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Elijah Salandanan

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Project Brief

Gloom is a 2D side-scrolling physics-based puzzle platformer set in a haunting monochromatic world. Inspired by Playdead's *Limbo*, the game uses a moody and atmospheric aesthetic, relying on desolate and inhospitable environments to create a sense of mystery and tension. Players will solve challenging puzzles and navigate environmental obstacles while uncovering a subtle, emotion-driven narrative of isolation and resilience. As players progress, they will encounter shifts in the world that reveal hidden elements and alter the environment, adding layers to both the puzzles and the atmosphere. At the heart of the gameplay is the "Inversion" mechanic, a feature that shifts the world's color and tone, intertwining gameplay, narrative, and character development to enhance both the emotional depth and puzzle complexity. With its minimalist design, intricate gameplay, and immersive aesthetic, Gloom delivers a captivating and thought-provoking experience.

Game Overview

– High-level summary of the game, including genre, platform, and elevator pitch.

Game Title: Gloom (Working Title)
Genre: 2D Side-Scrolling Physics-Based Puzzle Platformer
Platform: PC, with potential expansion to consoles and mobile platforms

Gameplay Concept:
Gloom challenges players with physics-based puzzles and environmental interactions integrated into platforming mechanics. Players traverse a haunting and mysterious world, overcoming obstacles that feel naturally embedded in the environment. The "Inversion" mechanic plays a pivotal role, allowing players to shift the world's color and tone to uncover hidden paths, solve intricate puzzles, and navigate evolving challenges. Subtle storytelling through exploration and visuals replaces direct exposition, with the mechanic itself reflecting key themes of the narrative, allowing players to piece together the story through observation and interaction.

Narrative Theme:
Set in a desolate and enigmatic world, Gloom tells a story of resilience and survival through its minimalist environment and ambiance. Themes of isolation, loss, and discovery are woven into the game's visual storytelling, leaving much to the player's interpretation. The Inversion mechanic, integral to both gameplay and narrative, reflects emotional control. Initially, inversion is triggered by external events, representing a person's inability to cope with trauma. As players progress and find soothing objects, they gain the ability to manually invert, symbolizing growing emotional control and mastery over their circumstances.

Central Idea:
The "Inversion" mechanic in *Gloom* is both a core gameplay feature and a powerful metaphor for emotional regulation and self-mastery. Initially triggered by external events, inversion represents the chaos and helplessness of coping with trauma. As players progress, they gradually gain control over this mechanic, symbolizing the journey toward understanding and mastering their emotions.
This progression is reflected in both the gameplay and narrative. Early challenges emphasize reactive problem-solving, while later puzzles encourage intentional and strategic use of inversion. The stark shift between the monochrome palette and the accompanying changes in music underscore the emotional duality at the heart of the game, blending gameplay, visuals, and narrative into a cohesive and evocative experience.

The "Inversion" mechanic in *Gloom* serves as a central visual and gameplay metaphor for emotional regulation and self-mastery. Initially, the mechanic is triggered by external events outside the player's control, symbolizing the disorientation and helplessness that often accompany the early stages of trauma. This phase reflects an individual's struggle to manage overwhelming emotions, as the world shifts around them unpredictably, forcing them to react and adapt.

As players progress through the game, they encounter "soothing objects" or other narrative elements that allow them to trigger the inversion mechanic through consumable items. This intermediate stage represents the process of learning coping mechanisms—temporary yet tangible ways to bring stability and relief during moments of emotional turbulence. It signifies growth but also highlights the reliance on external tools or supports. Finally, the journey culminates in granting the player full control over the inversion mechanic via the press of a button. This mastery symbolizes achieving emotional regulation—being able to intentionally shift one's perspective, adapt to challenges, and regain composure even in difficult circumstances. It reflects a sense of empowerment, where the player, much like a person gaining control over their emotions, can manipulate the environment to their advantage, uncovering hidden truths and unlocking new possibilities.

From a gameplay perspective, this progression mirrors the metaphorical journey. Early-game puzzles emphasize survival and reactive problem-solving, placing the player in scenarios where they must adjust to the mechanic's unpredictable shifts. Mid-game puzzles introduce agency, encouraging experimentation with consumable-triggered inversions. By the late game, puzzles demand strategic thinking and deliberate manipulation of the inversion mechanic, showcasing the player's mastery over their environment and, metaphorically, their own emotional state.

Visually, the monochrome inversion reinforces this narrative. The stark transition between black and white highlights the duality of emotional states—light and dark, chaos and

control, despair and hope. The shift from minor to major tones in the music further underscores this transformation, creating a cohesive sensory experience that deepens the metaphor. As players become adept at using inversion, they not only gain power within the game's world but also symbolically move toward balance and resilience, illustrating the profound strength that comes with mastering one's emotions.

Art Style:
Gloom adopts a monochromatic visual design, rendered in a pixel art style that emphasizes simplicity and atmosphere. Relying on shades of black, white, and gray, the game creates a moody and oppressive environment. Shadows, lighting, and silhouette art dominate the aesthetic, immersing players in a bleak and mysterious world while enhancing the sense of isolation and unease. The pixel art approach complements the minimalist design, allowing for expressive environments and storytelling through subtle details. Inspired by Playdead's Limbo, Gloom uses its art style to blend minimalism and environmental storytelling, inviting players to piece together its narrative through visuals alone.

Setting – WORK IN PROGRESS
The world of *Gloom* unfolds across a series of haunting and atmospheric environments, each designed to evoke a sense of unease and mystery. The game takes players through a diverse range of monochromatic settings, all unified by their oppressive and melancholic tone.

