

Review: Moments of awe, hours of tedium in 'No Man's Sky'

August 17 2016, by Lou Kesten



This image released by Hello Games shows a scene from the video game, "No Man's Sky." (Hello Games via AP)

If SpaceX CEO Elon Musk is right, our entire universe is a computer simulation. Fortunately for us, that sim is running on some high-powered gear, not to mention software sophisticated enough to generate something as weird and unpredictable as the human race.

"No Man's Sky" (Hello Games, \$59.99) is not that powerful—heck, you can run it on a PC or a PlayStation 4, and it was developed by a tiny

10-person team. Given those restrictions, it does a fairly convincing job of building a massive universe, with (supposedly) 18 quintillion planets.

The question for the typical gamer, then, is: What could you possibly want with all that [real estate](#)? Over the course of about 40 hours, I've visited a minuscule fraction of those planets—maybe 100—and I'm sad to say there's not much going on.

Sure, they look great, whether you're exploring a balmy paradise, a frozen tundra or an overheated wasteland. The friendlier climates are teeming with wildlife, from adorable, docile mammals to fearsome, hungry behemoths. There are many different kinds of plants and rock formations as well, which helpfully provide all the elements you need to continue your journey.

At the start of "No Man's Sky," you're stranded on a planet with a broken spaceship. Your first task is to dig up the elements—say iron, carbon, zinc—needed to repair and refuel your vehicle. Soon enough, you'll stumble upon some weird alien monoliths and abandoned laboratories, while flying mechanical sentinels start to notice your activity. No, you're not alone, but fans of sci-fi epics like "Mass Effect" will be disappointed to discover there are only three intelligent species in this sprawling universe.

The overarching goal of "No Man's Sky" is to make it to the center of your galaxy. The gameplay eventually devolves into a rather tedious loop: Land on a planet and mine the elements you need to power your ship's warp drive. Travel to the next "Atlas Station," where you'll be pointed toward your goal. Warp to the next star system, make landfall and start mining again.

Along the way, you can upgrade your spacecraft, your mining tool and your "Exosuit"; you'll especially want to focus on finding ways to carry

more elements and whatever other alien doodads you pick up. I'm the kind of gamer who loves fiddling around with inventory and crafting new gear, but even I grew weary of tinkering and just wanted to get on with the journey.

"No Man's Sky" will appeal to players who enjoy simple exploration, and it does provide moments of awe when you arrive in a new star system or land on a fresh planet. But it's a lonely journey that offers few new thrills after its first few hours. Now that Hello Games has figured out how to build a universe, I hope they fill it with more compelling stories. Two stars out of four.

More information: www.no-mans-sky.com/

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