



# MIDIAN UNMADE

*Tales of Clive Barker's*  
**NIGHTBREED**

*Edited by* JOSEPH NASSISE *and* DEL HOWISON

*Introduction by* CLIVE BARKER

*Featuring All-New Stories by* AMBER BENSON NANCY HOLDER

SEANAN MCGUIRE WESTON OCHSE

DAVID J. SCHOW STEPHEN WOODWORTH *And more*

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Edited by  
Joseph Nassise  
and  
Del Howison



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[Table of Contents](#)

[About the Editors](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

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*For all those who have felt that sense of unbelonging so characteristic of the  
Nightbreed—never forget that you are not alone.*

Joseph Nassise

*For Clive Barker—your kindness, talent, and influence will last with me for the rest of  
my life ... and maybe beyond.*

Del Howison

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## PREFACE

In late 1992 I picked up the Pocket Books paperback edition of a new novel by a writer I'd never read before, Clive Barker. The book in question was called *Cabal*, and I remember the cover quite clearly for it featured a dark, looming face superimposed on the night sky with the tagline "At last, the night has a hero" situated beneath the bright red letters of the main title.

Within the pages of that slim volume I was introduced to both an amazing world and an amazing writer. The tale of Boone and Midian and the creatures known as the Nightbreed instantly captivated me, drawing me into their dark embrace and never letting go. *Cabal* engaged my love of the dark and fantastic in a way that few books before it ever had, turning me into a lifelong fan of Clive and his work.

Just a few months after I had picked up that book, in the spring of 1993, I had the pleasure of attending the first public solo showing of Clive's art at the Bess Cutler Gallery in New York City. Paintings and drawings with names like *Cenobite* and *Books of Blood* and *Frank* hung on the walls in places and characters and worlds that are familiar to any fan of Clive's work but about which, at the time, I was just learning. I bought a print of one of the pieces (*Books of Blood: Volume 1*) and was pleased to have a few moments to speak with Clive as he signed it for me. It was a short but memorable conversation because we discussed the life of a writer and what it meant to be able to bring one's visions to life on the page for others to experience.

Fast-forward eighteen years to the fall of 2012. My own writing career had taken off at this point with more than a dozen novels to my credit, and I was casting about for a new project to begin when I came upon a battered copy of that original print edition of *Cabal* in a used bookstore. *Wouldn't it be fun to play in that world?* I thought to myself. I imagined picking up where Clive had left off, with the tribes of the moon scattered to the four corners of the globe, waiting for their savior, Cabal, to restore their sanctuary and call them all home again. What would their lives be like? What beauty and wonder and misery and madness would they have found, tossed out into the world like so much flotsam and jetsam, at the mercy of the monsters known as mankind? In that moment *Midian Unmade: Tales of Clive Barker's Nightbreed* was born.

It took another three years and the help of many people—my coeditor [Del Howison](#) (owner of the world's best horror bookstore, Dark Delicacies), editors Jim Frenkel and Melissa Singer at Tor Books, the twenty-three writers who penned the stories that appear herein, and, of course, Clive Barker himself—to turn that dream into a reality.

You hold in your hands the fruits of that effort, the physical embodiment of fantasy made flesh and blood, and within its pages you will find the Nightbreed in all their glory as they dance and sing and feast and yearn and hope and dream under the light of the moon.

I hope you find them as intriguing as I have.

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JOSEPH NASSISE

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# INTRODUCTION

(Reprinted from *The Nightbreed Chronicles*, 1990)

Our lives are scattered throughout with periods of *unbelonging*; in childhood, of course, and adolescence; but in adulthood too, when sudden loss (or gain) forces us to reassess things we believe immutable.

At such times we all become like changeling children, at odds with our friends and peers, looking to distant horizons for fresh comprehension of ourselves.

The fiction of the fantastic brims with metaphors for this condition: tales of people whose cells are protean and souls migrant, people called by mysterious forces to a place they've visited in other lives or states; a place never understood—at least until the moment of crisis—as their real home.

There, perhaps, they may enjoy the company of their own tribe.

Welcome, then, to the people I feel particularly at home with: the *Nightbreed*. They are a color rather than a family. A collection of survivors of what were once small nomadic nations: werewolves, vampires, demons, shape-shifters ...

In conventional Western mythology these are the villains; creatures who possess little more than an appetite for destruction and evil. But in cultures less brutalized by dualism these dream nations are much celebrated as feared; they are the spirits of our darker natures which healthier theologies don't seek to repress.

CLIVE BARKER

Pinewood Studios, England

September 1989



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# RETURN TO MIDIAN

Midian—the name means a place of refuge, a legendary city where all sins are forgiven.

—Clive Barker's *The Nightbreed Chronicles*

Twenty-five years ago, Clive Barker was the tour guide for our journey into Midian, a place he described as a “labyrinthine necropolis” occupied by “an ancient race of mythological creatures.” During this sojourn, he challenged our perceptions and prejudices when he declared that “evil hid behind a human mask and even monsters have souls.”

Barker’s “grotesques and freaks, noble beasts and exquisite transformers” were both apart from and a part of the world. Whether the sense of isolation sprang from an uncommon visage or, like Narcissus, a knowing from deep within, Midian called out to each of them.

More than a literary locale, the “hidden city” represented a liminal space familiar to anyone who felt that he or she did not belong; simultaneously a safe haven and a precarious dwelling where self-destruction, annihilation, or even transcendence was possible.

While no two Nightbreed looked alike, their sins were in essence singular; they were the Other. As such, they were feared and hated, for as Julia Kristeva posited in *Powers of Horror*: “The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*.”

