

## ~ Philosophy ~

“I Told You Not To Go To Cat Mountain” is an interactive fiction game that explores the idea of a shared dreamscape, an alternate reality that humans and animals both visit in their sleep. It also looks at issues of guilt and abandonment. Told through a text-based point-and-click format within a browser, with accompanying static artwork and sound, the game draws heavily from the *Sandman* comics by Neil Gaiman, and in particular the story *A Dream Of A Thousand Cats* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Sandman:\\_Dream\\_Country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sandman:_Dream_Country)).

I want to explore the idea of the shared dreamscape, to look at issues of guilt within dreams, and to try creating an interactive fiction game. I also have an interest in the short-form game, in pieces of narrative fiction that can be completed in a relatively short space of time (less than 30 minutes) but which reward the player for returning and replaying the game to uncover its full extent.

## ~ Feature Set ~

The game uses the interactive fiction game format - that is, the majority of the game is experienced as text on a screen, in which the player clicks links to progress through the game. Rather than being an open-ended gameworld, that the player can explore freely, they player is restricted to following the story down specific paths, branching off down multiple paths, but not “wandering” the world freely as in a modern RPG such as *Skyrim*. The text might be accompanied by some graphics, or sound, but these are not interactive.

The game is explored through conversations with the animal-headed memory people, different conversation options are unlocked for next time. Additionally, the player can select different locations to visit, and choose from a fixed list of actions.

If a player is used to a more open-ended graphical interface, this may sound limiting, but in fact is a good way of representing the intended claustrophobic feel of the game’s setting (Cat Mountain). The central idea of the game is that the PC is trapped and cannot escape the mountain, even through “death” within the dream.

Further linking in to this idea of being “trapped”, and the idea of trying to wake up from a dream but finding oneself still locked in it, is the sequence of multiple endings. The idea of being unable to wake up from a dream, or thinking you have woken up even though you are still within the dream, is something I have personally experienced and something I believe will resonate with other people.

Ultimately, the game “I Told You Not To Go To Cat Mountain” is telling a story - the PC is working through their own sense of loss over various people in their life, and the loss felt by their pet cat Molly. The interactive fiction format, with its focus on the inner life and feelings of the characters, is well suited to the overall narrative of the game.

## ~ Gameworld ~

The game takes place on a mysterious, mist-shrouded mountain. This is Cat Mountain. It is cold, it is wet. It is early evening just before dusk. A few stunted trees grow in the rocky mountain soil, and these seem to have been repeatedly chewed and scratched by giant teeth and claws. Visibility is so poor that it is hard to see more than a few feet ahead. Trying to walk away from the mountain is impossible, as upon doing so the PC

stumbles through the mist only to find themselves back in the same place. In the mist, the PC hears the mewling of kittens. Occasionally, the whole mountain shakes.

The village is strange, as it appear to be constructed entirely from cardboard boxes. This is because Molly loves sitting in cardboard boxes, so they feature heavily in her dream. The inhabitants have human bodies, but the heads of mice, of birds, of moths, of frogs, and other small animals that a cat might hunt. Within the village, there is a marketplace, a path leading to a hut near the edge of a rocky cliff, and a maze of narrow streets and cardboard box huts. Within the marketplace is the PC's best friend from schooldays, with whom they have lost touch. In a house in the backstreets there is a house that resembles their own inside, and there is the PC's ex-boyfriend. Finally, in the hut near the cliff edge, is the PC's deceased father.

There is a single rough track leading up from the village, up towards the top of Cat Mountain. Following the path up leads to a cave at the top of the mountain. The cave is very dark, and smells of meat. Outside the rocks have been scabbled over to hide animal scat with a sharp, bitter scent. Inside the cave sleeps a giant white cat with black tips to her ears. She is enormous - the size of an office building, of a hillside. She hides tight and snug within the cave, shaking the whole mountain when she wiggles to pounce.

The PC starts at the base of the mountain, and must first climb halfway to the village, then up to the cave at the top of the mountain where the giant, sleeping dream-avatar of Molly awaits.

## ~ *Implementation* ~

To develop this game, I will be using the Twine game creation engine: <http://twinery.org/>

Twine is an open-source tool for creating interactive stories. Games created in Twine are published directly to HTML, which can then be hosted on a web server and played in a browser. Twine allows for extremely easy creation of simple point-and-click text interfaces. By adding in further code, games can be easily extended your stories with variables, conditional logic, images, CSS, and JavaScript.

## ~ *Visual Examples* ~

The game is intended to be a simple text-based point and click game, with black text on a white background, with some simple black and white graphics.

In terms of feel for the game, two main visual influences will be:

*LIMBO* by independent Danish game developer Playdead: <http://playdead.com/limbo/>

*my father's long, long Legs* by Michael Lutz: <http://correlatedcontents.com/misc/Father.html>

