

DUNGEONS AND HANDHELDS

DRAGON QUEST IV

THE CHAPTERS OF THE CHOSEN



FORMAT

DS

PUBLISHER

Square Enix

DEVELOPER

Square Enix

REVIEWED BY

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As David Brent from *The Office* once said, “a good idea is a good idea forever”. Take the wheel as an example - since its conception the idea of a round thing that rolls hasn't really changed much over the years. Unfortunately, videogames can often be an exception to this rule - titles that were genuinely at the cutting edge of game design 15 years ago can look horribly dated and maybe even unplayable today. With this remake of *Dragon Quest IV* for the Nintendo DS (released now with the sub-heading of *The Chapters of the Chosen*), Square Enix have taken a chance that the mechanics of the eighteen-year-old original have managed to survive the test of time and keep up with the relentless pace of technology.

As it turns out, *The Chapters of the Chosen* is every-bit as robust as the wheel and despite the time that has lapsed since it first debuted on the NES in 1990, this faithfully translated and lovingly embellished DS version goes a long way to suggest that Slough's finest might have been on to something. Strip away its gloriously vibrant exterior, and what lies at the core of *TCotC* is strong game design held together with excellent characterisation and genuine charm.

On the surface, this is a fairly traditional role playing game. Delve a little deeper and it becomes apparent that, yes, this *is* a fairly traditional role-playing game. Aside from an interesting narrative structure, it adheres to the conventions that have become genre staples (and that the series no doubt played a large part in shaping); turn-based combat, party management, grinding through a

generous levelling system and rescuing cowering villagers from the forces of darkness are all present and correct. In some respects then, *TCotC* is unlikely to blow you away. In fact, one of the first words that springs to mind is 'cosy' and for hardened RPG fans, the game will probably feel like a pair of favourite pair of slippers; lacking in surprises, but pleasingly comfortable all the same.

This may suggest that *TCotC* is little more than a solid, if unexceptional RPG, but this would do the game a great disservice. Firstly, the care and attention that has gone into sprucing up its source material is evident from the moment you first start exploring the painterly-rendered villages and dungeons. It appears that Square Enix were on a mission to wring every last drop of colour from the DS's frail frame, and as a result, the game is often a feast for the eyes. The understated yet often dazzling visuals impress even further when you first realise that the world can be rotated 360°, a touch that manages to impress more than it probably has any right to. Spread this kaleidoscope of colour over two screens, and you have a game that makes great use of its host console's capabilities, although some use of the touchscreen would have been welcome.

Visually, there are rough edges. Though never short of charm, character sprites are fairly rudimentary and the world map can be a touch on the drab side. Additionally, some of the villages can look a little over familiar, with architecture being repeated and simply



rearranged. However, these small quibbles are easily forgotten when you're locked in combat against a team of ill tempered stick-insects or shovel-wielding moles. It is in fact the combat sections that most neatly sum up *Dragon Quest*. Although technically basic in presentation, the vibrant, imaginative and often quirky character design effortlessly washes away any need for huge polygon counts and bump mapping. Smaller but no less intelligently applied touches such as the day/night cycles - subtly shifting from the bright royal-blue skies of the daytime to the warm orange glow of sunset - further add to the sense of immersion.

Split over five chapters *TCotC*'s narrative structure strays somewhat from RPG convention. Rather than following the classic hero's journey, we are instead presented with four individual narrative threads that tie together in a final chapter. Through this simple idea the game remains engaging and intriguing - and discovering how the four chapters relate to each other is immensely rewarding.



The Chapters of the Chosen is a deep, well conceived, measured and expertly delivered title that is as rewarding to play as it is aesthetically pleasing. It is a title that is both a fascinating glimpse into the past and a wonderful vindication of the importance and durability of solid game design.

Though there are areas that may not appeal to some (the emphasis on grinding will no doubt test the patience of more action-orientated gamers), the game will no doubt serve as an excellent introduction to the RPG genre, as well as an opportunity for European RPG fans to play a previously unreleased title. That it can still hold its own as an excellent game in its own right, remake or not, speaks volumes, and with this as evidence, the upcoming *Dragon Quest IX* is an exciting prospect indeed.

VERDICT ★★★★★