

THE WEEK

Moscow's mock mission to Mars

After a seven-month journey, European astronauts have touched down on the surface of "Mars" — or, a sandpit in a Moscow warehouse

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Best Opinion: *PopSci*, *Guardian*

The video: Two astronauts from the European Space Agency have touched down on Mars after seven months in transit — or, at least, landed in a dusty corner of Moscow. The spacewalk is the highlight of the European Space Agency's Mars500 experiment, which aims to create the psychological conditions of an actual trip to the Red Planet. Six volunteer "astronauts" have been sealed inside a mock spacecraft in Moscow since last June. Over the weekend, a spacesuited pair of astronauts spent an hour and 12 minutes performing experiments in a large sand-covered arena intended to replicate Mars. The astronauts' "journey" will conclude in November, after 500 days of seclusion.

The reaction: The real challenge lies ahead — a "monotonous 'interplanetary cruise' without a highlight like the Mars landing to look forward to," says Clay Dillow at *PopSci*. Experts say if the astronauts are going to "lose their heads," they'll do so in the next few months. The European Space Agency has given the crew a "range of DVDs and video games" to stave off that outcome, says Keith Stuart at *The Guardian*, including *Guitar Hero*. "Was this a wise choice?" Endless guitar solos might just grate the nerves of fellow astronauts. "In space, maybe no one can hear you scream, but they can certainly hear you rocking out." Watch a video of the "astronauts" taking their first steps on the Red Planet:



Two "astronauts" are spending 500 days on a mock-space flight in Moscow. *Photo: YouTube* **SEE ALL 39 PHOTOS** ▶



