

A Predator is shown in a dark, dense forest. The creature's face is partially visible in the upper right, with its iconic mask and glowing eyes. A bright, warm light source, possibly a fire or a flare, is on the left, creating a strong lens flare and illuminating the scene. The Predator's arm and hand are visible in the lower left, holding a weapon. The overall atmosphere is dark and mysterious.

# PRIME EVIL

Filmmaker James Bushe and DOP Simon Rowling talk about Predator: Dark Ages, their adventurous new sci-fi short filmed in the wilds of Berkshire



Imagine a short film that pays homage to *Predator*, is set in the middle ages and features a small group of Templar Knights, who have been given the task of hunting down the beast and you'll have an idea of *Predator: Dark Ages*. Is it really possible to squeeze all of this into a short film you might be wondering? Well, judging from the teaser trailer that the team sent to Digital FilmMaker then it's more than achievable. It's all the more impressive when you consider that this independent production was engineered on a shoestring budget and with very little in the way of resources. The mainman behind the production is James Bushe and he not only wrote it but directed, edited and also had a joint hand as producer. He sounds like a man on a mission... "This has been something I've always been interested in from a very young age when I first got hold of my

parents VHS camcorder," says James reflecting on his career to date. "Since then I have worked away on various short films and music videos with friends/colleges. At the moment it's more of a hobby and part-time thing for me although I am looking to make the change this coming year and to finally get to make my passion a full-time job."

James teamed up with co-

producer Simon Rowling to put the film together and it's a partnership that they both think has been hugely beneficial to the outcome of the project. "I was the Director of Photography and also producer on the project," says Simon. "I used to produce at a production company in Soho, as well as being a DOP, so knew how to look after the project until we were shooting.





other producer's take over. But between me and James, we had to work on the concept, raise awareness and then raise funds for the shoot! I used to do SFX, such as pyrotechnics, before producing, so I was able to speak to some old colleagues in the industry, who gave us smoke machines and stuff like that. I fell in love with camera work whilst at the production company, so stopped being a producer and



moved into camera/lighting work full-time as a freelancer and haven't looked back. I'm now working on exciting projects such as this and others, bringing my past experience and knowledge with me, on top of my DOP work, which certainly helps!"

### Star struck

The film largely came about due to the passion that James had for the original Predator movie and once he'd seen that then the seed for the short was born. "I have always had a great love of the



film Predator," enthuses James. "I first saw it when I was 10 and it has been a favourite ever since. I also have an interest in Medieval/period films like Braveheart and Kingdom of Heaven and the era in general. A few years back, a friend and I were throwing ideas out of possible Hollywood movies we could do in the future

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and Predator came up along with the option of setting it in the past. Something that was first touched upon in Predator 2. Instantly combining it with my love of Knights sprang to mind and that was as far as the idea went initially. Then the other year I came across a creature costumer guy called Philip Lane (Sentient Creatures), who had an amazing Predator costume that he wore to events and suddenly I thought 'could we go and make us a fan film of my idea?' The actual film would probably never happen, so this could be as close as I ever got to do my Medieval Predator concept. I spoke to Philip, told him the idea and asked if he would be interested in playing our Predator and, luckily, he absolutely loved the angle. From that point on it was all systems go!"

"James and I met through various friends that we had in common," furthers Simon on how their partnership came to fruition. "And so we decided to meet. He mentioned to me that he had a great idea... To make a film of Predator in the Dark Ages and I said that whatever happened I'd be on board!"

"After teaming up with Simon we set about working on a shooting a teaser trailer and also organising our Kickstarter campaign," adds James. "To try get us the funds to shoot either a short film or a trailer for a fake feature."

