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# MOST DANGEROUS GAME

THE PREDATOR IS BACK AND THE UNIVERSE'S DEADLIEST HUNTER HAS EVOLVED. WE TALK TO SHANE BLACK, FRED DEKKER AND THE CAST ABOUT TAKING A SCI-FI ICON TO THE NEXT LEVEL

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL INTERVIEWS JOANNA OZDOBINSKA, JONATHAN HATFULL

**THERE'S SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU HEAR THAT ALIEN CLICKING SOUND AND THE HUM OF TECH SWITCHING TO INFRA-RED,** when you see that shimmer of something in the trees for just a second... It takes you right back to the first time you watched a band of special forces soldiers getting hunted down in the jungles of South America by a killer from another world, and the thrill of watching *The Predator* in action.

"I'm a huge fan of stuff that's very iconographic," enthuses writer Fred Dekker. "Like *Indiana Jones* and *James Bond* and *Batman*, and I think that the image that you remember seeing in this movie or TV show as a kid, what they look like, what they do, how they act, all of that stuff sticks with you. And then you see it 10, 20, 30 years later and you get that sense of nostalgia

and I don't think it's necessarily the storytelling or the writing or the acting, it's the iconography. I think you see that gleaming brushed copper-steel mask and you know what's under it and you get excited."

Hence the reason why, despite the fact that we suffered through two risible *Alien Vs Predator* movies and 2011's almost satisfying *Predators*, we're anxiously waiting for the right filmmakers to come along and deliver a new *Predator* movie that nails it, that delivers on the things we know and love while giving us something new. Frankly, it's hard to think of a more exciting creative team to take on that task than Dekker (*The Monster Squad*, *Night Of The Creeps*) and his old buddy Shane Black.

Black, of course, has been riding a high since the late Eighties, first as the writer of action hits like *Lethal Weapon* and *The Last Boy Scout*, then as writer-director of *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, *The Nice Guys* and, of course, *Iron Man 3*, and let's not forget he had a small ➤







➤ role in the original *Predator*. Still, even with all his genre, blockbuster and *Predator* bona fides, he tells us that jumping behind the camera for this wasn't just another day at the office.

"It was an experience," he grins. "It did have that nostalgia when walking into the room for the first time and seeing that seven-foot tall guy in front of you. It becomes very real very quickly and you're like: 'Wow, we're doing this.' This is like a mantle of responsibility which is now following up to me saying: 'We've really got to make another one, right?' There's the excitement almost of seeing an old friend that seems to accompany each time the Predator comes back and people go to see the movie and I think it's a responsibility to try to keep it going and try to keep it fresh."

Maintaining that sense of nostalgia and finding a way to surprise audiences would prove to be both the draw and the main challenge for the duo as they started work on the screenplay. Obviously, fans immediately chimed in with questions about where it fits in the canon and Black tells us that it's definitely a sequel rather than a reboot.

"[It's a sequel] to all of them," he affirms. "Even the *Aliens* ones. There's no reason for us to say they didn't happen. We don't have to address them specifically in the movie but as far as I'm concerned, the mythology is ongoing, and I don't see anything blatantly contradictory. In my mind it's just: 30 years ago, there was a noteworthy incursion involving this search for Captain Hopper. It resulted in everyone dying except for Dutch Schaefer. Then there was another invasion in the city hunter episode with Danny Glover's character. Now it's years later and even the son of the Keyes character in *Predator 2*, played by the son of the actor Gary Busey, is in our movie so we referenced the fact that now it's 30 years later."

However, references and namechecks aside, Dekker and Black were determined to make sure the story and mythology of the Predators developed beyond a new gadget or two. Hence the hybridisation, all those mysterious things going on with their DNA, and that big damn Predator we see throwing the classic incarnation through a wall in the trailer.

"The more we thought about it the more we realised that the series essentially never evolved much," Dekker explains. "It brought in the aliens but in terms of the mythology of the Predator world, there really wasn't ever any forward thinking. And so, one of the first things we talked about is: what are they doing here? Yeah, they hunt but do they hunt on other planets, do they only hunt here, why do they hunt, and more importantly what else do they do? Because they've invented interstellar spacecraft so it's not like these are tribal idiots, they're not just going out hunting for food. They're a very sophisticated culture. So, we wound up exploring that a little bit and that was the beginning of our thinking."