Even though sympathetic creatures populated other works, they often appeared as loners forced to the dark edges of society. If more than one type of monster inhabited the same landscape, they were enemies. Battle lines drawn, man’s oft-repeated history of “us versus them” was allowed to play out, neither questioned nor challenged.

*Cabal* was a tale written for the readers of its day but also in anticipation of the future. Like Rachel and Babette, the Other was and is a shape-shifter, transforming at the behest of a time, a people, or a nation. The constant? A seemingly insatiable need by humans for this space to be, at all times, occupied.

Although Barker engineered Midian’s destruction, he also left among the ruins pieces of hope. For the Nightbreed came together as one, not because they were the same, but because they were different.

LISA MAJEWSKI

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# THE MOON INSIDE

Seanan McGuire

Once, Midian. Once, the caves carved from the living rock, the warrens and rabbit-runs like veins through the flesh of the earth. Once, a world lived in constant descent, down, down, ever down, until it seemed that one day in their expansion they would strike the hot molten core of the world, where magma flowed like the blood of Baphomet. Once, safety. Once, home.

Now, Seattle. Now, the cold, cruel cities of the Naturals, which rise towering above the foundations like they would deny the very stone that birthed them. They bloom like grotesque flowers on these misshapen cities of the sun, spreading their petals to greedily block the sky from those they have left behind them on the ground. There is no safety here.

Babette curls in her room—a corner of attic in a warehouse whose ownership has become tangled over the years, bills of sale disappearing and deeds being mysteriously lost—and watches the rain p patter on her small and fiercely guarded window. Some of the others consider her strange for coveting this slice of the outside; she's too fragile to risk the sun the way she does, she should be more careful, she should move deeper into the communal room, forsaking privacy for safety. But her visions are their only connection to Lori (who came to them in skin and left in leather, wings against the moon, *oh Lori, see how she flies*), and hence, to Cabal. If she demands the window, and the sweet-faced moon beyond, she'll be indulged.

Seattle is a good city, as Natural cities go. The sun shines more often than the tourist brochures they once stole from a travel agent's office promised them it would, but it vanishes often enough that the braver and stronger of them can go abroad in the daylight, hoods pulled over heads, parasols shielding skins from an unexpected break in the clouds. They mingle with the Naturals that want making their faces known among the community. They won't be caught unprepared if another Deck rises, another human monster with a vendetta to pursue. Even Babette has seen the streets by daylight thanks to heavy cloud cover and well-placed awnings. She could be happy here, if this were home . . .

But this is not home. This will never be home. Cabal is moving through the world, and his woman moves through the world with him, and together they will find a new Midian, a strong, secure place driven deep into the rock, and the tribes of the moon will come together once more, living and dead alike, in the place where the monsters go.

The sun is setting and the sky outside the window is the bruised color of week-dead man flesh. Babette stills, listening to the sounds around her. Breed move through the shared spaces, whisper

corners, copulate in the rafters ... but none of them are paying any attention to her, not even Rachel who is her mother in all but flesh. Satisfied, Babette reaches out with clever fingers and undoes the latch, sliding the window open.

It is a teenage girl who braces the glass with a piece of masonry, keeping it from closing before she comes home, and a teenage girl who drops the bag of clothing to the street below. It is a creature like no other ever seen on this earth that slides through the open frame, dexterous paws finding the secret places between bricks and gripping tight, so tight that no force in this world could pry it loose. Its color is the gray of a misty sky, stippled with darker spots, like eyes. It blends into the city, blends into the twilight, and it slips away without a sound.

\* \* \*

The difficulty of being a teenage monster in a human city is the absolute lack of things to do on a Friday night. She could go to the movies, watch some Natural fever dream of terror or romance play out upon the screen, but she did that last week, and the amusement value wears thin after a while. She could buy a cup of coffee with the money she's bartered from the more daylight-safe members of the tribe, sip it slow and bitter while she sits at an outside table and watches the world go by—but what difference is that from her window, really? She still has no connection to the people who pass her. They're just closer, the blood in their veins like sugar candy and communion wine.

It's rude to eat the people in your neighborhood. Worse, it attracts attention, and attention is a thing to be avoided. It was attention that drove their splinter tribe of Breed from Columbus, where the corn grew high as heaven in the fields, and from Anaheim, where the sun was unforgiving but the nights were bitter cold and oh, so long. They can't afford another move, not right now, not with two of the women and one of the men of the tribe gravid with Nightbreed yet to be. Pregnancy is hard enough on the dead without adding the strain of another flight to the process.

In the end, Babette settles for breathing her beast back into her belly, where it curls like a predator in the fawn, dangerous and waiting for an opportunity to pounce. She collects the bag of clothing from the shadow where it fell and pulls each piece on with a rebel's reverence: the denim trousers, the loose linen shirt, the heavy down jacket that blurs her body's lines almost as effectively as a change of shape. She has come to see clothing as a form of shape-shifting; it lets people hide their true selves behind masks, distorting and remaking their own images. So tonight she will be a child of this city, this obscene flower of a city, and not of Midian; she will walk among them unseen, and she will see.

*I see this for you, Lori*, she thinks, and receives the barest trace of beating wings and a frozen distant sky for her troubles, skating across her mind's eye like the shadow of a dream. They are still out there, still searching, still running. Babette aches to run with them but no, no, that is not her lot; death; hers is to wait and watch, to hide and hear the things some would rather have unheard. She does not choose this, but she carries it with her as she slouches out of the alley and into the world of man.

They are everywhere, the Naturals, stinking and prolific, swarming the streets like rats despite the growing darkness, despite the falling rain. There was a time (*before her time, so many years before her eyes were opened*) when none of them would have dared the dark like this. They would have been too afraid of the tribes of the moon, who walked freely under the stars and took what meat they needed from those too unwise to bar their doors at night. Babette remembers that with every shoulder th

brushes hers and every body that shoves her aside, a tiny bit of almost-human flotsam bobbing through their hectic sea. Once, they would have feared her. Once, they would have run at the mere flash of her small white teeth.

