Designing an app for the purchase and reading of serialized fiction stories on a smartphone
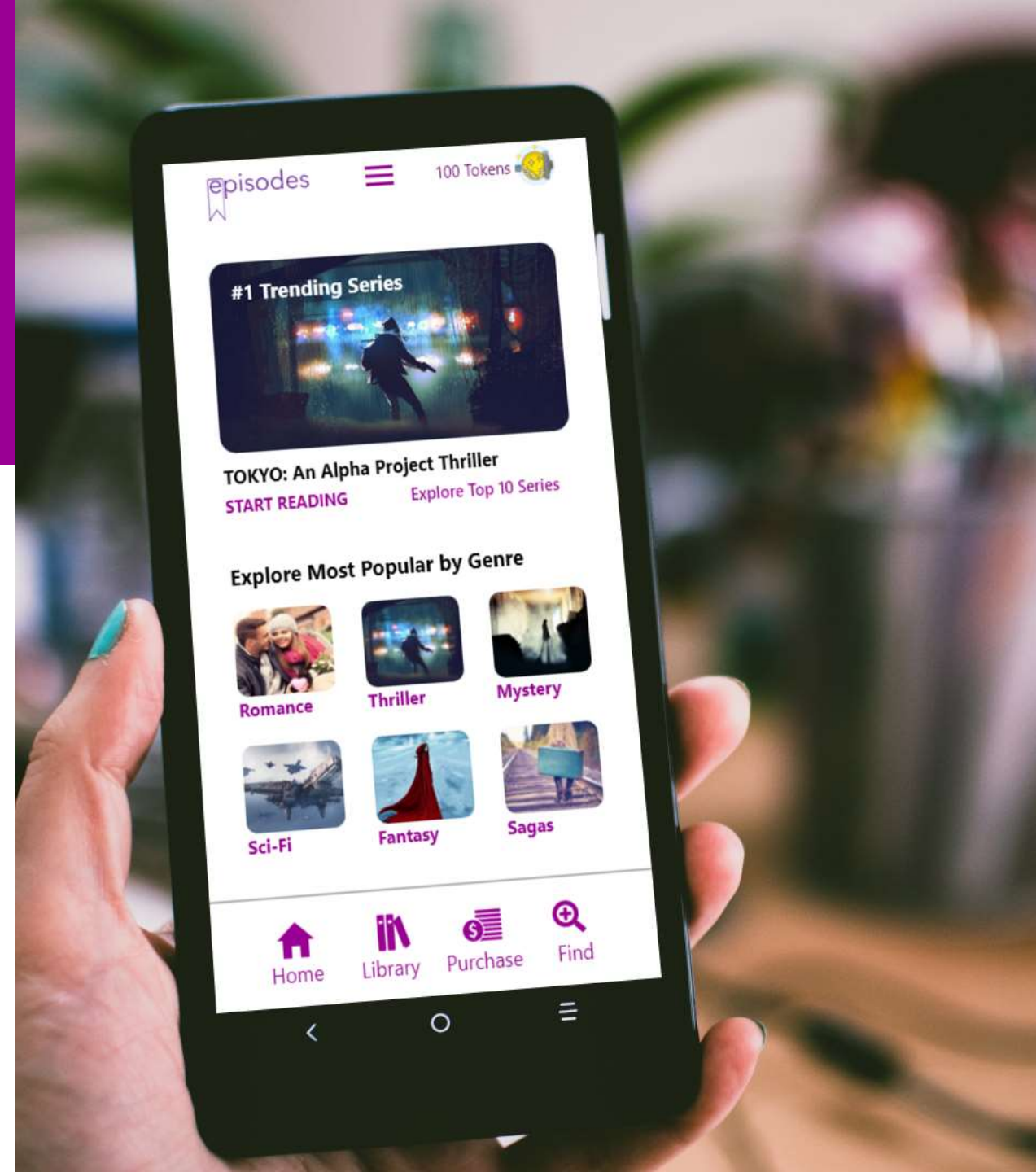
COMPANY: Wheelhouse Publishers

PROJECT SUMMARY

Serialized fiction has a long tradition going back to Charles Dickens and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Today, there is a rapidly growing market for serialized genre fiction read on smartphones by the Snapchat generation, and Wheelhouse Publishers (my independent publishing company) wanted to create a mobile app to attract readership of that key demographic.

ROLE

User Experience Designer | User Interface Designer | Usability Testing

Younger generations favor **reading serialized genre fiction on** their **smartphones**, and Wheelhouse Publishers (my independent publishing company) wanted to **develop** a **mobile app** for **selling serialized genre fiction episodes** to attract readers of that key demographic.
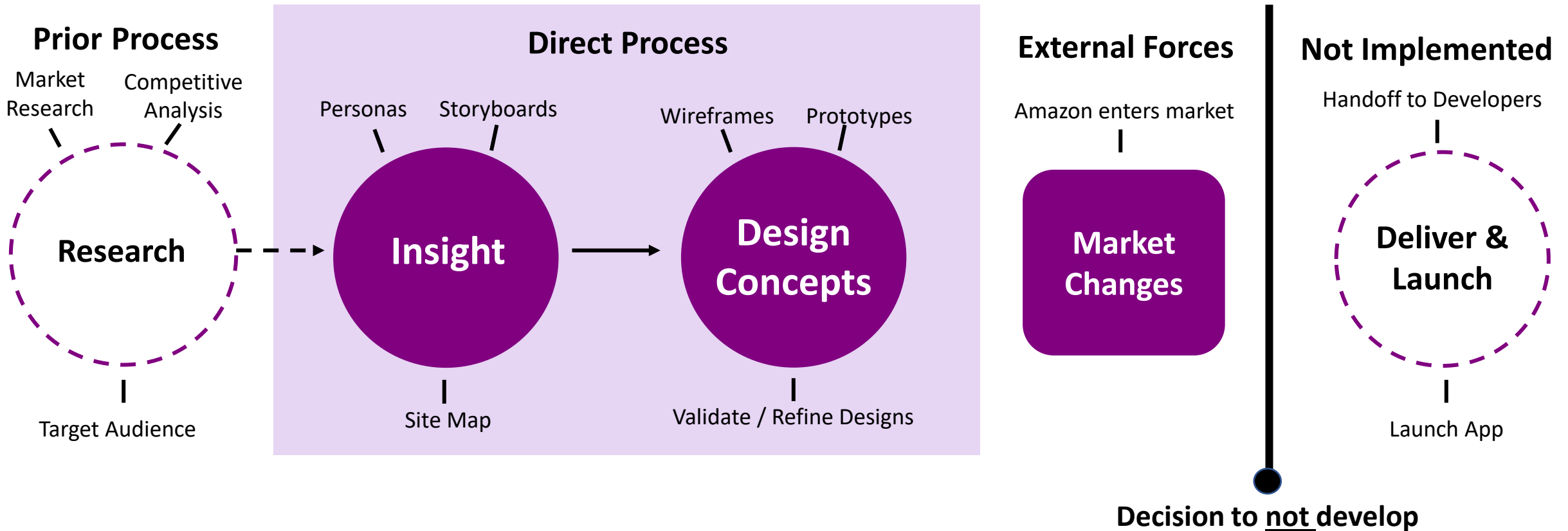
OUTCOME

Designed a **mobile app** so **readers** can:

1. **Quickly discover serialized genre fiction** and

2. **Easily unlock paid episodes**, . . . all from their smartphone.
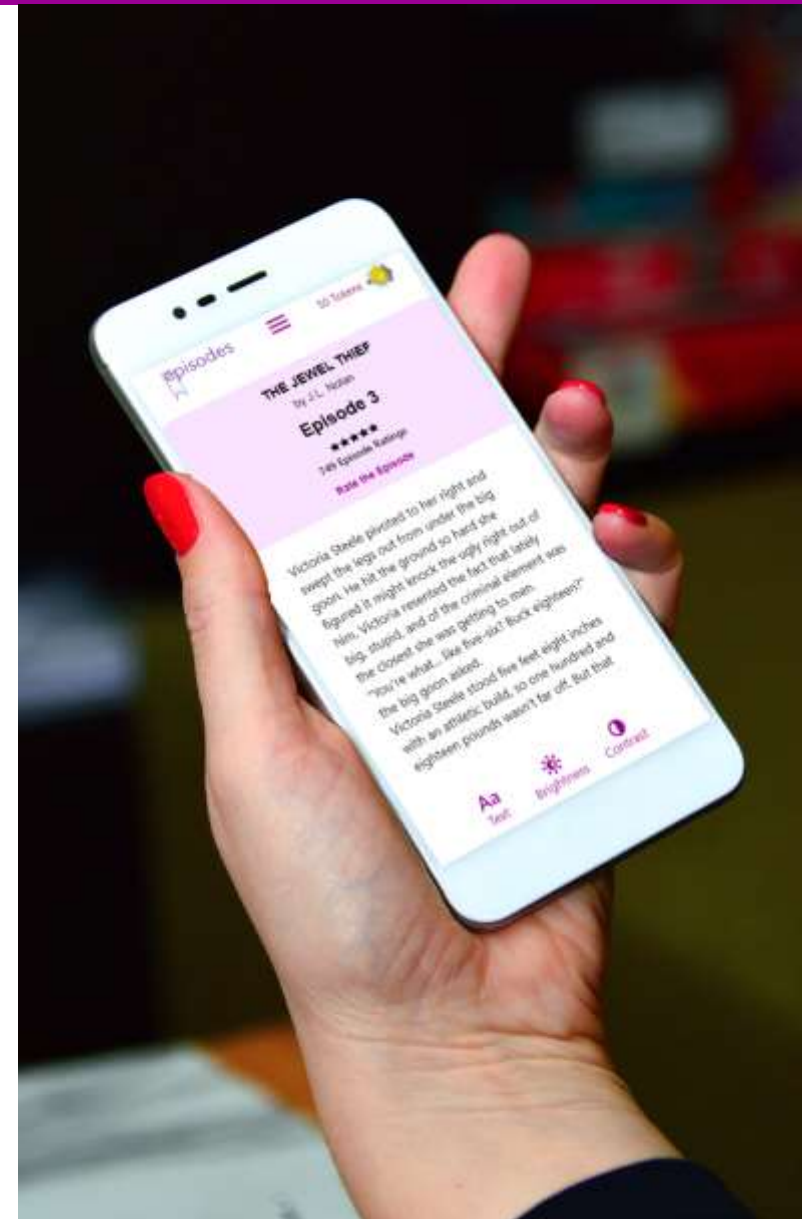
My process took me **from creating personas through user testing and design revisions.** Ultimately, the **entry of Amazon** into the market resulted in a **decision** to **not develop** the app.

