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HELLRAISER: JUDGEMENT

GARY J. TUNNICLIFFE TALKS PINHEAD



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HELLRAISER: JUDGEMENT

GARY J. TUNNICLIFE TALKS PINHEAD...

Words: Owen Williams

The history of the HELLRAISER series is one of compromise. Even Clive Barker's 1987 original, now revered as a twisted cult classic, was only rescued from disaster by reshoots. Some of its many sequels are underrated, some have their moments, and a couple have no moments at all: knocked out on the cheap for cynical reasons by filmmakers with no love for the franchise. So it comes as a pleasant surprise that JUDGEMENT – part 10 if you're counting – is the most fascinating HELLRAISER for years. If it's low on cash, it's gloriously high in concept.

The reason for that dramatic step up in quality is writer-director Gary J. Tunnicliffe, whose association with HELLRAISER began in 1990 with the threequel HELL ON EARTH. Gary has been involved in some capacity with every HELLRAISER since then, working his way up from lowly crew-member to chief make-up creator and designer, creature designer and operator, second unit director, screenwriter, and ultimately now to the top job. And he acts too. Shot in two weeks on a budget of \$350k, his JUDGEMENT manages to rise above its practical limitations and controversial re-casting of franchise icon Pinhead with an ambitious expansion of the HELLRAISER mythology, introducing Heaven for the first time, as well as Hell's gruesomely bizarre judicial system. The structure is a police procedural, but the answers the cops stumble towards on their hunt for an apparent serial killer are anything but obvious. We asked Gary to explain...

SCREAM: The last HELLRAISER, REVELATIONS, was infamously made very quickly and cheaply, purely so that studio Dimension could hold on to the rights. Was that the situation this time?

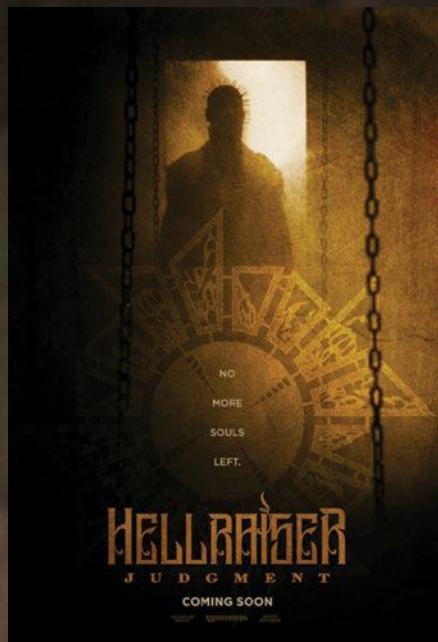
GARY J. TUNNICLIFE: I'm sure it's part of it, but it at least wasn't last-minute like REVELATIONS. I wrote the REVELATIONS script while I was working on SCREAM 4,

REX and UNDERWORLD and they're not exactly cinematic masterpieces. The director of those movies [George Pavlou] screwed them up, and the director of REVELATIONS didn't do me any favours either!"

I wrote a version of what became JUDGEMENT on spec immediately after REVELATIONS and pitched it to Dimension, but they weren't interested at that point. I thought that was my chance to direct a HELLRAISER film gone.

SCREAM: You then tried to fund it yourself as a Kickstarter project, is that right?

GJT: Yes, I took out the specific HELLRAISER aspects and reworked it as just a film about these weird characters. I didn't know much about the Kickstarter process at the time. Within three days we had about \$9k – I was asking for \$200k – but then it stalled, and it was explained to me that I needed to be going cap-in-hand with it to everybody I'd ever vaguely met in my life, every producer and actor, and going on Twitter and Facebook and all that. I don't know if it's my Englishness or what,



and by the time SCREAM 4 had finished, REVELATIONS had already been shot. It was that fast. What was filmed is not the script that I wrote. Fans say to me, "You're the guy that wrote REVELATIONS; that movie fucking sucked, man!" I'm like, "Excuse me, Clive Barker wrote RAWHEAD





but it just seemed really grubby. I don't want to sell t-shirts and badges. So I shut it down and abandoned it. And then three years later Dimension asked me if I was still interested in directing a *HELLRAISER*. I was like, "Yes, and I've got one!"

