

-Better gate guardian instead of exit electronics. = Shadow Man

-Darrell believes he has killed the zombie mom of Pierce, using water.

-Later show this in a flashback -- secret playable cutscene.

-show life as being okay inside the compound at the first

-the day after the boy arrives, he wakes up in the guest room of their house.

-girl is quizzing the boy, and also making him help with chores, etc.

-she's trying to help get him back to normal, by being bossy and pushy and so forth.

-Pierce does not know whether his mom survived the attack, as he was unconscious.

-revisiting the compound when it is overrun. (Level 3 of "tutorial", playing as adults.)

three levels at the start:

-open free compound

-characters running away through northern forest

-parents fleeing their compound to search for the kids

-monster that the kids are with is more evil, even though it doesn't seem like that at first

-zombie mom is a sort of protector figure ongoing and is a divider for at least one ending (do you kill her or not).

-zombie mom didn't really die, but Darrell thinks he killed her (with water, but she wasn't killed by that).

-do several playable cutscenes/levels with the kids

-Mary is kind of a Sarah Conner type of character with really strong-willed nature. She was a statistician. Mary looks on things as a forward-looking fashion, etc.

- Darrell is more the emotionally fragile at this point, and has those "man up" moments for himself, as well as Mary kind of helping him, too.

alternate theories:

-invasion of squids from another planet

-polor axis shift

-genetic mutation from a science lab

-magical curse on humanity

-water sprinklers to take out all the grays in a level, as another weapon. (hit switch on & off)

-water balloons as a new weapon.

-fire hydrant as a new weapon. (Need tool ? to open it)

-kids are safe in there on their own in abandoned prison complex.

-monster wants them so badly that it won't leave the post at front area, where parents can talk to

them at the back of it.

-parents have some sort of action early on in that results in "saving" the kids. (bringing them food & keeping up their morale)

-something is genetically different about the boy that makes him unable to become a gray, and the monster knows this.

-theme: grays are not the cause of the world's problems, they are the effect.

-Squid originates from an ocean area that is off the side of the river, and part of that same area. (adjacent to Alden Ridge.)

-Zombie mom is partially immune to becoming a gray, hence her ability to retain her protective instincts, etc.

-Pierce is fully immune, and hence the squid is studying him.

-Parents generally scavenge one at a time. Dad does it 65%, mom does it about 35% to give him a break.

-Darrell had a long night of fighting off stuff with the saving Pierce, etc. And then he is so tired that he falls asleep while Mary is going off.

-Darrell feels guilty for not killing the zombie mom when he had the chance right after she was turned, so that Pierce is having to then deal with her being around constantly.

-Darrell then has a chance to kill zombie mom or not at a later point in the game, and that has a big impact on the ending.

Intro sequence

Comic Panel (flashback later): Darrell is really being beaten back by the grays, who are on him practically in Boromir-ish proportions. Basically he's the brick wall between tons of grays and the boy, and there are just bodies of the grays all over the place -- he's unwavering in his super-human efforts to protect the boy, is what we want to convey. He's actively being bit on the arm by a gray while he stabs it with his one-tined pitchfork. Keep it T-rated, though. The woman who will become "zombie mom" is knocked down with a gray standing on her really callously. She's dead, but not bloody. Her son, Pierce from the main menu, is knocked unconscious behind Darrell, who is defending him. This is happening in the night, under the harsh moonlight -- it should be the most dramatic scene in the game if we can.

Comic Panel (first panel of the game): Darrell carrying an unconscious Pierce up the steps of the run-down brick house in which his family lives. Part of the 5-acre compound in which his family lives is visible behind him, with some various crops growing in really neatly and densely packed rows. The compound is ringed by an 8-ft iron fence that is all that keeps the grays out. Darrell looks really beaten up and extremely weary, and his clothes are in heroic tatters. It looks to be just after sunrise, and the lighting is really dramatic.

Comic Panel (second panel of the game): Mary and Lela are standing out on a path in the compound yard, with a different side of the fence and yard in view. This way the main gate of the fence is visible, and beyond it there's a view of the massive forest fire and all the dead trees, and beyond it in the distance you can see the top spires of Stantonsburg a bit. Mary has a big wheelbarrow (that deep plastic kind that is great for carrying large stuff) and she has six big water jugs, all empty, loaded in it. She's hugging Lela in farewell before she goes out to get water from a semi-distant well. It's now clearly midmorning, with the sun very high in the sky. In tying this back to the actual game area, should we state that the river water on their property is undrinkable, creating the need for the well to exist?

