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A few weeks ago, I published a video chronicling the evolution of 2D Metroid. I looked at how the games have progressed and regressed over time. I did this in anticipation of Metroid Dread, the first original 2D Metroid game in just under twenty years; the self-professed Metroid 5. Through playing all of these games, I gained a much better understanding of the series' strengths and weaknesses. I like to think I did a pretty good job outlining how the series has evolved, and set a pretty reasonable standard going into Dread. My questions were simple: would Dread be a worthy follow-up to Fusion? Would it find ways to incorporate the strengths of the series, whilst introducing facets of its own so as not to appear stagnant? Would this **feel** like Metroid 5, or would it simply be a disguise?

After 10+ playthroughs and a **lot** of reflection, not only do I think it met those standards, it exceeded them in ways I couldn't have expected. While it's not a perfect game, or even the perfect **Metroid** game, it's safe to say that this rests at the peak of what this franchise can offer, and is an impressive reminder of why I fell in love with it to begin with. Welcome back, Samus.

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We find Samus on the ground, unconscious. The mission was to infiltrate Planet ZDR and investigate for signs of the X-parasite. It didn't go according to plan. Samus was attacked by a mysterious Chozo and stripped of her powers by unknown means. She's stuck in the deepest depths of the planet, and must find a way to make it back to her ship. As Adam eloquently puts it: survive by any means necessary. It's an effective twist on the traditional format. There's no going back to your ship for respite, and there are seven EMMI crawling around ready to kill you when you enter their hunting grounds. The imposing Chozo from the beginning is nowhere to be found. Why did he attack you? Why are you still alive? Where is he, and what is he planning? There's a lot of uncertainty and tension this premise brings with it, accompanying you as you search for a way out.

ZDR is a compelling mixture of various environmental moods across the series. You get your more traditional ecologies: the smoldering rock and magma of Cataris, the burgeoning overgrowth of Ghavoran, and the underwater depths of Burenia. These are all archetypes we've seen before, plenty of times, but the level of detail they're able to render gives these biomes more to work with. While it's easy to gloss over the backgrounds, there's always something there to give each new room a standout feature. Be that a series of caves in Artaria, the bodies hovering over pits of magma in Cataris, and the visually arresting outskirts of the Burenia laboratory. Dark and stormy with rippling waves is pretty much my entire aesthetic. The addition of unnatural structures, signs of past civilizations, completes the unsettling atmosphere. Every single area has signs of intelligent life, usually in the form of creepy laboratories that the EMMI have made into their stalking grounds. It's difficult to discern where the mark of life begins and ends, as you often weave in and out of these structures, built into the planet itself.

Clearly, the Burenia lab was flooded a long time ago, as the coral reefs are bleeding into the building, deadly sea creatures making it their new home. There's evidence everywhere that the place has been abandoned for a very long time. It stands in stark contrast to Ferenia, a Chozo castle built on top of an underground mountain of rocks. It's just below the surface, so you can see the light filtering through the cracks, yet you're surrounded by reminders that you're still below ground. I love the red carpets and statues which adorn the halls. I love the music you get here, it has a sort of regal eeriness which amplifies the majesty of it all.

Nothing in this soundtrack is anything earworm-worthy, which is a bit of a shame given the series' pedigree, but the tracks all do a great job underscoring your exploration of each area. There's a vibe here that's odd, a little bit of techno, a little bit of synth, and a lot of melodies that don't really come together in a memorable way, yet help to set the tone. The EMMI areas showcase the soundtrack at its most powerful. Many of the tracks weaponize their ambience to put the player on edge, but the EMMI areas take it to the next level. Here's the track that plays when the EMMI are patrolling. It's just a bunch of scattered noises, pairing well with the distant sound of the EMMI crawling around, setting off its sonar device every once in a while. You never really know where an EMMI is until you're close to them, at which point, they'll likely hear one of your footsteps and begin their search. The track morphs into something a little more urgent. They quicken the pace of the notes, letting the player know they're being hunted. If they spot you, though, well: it just goes crazy. A clash of random noises, interspersed with a single note repeating itself over and over again, it signals to you one thing: if you can't get away, you're going to **die**.

