



THE GINELL ACCORDING TO
 THE AVENINBECK

SEEKING THE
 THE GINELL ACCORDING TO
 THE AVENINBECK

Second Coming

THE BURNING UP TIMES

Exclusive online Strangers PDF

Issue two: June 2006



Stranglers off riot hook — book planned (but of course)

THE STRANGLERS' protracted French court case saga — which began at their riot-torn Nice gig last spring, and has since clouded all their plans and activities — is finally over. With the threat of prison sentences lifted, the band looked as though the final outcome was adding a further burden to their shoulders. But manager Ed Klein says more action will be concluded.

Page 4 — New Musical Express 23rd February, 1980

Stranglers single and London date

THE STRANGLERS return to action next month with a new single, followed by a major London concert and various overseas jaunts. The London show will be in the first week of April, as part of the week of concerts to mark the 50th anniversary of the Rainbow Theatre — it could be April 3, but at presstime promoter Harvey was still juggling the week's events. Subsequently the band was still juggling the week's events. Subsequently the band was still juggling the week's events. Subsequently the band was still juggling the week's events.



Stranglers dates

THE STRANGLERS have now confirmed 11 dates for their July tour, plans for which were revealed last week. Their schedule, taking in a number of leading concert venues...

Live LP plan, as stars mass for Stranglers galas

THE STRANGLERS will — in the enforced absence of Hugh Cornwell — be joined on stage by an incredible array of talent, when they play their two concerts at London Rainbow this Thursday and Friday. The confirmed line-up at press-time includes Ian Dury, The Cure, Steel Pulse, The Members, Hazel O'Conner, Peter Hammill, Robert Fripp, Richard Jobson of The Skids, Wilko...



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THE BURNING UP TIMES

Issue two
June 2006

Editorial

Welcome to issue two of *The Burning Up Times*, your free Stranglers PDF created by Stranglers fans. In *Second Coming*, we focus our attention on the ground-breaking fifth Stranglers album, *The Gospel According To The Meninblack* – and what a journey it is! A spell in prison for possession of Class A drugs, incarceration in a French jail for inciting a crowd to riot, disjointed recording sessions, management litigation, assets frozen, UFOs and a spectacular flop in the charts! The band were on the verge of bankruptcy and breaking – and *Golden Brown* was just around the corner. What a period to have been a Stranglers fan!

Thank you to everyone who helped. Special thanks to:

Chris Alderton, Adrian Andrews, Christopher Balden, Stephen Baker, Steve Beaumont, Aldo Bocca, Paul Begg, Gary Binnie, Stuart Bolton, Jean Jacques Burnel, Steve Churchyard, John Cochrane, Lol Cole, Gary Cook, Hugh Cornwell, Clark Crass, Laurence Diana, Jim Drury, John Ellis, David Fagence, Jamie Godwin, Ian Grant, John Hallsworth, Andy Helgesen, Stephen Howard, Mitch K, Simon Kent, Doug Kerr, Donald Mackay, Davey McLaughlin, Keith Morris, Andrew Nicholson, Joe Ordinair, Karen Parfitt, John Pasche, Steve Pool, David Pritchard, Jamie Radley, Stephen Reid, John Robb, David Scott, Barry Spooner, Mark Tall, Chris Twomey and X-File of SE1.

Please accept our apologies to anyone we have inadvertently left out.

This issue is dedicated to Gary Cook, RIP, Stranglers fan and Strangled PDF contributor.

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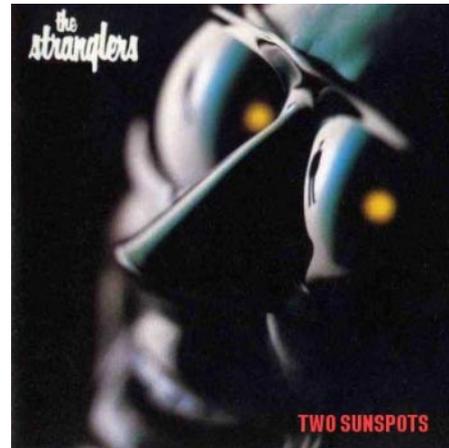
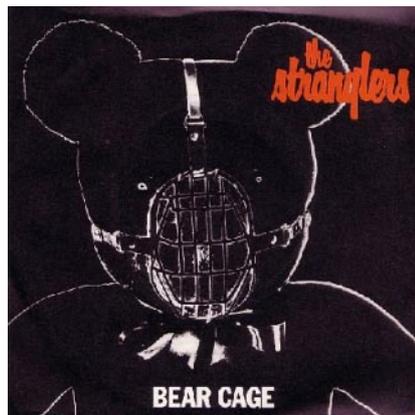
You have been informed

10 things you should know about *The Gospel According To the Meninblack*

1 *The Gospel According To The Meninblack* is The Stranglers' first concept album. It was also the first album the band produced themselves. It was Jet who first chanced upon the UFO phenomenon of the Men In Black in January 1978's *Flying Saucer Review*. The band were writing *Black And White* at the time.

2 Dave teased fans in January 1981's *Strangled* magazine when he revealed he and Jet wrote *Second Coming* – with a 13/4 piece that didn't make the final cut: "I'm saving that for another song." And we all know what that became, don't we?

3 *Meninblack* bore two singles; *Thrown Away*, which made Number 42, and *Just Like Nothing On Earth* – the first Stranglers single not to trouble the UK Top 75 singles charts.



4 *Waltzinblack* was originally mooted to follow up *Thrown Away*. The redundant artwork featuring two dancing MiBs, turned up in *Grip* '89.

5 *Two Sunspots* was first recorded at Eden Studios at the end of 1978 for a proposed January '79 single release, bridging the gap between *Walk On By* and *Live (X-Cert) LP*. When the idea was shelved, the artwork was used for 1980's *Who Wants The World?*, and *The Stranglers IV* IRS import LP.

6 Recorded and mixed in Europe, January to August 1980: *Thrown Away* and *Second Coming* were recorded in Germany. *Waltzinblack*, *Four Horsemen* and *Hallow To Our Men* In France, *Top Secret* and *Man In White*, in Italy and *Waiting For The Meninblack*,

Just Like Nothing On Earth, *Manna Machine* and *Turn, The Centuries Turn* were done in London... as were *Bear Cage*, *Vietnamica* and *Who Wants The World?* – although they never actually made the final track listing...

7 ...Three singles precede the album's release, but only *Thrown Away* gets on the album. Incidentally, did you know *Bear Cage* was written during a sound check in France? Bien sur!

8 On the original demo *Waltzinblack* segues neatly into *Second Coming*. *Just Like Nothing On Earth* sits between the two on the final vinyl.

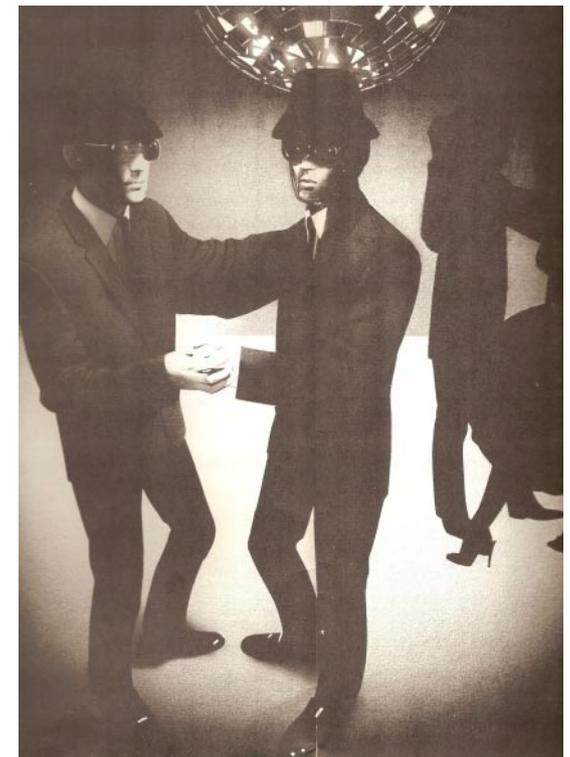
9 Also on the demo was an instrumental called *Freezer*. But then Hugh wrote lyrics for it, and it became *Manna Machine*. Apart from the inclusion of vocals, the other difference was the bass drum was much more prominent in *Freezer*. Boom, boom.

10 Talk about keeping it "in-house"...*Who Wants The World?* was the first single the band produced themselves – and in the excellent promo clip, the band



perform-in-black on a hill in the Kent countryside while a Man In Black prances about.

Manager Ian Grant, who played the perambulating MiB recalls the days' shoot: "They gaffer-taped my hat down onto my head so my hair didn't show – after all you can't have a MiB with blond locks! It nearly killed me trying to get it off afterwards. I was alright by the time we got to the pub in the village, though!"



Steve Howard revisits the period that spawned a monster...

1980-1981: Who Wants The World?

WARS, RIOTS, prison hunger strikes... The Stranglers résumé? You're not far off, actually. While the band experience a spiralling chain of misfortune – perhaps partly attributed to their fetish with UFOs and Men In Black – planet Earth was also behaving badly.

It's **January 1980**, and the new decade kicks off with unrest in Britain's steel industry with workers staging their first strike in 50 years in support of a 20% pay rise. The dispute lasts 14 weeks before the Lever Inquiry recommends a 16% increase in return for an agreement on working practices and productivity deals. In India, Indira Gandhi returns to power after three years in opposition and in Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe also takes control. Afghanistan witnesses the intensity of the Cold War as the Soviet Union invade in a move described by US president Jimmy Carter as "a callous violation of international law and the United Nations

charter – Soviet occupied Afghanistan threatens both Iran and Pakistan and is a stepping stone to possible control over much of the world's oil supplies."

We don't need no education? In Britain, concerns are voiced by both parents and teachers of children being encouraged to rebel in school because of Pink Floyd's Number 1 hit, *Another Brick in the Wall*. By the end of the month, it was forgotten as the Pretenders topped the chart with *Brass in Pocket*. Meanwhile, in a tiny pub venue in West London, new Irish band U2 played to a half empty Moonlight Club.

The Ska revival started at the tail end of 1979 gains serious momentum in **February** with the *Specials'* at Number 1 with *Too Much Too Young*. The charts also see *My Girl* by Madness, *Tears of a Clown* by the Beat and Booker T & the MG's with *Green Onions*. Heavy Metal also enjoys a renaissance led by Saxon, Def Leppard, Samson and Iron Maiden – all packing out clubs across the UK. However, the rock world mourns the loss of AC/DC's Bon Scott who dies on February 20th following a drinking spree.

Back in the UK pop charts, it's Blondie and the Jam dominating during **March** with *Atomic* and *Going Underground*. In contrast, the best-selling album artists are not quite as explosive: the Shadows and Johnny Mathis.

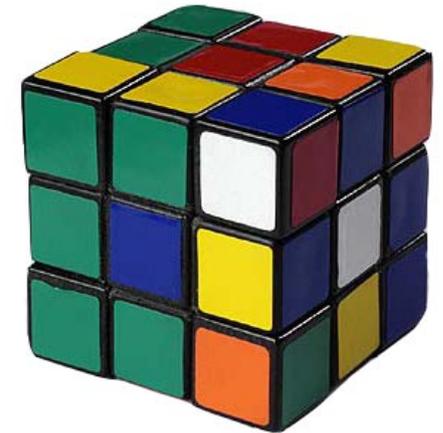
The world of television is hardly inspiring when the top BBC shows feature a woman who trains dogs and female cop with a bubble perm. (That's Barbara Woodhouse and Juliet Bravo, by the way!) In the real world, the fallout from the

Soviet invasion of Afghanistan continues as the British Olympic Association defies the government and votes to go to the Moscow Olympics.

March ends in misery when 123 people are killed in a North Sea oil rig collapse during gales. A massive wave breaks one of the supporting legs of Phillips-owned Alexander Kielland platform, at the Ekofisk field 235 miles east of Dundee, sending 208 people into the sea. Some make it into lifeboats before the platform capsizes. Most of the dead are Norwegian.

In **April**, there are more invasions. This time, it's the Rubik's Cube. Now we know what we all did with our hands before mobile phones. Shoppers can't wait to get the hands on fashion shoes Kickers, or rather, their feet in. Music press is a-buzz with The Stranglers and Friends concerts at the Rainbow, while Hershman's hermits, Sham 69 are banned from all London venues because of the behaviour of their fans.

