

JEFF POSS: Every day on my way to work, for a year and a half, I would drive by a shop called Browning's Auto Repair in Houston. Inside this fenced-in, overgrown yard there was this truck that was rusting away. You'd drive by this truck, and you couldn't help but look at it. It was calling out, like *Christine* or something. One day I saw a for sale sign on the window and I freaked out.

STEVE JOYNER: I was sitting at my desk and Jeff dropped a couple of polaroids in front of me and I said, "I want to get this truck." We were actually working on another movie called *The Return* that had an evil tow truck driver, so I went ahead and ponied up for the truck out of my own pocket, knowing that there would be a place for it somewhere.

JEFF POSS: We called this guy, Mr. Browning, and told him we'd buy the truck if he could start it. So we showed up ready to take it, he hooked a battery charger up to it and it started right up. We couldn't believe it. We thought for sure it wasn't going to start. This truck, in particular, had such a character to it, right out of that overgrown yard. I think the only thing that we changed was the name on the door and even that is in the same font. We changed it from Browning's to Wray's and I believe the address and phone number are even the same.

STEVE JOYNER: We decided to start calling this thing "Killdozer" because of its massive front grill, and also because of the great grindhouse movie *Killdozer* (based on the Theodore Sturgeon story) about a bulldozer that comes to life and terrorizes a work crew on an island. It's funny, in the original script, the part of Killdozer wasn't a tow truck at all, but a Police van that our heroes take from the Sheriff station.

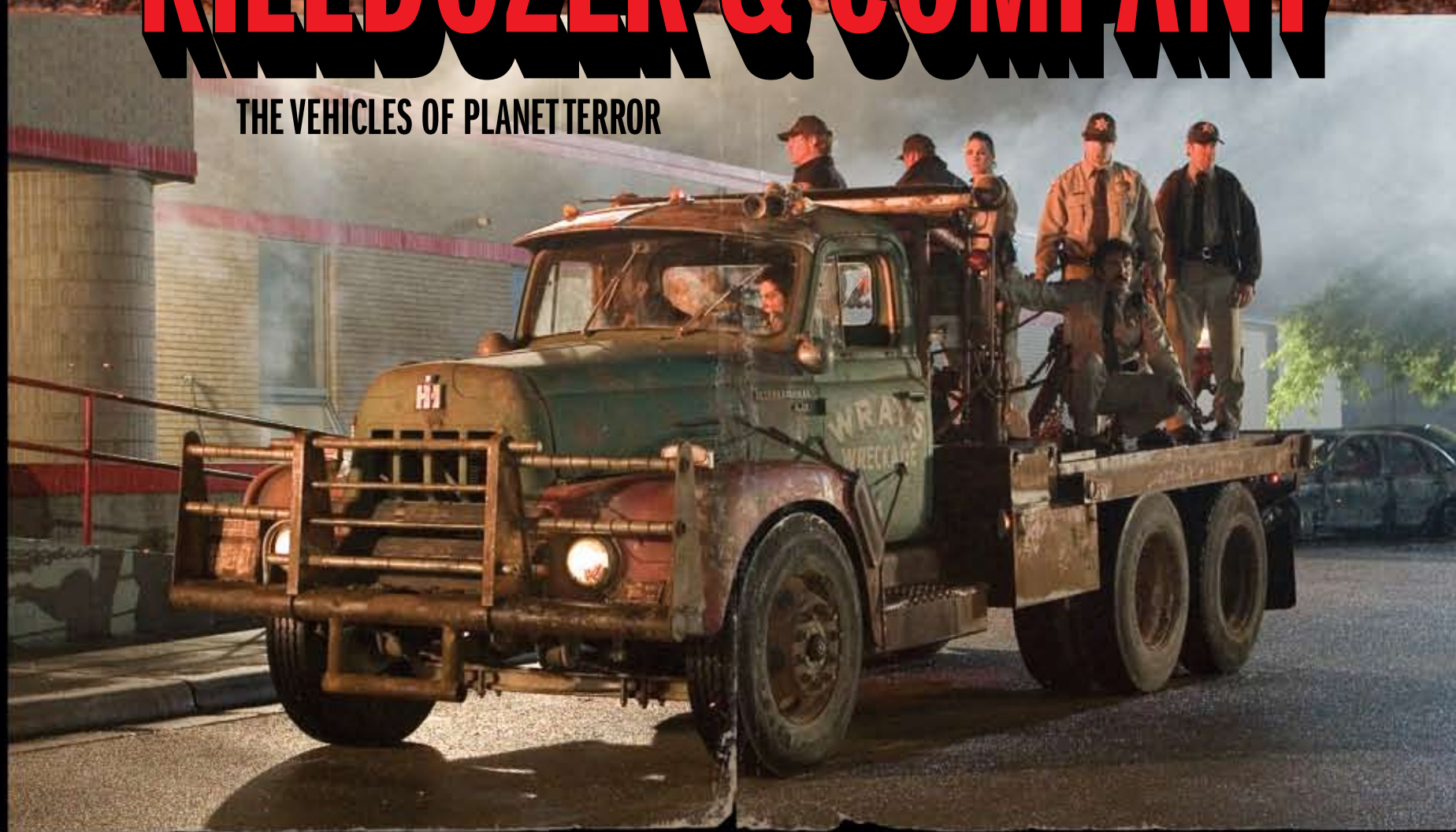
The original Killdozer is a very heavy, solid-iron truck. In the 50s, it was one of the biggest wreckers available in Houston. They would call on this thing to free stuck cement mixers and semis. We realized very early that we needed a more lightweight truck to do the stunts and road sequences for *Planet Terror*, so special effects and transpo came up with a system where they would get a couple of modern five ton truck chassis and place International L210 bodies onto them. Our production assistant, Erika Jeanne, found one online, and Paul Steel found one 20 miles outside of Shreveport, while on his way to pick up our helicopter. Paul has an eagle eye for hunting out equipment or anything odd. Then Caylah and I found another one on our way down to Luling on a location scout.

CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE: Looking at how the truck came out, you have to think about all the work from the transportation team, from the paint team, from our fabrication shop, from the effects shop. So many people in this production worked to take our original



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THE VEHICLES OF PLANET TERROR



truck, find the missing parts, make everything sound, so everything could travel and work. These guys really cared, and they definitely made it look cool.

Next, we have JT's convertible, which first appeared in *Roadracers*, a little movie Robert shot for Showtime in thirteen days. David Arquette's character, Dude, ends up driving straight to hell at the end of that movie in his cool Chevy, which we then matched for *Planet Terror*.

STEVE JOYNER: [Transportation Coordinator] Cecil Evans went out and found the matching car, it's a '56, but the original '56 never came as a convertible, and so Cecil Evans, [Mechanic] Bobby Sconci and his fabrication team took the car and chopped the top off and turned it into a permanent convertible '56, which never existed.

On *Roadracers*, Robert had the art department add "teeth" to the Dude's car; they found some part somewhere off of some other vintage car. This was before *Monster Garage* and *American Hot Rod*, before the resurgence of things like West Coast Choppers, and all the interest in restoration came. You could still get all these things and cut them up and get antique parts for them fairly cheaply. They were able to do that, but now when you try to go and find a '57 Chevy it's \$50,000 dollars.

The one detail that Robert wanted more closely matched to the original car from *Roadracers* was the grill teeth, and we spent a lot of time looking for these teeth that they used and we couldn't find them. I don't think they exist anymore, they've gone back to whatever original cars they were from, so Jeff Poss, our excellent sculptor, actually took wood and carved a replica based on a still from the movie.

