

"Days" offers introspection, brings fun and value

BENJAMIN MANN

You were never supposed to exist. You have no memories of your past. You possess no heart, only body and soul. Such is the premise behind "Kingdom Hearts: 358/2 Days" a title for the popular Nintendo DS system and entry in the very successful "Kingdom Hearts" series. Despite a few shortcomings, it offers a surprisingly deep and cohesive experience that examines what it truly means to "exist" and "feel." It's a title I'd recommend to any DS owner.

"Days" can feel a little confusing at first, especially if you haven't played an entry in the series prior to it. Beginning as Roxas, a young "Nobody" or being without a heart, you start with a completely blank slate, not knowing where

you came from or even how to talk. What you do know though, is that you're the thirteenth member of a dubious group dubbed "Organization XIII" whose own motives are muddled. Those motives help launch the story and provide suspense along the way.

The game's title derives itself from the 358 days Roxas spends within the Organization, and bridges the gap between "Kingdom Hearts" and "Kingdom Hearts II" for the Playstation 2. Still, the game would've been more accessible if it offered a prologue of sorts, highlighting some of the events in the previous games rather than thrusting new players into a confusing situation.

While the story may start over some people's heads, the gameplay itself begins quite the opposite. "Days"

begins with a very lengthy tutorial. While

it's great to ease new players into the game, spending five minutes just to teach you how to use magic feels excessive, and it would've been better if it was optional. Once you're able to pass the tutorial though, the true nature of the game shines through.

Unlike other games in the series, "Days" is

structured by missions, challenges you take on each day set in locations from previous entries in "Kingdom Hearts," such as Agrabah of "Aladdin" fame and Halloween Town from "The Nightmare Before Christmas." The missions themselves remain varied and fun: some require you to find and destroy specific enemies while others require you to gather reconnaissance on a certain world.

The worlds themselves are surprisingly accurate compared to the games they first appeared in, rendered in full 3D. Still, they've been made smaller to fit the portable nature of "Days," and sometimes feel lacking in decoration and characters to interact with. What's disappointing, however, is that "Days" doesn't offer any new worlds. While it's great to return to the castle from "Beauty and the Beast," it would've been even better to check out some new areas.

Because all worlds appear in previous games, "Days" can't help but feel recycled. The audio doesn't help either. Nearly every

song in "Days" is simply ripped from the first two games. There are a few exceptions however, such as a theme for a certain notable character. These original songs really shine, and it's a shame they aren't used more.

Like the original music, "Days" cutscenes are excellent but too sparse. On the DS, they look absolutely incredible, featuring detailed characters, scenes and an all-star

voice cast. The cutscenes tend to show up especially toward the beginning and the end of the game though, and the middle of the story is instead propelled by simple text by characters, not providing any voice work whatsoever.

"Days" weighs in at roughly 30 hours, a lengthy adventure for a DS game, but there's plenty to do even after beating it. There are many optional missions to complete, and even a multiplayer mode that lets you and your friends control one of many characters, working together or against each other on missions.

Even though content such as the audio and environments feels recycled, many ideas, themes and elements are fresh, not only for the series, but for video games in general. It's been a while since I've been so enthralled in a video game story, but "Days" does just that. Even with a few shortcomings, it's a great title and excellent addition to any DS owner's library. It can be picked up for \$35 at your local GameStop.