Part 1 of gameplay

- Pierce doesn't know that his mom was killed, though Lela does from when he came home. When Pierce asks about his mom, Lela kindly deflects it for now.
- When Pierce wakes up, one thought he might share is, "Am I now an orphan... or not?" He could instead say this later, after having seen his mom as a Gray, and after reaching Prison.
- Willis was running from all the Grays that were at the factory where Pierce and his mom also lived, and where there was a break-in of grays that scattered all of them. The break-in was caused by the giant squid, who, unknown to the humans, was there because it sensed Pierce.
- Willis took the same path that Pierce and co. did, but in a more circuitous fashion. All of them were heading along this path because Stantonsburg is the largest nearby town, and they had always said in their factory that their best bet would be Stantonsburg if they got overrun.
- Zombie mom then sees Willis since he is passing by where she was turned, and she then starts pursuing him like any other New Gray would.
- Willis happens to run into the nearby compound that belongs to the Williamses as he flees all the Grays including zombie mom. Just as he's reaching the fence and is trapped in despair, that's when the kids notice him. The kids have just returned to this screen, having completed most of their chores. (The last chore is a lure to return player to this screen.) Willis and Pierce recognize each other; Willis begs Pierce by name to open the gate.
- Still in the in-game engine and the first level, there's a gate up there at the top of the level, and we see Willis arrive and beg for entry. The first level ends when the player uses a key to open the gate and let Willis in (the key was found earlier in the level).
--Add a key that you can use on multiple doors. "Master key" object. This ensures that the player has the key because it has already been used to access the house's basement level.
- Right after the gate is opened, we go to the **next comic panel**. This is a panel with the gate hanging open, because they have not yet had time to close it. The Grays rush onto the screen the moment it opens. The kids hide behind some bushes and Willis runs off with a group of 5-6

Grays right on his heels. The kids have a little bit of discussion about this.

- Then on the **next comic panel**, zombie mom shows up looking fierce. Pierce is the only one who could recognize her given her twisted appearance, and he involuntarily steps out of the bushes. Lela expects this new Gray to rush them and kill them, so she braces for death.

- Then a **third comic panel** show zombie mom turning away from the kids, heading back through the gate, and some commentary from the kids. Pierce letting her know that its his mom, etc.

- Then a fade to black, and we come into an in-game cutscene with the kids. Pierce runs off after his mom without saying anything. Lela mutters “(My father didn’t save you so you could just run off and die...)” and then follows. Then control returns to the player when Lela and Pierce are both at the top part of the screen outside the gate. The exit from the screen into the further woods is to the north (and then it hooks east). Slow Grays swarm around in the south of the screen, so if you go back that way, you die. (Restart Level 2, north of gate.)

--No way to go to the overworld on death when not yet having reached the overworld, note to Chris.

--Level 2 is all avoidance and no weapons. How to avoid enemies and not die when there are enemies chasing you. No weapons, just some tools. Shallow waters. Use scythe to cut a path while being chased. Lots of easy ground to cover (5 screens), to give a sense of travel & distance. Each screen has a puzzle, but if you know its solution, it’s easily passed. Roughly 5 minutes the first time max, yet 30 seconds if a speed run. Can potentially kill foes with firey environment, but not necessary. Gators, king snakes, but no wolves. Slow grays, nothing difficult.

- Second level begins and sees kids fleeing the compound in some fashion, heading north and then far east. The kids hid from the first batch of grays, which pursued Willis south into the compound. So that’s why the kids can’t go south. There are more grays on the way, so they have to hurry; and Pierce is also wanting to follow his mom. Lela doesn’t want him to go alone or to be alone. Pierce just goes and says nothing.

- Second level ends with them at the Prison Complex that is beyond the current golden grays in the northwest of Stantonsburg.

- Squid The Enderman had already detected Pierce, and that’s why he attacked the factory where Pierce and co. were living.

- Partway through the second level, the bushes rustle or whatever, and then we go to a new comic panel that shows the squid emerging. A really big mouth that could swallow you whole, but its eyes are unclear in how dangerous it is. The squid emerges and looks terrifying.

- Then the players get control again, and the squid is there in in-game form, and yet does not harm the players. Just follows them slowly. (Fast enough to catch you, shallow water). This is the first squid screen. He follows you slowly.

