

Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: *We Know the Devil*

Platform: PC

Genre: Visual novel/Adventure

Release Date: September 12, 2015

Developer: Pillow Fight, Date Nighto, Worst Girls Games

Publisher: Pillow Fight, Date Nighto

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Aevee Bee

Overview

Being in the Summer Scouts sucks incredibly.

The cabins are stuffy, the beds are gross, the food is grosser, the counselors only sing about Jesus, and they won't let us have a transformation sequence.

These are a few of the beginning lines that start the story in *We Know the Devil*, where the player starts to follow three teenagers on their last days at a Christian summer camp. There is a sense of worry as it is revealed at the start that the devil is behind them, yet our protagonists seem more concerned with other things: the camp leader is stubborn, the bullies are annoying, the cabin wants to collapse on itself, the alcohol tastes bad, and someone is always left alone.

In this adventure visual novel, the player must make decisions on which of the three main characters will be paired up to participate in certain events. These two are given the opportunity to learn more about each other, and about themselves, while the other is occupied doing something else. Players are allowed to choose which characters get the advantage of opening up every few hours, but by 3 AM, something is strange about the one they saw the least of, and suddenly—they know the devil.

Characters

Throughout the game, the player focuses on three main characters participating at the camp who represent Group West.

- **Jupiter** – An over achieving tomboy with a relaxed demeanour who becomes anxious and self-blaming when things go wrong. Jupiter grew up with a strict mother who convinced her that touching others was impolite, while her father taught her that being touched as a girl is "not safe." This made her insecure about her feelings for others, fearing intimacy and becoming visibly uncomfortable whenever any topic relating to her interest in people is brought up.
- **Venus** – An awkward, shy transgender girl who does what is asked and believes people without any questions. This, however, is revealed to be her strategy to maintain neutral stances to avoid upsetting others by playing dumb. In doing so, she occasionally has trouble understanding tones and intent in conversation. Note that Venus' pronouns throughout most of the game are he/him, and is referred to as a boy until she becomes more comfortable with her identity much later on into the story.
- **Neptune** – A teenager perceived by others as the cool mean girl who enjoys fashion and being sarcastic. Neptune has a tendency to manipulate her friends into following her advice and whims, but her friends understand that it is her way of showing she cares, and often finds her sharp tongue to be funny.

While many off-screen characters are mentioned in dialogue, only two others exist with sprites.

- **The Bonfire Captain** – A minor character who gives instructions to the summer scouts. He maintains a happy facade despite not wanting to be there, his sprite showing him with a constant silly smile plastered on his face. The Bonfire Captain is firmly set on the idea that people are either "good" or "bad", with no room for improvement in the context of salvation.
- **Group South** – The only other scout group to be mentioned in the story. They are categorized to be too indistinguishable for the main characters to individually remember (thus being referred to as one entity), even though they have a habit of harassing Venus.

Breakdown

We Know the Devil's narrative tends to be purposefully vague, leaving room for open interpretation during certain scenes. The story trusts the player to build their conclusions based on their own experience and knowledge with religion, sexual orientation & identity, which evokes something personal to the reader. The game first does this by creating a sense of unease.

As soon as you start a new game, you see a background in dull tones while a low hum of music is heard. The sound is calm, and the words on the screen explains:

We're drenched in sunscreen and bug spray and incense. We feel gross, look gross, smell gross.

We're sunburned and bug-bitten and behind us is the devil, every annoyance of summer nipping at our heels.

The music gets louder, the sound of an ominous synth starts to become overwhelming with whispers of a crackling radio. It is as if the dissonant sounds forebode something coming. The main characters appear on the screen as grey monotone sprites with simple shading and noise textures. These elements create a tone of sombreness before the player gets to see the characters behave. Then, Jupiter trips on the group's walk to a meeting, and after making sure she is okay, Venus points out the "light" she believes is the bonfire, but is corrected by a coughing Neptune. These quirks more or less become their respective habits throughout the game: Jupiter getting physically hurt, Venus getting distracted by something in the distance, and Neptune having a coughing fit—each something that foreshadows their downfall.

When they get to the sermon, the Bonfire Captain tells them a story of his youth, back when he had two best friends who always hung out together as a trio. He had secretly thought one was annoying for all his whining and flaky tendencies. Feeling displeased with his friend's difficult behaviour, the Bonfire Captain thought by working harder, he could make up for the former's conduct. But instead, he realized:

I wasn't helping him at all.

You wouldn't have thought it, I wouldn't have thought it, but in the end he was the one that got in deep, deep trouble.

I probably could have stopped it if I'd told him to cut it out and man up instead of basically doing the opposite.