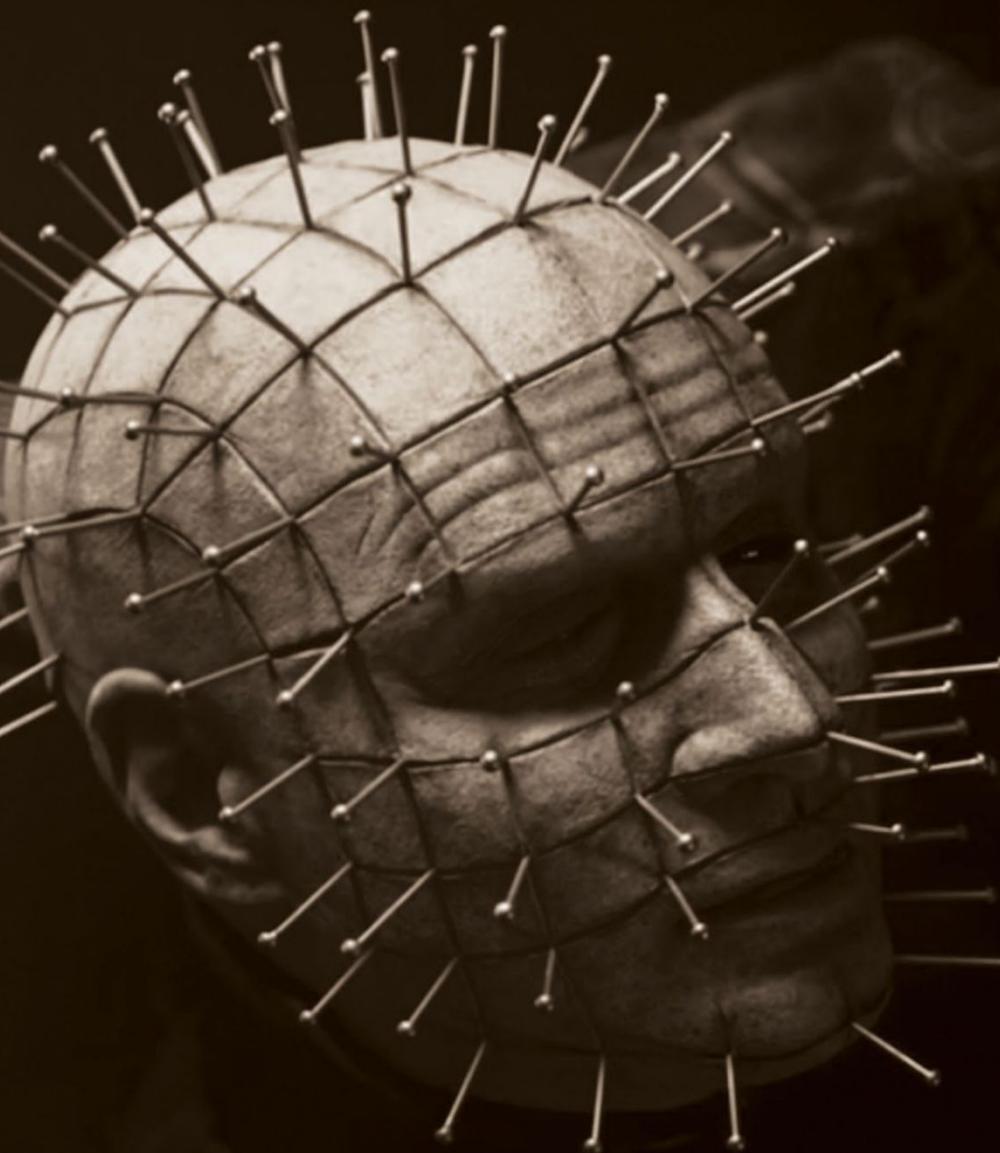
SCREAM: There's a lot of quite extreme, perverse stuff in *JUDGEMENT*: a lot of blood and spit and vomit and bizarre machinery and violence. Was there any resistance to all that from the studio?

