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# Metroid (video game)

**Metroid**<sup>[a]</sup> is an action-adventure game developed and published by Nintendo. The first installment in the *Metroid* series, it was originally released in Japan for the Family Computer Disk System peripheral in August 1986. North America received a release in August 1987 on the Nintendo Entertainment System in a ROM cartridge format, with the European release following in January 1988. Set on the planet Zebes, the story follows Samus Aran as she attempts to retrieve the parasitic Metroid organisms that were stolen by Space Pirates, who plan to replicate the Metroids by exposing them to beta rays and then use them as biological weapons to destroy Samus and all who oppose them.

*Metroid* was developed by Nintendo Research & Development 1 (Nintendo R&D1) and Intelligent Systems. It was produced by Gunpei Yokoi, directed by Satoru Okada and Masao Yamamoto, and scored by Hirokazu Tanaka. The game's style, focusing on exploration and the search for power-ups that are used to reach previously inaccessible areas, influenced other video games. Its varied endings for fast completion times made it a popular game for speedrunning. It was lauded for being one of the first video games to feature a female protagonist, though the player must complete the game in under five hours for this to be revealed, with the game's English-language instruction manual even using "he" to refer to the protagonist.

*Nintendo Power* ranked *Metroid* 11th on their list of the best games for a Nintendo console. On Top 100 Games lists, it was ranked 7th by *Game Informer* and 69th by *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. The game was re-released for the Game Boy Advance in 2004 as part of the *Classic NES Series*. It was released on the Wii Virtual Console in Europe and North America in 2007, and in Japan the following year. It is currently available to play through Nintendo Switch Online.

Metroid



North American packaging artwork

Developer(s)	Nintendo R&D1 Intelligent Systems
Publisher(s)	Nintendo
Director(s)	Satoru Okada
Producer(s)	Gunpei Yokoi
Artist(s)	Hiroji Kiyotake Hirofumi Matsuoka Yoshio Sakamoto
Writer(s)	Makoto Kano
Composer(s)	Hirokazu Tanaka
Series	<i>Metroid</i>
Platform(s)	Family Computer Disk System  Nintendo Entertainment System

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<b>Release</b>	<b>Family Computer Disk System</b> JP: August 6, 1986 <b>Nintendo Entertainment System</b> NA: August 15, 1987 EU: January 15, 1988
<b>Genre(s)</b>	Action-adventure
<b>Mode(s)</b>	Single-player

## Gameplay



In the *Metroid* screenshot, Samus Aran is seen jumping up while enemy creatures fly down toward her. Her numerical health meter is in the upper left corner, marked by "EN".

*Metroid* is an action-adventure game in which the player controls Samus Aran in sprite-rendered two-dimensional landscapes. The game takes place on the fictional planet of Zebes, a large, open-ended world with areas connected by doors and elevators. The player controls Samus as she travels through the planet's caverns and hunts Space Pirates. She begins with a weak power beam as her only weapon, and with only the ability to jump. The player explores more areas and collects power-ups that grant Samus special abilities and enhance her armor and weaponry, allowing her to enter areas that were previously inaccessible. Among the power-ups that are included in the game are the Morph Ball, which allows Samus to curl into a ball to roll into tunnels; the Bomb, which can only be used while in ball form and can open hidden floor/wall paths; and the Screw Attack, a somersaulting move that destroys enemies in its path.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

In addition to common enemies, Samus encounters two bosses, Kraid and Ridley, whom she must defeat in order to progress. Ordinary enemies typically yield additional energy or ammunition when destroyed, and the player can increase Samus's carrying capacities by finding storage tanks and defeating bosses. Once Kraid and Ridley have both been defeated, the player can open the path to the final area and confront the Mother Brain.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

## Plot

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In the year 20X5, the Space Pirates attack a Galactic Federation-owned space research vessel and seize samples of Metroid creatures—the parasitic lifeforms discovered on the planet SR388. Dangerous floating organisms, the Metroids can latch on to any organism and drain its life energy to kill it. The Space Pirates plan to replicate Metroids by exposing them to beta rays and then using them as biological weapons to destroy all living beings that oppose them. While searching for the stolen Metroids, the Galactic Federation locates the Space Pirates' base of operations on the planet Zebes. The Federation assaults the planet, but the Pirates resist, forcing the Federation to retreat.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

