WEST OF LOATHING

The West. Untamed. Dangerous. Wild. Perhaps even… wild wild. A time of legends.

But legends all have one thing in common -- they're from the past. In time, the wildness faded.   Brave pioneers bent the land to the will of the plow. Petty bureaucrats brought taxes and liquor regulations. Everything got all boring and… civilized.

Until the cows came home.

Overnight, the once-docile animals became savage, cunning, demonic beasts. Was it an invasion from Hell? Was it the work of an evil wizard? Did they just get... fed up with being branded and butchered and eaten?

First the ranches fell, then the forts. The cavalry, busy with the war in the east (and also terrified of demon cows), never showed up. The economy collapsed, as did most of the buildings, which also caught fire.

Lawlessness and opportunity returned in equal measure. Seizing on the latter (and being willing to tolerate the former), you decided to seek your fortune… West of Loathing.

Overview
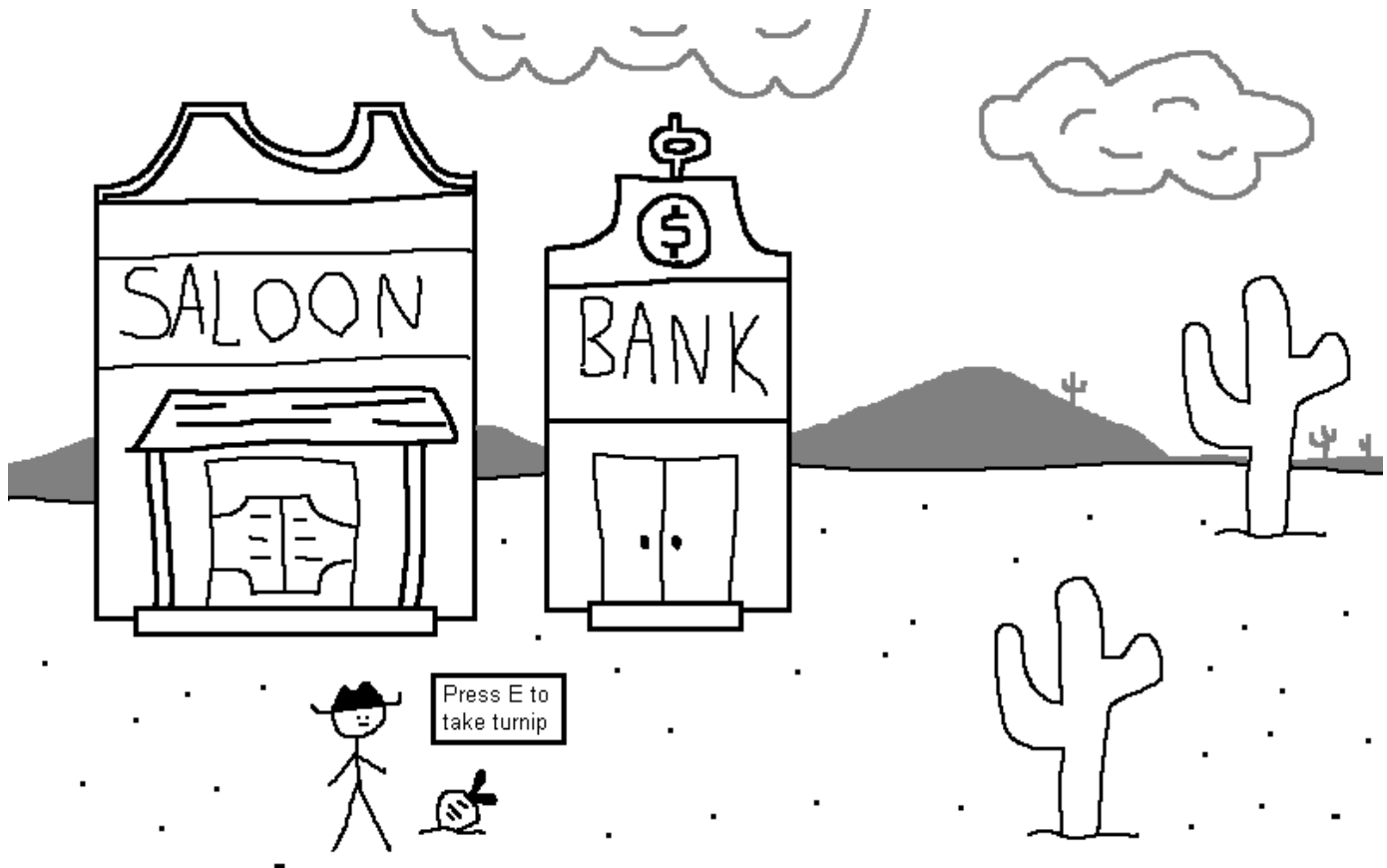
When the game begins, you fall off of a turnip cart in the sleepy town of Boring Springs. A few friendly NPCs will show you the ropes in a combination tutorial/character creation sequence. Once you've chosen a class (Cowpuncher, Beanslinger, or Snake Oiler), a Pardner, and a horse, you're given access to the Main Map and sent to Main Town (name TBD.) The choice of horse and Pardner is permanent. Once you leave Boring Springs, you cannot return. You check into your room in the Saloon (the only vacancy in the entire West -- how lucky for you!)

There is a very simple, flexible main quest line (help the Manifest Destiny Railroad Company lay tracks to Frisco) and lots and lots and lots of side content. 95% side quest stuff, 5% mainline.