And once, they would have followed her home with fire and with bellies full of terror, which is like coal: press it down hard enough and it hardens into a form of courage, diamond-hard and impossible to break. It's better not to be feared. She knows that, but oh, she wishes they would not touch her.

The tidal pull of humanity carries her down one street and onto the next, where she turns and swims against their current, heading for the one place that requires no human money and asks few human questions of a teenage girl who appears homeless to adult eyes. (And she *is* homeless, she *is*, because once was Midian and now is Seattle, and Lori and Cabal and the reunion of the tribes are so far away.)

The doors of the Seattle Public Library are unlocked, and quiet as a whisper, Babette slips inside.

\* \* \*

The existence of human libraries was a discovery Babette first made in Columbus, on a hot summer night when there was nothing else to do besides sit in the hayloft of their borrowed barn and watch the corn growing in the fields. Within these walls is everything the tribes of man have learned, and everything they have stolen from the tribes of the moon.

“Know thy enemy” is a saying known to Natural and Nightbreed alike, and Babette is hungry for knowledge. She already knew how to read, thanks to the gravestones in Midian. She learned her letters from the names of dead men, prizing their secrets from the granite and marble one syllable at a time. The difference between an epigraph and an encyclopedia is merely one of scale. Both preserve the accomplishments of the lost.

The librarians barely glance up as she ghosts past them, a familiar figure in her mismatched clothes and her oversized jacket. She doesn't shout or throw things or disturb the other patrons; like most of the city's itinerant youth, she is utterly polite while she is inside the library walls, and so she is allowed to come and go unhindered. It is a small and sacred contract, and one that has served her well in the months since the Breed have come to Seattle. The librarians do not know there is a monster in their midst, and the monster, unthreatened, sees no cause to reveal herself.

Luck is with her; there is an open space in the bank of computers at the back of the New Media room. Babette slips into a seat and presses the button to log herself on, marveling only a little as the machine swiftly responds to her command. Most of the Nightbreed have never touched a computer. The world is changing—the world is always changing—and this change is among the most dangerous of all, because she knows one day it will reveal them. Too many people are seeing too many things and posting them to the Internet, where they wait like snares for someone to stumble into them and start seeing the patterns.

She brings up a search engine, drags the mouse to the box at the top of the screen, and types a single word:

MIDIAN

Rachel would call it dangerous foolishness, but Rachel does not go out in the world as much

Babette does; she is older, and wiser, and has learned to mistrust too much freedom. Babette learning different lessons. Thanks to the oh-so-public slaughter at the necropolis, Midian is urban legend and modern myth now, indelibly etched into the stories of the Naturals. They take her for another human teenager made curious by tales of monsters—and maybe a little bit wistful. What would it Pelouquin said once, in Lori's hearing (and hence Babette's, for they have shared so many things since those dark days of fire and fear)? "Oz is over the rainbow and Midian is where the monsters go."

She has learned about Oz since then—more pretty lies for the Natural children—but more, she has found that many among the tribes of man yearn for Midian and its darkness as much as she does. Anyone who sees her screen will take her for one of those yearning children, and look no further.

The results of her search are a tangled complication of narratives. Here is someone claiming to have been at Midian when it fell; here is someone else saying that monsters are real and planning to remake the world in their own image. Here is truth and here are lies, all of them tangled together until it becomes impossible to distinguish them without knowing the true story, absolute and clean and down to your bones. They are still safe. They are still undiscovered.

"Midian again, huh?"

The voice is male, cocky, human. Babette tenses and blanks her screen before she turns to find a Natural boy behind her, his clothes as oversized and mismatched as her own, his hair a shock of bleached-out blond that reminds her of the cornfields in Ohio. "Were you spying on me?"

"No," he says, and then, "Maybe," and then, "Yes," with a grin that clearly aims to make all accusations dissolve into mist and forgiveness. "You come here once a week and do the same searches every time. A guy gets curious, you know? Wants to know what the mysterious girl with the curly hair is trying to find. You looking for monsters, Blondie?"

Babette almost touches her own hair in reflexive response. Her curls are the color of moonlight on dead grass, a gold that is true and cold at the same time, unforgiving and fair. Instead, she says, "don't think I'd know what to do if I met a monster."

"Scream and run away, if you know what's good for you," says the boy, offering her his hand. There is dirt beneath his nails. She doubts it came from digging graves. "Matt."

"Blondie," she says. Her name is a treasure she will not give to any Natural. She slips her hand into his—refusal will only draw more questions—and watches his puzzled blink at the coolness of her skin. "It's rude to look at other people's screens."

"But this is the library's screen, and that makes it as much mine as yours," he says, giving her hand a perfunctory shake before letting go. "Besides, if you're looking for Midian, I can take you there."

Babette is too startled to hide her confusion. "You?" she asks, before caution tells her to be silent.

It's too late: the word is out, and the boy with the bleached corn hair is smirking, amusement in his eyes. "Me," he says. "You think you're the only one who ever wished she knew where the monsters were? Come on, Blondie. I won't hurt you. But I might lead you to your heart's desire."

The computer's secrets have been spilled out on the floor like pearls, or teeth. There is nothing left to learn here, and the night is young. Babette rises like a wisp of smoke, too graceful for the gawky thing she seems to be, and inclines her head toward the boy who dared to speak to her. "Yes," she says. "Take me to Midian."

