



PATHS OF GORY

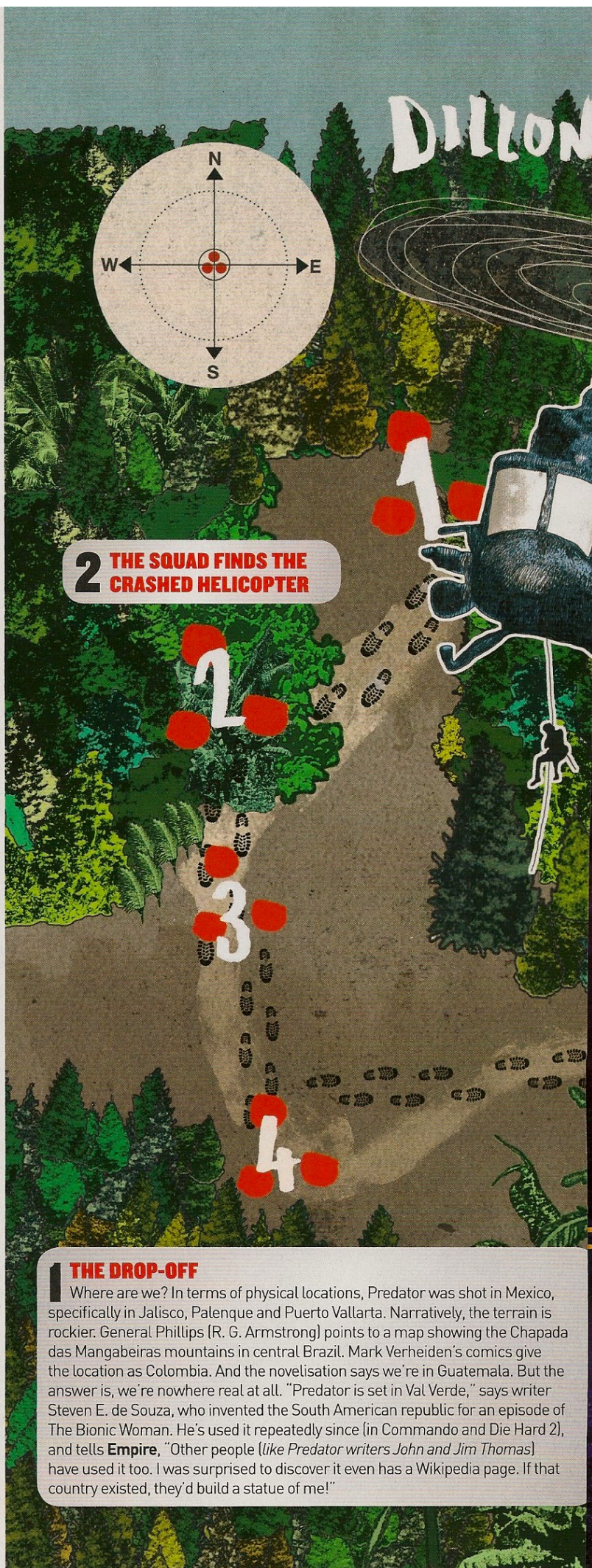
TRACING ARNIE'S ACTION-CLASSIC JUNGLE TREK

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ILLUSTRATION PETER STRAIN

PREDATOR LANDED ON PLANET EARTH IN 1987, two years after the plentiful death-quips and chain-mail wife-beaters of the much loved, absurd, epochal *Commando* (see page 92). Mapping it from base camp to extraction point suggests a simple A-to-B story, but John McTiernan's jungle rumble turns out to be a smarter film than its apparent macho '80s action formula admits, not to mention Arnold Schwarzenegger's greatest on-screen challenge thus far. As *The Terminator* he'd been dismantled by Michael Biehn, but *Predator*'s seven-foot star-beast would give him the pasting of his career as a hero and ultimately run away with the franchise. As he stood, covered in mud and wounds, in the ground-zero ashes of a once verdant patch of rainforest, it wasn't really clear if Arnold had won at all...

BASE CAMP

Much has been written — not all of it serious — about the homoerotic undertones of *Predator*, and while some of it's a stretch, it was nevertheless foremost in director John McTiernan's mind to parody the posturing of the action genre as much as celebrate it. "That scene at the beginning, where Carl (*Weathers*, as *Dillon*) and Arnold (*Dutch*) crash their arms together and start wrestling, is just laughably macho," groans editor Mark Helfrich. "That's exactly what McTiernan wanted. We knew it was going to be one of those moments where the audience roll their eyes and applaud at the same time, and it worked that way. It was all just about extending those moments and making them as brawny as possible. All that was designed."



