

Logline: A 9-year-old latchkey kid learns to cope with the emotional complexities of his younger brother's hospitalization by visiting a dream world that mirrors his therapy sessions.

Act 1 - To Go

The player plays a minute or so of a top-down retro handheld minigame. After a bit of playtime, the landline phone rings in the background. The game gets paused.

You are now in **third-person** control of a young boy (about 9 or so) in a very messy bedroom. The boy puts down his GameBoy. The phone is still ringing. As the boy, you can explore the bedroom. On a desk is some unfinished homework, with his name: Oliver Santiago. It was due yesterday. There is a calendar next to the bed with a big blue circle around today's date: xx/xx/2011. The player can choose to keep exploring the bedroom for clues about Oliver's background, or they can answer the phone. If they pick up the phone, they will hear Oliver's mother, telling him that she's going to be home soon to pick him up for his first therapy session. If the player keeps exploring, the phone will go to voicemail and play out loud for the player to hear. The player has a few more minutes of exploration before they hear a knock on the door. They can go back to playing the simple top-down retro game until they hear the knock. **Fade out.**

Fade in: First-person playable cutscene. The player is seated in the back of a moving car, with Oliver's mom in the driver's seat. She asks Oliver questions about school, homework, if he got home alright, if he's eaten yet, etc. The player is prompted to answer with dialogue choices for each question—they can ask questions back to learn more about Oliver's background, and get to decide whether or not they lie to Mom about having done the homework. Through the questions, it is made clear that Mom is passive-aggressively trying to figure out if Oliver even went to school that day, and that Oliver is not happy about having to go to therapy. Mom promises that if Oliver goes to three sessions and still doesn't like therapy, she won't make him go anymore. The last dialogue option the player selects doesn't get answered because Mom gets a call on her phone and answers it instead. Before talking on the phone, Mom drops a bomb: "Also, after this, we're visiting your brother." Oliver's vision gets blurry, and he hears a ringing. **Fade out. There are sounds of a seatbelt unlocking, then of a car door opening and slamming.**

Fade in: Third-person again. Oliver is sitting in a waiting room when his name gets called by a nurse. The player can choose to go into the doctor's office or to interact with the people in the room, who all seem to be staring at him. There is an old man who is very sleepy; when interacted with, he keeps apologizing to someone named Jeremiah in his sleep. There is a young couple arguing amongst themselves viciously. When interacted with, they act sweetly to him while insulting each other. There is another kid Oliver's age screaming at her dad. Oliver's mom sits in a corner seat with her laptop out, calling somebody about "work stuff." When Oliver interacts with her, she curtly tells him to go to the doctor's office, and then goes back to talking about finances over the phone. There is also a vending machine with Oliver's favorite candy, peanut butter cups. If he just had a dollar or some sort of grabbing tool, he'd be able to get one. If Oliver interacts with the machine, he unlocks an extra dialogue option with all the waiting room people where he can ask them for money for the vending machine. His mom doesn't give him any when prompted, but the young couple gives him 50 cents.

Oliver enters the Doctor's office. There are crayon drawings, diplomas, certificates, and owl statues all over the room. A sweet lady named Annie sits behind a desk, and asks Oliver to sit down. He does. Dialogue choices come up with questions for Annie about the owls (she just likes owls), what she's going

to do to him (she laughs: “All I want to do is talk, is that alright with you?”), and if he’ll get to draw too. She pulls out a piece of paper and crayons! Annie asks him to draw a place, any place in the whole world. The player can choose from a beach, a forest campsite, and a snowy mountain. They then get to draw their choice “on paper” using an MS paint-style drawing tool. Annie asks Oliver why he drew the setting, but he’s not sure. She asks him about what it’s like there, and he says he doesn’t remember. They talk a bit more: the player chooses from a list of dialogue options. The dialogue hints towards Annie trying to help Oliver grapple with his low self-esteem, using the drawing as an extended metaphor (“This is your beach--nobody else will love it if you don’t.”). The player sees a foggy photograph of the place Oliver described to Annie. Both figures in the photo are scratched out. A timer dings--Oliver’s session is over. He gets up and opens the door.

Match cut: Oliver hesitantly opens the door to a hospital room. A bald child in a bed (hooked up to equipment, looks to be 6 y/o) sits up when he enters. Oliver’s mom is sitting on the edge of the bed. She’s noticeably not on her phone: “Look who finally came in, Ezra! Your brother is here to say hi.” Ezra waves, visibly excited to see Oliver. The player gets to explore the hospital room. Oliver’s dad is snoring on a chair in the corner. There’s a brand new DS that plays the same minigame that was on the Game Boy in Oliver’s room, but with better graphics. During any interaction with Ezra, the player’s dialogue options are all cold and bitter. Their mom asks if Oliver would share the drawing he made at therapy with Ezra. Oliver refuses. Ezra gets upset, so their mom drives Oliver back home.

Oliver is back in his room. It’s still a mess. The answering machine beeps, and plays: It’s his mom chastising him for being so mean to his brother. She tells him she knows he skipped school, and that she’s really disappointed in him. Also, if he’s hungry, there are frozen dumplings in the fridge. The recording rambles on, and Oliver crawls into bed, drifting to sleep...

