

Oasis Hotel

Inspired by The Sims 2 for DS, Oasis Hotel is a surrealist deconstruction of the management sim genre, following an unnamed player character who, apparently, is the manager of a luxury hotel in the middle of a podunk desert town, where the guests and townsfolk are hilariously, and horrifyingly, abnormal.

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Core Game

Design Pillars

Genre Inversion

Oasis Hotel is, actually, a narrative game in a management game's skin. The narrative serves to be a deconstruction of the genre and how it always tends to infinite growth, and the relationship this has with capitalism.

Following this, Oasis Hotel's systems are intentionally easy to exploit, with exploits being narratively thematic with common real-world strategies used for the infinite growth demanded out of businesses.

Get Silly With it

Be funny. Be surreal. Be weird. Play The Sims 2 for DS and wonder how the hell this game exists. Steal from it whole heartedly. Make the silliest little freak and make him a main NPC.

Don't Forget About Horror

As much as Oasis Hotel is surrealist with comedy overtones, capitalism is a fundamentally horrible system. The inversion of laughter is laughter.

Game Loop

The main loop is based around taking in hotel guests:

- The player checks in a hotel guest
- The guest stays for a certain amount of nights
- The guest makes requests during their stay, which the player can fulfil
- Based on how good their stay is, the player is paid an amount of money

Certain guests progress the main narrative of the game, at the downside of paying less, meaning the player will strategise prioritising guests that will earn them more money right now, or guests that will progress the story and unlock more content.

Motivation

Primary Motivation

Making money, expanding the hotel, and bringing in more guests to see what bizarre people this town attracts.

If the player realises the actual systems behind the game, they now have a motivation to either refuse to expand the hotel to not kill the other businesses in town, or to massively expand its operations to see what happens.

Secondary Motivation

Initially presented as a blank slate for the player to project onto, it's later discovered that they're playing as Alex, with an actual history and backstory, and have to discover who they are after being hit with amnesia, and if they really are the manager of the Oasis Hotel.

Features

Day/Night Cycle

Oasis Hotel runs on a day/night cycle, with primary features built around it. One second equals one minute, with the player able to skip time by sleeping.

Guest Stays

The main feature of Oasis Hotel, and the primary way to make money, is to check in hotel guests and offer them stays at the hotel. Guests hang around the lobby waiting to be checked in by the player, and checking them in begins their stay.

The guest informs the player of what kind of stay they'll be having:

Fixed Stays

Fixed stays are set for a certain number of nights. All guests who stay under fixed stays can come back to the hotel multiple times.

During a fixed stay, a guest can call the player and give them tasks to complete. Completing them makes the guest more satisfied with their stay, and makes them more likely to pay extra when they check out.

Some calls are mundane, such as:

- Room service (With no kitchen, this typically means buying food from the local bar or convenience store)
- Unclogging a toilet
- Cleaning the room

Or, more outlandish, such as:

- Getting stuck in the hotel freezer
- Deliberately setting their room on fire
- Getting lost somewhere in the desert, and asking for rescue
- Breaking the ice machine and filling the floor with ice
- Stealing room furniture, and forcing the player to find out where they hid it

Some guests have tasks unique to them and their occupation or personality, and may never trigger certain tasks.

Guests can also call the player at random points, with often benign or humorous comments. Depending on what they say gives the player an indicator of how their stay is going, and how much they're likely to pay.

When the stay comes to an end, the player is paid and the guest leaves the hotel. Based on how many tasks the player successfully completes, the guest's mood, and how good the room they stayed in was, the guest will pay more or less money.

Rolling Stays

Unlike fixed stays, rolling stays pay less per night, but stay indefinitely until the guest decides to leave.

All rolling stays progress the narrative in some form with optional or obligatory content, and the guest deciding to leave is scripted when all their tasks have been completed. These are more analogous to quests, with infinite time to complete them, and much more story content than a simple minigame or fetch quest.

Some guests who start as rolling stays can come back as guests under fixed stays.

Boss Guests

Functionally the same as rolling stays, boss guests mark the narrative progression from one act to the next. The boss guest for each act can vary depending on choices the player made.

To finish an act, the boss guest must be defeated in a socialising minigame.

Socialising Minigame

Guests and townsfolk have varying moods, with negative ones being sad, angry, loopy, or scared. The player can engage characters in a socialising minigame, and if they are successful, the character leaves the minigame happy. Mood swings are more common with guests staying in the hotel.

If a player engages the minigame while someone is happy, and succeeds, their relationship will increase. At certain friendship levels, this unlocks extra narrative content and storylets in various acts, which serve to expand the world of Oasis Hotel by optionally engaging further with its characters.