Prior Process

Market Research

Competitive Analysis

Research

Target Audience

Direct Process

Personas

Storyboards

Insight

Site Map

Wireframes

Prototypes

Design Concepts

Validate / Refine Designs

External Forces

Amazon enters market

Market Changes

Not Implemented

Handoff to Developers

Deliver & Launch

Launch App

Decision to not develop

From prior market research, competitive analysis, and target audience insights, I developed the **personas** of **Naomi**, **Rachel**, and **Andrew** to **empathize** with the **primary ways younger readers discover** and **read serialized** genre **fiction**.

Naomi
Age 28
Attorney
New York, NY

Naomi is a regular *Episodes* reader and gets a notification that the next episode of the series she is reading is now available.

Rachel
Age 24
Nurse
Raleigh, NC

Rachel is a returning user who browses the most popular romances to find a new series to start reading.
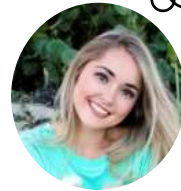
Andrew
Age 21
College Student
Los Angeles, CA

Andrew is a new user who decides to start the thriller that is the top trending series in the *Episodes* app.

Storyboarding allowed me to think through **realistic scenarios** for **how Naomi**, **Rachel**, and **Andrew** would **use** the **app** to **discover** and **read episodes**.

I love reading an episode on my train ride to and from work.

Reading an episode or two on my lunch break is such a fun escape.

I like reading short fiction as a break from my college classes and studying.

Naomi

Naomi is a regular *Episodes* reader and gets a notification that

the next episode of the series she is reading is now available.

1 **Receives New Episode Alert**

A new episode has been released. I have a 20-minute train ride to work, so it is perfect timing.

Naomi taps the link in the

push notification message.

2 **Unlocks Episode**

I read Episode 2 last week and looking forward to this episode.

Naomi unlocks the episode

with tokens in her account.

3 **Reads the Episode**

What a great story! I can't wait for another episode next week.

Naomi reads the episode.

Rachel

Rachel is a returning user who browses the most popular romance genre to find a new series to start reading.

1 **Opens the App on Phone**

I like a quick escape during lunch. A sweet romance story is a nice distraction.

Rachel grabs her cell phone and opens the Episodes app.

2 **Browses Trending Romance Stories**

Let me see what romances are trending right now.

She taps the Romance icon under Most Popular by Genre on the home screen.
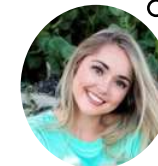
3 **Selects Series to Read**

Kiss the Quarterback looks exactly like the escape I want.

Rachel taps the image to go to the episodes list for the series.

4 **Opens the First Episode**

The first episode looks like a fun read. Just what I want today.

She taps the link to read the first episode in the series.

Andrew

Andrew is a new user who decides to start the thriller that is the top trending series in the *Episodes* app.

1 Creates Account

Episodes looks perfect for thriller stories I can read in under 20 minutes.

Andrew sees *Episodes* on Instagram and decides to download the app and create an account.

2 Sees Trending Thriller on Home Screen

Awesome, the top trending series is a thriller. I'm going to start that series.

From the home screen, Andrew taps the Start Reading link for the thriller that is the top trending series.

3 Selects Episode to Read

Cool, the first episode of every series is free.

He starts reading the first episode of the thriller series.
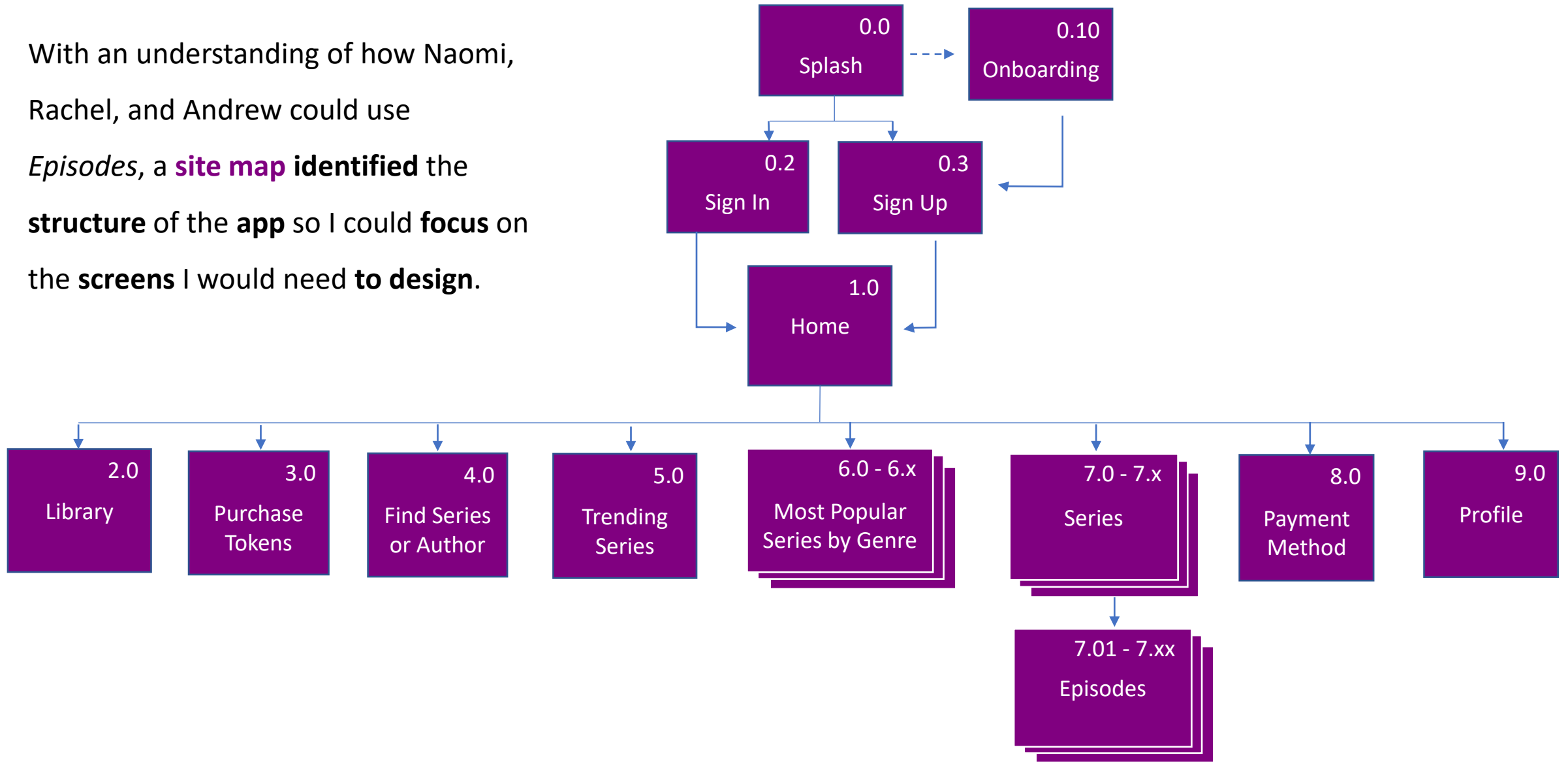
4 Purchases Tokens

What a great story. I'm going to purchase tokens so I can read more.

Andrew purchases tokens so he can unlock more episodes in the series.

With an understanding of how Naomi, Rachel, and Andrew could use *Episodes*, a **site map** **identified** the **structure** of the **app** so I could **focus** on the **screens** I would need **to design**.

| 0.0 Splash |
| 0.10 Onboarding |
| 0.2 Sign In |
| 0.3 Sign Up |
| 1.0 Home |
| 2.0 Library |
| 3.0 Purchase Tokens |
| 4.0 Find Series or Author |
| 5.0 Trending Series |
| 6.0 - 6.x Most Popular Series by Genre |
| 7.0 - 7.x Series |
| 8.0 Payment Method |
| 9.0 Profile |
| 7.01 - 7.xx Episodes |

# DESIGN CONCEPTS: SKETCHING LOW-FIDELITY WIREFRAMES

Taking pencil to paper, I **sketched low-fidelity wireframes** to **begin thinking about screen designs** for Naomi, Rachel, and Andrew to access and read stories.

