



*the* STRANGE CASE *of*  
CLIVE BARKER'S  
NIGHTBREED

IT WAS A DISASTER: HACKED BY THE STUDIO AND A COMMERCIAL FLOP. YET NIGHTBREED REFUSES TO DIE. DIRECTOR CLIVE BARKER'S ORIGINAL VISION HAS SOMEHOW BEEN REVIVED — AND IT COULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED WITHOUT HIS FANS



WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS

SPECIAL THANKS RUSSELL CHERRINGTON FOR THE POLAROIDS, AND PHIL AND SARAH STOKES  
AT THE OFFICIAL CLIVE BARKER WEBSITE FOR ADDITIONAL PICTURES



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unday, June 10, 2012, and the enormous crowd gathered on LA's West Beverly Boulevard buzzes with excitement. Clutching tickets that sold out just a few days after going on sale, they begin filing into the New Beverly Cinema for a screening of something most thought they would never get to see.

In attendance are the film's director, its star, and those responsible for the film's sudden rescue from the purgatory of lost opportunity.

It isn't a new film or a glitzy premiere. It's not even a debut — North Carolina's Mad Monster Party had that privilege in March. It is actually the second outing for the unholy grail of horror: the lost cut of Clive Barker's *Nightbreed*, the closest the film has ever come to the writer-director's original vision.

*Nightbreed* was hacked down and given only a desultory release by its hostile and horrified studio. Now, 22 years later, Barker's monstrous epic has been revived — albeit in rough, near-bootleg form — a full hour longer than the 102-minute theatrical version.

"It broke my heart in 1990," says Barker. "But now I've fallen in love with the film all over again."

**N**ightbreed was more infamous for what it wasn't than what it was. Liverpoolian writer Barker (once hailed by Stephen King as "the future of horror") had already impressed with his 1987 directorial debut, *Hellraiser*, an adaptation of his own novella, *The Hellbound Heart*. *Nightbreed*, another self-adaptation, this time of 1988 novel *Cabal*, was the 'difficult second album'. It is a madly ambitious love song to the abnormal, creating and collecting more unique monsters and creatures into one movie than had been attempted before. Dozens of make-up and puppet effects were designed and built to populate the mythical necropolis of Midian — only a fraction of which were more than glimpsed in the cut eventually released. Intended as the horror genre's *Star Wars*, *Nightbreed* quickly gained a reputation as its *Magnificent Ambersons* (or, some said, *Howard The Duck*).

*Nightbreed*'s failure was a huge surprise, not only to its makers, but also to a fanbase that had been salivating with anticipation. Horror bible *Fangoria* devoted more than 30 pages to it during production, but the magazine's final word on the subject was an autopsy — part embarrassed, part defiant — justifying why it had lavished so much attention on a film that sank so quickly. The film was, *Fangoria* insisted, "a wild kaleidoscope of dark images,

• Clive Barker puts the burn on Captain Eigerman (Charles Haid) while shooting the film's climactic siege in Midian.

captivating creatures and fascinating subtext". But while that may have been true, *Nightbreed* was also borderline incoherent: a skeletal structure barely understandable to anyone who hadn't read *Cabal*.

"*Nightbreed* was taken away from me," recalls Barker. "Its meaning didn't chime with the producers. They thought a movie in which the monsters were the good guys was just financial suicide."

The film's initial producer, Joe Roth, supported Barker's vision, but moved on during production. "Joe loved the premise," Barker says, "which is paradoxical because it's also what killed the movie so dead for 20 years! Jim Robinson, who took over, hadn't read the script and wasn't aware we were making a movie where the monsters were sympathetic. I actually like Jim a lot and always have. I call him Uncle Jim, and we've never had harsh words, even though we were at loggerheads for a long time. We've yelled at each other, but it wasn't harsh yelling! He respected the fact that I had a different philosophy to him, but I don't think he would personally have sanctioned the movie. He would have thought it was a tough sell, put it that way. In one sense, I don't actually think he's wrong. There's a part of the horror audience that wants convention."

*Cabal* is the tale of Aaron Boone (played by Craig Sheffer in the film), a patient of psychiatrist Philip Decker (David Cronenberg, see right), who is framed for Decker's spate of brutal murders and takes refuge in Midian, a secret, subterranean safe haven of gods and monsters. His arrival shatters the undercity's long-sustained peace, and as the forces of 'normal' society descend upon Midian to rout out the freaks, it's clear whose side we're supposed to be on.

