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Final Fantasy VII Remake's Modern Battle System has Remnants of the Original

By **GEORGE YANG** ([HTTPS://ONLYSP.ESCAPISTMAGAZINE.COM/AUTHOR/GEORGE_YANG/](https://onlysp.escapistmagazine.com/author/george_yang/)) © March 2, 2020 ☐
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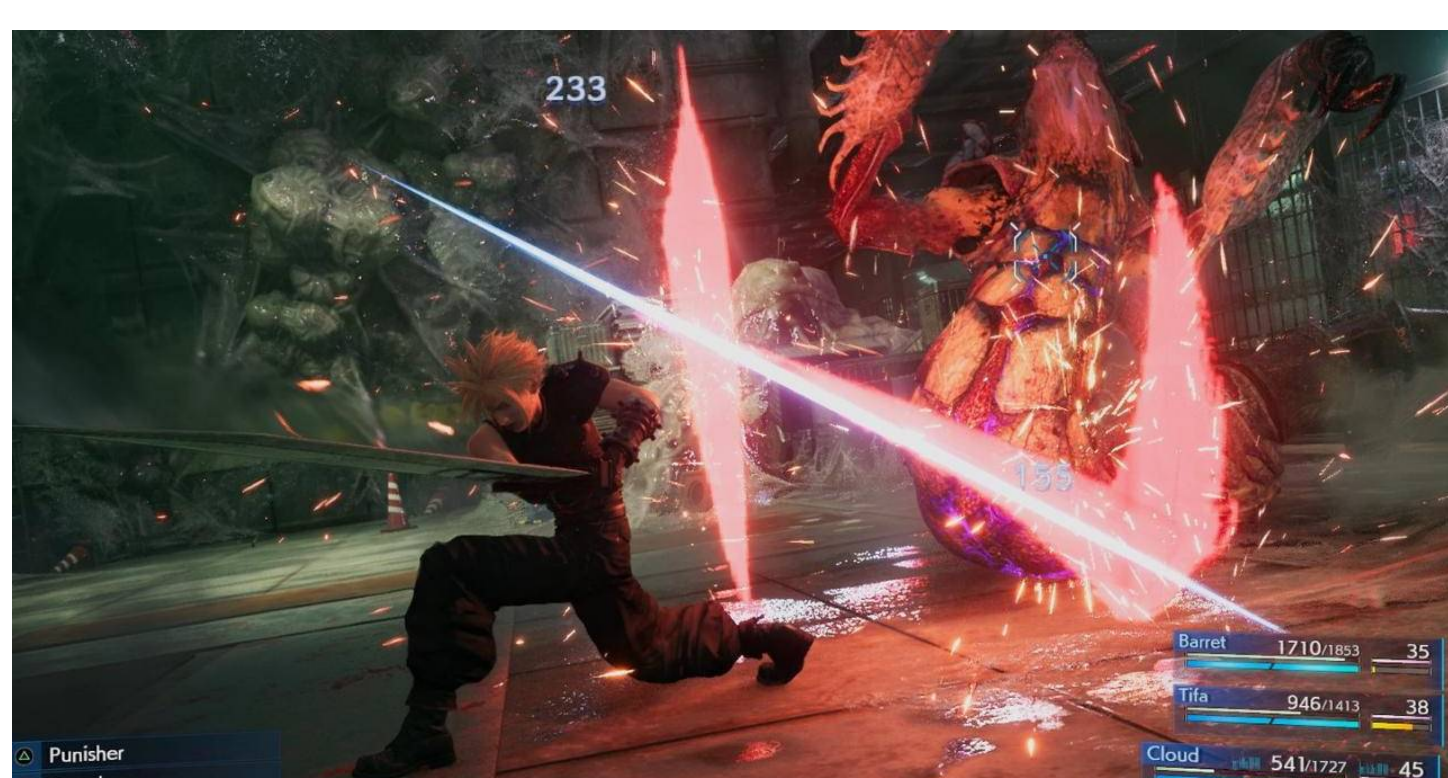
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OnlySP got a hands-on preview of the *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (<https://onlysp.escapistmagazine.com/final-fantasy-7-remake-theme-song-trailer/>) demo at PAX East 2020. The demo provides a taste of how Square Enix managed to take one of the best role-playing games of all time from 1997 and reintroduce the story to a new age of gamers by modernizing the battle system and controls, but also making sure that remnants of the original battle system remain.