1 Home screen lets Naomi, Rachel, and Andrew access the most popular series and top series by genre to quickly find what is trending.

2 Top 10 series shows trends updated every hour.

3 Rachel likes to get top romance series, so she has the option to browse by genre.

1 Home screen
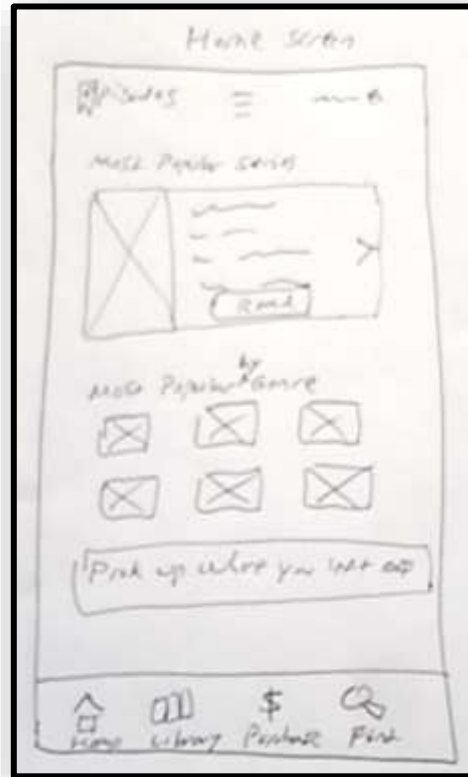
2 Top 10 Series

3 Browse by Genres
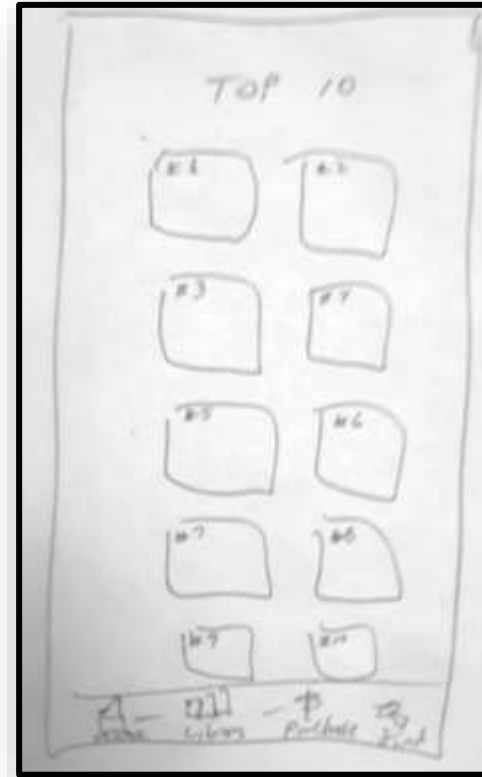
1 Series screen

2 Episode screen
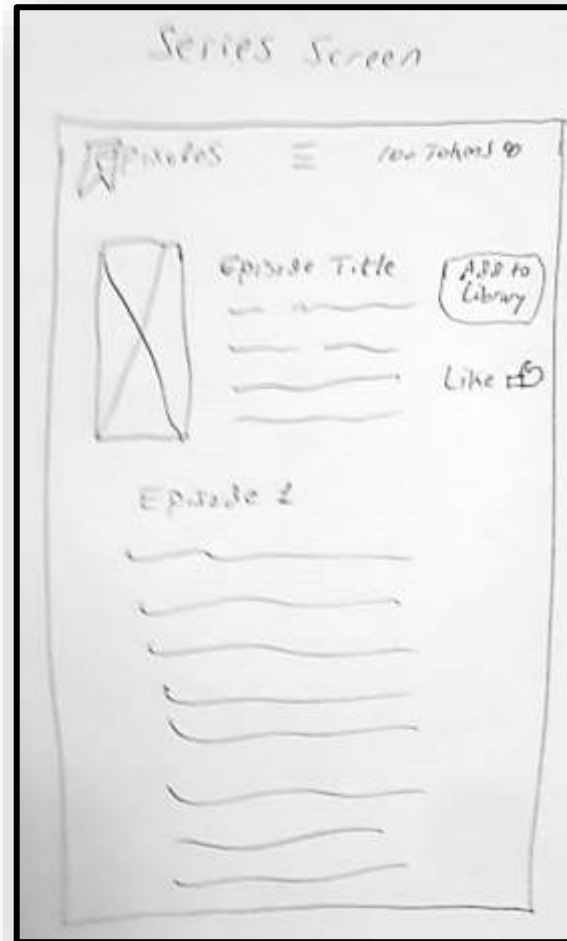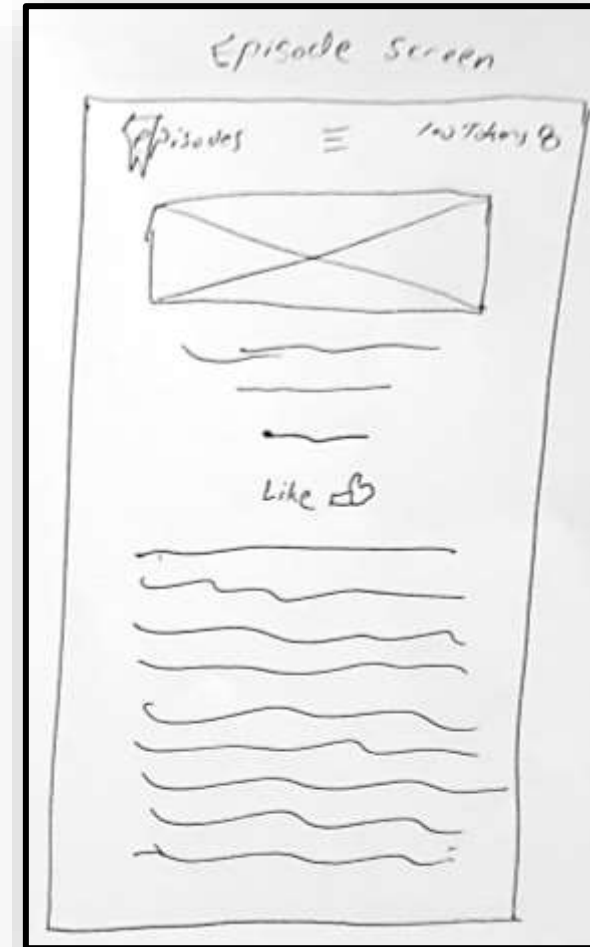
1 Naomi, Rachel, and Andrew can find a list of all the episodes released in a series, add the series to their library, and vote a "Like" for the series for social proof.

2 Episode screens lets Naomi, Rachel, and Andrew read an episode. In addition to series likes, they can also "Like" an episode.

While sketching helped me think about the design features needed, I created **mid-fidelity wireframes** to **add feature details to** the **screens** so Naomi, Rachel, and Andrew can intuitively and efficiently **navigate** the **app** to **read episodes**.

Naomi receives an episode release alert and taps the Read episode button

Naomi unlocks the episode, using 50 tokens from her account balance.

Naomi reads the episode, scrolling down the screen for more of the story.

Naomi now has 50 tokens remaining in her account.
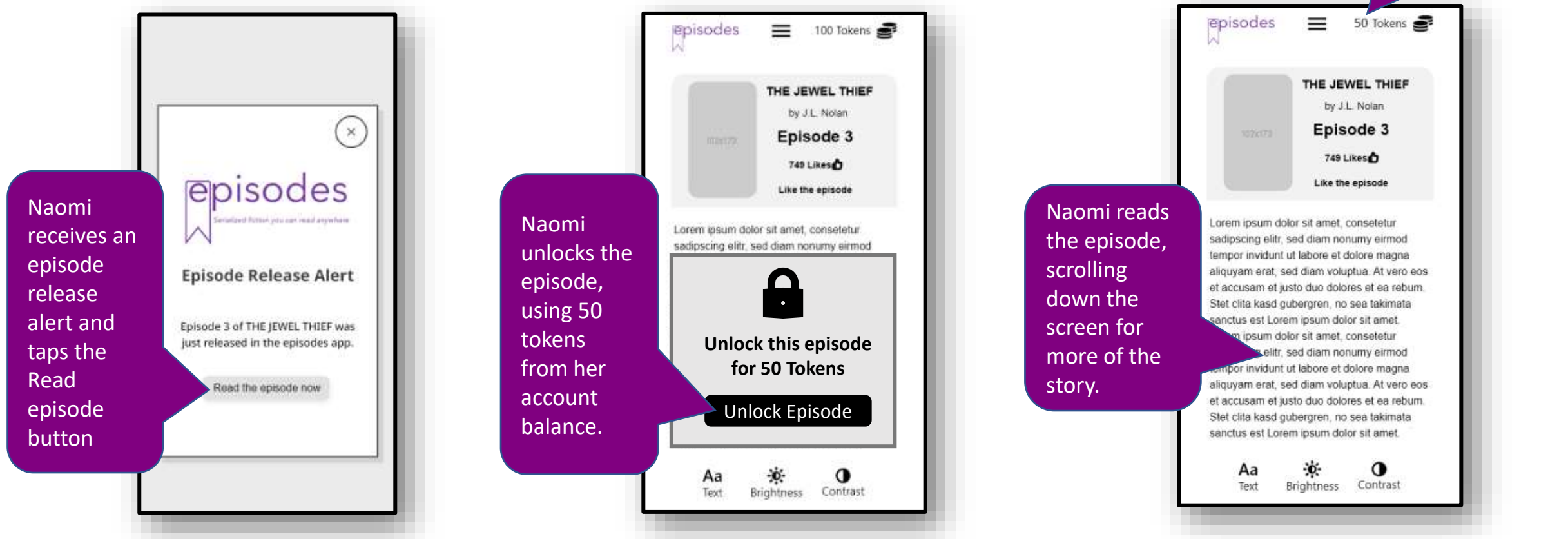
DESIGN CONCEPTS: MID-FIDELITY WIREFRAMES

