



JODIE WHITTAKER'S DOCTOR WHO

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DIRECTOR
EXCLUSIVE!

THE PREDATOR

How SHANE BLACK
is bringing the
fear factor back
to cinema's
ultimate
killer

THE NUN

The Conjuring
saga gets back
in the habit

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DISENCHANTMENT



THE WALKING DEAD

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•••
A “MIDLIFE CRISIS” BROUGHT SHANE BLACK BACK TO
THE PREDATOR UNIVERSE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 30
YEARS – AND, AS HE TELLS RICHARD EDWARDS, HE’S OUT
TO MAKE CINEMA’S ULTIMATE HUNTER SCARY AGAIN
•••

LET
US
PREY

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a green jacket and black pants, is aiming a handgun with both hands. She is standing in a locker room with blue lockers in the background. The scene is dimly lit, with a strong red light source creating a dramatic effect.





Lesson learnt:
don't touch
the hair.

SHANE BLACK DIDN'T MAKE IT TO THE end of the original *Predator*. Starring as the wisecracking Hawkins – the youngest member of Arnold Schwarzenegger's elite team of soldiers – he was the first to be eliminated, the most expendable role in an ensemble where life expectancies were, by dramatic necessity, a tad limited.

Now, some 31 years later, Black's making a return to the killer alien saga as director and writer with the efficiently titled *The Predator*.

"The thing is, I didn't really consider myself to be an essential part of the first *Predator*!" he confides to *SFX* when we meet in a San Diego hotel, the day before the film's Comic-Con panel. "I know it makes for a good point of reference in a story, but really I was just there to observe and get murdered as quickly as possible. So I really didn't expect to revisit it.

"But I will tell you I was surprised by its longevity," he continues. "The [Predator] costume was cobbled together in a period of weeks by Stan Winston. The title '*Predator*'

was just an afterthought when they said, 'We can't call it *The Hunter*, because there's a show by that name.' And yet these seemingly very 11th hour decisions ended up generating these concepts which have lingered in the zeitgeist for over 30 years. I suppose there was always a vector in place that I would inevitably be confronted with it some day!"

Yet for much of those three decades, there was little indication that Black was destined for another face-off with one of those "ugly motherfuckers". Off the back of *Lethal Weapon* he became one of Hollywood's hottest screenwriters (the first *Lethal Weapon* sequel, *Last Action Hero*, *The Long Kiss Goodnight*), before turning director with the excellent *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* and *Iron Man 3* – all projects notable for their complete lack of an alien with weird four-way mandibles. But this particular franchise had extra appeal thanks to Black's fond memories of having a good time "as a wide-eyed kid with my buddies".

"The Predator itself was the most indelible example of pure '80s pop art – the *Rambo* craze combined with the *Alien* craze, with a slight wink because there was that humour in it, too. And they were these muscle-bound guys who were so over the top, and such a crack team of X-whatever special ops soldiers, that you thought, 'Okay, that's just a very pure concept.'

"I had a bit of a midlife crisis and I thought, 'Wouldn't it be great, just as a lark, to go back and be a kid again? What could it hurt to revisit a time that was so special, and a type of filmmaking before videogames and CG polluted the market with visual overload? When you're forced to rely on a bit more ingenuity to conjure the same sort of effects? It'll be a lark. Let's do it!'"

THE BLACK LIST

While Black himself has been away from the hunt for three decades, the Predator species most certainly has not, returning in two straight sequels (*Predator 2* and *Predators*), two brand-splicing crossovers (the *Alien Vs Predator* movies), and numerous comics and games. And yet, considering the Predator's status as one of the most iconic extraterrestrials in cinema – up there on a cosmic plinth with Giger's *Alien* – it's been an awfully long time since it's done anything truly memorable on screen. In fact, it wouldn't be a stretch to say its only truly classic outing was John McTiernan's 1987 original – and that the formula for what makes a successful *Predator* movie is far from set in stone.

"[We started with] a session between Fred [Dekker, co-writer] and me watching the movies, and asking, 'What's iconic?' Well, there's the tension of the hunt, so we



Boyd Holbrook's Quinn finds himself leading the fightback.



No time wasted when it comes to throwing his weight around.



Unsurprisingly, his time on Love Island had proved brief.

acknowledge that any interaction of a *Predator* movie has to in some way include a version of framing it as a hunt. Also, the tension of the unseen is very important. And then the brutality, which started to get lost as the movies went PG. So we said, 'Okay, let's make sure we get this at least rated R,' so that when the Predator strikes, the results have to be calamitous, and often bloody.

