General Overview

Summary

- Humanity is nearing its end. The skies are entombed beneath a spectral blizzard, freezing and warping the world beyond repair. Unspeakable abominations stalk through the snow, snuffing out all signs of life. However, hope lies in the Fountain at the heart of the storm… Can you make it to the Fountain, escaping the inevitable? Or will you succumb to the blizzard, your soul becoming nothing but detritus for the permafrost?

Title

Beneath the Permafrost

Design Pillars

- **Survival:** It should feel like a desperate struggle through a nightmare. However, the player should not be defenseless. The player should feel like they are actively surviving and defending themselves.
- **Slow Horror:** The game should not just be a spooky-themed slasher or monster-movie-esque game, but something uncanny and deeply unsettling. An overarching feeling of dread should be prioritized over jumpscares or gore.
- **Decision-making:** Almost every resource or choice in the game should be weighed against a multitude of factors. This helps add a great deal of interest and strategizing to gameplay, along with keeping the player constantly second-guessing themselves.

Gameplay Features

- A temperature system where the player must use the environment and specific items to keep warm, lest they freeze to death
- The inventory system is styled after Resident Evil 4's inventory grid, requiring the player to debate over which items to keep and which to discard
- Some weapons will require both hands to carry, meaning the player in each scenario must decide between using a two-handed weapon or being able to carry a light source
- Light stealth mechanics (such as a crouching system) to encourage different approaches to situations
- While standard weapons can knock out enemies for some time, they will eventually get back up. The only way to permanently kill them is using fire, meaning the player must decide whether it is worth using up a set of matches
- Save points are rarely pre-determined, and instead the player gets to decide which fires can be used as save points. However, doing so requires a particular item which is limited in quantity

- The gameplay will occasionally shift with the arrival of an unkillable monster that hunts the player down throughout the game

Gameplay Loop

- Enter a new area with new gimmicks
- Explore a nonlinear level, slowly making the blizzard more survivable by lighting fires and killing enemies
    - Gather items to survive
    - Fight enemies
    - Solve longer-term puzzles
    - Uncover story beats
- Eidolon arrives and the player must hide or run from it. Its mechanics test the player on how much of the level they have conquered
- Now that the player has mastered the area, they enter a smaller, linear, dungeon level
    - Fight enemies
    - Solve shorter-term puzzles
    - Fight a boss
    - Uncover a major story beat

Playtime

- ~8 hours each playthrough

Additional Content

- Multiple endings
- Achievements
- Difficulty modes
- A nightmare mode that unlocks after beating the game. This mode makes the game more difficult and introduces new, more dangerous, variants of existing enemies. It also adds surprise encounters not seen in other modes
- A secret model museum that only unlocks after beating the game on nightmare mode

Art Style

- The game is 3D with a generally realistic style. However, it will have a PS1/PS2-esque quality with pixelated textures and low-poly models. There will still be some modern rendering features though, such as proper lighting, PBR materials, volumetric fog, etc. This is done because low-resolution models/textures force the player's mind to fill in more details (the human mind is usually better at scaring itself). Additionally, this will make the development process quicker.

Music Style

- Overall, the soundtrack should feel uncomfortable (because of the nightmarish horrors of the blizzard) and ethereal (because of the ghostly, somber nature of the story). It should also feel reminiscent of the cold, snowy, icy environment the game is set in.
- Most tracks will be slow, atmospheric, unnatural, and distressing. These atmospheric tracks should feel unpredictable and unique to set the player on edge. However, not all areas or scenarios will have music, since sometimes silence can be more effective.
- Some tracks (such as boss fights) will be more distinct, with painful instruments and cacophonous symphonies to stress the player.
- Some rare tracks will be calming and melodic to provide respite from the horrors. They should feel relieving and mix in elements of the ethereal atmosphere.
- Some scenarios will have adaptive music, where the main area theme will be replaced. For instance, if the player is about to freeze, the music should be tense to reflect that.