From the Home screen, Rachel taps the Romance icon under Explore Most Popular by Genre.
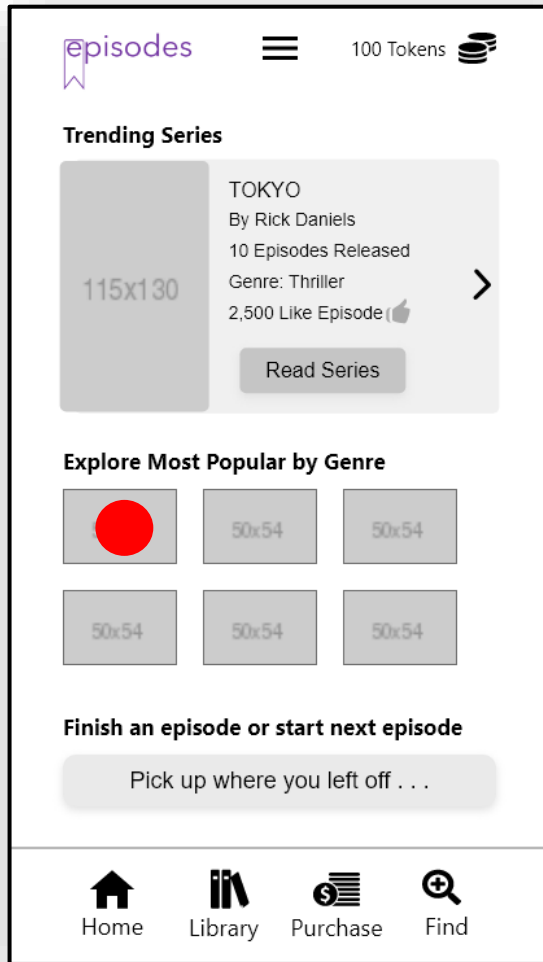
Rachel selects Kiss the Quarterback, the series she is interested in reading.

Rachel taps on the Read Episode for FREE link.

Rachel reads the episode and has found a new series to read. She votes "Like" for the episode.

Screen 1

episodes   100 Tokens

Trending Series

TOKYO
By Rick Daniels
10 Episodes Released
Genre: Thriller
2,500 Like Episode

Read Series

Explore Most Popular by Genre

50x54   50x54

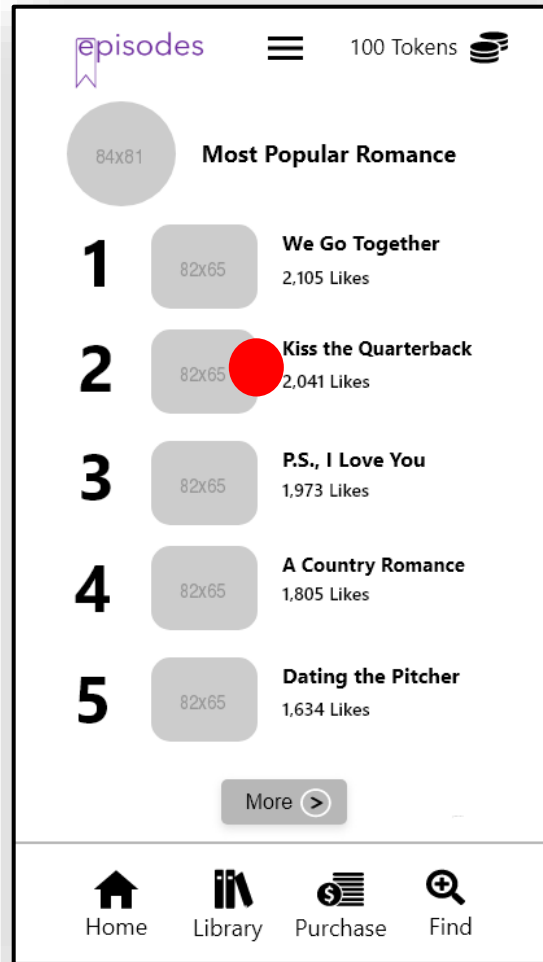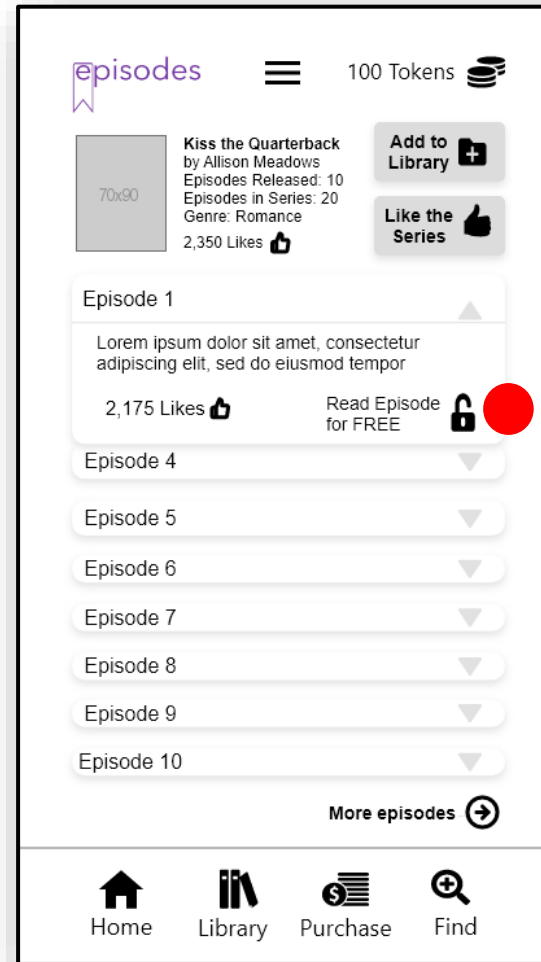50x54   50x54   50x54

Finish an episode or start next episode

Pick up where you left off . . .

Home   Library   Purchase   Find

Screen 2

episodes   100 Tokens

84x81   **Most Popular Romance**

1   82x65   **We Go Together**
2,105 Likes

2   82x65   **Kiss the Quarterback**
2,041 Likes

3   82x65   **P.S., I Love You**
1,973 Likes

4   82x65   **A Country Romance**
1,805 Likes

5   82x65   **Dating the Pitcher**
1,634 Likes

More

Home   Library   Purchase   Find

Screen 3

episodes   100 Tokens

70x90   **Kiss the Quarterback**
by Allison Meadows
Episodes Released: 10
Episodes in Series: 20
Genre: Romance
2,350 Likes

Add to Library

Like the Series

Episode 1
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor

2,175 Likes   Read Episode for FREE

Episode 4
Episode 5
Episode 6
Episode 7
Episode 8
Episode 9
Episode 10

More episodes

Home   Library   Purchase   Find

Screen 4

episodes   100 Tokens

KISS THE QUARTERBACK
by Allison Meadows
Episode 1

Like the Episode

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut labore et dolore magna aliquyam erat, sed diam voluptua. At vero eos et accusam et justo duo et ea rebum. Stet clita kasd gubergren, no sea takimata sanctus est Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut labore et dolore magna aliquyam erat, sed diam voluptua. At vero eos et accusam et justo duo et ea rebum. Stet clita kasd gubergren, no sea takimata sanctus est Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut

Aa   Text   Brightness   Contrast

DESIGN CONCEPTS: MID-FIDELITY WIREFRAMES

Andrew creates an account using Google.

Andrew wants to try out the app, so he skips adding more account details for now.

From the Home screen, Andrew taps button to read the top trending thriller series.

Andrew can read Episode 1 for free, so he clicks the link to open the episode.

Screen 1: Sign Up

episodes

Sign Up

Already an user?   Sign In

First Name

Last Name

Username or email

Password

Sign Up

Or Sign In With

Screen 2: Complete Your Account Set Up

episodes   ☰   0 Tokens

Complete Your Account Set Up

Upload Profile Photo

77x72   Upload Photo

Add Payment Method

77x72   Add Payment Method

Set New Release Alerts

77x72   Set New Release Alerts

Skip for now

Home   Library   Purchase   Find

Screen 3: Trending Series

episodes   ☰   0 Tokens

Trending Series

115x130

TOKYO
By Rick Daniels
10 Episodes Released
Genre: Thriller
2,500 Like Episode 👍

Read Series

Explore Most Popular by Genre

50x54   50x54   50x54

50x54   50x54   50x54

Finish an episode or start next episode

Pick up where you left off . . .