-Second screen, squid doesn’t arrive on-screen until player reaches a script trigger-point halfway

through the screen. This route will likely cause the kids to come into close proximity of the squid, where the player will realize the squid doesn't harm you.

-Third screen, prison's entrance is available through a hole small enough for children. It is here that kids have caught up to zombie mom, but there are more Grays here as well.

-- The only way to survive is either to go into the prison (which is ultimately what you have to do), or to go over near the squid, who will attack and kill any grays that get near it. Zombie mom will just stand there, watching.

-- Maybe we need a Slow Gray Spawn point so that as the squid kills Grays, more arrive. They will always arrive from the narrow path that got them here, so that they can't turn back, thus making the building entrance the only option.

-After the second level is complete (with the kids going into the hole), then we show **a comic panel** showing the prison in a dramatic fashion, and the squid monster looking fearsome with the kids clambering into the small hole in the front of the prison to escape everything going on with the squid and the grays outside.

-- If the parents come here later on to rescue the kids, they have to enter the prison from its back entrance. Inmates there are grays that got trapped, etc. They never got freed and thus died, etc. The parents can't enter through the front (being too small of a hole, and having squiddy out there), and so they have to go in the back.

- Then the third level begins with Mary arriving back home and waking Darrell, and them both finding the compound overrun. They are unable to leave through the north (need a compelling obstacle) and thus follow the kids directly. Instead they have to go to the southeast and wind up entering the overworld where level 001 already enters the overworld.

--Parents are trying to find Willis. Mary tells Darrell that she saw Willis run by while she was out, and that he said he was "so sorry about the kids!" This makes Willis their only lead, starting out.

- Then on with the regular game for a while. New game+ would actually start at the start of level 3, since level 3 is the first one that you can get gold on.

- The parents are essentially looking for Willis at first, since they think he has more information than he does.

General thematic things

- "The mom" is what D and M call zombie mom. "The squid" or "that squid" would be what they call the squid. And "the shadow man."

-The shadow man is actually the grim reaper, and he's what blocks you from moving to new areas without going and completing levels. His motivation is that he wants you to kill the grays so that he actually collect their souls. Shadow man can't actually kill grays on his own.

--The shadow man's final showdown is in the Shingen Research Facility if you choose to go that route on breaking the game.

--Shadow Man does not want you to let zombie mom live. Zombie mom dies in every version of the story except if you go to the Shingen Research Facility. The squid kills her except in the cases where you kill her or, ultimately, destroy Shadow Man.

--If you fight the shadow man and win, that's actually making the world a bit worse since his goal is no grays, so that's a very gray area that should be explored.

-The squid leaves the kids alone because they threaten the squid's home in some fashion at Alden Ridge. "Squid eggs" or similar. Darrell could even say, "You go after my kids, I'll go after yours."

-Some sort of visual effect for when the shadow man opens a psychic link to you.

-Shadow man forces you to find the kids and thus hate the squid. This doesn't make you save the kids, but does make you find them.

Phoenix Forest Story Bits

-**Comic panel** for introducing shadow man? Not explaining him, just showing him right before he is first introduced so that you realize he's a significant enemy. Also making it clear through in-game text that it is always the same enemy, not just a class of enemies. "Him again, etc."

-- This comic panel comes up in the first area with the forest fire, when you go to the place where currently the mechanical exit is.

- We should have Willis cowering somewhere in the phoenix forest, and you can encounter him and talk to him only after you've encountered the shadow man. He then talks about how that thing blocks the way of travelers until they do its bidding -- he heard about that at the factory from the three separate travelers that joined the factory compound when *their* compounds were destroyed.

-- Willis is a complete coward, and refuses to help them.

- New **comic panel**: just shadow man on a transparent background, looking like he's flying upwards. We'd use this on top of each background of each type of area when he vanishes (when the overworld area is complete) and have the message "Shadow man has vanished."

Stantonburg Story Bits

Shadow man forces them down the path to find the kids.

In-game cutscene with them seeing the kids through the bars.

- **Comic panel**: first shadow man showing up with the parents looking at the kids through the bars.

- **Comic panel**: Some sort of vision thingie from the shadow man giving further instructions

around this time. Interrupts their time with the kids with the shadow man appearing in freaky close proximity. He shows them Alden Ridge, and the squid eggs there. It also conveys clearly if nonverbally that they must go there and stop the squid or the squid won't let the kids free (and the shadow man can't stop the squid). The shadow man has jobs for them to do on the way, though.