GJT: (Laughs) Yes, there was. They thought it was fucked up. I wrote three different treatments, but they were still... unconvinced. Eventually I wrote a synopsis for something else called *HELLRAISER: ENTER DARKNESS*, which was set in a psychiatric hospital. They were like, "Perfect! *FLATLINERS* meets *HELLRAISER*! Write that!" But I held out for *JUDGEMENT*. I insisted that was the right film to make: that it should be different and weird. I said, "For the low budget we're talking about, let's risk *JUDGEMENT*. We've got nothing to lose." We made a deal where they said I could go away and write a full script for *JUDGEMENT*, and if they didn't like it I'd write the other film for free. My wife thought I was mad. But I wrote *JUDGEMENT*, sent it in, and they actually said they thought it was kind of cool and they kind of liked it – although obviously they had pages of notes. We did three months of rewrites and polishes.

That's another thing I regret about *REVELATIONS*. Nobody at Dimension was paying any attention to it because they were all focused on *SCREAM*. Victor Garcia could have made the most crazy, twisted, perverse film and got away with it because nobody was looking. He wasted that freedom. With *JUDGEMENT* it was the only Dimension film being made at the time so I was under the microscope. I had executives all over me, but it actually proved to be beneficial to the story and, eventually, the script was locked and we started pre-production and casting.

SCREAM: Was there ever a point where it looked like Doug Bradley might come back to play Pinhead? Is it correct that his involvement broke down over a non-disclosure agreement?

GJT: It's such a shame. I love Doug and I would have loved him to be in this. He's a 20-year friend. We've been through the trenches together: worked together, played together, had fun, hung out, been crazy dudes on the road! So as soon as the



script was green-lit I was really excited to send it to him. I got him on the phone, and straight away he said, "Why are you helping those assholes make another piece-of-shit-movie? I don't see the point." I was like, "This is my piece-of-shit movie, Doug! I'm directing this one!" I really wanted him to be like, "Oh it's you doing it! Oh well sign me up, I'm in!" He agreed to read it but he was pretty negative.

Dimension allowed me to pursue him, because I thought it was important to have him and I wanted my friend to be involved. We were offering him a decent amount of money. It wasn't an insult at all, like *REVELATIONS* had been, where they only offered him US\$5k. But there was a concern that if he didn't like the script he would be negative about it publicly (as he had been with *REVELATIONS*) or reveal plot points, so Dimension sent a completely standard NDA. Doug's response was "How dare you?" He sent me an email that said, "I'm not going to sign an NDA just to read a damn script." So then we were looking for another Pinhead.

I contacted him a few weeks ago with the subject header "Olive Branch" to try

and put this behind us so that when the film came out I could tell interviewers we'd had a falling out but it's all behind us now. I thought it would be nice to be able to say he wished Paul Taylor the best and things like that. I really wanted to make things right, but he never responded. So I guess we'll end up at some convention in America sometime and be scowling at each other across the breakfast table.

SCREAM: The irony is that it's a much better role for Pinhead than there's been for years.

GJT: I think it is. I think he'd have had great fun with it and relished it and the fans would have loved it. It would've been great. The fans are against us now, because we've had to re-cast again.

SCREAM: How did you settle on Paul Taylor to replace him?

