



JASON KINGSLEY

From a basement in Oxford to a group of dev studios, Jason and his brother Chris have guided Rebellion from the start. Andrew Fisher talks to Jason as the company turns 25 years old

It was a hard first question, but what makes a game a 'Rebellion game'? Jason replies, "Playability. Above all, gameplay is paramount. Graphics are important and we try to have the best graphics and story that we can. But at the end of the day if you ask me what component of a game makes it enjoyable, it's got to be the feel of the gameplay. And that's hard to write down and hard to define, but there have been plenty of beautiful games that have bad gameplay and plenty of ugly games that have great gameplay. For me, at the top of the list is always gameplay. I want people to feel like they were thrilled when they put down the controller."

What were your earliest experiences with the world of videogames?

I remember playing both *Scramble* and *Space Invaders* on arcade machines, and those pocket gamer watch things... I'm not sure which order everything came in now! There was a *Scramble* machine in the local chip shop. You'd go for chips after school and put your spare 10p into that. Arcade machines were obviously a big influence for Chris and I, and those fond memories of playing the iconic *Battlezone* machine played a big part in us bringing back *Battlezone* for virtual reality.

When did you start making games?

My brother Chris and I would invent our own variations of classic board games. So even as a kid I was thinking about making games. I eventually started working freelance after university for companies such as Electronic Arts and Atari.

Whose idea was it to set up Rebellion?

Chris and I had both been freelancers for a while and we set up the company because we were being asked to act as project managers but were not being paid to do so by the publishers, and because we were working with a group of other freelancers, we couldn't do anything if the others were late in delivering their milestones. We really wanted to formalise everything and form a development group, and having a limited company was a way of doing that. It gave us the opportunity to approach and pitch our ideas, and that's what really got us on our way.

Who designed the logo, which has stayed with the company for 25 years?

We discussed a range of different company names and logos, and eventually settled on the idea of basing



X0 (Anrig) The cockpit view from *Eye Of The Storm*—a game developed just as Rebellion was being formed.

it on the Solidarność logo, the one used by the Polish trade union. I felt like it conveyed the image of the word 'Rebellion' that was spray-painted onto a wall. It was a chap called Justin Rae who originally drew it up for us—he was our first employee, and he later went on to work for EA.

In those early days how did you divide the work between yourself and Chris?

50/50, always has been. Chris is more technical than me. Arguably I'm a bit more artistic than Chris, though it's fair to say we both share both traits. So, broadly speaking, we follow the same routes. So I would be doing the art and design and he would be doing the design and code.

Do you still get involved in game design and programming?

100 per cent, yes. Absolutely, it's very important to me. It's why I set the company up in the first place; I



Photo: Courtney White PR

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GLITTERING PRIZES

Rebellion's accolades



Rebellion can definitely call itself an award-winning developer. 2017 saw the company net two TIGA (The Independent Game Developers' Association) awards for Best Independent Studio (Large), and Best Visual Design for *Sniper Elite 4* – and a nomination for Best Studio in this year's Golden Joysticks. The *Sniper Elite* series has gained many accolades, receiving TIGA awards in 2012 and 2013. *Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death* scooped the TIGA Award for Best Game in 2003 and a BAFTA nomination.

Alien Vs Predator found itself the recipient of no less than three Jaguar Game of the Year awards in 1986 – from *Game Informer*, *Game Players* and *VideoGames*, as well as GameFan's Best Jaguar Action/Adventure Game – and found a place in *Retro Gamer's* Perfect Ten Jaguar Games (way back in issue 26). The PC follow-up won the Develop Award in 1999 for Best Computer Programming, and two BAFTA nominations. (The 2010 remaster was Develop-nominated for Best Use Of A Licence or IP).

Looking to the future, forthcoming shooter *Strange Brigade* (pictured here) picked up GamesRadar+'s Best of E3 2017 and Official PlayStation Magazine's Best of British 2018, along with three other Best of E3 nominations for its showing at the annual event.

▶ wanted to make games. So yes, right now after this I'm about to play some competitors' games, and then I'll go on and play our latest *Strange Brigade* build and do some compare-and-contrast.

You started out as bedroom coders. How soon did you move into a 'proper' office?

We actually started in our basement, not a bedroom! But it was probably a couple of years into it, when we went to see Atari in Slough and they commissioned us to do *Alien Vs Predator*; that we realised we probably needed to be in a proper office.

How well did Rebellion's first game *Eye Of The Storm* do?