Areas

- **South Aurburg:** The beginning area used to introduce the player to the game. It is a smaller, low-density region of the city of Aurburg. It will be the most normal area, simply looking like a frozen and snowed-in town. The Claret River separates this side of town from North Aurburg
    - **Story Hub:** Welcome Center
        - The main welcome center for Aurburg
    - **Area Dungeon:** Lionhart Hospital
        - The blizzard's influence has warped the hospital, creating irrational architecture (IE: upside-down rooms, rooms with pits leading into darkness, endless hallways, etc.) However, in subversion of expectations, the hospital will not look abandoned or bloody. Instead, it appears as if frozen in time: clean and pristine
    - **Boss Arena:** Morgue Labyrinth
        - A boss area set in the morgue under the hospital. The blizzard's influence has warped it, turning the morgue into a labyrinth
- **Collier Reach Park:** A forested park region encompassing the fictional Collier Reach Mountains. It is speckled with rivers, deep ravines, park lodges and shacks
    - **Story Hub:** Hunting Lodge
        - A small hunting lodge near the bottom of the mountain
    - **Area Dungeon:** Edevane Mines
        - A large coal/gold mine near the top of the mountain. The entrance to the mines is a massive, dark pit lined with ice spikes evocative of massive teeth
    - **Boss Arena:** Spectral Forest
        - A connected series of forest clearings, bordered by a dense thicket of trees twisting in impossible ways. A spectral blue glow emanates from above, creating eerie light shafts

- **Ice-Marred Snowfield:** A large field of snow scattered with massive ice spikes. Here, the blizzard is extremely dense, making navigation difficult. On occasion, the player may spot a magical, fiery aurora in the sky, weaving between the ice spikes and illuminating the ground with a strange glow
  - **Story Hub:** Gilded Sanctuary Church
    - The main church of the Crepuscular Faith, the religion founded around the Artifact. It is a medium-sized building constructed from wood, topped with a distinctive bell tower. The walls of the church are decorated with large, elegant stained glass windows depicting elements of their faith
  - **Area Dungeon:** Pharos Power Plant
    - A large coal power plant that formerly served as the main power source for Aurburg. The blizzard has left large sections of it frozen-over, requiring the player to restart machinery to melt the ice
  - **Boss Arena:** Frozen Sinkhole
    - A large sinkhole that formed in the center of the power plant. At the bottom is an ice cave that glows with a spectral aura
- **Echoside Amusement Park:** An amusement park situated beside Echo Lake which has been partially flooded and frozen-over. Ride tracks twist and turn throughout the park in impossible ways. As the player explores, it is hinted that something lurks just below the icy depths…
  - **Story Hub:** Ferry House
    - A small ferry house formerly used to transport tourists across the lake
  - **Area Dungeon:** Underpass Complex
    - A partially-flooded series of underground tunnels beneath the amusement park. The layout of the tunnels is designed to be confusing and incredibly claustrophobic
  - **Boss Arena:** Silverstone Lighthouse
    - A lighthouse in the center of the lake. Surrounding the lighthouse stretches a large, dangerous plane of ice
- **North Aurburg:** A large city. As the player navigates, the street layout changes and leads back into itself in non-euclidean ways, serving to confuse the player as they are hunted by enemies. Taller buildings seem to stretch and bend, swirling around the Fountain that looms in the center. As the player gets closer to the Fountain, chunks of the city can be seen broken and suspended in air. At the center, in an area known as the Eye of the Storm, lies a massive pit from which the Fountain flows

Enemies

Common

- **Husk**
  - **Appearance:** Appear as extra tall humanoids with bluish-gray, frozen skin and a bottomless hole in place of a face. They twitch and writhe unnaturally while moving

