

Minetest 0.4.10

Mike Saunders spent months trying to escape his Minecraft addiction. He thought he was out, but some open source hackers pulled him back in...

DATA

Web

www.minetest.net

Developer

Perttu Ahola and team

Price

Free under GNU GPL

Wait a second – isn't this a game? Shouldn't it be in the Gaming on Linux section earlier in the magazine? Well, maybe, but Minetest is so much more than a simple plaything. It's a world simulator, a construction engine, a sandboxed environment to build anything you want. At least, that's the goal – it's still undergoing heavy development.

Minetest is an open source clone of Minecraft, the phenomenally popular block-building game that has sold over 50 million copies around the world. Minecraft addicts spend weeks and months completely absorbed in the game – and when they're not playing it, they're watching videos of other people constructing amazing things. It can be played alone, but it comes to life in collaboration with other users on the internet. It's like the best of Elite, Mercenary and virtual reality combined into one game.

Although Minetest is available in the package repositories of many popular distros, it's a shame there isn't a distro-agnostic static binary to download. We managed to get the latest release via an Ubuntu PPA, however. Fire it up and

"It's like the best of Elite, Mercenary and virtual reality combined into one game."

you're asked to create a new world; choose a map generator (v6 works best at the moment) then select "minetest" as the Game type, and you're ready to go.

As in regular Minecraft, you're dropped onto a vast landscape with nothing else – no instructions, no tools, no plotline to follow. Using the WASD keys to walk and the mouse to look around, you can start digging and collecting blocks using the left button. To place a block, use the right mouse button. To switch between the different things that you're carrying, use the mouse wheel. And that's it – good luck!

Minetest's worlds are full of fields, mountains, oceans and caves.



Given enough time, you can build almost anything (image courtesy of Krock on the Minetest Forum).

Most players start by gathering wood and creating tools that can be used to mine more robust materials such as stone and iron. Minetest provides a crafting table in your inventory by default, so you don't have to create one from scratch as in the original Minecraft. There are various subtle differences like this scattered around the game, but by and large it's very familiar to anyone who has spent time with Notch's masterpiece.

A world of your own

Minetest's worlds are vast and expansive, with different biomes for woodland, mountains, desert and so forth. Dungeons are not enabled by default, but you can turn them on via a configuration option. Visually it's attractive and smooth, performing just as well as Minecraft on our test box, although the sound effects are rather weak (you'd expect more than silence after jumping from a mountain into water, for instance).

Another area that's lacking is non-player characters. Minetest's worlds are empty and lonely, but mods are available to pep things up with life. In fairness, Minetest hasn't even reached version 0.5 yet so there's plenty of work to be done – we're not criticising it. The reason we wanted to cover it in Linux Voice is because it has the potential to be very special.

Take the solid game foundations, add the giant wealth of talent from the Free Software community, and we could have the best video game – nay, world simulator – of all time. Then throw in an Oculus Rift and you may never want to leave your house! 🎮

LINUX VOICE VERDICT

Missing some features and rough around the edges in places, but could eventually be bigger than Minecraft.

★★★★★

