

Mutilating The Meaning of Death in *Crawl*

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It all began with a frantic, irrepressible impulse to slaughter. Perhaps there were more of us, but now there were just four, trapped in this godforsaken dungeon and cursed to never leave. Gripped by suspicion and terror, the last words of the decrepit cripple — “Only one shall survive and leave this void” — rang incessantly in our ears. So when our minds finally snapped, the sheer bloodlust pulsing through our veins, we leaped out of our tents with spiked clubs in hand, swinging them right into each other’s brittle torsos. Over and over again we clobbered, till only fleshy, pulpy mush was left and blurry scenes of carnage remained: the spattering of red and guts, the frenzy of movements, the cacophony of howls and shrieks.

But then I found myself breathing. Alive. And everyone else wasn’t. An uncontrollable wave of nausea and anguish suddenly overcame me and I staggered out of the hole, weeping. It’s time to leave. Out of the corner of my eye, however, I spy three restless phantoms rising from the broken bodies of my ex-comrades.

DEATH?

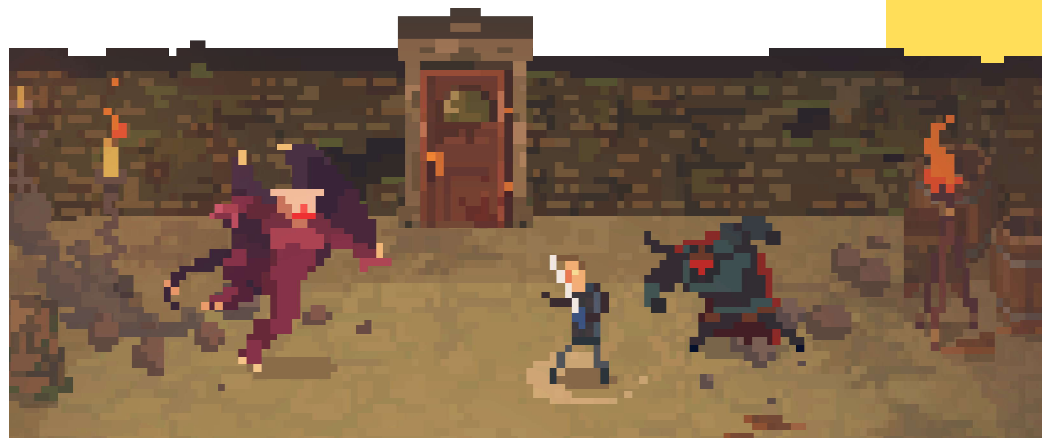
DEATH IS ONLY THE
BEGINNING.

EVEN IN THE RUINS,
DEATH IS DEFILED BY A
POWERFUL, DARK MAGIC
THAT WRITHES WITHIN
THE WALLS OF THESE
CAVES. MARKINGS OF
RITUALISTIC SACRIFICES
ARE STREWN ACROSS THE
UNHALLOWED GROUNDS.
MAGIC SIGILS PULSATE
WITH INCREDIBLE
ENERGY, DRAWING ME
CLOSER AND CLOSER TILL
I WAS ABSORBED INTO ITS
NUCLEUS. THEN I FELT IT
— THE POWER TO
TRANSFORM INTO AND
SUMMON RAVENOUS
GHOULS, ROTTING
CARCASSES AND
MANIACAL PRIESTS TO

STOP THE LIVING, BREATHING FOOL. THAT’S THE
HUMAN, NOW PLAYING PRETEND AT HERO, WHO HAD
TAKEN OUR LIVES, AND WHO ROAMS FREE IN THE
DEPTHS OF THESE DESECRATED HALLS.

THE ELDER GODS HAVE GIFTED ME THEIR STRENGTH,
AND I WILL WRANGLE HIS SOUL OUT OF HIS PUNY BEING,
RIP THE SPINE OUT OF HIS PUTRID FLESH, SHATTER HIS
SPIRIT AS HE’S PAINFULLY GASPING HIS FINAL BREATH-

This cannot be true. These ghastly spectres are relentless in their pursuit, unleashing torrents of repugnant beasts that sought to skin me alive and sacrifice me to their gods. Unlike previous undertakings in another life, dying and losses in this dungeon are routine and infinite, playing out like a malevolent display of necromancy. Even when death



beckons, I don't get to embrace its endless slumber; instead, I am doomed to an eternity of struggling as an apparition myself, forever hankering for the breath of the living.

Like an unwaveringly slow dip into madness, the seclusion poisons my mind, a constant shadow of a reminder that I cannot break free of this vicious cycle. I kill. I die. I kill. I die. When a phantom eventually guts me, it spits out my very essence, wrenching me out of my human husk and into the void once more, where I have to grapple against uneven odds to reclaim my humanity. Yet throughout this struggle, I somehow inherit immense strength and power from primordial forces. My momentary demise has even become necessary and inevitable, serving a bigger purpose than just mere inconvenience. It necessitates competition; it provokes embittered, irrational anger; and the strength I gain from it gives new meaning to the endless cycle of death.

Yet the maddening glow of finality still calls out to me from within the darkness of these caves, waiting to be unearthed amidst all this bloodshed. Whatever that is, I must find it. Conquer it. Hoard it for my own, purportless whim for survival.

HERE IN THE DUSKY
UNDERGROUND A
BLIGHTED GATE AWAITS,
WHERE UNIMAGINABLE
PAIN AND UNTOLD
SALVATION LINGER JUST
BEYOND. HERE IS WHERE
ABSOLUTION LIES IN WAIT,
WHERE BROKEN MINDS
VENTURE FORTH TO
STAND AGAINST
CYCLOPEAN HORRORS,
YEARNING TO BE
RELEASED FROM THEIR
FIENDISH PRISONS. HERE
WE CARVE AND BUTCHER,
LEAVING BEHIND ONLY
BLOODY ENTRAILS
TOWARDS OUR TRUE
DEATH, WHERE WE WILL
FINALLY BE EXPUNGED.

AN AMORPHOUS
SHAPESHIFTER, DEATH
MORPHS AND CONTORTS
INTO DIFFERENT FORMS IN
THIS SUBTERRANEAN
PLANE. ONCE IT WAS
IMPERISHABLE, BUT
THROUGH THE PORTAL IT
WILL ALSO MEET ITS
DEMISE, WHILE OFFERING
DELIVERANCE FOR ONE OF
US.

THIS ONCE ENDLESS
DEATH ULTIMATELY
RENDERS US—MORTALS
AND PHANTOMS—EQUAL.
WE ARE ALL THE SAME, YOU
AND I, TRAPPED IN THIS
NIGHTMARISH, UNDEAD
HELL. WHEN EVEN THE
DREADED VOIDS HAVE
BEEN DEADENED BY
ENTROPY, ONE OF US WILL
STEP FORTH THROUGH
THIS PORTAL, BRAWLING
AGAINST WHATEVER
ABOMINATION THAT
WOULD DEVOUR US,
LEAVING NOT EVEN A
GLIMMER OF BONE
BEHIND.