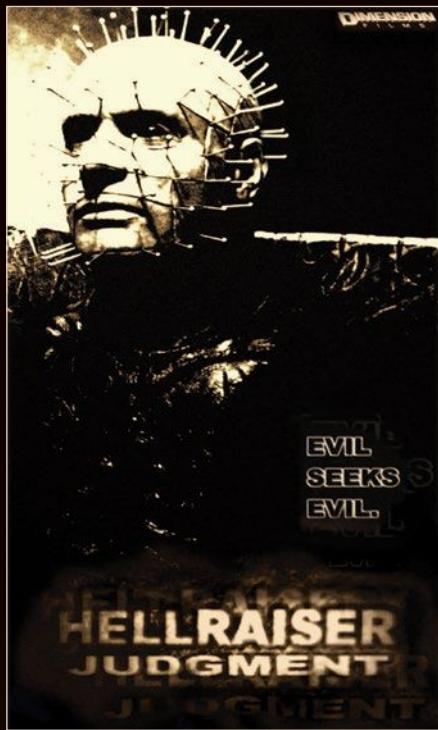
GJT: Loads of people auditioned in Oklahoma where we shot, and Paul had the right physicality and he did a good English accent, and in his casting tape he actually had a *HELLRAISER* box: we didn't announce what the role was, but he'd figured out from the dialogue it was a *HELLRAISER* movie. He was really excited and enthusiastic, and I felt confident I could work with him. He was thrilled when he got it. I told him I wanted him to play it like Grand Moff Tarkin. We used Peter Cushing as a reference all the time.

You know in the first film where Pinhead says "We'll tear your soul apart" and smoke comes out of his mouth? They did that by having Doug take a puff on a cigarette before he said the line. I wanted to try that for when Paul says "Evil seeks evil", and Paul said he smoked. But it turned out he didn't at all, or hadn't for years. I got him to take all these drags to say the line, and he almost passed out and got really sick! He was so embarrassed. I was like, "Great, first day of shooting and we've fucking killed Pinhead!"

SCREAM: Does a *HELLRAISER* actually need Pinhead? Several of the sequels have struggled to find anything interesting to do with him. Is he just the posterboy that the studio insists on at this point, because the fans latched onto him way back when?



GJT: When Doug turned us down, that was a conversation at Dimension. Half the execs at the table thought Pinhead was essential, and the other half weren't convinced we needed him at all. I was eventually like, "Eh, I'd keep him in if I was you. I'm in enough hot water as it is. If I make a *HELLRAISER* without a fucking Pinhead the fans'll go even more apeshit than they already are." Personally, I do think if you're going to make a *HELLRAISER* movie you need Pinhead. I think he's interesting, and he's actually one of the few horror icons that speaks and is articulate. But his rhetoric tends to be a bit similar every time, so that's how The Auditor came about, so we could hear someone a bit different.



SCREAM: You played The Auditor yourself, and you kept that secret throughout production. Why was that?

GJT: I didn't want the attention. I thought it would be very negative. I'd already got enough knives out for me. I wanted to do it; I thought if I fucked it up I could always dub myself later. But there was a technical reason for doing it too. When you do a prosthetic make-up, you have to hire actors a long time in advance to get the make-up ready, but we couldn't do that. And we only had two make-up artists in Oklahoma. So any time The Auditor was in a scene, I'd come in two hours before the start of the day, off the clock, and my make-up guys would do me. Then I would go onto set and start working while Pinhead came in and got his make-up on, because we couldn't have done the

two characters simultaneously. I'd direct for a bit in my full make-up and then go back and help apply Pinhead's stuff and finish him off. There are photos of me applying Pinhead's make-up in full Auditor costume.

Nobody at the studio even knew I was playing him. Not even Bob Weinstein. The nicest thing that happened was, Bob Weinstein called to congratulate me on the film when it was done – which never happens, by the way. And he asked who The Auditor was and I told him, and I heard him shout to someone away from the receiver, "That guy with the cuts on his face: that's fucking Tunnicliffe!"

