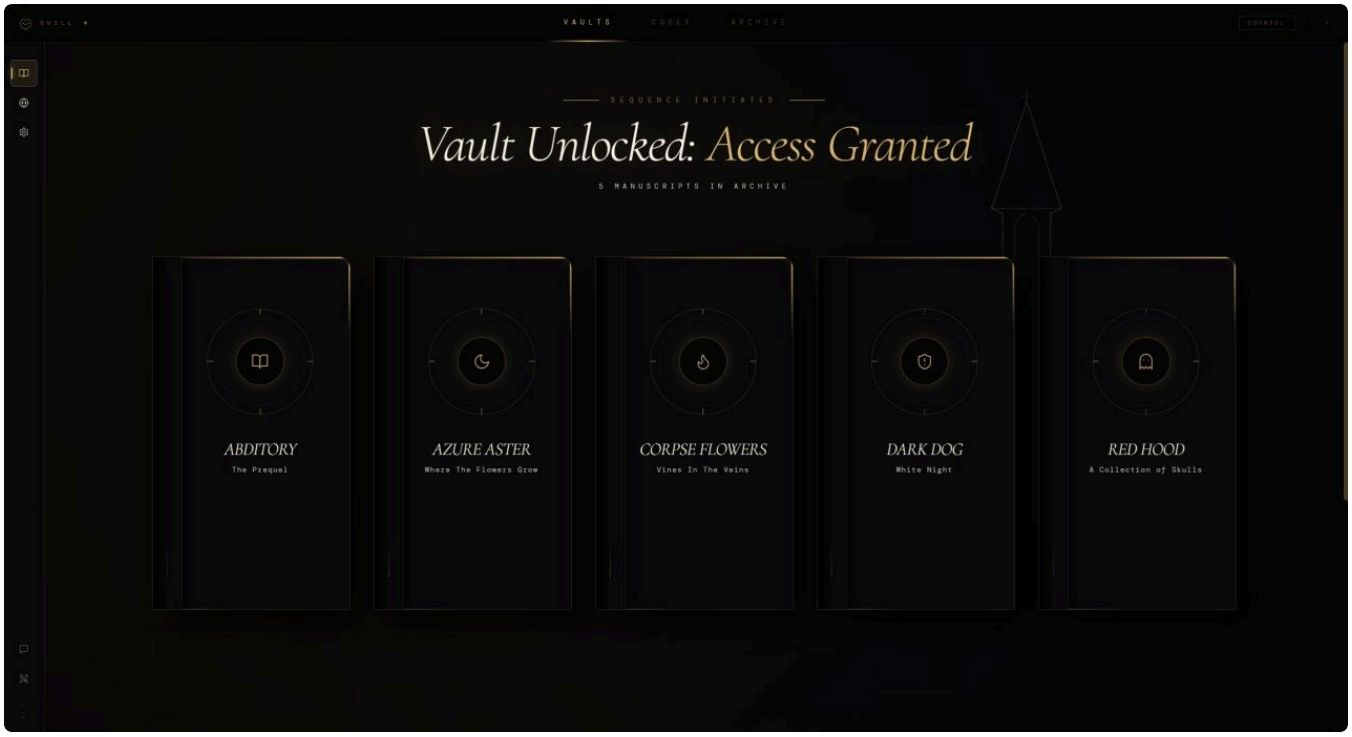
Quill

A writing app that keeps a writer's story and their world's lore side by side, so they never have to leave the chapter to remember what they invented.



01. Executive summary

Quill is a writing app for desktop and Android that I designed and built for people who invent their own worlds: novelists, game masters, players and character designers. Worldbuilders keep a second body of work beside the story, and when that lore lives in another app, every forgotten detail pulls them off the page. Quill keeps the story and the world together, with a World Codex, lookups right beside the chapter, two-click idea capture, and an AI assistant, Amadeus, that finds information but never writes. It's a working prototype that five people have tried, with projected time savings that structured testing will now check.

Role	Product designer and developer
Responsibilities	Product definition, UX and interface design, visual design, building the app, designing the AI assistant
Team	Solo, with Claude as a design and build partner

Timeline	2026, in progress
Project type	Self-initiated
Outcome so far	A working app with the Vaults, the World Codex, a chapter editor with split screen and the Archive Surface, and customizable settings. Amadeus works and is still being refined.

02. The problem

It's late, and Wren is three paragraphs into the best scene she's written all month. Her hero is about to name the creature at the door, and she can't remember what she called it in chapter four. So she does what every worldbuilder does: she leaves. She opens her notes, searches, scrolls, searches again. By the time she finds the name, the scene has gone cold.

Meet Wren and Theo

To keep the people I'm designing for in view, I built two personas from the writers and game masters I talked to. Neither is a real person; each is a composite.

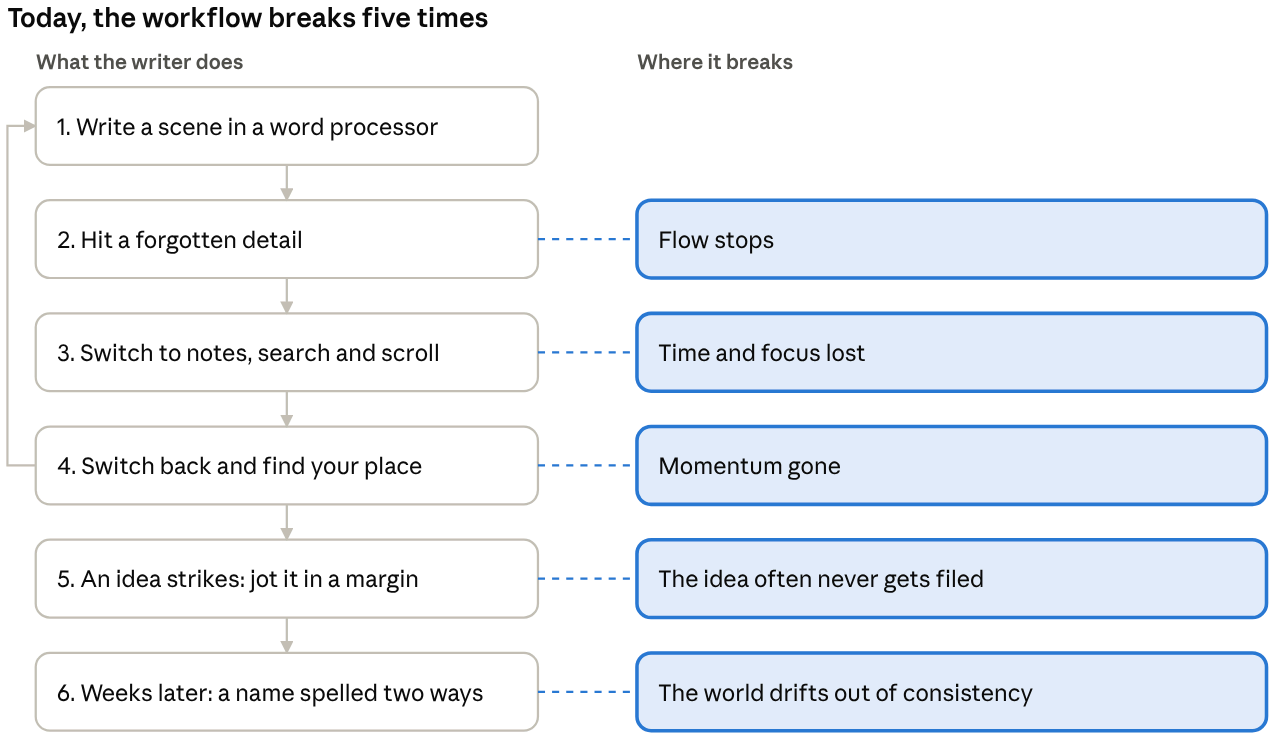
Wren, the novelist. Wren is 29 and works at a bookshop by day. At night she writes fantasy, and she's drafting book two of a trilogy. Her world lives in a 40-page document, a phone full of half-finished notes, and her memory, which is very good but no longer good enough. Her pain points: she breaks her flow to look things up, loses ideas that arrive mid-scene, and worries that small details are drifting out of consistency. *"Every time I go hunting for a name, I lose the scene. And the ideas I jot on my phone at midnight? Half of them never make it into the book."*

Theo, the game master. Theo is 34, a nurse who runs a weekly D&D campaign for six friends. His notes are spread across a binder, three documents and a group chat. His pain points: players ask about a character from three sessions ago and he can't find the answer fast enough, so he improvises, and then has to remember what he made up. *"If I can't find it in thirty seconds, I just wing it. Then two sessions later, someone calls me out because it doesn't match."*

Wren and Theo stand for Quill's two main audiences: independent fantasy and science-fiction novelists writing long, interconnected stories, and tabletop game masters running long campaigns. Both want the same thing: to keep the story moving while the world stays

consistent.

Today's broken workflow



Wren's evening today · after step 4 she goes back to writing, and the loop repeats

Wren's evening follows a loop that breaks five times. She writes, hits a detail she's forgotten, and leaves the manuscript to dig through her notes. Coming back, she has to find her place and her momentum again. When an idea strikes, she jots it in a margin or on her phone, where it often never gets filed. Weeks later, the cost shows up as a name spelled two ways. Theo's version is the same loop, except his happens in front of an audience waiting for an answer. And when either of them tries an AI writing tool for help, it offers to write the scene for them, which is the one part they don't want help with, and many of those tools send their unpublished work online.

