



The quaint, hex-based worlds are the setting for this relaxing 4X game.

INDIE 4X STRATEGY

# Before We Leave

## Build a cosy colony, but beware of the whales

**READERS OF A NERVOUS** disposition may want to look over the page at the game in which you chainsaw bad guys, because despite its nonviolent nature, city and planet-builder *Before We Leave* hides a dark secret: It calls its population “peeps.”

Players who can get past the twee, however, will discover a 4X game without the extermination—a 3X if you like—in which your citizens emerge from an underground bunker to revel in the sunlight of a rejuvenated world. What the disaster was that forced them down into the darkness we’re not told, but judging from the artifacts left on the surface, the peeps’ ancestors were once an advanced spacefaring civilization.

You start out on an island with limited resources and an old boat. Fixing this up to explore strange new lands becomes the aim, sending out colonists to the other islands to harvest more resources and discover... an old rocket. Fixing this up then becomes the aim, until you blast from the surface of your world and into a solar system where other planets lurk, ripe for colonization—and stranger things besides, including graceful, hungry space whales that appear very late in the game.

The spheres you explore are made of hexes, and you can spin them about like

some kind of mad god. The population doesn’t seem to mind, however, and the hex-clouds obligingly shuffle out of the way so you’ve always got a clear view. Each member of the population has a name and a couple of lines of descriptive text that gives them a bit of personality, and it’s enjoyable to zoom in and watch them bouncing about the landscape in real time, following roads to their jobs, gathering resources, heading home at dusk, and generally getting on with things. The day/night cycle means things get a bit harder to see at night, and many of your citizens will want to go home, but this is a 24-hour economy.

As you explore, expand, and exploit, you’ll eventually pepper the landscape with mines, lumber camps, and more. Each of these needs to be connected to the road network, as does every dwelling you build for your workers. This isn’t unusual for the genre, but your transport network carries the seed of frustration in it, as you struggle to punch roads through narrow gaps (especially in desert landscapes, where you’ll only want to build them on sandy hexes that are useless for food growing) while keeping frontage for your buildings. The fact that explorers, who seek ancient knowledge

from archaeological sites, can wander across fields and mountains just makes the point—if they can, why can’t miners?

The lack of any enemy to exterminate makes the game more about optimization, which the road conundrum perfectly feeds into. Fixing up the boat or rocket means gathering resources, processing them, and combining them with the fruits of the tech tree. Then you need peeps to work on the repairs while maintaining enough of a workforce to keep the economy stable.

This relaxing, cutesy, low-stakes take on the 4X does itself a disservice by keeping the space whales until so late in the game, but delivers on its promises of a combat-free way to let the hours pass in pursuit of the perfect colony. —IAN EVENDEN

**VERDICT** **7** **Before We Leave**  
**BUCOLIC** Gorgeous hex-based worlds, complete lack of combat.

**SHAMBOLIC** Whales appear too late, roads can frustrate.

**RECOMMENDED SPECS** CPU, Intel Core i5-9400 or AMD Ryzen 5 3400X. RAM, 8GB. GPU, Nvidia GeForce GTX 970 or AMD Radeon RX 590.

\$20, balancingmonkeygames.com, not rated

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