

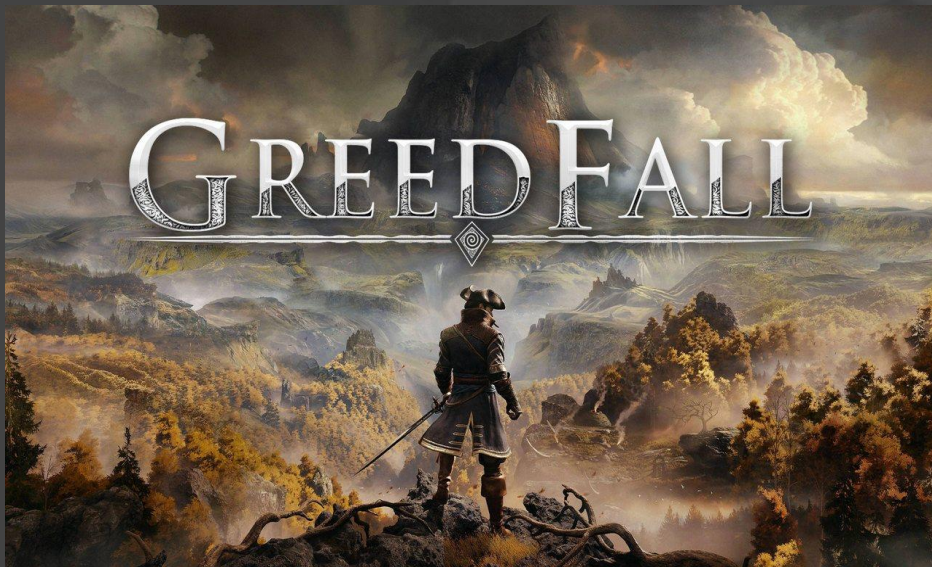


# A LEVEL DESIGN EVOLUTION: FROM INNOCENCE TO REQUIEM GDC

Laura Mas Maury – Level Designer  
March 20-24, 2023



HI !







# ABOUT THIS TALK...



1. How did Innocence guide us to Requiem's Level Design?
2. The evolution of Requiem's Encounters
3. The evolution of Requiem's Narrative sections

Free from narrative spoilers!





# A PLAGUE TALE

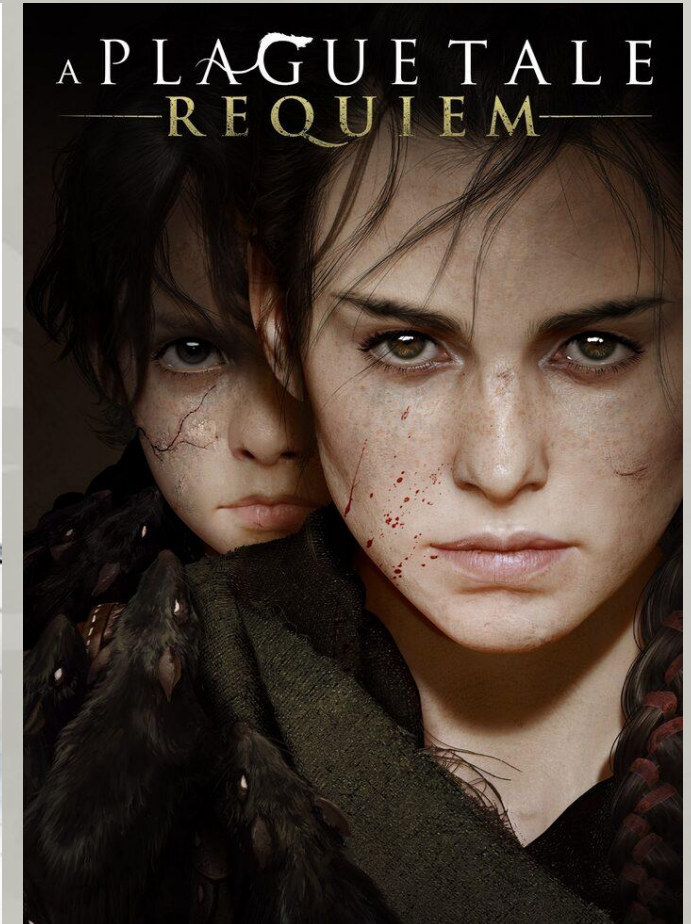
What is it?



- **Action Adventure Game**
- Set in 14th century France during the **Black Plague**
- Play as **Amicia** de Rune and protect your brother **Hugo** against a mysterious disease
- Survive against soldiers & **rats**



2019



2022



# APT:INNOCENCE CORE PILLARS

HOW DID INNOCENCE GUIDE US TO APTR LEVEL DESIGN?

## COMPANIONS



## NARRATION



## WITS





# AMICIA'S SKILLS

HOW DID INNOCENCE GUIDE US TO APTR LEVEL DESIGN?



## Amicia is equipped with a sling

- Kill enemies
- Break objects
- ...



Avoid hostile encounters with **Stealth**  
Avoid and make her way through **Rats**



## Play with **Alchemy**:

- To solve **puzzles**
- To **control light** sources
- To blind enemies
- ...





# **APT INNOCENCE: TEAM STRUCTURE**

How did we work together?

# TEAM STUCTURE

## A PLAGUE TALE — INNOCENCE —

- **45** people
- **3** Level Designers
- **17** Chapters
- **11** hours of gameplay

...disclaimer: I wasn't there!

HOW DID INNOCENCE GUIDE US TO APTR LEVEL DESIGN?



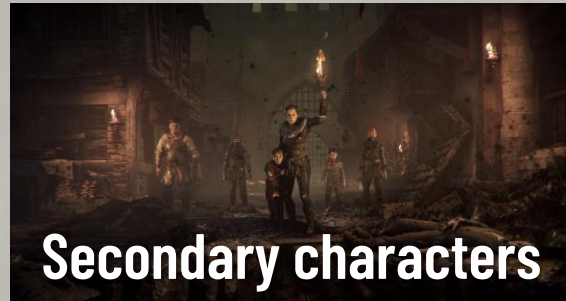




# **INNOCENCE RECEPTION**

## Strengths & Weaknesses

## STRENGTHS



## WEAKNESSES

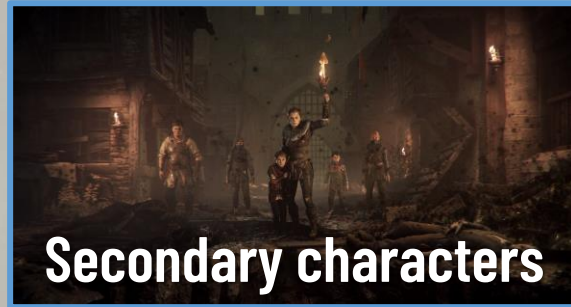


## STRENGTHS

### NARRATION



### COMPANIONS



### WITS

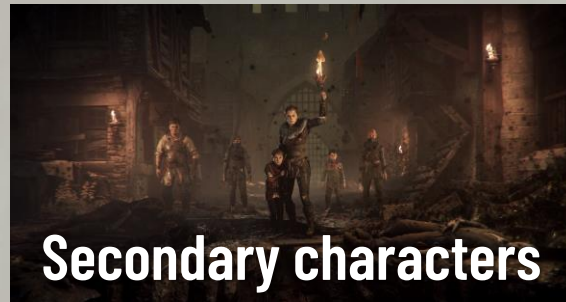


### WITS



## WEAKNESSES

## STRENGTHS

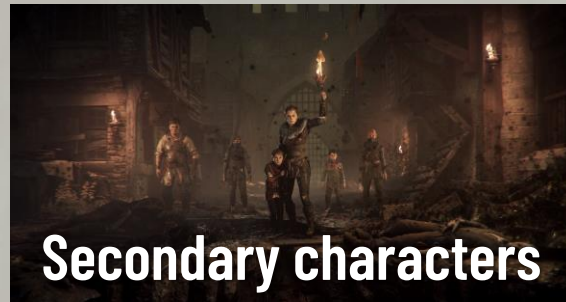


## WEAKNESSES





## STRENGTHS



## WEAKNESSES



WITS

WITS

WITS

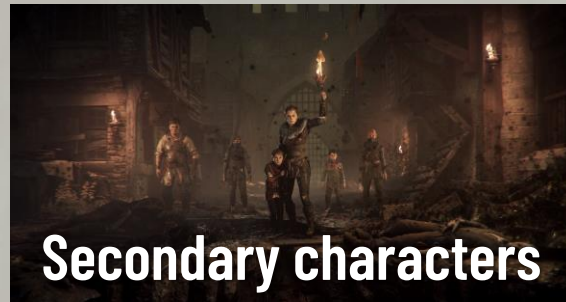


# THE END OF INNOCENCE

What's next? What can we do differently?



## STRENGTHS



## WEAKNESSES



### LEVEL DESIGN GUIDELINES:

1. Keep Innocence **Pillars**
2. Break **Linearity**
3. Create more **opportunities** and **experimentation**
4. Offer more **freedom** and **navigation**

A PLAGUE TALE  
—REQUIEM—







**A BIGGER ADVENTURE**  
A bigger team!

# TEAM STUCTURE

HOW DID INNOCENCE GUIDE US TO APTR LEVEL DESIGN?

## A PLAGUE TALE — INNOCENCE —

- **45** people
- **3** Level Designers
- **17** Chapters
- **11** hours

...disclaimer: I wasn't there!

## A PLAGUE TALE — REQUIEM —

- **70** people
- **6** Level Designers
- **17** Chapters
- **16** hours of gameplay

...I was there!





1. How did Innocence guide us to Requiem's Level Design?

**2. The evolution of Requiem's Encounters**


3. The evolution of Requiem's Narrative sections



# INNOCENCE'S ENCOUNTERS

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S ENCOUNTER SECTIONS?

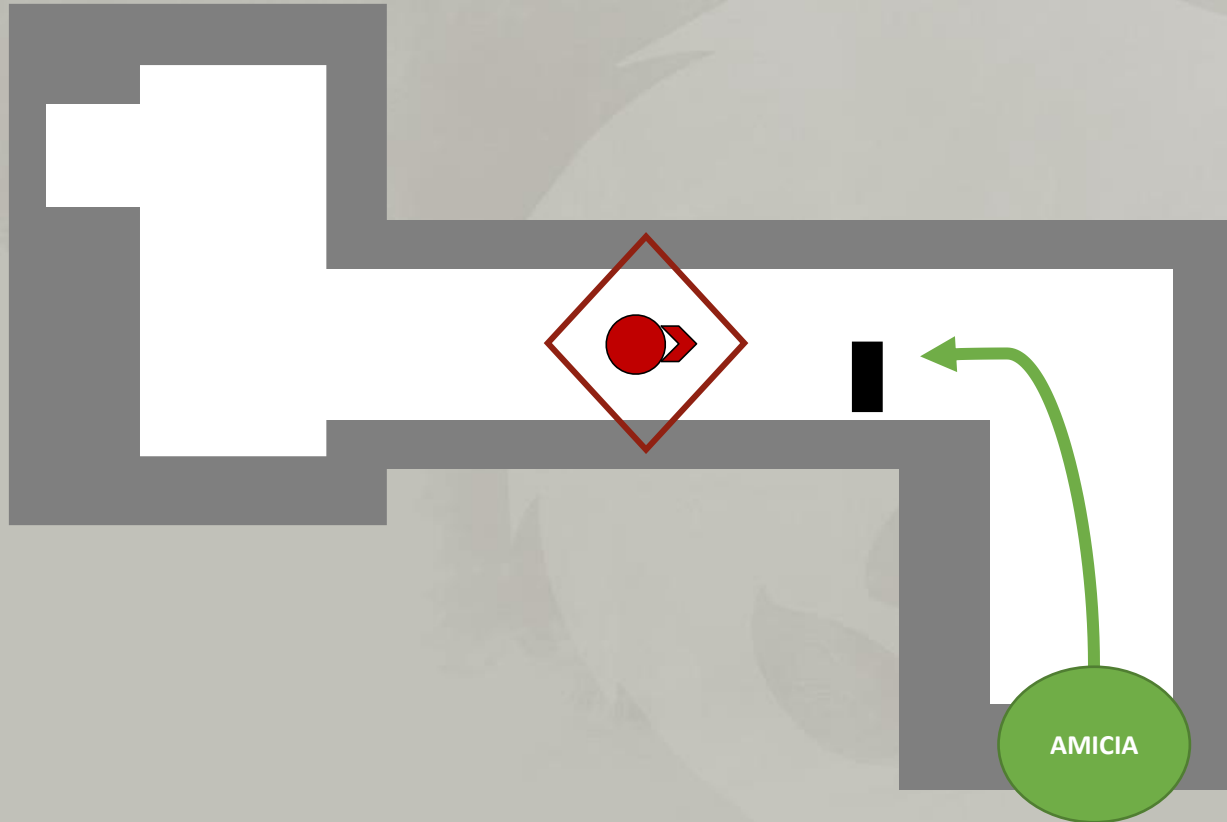


1. **Tense gameplay sections**  
(with  human enemies and/or rats)
2. Focus on **survival mechanics**  
(distract, using rats to your advantage...)



# INNOCENCE'S ENCOUNTERS

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S ENCOUNTER SECTIONS?



## 1. Tense gameplay sections

(with ♦ human enemies and/or rats)

## 2. Focus on **survival mechanics**

(distract, using rats to your advantage...)

## 3. **Linear** sequences

# REQUIEM'S ENCOUNTERS OBJECTIVES

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S ENCOUNTER SECTIONS?

## OBJECTIVES:

1. MAKE IT BIGGER



# REQUIEM'S ENCOUNTERS OBJECTIVES

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S ENCOUNTER SECTIONS?



## OBJECTIVES:

1. MAKE IT BIGGER
2. MAKE IS LESS LINEAR



# **BIGGER ENCOUNTERS**

## Case study of Chapter 03



# CHAPTER 03 OPEN ENCOUNTER'S BRIEF:

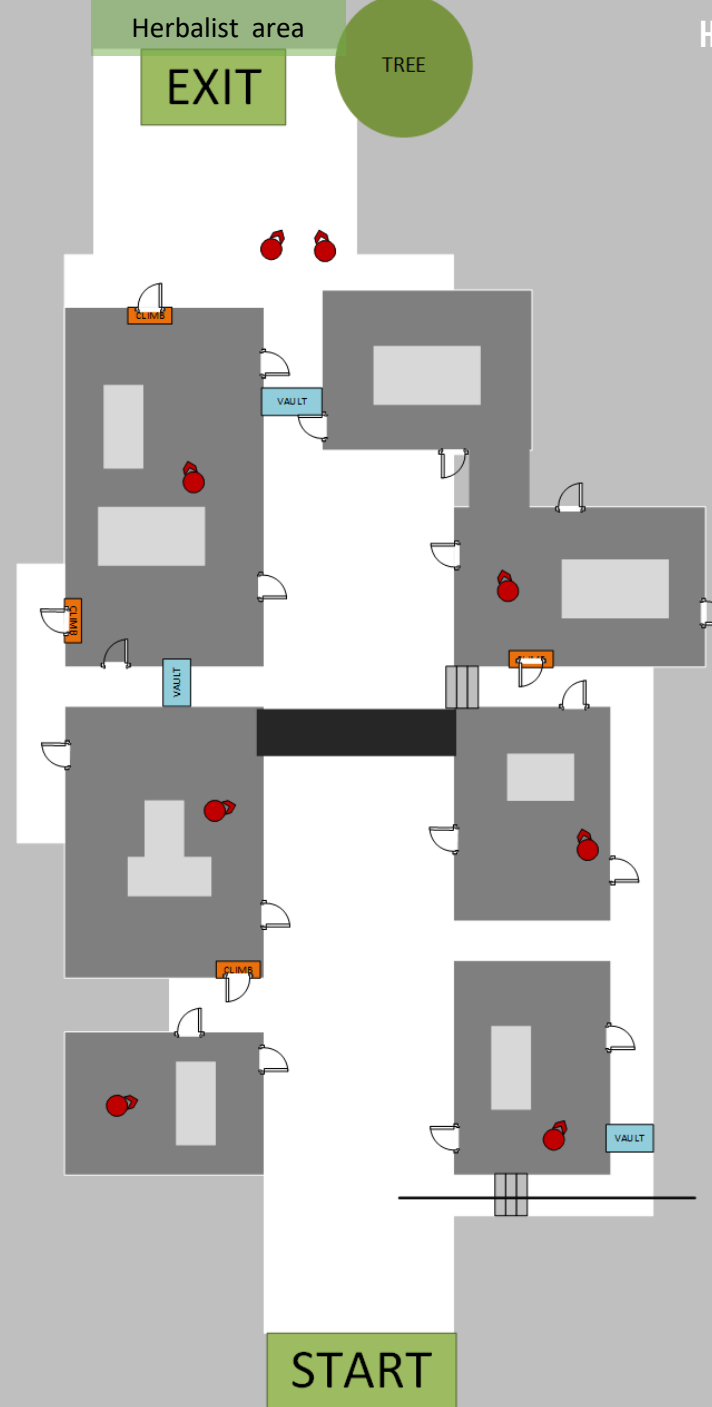
HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S ENCOUNTER SECTIONS?



