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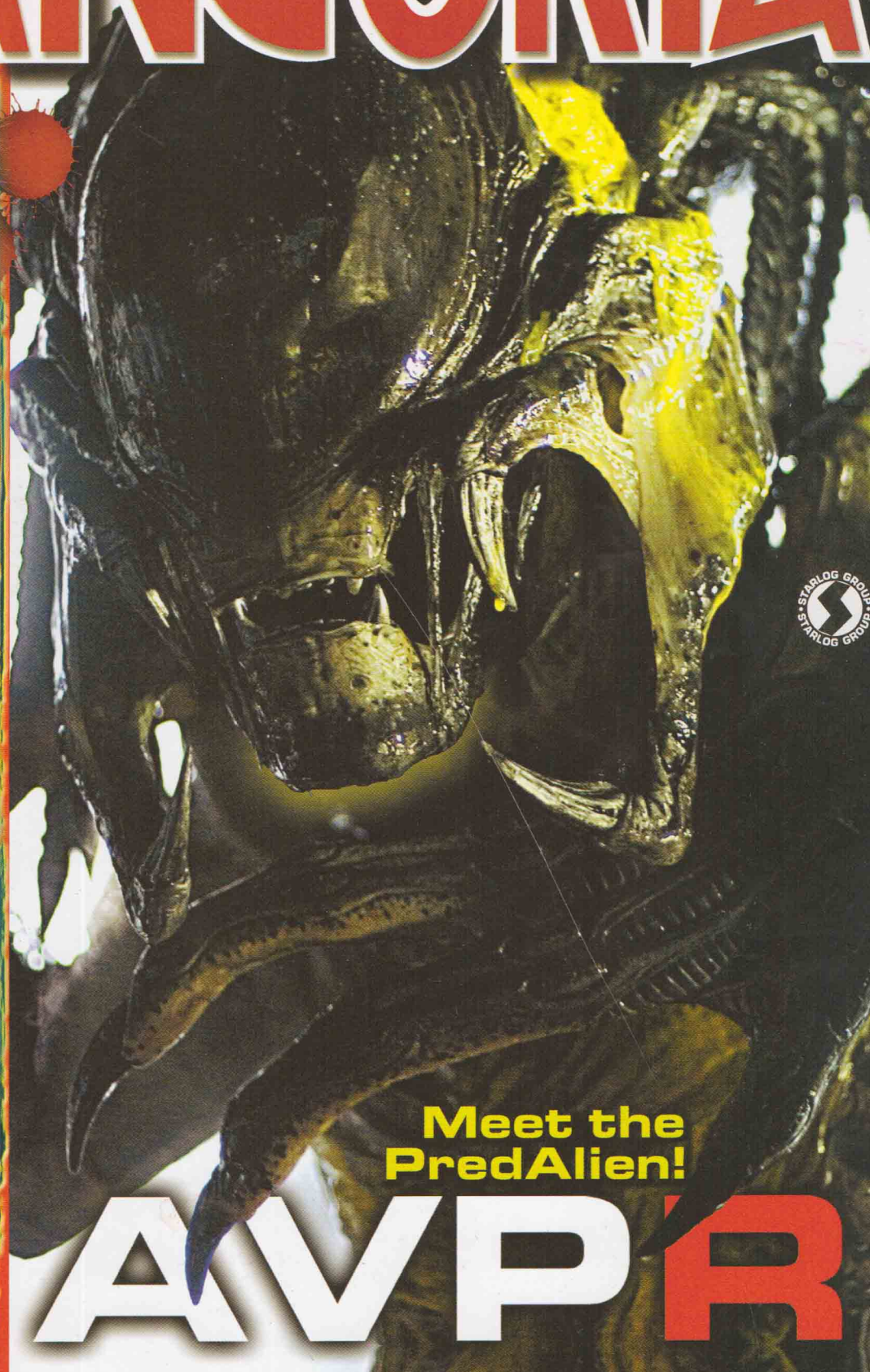


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Meet the
PredAlien!

AVP R

BROTHERS

The new battle between

before the night's shooting is to begin, to meet up with the directors of this, the latest entry in two of history's most popular science fiction/horror movie series.

