**Case Study No. # 01**

# ALIEN RESURRECTION

## CASE PROFILE

**Name:** Ben Tuszynski
**Job Title:** Senior Producer
**Company:** Argonaut Software

### Question Time

Q. Had much sleep recently?

A. *No! Not for three months now. The project is so close to completion, and it's all the little things that need attention. You do tend to worry in case you've forgotten something major. You just go over the game elements while lying in bed, wondering if everything's covered.*

Q. The sonics play a big part in creating the overall atmosphere. What else is gonna scare the gamers?

A. *Not knowing where you will get attacked from next. Aliens can drop from ceilings, they can run along ceilings, they can jump from wall to wall. Try shooting the buggers. Then you have the Face Huggers; these little perishers are a smaller target, and can also flock, which raises the stakes. If not killed, they hunt you down. Running through a door doesn't mean you're safe.*

Q. Is *Alien Resurrection* going to be the best first-person title on the PSX?

A. *YES! No doubt. I think we've managed to get all the right ingredients to use a licence to the fullest. I don't think anyone has managed to get this close to the film. Aliens equals scary, and this WILL scare you.*

Q. How closely does the game follow the film's plot?

A. *We've tried to follow the plot as much as we can. We had to add a few things to make this a playable game.*

Q. Such as?

A. *You have to go and find the clones, as the clones are not all in one room. Things like this add to the exploration of levels. But in all, it's as the film; you need to stop the Aliens getting to Earth and getting off the Auriga using Betty.*

Q. You're the Senior Producer – can you get us a date with Sigourney or Winona?

A. *Well, it's like this. I am very protective about my women... Nah! Sig and Win do not agree with these games, so will not get involved with our sort. Sorry!*

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It's been three years in the making, but now *Alien Resurrection* is about to cast a big shadow over the horror genre. We visited the Argonaut mothership to find out the true meaning of panic horror…

**T**hree years is a long time to develop a game, but that's how long *Alien Resurrection* has been under the microscope of development veterans Argonaut. How come? "Because we didn't think it was scary enough", says the game's designer, Jason Bringans. Now this sounds promising…

### Meet the Scare-'em Crew…

"We had a lot of help from Fox Pictures. They gave us all the material they had from the film. Not only this, they also stood by us when we asked to change from third-person to first-person perspectives. We were about to finish the third-person version, (as previewed back in EPM #14), but found it was not scary; the only way to get it scary was to go down the first-person road. Fox were cool about this".

That's a big decision to make such a crucial change. As Senior Producer Ben Tuszynski explains, "Part of the third-person game involved entering an air-conditioning system, which then switched the view to first-person view. Automatically, the scary atmosphere increased ten-fold. A first-person world was something we had to explore".

"Different projects (games) require different tasks. I think a major thing we do is to try and create a world for the

L TO R: Jason Bringans, Ben Tuzynski, Jeremy Luyties

player that they can become absorbed in", says Jason. But in a game like *Alien Resurrection*, exactly how do they create this 'world'? Jason says, "Designers need to have the vision to transfer reality to the gamer. The designer has the vision, but needs the help of the coders to set out the limitations then push them further". It doesn't finish there.

"We need artists to portray the arena. Also, the sound department to help with the setting of the ambience. So with these three teams, the designer has the tools to set the environment to let the gamer get fully engrossed".

### Do Panic…

So that's the fundamentals of what goes on, but what's so good about *Alien Resurrection* compared to other first-