**Objective:** Get to the Herbalist

**Setting:** Butcher's District streets

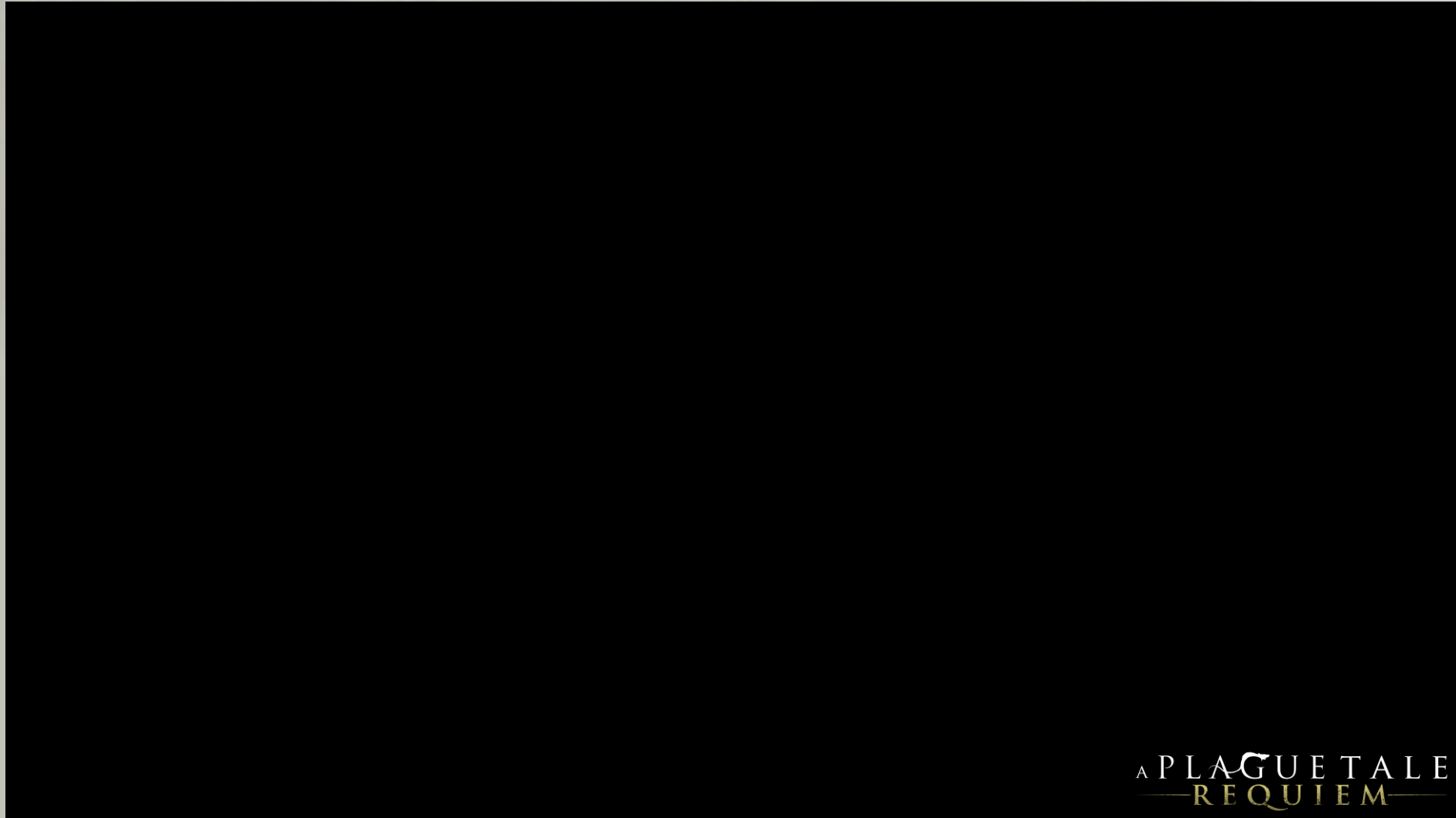
**Main mechanic:** Extinguish  
(It wasn't planned!)



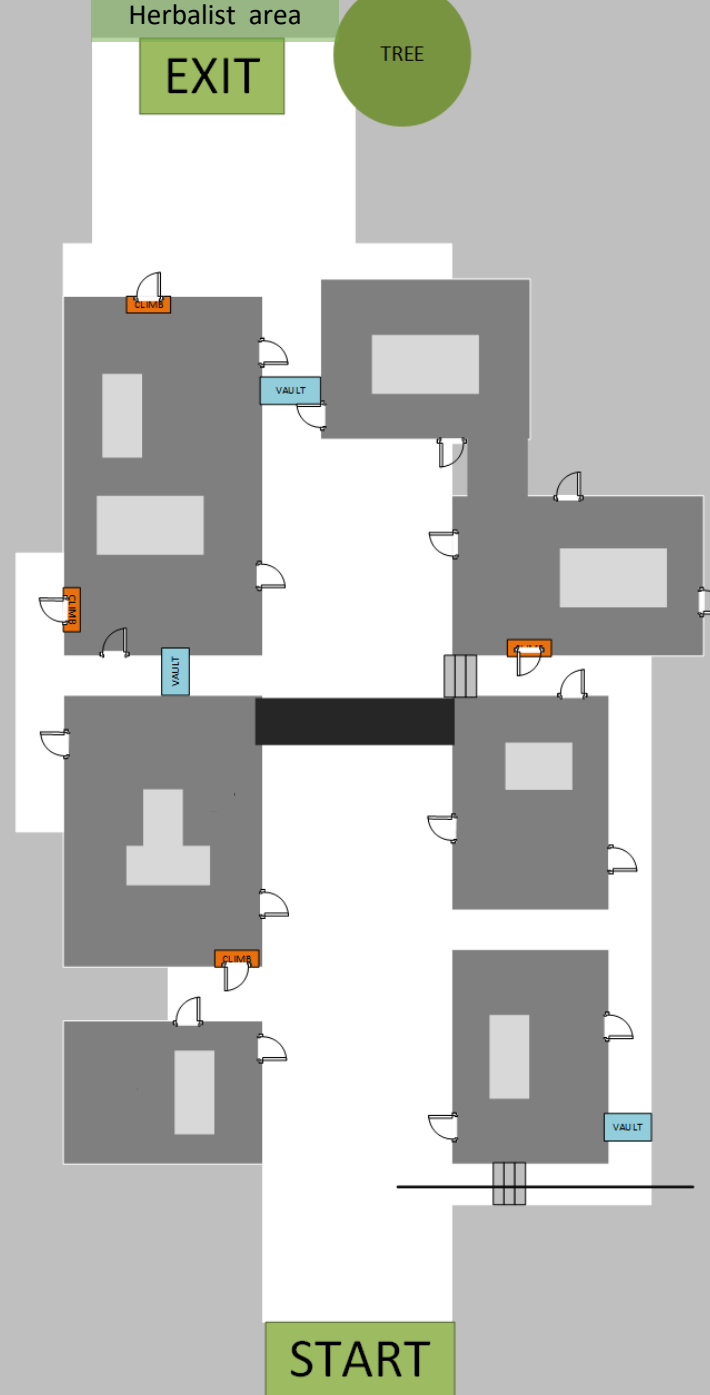


# CHAPTER 03 OPEN ENCOUNTER

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S ENCOUNTER SECTIONS?

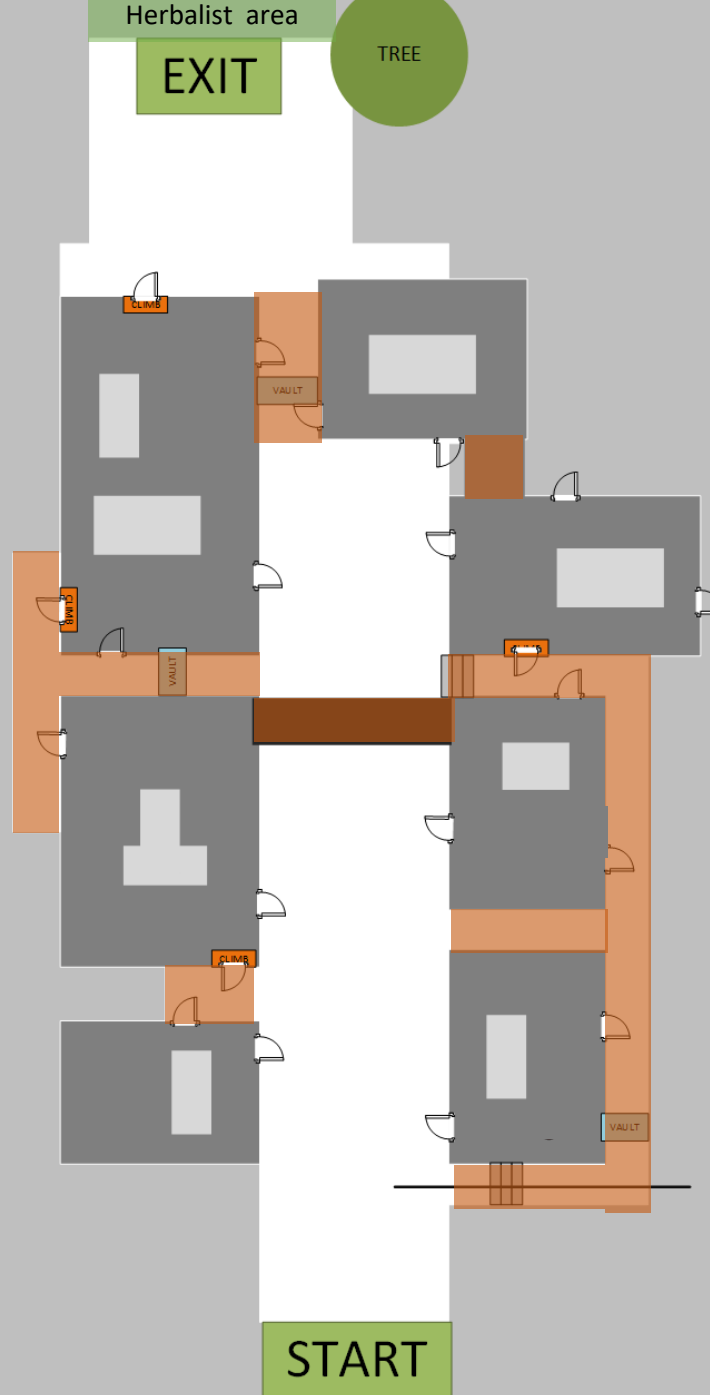


A PLAGUE TALE  
—REQUIEM—



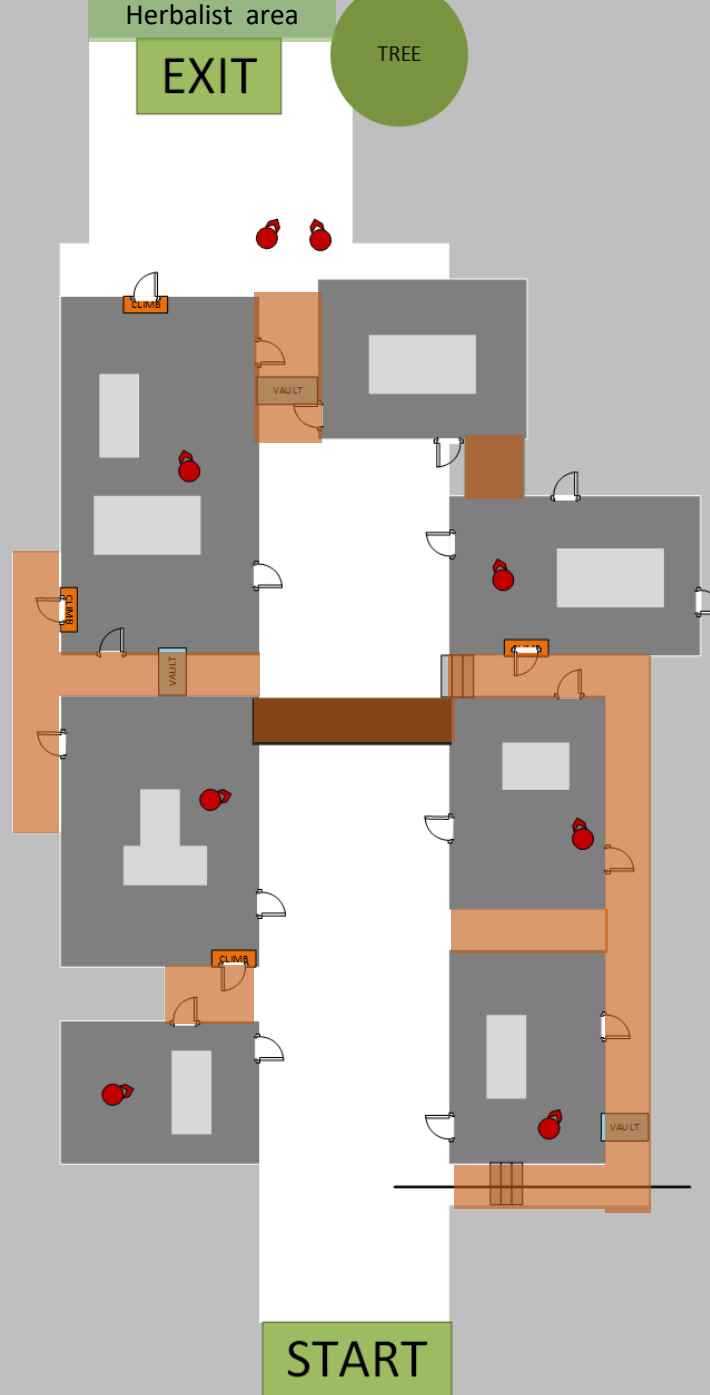
## LEVEL DESIGN ISSUES





## LEVEL DESIGN ISSUES

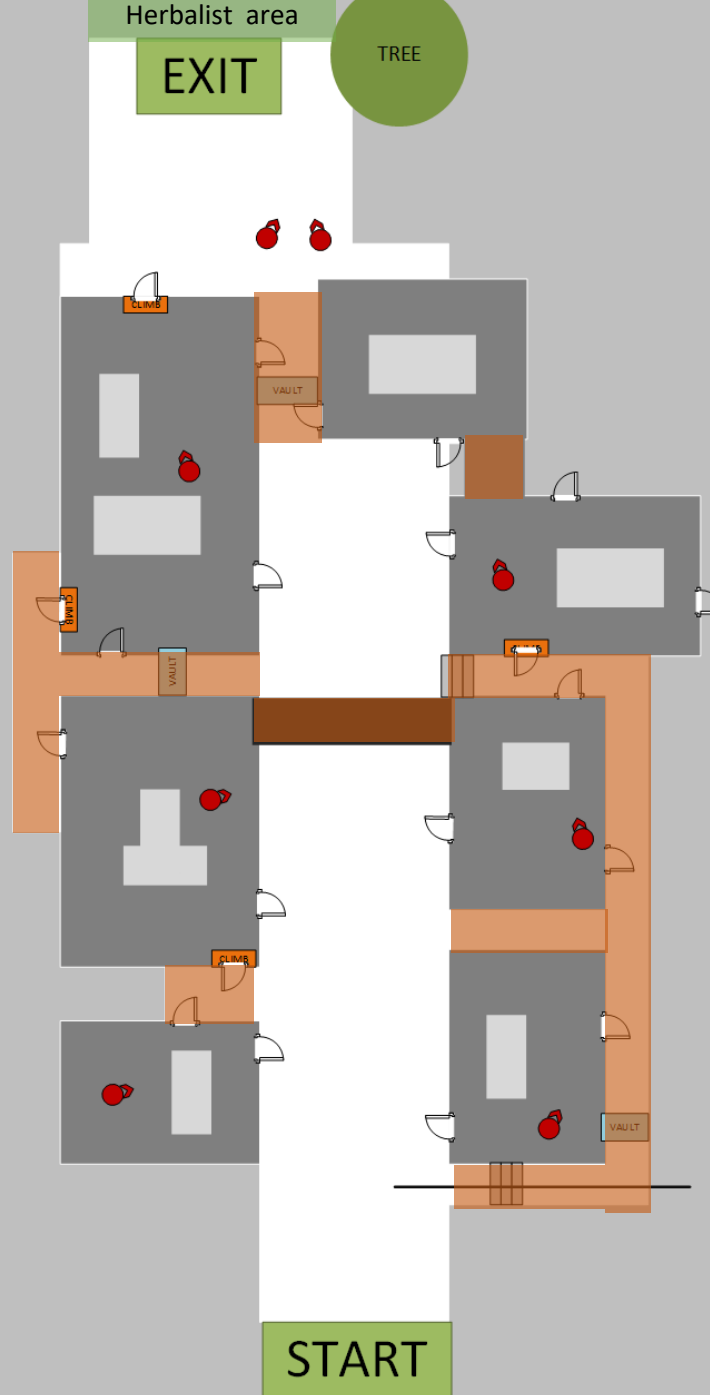
- Too **narrow**



## LEVEL DESIGN ISSUES

- Too **narrow**
- Too many **enemies**





## LEVEL DESIGN ISSUES

- Too **narrow**
- Too many **enemies**
- Lack of visibility

# CHAPTER 03 OPEN ENCOUNTER

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S ENCOUNTER SECTIONS?



