Bad Times at the El Royale (2018)

Written and directed by Drew Goddard

Set in the late 1960s, the El Royale is an old hotel perched on the California/Nevada border, a literal crossroads where four strangers arrive on a rainy night. The Spy (*Jon Hamm*) is a government agent posing as a salesman. The Priest (*Jeff Bridges*) is no priest at all, but a dying ex-con searching for cash hidden decades. The Mysterious Woman (*Dakota Johnson*) travels with her younger sister, whom she's rescued from a Charles Manson–in-all-but-name cult. And finally, the Singer (*Cynthia Erivo*), on her way to a nothing gig, but packing unexpected skills.

None of them realize the drug-addled, PTSD-ridden manager (*Lewis Pullman*) is secretly filming guests for blackmail at the behest of his unseen employers, or that he's stumbled onto proof of a sexual liaison involving the United States President! The characters' conflicting goals crescendo when the cult leader (*Chris Hemsworth*) arrives and takes the survivors hostage in an explosively violent finale.

The film, like many of its Tarantino-inspired peers, is about watching scorpions in a bucket. Throw weird, wild characters into a pressure cooker and let them ricochet off each other in crazy, and hilariously brutal ways. Great movie. And a good game adaptation must channel that "What the fuck just happened!?" energy.

So...

BAD TIMES AT
THE EL ROYALE!

The Official Video Game!

-Would become a branching, choice-driven story where players select one of the four hotel guests as their avatar: The Mysterious Woman, The Singer, The Priest, or The Agent.

Then navigate the night on a fixed *Majora's Mask* timeline. Think of it as an old fashioned choose-your-own-adventure book, but with a strict *if/then* logic and a *Dead Rising* time sensitive clock.

Each character's story branches in as many ludicrous ways as is conceivably possible. The game is by design punishing, killing players frequently and humorously. Success means not only getting your avatar through the climax but also uncovering their backstory.

There's never just one "correct" path. The plot tree embracing dead ends to let players explore tangents that end in satisfying disaster.

Gameplay would be similar in spirit to the *Until Dawn* franchise, but with fewer quicktime events, so the focus stays on player choice, not reflex. Regardless, the cult always arrives eventually, but the nature of that confrontation changes wildly depending on prior choices.

At this stage each character has a few potential win states, but they're meant to feel hollow—

-Because only now does the real game begin!

After finishing one run with each character, players unlock the ability to switch avatar perspectives mid-run, controlling all simultaneously. Essentially editing their own movie in real time, leading to countless deeply satisfying outcomes. True, one ending mirrors the film's original events (*Earning the "Goddard Goggles" achievement*), but most diverge to reward curiosity and replay.

It is, at its core, a game built to be broken. A clever player using foreknowledge to twist the plot into pretzel knots so absurd they'd be near impossible to hit by accident. And yes, a *Silent Hill* style "The Corgi was behind it" ending absolutely exists for the truly gloriously weird players.

The spirit of pulp tension remains faithful to the original film while giving players the unique thrill of directing their own grind-house film and letting the player build the story will make them fall hard for these characters and all of their dirty secrets.

Players will, in fact, have a great time at the El Royale!