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Intro

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Sonic Frontiers has a lot to prove to a lot of people. I am not one of them. If you watched my '06 video, you'd know I've been on the outs with Sonic for more than a decade at this point. I've been around to play the games, but rarely do they impress me anymore. I had pretty much written off Frontiers the moment we saw gameplay. I've been around the block enough times to know what we'd probably be getting: another title with promising potential, ultimately held back by one thing or another, falling wildly short of that potential.

I'll say up front that this one wasn't really for me, sorry to say. Won't claim there's any hatred here: the game was fine. It had its moments. Just don't think it really came together in the end.

There was a time where that would fill me with bitterness. I'd lament the state of Sonic, wondering where it all went wrong. Those days are behind me: I don't have the energy for it and I definitely don't think anyone wants to hear it right now.

Sonic doesn't impress me like it once used to, and that's okay. Sometimes, it's healthy to realize when you need to let go.

That said, I think I have some interesting things to say about this new Sonic game. This video will contain full spoilers; at this point, though, if you're watching this, you've probably already played it. I'll be playing the PS5 version using a review code provided by SEGA.

Now then: this is probably going to be the last time I talk about Sonic for quite a while, as I'd like to move on from this somewhat exhausting franchise.

This is Sonic Frontiers: The Game Of All Time.

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Sonic Frontiers Is The Game Of All Time!!!!

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In some ways, Frontiers is typical of the Sonic franchise. We're back to collecting the Chaos Emeralds on various different islands so Sonic can go Super and beat up the big robots, with a world ending deity thrown in for good measure.

This is an Open World- sorry, an **Open Zone** Sonic game. You run around picking up collectibles from boss fights, enemies, puzzles, and short platforming sequences. A lot of these

challenges, on their own, are pretty underwhelming: jumping through hoops, doing extremely basic platforming, grinding on some rails. Even though they're not all that satisfying in and of themselves, I do think that there's a certain sense of flow you can achieve when you're able to quickly chain them together. Particularly on Ares Island, I think it's fun to bounce between challenges like this, turning these shorter, more contained platforming sequences into larger levels of their own.

The control you have over Sonic in the Open Zone is quite good. You can tweak various movement options to get him feeling how you want him to. Running around with the power boost feels really cool. Sonic has always been about the joy of movement, so it's important to get that part of him right. My favorite move to pull off is the rail jump, which will fling Sonic high into the air and across the map. Using this, you can skip a lot of platforming segments, and reach areas you aren't supposed to be in yet. This is most fun on Ares Island, which is built with tall canyon walls that often surround you and box you in. Being able to fly past them, as if they were never even there, feels really good. Just like there's an inherently satisfying feeling to pulling off a momentum jump in the earlier Sonic titles, you feel like a badass doing it in Frontiers: even if it's only on rails, for some reason.

Your goal is to collect the seven Chaos Emeralds on each island. How you accomplish this is up to you. All you need are Vault Keys to unlock the Emeralds, and Memory Tokens to progress the story. Vault Keys can sometimes be found in the overworld, but are usually held within the Cyberspace levels. It's an interesting approach where you don't **have** to complete all or even most of the Cyberspace levels. Each one of them has four missions to complete. You get a key for finishing the level, but then there are three extra keys for obtaining an S rank, collecting a set amount of rings, and snatching all the red rings. You can simply run through all of the Cyberspace levels for a few Vault Keys at a time, or you can stockpile them by nabbing S ranks and red rings so you don't have to find as many.

Alternatively, you can go fishing with Big using the Purple Coins you pick up to purchase Vault Keys, Memory Tokens, and Portal Gears. Usually, you have to fight the bosses to obtain Portal gears which open up the Cyberspace levels, but if you decide to relax with Big instead, you can skip over all of it entirely. I think having an open structure like this is ideal to making the Open Zone format work. You want the player to have as much freedom as possible so they can pick and choose what they want to engage with at any given time. Each activity has a cost too. Bosses and Cyberspace levels are much more common, while each island only has one spot where you can fish with Big, usually hidden away somewhere. Purple Coins only get you so many tokens, so unless you've built up a stockpile, you won't always be able to buy everything you need. There's a good balance here that I appreciate.

