

Mars: The Planet of Destructible Delights

a review of *Red Faction: Guerrilla*

(available for PS3, XBOX 360, and Windows)

Think Myrtle Beach in April, when New Englanders flee south to beat back their winter blues and replenish some Vitamin D. Now imagine, if you will, everyone getting together and taking over a mile long stretch of beach. Suppose everyone spends all day, every day of their spring break building elaborate sand castles. In the end there are big castles, small castles, stairways and towers littering the beach, with paths weaving in and out. Finally, at the end of the week you are told: "Go ahead, *you can wreck it all.*" Hold that thought.

The year is 2120 and Mars has been terraformed into a mining planet. The Earth Defense Force (EDF), initially created to protect the citizens and workers of Mars, has turned into an oppressive tool of the mining corporations. You, as Alec Mason, arrive to meet your brother and are quickly drawn into the conflict, siding with a group of rebels trying to free Mars from the grip of the EDF. Mission by mission, sector by sector, you help the Red Faction gain control of the red planet.

The story, while compelling, plays second-fiddle to the top-notch environment in which the liberation of Mars takes place. The developers at *Volition* created a physics engine (*Geomod*) that is unbelievably realistic. In fact, it would have been a great experience if they just plopped you into their world without any mission structure whatsoever. Just like wrecking sandcastles, or paying a dollar a swing to see how much damage you can cause to a junk-car with a sledgehammer, there is something eminently satisfying about destruction itself.

Fortunately, the game has much, much more to offer. The game feels the developers had a brainstorming session and asked themselves: what would be cool do do with an engine like this? They started with a variety of destructive weapons that seem authentic. My personal favorites are the sledgehammer, the remote mines, and the modified arc welder. They then created a fleet of vehicles, each of which can be commandeered Grand Theft Auto style. With these ingredients, the gameplay can't help but be compelling. They then created a wide variety of mission types, so things never get dull or repetitive. My favorite mission types are simple guerrilla raids, riding shotgun with Jenkins (while manning a rocket turret), and best of all: a multiplayer mode where an elaborate set of buildings have been set up (Myrtle Beach Style), and everyone gets one minute with unlimited ammo to see how much they can destroy. While this sounds simple, after a while you realize that destruction is equal parts aggression, science, and art. All-in-all this ranks among my favorite single player *and* multiplayer games. Through its destructible environments and creative game design, Red Faction: Guerrilla has redefined "The Art of Destruction."

Dr. Anthony Betrus

Chair, Department of Information and Communication Technology

SUNY Potsdam

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