Home   Library   Purchase   Find

Screen 4: Tokyo Series

episodes   ☰   0 Tokens

Tokyo
by Rick Daniels
Episodes Released: 10
Episodes in Series: 15
Genre: Thriller
3,100 Likes 👍

Add to Library

Like the Series 👍

Episode 1

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor

2,175 Likes 👍   Read Episode for FREE 🔓

Episode 4

Episode 5

Episode 6

Episode 7

Episode 8

Episode 9

Episode 10

More episodes →
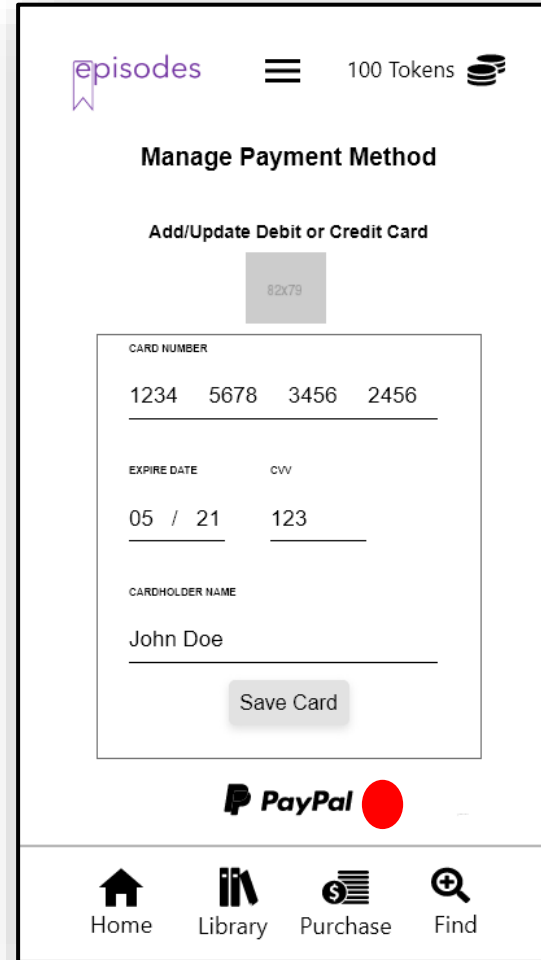
Home   Library   Purchase   Find

Andrew reads the episode and wants to purchase tokens so he can read more episodes.
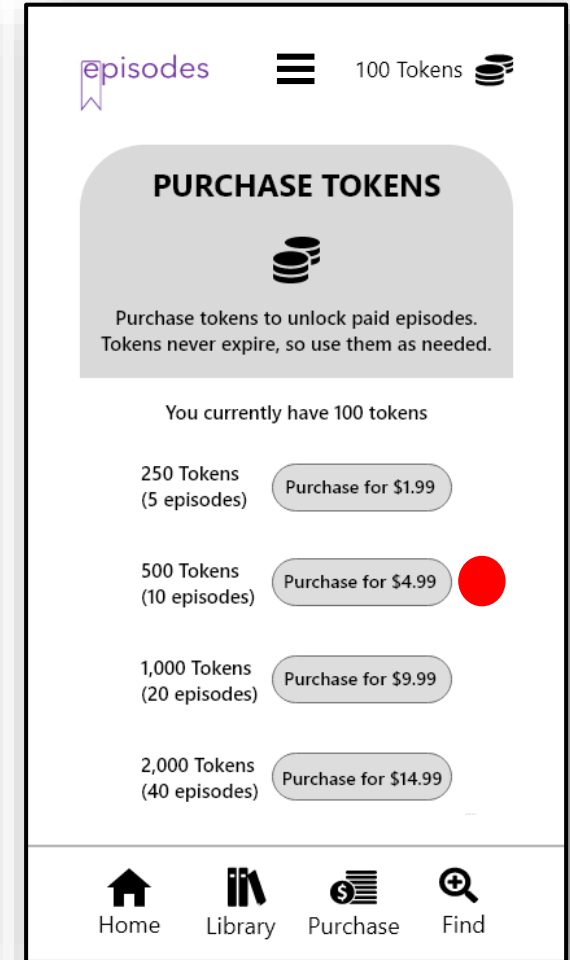
Andrew opens the hamburger menu and selects Payment Method.
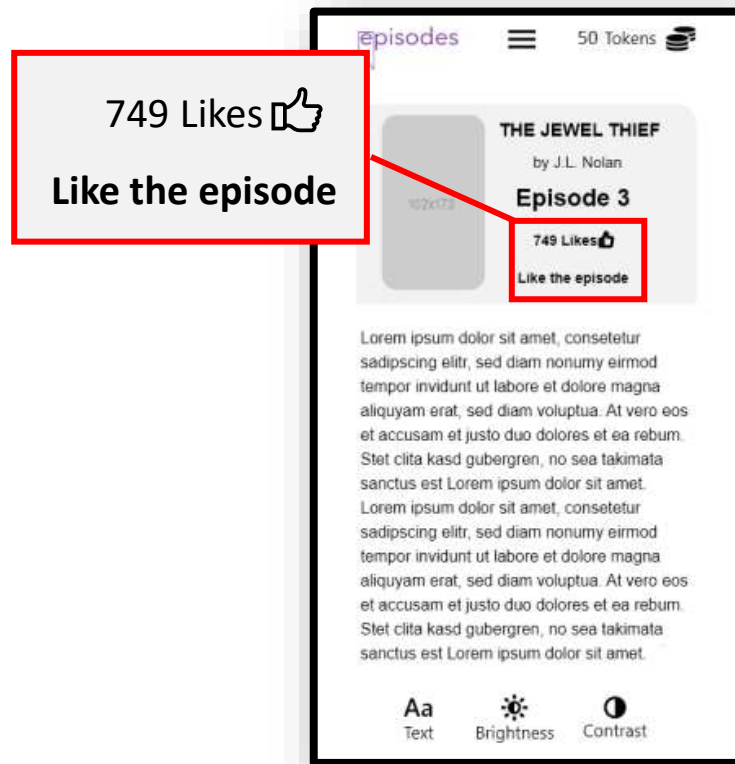
Andrew selects PayPal for his payment method.

Andrew is automatically taken to the purchase screen where he purchases 500 tokens.

Screen 1 — Episode reader

episodes — 0 Tokens

TOKYO
by Rick Daniels
Episode 1

Like the Episode 👍

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut labore et dolore magna aliquyam erat, sed diam voluptua. At vero eos et accusam et justo duo et ea rebum. Stet clita kasd gubergren, no sea takimata sanctus est Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut labore et dolore magna aliquyam erat, sed diam voluptua. At vero eos et accusam et justo duo et ea rebum. Stet clita kasd gubergren, no sea takimata sanctus est Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut

Aa Text — Brightness — Contrast

Screen 2 — Hamburger menu

episodes — 100 Tokens

Home
Library
Find
Payment Method
Purchase Tokens
My Profile
Log Out

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut labore et dolore magna aliquyam erat, sed diam voluptua. At vero eos et accusam et justo duo et ea rebum. Stet clita kasd gubergren, no sea takimata sanctus est Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut labore et dolore magna aliquyam erat, sed diam voluptua. At vero eos et accusam et justo duo et ea rebum. Stet clita kasd gubergren, no sea takimata sanctus est Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut

Aa Text — Brightness — Contrast

Screen 3 — Manage Payment Method

episodes — 100 Tokens

Manage Payment Method

Add/Update Debit or Credit Card

82x79

CARD NUMBER

1234   5678   3456   2456

EXPIRE DATE   CVV

05 / 21   123

CARDHOLDER NAME

John Doe

Save Card

P PayPal

Home   Library   Purchase   Find

Screen 4 — Purchase Tokens

episodes — 100 Tokens

PURCHASE TOKENS

Purchase tokens to unlock paid episodes. Tokens never expire, so use them as needed.

You currently have 100 tokens

250 Tokens (5 episodes)   Purchase for $1.99

500 Tokens (10 episodes)   Purchase for $4.99

1,000 Tokens (20 episodes)   Purchase for $9.99

2,000 Tokens (40 episodes)   Purchase for $14.99

Home   Library   Purchase   Find

Conducting a **usability test** with **5 users** helped me understand **4 out of 5**

users wanted to **see and leave ratings** for stories.

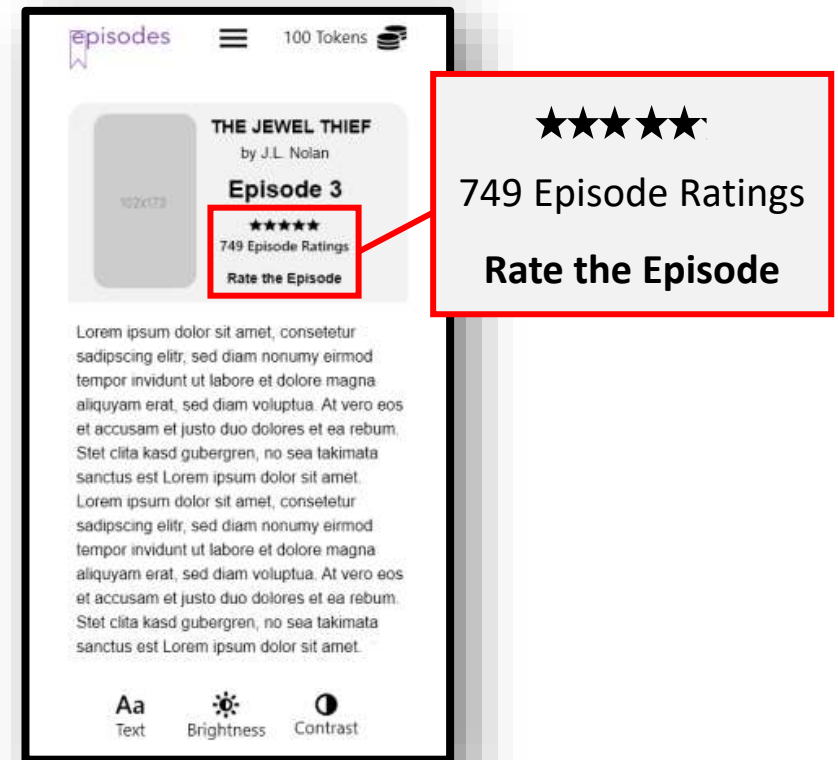Original screen

Revised screen

749 Likes

Like the episode

"I would like to see a ratings score and be able to rate the episode."

