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STAR TREK
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knows best

**It's
hunting
season
again!**

Kevin Peter Hall
as the Predator



**JACOB'S
LADDER**
Latest
nightmare
from GHOST
writer

DARKMAN
Behind
the mask

It was a rough morning at the 20th Century Fox Studios lot. One of those periodic executive purges that make such nifty Hollywood headlines had just taken place, and all over the Fox lot, film honchos were clearing out desks and files for the final time.

One exec, in the midst of tossing things out and deciding just what to take with him, came across an unsolicited script. He picked it up and held it at arm's length, deciding whether to toss it in the trashcan or leave it on the desk of his replacement who was due in the next day. He wavered a moment and then tossed it—

"On the desk," says writer John Thomas. "When this executive's replacement, Michael Levy, came in, he found the

PREDATOR SEASON



By MARC SHAPIRO

office completely empty except for our script sitting on the desk. He picked it up, read it and that was that."

Well, not quite. Levy did have to convince producer Joel Silver that the script for *Predator*, then titled *Hunter*, would be the box office smash it ultimately went on to be. That accomplished, Jim and John Thomas became the latest in a long line of writers to go from total obscurity to instant hot property. Hollywood thinking being what it is, it should come as no surprise that, when the long-awaited *Predator* sequel finally received a green light, the Thomas brothers were asked to pen the second *Predator* script.

And it wasn't as if the brothers weren't prepared for this second chance.

"We had five or six sequel approaches all ready for them," explains Jim Thomas, the other half of this *Predator* brother act. "One was a fantasy I always had about putting the creature in an urban jungle. And, as it turned out, that was the idea that Fox liked."

Jim and John Thomas are recalling their sequel's origins during a conversation on the Fox lot where *Predator 2* is winding up the last days of soundstage shooting. The Thomases, like good brothers should, pass the verbal baton back and forth with regularity, their blue collar appearance supplemented by a savvy and wide-ranging intelligence. And they're quick to point out that they aren't making a career out of re-viving their favorite monster.

In between *Predator* outings, the

The hunt continues on brand new turf, but Jim & John Thomas are still in charge.

brothers Thomas ramrodded the short-lived TV series *Hard Time on Planet Earth* (STARLOG #144) and landed the scripting chores on Sidney Sheldon's latest novel/movie *The Doomsday Conspiracy*, an original alien thriller called *The Attack* and yet another effort, a terrorist thriller called *Executive Action*. But the *Predator* is never far from their minds. Neither are the serious and downright silly ideas they have for further sequels.

"There are definitely possibilities for a real franchise here," says John Thomas. "The *Predator* could show up in a different time period like the Old West. It could wind up on other planets. The possibilities are pretty limitless."

"I think *Predator vs. Alien* is a good

idea that will probably never happen [on film, though it already has in Dark Horse Comics' acclaimed, licensed *Aliens vs. Predator* mini-series]," chuckles Jim Thomas. "My personal favorite would be to have the *Predator* beat the crap out of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles."

It's Human Season!

Well, *Predator 2* doesn't have Ninja Turtles (and only a cameo appearance by an Alien). What it does have is a top-notch director in Stephen (A *Nightmare on Elm Street 5*) Hopkins, a cast that features Danny Glover, Gary Busey, Rubén Blades, Bill Paxton, Kevin Peter Hall and Kent McCord, and the special FX wizardry of Stan Winston.



Filling in for the missing Dutch (Schwarzenegger), police detective Harrigan (Danny Glover) grapples with a younger, wilder creature (Kevin Peter Hall).

Predator 2 takes place in the environmental garbage can of 1997 Los Angeles, where drug lords are waging war over prized turf. Police detective Danny Glover attempts to keep law and order from breaking down while trying to uncover who's behind a series of grisly mutilation killings. Into this malaise walks the Predator, who is hot to hunt.

The first draft of *Predator 2*, following meetings with director Hopkins and producer Silver, flew out of the writing team's word processor in three weeks.

"Writing the sequel was *much* easier than the first *Predator*," declares Jim Thomas. "We had the story locked in and we knew all the elements. This script was written with a real sense of what the technical requirements would be, where, with the first film, we were more concerned with the mythos, the grand scale and the image of the characters. Those elements were in this script as well, but our eye was definitely looking toward how we were going to pull these things off when we were writing it."

