Hotel California

Game Design Document

CIT216 Game Programming

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**Part I: Concept**

**Premise:** Hotel California is a 2-D puzzle adventure horror game that has you solve the murder of a hotel patron that happened long ago. You play as Timothy Little, a tourist in California looking for a place to stay during his visit. You soon learn that in the Hotel California, a patron was murdered some time ago and haunts the establishment. You spend each night at the hotel discovering more clues about the patron’s murder, and current patrons become increasingly worried as their lives are put in danger by a more sinister and malicious evil spirit. Can you gather clues and connect the dots to uncover the truth about her murder while avoiding the evil spirit?

**Platform:** For ease of design and availability Hotel California will be developed primarily for PC and perhaps on MAC and consoles as a secondary platform if further development is pursued. PC is convenient and familiar to develop for as of now and more time would need to spent optimizing the game for other platforms. Hotel California’s simplistic interfacing will work well with a keyboard input but can also be adapted to controller input.

**Rating:** Hotel California will contain strong violence, drug and alcohol reference, and blood, so its ESRB rating will be T for teens. Strong violence is experienced through the history of the hotel and the murder of the patron. Some characters smoke or drink, or do both, and thus, drugs and alcohol are referenced frequently throughout the game. Blood will be present in small amounts throughout the game world and the T rating reflects that.

**Target Audience:** The target audience will be teenagers and young adults ages 13-24, who respond well to heavy problem solving and horror. This audience has the most time to spend playing video games and the horror genre is also marketed pretty heavily towards this age range in other media outlets, like television series and movies. This audience is also mature enough to handle the content of the story elements. The gameplay mechanics of puzzle solving in order to solve the mystery will also be challenging enough to this audience to engage them thoroughly. This audience will consist of mostly educated or in the process of being educated individuals that will be comfortable with a setting of learning and problem solving.

**Goals:** Hotel California will mostly focus on the elements of suspense and challenge to engage the player. Difficulty of problem-solving situations will be compounded by timing elements and a sense of encroaching defeat via a malicious and sinister spirit. Although player action develops through a predefined character, players will be able to uncover clues in their own way and learn the history of the murdered patron in a unique pattern. There will be a set path to uncover the mystery but certain random encounters will ensure the player can experience a unique playthrough from their friends or from other playthroughs they themselves have done.

**Part II: Game Story Elements**

**Backstory:** In the early 1950s a young woman by the name of Thalia Rex lodged at the Hotel California for the night while on a touring visit of the state of California. However, room service found Thalia dead the next day when she did not respond to inquiries to her room being cleaned. After that day, patrons began reporting certain happenings throughout the Hotel lights flickering, personal objects being moved or disappearing entirely, constant nightmares, disembodied footsteps, etc. As time went on certain spiritually sensitive individuals began describing an awful, evil, and malicious presence when they stayed at the hotel. In order to keep the hotel’s reputation, employees were tasked with denying any suspicions that the hotel might be haunted. For a time, the feigned ignorance of the haunting seemed to work towards actually lessening the frequency of odd happenings. Patrons rarely reported any paranormal activity and the hotel grew in popularity.

**Synopsis:** You play as Timothy Little, a young man on vacation to sight see and explore California. Upon hearing a rumor from a cab driver that the hotel was haunted and it was kept hush hush, Timothy eagerly booked a room at the Hotel California to see if he might experience strange happenings. You follow Timothy as he spends his nights in the hotel and it isn’t long before he encounters incredibly strange events, much like patrons used to describe. You soon find out you are staying in the same room as the patron was and begin uncovering clues that her death was a murder. The story moves forward as you uncover the past and find out the truth that the murdered patron was part of a sinister plot of evil.

**Part III: Game Elements**

**Challenges:** The main challenge the player encounters Hotel California is puzzle solving. Game world objects like desks can be opened, photographs can be examined and NPCs can be persuaded to part with personal belongings to uncover clues about the murder. Players can also try and get into different rooms or sections of the Hotel with keys and tools that are awarded after a series of player actions happen. Some things must happen in sequence, so not all areas of the Hotel can be explored at once, some areas are opened after specific events take place, and new dialogue options become available too.

