

# The Ever-Expanding WEAWEWORLD

After 25 years, Clive Barker's beloved first fantasy continues to enchant readers.

By JOHN NICOL

In honor of Earthling Publications' 25th-anniversary edition of Clive Barker's *Weaveworld* (featuring 30 awe-inspiring illustrations by Richard Kirk, and out this month), FANGORIA had the chance to chat with Barker and Mark Miller, co-head of Barker's production company Seraphim Films. *Weaveworld* tells the tale of Cal, Susanna and co. as they struggle to protect the last remnants of an ancient race known as the Seerkind magically woven into the fibers of a mysterious rug—a refuge from an evil that seeks to destroy the carpet's wonder and eradicate the Seerkind from existence. Those new to this story are in for an incredible journey, one that has been dazzling fans for a generation...

**FANGORIA:** Did you have any idea that 25 years after its release, *Weaveworld* would still resonate with so many people as an epic modern fantasy?

**CLIVE BARKER:** I always knew *Weaveworld* was going to be, structurally, a big book. For a book like that, you always put in a lot of effort and hope because you would like it to last. With *Weaveworld*, I set out to do something different. It has a timelessness of subject matter; it's not tied down in the same way a lot of fantasies are. It's not bound to a particular timeframe. It's the difference between perhaps what Steve King does so brilliantly, which is to tie things to a very particular feeling or period by going for very specific elements. Generally, I do the reverse, which is to take any specificity out. If I refer to a cigarette, I won't say the brand. If I refer to a cup of tea, I won't talk about what kind it is. That way, the narrative is saved from being mired in particularities. For me, that's better. That's one way that I hope the thing will go on and have onward momentum over the years.

I can tell you that I was always very proud of the story. I always thought the idea of having a world in a carpet was sufficiently original that if I wrote it well, it would have legs. These are all ifs, you know. In the end, I'm not a confident enough man—my self-esteem is not so high—that I can say with any certainty, "Oh yeah, this is going to last forever." I have my hopes, and that's all I can have.

It was packaged brilliantly by HarperCollins. The British edition, the first one to come out, was just beautiful. It went to number one immediately, which was certainly something I'd never experienced before. The *Books of Blood* never made it on any of the lists. Neither did *Damnation Game*. So at the time it came out, I definitely had a sense that whatever I was doing, even though it was a long way from what I'd done before, had piqued people's inter-

est. After all, nobody predicted that I would jump sideways into fantasy. Not high fantasy, of course, like stories with kings and princes and what have you, but into a sort of modern epic fantasy, as you said. I do think that's the legitimate description. It's epic in that it's about the fate of an entire species, but also in the sense that it's about how we keep the miraculous in our lives.

I believe that is a universal theme, so to that extent I did indeed hope that would keep the thing on the shelves for a long time. Twenty-five years? No. But here we are. Interestingly, it is easily the book that people bring to signings the most. [To Miller] You've been to a lot of those signings with me. Would you say that's accurate?

**MILLER:** Absolutely. They're typically well-worn copies, too. When people bring *Weaveworld*, they bring something they clearly passionately love.

**BARKER:** That's true. They've obviously been carried around or backpacked or whatever. I don't know what that is. A lot of the books I've written have been read by more people. Certainly *Abarat* has been read by more people than *Weaveworld* has, but the people who love *Weaveworld*, boy, they love it. They are committed to it, and it seems to mark a certain time in their lives, and they're very glad to have their editions signed.

**MILLER:** You're always touched by that, I've noticed.

**BARKER:** Well, it's a touching thing. Particularly if people have said—and again, I believe you've heard this first-hand—that it got them through bad times in their lives. An abusive parent or the loss of a loved one—terrible things like that. To be able to be there for someone during a time like that is one of the things that keep me going.

**FANG:** How do you feel about Earthling's treatment of your beloved book?

**BARKER:** There's nothing to say except wonderful things. The Richard Kirk illustrations are gorgeous. The design is gorgeous. The book has been treated so lovingly. I am not a man who says things he does not mean.

**MILLER:** Not even remotely.

**BARKER:** [Laughs] No. Not even. So you've heard it; I come to you as a man who is not brown-nosing. This is a book that has turned out genuinely gorgeous. What Paul Miller of Earthling has done in terms of commitment—the time he has put in to get this right, God bless him—pays off handsomely. And Richard's contribution is magnificent. He has deliberately—at least I think it was deliberate—kept some faces out of the illustrations. There are a few, but not many. He willfully keeps the faces of the main characters from us. Did you

notice that?

**MILLER:** I didn't, actually...

**BARKER:** That's my point exactly. Look at the illustrations again and you'll see that people are turning away, or their heads are just out of frame or whatever. I believe—now, I haven't talked to Richard about this, but I'm assuming—that he's done something that is firstly brilliant, and secondly keeps in line with what I mentioned earlier: not putting in particulars. He's allowing the reader to be the co-creator. Which is what I've always said anyway, right?