2 THE SQUAD FINDS THE CRASHED HELICOPTER

THE DROP-OFF

Where are we? In terms of physical locations, *Predator* was shot in Mexico, specifically in Jalisco, Palenque and Puerto Vallarta. Narratively, the terrain is rockier. General Phillips (R. G. Armstrong) points to a map showing the Chapada das Mangabeiras mountains in central Brazil. Mark Verheiden's comics give the location as Colombia. And the novelisation says we're in Guatemala. But the answer is, we're nowhere real at all. "Predator is set in Val Verde," says writer Steven E. de Souza, who invented the South American republic for an episode of *The Bionic Woman*. He's used it repeatedly since (in *Commando* and *Die Hard 2*), and tells *Empire*, "Other people (like *Predator* writers John and Jim Thomas) have used it too. I was surprised to discover it even has a Wikipedia page. If that country existed, they'd build a statue of me!"

YOU SON OF A BITCH



3 TO THE SKINNED CORPSES

Here's where we really start to get to know the cast. "There was definitely a subversive agenda," editor Helfrich tells **Empire**. "John McTiernan's credo was that rules are only made to be broken. The whole idea was that these were the toughest guys that nobody could stop, but the Predator stopped them all." The platoon members are an extraordinary collection of hardasses. Carl Weathers was a former professional American footballer, already known as Rocky's legendary nemesis Apollo Creed. Sonny Landham (*Billy*) and Bill Duke (*Mac*) were familiar action stalwarts. Richard Chaves (*Poncho*) and Jesse Ventura (*Blain*) were genuine Vietnam vets; the Thomas brothers said that, in an earlier era, the film would have been 'Nam-based. Even Lethal Weapon writer Shane Black — placed on set to play Hawkins in case last-minute rewrites were needed ("As if that script needed any work," Black scoffed) — didn't seem out of place. "Shane isn't a macho guy, but he can write it," laughs Helfrich. "He can hang with those guys easily."

5 OL' PAINLESS

McTiernan has talked about this famous scene as representing the opposite of what it appears to show. "I had a feeling people had a perverse fascination with guns firing," he recalled. "So I created this sequence where they take all of their guns and they blaze away and flatten the jungle. I was taking the piss, as the Australians say. The whole point is the impotence of all of the guns. It was exactly the opposite of what I believed I was being hired to sell." The iconic Ol' Painless, the not-so-mini 7.62mm M134 Minigun hefted by Ventura and Duke, is part of that joke. Designed for mounting on helicopters, an ordinary mortal would struggle to even lift it. "It's ridiculous!" chuckles McTiernan. Says Helfrich: "That's a scene I'm particularly proud of. It required a lot of editorial trickery to extend it. Bill still 'firing' the gun after the bullets were all spent was an idea I came up with. I used outtakes when the gun didn't fire to overextend the carriage rotation at the end, then I added a whirring sound over the reaction shots and inserts, prolonging the moment. It worked very well dramatically."

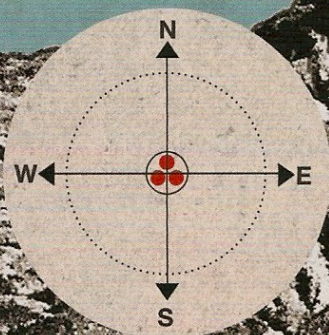
WE MOVE,
FIVE METRE SPREAD,
NO SOUND



4 THE GUERRILLA CAMP BATTLE

Predator's principal action scenes were shot by stunt coordinator/second-unit director Craig R. Baxley (he'd later direct the likes of Action Jackson and Stone Cold). McTiernan growls about this sequence on the DVD commentary — "I think the crew had all come from The A-Team or something" — but, says Baxley, "had I not had a TV second-unit crew that had worked well together previously, we could not have accomplished what we did. I was very passionate that the action on Predator should be cutting edge. Basically, every stunt has been done before. The challenge is in finding a combination of different elements to create something that looks and feels new. It's about execution. McTiernan was very confident. He had a lot of great ideas, and as a filmmaker it's wonderful to have ideas, but you also have to know how to execute."



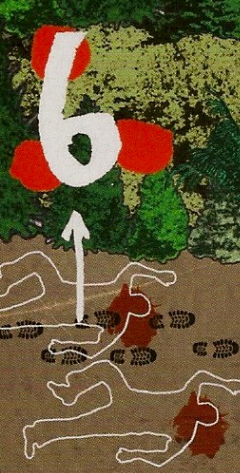


6 EXIT MAC AND DILLON

Back to the homoerotic subtext here: the relationship between Mac and Blain is one to keep an eye on. The moment in the film, post Blain's combustion, when Mac tells Dutch "He was... *my friend*," is pretty loaded, and Mac's behaviour here, charging off after the Predator alone — Dillon is lagging behind, trying to fetch him back — is rooted in those feelings. Slightly earlier, to hammer the point home, Duke even gets an emotional, moonlit soliloquy, toasting his special friend on his journey beyond the mortal coil. The film's novelisation was written by the gay poet Paul Monette.