You collect the emeralds so you can fight the island's Titan with Super Sonic. Easily the coolest parts of the game, these fights are a real spectacle. It's essentially just your normal moveset, but hopped up by your super form, fit with afterimages and unique counter animations. While the fights themselves aren't anything special and certainly aren't very difficult, the music **carries** them. It's been a while since I played a Sonic game and heard a song that sent chills down my

spine. Sonic and Metalcore go together like Chicken Nuggets and Barbecue Sauce, they were the most exciting parts of the game.

I haven't vibed with a Sonic soundtrack this hard since Generations. There are like 6 or 7 vocal themes, not including the Cyberspace levels which have vocal samples. We've got our good ol' buttrock main theme, Metalcore, Dubstep, EDM, even the more ambient island themes sound great. Sonic music is always good, but it hasn't been **this** good in a very long time. It might sound a little shallow, but a fantastic soundtrack matters a fair bit in deciding how much I like a game, notably if that soundtrack enhances the feel of the game. Like I said, they're most of the reason I love the Super Sonic fights.

They're such a spectacle too. In most Sonic games, stuff like this would be reserved for the final boss, but in Frontiers? Sonic is dodging missiles, gathering them all up into a ball, and shooting them back. He's riding giant spike shields like it's an Air Gear from Sonic Riders, smashing it back into the Titan he's fighting. He's blocking Laser Beams with his bare fucking hands, picking up a sword twenty times larger than his own body and slicing the Titan clean in half. It's such a funny juxtaposition: here you are exploring Kronos Island, learning more about the Ancients, watching the Koco die, having a heart-to-heart with Amy, taking in the beauty of the island with this serene backing track.

Then, you fly up this waterfall, get the last Chaos Emerald and- oh, oh what is… what is **that?** Wait, what's happening, oh my god, what. My heart is racing, what **is this**? The Titan fights **clear** anything in Forces, it's actually incredible how cool they are. Sonic does a **Bowser flip** on this Wyvern and throws him into a mountain, **oh my god**.

To my absolute shock and awe, Frontiers is actually interested in telling a story, with **characters** who have personalities. No matter what I might say in this video, I do want to adamantly express how much of a **relief** it is to see that. It was **surreal** to see Sonic comforting Amy after they watched two of the ancients die in each other's arms. To have Sonic assure Knuckles that they'll always be there for him. To see Sonic telling Tails that he's a hero in his own right. For Sonic to impress Sage enough that she finally believes he'll be able to save the world.

I'm **really** not used to this. I kept waiting for the next "Baldy McNosehair" but, to my surprise, it was a story with a more relaxed, serious tone. The thing about these characters is that they've always been pretty open to interpretation. One of the side-effects of not having a Sonic Character Bible is that they have often undergone shifts in demeanor, voice, and even personality. As such, I've always maintained a pretty simple stance: if they're written well, if I **like** them, that's all I want. I have no doubt there are people who won't like how Ian Flynn brings this world to life. There are already people who don't like his work, and that's perfectly fine. Personally, I really like his run in IDW, also working through Archie right now and like what I've seen of his style there. Though I don't quite think his work on Frontiers is as cool as his stuff in the comics, I do think he does a good job making me **care** about these characters again.

Tails, Knuckles, and Amy all share a brief spotlight on their islands of choice. It's nice to see another side of Amy for a change, not necessarily **overwriting** her passionate, romantic side; simply filling out the parts of her character that don't relate to Sonic. Even while she's trapped god knows where, she's set on helping the Koco reunite with their lost loved ones. Watching them pass on is painful for her, but it also strengthens her resolve to share her love with the world. You get the sense that Sonic really appreciates that about her.

While commanding a Koco army, Knuckles shows genuine interest in the architecture of the Ancients. He's taken aback by how similar one of the structures is to Angel Island, showing more interest in his heritage than he has since… Sonic Adventure? Man, we've really had it rough for a while, haven't we. Sonic and Knuckles bicker like brothers, but at the end of the day, they both care about each other like brothers. [Sonic reassuring Knuckles]. This scene, it… made me feel something I haven't felt in a long time. It reminded me that these two are thicker than thieves, Team Sonic used to mean something to me.

