



PREVIEW

Barbarian

Travelling to Detroit for a job interview, a young woman books a rental home. But when she arrives late at night, she discovers that the house is double-booked, and a strange man is already staying there. Against her better judgement, she decides to spend the evening but soon discovers that there's a lot more to fear than just an unexpected houseguest.

Barbarian is a horror film with an ingenious yet very relatable premise, particularly in times when people are forgoing traditional lodging like hotels and motels and instead booking short-term stays through services like Airbnb, HomeAway, Vrbo, etc. But, like Janet Leigh's character Marion Crane when she checked into the Bates Motel in Alfred Hitchcock's classic thriller *Psycho*, you never really know what awaits you when you spend the night at someplace new. And you're especially vulnerable when you arrive late at night and there's a convention in town, making it impossible to find any alternatives should your accommodations not be to your liking.

Barbarian marks the feature-film directing and screenwriting debut for actor Zach Cregger, (*The Whitest Kids U' Know* and *The Civil War on Drugs*). Cregger's inspiration for *Barbarian* came from a nonfiction book he had read by security consultant Gavin de Becker, in which the author encourages women to listen to the little voice in their head that identifies 'red flags' in interactions with men that society has encouraged them to ignore.

He explains, 'Those red flags are often benign, things like a man doing you a favour that you didn't ask for, or injecting sexuality into an otherwise sterile conversation, or unwanted physical touching even if it's not sexual. All these things that women have to be careful about, that as a man I never had to consider because I don't live in that psychic landscape where half the population could be looking at me as prey. It made me realise how different the experiences are of being a man in the modern world and being a woman.'

The book prompted Cregger to try a writing exercise wherein he would write a scene for a woman to enter that was loaded with as many of those 'red flags' as he could think of. He came up with the premise of a double-booked rental house where the woman had to spend the night filled with micro red flags, which he then expanded into a script for a horror movie. Cregger says, 'I have a real deep love of horror. I always have. I'm a big fan of the genre. So, it was easy for me to just draw upon all of the horror movies that I've watched in my life.'

Ironically, Cregger's background was actually in comedy. He explains, 'My first professional showbiz gig was as a writer-director for a sketch comedy show that went for five seasons. So, I did get to work out my comedy muscle group, as it were. And I think that in horror, you use the same muscle group, as comedy and horror are both about being one step ahead of the audience and zigging when they expect you to zag, and the anatomy of a joke is not too dissimilar from the anatomy of a scare. Both are about timing and tone, so it set me up well to kind of be in the pocket when it came to scares.' Still, Cregger was able to find ways to inject humour into the script.

He admits, 'That wasn't a conscious decision. It's just that, as a writer, I naturally have a rhythm that I think lends itself towards comedy. So, I decided to embrace that. I didn't want this to feel like a comedy first; it's a horror movie first. But I think that it's a great palate cleanser – that a great release can come when, after a scare, you're allowed to laugh, and I definitely want to encourage people to laugh during this movie.'

Once his screenplay was finished, Cregger sent it around to a lot of places that turned it down. Just as he was about to move on to focusing on another project, he heard from two young producers who ran a company called BoulderLight, Raphael Margules and J.D. Lifshitz, who were enthusiastic about it and agreed to produce it. They brought it to Vertigo Entertainment's Roy Lee, producer of such films as *The Departed*, *The Ring*, *It*, *The Grudge* and *The Lego Movie*, who also loved it and agreed to partner with them on it.

Cregger describes his experience getting the good news from Lee. 'You know, the phone call that you always kind of hope you'll get one day? I actually got that phone call, and once Roy signed on, the train left the station real fast and, and things got serious. So, you never know. It's 9 a.m. in the morning, I'm in bed playing video games in my underwear, the phone rings, I almost didn't answer it, and boom, life changed. It's pretty cool.'

The producers were able to find independent financing, and their financier had a relationship with a line producer in Bulgaria who assured him that he could get the movie made there at an agreed-upon budget. But just as the director-writer was about to leave for Bulgaria, he got a phone call. Cregger recalls, 'At my going-away party with my friends I got a call that our financier had very tragically died. This was on a Friday and, before our Bulgarian team would be dissolved, we pled for one weekend to try and find alternate financing. Roy got the script to New Regency and said, "I need you to read this this morning, and if you like it get on a Zoom call with the director this afternoon, but I need an answer today.'" The New Regency team read it, liked it, and after their Zoom call they told Cregger, 'Let's make it.'

