FINALLY, after a gaggle of expansion packs, the sequel to The Sims has landed, and those who enjoyed the original are in for a treat. The new game delivers the sort of fun you'd expect, with many more elements thrown in.

The Sims 2 is an enormously thoughtful and flexible game. There are many options to pursue and the gameplay is truly open-ended.

Even the install program is fun, as it features a mix-and-match game and a Sims quiz.

As before, you live the virtual life of your Sim citizen by ministering to their needs in social and physical domains.

However, this time around the gameplay is less focused on rudimentary tasks, but is about life goals, and because your time in each life stage - and ultimately your character's lifespan - is limited, the game has a finite feel.

You explore the possibilities for each of your Sims' unfolding lives.

The visuals in The Sims 2 are a huge step forward for the series.

This is no surprise when you remember that the original game engine is now four years old, and it wasn't stunning to begin with.

However, the new game is close to the forefront of 3D visuals, with a lot of attention to detail, superb animation and some really decent lighting effects.

The sound is also brilliant. Simlish speech yet again plays a major part in the game. Even better, almost any object you'd expect to make noise in the game does so.

Early on you will learn to play the piano badly, and it's quite funny.

The interface is very simple, with a lot of references to the original game.

That said, there are new, higher domain motivations.

Along with the usual needs, such as hunger, sleep and hygiene, there are new overall fears and dreams to deal with.

The fears are issues your Sim is particularly sensitive to, while the dreams represent the particular (and often funny) aspirations of your Sim.

There are different domains when it comes to wants, and some Sims will want material things while others will want to be popular or develop a certain level of intellectual prowess. There is even a more cheeky path, as some Sims are driven to indulge in convivial calisthenics.

In the game this is called making whoohoo, and it is very funny. Your Sims also have a family tree, and genetics actually plays a major part in the game, as your Sims are products of their genes. If you have a child in the game, it draws on the DNA of both parents, affecting appearance, skills and behaviour.
You will also progress through distinct chronological periods as you grow up and eventually retire. This keeps the game fresh, as you experiment with the possibilities of each age.

The game has goals, but really The Sims 2 is all about experimenting with the many and varied social situations you can get yourself into.

There are several wacky characters to meet and some will become friends, while others will pose a threat or present unique challenges.

The Sims 2 will captivate many people from the second they fire it up.

This amazing game closely parodies real life and has humour, drama and massive amounts of variety. If you are even vaguely interested in The Sims, this is a must-buy. It's so polished it is a solid candidate for game of the year.

Creative and flexible

The Sims 2 is flexible and can be customised. The game comes with a superb character creation utility you can use to create your virtual avatar.

The tool is very easy to use and so sophisticated you can come pretty close to creating a virtual likeness of just about anyone, including yourself.

**The Sims 2**

**Format:** PC  
**Distributor:** EA  
**Web:** [www.ea.com](http://www.ea.com)  
**Price:** $79  
**Rating:** M15+  
**Score:** 5/5

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