

ALIEN VS

Alien vs Predator, the Jaguar's much-hyped 3D texture-mapped extravaganza, is almost complete. Andy Nuttall spoke to Rebellion Software about their first Jag creation

At long last, Jaguar gaming is getting the chance that it so rightly deserves. The excellent *Tempest 2000* (which we previewed in the last issue of *STF*) started the trend, which is continued here with the equally great *Alien vs Predator* from Rebellion Software.

Based around characters and scenarios from the two films of the same name, *Alien vs Predator (AvP)* is a 3D texture-mapped game in the style of the

recent PC game *Doom* which, incidentally, is also being programmed for the Jaguar. Texture-mapping is a method of digitising an image, and projecting it onto a 3D vector polygon. So, out are the solid 3D shapes as seen in *Elite 2*, *Cybercon 3* and the rest; in are beautifully-textured 3D walls, floors, ceilings and control panels.

The Colonial space station, which *AvP* is based around, is split into five different levels, each of

which is accessed via a lift. There are two other special levels, corresponding to both the Alien spaceship and the Predator spaceship, making a vast total of seven, and we're talking

huge, huge levels here. You can be any of three characters: an Alien, the Predator, or a Colonial Marine. Each character has its



• The Predator's a large chap who, when invisible, can't use any of his super-duper weapons. So he just kills you with a gutting knife instead.

own specific set of missions, and things that it can and can't do. "*AvP* is specifically designed in terms of areas," Jason Kingsley, Rebellion's Creative Director, told us. "That way we've made it less linear, because you don't have to complete one task or mission before moving on to the next."

This is a particularly important feature, because it means that if you get stuck or hemmed in, you can go off and try something else instead. The weaponry is obviously an important point in any game involving Aliens. Rebellion's attention to detail

"The Colonial space station, which *AvP* is based around, is split into five different levels, each of which is accessed via a lift"



• The Head-up display (HUD) of each character provides information about the surroundings. An on-screen map like this can be switched on at any time which, cleverly, doesn't interfere with gameplay.

MODEL CITIZENS

To create the amazingly realistic images of Aliens, Predators and Colonial Marines in *AvP*, Rebellion digitised scale models of the characters which they bought from their local model shop.

"Some of them are digitised, and some are hand drawn," Jason Kingsley of Rebellion told us. "It's very important to the licence holders, 20th Century Fox, that their characters are well-represented in the game. We used the commercially-available plastic models of the characters, which we painted to a very high standard for an authentic look.

"They're physically-animated, and then digitised," Jason continues. "It's quite nice, but it takes a bit longer. All the characters are done this way - luckily, aliens and predators are readily available!" *Alien vs Predator* is due for release in the States in late March, so you should be able to get your hands on a copy soon, and see the excellent character animation yourself. Expect a full review in a couple of issues' time.



• The fully-mobile Predator model, as you can see, is a commercially available model, painted with care and then propped up on a stand-and-clip. Each frame of movement is then digitised, and the resulting code imported into *AvP*.

• Don't worry - this zombie isn't part of the *AvP* setup. It's actually taken from Rebellion's next game, *Dungeons*, a variation on the *Dungeon Master* genre.



• The first *Alien* film came out in 1979 and featured just one alien hunting down the crew of the *Nostromo*. It was widely acclaimed as being a landmark in science fiction film history.

PREDATOR



• 3D polygons as used in AvP give you an inkling of what's possible with the Jaguar. Not only are the textures realistic, but the wall shapes are authentic.

shows in that they have considered the balance of the weaponry. After all, Aliens don't carry guns.

Jason again: "The Alien doesn't have any weapons as such, apart from his teeth and his tail, so one of the problems we had was with the game balance. If you're playing the Alien, and everybody else has got guns, how the hell are you going to compete with them? To combat that, the Alien moves twice as quickly as the other characters."

The Predator, just like in the film, has got some amazing weapons which don't require ammunition, so he can eas-

ily kill all the other characters. To make it work for the player, again to balance the game, you lose points if you kill things when you're invisible. Rebellion have built a code of honour system into the Predator character, which means that he loses honour points if he uses his super-weapons to kill.

To further enhance the game, if you play the Predator you can switch between different views of the game. As in Predator 2, the character is equipped with four viewing techniques: heat-seeking, infra-red, ultra-violet and sonar. This means that while the Predator can't see things as they really appear, he can see movement in the dark and spot differences in temperature depending on the selected view.

"Playing as the Predator it's possible to complete the game, but lose,"

Jason told us. "You become an outcast from your race because you cheated. The player won't realise that until they see that they've got minus points because they've been wandering around invisibly and shooting everything."

