Foolproof

UX Brighton - 6th November 2026

Escape From Figma Island

Why and how to start designing in code again

1. How we ended up on Figma Island
2. Designers can work in code again
3. A side project is the best way to learn
4. Five tips for working in code with AI
5. Closing thoughts

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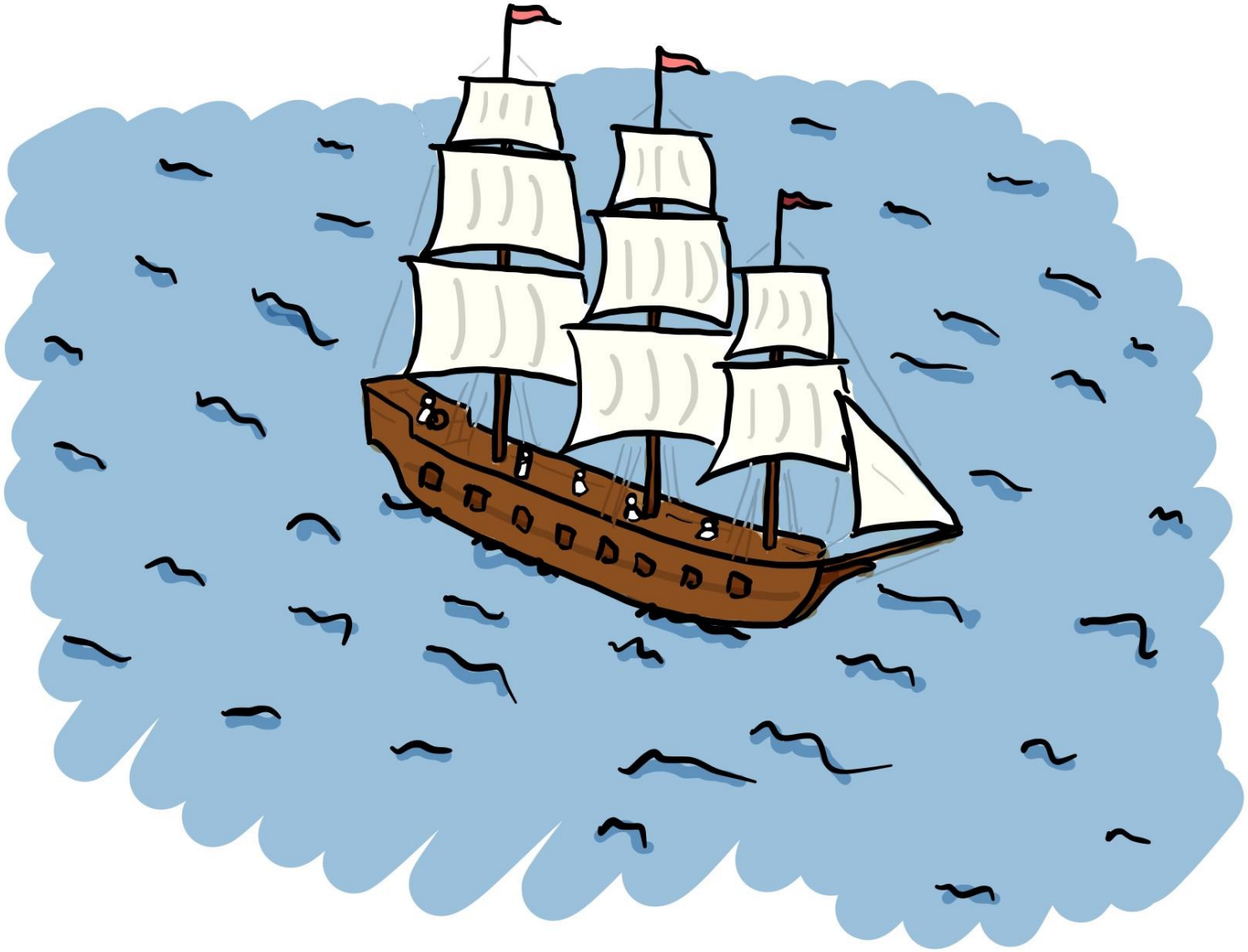
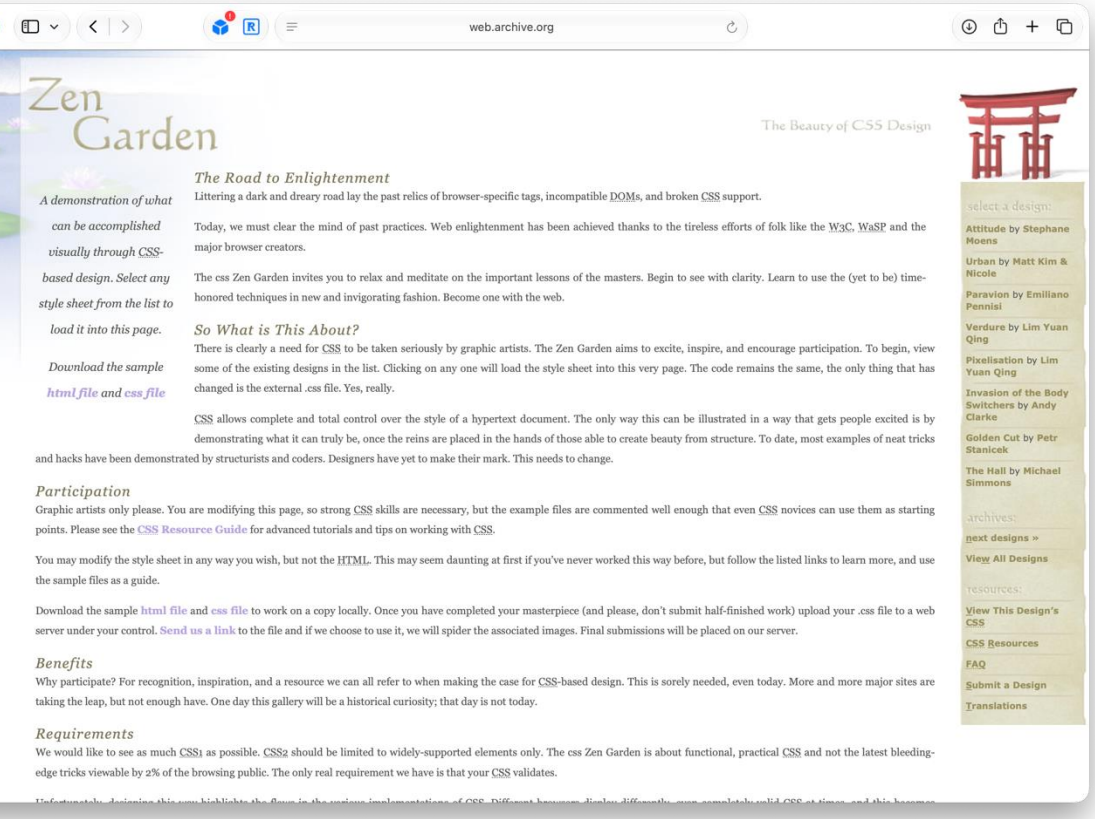
The year was 2005...




web.archive.org
Zen Garden
The Beauty of CSS Design
A demonstration of what can be accomplished visually through CSS-based design. Select any style sheet from the list to load it into this page.
Download the sample html file and css file
The Road to Enlightenment
Littering a dark and dreary road lay the past relics of browser-specific tags, incompatible DOMs, and broken CSS support.
Today, we must clear the mind of past practices. Web enlightenment has been achieved thanks to the tireless efforts of folk like the W3C, WaSP and the major browser creators.
The css Zen Garden invites you to relax and meditate on the important lessons of the masters. Begin to see with clarity. Learn to use the (yet to be) time-honored techniques in new and invigorating fashion. Become one with the web.
So What is This About?
There is clearly a need for CSS to be taken seriously by graphic artists. The Zen Garden aims to excite, inspire, and encourage participation. To begin, view some of the existing designs in the list. Clicking on any one will load the style sheet into this very page. The code remains the same, the only thing that has changed is the external .css file. Yes, really.
CSS allows complete and total control over the style of a hypertext document. The only way this can be illustrated in a way that gets people excited is by demonstrating what it can truly be, once the reins are placed in the hands of those able to create beauty from structure. To date, most examples of neat tricks and hacks have been demonstrated by structurists and coders. Designers have yet to make their mark. This needs to change.
Participation
Graphic artists only please. You are modifying this page, so strong CSS skills are necessary, but the example files are commented well enough that even CSS novices can use them as starting points. Please see the CSS Resource Guide for advanced tutorials and tips on working with CSS.
You may modify the style sheet in any way you wish, but not the HTML. This may seem daunting at first if you've never worked this way before, but follow the listed links to learn more, and use the sample files as a guide.
Download the sample html file and css file to work on a copy locally. Once you have completed your masterpiece (and please, don't submit half-finished work) upload your .css file to a web server under your control. Send us a link to the file and if we choose to use it, we will spider the associated images. Final submissions will be placed on our server.
Benefits
Why participate? For recognition, inspiration, and a resource we can all refer to when making the case for CSS-based design. This is sorely needed, even today. More and more major sites are taking the leap, but not enough have. One day this gallery will be a historical curiosity; that day is not today.
Requirements
We would like to see as much CSS1 as possible. CSS2 should be limited to widely-supported elements only. The css Zen Garden is about functional, practical CSS and not the latest bleeding-edge tricks viewable by 2% of the browsing public. The only real requirement we have is that your CSS validates.
select a design:
Attitude by Stephane Moens
Urban by Matt Kim & Nicole
Paravion by Emiliano Pennisi
Verdure by Lim Yuan Qing
Pixelisation by Lim Yuan Qing
Invasion of the Body Switchers by Andy Clarke
Golden Cut by Petr Stanicek
The Hall by Michael Simmons
archives:
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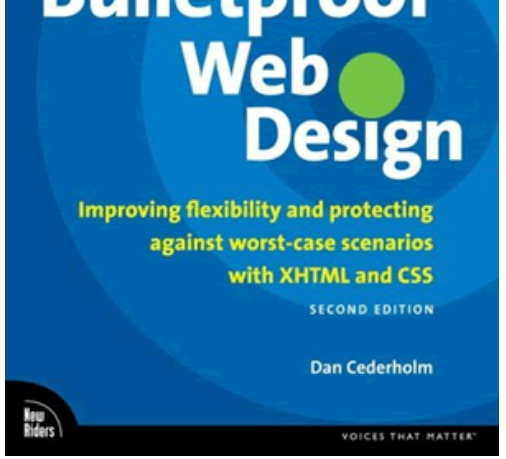
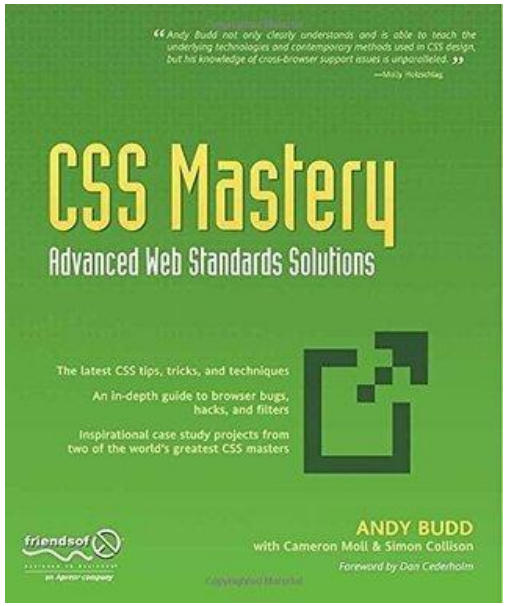
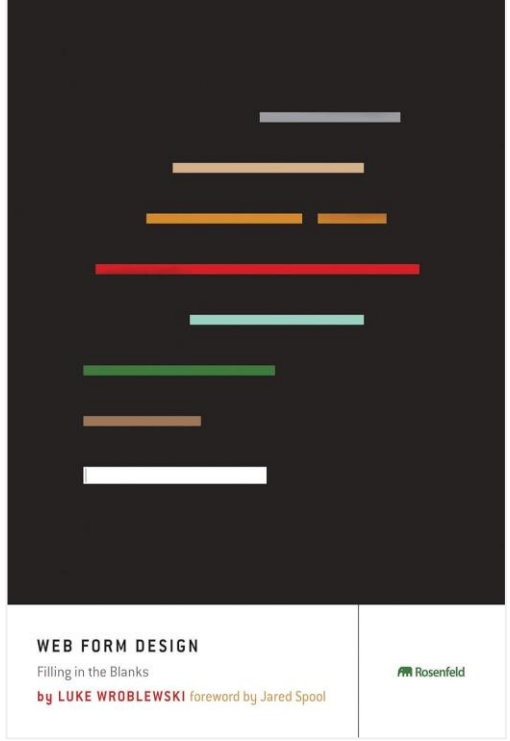
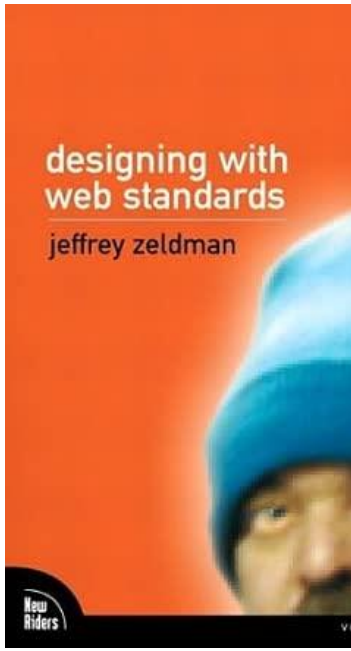
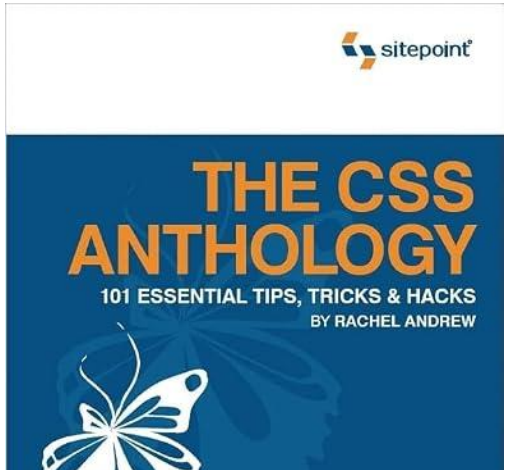
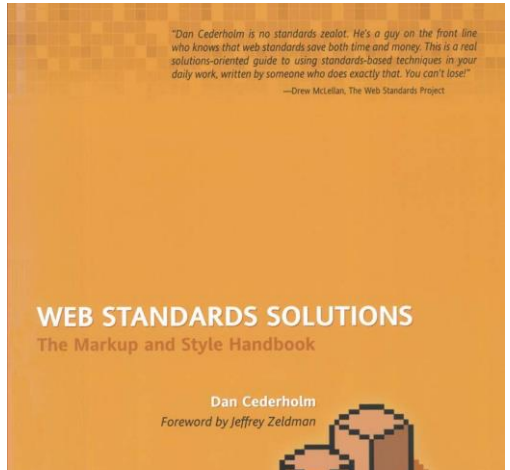

Bulletproof Web Design
Improving flexibility and protecting against worst-case scenarios with XHTML and CSS
SECOND EDITION
Dan Cederholm
New Riders
VOICES THAT MATTER


"Andy Budd not only clearly understands and is able to teach the underlying technologies and contemporary methods used in CSS design, but his knowledge of cross-browser support issues is unparalleled."
—Molly Holzschlag
CSS Mastery
Advanced Web Standards Solutions
The latest CSS tips, tricks, and techniques
An in-depth guide to browser bugs, hacks, and filters
Inspirational case study projects from two of the world's greatest CSS masters
friendsof
ANDY BUDD
with Cameron Moll & Simon Collison
Foreword by Dan Cederholm

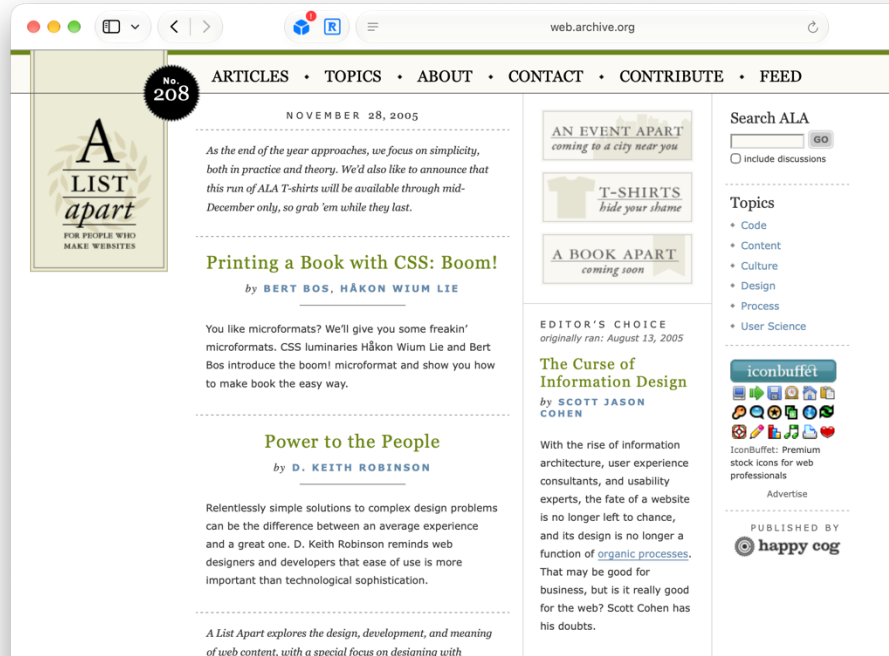

WEB FORM DESIGN
Filling in the Blanks
by LUKE WROBLEWSKI foreword by Jared Spool
Rosenfeld


designing with web standards
jeffrey zeldman
New Riders


sitepoint
THE CSS ANTHOLOGY
101 ESSENTIAL TIPS, TRICKS & HACKS
BY RACHEL ANDREW


"Dan Cederholm is no standards zealot. He's a guy on the front line who knows that web standards save both time and money. This is a real solutions-oriented guide to using standards-based techniques in your daily work, written by someone who does exactly that. You can't lose!"
—Drew McLellan, The Web Standards Project
WEB STANDARDS SOLUTIONS
The Markup and Style Handbook
Dan Cederholm
Foreword by Jeffrey Zeldman


CONTENT STRATEGY
FOR THE WEB


web.archive.org
No. 208
A LIST apart
FOR PEOPLE WHO MAKE WEBSITES
ARTICLES • TOPICS • ABOUT • CONTACT • CONTRIBUTE • FEED
NOVEMBER 28, 2005
As the end of the year approaches, we focus on simplicity, both in practice and theory. We'd also like to announce that this run of ALA T-shirts will be available through mid-December only, so grab 'em while they last.
Printing a Book with CSS: Boom!
by BERT BOS, HÅKON WIUM LIE
You like microformats? We'll give you some freakin' microformats. CSS luminaries Håkon Wium Lie and Bert Bos introduce the boom! microformat and show you how to make book the easy way.
Power to the People
by D. KEITH ROBINSON
Relentlessly simple solutions to complex design problems can be the difference between an average experience and a great one. D. Keith Robinson reminds web designers and developers that ease of use is more important than technological sophistication.
A List Apart explores the design, development, and meaning of web content, with a special focus on designing with
AN EVENT APART coming to a city near you
T-SHIRTS hide your shame
A BOOK APART coming soon
EDITOR'S CHOICE
originally ran: August 13, 2005
The Curse of Information Design
by SCOTT JASON COHEN
With the rise of information architecture, user experience consultants, and usability experts, the fate of a website is no longer left to chance, and its design is no longer a function of organic processes. That may be good for business, but is it really good for the web? Scott Cohen has his doubts.
Search ALA
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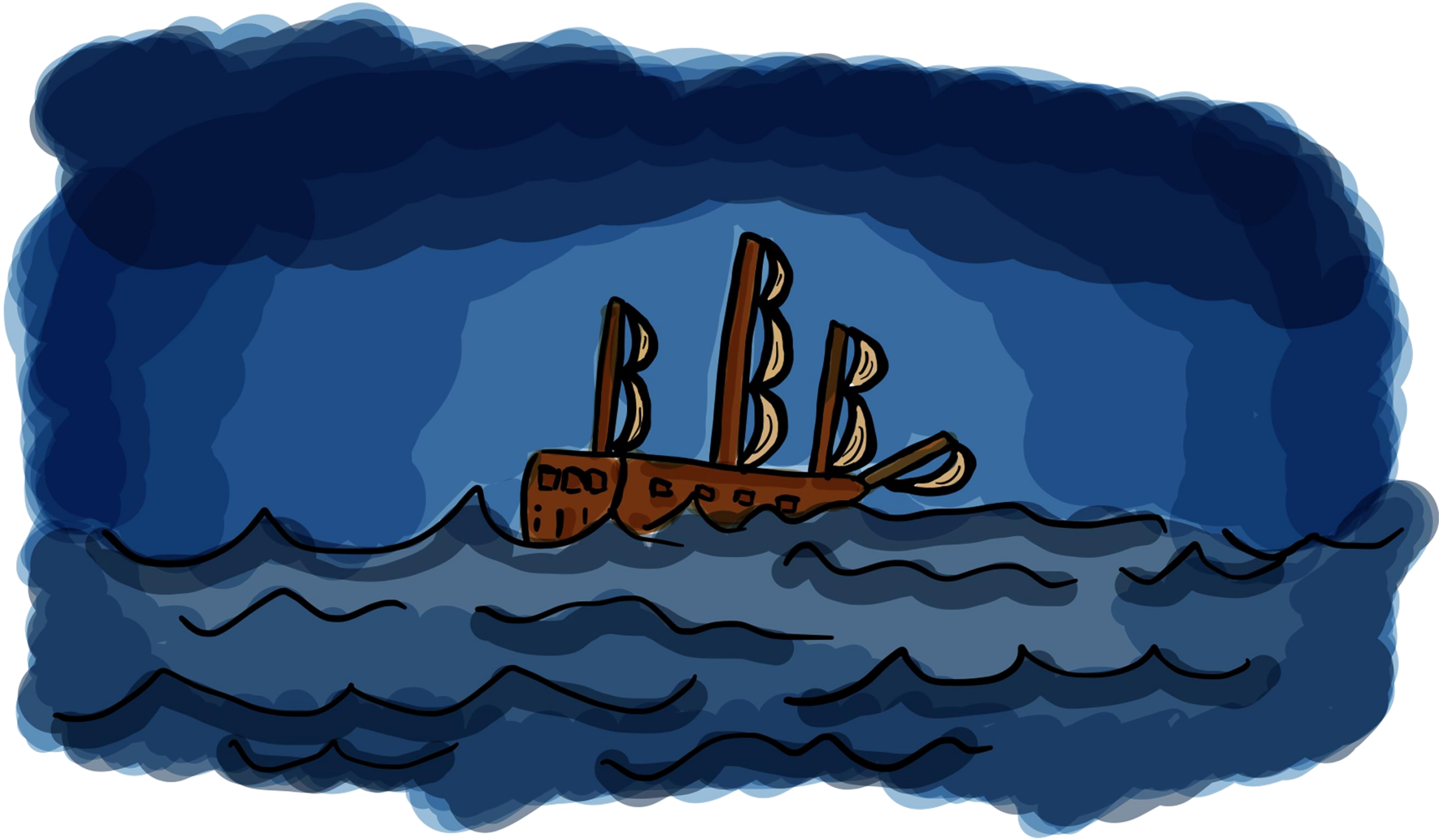
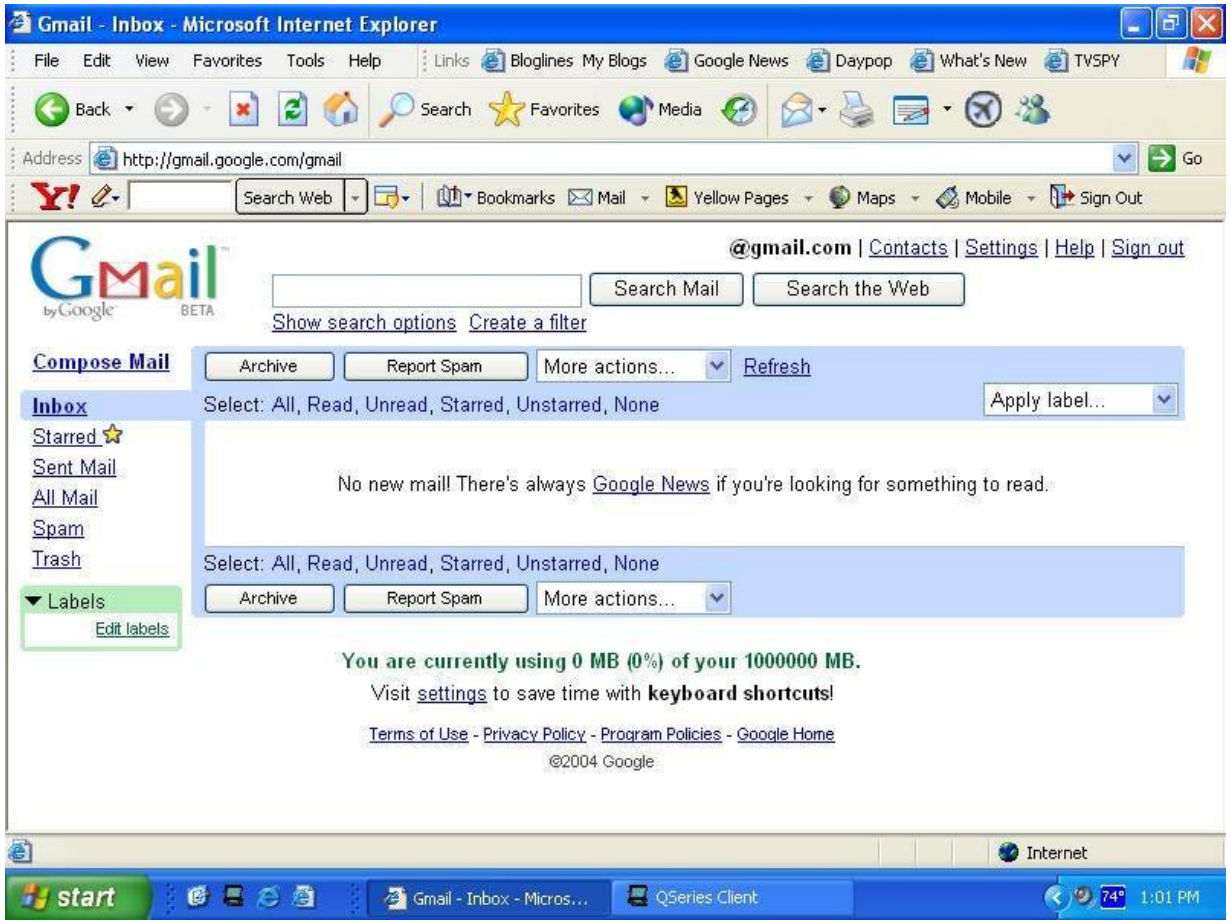
IconBuffet: Premium stock icons for web professionals
Advertise
PUBLISHED BY
happy cog



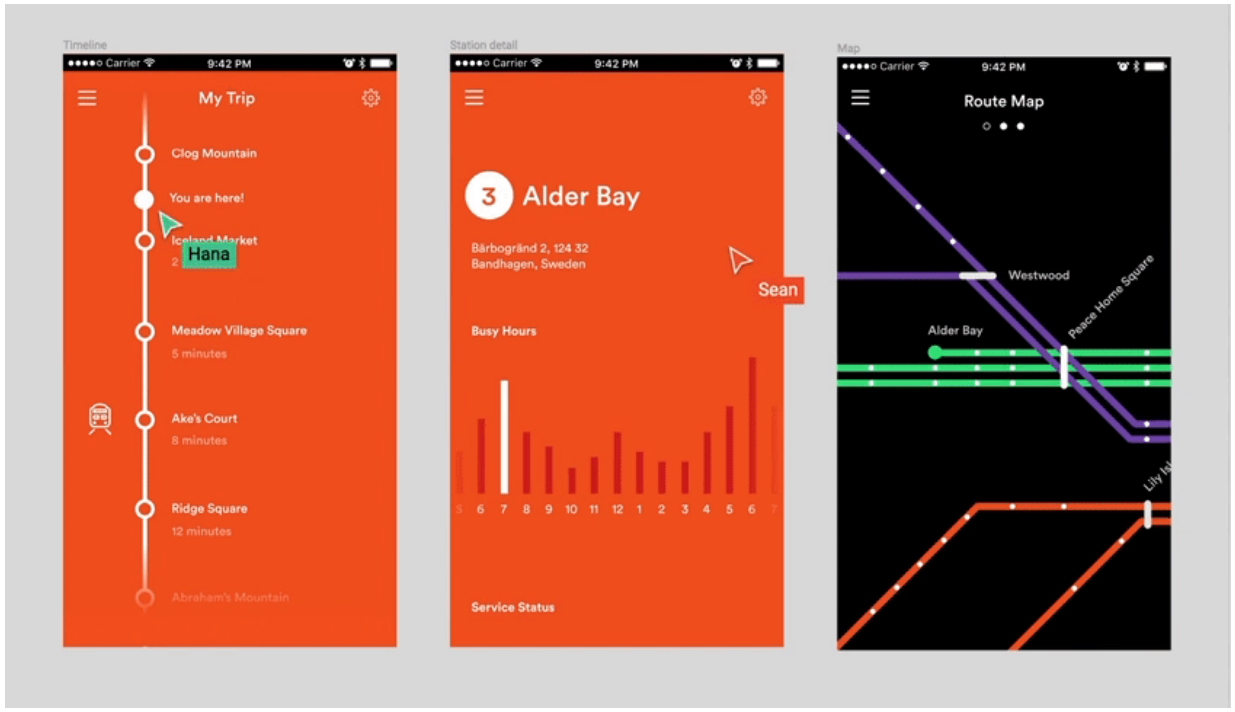
And then things got complicated...