May starts in dramatic fashion as possibly the first example of reality TV. Millions tune into all three UK channels for live broadcasts of the five-day Iranian



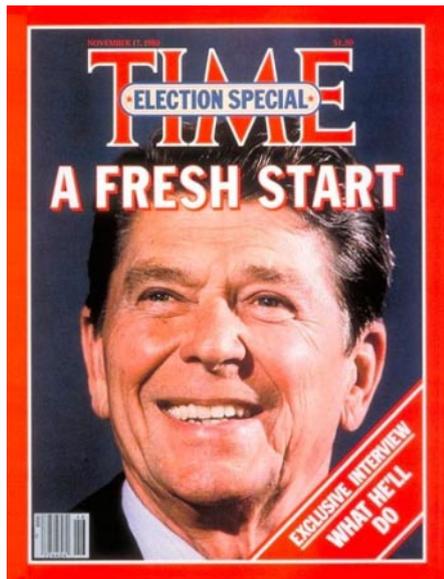
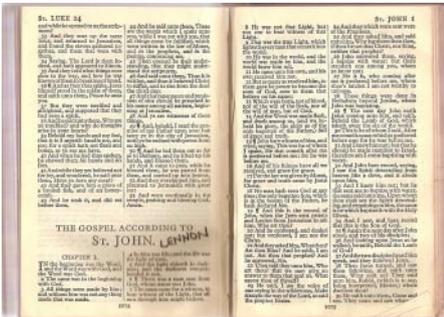
embassy siege in London. It ends when SAS commandos launch a daring rescue attempt, killing five Iranian gunmen and making one arrest. Nineteen hostages are set free but one dies and two are injured in the cross-fire. The gunmen belonging to a dissident Iranian group opposed to Ayatollah Khomeini, and ordered 91 political prisoners held in Iran to be released, along with an aircraft to take them, and the hostages, out of the UK.

At least nine people die after the massive eruption of Mount St Helens volcano in Washington State, USA. The independent music scene mourns the loss of Ian Curtis, lead singer of up and coming Manchester band Joy Division, who commits suicide on the eve of a US tour. His wife discovers his body hanging in the living room of their Derbyshire home. The band announce they would continue, but under another name, and New Order are born.

In **June** a little piece of UK history disappears as the sixpence ceases to be



The bible scrawled on by Mark Chapman, left at the scene of the murder



legal tender whilst unemployment in the UK reaches 2 million. The charts are topped by Don McLean and the theme from TV show M*A*S*H. Porridge is served to The Stranglers (not Dave, though) in the south of France for supposedly inciting an audience to riot. At the cinema, the big films are Fame, The Shining and Malcolm McLaren's version of the Sex Pistols story, The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle. And 1980 sees the release of Ridley Scott's sci fic horror film classic Alien in the UK.

Malc remains in the news in **July** with his latest venture, Bow Wow Wow, and their debut single *C30-C60-C90 Go!* Lead singer 14-year-old Annabella Lewin was pictured topless on the cover. Deaths include The Ruts' lead singer Malcolm Owen who dies in the bath from a heroin overdose, funny man Peter Sellers and the Shah of Iran. In a shadow of present day events, Iraqi security forces shoot dead three gunmen who attack the British embassy in Baghdad on the eve of the first national assembly elections for 20 years. Iraqi officials say the attack was an attempt to disrupt the ballot.

In Poland in **August**. Gdansk shipyard workers stage a strike in protest over the dismissal of militant crane driver Anna Walentinowicz. The Lenin shipyard strike was seen as part of a growing campaign to gain political freedom and to improve economic conditions for Poland's labour force. It also led to the worldwide prominence of Lech Walesa who led workers to a sweeping victory in a two-month battle with their Communist rulers for the right to independent trade unions and the right to strike. The agreement meant Poland became the first Eastern Bloc country formally to recognise an effective and independent trade union movement.

At the Russian Olympics, 6,000

competitors from 81 countries arrive to compete in 22 sports despite a US led boycott in protest at the Afghanistan invasion. Some 10,000 athletes were originally expected. The Soviet Union wins 197 medals while Great Britain bags 21.

Allegations of chart rigging surface in a World In Action TV investigation in **September**. British Phonographic Institute Chairman John Fruin resigns.

Trouble brews in the Middle East where three weeks of Border clashes between Iran and Iraq erupt into an all-out war to last eight years.

In **October**. in the UK, an array of rockers suffer hassles: John Lydon is found guilty of assaulting two men in Dublin. Joe Strummer is arrested for possession of a handgun and "certain substances" and the Specials' Jerry Dammers is charged with a breach of the peace following an incident at a gig in Cambridge.

You really got me now? Or have you? Ray Davies, lead singer of The Kinks, is taken into police custody accused of unpaid hotel bills. It turns out he has a lookalike who used his name to book reservations and leave without paying.

Blond bombshells The Police take control of the singles and album charts with *Don't Stand So Close To Me* and *Zenyatta Mondatta*.

By **November**, a new pop culture scene emerges in the UK; the New Romantics. Spandau Ballet becomes the first of these bands to chart with *To Cut A Long Story Short*.

In the US, Ronald Reagan succeeds Jimmy Carter at the Whitehouse while Michael Foot is elected new leader of the Labour Party in the UK. Meanwhile 20,000 people are killed as two large earthquakes hit Algeria. The Queen makes history by becoming the first British monarch to make a state visit to the

Vatican.

Top of everyone's Christmas lists is Pacman – a new computer game. It's based on an old Japanese tale about a creature that protects children from scary monsters by eating them.

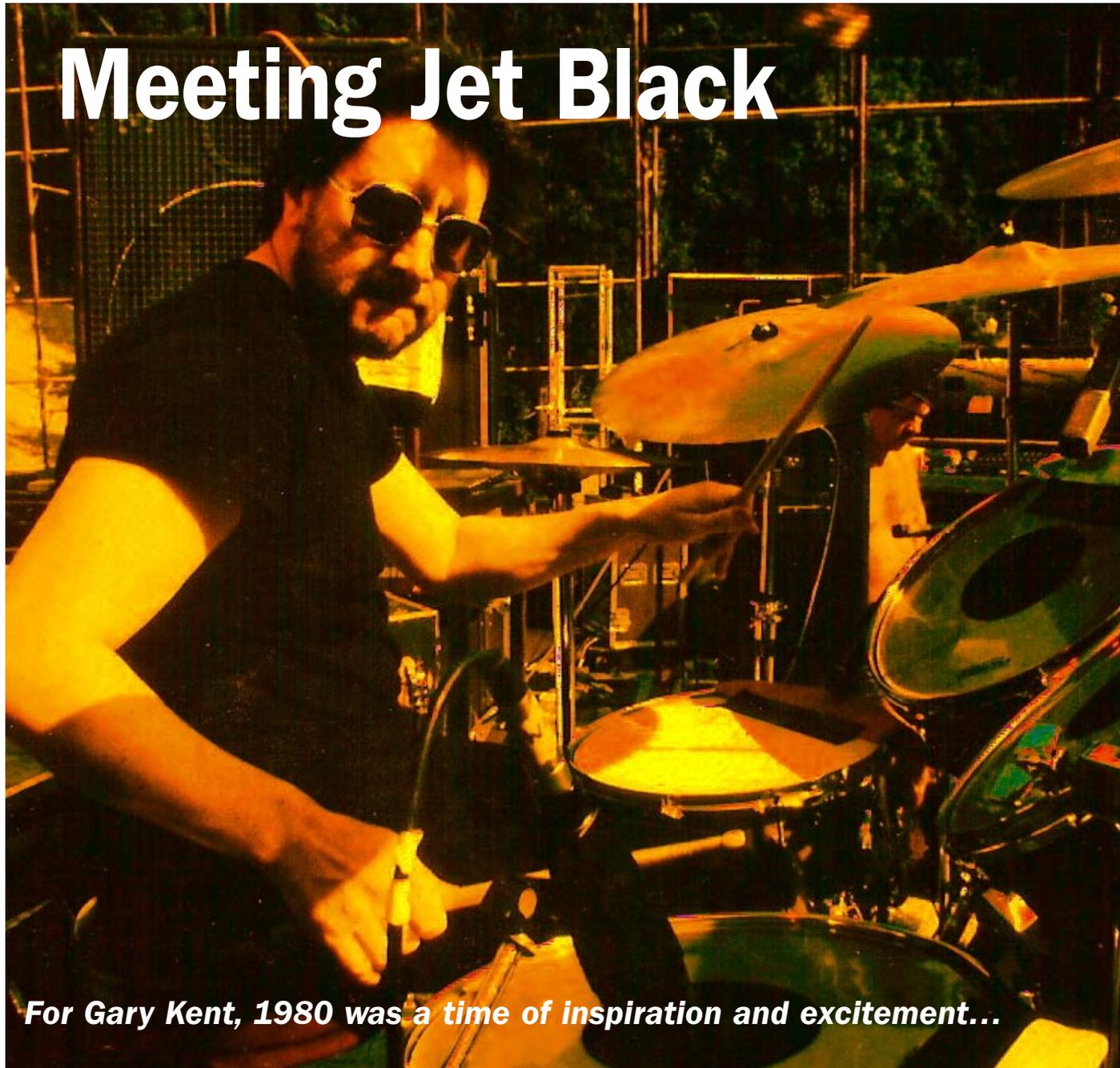
On **8 December**, the world mourns the loss of John Lennon, shot dead outside his New York Dakota apartment by crazed fan Mark Chapman. Lennon signs a copy of his *Double Fantasy* album for Chapman, who then fires five .38 calibre bullets into the former Beatle's upper body, killing him instantly.

The silver screen loses film maker Alfred Hitchcock and actor and heart throb, Steve McQueen.

Lennon's legacy reaches the singles charts in **January 1981** holding 3 of the Top 4 places. *Double Fantasy* heads the album charts both in the UK and US. Adam and The Ants hijack the UK singles chart with *Ant Music*. Violence erupts in Northern Ireland as civil rights campaigner and former Westminster MP Bernadette McAliskey, is shot by gunmen who burst into her home in Coalisland, County Tyrone.

In **February**, another rocker dies: Bill Haley, passes away, aged 55. He sold over 25 million copies of *Rock Around The Clock* – the biggest selling single of the rock era. In the UK, Adam and The Ants' LP, *Kings of the Wild Frontier*, gets to Number one. Joe Dolce's *Shaddup A Ya Face* tops the singles charts. Street party planners go into overdrive when Prince Charles announced his wedding to Lady Diana. As the Meninblack UK tour gets under way, *Thrown Away* fails to achieve Top 40 status. It is The Stranglers' 13th single release. *The Gospel According To The Meninblack*, despite initial sales of 50,000, peaks at Number 8 and within five weeks, it's gone.

Meeting Jet Black



For Gary Kent, 1980 was a time of inspiration and excitement...

I have been summoned to meet Jet Black – and I'm late. The office of Stranglers Information Service lurks quietly behind the modern concrete edifices that characterise the south side of London Bridge, dwarfed by Southwark Cathedral. And I'm almost there.

I'm shitting bricks as I take a short cut across the craggy flagstones and leafy graveyard. I'm running, sweating, dripping wet when I suddenly find myself face to face with a man in black.

His suit is old, his tie is thin, and his hair is wild – No! This ain't Jet Black! This suit belongs to the lanky frame of punk poet John Cooper Clarke, bumping right into me, mumbling what might have been an apology, or even a curse. Who knows? With a girl in tow clutching a camera and tripod, the pair hurry round me across crowded London Bridge. The next issue of new style magazine The Face features the photo session I'd stumbled upon, and soon I was about to come up with my very own front page story...

AFTER STRAGLED ISSUE one volume 2 came out I grabbed pen and paper. In a fit of teenage pique, I wrote a scathing letter to Suze, the new editor of the renascent magazine, condemning the uninspiring writing, slating the charcoal sketches and panning the poncey and irrelevant artwork. "Stranglers fans deserve more than this second rate effort." I declared. "Must try harder."

The moment I posted the letter I feared I'd been over-the-top but reasoned that, with all the mail they must get, who's going to read my letter anyway?

Unbeknown to me, all of issue one's content came courtesy of drummer Jet Black's fair hand. How was I to know? He used a nom-de-plume, Suze – based on

Suzanne, his girlfriend, to kick start the magazine following the publication's hiatus after Tony Moon left.

So, one day, I'm up in my bedroom, working on my still life portfolio for an upcoming Art college interview, when suddenly the phone rings. This is followed by the sound of my Mum's dulcet tones hollering up the hallway:

"Gary! Phone! It's Jet Black!"

Words echo up the orange and brown stair carpet to my poster-clad Stranglers cocoon like a rocket. He's read it. I'm fixed into position in front of the hi-fi clutching a copy of *Rattus*. What's he gonna say, I wonder? The afternoon lull is instantly blown into orbit and turmoil.

But it was funny hearing my Mum saying Jet Black – as if she knew him; well, she did in a way – each time she vacuumed my room, he was there on the walls, watching. She also heard his drumming through the ceiling most nights. And days.

Downstairs, my legs are jelly and my guts are full of butterflies as Mum passes me the phone. Is he gonna have a go at me? Don't forget, I wrote to Suze, the editor. Perhaps I'll deny everything.