- ○ **Mechanics:** Behavior is unpredictable, sometimes walking slowly and sometimes bolting at the player. They blend in with frozen, inanimate corpses, making them difficult to discern. Some of them may also have an alternate face arm variant which makes wide, sweeping attacks and encourages ranged combat. They also have a simple variant which is faster and more aggressive
  - ○ Found in all areas
  - ○ Medium damage
  - ○ Medium health
  - ○ Varied speed (movement is erratic)
- ● **Hunter**
  - ○ **Appearance:** Mostly invisible, though with a faint distortion effect suggesting a lycanthropic appearance. The silhouette also suggests branch-like protrusions from their body
  - ○ **Mechanics:** Are invisible aside from the tracks they leave in the snow. Prefer to stalk the player from forest scenery, making occasional sounds, before jumping out for the attack. Will sometimes dodge attacks, requiring the player to pay attention to sound cues and visual effects
  - ○ Found in Collier Reach Park and Ice-Marred Snowfield
  - ○ Low damage
  - ○ Low health (weak to the rifle weapon)
  - ○ Medium speed
- ● **Hydra**
  - ○ **Appearance:** Are similar to husks, though with warped, spiraling, twisted bodies and several long arms emerging from the neck instead of a head
  - ○ **Mechanics:** Every time one is killed, it grows more arms from its neck. Eventually, this can lead to it being massive and attracting enemies with the sound of it crawling on the hands
  - ○ Found in Ice-Marred Snowfield, Echoside Amusement Park, and North Aurburg
  - ○ Medium damage
  - ○ Medium health
  - ○ Varied speed (gets slower the more arms it has)
- ● **Tunneler**
  - ○ **Appearance:** Are floating, humanoid figures full of holes that pass through their entire body. They have long, flowing hair that moves in a phantasmal, spectral way
  - ○ **Mechanics:** Pass through walls by fusing with and moving through them like liquid. Can be heard via a sound as they pass through the walls and underground. Cannot see, and thus rely on sound and thermal detection to hunt the player. Occasionally, they'll pretend to be downed, only to start rapidly moving towards the player. While doing this, it looks as if they are lifeless corpses being dragged by the head by some invisible force
  - ○ Found in Echoside Amusement Park and North Aurburg
  - ○ High damage
  - ○ Low health

○ Fast speed

Uncommon

- **Sewer Arm**
    - **Appearance:** Is a long arm that emerges out of sewer drains. It has tumorous fingers branching off of other fingers, making it look akin to roots. It snaps and pops as its joints move
    - **Mechanics:** Rise when the player approaches. Has wide-sweeping attacks that cover the whole street and cannot be dodged. The player can waste ranged ammo to kill them and make street navigation easier, but there's always an alternate route to avoid them entirely
    - Found in South Aurburg and North Aurburg
    - Medium damage
    - Low health
    - Stationary
- **Corpse Bird**
    - **Appearance:** Appear as pterodactyl-like birds made from fused, gray, human corpses. Their backs are covered in sharp, icy feathers
    - **Mechanics:** Screech upon reaching the player, alerting nearby enemies to the player's location and lowering the player's temperature. They can also attack with icy feather projectiles. Serve to encourage the player to stealth around streets
    - Found in South Aurburg and Echoside Amusement Park
    - Low damage
    - Medium health
    - Slow speed
- **Facade**
    - **Appearance:** Blend in with normal coniferous trees. Their insides, when revealed, appear as a rapidly twitching and pulsing mass of merged bodies
    - **Mechanics:** Blend in with trees to catch the player by surprise. Moves by swimming through the ground with its roots, creating a low rumbling sound. Attacks by propelling sharp roots from under the ground when near the player. Hitting them can reveal weak spots under the bark
    - Found in Collier Reach Park
    - High damage
    - High health (weak to the axe weapon)
    - Very slow speed
- **Warped Deer**
    - **Appearance:** Appears as a frozen deer with blank eyes and human teeth
    - **Mechanics:** Does not move while observed and cannot be killed. When the player looks back, the deer can be found in a variety of possible poses, including standing on hind legs and smiling. Only appears once in a single area
    - Found in Collier Reach Park
    - Low damage
    - Unkillable

- ○ Medium speed
- **Providence**
  - ○ **Appearance:** Are gigantic heads with incredibly long necks that emerge from the sky and fade into the distant fog. The faces have some semblance to the structure of a human's, but are missing eyes/teeth and are distorted into exaggerated grins and sneers. A blue light shine from their mouth and illuminates the ground below
  - ○ **Mechanics:** Scan the ground, searching for the player. If spotted, a spikey tendril merges from their mouth and stabs the player. The player must search for hiding spots that blocks their cone of vision
  - ○ Found in Ice-Marred Snowfield
  - ○ Medium damage
  - ○ Unkillable
  - ○ Slow speed
- **Living Coaster**
  - ○ **Appearance:** Looks like a chain of roller coaster carts, though with numerous arms pulling it along the tracks like a centipede. Make loud, terrifying noises
  - ○ **Mechanics:** Crawls along roller coaster tracks by pulling itself forward. Attempts to hunt the player while they walk along the rickety tracks, though the player cannot see far into the fog. Fleshy weak spots must be found and attacked since attacking the metal is ineffective
  - ○ Found in Echoside Amusement Park
  - ○ Low damage
  - ○ High health
  - ○ Medium speed
- **Plow**
  - ○ **Appearance:** Are giant conglomerate abominations of several large corpses. Their face appears as a husk's, though filled with a porous gray mass scattered with teeth-lined holes. Crawl on the sides of skyscrapers like spiders and pass through giant holes in the buildings
  - ○ **Mechanics:** Are unkillable and crawl around on buildings. Are meant to be stealthed around, which serves to change up gameplay. Some crawl along buildings and jump down when the player is spotted
  - ○ Found in North Aurburg
  - ○ High damage
  - ○ Unkillable
  - ○ Fast speed