"Horror convention is that monsters are the villains," explains Barker. "My thesis, if you will, is that monsters and our responses to them are a lot more interesting and complex than that. We go to

**"THE CRITICS TORE ME LIMB FROM LIMB... THEY'D LOVED ME, NOW THEY HATED ME."** CLIVE BARKER



• Peloquin (Oliver Arker, left) and Kinski (Nicholas Vince, right). Right (from top): 'Red Face', as glimpsed in a flashback; 'Hotel Room Corpses', unused in either cut; 'Female Breed', seen in Lori's stumble around Midian; 'Tar Lady with companions restored for The Cabal Cut.



## A DANGEROUS METHOD ACTOR

THE CURIOUS CASE OF OL' BUTTON FACE

Why, you may ask, is *Nightbreed's* psycho psychiatrist Philip K. Decker played by David Cronenberg (above left, with Clive Barker)? He's undoubtedly a great director, but can he act?

"He's cold, man," laughs Barker. "He's not an actor, no, but what I liked was that there was a weirdness to him. When he's talking, he's so plausible, especially in comparison with Charlie Haid [*the excitable Lieutenant Elgerman*], who's ranting and raving. It was wonderful to have those two very different personalities working together. I'm a big admirer of David's and I asked if he'd do it, and to my astonishment he said yes. When he wasn't working he'd just sit around and write his William Burroughs script [*Naked Lunch*, which reached the screen in 1991]. He was great fun to have around."

Cameos aside, Cronenberg had never been on a film set as an actor before. He said he took the role "to approach filmmaking from a different perspective, to free my thoughts from their usual pattern, like a musician who gets the desire to play the blues instead of classical guitar." Those familiar with the director will not be surprised to learn that, even in the middle of shooting, he was forensically observing his own experience. "It is strange, the dislocation one feels as an actor," he said. "It's an organic process, so I'm letting it grow as it needs to."

"An actor would have played a villain," explains Barker. "Whereas David didn't. David played David."



Dracula to see Dracula, not Van Helsing. All the standard figures of monster movies have a moral ambiguity in common; we feel something more complex than simple hatred for them. I'm not interested in telling a story that's been told before. I wanted to make people think twice about why they love monsters."

*Nightbreed* was released in the UK in September 1990, seven months after its US release, arriving amid a whiff of disappointment and failure. Barker interviews in the likes of *Fear* magazine left audiences in no doubt the film they were getting wasn't the one he'd made: "The politics got so Byzantine that I didn't know who was stabbing me in the back and who was stabbing me in the eye, but they all had knives," he said. "There were times when I thought,

'I don't know why I'm bothering to deal with these people; they are total bastards.'" And that was Barker *promoting* his movie.

"I wanted to be honest about it," he tells *EMPIRE*. "I think not to have been would have been a double hypocrisy. I hated that poster (a knock-off of the *Bad Dreams* one-sheet); it was the antithesis of what the movie was. People went expecting a slasher movie and didn't get that. And those who expected a Clive Barker movie didn't get that either! Nobody was happy, and the critics, of course, tore me limb from limb. I'd made *Hellraiser* and they'd loved me, and now, in time-honoured fashion, they hated me."

And yet, *Nightbreed* gradually found an audience who both appreciated the movie as it was and were drawn in by the tease of what was missing. Maybe horror hounds instinctively champion an underdog, but it seemed that fans simply wanted to believe that the film could be improved. Doug Bradley, who played mutant patrician Lylesberg (as well as Pinhead in *Hellraiser*), tells *EMPIRE* that the film has never ceased to be a topic on the horror circuit.

"We've all been doing *Hellraiser* conventions for 20 years and the audience for *Nightbreed* has always been there," he says. "I was almost always asked whether there would be a director's cut, but I never actually thought there would be, unless somebody tripped over a tin that had 'Nightbreed Director's Cut' written on it. I knew that Clive had delivered his own cut, but I didn't think it still existed. And with the best will in the world, I doubted whether Clive would remember how it fitted together after all this time."