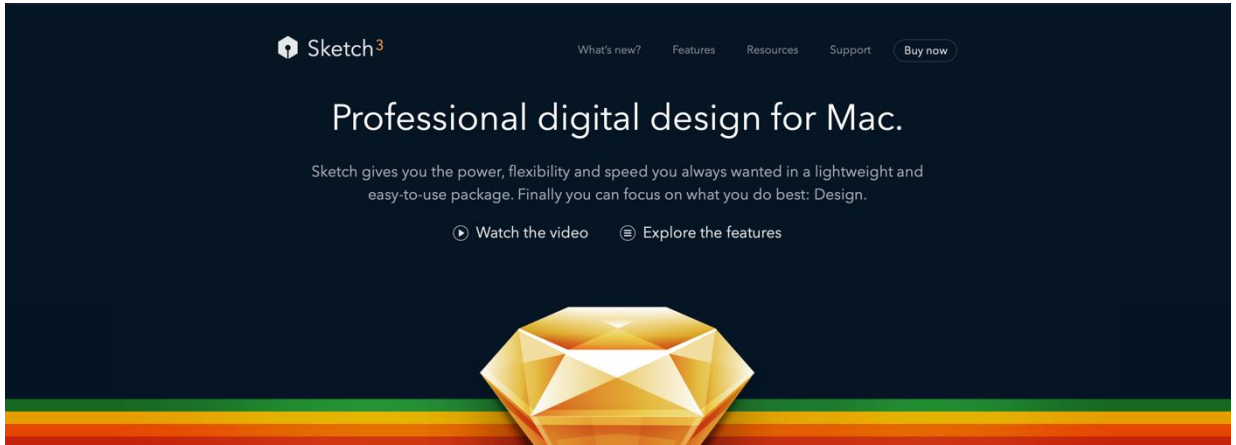


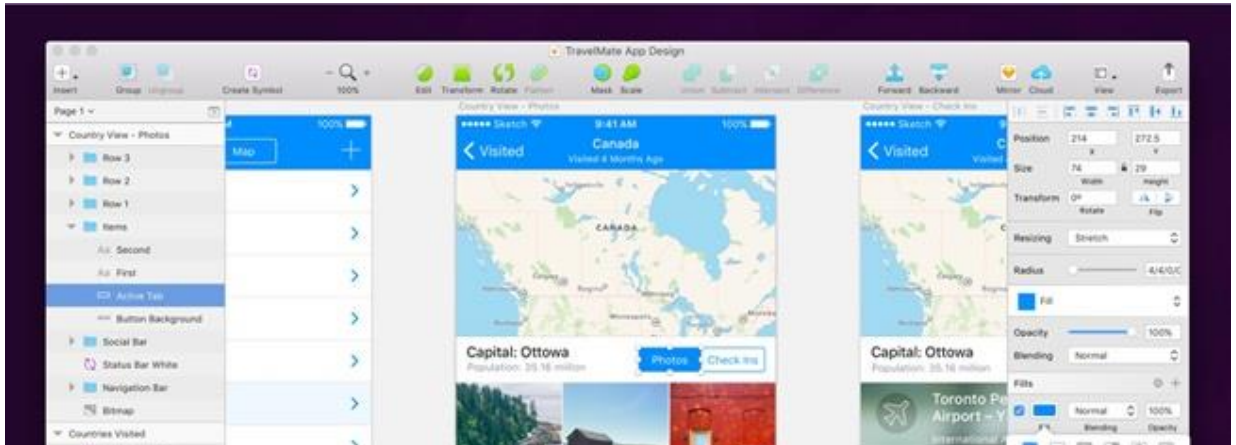


Designing in the abstract again

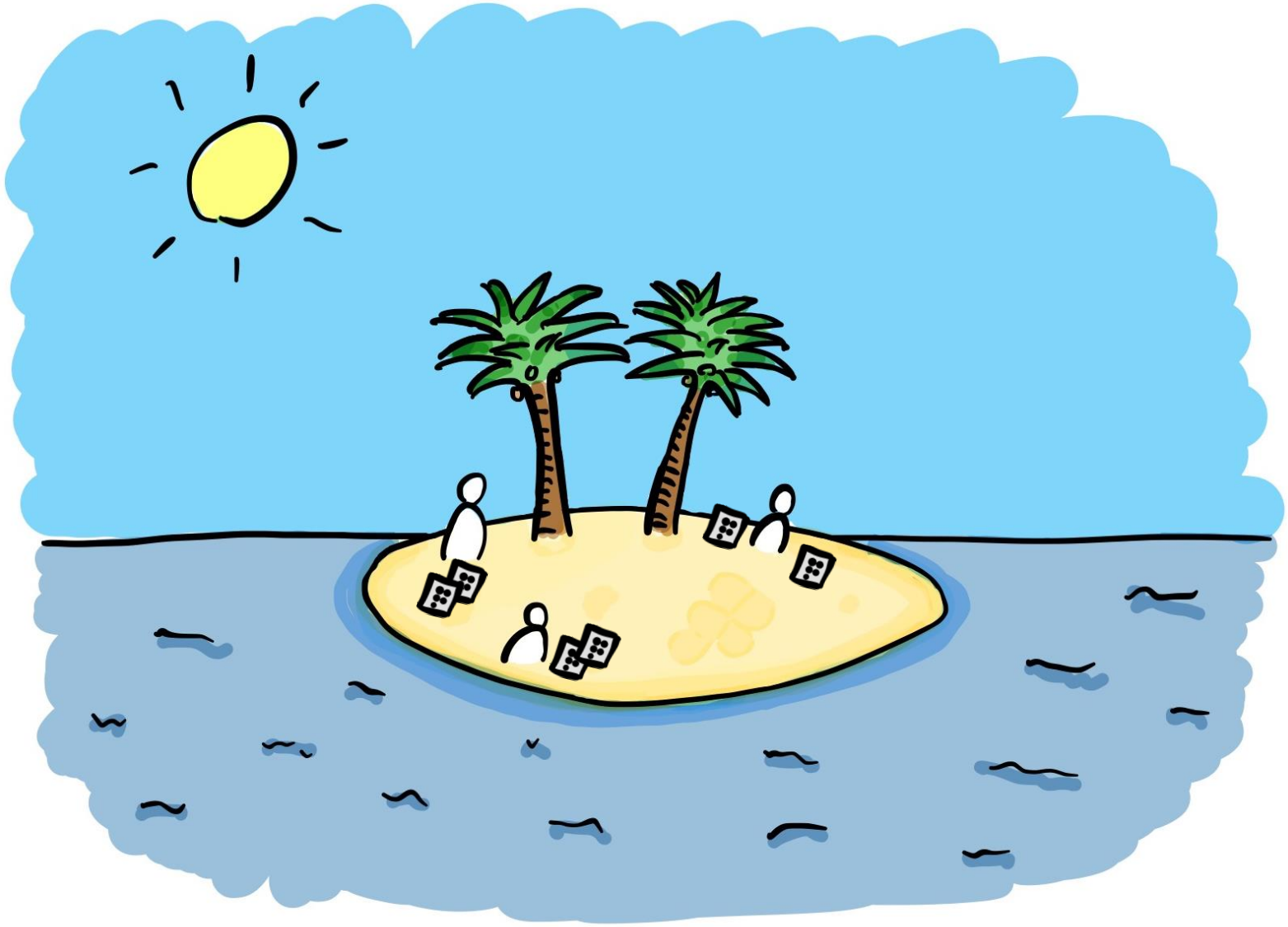


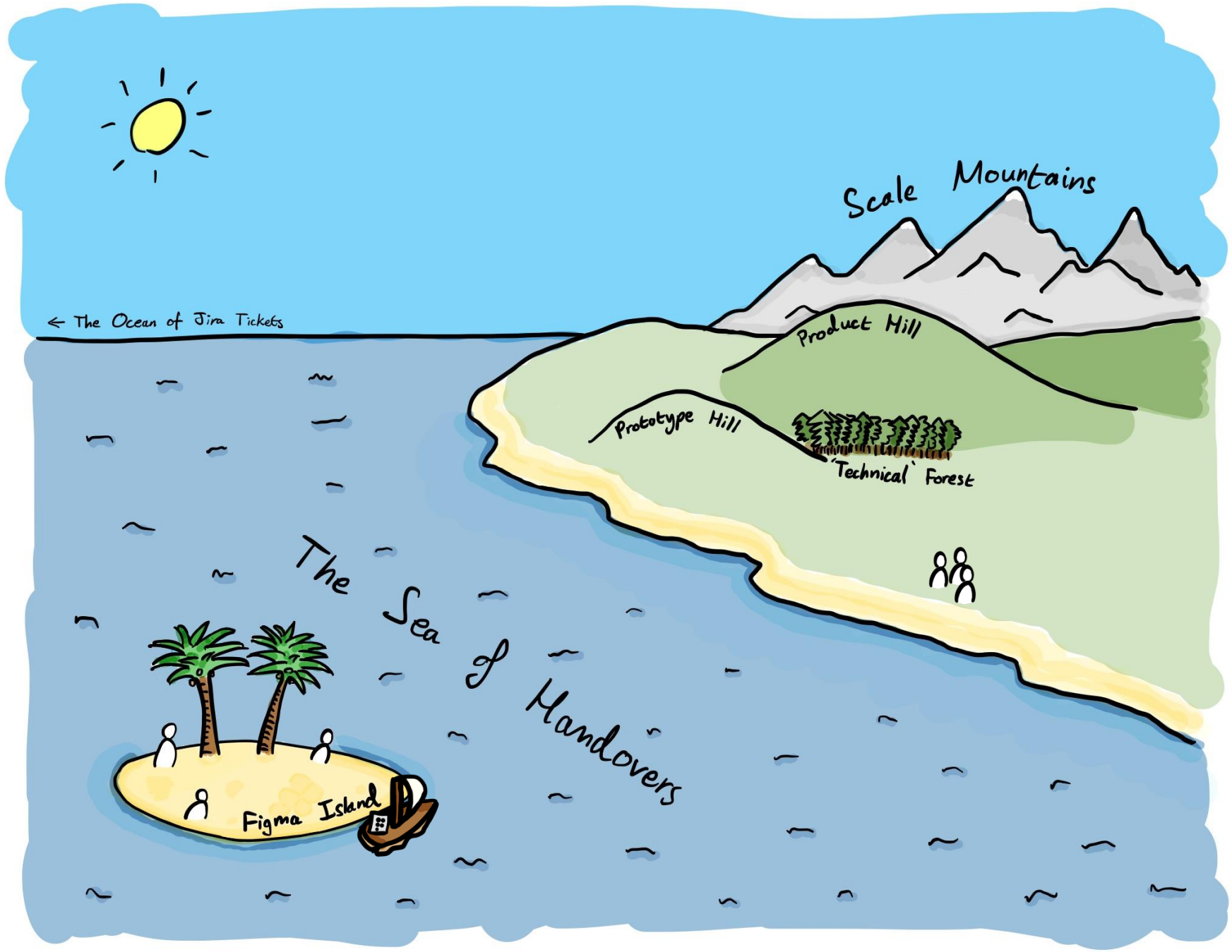






Stranded on Figma Island




Scale Mountains
← The Ocean of Jira Tickets
Product Hill
Prototype Hill
'Technical' Forest
The Sea of Handovers
Figma Island

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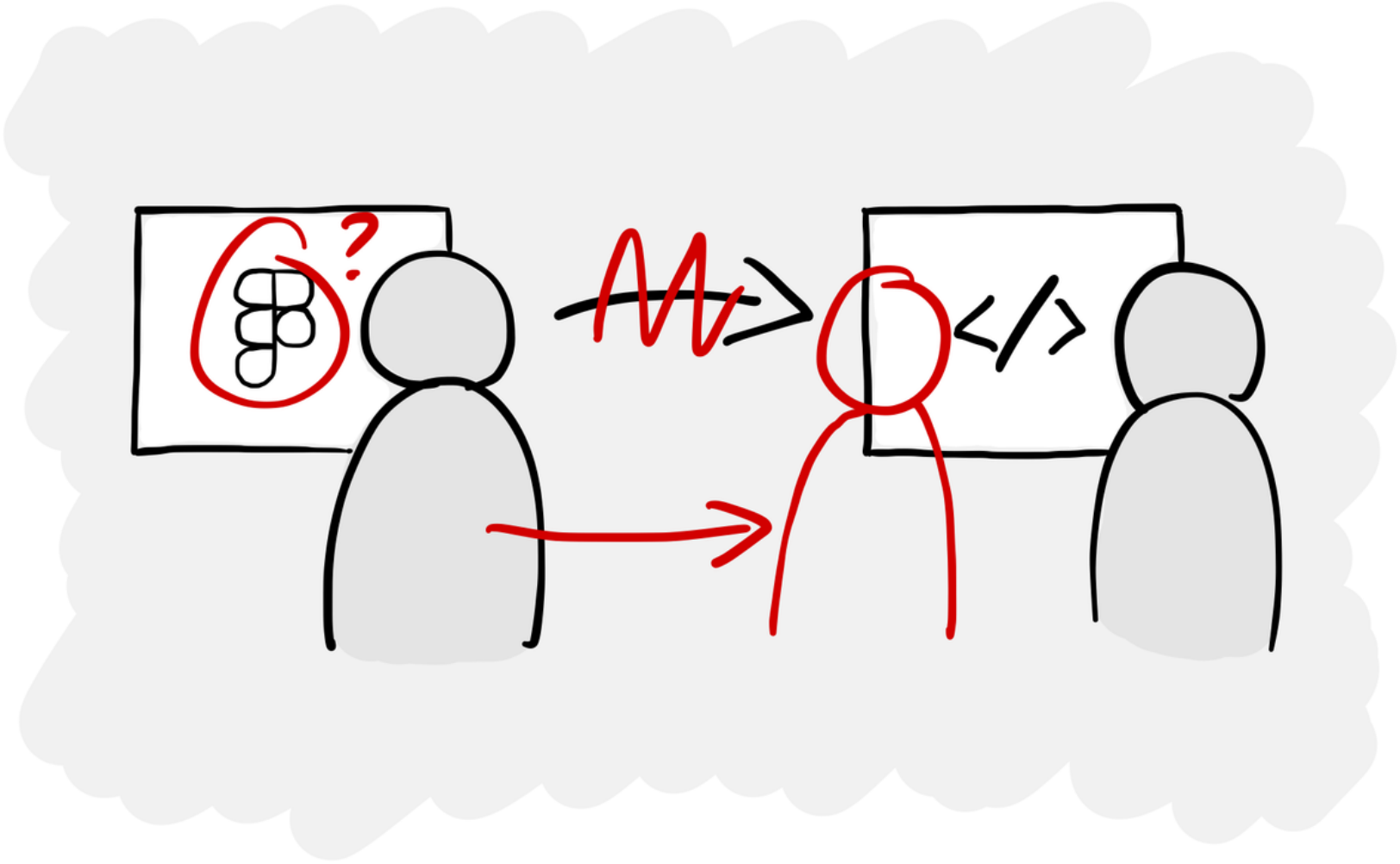
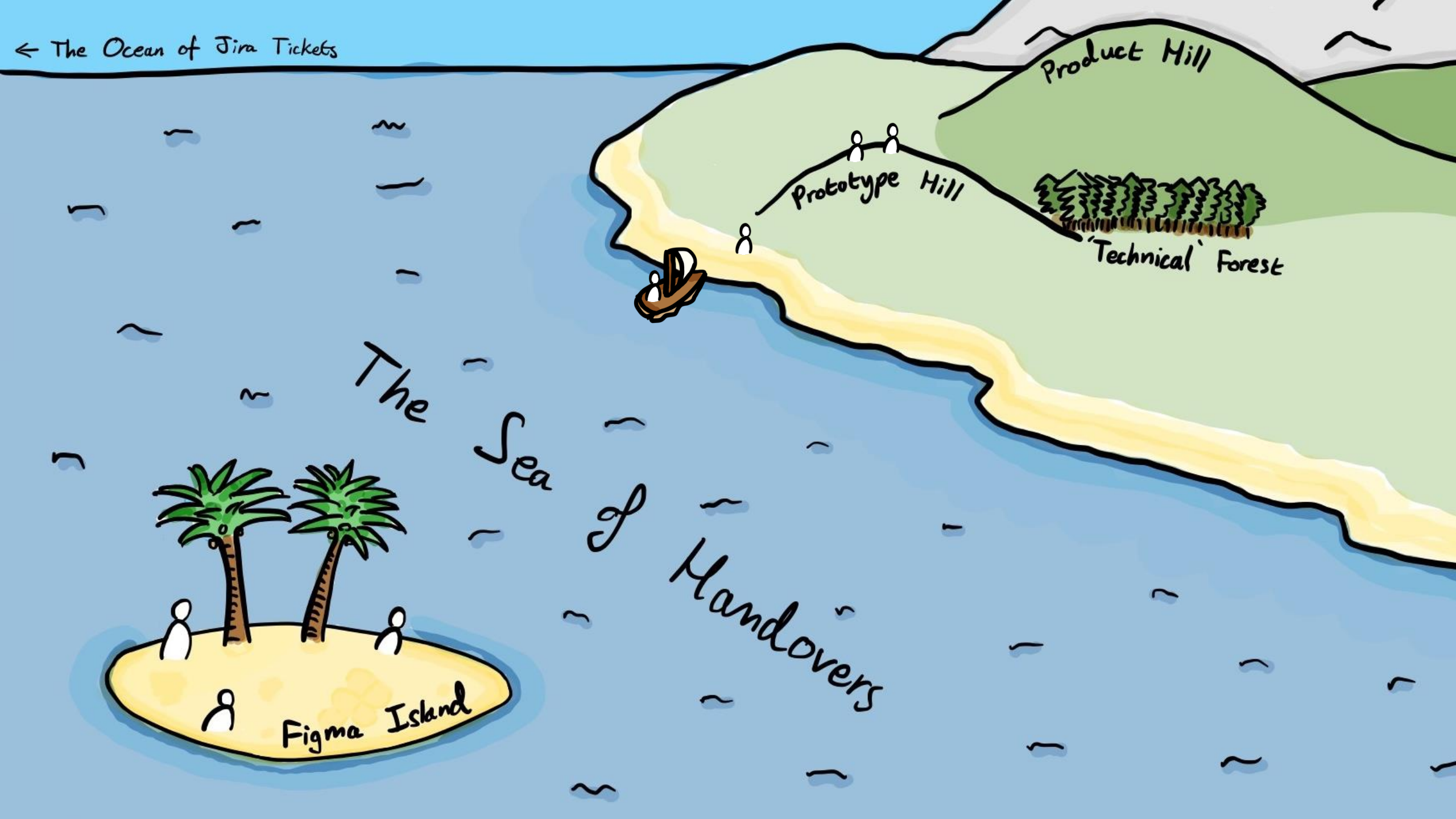
Old ways of working don’t make sense anymore

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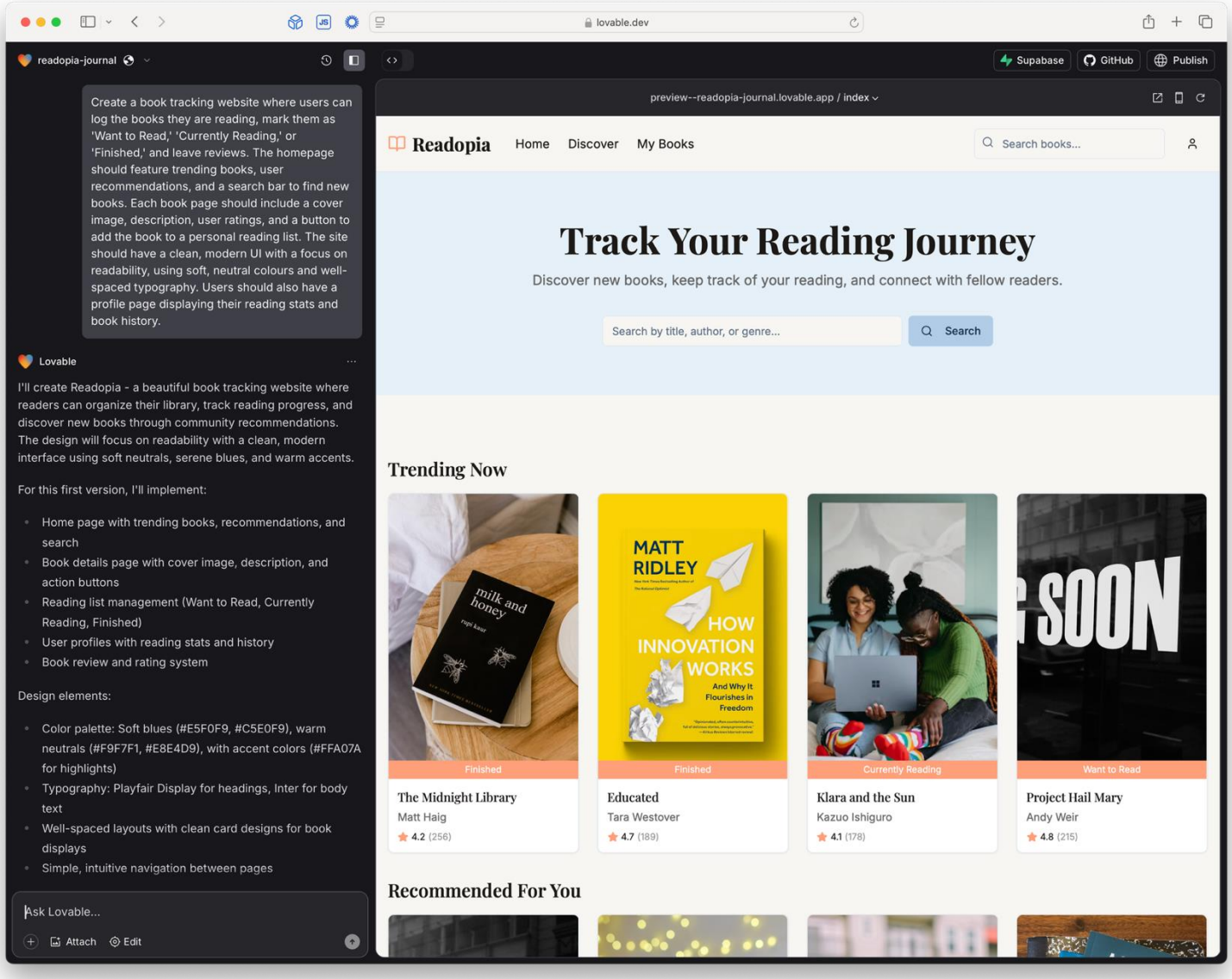
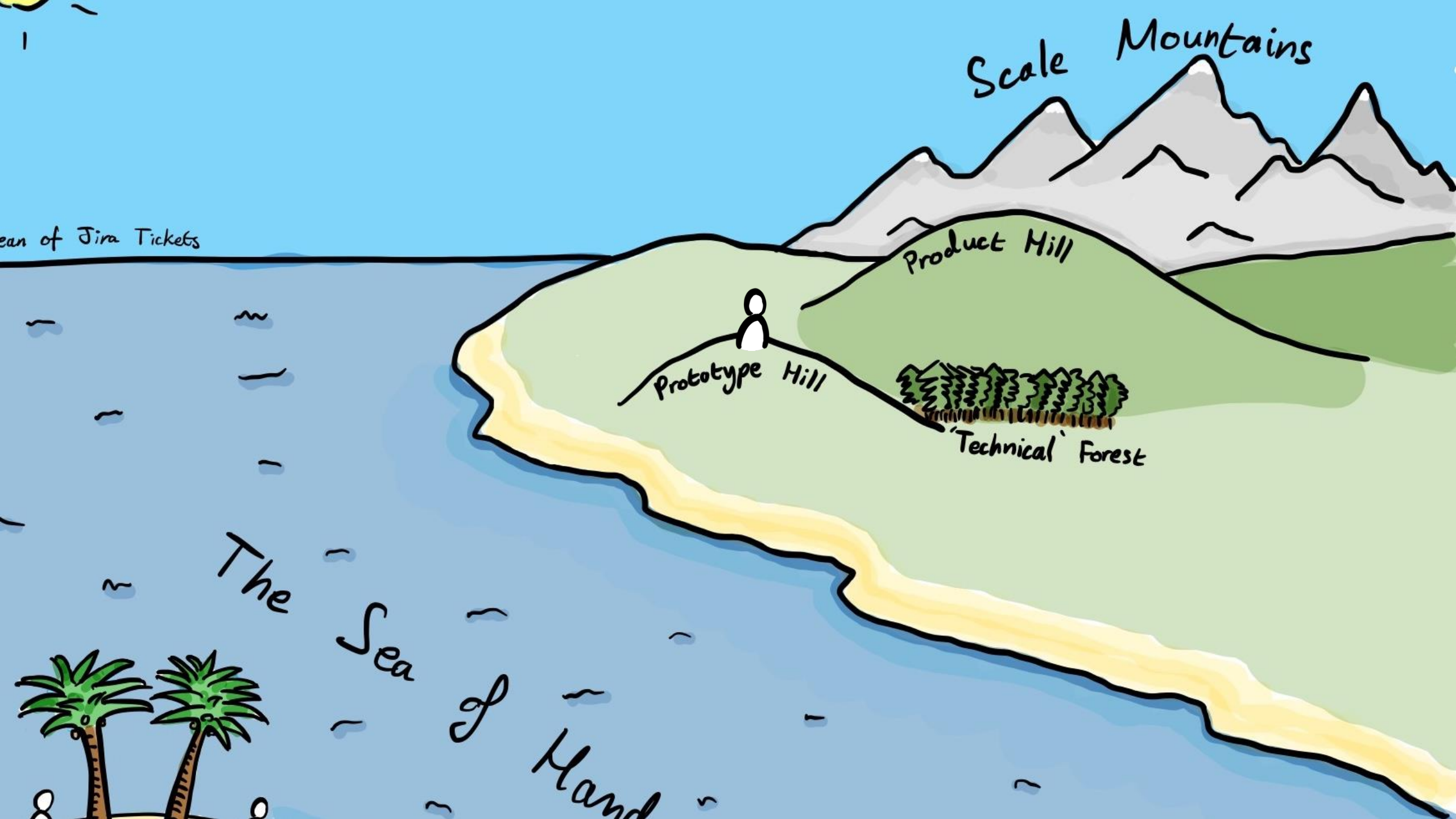
Figma Island

