

Castle  
"Deathmatch"

Written by  
Michael Scott Prinke

Michael Scott Prinke  
Mike@Lostsystem.com  
847.306.0107

Castle and Beckett investigate a murder at a video game company, only to find themselves caught in a deadly game of the killer's design.

ACT ONE

INT. CASTLE'S LOFT - DAY

CASTLE, MARTHA, and ALEXIS face off at the dinner table. It's like a scene out of the old west. CASTLE'S fearful eyes come to rest on a Scrabble board sitting between the three of them, and then on his hand, which reads "YEEEEEE."

MARTHA

Well, Kiddo? What's it gonna be?

CASTLE draws a "D" from the bag and adds it to the end. "YEEEEED." Not better. He ponders a way to salvage this.

ALEXIS

You can't stall for much longer,  
Dad!

CASTLE starts to sweat. MARTHA and ALEXIS wait like hungry vultures as he shakily begins to pick up the "Y." His phone starts ringing from the counter. Saved at last.

CASTLE

I'll get it.

CASTLE replaces his piece and goes to pick it up.

MARTHA

Don't think this is over, darling.

ALEXIS

You can't run forever!

CASTLE

No, just for a moment, which  
thankfully...

CASTLE checks his Caller ID - it says "Hell's Kitten."

CASTLE (CONT'D)

... is all I need.

CASTLE picks up the phone.

CASTLE (CONT'D)

Why Detective Beckett, to what do I  
owe the pleasure of this-

CASTLE stops, interrupted. Alexis throws a small and characteristically adorable tantrum. Drat! Foiled!

CASTLE (CONT'D)  
Uh-huh. Oh my, that is serious.  
Well! I guess I'd better get down  
there right away then! Uh-huh. Love  
you too, honey, bye!

BECKETT'S voice can be heard shouting indignantly through the receiver as CASTLE hangs up, doing a victory dance as he snaps up his keys and heads for the door.

CASTLE (CONT'D)  
Sorry, ladies! Murder calls!

CASTLE slams the door behind him as ALEXIS and MARTHA exchange a look of mutual irritation.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY BACK ALLEY - DAY

CASTLE arrives on the scene of the crime, meeting up with ESPOSITO and BECKETT. They start walking briskly towards the body.

BECKETT  
Well, you seem to be in a good mood. What the hell was that about on the phone earlier?

CASTLE  
Oh. Uh. Nothing. I was just in the middle of something and could not wait to leave.

ESPOSITO  
What was it, a root canal?

CASTLE  
Close. Scrabble.

BECKETT  
You don't like Scrabble?

CASTLE  
I suck at it. Alexis eats me alive every time we play.

BECKETT  
Seems like it'd be right up your alley with your fancy vocabulary.

ESPOSITO  
Yeah, how does a best selling author suck at a game about words?

CASTLE  
Can we just drop this?

BECKETT  
I knew you were a sore winner when it comes to poker, but I didn't think it went both ways.

CASTLE  
Do you go both ways, Detective?

BECKETT  
Quit trying to change the subject.

CASTLE  
That's a big yes.

ESPOSITO  
Beckett's profile fits the bill pretty well, if you ask me. On some of the harder cases we've done I've seen you get almost as frustrated as she does!

BECKETT  
What's that supposed to mean?

ESPOSITO  
Speaking of cases...

The three finally arrive at the body, which is covered in a cloth. LANIE is on the scene, lifting it up to examine the deceased. RYAN queasily joins the three.

RYAN  
Lanie's checking out the victim.  
This one's a complete mess, though..

BECKETT, CASTLE, and ESPOSITO head over to check out the body themselves.

BECKETT  
Oh, man up. We look at dead bodies every day. You've got to be used to it by now.

BECKETT comes up alongside Lanie and peers under the cloth. She recoils, disgusted. CASTLE looks under it too, wincing.

CASTLE  
Well. This makes me look at the ground beef in my fridge in a whole new light.

RYAN

A garbage man named Joe Lawson  
found him.

JOE LAWSON, a doughy, balding garbage man, sits on the  
sidelines while a police officer takes a statement from him.

RYAN (CONT'D)

We got a statement from him saying  
that he found it at six o'clock  
this morning.

BECKETT

It's one o'clock in the afternoon  
now. What took you so long to phone  
this in, Mr. Lawson?

JOE LAWSON

I just... I panicked. I didn't know  
what to do. Something like this  
could cost me my job. Or worse! You  
know how the mob is in this town!

BECKETT

Is CSU finished taking his  
statement?

ESPOSITO

Yes, ma'am.

BECKETT

You can go home, then. If you  
remember anything, though, anything  
else that you might have seen or  
heard, I want you to give us a call  
and let us know.

JOE LAWSON beats a hasty retreat.

RYAN

We managed to get an ID off the  
victim's wallet. No sign of his  
cell phone, though. His name's  
Dillan Moore. He's the CEO of  
Flashdance Interactive.

CASTLE

Who?

ESPOSITO

They make the P.O.W. games.

CASTLE and BECKETT are clueless.

RYAN  
First-person shooter series.

ESPOSITO  
Yeah, based on real world wars and battles.

CASTLE and BECKETT exchange suspicious glances.

ESPOSITO (CONT'D)  
We play it occasionally.

RYAN  
Every weekend.

ESPOSITO  
Sometimes after work.

RYAN  
I'm number 115 in the online leaderboards.

ESPOSITO  
110.

BECKETT  
I get it.

After slapping hands and bumping fists triumphantly the two quickly regain their professional composure.

BECKETT (CONT'D)  
Lanie, any details on the victim's death?

LANIE  
No conclusions so far. The victim is too badly mutilated. All I can tell you is that our boy wasn't killed here. There's not enough blood.

CASTLE  
Not enough blood!? It's like a water balloon full of raw meat exploded out here!

RYAN  
Excuse me for a second.

RYAN covers his mouth and walks off. LANIE and BECKETT exchange glances, shaking their heads.

BECKETT

Classy, Castle. CSU find anything?

ESPOSITO

They've been going over the scene with a fine-toothed comb. Nothing yet. No prints, no weapon, no evidence of a struggle. Backs up Lanie's claim pretty well. Whoever did this was careful.

CASTLE

If the killer was so careful and had enough time to rip this guy apart beyond all recognition, why dump the body here for the garbage man to find it? Why leave the wallet and the ID? Why take the cell phone?

BECKETT

Good questions, but there's too many of them and we're not going to answer them standing around here. Esposito, I want you and Ryan to see if you can get any info on that cell phone. Castle, you're coming with me. Flashdance is our best lead. Time to pay them a visit.

EXT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE - DAY

CASTLE and BECKETT approach the converted warehouse that serves as headquarters for Flashdance Interactive. It's been fixed up very nicely, the company's logo on display over the doorway.

CASTLE

Never would've taken Esposito for a gamer. Ryan, sure, but Esposito? He's always so serious.

BECKETT

People have to unwind somehow. Not everybody has access to hot air balloons, helicopters, and state of the art laser tag sets.

CASTLE

Are you much of a gamer, Detective Beckett?

BECKETT

I read in my spare time. Why, do you game much? If I check those leaderboards Ryan was talking about will I find Rick Castle at the top of the charts in P.O.W. 5?

CASTLE

No. Last time I touched a video game was about 20 years ago. An old college buddy of mine was obsessed with Nintendo, said video games were the dawn of a new frontier. I never cared for them, though.

BECKETT

Why not?