"It was our task to satisfy those requirements and stay true, so that John McTiernan, were

he to look at this after it was finished, would hopefully say something like, 'Nice job, guys.'"

One of the biggest challenges facing the new movie is that the original *Predator* is almost as memorable for the interplay between its testosterone-filled military heroes as its alien visitor – like *Aliens*, released a year earlier, it basically wrote the blueprint for putting soldiers in the crosshairs of an angry ET. So it seems one hell of a gamble pitting the Predator against a new rag-tag assortment of soldiers...

“When the Predator strikes, the results have to be calamitous”

"I think if you're going to go back after 30 years you can change some things, but don't change too much," counters Black. "I don't think anyone will want a *Predator* where a group of pre-school kids teams up with the host of a late-night horror show to go to Miami Beach to battle Predators in a Pachinko tournament. You don't want to go that far."

Yet the soldiers in *The Predator* are a different breed to the cartoonish, bulging biceps brigade personified by Arnie, Jesse Ventura and Carl Weathers in the original movie. Led by Boyd (*Logan*) Holbrook's Quinn McKenna, "the Loonies" are a bunch of military outcasts who come together when the transport taking them to a psychiatric unit has a close encounter with a certain visitor from outer space.

"We made a decision not to go with the sort of over-the-top muscles or the stunt casting," explains Black. "But if you don't have that, how do you make them a little more vulnerable, a little more broken and relatable than the super soldiers who populated that first film? We toned them down to the extent that these are the more marginalised and broken contingent – the least likely, as opposed to the most likely, people you would choose to save the world. I loved just bouncing random, broken people off each other in a movie, and getting actors good enough that all I have to do is essentially stay out of their way."

"We also brought in a kid as part of this group of misfits [played by *Room*'s Jacob Tremblay], who was on the autism spectrum, and a misanthropic female scientist who's not very fond of people, but loves animals [X-Men: *Apocalypse*'s Olivia Munn]. They're misfits who don't quite fit in, who've been marginalised. They were suddenly thrust onto a stage of having to save the world."

IF IT BLEEDS WE CAN KILL IT

Arguably even more of a potential banana skin than the casting is the Predator itself. Only the most die-hard fan could claim it's anywhere near as scary as it was back in 1987, a symptom of the sort of over-familiarity that's also neutered Freddy Krueger, Jason Voorhees and the Xenomorph in recent outings – by now humanity has defeated them in numerous ways, and they've even been made kid-friendly and cute as plushies and Pop! vinyl figures. →

"HE'S REALLY THE ANCHOR OF THE STORY"

Boyd Holbrook is Quinn McKenna



WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT QUINN MCKENNA?

McKenna is a contract gun-for-hire. He's estranged from his family, which is a fairly large, significant part of the narrative: becoming a father to this kid who he's not so much a father to, and then leading this group of men who are in need of direction, a gang of misfits. McKenna falls in with them, but he's really the anchor of the story.

FROM WHAT WE'VE SEEN, THE LOONIES ARE VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE SOLDIERS OF THE ORIGINAL MOVIE...

Oh, yeah. With all due respect to the original, there's a lot of cosmetic things going on in that film: the Native American guy has a bandana on; Jesse Ventura, the cowboy, chews tobacco. But Shane has really put so much of his depth into these characters, and you'll see the camaraderie in this. It's taken the original clay, and he's shaping it into these really odd, wacky, *Looney Tunes* kind of band of brothers.

WHAT'S QUINN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH CASEY?

They're kind of like... what was that couple who used to rob banks together? Bonnie and Clyde. There's a "pushing it to the limits" sort of quality. She's a really, really strong, grounded character. It's a great little yin and yang back and forth between them. We have to gain each other's trust, of course.

THERE'S A LOT OF IMPRESSIVE PROSTHETICS IN THE MOVIE.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE WALKING ONTO SET AND SEEING A PREDATOR IN FRONT OF YOU?

We had these seven-foot tall actors in really expensive suits. One of them got a little too hot one day, and had a spill. It was insane - you have a whole team of guys operating part of his face, and then you have the actor within the suit playing the role. I cannot believe how talented they are, and how scary and how realistic these things look.

YOU'VE LIVED THROUGH A PREDATOR INVASION NOW. IF A PREDATOR ACTUALLY DID COME TO TOWN, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

I would probably get to a very high secure location, and just watch through binoculars. I think that'd be fascinating enough. I'd love to see some aliens.

Richard Edwards



Someone's been polishing their mask...



