# Metroid Prime Remastered – First Level Analysis



Figure 1: Game Logo

#### Overview

Metroid Prime is **3D** first-person action-adventure game, developed by Retro Studios in 2001 for Nintendo GameCube. The title analyzed in this document is the Remastered version released in 2023 for Nintendo Switch. The game has all the typical characteristics of a **metroidvania** game: the player will move itself into an interconnected map that will unlock new paths whenever the player will get new abilities and power-ups throughout the gameplay. In the game are present many actions-shooting phases and environmental-puzzles.

### The First Level

The first level of the game **isn't set in the main map** of the game but in a different area. Its purpose is to give to players all the knowledge that they need to play the game in its entirety in a safer area.

### Narrative choices

The main character of the game is **Samus Aran**, a bounty hunter soldier, who lands on a **Space Pirate Frigate** after having received a distress signal from here. Inside the Space Ship, Samus will know about experiments made by the Pirates with a radioactive substance called **Phazon**. In the Frigate she will face against a part of crew of the **pirates** and **parasites**. This session ends when, once Samus defeated the **Parasite Queen** in the space ship, the entire frigate is going to collapse, so the protagonist is obliged to leave immediately the ship to land in the nearest planet where the frigate was orbiting by: **Tallon IV**. The rest of the game will be set here.

As an introduction, the players have the opportunity to know more about the **lore** of the game. It's inside the frigate they learn about the Phazon, the pirates' experiments with this substance and the presence of parasites. The entire tutorial gives **claustrophobic vibes** that are present as well in the main game. The frigate doesn't offer wide environments but really tight ones. But the **atmosphere** is **not** of a horror game, thanks to the music, the general illumination that let the player sees everything is in its view and the gameplay that is proper of an action game. In this Retro Studios did a good job: the feelings that the player is going to discover about game's lore thanks to its exploration is real: it isn't necessary to complete the game, but know more about what surrounds Samus is relevant to play the game with a different awareness.

## HUD

Since the game is structured to be a first-person shooter, the HUD is studied to let the player feel very immersed in the role of Samus.



Figure 2: Metroid Prime HUD

The HUD presents a structure that implies to see what there is in Samus' helmet. Those are eight information given to the player:

- 1. On the **top left** there is the radar, where Samus can sees enemies' position;
- 2. On the middle top is shown Samus' life bar
- 3. On the **top right** there is the 3D map of the frigate, where are shown rooms and the doors that divide them;
- 4. On the **middle left** is shown an indicator for environmental dangers, that is not very visible generally but that becomes opaquer when the player is near a danger and this information works with a sound notification when the player is really close;
- 5. On the **bottom left** is shown the visor used by Samus, which at the beginnings there are only twos: the Combat Visor and the Scan Visor;
- 6. On the **bottom right** is shown the arm cannon currently used by Samus, which at the beginnings there is only one: the power beam;
- 7. On the **middle right** there is the missiles counter owned by Samus;
- 8. At the center of the screen, there is the aim of the arm cannon.

Even if there are a lot of information on screen, the **color choice**, a transparent blue, is very good to don't let the player feel **overwhelmed** by the HUD.

Part of the information are uncomplete, in particular referring to the point 5 and 6, but it's a good hint for the player because if there is in general a selection and in that moment of the game there is a lack of choice, it means that the game will give to the player **new power-ups** later in the game.

## **Level Design**

The Space Frigate is a very good choice to let the player feel the atmosphere of the game but at the same time is capable to **give**, in a very restricted area, **all the information** that the players need before starting the real game.

The map is structured in order to use, step by step, all the actions that Samus can perform during the game. It is designed to divide the entire structure in rooms where is needed to do just one action at a time. Once learned the basic actions, the level gives a combination of the initial skills and the environment starts to change in order to rise the challenge of the gameplay: for example, at the beginning the players shoot against doors, then at static enemies, later at static enemies that shoot against you too and at the end the enemies are dynamic and more aggressive. The way the players learn new abilities just passing through a door is very efficient because let to the players the feeling to leave a safer and cleaned area to move to the successive one knowing that there is something more difficult to do or there is the chance to learn something new about the gameplay.

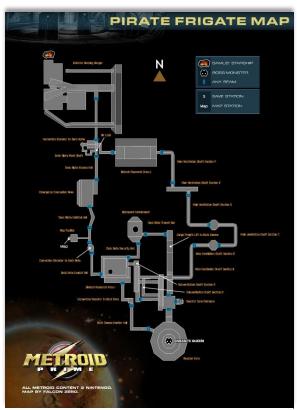


Figure 3: Space Pirate Frigate Map

The Frigate itself shows the nature of Metroid Prime's **level design**: the players will have the sensation to just move continuously forward for all the entire session but the level will end exactly where it started. As a real metroidvania, **the map is interconnected** and this is just a preview of what the player is going to face in the real game: there are secondary rooms where the player can save the game or there are **hidden paths** where the player can unlock **new items**. It's all in the first level.

An important aspect of the level design is performed by the 3D map that the players can consult every time: it can be open through a dedicated button (even if there is a section of it in the HUD) and it isn't shown in its entirety because every time the players step into a new room, that room will appear in the map as well. So, to see the entire map the player should explore every room or, if players are good explorers, the entire map could be found in a secret area of the game.