Quite well, I'd say and it was innovative for its time. We were trying to make a game where you didn't kill things – the idea was to explore and photograph, and we wanted to break ground with a 3D exploring game. I can't even remember the exact numbers as it was so long ago, but it did well enough to make us a profit.

What was the Jaguar development kit like to work with?

Interestingly enough we didn't know it was called Jaguar to begin with. We received hand-built, PC-like boxes to start with, later on followed by development kits known that were known as Alpine boards, named after the classic car manufacturer from the Sixties and Seventies. It came in a horizontally orientated PC tin box. And compared to what we have nowadays, you can imagine how difficult it was to work with. I remember taking weeks before we got anything on screen at all! They were hand-built, literally hand-built out of Cambridge.

How did Rebellion get commissioned to make *Alien Vs Predator*?

We got the commission partly on the basis of *Eye Of*



The Storm's success, but also from a pitch we did for a 3D dragon-flying game, which we actually demoed at Atari's office for Alastair Bodin and Bob Gleadow. God knows where that demo is now! There were only about six or so people in their Slough headquarters next to the train station, we did the pitch and they commissioned us to work on the Atari Jaguar. It was that game that really established us as a developer and we really kicked on from there.

How much help did you get from the likes of 20th Century Fox and Dark Horse Comics?

None from Dark Horse – it wasn't anything to do with the comics at all. In fact, the game came up well before we even knew about the comics. The game was wholly its own thing. We had a moderate amount of help from 20th Fox Century. Fox was more just a licensor in those days. We had access to the sound effects, but that was it more or less. Of course they had final approval over everything.

The choice of three characters added a lot to the game's depth – were you pleased how it turned out?

Yes, that was very specifically mine and Chris' idea. It was a very early instance of a game allowing you to play the bad guys, as it were, as well as the good guy. So yes, it's something we're very happy with. As a game mechanic it really complicated things for us because effectively we had to make three different games instead of one, so it really was an unusual, innovative game.

Have you played any other games based on the *Alien* franchise?

It would be a bit like a busman's holiday. I was so steeped in *Alien Vs Predator* and everything about it that even when it comes to rewatching the movie now, I do enjoy it, but I enjoy it differently! If I can put aside that I had studied it so extensively for the



▶ [Jaguar] Mordering a nameless space marine in *Alien Vs Predator*.

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FIVE TO PLAY

Rebellion's games cover all sorts of genres...



ALIEN VS. PREDATOR (JAGUAR)

■ This Jaguar killer app put Rebellion on the map, and for years it was the definitive game set in the *Alien* universe. Thanks to the choice of characters (*Alien*, *Predator* or *Marine*) – each with their own objectives – and the tense atmosphere generated this is a game to keep coming back to.



BATTLEZONE (VR)

■ A clever use of a now-old IP, this was an early hit in the new wave of virtual reality games. Classic *Made* reimaged the glowing green vectors of the original, and there was a huge amount of new content in solo and co-op modes. It goes without saying that placing you directly in the cockpit greatly enhances immersion.



SNIPER ELITE (PC)

■ The series brought its own take on the FPS genre, combining stealth and precision. Look beyond the hype and blood surrounding the game's signature killcam and you'll find a surprising amount of depth – there's usually more than one way to complete a mission, although going in all guns blazing will usually end in your gory death.



ROGUE TROOPER REDUX (VARIOUS)

■ Combining the 'No Earth' setting of the comics with some clever tactical options (spray mines, create a holographic decoy or set up sentry guns), this was a good alternative to certain other big-name cover shooters. And the brand-new HD remaster makes it look better than ever.



EVIL GENIUS (PC)

■ This plays out like *Dungeon Keeper* crossed with *James Bond* with heaps of humour. *Evil Genius* sees players constructing a typical Bond-villain-like hidden lair (with traps to stop any pesky invading spies) and carrying out acts of infamy around the world. Rebellion is now currently hard at work on a PC sequel.

game, it makes it easier to remember why I enjoyed it so much originally.

Aliens Vs Predator for PC was also successful. What new content did you add, and was anything left out?

We added lots of new content: aliens running on walls and ceilings; quantum objects so you'd never quite know where pick-ups or some enemies were going to be; a pheromone system so aliens would track you around levels and would be more likely to find you if you stayed in one place for too long; volumetric explosions; unsettling players right at the start by letting aliens attack them whilst they were watching a cutscene on a screen in the APC. I think that game was exactly what we wanted it to be. The trouble with making a videogame from a licence with classic movies like *Aliens* and *Predator*, you've got to boil it down to its essence, which is claustrophobia, Colonial Marines, the *Predator*, the *Xenomorph*, and then build it back up again. Personally, looking back on it now, I don't think there was anything missing from it, no.