Lovable, Figma Make, etc. are a local maxima

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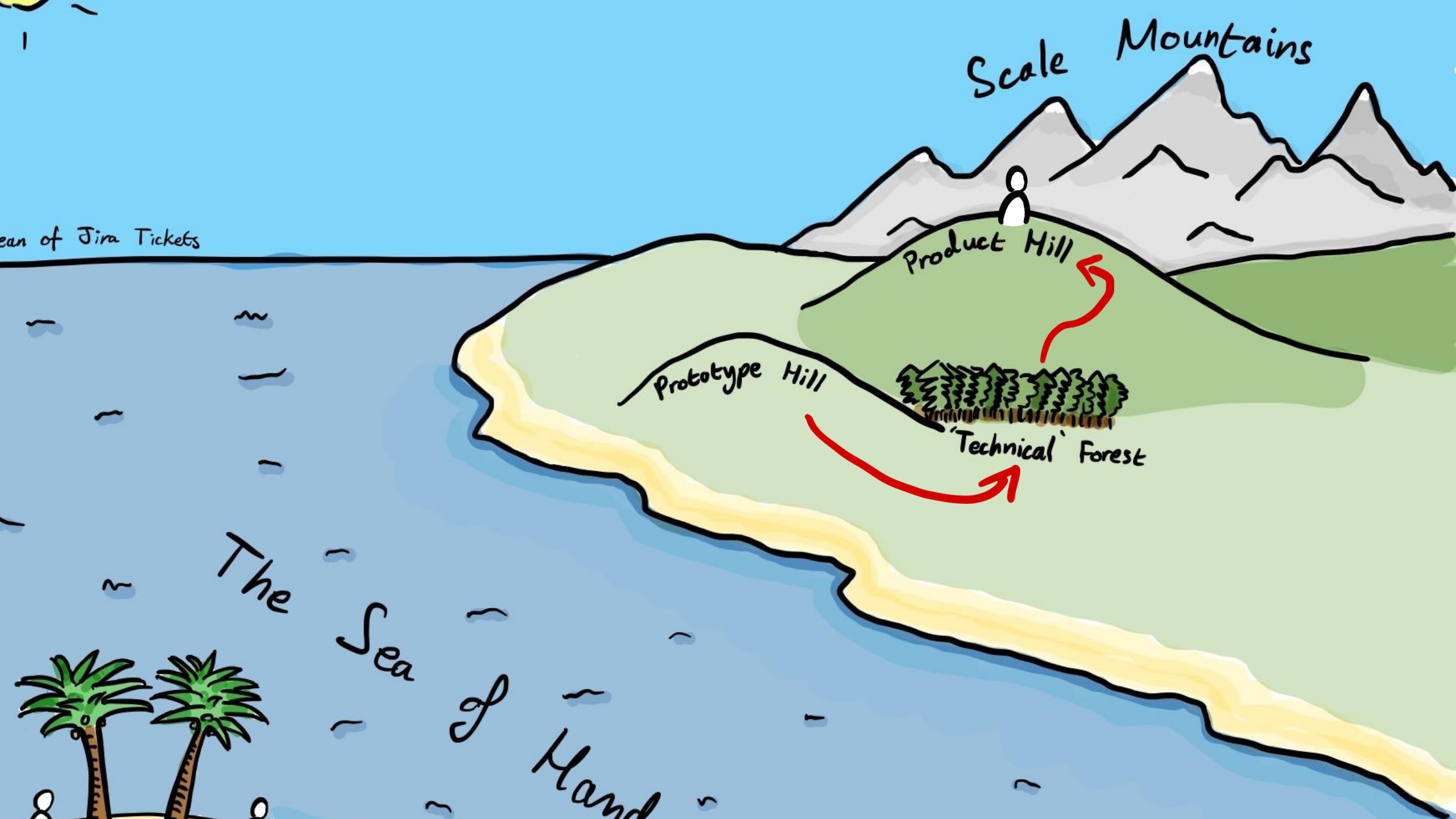
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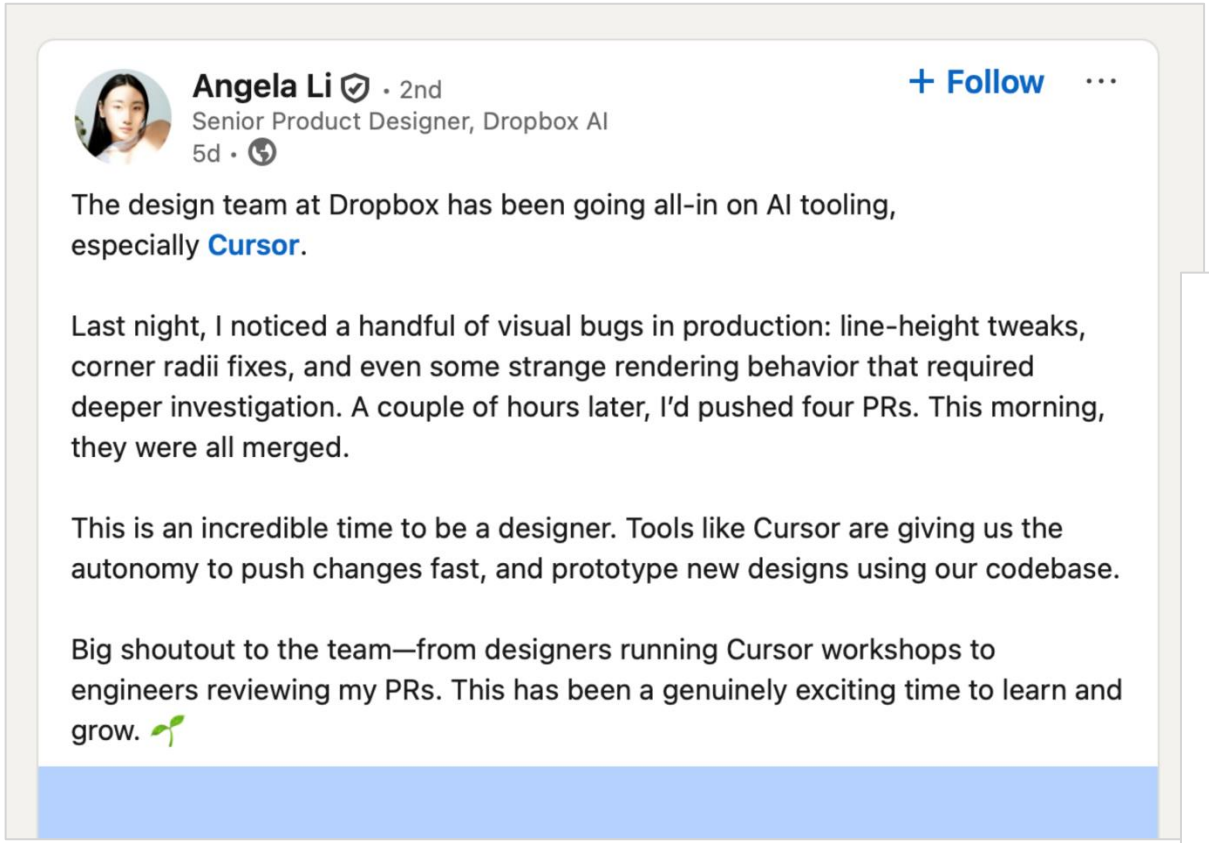
Designers are starting to work in code (again)



Angela Li • 2nd
Senior Product Designer, Dropbox AI
5d •

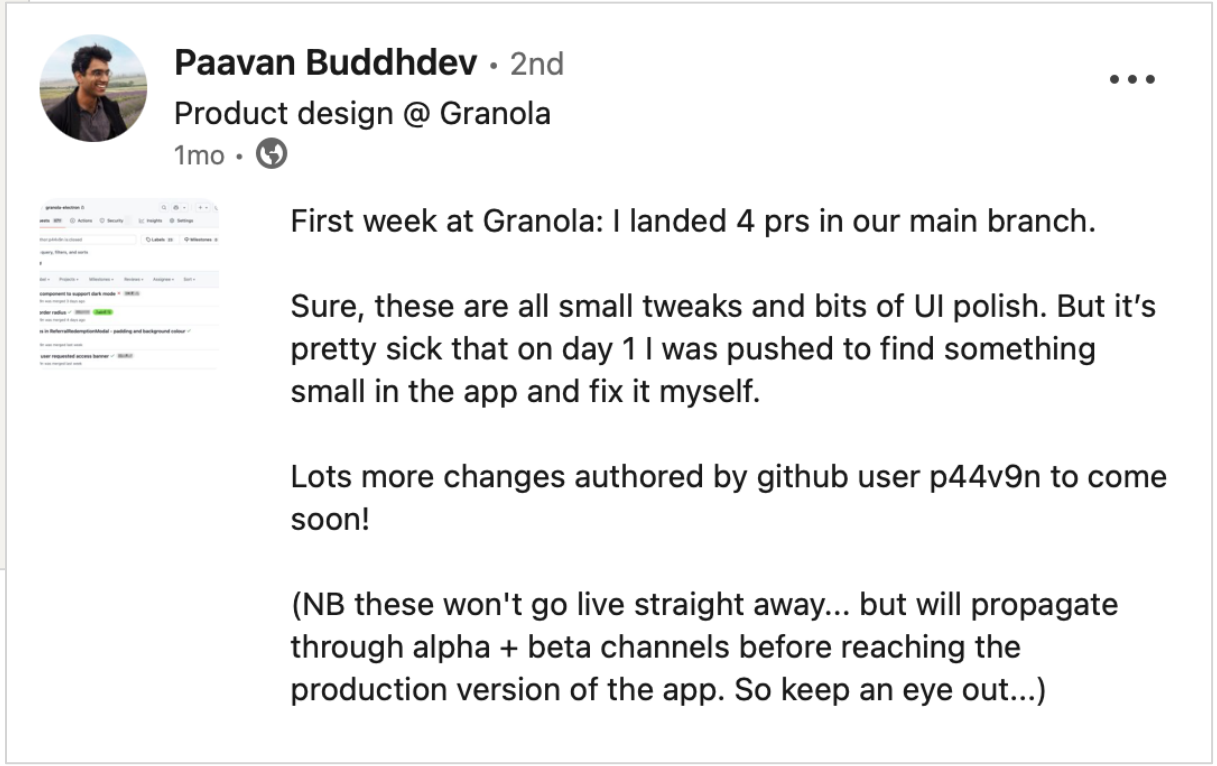
+ Follow ···

The design team at Dropbox has been going all-in on AI tooling, especially **Cursor**.

Last night, I noticed a handful of visual bugs in production: line-height tweaks, corner radii fixes, and even some strange rendering behavior that required deeper investigation. A couple of hours later, I'd pushed four PRs. This morning, they were all merged.

This is an incredible time to be a designer. Tools like Cursor are giving us the autonomy to push changes fast, and prototype new designs using our codebase.

Big shoutout to the team—from designers running Cursor workshops to engineers reviewing my PRs. This has been a genuinely exciting time to learn and grow. 🌱



Paavan Buddhdev • 2nd
Product design @ Granola
1mo •

First week at Granola: I landed 4 prs in our main branch.

Sure, these are all small tweaks and bits of UI polish. But it's pretty sick that on day 1 I was pushed to find something small in the app and fix it myself.

Lots more changes authored by github user p44v9n to come soon!

(NB these won't go live straight away... but will propagate through alpha + beta channels before reaching the production version of the app. So keep an eye out...)

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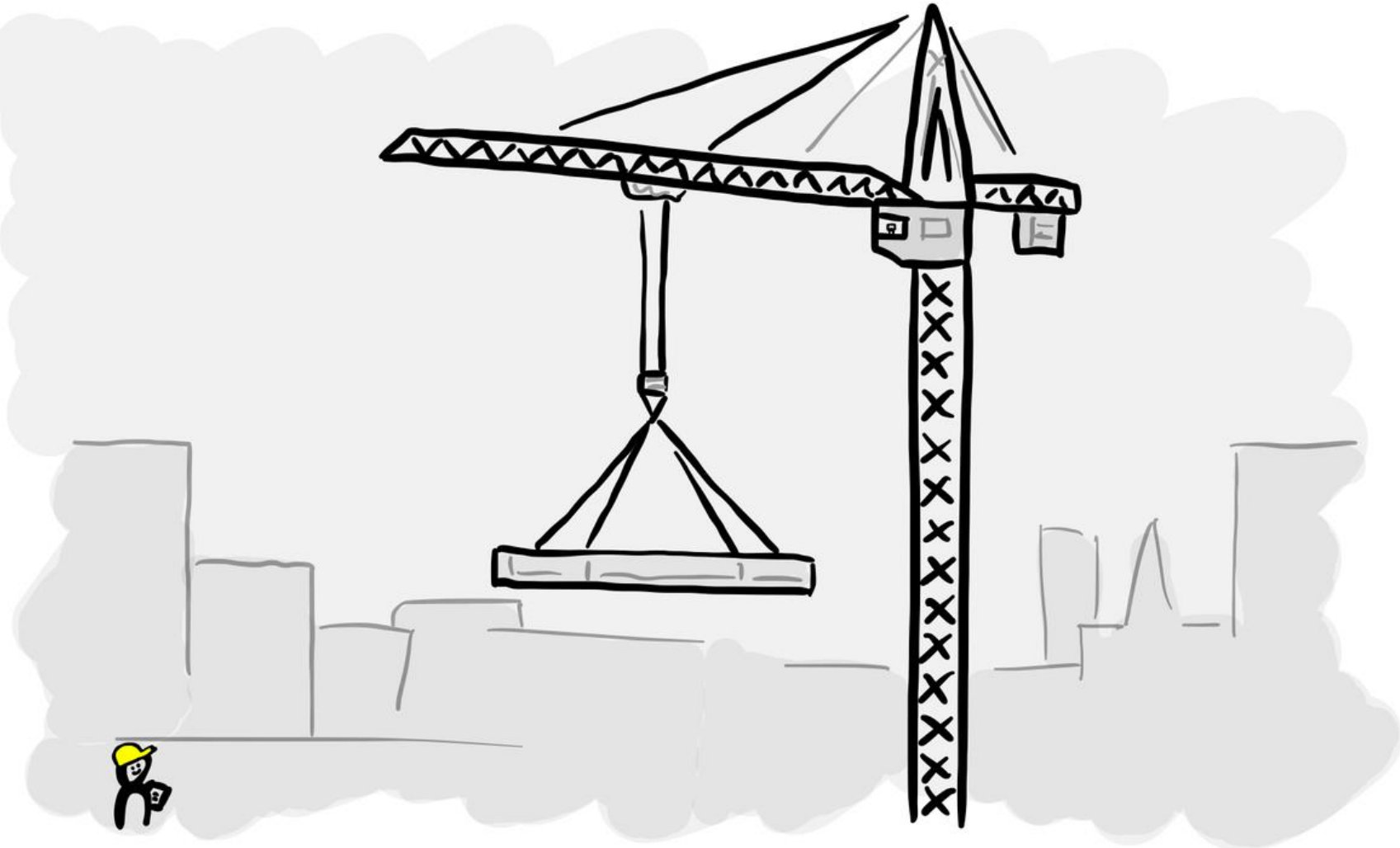
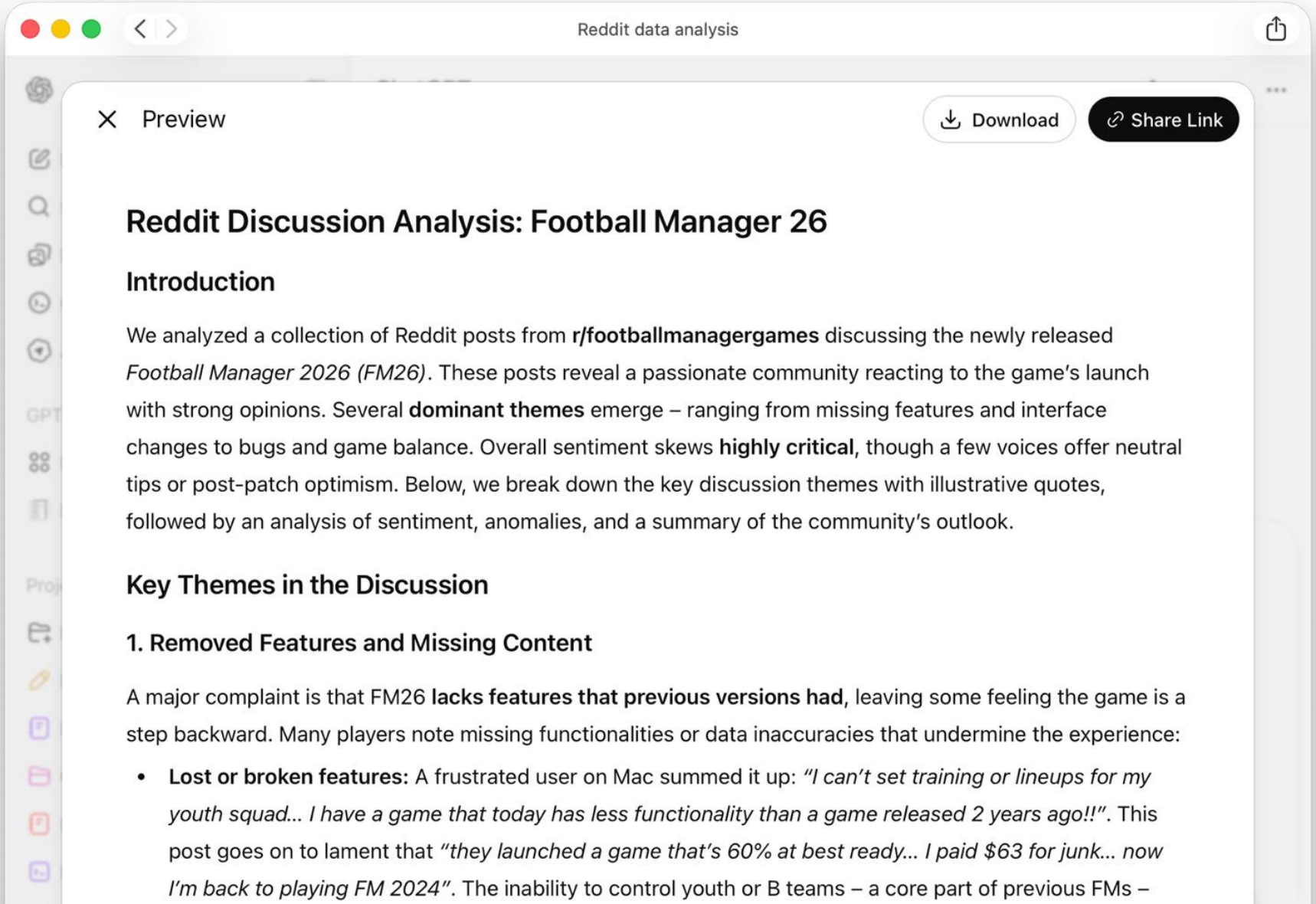
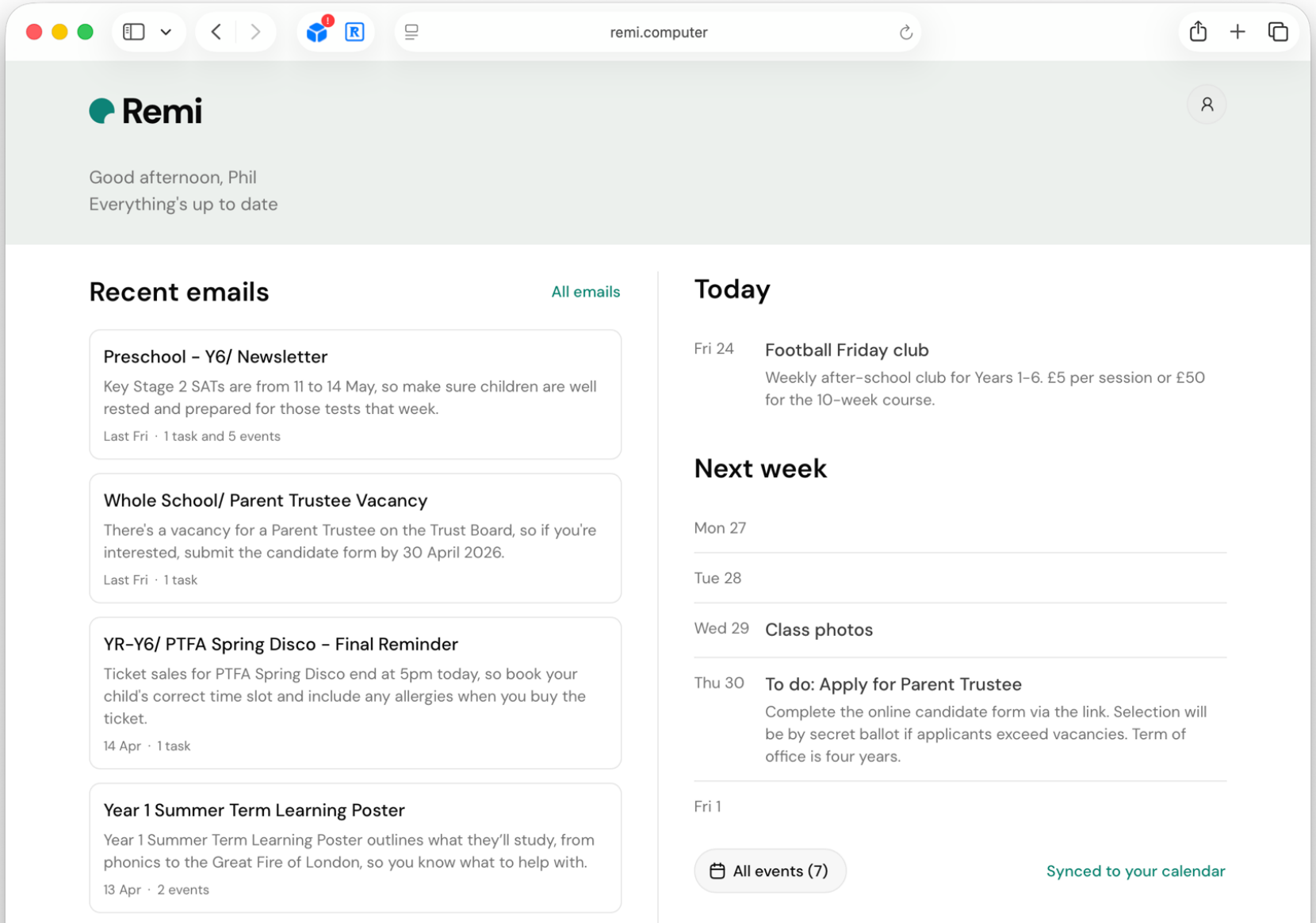
A side project is the best way to learn by doing



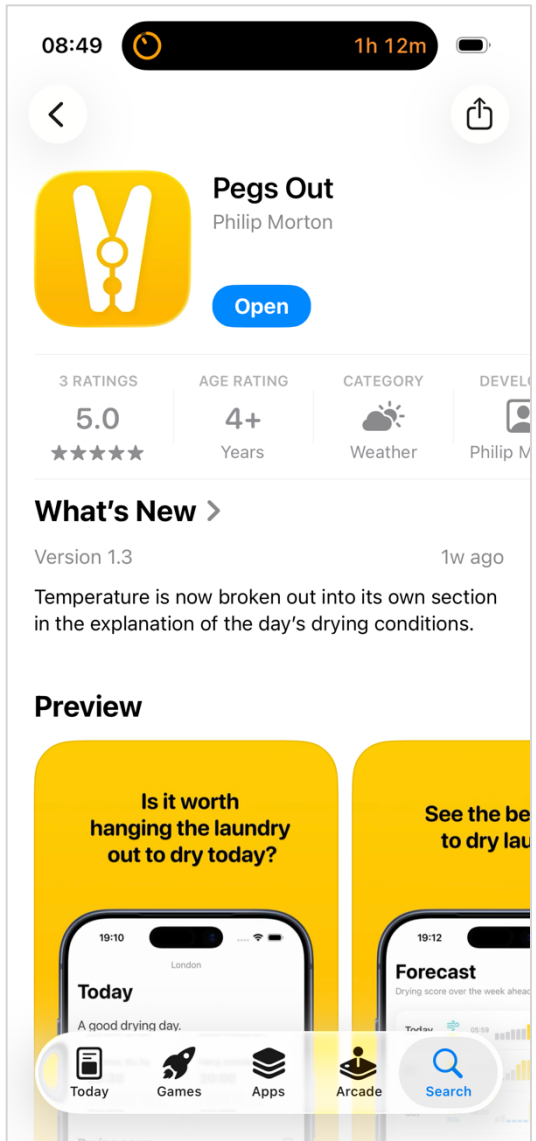
Reddit scraper

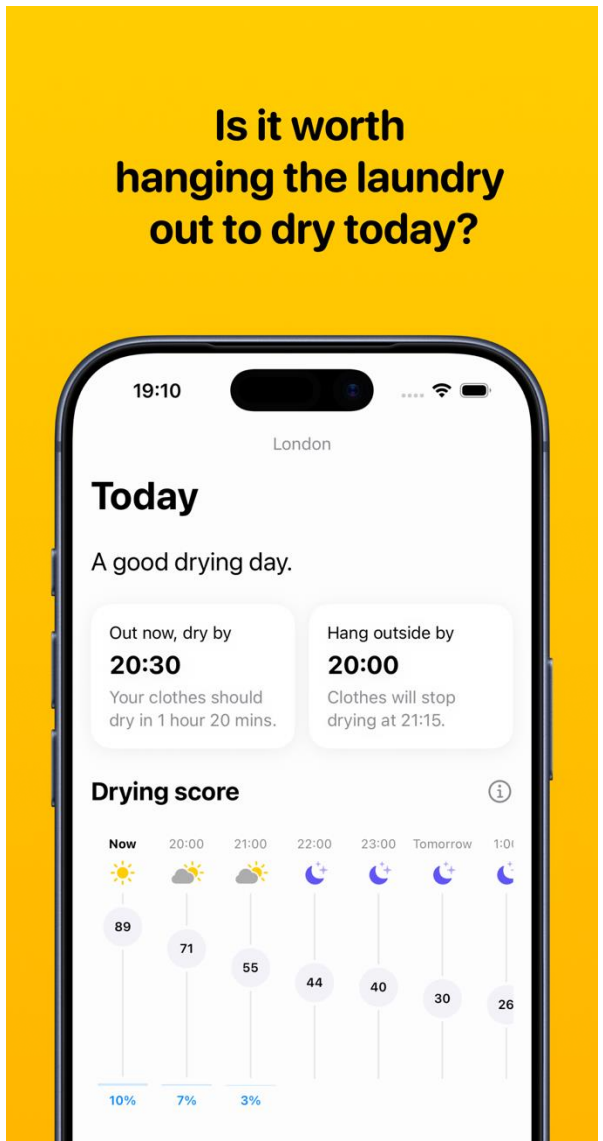


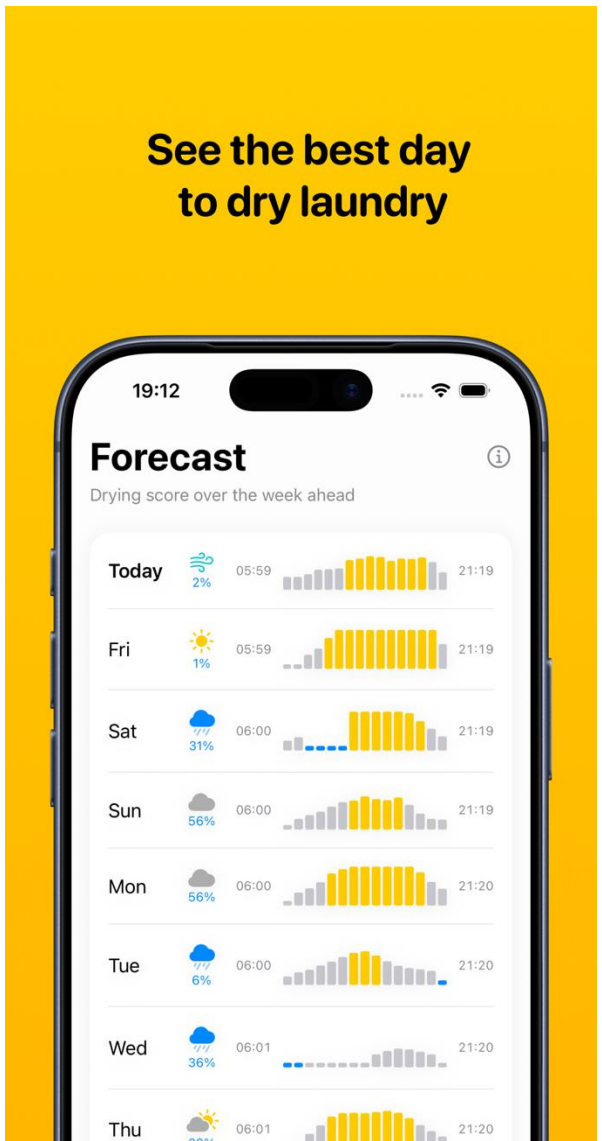
Remi – school email assistant

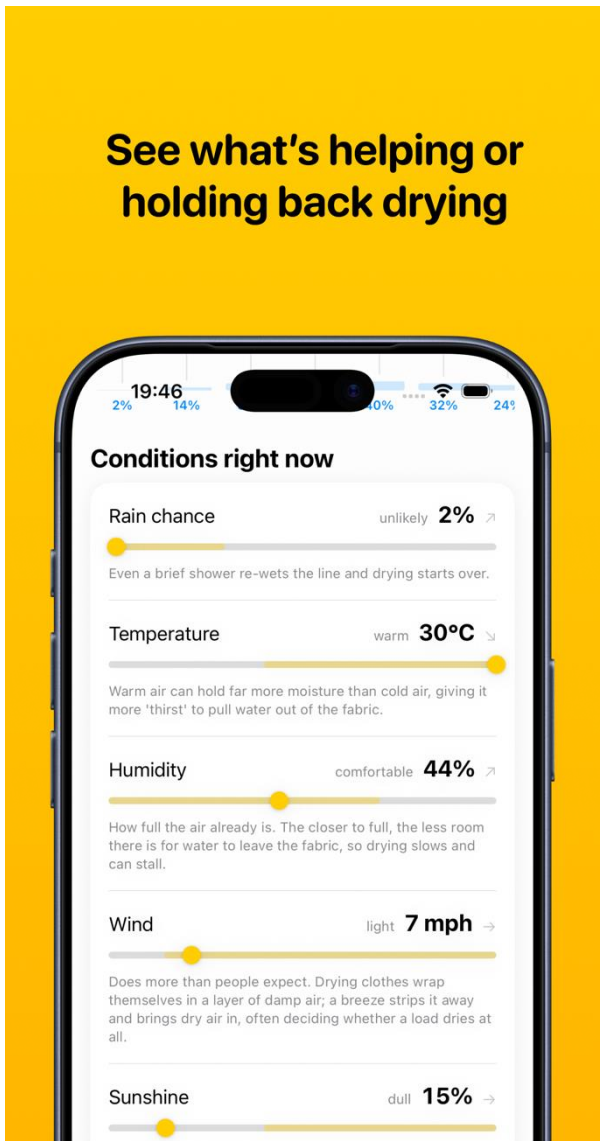


Pegs Out – will my laundry dry outside today?