1. **Haunting Woods:**
   Dense, shadowy forests filled with twisted trees and obscured paths. The woods are alive with foreboding sounds and faint movements, suggesting unseen dangers lurking just beyond sight.
2. **Abandoned City:**
   Crumbling buildings and empty streets echo the remnants of a once-thriving civilization. The city feels eerie and lifeless, with broken windows, toppled signs, and faint traces of those who once lived there.
3. **Factories and Rooftops:**
   Massive, decaying industrial complexes with rusted machinery and collapsing structures. Rooftops offer vertigo-inducing views of the desolate world below, presenting both opportunities and dangers as players navigate narrow beams and unstable surfaces.
4. **Caves and Subterranean Depths:**
   Dark, claustrophobic tunnels filled with stalactites, dripping water, and the echoes of unseen creatures. These caves represent the deepest, most isolating parts of the world, challenging players to find their way in near-total darkness.
5. **Otherworldly Liminal Spaces:**
   Throughout the journey, players encounter areas that feel surreal and out of place—bridges that fade into mist, rooms with impossible geometry, and pathways that seem to loop endlessly. These liminal environments reinforce the game's themes of uncertainty and emotional turmoil.

Each setting is carefully crafted to contribute to the game's narrative and emotional journey. The environments grow increasingly surreal and fragmented as the story unfolds, reflecting the protagonist's struggle to gain control and understanding of their inner world. Through exploration and environmental storytelling, *Gloom* immerses players in a hauntingly beautiful yet unsettling journey.

Core Inspirations:
Gloom draws direct inspiration from Playdead's *Limbo*, both in its monochromatic art style and its focus on atmospheric puzzle platforming. However, Gloom sets itself apart by introducing the Inversion mechanic, which dynamically alters the environment and gameplay, reflecting emotional and psychological states.

Target Audience:
Gloom is designed for players who enjoy atmospheric, emotionally engaging experiences with challenging puzzles. Fans of *Limbo*, *Inside*, and other indie platformers that emphasize mood and storytelling through visuals will find Gloom appealing.

Key Differentiators:
- The Inversion mechanic not only impacts gameplay but is woven into the narrative to represent emotional growth. Initially triggered by external events, later it becomes a tool for the player to manage their emotions and navigate the world.
- Narrative Through Gameplay: Rather than using direct exposition, Gloom uses its gameplay mechanics—especially Inversion—to subtly communicate themes of trauma, control, and resilience.
- Atmospheric Puzzle Design: Gloom's puzzles integrate seamlessly into the environment, with dynamic elements that change based on the player's manipulation of the environment, adding a layer of emotional and psychological engagement.

Gameplay and Mechanics
– Core gameplay mechanics, controls, and systems.

Core Gameplay:
Gloom challenges players with physics-based puzzles and environmental interaction. The "Inversion" mechanic is central to the gameplay, allowing players to shift the world's monochrome palette to reveal hidden paths, platforms, and interactable objects. In addition to altering the visual environment, Inversion may also change the physical behaviors of certain objects, adding another layer of complexity to puzzle-solving. The game emphasizes problem-solving through observation, precise movement, and dynamic shifts between the two world states. Players explore a mysterious landscape, piecing together the story as they progress.

Core Mechanics:

Inversion:

- Players can invert the monochrome palette of the world, flipping black to white and white to black. This reveals or conceals elements like platforms, walls, and objects.
- The inversion also impacts interactable objects, creating new ways to solve puzzles or traverse the environment.
- The music dynamically shifts between minor and major tones, emphasizing the emotional and gameplay differences between the two states.
- Early in the game, players cannot directly control Inversion. It is triggered by specific events in the story. As they progress, they will gain the ability to trigger Inversion through consumable objects, and eventually, they will be able to manually activate it by pressing the Y button.

Movement and Traversal:

- The player can walk, jump, mantle onto ledges, and climb ladders to navigate the environment.

Object Interaction:

- The player can toggle interaction with objects like levers, keys, and crates to solve puzzles. Interactions may behave differently based on the current inverted state.

Environmental Triggers:

- Mechanisms like pressure plates and switches are influenced by inversion, adding complexity to puzzle-solving.

Dynamic Puzzle Solving:

- Puzzles require players to analyze the environment in both states, experimenting with inversion to uncover hidden elements and create solutions.

Hazards and Challenges:

- Environmental hazards may also change during inversion, introducing new threats or removing others. Players must carefully time their actions to survive.

Control Schema:
Movement:

- Left Stick / Arrow Keys – Move left or right
- A / Spacebar – Jump

Interaction:

- X / E – Interact with objects like buttons, levers, platforms, and keys. Interaction is toggled for dragging or carrying objects.

Ladder Navigation:

- Up / W – Climb ladders
- Down / S – Descend ladders

Inversion:
- **Y – Manually toggle the world's monochrome inversion (unlocked later in the game)**

Camera Control:
- **Right Stick / Mouse Movement – Perform a limited camera scan within a radius around the player**

Player Interaction with the Environment:

Physics-Based Objects:
- **Crates, levers, keys, and debris can be moved or interacted with to solve puzzles or create new pathways.**
- **The environment responds dynamically, with objects sliding, falling, or tipping realistically. The inversion mechanic can also alter how these objects behave, providing new opportunities for puzzle-solving.**

Triggers and Switches:
- **Mechanisms such as pressure plates or switches are tied to puzzles. Activating them can open doors, extend bridges, or disable traps. Some mechanisms may only be triggered or revealed when the world is inverted, adding complexity to their use.**

Dynamic World:
- **Players may encounter events such as crumbling platforms, swinging hazards, or shifting paths, requiring quick thinking and adaptability. The inversion mechanic may change the physical state of these hazards or open up previously inaccessible areas.**

Exploration:
- **Hidden areas and environmental storytelling elements encourage players to explore beyond the immediate path, rewarding them with new insights, shortcuts, or important items. Inversion may reveal these hidden areas or unlock new ways to progress.**

Story and Narrative
– Plot summary, characters, setting, and themes.