I listen intently for a second, but my SB pencil behind my ear clicks on the earpiece...

"Hello? Gary?" Says the gruff voice on the phone. The voice is monotone, how it was on the Nicky Horne Capital Radio interview with Jet I'd taped in March when Hugh lost his appeal. Fuck. It's him. Jet Black is talking. To me.

"We received your letter..." I expect the worst. He's gonna take me apart. "You've obviously got some ideas – can you do any better?"

"Erm – yeah...well." I splutter.

"Then you'd better come down and see me for a chat then. What are you doing tomorrow?"

I'M ON the Central Line the next day, City-bound in my Stranglers uniform of black shirt, black trousers and black monkey boots; I polished them with Dad's boot polish the night before. The only thing was my tie – it looked odd, not quite as black as it should have been. "Dad must have a funeral tie", I thought to myself as I rummaged through his big brown and beige kippers before I left the house. All I found was a medium thin blue one. "It's nearly black", I thought, reassuring myself now in the glass windows of the carriage, recalling Gary Numan on the front cover of *Smash Hits* in a black shirt and red and blue tie.

Kids a year beneath me sat at the opposite end of the carriage, eyeing me up with envy – if only they knew who I was meeting! Thoughts drifted back when Rutter came to school saying he'd met Jet in Oxford Street in a black Crombie coat like he wore on *Black And White*.

Of course, we didn't believe him, as kids don't; he was probably just trying to ingratiate with us Stranglers fans. But then, intriguingly, he revealed that Jet had holes in his beard. Now that was a funny thing to say – unless he's a good liar, that is. Note to self: "check out Jet's beard for holes."

I'm late when I discover Bank and Monument are not the same station like the topographic Underground map seems to suggest: a lengthy subway connects the two, where I get confused, and start to panic.

I am finally struck by a white-painted doorway of New Hibernia House in Winchester Walk, but there's nothing to convince me I'm in the right place. It's just an old warehouse. I can't see any name on the buzzers, but the door is ajar, so I go in. It's dark, there are no lights on. I can see a door to the left. Wooden

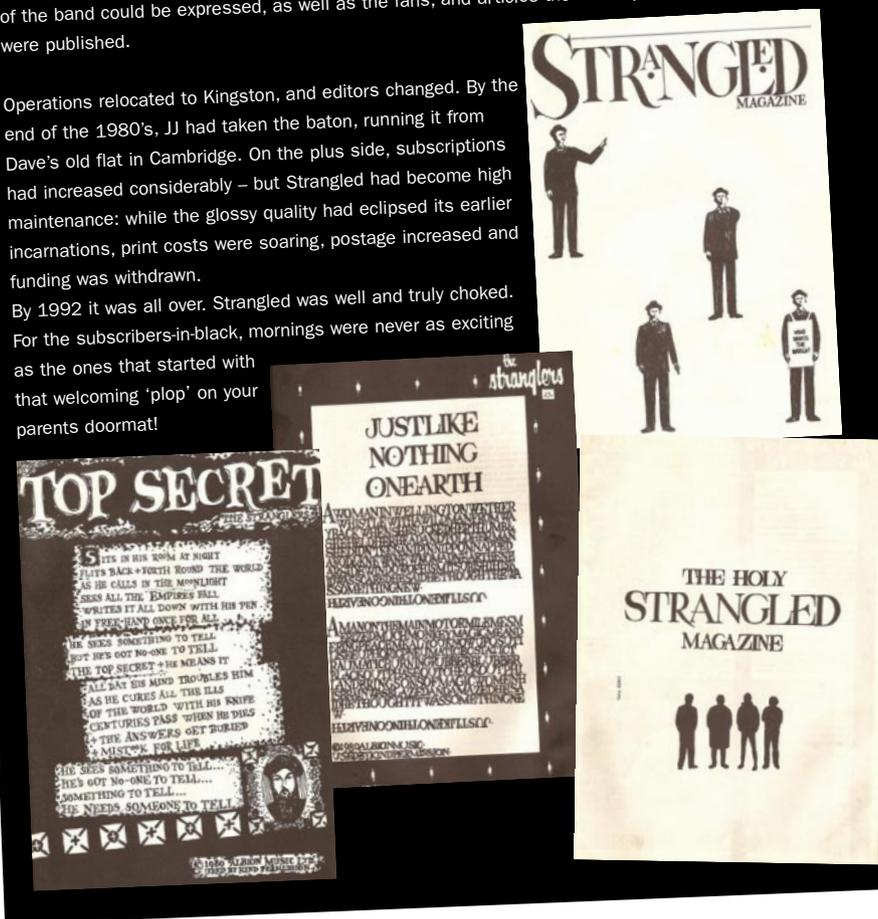
Strangled at birth...

Back in the dark days before the Internet and online shopping, the Stranglers Information Service handled the bands merchandising, inquiries and fan mail with the help of a motley flock of fans willing to devote their time and energy to the band.

Although often credited to Sniffin' Glue fanzine, Strangled first published the classic punk dictum: 'Here's 3 chords – go out and form a band!' Initiated in 1977 by the band's then publicist Alan Edwards. Tony Moon took it over from his south east London home until 1979, when Jet took over the running of SIS. Strangled became bi-monthly, although some remember the term a little optimistic! Moving into a part-converted warehouse between the Thames and Borough's fruit and vegetable market, Jet enrolled the assistance of his family and volunteer fans; the backlog of unanswered mail went down, merchandising went out as Strangled went from strength to strength. Not only that, but opinions of the band could be expressed, as well as the fans, and articles the music press weren't interested in, were published.

Operations relocated to Kingston, and editors changed. By the end of the 1980's, JJ had taken the baton, running it from Dave's old flat in Cambridge. On the plus side, subscriptions had increased considerably – but Strangled had become high maintenance: while the glossy quality had eclipsed its earlier incarnations, print costs were soaring, postage increased and funding was withdrawn.

By 1992 it was all over. Strangled was well and truly choked. For the subscribers-in-black, mornings were never as exciting as the ones that started with that welcoming 'plop' on your parents doormat!



pallets are spread across the ground. I check to see what's on them: Stranglers posters. Mail bags overflow with envelopes. There are a couple of desks with a rubber stamp sitting poised on top of a red ink pad. I pick it up and turn it upside down. It reads: *The Stranglers*.

It's like the Marie Celeste: has Jet gone home? I suppose he's fed up waiting.

"You must be Gary? How do you do?" Gruff, monotone-voiced Jet appears, complete with sunglasses even though it's dark. I meet his big outstretched hand with my uneasy teenage wet fish handshake, and I suddenly increase my grip in a more manly, adult manner. I stop at the point where I'm squeezing as hard as I can – that won't do, jeopardising the percussive dexterity of the world's best drummer. What was I thinking of?

Fuck. I'm star struck... dumbstruck. What do I call Jet? Jet? What do I say? Shall I call him Brian? No.

I pick Jet, which passes without any objection or correction. We're small-talking but words shoot right past in a whirl as my head drifts in and out of album covers and photos. None of them look like Jet: he looks so... normal. You wouldn't know he was a rock star in his tired black T-shirt and baggy grey strides. He looks like any dad decked out in regular Marks And Sparks gear and black plimsolls.

His hair was browner than I thought it was – it always looked black like the rest of the Men In Black – and there *were* holes in his beard. He introduces his brother, Paul – his polar opposite: he's thin and wiry, his handshake is not so firm. He is dressed like a lecturer in fawn corduroys and pince-nez.

"I hear you weren't that impressed with the last Strangled?" he says, solemnly. The pair stand side by side like a

couple of bailiffs: they also come in two – so you knew they mean business. I told them how it was:

"The artwork was shit. Sorry... did Suze do it?"

Suddenly, Jet's son, Anthony, arrives. He is in his early 20s, lean and friendly. He says he helps out with the fan mail mostly, ploughing through the back log. Then another boy appears in the doorway who Paul seemed to be expecting. His name is Steve, who said he was interested in helping out with the merchandising accounts in his spare time while he studies accountancy.

Jet rounds up the family, and the two new boys. "Let's go to lunch, shall we?" he says.

NEXT TO BANKSIDE power station lies the quaint Anchor & Hope pub. Never has watching a perambulating pair of legs been so engrossing: Jet's feet amble along in ten-to-two fashion along Clink Streets cobblestones... his legs are hidden by the drum kit. Usually.

Inside the pub, I'm treated to a pint as we circle the food bar. I'm starving, but I'm really too nervous to eat food. I need drink.

"Make that a lasagne," Jet tells the woman behind the hotplate. "What you having, Gary?"

Something simple, I think to myself. And something relatively inexpensive so they don't think I'm taking the piss out of their hospitality. Moreover – something I won't choke on or embarrass me in front of such esteemed company.

"A Scotch egg please."

"Scotch egg. Just one?"

"Please."

"And chips...?"

"No thanks."

Meninblackincolour

Party time at the SIS HQ!

New Hibernia House. 1980. One morning, a delivery man pitches up with a colour television and a video cassette player. He unloads it and sets it up on the table over the back. Apparently it's from the record company. It was the first time I'd seen a video player. But why was it here? We were about to find out.

Saturday night, and it's Jet's SIS party – and what a do it was. I got there about 8pm and discovered Jet serving drinks with the help of his girlfriend, Suzanne. They were stood behind a makeshift bar, with mein host Jet making sure all the chaps had a tin or two of room temperature Carling Black Label, while Suzanne poured out beakers of Liebfraumilch for the ladies. I took along a girlfriend, or rather, a friend who happened to be a girl, but I was very keen on her. She was a beautiful blonde who happened to harbour a soft spot for Mr. Burnel (what girl didn't in those days?) Later, when JJ arrived on top of his roaring Bonny, half inside, half in Winchester Walk – JJ spotted her: he couldn't take his eyes off her. She must have been well made up. Naturally, I was angry and jealous, but no karate expert. I was only 17.

Dave and his wife were there, sitting cross-legged on the floor, smoking and drinking in a dark corner. With them was Stranglers manager Ian Grant, whose offices were upstairs; the lettering on the windows on the first floor read 'Black And White and Management, and Modern Management'. These were hippes, maan! Dave in his clogs and sheep wool coat, his tiny wife with her long auburn mane of hair, and Ian with centre parting, sunglasses and long suede trench coat.

The place was filling out, and I was looking out for Hazel O'Connor, Hugh's then girlfriend; even though Hugh hadn't turned up, I liked her. Her band provided

the support on the tour, so I had seen her perform quite a lot. When I saw her bass guitarist, Wild Oscar, I thought about asking him if she was coming. But then, the TV suddenly lit up. Showtime!

Jet set the video to play, a stream of Stranglers promo videos appeared before us – videos I had never ever seen before. I remember seeing the video to *Five Minutes* for the first time, and my jaw almost touched the floor. And seeing the band in *Nuclear Device*, in khaki shorts and hats with corks had the room in stitches. Ian was so impressed with the televisual treat, he went over with a piece of cardboard and placed on top of the telly. It read: "What price the 4th Channel?" (We only had three in those days.)

The night was an unforgettable moment in my life. But it wasn't quite complete: I hadn't got the girl at the end.

We found a sofa on the far side of the room, and settled on it. I'd only got as far as a kiss when the light was blocked out by the arrival of a certain bass guitarist. JJ, coming to whisk away my squeeze? No – it was Oscar, who was hurtling for us, pissed rotten. He sprawled out on top of us and proceeded to puke up all over us and the sofa. Is that where Foxtrot Romeo Oscar comes from? Anyway, my romantic moment had passed, and I ended up escorting my belle back to London Bridge station. I didn't go back to the party. I went straight home, depressed.

Monday morning, and I'm back at the office. Anthony and Steve are there. Aware of the noxious stench of puke coming from the other room, we knuckle down to watch the videos over and over again.

What price MTV?!



New Hibernia House now

was the most innocent, inoffensive and inexpensive thing on the menu. One out of three, it turns out.

The five of us huddle round a wooden bench on the jetty overlooking the Thames. The warm sunny haze, the view of London and a second pint of lager lubricates the chat. It doesn't get much better than this.

Jet: "Where do you live, Gary?"

"Leytonstone."

"I used to play along the Leytonstone High Road. I played in jazz bands before The Stranglers – do you know the Plough And Harrow? I used to play there many

years ago – is it still there? Is it still rough?"

Lunch comes quickly, and my orange bread-crumbed cricket ball appears in the centre of a gleaming white plate. Everyone stabs at their steaming hot pub grub. With the beer going to my head, I unravel my cutlery to slice the egg in two – and watch in paralysing terror as half of it flies off the plate, across the table, down through

the decking before plopping into the Thames for a whopping six.

