

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 see 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 two: 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 incomplete, 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.

- **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**:

- at the beginning enemies are **static** and **inoffensive**, the player has all the time to aim and understand the situation before shooting;
- then enemies will become more offensive but still static, the **challenge grows** but with the right balance;
- 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** to the story and the characteristics of enemies and environmental elements. 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 a computer which 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;

- **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.

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.

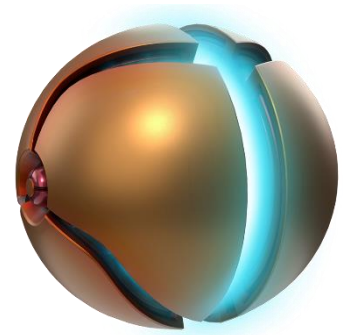


Figure 5: Morph Ball