In 2000, Rebellion bought the rights to 2000 AD. What led you to this purchase?

Like so many of us, and many of us in the games industry I'd wager, I grew up reading *2000 AD*. I've

been reading since *Prog One* and I still try to read every issue and I'm still a huge fan. *2000 AD* needed someone to step in, I think it's fair to say, and Chris and I were more than game to bring it into the Rebellion family and keep its status intact as Britain's powerhouse comic. *2000 AD* has been so influential on sci-fi, not just through the many writers and artists who've made their names there over the years. It's the worlds they've created and how those worlds have influenced other comics or films and books. Just take *Blade Runner 2049* that's just come out – you can see a lot of *Mega City One* in the original *Blade Runner*. Our 25th birthday isn't the only big milestone we're celebrating – *2000 AD* and of course *Judge Dredd* turned 40 this year, which is some achievement.

2005 saw the first Sniper Elite game arrive. What inspired you to make it?

The idea was to make a war game which was really about how horrible war is and to make it entertaining. And that took us to the idea of emphasising what sniping can do rather than shying away from its devastating effects, or reducing what you see of the bullet to a crosshair. We felt it would be interesting to, well, not quite simulate, but to showcase the bullet shots with the camera to make it truly impactful. We wanted to make the shot feel dangerous, to make it feel difficult to pull off, and ultimately both satisfying and, like I say, impactful to achieve.

Much has been written about the killcam feature – where did that idea come from, and what do you think it adds to the experience?

Obviously lots of people get thrilled by it – I remember the first time we showed the X-ray kill cam to people and everybody winced. I thought, 'That's brilliant, that's exactly what it should be.' Shooting another person – okay, it's in the context of war – but shooting another person is an absolutely dreadful thing to do. We wanted to emphasise that by showing you the effect of the bullet closing in on somebody and maybe even showing the person's face as they're going to die.



W [Jaguar] Entering a hostile zone in 3D game *Skyhammer*.

The idea that eventually evolved into what's become the killcam was, from a gameplay perspective, to make you register the damage you are doing, rather than just simply targeting as many enemies as possible as quickly as possible.

Zombies have invaded many games, including your own Zombie Army Trilogy. Why do you think people like to blow them up?

The best thing about zombies is they're basically always animated by some kind of evil force or disease or whatever. Killing them, stopping them, or releasing them from this curse is pretty much guilt-free and arguably more legitimate than shooting most other enemy types. I think zombies are quite good baddies, yeah... in our games they tend to shamble so you can theoretically run away from them and line up multiple headshots quickly. You might feel overwhelmed but you've always got a fighting chance against them!

Rebellion owns a lot of different properties. Does that add extra pressure or problems?

It means you have to choose what you want to work on next very carefully. You want to work on a combination of original stuff and really great stuff from the past. ▶



X [Jaguar] The then-impressive polygonal racing game *Checkered Flag* was developed by Rebellion.



SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- EYE OF THE STORM (AMIGA, DOS) 1993
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR (JAGUAR) 1994
- CHECKERED FLAG (JAGUAR) 1994
- TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX (PLAYSTATION) 1999
- ALIENS VS PREDATOR (WINDOWS) 1999
- ASTÉRIX: SEARCH FOR DOGMATIX (GAME BOY COLOR) 2000
- SKYHAMMER (JAGUAR) 2000
- THE MUMMY (PLAYSTATION, WINDOWS) 2000
- SNOOD (GAME BOY ADVANCE) 2001
- GUNFIGHTER: THE LEGEND OF JESSE JAMES (PLAYSTATION) 2001
- DELTA FORCE: URBAN WARFARE (PLAYSTATION) 2002
- MEDAL OF HONOR: UNDERGROUND (GAME BOY ADVANCE) 2002
- GUNFIGHTER II: REVENGE OF JESSE JAMES (PLAYSTATION 2) 2003
- JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS DEATH (VARIOUS) 2003
- DEAD TO RIGHTS: RECKONING (PSP) 2005
- DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN (PLAYSTATION 2) 2005
- SNIPER ELITE (VARIOUS) 2005
- 007: FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE (PSP) 2006
- ROGUE TROOPER (VARIOUS) 2006
- GUN: SHOWDOWN (PSP) 2006
- ALIENS VS. PREDATOR: REQUIEM (PSP) 2007
- FREE RUNNING (VARIOUS) 2007
- HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX (PSP) 2007
- STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT – RENEGADE SQUADRON (PSP) 2007
- THE SIMPSONS GAME (VARIOUS) 2007
- CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR – FINAL FRONTS (PLAYSTATION 2) 2008
- PDC WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP DARTS 2009 (NINTENDO DS, Wii) 2009
- EVIL GENIUS (WINDOWS) 2009
- EMPIRE EARTH: GOLD EDITION (WINDOWS) 2009
- STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT – ELITE SQUADRON (PSP) 2009
- ALIENS VS. PREDATOR (VARIOUS) 2010
- JUDGE DREDD VS ZOMBIES (MOBILE) 2011
- NEVERDEAD (PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360) 2012
- SNIPER ELITE V2 (VARIOUS) 2012
- PINBALL WORLD (LINUX, MACINTOSH, WINDOWS) 2014
- SNIPER ELITE III: AFRIKA (VARIOUS) 2014
- ZOMBIE ARMY TRILOGY (VARIOUS) 2015
- BATTLEZONE (PS VR, WINDOWS) 2016
- SNIPER ELITE 4: ITALIA (VARIOUS) 2017
- ROGUE TROOPER: REDUX (VARIOUS) 2017



