

Review: 'Trials of Mana' a pitch-perfect remake bridging old and new

May 27 2020, by Gieson Cacho



Credit: Square Enix

Hollywood knows plenty about remakes. The industry has been doing it for decades as the website Film School Rejects noted: With every technological leap, the push to retell a previous film follows. The advent of sound led to a new "Count of Monte Cristo" movie and the introduction of computer-generated images produced an unending slew

of live-action Disney classics.

The [video game industry](#) is treading a similar path. With hardware upgrades that produce more lifelike visuals, publishers have found success in remaking older games. Capcom has made a mint with the "Resident Evil" series and Blizzard has dabbled in it with its real-time strategy games, but the publisher that has the most to gain with remakes is Square Enix.

The company sits on a treasure trove of games that could benefit from a modern retelling and the publisher has proven it has the wherewithal to produce them. Look no further than the "Final Fantasy VII Remake."

One of the gems that Square Enix has recently produced is "Trials of Mana," the third entry in the Mana series. It was released in Japan, but the Super Nintendo title never made it to American shores. Well, that is until the publisher picked Xeen to remake the chapter from the ground up.

It was the right move given the poor reception of the "Secret of Mana" remake. From the outset, the developers modernized "Trials of Mana" for a new generation. The game unfolds differently from the other entries with six potential protagonists that players choose in the beginning. They pick a main hero and two supporting cast members.

Once that's done, the campaign unfolds with a distinct storyline. I picked Duran, the prototypical sword-wielder, and backed him up with Angela, a mage, and Riesz, a valkyrie-type support character. The game weaves their stories together and I discovered that the other heroes that I didn't pick had crucial roles in their respective kingdoms.

The game followed my trio as they helped Faerie restore mana that was fading from the world. The quest to restore this important force leads

them to eight Mana Stones and their respective elementals. At the same time, Duran, Angela and Riesz have to deal with the politics surrounding their nations. They're all embroiled in wars. Although these seem like separate problems at first, the primary quest and personal ones are intertwined.

Despite being based on a 25-year-old game, "Trials of Mana" feels updated while maintaining its inherent nostalgia. Players jump from town to town with each new locale offering better equipment for the road ahead. Meanwhile, players level up their heroes and craft how their roles in the party.

With my trio, Duran was the physical damage dealer that could break enemy shields while Angela was my go-to damage dealer and Riesz boosted their attacks and defense while offering another dose of damage on the side. The progression system gets more complicated at Level 18 as players choose a new class for their heroes.

The decision strengthens them and tweaks their roles. Duran could go from focusing on offense to becoming a defensive stalwart for the party, absorbing damage from foes. The power from a new class is even more pronounced at Level 38 when players can choose a more advanced job. The problem with this is that players need certain items to graduate to that role. Unfortunately, finding these upgrades is difficult at the beginning of "Trials of Mana's" mushy second act.

This part of the campaign gives players more freedom to tackle bosses in any order, but at the same time, the lack of the required item makes that journey more difficult. Players will need to power up their heroes by grinding through levels or going on a hunt for special seeds in the Woods of Wandara.

By enduring either path, players will find themselves overpowered

through the "Trials of Mana's" last act. If players upgrade their heroes to the third class and gear them up with powerful items randomly generated from seeds, they should have no problem with the final confrontation and boss fights that repeat themselves. The lack of a bigger payoff and some rote revelation makes the final third of the campaign anticlimactic.

Nevertheless, the team behind "Trials of Mana" did a great job updating the original. The team mixes just the right amount of 1990s nostalgia that lets the remake feels as if it's part of that era while improving the combat mechanics so that it doesn't feel out of place in this current generation. That balancing act can be difficult, but when done correctly as in "Trials of Mana," it has a way of transporting gamers to not just a fantasy world but to a different time altogether.

"Trials of Mana"

3 stars out of 4

Platform: PlayStation 4, Nintendo Switch, PC

Rating: Teen

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