

‘The Hierophant’ Game Design Document

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1.0 Game Summary

“The Hierophant” is a visual novel and single-player point-and-click mystery game where the player is tasked to help solve a string of murders as a **Tarot Reader (TR)**. Set in 1977 in a fictitious American city, a serial killer evades the police, but the crime scenes they leave behind all relate to Tarot Cards. The police request a Tarot Reader (the player), as a consultant. Using your knowledge of Tarot, you must solve the mystery of these gruesome murders before it's too late.

1.1 Pillars

1. A Murder Mystery Visual Novel with point-and-click gameplay interface.
2. The narrative uses the fortune-telling of tarot cards as both a gameplay mechanic and a storytelling device.
3. Player interaction is based around the selection of dialogue choices which lead to multiple narrative outcomes.
4. The game draws inspiration from the dark, grungy environments of American cities in the late '70s to set the tone.

1.2 Genre/Platform

The genre is a visual novel with single-player point-and-click mystery game elements.
The platform will be on the PC and players will use a Mouse and Keyboard (spacebar).

2.0 Game Flow

The game is divided into sections, with two main gameplay sections, detailed above. As the story is structured into three acts, each act will contain several instances of the core gameplay loop.

2.1 Main Menu

The main menu options will include: New Game, Load Game, Options, and Exit Game

- New Game: Begins the game at the Introduction/Tutorial as seen on Story Branch Tree (see Interface Design)
- Load Game: Opens up save files that the player can return to and continue to play
- Options: Changes display options for the game. Shows game controls.
- Exit Game: Application closes

2.2 Start

- Once the player chooses to start the game, an introductory cutscene will play and lead into the first reading and tutorial level (Introduction/Tutorial in Story Branch Tree - see Interface Design)



(Above: Mockup of main screen interface)

3.0 Gameplay

The core gameplay loop revolves around a series of case file examinations, tarot readings, and police interrogations. Player choice will influence the outcome of the story as a whole, as well as their relationships with the non-player characters (NPCs).

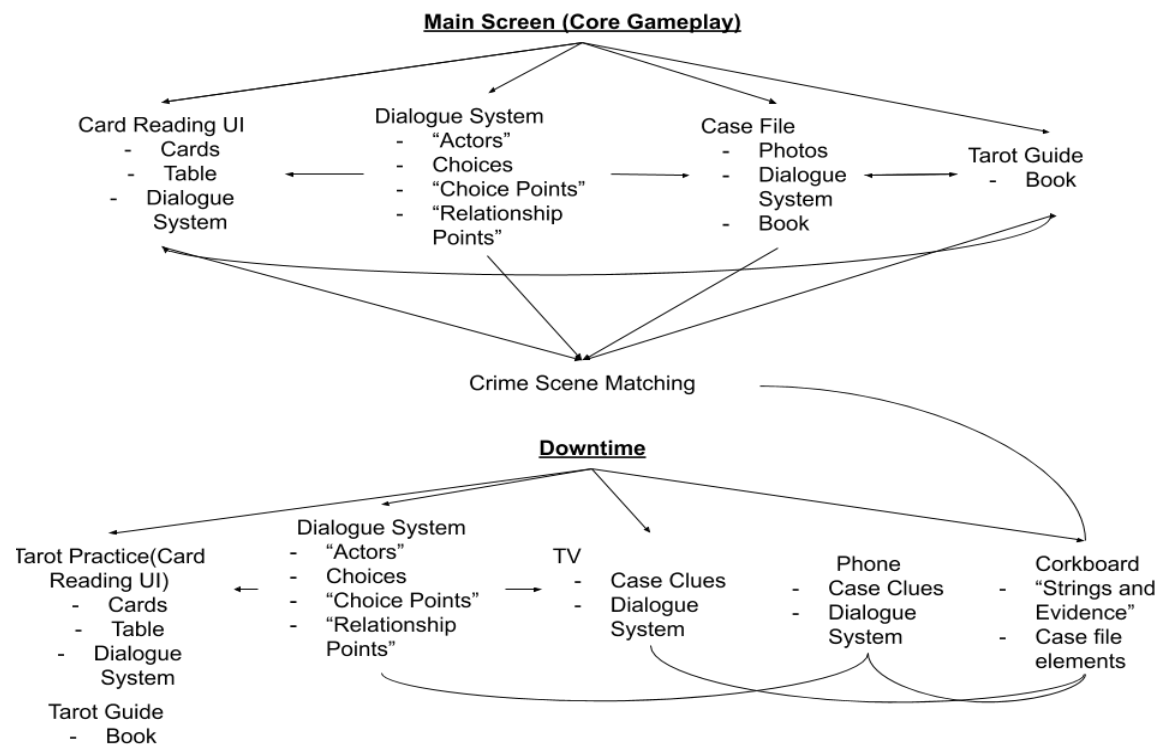
The **dialogue** will determine how the story plays out. Players will use the left click on the mouse to cue the next line of conversation. As the player interacts with NPCs, they will be given dialogue options to choose from. These options will influence your relationship with the NPCs you encounter. If you choose a response that has a good intention, you are awarded point(s). If you choose a response that has a mean intention, your points are deducted. The relationship scoring system will be operating primarily behind the scenes, though the player will be given hints like changes in characters' expressions (sprites) whether their response was favourable or not.

