

***Nexus***

***The Jupiter Incident***

***Icon Creation Tutorial***

***By The Old Dragon***

# **Foreword**

Hi all,

And welcome to my second tutorial. Before I begin, I'd just like to thank some of my fellow modders for their help in unearthing the secrets that I'm about to reveal. So Stanmart, Adelinous and Starfleet... thank you all very much.

So what are my aims here? Well, as you've no doubt figured from the title, I intend to take you step by step through the entire process of creating an icon for Nexus. This tutorial is intended for those who have no idea (like me not so long ago) how to go about this, so if you're of a more knowledgeable disposition, then feel free to skip through to the part you're stuck on. Just don't get stropky if you think I'm trying to teach you how to suck eggs.

Before we begin, I'll be doing the first half of this with Adobe Photoshop (so if you're using something different, you may have to figure out a few parts for yourself. There, I've warned you so now you can't tell me off) and the second half with the Nexus modding tools.

I'm not going to claim that this is the right way or the best way to create these, this is simply the method that works for me and until I stumble upon any shortcuts, is the way I'll continue to do them (there, now my disclaimer's out of the way, we can concentrate on something more important...).

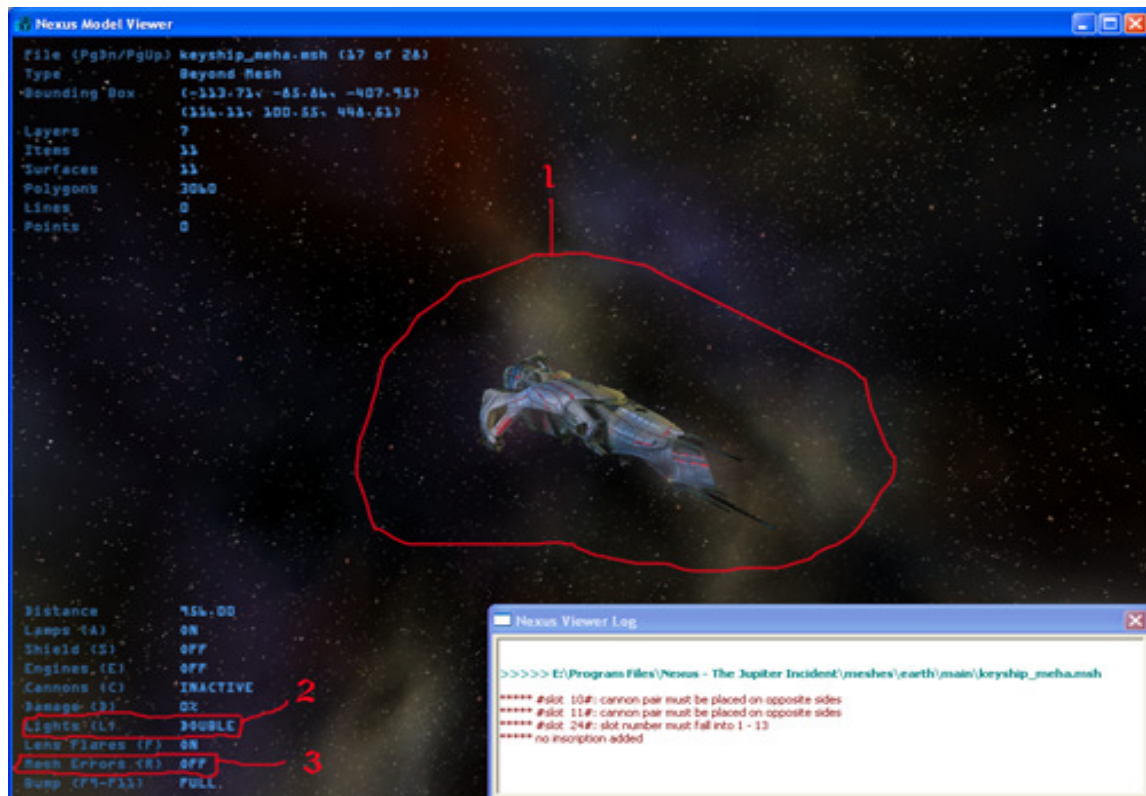
So let's begin...