"AvP's map is vast, with around 14MBytes of code, compressed down using the Jaguar's hardware compression"

ALIEN IN CHARGE

In the film *Aliens*, the fully-grown Aliens scurried around in packs. The Rebellion

boys considered the option of controlling more than one Alien in their game, but found that it would be too difficult. "We couldn't work out a good way of enabling the player to play several Aliens at once without changing the game structure," says Jason. "So, you control



• The great thing about the Jag, Rebellion reckon, is that you're not limited by colour. You can basically choose anything you want, like this pretty refuse chute, and Jag handles it happily.

one, and it can charge around really quickly. You have to start from a particular area of the map - the Alien's lair - but we haven't really refined that area of the game yet."

Importantly, Rebellion feel that it would be annoying to have to go back to the beginning again when you're playing an Alien. They're considering making a number of start points around the space station, with Aliens strategically placed which go into a quiescent phase if you're not actually using them.

• The first link between aliens and predators was in the film Predator 2 where there was an alien skull on display in the trophy room of the predators' spaceship under Los Angeles.



• Grim Reaper's also from Dungeons, a game which Jason Kingsley describes as "more impressive each time he sees it." Apparently it's significantly more advanced than AvP - we shall see.



• The unlikely combination of all three characters would never normally be seen in the same shot. Except for the game Mutant Zombie Scythe-wielding Predators from Mars, that is. But that's a secret.





● Rebellion have really gone to town with the functions of the space station - many of the doors and windows feature a glass effect so you can see but not walk through them.

AvP's map is vast, with around 112MBits (14MBytes) of code in total, compressed down using the Jaguar's hardware compression. There are three different games in there, as well - from the point of view of a Marine, as a Predator, or an Alien.

"Depending on which you play, the scenario is flipped on its head," says Jason. "If you play the Alien character, you have to rescue the queen who has been captured by the Predator. If you play the Marine, you have to rescue your buddies and set the self-destruct sequence. If you play as the Predator, you have to capture the queen's head, and fight really well.

"The Marine player starts in the middle, and you can go up or down. The Predator ship's docked at the top of the space station, and the Alien's at the bottom. So, the Predator player starts at the top and works his way down, and the Alien player starts low and works upwards. We're hoping that this gives the game a hell of a lot of value."



● He does, however, have one definite advantage. Any Marines he captures are taken back to base and "altered," creating another Alien. This adds to your number of lives - so who needs weapons, eh?

"It's quite a strategic game. If you're a Marine, say, you only have 99 rounds of ammunition - so you have to find an armoury to get some more. A good idea is to clear areas as you move, closing doors behind you so you know that certain areas are rid of enemies. Also, you know that Aliens can't open doors so you can't be jumped on from behind."

SEEDY PCs?

AvP's texture-mapped graphics and 16-bit sound would slow a lesser console down to a crawl, but not the Jaguar. Jason again: "Jaguar's a fast machine - it's in the league of a fast 486 PC. It enables us to do really interesting things, such as the texture-mapping in 16-bit colour." 16-bit colour is equivalent to 65,536 different colours on-screen at any one time - chosen from a palette of 16.7 million. "And you can do things like create transparent

objects," continues Jason. "The head-up display (HUD), for example, is transparent."

Rebellion rejoice in comparing the Jaguar to top-end PCs, even though they're aimed at a different market. Jason thinks that in some ways, you can do more with this £200 unit than with machines costing £1,500 or more: "With AvP we're doing everything in 65,000 colours instead of 256 (the normal PC

Video footage is great for introducing games, but once you've seen it, you've seen it.

"Using CD, you can only really go the way the designer wants you to. With this thing (points to AvP), you can go side-ways. You can also rotate and sidestep at the same time. There's no CD in the



● This is the view when you play the Alien. Notice that the HUD doesn't feature any weapons - because my Alien doesn't have any...

"AvP's texture-mapped graphics and 16-bit sound would slow a lesser console down to a crawl"

world which could store this much information as video footage."

Does Jason feel that the imminent release of the Jaguar CD will help it along, then? "I hope so," he says. "We are looking at doing things on CD, but I want to use it as a massive storage medium, not as a way of showing a 30 minute B-movie. For example, we have problems on a cartridge with 112MBits because it's not enough. I want to do a game with 50 levels, but we can't get it into the cartridge."

"I want to see games that people never finish - for them to sit down and play a game for a week, get through say half a level, and for there to be 60 levels. I don't want people to finish a game in an afternoon." Wise words. **stf**

screen mode). And also, you must remember that we're just starting to learn how to program on this machine. PCs have been going for an awfully long time, and people have had a chance to learn how to squeeze the best out of them."

Although the 3DO is touted as a competitor to the Jaguar, Jason has strong feelings about the comparisons. "I've seen some interesting stuff on the 3DO," he says, "but I think that it's not really

competing because of price. I've been quoted in a magazine as saying '3DO is crap,' but I think it's a good piece of kit. It's overpriced, and the games aren't properly interactive - people are going down a blind alley as far as video footage goes,



● Remember in Aliens when they were waiting for an attack, but the Aliens were in the roof above? Remember the tracking unit that made that spooky "hlp" sound? That's in here, on the bottom left-hand corner - and it's as scary as ever.