It was Mark Goldblatt, the studio-appointed editor who took over from Barker's man Richard Marden, who told Mark Miller of Seraphim Films that a VHS dub of the *Nightbreed* workprint was likely to still exist. Miller had come to work at Barker's production company and, aware of the painful saga, took it upon himself to track down the missing footage.

"We began our hunt," Miller recounts. "And oddly enough, it ended here in the Seraphim offices in LA! Some tapes had found their way onto a shelf and merchandise had just piled on top of them — we found them when we did some spring cleaning."

Yes, you read that right: after two decades of Barker saying that a director's cut was dependent on someone locating the necessary footage, it had been sitting in his offices the entire time.

However, there are caveats. Firstly, we're not talking about the actual film stock. These were VHS tapes of varying quality, recorded on the British PAL system but stored in the US, where they use NTSC. "That's why I wasn't watching them," Barker says, dryly.

"I took them home and found I couldn't play them!" says Miller. "Phil and Sarah, the lovely folks that run Clive's website in the UK, put them on a DVD and came back with an email saying, 'There's loads of new footage!'"

Secondly, there's a wider point about Barker himself. He has been reluctant to look backwards, even when he's written works intended as beginnings. *The Third Book Of The Art* (the last part of a trilogy started by *The Great And Secret Show* and continued by *Everville*) and the second half of *Galilee* have never materialised. Meanwhile, *The Scarlet Gospels*, the mooted meeting of Pinhead and Barker's paranormal investigator Harry D'Amour, has yet to make the journey from imagination to page. Both *Cabal* and *Nightbreed* end with Midian's destruction and the scattering of >

the Midianites, leaving Boone on a mission to reunite them in a new home, yet Barker has never bitten on his own sequel bait.

"Knowing Clive the way I do, I don't think he would have continued with *Nightbreed* even if it *had* been successful," Doug Bradley chuckles. "His mind moves far too rapidly. Even while he was writing *Cabal* and directing *Nightbreed*, he would have been planning another eight novels and films. Everything he's ever done has always been the first in a cycle of 36. He was always like that."

So if Barker tends not to revisit even positive experiences (he didn't return for the *Hellraiser* sequels), *Nightbreed* had no chance.

"The movie failed so dismally and the reception was so vicious, I was just dragged down by the waste of it," Barker says. "If I've come across as distancing myself from it, it's because I felt that I had not succeeded. I felt I'd let everybody down, including myself. There were a lot of people who'd really given their love and pushed harder than they needed to on my behalf, and we had nothing to show for it. The studio wouldn't even pay for the real actors to dub it; they wouldn't pay for Doug to come over to L.A. to do his voice (*Bradley is dubbed in the theatrical cut with a German accent*). I felt terrible about that. I'd known Doug since I was 15! There was a sense I was losing my team. So you begin to see why I felt so bad about it..."

**L**ate March, 2010, Indiana. The HorrorHound convention is hosting the world's first screening of the newly discovered *Nightbreed* workprint. Websites have picked up the story of the tapes' discovery and messageboards fill up with expressions of hope that, at long last, an uncut DVD is on its way. A legion of expectant fans is revealed, but their cheer has all but disappeared by the time the lights go back up.

"It actually wasn't the most successful screening," admits Miller, ruefully. "People did not respond to it very well. They were confused by how rough a cut it was. It was two-and-a-half hours of silence! There were scenes with no sound, scenes that had nothing going on; there were long gaps with just plate cards saying 'FX go here'..."

It needed work. Russell Cherrington, a writer-director, lecturer in film production and friend of Barker's, was allowed to take the footage and, with the type of reverent care and attention devoted to a lost Georges Méliès or a fractured Fritz Lang, created the first of several composite cuts. He was as interested in what Barker's fans wanted as Barker himself, if not more so. "As somebody that loves Clive's work with a passion, I decided I really wanted to construct the movie he set out to make," says Cherrington. "I wanted people to realise this movie exists and that it's wonderful. It's not a slasher movie; it's more like Cocteau or a Fellini than anything else! The film was legendary because of the monsters, and the fans that had been following the saga all knew there'd just been so much more of Midian originally. For years I'd heard their calls about what they wanted to see. My goal was to put in everything everyone wanted."