## Step One

Well, the first thing we going to need is a picture of the object for which we'll be creating the icon. In my case (because I need to create a new one for my mod and haven't got round to it just yet), I'll be creating one for the 'Angelwing' ship. But you can use this process to create any kind of icon for the game.

If you've drawn the picture yourself, skip on to step two. But if you're using a ship mesh, then stay with me...

Right then, fire up the Nexus model viewer and find the mesh you want...



Then,

- 1) Play with the image till you find the right camera angle for you. Just a couple of general points with regard to this.
  - For any stationary objects (stations, satellites, etc), a head or side on view works well as for the most part, they're symmetrical.

- For ships though (irrespective of size or class), choose an angle that favours the objects right-hand side if you want the ship to face 'inwards' or choose the left side if you want them facing 'outwards'.
- 2) Turn on the second light source! If you don't then you could find the rear side of your icon could disappear. My first successful attempt led to my stealth shuttle looking... well, stealthed. Great for the ship itself, but not good for an icon.
- 3) When we load up a mesh in the model viewer, sometimes we might get 'mesh errors' (those annoying flashing red and yellow sections). So simply turn off the error reporting.
- 4) And finally, when things are ready (the main model viewer window should be active, but it doesn't hurt to check), press **ALT +PRT SC** to save the image and proceed to step two.

## *Step Two*

Fire up Photoshop (if you haven't already), open a new document (only worry about the name of the new document, the size will automatically be selected) and paste the image we just saved into it. Before you do anything else, save this picture – it's your master copy in case things go wrong!

Use the 'rectangular marquee' tool to crop the picture down to size a little, make sure you leave at least a full centimetre around the ship/picture. Cropping too tightly at this point will cause us problems.

So this is what I've got now and hopefully, you've got something similar...



The next phase is probably the longest in this entire process. What we need to do is completely eliminate the background. There are a few ways of doing this, the 'magic wand' tool for instance – but it only really works on pictures with clean, clearly defined borders. If I was to use it here, then some of my ship would be selected along with the background, not good.

Another way would be with the 'lasso' tool, but this requires a very steady hand and lots of patience as you have to go round the entire object in one go. Damned difficult.

My preferred method is with our 'marquee' tool. If we zoom on nice and close, we can use it to snip around our picture quite accurately and a bit at a time. It simply takes quite a lot of time.



Then again, you may have your own method. Whichever's easiest for you, off you go and remove the background from your picture and we'll meet up again in step three... have fun 😊

### **Step Three**

Well, after all that hard work, here's what I've ended up with...



Not bad eh? Hopefully yours will look similar. Now this step is going to be quite short and sweet, all we're going to do is save it, close it and then reopen the new file... just with a lot of waffle and a few more pics from me.

Before we go anywhere, I'd just like to draw your attention to a little something. Hopefully, you'll have a little window open that looks like this...



In Photoshop, you'll find it under the **window** menu as **channels**. As you can see, it shows the three colour channels – remember!

Ok, open up the **file** menu and select the '**save as**' option. It doesn't matter where you save it to, as long as you know where it is. The only important thing is to save it in **.tga** format as this is the easiest way that I've found to introduce the next phase. So save it now, when the dialog box comes up, choose the 32bits/pixel option. With our file now saved as a **.tga**, close the current file and then reopen the **.tga** version.

You may well be asking yourself "why has this prat just told me to close the file then reopen it?" Well as I hinted before, we're adding a little something... remember the '**channel**' window from before? Take a look at it now...

