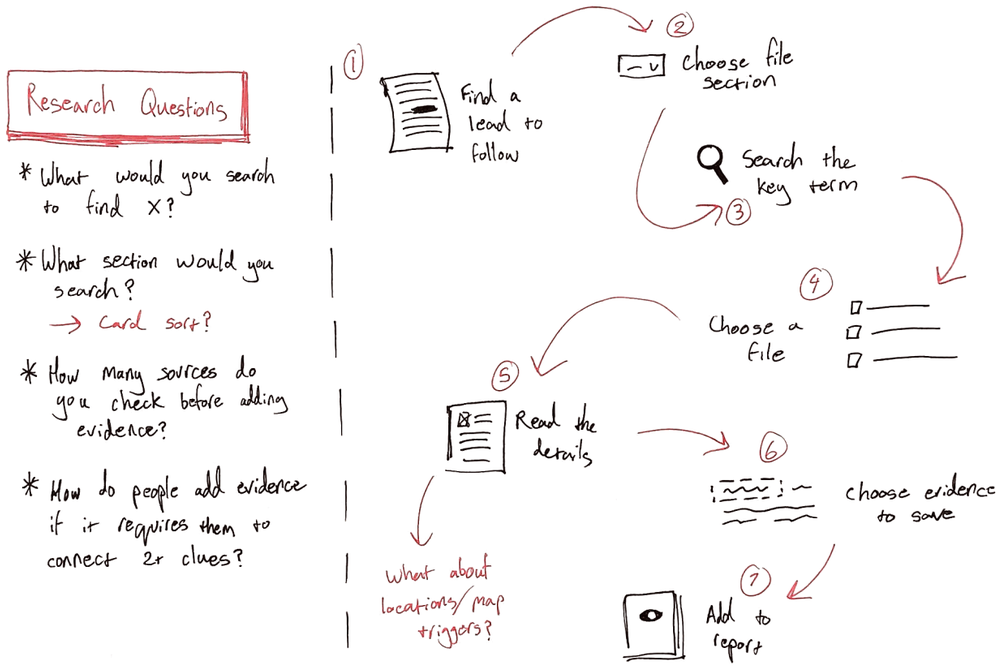
Prototype 4: Location UI

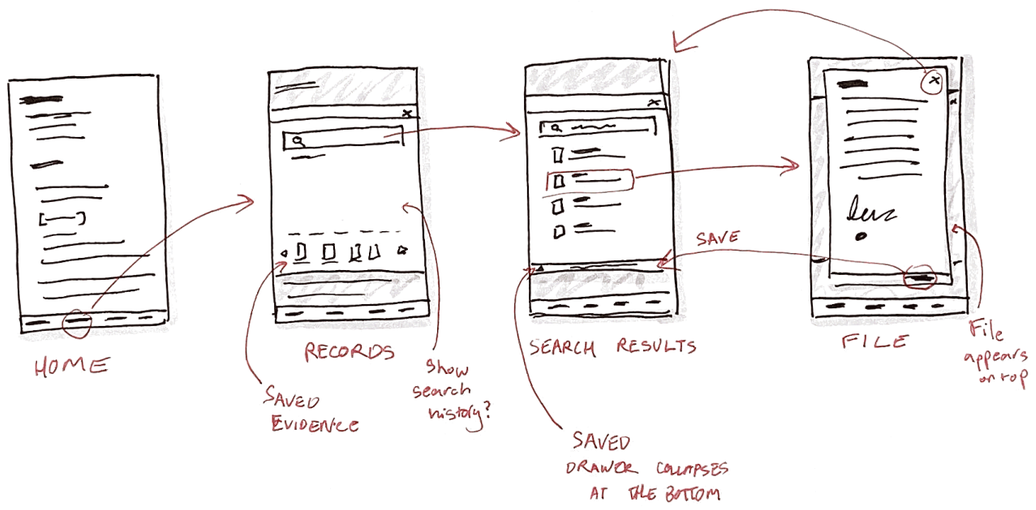
- Monochromatic wireframes developed alongside the content-only HTML prototype.
- This gave me a chance to see how the flow functioned in the interface and show it to users for context after tests.
- Experimented with prototyping both Marvel and Figma versions (Figma won).
- Click or scan to try it for yourself.

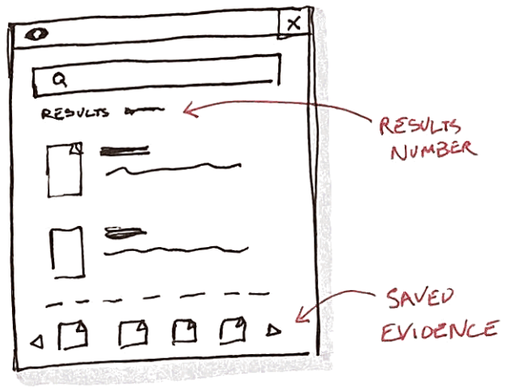
Solving the Case

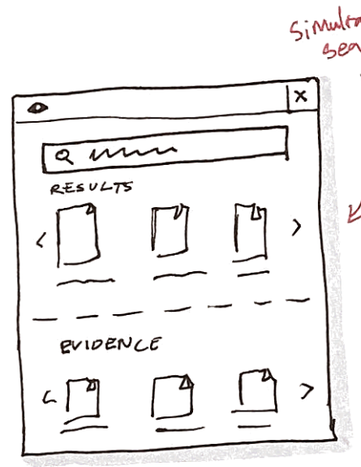
Designing search and evidence reporting to catch a killer

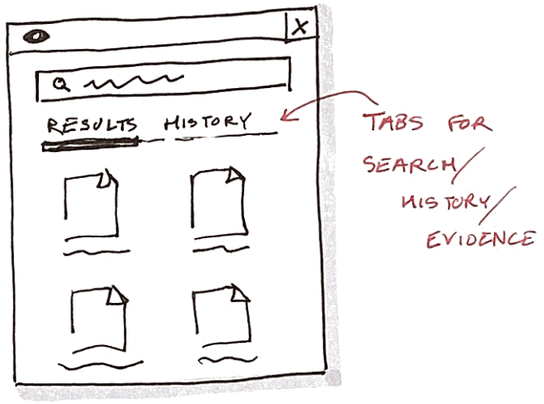
Designing a Search Engine

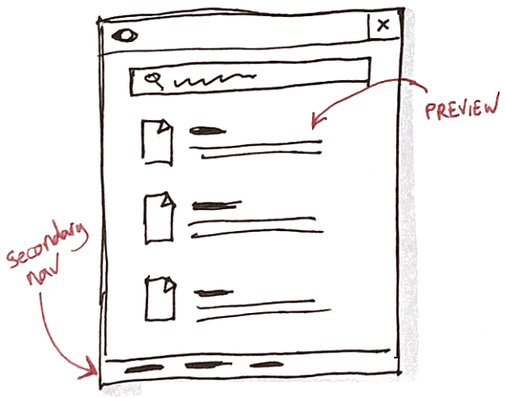


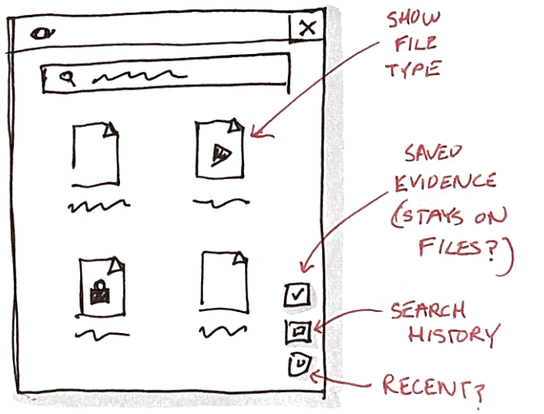












Trialing Search Prototype Options

```
<html>
  <head>
    <meta charset="utf-8">
    <title>Object-oriented JavaScript example</title>
  </head>

  <body>
    <p>This example requires you to enter commands in your browser's JavaScript console (see <a href="h

  </body>

    <script>
        const person = {
            name: ['Bob', 'Smith'],
            age: 32,
            gender: 'male',
            interests: ['music', 'skiing'],
            bio: function() {
                alert(this.name[0] + ' ' + this.name[1] + ' is ' + this.age + ' years old. He likes ' +
            },
            greeting: function() {
                alert('Hi! I\'m ' + this.name[0] + '.');
            }
        };
    </script>
</html>
```