But it's not just the Predators who are evolving. Their expeditions to come and make hats out of

ribcages have not been entirely missed by the government. "They've come often enough to earth now, humanity has sort of noticed," Black teases. "It's no longer a situation where they go under the radar in the jungle somewhere or that the city hunter can be explained away as a terrorist – no, we understand now, there's aliens that come to earth and we've established an agency to watch the skies and monitor for the next incident."

This is where Sterling K Brown's mysterious Will Traeger comes in, a man who's keenly interested in what Army Ranger Quinn McKenna (*Logan's* Boyd Holbrook) found while on a mission in Mexico. While Traeger is the man with all the answers, McKenna is the one who finds himself hurled into a situation that's entirely out of his control...

"[Quinn] is a contract gun for hire special forces soldier, a rogue kind of guy, displaced from his family," Holbrook tells us. "He is a good guy, and he's the anchor of it all really. He's put in a bind from the get-go and the military are trying to shut him up about what he knows and keep it under wraps. So, he's always kind of looking over his shoulder and



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**WE TALKED ABOUT: WHAT ARE THEY DOING HERE? THEY'RE A VERY SOPHISTICATED CULTURE**  
FRED DEKKER  
”



Clockwise from top:  
A great cast including Trevante Rhodes, Keegan-Michael Key and Thomas Jane play the PTSD-suffering antiheroes, Alfie Allen's Lynch had better duck, get ready for a new breed of Predator.







## RESHOTS EXPLAINED

Inside **The Predator's** retooled third act

Every time a big movie goes for reshoots we see the same reports, the same concerns, the same gleeful rubbing of hands as people who have been opposed to the movie since the beginning start anticipating being 'proved right'. But, as surely everybody knows by now, reshoots are a part of every big budget movie, and Black is open about what needed to change.

"We had a plot that was complex, and we had a large appetite," he tells us. "We didn't have a lot of money, but we had a large appetite. Compromises were made so that some of the effects weren't as good as we would have wished, and the main problem was that the climax of the film was shot to save money largely during the day. That's one thing to have that during the day somewhere in the middle of the movie but the climax... And the studio was generous and great about it and they said: 'You know what? We agree this works but it's not perfect. We think that'd be much spookier if shot at night.' And they let us go back and the difference is literally day and night, that's what changed."

not really sure about anybody he comes across except for his family."

Turns out, not being sure about who he's coming across is a very reasonable position for our hero to be in as he's promptly thrown on a bus with a group of PTSD-stricken ex-soldiers who have just been kicked out of a VA meeting for starting a fight. There's loudmouth Coyle (Keegan-Michael Key), unpredictable Baxley (Thomas Jane), well-meaning Nettles (Augusto Aguilera), loner Lynch (Alfie Allen), and Quinn's best buddy Williams (Trevante Rhodes). Collectively referred to as the Loonies, they're a bunch of unstable misfits who have been screwed over and abandoned by the government, and they're about to become the only thing standing between the state of Georgia and total carnage. Not exactly your typical square-jawed musclebound alien hunters, then, and that's entirely the point.

"It came from mine and Shane's social views and our political perspective," explains Dekker. "The Eighties was the Reagan era here in the

States and that was a time when it was very fashionable to show these macho heroes who had just come from the gym and were constantly sweating and wisecracking and smoking cigars, and there was a kind of a superman myth. What we've learned in the 30 years is that a lot of that is just crap and it's propaganda, and at the same time we've seen a lot of our servicemen in real life cast aside after they've gone to war, very often for reasons they don't understand and we don't understand.

"So, we thought what if our heroes are the underdogs, what if they're the outcasts?" he continues. "And that led us very quickly to Robert Aldrich and *The Dirty Dozen*. Okay, let's do a *Predator* movie with the Dirty Dozen. They're a bunch of considered losers and outcasts and loonies but the truth is that they're highly trained soldiers who just aren't being used for their skillset, so what if they have to do it for personal reasons? And we got very excited about that as the template for the movie."