Why it matters

These aren't small annoyances. In Gloria Mark's field research at UC Irvine, people took an average of about 23 minutes to return to interrupted work, often after detouring through two other tasks. Psychologist David Meyer has estimated that switching between tasks can cost as much as 40% of productive time. Both looked at office work rather than

writing, but anyone who has lost the thread of a scene knows the feeling. There's an emotional cost too: hunting through notes and worrying that a contradiction has slipped through chips away at a writer's confidence. And the practical cost arrives later, when an editor, a beta reader or a reader finds the mistake and the fix means rereading and rewriting.

Sources: Mark, González and Harris, "No Task Left Behind?" (CHI 2005), and Mark's 2006 Gallup interview; American Psychological Association, "Multitasking: Switching costs," summarizing Rubinstein, Meyer and Evans (2001).

Wren and Theo aren't alone

I know this problem first-hand, since each of my own manuscripts carries its own cast, places and lore, and the writing world describes it the same way. Story bibles range from index cards to wikis with hundreds of linked pages, and even writers with excellent memories eventually hit a wall (Bookishelf; Indie Author Magazine). Contradictions get caught by a read-through with the bible open, by copy editors, and often by readers. Editorial processes aren't mainly built to catch continuity slips, so readers pool them in online threads, and some authors have fixed later editions as a result (Penguin Random House News for Authors). Readers are thorough: some romance readers read more than 300 books a year and reread a whole series before each new release (Bustle). And because many novelists keep their manuscript and notes in separate tools, a story bible kept in a different app often stops being used at all (Novela and Sudowrite, both writing-tool companies).

The research points the same way. In a survey of 130 science-fiction and fantasy writers, getting information quickly and from somewhere reliable were the most important qualities in a source, both scoring 5 out of 5 (Holappa, 2017).

Game masters like Theo feel it most sharply, because their audience is sitting right there at the table. Fantasy author and D&D designer Scott Fitzgerald Gray says the notes behind *A Prayer for Dead Kings and Other Tales* run to about 85,000 words, for a book of 135,000 (interview, 2011). On the RPGBOT podcast, game masters say a table flipping through rulebooks is what makes a session stall. A search on D&D Beyond can find a rule in about 20 seconds, and one host's limit for an on-the-spot lookup is 30 seconds (RPGBOT, *First Time DM Part 1*, 2022). A 2022 Bowling Green State University dissertation, based on focus groups with D&D players, found that groups differ in how strictly they enforce the written rules, something the author calls rules adhesion (Patalita, 2022). And

fantasy author J.V. Hilliard built his realm of Warminster over two decades of D&D campaigns, short stories and character memories, tracked on a wall-long whiteboard of notes, outlines and character arcs (interview, 2022).

What nobody has measured is how often writers look things up while drafting. Quill's testing will count it: lookups per session, lookups per 1,000 words, time spent cross-referencing, and how often the same thing gets looked up twice.

The core problem

Writers managing complex fictional worlds must constantly move between their manuscript and outside reference material to find, save and check information. That fragmentation interrupts their flow, makes information harder to find, and raises the risk of inconsistencies.

Constraints

Quill is self-initiated, with no budget or team. The AI had to run on the writer's own computer and never write for them, and the app had to stay calm enough for long sessions.

03. Research and discovery

How I researched

I started with what I could do quickly: reflect on my own writing process, read published research on interruptions, look at how writers keep their lore today, and compare the tools that already try to help. Then I talked with five people who write, run or play tabletop campaigns: two game masters, two players, and a friend who reviewed Quill from a UX angle.

How writers cope today

Most writers lean on some mix of four things: a series bible (one long document or spreadsheet of characters, places and rules), a personal wiki in a note app with a page for each entry, paper notebooks and index cards pinned to a wall, and memory, backed up by

rereading earlier chapters. Each works until the world gets big. Nobody has published reliable figures on how long writers spend looking things up, so measuring it is one of the first things testing will do.

What Wren and Theo need

Putting the research and conversations together, eight needs kept coming up:

User need	What I heard or found
Contextual access: see lore without leaving the page	Holden gives up and improvises when his notes are hard to reach; on the RPGBOT podcast, a table flipping through rulebooks is what stalls a session
Fast capture: save an idea before it's forgotten	Samantha writes down keywords and places during sessions so the DM doesn't have to remind her
One source of truth: every detail in one place	Scott Fitzgerald Gray's notes ran to about 85,000 words for one book; Dilan keeps each character's details and art together
Consistency: catch contradictions early	Readers notice when details slip, and some authors have fixed later editions after readers spotted mistakes
Reference: reread earlier material while writing	Holden and Samantha both rely on side-by-side notes to remember what happened in which session
Different routes for different moments	Johnny: brainstorming and running a live session need different ways in
Ownership and privacy: the writing stays theirs	Most AI writing tools draft prose for you, and many send work online
Comfort in long sessions	My own long writing sessions

The competitive landscape

Several tools tackle part of the problem. Laying them against those needs showed which ones each leaves unmet:

Tool	Built for	AI	Where it falls short	User need left unmet
Scrivener	Drafting long manuscripts	None built in	Research folders and a split editor, but no structured world database or term reminders	One source of truth, consistency
World Anvil	Building and sharing a world wiki, with campaign tools	None built in; AI features are out of its scope	Worldbuilding comes first, with Manuscripts alongside the wiki and a steep learning curve	Contextual access, fast capture
Campfire	Worldbuilding modules plus a manuscript	No AI drafting listed	Browser, desktop and mobile apps; lore and writing live in separate modules	Contextual access
Obsidian	Linked personal notes	Via plugins	Built for notes, not manuscripts; lore beside the page takes plugins and setup	Contextual access, fast capture
Novelcrafter	Drafting with a codex of story elements	Can draft prose	Strong codex, but its AI can write for you	Ownership
Sudowrite	AI-assisted drafting	Writes prose, fed by a Story Bible	Built around the AI doing the writing	Ownership

Tool	Built for	AI	Where it falls short	User need left unmet
Calliope	A calm editor with an AI companion for research and consistency	Never writes prose	Web-based, with AI running through an online service	Privacy
Everwrite	A private, on-device writing studio for novelists	Never writes prose	Mac only, and built for novelists rather than game masters	Different routes for different moments; Windows and phone users

Checked against each tool's own site or listing in November 2026.

The older tools split into two camps: note and wiki tools that keep lore away from the page, and drafting tools whose AI writes for you. In 2026, a new kind of tool appeared alongside Quill: apps like Calliope and Everwrite, built on the same rule that the AI never writes your prose. That's encouraging, because it shows writers want exactly this. But each still leaves part of Wren's and Theo's needs unmet: Calliope runs online, and Everwrite is Mac-only and made for novelists alone.

The opportunity

Quill's opportunity isn't being the only tool whose AI won't write. It's being the one built for worldbuilders on both sides of the table: novelists and game masters, with a Codex that holds images like an art board, several ways to reach the same lore for different moments, an assistant with a personality the writer shapes, and a home on Windows and Android with the AI running locally.

Design requirements

From those needs and gaps came Quill's requirements: what it has to do to fix Wren's and Theo's pain points.

Quill must…	Need it serves	How Quill does it
Show lore beside the page, without leaving the chapter	Contextual access	The Archive Surface beside the chapter, and Codex terms with hover reminders
Save an idea from the manuscript in two clicks	Fast capture	Send to Codex, and sticky notes
Keep every detail, including images, in one structured place	One source of truth	The World Codex with categories, images and custom categories, plus Obsidian import
Make contradictions easy to catch	Consistency	One Codex for every name and rule, and Amadeus's naming help
Let writers reread earlier material while writing	Reference	Split screen by dragging a tab
Offer more than one route to the same information	Different routes for different moments	The terms bar, the Archive Surface, the Counsel and split screen
Help without ever writing, and keep the AI local	Ownership and privacy	Amadeus retrieves and checks only, running on a local model
Stay comfortable over long sessions	Comfort	Interface scaling, a contrast boost and optional decoration

This research is still small: five informal conversations plus published accounts. Structured interviews in the validation plan (chapter 07) will test these needs with more writers and game masters.

04. Strategy and design direction

The guiding question

With the problem clear, I framed the question that would guide every decision:

How might we help worldbuilding writers retrieve and capture story information without disrupting their writing flow?

Three design rules

Three rules came out of that question, and every feature had to pass all three. **Stay in the chapter:** anything Wren needs should come to her. **One home for the world:** the Codex is the single source of truth, and ideas flow into it from anywhere. **Support, don't replace:** tools, the AI included, help her think and remember, but the writing stays hers.

