

PREDATOR

Arnold Schwarzenegger commandos play FRIDAY THE 13TH in the jungle with ALIEN.

By Frederick S. Clarke

20th Century-Fox's upcoming summer hybrid, PREDATOR, produced by Lawrence Gordon, Joel Silver, and John Davis, combines elements of two of their top grossing films. The COMMANDO meets ALIEN story is basically THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME updated with a science fiction motif. Formerly called HUNTER, the James and John Thomas screenplay features a creature that is the ultimate predator. Like the terrestrial chameleon, it has the ability to mimic whatever background environment it inhabits so perfectly, that it becomes completely invisible when motionless. When moving, a faint rippling outline betrays its presence.

The creature is a hunter. It enjoys a challenge. The Predator travels from world to world in a spaceship which is also chameleon-like, searching for the most dangerous being to stalk and destroy. On Earth, the game happens to be Arnold Schwarzenegger, who plays "Dutch" Schaefer, head of an elite paramilitary unit. The Predator comes to our world just as Schwarzenegger and his men are investigating a downed helicopter in the dense South American jungle. It proceeds to hunt the highly trained men, eliminating them one by one until it and Arnold Schwarzenegger are the only ones left.

But the creature does give them a sporting chance. At one point it has a perfect opportunity to kill an unarmed man, and



Arnold Schwarzenegger and his elite core of commandos encounter the ultimate predator, an alien from outer space, in the jungle of South America in PREDATOR, which 20th Century-Fox opens June 5.

simply walks away. It calls its ship by means of a sparkling wand-like device which doubles as a weapon. At the climax this wand is used against the alien in a situation similar to Bond fighting Oddjob with his own razor-rimmed derby. The film was directed by John McTiernan (NOMADS) in Mexico and will be released nationwide by Fox on June 5.

Originally, Fox contracted the film's special effects out to two companies: Richard Edlund's Boss Film Creature Shop for alien designs and R. Greenberg Associates in New York for opticals. Producer Joel Silver had worked closely with Bob Greenberg on the effects for XANADU. Due to dissatisfaction with the initial makeup designs, PREDATOR's effects were yanked from Boss and given to Stan Winston, best known for the rod puppet work on the alien queen in ALIENS.

Steve Johnson, one-time

supervisor for all of Boss Film's Creature Shop effects, was initially in charge of creating the working mechanical Predator. Johnson contributed significantly to the effects of POLTERGEIST II, nominated for this year's Oscar, but is not among the nominees cited by Boss. Unfortunately, too many hands were involved in the Predator design. "We didn't design it and I was against the design from the beginning," said Johnson. "When we finally got it finished, the filmmakers realized it looked like their design, which was a man-in-a-suit."

The optical work by R. Greenberg Associates involved creating the creature's disappearing act and various shots of the alien spacecraft. The invisibility effect is said to be created by filming the actor who plays the creature in a prefabricated bright red suit, possessing the exact same shape and dimensions as the sculpted

rubber monster suit worn while in its visible stage. The suit is a brilliant red to delineate it sharply against the predominant greens of the jungle locations, using a process akin to blue screen to generate a traveling matte for the effect. Once the monster, suited in red, is filmed, an identical camera move is repeated using a computerized motion control camera, which records only the background. The two negatives are later combined with an animated shimmer revealing a vague outline of the creature moving through the greenery as the background bends

around its shape. When it stops, it vanishes completely.

According to Johnson, one planned shot that was to take advantage of this "cloaking device" was later dropped. "The men are gathered around with machine guns searching for the alien," said Johnson. "After they exit frame, the monster begins moving, and we realize it had been there the whole time standing next to them, and they never knew it."

It was director John McTiernan's idea to give the creature backward-bent legs, a third joint like that of a satyr's leg, according to Johnson. "I thought it was a great idea," he said. "I had always wanted to try something like that. I don't think the concept's ever been done as extensively as it was to have been done in this film."

According to Johnson, a company called McCallister Corporation has been working with a team of scientists for ten years on a similar leg exten-

sion. The product is intended to increase a runner's speed by means of the larger gait it provides. It's expected to be on the market in three to four years. "This team of scientists with access to all kinds of money and research material hasn't been able to perfect the thing yet," said Johnson. "I knew from the beginning that it couldn't be done as a self-contained unit. But McTiernan insisted we do the trick self-contained, meaning that we'd use no wires, and the actor would walk around the jungle in 12-inch leg extensions."

