

# A V P

The tussling titans bring their monstrous battle to our civilization for the first time.

Ripley's no longer around, but there are still strong women on hand to take up arms against the Aliens.

Since the 1979 debut of the sci-fi horror classic *Alien*, 20th Century Fox has done quite well financially with the franchise; in 1987, the studio released *Predator*, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, and launched another successful series. Responding to the rabid fan base's expectations for both properties, Dark Horse Comics published a number of comics titles which speculated on a question many enthusiasts were already asking: Who would win if these cinematic juggernauts ever faced off?

As a point of fact, the filmmakers themselves threw gasoline on that fire by briefly showing an Alien skull trophy hung on a wall at the end of *Predator 2*. In the ensuing years, there were a number of video, computer and collectible card games which became wildly popular and added extensively to both properties' mythos.

In 2004, fans got what they were wishing for with Paul W.S. Anderson's *Alien vs. Predator*. The film, while satisfying the curiosity of some (and being monetarily successful—the biggest grosser of either series—with a worldwide box office of approximately \$171 million), left many buffs feeling cold and unsatisfied. *AVP* played more like an episode of *WWE Raw* than the epic confrontation fans craved, lacking the mystery and suspense that was so integral to the success of the initial entries in both series.

So it is with no small amount of curiosity as to what perspective a new film in the series might take that Fango steps onto the set of *Aliens vs. Predator—Requiem* (opening Christmas Day from Fox) as it begins shooting in Vancouver, BC. This new entry is being helmed by two first-time directors,

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## BATTLE IN YOUR BACK YARD!

Colin and Greg Strause, who have an extensive filmography as visual FX artists through their Santa Monica, CA-based Hydraulic company. The duo has provided stunning images for such films as *X-Men: The Last Stand*, *Aeon Flux*, *Fantastic 4* and *The Day After Tomorrow* (for which they won a BAFTA award), to name but a few.

Creating the creatures once again are Tom Woodruff Jr. and Alec Gillis of Amalgamated Dynamics, who were responsible for the xenomorphs in most of the *Alien* series and also had a hand in devising the original look of the Predator. The new film's cast is made up primarily of accomplished yet relatively unknown actors such as Reiko (24) Aylesworth, John Ortiz, Steven (Rescue Me) Pasquale, Johnny (One Missed Call) Lewis, Gina Holden of TV's *Blood Ties* and *Flash Gordon*, David (Final Destination 2) Paetkau, Kristen Hager and young actresses Shareeka Epps and Ariel (Dark Water) Gade.

The night is bitterly cold as several

assault vehicles and armored personnel carriers move down the streets of Port Moody, a small town just on the outskirts of Vancouver, where tonight's scenes are being shot. The thoroughfare has been cleared of traffic, and the town's citizenry as well as curious onlookers are kept at bay by security. Overhead, rain towers hang swaying in the wind from cranes—an ominous preview of the downpour that's to come later in the evening. Fango is led through the hubbub of production crew and equipment and given a seat with a clear view of things.

The Strause brothers sit behind a row of monitors, carefully observing the setup of blood and weapons around one of the armored personnel carriers. They move about assuredly, and seem to give out orders as if of one mind. They're big men, which helps, and look like the kind of guys you'd see on line at your local comic convention—fanboys who have been given a shot at every fan's dream.

This dream, however, has not been without its trials and tribula-





Never pick up a hitchhiker on a dark, rainy night...



Who would win a fight between a Predator and an Alien? The question here is, who would win a fight between a Predator and lots of Aliens?

tions. "This week has probably been—technically—one of the worst," Greg says as he keeps one eye on things, "because of location, dealing with the minors—since you can only get so many hours with them a day—getting the rain right, getting the traffic locked down... A lot of our other days have been stage work where we don't have those limitations, but this week has been one of the trickier ones because of that type of stuff."

Still, the two brothers' excitement seems to almost crackle off of them and infect everyone working in the vicinity. "It's been going really good," Colin adds with a huge grin. "It's a challenge. I mean, it's like a war every day. We have a lot we need to do, and we're trying to make sure we get through everything, but it has been fun."

The plot of *Aliens vs. Predator—Requiem* (scripted by Shane



Introducing the first generation of Aliens to be born and raised in suburbia.

Photos: James Dittiger/Copyright Fox



Salerno) is closely guarded, but bit by bit it begins to come together: After some sort of an accident (interstellar or otherwise), Aliens are let loose in a small Colorado town. In short order, the area is overrun and its citizens are abducted to presumably be used as chestbuster hosts. An isolated group of survivors comes together and begins to fight back, and as tensions mount, help comes from a most inconceivable source—a Predator.

This all brings up myriad questions regarding the timeline of the series. In the initial *Alien* quartet, which was set several hundred years in the future, special care was taken to make sure that the unrelenting species never made it to Earth. Yet this new film takes place in our present day, with the Aliens invading modern civilization. "Yep," nods Greg, "and to everyone's relief, this actually will *not* break the series' continuity."

Colin leans in and makes an emphatic assurance, "The movie *will* be canon. It will be faithful to the movies' history."

"It all gets taken care of," Greg continues. "Great effort has been put in—and only time will tell how successful we are—

about sticking to what has been established."

"We are maintaining continuity to both of the franchises," Colin adds, grinning like someone in on a *really* good secret, "not reinventing stuff or creating new rules for the Aliens and Predators."

At this point, the directors are called back to OK the shot which is being set up. The scene takes place in the aftermath of the National Guard arriving in town and meeting some of the film's extraterrestrial stars. From the looks of things, the soldiers haven't fared too well. Several cast members, including Aylesworth, Pasquale, Lewis and Hager, arrive, and the brothers pull them aside and explain the action to come. Playing some of the surviving townspeople, they come upon the seemingly abandoned military vehicles and begin helping themselves to the artillery left behind.