Once, Midian. Once, safety and security and home in the deep warrens and the living earth. Babet knows she is not walking backward through time—knows it better than any other member of the tribe. She has *seen* Cabal since the destruction of their sanctuary, *seen* him scouring the edges of the world looking for safe haven. She knows to the bones of her that whatever she walks toward, it can't be home. But Babette, for all her cold-blooded strangeness, is a teenage girl, and teenage girls are vulnerable to dreaming.

She follows Matt through the alleys behind the library like a rat following a piper, her girl-skirt drawn tight around her bones, hiding her second face from view. Matt moves almost as quickly as one of the Nightbreed, skipping from one side of the alley to the other, his strong boy's bones moving through his lanky boy's limbs. The smell of him is everywhere, blood and flesh and sweetness. She isn't the hungriest member of the tribe—can be sated on cat flesh and rat flesh more often than not—but she still wishes he would move a little more like a predator, and a little less like prey.

After they have walked too far for her liking and not far enough for her to feel safely distant from her kin, Matt stops. "Here we are," he says, waving a hand to indicate a rusty door set into the hard brick of a nearby wall. "Midian."

Babette frowns, searching his face for the joke she knows must be hidden there. No joke reveals itself. She looks to the rusted door, and passes judgment: "This is not Midian."

"It is if you want it to be. Midian isn't a place, Blondie; it's a state of mind. Places can be destroyed, but ideas are harder to kill." He moves to the door and knocks twice, calling, "It's me! Let me in; I brought new blood."

"What's the password?" demands a voice from beyond the door.

"Midian lives," says Matt. He's trying to sound old and wise and eerie. He sounds like a child playing at things he doesn't understand.

*I should go*, thinks Babette. Go now, while this farce is still unplayed, while she still has a chance to slip away unnoticed—but curiosity is a strong thing, and she wants to know what lies behind the door. So she stays where she is, stays as she is, as it swings open to reveal a teenage girl in too much makeup and a black lace dress two sizes too small for her.

"Welcome to Midian," says the girl. "Do you fear monsters?"

Here is a question Babette can answer honestly. "Only the human ones," she says.

The girl looks disapproving. "This is not a place for pretenders or people looking for a scare. Do you come to Midian freely and with an open mind?"

"I have always been coming to Midian," says Babette. "Midian is where the monsters go."

"See, Danni? She's one of us," says Matt. "Let us in."

The girl he calls Danni rolls her eyes and steps to the side, holding the door open as she does. "Welcome to Midian," she says. "Enter freely and be unafraid."

There are so many things Babette wants to tell her: wants to tell her that when one enters Midian one should always be a little bit afraid, even if Midian is home and haven altogether. Living among monsters does not come without its share of dangers. But the first part was correct. One must always enter freely, for otherwise, why enter at all? So she slips like a shadow through the door and into the room beyond, where she stops, bewildered by the scene before her.

It is not a large room. It was a coffee shop once, before its windows were covered with soap and

cobwebs and these children, these pretenders to Midian, found a way to pry open the back door and slip into their secret sanctuary. There are eight of them, Matt and Danni included. Some are dressed in black with too much makeup; the rest are in patches and rags, layers that don't quite match but echo Babette's own. The unseeables of the city, gathered with the would-be children of the night that never falls.

They are not her kind. She should never have come here.

But the door clangs shut and she is trapped, Matt coming up behind her on one side, Danni on the other. "Welcome to Midian," he says, waving a hand to indicate the tired, dirty space, lit by candlelight with faded Halloween decorations and newspaper clippings plastering the walls. He looks to her, waiting for her reaction. When it's not forthcoming he prompts, "Well?"

"It's not what I expected," she manages, after a moment's strangled silence. She wants to laugh. She wants to cry. Is this what they are now, the tribes of the moon? From reality to legend to children telling themselves stories in dark and dusty rooms? The other kids are watching her, taking her measure in a way that makes her yearn to breathe out her beast, to run wild and biting through the ranks until they end their credulous lives on the tiled floor. She struggles to contain herself (*Lori, give me your strength*) and adds, "How did you find this place?"

"Danni's dad used to be the general manager," says Matt, looking proudly to the girl in the black lace dress. "She realized we could use this space. That we could all be monsters here."

"But you haven't proven you're a monster," says Danni, shoving her way back into the conversation like a crowbar. "Why should we trust you?"

Answers pile up on Babette's tongue, each one truer and sourer than the last. She swallows most of them, spitting out the most innocuous: "Because I have no one to tell about you. How can I be in danger if I have no threats to make?"

"She's no monster," says Danni dismissively. "She's a pet at best, and prey at worst. If you want to keep her, you'll need to feed and water her, and make sure no one else eats her."

"Promise," says Matt, with a small and secret smile that Babette can't help feeling is intended only for her. "I won't let her pee in the corners or anything."

Danni snorts—the most monstrous thing Babette has heard from her yet—and turns her back on them. "It's your funeral," she says, and walks away, showing how little she thinks of them. Babette doesn't mind.

It's better to be disregarded.

\* \* \*

Now, not-Midian. Now, human children playing dress-up in a dark room that isn't theirs (which may be the most Breed aspect of this strange and deepening evening; they're all squatters in their own ways, clinging to the sides of human society like ticks on a fawn), wearing their artfully tattered clothing, hissing at each other in a mockery of monstrosity. Babette finds herself a place in one of the corners and watches them, all wide eyes and silence. She knows there's something to be learned here if she can just sneak up on it and make it show its face to her.