CASTLE

They're just so mindless. Go there, shoot that, get the power-up. There's just nothing to identify with. Thank goodness Alexis never got into them either, it'd drive me crazy.

BECKETT

Huh.

CASTLE

What?

BECKETT

You're usually just so...

CASTLE

Childish?

BECKETT

Open-minded. You're a glutton for new experiences, but you pick this one to shut out?

CASTLE

Why don't we keep our mind on the case?

BECKETT

You know what I think?

CASTLE

No, and let me tell you it drives me crazy some days.

BECKETT

I'll bet you really are a sore loser. I'll bet your friend beat the pants off you in college and you just couldn't take it.

CASTLE

Isn't the mutilated victim more important than challenging my manhood?

BECKETT

Just like you can't take your own daughter beating you at Scrabble.

CASTLE

Let's save the hard-boiled detective routine for the real suspects.

BECKETT

Oh, I'm just getting warmed up.

CASTLE

Great...

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE RECEPTION DESK - CONTINUOUS

CASTLE and BECKETT approach a receptionist, JOANNA.

JOANNA

Can I help you?

BECKETT

Detective Kate Beckett, NYPD. We have an appointment to see your vice president.

JOANNA

Ah, of course. Mr. Knight is ready to see you.

CASTLE's attention is on the two huge, beefy security guards posted at the door to the main office floor. They are both exceptionally well-armed.

BECKETT

Castle?

CASTLE

Why does a video game company need such beefy security?

JOANNA  
Flashdance Interactive has some  
very... vocal fans.

CASTLE  
I see.

JOANNA  
If you'll please follow me?

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS

The floor of Flashdance Interactive is an electronic factory  
manned by over a hundred geeks at a hundred computers.  
CASTLE'S eyes are drawn to an outburst from one ERNIE LAUFER,  
a thin, clean-looking man with trendy glasses.

ERNIE  
I'm telling you, it doesn't have  
that kind of kickback! The player's  
aim shouldn't wander that much!

GEEKY INTERN  
But it's a shotgun!

ERNIE  
A light combat shotgun with a  
stock! With a stock! You've made it  
less accurate than a machine gun on  
full auto!

CASTLE faces forward again only to be distracted by mettle  
more attractive. SANDY, 28, sits at a digital sculpting  
program working on a female model. She hasn't gotten around  
to the clothes yet. CASTLE stops to gawk for just a moment.

CASTLE  
Well that's very... convincing.

SANDY  
Oh, you really think so? I don't  
know. I haven't quite got the pores  
yet.

CASTLE  
Yeah, uh, just one thing, could you  
make those a little bit--

A breast joke is averted as BECKETT'S fingernails dig into  
CASTLE'S earlobe and insistently drag him off.

CASTLE (CONT'D)  
Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The two are led into a disorganized office, cluttered with G.I. JOE action figures and spreadsheets. A man in a respectable black sports coat eyes a series of maps hanging on the wall, crossing things out and making alterations.

JOANNA  
Mr. Knight?

CASTLE blinks in surprise as ALLEN KNIGHT turns around. As he lays eyes on CASTLE he returns the look of excitement. BECKETT makes to flash her badge.

BECKETT  
Detective Beckett, NYPD. We'd like  
to ask you a few--

CASTLE  
Allen?

ALLEN  
Ricky!

CASTLE  
Allen, you old son of a gun! Look  
at you! Last time I saw you, you  
had hair down to here! You've sure  
cleaned up!

ALLEN  
Only on the outside, man. I'm  
workin' Flashdance now! Biggest  
little game company on the east  
coast. Lead designer of the P.O.W.  
series, but I bet you've played all  
five of them by now!

CASTLE  
Uh. No.

ALLEN  
Huh.

ALLEN stings with disappointment.

ALLEN (CONT'D)  
Well, how about you? NYPD? And here  
I thought you were going to be a  
famous author!

CASTLE  
Oh. I am.

ALLEN  
Really? What do you write?

CASTLE  
Uh. Heat Wave? Summer Heat?

Allen shakes his head. This allegedly doesn't ring a bell.

CASTLE (CONT'D)  
The Nikki Heat books? Derek Storm,  
too? New York Times best sellers?

ALLEN  
Not ringing a bell, man.

The two stare daggers of disappointment at one another.  
BECKETT clears her throat.

BECKETT  
I'm sorry to interrupt the reunion,  
but I need to ask you a few  
questions about Dillan Moore.

ALLEN  
Uh, yeah, sure. Is Dillan in  
trouble?

BECKETT  
He's been murdered, Mr. Knight.

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE OFFICE - LATER

CASTLE and BECKETT now sit across from ALLEN at his desk as a  
fresh-faced intern, TOMMY, brings in some coffee.

ALLEN  
Thanks, Tommy.

Tommy quietly leaves as ALLEN takes a somber sip from his  
cup.

ALLEN (CONT'D)  
You know, Dillan and I had our  
differences.  
(MORE)

ALLEN (CONT'D)

He was a businessman, always looking out for the bottom line, I was the creative guy. He was a good friend, though. Got me my first gig.

BECKETT

When was the last time you saw Mr. Moore?

ALLEN

He was working late last night. He usually did. A lot of us do. It must've been midnight by the time he left.

BECKETT

Can you give me a list of people who might have been here at that time?

ALLEN

Yeah. I can have Joanna give you the timesheets.

CASTLE

Is there anybody who might have wanted him out of the way?

ALLEN heads over to the window overlooking the bullpen outside, staring in quiet wonder.

ALLEN

Sure, plenty of people. In this business? You're lucky to survive as long as I have without someone cutting your throat.

This surprises CASTLE and BECKETT. We all know games are violent, but the gaming business?

ALLEN (CONT'D)

In a figurative sense, I mean. I know your cute little mystery stories rake in a lot of bucks for you, Ricky, but here? That much is on the line for all those people out there.

CASTLE

Cute? Wait, I thought you said you didn't--

BECKETT

Did either your company or Mr. Moore have any problems, recently? Bad business deals, personal problems, anything like that?

Allen considers this carefully as he moves back to his seat.

ALLEN

Dillan's been in a big battle with our publisher over the release date for P.O.W. 6. They've been trying to push us to release this year, and we only just started.

CASTLE

Sounds like a pretty standard disagreement in the entertainment industry.

ALLEN

It is. It literally happens every time we have a release. But I can't imagine why anybody would kill Dillan Moore over that.

BECKETT

Can you give me your publisher's contact information?

ALLEN

Sure. I'll have Joanna bring it up for you along with the timesheets.

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE RECEPTION DESK - DAY

JOANNA finishes handing BECKETT the requested time sheets and information, which she starts scanning immediately.

BECKETT

Thank you very much for your cooperation, Mr. Knight.

ALLEN

Go ahead and call me Allen. I have to ask, though. Dillan was a good friend of mine. How did he die?

BECKETT looks up for just a moment in sympathy to the victim's bereaved friend.

BECKETT

We're not quite sure. We found his body very badly mutilated in an alleyway.

ALLEN seems to ponder this for a moment.

ALLEN

I see. Well, good luck to you in solving the case. Ricky! Any chance you'd be up for dinner tonight?

CASTLE hesitates in a flash of suspicion. Not often someone swings moods like this so quickly.

CASTLE

Couldn't hurt. I guess we have a lot of catching up to do. I'd give anything to get out of Scrabble with my mom and Alexis. They're going to be out for my blood.

