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## Previews

### Hands on with the evolutionary *Spore* Creatures on DS

Sharp teeth lurk beneath the cute exterior

By [Kath Brice](#)

| Feb 13, 2008

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First conceived for PC, *Spore* is one ambitious game. *Sims* creator Will Wright dreamt up the evolution-based game and it's been in development for several years. In early 2007 it was confirmed the game would also be made for DS and mobile platforms (along with rumours of a PSP version, which haven't been substantiated since).

How exactly the game would work on handheld platforms wasn't explained, though. So until we got hands on with *Spore Creatures* on DS this week, we were in the dark as to how such a massive title – which starts you off as a microbe at the very beginning of life and culminates in a galactic phase that has you ping-pong about space in a UFO – would work on Nintendo's handheld.

It turns out that *Spore Creatures* is to *Spore* a little like Maxis' *MySims* is to *The Sims 2*. It's a more linear experience to *MySims*, but it does have a similarly cute art style – with colourful 3D worlds and flat 2D characters – and more streamlined gameplay. The evolution theme remains and you begin the game as a fairly unappealing blob (ours was called Oogie) but with a goal to collect new body parts and evolve in order to increase your life skills and, depending on what you'd prefer, give yourself a prettier or uglier face and body.

The game seems to blend elements from quite a few genres. At the beginning it's reminiscent of a fairly straightforward adventure with a plot (your creature has crashed its spaceship into a strange planet) and specific goals written in a notebook to achieve in order to move forwards.

But when you begin to encounter ever more aggressive natives and realise you don't have the abilities, or body parts, to kill them the game's unique type of levelling up makes it feel a bit like an RPG. It's also got a similar sense of humour to *The Sims*, as demonstrated by the colourful and bouncy creatures, and early on when you're told you can't carry fruit until you've found some arms.

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Befriending other species – which is done by stroking them and then dancing with them in a screen-tapping mini-game – reminded us a bit of the social aspects in *The Sims*, too. However, there's more to making friends here than just having someone you can invite round for pizza in the hot tub. Once you've made friends with another creature, it'll sometimes offer you a body part modelled on one of its own. You can also ask it to follow you and it'll help you out in fights. Just be careful not to accidentally beat up one of its own kind in front of it (as we did) or they turn quicker than a Doberman whose bone you just pinched.

Body parts can only be fitted at your nest. There an editor screen is accessible and you can scroll through displays of different mouths, arms, tails and eyes. These can be slotted on pretty much anywhere but they're generally more useful in their more traditional positions. Once attached, you can alter their size and colour to create a very unique looking creature – one with tiny legs and a giant mouth or one with a row of eyes running down the side of its body. If that's what you really want.

Not only do these individual body parts have their own attributes that help in certain ways – a big mouth might help you eat quicker and gain health faster, whereas spikes can help your defensive ability – but they evolve your creature's personality, too. A personality screen shows a list of different traits and while you begin as a meek vegetarian, it's quite easy to become an aggressive carnivore if you fight enough of the other creatures.

So while on the surface *Spore Creatures* looks extremely cutesy, there's quite a layer of depth to it. We found it difficult to get lost in the early stages – especially because other creatures and goals are marked up on the handy top-screen map – but with 15 levels in total it seems likely the game will evolve into something trickier.

Controlling the game on DS though seems very deliberately simple, perhaps to ensure it also appeals to the sort of younger demographic that might enjoy sticking big arms on a blob before going off to dance with the Meepers (one of the species in the game). Anyway, you move your creature around using the D-pad and interact with the world using the stylus.

So tapping a tree makes you shake it to get food, and slashing at an enemy attacks. Ah, the combat. The combat was the only aspect we weren't that impressed with during our time with the game. It felt a bit too simplistic and stylus slashes didn't seem to relate to any particular moves – although it's possible it gets more complex in the later levels.

The main game is single-player only, but EA has talked about the wireless and wi-fi functions of the game which enable you to save and trade your created beings with others, to then appear in their game. It's feasible some sort of battle mode might make it into the game, too (like in the mobile version), but these multiplayer elements are apparently still being worked on.

We're hoping *Spore Creatures* manages to offer enough depth to appeal to a broad audience. Maxis has managed it previously with games like *MySims* but *Spore Creatures* doesn't have quite the same range of customisation and revolves around a more linear story.

This aside, it's massively endearing, feels really quite unique to play and finding and strapping on new body parts will surely never get old. The game has been confirmed for release on September 5th in the UK (September 7th in the US). At this stage, we're certainly very keen to play more then.



[Kath Brice](#)

Kath gave up a job working with animals five years ago to join the world of video game journalism, which now sees her running our DS section. With so many male work colleagues, many have asked if she notices any difference.

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