SCREAM: The Auditor and the new characters are part of a different order than we've seen in *HELLRAISER* before, right? They aren't Cenobites.

GJT: They're not, no. I called them the Stygian Inquisition, and I had that strange bureaucracy of Terry Gilliam's Brazil in mind. In my dream version you'd see that there are rooms full of hundreds of auditors, and you'd see that there were thousands of these houses all over the world, processing people all the time. It wasn't so much trying to do leather-bound Cenobites. My idea was to show a different part of Hell. The Cenobites and the Order of the Gash are this weird sadomasochistic kind of cult, but all of Hell isn't like that, because all of Hell isn't populated by those kinds of people with those specific desires and wants.

SCREAM: I was impressed by how careful the film is to make that clear. Some filmmakers and writers have missed the

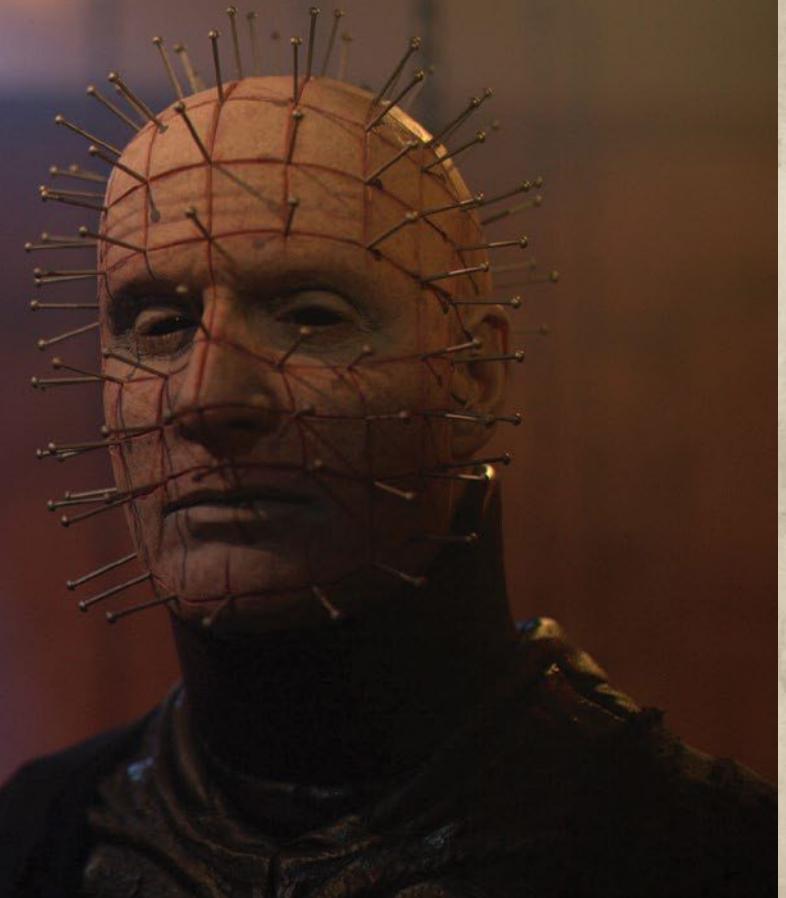
point that the Cenobites aren't punitive. They're not devils that take you to Hell as punishment. It's more this Lovecraftian thing of taking you somewhere unimaginable beyond horror, because in some way you've asked for that to happen. That was what Clive Barker hated about *INFERNO*: that at the end it turns out to be Pinhead teaching someone a moral lesson. That's not what the Cenobites are about at all.

GJT: Exactly. The Stygian Inquisition take care of that side of things. They're constantly processing souls, and Pinhead is separate to that. He's off with his Order of the Gash, and their thing is you open the box and they come for you. But I think Pinhead also has certain duties in Hell, like a manager who has to get involved sometimes when there's a problem on the line! And I think he's bored. I think he's been doing this a long time and there's no sensation in it for him any more. Where does the thrill for the Cenobites lie, after they've been doing this for centuries? That's why he's quite energised by going after the angel at the end of this film.

