'Sonic the Hedgehog 2' is better than the original

By John Wenzel
The Denver Post

At first glance, "Sonic the Hedgehog 2" looks like a cash grab from the same people who made 2020's shockingly successful "Sonic the Hedgehog."

I use "shockingly" because the first movie, which had its modest charms amid the loose ends and bald spots, seemed destined for the scrap heap of video game adaptations — a genre that has repeatedly tanked over the years because studios have no idea how to translate interactive digital characters to real-life settings.

Instead, "Sonic" made more than $300 million in the U.S. and went on to become the highest-grossing superhero movie of the year (yes, even beating Marvel's widgets). Go figure.

Paramount Pictures and Sega of America
From left, James Marsden, Tika Sumpter and Sonic (Ben Schwartz) in "Sonic the Hedgehog 2."

That first "Sonic" — about a blue, extraterrestrial hedgehog who runs so fast he makes The Flash look sleepy — smartly embraced its kid-friendly contours, depicting its cartoonish protagonist as a fully CG creation that lives in the real world (in this case, the blandly fictional hamlet of Green Hills, Montana). It could have been a jarring contrast, but it worked because everyone seemed to know exactly what kind of movie they were in.

The cast fully returns here for "Sonic the Hedgehog 2," and to better effect than the original.

Sonic is still voiced by Ben Schwartz ("Parks and Recreation"), who leans into our hedgehog's more childlike qualities as he entertains his superhero aspirations. Sonic's human sidekick, Green Hills police officer Tom Wachowski (a chipper James Marsden) is leaving Sonic home alone to attend a wedding in Hawaii with his wife/Sonic's mother figure Maddie (Tika Sumpter). Maddie's sister and the bride-to-be, Rachel (Natasha Rothwell), nearly steals the show in scenes that feel barely tethered to the main plot, as if a sitcom was plopped into the middle of a Thanksgiving Day parade. Surprisingly, it works.

Meanwhile, Sonic's pun-happy nemesis, Dr. Robotnik (Jim Carrey), escaped from his galactic exile at the end of the last movie. Knuckles, a red, brawnier version of Sonic (voiced by Idris Elba), struts through a portal and tells Robotnik about his quest to find an ancient stone known as the Master Emerald. Robotnik, who increasingly resembles his ridiculous video game silhouette, is freed.

Another new-old character is Miles "Tails" Prower (voiced by Colleen O'Shaughnessey), Sonic's sidekick who similarly debuted in the 1992 game "Sonic the Hedgehog 2." Tails has made his way to Earth for the same reasons — to find Sonic and secure the Master Emerald — although he's more like Sonic than Knuckles, an innocent presence whose sweet voice belies his apparent space travels and unexplained powers.

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