Cherrington spent months deconstructing the theatrical cut and the workprint tapes, re-adding sound-effects, dialogue — with Doug Bradley re-dubbing Lylesberg — and music where needed, creating something closer to Barker's original vision. A second workprint surfaced, featuring more new and alternative material, and that too was incorporated into what Barker calls "The Kitchen Sink Cut".

"It had everything possible in it," laughs Cherrington. "It wasn't tight at that point. [One character] even died twice!" Slowly, though, the cut began to take shape. "The most wonderful moment for me was the first time I burned it onto a disc," he beams. "It was different editing it than it was actually watching it. I watched it and I felt like

the happiest person in the world! That was the moment I made up my mind to call it 'The Cabal Cut', because it was so much more like the novel than previously. Clive watched it and I got this message saying, 'Oh my God, we have the film I wanted to make!'"

The hour of new footage lays much more character detail on Boone and his lover Lori (Anne Bobby). Early scenes take the time to show Boone and Lori talking and making love. Lori is revealed to be far less demure than her previous theatrical-cut self. It turns out she's a nightclub singer... yup, there's now a musical number.

There are also significant strands from the novel re-added. In the book, Decker wears a mask — "Ol' Button Face" — while killing, often talking to it and hearing it reply; Lori develops a psychic link with a Midianite child, allowing each to see through the other's eyes; and after the *Nightbreed* accept and monsterise Boone, Lori commits a strategic suicide, forcing him to revive her with his newly acquired vampire-like bite, making her his immortal beloved.

Some missing monsters that had become part of fan folklore are also back in, such as a Harryhausen-ish stop-motion leopard woman riding a dinosaur. The long sequence at the end of the film, in which an impromptu redneck army cheerfully takes Midian and its inhabitants apart, now feels much more like a tragedy: it's the eviction and extermination of Midianite victims rather than the cacophonous monster-mash battle it once appeared to be. Reshoots had seen Decker resurrected supernaturally, shifting the focus away from Lori and Boone, but that has now been dropped again in line with Barker's intended story. And the film now has time to breathe, rather than just rattling through the narrative as quickly as possible.

"I love Mark Goldblatt, but he had an impossible job," says Barker of the editor brought in by the studio to 'rescue' the film. "He cut many movies that I admire a great deal (*Goldblatt had been the editor on *The Terminator* and *The Howling**), but I hadn't accounted for his cutting style, which is to pare things to within an inch of their lives. He did everything he possibly could, bless his heart, to make me feel good about what was happening, but watching all this footage get discarded was like a death of a thousand cuts. We had a lot of very long shots with graceful, beautiful camera moves that Mark would simply cut in half. Everything jumps around in the theatrical version. It has no true rhythm. The theatrical cut convulses, but *The Cabal Cut* dances."

In many ways, *The Cabal Cut* is stranger than the theatrical version: it begins, as always, with a dream sequence and never really sheds that aura of surreal otherness. But in either version it's hard to shake the notion that, while the film fleshes out the creatures physically, we still never learn anything about them.

"That's something Clive does," says Doug Bradley. "You can pick up on these things as a sort of shorthand, and understand what's happening in a strange way, but he's great at dropping in amazing characters that make you go, 'Woah! Who are they?' And at the end of the film you're none the wiser. 'We are cenobites.' Okay, and a cenobite is...? 'We are explorers in the further regions of experience.' Yes, but *who the fuck are you?!'*"

The Midianite Rachel (Catherine Chevalier) tells Lori that the *Nightbreed* are "the last survivors of the great tribes... shapeshifters, freaks, the remains of races that your species has driven to extinction", but there's no real explanation of how they've come to live in a cemetery in Alberta, Canada, or how Midian has remained secret despite apparently being just off a main road and quite easy for everyone in the movie to find. A 'making of' book called *The Nightbreed Chronicles* >

• Lylesberg (Doug Bradley) is propped up by Boone (Craig Sheffer). Bradley says of being dubbed with a German accent for the theatrical version: "I think some executive woke up one morning and hit his head on the bedpost and said, 'Mein Gott! LylesBERG! He's Cherman!'" Inset: Cronenberg as Decker with a stand-in Ol' Button Face. Below (from top): Barker's hated *Bad Dreams*-style 'slasher poster'; Cherrington's *Cabal Cut* one-sheet.