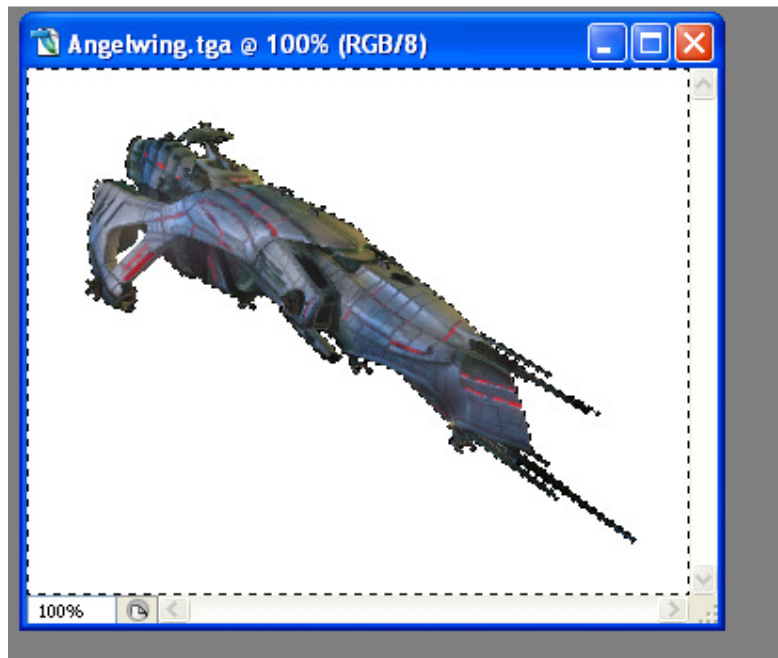


We've now got something new in there – the Alpha channel!

Time to move on...

## **Step Four**

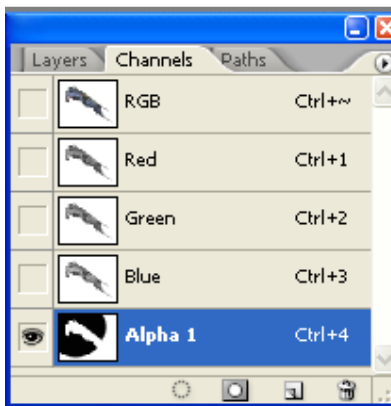
With all the colour channels highlighted (see above), select the '**magic wand**' tool and click on any part of the nice white background and what should happen is that we get a dotted line around the very outside of the picture and surrounding the ship/object too...



Unfortunately, the dotted line isn't to clear in my little picture here. But you'll see it quite clearly because it moves.

So what I want you to do now is open up the **Edit** menu and select '**copy**' (or press **CRTL + C**) to copy the background.

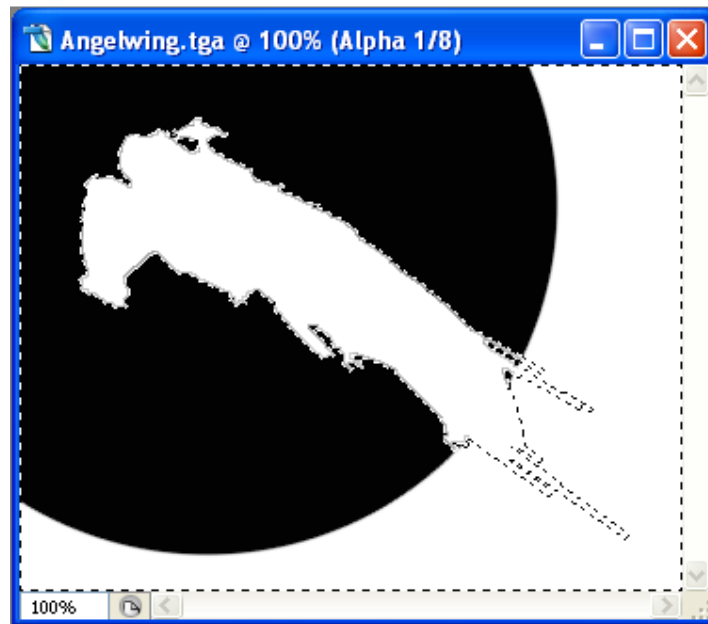
Then highlight the **Alpha** channel...