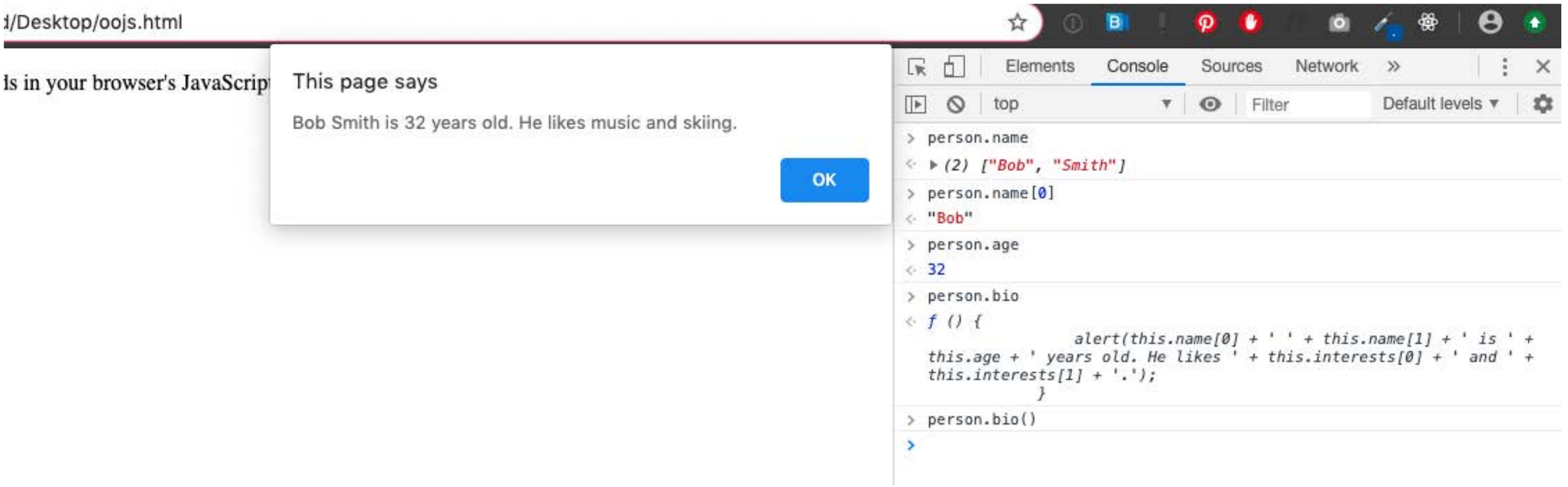
Getting started with Custom Search

What is Custom Search?

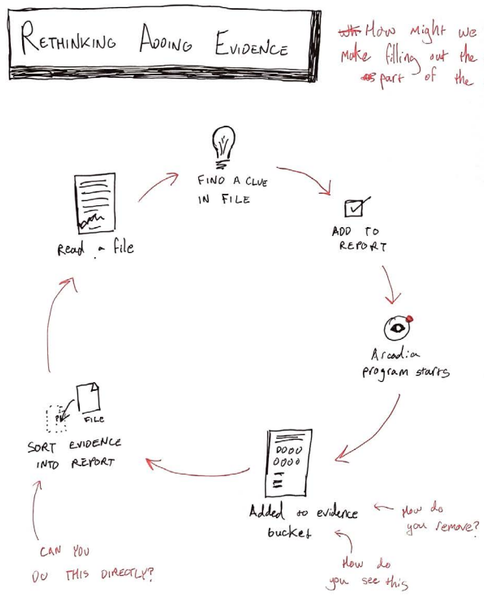
Next: Create a search engine

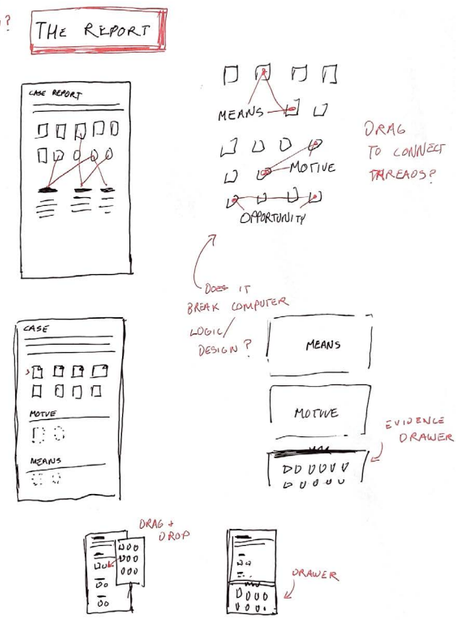
Google Custom Search lets you include a search engine on your website to help your visitors find the information they're looking for. Because Custom Search is based on Google's core search technology, you can be confident that your users are getting high quality, relevant results. You can customize a lot of your search engine, including:

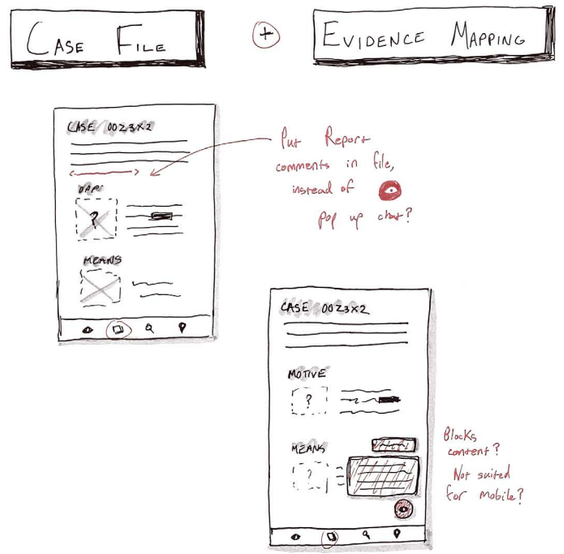
- Apply your site's look and feel to the search box and results page
- Use search features such as refinements, autocomplete, and promotions to enhance your users' search experience
- Understand your users' behavior by linking your search engine with Google Analytics
- Make money from your search engine with Google AdSense