ALLEN

You still can't beat your mom at Scrabble? After all the time we spent playing it back in college?

BECKETT smirks at CASTLE wryly.

INT. MORGUE HALLWAY - DAY

RYAN and ESPOSITO approach the doors to the morgue in rushed frustration.

RYAN

Why do Beckett and Castle get to go to all the fun places?

ESPOSITO

I don't know, but she's going to have our heads when we tell her the phone company's giving us the runaround. Let's just hope Lanie's had a little more luck.

RYAN

Think they'll budge?

ESPOSITO

I once had a case involving an abducted girl.

(MORE)

ESPOSITO (CONT'D)

Took them three days to finally give us her cell phone records. I'm not too optimistic about how much they'll cooperate if the victim's already dead.

INT. MORGUE EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY

Lanie goes over the body with RYAN and ESPOSITO.

LANIE

Liver temperature puts the victim's death at around one o'clock AM last night. Thankfully he still had a liver that we could take it from. The killer sliced him down the sternum, mangling his internal organs in the process, but the cut is straight, suggesting that this was done with some kind of power tool. We concluded from the lack of blood on the body and at the crime scene that it was done post-mortem.

RYAN

With this kind of mess how are we supposed to tell how he really died?

LANIE

Well...

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE RECEPTION DESK - INTERCUTTING

BECKETT's cell phone rings just as she and CASTLE prepare to leave. She picks up.

BECKETT

Beckett.

ESPOSITO (O.S.)

Hey. Nothing on the phone yet, but Lanie's put the time of death at around one o'clock last night.

INT. MORGUE EXAMINATION ROOM - INTERCUTTING

ESPOSITO

And that's not all.

ESPOSITO holds up a deformed piece of metal in a pair of tweezers.

ESPOSITO (CONT'D)  
Lanie's found us a weapon. We got a slug here from a 9 millimeter pistol.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. PRECINCT HALLWAY - DAY

BECKETT and CASTLE approach the interrogation room as BECKETT goes over the list.

BECKETT

We have a list of three people who clocked out between eleven and one last night, including your buddy Allen.

CASTLE

Now don't that just beat all.

BECKETT

Castle, I know what you're thinking, but we can't jump to conclusions yet.

CASTLE

So I'm not the only one who's suspicious of how nonchalant he is over his boss being brutally eviscerated.

INT. PRECINCT INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

BECKETT sits across from SANDY, the blonde woman that CASTLE was talking with earlier.

BECKETT

Do you work late often?

SANDY

No, not really. Usually when there's a crunch and we need to speed things up.

BECKETT

Does that happen often?

SANDY

More often for the other teams than the art team, but sometimes, yeah.

INT. PRECINCT INTERROGATION ROOM - INTERCUTTING

Now it's ERNIE's turn. BECKETT looks up from the case file to scan his expression.

He looks exhausted, like he hasn't slept for a few days straight and is fighting off a colossal migraine.

ERNIE

Oh, God.

BECKETT

Just calm down, Mr. Laufer. All I need is for you to answer a few questions.

ERNIE

I know, it's just that I've been under a lot of stress lately, and now, this, with Dillan...

BECKETT

I know you're upset, but just try to bear with me, okay?

ERNIE

Okay.

BECKETT

Do you work late often?

ERNIE

Yeah. Every night. I'm the lead programmer, so I always work late.

BECKETT

And what do you do there, staying that late?

ERNIE

Usually fixing other peoples' mistakes. They keep hiring all these interns who don't know what they're doing.

INT. PRECINCT INTERROGATION ROOM - INTERCUTTING

Squiggy over to TOMMY in the hot seat.

TOMMY

What am I going to tell my professor about this? What am I going to tell my parents?

BECKETT

Just relax, we're not accusing you of anything. I just need you to answer a few questions. Okay?

TOMMY

Am I going to have to go to court?

BECKETT

You may be called as a witness.

TOMMY is filled with palpable dread at this prospect.

INT. PRECINCT INTERROGATION ROOM - INTERCUTTING

Back to ERNIE.

BECKETT

What was your relationship with  
Dillan Moore?

ERNIE

He was my boss. He called the  
shots. Well, Allen does most of the  
time, but Dillan was the one who  
gave us the deadlines.

INT. PRECINCT INTERROGATION ROOM - INTERCUTTING

Back to TOMMY.

TOMMY

I didn't really get to know him  
that well, he was our producer.  
Mostly I worked with Allen. He and  
the other leads answered to him  
most of the time.

INT. PRECINCT INTERROGATION ROOM - INTERCUTTING

Back to SANDY.

SANDY

He was the producer for our team.  
That's all I really know about him.  
He didn't socialize much with us,  
except maybe the occasional office  
party. I guess he liked to keep his  
business life and his private life  
separate.

BECKETT

Did you see or hear anything  
unusual last night around the time  
you left?

SANDY  
No, I didn't.

INT. PRECINCT INTERROGATION ROOM - INTERCUTTING

TOMMY  
No.

INT. PRECINCT INTERROGATION ROOM - INTERCUTTING

Back to ERNIE. He hesitates.

ERNIE  
No.

BECKETT  
Are you sure?

ERNIE  
No. I mean, nothing, I didn't hear  
a sound or see a thing.

BECKETT begins to lean across the table.

BECKETT  
Mr. Hudson, a man has been  
murdered. If you saw or heard  
anything, you need to tell me about  
it right now.

As BECKETT closes in on him, ERNIE's face starts to scrunch  
up. He finally breaks into tears.

ERNIE  
I fell asleep under my desk!

BECKETT sits back down, overflowing with exasperation after  
working up all that hard-boiled flare.

ERNIE (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry! If I hadn't been  
sleeping, Dillan wouldn't have...

INT. PRECINCT INTERROGATION ROOM - INTERCUTTING

ESPOSITO approaches CASTLE outside while BECKETT talks with  
TOMMY.

ESPOSITO  
Hey, Castle. Captain Montgomery  
wants to see you. Says it's  
important.

CASTLE heads off with ESPOSITO with gusto and urgency. Back  
inside the interrogation room proper, BECKETT collects her  
papers.

BECKETT  
Thank you very much. That will be  
all.

TOMMY  
Well... There's one last thing.

BECKETT  
Yes?

TOMMY  
I saw Mr. Moore talking with a guy  
from our publisher, Mindgames. They  
started yelling at each other.

BECKETT freezes. Now this is interesting.

BECKETT  
Oh?

TOMMY  
He told Mr. Moore that if he kept  
doing what he was doing, he'd be a  
dead man.

INT. PRECINCT HALLWAY INT. MOMENTS LATER

BECKETT storms up to ALLEN, bone ready to pick.

BECKETT  
You told me that nothing unusual  
happened yesterday.

ALLEN  
And?

BECKETT  
Your intern says someone from your  
publisher dropped by. Said he and  
Moore got into a big argument.

ALLEN

Oh. Right. That. Yeah. It must have slipped my mind.

BECKETT

Awfully big thing to just slip your mind in a murder case. Any other details you may be forgetting?

ALLEN

I'm a little distracted, Detective. My friend and mentor of over fifteen years just died.

BECKETT gives him a hard stare, waiting for a real answer. Allen gushes exasperation.

ALLEN (CONT'D)

No, Detective Beckett.

BECKETT

You're sure?

ALLEN

Yes, Detective Beckett.

BECKETT

Cut that out.

ALLEN

Would you rather I called you Kate? Katey? How about Kitten?

BECKETT starts to fume. This seems all too familiar.

