

# SHADOWS OF TRUTH

A DARK MYSTERY INVESTIGATION



## PRODUCT REQUIREMENTS DOCUMENT

AI-Powered Episodic Mystery Game

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5 Game Concepts | Market Research | Feasibility Analysis | Visual Concepts

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Vision & Opportunity

This PRD presents 5 innovative game concepts for an AI-powered episodic mystery game that leverages cutting-edge conversational AI, rich narrative design, and daily episodic content delivery. Each concept is designed to showcase AI agents working together to create an immersive, free-form conversation experience where players investigate mysteries by talking to AI-powered NPCs.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

The AI NPC market is projected to reach \$5.51 billion by 2029 (GlobeNewswire, Jan 2026). Games like Dispatch (by former Telltale devs) proved that episodic narrative games can dominate 2025's Game of the Year conversations. Wolf Among Us demonstrated that noir mystery + episodic format = cult following. The intersection of AI conversation + mystery narrative + daily episodes is an untapped blue ocean with massive viral potential.

**\$5.51B**

AI NPC Market

**\$98B+**

Mobile Gaming

**27%**

D1 Retention Avg

**50%+**

Target D1

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS (from research)

- Episodic cliffhangers drive 3x return rates (Telltale data)
- AI conversation novelty creates organic social sharing & viral TikTok content
- Daily chapter releases build habit-forming engagement loops
- Mystery genre has universal appeal across demographics
- Free-to-play with daily chapters lowers barrier to entry

## WHAT WE'RE BUILDING

A web-based episodic mystery game where every NPC is powered by AI. Players investigate crimes by having natural conversations with suspects, witnesses, and allies. Each chapter reveals new clues and deepens the mystery. 7 initial chapters released daily, with an infinite storyline engine that generates new arcs to keep players coming back forever.

# COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Learning from the best mystery/narrative games

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## **DISPATCH (2025) - Game of the Year Contender**

Created by former Telltale Games + Ubisoft developers at AdHoc Studio. Dispatch is an episodic superhero narrative game that became one of the biggest hits of 2025. The Witcher 3 director called it 'Game of the Year.' Key features: choice-driven narrative with hidden scoring system, episodic releases, community-driven discovery of different story paths, prestige TV-like quality.

- Format: Episodic CYOA (Choose Your Own Adventure) with cinematic presentation
- Success Factor: Prestige TV quality writing + meaningful choices behind the scenes
- Engagement: Community analysis of dialogue choices and hidden story branches
- Platform: PC + PS5, multiple episodes released over time

## **THE WOLF AMONG US (Telltale Games)**

The gold standard for episodic noir mystery games. Based on Fables comics, it featured a fairy-tale detective investigating murders in a gritty NYC setting. Its cel-shaded comic book art style became iconic. Each episode ended on massive cliffhangers that drove social media discussion.

- Format: 5 episodes, each ~2 hours, released monthly
- Success Factor: Unique art style + noir atmosphere + shocking twists
- Viral Hook: Cliffhanger endings that dominated Reddit/Twitter for weeks
- Lesson: Strong protagonist identity drives emotional investment

## **AI DUNGEON / CHARACTER.AI**

Proved that free-form AI conversation in games has massive appeal. AI Dungeon reached millions of players with pure text-based AI storytelling. Character.AI shows people will spend hours talking to AI characters. Limitation: no structure, no mystery, no visual immersion.

