= Freelancer (video game) =

Freelancer is a space trading and combat simulation video game developed by Digital Anvil and published by Microsoft Game Studios . It is a chronological sequel to Digital Anvil 's Starlancer , a combat flight simulator released in 2000 . The game was initially announced by Chris Roberts in 1999 , and following many production schedule mishaps and a buyout of Digital Anvil by Microsoft , it was eventually released in March 2003 .

In the game , players take on the roles of spacecraft pilots . These characters fly single @-@ seater ships , exploring the planets and space stations of 48 known star systems . They also engage in dogfights with other pilots (player- and computer @-@ controlled) to protect traders or engage in piracy themselves . Other player activities include bounty @-@ hunting and commodity trading . The single @-@ player mode puts the player in the role of Edison Trent , who goes through a series of missions to save the Sirius sector from a mysterious alien force . In multiplayer mode , players are free to take on any role and to explore anywhere from the start .

Originally , Roberts promised features such as automated flight maneuvers , dynamic economies , and a multiplayer mode that could host thousands of players , but diminished versions of these features were implemented in the final release . The game 's initial technical demos impressed reviewers , but after the Microsoft buyout and Roberts ' departure from Digital Anvil , critics had doubts about the game . Reviewers judged the final product technically good but failing to fulfill their initial expectations .

= = Gameplay = =

Players take up the roles of pilots who fly single @-@ seat spacecraft , trading with merchants on space stations and planets , and engaging in combat against other vessels . Starting with a small spacecraft in a star system , the player 's character explores the region , opening up new systems for further adventures . Each system provides opportunities to increase the pilot 's wealth ; aside from taking on jobs to ferry goods and hunting for bounties , the player character can engage in trade . The player character 's primary goal in the game is to accumulate money , so as to buy more advanced weaponry and equipment to upgrade his ship .

The game is played primarily through " pointing and clicking " with the mouse and a few keyboard commands . This system is also used to control the spacecraft , a breakaway from the traditional use of joysticks for space flight simulators . Observing their spacecraft from the rear , players fly their ships by moving the mouse in the direction they want the vessels to go . Freelancer 's spacecraft follow simplistic flight dynamics ; however , a dash of realism is implemented by allowing the vessels to cut power to their engines and turn to face any direction while drifting along their original path ? conservation of momentum . Clicking the mouse button shoots the ship 's weapons at the location of the cursor . The interface has no radar display ; the location of objects not shown on the screen are indicated by pointers at the screen 's edges . Targeting , communications , and navigation data are displayed in information boxes that can be minimized .

After the pilot docks with a space station or lands on a planet , the screen and its interface change to a rendition of the area he is visiting . The player moves the pilot to different locations and interacts with certain objects , such as reading a bulletin board and talking to other characters , by clicking on their graphical representations . Freelancer 's economy consists of buying and selling spacecraft , their armaments and components , and commodities . Certain goods are considered contraband in some systems , and they have to be smuggled past police patrols to their buyers . Computer @-@ controlled characters (non @-@ player characters or NPCs) in certain locations on the planets or stations offer quests and jobs .

Freelancer features a multiplayer mode , allowing up to 128 players to play together in a game . Multiplayer games are hosted on game servers ; personal computers that meet the requirements for the game can act as a server . Gameplay is similar to the single @-@ player mode , but is absent of story @-@ driven quests . Because the server keeps individual records of the players ' progress , they can resume their game when they next log on to it . A persistent virtual galaxy is thus

maintained for them .

= = Plot and setting = =

The events in Freelancer take place 800 years after those in the video game Starlancer (2000) . The solar system was engulfed in a civil war , fought between the Alliance and the Coalition . Facing defeat , the Alliance placed its people in stasis and sent them to the Sirius system , where they settled and transformed the surrounding space (the Sirius sector) into a region of political intrigue and opportunity . The rule of the sector is mostly split among four houses , each named after the sleeper ship that brought them to the system . Each house exhibits the culture of its terrestrial ancestor : Liberty of 1920s United States , Bretonia of Victorian era United Kingdom , Kusari of Shogunate era Japan , and Rheinland of Second Industrial Revolution Germany . The fifth sleeper ship , Hispania , suffered a malfunction en route and was abandoned in deep space (in the Omicron Alpha system) . The descendants of its crew became pirates .

