

Game Title: Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride  
Platform: SNES / Nintendo DS  
Genre: Role Playing Game  
Release date: September, 27, 1992 (JPN) / February, 17, 2009 (US)  
Developer: Chunsoft  
Publisher: Enix Corporation  
Writer / Creative Director: Yuji Horii  
Author of this Review: Samuel Dassler ([sammyd@samueldassler.com](mailto:sammyd@samueldassler.com))

## Overview

Although the gameplay of *Dragon Quest V* is similar to every other Dragon Quest title, the narrative of the game is much more involved and personal. It has many mature story concepts that were unheard of at the time for a video game. It told a story which spanned generations and tackled themes such as marriage and pregnancy.

The story of Dragon Quest V covers thirty years of the player-named Hero's life. The player is at first a small child traveling with his father Pankraz. They are searching for both Hero's mother Mada and the Legendary Hero, the only one capable of wielding the Zenithian Equipment against the dark lord. Pankraz is killed by a servant of the dark lord and Hero is forced into slavery. Ten years later Hero escapes and resumes traveling the world to find his mother and the Legendary Hero. He gets married, becomes a king, and has children of his own. He and his wife both end up trapped in stone for eight years. Hero's children rescue him and it's revealed that Hero's Son is the Legendary Hero. Hero and his children set off to find his wife and the reunited family travels to the dark world to destroy the evil lord of darkness, Nimzo.

## Characters

Hero - The main protagonist of *Dragon Quest V*. The story game covers three different phases of his life. At the start of the game he is a six year old boy who can't read. His father is killed and he is sold into slavery. Ten years later he escapes and resumes his journey to find his mother. Hero is unnamed and silent so he functions as an avatar of the player.

Pankraz - Pankraz is the father of Hero. He is the king of Gotha although Hero is initially unaware of this. He left Gotha to find his missing wife and to find the Legendary Hero.

Sancho - The attendant to Pankraz and Hero. He travels the world first with Pankraz and Hero, and later with Hero's children. He is fiercely loyal to Hero's family and the kingdom of Gotha.

Prince Harry - Harry is the Prince of Coburn. As a child he had a reputation for poor behavior which indirectly caused his slavery and the death of Pankraz. The two escape ten years later and he eventually becomes the responsible king of Coburn.

Bianca Whitaker - Bianca is a childhood friend of Hero. They are separated but many years later she becomes one of Hero's potential brides.

Nera and Debora Briscoletti - Daughters of a wealthy merchant. Their father allows Hero to have one of their hands in marriage after proving himself. Debora is shrewish while Nera is sweet and loving. Both are loyal to Hero and support his quest.

Boy - Boy is Hero's son. He is also capable of wielding the Zenithian Equipment, a magical set of armor, which proves that he is the Legendary Hero that Pankraz was searching for but wasn't born until nearly two decades after Pankraz's death.

Girl - The twin sister of Boy. Like Hero and her brother she is named by the player. She can talk to animals which is a trait shared by her father and grandmother.

Bishop Ladja - Ladja is a servant of Nimzo, the dark lord. He captured Mada and brought her to the dark lord. He later orchestrates the plot that results in Pankraz's death. Decades later Hero's family manages to destroy Ladja in battle. He built Crocodilopolis as a monument to Nimzo and portal to the dark lord.

Nimzo - The true dark lord. He rules from the dark world so he is not seen until the final battle.

## **Breakdown**

What makes *Dragon Quest V* so unorthodox is that the narrative progresses through three generations. This forms a classic three act story structure. The game follows the Hero's life from early childhood to growing up and starting a family. This was an innovative technique during *Dragon Quest V*'s original Japanese release in 1992 and was still uncommon when the game was rereleased in 2009.

The first generation starts off with Hero and his father Pankraz returning to their quaint hometown of Whealbrook. They have been traveling the world with their attendant Sancho since Hero's mother, Mada, was killed soon after Hero was born. An interesting note of this section is that Hero, being six, can't read. If he tries to check a bookshelf or sign he cannot discern the strange symbols. In this first segment of the game Hero makes friends and connections that will remain for the rest of his life. In particular he meets an eight year old girl named Bianca with whom he scares ghosts away from a haunted mansion. The two also adopt a monster named Saber.