The only problem for Holbrook was that he ➤





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DEADLY**  
SHANE BLACK

was supposed to be playing the square-jawed hero, and maintaining that gritty intensity was a little tricky with such a talented cast having quite so much fun. “These guys were all over the place and it was really difficult to not engage and get into the gags and the laughs,” he laughs. “Obviously hanging out with Thomas Jane and Keegan-Michael Key, it was a lot of laughs. We had to go back and shoot another couple of takes because I couldn’t stop laughing! Shane was saying: ‘No, you’re the serious guy!’ and I was like: ‘Why would you put me up against these guys then? What do you expect?’”

While the Loonies are causing havoc on the bus, all hell is breaking loose inside the government facility, where they’re about to discover just what the Predators have been up to. One of the scientists lucky/unlucky enough to be brought in is Casey Bracket, played by Olivia Munn, who has to team up with this gang of unusual individuals in order to make it through the night. “I love this character,” Munn tells us. “She is an evolutionary biologist who is brought in by the government to understand

why this Predator is more advanced than the ones that they’ve seen from before.”

While Dr Bracket can (and does) pick up a gun and defend herself, Munn was keen that the character not fall into the trope of ‘strong female characters’ where the strength is purely literal. “I talked with Shane, I said: ‘I think a lot of times women can either be the love interest or the wife, you know the damsel in distress, or they are this badass *Terminator* kind of girl, and I don’t think either one helps,’” she explains. “I don’t think that she needs to be like badass fucking warrior bitch. Why can’t she just be a woman who’s actually very capable and smart, who is going to help when everyone is trying to survive. And he was like ‘one hundred percent’. So, she was capable of using guns without it being a thing, you know just like guys are. It’s the same feeling if right now we’re in this room, and it there’s a gunman outside, we would all just band together and that’s just the energy that I wanted her to bring.”

Something that becomes abundantly clear during the course of our interviews is just how much work has gone into making sure that the

Olivia Munn is scientist Dr Bracket.





characters in this film go beyond cardboard cut-outs: "We chose misfits," Black explains. "Even the little boy who Jacob Tremblay [plays] is on the autism spectrum and feels sort of shut out from society. There's a misanthropic female scientist who is sort of just in her world and doesn't really care for people as much as she does for animals or dogs. Everyone in the movie is sort of a little quirky, a little tic-y, a little odd. It was important that in the context of the film they have forgotten that they're good."

Speaking of Jacob Tremblay's character, young Rory is at the centre of things as his father Quinn desperately tries to keep him safe after he triggers a device that draws the attention of the alien hunters. It feels unusual to highlight a father-son story so heavily in an R-rated action film, but Dekker reminds us that, given this creative team, that was always going to be the case.

"It's funny you should say that, because you know we did *The Monster Squad* together back in 1987, and then I did *Robocop 3* with a kid and he did *Iron Man 3* with a kid, and so I think when we walked in and sat down in our first meeting we looked at each other and said: 'Well there's gonna be a kid, right?'" he laughs. "We didn't even really have to talk about it: 'I guess we have to because we're us!' But it turned out to be a great choice because it's one of the most important through lines of the whole movie."

Still, just because there's an award-winning child actor in the mix, don't expect *The Predator* to forget its dismembering roots (we already mentioned the ribcages). One of the main challenges facing the film was how to make

## FANNING THE FLAMES

**Fred Dekker** addresses the haters

It's no secret that fan culture has a toxicity problem. We've seen it pop up with *Ghostbusters*, *Star Trek*, and we've spent what feels like the last decade watching the reaction to *The Last Jedi* rumble on. With a movie like *The Predator*, there's always going to be online criticism of every little thing and it's something that Fred Dekker has experience with.

"I did a sequel, I worked on the *Star Trek* franchise on television, I'm very sensitive to the fan response being all about just them wanting to see the same damn thing they've seen a million times," he explains. "So, I pushed from the get-go to stretch the mythology, to push the boundaries, to try and do new things because if you don't then why are we making the movie? I'm intrigued to see how that plays because we're living in a time right now where there's a real fan toxicity where if you do something that breaks the mould of what they expect it to be, they criticise you rather than accepting that the filmmakers were doing what the filmmakers wanted to do."