The EMMI really impressed me. I was always a big fan of the **idea** of making larger, more involved sequences with entities that resemble the SA-X, but something about their designs weren't super intimidating. However, when I was spotted by one of them for the first time, prompting me to run for my life, that fear was pretty damn genuine. These things are **fast**, and the way they can contort their bodies, go through their own crawl spaces, show up out of nowhere to surprise you, then pin you to the ground and stab you in the neck with swift, precise motions: you could say they grew on me. It feels like you've entered their winding labyrinth. So not only can the player not harm or destroy these EMMI until they've found a way to the end of the maze, they also can't move as freely or swiftly as their pursuer. They're trapped inside the moment they're seen, forcing some on-the-fly evasive thinking. Each EMMI has a different ability to make every encounter unique.

One of them has the speed booster, another can freeze you on sight, another can see and fire through walls. Every EMMI is different from the last, each with their own uniquely challenging arenas and abilities that make them difficult to contend with even if you know all of their tricks. When you finally track down the Central Unit, destroying them and stealing their ability, turning off the film grain effect, now able to traverse without worry: it's incredibly satisfying. Your defensive options prevent this game of cat and mouse from ever getting too frustrating. Early on, you're given the Phantom Cloak to turn invisible and evade the EMMI's sight. You're also given the ability to counter them when caught. Both of these abilities are, obviously, extremely useful in evading the EMMI, but they have drawbacks. You can only stay invisible for a short

period of time. Moving, shooting, or jumping while invisible will make the Aeion gauge deplete faster. After it depletes, it begins draining your energy. All the while, you move at a snail's pace, meaning you can't keep it on through the **whole** section. You also can't use it when an EMMI is chasing you, meaning there are no get out of jail free cards here. When you're inevitably caught, even now you still have a slim chance of survival if you can counter at the two available opportunities you're given. It's very difficult, as the window to counter is microscopic, and the counter timing changes at random. Sometimes it'll come out quick, sometimes it'll be delayed. It's rare and challenging, but even up to the moment you're killed, you **always** have a way out. That's ZDR's mood: a fight for survival on an abandoned planet. If that isn't Metroid to a tee, I don't know what is.

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You know, it's interesting that the inciting incident here is a video of the X-parasite being sent to the Federation. I wonder how they were contacted? Did they **perhaps** check the Federation's **website**?

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I'll be the first to admit that I was a little worried about how Samus would feel; her movement speed, abilities, etc. As you'll recall, I don't have a high opinion of Samus Returns as a whole, so my hopes weren't exactly high. Despite how many angry comments I got, it is **curious** that many of Dread's gameplay strengths are an example of Mercury Steam addressing the larger criticisms of Samus Returns.

The Switch doesn't really use the touch screen for much of anything, so we don't get any gimmicks here. You can turn into the morph ball with the press of a single button, a feature from AM2R. Samus Returns doesn't count, because it's literally faster and more convenient to manually enter morph ball mode than it is to tap the touch screen. Plus there's a new slide move which eliminates the need to enter morph ball mode most of the time anyway. Super Missiles are a direct upgrade, like they are in Fusion, meaning there's no awkward missile switching. The Grapple Beam is activated by holding ZR and shooting, which honestly just makes more sense than randomly being context-sensitive in free aim, and allows the player to naturally switch between beam and grapple modes.

The melee counter isn't something you have to come to a dead stop to use. Now, you're allowed to counter **while moving** which makes much more of a difference than you might initially realize. Maintaining your movement is essential to Metroid, given that all of the games promote speedrunning to some extent. Relying on a move which forced you to come to a standstill was slow and clunky. While it was initially satisfying to pull off, as the game went on, whenever I saw the counter signal, I'd just let out an exasperated sigh. In Dread, most enemies can be countered almost as soon as you're next to them. There are some notable, annoying exceptions, but for the most part, you can run by an enemy, look for its signal, and counter-kill it without disrupting your flow. Those signals also vary in how long they take to come out, meaning with each new enemy comes a different counter timing to learn.