How success will be measured

Each rule becomes a task I can measure in testing, timed against the same task in the writer's current tools:

Task	What's measured	Success looks like
Retrieve a lore detail from the manuscript	Task completion, time, errors	Found without leaving the chapter, faster than with the writer's current tool
Capture a new idea mid-chapter	Task completion, time, clicks	Saved to the Codex in two clicks, with no lost text
Reread an earlier chapter while writing	Task completion, time	Both chapters open side by side, without help
Check a name for consistency	Task completion, errors	The right spelling found on the first try
Ask the assistant for help with prose	Whether any prose is produced	None: the assistant declines and offers notes instead

What Quill could save

Until testing happens, these are projections, not results. They rest on assumptions stated below, so anyone can check the math:

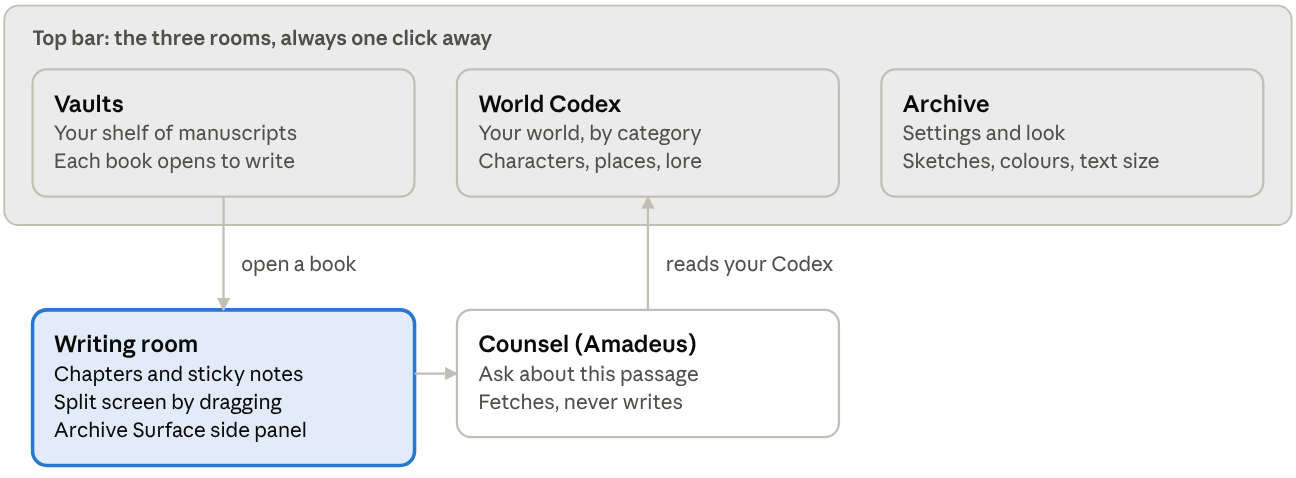
	Wren today	Wren with Quill (projected)
Time per lookup	About 60 seconds: switch apps, search, scroll, switch back	About 10 seconds: hover a term, or glance at the Archive Surface
Time spent on lookups in a four-scene session	About 12 minutes	About 2 minutes
Times she leaves the manuscript per session	About 12	None
Saving an idea mid-scene	30 to 60 seconds, and often lost	Two clicks, a few seconds

If these assumptions hold, Quill could cut the time Wren spends looking things up by roughly 80% per session, and for Theo, a 30-second lookup at the table could become a glance. *Projected, not yet validated by research. The figures assume about three lookups per scene, a working estimate for scenes that involve established lore; no study has measured the real number. Testing will replace these with measured results.*

How Quill is organized

Quill works like a library with three rooms, and the top bar always shows which one you're in:

Quill is three rooms, with the Counsel one step from the page



Quill's structure · three rooms and the Counsel

Opening a book takes Wren to the writing room, where the Archive Surface and the Counsel sit beside the page and read from the Codex.

The balancing acts

Most of the design work was balancing two good things that pull against each other. Helpful AI pulls against the writer's ownership, so Amadeus only fetches, checks and answers, and every fact is reachable without her. Reminders pull against a clean page, so Codex terms live in a bar that collapses away, with details on hover. Multitasking pulls against simplicity, so split screen is a drag of a tab, a gesture people already know from web browsers. And personality pulls against focus, so sketches and colour schemes are optional, and text can be scaled and boosted.

05. Design process and iteration

Designing and building in one loop

I designed and built Quill myself, in quick rounds with Claude: describe an idea, build it, try it in a real writing session, then keep, change or cut it. Working this way let me try far more versions than I could have alone. The trade-off was staying deliberate, so every idea still had to pass the three rules.

Where it started

Before building anything, I wrote down what Quill needed to be:

> I want to design a writing app that can be used flexibly: for DMing tabletop RPGs, for players, for character designers, for world-builders and for novelists. I would like it to be creative, with fun customization options, but also to have a lot of ways to support a writer.
>
> We need a Codex, a bible of sorts for all the world and character information, ways to classify and sort that information, and a clean way to fill it in. These sections should support images, because visuals are important to a lot of world-builders, like concept art.
>
> We need a section for all the manuscripts, with room for more than one. If someone is writing a long series, they should be able to make more than one manuscript so everything stays contained. Since the app can be used by story writers or by DMs, there should be two forms of manuscript: one more technical for TTRPG work and one for novelists, both with most of the same features. Split screen for quick reference to past chapters, character information, scenes and acts. Notes for quickly jotting down ideas or sections to edit.
>
> Quick access to the Codex, but also keyword reminders below the page. You should be able to remind yourself of world information quickly, without disrupting your own flow. Clicking a reminder gives more than a quick blurb, and the Codex panel lets you search and see everything in full. We need autocorrect, grammar and formatting, and the ability to add to and update the Codex as we go. I often make new content on the spot and don't want to break my stride, so I want to add it to the Codex from the manuscript and keep working, and update it the same way.
>
> I think it would be beneficial to use the power of AI, but not to replace the writer. We should design a helper AI that can fetch information on the fly and give support based on your own trends and patterns: naming conventions stay consistent, and quick research happens through the AI rather than Google or outside sources. It can act as a search engine with so much context about your world that it keeps everything aligned and recommends things based on your patterns. But it must never cross the line into doing too much of the work and taking away the user's creativity. It's support, not replacement.

That brief turned into requirements one pain point at a time. *"I lose ideas mid-scene"* became *"A writer can save any selected passage to a new or existing Codex entry in two clicks, without leaving the chapter."* A requirement only made the list if it passed the three rules.

How Quill grew

Quill didn’t arrive in one piece. It went through five phases, each planned and built with Claude:

Phase	When	What happened
1. Single-file desktop app	Around May 2026	One file of about 3,200 lines in a frameless Electron window: five manuscripts, a chapter tree grouped into acts, autosave every 3 minutes, lore categories with an Obsidian importer, Amadeus through Ollama with sass and warmth sliders, five themes and IM Fell type
2. Rebuilt as Quill v2	May to September	Rewritten in React, Vite and Tailwind as separate files. Screens for the Dashboard (now the Vaults), Editor, Chapter Tree, Writing Area, Codex and Settings (now the Archive); panels for Amadeus, Codex, Campaign, Fate, Discord, Sticky Notes, the Sketch Gallery and a Command Palette; spell check, grammar check, synonyms and a custom dictionary
3. Syncing between devices	August 5	Every save copies to a cloud database (Supabase). On opening, local data uploads first and only missing data downloads, so the device's copy always wins. Fixed a bug where a brand-new device overwrote real work with empty data, and added sync messages and diagnostics
4. Phone version	August 5	An Android app built automatically with GitHub Actions and Capacitor, with a bottom tab bar, bigger tap targets, a scrollable toolbar and full-screen Codex panels
5. Windows installer	August 17	A standalone Windows app. Pushing changes now rebuilds and publishes both the phone and Windows versions on their own

Phase 1: Single-file desktop app (around May 2026)

- **Build:** `quill.html` (about 3,200 lines) ran in a frameless Electron window, started with `start.bat`.
- **Writing:** five manuscripts (Abditory, Azure Aster, Corpse Flowers, Dark Dog, Red Hood), a chapter tree grouped into acts, and autosave every 3 minutes.
- **Lore system:** categories for characters, races, locations, magic and languages, plus an Obsidian vault importer.
- **Amadeus:** a local AI companion running through Ollama. Its personality comes from `Amadeus.Modelfile`, with sass and warmth sliders, a floating chat bubble window and streamed replies.
- **Look:** five themes (Inkwell, Dusk, Sepia, Midnight, Crimson), a gothic canvas background and IM Fell typography.

Phase 2: Rebuilt as Quill v2 (May to Sept)

- The app was rewritten in React, Vite and Tailwind, split into separate files in `src/`.
- **Screens:** Dashboard, Editor, Chapter Tree, Writing Area, Codex and Settings.
- **Panels:** Amadeus, Codex, Campaign, Fate, Discord, Sticky Notes, Sketch Gallery and a Command Palette.
- **Writing tools:** spell check, grammar check, synonyms and a custom dictionary, all handled in `main.js`.

Phase 3: Syncing between devices (Aug 5)

- Every save is copied to a cloud database (Supabase) automatically by sync.js.
- When the app opens, it uploads your local data first, then downloads only what's missing. Your device's copy always wins, so nothing gets overwritten.
- **Fixed:** a brand-new device was uploading its empty data over your real data. It now downloads instead.
- **Added:** pop-up messages and diagnostics that show whether a sync worked.

Phase 4: Phone version (Aug 5)

- An Android app is built automatically through GitHub Actions (android.yml), using a tool called Capacitor.
- **Mobile layout:** a tab bar at the bottom, bigger tap targets, a scrollable toolbar, full-screen Codex panels, and a chapter tree and campaign panel that fold away.
- **Installing:** each build goes to a GitHub Releases page called `latest-build`, so you can download it straight to your phone.

Phase 5: Windows installer (Aug 17)

- windows.yml builds a standalone Windows `.exe` (one that runs without installing) and posts it to the same Releases page.
- **Workflow now:** push changes to the `main` branch, and both the phone and Windows versions rebuild and publish on their own.