Once you are hired by **Lana (female detective)**, you are tasked with examining **case files**. Each case file contains a collection of crime scene evidence. Upon the first examination, there will be a zoomed view of the table where you can interact with the evidence photos as well as view the cards and tarot guide. When a piece of evidence has been clicked, **Lana** will explain the contents of the photo and other necessary information. Once all the pieces have been examined, they get added to the **corkboard** which will be accessible to players at any time.

After the case files have been examined, the player will have to connect the imagery and symbolism of tarot cards to the crime scene. The player can access their tarot guide if they are unsure about which card is the correct match. When the player selects a potential match, they will be scored on whether or not their answer is correct. **Lana's** response will indicate whether or not the answer was correct. "Precision" points are awarded/deducted based on the answer. The matches selected will influence the outcome of the individual case and the overall story. The number of cards presented for matching increases with each subsequent case, thus increasing the difficulty.

Tarot Readings are presented in **police interrogation format**. Throughout each case, **Lana** and **Keith (rookie detective)** bring in a suspect that the player will perform tarot readings on. These readings are meant to interrogate the suspects and encourage them to reveal relevant evidence to the case. The player will be scored on their accuracy of connecting the symbolism and meaning of the cards to the suspect and their answers.

In between core gameplay sections, (during "downtime"), the player can review case notes, practice tarot, and gain more information about the world in the game. Depending on the players' dialogue choices in conversations with NPCs, additional dialogue options and scenes will become available. These dialogue-only sections resemble a traditional visual novel. These influence the outcome of a case and an NPC's overall fate. (See [Interface Design](#) for more detail.)



