



VENOM



JACKIE CHAN

THE WORLD'S LONGEST RUNNING MAGAZINE OF CULT ENTERTAINMENT

STARBURST

**THE HOUSE WITH A
CLOCK IN ITS WALLS**

Eli Roth Returns!

MOVIE PARASITES

DOCTOR WHO

RODDY PIPER

FRIGHTFEST

STAR TREK

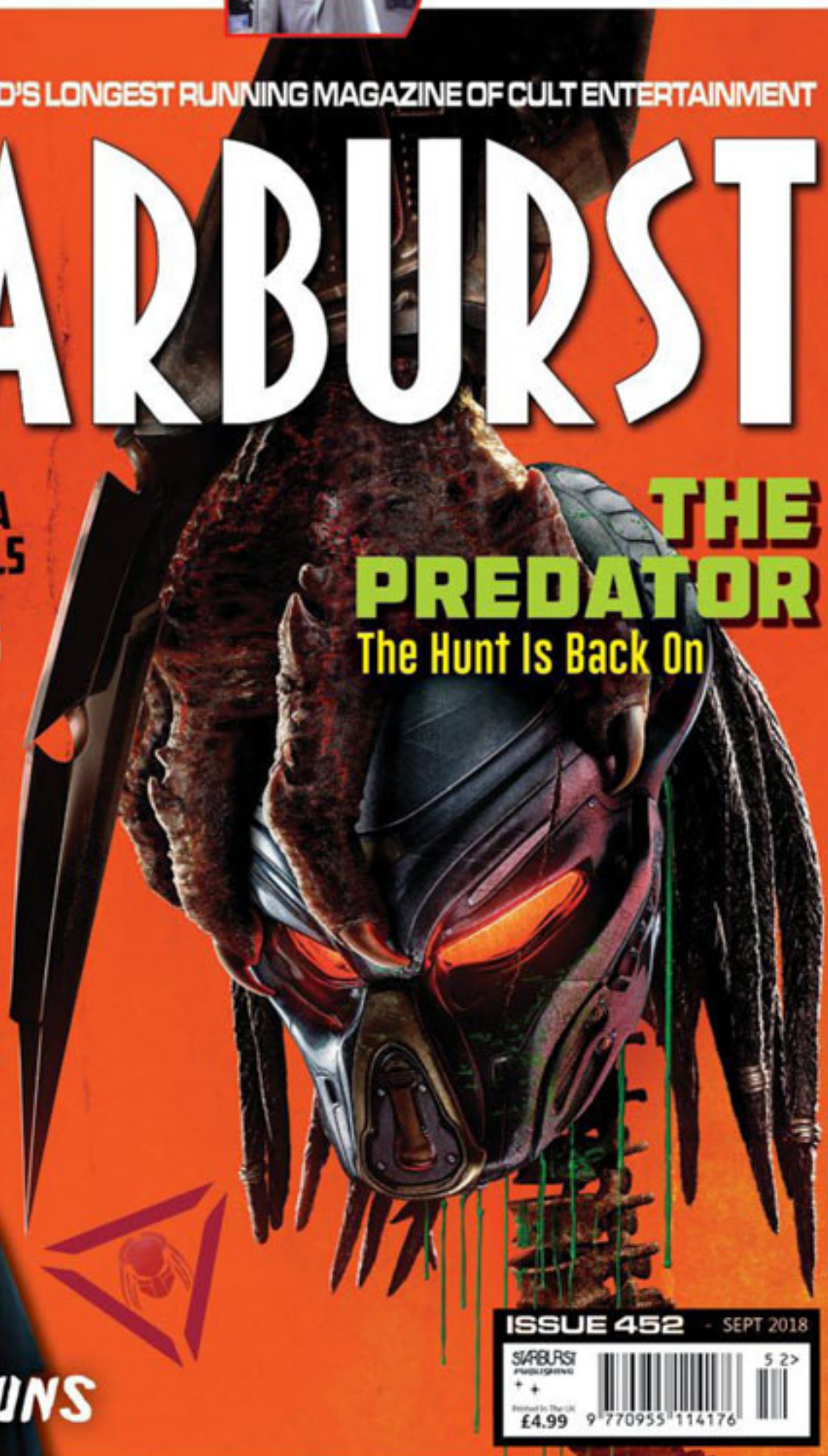
SLNDERMAN

UFOS

+ MUCH, MUCH MORE

**THE
PREDATOR**

The Hunt Is Back On



FUN WITH NUNS

ISSUE 452 - SEPT 2018

STARBURST
Magazine

++

Printed in the UK

£4.99



MOVIES + TV + GAMING + AUDIO + COMICS + BOOKS



ALWAYS BET ON

by Iain Robertson

MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS AFTER ITS DÉBUT, THE PREDATOR'S FUTURE RESTS - IRONICALLY - IN THE HANDS OF ITS FIRST VICTIM: SHANE BLACK. STARBURST LOOKS AT WHAT WE CAN EXPECT FROM THE FILM AND GETS YOU UP TO SPEED ON THE DIRECTOR...

The Predator shoot was not going well, and director John McTiernan was a worried man. He'd had to hire security guards to stop actor Sonny Landham attacking fellow cast members, the alien costume was unconvincing, and the Belgian martial artist they'd cast to wear it - Jean-Claude Van Damme - wasn't nearly intimidating enough.

To add to his problems, amongst the absurdly muscular, testosterone-fuelled cast, one wasn't cooperating. For starters, Shane Black, playing Hawkins (wears glasses, makes awful jokes about part of his girlfriend's anatomy, first to die) looked, well, normal. He was also the writer of the upcoming *Lethal Weapon* and had been hired not for his brawn, but with the idea that, by playing the character who gets killed off early, he could spend his downtime polishing the film's script.

Black, however, was having none of it. He'd been hired as an actor, and after selling his first script for a then-astonishing \$250,000 - other than adding his character's infamously bad jokes - he wasn't about to write for free.

In the end, none of the cast killed each other, the alien was successfully redesigned, Jean-Claude was recast (wonder what happened to him?) and it turned out the script was pretty good even without Black's input.

As for Black, well, thirty years later, he's returning to the franchise. And this time, no one's paying him to act.

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU?

