

Ranking the Dreamcast Era Sonic the Hedgehog Games

Originally written: 11 December 2022

The Dreamcast Era is actually the last era of Sonic I experienced. I technically grew up watching Sonic X, but I did not play any of the games until 2009. So, I think I entered the franchise late enough to not have the heavy nostalgia that cloud's people's visions of these games. At least to a major extent.

This time, I'll be addressing four more titles: Sonic Adventure, Sonic Adventure 2, Sonic Heroes, and Shadow the Hedgehog.

Yes, Sonic Heroes and Shadow the Hedgehog are Dreamcast Era games, even though they're not made for those consoles. Just going by consensus, and what Sega believes, Shadow is the last Dreamcast Era game. Sonic Rush is treated as the first Modern Era game (we need to find a new name for this period, as it is no longer modern).

Like before, the spin-offs will not be addressed here. If they were, you could bet something like Sonic Shuffle or Sonic Battle would be at the bottom. Or even Advance 2. Without further ado, here we go.



4. SONIC HEROES (2003)

This is such an **awful** game. Sonic Heroes might look appealing when you're watching the gameplay, but as soon as you play it, everything breaks down. There is something wrong with nearly every aspect of this game. Keep in mind, I've played the GameCube, PlayStation 2, and Xbox version. There are rumours that the PS2 one is buggiest, but I can dispel them. Aside from worse audio quality and a sloppier frame rate, almost every glitch I experienced on PS2 can be replicated on GCN and Xbox. I'll assume PC as well.

Firstly, the **physics and controls** are all wrong. Some criticise Heroes for being too slippery, and they're correct. It never feels like there's traction beneath the characters' feet. You can release the analogue stick, and they'll still run their asses off a cliff.

That leads into the second issue, the **level design**. Believe it or not, most these levels are good in concept. If you look at the level designs themselves, they're everything I think a Sonic game should be: linear but with enough multiple paths to be worth replaying. Frog Forest, Egg Fleet, and even Rail Canyon are excellent examples. However, notice what they all have in common. **Bottomless pits**. In a game with sloppy controls, most of your deaths will come from falling off the stage. In that sense, the bottomless pits everywhere feel like a cheap way of costing the player lives.

Back on the physics, Casino Park and Bingo Highway are completely broken. The pinball mechanics don't function as the characters will constantly change their weight and direction. The grinding feature is a downgrade from Adventure 2 since the balancing mechanic is gone, and the speed button barely increases your velocity. The rail switching seems to work fine as long as you're not holding the speed button, but this is not communicated to the player, hence why most of you probably died on levels like Final Fortress as a kid.

Special Stages are fucked up, another case of bad physics. I've randomly walked backwards in these tubes, and the boost bar drains too quickly. I don't even know why you'd use Fly or Power formations when you need to reach the end or Chaos Emerald as fast as possible. Interestingly, the PS2 and Xbox versions are nowhere near as jittery as the GCN version. The physics still don't function properly across all platforms, though.

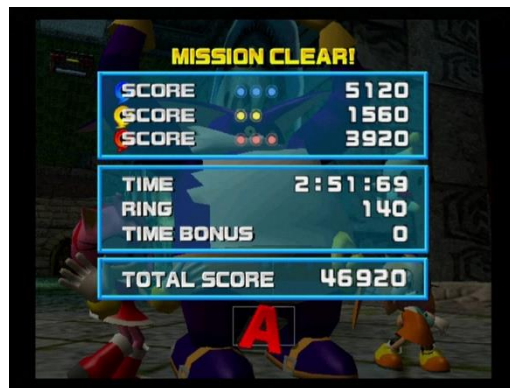


And for all the talk of **teamwork**, there sure is so little of it in the gameplay. On all my playthroughs, I stick to the Speed formation. The Fly formation is too slow and limited, while the Power formation is way too dangerous. E-123 Omega and Knuckles demonstrate this the worst since they slide a great distance in random directions, leading you to fall off the level. Therefore, I mainly feel safer fighting enemies with the **Speed** formation and Homing Attack. Even that's not reliable since the bloody move can miss half the time.

Sonic Heroes treats you like an idiot, as well. There are signs plastered everywhere telling you what formation to use, and they automatically switch you into that formation sometimes. What's the point of the team gimmick when one type is most useful, and the game never lets you guess which formation is needed for progression? At least the Team Blast mechanic is a good feature, granting different bonuses for each team.

Speaking of the teams, only **two** of the four are worth playing in my eyes. Team Sonic is the normal mode, with stages ranging from 4 to 8 minutes. While that seems long to some, these levels have enough content to keep me engaged. Team Chaotix's mission-based levels also seem to frustrate others, but again, I never had an issue. Outside of Mystic Mansion, all of

them are quite easy to accomplish, and the gimmick adds some variety. Meanwhile, Team Rose and Team Dark feel redundant because of Team Sonic. The Rose levels are way too short to enjoy, usually clocking in at 2 or 3 minutes. But the Dark levels drag on too long, regularly hitting the 10+ mark.



That transitions into another problem. Heroes requires you to beat the game four times to complete it. Each team has the exact same levels in the same order, with only select areas tweaked and the level either being extended or abridged. This is the definition of padding for a game in desperate need of it. At least in SA1 and SA2, the different stories have unique levels and actual plots. Here, it's the same thing.

One might say I'm overexaggerating the issue since Sonic the Hedgehog 3 & Knuckles has the same concept. But in that game, the final boss is never locked behind beating all four playthrough types. When you play Knuckles' story, you're going to end with the battle against Mecha Sonic; there's no true final boss that unifies all the stories. Why couldn't each team in Sonic Heroes have its own self-contained plot with a unique fight against Metal Sonic? They did not need to join together at all.

Oh right, the boss battles. Those suck ass. **Every last one.** The enemy rushes are boring and repetitive, and you'll spend most the time spamming Team Blast techniques or the Thunder Shoot. The fights against Eggman will likely have you dying from strictly falling in a pit, just like the levels; Egg Emperor in particular can screw you over with ramps that fail to work. And the team fights are pathetic as you just spam each team's version of the Blue Tornado. Lastly, Metal Sonic's first form is rough but has an interesting concept. His final form is a disappointing conclusion to an already awful game.

I'm sorry if you adore Sonic Heroes, but it is hard to find good things in this game that aren't followed by tons of bad elements. In terms of everything that makes a game functional and decent, this game is an embarrassing release. SA1 and SA2 are much more playable despite releasing on weaker hardware. But what do I like about Heroes outside of its level design?

The **music is awesome.** Aside from "We Can", all the vocal themes are powerful in this entry. They're arguably the best of the Dreamcast Era. And the stage themes have some bangers like Ocean Palace, Grand Metropolis, Hang Castle and the Bonus Special Stage. Plus, while the English voice acting is still amateurish, the characters deliver emotion better than in the previous titles. Sonic's voice is a bit too high, but this is Ryan Drummond's strongest performance as the character. His Metal Sonic is also a good fit, and the Chaotix team sounds great here.

Heroes' story isn't good, although **at least it's a minor aspect** of the game. If you're not going to bother to have an interesting plot, showing as little of it as possible is a good move. And for what it's worth, I like many of the cutscenes decently. Metal Sonic is one of my least favourite characters, yet I appreciate making him the main antagonist. It actually gives him something to do instead of rusting in a corner. In fact, having 14 important characters in this plot is something new Sonic games can only dream of.

Finally, I appreciate Heroes **ditching multiple gameplay styles**. I'll delve more into this when discussing the Adventure games, but it's obvious that most only care to play speed-oriented levels. Look up any review of Adventure or Adventure 2, and the same conclusion is reached; the speed levels get all the praise while everything else is disliked. While I wish multiple playable characters were still a thing in newer Sonic games, I'm glad Heroes streamlined the series to focusing on one core gameplay style. It means more attention can go into that, rather than splitting attention to styles most won't care for.



That's all I've got regarding positives. Overall, **Sonic Heroes is a terrible piece of software**. It's not entirely unredeemable, and it's not the worst Sonic game (which is saying something). But it's too broken for me to give it anything higher than a "below average" rank. Any positive is outweighed by the mountain of negatives. With that, I consider it the worst of the Dreamcast Era entries on this list.

But don't worry. I consider every other game on the list to be no lower than average, so it's all uphill from here.

3. SONIC ADVENTURE (1998)

Before going further, I will not use Sonic Adventure DX: Director's Cut as a basis for my thoughts, even though I played it first. I am using the original western release of Sonic Adventure on the Dreamcast, which I owned in the past. It fixes bugs in the initial 1998 Japan release and has much better visuals than DX. Here's a quick comparison between the versions, courtesy of [Dreamcastify](#) (I highly recommend reading these articles).

Yeah, DX is ugly, isn't it? The only worthwhile advantage is the ability to skip every cutscene, which is a welcome addition.

Right off the bat, the reason this game is above Heroes is due to its polish. It's still a late 90s 3D title, so there is some jank. But I don't die nearly as much from bullshit as I do in Heroes. Glitches are more prevalent in DX (the Emerald Coast loop being the most famous), which is

unfortunate as that's the version Sega is selling now. If you're not playing Adventure on a Dreamcast, then you're playing the botched DX port, regardless of what the title claims.

I can sum my thoughts on the gameplay up easily. I love Sonic's levels, I like Tails' levels, E-102 Gamma and Knuckles have average levels, and Amy and Big have terrible levels. Let's work from the worst to the best.

Big. As a character, Big the Cat doesn't leave an impression on me. I don't hate him like many as he seems like a loveable guy. But he's just nothing special. His gameplay, on the other hand, is atrocious. My issue isn't even that it revolves around fishing. Fishing can be fun, but these fishing mechanics are poor. Many times, Big will randomly quit fishing even when Froggy is hooked. And aiming the lure is difficult once it's in the water.

It's rumoured that Big was made to advertise the Dreamcast's fishing rod controller. That is false. Big was added because the developers wanted a character who "moved at his own pace", to contrast the faster characters. I don't understand why they thought a much slower and foreign gameplay was needed, as these are rarely received well in Sonic titles. Granted, it was the first 3D entry to try this, and several N64/PS1 platformers were shoving every gameplay style in as well. So maybe Big's gameplay is just a product of the time period. If you want competent fishing on the Sega Dreamcast, just boot up Sega Bass Fishing.

Amy doesn't handle awfully, but she takes too long to reach her full speed. I wish she had the skip manoeuvre that Sonic Advance would later gift her. Here, her acceleration hurts the pacing of her levels, which already have questionable pacing. Twinkle Park and Final Egg are standard, but Amy's version of Hot Shelter is the longest level in the game. Any time I replay it, the stage takes forever to clear. It's just lucky it has a cool look and theme.

That said, Hot Shelter might be Amy's best level just because it has the most substance. Amy only gets three levels, leading most of her campaign to focus on cutscenes. This is not a strong playable debut for the pink hedgehog, sadly. At least Sonic Adventure 2's multiplayer and Sonic Heroes did her justice by making her more like Sonic.

Can I be real? I **never** liked **Knuckles'** treasure hunting levels. I found them boring at best and frustrating at worse. Exploration in a Sonic game is not my cup of tea. Additionally, Knuckles feels too heavier for my liking here. At least I can blaze through most these levels with Tikal. Otherwise, I have nothing to say about these levels. Lost World is probably the best, while Red Mountain is the worst. Some think Sky Deck is the worst, but I simply find it easier to navigate.

Onto **E-102 Gamma**, another character I have little to say. Man, when something's average, it's hard to talk about it. He controls well and the shooting has a mild thrill to it. However, the stages lack difficulty because of the lenient time limit. If it were shorter across the board, Gamma's levels would be worth putting some effort into. At least he gets one of the best bosses in the game, the fight against E-101 Beta.

I can merge **Tails and Sonic** into the same section. In short, I like Tails, but just wish his levels didn't have a racing mechanic. But these two characters have the most fun levels in the game. Of them, I only dislike Sonic's version of Sky Deck. Final Egg is also dull to look at in my opinion, but the core gameplay is the strongest among Sonic and Tails. It feels like

playing a classic Sonic game, just in 3D. And even in the modern games, that specific feeling is something we've not had in a while. The only thing I don't like is that the characters don't feel as heavy or grounded as I wish they were. And they can be difficult to keep straight; I'm sure you know how hard it is during Windy Valley, where they always hit the walls.

So, of the six gameplay styles, only **two** amaze me. Two are average, while the other two are terrible. This doesn't do any favours for this Dreamcast classic, unfortunately. And not helping matters is the hub world. Obviously, Sonic 2006's hub worlds are way worse, but they feel pointless in Sonic Adventure. It's a holdover from when the game was developed as a Saturn RPG. I understand why others may appreciate them, and my arguments purely stem from preferences. But in a Sonic the Hedgehog title, I much prefer going from level to level instead of needing to navigate the hub world. It takes out what I perceive as filler.

The game's presentation is overall nice, at least on Dreamcast. Its soundtrack is one of the best in the series, and I recommend giving tunes like the Emerald Coast music a full listen. They tend to be very lengthy, almost like Sonic 3D Blast's tunes on the Mega Drive. Aside from the character battles, the rest of the bosses are okay. Perfect Chaos naturally steals the show, but I also enjoy the battles against Beta and Egg Viper.

The **story** isn't anything special, though I appreciate it trying to expand its scope after Sonic 3K began introducing narrative elements. Gamma has the strongest story, and therefore my favourite from a pure cutscene perspective. However, Tails is decent as well, as we get to see him grow to be stronger. And I like Tikal as a character.

Voice-acting wise, this is where some of the Japanese cast debuted. And unlike their English counterparts, they mostly voice their characters to this day. I've nothing bad to say about them. However, the English acting is bad. I blame the voice director primarily, as almost every character sounds one-note in this title. And I can't cut the game slack when Crash Bandicoot 2 and 3 came out at a similar time and have much better performances.

Ooh, and better cutscene animation. These faces have not aged well in the slightest, if they were good to begin with. That said, I still love Deem Bristow as Dr Eggman, and Duke Nukem guy as Big/Gamma. By the way, am I the only one who thinks Tails sounds like Linus from Peanuts here?

Oh yeah, Chao Garden... I never used it.

Overall, **Sonic Adventure is an important game in the series**, and one I really used to love. But while I still love it, I'd be lying if its flaws aren't more obvious when I remove my nostalgia goggles. Only a third of this game is great, while the other two-thirds ranges from mediocre to bad. Its hub worlds don't benefit it in my eyes, and there are other 3D Sonic games I'd rather play. It's better than Heroes by a long shot, but just falls below the other two entries on this list. Still, I will always respect Sonic Adventure.

2. SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG (2005)

You guys probably want to kill me for putting this game above the other two. Now, I've only played Shadow the Hedgehog on PlayStation 2. This is the worst version of the game, as it *tries* to run at 60, yet often drops below 30. Plus, the load times are terrible. However, unlike Heroes, I 100%'d this title. Why?

Firstly, Shadow's levels **are not as bad** as the Internet would lead you to believe. Many are straight forward, and typically have a higher/lower path you should take depending on your mission. There is also decent variety, as you go to cyberspace, a circus, a jungle, and a haunted castle like the last entry. Some levels look boring, like Final Haunt and Central City. But even with the military levels, I find some interesting visuals like GUN Fortress, the now-toxic Prison Island, and The ARK looks even better than in Sonic Adventure 2.

The game is also **nowhere near as buggy** as Sonic Heroes. The Light Dash actually functions correctly, grinding doesn't make my palms sweat, and the physics generally feel tighter. People complain that Shadow is too slippery here, which is still true. Though, I find him much more manageable than the characters in Heroes. The main issue with Shadow is that he takes a while to turn. I notice this most when going along curves in levels like Glyphic Canyon. But seeing as many of the levels don't have these curves, it's not a major issue. Overall, this game is much more stable than Heroes, which affects how I perceive the level design. Now bullshit isn't killing me every second.

But the **guns**, we gotta talk about those. I'll explain the tonal issue later, but the gunplay here isn't terrible. For one, there is decent weapon variety. You have pistols, sub-machine guns, gatling guns, the Billy Hatcher vacuum, swords, and even a Shadow Gun that instantly kills an enemy. I see the guns as a way to handle combat differently from Heroes. In that game, while the idea of fighting enemies wasn't bad, the execution left a lot to be desired.

In Shadow the Hedgehog, you're mainly encouraged to simply keep as much ammo as possible. Without guns, you take forever to kill enemies. With guns, you can drain their health quickly. The auto-aiming is fine, though I feel uncomfortable when a gun lacks auto-aiming, like the grenade launchers. This game is no Ratchet & Clank in terms of gun depth.

That's my only gripe with the gun system, really. It's not a good fit for a Sonic game where you're meant to be going fast. There's nothing complicated about the system or very rewarding. It's just a method of speeding up enemy deaths. It works, but they could've constructed a completely different game style that complimented the combat here.

Now, onto one of the game's infamous gimmicks: **the missions**. Most levels have a Neutral mission, a Hero mission, or a Dark mission. I don't know why this series loves labelling things as Dark and never Evil, but whatever.

Personally, a lot of these missions didn't throw me off. Again, Shadow's levels are so linear that you have to be ignorant to miss some of these targets. Take the 400 Ring mission with Tails in Circus Park. They have these shooting galleries in almost every section, and Tails tells you to utilise them. And in Sky Troops, destroying Eggman's ships with Black Doom is easy since they're all on the main path. Same goes for the objects in Space Gadget.

I won't say there aren't bad ones. Mad Matrix's Dark mission can suck a million dicks. And any mission where you must kill every enemy is suspect. These missions seem to frustrate players the most, and I don't blame them. A good solution would've been to have more enemies than the player needs to kill, which is only done in select levels like Black Comet. Alas, we have a situation that alienates many people.

The missions in Lost Impact, Central City, and The Doom make those levels the worst in the game. Not only are the missions very lengthy, but all three of these levels are **mazes** where every section looks the same. Hell, Central City doesn't even have a goal ring, so you're forced into doing a non-standard mission. This is where I believe a map would've significantly helped, and oddly enough, the game had one in its development stages. Why it was removed is beyond me.

The **enemies also have bad AI**. When you're allied with the Hero character, the Hero enemies will still shoot at you no matter what. Same goes vice versa. Hell, some levels have an internal conflict because of the characters chosen. In Cryptic Castle, Amy is the Hero character and Eggman is the Dark character. There are Egg Pawns and Black Arms, though. Killing Black Arms gives you Hero points but killing Egg Pawns gives you Dark points. So, to get a good score on the Dark mission, you have to listen to Eggman scold you as you kill his robots.

In general, I see the missions in Shadow the Hedgehog as a way of adding decent variety to the title, even if not all are as good as they should be. Some of my favourites are the ones where you have to chase an object like in Iron Jungle, or the Mad Matrix Hero mission where you explore every digital tower sans the red one (which is where you'd go for the Neutral mission).



I suppose one major reason people hate the missions has to do with the **story**. Look, I've given this game a lot of praise so far, but now comes the negatives. All the gameplay points still stand, good and bad. However, the terrible narrative and structure of this game cannot be understated.

Firstly, you must play the game **ten times**. It's not as bad as Sonic Heroes, since you only have to do six levels on a playthrough, and you have control over what levels you go through. But even still, there is no reason you should have to beat this game ten times just to unlock the final boss. A bad boss at that.

Secondly, just that. **Every pathway in this game is pointless**. Shadow the Hedgehog has no coherent narrative worth following, yet that was a major selling point of the game. You can't decide Shadow's morality since the Last Story firmly plants him as a good guy! If they were going to make this a mainline entry, why didn't they make this a single adventure without the morality/path system. It probably would've made players happier.

And all the missions could've been bonus content. Hell, that's how the Expert Mode in this game works; aside from two levels, all of them just require you to get to the end. *That* is the game we deserved.

There's also the **tone issue**. I'm not personally bothered by Sonic trying to be darker or more serious, however, they did not handle it well in this game. Shadow the Hedgehog is a child's idea of what a mature story is like. Characters swear for no reason most the time, and the stilted English voice acting doesn't help. They give Shadow a gun just to look edgy, meanwhile the man can just jump into a foe to disable them. They also give him a motorcycle to look cool while he can just run faster than the motorcycle. Some people hate this game for the tone alone, and I can't say I blame them entirely.

Regarding the ending, while I like Shadow getting over his past, it does spit in the face of all this game's storylines. He wants to find out more about himself and what he was designed for, yet in the end, he just throws it all away. And again, he's a good guy. The problem is that this arc is a pure circle. We saw this in Adventure 2, even down to memory loss where he forgot what Maria said. In the end of that game, he turned to the good side. What the hell is different in this game?

I will say, there are moments I genuinely like. The scene with Vector and Shadow at the end of the Semi-Hero path (if you're watching in Japanese) actually makes me feel something emotional. And I don't mind the GUN Commander in concept, but I wish he was just more fleshed out. The idea of someone joining the same military that killed his childhood friend could make for an interesting antagonist or anti-hero. But they botched that.

Plus, it's nice to get some info filled that supports **SA2's narrative**. Why did Gerald build an Eclipse Cannon that could destroy a planet? Simply to destroy the Black Comet if he got the chance. Why did GUN invade the ARK? Possible because of the Eclipse Cannon (which Gerald never explained) and because the Artificial Chaos project went out of control, as shown in Lost Impact. Since Shadow was his next project, GUN stepped in and raided the ARK to terminate that, which we see happen in The Doom.

Oh right, the Black Arms. A lot of people hate them, but I'm not offended. This series already had so much craziness that aliens seem relatively mundane. Hell, I watched Sonic X and am one of the few who liked the Metarex Saga. Although, I understand people disliking how Shadow has to be part alien. That part feels contrived, although it does still justify why Black Doom was interacting with Gerald, which leads to the Eclipse Cannon situation above.

Overall, **Shadow the Hedgehog is a very flawed title**. But I'd be lying if I said I didn't find it fun. Since it only has one gameplay style, it has more going for it than Sonic Adventure. And on the technical side, it's a breath of fresh air compared to its predecessor and 2006 successor. The game was overambitious with its multiple paths and stories and is ultimately a mess on that front. But I'll still replay it and have a good time.

By process of elimination, you know what's coming next.

1. SONIC ADVENTURE 2 (2001)

Unlike many of you, I did not grow up with Sonic Adventure 2. I didn't play it until around late 2013/early 2014, believe it or not. And yet I believe it to be one of the best 3D Sonic

games of all time, probably one of the best Sonic games in general. I've played the Dreamcast version, but I no longer own it. I mainly use the PlayStation 3 version.

To get this out the way, Battle has better multiplayer and a better Chao Garden. Cutscenes are also 60FPS across the board. But almost everything else is better on Dreamcast, from the lighting, to the audio balance, to the cutscene effects, to the fact it had free DLC. At least Battle isn't as much of a downgrade as Adventure DX is, for this port actually has some enhancements.

Let's get the bad out the way first. The **treasure hunting levels** are the weakest in the game. You know about the gimped radar, the vague gimmicks like Security Hall's vaults, and how needlessly large some levels can be. Rouge's stages aren't awful except for Mad Space, but Knuckles' Death Chamber and Meteor Herd are pretty bad.

That said, I prefer the levels in this game compared to SA1. For starters, the characters control much better. This makes the inherent act of moving around satisfying. I mentioned how Knuckles felt too heavy in SA1, but here, he feels perfect to control. There's never a moment where the physics let me down.

Furthermore, despite some stages being frustrating, the level design is more interesting overall. In SA1, the only stage that would grab someone's attention is Sky Deck; and more than likely, they'd hate it. In SA2, Aquatic Mine is decent to explore with a cool water gimmick. Egg Quarters is a trimmed version of Death Chamber, and better in every way for it.

I also don't find locating the objects a huge hassle in many cases. You have the hint monitors, after all. Yes, the first hint typically sucks, even if you're an SA2 pro. However, every single third hint spells out exactly where you need to go. Mad Space lies to you, but by the third hint, you should know it's lying. And that's how I'd recommend playing the stages on a first playthrough. **Don't be concerned about getting an E Rank.** Use the hint monitors to assist you in clearing these levels quickly. Considering every level has notable landmarks, travelling within them is generally simple.

The **shooting levels** also see an improvement from SA1. The levels have a degree of substance, where dying is an actual possibility. And many of the levels are lengthier, with Cosmic Wall being the longest non-hunting level in the game (7 minutes). I have little to say about these levels because they're so self-explanatory, although I have some quibbles.

Firstly, **Tails is the worst character** in SA2. All his levels are bad. Eggman has some cheap enemy placement as well, but you can tell that Tails was a last-minute addition. Prison Lane, Mission Street, Hidden Base and Eternal Engine all have enemies sniping you through doors or landing on you. On Hard mode, this is especially brutal. Quite frankly, it's very unfair, and leads to me never wanting to play as one of my favourite Sonic characters.

Secondly, there is still untapped potential in these levels. Why are the enemy types not varied up a great deal when the shooting requires different challenges? Why can't you upgrade your weapons mid-stage like in *Forgotten Worlds*, for a bit more depth? Although these aren't necessary, they would've enhanced the levels greatly and potentially have made them as good as...

The speed levels (called the **action stages** by the game). No doubt, this is where most spend their time playing SA2, and for good reason. Sonic has never controlled better than in Sonic Adventure 2, and I stand by that. Despite coming out in 2001, none of the other games has been able to surpass this title here. Sonic's acceleration is **perfect**. Whenever I die in this game, I never feel that it's because of Sonic's controls. And unlike SA1, he's neither too floaty nor too unstable; you can hold up on the analogue stick, and this motherfucker goes as straight as an arrow.

And the level design is still top-notch. I know many don't like how linear SA2's levels are. But we've been over how I prefer this approach. I think there is enough flexibility in these stages to lead to replayability. You have the Mystic Melody platforms that appear later, and again, you just want to find as many shortcuts as possible in these stages. Pyramid Cave is a great example, as the level is generally the slowest speed stage in the game. But now that I've learnt how to break parts of it with some good timing, I enjoy this hated level.

Every Sonic stage is good at a minimum. Crazy Gadget might be the worst due to the awkward gravity gimmick, but I don't find it nearly as clumsy as Mad Space. Shadow's stages are also good, but it is unfortunate that he only has four levels in the game. Even Tails and Rouge get a driving minigame level. Kind of odd to shaft such a major character, although, it's worth noting that none of these three were meant to be playable initially. They're all later additions.

My criticisms with the speed levels can be briefly summarised. To start, the **Action Button** fucks so many things up, specifically with Sonic. Any time you have to Light Dash in the air, my asshole clenches. I've bounced into a bottomless pit so many times because they're both mapped to the same button. And there's no excuse when the DC controller has 4 face buttons. But that's Yuji Naka for you, isn't it, *Balan Wonderworld*?

Additionally, this is the game to introduce **grinding**. It's not as bad as in Heroes, however, it is too unstable in this entry. You fling off rails way too often when switching, especially if you're going at top speeds. This can lead to someone despising Sky Rail or Final Rush, and I cannot blame them. But these complaints do not sour what is one of Sonic's best appearances.

Story-wise, Adventure 2 is obviously flawed. Go to YouTube and you'll find someone nitpicking the story for hours. There are legitimate problems, such as it making no sense how Gerald reprogrammed Shadow to destroy Earth when he should've been imprisoned. Maybe the idea is that he was allowed to work on Shadow within the jail, but that's a huge stretch. Plus, Shadow misremembering Maria's wish is very dumb. "Give them a chance to be happy" is nowhere near "get revenge for me". The idea seems to be that Shadow lost his memories, but since he remembers other things crystal clear, it's never understood why he couldn't remember this specifically.

However, I appreciate SA2 for trying to tell a more serious narrative. One can question if military elements belong in Sonic the Hedgehog, but I view this game as an example of Sonic maturing with the audience. Look at a series like Mario or Pokémon, which refuses to grow up with the audience, and always aims at the lowest common denominator: kids. I'm not saying Sonic should've gone full-on adult in its games but adding some more narrative importance only enhanced SA2 for me.

In fact, this might be exactly why many hate Sonic Heroes' story. Because whereas Adventure 2 felt like it was maturing with the demographic, Heroes reverted everything to a very childish audience. Shadow and 2006 swung in the opposite direction, trying to be as "adult" (what a kid thinks adult is) as possible, and now we're in the split situation we're in.

There are cool moments in Adventure 2. Even with the janky animation, every cutscene feels livelier than many later Sonic games. It's little stuff like Eggman scratching his ass, Sonic cutting off Shadow in the English dub, or how the camera is almost always in motion. Compare this to Lost World, and you see a major difference in direction.

Give this game credit for **utilising much of its cast** well. Sonic feels like his normal cocky self, although he's not annoying in this title. Tails' arc continues from SA1, having him still feeling safe around Sonic, but able to do things independently now. And this is one of Eggman's best appearances in my opinion. He feels like a genuine threat throughout the narrative, especially with that scene in the ARK. You know, where he's got Amy at gunpoint, then tricks Tails into confirming what he already discovered. For once, Eggman can be called a genius.

The new characters are good, too. I like that Shadow isn't just "evil Sonic", like the marketing made him out to be. He's neutral for most of this game, and his connection to Eggman has made for an interesting dynamic between the two. This game also has furry bait lady, Rouge the Bat. In all seriousness, Rouge has been a consistently strong character since SA2. I don't get how a jewel thief works for the government, but it gives her an edge that the average good guy doesn't have here. Her dynamic with Shadow is another strong point, which even Sonic 2006 would handle well.

Knuckles and Amy are the **weakest characters** in this story. Amy is just a tagalong who causes nothing but problems for the others. She rescues Sonic, but Tails was already going to do that. And she reminds Shadow of Maria's wish, but I explained how that was dumb to begin with. Knuckles is just kind of there. His Master Emerald plot has nothing to do with the story until the end; only Death Chamber has some importance as a level.

The last issue I'll bring up with the story happens at the end. I mentioned how it makes no sense that Gerald reprogrammed Shadow, but there are problems after that. How is the Biolizard able to use Chaos Control after Knuckles neutralised the Emeralds? That is a contrived way to force a Super Sonic fight, having this lizard ram a cannon up its ass while it drives the ARK to Earth.

At least this leads to an okay boss fight. It's nothing amazing, but the fight against **Final Hazard** has the best atmosphere of the Dreamcast Era. Firstly, Live and Learn is a great tune. Secondly, it goes back to us constantly being in motion. The ARK is falling towards the Earth in real-time, making the stakes higher than the other three titles. And I think the dialogue from the characters really enhances the serious nature of the battle.

I haven't mentioned the English voice acting here yet, and generally I think it's still amateurish and inferior to the Japanese. But compared to SA1, the directing here is overall stronger. And the Last Story is where both casts do a great job. No matter what my settings are on, I feel the panic when Amy's begging you to hurry up. The fact that the screen reddens after four minutes helps.

I could gush about the climax of SA2 all day, but let's quickly address the **other bosses**. They're better than SA1's, although that's not a hard accomplishment. Character fights still suck, being way too easy. It's the original battles that are great. King Boom Boom and Egg Golem (as Sonic) are my favourites just because of the ways you can speed them up. Considering that they're not super interesting on their own, I appreciate bosses where you can hasten them via your own skill. This actually makes them more engaging because it's a test of how well you can play their game.