JEFF POSS: I use MDF (medium density fiberboard) which is just a nice shaping material that has a specific density all the way through it, so I wouldn't have to deal with grain. And I used an old technique of bolting it to a table and taking a rasp to it and hand shaping it. I worked it back and forth for a day or two until I felt I got the shape right, then through a series of layers and sanding and wet sanding. I thought that was kind of respectful to the car itself because that's how they used to make these cars. So it felt right working on it that way, with layers of lacquer and wet sanding to get a mirror finish. We made a mold of it and we cast them in a fast setting hard plastic, but we used a process that we use a lot here. We pre-paint the surface of the mold with a chrome-type paint. That way as the plastic sets, the mold bonds to the paint. It creates a much more durable finish and a much more realistic metallic finish, because you get the gloss from the original surface from the mold.

STEVE JOYNER: Dakota's son Tony happened to have



this mini bike in the trunk of the car when they escaped. By the end of the movie, it's one of the only running vehicles the characters have left. So Wray rides the mini bike to destroy all the bad guys. It's a very small motorcycle. It almost looks like a toy. I mean, you can pick it up and carry it under your arm, but it still goes 50 or 60 miles an hour with a full size adult on it.

JEFF POSS: Our stunt guys were driving with one hand while they're shooting with the other, riding that little bike around all the explosions and debris and people.

CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE: It was crazy

STEVE JOYNER: Again, it took a lot of coordination between all the departments to rig up this chase sequence, but it's very exciting.

CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE: Of course you have to get a feel for what your cast is going to experience. We had the bikes arrive one day for a test show and we got some shots of Robert taking the pocket bike for a test drive.

JEFF POSS: I think he got off the bike and said, "Yeah, make it go faster."

STEVE JOYNER: For Cherry's chopper, Cecil Evans and his crew did a lot of research into getting the right look. This bike ended up playing a very key role in *Planet Terror*.

CECIL EVANS: Our stunt coordinator, Jeff Dashnaw, had a friend that was working with Jesse James [of West Coast Choppers] in some capacity and when Jeff came here to start prepping the movie, he mentioned to me that he had talked to this guy and his guy was going to go to Jesse. Robert ended up calling Jesse himself, so he was really the one that got the choppers here. We had pictures of between six to ten other motorcycles that we could've used in lieu of the Jesse James bikes, but of course, when the Jesse James bikes arrived, they wanted to use them.

PREVIOUS SPREAD (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): Polaroid of the Killdozer rusting away at Browning's Auto Repair in Houston. • Killdozers being painted on the Troublemaker backlot. • The final Killdozers are ready for action. • The Killdozer arrives at the hospital with heroes in tow; **ABOVE (FROM TOP):** Robert Rodriguez takes the pocketbike for a spin while First Assistant Director Brian Bettwy observes. • The "chopped top" 1956 Chevy "with teeth."; **OPPOSITE:** The Jesse James custom chopper.



CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE: The bikes were sent to us on loan. The thing that was so cool about it was we had no idea what was going to arrive. A bike with a black tank? I don't know. And these phenomenal bikes arrived, obviously you can see the detail in the work.

STEVE JOYNER: The bikes were just beautiful. The paint job alone would have taken a normal customizer weeks, probably months to do, and Jessie and his crew were able to crank them out and get a pair of matching bikes to us.

Robert had very specific dimensional designs, he knew exactly how he wanted Wray and Cherry to fit on the bike. One thing he was very specific about was the rear tire size and the height of the seat to the ground and the angle of the chop, so I believe that in Robert's conversation with Jessie he outlined basically the requirements of the shot and left the design up to Jessie, that was the evolution. When Robert writes this stuff he always has a very specific blocking in mind.



STEVE JOYNER: We hired a guy named Steve Galleon to work on this project, and he has a friend who worked on helicopters in Iraq. He knew we were researching military bases and so he brought in a video his friend had shot of a Sea Stallion helicopter. When Robert saw the tilted way it takes off, he had the idea of using it as a weapon. After all, we're always looking for bigger and badder ways to cut things up around here.

