WINTER'S HUNGER

GDD Version: 3.2

Last Updated: April 30, 2025

Author: Nightmare Works

NIGHTMARE WORKS

Table of Contents

Game Basics & Targets

Title: Winter's Hunger

Platform: PC, Browser

Delivered: Itch.io, Future Steam Release (JUNE 2025)

Engine: Unreal Engine 5 (v5.4.4)

Target Release: May 2025

Target Age / Rating: 17+ / ESRB M (Violence, Limited Gore)

1. Game Overview

Genre: Single-player Survival Psychological Horror

Core Concept: You are a paranormal investigator stranded in a snow-bound mountain range, hunting the myth of the Wendigo. Balance exploration, resource management, puzzles, and combat to weaken the creature—and its hold over you.

Unique Selling Points:

- **Dynamic Hallucination System:** Randomized visual and audio distortions driven by your sanity meter.
- **Hybrid Navigation:** Seamless blend of point-and-click exploration with free-roam puzzle and combat arenas.
- **Environmental Unpredictability:** Shifting snowstorms and interactive sound design amplify tension and ambience.

Inspirations:

- *Eternal Darkness* (Sanity mechanics, audio/visual distortions)
- *Until Dawn* (Wendigo lore, cinematic tension)
- *Phasmophobia* (hunting gadgets, sanity effects)
- *That Which Gives Chase* (Visual style, UI/ UX style)
- *Daggerfall* (Dungeon-Crawler UI/UX Style)

2. Story & Themes

2.1 Story Synopsis

A seasoned Paranormal Investigator has taken it upon themselves to investigate local disappearances, which has led them to the Wintery Mountains. Here, they uncover evidence of stirring cult activity, specifically, a cult that seeks to placate a myth of a Wendigo—but whether it's out of loyalty or fear, few can say. This mysterious cult has been, evidently, taking people and using them as sacrifices in rituals that would supposedly summon the Beast, which would then do what Wendigos do (punish people for perceived transgressions against the natural world).

All of this is gathered from journal fragments from previous travelers, as well as various cult ritual symbols and long-forgotten native cave paintings. Trapped in the Wintery Mountains, the Investigator has little choice but to continue their search for definitive proof of cult activity. Moreover, when it's found, the Investigator likewise has little choice but to try and stop the cult from achieving their (admittedly far-fetched) plan to summon the Wendigo. Throughout the mountains are five Wendigo Skull Totems hidden behind various puzzles that, when interacted with by the player, interrupt the cult's ritual.

Of course, being trapped and alone in the Wintery Mountains does leave its toll on the Investigator. While the Paranormal Investigator is not just any normal person and does have more experience with the supernatural, they are still human, prone to bouts of lapsed sanity caused by increased isolation. Hopefully, they will complete their mission before their body gets ravaged by hunger and the elements, and before their mind gets swallowed by fear and panic. As it might turn out, the real monster could be the mind we broke along the way.

2.2 Themes

- **An Indifferent Universe:** Just as the universe doesn't care about what asteroids come hurtling towards Earth's way, the Wintery Mountains do not care about what people get trapped in its blizzards, starved and alone. How will the player deal with the lack of care and direction?
- **Isolation and Sanity:** The Wintery Mountains themselves almost outright conspire against the Paranormal Investigator, hoping that the struggle for dwindling resources will be enough to convince them that they're already dead—prey for the Beast.
- **Unreliable Reality:** With such a lack of certainty, connection, and direction, the player is left to wonder what is and is not real, what will and what will not impact their choices, their playthrough, and their ultimate ending. Hallucinations blur the line between reality and distractions—ones that just might end the Investigator if entertained for too long.
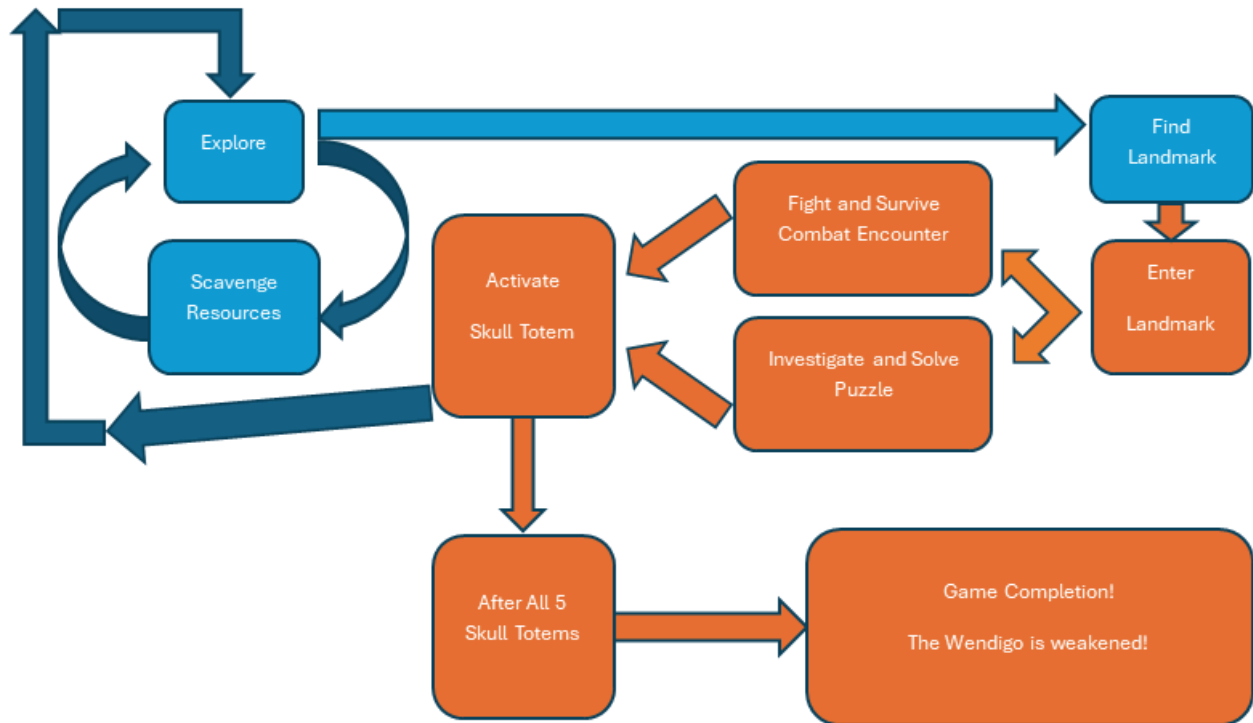
2.2 Player Image

