

In *Predator* an unorthodox rescue mission turns into a fight for survival against a hostile alien. Pretty soon Arnie's the only one left – and he doesn't play the alien this time.

Predator is the latest in the 'one-word title' genre of action movie, usually featuring Man's meagre resources, but unlimited resource, pitted against an indestructible creature. It all started back in 75 with *Jaws*. Since then such films as *Alien*, *The Thing*, *Poltergeist*, *The Terminator* and *Aliens* have standardised the ingredients of their 'imitable' shark-starring ancestor. And since then a large portion of the budget, and prominent screen credit, have gone to the 'creation' of the creature. The subtleties of *King Kong* – if the concept is not too revolutionary – are behind us. Now the watchword is simply 'kill or be din-dins'.

Of course *Predator* would claim for itself an innovation (the surprise twist halfway through the story), but they're not fooling anyone. To begin with the creature is too evidently the grounded pilot of *Alien*, in which he was only indirectly responsible for the catastrophe, and *The Thing*, where he was defrosted by the unsuspecting Norwegians. In fact *Predator's* pre-credit is a direct crib from Carpenter's film (and his *Starman*, and *Cocoon*): out of the far reaches of space comes a star ship which drops a pod, or crash lands on Earth. He looks like *Alien* and he camouflages himself like the *Thing*, but for good measure he has the technology of the *Terminator* (Arnie's best role). These Science Fiction antecedents are then simply combined with the hero ('He's the best') and combat tactics of *Rambo/Commando* (Arnie again), together with the commando team, who must say the words 'pussy' and 'asshole' several times, and all their fully-up-to-date technical paraphernalia, courtesy of *Aliens*.

All this is fine, but we no longer take it very seriously of course, and so we quickly get bored, which was not the case with *Jaws* or *Alien*. I enjoy unseen-menace thrillers and gung-ho overwhelming-odds shoot'em-ups as much as the next man, but the producers have made the mistake of assuming the less explaining is done the better. Here we see an extremely sketchy briefing at the beginning and then – quick, before they doze off! – we're out there and the mayhem starts. Half the fun of *Alien* and *The Thing* was that the characters were scientists and we could watch them work out what was happening to them. Here they haven't a clue, naturally, but that doesn't mean we need not have any. It's not even clear why the *Predator* is killing them all off. The poster tells us he does it for fun, and he certainly doesn't appear to eat much of them, although one shot shows us (in silhouette) the ripping out of what looks like the spinal column with the brain attached to it, as if that's all he wants. An interesting idea but why not tell us more?

Another regrettable habit, inaugurated by *The Thing*, is that of having the character in peril utter, just when the tension is highest – and usually when the creature's expensive make-up effects have been revealed in their eye-popping glory – some bathetic aside to the audience, creating a wave of nervous laughter from the less hardened. Thus Arnie's 'You're one ugly motherfucker', delivered with customarily hollow conviction and shaky accent.

Add to all the noise and confusion the throbbing musical score – this time from Alan Silvestri, though it might as well have been Jerry Goldsmith or James Horner – and the recipe is complete. If this is what you like it will amuse you, but it won't engage you: we all know Arnold Schwarzenegger is as indestructible as any monster they can throw at him.