The Aeion abilities were pretty cool to play around with, but one of their annoying drawbacks was how their energy meter functioned. Using an Aeion ability would drain your Aeion gauge, and the only way to refill it was to kill enemies. Counterkills would reward more Aeion, and there were occasionally refill spots to use if you were running low. Since it was used a lot for puzzle solving, there were many times where I'd be trying to solve a hard puzzle or something and run out of Aeion, forcing me out of the room to go look for a recharge. In Dread, the gauge has been transformed into something that automatically recharges. This makes it so you can still use your abilities for puzzle solving, but only for a short window of time. It just makes more sense.

The camera is zoomed out much further, and the environment design allows for areas with more space. It's been widened enough to allow for the speed booster, something Samus Returns had to omit due to its much more claustrophobic design. I mean, AM2R tells me it wouldn't have been impossible to meaningfully incorporate the Speed Booster into SR388 with a few tweaks, just as it was introduced to Zebes in Zero Mission. Changes like this make exploring Dread as exciting as AM2R, Zero Mission, Super Metroid, or even Fusion. It simply feels like there weren't compromises that had to be made, and sure maybe a lot of that comes down to Dread being developed for the Switch rather than the 3DS, and it not being a remake of Metroid II. Yet, I do believe many of these problems were deliberate choices that could have been avoided, given that AM2R **exists**. The fact that they were all addressed in Dread gives me a ton of respect for the devs at Mercury Steam (though recent news about them not crediting their staff makes me want to take that statement back), and a lot of validation for the deserved flack I gave it in my Metroid evolution video. A game which, by the way, I don't even think is bad.

Through these changes, and additions of its own, Dread positions itself as much more of an action game than its predecessors. The boss fights are longer and often more intense, with more emphasis placed on learning tells and dodging fast attacks. Upgrades like the Phase Shift allow for these more frenetic fights, since you have an ability that lets you quickly dash around the battlefield. Metroid has always been an action game, of course, but you could say that Dread hones in on it, making longer and harder boss fights as a consequence of that focus. What I find really impressive, though, is that the boss design stays true to the best games in the series. Fast-paced fights where you get to lay on the firepower while dodging attacks. I especially enjoy the boss dynamics once you unlock the Storm Missiles, since you have to balance the act of locking onto the enemy with dodging their attacks. It's a satisfying push and pull with every encounter.

Perhaps they re-use a few mini-bosses more times than I'd like, but at least they almost all introduce a new mechanic. Whether it be the spear parasites gaining shields you can counter to destroy, or having that shield counter need an additional grapple beam to yank off, or throwing in two of them at once, or giving you just enough room to speed boost and shinespark for massive damage. I'm a pretty big fan of just how many times they've given you the ability to shinespark into bosses, it's super rewarding. Probably the most memorable instance is this experiment fight where you can completely skip the second phase if you store a shinespark when the fans are pushing you. You even get a different dynamic when you unlock abilities like the screwattack, where you can often just jump into these repeated minibosses and kill them in no time flat. You can one hit the Central Units when their brain is exposed, I just love how many little secrets there are to the power-ups. They aren't **just** used to open new doorways, they also serve as upgrades to your combat ability. Which has always been true of Metroid, sure, but I think Dread really doubles down on making every ability stand out.

I do think it's kind of a shame that there aren't that many new abilities, but at least they play around with your expectations. Usually, the morph ball is one of the first things you get, but here, you have to get quite a ways in before you unlock it. It was probably the most satisfying "morph ball acquired" moment in the series given just how many places you're barred from accessing without it up to that point. The cross bombs are a neat upgrade to the morph ball bomb, and they're able to craft some interesting puzzles around the idea of them pushing you far distances. The speed booster, oh my lord. I didn't think they could make my favorite ability even better, but they have. There are some quality of life changes, like how you're given several seconds to choose your direction, removing pretty much all the frustration you'd get awkwardly fumbling around in Fusion and Zero Mission. Morph Ball shinesparking no longer throws you up in the air, so you can just shinespark in any direction. And, the big one, you can now maintain your speed boost after a jump, through wall jumps, and through slides. I didn't even know you could do this on my first couple playthroughs, since it's never strictly required. It's **really hard**, but you can finagle your way through them by traditional means. It felt like unlocking a sixth sense when I saw how it's been expanded. Not only does this make the shinespark puzzle solving more fun and less frustrating, it also makes for a more fluid speedrunning tool with a **lot** of interesting potential.