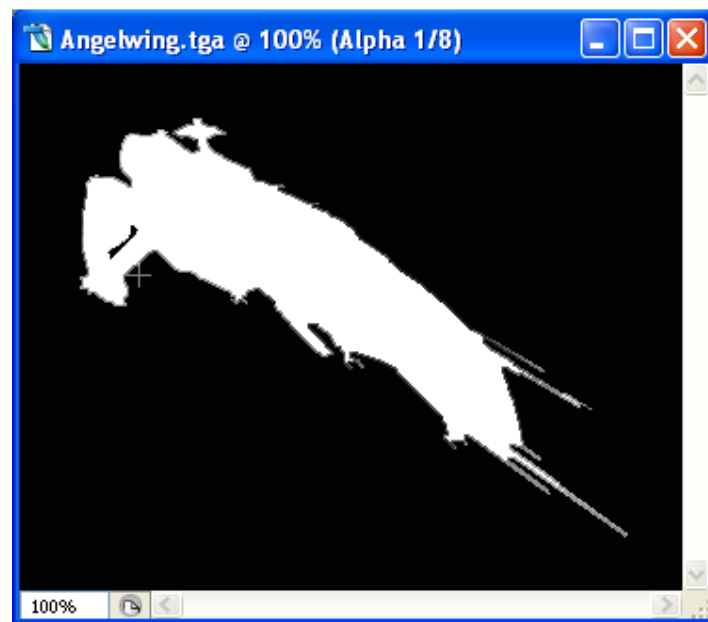
And open up the **Edit** menu (again) and select '**paste**' (or **CTRL + V**) to paste our background into the Alpha channel.

With that done, select the '**Brush**' tool, make it nice and big, choosing black for our colour (don't worry about being careful here, if we've done things right there's no chance of colouring something in that we shouldn't) and colour in the **Alpha** channel.

Now I've stopped the next pic half way through, but you folks do the entire background area. As you can see the outline of my ship is clearly visible against the background.



Like I said, nice big brush and just plaster the area, done in seconds. And the finished version...



If your picture requires little 'cut out' areas like mine here has, then you're going to have to repeat the **select – copy –paste** routine from colour channels to the Alpha channel for each area.

And with that done, we've almost finished this step. All that remains is to crop the picture down as close as possible to the ship/object (the reason we're doing this now instead of earlier is simply because of selecting the background. If we were tight into the ship/object then we'd have to select the background a bit at a time. This way we get it done in one quick pass.), so do that now please.



The final part of this step is to resize the picture. For an icon, it's simply too big at the moment. Below you'll find my little 'ship size' guide, it's not an absolute by any means, you're free to pick your own sizes. But my own trial and error has led me to think these sizes are about right, so...

**Big ships at 90 pixels**

**Mediums at 65 Pixels**

**Small at 50 pixels**

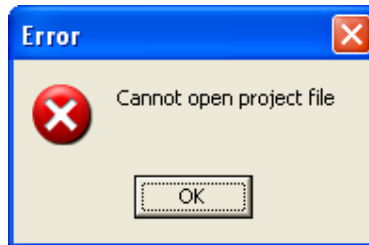
**Fighters at 25 pixels**

And before you tell me off, these sizes are the **width** of the picture. So go ahead and resize your ship/object, then save the picture one final time. I prefer to take the '**save as**' option as I can check that it is saving the all important Alpha channel. With that done, close down Photoshop (unless of course, you have more icons to create) and move onto the next step.

