

WORDS JORDAN FARLEY & JAMIE GRAHAM

MONSTER

THE PREDATOR

STARRING Boyd Holbrook, Olivia Munn, Jacob Tremblay **ETA** 12 September

Before he became a screenwriting wunderkind selling scripts for millions, Shane Black starred in *Predator* as Hawkins, the first macho mercenary to meet the extraterrestrial hunter's ire. It's an experience that clearly left an impression as Black is behind this summer's big-screen comeback for the ugliest mofo in movies, and he's bringing a taste of the '80s with him.

"Part of the reason for doing this is just... the nostalgia," says Black, who directs and co-wrote the script with his *Monster Squad* writing partner Fred Dekker. "I wanted to recapture the sort of moviemaking that we would line up for on a Saturday afternoon, the way we did for *Wrath Of Khan* or *Raiders*."

But after 31 years of sub-par sequels and risible crossovers, what makes *The Predator* different? The answer again lies in the past. "There's a 30-year trail of breadcrumbs," Black explains. "You can go back and pluck the elements you want, take the nostalgia, what is iconic, and then enhance as needed."

To that end Black and Dekker (no pun intended) have concocted an enticingly irreverent spin on the alpha male formula established in the '87 original, with a squad of traumatised vets the front line of defence against the galaxy's ultimate killing machine. Several 'classic' Predators will feature, alongside a new, 10ft tall, genetically advanced 'Ultimate' Predator, born of experiments in hybridisation.

"When I make a movie that pleases me, it tends to be that I'm not that far removed from the actual audience," Black smiles. "So I'm hoping people will find it as nostalgic and as chock-full of stuff as we hope it is." The hunt is on.



PREVIEW

VENOM

STARRING Tom Hardy, Michelle Williams, Riz Ahmed, Jenny Slate, Woody Harrelson **ETA** 5 October

As played by Topher Grace in Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man 3*, fan-favourite antihero Venom didn't exactly put his best foot – or should that be tentacle? – forward. But expect Tom Hardy to change all that in Ruben Fleischer's *Venom*, the movie chosen to kick off Sony's Marvel Universe (which has been described as an "adjunct" of the MCU).

Hardy plays journalist Eddie Brock, investigating the shady dealings of Dr. Carlton Drake (Riz Ahmed), whose lab is in possession of an alien symbiote that might just aid the evolution of the human race. Or, y'know, mess everything up. Long story short, Drake merges with the symbiote and morphs into a living, snarling oil slick with huge gnashers and a long, pointed tongue. Can Brock maintain control and use his newfound powers for good? "You will only hurt *bad* people," he commands

his ruthless passenger, though his voice quavers with self-doubt.

Described by Columbia Pictures president Sanford Panitch as a "spin on a horror film", expect *Venom* to take its cue from Fox's *Deadpool* and *Logan* to occupy less conventional, more hard-edged superhero territory. An R-rating is expected, and Fleischer, who directed *Zombieland*, says, "There's a dark element and a wit that appeals to me," while also stressing the horror angle by promising to explore the "Jekyll and Hyde" dynamic between Brock and Venom.

With Hardy issuing a statement at Comic-Con 2017 that the movie is largely based on the six-issue *Venom: Lethal Protector* miniseries (1993), there is hope that Tom Holland's Spidey will cameo – in the comics, Spider-Man and Venom agree to leave each other alone if the latter commits no crimes, with Venom moving to San Francisco, where Fleischer's film is set. Meanwhile, *Spawn* creator Todd McFarlane, who is directing the 2019 movie starring Jamie Foxx and who also co-created *Venom*, has suggested his two antiheroes might cross over down the line. "Might be kind of cool," he says.