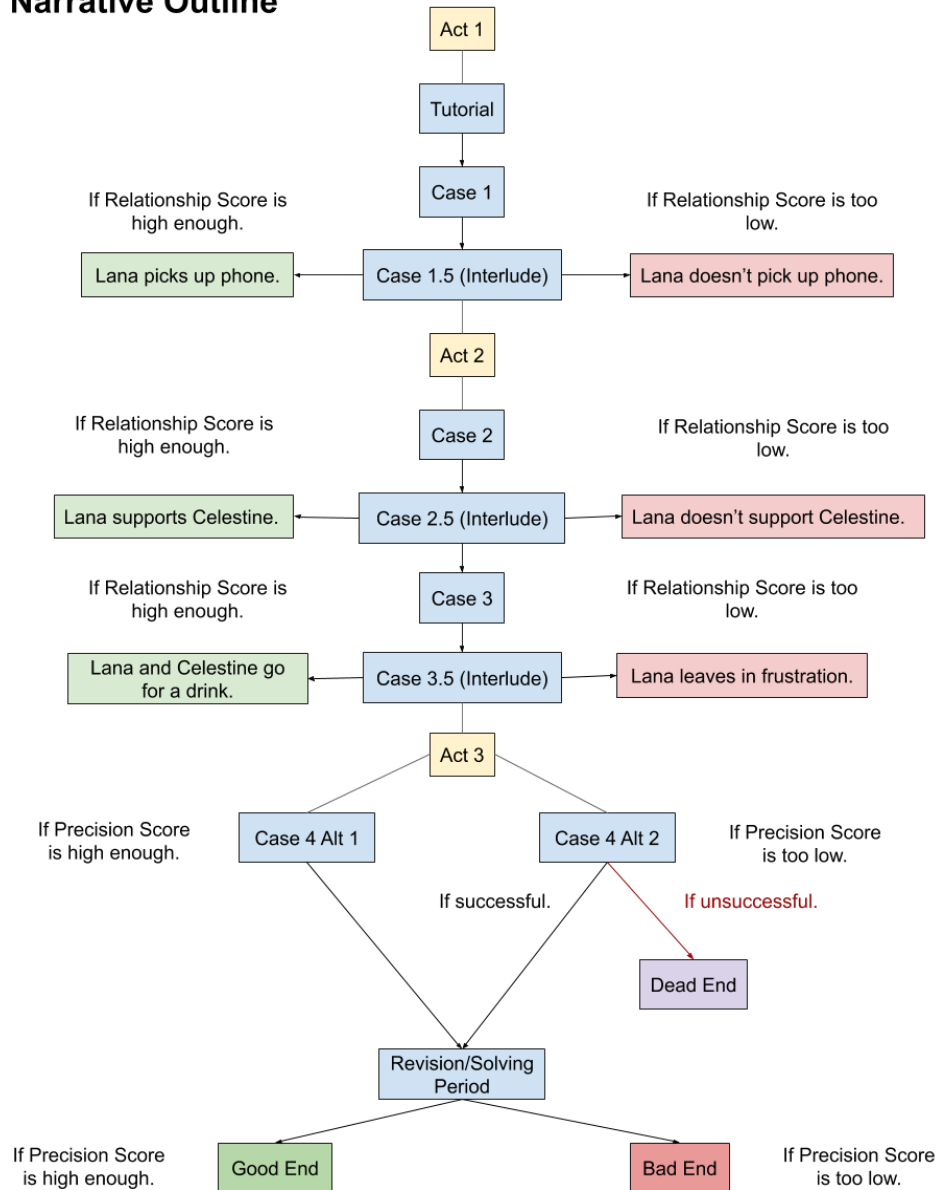
3.1 Cards

The game will use twenty-two of the Major Arcana Cards from the classic Tarot.
These are:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| ➤ 0. The Fool | ➤ 8. Strength | ➤ 15. The Devil |
| ➤ 1. The Magician | ➤ 9. The Hermit | ➤ 16. The Tower |
| ➤ 2. The High Priestess | ➤ 10. Wheel of Fortune | ➤ 17. The Star |
| ➤ 3. The Empress | ➤ 11. Justice | ➤ 18. The Moon |
| ➤ 4. The Emperor | ➤ 12. The Hanged Man | ➤ 19. The Sun |
| ➤ 5. The Hierophant | ➤ 13. Death | ➤ 20. Judgement |
| ➤ 6. The Lovers | ➤ 14. Temperance | ➤ 21. The World |

4.0 Interface Design

Narrative Outline



The story is separated into three acts. There will be a tutorial that will teach the player what all the available interfaces are and how they can use them. It will also teach them the idea of tarot and how to choose cards in a reading to get the answers they are looking for. Act one will also be intuitive for the player. As the story progresses, the scoring will scale up and add or deduct points accordingly. Act Three branches off depending on how well the player solves cases. In the end, the scores of "Precision" (how well the player accurately solves the cases) and

“Relationship”, (how strong Celestine’s relationship with other NPCs is) will be tallied up. Depending on the player’s choices and score, they will get one of the two endings listed in the [NDD](#).

Each case (blue box) has a specific mystery, involving a **case file examination**, a **reading/interrogation**, and specific world events (aka “**downtime**”). Depending on how well the player performs, they will either solve the mystery or not. If they succeed they will get a boost in “Precision” and a dialogue section relating to their success. There will also be a chance to boost or deplete their “Relationship” score with the NPCs based on the choices they make. If they fail then there will be a reduction in their “Precision” score and receive a cutscene relating to their failure. They will still be able to boost or reduce their “Relationship” score regardless of whether they were successful in solving the mystery.

This continues until the end of Act Two when their “Precision” score will be tallied up. If they rank low at this point, then a minor character will be killed (**Suzanne the Journalist**) and the player must solve the recent murder that they could’ve prevented (Case 4 ALT 2). If they succeed in their precision rank, that minor character will be spared and the player will open another cold case (Case 4 ALT 1). This will offer more clues to catch the culprit in the Cases Review (Summation). The case review will include the **corkboard** and all of the information collected up until that moment.

This split will reunite in the Cases Review (Summation), except if the player has failed to save the minor character (**Suzanne the Journalist**), and fails to solve the fourth case (Case 4 ALT 2). The serial killer will lament that they expected more from the Tarot Reader, and kill her, ending the game on a sour note.

However, if this hasn’t happened then the player will have to connect the cases. Their final scores are tallied, and depending on how high both their Precision and Relationship score is, they get one of two endings (listed/explained in [NDD](#).)

4.1 Case File Examination

In every case, the player will be sat down with the detectives who have a file. The view of the table will switch to bird’s eye view for easier examination. The player can then click through and interact with the evidence kept in that file. Upon clicking an item, there will be a voiceover (done by **Lana**) explaining the evidence to the player. Once the item has been interacted with, it will appear on the **corkboard** for further reference.

(Below mockup of Case File)



4.1.1 Case Design

The layout of the case file will be standardized for each case. A collection of evidence will be scattered throughout the folder. The player will have to connect a Tarot card to the crime scene evidence based on the examination of the photos and the imagery in the tarot cards that are provided for selection. Note: Not all twenty-two cards will be available for selection. Only a specific few.

Case One: "The Fool's Errand"

The evidence provided in case one will consist of a:

- Photo of a large tree near a cliff leading into a small cannon.
- Photo of a young, long-haired man with a guitar on stage. Newspaper clipping, "A Rising Star", written by Suzanne Young.
- Photo of a young boy in a school uniform with an older man.
- Photo of a man wearing a jester hat while holding a guitar.
- Business card reading, Swindle Talent Agency, XXX-XXX-XXXX, Richard 'Ricky' Graves, Talent Manager.
- An iron-on patch of a dog.

Solution:

In terms of imagery, the player will have to make the connection that the victim matches "The Fool" card. In terms of narrative, the correct match is "The Fool" because "The killer is saying the victim set off on a journey for fame and fortune, but lost sight of himself in the process". From this, the detectives will agree, and Celestine will ask who started the guitarist's music career. The detectives will say his record manager (Ricky Graves), and the tarot reader will say that the killer is leading them towards the manager.

