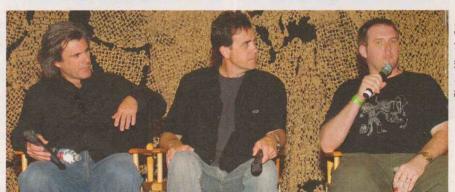By CARNELL

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Let's face it: Creatures are really the backbone of horror cinema, bringing us, the audience, back into the theater time after time, decade after decade. It has been that way ever since Lon Chaney created the main character in Tod Browning's *London After Midnight* in 1927. They were what brought people back when Jack Pierce created the Monster in 1931 for Boris Karloff's *Frankenstein*, and what have lured us in the subsequent decades through the work of such seminal FX wizards as Dick Smith and Stan Winston, Rick Baker and Tom Savini. They are, in effect, what we the shivering multitudes *love* to see.

Two more names that belong in the pantheon of our beloved genre are Tom Woodruff Jr. and Alec Gillis of Amalgamated Dynamics Inc. Separately and together, the duo have helped craft some of the most delightfully fiendish nightmares in modern cinema. Films such as *The Terminator*, *Pumpkinhead*, *Tremors* and *Wolf* dot their filmographies; in 1992, they shared the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects for their contributions to Robert Zemeckis' *Death Becomes Her*. But they're best known for handling the creatures in *Alien³*, *Alien Resurrection* and *Alien vs. Predator*, and their contributions can currently be seen in 20th Century Fox's *Aliens vs. Predator—Requiem*.

FX CREATORS TOM WOODRUFF JR. AND ALEC GILLIS GOT THE WARRING CREATURES INTO FIGHTING SHAPE.

FX creators Alec Gillis (left) and Tom Woodruff Jr. (center) and co-director Greg Strause first teased Fangorians about *Aliens vs. Predator: Requiem* at last year's Burbank con.
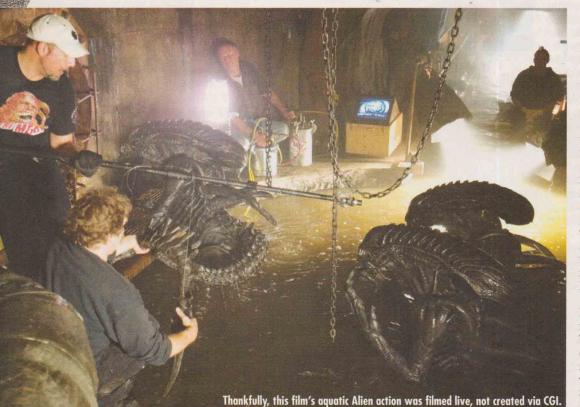
"We're very similar kids from two different coasts," Gillis says. "I was on the West Coast in California and Tom was on the East in Pennsylvania. We were both interested in stop-motion animation and Ray Harryhausen movies as well as *Planet of the Apes*. Those old inspirational films jumpstarted us making movies in our parents' houses—me in the garage, Tom in the basement—and

doing makeup on ourselves and our friends. I ended up going to USC's film school and working at Roger Corman's studio with Gale Anne Hurd, Jim Cameron and the Skotak brothers, who were the visual effects guys on *Aliens*. I kind of established a working relationship with all of them which then, later, translated to me getting hired at Stan Winston's shop on *Aliens*, which is where I met Tom."

"When I moved out to California," says Woodruff, picking up the story, "I had a portfolio full of stuff I'd done for my own movies which couldn't even begin to compare with what people were doing professionally. But there was enough there to—after about six months of making the rounds and visiting people who had shops up and running—get me jobs. I had also made contact with [*Apes*'] John Chambers, who at that point was already retired and out of the business, but he got me in to see people like Tom Burman and Stan Winston.

"My first job was at Makeup & FX Labs on a movie called *Metalstorm* back in the early '80s," he continues. "From there, I met a couple of guys and we all ended up going to Stan Winston's next. Actually, they went to Stan

Thankfully, this film's aquatic Alien action was filmed live, not created via CGI.