Act 2 - Alone

Third-Person Top-Down Survival Game (Don’t Starve style, elements of Minecraft and Terraria)

Oliver wakes up in the place he described to Annie (every detail the player picked during the Annie sequence is used in the making of the location). Several nuggets of information scattered throughout item descriptions, internal dialogue, and collectibles relate the dream to the isolation he feels at home and his low self-worth as a consequence of that. The gameplay revolves around Oliver slowly but surely building a place for himself to live from scratch. Monsters come around at night to snatch his food and supplies. In-game, the process of creating his own place takes years. By the time he’s completely satisfied with his new home, he’s also learned how to take pride in his work, and how to love and trust himself. Oliver completes the house and sleeps in his dream bed one last time. **Fade out.**

Fade in. Oliver wakes up in the real world, in his messy bedroom. A voicemail from his mom plays, telling him to meet her outside for therapy when he’s ready. Oliver looks around at how dirty his room is and frowns. He leaves and comes back with a broom and a sketchbook. Oliver now has the gameplay abilities to clean and customize his room by interacting with either of those items. If the player chooses to clean the room, they can find an equipable flexible extension arm toy. They also unlock a few decorations--some of them are drawings of items he got in his dream, and others are real-life items that had special significance within the dream world (e.g. a stuffed animal that looks like the monsters from his dream). The room functions as an achievement wall of sorts for the rest of the game. When the player is done customizing the room, they are prompted to leave it.

Fade out. There are sounds of a seatbelt unlocking, then of a car door opening and slamming.

Fade in. Oliver is sitting in a waiting room when his name gets called by a nurse. The player can choose to go into the doctor’s office or to interact with the people in the room, who all seem to be staring at him.

The old man is awake now (interaction: he talks about youth and how he used to love someone). The young couple is in tears (interaction: “they seem to have calmed down. I wonder why they came to see Annie.) The waiting room dad is in tears, and his kid is trying to comfort him. Oliver’s mom is still calling somebody about “work stuff.” If Oliver grabbed the extension arm from his room, he can now grab peanut butter cups from the vending machine.

In therapy session two, Oliver is asked about the drawing he made last week. Oliver tells Annie about his dream world. Annie asks if he was alone in his dream. “No, there were monsters there too.” Annie gets Oliver to draw the monsters (MS Paint tool again). In this session, Annie and Oliver work on sharing and connecting emotionally with other people.

When Oliver gets home and eventually goes to sleep, he’s back in his dream world. He opens the door to the home he made to be greeted by what looks like the monster Oliver drew for Annie. The monster shocks the player--the house they made is a safe space, having a threat there should create tension. Oliver wants to kick the monster out, but they beg to stay. Oliver feels bad and agrees to let them live with him until he can teach them how to take care of themselves.

This part of the game plays exactly like the previous dream, except now with a pokemon game/pet simulator/dragon quest element to it on top of everything else—Oliver must provide for his new friend and train them so they can learn how to survive on their own against other monsters). In the process, Oliver learns how to share and connect with others. If the player secured the peanut butter cups previously, they can use them for a strong positive effect on Oliver’s new friend. As the friend levels up, they begin to lose their strange drawn form and resemble the silhouette of somebody familiar, but Oliver can’t quite put his finger on it.

Before Oliver wakes up, the player sees a foggy photograph of the place Oliver described to Annie. One of the figures in the photo is no longer scratched out. It’s a younger Oliver, hugging the other scratched-out figure.

Quicktime. Oliver is woken up by his mom. He was taking a nap on a set of bleachers, wearing a soccer uniform. The game is about to start! He scrambles down and starts playing. Oliver has the choice to either pass the ball so somebody else can score, or try to score himself. If Oliver passes the ball, it scores, but if he hogs it, then he misses.**Fade out. There are sounds of a seatbelt unlocking, then of a car door opening and slamming.**

Fade in. Oliver is sitting in a waiting room when his name gets called by a nurse. The player can choose to go into the doctor’s office or to interact with the people in the room, who all seem to be...doing their own thing? The old man is very happy now (interaction: he talks about his dearly departed husband, Jeremiah). The young couple is in tears (interaction: they are at peace, and have come to terms with the stillborn pregnancy that brought them in.) The waiting room dad is sitting calmly, while the daughter sleeps on his lap. Oliver’s mom is still calling somebody about “work stuff,” but she gives Oliver three dollars for candy.

Session 3. Oliver is excited, if only so that he can stop going afterwards. Annie asks him about the monsters again. Oliver says that he made friends with one of them, but that the others were somewhat violent. After a bit of chatting, Oliver and Annie come to the realization that maybe the other monsters were also hungry, like Oliver’s friend was. Oliver cries when he realizes that he was hurting people like his friend.

When he goes home to sleep, Oliver tries to talk to one of the monsters, and they end up being scared and hungry, like he and Annie thought. Oliver spends this dream starting up a small town for all the

“monsters” to live in (plays like stardew valley/animal crossing). They learn and grow and have relationships and pastimes of their own that Oliver participates in (MySims style minigames).

Act 3.

When Oliver wakes up, it’s because his parents are shaking him awake. Both of them. It’s the middle of the night. They say his brother is feeling really bad. Oliver rushes to put on PJs, and all of them head to the hospital.

When they get there, the primary care physician lets them in, but pulls the parents aside to tell them that to even try and cure the brother, they need to find a bone marrow donor--usually, siblings are the most likely to have matching bone marrow. Meanwhile, Oliver slowly approaches Ezra. They spend a moment together. Oliver apologizes to Ezra about the drawing and tells Ezra about his dreamworld adventures. He draws himself in the dream world, holding hands with the first friend he made there. The player realizes that the silhouette is Ezra’s. Ezra recognizes the dream world to be a place that they used to visit all the time as kids. Ezra asks Oliver if he can be in his dreams with him instead of in the hospital with all the yucky medicine and scary needles. Oliver tells him that he already is.

The player sees a foggy photograph of the place Oliver described to Annie. One of the figures in the photo is no longer scratched out. It’s a younger Oliver, hugging the other scratched-out figure.

END.