Colin and Greg Strause arrive in a large, black SUV, tires crunching in the moist air. The Brothers (the name by which everyone seems to refer to them) are a bit of a surprise: broad of shoulder, hair closely cropped and looking as if they might have played a bit of football once upon a time. As they approach, welcoming smiles spread across their faces, and one can almost feel excitement crackle off of them like electricity. As they begin to speak, it's apparent that blood does indeed run thicker than water. They are brothers in every sense of the word, seemingly communicating with one another on a level deeper than words, exhibiting a habit of completing one another's sentences and speaking in a rat-a-tat, ping-pong back-and-forth manner.

The Brothers came to directing via an impressive history as visual FX artists on films such as *Titanic*, *Terminator 3*, *X-Men: The Last Stand* and *300*. In addition, through their Hydraulx (or Hy'draul'x, according to their website) company, they took the helm on a host of music videos and TV ads, which led these movie-loving kids from Chicago to this fog-enveloped lot in Vancouver, Canada, and the director's chairs on an important franchise entry from a major studio.

The duo lead the way to their RV; once inside, one can't help but notice how the space looks decidedly un-lived-in. It's as if the Brothers spend very little time here, their energies being better spent in the trenches—on the set. They settle in for a

By CARNELL

A thick fog lies across the open field that separates rows of recreational vehicles from the craft services tent on the set of 20th Century Fox's *Aliens vs. Predator—Requiem* (opening December 25). To the right, across a gravel parking lot, large warehouse-like buildings loom; several large men scurry about carrying lengths of wood and power tools. Cast and crew come and go, but everyone ends up—sooner or later—at the tent to grab a quick bite to eat. Fango has been invited here this evening, just a few hours



Colin (left) and Greg Strause have plenty of surprises up their sleeves for *Alien* and *Predator* fans.

IN CLAWS

Aliens and the Predator is so big, it took two directors to oversee.

quick chat before getting back to the job at hand: refereeing the battle between two of the cinema's most vicious extraterrestrials.

"Colin and I have been working in the industry for almost 12 years now," Greg says, biting into a breakfast burrito; time is precious and eating is frequently done on the run. "About five or six years ago, we started

directing music videos, and that quickly led to commercials. In the meantime, we had our visual effects jobs, and we kept working on bigger and bigger movies. As our company grew, it was 10 guys, then it was 20, then it was 40, then it was 80 people. It kept giving us experience with films like *Titanic* and *Galaxy Quest*. Then we won a BAFTA

[British Academy of Film and Television Arts award] for *The Day After Tomorrow*. That started getting us a reputation—especially over at Fox—for being able to handle these big movies and doing a good job on them. Meanwhile, we'd been pitching our own projects; we actually went in for the original *AVP*, except our idea was a little



too big. It was going to be set on the home worlds, and there were 40 minutes of no one speaking any English. That kind of threw them off a little."

"It was a bit outside the budget range," laughs Colin, demonstrating that two-minds-one-thought manner. As they speak, the listener begins to feel like an observer at a tennis match, head swinging back and forth. "When the sequel came up, we heard about it and got in. The really important thing [to remember about] movies is that it's very easy for everyone to have a different

Meet the Predalien, which could kick that other hybrid's ass.



It's unlikely they carry anything in his size...



"Using lesser-known actors was a strategic decision...we already had two of the biggest creature stars in cinema history."

—Greg Strause

ented *Alien vs. Predator*, and more of a return to the spirit of the originals in both series. "Our take on it was to go for that gritty feel," Greg explains, "and they're letting us roll with it. It's definitely going to be eye-opening compared to the last movie."

"It's actually nice having blood on the chestbursts," Colin adds.

The casting process was also a key consideration, in that the filmmakers could have gone out and cast a bunch of names that would have only driven the film's budget through the roof. "Using lesser-known actors was a strategic decision

we had to make," Greg says between bites, "because in the end, we want the best movie we can, and we already had two of the biggest creature stars in cinema history."

"Since we had the Predator and Aliens, we wanted to find good, interesting actors," Colin says. "It's really important to us that no one comes off as cheesy or contrived."