Gameplay consists of entering Main Map locations, talking to people (using KoL's dialog scripting language,) interacting with various objects (also using KoL's dialog scripting language,) solving puzzles (you guessed it,) and fighting monsters.

As you move from one location to another on the Main Map, various random encounters will occur. Your choice of horse and Pardner will partially determine the specifics of random encounters.

Each stage of the mainline quest has some non-violent way to solve it, to ensure that the entire game can be played with no fights if desired.

Interaction Principles

All fights should be avoidable. Any conversation option that results in a fight should have an icon next to it indicating that it will begin combat, and there should always be the option to back out of it.

All interactions should be initiated by the player, either by walking to a screen exit, hitting the action key when prompted by a nearby object, or choosing an option within a dialog.

The player is never locked into a particular area. *If you are not in a dialog or fight*, you are always free to leave to the Main Map. If we want to put the player in a dramatic situation where they are imprisoned and stripped of their belongings, we can do it in the scope of a single dialog.

Random encounters should be something to look forward to instead of something to dread. Combats in random encounters should always be avoidable, and *rewarding in a unique way* if not avoided.

Character

The character consists of a handful of basic statistics and a whole bunch of derived ones.

Basic Variables

The basic numbers that players will accumulate are:

     Muscle XP
     Mysticality XP
     Moxie XP
     Meat

There are also two other counters that will be tracked but that are somewhat derivative:

     Total XP earned
     Level

Leveling

Because people want levels, we will give them levels. When Muscle/Mysticality/Moxie XP is earned by defeating monsters and such, it also advances the "total XP" counter. Once that hits certain thresholds, the player levels up and selects a Perk. The leveling and selection of Perk happens in a dialog, and can't be skipped. On the backend, every time a dialog or fight is ending, we check to see if the player leveled up and if so, we force them into the "Level up!" dialog.

Derived Stats

All other character statistics are derived from skills, perks, effects, gear, and fetishes.

Muscle -- used to calculate attack and defense for melee attacks
Mysticality -- used to calculate attack and defense for magic/elemental attacks
Moxie -- used to calculate attack and defense for ranged attacks
Maximum HP
Maximum AP (Action Points) -- AP are spent in combat to perform actions
Speed -- determines who goes first in combat
Stomach Capacity -- how many food items you can eat in a day
Liver Capacity -- how many booze items you can drink without negative consequences
Spleen Capacity -- how many potions you can use in a day
Toughness -- how many Afflictions you can take before you are knocked out
Duds Fanciness -- how fancy can your duds be

Armor -- reduction in physical damage from attacks

Various elemental resistances -- % reduction in damage of particular elements

Other Tracked Stuff (flags)

WoL retains KoL's concept of daily, normal and permaflags.

Daily flags: Retained until the player sleeps or is knocked out. Used for limiting things to once per game day.

Normal flags: Changes in world state for the player's current character.

Permaflags: Applied across all characters. Used for New Game+ unlocks, configuration options, etc.

Skills

These are whence most of the character's derived stats get their baseline values.

Basic Skills (for all players, independent of class)

(These are treated as skills on the backend (levelling by spending XP), but are presented as "stats" to the player.)

Muscle -- levels up by spending Muscle XP

Mysticality -- same (but with Myst XP)

Moxie -- etc

Grit -- determines max HP, stomach capacity, toughness; also levels up by spending Muscle XP

Gumption -- determines speed, Maximum AP, and spleen capacity; same (but with Myst XP)

Glamour -- determines the fanciness of the duds you can equip, and your luck (item and Meat drops); etc.

Basic Class Skills

Cowpunchers automatically get:

Tough Customer -- adds bonus damage to melee attacks

Intimidatin' -- unlocks conversation options

Beanslingers automatically get:

Hellbender -- adds bonus damage to spells

Outfoxin' -- unlocks conversation options

Snake Oilers automatically get:

Deadeye -- adds bonus damage to ranged attacks

Hornswogglin' -- unlocks conversation options

Other Noncombat Skills

During the tutorial, you'll get to select a third levelable skill. This is partly just to give the player a preview of some of the systems that will exist in the game. Examples:

Dickerin' -- reduce cost of items at NPC stores

Foragin' -- get extra items when you forage stuff from cactuses

Lockpickin' Expertise -- % chance of lockpicks (needles, found in haystacks) not being consumed when used

Various noncombat skills (including the ones not selected during character creation) can be learned from teachers or skill book equivalents out in the world. These should be rare/expensive.

Increasing Skills

Skills are increased by spending XP of the skill's type (Muscle, Mysticality or Moxie)

The basic M/M/M stat skills can be increased indefinitely, and have escalating costs for each point. Since these only affect attack damage and defense, it's fine if the player grinds them up super high.

The basic G/G/G skills are can also be increased arbitrarily high, but only some aspects of them scale linearly -- others are tiered and stop after a while. For example, let's take Grit.

1	30 maximum HP, 2 stomach capacity, 2 toughness
2	+10 maximum HP
3	+10 maximum HP and +1 toughness
4	+10 maximum HP
5	+10 maximum HP and +1 stomach capacity
6+	+10 maximum HP per Grit

Gumption can arbitrarily scale Speed -- eventually there just won't be any monsters faster than the player. Glamour can arbitrarily scale item and Meat bonuses. If drops are pegged for a high-level player that's fine.