User comment

★★★★★

749 Episode Ratings

Rate the Episode

Original screen

Revised screen

1 **3 out of 5 users** found the **slider confusing** and **commented** they would **prefer** to tap to a **"Top 10" list**, similar to the Most Popular by Genre.

2 Another **3 out of 5 users** **wondered** if the **"Pick up where you left off..."** **button was necessary** or needed to be so prominent.
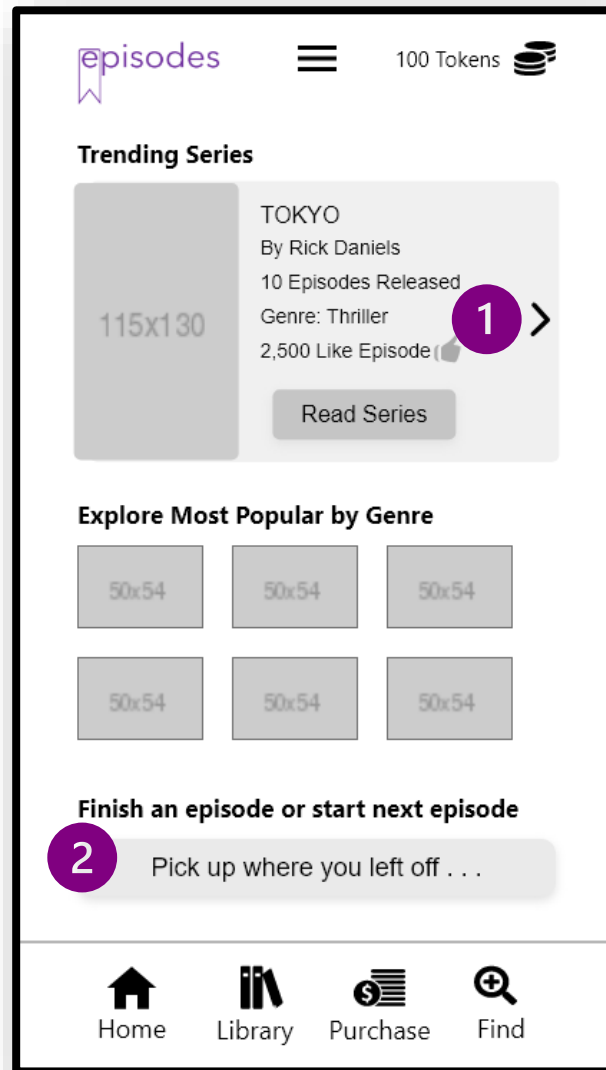
3 I replaced the slider with the #1 trending series.

4 Links let user Start Reading the series or Explore Top 10 Series.

5 I removed the button and created more space for the Genre icons.

Original screen:

episodes ☰ 100 Tokens

Trending Series

115x130

TOKYO
By Rick Daniels
10 Episodes Released
Genre: Thriller
2,500 Like Episode

Read Series

Explore Most Popular by Genre

50x54 50x54 50x54
50x54 50x54 50x54

Finish an episode or start next episode

Pick up where you left off . . .

Home Library Purchase Find

Revised screen:

episodes ☰ 100 Tokens

#1 Trending Series

334x169

TOKYO: An Alpha Project Thriller
START READING   Explore Top 10 Series

Explore Most Popular by Genre

92x74 92x74 92x74
Romance Thriller Mystery

92x74 92x74 92x74
Sci-Fi Fantasy Sagas

Home Library Purchase Find

I conducted an **A/B preference test** with **10 users** to see **how** the design **changes** were **received,** with **80%** of **users selecting** the **revised Home screen design** to provide confidence in the redesign.

Original Home Screen
(Selected by 20% of users)
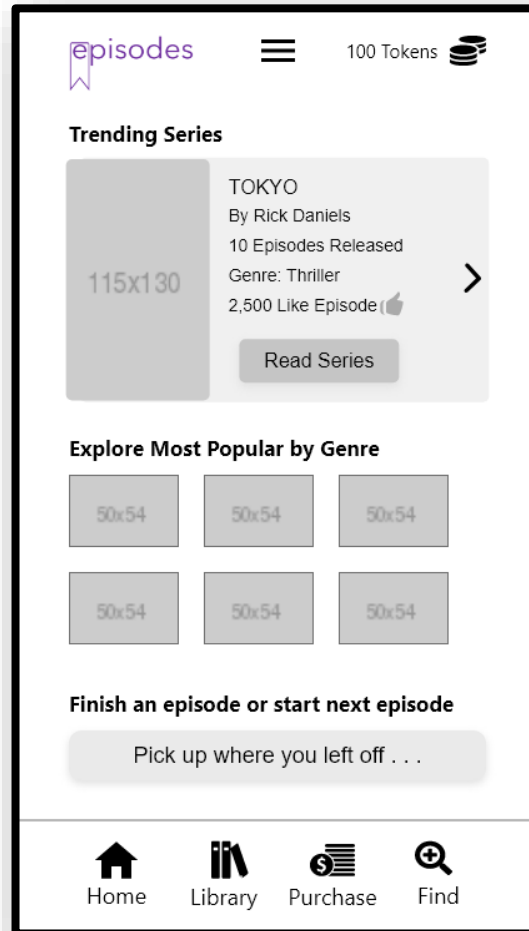
Revised Home Screen
(Selected by 80% of users)
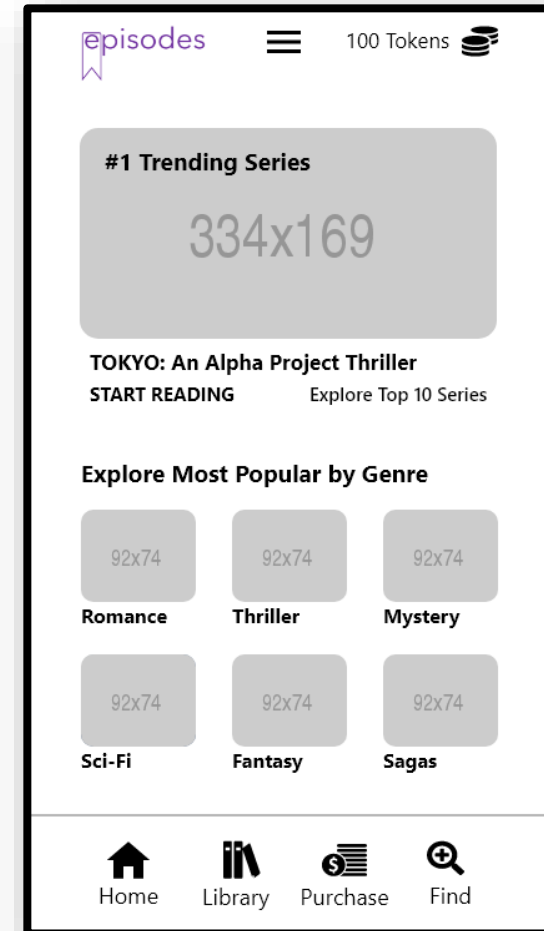
A second **A/B preference test,** with the same **10 users, asked** if they **preferred** the **"Like"** or **ratings** option, with **90%** of **users selecting** the **ratings** redesign.

Original screen with "**Like**" (Selected by 10% of users)

Revised screen with **Ratings** (Selected by 90% of users)
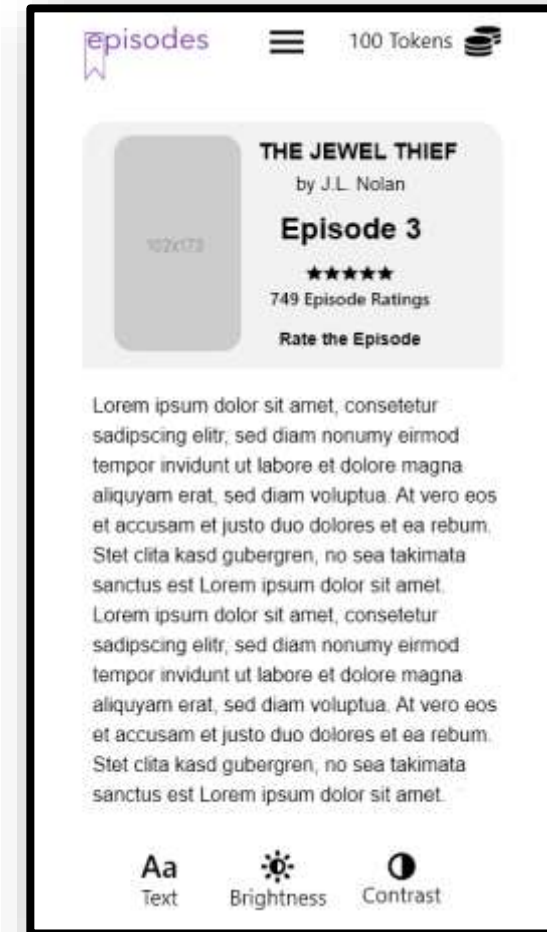
The **visual design** **evolved from** the **earlier iterations** for an accurate **representation** of what the **developed app** would **look like** so Naomi, Rachel, and Andrew could quickly discover serialized genre fiction and easily read episodes from their smartphones.

