

# METROID DREAD

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

**AVAILABLE ON:** [Nintendo Switch](#)

**DEVELOPED BY:** MercurySteam Entertainment, Nintendo

**PUBLISHED BY:** Nintendo

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*Metroid Dread*, a.k.a. *Metroid 5*, entered early development on a few occasions during the original Nintendo DS' cycle. Producer Yoshio Sakamoto had a clear vision of what he wanted the game to be like – and ultimately, he postponed the project until better technology came along to support his vision. Unfortunately, the *Metroid* franchise itself fell on hard times. Nintendo DS got a couple of games that disrespectfully carried the franchise name, *Metroid: Other M* – Team Ninja's narratively illogical and inconclusive attempt to cross 2D and first-person *Metroid* – was angrily disowned by franchise fans, and finally, the long-awaited fourth game in the *Metroid Prime* saga was basically cancelled, for the time being at least. Enter MercurySteam and *Metroid: Samus Returns*, their critically acclaimed remake of *Metroid II*, released in 2017. After the game's success, Sakamoto commissioned MercurySteam to produce a demo, and show him what they could do to and for the *Metroid* franchise on the Nintendo Switch. He was obviously pleased with MercurySteam's efforts, 'cause here we have it. *Metroid 5*, brought to us by the very same people who gave us a fabulous remake of *Metroid II*. How did they do with an original *Metroid* script? Let's find out. This is *Metroid Dread* – and there's plenty to love about it.

The Galactic Federation receives a startling video message, which proves that the X are still alive on the remote planet of ZDR. A small group of E.M.M.I. (Extraterrestrial Multifunctional Mobile Identifiers), basically indestructible combat droids able to drain all life force out of their targets in mere seconds, are sent in to investigate and neutralize the threat. When all contact with the E.M.M.I. hive is suddenly severed, Samus Aran is once again sent in as back-up. When Samus arrives on ZDR, she very soon realizes she's walked straight into a trap; first, she falls the victim of a crippling attack which strips her of all her abilities, then

discovers all of the Federation's E.M.M.I. droids have been reprogrammed to hunt her down. The hunter has become the hunted – but why, and by whom?

Classic *Metroid* as we know it is alive and well in *Metroid Dread*. Since pretty much this same team made *Samus Returns*, it's kinda obvious that *Metroid Dread* largely feels like a major system update of the 3DS game. A lot of features from the *Metroid II* remake are brought back, but actually they go one step further, bringing back a host of beloved – and not so beloved – features from every game and reimagined title, starting with *Super Metroid*, and adding in a bigger host of whole new features, with the goal of creating the ultimate 2D *Metroid*, as if to sell this as Samus' final mission. Or, at least a conclusion to the storyline that began with *Metroid* nearly 40 years ago.

The story and setting of the game are some of its finest early traits, which remain strong right up 'til the end. Although the world of ZDR is deliberately designed very similarly as Zebes, SR388 and the B.S.L., there are a lot of surprises within the world itself, a host of new challenges for even the most hardened *Metroid* adventurer to conquer. The environments change, constantly, bluntly preventing you from running the same passages over and over again, or effortlessly cleaning up the different areas of ZDR from item upgrades. The restrictions the game creates for you as an explorer are logical; unlike in *Metroid Fusion*, where you were simply TOLD that you cannot do this before you do that, or cannot go there before you go here, in this game the reasons for any limitations are in plain sight. Adam A.I. is certainly back – this time with voice acting, which is a pain to listen to – but at least this time that stupid computer is not the one locking all the doors around you just to fuck with your nature... which brings us to the most notable antagonists of the game.