Tails was no different. Now, I'll admit, in order to sell his character here, they also had to try to continue a running thread from Forces that I never actually liked. The idea that Miles Tails Prower would cower in fear at the sight of Chaos Zero because he… lost Sonic is uh… what's the word, it's uh… stupid. Remember when Sonic died in SA2 and Tails' response was to kick the shit out of Eggman? I just can't envision a world in which these two are the same characters.

If you're willing to suspend your disbelief a little, and imagine a version of Forces where Tails was simply overcome by grief, I think his self-doubt here is pretty touching. He starts to wonder if he really **is** useless without Sonic, seeing as he completely fell apart when Eggman took over the world, and still sorta blames himself for it. Sonic is quick to point out that he defeated Eggman on his own, several times, and he's always been there to save Sonic. Tails has grown a lot and he's an invaluable asset. He may have once been in Sonic's shadow, but he's ready to cast one of his own. Tails striking out to become just like his hero is a fantastic next step for his character.

Sonic's a fun-loving, free spirit who's always on the move. He's confident that he'll be able to save his friends and get out safely. He's a bit impatient, particularly when helping the Koco, but that stems from his concern for Amy's well-being. He's more than happy to help the Koco find peace. There's even a genuine curiosity there, where he wonders what happened to the Ancients who lived on the islands. He overcomes every obstacle in his path, the constant doubt Sage throws his way, as he's corrupted by Cyberspace. That persistence, that heroic spirit, the care he shows for the world and his friends, the bond that they all share: it's enough to shatter Sage's cold and calculated outlook. It inspires her to help Sonic confront that evil and save the one person she cares about most.

Eggman doesn't do too much in this story, mostly existing through the Audio Logs you collect while fishing with Big. Sage was an AI he created to help him hack into Cyberspace to discover the secrets of the Ancients' technology. It's meant to be a program, something Eggman created to help him conquer the world, and nothing more. But the longer he's stuck in Cyberspace, the

more Sage helps him out, the more she tells jokes that make him laugh, the more he begins to care about her. He stops using "it" to refer to Sage and starts using "she." Even gets him to reminisce about his cousin Maria who he never really got to know, hinting ever so slightly at a loneliness hidden under all that ego.

Sage shows us glimpses into his humanity we haven't seen since that conversation with Tails on the ARK. It's a refreshing change of pace, but it doesn't mean he can't also have his own funny moments too. I mean, he's always gonna be Eggman. [Sonic not fast enough scene]. It's nice to have someone else play the villainous role again.

The Starfall Islands are shrouded in mystery, with destroyed ruins dotted everywhere, and highly advanced robots wreaking havoc. The stuff here bears a resemblance to the structures on Angel Island, they're getting visions of creatures who look like Chaos, wiped out by an unknown force. It still blows my mind that I can say something like that, by the way. Not only are we expanding Sonic Lore, we're also gonna casually reference previous Sonic games and characters, to the point where it kinda becomes a little overbearing? For once it feels like these things actually matter. It starts to **feel** like this is one big world, with an unbroken continuity.

It adds more meaning to the Chaos Emeralds, Chao, Chaos, and Angel Island, while still letting the story of the Ancients take center stage. The titans you fight were created by the Ancients to be piloted by four warriors using the power of the Chaos Emeralds in the hopes of defeating The End. They were able to imprison it within Cyberspace, losing their lives in the process.

What's interesting, though, is that the Chaos Emeralds were used primarily as a source of energy to power their technology as a means to live peaceful lives. I sometimes forget that, at the end of Sonic 1, when you collect the Emeralds, it causes a bunch of flowers to start growing. Not only do the Emeralds promote nature, they can also be used to preserve it. And it's sort of poetic that Sonic and friends found these relics of the Ancients and used them to do exactly that: promote and preserve nature.

Though we don't know all the details, this disembodied voice is attempting to get Sonic to use the Chaos Emeralds to destroy the Titans, and in so doing, allow The End to escape and threaten the world once more. All the while, corrupting the one who set it free. Who better than Sonic the Hedgehog to continue carrying on their legacy and finally defeat the evil that they never could. When he asks them to lend him their power to defeat The End once and for all, I was reminded of someone… for but a brief moment.