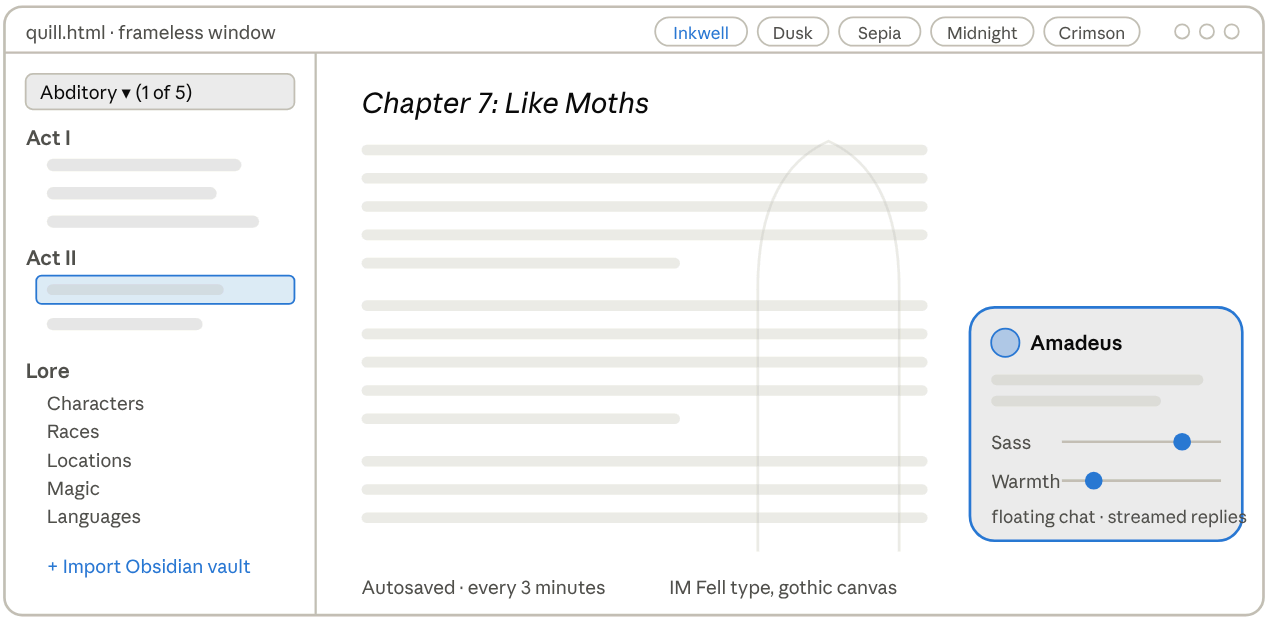
The first version worked, but it was one enormous file, which made every change risky. Rebuilding it in separate pieces in phase 2 was the moment Quill became something I could keep improving, rather than something I was afraid to touch. The building sessions with Claude weren't saved, so the brief above and this build log are the record of that work.

Rough first, polished later

I didn't sketch Quill on paper. I went straight to working prototypes, because seeing real chapters in a layout shows problems that empty boxes hide. The Vaults are a good example of how rough the early versions were. The first prototype had no way to move between Quill's rooms at all, and long titles wrapped awkwardly across the books. The final version added a Vaults, Codex and Archive bar across the top and tightened the shelf so each title fits on one line.

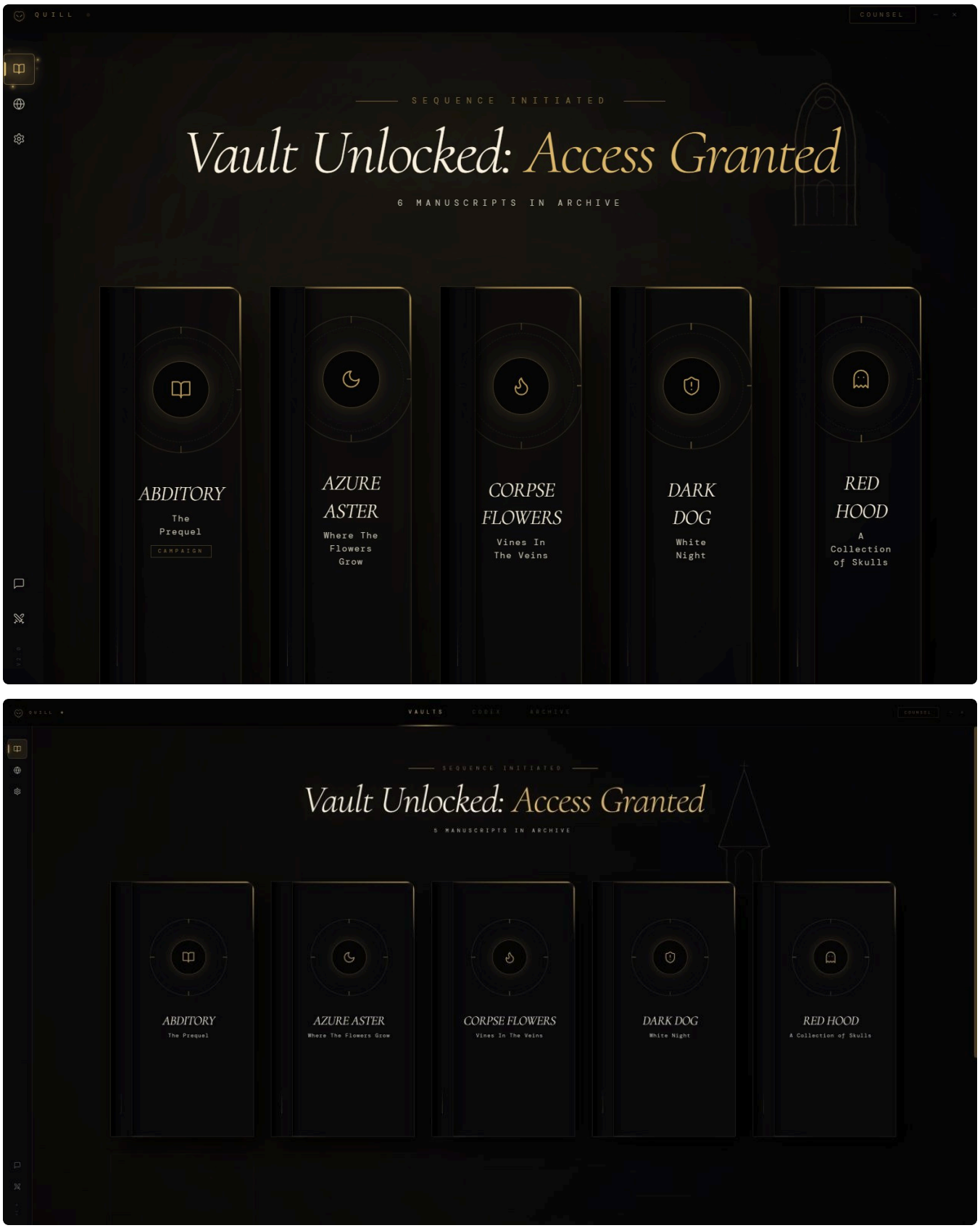
The very first Quill looked quite different. I didn't save any screenshots of it, so this reconstruction is drawn from the build log: everything ran from one file in a frameless window, with a chapter tree grouped into acts, a short list of lore categories, five themes, and Amadeus floating in a chat bubble with sass and warmth sliders.

Reconstruction · Quill, phase 1 (single-file app, May 2026)



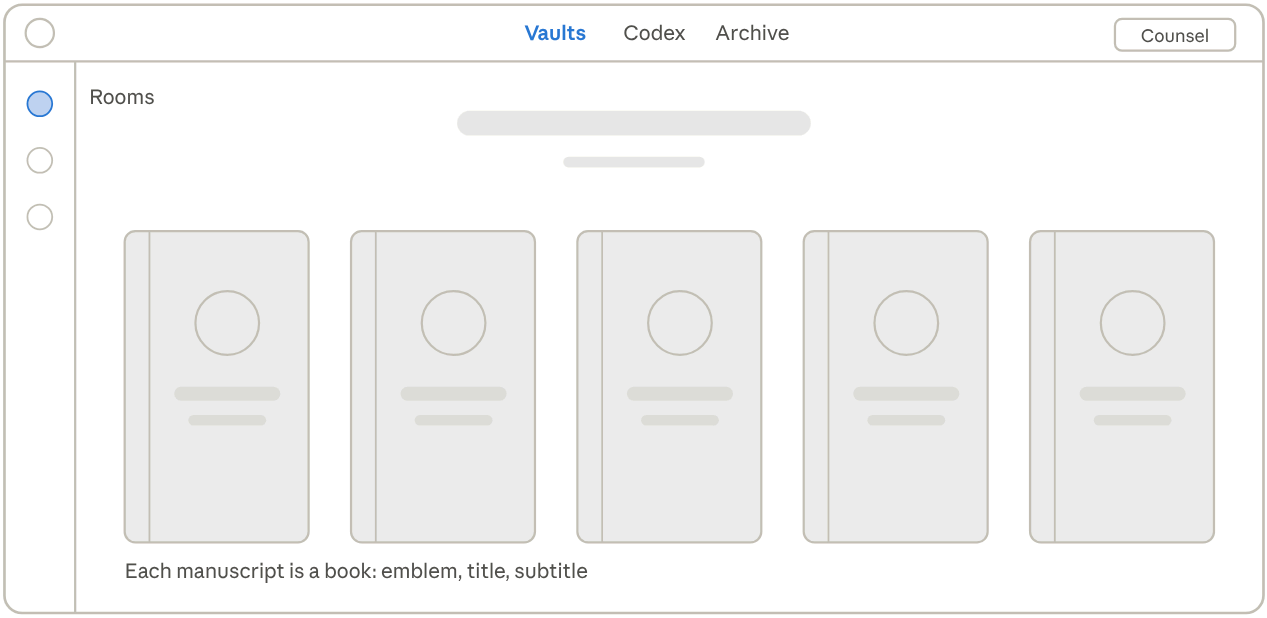
Reconstruction of phase 1, drawn from the build log · no screenshots of this version were saved

Much of what makes Quill work today wasn't there yet. There were no separate rooms, no Archive Surface beside the page, no terms bar, and no split screen. Looking something up still meant leaving the chapter for the lore list, the exact problem Quill was meant to solve. Those gaps shaped phase 2.