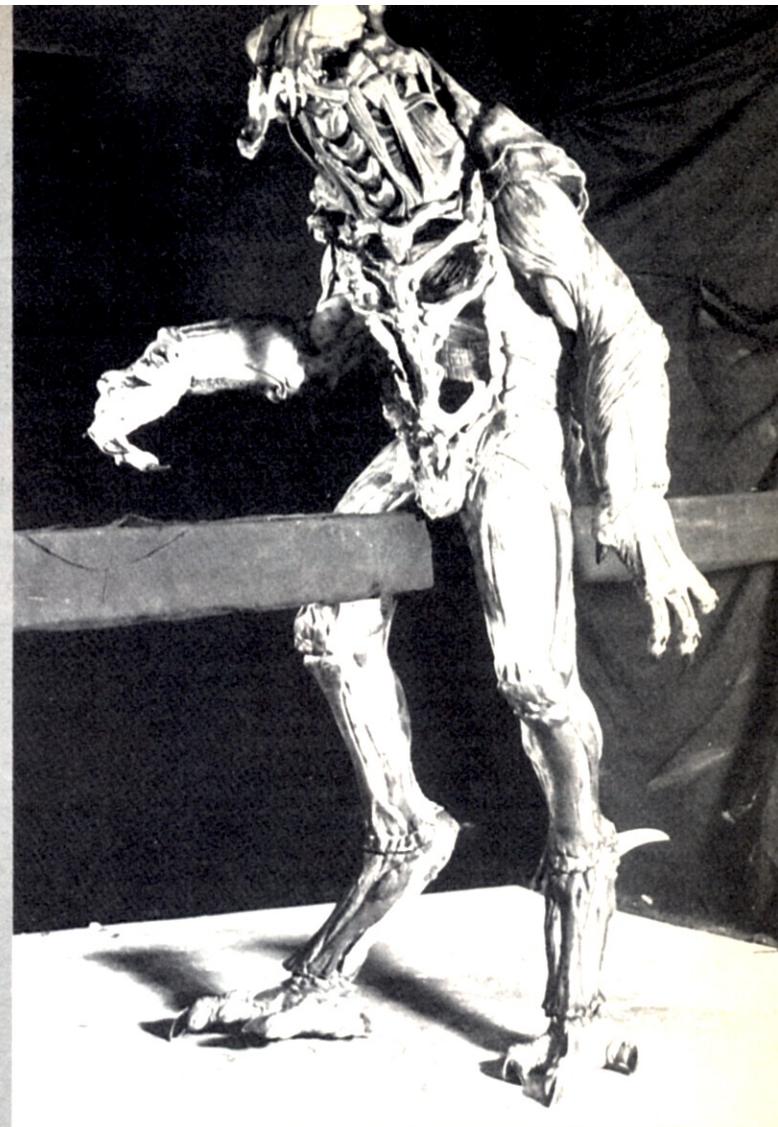
Johnson hired ALIENS effects expert Doug Beswick to build the extensions. Beswick's assistant, makeup artist Tony Gardner, tried-out the leg extensions at Boss Film. "Tony could almost walk a few feet with these backward-bent legs," remembered Johnson. "There had to be someone there at all times to spot him in case he fell on the concrete floor. It looked clumsy, was really tiring for him, and it was dangerous as hell."

Imagine how it would have looked in the jungle. Rumor has it that director James Cameron was called in as a consultant to view the unfortunate-looking test footage. His previous assignments directing THE TERMINATOR and ALIENS attest to his ability at shooting these kinds of effects sequences. His reaction to the footage was that it looked like a guy on crutches hobbling through the woods. So much for the ultimate predator...

Johnson came up with the simplest, most obvious solution: "Build a harness for the actor, string him up with wires, and carefully storyboard the shots so you don't see the full figure too many times," he said. "You just show it once or twice as a specialized shot to sell it to the audience, and the rest of the time simply shoot around it." Johnson's crew constructed extra feet with metal braces that could be used without the harness for close shots. Boss did several video tests with the harness just to prove to the studio that it would work.

