

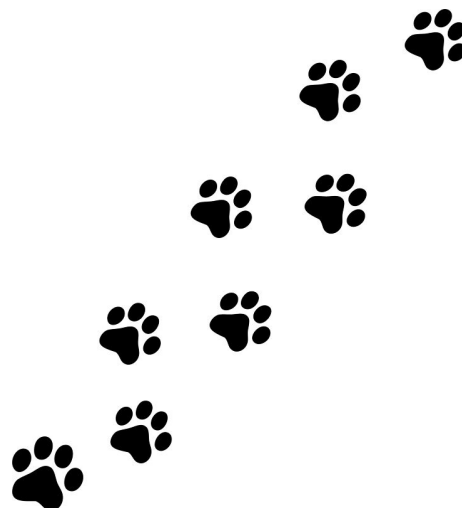
~ **Brief** ~

You awaken near the foot of a mysterious, mist-covered mountain, with no memory of how you got there. This is Cat Mountain. Attempting to walk away from the mountain through the mist simply leads you in a loop back to the same point; climbing the mountain leads a small misty village near a rocky cliff populated by people with the head of mice. Here, you are warned against remaining on the mountain once night falls. If you continue to climb the mountain, you find yourself attacked and killed by a huge, hill-sized cat that seems oddly familiar... only to find yourself once more back at the foot of the mountain. If you dawdle too long in the village, night falls and the cat descends upon the village and destroys it.

The twist is that you, as the main character of the Dreamer, have become trapped in the dream of your pet cat, Molly. Molly is furious that you gave away her kittens, and in her fury has created a nightmare that has trapped you in it. The eventual escape from the mountain is to “wake up” from the dream. To do so, the Dreamer must escape from a dream by “dying” within the dream - but what will happen then...?

“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).

Each time the main character (the Dreamer) “dies”, they will see a list of all the possible endings, highlighting which ones they have unlocked so far. In this way, the player will understand that they must play the game through four times. Three times they will need to complete specific challenges within the village, but each time they will gain further knowledge of how to escape the mountain. More options will become unlocked within the game by playing it. This model of gameplay borrows from the game *The Uncle Who Works For Nintendo* (<http://jayisgames.com/games/the-uncle/>).



~ Setting ~

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 Dreamer stumbles through the mist only to find themselves back in the same place. In the mist, the Dreamer 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 carboard box huts. Within the marketplace is the Dreamer'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 Dreamer's ex-boyfriend. Finally, in the hut near the cliff edge, is the Dreamer'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 Dreamer 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.



~ *Plot / Storyline* ~

At the beginning of the game, the Dreamer awakens near the foot of Cat Mountain, with no memory of how they got here. Although this is not initially revealed, the Dreamer has become trapped in the dream of their pet cat, Molly. Molly is furious that the Dreamer gave away her kittens, and in her fury has created a nightmare that has trapped the Dreamer.

The Dreamer is presented with two options: to walk away from the mountain into the mist, or to climb the single track up the mountain. Attempting to walk away from the mountain through the mist simply leads the Dreamer in a loop back to the same point.

If they follow the track up the mountain, they find themselves in the village of buildings made from cardboard boxes near a rocky cliff. There is a single track that leads up the mountain.

Most of the inhabitants on the village won't speak to the Dreamer, but there are three that will speak. Three different people from the Dreamer's real life - their father, their childhood best friend, their recent ex-partner - warn them against remaining on the mountain once night falls. In this strange village, however, all the inhabitants have the heads of animals. All of these people are people that the character has lost in their waking life in different ways.

The Dreamer must talk to each of these three people, and gain an item from them. There is only time to gain one item before night falls, and the NPCs hide in their houses. However, the Dreamer does keep the item upon "dying" and restarting. These three items are a **kitten**, a **bag of duck strips**, and a **feather on a stick**. In addition to gaining the items, the Dreamer gets a clue about where they are, and what is happening.

If the Dreamer throws themselves off the edge of the cliff, they to wake up back at the start, with all their items intact. There is a sequence where they seem to waking, but the dream-cat pulls them back in.

If the Dreamer continues to climb the mountain, they find themselves at the outside the cave of Molly. They must have all three items to be able to survive, otherwise Molly will kill them... only for them to wake up back at the foot of the mountain, with all the items again.

Each time the Dreamer dies, they will see a list of all the possible endings, highlighting which ones they have unlocked so far. In this way, the Dreamer will understand that they must play the game through four times. Three times they will need to collect specific items from the village, but each time they will gain further knowledge of how to escape the mountain. More options will become unlocked within the game by playing it.

The eventual escape from the mountain is to "wake up" from the dream. To do so, the character must use the standard trope of escape from a dream - they must die in the dream, specifically by throwing themselves off the small cliff by the village. However, this will initially just bring them back to the same place - the reason being, they also need to wake up Molly the Cat.