Note: This minigame requires fully fleshing out and integrating into the rest of the systems in Oasis Hotel, and currently exists as a known need to fill in a gap in talking to people in the town repeatedly without writing extreme amounts of dialogue, an engaging end to the sanity system, and giving a satisfying resolution to each act. An integration being considered is a card or deck-building minigame, with cards being found on sale in stores, at certain points in the story, after "battling" certain characters, etc.

Sanity

The player has no apparent needs metre, and only a sanity bar. If the player does not sleep, eat, shower, etc., however, their sanity metre will start to drop. Their animations will be interrupted by them rubbing their eyes, their stomach growling, and similar indicators that they need to take care of themselves.

If the player ignores these, and their sanity bottoms out, Alex will become extremely paranoid and start seeing shadowy figures while walking around. These will engage the player in the socialising minigame. If they succeed, they are given a short break to deal with

their needs before the figures return. If they fail, Alex passes out, and wakes up in the hotel with the concierge concerned or chastising them, with some money lost.

Alex can never die for narrative reasons, and only ever passes out if the player does not attend to his needs.

Expanding the Hotel

As the player earns more money, they can start to expand the hotel with new amenities, to make more money and unlock new content. Expansions are granted as permits built over a certain amount of in-game time, with one permit being granted at a time. These expansions are fixed into the design of the hotel, with obvious gaps where expansions would go.

Rooms

The player can buy new rooms to put into the hotel, being the primary way they can make more money.

Note: The amount of available rooms needs to be tested with how many concurrent guests a player can handle before the load becomes too overwhelming, as well as building around strategies the player makes with bringing in guests and keeping them happy. A current ballpark number is looking at 5-7 rooms.

Room Customisation

The player can further enhance rooms by customising them with furniture and extra items. The more lavish a room is, the more a guest will pay at the end of their stay. However, if a room is too expensive, some guests will not stay in them.

A room requires a bed, toilet, shower, and sink to be considered functional. If a room does not have these, a guest will complain, and if not resolved in time will leave early without paying.

Facilities

Beyond rooms, the player can also expand out new facilities for the hotel. Some assist with running the hotel, such as a kitchen and cleaning closet. Some are already present in the town, such as gyms, restaurants, casinos, markets, boutiques, spas, etc.

Unchecked Expansion

The primary narrative branching of the game is based around how much the player expands the hotel to cover amenities already present around the town, now undercut by the hotel. This will start being shown to the player through businesses being closed, people worrying about their jobs being gone, with most townsfolk never making the connection between the hotel rapidly expanding and the town's economy being absorbed into it.

Exploring the Town

The town in Oasis Hotel is open world, with new sections being unlocked as the narrative progresses. Here the player can interact with townsfolk who live there, engage with other businesses, buy items and furniture for the hotel, or find narrative content to investigate.

The player is free to explore the town at any time, with guests always ticking in the background if there are any currently staying in the hotel, and calling the player to give them tasks. The town is small enough for the player to make it back to the hotel in a reasonable amount of time if they go exploring, with the hotel in a central location.

If the player attempts to run to the very edges of the town into the desert, they will be lost in a sandstorm with their sanity bottoming out, forced into a socialisation minigame that they always fail, and wake up in the hotel with some money lost.

Extra minigames

Mostly sandbox-like toys for the player to mess with, these become unlocked as the player either expands the hotel with new amenities or discovers new places around town. These include musical toys to play and record instruments, painting canvases, casino card games, and so on. Some of these can earn the player a little extra money if played correctly.

These extra minigames cost the player money as they are run by other businesses. The player can play them for free if they copy the business into the hotel complex.

Content

World Summary & Context

The world of Oasis Hotel is, in contrast to the apparent mundane insanity of its inhabitants, highly supernatural, which is intended to be almost entirely hidden to the player until they start hitting the extreme ends of the story. These extreme ends being refusing to expand the hotel at all, and expanding it as much as physically possible.

The town is puppeted by an eldritch being simply named the Desert. This is the apparent life force of the town, who governs its citizens under a strict set of rules. If these rules are broken, citizens are "taken" by the Desert and never seen again. One of these rules is explaining the workings of the Desert to outsiders, making speaking about the Desert out loud a taboo, and only referred to with insider language.

The Desert is a stand-in for capitalism, which will never be explicitly stated in the game. This makes the Desert a problem created by the town's inhabitants (if not the current inhabitants' ancestors), but they are entirely convinced it's an act of nature they will always live under.