## NARRATIVE ISSUES

- Why is the **herbalist's workshop** in a city?
- **Why are the guards here?**

## GAME DESIGN ISSUES

- **Extinguish mechanic is almost useless because of the absence of rats**



# LESSON LEARNED...

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S ENCOUNTER SECTIONS?



« A Plague Tale:  
Innocence, but bigger »  
**is not enough!**

# CHAPTER 03 ITERATION

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S ENCOUNTER SECTIONS?



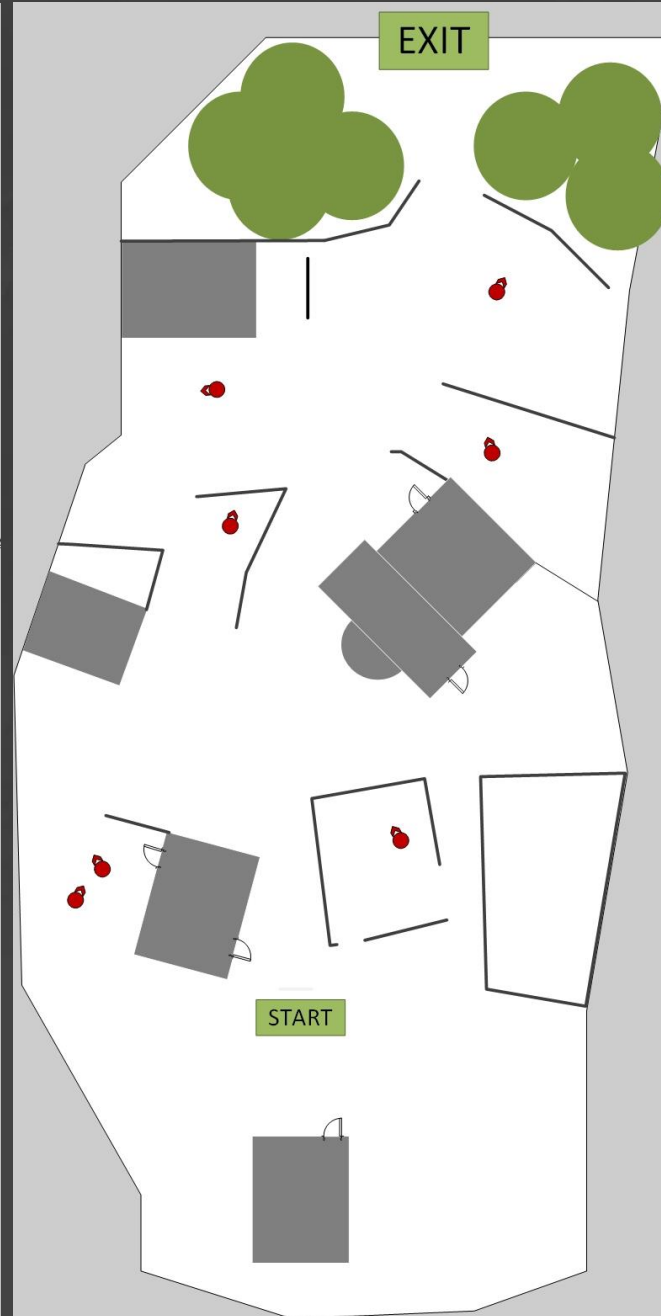
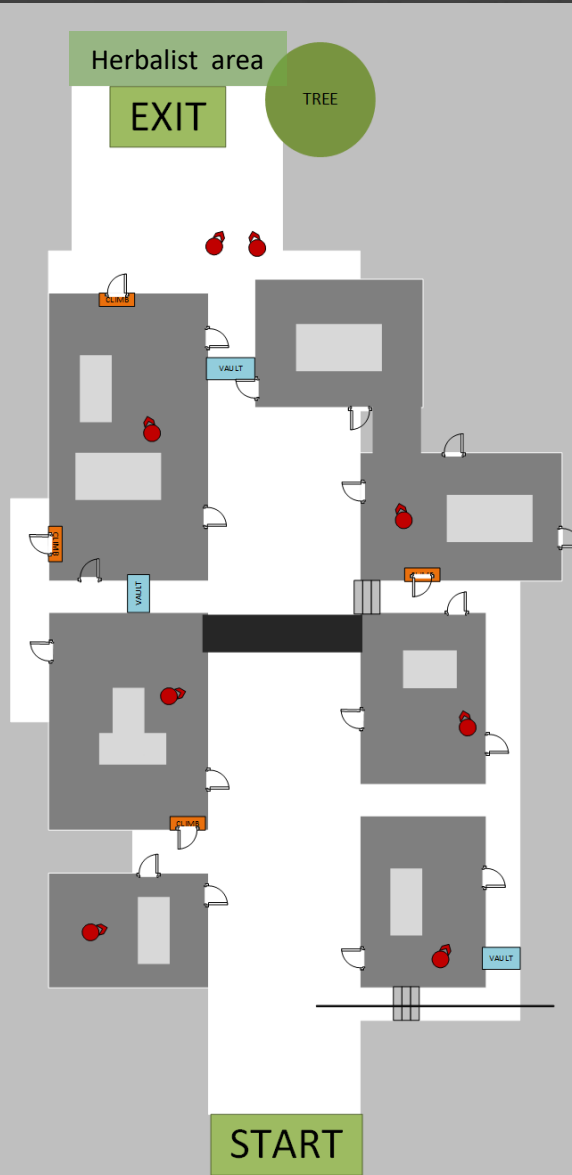
- ✓ More **space**
- ✓ Improve **visibility**
- ✓ Better contextualisation of the Herbalist



- ✓ Bring back the rats
- ✓ Put the **extinguish mechanic** forward
- ✓ Better contextualisation of the Guards, they loot what they can to survive

BEFORE

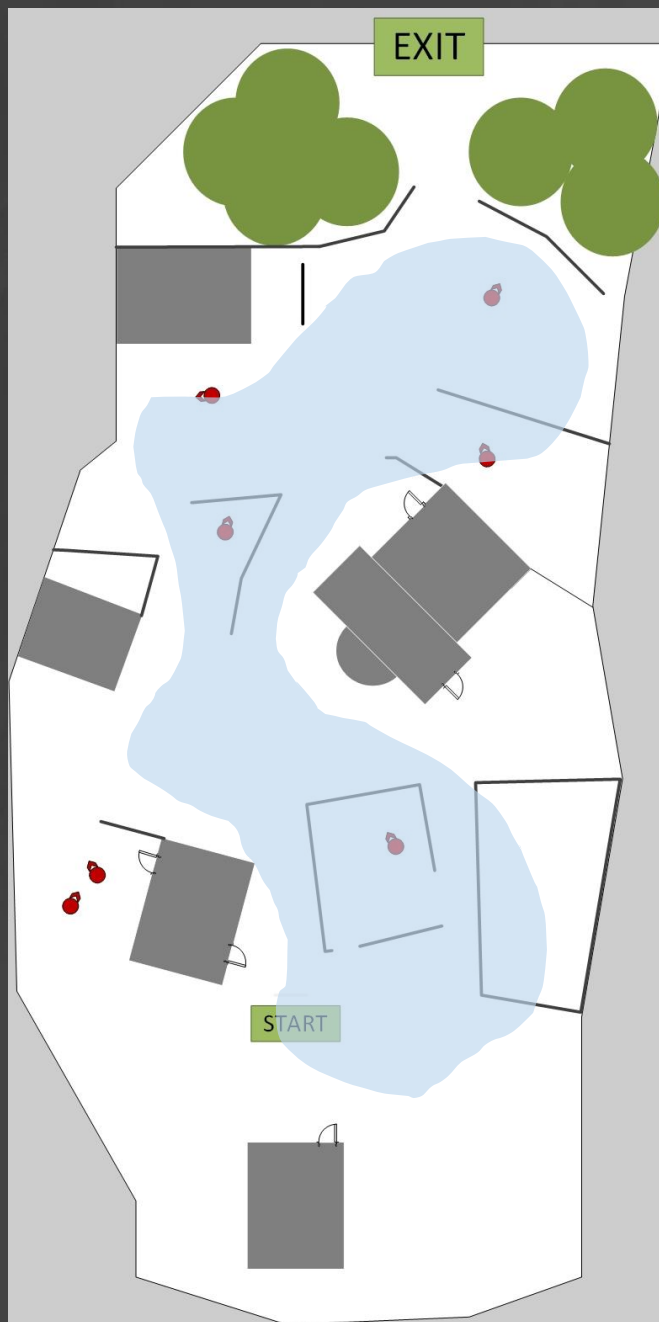
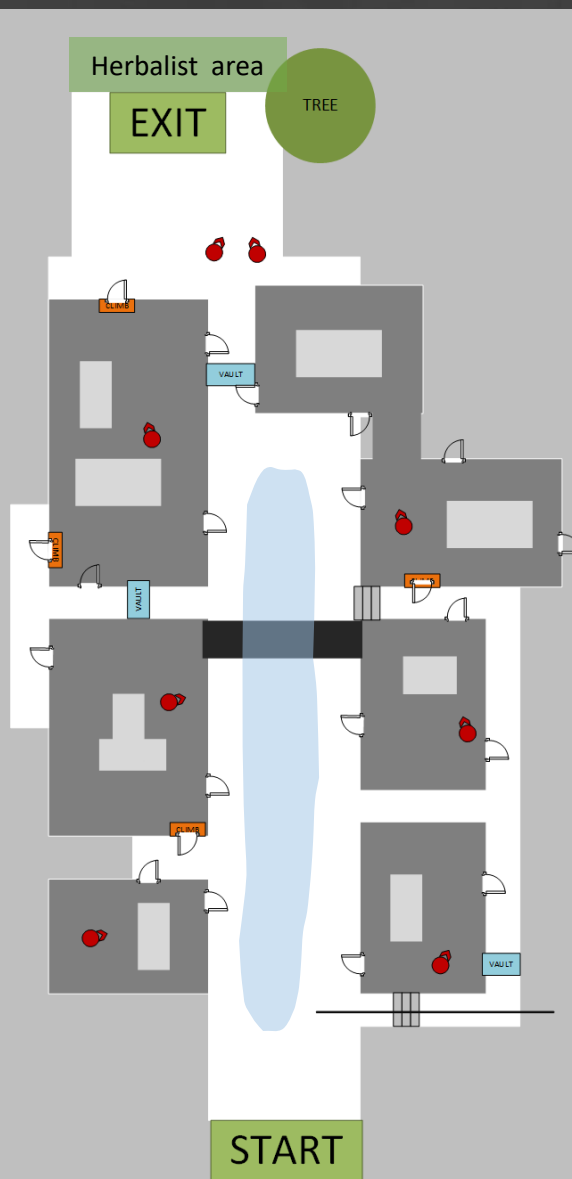
AFTER