During shooting, Dekker tells us that he and Black tried to adopt a bunker mentality, but it's not always easy. "We're all reading the same websites," he tells us. "And I've tried to be Jiminy Cricket to Shane's Pinocchio and say this is going to go away, it's the *Snakes On A Plane* thing. This is a notable bomb that had a lot of online presence and asking an audience what they want before you give it to them is a horrible mistake. Because then you're essentially giving up your role as a storyteller and you're just becoming a manager, and that's not what we do. What we do is create stories and tell them to the best of our capabilities and hope that people like them. But I have to believe that if our heart is in it and it's clear that our heart is in it, then people will go along for the ride."

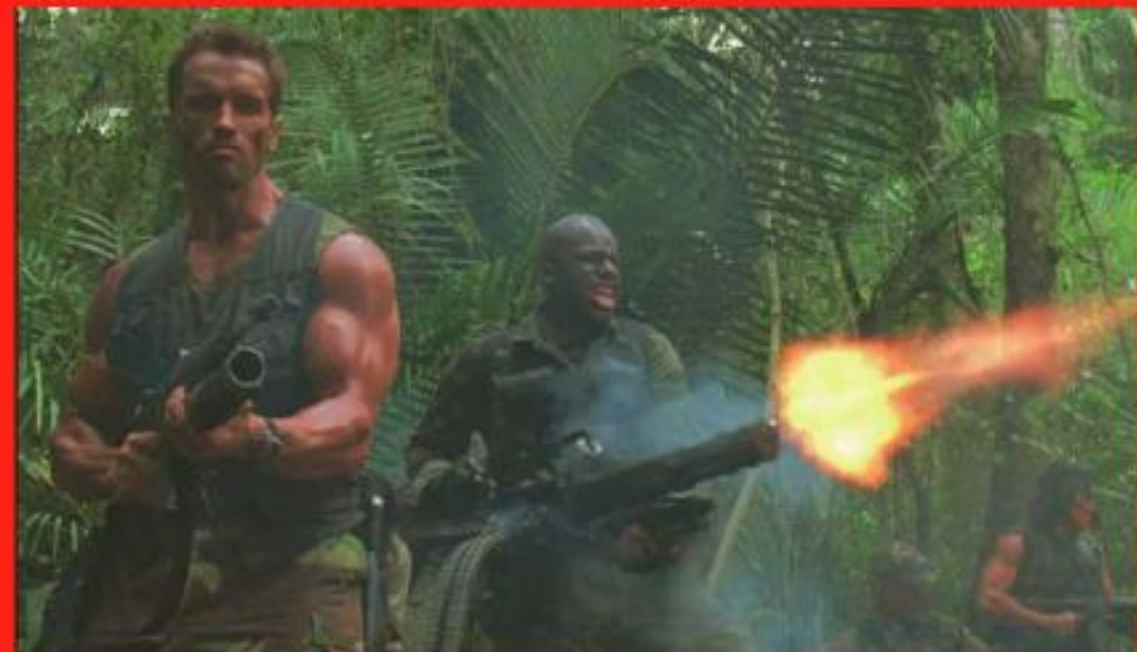
"I've always felt that you're making a movie not just for the people that are going to go on opening Friday night, you're making a movie for the people who are going to enjoy it ten years from now," he continues. "I made two movies in the Eighties, *Night Of The Creeps* and *The Monster Squad*, and they both bombed at the box office, it was crippling and heart-breaking for me, essentially stopped my career in its tracks, and then 20 years later I find out that both of these movies have massive followings and if you show them in a theatre they'll sell out. So, I think the idea that we need to pay attention to what's happening right now is foolhardy because movies should stand the test of time. If every filmmaker was only concerned with their opening weekend box office, they're in the wrong business."

Our heroes are outsiders but they've got the skills we need.