So Cal, Susanna, Immacolata—you're allowed to imagine them for yourself. There are hints of them—glimpses—but in contrast to *Abarat*, where I did very specific, big, color paintings of what people look like, you get none of that from Richard here. I think his illustrations are, without question, high art. I almost don't want to call them illustrations; they're so much more than that. They're brilliant. Beautiful. They're their own fantasy. Exquisite, creatively committed contributions to the act of imagining. That's what the book is. I cannot say enough about the care and love that have been put into it.

**FANG:** Can you walk us through *Weaveworld's* genesis for those who don't know that tale?

**BARKER:** The genesis of the book was a drawing, as is so often the case—one that I believe is reproduced in *Clive Barker, Illustrator* or some such thing, and it has a little boy falling into a carpet. It's an unfinished illustration. There's another rough one of a young boy standing on a carpet in what turns out to be the auction scene. You know, I'd originally thought of the book as a children's story.

The idea of a world of magic encoded and put into a carpet seemed to be right for a kids' book, but then I realized that one thing I could do was add the sex and violence which actually never find their way into epic fantasy. When I say sex and violence, it's not as though there are huge scenes of shitting going on—there aren't. When the violence happens, it is short, but on the other hand, it is there. The death by lions, etc. There's some pretty gruesome stuff.

When I thought about doing it that way, the whole book shifted, and I realized that this could be about a magic that was not children's magic. I realized this could be a dark, almost Blakean book. It was the first time the real influence of William Blake found its way into something I had written. Particularly Blake's "Jerusalem"; just listen to this:

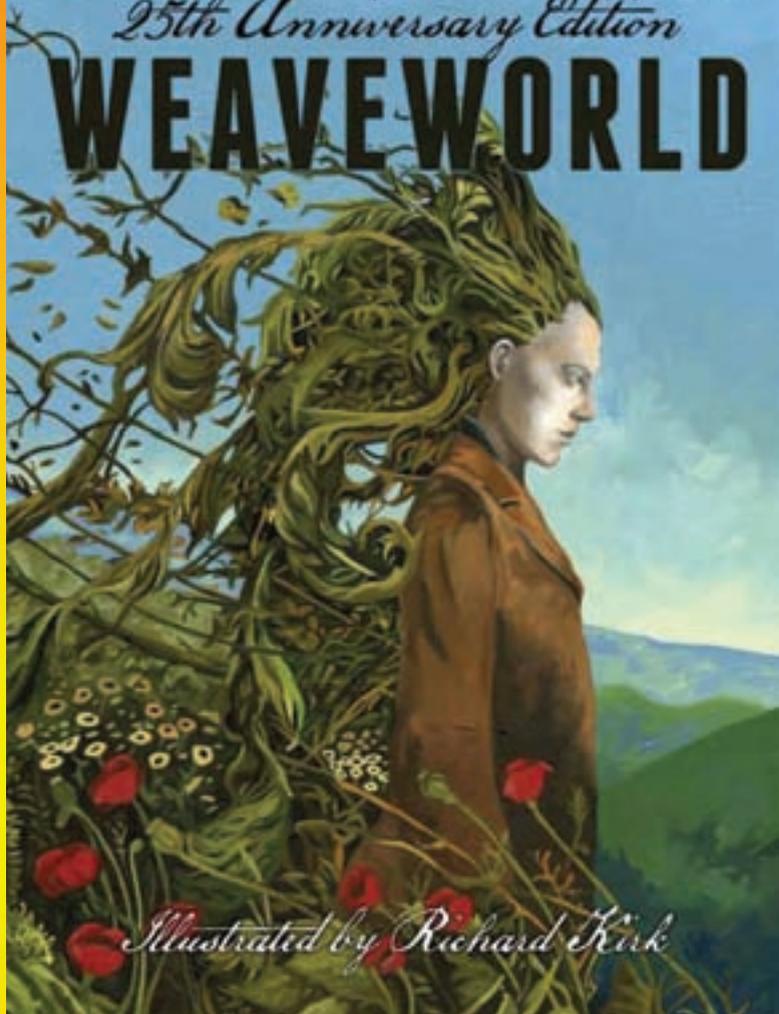
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And did those feet in ancient time,  
Walk upon England's mountains green?  
And was the holy Lamb of God  
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

# CLIVE BARKER

25th Anniversary Edition

# WEAVERORLD



And did the Countenance Divine  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here  
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Honestly, you can't make greater words than that.

**FANG:** In retrospect, how did writing *Weaveworld* affect your evolution as a writer, creator and artist?

**BARKER:** It was a change. It was a shift stylistically, in terms of genre and in the way I structured the novel. I deliberately structured it to be read in quick bites. It was the first time I'd ever looked at the way people read—at that particular time, at least. Now it seems that people choose to listen rather than read.