Basic class skills (Hellbender, Tough Customer, etc.) can be increased arbitrarily. Bonus damage can go as high as the player wants. Conversation skills can also go up indefinitely -- you'll just run out of challenges you can't overcome.

Combat skills can be leveled up a fixed number of times. These get expensive quickly in terms of XP, and become significantly more powerful as they level. Each tier of each skill is effectively treated as a different skill -- it can vary in targeting, AP cost, whether it's limited once-per-fight or not, etc. Higher tier versions are always better than lower tier versions.

Effects
Effects do not have a duration -- they all last a day. They consist of a name, a funny description and an arbitrary number of stat/number pairs. "Lead Feet,Your feet are extra thick!,muscle 5,speed -1"
Effect names and descriptions can be madlibbed when the effect is granted, so we can do a thing like "Bleeding %Face|Elbow|Butt%,You are bleeding from someplace!,maxhp -10"

Perks
Perks are basically passive skills. They can't be leveled up. You get some by doing things out in the world (Reading a book of Goblin botany might give you a +10 damage bonus against Goblins) and some by choosing amongst a selection when leveling up. The better leveling perks can have class or stat requirements, or have pre-requisite perks. We should make sure that there are enough Perks without requirements that the player can always select one, up to a reasonable level.

Fetishes
Fetishes are like the Limiters in Transistor, or +ML effects in KoL. They are themed as items, but they are not actually items -- they live in a display case in your room at the Saloon. Each fetish can be toggled on and off. They are unlocked via permaflags, so they stick around between playthroughs. They increase the difficulty of combats in specific ways, and increase rewards in specific ways.

"Unlock a fetish you don't already have" might be a thing that happens as a reward for finishing a medium-length side quest. The lady whose cat you rescued says "Here's this weird thing my uncle gave me, you can have it" and you get "Fetish: Tiny rubber heart. All monsters have +5 HP and are worth +5 XP." The heart appears in your display case. Clicking it causes it to start beating, indicating that it is active and applying its effects to combats.

These mainly exist to provide increased difficulty and rewards for repeat playthroughs.

Passage of Time
Sleeping in your room in the Main Town Saloon causes a day to pass. You lose ALL effects (both positive and negative) Your Stomach, Liver and Spleen capacities are reset.

Afflictions
Losing fights causes Afflictions, which is a specific kind of negative Effect. If adding an Affliction would put you over your Toughness limit, you are instead knocked out. You wake up in your room, equivalent to having slept on purpose. The game's death penalty is basically "Losses make you slightly weaker, and if you lose too many times in a row we decide when you're sleeping instead of you deciding." It might make sense to theme all of these as physical injuries, to make them more distinct from the negative effects from booze.

Pardners
Before leaving Boring Springs, the player chooses a Pardner (or not, if they want to be weird.) Each of Pardners has different combat abilities and plotlines, and unlocks different options in various encounters.

Doc Alice, the drunken sawbones.
Equipment: shotgun and doctor's bag.
Combat Abilities: Weak attacks against all enemies, healing.
Noncombat abilities: Heal NPCs in random encounters.
Plot: Is secretly dying, wants to defeat the necromancer so she isn't brought back.

Ol' Pete, the tetched prospector.
Equipment: pickaxe and lantern.
Combat Abilities: Magical attacks and debuffs.
Noncombat Abilities: Find extra treasure in mines and random encounters.
Plot: Dug too deep, saw horrible things. Wants to forget.

Susie, the ranger who doesn't take any guff
Equipment Slots: rifle
Combat Abilities: High single-target damage.
Noncombat Abilities: Find new locations more frequently.
Plot: Former rancher, family was killed, wants to kill all cows

Gary, the goblin
Equipment Slots: knife
Combat Abilities: Spawn goblin buddies to fight on your side.
Noncombat Abilities: Negotiate with goblins. This is necessary for a fully nonviolent playthrough.
Plot: Is a goblin. Wants to go to Frisco so he can explode and spread his spores.

Pardners will conspicuously *NOT* start a romantic relationship with the player in exchange for trinkets.

Items and Gear

General item categories are:
Consumables: Food, Booze, and Potions
Gear: Equippable (slots vary per class/Pardner)
Miscellaneous: Items that advance plots, change quest states, etc.

Food gives effects and XP. Much of it is immediately consumed upon purchase from an NPC (so we can maintain scarcity of the best stuff -- traveling merchants and so on) but some food is trail-worthy and exists an an inventory item. The player can consume as many food items per game day as their stomach capacity allows.

Booze gives effects and XP. Some of it is immediately consumed on purpose, but it's generally more portable than food. Once you've consumed up to your liver capacity, you'll start to get negative effects (which are not afflictions) in addition to the positive ones. The more negative effects you have, the worse they get, until they become debilitating.

Potions are rare and expensive, and grant beneficial effects. Consumption is limited by spleen capacity.

Gear: Hat, Shirt, Pants, Boots, Weapon, Off-hand, Sixgun, Neck, Ring.

Pardners have equipment slots as well, that vary by Pardner. A shotgun, for instance, can only be equipped by Doc Alice.

Equipment has a fanciness level (ie. Glamour requirement) and some is restricted by class. Only Beanslingers can wield utensil-class weapons, for instance. (We may attempt to reduce/eliminate instances of off-class gear dropping, but it's not critical if it does.)

Items are key->value pairs. Enchantments on gear are a subset of key->value pairs, always additive to elements of the player object. (We may encounter situations that require making exceptions to this, but let's try to keep it as simple as possible.)

