

Metroid Prime 3: Corruption by Roger Danish

If *Zelda* and *Mario* aren't enough to get you all jittery with excitement, Nintendo, along with their development partners at Retro Studios, are working hard on their *Metroid* title, *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption*. For all of the scoops on the game straight from the developer's mouths, turn to the exclusive interview in this very cover feature.

The first thing to note is that there is a small learning curve involved with *Corruption*'s unique controls, especially for those of us who are used to the GameCube setup. While they are intuitive, there are a lot of buttons to use and actions to perform, which takes some getting used to. To aim Samus's cannon, all you need do is point the Remote where you want to shoot on screen. As long as you keep the Remote within the confines of the size of the screen and use quick and precise movements, accuracy and response is spot on. If you want to turn Samus, you'll need to aim the Remote all the way to either edge of the screen. Movement (forward, back and strafing) is handled with the analog stick. To aid you with targeting enemies, you can lock on by holding down the Z trigger on the Nunchuk controller (however, you must be within a certain range to do so). Firing is handled by the A button on the Remote, while jumping is done by pressing the B button, which is located underneath. Finally, you can press the C button to curl up into Samus's trademark Morph Ball.

Here's where things get interesting. You can use also use the Remote for special actions, such as pulling door switches. You actually mimic the movements of reaching forward with the Remote, then turning the handle and pulling it back to open the door. To use Samus's Grappling Beam, you must press the Z trigger to lock-on to a target (in the demo these were pieces of debris blocking doorways and enemies with shields), and then swing the Nunchuk forward. Once the grappling hook is attached, you then pull down on the analog stick to yank the object away.

The demo was impressive, intense, and once we became used to the mechanics, a blast to play. We can't wait to see what other surprises are in store for us as the game gets closer to its expected release.



RETRO STUDIOS

To get a feel for what it was like to work on a Wii game, we made the trek to Redmond, WA, home to Nintendo of America, and sat down for a chat with a few of the people working on *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption*. We got lucky and caught some of the guys in charge of the game.

From Nintendo Co., Ltd.:
Mr. Kensuke Tanabe - Producer, SPD Group 3
From Retro Studios:
Michael Kelbaugh - President
Bryan Walker - Senior Producer
Mark Pacini - Game Director

We didn't go in unprepared. A short while prior to our scheduled meeting, we invited members from Luv2Game.com to give us their questions to ask in person. The following is a transcript of the conversation that ensued with credit given to the LZG members who came up with the original questions.

Glitch: What are you doing to make *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption* better than previous *Metroid* titles?

Mark Pacini: What we have done is incorporate the new corruption mechanic that, if you know a little about the story behind the *Metroid Prime* series, has to do with phazons. We're building on that in *Metroid Prime 3* and are making it a critical part of the game's story as well as integrating it into the main mechanics of the game. Samus will become incredibly powerful.

Glitch: Can you tell us anything about any new weapons we may find in *Corruption*?

MP: One of the new things we're doing is implementing a weapon stacking system, similar to what was done in *Super Metroid*. In other *Metroid* games, the player would switch between weapons. In *Corruption*, you will be able to stack the beams on top of each other in a way that you will continue to have the same power of the previous beam but the new beam will be added on top. For example Samus may have one beam that has heat properties, like the plasma beam (that would be an upgrade to the normal power beam). She can then add another beam on top of that that would possibly enable her to shoot through certain types of material — things like that. So really what we are doing is adding a different type of game play that, rather than making you switch between different weapons, you will combine weapon systems themselves. That's just a basic example of the new weapons system.

eL_capitan: Besides aiming, how are you utilizing the Wii controller in the game?