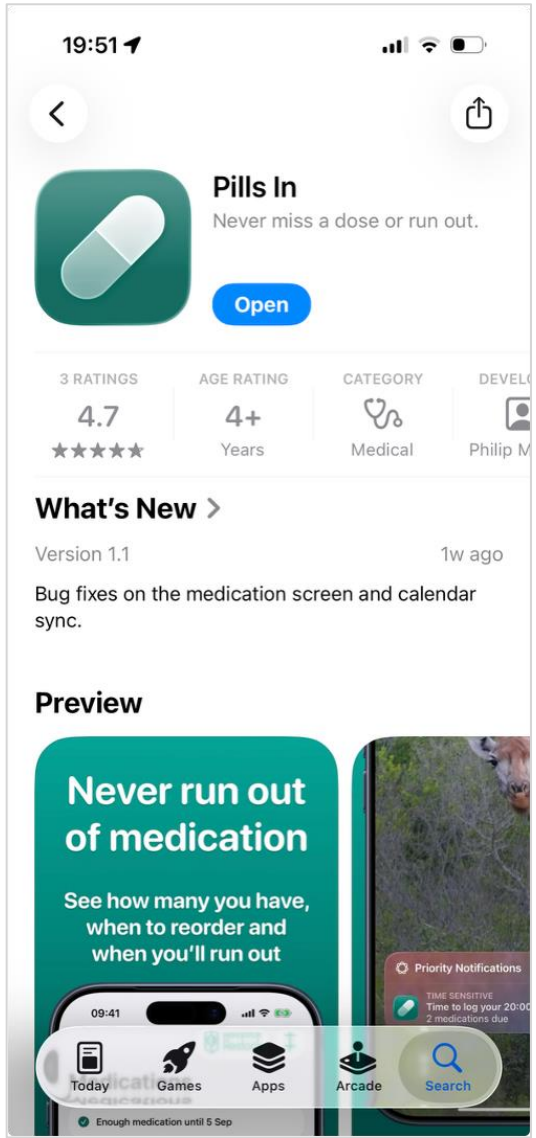




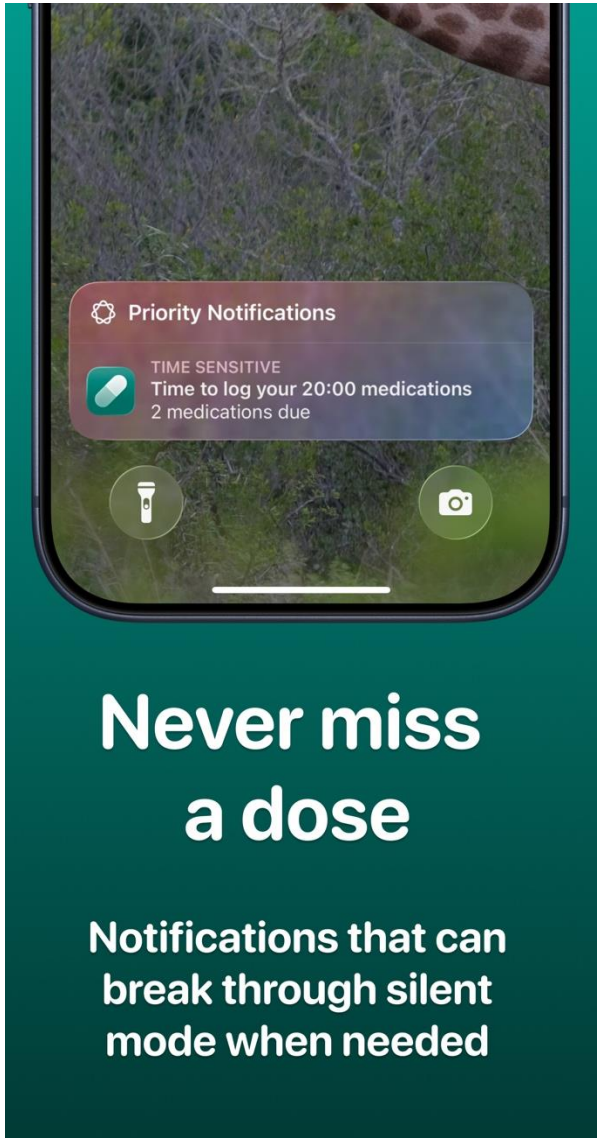


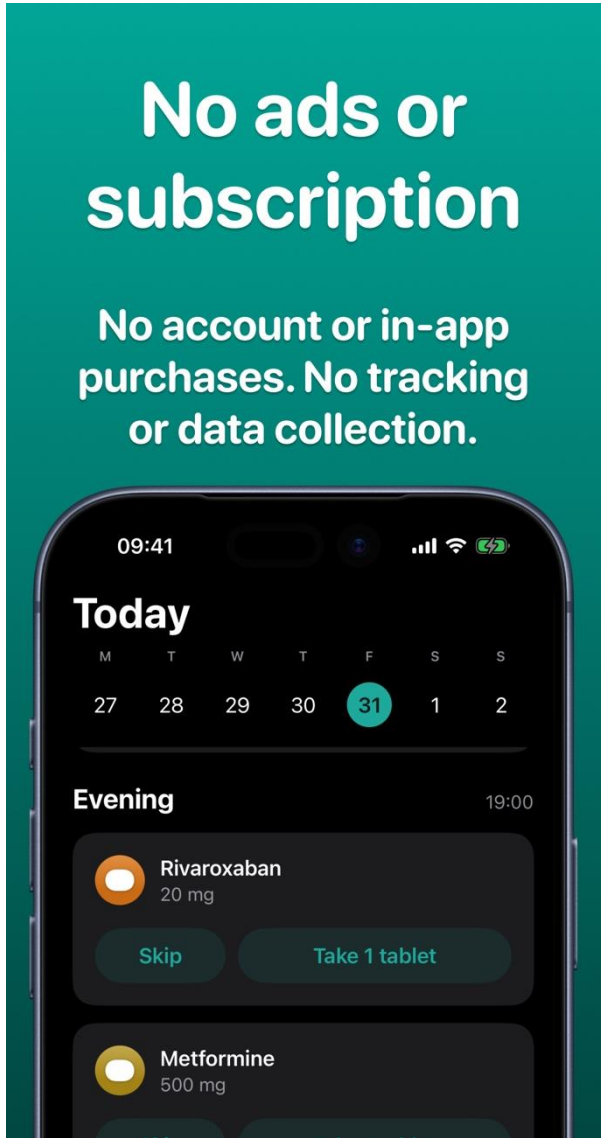


Pills In – medication app

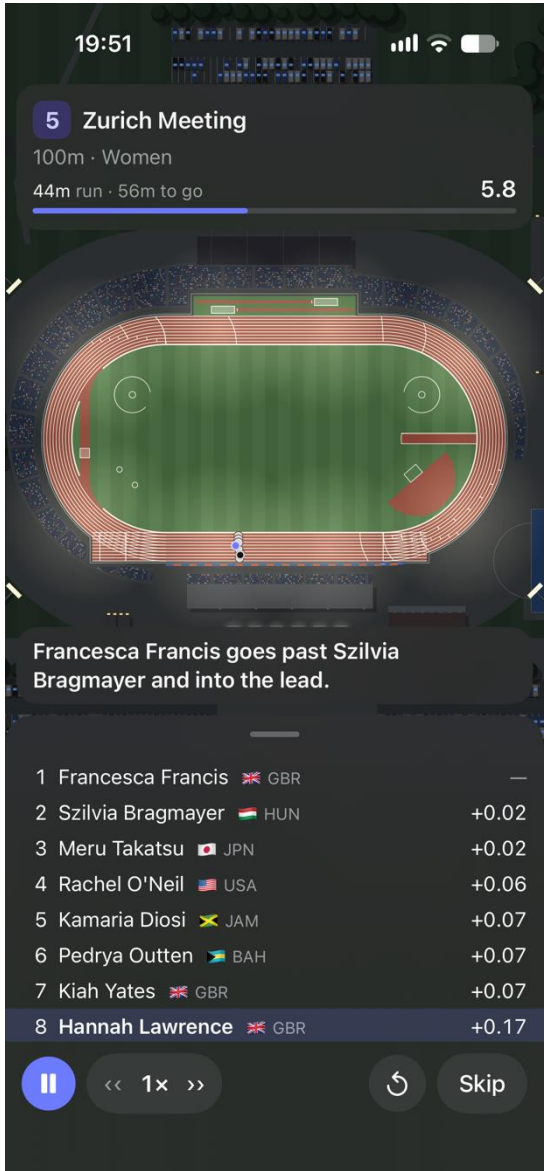


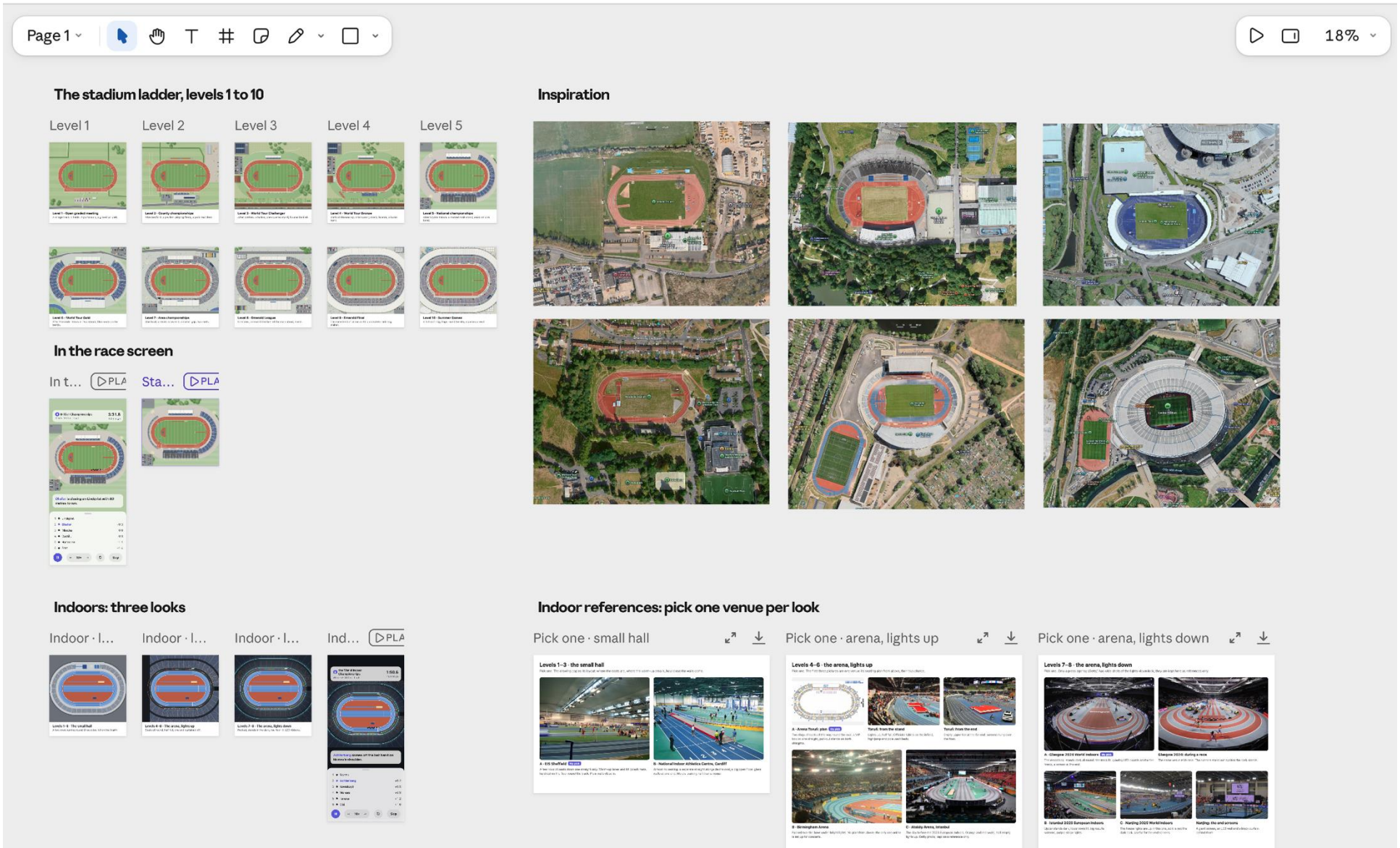




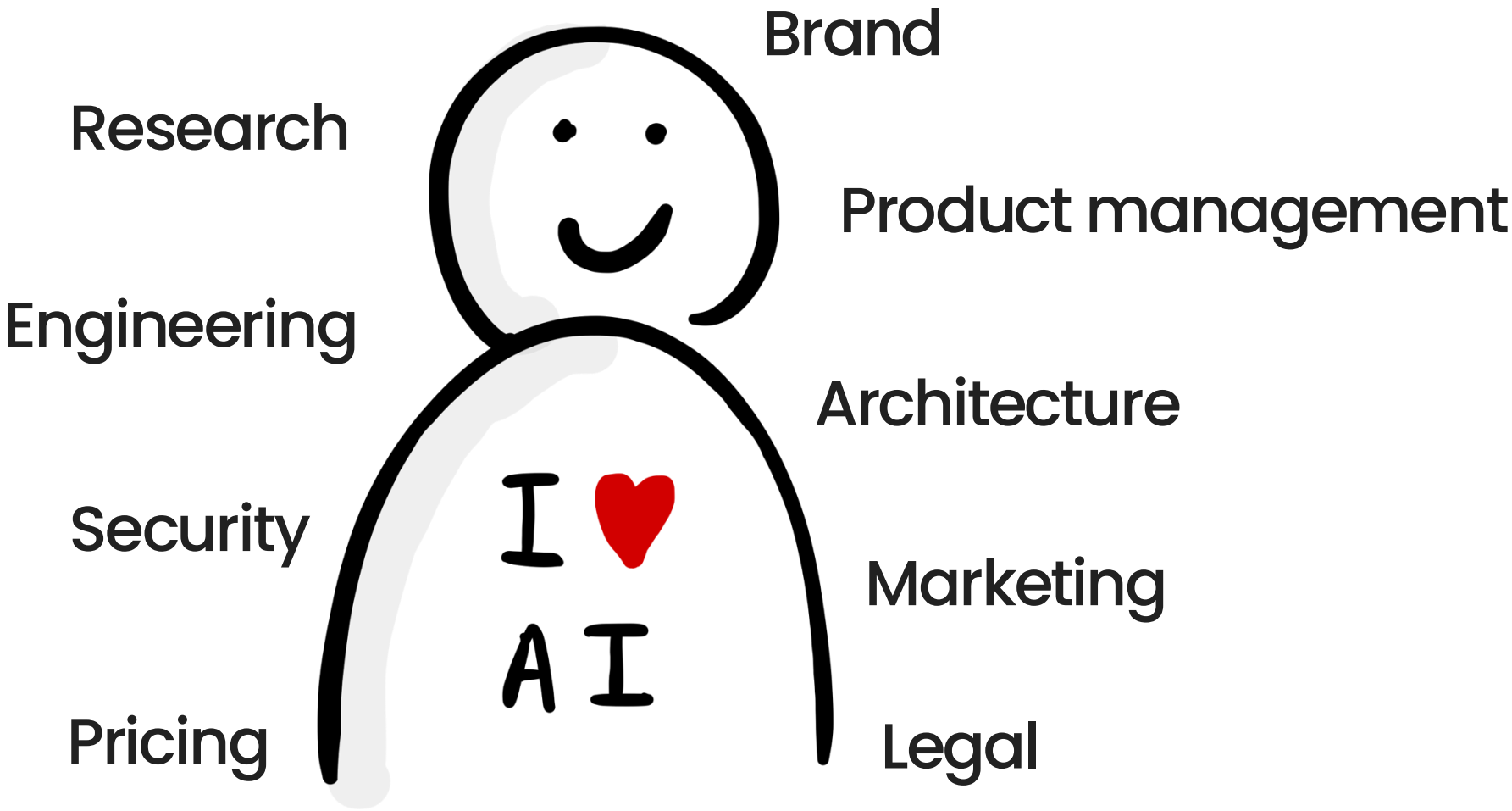


Track Club Manager – athletics game (WIP)





On a side project, you are the team



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Five tips for designing and working in code with AI

You are the designer, AI is your assistant

Manage the work and the knowledge

Build your own design system in code as the source of truth

Design in the real product using jigs

Establish a repeatable workflow with skills

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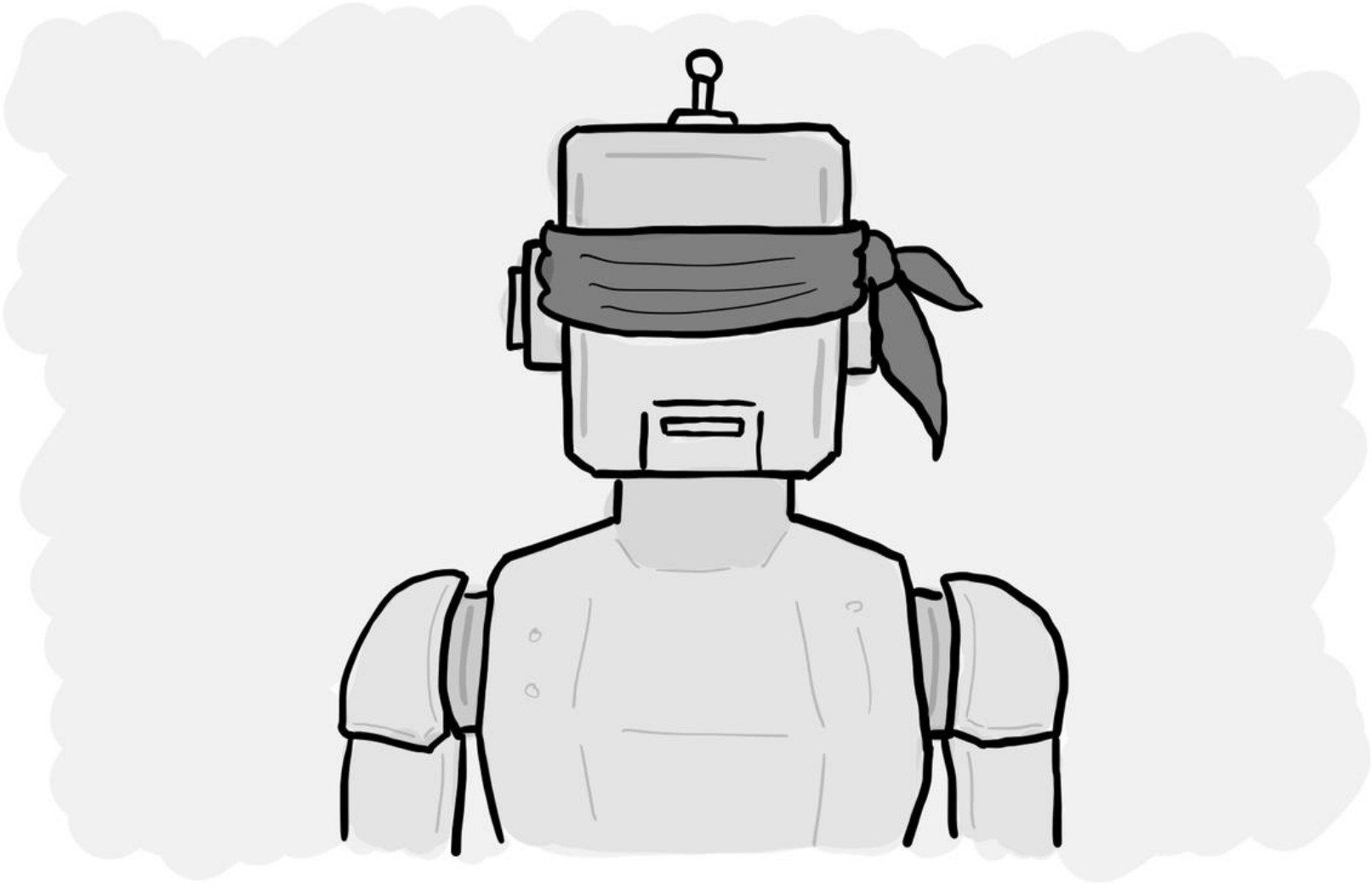
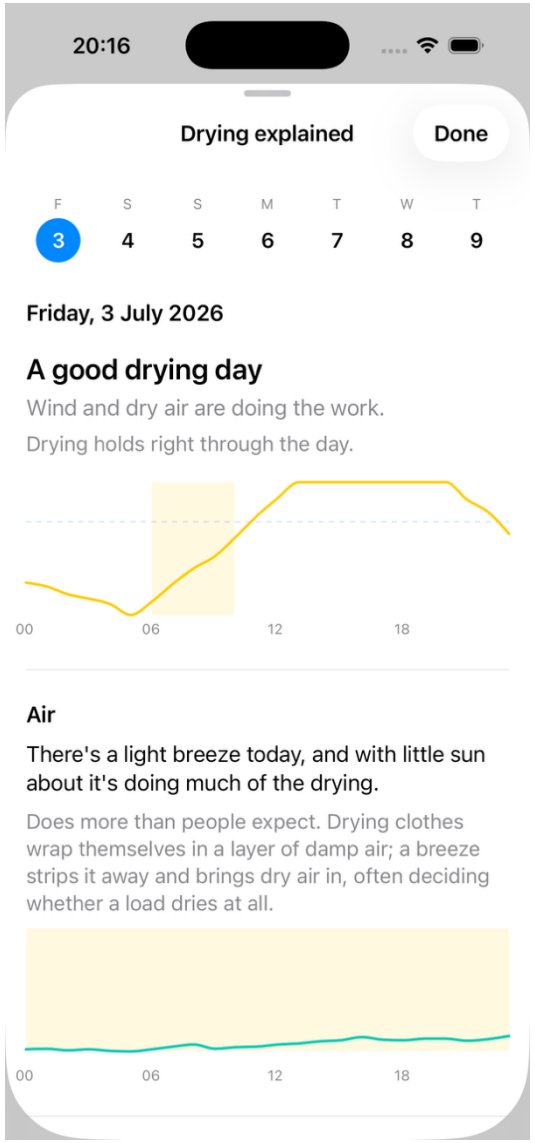
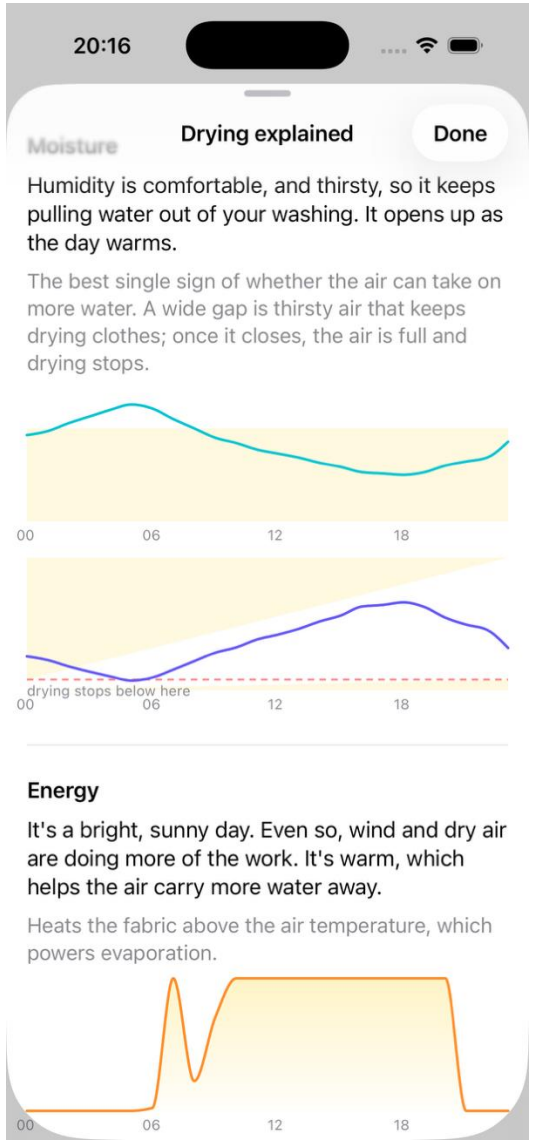
AI is bad at design