3. Core Gameplay Loop

Flowchart Graphic: Blue = Exploration; Orange = Arenas

1. **Point-and-Click Exploration**
   a. Traverse the overworld, discover resources (food, heat sources, batteries), lore items, and arena entry points.
   b. Every movement results in a decrease to Hunger, Temperature, and Battery Life.
   c. Players may also find note-items that when interacted with, read clues or other notes that lead to puzzle arenas and/or detail their solutions.
   d. Notes may also just have flavor text that details in-game lore, if applicable.
2. **Resource & Status Management**
   a. Monitor Sanity, Hunger, Temperature, Battery Life, and Ammo.
   b. Inspired by survival game mechanics
   c. These meters are restored by Polaroids, Food(s), Pyres, Batteries, and Ammo Boxes, respectively

3. **Free-Roam Mode**
    a. Enter arenas to solve environmental puzzles or engage in combat with wolves and/ or cultists.
    b. Use WASD to move instead of teleport station interacts
    c. Suffer penalties due to low core meters:
        i. Low Sanity results in lower Player Health
        ii. Low Hunger lowers mouse look speed
        iii. Low Temperature lowers movement speed
    d. Interact with the Wendigo Totem upon completion to progress
4. **Conclusion**
    a. After interacting with all of the Wendigo skull totems, the game ends in a success. The totems were keeping the Wendigo alive, and without them, is rendered too weak to influence people anymore.
5. **Death**
    a. Failing any vital meter (sanity, temperature, hunger) triggers Death Screen with stats summary, followed by rogue-like restart.

4. Key Systems

4.1 HUD & UI

The Heads-Up Display (HUD) communicates essential information to the player at all times, consisting of the following elements:

- **Player Portrait**
  - Shows the Player what their character looks like, following the conventions of old First-Person Dungeon Crawlers.
- **Sanity Bar** (restored by polaroid consumables and fires)
  - Represents the health and mental state of the player character.
- **Temperature Bar** (restored by pyres)
  - Displays the current warmth level of the player character.
- **Hunger Meter** (restored by consumable food items)
  - Represents the "energy" level of the player character.
- **Ammo Counter/ Flashlight Charge Meter** (restored by ammo boxes and batteries)
  - Displays the remaining bullets/ charge for the currently actively equipped tool.
- **Active Equipped Tool** (flashlight or rifle)
  - Displays the actively equipped tool
- **Compass**
  - Shows where north is in relation to the player's rotation; added to help navigation
- **Journal:**
  - Displays the current objective, if any
  - Displays the button controls

4.2 Movement & Interaction

Players move and interact throughout the various game modes in the following ways:

- **Point-and-Click Movement:** Players are to click E to interact with various teleportation nodes to "move" between sections, while in the point-and-click regions of the map.
- **Free-Roam Mode:** WASD is used for combat/puzzle arena sections.
- **Contextual Interactions:** 'E' click prompts allow players to use consumables, trigger events, or otherwise examine certain objects.

