



All your buildings will slowly deteriorate in the Martian dust, so make sure you keep resources aside to maintain them.



Format PS4, XO, PC (reviewed) Publisher Paradox Interactive Developer Haemimont Games ETA Out now Players 1

SURVIVING MARS

A small step – not a giant leap – for game-kind

It's not the dust storms or the cold snaps that make *Surviving Mars*' version of the Red Planet feel hostile, but the depth of its systems. This is not a space holiday by any means – it's a colony builder about careful resource management, forward planning, and not building beyond your means.

That doesn't mean it's dull, or that there aren't odd moments of wonder where you'll want to zoom in and put its excellent photo mode to use. It's just that, most of the time, it'll feel more familiar than its alien setting suggests.

You start by securing oxygen, electricity, and water, which are the lifeblood of your colonies. Soon you'll be scanning the surface for metal and concrete deposits, and finding ways to extract and transport them efficiently. Those resource veins might be far apart, which means setting transport routes for your small fleet of vehicles and sending

worker drones off into the dust. As you build up your stocks, you pick your way along the tech tree to gain access to new factories, housing and technologies, all the while building glass domes for your colonists filled with apartments, medical clinics and casinos.

You can get satisfyingly deep into almost every aspect of it, manually assigning individual workers to particular jobs and choosing exactly what hours the diner should stay open for. That complexity means it's a difficult game. Just as you thought it was going well, your water extractor grinds to a halt, clogged up by dust. You can fix it with machine parts, but production of those has stopped because you've run out of electronics, and you don't have enough rare metals to maintain an electronics factory. Then your AI assistant chimes in: "A meteor is heading your way." Gulp.

We constantly felt the urge to start again with a more efficient plan, which we think is a credit to the fact that you're always learning from your mistakes. We really appreciate how different each run

feels, too: the tech tree is semi-randomised, and you'll face different resource challenges every time.

Down to Earth

However, its obsession with resource management makes the game feel dry at times. Often, you're trying to keep so many plates spinning that there isn't enough time to properly enjoy the red planet. Haemimont could've done more with that setting, too. 'Mysteries' are the high points: they're random events, triggered by the discovery of a strange artefact such as a buried metallic sphere, that launch mini-stories with decisions to make. We wish the rest of the game made us feel as curious, because the regular missions are dull and too infrequent, feeling unfocused.

Expect some control frustrations, too. For example, if you want to reassign a group of drones to a new control centre – which you'll want to do often – you have to individually click on each one and send them on their way. It's far too fiddly.

Those issues haven't ruined our time with *Surviving Mars*. But when we step away from it, we're not obsessively thinking about how we'll build our next settlement, as we have done with other games in the genre. Overall, *Surviving Mars* is a solid colony builder – it's just not as alien as we hoped it would be. ■

“YOU CAN GET SATISFYINGLY DEEP, SUCH AS CHOOSING THE HOURS YOUR DINER SHOULD OPEN FOR”

What should you name your colony's first diner? The Mars Bar. Go on, do it.

GM LOVES...

- ✓ Deep systems mean lots of nuance to master.
- ✓ There's plenty of variation between each playthrough.

GM HATES...

- ✗ It ultimately fails to capitalise on its unusual setting.
- ✗ A few niggling control issues get annoying fast.

Better than...



Cities XXL

Having virtually unlimited cash takes all challenge out of the game, and a rigid structure makes it a pain to play. One to avoid.

Worse than...



Cities: Skylines

It looks gorgeous, and its animations are a joy to watch. It's easy to get into, but deceptively hard to master. One to cherish.

i NEED TO KNOW



Every potential colonist has perks and flaws, so choose wisely. You want to group together those with similar interests: sticking all the hippies in a dome filled with gardens, for example.

GM JUDGEMENT

70%



A solid colony builder packed with complex systems, but the red planet feels a little too familiar.
Samuel Horti