

METROID: ZERO MISSION

GENRE(S): Action-adventure

AVAILABLE ON: GBA

DEVELOPED BY: Nintendo

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During the early development of *Metroid Fusion*, the media and *Metroid* fans alike first thought Nintendo was doing an enhanced remake of *Super Metroid* for the Game Boy Advance. While that turned out wrong, some of the development team thought it was actually a great idea. *Super Metroid* director Yoshio Sakamoto disagreed, but presented an alternative: how about they instead did a remake of the very original *Metroid*? After all, several years had passed, the original *Metroid* had been all but forgotten in the wake of its successors – how about they brought the NES classic up to speed with its sequels? The final product was called *Metroid: Zero Mission* – and I'll be damned if this absolutely magnificent game isn't at least one of the reasons remakes are produced today.

Bounty hunter Samus Aran is sent to the dark planet of Zebes to eliminate the notorious Space Pirates – governed by a sentient bio-mechanical being dubbed "Mother Brain" - who have recently attacked the Galactic Federation and stolen from them no less than the most dangerous bio-weapon in the galaxy.

Let's get the most important thing out of the way first: calling *Metroid: Zero Mission* a remake of *Metroid* is like calling a Porsche a remake of a horse carriage. Meaning, it doesn't matter how many times you've beaten the original *Metroid*. *Metroid: Zero Mission* is filled to the brim with updates of a later standard, deadly surprises that will keep you on your toes at all times, and tons of new secrets, as well as new upgrades, familiar to those who've played the later games. The story is the same, the music is the same (although remixed, of course), the order of things is the same, but that's where the immediate similarities between the games end.

Let's recap. You are Samus Aran, the best bounty hunter in the galaxy, equipped with a high-tech suit of armor that would make Tony Stark blush. You are to infiltrate the core of planet Zebes, and eliminate the Space Pirates' trusted associate Kraid, as well as commander Ridley, before making your way to the main laboratory and destroying the half-organic supercomputer in charge of Zebes' defense systems, Mother Brain. The laboratory itself is well guarded, by not only Kraid and Ridley, but a small army of Metroids, who the Space Pirates intend to use as weapons of war against the galaxy.

Kraid and Ridley are both heavily upgraded from their pathetic NES origins into behemoths closer to their respective designs in *Super Metroid*. The boss fight against Kraid is actually almost identical to the boss fight in *Super Metroid*; the screen is reversed back to right-to-left as it was in the original *Metroid* and the fight's a little tougher altogether than in *Super Metroid*, but long-time fans with serious skills will have no trouble with Kraid. Ridley... well, the boss fight itself is again almost identical to the boss fight against Ridley in *Super Metroid*, BUT he is just as much of a pathetic pushover as in the original *Metroid*. It's so easy to find a spot where he can't hit you, and just blast away, just like in the original. Mother Brain is the same as before, but the level layout has some small differences (that actually grow into very essential differences in mere seconds into the fight), and she has one single weak spot: her eye (which she didn't even have in the original, OR in *Super Metroid*), which occasionally opens to shoot an energy blast, as if everything going on around you during the fight wasn't enough. The final boss fight in the original was frustratingly hard – until you found one sure-fire trick to survive. This one's a very balanced bout, I like it very much, and all in all, I enjoy the boss fights in *Zero Mission* way more than the boss fights in the original article. Even Ridley, 'cause in *Super Metroid*, he was an extremely frustrating boss. This balances him out. ...Did you, by any chance, think that we're done here?

I did. The first new boss appears just a while after you've gathered your first sets of missiles, to lay out the fact that there are many new bosses to encounter already during your trip to Kraid. Unlike the somehow weird boss fights in *Metroid Fusion*, these are unique alien monsters that could easily be

enhanced versions of scrapped designs from the original *Metroid*. The map (oh yes, the map is in the house, ladies and gentlemen) shows only the very basic structure of Zebes, which, as you know, is mostly filled with vertical halls connected by corridors both long and short – and tons of secret rooms in the between, which are drawn to the map only once you find them! The ancient Chozo race – the “bird people” – plays a much bigger part in the *Metroid* lore than ever before. The “living statues” which store the Chozo's consciousness (or something) are there to guide you from one destination to the next, to help you make actual progress in the story, but unlike the Adam A.I. in *Metroid Fusion*, the Chozo statues only give you a guideline, not an order – you are not restricted from exploring the planet at any time. Once you explore long enough, you will find that there is a world beyond the core of Zebes – Crateria from *Super Metroid* is scripted into the game, and stores an ancient shrine dedicated to the Chozo...