Central Idea:

The "Inversion" mechanic in *Gloom* serves as a central visual and gameplay metaphor for emotional regulation and self-mastery. Initially, the mechanic is triggered by external events outside the player's control, symbolizing the disorientation and helplessness that often accompany the early stages of trauma. This phase reflects an individual's struggle to manage overwhelming emotions, as the world shifts around them unpredictably, forcing them to react and adapt.

As players progress through the game, they encounter "soothing objects" or other narrative elements that allow them to trigger the inversion mechanic through consumable items.

This intermediate stage represents the process of learning coping mechanisms—temporary yet tangible ways to bring stability and relief during moments of emotional turbulence. It signifies growth but also highlights the reliance on external tools or supports. Finally, the journey culminates in granting the player full control over the inversion mechanic via the press of a button. This mastery symbolizes achieving emotional regulation—being able to intentionally shift one's perspective, adapt to challenges, and regain composure even in difficult circumstances. It reflects a sense of empowerment, where the player, much like a person gaining control over their emotions, can manipulate the environment to their advantage, uncovering hidden truths and unlocking new possibilities.

From a gameplay perspective, this progression mirrors the metaphorical journey. Early-game puzzles emphasize survival and reactive problem-solving, placing the player in scenarios where they must adjust to the mechanic's unpredictable shifts. Mid-game puzzles introduce agency, encouraging experimentation with consumable-triggered inversions. By the late game, puzzles demand strategic thinking and deliberate manipulation of the inversion mechanic, showcasing the player's mastery over their environment and, metaphorically, their own emotional state.

Visually, the monochrome inversion reinforces this narrative. The stark transition between black and white highlights the duality of emotional states—light and dark, chaos and control, despair and hope. The shift from minor to major tones in the music further underscores this transformation, creating a cohesive sensory experience that deepens the metaphor. As players become adept at using inversion, they not only gain power within the game's world but also symbolically move toward balance and resilience, illustrating the profound strength that comes with mastering one's emotions.

Narrative Overview
Gloom tells a deeply symbolic and emotional story through its minimalist environments, environmental storytelling, and the evocative "Inversion" mechanic. The game's narrative explores themes of trauma, emotional resilience, and self-mastery, guiding players on a metaphorical journey through the struggles of coping with overwhelming emotions and learning to regain control over one's internal state.
Set in a bleak, monochromatic world filled with haunting, liminal spaces, the story unfolds as players explore eerie forests, abandoned cities, shadowy factories, desolate rooftops, and dark caves. Each setting serves as a metaphorical representation of different stages of emotional turmoil, from the initial confusion and isolation to gradual empowerment and clarity.

Narrative Progression
The game begins with the player navigating a world in disarray. The "Inversion" mechanic, initially triggered by external events beyond the player's control, represents the unpredictability and helplessness that accompanies early trauma. These unbidden shifts in the environment disorient the player, forcing them to adapt and survive while grappling with a sense of powerlessness.

As the player progresses, they encounter objects or elements in the environment that provide temporary control over inversion, such as consumable items that allow for situational shifts. These "soothing objects" symbolize coping mechanisms—tools that provide relief but are external aids rather than intrinsic mastery. The world reacts to these controlled inversions with subtle changes in pathways, objects, and puzzles, encouraging the player to experiment and find creative solutions.

In the final stages of the game, the player gains full agency over the inversion mechanic, able to toggle between states at will. This mastery signifies emotional resilience and the ability to regulate one's own internal state. By manipulating the world's inversion, the player uncovers hidden paths, overcomes challenges, and alters the environment to their advantage, mirroring the journey of personal growth and self-mastery.

Environmental Storytelling

Gloom avoids direct exposition, instead relying on its environments and gameplay to convey narrative depth. The world itself tells a story through its decayed and fractured structures, whispering of a once-thriving place now consumed by despair. Objects, symbols, and environmental clues hint at the protagonist's struggles, leaving much open to player interpretation. The progression through the game's haunting locations mirrors the player's internal journey, with each space representing a different emotional or psychological stage.

Thematic Significance of Inversion

The "Inversion" mechanic serves as the narrative and emotional centerpiece of the game. Its visual and auditory shifts underscore the duality of emotional states: light and dark, chaos and control, despair and hope. In its uncontrolled state, inversion illustrates the grip of trauma on one's life. As the player gains control over this mechanic, it symbolizes the journey toward emotional resilience, illustrating how mastery over emotions can provide clarity and empowerment.

Ending and Resolution

The story concludes with a powerful moment of emotional catharsis, as the protagonist fully embraces their ability to control the inversion, symbolizing the triumph of resilience over despair. The monochromatic world transforms subtly in response, leaving the player with a sense of bittersweet hope. The ending is deliberately open to interpretation, encouraging players to reflect on their own experiences and the emotional journey they've undertaken.

This story and narrative structure seamlessly integrates with *Gloom*'s gameplay and mechanics, creating an evocative and thought-provoking experience that lingers with players long after the game ends.

Level Design

– Structure of levels, progression, and layouts.

1. Haunting Woods

Metaphor: Confusion and Isolation
The forest represents the initial stage of emotional turmoil—being lost and overwhelmed in a vast, uncharted mental landscape. The dense trees and limited visibility mirror the fog of confusion that often accompanies trauma. Crumbling branches, shifting paths, and oppressive shadows evoke feelings of fear and vulnerability.
Gameplay Implication: Puzzles here might involve finding ways through maze-like environments, with inversion revealing hidden pathways or dangers like falling branches or concealed gaps.

2. Abandoned City
Metaphor: Disconnection and Desolation
The city symbolizes the alienation and emptiness that follows trauma. Crumbling buildings, shattered windows, and empty streets reflect a sense of loss and the feeling of being out of place in a world that has moved on. The city is simultaneously familiar and uncanny, like returning to a place from the past that no longer feels the same.
Gameplay Implication: Environmental puzzles might revolve around broken infrastructure, such as collapsing bridges or blocked alleyways. Inversion could reveal new routes through forgotten interiors or activate machinery in abandoned factories.