AI on its own



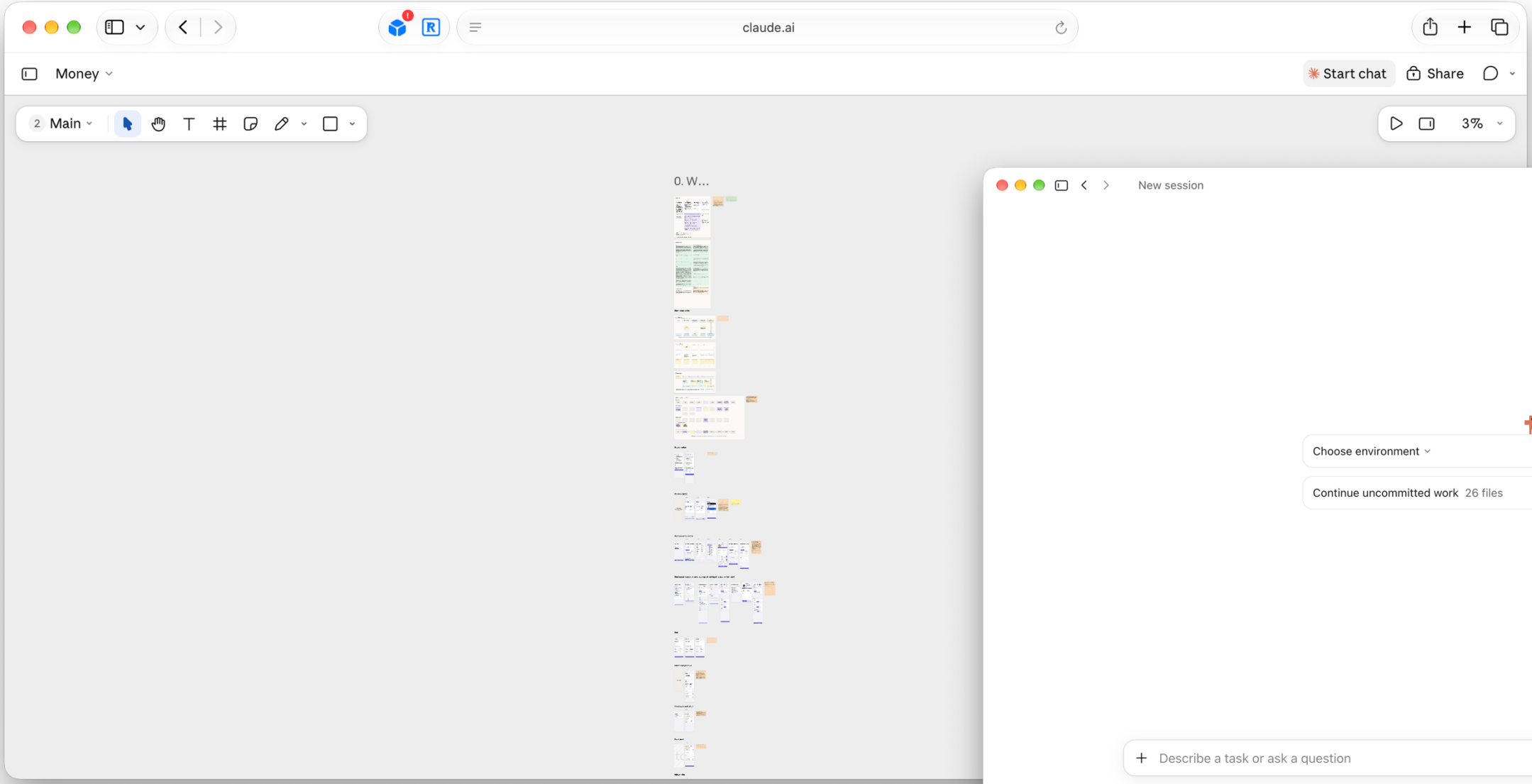


AI with your direction

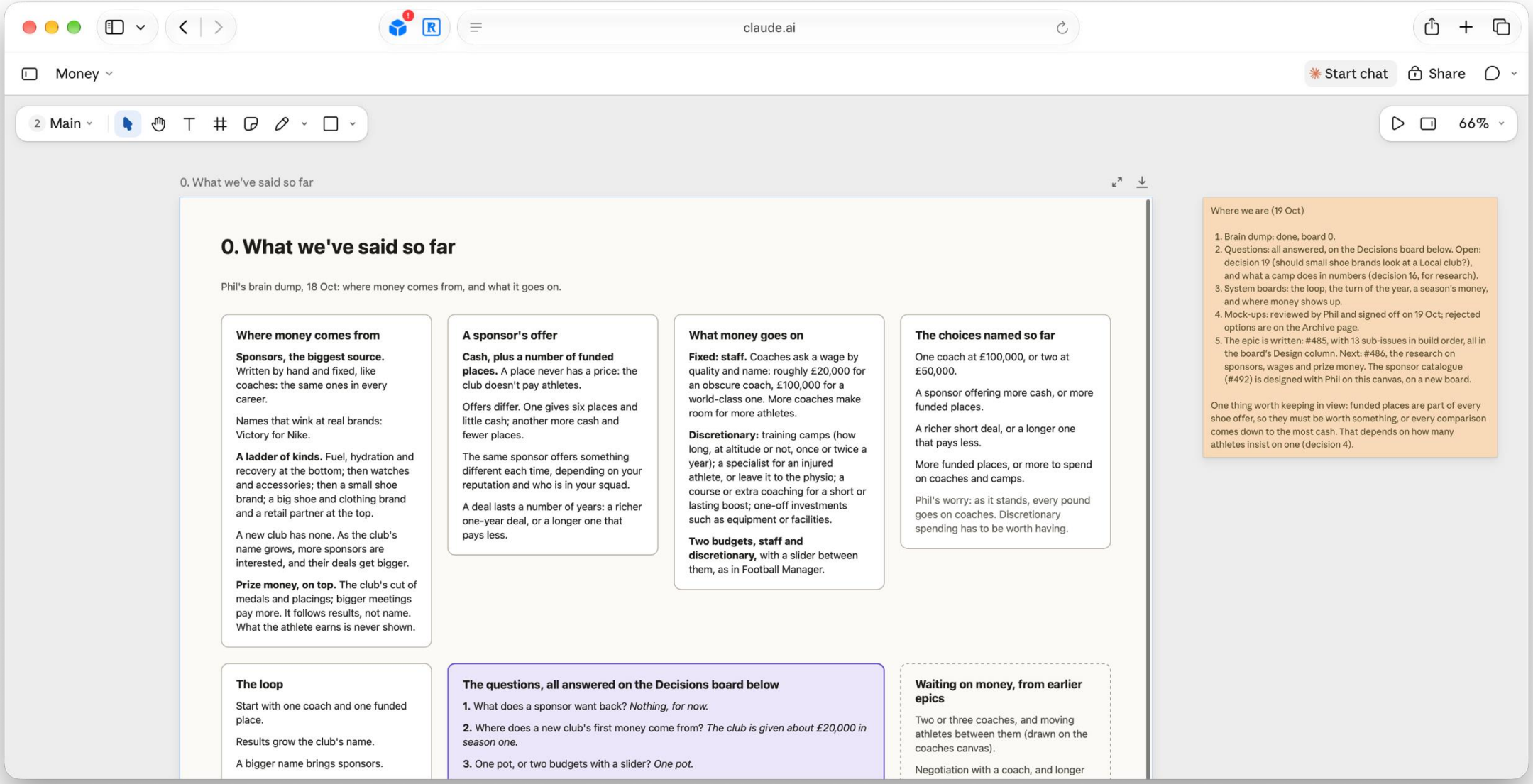




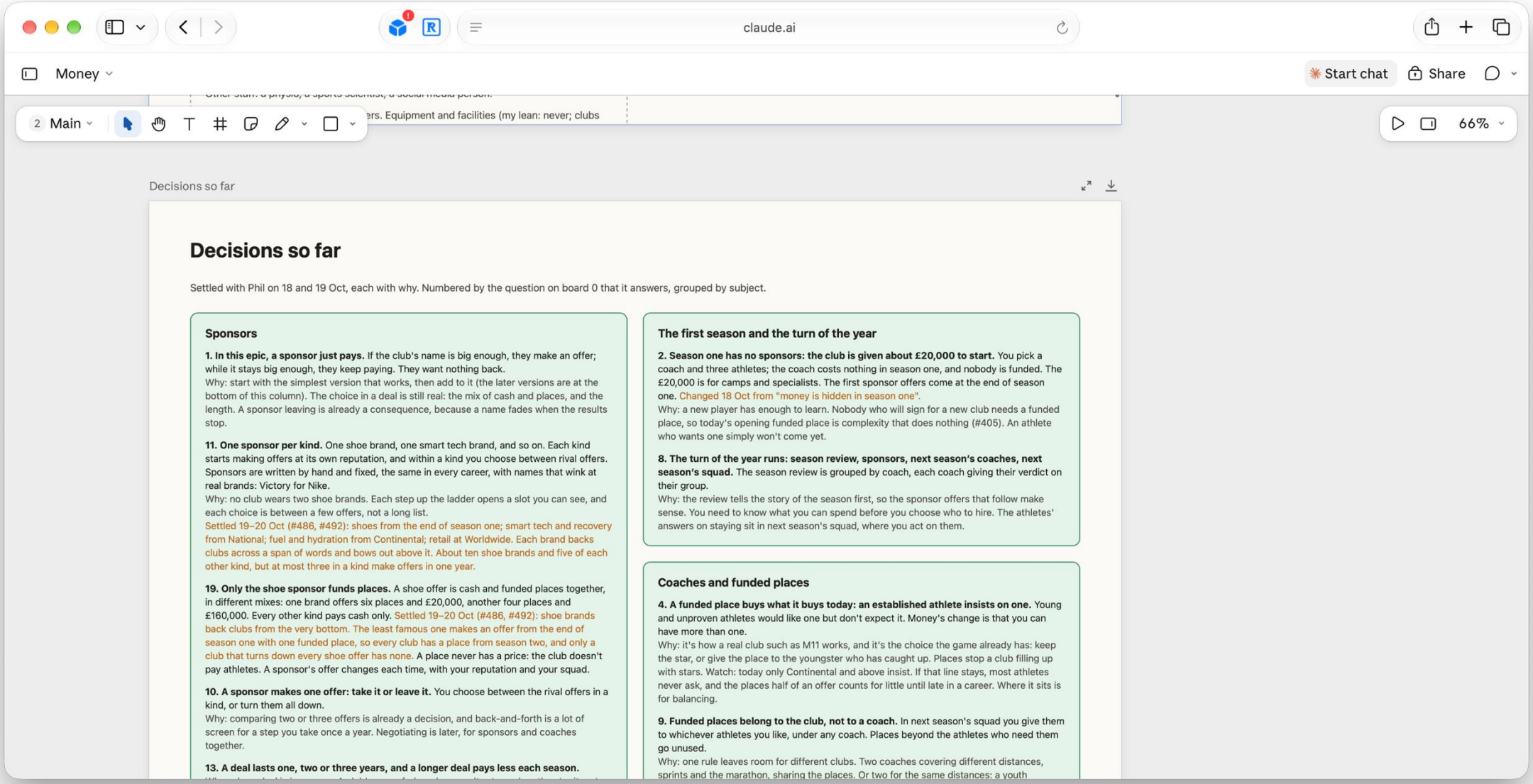
Working together on a canvas



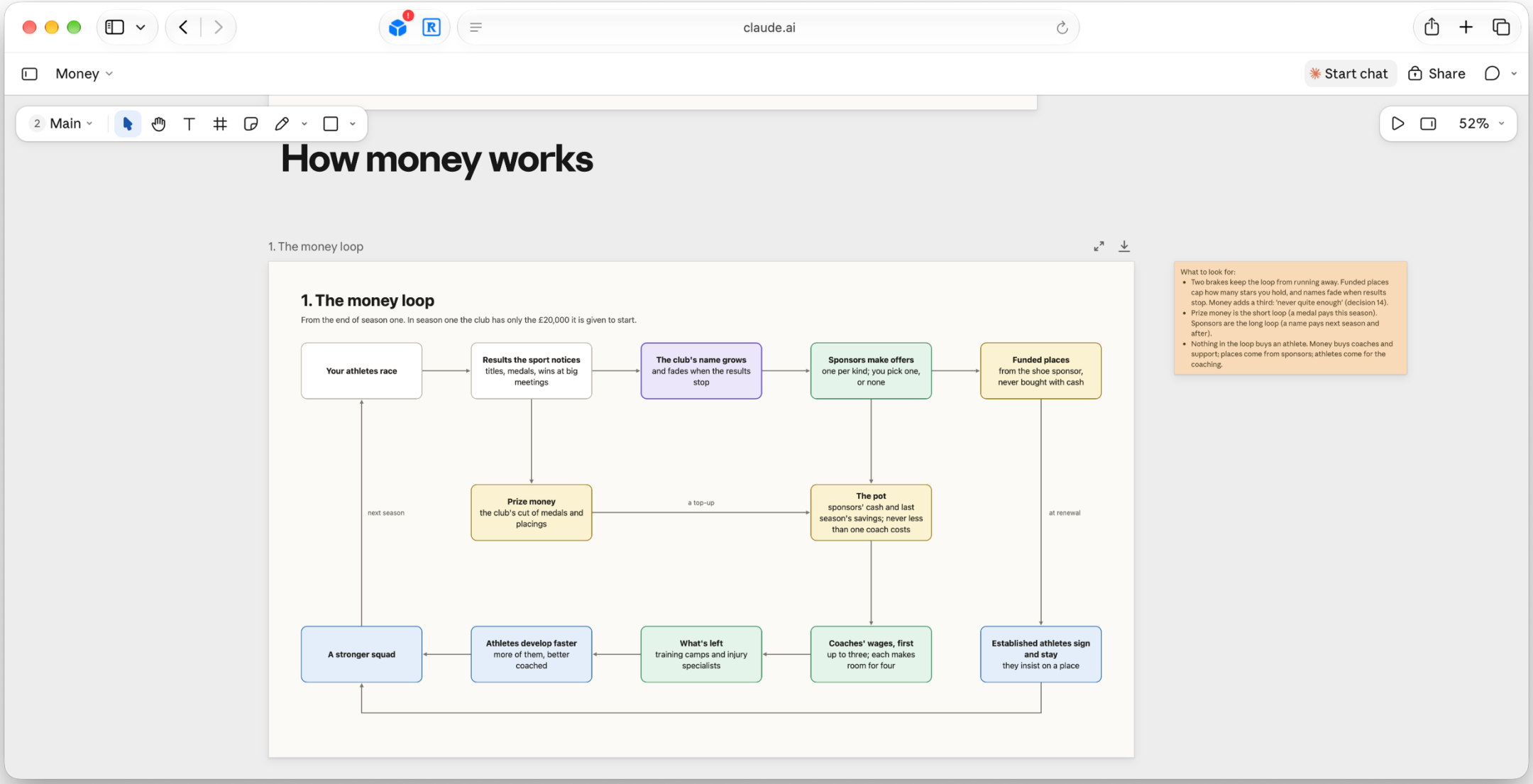
You design, AI assists



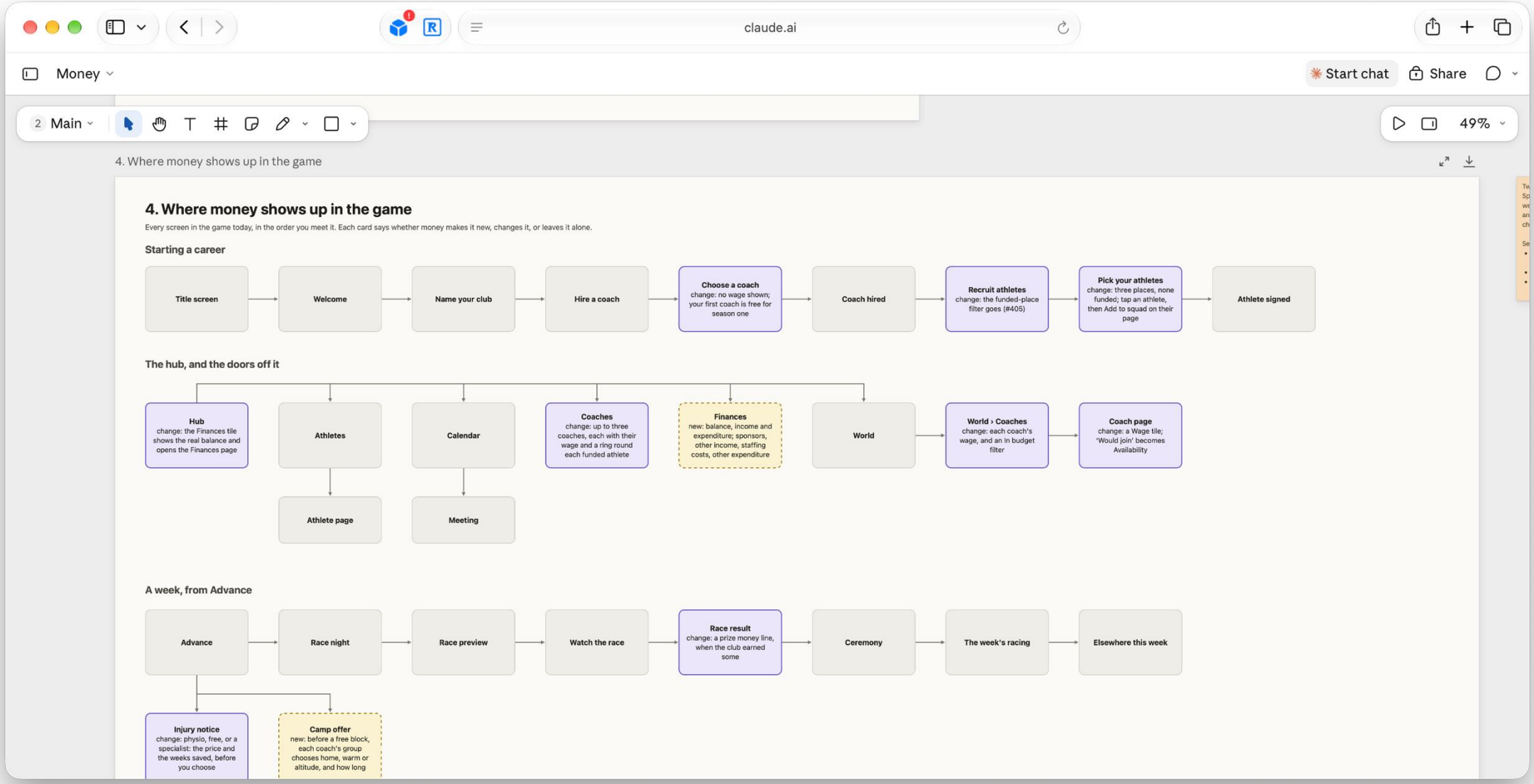
You design, AI assists



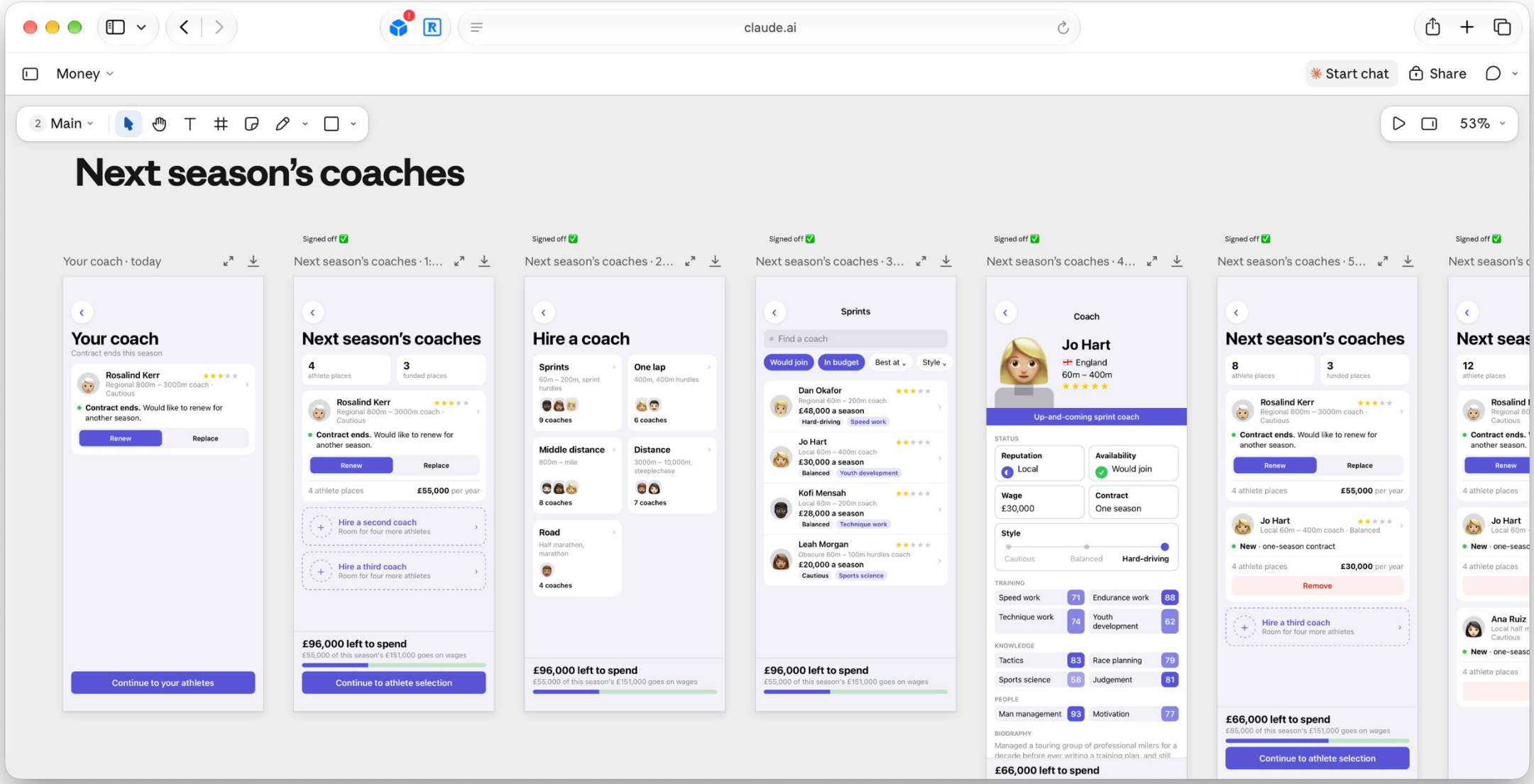
You design, AI assists



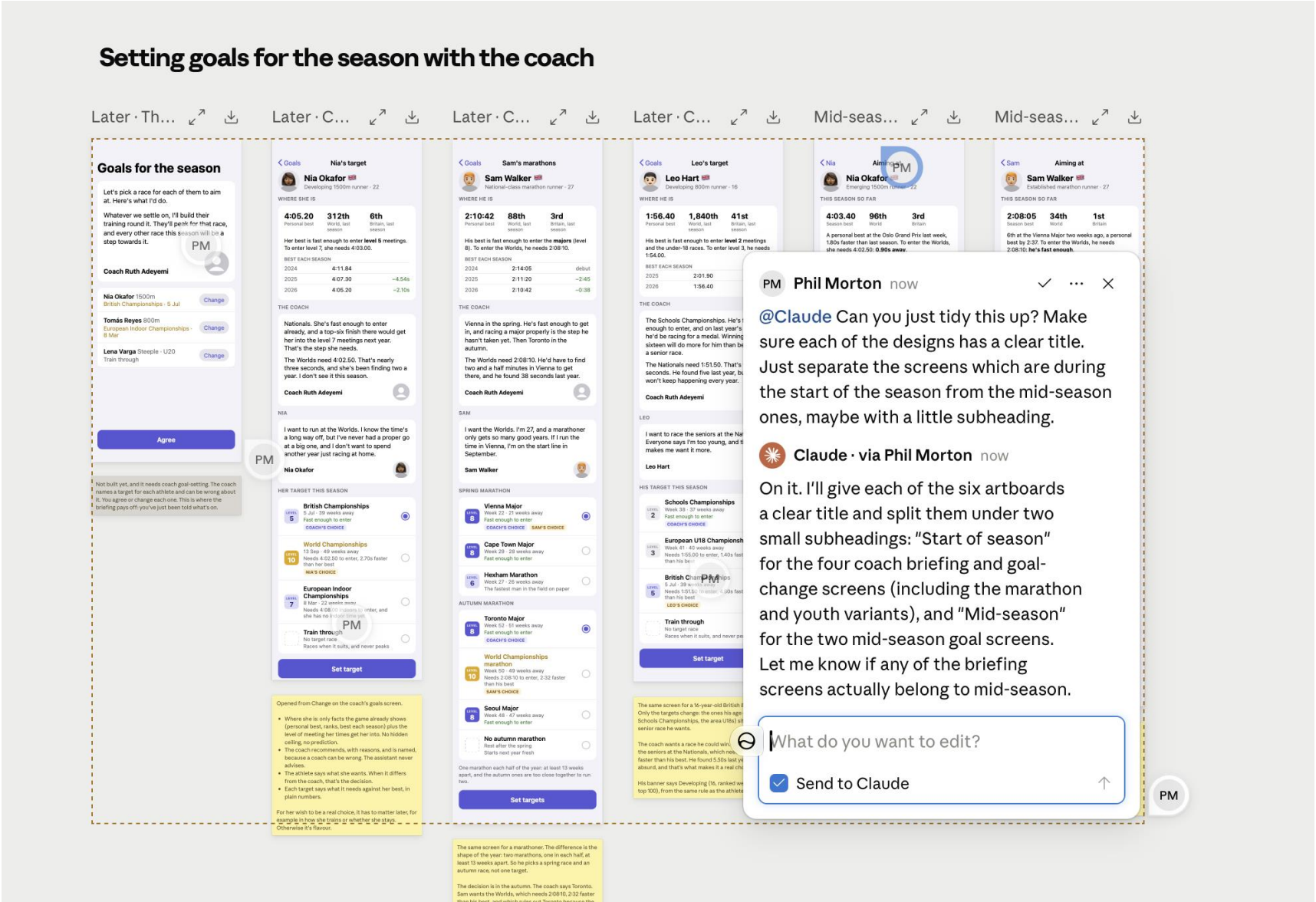
You design, AI assists



You design, AI assists



You design, AI assists



Five tips for designing and working in code with AI

You are the designer, AI is your assistant

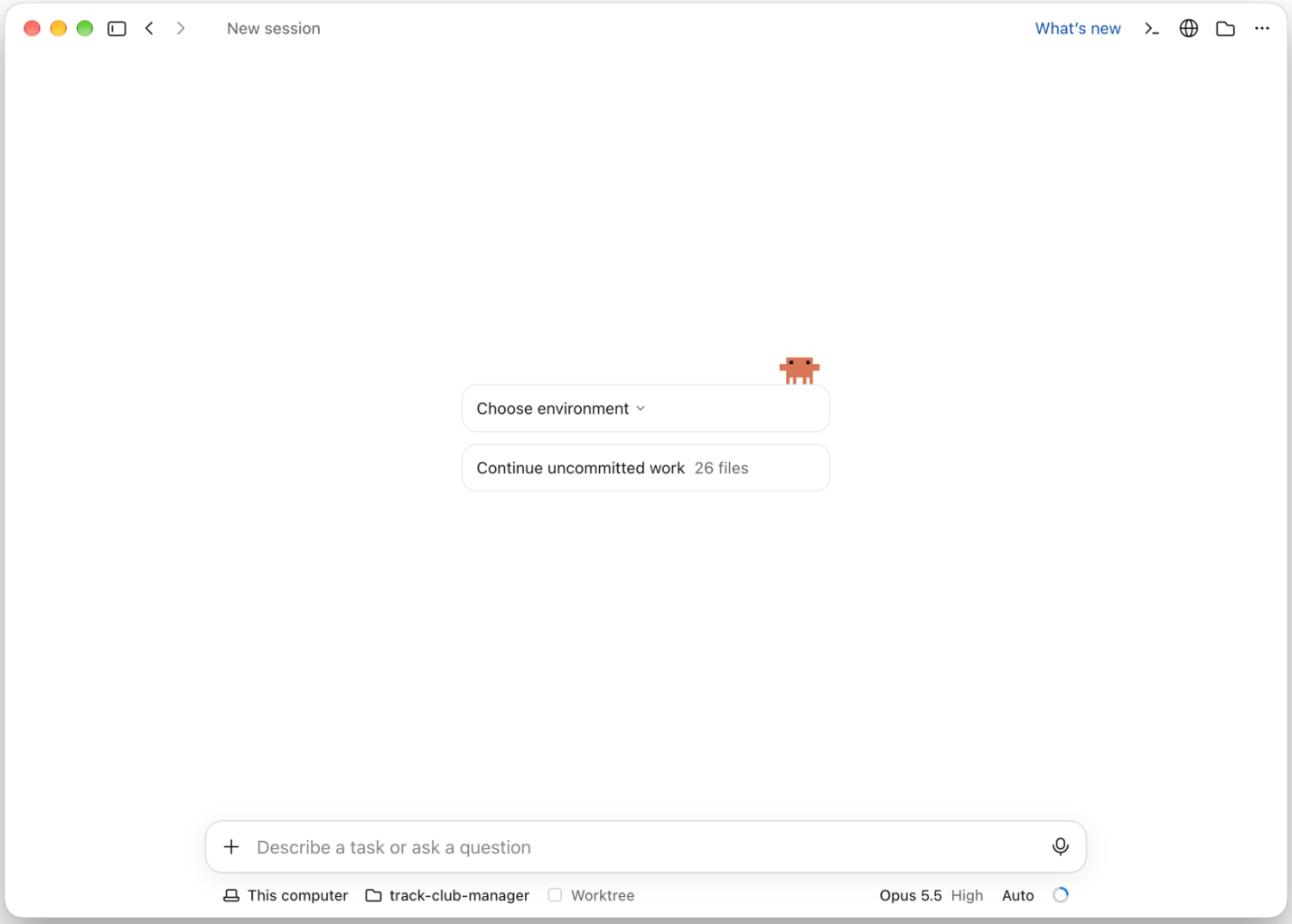
Manage the work and the knowledge

Build your own design system in code as the source of truth