Johnson said that the effect worked beautifully. It wasn't costly, was safer for the actor, and any number of takes could be photographed with it. The wires took the weight off the actor but still made it appear he had contact with the ground. Martial arts actor Jean-Claude Van Damme, who was to play the Predator could move as quickly and gracefully as a lithe leopard, leap over obstacles and ascend steep inclines—in effect, he resembled a stealthy predator. "Producer Joel Silver was totally cooperative with us at Fox," Johnson recalled. "He understood the problems and limitations. Unfortunately, other people had the final say."

Down in Mexico, the production team was generally enthusiastic about the idea. Johnson pointed out that in order to film a self-contained unit, it would have been necessary to build braces all the way up Van Damme's thighs. This would have made the propor-



The alien PREDATOR built by Boss Films Creature Shop which was abandoned after filming in Mexico. Worn by an actor on stilts, with arm extensions, the suit was supported by a harness and wires, now replaced with something less exotic.

tions bulkier and the suit more difficult to work in.

Johnson disliked the creature's head design so much that he decided to mechanize it so it could change shape. A puppet was built from the waist up employing totally state-of-the-art mechanics. It allowed the crew the freedom of doing effects they never could have accomplished with a suit, since many cable controls needed to be installed inside. "I didn't feel the least bit devious about this," he said, "because I knew I was right. These minor changes in the stock of creature's capabilities could only help the creature's character, thus benefiting the entire film."

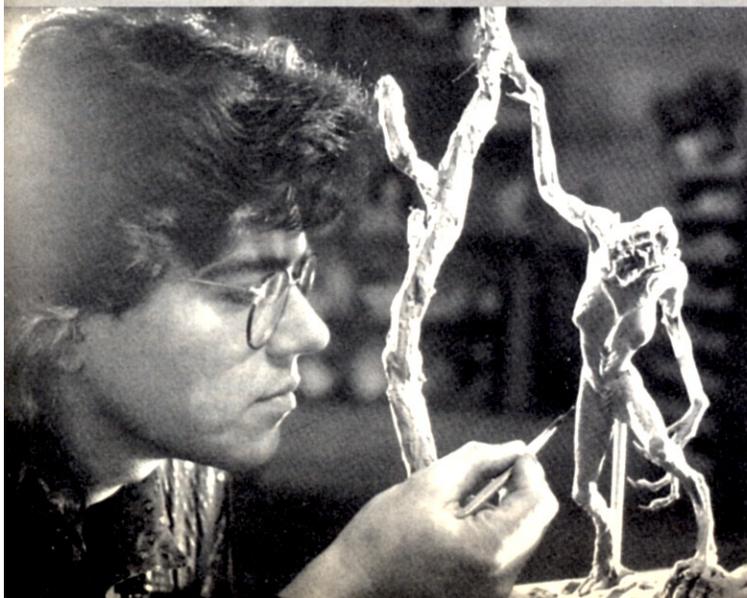
The Predator could flip its head completely over backwards, designed for a specific shot where it watches a bird fly overhead. Also, it was able to swivel its head 360 degrees around. Explained Johnson,

"Both movements allowed it to flip its head in all manner of crazy directions—just like the ultimate predator should be able to do upon hearing a noise." The eyes had several irises, each equipped with fibre optics that were connected to a rheostat. A color wheel of finely-painted hues was positioned behind a light source and operated remotely, giving the head weird sparkling insect eyes which glowed, changed color and varied in intensity.

The suit worn by Van Damme was never planned to be just a man wearing a rubber suit. Sixty percent of it was covered by 3M Scotchlite material, cut into strange shapes. Optical noise created by Greenberg's shop was intended to be front-projected onto the suit. Filmed as separate elements, the patterns reflected the creature's current

continued on page 122

Former Boss Films Creature Shop supervisor Steve Johnson works on a prototype for the alien not used. The alien now seen in the film is made by Stan Winston.





Steve Wang of Boss Films' Creature Shop sculpts an arm extension of the PREDATOR design which wasn't used.

PREDATOR

continued from page 5

mood or temperament: white TV snow for anger, static electricity for confusion, rushing water for its few periods of calm.

Unfortunately, none of these effects found their way into the picture. On location the monster was photographed in full body pose, and to make matters worse, in broad daylight. Johnson said this was something that just isn't done with intricate makeup effects, unless, of course, you're filming *MONSTER FROM THE SURF*. "What they ultimately decided was that the Predator no longer fit the style of the movie," he said. "When they had first envisioned this thing, it wasn't nearly such a hardcore, gut-wrenching action adventure. They thought the monster too fantastic; not realistic enough."

