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By [Roger Hargreaves](#)

| Sep 9, 2008

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It says a lot for mankind as a species that the first thing anyone does when faced with the ability to mimic the almighty is make monsters that look like a giant walking John Thomas. So overwhelming has the flood of 'sporn' been for the recently released PC version of *Spore* that it already threatens to overshadow the game, with dozens of websites springing up that would make even a furry fetishist blench.

In the interests of thoroughness, trying to mimic such creationist erotica was naturally all part of the reviewing process, but the results were disappointingly un-titillating. Although expansive in its own way, *Spore Creatures'* creature creator doesn't allow anywhere near the freedom of its PC big brother. Not least because all the creatures are rendered as 2D cut-outs, with each body part layered on top of the other as if it's made of Fuzzy Felt.

As you may or may not know, the PC version of *Spore* is an almost impossibly ambitious 'everything simulator' in which you essentially play god, nurturing a species from single-celled organism to space firing coffee drinkers. This is only managed because it's basically five games-in-one. The later ones are *Populous* and *Civilization*-style strategy games, whereas the first one has more in common with a simple arcade game like *Pac-Man* (and has already been spun-off as mobile game *Spore Origins*).

Spore Creatures is based on the second creature phase of the PC version, as you and your pals start the game as goggle-eyed sea slugs making their first forays onto land. Before you're even able to hum the first few bars of Also sprach Zarathustra you're buzzed by a mysterious UFO and your sole remaining sea slug pal is abducted. The rest of the game involves chasing after him as you evolve yourself into ever more complex, U-rated, monsters.

Although a great deal of care and effort has clearly gone into *Spore Creatures*, few are going to get past the fact that one of the most open-ended and ambitious games of all time has been devolved into a linear and prescriptive DS adventure. There's only one way to play this game and if you don't follow the constant signposting you won't be getting anywhere.

You can access the editor whenever you visit a friendly nest, making use of the new body parts that you find in each level. You can resize and rotate each part, but you can't mould it in any other way. What's more irritating is that although the game describes in detail what each part does when you first find it, there's no way to recall this information when you're in the editor. So unless you can remember exactly which mouth allowed you to breathe fire you're going to have to try them all until you find out.

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Out in the gameworld (which is portrayed in slightly less salubrious 3D) your constant body modifications have two primary uses: to help in combat and to solve a series of environment puzzles. Although ascribing the term puzzle to any of the situations you find yourself in is rather generous, considering you're almost always told exactly what kind of legs you need to survive spiky thorns or what you need to get across some deep water. (This exacerbates the problem which is the PC version's main downfall: that creating wacky looking monsters is all very fun but they're rarely of any practical use when playing the game.)

Combat in *Spore Creatures* works quite well in its basic form as you manoeuvre around a circular arena, employing your various special abilities according to the power left in your energy bar. Taking on an enemy alone is almost always suicide though and ganging up on them with the help of two allies often far too easy. Gaining the latter is a pure test of patience as you sidle up to neutral monsters and rub smiley faces on them until you initiate a simple rhythm action game. This process often has to be repeated multiple times and has you wishing you could survive as Johnny No Mates indefinitely.

Although you can download other people's designs online and see them appear in-game, this doesn't do anything to enrich the gameplay. With just a little more ambition in terms of the actual game structure the sum of all these disparate parts could have been so much more.

Spore Creatures

Not the cheap cash-in you might have feared and yet still a portable game that runs contrary to all the aims of the PC original



[Roger Hargreaves](#)

After being picked last for PE one too many times, Roger vowed to eschew all physical activities and exist only as a being of pure intellect. However, the thought of a lifetime without video games inspired him to give up and create for himself a new robot body capable of wielding a joystick â€” as well as the keyboard necessary to write for both Pocket Gamer and Teletext's GameCentral.

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

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