Case Two: "Tall, Dark, and Dead"

The evidence provided in case two will consist of a:

- Photo of a tall urban building at night with lightning in the sky.
- Photo of a smiling man in a suit and tie. He is on a stage holding a small computer chip in his hand and waving to the crowd.
- Photo of a woman wearing a white beret next to Leo. He has his arm around her and she is smiling at the cameras.
- The cracked microprocessor that was broken from being smashed.
- A business card that reads "Leonardo Jr. Bates. Cancom Executive. Phone xxx-xxx-xxx. 75th floor of Cancom Tower." There are bloodstains on its edges.
- Bank notice with lots of red "Overdue" stamps on it.
- Doctor's notice for Beatrice Bates. Says she was getting a prescription for "Clomiphene citrate" at 8 PM on October 7th, 1974.

Solution:

The Player will have to connect the card meaning to the crime scene based on the crime scene evidence and tarot card imagery like in case one. In terms of imagery, the player must make the connection that the photo of the building matches the imagery in the card "The Tower". In terms of narrative, the correct option is "The Tower" because "The killer is saying the victim invited chaos into his life". From this, the detectives will agree that the victim was known to be a risk-taker in the stock market. The detectives decide that they should bring in the wife for questioning to see if Celestine can get more answers.

Case Three: "Caught in Between"

The evidence provided in case three will consist of a:

- Photo of a gazebo in the middle of Willis Park. The picture was taken at sunset.
- Photo of a slender woman in a pantsuit in the middle of a school campus.
- Photo of a posh couple in the middle of a cathedral attending a night mass.
- A briefcase that seems to be worn out as though it were thrown away.
- Elegant veil, long enough to act as a shawl.
- Note with messy handwriting.
- Divorce papers that were signed by only Isabelle Giovanni.

Solution:

The Player will have to determine that the correct Tarot Card is the 'High Priestess'. The structure of the gazebo is meant to represent the pillars of the entrance to the temple found between the High Priestess. The translucent shawl is indicative of the clothing the High Priestess wears. As one of the symbols of the High Priestess is the spread of knowledge and wisdom, the victim was strangled as a sign of silencing that voice. The time of death also represents the ideology of light and dark, sundown being the time where the sunsets and nighttime begins. The pomegranate and crown are meant to throw off the player, pomegranates

are found on both the High Priestess and Empress card while the 12-jewelled crown is solely independent of the Empress card.

Case Four Alternative #1: "Judgement Day"

The evidence included in the first alternative case four will consist of a:

- Newspaper clipping detailing a research accompaniment by Professor Henry D. Jenkins.
- Photo of the victim tied to a tall lamp in his office. The body is placed in a 'flamingo-like' position. He has no noticeable wounds.
- Autopsy report reporting a death by cyanide
- Picture of a neat office.
- Picture of brandy on the desk.
- Picture of a woman and a young boy.

Solution:

The player will have to connect the murder to the tarot card "The Hanged Man" *reversed*. The way the body is tied to the lamp post matches the physical position of the man on the hanged man card. The killer is saying the victim should have slowed down but ignored these signs. The detectives know the victim was a workaholic who focused too much on his work rather than his personal life and suffered because of it. The detectives say they should bring in a close coworker to ask about the victim.

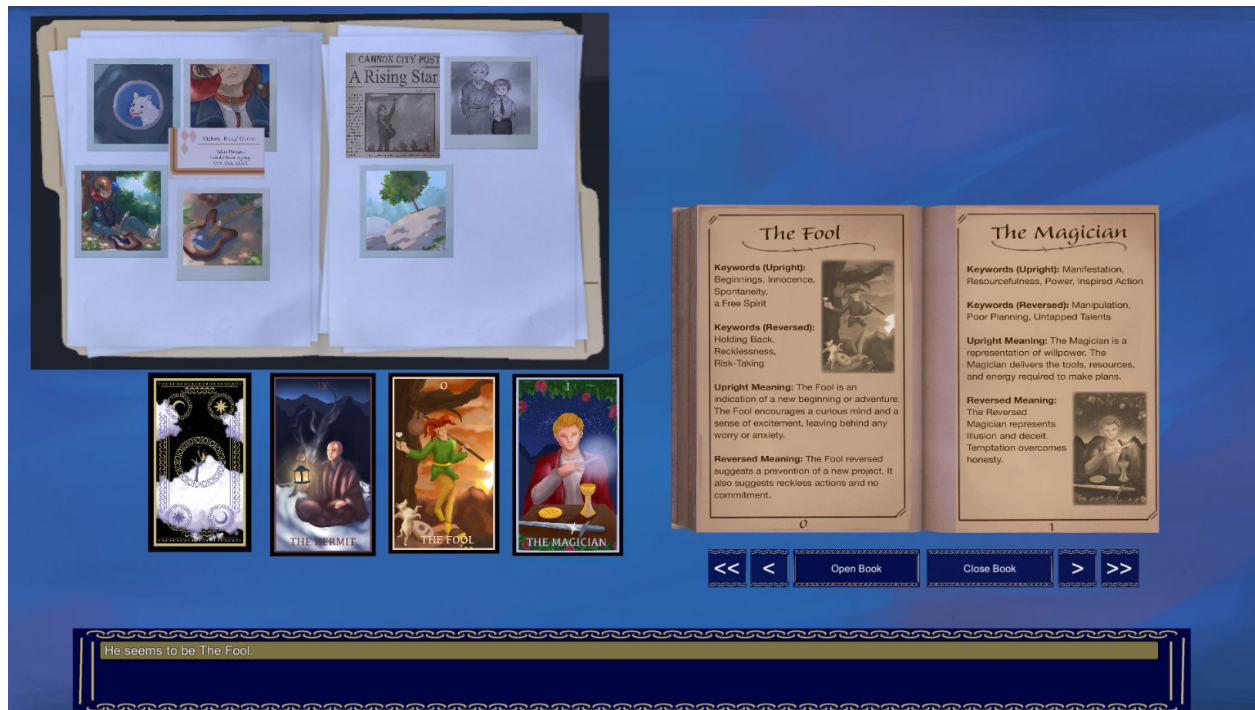
Case Four Alternative #2: "The Fallen Angel"