The Oasis Hotel serves as a physical manifestation of the Desert and its wants and desires. If the Oasis Hotel is ever run out of business, it's said that the entire town will go down with it. One person, the Manager, signs a contract to be a living vessel for the Desert, running the hotel. This role is given in exchange for apparent immortality, and the contract is perpetual. However, if the Manager does not fully enact the will of the Desert, they're taken, and the role must be filled again to keep the hotel running.

The previous Manager, Sylvester Silick, was able to keep the Desert satisfied by restricting growth of the hotel, similar to a well-meaning CEO holding back shareholders. After several missteps, however, he was taken by the Desert, ending his over hundred-year streak of running the hotel. Since then, the townsfolk have been desperately trying to fill the position, with no-one lasting more than a few weeks. This brought them to the point of tricking outsiders to take on the role, leading us to the player's start in the narrative.

Narrative Summary

The player, amnesiac after a car crash, wakes to find townsfolk, and their one employee, reminding them of their role of Manager at the Oasis Hotel. Apparently, they drove off into the desert for unknown reasons, not for the first time, and were saved by the local population.

The game is split into several acts, with each act ending in a boss guest. The start of each act marks a point where more facilities can be constructed, more characters can be spoken to, more guests are unlocked, more of the town can be explored, and so on.

Note: The amount of acts, and amount of actual story content, is yet to be determined, and requires testing with how much engagement there is over the hotel guest loop, and how much players want breaks from it to see optional narrative and lore content.

The narrative branches based on the player's actions, into three main storylines:

1. Expanding the hotel as much as possible, and amassing the entire town's economy into the hotel
2. A midpoint where most players will end up on their first run, expanding the hotel's amenities somewhat, closing down some businesses, but not to extreme measures
3. Only expanding the hotel's guest rooms and minor facilities, and not shutting down any businesses in the town

Branch one will lead the player to fully satisfying the Desert, at the town's absolute destruction. Alex ascends to a demi-god figure, before the Desert fully reveals itself to them, destroying them both in the process.

Branch two is far more down to earth and will sidestep the Desert as an antagonist, instead focusing on Alex as a person and what they'll do after finding out who they actually are. There are current plans for sub-branching, such as choices where Alex can stay in the town or try to escape with outside help.

Branch three involves deliberately going against the Desert's wishes, ending in Alex having to battle the Desert in a violent sandstorm. This results in both good and bad endings where the player succeeds—or not—in finally defeating the Desert and freeing the town, albeit in ruins.

Characters

Alex (any/all)

Initially presented as a blank slate player character for the player to project onto, Alex was driving to the town to investigate it, crashing their car in the process.

Note: Alex's motivations for coming to the town and his background are still in development, with questions of how much his backstory will relate to the overall themes of the game, or if they'll be fairly distinct to help make them more subtle.

Alex is initially amnesiac, even forgetting their name, with the player knowing as much of the town as they do. They are coerced into signing the contract to become Manager of the Oasis Hotel, disoriented after waking up. As far as Alex knows, she's always been the Manager of the hotel.

Concierge (he/him)

The only other employee at the Oasis Hotel, the concierge serves as a tutorial character and a main NPC for Alex to rely on. Despite having little passion for the job, he is pleasant to speak to, and is always willing to help Alex where he can. He isn't permanently tied to the hotel as the Manager is, but doesn't like the idea of quitting.

The concierge is fully aware of Alex being tricked, and feels some amount of guilt over it, but ultimately believes this is the best to keep the town and its inhabitants alive, especially as several Managers before Alex could not do the job as well as Sylvester could.

Slyvester Silick (he/him)

The previous notable Manager of the hotel. Decades into his run, Slyvester realised what the Desert was demanding, and how it would lead the town to ruin, and devised strategies to try keeping it happy but not giving in to its desires fully. The Desert became increasingly enraged with him, but could not find suitable ways to take him due to technically performing well enough and his mass popularity, leading him to hold it back for over a hundred years. Ultimately, this wasn't enough, and Slyvester was tricked by the Desert into breaking a rule.

The player can find old writings of Slyvester's strategies of keeping the Desert sated and held back, and his downfall, giving players hints of how the narrative branching in Oasis Hotel works.

Townfolk

The player can meet and interact with various townfolk while they run the hotel, who run various businesses, bureaucracy, and live in various social classes. All the townfolk will seem as bonkers as each other, sometimes in different ways, but not to a point that everyone are slandered caricatures.

Being a remote desert town, the town, and subsequently its inhabitants, are inspired by the culture and society around the American Southwest.

Hotel Guests

Some hotel guests will be townfolk looking for a short break, but most will be tourists and outsiders. As guests can travel from anywhere into town, they have a wider range of cultural influences to pull from. Generally, once they're in the hotel, they're just as wild as the townfolk.