**"IT'S NOT A SLASHER; IT'S MORE LIKE A COCTEAU OR A FELLINI THAN ANYTHING."** RUSSELL CHERRINGTON



## THE FANDOM EDITS

NIGHTBREED ISN'T THE ONLY MOVIE TO UNDERGO A FAN-INSPIRED TRANSFORMATION



### GIORGIO MORODER'S METROPOLIS 1984

In 1984, disco producer Giorgio Moroder released a restored, tinted edit of Fritz Lang's silent masterpiece. He turned intertitles into subtitles, added pop track by Bonnie Tyler and Pat Benatar and released it to controversy. Sometimes, Giorgio, less is more.

### STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM EDIT 2001

This is now legendary. It loses 20 minutes of the Lucas version and huge swathes of Jar Jar Binks and Jake Lloyd's storylines, as well as re-editing scenes so that, for example, Anakin actually appears afraid when Yoda notes that there is great fear in him.

### PEARL HARBOR: STRENGTH AND HONOR EDITION 2001

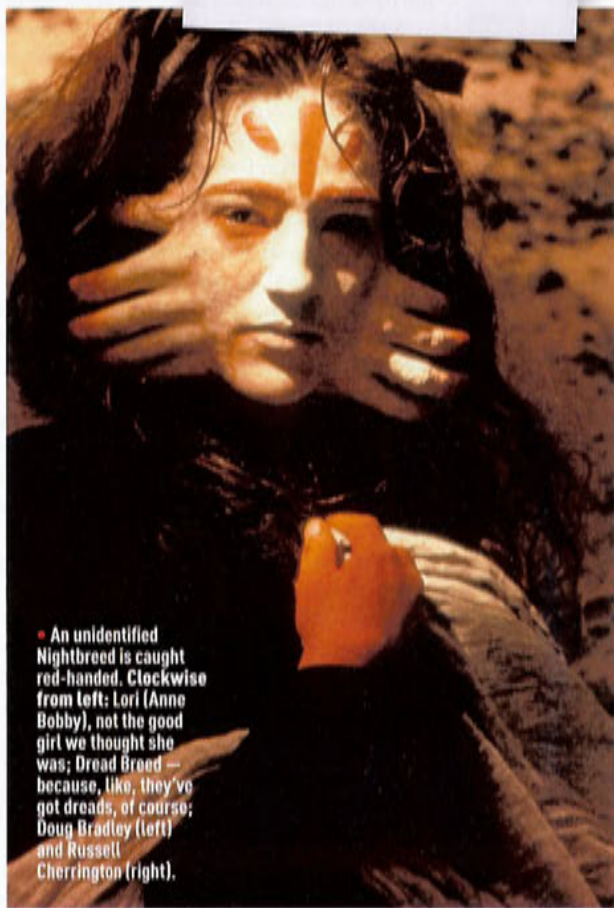
Judging by this, the thing standing between Pearl Harbor and greatness was the love story. Lose that, and you remove 60 per cent of the film's corniness and at least 80 per cent of its pacing problems. Sure, it's still a Michael Bay film, but there's no phony tension and it becomes a straight-up war movie with that cool bomb-cam

### THE MATRIX: DE-ZIONISED 2005

This combines the two Matrix sequels into one film, losing two hours of Zion raving and any pace-sapping soppy stuff

### THE GRACE EDIT 2012

Actor Topher Grace decided he wanted to learn more about editing, so he edited all three Star Wars prequels into one 85-minute movie as practice. According to friends it was coherent and well-paced, but don't expect to see it any time soon. Unless you're his mate. HELEN O'HARA



• An unidentified Nightbreed is caught red-handed. Clockwise from left: Lori (Anne Bobby), not the good girl we thought she was; Dread Breed — because, like, they've got dreads, of course; Doug Bradley (left) and Russell Cherrington (right).