3. Factories and Rooftops
Metaphor: Pressure and Overwhelm
Factories represent the relentless grind of processing emotions, with their mechanical and industrial aesthetic symbolizing the mental and emotional effort of trying to make sense of trauma. The rooftops, precarious and open to the void below, represent the high-stakes balancing act of coping.
Gameplay Implication: Puzzles might involve conveyor belts, moving machinery, or navigating perilous heights. Inversion could change the direction of machines or reveal hidden safety measures, representing small but significant moments of control amidst chaos.

4. Caves
Metaphor: Introspection and Despair
The dark, enclosed spaces of the caves reflect the deep, internal struggle with despair and hopelessness. The claustrophobic atmosphere symbolizes being trapped in one's mind, where every sound echoes endlessly, and the way forward is unclear.
Gameplay Implication: Players might solve puzzles involving light and shadow, using inversion to illuminate hidden paths or to manipulate the cave's shifting walls. Environmental hazards could include falling stalactites or rising water.

5. Rooftops
Metaphor: Perspective and Uncertainty
Rooftops symbolize the search for clarity and control, providing a view of the vast, fractured world below. However, they also represent the precariousness of emotional recovery—one wrong step could mean falling back into despair.

Gameplay Implication: Puzzles could involve navigating narrow beams, activating bridges, or using inversion to create temporary footholds. Dynamic winds or shifting weather might add challenges, representing the instability of this phase.

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6. Dynamic Liminal Spaces (e.g., shifting platforms, floating ruins)
Metaphor: Transition and Growth
These surreal spaces could represent the journey of adapting and finding balance, where the world feels abstract yet purposeful. They embody the fluidity of emotions as players move closer to mastery over their emotional state.
Gameplay Implication: Puzzles might include platforms that exist only in one state or dynamic elements that must be stabilized with inversion. These areas could grow increasingly intricate, reflecting the complexity of emotional regulation.

General Integration
Each environment's puzzles and visuals should evolve alongside the narrative, subtly indicating the protagonist's progress. Early areas focus on survival and reacting to changes, while later ones encourage deliberate, controlled actions to reflect growing emotional resilience. Together, the settings create a cohesive metaphorical journey through the process of healing and self-discovery.

Potential Enemies and Environmental Hazards

1. Haunted Woods:

Enemies:

- **Shadow Beasts:** These are dark, amorphous creatures that stalk the player through the trees. They are stealthy and only fully reveal themselves when the inversion is triggered, shifting between visibility and invisibility.

    - **Metaphorical Implication:** These creatures represent the unseen fears and anxieties that people carry within them. The inability to fully face these emotional states until a person learns to cope with their emotions is symbolized by their sudden visibility in the inversion state.

Environmental Hazards:

- **Fallen Branches:** Fallen tree branches or debris block paths and act as obstacles, requiring the player to navigate carefully to avoid damage or being trapped.

    - **Metaphorical Implication:** The fallen branches represent emotional roadblocks or unresolved issues that hinder progress. They are obstacles that seem unavoidable at first but can be dealt with as the player gains control over their emotional state (inversion).

- **Whispering Winds:** The wind howls through the trees, pushing the player backward or to the side if they're not careful. These gusts are stronger during moments of inversion.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** The winds signify the overwhelming nature of external pressures or intrusive thoughts that throw people off balance when they're struggling emotionally. The inversion mechanic allows the player to find ways to resist or overcome these forces.

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2. Abandoned City:

Enemies:

- **Ghostly Figures:** Semi-transparent human-like silhouettes that wander the city streets. They are initially harmless but become hostile when the player is not in control of the inversion mechanic, causing confusion and disorientation.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** The ghosts symbolize the lingering effects of past traumas—unresolved memories and feelings that haunt an individual until they gain control over their emotional state and past experiences.

Environmental Hazards:

- **Cracked Pavement:** Large cracks in the road that collapse when stepped on, forcing the player to find another route or risk falling into a lower, more dangerous area.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** The cracks represent the fragility of one's mental state. In moments of emotional turmoil, one's foundation feels unstable, and small missteps can lead to feelings of falling apart.

- **Crumbling Buildings:** The walls and buildings of the city are decayed, and pieces of debris frequently fall or collapse. Some pathways will be blocked by these obstacles, forcing the player to think ahead.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** The crumbling buildings reflect the breakdown of stability or structure in one's life. In moments of emotional imbalance, everything feels like it's falling apart, but with control (inversion), these obstacles can be avoided or bypassed.

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3. Factories:

Enemies:

- **Mechanical Constructs:** These are erratic, malfunctioning machines that have been left behind. They attack on sight, using gears, drills, or other industrial tools.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** These constructs symbolize the chaotic, unpredictable aspects of an individual's emotional state when they lack control. They are products of external pressures or systems that continue to function unpredictably until the player gains mastery over their emotional state (inversion), allowing them to manage these threats.

Environmental Hazards:

- **Conveyor Belts:** Moving platforms that push the player towards dangers like grinders or spikes. Players must time their movements carefully to avoid being crushed or thrown into hazards.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** The conveyor belts symbolize the feeling of being swept along by life's demands, with no control or agency. The inversion mechanic reflects the player's growing ability to control the flow of life and avoid destructive forces.

- **Steam Jets:** Puffs of high-pressure steam from broken pipes that can scald the player if they are in the wrong place at the wrong time. These jets intensify when the inversion occurs.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** The steam jets represent sudden, overwhelming emotions or reactions. These bursts mirror moments when emotions erupt unexpectedly, but through emotional regulation (inversion), the player can control their exposure to these emotional surges.

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4. Rooftops:

Enemies:

- **Sky-Walkers:** Enemies that appear on rooftops, using ropes or other tools to descend from higher levels. They are agile and often appear after the inversion, jumping down unpredictably from above.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** These enemies represent external pressures or distractions that come from unexpected sources—perhaps people or

responsibilities that feel out of control or out of reach. They become more manageable when the inversion mechanic is under the player's control.

