

Game Title: **The Neverhood**
Platform: **PC**
Genre: **Adventure**
Release Date: **1996**
Developer: **The Neverhood, Inc.**
Publisher: **DreamWorks Interactive**
Creative Director: **Doug TenNapel**
Author of this Review: **Chris Tallman : CTallman@DigiPen.edu**

Overview:

The Neverhood is a goofy adventure game created entirely using stop-motion clay animation. Although the presentation is given with a comical flavor, the narrative design and methodology is non-trivial. Symbolism and the player's imagination are effectively manipulated to create intricate story contexts and game immersion through familiar associations, such as the Hebrew creation story.

Characters:

Klaymen – The protagonist. Although Klaymen doesn't have any dialog in the game, what little recognizable personality he has is presented through body language and sound effects. His personality is almost nonexistent, as he is depicted to be very naïve and infantile; His curiosity is a key trait, which leads him into several quandaries involving learning about *right* and *wrong*. Klaymen's character is the manifestation of growth into adulthood. The choices Klaymen must make become increasingly more important; Further into the game, his choices yield more prominent effects.

Klogg – The antagonist. The distinction between Klogg and Klaymen is extremely stark; For every quality that Klaymen develops, Klogg possesses the opposite quality. For instance, this can be seen though Klaymen showing compassion and acceptance toward a character that was previously hostile; Klogg demonstrates the exact opposite toward this character by destroying him when he is

vulnerable.

Hoborg – The father figure. Hoborg is the powerful creator and king of the Neverhood. He is the god-figure in the story, and is used as a basis for morality. In this story, Hoborg created Klogg to be a companion and the first inhabitant of the Neverhood. Despite Hoborg's benevolence, Klogg is rebellious and indifferent; This is important to the story, as Hoborg becomes overthrown and imprisoned by his own companion.

Breakdown:

The Neverhood uses symbolism to demonstrate the classic *good versus evil* theme. Easily recognizable symbols for good (or evil) can be seen in the physical appearance of the characters. Klaymen is depicted with average stature, logical proportions, and smooth, round edges. Klogg, alternatively, is given a thin, gangly stature, asymmetrical proportions, and sharp, spiny edges. Hoborg has a robust build, very geometric proportions (that is, He is made of connected cubes), and edges forming right angles. This symbolism attempts to distinguish personality and moral perspectives in the characters by using visual cues: Defining a character's inner identity using outer terms.

An even more recognizable symbol comes from the story itself. Using cultural and religious references, *The Neverhood* presents a near-universally familiar theme. This narrative mimics the Hebrew creation story; God created the earth, and shortly afterward, created Adam and Eve. God intended them to live happily in the beautiful Eden. The tree in the center of the garden was the only thing they couldn't have. Through disobedience, they ate the forbidden fruit and sacrificed their relationship with their creator. Similarly, the Neverhood story begins with Hoborg creating the Neverhood. Despite having created a beautiful new world, Hoborg became lonely; He decided to use a “life seed” (a metaphor linked with “good seed” and “bad seed” archetypes) to create Klogg. Klogg

was irreverent and self-centered; Upon trying to steal Hoborg's crown (a symbol of enlightenment), Hoborg scolded and warned Klogg that the crown was the only thing he couldn't have. Disobeying Hoborg, Klogg snatched the crown away and declared himself as the new king of the Neverhood. Hoborg was rendered frozen without his crown, leaving Klogg unhindered.

In addition to symbolism, *The Neverhood* uses another interesting narrative approach: It attempts to present the back-story through finding video disks scattered around the world. The story spans twenty disks, each of which are found out of sequence. This is an interesting design decision, because until the abridging disks are found, the player is left wondering how large story arcs fit together. The player may invent interesting subtext that perpetuates curiosity and commitment. However, the player could alternately conclude that the middle of the story is useless when the end is known. This latter observation doesn't seem to be very relevant, as the player is likely to have questions regarding causation that ultimately need to be answered.

Strongest Element:

The strongest narrative element in *The Neverhood* is the effective use of symbolism. Most of the metaphors are easily identifiable, with more subtle symbols being less important to the narrative intentions. The characters remain consistent with their archetypes and describe the other characters by using contrasting or matching symbols. Klogg's evil persona is opposed to Klaymen's persona as shown through their appearance, choices, and relationship with Hoborg. Hoborg and Klogg have worn the crown, and thus share a similar sense of enlightenment not known to Klaymen. Hoborg and Klaymen demonstrate compassion toward other minor characters, whereas Klogg demonstrates hostility.

Unsuccessful Element:

The weakest story element in *The Neverhood* is the method for presenting the back-story (collecting video disks). Because the back-story is revealed in a non-sequential order the player learns the end of the story before learning the beginning. This result could potentially cause the beginning of the story to be trivialized. The story end cannot easily be supported by preceding story elements until all the disks are collected. If the disks were found in order, the story would be much easier to follow and acknowledge, however the mystery and intrigue of the unknown would be diminished.

Highlight:

Halfway through the game, Klaymen finds a large platform with a giant pin holding two previously separated halves of the Neverhood apart. The pin is the only remaining obstacle preventing him from restoring the broken world and reaching the final area; After much physical exertion, Klaymen manages to pull the giant pin and bring the two halves together. This is a significant chapter in the story, as it represents a threshold required to cross to complete the journey. With the two halves joined, Klaymen is finally face his evil twin, Klogg.

Critical Reception:

1. Gamespot reviewer, Joe Hutsko, was very focused on the difficulty of *The Neverhood*. The puzzles are arguably difficult, with increasingly more complex puzzles late in the game. Completely ignoring the story, artistic qualities, and overall fun factor, the reviewer argues that “*The Neverhood's sum of parts never quite lives up to its promise.*” The review score is 4.9/10.

<http://www.gamespot.com/pc/adventure/neverhood/review.html>

2. AdventureGamers.com presented a well-rounded review of the game. Jim Saighman reviews the game, describing dialog(rather lack of), camera perspective changes, and puzzle difficulty. One notable criticism Saighman makes is about the length of *The Neverhood*, saying “*even by objective standards, it is not a long game.*”The review score is 4.5/5.0.

<http://www.adventuregamers.com/article/id,300>

Lessons:

1. Symbolism is a effective and valuable tool in driving narrative design. Characters are believable when qualities are recognized and identifiable.
2. Even when presented in tandem with comedy, key story plots can be serious. The death of a character can be both humorous and sad.
3. In an unconventional medium (such as stop-motion clay animation), creative freedom exists in the form of fantastic expression. Characters who perform exaggerated or unrealistic actions still remain in character.

Summation:

The Neverhood is unique from many other games; Firstly, the medium used is clay, which allows for wildly exaggerated characters, environments, and situations. The main character is not limited to normal physiology or expressions. Secondly, *The Neverhood* combines humor with serious narrative design – primarily symbols and archetypes. Despite being a game that primarily revolves around traditional adventure elements like puzzle solving and item collection, *The Neverhood* effectively demonstrates character progression, character interaction, and immersion.