BEFORE

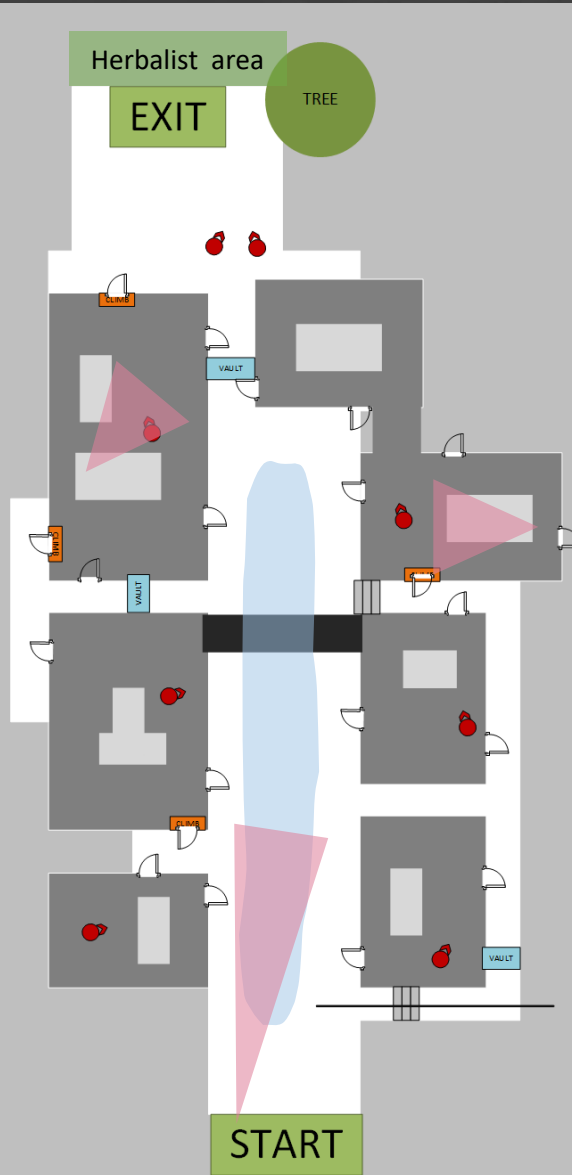
AFTER



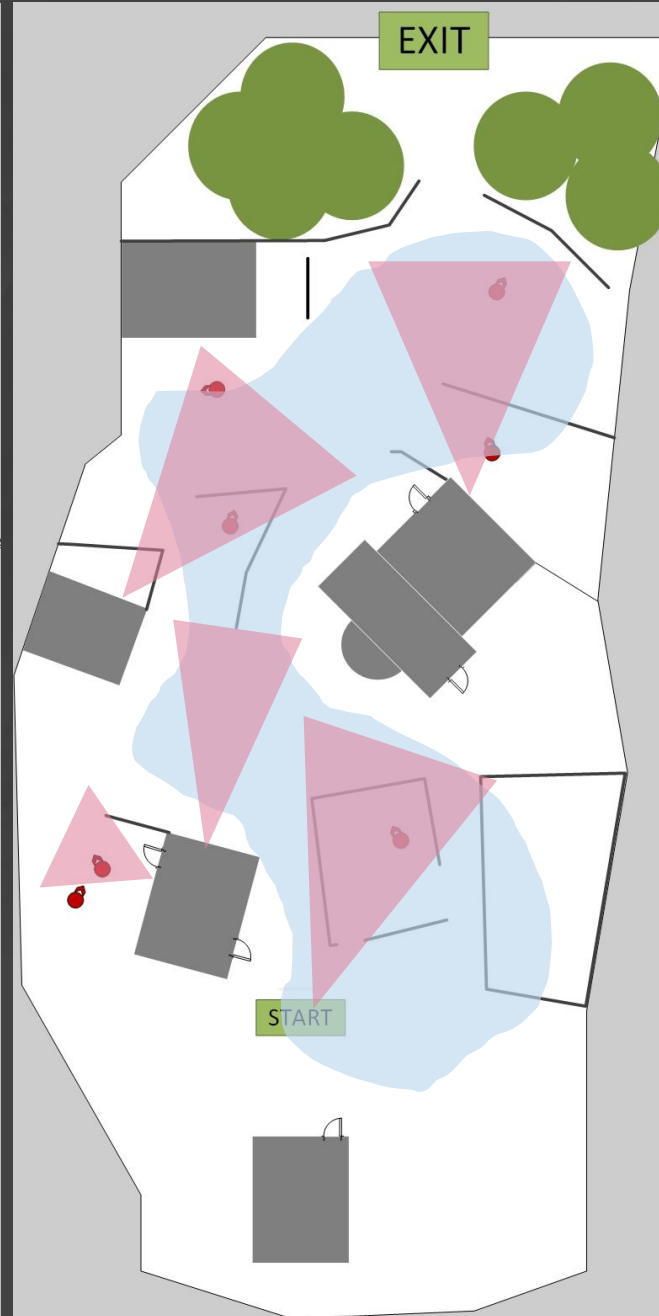
## EMPTY & FULL SPACES

- **Empty spaces** create a feeling of freedom and can host experimentation

BEFORE



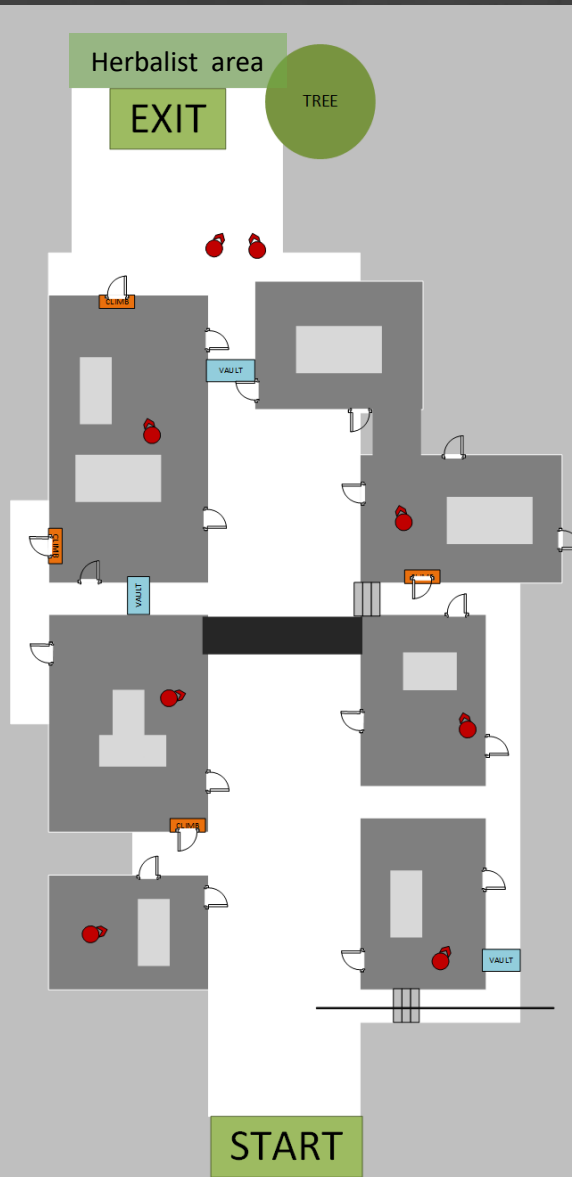
AFTER



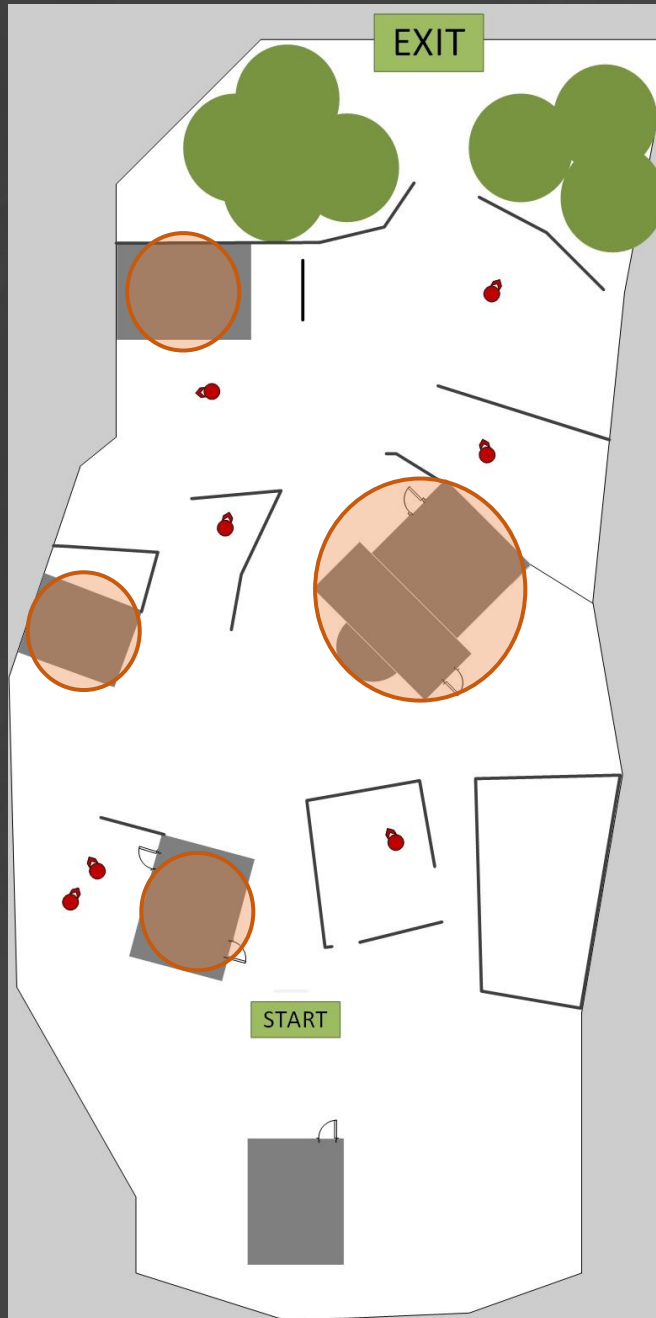
## EMPTY & FULL SPACES

- **Empty spaces** create a feeling of freedom and can host experimentation
- **Empty spaces** offer more **lines of sight** to emphasize gameplay elements and enemies

BEFORE



AFTER

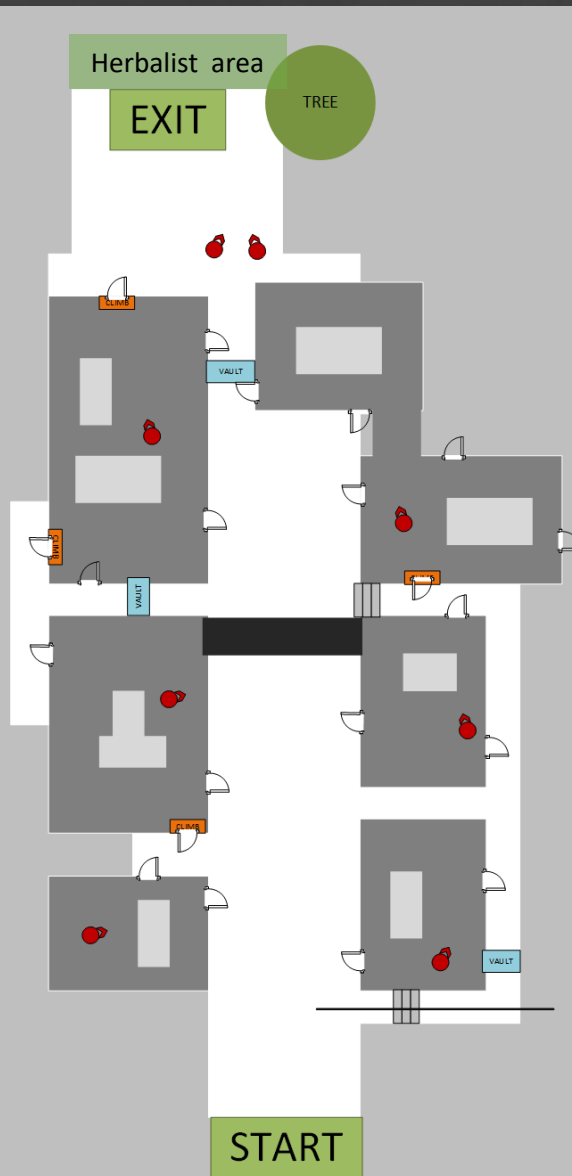


## EMPTY & FULL SPACES

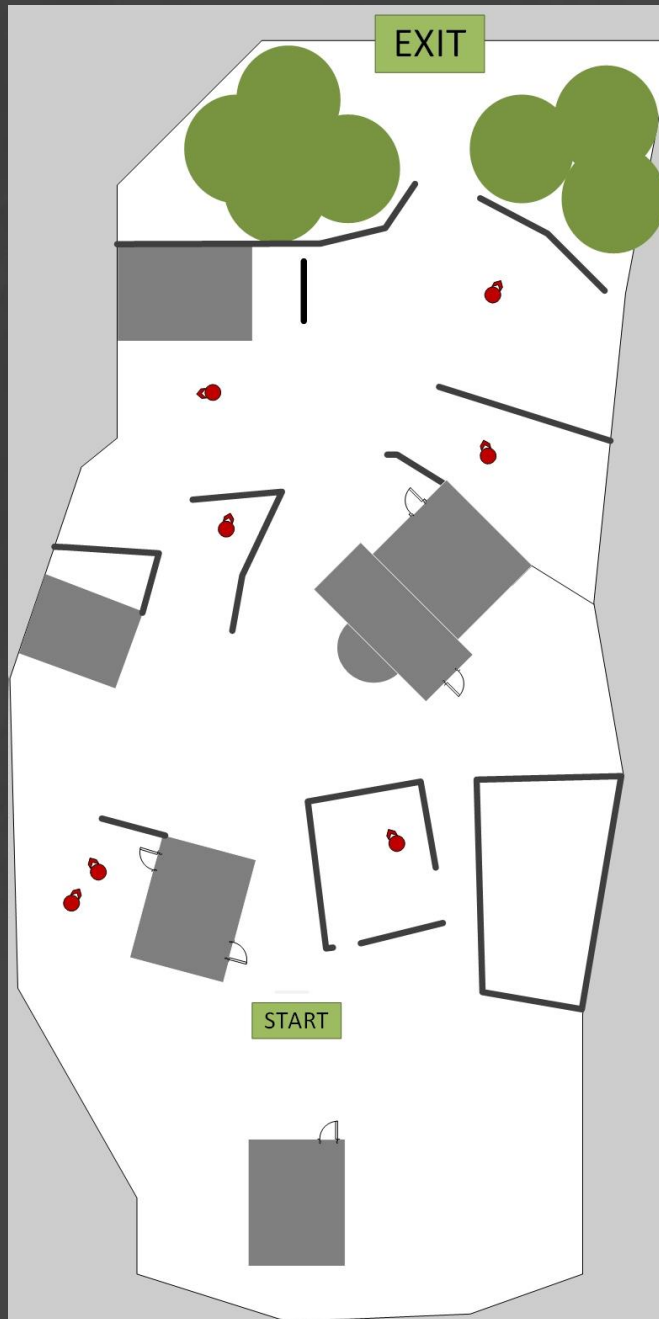
- **Empty spaces** create a feeling of freedom and can host experimentation
- **Empty spaces** offer more **lines of sight** to emphasize gameplay elements and enemies
- **Full spaces** become « **mid-objectives** »



## BEFORE



## AFTER

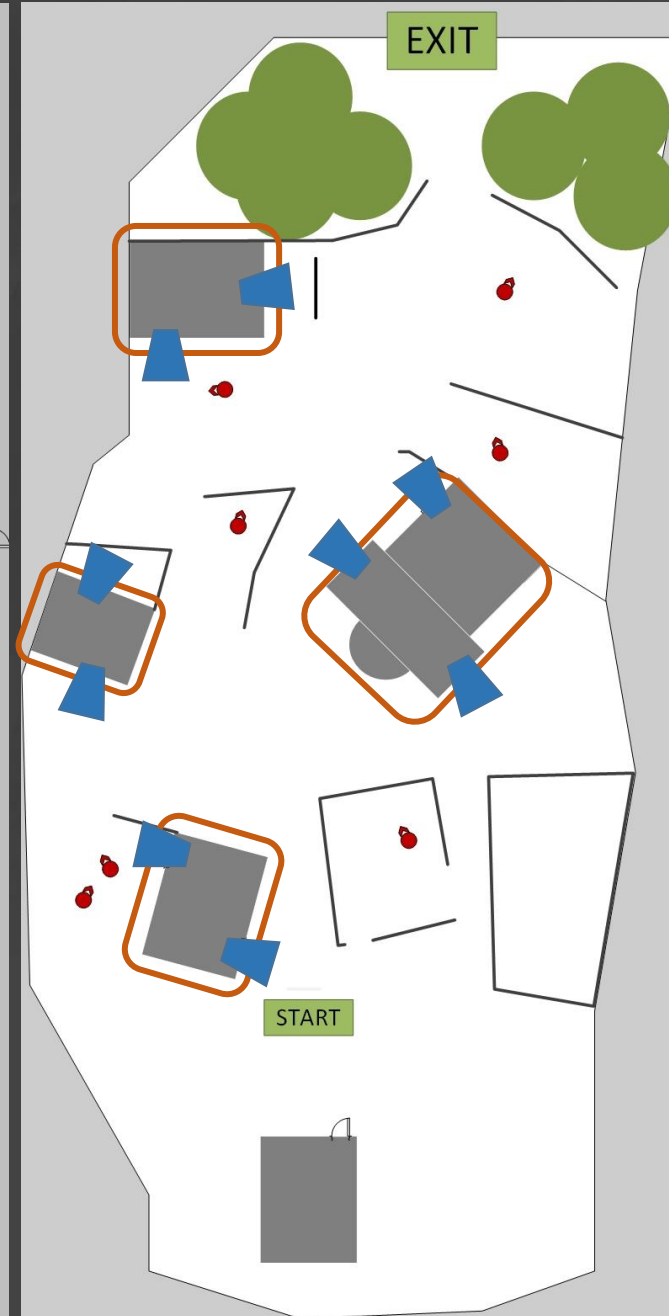
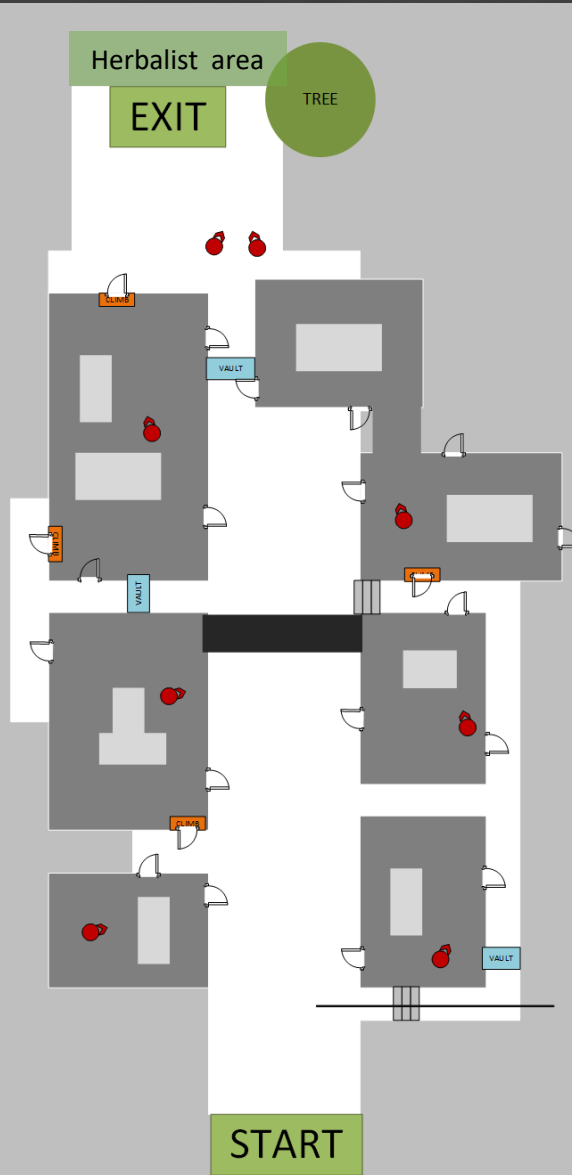