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**UNDERCOVER!**
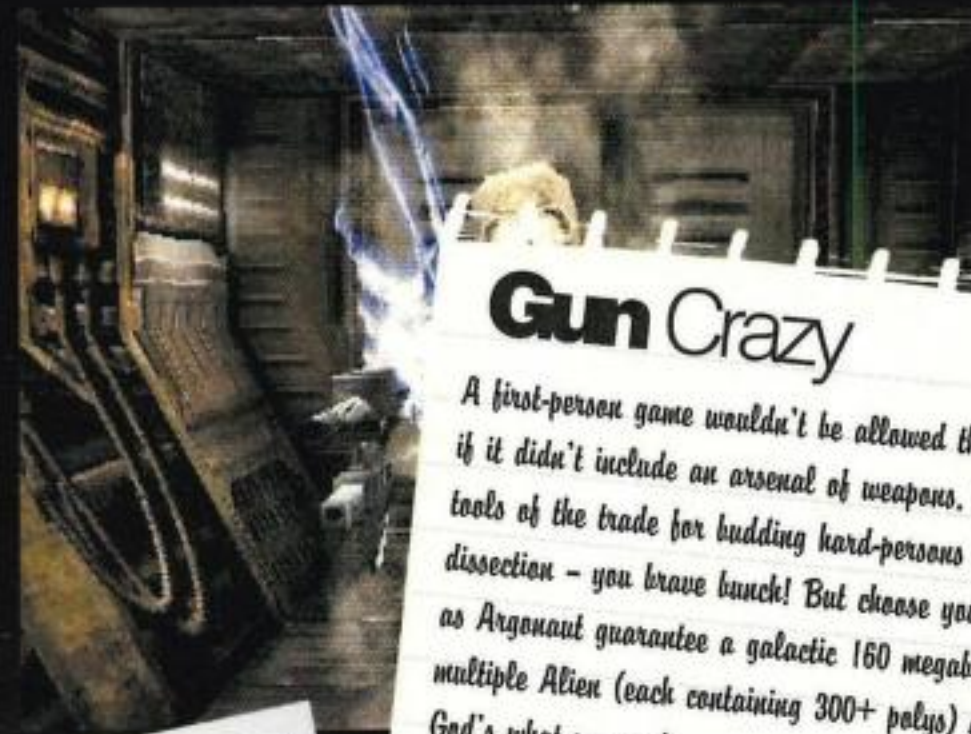
person games? We asked Fox playtester Jeremy Luyties. "We offer a different experience with this product. We're offering panic horror, which is completely different to the typical first-person *Quake*-alike". So it's finished then? "We've finished building the game, it's just going through the final bug test".

Okay, so Jeremy is the playtester. What's the hardest part when playing the game? "Level Three [looks excited]. This is when you're really tested as to whether you can cope with the 360-degree attacks of the Aliens. They run on ceilings, jump to walls and even sneak up to get at you". That sounds pretty scary in itself. "They [Aliens] relentlessly pursue you around every corner. Even the Face Huggers hunt you down if you don't kill them first – you really do start to sweat."

'You're telling me' we think, as we're given the controls. "The best bit for me at the moment is Level Seven, for its level design, puzzle, AI and the interaction with the Aliens, Face Huggers, Inmates and Marines. You're now a fair way into the game, and it starts to all come together and creates a real sense of urgency, as everything is out to get you. You really start to panic."

Now I'm too scared – time to leave the room and grab a quick chat with one of the coders, Martin Piper.

It's been a long time coming. Have y'all accomplished what you set out to do? "The whole team wanted to make sure we made the best game we could. To do this, we've had to embrace new technical advances – which, of course, takes time. When we show this game to people, they don't believe it's running on a PlayStation. That's

a great compliment to the whole team. We've managed to squeeze a great deal of performance from the PSX, much more than anyone originally thought possible, so I do think we have accomplished what we set out to do".

So was this game not possible three years ago? "No, three years ago we probably wouldn't have been able to produce a title as sophisticated as this", adds Ben.

## Cunning Stunts

It certainly is looking crisp. We asked Martin what clever tricks Argonaut have pulled in making *Alien Resurrection*. "When the team decided to make the switch to a full 3D game, we threw away all our previous work (third-person code). This was a hard decision to make, but it offered us much greater freedom when designing the new engine. We've basically taken algorithms and ideas from writing a PC style of game, and then we'd think of ways to squeeze this into a PlayStation with its restrictive memory limits. For example, we use BSP and portal algorithms to generate impressive maps the player can interact with. These techniques are used in

PC games today, so the entire engine is very up-to-date. This means we can also produce coloured light sources which light the map and objects, adding a great deal to the atmosphere for the game experience".

Martin concludes, "I think we've managed to break the myth that the PSX cannot cope with a PC style of development". Jason adds, "A lot of stages are very dark. If the player can find Flare items, they can be used to illuminate the scenery. In long corridors, the player can use a flare to lighten the farthest point – we added this just to show how the game engine overcomes the need for fogging or draw distance". You can call him smarty-pants, but this attention to detail is the fabric of quality titles.

We asked Martin how the licence affected his job. "From a programming point of view, a project is just a technical challenge and the licence doesn't affect our job much. I'm just glad I was given the opportunity to work on such a technically difficult project". **e**

## Gun Crazy

A first-person game wouldn't be allowed through extreme's door if it didn't include an arsenal of weapons. Here's a taste of the tools of the trade for budding hard-persons bent on Alien dissection – you brave bunch! But choose your appliance wisely, as Argonaut guarantee a galactic 160 megabytes of 360-degree multiple Alien (each containing 300+ polys) slaughter. Guns? God's what we need...

Fig. 01  Fig. 02

Fig. 03  Fig. 04

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