Some friendships you can keep up. The rest you gotta leave up to god.

This memory he shares continues to echo in meaning as the player is only ever prompted to choose which two of the three must stay together to complete an event, while the other is left out. The implication that something terrible is bound to happen in a trio of friends adds a sense of urgency to the already ominous setting with the devil. For example, when Group West heads to the house they are meant to stay in. It is in horrible condition, the electricity is a health hazard and the lock has been broken into. The player is given two choices, both only consisting of written astrology planet symbols representing the main characters' names: "♀ + ♃" and "♃ + ♀"—reading Venus and Jupiter, Jupiter and Venus respectively. Upon the first choice (Venus and Jupiter), the player follows them to the shack in an attempt to find tools that could fix the lock. They find the tape they need in the drawers, and are relieved that they do not have to go back to the captain, despite being the few scouts he likes. The thought of being liked by the Bonfire Captain makes Jupiter uncomfortable, even though she agrees that he would not do anything terrible to them. Then, she suggests that maybe he has already done something, like

“how you don’t have to touch someone to touch someone”, but quickly diminishes the thought instead of clarifying for Venus.

Choosing ♀ + ♀ leaves Venus to unpack as the two others head to the shack. This option brings the pair to a greenhouse, filled with long poppies and blue mushrooms hugging the only source of light. They also note a beautiful dresser that houses several shelves of lilies, impressing them both. Jupiter puts her weight on the dresser to bring attention towards one of the flowers, and in doing so, the cabinet collapses with the sound of scraping wood noises that horrifies them both. She bursts out in tears over ruining the dresser, which prompts Neptune to insist that it was not her fault. While trying to convince her, Neptune becomes distressed over Jupiter’s need to be good by diligently following rules. Neptune starts to draw attention to the hypocrisy that by trying harder to please people more than everyone else, Jupiter is letting them get away with being mean to her, yet she refuses to allow herself the same kind of forgiveness when she makes a mistake. Jupiter weakly promises to try being “less good”, which frustrates Neptune even more.

Both scenes reveal details about Jupiter that only the other character learns through being with her. Venus and her learn that they are similar and share the same sentiment that being good is for the better. Still, neither of them enjoy the positive attention from their captain, who has standards and expectations they are unsure they feel comfortable with. Her line proposing that the Bonfire Captain has already “touched” them shows that she believes there are ways to impact someone without physical contact. If the player chooses the other option, Neptune takes the opportunity to lecture her on how others may take advantage of her kindness, and how she dislikes it when Jupiter becomes self-deprecating. It may seem harsh for Neptune to be so direct about her opinions, but they both know that she only states it because she worries about her. Either way, Jupiter opens up and feels closer to one. The captain’s story brings concern for the other.

An hour time skip occurs after each scene, showing the three of them bantering before the next one of the seven decisions appears. The context is typically focusing on one character who has to do something, and the player picks from the other two. Information about Jupiter, Neptune, and Venus are learned this way, showcasing individual personalities, and how their dynamic differs from person-to-person. When alone, the characters sometimes open up to each other about how they feel for the person who they left behind. Jupiter is perceived as cool and kind by the others, but she thinks Venus is a jerk sometimes, and is ashamed by her feelings for Neptune. Neptune comes off as a strong individual that can stand up for herself, yet she worries how others would perceive them if she pursues a romantic relationship with Jupiter. She hates how both Jupiter and Venus want to be “good” as it makes them more vulnerable, and tries to force them to behave otherwise. Venus is timid and trusting of her friends, but is jealous of how insults do not affect Jupiter, and refuses to be bad no matter how much Neptune pushes it. The time they spend together is empowering because it gives them space to express these feelings and thoughts. On the other hand, the one left behind has to deal with the manifestation of their sin alone.

At 2 AM, they sit awake in the house, not knowing how to take shifts in order to keep watch of the devil that is coming. They have just boosted the signal of their weakening siren, and Jupiter takes the initiative to tune the radio for god’s advice on surviving the night. The trio prays out of habit until they finally hear the voice. The lines spoken by god are passages that reflect

which girl is to be possessed. They stay together, now with the knowledge that they know the devil.

Red Ending (♂):

Jupiter flicks her hairband until it snaps. A storm of hands gathers to restrict the movement of the others as Jupiter begs the two to not touch her. She confesses that she liked the idea that doing good deeds would make her a good person, but how her heart was never quite in it. She recalls her parents teaching her that touching is not allowed for different reasons.

But if it's only what I feel inside that matters, what am I supposed to do?

I can't stop that kind of touch.

So what if I just stopped trying not to, you know?