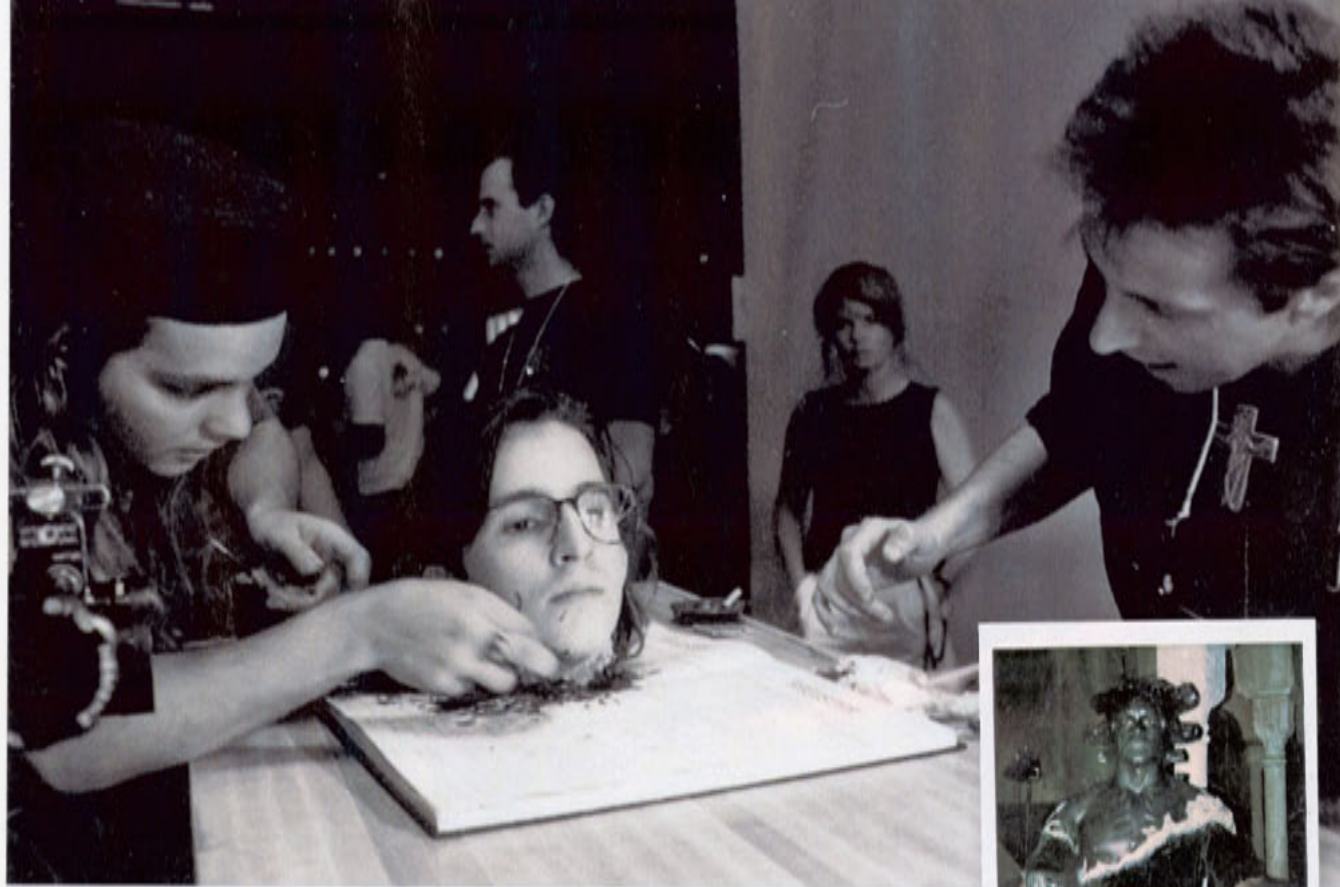




## ROCK OF MONSTERS

HOW NIGHTBREED  
INSPIRED AN  
EXTREME-METAL  
CONCEPT ALBUM

In 2000, ten years after it disappeared, Nightbreed was exhumed by Suffolk extreme metal heretics Cradle Of Filth for their fourth album, *Midian*. "It kind of is and isn't a concept album," lead screamer Dani explains to *Empire*. "*Midian* as a title just made perfect sense. The central song, *Tortured Soul Asylum*, is about *Midian*, and the characters in the rest [of the album] made up a sort of collective from this mythical place where monsters live." Several of the band were fans of Barker and the way he mythologised himself. "We loved *Cabal*, *The Damnation Game* and *The Books Of Blood*," says Dani. "And we liked that everything had Clive Barker presents..." on it before people even knew who he was. That gave it an air of mystery; you should know who this is, but you don't." Barker gave the record his "remote blessing, but the band only heard about it second-hand." "We felt old Clive was a bit sniffy about it," says Dani. "He wasn't very interested." More enthusiastic was Doug Bradley, who lent Pinhead-ish gravitas to the album's narrated passages. "I'm not really a fan of black metal or death metal or whatever it is," Bradley tells us, "but there's obviously a big crossover with the horror audience. I thought Dani was very sharp. I liked his writing, so I did that recording and a couple of years later they asked again!" "Doug's been on four of our albums now," Dani laughs. "We can't get rid of him!"