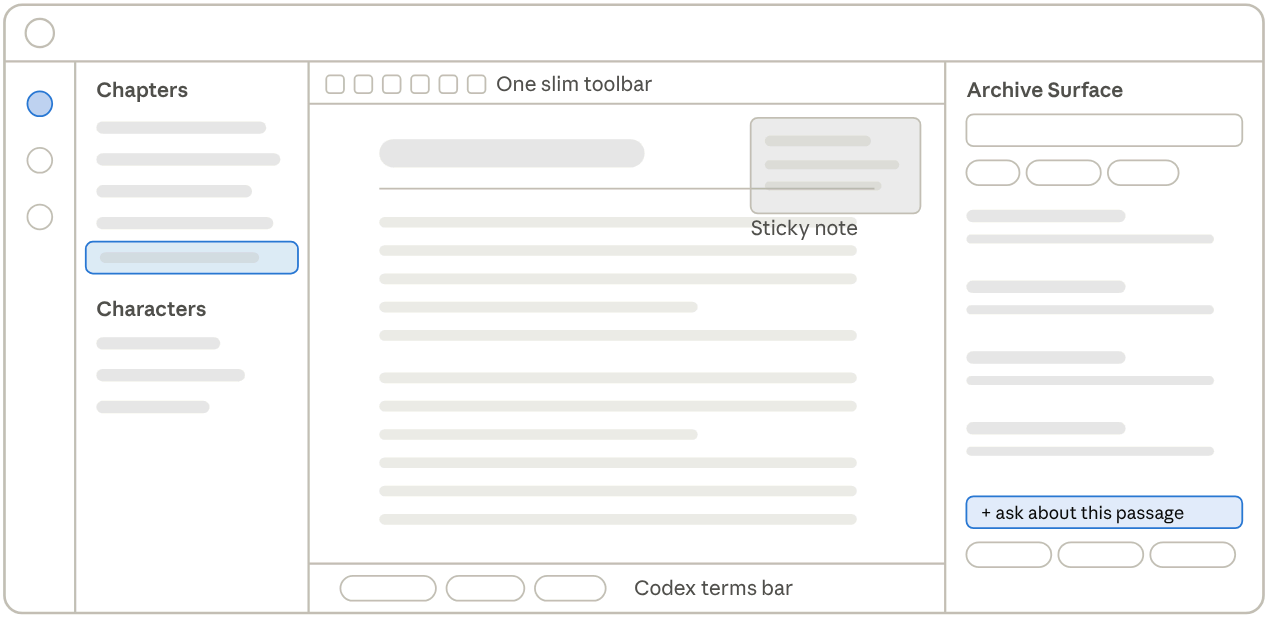
To show each screen's structure without the styling, I drew wireframes from the final screens afterwards:

Wireframe · Vaults



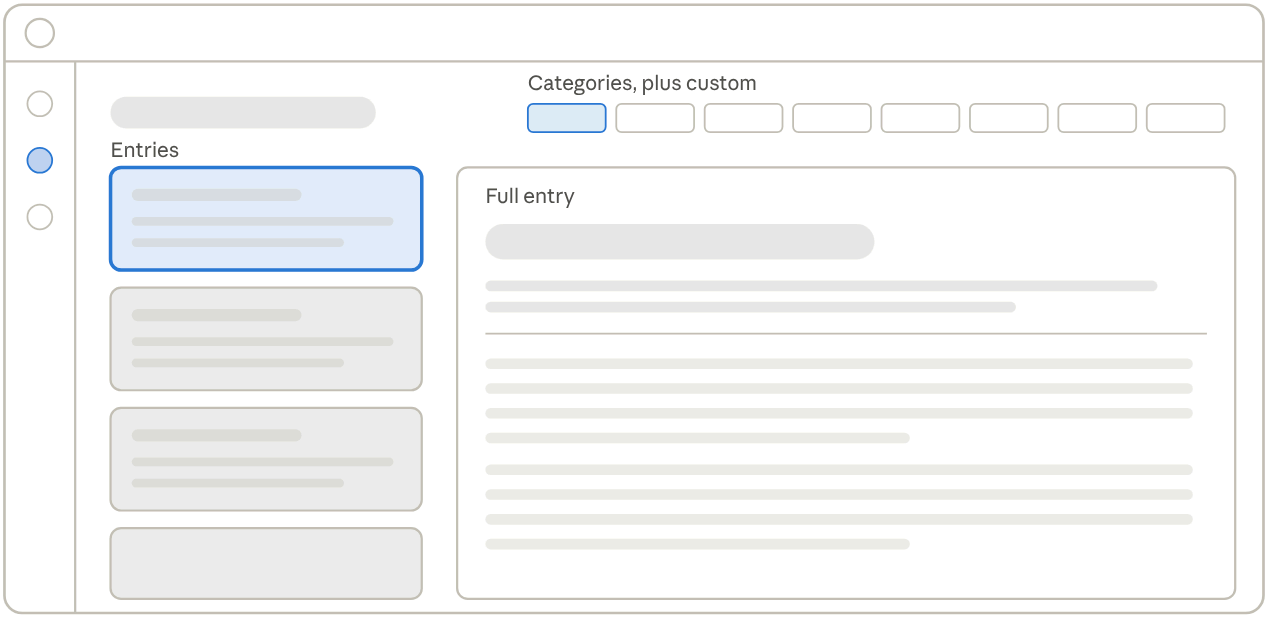
Wireframe · Vaults (drawn after the build)

Wireframe · Writing room with the Archive Surface



Wireframe · Writing room with the Archive Surface (drawn after the build)

Wireframe · World Codex



Wireframe · World Codex (drawn after the build)

Choosing between options

Each feature was weighed against at least one alternative. Looking things up could have opened the Codex in a separate window, but a side panel keeps Wren in the chapter. Split screen could have been a menu option, but dragging a tab is a gesture she already knows. The assistant could have drafted prose, but one that only retrieves and checks protects her ownership. And decoration could have been fixed, but making sketches and colour schemes optional keeps focus first. I judged each option against the three rules in my own writing sessions: does this keep me in the chapter, does it add clutter, does it hold up over a long session? A feature stayed if it earned its space on the page, and some ideas were softened rather than cut.

When the build changed the design

Building Quill myself meant technical problems landed straight on the design. The worst came with syncing: a brand-new device, with nothing saved on it yet, uploaded its empty data over a writer's real work. For Wren, that would mean opening her laptop and finding her trilogy gone. The fix became a design rule: each device's own copy always wins, it

uploads first, and it only downloads what's missing, with clear messages showing whether a sync worked. Running the assistant on a local model came out of the same loop, so writers' unpublished work isn't sent to an AI service.

Five decisions that shaped Quill

1. Send to Codex. Ideas arrive mid-scene and used to end up in margins or phone notes. Now Wren selects the passage and adds it to a new or existing Codex entry: two clicks, without leaving the page.

2. The Codex terms bar. Forgetting what a name means interrupts writing again and again. Every Codex term in the chapter appears in a collapsible bar under the page, colour-coded by category, and hovering one shows its entry, so a refresher never opens a new window.

3. Split screen by dragging a tab. Rereading an earlier chapter used to mean switching files and losing her place. Dragging a tab to the middle opens it beside the current chapter, with no new menu to learn. For Theo, it's how he keeps last session's notes open while running this one.

4. The Archive Surface. Looking something up shouldn't mean leaving the chapter, or depending on AI. The whole Codex opens in a side panel with search and categories, and works with or without Amadeus.

5. Make it yours, but optional. A writing space should feel personal without getting in the way. Background sketches and six colour schemes add atmosphere, and all of it can be turned off.

The final screens for each of these are in chapter 06.

