

GAMING INSURRECTION

For gamers, by gamers



METROID

Gaming Insurrection
reflects on the series that
introduced Samus Aran to
the world

SAGA

METROID

ALL ABOUT METROID

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BY LYNDSEY HICKS



When Metroid hit the scene in 1986, there weren't many like Samus Aran and the eponymous jellyfish-like creatures. No game had a lead female protagonist who could convey such wonder and exploration as Samus did in the series' opening game. With Samus' introduction, the gaming world finally realized that women were strong and able-bodied creatures that could carry a game all by themselves.

What I have come to learn about Metroid could fill volumes of an encyclopedia. Super Metroid was the first game that really challenged me, as a gamer, to think. Simply think about what I was doing, plot where I needed to go, devise a strategy to survive. It was through Metroid II that I learned to appreciate antique

exploration. With Metroid, I learned to appreciate the advances made in technology. Metroid was the catalyst for exploring my roots and learning where I came from as a gamer.

Metroid as a series isn't just some series. Rather, it's a look at space and what happens when someone is forced to survive on their own with virtually no help. Actually, it's a lot like the movie Alien. That being said, the starkness of Metroid's landscape provides an interesting case study in character design and back story. With the wonder and splendor of Samus' environments comes a detail unknown before Metroid. Samus is one of the first fully fleshed out characters in gaming history, and she is part of Nintendo's first-party crew that has fully realized stories.

With this look at Metroid, the intention is to examine Samus' roots and the effect she had as a progressive character. Samus is the first lady of gaming. An elder stateswoman, if you will. Metroid's roots lay in the fact that the game was so challenging to

start and complete. Its present and future rely on that fact, as well. With a long-hinted-at sequel to Metroid Fusion on hiatus, now is the time to look at Samus, where she's been and where she can go and decide if she should go there. Now is the time to reflect on all that Samus has achieved as a character and as a property and decide her place in annals of gaming history. Now is the time to give Samus the credit she is due as a forerunner to the modern gaming woman.

You can look at Samus and Metroid with a critical eye and see it holds up under scrutiny. With tight gameplay and amazing — and yes, we do mean amazing in every sense of the word — music and atmosphere, Metroid as a series has provided first-rate experiences to legions of gamers for at least 20 years. With this piece, we intend to look at Metroid's beginnings as an 8-bit standard establisher for platforms and as a 16-bit masterpiece. This is Gaming Insurrection's love letter to the character, the woman, the warrior they call Samus Aran.

Who is Samus Aran?

Samus is the child of Virginia and Mark Aran of the K-2L Earth colony. Samus was orphaned at the age of 3 during a Space Pirate raid on the colony as the Pirates were in search

of resources. Samus was rescued by the Chozo people and taken in to live on their planet of Zebes. Given blood transfusions so that she could survive in the planet's harsh climate and habitat, Samus was trained and

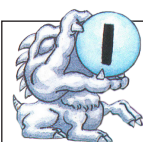
molded into a warrior that could protect the bird people. Eventually, Samus was given a power suit specifically designed for her. The suit functions as a life support system as well as armament.

Samus set off to join the Galactic Federation and, after an unknown time, left the force to pursue life as a bounty hunter.

Samus is the most called upon hunter in the galaxy and frequently

brings success to the Federation.

It is this reputation that compels the Federation to request that Samus investigate the activities of the Space Pirates on Zebes.



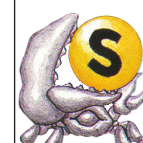
Ice Beam: Quite possibly the most useful of all Samus' beams, this pickup first found in Metroid allows Samus to freeze her enemies. This can create platforms for her or provide access to otherwise unreachable places. It was the ultimate beam for Samus in Metroid. It is distinctively blue.



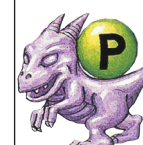
Wave Beam: The Wave Beam is necessary in Metroid but loses importance in later missions. It allows Samus to shoot through walls and other objects with a shot that arcs in a wavy pattern. It is distinctively purple.



Charge Beam: Samus receives the Charge Beam in Super Metroid. With it, she can store a beam attack for future usage. Note: In the Super Smash Bros. series, her charge shot is MUCH larger and takes the place of most of her beams.

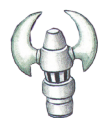


Spazer Beam: The Spazer is present in Metroid. Called the Long Beam in that game and Spazer in Super Metroid, the Spazer allows Samus to shoot three beams in one shot, widening and lengthening the standard beam. The Spazer is distinctively yellow.