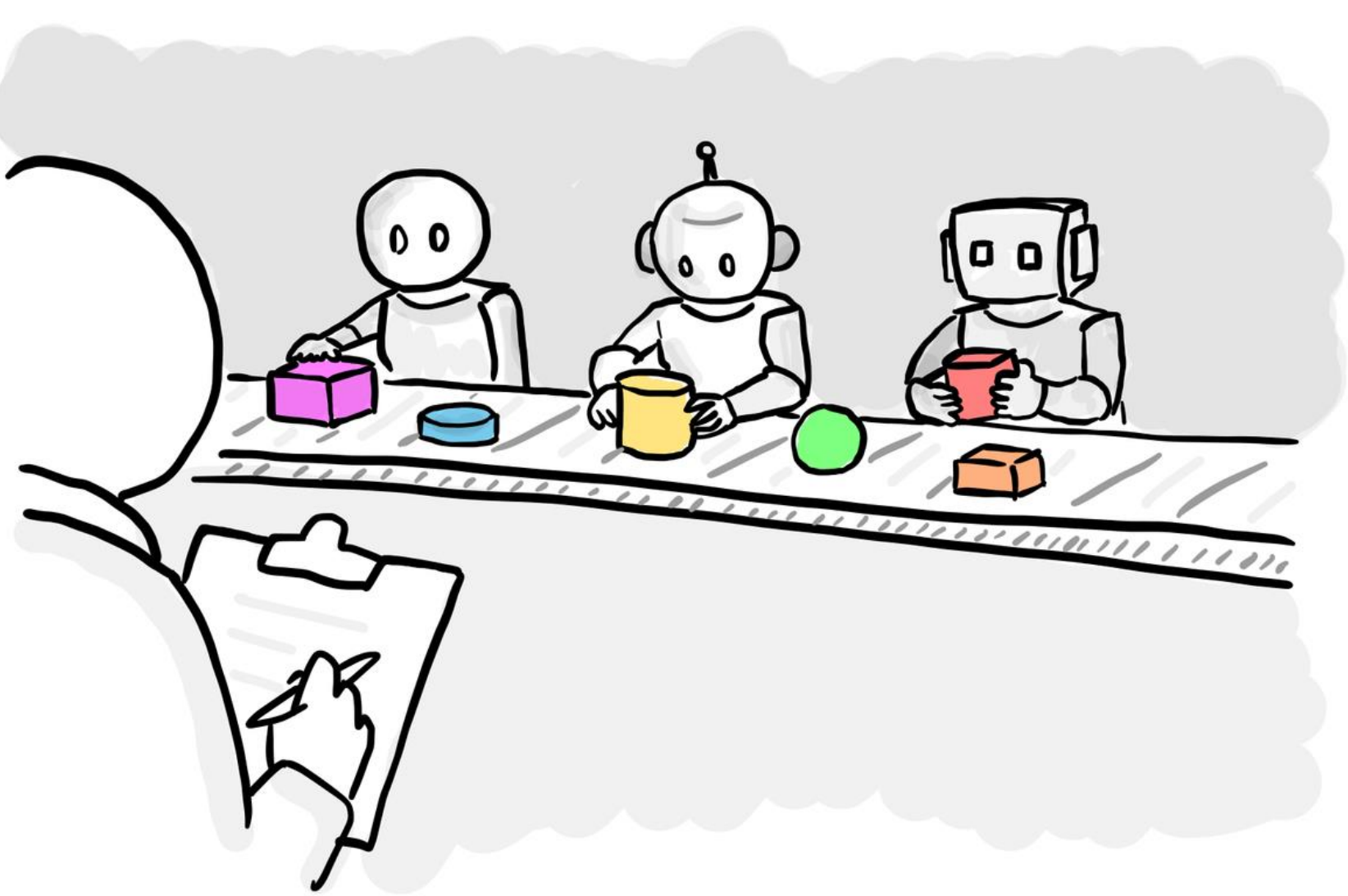
Design in the real product using jigs

Establish a repeatable workflow with skills

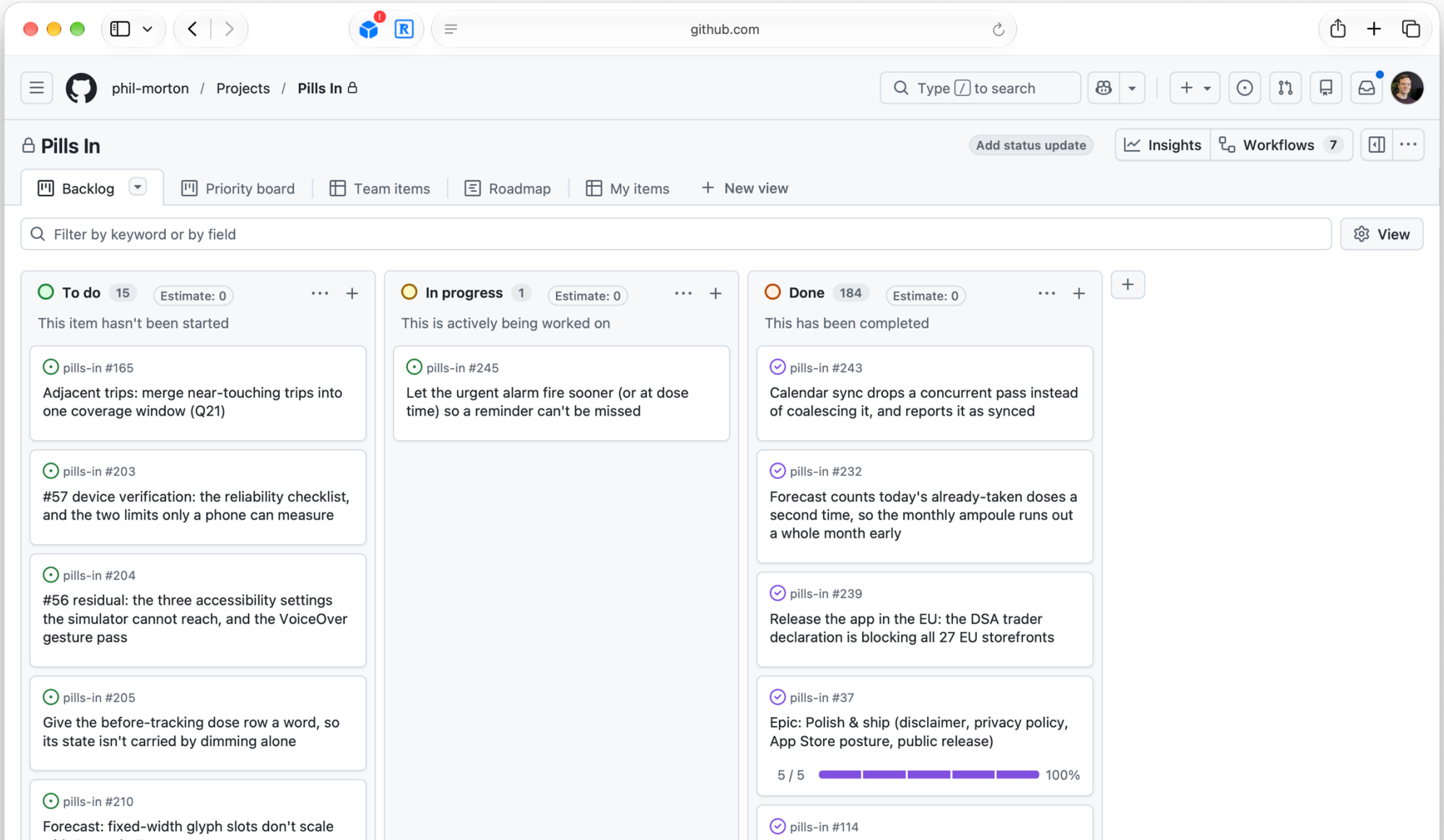
You need to manage your AI agent's work



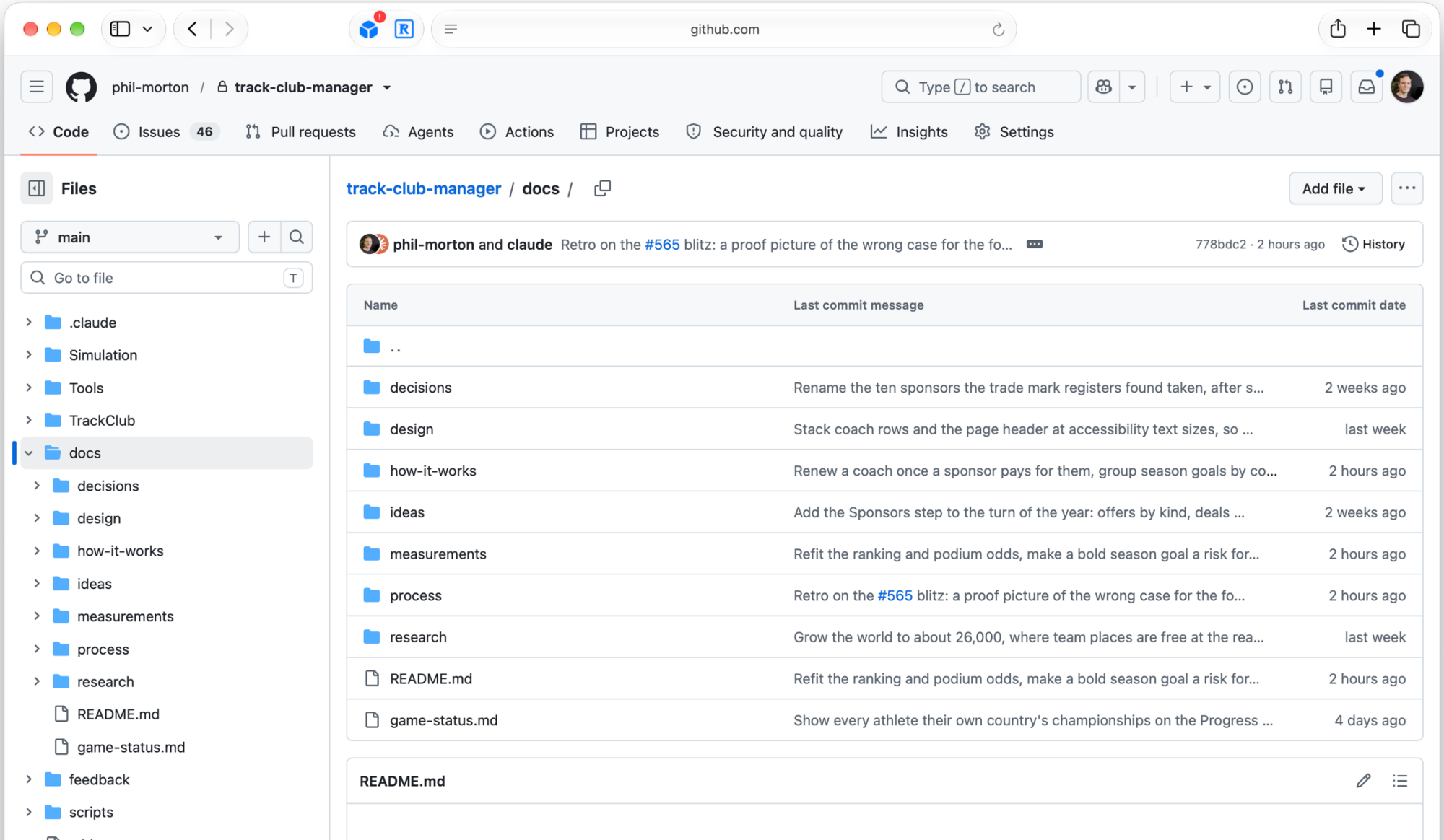
Break down work into little pieces



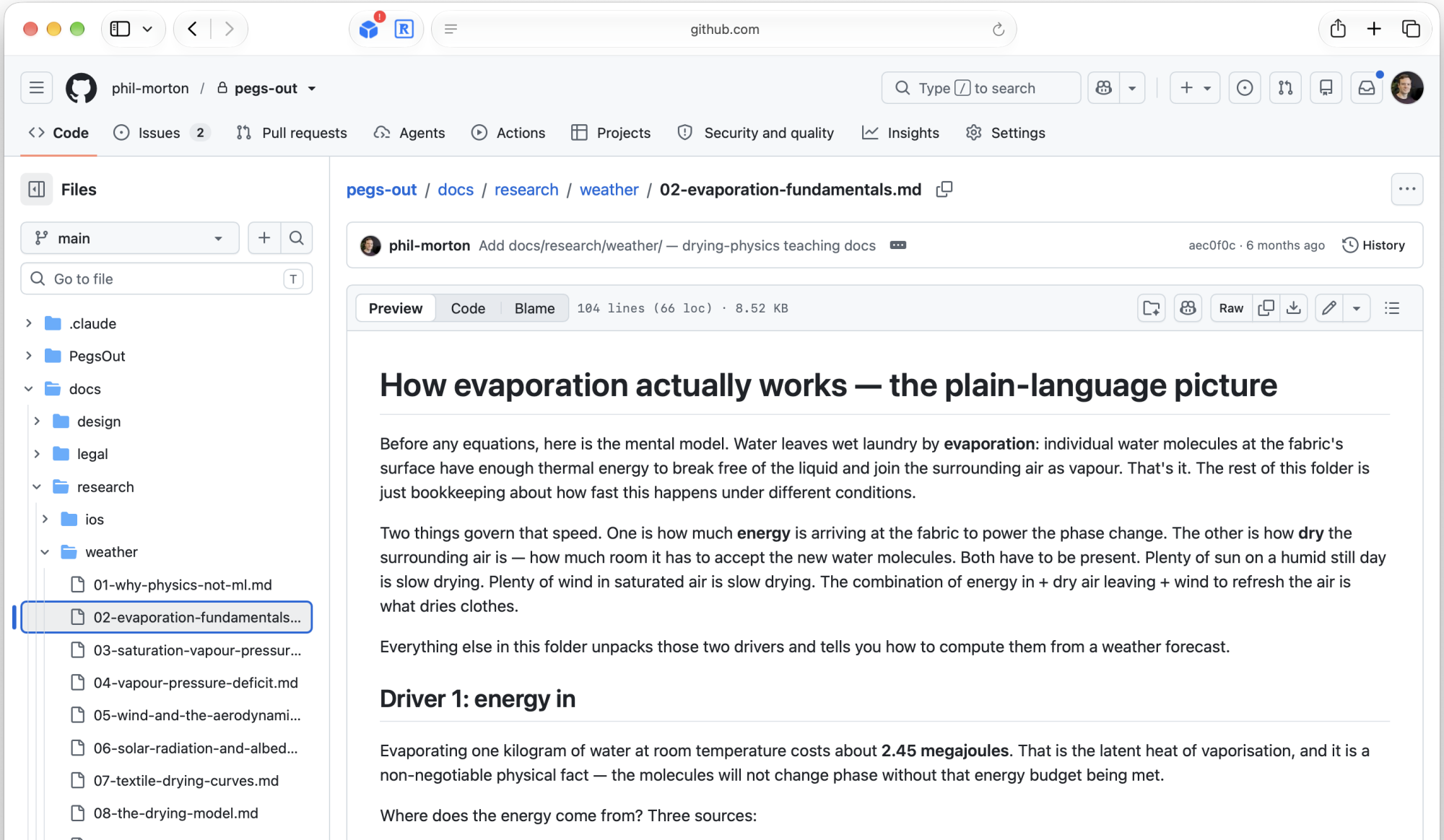
Managing the work using GitHub issues



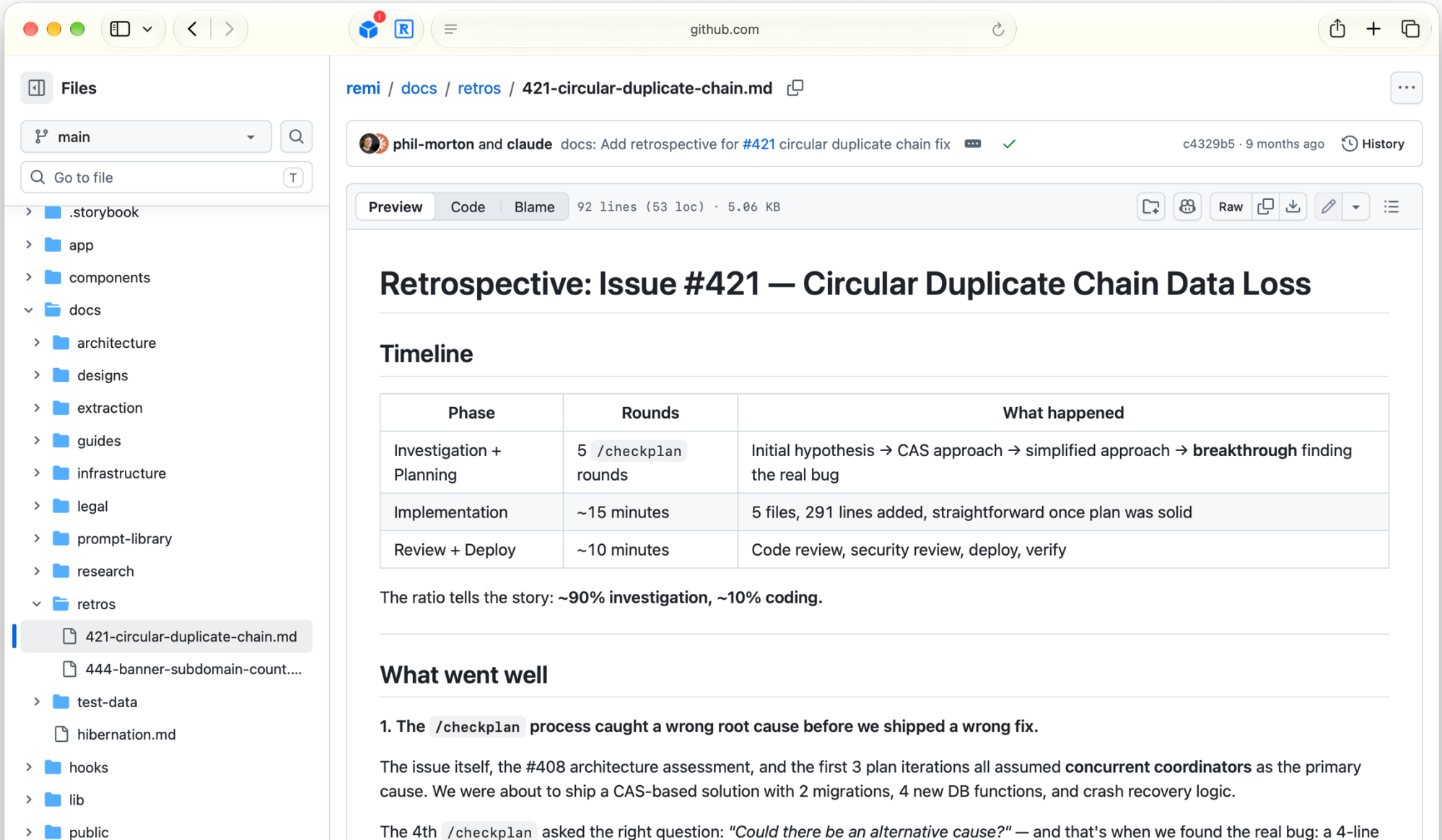
/docs – manage the knowledge



Research: your knowledge base



Retros: the agent learns from the work it does



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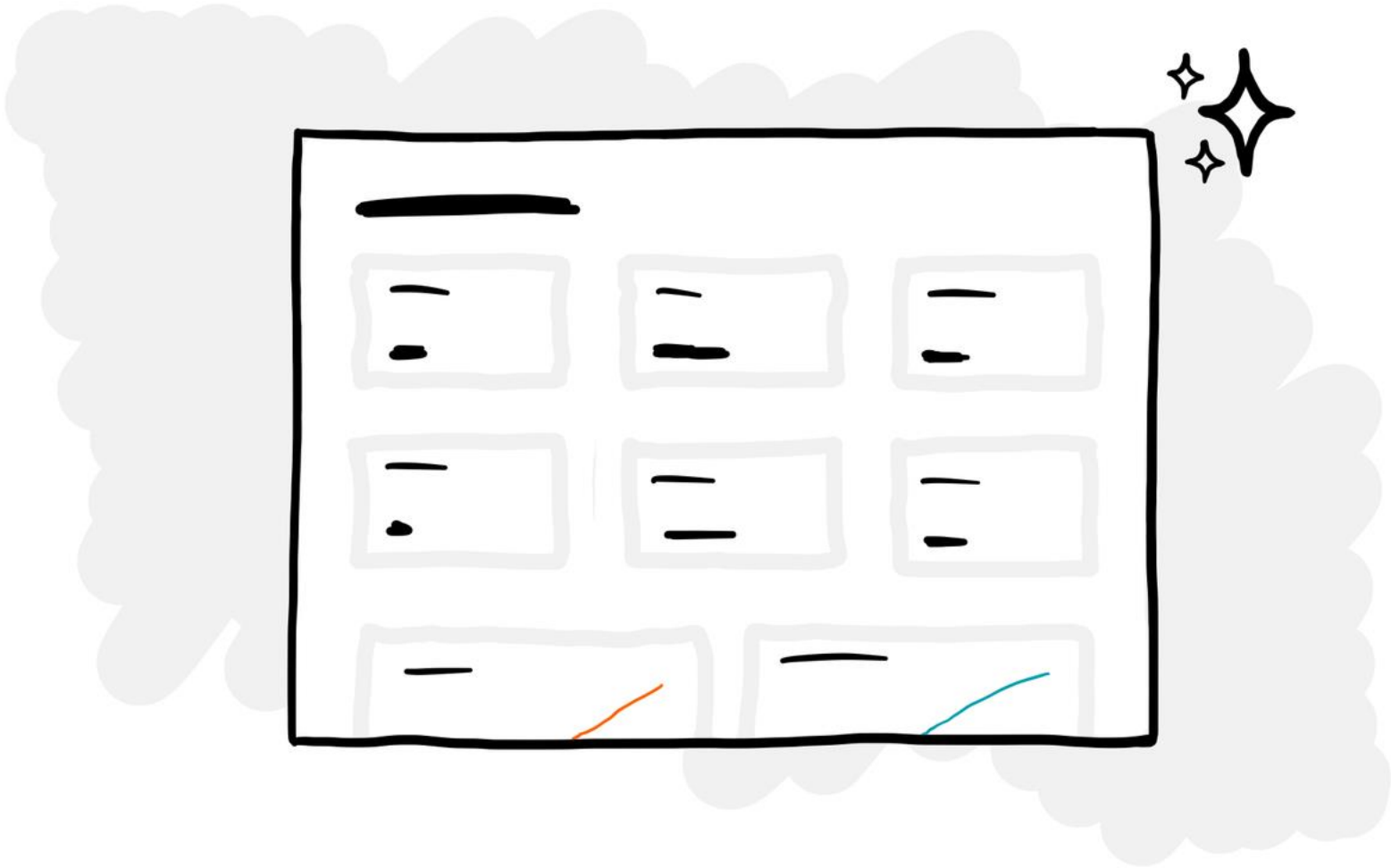
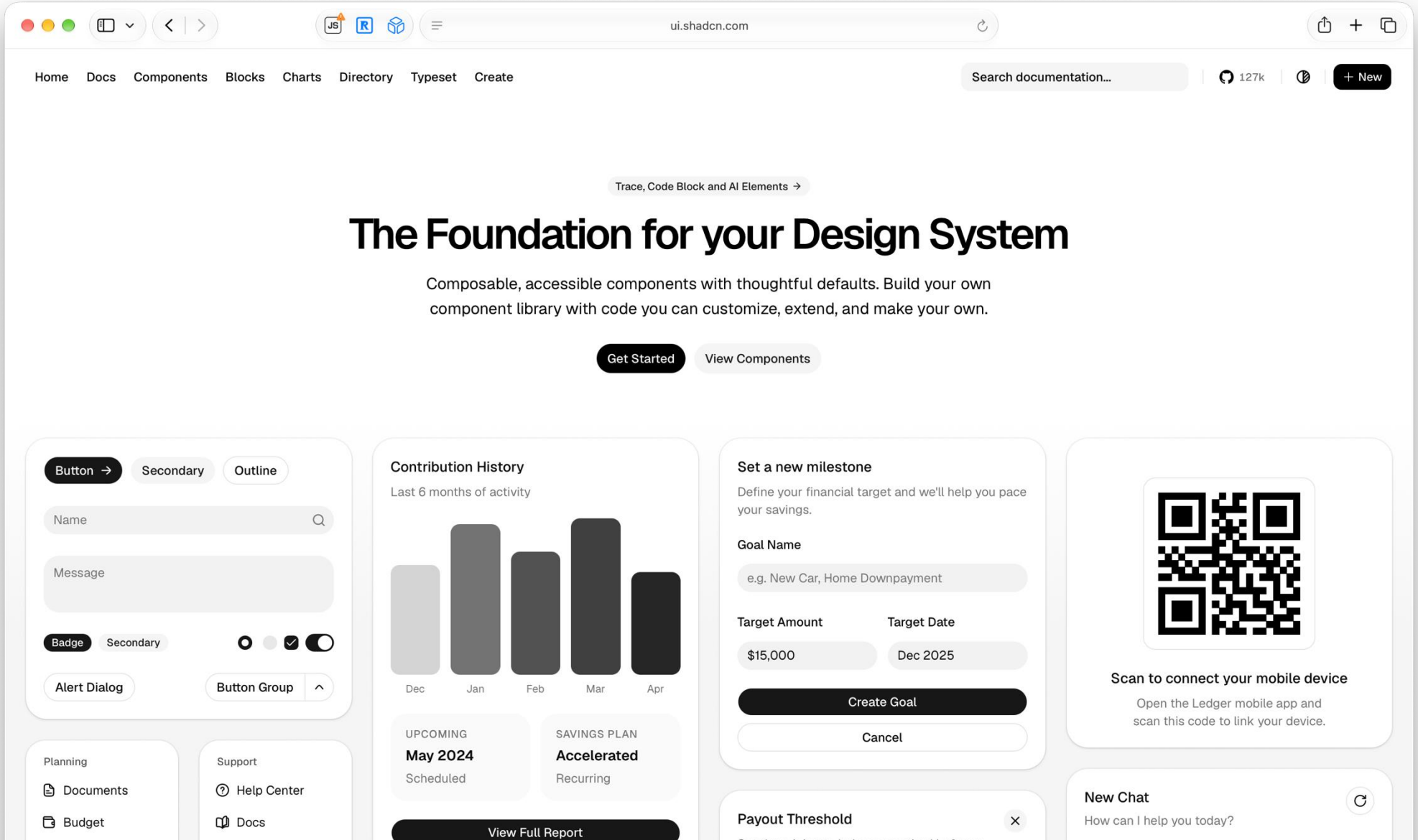
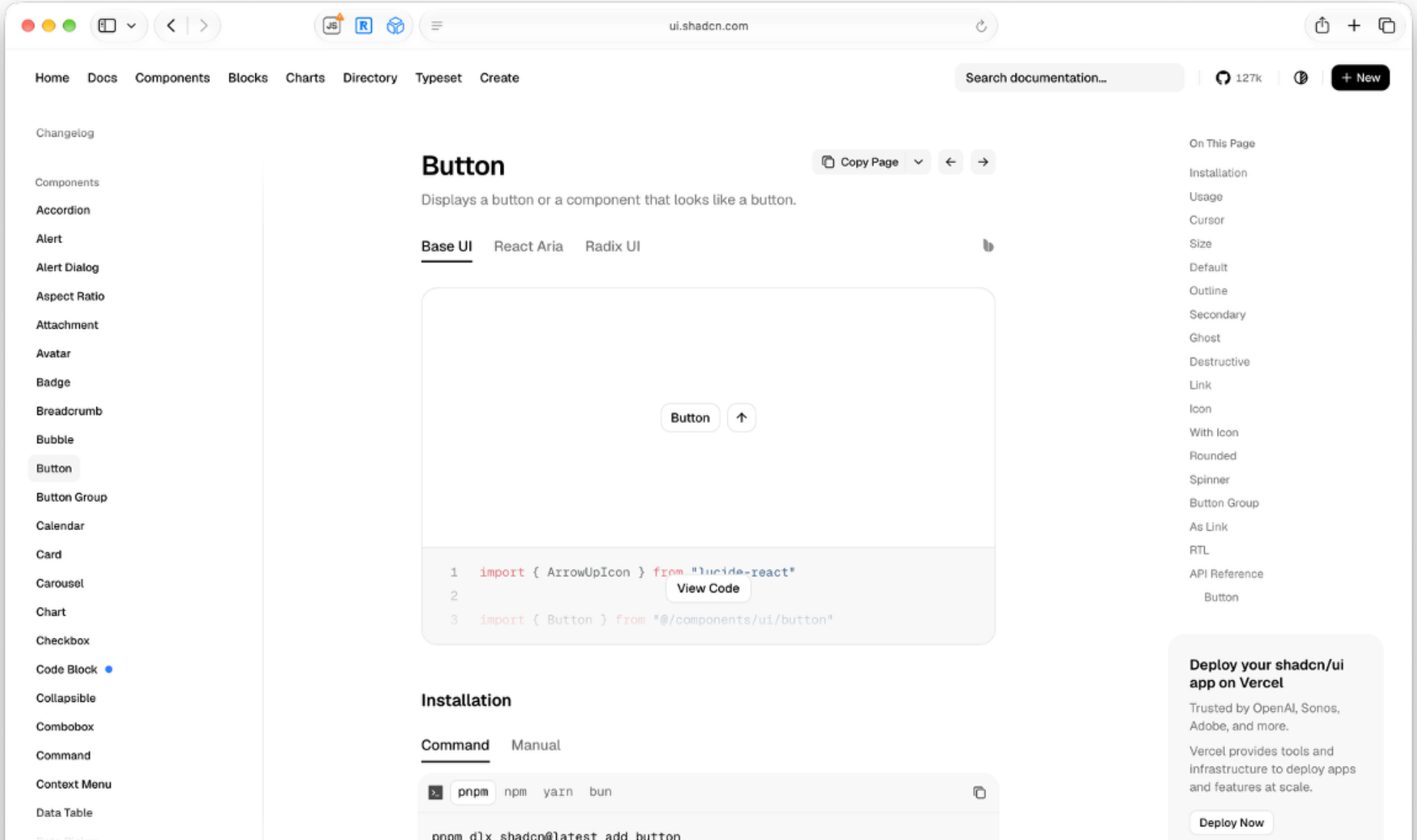
We all know the importance of a design system, and it’s easy to get your own in code



