Game Design Document — Shadows of Kuldhara

# 1. Game Overview

**Title:** Shadows of Kuldhara  
**Genre:** Action-Adventure / Psychological Thriller  
**Perspective:** Third-person (primary), first-person for flashbacks and hallucinations to enhance immersion and psychological tension.  
**Platforms:** PC / Console  
**Target Audience:** Mature players; fans of dark psychological narratives, stealth, and action-adventure gameplay.  
**Core Themes:** Trauma, vengeance, morality, fragility of sanity, skill evolution, the consequences of choice, and the psychological impact of violence.

**Game Concept:** Shadows of Kuldhara is a story-driven action-adventure game focusing on Dev, a protagonist torn between morality and vengeance. The gameplay combines stealth, combat, and environmental interaction while the narrative adapts to player choices. Dev’s mental state, represented by a dynamic sanity system, directly influences gameplay, visual style, and narrative outcomes. Players experience both the physical and psychological consequences of Dev’s decisions, emphasizing immersive storytelling and strategic planning.

# 2. Story & Narrative

**Full Story:**

**Prologue — Arrival & Blood:** Dev’s family moves to Kuldhara, a remote village enforcing a brutal tradition: the eldest child of every household must be sacrificed to the village priest’s deity. Dev’s father refuses to comply. During a nighttime escape attempt, villagers intercept the family. Dev’s brother is sacrificed before his eyes. His father’s apparent death is witnessed from the back, and Dev, along with his mother, is exiled to the jungle. The player experiences this as a short stealth-puzzle sequence controlling Dev’s father, emphasizing protection and stealth mechanics early in the narrative.

**Exile & First Kill:** Dev grows up in the jungle under his mother’s guidance, learning survival skills, moral lessons, and restraint. Dev experiences nightmares, anger outbursts, and psychological trauma from his early experiences. During a hunting practice, he wounds a deer, but his mother intervenes, teaching him the sanctity of life. One night, a thief breaks into their hut. Dev finds the thief carrying his father’s pendant, triggering intense flashbacks. The thief exploits Dev’s moment of vulnerability, kicking him. When Dev opens his eyes, he witnesses his mother stabbed. Overcome with rage, he kills the thief in a brutal first-person sequence inspired by God of War 3. This event activates the sanity system, introducing hallucinations: Brother (Vengeance) and Mother (Mercy). These guide Dev, influencing gameplay mechanics, dialogue, and visuals.

**Return to Kuldhara:** Dev returns to the village seeking answers and vengeance. He encounters a series of targets, each progressively teaching gameplay mechanics and deepening narrative engagement:

1. **Gatekeeper (Outskirts):** Introduces basic stealth and assassination mechanics. Dev’s early combat is messy and unrefined, reflecting his inexperience. Afterward, Dev briefly encounters Anaya in the market.
2. **Hunter (Forest):** A skilled tracker tests Dev’s stealth and tracking abilities. Dev learns trap evasion and advanced movement. Anaya discreetly leaves guidance to a secret cave hideout.
3. **Blacksmith (Forge / Hangar):** Environmental boss fight emphasizes player choice and moral divergence:
   * **Mother Path:** Dev disarms and spares the Blacksmith, receiving light blades and a hunting bow. His actions encourage stealth-based and precise combat strategies.
   * **Brother Path:** Dev succumbs to rage, brutally killing the Blacksmith and taking a massive greatsword. Visual transformation: torn hooded cape with blood stains, Guts-inspired facial features, darker eyes. Animations, combat style, and audio cues reflect Dev’s monstrous state.
4. **Common Mission with Anaya:** A cooperative mission demonstrating brief teamwork. Hallucinations debate in Dev’s mind, giving players insight into psychological conflict. This mission subtly shifts narrative perception if Dev favors Mother’s path.
5. **Witch Woman:** Illusion-heavy environment with traps and sanity-challenging encounters. Hallucination interactions impact combat and navigation, reinforcing the psychological thriller elements.
6. **Long Walk with Anaya:** Narrative-driven sequence exploring Anaya’s perspective and emotional backstory. Hallucinations and player choices influence dialogue and narrative tension.
7. **Village General:** Major combat challenge incorporating patrols, reinforcements, flanking, and environmental hazards. Successful defeat opens access to the Priest’s mansion.
8. **Rain Scene:** Emotional and narrative payoff moment. Dev and Anaya shelter together during a thunderstorm. Player experiences temporary suspension of hallucinations, signaling a moment of connection. Dev remains emotionally distant, highlighting his internal conflict.
9. **Priest (Final Boss):** Dev infiltrates the mansion, solving puzzles and confronting elite guards. Final confrontation branches based on accumulated morality:
   * **Mother Ending:** Dev spares the Priest, who betrays him. Dev dies, holding onto moral integrity.
   * **Brother Ending:** Dev kills the Priest, burns the village, and departs with his father, fully consumed by vengeance. Anaya survives.