"Most of our cast are New York stage veterans," Greg notes. "We've seen the stuff on the Internet saying, 'Oh, they got TV stars.' Actually, we got theater people. We got real actors to come in for the roles. We went through a pretty grueling casting process, but at the end of the day, on the poster, there are Aliens and Predators."

The decision to go with Tom Woodruff Jr. and Alec Gillis of Amalgamated Dynamics Inc. for the film's creature FX was an easy one to make, however. "First of all," Greg explains, "Tom Woodruff is an excellent performer. People seem to think that it's just

opinion on what the film should be. In this case, everyone was on the same page. They wanted to make more of a *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*—more of a small horror film, like what Ridley [Scott] did on the original *Alien*."

"They didn't want to just make a sequel to the last movie," Greg adds. "They wanted to do something different..."

"...with relatable people, characters you actually cared about, and to really make it scary. We believe that the horror roots of the *Alien* franchise have been forgotten for quite a while."

The perspective of *Requiem* is thus distinct from that of the previous action-ori-

R i s f o r R E Q U I E M

Despite the financial success of the first *Alien vs. Predator*, the drubbing it took by critics and, most importantly, the fans, was tantamount to a lynching. In hindsight, many people blame the studio in part for making the decision to go with an all-audience-friendly PG-13 rating.

Thankfully, this is not the case on *Aliens vs. Predator—Requiem*, which was made evident by the red-band trailer that hit the Internet a few months ago. Tom Rothman, chairman of Fox Studios, said in print before production began that the new film was going to be more violent and grittier. "And that's exactly what we're doing," co-director Colin Strause assures during filming.

"Blood was something that was kind of lacking in the last movie," his brother Greg adds. "The last AVP was the only movie in the franchise that wasn't an R."

"It's pretty common knowledge that you can double the box-office gross by not getting an R rating," Greg continues.

"And double the places you can advertise," says Colin, finishing the thought (as the brothers often do). "If you do an R-rated movie, you can't advertise on certain channels or at certain times and you can't put billboards in certain places. So it's a bit of a gamble for the studio. It's hard when you're investing in a sci-fi genre film, and if it has that rating, you're making it twice as difficult for yourself to sell it. But at the same time, you're giving yourself the freedom to do what the fans want you

to do. On some movies that works great, but others just get watered down. It's also a riskier investment, so they tend to give you less money."

"The fact of the matter is," concludes Greg, "if you go R-rated, you'll have fewer resources behind you."

But there are always other avenues that can be utilized to get word out on a film you strongly believe in: the Internet, for example. The web has been abuzz with rumors and rampant speculation by buffs who have gone over that trailer more minutely than the Warren Commission on the Zapruder film. And the amount of speculation has been staggering.

By all accounts, there will be a few chestbuster sequences. In May, assistant art director Andrew Li said in an on-line interview, "The main difference in our clothes is, of course, that some of them had to be rigged for our chestbusters." Back in January, in another web chat, puppeteer Morris Chapdelaine said, "There was certainly a large variety of creature work in this film! The fans will go nuts when they see what we have in store for them."

So far, so good.

As far as armaments go, the Predator shuriken returns, but so far there has been no sighting of the disc weapon from *Predator 2*. In the trailer, a razorlike whip is seen being wielded by the extraterrestrial hunter, who uses it to cut an Alien into pieces. "That's not the final thing that happens to that Alien either," Colin wrote on the IMDb message boards. Also, there are images of dual shoulder cannons which are fired by hand.

But it's the presence of a Predalien, which has been confirmed in an officially released production still as well as glimpses in the new trailer, that has garnered the most fan expectation. Other rumors of interest include the hiring of underwater camera operators for a scene that will involve "mayhem, carnage and people dying." Certain shots in the trailer show the Predator and multiple Aliens fighting in a sewer system, as well as a highly anticipated tussle atop a building. Again, Chapdelaine has said, "There were a lot of favorite scenes, but I have to say that the battle on the rooftop was amazing! We worked on it for over two weeks and it was brilliant. There's some stuff that has never been seen before—weapons, gadgets and hand-to-hand combat that's sure to pique everyone's interest." This is something that Fango can confirm, since everyone talks excitedly about this sequence during our set visit.