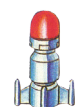


Plasma Beam: The most powerful beam Samus can acquire, the Plasma Beam was introduced in Metroid II. With a distinctive green color, the Plasma Beam gives Samus sheer firepower over her enemies and is the only beam powerful enough to face some enemies head on. If you run out of missiles and Power Bombs, using a charged Plasma Beam in conjunction with the Ice Beam might just save your life.

A bounty hunter's tools



Grappling Beam: Introduced in Super Metroid, the Grappling Beam allows Samus to catch on to a distinct-patterned block to swing across gaps that she could not otherwise jump. It also can be used to kill smaller enemies. This beam is necessary in the early part of your mission, but loses importance once the Space Jump and/or Screw Attack are gained.



Missiles: Samus can find missile containers scattered across Zebes and SR388. These containers add five to Samus' total in Metroid and Super Metroid and 10 in Metroid II. While they are used mostly to open certain types of doors, Samus also uses them to kill enemies and bosses. Samus can hold a maximum of 255 missiles in Metroid and 230 in Super Metroid.



Super Missiles: A stronger type of missile, these were introduced in Super Metroid. Samus can hold 55 maximum.



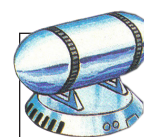
Bomb: Samus' most basic weapon and also one of the first that she will discover in her journey. The bomb is set in morphing ball form and detonated automatically. They cannot hurt Samus.



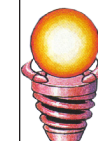
Power Bomb: A souped-up version of the bomb, Samus discovers these in Super Metroid.



Energy tank: These are what sustains Samus in her Power Suit. When she runs out of energy, it's game over. Energy tanks hold 100 units, and Samus can carry eight in Metroid and 14 in Super Metroid. The tanks are



Reserve tank: Introduced in Super Metroid, Samus can carry four that hold a maximum of 100 units each. When Samus' main energy tanks are depleted, her reserve tanks kick in to refill at max 400 units. This can be a lifesaver if you're between battles with no energy refill station nearby.



Spring Ball: Samus' acquires this ball form in Metroid II. It allows Samus to do a sort of bounce maneuver in ball form. In Super Metroid, it is entirely skippable if you wish as it does not really impact Samus' ability to complete the game.



Varia Suit: Introduced in Metroid, the Varia Suit serves several purposes. The suit reduces damage to Samus by half and also allows Samus to enter the super-heated area of Norfair in Super Metroid. The suit is distinctively orange and red.



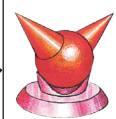
Gravity Suit: Introduced in Super Metroid, the Gravity Suit negates the affect of water on Samus. She can move fluidly through it with the suit activated, and the suit reduces damage to Samus by three-fourths. The suit is distinctively purple.



Screw attack: Arguably Samus' most famous weapon, the Screw Attack allows Samus to destroy enemies as she does a somersault. It was first introduced in Metroid.



Hi-jump boots: A useful component to Samus' armor, the boots allow Samus to jump higher than normal. Many ledges and otherwise unreachable areas become accessible with these equipped.



Space Jump: Introduced in Metroid II, the Space Jump gives Samus the ability to fly. As long as she does a somersault and the player taps left or right, Samus will move higher in the air. This makes all previously out-of-reach areas within range.

NOTES:

- The Spazer was in Metroid, but was called the Long Beam.
- The Wave Beam and Plasma Beam switched functions in Super Metroid. The Plasma Beam remained the strongest but the Wave Beam allows Samus to shoot through walls, ceilings, etc.
- Beams could not be mixed in Metroid or Metroid II. Beams could be combined, however, in Super Metroid. The only caveat is that the Spazer and the Wave could not be activated at the same time.



Morphing Ball: The first accessory that Samus will find in the series is the Morphing Ball. Without it, Samus cannot start her mission. The Morphing Ball is necessary for Samus to drop bombs and advance through crevices in all of her missions.



X-Ray Visor: Introduced in Super Metroid, the X-Ray Visor allows Samus to shed light on hidden areas. It's useful in areas that you have never visited, but decreases in value once you've been through the game a couple of times. Like the Spring Ball, it's not really necessary to complete the game.



The story so far ...



Metroid

Samus arrived on Zebes, and she immediately set about her investigation as to what Metroid really were and who was behind their propagation.