Personally, I was hoping for just a little bit more. I still really don't like that we have to keep ending these games with the Gravity Suit. I really like Samus' suit design in this game, it has an interesting flavor, but to just see the purple stacked on top of it as per usual is kinda disappointing. And purple's my favorite color! I really love how the Prime games handle their suit upgrades, and wish a little of that bled into Dread beyond the last few moments of gameplay. However, I do feel like these upgrades make for an incredibly satisfying toolkit for the endgame, and the final boss is perhaps my favorite in the series. You can use your beam, storm missiles, you can counter him at various points, you have to use your space jump and phase shift to avoid certain attacks, you get to slide under him, there's enough room to shinesspark, and one of his later attacks can be destroyed with the power bomb. It really feels like you're throwing out your entire arsenal, it's a challenging fight and a fitting final test for this mechanically heightened Metroid.

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One of my concerns going into Dread was how it would ultimately handle your progression. The more I think about and reflect on the franchise, there are only really a few games that ever let you loose into the world and had you figure things out on your own. Metroid I, and Super Metroid. Every other game, to a greater or lesser extent, spelled out the way forward. I really enjoyed floundering around Zebes in Super Metroid, lost and alone, but I know not everyone loves that. So it's really no surprise that Dread guides you with its unseen hand. Thankfully, there's nothing here like Zero Mission or Fusion, no one is expressly telling you where to go next. Adam mentions maybe like one or two times where you have to go, but most of your intended path is for you to figure out. I appreciate that; **however**.

What got on my nerves a bit was just how much was robbed from my own critical thought. How many times I'd get an ability, it would show me how to use it to escape the room I was in, classic metroid, only for me to escape the room and conveniently be right next to something I can break or unlock with this new ability, which just so happens to be the way to the next ability, and so on. All I really wanted was just one or two moments where I really had to think about the world and where I was going, but that just never happened until I was looking for secrets. Maybe I've just played enough Metroid to know the tells, since I've heard from a few friends that they managed to get themselves lost at a few points, but I just couldn't help that small pang of annoyance whenever I was spit out of a power up room and into a teleportal.

It's even more frustrating when the game gives you literally no other option than to take its path. So you take the red teleportal after getting the morph ball, which takes you back to Artaria. You do this because you can't go fight Kraid without the Varia Suit, which you keep a mental note of. Conveniently, there's a morph ball shaft in the left room, the only way forward. You could theoretically go down, but why would you? This is a new path with a tantalizing power up. This takes you to the Varia Suit, which you unlock after an admittedly cool set-piece where the lava explodes around you, destroying the area. After this, though, you're spit back out to the red teleportal and are **forced through it**. There's some debris blocking your morph ball path now, for some reason. Of course, the reason is because they want you to immediately go back and

fight Kraid, but I suppose my question is: what was even the point of doing this to begin with then? What if you wanted to get some power ups before going back through the teleportal? What if you wanted to hunt around for new paths or something? I understand why the game sometimes blocks off pathways. When the planet freezes over, you need to fix it by killing a boss, so of course they don't just allow you to go wherever you want. I get that, it's actually pretty reminiscent of things Fusion would do that I really liked. But in this case, there's absolutely no reason for them to do this other than to make doubly sure that the player goes back to Kraid, like they have such **little** faith in the player to make the connection between Kraid and the Varia Suit.

Even though it isn't nearly as obnoxious as Zero Mission literally spelling out your next upgrade, it was still something that bothered me... until I discovered, by accident, on my first playthrough, a sequence break to get the Gravity Suit early. So I went through the Green Teleportal, poked around and found a speed booster puzzle. I solved it, because any excuse to use the speed booster makes me happy, and I noticed a little hole in the wall at the end. So I went through it. I started wandering around pretty confused. Was this... the correct path forward? Certainly not, a speed booster puzzle this intense would never be on the main path right? Why am I skipping over this entire left section of Burenia? When I got the Gravity Suit and left, that's when I realized: I just skipped the left section of Burenia. They clearly wanted me to go there, but I did a sequence break.