BECKETT

Who was it?

ALLEN

Jackie Nesmit. CEO of Mindgames, our publisher. He dropped by to check our progress, and he wasn't too happy. I told you we were arguing about the release date. I can get you his direct number, if you like.

BECKETT

That would be helpful.

As ALLEN reaches into his pocket to pull out his phone, BECKETT spies another conflict in progress over his shoulder.

ALLEN realizes she's looking right past him and turns around to look as well.

INT. PRECINCT BULLPEN - DAY

CASTLE, RYAN, ESPOSITO, and CAPTAIN MONTGOMERY are all sitting around Beckett's desk, where they've set up a Scrabble board.

CASTLE

Do we really have to do this?

MONTGOMERY

Yes, we have to do this—you don't want me to revoke your free pass now, do you?

CASTLE

Thinking about it. Can we at least get this over with quickly?

MONTGOMERY

I want to savor this—I haven't found a game I can beat you at in months!

CASTLE looks at the board sullenly, then to RYAN and ESPOSITO.

CASTLE

Which one of you talked?

The two of them just laugh it off.

MONTGOMERY

It's your move.

As BECKETT and ALLEN approach, CASTLE places a piece on the board. MONTGOMERY rubs his hands together excitedly as he prepares to make his own move, laughing. ALLEN shakes his head in disappointment.

ALLEN

Well, buddy, I gotta go—if Kate is finished with the... interrogation, that is.

BECKETT shoots ALLEN a resentful nod. CASTLE double-takes over this choice of names.

ALLEN (CONT'D)

We're still on for dinner tonight, right?

CASTLE  
Yeah, sure.

ALLEN  
Awesome! See you then, buddy!

ALLEN slaps CASTLE on the shoulder and leaves, BECKETT's glare trailing after him.

BECKETT  
Turns out Flashdance's publisher came over for a visit and had a shouting match with Moore last night. Knight "neglected" to mention it. You know, you and your friend have a lot in common.

CASTLE  
Yeah, except I'm not even on a first-name basis with you. Kate?

BECKETT  
He's not either, so don't try it.

CASTLE  
I'm telling you. Suspicious.

BECKETT  
Oh, come on, you don't really suspect your old college buddy, do you?

CASTLE  
Yes. Now that we have a lead, we should probably be heading off. Sorry boys, murder calls!

CASTLE elatedly moves to get up.

BECKETT  
No, no. Take your time! It looks like such a riveting game, I would hate to pull you away from it.

CASTLE's eyes beg for mercy around the table.

ESPOSITO  
It's your move again, bro.

CASTLE sighs and continues playing.

BECKETT

You seem awfully quick to pin it on Knight.

CASTLE

I keep telling you. Suspicious! How does he just shrug off his boss's death? How does he just casually forget a key fact in his murder case?

BECKETT

It is odd, but it's like I said before, we can't go making snap judgments until we've got all the facts. Anyway, doesn't this make a good story? A publisher fighting with a creative studio over a release date? Tons of money at stake?

CASTLE

No. It's too clear-cut. It's like if my publisher murdered me for being late with a manuscript. They pay me, not the other way around. They don't have to kill me in order to keep their money. We're missing something in all this, but I'm sure the publisher didn't kill him.

RYAN lays the last piece on the board.

RYAN

And triple word score, and... that's all the pieces!

MONTGOMERY

Tally 'em up, boys.

CASTLE looks at his hand. Six pieces. "HJIKLV."

CASTLE

I lose twenty-three points.

BECKETT

Twenty-three points? Really?

MONTGOMERY

What's your total?

CASTLE

Negative five.

MONTGOMERY

Oh, this is just too good. Wait'll  
I let the commissioner and the  
mayor know!

ESPOSITO

And it looks like our winner is  
Ryan at three hundred and thirty  
points.

Pats on the back all around for RYAN, except from CASTLE.

CASTLE

I still don't think "quax" is a  
word!

BECKETT

Well, I do hate to break up the  
fun, but we do need to get over to  
Mindgames to talk with this CEO.  
Ryan, Esposito, head over to  
Flashdance Games and start combing  
it for anything you can find. If  
Moore was killed after work it  
would have been somewhere around  
there.

RYAN and ESPOSITO exchange excited glances. Finally, their  
turn to check out someplace cool.

INT. JACKIE NESMIT'S OFFICE - DAY

CASTLE and BECKETT meet JACKIE NESMIT in his office, which is  
huge and squeaky clean. NESMIT himself is prim and proper,  
but short and chubby, kind of like a gopher in a suit.  
BECKETT finishes flashing the badge.

BECKETT

Mr. Nesmit, can you tell us what  
you spoke with Mr. Moore about that  
night?

NESMIT

Just a routine inspection. I like  
to make sure all our studios are on  
track. You know it's a shame about  
Moore, he was always one of the  
better ones.

CASTLE

Do you always scream at the better  
ones?

NESMIT squirms uncomfortably.

NESMIT

I don't know what you mean. We had a civil discussion.

CASTLE

Our witnesses distinctly heard the phrase "you're going to be a dead man."

BECKETT

I'll ask again, Mr. Nesmit. What were you talking about?

NESMIT

We want the next P.O.W. Game for the Christmas season. That's all.

BECKETT

And? As I understand it that's a pretty typical disagreement. Not exactly something to have a shouting match over.

NESMIT

And... I might have been a little bit forceful with Dillan.

BECKETT

Forceful how?

NESMIT

I... might have threatened to give a portion of his funding over to another studio's project.

CASTLE

The plot thickens.

NESMIT

I was just bluffing, though! I just wanted to get something out of them, anything, get the release date a little sooner to please the investors! Honestly? I pull from other studios to give to them!

CASTLE

Because stealing from peoples' budgets does all sorts of great things for company morale.

NESMIT

This is business. You gotta produce, and I give the capital to studios that produce. Ones that don't, however talented they may be, well, they end up like Rhino.

CASTLE

Rhino?

NESMIT

Yeah. Talented, but flakey. Their last claim to fame was this movie-game. What was it--*The Phantom Knife*.

CASTLE drifts off in thought.

BECKETT

Have you cut many studios' budgets to "support" Flashdance?

NESMIT

It's not what you think. I mean... yeah. When the new console generation came out, standards jumped. People started getting more selective about their games. So, studios have to compete on their pitches with us.

CASTLE

What was that game you mentioned?

NESMIT

*The Phantom Knife*. This weird, artsy, Blade Runner thing about a serial killer who murders a bunch of old school buddies. Kind of a murder mystery.

CASTLE

Rhino still around?

NESMIT

Barely.

CASTLE

Let me take a wild guess. They mainly "compete" with Flashdance for funding, right?

NESMIT

Yeah.

CASTLE

Just how much money is at stake for them, here?

NESMIT

Is this all confidential?

BECKETT

This information will be used if it's pertinent in establishing identity and motive in our case. Which means it will be released.

NESMIT sweats a little.

NESMIT

Their last production was a disaster. They spent five years on this turkey--*The Phantom Knife Returns*. Five years! And what did they have to show for it? Another cheesy mystery game. I get it. They want to innovate. Make games that are art. But there's hardly any money for that kind of thing, even in print, unless you're Dan Brown, or Stephen King, or that guy who writes those God-awful Nikki Heat books. What was his name?

CASTLE

It's not important. Go on.

BECKETT glances at CASTLE in surprise. Just a few hours ago he was agonizing over it with an old friend of his.

