

1998's Sonic Adventure was a major hallmark for the blue blur. While it wouldn't be the first time that we saw the world's most famous Hedgehog in the third dimension, this *was* the first time we'd see him in a proper 3D platformer produced by SEGA heavyweights such as Yuji Naka. Of course, with technology having changed so rapidly since the launch of Sonic & Knuckles, SEGA was bound to follow the market's hype surrounding 3D technology, but when projects like the infamous Sonic X-Treme fell through, the former posed as the solution to this problem.

Sonic Adventure began its development on the struggling SEGA Saturn, and while not much is known about this point of development, there's a few nuggets of information. Firstly, Sonic Adventure Saturn (which will be referred to as SA-Saturn from this point on), had a very short development lifespan. SEGA enthusiasts are well aware at this point that the SEGA Saturn bombed in the market, and wasn't going to last much longer. Not wanting their next flagship title to make its debut on a sinking ship, SA-Saturn's development team made the jump to the SEGA Dreamcast.

The work done on SA-Saturn would be repurposed into "*Sonic World*", a counterpart segment to the compilation of Sonic 1-3 & Knuckles found on *Sonic Jam*. While *Sonic World* served as a Sonic museum of sorts, its actual purpose was to serve as a tech demo for platforming in a 3D space. Speaking of Sonic Jam, the Sega Saturn port of Sonic 3D: Flickies' Island (better known by others as Sonic 3D Blast) possessed special stages found in early versions of Sonic Jam. This was done because due to Sega's frustration with Sonic Jam's delays. Additionally, Sonic 3D's Saturn port was made to compensate for the cancellation of Sonic X-Treme.

Getting back to Sonic Adventure and looking beyond *Sonic World*, the most that is known of SA-Saturn are these screenshots shown at the Sonic Adventure Musical Experience, and concept art shared by designer Satoshi Okano (notably the one depicting a spider character, which can be seen on posters in Speed Highway).

During development of Sonic Adventure, several characters underwent design tweaks. Most notable among these were newcomers E-102 Gamma and Big the Cat.

In Big the Cat's case, his earlier designs follow a silhouette similar to his final appearance, though there seems to have been a notable focus on exaggeration. Some are relatively minimalist like Big having no articles of clothing save for sandals, while others show him bearing fangs or towering over Sonic even more than he already does in the final game. In the case of the unusually large Big (strange sentence, we know), it appears that his design leaned more on Totoro from Hayao Miyazaki's "My Neighbor Totoro".

For E-102 Gamma, his design tweaks were more drastic. While his theme as a gun-wielding robot remained intact, Gamma would otherwise undergo complete changes to his entire body shape. One depicts him with a triangular body and a top hat-like head, with the overall aesthetic of the body closely resembling Dr. Eggman's original outfit. Another shows him having a circular body, a hood-like cover, topped with a belt-like structure, topped off with him dual-wielding machine guns. From this point on, the structures resembling a belt would stay, while the hood seems to have been redesigned as a visor. The next design boasts a body shape resembling a tombstone while returning to a single machine gun, while the next design boasts a rounder shape. The final design has clearly taken after the first 3 and gave Gamma a more threatening stature.

However, as stated earlier, Sonic Adventure and SA-Saturn was not the series's first foray in to 3D. We have to start with 1995's *Fighting Vipers* (effectively the westernized and unhinged sibling of SEGA's Virtua Fighter series). Character designer Masahiro Sugiyama, during a fit of boredom, programmed Sonic and Tails into the game for self-amusement. Fellow programmer Yu Suzuki took notice of this gag and passed it up to SEGA AM2's head producer Hiroshi Kataoka, who in-turn passed it to Sonic Series producer Yuji Naka, who actually approved this idea against Kataoka's skepticism.

Interestingly, whereas Kataoka's concern was putting Sonic's family-friendly characters in such violent circumstances, Naka's concern, as expressed in the February 1996 issue of SEGA Saturn Magazine, was whether or not they could pull off a smooth gaming experience since Sonic has a big head and small arms, but of course things would come around for the development team. Launched on May 1996 in Japan, Sonic the Fighters would mark the Sonic franchise's first debut in 3D.