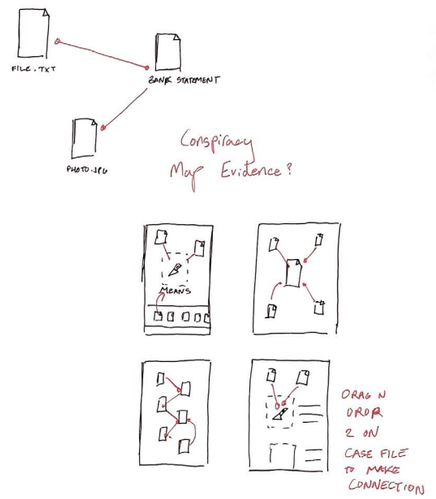


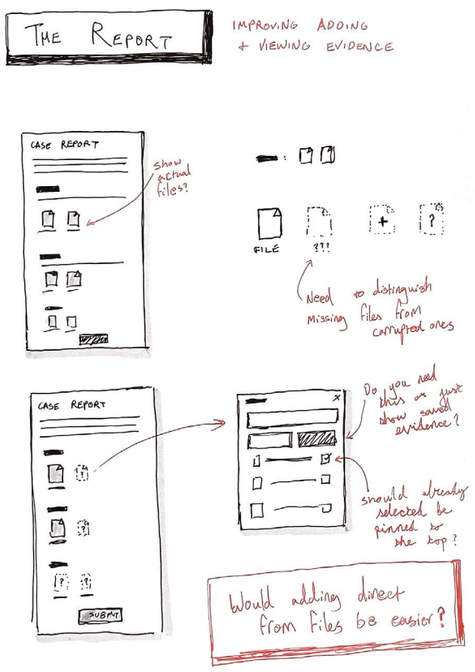
How to Add Evidence

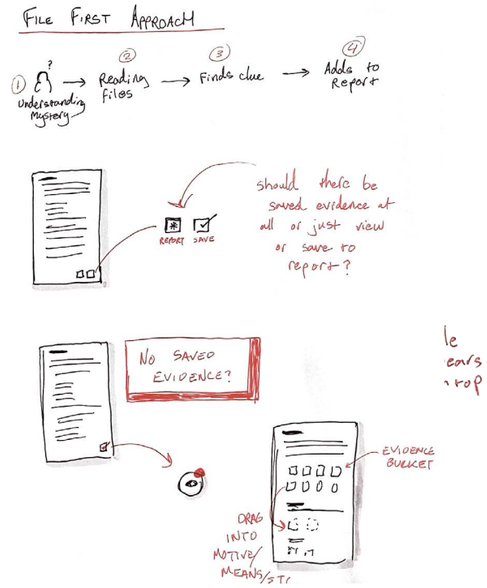


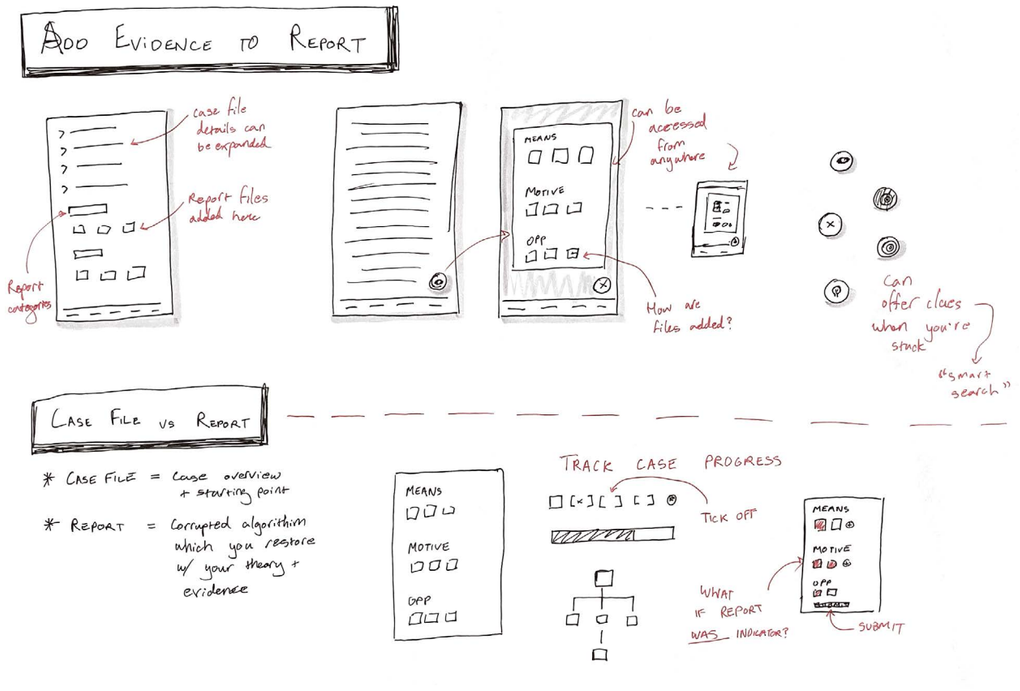




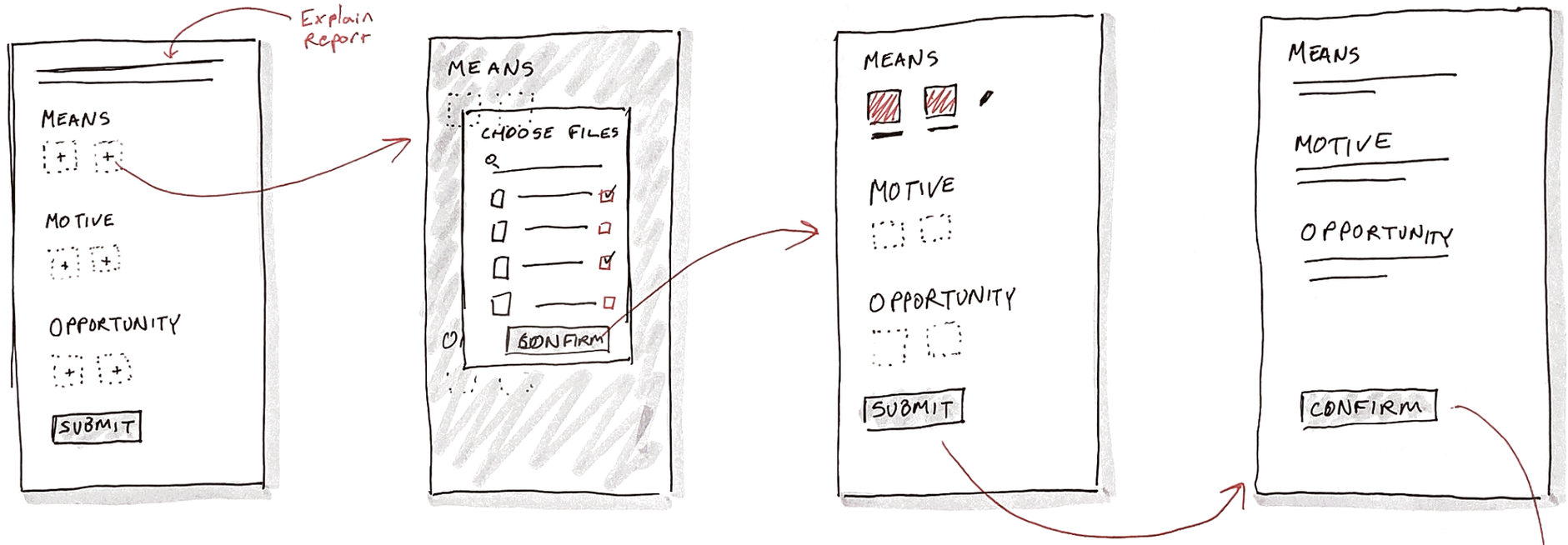








Generating a Case Report



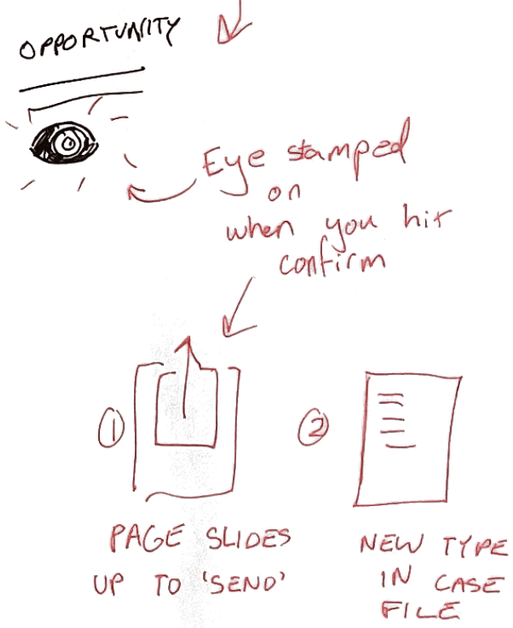
HOW IS THEORY GENERATED?

