

## “NIGHTBREED” Resurrected? A Progress Report

Written by Mike Watt  
Thursday, 15 April 2010 11:36

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Clive Barker’s NIGHTBREED, the dark fable about monsters without and within, began life as a short novel called CABAL and was later adapted by the author to direct himself for the big screen. After numerous setbacks and compromises, the movie was released, with little fanfare, in 1990 by 20th Century Fox. But what audiences saw and what the artist envisioned were two very different things.

In 2002, Barker told me that of his film work, he considered NIGHTBREED to be “the runt of the litter. Why do I say that? Because there are so many frustrated possibilities there. When you have a vision of something and you get halfway down the line to making it possible and studio politics interfere, it’s frustrating. One of these days, I’ll buck up the courage and look at it again.”



Over the years, Barker continued to approach the two companies that held the footage, Fox and production entity Morgan Creek, in search of scenes excised to accommodate reshoots and a reworked ending imposed on him by the executives. There was much more involving the evil Dr. Decker (played by genre legend David Cronenberg) and his relationship with his expressionless mask—his “face”. Barker had also shot a scene of Lori (Anne Bobby) singing a sad version of “Johnny Get Angry,” mourning the loss of her lover, Boone, prior to her discovery of his survival. There was a new ending for the self-skinning Narcisse (Hugh Ross), including his own verbal introduction to Decker, a bloodier sendoff for Captain Eigerman (Charles Haid) and a more ambiguous demise for Decker himself. And so much more involving the Nightbreed themselves—the menagerie of creatures who called the Midian necropolis their home. Not so much stories, *per se*, or even sequences, but “moments” that Barker desired to restore.

For a long time, it seemed this footage was indeed lost. Then Barker’s longtime friend Mark Miller took it upon himself to undertake the search on his own. According to Phil and Sarah Stokes, the curators of Clivebarker.info—Barker’s official website and physical archive—authors of MEMORY, PROPHECY AND FANTASY: THE WORKS AND WORLDS OF CLIVE BARKER and editors of THE PAINTER, THE CREATURE AND THE FATHER OF LIES, a collection of

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Barker’s non-fiction due out from Earthling Publications later this year, Miller achieved the impossible. “He’d uncovered the outstandingly wonderful news that the ‘lost’ footage actually still existed and was safely in [Morgan Creek’s] storage,” the Stokeses tell Fango. The balloon quickly burst, however, when Miller told them “the very bad news that they had no intention of doing anything with it.”

From Morgan Creek’s point of view, NIGHTBREED had been an underperformer in terms of both theatrical box office and on home video. As Miller was informed, the studio didn’t even see the benefits of upgrading the film for Blu-Ray. For their part, the Stokeses saw no merit in, as they saw it, “antagonizing” Morgan Creek with a fan protest. Instead, they thought it more helpful to demonstrate to the company that there was a groundswell of support among fans who would indeed pay good money for a director’s cut.



“Supported by news items on Fangoria.com and other sites, we were immediately swamped by e-mails,” they say. “The response has been incredible, for which we give our huge and heartfelt thanks! We’re still adding names every day to the [support page](#) . A couple of thousand e-mails into the process, Clive sent us an old UK PAL VHS tape marked simply ‘NIGHTBREED’ that he and Mark had pulled off a shelf without any idea whether it had anything unusual on it. We popped it in our player—and found it to be a 145-minute version of the film’s mid-1989 workprint—that’s 44 minutes longer than the theatrical release—and it’s even more significant than that, since there are none of the later reshoots of Decker’s murders, so the actual deleted footage is far more than 44 minutes!

“We gave Clive, Mark and everyone else the great news,” they continue, “and then six weeks later, we were stunned with a second VHS, this one running 159 minutes with even more deleted scenes. In the meantime, Morgan Creek had contacted us, prompted by the sheer number of people who’d added themselves to the support page. Reversing their earlier ‘no intention of releasing it’ position, the power of NIGHTBREED’s fans had convinced them to think again. While they’ve not come round to a ‘yes’ position yet, we’re continuing to have constructive conversations about getting this done. For instance, it was Morgan Creek who kindly authorized the screening of the VHS workprint at HorrorHound,” the recent genre convention in Indianapolis.

In a packed house and introduced by much of the cast (including Doug Bradley, Oliver Parker

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and longtime friend Ashley Laurence), as well as a visibly ill and near-voiceless but excited and animated Barker, the NIGHTBREED workprint was unveiled. To die-hard fans, this was *the* moment—and perhaps only die-hard fans could have truly appreciated the screening. The near-three-hour assembly was minus score and sound FX as well as all visual postproduction, bearing the once-typical editorial onscreen marks indicating cuts, fades, etc., and contained multiple takes of certain shots. A good 20 minutes played with the audio out of synchronization with the image. There wasn't the traditional pace of a feature film, just an unreeling of footage.

Which is what made the screening so rare and amazing. For the first time (minus a preview screening for Horrorhound inner circle the night before), this material was seen in its entirety by the general public—at least, those lucky enough to attain tickets. It was a rare glimpse behind the curtain of filmmaking and, for many in the room, the very first opportunity to see what a movie looks like in its larval stage. And it gave everyone there an idea of what Barker originally envisioned. Somewhere between this raw form and the compromised version we were given 20 years ago lies the Clive Barker Cut.

But only if (or, God willing, when) Morgan Creek acquiesces.

As of this writing, Phil and Sarah Stokes have nothing new to report. “We’ll close our comments with, ‘Since the HorrorHound screening, conversations have continued with Morgan Creek as to the next steps toward a reconstructed version of the movie.’ ”

Which means it's now up to us, the fans, to prove to Morgan Creek that such a restoration is worth undertaking. Oddly enough, looking back at NIGHTBREED's history, the time seems riper than ever. In 1990, horror hadn't yet resurfaced as a financially viable genre, so executives didn't know what to do with the morally ambiguous monster movie. In 2002, the possibility of even locating the footage seemed impossible, as Barker once related: “I'm sure I won't be given the keys to Fox's vaults and [be told], ‘Go look for your missing 25 minutes.’ It's sort of interesting that movies have their moments where suddenly they come back into focus again, and I hope this can happen for NIGHTBREED at some point—where somebody does say that. An advocate does appear. It doesn't have to be the head of the studio, just someone who comes in and takes a position of power at Fox, calls me and says, ‘Hey, we'd like to see what we can do about putting this picture back together the way you intended.’ That's not beyond the realm of possibility, but it ain't happened yet.”

But, Barker added, “And yet, looking at the other side, I've had a lot of good fortune. I've had

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wonderful people to work with and for.”

While his irritation with the industry has never been a secret, Barker’s optimism and faith in his fans, and horror fans in general, has never wavered. Speaking barely above a whisper to a roomful of people, he pointed his hand, scanning the crowd. “You,” he said. “This is happening because of you. You kept this alive all this time. You’re saying to them, ‘We tell *you* what we want. You don’t tell us.’ I can’t thank you enough for this.”

*Special thanks to Ally Melling, Lydia Burris, David Alusik, Phil and Sarah Stokes for their invaluable assistance with this piece.*

{jcomments on}