MP: One example would be the grapple beam. The way it's done is you take the Nunchuk controller (editor's note: the one with the analog thumbstick) and actually cast it forward at certain targets to fire the grapple beam. You're not using a button to fire the grapple beam; it's actually a motion you make with the controller. The beam will not only allow the player to swing in this game, but you will be able to latch onto things and lift them away. It's a major mechanic that we're working on. Other new control aspects are simple context sensitive interaction. In previous *Metroid* games, we used scanning as one of the ways to do things like open doors or access certain areas. In this game, we wanted to make even the simplest action really interesting because we have this new controller to work with. So, for example, a very simple contextual interaction would be, rather than scanning something, Samus will put her left hand out and grab a handle. You, the player, will use the motion of the Wii controller to pull the handle, twist it and push it back in without touching any buttons. So it's a really different way to interface with the game. We're making interactions, even on the simplest level, really fun. Those are just two basic things we're doing with the controls but there really is a lot more.

eL_capitan: Can you tell us what type of sounds will come out of the controller's speaker?

Kensuke Tanabe: Unfortunately, there is nothing concrete we can discuss about that at this time but we'll release those details as soon as they are finalized.

lobitoh: Can you tell us anything about the online aspects of the game?

Bryan Walker: There will be no multiplayer in *Metroid Prime 3* but we are very excited about the potential of the Wii Connect 24 online functionality and we expect to find different ways of leveraging that.

lobitoh: Will Samus have any new costumes or will we get to see her without her suit?

MP: [chuckles] We always like saving surprises for the player. You can be sure it's being considered heavily.

HGM: I think you'll find that a lot of people would like to see that. [chuckles]

BW: [laughs] Us too.

mlrlycupants: Can you tell us where in the *Metroid* timeline this game falls? Is it a direct sequel to *Metroid Prime 2* or does it fall somewhere else in the series?

KT: It's set a few months after *Metroid Prime 2*.

HGM: Can you talk a little bit more about the subtitle, *Corruption* and how that ties into the game?

MP: Sure. Like I mentioned before, it's not only a part of the story, but part of the game play as well. In *Metroid Prime* and *Metroid Prime 2*, the planets the player was visiting were actually corrupted by phazons. In *Metroid Prime* the planet got hit by a phazon and it corrupted all the indigenous life forms and the pirates were taking advantage of that. In *Metroid Prime 2* the phazon infected that planet and actually split into a dark and a light world, shall we say... in *Metroid Prime 3* we've taken the next step in which we see what happens to planets that become corrupted. We not only show that on a galactic scale as one of the primary things you're doing in the game, but also dealing with it on a personal scale. Samus herself becomes corrupted by a phazon. Not only is this a detrimental thing, but it unlocks all of these abilities that Samus never had before and that will essentially make her very powerful... but at a cost. So not only is corruption in the game a very large idea but it also affects the player on a very personal level.

HGM: Is this game strictly a first-person shooter? Will we find any 2D or third-person sections in the game?

KT: Besides some cut scenes and the 3rd person view you will get when Samus morphs into a ball, the game is strictly first-person.

Lupus_Gemini: Will any of the bounty hunters from the DS game show up in this game?

Michael Kelbaugh: None of the hunters from *Metroid Prime: Hunters* make an appearance, but plenty of new hunters do.

dack: Will there be any sort of cross-platform link between *Corruption* and *Hunters* via WiFi or anything like that?

KT: We don't have any plans to do that at this time.

HGM: In terms of size and scope, how does *Corruption* compare to previous *Metroid Prime* titles?

MP: It will be very comparable. Previous games had around 20-24 hours of game play and that's where we're headed with this title.

HGM: How many people are on the development team?

MK: There are about 70 people overall.

HGM: Is that more than for other *Metroid Prime* games? Did you have to ramp up for this one?

MK: Yes, but not considerably. There is new technology to deal with on the Wii so we did increase our head count.

HGM: In terms of graphics, I know the Wii isn't trying to push the boundaries of the next generation with visuals, but how would you compare it to the previous titles on GameCube. Are you guys adding new technical bells and whistles?

MP: The graphics have been upgraded considerably. We have more memory, and with the new CPU/GPU architecture, you're going to see a very noticeable improvement in the quality of the visuals.