## EMPTY &amp; FULL SPACES

- **Empty spaces** create a feeling of freedom and can host experimentation
- **Empty spaces** offer more **lines of sight** to emphasize gameplay elements and enemies
- **Full spaces** become « **mid-objectives** »
- The mix of **empty** & **full** improves the visibility with clear walls & covers

BEFORE

AFTER

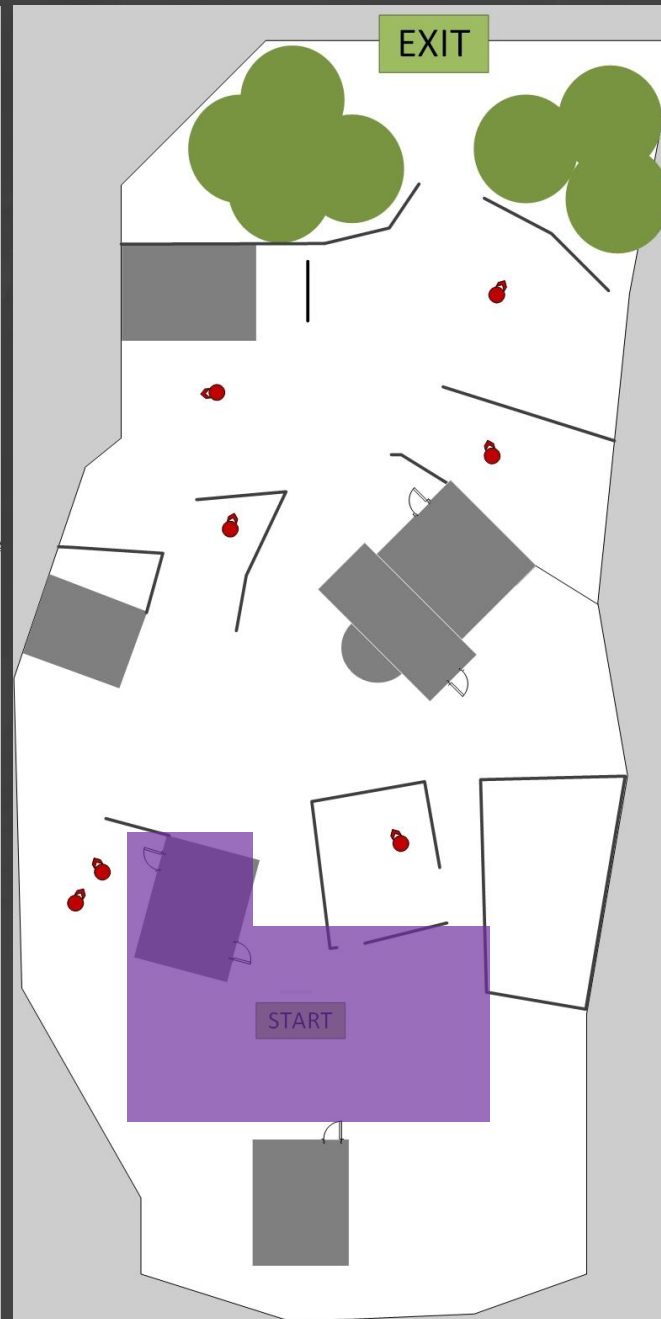
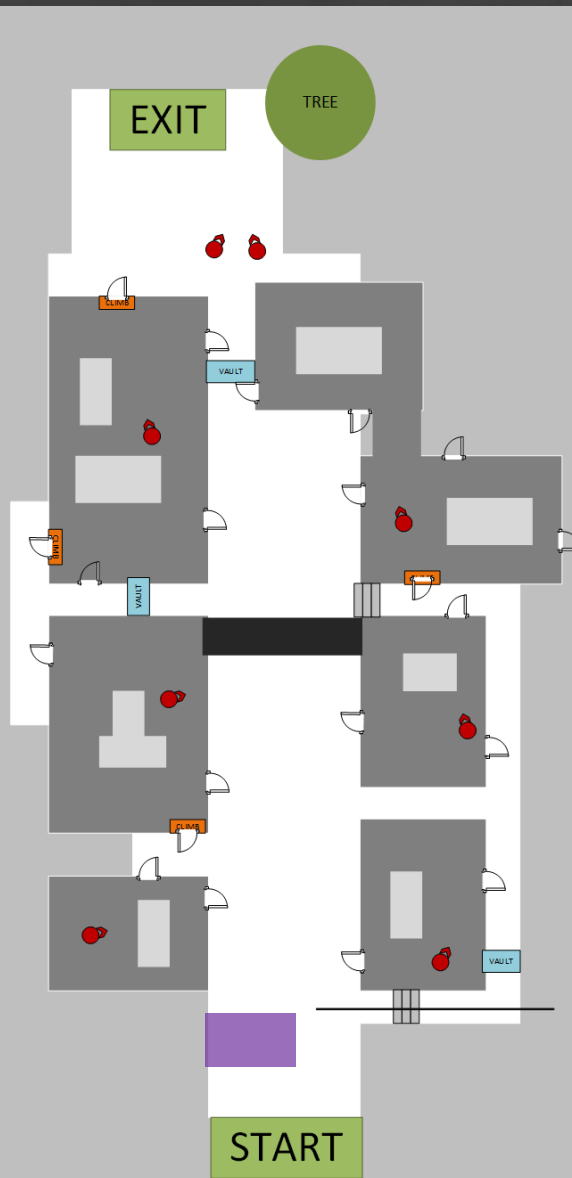


## SAFE SPOTS

- Usually a **full space**
- Safe spots are used for **observation & planning**
- **No enemies** must be inside a safe spot
- Safe spots always have **several entries**

BEFORE

AFTER

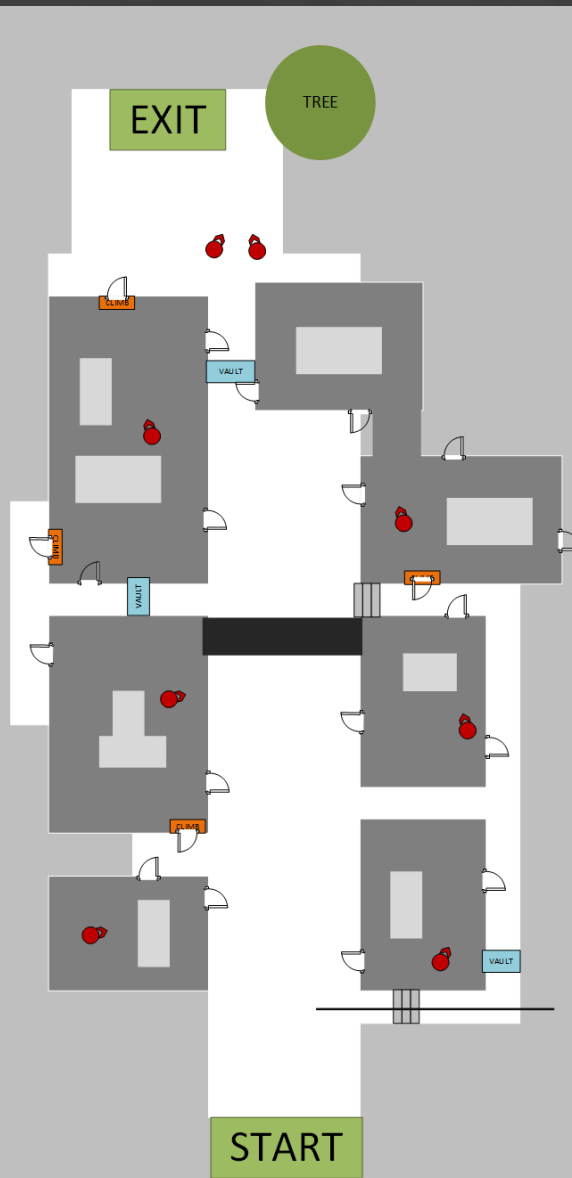


## BUFFER ZONE

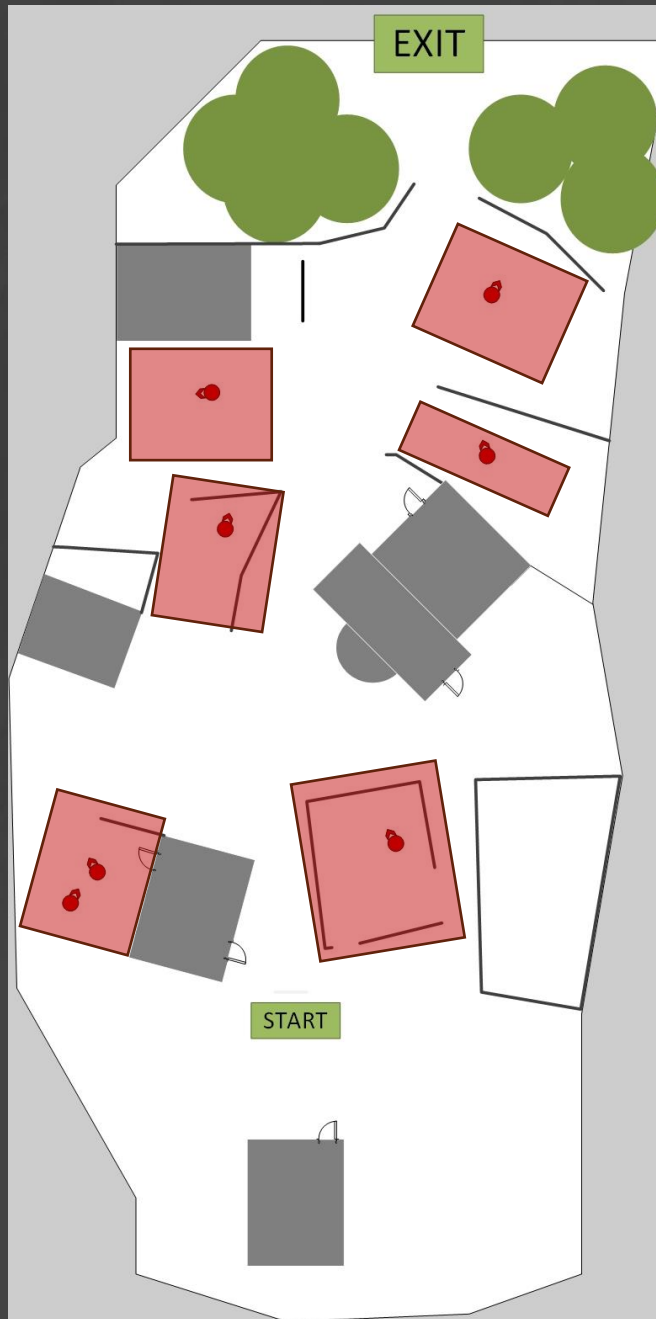
- It's the **arrival zone** of an encounter
- It's a **safe spot** as well
- Allow you **to discover enemies** when entering the buffer zone
- Time to plan a **strategy & multiple options** are available for progress



BEFORE



AFTER



## ENEMIES

- Players must understand the enemy's **influence zone**
- **Split** enemies to ensure challenges all over the encounter
- Give at least **3 different ways** to overtake a situation/enemy
- Limit the number of **enemies** to around 6
- **Avoid snowball effect!**



# OPEN ENCOUNTERS NEW GUIDELINES

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S ENCOUNTER SECTIONS?

1. **Tense gameplay sections** (with human enemies and/or rats)
2. Focus on **survival mechanics** & **use of the full toolset**
3. **Overall open-ended approach:** reward creativity and risk taking

A PLAGUE TALE  
—REQUIEM—





1. How did Innocence guide us to Requiem's Level Design?

2. The evolution of Requiem's Encounters

**3. The evolution of Requiem's Narrative sections**





# A BIGGER ADVENTURE

A bigger story

# TELLING A STORY

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?

EXAMPLE: APTR, CHAPTER 06



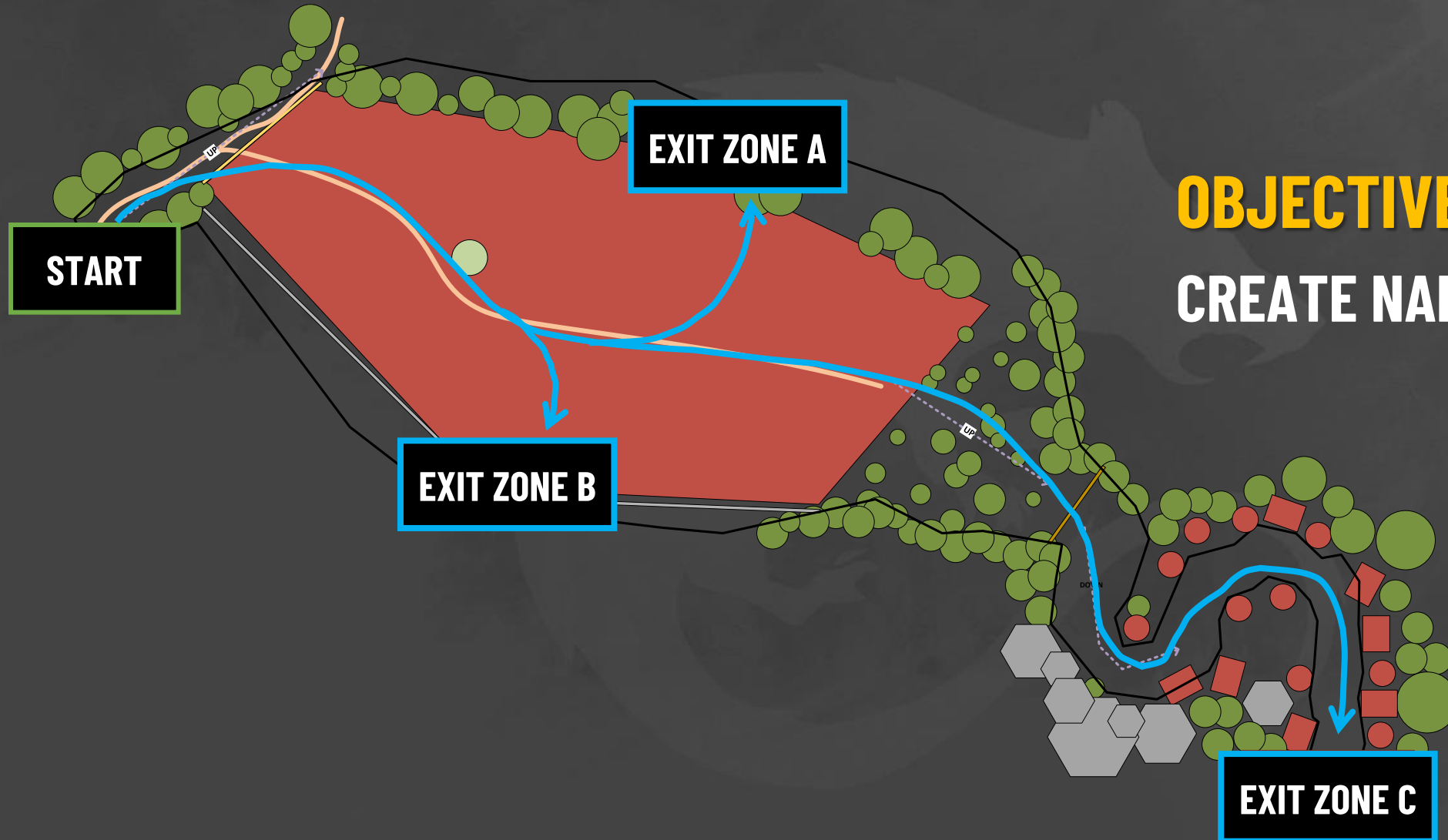
An « Event » has:

- A strong **narration**
- A **detailed animation** using the in-game camera
- An **intimate moment** between Amicia and her companions



# REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE OBJECTIVES

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S ENCOUNTER SECTIONS?