1 The splash screen greets our users to help establish the brand and what the *Episodes* app is about with the tagline "Serialized fiction you can read anywhere" and displaying the home screen phone image.

2 An introduction screen invites a new user, like Andrew, to view an onboarding tutorial or skip and directly sign up for an account.

As a new user, Andrew can move through the tutorial screens to learn about the app's main features.
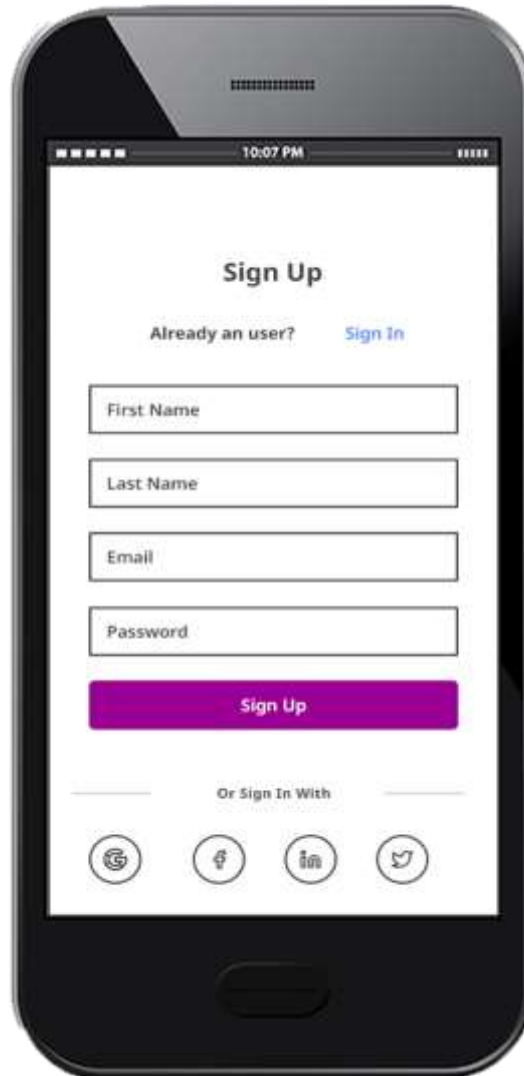
1 Andrew can choose to sign up for an account with his name, email, and a password or use one of the major social media accounts.

2 He can decide whether to upload a profile photo, add a payment method, and set new release alerts. Andrew can also skip the step for now.

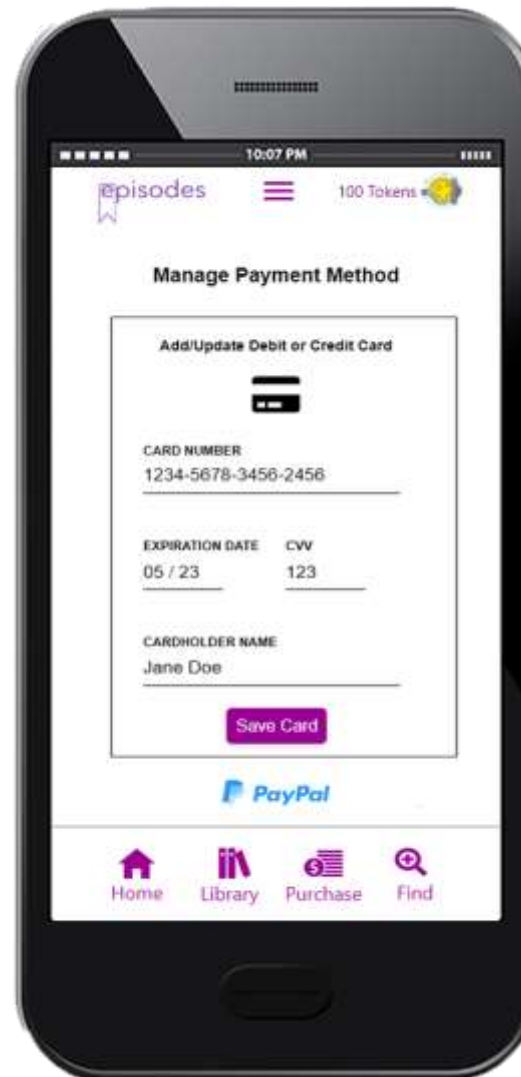**3** Andrew sets a push notification for episode releases for any series he might save to his library.

1 Sign Up

2 Account Options
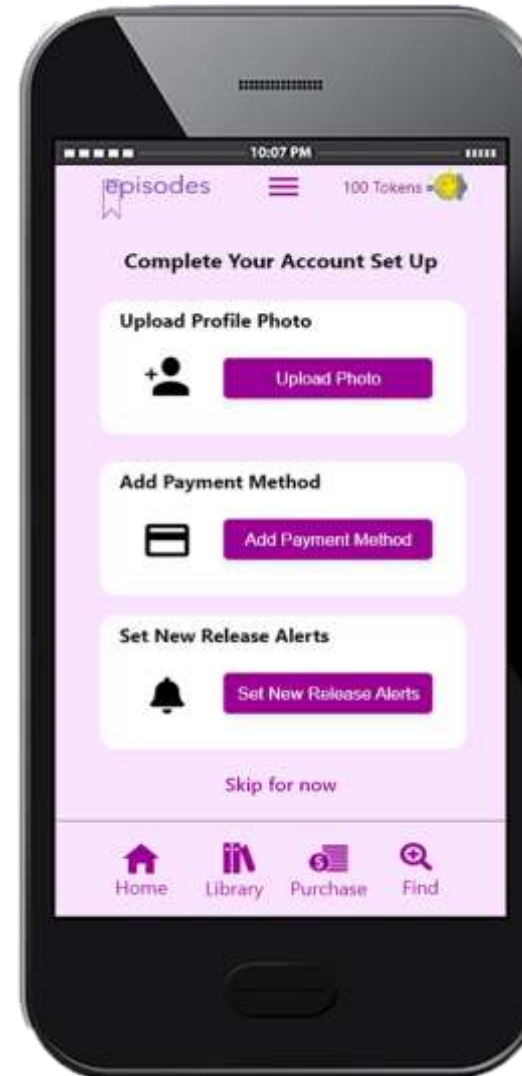
3 Set Release Alerts

1 **Payment Method**
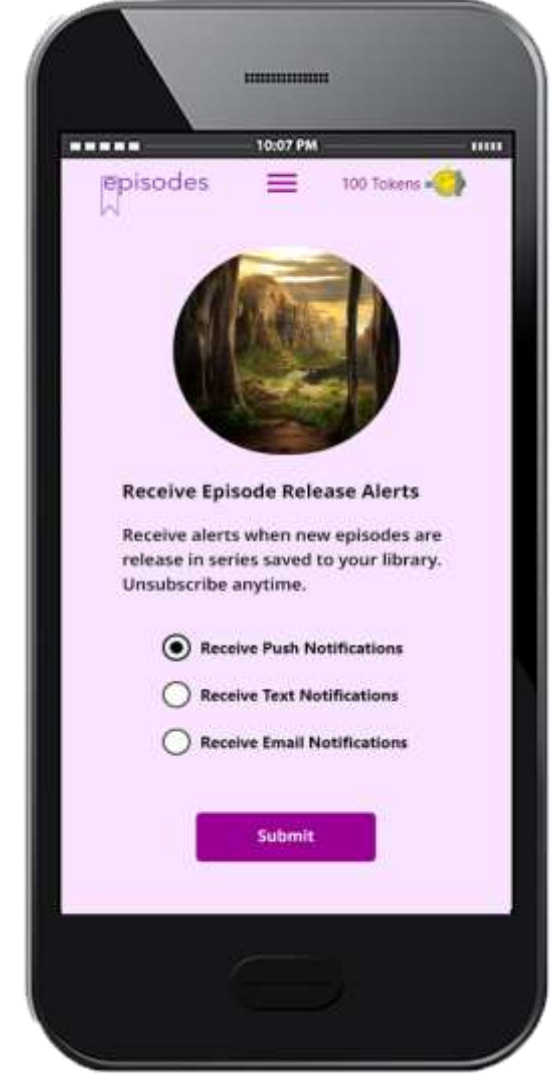
2 **Purchase Tokens**

1 Andrew can add a debit or credit card or connect to a PayPal account so he can purchase tokens to unlock paid episodes.

2 Andrew can purchase tokens in blocks of 250, 500, 1,000, or 2,000 to read from 5 to 40 episodes, giving him control over how much he spends at any given time.

