The 1987 Film “Predator” stars Arnold Schwarzenegger as the protagonist in an action packed, Central American guerilla war themed setting, with a twist. He plays the character “Dutch”, the leader of an elite special task force that primarily undertakes rescue operations. The movie opens with a scene in space of a spacecraft heading towards the Earth, and a small pod is seen to detach itself and fly towards the surface. Immediately from there, we are taken to the jungle scene of Val Verde and Dutch with his team. Dutch is informed that a high ranking cabinet minister was lost some time before in enemy rebel territory, and Dutch signs on to reduce said minister. After reaching the supposed rebel base location, Dutch and his team go in and destroy the entire base, killing everyone who was stationed there. However, it is at this point that Dutch finds out that the whole mission was a setup to enlist Dutch and his crew to raid and destroy an enemy target. Clearly, Dutch did not take being lied to well, and, after finding and bringing along a lone woman named Anna as a prisoner, the team moves to head back to the helicopter pick up point.

Now, at this point, it is relevant to stop and assess how the movie has thus far played out. The main focus is supposed to be about some alien encounter /contact, however, aside from the opening scene, we have yet to see evidence of this aspect. Further, the movie is already halfway over! In this way, we know about as much about this mysterious alien as Dutch and his team. This will be a continuing trend in the movie, where the viewers remain only slightly ahead of Dutch and his team in terms of intel about this alien predator. The last information we receive occurs when the alien looks at its own hand, which appears somewhat reptilian with claws. [trope]

As for this intel, the viewer gets the first bit of information concerning the alien as we see through some alternate 3rd person view that feels suspiciously like someone’s gaze and consists of a temperature map of region in view. Thus, we learn that the alien’s eyesight must be based on relative temperature differences.

On their way to the helicopter pick up, Anna attempts to escape, and one member of the crew chases her. Just as he locates her, a shape emerges from the jungle and kills him, leaving Anna alone. Both the viewer and Anna are left confused after this incident, yet we must assume the alien made its first move when viewer is shown the body of said team member hanging from the top of a tree high above the forest. Then, while searching for the body, another member of Dutch’s team sustains two hits by large energy blasts that leaves a massive hole in his chest. The rest of team immediately responds by firing blindly into the forest, but they see nothing. The team concludes that something must be out there, and that no weapon of this world (Earth) could’ve caused such damage at such a distance. From these prior events, the viewer also picks up new information. We learn that the alien must be very comfortable with heights, with climbing, and with navigating the forest high above the ground, and we learn that the alien must have access to superior, energy-based weapon technology. However, just like Dutch and his crew, we remain largely in the dark about most of the characteristics of this mystery alien.

The next encounters occur in relatively quick succession. First, the viewers finally witness the alien in full view as a distorted image sits on a tree branch, and the distortion disappears, revealing
the fully armored alien in full view. The alien removes what appears to be a first aid kit from its suit, removes a bullet from its thigh (screaming in pain during the process) and uses another device to finish closing the wound. Now, finally, the viewers get to see that the alien not only has superior weaponry, but general technology as well, including active camouflage, exoskeletal body suits, and a first aid device that catalyzes the healing process. During this time, Dutch concludes that this thing is methodically hunting them, and thus clearly has some level of intelligence. The team’s response it to build a series of large traps. Second, Dutch’s team’s knowledge of the alien never stays far behind that of the user as the alien kills two more members when they go looking for this mysterious alien. They, too, get to glimpse the alien, with both active and inactive camouflage, and both they and the viewer gets a glimpse of the alien’s powerful, shoulder-mounted, energy gun. We also see that the alien has other secondary weapons when one of these two men is killed as the alien rushes forward with a long blade. The next member is killed as he attempts to face the alien alone, armed with nothing but a machete, then another by laser while running. Only Dutch and Anna remain at this point, and Dutch tells Anna to run to the helicopter. Still being pursued, Dutch accidently slides and falls off a large cliff into a lake below. The alien follows, but cannot find Dutch, who hides in plain view while cold and covered in mud on the bank of the lake.

Here, Dutch’s learning quickly closes the small gap between him and the viewer. Dutch gets a full view of the alien, gains knowledge of the active camouflage, the body suit, and the weaponry, and makes an informed assumption about how the alien may only see temperature differences.

What follows is the final fight between Dutch and the alien, and both the viewer and Dutch learn new information simultaneously. Dutch, covered in mud and sporting a bow and explosive tipped arrows after his weapons were damaged, has learned to use heat and sound to lure the alien. He lights a bonfire and gives a loud, primitive yell to bring the alien near, then manages to permanently damage the alien’s camouflage technology. The alien responds by blindly firing into the forest in the direction of the explosive arrow. Dutch later follows a trail of green liquid (which we both know now to be the alien’s blood) to stage another attack, but the alien quickly gets the upper hand and captures Dutch in a pool of water. However, after staring at Dutch’s face, the alien decides to remove its mask (which we see aids its vision) and detach its shoulder gun to face Dutch respectfully in hand to hand combat. The alien, who stands a foot taller than the already tall Dutch, completely overpowers Dutch in strength and physical attacks. Cornered, Dutch sees one of his traps and attempts to lure the alien in close enough to use it, but the alien notices it and moves around to attack from another angle. Fortunately for Dutch, that places it just beneath the counterweight for the trap. Dutch quickly release the trap and the alien is trapped beneath, bleeding out. Dutch, looking at the trapped alien, asks rhetorically “What the hell are you?”, and the alien responds by repeating the phrase. It then opens a panel on its armor, and pushes some buttons, revealing a string of 5 strange, yet regularly repeating, characters on a small screen. Both Dutch and the viewers realize it is some sort of countdown in a foreign script, and that Dutch probably has no desire to be there when the countdown reaches the alien’s equivalent of zero. Dutch is able to get far enough away to duck and hide behind a large trunk as a large mushroom cloud-shaped energy explosion erupts from where the alien was trapped.

Now, both Dutch and the viewer have learned quite a bit about the alien together, but the progression this learning process, and of the movie in general, have given rise to interesting notes about the roles Dutch, who is of course human, and the alien play. In the beginning, the clearly civilized and ethical Dutch and his team (remember, they only do rescue missions and felt cheated that they were used for simple military gain) at first equated the alien skulking in the forest to be
nothing more than a savage animal. But as the movie progresses, we see these initial roles slowly converge as we perceive the alien to take on more human characteristics and Dutch those more primitive and wild. For example, in the beginning we see Dutch’s team firing blinding into the forest after sustaining injury from some unseen assailant. Later, the alien does the same when Dutch, unseen, fires an arrow and disables its camouflage. Further, we slowly see that the alien is very humanoid in shape, and carries intellectually advanced technology. We also see that the alien bleeds when hurt, feels pain, and needs to carry a first aid kit. On the contrary, Dutch, after falling in the pool of water, resorts to more primitive technology (think almost caveman-like) to attack, and to fire and wild primal screams to lure the alien in. In this manner, it is now Dutch who has taken on the primitive hunter role, and the alien who becomes the prey. In the final fist fight, we see that the alien clearly has an understanding of feelings and concepts such as pride, honor, respect, and more, which are very much human traits. Lastly, as it activates its detonation device, we see that the alien has a written language as well. This indicates that, wherever the alien came from, there exists similar community and societal structures that necessitated the development of the written language. Aside from appearance, size, and state of technology, the end of the movie shows that Dutch and the alien are really one and the same, and, possibly, makes the conjecture that any group of intelligent beings share, at some basic level, the very same needs, values, and feelings.