When the first trailer for *The Predator* - Black's long-gestating entry in the series - dropped in May, the Internet inevitably went wild. It is, after all, the first new film in the series since 2010's fun-but-uninspired *Predators*, and only the second since 1990's *Predator 2*. (There are rumours that the Predators may have encountered Aliens a couple of times in the intervening period, but we refuse to believe them.) There were, however, a vocal contingent of fans who expressed concern.

Quite simply, it wasn't what they were expecting.

It had long been known that Black was moving away from the jungles - both literal and metaphorical - of the previous entries, and setting the film in that most unthreatening of environments: suburbia. However, the first footage we saw had a far gentler, almost Spielbergian tone than many were expecting. Hell, it's even set, *E.T.*-style, at Halloween. It opens with a young boy (Room's Jacob Tremblay) opening a box of alien artefacts, staring at each in wonder, intercut with shots of a spaceship crashing on earth. There are shades of *Close Encounters*, which Black has cited as a touchstone for the movie. Plus - kids! Since when do Predator movies have kids?

Of course, to paraphrase another Spielberg film, after the oohs





BLACK

and ahhs, there's running and screaming, but it was a deceptively soft reintroduction to the Predator-verse.

Has *Black* done a *Terminator* with us, taking a formerly adults-only franchise into family-friendly territory? Are we to be denied the series' trademark exploding heads and spine-ripping?

Not a chance. "PG-13 is for pussies," says *Black*, channelling Hawkins. "Spines bleed... a lot."

Further footage has put a greater emphasis on the series' more familiar tropes: big guns, bigger aliens, and people dying in a variety of unpleasant ways. Reports from the set have confirmed that the gore, along with a refreshing reliance on practical effects, is intact and that the plot is far more complex than the initial trailers may suggest.

Ah, the plot. *Black*, along with the studio Fox, has done an excellent job of keeping details of what the film's actually about a closely guarded secret; something of a rarity nowadays. From what little we know, *The Predator* sees the stakes raised considerably. Where previous movies have been concerned with the fate of a handful of characters, this time around the survival of humanity is at stake.