In the course of her exploration, she discovered that Ridley, a Space Pirate general and also the being in charge of the K-2L raid that killed her parents, was also in charge of the Metroid propagation project. Kraid, another Space Pirate associated, was involved. These two were the tip of the iceberg, however. Samus discovered that Mother Brain, a defense mechanism for the planet controlled the Space Pirates, was the true mastermind of the plot to use Metroid. Using this knowledge, Samus destroyed Mother Brain with weaponry and equipment she'd discovered and escaped the planet as the Space Pirate base exploded.

Super Metroid

For a few brief minutes the galaxy was at peace. But shortly after Samus left the hatchling at Ceres, the Space Pirates attacked. Led by Ridley, the scientists were slaughtered and the hatchling stolen. Samus escaped the exploding station and immediately set course for Zebes.

Landing on Zebes, Samus relived her past battle with Mother Brain as she journeyed through the hollow-but-mysteriously rebuilt halls of Crateria. Samus realized that the Space Pirates had restarted their underground operations and had begun a new project using the Metroid to take over the galaxy. With new weapons in tow, Samus took on old foes Kraid and Ridley and new foes Phantoon and Draygon. She was now ready to journey to Tourian, the new lair of Mother Brain.

Reaching Tourian, Samus encountered several hostile Metroid. How could this be, Samus wondered. She had killed all except one, and it was then that Samus realized that these Metroid were cloned from the hatchling. Samus pushed forward until she came to a room where several creatures had been sucked dry of life. Touching the carcasses, Samus watched as they turned to dust. As the husk blew away, Samus noticed the largest Metroid she had ever seen approach. The Metroid quickly attacked another enemy that was focused on Samus, and killed it. It then swooped down upon Samus. She tried to fight it off but grew weaker and weaker as the Metroid siphoned her energy. Suddenly, the Metroid seemed to recognize Samus. Yes, this was the same Metroid hatchling she'd rescued during the SR388 incident. The Metroid, now of monstrous room-filling size, realized what it had done. It hovered above Samus for a few moments and then flew away, seemingly ashamed.

Samus, slowly recovering from her brush with death, moved forward desperately trying to find the Metroid. She refilled her energy and missiles and discovered the door leading



to Mother Brain. Samus moved through the rooms, finally reaching Mother Brain. The brain was surrounded by a glass tank and set up at a dead end. Reminiscent of her first battle with Mother Brain, Samus used her missiles to injure the throbbing brain. It seemed to work as the stand holding the pulsating gray matter shattered. However, Samus wasn't done by a long shot.

The brain fell to the floor and for a moment was still. Suddenly, the brain attached itself to a bi-pedal body and rose. Samus immediately steeled herself for battle. Mother Brain and Samus traded shots until the brain used a life-draining beam that immediately blasted Samus against the wall. Not satisfied with merely injuring Samus, the brain wrenched back ready to blast the bounty hunter into oblivion. At the last second, the Super Metroid flew in and attacked Mother Brain! The Metroid drained the brain and then tended to Samus. It restored her life, but as it was doing so, the not-so-dead Mother stood up. The brain began firing at the Metroid, which had finished restoring Samus. The Metroid then took last swoop at Mother Brain. The brain shot a final time and killed the Metroid. As it disintegrated, its remains fell about Samus and the bounty hunter began to glow. Samus was now imbued with the life of the Metroid; she now had the Hyper Beam.

Using her newfound weapon, Samus began focusing her shots at the brain. She dodged the desperate being's shots and countered with forceful blasts of her own. Finally, the brain fell. Mother Brain was no more. However, because the brain was tied to the Zebes' defense system, a self-destruct sequence was set and Samus had to escape.

As the time ticked down, Samus made her way through the back rooms of Tourian and Crateria and up the shaft she had originally taken to start her journey. As she was leaving, she thought back to the friends she'd encountered during her mission, and instinct told her they were nearby. She stopped on the way out of Crateria and blasted through a room she'd long ago visited in search of weapons. There, she found the Etecoons and Dachola, which had taught her important techniques vital to her mission. Samus blasted a hole for them, ensuring they made it off the planet, and then made her way to her own ship. She arrived just in time and escaped the exploding mass.