● Just a thought: how does a predator collect the skull of an alien as a trophy if an alien's blood is made of acid? Answers on a postcard please to the usual address.

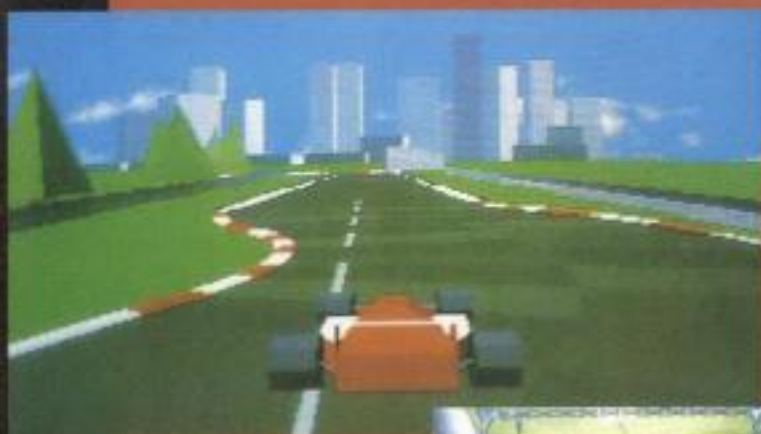
presenting...

REBELLION SOFTWARE

ST FORMAT talk to Rebellion Software, the developers of *Alien vs Predator*



● Rebellion Software, from left to right: Justin Ray, Mike Beaton, Stuart Wilson, Jason Kingsley and Toby Harrison-Banfield.



● Above: *Checkered Flag 2* this was a very early version and things should be improved by the time it comes out.



● Right: *Alien vs Predator*, Rebellion's latest release.

● Set up about 14 months ago, Rebellion Software's aim is to produce games for the newest and most advanced computers and consoles around. "We call ourselves pioneer developers," says Rebellion's Jason Kingsley, "because we can take new hardware platforms and develop software for those new systems." At present, though, they're only developing for the Jaguar, although they are now in the early stages of negotiation with "other hardware manufacturers" to create games for future hardware platforms.

● Before creating Rebellion, Jason had been freelancing for various companies, which wasn't a good experience - one of them for instance, was Mirrorsoft, which took a lot of good programmers down with it when it sank. He set up Rebellion in anticipation of the new generation hardware - by his own admission, he didn't know that the Jaguar was going to appear. "Computer hardware moves in cycles," reckons Jason, "We could see 16-bit machines already available, you could buy 32-bit chips, and we just thought that something would show up eventually."

● Rebellion currently have nine employees, most of whom are creamed from Oxford University graduates. The technical and creative ability of Rebellion, then, should be second to none - and it seems to show in the technical excellence of *Alien vs Predator*. They are currently looking at getting more programmers to join them, who preferably already have projects in hand - not necessarily on the Jaguar.

● Jason has found it easy to get decent programmers so far. However, they have had to sack three people because they didn't fit in

with the rest of the team. "Getting people to work with our team and to have our standards is quite difficult. We have a reasonable turnover of staff." This isn't because Rebellion are difficult, it's just that they do set themselves high standards, and they like their programmers and designers to share their knowledge.

● "The people we sacked were too set in their ways," Jason told us. "We are all part of a team. None of us can do it on our own, and we don't want any prima donnas who think they can do it on their own. You occasionally get programmers who like to keep secrets from everybody and who keep themselves to themselves. We like to keep open, swapping source code and ideas between all our people."

● Currently, Rebellion are developing four Jaguar projects: *Alien vs Predator*; *Checkered Flag 2*, a first-person perspective car racing

game; *Hammerhead* - which was previously known as *Cyberpunk City*, apparently, but details are sketchy; and *Dungeon*, an RPG based on a similar - but more advanced - game engine to *AvP*. You can find some of the models used in *Dungeon* in the *AvP* preview - turn to page 58.

● Jason has a lot of faith in the Jaguar platform and backs it up with the bold

comment: "I think Jaguar's at least 18 months ahead of anything else." Also, though, he is equally confident about what they can do with the Jaguar in the future: "While other companies seem to concentrate on presentation, with things like full motion video and gameplay drawn from CD, we try to concentrate on the gameplay. *Alien vs Predator* is a good game in its own right. If it didn't have *AvP* stamped on it, people would still buy it." And we're inclined to agree with him.

Jason has a lot of faith in the Jaguar platform and backs it up with the bold comment: "I think Jaguar's at least 18 months ahead of anything else"