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Sonic Frontiers is The Game Of All Time…

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In some ways, Sonic Frontiers is typical of the franchise. A game that, even after four years of development, feels unfinished, filled to bursting with frustrating jank, odd level design, broken scripting, laughable voice direction, and nonexistent cutscene animation.

Sonic can be pretty fun to move around in the open zone, to a point: and that point is when he becomes magnetized to the floor or trips over a loose rock and flies away. I enjoy having my cyloop broken while I'm trying to make a circle because Sonic touched something I could barely see. I also love when my jumps seemingly give me no height, carrying none of the momentum that went into them. Trying to clear even the smallest of gaps is challenging because your jumps suck and the air boost is laughably bad.

I have to ask: what happened to being able to do stuff like this? Does anyone remember the point of the Boost? It was to allow Sonic to reach speeds never thought possible. You were moving so fast you plowed straight through enemies, it made you feel like you were living out the opening to Unleahsed: it was a **thrill**. So when you slow Sonic down and nerf all of his abilities, it puts into stark focus how limited the style is when it isn't allowed to play to its strengths. The Boost was created for fairly linear hallways focused on quick reaction timing and speed running, not necessarily freedom of movement. I think they ended up running into a wall here, because for all the potential this Open Zone concept has, they mostly have you grinding on rails and hitting springs which give you memory tokens at the end. You end up running around looking for dash pads and bumpers to shoot you into a random set of blocks and rails awkwardly floating in the sky, popping in and out of existence, so that you can grab the memory token and never think about what you just did again. It is sorta fun to chain some of these together, but many of them are far too simple to get anything out of. Jump on some moving platforms, do a few rail switches, or simply **watch** Sonic do something for a few seconds.

It's hard to find the words to describe these sections: they feel like randomly generated snippets of Cyberspace most of the time, and the only satisfaction I get out of them is from the memory token at the end. Even then, I'm usually looking for ways to skip the platforming entirely so I can nab the token and leave. You can do this pretty often in the first two islands, another reason why I find them fun: but the last three islands introduce pretty rigid 2D sections which force you to play by their awful rules. It's here where the game's worst qualities show themselves.

The reason 2D sections worked in previous Boost games was because you were in preset levels which could switch between them seamlessly. It was much easier to switch between 2D and 3D this way. If you're into the speed running scene of games like Unleashed, though, you'll know that you can glitch your way through many of the 2D sections by completely skipping the transitions. Some strange looking stuff can happen here, but it's nothing a normal player is ever gonna see.

It's increasingly more likely in Frontiers because the triggers for Sonic to enter 2D are more specific and, much of the time, don't even work properly. If you miss this dash pad, the camera won't turn, and Sonic will still be in 3D, which is just going to confuse you. Sometimes the dash pad launches you away from where you want to be going. Sometimes you'll be moving so fast

that you phase through a spring that was supposed to continue you on the path. Sometimes you'll be running up a wall and Sonic will suddenly decide he wants to run down it instead, for no discernable reason. Watch anyone play Frontiers and they'll run into something that doesn't work properly, I guarantee it. Within only my own footage, you'll see that stuff just tends to go wrong when you're in a scripted sequence. It's not at all an uncommon occurrence, and it's what most of the final three islands are.

They're antithetical to the open design of Frontiers, since in order to make these sections work, they have to litter the world with dash pads and springs that you can barely see, and usually only shoot you in a single direction. There have been so many times where I'm trying to get somewhere and run into a dash pad that sends me backwards or locks me into a 2D section that I've already done. Most open world games are about seeing something and then going to it, right? That's part of why Breath of the Wild was such a hit. In Frontiers, the game isn't built to let you do this.

You would think that a game like this would want you to **feel** more like Sonic, letting him run up walls and stuff. If you try to do this, Sonic will awkwardly stop and slide down. You can **drop dash** up a few walls you can't run up, for whatever reason, but most walls simply block you, and it feels very wrong. I'm not even just talking about the huge mountains, it's sometimes hard to even walk up small bumps on the ground. I can't believe I'm saying this, but Sonic Lost World has a freer range of parkour movement than Frontiers does, and that's just… weird.