NESMIT

But in games? Get real! That sort of thing hasn't been viable for over fifteen years at this point! Hell, back then a bestselling game had a budget of about a half a million dollars. This one was fifty million dollars, and they wanted another fifty-million!

CASTLE

I think even Dan Brown might bat an eye at that kind of money.

NESMIT

Don't get me wrong, it looked really promising, but we had to cancel it. The thing was just a black hole for money. It would've had to have sold over thirty million copies to make up for what they were asking for. Know how many copies our last P.O.W. Game moved? Fifteen million! And that's one of the best-selling games of all time!

CASTLE

Can you put us in contact with them?

NESMIT

I can't just hand out contact information to anyone.

BECKETT

You will if we get a warrant.

NESMIT sighs in defeat, flips out a smart phone and starts thumbing through it.

NESMIT

Fine. I can get you in touch with Jared Kanno--he's the head of their studio. You don't think they're involved, do you?

BECKETT

We can't draw any conclusions yet.

NESMIT

Here it is.

NESMIT finishes scribbling down Jared Kanno's number and hands it to BECKETT. CASTLE ponders as he looks at it over her shoulder.

CASTLE

Thank you.

CASTLE immediately goes to leave. BECKETT, surprised and flustered by his sudden departure, follows after quickly, catching up with him before he exits the room.

BECKETT

What's up?

CASTLE  
*The Phantom Knife*. I know that  
game.

INT. CASTLE'S LOFT - DAY

CASTLE rummages through an old closet, BECKETT staring in  
fascination over his shoulder.

CASTLE  
Allen and I played it on his  
computer a long time ago. Only game  
I really liked. It was his way of  
bribing me to play other games with  
him.

BECKETT  
So there's more to you than meets  
the eye when it comes to video  
games.

CASTLE  
This was more like an interactive  
novel. Here it is.

CASTLE digs out a dusty old jewel case, the CD still inside.

INT. CASTLE'S LOFT - MOMENTS LATER

CASTLE hastily pops the disc into his laptop, the Rhino Games  
logo appearing on the screen.

BECKETT  
I don't get it, what does this have  
to do with-

CASTLE  
Watch.

The two are treated to a familiar scene as a man is shot to  
death in a back alley with a semi-auto. It cuts directly to a  
gruesome scene of his corpse being cut up with power tools in  
a garage.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. PRECINCT HALLWAY - EVENING

BECKETT and CASTLE approach the interrogation room once again.

BECKETT

We have two options: either it's a copycat, like you're saying, in which case we have no leads other than a fifteen year old video game that we don't have time to play. Or it's the rival studio gone bitter about being cheated out of funding. One of these is realistic and right in front of us, and that's the one I'm going to go with first.

CASTLE

I'm still not sure that's the case. He'd have to have known he was being cheated.

BECKETT

That's what we're here to find out.

INT. PRECINCT INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING

BECKETT paces impatiently around JARED KANNO, a shabby looking guy in an old T-shirt and jeans and a heavy, crusty beard. He looks like a combination of George Carlin and Jim Henson. CASTLE almost can't believe he's looking at this guy.

JARED

Please, call me Jerry.

BECKETT

What was your relationship with Dillan Moore?

JARED

Dillan? We met a few times at conferences. Sometimes we'd talk at publisher meetings. He bought me lunch once. I'd call him a friendly acquaintance.

CASTLE

From the sound of things you two were a little at odds when it came to business.

JARED

We have very different styles of working, yes, but it's not really a problem.

BECKETT

Do you recall making a computer game called *The Phantom Knife*?

JARED

Ah, those were the heady days! I was in magazines, gave keynotes... It's all kind of a blur now, though. This is so embarrassing, but I can barely even remember what happened in it!

BECKETT nods over to CASTLE, who sets up the laptop for him and plays the opening scene.

CASTLE

Is this ringing a bell?

JARED

Goodness! Yes, now it does, certainly. How wonderful that people still remember it. I tried to get another one made, you know. I suppose I was hoping to re-live my former years.

CASTLE

We heard. We also heard that the project got canceled.

JARED

Yes, well. These things happen. Some projects simply aren't meant to be.

BECKETT

Pretty casual attitude for a fifty-million dollar loss.

JARED

Money is hardly the matter, detective. It's about the art of it, creating new experiences!

(MORE)

JARED (CONT'D)

I think that as long as you enjoy life, it doesn't matter if you're the winner or the loser.

BECKETT slips some photographs onto the table. Dillan Moore's body. JARED looks them over in shock and horror.

JARED (CONT'D)

This is-

BECKETT

Dillan Moore. Mutilated. Just like in your game.

JARED

Who would do such a thing?

BECKETT

You tell me. You wrote it.

JARED

You don't think I did this?

BECKETT

Where were you at one o'clock last night?

JARED

I was at home.

BECKETT

Do you have anyone who can substantiate that claim?

JARED

What do you mean?

BECKETT

Is there anyone who can vouch for you?

A pause as JARED considers his answer.

JARED

I'd like to see a lawyer.

INT. PRECINCT BULLPEN - EVENING

CASTLE rubs his eyes tiredly. The two of them have been at this non-stop.

BECKETT

Nobody can back up his alibi, but we don't have much more than circumstantial evidence.

Even as she sips a piping hot cup of coffee, BECKETT can't help but yawn herself.

BECKETT (CONT'D)

Alright. So let's hear your big conspiracy theory for the day.

CASTLE

That's just it. Even if we try to put this together as a copycat case it doesn't make any sense. *The Phantom Knife* was kind of like Stephen King's *It meets Silence of the Lambs*, with a serial killer preying on a bunch of old school friends. One of them was the killer, and you were supposed to figure it out.

BECKETT

Well, great. Who was it?

CASTLE

You are. You think you're collecting clues, but you're actually covering your tracks the whole time.

BECKETT

Huh. That's a good twist.

CASTLE

See why I liked it? But that doesn't help us solve this case.

BECKETT

We're getting nowhere fast. Just in case, I'm going to start getting a list together of the victim's friends and family.

CASTLE

Speaking of friends, looks like it's about time for me to meet up with Allen for dinner.

INT. FROSTY KING - EVENING

CASTLE looks irritably across the table at ALLEN as they sit together at the deserted Frosty King, a heinous Dairy Queen knockoff.

CASTLE

You know this isn't what I had in mind when you said "dinner," right?

ALLEN lays a Scrabble piece down on a board that sits on the table between them alongside a couple of drinks and the worst kind of chili dogs.

ALLEN

It's your move, bud.

CASTLE

Do we really have to do this?

ALLEN

Yes. It's nostalgic! Besides, we used to come here all the time. What better place to catch up?

CASTLE

That was 20 years ago.

ALLEN

Time flies fast in my business, man. Feels like just yesterday to me.

CASTLE

That why you didn't so much as break a sweat when you heard your boss got killed?

ALLEN gives CASTLE a hurt look.

ALLEN

This is game development. It's like Freddy Mercury said: The show must go on. We can't let our personal feelings get in the way of what we do, no matter how much we might hurt.

Allen sullenly puts his concentration back on the game for a moment.

ALLEN (CONT'D)

So, aside from bestselling mystery series, what's been in your cards, Ricky? You mentioned someone named Alexis earlier. New girlfriend?

CASTLE begins to soften.

CASTLE

No. Alexis is my daughter.

ALLEN

Oh my God. So you and Meredith, you two are still-?

CASTLE

No. God no. We're divorced.