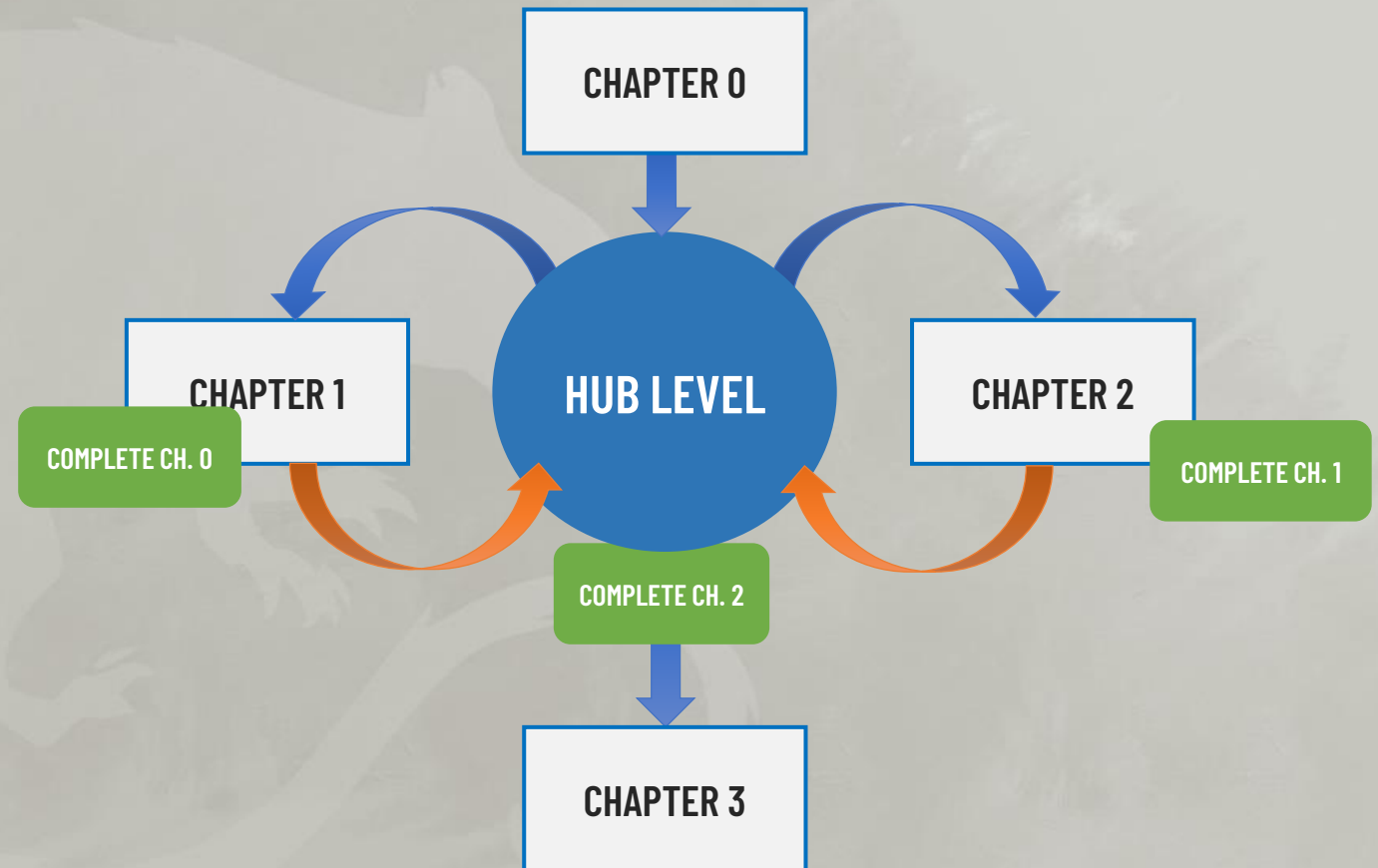



**OBJECTIVE:**  
**CREATE NARRATIVE HUBS**

# HUBS DEFINITION

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?

- **Nonlinear levels** connecting several linear levels
- Players **revisit** them multiple times and can observe the **evolution depending on their actions**
- Accesses to **Chapters are gated**





# **A NARRATIVE CHALLENGE**

Study case of "Town Hub"



# TOWN HUB'S BRIEF

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?



**Gives access to:** CHAPTERS 02, 03, 04

- Wish to showcase a **living** and **colorful Town**
- Create a **less linear** level
- Create **memorable events** for the players and the siblings
- The feeling of **liberty** and opportunities in the very **first hour** of the game



# TOWN HUB

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?





# TOWN HUB ACTIVITIES

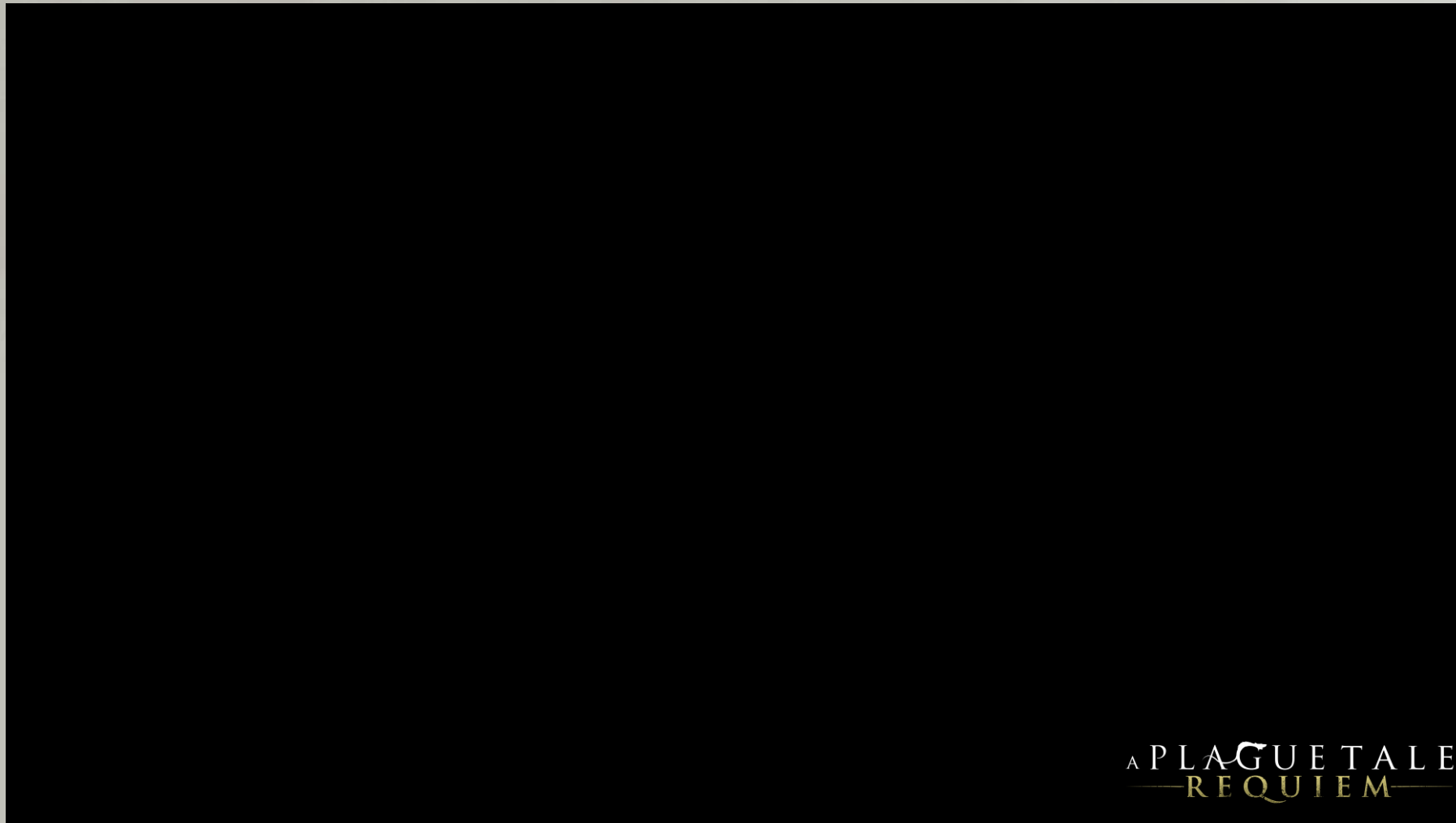
HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?





# TOWN HUB STRUCTURE

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?



(video speed is multiplied by 5)

# TOWN HUB STRUCTURE ISSUES

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?



## PRODUCTION VALUE

- Very **expensive** to make
- Not enough **human resources**

## NARRATIVE/LD ISSUES

- Too many events = **none of them are memorable**
- Town is too big = **hard to fill**
- We were not **delivering our messages**

# LESSON LEARNED...

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?



« Designing Hubs »  
**IS HARD!**



# TOWN HUB ITERATION

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?





# TOWN HUB ITERATION

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?



✓ Narration is less scattered



# TOWN HUB ITERATION

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?



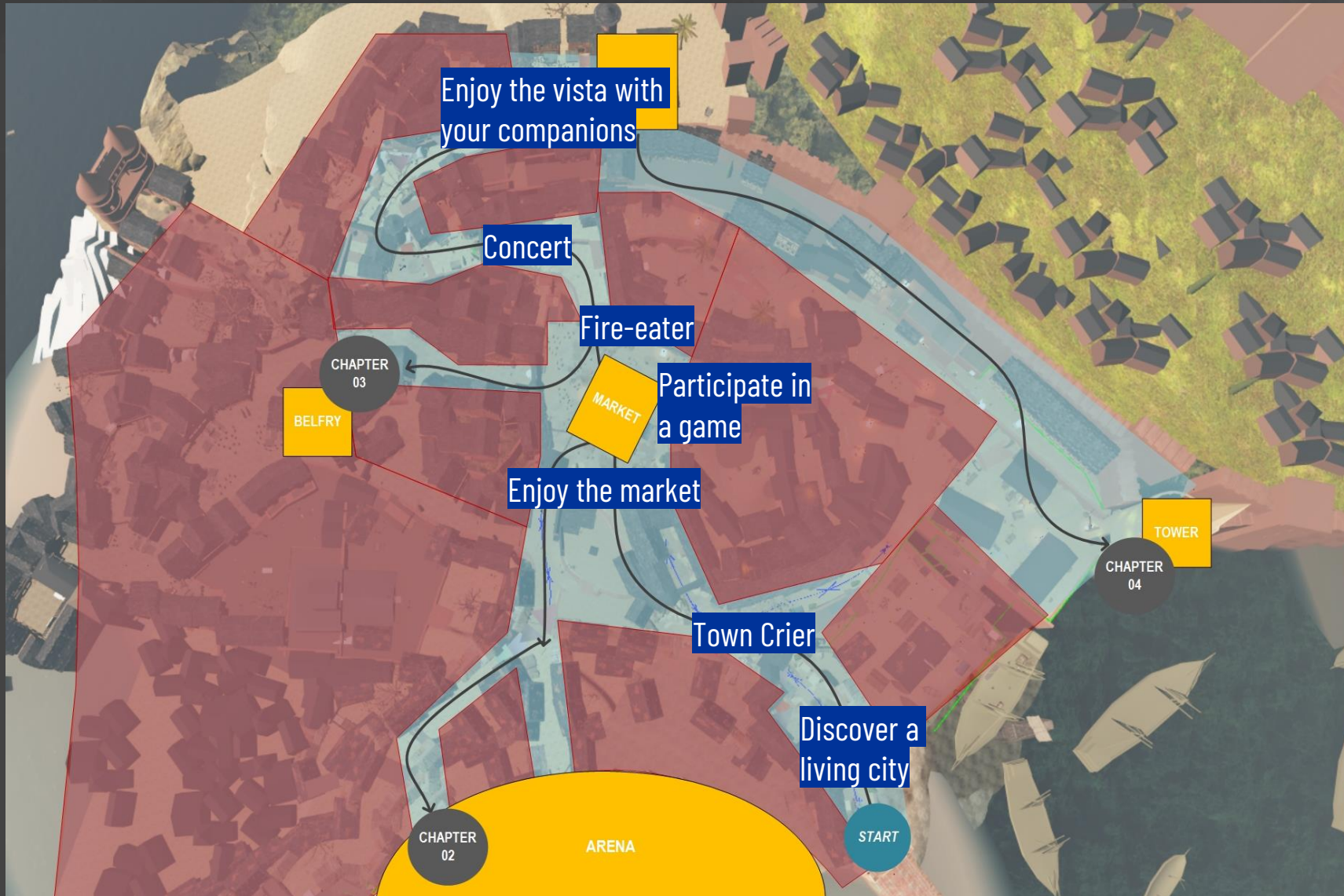
✓ Narration is less scattered

✓ Players' path is more manageable



# TOWN HUB ITERATION

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?

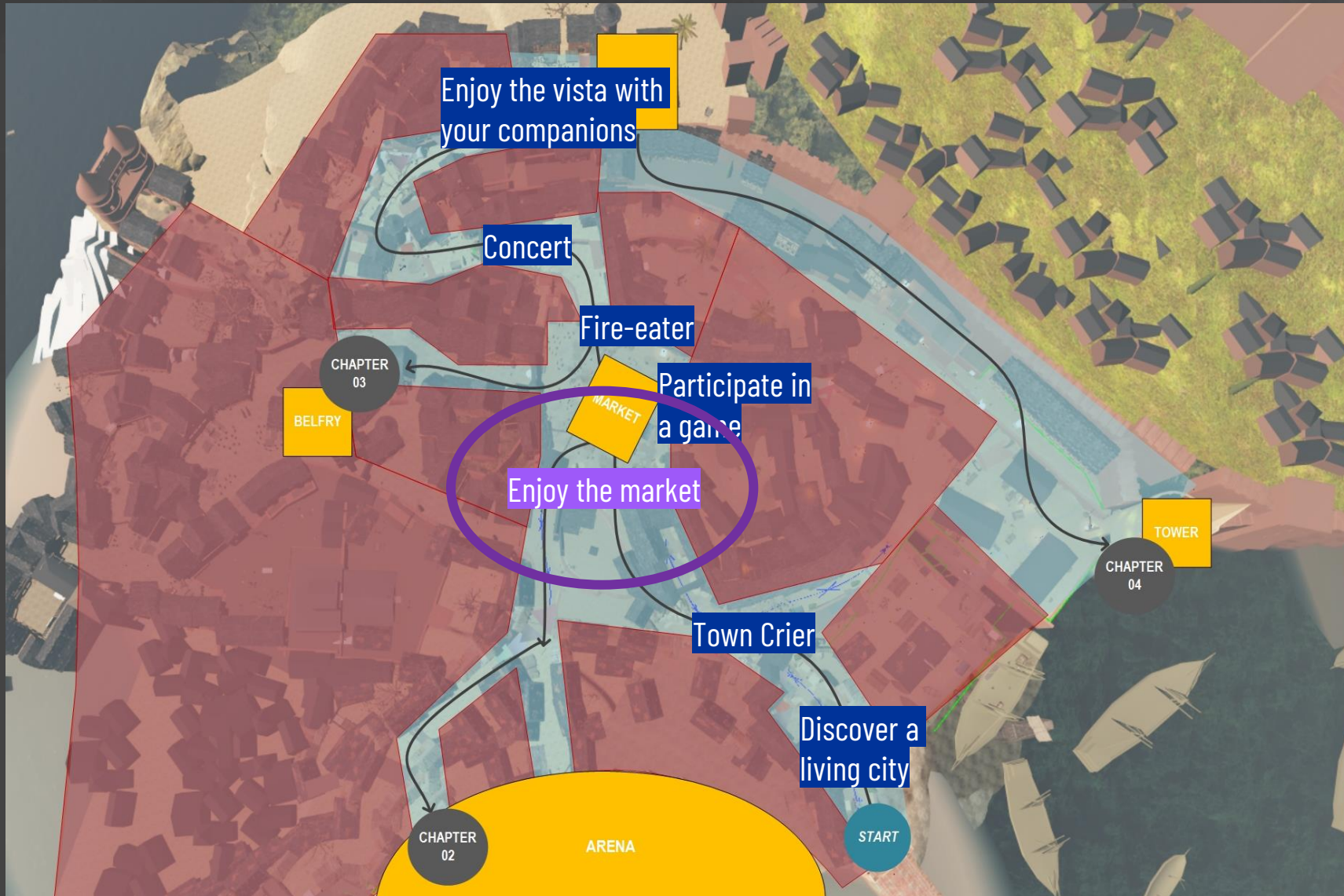


- ✓ Narration is less scattered
- ✓ Players' path is more manageable
- ✓ Each event is unique and reflects Amicia & Hugo's happiness



# TOWN HUB ITERATION

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?