It's really hard to maintain your flow state when you, again, trip over rocks and logs on the ground, keep running into walls and slippery slopes which stop you dead in your tracks, lose **all** of your speed immediately during a jump. That isn't even mentioning that there's more to the Open Zones than just the mini-platforming challenges, and almost **all** of them suck.

Puzzles? I can hardly call them that. Parry three projectiles, perform the Quickstep a few times, hit a ball through some hoops, play some jump rope, walk across the blue tiles. Some of this stuff wouldn't be out of place in Rise of Lyric.

Bosses? They're **terrible**. Almost all of them have several minute long spectacle sequences that ruin the pacing of the fight, especially since you have to do it all over again when you die. Most of the Squid fight is you running through loops, while the cinematic camera angle actively screws you over and doesn't let you see where the balls are coming from or where you're supposed to dodge. This section where you ride Shark's tail is pretty neat the first time you see it, but if your attack stat is too low, you'll probably have to sit through this cutscene multiple times per fight, and they **really** drag.

Some of the fights are incredibly janky. Strider has you circle around him on three sets of rails, trying to connect all three of them. It's pretty easy in the first phase, just don't be on the same rail as the projectile it shoots out. The second phase, though? You start to realize that these four legs will **block your camera** every couple seconds, meanwhile Strider shoots out four different balls that each move in a different direction on the rail. Some of those balls will rail switch **with**

you, and it's **really** hard to see what rail they're on due to the angle and the fact that, oh yeah, **there's a giant leg blocking your view**. You might say: simple, jump over them! Well, when you jump, you disconnect from the rail scripting and fall off! Isn't that lovely.

Asura always feels like a crapshoot. Whether these blue dash circles are going to take you where you need to go is always uncertain. Sometimes you hit the ceiling, sometimes you fly off of the leg, sometimes you launch high into the sky. When you're finally on top of it and start wailing away at the weak points, you'll occasionally get hit by nothing in particular. Since hits bounce you back pretty far, it can result in you falling off Asura entirely, forcing you to run back up: again, through no fault of your own.

By the way, here's a fun fact: you don't get invincibility frames after a hit, so there are situations where you'll be instantly killed depending on where you get sent flying. Fun stuff. At some point I stopped going after bosses unless I absolutely needed to, they're **major** pace breakers. Plus, all they unlock are more Cyberspace levels.

Combat? Well, it looks pretty flashy, and has a base level of satisfaction, but there's no depth to the system at all. You spam random, cool looking attacks. A few of those attacks are better than the others, particularly the ones where Sonic shoots stuff out of his hands, they tend to melt enemies for whatever reason, so I mostly stuck to those. After a while, though, running into a group of enemies was something I avoided like the plague. When those enemies started putting up cyloop barriers, it became an exercise in frustration.

They also aren't very difficult. Fun fact, this game has a parry feature. Sounds awesome, right? Well, it was pretty awesome, until I learned that there's no timing element to it at all, and you can simply hold the parry until an attack hits you. It's why basically none of the enemies or minibosses pose much of a threat, you can just sit there and hold the parry, allowing you to get off your powerful counter move that leaves them vulnerable. It's unfortunately the reason the Super Sonic fights are glorified cutscenes, as well, since all you need to do is sit there, parry, and then mash buttons like your life depends on it.

The speed at which you defeat enemies is based on your power level, which you upgrade by collecting seeds of power. I don't think it's able to account for how many of these you can collect on a casual playthrough, though, because even on Hard Mode, I always reach the last several islands and end up doing more damage than I really should. I tend to rip through the final titan so fast that his health bar stops draining because I skipped through all the flashy cutscene stuff he was supposed to do to me.

So yeah, the Super Sonic fights are really awesome and Sonic does some rad stuff in the cutscenes, but they pale in comparison to other games with similar hype moments. Metal Gear Rising has phenomenal boss fights with incredible music and lots of spectacle, but they're also **actual boss fights** which can kick your teeth in on higher difficulties. Your attacks are flashy and satisfying, but so are the attacks in DMC5, which has **far** more elaborate combo strings you're encouraged to be flexible with for a higher ranking. Puzzles are… well, I guess they suck

either way, but they're definitely better in Breath of the Wild. It just isn't a favorable comparison when put up against games that do these things better.