A larger, hybrid Predator is joining the fight on Earth.

"That was a very real problem," Black admits, "because although the Predator make-up is still enduring and really cool, it's got to the point of recognisability where you can walk out the door at Comic-Con, see a pretty serviceable Predator walking around and go, 'Damn, you could film that!'"

"You can't really change the make-up," he goes on. "What you can do is change the way you film it, so that it doesn't look clunky, and never reveal it in harsh light or for too long. You can emphasise again the elements that made the Predator frightening in the first movie, which were how fast, how effortlessly, bloodily efficient it is. And once again, don't see too much of him. He's a hunter. He appears, he strikes, he retreats. Just keep him as deadly, as fast, agile and almost cheetah-like as possible. The more you see him walking around doing stuff or making himself breakfast, the less it's going to be effective."

Black also utilised another weapon in his battle against familiarity. So in the long-honoured tradition of creature

“There must be scientists building those things on Predator World”

sequels introducing us to something bigger and deadlier than we saw before - the Alien Queen being the classic example - *The Predator* will introduce a new genetically modified, souped-up version of the species.

"What we've touched on in the movie is the notion that this is a civilisation that, yes, goes to planets and hunts; they wear tribal garb and netting; they carry skulls; they have spears and masks. But yet for all their ceremonial look, they arrived in an interstellar spaceship. Which means there must be scientists who built those things on Predator World. They're not just jumping around in trees, making those spaceships, so the idea is that a →



S U T T I N G U P

Special effects expert Steve Johnson has been a Hollywood heavyweight on numerous major movies, including *Ghostbusters* and *Big Trouble In Little China*. But creating the original Predator suit was a nightmare in the jungle...



Off-duty Predator, rocking his Rab C Nesbitt cosplay.

Even Predators can't resist an occasional jazz hands.



WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE LIKE ON PREDATOR?

This story is really complicated – because some of it was good and some of it was really, really bad. I worked on *Predator* for quite a long time – and I was working on the suit for Van Damme before Stan Winston and Arnold were involved. Van Damme was the original Predator but as everyone knows he got let go and it might have been because of my suit and the fact it gave him very limited

mobility [laughs]. I have a new book called *Rubberhead Volume II* and I have a whole chapter on this because it obviously did not end how I wanted...

YOU MEAN, NOT GETTING A CREDIT ON IT?

I thought I did get a credit on it! Didn't I? I got famously fired from it, to cut a long story short. Or at least they fired me from designing the suit [laughs]. But what they didn't fire me from is all the gore

that is in there. They still used a lot of my work. So there are my skinned and flayed bodies in there. Carl Weathers getting his arms cut off. The chests exploding. That was what I did on *Predator*. I love doing that stuff and it was actually a really gory movie for the time.

NOW THERE IS A NEW PREDATOR, WHICH WILL PROBABLY INVOLVE SOME CGI CREATURES. AS YOU HAD SUCH COMPLICATIONS MAKING THE

ORIGINAL SUIT, DO YOU THINK LIFE MIGHT HAVE BEEN EASIER WITH CGI AS AN OPTION?

Some of the stuff I am most proud of in my career used both: *The Abyss*, *Species* and *Spider-Man*... It just depends how you use the CGI. There is no way to make some movies now without CGI. So it has helped the industry because now we can see new interpretations and stories – and I think that can only be a good thing. **Calum Waddell**

"SHE STUDIES HOW PREDATORS EVOLVE AND CHANGE"

Olivia Munn is Casey Bracket



HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP CASEY BRACKET?

She loves her job, she loves her dogs and those are her passions in life. She's the top of her field and she studies how Predators evolve and change - she's brought in by the government to figure out why this Predator is so much more advanced than the Predators they've seen in the past.

WOULD YOU SAY THE CHARACTERS ARE MORE NUANCED THAN IN THE ORIGINAL MOVIE?

Instead of being these badass military guys, they are like a dirtier dirty dozen. They're a bunch of misfits who are not the first people you'd call to save the world. We band together and become a unit, really for survival.

YOU DID X-MEN: APOCALYPSE A COUPLE OF YEARS BACK. ARE YOU NOW SEEKING OUT ACTION-HEAVY ROLES?

