

## THE PRODUCTION DESIGN OF PLANET TERROR

# THROWING OFF THE TIMELINE

**STEVE JOYNER, Production Designer:** One thing about Robert and Quentin is that they both like to create timeless pieces of work. When we worked on *Jackie Brown* back in 1997, one of the small details was that all of the cars in it had 1995 validators on the license plates, per Quentin, to throw the timeline off. Quentin and Robert's movies exist in a parallel world to the world we live in; one that is very similar but slightly off. That's one of the elements that makes them such interesting filmmakers.

**CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE, Production Designer:** When I saw *Thelma and Louise*, that was a movie that could have happened at any time, it didn't structure itself to a singular time. Was it in the 50s? Was it in the 60s? Was it in the 90s? It had an ethereal quality to it. When I watch *The Thing*, when I watch *Near Dark*, those movies don't seem like they have a time to me.

That's really the tone that *Grindhouse* had and one that I strive to create. Whatever tools we use need to allow the film to rise above dating itself or limiting itself. Because you want to create a universal story that's timeless. And a great horror movie is timeless.

The production design for *Grindhouse* really began over Thanksgiving weekend 2005. Steve and I spent three days solid just taking photographs of the area around Troublemaker Studios. Our production facility is in the middle of this perfect playground. We're based in an old airport, so all these wonderful found objects exist. Great buildings that have this abandoned feeling. You can feel the wind whistle through old airplane hangars. There are these great objects, reference for our guard towers, all these strong vertical elements. So we went into the back roads around the old airport and saw that

**THIS PAGE:** CG renderings of the old Army base by Troublemaker Digital artist Alex Toader. **OPPOSITE (CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT):** Chipped paint detail • Lead prop fabricator Jeff Pass at work on the detailed miniature of the Army base • Troublemaker Studios/Army Base from above • Photograph of Troublemaker Studios as "Outpost 31" from John Carpenter's *The Thing* • Overgrown road • An old building at the airport.



they really provided a perfect setting for the feel of an abandoned military base. All the paint on the roads had been chipped away, the vines had grown over the fences, rows of lampposts along parking lots, cargo containers everywhere. There was one picture that we took, in particular, that really made an impact.

**STEVE JOYNER:** It was a cloudy, stormy day. The sky was very gray and when we stood in the corner of our facility and took this picture, we realized that we basically had Outpost 31 from *John Carpenter's The Thing*. *The Thing* is definitely a movie that we refer to frequently, and Robert does too. It's a movie that is just brilliantly lit and designed by [Production Designer] John Lloyd.

**CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE:** So we showed the stills to Robert and he said "That's really cool. I've got [Alex] Toader working on some renderings." So I think it was a week later that we received these great illustrations and

renderings. Toader's stuff is really a lot of fun. He's a child of Romania and the cold war, so we really enjoyed his take on everything.

**ALEX TOADER, Troublemaker Digital Artist:** Robert asked me to do some sketches and a layout of the existing buildings in our facility to see what kind of action could take place. Basically, block it out to see if we could turn around big army trucks or land a helicopter in the space available but also to just make it look bigger and to see if we could block out the city in the background. I did a quick illustration in Photoshop using photos I took of the building (which was bright white) and turned it into an old army base with insignia and broken stuff all around. After seeing it, Robert suggested to deck it out with more massive stuff. Using the notes I got from Robert, I build a set in 3D fairly quick and started to add girders, cranes, guard towers, pylons and all the stuff you usually see around a base.



Within a couple of days I had fully rendered images from different camera angles of what the base could look like in darkness, lit only by army base lamps. Since this was a night shoot, it was very important to design with that color in mind. Robert didn't want everything to get lost by having the color of the set be too dark. After Robert approved the look, I passed it on to our production designer Steve Joyner. The additional designs and details added by Steve and his crew made the outside set outstanding.

**CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE:** Both Steve and I are definitely children of the cold war. We love the idea of having a formidable foe, of an enemy that's tactile and real and not some nebulous element. We pulled a lot of reference—definitely bunkers, blockish, solid structures, solid foundation, elements that have strong footing, nothing feeling spindly, and we knew that we really had to work out some things because the warehouses that we had to work with naturally do have kind of a thin feel.

**STEVE JOYNER:** We definitely needed to take the warehouses that existed and anchor them solidly. That's a lot of the design that we put into the exterior of the building.

One thing about working with [producer] Elizabeth Avellán, is that she's very conscientious of the crew and works hard to find, recruit, and retain the very best people at every level of the show. One of those people is certainly our great set designer, Jeff Adams, as well as our outstanding construction coordinator, Joe McCusker.

**CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE:** Who I really consider a fellow art director.



**OPPOSITE (FROM TOP):** Blank Blank at work on a "crow's nest." • Fence posts and chain-link fence. • The bunker exterior (also known as "level one"); **THIS PAGE (FROM TOP):** A shack made in the style of MacReady's from John Carpenter's "The Thing." • Abby (played by Naveen Andrews) in front of the hanger doors. The "31" painted on the doors is a reference to Outpost 31 from John Carpenter's "The Thing."

**STEVE JOYNER:** Joe contributed to every level here and had some great structural ideas that we incorporated—the fence posts between the chain link fence to increase the mass of the columns were Joe's idea. We had to ring the base and fence in concertina wire. That stuff at a large scale doesn't photograph, so to create the drama of actually being trapped behind the wire, Joe's idea was to create these massive concrete pillars between the sections of fence, and they worked as advertised. They really beefed it up.

**CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE:** Also, the paint department, obviously you can imagine how much surface area had to be covered, in just a few weeks. Our lead scenic Tommy Karl worked overtime, he had to paint everything, from miles of square footage of building which had to be aged to the aged surface of the runways.

It comes down to the thousands of mind-numbing decisions that you have to make about every element. What color is each door? What is the font of the stencil text? How much aging do you have? How do you separate your warms and cools? How do you have pieces stand out? How do you have them not disappear during a night shoot?