■ [GameCube] The BAFTA-nominated *Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death*, inspired by the 2000 AD comics.

► Ideally. So, for example, *Battlezone* is a new game based on a past brand – and we've brought it back in VR. *Sniper Elite* we created ourselves, same for *Zombie Army: Evil Genius* is something we acquired and we're very excited to do more with it with *Evil Genius 2*. It's a bit like a portfolio approach, allocating time and investment in and across a number of different assets at the same time. It certainly takes some balancing.

Rebellion worked on a lot of handheld games, including the PSP and Game Boy. What do you think works well on handhelds?

Well, I used to say short-term games, simple things that you pick up and play and put down again for travelling on a bus or something like that. But these days with the success of Nintendo's Switch, I've changed my mind. I think that actually playing a handheld format like Switch on your sofa in your living room is actually quite convenient and fun. So therefore I think it's completely changed.

And there are some fantastic games on Switch now including of course *Rogue Trooper Redux*. So I think perhaps my opinion of handheld gaming has changed. I think now – as long as the controllers work... I find touchscreen games slightly less deep than controller-based games. I think some of the iPhone and iPad games are perhaps a little more shallow than things like Switch games. So I'm very in favour of things like Switch. I liked the PSP too, and going back the Atari Lynx was quite fun!

Rebellion now owns three book publishing labels. Have you thought about developing any books into games – or games into books?

Absolutely, yes. We obviously do books based on comics – there are the *Judge Dredd* ebooks for example. We've announced the tie-in *Strange Brigade* book, *The True History Of The Strange Brigade*, and that will explore the origins of the cast of characters in that game. We've done comic book versions and book versions of *Sniper Elite*, and we even went full circle and did a promotional comic for *Rogue Trooper Redux*,

which of course is based on the 2000 AD comic. So yeah, it depends. It depends entirely on the strategy and on the timing, on what we've got and what we're able to do.

Rogue Trooper has undergone a remastering process for new hardware. Are you happy now more people will play it?

Oh, very much so. The original game was an exciting game, and it did great justice to the *Rogue Trooper* comic. In many ways it was a trendsetter as one of the first cover-based games, but it also influenced us as a studio when it comes to making tactical shooters like *Sniper Elite 4*. The team here and at TickTock have done a totally fantastic job, so to be able to bring *Rogue Trooper* back and make it look as good as it does, it means a lot to us as a studio.

Are there any other Rebellion titles that you would like to remaster?

We've got nothing to announce on that front just yet, but I will say that we do have a diverse library of properties and we are keen to bring back some of those classics and give them the modern-day makeover they deserve. But you'll just have to watch this space for now!

Which hardware has been your favourite to develop for?

It wouldn't be right to say which is my favourite to develop for, but I will say that I play most of my games on PC. I'm a big fan of mouse and keyboard – which can be to the annoyance of some of the people here who play their games with a controller! But we have a rich heritage of strong PC games here at Rebellion and I'm more than happy to still beat that drum!

How do you see the future of gaming, and how does Rebellion adapt?

We've always been flexible. We've been around for 25 years, and we've always adapted and worked with the technology as opposed to against it. Nostradamus



W Audio files being edited in Rebellion, with Xenomorphs hiding under the monitor.