Environmental Hazards:

- **Loose Tiles:** On the rooftops, some tiles may collapse under the player's weight, leading to falls or environmental damage.

    - **Metaphorical Implication:** The loose tiles are a metaphor for unstable foundations in one's emotional state. They reflect how an unstable emotional environment can lead to accidents or setbacks until one gains control of their emotions and the environment stabilizes.

- **Windswept Edges:** Strong gusts of wind blow across the rooftops, pushing the player off the ledge if they're not careful.

    - **Metaphorical Implication:** The winds represent the unpredictable nature of life's challenges, pushing the player (and metaphorically, the individual) toward moments of instability. As the player regains control, these winds become more manageable.

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5. Caves:

Enemies:

- **Lurking Shadows:** Creatures that live in the caves, emerging only in complete darkness or under certain conditions triggered by the inversion. They react aggressively when the player moves too quickly or disturbs their surroundings.

    - **Metaphorical Implication:** The lurking shadows represent repressed emotions or memories—those parts of the self that are hidden from view and are only revealed under certain emotional conditions. These emotions can be overwhelming but are easier to manage once the player can control their emotional state.

Environmental Hazards:

- **Cave-ins:** Sections of the cave collapse, blocking paths or forcing the player to find another way around. These hazards increase during moments of inversion.

    - **Metaphorical Implication:** Cave-ins symbolize emotional breakdowns or moments when everything seems to fall apart. They represent the destruction caused by unresolved trauma or emotional strain, but the

inversion mechanic allows the player to find new pathways and overcome these obstacles.

- **Stalagmites and Stalactites:** Sharp, pointy structures that can cause harm if the player falls or makes a misstep.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** These represent sharp, painful memories or emotional scars that can injure the player. The inversion mechanic reflects the need to find balance and control, avoiding these dangerous pitfalls by managing emotional reactions.

Liminal Versions:

1. Haunted Woods (Liminal Space):

Enemies:

- **Wandering Spirits:** These entities are disembodied souls that appear in the peripheral vision of the player, always just out of reach. They flicker in and out of existence, creating a sense of unease and uncertainty. These enemies do not attack directly but instead drain the player's emotional stability, causing the inversion mechanic to shift uncontrollably.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** The wandering spirits represent unresolved memories or the sense of being stuck in a phase of life, caught between what was and what could be. They evoke the feeling of being lost in the transition from one state of emotional or psychological health to another.

Environmental Hazards:

- **Shifting Pathways:** The woods are constantly changing, with paths that appear or disappear as the player progresses. These shifting routes often confuse the player, creating a sense of being trapped in a repetitive cycle.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** Shifting pathways symbolize the instability of the mind when in turmoil. The player's inability to find stable ground echoes the sense of being stuck in a liminal emotional state, unsure of which direction to take until emotional control (inversion) is achieved.

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2. Abandoned City (Liminal Space):

Enemies:

- **Echoes:** These are disjointed, fragmented versions of the player's past, appearing as distorted versions of people or objects that seem familiar but feel wrong. They are mostly non-threatening but evoke a sense of dread. As the inversion mechanic is triggered, these echoes become more defined, either trying to pull the player in a direction or blocking their path.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** Echoes represent lingering, unresolved emotional issues or experiences that no longer have a clear place in the present. They're a reflection of being in-between stages of emotional recovery—something that's not fully resolved yet still has a powerful hold.

Environmental Hazards:

- **Flickering Lights:** Streetlights and building lights that occasionally flicker, creating dark, transient spaces. These lights sometimes reveal hidden threats but can also obscure potential escape routes, disorienting the player.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** Flickering lights represent the uncertainty of clarity and understanding during emotional or mental turmoil. They symbolize those moments when the path forward is unclear, and one must wait for the emotional fog to clear before moving ahead with confidence.

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3. Factories (Liminal Space):

Enemies:

- **Machinery Constructs:** These creatures are an amalgamation of malfunctioning, half-dismantled industrial machines. They appear in places that seem to exist between fully functional and abandoned, representing a breakdown of purpose or identity.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** The broken machinery represents the disintegration of order or control—both externally in life and internally in the psyche. The lack of functioning and the malfunctioning of the machines mirror feelings of losing direction or purpose, as well as the anxiety that can arise from such instability.

Environmental Hazards:

- **Broken Conveyor Belts:** Some conveyor belts are in motion while others are frozen in place, moving erratically or at unnatural speeds, creating obstacles for the player.

- o **Metaphorical Implication:** The conveyor belts reflect the feeling of being caught between two states—moving forward but without direction, or not moving at all. This represents emotional stagnation or feeling as though time is passing but you're not progressing, a common sensation in liminal emotional states.

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4. Rooftops (Liminal Space):

Enemies:

- **Phantom Figures:** These enemies appear to be distant, blurry shapes standing at the edges of rooftops. They do not move or interact until the player gets too close. When the inversion mechanic is activated, these phantoms become more aggressive, blocking the player's path or forcing them to fall.

  - o **Metaphorical Implication:** The phantoms represent the boundaries between fear and safety, memories of past traumatic events or unresolved psychological issues that feel close but seem unreachable. They symbolize the emotional barriers one faces when trying to transition between states of emotional stability and chaos.

Environmental Hazards:

- **Unstable Roofs:** Some roofs are cracked or broken, causing them to collapse under the player's weight. The inversion mechanic causes these roofs to either stabilize or disintegrate further, depending on the environment's emotional state.

  - o **Metaphorical Implication:** The unstable roofs reflect the fragility of emotional stability. When emotional regulation is poor (early in the game), the player feels at risk of falling. Mastery of the inversion mechanic symbolizes overcoming this fragility, allowing the player to regain control over their environment and emotional stability.