Items either stack indefinitely or have identity. Items are generated as copies of a proto-item so that their properties can be adjusted later (or items can be randomly generated based on a template.)

Items can have an arbitrary number of actions associated with them, each of which is associated with a specific dialog script. Usually this will just be [use] or [eat] or whatever, but let's keep it flexible. Any crafting / combining / enchanting of items will take place in these scripts, rather than having separate systems for that kind of thing.

Any time you're not in a dialog script or a fight, you have unfettered access to your inventory.

Out-of-Combat UI
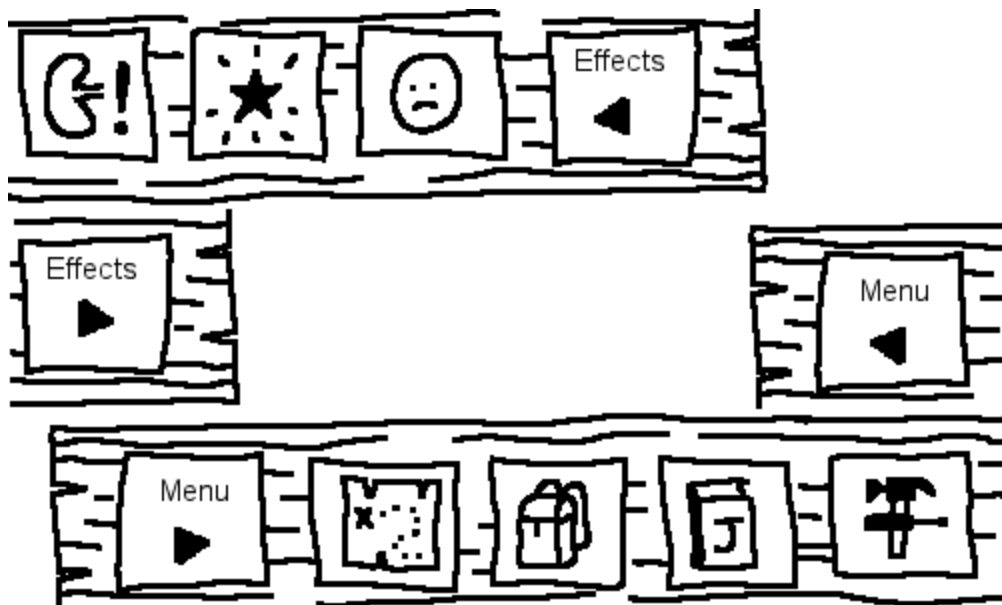
Whenever the player is in a walkin'-around location, there are two sliding UI panels. In the top left, and only visible if the player has active effects, is the Effects panel, which can be opened to view those effects. This will need to scale or scroll if the player has a buttload of effects.

In the lower right, a collapsible panel contains links to Main Map, Inventory, Character (icon not pictured), Cowboy Journal, and Options.

The Cowboy Journal

Combination quest log, Cheevo journal, and Mass Effect style codex. Paginated… in a way that makes sense. Monster Manuel style factoids for defeating monster types. Reading books in the world unlock Tales of Dread style short stories about famous gunslingers and stuff.

Options Menu

All the basic stuff, plus a bunch of joke settings.

Nerd Mode: Expose a lot more game math in skill descriptions, combat logs, etc.

Jick Mode: Use the best font. Which is Arial.

Funnier Mode: Remove the dumbest 40 jokes from the game. (Secretly does nothing)

Inventory

Jick
the Level 9 Cowpuncher

Vitals:

Muscle:	25
Mysticality:	11
Moxie:	17
Hit Points:	44
Action Points:	3
Speed:	7
Muscle XP:	400
Mysticality XP:	69
Moxie XP:	44

Punchin' Bonus: +5
Shootin' Bonus: +1

Details:

(tap somethin' to see details, Pardner)

Gear:

- eight-gallon hat
- rusty six-gun
- Necklace with super duper long-ass name
- (no ring)
- (no belt)
- matchless chaps
- clownskin boots

Inventory:

Showing: Consumables (all)

- cool beer
- beefy bread
- snake oil
- tasty taco
- zipper bun

Icons at the top of the inventory pane are used to sort what you're looking at. Top row is consumable / gear / misc, bottom row is context-sensitive subdivisions. Might need two rows of icons for gear, since there are a lot of gear types. Little buttons toggle [icon / name] view versus grid of icons.

Double click to equip gear or use the default action (eat, drink, [use], etc.) on a consumable or misc. item. Drag to equip also works. Single click to load tooltip in the lower left pane, which includes buttons for equip, eat, etc. This details pane is also where secondary uses on items will live.

Character Sheet

Jick the Level 9 Cowpuncher

Vitals:
Muscle: 25
Mysticality: 11
Moxie: 17
Hit Points: 44
Action Points: 3
Speed: 7
Muscle XP: 400
Mysticality XP: 69
Moxie XP: 44

Punchin' Bonus: + 5
Shootin' Bonus: + 1

Details:

(tap somethin' to see details, Pardner)

Stats:

25	Muscle	100 Muscle XP to Improve	+
11	Mysticality	86 Mysticality XP to Improve	+
17	Moxie	44 Moxie XP to Improve	+
7	Grit	100 Muscle XP to Improve	+
5	Gumption	86 Mysticality XP to Improve	+
2	Glamour	44 Moxie XP to Improve	+

Skills:

5	Tough Guy	100 Muscle XP to Improve	+
	Intimidatin'	100 Muscle XP to Improve	+
1	Dickerin'	44 Moxie XP to Improve	+
5	Cowpunch	(MAX)	+

The upper left character preview thing is shared with inventory. This is where you go to view / level up your stats and skills.