After I beat the game, I immediately went back for a second playthrough. What else am I missing here? There has to be more, right, that can't be the only one. Thus started my journey of uncovering sequence breaks, on my own since none of them were on YouTube yet. What I discovered was essentially a treasure trove of things the game lets you do. I discovered that you can get Super Missiles early by doing some cool speed booster shenanigans in a cold room. I discovered that you can get the screwattack while the planet is still frozen by infinite bomb jumping or shinesparking into this shaft. The fact that I was able to discover all of these on my own was impressive enough, but when I went to YouTube to look for more, I found **so much**. Apparently, I didn't even get the Gravity Suit as early as you **could** obtain it. Since you can shinespark underwater, you can get the Gravity Suit before the Space Jump or Storm Missiles. You can do the same shinespark trick backwards in this area to get the cross bombs early. You can get the space jump without the storm missiles, you can get the scan pulse by finding the orange teleportal, and, by far the best damn thing in the game, you can get the grapple beam before Kraid, which opens a secret path to unlock the morph ball bombs. I had always wondered what this little bomb tube was in Kraid's Lair? It served no purpose, I just couldn't figure it out. Turns out, it was there to **signal to the player** that you can get morph ball bombs before fighting Kraid, and can use them to shoot out of this tube and instantly kill him in his second phase.

I felt like a kid in a candy store uncovering all these sequence breaks, it was pure Metroid bliss. As much as I was annoyed by the game holding my hand so much, it was difficult to dwell on that when it does **exactly** what I wanted it to do, and gives you its express permission to break it in half. Not only that, it designed so many of these sequence breaks intentionally, to an extent

that I don't even think Super can top, at least for **intentional** tricks and skips. Even then, there have been a cavalcade of clearly unintended skips to get things like the screwattack before the Gravity Suit, skip an entire boss, and even phase through the floor. Dread even being **comparable** to Super Metroid, **without** an infinite wall jump, is pretty damn incredible.

Playing the game to sequence break leads to **so many** interesting alternate pathways. Getting the Grapple beam before Kraid lets you leave this room, instead of being trapped here and forced to go through the purple teleportal. Early Super Missiles increase your damage output on the bosses and mini-bosses you'll encounter. Getting the Gravity Suit and Screwattack early means that you can go back and kill this beetle boss with the screwattack. One of the first things the Screwattack tells you is that it can even hurt electrified enemies, which is a subtle hint that you can cheese this boss entirely when you get it early. You're normally supposed to come to this area and leave for the Gravity Suit, but if you come here after the Gravity Suit, you're able to quickly bypass the EMMI rooms that are supposed to first be traversed **without** the suit. You can completely trivialize the EMMI if you sequence break. And you can tell they intentionally built it this way, because when you sequence break like this, instead of having to leave Ferenia and kinda awkwardly come back, with this route, you can grab the Space Jump, Storm Missiles, and Wave Beam, and head straight to the surface for the end of the game.

It can even improve the endgame item hunt for 100%, which is unfortunately not perfect. Since the Power Bomb is so closely related to the story, there's really no way to get it before the end of the game, which inevitably means you have to go back to all these places that require the power bomb and get the upgrades you missed. I don't think it's as obnoxious as Zero Mission or Fusion, since all of the teleportals connect at the end making world traversal much faster, but it's still a little too long for my liking. I get why picking up power bomb ammo early doesn't actually give you the power bomb, like it would in previous games, but it **really** would have solved **everything**. 100% would be clean, the sequence breaking would be the best in any Metroid game, and I would be fully satisfied. Alas, that is not the case, but **at least** sequence breaking allows you to pick up a lot of the secrets along the way much more naturally than the main path.

Let me tell you, if Dread didn't have sequence breaking, if the developers didn't put so many of them in the game, I think my opinion of it would be **a lot** lower than it currently is. I'm glad they made a conscious effort to reward veteran players in that way, without making a first time playthrough **too unwelcoming** for Metroid newcomers. I mean, this is half the reason I love Super Metroid, and it's half the reason I love Dread.

