Analysis of Mechanics

Jakub Pokorný xpokorj00

Title: Frostpunk

Released: 2018

Author: 11 Bit Studios

Primary Genre: Strategy city builder

Secondary Genre: Survival

Style: Realistic dystopian steampunk

Analysis

Frostpunk is a survival city builder taking place in an apocalyptic winter wasteland of the 19th century. While colony builders commonly combine with survival genre, a classic city builder would on paper seem to clash with survival genre by their usual game loop. City builders are usually slow placed and relaxed games, where the player expands their city, only limited by resources and game progression, while fast paced survival games are thrilling for their players. However, Frostpunk combines these genres, elevating them further by combining their elements together. The main game mod, same as the studios previous games, is also heavily focused on its story aspect, diving into the history of the freezing world and also the stories of individuals in the city, showing not only their physical, but also the psychological struggles.

Gameplaywise, it is similar to a standard city builder. The UI shows the collected resources and has multiple interfaces for building structures, divided into categories. There are also panels for research and declaring laws, to unlock upgrades and new buildings. The first noticeable difference is in the layout, while most city builders have a square grid for structures, Frostpunk has a circular grid with the main generator in its center. That makes building around its circular heat zone less bothersome and also helps to emphasize its importance. The whole city is built around it as the main heat source, until smaller generators are unlocked.

And this is where one of the survival factors comes into play. The never-ending winter. The player not only has to manage the few scarce resources on the map and provide coal for the generators, but also has to build around it's heat zones, making each placement of a structure matter as people can and will get sick. As the game progresses, so does the temperature drop, requiring the player to prioritize upgrading the generators and buildings just to combat the cold. Another important mechanic is the hope and discontent meter of people. People in the city will become hopeless and angry quickly, causing the player to choose between bad short-term and often morally gray solutions. This creates a really immersive feeling of fighting an always losing battle. "The city must survive", as the catchphrase of the game says, even if it means sacrificing the lives of the people in it.

The style of the game takes from the Steampunk subgenre. Although still having the style of the late 19th century Victorian era and steam-powered technology, it is slightly more down to earth and focused to match the harsh cold world. That reflects on most of the visual aspects of the game. The visual design of the game incorporates industrial metal structures, pipes, glass, and mechanical elements. It is mostly visible on colossal steam generators, built to provide heat to the colony, giant automaton robots, and the rare resource "steam cores", being used for special buildings and events.

The game interface itself is made in this style. Small floral ornaments, which were often part of Victorian era architecture, appear on the UI elements, and clockwork sound effects can be heard when pressing the game's buttons. The sound of ice cracking is played, while the whole screen starts to freeze over, as the in-game temperature drops to even more extreme temperatures and the game's event windows appear on the screen in a style of puddles of coal, desperately trying to push the cold back. Together with the incredible art, gives the game a really unique and catching style, making it to this day still one of my favorite games.