

You're working on a horror game. The designer has developed three gameplay mechanics: run, sneak, or fight. One of the creative pillars, or guidelines, of the game, is to "motivate the player to embrace the horror." Design a story concept incorporating these elements.

### STEP ONE: Horror game: Run, sneak, or fight. Creative pillar "embrace the horror."

You are a nameless, player-created Avatar. An **evil mage** has locked you inside a many-roomed maze crawling with semi-intelligent flesh-eating **ghouls**. (Pitch to Art: Pale Man of *Pan's Labyrinth* meets Junji Ito's *The Enigma of Amigara Fault*.)

To unlock doors in the maze, you need to obtain the **bloodkey crystals** collared around the ghouls' necks. The only weapon provided in the game is your starting weapon, the **Sacrificial Knife**. You can **outrun** the ghouls, but that won't serve you to get out -- to obtain the crystals, you can either **sneak** behind the ghouls or you can **run at** the ghoul to **fight** them directly. Both cause the ghoul to **startle**, greatly weakening them. Either way, you must approach! Both approaches have their pitfalls.

Failure to end a fight fast enough OR failure to remain stealthed will cause the ghoul to become **enraged**. If you can't **run** away from the enraged ghoul fast enough, it will block the room's exit by destroying their own bloodkey crystal, confining you with it... then it will attack you in rage mode.

If you somehow survive this **fight**, you are left with a broken crystal. But don't despair (heh). A broken bloodkey can be revitalized. You just have to turn the Sacrificial Knife upon yourself, and infuse the crystal with your own blood, at a penalty. But you can only do this trick so many times before you reach fail-state and lose the game.

Later in development, user testing reveals that players really want the ability to crouch. The designer asks you to add it.

### STEP TWO: Add Crouch

A **crouch** could work with sneak of course. I don't think you should be able to move in a crouch though; it should be stationary for extra scary factor, let's assume Design agrees.

The ghouls could have **blind spots** when they become enraged, and a **well-timed crouch** could knock the ghoul out of the rage state and reset it into a base state, giving you a chance to heal up.

**A poorly timed crouch** means you get insta-death devoured in a gory scene (ala the Mori mechanic from *Dead by Daylight*). You'll have to know when to crouch and when to run!

The ability to crouch ratchets the pressure, I think it would make it scarier, and heighten stakes, even though *technically* it makes the rage state safer. But you don't want to watch yourself get eaten!

My character is just a generic avatar at the moment, so there really isn't a specific effect there. But imagine trying to stealth up to a ghoul, messing up and enraging it, and then having to crouch -- there should be a tiny time delay of outcome to allow you to sh\*t a brick while you await your fate-- motionless right in front of the horrible looking thing, praying you've confused it and it's not about to rip you apart for lunch!

**The design department would like three more pitches for the crouch mechanic.**

### **STEP THREE: Modifications/Alternate Pitches to Crouch**

- The ghouls are blind-spotted in their base state, they look down. They are impervious to you until you **crouch** into their field of vision. You must crouch to start any encounter. You can still use **stealth** or **run** to approach, but crouching is the trigger for initiative.
- The door-crystals are set on the floor in front of the door, instead of above it. You must **crouch** to activate and unlock any door.
- The ghouls' weak spot is their knees. You must **crouch** during battle to successfully take them out.

### **FULL STORY PITCH**

You awaken in a dank, crypt-like room, equipped with nothing but a knife. Something shuffles around in the room with you – a ghoul so twisted and horrific you can barely look at it. There are no instructions as to what to do. (Maybe sparse instructions – that's one for playtesting)

As you explore you discover that you are locked in the room. But the shambling ghoul is not! When it loops past the door, a crystal above the door glows blue, as does a smaller crystal collared on the ghoul's neck. (Perhaps the ghoul even briefly opens the door and stands in the doorway). You now understand that you have to get that crystal. Player decides the approach, succeeds (or fails) at taking the ghoul's crystal. It pulses red normally, but shifts to blue when near the door.

The door opens.

The player escapes into a hallway...and is confronted by a long series of doors. There is NO door at either end of the hallway. There is no sign which of the other doors is the right one to open next. One of the rooms will have two doors, progressing you out of this hallway series (and into another). But which one? The player chooses a door. The crystal in their hotbar flashes red...blue...and then cracks, broken. **The choice is made.**

The door opens. Another room. Another ghoul.

As you explore, rooms get larger, more complicated, and filled with clues about your nemesis, the mage who placed you here. (Pitch to Design: The number of ghouls increase, but then their crystals are fragmented, and all ghouls must be defeated in any given room to obtain all pieces of the crystal into one functional bloodkey.)

**As you play on, you realize that these ghouls were once heroes like you.** Some were solo adventures, some were bands of friends. Families. This is why ghouls **stattle**. Their fear is the last shred of their humanity.

You come to this conclusion in at least one of two ways (playstyle dictating this); one, via discovered lore; or two, **you obtain a broken bloodkey and discover the way to get it to work again is by cutting yourself with the Sacrificial Knife and infusing the crystal with your own blood.** Infusing a bloodkey crystal makes your avatar grow ghoulish.

The body changes in appearance, bit by bit, and your thoughts darken, becoming fragmented and fearful... as you begin to crave human flesh. There is a cap on how many times you can pull this infusing trick before you lose your mind and body... and transform fully into a ghoul yourself.

Eventually, you make it out of the maze of corridors. You use everything you've learned and gained to defeat the mage in a final boss battle. You have won!

...But at what price? What have you become? *What have you become???*

## **ENDINGS**

### **Bad Ending:**

In his death throes, the mage reveals that only he could have reverted the remaining ghouls (and there are many, thousands of them) to their formerly human states. Only his living blood could break his spell. Gone forever now. Spilt by *you*.

And now perhaps **one final choice** remains to the player, a choice of two (bad) endings:

Live with what you are now, half man, half horror. Live with what you've done, murdering all the brave souls who came to each room before you, trapping the others you didn't encounter in their hellish existence forever.

*Live with your monstrosity, live with your cowardice.*

*Or turn the knife upon yourself. One last time.*

### **Better Ending:**

As he dies, the mage reveals applying his living blood to his **Master Crystal** is the key to freeing the ghouls. You successfully do this. All the remaining ghouls become human again. But the mage laughs one last time as he dies. For you, player, are only half a ghoul. Your transformation was incomplete.

And so, you, and only you, remain a monster.

### **Best Ending:**

You defeat the mage without ever once infusing a bloodkey crystal. This allows you to free the other ghouls while retaining your own humanity!

O hero triumphant!

Good thing you were *so good* at killing those ghouls. Mercy, you are reassured by those who survived. It was mercy.

*It was mercy.*