

Donovan Sepulveda

History of Games

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## **Kingdom Hearts – A Strange, But Successful Combination**

Disney videogames in the late 1990's were all about happy themes starring the companies most recognizable mascots, including Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Goofy. In 2002, Disney would collaborate with Square Enix in order to create an Action Roleplaying game that would become gigantic in the world of videogames today. It started off on a great foot, with the first game in the series growing a massive following, and the story and scale of the gameplay has only increased with time. Kingdom Hearts is a series that many video game fans can enjoy, and should enjoy. It transcends the demographic of just hitting one target audience through its combination of great storytelling, popular characters, and stellar gameplay mechanics.

### **Story**

Kingdom Hearts starts off featuring three best friends, Sora, the protagonist and main character you play as, and his two friends Riku, and Kairi. The trio seeks to journey from their home island and discover what the world has to offer to them, but their plans are changed when their home island gets attacked by creatures called heartless. Sora gains a weapon called a Keyblade, and is able to use it to fight these heartless. Because there are too many heartless, the island becomes swallowed by darkness, leaving Sora separated from his friends. After the

world is swallowed, Sora is taken to Traverse Town, a world where souls who lost their homes get sent too.

From here, Sora learns that the heartless are trying to destroy all worlds, and he must stop them because he is the Keyblade's Chosen Wielder. He soon meets Donald and Goofy, who come from Disney castle in search of the Keyblade Wielder to stop the heartless as well as find their King, Mickey Mouse. The trio then set off on their mission to not only find the king and destroy the heartless, but find Kairi and Riku as well. Along the way they travel to a numerous amount of Disney themed worlds, meeting both Disney and Final Fantasy characters to help them or impede them along the way.



(From left to right) Goofy, Sora, and Donald

## **Gameplay**

The gameplay in this game is very different from what final fantasy players would expect. Rather than turn based fighting, the combat is all live and fluent, and this makes for fast paced fighting and action that engages the player much more. This combat system is very deep and has many different styles to it, based on the equip system that the players have. With the ability equips, you can not only give your character longer or shorter combos, but you can change the finishing combo move, or even include special abilities that launch powerful combo attacks. Although there is a deep combat system in the game, most of the first half of the game involves the same basic combos and abilities, with little variation and addition. This can be frustrating, as maneuvering Sora and fighting with him can be more of a struggle at times if you're playing with a limited amount of abilities. The combat really hits its peak after the first half of the game and you get more abilities. The game focuses on Sora swinging the keyblade to do combination attacks, but Sora also gains the ability to use magic (Fire, blizzard, thunder, etc.) to help him fight battles. He also gains the ability to Summon, which allows him to call upon an unlocked friend besides Donald or Goofy who will fight alongside him in battle. This adds a lot more depth to the gameplay, rather than just constantly hacking and slashing away at enemies, which will not always work.

Although the gameplay segments can be very exciting and fun, even in the earlier parts of the game, a constant problem tends to be the camera system in the game. Too often did I find myself struggling to move the camera around because it went through a wall or blocked me from seeing what I was doing, and caused me to die because I couldn't find where I was trying to go and got attacked ruthlessly by heartless in later areas. They fixed this problem in the later games, but as for Kingdom Hearts 1, the camera tended to be a greater foe than the enemies you were fighting in some areas of the game.

A poor area where this game struggles is within the travel system between worlds. It's very cool to see how the hub world is used where you can quickly view all of the worlds that you have access too, but traveling there is another story. You fly through little on-rail-shooting segments on the Gummi Ship, and this is where the game struggles most. All you do during these sections is move and shoot other ships that are in your way, collecting pieces that they drop for further enhancements on the Gummi Ship. These sections can be fun at first, but they quickly turn into a drag because they are both very repetitive and at some points very difficult. In my first play through I didn't even understand how to upgrade the Gummi Ship because the tutorial was not only lengthy, but not very good at explaining the method of upgrading your Gummi Ship. This led me to struggle a lot during the later sections where the Gummi Ship levels were much more difficult. Luckily, during the later areas, the Gummi Levels are more removed with the help of a warp system that allows the ship to automatically travel to previously explored worlds, without having to play through the levels again.

The game increases the level of difficulty steadily. This is done effectively through the increase in enemy difficulty as well as complexity of fighting in the game. The gameplay itself is

never something that becomes a struggle to the player, and winning or losing a fight is fair, unless the camera is obstructive to the player. Something that's great to see is that there If I struggled in an area, I would rethink how I distributed my ability points so that I could find success, and that is a very important point to where *Kingdom Hearts'* combat shines. The gameplay would be perfect if the gummi ship levels were improved (Or even removed completely if it wasn't a worthwhile task) and the camera was fixed to properly support how the game is meant to be played.



Boss Fight: Sora VS Cerberus at Olympus Coliseum (Hercules World)

## Graphics

*Kingdom Hearts* has some great graphics and cinematics throughout the game. It followed the trend that many Square Enix games followed, with CGI cinematics in the intro and

ending of the game, and these areas were where the quality of the animation really peaked and showed what the player was getting him or herself into. The graphics throughout the game were also very well done and received. *Kingdom Hearts* won several awards for its high graphical quality, including runner-up for “Best CG Graphics” by IGN, as well as on IGN’s list of “Best Looking Games on PS2. Despite the game looking very polished, there are certain moments where the facial expressions look a bit blurry, as well as some noticeable lip-synching problems.

## **Sound**

The music in the game is mostly composed by Yoko Shimomura, and he did a phenomenal job on it. There was clearly a lot of time spent working on the music and making sure that the orchestrated sections were performed perfectly to not only fit the game, but further immerse the player. They also got a considerable amount of help from Disney, being able to use the music seen through the iconic movies for their respective worlds throughout the games. This also allows for a much more immersive experience that even makes the player feel that they are not only in a game world, but that they are in a Disney world, and that is an important factor for drawing in people to play this game. This is important because it allows Square Enix to widen the demographic that this game can appeal to. *Kingdom Hearts*, because of this, not only appeals to teens, but also to younger players and older players who feel nostalgia to the respective Disney franchises. The voice acting for the English Localization was clearly top notch, with largely noticeable actors playing roles, and doing a great job at it. Some key roles included Haley Joel Osment, Hayden Panettiere, and Mandy Moore.

## Overall

*Kingdom Hearts* is a series that started through an unlikely meeting, but has turned into something much larger, with a whole series that spans multiple consoles, and an even greater fan base that supports the series endlessly. Although this game has its flaws, there are many areas where it shines over all other games within the genre. The captivating story, as well as the stellar gameplay are superb and have only been increased in quality throughout the expansion of the series. If they would have found a good way to use the Gummi Ship in the game, along with working the camera in a much more efficient way, the game would be close to perfect. However, the cons are far outweighed by the pros, and this game is a classic on the PlayStation 2, and a must have for fans of Disney, Square Enix games, and adventure games. With the series now having been re-released onto ps3 in compact HD versions, there has never been a better time to get into the series.

### Works Cited

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