The evidence included in the second alternative case four will consist of a:

- Picture of Suzanne Young.
- Crime scene. Suzanne is in a cemetery, tied to a gravestone with her newspaper articles fastened to her back like wings. Her head is tilted upwards looking at the sky as her eyes are closed.
- Letters to Professor Carmicheal about Tarot.

Solution:

The Player will have to determine that the correct Tarot Card is "Judgement". The newspaper clippings strung together like wings represent the soul gaining her wings in the judgement card. The graveyard and the position of the body symbolize the dead rising to be judged by the angels as to whether they will go to heaven or hell. In terms of narrative the player needs to connect the crime scene to Judgement, or else Keith will get impatient and convince Lana to give up the tarot lead. However, solving it will make Keith realize there is a connection to tarot and he becomes more forgiving. Lana decides to bring in Professor Carmicheal since Suzanne was using him as an informant to tarot and she was last seen with him.



(Above mockup of Matching the Tarot Card to the Crime Scene Evidence)

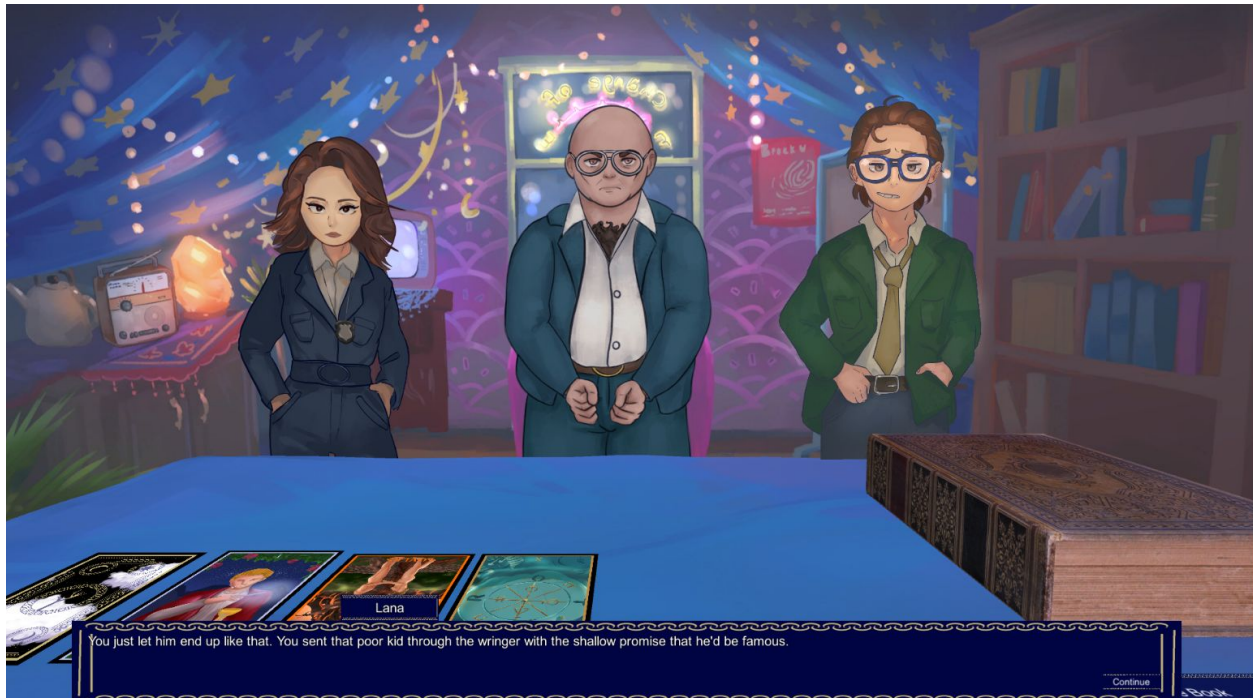
4.2 Matching Tarot Cards to Crime Scene Evidence

Upon examining the evidence in the case file the player will be prompted to interpret the evidence to identify which tarot card matches the crime scene. A selection of Major Arcana cards will be spread out in front of the player once the deck has been clicked. The number of cards presented in the spread will scale up as the story progresses. For example, case one will have three cards, case two will have four cards, case three will have five cards, etc. Upon selecting a potential match, your accuracy will be scored accordingly. If your interpretation is correct you are awarded point(s). If your interpretation is wrong, you will be deducted point(s). Right or wrong answers will also be indicated by **Lana** in her responses to your selection. This scoring system will contribute to your overall score which will affect the outcome of the game. As the game progresses, the scoring system will increase with difficulty, awarding and/or deducting more points per case.