Nowhere is that more evident than in Cyberspace. Good **lord**, Cyberspace is awful. This is where most of the cracks form in Frontiers' foundation. I praised the overworld controls, in part, because you can tweak them. But for Cyberspace, they decided, pretty arbitrarily, that you are not allowed to tweak them. This means you're stuck with the default controls, and those are… baaaaaad. Your midair turning radius is slow and wide, making precision platforming next to impossible. Sonic is slower than he's ever been in the Boost games, and he **still** loses all of his speed during a jump. He has an 06-esque pause after every homing attack, his air boost gives him more vertical height than it does distance, the worst of both worlds. You can only use moves like the stomp and air boost once until you **touch the ground.** Usually, after you did a homing attack or hit a spring, your air boost and stomp would reset, which makes a lot of sense. The Boost levels are built for rhythmic stuff like this. Air boost, stomp into a spring, air boost again, homing attack through some enemies, air boost again, stomp into a dash pad, and keep moving. It's why they're so fun to play. In Frontiers, there are levels built with this in mind. Multiple stomp points, opportunities to air boost several times, and you'll find yourself awkwardly flailing around in the air in those instances.

Frontiers is built like these games, but your controls and physics do not fit them at all. Take 1-2, the only level with a hard S rank. I guarantee the reason most people are struggling with this level is because they're trying to play it like previous Boost games. I definitely was. There's an upper and lower pathway in the beginning. The lower pathway is supposed to be the slower one, making you run up and down a bunch of slopes on dash pads to slow you down as a punishment for taking the easy way or falling off the top. To maintain the top pathway, you have to platform between thin, narrow blocks. But your reward, in theory, is a faster path to the end.

In practice, however, I've found that the fastest way to get through this section, barring undiscovered speed run tech, is to do nothing and take the theoretically slowest path. Why? Because, when you jump, **you lose all your speed!** The top path is a death sentence here for getting a good time, **and** it feels awful. I'm not saying it's impossible to get an S rank after taking this top path, but it **is** the slower path.

So many levels are like this. Conventional Boost wisdom fails you, conventional **platforming** wisdom fails you. When they aren't a bunch of boring 2D levels that make you wish you're playing Sonic Mania instead, they're ripping levels from other Sonic games. Oh man, it's SKY RAIL, RADICAL HIGHWAY, GREEN FOREST, METAL HARBOR, YOOOOO. Yet, all I can think about playing these levels is "man, this was really fun in SA2, maybe I should go play that game."

Why was Metal Harbor fun to begin with? Well, it had boppin' music, Sonic felt good to control, there was a lot of split-second decision making to keep your speed up, and a memorable end set piece where you rode the rocket up into the sky. You could cheap out and take the lower handrail, the cowards way out, or you could risk the top pathway for more points, at the cost of

potentially missing the rocket entirely. The music stops as you fly into the air, until you jump off, with an ending song timed to play exactly as you hit the skateboard. You victory lap to the end and probably get a B-rank because A ranks are hard to get in SA2.

I didn't even recognize Metal Harbor at first because it shares almost nothing in common with that level. It has the Chemical Plant visual theming **again**, with Egg Robos **again**, no GUN robots anywhere, no jets flying across the screen. You get light dash pathways that, no joke, set your speed value to 0 at the end. You run through familiar setpieces, but the rocket section at the end doesn't have a rocket at all, it's just a big automated rectangle. You can take the top path if you want, but there's really no reason to, no timer ticking down, no extra points, nothing: it's a soulless copy, they all are.

And when there is an original level, it doesn't even come **close** to the quality of the level design seen in Unleashed or Generations. Not that I can even tell any of them apart since there are only four level themes in the game, all pulled from Generations. It's getting to the point where I can't even look at the Classics anymore without wincing a little bit when I enter Green Hill or Chemical Plant.

For a lot of people, what a level looks and sounds like doesn't really matter as long as it's fun. I don't think the Cyberspace levels are fun, but you know what? If these are fun for you, and that's enough, I think that's awesome! But it's never been enough for me. Part of the reason I used to love Sonic is that the series had a good blend of everything. Sure, the level design was fun and expansive, Sonic was fun to move around, it always felt good to get a high ranking or make it to the end as fast as possible. But it was always backed up by some cool visual design and music that fit the mood. Cyberspace music is really good in isolation, but it's hard for me to build a connection to these songs when they're attached to levels that have no identity of their own.