...WAITWAITWAITWAIT. Let's look at the facts here. Even though *Metroid: Zero Mission* has all this new stuff, doubled Energy Tanks, more suit upgrades, more of everything, it's still the same game. Kraid, Ridley, Mother Brain down – we're done. WHY do we need all of this, one might ask while counting down seconds to the Tourian labs' self-destruction – well, they'll get their answer in literally less than a minute. *Metroid: Zero Mission* does not end in Mother Brain's defeat and Tourian's destruction. Not by a long shot. You see, what you just witnessed was *Metroid*, the 2004 version. What we've got coming ahead is *Zero Mission*, a perhaps short, but very challenging “add-on” to the original game.

I try my best to avoid spoilers of what's going on, when and why this all happens, so I'll go straight to the bottom line. The basic concept of *Zero Mission* roots back to the beginning of the “classic *Metroid* death animation” – when Samus' suit breaks, she's dead. It's Game Over. To avoid (further) questions whether or not Samus was anything without her suit, they gave her a mission where she doesn't have it. You are equipped with absolutely nothing but a pathetic stun pistol and blue tights, thrown into an extremely hostile and lethal environment where your only key to survival is stay hidden, find your way to a hidden suit of armor, take on an experimental weapon prototype built by the Space Pirates, and find yourself a “lifeboat” to get the eff out of Dodge. (By the way, once you figure out what place this actually is, you'll be

in for a mindblowing treat, assuming you're a long-time fan.)

Zero Mission is most definitely an interesting, unique challenge to any *Metroid* stalwart due to its previously unseen stealth mechanics. Samus can still pull a somersault, and the Morph Ball ability is replaced with a crawl – Samus automatically crawls through narrow passages. Your stun gun is almost completely useless against enemies – the only reasons you have a weapon of any kind before finding your new threads, is to shoot locked doors and weak walls. As for the doors of color, there's another way around them – if not, you're heading the wrong way. The map of this place is much bigger and more confusing than any of the single regional maps in the main game.

The soundtrack of *Zero Mission* is a mix between slow, ambient horror, and a very familiar tune from *Super Metroid*, that hits after you are first spotted by an enemy (it's scripted, no need to try and avoid it). After the enemy gives up the chase, the song dims down to loop its basic rhythm, and then explodes into a full mix when you're spotted again. The audio design in particular creates a genuine feeling of dread that is there throughout the mission (or level, whichever you prefer). Even if it doesn't play like usual *Metroid*, it sure feels like PURE *Metroid*. After you reach the point where you regain your old abilities, the music reverts back to the happy space-adventuring of the original Brinstar theme. Don't worry: you're still not overpowered although it first might feel like it, those enemies can still do quite a number on you. Only this time you can do quite a number on them, as well.

Without Samus' suit or special skills at hand for most of its duration, the mission can be extremely frustrating, but it is rewarding. At the point you regain your suit, assuming you're still feeling up to it, you can explore the final map in the standard *Metroid* style to increase your chances against the horse's ass that is the final boss. In a way, *Zero Mission* is kind of like a small-scale game itself instead of a bonus level or add-on.

The game ends here, but the *Metroid: Zero Mission* game card has two more completely optional rewards

in store for you: a New Game+ feature with visual aids to help you achieve 100% completion of the game, as well as a chance to tackle the very original *Metroid*. Whether you're new to the series, or a long-time fan, I believe you'll enjoy this bonus quite a bit. The game is still one of the better mid-card games from Nintendo's classic era, and so very interesting to revisit especially after this here hyper-remake.

I'm sure that to some gamers, *Zero Mission* is the part which makes this game more worthy of one's money and time than the actual remake. I think it's the other way around; while the "add-on" as a mere concept justifies a high ranking, it's the absolutely marvellous re-imagining of the original *Metroid* that makes it stand out. With the original *Metroid* in tow as an endgame bonus on top of everything else, it's very safe to say that *Metroid: Zero Mission* is one of the most essential titles in the whole series, perhaps second only to *Super Metroid*.

9.3