As a last resort, the Federation decides to send a lone bounty hunter to penetrate the Pirates' base and destroy Mother Brain, the biomechanical life-form that controls the Space Pirates' fortress and its defenses. Considered the greatest of all bounty hunters, Samus Aran is chosen for the mission.<sup>[1]</sup> Samus lands on the surface of Zebes and explores the planet, travelling through the planet's caverns. She eventually comes across Kraid, an ally of the Space Pirates, and Ridley, the Space Pirates' commander, and defeats them both. Eventually, Samus finds and destroys Mother Brain.<sup>[2]</sup> She then places a time bomb to destroy the lair and must escape before it explodes.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Development

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After Nintendo's release of commercially successful platforming games in the 1980s, including *Donkey Kong* (1981), *Ice Climber* (1985), and *Super Mario Bros.* (1985), as well as the critically acclaimed adventure game *The Legend of Zelda* (1986), the company began work on an action game.<sup>[4]</sup> The game was dubbed *Metroid*, which is a portmanteau of the words "metro" and "android".<sup>[5][6]</sup> It was co-developed by Nintendo's Research and Development 1 division and Intelligent Systems, and produced by Gunpei Yokoi.<sup>[7][8][6]</sup> *Metroid* was directed by Satoru Okada and Masao Yamamoto (credited as "Yamamoto"), and featured music written by Hirokazu Tanaka (credited as "Hip Tanaka").<sup>[6][9]</sup> Makoto Kano (credited under his last name) was tasked to create the scenario, and Hiroji Kiyotake (credited under his last name), Hirofumi Matsuoka (credited as "New Matsuoka") and Yoshio Sakamoto (credited as "Shikamoto") designed the game's characters.<sup>[6]</sup> The character design for Samus Aran was created by Kiyotake.<sup>[10][11]</sup>

The production was described as a "very free working environment" by Tanaka, who stated that, despite being the composer, he also gave input for the game's graphics and helped name the game's areas. Part way through development, one of the developers asked the others, "Hey, wouldn't



Yoshio Sakamoto, a character designer for *Metroid*, speaking at the 2010 Game Developers Conference

that be kind of cool if it turned out that this person inside the suit was a woman?" This idea was incorporated into the game, though the English-language instruction manual for the game uses the pronoun "he" many times in reference to Samus.<sup>[12]</sup> Ridley Scott's 1979 horror film *Alien* was described by Sakamoto as a "huge influence" on *Metroid* after the game's world had been created. The development staff was affected by the work of the film's creature designer H. R. Giger, and found his creations to be fitting for the *Metroid* universe.<sup>[13]</sup> Still, there were problems in progressing the development in spite of the approaching release date that eventually led Sakamoto to be "forcefully asked to participate" by his superiors, hoping his previous experience could help *Metroid* team get the job done. Sakamoto stated he figured out a way to bypass the limited resources and time to leverage existing assets "to create variation and an exciting experience".<sup>[14]</sup>

Nintendo attempted to set *Metroid* apart from other games by making it a nonlinear adventure-based game, in which exploration was a crucial part of the experience. The game often requires that players retrace their steps to progress, forcing the player to scroll the screen left in addition to moving it right, as was the case in most contemporary games. *Metroid* was also considered one of the first video games to impress a feeling of desperation and solitude on the player. Following *The Legend of Zelda*, *Metroid* helped pioneer the idea of acquiring tools to strengthen characters and help progress through the game. Up until that point, most ability-enhancing power-ups like the Power Shot in *Gauntlet* (1985) and the Starman in *Super Mario Bros.* offered only temporary boosts to characters, and they were not required to complete the game. In *Metroid*, however, items were permanent fixtures that lasted until the end. In particular, missiles and the ice beam were required to finish the game.<sup>[4]</sup>

After defeating Mother Brain, the player is given an end screen based on the time it took them to get there. *Metroid* is one of the first games to contain multiple endings, with five in total. In the third, fourth, and fifth endings, Samus Aran appears without her suit, and for the first time, reveals herself to be a woman. In Japan, the Disk Card media used by the Disk System allowed players to save up to three different games in *Metroid*, similar to the three save slots in *The Legend of Zelda* in the West. Use of an internal battery to manage files was not fully realized in time for *Metroid*'s international release. The Western versions of *Metroid* use a password system that was new to the industry at the time, in which players write down a 24-letter code and re-enter it into the game when they wish to continue a previous session. Codes also allow for changes in gameplay; the "NARPAS SWORD" grants Samus infinite ammunition, health, all power-ups, and a modified Ice Beam.<sup>[4]</sup> The "JUSTIN BAILEY" code lets the player play as Samus without her Power Suit, which was thought by some to be the only way to use the feature; however, it is available simply by beating the game quickly enough to reveal Samus wearing a leotard at the ending sequence.

