

GamerZines

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First Look

by PreOrder-IQ.com



**WE GO HANDS-ON WITH RESPAWN'S
RADICAL MULTIPLAYER SHOOTER**

TITANFALL™

THE SIMS 4

HANDS-ON

Toying with simulated humanity

Emotional torment is something *The Sims* has been built on since the very beginning – be it trapping a new Sim in a ladder-less swimming pool to get a quick injection of Simoleons, or naming and modelling a sim after your real-life boss so you can deny him toilet breaks in-game just as he denies you them in the real world. As with all great sandboxes, it's the player's imagination and creativity which determines enjoyment, just as much as the tools the developer offers.

At gamescom, Maxis were keen to point out that with *The Sims 4*, they're eliminating as many interface barriers as possible in both the main game and the creation suite, in order to

ensure that the player's creativity is the star of the show, not their mastery of the menus.

Centre to this idea is an all-new set of creative tools revolving around designing both the Sims themselves and their dwellings, from setting a house's foundations to deciding whether that family picture would look best on the dining room wall or in the kitchen. This series has always boasted that kind of varied choice but for the fourth entry, Maxis are adopting the same kind of ergonomic design as they implemented in *SimCity*. Rooms can be duplicated, including all furniture inside, and snapped onto a house with no fuss, and foundations can be raised or



PUB: EA
DEV: MAXIS
LAST GAME: SIMCITY
PLATFORMS: PC
ETA: EARLY 2014



lowered by players tugging on orientation arrows with their mouse.

Manipulating wall height and roof patterns in previous games was obtuse and complicated, but here it looks to be intuitive and simple, while

“It’s the player’s imagination and creativity which determines their enjoyment”

offering that complexity and choice players love so much. It’s still possible to fawn over wallpaper, furniture, lighting and tiling choices but now

players can purchase pre-made rooms, like they’re shopping in Ikea. Once purchased you just simply snap them onto your house, with walls and furniture morphing around obstacles without player intervention.

Veterans of this series may be unknowingly grinding their teeth at this focus on accessibility and ease of use, but we were told none of the previous game’s detailed building and customisation minutiae have been sacrificed to accommodate this kind of design ethos. The same goes with the Sim creator as well, with players now able to directly manipulate a Sim’s face by clicking and dragging on it – pulling on individual components like lips, nose, pupils ➤

PREVIEW



Pull on the arrows to change the shape and height of any room.



and any other detail, tweaking it to their whim. There's still dozens and dozens of sliders for every facial element you could think of (even to the degree of being able to push a beauty spot all around a Sim's face) but we found the act of extending and shrinking nose bridges and elongating upper lips much more enjoyable when we could pull them in and out with a simple click and drag. Messing around with body types and clothing choices offered a

similar level of freedom. Sims now also have four different walk options available to them (Swagger, Party Walk, Snooty, and Default) but during our hands-on we weren't able to tweak Aspiration, Age or Trait options. As with previous games, those character choices are still there, it's just that Maxis are still tweaking their implementation to perfection.

Unfortunately our hands-on time with *The Sims 4* didn't extend outside the editor. Instead we could only take Producer Grant Rodiek's word that the new AI Emotion engine completely changes the way Sims interact with each other. Mood now determines what interactive choices are available to the player – for instance, a Sim won't flirt with another if he or she is in the throws of depression. Listening to music, watching TV or going nine rounds with a punching bag can shift their mood, but exhaustion, hunger and the need to take a trip to the toilet can still swing moods.



There's still a number of sliders for players to toy with if they wish, but getting hands-on with a Sim's face is much more fun!



Even a sim's iris size isn't out of the player's tinkering bounds!

We were essentially shown an extended version of *The Sims 4* demo which debuted during EA's gamescom keynote ending with two lovers flying into the heavens inside a red suggestively shaped rocket ship, but the game still looked impressive in person. The character animations are still delightfully exaggerated in a manner only Maxis and Dreamworks can pull off, and we also spotted a

"The Sims 4 will boast an offline game mode. Score one for the good guys!"

streamlined interface which highlighted any given Sim's current mood status and influences while also offering up more space to show off action between characters.

Other improvements were also fleetingly mentioned during the presentation, such as the ability for Sims to engage with activities and conversations with multiple people

rather than just one-on-one as before – as well as confirmation that *The Sims 4* will indeed boast on offline game mode. Score one for the good guys! Overall, what we saw and got to play of this sequel seemed massively encouraging, especially for a game that's still in a pre-Alpha state.

What'll be really interesting to find out is how online play factors into *The Sims 4*, and whether this sequel will make an appearance on either the Xbox One or PlayStation 4 down the line. We'd presume both would be safe assumptions to make, but with Maxis burned so mercilessly on their ambitious 'connected play' idea for *SimCity*, we wouldn't be surprised if they kept *The Sims* as it is rather than break an already successful mould.

The Sims has always been about creating stories, and it'll be very interesting to see what tale EA and Maxis tell regarding this new entry before it launches on PC only in 2014. ■



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