“Our developers should be proud of what they have achieved”

Jason Kingsley

proved that predicting the future is quite difficult. And I'd hate to predict it myself! The industry will continue to explore new areas, new ideas and new avenues as it always has done, and we'll endeavour to continue being a part of that.

After 25 years of the company, do you still have a passion for the industry?

I'm happy to say I'm as passionate about everything I do these days, arguably more so than when I started out. Not having investors, being independent – it means Rebellion is very much our company, and that means we can be and are as involved as possible. I have two big passions in life – gaming is one of them, and the other is training my own medieval horses. I have four suits of armour and I go riding whenever I can, and I joust and fight for the English Heritage and the Royal Armouries and the Historic Royal Palaces... so hopefully that tells you a bit about my passions!

Looking back, what are your personal favourite games that Rebellion has developed?

I think the first commercial game we made as Rebellion which was *Alien Vs Predator* has to be a defining moment, because you suddenly get something out there and it's a hugely successful thing. I'd made games before – I made a game called *Blade Warrior*, *Eye Of The Storm* and stuff, but they weren't really made as Rebellion. But your first game that's labelled Rebellion is *Alien Vs Predator* and it was brilliant. It was really fun to work on. And we innovated. We used actual models, we used photogrammetric techniques – we actually photographed things and put them in the game. It looks a bit clunky today perhaps by modern standards but not to me, I'm really proud of what we achieved back then.

2017 has been special, too. *Sniper Elite 4* was the first time we released a game in the series without a traditional publisher and not only is it outperforming *Sniper Elite 3*, but most importantly many



X (GBA) Rebellion created a number of portable games for EA, including Tiger Woods PGA Tour Golf.

players think it's the best game in the series, too. Our developers should be proud of what they achieved and it's nice to know we made the right decision.

What have been the funniest moments from the last 25 years?

I can remember being told by an external producer that we needed to get 32 colours on the Sinclair Spectrum. And I said that wasn't technically possible because it didn't have 32 colours, and they said, "Don't give me excuses, give me solutions."

I pitched a science fiction flying game to a publisher and the people on the other side of the table said, 'Could you change it to a hovercraft game?' I said, 'Well, I suppose so, but why?' And they said, 'The last hovercraft game we made did really badly in the market, and we think there's room for another hovercraft game.' So... the last hovercraft game they made was a shitstorm, but they wanted us to make them another because they thought there was a gap in the market? Really!?

Finally, I was also told by somebody that blue characters in videogames don't sell. This particular person was talking about *Rogue Trooper*, and said, 'Oh of course if *Rogue Trooper* had been anything other than blue, the game would have sold even better than it did.' That's even though it sold really well. So I said, 'Oh, and why's that?' He said, 'Any videogame with blue characters doesn't sell.' And I said, 'What, like *Sonic The Hedgehog*?' He said, 'Well, apart from *Sonic The Hedgehog*.' So I said, 'The Smurfs Game' – it was huge at the time. 'Well, yes, apart from those two. I can't think of another game character that's blue...' Then he just harrumphed and walked off. I wonder what he thought when he saw *Avatar*. ★

Thanks to Jason for his time.



H (GBA) Rebellion attempted to recreate Medal Of Honor in portable form.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

It's time for you to lead a rebellion and ask Jason your questions

NIKOLAI: What game that you did not make, do you wish you had thought of before the creators?

Fallout! Post-apocalypse stories are popular fodder these days in books, comics, TV and, of course, games, but *Fallout* is the king as far as I'm concerned. The blend of despair, commentary and humour is perfect.

CRUSTY STARFISH: *Alien Vs Predator* on the PC is still the best game ever to feature those nasty creatures – would you consider doing an up-to-date version?

We'd love to do another *AVP* project. Look closely around the studio and you'll find facehugger cuddly toys all over the place! It's up to Fox, though, and we still have friends there. Would be hard to turn down.

ANTIRIAD_2097: How closely involved with the Karl Urban *Dredd* film were you and Rebellion?

Very involved. I mean, obviously we licensed it, but we worked very closely with the production team right from the very beginning. We weren't involved on the day-to-day basis of production, but we were very involved in the beginning.

JDANDDIET: What are your favourite *2000 AD* characters and are we going to see them on the screen?

That's a tough one. My tastes have changed with the times, just like the Prog. As for getting them on-screen, we're planning for a really interesting ensemble cast for the *Mega City One* TV show. I think *2000 AD* fans will love what we're planning.