She tells them that she wants to be touched as much as she wants to be hurt, so she asks them to let her “feel like a real devil for a moment” after having to be the good kid all the time. The two distance themselves from her grasp, and the sound of the radios destroy the devil. Throughout the story, Jupiter has a habit of impulsively flicking her hairband to distract herself from thoughts she deems to be negative. This habit could have developed from an early age, apparent when she may tell Neptune that her dad is also gay, and that many of the things they both do are to avoid making her mom upset. Her internal struggle trying to maintain her feelings for another girl guilts her to hurt herself as a response, and to sidetrack herself from wanting things that her mom would not approve of. Her feelings reveal to be too strong however, and the lack of physical contact left her with the space to invite the devil.

Yellow Ending (♀):

Venus gestures towards the window, asking if they can see the light once more. This time, they can. The light spreads into the house, which influences them to run outside where it ultimately traps them. Venus questions why Jupiter and Venus refuses to let her be consumed by the light. It eventually takes her, and:

She has eyes to fly with and wings to see.

As terrible as an angel, be afraid.

That wing to see the truth and eye to lay it bare.

The two others cover their faces to escape the light, and the sound of the radios destroy the devil. This passage of text is the first instance where Venus is referred to as “she.” This moment itself is meaningful when put into context that throughout the story, she is presented as a cisgender boy, even Jupiter and Venus using he/him pronouns for her. Venus herself never explicitly states that she is different, but she is aware that there is something about her that makes it difficult to fit in. Group South’s actions support this, bullying and antagonizing only Venus out of all the camp scouts. Neptune and Jupiter also hint that she deviates from others. At different

points of the story, the two when alone with Venus may say something similar to the effect that she is “not like other boys” and that she is the only one Neptune can endure at the camp. When Venus takes in the devil, her struggle with her identity finally has closure, and she is able to express herself in a manner that shows her real intentions, something Neptune said Venus is unsure of.

Blue Ending (Ψ):

Neptune rushes to the washroom again as her coughing gets worse, vomiting pools of black into the toilet. The others beg her to open the door when she remains in there for too long. Eventually, the door opens to a standing Neptune with trails of black pouring down her body from her head. She crushes Venus against the wall and Jupiter rushes to free her. Neptune apologizes for lying about being fine, stating they should have known better. She reiterates the unfairness she feels in seeing the others’ need to be “good” when in doing so is making the two feel distressed.

Why did they think I wouldn't notice that?

That it should so obviously be me.

That it should obviously be you.

She justifies her actions pointing out how uncomfortable Venus looks, and implies she could hurt and stain her more. Jupiter too, if she would let her. Her gaze tempts them to drown, but the two choose to stay clean and the sound of the radios destroy the devil. Neptune’s silver tongue and tough love is how she defends herself and her friends, but it is also a weapon she uses to hurt others, to hurt Venus into becoming something different. Her devil is described as “ichor”, meaning blood of the gods, possibly referring to her rejection to what the camp stands for, and god himself. As she slips closer into her own personal hell, she starts coughing up bile more and more until she transforms into something corrupted, assumingly by not allowing god in. By staining her friends, she hopes that they can finally understand that their queerness is normal, going against the camp’s expectations in the criteria for a “good” person.

Dawn eventually arrives and the two talk as the other one rests. The camp scouts around them continue to work. These endings parallel the Bonfire Captain’s story, where the odd one out from a trio becomes trouble, and that there is no use in helping them. His sentiment that “some friendships you can keep up. The rest you gotta leave up to god” resonates in this context where one friend is kept, and the other is “left to god.” Many players by this point assume these are the only endings, however, if the player balances out the seven decisions so that no pairing is picked more often, then when Jupiter dials for god, the devil talks instead. Her voice is honey-like when she begs them to come back, like a mother who yearns for her children:

I can't even come save you.

But I can promise one thing.

There is room for three in my world.

And only two in his.

When the voice stops, Venus absently states that “she was nice” as the other two physically panic. Jupiter says she must have tuned into the wrong frequency, and is quick to blame herself for inviting the devil while Venus believes that an attack will wake them up from this nightmare. Neptune begins destroying their equipment out of anger as she comes to terms with the idea that they will have to interact with the devil. Jupiter tells them to not make her say why they all clearly deserve to be the devil.

True Ending:

The devil comes for all of them. When they are consumed, they hold each other. Venus’ body peels off like an eggshell, Jupiter is light as air as her many arms hug them, and Neptune’s sickness is boiling away. The devil is finally not lonely. The radio is broken, they ask to be let out, and they let themselves out. The other scouts come with their own radios:

There is nothing to fear when there is two against the devil.

But we can't wait to see what they'll do against the three worst girls since Eve.