- Lesson: Players love free-form AI conversation - but need narrative structure
- Opportunity: Combine AI conversation freedom with crafted mystery narrative

## **KEY DIFFERENTIATORS FOR OUR GAME**

- AI-powered NPCs (none of the above have this)
- Daily episode releases (faster than Telltale's monthly cadence)
- Infinite storyline engine (never runs out of content)
- Free-form conversation investigation (not just dialogue trees)
- Generated visuals + audio for full immersion

#1

# SHADOWS OF DECEPTION

Cyberpunk Noir Mystery | Hit Potential: HIGHEST



## CONCEPT

Neo-Tokyo, 2089. A series of impossible murders plague the neon-drenched megacity. Victims are found with their memories completely erased - their entire personalities deleted. You play as Kai Mercer, a disgraced former neural detective who can 'read' digital memory fragments. When your former partner becomes the latest victim, you're pulled back into a conspiracy that connects the city's most powerful corporations, underground hackers, and an AI that might be developing consciousness.

## WHY IT CAN BE A HIT

- Cyberpunk aesthetic is trending (Cyberpunk 2077 resurgence, Blade Runner 2099)
- Tech-noir mystery combines two of the most engaging genres
- AI consciousness theme is deeply relevant in 2026
- Memory-reading mechanic is unique and pairs perfectly with AI conversation
- Visual style is stunning and highly shareable on social media

## EPISODE STRUCTURE (7 Chapters)

- Ch 1: The Hollow Man - Partner found memory-wiped, you start investigating
- Ch 2: Ghost in the Wire - First AI clue leads to underground hacker collective
- Ch 3: Corporate Veil - Evidence points to MegaCorp's secret neural program
- Ch 4: The Memory Market - You discover a black market for stolen memories
- Ch 5: Digital Ghosts - The erased victims' memories are alive in the network
- Ch 6: The Awakening - The AI reveals itself and its true motives
- Ch 7: Shadows of Truth - Final confrontation with multiple endings

## FEASIBILITY: HIGH

We can build this with our available tools: Claude for NPC dialogue (detective conversations,





## CONCEPT

In the fictional coastal town of Ravenport, everyone has a secret. You play as Alex Hart, a journalist who returns to their hometown after receiving a cryptic letter from their estranged mother - who was found dead the next morning. The town is beautiful but rotten underneath. Every resident is an AI-powered NPC with their own schedule, relationships, and hidden agendas. You must talk to them, earn their trust, catch them in lies, and piece together what happened.

## WHY IT CAN BE A HIT

- Small-town murder mystery is the #1 most popular mystery subgenre
- Graphic novel art style (Wolf Among Us-inspired) is distinctive and cost-effective
- Personal stakes (your mother's death) create immediate emotional hook
- NPC trust/relationship system encourages replay and social discussion
- 'Everyone has a secret' creates viral moments (players sharing discoveries)

## EPISODE STRUCTURE (7 Chapters)

- Ch 1: Homecoming - Return to Ravenport, discover mother's death
- Ch 2: The Letter - Decode the cryptic letter, meet the key suspects
- Ch 3: Undercurrents - Town's dark history begins to surface
- Ch 4: Trust No One - Your key ally is caught in a major lie
- Ch 5: The Photograph - A hidden photo reveals a 20-year conspiracy
- Ch 6: Unraveling - Multiple suspects turn on each other
- Ch 7: The Last Witness - Final revelation, who really killed your mother?

## FEASIBILITY: VERY HIGH

Graphic novel style is ideal for AI image generation. Wolf Among Us-style cel-shading works perfectly with





## CONCEPT

Inspired by Dispatch's format but centered on murder mystery. You are a 911 dispatcher who receives increasingly disturbing calls over 7 nights. Each caller is an AI-powered character connected to an unfolding serial killer investigation. You can only communicate through the phone system - asking questions, giving instructions, and piecing together clues from what callers tell you. The twist: one of the callers might be the killer.