There have always been Naturals who aspired to become Nightbreed. She was too young in the days of Midian to have had much congress with them, but she remembers their faces, pale with pain and

weeping like the moon, and their eyes. You could always tell the monsters-in-waiting by their eyes. Some of them came to Midian full of sin and secrets, and those ones might make it past the door down into the dark to be judged by Baphomet. Others came innocent and empty, and they were turned away, if they were lucky. (But Boone came empty of anything but darkness and dreams, and he became Cabal, their savior; Lori came empty of anything but love, and she became *his* savior, and Babette's, and in the end, that made her everyone's. Maybe they chose the wrong supplicants, opened their doors to the wrong design.) Babette searches the faces around her for signs of Midian, for the slivers of moonlight that invite the monsters in.

She does not find them. She finds damage, yes; more damage than she could ever dream would lurk in the eyes of children. This world has used them harder than any monster, and for a moment she entertains the thought of taking them all home with her, handing them over to the members of the tribe who hunger, night after night, for the flesh they cannot have. Babette could feed her people and save the children in the same gesture: every bite would drive the balm deeper into the blood, until those who *truly* dreamed of Midian began to change, to breathe their true faces into the world...

But no. That is not the way, not now, not in this open, exposed place. Cabal will come for them and they will make themselves a new home, far from the prying eyes of mankind. Then, and only then, will they be able to think of saving anyone but themselves.

"Having fun?" asks Matt. He thinks himself stealthy, moving through the shadows to appear suddenly beside her. She does not disabuse him, although he has taken no step without her knowing since they arrived.

She looks to him, trusting the darkness to hide the way her pupils have expanded, the way her nostrils flare and scent the air. He smells of sunlight. "I should go," she says. "It's late."

"You just got here."

"No." She pushes away from the wall. "It's too late."

So she walks through the children of this unhallowed place, looking neither left nor right, until she reaches the door. Danni is already there, a sneer on her face.

"Didn't care for the monsters after all, did you, Blondie?"

It takes Babette a moment to remember that she gave her hair color as a name to these people. When she does, she inclines her head as politely as she can and says, "Not these monsters." Then Danni is opening the door with a joyful crow's-cry of "Don't come back!" and Babette is stepping out into the damp nighttime air, and Matt is running after her, asking what he did wrong, asking why she didn't like their secret little kingdom.

Babette keeps walking. It's all she can think to do. Better not to run; running shows weakness, shows you should be pursued. So she walks, chin up and hands down, and Matt pursues away from the door (which closes behind them with a click, final as a coffin lid), away from the alley, into the warren of the midnight streets.

There are men, and there are monsters, and then there are the monsters who are men; a different thing than honest Nightbreed, who know what they are and do not conceal it. Babette is distracted, trying on different ways to evade her pursuer without giving herself away, and does not hear the footsteps until they come too close.

"What do we have here?" asks a voice, older and harder and colder than any of the children who



played at being monsters.

Matt cringes.

Babette sighs. “My brother and I lost our way,” she says, turning, trusting the illusionary relationship granted to them by hair color to carry her story to willing ears. “Can you tell us how to get back to Pine?”

The men behind him—worse luck, for there to be three of them, all large with muscle and smiling in a way she recognizes too well—laugh. “Not until you pay the toll,” says the one who spoke before. He thrusts out his hand. “Empty your pockets.”

“My pockets are already empty,” says Babette, looking at his hand curiously, as if she expects it to fill with treasures. “What’s in yours?”

“Don’t mess with me, kid,” says the man, and grabs her shoulder.

Babette twists her head enough to keep looking at his hand, and sighs.

“I wish you hadn’t done that,” she says.

The screaming begins shortly after.

\* \* \*

Babette is not the most deceitful of her kind: the face she presents most often is that of a sweet-faced girl with a liar’s halo of golden curls, and down deep, that girl is real, is not a lie. But that girl is not the only thing she is. The stranger’s hand weighs heavy on her shoulder as she breathes out the fear that rests in the swampy depths of her lungs, breathes out flesh and fierceness and fury. *This is a terrible idea*, she thinks, and *He laid hands upon me*, she thinks, and through it all, the beast unfolding across her person, until she has claws, until she has fangs, until she can make her displeasure known.

The process takes several seconds. The men do not move. Terror that comes too quickly can do that to a man; can freeze his feet in place while his mind denies the reality of what he sees before him.

When her teeth find the throat of the first man, he remembers movement, but he remembers it too late. Babette is not the most deceitful of her kind. Like all of the Nightbreed, she is exactly deceitful enough.

Once, Midian; once hiding through isolation, humans intruding rarely, for they knew the wisdom of staying far from the houses of the dead. Now, Seattle, where isolation is not the only way, for they lurk in the stronghold of the enemy. When they must kill, it is to be done quickly and well and leave no witnesses, for witnesses might remember the things they have seen, the impossible miracles of flesh and claw.

The first man falls, still twitching, as the flash of motion that is Babette finds the second. Cold wetness on his stomach, and he thinks she has missed, thinks he can run, but as he takes his first step, his offal splatters to the ground, and the shell of his body follows, landing hard, so much discarded trash. Matt screams. It is the first sound since Babette breathed her secrets into the night, and he is still screaming when the third man falls, and Babette closes the distance between them, her hand over his mouth, his thin shoulders pressed against the nearest wall.

“You said you would take me to Midian,” she says, and her voice is broken glass and rusty nails filtered through a mouthful of teeth like knives. “You lied.”

He says nothing, only whimpers as she pins him there, and the alley smells of blood, and his flesh smells of fear.

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“Forget monsters; forget Midian,” she says. “Run into the light, and do not look back. If you do—you whisper a word of what you saw here—I will know, and I will come for you, and I will show you Midian. Now run, little liar, and forget, for your own sake.”

She releases him, and he runs, a fleeing fawn in this obscene, exposed forest of a city. Babette looks at the carnage and sighs before tilting back her head and howling to the hidden face of the moon, blocked out by clouds but no less present. She howls like she could bring back Midian through the sheer power of her grieving, and stops only when an answering howl from the rooftops tells her that her message is received.

