

**The Game of Cat & Rat**  
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Art by Micheala Gustafson

My grandparents talk about fish and coral reefs. The fish and coral probably wouldn't last longer than a week in these times. They looked beautiful though, at least in the books I read. The air quality has changed as well. It changes the appearance of newborns, even the animals

look different. It also messes with people's brains, like the way they dream. Especially when I dream. The only dreams I have are nightmares. Even that seems normal though.

I grew up in a house with my mother and two brothers. My father left us for his "important" business. Really? THAT was the best excuse you could come up with?

I'm going to turn twelve this winter. Nothing exciting will happen. My Mother is always busy grieving over our dead sister. You can request your loved one buried in the house you live in. It's a little disturbing. Her casket is placed in the basement with a glass panel over it. Like in those old horror films.

After taking care of my youngest brother, I headed to my room. It was a long day. And it's going to be a long night.

As I lay my head down, I try to imagine a world of my own. With fish everywhere and beautiful small bugs. It still doesn't work. It doesn't matter what I imagine, it always fails. Slowly, I drift to sleep. I woke in a world full of flowers and beautiful streams.

Then the clouds rolled in. The world became gloomy and black. Looking around, I could see nothing but the darkness. Panic flew through me, I started to run. *I hate the dark, I hate the dark, I hate the dark...* I stumbled down a steep hill, through branches, trees, and leaves. I fell and fell and fell, until I was on the ground again. Dizziness swept through my body. As I got my vision straight, I saw a light brown animal in the trees.

"Hello?" I called, but the animal wouldn't move. As I crept closer, the animal got larger. Now, eye level with this creature, I tapped the back of its head. The thing jolted then turned it's head to face me. It was a deer, eating its young. The dangling body hung from the deer's mouth, motionless. It felt as if I was being sucked up by the dead child's eyes. I heard a voice calling, "*Brother... Brother... Brother!*"

Someone was shaking me. "Cypher, what do you want?" I said in a sigh.

His gentle, pale eyes reminded me of the baby deer. "It's Mother, she's not answering me."

Slowly, I brought myself out of bed and walked my younger brother to the basement.

"Mother, Cypher was asking you a question." I was shocked to hear my voice so unsteady when I spoke.

The room became dark and horrid as my Mother turned her head. Her voice came as a scratchy low noise. She grew as she stood up.

*"How dare you speak to your mother that way!"* Her words were cold, but not directed towards me. I looked at my brother, but he was no longer beside me. As I slowly glanced up, I saw my mother holding him by his scruff and looking him in the eyes. As if he had said something to offend her.

She wasn't my Mother, not anymore. Her figure had changed, She had a disgusting half face, with the other half melting away. She held Cypher with the longest arms and fingers. She slowly turned towards me. *"Don't disobey me, Eno. For if you do, it'll be the last time."*

She brought Cypher up closer to her mouth. Slowly, her mouth grew large, almost like a snake, and ate my brother.

I jolted myself awake. What was that? I woke up. Or at least I thought I did. As I sat in bed, I thought of the dream. *First the deer, then my mother.* Mothers nowadays abandon their children, or worse, kill them. *Am I overthinking this dream? Maybe there's no real meaning to it. I hope.*

I dressed myself and tried to head outside. I needed air after that dream. Sadly, it didn't help. Because I never woke up. The world outside wasn't my own. It looked like an abandoned amusement park.

*This is new. Wonder if there'll be any cannibal mothers here,* I thought to myself. Suddenly a strange zombie-like, limping figure came running towards me. Fear struck me, as I ran. I didn't know where I was going, but at this moment I didn't really care.

As I ran, I heard a voice. *As you run, think about what you will need to do. This is a game Eno. Relax. If you win the game we'll let you wake. Don't die. You'll kill us all.*

Us all? Doesn't it mean me? Or maybe they are a part of me? Oh whatever! The park lasted forever. The creature was right behind me. Then, all of a sudden, it stretched out its arm and grabbed me.

*"I've been waiting for a game of cat and mouse."* it hissed, spitting everywhere.

"You disgust me." I said as I kicked its dripping face and twisted one of its fingers. A cry of pain filled the air and the monster dropped me. I ran some more.

*"A mouse doesn't eat the cat!"* It screamed.

The monster started sprinting towards me again. *"You're not playing by the rules."* The voice was closer, right in my ear almost. I spun around a corner but his arm, again, reached out and grabbed me.

*"Game over RaT!"* As he emphasized "rat," he lifted me up and slowly, I went down a black hole.

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"Will he wake up soon?" My mother was talking now.

*Mom I'm awake I can hear you! I thought.*

"It's not likely. He's deep in a coma. With this atmosphere, hardly any patients wake up."