* Tag all files with the evidence for the theory(s)
* If all files contain matching tags, then they become that theory
* Else a corruption error is generated.

Files smoosh together ①

Loading ②

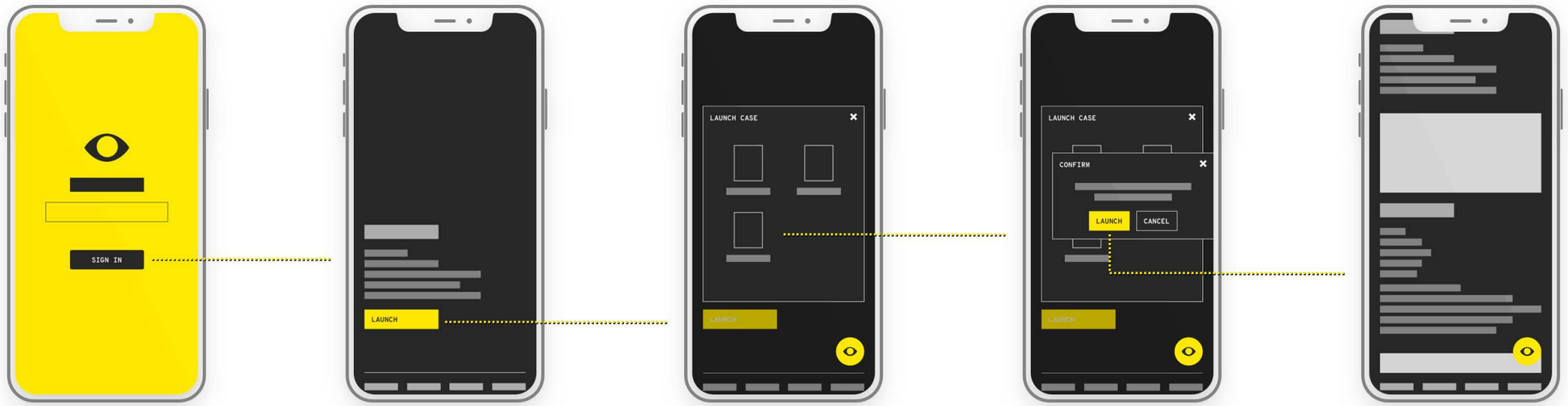
Text ungarbles ③ to show generated theory



Wire Flows

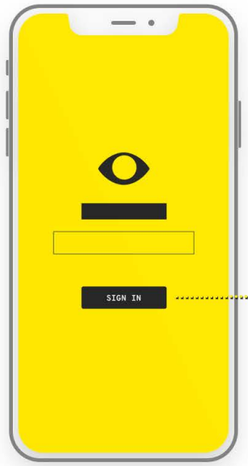
Mapping out a complete journey through a case

Launch a Case

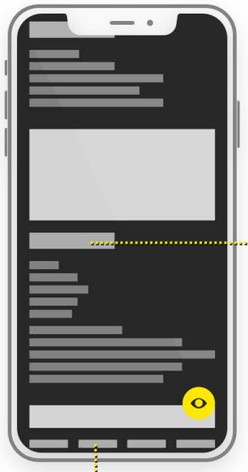


Sign in | Start screen | Launch case | Confirm case file | Case file

Find a Clue at a Location



Sign in



Current case file w/ corrupted location

Location list

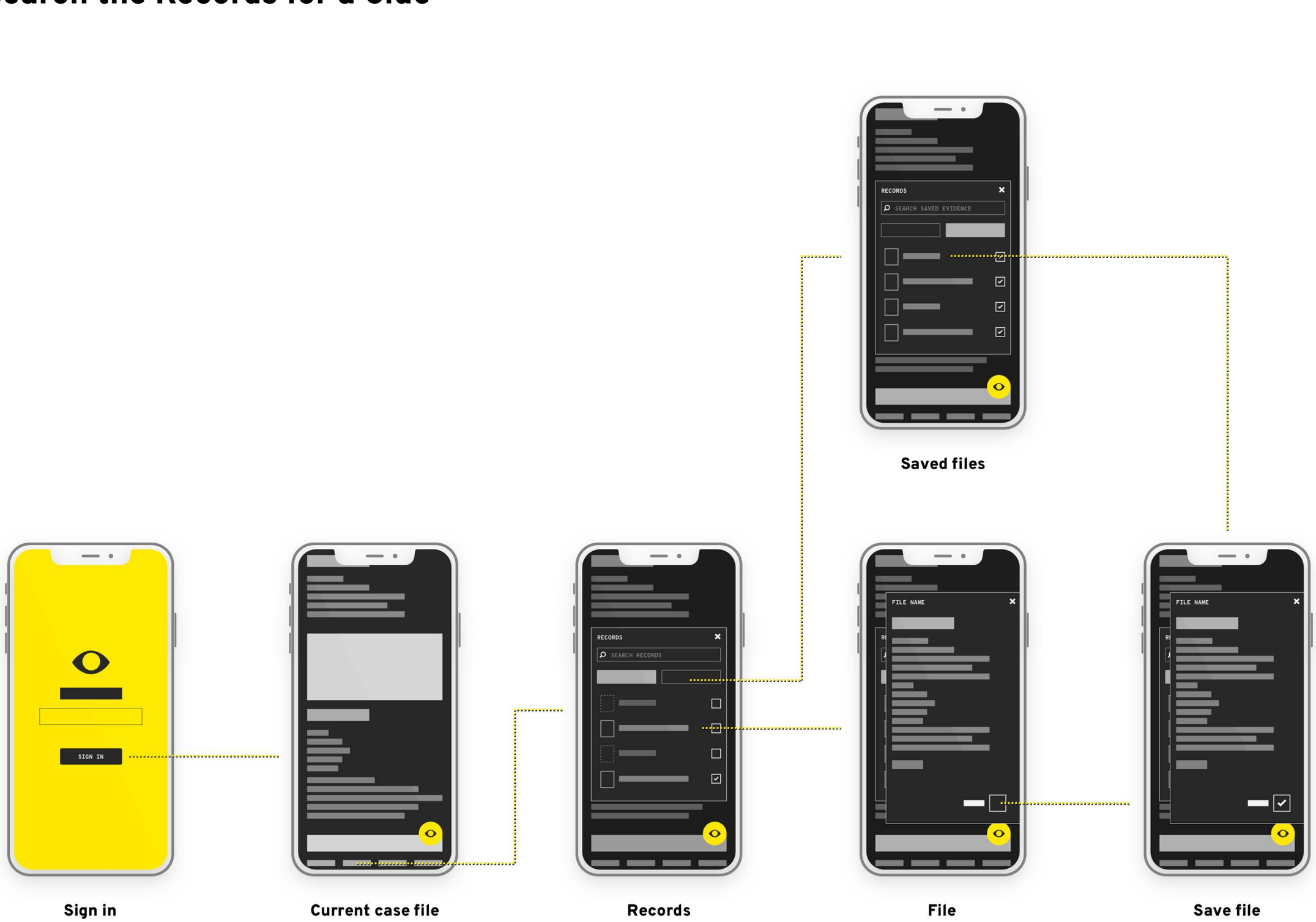
Corrupted location

Photograph matching location

Restoring...