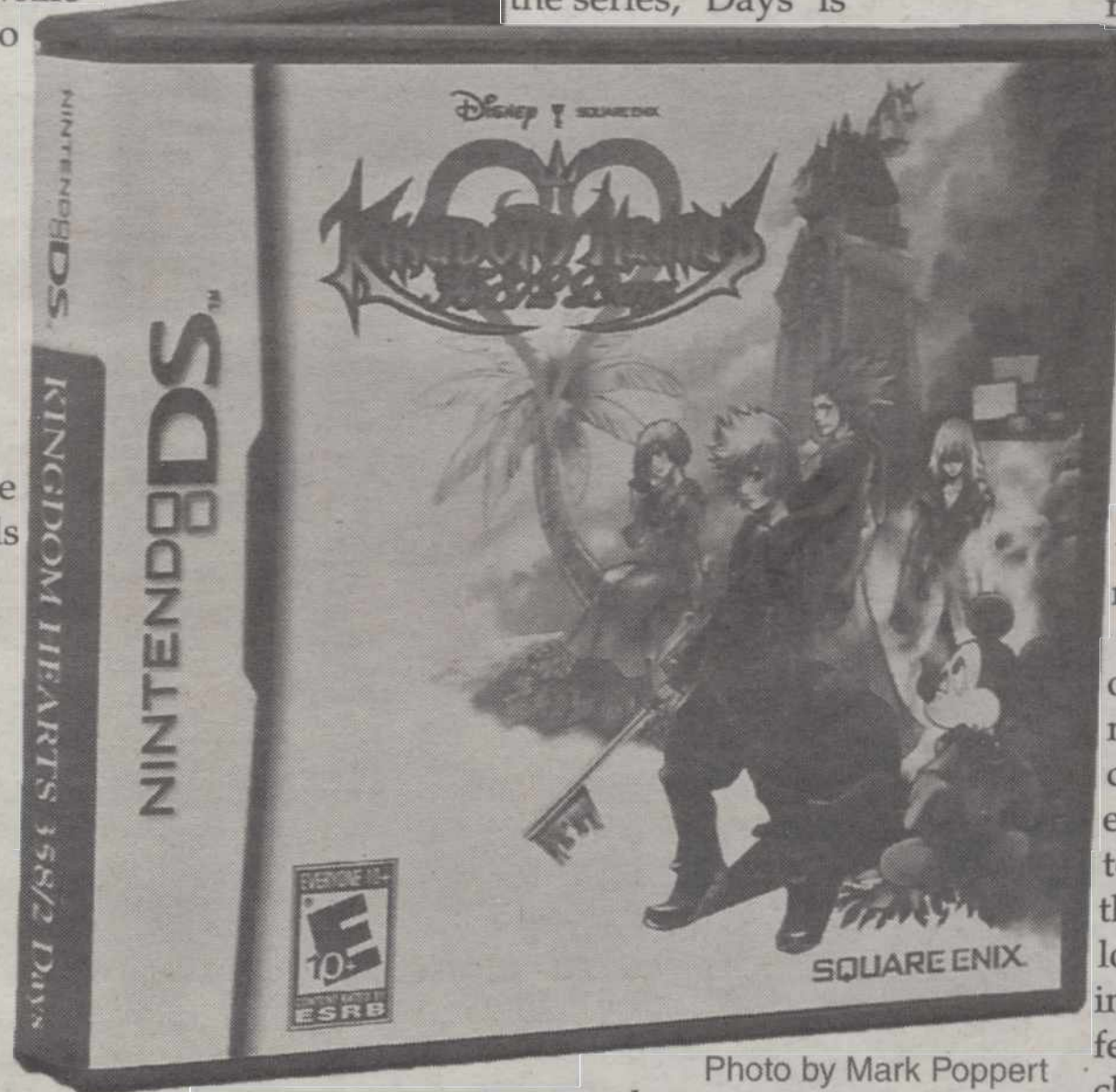


Photo by Mark Poppert

"Sherlock Holmes" is fast-paced fun

ALISON FIELDHOUSE

One of the most memorable stories of all time has been translated into a movie that is both engaging and action-packed. "Sherlock Holmes" is a great watch for those who are familiar with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories and for those who are looking for a movie worth their time and money. It also helped that it was a mystery because I am an avid mystery fan.

The movie is directed by Guy Ritchie and features a slew of A-list actors and actresses, including Robert Downey Jr. as Sherlock Holmes, Jude Law as Dr. John Watson, and Rachel McAdams as Irene Adler. Downey Jr. is brilliant as the astutely observant and whimsical Holmes. Law as Dr. Watson provides the perfect balance of friend and professional. McAdams, although in more of a minor role, stood out in her own way, but was not as memorable as Downey or Law.

Although the movie uses characters from Doyle's original stories, it is not necessary for the viewer to have read the stories to understand the movie. The plot stands alone and starts with fast-paced action that lasts throughout the entire movie. Along with the numerous fight scenes, the mystery story keeps it entertaining. Sherlock Holmes' powers of observation are amazing and I was glued to the screen the entire time. The bad guy was just as devious and dangerous as you would expect him to be and the

movie ended in a way that suggested there would be another to come.