The demo starts off in the Sector 1 Reactor at the Mako Reactor's Core. Both Cloud Strife and Barrett Wallace are playable in this demo. Players are able to switch between both characters if they would like by pressing up or down on the DualShock's direction pad. When switching characters, the game will pause for a moment, pan the camera out, and then shift to the next character. However, one aspect to note is that the player will only be able to control other characters besides Cloud during battle. Whenever I ended an enemy encounter while playing as Barrett, the game automatically switched me back to Cloud, so controlling Cloud will be mandatory for exploration.

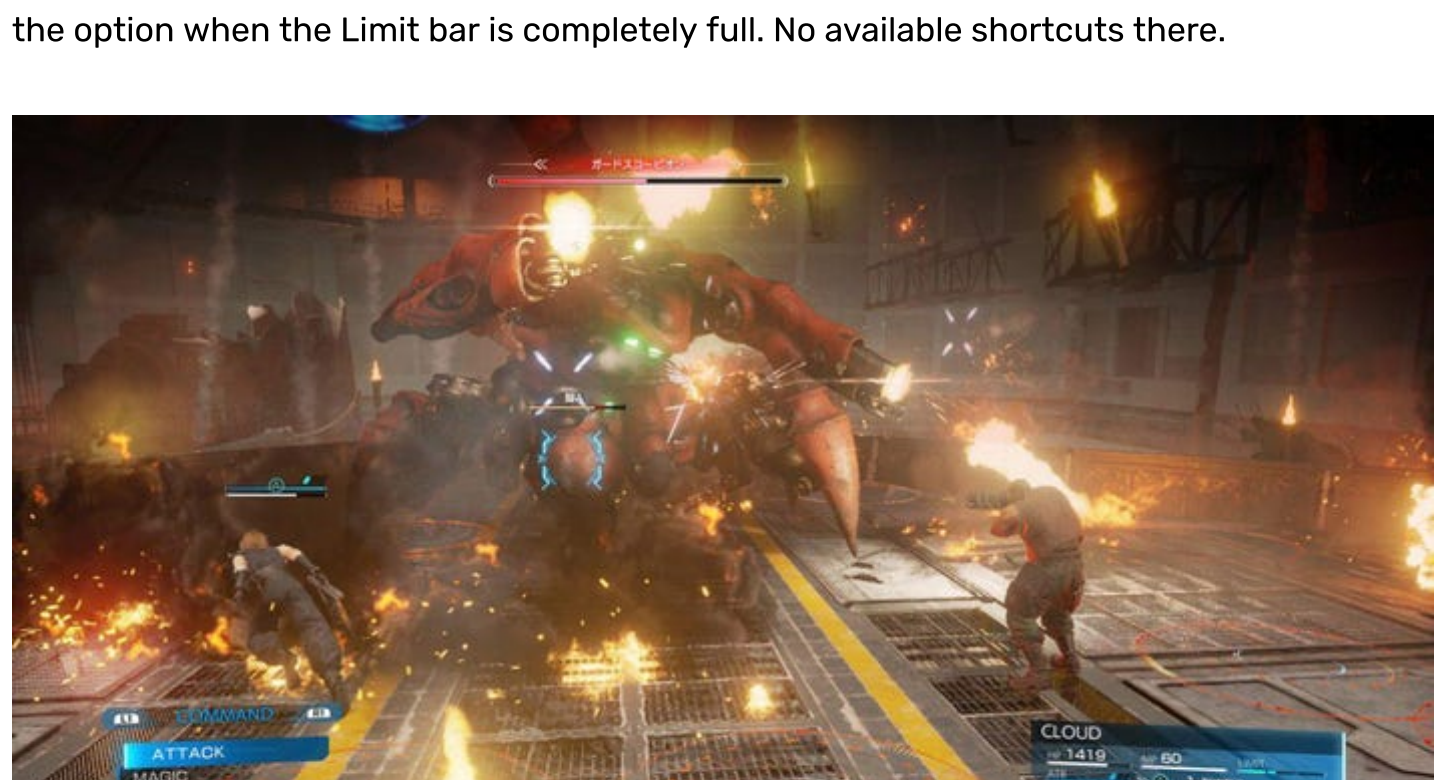
As for the battle system, it will feel incredibly familiar for those who have played *Final Fantasy XV*. The battle system has mostly shifted towards real-time action rather than turn-based, but Square Enix has done a good job transitioning certain elements of the old turn-based system to fit a real-time action system. The square button is used for normal attacks such as Cloud's three-hit combo. Cloud does around 15-30 damage per hit with his normal attacks and requires individual button pushes for each hit. However, players can hold down the square button while controlling Barrett and unleash a constant barrage of bullets to put pressure on the enemy. Barrett's individual damage is in the low single digits, which balances out since Barrett's damage per second is significantly higher than Cloud's.