A new world is revealed to them, with new bodies. They hope more kids come after them, as they have room for everyone. This ending shows Jupiter, Venus, and Neptune at peace with themselves and happy. The devil represents the things they were taught to repress by society, namely their sexuality, gender identity and feelings. Jupiter wants to be able to convey her attractions towards girls, Venus does not want her old body, and Neptune does not want judgment to define her. It is only when they become the devil that they partake in their inner desires and truly accept this. Having “two against the devil” works because it protects them from having to face this at the expense of one. The fact that it takes three to fully come to terms with accepting their queerness goes to show how people are willing to out one in order to protect their own sexual orientation/gender identity. Society here morphs religion to excuse their bigotry, using the idea of the devil to scare away thoughts they deem bad. Metaphorically, it is not the devil they should have hid from. The devil, using the words of the Bonfire Captain, is who allows the “friendships you can keep up. The rest you gotta leave up to god.”

Strongest Element

The character’s realization that they are the devil is arguably the strongest element of the storyline. The player follows Jupiter, Neptune, and Venus on their journey of self discovery, but the main pairing they choose is not the one who undergoes the biggest change. For example, pairing Neptune and Jupiter up all the time results in their budding friendship, but also outcasts Venus whose self-repression manifests into something larger than herself, giving her a glimpse of

what she can have –or be, in this case. The moment when she physically changes into a feminine figure and her pronouns shift to ones she wants, reflects the suppression their society has forced her to endure. It suddenly makes sense why she is so angry at the camp and the world when you avoid leaving her in other playthroughs, and why the other two make exceptions for Venus for being “a boy” because they, too, feel something is different. The same implies for the other endings where Jupiter and Neptune turn into the devil, and indulge in something that has been foreshadowed at, yet the player would not fully understand unless they took the time to see the characters grow themselves. Paired interactions are how characters reveal information they think the other wants to hear. It is how they bond. But the truth is revealed when there is no one else but themselves, and the devil. Each of them turning into the devil during the true ending is where not only do they finally come to terms with how different they are, but also where they learn to accept themselves and wish for the courage for others to do the same.

Unsuccessful Element

The music is something that often changes following the scenes to help convey the mood and emphasize the dreamlike quality of the environment. The theme itself is rhythmically unrelenting up until the last moments when it winds down into the solo synth. Many of the songs have a constant rhythm that gradually builds upon other layers of sound until it reaches an echo quality, which crescendos into a crackling distortion. At best, it makes the player feel as restless as the characters seem. The music is eerie, like the rest of the environment, and it becomes urgent when needed. At worst, it feels *overwhelming*, like you're being slowly dragged into something that gradually smothers you before relenting into disquieting silence. This has been an issue for some players, as the mixing of both the sound effects and music is frequently loud, even if lowered to the minimum. This makes the experience disorienting, and can turn players away if the audio is too distracting, especially in a video game genre where text-based narrative is the main feature and the player is unable to focus on that.

Highlight

There are moments in the story where the writing becomes vague, lacking descriptions in some areas, and using inaccessible language in others. It can be difficult to understand the narrative at moments because of it, but there are scenes that take advantage of the qualities of open interpretation this element allows. The outcome of Jupiter's 12 PM decision highlights this. The three are drunk at the cabin from the alcohol Neptune had hidden when Jupiter suggests playing seven minutes in heaven, a party game where two are selected to do whatever they wish to in a closet. She takes the initiative to go first, and the player is able to choose who she goes with. If Neptune is chosen, the two reach for each other and the scene describes the sounds of

content they make when they feel each other. It is implied they kiss, neither of them choosing to acknowledge what is happening, as that is what makes it real. Neptune eases Jupiter's worries:

It's your word against mine.

A double lock. So it never happened unless we both say it did.

Both agree that they will never talk about this because they know better than to admit what sin they have done, and indirectly tell each other words of confessions in disguise as nonchalant discussions. They blame their drunkenness that consumes their brains, and state that nothing can be proved since no one can see anything. The "hand in the air" is merely nothing. Jupiter is able to touch. Yet, this is not obvious to the player:

Jupiter
This is nothing.

Neptune
Ah.

Jupiter
And so is this.

Neptune
Oh.

Jupiter
This too.

Neptune
You get it. Oh. Exactly. Just...nothing.