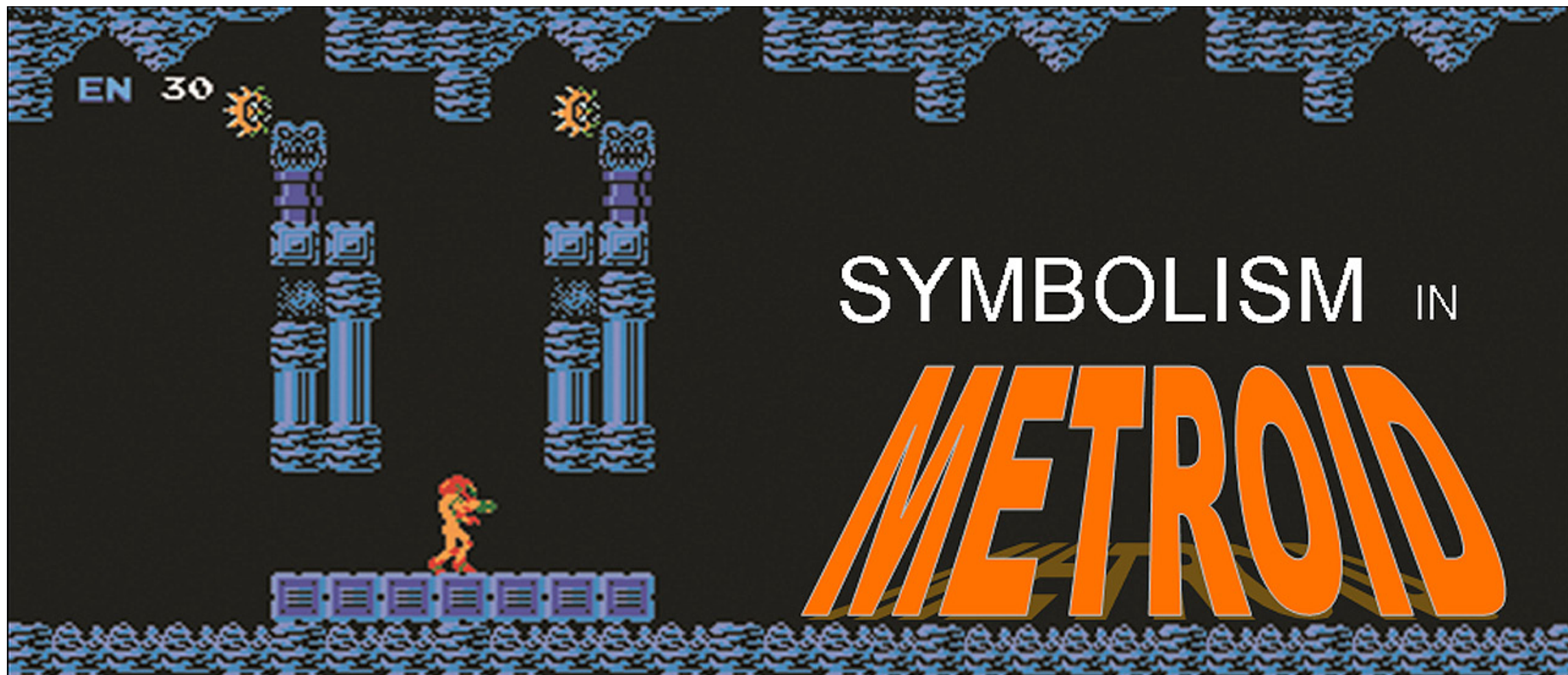
Samus was free to explore the galaxy and take on new bounty. The hunter knew that despite the eradication of the Metroid species and the threat of the Space Pirates, the Galactic Federation would be calling upon her once again to save the galaxy.

Metroid II: The Return of Samus

With Samus' success on Zebes, the Galactic Federation foresaw the emergence of the Metroid threat. After sending a team to SR388 — home of the Metroid — and losing them, the Federation retained the services of Samus Aran. Because she had dealt with the Metroid menace before, Samus was sent to eradicate the species. As before, Samus gathered weapons on SR388 to help with the mission.

After eliminating the smaller Metroid, Samus faced off against the Queen Metroid. Samus destroyed it and discovered a Metroid hatchling. Hesitant to kill it, Samus recovered the creature after it had imprinted her as its mother. Samus took the hatchling to the Ceres Space Colony so that scientists could study it for more information on the species ... "the last Metroid was in captivity and the galaxy was at peace."





Symbolism and iconography play a large part in many video games from the 1980s. Many companies invoked mythology in their titles and based their characters off of existing properties. Metroid is no stranger to this.

I have always gotten the impression that Samus' power suit design was influenced through the "Predator" character of mainstream movies and through Ellen Ripley of "Alien/Aliens" lore. Also, as a small child afraid of the "Alien" movies, when I picked up Super Metroid and began playing through, I always thought Samus somewhat resembled the alien from the eponymous movies. Later, after seeing pictures of the Predator, I realized the connection. She is, however, far more cool, in my opinion.

