Conutti!

Got nuts?

A satirical RPG video game on COVID-19

Game Design Document

Link To Prototype:
https://gmangray4.itch.io/conuttyprototype

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Concept

High concept

A game that would help to expose and criticise the struggle of living during this time of pandemic in a funny manner as well as serve as a way to measure up your morality standards and sensibilize the population such as Covid-Idiots – all together to form a modern satire.

The video game will find a way to alleviate the seriousness of the current pandemic and the different rules the Quebec Government imposes on us with cute little hamsters. Similarly, the artistic/design statement is inspired by young Thai protesters that are using hamsters from the famous *HamTaro* Serie to mock the new Coronavirus rules that their Government implemented that crippled their freedom. To do so, the *Free Youth Movement* protests use whimsical tactics to value their basic rights to gather and hold rallies.

In short, the general idea will demonstrate our current lives through the lenses of a cute hamster that uses a wearable smart ball in a hamster's world. In order for the player to complete the game, (or survive in the time of the pandemic), the latter would have to use their smart ball to go about the world. The smart ball would have an integrated GPS, proximity sensors or more affecting the gameplay, player's morality and narrative.

- A satirical video game that embodies an argument on the social and political pressure that the current rules implemented by the Quebec Government have on the population.

- A social narrative, a social argument and politically correct protest of our current lives, especially when considering wearable technology helping or hindering our said lives.

- The hamster ball, the wearable chosen for our project, acts as a cocoon that addresses our feeling of frustration and anxiety towards the pandemic. The ball would work similarly to a mask and a smartphone altogether.

- The data from the hamster ball harvested from its pseudo components would change the gameplay. The game would mirror our current lack of

privacy and civil liberties in exchange for security that it provides from COVID-19 and ourselves.

Genre and medium

This game is a role playing game in the form of a short demo adventure following a narrative. The player will control the main character, a cute little hamster, in third person with a 2.5D perspective. The whole will support the satirical concept as well as the cute, easy and fast paced gameplay. As a satire of serious current events, the genre needs the player to feel detached while at the same time make the parallel with the last months. The whole will be playable exclusively on PC and will be available through *Itch.io* and *Steam* (if the non-refundable 100$ can be paid).

Story

The narrative follows a male hamster, the main character, in a small town of the hamster's world. The world is an exact copy of our world, but where humans are hamsters and everything is cutesy. The story is based at a time where a deadly pandemic named *Conutti-91* is changing the world upside-down. The hamster first navigates the pre-pandemic world and subsequently becomes out of control. Following the escalation, the hamsters' Government is implementing new rules to decrease the spread of the new virus - even if the rules are detrimental to some basic hamsters' needs. However, the main character needs to push through and try to live in an ever changing world.

Objective

The narrative takes place in a hamster world where the deadly pandemic *Conutti-91* is changing the daily life of the hamsters. The goal of the game is straightforward; the player needs to complete tasks while complying with the rules enforced each day by the hamsters' Government up until two days passes and the hamster goes on with his newly changed life.