4.3 Readings/Interrogations

The detectives will bring in a suspect and ask the Tarot Reader to do a reading. Celestine will draw three cards and place them on the table. The Player can then click on each card from left to right (going in order: Past, Present, Future). Each card is related to the specific reading (no randomization) and the Tarot Reader will comment on the card revealed. The player can then click on the details of the card for more information, as well as consult a guidebook with even more information. After they're satisfied with gathering info, they can choose to "Interpret" and dialogue options will pop up. These options will be an interpretation of the card, but only certain ones are correct. If the player chooses the correct answers, they receive more precision points

and the suspect will reveal more helpful information to solve the case. If the player is having difficulty choosing the right interpretation, there is a Tarot Guide that will be accessible during the readings. This offers additional information about the cards and their meanings. This process is repeated three times (Past/Present/Future) and depending on how many answers the player got correctly, they will either succeed or fail the reading. If they succeed, it goes towards their precision score and opens up a specific path where the character will reveal more information. If they fail, it reduces their precision score and opens up a path where the character hardly reveals anything and leaves.



(Above: Interrogation interface)

4.4 Downtime

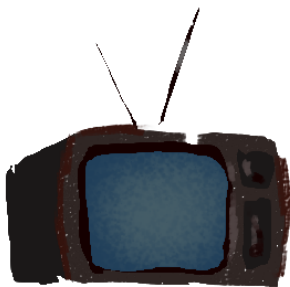
A “downtime” scene will be presented after every case. The player is left alone in the fortune-telling shop and can interact with select items in the environment. The select items that will be interactive in the downtime sections will be the **phone, television, tarot deck, tarot guide, radio, and the corkboard**. The downtime section will be indicated by the store sign shutting off for the night.



(Above mockup of Downtime Environment with secondary interfaces)

4.5 Secondary Interfaces

- Television Set
 - This will show certain events based on the case. When the player clicks on the television it will zoom in full screen. It will not be animated, but there will be static images with text. This is to serve as world-building, in particular for the political climate of the city. This object will be identified as interactive with a highlighted border. This object will also be a separate item from the rest of the environment.