...and also not to get too close to those funny-looking eggs.



Every new group of humans has to learn the hard way about the acid-for-blood thing...

Quiet is called for, and the first shot of the evening is ready to go. A command for rain is given, and the overhead towers begin showering the street in torrents of water. Soon, everything and everyone is soaked. Far off down the street, the cast makes ready to run into frame and go through their prescribed actions. Now wet and standing

in 30-degree weather, the performers look both effectively scared and quite uncomfortable. Action is called, and the actors dash down the street and congregate around the open APC. The rain gives the scene a distinctly alien aspect as water shimmers off the metal surfaces and asphalt.

"Where are they?" one of them shouts.

Another asks nervously, as he peers at the blood which covers the ground, "Is this our help?!"

Aylesworth jumps into the vehicle and begins handing out pistols, shotguns and M-16s. She barks out explanations like a seasoned pro. Later, the actress says, "I've really only ever worked with Berettas before, but now...I'm handling *serious* machine guns."

The scene is stopped and repeated several times. Although this is a small moment in the film's overall scenario, the download of information is important to establish later sequences in which these common townsfolk start firing weapons with a seemingly practiced hand. Each repetition means more rain, and more rain means wetter—and more frozen—actors.

"Being so cold is something in and of itself, because it was difficult just getting over the initial shock," says Hager, who



He's stalked countless planets—but can the Predator handle an Earth sewer?

**"The Predator has been dramatically altered. We had the opportunity to totally redesign him."**  
**—Tom Woodruff Jr., FX creator**

plays Jessie, a high-school-aged girl whose life has come unstrung thanks to the Alien invasion. "It has been like ice water. The first few days, I was so chilly that I had to stop and think about what I was saying. It has helped with the state of being, because [our characters are in] this chaotic world where you don't know what's going on and you're uncomfortable and you don't want to be where you are. It has also helped because everyone is so alert and so alive on camera. So, as much as it's a difficult and painful experience, it pays off for this movie."

As the scene is gone through again and again, Fango steps over to talk with Woodruff and Gillis—creature FX veterans and long-time Fango friends. It's a great relief for everyone concerned to get out from under the icy downpour.

"We've gotten very good at these movies," Gillis says, "and to an extent, we've reused some of our molds while creating new things as well. We're in a unique position, one that nobody else can really match, in that we've done this drill a lot. We know the basics, and the foundation of the work can be produced *very* quickly. Then it's a matter of just adding subtleties and making changes on top of that, which other people would find it difficult to get up to speed to do."

"On this movie, we've been able to make more refinements and rework things to suit the Strause brothers' taste," he continues. "They're big fans of *Aliens*, which is fantastic to us because that's still a great model for a movie that is mostly practical effects. There

are no digital gags in *Aliens*, just miniatures, and the film still holds up pretty well. Most filmmakers, when you say, 'We want to approach this like *Aliens*,' they get it immediately: 'OK, I know what you mean.' So from that standpoint, it has been a blast. It has been a very fast build and a quick, accelerating schedule, but they—the Strauses and Fox—have also given us a tremendous amount of trust because they know we've been doing this for 20 years."

So, based on the fact that they've done this several times before, it should be an easy assignment, right? "Well, no," explains Woodruff with a wry chuckle. "It seemed like that at first, but of all the movies we've been involved in, this was the shortest design-and-build time we've ever had. From the point where we had our concepts pretty much accrued, we had about two and a half months to

of the covering. So it's taking advantage of that, and we've redesigned the face as well. It's a whole different Predator now."

Fango is then reunited with the brothers Strause to peek over their shoulder at the monitor. What's being shot looks incredible: moody, tense and very much akin to the first *Alien*. Shadows paint the landscape and imply the presence of the menacing creatures at every turn. Glancing around, this writer raises the question as to why the choice was made to film in Vancouver. As usual, the siblings answer as if of one voice. "One reason," explains Greg, "was that it's easier to match the Colorado setting where the movie takes place. Vancouver also has a really strong production industry. Outside of LA, Vancouver would be your number-two choice; or maybe Australia or, like, Prague. We wanted the stuff to *look* like Colorado. It had to feel like small-town America, which we can definitely achieve here, and there are tax advantages. You get great crews and you can make the money go a bit further."

"Right," Colin goes on, completing the thought, "and Fox has done a lot up here. They did the second and third *X-Men* up here, the *Fantastic 4s*. The studio had a lot of good contacts in Vancouver."

"Yeah" Greg says, while observing the progress of the next setup. "It has been pretty good. Some towns are definitely not as film-friendly as we thought they'd be, but overall, it has been fine."

As the production moves on to yet another sequence, it becomes more and more apparent that this production is in capable hands. *Aliens vs. Predator—Requiem* is obviously being helmed by directors who, although young, have both their heads and their hearts in the right place. The look of the creatures is being handled by seasoned professionals who intimately know these beasts and what they're capable of. The cast, while not exactly household names, is comprised of strong actors who are excited about the film and the scenes in which they're involved. In the end, this follow-up to an already established and successful franchise is on course to make an impact on its already rabid audience.

"I don't want to jinx it," Ortiz, who plays Sheriff Eddie Morales in the film, says later, "but I'm feeling something very special. It's very easy to be like, 'Oh well, it's a sequel to this movie that has a lot of expectations attached to it,' but I feel it's going to surprise a lot of people. It's really going to be good."