Graphics

The visuals of the game revolve around a cute, humorous and simple art style that integrates subtle intricate styling to support the High concept. It also boasts an inclusive art direction and the consideration of the short amount of time allowed for development to still deliver a higher end product. Inclusivity is in order since the game's hidden meaning and the Coronavirus are interrelated. As such, the game is intended for a wider audience. The inspiration comes from *Mineko's Night Market* with its overall graphics, 2.5D depiction of their world and the user interface, as well as the *Animal Crossing* series for their world and user interface also.
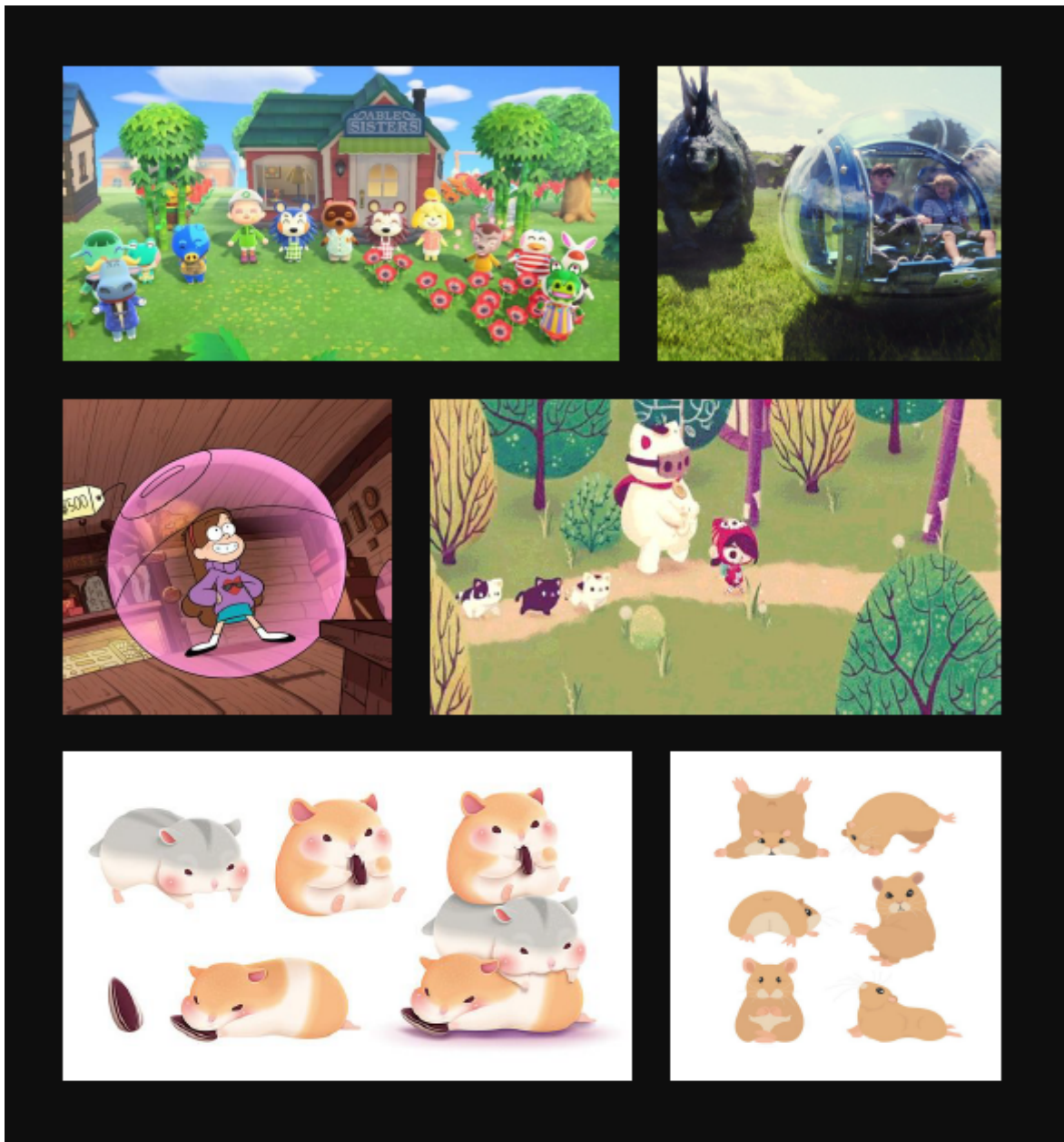
Drive of all Alex's art for the project, including sketches and final editions:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-z26LIRJ1Y2al0oqAryRdLAkVkzcmryK?usp=sharing

Copyrights

The game takes place in a hamster world full of cuteness. The main inspiration comes from the *HamTaro* series and the way Thai Protesters used the same idea for protesting the Coronavirus laws enforced recently. The general concept came from the French play *Rhinocéros* from Ionesco for its satirical form and humans as animals. Aesthetically, the first inspiration is *Mineko's Night Market* with its overall graphics, 2.5D depiction of their created world and the user interface while the second is the *Animal Crossing* series for their world and user interface also. For the gameplay however, the inspirations were *Dead Rising 2* and the *Mass Effect* trilogy. The first was for its day to day system where conditions worsen each day and its tasks that are limited at certain periods of each day all the while you are pressured to complete them fast. The latter was an inspiration for its morality system in which it gives the player different choices and endings depending on if you do good or bad.

Characters

All the characters are cute little hamsters who will be generic to the role they are given. The genericism is used as a cute and childish looking aesthetic that invites an easier and funnier understanding of the narrative imbued in the game.