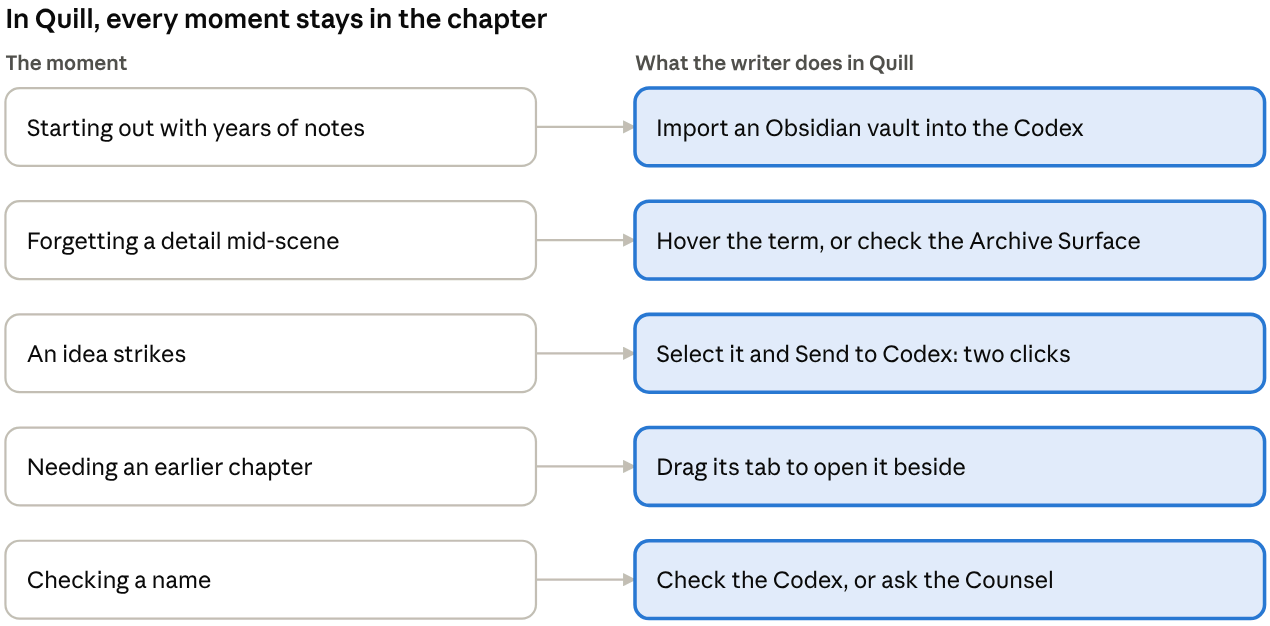
What changed along the way

Each of these decisions moved, and each move traces back to one of the balancing acts in chapter 04. The quick Codex panel grew into the Archive Surface, with search, filters and an "ask about this passage" field, so every fact is reachable with or without Amadeus. Codex terms moved into a bar that collapses away, so reminders never crowd the page. Split screen became a drag of a tab instead of a menu. And settings gained a contrast boost, interface scaling up to 140%, and optional decoration. The hardest part throughout was keeping a feature-rich app calm on the page, and resisting features that would make

the AI do the writing. Early feedback pushed back too: Johnny found the many routes to the Codex a little redundant, which is why the next step is making clear which route suits which moment.

Wren's evening, redesigned

Here are the same moments that broke Wren's workflow in chapter 02, now handled without leaving the chapter:

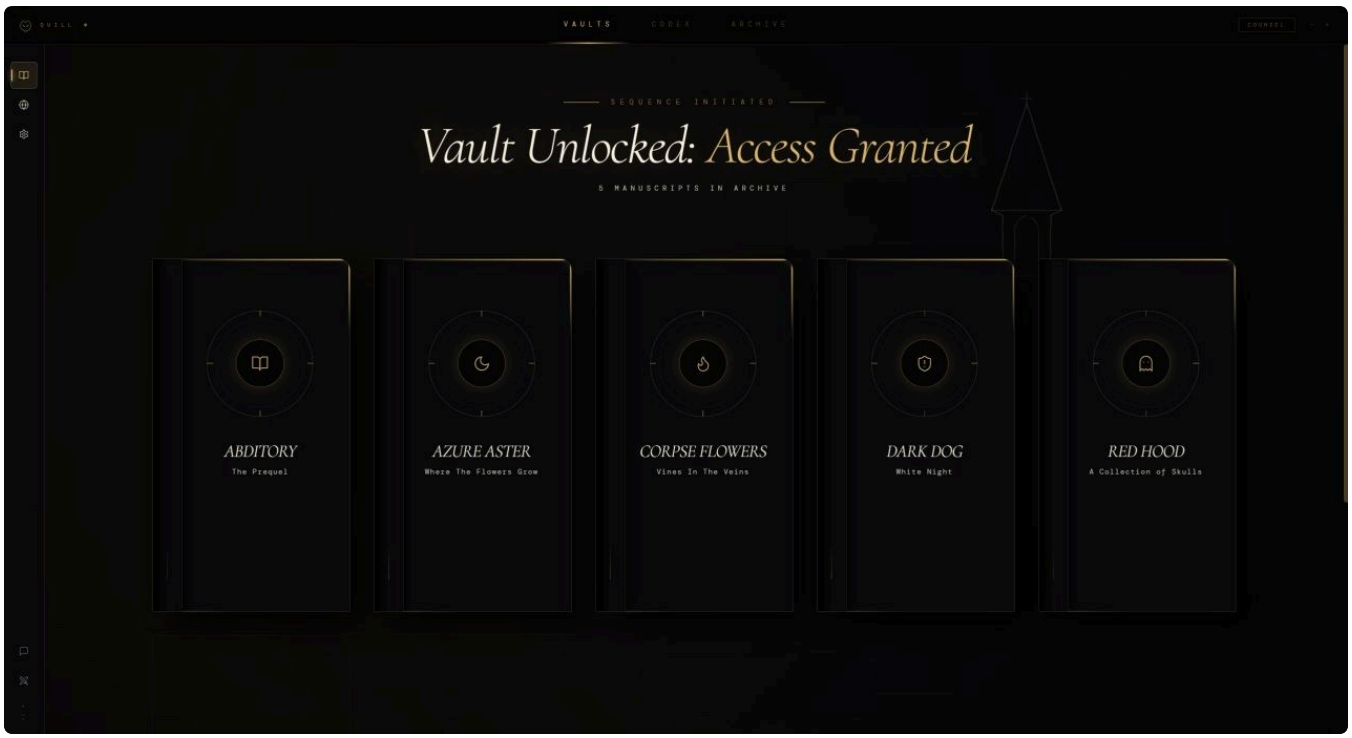


Wren's evening, redesigned · the same moments as chapter 02, inside Quill

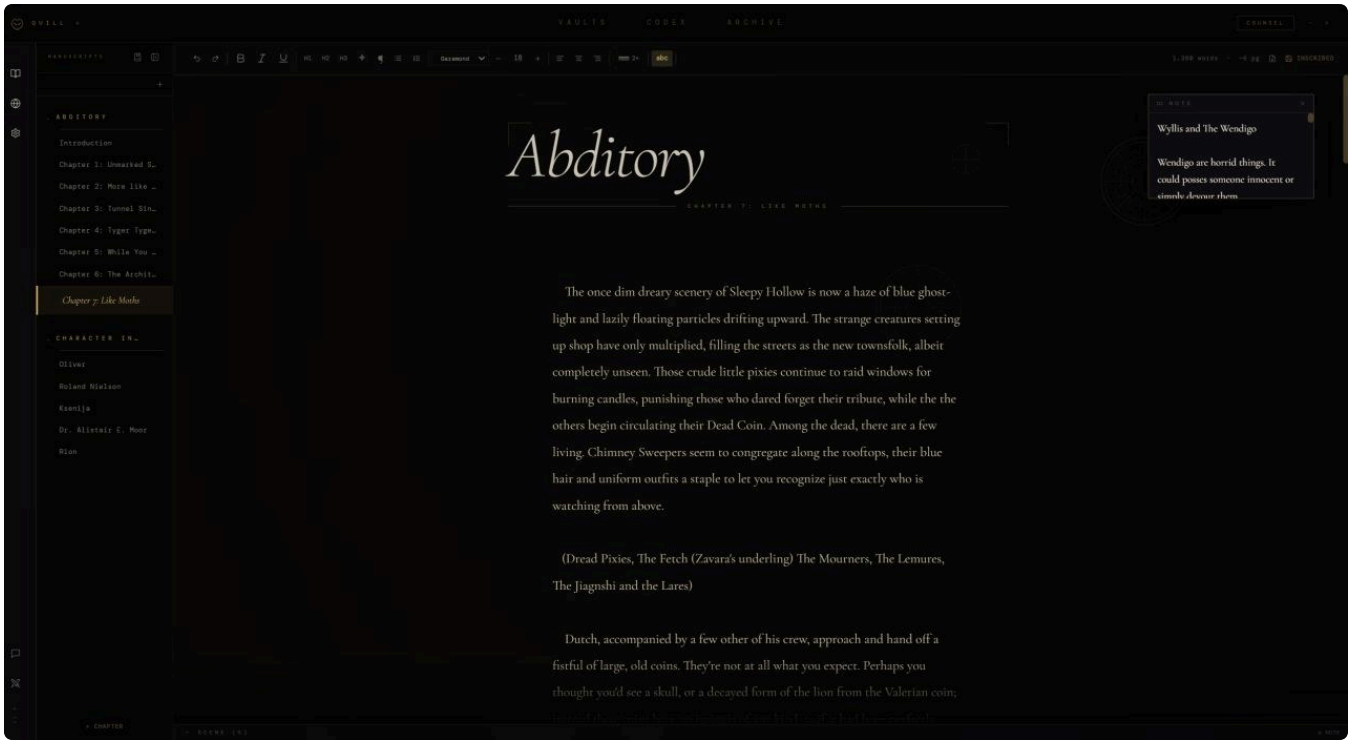
06. Final solution

The final screens

Here's where Quill landed. Wren opens the app to the **Vaults**, where every manuscript is a book on a shelf with its own emblem, title and subtitle. When she starts a new one, a quick setting lets her choose between a novel and a tabletop campaign, with nearly all the same tools in both, so Theo's campaign and Wren's trilogy can sit on the same shelf.