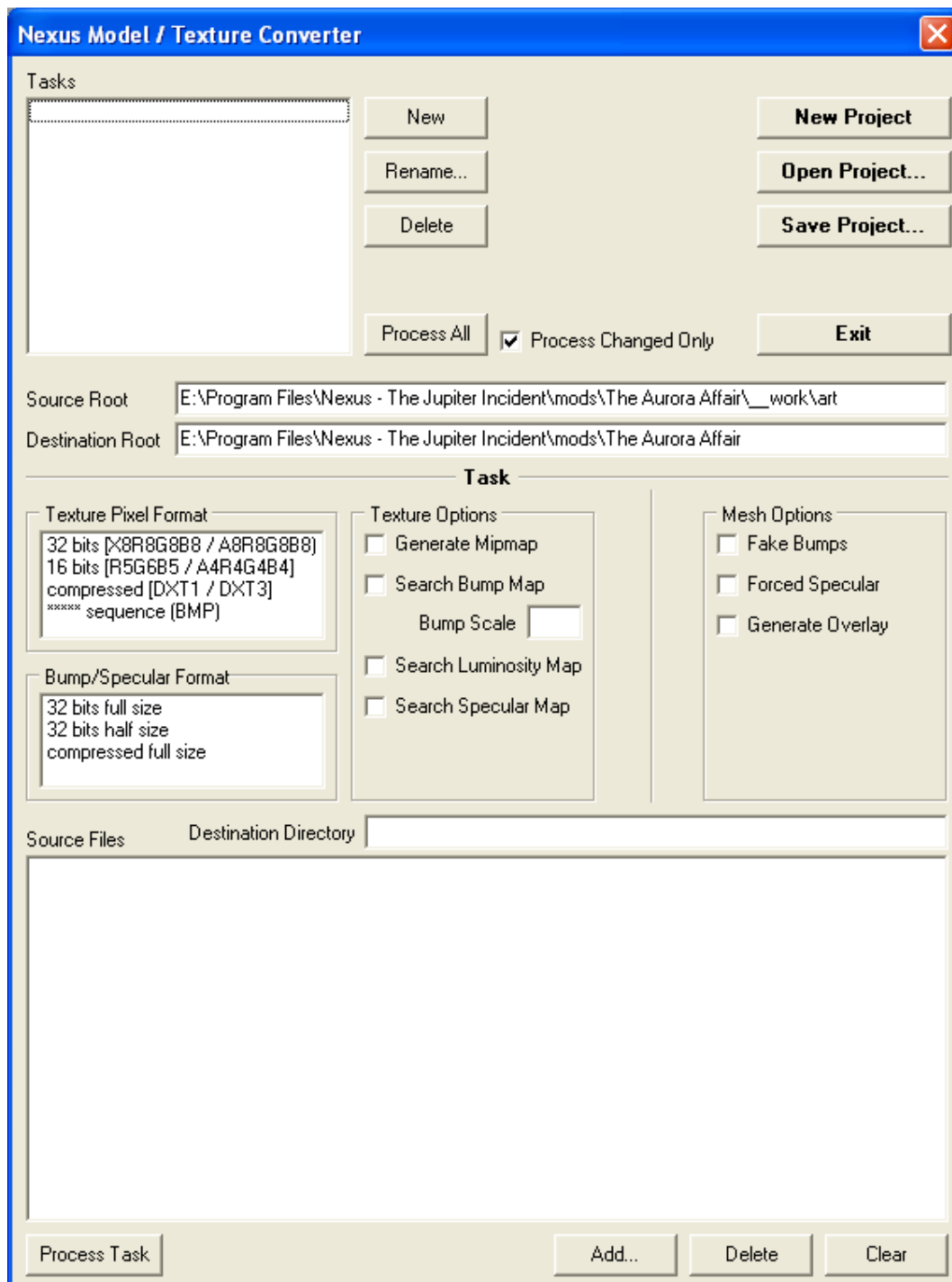
## **Step Five**

Ok then, boot up the **mod tools launcher**, select your mod and then click on **Model/Texture Converter** to start the ball rolling in the final step.

Now the first thing that's going to happen is this...



Don't worry; this happens to me every time. Just click '**ok**' to proceed and you should end up with a window that looks like the following...



So let's go through this bit by bit (I assure you it's not half as bad as you think. In fact, it's that easy we'll be able to cover this second part of the process in one step!).

So the very first thing we're going to do is click on the **'New'** button. This will bring up a little window asking us to provide a name for our task, the name you choose is completely irrelevant but is required for us to proceed – so add your name (I just leave it as the default), and press ok.

You'll notice that two boxes have been filled in with our mod data as the program booted up. I guess this was an attempt by the Devs to be kind to us and on the typing a bit – unfortunately, this has kind of backfired a little.

The first box (**Source Root**) is going to give us problems as it is; so completely empty it. I'll tell you why in just a little while.

The second box (**Destination Root**) is just how we want it – so no touching! It's also the first half of our destination path and will automatically lead to your mod folder.

In the middle section of the window, there are lots of boxes we could tick and a couple formats to play with... but we don't really need to for our little project, so again – no touching.