- Main Character
- Girlfriend Character
- Police Officers
    - Fat officer
    - Moustache officer
    - Rookie officer

- Store Clerks

- Grocery store clerk (middle aged hamster with dark fur and strong expression)
- Flower shop owner (old and cute ma'am)
- HaMart clerk (typical student with glasses and braces)

- The mechanic (a young, lively and strongly built red with white spotted fur female hamster)
- Pedestrians (if possible, like joggers, kids, a couple, and more)

The world

In general, the town will be a basic reconstruction of a small north american town, like recent *Animal Crossing* titles in terms of simplicity.

The key locations, and only ones that are interactives, are as follow:

- Home
- Bank
- HamMart Store
- Flower store
- Grocery store
- Girlfriend's home
- Garage home
- Police station
- Clock Tower

User Interface

As mentioned previously, the user interface is heavily inspired by two video game titles: *Mineko's Night Market* and the *Animal Crossing* series. This sort of user interface design was chosen to support the High Concept with cuteness, humour and simpleness. With the inclusivity of the game's hidden meaning and the Coronavirus, the game is intended for a larger audience - as previously mentioned. As such, the user interface and its overall user experience will also support a more inclusive design while retaining its cute, humorous and simpler aesthetics.
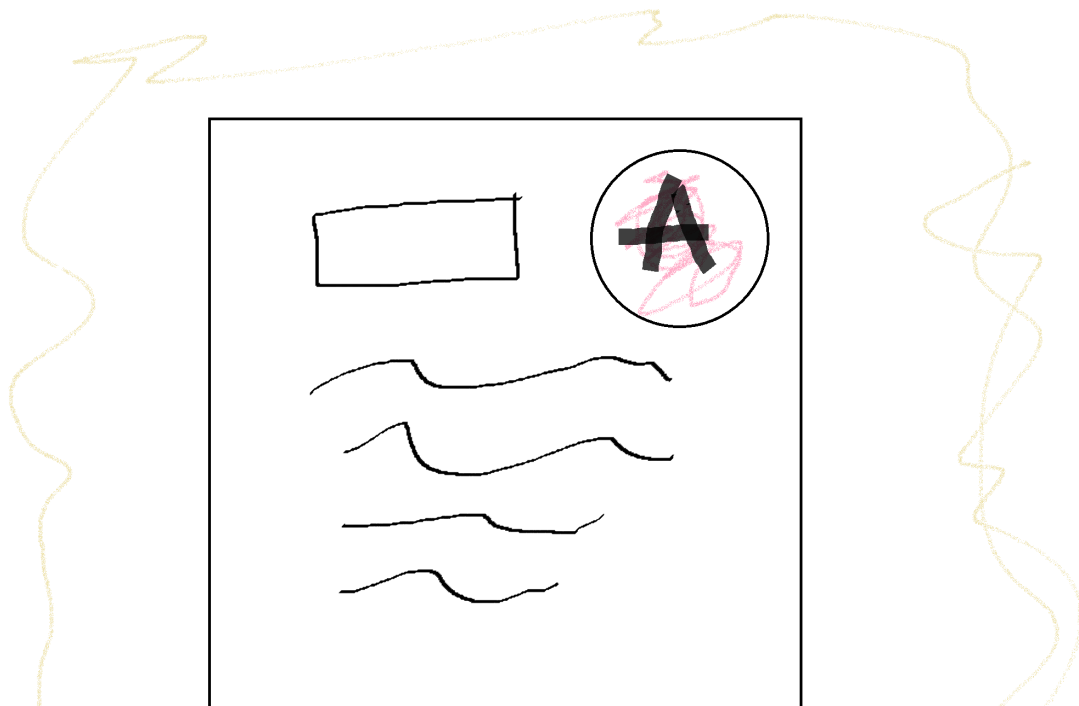
The in-game interface, to support gameplay, will include:
- The day (date) & Time of day (clock)
- The time remaining to complete tasks that can be done live (live timer/alarm)
- Equipment selection wheel for the Task list and Map

The UI style the project is aiming for:

Example of a UI sketch for the endings interface:

Game Flow

The flowchart of the game is made with an accessible experience in mind. To do so, the game does not indulge in extravagance by using unnecessary and sometimes excessive ways of working. Lacking the time for real user analysis research, work has been done with the help of Reddit, by taking into account a majority of opinion on the way video games flowcharts are done (for example this thread: link).
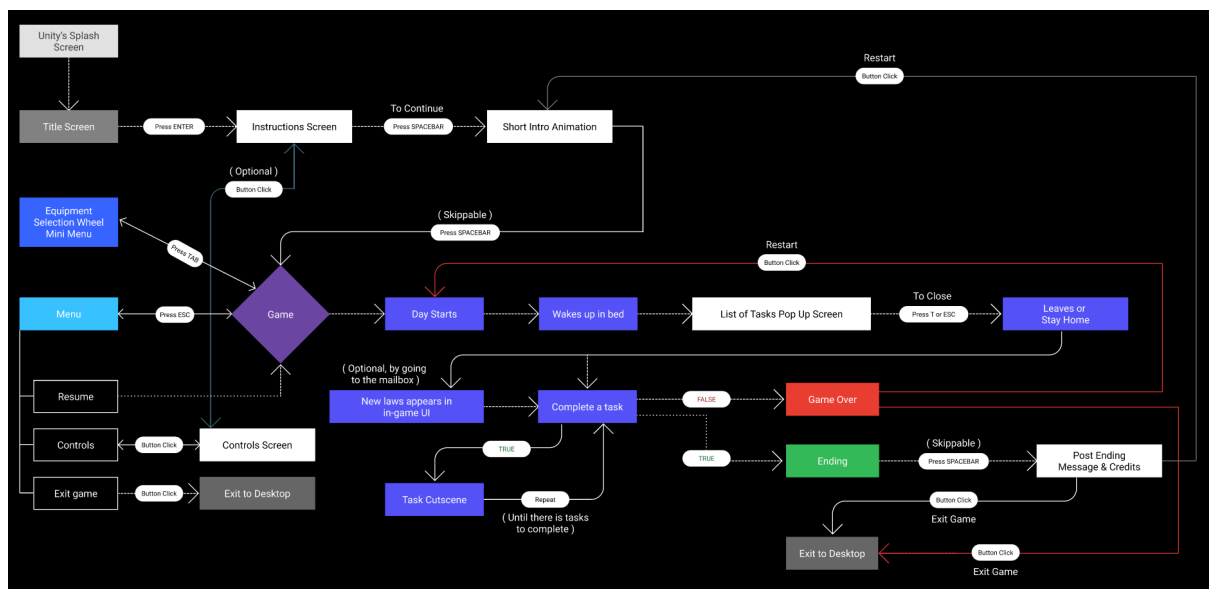
In order to make the game more accessible and fun with a drop-in-and-play mindset for players of diverse backgrounds, the game fused some ideas coming from consoles into its PC only medium genre. To prevent players fatigue of endless menus, (and due to lack of time for this project), there is no title screen menu. This way, the player can skip one step of the menu and be less bothered by the lack of setting options. Processing is not a problem either as an instruction screen scene pops up right after the PRESS ENTER title screen scene - giving time to the Build to complete generate the game.
The small instruction screen scene will explain the gameplay quickly and efficiently, and propose the player to look at the controls that will be integrated in the in-game

menu also for more convenience. Afterwards, there will be a short animation introducing the story and tie directly to when the game begins - be it textual, 2D animated or a mix of both that can be skipped if need be (skippable with spacebar if any key is detected one time before). This introductory and short animated type of scenes is inspired by indie game, like *OneShot*.

As for the game, right after the main character wakes up, the player will be greeted with the task list to which the objectives are known right off the bat, since players in general on Reddit agree that a clear objective at the beginning is important (like *Sea of Thieves* in-game beginning letters for events). Next, after the list of tasks is closed, the Laws news will appear in the in-game user interface and be a permanent feature in order to ease the understanding of the rules, add to the tension, motivation and fun.

For the last part of the video game, if the player gets a game over, the latter gets the conventional choice of restarting or quitting the game. On the other hand, if the player gets the ending, a post-game ending message saying ''Thank you for playing and stay safe!'', the credits and the option to restart or quit the game.

Link to the Flow Chart:
https://www.figma.com/file/n3hYhCBeyDNY9trpYP9pYR/Game-Flow-Chart?node-id=0%3A1

Gameplay

Mechanics and systems

The game is composed of various mechanics and systems that allow and support the proper functioning of the narrative in the given hamster world. The mechanics and systems work as follow:

■ Interaction system

The user walks over to a store or object and presses the interaction command. A short clip will appear to showcase the interaction occurring then it closes once it's done.

■ Day System

The player processed to the next day when they completed all tasks on the list and returned to their bed before 11pm. Each day starts at 7am. The day system is like:

- Every 1 minute = 1 hour.
- Every computed task takes 1 hour to do.
- Each day must end with the user going to bed before 11pm.