Pankraz is later called to the neighboring kingdom of Coburn to watch over the pampered and bratty Prince Harry. Prince Harry's mischief ends up getting him kidnapped by monsters so Pankraz sets off to find him with Hero and Saber in hot pursuit. They rescue Harry but are attacked by monsters on the way out. Pankraz confronts to allow Hero and Harry's escape but they get ambushed by Bishop Ladja, a powerful sorcerer and minion to the Demon Lord. Pankraz arrives in time but Ladja holds a blade to Hero's throat. Pankraz allows Ladja's minions to kill him so Hero's life is spared. In Pankraz's final moments he tells the barely conscious Hero that his mother is alive but imprisoned by the master of Ladja and he must find the Legendary

Hero to save her. Saber is released in the wild to regain his feral nature and both Hero and Harry are forced into slavery.

Generation two, paralleling act two of the narrative, starts ten years later. Hero and Harry manage to escape their slavery at Crocodilopolis. Harry becomes king, and his time as slave makes him a benevolent and effective ruler. Hero returns to a destroyed Whealbrook. Sancho is nowhere to be found. Hero finds Pankraz's secret treasure deep in a cave he once explored as a child. He obtains the Zenithian Sword, the sword of the Legendary Hero. In a shocking twist Hero cannot use the sword. He is not the Legendary Hero. This is a drastic contrast with most RPGS. While most game stories deal with the player taking on the role of the chosen hero *Dragon Quest V* tells the player that they are merely a supporting role. Hero continues his journey and reunites with many people he met as a child. When hero finds Saber he is feral and terrorizing a small farming town. Hero tracks him down to a cave and engages him in battle. While Saber is a wild beast somethings stays his fangs. He cowers in a defensive position until the player uses a special ribbon given to them by Bianca in the past. It triggers Saber's memory and he joins Hero's party.

Hero is later faced with marriage. He is initially tasked with recovering two rings by a rich man to win his daughter Nera's hand in marriage. He is given the option of marrying Bianca, his childhood friend however. Just as Hero is about to choose between the two a third option opens. Debora, the shrewish older sister of Nera, comes downstairs and allows Hero to marry her. After the honeymoon Hero and his bride make their way to Hero's real homeland of Gotha. In Gotha he reunites with Sancho and two shocking revelations occur. The first is that Pankraz was king making Hero heir to the throne. The second is that Hero's wife is pregnant. The scene where Hero's wife gives birth is interesting because Hero is told to wait in the throne room. The music stops but the player is free to roam around and talk to the few lingering NPCs, not knowing what will happen just as if they were in a hospital waiting for their real wife to deliver. The lack of music heightens the tension. After some anticipation Hero is informed that his wife gave birth to healthy baby twins, a boy and a girl. Festivities carry long into the night but Hero's wife is kidnapped by monsters. Hero tracks her down to an ancient tower where he fights against one of the minions who killed his father over a decade ago. Hero defeats the monster but both he and wife are turned to stone statues. Hero's statue is sold to a Mr. Porgie in an auction. Instead of watching their own children growing up the player, like the character they are playing, is brought to Porgie's front lawn to watch the son of Mr. Porgie grow up. Years pass as both the player and Hero, who is aware of his surroundings, watch the household develop.

An indeterminate amount of time later Sancho shows up with two small children to unfreeze Hero. It turns out they are the eight year old children of Hero. Even more shocking is that Hero's son can use the Zenithian Sword. He is the Legendary Hero Pankraz and Hero were searching for. He just wasn't born yet. The fact that the player never saw Sancho and the children's search for Hero is an important concept. *Dragon Quest V* is the story of Hero, not his children. Although his kids comment on the journey throughout the rest of the game and the Hero's Son is the Legendary Hero, players only know what happened through the perspective of their character. Hero sets off with his children to rescue his wife and mother who has been captured by the

Demon Lord. Since he has found the Legendary Hero he now has to find the remaining Zenithian equipment to compliment the sword. After a few adventures, many of which involve meeting Hero's old acquaintances from the past, they find the statue of Hero's wife in Crocodilopolis, the completed monument Hero was forced to work on as a slave. Hero's wife is freed and the reunited family travels to Nadiria, the dark world, to confront Grandmaster Nimzo and bring peace to the world.

