**I**When Dragon quest XI released, it was the first game I got and immediately started playing on day 1 in a long while. I love Dragon Ball and Toriyama’s artstyle, and I remember playing the shit out of Dragon Warrior Monsters and some Dragon Warrior game (I think 2?) on the Game Boy Color in my teens so I was hyped since seeing the first beautiful footage released of this. So I unpacked it, enjoyed that delicious new game smell, made some coffee and started a glorious day of playing my new game.

**1**

The game is incredibly old school JRPG from the start, including a starting mission where you’re armed with a shit tier wooden weapon and need to find your native village rascal who went in some cave with monsters. But as soon as you walk up a mountain you will notice that it looks really good. The colors and design will stroke your eyes. Obviously the graphics are technically less impressive than the toplookers like Red Dead Redemption 2, but the style itself does look amazing. As far as cell-shaded style graphics go this is the best you’ve ever seen for sure. Seeing this Toriyama style within the beautiful green world was amazing from that first mission on. The game’s presentation is spotless, from intuitive UI’s to the cutscenes and music and the gameplay is very solid JRPG with a classic turn-based battle system. And I mean really solid JRPG. It has you climbing up from dealing 3 HP damage per hit, to slowly getting some simple special attacks to eventually unlocking impressive skills and magical attacks late I the game. While somewhat slow, it’s also nice because you will appreciate every new move and every step in your character growth more. \\n

The story is also slow, but I my opinion this is cute and endearing rather than annoying. There’s attention to detail and emotional fleshing out of the main characters and the world. Sometimes it’s ludicrous elements can get a bit *too much* for me (like the son of the sand empire’s ruler being basically a complete faking useless douche) in general I do really like the pacing and the way in which the story unfold. And it does feel like you are really swept away on and adventure, sometimes choosing your own pace and sometimes being propelled forwards by events beyond your control. There’s side-quests and exploration is worthwhile as hidden items, crafting materials and chests can be anywhere.

**2**

You control a party of max 4 characters in battle, and in typical JRPG fashion the party members are unlocked In the game through story progression. The character design, in line with the graphical quality of the game is spot on. The main characters will grow on you and they’re all memorable. The ones that made the most lasting impression on me are for example Jade who is basically a hot martial arts princess and Sylvando who has some traits of a flamboyant homosexual. But they are all great, design and character wise. They also are all unique in their combat value depending on your preferences and builds. No party member will be useless and completely replaceable by another. There’s alternative costumes which look cool as well so you can put your characters in your favorite style. \\n

The game is also really good gameplay wise, assuming you don’t hate turn-based systems. Dungeons are generally well-designed, barring a few annoying ones (but then again a good RPG needs some of those as well), usually long enough and with enough branches to be interesting but not big and complicated enough to feel like exploring is a chore. Every character has a style broadly fitting RPG archetypes (mage, healer, thief etc. ) but each character also has different kinds of weapons which can dramatically change their style. The thief Erik for example can handle sword or knives, but also boomerangs which always deal (usually less) damage to all enemies. There’s room for variation and different builds; different characters have healing skills and there’s a variety of buffs and debuffs as well to strategize with. You probably don’t need too many elaborate strategies for most of the game but you will at the end game. Besides the character’s unique skills, there an overdrive mechanic (“pep”) which allows for different kind of super attacks, which can combine with different characters for extra strong ones. They look cool and also adds another layer of team building.

**3**

My only issue with the game is that in a certain way it is so slow. I’m not talking about the story or the amount of gameplay as a typical JRPG pace is part of the genre but the game is also slow in introducing both difficulty and the more in-depth game mechanics. Most of all, some of the more interesting role-specific abilities get unlocked really late in the game (and it is a long game!), which is kind of good because it means you will still be unlocking worthwhile abilities end-game too but it is bad because it means you will be able to experiment the more interesting team builds quite late. Likewise the game is really slow to introduce new mechanics, almost to the point where the first whole third of the game feels like it’s the tutorial (and we’re talking a 100+ hour game). There’s a genuinely good and fun crafting mechanism, but unfortunately you have to get pretty far into the game to really be able to make a nice variety of actually useful items.

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Some people hate the fact that the music plays non-stop: it goes from field tune to battle tune to town tune to field tune to dungeon tune to field tune, but a small variety of songs plays all the time. And it is typical Dragon Quest music which I guess can be it or miss, but I didn’t mind. Reminded me of the old days (which is probably exactly what it’s supposed to do). And anyway it is a solid qualitatively high JRPG soundtrack. What did annoy me however, was the fact that enemy battle cries are in these 8-bit sounds I remember straight from Dragon Warrior Game Boy games. It’s a cute thought but for me this feels out of place since the rest looks and sounds beautiful and this lessens the immersion somewhat. \\n

The overall quality, beauty and thorough polish and detail of the game does make up for it all and even when slow I regularly found myself just looking around at the world, the town and the characters. The main quest is long, even for a JRPG and will definitely surprise you. There’s good end game content as well, including some very difficult optional bosses and literally tons of collectable items, including alternatives costumes.

**C**

9.1

Even though I must admit that around the 85 hour playtime mark there was a short while where I though “okay I’m ready for this game to end now” this lasted only shortly and when I did actually finish it I felt about sad about that. It was a beautiful journey, starting as a nobody with shitty equipment, through excitedly visiting the capital for the first time, getting the JRPG classic boat, later on flying whale-thingy all the way to being the full-fledged chosen one with superstring end-game equipment, stats and attacks. The turn-based gameplay, exploring, questing is all very good but the best thing is just the general feeling of following the adventure in this beautiful world, enjoying the excellent visuals, art style and music (yes I liked it). \\n

The pace is somewhat slow and could be higher. And I’m not talking about the cutscenes since that’s kinda part of the genre but I’m talking the pacing of the game. The rate at which the more interesting game mechanics, special skills and difficulty increase are introduced could be faster. However, the sheer beauty and magical vibe of the game easily compensates for this. And late in the game you will need to make use of the most elaborate crafting and combat mechanics of the game to beat the end-game bosses. Stick through these moments when it feels a bit too slow and you’re appetite for this game will soon be revitalized in the game’s next phase.\\n

Dragon Quest XI is a glorious return of a fan favorite, one of the best games on the PS4 (and Switch) and an absolute must play for anyone who likes (J)RPG’s. And it does definitely show that the JRPG genre hasn’t per definition aged bad and that they can adapt to the current gen just fine.