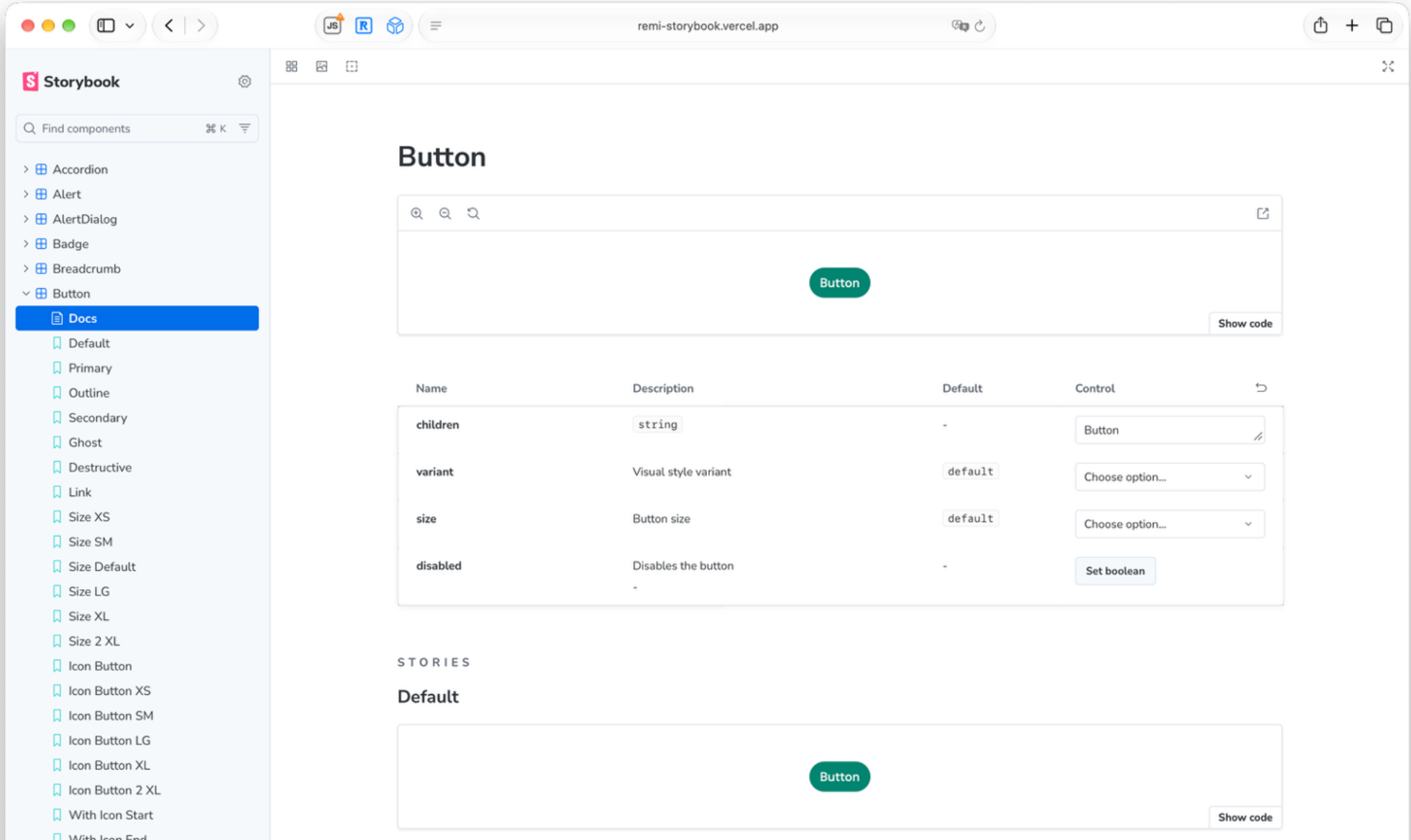
shadcn – coded design system in a box



shadcn – coded design system in a box



Storybook – see your coded design system



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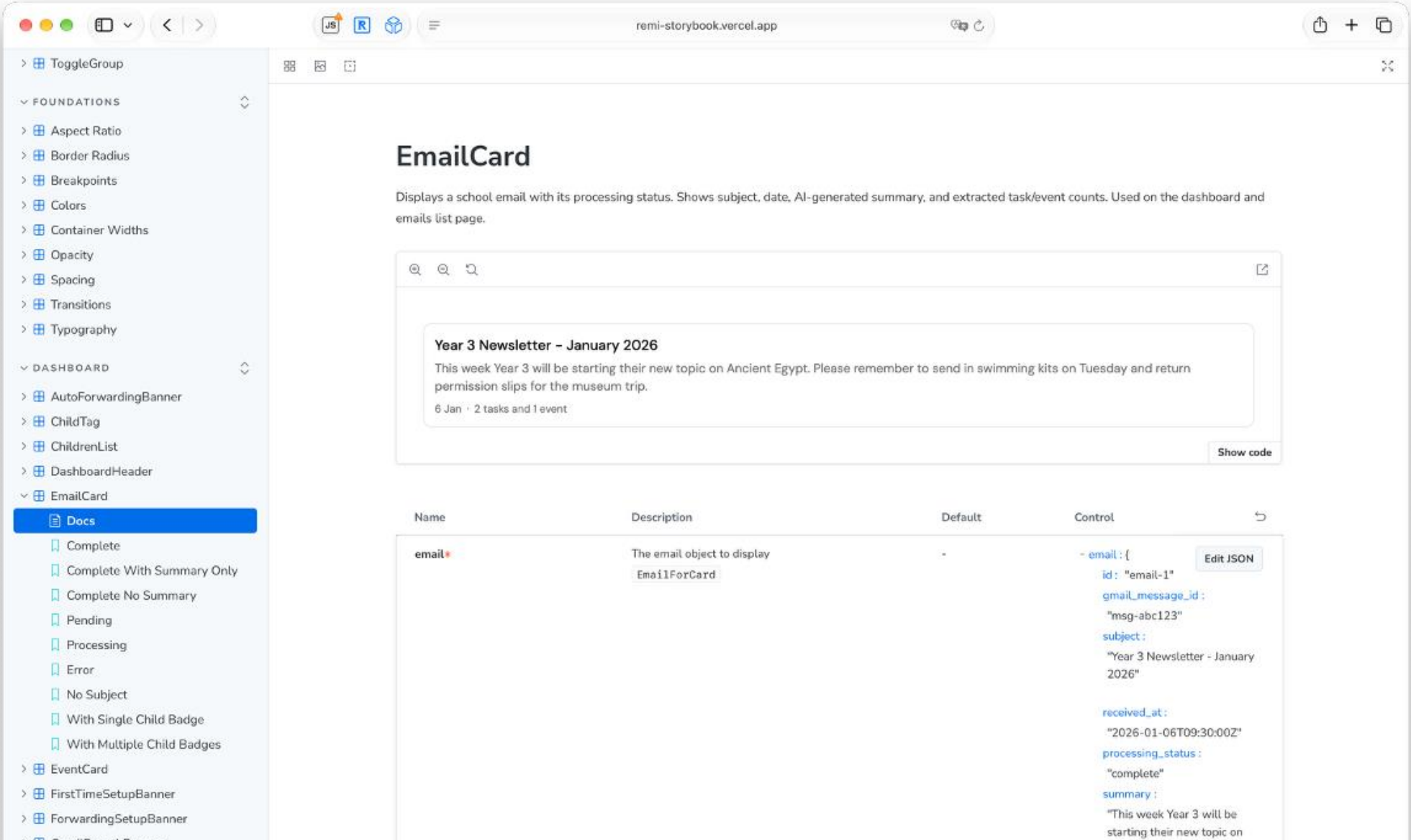
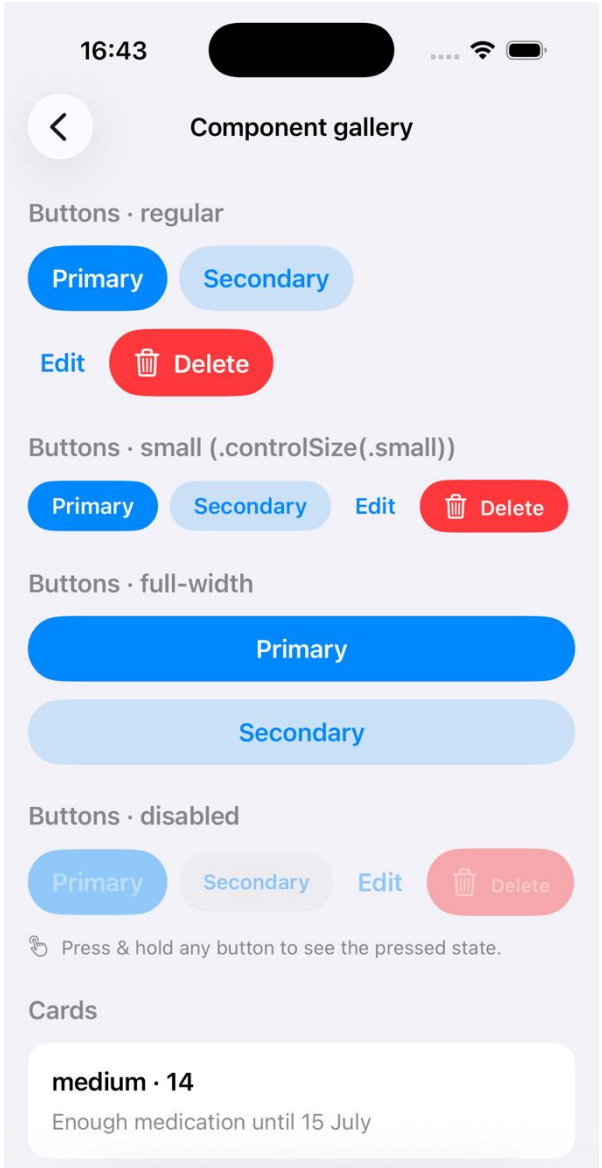
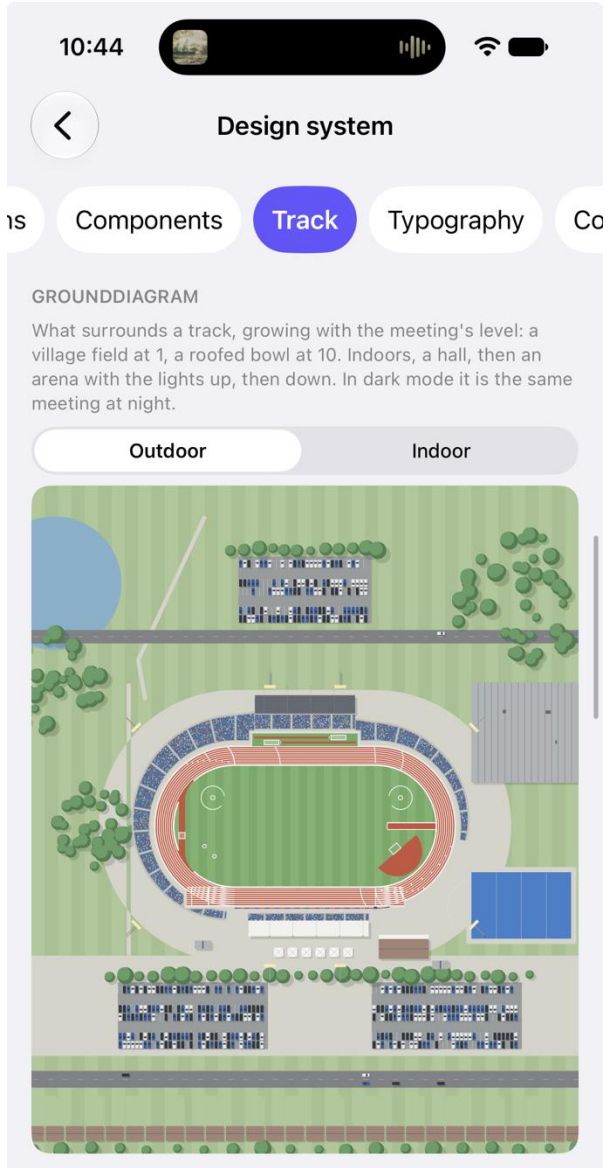
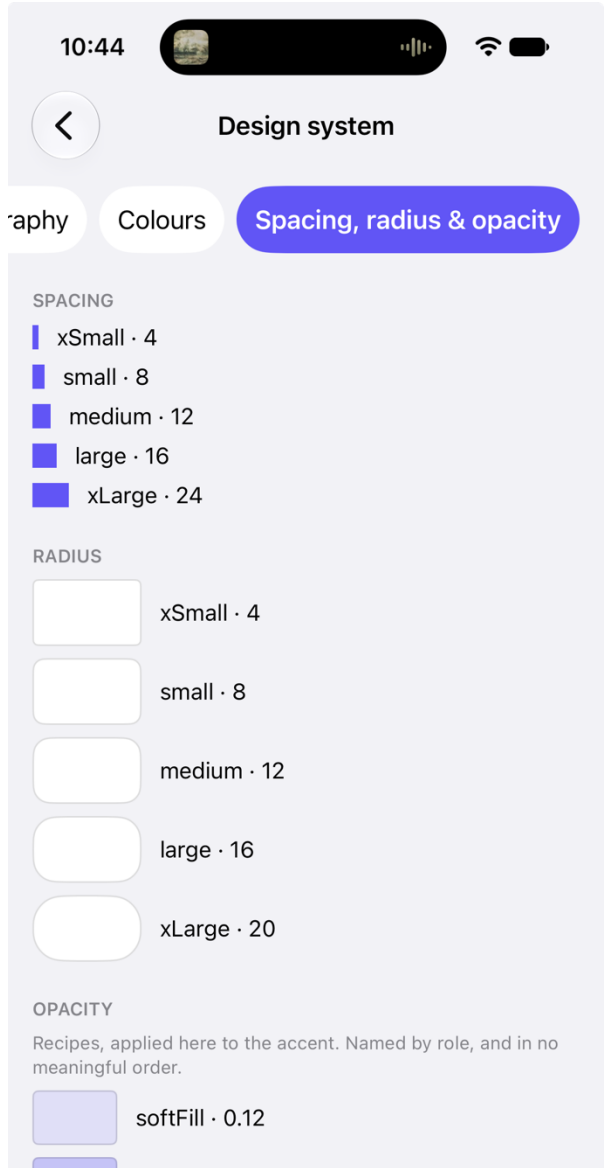
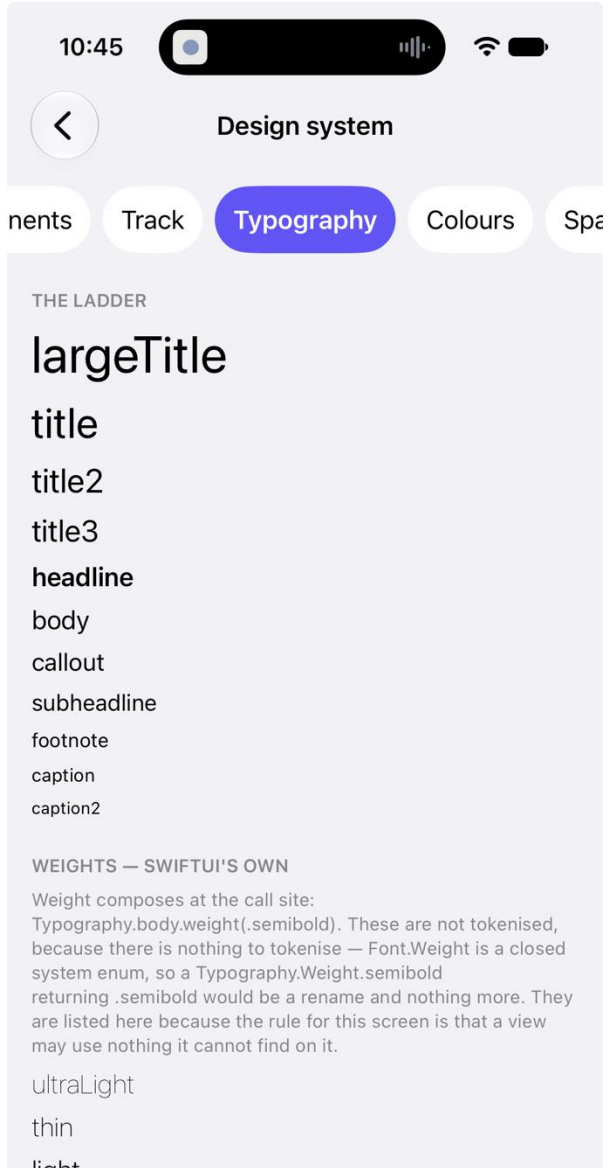


iOS apps – get AI to build your own in Swift UI









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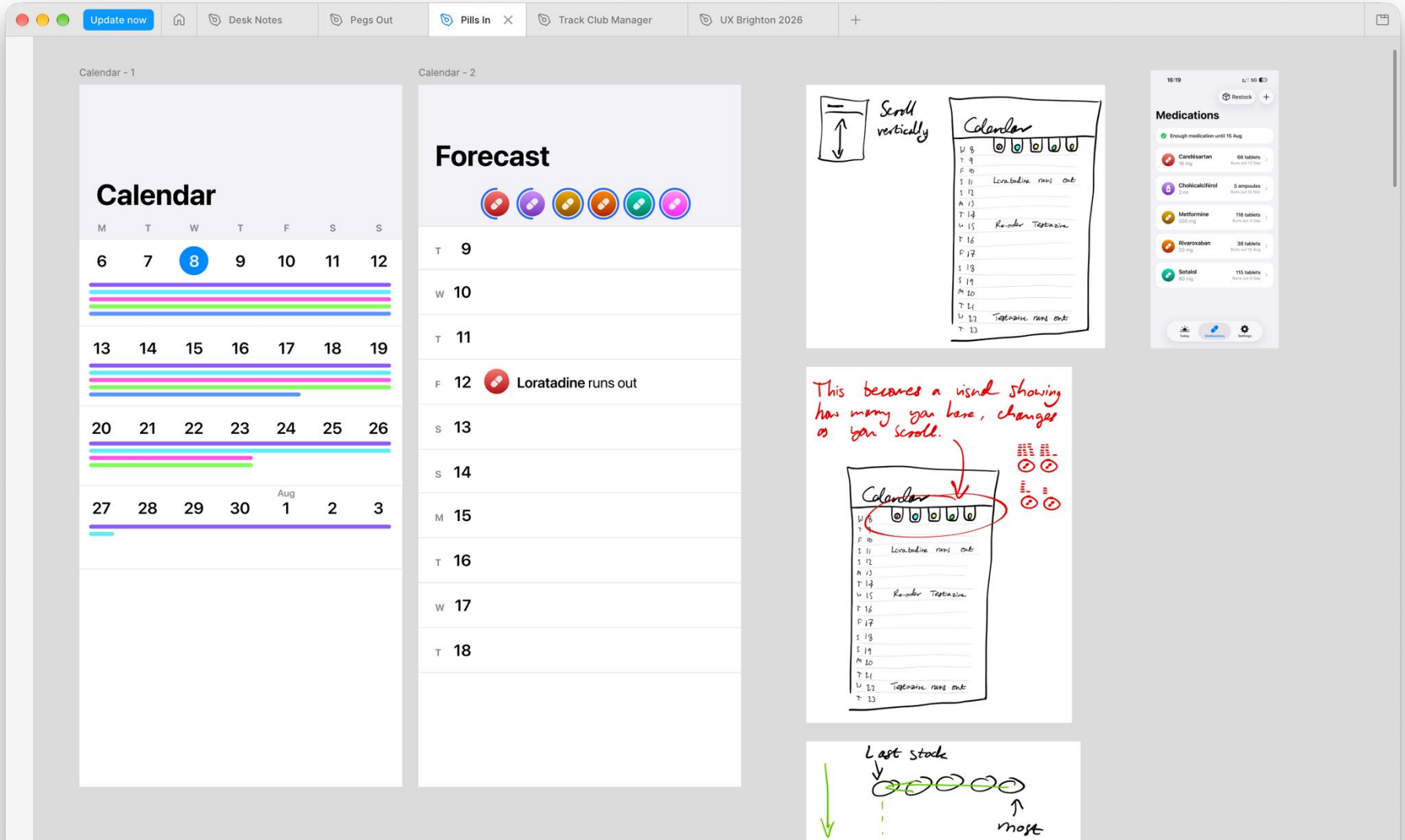
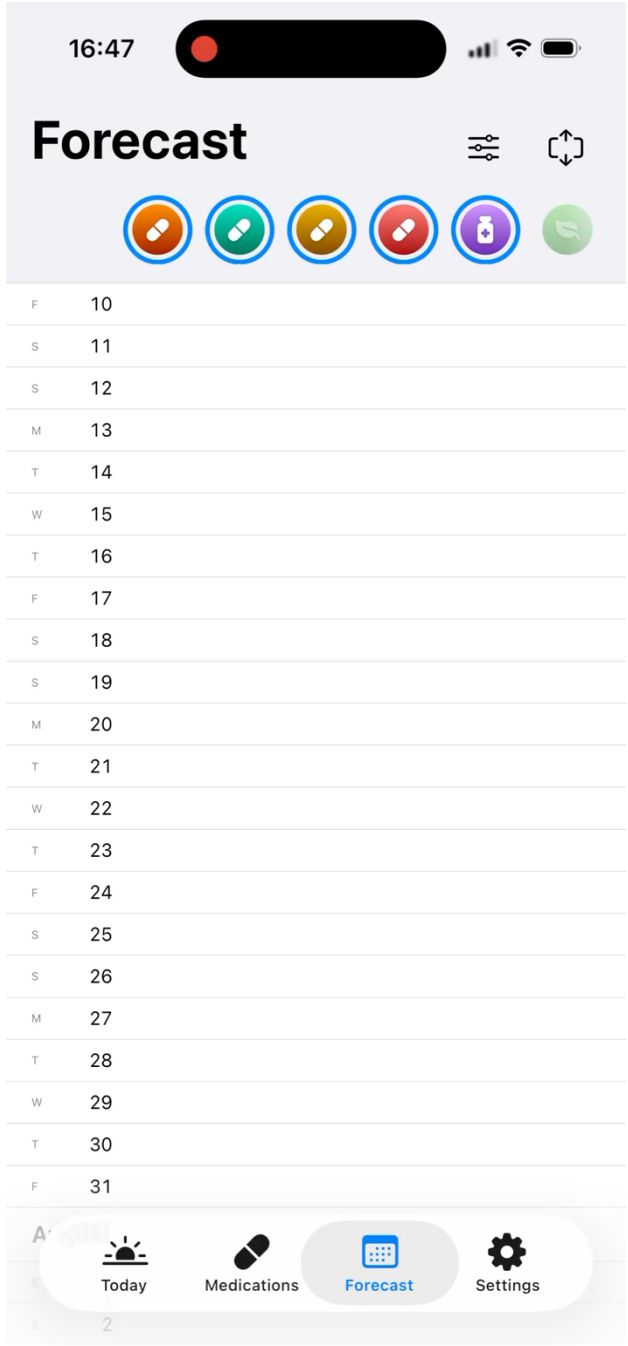
Using just enough Figma, and then designing the rest in code



Jigs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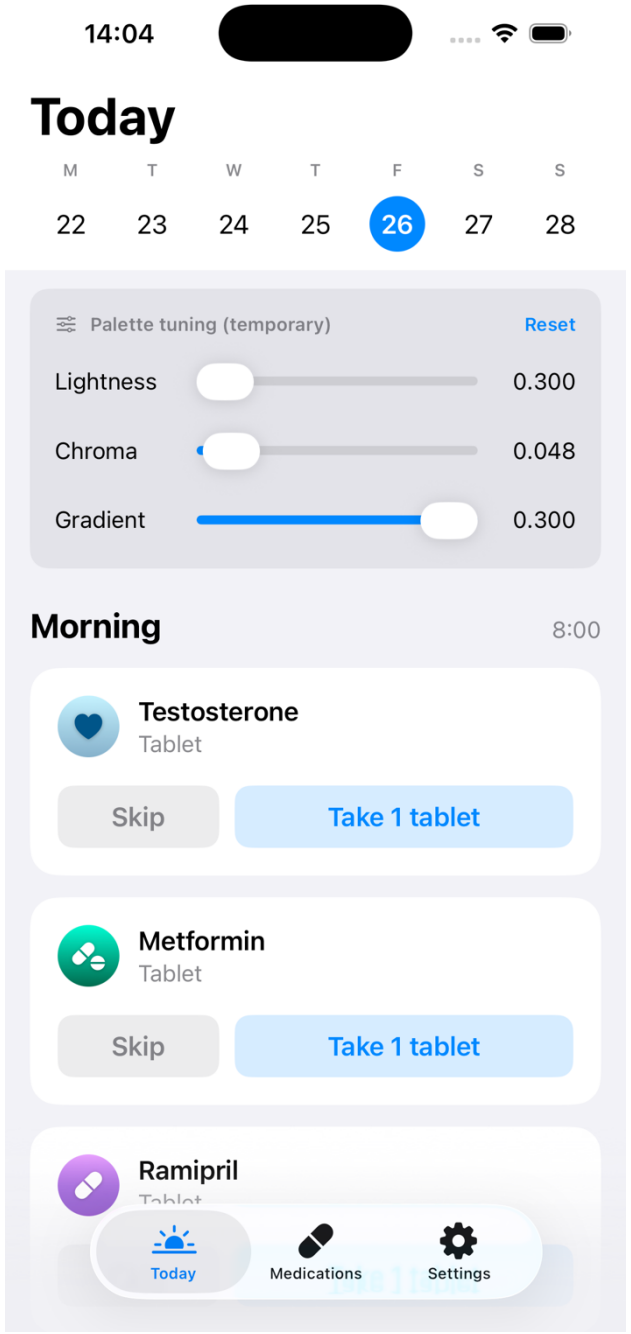
Today
Medications
Forecast
Settings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Today
M T W T F S S
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Palette tuning (temporary)
Reset
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Chroma 0.048
Gradient 0.300
Morning
8:00
Testosterone
Tablet
Skip
Take 1 tablet
Metformin
Tablet
Skip
Take 1 tablet
Ramipril
Today
Medications
Settings

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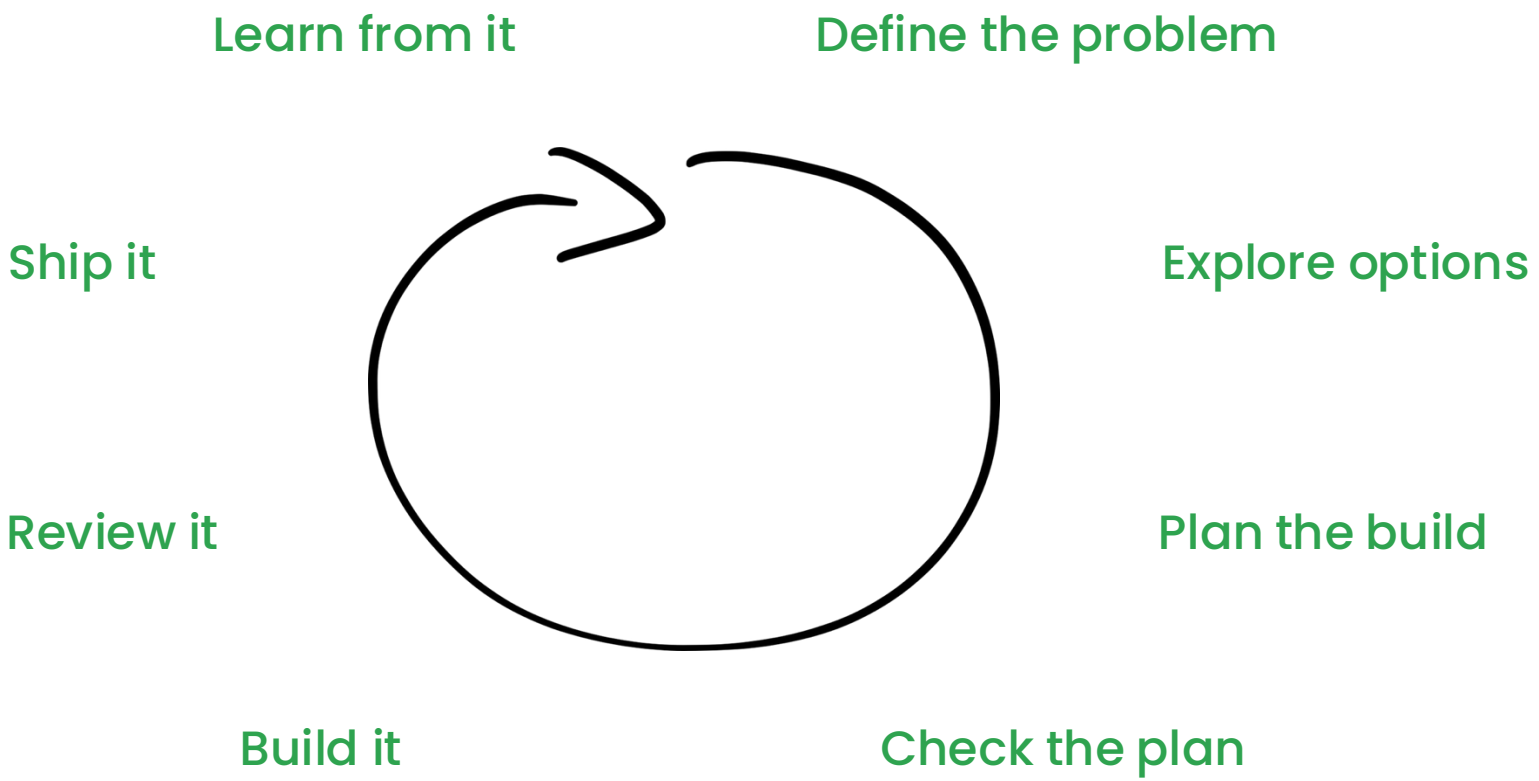
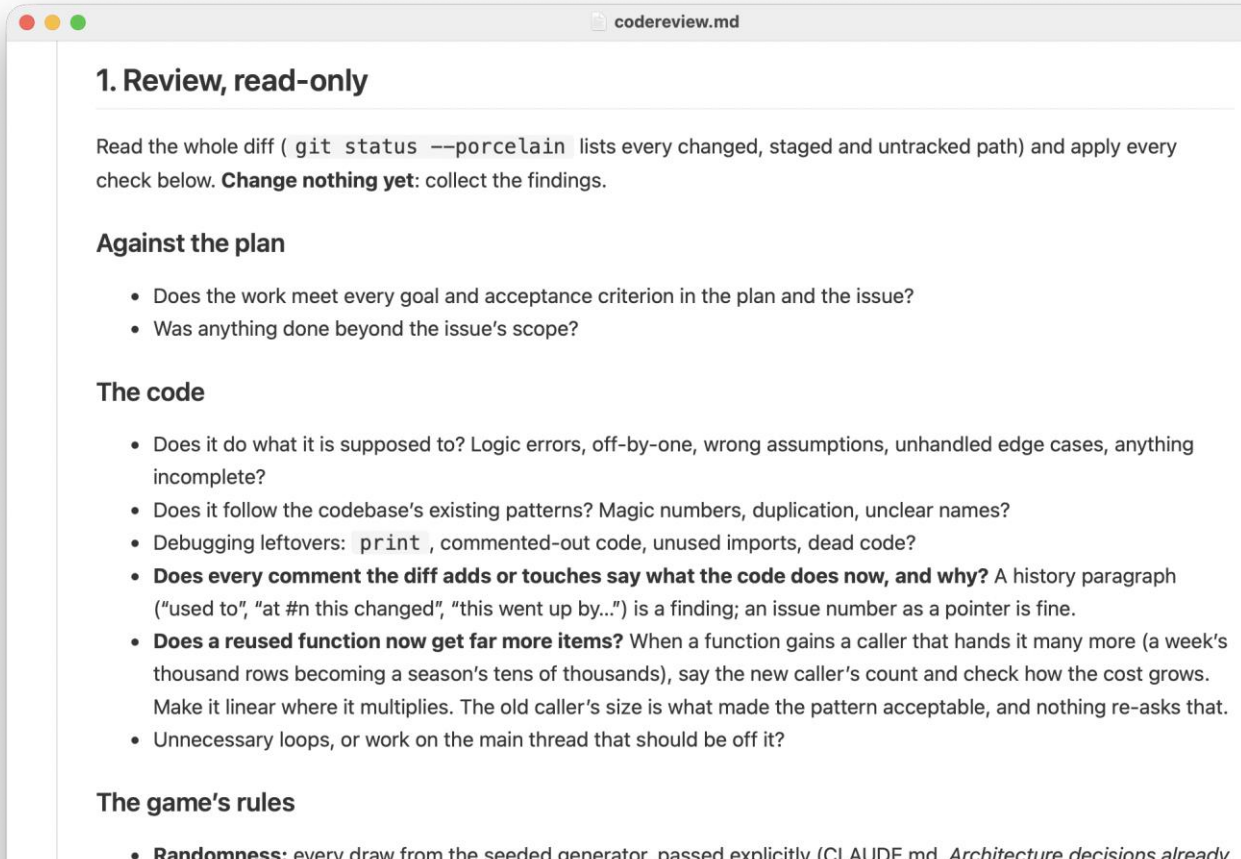
Software development is repeating the same process over and over again



Develop your own set of skills - stop repeating yourself and embed what works

"Can you double check the work that you've just done and make sure you haven't missed anything?"