In the end, the Boss team never built another creature because

Stan Winston was offered the assignment. Winston's creature is played by a very tall black man in a suit, equipped with muscle enhancement, fighting spurs which retract after battle, and several weapons over a MAD MAX-styled armour. The makeup is much more naturalistic and humanoid.

Other Boss Film effects beside the creature got scrapped, including a menagerie of alien heads for the Predator's trophy room in its ship. Also dropped was a full body makeup for one character who gets dragged to the ship. The Predator was to dig its claws into the commando's back and rip out his spine. Johnson did a body for the action to be seen in longshot, complete with a dummy head which was to pop off as the creature gutted the body with a cracking whip maneuver.

But, there are some effects supervised by The Creature Shop which, so far, have remained in the film. At one point, one of the commandos gets his arm blown off by an explosive charge the Predator hurls at him, a Johnson effect, using a gelatin arm, air-powered to blow apart with spurting blood. Boss fabricated three corpses, the Predator's first victims, found by the commandos early in the film, skinned bodies hung upside down by their ankles from trees. Johnson rigged an elaborate and ingenious effect for a shot where the Predator blasts one character with its weapon. The character is shot in the back. Johnson rigged a spring loaded mechanism on the actor to show the projectile bursting through his chest.

Boss Film art director George Jensen's storyboards depict a climactic battle in which Arnold Schwarzenegger goes one-on-one with the Predator. It beats him to a pulp and closes in for the kill. Will Schwarzenegger survive? Does Rambo wear green underwear? □

A small maquette of the PREDATOR designed by Nikita Natz of Boss Films' Creature Shop, sculpted by Jim Kagel and painted by supervisor Steve Johnson.



The Princess, seduced by evil in William Hjortsberg's script for LEGEND.

HJORTSBERG ON LEGEND

The author of *ANGEL HEART* also wrote the script for Ridley Scott's *Satanic fairy tale*.

By Dan Scapperotti

William Hjortsberg, who wrote the novel *Falling Angel* on which *ANGEL HEART* is based, worked on a screenplay for *LEGEND* for four and a half years before it was eventually produced. "I made up everything on *LEGEND*," he said. "I wrote the story and screenplay. Everyone loved the first draft, but then got scared because my original story was much more visceral. Darkness in the original story turns the princess into a beast and then fucks her. The hero breaks into his lair while they're coupling and a big fight occurs in the midst of that. It was much stronger. Of course that was the first thing I had to take out when I did the revision."

Looking back on the experience of working with director Ridley Scott on *LEGEND*, Hjortsberg feels he may have been a little too complacent. He wanted to be a team player and was afraid someone else would be hired to finish the script. "Looking at the film, I think I should have put up a struggle," he said. "The writer in the film industry, although he is indispensable in a lot of ways is not taken very seriously. It's an odd situation. No one tells the cinematographer what to do because they can't do it. But everybody thinks they can write, everyone and his brother-in-law thinks they can do better. Script meetings come up with notes from everybody. The star has notes, the director has notes, the director's assis-

tant has notes and by the time you put all the notes in, it becomes something different from what you originally had."

Hjortsberg has written a script for Goldcrest on *MANDRAKE THE MAGICIAN*, based on the comic strip, with which he is very pleased. "Goldcrest ran into some bad luck with *REVOLUTION*," said Hjortsberg. "In fact they almost went broke. They're trying to farm out *MANDRAKE* now. It was at Warner Bros, but when they couldn't find a director they sort of lost interest. It's one of those projects that will cost a lot of money to make. It's set in the '30s and has a lot of incredible illusions. Studios get leery when they have to cough up \$24 or \$30 million."

Hjortsberg is quick to point out that he doesn't want to complain about an industry that has been very profitable for him. But, having written novels where an editor collaborates with the author for the benefit of the book it is a very different feeling being just a minor player in the process of filmmaking. But Hjortsberg admits that the financial rewards of screenwriting far outweigh those for novels. "I'm on a sort of financial treadmill since Hollywood came into my life," he said. "I've earned a kind of reputation, so I've been getting the work. I couldn't make the kind of money I have to make to send my daughter to Vassar and pay two alimony checks without the movie business." □