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5. Caves (Liminal Space):

Enemies:

- **The Hollowed:** These creatures appear as hollowed-out versions of normal animals or people, lost in the caves and mindlessly searching for a way out. The inversion

mechanic causes them to become more aggressive or to retreat further into the shadows.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** The Hollowed symbolize feelings of emotional emptiness or being lost in the dark, unable to move forward or escape from one's inner turmoil. They reflect the feeling of being trapped in an emotional limbo with no clear direction, but they can be overcome once the player gains control.

Environmental Hazards:

- **Echoing Cavern Walls:** The sound of the player's movement echoes unnaturally in the cave, distorting their sense of direction. This changes depending on the inversion, as the echoing sounds become either disorienting or more calming.

  - **Metaphorical Implication:** The echoing cavern walls represent the inner voices that play on repeat in one's mind—regrets, anxieties, or intrusive thoughts. These echoes distort the perception of reality, and only through emotional control can the player find clarity and direction.

Metaphorical Implications of Liminal Spaces:

Liminal spaces throughout *Gloom* represent the transitional phases between emotional extremes—chaos and control, confusion and clarity. These environments embody the psychological struggle of feeling "stuck" between stages of emotional healing or growth. The metaphor of being in an in-between space, whether it's a haunted forest or an abandoned city, conveys the unsettling feeling of not being in a fully formed or stable emotional state.

Through the use of the inversion mechanic, the player learns how to manage their environment by regulating their emotions. The disorientation and unpredictability of liminal spaces gradually shift into opportunities for clarity, representing the psychological journey from chaos to self-mastery. These spaces are where the player must confront the darker, less stable aspects of themselves in order to progress, making them central to both the narrative and gameplay experience.

Art and Aesthetics

Visual Style:

Gloom adopts a **monochromatic pixel art style**, heavily inspired by games like *Limbo*. This minimalist approach relies on a grayscale color palette—black, white, and various shades of gray—to create a somber, atmospheric tone. The use of sharp contrasts between light and shadow enhances the oppressive mood and supports the game's narrative themes of isolation, confusion, and emotional turmoil.

The world is designed with a focus on **environmental storytelling**, where each scene and object carries emotional weight. The monochrome art style allows for intricate use of **lighting** and **silhouettes** to convey meaning without explicit exposition, fostering a sense of mystery and encouraging players to uncover the story through exploration.

Visual Metaphors:

- **Shadows and Light:** The interplay between light and dark represents the duality of emotions, where moments of clarity and hope are contrasted by overwhelming shadows of despair. The player's interactions with light, particularly through the inversion mechanic, highlight the constant struggle between control and chaos.
- **Dynamic Environments:** Environments, such as the haunting woods, abandoned city, and industrial factories, are designed with fluidity, using subtle animations and particle effects to enhance immersion. These spaces, while visually bleak, are designed to evolve in response to the player's progress and mastery over the inversion mechanic, symbolizing the growth of emotional control and understanding.
- **Inversion Mechanic:** When the inversion mechanic is triggered, the **color palette flips**, shifting between black and white. This visual transformation is more than a simple aesthetic choice; it represents emotional shifts within the character, mirroring moments of self-reflection or emotional regulation. The inversion also alters the tone and depth of the environment, changing how players perceive hazards, paths, and interactable objects.

Character Design:

The protagonist, though minimalist in design, is given enough visual detail to evoke empathy. The character's silhouette remains relatively simple but expressive, with small animation details—like subtle movements during the inversion process—that reflect their emotional state. These animations evolve as the character gains control over their emotional state, moving from more erratic, stilted movements to more fluid, deliberate actions as the story progresses.

Environmental Design:

Each setting in *Gloom* is designed to emphasize a specific emotional state or theme. For example:

- **Haunting Woods:** A dense, overgrown forest filled with swaying trees and shifting paths, casting long, eerie shadows. The natural world feels both alive and oppressive, adding to the sense of isolation and confusion.

- **Abandoned City:** Decaying urban structures, cracked streets, and overgrown buildings embody the feelings of loss and desolation. The absence of life is palpable, with only the sounds of creaking structures and distant echoes breaking the silence.
- **Factories and Rooftops:** Industrial spaces with rusted machinery and crumbling rooftops highlight the themes of pressure, control, and uncertainty. These spaces challenge the player both physically and mentally, with moving platforms and precarious heights creating constant tension.

Animation Style:

The game utilizes **rig-based keyframe animation** to ensure smooth and intentional character movements, with a focus on emotional expression. This technique allows for more controlled, deliberate animations, making the protagonist's emotional journey more apparent. As the player masters the inversion mechanic and gains control over their environment, the character's animations shift from awkward and jerky to fluid and purposeful, symbolizing their mastery over their emotional state.

Music and Sound Design:

The auditory experience of *Gloom* is tightly woven into its visual aesthetics. The sound design is subtle and atmospheric, with a focus on environmental sounds that enhance the sense of isolation—such as wind, distant echoes, or the sound of footsteps on gravel.

The **dynamic music system** shifts between **minor and major tones** depending on the current state of the world, reflecting the emotional highs and lows of the player's journey. When the inversion mechanic is triggered, the music also shifts to match the emotional tone of the world, deepening the connection between sound, visual design, and narrative.

Overall Aesthetic:

Gloom aims to create an immersive, melancholic atmosphere that pulls players into its world. The combination of monochrome pixel art, environmental storytelling, and the inversion mechanic creates a haunting and reflective experience, allowing players to connect emotionally with the game's themes of trauma, emotional regulation, and growth. The aesthetic choices in *Gloom* are all carefully crafted to support the metaphorical journey of the player, using visual and auditory cues to enhance the storytelling and gameplay.

Sound and Music

– Audio design, including sound effects, music, and voiceovers.