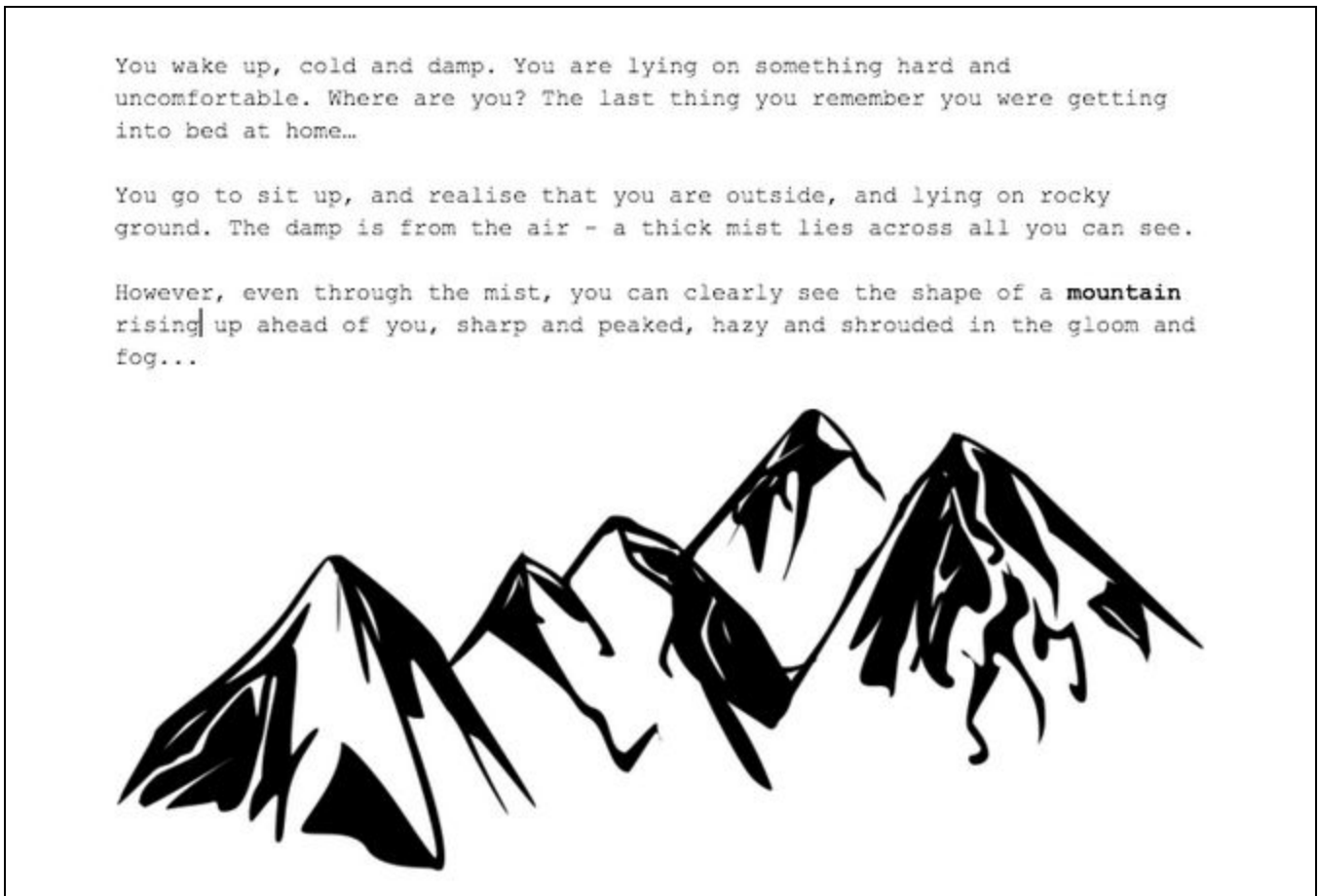
These are seminal games within the puzzler and horror genres.

~ I Told You Not To Go To Cat Mountain: Game Design Document ~



Screenshots from **LIMBO** (left) and **my father's long, long legs** (right)

My graphic skills are limited, but the sample screenshot from "I Told You Not To Go To Cat Mountain" below should give an understanding of the look-and-feel of the game. The **bold text** represents a link that can be clicked. On the first screen, there is only one link that can be clicked, to initially guide the player through learning the interface of the game.



Sample screen from **I Told You Not To Go To Cat Mountain**

## ~ **Gameplay Mechanics and Systems** ~

The game “I Told You Not To Go To Cat Mountain” will be a text-based, point and click adventure game, where the player can choose from a list of possible actions or replies.

It is a closed world game, where the player’s exploration is limited to three main areas:

- base of mountain
- village with cliff
- mountaintop with cave

The player can collect three specific items within the game (a kitten, a feather cat toy, and a bag of duck strips). They can collect only these three items, which stay with them even once they die. Therefore there is a limited, specific inventory of items which must be obtained to unlock full ending.

Dying within the “I Told You Not To Go To Cat Mountain” world brings the PC back to the start of the game, but with their inventory intact. In fact, the game is a narrative loop: the PC MUST die multiple times to be able to complete the game. The specific ways to end the game are:

- Waiting until dusk in the village - return to start
- Climbing to the cave without all three items to complete the game - return to start
- Jumping off the cliff without Molly - return to start
- Jumping off the cliff after Molly - wake up and end the game

“I Told You Not To Go To Cat Mountain” is intended to be claustrophobic, with a limited world and inability to escape. The closed world and limited text options presented to a player highlight this fact.

“I Told You Not To Go To Cat Mountain” intends to explore inner life and feelings: text-based game allows for explorations of inner life.

“I Told You Not To Go To Cat Mountain” is intended to be cyclical and episodic, mimicking the experience of a dream:

- Dreams are episodic in nature
- Dreams have episodes where the dreamer is convinced that they have “woken up”, but are in fact still in the dream

Finally, “I Told You Not To Go To Cat Mountain” is intended to be played in short sessions (less than 30 minutes). The fact that it is browser-based means it has a low barrier to entry, and it will be easy for people to start it quickly and easily on any device such as a laptop or even a smartphone, hopefully then being intrigued by the story, and with the very simple mechanics enabling quick learning, and ease of playing.