Stalking Threats

- **The Eidolon**
  - ○ **Appearance:** Is a large, two-headed, four-armed shadow creature with a hole in its chest. Its surface is made up of swirling, tortured faces and several writhing arms emerge from its shadowy base. Its face has a hole from which a bright blue light emerges, indicating where it can see

- ○ **Mechanics:** At set points in the game, it will appear to hunt the player down
  - When it arrives, time and enemies will seem to literally freeze in place
  - It is always searching for the player. If the player does something to attract its attention, it will visit that spot in the level. If it doesn't find the player at the spot, it will continue to wander randomly
    - It can see through the face of living enemies. When a player enters a frozen enemy's line of sight, it will alert the Eidolon
  - If the player enters its line of sight, an intense chase will commence
    - If the player enters a spot in which it cannot fit, it will summon a portal and reach its arm through to grab the player
    - It can phase into the ground and re-emerge near the player
- ○ **Symbolism:** Its shadowy appearance and looming, recurring presence is representative of death. Its many hands represent both the hands of a clock, clicking away until the unavoidable end, and the grasping arms of the dead. Its face light represents the idiom "going towards the light" and its attack animation (hugging the player) literally represents the "cold embrace of death". The hole in its chest is meant to suggest where the Artifact belongs. Its multiple heads are inspired by the rebus, referencing both the idea of immortality and the combination of life and death in the same body
- ○ Found in all areas
- ○ Instakill damage (though portal arm only does medium damage)
- ○ Unkillable
- ○ Varied speed (slow while searching and fast while chasing)

Bosses

- **The Gurney**
  - ○ **Appearance:** Is an extremely tall, lanky, humanoid creature which crawls on all fours. Its head resembles that of a vulture. Its torso is surrounded by a metallic frame with wheels such that it vaguely looks like a gurney when on all fours. Its lumpy back also vaguely resembles a patient in the bed
  - ○ **Mechanics:** Attempts to hide when looked at, instead stalking the player through the maze and attacking from behind
  - ○ **Symbolism:** It is designed to mimic the idea of a minotaur in a labyrinth. These concepts have been associated with unwinding dark secrets/truths and facing fears, such as of death. It is also representative of elements of a hospital, with hospitals being places of great pain and sometimes death
  - ○ Fought at Morgue Labyrinth
  - ○ Low damage
  - ○ High health
  - ○ Slow speed
- **The Hunger**
  - ○ **Appearance:** Appears as a modern depiction of a wendigo, with a humanoid figure and deer skull for a head. Its body is covered in branch-like protrusions. It has extremely large antlers that are vaguely shaped like outstretched human

hands. When the skull is shot at, it breaks apart, revealing a large, shadowy, warping mass of human and animal teeth
- **Mechanics:** Slowly stalks the player and jumps out from the trees to catch them off-guard.
- **Symbolism:** It will be designed to look like a deer-esque wendigo. In folklore, people turn into a wendigo by partaking in cannibalism. This is a symbolic parallel to the Horizon Research Project. The research team sacrificed people's lives for their own benefit, just as a wendigo cannibalizes people for its own benefit
- Fought at Spectral Forest
- Medium damage
- Medium health (weak to the rifle weapon)
- Medium speed

● **The Reflection**
- **Appearance:** Looks like the player character, David, though turned into a husk with a hole in his face
- **Mechanics:** It attacks and can be attacked as if it has a physical presence, though it is entirely invisible. It can only be seen through reflections in the shimmering, magic ice. It will copy whatever weapon the player last attacked with by pulling it out of its face cavity. To kill it, the player must melt the ice it's reflected in
- **Symbolism:** It represents the player's fear and inability to face their own mortality. It is suggested that the enemy might not even be real, and is simply a figment of the protagonist going insane given the circumstances
- Fought at Frozen Sinkhole
- Varied damage (depends on equipped weapon)
- Medium health
- Slow speed