John Thomas claims that, like the first *Predator*, the sequel will feature the creature as the central character. He points, however, to the fact that this Predator is much younger, and consequently more reckless, and that his weaponry has been expanded to include a wide variety of nets, spears and guns. But it's the story itself that has the brothers really excited.

E A S

III



"We had a wealth of background about the Predator that, for one reason or another, we weren't able to get into the first film," John Thomas says. "With the sequel, we've been able to tell all the backstory and basically catch up."

"For instance, we discover that the Predators are a race of hunters and sportsmen who've been visiting this planet for 700 years. We're able to show his spacecraft for the first time and basically get down to the mechanics of what he does. We explain to the

audience in no uncertain terms that the creature is *not* a psychopathic monster and that its motives and agenda are pure."

Jim Thomas adds, "It's also obviously *not* the same creature. This one is more ambitious, which is why it chooses an urban setting for its hunt. We already know what the Predator looks like and what it will do so those elements of the story won't really surprise the audience."

"The trick for us in this one was to give the audience the expected back in new and innovative ways. We've set you up with things you might expect to happen, but don't be surprised if they end up coming at you from a slightly different angle."

Jim Thomas offers that *Predator 2* will establish the base from which any future Predator outings will spring.

"This is the bible.

We connect up all the pieces.

There were things cut out of the first film that left people mystified as to what the film was really all about. *Predator 2* will clear all the questions up."

It's Alien Season!

Predator originally began as an idea by Jim Thomas for a spec script.

"The story was initially a rough idea about a brotherhood of alien hunters who come to Earth and then separate," relates Jim Thomas. "But we soon realized that many Predators made the story too complicated. So, we changed it

to the notion of one alien coming to this planet to hunt the most dangerous game possible, and that turned out to be the combat soldier. And because of America's involvement in Central America at the time, we chose that as the story's background."

Adds John Thomas, "The first draft of the script was really the essence of a hunting story, although much of that doesn't really come across in the first movie."

The brothers spent the next few months going through the Hollywood nightmare of having everybody in town turn thumbs down on their offering. "It really was a nightmare," remembers Jim Thomas. "Agents wouldn't read it because we weren't already represented by somebody else."

Predator finally found a home with a low-budget production company intent on making the film in the Philippines. The brothers were ready to sign on the dotted line when the miracle at Fox set them up with the big boys. That translated into a number of meetings, especially when Arnold Schwarzenegger took a shining to the script.

"Arnold liked the script immediately," Jim Thomas recalls. "He was very interested in his character, and in those early meetings, that scared us a bit because we knew Arnold had a certain take on action roles that didn't necessarily coincide with what we had in mind. When he asked us what we thought of his character, we told him we thought of him as an everyman."



Aiding Glover in his investigation of the grisly murders plaguing LA are Ruben Blades and Maria Conchita Alonso.

"We told him that if he would just play this guy straight, as a real person who is really afraid and concerned for the welfare of his men, that the audience would truly believe that he was in great jeopardy. And that when he quite literally rises out of the mud, people would really perceive him as a true hero. Arnold played him that way in the film, and I believe it's to his credit that the film worked as well as it did."

The writers recall that there were numerous discussions centering around whether or not Schwarzenegger would win the interplanetary struggle or, for that matter, even survive.

"Whether or not Arnold and/or the Predator would actually die in the film was a major topic during script revisions," John Thomas reveals. "Even though the basic theme was of one man being pushed to his limits and ultimately surviving, we toyed with the idea of the Predator defeating Arnold but letting him go and vice versa.

But it was decided that somebody had to win and that you couldn't have a satisfactory Hollywood ending unless the monster gets it in the end."

With the dust largely settled on their *Predator* efforts, John Thomas assesses the relative merits of the two scripts.

"I think the first script was much cleaner and a lot more pure. The second script is definitely more complex and multi-layered. The second one explains much more and it definitely contains a lot more action."

Conversation turns to the Thomas brothers' other genre adventure, the CBS series *Hard Time on Planet Earth*, which followed the adventures of an exiled alien warrior named Jesse (Martin Kove) and his parole officer thingamobob Control who have been banished to Earth for anti-social crimes. Jim Thomas claims that all their good intentions for the show were torpedoed by that season's writers' strike.