With the evolution of Samus' design in the past 20 years, more symbolic liberties have been taken. Samus, revealed to be female at the end of the first adventure to those brave enough to make it through, was originally designed to be male. Partially through development of the game, a designer thought the change should be made. At the time of Samus' creation, there were few female protagonists. Samus was the first, the herald of a new era. While her Power Suit's design is designed to look male, there is still the subtle hint of a female beneath it. One can see it by



Lyndsey Hicks
EDITOR'S TAKE

looking at the contour of the metal and seeing the intent for shapely hips and legs.

Also in her suit's design, Samus has been modeled to look much like a bird. Given that the Chozo, a birdlike race in Metroid lore, created the suit, one could expect her to mimic birds. Her graceful movements and sharp features within the suit do appear birdlike. The Chozo's influence can also be seen in the statues that hold items upgrades for Samus.

Gamewise, there are several clues that are scattered across the first three games that Samus is female.

The first is, of course, if you finish Metroid. Depending on your ending, you can see Samus' true form. Now,

some would say "Just read the instruction manual." However, it wasn't that simple. Just by reading the instruction manual, you would never know that she was female. That's because Samus was described as "he" throughout. This was probably intentional, intended to throw off players and make them work for the good ending.

The second is in Metroid II. At the end of the game Samus comes across the final Metroid, a hatchling that had been protected by the Metroid Queen. After Samus has destroyed all of its brethren, the hatchling is described in Super Metroid as looking at Samus as though she were its mother and following Samus like a confused child. That is the essence of femininity.

The third can be seen in Super Metroid. Super Metroid is the first in the series to provide players with a map. In the course of discovery, the map changes from blue to pink.

I don't think that was a coincidence on the part of the developers, especially since her suit turns pink in Metroid once the Varia suit is acquired. That did not escape this writer's notice.

The evolution of the Metroid race also holds a type of symbolism. The eponymous Metroid resemble jellyfish with large teeth or claws, depending on your

take. Also, at the end of Super Metroid — without giving too much away — the Metroid and Samus' destinies become intertwined. Without them, Samus would not live on. On the other hand, living with them wasn't an option, either. It's this mingling of the two entities that ensures that symbolic nature of the name Metroid lives on despite the final Metroid's destruction.

The final symbolic piece of Metroid is the usage of exploration. Every Metroid game has included exploration for Samus to reach her final goals. "Metroid instinct" — a term coined by Metroid Database website founder TJ — outright requires bombing and shooting anything that seems suspicious and could possibly lead to new areas. This sort of natural instinct is found in every game with the word Metroid in the title. In fact, when gamers talk about Metroid, the first things that come to mind are good music and the innate sense to bomb everything in sight as it may lead to something good more often than not.

One can only help but wonder what future games in the Metroid series will hold in terms of symbolism. With hope, this writer wishes for the series to come back to its roots on main consoles and reach back to its 2D brethren in a nod to its glorious past.

DID YOU KNOW?

Metroid and Kid Icarus are “sister games.” Both were developed and released in Japan in 1986. Hirokazu “Hip” Tanaka composed the music for both games, and they both utilize a password system in the United States — the first of its kind on the NES. These are just a few of the similarities that the games share.

Metroid is retold with the Game Boy Advance game Metroid: Zero Mission. This retelling includes new bosses and a mission added at the end of the original game.

The first game in the series to feature an in-game map is Super Metroid. The undiscovered areas on the map are blue; discovered areas (or visited areas) are pink.

METROID PONDERINGS

If Samus faced the Metroids at the end of the first game, and she knew how to defeat them, why weren't the teams sent to SR388 informed of the ways to kill them?

Was the Mother Brain at the end of the first game one of many Mother Brains (you fight a second one at the end of Super Metroid), or was it the same Mother Brain from the first game?

Answer: *It is the original Mother Brain, who first encountered Samus on Zebes as a child. The later Aurora Units were based off this original Mother Brain.*

Where is Mother Brain's bi-pedal body in Super Metroid stored? It's not immediately visible after you defeat her glass jar incarnation, so where did the space pirates put it?

Answer: *The body is stored underneath the glass tank that the Brain is stored in. It quickly attaches to the head and rises from the floor.*

Whose Wrecked Ship is it in Super Metroid?

