



PHOTO: LINDA MCCARTNEY

Bloody nice boy

by Ian Johnston

"The beast drew Cal's astonished eyes. He saw the morbid fashioning of its skin, which made it billow and swell, and heard again the howl that he'd thought was simply the wind.

"It was nothing so natural; the sound came out of this phantasm from a dozen places, either the din or the breath it rose on drawing most of the garden's contents out of the ground and throwing them into the air."

from *Weaveworld*
by Clive Barker

Clive Barker strode into Entitlement books last Wednesday with the gait of a young schoolboy and the looks to match. It was hard to imagine the 35-year-old Liverpoolian was anything but a school chum, with his wide mischievous grin and voice that became high-pitched whenever he got excited, which was often.

Yet the reputation and images that preceeded him to Halifax painted a much different picture. Author and filmmaker Clive Barker has built a reputation over the last four years as a practitioner of the bizarre and strange. His best-selling six-part book series, *The Books of Blood*, has had horror and fantasy critics falling all over themselves for superlatives to describe the young writer.

"If you haven't heard of Clive Barker yet, you will," wrote one magazine. Horror institution Stephen King says Barker's writing made all other horror writers look like they've been treading water for the past few years.

"I have seen the future of horror," says King, "and his name is Clive Barker."

Barker himself seemed quite

oblivious to all the hoopla as he autographed copies of his new book, *Weaveworld*. Dressed in a sweater, jeans and a pair of runners, he seemed a little bit overwhelmed by the praise his fans heaped on him.

"Oh, you read my book? Did you have fun with it?" he asks a fan.

"Was it a fun book for you?" he asks again.

"You thought my movie was weird? Oh, yeah, it's really strange... really strange."

However, some more conventional book reviewers wish Barker would just go away, his novels and short stories fading quickly into the obscurity of bargain bins and used book shops. His work has been strongly criticized in his English homeland. Although most have praised his use of language and attention to atmosphere, again and again his work has been condemned for its depiction of death, mutilation and monsters of the most disgusting variety.

Like horror movies and porn magazines, his stories have been held up for ridicule as a popular example of man's decay, and the inspiration for many violent crimes.

"You've got to forbid yourself nothing," Barker says in describing his writing philosophy. "You've got to trust your imagination and go with it."

"I can't stand horror that doesn't have the guts to be disgusting, or horror so pie-faced it doesn't have the guts to be absurd."

The author says the horror genre provides him with the perfect vehicle for his wild imagination.

"Science fiction readers need

pseudo-science fiction explanations even if they don't believe it, even if the explanation is spurious.

"Horror readers... I think it's got something to do with their imaginative gusto, say... Ok, I can take this on board.

"I like that, it pleases me."

New York was just a city.

"He had seen her wake in the morning like a slut, and pick murdered men from between her teeth, and suicides from the tangles of her hair. He had seen her late at night, her dirty back streets shamelessly courting depravity. He had watched her in hot afternoon, sluggish and ugly, indifferent to the atrocities that were being committed every hour in her throttled passages."

from *"The Midnight Meat Train"*
from *The Books of Blood*

"Does anyone here have a tissue?" Barker asked as he drew a picture on the inside cover of a copy of *Weaveworld*. "I can't stand to have ink stuck on the end of my pen while I write."

Barker is also a graphic artist who has drawn the covers for all of his published works. He says that if bookstore crowds aren't too large, he likes to draw pictures on every copy he autographs. The drawings, as you might expect, are of goblins, horned creatures, and faces of people in obvious distress.

"Someday, somebody's going to collect all these pictures and psychoanalyze me," he says. "Bet that'll make a good movie."

Barker wrote two screenplays which were eventually transformed into British films. He doesn't like to talk about them,

and has taken steps to prevent his work from being "totally massacred" on the screen again.

"If somebody's going to fuck with Clive Barker, I want it to be me," he says.

Recently he travelled to Hollywood to "sell his wares", walking away from Tinseltown with \$3.5 million to write and direct a horror film for New World Pictures, the distributor of Ingmar Bergman films as well as less memorable efforts dealing with crab monsters and student nurses.

The result of Barker's film experiment is *hellraiser*, a love story with lots of blood, gooey monsters and weird, shocking images.

Barker, who had never directed a film before, admits it was a little bit scary stepping behind the camera on the first day of shooting.

"It was quite difficult but by that time, I was committed."

He says that with the help of a good crew, the filming of *Hellraiser* was completed under budget and on schedule.

"I was surrounded by creative people having a good time making strange images," he says.

Not surprisingly, film censorship proved a problem just prior to *Hellraiser's* August 14 release. To avoid an X rating in the United States, several scenes had to be edited out of *Hellraiser*. Barker says further cuts were made to assure approval from the Ontario Censor Board.

"They cut my movie," he says, breaking into mock sobs. "They took out some rat-slicing sequences and scenes of rats nailed against walls, and a scene

of (the character of) Frank coming apart at the seams at the end.

"It was all totally arbitrary. If I came back next year, they (the censors) would want new cuts."

Clive Barker dedicated the first of *The Books of Blood*, featuring the stories "The Midnight Meat Train", "Pigs Blood Blues" and "Sex, Death, and Starshine" to his mom and dad.

Barker is a little uncomfortable with the title of "the future of horror". He says he wants to write fantasy novels and has plans to film a fantasy film in the future.

"I don't want to write simply gore stuff. I want people to have imaginative experiences you can't get anywhere else except in books."

Barker says a famous composer once said he wanted his music to be like breathing the air of another planet. "That's what I'm going for."

"And it's only been three and a half years," he says, his face breaking into a wide grin as he prepares to leave the bookstore.

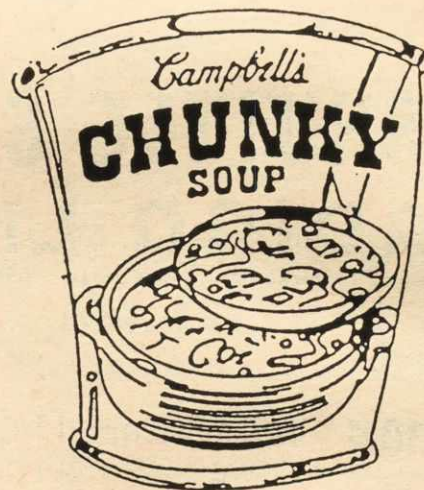
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