

# METROID II: RETURN OF SAMUS

**GENRE(S):** Action-adventure

**AVAILABLE ON:** GB

**DEVELOPED BY:** Nintendo

**PUBLISHED BY:** Nintendo

**RELEASED:** November 1, 1991

Two years on the market, the Game Boy had already had its share of spin-offs, companion titles and conversions of almost every popular NES game. There were even franchises which began their march on the Game Boy, but an exclusive narrative sequel to an NES classic was something completely unheard of before the coming of *The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening*. *Metroid II: Return of Samus* was indeed conceived as a Game Boy title from the get-go; today, it is considered one of the handheld's greatest classics, and for many reasons, a much more important factor to the possibility of a third game than the original ever was.

Fully realizing the threat the Metroids pose to the galaxy, the Galactic Federation sends an array of assault teams to SR388 to eliminate the remnants of the species. When contact with each team is lost, the Federation once again turns to bounty hunter Samus Aran, who travels to SR388 to complete their mission, and discovers the Metroids are far more dangerous than the Federation ever imagined.

There are a couple of things you should know about *Metroid II*. First and foremost: it is very different from all *Metroid* games as you know them, and at the same time, it feels more like *Metroid* than the original game! Confused? Well, so am I. While exploration is still very much the core of the game, your mission itself is very different from the original; your mission is to drive the Metroids extinct. That literally means that you have to kill the 40+ Metroids left in the whole galaxy – that is your main goal. To accomplish this goal, you have to solve the labyrinth that is planet SR388, and at the very least find all the available gadgets to reach those Metroids hiding in its darkest, very often hellishly obscure corners. There

is still no map to help you navigate, the system's display allows you to see very little at any given time, and also, amidst all of these new toys there is still no way for you to scope out the hidden passages beforehand. You just have to try your luck, and try not to get lost. You'd do well to know from the start that the (invisible map) is laid out in a surprisingly organized fashion; you'll see it once you get a hang of the game.

Every time you kill all the Metroids in a certain area, an earthquake effect informs you that you're ready to move on to the next area. The thing is, finding the passage itself to the next area is quite damn hard – usually it's a spot which you have passed already, but there are no telltale signs that there was ever anything beyond that spot. You just have to backtrack until you find a new, or rather, unblocked hole in the ground. Luckily the level design is a bit more diverse than it was in the original *Metroid*, and you can actually remember where you've been, and where you haven't – at least a bit better. That reminds me: this is the Game Boy we're talking about, and by its level design alone, *Metroid II: Return of Samus* was – by far – the most ambitious game exclusively made for the system back in the time of its release. That's not where its ambition ends, though – enter some dastardly new visual upgrades to Samus' character, as well as the toys at her disposal, and a whole new save system.

In the original game, Samus looked like a pink blob wearing tights and a punch bowl for a helmet. Having the Varia Suit on made her a little bit more pink. Well, since the game is in black and white, and the Varia Suit is an essential upgrade – meaning it's essential to have the player know which suit they're wearing – Samus' graphical design needed some serious work. In her basic suit, Samus is already one of the most detailed character sprites on the Game Boy – add colour and a breath effect, and she's basically Samus in *Super Metroid*. You can also shoot straight downwards from the beginning. The Varia Suit, which you can obtain quite early on in the game, adds the gigantic shoulder pads that have been an iconic part of Samus' suit ever since, to indeed create a visual indication that she's wearing a different suit of armor. She also runs faster than before in that new suit, and her morphball form looks different, small steps towards even higher tech. It's incredible to see in such an early Game Boy title. It's still not all there is, as we're

continuing to push the envelope.

All of the upgrades to Samus' weapons and equipment now have in-game names, and all of it's essential right from where it's picked up to the end of the game. The game adds a couple of totally new upgrades including, but not limited to, the stalwarts Spring Jump (which enables you to jump in morphball form) and Space Jump (which allows you to perform consecutive vaults in mid-air, meaning you can practically fly) as well as Spider Ball, which allows your morphball to cling to walls and climb them. As ingenious as that last one sounds, controlling the Spider Ball is sometimes pure hell... but hey, you can't have it all at once.

So, the Metroids. Finding them is the greatest challenge in the game for a long, long while – actually killing them is quite easy. They are divided into a few different types to keep the boss fights from becoming TOO easy. The first type you encounter, and keep on encountering for that aforementioned long while, is the Alpha Metroid, which is basically a classic Metroid with a hard shell to make 'em seem tougher and more intimidating. Well, they just fly around – get stuck in corners pretty easily, too – and all it takes to kill them is five missiles to the gut. Gamma Metroids add some spark – literally – to their flight, and take ten missiles to kill. Zeta and Omega Metroids are truly annoying; their flight patterns are frustrating, their long tails make their attacks hard to avoid and they take about a million missiles to kill... if you've played *Super Metroid*, they might seem very familiar 'cause both Draygon and Ridley are obviously based on these fuckers.

Finally, there are the classic Metroids, and their broodmother, the final boss of the game, Queen Metroid. The regular Metroids are exactly the same they were in the NES original – much faster and more annoying, though. Queen Metroid basically kicks the casual gamer's ass; meeting her, the player falls on a sudden and ultimate difficulty spike that will have them pondering all sorts of higher truths. Is Samus strong enough? Were you too hasty to get here? Can that thing even be beaten? Was this all just a waste of time? In truth, Queen Metroid is a truly challenging boss, and as hard as she is to beat, I had absolutely no

quarrel with the game itself. Constant defeats were entirely my own fault. Dodge and strategize, that is my one and only advice. This is exactly how the boss fights in the original should've been. And here, on the GAME BOY, they learned how to build a good fight.

So... I told you that to experience the original *Metroid* as it should be experienced, you should turn to the remake. As you know, there are actually two well known remakes of *Metroid II*: the unlicensed *AM2R* from 2016 and *Samus Returns* from 2017 (the latter of which is up for review later). Yes, you should definitely experience at least one of those, but you should ALSO take this original article into careful consideration. Not only is it much better than its predecessor, it's one of the most technologically advanced Game Boy titles; there are problems with audio design, some case-specific controls and collision detection, but there are no signs of usual and far more annoying tech problems related to the Game Boy, such as invisible walls. *Metroid II: Return of Samus* is easily one of the original Game Boy's greatest games, and polishing its shine further is the fact that its ending leads directly into one of the greatest video games ever made.

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