The seven E.M.M.I. take the Metroids and SA-X's place as the supporting villains standing between you and the real evil force at work on ZDR. *Zero Mission*'s Zero Suit Samus "add-on" is used as a template for sequences clearly cut from your general exploration; the E.M.M.I. patrol certain zones in each region of ZDR. Coming into physical contact with an E.M.M.I. equals instant death on a 99% probability; getting

spotted closes all doors around you until you manage to avoid the droid long enough. Until you can make it to a supercomputer unit (that looks more than a little like Mother Brain, and acts like her, too) and absorb the energy needed to kill just one E.M.M.I. in each of the designated zones, your only hope of survival is to run, hide, and find a safe exit without getting spotted, from the labyrinthine corridors of the E.M.M.I. zone. Doesn't sound very *Metroid*-like, I most certainly know, because I was almost ready to give up on the game after my encounter with the second or third E.M.M.I., but I finally grabbed myself by the neck, and I'm glad I did. The whole game certainly doesn't revolve around the E.M.M.I. like *Samus Returns* revolved around the Metroids. There's just one E.M.M.I. zone in each of the seven main areas of the game, they are clearly cut off from the rest of the area structure, and once you learn how to efficiently kill these (allegedly) unkillable Terminator-wannabes, they'll turn out a fun challenge among the game's many others.

The game might look massive, but its tempo – which increases hard upgrade after another – fully compensates for the map's impossible size. Samus generally moves faster than ever before, and there are no abilities that require you to stop moving besides free-aim. The Aeion concept brought over from *Samus Returns* is now designated to different excess buttons, there's no longer a need to switch between the Aeion abilities with the digital pad. As for these abilities themselves, there are only two of them instead of four. Pulse Radar (previously known as Scan Pulse) is brought back; you can even go to another room during a scan, it continues to reveal any hidden blocks until it times out. Flash Shift is a lifesaver – it grants Samus a long-awaited dodge ability that is also used to solve some certain types of environmental puzzles.

Many classic upgrades make their glorious (AND less glorious) returns to the fold, including Speed Booster, which is here to drive the player insane with the related puzzles worse than any *Metroid* game ever. As for completely new, never-before-seen stuff, there isn't plenty to say, unfortunately – it's the tweaks made to the classics that truly matter. The Cross Bomb and Storm Missile are some good examples of these tweaks; the Cross Bomb lets you blow straight lines of bomb blocks to smithereens at once

before your acquisition of the Power Bomb (which comes along very late on in the game), and also gives you a boost over bridges of pitfall blocks. The Storm Missile is a charging missile that fires five heatseekers when fully charged. Although they might seem useless at first, every upgrade in this game counts to the comfort of progression. Also, keep in mind that there are no useless passages or shortcuts to be found in *Metroid Dread*. The level design is simply genius work, and right up there with the game's story and setting as its greatest traits...

...But then, we get to the bosses. The big boss fights in this game are of great design, and despite all of my frustration, especially with a certain boss called Experiment No. 57 – which is a very suitable name for it, since it took me about 57 experiments to finally put that bastard down – I love how strategic these boss fights have become, and how they retain the difficulty level of the good old days, while the game itself is a somewhat guided experience. However, the miniboss fights against "lieutenants of the ZDR army" are quite repetitive, and the problem with ALL boss fights is that even at your absolute strongest, you take ridiculous amounts of damage from just one hit of anything. In the worst case, it doesn't matter if you face a boss with two or twelve energy tanks at your disposal; make one mistake, get caught in the receiving end of a deadly combo of attacks, or miss one essential *melée* chance, you're done. At its worst, just one attack – any attack – by the boss drains you of a whole tank of energy. Good luck in conquering Hard Mode.

Something or some things will grind your gears when it comes to *Metroid Dread*, that's for sure. The bottom line, though, is that if you're a fan of *Metroid*, you are going to love at least most part of the game unconditionally. There is nothing to truly keep it from becoming a modern classic. Set against the two most recent major games in the franchises that most inspired the original *Metroid* – *Super Mario Odyssey* and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* – *Metroid Dread* definitely gets the shortest straw by far, but it is still one of the most essential first-party Nintendo Switch games in known existence.

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