## Music

Tanaka said he wanted to make a score that made players feel like they were encountering a "living organism" and had no distinction between music and sound effects. The only time a melodic theme is heard is when Mother Brain is defeated in order to give the victorious player catharsis. During the rest of the game, the melodies are more minimalistic, because Tanaka wanted the soundtrack to be the opposite of the "hummmable" pop tunes found in other games at that time.<sup>[15]</sup>

## Release

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Officially defined as a scrolling shooter video game, Nintendo released *Metroid* for the Family Computer Disk System in Japan on August 6, 1986.<sup>[16][4]</sup> It was released on the Nintendo Entertainment System a year later on August 15, 1987 in North America, and on January 15, 1988 in Europe.<sup>[16][17]</sup>

## Emulation

The game was re-released several times after its original launch via emulation. Linking the Game Boy Advance game *Metroid Fusion* (2002) with the GameCube's *Metroid Prime* (2002) using a link cable unlocks the full version of *Metroid* on the GameCube.<sup>[18]</sup> The game was also available as a bonus upon completion of *Metroid: Zero Mission* (2004).<sup>[19]</sup> Additionally, a stand-alone version of *Metroid* for the Game Boy Advance, part of the *Classic NES Series* collection, was released in Japan on August 10, 2004, in North America on October 25, 2004, and in Europe on January 7, 2005.<sup>[20]</sup> The game arrived on the Wii's Virtual Console in Europe on July 20, 2007, in North America on August 13, 2007, and in Japan on March 4, 2008.<sup>[21]</sup> *Metroid* was released for the Nintendo 3DS Virtual Console in March 1, 2012.<sup>[22]</sup>

At E3 2010, Nintendo featured *Metroid* amongst other games from the Nintendo Entertainment System and Super Nintendo Entertainment System on a tech demo called *Classic Games*, to be released for the Nintendo 3DS. Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aimé said "not to think of them as remakes". Miyamoto said that these classics might be using "new features in the games that would take advantage of the 3DS' capabilities".<sup>[23]</sup> These later became the *3D Classics* series which did not include *Metroid*. .

## Remake

The game was reimagined as *Metroid: Zero Mission* with a more developed backstory, enhanced graphics, and the same general game layout.

## Reception

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### Critics

In 2006, *Nintendo Power* ranked *Metroid* as the 11th-best game on its list of the Top 200 Games on a Nintendo video game console.<sup>[28]</sup> Two years later, the magazine also named *Metroid* the fifth-best game for the Nintendo Entertainment System in its Best of the Best feature, describing it as a combination of *Super Mario Bros.*'s platforming and *The Legend of Zelda*'s

### Reception

exploration and character upgrades.<sup>[29]</sup> On Top 100 Games lists, the game was ranked 69th by *Electronic Gaming Monthly*,<sup>[30]</sup> and 6th by *Game Informer*<sup>[31]</sup> then 7th in 2009 by *Game Informer*.<sup>[32]</sup> *Game Informer* also put *Metroid* 7th on their list of "The Top 200 Games of All Time", saying that it "started the concept of open exploration in games".<sup>[33]</sup> GamesRadar ranked it the fifth best NES game ever made. The staff felt that it had aged after the release of

*Super Metroid* but was "fantastic for its time".<sup>[34]</sup> *Metroid*'s multiple endings enticed players to race through the game as fast as possible, a method of play commonly known as speedrunning.<sup>[4]</sup> *Entertainment Weekly* picked the game as the #18 greatest game available in 1991, saying: "The visuals are simplistic, but few games make you think as much as the five-year-old *Metroid*. Try not to consult Nintendo's hint book, which provides detailed maps of the terrain your hero has to navigate in order to complete his mission."<sup>[35]</sup>