Horrified and embarrassed, I swig some beer to conceal my face behind a pint, praying nobody saw what happened. They probably did. Of course they fucking did! My hunger suddenly disappears.

BACK AT THE SIS office, Jet clears some desk space for me and my art ideas. He brings me a clutch of pens and paper and he sits next to me, cutting out the good stuff and laying out in front of him. How bizarre was this? Jet sitting next to me cutting out my sketches? I drew JJ, some Men In Black, and a mock advert for that summer's new tune, *Vietnamerica*.

At that point, a call comes through for Jet. It's Steve Churchyard, producer on US import, *Stranglers IV*. Jet goes in the office so I go for a piss. Then I notice an arch leading to an open door. Furtively, I sneak in, and I make an amazing discovery. There, at the far end wall, lies *the Raven backdrop*, hanging resplendent and noble. Perhaps the band rehearse here too?

My inaugural day ends with a pile of Stranglers goodies to take home to Leytonstone: posters, a Rattus T-shirt and a pocketful of badges. Anthony offers me a lift part way to Mile End in his Morris 1100, throwing teasing titbits. Now I know JJ's whispered "*allow me to rearrange your face ...*" coda. Anthony is just as fanatical about The Stranglers as I am.

UNABLE TO STAY away I'm back the next day, helping Paul. Anthony and Steve answer fan mail and merchandise. Over the next year I spend all my spare time. Jet comes in most days

when the band aren't recording or touring. He is a warm, fatherly figure, always approachable and decent. In fact, no windows get smashed, no jukeboxes are trashed, nor are there any temper tantrums. As soon as he sets foot in the building I bombard him with questions gleaned from the fan mail, without any protestation.

I get to know who Fred Grainger is and who Choosey Suzie was. I discover unfathomable lyrics, like "Money round to buy a Morry Thou" and also the fate of Lot's wife. I find out what La Brea is all about, what mastodons were, and what a gerrymander did. A myriad of minutiae get explored and discussed. Although one day was particularly fraught.

Jet turns up one day and walks over to the radio cassette and sticks in a tape without saying a word. He turns it up, and we listen intently. But it's all crashes and clunks... it's like someone playing a tape inside a biscuit tin.

"Jet – is this the new album?" I enquire.

Jet stays mute, smiling smugly now. Anthony and I concentrate on the tunes, right up until the end.

"Well... what do you think?" Asks Jet.

Anthony and I had just shuffled and squirmed uneasily throughout. It was disheartening. It was shit.

"Not a lot." I say. "I didn't like it."

"It's different." Anthony adds. "It doesn't sound like The Stranglers..."

"Don't worry." He says. "It'll grow on you," Jet sagaciously adds. Of course, he was right.

But at the time, neither of us sitting there could quite appreciate the privilege and gravitas of hearing a sneak preview *The Gospel According To The Meninblack* – six months before its release.

"Salad, or something?"
 "No. I'm alright, thanks."
 "Three lasagne and chips... one tuna salad.... And one Scotch egg, on its own please. We'll be outside."
 I could have murdered the lasagne, but it was too late now. I should have ordered chips, but you can't have that with a cold Scotch egg... At least I'm safe in the knowledge that a Scotch egg

Fancy a fortnight away with The Stranglers?

Chris Alderton did! And she lived to tell us the tale!

IN 1980 I worked on a national newspaper; highly paid but under occupied. So I volunteered my services for the SIS, and it wasn't long before Jet's brother, Paul, asked me if I had any more spare time to help out with merchandising on the *Meninblack* tour. You bet!

I detected a beef between the band and management over money; the coffers weren't exactly rolling in and money was tight. Which is why the SIS was so reliant on an exuberant bunch of volunteers and loyal fans. We had a lot to do: stacks of letters were piled up in the corner awaiting opening and T-shirt orders to be despatched.

Jet's other brother, Kevin, was drafted in to distribute merchandise from gig to gig, aided and abetted by his partner Lynn, a former nurse. Even I was embarrassed being around those two – they couldn't keep their hands off each other! London fans came to the rescue setting up the merchandise stall at gigs all over the UK, cadging overnight stays with friends. Paul issued temporary crew passes in return, plus a chance to watch most of the gigs. One chap, Steve, who was there to do the books or something, came to help out at gigs but spent most of his time on the side of the stage pogoing!

Bristol Locarno

The tour kicked off at The Locarno at Bristol – my first gig. We got there early. The crew were already set up and the band sound checked. Behind the stall, a couple of tables put together, was a thick velvet drape. Kevin, with his keen

business mind, had the idea of pinning up T-shirts onto it.

I'd never met the road crew before, and initially they came across as a surly bunch of wankers! That, I soon found,



Kevin, Lynn and Dave, Nottingham

was a big misjudgement on my part. After realising just how hard they worked and how talented they were, I got to like them. Setting up took several hours, although taking down took half the time. They still

looked like chunky retards, though!

The Bristol gig itself was amazing. The band played a set of the old favourites intermingled with the MiB material. *Just Like Nothing On Earth* with the strobe lighting turned the audience into a frenzy – I wondered if any epileptic fits were induced? Strobe lighting has this magical effect that turns everyone into a great dancer; it was the same at every gig, a flurry of arms in the air and energised people jumping up and down.

Back on the stall, "Raven" and "Rat" shirts were selling like hotcakes. So were the new MiB shirts, with a profile of the band in white on the front. When the MiB material first arrived at SIS HQ, someone said: "they look like the Stranglers are the men covered in birdshit" It might have been Paul's idea, I can't remember, but a series of "Birdshit" shirts were duly printed – and duly sold out. I recall that every single shirt that had been lovingly pinned up on the velvet drape got ripped down leaving gaping holes in it.

The fans were terrific. At the end of each gig, they'd march out drenched in sweat with an exuberance and a buzz that you knew would last them for days. It was the same for us on the merchandising stall except that we couldn't crawl back to a warm bed immediately. Kevin made us count every T-shirt, sweat-shirt and poster that hadn't been sold. Everything had to be sorted into sizes ready for the next gig, then we had to unfold all the sweaty five pound notes screwed up into balls and put them in neat piles with the Queen's head facing up a certain way, of course.

The band and crew were booked into the local smart hotel. We on merchandising duties had to make do with whatever guesthouse we would find, the cheaper the better. So, after a night in a damp B&B with barely enough warm water, it was on to Plymouth and then next stop, Southampton. There were some diehard young fans following the band around, with an assortment of WiBs and NiBs (that's women in black and nubiles in black!) If they didn't turn up at the next gig, we worried about them. So did the crew who made sure they were fed from time to time.

Sister's in Southampton

My little sister Jill was at Southampton University, and in return for helping with the merchandising, got on the guest list, along with a couple of her friends, Pam and Clare. They arrived just in time for the sound check and were thrilled to have a long chat with JJ and Hugh at the gig.

They were living in Derby Road, probably the most notorious road in Southampton, where all the prostitutes hung out. Ghastly dolls would sit in the front windows. If the light was on that would mean the occupant was available for business. Perhaps Derby Road has been gentrified now? Hugh somehow managed to work his acquired local knowledge into his repartee with the crowd which raised a big laugh. Pam was press ganged into writing a gig review which appeared in *Strangled*, April 1981. I remember she opened by saying:

"There are several things which one has come to expect from a Stranglers concert ... (1) Sweat (2) Someone says 'wanker' (3) Gorilla bouncers who come out with things like 'that French git - he's a head banger' (4) A lot of black clothing (5) Loud throbbing rampant music and



JJ with fans, Nottingham

(6) Cameo appearances from over enthusiastic fans..."

She was spot on, and ended by remarking how refreshing it was fans who'd jumped onstage were left alone and not hurled off in front of 2,000 people. Our Gary Kent did the artwork for the

cover of that issue, which he named "The Holy Strangled Magazine" and Clare did the artwork for the back cover. Talk about making good use of all available resources!

Have to mention Joe here. Joe (Seabrook) was the official bouncer to the band. A lovely man - three feet wide, tall,

and not the sort of chap you would pick an argument with, but with an immense psychological understanding of the fan population. Very rarely - and this is where his instinct would kick in - would he stop a fan coming on the stage. A gentle giant and a gentleman.

Canterbury and beyond

Next up, Canterbury - where we stayed in one of the nicest guest houses on the whole tour. The ever-so-middle class landlady even asked if we could get a signed photo for her son. JJ did the honours and got the entire band to sign, although he slightly spoiled it by drawing an enlarged penis in the corner of it! I was sharing a large family room with one other that night and ended up sharing with six stranded London fans who couldn't get back. Kevin paid the extra the next morning when our landlady looked somewhat surprised as me and my official sharer plus six cheerful skinny kids dressed in black made a b-line downstairs for the best breakfast we'd had so far on the tour. Her son, by the way, was delighted with the signed photo.

Then it was Brighton on the Friday. Rest and recreation was reserved for Saturday in preparation for the Hammersmith gig on Sunday. Luxury kicked in when I had the opportunity to sit back and relax with a lift back to London in the crew bus where the sometime surly crew, who had by now, cast off their mantle of stress and strain from the first week, were getting into relax mode, becoming amusing human beings in the process! Alan was the main man - with his co-evil compatriot, Bruce. I remember a tense, stoical guy who drove the articulated lorry with the equipment from place to place. A Paul Hogan/Crocodile Dundee looky likey!

Pete, the driver of the crew bus, became the envy of all the alpha males when he pulled a gorgeous Swedish girl in a Notting Hill hotel.

Week two

The second week started off in Birmingham – where we endured the prime contender for Britain’s worst bed and breakfast. The odour of damp, rotting wood stayed with us for days. Ah! A word about the band here. Yes, we saw them every day. And yes, they were lovely. We also had Access All Areas passes – amazing how blasé one gets! Once you’d been backstage a couple of times, you didn’t need to go again. JJ always had a ribald comment to make and Hugh, a profound remark laced with sarcasm. Dave was always Dave, the most brilliant tunesmith in the world, and happy doing what he was doing. He always said if he wasn’t in the band he’d like to tune peoples’ pianos. Jet was the gruff and grumpy ubiquitous presence. Never smiling. Always there. He’d come to us after the gig and check on how the merchandising went. At Birmingham, we’d sold 66 pairs of “Jet Black Drumsticks”. It was scary to see Jet smile so broadly!

Considering every fan wanted a piece of the band’s time, they were always charming – making an effort to have a word here and there. I don’t know what it was about them, but they sometimes attracted the most dysfunctional and extreme people wherever they went. There was always one fan with the over-the-top personality competing to be the loudest, funniest or most outrageous. Some were downright dodgy and dangerous. In these politically correct times, I suppose another way of putting it would be to say that many fans appeared to be struggling with

serious personal issues. (*They’re our readers, Chris! – Ed.*) Nonetheless, where would any band be without their fans? Especially with such energy, high spirits and enthusiasm.

Touring takes its toll. A sleepless night in damp squalor without the pleasure of a decent shower – then it’s up early and off to the next gig; set up, clear up and fall back into bed. There’s no time for headaches or stomach cramps. Am I



Joe Seabrook, the bouncer, Nottingham

complaining? No way! There’d be the occasional flare up or temper tantrum from someone on the crew. That was considered normal behaviour. My temper tantrum came the following night in Stoke where I had a bad encounter with a door in the ladies loo which came off the door frame and I vaguely recall a sink parting company with the wall. The crew had introduced me to Screwdrivers – orange juice with vodka. Having consumed at

least eight of these cocktails, I flipped. Kevin kindly let me have the night off and watch the band and I was in heaven seeing the MiB spectacle from the side of the stage.

Sheffield, Nottingham

Then it was Sheffield, then Rock City in Nottingham – where I remembered to take my instamatic camera with me! My final date on the tour was Liverpool Royal Court, where I said goodbye to the B&Bs and stayed with my friends, The Poyntons (UK Karate champions) that night. Gary Kent came and stayed over and was party to the wonderful Liverpoolian humour that night, and then forced to endure a ride with me on the Mersey Ferry the following day. (*I kept down your lovely scrambled eggs, didn’t I?? – Ed.*)

Sadly for me, it was back to the day job on Monday. But every single night for the next two weeks, I failed dismally to get a decent night’s sleep. All the time I had the opening notes of *Waltzinblack* doing my head in! And just as I began to drop off to sleep, I’d get the sinister hee hee hee hee hee hee’s. I’d have total recall of seeing JJ on stage doing his standing on one leg thing with perfect balance, wearing his spray-on tight black jeans. I’d fear for his future fertility.

Actually those jeans were sooo memorably tight, I once asked him if he got his mum to take them in for him! He found them in Japan and came back with several pairs. Hugh would encroach into my thoughts in a strobe light singing: “*a woman in Wellington wet her whistle with a wild man from way back when*” and there was Jet bashing the drums like a demented Muppet. Dave looked like the devil incarnate!