SCREAM: It's almost jarring to see Heaven introduced into a *HELLRAISER* film... Which is weird because if we accept the one exists in *HELLRAISER*'s world, we must have accepted they both do.

GJT: Yeah, I'm a staunch atheist, but if you're going to buy into *HELLRAISER* and accept that there's a Hell, you have to also accept that there must be a Heaven. I reasoned that God isn't proud of his basement, but he's still running it. He lets them do their own sordid stuff, but he puts a couple of angels in charge of it





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and occasionally they have to go down there, and occasionally they put it to use for their own ends. That to me was a really interesting sub-plot: if there’s a Heaven, maybe it’s involved in all this. I started researching angels, and that’s where I found the Jophiel character [played by Helena Grace Donald], who’s the one that banished Adam and Eve from Eden. I read a lot to make it all Biblically correct. When I first saw *THE OMEN* as a kid, the first thing I did afterwards was get a Bible and look up The Book of Revelation and go, “It’s all really in here! *THE OMEN* is true!” I wanted people to come out of *JUDGEMENT* and go and look up Jophiel.

SCREAM: How did you decide which of the classic Cenobites to use?

GJT: Again, because of the budget I was actually trying to re-use stuff. I didn’t really like the way the Stitch Twins turned out in *HELLSEEKER*, so this was a chance to do them properly. It was a case of, rather than trying to make costumes, which is expensive, just going online and trying to find good bondage costumes. That was a drag. “I’m researching my movie, darling. Damn this research!” Then in Oklahoma it was just about finding people who fit the costumes.

And I just love Chatterer, and Mike Regan, who works for me, plays him, so

that was a no-brainer. He had to come back. I’d have loved more Cenobites, but they’re expensive!

SCREAM: How did John Gulager [director of *FEAST* and *PIRANHA 3DD*] end up playing The Assessor?

GJT: I just thought of him immediately. I’d never seen John act but I knew he’d be perfect. I wanted it to be over the top and weirdly creepy and slovenly and sweaty, and he really went for it. When he was directing *FEAST* I found him a nightmare to work for, but I’d hire him as an actor any time.

SCREAM: And how did you score that cameo from Heather Langenkamp?

GJT: Heather is originally from Oklahoma and a friend of the casting director [Chris Freihofer]. He told her he was working on one of the weirdest scripts he had ever read, and she was curious and asked to read it, and when she did she thought it was totally bizarre and asked if there was a small part in it she could do. I think she was really just looking for a cameo with the view, “I’ll visit Oklahoma, see my family and do this really weird, cool little film where I’m foul-mouthed and ugly!” I didn’t know her. I was just a fan of her and her amazing husband [FX artist David LeRoy Anderson]

and was thrilled to have her on set. And she knows how to drink a glass or two of wine at the end of a shooting day!

SCREAM: Finally, have you had any contact with Clive Barker during this project?

GJT: I haven’t, apart from some emails with people within his organisation. It’s sad. A few of us who are friends with him from *HELLRAISER* and *LORD OF ILLUSIONS* and things still meet up in LA, but most of us haven’t seen him for several years. He was always a fascinating person to be in the presence of, and I loved his work. I wish I had his work ethic. You’d go and hang out with him and when you got home you’d feel like you had to start writing or creating something immediately. “Life’s going by and I’m not doing enough!” I don’t really care what the fans think of *JUDGEMENT*, but I really hope Clive sees the film and at least thinks it’s interesting. I’d love the master to approve of it.

SCREAM: Thanks for the interview, Gary.

GJT: My pleasure, thanks.

HELLRAISER: *JUDGEMENT* is currently available as a Region 1 import from the States. Dimension has yet to announce any UK and European release date at this time.