USER EXPERIENCE OF THE VISUAL DESIGN
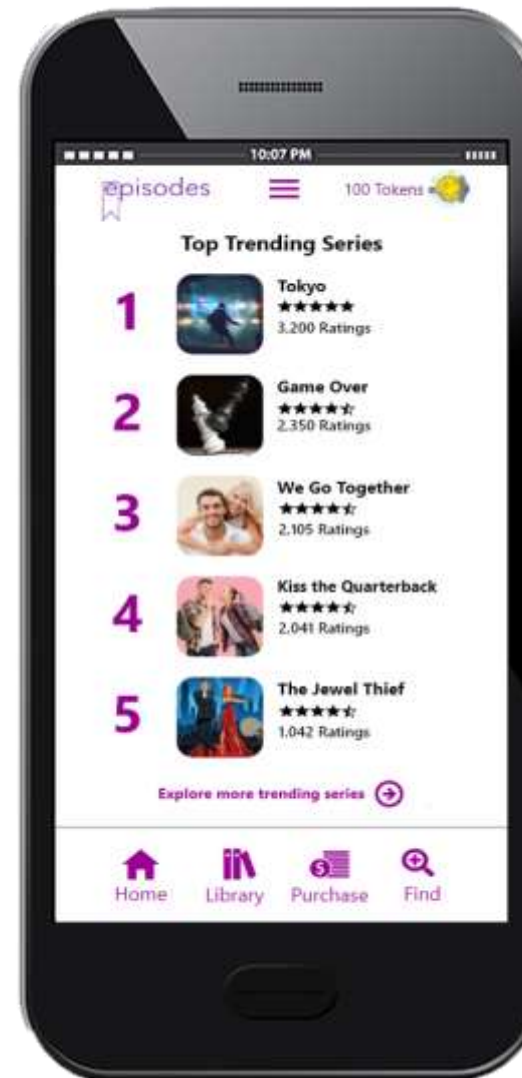
(1) Naomi, Rachel, and Andrew can connect directly to the #1 trending series, view the Top 10 trending series, or select the Top 10 series by genre.

(2) Selecting "Explore Top 10 Series" opens the Top 10 trending series screen.

(3) Selecting a genre, say Romance, opens the Top 10 screen for that genre. Perfect for Rachel, who enjoys reading romance.

(1) Home

(2) Trending Series


(3) Trending by genre

USER EXPERIENCE OF THE VISUAL DESIGN

1 Returning users like Naomi or Rachel can visit their **library** to read episodes from one of their saved series.

2 Once a **series** is selected, they are brought to the series screen. There they can rate the series and/or unlock an episode.

3 Unlocking an **episode** deducts 50 tokens from their account balance. Like for the series, they can leave a rating for the episode as well. The user can control text size, font, and screen brightness and contrast for the most enjoyable reading experience.

1 Library
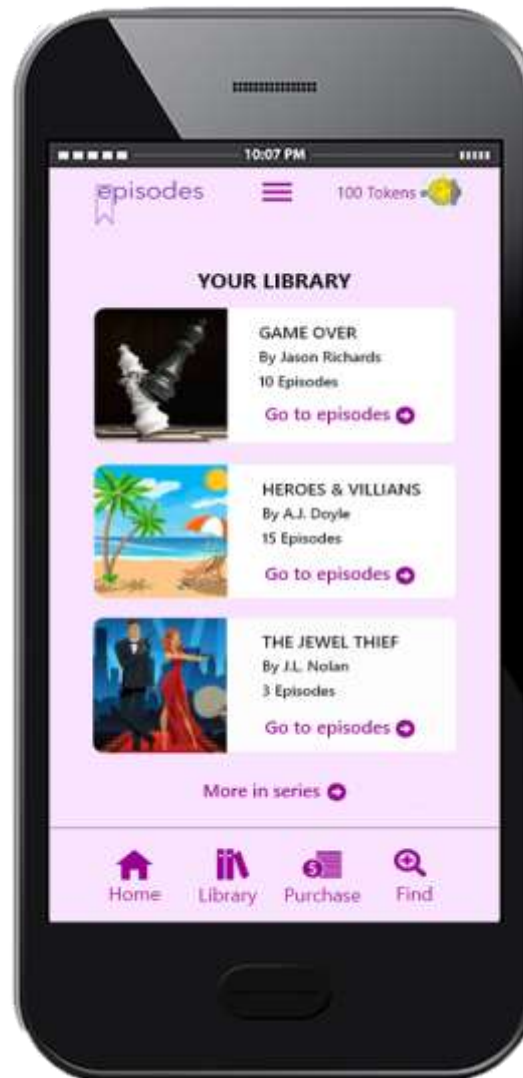
2 Series
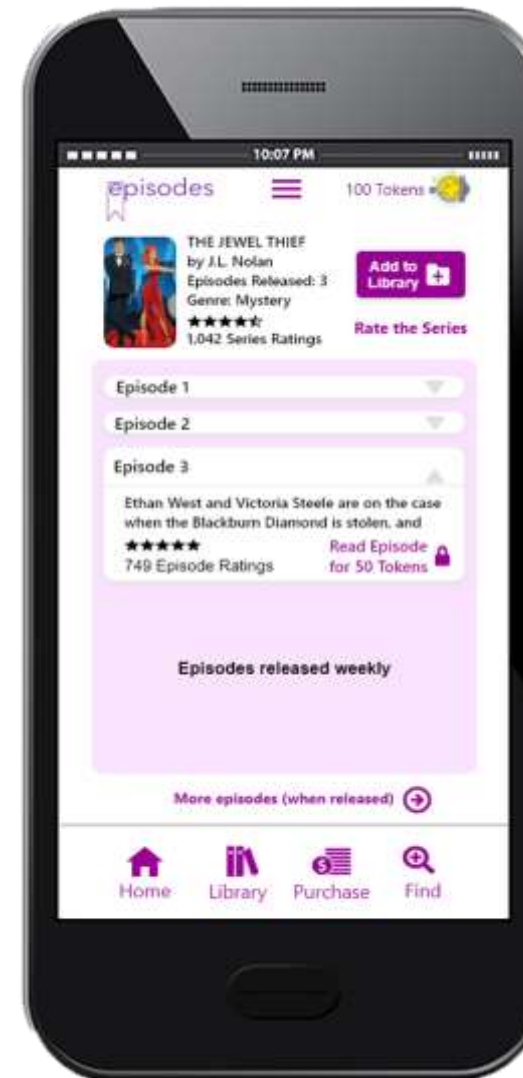
3 Episode

Color Palette

#9A0094   **#FAE3FF**   **#FFFFFF**

Purple is a great color to associate with fiction as it occurs rarely in nature, so it is intriguing and associated with imagination. And even darker shades of purple tend to evoke a sense of warmth and invitation.

A lighter purple is used for information backgrounds to contrast well with black text, with darker purple (using white text) used for buttons so the CTAs are easy to identify for the user.

A white background with dark (black or dark purple) text allows the user to focus on information presented

Images & Icons

Explore Most Popular by Genre

Romance   Thriller   Mystery

Sci-Fi   Fantasy   Sagas

Images and icons representative of fiction stories to draw the user's eye in a visually appealing and informative way.

Typography

Open Sans - Aa

Open Sans is a modern and humanist typeface that is highly legible on screen and at small sizes, making it a sound choice for a mobile application.

Navigation

Home   Library   Purchase   Find

Icons and text identify main navigation items. Top hamburger menu opens with full menu options.
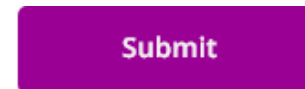
Home
Library
Find
Payment Method
Purchase Tokens
My Profile
Log Out

Submit   Add to Library

Explore more trending series

Purple links and buttons with white text provide clearly labeled CTAs for users.

While **user testing provided confidence** that I had **met** the **objective in designing** a mobile **app** so users could quickly discover serialized genre fiction and easily read episodes from their smartphones, **Amazon's entry** into the **serialized genre fiction app market** led to the determination **developing** the *Episodes* **app** was **no longer viable.**

Episodes

Kindle Vella

Amazon's *Kindle Vella* represents a barrier to market entry for the *Episodes* app

The *Episodes* app design met objectives but, without an established product, trying to develop and launch the app with Amazon announcing the release of a serialized fiction app (Kindle Vella) represents a situation where a small independent publisher cannot effectively compete for readers.
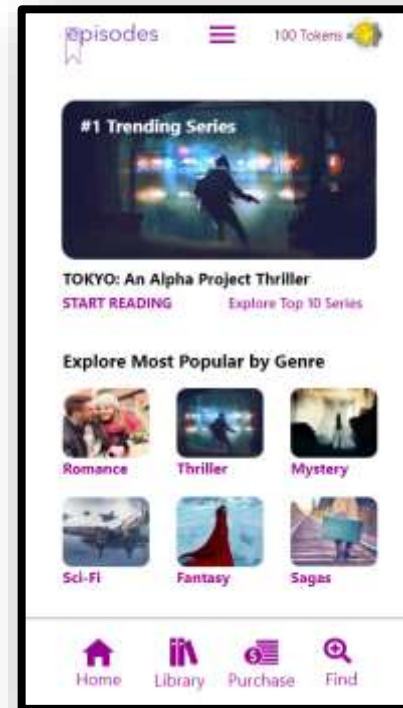
Development of a design doesn't always happen: Despite solid market research, a user-centered design process, and validation from user testing, **other factors sometimes result** in a **design not being developed**. Nonetheless, it was **still a valuable process**.

Despite the *Episodes* app not moving forward to development, it was a worthwhile process in designing a mobile application. Additionally, the experience and learnings from every design process are valuable toward continued growth as a designer.