

PLAYSTATION 4 AND XBOX ONE: ALL THE LATEST GAMES INSIDE

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HIGHLIGHTS

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WOLFENSTEIN ■ NO MAN'S SKY ■ METAL GEAR SOLID V ■ DRAGON AGE III ■ THIEF



THE SIMS 4

PURE AND SIMPLE

Format: PC Publisher: EA Developer: The Sims Studio Release date: Late 2014

INSIGHT

To replicate all the nuance of social behaviour, The Sims Studio filmed colleagues in secret during work functions and studied interactions to perfectly capture all the mannerisms and quirks in the Sims themselves.

■ FOR A GAME THAT was originally made as a satire on the suburban domestic dream of middle-America, the Sims franchise took an unfortunately capitalistic turn in its last iteration – *The Sims 3* may as well have been called *DLC: The Game*, with so many content drops coming to form the central experience of the entire game. *The Sims 4* is a killswitch for that, it seems – having been in development for three years, the game has gone on a journey through various development teams, reworking and reengineering core aspects of the game in a process that's seen every element scrutinised. The focus has been on what makes a Sim a Sim – that is to say, Maxis is paying close attention to what makes our digital alter-egos even more human.

Graham Nardone, associate producer on the title, told us: "Our new tech that's driving more lifelike behaviour sounds like a subtle change, but it has a big impact in how the game is played. Now the balance between managing your Sim's needs versus progressing their lives via things like skills, careers, relationships, and aspirations becomes a more interactive experience, where your Sim's successes and failures are directly defined by you as the player." This technology is called SmartSim – and it grants the Sims the ability to multitask, engage in real group dynamics, move fluidly and believably and makes their entire life that much more authentic. "Artificial intelligence is one of the areas where videogames can still improve by leaps and bounds, and we're concentrating many of our efforts there. Think of it like this... have you ever wished you had a little more time in your day to get things done? The changes we've made help you accomplish just that for your Sims!"

This is an important point for the sequel to focus on – the main point of *The Sims* is escapism. As a distraction,

the game taps into the appeal of a perfect domestic existence; the ability to micromanage simplified aspects of life engages that part of our personalities that craves control. That isn't to say everyone wants to be a benevolent puppet-master; *The Sims* is infamous for bringing out the dark side of players. "If you're more of a deviant player, we're going to have a lot of fun things in there for you to be able to mess with other Sims, control their lives, manipulate them, make them have a miserable existence," explains Nardone. "If you want to do that, it's going to be there for you."

While some players will enjoy this potential for sadism, other may balk at it – some players want a sense of progression from *The Sims*, not just an excuse to get megalomaniacal. "The way we think of sandbox – you know, this open world filled with tools that you can go in, manipulate, play with, set up scenarios exactly how you want – that's different than how our players think of a sandbox. Really, to them, sandbox is another word for life simulation and what they want are more tools, more freedom to play out their lives in any variety of ways that they want. They think sandbox, they just want more gameplay options, more ways to do the same thing. [*The Sims 4*] is really about going back there, adding more depth into the gameplay, giving them the ability to tell stories in ways that relate to them."

That's an interesting point – using the game as a canvas upon which to paint your own, personally relevant stories. The original *Sims* is a game in which

you can never really *succeed* – you just keep the mundanity of dollhouse life at bay by acquiring more stuff: a big, airy house; a loyal and attentive partner; a well-paid and satisfying job; a healthy and vibrant social life. The challenge for *The Sims 4* will be keeping that appeal alive.

"Each *Sims* game we create is a learning process that helps set the foundation for future development," Nardone explains. "A great example of this in *The Sims 4* are the advancements we've made in Build Mode to retain the powerful tools that our long-time fans have come to expect, as well as providing a more welcoming experience for those who haven't delved

into personalising their virtual home before. We introduced the concept of Blueprints during *The Sims 3*; we saw what worked, and what we'd ideally change with that system, and incorporated those learnings into *The*

Sims 4 to create a very robust room catalogue with expanded functionality that players will immediately appreciate. It's very flexible and helps ease players into making the world their own."

It all sounds very promising – and Maxis' focus on the single-player experience is reassuring. There's thought and effort gone into the ability to make your Sim avatars become more like you – there's even a feature that allows you to customise their memories. The detail in which you can recreate yourself in this open-ended sandbox realm is extensive, and we look forward to seeing what levels of havoc we can test our virtual selves with when the game launches in Autumn 2014.

“EACH SIMS GAME WE CREATE IS A LEARNING PROCESS THAT HELPS SET THE FOUNDATION FOR [THE] FUTURE”

INDIE
UPRISINGINDIE GAMES TO
WATCH OUT FOR IN
THE YEAR TO COME

TRANSISTOR



Bastion was a great game – somewhere between the vivid

and vibrant art direction and sublime soundtrack lay a game that studied the core aspects of an RPG and breathed fresh life into them. *Transistor* looks to carry that on; with a talking sword, fresh combat and time-freezing mechanics, what's not to get excited about?

ELITE: DANGEROUS



David Braben and Frontier Developments took to

Kickstarter to fund this game, which had been floating around in development limbo for about a decade. The game is listed as a 'space trading and combat simulator' and is set in an open galaxy. If you enjoyed the original *Elite*, then this game is one to keep an eye on.

HOTLINE MIAMI 2:
WRONG NUMBER

The modern-retro, self-aware, amoral stylings of

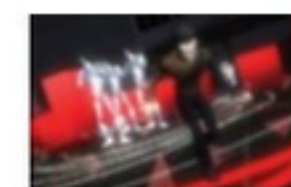
Hotline Miami burnt lasting impressions into the eyes and brain of games™, and from what we've seen of the sequel, we expect it to do exactly the same – albeit in a much more pronounced and in-your-face manner.

EVERYBODY'S GONE
TO THE RAPTURE

The Chinese Room is developing its new PS4

exclusive to show the countryside of Shropshire in the final moments before the apocalypse, keen to show off what games can uniquely do with storytelling, and that gets us very excited indeed. More British apocalypse stories, please.

VOLUME



Mike Bithell's oldschool 'crime simulator' takes its inspiration

from the original *Metal Gear Solid* and promises to be traditional stealth gaming, held together with a tight and introspective narrative. Gorgeous lighting, interesting character design and an intriguing theme put this game on our radar for next year's big indie releases.



■ The overall art style of the game has shifted from the aspirational picket fence suburbia to a more Southern style – evoking the feelings of airy gallery houses in an all-American wonderland.



■ Character Creation in *The Sims 4* brings a new level of precision when creating your domestic automata – everything from skin tone to body mass, facial structure to expressions can be customised and tampered with.



■ Maxis is keeping the lid on exactly how open the career path for your Sims will be, but we definitely know you can be a sedentary writer, binge eating junk food and playing games all day. Sorted.