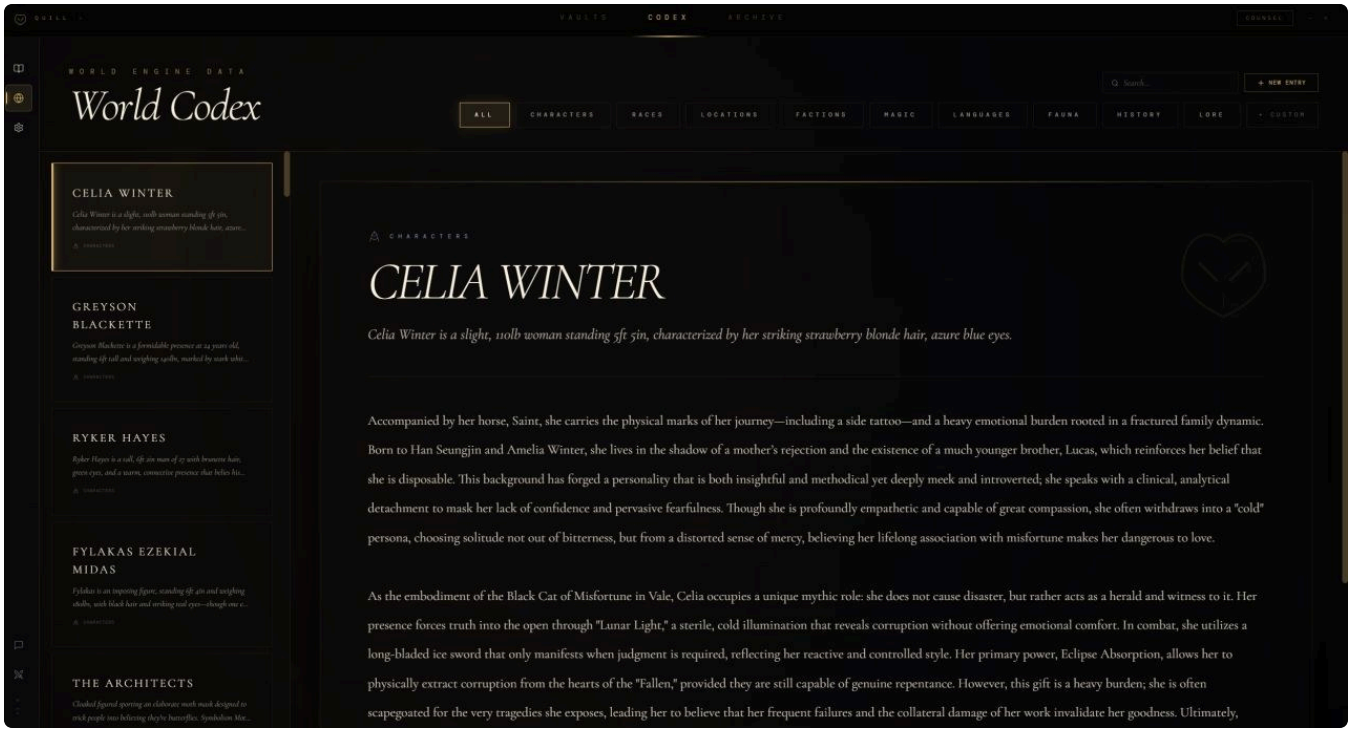
Opening one takes her to the **writing room**: chapters on the left, a quiet page in the middle, sticky notes beside it, and her word count and save status at the top. Any passage she selects can go straight to the Codex.



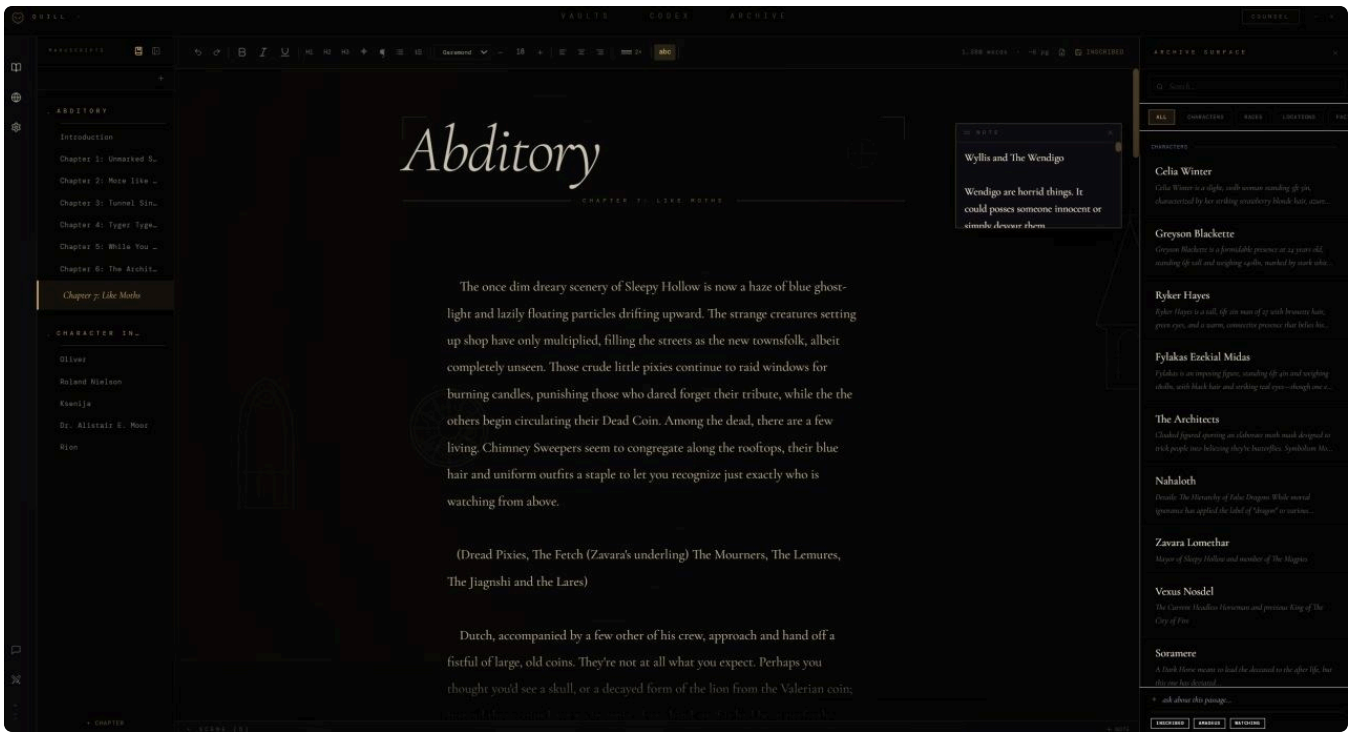
Under the page, the **Codex terms bar** lists every term in the chapter, colour-coded by category. Hovering one shows its entry.



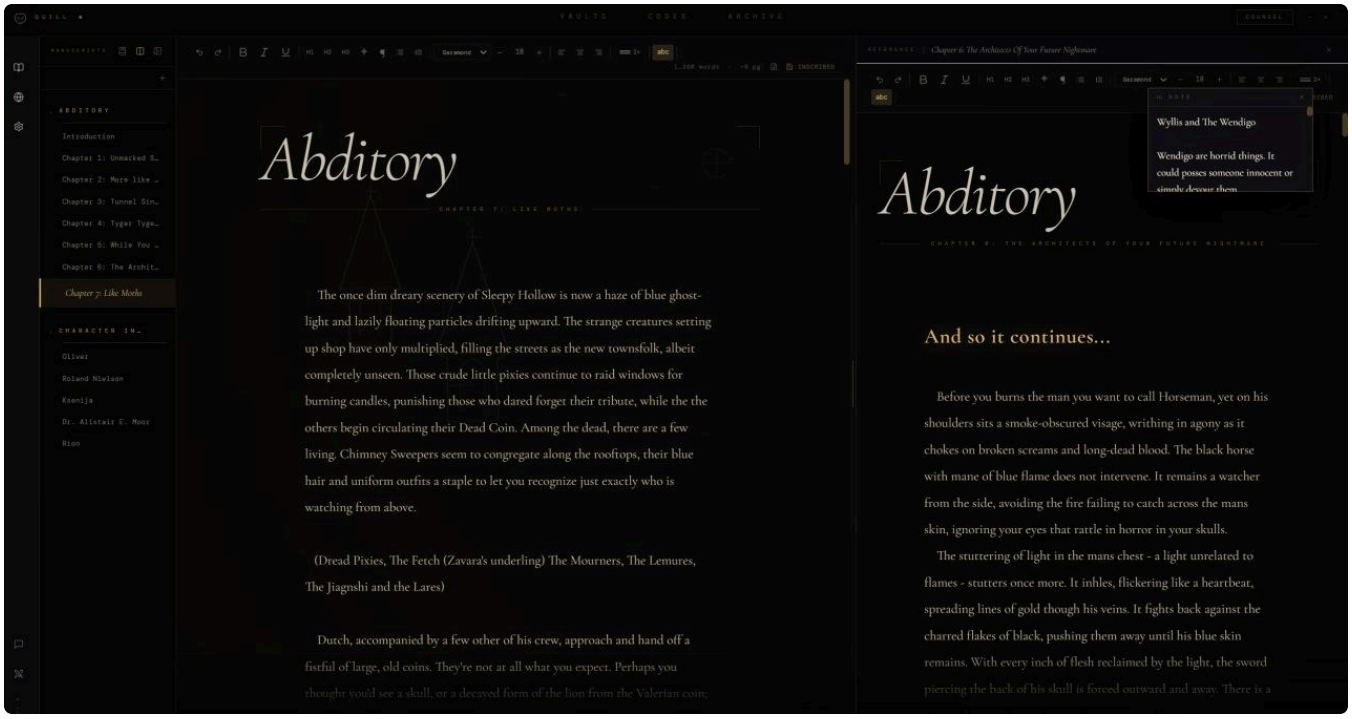
Everything she knows about her world lives in the **World Codex**, sorted into characters, races, locations, factions, magic, languages, fauna, history, lore, or a category of her own.