The next bit we need to tinker with is the '**Destination Directory**' box; and it forms the second half of our destination path. Now because it makes things simpler for me, I always enter the following path in to here...

**\meshes\new\**

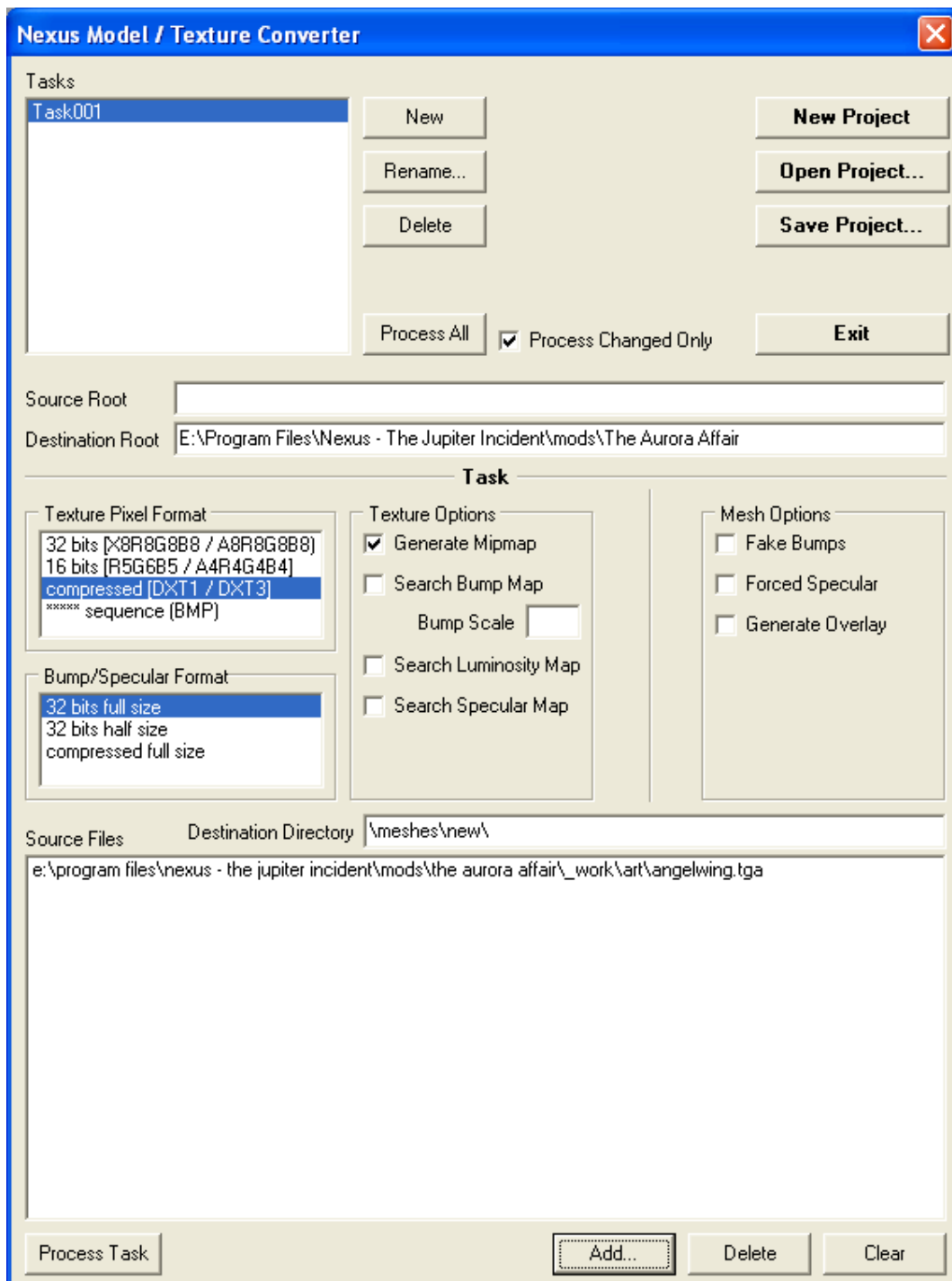
As we're doing icons here, you could change it straight to something like **\textures\icons\** if you wished. But I like to check my work first before I place it in the correct folder so I'll be sticking with the **\meshes\new\** entry.