WE BOTH GOT SCORES TO SETTLE



11 THE FINAL SHOWDOWN

Those impotent guns, like the physicality of the cast, are ultimately irrelevant: Arnold ends the film as a primitive jungle warrior. He even gets a Tarzan roar. And this is where we finally get the full reveal of the Predator, played by the late Kevin Peter Hall. The problems leading to this moment are well documented, with the Stan Winston-designed creature replacing, at very short notice, the original version, which wouldn't have been out of place in an '80s Doctor Who episode. "We opened the box and thought, 'Boy, are we in trouble,'" recalled McTiernan. "They had to shut down production for a while and reimagine the shape of the Predator," Helfrich says. "I was very proud of the Predator-vision and the heat-vision, and the invisibility effects; those had all been thoroughly worked out in pre-production. But the creature itself was the one thing that hadn't been fully developed prior to shooting. I have a picture somewhere of someone (actually Jean-Claude Van Damme, in an early, pre-Bloodsport role from which he either jumped or was pushed) in this ridiculous red lobster suit." Interestingly, the novelisation, written too early to reflect the new Predator, presents a creature that can shapeshift, occasionally taking the form of jungle animals. "Luckily, they eventually came up with a winner," laughs Helfrich. "Dreadlocks were in that year!" owen@empiremagazine.com

7 BILLY LOGS OFF

This is Sonny Landham's big moment, and the pay-off for a strange thread running through the film that suggests some sort of supernatural connection between Billy and the alien. Billy's is the only off-screen death, as he stands to face the pursuing creature while ritually slicing his chest. All we hear is his final scream, while the POV shot, from the perspectives of Dutch, Poncho and Anna, shows nothing but jungle. It's a subtle echo of Anna's earlier line about Hawkins: "The jungle came alive and took him." Landham, incidentally, was not quite so spiritual as his on-screen counterpart. His temper was so volatile that he had a bodyguard on set, not to shield him from the rest of the crew, but to protect the crew from him.



IF IT
BLEEDS
WE CAN
KILL IT

9 ANNA ESCAPES

As she runs east alone to the rendezvous point, this is the last we see of Anna until she shows up in the helicopter at the end (having, in fact, got to da choppa). A couple of scenes were planned for her in *Predator 2*, but her reappearance was ultimately limited to a brief cameo on a videotape, advising the US military.

10 THE RIVER SLIDE

After going off-road to draw the Predator away, Dutch falls back into the river. His slide through the jungle was achieved by putting Schwarzenegger on rails and firing him downhill. Baxley and his team rigged up the system, which was designed "to put the audience in the middle of the action". The rig was tested with a crew member, and found to be satisfactory, but it behaved rather more erratically when the much heavier Arnold was strapped to it. "We told him it'd be fine," said Baxley, "and then at the other end he was like, 'BAX!'" The spectacular fall into the river, meanwhile, saw the production's only casualty: the stuntman threw his knee out.

8 PONCHO IS KILLED ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE RIVER



DOUBLE DUTCH

SO WHY DIDN'T WE GET TO SEE A SECOND HELPING OF MAJOR SCHAEFER?

SCHWARZENEGGER DIDN'T want to return. According to some reports, he disliked the city setting of *Predator 2*, but others say it was just about the loot: "We should have had Arnold in the movie," said producer John Davis, "but the deal broke down over \$250k. Which was a shame."

We learn something of Dutch's fate from Gary Busey's DEA agent Peter Keyes, who reports on Dutch's post-jungle debriefing. This is expanded further in the *Predator 2* novelisation, with Keyes recalling speaking to a radiation-poisoned Dutch in hospital, before Dutch escapes, never to be seen again.

Mark Verheiden's *Dark Horse Comics* run with the 'Dutch is missing' angle. They involve (ahem) Dutch's brother, another Austrian Oak, this time working as a detective for the NYPD, encountering his own Predators on Dutch's trail. There were three of these stories, which never reached a conclusion. General Phillips is a regular character, and Verheiden's *Dark River* story brings back the chopper pilot from the end of *Predator*, who intriguingly suggests that Dutch was found to have contracted an alien disease from the Predator's blast, and was subsequently returned to the jungle and abandoned there. It turns out to be a lie, but we're liking the idea of a journey upriver leading, with extreme prejudice, to a Kurtz-like Major Schaefer.

Strangely, the Kurtz-ish Noland, played by Laurence Fishburne in *Predators*, was a role originally earmarked as Danny Glover's Mike Harrigan from *Predator 2*. But a cliffhanging cameo from Dutch, arriving at the end of the film on a Predator ship, was mooted. What? How? We may never know...