Freelancer 's planetary bodies and space stations lie close to a single plane in each system , although some are above or below this plane and ships can travel out of the plane . There are 48 known star systems , and spacecraft can travel from one system to another by passing through jump gates . These systems are shown a 2D map , however the jump gate mechanism actually provides no clear idea of how close each system is to others or spatial directions between them , so this map is just a simplified convention . Within a system , spacecraft can travel in the trade lanes ? a series of gates that connect to form a " space highway " ? to quickly reach places of interest , such as planets , space stations , and mining operations . Asteroid and debris fields populate some of the systems , and secret hideouts and derelicts with valuable items exist in deep space . Merchant ships ply the trade lanes , carrying cargo from system to system and occasionally coming under attack by pirates . Patrolling the systems are police and large naval warships .

= = = Characters = = =

The player takes on the role of Edison Trent , a " mercenary freebooter " , in single @-@ player mode . Regardless of Trent 's background , the player can play him in different roles , such as being a trader , pirate , or bounty hunter . Throughout the story , Trent meets several NPCs , such as Liberty Security Force (LSF) commander Jun 'ko Zane , xenoarchaeologist Professor Roland Quintaine , and head of a secret organization , Casper Orillion . Trent 's relationships with these NPCs are pre @-@ determined and illustrated by cutscenes ; the player has no choice of import in Trent 's interactions with these NPCs .

Most NPCs are aligned with a certain faction , such as the police , pirates , a company , or government . Each faction has its own agenda , and the relationships among them are interlinked in a web of alliances and hostilities . Player characters anger a faction and its allies by destroying its ships . Likewise , they gain the favor of a faction ? and , to a smaller extent , its allies ? by attacking its enemies . Player characters who have a bad relationship with a faction are attacked on sight by its forces and denied from docking with its stations . Paying bribes to a faction improves its attitude to the player character . Several NPCs with major roles are voiced by professional voice actors , such as Ian Ziering (Beverly Hills , 90210) , Jennifer Hale (Metroid games) , George Takei (Star Trek) , and John Rhys @-@ Davies (Indiana Jones films and Sliders) . These NPCs are excluded from the multiplayer mode because of its lack of a campaign story (scripted missions) .

= = = Story = = =

The plot of Freelancer 's single @-@ player campaign is illustrated with two hours worth of in @-@ game cutscenes . The story is linear in structure ? the player is unable to effect a different storyline ? and broken down into stages . Cutscenes inform players of background events and the goals in a stage . Most stages have no time limits for their completion , and players can put the main story on hold while taking on missions (jobs) not crucial to it . However , players can only proceed to other

regions of the Sirius sector , where more advanced ships , weaponry , and equipment are obtained , after completing missions that advance the story . Some stages are not introduced until the character has achieved a certain level (based on total worth accumulated) , and it is not possible to gain sufficient levels just through the story itself , so players must spend at least some time on side missions to gain money to advance to the level required for the next stage of the story . This is also necessary as some stages would be too tough with only the money and items collected in the story .

On starting single @-@ player mode , a cutscene shows the destruction of space station Freeport 7 by unknown forces , leaving Trent without money or ship on the planet Manhattan . While waiting for his debtor , Lonnigan , to regain consciousness , Trent takes up employment with the LSF under Jun 'ko Zane , who provides him with a small ship . Lonnigan refuses to pay Trent when he awakes and is mysteriously taken away by the LSF . His death is later announced , and Trent is contacted by a thief who reveals that a mystery party destroyed Freeport 7 to get an artifact in the thief 's possession . An LSF officer kills the thief , and he is shot by Zane in self @-@ defense as she arrives at the scene . Zane and Trent flee Liberty space , traveling across approximately half of the Freelancer world in their flight . Trent locates xenoarcheology expert Dr. Quintaine to learn more about the artifact . While finding additional materials for their research , they discover the existence of the Nomad alien race , who are the caretakers of an empire that belonged to the previous inhabitants of the Sirius sector , the Dom 'Kavosh . The Nomads can possess humans and have slowly infiltrated the four Houses in this manner , planning to ignite a civil war to weaken the humans for elimination .

Trent joins the Order , a secret organization formed to combat the Nomads , and helps to rescue the Liberty president from the aliens . Quintaine 's research reveals the artifact to be a map and the key to the Dom 'Kavosh 's hyper gate ? super jump gate ? network , which currently acts as the Nomads ' source of power . The Order launches an attack on what they believe to be the Nomads ' homeworld , aiming to activate the hyper gates and cut off the Nomads from their power supply . The activated gates suck the Nomads to an unknown location , and the Order watches over the gates for their return . With the Nomads ' defeat , events return to normal in the Freelancer world . Trent and Zane are granted full pardons by the governments , and Trent is asked by the Order to be their eyes and ears in Liberty space , allowing the player to continue the game without any story elements .