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I've saved this talking point until the end because it's the one where I'll be raising a few more prominent criticisms. Just try to keep in mind that I adore this game, okay? It's good to criticize the things you love. Embrace it.

This story is the finale of a saga, one that I wasn't really sure even existed until they announced that it did. I guess I just assumed that Metroid would continue down its narrative track and

change things up as it went along, but no: we may be getting more Metroid games, but this is the definitive end to the now five game saga surrounding the Metroids. In a lot of ways, it feels like a fitting finale. It is surreal to finally see more of the Chozo, beings that have been heavily alluded to. Learning about this radical sect of warriors is interesting given that we only really have the perspective of them aiding Samus as a more reserved species. Raven Beak is one of the most intimidating forces Samus has gone up against, trying to lure out her latent Metroid abilities. It's implied that he stole her powers and hid them throughout the planet, hoping that through this process she would fully awaken her Metroid DNA. Near the end of the game, there's a bit of a fake out where you think you're talking to Adam, but it's actually Raven Beak. He starts talking about destiny and other weird stuff before you fight the boss, it instills this perfectly ominous feeling into the player that something isn't quite right here. Helps that Adam's voice is delightfully cold and robotic, making it so much more believable that Samus would have a hard time trusting it in Fusion.

What I love about this fake out, though, is that it's difficult to discern where it even happens. Have you actually been talking to Adam this whole time, or was it Raven Beak from the beginning? I find it curious that Adam says you'll lose communication and need to access a network terminal to re-establish comms. This is one of only two times he calls Samus "Lady," the other being the scene right before this. Over the course of your gameplay, Adam does not call Samus Lady a **single** time. Considering they went out of their way to have him call her Lady twice in the intro, and **never again**, it leads me to believe that Raven Beak was talking to Samus the **whole time**. And when you view the story this way, it starts to make a lot more sense. Like, why did you lose your powers? Adam basically tells you "idk, amnesia I guess?" which initially is a super lame explanation, but when you consider that it's Raven Beak coming up with a random excuse, because he's the one who stole your powers and hid them around ZDR, in an effort to turn you into a weapon: it starts to make a little more sense.

Ultimately, there's no way to definitively prove when Raven Beak was in control here, but it's a fascinating question nonetheless, building him up as this manipulative, sinister threat for Samus to face after she blasts away the illusion. Her nonverbal communication in cutscenes is **on point**. She has a level of swagger and bravado fitting for a woman who has been on dozens of missions at this point and has just **had enough** of everyone's shit. You really get the sense that she's been hardened by all the stuff she's gone through, especially after the revelations in Fusion. So when she sees Kraid again, slowly lifting her arm cannon up to shoot him in the mouth, you really get the sense that she just doesn't give a fuck anymore, and I love that. It's actually why I'm okay with Kraid being back. In Samus Returns, Ridley coming in at the end is incredibly forced, but it also serves pretty much zero purpose outside of nostalgic reverence. Kraid, meanwhile, is here to show just how much Samus has grown. If you've been with the series up to this point, you've seen Kraid, you know all his tricks, it's not impressive anymore, and Samus **agrees with you**.

It isn't as if she's an emotionless robot, either. Sure, you can make your comparisons to the Doom Slayer or whatever, but there are so many moments where she shows vulnerability, weakness, anger, grief. When she lowers her arm cannon after recognizing that Quiet Robe isn't

a threat. When she lingers for a while, staring at his corpse, before begrudgingly moving on. When she starts screaming in anger in her fight against Raven Beak. At the beginning of the game, Adam comments on how the bounty for this mission is low, and he's confused as to why Samus took it in the first place. And, if you understand Samus as a character even a little bit, you realize that she's on this mission because the X-parasite poses a threat to the galaxy. Even if there was **no bounty**, she'd still be here. You don't need a heavy dialogue dump to understand where Samus is coming from, and I adore that Mercury Steam were able to establish the beats of her character while only giving her a few words of speech.

