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How to teach an old monster new tricks

Director Dan Trachtenberg is breaking new ground with his *Predator* companion film, **PREY**

HE DIDN'T KNOW it at the time, but Dan Trachtenberg was already developing his *Predator* movie back in 1987, before he'd even watched the original. "I was dying to see it, but I was not allowed," says the director, who was six when *Predator* was released. "In third grade, I was on the way to a karate tournament with these [older kids] who had seen it, and over the entire trip they described the whole movie. I vividly remember them saying there was this character, Billy [Sony Landham], a Native American scout who fights the Predator on the bridge over a waterfall." When Trachtenberg eventually saw the movie, that fight was nowhere to be seen (Billy dies off-screen). "I just thought, 'What?'" But that image captured my imagination." The thought



Clockwise from top left: Leap of faith — Amber Midthunder as Naru; Dane DL; Leggs as the Predator; Director Dan Trachtenberg; The Predator; Naru's first shoot; Steve Martin; Blakey Kytayeva; (clockwise from top right)



stuck with him for 30 years and eventually led to his *Predator* prequel, *Prey*.

Set in the early 1700s, *Prey* follows Naru (Amber Midthunder), a young Native American woman from the Comanche tribe. Naru is training to be a warrior, a position usually reserved for men. Her developing skills are put to the most extreme test when she's confronted by a Predator, which has landed on the edge of her tribe's land, with advanced alien technology and a thirst for blood. Armed only with simple weapons, it becomes her mission to hold off the Predator and protect her people.

"I wanted to shift the focus to someone who would normally be a sidekick," says Trachtenberg. "In *Predator*, Billy was just one of the men on the team. In *Prey*, we're watching

someone lead this movie that has never led this type of movie before." After lots of *Predator* movies in which people team up to beat the alien, Trachtenberg was keen to tell a story in which a single person must beat the seemingly unbeatable. "I wanted to make a survivor's story about someone who was really up against the impossible, to make it feel even more severe than what we had seen before."

The 1700s setting also pushed Trachtenberg to consider what the Predator's advanced alien technology would look like three centuries ago. "The key was I never wanted it to feel 'easier' for Naru," he says. "The premise is David versus Goliath—I didn't want to make Goliath smaller. It doesn't have its plasma caster, but it does have heat vision and other tools," including

a spiffy shield that is both defence and weapon.

Prey is only Trachtenberg's second movie, following his 2016 spin-off hit, *10 Cloverfield Lane*. He actually pitched *Prey* to 20th Century Fox immediately after his debut film's release, but it took years, during which Fox was bought by Disney, for the film to get a greenlight. One thing he wanted to repeat from his first directing experience was to set himself an artistic limitation. In *10 Cloverfield Lane*, it was telling a story in a single setting. For *Prey*, it was using as little dialogue as possible. "It creates a guiding purpose for the storytelling," he says. "Telling a story primarily through actions, through human behaviour, I find that to be delightful."

The film does have some dialogue, which was originally intended to be all in Comanche (Trachtenberg is not Comanche, but producer Jhane Myers is, the cast are predominantly Native and First Nations actors, and the production worked with Juanita Pahdpony, a Comanche cultural consultant). Though the final film is in English, the cast all recorded their lines in Comanche too and a Comanche dub will be available on the film's Disney+ release. "It's a little more sophisticated than perhaps our memory of watching dubbed movies," Trachtenberg says. "There's a 'lip match' [choosing words to match the actors' mouth movements as closely as possible] that we do now. It won't be like watching old kung fu movies. One thing that sounds the same in any language: screaming. And there will be lots of that. **OLLY RICHARDS**

PREY IS ON DISNEY+ FROM 8 AUGUST