All in all, my two weeks on the Meninblack Tour was quite an experience!

I'll get my occult

The further encounters of Gary Kent with the Men In Black

IT'S JUST like any other boring Sunday when I read about a song written by a Hungarian composer that was deemed so depressing the BBC slapped a ban on it in the 1920s. Intriguingly, many of those who played the record committed suicide straight afterwards. To an attitudinal, hormonal teenager like me, gleaning such facts from the Sabbath's tabloids was morbidly fascinating to say the least. The song in question was Gloomy Sunday, and today is just that. I'm depressed – and skint, strapped for cash. Trapped in suburban isolation, stifled by the distant linger of congealed Sunday roast dinner, while the chime of church bells mangle the cheerless lull.

Caged within my parents grown-up void, I find myself in limbo between Jim Bowen's Bullseye and a supper of ham sandwiches, tinned peaches and Carnation

'I looked, and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire unfolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out the midsts thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midsts of the fire. Now as I beheld the living creatures behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of beryl and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides, and they turned not when they went...'

The Book of Ezekiel

milk. Suddenly the phone rings, spurring the afternoon into action.

It's Anthony, Jet Black's son: "The Strugglers are playing in Guildford tonight. Do you wanna come with us?"

ANTHONY'S BATTERED blue-grey Morris 1100 suddenly appears, gyrating the junction of Fillebrook and Fairlop on two wheels. Four heads in wraparound sunshades shout out the chorus to Go Buddy Go in synchrony; the Sunday congregation has arrived. The door bursts open and I squeeze in the back between Hazel and Rob, with an offer of petrol money. "I've got us backstage tonight." Anthony reveals, matter-of-fact, as we speed off in a cloud of grey smoke. I wonder if the car will make the journey and christen the car Puff The Tragic Wagon and say goodbye to gloomy Sunday.

My thoughts turn to meeting all of my idols at once... 'hallo' to our men, you might say. Imagine how exciting it was being a Stranglers fan in 1980 – on the verge of a new album. Maledictive turbulence abound, band interviews are laced with talk of Men In Black, UFOs and sinister goings-on.

It comes as no surprise there's a certain an element of danger combined with jubilation felt by proxy: MiB's suppress information, silence eyewitnesses and bend minds. Something is bound to rub off by the time the album comes out.

The Lyceum gig revealed an exciting



Guildford Civic Hall

portal into the future sound – inspired, eccentric and unique. Obscure and obtuse, a very different band from the one I fell in love with in 1977. And the last fortnight integrates the final Meninblack recording session, making tonight the first in a handful of gigs to precede the American tour.

FIVE O'clock and we're spilling out from the beryl-coloured chariot in front of the oblong Civic Hall. We follow Anthony into the foyer where his Uncle Paul solemnly sets out the merchandising stall like a vicar tidying up the WI stand. But then, from within the main hall, a jagged bass riff cracks through building like a power drill. Not wishing to miss a trick, I quickly follow the others into the darkened crowd-free auditorium. At the furthest point, up on the stage, the Guildford Four are clad in black and sound checking their equipment, and I can scarcely believe my eyes.

"Hello, hello, one-two, hello, that's

better,' calls out Hugh to the unseen sound man. "Hello, hello... Yup, that's fine. That's it."

Next to him, slouched in a canvas assembly hall chair, is JJ. Positionally, he's on the wrong side of Hugh, on the stage. With a leg cocked on a wedge monitor, he thumbs away on the black Fender Precision nonchalantly like a coiled spring waiting for some action. Jet crouches behind his drum kit and screws a butterfly nut into submission. Dave reverently stands behind his pulpit, patiently waiting his moment. He plays a rhythm with analogue synthesizers, layering this eerie fairground elegy; it's playful and spooky, dark and peculiar... dexterous Dave Greenfield unfurls his two-handed version of *Waltzinblack* until the tune collapses a couple of bars in.

"Aarrgh!" He cries out, "I've run out of hands!"

The other Stranglers laugh out aloud as I soak up the scene with forensic detail: their reaction tells me this was the first,

and probably the only time *Waltzinblack* is ever played on a stage.

"We're needed in the foyer," says one of Anthony's mates pulling us away from the spectacle, "the Ayatollah wants us." Idle hands are put to use as Paul supervises the last T-shirt pinned to the wall, and boxes are hidden from reach. Jet arrives from sound-checking.

"Gary – do you think we need a poster advertising Choosey Suzie and Tomorrow Was?" He suggests. "We're selling them tonight. I've brought you some paper and pens..."

Jet brings out a draughtsmen's A1 size pad, and clears space for me on the stall to squeak my black magic marker pen to his nodding approval. Talk on the stall revolves around the loss of the artwork for the proposed song book following the demise of artist Kevin Sparrow.

"What do you think – one pound-twenty?"

A boisterous crowd gathers outside, banging on the glass as I complete my masterpiece. Jet and brother Paul hop up some steps to drive their golden drawing pins into each side of the poster, forming the foyer's centrepiece, and I struggle to process the surreal sight of the brethren-in-black pinning up my poster art.

"Up just a little bit on your side, Jet." I say. "Just there."

IT'S JUST gone 7.30 and pensioners in peaked caps unlock the doors. Half of Guildford's youth stampede the foyer, crowding the stall. I grab wrinkled pound notes from sweaty palms in return for the most popular T-shirt, *The Raven*. I recognise Jimmy Pursey of Sham 69 weaving through the crowd, on his own, with nobody hassling him for autographs. The anti-Sham backlash in the music press is in full swing this summer.

The Stranglers arrive at the alter to the sound of *Waltzinblack* booming out like a clarion call, and stall helpers take turns to go in and watch the spectacle. I get to go right down the front for *Down In The Sewer*. Next up, *Who Wants The World?* – but it all goes awry. The song starts, but something is amiss. Instead of Jet's familiar tom-tom rolls, we get a ride cymbal being tapped. Jet curses, the others look at him and he smiles. The audience are awestruck into silence, and the band restart the song – with toms.

When the gigs ends, Anthony gathers us together to take us back stage to the bands dressing room. It's a big white-walled room rammed with black-clad bodies, and there's food and drink on a



table to the left. I make mental notes what to say to each Strangler, but it's impossible to come up with chatty and witty ideas, smart retorts or small talk for that matter. I'm shitting myself. Jet joins us, and chuckles when I asked him what happened in *Who Wants The World*:

"I probably thought I was doing the next song. It was all my fault – I hold my hands up to that one. Just one of those things..."

Anthony and his mates vanish, but then I see Hugh over to the left, talking architecture. It's the first time I've seen him in the flesh, hearing his anodyne spoken voice. He sips from a plastic cup as a journalist scribbles notes. JJ holds court to an attentive scrum of disciples in black leather bomber jackets. I edge my way nearer to them, standing on tiptoed monkey boots, craning my neck to listen. I catch the odd softly spoken sentence – and discover JJ doesn't sound a bit French! I weave around the perimeter wall of bodies as bony elbows and biceps flex, territorially pissing, guarding against invasion of their precious space with the best bass player in the world. He's talking Karate: I hate Karate. He stands with one foot on the back of a chair with his

knee at his chin, looking down, bowed in concentration, intense, pensive, or just plain bored. Talk turns to singing; he explains how his vocal technique has recently changed:

"I used to shout songs, you know, like *Go Buddy Go, Something Better Change* – but now it's more of a whisper... *The Raven, Don't Bring Harry... Ice*. It's because I've not really got a singing voice, not like Hugh..." I'm enthralled, particularly when he shares his beef about being the underdogs of the media:

"We don't have chart success in the UK because they won't play us here. They blank us out. Because the radio stations don't play us, people won't buy our records. I mean, look at *Bear Cage* – it was commercial enough to have done well in the singles charts, but they didn't play it."

I interrupt: "It wasn't that commercial."

JJ raises his head and locks eyes with me.

"Sorry? What did you say?" He says.

"Well, *Bear Cage* – it wasn't commercial... for the charts I mean. It's not what they call commercial, is it?"

"Oh yeah? Okay. Define commercial, then?"

"Eh?"

"Go on, define commercial."

"Okay – not *Bear Cage*."

Succinct and to the point. But, oh dear. How about I now define who needs a lippy, smart-arse like me in their dressing room? The daggers are out, there's some uneasy shuffling and I'm made to feel like Judas Iscariot. The elbows are back, flexing, and one rude greasy-haired disciple steps right in front of me and showers our leader with embarrassing sycophancy. I despise such talk, and shove him aside



to finish my sentence.

“What I mean is – *Bear Cage* isn’t like any song other Top 20 single, it’s very different from what actually sells. It was never a single, was it? Be honest.”

“What’s your name?” JJ asks.
 “Oh – you’re one of the helpers at Hibernia House, aren’t you? Pleased to meet you.”

I nervously remind JJ of the postcard I received from him last year, postmarked Tokyo, when he dutifully responded to a long list of questions I sent him, signed off with: OK take care Gary, or is it Clark

Kent? JJ Bernel. Of course, he doesn’t recall writing it, and gets distracted when Hugh comes from the loo. JJ beckons him over:

“Hugh, this is Gary – he’s a helper – down at the SIS.”

the stranglers



My heart races as the lofty frame of Hugh steps forward to shake hands. I’m instantly struck by his overwhelming eyes – deep hazel in colour, they’re magnetic, hypnotic, and dilated.

“Very pleased to meet you. Thanks for all the help – it’s very much appreciated. Are you from round here then...?” Hugh says he vaguely recalls writing me his postcard from Japan, where he confesses to driving a white van.

“It’s a Ford Escort.”

The Stranglers are all so different – and I haven’t even found Dave yet. He’s probably tuning pianos, or solving puzzles – maybe even conjuring up a spirits in dark corner. But no. He’s right in the centre of the room with his ubiquitous black shoulder bag swung over one arm. He’s standing all alone, holding a plastic cup. I’m gonna go up to him – but what shall I say? Having just read Dennis Wheatley’s non-fiction piece, *The Devil & All His Works* – I move in, brimming with confidence, beaming with excitement.

“Dave!” I exclaim. I may have frightened him, as he froze like a rabbit in the headlights. He removed the cup from his visage, and his mouth was locked in an expectant gawp. It was now time to go in with my firelighter of a conversation starter. “I hear you’re into the occult?”

Those photogenic cheek bones in the *Who Wants The World?* video suddenly rear up and expose a larger set of gnashers than I ever imagined. Tension mounts as Dave is on the brink of revealing all about his mysterious interest.

“Yes.”

That’s all he said. I pictured an enlightening lecture on witchcraft, numerology, sorcery and flying saucers. The moment is gone, vanished, words are lost. I was stupefied in a hiatus, star

‘Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel upon the earth beside the living creatures...’

struck. Dave looks impassive and helpless. In silence we watch each other’s mouths, waiting for something to happen, someone to say something. Suddenly Dave spots an imaginary friend calling him and goes over to the drinks table to top-up his beaker.

Visit over, Anthony reforms the congregation, and we get back into the spaceship and head for East London. I’m in the front this time, where I stretch out my legs and sulk quietly to myself, consumed with mortification, rewinding the Dave transcript over and over again.

I should have asked him what they did in the studio last week. I could have asked him when the album’s coming out. Then I would have asked him about the biblical vein running through the lyrics, had I known them. I might have discovered alternative theories within parables, wheels within wheels, new theories behind the Gospels. My eyes grow heavy along Grove Green Road as I imagine myself as Ezekiel, dwelling in melancholy, waiting for something to happen at the edge of the Khobar.

It’s late as the headlights swing round Leytonstone’s hedge-lined houses. Anthony turns the wheel into Drayton Road, and then a sharp right hander into Fillebrook, when Puff The Tragic Wagon decides enough is enough. The awkward road camber causes the car to go into a spin. The nearside front wheel beneath my feet shears off from its axle, sending the car into anarchy, crashing into the kerbside and sliding into the lamppost by the synagogue. The jolt shocks everyone on board, but no one is hurt, just shaken. We walk away unscathed.

The Bold Testament

Erstwhile former Strangler Hughinblack talks to Gary Kent about *The Meninblack* – and why the drugs don't work

Hugh, November 2005



HUGH CORNWELL ARRIVES on time for our noon date outside a bank in Notting Hill towards the end of 2005. “Did you get my text? He asks. “I was going to say we could drive to a nice café I know...”

With my car in a Tube car park the other side of London, we set off on foot to one of Hugh's favourite daytime haunts. He walks with the same spirit he displays onstage: purposeful, pragmatic and ergonomic. His six foot plus frame zigzags the windy and winding streets, carving out a crow's flight path like a GPS device. All the time he is talkative, and listening intently: small talk is effortless, like his gait. One step behind, I shuffle through the wet leaves of West London, trying to keep up and chat simultaneously. He is interested in future editions of *The Burning Up Times* and whether I enjoyed his solo gig in Brighton in August when

my wife and I met him backstage for a pre-gig chat.