Our lead prop fabricator, Jeff Poss, was prepping the Kevin Costner movie, *The Guardian*, in Louisiana and they had a deal with the Coast Guard. It was very positive Coast Guard movie—they were going to provide support and loan them helicopters for the shots and have their people there on set. Right in the middle of pre-production they got hit with Hurricane Katrina and the Coast Guard had to divert all its resources to handle it. So it was at that point that they went out and looked for helicopters to build themselves.

JEFF POSS: We were able to buy the one extra shell that the *Guardian* production didn't touch. It was most of the exterior of a Black Hawk, but really rough. It was just a shell. It would've been great as a boneyard helicopter, but shortly before it showed up, we heard it was probably going to be converted into a much larger helicopter, a Sea Stallion. So we started wondering how we were going to do that.

We actually went and bought some little models, we bought models of the Sea Stallion and the Black Hawk in the same scale and ran the Black Hawk through the band saw seven or eight times to figure out what parts we could actually use to scale up to the Sea Stallion.

When you look at the Stallion there are certain things that really make it the Stallion. Primarily, the nose and the engines. Those are really the key elements which set it apart from a Black Hawk, so the nose was crucial. We had a couple of guys focusing on the nose, and then the body was mostly done with panels. We kind of employed a ship building technique of bracing ribs and then skinning that. Then we went in and filled the whole inside of it with fiberglass to turn it into one big body again. At that time, we were still playing with the idea that this thing would end up going on to a truck and being tilted nose down. So we couldn't just screw it together, we had to make sure it was a solid unit, a complete shell that would support its own weight.

CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE: One of the advantages of making a set piece like this is that you have access to it at any time. A movie schedule can change at any minute on any day. Something you think is going to shoot in two days may not shoot for two weeks. If you set up a rental for something of this scale—like a military vehicle—and the schedule changes, you find yourself recutting deals and paying fees. Building it yourself allows you to have something available at all times, day or night.

STEVE JOYNER: One of the other factors in building your own vehicle like this, is when we work with picture cars, we need



OPPOSITE: A real Sea Stallion in action. • The salvaged Black Hawk helicopter. • The removed windshield before being married the new body. • The new hull being built "ship style." • The finishing touches are put on the nose before being turned over to the paint department; **BELOW:** The Stallion team from left: Blank Blank, Blank Blank, Blank Blank, Blank Blank, Blank Blank and Blank Blank. • Our heroes escape to the Stallion.

to cut into them in order to place lights or cameras. In this case, we allowed for this flexibility, where we wouldn't have been able to in the real thing. Our vehicles are designed to pay homage to the real thing and look real to the eye, but also allow the camera to get all the shots.

JEFF POSS: Another advantage is being able to move it on a dime. The way we engineered the steering and everything, two guys can move this helicopter. With a real helicopter, or a real Sea Stallion, you put it

down, and it's pretty big deal to move it over a foot. **STEVE JOYNER:** There was a giant weight difference, our helicopter probably weighed 8,000 pounds, and a real Sea Stallion is closer to 65,000.

CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE: I love to break things down to the component parts. When you really see the elegance that everything is hand made. Almost nothing here is a found object. Every piece from the landing gear to the instrument panel to details in the lighting, everything is hand-fabricated.

STEVE JOYNER: Troy Engel drew the "Death From Above" artwork for us. The 31 is a reference to Outpost 31 from *John Carpenter's The Thing*. So we had our Unit 31, which was a clandestine unit, and their motto was "Death from Above" with its hissing black cat delivering a bomb. The classic Ray-O-Vac 9 lives cat was the inspiration for the artwork.

CAYLAH EDDLEBLUTE: Here's the bottom line—we just wanted to make something cool, and in our humble opinion, it's particularly cool.

STEVE JOYNER: We like to get pretty far into a project before we show something to Robert. On this, we pretty much had the floor and the body together with a couple of seats before Robert actually came and looked at it. When he climbed in, his only comment was, "Somebody wake up Hicks."