4.3 Resource Management

Players are expected to successfully manage the following resources:

- **Sanity (**restored by polaroid consumables and fires)
  - Lower sanity results in increased hallucination spawn rate, as well as lower health for the combat sections.
  - Polaroids restore 15 Sanity upon interaction.
- **Temperature** (restored by pyres)
  - Lower temperature results in decreased movement speed during free roam sections.
  - Sources of heat (such as pyres & lookout towers) completely restore Warmth when interacted with.
- **Hunger** (restored by consumable food items)
  - Lower Hunger results in lower/ less responsive mouse look speed in combat sections.
- **Ammo** (restored by ammo boxes)
  - Lower ammo hinders the player's ability to successfully complete the combat sections.
- **Flashlight Charge** (restored by batteries)
  - Lower charge hinders the player's visibility.

4.4 Combat Mechanics

Combat in Winter's Hunger is relatively straight-forward:

- **Weapons**
  - **Rifle:** The player character's primary firearm. Requires ammunition and has a limited fire rate. Left mouse click shoots, hold right mouse click aims. Holds 100 rounds of ammo at maximum.
- Low Resource Effects:
  - Low Sanity: Increased Hallucination spawn rate.
  - Low Hunger: Reduce mouse look speed.
  - Low Temperature: Reduces player movement speed.
- Enemies:
  - Varying Hit Points between 1-5.
  - Wolf AI is simple, prone to running around and charging the player
  - Cultist AI is more complex, able to path-find, regain line-of-sight, and maintain distance.

4.5 Puzzle Mechanics

Puzzles are to challenge the Player's observation, problem-solving, and navigation skills.

- Navigating to puzzles can be moderately difficult in and of itself; inefficient travel imposes the risk of core stats being reduced too low.
- Each of the five (5) puzzles carry unique mechanics for their respective area, utilizing things like audio clues, point-light positions, color coordination, etc.
- All puzzle completions are required in order for players to successfully complete the game.

4.6 Hallucination Mechanics

Hallucinations exist to uplay the ambience and scare-factor of the game for the player.

- Certain actions (such as being shot, bitten, eating raw meat, failing a puzzle, etc.) can lower sanity.
- Most hallucinations work off a sanity threshold trigger (i.e. lower than 95% or lower than 85% for example)
- Most hallucinations also have an "appearance" timer, a randomized time of "show-time" when the hallucination is audible/ visible as applicable, flickering on-and-off throughout play to add a sense of unnerving uncertainty.
- Hallucinations Include:
  - "Eerie" sound bites playing
  - "Eerie" ambient tracks
  - Non-interactable "Fake" food
  - Floating, Jiggling Fake Food
  - Pyre's occasionally swap colors to green from red and back again
  - Pyre's toggle off/ on (they're still intractable as normal, as hallucinations are not real, but the Player doesn't know that until they try).
  - Appearance of the Wendigo Model(s)
  - Wendigo Model animations
  - Camera Zoom effects
- Sample Image:

5. World & Level Design

5.1 Setting

A haunted northern taiga—vast pine forests, frozen lakes, abandoned cabins—rendered in a low-poly, pixelated aesthetic reminiscent of early 2000s PC games. The mountains are largely isolated from civilization; the only recognizable structures are abandoned lookout towers and snowed-in cabins.

The region used to be the homeland of various indigenous tribes, but something had happened to them, reducing their influence over the region. Over time, other people have ventured into the mountains and surrounding forests, maybe even building minor infrastructure like small cabins and towers, but nothing major like highways or the like. It's likely the region was host to a ranger park or other protected area, but alas, it seems like whatever was there has fallen into disrepair by the time the player comes across it.

Now, the region harbors a dark and mysterious evil: the Cult of the Beast. This cult is intent on summoning a Wendigo to terrorize everyone they come across—if not just sacrifice them outright.

5.2 Key Locations

- **East Lookout Tower:** Ranger station with limited supplies, generally a safe zone.
- **West Lookout Tower:** An abandoned station.
- **Caves:** Carvings, cult altars, and torn apart former explorers.
- **Hunting Lodge:** Blood-stained remains and signs of struggle.
- **Frozen Cave:** Hidden cavern encased in ice.
- **Cult Ritual Site:** Altars, symbols, Wendigo idols.
- **Old Burial Mound:** A strange memorial, its meaning lost to years of harsh weather.

5.3 Environmental Hazards

- **Dynamic Snowstorms:** Reduces player visibility. They occur on an independent randomized timer, centered around the player character's camera for minimal particle effect generation & performance lag.

6. Art & Audio Direction

6.1 Visual Style

- **Game Perspective:** First-Person POV
- **Model Resolution:** Low-Poly models reminiscent of older PS2 games
- **Visual Filters:** Heavy pixelation for distinctive atmosphere and to further imagery that callbacks older games and styles.
- **Clarity:** High-contrast silhouettes to ensure object readability.
- **Tools:** 3DS Max/ Blender for iterative 3D asset refinement.