### A tall tale

Making a film like this is quite an undertaking if you do have budget to play with, so for the twosome to attempt it with little







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in the way of cash makes it even more of a curiosity. "Our film follows a group of war-torn Templar Knights who are entrusted by the church to hunt down a demon that plagues the English countryside," elaborates James. "They are joined by a Saracen, still considered an

enemy to the knights, but who has experienced such a beast before in Jerusalem. Together they must form an uneasy alliance if they are to slay the beast. Their battle with the Predator will be the thing myths and legends are made of. I wrote the film in short bursts over several weeks. We



changed many aspects several times to try accommodating the possible budget limits and adding in more interesting ideas and characters as they arose. Not to mention the odd predator reference here and there."

Why make it a short rather than a feature though with all of this potential at hand? "Budget," laughs Simon, pointing out the obvious hurdle. "And the copyright of course! We would have loved to have made a feature, but we didn't have the copyright to the Predator character, and we certainly didn't have the budget! Our friends who made the Street Fighter series have done the same as us, first making a pilot (short) and then a series with the copyright behind them. We will just have to see where this leads us, but after hearing about Shane Black writing a new Predator feature, I doubt we will be able to get the copyright."

"This is a fan movie, made by fans for the fans," James points out. "So there is no financial incentive to shoot a big scale feature film using the Predator brand. Though we are currently developing our initial concept into a feature film with our own original monsters."

Needless to say, with such limited resources involved, the production was kept to the bare minimum, especially when it came to crew. "It was mainly made up of friends in the industry who I have worked with on various projects, as well as some new people," says Simon. "They all loved the concept, whether they were massive Predator fans or not and just wanted to be part of a mini Ridley Scott-style film, even if it was on a small budget. We were aiming very high and everyone loved it!"

"They all loved the concept," agrees James. "And just wanted





to be part of it! Even if it was on a small budget, we were aiming very high and everyone loved where we wanted to take it and they were also willing to put in the time and effort to make it happen, which we are very thankful for."

### Beefy hardware

Considering the pretty humble origins of the film, the twosome did actually manage to get quite a lot of decent kit at their disposal. "What didn't we use," chuckles Simon. "We went all

out to impress and give our film the feeling of a larger scale production. We used a Steadicam a lot of the time, as well as a Movi Rig, both handheld on the back of horses or on the ground running, and even up in the sky on an Octocopter. We shot on an Arri Amira with Zeiss Super Speeds Mark II's. The Amira produced some beautiful images and was the perfect camera for the shoot, being a lighter weight than the Alexa and the ability to shoot outside in the various



lighting conditions really helped me do my job, especially in running scenes or if lights weren't available. That said, lots of things happened that weren't planned, but that's filmmaking! Generator's breaking down and high winds so we couldn't fly the octocopter were just a couple of things that weren't expected."

The pair also rounded up a respectable cast into the bargain. "So, as I said, we had Philip

Lane already on board from the go as our Predator," beams James. "I was also good friends with Ben Lloyd-Holmes and Jon Campling and asked them if they would be interested. Again, they both loved the concept so that worked out well. Ben also came on board as a producer, along with Lucinda Rhodes-Flaherty. Simon suggested Amed Hashimi and, luckily, he also found the idea very interesting. They were



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also all huge Predator fans, so that helped. We were actually contacted by Adrian Bouchet about possibly acting in the film and were instantly sold. He had a great presence and had starred in several medieval themed projects before, not to mention Alien Vs Predator."

"I also knew Adrian, our lead actor, through a feature I did a year or so ago," adds Simon. "Joe Egan I also knew through doing a TV pilot and he was super enthusiastic about getting involved! The extras were actually a re-enactment group and loved taking part, as well bringing with them all their tents, weapons and costumes. Again, they were huge Predator fans."

"Lastly, Sabine Crossen, a

friend of Lucinda's, came on board last minute and threw herself straight into the deep end," adds James. "But she did an amazing job. They all did."

### Out in the wilds

Predator: Dark Ages was filmed outdoors too, which isn't bad going considering it was during October of last year. Luckily the weather appears to have been kind to them. "It was shot completely on a location near Newbury over two long weekends," says James.