■ Mailbox System

This is where the player received new laws news that will come into effect during the day. They must interact with the mailbox to receive the laws (rules) then the day begins. The mailbox can be not used to mimic people who are not up to date in general. As such, the first task involves the mailbox, but is the only one not ending in a game over.

■ Tasks System

The tasks the user must complete within the days are the following. They will have a fixed time when they become available and have a deadline to complete.

First Day			Second Day		
Task	**Time Start**	**Time End**	**Task**	**Time Start**	**Time End**
Consult the news for new laws coming into effect during the day with the mailbox	7am	NA	Consult the news for new laws coming into effect during the day with the mailbox	7am	NA
Go to Bank to get money	9am	5am	Take a bath	7am	9am
Buy a ball at HaMart	10am	5am	Go to your girlfriend's house before she goes to work	7am	9am
Do Groceries	10am	5pm	or		
Job Work at home	9am	7pm	Go to your girlfriend's house after she returns to work	6pm	9pm
Visit your girlfriend	4am	9pm	Take your ball to the garage	8am	2pm
Go to sleep	Once all tasks are complete	11pm	Buy flowers at the flower shop	10am	5pm
			Pay bills at the bank	9am	5pm
			Go to sleep	Once all tasks are complete	11pm

▪ Rules of each day

First Day			Second Day		
Rules	**Time Start**	**Time End**	**Rules**	**Time Start**	**Time End**
Curfew: no hamster allowed outside their home after 7pm.	7pm	-	Curfew: no hamster allowed outside their home after 7pm.	7pm	-
Hamsters are not allowed to get to close to others	7am	-	All hamsters must travel in their ball	10am	-
			Hamsters are not allowed to get to close to others	7am	-

▪ Morality System

The morality system supports the high concept by sensibilizing the population to subjects such as COVID-19 and also adds a touch of funniness with stamped mail. Depending on the endings discerned to the player, mail is received with a little stamp that gives a rank to the specific ending or game over given to the latter. The rank can help to show the user how close they made it to the true ending since only one ending is considered good when all of the rest are bad. When an ending, or game over, occurs the player receives a letter that drops in front of the screen as an overlay popup and gameplay comes to a full stop. The letter will then explain which one they have received with a narrative driven description and a rank letter that comes in the form of a stamp.

Win/lose states

The player loses when

1. Time moves past 11pm.
2. If the user fails to meet a task in time.
3. If the cops catch the player breaking the rules. (see list of rules)
4. If you go to your girlfriend's place without taking a bath first.
5. If you got to your girlfriend without bringing her flowers on the second day.
6. When you get too close to an NPC without your hamster ball after the rule is enforced on day two.

Environment

1. The player cannot exit the delimited environment defined by the map.
2. Some places, like the girlfriend's backyard, can be used as hiding spots from the Police on the Second Day.
3. Some places cannot be accessible with a hamster ball, like the girlfriend's backyard.
4. Only defined places on the map can be interacted with.

■ **Map Layout**

Link to the map: https://www.figma.com/file/DM8VTj7Ak15LFtQMhV8Uiy/Map

Legends

- Gray walls are hedges
- Red houses are buildings.
- Blue is the player's house.
- Black is a hole in the hedges that players can crawl through.
- Brown is the town clock tower.

Commands

Keys	Action
W	Move up
A	Move left
S	Move Down.
D	Move Right
T	Opens/Closes the Task list
E	Enter ball Interact
M	Opens/Closes the Map
TAB	Opens equipment selection wheel (Task list and Map)
ESC	Opens/Closes game menu and closes task list & map
Spacebar	Interact, move to the next part of a clip or event
Left Mouse Click	Interact with the interfaces

Tools and equipment

- The Hamster Ball
- The Hamster PC (to work on assignments)
- The Task list

- The Map (Idea: we could introduce it as a tool before equipping it)
- The Bath (to wash)
- The bank counter (for paying bills & getting money)
- Grocery cart (for doing groceries)
- A Bouquet of flowers (for the girlfriend)

Game mode

The game title is a single player adventure demo. This specific game mode is used to reinforce the role playing game (RPG) aspect of the game since the narrative plays a major role in this project.