The purpose of the map is to analyze the best path to reach a game's goal and this is realized in 3D because of different layers accessible through elevators and vertical environments. During the tutorial the map isn't so relevant because of its linearity but it's useful for getting used of it and just to check if there are hidden secrets left during the exploration that the players aren't aware of.

From an artistic point of view the environment is realistic and authentic. The choice of colors is really important to distinguish elements (such as enemies or artifacts) from the environment:

- **Bright blue** is the color that is used to show constraints (like doors, boundaries, artifacts that have to be scanned to move on);
- Orange is the color used for interactable elements (like elevators or save points);

• **Red** is used to recognize the danger or important things (like recognize enemies through the aim and computers with important information).

All these elements are presented in a very progressive way during the exploration that let the player recognize individual elements thanks to the use of appropriate colors matching.

## **Basic Gameplay Mechanics**

The basic actions of the player are:

- Movement and Jump
- Aim and Shoot
- Change Visor and scan elements of the environment

All these elements are presented into the game through a step-by-step tutorial which every action is suggested by the game with a text message in the HUD



Figure 4: Tutorial message

The choice to give hints to the player in this explicit manner is **necessary** because of the many possible combinations that the player can do with the buttons. Clear messages like the one shown in the *Figure 3* are essential to be sure on what it's possible to do in the game.

## Movement and Jump

Movement is the only things that isn't introduced properly: who plays a game is supposed to know **how to move** in 3D environment. The Jump is introduced only in one room of the tutorial where there is a very easy platforming phase where the game suggests the player the right button to press for making a jump.

## Shooting

Shooting mechanic is introduced at the start of the tutorial level through the **aim action**: if the player wants to start the game is obliged to **unlock a door** through **aiming** and **shooting** four lights placed at the side of it. This is a way to force to know the basics, in order to progress into the level. The **learn phase** of shooting is **reinforced** more times with other doors and then with first enemies. They are shown into the level with a **progressive difficulty**:

- o at the beginning enemies are **static** and **inoffensive**, the player has all the time to aim and understand the situation before shooting;
- o then enemies will become more offensive but still static, the **challenge grows** but with the right balance;
- o halfway through the tutorial, they will be **aggressive** and **dynamic**, and from that moment the players have to be careful because they have more chance to defeat them.

After all these enemies, the tutorial level shows the **first boss fight**, the **Parasite Queen** and it is the occasion to the game offers, **after learned and practiced** all the shooting skills, the chance to show how well they have been **mastered** with a fight that is not very difficult but that represent the first challenging moment of the game.

### **Visors**

The player can switch from a **Combat Visor** to a **Scan Visor** and vice versa. The first option view is the main one, which the player can do all the **basic actions** while the second option is a special perspective that let the player interact with elements that can lock/unlock functions of the game (like doors or elevators) or give information story the characteristics of enemies and environmental The player, once learned the shooting mechanic, is introduced to this new feature and to move on to the next area the player is obliged to switch from the Combat Visor to the Scan Visor, because the passage is blocked by which computer is necessary to interact with. This action is **necessary and useful** because the player is **forced** to do this action and in this way the game assured the player to give an important action that should be performed throughout the entire game. During the game is necessary to use again the Scan Visor to unlock mechanism and also know information of the enemies: at the end of the level the player will face the Parasite Queen and the game itself suggests to the player to use the Scan to know the enemy's weak points. It's here that is possible to see in how many ways the Scan vision could be useful during the game.

## **Advanced Gameplay Mechanics**

During the tutorial Samus is capable of other important actions that are very useful to succeed in the tutorial level:

- Power Beam, maintaining pressed the shoot button, the player can release a big amount of energy with a higher damage of the basic attack;
- Missiles, strong limited weapon with a very high damage;
- Morph Ball, Samus can turn herself into a sphere which let her go through special paths that are inaccessible into a basic stand position and also unlock special doors that require this form factor to be opened;

o **Grapple Beam**, a special grappling hook shoot by the Samus' arm cannon that let her bypass dangerous environment and reach higher spots.

All these actions are considered **advanced** because, at the end of the tutorial level, the player is going to **lose** those actions due to electromagnetic waves that weakens Samus.

This aspect could be considered a deficit of the tutorial level, because is in that exact moment that the player started to know how to use those powers and then the game leaves the player feels weaker suddenly.

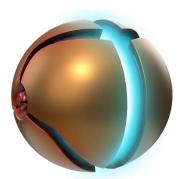


Figure 5: Morph Ball

But this is, actually, the **best aspect** of the tutorial:

The players, after the tutorial, during the exploration of entire game will encounter obstacles that cannot be overcome because is requested one of the **power-ups owned during the tutorial**. This is a very good lecture of the level design, because through the tutorial level, developers give all the interpretation that the player needs to move into the interconnected map of the game: thanks to that experience, the players will remember all those spots which aren't possible to go through and when the player will re-obtain those power ups, they will remember where those power ups are to be used, without any kind of suggestions. And it's possible to proceed into the game.

#### Conclusions

The tutorial level of Metroid Prime has all the elements needed to let the player enjoy the journey into the game, spreading all the information needed and giving them in a way that the player is forced to use to complete that level. Moreover, are given elements that will be useful to the future interpretation of the game's map and the goals to reach during the exploration of the map.