Says Cregger, 'It was just one of those miracle things where we got saved by the skin of our teeth when the good people at New Regency came in and rescued us from obliteration.' New Regency not only financed the movie but also joined the creative process and was on set every day with the filmmaking team in Bulgaria.

He describes the film as 'a roller coaster that is designed to be seen in a theatre. If you go to a theatre, you will scream, you will laugh, you will have a blast. I'm not saying that you won't have a good time watching it at home, but you want to go on a roller coaster at a theme park, not on virtual reality goggles. That's the difference.'

Continues Cregger, 'It's supposed to be a big midnight movie theatre experience where you are screaming, grabbing the person next to you and then laughing right after. My favourite horror movie experiences are always in a theatre, and I'm always on a roller coaster. And that's the goal. There's some social themes kind of being explored in this movie, and if people come away with it and have a discussion about those themes, great. That's fine with me. That's not the goal. I don't want this movie to be too satisfied with itself. I'm not trying to be didactic. I just want people to have a blast. So, I hope it's a roller coaster. And I think it is.'

Production notes

BARBARIAN

Directed by: Zach Cregger

A BoulderLights Pictures/Vertigo Entertainment production

Presented by: Regency Enterprises

In association with: Almost Never Films, Hammerstone Studios

Executive Producers: Yariv Milchan, Michael Schaefer,

Natalie Lehmann, Danny Chan, Alex Lebovici, Bill Skarsgård

Produced by: Arnon Milchan, Roy Lee, Raphael Margules, J.D. Lifshitz

Line Producer: Chris Abernathy

Associate Producer: Eric Tavitian

Casting by: Nancy Naylor

Written by: Zach Cregger

Director of Photography: Zach Kuperstein

Editor: Joe Murphy

Costume Designer: Kiril Naumov

Music by: Anna Drubich

Cast

Georgina Campbell (*Tess*)

Bill Skarsgård (*Keith*)

Justin Long (*AJ*)

Matthew Patrick Davis (*the mother*)

Richard Brake (*Frank*)

Kurt Braunohler (*Doug*)

Jaymes Butler (*Andre*)

Sophie Sorensen (*Bonnie*)

Rachel Fowler (*Meg*)

J.R. Esposito (*Jeff*)

USA 2022

102 mins

Courtesy of 20th Century Studios

NEW RELEASES

Decision to Leave (Heojil Kyolshim)

From Mon 17 Oct

Triangle of Sadness

From Fri 28 Oct

The Greenaway Alphabet

From Fri 11 Nov

Aftersun

From Fri 18 Nov

What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?

(Ras vkhedavt, rodesac cas vukurebt?)

From Fri 25 Nov

RE-RELEASES

The Others

From Mon 17 Oct

Poltergeist

From Fri 21 Oct

Nil by Mouth

From Fri 4 Nov (Preview on Thu 20 Oct 20:20; extended intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large on Fri 4 Nov 17:50; intro by Kieron Webb, Head of Conservation, BFI Archive on Mon 7 Nov 18:00)

The Draughtsman's Contract

From Fri 11 Nov (+ intro by Kieron Webb, Head of Conservation, BFI National Archive on Fri 11 Nov 17:50)

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

BFI Expanded presents: World Premiere: Haunted Hotel – A Melodrama in Augmented Reality

Mon 17 – Sun 30 Oct 14:00-21:00 BFI Southbank

Doctor Who: The Time Meddler

Sat 29 Oct 12:00

Hellraiser: 35th Anniversary + intro by actors Nicholas Vince and Simon Bamford, with Phil Stokes, BFI Governor/Curator of the Clive Barker Archive

Sun 30 Oct 18:30

Preview: A Bunch of Amateurs + Q&A with Director Kim Hopkins and Special Guests (TBA)

Wed 2 Nov 18:15

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 7 Nov 18:30

Preview: Living + Q&A with director Oliver Hermanus, producer Stephen Woolley and further guests TBA

Mon 7 Nov 20:40

Life Moves Pretty Fast – The John Hughes Mixtapes Launch: Ferris Bueller's Day Off + panel

Fri 11 Nov 20:20

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