MK: One of the nice things about working on the Wii is that the transition from GameCube has been very smooth. There hasn't been a lot of downtime. Just from a development standpoint, it's been a blessing not to have to spend months and months just learning a new system. It's been very cost effective and a very nice transition.

HGM: Are you working with the final Wii hardware yet or is it still a work in progress?

MK: No, we're constantly getting tweaks and upgrades. I don't know if hardware is ever really final from a developer's perspective. There's always new things being discovered and taken advantage of throughout a system's life, but we're very comfortable with the way things are going.

HGM: Was implementing the Wii controller into a FPS a "no-brainer" or are there still things you're experimenting with?

MK: One of the things about working with Nintendo is that things like this really are a no-brainer. They made it so easy to implement the control scheme. It's just common sense to use the controller the way we have for aiming, but we've been really trying to look outside of that. The real challenge for us was to come up with things to do besides that. How do we leverage this new controller to make playing the Wii a really cool, unique experience? Those things are what will make this game really fun to play. The things like the grapple beam and manipulating handles are just some of the things that we've been devoting a lot of our resources into to deliver that fun experience.

HGM: Are there any things you tried to do with the controller that just didn't work out and you had to scrap?

MK: Well... there are always ideas that don't work out. It's always a struggle to perfect an idea, but I can't think of any specific thing that we just ditched because it didn't work. Things just got better as the designs were polished.

HGM: Regarding the grapple beam that you've already talked about... can you use this in combat, to rip away an enemy's shield, for example and use it as a weapon?

MP: Absolutely. That was one of the things we showed at E3, pulling away a pirate's shield, and we're planning to really expand that so the grappling isn't just something that you use to pull a panel off a wall or swing from, it's something you'll be able to use in combat in different situations.

HGM: For our readers who still haven't gotten to play the game, can you tell them whether this title will be more adventure oriented or more action/fighting oriented?

MP: The basis for the whole *Prime* series is exploration. That's what makes the *Metroid* games interesting. So that is, first and foremost, the thing that we wanted to stay behind — that this is a first-person adventure game. However, the uniqueness of the controller does allow us to expand upon the action parts of the game as well. It lets us do the action parts even better than we ever could before.

HGM: So then you would characterize it as an adventure with lots of great action?

MK: [laughs] Yes; or as an action game with lots of great adventure.

HGM: When you took over the *Metroid* franchise, there must have been a lot of pressure to maintain the things that made the game a *Metroid* game. Do you still feel that pressure working on this title now that you've been doing it for a while?

MP: There was always a lot of care taken to make sure we did it right and the first *Metroid Prime* was well received by the fans, so we think we did well. But the pressure is always there to make sure we keep improving. It's a continuing battle that we always have. How do we make the game better? How do we meet the goals we put upon ourselves? It's a good struggle and a rewarding struggle and we're glad to be working with the support of Nintendo and Mr. Tanabe to meet those goals.

KT: I might be putting a little pressure on them. [chuckles all around]

BW: The capabilities of the Wii hardware and the new controller have really been a breath of fresh air and made it easier to innovate with this new game in the series. In essence, we were challenged to take advantage of these new features and it has made it so it's not just the third time around for the series. It's very exciting for us to have new toys to play with.

HGM: Is there a collaboration between Retro Studios and Nintendo? How closely do they work with you on the game?

MK: Well, they're sitting right across the table from us [laughs all around]. It's certainly a collaborative effort. They're here a lot, we go there a lot. We're constantly exchanging ideas. There's a lot of input from many different parts of Nintendo. There's a lot of strong support and ideas from Nintendo of Japan and Mr. Tanabe.

HGM: Is there any last thing that we haven't covered that you'd like our readers to know?

MK: We're probably the most hardcore *Metroid* fans on the planet and every day we think about how we can make the game better for your readers. We really appreciate the feedback and the questions.

HGM: We're very excited ourselves. Thanks for taking the time out of your busy schedules to talk to us today.