Narrative plot

Details

The game is going to be composed of only two days as the demo, whereas the full game would have been at least one week long. Two days is the strict minimum to be able to grasp the essence of the narrative plot and gameplay correctly. The cute and funny narrative helps in supporting the high narrative by making fun of the current measures with the Coronavirus in the Quebec Province that strains the population while at the same time denunciating bad behaviours - like not respecting the laws imposed by the Government when they are for everyone's safety.

Intro

In the year 91 AH (After Ham), Mark's world was put upside down when the *Conuttivirus* took the world by storm. In a now ever-changing world, Mark needs to prepare for the new normal. He has much on his plate, but with his trusty To Do List he can keep track of what he needs to get done for today.

The nutty news said that all hamsters must practise social distancing unless they are in a hamster ball. Curfew is at 19:00 and the Police will fine anyone in sight.

Will Mark survive this new reality?

First Day

The pandemic has been announced and all hamsters must travel in balls starting tomorrow. As this is a sudden announcement you will need to quickly go to the store to buy a hamster ball while achieving your other daily chores. You must complete your class assignments before they are due at 7. Buy groceries as you're running low at home. You don't have a crush on you so you must go and retrieve some at the bank. Your girlfriend also requests that you visit her today or the relationship will fall apart.

Second Day

You have achieved the hamster ball yesterday just before the law enforces that all hamsters must now travel in hamster balls. However, your hamster ball's tracker is broken and you must have it fixed at the garage. All hamster balls are required to have a working tracker so that the law knows if you're out past curfew. You will need to have this fixed before 10 am or will be in trouble.Your Girlfriend is also very upset with you, and you must meet her today with flowers or your relationship will be in Jeopardy. You can meet her before she leaves for work at 10 or at 7 after she returns to her home for curfew.

Ending

There will be ten bad endings (game over) and only one good ending. The ranking is also inspired by how *Dead Rising* handles its endings. Every ending is a bad ending but they are given a rank to show the user how close they made it to the true ending.

When an ending occurs the player receives a letter that drops in front of the screen and gameplay comes to a full stop. The letter will explain which ending they have

received with a narrative driven description and a rank letter that comes in the form of a stamp.

Rank	Morality	Condition	Description
S	Good	Completing all the tasks correctly.	The player receives a discerning letter for good conduct. **Dialogue**: (Himself) Great I made it home on time! **Ending screen**: Mark is a good ham! Everyone should hope to be like Mark.
A	Bad	Falling to go to bed in time on the second day but you did all the other tasks.	The player is sent a letter from his future self stating that he is disappointed in himself, but not surprised.
B	Bad	Showing up at your GF without flowers but you took a bath.	The player is dumped by his girlfriend with a letter.
B-	Bad	Showing up at GF without a bath.	The player is dumped by his girlfriend with a letter.
C	Bad	Failing to complete any of the	The player is sent a letter from his parents stating that the player is a lousy hamster being.

		tasks on the second day.	
C- **(A)**	Bad	Failing to comply with curfew by getting caught by a cop after curfew	The player is given a statement of offence after being caught by Police officers after curfew. **Dialogue**: Hey, it's past Curfew! You nutty youngster! **Ending screen**: Mark was caught after curfew. He's got a big ticket to pay back now. RIP. No video games or UberNuts for a month.
D **(B)**	Bad	When you get too close to an NPC without your hamster ball after the rule is enforced on day two.	The player is given a statement of offence by mail after a report from anonymous citizens **Dialogue**: Help Officer! This ham is too close to me! **Ending screen**: Mark got called out by a pedestrian and was framed for not social distancing. Karens be Karens; they don't have anything better to do.
D-	Bad	Breaking the law by being caught by one of the Police officers.	The player is given a statement of offence after being caught by Police officers.
E **(C)**	Bad	Falling to go to bed in time on the first day.	The player is sent a letter from his future self stating that he is disappointed in himself, but not surprised. **Dialogue**: (To himself): Oh no… I'm so sleepy. Imma take a nap right here. **Ending screen**: Mark falls asleep outside after curfew and awoke in a jail cell the next day.

E-	Bad	Falling to do work for home remote job.	The player receives a letter saying he is fired from his job.
F **(D)**	Bad	Failing to complete any of the tasks on the first day.	The player is sent a letter from his parents stating that the player is a lousy hamster being. **Dialogue**: (To himself): Oh no! Oops, I think I'm late for something? **Ending screen**: Mark was too late on one of his tasks. Mark was not able to achieve everything he needed in time. He didn't survive this new reality.