6.2 Audio Design

- **Realistic SFX:** Enhanced ambient recordings (wind, footsteps in snow) made with practical effects (fan blowing, spoon in sugar).
- **Supernatural Layers:** Distortion, echo, reverb, etc.
- **Music & Sound-Scapes:** Various musical notes & ambient sound inline with horror genre conventions.

Style Questions, if applicable, can be answered with the **STYLE GUIDE!**

Key Assets Appendix (refer to detailed asset list(s))

7. Puzzles & Puzzle Design

All puzzles feature seamless teleport between modes with invisible walls and clear visual cues.

Puzzle 1: Frozen Hand

- **Location:** Alternate Lookout Tower.
- **Goal:** Free frozen hand on doorknob using kerosene & match (correct) or crowbar (5-point sanity penalty).
- **Mechanic:** Press Interact on the solution object.
- **Image:**

Puzzle 2: Split in the Cave

- **Location:** Northeast Cave.
- **Goal:** Choose the right passage using environmental clues (boot bite vs. extinguished lantern). Wrong path (left path with boot) → sanity debuff (-20 points).
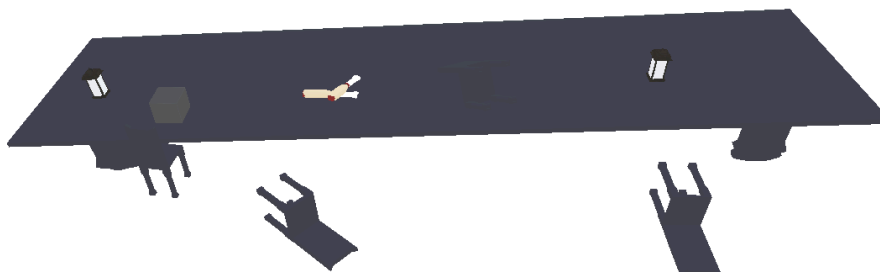- **Mechanic:** Press Interact on the solution object.
- **Image:**

Puzzle 3: Harp Chamber

- **Location:** Northwest Cave.
- **Goal:** Play bone harp strings in sequence matching four symbolstones (Fire, Snowflake, Food, Deer Skull) to open the totem chamber.
- **Mechanic:** Press Interact on the harp object's strings in the right order.
- **Image:**
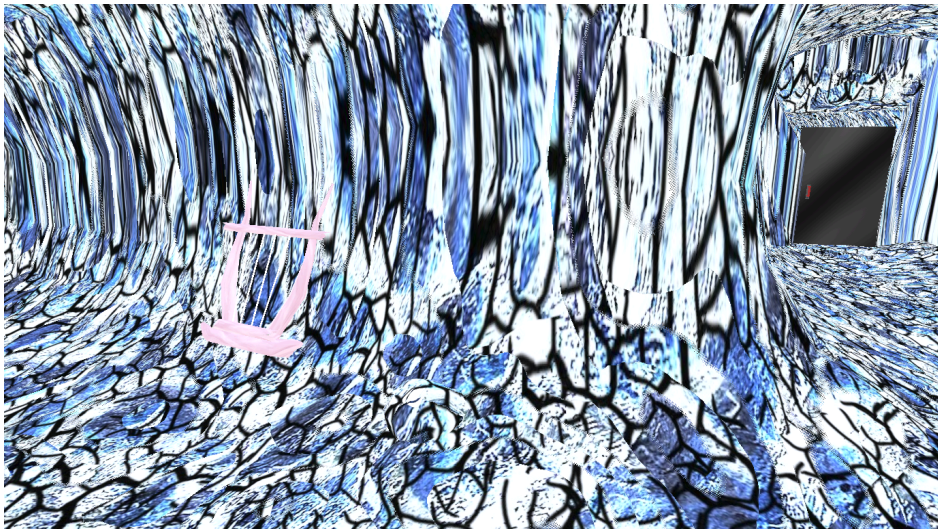
Puzzle 4: Silent Feast

- **Location:** Southern Campground cabin.
- **Goal:** Interact with chair, plate, or cursed food. Only plate move preserves sanity & adds +5 hunger; others grant debuffs of –20 sanity. Exit spawns Wendigo Skull Totem.
- **Mechanic:** Press Interact on the solution object.
- **Image:**

Puzzle 5: Frozen Echo

- **Location:** Northern Campground.
- **Goal:** Read obelisk riddle to ring bone, icicle, and metal chimes in correct order to unlock metal door.
- **Mechanic:** Press Interact on the solution objects in the right order.
- **Image:**

8. Enemies & Other NPCs

I. **Wolves:** Simple AI that will chase & bite the player.
    - HEALTH: 1
    - IMAGE:

II. **Cultists:** Equipped with a more complex pathfinding system, will walk around to find line-of-sight and fire at the player at range.
   - HEALTH: 5
    - IMAGE:

III. **The Wendigo:** Is not an enemy in-game, and is more-so a lurking background decoration, an idea meant to frighten the player through subtle presence rather than outright combat or jump-scares.
   ● IMAGE:
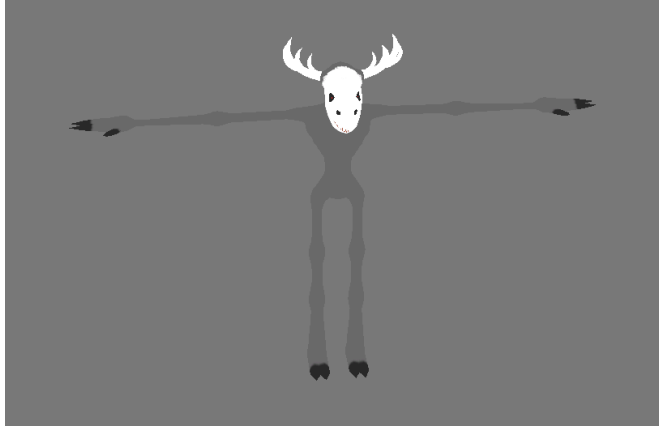
IV. **Polaroid-Man:** The human in the photo's scattered throughout the map, that when interacted with restore some sanity. Model taken from an unused player concept.
   ● IMAGE:
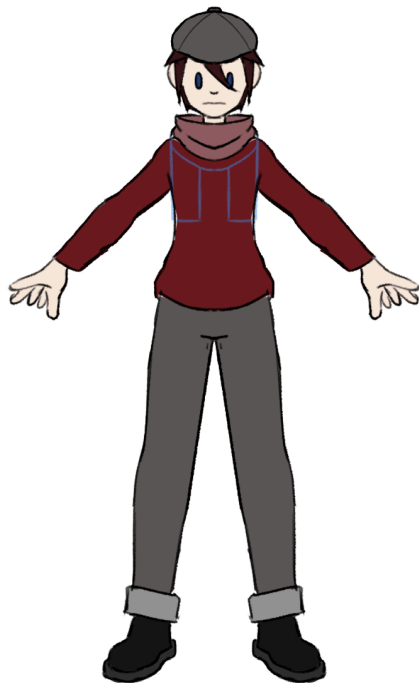
9. Progression & End States

- **Victory:**
  - Win through completing ALL puzzles & combat encounters.
  - Specifically, upon completion of an arena (either puzzle or combat), the player will be prompted to interact with a Wendigo Totem. When all totems are activated, the player wins.
  - Certain Cutscenes display, such as the Wendigo being banished from reality.
 - TOTEM IMAGE:

- **Failure:**
  - Death by:
    - Low Sanity
    - Low Hunger
    - Low Temperature
  - Death restarts the game, as per rogue-like & similar genre conventions
  - Certain Cutscenes display, such as the player being dragged off into the woods upon reaching low Sanity, Hunger, or Temperature.
- End Screen Displays:
  - Total Play Time
  - Win/ Loss State
  - Final Scores of Sanity, Hunger, & Temperature at game end
  - IMAGE:
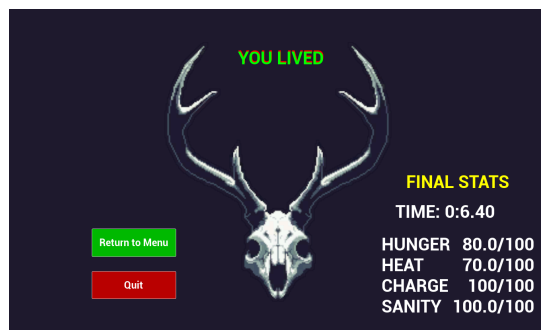
10. Future DLC & Other Planned Content

Live Service Strategy

Winter's Hunger will launch at a base price of $4.99. To support ongoing development and continued engagement with the community after release, we plan to offer optional paid downloadable content (DLC). These DLCs will expand the *Winter's Hunger* experience, encouraging players to return to the game with fresh challenges and new stories. All DLC will be available through the *Winter's Hunger* page on Itch.io and will integrate seamlessly into the base game upon purchase.

Planned DLC Releases

- **DLC #1: Nightmare Mode**
  - *Release: Summer 2025 | Price: $0.99*
  - Challenge your survival skills like never before with *Nightmare Mode*! This new difficulty setting features more scarce resources, deadlier enemies, and brand-new hallucination events that keep the experience unsettling and unpredictable. Even seasoned players will find themselves pushed to their limits.
  - This DLC launch would also feature an official Steam Page for the release.