On *X-Men* I did all the fight scenes myself, and after that I got that bug, I wanted to do a full-on action movie. But a lot of times in movies, when a woman is doing lots of badass action stuff, she does it in service to be the image of what we keep putting out with women: you either have to be a damsel in distress, or a hardcore badass - but not everyone has to be so tough to be respected. For her, as a scientist, I wanted her not to be proficient in weapons, but I wanted her to know how to pick up a gun and know how to use it. I said to Shane that we don't see men picking up a gun and saying, "Show me how to use it." Nobody asks why, they just go, "Of course, he's a guy. He knows how to use it." So I said, "Can we have the same assumption that we've had with men for years and years?" He was like, "Yeah, I'm going to do that." The action that my character takes on is simply for survival, so she's not a superhuman, and she's not a trained soldier. But she has willpower and adrenaline that kicks in, raising a very normal person to a level of activity that they didn't realise they would be doing.

Richard Edwards

GETTY (3)



The Predators are keen to make amends for previous defeats.



Jacob Tremblay as misfit Rory.

group of rogue Predators on their world is not happy that they've been bested not once but twice - and perhaps more - by humans. They send their champions, and the champions never come home.

"This is not sitting well with a group that's particularly contentious and ambitious. So I think they conspire to produce a second Predator, the one you see in the movie, who's basically an assassin. He is bred using traits from other species that they have hunted to be the enforcer, the guy who just gets it done. He has a sort of under armour as it were, almost like a crustacean. He goes from one colour to another like a chameleon, so he's got these weird survival skills. When this larger Predator steps out and reveals himself, hopefully audiences say, 'Well, at least that's not the traditional Predator outfit we're used to.'"

The origins of Predator- plus are a nod to a

“He is bred using traits from other hunted species to be the enforcer”

mythology that's gradually expanded via movies and comics since the creature first appeared as a mysterious (but lethal) blur in that Central American jungle. Black says that

he likes to read the comics (though he says that little made it into the movie: "at one point there was a line about them coming [to Earth] since medieval times"), and says that - unlike some other franchises that deny the existence of any sequels inconvenient to continuity - he isn't pretending that any of the follow-ups don't exist.

"In my mind, in '87 there was this experience with →



TEAM PLAYER

Veteran casting director Jackie Burch on how the legendary ensemble of *Predator* came together...



The Alpha Male Champs finalists, 1987.

HOW DID YOU GET THE CASTING JOB ON *PREDATOR*?

Arnold had a lot of trust in me and also, by that time, I had done some other big projects with him and the cast had really gelled. What every big actor wants when they are doing a new movie is for people that are easy to work with on the screen.

When I got the *Predator* script obviously the big thing was to find a lot of muscle. My take on it, and the director later told me I was correct, is that these guys had probably all been Vietnam veterans. There were a lot of Vietnam movies around at the

time, so I took that as my lead – a more exaggerated version of them because obviously this was a sci-fi movie...

DO YOU REMEMBER THE CASTING PROCESS?

Arnold was already cast. Jean-Claude Van Damme had done some work by then but he was not a major star. I think when we cast him he felt that this was going to make him a big name – however, the original suit just did not work for him and the *Predator* itself began to develop. Originally, if I remember, we wanted someone to do some martial arts work but

obviously that was not how the film turned out. Jesse Ventura I cast because of *The Running Man*, which was just before *Predator* and I worked on that as well. No one really knew him back then, but he was trying to get a big break after being a wrestler – believe it or not he was worried about where his career was going. Carl Weathers was quite well built and he had been in *Rocky* so he was great for being opposite Arnold.

SO IT WAS QUITE A TESTOSTERONE-FUELLED SET?

I guess it was [laughs]. Actually, one of the biggest challenges was

that we needed a strong actress to stand with Arnold. That was quite a long casting process – but I loved Elpidia Carrillo, she was great.

The audience who had seen *Commando* responded really well to Arnold being with a woman of a different ethnicity. I am not sure why that was, but in our feedback from *Commando* that was what people really loved – that little love story, which was unusual for the time I guess. Hollywood was so conservative. So with *Predator*, and also *The Running Man*, that is why you see him with more exotic leading ladies. **Calum Waddell**



Walking tall on a good hair day.

Dutch Schaefer's patrol, looking for Jim Hopper. Then there was the second one, which took place. And then there was the third one and the *AvP* universe. It's like, who's to say? There was a mention in the [new] film, that's since been cut, that humans have suspected there have been abductions. I've tried to service the fact that it's not a reboot, but a sequel that implies it's simply 30 years following the first one. The difference is that Predators are up to something. They didn't just sit around. They've evolved, and they've done stuff.