Winston's and I went to Tom Burman's and did a couple of movies—*Star Trek III* and *Buckaroo Banzai*. The cool thing there was getting to listen to Burman tell stories about *Planet of the Apes* and this gorilla-suit performer named Janos Prohaska every day at work. These were the guys who, as a kid, I was always drawn to in terms of just wanting to be like them some day. That was a great time. So, from there, I went to Stan's and joined up with the guys again on *Terminator*, *Predator*, *Aliens*—one right after another. I met Alec there."

The two men reveled in pitting the Alien and Predator against each other once more. "The shoot itself went very well," Gillis says, noting that *AVP—R* combined the working conditions of the two franchises. "The *Alien* movies are generally indoor kind of stories: dripping hallways, corridors and pyramids. So you're working days because you're not usually out on location. But *Predator* movies are usually location-based, with a lot of scenes in the jungle or on rooftops. *AVP—R* was kind of a mix of the two, which was interesting. We actually did more location creature work on *AVP—R* than we've ever done before—working out of the backs of trucks and things like that—which was a different logistical challenge for us. But it was fun."

The new entry in the *Alien* and *Predator* franchises was slightly different from previous installments; for one thing, it's set in the present day. For another, changes were made to the creatures themselves. Directors Colin and Greg Strause have described the new extraterrestrial hunter, for example, as the "Wolf Predator" (referring to Harvey Keitel's Winston Wolf character in *Pulp Fiction*), and have also referred to him as their "*History of Violence* Predator." Clearly, crucial alterations were made to the creature's appearance. "The differences are in the way the Predator looks, his body and also in his face," Woodruff explains. "His features are really different; it's a mix of characteristics from the other movies."

"Our idea about the lineage of the Predators you've seen in the movies is that the ones in the first two films are adolescents," Gillis explains. "They're hunting humans and are kind of bratty in a way where, if they're not winning, they upset the chessboard and blow the whole place up. The

"Dinner's on, boys!"

Looks like one of the xenomorphs got some bad acid.

guys in *AVP* were on the cusp of manhood. They were going into a rite of passage, and yet they weren't terribly experienced. Still, they had all their equipment and the best field battle gear, but things got out of control for them. Of course, there was also the one who was, as Paul W.S. Anderson has said, 'like a leading man,' so we humanized him, anthropomorphized him a little bit—you know, gave him the extra-long dreadlocks—so that you would feel there was a little bit of a romantic quality to him…given the fact that he's a butt-ugly monster.

"So with this guy—with the Wolf—the idea was that he's like a 45-year-old veteran," Gillis continues. "He's grizzled and maybe has been on a lot of campaigns. He's someone who works alone. He's a clean-up man. We kind of thought of him physically like Tom Berenger in *Platoon*: just a tough, messed-up dude. The other great thing, which was very astute, that the Strause Brothers said was, 'Another reason this guy doesn't load up with armor is that's not why he wins against the Aliens. It's because he's smarter than them. It's because he has special gadgets that the others don't have. So he doesn't need to protect his body. A sissy does that.' "

Given that the previous *AVP* was rife with CGI and digital FX, it probably came as a relief to some die-hard fans that *Requiem* didn't continue in that mode. "It was even more practical this time," Gillis notes, "because we didn't have thousands of Aliens crawling up pyramids. I mean, there was definitely an aspect of that, but the Strause Brothers' idea for this was more like *Texas Chainsaw*: fast cutting and glimpses of things. This really doesn't lend itself to the standard CG approach, which is the 'awe shot' where you have some fantastic, overblown image. This one is fast and furious."