Another challenge the player faces is the looming threat of something evil approaching him or her. There will be an apparition that the player can encounter at random times as the night progresses and if the player is caught by the spirit, it will be game over. As the player gets closer to the truth about the murder of the patron the apparition becomes more and more aggressive and appears more frequently. This apparition is not the spirit of the murdered patron, but rather an awakened evil that was brought about by the murder.

The player’s other challenge will be hotel security. If the player is caught in a restricted section of the hotel by security it will also be game over, as the player will be thrown out of the hotel, unable to solve the mystery. Security personnel are stationed at set places within the hotel, and do not appear randomly. Players can also aggravate NPCs and be thrown out for disturbing other patrons.

**Strategies:** Repetition and back tracking are key to solving puzzles in this game. Anything that can be examined should be, doors that are left open by hotel guests should be entered, anything the player can look at like pictures or desktop objects should be looked at as well. The player should return to previously explored areas after advancements are made on clues to see if new opportunities are there. NPCs should be talked to until their dialogue options are exhausted. Again, the NPCs a player previously talked to should be talked to again to see if new dialogue opens up.

There are two sources of hauntings in the Hotel the murdered patron’s spirit and an evil, malicious spirit. Both could be the cause of certain things made available to the player, like suddenly unlocked doors or helpful objects. However, the player should keep an eye out for a manifested spirit, because the murdered patron does not appear as a spirit but rather simply interacts with the game world. The evil spirit appears as a spirit and will seek the player to ward him or her away from finding out the truth of the murder. The player should avoid the evil spirit at all costs by hiding behind doors or under tables.

Similarly, the player can hide from hotel security by hiding from them or moving to a different area to avoid getting caught. Some NPCs won’t be helpful to the player until specific information is found or certain events unfold. Perhaps two NPCs dislike each other and they won’t cooperate with the player until their issues are resolved. Continuously talking to these NPCs puts the player at risk of being reported to management, which should be avoided if the player wishes to continue playing the game.

**Level Structure:** Levels in Hotel California will be the different floors of the Hotel. The player begins in room 32, so the first 3 floors can be explored relatively freely without drawing suspicion. On other floors, security might be suspicious of the player. There will also be 2 basement levels that are restricted to the player initially but can be explored later. Each floor will have desks, tables, chairs, and other furniture that can be interacted as well as NPCs to talk to. The basement levels will be the most difficult with the hardest puzzles, the most frequent visits by the evil spirit and with more on duty security that player will have to avoid. The basement levels have the most to offer in terms of solving the mystery, and so they must also include the most obstacles. There will be a main lobby area that the player can talk with NPCs, both patrons and hotel staff. There won’t be much paranormal activity in this area and security won’t be suspicious of the player in this area. Hotel California has 6 floors, and floors 4-6 simply offer more clues and opportunities with NPCs than the initial floors the player has unrestricted access to. Security personnel will be more skeptical of the player on higher floors and the evil spirit will manifest more on upper levels. There will also be a roof level where the player can find more clues and NPCs.

**Interface Design:** Players can access information and control the game in a variety of ways. The player will be able to control the game with traditional menus like a start game menu, options menu, control menu, and a pause menu. The start game menu will contain a new game option to start a new game and overwrite old saves, a continue button to begin the game from the most recent save file, an options button to open an options menu and a quit game button. The start game menu will have a background of the hotel sign with menu buttons to the right. The options menu will have menus for audio, video, and controls. The pause menu will have a resume button, a save button, a button to access the options menu, and a quit game button. The quit button will prompt the player to return to the title screen or the desktop. The main input to move the player character and have the character interact with the game world will be the keyboard.

Players can access information through an inventory menu that will let the player see all the clues they have gathered, whether they are physical objects or important pieces of dialogue. The player can track their progress via a journal that lets them know what information they have collected about the mysterious murder and NPCs. Through keyboard input players can talk to NPCs, examine objects, and interact with the game world. Dialogue will be contained in an area below the main game screen to avoid clutter. There will be a GUI that holds the players physical object inventory in the left side of the screen as well as the time of night and the night number in the top left of the screen. Players can interact with certain game objects like doors and tables to hide from threats.