

B-Fest '87

A TALK WITH HELLRAISER CLIVE BARKER

Clive Barker has kind of exploded onto the North American horror field. The author of several gruesome films—two of which he publicly disowns—*Underworld* and *Rawhead Rex*—and director of *Hellraiser*, a film which the Ontario Film Review Board wanted banned outright, Barker is also the writer of two best-selling novels, *The Damnation Game* and *Weaveworld*. His six-volume collection of short horror fiction, the *Books of Blood*, has been available for roughly two years in Sphere paperback. The Second Annual B-Movie Festival featured the uncut *Hellraiser* for its closing-night Halloween gala. Barker was on hand to introduce the film. In an interview with *Excalibur's* Norman Wilner, Barker presents us with his experiences in filmmaking and writing, and his views on the taboos left in today's society. It should be noted for the sake of this interview that *Rawhead Rex* is a tale about an ancient fertility god running amok in 1980s Ireland.

EXCALIBUR: In 1986, two films were released with screenplays written by you, *Underworld* and *Rawhead Rex*. You've since disowned both pictures, but which one would you prefer audiences to see?

BARKER: I would have to have my back against a wall with 10 machetes poised over my head to recommend either. I took these guys (director George Pavlou, producers Don Hawkins and Kevin Atteu) to court to get the rest of the material that they had access to, *back*. The point was that, jeez, I thought, they had fucked me over right royally with the first two pictures, done stuff behind my back, changed stuff, fiddled around...

EXCALIBUR: I saw *Rawhead* the other night, and it's a bit disjointed.

BARKER: It's a poor, poor picture. I didn't write half the dialogue, and they locked me off the set in order to be able to do that behind my back.

EXCALIBUR: The *Rawhead* creature, though (a large, toothy beast); is that how you envisioned it?

BARKER: No, and they asked me to draw it, so I drew the monster as I felt it should look, and the next time I saw the monster it was like Arnold Schwarzenegger, like this plastic Arnold Schwarzenegger type, with the tits of Jayne Mansfield, and the face of a shaved gorilla... not my idea of *Rawhead* at all.

EXCALIBUR: How did you see him?

BARKER: Very lean, very lean, like a naked appetite, and not gorilla-like at all, very flat-faced. Much weirder than that, *much* weirder. And naked... I don't think things rise from the grave after two thousand years with their clothes intact. *Rawhead Rex* is a story about—you probably can't use this—a nine-foot *dick* on the loose.

EXCALIBUR: Oh, we'll print anything.

BARKER: Okay, then, that's what it's about. It's about the phallic principle. I mean, he should *look* like that. He should walk like... a *dick* on the loose. And he didn't. They took out the brutality, the blood, they took out all the stuff they could have done.

EXCALIBUR: But they did leave in the *Baptism* (in which *Rawhead* urinates on one of his servants, "cleansing" him of conventional religion).

BARKER: Yeah, but they left in the urination without any of its perversity. I mean, I don't want to trash these guys; they did what they did, and I don't like what they did, and the bottom line is that's the relationship: Thanks, guys, I didn't like what you did. That's what it amounts to. They don't speak to me, I don't speak to them. It's like a marriage, really.

EXCALIBUR: You were reported to be

taking *Son of Celluloid* around, and you ran into some trouble in Hollywood there.

BARKER: Only in the sense that this is a story about a cancer that does Fred Astaire impersonations, and there's a certain element of surprise there. It's a picture we're actually going to develop now, with the same people [who worked on *Hellraiser*]. Christopher Figg, and all that.

EXCALIBUR: Will you be directing it?

BARKER: I don't know, we'll have to think about that. Certainly I intend to watch over it as a producer... I think it would be great fun to do. A cinema like this... all the doors locked, and there's a creature in here doing movie star impersonations!

EXCALIBUR: But the creature is a walking cancer, and if there's one thing you still can't do, it's cancer.

BARKER: Yes, though AIDS is probably up there now. In a curious kind of way, I think that the cancer and tumour stuff has been done by Cronenberg. I think that Cronenberg has approached this before... in the *Videodrome* sequence, and even as early as *Shivers*, you know, the guy talking to his stomach. He's pretty much been concerned with the tumour on the loose.

EXCALIBUR: The books. The *Books of Blood*. Will there be more short fiction?

BARKER: There will be more down the line, but it probably won't be horror fiction. It'll be *weird* fiction, because that's all I can write... I mean, everything I write is weird, but I'd like to do some science fiction.

EXCALIBUR: What are your influences?

BARKER: The pictures that are a major influence are almost never

seen over here, like the films of Dario Argento.

EXCALIBUR: The main object of *Hellraiser* is a mystic puzzle box, almost like a cosmic Rubik's Cube. How did that come about?

BARKER: There are lots of mystical things about puzzles, almost like a mystique surrounding them. Chinese puzzle boxes, that sort of thing. I've always liked the idea of people setting puzzles, and that people would like to have puzzles set for them. Can you think of a more useless activity than solving a crossword puzzle? And yet there are people who, on their way to work every morning, spend a lot of their time teasing themselves with them. They'll just go wild if they can't get the solutions! And the idea that the solution to one will give you something that you don't expect... seems to be me to be doubly interesting. The box turned out to be a real technical challenge, since it was so small and it had to do so many things. In part 2 we get to see the Box Of All Boxes, when we actually go into Hell, and see all these things.

EXCALIBUR: And you'll be directing or producing?

BARKER: Executive producer, and it's my story. Kirsty (just about the only survivor of *Hellraiser*) goes to Hell to rescue her Daddy. We've got seven characters back from the first one, and six of them are dead, and rather pissed off.

EXCALIBUR: *Weaveworld* and *The Damnation Game*... are there going to be future film deals for those?

BARKER: We're looking at *Damnation Game* as a possible mini-series, in part because I think it could be really scary. *Weaveworld* would be a feature, something that I would direct, hopefully.

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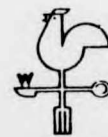
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