For the first few months of development, the players would only get glimpses of the game through screenshots focused on popular Sonic characters posing in 3D environments. Japanese players would finally be able to get their hands on the game on February 1996, when Sonic the Fighters would have a playable demo at the Amusement Machine Operators' Union Show (often shortened to AOU Show). Here, we can see screenshots from 3 stages: Aurora Icefield, Mushroom Hill, and Death Egg's Eye. Newcomers Bean the Dynamite and Bark the Polarbear would make their debut here, though Bark's design is quite different from the final, and debatably more generic. SEGA would eventually announce a Sega Saturn port of Sonic the Fighters, but this would fall through, and the game wouldn't see a home console port until its

inclusion in the *Sonic Gems Collection* and its ports on Playstation Network and Xbox Live Arcade.

But SEGA wasn't done with putting the Blue Blur on the Saturn. Somewhere between the first and second quarter of 1996 was the start of another project: Sonic Saturn, a counterpart project to the infamous Sonic X-Treme. Sonic Saturn's development life began within STI Burbank, a studio established under SEGA Technical Institute by developers Peter Morawiec, Adrian Stephens, and Howard Drossin. STI Burbank's goal was to compete with Nintendo's groundbreaking Super Mario 64, which meant making adapting Sonic's classic formula into 3D. Graphically, the game would use sphere-rendering technology, which keeps those pesky polygonal edges from showing, as seen by many 3D games of the era.

While not much is known about Sonic Saturn's main gameplay loop, there's information on its bonus stages. This was Sonic Pool, and Billiards minigame that involved Sonic using a Spin Dash to strike a ball with the goal of getting the other 7 balls into portals within a given time limit. Alternatively, the player could push the balls around, but this was much slower. Following tradition, Sonic Pool has a variety of themes including Egypt, Rome, Snow, Galaxy, and Future.

Unfortunately, due to Yuji Naka disliking the project, Sonic Saturn received little support. Because of this, Sonic Saturn's development remained largely static. At this point, STI Burbank was put in an unwinnable battle: unable to make considerable progression Sonic Saturn, but also unable to focus on any projects other than Sonic Saturn. This would eventually result in the cancellation of Sonic Saturn, followed by the closure of STI Burbank in December of 1996.

Before STI Burbank's demise, Sonic Pool's addition to Sonic X-Treme was considered. In a Sonic Retro interview with Christina Coffin, lead developer on Sonic X-Treme, she

mentioned that while both Sonic Saturn and Sonic X-Treme shared similar artyle, STI Burbank's sphere-rendered Sonic contrasted so much with X-Treme's pre-rendered Sonic that every ended up getting ported over except for the blue hedgehog himself. Without having access to the source code, Christina instead recreated both the gameplay and the sphere-rendering technology for Sonic Pool.

At the end of the Blue Blur's journey on the Saturn sits Sonic R. Initially started by british studio Traveller's Tales as a Formula One racing game designed to compete with a game also called "Formula 1" on the original Playstation, this project would undergo a new creative direction as Sonic R following a mandate by SEGA to compensate for Sonic X-Treme's cancellation. The project was referred to as "Sonic TT" for a while - a reference to the terms "Time Trial", "Tourist Trophy", along with SEGA's own Manx TT Super Bike.

Jon Burton, head of Traveller's Tales (now TT games) and YouTube channel GameHut has published videos showcasing the oldest builds of the game. First is **Prototype 0.1**. There are no characters. There's only a first-person perspective. This has minimal texture work and no sky texture. Movement is currently limited to just a rail that goes around the track.

Next is **Prototype 0.2**. At this point, there are character models. The models are not animated. For unknown reasons, Sonic's model is flickering. The game is still on a rail. The game has a Sonic model with a metallic texture used to test environment mapping on characters, but this was only used for the trophy and title screen. You cannot collect rings. Interestingly, the background for Resort Island is taken from Mickey Mania, another Traveller's Tales game.

Next is **Prototype 0.3**. The game is no longer on rails, but there's still no animations for the characters. Following this, there are now secret areas. There's now a collect animation for rings. There's simple AI for opponent racers.

During development, Sonic Team would design the tracks on paper, followed by Traveller's Tales interpreting the drawings into 3D. The game originally had a mirror mode that flipped the tracks, but this mode was scrapped when the draw code would have to be re-written to accommodate this feature. Sonic R would be shown at E3 1997, where studio head Jon Burton would recall people giving up when they fell into the water due to Sonic's speed being greatly reduced under such conditions. In response to this, Sonic's underwater speed was sped up.

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