● **The Leviathan**
- **Appearance:** Is akin to a large, eel-like sea monster with fins. Its mouth is full of several rows of teeth and its back covered in trypophobic holes from which tendril-like appendages emerge
- **Mechanics:** Submerges itself below the ice and launches surprise attacks, so the player must constantly be wary of what's below them.
- **Symbolism:** In biblical mythology, the leviathan is representative of power, chaos, and sometimes envy. In this sense, this monster is symbolic of both the protagonist's journey (overcoming an insurmountable, chaotic force), and envy for Di'Anumor's power
- Fought at Silverstone Lighthouse
- High damage
- High health
- Medium speed

Items

Melee Weapons

- **Ice Pick:** A slightly weaker weapon with low stamina cost
  - One-handed
  - Low damage
  - Medium speed
  - Medium stamina cost
  - Medium inventory size
- **Metal Pipe:** A weak weapon with low stamina cost and long range
  - Two-handed
  - Low damage
  - Medium speed
  - Low stamina cost
  - Medium Inventory size
- **Axe:** A sluggish but heavy-hitting weapon
  - Two-handed
  - High damage
  - Slow speed
  - High stamina cost
  - Large inventory size
- **Knife:** A nimble weapon. Stabbing an enemy deals extra damage if they didn't notice the player before getting hit
  - One-handed
  - Medium damage
  - High speed
  - Low stamina cost
  - Small inventory size

Ranged Weapons

- **Pistol:** A small pistol with generally low power
  - One-handed
  - Common ammo
  - Medium damage
  - Fast reload speed
  - Short range
  - Small inventory size
- **Rifle:** A two-handed hunting rifle that deals more damage
  - Two-handed
  - Uncommon ammo
  - High damage
  - Medium reload speed

- ○ Long range
- ○ Medium inventory size
- **Revolver:** A handgun with good damage and piercing bullets, but which has a slow reload speed
  - ○ One-handed
  - ○ Rare ammo
  - ○ High damage
  - ○ Slow reload speed
  - ○ Short range
  - ○ Small inventory size
- **Flare Gun:** A gun that catches enemies on fire when shot
  - ○ One-handed
  - ○ Rare ammo
  - ○ Low fire damage
  - ○ Medium range
  - ○ Small inventory size

Consumables

- **Matches:** Can be used on knocked-out enemies to light them on fire
  - ○ Common
- **Canned Food:** A less ideal healing item option. Is better when saved for cooking at a fire
  - ○ Common
  - ○ Low, fast-speed, gradual healing
  - ○ Can be cooked using a fire
- **Cooked Canned Food:** A generally good healing item with an added warmth boost
  - ○ Medium, medium-speed, gradual healing
  - ○ Provides warmth boost
- **Empty Can:** Can be thrown to create a distraction
  - ○ Common
- **Medkit:** A powerful healing item, but which lacks the warmth-boosting effects of cooked foods. Meant to be usable during combat due to its instant healing effect
  - ○ Rare
  - ○ High, instant healing
- **Pill Bottle:** A consumable which temporarily grants infinite stamina, but increases damage taken
  - ○ Uncommon
  - ○ Temporary infinite stamina
  - ○ Temporarily multiplies any damage taken
- **Lock Pick:** Allows the player to unlock specific doors and containers, usually leading to greater rewards
  - ○ Rare
  - ○ Can only be obtained through killing and looting enemies

- **Molotov:** A throwable item which creates a fiery explosion, leaving a lingering area-of-effect. Requires matches to be used
  - Rare
  - Medium fire damage
  - Short range
  - Medium inventory size
- **Sanguine Powder:** Can be thrown in stationary fires to create save points
  - Rare

Miscellaneous

- **Lantern:** A handheld kerosene lantern that must be lit using matches
  - Serves as a light source
- **Outskirts Map:** Used to see a map of the Outskirts and the position of the player
- **South Aurburg Map:** Used to see a map of South Aurburg and the position of the player
- **Collier Reach Park Map:** Used to see a map of Collier Reach Park and the position of the player
- **Snowfield Map:** Used to see a map of the Ice-Marred Snowfield and the position of the player
- **Amusement Park Map:** Used to see a map of Echoside Amusement Park and the position of the player
- **North Aurburg Map:** Used to see a map of North Aurburg and the position of the player
- **Bleeding Powder:** A key item used to receive the "All for Nothing" ending