“So what are you having?” He asks as we go through the Mediterranean-style café's glass door, “I'm getting this, by the way.”

We sit at a granite-topped table in the middle. Hugh blends in with the cappuccino-swiggering throng, and no one stares or over concerns themselves with who or what he is, or does. It must have been a different story at the height of The Stranglers' intra-punk heyday.

Twenty-six years ago almost to the day, Hugh was in a car driven by tour promoter Paul Loasby coming back from Wales. It was the early hours following the penultimate concert of The Raven Tour. When the car hit West London, they were greeted with a random police stop check, and Hugh was nabbed in possession of what he has describes as “a small chemistry set”.

Tucked away in his bag is a gram and a half of coke, a wrap of heroin, half-ounce of dope, resin, some grass, and a couple of packets of magic mushrooms – in case he gets the munchies, perhaps? Two months later, on 6 January 1980, the authorities penalise the high-profile expunk rocker and fine him £300 and serve him with a punitive eight-week prison sentence.

Out on bail pending an appeal, he joins the band on new tracks *Bear Cage* and *Waiting For The Meninblack* at Air Studios where a Stranglers fan spots him with JJ most evenings in a West End bar.

Hugh tells the fan he is trying to behave himself: “That's right. I was policing myself. I didn't want to end up in any more trouble than I already was.” *Who Wants The World?* is recorded at The Church and two days later, Hugh loses the appeal. On 21 March 1980, Hugh begins his custodial sentence:

“I really thought I was gonna get off....” he says, with charming naivety. “I thought I was gonna pay a huge fine and get a suspended sentence, but it wasn't to be.”

A stone's throw from his old Tufnell

Park stomping ground, Hugh does his porridge at Pentonville where he washes up in the canteen and scrubs floors. “It's all in *Inside Information...*” he says, reminding me of the booklet he put together with Record Mirror journalist Barry Cain.

As a steaming plate of lasagne is placed in front of Hugh, my stuffed peppers and salad arrive, and together we unravel our napkins and cutlery in mirrored synchrony. The smell from the food is delicious, but before we tuck in, I show Hugh the pack of photos that



Holloway 25.04.80: Hazel is there to meet Hugh upon his release



Castel S. Angelo, soundcheck, 2 July 1980: five days after being released from jail in Nice

arrived on my doormat just as I was about to leave the house. A reader sent his collection of rare snaps from July 1980 of the band sound checking in Rome, and eating ice creams (Dave with fag in one hand, cornet in the other) in St. Peter's Square.

"Look who that guy is, just there..." Hugh points excitedly at a photo, "that's Barry Cain!" (*Barry Cain can be spotted in this issue somewhere... Ed*)

At the time, the jail sentence sends shockwaves throughout the music fraternity, but Hugh remains resolute. When Thin Lizzy's Phil Lynott appears in court shortly after for possession of cocaine and cannabis, Hugh sends him this message: "Tell Phil I'll see he's alright in here." Hazel O'Connor, Hugh's girlfriend at the time, passes on his perception of Pentonville to Sounds readers: "the food is palatable but the room service is non-existent." I ask Hugh whether the rest of the band made visiting time:

"Yeah, they came. But they didn't bring any money with them – so they couldn't even buy me a cuppa tea! The only time you get a cup of tea in prison – that didn't contain Bromide – was when you had visitors. I thought great, a nice cuppa tea. But not one of them had any money. Can you believe that? The band came to see me without any bloody money to buy me a cup of tea!"

Two Stranglers gigs go ahead that Easter sans Hugh at The Rainbow Theatre and prisoner F48444 sits in his cell a mile up the road. Filling his shoes, a wealth of musicians and friends step in, including Hazel, Toyah Willcox, The Cure, Steel Pulse, Richard Jobson, Phil Daniels and Ian Dury.

The concerts are originally planned to showcase the band's new material, but the old numbers are revived for simplicity.

Meanwhile a story leaks out to the press about Hugh being denied a guitar in his cell, and the prison authorities are alleged to have replied: "There's a bus driver in here and he hasn't asked for his bus." Ian Dury tells Sounds: "At least Hugh will get enough material for an album in there."

"Yeah – Second Coming came from Pentonville..." Hugh adds, taking in a fork full of lasagne. After serving just five weeks, Hugh is freed. But 57 days later, Hugh is in clink once more, a second spell in a cell, this time for inciting a riot at Nice University. With an ironic twist, news comes over the café's radio that France has suffered a further night of rioting in the capital.

"Nice was the worst point of my life." He admitted. "I thought I'd left all that behind me and turned over a brand new leaf to get on with work, and then suddenly I was back in jail again. I got very depressed."

I had to find out if he was still taking drugs around this time, in spite of his well-documented declaration to the press outside Pentonville it was the end of both his drug career and prison career. I get my answer. Out of the blue, Hugh throws me this exclusive:

"Well.... when I was done for possession of heroin – I hadn't actually taken any up until then. Someone had given it to me on tour in the dressing room, so I put it in my bag along with all the other drugs I'd been given. I wouldn't take the heroin till after the tour because I didn't know how I would react to it. So the funny thing was, when I actually got sent down for heroin, I hadn't tried it yet. When I came out, there was no reason not to try it – which is what I did for the next two years. It was just the beginning."

The entire cafe almost chokes: a fat man in a cloth cap sitting bang opposite,

facing me and gorging his food heartily, is wide-eyed in wonderment from that point on; his bulbous eyes almost burst, although he never stops scoffing. A slender-legged lady shuffles in her seat and crosses her legs, quickly redirecting her gaze outside towards Notting Hill normality. It was like we'd all reached the juicy bit in the book together. I bet now they were all wondering who this denim-clad guy talking into my microphone was.

All they probably know is it's not Pete Doherty. With an eye on the slender legs adjacent, Hugh sits bolt upright and digs a silver spoon into the froth of his coffee cup:

"Heroin. You know, it's very interesting. It gives you the most amazing feeling. You don't need sex, you don't need booze, you don't need food – you want for nothing. That's why it's so dangerous." Hugh scoffs at drugs fuelling creativity: "If you're creative, you're creative. It can give you a weird slant on it, but I don't think you can say drugs make you creative. I mean, I don't take any drugs and I feel as creative now, if not more than when I was taking loads of drugs. So I think it is misnomeric thinking. All this stuff about opening the doors of perception, it all rubbish."

Out on bail, work on *The Meninblack* album resumes, but a prison sentence looms until the court hearing, set for the end of the year. Hugh recalls finding it difficult to knuckle down:

"We were just eating out in Rome the whole time. We'd come back to the studio with our bellies full, trying to work. So not a lot of work got done, that's for sure."

A three-week tour of the UK finally showcases the new *Meninblack* material, kicking off at The Rainbow and culminating at a dazzling Lyceum gig. Off to the States for a two-month tour, when calamity strikes following the New York

date: the lorry containing the band's instruments and equipment is hi-jacked – and none of the gear is insured. "It was one thing after another. Me being busted and everything, our equipment going missing in America, a telephone guy blowing up the studio in Munich which put us out of action for ages... The Nice incident... it was all a catalogue of disaster." Looking back – was this the malevolent handiwork of the Men In Black? "We were in a doom-laden state anyway – heroin brings you down. There are accident-prone people out there who seem to bring on their own bad luck and I think we brought on our own disasters. I think we were at the top of our tree then – but it was a huge relief to get out of that period alive."

On Monday 9 February 1981, *The Gospel According To The Meninblack* was released. Initial sales of 50,000 elevated it to Number 8 in the UK album chart, but it quickly disappeared after just five weeks. Beautiful calligraphy on the front cover art work reveals recording work took place between January and August 1980 – and Hugh was bewildered why its release came a massive six months later.

"Maybe the record company didn't want it coming out at Christmas? I dunno..."

I proposed it was due to the Nice incident: inciting a riot came with a possible 10-stretch; the court hearing didn't occur until December and on 13 January 1981, suspended jail sentences were awarded to JJ, Jet and Hugh with a £17,000 fine.

"Ah, of course. That would be it – in case we went back to prison. That's why!"

Of the finished product, Hugh is proud: "I think it's great. Some people might say some of the songs are a bit obtuse and a bit too experimental, but we just wanted

to be off-the-wall. Was it a concept album? Well, lyrically, it was – but it didn't sell, did it? I mean, it was a commercial disaster. But we got it out of our system. Had we not come up with Golden Brown though, the record company would have dropped us."

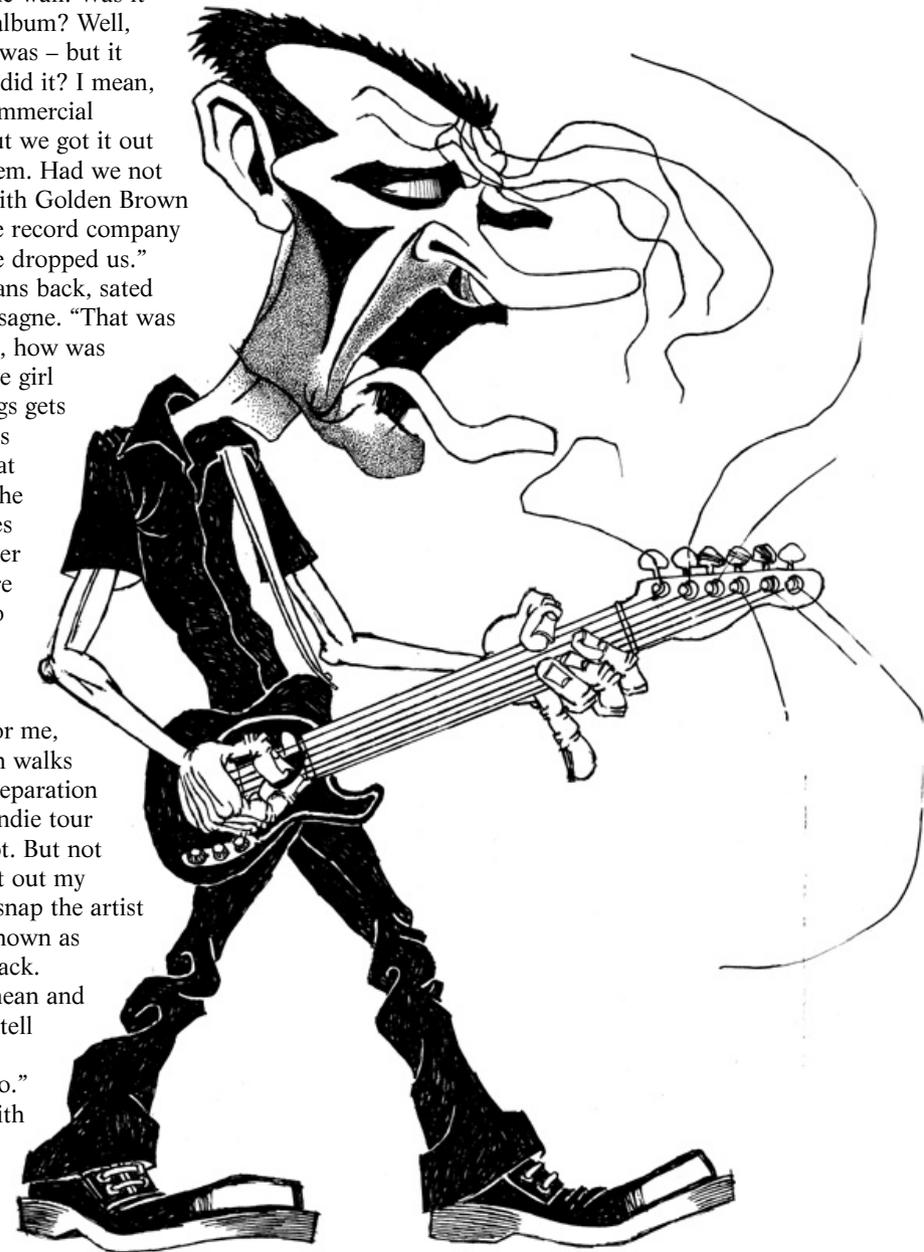
Hugh leans back, sated from his lasagne. "That was really good, how was yours?" The girl with the legs gets up and goes while the fat man with the bulging eyes watches over us. We were about to go in our separate directions: the Tube for me, while Hugh walks home in preparation for the Blondie tour support slot. But not before I get out my camera to snap the artist formerly known as Hugh-in-black.

"Look mean and moody," I tell him.

"No... no."

He says, with the feint hint of irritation. "I can't."

He smiles instead.



Who needs

Hugh?