Admitting to scouring the Internet for gossip and innuendo on their own picture, the Strause brothers have been popping onto *Aliens vs. Predator* message boards to post other tidbits. They've confirmed on-line that there will be a few fully CG Aliens, but most of the time it will be Tom Woodruff in a suit with a digital tail and that these creatures, thankfully, will not be seen in daylight.

With all this conjecture about a film months before its release, one wonders if the brothers have already tipped their hand too soon with the trailer and smattering of pics hitting the ever-hungry Internet. In another IMDb posting, Colin assures that they have more surprises on the way: "Don't worry; there are still plenty of shocking moments that will never be shown in any trailer."

"The fans have been clamoring to see the AVP franchise move back into a more hard-edged, visceral realm," ADI's Woodruff tells Fango, "and that's what the Strause brothers and Fox have delivered. I'm glad Alec Gillis and I were invited back into the ring with them. Fans everywhere seem to be excited at the prospect, and it should make for quite a Christmas present when it opens in December."

—Carnell

There's no flinching from the leftovers when these Aliens prey on small-town folks.



about how you make the suit. It's not like that at all. There are actually two sides to it, and one side is who's wearing it. It's a bigger concern than how the suit looks."

"It's also their passion for the project," Colin says. "Tom sculpted the Warrior Alien when he was at Stan Winston's. He has been with this stuff for 20-odd years now, and has been a performer in most of the movies."

"These guys have really elevated the science and technology that go into the animatronics and the controls," Greg continues. "Their stuff is quite impressive."

"The other thing that's great about them is that when you hire their company, they are the guys," Colin adds, obviously impressed. "They're at every meeting. They're on set every day. Tom is the guy in the suit."

"Tom and Alec are very much involved with day-to-day operations, and their design

where there's 15 minutes of people being ripped apart by barbed wire, but there are moments in this that are pretty extreme."

"Actually," Colin reveals, "some of it is extreme enough that we're surprised the studio even let us do—I mean, conceptually—what we do to certain people."

The details of *Requiem's* plot (as scripted by Shane Salerno) are being kept fairly ambiguous at the time of this writing, but the Strauses break that silence for Fango and give up some of the goods. "There's a bit of an accident, and the Predator has come to clean up the mess," Greg reveals. "The anal-

ogy we always use is that our Predator [played by Ian Whyte] is sort of like the Harvey Keitel character in *Pulp Fiction*. It's actually how he's addressed everywhere: 'You see the Wolf.' So he's not here for a hunt; he's here to mop up. It's kind of cool, because it lets you see a Predator in a whole different way. Also, he's not the same Hunter Predator, either. He's a little higher up—an upper-echelon kind of guy. Put it this way: He doesn't need 85 pounds of body armor."

"He's a stripped-down elder," Colin says, a kid-in-a-candy-store grin spreading across

"They wanted to make...more of a small horror film, like what Ridley [Scott] did on the original *Alien*."

—Colin Strause

Even after five previous films, just a shadowy glimpse of this beast is enough to be frightening.

his face. "We jokingly referred to him as our *History of Violence* Predator. He's much thinner, muscular, much more of a bad-ass. Again, we went very much toward the original, but then there's some new shit he's got that's awesome."

"Some new toys, some new weapons and a totally new helmet design," Greg adds. "He's a very different kind of Predator."

"Some of the new weapons are not technological at all," Colin notes. "They're just brutal."

An early version of the *Requiem* script was leaked on-line, but the Brothers state that this draft was abandoned long before the duo took command of the production. "We'd never read the script that *Ain't It Cool News* reviewed. Everyone on the Internet was going on about that thing," Colin says, leaning in and making his point emphatically. "That script was so long gone by the time we got the job. Since we came on, the film has been rewritten twice. We've gone through pretty heavy redevelopment, changing the story and really beefing up the characters."

Given that, as the pair expressed above,

sense is just awesome. Through that phase of this project, there were various things that we had to achieve with creatures and props and all sorts of goodies like that. They really blew us away with a bunch of new Predator weapons and stuff that made us go, 'Whoa! This is going to be awesome.'"

