

DOUBLE AGENT

A Spy & High School Life
Simulation Game

Premise

You are a high school junior who was quietly recruited by a government intelligence agency three weeks before the school year started. Your mission runs until graduation. Your cover cannot break. Neither can you.



Synopsis

The player is a 16-year-old student placed undercover in high school. The agency believes a foreign intelligence network is operating out of the school, using faculty and student connections to move classified information. The player was recruited specifically because they are young enough to be invisible, smart enough to be useful, and has no prior ties to the school.

The player attends classes, builds friendships, manages their GPA, and earns spending money, all while feeding intelligence back to their handler each night. As the semester progresses, missions escalate, the enemy network gets closer to identifying a leak, and the player's two worlds begin pulling in opposite directions. A friend wants to know why you keep disappearing. A teacher notices your grades slipping. A mission goes sideways and someone at school saw something they should not have.




TWO WORLDS, ONE LIFE

SPY WORLD (NIGHT)

The player receives mission objectives, deploys to locations, extracts information, and makes decisions that have real consequences. This mode is where the thriller lives.

SCHOOL WORLD (DAY)

They attend classes, choose how to spend free periods, manage friendships, and keep their grades high enough to avoid scrutiny. This mode is deliberately low-stakes in appearance. The tension is quiet. Nothing here looks like a spy game.



The background of the slide is a photograph of a school hallway. A person is walking away from the camera down the center of the hallway. The hallway has lockers on both sides and fluorescent lights on the ceiling. The image is faded and has a light beige overlay. In the top right corner, there are three small, dark purple circles. In the bottom left corner, there are three small, dark purple circles and a thin horizontal line extending across the width of the slide.


Questions User Asks

what did you sacrifice today, and for which life? Staying late to study means skipping a briefing. Accepting a social invitation builds cover but costs time you needed for surveillance. Money earned from a part-time job can fund equipment or a class trip, not both. Neither mode is allowed to feel optional, because the theme only works if both worlds are genuinely demanding. The player is not a spy who goes to school. They are two people at once, and the game's pressure comes from the fact that neither version of them can afford to fail.



Tone

We want players to feel the slow, creeping weight of living a double life — not through action-movie thrills, but through the small, ordinary moments where the two worlds rub against each other. A friend asks where you were last night. A teacher pulls you aside after class. You sit at lunch and realize you cannot remember which version of yourself you are supposed to be right now.

- **Tense.** The threat in this game is never a gun or a car chase. It is a pause in conversation, a look that lasts a second too long, a lie you told two weeks ago that you are not sure you can keep straight. We want players to feel a low, constant pressure — the kind that does not spike but never fully goes away.
 - **Ordinary.** The setting is deliberately mundane. Hallways, classrooms, a cafeteria, a bedroom desk with homework on it. The contrast between how normal everything looks and how precarious your situation actually is should make even routine moments feel loaded. The danger lives inside the everyday.
 - **Thrilling.** For all its weight, this is still a spy game — and there are moments where that hits. A mission comes together perfectly, a risky bluff lands, and for a second you feel untouchable. We want players to chase that feeling, because it is the reason anyone would ever say yes to this life in the first place. The thrill is real. It just always comes with a price.
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The Setting

The game takes place at a public high school in a mid-sized American city. The agency selected it because it is large enough to absorb a new student without friction, and because a foreign intelligence network has been using its faculty, its events, its building to move classified information for at least two years. Nobody at the school knows this.

The player arrived three weeks before the school year started. There was a cover story, a schedule, a handler reachable only after ten at night. Everything else had to be built from scratch, in real time, under observation.

We want the school to feel completely real. Not the movie version, but the real version, which is duller and harder to read. The kind of place where someone can be passing documents to a foreign government and it looks, from the outside, like they are just a little distracted. Missions do not take place in dramatic locations. They take place in the copy room after hours, the parking lot during a home game, the library basement where nobody goes.

The enemy network has been inside the building longer than the player has. As the semester progresses it gets closer to identifying the leak. Meanwhile the player's two lives begin pulling apart. A friend wants to know why you keep disappearing. A teacher has noticed the grades slipping. Someone saw something last Tuesday and has not mentioned it yet.

The school year ends in June. The mission is supposed to end with it. The player is sixteen. They did not know, when they said yes, what this would actually do to them.

Game Play

Our core gameplay is managing a double life — navigating high school as a normal student while carrying out covert missions as an undercover spy. The player must keep three stats healthy at all times: Cover Integrity, GPA, and Social Standing. Each day, the player is given a limited number of action points to allocate across competing obligations. The game is structured around a school semester. Each in-game day presents the player with choices about how to spend their time:

- Attending class maintains GPA but leaves little room for mission prep
- Socializing builds relationships but costs time you may not have
- Skipping obligations to focus on missions drains the stats you neglect
- Resting recovers your ability to function but advances the clock

Nights are reserved for missions, which play out as branching decision sequences. There is no action gameplay — instead, the player reads a situation and chooses how to respond. Do you talk your way past the guard or find another route? Do you grab the extra intel and risk being late, or play it safe? Choices have consequences that carry forward into the next school day.