= = Development = =

In 1997 , Chris Roberts began work on a vision he had since he first conceived Wing Commander . He wanted to realize a virtual galaxy , whose systems execute their own programs regardless of the players ' presence ; cities would be bustling with transports and each world 's weather changes on its own time . Commodity prices in each star system would fluctuate , according to the activities of the computer controlled traders , who import and export goods . Roberts envisioned thousands of players simultaneously interacting with and influencing this world through a unique and intuitive user interface never seen before in other games . Each player could pursue a quest set up for their character , and join other players to attempt other missions together without needing to exit the game and start a new mode of play . Artificial intelligence would fly the players ' spacecraft , letting them concentrate on combat or other tasks . Roberts intended the cutscenes and gameplay visuals to be of equal quality so players would be unable to distinguish between the two .

Two years later , the project was officially announced as Freelancer at GameStock , an annual showcase to the mass media of Microsoft 's games . The media covered the event , focusing on the features promised for this game . There were concerns about the state of the graphics and uncertainties over the promise of a dynamic economy , but gaming site GameSpot gave Roberts and his company , Digital Anvil , the benefit of their doubts . Initially in 1999 , Roberts announced the game would be available on the market by fall 2000 . However , the project suffered delays and by Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) 2000 , Roberts said the earliest release for the game was at the end of 2001 .

In June 2000 , Microsoft started talks to buy Digital Anvil . Roberts admitted that his team required large sums of money , which only a huge company could provide , to continue developing Freelancer with its " wildly ambitious " features and unpredictable schedule ; the project had overshot its original development projection of three years by 18 months . Roberts trusted that Microsoft would not compromise his vision for Freelancer , and was convinced the software giant would not attempt the takeover if it did not believe Freelancer could sell at least 500 @,@ 000 copies when released . Roberts left the company on completion of the deal , but assumed a creative consultant role on Freelancer until its release . Microsoft instructed Digital Anvil to scale down the ambitions of the project and focus on finishing the game based on what was possible and the team 's strengths . Features such as the automated flight control , conversations that had different choices of responses , and sub @-@ quests were abandoned . Despite the reductions , several reviewers believed the resultant product was still true to Robert 's vision .

The Freelancer team kept a low profile throughout 2001 before displaying a demo of their latest work at International Games Festival 2002 , drawing large crowds . Microsoft announced the project was on schedule , and Digital Anvil added all the planned content for the game by October 2002 . A beta test with approximately 500 testers was conducted , and the only main activities left were to refine the game 's features and to fix errors uncovered in the testing . The game shipped to retailers on March 4 , 2003 , and was later available online through Yahoo 's Game on Demand service . Digital Anvil 's role on Freelancer ended on June 6 , 2003 , with their delivery of a software patch to resolve issues on the server and cheating ; the staff were redeployed to other departments in Microsoft . In accordance with their 5 @-@ year support policy for software , Microsoft stopped supporting the game on April 8 , 2008 , and shutdown their global server , which managed the list of multiplayer servers and the connection of players to them .

Freelancer 's soundtrack was released by Sumthing Else Music Works on November 18 , 2003 . Composed by award winning composer James Hannigan , music group Visual Music Incorporated , and Digital Anvil 's musician and programmer Andrew Sega , it includes a bonus DVD that contains the game 's alternative introduction movies , concept art , scripts , and deleted content . Communities of Freelancer players banded together to produce modified versions of the game . Their software modifications included new ships ? including big capital ships ? for players to fly and new factions for them to join . Certain modifications allowed the players to fly ships of one franchise against another , for example , Star Wars versus Wing Commander . The communities also worked around the loss of the global server , allowing players to host the modified games on their servers and continuing the Freelancer multiple @-@ player online gaming world .

= = Reception = =

Chris Roberts is highly regarded in the field of spaceflight combat simulators due to his successful Wing Commander franchise . When the industry learned that he was creating a new spaceflight combat simulator , they paid close attention to it . In its first public showing at E3 1999 , Roberts 's Freelancer won four Game Critics Awards , including Best Game of the Show . Journalists at one of the game 's later showings queued up to 90 minutes to catch a glimpse of a half @-@ hour demonstration . Computer Gaming World , trusting Roberts 's vision , named Freelancer as a game that would revolutionize the gaming industry . Shortly after the game was released , IGN called it the Game of the Month . Early in the game 's development , the industry was enthusiastic about the prospect of playing in a world that changes without player interaction (a dynamic world) , although there was caution over the possibility of such implementation with contemporary technology . Delays in the schedule and Microsoft 's take over of Digital Anvil gave rise to speculation that Roberts 's most promised feature ? the dynamic world ? would be cut .