Overall Sound Design:

The sound design in *Gloom* plays a critical role in shaping the emotional atmosphere of the game. The world of *Gloom* is immersive and haunting, with sound being used to enhance the player's experience of isolation, tension, and emotional fluctuation. Sound effects and environmental audio cues are integral in guiding players through the game, building on the visual storytelling to reinforce the atmosphere and the emotional state of the protagonist.

Environmental Sound Effects:

Sound effects are designed to reinforce the desolate and eerie environments. The game world is filled with subtle environmental sounds that help build tension and immersion:

- **Wind and Weather:** Soft wind sounds rustling through trees or howling in open spaces create a constant sense of emptiness, adding to the isolation.
- **Footsteps:** The sound of the protagonist's footsteps varies based on the environment—clanging on metal in the factories, crunching gravel in the woods, or soft thuds on crumbling city streets. This auditory cue not only reinforces immersion but also signifies the protagonist's presence in a world that feels abandoned and lost.
- **Ambient Noise:** Background noises, such as the distant clatter of broken machinery, creaking structures, or eerie echoes, help create a persistent sense of unease. These sounds are often subtle but contribute to the atmosphere and can hint at hidden dangers or secret paths.
- **Inversion Effects:** When the world shifts through the inversion mechanic, environmental sounds are subtly altered as well. For example, the wind may grow more pronounced, or distant sounds might fade in and out depending on the inversion state. This shift reinforces the emotional state of the player and their growing control over the environment.

Character Sounds:

The protagonist's movements, actions, and emotional shifts are reflected in a variety of character sounds, designed to make the player feel more connected to the character's journey:

- **Movement:** The character's movements are accompanied by soft, natural sounds—footsteps, climbing, and mantle sounds—that respond to the environment. As the inversion mechanic takes hold, these sounds may become more strained or smoother, reflecting the character's emotional state and progress.
- **Inversion Sounds:** When the inversion mechanic is triggered, a distinct sound accompanies the transition. This could include a rising crescendo of music, a subtle shift in the pitch of environmental sounds, or a deep, resonant tone that signifies the mental shift.
- **Physical Interactions:** Actions like grabbing objects, activating levers, or interacting with other elements of the environment will have unique sounds that reflect their purpose and significance in the puzzles. These sounds may change subtly based on the inversion state to convey the shifting nature of the world.

Music:

The music in *Gloom* plays an essential role in supporting the emotional journey of the protagonist. The soundtrack is composed with the same minimalist approach as the visual design, using sparse instrumentation and subtle melodies to create an emotionally rich, atmospheric backdrop.

- **Minor Tone (Initial Stages):** The music in the early stages of the game uses a minor key, emphasizing feelings of despair, confusion, and emotional turmoil. The slow, haunting melodies set the tone for the player's initial struggle with the inversion mechanic and their journey through the dark and oppressive world.
- **Major Tone (Progression):** As the player progresses and begins to master the inversion mechanic, the music shifts into a major key, signaling the growth and eventual empowerment of the character. This transition is gradual, reflecting the

player's ability to regain control over their emotional state, and adds an uplifting, hopeful quality to the music.

- **Dynamic Shifts:** The inversion mechanic causes not only the environment to change but the music itself. Each time the inversion is triggered, the music subtly shifts from minor to major, emphasizing the emotional state of the character. This dynamic musical system enhances the gameplay experience by deepening the emotional impact of the player's actions.
- **Themes and Motifs:** The game's soundtrack is built around recurring motifs that represent the protagonist's journey. The melodies evolve as the character moves from uncertainty to self-mastery, with variations on themes to reflect emotional shifts. The music serves as both a narrative tool and an emotional guide, subtly signaling important changes in the story.

Sound Effects for Puzzles and Interactions:

Puzzle-solving and interaction with the environment are integral to *Gloom*'s gameplay, and the sound design for these elements is carefully crafted to match the game's atmosphere.

- **Puzzle Triggers:** Pressure plates, switches, and other interactive elements will have corresponding sounds that reflect their function—soft clicks, mechanical whirs, or tonal chimes, all subtly altered by the inversion mechanic.
- **Environmental Hazards:** Hazards such as falling debris, crumbling platforms, or distant dangers will have auditory cues, such as cracks, groans, or sudden spikes in intensity, warning the player of imminent threats. These sounds will shift with the inversion mechanic, signaling when a hazard becomes more or less dangerous based on the environment's current state.
- **Object Interactions:** Sound effects for interactable objects like levers, keys, or crates will vary based on context, from the sound of a lever clicking into place to the scrapping noise of a crate being dragged. When inversion is triggered, these sounds may shift in tone, further reinforcing the impact of the mechanic on the environment.

This section outlines the role of sound and music in the game, emphasizing how it supports the emotional journey and enhances the gameplay experience. The combination of atmospheric sounds, dynamic music shifts, and detailed character sounds creates a cohesive and immersive world for the player.

Technical Requirements

– Engine, platforms, performance, and technical goals.

The following technical requirements outline the essential tools, platforms, and specifications needed to develop *Gloom*:

1. Game Engine:

- **Unity** (Recommended Version: 2024.x)
- Unity will be used for its flexibility in handling 2D physics-based puzzles, pixel art rendering, and robust animation capabilities.