If you wanted to learn them, put up with the awful controls, get past the boring level design, and go after those S ranks and red rings: guess what? Every single red ring is on the main path, it took me no time **at all** to get them, a far cry from games like Colors where I had to comb through each level for them. **And,** the only remotely challenging S rank is in 1-2. The rest are so chill that you can often do a completely casual run and be 30 seconds to a full minute past the S rank time. I was **tripping over** S ranks in Frontiers, they aren't satisfying to achieve in the slightest.

As if that wasn't enough, there's pretty strong evidence that Frontiers had a troubled development. Morio Kishimoto has mentioned that they had to go through a trial and error process to figure out how the open zone concept was even going to work. A pretty harmless interview on its own, I'm sure even Breath of the Wild went through a trial and error phase. Until you pair that information with both the janky and buggy nature of the overall game, and the way that it pads its length. In promotional material for Frontiers, you'll most likely see that they're touting **5** islands to explore. Given the size of them, it's a pretty hefty number of islands, and they've only shown three of them in pre-release.

Turns out, there's a **reason** only three of them were shown. The fourth and fifth islands were split off from Kronos Island. There's evidence in the game's code, **and** through an Eggman audio log where he refers to 3 starfall islands.

This is lame for a number of reasons. Firstly, it means that Frontiers drops off a cliff halfway through its run. Chaos Island is already pretty weak, focused on 2D platforming sections with awful physics that sometimes break while you're playing them, and doesn't allow you to use rail momentum jumps very often to do cool stuff like you could in Ares or even Kronos. Then, you're dropped into the fourth Island, which is a series of six towers with scripted, usually 2D platforming sequences, until you reach the top, watch a short cutscene, and then leave. There are entire areas on this island, each with their own platforming challenges, that have **absolutely nothing** in them. In fact, you can even run over to see Kronos Island, confirming that this isn't even Island 4, it's just the other half of Kronos you could never reach before.

The final Island also has the same theme as Kronos, and is pretty barebones. Oddly enough, this Island was part of their initial showcase of the game, likely meaning that it was one of the first islands they created. It sits in a weird position, where you're basically ready for it to be over, but it's also the stingiest island in terms of vault key and memory token requirements, so you almost always spend more time here than you'd ever want to.

More than just these two islands being really bad and clearly rushed, it starts to put everything into a new perspective for me. Why is the final boss just the Bentley hacking minigame? Probably because they didn't have much time to make a final boss on the same level as the Titans. An Ikaruga homage was their option for a secret hard mode boss. Because otherwise, Sonic and Sage just fly into space and kill it in a cutscene.

Why does the game rely so heavily on 2D sections in the latter half? Probably because it was easier to plaster those across the islands. Why is the game so rough and unpolished? Why do the cutscenes feign attempts at expressive animations? In fact, why do all of the animations look so rough? Because, like so many Sonic games before it, for whatever reason, they did not have the time to finish what they started.

Most painful of all, the well written story I mentioned before, where these characters finally get to act like themselves again: cannot shine when it's trapped within the confines of a game like this. The cutscenes are poorly animated, they mostly consist of characters standing around, asking questions about the Ancients, making frankly **too many** references to past events when it doesn't even make sense.

The characters don't actually get to do anything since the premise of the game is that they're stuck in Cyberspace. So all Flynn really **can** do is reference a bunch of stuff and have some nice bonding moments. He can't do anything like he does in the comics, where Tails is trapped in his lab during a zombot invasion, and whips out his tornado 2 mech suit to escape. Frontiers just doesn't allow for that. Once again, Sonic gets to do all the cool stuff and everyone else just sits and watches.

I'm still not a fan of the English voice cast. I actually did my first playthrough on Japanese because I could tell they were putting a lot more effort into the narrative this time and wanted to enjoy it to the best of my ability. Again, this is never a dig at the **people** voicing these characters, I usually enjoy them in other roles. Knuckles and Tails sound fine to me. It's mostly Sonic, Amy, and surprisingly enough Eggman who give some strange performances. Amy has trouble emoting. Eggman is trying to act more casual and it makes him sound like he's out of breath. And Roger… look, lots of people are saying this is his best performance of all time. I'll admit there are a few lines here that worked for me. But most of them… sound like this. I am not a fan of the deep voice thing he does here, it sounds incredibly forced.