"On Earth, the first encounters flew under the radar, or were disbelieved, and have given way to an environment where it's sufficiently prevalent that the government, or a private agency, has noticed. So they've appointed a group to await the next incursion. This movie is the story of that next incursion. There's a group of professionals who are waiting for it, and there's a group of completely ignorant grunts who just got caught up in it. To me the fun is watching all the professionals get diced and sliced, and then it's up to the grunts to save the world when no one else can."

The Predator may have a lucrative track record at the box office, but there's still a sense that Black needs to save something in the real



Shane Black talks the troops through a scene.

world – the franchise's soul. The question is, how does he feel – after two-and-a-half years on the movie – about his return to the saga. And did it help him recapture that lost youth?

"It was a mistake, I think, thinking it would just be a fun lark, because my God, it's been tough!" he laughs. "Working within the limitations of a budget, shooting in Vancouver in the rain, greenscreen every day..."

"The good news is that all of this knits together very well. It's been a ride and a nostalgia thing. It was mostly a midlife crisis

thing, if I were to be honest about it. If it hasn't exactly made me feel like a kid again, it's certainly reinvigorated me to keep going. I'm blessed and honoured to be viable in moviemaking – I've seen lots of people around me fall off. The fact that after 30-something years I'm still able to even do this is something I'm eternally grateful for. I don't know why or how I was given that opportunity, but I'm grateful for it." ●

The Predator is in cinemas from 13 September.

THE HUNT CONTINUES

Dark Horse's Chris Warner on the new *Predator* comic book



The returning comic book is not linked to the new film.

HAVING DRAWN 1989'S inaugural miniseries, Chris Warner knows just what it is that makes Predators so scary and formidable. Now Dark Horse's senior editor is penning a sequel to 2017's five-partner *Hunters*

for artists Agustin Padilla and Neeraj Menon.

"The Predator is just flat out cool as all hell!" he laughs. "It's one of the greatest monster designs ever. But as I've gotten older, I've learned to appreciate

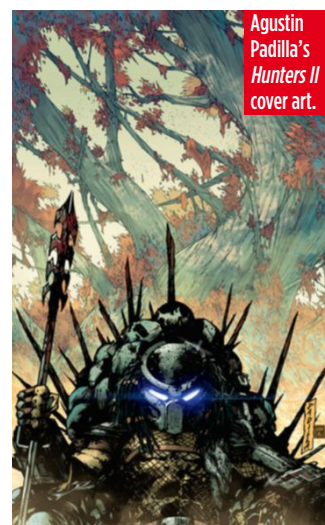
Predator as metaphor. In a real sense, we are the Predators as we hunt for sport without giving it a lot of thought to what our target species think about it or what the repercussions are. Let's not forget that humans almost wiped out the American bison in less than a century. To be honest, I kind of root for the Predators!"

Mostly set in Afghanistan, *Hunters II* focuses on Tyler Swain, who has fatefully misrepresented his first encounter with the Predators in the original series. "Good stories need to be about something more than just monsters and guns and stuff blowing up. Hopefully we're providing that," says Warner, who reveals that *Hunters II* shares some themes with Shane Black's new blockbuster.

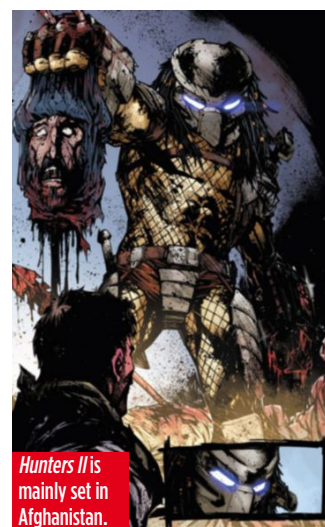
"There's some serendipitous common ground, but I've had this *Hunters* idea rattling around in my head for many years," he explains. "I prefer not to get wound too tightly into established continuity, so I like to use the first film as my touchstone."

While Black has stated that he wanted there to once again be a sense of mystery to the Predators, Warner believes that their unknowable alienness is essential to their appeal. "The mystery is what makes the Predators interesting," he says. "Since day one of Dark Horse creating Predator comics, the main premise we've hewed to was that you don't get into the Predators' heads."

The fact that the Predators don't really speak also enhances their shadowy qualities. "Humans always have the fear of the other, and their inability to directly communicate doesn't help,"



Agustin Padilla's *Hunters II* cover art.



Hunters II is mainly set in Afghanistan.

reasons Warner. "From a writing standpoint, having the Predators not speak is far easier, since their speaking would almost certainly sound ridiculous." **Stephen Jewell**

Predator: Hunters II #1 is out now.