## PREDATOR EVOLUTION

How the **Predator** movies have changed with the times



### PREDATOR 1987

**HEROES:** Musclebound special ops guys

**GUNS:** All the guns

**BODY COUNT:** Epic

**PRESIDENT:** Ronald Reagan

**TONE:** Starts out as a knockabout Eighties action movie as Arnie and his team of ultimate badasses head into the jungle to mow down a village full of baddies and rescue a missing Captain. However, the tables turn, and they start getting picked off one by one in a mix of Vietnam allegory and weapons porn. It's brilliant.

**IN A QUOTE:** "I ain't got time to bleed."



### PREDATOR 2 1990

**HEROES:** Overworked LA cops

**GUNS:** A lot, but less ridiculous than the first

**BODY COUNT:** High

**PRESIDENT:** George HW Bush

**TONE:** The focus shifts to the LA gang war and the underfunded police department. There's still a lot of violence but there's also anti-authoritarianism as Danny Glover and his squad are left to fight alone, and Gary Busey's swaggering government team are decimated in a single set-piece.

**IN A QUOTE:** "Shit! Why can't this guy stay on the ground?"



### AVP: ALIEN VS PREDATOR 2004

**HEROES:** Scientists on an Antarctic exhibition

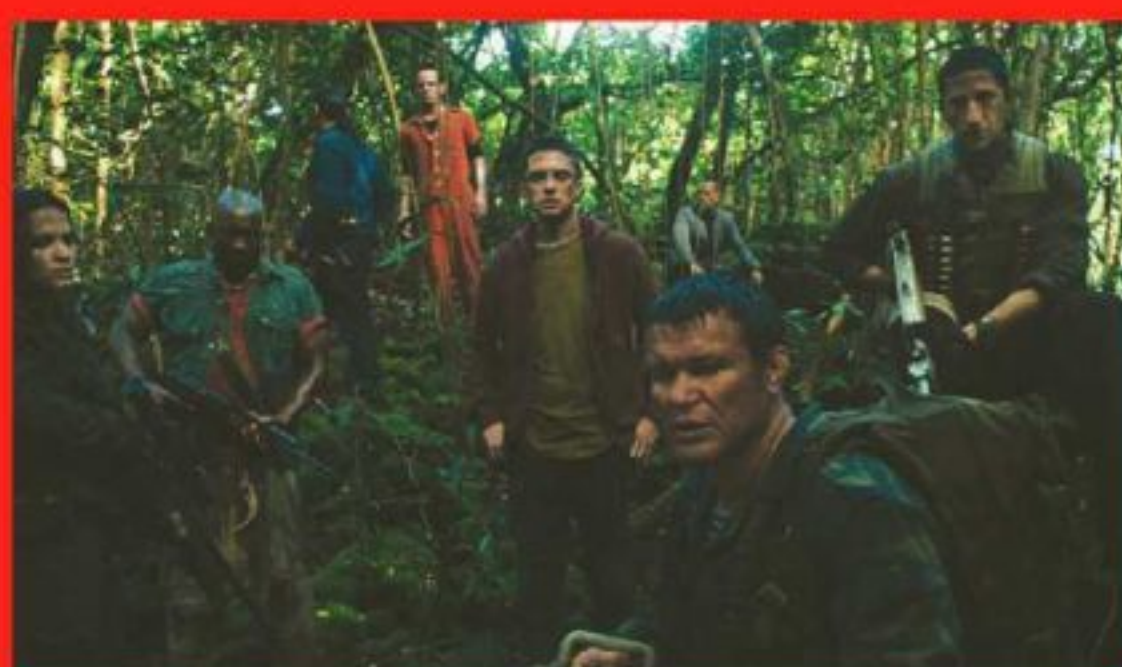
**GUNS:** Not many

**BODY COUNT:** Moderate

**PRESIDENT:** George W Bush

**TONE:** You'd struggle to pick out a tone beyond exploiting lucrative crossover potential. It's a mad fumble to fit in enough fan-service referencing (look, it's Lance Henriksen!) and figuring out how an Alien and a Predator would actually fight.

**IN A QUOTE:** "During a big game hunt, the animals being hunted don't arm the hunters!"



### PREDATORS 2010

**HEROES:** The deadliest people on Earth

**GUNS:** Some, but increasingly few

**BODY COUNT:** Relatively low

**PRESIDENT:** Barack Obama

**TONE:** A combination of a Robert Rodriguez fever dream and an attempt to get back to what was good about the first film: the hunt. There's a slight attempt to move away from musclebound men, and it very nearly works before a fumbled final act.

