

Review: 'Dragon Quest Builders' a perfect fit on Nintendo Switch

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It's impossible for me to keep up with every game. Dozens of titles launch every month and some are bound to fall to the wayside. That's how "Dragon Quest Builders" fell off my radar in 2016.

Fast-forward two years later and the project has a new lease on life thanks to the Nintendo Switch. Square Enix ported the game to the system and that gives [players](#) another chance to experience one of the better titles spawned from the success of "Minecraft."

"Dragon Quest Builders" adopts the mining, building and resource-gathering of the video game phenomenon and marries it to the elements of the legendary Japanese role-playing game series. The result is a more accessible version of "Minecraft" that leans on storytelling and mission design to teach players the gameplay and carry them through each of the four chapters.

Players create an avatar and take on the role of the legendary Builder who has to save the land of Alefgard from the Dragonlord's domination. The villain and his monsters have conquered the world and taken away humanity's ability to create. Being blessed with ability to construct objects by the goddess Rubiss, the Builder has to re-establish bases in Cantlin, Rimuldar, Kol and Galenholm, and Tantegel.

That's easier said than done as players have to forge bonds with allies by taking on missions. This advances the story and unlocks more items so players can build more useful structures. Success brings its own

problems as it catches the attention of the Dragonlord. He'll send his minions to destroy the base forcing players to rebuild.

Like "Minecraft," "Dragon Quest Builders" fosters a sense of creativity, as players are given tools and have to construct traps, rooms and other amenities. Effectively using space is vital because bases aren't large.

The limitation forces players to be more efficient with their designs. Expert players can build luxurious towers or novices can opt for flat bases. Either strategy is workable, but the fun is in the journey to success. "Dragon Quest Builders" works best when it lets players experiment and learn the building systems.

The other parts of the gameplay—combat and exploration—are more fleshed out and work better than in "Minecraft." The project benefits from Square Enix's action RPG pedigree. In "Dragon Quest Builders," enemies are smarter and more varied. Players even encounter epic boss fights that take some puzzle-solving or careful dodging to win.

Meanwhile, exploration is measured as the campaign for each chapter slowly unfolds and players uncover new portals to advance the narrative. Square Enix does a clever job of intertwining the "Dragon Quest" mythology into the mission design and world building, leveraging the nostalgia of the original NES titles to make it more appealing to core fans. Veterans will recognize the music and other touches that echo the 1980s entries.

For everything that "Dragon Quest Builders" gets right, the game has room for improvement. The camera often needs to be reworked or reset as players move in and out of structures. That could lead to some annoying fidgeting as players look for the best angle to enter a room.

The other problem is that some missions can be frustratingly obtuse.

This often happens when players are looking for that last ingredient to concoct a potion or key item to finish a quest. The game offers no direction when it comes to finding these pieces, and this often leads to hours of aimless wandering. Internet help is vital for a game like this.

Despite these flaws, there's still plenty to like about "Dragon Quest Builders." If the story mode isn't fans' cup of tea, they can focus on building the ultimate headquarters in an unlimited mode in a land called Terra Incognita.

All of this is wrapped in a package that's perfect for the Nintendo Switch. The system's ability to switch from portable to living room console lets players take the game with them anywhere. That's a vital option for a [game](#) designed to devour players' free time and engross them with open-ended gameplay.

'Dragon Quest Builders'

Three stars out of four

Platform: Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, PlayStation Vita

Rating: Everyone 10 and up

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