Joe Ordinair recalls the Rainbow gigs without Hugh and meets John Ellis

“AND THEN THERE were three...” Jet Black tells the expectant Rainbow audience. The third and fourth of April 1980 sees two concerts performed by The Stranglers sans Hugh; pre-booked ahead of his spell in Pentonville, they were to have showcased the new songs. Dismissing the option of postponement, a sympathetic and eclectic coterie of rock’s contemporaries agreed to step in, and Easter gigs went ahead – with a little help from their friends.

“Paul McCartney has been approached...” according to Jet, being interviewed on Capital Radio’s Nicky Horne Show the day Hugh lost his appeal, as was “...Kate Bush, plus there will be a some surprises in store...”

The surprise was that neither Macca nor Kate performed! While the three Stranglers plus John Ellis provided the backdrop, the visitors languished in the karaoke limelight – and in case we forgot who was missing, a cut-out of Cornwell was lowered by rope to a loud cheer from the crowd: “I can think of a lot worse places to be... like in Pentonville nick,” growled Ian Dury in sunshades during Peaches – prior to successfully culling Bear Cage.

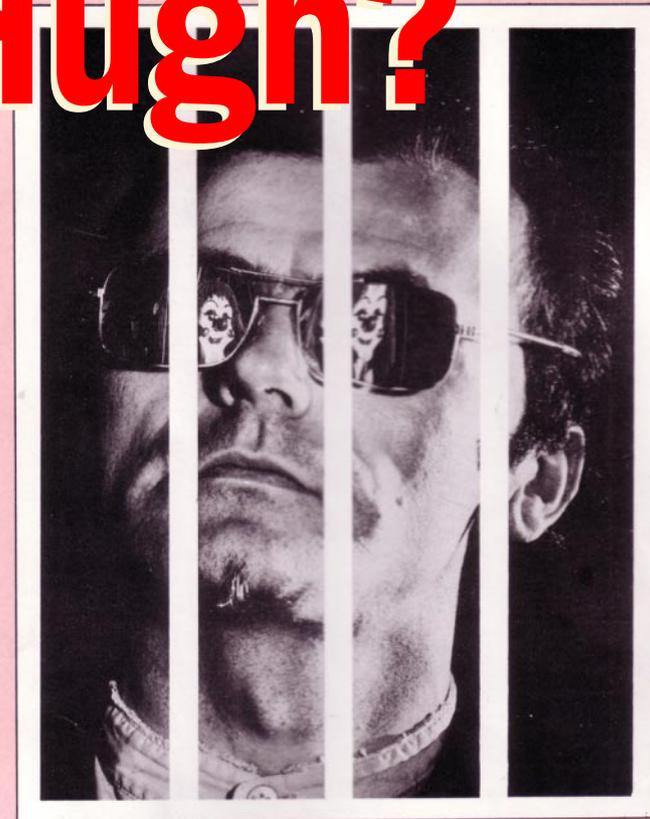
Richard ‘Jobbo’ Jobson pitched up with the biggest quiff ever witnessed, but still managed to ably belt out Nubiles, Heroes and Five Minutes while Toyah and Hazel took turns in upstaging duties. On

Sleazy, Nicky Tesco toasted – more dreadful than dread – and then slipped up on Ice while Phil ‘Jimmy the Mod’ Daniels impressed the hardcore with his Stranglers sweat shirt, as well as Toiler and Dead Loss Angeles. Pete Hammill (who?) destroyed Tank, The Raven and Shah, but full honours go to Jake Burns for a blistering call to arms with Sewer – but there was more: blond bombshell Billy Idol appeared... and promptly vanished, courtesy of a Good Friday kyokoshinkai from JJ. It really was truly extraordinary.

John Ellis talked to to *BUT* about that extraordinary gig:

“At the end of the Euroman tour, I had a fight with JJ on the last night, and vowed never to work with him again. A year on, there I was, for my sins! The Rainbow gigs were interesting because I had to learn a lot of Stranglers material very quickly. I knew the songs in as much that I’d heard them, but now I had to learn them. Of course, Dave was very helpful, but I was quite used to learning stuff very, very quickly, which was probably why I got the call in the first place. I had to do just that when I worked with (Peter) Gabriel. In fact I may have been in between American and European tours, so I was in that mode.

“Rehearsals took place over several days round the back of The Stranglers headquarters in Southwark. I remember teaching Robert Fripp guitar parts, which



On Friday, March 21st., this year, Hugh Cornwell, guitarist and vocalist with the Stranglers, was sent to Pentonville Prison, London for two months after losing an appeal against sentence for drug possession. Of his guilt under the law there is no question. However since he was in possession of 'small amounts' for personal use only there seems to be little to gain by sending an entertainer to prison for such a matter. Judge McNair, at Knightsbridge Appeal Court was fully aware of Cornwells public commitments when he confirmed the sentence because 'a prison sentence would set an example to other pop stars and to the Strangler's fans'. What in effect has happened as a result of the sentence is that artists like Ian Dury, Wilko Johnson, Steel Pulse, Robert Fripp, Pete Townsend and John Cooper Clarke amongst others have all been in touch with Strangler's manager Ian Grant to express their sympathy over the event and their support for the Strangler's committed two shows to celebrate the Rainbow's 50th birthday. The really harsh reality is the effect it will have on Cornwell. Under prison law he can only write one letter a week - two by 'special permission'. He can receive no more than three visitors at a time and that's only once a fortnight. Cornwell is an avid reader of newspapers, magazines and non-fiction. Its expected that something of prison life will come out in future music from the band. That the Strangler's current single is called 'Bear Cage' is sheer irony. That Cornwell will be able to watch it climb the charts from the sanctity of Pentonville is verging on insanity. Cornwell will be released on May 16th 'pending good behaviour' and the Stranglers intend to return to the Rainbow for special concerts on June 3rd and 4th -and as Jet Black had to say a few days ago '...the sojourn to Pentonville Holiday Camp is going to result in us having the last laugh.....and he who does, laughs the longest...'. .

From the official programme for the Levi's Rock series of Rainbow gigs

From the official programme for the Levi's Rock series of Rainbow gigs

1930 Rainbow 1980

JUDAS PRIEST
plus **IRON MAIDEN**
Tuesday 1st April*

WHITESNAKE
plus **SAXON**
Wednesday 2nd April*

THE STRANGLERS
Thursday 3rd April

THE STRANGLERS
plus guests
Friday 4th April

JOHN McLAUGHLIN
plus guests
Saturday 5th April

AVERAGE WHITE BAND
and
BILLY CONNOLLY
Sunday 6th April

THE JAM
plus
THE RECORDS
Monday 7th April

THE JAM
plus
THE RECORDS
Tuesday 8th April

D. J. ANDY DUNKLEY
(except 8th)

OFFICIAL PROGRAMME

Levi's Rock



Hugh Cornwell and John Jacques shared having to head a mission over at a Stranglers - multi press cricket match that succeeded - a charity match for Cancer Aid's help a London Child Appeal

John Jacques himself "like"



was strange. But these were such interesting people... Ian Dury... Peter Hammill, I always liked his voice. There were a lot of strange connections too. (Steve) Hillage - ended up mixing one of my solo singles, and we nearly did an album together. Jake Burns of Stiff Little Fingers was there - he named his band after a song I wrote in the Vibrators, of course. That was kind of weird. The gigs were very exciting; you never knew what was going to happen next. Didn't JJ jump on top of someone on the stage... Toyah maybe? I remember thinking as we came off stage that first

night how absolutely fantastic it was. The vibe was brilliant. I really enjoyed it. It was such a good idea - in The Stranglers vein of having great creative ideas.

"Backstage there was a massive amount of cocaine waiting there. Jet was sat at the table looking after several large bags of the stuff. There was certainly a lot of gabbling going on backstage. Robert Smith talking the price of cabbages to Hillage? I dunno - but that's what happens when there's a load of cocaine around.

"I was pissed off I originally only got credit for playing on one song. So I phoned up the record company and told them I played on every song. After the gig, the management sent out thank you letters to everyone who participated. I found mine in the loft the other day, and I stuck it on eBay. I don't really hang onto the past - I'd rather have the cash in my pocket than a letter in the loft."

'STRANGLER' HUGH GOES TO JAIL

PUNK ROCK star Hugh Cornwell of The Stranglers was sent to prison for two months yesterday, as "an example to other pop stars and fans."

Singer-guitarist Cornwell, 30, was appealing against the sentence passed earlier by West London magistrates for possessing drugs.

His counsel, Mr. John Mathew QC, said at Knightsbridge Crown Court yesterday that only small quantities of drugs had been found in a search of Cornwell's car and that a jail term was too much of a penalty.

Mr. Mathew added: "He now realises a custodial sentence is not only a personal disaster for him, but also the indirect affect on others is disastrous."



HUGH CORNWELL 'Rainbow' cancelled

Scrapped

But Judge Macnair said it was necessary to set an example and the prison sentence must stand.

After the hearing Ian Grant the band's manager, forecast that the decision would be the death of The Stranglers.



RATS & RAVENS REJECT REACTIONARY RAP

ROCK RADICALS RALLY ROUND

DEAR FRIENDS,

When we first planned these concerts the format intended was totally different from what you are going to see performed by THE STRANGLERS on stage tonight. What was planned was a presentation of new & newish numbers, including a lot of material that had never been performed in public before.

However, as you already know, HUGH CORNWELL is at present in Pentonville Prison, and will not be released until April 25th. Our first reaction was that these Rainbow concerts would have to be cancelled, but then it was decided that if that happened the authorities would have won.

So - several hundred phone-calls later, to various contemporary and sympathetic musical personalities, THE STRANGLERS' show you will see on stage tonight came into being. What you will see is THE STRANGLERS plus a talented collection of musical volunteers performing a familiar, but none-the-less enjoyable STRANGLERS' set.

Subject to last-minute changes, our guests during the set will be:-

JOHN ELLIS (from Peter Gabriel's band); ROBERT SMITH & MATTHIEU HARTLEY (from The Cure); HAZEL O'CONNOR (star of "Breaking Glass"); ROBERT FRIPP; PETER HAMMILL; PHIL DANIELS (star of "Quadrophenia"); JOHN TURNBALL (from The Blockheads); NIK TURNER (ex-Hawkwind); NICKY TESCO & NIGEL BENNETT (from The Members); DAVID, BASIL & STEVE (from Steel Pulse); RICHARD JOBSON (from The Skids); TOYAH WILCOX; IAN DURY; DAVEY PAYNE (from The Blockheads); and JAKE BURNS (from Stiff Little Fingers).

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank all these people, plus the many others who offered their services, but who were either unavailable or who couldn't be fitted in due to lack of available time.

Thanks also to STEVE HILLAGE, ANDY DUNKLEY (D.J.), ALAN EDWARDS, PAUL "SHEDS" JACKSON, and IAN GRANT for their time and effort.

THANKS FOLKS

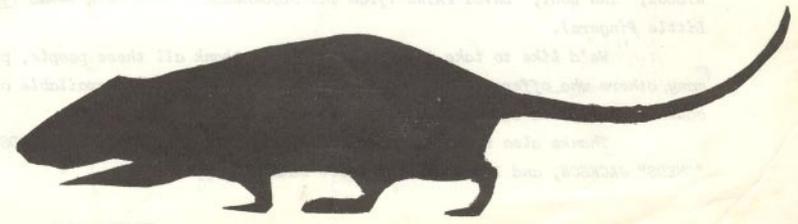
So we don't have to break the flow of the set by introducing all our guests and volunteers as they appear on stage - and also to help anyone who is either short-sighted or lacking a photographic memory, the concert you will see tonight will almost definitely run as follows:-

- GRIP with Hazel O'Conner, Robert Smith and Davey Payne
- HANGIN' AROUND Hazel O'Conner and Robert Smith
- TANK Peter Hammill, Nigel Bennett (DAY 1) and Robert Fripp (DAY 2)
- THREATENED Nigel Bennett (DAY 1) and Robert Fripp (DAY 2)
- TOILER Phil Daniels, Nigel Bennett (DAY 1) and Robert Fripp (DAY 2)
- RAVEN Peter Hammill and Basil - Steel Pulse (DAY 1)
- SHAH SHAH Peter Hammill and Basil - Steel Pulse (DAY 1)
- ICE Wilko Johnson and Nicky Tesco
- DEAD LOS ANGELES Phil Daniels and Wilko Johnson
- NICE AND SLEAZY Nicky Tesco, Basil and David - Steel Pulse
- BRING ON THE NUBILES Richard Jobson and Wilko Johnson
- PEACHES Ian Dury, Wilko Johnson and Davey Payne
- BEARCAGE Ian Dury, Wilko Johnson, Matthieu Hartley and Davey Payne
- HARRY
- DUCHESS Toyah Wilcox
- NO MORE HEROES Richard Jobson
- FIVE MINUTES Richard Jobson and Larry Wallis
- SOMETHING BETTER CHANGE Toyah Wilcox and Steve Hillage
- DOWN IN THE SEWER Ian Dury and Jake Burns

John Ellis will appear with the STRANGLERS throughout the set and at various moments Steve from Steel Pulse will be adding various rhythmic drum patterns. Don't ask about encores -- anything could happen.