Something to a similar extent happens in her route with Venus. If chosen, Venus unintentionally provokes Jupiter who flicks her hairband until it is just the violent sounds of Venus being choked. The player understands that this is all happening purely from context clues and the dialogue that progresses this event. It can say so much about Jupiter—how much she craved to be touched, how much she wanted to hurt, how much the other allows and what it says about *them*. Neptune is reciprocal because she likes her, adding onto her goal to make her "bad" out of love, and Venus quickly forgives her because it is easier, and because Jupiter's wish to touch a girl is validating to Venus' identity. Jupiter's 12 PM event is a highlight because it gives room for the player to understand Jupiter's feelings. It is a moment that portrays the difficulties and beauty in relationships, and how dialogue of expressions can convey so much. It makes them focus on just her sense of touch, the one she fears the most, and it does this by removing descriptions that are to be expected in a scene, especially in the visual novel genre that are already so limited in elements when compared to others. Venus and Neptune have their own

similar opportunities, however, the juxtaposition between their character interactions is not as dramatic.

Critical Reception

WIRED – N/A – In this review, Julie Muncy talks about how the setting affects the relationship-building element from the game, stating that it successfully “makes everything feel heightened, a world in Catholic technicolor.” This raises the stakes of intimacy knowing that the devil is there, which sticks with the player when they choose which character is paired at the expense of the third.

Offworld – N/A – Leigh Alexander’s review sets their focus on *We Know the Devil*’s visual novel format where the writing at times is vague. They refer to it as “non-essential dialogue (neither necessarily characterizing someone nor moving the story or highlighting its theme)” which may at times make it feel like the player is reading a conversation with a niche topic they are struggling to understand unless they are already familiar with it.

Lessons

- **Being “bad” is not necessarily a *bad* thing:** As Neptune herself has already implied, society is not always correct on certain views. If people deem you to be not “good enough” by simply trying to express yourself, then you should find people who are alike and care about you instead of trying to be someone else. Jupiter, for example, is keen on doing what adults in her life want her to do. Nevertheless, in doing so has made her feel insecure about what she truly wants, and has difficulties forming real friendships until she meets Venus and Neptune, who have their own struggles fitting in. There will always be “bad” people, it is just a matter of finding the “right” ones who relate and grow together with you.
- **Building relationships with others can be difficult, but is worth the effort:** The struggle of balancing attention for two friends can be demanding, especially when your time with them is limited. People tend to connect better in one-on-one environments, such are the scenes with pairs, but the majority of the outcomes lead to one being left out. Opening up to one person is hard enough, two can feel awkward when you have to choose. However, being able to maintain a trio requires a strong foundation built on trust that allows a space of honesty. Attempting to balance out the player decisions is difficult and can commonly result in the devil taking one girl. When done right, it is rewarding as a spectator watching them become at peace with themselves.
- **The best “good” people have their own flaws:** Jupiter is often referred to as the one who tries the hardest at camp. Everyone, including Venus and Neptune, likes her and

admires her kindness. It is only when Jupiter is excluded that her insecurities and fears manifest into the devil, and she pressures them to not put her on a pedestal to finally accept her as her own individual. Venus and Neptune are baffled after it is over, surprised it was not them as they agreed they were both bad, and with that they must come to terms that Jupiter was hiding things too.

- **Sometimes writing less is more:** As seen by the outcomes of Jupiter's 12 PM scenes, sometimes you have to trust that the reader can interpret what happens with information previously given to them. This event is one that occurs near the end when the player by now has had time to understand Jupiter's relationships, which allows room to derail from previous writing. The kissing could have been directly described, but that would have taken away the effectiveness of vague writing when they convince themselves that "nothing happened" because to the reader, *nothing* was explicitly stated, therefore we would have to agree. But the player and the characters know better.
- **Make the writing accessible:** On the other hand, while being vague can be effective sometimes, also understand that less writing only works if the previous information is clearly available. When they reach their cabin, their lock is described as broken because they do not hear any "static", and upon further inspection, the "crystal and whisker" is loose. The mental model of the lock is unusual, which makes the player have difficulties understanding what is happening without proper descriptions of signifiers, and having a decision appear right after this moment is jarring for the player. The player is very unlikely to realize what the choices lead to until they move to the shack locations (to find a tool that could fix the lock), and even then, they may come back empty-handed. Yet, the game progresses them inside the house anyway with no answer to why, or to what just happened.

Summation

We Know the Devil is a beautiful visual novel which captures a coming of age story that feels personal to members of the LGBT+ community with themes of self-repression, especially under the guise of religion. Aevee Bee manages to tell a story in a way that seeks to build and speak from the player's experience with who they are, and how different they fit in an overwhelming society. One must be familiar with such emotions and/or concepts before starting the game if they wish to truly immerse themselves. While this may make the writing's language inaccessible sometimes, the narrative is deserving of analysis as any other transformative story that speaks on minorities and the problems they may face. After all, not everyone is familiar with the devil.