2. Platforms:

- **PC** (Windows, macOS)
- **Consoles** (PlayStation, Xbox, Switch – depending on future development and resources)
- **Mobile** (Optional, as a potential post-launch release for touch-based control)

3. Art and Animation:
- **Pixel Art Assets** (Resolution: 16x16 to 64x64 px per character/object)
- **Rig-based Keyframe Animation** for smooth character and object movements
- **Spritesheets** for character and environmental animations
- **Tilemaps** for environment design and puzzles

4. Audio:
- **Sound Design Tools:** FMOD or Wwise for advanced sound control, dynamic music and environmental sound integration
- **Music Composition:** Custom tracks (software: Ableton Live, FL Studio, or similar DAWs)

5. Programming and Scripting:
- **C#** for scripting in Unity
- **Physics Engine:** Unity's built-in 2D physics system for object interaction, player movement, and environmental physics
- **Sound/Audio Integration:** Integration of dynamic music and sound effects tied to gameplay events, such as inversion state changes
- **UI System:** Unity's UI tools for menus, HUD, and controls

6. Controls:
- **Keyboard & Mouse** support (for PC platforms)
- **Controller Support:** Gamepad support (Xbox/PlayStation controllers, or custom controllers) for smooth console experience
- **Mobile (Optional):** Touchscreen controls for a mobile version, including taps, swipes, and on-screen buttons for interaction and inversion

7. Performance:
- **Target FPS:** 60 FPS for smooth gameplay
- **Resolution:** 1080p minimum, with scalable options for lower settings to optimize performance on lower-end devices
- **Memory Usage:** Optimized for low to medium memory usage to ensure smooth performance across various platforms

8. Version Control:
- **GitHub/Bitbucket/Unity Collaborate** for version control and team collaboration throughout the development process.

This section provides the technical framework needed to support the development of *Gloom*, ensuring that the game runs efficiently across multiple platforms while maintaining its artistic and gameplay vision.

Target Audience
– Demographics and market positioning.

Gloom is designed to appeal to a broad range of players, particularly those who enjoy atmospheric, emotionally engaging experiences with challenging puzzles. The game's minimalist art style, atmospheric storytelling, and metaphor-driven gameplay will resonate with players seeking a deep, introspective experience.

Primary Audience:
- **Age Group:** 18-35 years old
- **Gender:** All genders
- **Core Interests:**
    - Players who enjoy puzzle platformers with a focus on exploration and environmental storytelling.
    - Fans of games like *Limbo*, *Inside*, *Ori and the Blind Forest*, and other emotionally driven indie games.
    - Players who appreciate narrative-driven gameplay that encourages self-reflection and emotional depth.
    - Fans of atmospheric games with minimalist aesthetics and immersive worlds.

Secondary Audience:
- **Psychological and Narrative Enthusiasts:**
    - Players interested in games that incorporate psychological elements and emotional themes, particularly those exploring trauma, resilience, and personal growth.
- **Indie Game Community:**
    - Those who are drawn to the indie game scene for unique, thought-provoking experiences that are not always found in mainstream titles.
- **Casual Gamers:**
    - While *Gloom* offers a challenge, its accessibility and non-complex controls make it approachable for casual gamers looking for an engaging yet easy-to-learn experience.
- **Fans of Minimalist Art and Sound Design:**
    - Players with an appreciation for minimalist visual and auditory design will find *Gloom*'s pixel art, monochromatic palette, and atmospheric soundscapes captivating.

Player Motivations:
- **Exploration and Discovery:** Many players will be drawn to uncover hidden paths, secrets, and environmental storytelling elements throughout the game world.
- **Emotional Engagement:** *Gloom*'s narrative depth, combined with its unique inversion mechanic, offers an emotional journey that will connect with players on a personal level, motivating them to explore the game's world more fully.
- **Puzzle Solving:** Players who enjoy clever, physics-based puzzles that integrate seamlessly with the environment will find satisfaction in overcoming the game's challenges.

By combining thought-provoking themes, challenging puzzles, and a deeply immersive atmosphere, *Gloom* appeals to players who enjoy games that offer more than just entertainment, but also an opportunity for introspection and personal connection.

Monetization

Gloom will follow a **one-time purchase model**, offering players the full experience without the need for in-app purchases or microtransactions. The game will be available on **Steam**, **Itch.io**, and **consoles**, with a primary focus on reaching a wide audience on these platforms.

Platform Distribution:

- **Steam & Itch.io:** The game will launch on PC first, with both platforms offering easy access for indie game enthusiasts. Early access or beta versions may be available prior to the full release to build anticipation and gather player feedback.
- **Console Releases:** Plans for releases on **Xbox**, **PlayStation**, and **Switch** are in progress. The game will undergo a **holistic review** process for **Xbox** to ensure it meets platform standards and is prepared for a smooth console release.

Marketing & Exposure:

- **Advertising Campaigns:** Targeted advertising campaigns will be developed to reach the game's core audience, leveraging social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), gaming sites, and ads on Steam.
- **Social Media Management:** A **social media manager** will be hired to handle accounts and engage with the community. This role will be crucial for building awareness, increasing visibility, and maintaining engagement with players leading up to and following the game's release. Regular updates, behind-the-scenes content, and player interactions will drive excitement.
- **Professional Music and SFX Production:** To enhance the emotional and immersive atmosphere, the game will feature **professional music** and **sound effects**. A composer and sound designer will be contracted to ensure the audio is of the highest quality, contributing to the game's moody atmosphere.

Community Engagement & Outreach:

- **Game Conferences & Local Communities:** The development team will attend major **game conferences** (such as PAX, GDC, and local events) to showcase *Gloom* and gain exposure. These conferences are a great opportunity to network with industry professionals, meet potential collaborators, and get the game into the hands of press and players.
- **Outreach through Social Media & Youtubers:** A focused outreach strategy will include contacting **YouTubers** and **streamers** to play and review the game, helping to generate buzz and visibility among gaming audiences. Influencers and content creators will play a key role in the marketing campaign.
- **Local Game Development Communities:** We will actively engage with local game development communities to foster connections, share development progress, and receive feedback. This grassroots approach will build strong community support for the game.

Future Potential Collaborations:

- **Producer Support:** As the project progresses, the team may seek **producer support** to help with additional project management, marketing, and distribution efforts.

Overall, *Gloom* aims to build a strong community around the game, driving both digital and physical sales while increasing its exposure through an integrated marketing strategy and community outreach efforts. By building anticipation through social media, attending key events, and seeking exposure from influencers, we aim to create a successful launch and sustain long-term interest in the game.