Alone in the rain, Babette breathes her beast back into her body, and waits for the Nightbreed to come.

\* \* \*

Messes are inevitable; when one world presses up against another, they cannot be avoided. Some messes serve a purpose. There are mouths to feed, after all, and three more of them on the way. Children are always born hungry. The Breed who answer Babette’s call are happy enough to remove the bodies, carrying them in pieces back across the city to the warehouse. Rachel resolves out of the mist, her eyes wet with sorrow, and Babette flings herself into her almost-mother’s arms, clinging there like a much younger child.

“Are you all right, my dear?” asks Rachel.

Babette does not respond. She is thinking of children who play at being monsters and monsters who play at being children, of men who cross lines they should have stayed far away from, and of the line between truth and legend, between legend and fairy tale. The rain will wash the blood away. The Nightbreed will remove the rest, and this night will enter the uncomfortable country between truth and lies. She has spent too many of her days there. She no longer knows where the boundary lies.

Babette is too large now, to be held with ease; too old now, to be carried. But she closes her eyes and lets Rachel carry her, and all her thoughts are far away, of Lori, and of Midian, where such boundaries will no longer be needed—where it will be only monsters, safe at last, forever.

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# THE NIGHT RAY BRADBURY DIED

## *A Tale of Lost Midian*

Kevin J. Wetmore

Nobody walks in Los Angeles, but he walked as he always had. It almost never rains here, but tonight during the “June Gloom,” drops fell from the dark skies. And so he walked, alone. Always alone.

He walked the thousands of miles to the city of lost angels and now he walked everywhere, most at night. With a face like his you cannot simply walk into the DMV and apply for a license. Didn't matter. He couldn't pass the driver's test anyway. He had never had much use for words. Not with a face like his. But at night, hidden under hats and clothing and hoods and darkness, he could walk unmolested.

He had been born with a wolf's snout where a Natural's nose and mouth would be. He couldn't speak. He tried to communicate through gestures and through tapping out messages. His birth parents hated and feared him. He couldn't even remember the name he was born with. When they finally let him at a highway rest area, he wandered, walking, until he found Midian. Midian gave him a home and a name and a function. He spoke through rhythms and percussion, so they called him “Drummer” and let him drum. It was his gift to Baphomet and Baphomet's gift to him. The drums spoke for him and gave him a role in Midian. His voice, through the sticks in his fists, summoned the Breed, warned of danger and marked the rituals in honor of Baphomet. He had a name, a place, a purpose.

Then Midian fell. And once again the Breed now known as Drummer walked. He walked by night to the one other city he knew of where he might survive. Unlike some Breed, he had a silhouette that could pass for a Natural's, but his face, specifically his muzzle and teeth, gave away that he was something else. But Los Angeles was a superficial city. The people looked but did not see. One might blend in, if one didn't draw attention. Because once those superficial people saw, they hated anything not beautiful. And then they would try to hurt him, try to kill him. Yet again.

There were a lot of Breed in LA. Some knew they were, some were unawakened, but you could see their yearning. It was in their hair, colored in shades not found in nature. It was in metal, pushed through lips, and noses, and nipples, eyebrows, cheeks, chins, and other areas less visible. Ink covered arms, legs, backs, and even faces—images dark and beautiful, their meaning sometimes only known to the one whose skin they covered and sometimes not even to them. A lost tribe of addicts, runaway dreamers, the lost, the broken, and the damned, seeking to fill a hole in them with something

sometimes anything.

He had a new name, too. To live in a real city you needed more than one name. So Drumm became his last name. Now he called himself Iblis, after stories an old man told him when he first got to the city. The man was blind, but had memorized the Koran. Under a bridge, during Drummer's first winter in the city, he heard the story:

We have established you on earth, and We have provided for you the means of support therein. Rarely are you appreciative. We created you, then We shaped you, then We said to the angels, "Bow down before Adam." The angels all bowed, except Iblis; he was not with those who bowed. Allah said, "What prevented you from prostrating when I ordered you?" Iblis said, "I am better than man; You created me from fire, and created him from mud."

Drummer decided he had been reborn as Iblis, as he had been created in the fires of Midian that night and while he would try to blend with man, he would never bow down to him.

He lived in a small basement apartment next to the laundry room on the bottom of Coldhead Canyon where it emptied out of the Hollywood Hills onto Sunset, just a few blocks north of Hollywood Forever Cemetery. When he was lonely or homesick, he would spend hours quietly beating rhythms on the tombstones in Hollywood Forever, drumming on the faces laser-etched on granite or marble, next to names written with letters he did not recognize and could not read. He meant no disrespect to those buried there. While he drummed, he sometimes thought of those buried there and offered his drumming up to them. He walked among the graves and felt at peace.

It also allowed for the cosmic joke of his life. He drummed one February night on a tombstone and heard a voice nearby. Ordinarily he remained vigilant and ran at the first sign of anyone—the police were unkind to those in the graveyard after dark and everyone was unkind to Breed. But he thought of the fires of Midian and all he had lost and his arms moved with wild abandon, marking a beat that sang of both a broken heart and a vengeful fury. He was a catastrophe of a creature, and his music that night spoke eloquently of his pain while assuaging it at the same time. He just needed a second or two more to finish the song.

"Shit, man, you're good!"

Too late he saw the two young men. They stumbled toward him. Sticks in his hands, he began to move away from them.

"Hang on, dude! We need to talk to you!"

Too late to run. They approached, but their speed was not aggressive. He knew what that looked like. His hood was drawn low and he had a scarf over the lower half of his face. He tried to look indifferent, but his heart was pounding louder and more rapidly than his drumming had been.

"Dude, that was fuckin' metal!"