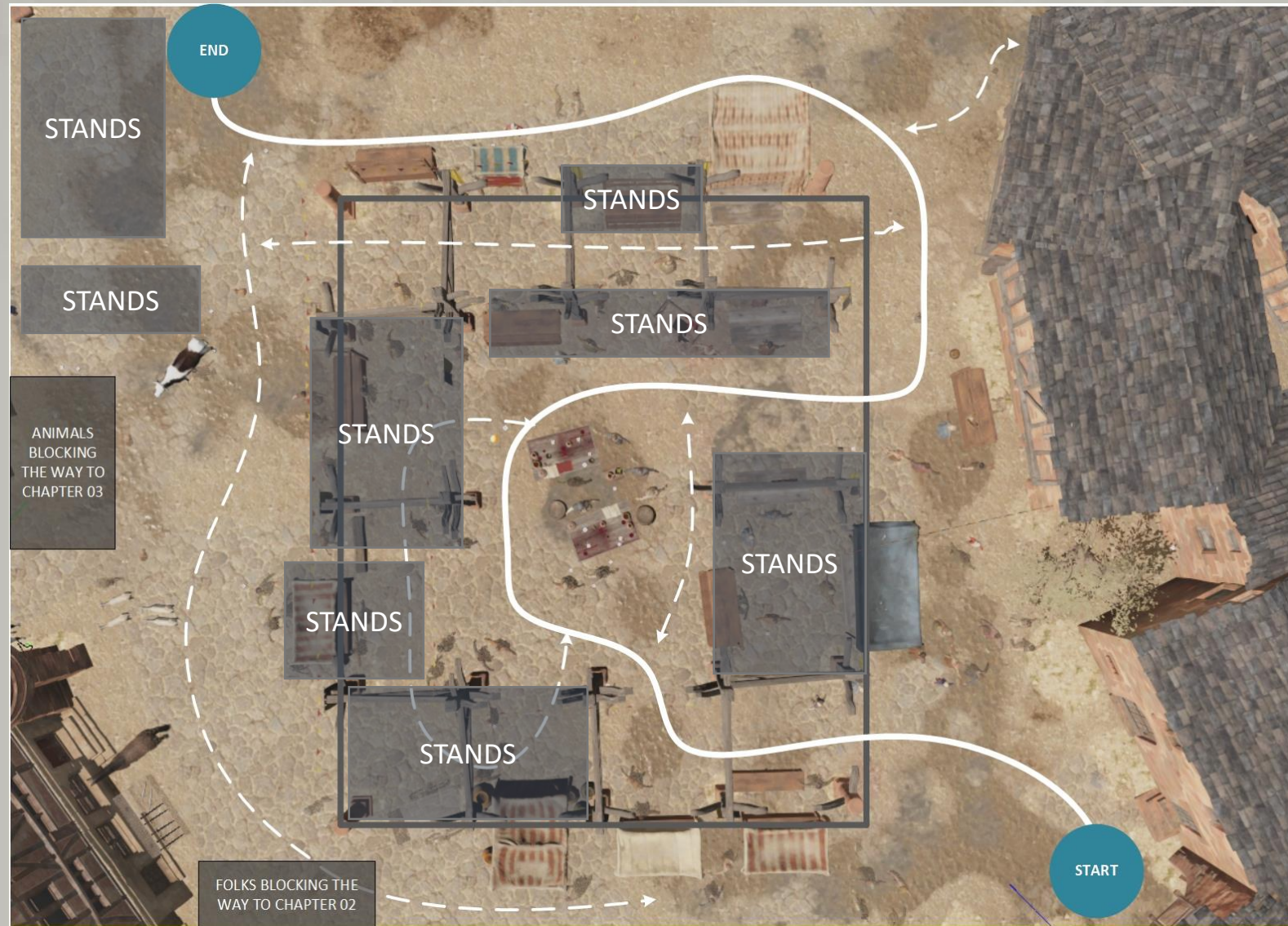


- ✓ Narration is less scattered
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# TOWN HUB MARKET

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?

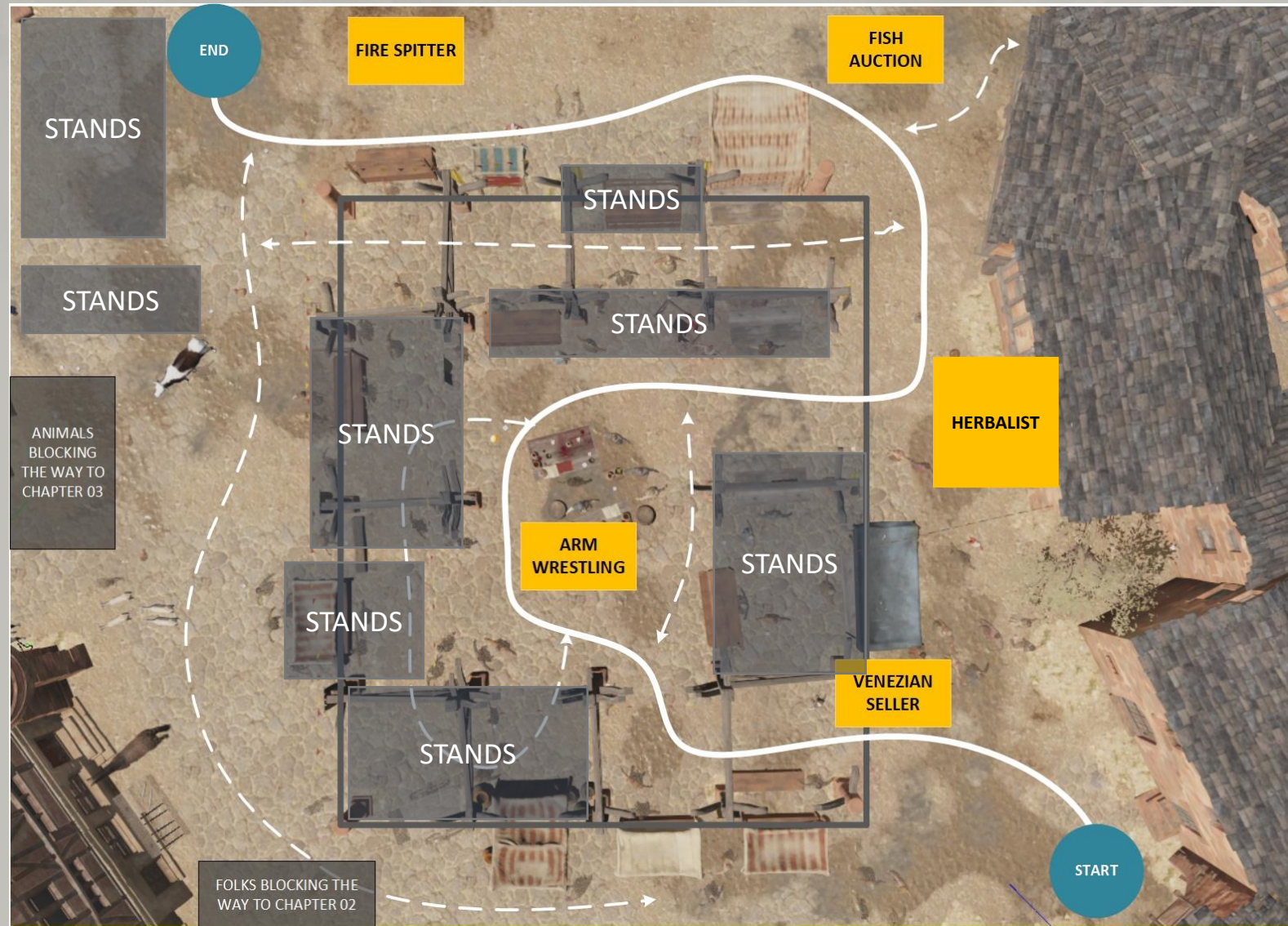


- Even though it's mandatory to walk in the Market: **create multiple paths**



# TOWN HUB MARKET

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?

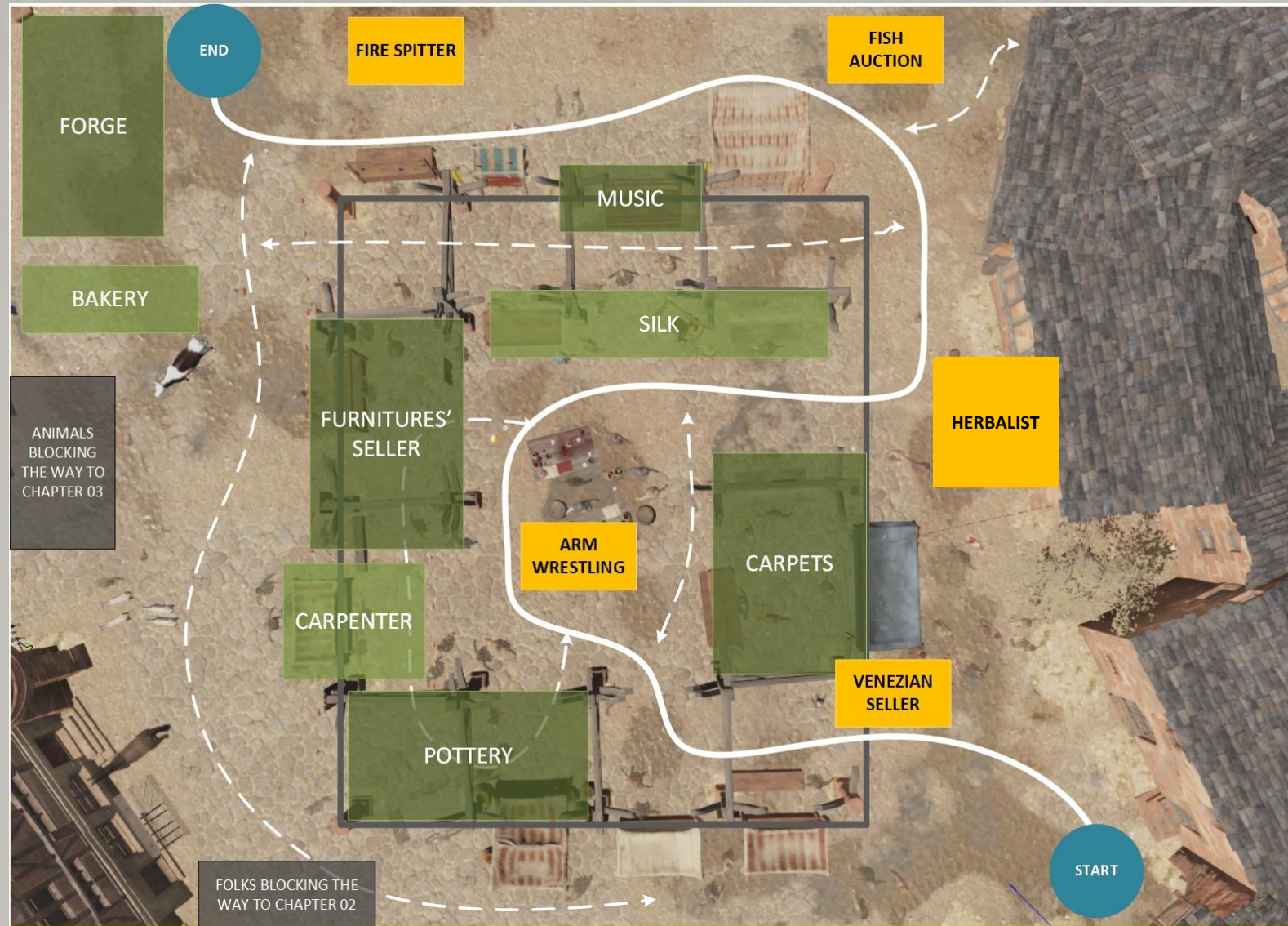


- Even though it's mandatory to walk in the Market: **create multiple paths**
- Design **impactful events** along the way



# TOWN HUB MARKET

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?



- Even though it's mandatory to walk in the Market: **create multiple paths**
- Design **impactful events** along the way
- Stalls with **strong themes** (folklore & credibility)





# TOWN HUB GUIDELINES

HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE REQUIEM'S NARRATIVE SECTIONS?



## DOING LESS MEANS DOING BETTER:

- Earn time to **polish events a lot more** and make them memorable
- Give a **believable sensation of an opened space** without losing the players

## DESIGNING A NARRATIVE EVENT MUST:

- Be unique and highlight the **characters' relationship**
- Give **credibility and authenticity to the world**



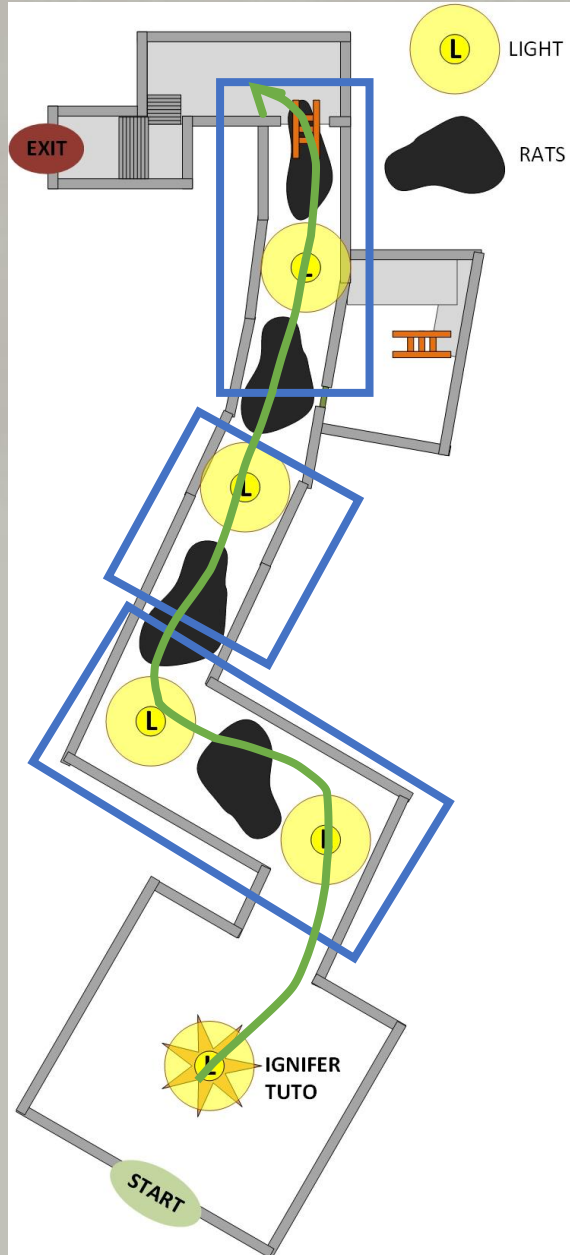


1. How did Innocence guide us to Requiem's Level Design?
2. The evolution of Requiem's Encounters
3. The evolution of Requiem's Narrative sections
4. **BONUS: The evolution of other sections!**



# PUZZLES (BEFORE)

BONUS: HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE OTHER VARIETY OF SECTIONS?