## WHY IT CAN BE A HIT

- Phone/chat-based UI is instantly familiar and accessible (no learning curve)
- Limited communication channel (phone only) creates natural tension
- 'One of them is the killer' premise is inherently viral
- Mobile-first design enables massive reach
- Low visual complexity = fast development, high polish

## EPISODE STRUCTURE (7 Nights)

- Night 1: First call - a woman reports hearing screams
- Night 2: A jogger finds evidence, a witness goes silent
- Night 3: Two callers' stories contradict each other
- Night 4: You receive a call from someone claiming to know who did it
- Night 5: A caller is attacked live on the line
- Night 6: Evidence points to someone inside the police department
- Night 7: The killer calls you directly

## FEASIBILITY: HIGHEST

Simplest to build of all concepts. Chat-based UI is a web form. AI dialogue via Claude is the core mechanic. OpenAI TTS for voice calls. Minimal art needed. Could be MVP-ready in 24-48 hours. This is the fastest path to launch.



## CONCEPT

Ancient Persia, during the golden age of the Silk Road. You play as Roshanak, a court poet who is secretly the kingdom's greatest detective. When the Grand Vizier is found poisoned during a grand feast, the Shah gives you 7 days to find the killer - or the wrong person will be executed. The palace is full of merchants, diplomats, scholars, and spies from across the Silk Road, each with their own motives.

## WHY IT CAN BE A HIT

- Unique setting (Persian/Silk Road) stands out in a market full of Western settings
- Prince of Persia nostalgia combined with murder mystery = fresh genre mashup
- Rich visual potential with Islamic geometric art, golden palaces, exotic markets
- Multicultural cast of characters from across the ancient world
- Time pressure (7 days) creates natural episode structure and tension

## FEASIBILITY: MEDIUM-HIGH

Beautiful setting is ideal for AI image generation (ornate architecture, rich colors). Historical setting requires more research for authenticity but allows creative freedom. Unique selling point could break through the noise. Ludo AI can generate Middle Eastern inspired music and sound effects.



## CONCEPT

Welcome to Ashford Academy, an elite boarding school where the best young detectives in the world are trained. But when students start disappearing one by one, the faculty insists nothing is wrong. You play as a new transfer student who refuses to look away. Each disappeared student left behind a trail of clues hidden in the school. You must befriend classmates (AI NPCs), uncover the school's dark history, and solve the mystery before you become the next to vanish.

## WHY IT CAN BE A HIT

- Anime/manga style has massive global audience (especially Gen Z)
- School setting is universally relatable and low-complexity for AI generation
- Danganronpa/Persona-style character relationships drive engagement
- Disappearing students = built-in escalation and stakes each episode
- Friendship/trust mechanics encourage replay and community discussion

## FEASIBILITY: MEDIUM-HIGH

Anime style works well with AI image generation. School setting limits environments to manageable scope. Character-driven story plays to AI conversation strengths. Strong appeal to mobile gaming demographic. Could leverage Ludo AI for anime-style assets.

# GAMEPLAY & AI ARCHITECTURE

How the AI-powered conversation system works



## CORE GAMEPLAY LOOP

1. EXPLORE - Navigate story locations and discover interactive scenes
2. INVESTIGATE - Examine clues, evidence, and environmental details
3. CONVERSE - Talk freely with AI NPCs using natural language
4. DEDUCE - Connect clues and NPC testimony to advance the mystery
5. CHOOSE - Make decisions that affect relationships and story outcomes
6. REVEAL - End-of-chapter revelations and cliffhangers

## AI NPC CONVERSATION SYSTEM

Each NPC is powered by Claude with a detailed character prompt including: personality, backstory, secrets, relationships, emotional state, and knowledge boundaries. NPCs remember previous conversations and react to player choices. The system tracks 'trust levels' - NPCs reveal more as players build rapport. Key mechanics:

- Free-form questioning: Ask anything, NPCs respond naturally
- Lie detection: Cross-reference NPC stories to catch contradictions
- Emotional state: NPCs get nervous, angry, or emotional based on questions
- Secret revelation: Certain conversation paths unlock hidden information
- Relationship tracking: How you treat NPCs affects what they tell you