- **DLC #2: Tools of the Cult**
  - *Release: Fall 2025 | Price: $0.99*
  - Sharpen your survival instincts with *Tools of the Cult*! This DLC adds a variety of immersive minigames that make every moment of survival more interactive and rewarding—after all, the Cult of the Beast must have been doing the same in order to survive this long! Whether you're struggling to pick frozen locks, preparing meals to stave off hunger, or gathering firewood against the biting cold, every action now demands your focus and skill. These new mechanics bring deeper tension & satisfaction to your journey through the frozen wastes.
  - The minigames include:
    - **Lockpicking Minigame:** Fumble with frozen locks as you try to open supply caches and escape danger.
    - **Cooking Minigame:** Prepare vital meals by balancing ingredients and timing to maximize nourishment.
    - **Wood Gathering Minigame:** Search for and collect firewood under harsh conditions to keep the cold at bay.
    - **Trap Setting:** Set up snares or deadfalls to catch small animals. A simple timing and placement game — set too early or too late and the trap fails.
    - **First Aid:** Treat wounds by applying bandages, splints, or stitching under harsh conditions — a quick, steady-hand task.
    - **Shelter Repair:** Patch holes in walls, roofs, or barricades to keep out the cold or enemies. Involves quick, resource-based repairs under pressure.
    - **Fire Starting:** Create fire with friction, matches, or flint, presenting a new challenge (e.g., maintaining a steady rhythm).
    - **More to come:** Additional survival activities will be added to enhance immersion and replay-ability!

- **DLC #3: The Last Morsel**
  - *Release: Christmas 2025 | Price: $0.99*
  - Continues the story beyond the original campaign in *The Last Morsel*. Step into the role of the Paranormal Specialist once more to hunt down the last remnants of the Wendigo Cultists. Race against time to prevent the resurrection of the Wendigo in this intense, lore-rich epilogue adventure, in many more spooky locations....

Appendices:

I. Control Schematics
- **Interact - E**
- **Free Roam Movement – WASD**
- **Free Roam Sprint – Shift Click**
- **UI Interact – Left Mouse Click**
- **Equip Flashlight - 1**
  - **Toggle Flashlight - F**
- **Equip Rifle - 2**
  - **Fire Rifle – Left Mouse Click**
  - **Aim Rifle – Hold Right Mouse Click**
- **Toggle Journal - Tab**

II. Game World Map
- Topography Map:
  - This map features the topography of the map/ world terrain seen in-game.
  - Image:

- Landmark Map:
  - This map features indicators for the landmark locations. They are easily seen with an unlit view of the scene and are clearly labelled in the outliner for easy identification.
  - Image:
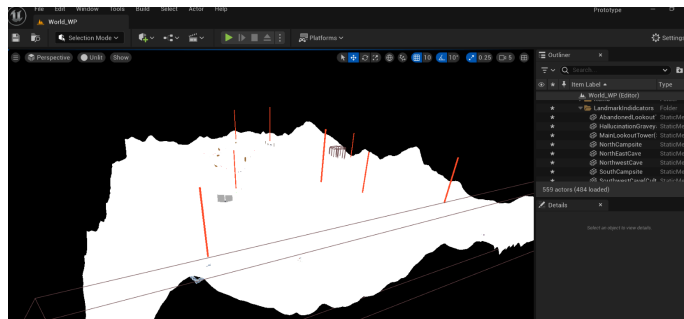
III. Map Locations

- **East Lookout Tower**
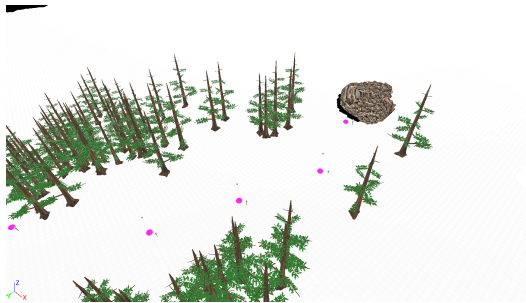 - Ranger station with limited supplies, generally a safe zone.
  - Image:

- **West Lookout Tower**
  - An abandoned station.
  - Image:

- **Caves**
  - Carvings, cult altars, and torn apart former explorers.
  - Image:

- **Hunting Lodge**
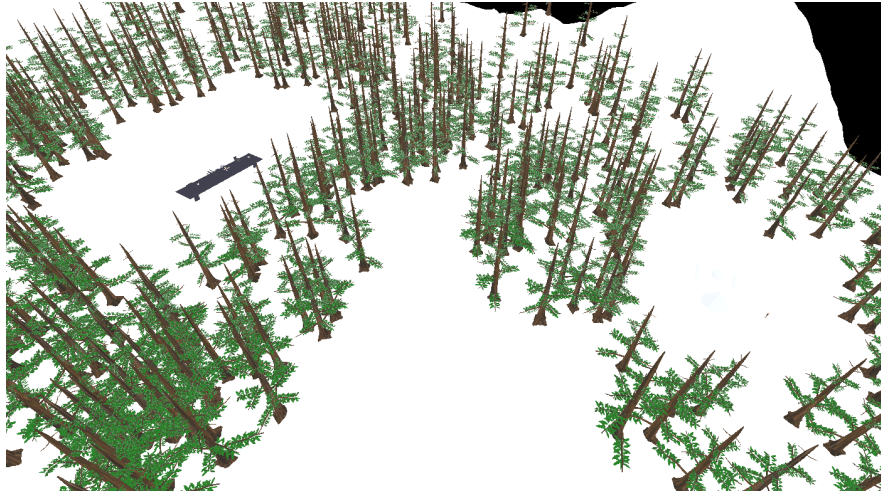 - Blood-stained remains and signs of struggle.
  - Image:

- **Frozen Cave**
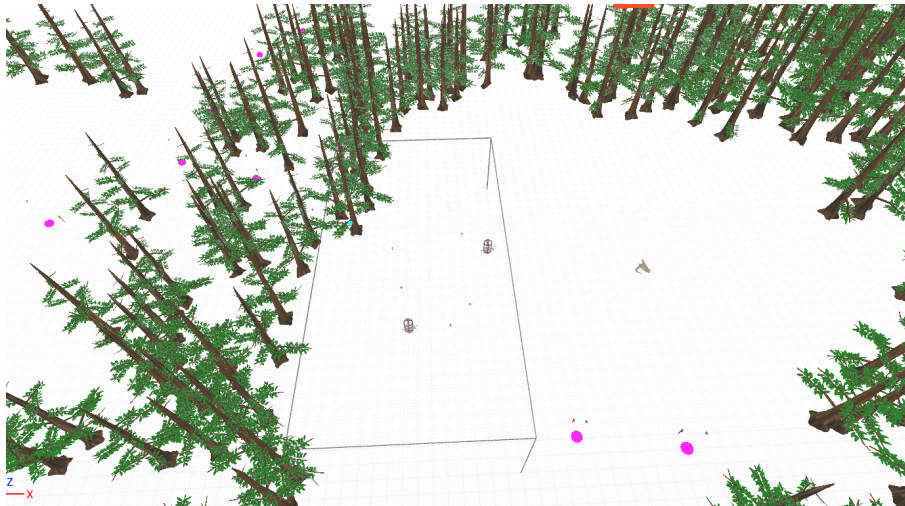 - Hidden cavern encased in ice.
  - Image:

- **Cult Ritual Site**
  - Altars, symbols, Wendigo idols.
  - Image:

- **Old Burial Mound**
  - A strange memorial, its meaning lost to years of harsh weather.
  - Image:

IV.   UI Mockups

- Pixel Art Game Logo
    - Art is supposed to be bright for contrast and reminiscent of icicles
    - Image:

- Pixel Art Game Splash
    - Eerie image of a Deer skull meant to evoke horror elements and imagery of the Wendigo
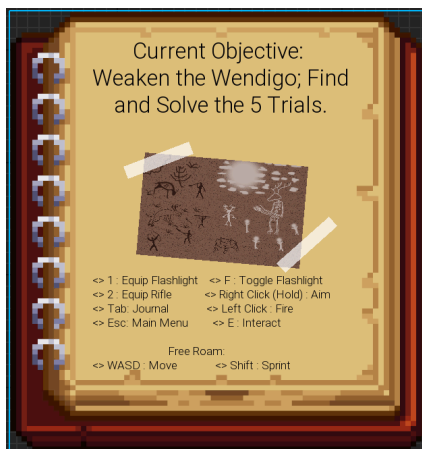   - Image:

- Pixel Art Game HUD
  - Reminiscent of older First-Person Dungeon Crawlers, the comprehensive HUD that contains information about the player's Sanity, Hunger, & Temperature levels, as well as the active equipped tool & appropriate tool meter, and an image of the journal as well as a compass.
  - Image:

- Pixel Art Game Journal Menu
  - Menu container for the journal, which would contain text for mission objectives and active control schemes.
  - Image:

- Pop-Up Text Example
  - Certain events, like transitions between point-and-click navigation and free-roam sections, require pop-up text to notify players of the change.
  - Image:
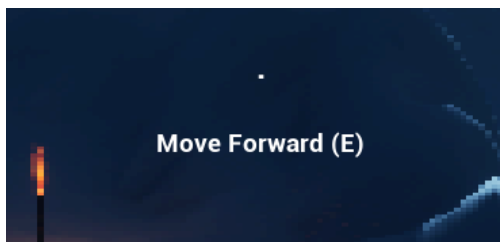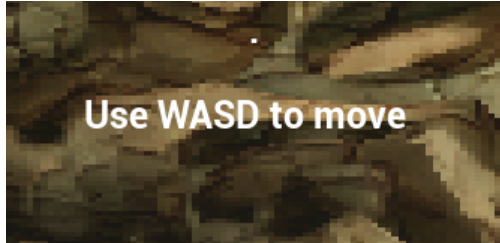
V. Sound Asset List