Main Map
The main map, at full zoom-out, looks something like this:
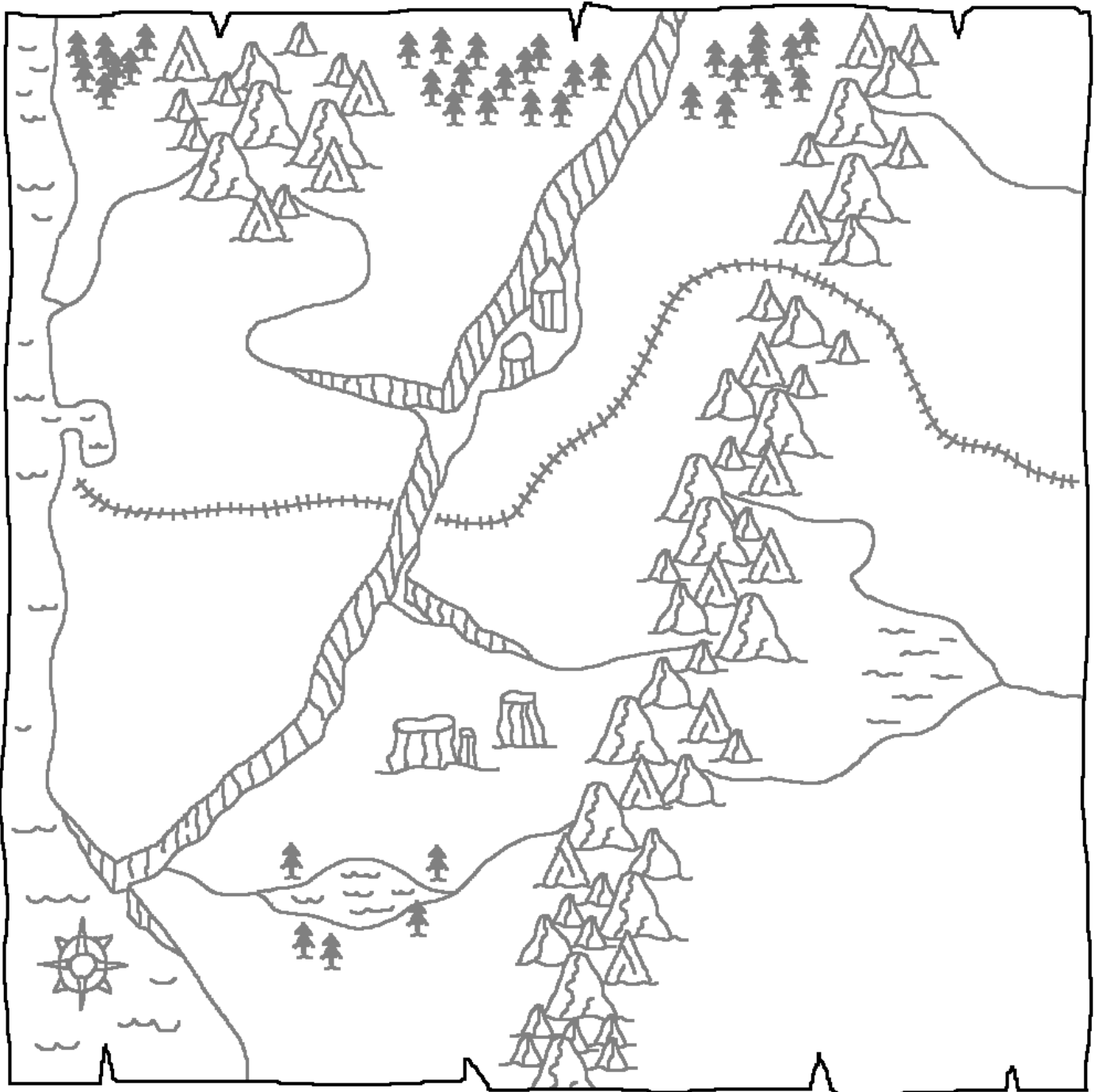
Main Town is in the lower right corner. The locations east of the big mountain range are accessible from the beginning, once discovered. The middle band opens up after you've helped build the railroad through the pass, and the western section opens up after you've helped them bridge the canyon. Most of the villains at the ends of the various threads (The Necromancer, El Vibrato Boss, Worst Cow, etc.) are in this western section. Everything that can be used in the main questline to convince Emperor Norton to issue the railroad permit (and thus end the game) is also there.

Moving Around the Main Map

When a dialog choice (or clicking the main map icon) sends you back to the main map, you see a zoomed-in version with your current location indicated by a blinking X.
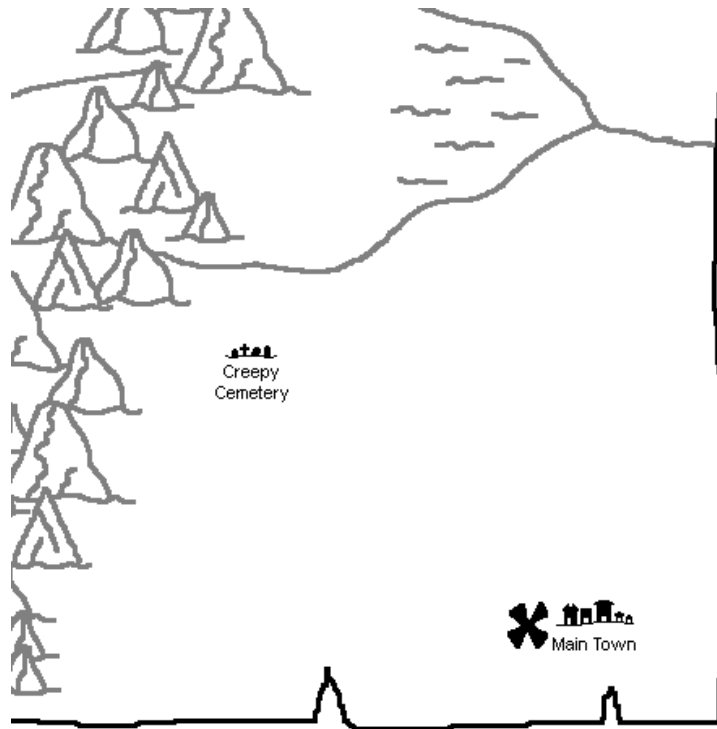
You can drag the map around to see the surrounding area. Clicking on a destination causes a Family Circus style crazy trail to appear.
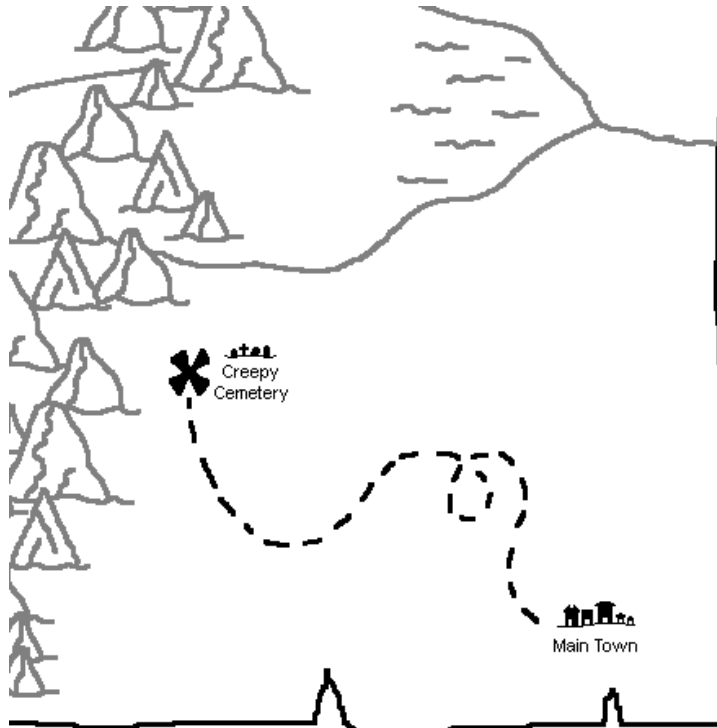
While the trail is ticking out, a number of random events will trigger based on the total distance being traveled. These will all be in the form of dialogs. *Every trip triggers at least one event*.

Once those events are exhausted, you are sent into the Walkin'-Around Area you selected.

Walkin'-Around Areas
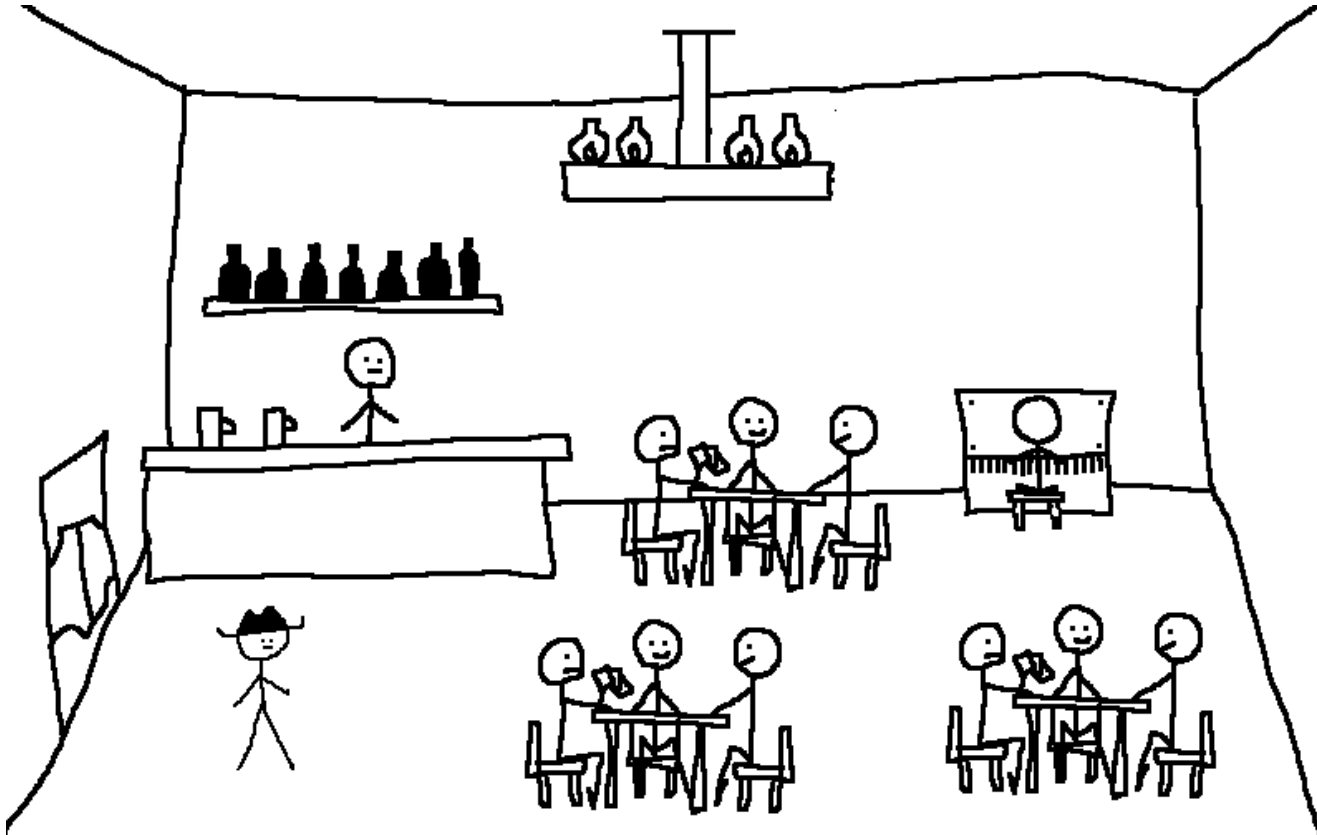
When you're in a location, you walk around with WASD (or click to move, or click on an interactable item to go to it and invoke it). If you approach the bartender, you'll get a little popup near your head that says "E: Talk to barkeep" (or "Tap to Talk to barkeep" on a tablet, say) and if you hit it, the screen blurs and a dialog modal appears.

Chuck the Bartender

"Howdy, Pardner! Care to wet your whistle?"

Yup

Nope

Let's Fight
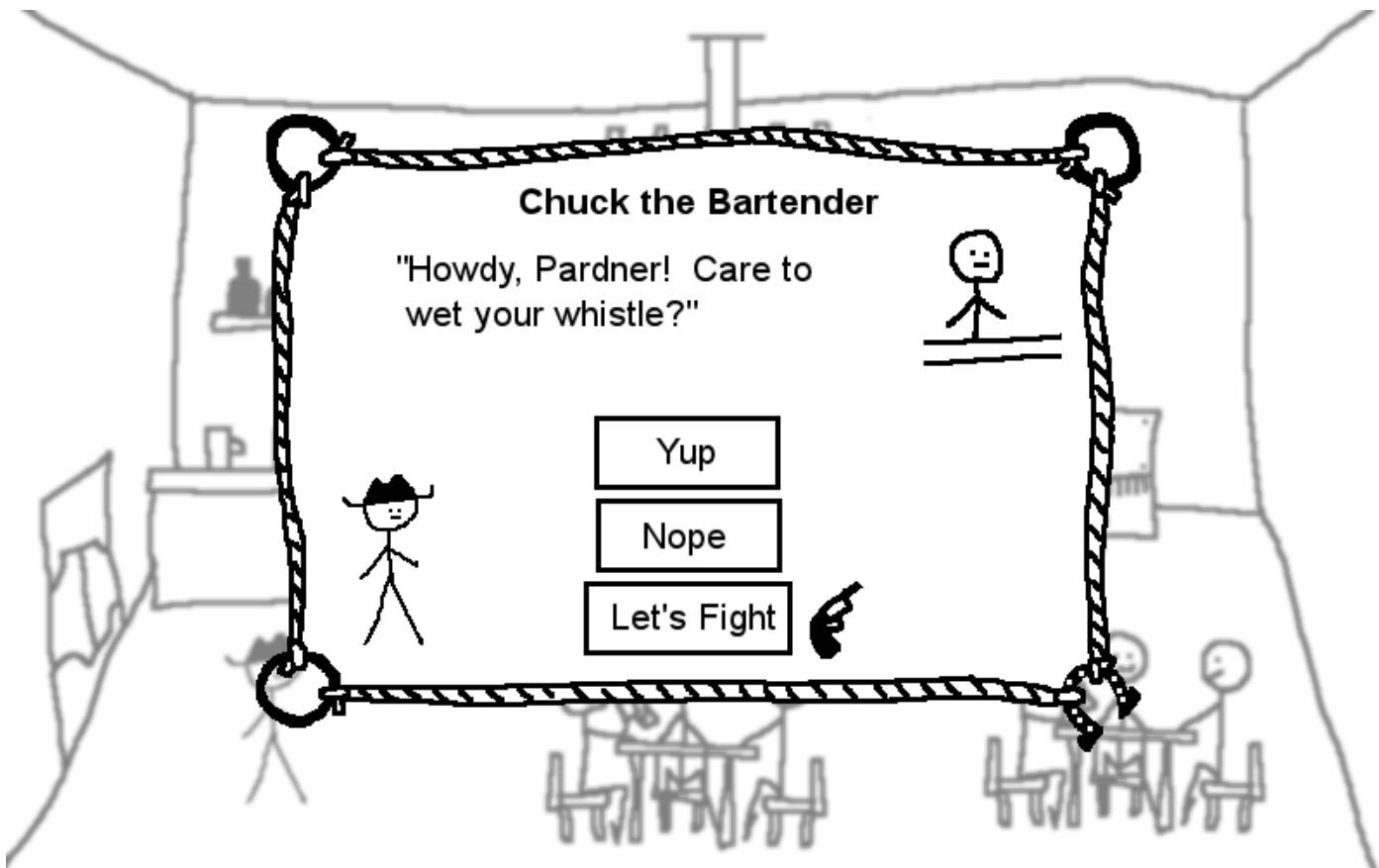
Some things are just noninteractive scenery objects, obviously, and some things will just pop up little tooltips when you get within range, rather than triggering a modal. Like a funny epitaph on a tombstone, for instance. No reason to make the player click three times for a single joke.