In a retrospective focusing on the entire *Metroid* series, GameTrailers remarked on the original game's legacy and its effect on the video game industry. They noted that starting with *Metroid*, search and discovery is what continues to make the franchise popular. The website felt that the combination of detailed sprites, original map designs, and an intimidating musical score "generated an unparalleled ambience and atmosphere that trapped the viewer in an almost claustrophobic state". They also noted that the Morph Ball, first introduced in *Metroid*, "slammed an undeniable stamp of coolness on the whole experience and the franchise", and they enjoyed the end segment after defeating Mother Brain, claiming that the race to escape the planet Zebes was a "twist few saw coming". The game brought "explosive action" to the Nintendo Entertainment System and a newfound respect for female protagonists.<sup>[4]</sup> Noting that *Metroid* was not the first game to offer an open world, nor was it the first side-view platformer exploration game, and neither was it the first game to allow players to reach new areas using newly acquired items, Gamasutra praised *Metroid* for being perhaps the first video game to "take these different elements and rigorously mold them into a game-ruling structure".<sup>[36]</sup>

Reviewing the original NES game, Allgame awarded *Metroid* with a five stars, their highest rating.<sup>[25]</sup> The review praised the game over *Metroid II: Return of Samus* and *Super Metroid*, stating that "Metroid's not just a classic because of its astounding graphics, cinematic sound effects, accurate control and fresh gameplay, but also because of its staying power."<sup>[25]</sup> Reviewing the *Classic NES Series* version of the game, GameSpot noted that 18 years after its initial release, *Metroid* "just doesn't measure up to today's action adventure standards", giving the game a rating of 5.2 out of 10, for "mediocre".<sup>[37]</sup> For the Wii Virtual Console version, IGN commented that the game's presentation, graphics, and sound were basic. However, they were still pleased with *Metroid*'s "impressive" gameplay, rating the game 8.0 out of 10, for "great," and giving it an Editor's Choice award. The review stated that the game was "still impressive in scope" and that the price was "a deal for this adventure" while criticising the number of times it has been re-released and noting that it takes "patience" to get past the high initial difficulty curve.<sup>[38]</sup> In GameSpot's review of the Virtual Console version, they

Aggregate score	
Aggregator	Score
GameRankings	63.00% (NES) <div>61.54%(GBA)<sup>[24]</sup></div>
Review scores	
Publication	Score
<i>AllGame</i>	<div>★★★★★<sup>[25]</sup></div>
<i>GameSpot</i>	5.5/10 <sup>[26]</sup>
<i>IGN</i>	8/10 <sup>[27]</sup>

criticized its "frustrating room layouts" and "constantly flickering graphics". In particular, the website was disappointed that Nintendo did not make any changes to the game, specifically criticizing the lack of a save feature.<sup>[39]</sup>

*Metroid*'s gameplay, focusing on exploration and searching for power-ups to reach new areas, influenced other series, mostly the *Castlevania* series.<sup>[40]</sup> The revelation of Samus being a woman was also lauded as innovative, with GameTrailers remarking that this "blew the norm of women in pieces, at a time when female video game characters were forced into the role of dutiful queen or kidnapped princess, missile-blasting the way for other characters like Chun-Li [from the *Street Fighter* series] and Lara Croft [from the *Tomb Raider* series]".<sup>[4]</sup>

To date, *Metroid* has shipped 2.73 million units worldwide.<sup>[41]</sup>

## Music

In his book *Maestro Mario: How Nintendo Transformed Videogame Music into an Art*, videogame scholar Andrew Schartmann notes the possible influence of Jerry Goldsmith's *Alien* score on Tanaka's music—a hypothesis supported by Sakamoto's acknowledgement of *Alien*'s influence on the game's development. As Schartmann notes, "Much like *Metroid*, the movie owes some of its tensest moments to silence."<sup>[42]</sup> Schartmann further argues that Tanaka's emphasis on silence was revolutionary to videogame composition:

Tanaka's greatest contribution to game music comes, paradoxically, in the form of silence. He was arguably the first videogame composer to emphasize the absence of sound in his music. Tanaka's score is an embodiment of isolation and atmospheric effect—one that penetrates deeply into the emotions.

— Andrew Schartmann, *Maestro Mario: How Nintendo Transformed Videogame Music into an Art* (<http://thoughtcatalog.com/book/maestro-mario-how-nintendo-transformed-videogame-music-into-an-art/>), Thought Catalog (2013)

This view is echoed by GameSpot's *History of Metroid*, which notes how the "[game's music] superbly evoked the proper feelings of solitude and loneliness one would expect while infiltrating a hostile alien planet alone."<sup>[2]</sup>

## Notes

a. Japanese: メトロイド Hepburn: *Metoroido*

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## External links

- *Metroid* (<http://www.metroid-database.com/index.php?g=m1>) at the Metroid Database

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