"Naw, dude, that was like fuckin' Lars Ulrich combined with Neil Peart combined with, I don't know—a whole fuckin' African tribe or something."

They were excited. Glassy-eyed and looking at him like he was some sort of god. Dressed alike in black leather jackets, covered with writing, torn jeans and boots. Ink on all visible skin. They weren't Breed, but they were a breed unto themselves.

The one with long, greasy hair said, "Me and Ian here, we heard you and were like, 'That guy's the

shit we gotta go meet him.’”

Iblis just looked at him.

“What dude here is trying to say is, are you in a band or anything?”

Iblis shook his head, no.

Ian gave him a look, took a long pull on his beer. “You fuckin’ mute or something?”

Iblis returned the look, trying hard not to seem scared. He couldn’t believe it when he nodded.

The other one spat. “Shit, man, that’s fucked up. Still, who needs to talk when you can play like that.”

Ian was still looking. “What’s your name, man?”

Iblis held out a piece of paper that said, “Name Iblis Drummer. I am poor and hungry.” He had had a junkie write it out for him. Sometimes you can panhandle and get money and not worry about being hated and hunted, because all the beautiful people avoid looking at poor people asking for money. That was how he paid the rent most days.

“‘Drummer,’ huh? No shit? Whatever. Everyone in this town is bullshit.”

Ian was still looking at him. “Okay, look—we’ve got this band, and we need a drummer. You’re the fuckin’ best thing I’ve heard in a long time.”

Iblis nodded, as if he agreed.

“So anyway, you think you might be interested? Here’s the thing. We’re kinda like a speed metal band and we wear costumes and masks when we play, like Gwar, you know?”

Iblis nodded, as if he did know.

Ian took another pull, draining it, then threw the bottle into the darkness, where it hit something and may or may not have broken.

“So anyway, if you’re interested, we’ll get you a mask and a costume and you can jam with us. The money’s not great, but it’s cash under the table and we can usually get free beer.”

“Plus pussy. Man, metal groupies love us!” said greasy hair.

“This is Damon, he blows bass. I’m Ian, lead vocals and rhythm guitar. You’ll meet Zack. He’s the lead guitar. He’s like you—doesn’t talk for shit.”

Damon belched. “Yeah, but he plays that guitar like he’s fucking a porn star.”

And that is how Iblis, without ever speaking or showing his face onstage, became a drummer for a speed metal band. He would perform, drumming in front of people, for those brief hours passing time as something else: a Breed pretending to be a Natural pretending to be a Breed. He even wore the masks and costume to rehearsals. At first the others in the band made fun of him for it, but as he played they came to see and treat him like some kind of percussion saint, and they left him alone to do his thing and take his cash, and never go out with them afterward.

But tonight, as small drops fell, he began walking. Something in the world had changed, and he felt it in his soul. His fingers nervously beat a tattoo as he walked. He kept his head down, but could not stop his fingers and hands from pulsing over objects—mailboxes and phone poles, parked cars and parking meters. He was sending some code he didn’t even speak out into the universe, not knowing why, just knowing it had to be sent.

He walked farther than he ever had, passing the clubs on Santa Monica in West Hollywood. The pounding dance music, rhythmic and ritualistic, drew him, but he might not enter. The men in the

clubs were beautiful, their bodies hard and their faces sharp, carved by hours in the gym. Beauty and desire. Rejected elsewhere, in small towns and suburbs, they came here to their own kingdom, where they were the beautiful ones, where they were the Naturals and the norms. Like Iblis, they were drawn to this city to find a safe place to be what they were, but Iblis had no place among them. His body was hard, his muscles like steel wire from the drumming, but no one looked upon his face with desire. He was not welcome among the flashing lights and sweaty bodies. More people pretending to be Bree. And more people who would fear and hate and hunt if they actually saw one.

He passed through the enclaves of wealth and learning, those on the top, on their way up and some on the way back down again. He walked all the way to the ocean. He didn't know why, but this was where he needed to be.

He sat on the sand, head wrapped tight, hooded sweatshirt under jacket with baseball cap and scarf. One must always hide from one's public.

The ocean's susurrus was its own rhythm, and his fingers began to match it on his thighs. Slow, first. Then going in rapid counterpoint to the waves. It was mindless to him, yet also comforting. This was his way of communicating with the world. Even if the Naturals didn't understand it.

That's when he heard something. It sounded like crying. Keeping his head down, he shifted and looked around. Twenty or so feet away was a dark lump. His eyes had always been good in the dark (one needs good night vision when one lives underground, after all—not all of Midian's gifts had abandoned him), and he was startled to see it was someone dressed like him. He stopped drumming on his thighs and just listened.

A sniffle. A low moan. A woman. Or more like a girl.

Against practice and instinct, he got up, walked over, and sat down five feet away from her.

“What?! Am I bothering you? It's a public beach, you know.”

He could not see her face, but he could see her pain. She was hiding, too. It was cold out, but not enough to justify the layers of clothing, not to mention the hat and scarf. She could have been his twin at least when it came to attire.

“What are you staring at, huh? What? You think I'm a Muslim or something? You want to make fun of me? Why don't you say something?... You want to see? Fine! *Fine!*” Her words were slightly slurred.

She pulled off the hat and scarf in one awkward motion and he saw.

There was a small hole where her left ear should have been, surrounded by whorls of pink scars and tissue. The eye on that side was milk white, the hair burned away as well. The disfigurement clearly went down her neck into her collar, and left a very distinctive border between the not-quite-pretty girl she once was and the burned, malformed features that she was trying to hide.

“Happy now? Now you know I'm a freak? Happy?” She sobbed quietly and began to wrap the scarf around her head once more.