**Epilogue / Themes:** The narrative concludes with the consequences of Dev’s path. Themes emphasize the psychological cost of choices, the fragility of morality under trauma, and the evolution from innocence to calculated or monstrous action.

# 3. Characters

**Dev:** Central protagonist; evolves from a messy, inexperienced killer to a highly skilled assassin. Player choices and the sanity meter impact appearance, abilities, combat style, and narrative outcomes.

**Anaya:** Priest’s daughter; limited cooperation and emotional foil to Dev. Appears in transitional narrative moments, affecting plot development.

**Mother & Brother:** Hallucinations representing moral polarity (Mercy vs. Vengeance). Influence Dev’s actions, sanity meter, visuals, and dialogue.

**Father:** Presumed dead during early game; revealed alive in final acts. Motivates Dev and informs narrative climax.

**Villagers & Bosses:** Includes Gatekeeper, Hunter, Blacksmith, Witch Woman, Village General, and Priest. Serve as gameplay challenges, narrative drivers, and moral choice catalysts.

# 4. Gameplay Mechanics

* **Combat:** Dynamic melee, weapon variety, environmental kills. Progression reflects Dev’s growth from amateur to master.
* **Stealth:** Hide, distract, and silently eliminate targets. Early-game stealth is clumsy; mid-to-late-game allows precise planning and execution.
* **Sanity / Hallucinations:** Dual influence system impacting gameplay, visuals, audio, and character progression.
* **Skill Tree:** Focused on Stealth, Combat, Mental/Sanity, and Planning/Tools. Unlocks new abilities and tactics.
* **Progression:** Player experiences gradual mastery, from chaotic fights to tactical, efficient combat, with moral consequences shaping narrative.

# 5. Missions / Levels

Detailed mission list with objectives, moral implications, and skill development opportunities: 1. Gatekeeper  
2. Hunter  
3. Blacksmith  
4. Common Mission with Anaya  
5. Witch Woman  
6. Long Walk with Anaya  
7. Village General  
8. Rain Scene  
9. Priest (Final Boss)

# 6. Skill Progression & Tree

* **Branches:** Stealth, Combat, Mental/Sanity, Planning/Tools
* **Early Game:** Basic combat, limited stealth, chaotic performance
* **Mid-Game:** Environmental manipulation, advanced stealth, tactical combat
* **Late Game:** Mastery in all areas, precision in combat and morality choices
* **Sanity Interaction:** Hallucinations adapt to player skill and choices, providing feedback and narrative reinforcement

# 7. Visual / Art Concept

* **Brother Path:** Dark, menacing appearance, blood-stained hooded cape, fearsome Guts-style facial features, aggressive animations, greatsword combat.
* **Mother Path:** Clean, hopeful appearance, light clothing, soft facial features, dual light blades and hunting bow, warmer lighting, calm animations.
* **Dynamic Real-Time Sanity Effects:** Character model and animations adapt to current sanity and morality, affecting idle, combat, and cutscene visuals.
* **Environment Design:** Contrasting palettes for Jungle (muted), Village (dark, torch-lit), Forge and Witch lair (high-contrast hazards), Mansion (structured with strategic challenges). Hallucination moments introduce distortions in audio and visual presentation.

# 8. Technical / Systems Notes

* Engine: TBD (Unity / Unreal / Custom)
* Save system, checkpoints, respawn logic
* Input mapping for keyboard, controller, and customizable controls
* Physics for environmental interactions, combat, and stealth
* AI systems for enemy patrols, perception, and adaptive difficulty

# 9. UI / HUD

* **Sanity Meter:** Shows influence of Brother vs. Mother, color-coded and dynamic
* **Health / Stamina / Resource Indicators:** Visual, intuitive display
* **Inventory / Skill Tree Interface:** Accessible and upgradeable
* **Combat / Stealth Prompts:** Contextual indicators for interactions, takedowns, and enemy awareness

# 10. Audio / Music Notes

* **Ambient Soundscapes:** Jungle, village, forge, mansion, and hallucination sequences
* **Combat / Stealth Cues:** Audio feedback for strikes, misses, detection, and success
* **Hallucination Audio Cues:** Whispering voices, conflicting directives, dynamic volume and intensity
* **Mission-specific Themes:** Musical scores aligned with tension, emotional arcs, and climax sequences

# 11. Narrative / Dialogue Notes

* **Hallucination Lines:** Dynamic dialogue for Mother & Brother, reflecting morality and player choices
* **Internal Monologues:** Provide insight into Dev’s psychological state, guiding player decisions
* **Key NPC Dialogues:** Anaya, Priest, and Bosses deliver story-critical information and emotional context

[Visuals placeholders: Concept art for Dev, Anaya, enemies; Environment sketches; UI mockups]