Final Fantasy VII Remake headlines Square Enix E3 event, gets March 2020 launch

reader comments

51 with 36 posters participating, including story author

Share this story

- Based on how *Final Fantasy VII Remake*‘s reveal looked live at Square Enix’s event (meaning, on the company’s giant projectors), its stutters and minor visual artifacts hint at fully real-time rendering on PS4. But we’ll have to wait and see if that bears out when we test the game later this week at E3.
  Square Enix
- We’ve already seen high-fidelity Cloud…
  Square Enix
- And we’ve already seen high-fidelity Aerith…
- …but today, we finally get to see the redesigned, modern-gen version of fan-favorite Tifa in all her martial arts glory.
- And, hey, we’ll gladly take another dramatic look at Sephiroth.
- Nanoseconds after this frame, Sephiroth mysteriously vanishes. Of course he does.
- She’s happy to see Barret.
- She’s not exactly thrilled to see Cloud.
- He’s happy to see… well, anything he can shoot.
- A few more familiar characters popped up in today’s new trailer.
- Midgar, in all its shiny glory.
- Landing with a somersault and a Buster Sword

unsheathing.
- Cloud is running.
- Barret doling out some punishment.
- The buster sword is just as big an awesome as we remember.
- The attacks have lots of particle effects.
- We even got a recreation of the original box art.
- The only thing missing from this lineup is a blue menu system.

LOS ANGELES—Square Enix's E3 press conference began by wasting no time with its big, expected news: *Final Fantasy VII Remake* finally has a release date. The PlayStation 4-exclusive JRPG will launch on March 3, 2020. If that sounds like too long to wait, and you're in Los Angeles this week, Square Enix says all E3 2019 attendees will have a chance to play the game's first real-time demo on the show floor.

Monday night's event included the clearest demonstration yet of how the game's combat system will work: as a mix of real-time attacking and dodging, and an "active time battle" (ATB) system of pausing to activate special abilities and items. The latter will only activate once players have built up enough of their fighters' ATB meters, which grow as players pull off more successful weapon swipes and dodges. (This means crucial items like potions and Phoenix Down revives won't work until you rack up enough hits on foes, and using those will mean waiting longer to activate magical spells and special melee attacks.)

More familiar *FFVII* characters finally got their in-game reveals, as well, particularly the popular martial arts ally Tifa. One of her ATB special attacks, a flurry of punches followed by a flashy bicycle kick, fit in nicely with Cloud's barrage of sword swipes within a Japanese kanji character, a massive lighting-ball blast from Barret's machine gun, and a green, particle-filled explosion of healing power from Aerith. Barret's standard attacks will largely revolve around gun

shots, not melee swipes, so he will be able to control real-time combat from a distance—and that likely means other popular *FFVII* characters will work the same.

- Finally, a lengthy look at the game's mix of real-time action and pause-menu activation of special powers.
- The scorpion activates yet another shield.
- We tried our best to get clear shots of *Final Fantasy VII Remake*'s frantic combat.
- When the action is paused, any dramatic effects on screen will pan slowly in *Matrix*-like bullet-time style.
- Let's wreck some baddies.
- Will our heroes outlast the scorpion? (Spoiler: yes, but not before the jerk activates a bomb with a 20-minute timer.)
- As Cloud explains, you can take cover behind debris.

The game's mix of real-time and paused-menu action was demonstrated in lengthy, breathtaking fashion by a battle sequence between Cloud, Barret, and a massive Scorpion Sentinel. In this boss battle, the robo-arachnid activated various shield effects and healing fields, which Cloud and Barret had to take down one at a time by focusing on weak points, using proper elemental attacks, and distracting the Sentinel. The latter example came when a massive laser blast was aimed at Barret, who hid beneath cover. At this point, the demo's player switched control to Cloud to rush the robot and slash it to bits. Character swapping is imperative in the game's bigger battles, we're told, in order to more quickly grow each combatant's ATB meters, but you can still assign their battle traits via a menu when you're not in direct control. (We only saw three characters active in battle at any given time during the whirlwind presentation.)

In addition to so much battle content, the Monday night reveal included a ton of apparent real-time game content, as evidenced by slight frame rate judders (clearly visible since

we were in attendance at the publisher's E3 event) during the familiar opening sequence: a tight zoom on Aerith's scared face, then a shift to a madly rushing train with Cloud as its passenger. As the train pulled up to the game's familiar train station, the iconic hero landed from a somersault jump by dramatically unsheathing his massive Buster Sword.

However, while the lengthy reveal included a few memorable, cinematic scenes, we didn't get a formal look at how the game's traversal within (and outside of) Midgar will work. At the very least, the conversation snippets we saw were typical Square JRPG fare—meaning, serviceable dialogue between familiar characters, only framed in cinematic fashion with apparent real-time graphics. One sad conversation at a bar saw Tifa admit to Cloud, "I know we have to think big if we're going to make a difference… but not like this. I just… I feel trapped." In another sequence, Cloud approaches the villain Sephiroth in an alleyway that is filled with burning imagery, to which Sephiroth replies, "I have a favor to ask of you. run away. You have to leave."



Enlarge / Tetsuya Nomura (left), FFVII's original director, showed up at the Los Angeles event to offer his blessing.
Sam Machkovech

And, yes, as previously announced, this *Final Fantasy VII Remake* project is episodic, which the publisher confirmed once more by saying: "The first game in this project expands on the story of Midgar and is such an elaborate retelling that it has become a solid standalone game in its own right." The company also described the current project as "two Blu-ray discs worth of content," but it's currently unclear whether those two discs will make up this March's game, or whether that "two discs" line is a hint at two *FFVII Remake* launches altogether. Today's announcement of a pre-order opportunity doesn't include any "episode one" subtitle for the March 2020 SKU.

But that's not all, classic JRPG fans!

After *FFVII*'s splashy presentation, the publisher confirmed a number of fan-favorite series landing on modern platforms. Arguably the biggest of these is Final Fantasy VIII Remastered, an apparent upscaling of the PS1 classic's original polygonal assets to higher resolutions. As a surprise perk, the release will also include apparently higher-resolution full-motion-video sequences than we ever saw on PS1 (albeit they're still blurrier than standard 1080p resolution).

That game will launch in "2019" on PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, and Windows 10 (via Steam). Hopefully its development will include significant optimizations, as the video footage shown on Monday suffered from significant frame rate stutter.

Two never-before-translated Square Enix RPGs are also coming to the West for the first time, both in the "SaGa" series: the Super Nintendo classic Romancing SaGa 3, and the 2016

PlayStation Vita game SaGa: Scarlett Grace. Both freshly translated games will hit Nintendo Switch, Steam, PlayStation 4, iOS, and Android, while Romancing SaGa 3 will additionally reach Xbox One, the Windows Store, and PlayStation Vita. Neither game has a release date.

And if you never got to dive into the multiplayer fun of the GameCube action-RPG *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*, that four-player quest will soon be yours to try out on PS4, Nintendo Switch, iOS, and Android. How exactly its real-time action will scale to smartphones remains to be seen, but we'll find out soon enough, thanks to a vague release window of "this winter."

Listing image by Square Enix

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1519979