

# OCTOPATH TRAVELER

**GENRE(S):** J-RPG

**AVAILABLE ON:** Nintendo Switch, PC

**DEVELOPED BY:** Acquire

**PUBLISHED BY:** Square Enix

**RELEASED:** July 13, 2018 (Nintendo Switch)

God only knows how much I love *Final Fantasy VI*. When a game comes along almost 25 years later, and is advertised as a spiritual successor to that particular masterpiece – and not just that, but homage to just about every J-RPG that came before the rise of the PlayStation – there's just no way that yours truly could pass that up. It looks the part, it initially feels the part, but in the end, *Octopath Traveler* will probably not be the game you were hoping for.

As the game's title implies, *Octopath Traveler* revolves around eight individuals: Olberic the knight, Cyrus the scholar, H'aanit the hunter, Alfyn the apothecary, Ophilia the cleric, Tressa the merchant, Therion the thief and Primrose the dancer. Each of these characters leaves their home in search for a higher truth, to redeem their individual pasts and to learn something about themselves.

The thing that made *Final Fantasy VI* stand out from the rest of the *Final Fantasy* series was (and still is), that the characters did not start out as a tight-knit group. Everyone in the huge cast of characters had their own problems which they needed to work out before coming together and taking on an evil force threatening the whole world. They had similar agendas from the beginning, but they all came from different backgrounds, they all had different stories to tell.

The characters of *Octopath Traveler* all have different stories to tell, for sure – but they are not united in any way. They are not pitted against a worldwide crisis, they are simply not connected to each other. Every single one of the eight storylines in the game concerns the one character in question – the mere

existence of his/her comrades is acknowledged by a lengthy stretch of random field banter, usually concerning conflicts of interest between a noble knight and downtrodden thief. There is simply no real connection between the characters, and no big evil to fight in the end – those are the first things you should know before heading into the world of *Octopath Traveler*, and also the things that might throw you off the game before you even hit start, assuming you're here for a thoroughly enjoyable J-RPG from the days of yore.

On the lighter side, *Octopath Traveler* looks and sounds simply magnificent. The soundtrack, single-handedly composed by Yasunori Nishiki, is awesome, although it could use some more variety considering the game's length. As for the graphics, I personally love the crossover mix between 16-bit pixel art and modern effects such as well-placed close-ups and real-time shading. In a word, the game is beautiful to look at and listen to, assuming you came here for the same purpose as everyone else.

There's a lot of assumptions here, so let's get straight to the point: *Octopath Traveler* is a good game. What makes it a good game? Some of the characters, their individual storylines, as well as their special talents you can take advantage of in the field, as well as in battle. It's all very tactical – especially in the beginning of the game, when you're scouting the world for new talents to join your group. The old-school turn-based combat is perhaps the game's greatest trait right up 'til the end, since even foes ten to fifteen levels below you might be well-equipped against certain weapons and talents, and just might kick your ass if you're not careful.

All in all, *Octopath Traveler* feels so damn good from the beginning up 'til a certain point. After a certain while, you might find yourself intrigued by the individual storylines, but the entirety feels pointless. Sure, there are optional side quests and dungeons to conquer if you're feeling interested enough, but the game itself revolves around eight completely separate, and heavily guided storylines; once you're done with them and seen the end credits roll, there's no blaming you if you're feeling tired, after all it takes you about 80 hours to be done with the 32 chapters of it.

No RPG would stick anyone to the couch if there was nothing to the story; sure enough, some of the storylines are quite interesting, some even lightly cross with each other – albeit again, with no actual connections between the lead characters – and, best of all, they touch some subjects that would never have come to pass in early games of the type. Prostitution, mass murder and cult worship are just some of these subjects – and the things that keep the story alive amidst all of its shortcomings.

*Octopath Traveler* gets better as a game as you go; while the story and the LONG cutscenes/dialogues might throw you off, the game itself – especially its combat system – should please anyone into turn-based, old-school RPG's. Secondly, the game guides you all the way; there's simply no way for you to be an ass and make a party full of soldiers, since there's the basic job for each character and one secondary job that can't be done by more than one character at a time.

BUT, it ends in a brick wall. Once you're done with each of the eight storylines, the game is simply DONE. There's no level cap, you can go on building the characters as much as you want, but the truth is that 45 is the highest experience level you need to finish the game; it takes you about 60 hours to reach that milestone. There will probably be a dozen optional dungeons to finish after you've done that – worth it? You be the judge.

So... back to *Final Fantasy VI*. *Octopath Traveler* should not, ever, be compared to *Final Fantasy VI*. It has just about the same premise, but the execution is completely different. As a modern 16-bit retro-style JRPG, it is more than all right, and certainly recommendable to a certain type of audience.

## 7.5