**IN A QUOTE:** "This planet is a game preserve. And we're the game."

sure that a monster we are all so familiar with remains a genuine threat, something that puts the audience on edge.

"We can't scare you anymore by showing you the Predator face because everyone knows it too well," acknowledges Black. "But what we can do is remind you why it was scary in the first place, remind you why you ought to be scared of it. We can show you how fast it moves, keep it mysterious, really try to film it fast and deadly like it's meant to be and remind you: 'Oh, that's right!'. In the movies these things are really creepy, get back to that – that was our goal."

"And the R-rating helps us because ...

Remember how you would see Wolverine in previous movies and in the background, you would see him going: "Grrrr!" and then you'd go: 'This is PG but did he just kill that guy?' he asks. "So finally, in *Logan* they show you [the claws] right up through the throat and you go: 'I knew it! I knew he was killing people!'"

Having starred in *Logan* himself, it's a point of view that Boyd Holbrook can get behind. "The Predator has always been a bad motherfucker," he laughs. "Logan was never let loose until *Logan*, so I think it's the same thing. I mean, with the Predator it's always been no-holds-barred."

While we have a huge number of unanswered questions about the specifics of the plot and the Predator secrets, it's going to be





# THE PREDATOR

Most Dangerous Game



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 MOTHERF\*\*\*ER!  
 IT'S ALWAYS  
 BEEN NO HOLDS  
 BARRED**  
 BOYD HOLBROOK

”



Clockwise from top:  
 Jacob Tremblay plays  
 Boyd Holbrook's son  
 Rory, the Predators'  
 evolution is explored,  
 Baxley (Thomas Jane)  
 under fire, a new spin  
 on an iconic design,  
 McKenna (Holbrook)  
 takes aim.



very interesting to see how these tones come together. “Well, I think our brains work in synchronicity,” Dekker tells us. “[Shane and I] think very similarly in terms of storytelling and where we think differently. I think our differences are very complementary. Because I will always push for the emotion and the sentimentality and that moment of ‘oh my God I can’t believe that just happened’, I’m very much influenced by Spielberg in that sense. And Shane is much more wry and dark and interested in the wisecrack in the face of adversity. So, the combination of those two actually ends up being kind of terrific.”

“I think it’s just fitting that if we were going to

try to reimagine this then you need someone like Shane Black with that kind of humour, wittiness, spark, snap to it all,” adds Holbrook. “I think what Shane has done has just gone so much deeper, with all due respect to the original – it’s a great film, go back and watch it. It’s kind of why I wanted to walk the same path, to be a part of something that’s just stuck around. It’s just a fun world to live in.”

As a Shane Black fan, no matter how you feel about sequels and franchises, there’s something undeniably exciting about how thrilled he clearly is to be revisiting and re-energising a movie from his youth, even if he makes a jokey reference to a midlife crisis. “There was a

magical time when I was much younger, and I was working on *Lethal Weapon*, I was working on the *Predator*, I had written *The Monster Squad* with Fred Dekker... it was just so much happening and we were so young and full of enthusiasm for this business,” he remembers.

“And I think after a while you get tired, it gets repetitive or you get frustrated by things, life happens too and ultimately I was feeling old – at 50-something where did the time go? I wanted to say: ‘Let’s be kids again’ so I called up Fred and I said: ‘Remember we used to stand in line in Westwood Village by UCLA and try to watch *Night Shift* and *Porky’s Revenge*? I just would love to go back and do that again’.

“We thought this would be fun, a lark – we’d go back and be kids again. It’s not a lark, it’s two goddamn years so be careful what you wish for! But after all this work we have got a pop culture shape that is hopefully worthy of the first one. We can’t equal that, but we can make it in a shape that has that fun and try our best to scrape out a bit of *Predator* that’s not just a studio movie, that’s not just a CG fest but that really feels like we’re honouring something. In this case my dream would be if John McTiernan would come back to me and say: ‘Wow, you really did good.’”

*The Predator* is released on 12 September.