You'd expect with such high odds that we'd get the very best humanity has to offer to defend us. Arnie at the minimum. Possibly accompanied by Batman (hey, he's fought Predators before). So who has *Black* given us? "A ragtag crew of ex-soldiers and a disgruntled science teacher."



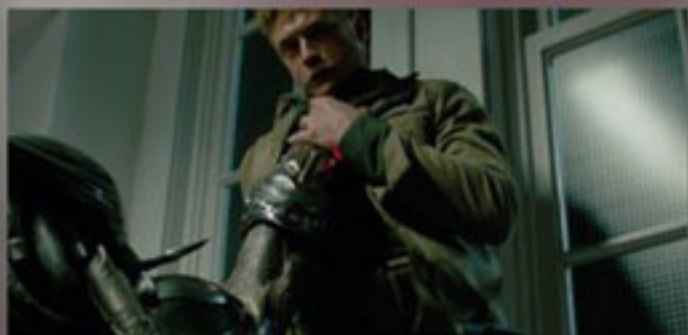
We're screwed.

Or possibly not. *Black*'s group can more than handle themselves and is composed of some of the best up-and-coming talent in Hollywood. Heading up the human cast is Boyd Holbrook as the brilliantly named Quinn McKenna, the father of Tremblay's character Rory and a Special Forces commando.

Holbrook wasn't the original choice for the role. After rumours that *Black* initially wanted James Franco, the part was offered to Benicio del Toro. He reluctantly turned it down after a month of negotiations, choosing to focus on *Soldado*, the sequel to *Sicario* instead. Along with, y'know, *Star Wars* and *Avengers*.

With the in-demand del Toro passing on the role, it's given Holbrook the biggest part of his career. After impressing amongst the ensemble of *Narcos*, he broke out last year as Donald Pierce in *Logan*. And while the acting plaudits went to Jackman, Stewart and the frankly astonishing Dafne Keen, Holbrook's villainous performance was enough to catch *The Predator* director's eye.

Joining Holbrook's hastily-assembled unit are Trevante Rhodes (who starred in the Oscar-winning *Moonlight* alongside Mahershala Ali, who coincidentally died violently in *Predators*); Keegan-Michael Key (AKA the half of Key & Peele who didn't direct





Get Out); former Punisher Thomas Jane; and Alfie Allen, who, as *Game of Thrones* fans can attest, is no stranger to losing body parts and therefore well-suited for the role.

If that's enough testosterone for you, heading up the female contingent is Olivia Munn (*X-Men: Apocalypse*) as Casey Bracket, the aforementioned disgruntled science teacher, and *The Handmaid's Tale* star Yvonne Strahovski as Emily, McKenna's wife and mother of Rory.

Oh, and for fans of *Predator 2*, there's a special Busey Bonus, with Jake Busey (soon to be seen in Season Three of *Stranger Things*) as the son of the late Peter Keyes - who was played by his dad Gary. We're going to take a wild guess and say his character's special skills are spouting both exposition and copious amounts of blood.

STICK AROUND

While Black has (we're guessing reluctantly) announced his cast, he's been less forthcoming about everything else. We know much of the third act was reshot, and that the release date was moved back from its initial March slot. Surprisingly, Black even talked to Arnie about returning. The film's events take place between the 1997-set *Predator 2* and the when-the-hell-is-it-set *Predators*, and we know that Tremblay's character Rory accidentally triggers the Predators' return to Earth. Rory's preternatural ability to learn languages - a side effect of his autism - helps him become an important player in the fight. And apparently, Quinn discovers the Predators on Earth, only for the authorities to disbelieve him (you'd think they'd have learnt by now), leading to his forming an unofficial team to fight the aliens.

As for the Predators themselves, well, they've been busy, and they're no longer the familiar psychopaths we all know and love. Besides hunting their way around the galaxy, they've been taking the opportunity to upgrade, genetically enhancing themselves with features of the races they come across. Think of them as being like the Borg, only less fun at parties. The result? Besides the traditional Predators, we have a new breed: bigger, smarter, faster and deadlier than before. And the two sides don't necessarily get along.