We will include a UI element showing the state of all three stats at a glance, so players always feel the tension of what is slipping. Relationships with key characters also function as a hidden resource — a well-maintained friendship might give you an alibi, while a neglected one might become a liability at the worst moment.

Whether the game will include fail states or simply route players toward different endings based on their stat levels is an open question. Hard fail states create more tension but risk frustrating players. Soft consequences that reshape the story may better suit the tone we are going for. This is something we will test early in the prototyping stage.

Game Play - II



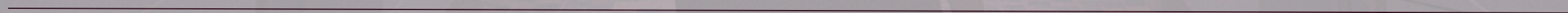
Our core gameplay is built around managing a double life through scheduling, map exploration, and high-pressure encounters. During the day, the player moves through a school map and chooses how to spend limited time across classes, studying, friendships, errands, and covert preparation. Different locations offer different ways to build credibility, gather information, create alibis, or prepare for missions.

The player must balance four major stats: Cover Integrity, GPA, Social Standing, and **Mission Progress**. Focusing only on school life keeps the player safe but causes the mission to stall. Focusing too much on spy work advances the operation but damages grades, relationships, and cover.

Many scenes are built around conflicting objectives. The player may need to appear like an ideal student while secretly disrupting a situation, impress a teacher while hiding another motive, support a friend while extracting information, or join a normal school event while advancing a covert task. These contradictions create the main tension of play.

When major conflicts occur, the game shifts into small turn-based card encounters. The cards available depend on earlier choices: studying may create academic credibility, socializing may provide an alibi, scouting may unlock safer routes, and resting may improve composure. Choices carry forward, shaping relationships, suspicion, mission outcomes, and different endings.

As the semester progresses, the player begins to realize that the mission may not be as simple as it first appeared. Hidden files, strange patterns, and repeated tests point toward something larger..... The player may not have been chosen by accident.....



Tone References

The central influences for the game are le Carré's view that espionage is mostly waiting and compromise, Donna Tartt's suffocating social worlds, and Richard Linklater's insistence that being young is its own kind of stakes.

Books

- John le Carré (esp The Spy Who Came in from the Cold and Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy)
- The Secret History — Donna Tartt
- Never Let Me Go — Kazuo Ishiguro
- Patricia Highsmith (esp The Talented Mr. Ripley)

Movies that are slow, specific, and quietly unbearable

- The Lives of Others
- Zodiac
- Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy
- Ordinary People

Movies where normal life is the threat

- Blue Velvet
- Happiness
- American Beauty

TV

- The Americans
- My So-Called Life
- The Outsider

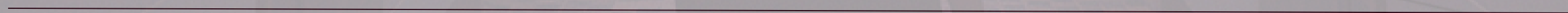
Games

- Disco Elysium
- Oxenfree
- Night in the Woods
- Firewatch

Key Challenges for Design



- **Making stats feel meaningful, not mechanical.** The three-stat system only works if players genuinely care about what each stat represents. If GPA feels like an arbitrary number rather than a real consequence, the tension collapses. We need to make sure that every stat change is tied to a scene or a character moment, so the cost of neglect feels personal rather than numerical.
- **Balancing player agency with narrative control.** Because the story escalates on a fixed semester timeline, we need to ensure that player choices feel impactful without breaking the pacing of the plot. Too much freedom and the story loses shape. Too little and it feels like the player is just watching it happen.
- **Writing believable characters on a short timeline.** The spy premise only creates emotional stakes if the people around you feel real. With five weeks of development time, we will need to be selective — a smaller cast written with depth will serve the game better than many shallow ones.



Key Challenges for Tech



- **Branching dialogue and stat tracking in Ren'Py.** The core loop depends on choices that carry consequences across multiple days. Building a system where past decisions surface naturally later in the game — without creating an unmanageable web of variables — will be our main technical challenge.
- **UI legibility.** The stat display needs to communicate pressure at a glance without pulling the player out of the story. Getting that balance right in terms of visual design will require iteration.
- **Scope.** This is the most important challenge. Ren'Py is approachable, but branching narratives grow quickly. We will need to set firm limits early on how many story branches, days, and endings we commit to, and resist expanding scope once production begins.



Who is this for?

This is a game for ages 16 and up who find ordinary situations more unsettling than extraordinary ones.

Although it has spy mechanics, it is not primarily targeted at fans of action games or espionage thrillers. Our plan is to lead with the human story rather than the genre: a teenager trying to hold two lives together. The school setting, the friendships, the pressure of junior year... most people have a version of all that. The mission running underneath is what makes those things strange.

Most spy games promise gadgets, gunfights, and heroes who always know the next move. This game offers something more unexpected: a teenager trying to hold a double life together with no training, no backup, and a math test on Friday. Games that draw tension from ordinary life rather than extraordinary spectacle are rare, and there is a real audience hungry for them.



Appendix – Individual Concept Docs

<https://mechanicsofmagic.com/2026/05/04/p2-individual-concept-doc-sally/>

<https://mechanicsofmagic.com/2026/05/04/checkpoint-1-individual-assignment/>

<https://mechanicsofmagic.com/2026/05/01/checkpoint-1-concept-doc-25/>

<https://mechanicsofmagic.com/2026/05/04/p2-individual-concept-doc-jinpu/>