• Above: Barker works on a reshoot, done at the studio's behest to give Decker extra slasher adventures. Right: Baphomet, god of *Midian* (Bernard Henry). Below: Vasty Moses (Mark Jones), an ambitious prosthetic job even today, according to model unit director Julian Parry.

functions as a catalogue of the film's creatures, with biographies penned by Barker: porcupine girl Shuna Sassi (Christine McCorkindale) is an ex-prostitute who tried to drown himself in the River Seine after a drug called St. Victor's compound re-shaped his features; rage-monster Peloquin (Oliver Parker) is a sex addict. But there's no suggestion the actors knew any of this.

Simon Bamford, who played Ohnaka (and also played the fat cenobite in *Hellraiser* and *Hellbound*), says Barker simply pointed him towards the character of Tadzio in Visconti's *Death In Venice*. "He's supposed to be a character you might be obsessed with but is unobtainable," Bamford says. "That *Chronicles* book says something about his having been created by angels as a perfect being, after which they broke their mould and painted him with tattoos. Somebody told me that, but I'd never heard it before. It made me laugh!"

A flawed film in any form, then, but still a fascinating one: maybe it's not the horror genre's *Star Wars* or *The Magnificent Ambersons*; maybe it's its *Dune*...

**D**uring *Empire*'s conversation with Barker, the author keeps discreetly and mysteriously turning to his computer to fire off tweets. It's clear he isn't being rude, though: it appears that something is going on.

It turns out to be an announcement, changing *Nightbreed: The Cabal Cut* from essentially a fan edit — albeit a sophisticated, author-approved one with festival interest — into something more official. "My friends," wrote @RealCliveBarker, "following two sold-out screenings of *Nightbreed: The Cabal Cut*, Morgan Creek has given us permission to show it around the world and to prepare it for a release on Blu-ray. This could not and would not have happened without all your voices. We have been heard..." Barker, it's clear, is newly enthused.

"It was the Mad Monster festival screening

that kicked everything off," says Miller. "They initially asked for the workprint that had played so poorly at HorrorHound, but I told them what had happened and that we were working on something a bit more genuine. Russell and I then had to race to deliver something that we were all happy with by the time of the festival."

"It's gone absolutely mad!" Cherrington says. "It was at Mad Monster that Anne Bobby stood up and said, 'We should Occupy Midian!' I went to the bar, got on my iPhone and bought the URL right then! By the next week, Ryan Danhauser (*co-host of a Clive Barker podcast*) got a Facebook group going, and within two months we're up to nearly 6,000 people on a petition and 5,000 likes on Facebook, just from one screening. We're getting requests for it to close great big festivals, even in its current state! What today's announcement means is that we can at least take the tapes we've got and try to restore them, like *The Wicker Man*. We can do a proper high-quality digitisation, so it's not just sub-quality footage that's been played out of a VHS and onto a DVD. But we haven't finished our journey with it. We're determined to find the original negatives."

The *Cabal Cut* does indeed have a long way to go: in its current condition, while a tantalising look at Barker's vision, it's not in a releasable state. "What we're looking at is a monstrous jigsaw," Barker says. "But the fact we've been able to reassemble the pieces in the right order now testifies to the fact that my version was actually shot. After all this time, I'm suddenly very optimistic!"

"My favourite moment was when Clive said to me, 'Y'know, I think we could lose five or ten minutes of this if we trim the fat,'" laughs Miller. "Twenty years later, it's finally too long!"

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**NIGHTBREED: THE CABAL CUT WILL PLAY AT LONDON'S FRIGHTFEST ON FRIDAY, AUGUST 24. KEEP AN EYE ON WWW.OCCUPYMIDIAN.COM FOR FURTHER UPCOMING UK SCREENINGS.**



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