Did that present them with any major challenges? "Not too many," chips in Simon. "As one of the producer's (Ben) has worked on location before, as have I on various shoots, so we knew what



we were getting involved with. Rain, wind and the cold weather were never really an issue luckily, even though we were prepared for them. It was the lack of hours of daylight that was an issue, as it took longer to get lighter when we were in the woodland, even

though we used lights most of the time. Getting the kit there and back, as well as the food and crew, was tiring to say the least!"

"We wrapped on the night that the clocks went back," agrees James. "So we just avoided the darker, shorter days of winter. Getting the kit to and from location was always a struggle and took time each day, as well as sorting out the food and crew. Prepping in the dark and packing away in the dark was something we had to get used to."

And all on top of a limited budget, right? "We raised our minimum," says Simon. "Which was £5.5K through Kickstarter so thank you to everyone who donated for that. Then we had a private investor come on board and input another £5K, which actually made it possible for us to shoot! But 90 per cent of everything we did was done through favours and that money mainly covered petrol and some accommodation. The rest was friends and family being absolutely amazing and supporting us right from the start,





from the horses and riders, to the food and location, we have so many people to thank."

"We are currently in the edit stage of post-production," adds James on how progress is going to date. "And hoping to have picture lock shortly. It's looking to come in at around 25-30 minutes run time. It will need its fair share of VFX shots still, but the Raw images from the Amira are stunning and the quality looks a



leap up from my previous DSLR/C300 work. I am rather impressed how well everything is coming together, but then that's thanks to the great cast and crew."

### Lessons learnt

"It would have been great to have had more time for actual shooting," adds James reflecting on the production overall. "Just an extra two days I'd say. Each day we had to cram in a lot of set ups to shoot and usually it consisted of trying something complicated, such as using horses, fight scenes, the Steadicam, night shoot work and there were also limitations with the costume. Plus, it would have

been good to have more time for pre-production and planning. It was a tough shoot, but a great learning experience. Not much else could be done without a larger budget, as I think we pushed this to the absolute max with what we had. More filming days would probably have made this a lot easier, allowing us to get more shots and covering ourselves in the edit. But more

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days is more budget, so we did what we could and, in eight days, we pushed it to the max with 200 slates in total. I would also get more crew and experienced hands on set, especially when shooting on location and

producers on board at an earlier stage in pre-production, to ease the pressure on ourselves."

"I would potentially get more crew and producers on board at an earlier stage," Simon agrees. "But not much else without a







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larger budget could be done to be fair, as I think we pushed this to the absolute max with what we had."

One thing is for sure, it has continued to fire up the duo's passion for future filmmaking. So what's up next? "The feature of this bad boy," shouts James. "I am also currently working on a feature version based on my

award-winning short horror/comedy Cannibals and Carpet Fitters. I'm hoping to shoot late summer. We'd love to make this into a feature but, as mentioned, we don't think that will happen. Turning it into something very similar, with a different antagonist is certainly something we have discussed and are looking in to producing."



"As James mentioned, we'd love to make this into a feature," endorses Simon. And, if we can't get the rights, then we'll just have to change the script a bit! But, I'm also looking at various features next year to get involved with as a DOP, so I can't wait. It also depends if James wants to work with me again!"

"This has been very ambitious," adds James summing up their latest endeavour. "A medieval/sci-fi adventure with bloodied swords and a creature prowling the English countryside, but also great fun and a dream project

really. Being a huge Predator fan and actually getting to shoot my own film has been a very fulfilling experience and something I can be proud of. I mean its Templar Knights versus Predator. What's not to like?"

"It's a film of epic proportions," agrees his fellow producer. "It truly is a short film that Ridley Scott or John McKiernan would have loved to have made. But I'm glad they didn't, as it was an amazing experience working with all the cast and crew involved and especially the Predator himself! That's one thing ticked off my bucket list!" ■