- **INDIVIDUAL SOUNDS**
  - Campfire
  - (1,3),
  - Axe Hit,
  - Ice Shovel,
  - Wind,
  - Apple bite B
  - Page Sounds (2 A-C, 6 A-B)
  - Rifle_3
  - Creaking Chair (1-3)
  - Cult Mutterings
  - Rifle Loading Sound
  - Cultists hit sound (O, P, Q, R)
  - Player hit sounds (1,2,5,6)
  - Heartbeat sounds (2_2.1 (pitch shift))

- **SOUNDSCAPES**
  - Outdoor Soundscape,

- **OUTDOORS**
  - Strong Wind (1, 2),
  - Wind_edit,
  - CampFire,
  - CampFire (2, 3)

- **ANIMALS**
  - OWLS_,
  - Growl_long_version,
  - Wolf Whimper (a,b,c),
  - Wolf howl,

- **WALKING**
  - Snow Steps
  - Snow Steps (long)
  - Walking on Dirt Path and Leaves 1
 - Walking on Dirt Path and Leaves 2
  - Walking on Dirt Path and Leaves 3

- **HALLUCINATIONS**
  - Splash (Echo only)
  - Zombies_mixdown
  - Zombies_RUN_mixdown

- **WENDIGO**
  - WENDIGO HOWL (B-C)

- **MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS**
  - Bone Chime
  - Ice Chime
  - Metal Chime
  - Harp Strings (1-4)

- **MUSIC**
  - Suspense (1-3)
  - Battle Music 1
  - Battle Music 2
  - Calm Music
  - Horror Calm Ambient
  - Creepy String Instrument
  - Combat Music 1
  - Fast Battle Background
  - Slow Music Background
  - String Horror Theme

VI.   Food Item Asset List

- Apple
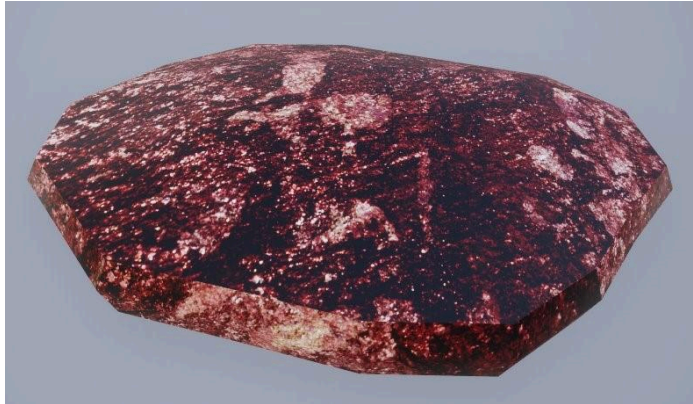   - Restores 15 Hunger
    - Image:

- Bread
    - Restores 30 Hunger
    - Image:
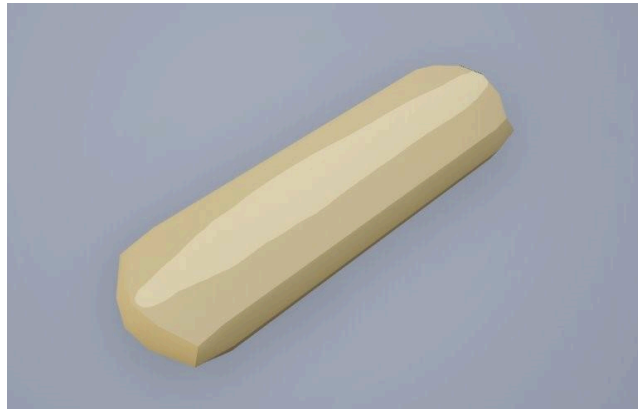
- Rotted Meat
  - Restores 20 Hunger
  - Reduces Sanity by 20
  - Image:

- Mysterious Meat
  - Restores 40 Hunger
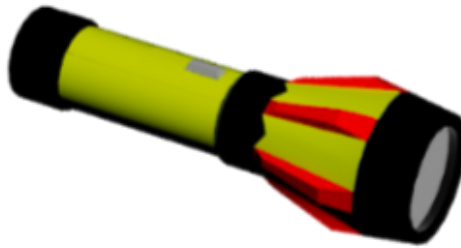 - Reduces Sanity by 10
  - Image:

VII. Prop Asset List

- Rifle
  - Tool used by player to combat enemies at range
  - Image:

  -
- Flashlight
  - Tool used by player to light up dark scenes
  - Image:

  -
- Ammo Box
  - Consumable used to restore rifle ammo
  - Image:

- ○

- ● Batteries
  - ○ Consumable used to restore flashlight charge
  - ○ Image:

  - ○
- ● Polaroid
  - ○ Consumable used to restore sanity
  - ○ Image: