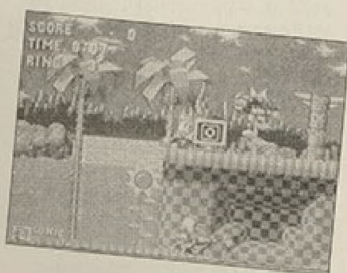


# Games Week

**Hubble, bubble, toil and trouble ... that's Gary Penn, with another cute collection of hot news, rave reviews and**

**H**e's here - the Hedgehog whose face has graced more magazine covers than Jim Morrison's has arrived. And it's really quite something. It looks gorgeous - beautiful even. It sounds divine. In fact, I'd go so far as to say it's the slickest platform-based romp in the world - but only, sadly, in terms of aesthetics. When it comes to playability, **Sonic** delivers far less than it promises (which is considerably more than most other releases). That's not to say it should be dismissed with a single brush of the hand - **Sonic's** certainly entertaining in a classic platform romp kinda way - it's just that **Sonic's** not the **Mario**-beater that everyone was expecting.



*Sonic punches a video monitor in Green Hill Zone. He'd be better off jumping on it to get the 10 rings.*

Whereas the **Mario** series offers an adventure in itself, **Sonic** is akin to a computerised adventure playground of sorts. Generally there's a lot of running around and jumping and bouncing and a little bit of discovering secret bonuses too.



*• Rolling around inside a Secret Zone. The UP and DOWN increase and decrease the speed of rotation.*

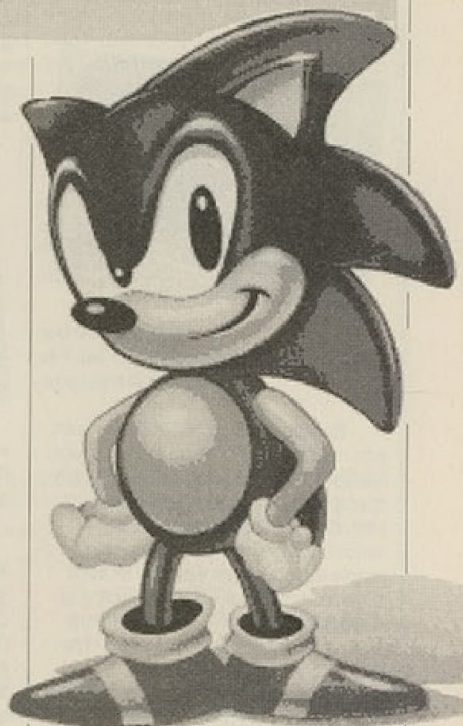
A mad scientist called Dr Ivo Robotnik is kidnapping innocent animals and turning them into robots. Hardly a cause for concern - unless you happen to be a hedgehog called **Sonic**, who's out to put the world to rights and rescue kidnapped innocent animals in the process. This hip, spiky-haired, trainer-wearing hedgehog isn't just good at running, oh no. The ace up his sleeve is a move called the Super Sonic Spin (which doesn't involve rubbing his chin in disbelief whenever he's threatened by something bad). No, **Sonic** curls up into a protective ball in which state he can happily knock out anything that gets in his way. Well, provided it isn't spikier than he is.

The Super Sonic Spin is also used to break open video monitors dotted about the landscape (some are hidden in the strangest places, too). **Sonic** is then rewarded with the contents of the monitor in question, be it a protective shield, invincibility or increased running speed (and that just has to be seen to be believed) - all of which are granted on a temporary basis. Marginally more permanent is the extra life and the addition to **Sonic's** inventory of 10 rings.

Ah, yes - the rings. There are hundreds of them to be found in every zone and most are easily collected. However these sparklers have more use than is at first apparent. They provide a sort of dog's chance for **Sonic** - that's to say, **Sonic** doesn't die if he's in possession of one or more ring when he bumps into something bad. Collecting a sufficient quantity of rings affords **Sonic** the opportunity of entering the Secret Zone. A maze of blocks rotates through 360 degrees against a lush two-layer parallax backdrop built of vaguely Escher-esque animals.

At the heart of the maze lies the Chaos Emerald - the object of **Sonic's** desire. Special blocks make life that little bit more difficult. Some bump **Sonic** away, others affect the rotation of the maze in terms of direction and speed. There are six Secret Zones in total, and a hefty reward for collecting all six gems.

**Sonic's** weird and wonderful world



comprises six Zones, each divided into the Acts (levels). At the end of every third Act **Sonic** has a short scrap with Dr Robotnik. He's sat inside his strange floating form of transport which sports a different weapon every time - such as a ball on a chain, a form of flamethrower and a retractable spike which also removes the scenery. Skilful Super Sonic Spinning is of the essence as Dr

Robotnik



*• Here in Marble Zone we see Sonic attacked by one of the few adversaries which shoots.*

chases Sonic around the screen.

Each Zone has an oddball theme and a look and a tune to match. The first Zone, Green Hill, features spikes, springboards (which increase considerably **Sonic's** jumping height), bridges (which bend under **Sonic's** weight), and loops (which Sonic runs around). Marble Zone on the other hand involves the negotiation of maze-like caverns filled with lava pools, huge spiked platforms attached to chains (which fall and rise), and moving blocks. Zone Three, Spring Yard, is packed with springs and pintable bumpers - indeed, part of one Act is a form of pintable where **Sonic** becomes the ball.

Labyrinth Zone has an obvious quality. However the best part of this labyrinth happens to be underwater. ➤

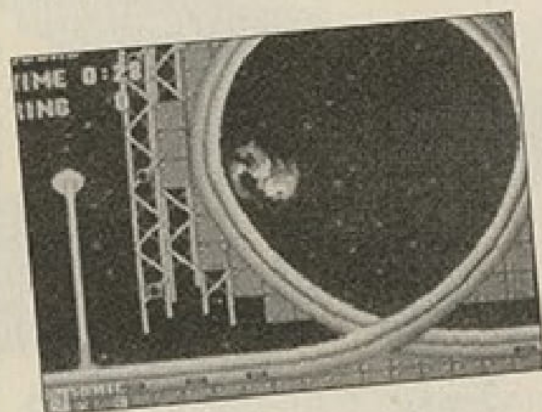


# GAMESWEEK

## GAMERS' GUIDE

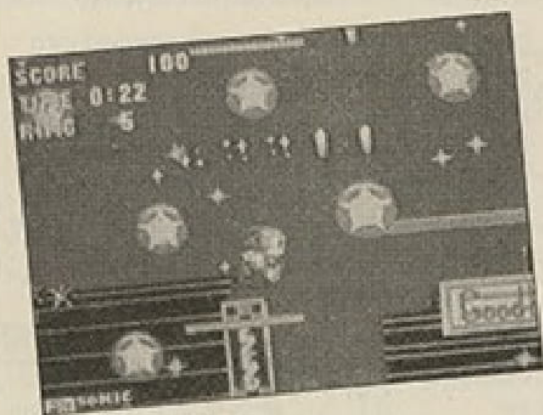
which is why he has to regularly consume bubbles of oxygen produced along the way.

Star Light Zone is pretty much like a fairground ride in itself, while Scrap Brain Zone is full of slippery floors, razor-sharp saws and grinding wheels. Should **Sonic** prove himself man enough to make it through these six Zones in one piece he gets to meet Dr Robotnik in his hideout for a show-down from which there can be only one winner.



• *Sonic loops the loop in Star Light Zone. He can only do this if he first builds up enough speed.*

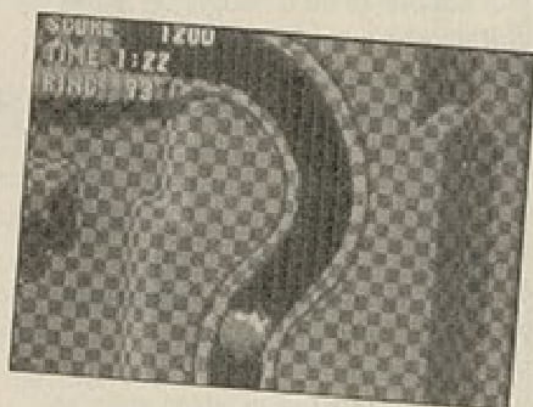
**Sonic's** strength is that it overflows with neat touches. The hedgehog's legs are speed-blurred when he runs at high speed, and his range of expressions is vast. Context-sensitivity abounds in almost all departments. It goes beyond a simple fanfare for an extra life or aural accompaniment for a jumping action or screeching to a halt – every event has an associated jingle or spot effect. The Game Over tune is a suitably depressing, down-beat remix of the main theme which tails off in a



• *The Spring Yard Zone features pin tables of sorts, with Sonic the ball bouncing off these pins.*

sarcastic manner, while the simple jingle played when **Sonic** is running out of air in the underwater cavern does a tremendous job of getting the adrenalin flowing.

It's obvious even from the outset that **Sonic's** a tad different to other Sega cartridges. As soon as the MegaDrive's turned on, the word SEGA appears larger than usual and on a white background, then a chorus of angels with a sore throat sing 'SAY-GA'. Even the arcade-style attract sequence is real neat. A large **Sonic** upper half inside an MGM-style surround slides on screen and he waggles his finger in a disapproving manner. How sweet.



• *Green Hill Zone's three Acts feature tunnels such as this. Sonic instinctively curls up and rolls through them.*

As much as I enjoyed playing **Sonic**, I didn't find it as compulsive as, say, the **Mario** series. In essence **Sonic's** platform action offers nothing new. What it does provide is a package full of surprises and features which impress – for the first few viewings, anyway. The adversaries are a great disappointment as they lack true character and interaction with them is minimal. There are a couple of bugs too: **Sonic** is occasionally forced into walls that don't lead to secret rooms, and the appearance of flickering pieces of scenery is all the more noticeable within the otherwise ultra-slick surroundings.

Gripes aside, **Sonic** is visual and aural feast which just has to be consumed. It's without question one cartridge that every Sega MegaDriver just has to own. It's also going to be a bitch to convert to the home computer formats ... ■