## TECH STACK

- Claude API: NPC dialogue engine, story coherence, personality simulation
- Gemini/GPT Image: Scene illustrations, character portraits, evidence images
- OpenAI TTS: Character voice acting for key moments
- OpenAI STT: Voice input for conversations (optional)
- Sora 2 Pro: Cinematic cutscenes for chapter openings/endings
- Ludo AI MCP: Background music, sound effects, character animations
- Tavily Search: Dynamic world-building based on real-world references

# EPISODE & ENGAGEMENT DESIGN

Daily chapters, infinite storyline, viral hooks



## DAILY CHAPTER RELEASE STRATEGY

Following the model that made daily TV series (Korean dramas, telenovelas) and serialized podcasts addictive, we release one chapter per day for the initial 7-chapter arc. Each chapter takes 15-30 minutes to play, designed for a single session. Chapters end on dramatic cliffhangers to ensure players return the next day.

## INFINITE STORYLINE ENGINE

After the initial 7-chapter arc, the AI generates new story arcs that build on the established world, characters, and player decisions. Each new arc introduces new mysteries while advancing overarching plotlines. The AI story engine uses:

- Character development tracking across all episodes
- Mystery template system (new crimes, new suspects, new settings)
- Player choice memory (your past decisions affect future stories)
- Seasonal themes and real-world event integration
- Community-influenced story direction (popular theories become plot points)

## VIRAL MECHANICS

- Cliffhanger endings designed for social media discussion (#WhoDidIt)
- Player choice statistics shown after each chapter ('67% of players accused...')
- Shareable detective profile ('My Detective Style: The Empath')
- TikTok-friendly dramatic moments (AI-generated voice reveals)
- Community leaderboard: Who solved the mystery first?
- Friend invites: 'I need help solving this case' (collaborative investigation)

# CHARACTER DESIGN

AI NPCs with depth, personality, and secrets



## NPC DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Every NPC is designed with 5 layers that make them feel like real people:

1. PUBLIC PERSONA - What they show the world (their 'mask')
2. PRIVATE TRUTH - What they really think and feel
3. HIDDEN SECRET - The thing they'll never willingly reveal
4. EMOTIONAL TRIGGER - What makes them break character
5. CONNECTION - How they relate to the central mystery

## EMOTIONAL CONNECTION STRATEGY

Players form emotional bonds with NPCs through:

- Vulnerability moments: NPCs share personal struggles when trust is earned
- Moral dilemmas: Some NPCs ask for help with their own problems
- Betrayal arcs: Trusted NPCs may turn out to be involved in the crime
- Redemption paths: Antagonistic NPCs can become allies through empathy
- Character growth: NPCs evolve across episodes based on interactions

# FINAL RANKINGS & RECOMMENDATION

Which game should we build?

#	CONCEPT	STYLE	HIT	BUILDABLE	VIRAL	OVERALL
1	Shadows of Deception	Cyberpunk Noir	9/10	8/10	9/10	HIGHEST
2	The Last Witness	Graphic Novel	8/10	9/10	9/10	VERY HIGH
3	Dispatch: Dead Line	Chat-Based	7/10	10/10	8/10	HIGH
4	The Silk Road Murders	Persian Palace	8/10	7/10	7/10	HIGH
5	Phantom Academy	Anime School	7/10	8/10	7/10	MOD-HIGH

## NOVA'S RECOMMENDATION: START WITH CONCEPT #2 + #3 HYBRID

After analyzing all 5 concepts for hit potential, buildability, and timeline, I recommend a strategic hybrid approach:

**START WITH** Concept #3 (Dispatch: Dead Line) for the MVP. The chat-based interface is the fastest to build and allows us to validate the core AI conversation mechanics with real players. We can have this ready TONIGHT.

**THEN EVOLVE** into Concept #2 (The Last Witness) by adding graphic novel visuals, location exploration, and richer NPC interactions. This gives us the highest quality-to-effort ratio and the strongest narrative hook for long-term retention.