I'd love to play the game on Japanese in the future, but during The End boss fight, there are no subtitles. One of my favorite parts of that fight, where The End tells you how weak and insignificant you are, is unintelligible if you turn on another language. Felt like the universe was punishing me for not suffering through the English.

The story itself doesn't even have the time it needs to breathe, and crumbles under its own weight. That father daughter relationship between Sage and Eggman? It's built entirely on the back of four or five cutscenes of them standing in the same area of Cyberapace talking about how they're going to get out of there. If you don't listen to the Eggman logs, their relationship comes out of seemingly nowhere.

I **really** wish I could love Sage, but I just don't think Frontiers does a very good job building her into an interesting character. She floats around, telling Sonic he's a loser and can't win, until she finally believes in him and dies. Except not really, because Eggman just revives her in the end like nothing actually happened, and Sonic has no reaction to this death even though he's been trying to get her on his side the whole time. We just have to rush ourselves to an ending because there's simply no time to do anything else!

Look at the turning point moment of Sage's character. She's watching Sonic and Tails have a bro moment, and it moves her. Cool idea, but this is how that moment is portrayed… [play scene]. They don't have more than one location where they've ever talked, so it just cycles through scenes of them talking to each other about Cyberspace for some reason, while this horrible song plays in the background. The intended emotion of this scene is one of sadness, but I laughed my way through it.

Sonic's corruption is built up as a major consequence of saving his friends, that gets resolved the very moment it becomes a problem. Remember when Sonic died in '06 and you had to play as **everyone** to collect the Chaos Emeralds during the literal End of the World? Well, here, Tails, Knuckles, and Amy hold hands, get locked up again, and Sonic is instantly fine. It plays this triumphant theme too, like: how did they describe this moment to Ohtani? What did he think was gonna happen here that warranted this jingle?

No matter how you slice it, the final boss is a big Nothing Burger. Either you play on Easy or Normal and the final boss is this random Titan that's less flashy than the previous three, and his triggers don't even work correctly most of the time. Or you turn on Hard Mode and the final impression you're left with is a **slightly** difficult hacking minigame. It leaves a sour taste in your mouth at the tail end of a game that was already struggling to finish the marathon.

It's really sad how hard Frontiers falls when it's able to reach heights I haven't seen in a long time.

And I suppose this is where we diverge. For so many people, the highs are enough to completely overlook that there even **was** a fall. They're happy to look forward to a future game that **won't have** a fall. They see the glass half full; I see the glass half empty.

I don't have faith that there won't be a fall next time: I've been hoping there won't be another fall for about a **decade**. I remember when Generations came out, and everyone collectively said: wow, this was awesome, I can't wait until we finally get a fully original Boost game of this caliber, one with an original story, new environments, and maybe we'll finally see a few more playable characters like Shadow or Blaze.

Then, we got Sonic Lost World. Well, it was a proof of concept, it got a lot of things wrong, but the parkour gameplay fits Sonic really well! I can't wait to see what they do with that in a more original sequel with a cool story!

Then, we got Sonic Forces. Need I go on? I'm sorry if this sounds cynical: I really don't have faith in Sonic anymore. We have **no idea** what the next Sonic game will be like. Mania was one of the highest rated, best-selling entries in a hot minute, and they didn't greenlight a sequel. Who **knows** what the future holds for Sonic.

Until they announce a bonafide sequel to Frontiers, I'm not gonna hope for anything. And even if they do, it doesn't change the fact that **this** will forever feel like a prototype we waited five years for, with nothing to tide us over in the interim besides a few decent movies, a bad racing game, and some overpriced, glitchy ports.

I have never felt more at odds with this franchise. I'm glad I at least got a few things out of Frontiers, that it wasn't a complete disaster, but… it's still falling far short of what I expect from this franchise, and has further solidified that I **do not** love it anymore.

When the new Sonic game comes out, I'll be there to play it if it looks good, maybe I'll even talk about it. In the meantime, though? I have other stuff to play, from franchises I simply care more about.