Files found at location

Search the Records for a Clue



Solve the Case

Current case file

Empty case report

Add files to report

Filling in report

Case theory compiled from evidence

Case conclusion

Add current file to report

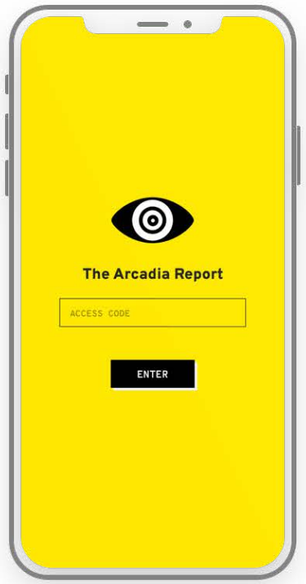
Alpha Prototype

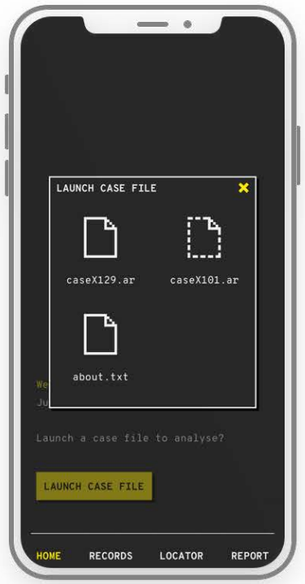
Solving the mystery

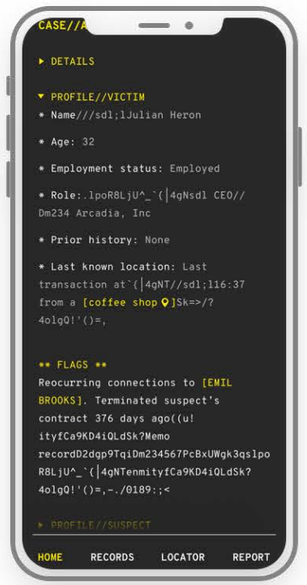
Scan or click for blog posts

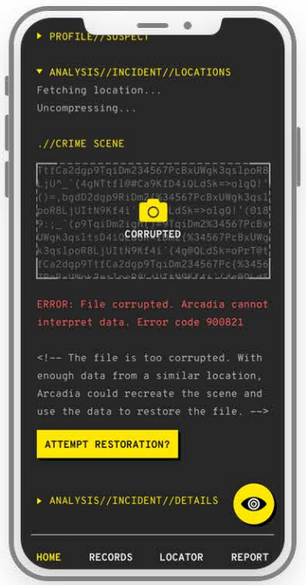
The Arcadia Report v0.1 (1/4)

Launch a case and read the case file detailing the crime.



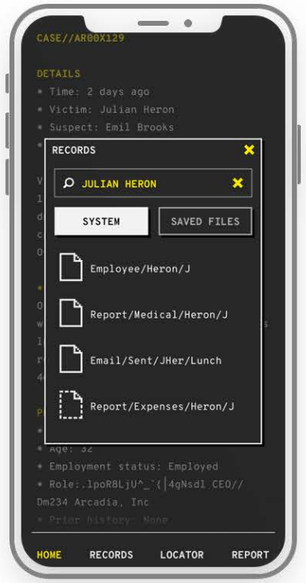


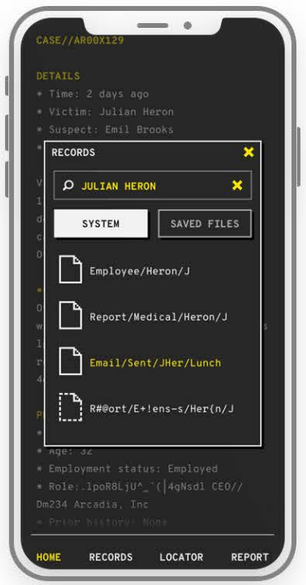




The Arcadia Report v0.1 (2/4)

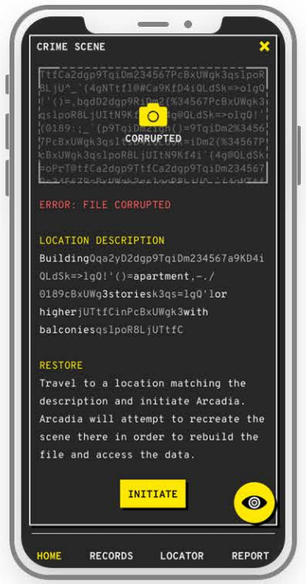
Search the records for clues to prove your case.

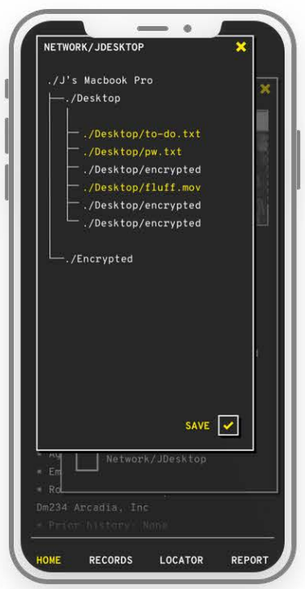




The Arcadia Report v0.1 (3/4)

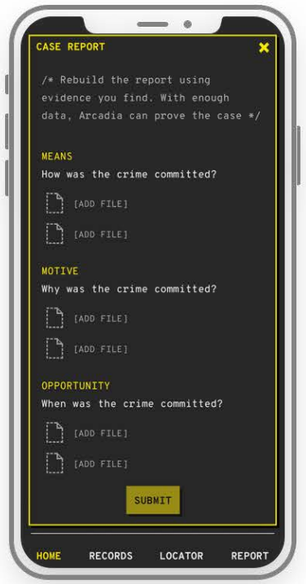
Travel to real world locations to uncover new evidence.

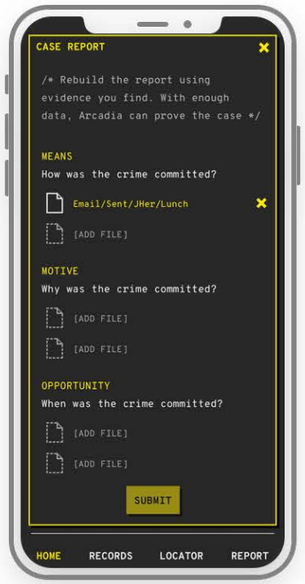


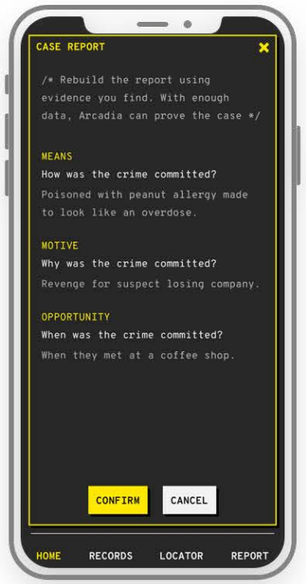


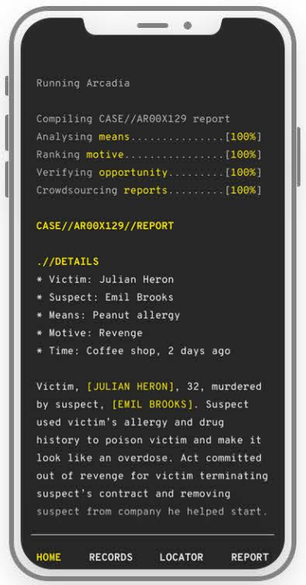
The Arcadia Report v0.1 (4/4)