"It's an interesting thing," Woodruff points out. "The people we've seen at conventions all over the world always seem to say that the least effective stuff in this type

The new movie's Predator is older and wiser than the one seen in the previous *AVP*.

they approach things. They have this great facility in Santa Monica that looks like some James Bond villain's lair: all hi-tech and gleaming. And then there's their grandmother, who's this little old Scottish lady walking around their offices with a tin of muffins, offering people snacks. Their mom and dad also work for them. I believe their mother is in accounting and their father scans all the stuff. Their dad took his pension money when he retired from IBM and bought computers for the guys. It was like, 'OK, you can go to college or you can do this.' And they said, 'We want computers!' and they started the company. Then their dad came to work for them and they moved out here. How often do you see *that* in movies? They loved it, because we had real stuff [at ADI] and they could see a Predator and an Alien or whatever, and we were at their place like, 'Look at the interior design and all of these workstations.' "

of movie is the CG effects, because it breaks out of the mold—out of the context of what we've always seen in the *Alien* or *Predator* movies. It does seem a little out of place. Not that it's bad or substandard work, it's just that there's this tone to it you can recognize and feel. You know it's not exactly right.

"Another interesting phenomenon is that the real stuff has limitations—*everything* has limitations—which means that, as a filmmaker, you find a way to shoot around it," he continues. "We've been involved with so much that we probably have the best handle on what doesn't work. If you go back to the very first *Alien*, Ridley Scott said that as beautiful and as sinister as the Alien suit looked, it really didn't move that great because of the construction techniques they chose at the time. So he shot around it, and found a way to make it work. That makes it so much more effective, because you're not showing the audience every little thing. You're not presenting it on a huge stage with a Ray Harryhausen vista of two creatures where everything is happening in full view. You're hiding it because you can't show it all, and that allows the audience to fill in the blanks. You can never compete with what is going to work on them in their mind's eye."

Collaborating with first-time directors can sometimes be difficult, but given the Strause Brothers' own level of experience as visual FX artists, they proved themselves to be consummate professionals and great allies. "At one of the first meetings," Gillis says, "they came by our studio with a bunch of people from [their company] Hydraulx. You never know how those types of things are going to go because of something Tom and I call 'digital arrogance,' which is when a group of people breeze in who don't know about the history of effects and don't know who we are. So we didn't know what to expect, but they showed up with six people who were the coolest, most fun fans of practical effects that you could imagine. Josh, who does their pre-vis stuff, is like 6-foot-6, and he was *dying* to get into an Alien suit. He wanted to get shot, and he knew everything about every gore movie you could ever imagine. They were so appreciative of what

Gillis gives an unfortunate actor a faceful of facehugger.

we do. It was refreshing.

"We'd heard a couple of digital guys were going to direct this film," Gillis adds, "and we were like, 'Oh, boy—this might be tough, because it could be difficult [for them] to make a movie like this where the backbone is practical effects.' But they were *so* supportive. What that does is that it removes any competition. We don't have a digital company trying to absorb every shot they can get just to justify a big, bloated overhead. Instead, you have filmmakers who are really going to put their last dime into all these digital shots. They *want* it to look good. So, we can talk very openly and honestly about what we can and can't achieve. It allows us to say, 'We don't think we can do that shot because of this, this and this.' And they can say, 'OK, we'll fill in and do that, that and that.' It was such a great working relationship. They also look like guys who you'd meet at a convention, who would come up and have us sign our *AVP* book and ask us all the questions. They're funny guys. They're smart.

"And beyond that, they had directed before, which was good. They've done a bunch of videos and commercials, a lot of cool stuff, so they're innovative in the way

" 'And I don't smell any acetone!' " Woodruff says with a mischievous grin. "We all share shop envy."

Smiling, Gillis adds, "I hope we get to continue this, because it feels like a partnership."

In addition to creating monsters and visions of other worlds for film, the artists have taken to releasing coffee-table art volumes focusing on their efforts. The first was *Alien vs. Predator: The Creature Effects of ADI* from Design Studio Books. "We've actually done a book on this show as well," Woodruff says; that tome was released by Design Studio last month. "We're also planning on putting together video coverage of the whole building process and finding some way to release it on DVD, because that's something that hasn't been done yet."

Also available from Design Studio is Gillis' *Worlds: A Mission of Discovery*, a visual depiction of humankind's first exploration of life-supporting planets. "That book is a great testament to not just the practical stuff," says Woodruff of his partner's project, "but to using the digital realm to integrate practical elements into real environments. It, much like the work on *AVP—R*, is a *really* great blend."

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