Now we're down to the bottom third of the window, the '**source files**' area.

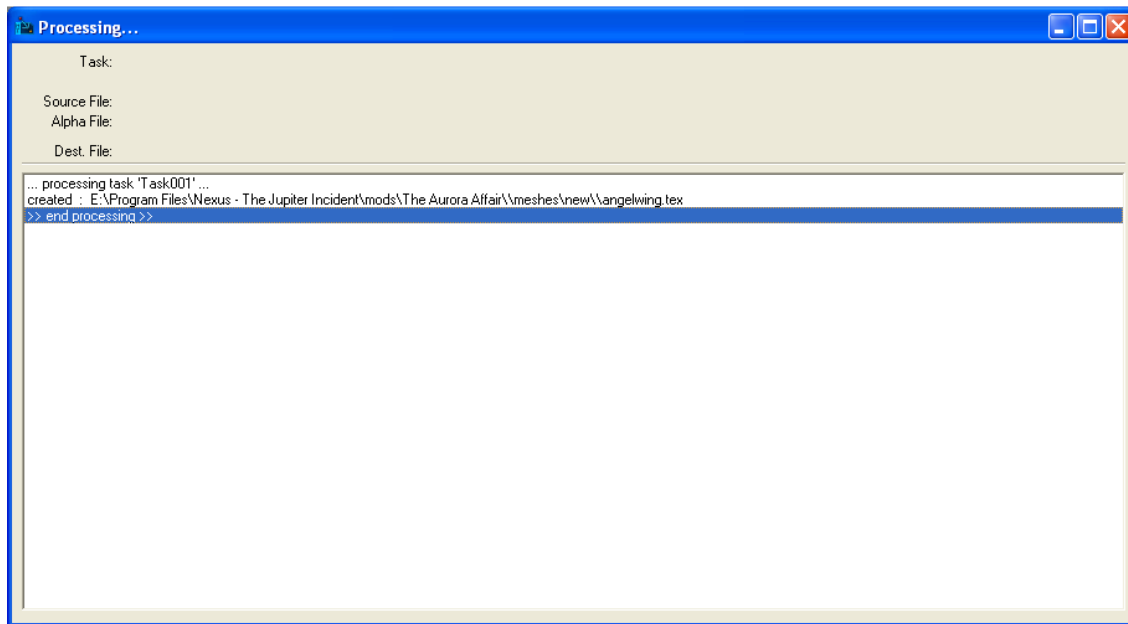
To start off with this box will be empty because we haven't selected our file yet, so click on the '**add**' button at the bottom and navigate to wherever you saved your **.tga** file to... select and open it... and we've made the required entry. But you'll notice that it's got a full **source path**!

Now had we left the **Source Root** box with its original entry, what would happen when we try to '**process**' the task is that the converter would follow the **Source Root** path (arriving at our mod quite happily) and then try to follow the path in the **source files** area, meaning it'd be looking for a new drive inside our mod. Clearly it won't find one; therefore it won't be able to find our **.tga** file which in turn means that the converter will throw up an error and won't do its job. So that's why we clear the **Source Root** entry, it's the simplest way around the problem.

So after that bit of a rambling explanation, what we should now be looking at is...



So, if you've done any other files for converting, select them now (as long as you don't mind them all going to the place, we can do tons of files in one go), otherwise click on '**Process Task**' and you'll get this...



Giving you a status report and hey presto... you've just successfully created an icon with a transparent background!

## **Final Words**

That's about it really folks, you can load up the model viewer to admire your handiwork or place your new icon straight into its proper folder... your times your own now.

If you have any thoughts or opinions on this tutorial, whether good or bad, please feel free to post your remark in the tutorial section of my ModDb site...

<http://www.moddb.com/mods/nexusthe-aurora-affair/tutorials>

Or email me at...

[draconicdreams@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:draconicdreams@hotmail.co.uk)

All I ask is that you keep things civil and polite.

Till next time, happy modding.