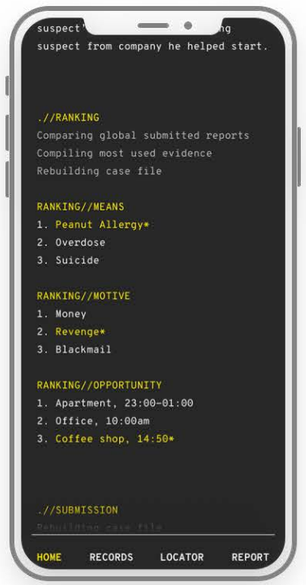
Add evidence to the report and submit your theory to solve the case.

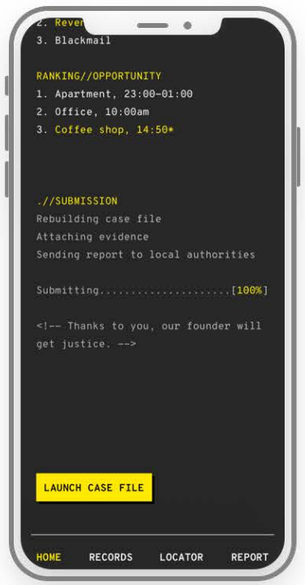












Case Report Iterations

Case Report Iterations

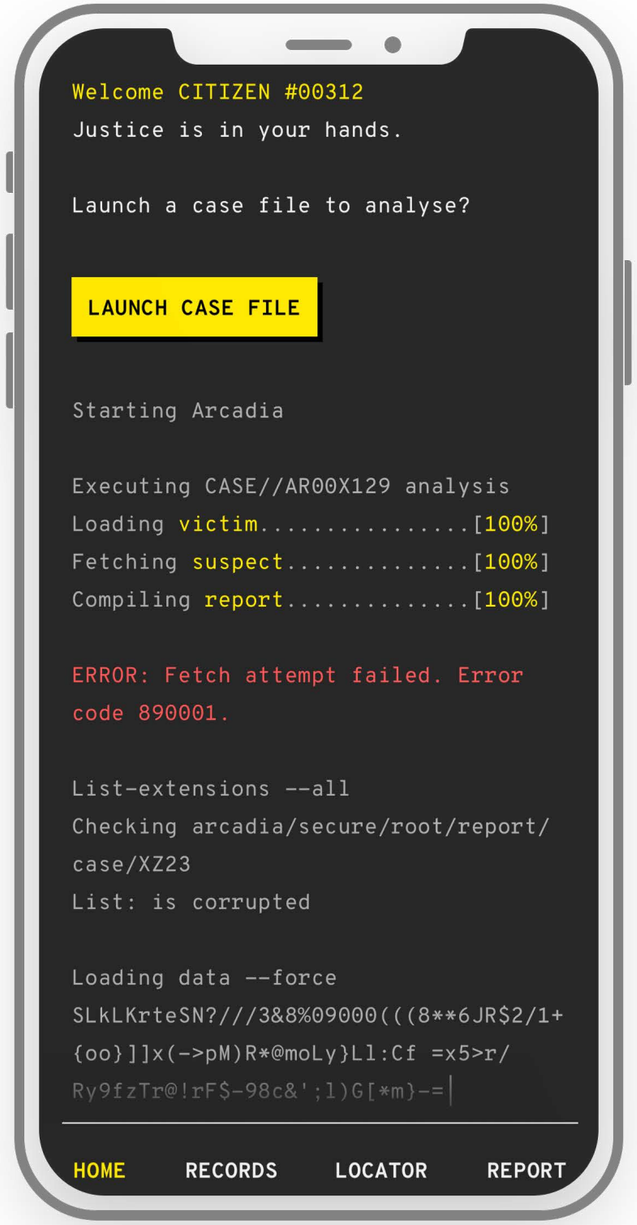
Adding Evidence Iterations

Solutions Iterations

The Arcadia Report v0.1 Prototype

Prototype 5: Full Flow

- Alpha version of the complete flow, from launching a case to unlocking clues and solving the mystery.
- All real content in context, perfect for iterating on microcopy of the interface as well as story elements like clues.
- Click or scan to try it for yourself.