Even the battle status UI for Cloud and Barrett on screen looks exactly the same as the ones for the party members in *Final Fantasy XV*. The battle status UI at the bottom right of the screen consists of four metrics: HP, ATB, MP, and Limit. The ATB system receives an overhaul in the remake due to its more action-focused battle system. In the original turn-based game, when a character's ATB bar is filled up, that character can then act in battle. In *Final Fantasy VII Remake*, both characters receive two ATB bars that refill over time, and they can use one ATB bar to perform special actions like use certain abilities, cast magic, or use items.

The two ATB bars actually fill up rather quickly, so combat never feels stale while you pepper your normal attacks with abilities in between. Another aspect Square Enix successfully transitioned from a turn-based system to a real-time action system was the battle menu select. By pressing cross (X), players can pull up the Command Menu, which then puts the battle into Tactical mode. This mode allows players to select abilities, spells, or items. However, when in the Command Menu, time slows down significantly. For those who have played action games that slow down time when pulling up a weapon wheel, like *Horizon: Zero Dawn* or *Days Gone*, it is similar to that but even slower. This can help players select different actions without panicking and, through this implementation, retains some of the spirit of the turn-based system from the original game.

Similarly to another Square Enix series, *Kingdom Hearts*, the player can also hold down the L1 button to access ability shortcuts to use Cloud or Barrett's special abilities in battle. Each of them has three corresponding to the square, triangle, and circle buttons. When holding down L1, the cross button is used for items like potions. Unfortunately, magic could not be set to the shortcut menu. If players wanted Cloud or Barrett to cast magic, the only option would be to pull the Command Menu to enter Tactical Mode and select it from there. Limit attacks also seem to only be accessible through the Command Menu and selecting the option when the Limit bar is completely full. No available shortcuts there.



Additionally, pressing the Options button on the DualShock controller only pulled up a layout of the controls. The demo did not provide access to a menu where you could check character stats or customizations. As a result, I wasn't able to see how aspects like Materia were implemented into the remake.

Holding down the R1 button now allows characters to guard against incoming attacks, which is always useful. While in Tactical Mode, you can also press R2 and L2 in order to give commands to your allies, which will be helpful to perform certain tasks such as focusing on attacking when an enemy is vulnerable or healing themselves when they are hurt.

The discussion around *Final Fantasy VII Remake's* battle system has been heated. Purists wanted the turn-based system to stay intact, while others wanted perhaps a more modern, real-time action-based game. While I believe that the purists may be a bit disappointed that the remake centers around more real-time action gameplay, I also think Square Enix did a good job in making sure the old turn-based elements from the original were implemented well in *Final Fantasy VII Remake*. Magic and Limit attacks only seemingly being able to be accessed through Tactical Mode may have been a good compromise by restricting such options to being menu only.

Overall, I had a great time with the *Final Fantasy VII Remake* demo, and I can not wait to play the full game when it releases on April 10, 2020 for PlayStation 4.

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When George isn't playing video games, he's writing about video games! His dream one day is to be some kind of host on a video games media platform.

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