I lived in London at the time, and I would see everybody reading on the Underground and they'd read one chapter of their books—maybe two—and they'd be home. *Weaveworld* has a lot of little chapters in it. They're like a lot of candies in a big, glittering box, and you can eat just two and be home. People seem to enjoy it that way. It wasn't like they had to dig into any huge piece of narrative, some of which they might have already forgotten the next time they jumped into the book. Instead, I deliberately made it accessible structurally. It seems to have worked.

believe. To some extent—by sheer luck, of course, nothing planned at all—I think I was able to do the same with fantasy. I feel as though I was able to lead it into a more robustly real area. When I turned that corner, as Mark said, I never looked back, and since then I have had the opportunity to delve into the entire spectrum of imaginative fiction. So, I would say that writing *Weaveworld* affected me in every way imaginable.

**FANG:** Twenty-five years later, what do you think people make of *Weaveworld*, and is there something there for new generations of readers?

**BARKER:** Those are impossible questions for any author to answer. The truth is that a book is different for every reader.

**MILLER:** It's not even the same thing it is for the writer.

**BARKER:** That's right. I did an introduction for *Weaveworld* for its 10th-anniversary edition, I believe. In there I say, "I am not the man who wrote this," right?

**MILLER:** The intro is also in the book that Phil and Sarah [Stokes] edited, *The Painter, The Creature, and the Father of Lies*. You said, "The author who wrote *Weaveworld* has disappeared."

**BARKER:** And indeed he has. My relationship with my father was a troubled one in a lot of

**MILLER:** And you have never really looked back.

**BARKER:** No...I haven't. You're absolutely right. Bear in mind, I didn't get, by any means, universally good reviews. You know, there were a lot of reviews from disappointed horror fans who were pissed off that I had entered this new territory. Stephen [King] said this wonderful thing about me being the future of horror, and I turned out not to be the future of horror after all.

I had always wanted to write in a number of genres—what I'd call the range of imaginative fiction: children's fiction, fantasy, science fiction, horror fiction. I wanted to be a presence in all of those, and I wouldn't be so arrogant as to say that I'm any stylistic leader or genre changer. I didn't think I'd have the luck to help shift a genre as I did with horror. I came along at the right time with the right thing to help horror turn a corner, I

ways. He was in my life when I wrote the book, but was gone by the time I'd written that introduction. I'd say that was a defining absence. In the same way now, I am not the same man who wrote that introduction. There was an earthquake here three nights ago. My very first thought was, "I must call mum," and I went to the phone and then remembered that she was dead. Because my mom always had her ears open to anything that might happen in Los Angeles, she was the one I'd call to reassure that everything was well. It was the middle of the night, which probably explains my somewhat tardy response to the fact that she was no longer at the other end of the phone. There it was, like a punch to the stomach.

People ask, "What do you mean you're not the same person who wrote this book or made that movie?" One of the things about being alive is having people who care enough about you that they need reassurance that you're OK. Now, perhaps the most important individual in my life who I wanted to know that all was well with me is not there. Life has a life of its own. People will make of it what they'll make of it. When they go through defining moments in their lives, if they decide to revisit the book, they'll make of it very different things than they did the first time they read it.

There are just far too many variables in life to give any sort of satisfying answer to that question. I simply know that I wrote what was true, I felt, to the story. I tried not to let myself get in the way, and I hope it continues to touch people.

**FANG:** So what's next for you?

**BARKER:** Well, I'm writing *Abarat IV*, which is called *The Price of Dreams*, and I will go directly onto *Abarat V*, the final book of the quintet, which will be called *Until the End of Time*—and I'm having a blast, I must say. I came out of my coma and spent a month writing complete nonsense, rewriting and rewriting sequences without realizing I hadn't written them before, and when I started realizing that's what I was doing, I got a little frightened. I thought I'd never get my clarity back. That's a terrifying thought—but I'm back at it, and have written 80,000 words thus far.

It's interesting, because I read something from a woman on Twitter today. She said that I didn't work hard enough. She said she wanted back the prolific Clive Barker of the '80s and '90s. Which, in its way, is nice. She just wanted more to read. The challenge of writing and painting these books has been enormous. It's not something I'd ever undertake again. Am I happy that I did so? Damn right I am. I'm happy I let this challenge into my life. I want people to know that the passion for that stuff has not gone away at all.

I was always haunted by the phrase, "There are no second acts in American lives." Even though, at the time I first heard it, I was not yet a permanent resident of America, I felt it was a universal thing. It's very hard to have a second act to your life which has the kind of glitter of the first half, because the first half is fed by youth.

The paintings for *Abarat* were done at the beginning of the second half of my life. I'm still painting and I'm still writing and, certainly, my ambition for other books, like *The Art III* and *Galilee II*, are still there, which is not to say that I believe they'll be easy to write, because no book is. I do believe that I have it in me, storywise and passionwise, to write them. And the joy of beginning a new story—of feeling that first spark—and being able to write a sequence that has a narrative twist in it...that joy never goes away.