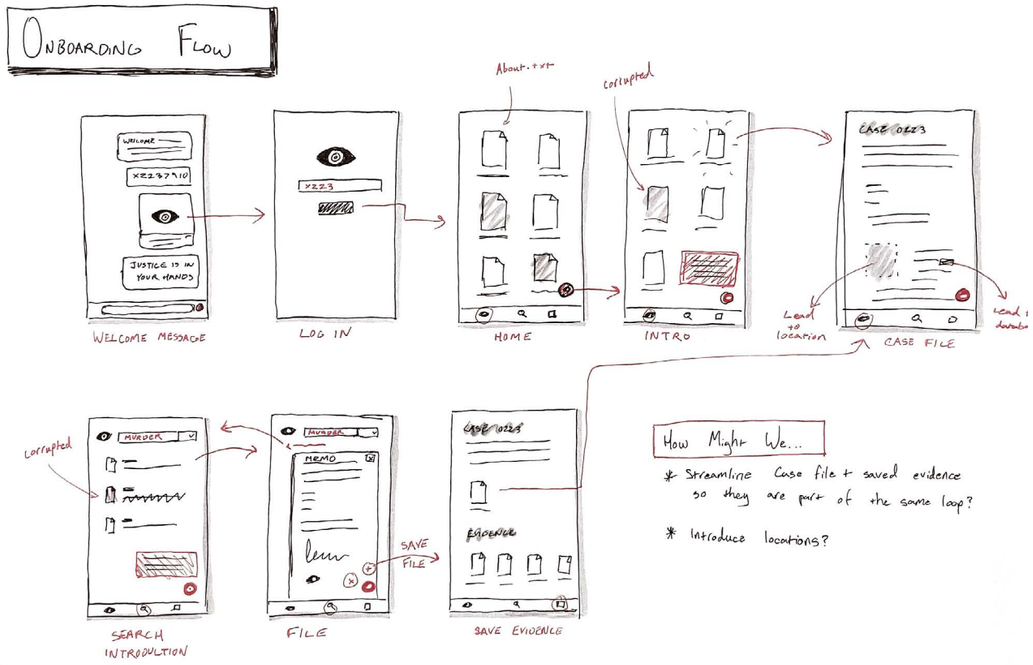
Onboarding

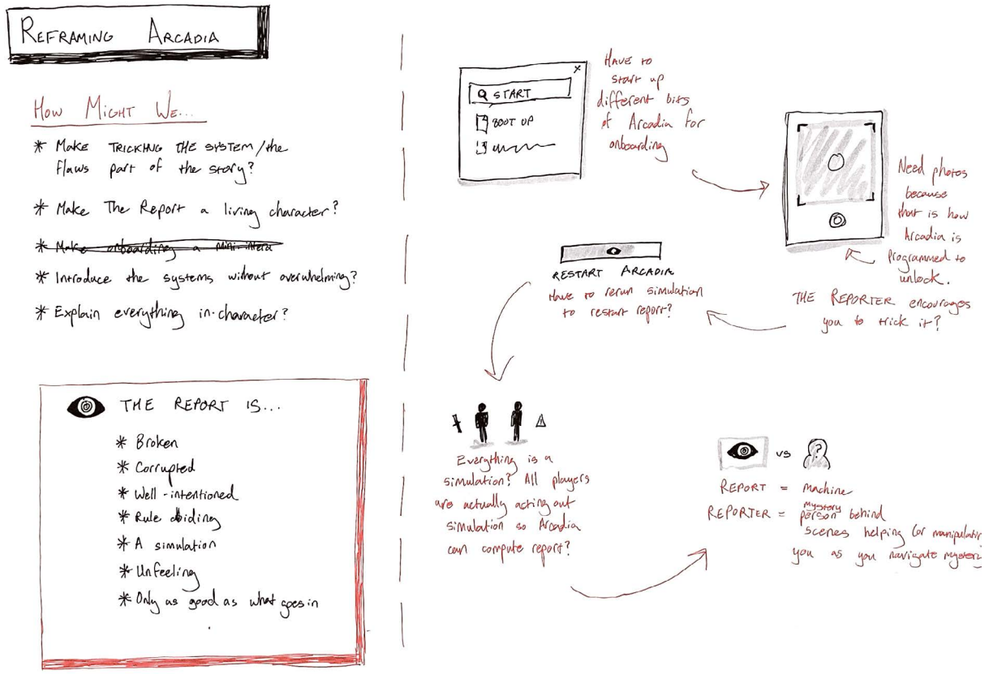
Going back to the beginning to introduce Arcadia

Scan or click for blog posts

Onboarding Content Design

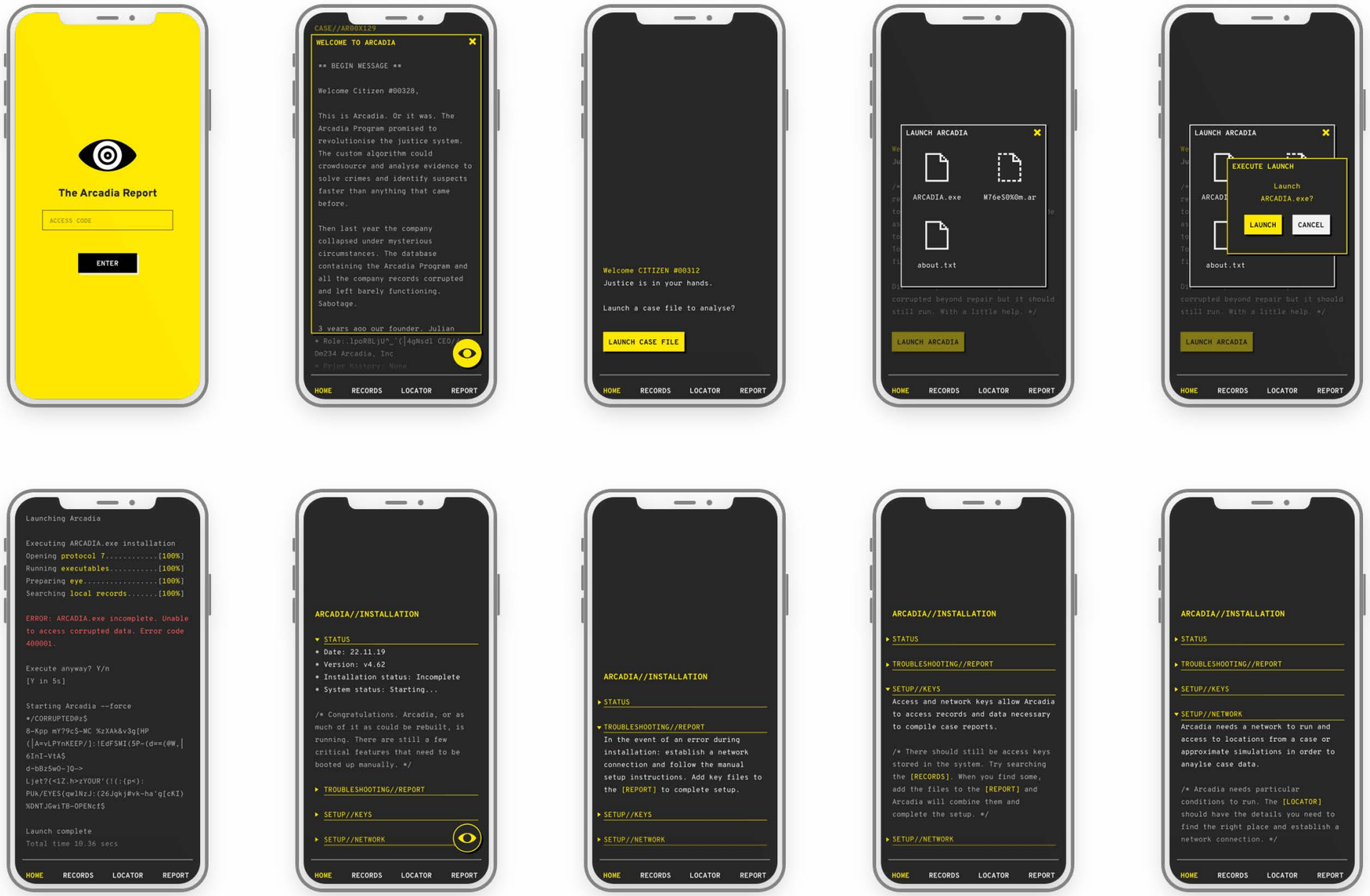
```
## Establish Context
   - What is/was Arcadia?
   - Why you are doing this
   - Corrupted database
   - How Arcadia works

## Teach
   - Locations (camera/how Arcadia works)
   - Reports (adding evidence/how Arcadia works)

   -------------------------

 # Case 0 - Rebooting Arcadia
   - Arcadia database being reconstructed
   - Just enough backstory to establish context: what was Arcadia,
     something happened, serial killer
   - Corrupted database
   - Getting it set up on your system

## Outline
   - Messages / unscramble puzzle
   - Arcadia direct : Citizen chosen. Justice is in your hands
   - Backstory + Message
   - Initiate Arcadia in your location
```