And finally, I have almost nothing to say about the **Chao Garden**. Others love it, but I never cared for it. Raising Chao is **lengthy** process, and as an adult (even as a teen), I just don't have the time to invest in it. I always saw it as harmless side content for the game. Although, I despise that they require you to raise Chao in order to get every emblem. That'd be like if you needed to play a football game within *Kingdom Hearts* to see its secret ending.

This is an area where the GameCube port greatly improves on the Dreamcast original. I can't recall every difference, but I know most the Black Market features were put in Battle; on Dreamcast, you had to access a website by having your Dreamcast online. And it's best on GCN compared to PC/Xbox 360/PS3, where you don't have a portable device to transfer data to. With GCN, you can use your GBA. And hell, on Dreamcast, just whip out the VMU.

Side note: I always drowned my Chao trying to get them to swim. I thought that was how you'd teach them.

If it wasn't obvious, I adore Sonic Adventure 2. Is it overrated? Maybe in certain aspects, but I think the game lives up to its great status. The speed stages are some of the bests in the series, and I've been able to appreciate the other gameplay styles. Its narrative is one of the strongest, as it's not as embarrassing as Shadow or 2006, while also not as infantile as Lost World and Heroes. I find it to have a great deal of content, the multiplayer is alright, and the soundtrack is fantastic.

It is the representative title of the Dreamcast Era in my humble opinion. And I see it as a Top 5 title for the series.

CONCLUSION

Truth be told, writing this retrospective saddened me. I'd been thinking for many years that the Dreamcast Era was a great period for Sonic the Hedgehog. Well, I thought the 2000s was a great period primarily because of the creativity that 2010s games lacked. But we see that perfect illusion shattered. I can't even say this era is as solid as the Classic Era, despite liking it more overall.

Of the Classic Era, only Sonic 2 feels like it's in a rough state. And that makes sense due to the game's rushed nature; blame the marketing team and Sega's planning department for that. But within the Dreamcast Era, every single game is still not up to the quality standards it should be.

For 1998, Sonic Adventure had some inexcusable voice acting. Crash Bandicoot 2 and 3 were better, along with the Spyro games. Even Metal Gear Solid came out the same year and blew away whatever they were doing in Adventure.

Sonic Heroes is a 2003 video game. But Super Mario Sunshine makes Heroes look like it's still in its alpha stages.

Shadow the Hedgehog came out in 2005 and is probably the most polished of the four games. Yet it's still poorly optimised on PlayStation 2, and I've heard the Xbox and GameCube versions can have random freezes. It seems more common on Xbox, which is still inexcusable if true. I can't confirm that, but I can confirm how Shadow also has a serious padding issue.

Both Shadow and Heroes have hideous design on this front, forcing the player to replay similar events over and over just to **beat** the game. Not complete it, but beat it.

The Dreamcast Era is still an important period of Sonic the Hedgehog, without question. Maybe I'm looking too harshly at some of these games. I'm not afraid to admit that. Adventure is the first 3D Sonic game, so it's more acceptable if it's rougher. However, Heroes is the third game, and feels as buggy as Cyberpunk 2077's launch. Shadow is the fourth game, and still suffers from the design issues of Heroes and Advance 2 (GBA) of repetition.

This is a **mixed bag of an era**, for sure. Heroes is a bad game; if I had a scale, it'd be no higher than a 4/10. Adventure is a very nostalgic title, but it's ultimately average. Who cares for all the multiple playstyles? I believe there is a solid game in Shadow the Hedgehog, but the developers should've pushed ideas further, and cut out some of the blatantly bad elements like the progression system. And Adventure 2 is the only game on the list that I can confidently call **good**. That is pretty sad.

One bad game, one average game, one mildly above average game, and one good game.

Thankfully, not all was doom and gloom here. Wider casts began to be used in these games, with even Shadow the Hedgehog having a large assortment of characters to see. And the developers had the balls to experiment with radically different gameplay styles across all four entries. SA1 has fishing, SA2 has mech shooting, Heroes has the team gimmick, and Shadow has the gunplay.

I give the Dreamcast Era credit for being experimental. Not every experiment worked, but I do feel genuine effort went into all these games. Even in Heroes, the execution is botched beyond belief, but the team mechanic has great potential. **The Dreamcast Era was a great time for testing how Sonic could be in 3D, but ultimately, it is not good across the board.**

What are your thoughts on this period of Sonic in general (1998-2005)? Be it the specific games, the atmosphere around this time, or hell, tell me if you agree or disagree with my opinions.