He waited in silence. Iblis had found not doing anything usually resulted in people continuing to pour out their feelings and thoughts.

She sobbed for a while and he began beating out a rhythm on his shoes.

“You're not grossed out?” Quiet, but genuine.

He shook his head no and kept gently banging on the sides of his boots. It was almost hypnotic.

“I didn’t always look like this. I was pretty ... once. My stepfather was kind of a jerk, and was smoking in the apartment one night and fell asleep on the couch. My room was right next to the door, so I smelled the smoke and got up, but by then...”

Iblis nodded. Not Breed, but broken. She knew the pains he knew. Hide away from the eyes of others. Especially if you don’t like what you see in them.

“It was over two years ago, but the doctors say this is what it’s going to be like, and we can’t afford ... and sometimes I just...”

She cried some more.

He thumped some more.

“You want to know the stupid thing? I’m not even crying about any of that.”

She picked up a handful of sand and threw it. The wind caught some, the rest fell to the ground again.

“Tonight Ray Bradbury died.”

Iblis nodded. As if he knew who that was.

“You know who that is?... I know, it’s dumb. It’s not like he was my father or my friend or something. I never met the guy. I dunno. It’s just when I read his stuff I’d forget myself. I’d disappear and the only thing left was a world he created. Better than this one, or the one I was living in back home.”

She shifted on the sand and just sat. He stopped drumming.

“I didn’t know him and it’s not like I read his books and I was like, ‘Oh, he gets me.’ I mean I’m not in high school or something dumb like that. I just ... I just read the things he wrote and they made me think we’re not alone and the world is a pretty amazing place. It’s like an amusement park closing for the winter. You drive by and you know it’s still there, but somehow the life is somehow missing and there is a little less light in the world. A little less joy. Cotton candy won’t smell as sweet ever again.”

Iblis nodded. This time he knew.

“Okay, I’m just being stupid. So, what’s under your scarf? You burned too?”

She reached toward him and he instinctively pulled back.

“It’s okay. I won’t hurt you,” and she continued to move toward his face. Gently but firmly he grabbed her hand, suddenly moved it down, and she stumbled into him, landing on the sand next to him so they now sat side by side.

He held her hand with one hand and began to drum on her palm. He could feel the tension and shock of being manhandled in such a way drain from her.

“Not a talker? Okay.” Yet somehow the rhythm began to soothe her. Not taking away the pain, but making it a familiar presence, so it lost its bite.

A few minutes passed. A hundred yards away, couples walked hand in hand on the bike path. In the distance in the opposite direction, large ships slowly moved through the dark water. They sat, not speaking, but listening to the drumming of his fingers on her palm, and for one minute, each knew peace.

She wiped away a tear and got up, but only to walk over to her backpack. She pulled out a tattered paperback and handed him the book. He couldn’t read any of the words, but the picture captured him

It was a man, sitting with his legs crossed, facing away. His body was covered in tattoos. Iblis wondered if he was Breed. Wondered if she was showing this to him because she understood Breed.

“It’s a buncha short stories called *The Illustrated Man*. It’s about this guy who has tattoos that tell stories that come true, but the stories themselves are about all kinds of things. He’s intense, but there’s a truth to him.” She looked Iblis right in the eye. “Kinda like you.”

She stood up, brushed off the sand, and gathered the backpack.

“Keep the book. A gift. You made me feel better for a few minutes, and that is a rare thing. Maybe Ray here,” she said, tapping the book, “can help you feel better for a few minutes. He’s good at that.”

She turned away. “Night.”

He did not watch as she began to move from him, but then he heard her coming back again. As he turned to look, she was already standing over him, bending down. Her lips touched his forehead, brushed against his skin, and then were gone again.

“Thanks. I just wanted to say thanks. And you don’t need to be so sad. Read the book. Maybe it will bring a smile to whatever it is you’re hiding behind that scarf.”

As she straightened up, he dropped the book and slowly pulled down the scarf. She looked at him and did not scream. Did not wince. She just looked. And then whispered, “Thank you.”

She turned again and walked away. Iblis sat for a long time. He sat until he knew he had to leave in order to walk back to his home before the sun rose.

As he walked, he looked at the picture on the book. The man faced away. You couldn’t see his face, but his body screamed power. His sinews were taut and tight and ready, yet at rest. You could almost see the small images on his body changing.

As the sky slowly began to change from black to blue, he knew that someone or something had left the world. It wasn’t like Midian had fallen again. Just that it had gotten smaller. The Naturals had grown closer. That’s when he realized. He didn’t know her name. He knew nothing about her but her pain and her loss. But he was able to lessen those.

He walked past the temples of the beautiful, now silent. No more loud rhythms enticing the crowd. They stood empty and abandoned, like Midian. He saw the homeless sleeping in the doorways.

He felt changed. Was this what Cabal had gone through? He shifted in his skin, under the scarf and the hat and the jacket and the hood. Sometimes the walk back to what passed for a home simply reminded him of how alone he now was. Not tonight. Tonight something had been lost, so something must be gained.

Instead of turning on Coldheart, he kept walking, back to Hollywood Forever. That was what was missing. He had been putting on the costume and mask and drumming for the band so much recently he had not been here in a while. He needed, before the sun was fully up, to drum again. Not for crowds of people pretending to be monsters, not for the beautiful to dance and seduce and judge, not for crowds at all, but for the lost and the broken.

He moved past the familiar marble. The lawns and graves were well kept here, unlike Midian. He was still at home among the dead, even the beautiful dead of Los Angeles. Even the name, Hollywood Forever, seemed a lie, but a lie with a promise. Among the familiar stones, paths, and crypts the real rhythms of the Breed began to return to him. Not what he played in clubs and bars, but what had come through him in Midian.



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