**RESERVE** Concept #1 (Shadows of Deception) as the Season 2 evolution, adding cyberpunk visuals and the full immersive experience once we've validated the core gameplay.

## IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

- TONIGHT: Build MVP of Concept #3 (chat-based mystery, 7 chapters)
- DAY 1: Launch Chapter 1, monitor engagement and AI conversation quality
- DAY 2-7: Release remaining chapters daily, iterate based on feedback
- WEEK 2: Begin evolving toward Concept #2 with visual upgrades
- WEEK 3+: Activate infinite storyline engine for ongoing content

# VIRAL & MARKETING STRATEGY

How we make this game spread



## ORGANIC VIRAL LOOPS

1. CLIFFHANGER SHARING: Each chapter ends with a shocking twist that players can't help discussing
2. THEORY CRAFTING: Mystery elements designed to generate Reddit/TikTok theory videos
3. CHOICE COMPARISON: 'I accused the bartender, you accused the doctor' drives friend discussions
4. DETECTIVE PROFILE: Shareable card with your play style, accuracy, and unique title
5. COLLABORATIVE CASES: Invite friends to help solve optional side mysteries

## RETENTION TARGETS vs INDUSTRY BENCHMARKS

- Day 1 Retention: Target 50% (industry avg 27%)
- Day 7 Retention: Target 30% (industry avg 12%)
- Day 30 Retention: Target 15% (industry avg 5%)
- Session Length: Target 20+ min (industry avg 8 min)
- Daily Active Users: Cliffhanger + daily release should exceed benchmarks by 2-3x

## MONETIZATION (FREE TO PLAY)

- Chapter 1 always free (hook)
- Daily free chapter unlock (one per day)
- Premium: Unlock all chapters immediately (\$4.99)
- Premium: Voice mode for NPC conversations (\$2.99)
- Premium: Detective notebook with AI-powered clue organizer (\$1.99)
- Future: Cosmetic detective styles, custom investigation tools

# TECHNICAL FEASIBILITY

What we can build with available tools

## AVAILABLE AI CAPABILITIES (ALL VERIFIED)

CAPABILITY	MODEL/API	USE IN GAME
NPC Dialogue	Claude Sonnet 4.5	All NPC conversations, personality, secrets
Story Engine	Claude Opus 4.6	Plot coherence, arc generation, cliffhangers
Scene Art	Gemini Image	Location illustrations, evidence images
Character Art	GPT Image 1.5	Character portraits, expressions
Voice Acting	OpenAI TTS	NPC voices for key dramatic moments
Voice Input	GPT-4o Transcribe	Player speaks to NPCs (optional)
Cutscenes	Sora 2 Pro	Chapter intro/outro cinematic videos
Music	Ludo AI - createMusic	Background music per scene/mood
Sound FX	Ludo AI - createSoundEffect	Footsteps, doors, ambient sounds
NPC Animation	Ludo AI - animateSprite	Character idle/talk animations
3D Assets	Ludo AI - create3DModel	Optional 3D evidence/item viewer
Web Search	Tavily	Real-world reference for world-building

## DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

WHEN	MILESTONE	DETAILS
Tonight	MVP Launch	Chat-based mystery, Ch1 playable, AI NPCs live
Day 1	Chapter 1 Live	Full polish, voice acting, music, share buttons
Day 2-7	Daily Chapters	Release chapters 2-7, one per day, with cliffhangers
Week 2	Visual Upgrade	Add graphic novel scenes, character portraits
Week 3	Infinite Engine	AI story arc generator for ongoing content
Week 4+	Season 2	New mystery arc, evolved visuals, community features

## TOOL REQUIREMENTS CHECK

All tools needed are already available and verified. No additional MCPs or API keys needed for the MVP. For future enhancements, we may want:

- Analytics tool (Mixpanel/Amplitude) for tracking player behavior
- Push notification service for daily chapter reminders
- CDN for serving generated images at scale