The generational storyline is reinforced by the game constantly returning the player to familiar locations and characters during different times. The most important elements of the first act are Hero making future connections. When Hero sees those characters again in act two and three many years have passed. His childhood friends end up becoming important allies. The three acts also corresponds to three generations of Hero's family. Pankraz, the father, is a central character of the first generation. In act two Hero become the main character. In act three Hero's son becomes a major focus.

### **Strongest Element**

*Dragon Quest V* manages to create characters that are well developed and sympathetic. When Pankraz is killed it is an emotional scene. Likewise choosing a bride is not just a matter of picking which one looks best or fights best. Each woman has a distinct personality which makes the decision meaningful. Price Harry is a major character who is given a real character arc. he starts of an obnoxious, pampered brat. The difficult life as a slave causes him to change himself and become a kind, just ruler.

One of the best ways that Hero's family is defined is through their dialogue outside battle. There are hundreds of NPC characters that all say different things. Hero can talk to his party members and they have unique comments based on what each NPC says. This is completely optional but adds a lot to the psychological complexity of Hero's family by fleshing out their personality.

### **Weakest Element**

When Hero is faced with marriage he is presented with three potential brides and the choice is made meaningful by the development of the characters. The only problem with this setup is that the game makes it clear that the player should pick Bianca. She is given the most development time by being Hero's childhood friend and is even shown to be the wife on the game's box and promotional art. She is the choice that 'fits' the story best.

### **Highlight**

*Dragon Quest V's* crowning narrative moment is when bishop Ladja's minions kill Pankraz. What makes this section so poignant is that it uses the mechanics of the game to illustrate this moment rather than a simple cutscene. The player is forced to watch in agony as a battle auto plays. Players have to watch Pankraz's life being slowly chipped away. Pankraz could just attack a few times and destroy the monsters but he doesn't; players are powerless and have to watch Pankraz's health dwindle to zero.

### **Critical Reception**

*Dragon Quest V* was lauded on its release with most praise going towards its narrative. It received a 36/40 by the Japanese magazine Famitsu when it was released in 1992. It was only released in Japan at the time and many reviewers, such as Nintendo Power magazine, called it one of the best games never released in America. The remake for the Nintendo DS in 2009, released in North America and Europe for the first time, also received glowing praise, averaging 84/100 on Metacritic.<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Parish of 1up.com commented that the game “gets better with age” and reacted positively on the game’s mature and experienced perspective.<sup>2</sup> Yuji Horii, the creator of *Dragon Quest* has also stated that *Dragon Quest V* is his personal favorite of the series.

## Lessons

**Mature, Psychological Themes** - On a thematic level the story of *Dragon Quest V* is about family. The game tackles this theme with a maturity that is lacking from most other mainstream games. It forces players to experience the death of a parent, marriage, and having children while playing.

**Changing World** - The world of *Dragon Quest V* has depth because the world changes as the story progresses. People Hero knew as a child may grow up to have children of their own. Hero’s family comments on dialogue of NPCs. Because the world matures along with the Hero and player it makes traveling through areas multiple times engaging.

**Characters with Depth** - The characters of *Dragon Quest V* is told through the characters which go through many life changing events that add to their believability. The character archetypes are not complex but the way characters act during the story of the game brings them to life.

## Summation

*Dragon Quest V* introduces themes and innovative storytelling devices that were unheard of at the time of its original release in 1992. Ever since it has remained one of the best examples of the narrative potential of games by presenting players with a story of thematic relevance and psychological depth. It proves that video games have the power to affect player’s lives outside of the game itself.

---

<http://www.metacritic.com/game/ds/dragon-quest-v-hand-of-the-heavenly-bride>

<sup>2</sup> *Dragon Quest V and the Maturation of Perspective*, Parish, jeremy, 1up.com, <http://www.1up.com/do/blogEntry?bId=8983724&publicUserId=5379721>