ALLEN

Mind if I give her a call?

CASTLE

You do and I'll kill you.

ALLEN quirks at CASTLE in amusement.

ALLEN

You and Meredith, though. I bet that girl of yours must be a real hellion!

CASTLE

Not my Alexis. She's as mature and responsible as a young Mother Teresa.

ALLEN

Man!

CASTLE

I'm surprised my own self.

ALLEN

If you get around as often as you used to, yeah!

CASTLE

Well. Not quite as often, but often enough. Sometimes Alexis gives me a curfew. Working on my books gave me plenty of time to spend with her at home, though.

ALLEN

Ricky Rodgers, a stay-at-home dad. There's something I never thought I'd see.

CASTLE

Well, how about you? Did you ever get around to sowing any oats?

ALLEN

Bachelor for life, pal. Romance was your gig, not mine.

CASTLE

Don't you ever worry about leaving anything behind?

ALLEN

My games are my legacy. I'm going down in history as a pioneer in a new storytelling media.

CASTLE

Interesting way to look at it.

ALLEN

It's true! My military shooters aren't so different from your mystery novels. The pulp of the new generation, man.

CASTLE

I never really thought about it that way. You know, I don't mean to brag, but Nikki Heat is doing quite well on the New York Times best seller list. We've even got a movie in the works. I bet it could make an interesting game. I don't suppose you'd--

ALLEN

No way, man. I'd never stoop that low.

CASTLE

Excuse me?

ALLEN

A game based off a book license? Give me a break. Even at the worst of times we're not that desperate.

(MORE)

ALLEN (CONT'D)  
Besides, interactive novels just  
don't sell these days.

CASTLE  
Well, what about *The Phantom Knife*?

ALLEN is caught in a pause of dread as he falls under a  
harsh, probing gaze from CASTLE.

CASTLE (CONT'D)  
That one sold well enough back in  
the day, didn't it? We played it.

ALLEN  
Why, yes. It did. I remember that.

ALLEN puts his mind back on the game.

ALLEN (CONT'D)  
In fact, now that you mention it,  
the whole thing seems awfully  
similar to this case of yours,  
doesn't it?

CASTLE  
Just a bit.

CASTLE makes a move, yet another in a long series of botches.  
ALLEN rolls his eyes and starts putting together a long,  
intricate word on the board, stealing the game with only  
three pieces.

CASTLE (CONT'D)  
Damn it!

ALLEN  
You never did get this game.

CASTLE  
What am I doing wrong?

ALLEN  
You're an author. You want to  
impress people with your  
vocabulary, so you keep blowing all  
your letters trying to make big  
words.

CASTLE  
Isn't that the point?

ALLEN  
Sometimes it's not about getting  
the biggest word first.

(MORE)

ALLEN (CONT'D)

Sometimes you have to be conservative. Save your best stuff. Try to make your opponent lay out the pieces for you. You got me, man?

ALLEN locks CASTLE'S eyes in a hard, probing stare of his own. As he starts to wrap his mind around it, CASTLE'S phone starts ringing. He pulls it out to find Hell's Kitten is calling him again.

CASTLE

Where was this five minutes ago?

He picks up the phone.

CASTLE (CONT'D)

What's up?

INT. PRECINCT BULLPEN - INTERCUTTING

BECKETT is pulling on her coat, preparing to leave.

BECKETT

Hey. Esposito just called. He's found something. We need you to get down to Flashdance and meet us there right away.

EXT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

CASTLE arrives alongside BECKETT. Both of them approach an alleyway where RYAN and ESPOSITO are waiting for them. ESPOSITO holds up a shell casing for them to look at in the palm of a rubber-gloved hand; BECKETT pulls on her own glove and inspects it.

ESPOSITO

We found these shell casings: 9 millimeter, just like the slug Lanie found on the vic.

RYAN

And it gets better.

RYAN opens up a dumpster. The inside is sprayed with blood.

RYAN (CONT'D)

Looks like our friend the garbage man was holding out on us.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. PRECINCT INTERROGATION ROOM - MORNING

JOE LAWSON sits in the hot seat now, with BECKETT pacing around him. CASTLE is on the other side of the glass, watching while he clicks his way through *The Phantom Knife*.

BECKETT

According to the statement we took from you yesterday you said you didn't see anything out of the ordinary other than Moore's body in the alley.

JOE LAWSON

Yeah.

BECKETT places a photograph of the bloody dumpster on the table.

BECKETT

What about that?

JOE LAWSON

Never saw it. When I went to check, the dumpster in that alley looked--

BECKETT

This dumpster is several miles from the alley where you reported finding him. It's directly outside of where he worked.

JOE LAWSON

It's not on my route.

BECKETT

I didn't say it was. Now that you mention it, you're pretty quick to try and avoid talking about it.

JOE LAWSON

You asked if I saw it. I'm telling you, I didn't see it!

BECKETT

If I call your supervisors, will they back you up, or am I going to find out that you're lying about this alley being on your route?

BECKETT pulls out her cell phone and digs out the phone number. JOE LAWSON hesitates.

JOE LAWSON  
Yeah. They will.

BECKETT  
So you don't mind me checking on that, then.

JOE LAWSON  
You might end up on hold for a while.

BECKETT  
I've got time.

BECKETT dials the number, and the phone starts ringing. JOE LAWSON starts to sweat.

BECKETT (CONT'D)  
If you're lying to me, that would be obstruction of justice, which is a class 3 felony. I hope you understand.

JOE finally cracks.

JOE LAWSON  
Alright, alright! I did see it!  
It's on my route.

BECKETT snaps her phone shut, hanging up.

JOE LAWSON (CONT'D)  
I went to pick up the garbage there that morning, and this guy came out and jumped me. He put a gun to my head, told me to load up this bag. He ran me around town for a while, took me into that alley, told me to dump it, then call the police--I don't know why.

BECKETT  
Can you tell me what this man looked like?

JOE LAWSON  
No. He was wearing a mask. I couldn't get a look at his face.

CASTLE  
(muttering)  
Just like the game.

CASTLE bangs excitedly on the glass.

INT. PRECINCT HALLWAY - MORNING

BECKETT approaches CASTLE.

BECKETT  
What is it?

CASTLE  
I was wrong. The killer isn't  
imitating the game, he's playing  
one of his own. With us!

BECKETT  
What do you mean?

CASTLE  
Allen told me that you don't blow  
everything you've got in the first  
round. You save your best pieces  
for later and let your opponent put  
it together for you. That's what  
the killer is doing!

BECKETT  
Sounds far-fetched, Castle, even  
for you.

CASTLE  
Think about it. We found the body  
mutilated, but he left the wallet  
so we could find our way to  
Flashdance. Allen slipped us his  
publisher, we went there. That led  
us to Rhino and *The Phantom Knife*,  
which the killer is imitating, and  
now we've got their boss as our  
prime suspect! He's been planting  
clues for us the whole time!

BECKETT  
That's a pretty elaborate frame job  
to get an unsuccessful game  
developer out of the way, don't you  
think?

CASTLE

Yeah, but to get your boss out of the way?

BECKETT

What are you saying?

CASTLE

Allen!

BECKETT starts putting the facts together in her head. She nods, getting it.

BECKETT

He's next in line to be head of the studio.

CASTLE

It makes sense.

BECKETT

Yeah, but it doesn't give us anything on him.

CASTLE

He's holding on to his best pieces, waiting for the right time. Only now, I know what his next piece is going to be!