I even love how they re-incorporate the X-parasite. One of the Chozo on SR388 was infected, so they had to quarantine him and lock the parasite in their prison. After Samus unknowingly releases them, they infect the entire planet, and suddenly the normal enemies you've been fighting have been infected by X-parasites that you can absorb. It increases the difficulty, while throwing a bone to fans in a completely unobtrusive way. Unfortunately, this is kinda where my largest criticisms come in. At some point, an X possesses Quiet Robe, and turns the EMMI back on. I am genuinely confused as to the role this possessed Quiet Robe plays in the narrative. Suddenly, it shows up at the end in Samus' ship, takes away her out of control Metroid powers, and she leaves. There's no reflection, no moment of pause, it just **ends**. Samus getting lifesteal was **so cool**, watching her turn into a Metroid feels like the logical next step after Fusion. There's a feeling while you're escaping the planet that Samus really is a threat to the universe. How will she grapple with this newfound power? How will the universe attempt to hunt or use her, as the Federation did? All of these really interesting questions are seemingly thrown out the window when this x-parasite flies into her.

For a saga finale, this ending is far too ambiguous. Did this remove her Metroid DNA or simply suppress it? Did Quiet Robe overtake the X-parasite to do that, or was it the will of the X-parasite that made it happen? And the fact that it unceremoniously ends at this point, with not a hint of input from Adam or Samus, makes it feel really incomplete. I'm all for leaving things up to interpretation, but this is something I'd have appreciated just a little more elaboration on.

There are also some things about this faction of Chozo that kinda bother me. Quiet Robe explains to Samus a lot of the new lore they added in Samus Returns that I'm not a big fan of to begin with. How they installed weird DNA machines you can plug Metroids into to descend further into the depths. I don't care how far they want to go to try to explain this, even if it makes sense, I just think it's stupid and kinda contrived. Yeah, having an earthquake occur every once in a while was also weird, but at least it could be explained by natural causes or the Metroid queen. But hey, Samus Returns is the **recommended way** to play Metroid 2, so whatever. I can live with that.

What I absolutely will not live with, though, is the implication that what Samus did on SR388 was justified. An element to Metroid II's story that I adore is how the baby Metroid gets you to question Samus' mission. Why did the Federation send you here to wipe out an entire species? Did they really need to kill them all? I'd say, the fact that she spares the last Metroid, is a sign that no, in fact, maybe what she did was morally questionable. In Fusion, they go on to explain

that eliminating the Metroids allowed the x-parasite to roam free without any natural predators, destroying the planet's ecosystem. In Dread, though, Quiet Robe basically says "man, it's a good thing you wiped out those Metroids, because Raven Beak really wanted to go back and weaponize them." It just robs a lot of the emotional weight from some of the things that have happened to Samus, because now, well, even if she did do some questionable things, that's okay because at least Raven Beak couldn't come and take over the universe.

I do like the idea of Raven Beak seeking out Samus after he learned of her Metroid DNA, it feels like a natural motivation to put the two at odds. But the reveal of her being genetically linked to him was just a step too much. It's completely unnecessary. What does this add to Samus' character? And how many questions must we now ask ourselves? Where and when did Raven Beak give Samus his DNA? Why does Samus seem to have no idea who he is? Why has Raven Beak not sought her out up to this point? Samus' character has always stood out to me because, even though she was helped by the Chozo, ultimately, it was her bravery and confidence which carried her through to the end of all her missions. She is the reason she's survived this long. I don't see any meaningful reason to have Raven Beak spouting about her being his "daughter" ; it feels **extremely cheesy** and comes out of nowhere. Which is saying something, because Metroid lore ain't exactly perfect.

But, that's the thing, isn't it? Metroid **lore** has always been pretty wonky, and I think the things that Dread carries with its story are more important anyway, building out more of Samus' character, building the tension for upcoming boss fights, and incorporating fanservice in a completely natural way. If it's got to be a little cheesy and contrived to get to that point, I can live with that.

Dread isn't perfect. I know that, you know that. And yet, I've played it more than ten times, and I'm probably going to do several more playthroughs. There's something about Metroid I'm drawn to again, and again, and again. If this series is to continue, I think Mercury Steam have an incredibly good grasp on what makes the series appealing, and are evidently **very** receptive to criticism. I'm not really sure where we'll be going from here, but one can only hope that Metroid Prime 4 does for Prime what Dread did for 2D Metroid.