- **Corridor** shaped structure

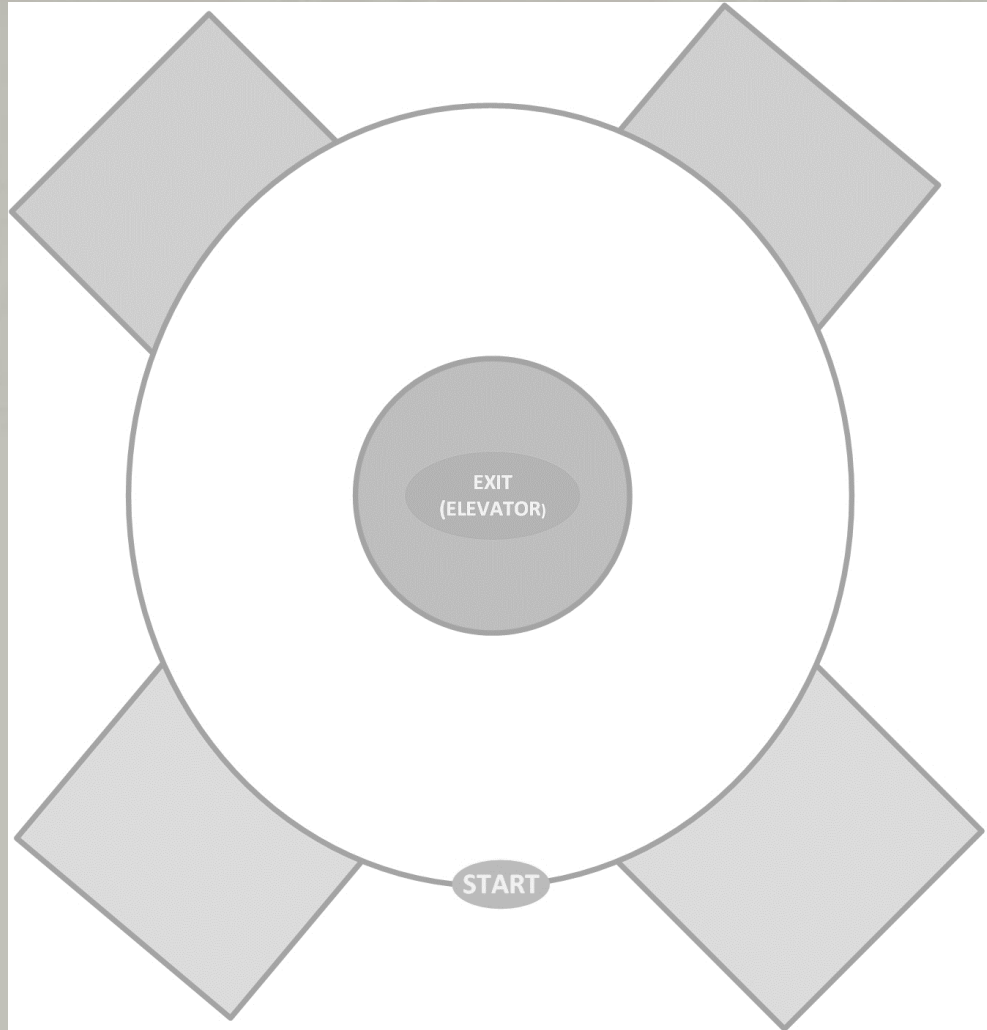
- **Puzzles** follow each other **without being linked** together

- **Linear** solutions



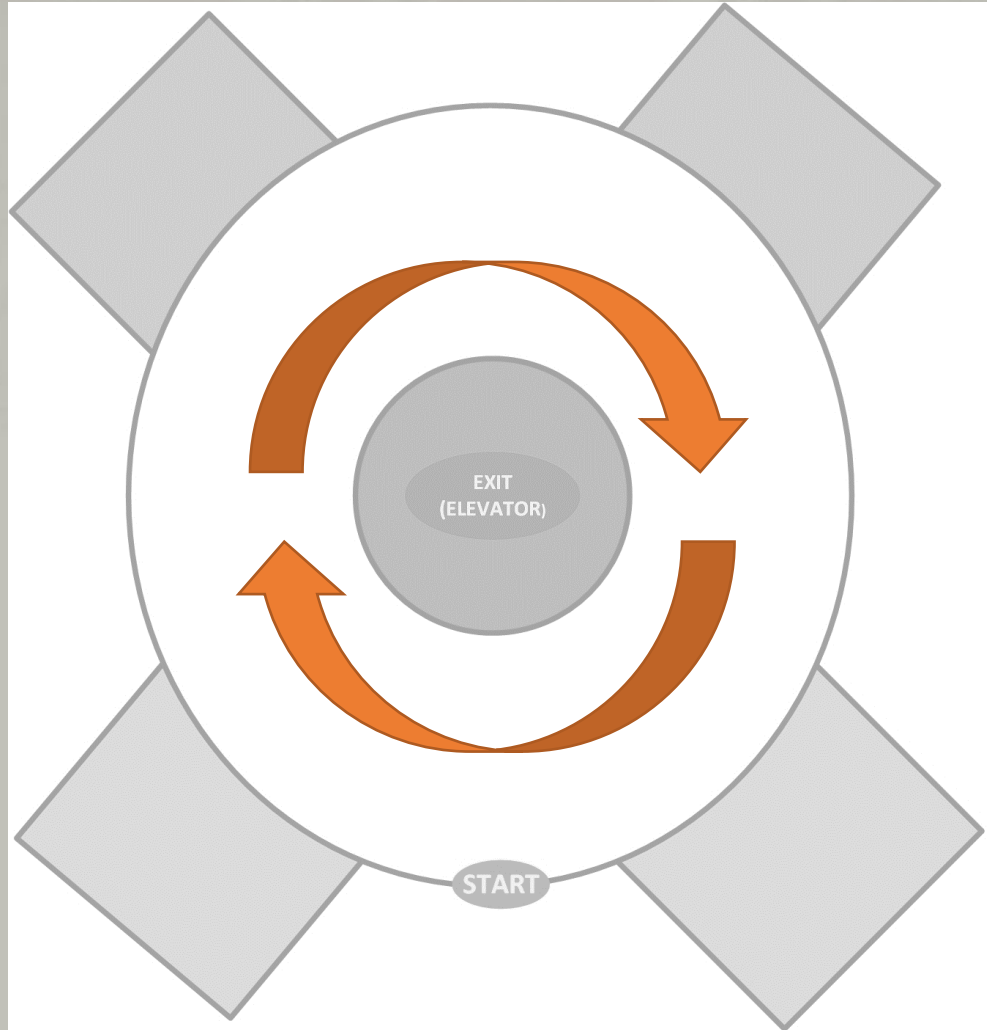
# PUZZLES (AFTER)

BONUS: HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE OTHER VARIETY OF SECTIONS?



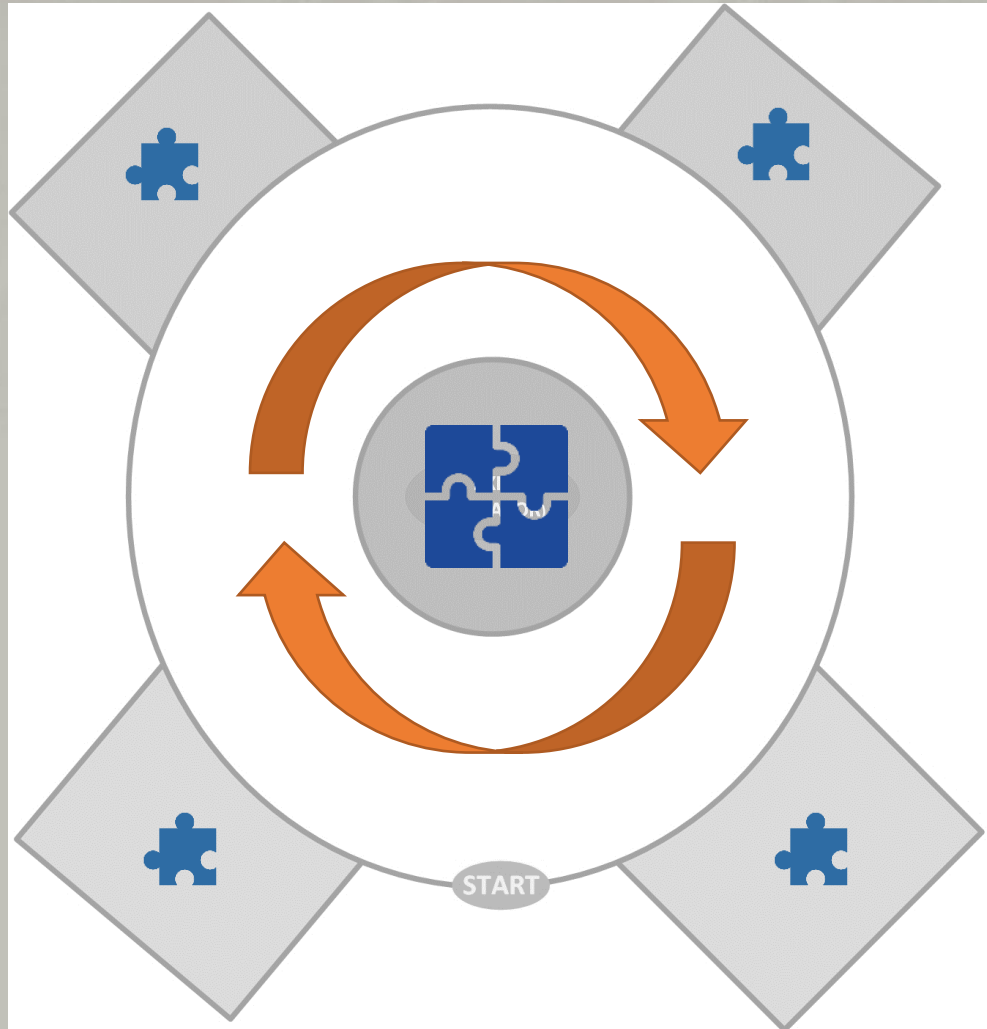
- ~~Corridor~~ shaped structure
- **Puzzles** follow each other **without being linked** together
- **Linear** solutions

# PUZZLES (AFTER)



- ~~Corridor~~ shaped structure
  - **Circular shape** allowing the player to **walk freely in the room**
- **Puzzles** follow each other **without being linked** together
- **Linear solutions**

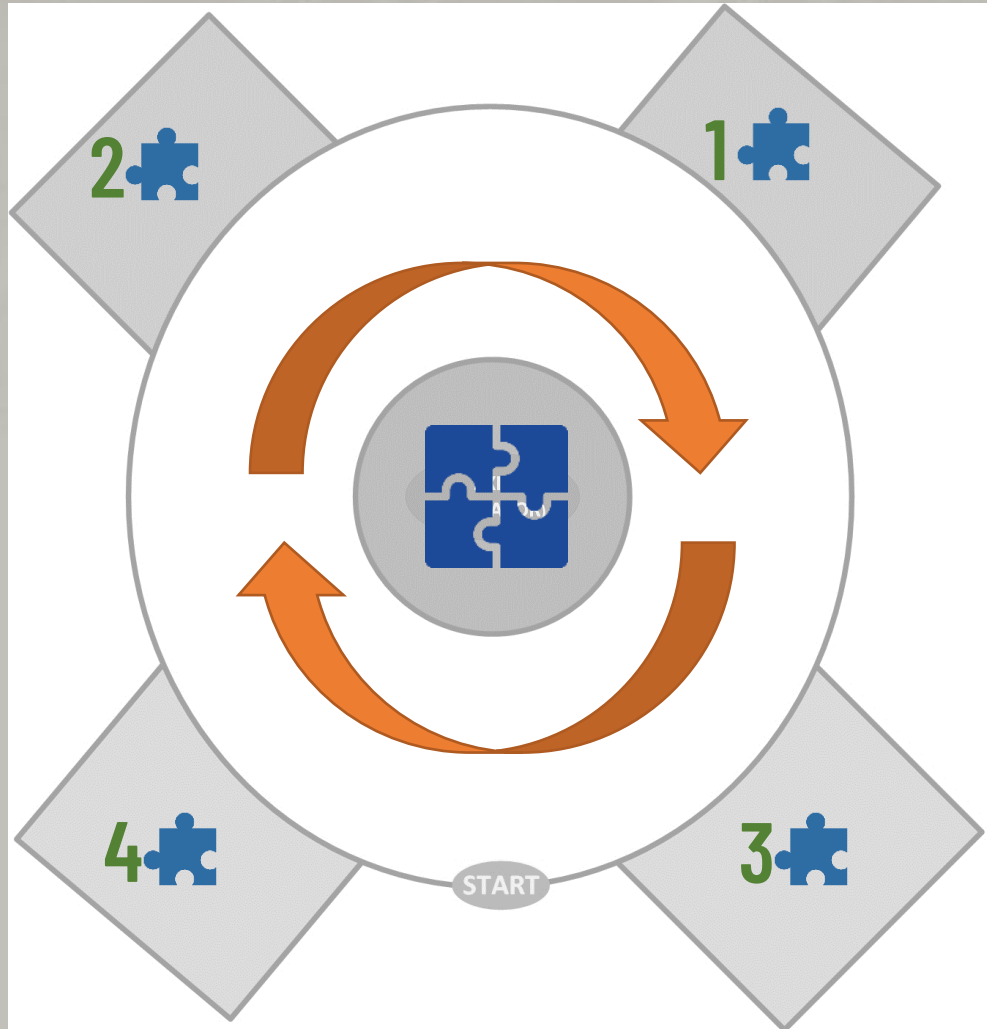
# PUZZLES (AFTER)



- ~~Corridor~~ shaped structure
  - **Circular shape** allowing the player to **walk freely in the room**
- ~~Puzzles follow each other without being linked together~~
  - The whole room **hosts multiple & connected puzzles**
- **Linear** solutions



# PUZZLES (AFTER)



- ~~Corridor~~ shaped structure

→ **Circular shape** allowing the player to **walk freely in the room**

- ~~Puzzles~~ follow each other ~~without being linked~~ together

→ The whole room **hosts multiple & connected puzzles**

- ~~Linear solutions~~

→ Solve the rooms' puzzles **in the order of your choice**

# ACTION SEQUENCES

BONUS: HOW DID INNOCENCE INFLUENCE OTHER VARIETY OF SECTIONS?



- Encourage **movement**

- **Use full toolset**

- Plan **your own strategy**

A dark silhouette of a dragon is positioned on the left side of the frame, facing right. The dragon has a long, curved tail and its body is partially obscured by the text. The background is a textured, golden-brown sky with soft, wispy clouds. The overall mood is somber and atmospheric.

# REQUIEM'S POST-MORTEM



# DID WE NAIL THIS?

REQUIEM'S POST-MORTEM

## 17 LEVELS

- **17** Encounters
- **2** Hubs + **3** narrative focused levels
- **8** "bigger puzzles" + all the smaller ones
- **14** exotic sequences

**= 16 hours of gameplay with 6 Level Designers**



# OUR 08 TAKEAWAYS

REQUIEM'S POST-MORTEM

## LEVEL DESIGN

## PRODUCTION

# OUR 08 TAKEAWAYS

REQUIEM'S POST-MORTEM

## LEVEL DESIGN

Players' playground should be clear and allow them to experiment

## PRODUCTION



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REQUIEM'S POST-MORTEM

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Players' playground should be clear and allow them to experiment

Encourage players to take risks instead of punishing them

## PRODUCTION

# OUR 08 TAKEAWAYS

## LEVEL DESIGN

Players' playground should be clear and allow them to experiment

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Give players time to observe and plan their strategy

## PRODUCTION

# OUR 08 TAKEAWAYS

## LEVEL DESIGN

Players' playground should be clear and allow them to experiment

Encourage players to take risks instead of punishing them

Give players time to observe and plan their strategy

Give players several opportunities and multiple paths to overtake a situation

## PRODUCTION



# OUR 08 TAKEAWAYS

## LEVEL DESIGN

Players' playground should be clear and allow them to experiment

Encourage players to take risks instead of punishing them

Give players time to observe and plan their strategy

Give players several opportunities and multiple paths to overtake a situation

Create believable sensations of an open space, even in narrative sections

## PRODUCTION

# OUR 08 TAKEAWAYS

## LEVEL DESIGN

Players' playground should be clear and allow them to experiment

Encourage players to take risks instead of punishing them

Give players time to observe and plan their strategy

Give players several opportunities and multiple paths to overtake a situation

Create believable sensations of an opened space, even in narrative sections

Everything you design must be unique and memorable!

## PRODUCTION

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Doing less to do better: earn time to polish



Still learning but  
**WE ARE VERY PROUD OF IT!**





# A LEVEL DESIGN EVOLUTION: FROM INNOCENCE TO REQUIEM GDC

Thank you for listening!  
Do you have any questions?

Laura Mas Maury – Level Designer  
March 21-25, 2023