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE BULLPEN - EVENING

Flashdance is cordoned off with police tape now that it's a crime scene. Even the security guards are gone, leaving CASTLE and BECKETT to stalk their way to the truth.

CASTLE

That cell phone has to be in Allen's desk somewhere.

BECKETT

Unless he took it home.

CASTLE

No. I don't think so. He only had yesterday to do it, he'd want it nearby so he could plant it at the right moment, but he wouldn't want to keep it on him if he got searched.

BECKETT

You're guessing.

CASTLE

Yeah, but at least we can actually search the office. If we took this to the judge and asked to check his house I don't think he'd be too thrilled to give us that warrant.

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The two slowly open the door to Allen's office, only to find Allen himself already standing at his desk. BECKETT draws her gun in a flash.

BECKETT

Freeze!

ALLEN

Woah, woah! I'm just here to grab some files.

BECKETT

From a crime scene.

CASTLE

So devoted to your work. That why you killed Moore? To get him out of the way?

ALLEN

What?

CASTLE

We've figured it out, Allen. You've been playing us this whole time, planting clues for us to find, pointing us exactly where you want us to go. I bet you're getting ready to plant that cell phone at Jared Kanno's office, or in his car, probably along with your gun. And then with his studio shut down and Moore dead, you end up in charge, and better than that, you don't have to compete with Rhino for budget any more.

ALLEN gives CASTLE a slow, ponderous, incredibly patronizing round of applause.

ALLEN

Very good, Ricky, very good. That's exactly what I would do.

CASTLE

Aha!

ALLEN

If I had any interest in doing any of that. I don't want Dillan's job. I told you, I'm the creative guy, he was the businessman, and I liked it that way. And between us and Rhino? Please. Our studio always wins out anyway. Eliminating the weakest player in any game is a real waste, don't you think?

BECKETT

So who's the strongest player?

ALLEN gestures openly to himself.

CASTLE

You're saying the killer did all this to get to you?

ALLEN  
You got it, bud.

Before anyone can process what any of this means, BECKETT's sharp instincts pick up a shadowy figure moving outside the window to ALLEN's office.

BECKETT  
Get down!

BECKETT pulls CASTLE to the ground and ALLEN dives behind his desk as the SHOOTER opens a hail of gunfire on the office. They cover their heads as glass rains down on them.

The click of an empty gun signals an all-clear, and the SHOOTER flees as the trio scrambles to their feet. BECKETT grabs her radio while CASTLE and ALLEN give chase.

BECKETT (CONT'D)  
We have an armed suspect, code 245-  
Castle, Knight, hold it!

Realizing that there's no way she's going to stop the two of them, BECKETT groans and quickly chases after.

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS

CASTLE and ALLEN both give chase through the studio, with Allen splitting away and trying to head off the SHOOTER at one of the side exits. Unfortunately he's not quick enough and the culprit slips through as the two of them dive after.

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

The SHOOTER moves up a floor and quickly makes his way out a window, onto a fire escape. After squeezing through the door, CASTLE and ALLEN rocket after him.

EXT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE ALLEYWAY - CONTINUOUS

The SHOOTER makes a desperate leap from the second floor fire escape, landing with a smack on the pavement below and falling over. ALLEN and CASTLE exchange glances and nod to each other before making to do the same.

The SHOOTER quickly kicks over a bunch of trash cans boxes underneath them, and ALLEN lands in a pile of refuse and garbage as the SHOOTER scrambles to his feet.

CASTLE lands comparatively safely and grabs a hold of him, but the SHOOTER grabs a trash can and swings it at CASTLE. He jumps back, but ends up tripping and reeling into the garbage with ALLEN. The SHOOTER quickly flees.

As our two heroes recover, ALLEN brushing a few orange peels off his nice sports coat, the police scramble in and surround them.

POLICE OFFICER

Freeze!

ESPOSITO and RYAN quickly rush in as the cops train their guns on the pair, who, being two out-of-shape middle-aged guys, are completely out of breath and collapse on the ground.

ESPOSITO

Hold it, Castle's with us!

CASTLE

So's Allen.

ALLEN

Thank you.

BECKETT finally catches up and breaks through the crowd as well.

BECKETT

Are you two okay?

ALLEN

See that? She's concerned about me.

CASTLE

In your dreams, pal. Yeah, we're fine.

ESPOSITO

That must have been our guy.

CASTLE

And how.

ESPOSITO

I've seen a lot of boneheaded moves in my time, but that one... What did he have to gain by exposing himself like that?

CASTLE

Simple. Kill one of us-

BECKETT

-and then plant the gun in Allen's office-

CASTLE

... And then Allen's out of the game. Just what the hell kind of game are we playing, anyway?

ALLEN

It sure ain't *The Phantom Knife*, I can tell you that. More like deathmatch in one of my games. Except now...

ALLEN stands and helps CASTLE up off the ground.

ALLEN (CONT'D)

It's a team deathmatch.

CASTLE

At this point? I'd die for a game of Scrabble.

ALLEN

Careful what you wish for.

INT. PRECINCT BULLPEN - EVENING

The gang and ALLEN have all assembled here.

ALLEN

Whoever it was, they didn't just want Moore out of the way, they wanted to get me too. Man, they must really hate my guts.

ESPOSITO

Badly enough to risk becoming a cop killer?

ALLEN

Badly enough to want to frame me for murder 1 and put me away for life.

BECKETT

Assuming they weren't just trying to shoot you.

CASTLE

No, Allen's right. Everyone on the trail of the case would be dead, leaving no choice but for the police to assume it was him.

ALLEN

With all that done both the lead design and producer positions would be up for grabs.

CASTLE

But only to the people directly underneath you.

ALLEN

You got it, bud.

BECKETT

And who would that be?

ALLEN

There's three people it could be: Ernie, the lead programmer; Sandy, the art director; and Greg, the lead writer. I'd guess the lead writer, he hates my guts. Game designers and writers never get along.

CASTLE pages through the time sheet intently.

CASTLE

Tell me about it. Not on the time sheet at the right time, though. The programmer and the artist are.

BECKETT

Can we even trust that information, though? It could just be another plant by the killer. Even if we follow it, we have no guarantee we're going to find the evidence we need.

ESPOSITO

Well if it is or it isn't, we'd better act fast. With what our guy just pulled I wouldn't be surprised if he skipped town.

ALLEN

No. Whoever it is, they're a mastermind. They'd give themselves away immediately if they did that. They'd probably just try to show up to work tomorrow like nothing happened, like all the rest of the team leads, if Flashdance weren't closed off.

A short pause as the group ponders. CASTLE gets a lightbulb as he turns to BECKETT.

CASTLE

You know what? I think I've got a plan. It's time to play this game your way, Detective.

END ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE RECEPTION DESK - MORNING

The police tape has been removed from the scene and life has all but completely resumed for the studio. RYAN prepares to leave, shaking hands with ALLEN.

RYAN

Thank you for your cooperation, Mr. Knight.

ALLEN

Any time. Best of luck with the investigation, detective Ryan.

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE BULLPEN - MORNING

ALLEN passes through like he owns the place, thanking a few people for coming in. As he does, he passes by CASTLE, ESPOSITO, and BECKETT, all in disguise at a few beta testing stations.

As CASTLE watches him pass by he opens his phone and dials a number, crossing his fingers. The phone shows the name "Dillan Moore" when he dials.

A ringtone comes from ERNIE'S desk. His face goes white as ALLEN approaches, grinning diabolically.

