



Guitar Hero: still big on Mars

Astronauts turn to Activision's canned guitar game during simulated space mission.

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Diego Urbina keeping fit during his long months in the sealed European Space Agency module where the pioneering international study Mars500 is set. Photograph: ESA

The Mars500 project is a simulated mission to the Red Planet, currently being staged within an enormous hangar in Moscow. Three crew members from the European Space agency are spending around 520 days couped up together in a 'space station' so that scientists can observe the effect that such a long period of isolation can have on human behaviour. An actual Mars mission probably won't be on the cards for another 20 years, but at least by then we'll know what it is that's likely to drive the crew to distraction while floating through thousands of miles of dark nothingness.

Anyway, to keep the crew occupied during the experiment, they've been provided with a range of DVDs and video games. A photo released by ESA, shows Diego Urbina playing on a Wii balance board. Nintendo's console was surely top of the agency's must-have list as it will allow astronauts to exercise while fending off boredom. But we can also see a set of Guitar Hero drums in the background. Was this a wise choice?

In some ways, music games are the perfect interactive entertainment on a long space flight. They're multiplayer, so crew members can enhance their group interaction skills, but they're also *cooperative*, thereby lessening the possibility of people coming to blows (unless, of course, the electronics engineer just totally fails to nail the tricky lead solo in Slayer's Raining Blood).

Guitar games are also physical and mildly creative. Of course, there could be problems if a lone crew member decides to practice one song over and over again at full volume while everyone else is performing a series of intricate low-gravity experiments. In space, maybe no one can hear you scream, but they can certainly hear you rocking out to Megadeth's Hanger 18 if they're in the next module.

So what game would **you** bring along if you were to spend over a year in a series of

small compartments, the largest of them no bigger than a bendy bus? Would you go it alone with Civilization III? or maybe pull your colleagues into lengthy Left4Dead sessions? Science needs to know...

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