A/B TESTING

The old Heart of the City:

This version of the city center was a very open space, with seven exits spread around:
1. Wharf
2. Back to the Suburbs
3. Scientist/Friend's Lab
4. Sewer
5. Water Works
6. Duck Pond
7. Old Street

Though it had plenty of leg room and featured key pull-tabs to teach players, I could see potential for creating a space that more organically made players use the movement mechanics. In this case, it might have been a little too empty for its size.

With that realization, it was time to start brainstorming. One of the main pillars of my new design was to add more verticality to the level; players liked to platform and there were few places to do that. To find my other pillars, I knew I had to take a good long look at our mechanics (hover-spin, triple jump, and dash) and extrapolate how the levels could capitalize on them.
I knew players liked to be able to jump and hover places, so there needed to be places you could only get to by hovering. There should be at least three or four heights/floors to this level to allow me to place that geometry.
At the same time, I had to keep mind that there were seven exits.

My Goals:
1. Verticality.
2. Areas that can only be accessed through a specific mechanic or a combination thereof.
3. Retain at least some of the feeling of openness.

Other than that, I had complete freedom to design it as I pleased. A "tyranny of the blank page" situation if there ever was one.

There was one more thing to keep in mind, however. After discussing our game with professor, we thought we would try out starting the player inside of the lab and give them free reign to explore later. This, of course, would change things. What the player would see and when, whether or not hero props were required to exist, and where/how to lead them all needed to be re-examined.

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<u>My thought process</u>

We know we start off in the Lab this time around, so there's no need to design the City with the roads leading to the Lab.

What *do* we need it to lead to then? --Well after doing the stuff in the Lab, the level should direct them to the Mayor's Estate.

What of the rest of the Level?

Options to stop the player if they don't go directly to the Mayor's house:

1. "My tracker tells me you aren't going in the right direction"
2. Physically wall off the areas. Though, this may lead to them wasting time desperately trying to get over the obstructions. I don't know if this is too gamey though.
3. Temporary Camera region so that they can't see that other options exist. It disappears after leaving the level for the first OR to cover our asses completely, add unseen barricade in addition to the camera shift

We'll start with the Lab then. You exit the lab with the intention of getting to the Mayor's place.

What to keep in mind:

1. Verticality
2. Obvious markers
3. Hovering, Triple Jump
4. Openness

I like option three but I feel like I need just one more thing before I start. How this all is oriented and exactly how it obscures the other paths using only the camera shift. Where would we need it all positioned?

According to Professor Orth's feedback, this option to the rest of the world should be visible, but blocked off.

Once players return from the mayor's house with their first quest, they can go behind the Lab and reach the rest of the city.

I want them to have an idea of where their quest destination might be, so maybe it can be foreshadowed while walking on the way to the mayor's estate, turning the camera after turning the corner to reveal more.

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Eventually, the design shifted again. The old street and duck pond were scrapped and now players were entering the level from the suburbs again.

This is what I ended up with, the new Heart of the City (Work in Progress):

1. Wharf
2. Back to Morthison Bridge
3. Scientist/Friend's Lab
4. Sewer
5. Water Works
6. Mayor's Estate

Playtester Feedback
"Which Heart of the City do you prefer? Why?"
Tester1: The old one is more polished, but the new one is really cool because of changes in elevation. It's nice to be able to jump around.
Tester2: The newer one; there's more to it.
Tester3: The new one is better because it has better context. I really enjoyed the ground moving under my feet when pulling tabs in the old one though, so you should try to incorporate that into the new one.

Just as I did for the Mayor's Estate, I spent quite a bit of time looking up cities and suburban areas and translating their designs over into the game without forcing the design, still keeping the fidelity, and, at the same time, using the space to make our movement mechanics shine.

Thankfully, this wasn't too difficult as there were many opportunities to add ridges (read: platforms) and not have them look out of place.

The team seems to like this new HOTC, and so do the playtesters. It may not be complete, but there is plenty of potential.