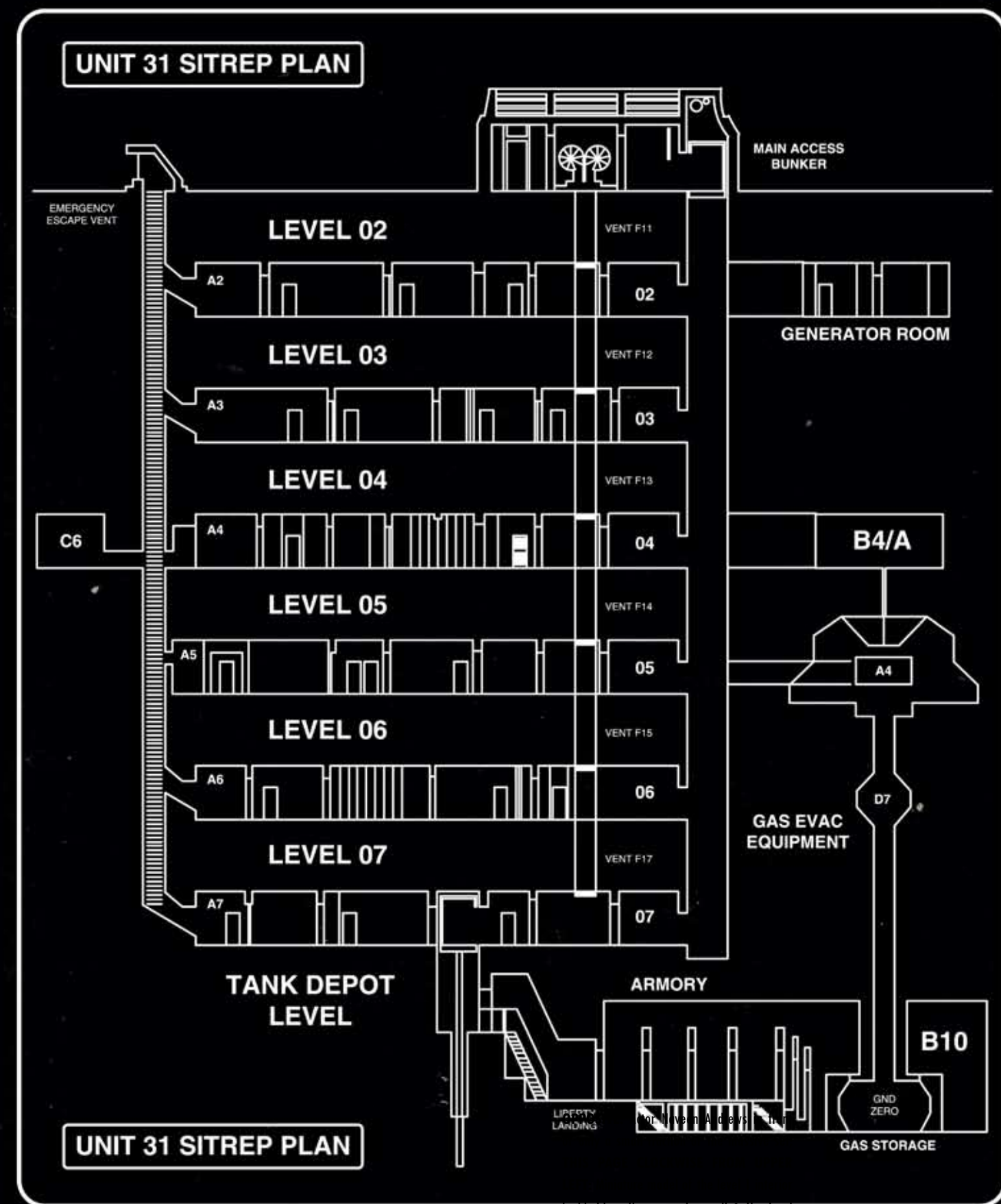


# LEVEL 1

**CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE:** One of the first things we did in designing the different levels inside the bunker was to do a really rough floor plan of each level and show it to Robert. We realized we had three levels and that we had to work out the transitions between those levels, figure out how we could segue from one to the next.

Level one is the above ground bunker. Originally, that bunker was going to be a throwaway piece, we weren't going to use it much. But Robert liked Steve's design so much that he placed a lot of the action there. Inside is the quarantine cell where all the survivors are based. Seeing as how level one was above ground, I wanted it to have greens, like grasses—very natural. As if there was still vegetation, still some life and breath in it. We wanted it to be the room where all the life support was for the rest of the levels; that's where the ventilation system is, where the arteries are. We painted all the piping red and blue to represent the lifeblood.

**ABOVE (FROM TOP):** Abby and Wray prepare to descend in the level one elevator. • **Miniature model of the level one interior highlighting the ventilation system.** • **The full-scale level one interior.** Notice the red and blue "lifeblood" pipes that run along the ceiling. **OPPOSITE:** A map of the interior bunker.





# LEVEL 4

**CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE:** Level four was just underground, so I wanted it to be brown, the color of earth. Browns, bits of yellows starting to go into reds. We referenced a lot of fortresses and bunkers from World War II. There's always a feeling in these bunkers like you're being watched. They're oppressive. There are lots of slits everywhere for guns to go through and it always feels like eyes are watching you. These elements also allow for letting light through—cool back light. And Robert is all about cool back light. Signage is also something that's key here. Signage can really bring something to life. When it's lacking, something feels flat. You want your environment to feel real, and the set dressers did a phenomenal job here. There are a huge number of angles in Level four, it was really tough to get all the piping in, but those guys just got in there and made all the bends, giving the hallways a strong horizontal path to follow.

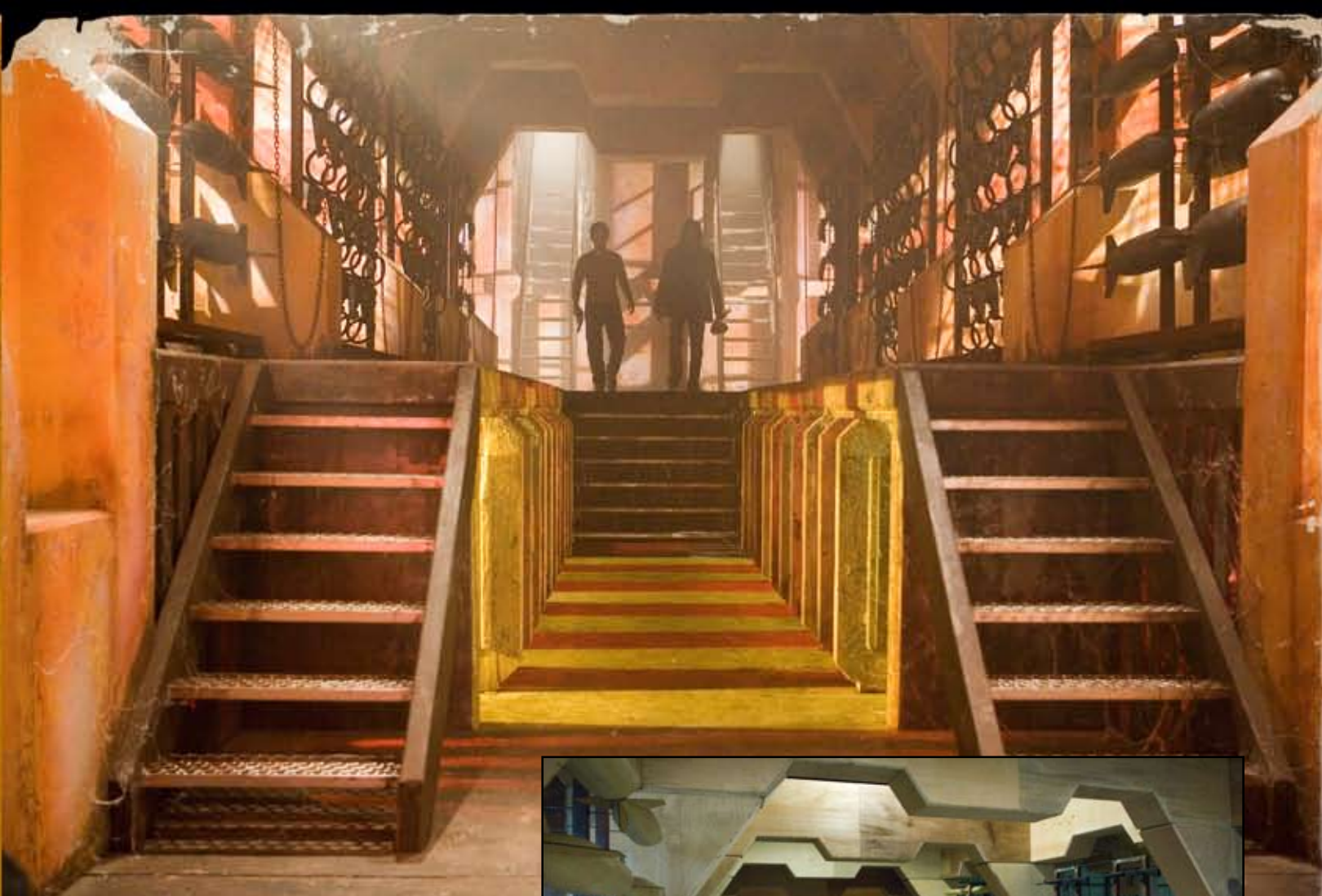
**STEVE JOYNER:** Every department worked really hard to bring the different levels to life, but Level four really shows the work of every individual department that came together as a team: paint, construction, set decorating, special effects. Bart and Dave Hack did a brilliant job down there, getting so much material. It looks very real, very simple. But it wasn't. Those guys worked really hard to get that looking right and we really want to thank them.

**CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE:** John McLeod and his team also did a phenomenal job building out the soft, lead doors for the stuntmen to crash through.

**STEVE JOYNER:** John McLeod is one of the top ten guys in the world that does mechanical effects, and he's probably near the top of that list.

**CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE:** These are people you truly know you've been in the war with for years. Our ability to communicate with one another, the language we have together is just phenomenal. I feel really lucky to have those people here and we have definitely learned a lot from them. They're a bunch that just does exceptional work.

**BELOW (FROM TOP):** A photograph by Caylah Eddleblute of a stairwell in the old Austin State School provided the inspiration for the corrugated hallways of level four (turn your head sideways to the left). • The level four hallway begins to take shape. • Abby and Wray run through the completed level four. **OPPOSITE (FROM TOP):** Abby and Wray enter the armory in level eight. • The level eight set under construction.



# LEVEL 8

**CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE:** Next we have Level eight, the armory, where we descend into hell. We had just recently seen *George Romero's Land of the Dead*—a movie with great production value for not a lot of money. There's a really cool scene in it where John Leguizamo walks down a trench. I really keyed on that. It seemed really scary as shit to me. We talked to Robert, and we said, "Trench?" And he said, "Cool."

Troy Engel, who does a huge amount of graphics and 3D work for us, rendered out some images and some really key elements came to mind. If you were going through this trench, where would zombies come out from? Are they in the walls? Are they underneath you, coming from nowhere? Are they above you? What are they hiding behind? One of the key things that we worked out was the idea of having a really theatrical set with no walls. I had an image in my head of light passing through weapons and those shadows being on characters as they pass through this passageway and onto the Doom Devices. Ultimately, everything comes down to light, that's why you have elements like this through which light can shine. [Gaffer] John Sandau was superb. He really helped us to be excited about it, and I think we got to learn some cool stuff from him. It all comes down to light and shadow, really. Something that's

scary as hell, we wanted this to be scary. So we created a set that had no walls, and a lot of design went into building the racks so that all you see is the shadows of the weapons.

Early on, we were talking to [storyboard artist] Marc Baird and I remember he said the word "catacombs." Obviously, we were thinking a lot about vapor, breathing, the gas in the gas packs. So we made racks of these masks that Jeff Poss sculpted for us. And it really had that feeling of suffocation, like remnants of humanity were buried deep within the levels of this Armory facility.

**STEVE JOYNER:** One thing about designing and working with both Robert and Quentin is that the design is initially there from them. They are very descriptive writers. You are able to paint a picture of what the environment should look like. So I think Robert and Quentin really deserve as much of the credit for designing the look of the film as the entire team, we could not have done anything without their words.

**CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE:** Definitely, those guys create the picture and you feel yourself walking down the road to the end.