→ /codereview



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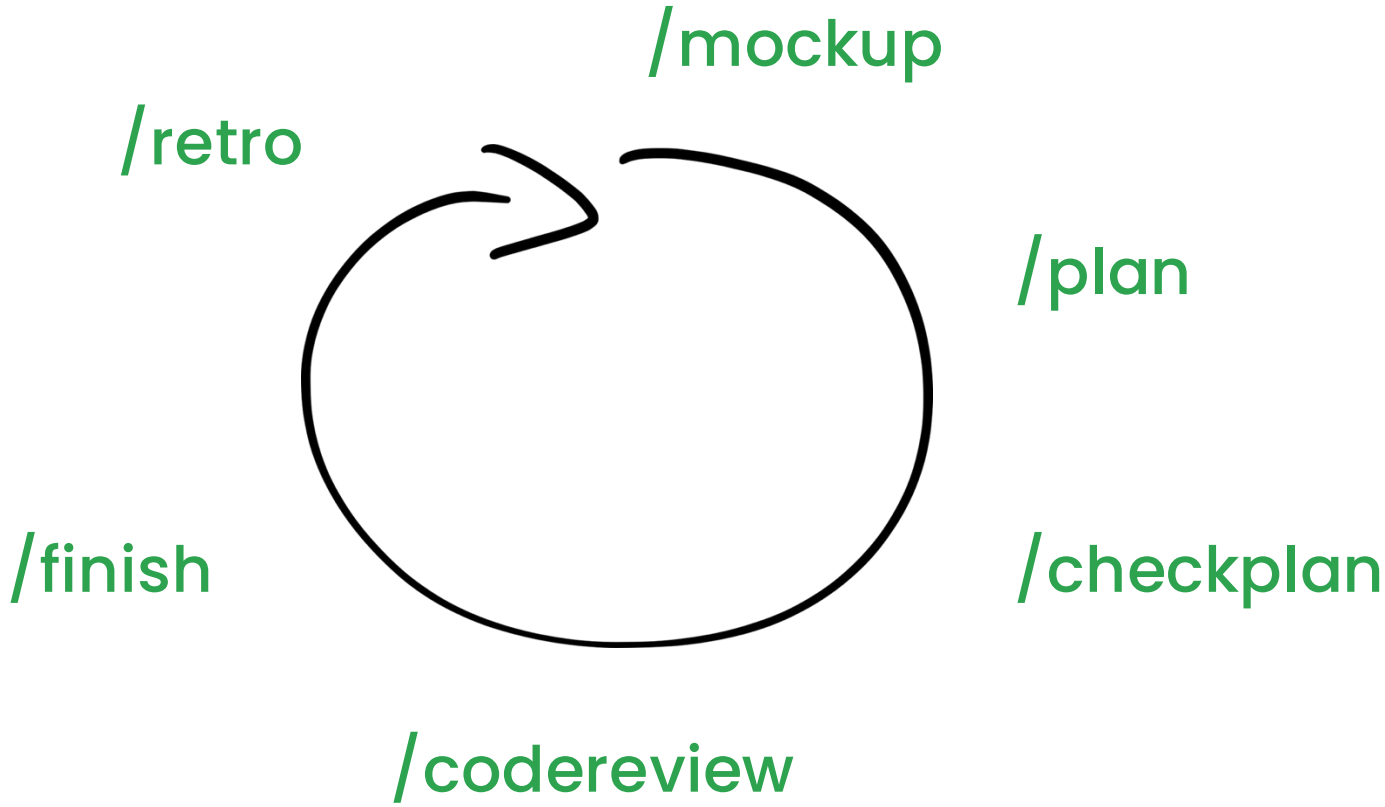

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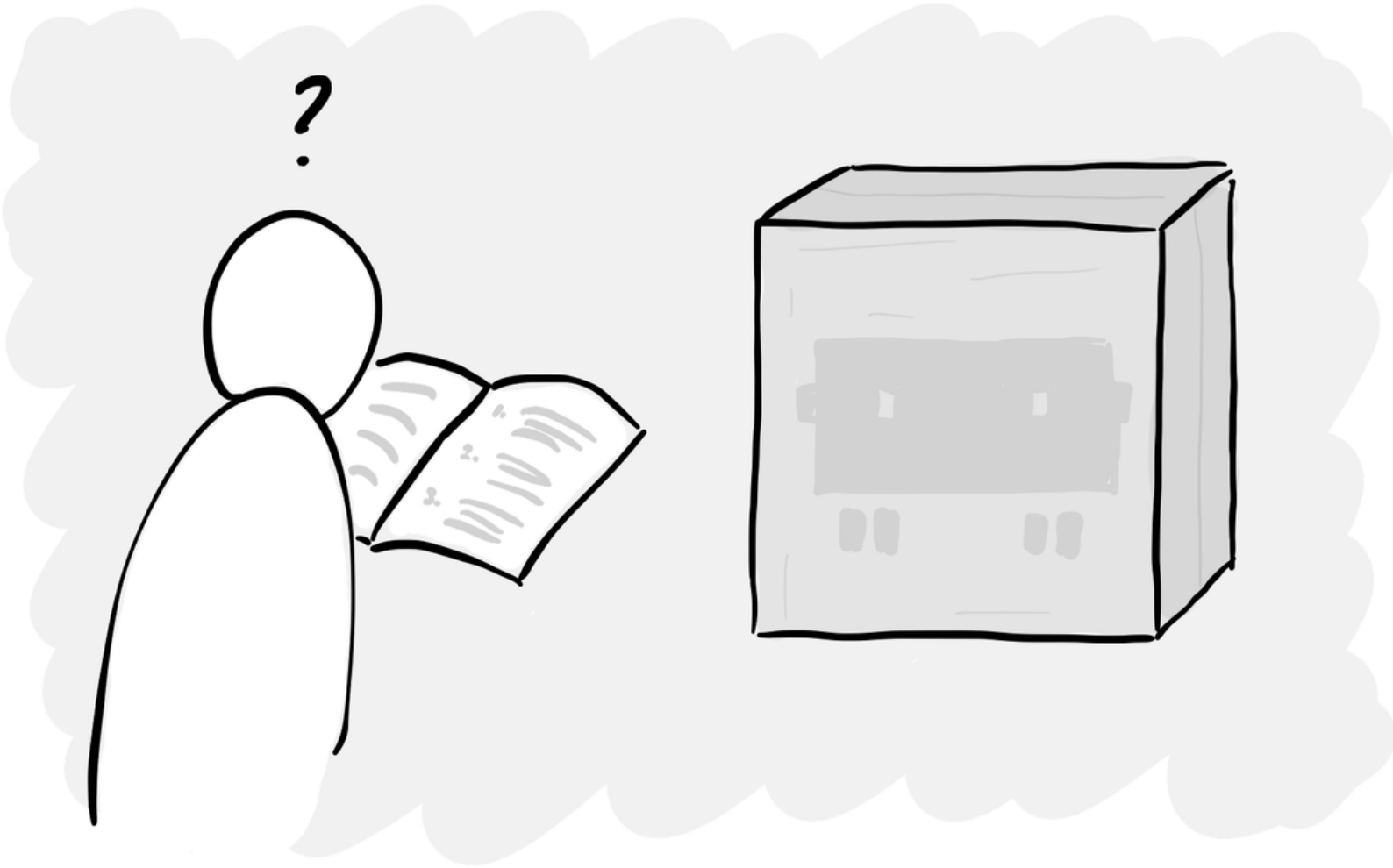
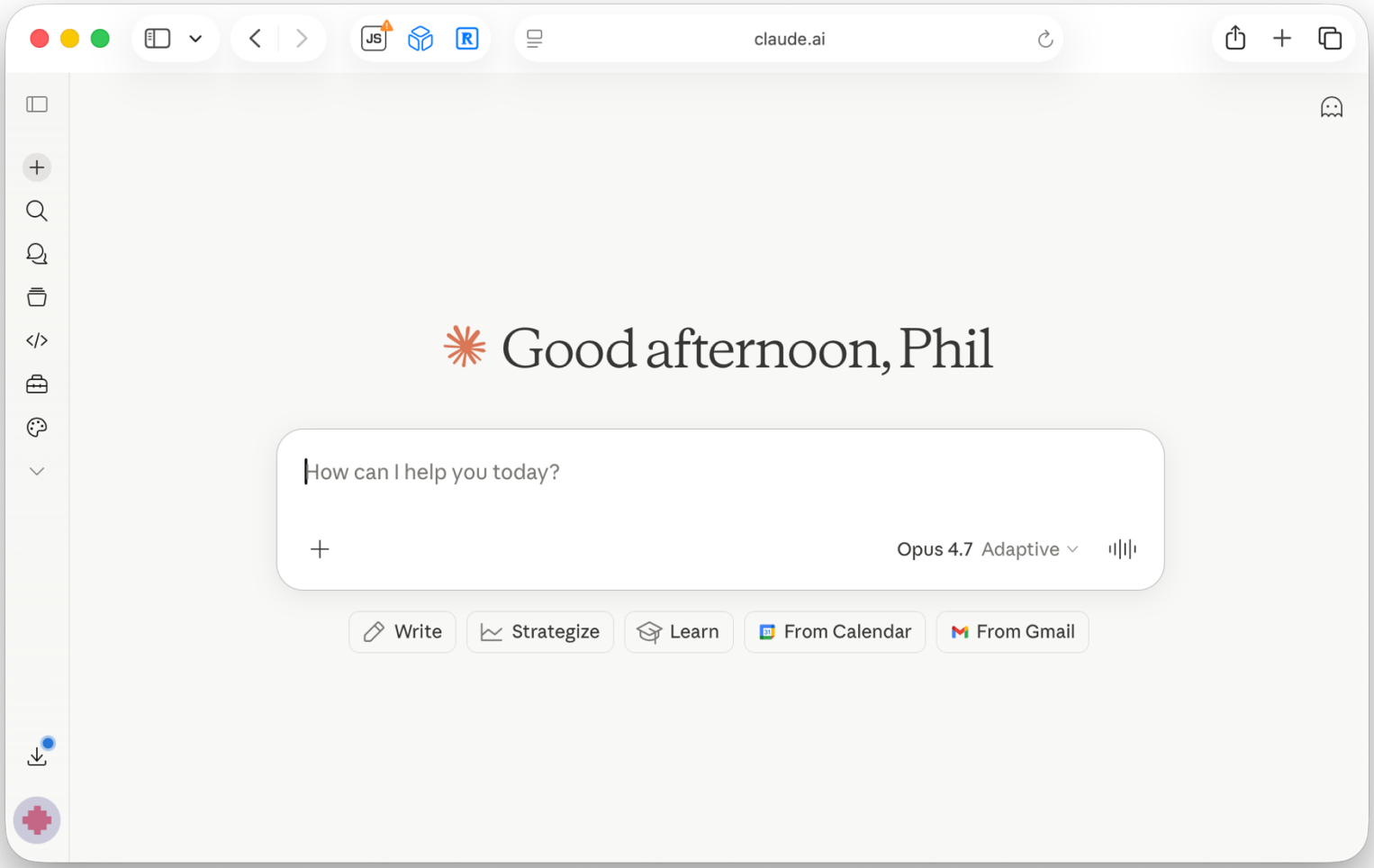
1. How we ended up on Figma Island
2. Designers can work in code again
3. A side project is the best way to learn
4. Five tips for working in code with AI
5. Closing thoughts

This can be overwhelming...



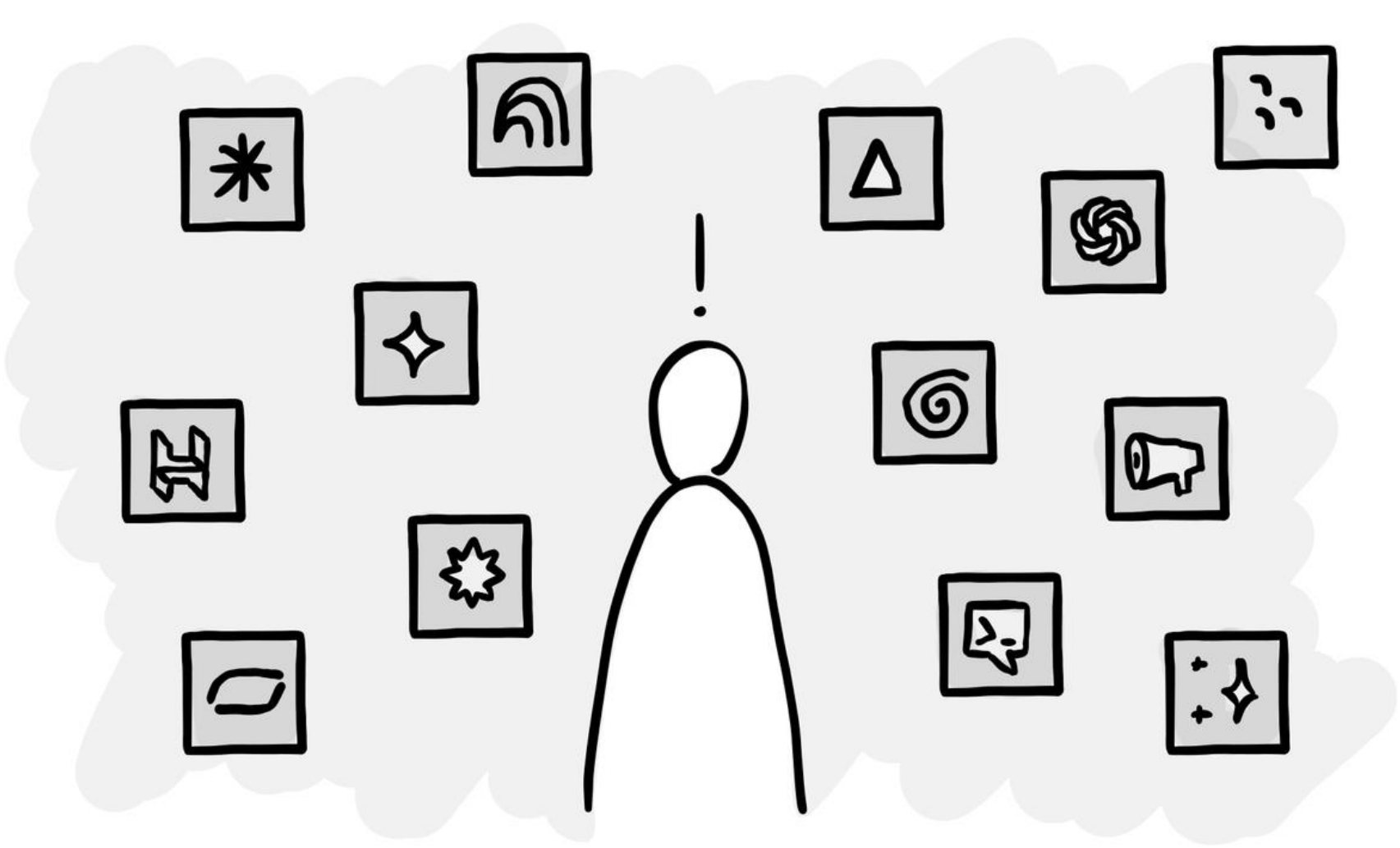
AI is the personal tutor and the safety net



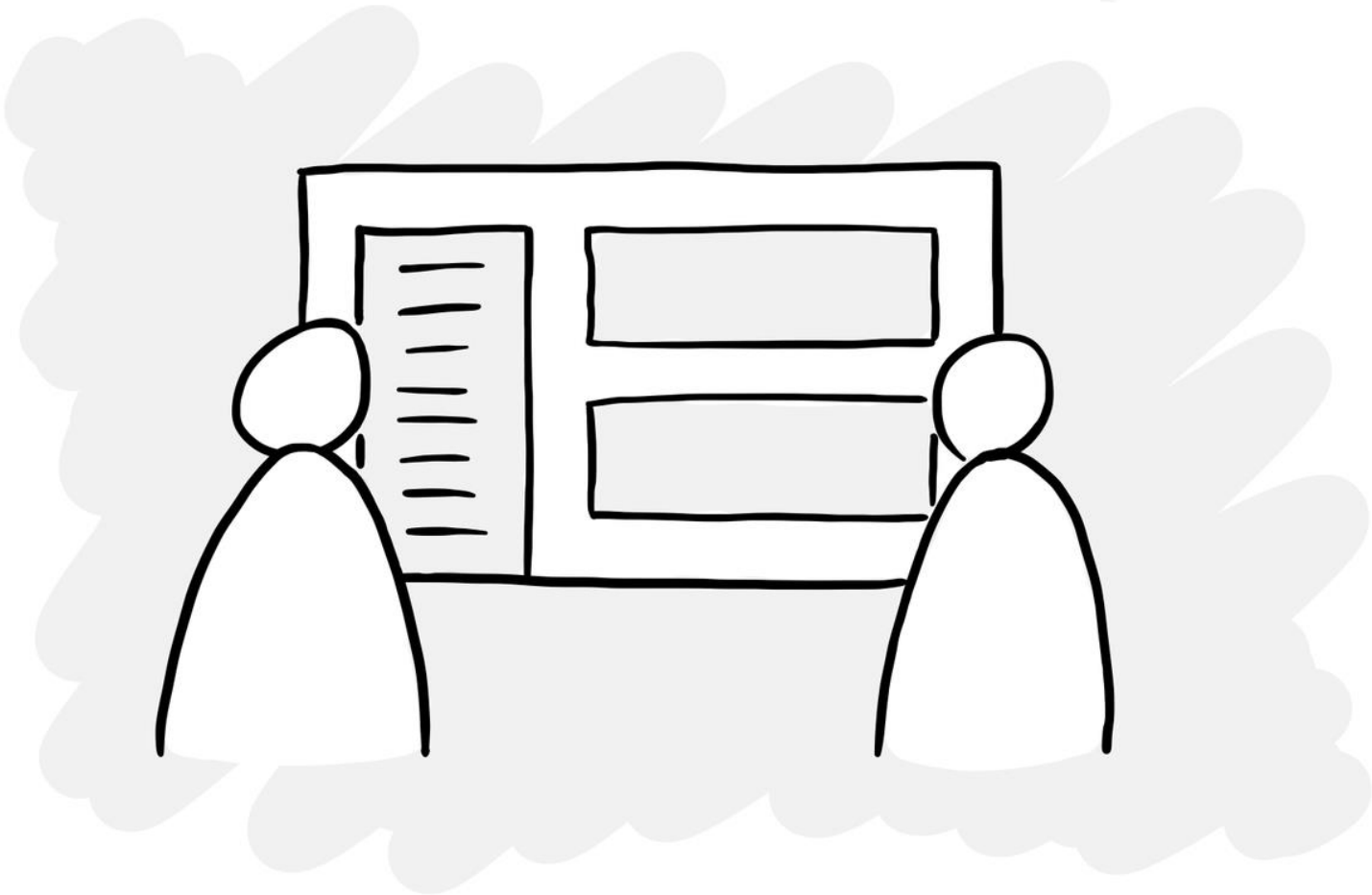
Most people are still watching from the sidelines



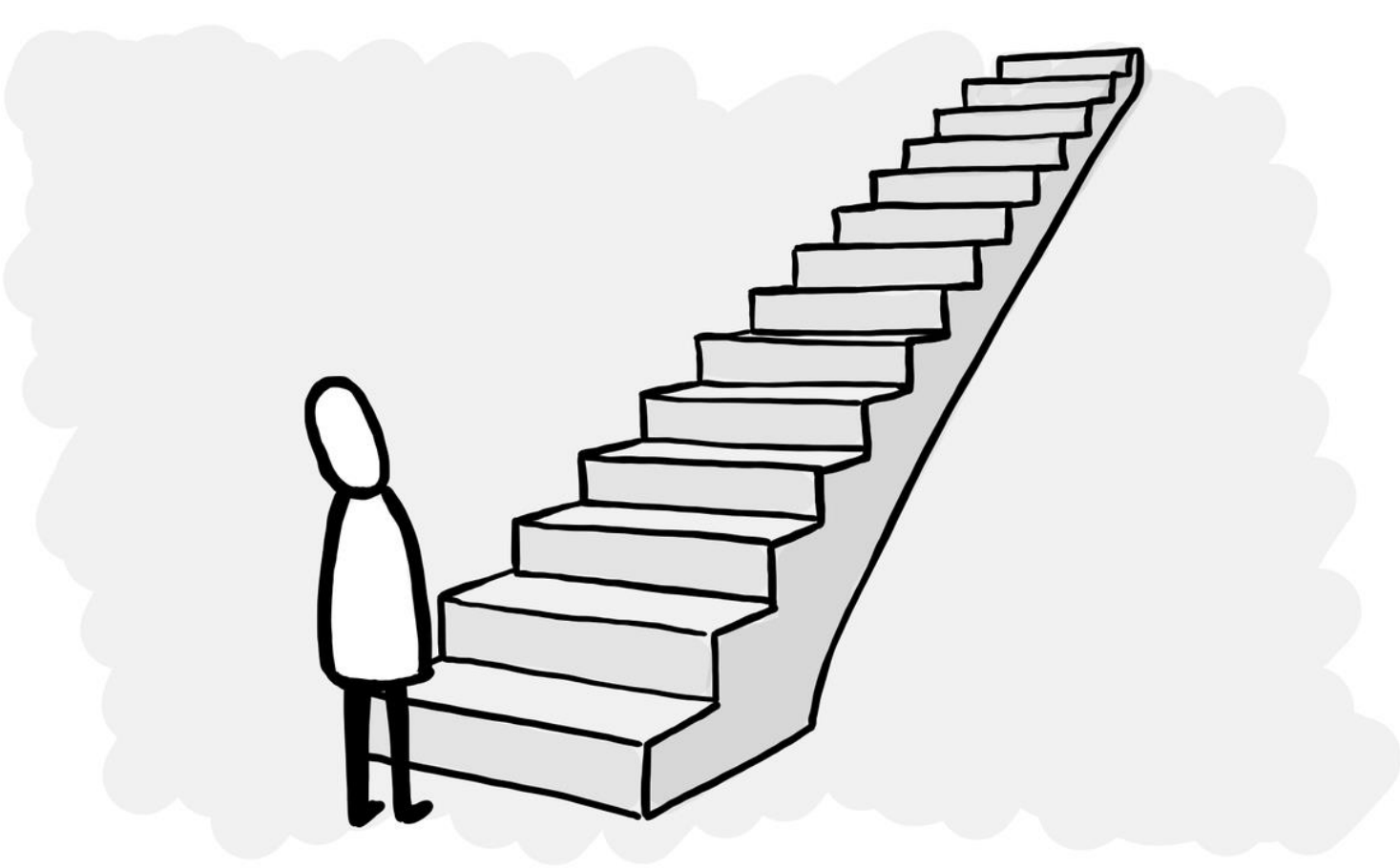
No-one has it figured out yet

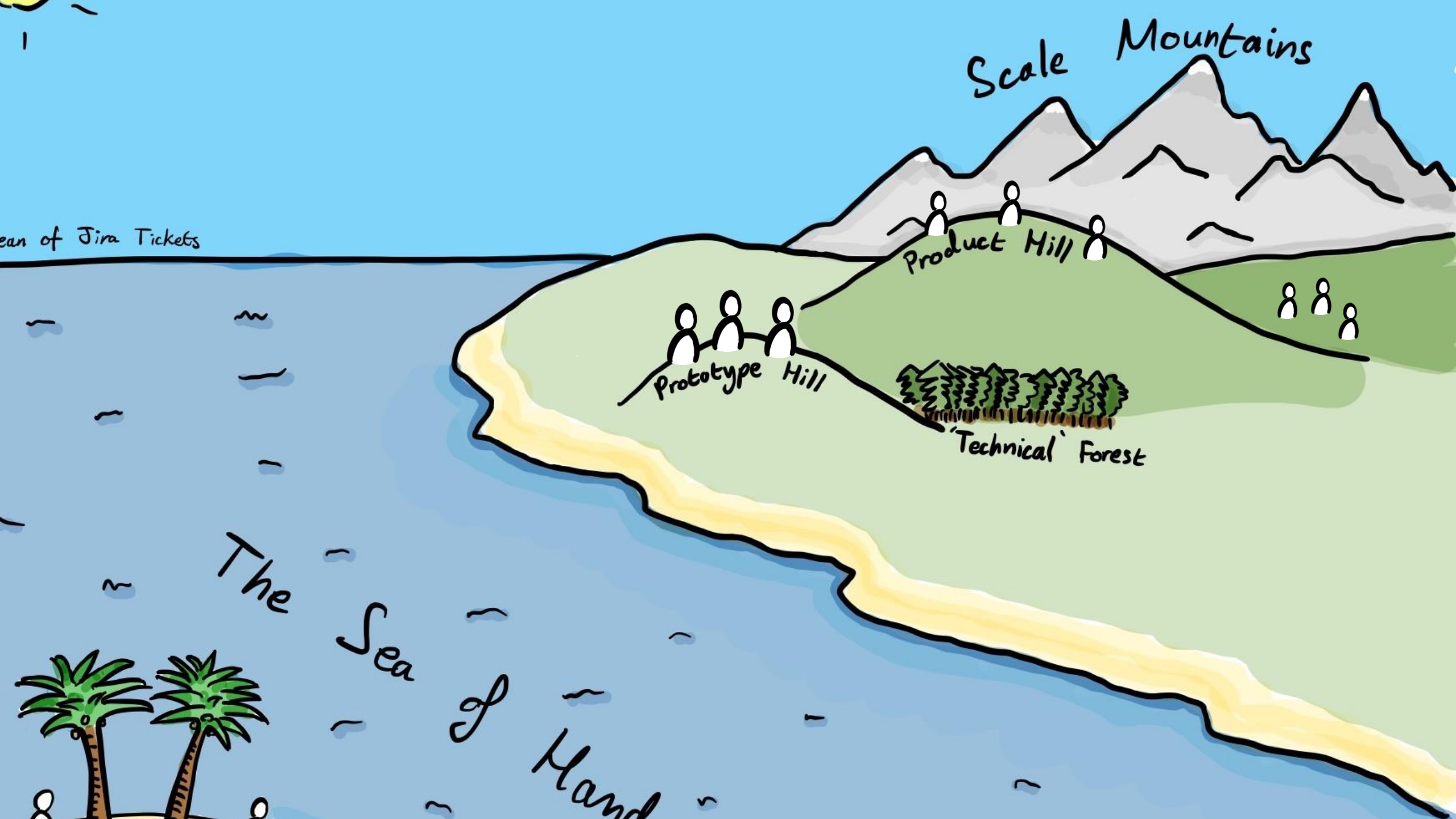


But we know current tools, methods and skills will need to change



Make progress despite the uncertainty, one step at a time

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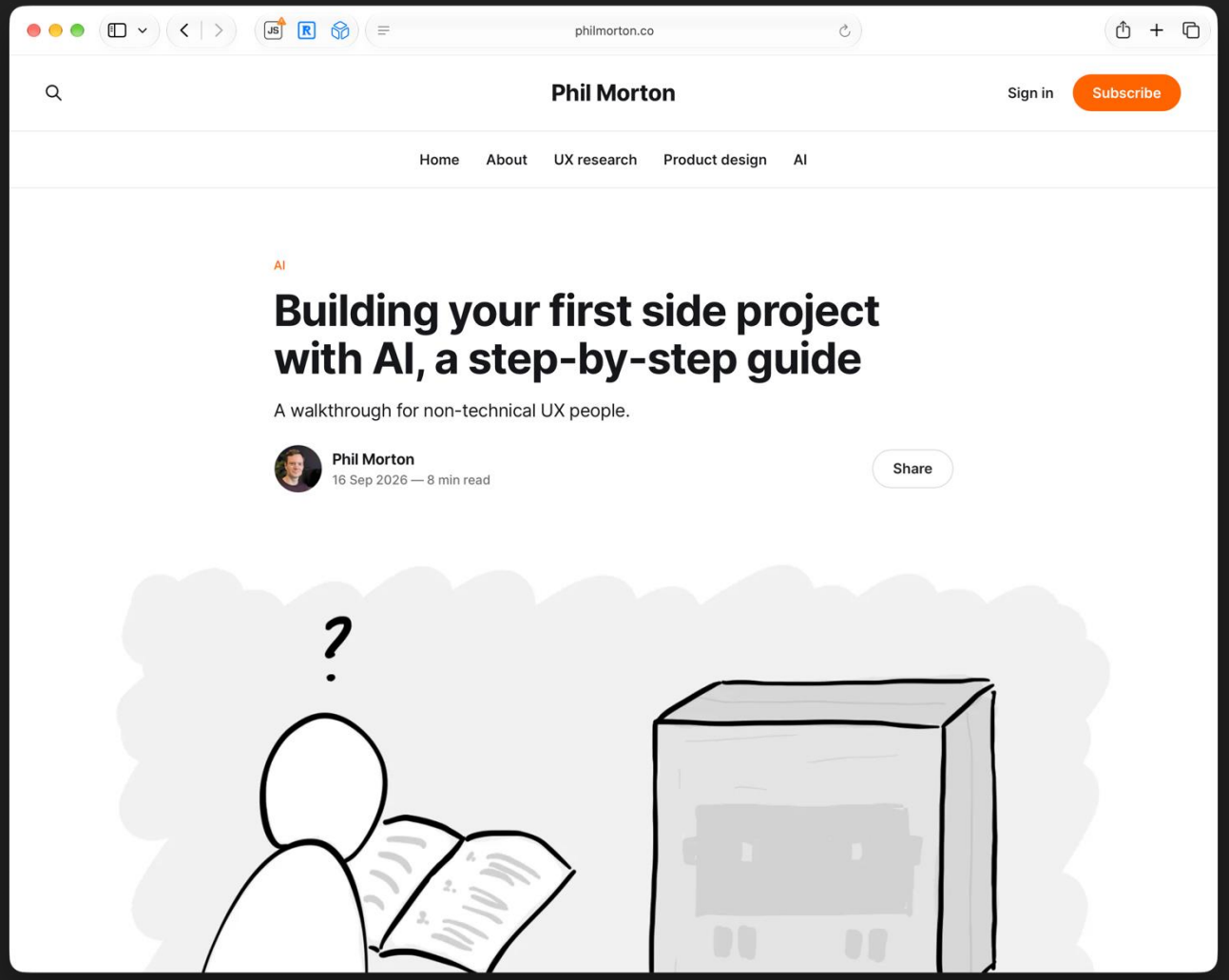
Thank you.



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