

MARS COLONY VARIATIONS

“This Game is Too Hard”

Mars Colony is a game about failure. It’s about exploring the things people do when faced with repeated failure. For these reasons, Kelly’s job on Mars is intentionally difficult. Only when a series of arbitrary dice rolls turn in the Savior’s favor, does he have a chance of stabilizing three Colony Health Markers and “saving” the colony. Anything less will be, in one way or another, a failure.

It’s important not to approach *Mars Colony* as a game that can be won or lost. The game is not really about winning or losing because saving the colony is all an illusion anyway. Take for example, the Colony Health Markers. Each time Kelly stabilizes a Marker, the players add a new one to the list. Kelly may make some progress, but the Colony will always develop new problems. Once you realize this, the game instead becomes about Kelly’s choices in spite of her failures.

Nonetheless, I realize that, for some people, facing one in-game failure after another isn’t much fun – especially when those failures are tied to a heavy dose of luck. If this concept bothers you intrinsically, then *Mars Colony* probably isn’t the game for you. If instead you are simply looking for a slightly more forgiving fiction, you may want to try one of the following two game variations. Both keep the core of the game intact while increasing Kelly’s chances for success.

One thing to keep in mind is that these variations are not intended to be used together. To do so would make Kelly’s job too easy and undercut the prevailing theme of failure that is essential to the game.

Double Doubles

In this variation, any time the Savior rolls doubles (except double 1s) he counts double the total towards his progress. So if, for example, the Savior were to roll [3,3] during a progress scene, he would add 12, not 6, to his total. Similarly, a roll of [6,6] would count 24, not 12. However, double 1s still trigger a Humiliation or Scandal when appropriate.

This variation can result in some exciting swings. With a few well-timed doubles, Kelly can go from zero to hero in just one or two progress scene. While I’ve certainly

seen players fail miserably using this variation, I've also seen Kelly stabilize a full five Health Markers before endgame. On average, Kelly will stabilize or come very close to stabilizing the colony each game when using this variation.

The downside to Double Doubles is that it is possible to roll too well. Without much adversity, the Deception rules become less important, Scandals occur only rarely, and the game overall can seem a bit bland. Still, if you are looking to give Kelly a healthy boost, this is the variation for you.

Best Intentions

In this variation, any 1s rolled on the first roll of a series (except for those that would trigger a Scandal) do not cause a failure. Likewise, Humiliations do not count on the first roll of a series. Only when the Savior rolls a Scandal can Kelly fail. However, if and when the Savior decides to continue rolling during a given progress scene, 1s count against him as per the normal rules.

This variation ensures the potential for at least minimal progress during almost all progress scenes. It also protects Kelly as she begins to put her plans into action. The game will still force the Savior to push his luck if he wants to stabilize three Colony Health Markers, but Best Intentions prevents a certain "whiff" factor on the first roll of each progress scene.

Best Intentions is a bit like working with a safety net. On the other hand, when well-used, it can give Kelly a push towards success that the basic game does not otherwise allow for.

I hope you enjoy these variations. They can add a bit of variety to *Mars Colony*, and allow the optimist in us all to believe that Kelly is not, in fact, doomed.

– Tim C Koppang
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