

First Encounters from GameTek

Are you looking for a complex sci-fi space simulation adventure involving lots of spaceships, action, intrigue, and combat? If you are, you can TRY GameTek's "Frontier : First Encounters," but I highly doubt you'll find what you're looking for.

From what I gather, First Encounters is the latest in a series of "Frontier" games. Seeing as how this is the first that I've heard of this series, I have no previous experience from which to draw comparisons.

The basic plot behind First Encounters is a little hard to describe. The best I can come up with is that your role is that of a Han Solo-type character. It's just you and your ship, trying to make a living in a corrupt and dangerous galaxy. Oh, sure, you may think you're just making an innocent little passenger run to a nearby planet, but little did you know how valuable your passenger is. Or how about that piece of artwork somebody wanted picked up and delivered? Chances are good it was stolen from someone, and that someone is going to come after whoever has it, no questions asked. Pirates, police, aliens, mobsters, competitors, anyone and everyone who may find what you're doing the slightest bit questionable is more than likely going to come after you. But, then again, they may leave you alone. It's hard to tell, and this air of suspense helps to drive the game along.

First Encounters looks decent enough. The graphics aren't stupendous, by any means, but they are, well, decent. The CD-ROM version has some grainy full motion video, amounting to head shots of people you encounter in various locales on space stations, docking ports, and the like. Oh, and guess what? They're BRITISH actors. And not very good ones at that. Royal Shakespearean Theater Company this ain't. Maybe a good way to describe this game would be "Han Solo meets Monty Python." Nah, I like Han Solo too much to make that comparison.

Sound is only okay in this game. The standard engine, laser, explosion, and other sci-fi sound effects are, well, okay. Music is more MIDI, with a couple somewhat imaginative pieces that I actually enjoyed. However, the rest of the tracks left so much to be desired that I turned the music off. The graphics and lack of sound effects don't give the eyes and ears a whole lot to occupy themselves with. But that's okay, because your mind is going to be using all of your mental capacity for other tasks. Here's why:

Control and interface in this game are horrendous. This is yet another game where one must sit down and take the time to learn all the controls intimately before even attempting to play the game. Now, I haven't played a whole lot of flight sims in my time, but I do know that control interface is a critical factor in making the game fun. Well, First Encounters fails in this regard. Flying your ship is difficult right off the bat. I tried the mouse with little success. I also tried a joystick with little success. On top of that, integrating the myriad of keyboard commands into your flying technique is frustrating. Make sure you know which function key you're pressing, or else you may find yourself opening hailing frequencies in the middle of a battle. Not good. The instruction manual is very thick, but largely uninformative. It tells you what everything does, but not how to use it. Well, I could go on and on about the control, but space is limited. :)

Needless to say I didn't enjoy First Encounters very much. If you can get by the horrendous control (and I COULDN'T, by the way), then the depth of game play and intricacies of the different missions you can undertake may be just what you're looking for. However, I wouldn't count on it. Chewie, get us out of here!

Jeff Godemann
cirrocu@aol.com

Ratings

Graphics	82
Sound	74
Interface	38
Fun Factor	50
Overall	61

System Requirements

486 / 33
5MB Ram
mouse
VGA
2x CD-Rom
sound card