Then further dialogue with the kids in the in-engine cutscenes where they talk about plans briefly, and set up the plot for the rest of the game. They establish where they are going to meet, as well. Establish that there are rations in there.

Phoenix Forest side episode

- For Chris: something secret that you can only return to when you have a combination paper to do so. Potentially run into Willis here. Maybe then he can live?

Stantonsburg side episode

- For Chris: related to the burning house, etc.

Deadlands side episode

Zack - related to the NPC living in that isolated house way to the north.

Marsh side episode

-For Zack: related to the secret facility way down to the south. (Combination paper needed here)

Snow side episode

-For Erik: related to the hermit living over by the ice?

Ganan Fields side episode

-For Zack: something new, optional area, extra challenges both for skill and puzzles. (Exists off to the side from Snow Hill.) Big bugs, maybe castle ruins with dungeon-type levels belowground.

Branch Point 1: Deadlands-Marsh-Snow-Ganan or Mines

-If you go to the mines, then you can't get to the deadlands at all. If you go to the deadlands, then there is an avalanche in the mines.

- There's a section late in the mines, where if you've beaten all the rest of the mines, then that's what triggers you to not be able to go to the deadlands (story piece happens after this). Simply entering the deadlands at all closes off the mines.

- If you go through the mines, then Shadow Man gets pissed and tricks you into a situation where you have to kill zombie mom. Basically this is his revenge for being pissed off that you eluded him. Parents remark “at least he didn’t go after our kids.” **Comic panel** with zombie mom getting killed by both parents at once. Shadow man in background looking menacing and satisfied. Make the player do it before showing this.

- Seeing zombie mom a ton in the deadlands and marsh and snow, etc. The protagonists don’t see that she’s good, and she tears at Darrell’s emotions a bit, too.

- Then in the buildings at the snow town, there’s the poignant scene where the characters realize she’s not a normal gray. There are a bunch of buildings there in the snow town, some of which are pretty close together. There would be grapple points that the players could use with the whip to get from one building to the next. As the players are exploring, they wind up getting chased by a gray horde, and zombie mom is among them. Zombie mom realizes who they are partway through this, and stops and there’s a bit of in-game cutscene with her reactions and the characters’. Then characters have to flee up into the one building they’ve been backed up against, and it seems to be a dead end. However, at the top they’re able to grapple across to the adjacent building. The zombies would just go around, but zombie mom kills them with her New Gray strength and then there’s a long look between her and the characters across the snowy rooftops. Then she leaves. **Comic panel** of them looking across the building tops, with the snowy wind. No text.

- In the desert and the nightdale areas and on until Alden Ridge, you keep seeing zombie mom, but there’s no interaction and it’s very slight. Unless she died, in which case even that doesn’t happen.

Desert side episode

For Erik: new entity that a small ragtag group (research or militant) live out in the desert where there are fewer grays, etc. This is a secret facility you can find.

Nightdale side episode

For Chris: something new.

Branch Point 2: The River or the Bleeding Earth

-two comic panels here, too. Blood or water, hmm.

Alden Ridge side episode

For Erik: something new. Bonus level/scenario away from area on world map.

Near-End Of Alden Ridge Story Bits

Near the end of the game, the squid busts into the prison when the parents destroy its eggs. Willis winds up showing up, trying to save them, and getting killed -- tragic hero plus the squid means business.

Control shifts to the kids, and they wind up having to escape through some tunnels. This is when Willis dies. They have no weapons or anything, and can only flee from both the squid and the tons of grays. Squid also kills the grays that are around. After the first few grays get killed, the others start to flee from it. The tunnel is TEEMING with grays.

At the end of the tunnel is a portal with the shadow man standing near it. That portal leads you to Alden Ridge.

If either of the kids get down to one health in this sequence, then switch to a **comic panel** showing Pierce heroically throwing himself to the squid and Lela escaping through the portal. Pierce then dies and Lela goes on. The normal state is that he dies, but you play really well then he can live. Best 3 endings are only possible if he lives this way.

The squid can't follow you through, so it has to trek all the way to Alden Ridge. Tension!

- What's the significance of the Shingen Research Facility to shadow man?

Endings (16 panels here)

Secret special ending early in the game - Worst "Blind" ending with no text, just lots of sound. Everyone else is dead, and he's crawling around and blind. The super dark ending. Hearing his family turn and come after him, etc. Neither the squid or shadow man die.

A few main ending pieces based on how the final bosses are handled, but then everything else is cobbled together to show you a procedural ending based on what actions you took during the game.