

METROID

GENRE(S): Action-adventure

AVAILABLE ON: NES

DEVELOPED BY: Nintendo, Intelligent Systems

PUBLISHED BY: Nintendo

RELEASED: August 6, 1986

In the wake of the 35th anniversary of the original *Metroid*, and the recent release of the fifth game in the main series – *Metroid Dread* – I decided to finally take on the whole series from the very beginning. Although being a first-party IP for Nintendo, not to mention such an honored, well-established franchise, I must say I'm not nearly as acquainted with the series as a whole as I am with Mario. Not even as acquainted as I am with *The Legend of Zelda*. Actually, the *Zelda* and *Metroid* franchises have one special thing in common: I consider both games masterpieces... of the 16-bit era. I sidelined everything else from both franchises for many years, along with Nintendo itself. *Metroid* was one of the first franchises I fell in love with when I first started playing Game Boy Advance, but still I continued to push back a potential high dive into the series. During the years of the original VGMania, *Super Metroid* was the only game in the series I considered worthy of a review. Or, maybe I just felt I didn't know enough about the series to have the right to share my feelings. That was all a long time ago... and now, as Samus Aran reaches the age of a female at her prime – you can take that to the bank – it is finally time to go back to the very original *Metroid*.

In the far future (originally in the year 2000, haha), the Galactic Federation discovers an extremely dangerous, parasitic lifeform from the planet SR388. Named "Metroid" after an ancient word describing "weapon", the Federation attempts to contain the threat instead of attempting to eliminate it. The vessel carrying the Metroid samples is attacked by the infamous Space Pirates, who hail from the dark planet of Zebes. After the Federation's attack on the planet results in countless losses of lives, they turn to Samus Aran, proclaimed the best bounty hunter in the galaxy, who enters the Space Pirates' impregnable

fortress alone, to destroy Mother Brain, the Space Pirates' bio-mechanical defense system, and to neutralize the threat posed by the Metroids.

Produced and co-created by the late Gunpei Yokoi, one of Nintendo's hall of famers, *Metroid* was conceived as a combination of *Super Mario Bros.* and *The Legend of Zelda* – both of which were designed by his former protégée and close colleague Shigeru Miyamoto. Yokoi and director Satoru Okada's initial idea was to deliver a game that would cross the exciting platformer action of *Super Mario Bros.* with the free exploration factor of *The Legend of Zelda*, complete with upgrades to Samus' equipment, which would allow her to discover new passages to new areas in places she might've had already visited. As the game itself began to take shape, and Makoto Kano worked out a script, it was clear that the game was to be something that for all its similarities, could not be compared to anything Nintendo had done before. As it happens, its wholly different tone is exactly why *Metroid* became so popular through the years, especially among more mature gamers. But, that's a story for another day..

Even if you're not all that acquainted with the series, you probably know the basics. *Metroid*, be it of the main series or the extremely popular FPS spin-off *Metroid Prime*, is all about exploration, and getting better in terms of health reserve, weaponry and gadgetry. As old as *Metroid* is – not quite as old as yours truly, though, I'm not trying to mock the game – that same core design originates here. Even though it's small-scale stuff compared to its 1994 monster of a brother, you must take a minute to reflect on the fact that this game was made in 1986. In its time, it was an incredibly ambitious game.

Planet Zebes is divided into three regions: Brinstar, Norfair, and Tourian. You'll be spending most of your time in Brinstar and Norfair, searching for enough health and ammo reserves to be able to take on their respective bosses (Kraid and Ridley), before making that final trip to Tourian to face (face?) Mother Brain herself (itself?). Unlike the later games, in which almost every single gadget is absolutely necessary for the sake of some form of completion, in *Metroid* we have the stuff that is necessary, and the stuff that makes some form of completion a whole lot easier to manage.

If you know what you're doing, *Metroid* isn't a long trip at all – but it is difficult. Not in the usual "hey, I'm an NES game, would you like your ass medium-rare or well-done?" kind of way. The generic level design is the greatest challenge of the game, and no, that's not a compliment. Again, keep the game's age in mind; it was truly ambitious. The core gameplay itself took a hell of a lot out of the NES to function as it was envisioned. Of course, problems with age do not change the fact that every room and corridor in *Metroid* looks exactly the same. There is no map of any kind – the only way to make progress in this game without a step-by-step walkthrough is to explore, and know what waits beyond every passage, either by memorizing it (assuming you're Superman), or using pen and paper to draw a map yourself. Also, there's no gadget to find hidden passages like in the later games; you just need to bomb and shoot every single tile in the game to be sure you're not missing anything. Sometimes, these passages lead to gadgets that are necessary to make it to the endgame; that's quite a flaw. Much like in *The Legend of Zelda*, you can go anywhere you want at any time, but you won't be able to access the final boss' lair without taking care of the other two first.

Before I forget, some of these passages lead to literally nowhere. Don't try to think positive here; there's literally nothing there but empty space to throw the player off the ball. It pains me to say this, but there are even some spaces in the game that are deliberately designed as death traps, from which you simply can't get out from without dying, or in the worst case, there is no way to even die without resetting the console (and missing out on a vital password to continue from the closest checkpoint).

Kraid and Ridley are perhaps two of the... how shall I put it... worst liars in video game history. While the boss fight against Kraid poses some remote challenge, Ridley is one of the easiest bosses to beat, in any game ever made – which kinda contradicts his reputation as the most popular and memorable villain in the franchise. On the NES, of all systems!! Well, if you come to the conclusion here that Mother Brain's gonna be as much of a damn pushover, think again. Those bastards lied to you. Despite being completely still for the duration of the "fight", that bitch of a brain can and will take all that you've got. Just pray it will

be enough. The environment during the final boss fight is your enemy here, not that overgrown brain; be that as it may, don't expect to beat the game without making the effort to find at least 80% of the hidden item upgrades. Without the map or any other tool to find them, it's going to take time. Whether you're willing to offer that amount of time to this retro classic, or not, is totally up to your resilience and interest. And, of course, sense of direction – something I have never really possessed, and that's why I was so compelled to refer to a walkthrough to be able to complete this game. I'm proud to say I ultimately used it just for directions, though, and didn't have to follow it to the last word.

Metroid is an ambitious classic, which has not stood the test of time nearly as well as its "predecessors"; *Super Mario Bros.* and *The Legend of Zelda* are both still magnificent games in theory and practice. If you want to experience the game as I believe it was intended, and much closer to the 2D *Metroid* standard established in later years, I strongly recommend you turn to the Game Boy Advance remake. If you're confident, resilient, and mostly, eager enough, then you can't go completely wrong with the original article.

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