"The pilot had been pretty well-received and we were just waiting for the network to decide what was going to happen. But when the writers' strike hit and put everything on television on hold, John and I went ahead and made a deal at Paramount to write an action thriller called *Executive Action* [currently at Warner Bros.]. We were right in the middle of doing that when we got a call from the *Hard Time* people saying, 'Congratulations, you've got 13 episodes.' Well, we went ahead, but we found that we couldn't do it with the kind of passion necessary to make a successful show."

"But," chuckles John Thomas. "we have found out that the show is the most popular series in the Philippines."

It's Planet Season!

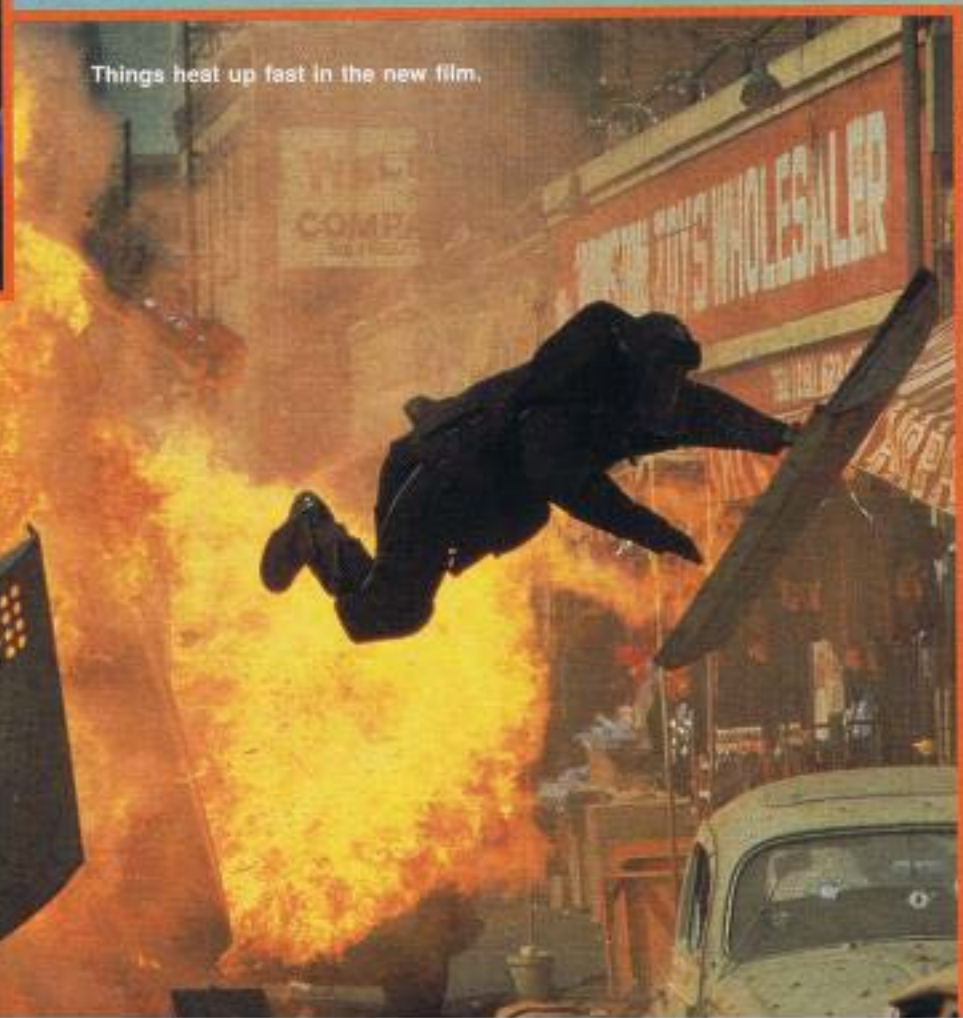
Jim and John Thomas were born in Needles, CA and lived what Jim Thomas describes as "an *American Graffiti* experience growing up in Bakersfield." It was also an experience, claims John Thomas, that saw them bombarded with inspiration for storytelling.