That was the response generated from many fans by an early trailer released to the

Internet late this past summer, which showcased *Alien* and human carnage aplenty. The Brothers, however, insist that the blood and guts are used judiciously in the R-rated *Requiem*. "The idea is that we don't want to be over the top or gratuitous," Greg explains. "There's a point where if you're just showing someone's head getting beat open for 10 minutes, it's like, 'OK, I get it,' but it's not scary. It's gory, but not scary. There's definitely some gnarly stuff in this film, though. It isn't going to be anywhere near as outrageous as the end of *Silent Hill*,



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While the xenomorphs can be said to be *Requiem's* villains, only the Predator could be responsible for this bit of human carnage.

it's the Predator and the Aliens audiences will flock to see, it was important to split the script's narrative between the battle between the two creatures and the people that conflict threatens. "There's a very com-

elling human story," Greg says. "Then, the Predator-and-Alien side starts off with much more mystery, intrigue and suspense. That's not to say there isn't going to be action—there's going to be plenty—but we don't want to create a situation where there's 50 minutes of World Wrestling Federation fights between Aliens and the Predator. It's important to remember that less is always more, and you have to hide as much as possible in shadows. That's why in literally every shot, there's a ton of smoke and atmosphere. The whole last third of the movie is in blackout—no lights—and rain.

"The thing was, in *Alien*, they had steam jets and strobe lights—things that helped hide the creature," he continues. "The problem in *AVP* was that they were in this temple, and there really weren't a lot of places for atmosphere there. If you see too much of the creatures, it demystifies them and they're just not scary. They become guys in suits running around beating each other up. If you look at the original *Predator*, they rarely had a clear shot of it. We've been using that same mentality, which is that you're always looking through something. You're only seeing parts of the thing. We have to keep them mysterious. If we show too much of it, then we have nowhere to go."


That gives the new film a stylistic and thematic kinship with the first entries of both series. "The functional word is going to be *gritty*," Colin says. "Pretty much the whole second half of the movie is being shot

handheld, which hasn't really been done in the *Alien* franchise before."

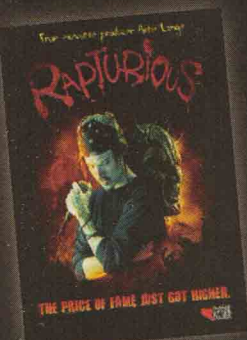
"The films almost became cartoonish in some ways, in terms of their visual style," Greg says. "We lobbied heavily and got Daniel Pearl to shoot this film; he did the original *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and also the remake that Marcus Nispel made in 2003. He likes to work with shadow, and less is more with everything he does."

"Daniel was someone we had worked with on music videos and in the commercial world," Colin reveals. "He definitely has a distinct look to his footage, and that's really important."

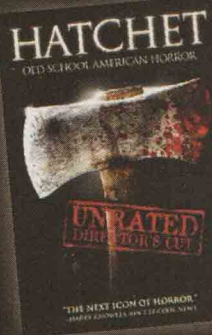
Looking toward the future, the pair will hold off on any decisions until they're finishing up *Aliens vs. Predator—Requiem*. "We'll probably get more into what's next once we're done here, go back to LA and start getting into the editing," Greg says as his cell phone rings with a "You're needed on set" text message. "Then, on the weekends, we'll start reading stuff. We have a cool disaster movie we want to do which needs to be polished up a little bit and taken out around town. This film has a pretty built-in audience, and it already has a tracking aspect. The buzz is growing every week."

"Wait until you see where we leave this movie off, though," Colin says with that now-familiar grin. He gets to his feet and moves toward the door. "It really allows for something cool for the next one. It definitely gets left off in a very interesting place." 

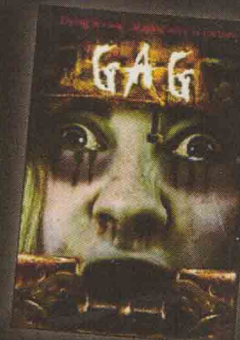
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