The concerns were partially realized ; the features , although not cut , were reduced , leaving Freelancer with a virtual world that did not live up to the industry 's expectations . It presented a static galaxy , where territories of various factions never change despite the groups ' frequent raids and attacks on each other , and commodity prices remain fixed . Nonetheless , reviewers from video game sites , such as Eurogamer and GameSpy , accepted the limitations and focused on other

areas of the game . They found the lack of variety a greater detraction from the game than the compromised dynamic world . Excluding the single @-@ player campaign , players never meet any memorable NPC because almost everyone sounds American . According to Game Nation TV , after playing for a while , every character and place looked similar to the extent that the game makes " Star Trek look like a xenomorphic zoo " . Furthermore , instead of serving as entertainment , the missions , which entail the pilot to fly to a particular location and destroy the enemies there , are so repetitive that they become chores to the reviewers instead .

Freelancer 's graphics software was of older technology , but it did not detract from FiringSquad 's praise of the game 's artistic quality . The beautiful and realistic depictions of the universe impressed other reviewers , such as GameCritics.com and the Stratos Group . IGN , in particular , was enamored with the game 's graphics , describing them as " simply gorgeous " with the best explosions and enormous ships . The mouse @-@ and @-@ keyboard flight control was praised by the industry . Several reviewers found it easy to shoot down enemy ships with the intuitive controls , but others pointed out that aerobatic maneuvers , such as jinking or barrel rolls , cannot be performed , reducing dogfights to overly simplistic and repetitive " chase or be chased " sequences that pale in comparison to the action in other spaceflight simulators .

On the story side , reviewers agreed the professional actors , such as Ian Ziering , did a good job in bringing their respective characters to life . However , criticism was placed on the lone voice who voiced all the generic male encounters for his monotonous delivery and making all his characters sound alike . The long cutscenes , which cannot be skipped , frustrated game journalist Tom Chick ; he wanted to skip the scenes and continue playing instead of being forced to watch a clichéd story . Other reviewers expressed their own frustrations with the story , such as being forced to move to another star system at undesired times , or leaving them without an objective after the campaign abruptly ended .

FiringSquad said Freelancer 's multiplayer mode encapsulated the " best and worst of [the game] in a nutshell " : although players can move their characters anywhere , group with others for missions , and trade ships and equipment , they have very little else to do in the unchanging virtual galaxy . Despite these limitations , Stratos Group said the joy of playing with real @-@ life counterparts is a positive factor ; the NPC pilots are so inept that human @-@ controlled pilots outperform them most of the time . However , as the missions are practically the same , IGN and GameCritics.com questioned the point of playing them repeatedly with friends . Furthermore , IGN thought it was meaningless to amass wealth and higher @-@ grade equipment when they cannot be transferred to other servers . The lack of substance and repetitiveness led the gaming site to wonder how long Freelancer can be viable as a commercial multiplayer product . Whereas massively multiplayer online games such as EverQuest have thousands of players in a vast playing area , Freelancer can accommodate only up to 128 ; the loneliness of playing in such a sparsely populated virtual world gave UGO concern as well over the longevity of Freelancer 's multiplayer mode .

Overall , reviewers acknowledged Freelancer fell short of the promises initially made by Roberts ; however , it demonstrated a high quality of work in its implemented features . The various concepts were well meshed together to form an entertaining product . It never broke or raised the bar of its genre , but boasted a high production value , and has been said to be well worth the money . The game , however , was an anti @-@ climax for those who were hooked by the touted and promised initial concepts , many of which were never realized . Freelancer was a " hugely ambitious game " , as admitted by Chris Roberts , for a company to develop without the necessary capital and resources .

= = Sequels = =

= = = Freelancer 2 : Project Lonestar = = =

There were reports that Digital Anvil and Microsoft Game Studios worked on a Freelancer sequel

called Project Lonestar for the Xbox 360 until Digital Anvil dissolved in 2006 .

= = = Star Citizen = = =

Star Citizen is an upcoming space trading and combat simulator video game for the PC and is considered a spiritual successor to Freelancer as the game designer is Chris Roberts . Star Citizen is currently being developed by Chris Roberts ' Cloud Imperium Games Corporation , founded in 2011 . Roberts ' previous works include games such as Wing Commander , Wing Commander : Privateer and Freelancer . It is announced that it will have a persistent world massively multiplayer , single @-@ player campaign , and customizable private server components . Players take the role of spacefaring humans in a 30th @-@ century Milky Way centred around the fictional United Empire of Earth (UEE) , an analogue to the Roman Empire . A central theme of the game is citizenship (or lack thereof) in the UEE . Players are not automatically granted citizenship , rather must earn it if they desire , and in @-@ game opportunities are influenced by it . Strong focus is placed on player interaction . The game has entered alpha phase in Q4 2015 .