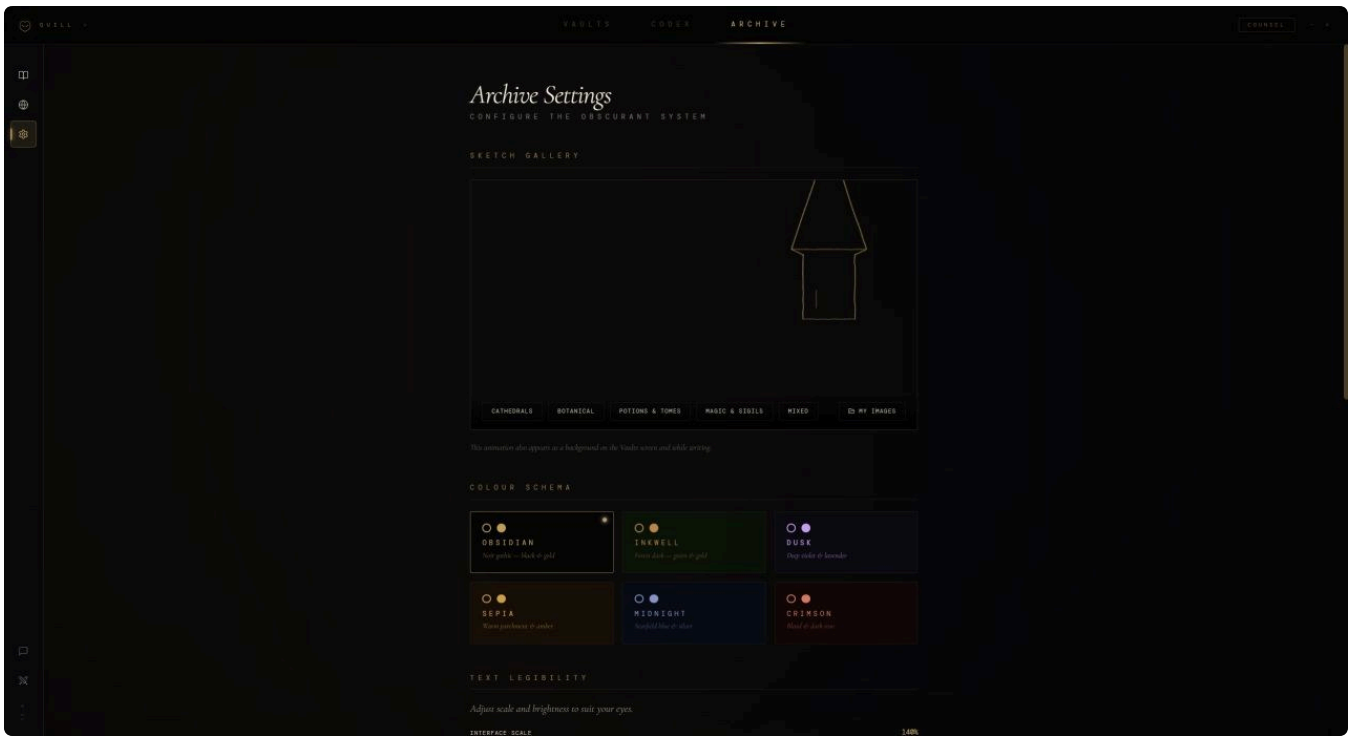
When she needs something mid-scene, the **Archive Surface** opens the Codex beside the page, with search, categories and an “ask about this passage” field for Amadeus.



Split screen puts an earlier chapter next to the one she's writing, or, for Theo, last session's notes beside this one.



And **Archive Settings** lets her make the space her own, with a sketch gallery (cathedrals, botanicals, potions and tomes, magic and sigils, or her own images), six colour schemes from Obsidian to Crimson, text legibility controls, the Counsel connection, and Obsidian import.



Built to be readable

Interface scale goes up to 140%, a contrast boost helps in long sessions, decoration can be switched off entirely, and the colour schemes suit different tastes and needs.

Back to Wren's evening

Each of Wren's three frustrations now has an answer. Breaking flow to look things up is handled by the terms bar, the Archive Surface and the Counsel. Losing ideas is handled by Send to Codex and sticky notes. And drifting consistency is handled by one Codex as the source of truth, plus Amadeus's naming help. The creature at the door has a name again, and Wren never left the page to find it.

07. Current status, feedback and validation plan

Quill is a working prototype, and five people have tried it informally. Nothing has been measured with writers yet, so here's what I've learned so far and how I'll find out the rest.

Early feedback

The first people to try Quill were five friends and family members: two game masters, two D&D players, and one who reviewed it from a UX and UI angle. These were informal sessions rather than structured tests.

Holden, a game master who has ADHD, told me he checks out when he has to dig too far for information. If his notes aren't easy to reach mid-session, he stalls, or gives up and improvises: exactly Theo's problem. He liked having several places for quick reminders, and leaned on split screen because he has trouble remembering which session something happened in. Johnny, also a game master, found having so many ways to do the same thing a little redundant at first, but saw the reason: brainstorming and running a live session need different routes, from building the world to using it live and jumping around fast. *(Holden's and Johnny's comments are paraphrased; the others are in their own words.)*

Dilan Helmick uses Quill purely as a character builder. He appreciates being able to call up information from different places, and "loves being able to add photos of the character in the Codex like an art board." Samantha Oach, a D&D player rather than a game master, uses it for session notes and her character's details: "I like being able to pull up notes from each session side by side and I can write down all the keywords and places, that way I can remember them and don't have to have the DM remind me constantly." And Michael Dolce, looking at it from a UX and UI angle, called it "a really thoughtful app that improves workflow for writers and storytellers, allowing them to actually remember their own world and not lose anything."

Three things stood out. Quick access matters most to people who lose focus easily, which matches the research on interruptions. Different people take different routes (Dilan the art board, Samantha the side-by-side notes, Holden the quick reminders), which supports having several ways in, as long as it's clear which route suits which moment; a short first-run guide is the next step there. And Quill reaches beyond novelists, to players and character builders too.

What might trip people up

Before formal testing, I walked through the app task by task to find likely snags to watch for:

Task	Likely snag	Fix
Check a character detail mid-chapter	The Archive Surface opens from an unlabeled icon	Add a tooltip and a short “Codex” label
Save a new idea to the Codex	Nothing hints that selecting text offers Send to Codex	Show a one-time hint on first selection
Reread an earlier chapter alongside the current one	Dragging a tab to split the screen is a hidden gesture	Add “Open beside” to the tab's right-click menu
Make the text bigger	“Archive” doesn't read as settings	Title the screen “Settings”, with Archive as its subtitle
Read small labels	Dim gold labels on black may fall below recommended contrast	Brighten them, or include them in the contrast boost

What's shipped, and what's still unproven

Quill runs on Windows and Android, synced between devices, with the Vaults, World Codex, writing room, Archive Surface, split screen and Archive Settings, and Amadeus works and is still being refined. Every feature holds to the three rules, and early users found the quick lookups, split screen and Codex useful for how they write, run and play their games. What's still unproven is whether writers really find facts faster, capture more ideas and keep their worlds more consistent with Quill than with their current tools, and whether the projected savings in chapter 04 hold up.

How I'll find out

The plan runs about six weeks. In weeks 1 and 2, I'll interview three to five novelists and one or two game masters about how they keep lore today, asking questions like: How often do you look up past events, characters or lore while writing or running a session? What happens when you can't find something? Have you ever contradicted something you'd already established? Roughly how much time do you spend searching your notes? Do you use digital tools, paper or memory? In week 3, I'll time the success-criteria tasks from chapter 04 in each person's current tools, to set a baseline. In weeks 4 and 5, five or six participants will do the same tasks in Quill in moderated sessions of about 45 minutes, thinking aloud, with a sample world or their own notes imported from Obsidian, while I

measure completion, time and errors against the baseline. In week 6, I'll group the findings by severity, fix the top issues (starting with the likely snags above), plan a retest, and update this case study with real results.

08. Reflection and next steps

What I learned

Building Quill taught me that a firm rule makes design easier, not harder. Once I decided the AI would never write, dozens of later decisions made themselves. I also learned that designing with AI moves fastest when the principles are written down first, because they decide what gets cut.

What I'd do differently

If I started again, I'd talk to other writers sooner, before building features around my own habits. The five people who've tried Quill already pushed my thinking in ways I couldn't have managed alone: Johnny's point about redundancy, for one, turned into a clearer idea of which route suits which moment.

What's next

Next, I'll sit with a handful of writers using their own notes and watch where they hesitate as they find a detail, save a new idea and reread an earlier chapter. Then I'll finish refining Amadeus and ask writers the question that will shape what Quill becomes: *what have you always wanted in a writing program, but never found?*