ALLEN

Hey, Ernie! Bud! How's it going?

ERNIE lets the phone ring.

ERNIE

Good, Allen. Good.

ALLEN

Aren't you gonna pick that up?

ERNIE

Right. Right...

The programmer shakily pulls a smart phone out of his desk and looks at it. ALLEN whips out his own cell and calls the programmer's number, tapping the name "Ernie Laufer" on the screen.

Another ringtone goes off at the same time, this one coming from the programmer's pocket.

ALLEN has just enough time to ooze a bit of smugness before ERNIE gets up and draws a 9 millimeter pistol on him. CASTLE, BECKETT, and ESPOSITO respond immediately, with BECKETT and ESPOSITO getting on both sides of them and training their guns on ERNIE.

BECKETT

Don't move! NYPD! Put the gun down right now!

ALLEN

This ain't gonna work, bud.

ERNIE

Even with a gun in your face it's just like you to be standing right there, talking down at me like that, just like you do with all your lowly subjects!

ALLEN

You know it was never like that.

ERNIE

Shut up! I'm not your buddy, I'm not your friend--

BECKETT

Ernie, I'm going to tell you one last time to put the gun down!

ALLEN

Look, I'm sure we can talk this out.

ERNIE

Talk this out? Do you know how much blood, sweat, and tears I shed to make your ideas work while you got all the credit? Do you know what all the extra hours, all the overtime cost me?

ALLEN

I know you're angry, but--

ERNIE

My wife, Allen! You wouldn't know anything about that, though, because all you ever think about is yourself! You and Moore both! All you had for me when it happened was more of your work for me to do!

ALLEN

This isn't going to bring her back,  
Ernie.

ERNIE

Shut up, shut up, shut up!

BECKETT

Listen to me, Ernie. You don't want  
to do this!

ERNIE

Why the Hell shouldn't I? If I'm  
gonna lose to this asshole I might  
as well take him with me!

BECKETT

This isn't a game. You're talking  
about taking a life.

ERNIE

I've already taken a life!

BECKETT

Ernie, look around.

ERNIE'S eyes dart all over the room. Everyone in the company has their eyes on him, all of them wearing expressions of the utmost pity.

BECKETT (CONT'D)

You hate Allen for what he did to  
you, but what about all those  
people? Are you going to take it  
out on them, too? They're as much a  
part of this as him, and Moore, and  
you too.

CASTLE

Don't you think you've put them all  
through enough pain for the sake of  
beating Allen at a game?

ERNIE starts hyperventilating as his finger trembles over the trigger. Finally, he puts the gun to his own head.

ALLEN

No!

ERNIE pulls the trigger. There's a loud "click!" He never reloaded it. He breaks into tears and finally drops the gun, his posture shriveling as ESPOSITO moves in to cuff him.

ESPOSITO

You have the right to remain  
silent. Anything you say can and  
will be used against you in a court  
of law.

ALLEN moves past him, retrieving Moore's discarded phone from his desk top and opening it. The background image shows a company picture with Moore, ALLEN, and ERNIE leading the group. ALLEN looks sadly at ERNIE.

ALLEN

Should've turned the phone off.

ERNIE gives an insincere, pathetic laugh.

ERNIE

Always the little mistakes.

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE - MINUTES LATER

ERNIE is being escorted out by several armed police officers. ALLEN is on the phone while RYAN approaches CASTLE, BECKETT, and ESPOSITO.

RYAN

CSU has already found the power  
tools with traces of blood at his  
home.

ESPOSITO

And forensics shouldn't have any  
problem matching the slug to the  
nine millimeter.

CASTLE

Phew. Looks like this case is all  
wrapped up.

ALLEN finishes his conversation and turns back to the rest of the group.

ALLEN

I just got off the phone with  
Jackie. He's agreed to give the  
company a week's paid vacation.  
Also, I've been appointed as the  
new head of the studio.

CASTLE

Couldn't go to a more capable guy.

ALLEN

Yeah. Uh, listen, Ricky, we're going to head out for a round of drinks later. Sort of a half-celebration, half-drown-your-sorrows kind of thing. You want to join us?

CASTLE

Not that I don't appreciate the offer, but frankly your crew is just a little bit too rough for me.

ALLEN

Heh, fair enough, I suppose.

CASTLE

Maybe we could have dinner again tomorrow night? The chili dogs will be on me this time.

ALLEN

I'd like that.

CASTLE

Cool. Well, Allen, it's been good seeing you again.

ALLEN

Yeah. Hey, Rick?

CASTLE

What is it?

ALLEN

I lied, earlier.

CASTLE

What about?

ALLEN

I've read all your stuff. I... absolutely adore it.

CASTLE smiles triumphantly.

CASTLE

Guess I've got no excuse now, huh? I've got to give your games a try.

ALLEN

Let me know what you think.

CASTLE  
I will.

ALLEN  
Take care, Ricky.

CASTLE turns around and heads off to catch up with BECKETT.

CASTLE  
Remember what Freddy Mercury said!

ALLEN  
The show must go on.

INT. FLASHDANCE INTERACTIVE RECEPTION DESK - CONTINUOUS

CASTLE catches up with BECKETT by the reception desk.

CASTLE  
Any plans for this evening,  
Detective Beckett?

BECKETT  
Not particularly. Why? Hoping to  
duck out of a game that Scrabble  
game with Martha and Alexis again?

CASTLE  
Actually I wanted to ask if you'd  
join us.

BECKETT'S expression melts as she starts shaking her head and grinning, half diabolically and half warmly. She has got to see this.

INT. CASTLE'S LOFT - EVENING

CASTLE now sits at the table, caught up in a game of Scrabble with BECKETT, MARTHA, and ALEXIS.

ALEXIS  
You'd better have a pretty big  
trick up your sleeve, Dad. Gram and  
Detective Beckett have you beat  
pretty bad so far.

CASTLE  
We'll see.

BECKETT  
 (imitating Allen)  
 Well, Ricky, it's your turn!

CASTLE  
 Don't call me that.

CASTLE rakes his eyes over his hand, pondering carefully.

MARTHA  
 Quit stalling, darling, some of us  
 have beauty sleep we're trying to  
 catch up on.

CASTLE  
 I just don't know. Oh. Oh. Oh! Ohh!  
 Look at this!

CASTLE promptly starts placing pieces, spelling out a huge  
 word between pieces that have already been laid on the board.

CASTLE (CONT'D)  
 I believe that's 85 points, which  
 puts me ahead of you--

CASTLE points at ALEXIS.

CASTLE (CONT'D)  
 And you!

Now at MARTHA.

ALEXIS  
 No way! I demand a recount!

MARTHA  
 Droll, dear. Very droll.

BECKETT  
 You've still got a ways to go  
 before you're caught up with me,  
 though.

CASTLE  
 We'll see. Still plenty of pieces  
 left in the bag yet. Besides, it's  
 like I always say-

ALEXIS  
 Always win everything?

CASTLE

No! It's not about winning or losing, it's about the fun you have playing.

ALEXIS

That is so not what you say!

CASTLE

Is too.

ALEXIS

Is not!

CASTLE

Is too times infinity!

MARTHA

(To Beckett) I raised him, and believe me, dear, it's definitely not what he says.

CASTLE

I can't believe my own mother would impugn my honor!

BECKETT

We'll see how honorable you are when I'm done with you.

BECKETT begins to make her next move.

END ACT SIX

END OF EPISODE