Random Events

When the player leaves Boring Springs, a queue of random events is created. The player's choice of horse will make a big difference in the composition of the random event queue (REQ). When a certain travel distance has elapsed, the next event pops off the REQ. Every third or fourth event will be a generic [discovery event] that will cause a nearby location to be revealed on the map (and each location will have a unique discovery dialog). If the player already knows about everything nearby, these events are just skipped. Some events are [local encounter] which will vary based on the player's position on the main map.

Game events will have the ability to place things in the REQ a specified distance ahead -- the player might get flagged down by a pony express rider who gives him a delayed reward for completing a quest.

The game's villains can be introduced by having them send emissaries or henchmen to the player via the REQ.

Main Quest: The Manifest Destiny Railroad Company

Step 1: The Missing Spike. The company is one railroad spike short of finishing the first section of track, and the home office won't send them another one because they're being dicks about the mistake. The player has to find a railroad spike somewhere.

Step 2: Landslide Pass. The mountain pass the company surveyed has suffered a massive landslide, and they need "a year's supply of dynamite" to get through it. This is just another item, available from various sources.

Step 3: Big Huge Canyon. The company needs to build a bridge spanning the canyon, but is short on labor. You have to convince a certain number of workers to join the cause. Maybe you do it by becoming the ruler of a tribe of goblins and ordering them to work. Maybe you smooth-talk a bunch of bandits into doing it. Maybe you summon an army of skeletons.

Step 4: The Permit. They can't build the rest of the track into Frisco without dealing with a lot of red tape. Emperor Norton has to issue a permit, but he's nuts, so you either have to defeat him or give him one of the weird things he asks for (which you'll get by fully exploring one of the bigger side branches.)

Location Categories

In addition to whatever one-off story content exists, there are a few categories of location that there are a bunch of:

1) Abandoned Ranches. When the cows came home, ranches became environmental storytelling ruins. Cow demons lie in wait for looters. Dealing with enough of them unlocks the secret cow gate, a portal to the dimension from whence the cows came home.

2) Cemeteries. A necromancer is raising cowboys from the dead. You piece together clues from various graveyards to eventually find him inside his ossuary beneath Reboot Hill and either destroy him or take his place.

3) Haunted/Non-Haunted Mines. Mazelike ruins infested by various clans of bad guys. Goblins, bandits, cows, undead, you name it. Some mines intersect with El Vibrato Ruins.

4) El Vibrato Ruins. An ancient buried civilization. Some of their robots still work. A scholar in Main Town will pay dearly for recovered relics.

5) Goblin Camps. Populated with decidedly non-shamanistic, non-tribal goblins. As per that article about goblins being a fungus, goblins are a fungus. Crotch Goblin Lawyer. Gulch Goblin Dentist. Smooth-talking players (or players who choose the goblin Pardner) can establish a nonviolent relationship with them.

6) Army Forts. The army left when the cows came home and the war back east started. These forts have been overrun by various types of bad guy.

7) Missions. NPC nuns will send you on various errands.

These locations will tend to contain items that reveal the location of other similar locations -- in the ruins of a ranch you might find a letter from another rancher with a return address on it. An army fort might have retreat orders pointing to a different fort. We want the player to be able to focus on a particular type of thing and not have to rely completely on random location discovery.

Main Town

When you first arrive, the Main Town only consists of a saloon and a bank. The saloon contains the player's room, and is a place to gamble (ie. use speech skills to get free Meat) and chat with NPCs, learn new locations, get minor quests, etc. The bank is closed. You can convince them to open, but each time you do, they immediately get robbed (ideally in a simple animation that you watch while being temporarily unable to do anything else) and put a bank robber encounter in the REQ.

Throughout the game, you can rescue new NPCs who will then move to Main Town and open stores. A new store always opens to the right of the rightmost building. Stores eventually gain new functionality based on whatever store opens up to *their* right -- let's say you rescue a gunsmith, who opens up a shop that sells… guns. If the next NPC you rescue is an ice cream man, the gunsmith might be inspired to make a gun that shoots snow and deals cold damage. If it's a newspaperman, the gunsmith can borrow his printing press and start making bullets with specific villains' names on them, which can be used to deal a whole bunch of damage.

If some of the NPCs are rescued via REQ events that can be postponed, this gives an experienced player some control over the high-end items and services that are available on a particular playthrough.

Frisco / Ending

Frisco, as it turns out, is a set of high-rise apartment buildings that occurred naturally via erosion. If you make Norton angry, he'll retreat into one, and you'll have to fight your way up the floors to reach him and defeat him.

Once you've gotten the permit and they've finished the railroad, you'll get an ending "cutscene" where it scrolls from window to window on one of the buildings, and shows you the aftermath of the things you've accomplished during the game by way of the stories of individual people who have moved to Frisco. Keeping these low-fi (a bunch of them will probably just be people waving) means we can do a lot of them.

Combat

Combat needs its own entire document. That document is forthcoming.