While opposing groups of aliens were a plot point in *Predators*, Black's expanding on the idea. It's not the only influence the previous film has had. The Hell-Hounds - used to flush out prey - are back, and also the recipients of a nifty redesign.

Different groups of Predators, Hell-Hounds and the odd Busey aside, though, Black's mainly ignoring the sequels, and tailoring his film to follow on from the original (and best) movie. He's just being a little elusive as to how.

The secrecy shouldn't be a surprise, really. Black likes giving audiences that rarest of things nowadays - the element of surprise. He is, after all, the man who pulled off one of the greatest misdirects in recent cinema with *Iron Man 3*'s Mandarin - something deliberately referenced in *The Predator*'s poster, which sports the tagline "You'll never see him coming."



SOME DAMN FOOL ACCUSED YOU OF BEING THE BEST

If the previous *Predator* films have been wildly inventive regarding both their creatures and their gore, there's one area where they've been noticeably uninspired. While the original may be full of ridiculous, quotable dialogue, it's hardly Shakespeare. The likes of "Get to the chopper" and "I ain't got time to bleed" may be among the film's most memorable lines (along with, y'know, that one pertaining to the Predator's looks), but they're more memorable for their macho absurdity than being brilliantly written. As for the sequels, well, can you recall a single line from *Predator 2*?

That's about to change, though. *The Predator* is being written and directed by a man who was knocking out witty, pop-culture referencing dialogue when Quentin Tarantino was still applying for jobs in video stores.

After *Lethal Weapon*, his breakout script, Black became one of the hottest writers in Hollywood. He stepped back from the series after the original (his story for a sequel was rejected for being too dark, ending with the death of Riggs), following it up with cult favourite *The Monster Squad*. That film's co-writer and director Fred Dekker reunites with Black on *The Predator*'s screenplay.

Scripts followed for *The Last Boy Scout*, *The Long Kiss Goodnight* and the better-than-you-remember action spoof *The Last Action Hero*, with Black becoming the highest paid writer in Hollywood in the process.

And then he disappeared for almost a decade. Partly burned out, partly frustrated with a Hollywood that rewrote and compromised his work, Black withdrew from the industry.

When he returned in 2005, he'd found the perfect way to retain the creative control he so desired. He both wrote and directed his comeback film, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, a great, fourth-wall-breaking crime thriller with a pre-*Iron Man* Robert Downey Jr., Val Kilmer, and Michelle Monaghan.

He didn't direct again for eight years when, on Downey's recommendation, Black landed *Iron Man 3* - either the best or worst of the trilogy, depending on your feelings about what he and co-writer Drew Pearce did to the Mandarin. It was the perfect film for the fledgling director, combining his trademark action, comedy, razor-sharp dialogue and leftfield plot twists on a massive canvas, although considerably less expletive-ridden than his fans were used to.

Fans of creative swearing were reassured by his next movie, however. Most directors would follow a Marvel movie with a similarly sized blockbuster. Black instead made *The Nice Guys*, an action comedy with Ryan Gosling and Russell Crowe (twist: neither of them are particularly nice). While only a modest hit, it's a huge amount of fun, featuring Crowe's best performance in years.

He's back on blockbuster form with *The Predator*, though. Fox is sparing no expense, confident that Black's the man to resurrect the series. The *Predator* movies, along with those featuring Aliens we don't talk about, were all decent sized hits off mid-size budgets. This time around, Black's got the budget to do his vision justice, and big things are expected. He did, after all, direct *Iron Man 3*, the 15th highest-grossing film of all time. And although R-rated movies don't traditionally do as well as their more family-friendly counterparts - the odd *Deadpool* and *Logan* aside - it's a sign of the studio's faith in the director that they've let him go all-out on a big budget blockbuster.

What we can be sure of, though, is that the series is in good hands. Black remains one of the best writers in Hollywood and a formidable action director. He may have turned down the chance to take a larger role in the series' genesis thirty years ago, but he's embracing the next step in its evolution. After all, as the *Predator*'s first victim, he's due some payback.

THE PREDATOR invades cinemas from September 14th.