

WAITING
BY THE
DOOR

MANUAL

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A Letter from the Creator

This game was inspired by my roommate's cat, Chowder. I used to lie on the couch with him, waiting for her to come home. As soon as he heard her in the hallway, he would run to the door and just sit and wait for her to walk through. In those moments, I never felt alone. But I often wondered what it was like for him when we weren't home. He can't feed himself, he won't use a dirty litter box, and most of all, he's alone.

I used to envy Chowder, sunbathing peacefully on the couch with no responsibilities, but maybe it isn't as easy as it looks. Waiting, not knowing when someone will return, is its own kind of loneliness. That's what inspired me to make this game. It's a reflection of both Chowder and myself: the experience of waiting for someone, holding on to hope, and believing that any minute now, they might walk through the door.

I hope *Waiting by the Door* helps players see that quiet moments can carry deep emotion. For anyone who bears heavy feelings in silence, I want you to know you're not alone. Sometimes, hope is all we have to keep us moving. I hope you'll empathize with Oscar, and show a little extra love to the pets who wait for us, too.

Thank you for playing. I hope you enjoy the experience.

Julia Shen



Story

Oscar stretched out from his afternoon nap, paws flexing against the sunlit floorboards. It was dinnertime, or it should've been. But the house was still. Too still. The comforting scent of Elliot lingered in the air, but his footsteps, his voice, and his presence were gone.

The food bowl sat half-full. The door never opened. Each creak of the floor or rumble of a passing car made Oscar's ears twitch, but it was never Elliot. The last time he saw him, Elliot had been pacing, carrying something invisible but heavy.

Now, with the house hushed and unmoving, Oscar begins to search. Room by room, memory by memory, the story of Elliot, his work, his friendships, and the fallout that followed starts to unfold through the quiet objects left behind. There's more here than Oscar understands, but one thing is certain: something happened. And until he knows what, Oscar will keep looking and keep waiting for Elliot to come home.



Getting Started/Basic Rules & UI

Getting Started

In *Waiting by the Door*, you play as Oscar, a cat left alone in his owner's apartment. The goal is simple: explore the space, uncover memories, and piece together what happened to Elliot.

Controls

- W / A / S / D – Move
- Spacebar – Jump
- E – Interact with objects

Oscar can walk, jump, and investigate items around the apartment. Certain objects will trigger internal monologues or cutscenes that slowly reveal the story.

Gameplay Structure

The game unfolds across three rooms:

1. Bedroom – where stress and early startup memories linger
2. Office – the heart of the conflict
3. Living Room – where the emotional climax occurs

Each room contains 3–4 key objects to interact with. You must explore all story-relevant items in a room to unlock the next.

There is no map, but each space is designed to be intimate and easy to navigate, encouraging slow, thoughtful exploration.

As the game begins, Oscar awakens alone. With Elliot gone and the house unnervingly silent, it's time to start searching.

“Enemies” (Conflict)

In *Waiting by the Door*, the primary conflict is emotional rather than physical. There are no traditional enemies or combat encounters. Instead, the challenges Oscar faces are internal and environmental, shaped by absence, memory, and uncertainty. The “enemies” in this game are:

1. Silence and Isolation

The house feels abandoned. There are no voices, no footsteps, only the distant hum of city life outside. As Oscar, players must confront the loneliness of waiting, piecing together a story in a space that was once full of warmth. The stillness itself becomes something to push through.

2. Fragmented Memories

Each item tells only a small part of the story. The conflict lies in uncovering these scattered clues and assembling them into a fuller picture of Elliot’s disappearance. Players must explore with care, piecing together emotions and events through Oscar’s limited understanding of the world around him.

3. Emotional Uncertainty

Oscar doesn’t know if Elliot will return. As players move through the game, they’re faced with growing doubt. This slow-building emotional tension is the game’s most powerful obstacle.

While there are no visible enemies to avoid or defeat, the emotional weight of each space challenges the player to keep going, to keep waiting, and to care enough to uncover the truth.

Advanced Controls/Gameplay

Waiting by the Door focuses on exploration and emotional storytelling rather than complex mechanics or progression systems. There are no power-ups, hidden items, or upgrades. Oscar does not become more powerful. Instead, the experience deepens as the player uncovers more of Elliot's story. The gameplay remains consistent throughout: explore, interact, and piece together the narrative through Oscar's perspective.

Helpful Tips

Pay attention to details and explore thoroughly.

You must interact with all key objects in a room before you can move on to the next. Listen for sound cues or watch for subtle visual changes that signal progression.

Think like a cat.

Cats love to scratch, knock things over, and leap onto tables. Oscar is no different. Try nudging bottles, pawing at paper bags, jumping onto furniture, or interacting with anything that seems just a little out of place.

Follow the digital trail.

Elliot lives a connected life with phones and laptops. Each might hold part of the story. Look for screens or devices that hint at what he was going through.

Final Demo:

https://mediaspace.illinois.edu/media/t/1_ib8ftcbh