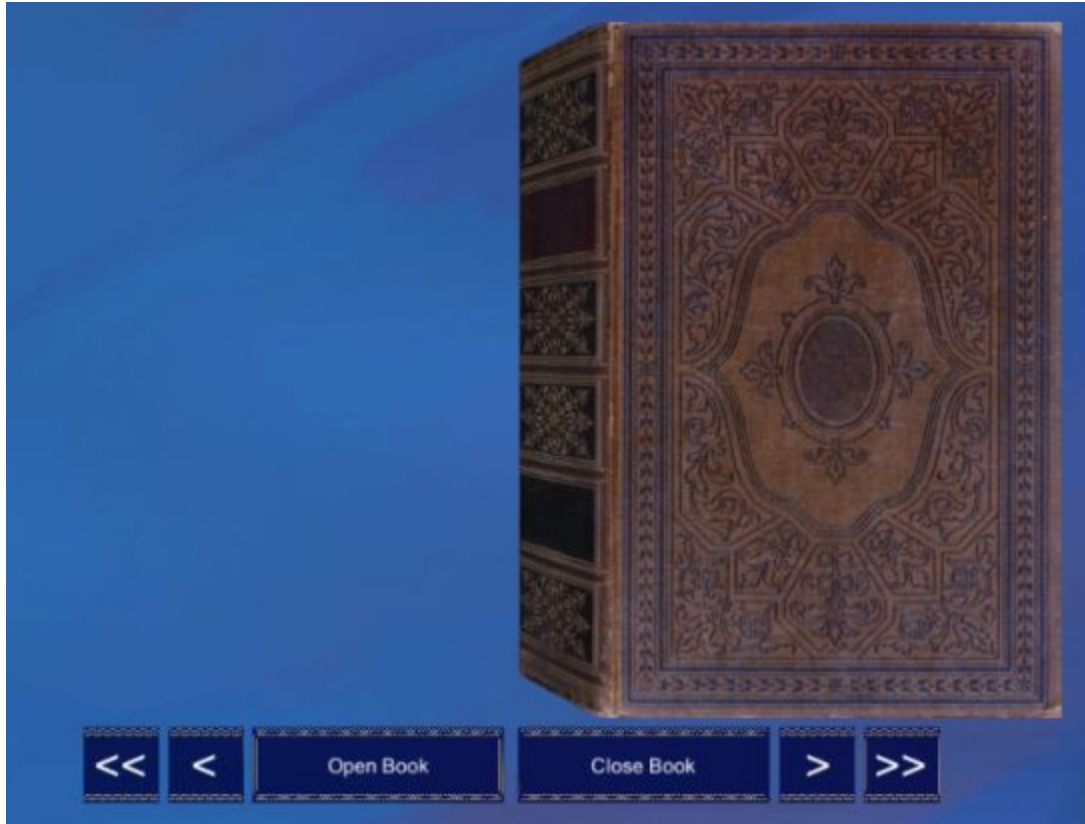
➤ Tarot Deck

- The Tarot deck will be available to the player to browse through as many times as they want. The deck will contain all twenty-two cards in the Major Arcana. Clicking on the object will spread out the cards on the table. Players can then shuffle through and choose a card for closer examination. This object will also be a separate item from the rest of the environment.

➤ Tarot Guide

- The tarot guide will act as a source of information for the player's deck of cards. It will explain the symbolism and meanings in certain spreads to help the player make accurate choices in readings/interrogations.

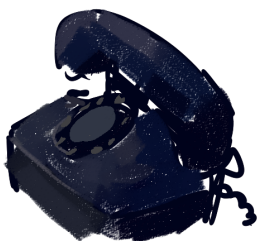




(above: tarot guide)

➤ Rotary Phone

- The Rotary Phone will be for communication between the detectives and the Tarot Reader. If the player wishes to skip “downtime” they can click the phone and a voice-over of Lana will pop up saying the Tarot Reader is needed for a new case. This will then transition to either a Case Examination or a Reading depending on the Case. This object will be identified as interactive with a highlighted border. This object will also be a separate item from the rest of the environment.



➤ Corkboard

- The Corkboard will track the progress of the player and store all the evidence gathered from the case file examinations as well as information gathered from secondary sources like the TV, radio, and tarot guide. Each case will be grouped together in sections. At the end of every case, the corkboard will be shown to update the player on their progress as well as everything they've collected after each case. This object will also be a separate item from the rest of the environment.



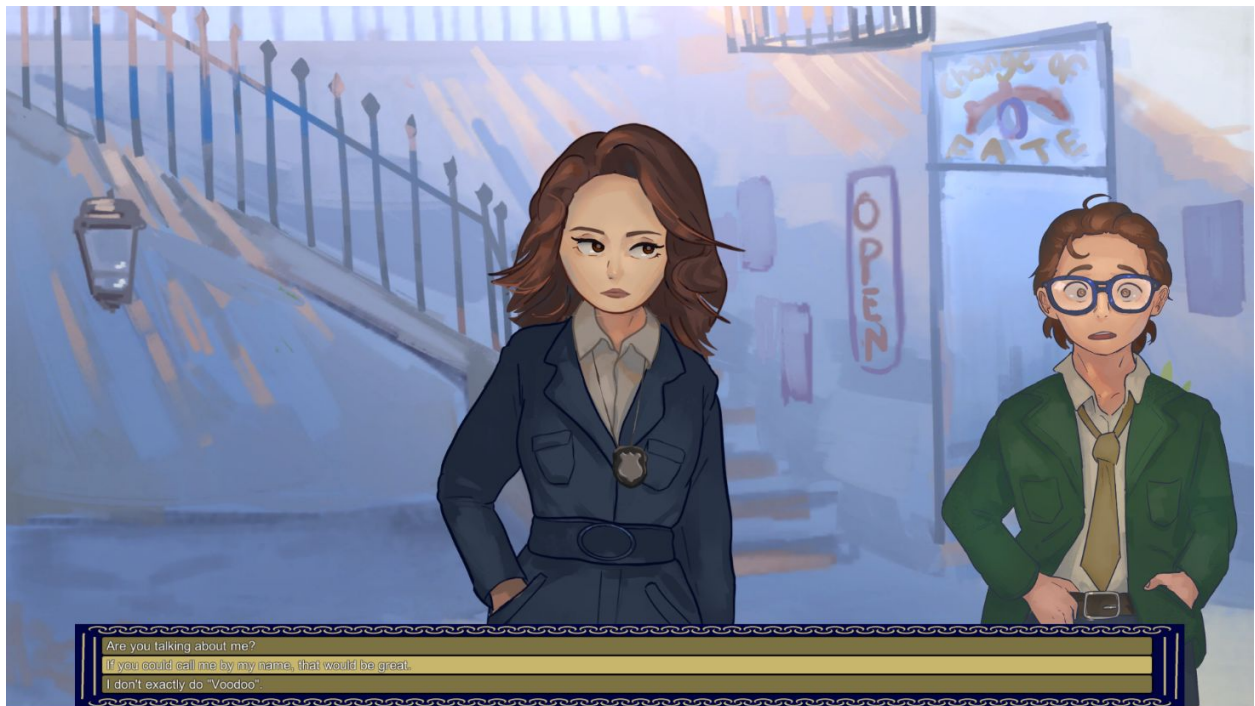
➤ Radio

- The radio will act as world-building. It will be playing in the background of the downtime segments and provide additional information for each case.