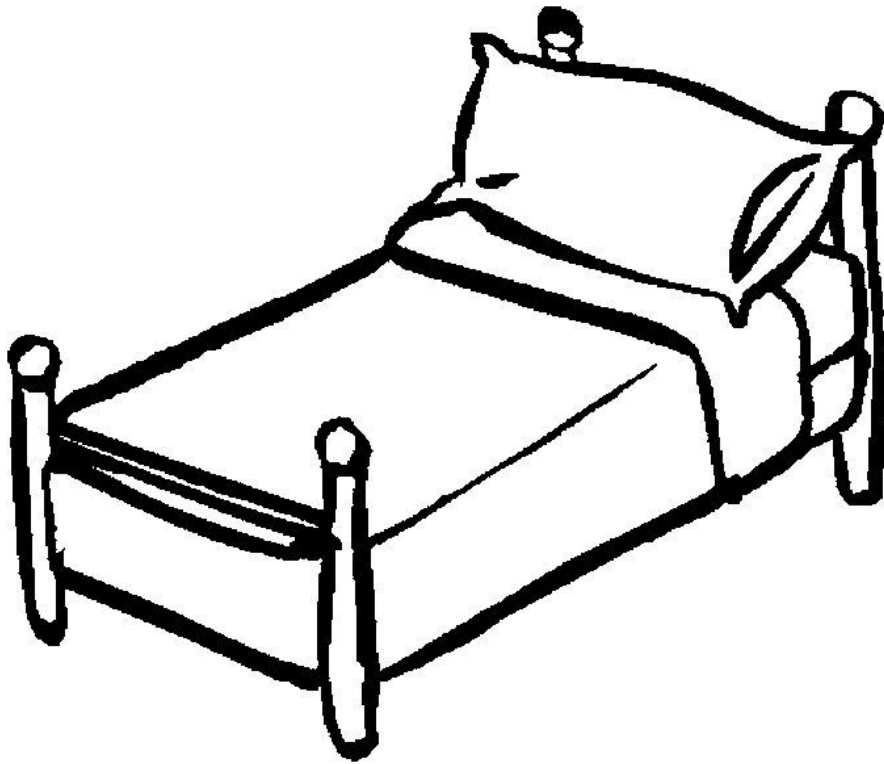
To take up Molly the cat, the Dreamer needs to collect three items from the three animal-headed inhabitants of the village, and gain the following items:

1. Father - a kitten
2. Partner - duck strips
3. Friend - a feather on a stick

The final sequence to defeat Molly is:

1. Tempt her out of the cave with the cat toy and lead her to the cliff
2. Give her the kitten to stop her batting you over the edge of the cliff
3. Get her to jump over the cliff by throwing the duck strips over

This time, upon “dying” within the dream, the Dreamer wakes in their own bed, with Molly also waking up her sleep and wrapped around the character’s head. Slightly spooked, they move Molly to her own basket in another room, and the game ends.



~ Characters ~

Main Player Character: The Dreamer

The main player character is an unnamed female character. As this game is text-based, they are simply addressed as “You” throughout the game. For the purposes of this document, it is helpful to refer to the main character as the Dreamer, although they will not be addressed as such within the game.

NPC: The Father

At the edge of the village, in a hut made from a cardboard box, lives The Dreamer’s deceased father. The Father looks and sounds like a middle-aged man, but he has the head of a frog. This is because of the intersection of The Dreamer and Molly’s dreams, where The Dreamer is remembering people from their past, and Molly is dreaming of hunting. The Dreamer dreams of their father as they feel guilty about not being there when their Father died. After exploring this memory, the Father gives the Dreamer the **Kitten**, which will be needed to wake Molly.

NPC: The Ex Boyfriend

In the village, in a house made of cardboard from the outside but The Dreamer’s old flat inside, is The Dreamer’s Ex Boyfriend. The Ex Boyfriend is a man of around 30 years of age with the head of a mouse. The Dreamer dreams of their Ex Boyfriend as they feel regret about the ending of the relationship, which happened at a distance and lacked closure. After exploring this memory, the Ex Boyfriend gives the Dreamer the **duck strips**, which will be needed to wake Molly.

NPC: The Old Friend

Found in the village marketplace is the Old Friend, who was very close to the Dreamer at university, but from whom the Dreamer is now estranged. The Old Friend is a woman of about 25 years with the head of a moth. The Dreamer dreams of the Old Friends as they feel regret about an argument which soured the friendship. After exploring this memory, the Old Friend gives the Dreamer the **feather on a stick**, which will be needed to wake Molly.

NPC: Molly The Cat

Molly the Cat hides in a cave at the top of the mountain, giving Cat Mountain its name. She is hiding there in preparation for hunting the Dreamer. She is huge - at least 10 metres tall, with a tail as thick as a tree trunk. She has mostly white fur, with black on the tip of her tail and on her ears. When she wiggles, the whole mountain shakes. Molly’s main motivation is revenge - she is furious with the Dreamer for giving away her kittens. The Dreamer is within her dream, where she plans to hunt the Dreamer and toy with her. Molly must be “defeated” - that is, woken up - before the Dreamer can also wake up and escape from her dream.

NPC: The Kitten

The Kitten is one of the four kittens of Molly the Cat. The kitten is a mixture of white (like Molly) and tortoiseshell (like the unknown Father). Unlike Molly, the Kitten is small. It is old enough to walk on its own. Once it has been collected by the Dreamer, the Kitten follows the Dreamer of its own free will. The Kitten likes duck strips, and is happy to see Molly.

~ **Gameplay Mechanics** ~

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.

Instead, 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 fix 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 Dreamer 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 Dreamer 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.