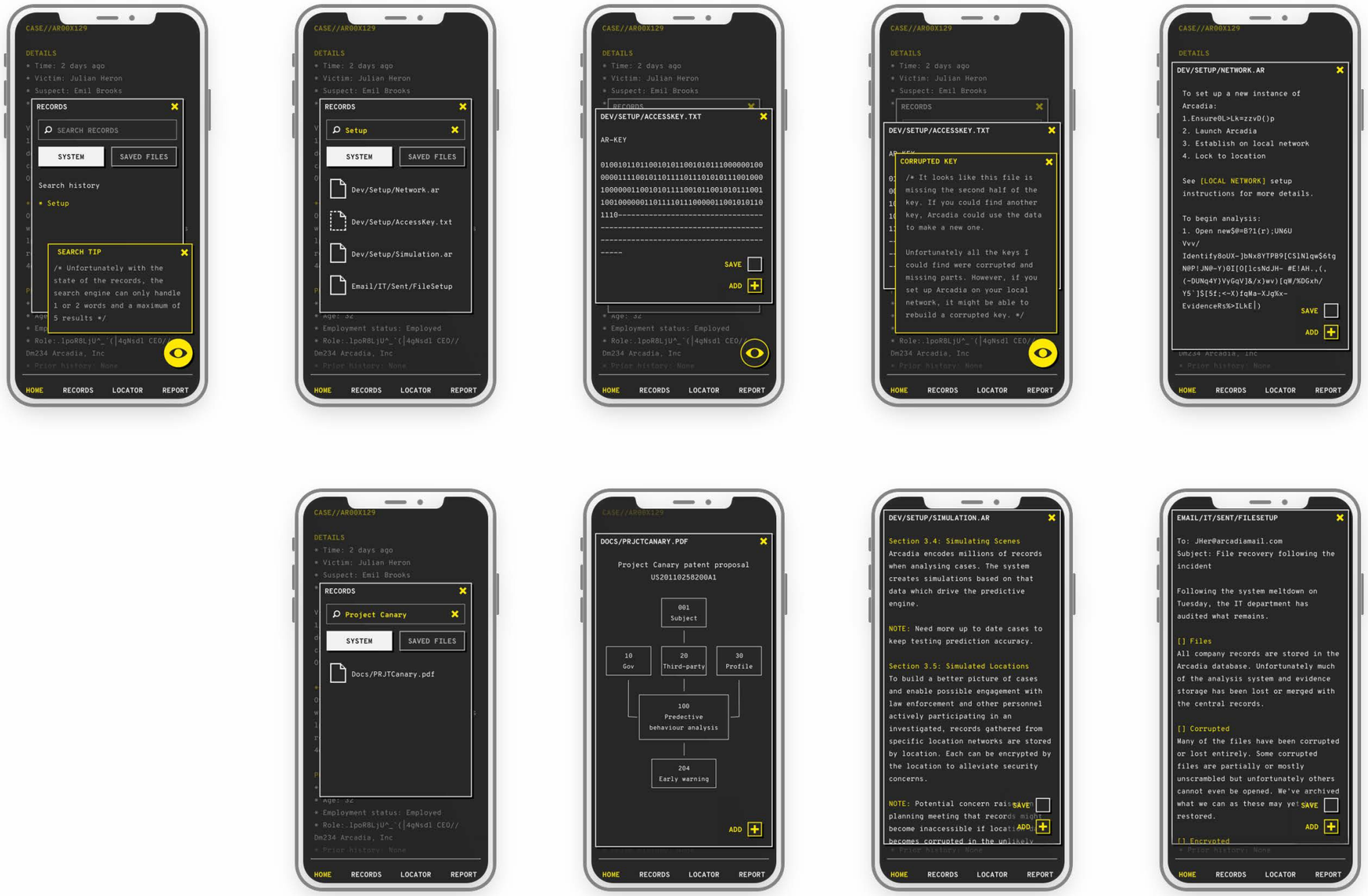
Onboarding: Launch and Case File

The idea is to teach first time players how to launch and investigate a case by letting them reboot the corrupted Arcadia database.



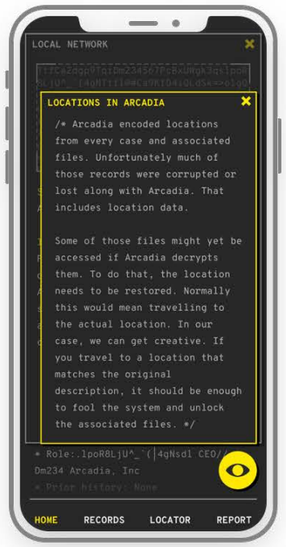
Onboarding: Records and Clue Files

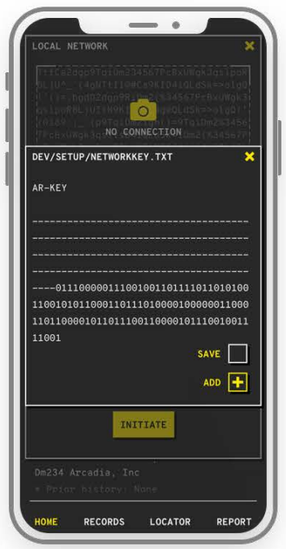
Players can search the records for the access key files to manually restart Arcadia while discovering secrets that hint at what is to come.



Onboarding: Locations

The onboarding offers a simple introduction to locations that players can complete from anywhere.





Onboarding: Case Report

Adding the key files restarts Arcadia and introduces players to what it is like to solve a case. With Arcadia back up and running, they can then dive into the first chapter ready to go.

Iterating Based on Usability Testing

v0.1

Save + Add

v0.2

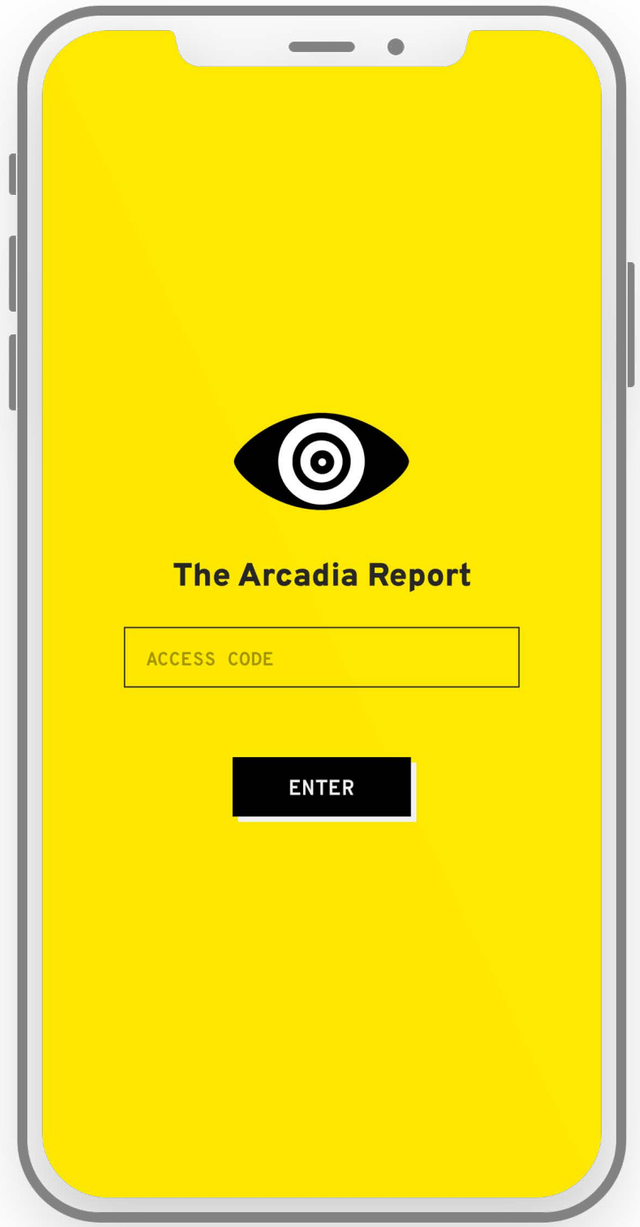
Add directly to report

- Testing with users, people were absorbed in the story but struggled to understand the difference between saving evidence for later vs adding directly to the report.
- Opting for simplicity, I removed the save for later function entirely. This simplifies the experience for users while centring activity around the case report.
- In the next version, the goal will be to continue testing and simplify further now that the core content is in place.

Onboarding Prototype

Prototype 6: Onboarding

- Onboarding incorporated everything I learned from previous prototypes and user feedback to introduce the core elements of The Arcadia Report.
- Iterating on the full flow, I continued to refine the visual design, introducing the ‘Arcadia eye’ for contextual clues.
- Click or scan to try it for yourself.



Stay safe