The film is two hours and 14 minutes long but

lover then this will be a great movie for you, and even if you aren't, the action sequences, actors and plot itself will be more

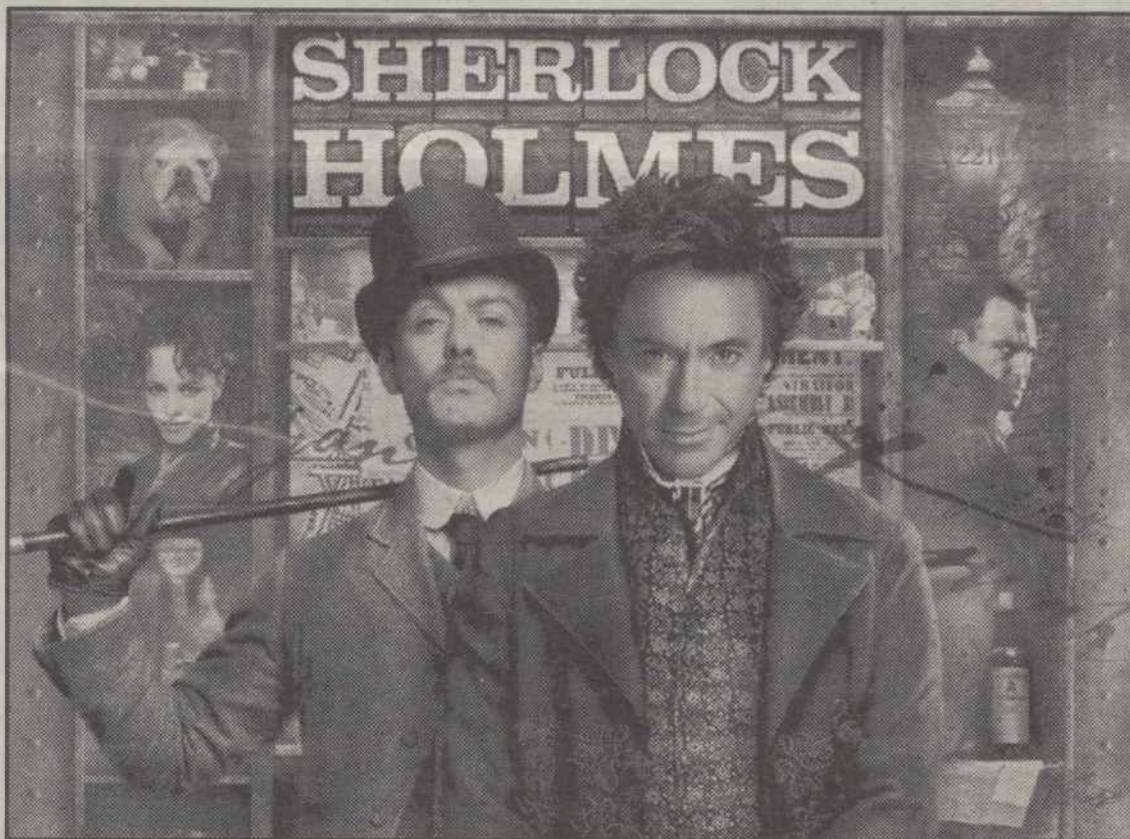


Photo courtesy of Warner Bros.

it doesn't feel like it. The actors brought the story to life and the events kept me entertained and held my interest.

There were no songs used in the movie, but there was musical accompaniment. In a movie such as this, it would have been out of place for actual songs to be used. When the movie came to a suspenseful point in the plot, the musical accompaniment set the mood with the use of string instruments and sound effects.

The scenes used to set the backdrop helped to create a realistic setting for the events; the famous Baker Street that Holmes' lives on, looked and felt authentic. Also, when scenes needed to be dark and gloomy, the foreboding buildings and dark atmosphere produced the desired effect.

If you are a mystery

than enough to hold your interest. Sherlock Holmes was enjoyable and a fun watch.

Information about show times and ticket prices can be found online at www.fandango.com.

