

# Darkspore

The dark of the sim

Since *Diablo II*'s mainstream appeal died off some years ago, there's been a void to fill in the action-RPG genre. Many titles have tried to copy the game, or put their own spin on things with varying degrees of success. Others have adapted to find their own triumphs by adjusting the amount of role-playing or action. On one side, you have titles like *Mass Effect* which give players plenty to do when they're not in battle but still keep the combat exciting and action-packed. Then, you have the other side: action-RPGs that only barely deserve the name because they have character progression and loot systems. *Torchlight* is a shining example of this take on the genre, and despite everything you think you know about Maxis and its giant promise cake *Spore*, *Darkspore* quite happily finds itself in this particular niche as well.

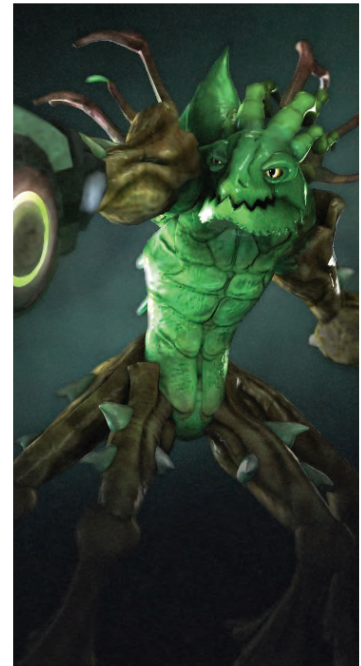
*Darkspore* borrows a fair bit of technology from its predecessor's creature phase, but not much else. The player will take control of the last Crogenitor – a race of super-beings that used to spend their afternoons making life-forms before some of their fancy new E-DNA went bad and their creations turned to the dark side. The *Darkspore*, corrupted by E-DNA, rose up and crushed their creators. Now, many years later, they have spread throughout the universe and it's up to you to save the

## [ details ]

Platforms:  
PC  
Genre:  
**Action role-playing game**  
Age restriction:  
**12+**  
DRM:  
**Internet connection required**  
**[EA account]**  
Multiplayer:  
**Local: None**  
**Online: 8 players**  
Developer:  
**Maxis**  
Website:  
**www.darkspore.com**  
Publisher:  
**Electronic Arts**  
Distributor:  
**Electronic Arts South Africa**

day. What a treat. You can gather that *Darkspore* is hardly setting itself up to be a narrative prodigy, and as you continue through the campaign you won't so much as interact with a story but simply be told of the demise of the Crogenitors and rise of the *Darkspore* by the computer onboard your ship. Thankfully, that stuff doesn't matter too much in a game like this; it's the action you're after, and that's what you shall have plenty of.

As a Crogenitor, you will have access to twenty-five heroes (each with four variants), or "living weapons", which you'll unlock as you gain levels and progress through the campaign. Think of these heroes as creatures similar in purpose to Pokémon – each has their own speciality and will be suitable for different situations or against certain enemy types. They're divided into three classes: speedy Ravagers, mighty Sentinels and spell-casting Tempests, with each archetype resulting in a collection of abilities most suited towards their particular style of play. The player then assembles up to three squads of three heroes each and takes them into each stage in the game's six worlds. The heroes cannot all be used at the same time, but each has a squad ability that can be accessed by any other hero in the squad provided the base hero is still alive. From this point on, the game presents you with a repetitive formula



**/1/** Kill enough *Darkspore* and you'll be granted a brief power called **Overdrive** that activates all squad powers simultaneously. It'll continue as long as you keep killing the enemy.







for progress: get through each area, kill different Darkspore that drop items, health and power (mana) pickups, then get to the end-level boss and attempt to kill it. The way in which squads are assembled and customised will be a little strange at first, as it's quite different to the norm in this genre, but once you've got it down pat you'll find that the whole process makes a ton of sense and feeds into the rest of the game well. In fact, the entire game feels well thought-out, and is sure to entertain those gamers who enjoy the grind and progression loops one gets sucked into in such games.

Did you catch that word "grind" over there? Yeah, that's important: *Darkspore* is all about the grinding. As you go through the chapters, you'll find yourself coming up against incredibly tough challenges that your heroes are simply too low-level to deal with. Usually that'll be in the form of the final level boss that is very often way more challenging than the rest of the level. It's a frustrating game at times, as the only way you'll be able to beat that boss is with the right squad that's been equipped with sufficiently powerful items, and the only way to get those items is to grind for them. You'll find yourself repeating levels frequently, especially later on when the difficulty gets particularly silly, and with little randomisation of

the levels each time you jump in, players with short fuses will find their keyboards broken before too long.

Those players that do manage to keep their anger bottled up or those who live for the grind and relish the idea of big rewards for their frustration will be happy here. If *Darkspore* is treated as something of an arcade game, you'll find that it's enjoyable, and each level is mercifully great to look at to ease that frustration. The game's aesthetic in general is eye-catching; it's stylised but not oversimplified and the gameplay environments stand out from the regular sci-fi crowd. Each level is a challenge all on its own, and if you conquer it you stand the chance to gain a lot for your heroes. Items cannot be equipped in the field, as each pickup represents a genetic blueprint that must be bonded to your hero in the ship's laboratory, which you might recognise as the creature editor from *Spore*. While each hero can't be altered to the extent as what *Spore* allowed you to do, but you'll find plenty of customisation in both the looks and combat departments.

*Darkspore* is special, mostly in a good way. It has its iffy bits, but it's a simple and fun game that you may find strangely alluring if the repetition doesn't bore you to death. **NAG**

**GeometriX**

/ PLUS / Looks good / Combat is fun / Tons of customisation  
/ MINUS / Repetitive / Fluctuating difficulty / Too simple for some

IF YOU'RE OKAY WITH REPETITION AND POTENTIAL FRUSTRATION, DARKSPORE WILL BRING YOU HOURS OF JOY.

70



# NAG



## PS Vita

We play with Sony's new toy

## Reviews

- L.A. Noire
- The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings
- Duke Nukem Forever
- Brink
- + More!



# BATTLEFIELD

# 3

Two words, Hands-on multiplayer! Or is that three words?

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If your DVD is missing we are really sorry. The truth is the DVD had to be redone this month after the burner was formatted. This has nothing to do with your particular DVD being missing - that's just bad luck, which is why we're sorry.