Answer: *According to the Metroid Wiki, the ship belongs to astronauts from an ancient civilization that crash landed on Zebes.*

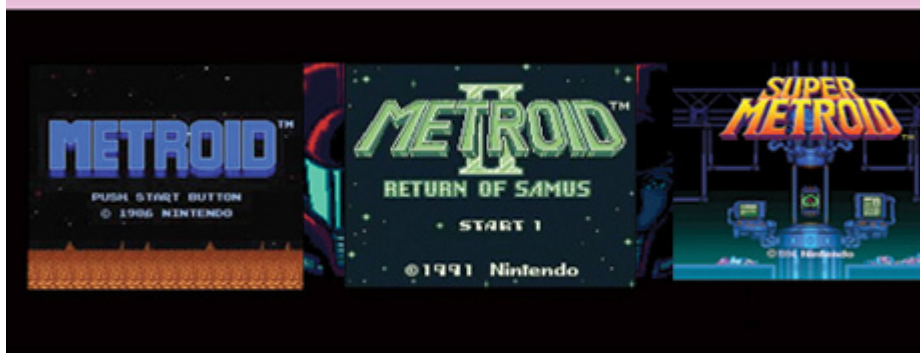
Who created the weapons and left them for Samus on Zebes and SR388?

Answer: *The Power Suit is confirmed to have been made by Mother Brain and the Chozo, whom Mother Brain was created by and working for.*

How did Kraid fit into his room in Super Metroid?

We know his appearance has been retconned so that he did not grow to be two screens tall between the three games, but how did he fit in that room by himself? Likewise, did Ridley teleport into and out of his chamber?

METROID



SAGA

METROID RESOURCES

If you're looking for information about Samus and her exploits, look no further than the **Metroid Database**.

Founded in 1996, it is the first and foremost place to visit in search of help with your favorite Metroid game, maps, music and other media based off everyone's favorite bounty hunter. Visit them at www.metroid-database.com

Reflecting on Metroid: The series that gave me an identity

Metroid is one of those game series that come along that change the way you think about games. It isn't just a pioneer. It isn't just a game you can play and be done with once you're finished. It's one of those truly life-changing games that make you question just what it is you know about playing video games.

My first exposure to the Metroid series came when I was 13 years old. I received Super Metroid as a gift for Christmas. I had no instruction manual, no guide. All I had was a cartridge for my Super Nintendo and three already-played files on it. Suddenly, I was thrust into the world that is Metroid with a character I'd never heard of to fight against equally unheard-of villains. I take that back: I had heard of Mother Brain, albeit many years before through the “Captain N” cartoon that I watched when I came home from school.

Samus was so foreign to me then. It, rather she as I found out later, was so unique. My first impression of the character was of the Predator movies and of Alien. I wanted to find out more about her and why she was hunting these animals called Metroid. Keep in mind that this was in the days before the ad-

vent of the Internet, so information was a little hard to come by without reading gaming magazines.

Once I started playing, I was little lost at first but slowly but surely found my shooting legs. After about six months, I could find my way around the file I'd chosen to play and I had a “wingwoman.” My wingwoman was a friend who also loved the character. We played the game together, she pointing out places I needed to go and walls I needed to bomb. Having that extra set of eyes helped with a game as large as Super Metroid. Sure, it's linear, but it's still big enough for two people to navigate.

Within a year, my wingwoman and I were closing in on Ridley and Mother Brain. It was then that I discovered Samus is female. And it was also at this time that I decided to name my

first-born daughter after her when I ever got around to having children. My fascination with the character finally led us to the end of the game and the official Nintendo Player's Guide. Afterward, we rejoiced in the fact that we'd beaten a Metroid game. My best time remains 1:54, even after 15 years of playing.

My experiences with Super Metroid led me to try the other two games (at the time) in the series.

Having played Super Metroid and then Super Smash Bros., I decided I wanted to give the original game

“ **In Samus, I gained a positive role model at a crucial age. Teenagers and preteens, especially girls, need someone or something positive and strong in their lives, and Samus filled that role for me. Samus is, for me at least, the embodiment of what a strong female character should be.** ”

a shot. While it's not my favorite game, it was an eye-opener in terms of showing me how far Samus and Metroid, as a whole, had come. Metroid II expanded that outlook although it, too, is not my favorite game.

What I have learned from Metroid has stayed with me for the majority of my adult life. In Samus, I gained a positive role model at a crucial age. Teenagers and preteens, especially girls, need someone or something positive and strong in their lives, and Samus filled that role for me. Samus is, for me at least, the embodiment of what a strong female character should be.

Other game designers and companies could learn a lesson from Samus' design and concepts: Strong female characters rule.



Lyndsey Hicks
EDITOR'S TAKE