"We're Welsh-Irish, both cultures that are steeped in the storytelling tradition. We grew up surrounded by books (especially science fiction), radio, television and the stories that we heard told by our family."

The brothers took a rather circuitous route to writing stardom. They worked as lifeguards, teachers, ditch diggers and carpenters. Jim, with a stint in law school, combined his photography skills and some time as a ranch hand in a book called *Early to Rise*. John wrote short stories and attempted a novel. Jim also worked as a grip and soundman on a number of low-budget features.

They finally connected in a screenwriting way. "Jim had written a screenplay," says John Thomas, "and he was having some problems with it so he came to me with it. Things worked out so well that we decided to work together to break into show business with another script. We figured to do that we would have to come up with the wildest idea we could think of.

(continued on page 72)



Things heat up fast in the new film.

Hunt Talk

The title creature in *Predator* and now *Predator 2* has been called many things. But honorable? Never! At least not until now.

"But he is quite honorable," insists *Predator 2* director Stephen Hopkins. "He's a mysterious, murderous creature, but he's also a creature who lives by his race's time-honored rules and traditions of the hunt. With this film, we'll get to see more of that side of him."

Hopkins' positive attitude, coupled



Stephen Hopkins (above right with long hair) has traded the horrors of nightmares on *Elm Street* for the pleasures of alien terror.

with good notices on *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child* and a grade B thriller called *A Dangerous Game*, were instrumental in convincing the *Predator* folks, primarily producer Joel Silver, that Hopkins was the one to handle the inevitable follow-up to 1987's creature feature. And Hopkins has rewarded the confidence with what insiders are calling an excellent job of bringing the Predator into another kind of jungle.

Hopkins, a Boy Scout in his last life, prepared for his task by storyboarding the entire film and being an integral part of script revisions. But that didn't mean that there were not challenges afoot once the film got underway.

"There has been a bit of a challenge in directing a creature that doesn't speak. Since it can't talk and explain itself, we've had to rely on the story to explain things as we go along—which is nice because obviously we're dealing with something more serious and less camp than, say, the *Nightmare* films.

"What's fascinating about directing something like this is that it crosses over so many genres. *Predator 2* is a straight horror story, it's science fiction and it's a mystery, too."

Hopkins claims that his directing style, a very extreme combination of sharp camera angles and extreme focuses, hasn't been compromised by the logistics and nature of *Predator 2*.

"There have been some compromises," he concedes. "There always are on a picture like this one. But I don't think I've had to change my basic approach to directing—which, in this film, is to paint the Predator as this Gothic presence with a definite agenda who stalks the futuristic skyscrapers of Los Angeles."

Stephen Hopkins, born in Jamaica and raised in England, moved from comic book illustration to rock video storyboarding. He eventually moved into the driver's seat and directed videos for the likes of Mick Jagger, Tina Turner, Billy Idol and Elton John.

Hopkins moved up to set designing and second unit directing when a buddy from his rock video days, Russell Mulcahy (STARLOG #106), got the nod to direct *Highlander*.

Hopkins, following *Highlander*, felt he was ready to direct his first motion picture and found what at first seemed an unlikely property in a script called *A Dangerous Game*, which focuses on a bunch of punks being hunted down by a crazed cop in a department store.

"The story was stupid," he admits, "and the script was mediocre at best. But I felt that there was a nice little Gothic-style thriller in there someplace and that if I worked at it a bit, I could bring it out."

Hopkins did and the result won him *Nightmare on Elm Street 5*. It was a film that he had high hopes for going into but, in hindsight, looms large as a "gigantic disappointment."

"It was a rushed schedule without a reasonable budget and, after I finished it, New Line and the MPAA came along and cut the guts out of it. What started out as an OK film with a few good bits turned into a total embarrassment for me. I can't even watch it anymore."

Hopkins claims that *Predator 2* will be something he'll have no trouble watching. He cites the performances of Danny Glover and Gary Busey as "excellent" and "the straightahead nature of the project" as major plusses in this sequel. He also comments on the persistent rumor that this Predator has brought along some buddies who appear in the last reel.

"We've already shot the ending," Stephen Hopkins says, "and there's only one Predator in it. So, if any others turn up, nobody's going to be more surprised than me."

—Marc Shapiro