4.6 Visual Novel Dialogue

Throughout the game, there will be dialogue choices that impact the “Relationship” score of the Tarot Reader and the Detective. These will pop up in between the other three types of gameplay (Case File Examination, Readings and Downtime) in the form of a cutscene. The type of cutscene will be dependent on whether the player correctly or incorrectly solved the case prior. For example, if the player solves a case they will receive a more positive outcome and be given easier prompts to boost their “Relationship” score. If the player does not solve a case they will receive a more negative outcome in the story and be given harder prompts to win back the favour of **Lana (female detective)** in their “Relationship” score. There will be three dialogue choices the player can select. Each choice will have a value of positive or negative “Relationship”. This score will be tallied up at the end of the game and affect the ultimate ending (see [NDD](#) for details).

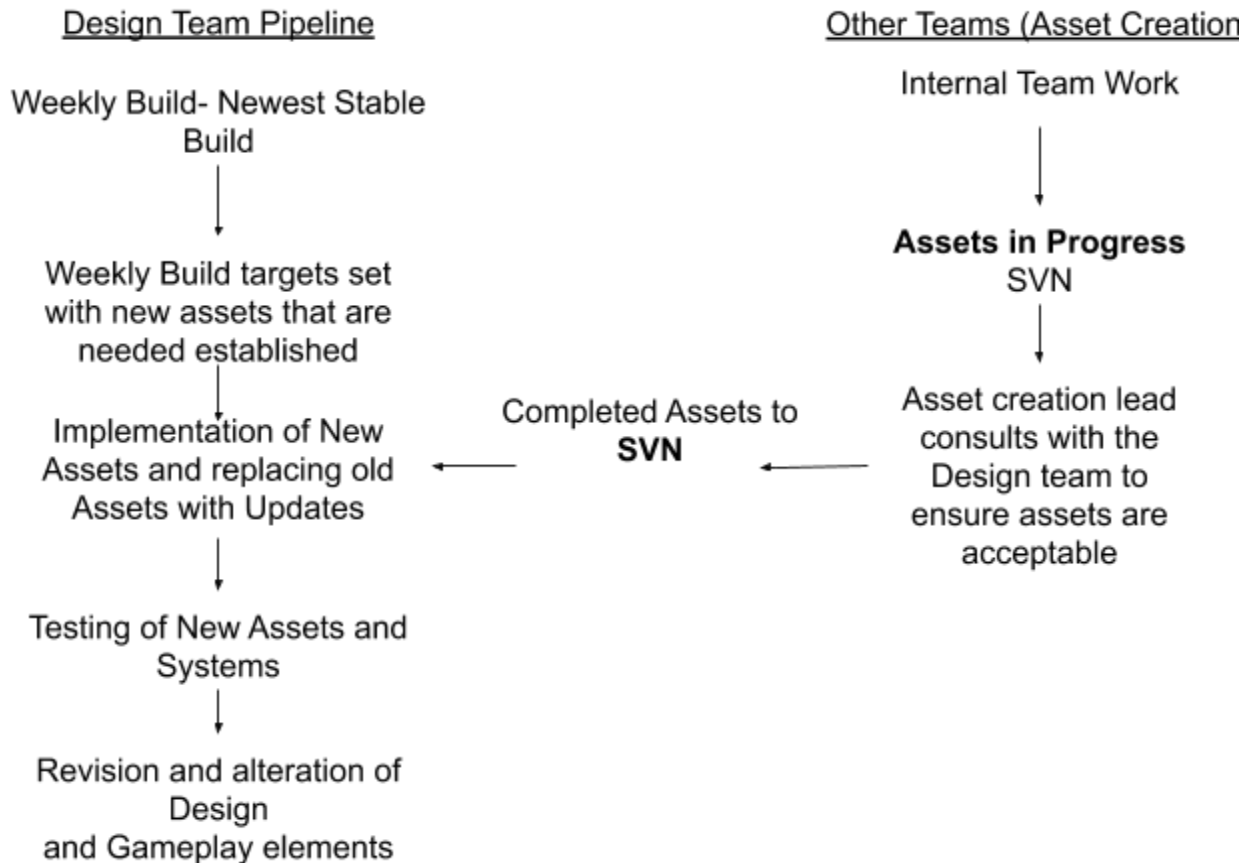


(Above: dialogue box)

In summary, every case will have a **case file examination**, a **matching of crime scene evidence to tarot cards** puzzle, a **reading/interrogation**, and a **downtime/rest** segment. These can vary in order but all four must be included in every case. Depending on the player's

proficiency in solving the case they will get a “Precision” Score which determines what ending they get. In between cases, there will be cutscenes to progress the story, which will contribute to the “Relationship” score. Both “Relationship” and “Precision” scores will determine the ultimate ending of the game.

5.0 Design Pipeline



6.0 Character Design

See [Art Design Document](#).

Narrative Summary

See [Narrative Design Document](#)

7.0 Sound Overview

See [Sound Design Document](#)

7.1 Music

See [Sound Design Document](#)

7.2 Voice

See [Sound Design Document](#)