

The game follows the player, who takes on the role of a caravan-master traveling along “The Golden Corridor,” a setting inspired by the historical Silk Road. The history of the Silk Road and the cultures along it have been a huge source of inspiration for me, and I wanted to explore these kinds of crossroads, both literal and metaphoric, a bit more.

The story begins as the player’s caravan arrives at a caravanserai by an oasis. Upon arrival, they discover that a murder has taken place. The player, as a Sahvan, a caravan-master of recognized authority along the Corridor, is asked to get to the bottom of it. Their word and position are respected by all parties, and, crucially, they were not present for the murder itself.

Though it is certainly unfinished, it highlights many of the skills I have gotten good at while working in TTRPGs and writing for visual/interactive novels, which is where most of my experience creating games comes from. Specifically, it illustrates my ability to write dialogue, to worldbuild, and descriptions with the perspective of a “player” in mind, as opposed to a reader or viewer. I have tried to think about each of the encounters fleshed out considering how a player will perceive and interact with it, creating a sense of agency while maintaining a reasonably cohesive flow.

It also demonstrates the way I end up coming up with stories more generally. That’s a little bit more difficult to pin down, but my *default* approach to structuring a narrative is non-linear, or at least ones that do not have purely pre-determined outcomes. Obviously, some pre-determined outcomes become necessary for the sake of a cohesive story structure, and for the sake of not pulling my hair out trying to think of every possible outcome. Still, I find that branching possibilities and a way to incorporate uncertainty into the structure allow for a more dynamic and engaging experience. This is part of the reason I take such inspiration to TTRPGs and cRPGs: they offer frameworks in which choices and skill checks can meaningfully shape how a story is experienced, even if they don’t determine the outcome.

Speaking of skill checks, they are really the core mechanic of the game, other than reading and selecting dialogue options, and I see them as the game’s most unique feature. The four skills I ended up implementing –Reason, Empathize, Interpret, and Contextualize– were chosen because I see each of them as an important way to engage with and understand the world around you. There are others, of course, but like I said: for the sake of not pulling my hair out. Reason allows the player to deduce and draw conclusions from observable facts; Empathize provides insight into the emotions and intentions of others; Interpret allows the player to seek meaning in art, nature, and social cues; and Contextualize helps the player situate events and information within a broader historical, cultural, or political context. It’s that engaging with the world around that I see as the main “purpose” of the game. Yes, the story resolves the murder, and solving it is the goal, but these checks offer tid-bits about the other people at the caravanserai, the world’s history, an appreciation of meaning in art or nature, and more.

The goals I have in continuing to work on the game is to create ways for the player to learn more about the context they find themselves in. For example, upon investigating the caravanserai, players may speak with the Arakh tribe, observing their camp, tents, and animals. A Reason check might help the player deduce that their camp is only partially packed because they plan to move soon, while an Interpret check on the tents’ painted patterns could show a metaphor for impermanence.