Hope you enjoy watching this concert; we'll enjoy doing it.

THE STRANGLERS AND FRIENDS



Flyer left on seats for the Rainbow gigs without Hugh, no good if you like the set list to be a surprise!

Ian Grant: Jean Genie

Gary Kent

“I SAT IN court and watched Hugh get sent down. Hugh thought he was going to get off – even his flatmate, Nick Pedgrift, the bands lawyer – was telling him he was gonna get off...”

Stranglers manager Ian Grant was depressed, and gave the waiting newsmen their sound bite: “this decision will cost £200,000 and to be honest I can see it being the demise of the group.”

Ominous tones pointed the way The Stranglers were already heading. Their finances were frozen in a dispute with Albion, the bands former management, and now a ground-breaking tour of India and the Far East was scrapped. Two sold-out concerts at the Rainbow that Easter now hung in the balance.

“We drove from the court back to New Hibernia House with Andy Dunkley and Sheds in the car, both trying to buoy me up, giving me moral support. Then I thought ‘okay – let’s go for it’ and I started phoning around to find anyone who was feeling charitable to do the gig in place of Hugh – the highest rock star first. So I started with Mick Jagger and Paul McCartney and worked downwards. I thought these guys have been busted, they’ve been inside. Of course, we didn’t end up with those giants at all, but we did get a most interesting bunch of people.”

Ian had just 13 days to get a roster of unpaid artists to stand in for Hugh.

“I think we got Phil Daniels because of Jan Stevens, who worked with me, was going out with him – they’re married now, got a kid. Richard Jobson was easy because of our connections with The Skids. Hazel was obvious, [Toyah](#) was obvious – I’ve got

connections with her... we knew Fripp... Nik Turner... Dury... I remember we were doing Billy Idol’s press at the time, but JJ didn’t want him on the bill, but he turned up anyway and if I remember rightly, JJ

Page 2 SOUNDS April 5, 1980

Dury joins Stranglers' guests

THE STRANGLERS have compiled a list of some 20 or so artists and musicians who will be appearing with them at their London Rainbow concerts on April 3 and 4 while guitarist Hugh Cornwell is doing porridge for drug offences.

Those confirmed to appear with the remaining Stranglers include Hazel O'Connor, The Cure, Peter Hammill, Robert Fripp, John Cooper Clarke, Steel Pulse, The Members,

Richard Jobson, Wilko Johnson, John Ellis, Toyah Wilcox, Nik Turner, Phil Daniels and Ian Dury. There may be more names, including possibly an “old fart or two” according to the Stranglers’ publicist, appearing as well.

All these people will not be playing at once on the stage. The Stranglers will be joined by various people on various numbers. It’s something of an organisational feat and will

require almost a week of rehearsals to get it right.

A live album could also be made of the gig. The proceeds would go to ‘The Cure’, a drug rehabilitation centre which has been sponsored by The Who among others. The publicist added: “It seems a more constructive thing to do than putting Hugh in prison.”

Latest reports on Hugh’s well being in Pentonville prison indicate that he’s still in good spirits. In a message brought out by girlfriend Hazel O’Connor last week he said: “The food is palatable but the room service is non-existent.”

But attempts to take a guitar into Hugh have failed. The prison authorities are alleged to have replied: “Look, there’s

a bus driver in here and he hasn’t asked for his bus.” More examples of the wit and wisdom of the prison authorities will be brought to you as they arise. And Ian Dury said this week: “You’ve got to look on the bright side; at least Hugh will get enough material for an album in there.”

Details of the June Rainbow concerts to celebrate Hugh’s release are expected in a week or two.

● Phil Lynott of Thin Lizzy appeared in court two weeks ago charged with possessing quantities of cannabis and cocaine. He pleaded not guilty and the case was adjourned. When the Stranglers’ manager returned from visiting Cornwell in prison last week, Hugh’s message was: “Tell Phil I’ll see he’s alright in here.”

the late 60s. It was part of a staple diet along with a spliff. I think Jet was big on it. Backstage, a huge mirror was put on a table in one of the dressing rooms with the bags on top.”

kicked him over onstage.”

With support acts including Joy Division, UB40 and Hazel O’Connor, nobody left feeling short-changed.

“I’ve been able to pull off some feats in my time, you know, up against the wall type situations, but doing these nights was a fantastic feeling. Both nights were sponsored by Levi’s. We were given £25,000 – a significant amount of money in those days. I was on one fifth, for what it was worth for the most part since joining the band as a partner. But the controversial thing with those gigs was that everyone was paid in cocaine – £1,000 worth! I went and got it from a friend of a friend in Worthing. Everyone was doing cocaine then – the band were big on it in those days. At the time it was part of the culture, part of my culture of

collapse, creativity in the Stranglers camp was somewhat jaded, in spite of having already thought out their next opus, *The Meninblack*.

“Well it was their limpest time, to be honest. They released *Bear Cage* – it was lame – *Who Wants The World?* was slightly better. What they should have done was take a breather. The *Meninblack* period was sheer lunacy all around. I mean, they thought they were the Men In Black. Jet used to sit out in Warminster looking for UFOs. How much of it was real and how much of it was unreal – only they know. Most of it was for real. *The Meninblack* was complete commercial suicide. I think it was after the gear got nicked in America that Jet told someone I was extravagant. He may have said it tongue-in-cheek, but he printed 10,000 Strangled magazines in French.”

With the recording of *The Meninblack* complete and a US tour booked, Ian was becoming increasingly invidious in his role. That September, Ian quit.

“We never got to that big stage where we were all filthy rich and never had to worry anymore. They resented me for quitting, and maybe I resented them for a short time after – in that they denied me that success because they fucked everything up. They went to America, and they alienated all the Americans. They were rude to audiences, rude to press people, radio people, everyone.

“As much as *The Stranglers* could be pains in the arses, my memories are only of fun, from the first time I saw them play at the Nashville with Dai and Derek to 1980. JJ will always be in my top three favourite bass players – Jack Bruce and John Entwistle being the top two.

“I had very good days with very fond memories of the period. “

While *The Stranglers* and friends took advantage of the white powdered rider, Hugh was sitting in his cell a five minute bus ride away.

“Obviously I felt for Hugh. I went a couple of times to see him in Pentonville, and he wasn’t very happy because we went ahead with the concerts. How would you be, sitting in a cell and suddenly you heard it given out on the radio? That’s how he first found out. So eat your heart out Pete Doherty!”

With finances loitering on the brink of

Burnel karate kicking at your head as you're at the mixing desk? Laid back producer Steve Churchyard takes all that in his stride as Clark Crass discovers...

Essex Boy

LIKE JET, STEVE Churchyard hails from Essex. When he left school he joined Air Studios under legendary producer George Martin where he cut his teeth on tracks by UFO, Cockney Rejects and The Pretenders.

Now a resident of San Diego, California, Steve has enjoyed sessions over the years with Joni Mitchell, George Michael, Billy Joel, The Eagles and more recently, The Darkness; he is also a thrice-nominated Grammy engineer, producer and mixer. But back in his Strangling days, he twiddled knobs on no less than four Stranglers' albums.

"I first met the guys in 1979 at Air. I was halfway through mixing *Duchess*

when suddenly the door bursts opens and the band all file into the control room. They've all got sunglasses on – and dressed in choirboy outfits – white cassocks, the lot! They'd just finished the video for *Duchess*. So I'm sitting there mixing, when the next thing I know, Jean Jacques is throwing great karate kicks all around me, missing my head by a whisker. What did I do? I made sure I didn't move – I kept my head down! Otherwise I would have lost my head!"

When *The Raven* sessions overran, Steve stepped in to take over from Alan Winstanley who had moved on to his next project, at Hugh's suggestion, having already succeeded Martin Rushent on

Hugh's *Nosferatu*. An Air session at the tail end of January 1980, saw Steve and The Stranglers record *Bear Cage* and *Meninblack* (*Waiting For 'Em*).

"That's when Ian Grant, asked me if I'd be interested working on their next album. I said: 'Sure, I'd love to.' So Ian said: 'Great – you're on a plane to Munich!'"

Once Hugh was released from

Steve Churchyard recorded and mixed four Stranglers albums – including *The Meninblack*.

Pentonville, *Second Coming* and *Thrown Away* were laid down during the last week of May at Georgio Morodo's Musicland Studios in Munich. For such a famous studio, Steve was surprised at its unusual set-up:

"It was situated in the basement of a hotel. I was expecting some fancy place, after all, this was where all those disco hits by Morodo came from... Donna Summer, Sparks... Queen and Led Zeppelin also."

The studio, according to Hugh in 'Song By Song' possessed a wealthy cache of porn-flicks, but Steve was more interested in the drum room: "It was completely lined with mirrors. I often think about that. I'd never seen that before."

Unfortunately, luck wasn't on their side when a telephone engineer walked into the studio one day:

"We were all sitting around the studio discussing which tracks we were going to record. Suddenly this guy came in from the Munich Telephone Company and picked up a telephone. He started to pull a cable which went round the back of the rack and the mixing desk, and then all of a sudden, the whole console went down. He managed to blow the power supply. Needless to say, he got well and truly thrown out, but that wasn't all. Back then, there were only two of these Harrison desks in the whole of Europe, and getting hold of a new power supply became a real problem. Tracking down a replacement took days of studio time and by the time

we got one, we were seriously behind schedule."

Desperate to make up for lost time, Steve was once again in for a shock when he came face to face with Jet's unconventional method of recording the drums:

"Jet laid down the drums playing just the kick drum alone onto the first track of the tape. Then, he went through and added a snare, which he played again, on its own on the next track. And that's how I recorded him! The same for the hi-hats, crashes, toms...all separate tracks, and recorded solo. It was really weird!"

Perhaps without the pressure of time, Steve could have appreciated Jet's methodology more:

"Oh yeah – I mean, looking back I can see what they were doing. This way, it gives you complete control over each part of the drum kit. Particularly when we mixed it, because we used a lot of MXR Flanger, but we could put it on just the cymbals, or the snare drum, or the tom-toms and not affect anything else.

Whereas if he'd played it live all in one go, then we wouldn't have had such control. So it was something that Jet developed recording *The Raven*, as far as I know. It was a mixers dream."

Steve was even more complimentary towards Jet:

"Recording like that, Jet's timing had to have spot on accuracy. So full marks to him for that! And also his curries... did you know Jet has an amazing culinary side? He can make something really tasty out of virtually next to nothing... we had some great curries, courtesy of Jet."

As *Who Wants The World?* is released in the UK, The Stranglers reconvened in Paris with Steve. At Pathe-Marconi Studios at Boulogne-Billancourt, southwest of the capital, they laid down



Steve Churchyard, third from right, with Herbie Hancock among others...

Last Tango In Paris

Laurence Diana tells Gary Kent how his weekend with the family was disrupted by the *Meninblack*

“A FRIDAY NIGHT. In May, I think it was a Bank Holiday weekend. Anyway, I’d just met my girlfriend. We set off for Devon to visit her parents for the first time. But, no sooner had we arrived, I was given a message to contact the studio.”



Laurence was an engineer at Advision in London’s West End. When he called his base, he received a surprise: “They said: how would you like to go to Paris tomorrow with The Stranglers?”

Accepting would mean leaving immediately, which is what happened. Twenty-five year old Laurence and his girlfriend turned on their heels and headed for Heathrow where they flew to Charles de Gaulle. Laurence was no stranger to The Stranglers having previously assisted producer Martin Rushent mixing *Black And White*, *Live (X-Certs)* and *Euroman Cometh*. In March 1980, he recorded *Who Wants The World?* at The Church in Crouch End, north London. In Paris, Laurence was surprised at the altered working pattern:

“The band wanted to work round the clock with me and Steve Churchyard on a rota system... so I ended up doing the graveyard shift. Steve had Hugh and Jet, and I had JJ and – oh gosh... I can’t remember the keyboard player’s name... What was it? Dave, that’s it...”

Waltzinblack, and *Four Horsemen* (the one sung by, er... Dave!) were recorded at Pathe-Marconi old EMI studios.

“The thing that struck me was how the drums were laid down on *Four Horsemen*. It was weird. Jet used a cassette with the drums recorded to a click track, and then matched the exact sound with his drums. Then, instead

of recording the kit all together, he recorded each part individually, one drum at a time. He started with the kick drum on it’s own, and it was laid down onto tape. Then the next... That’s how each part was recorded. So, track one would have the kick drum – track two, the snare – track three, the hi-hats and so on. He basically stripped apart the drums. And drum fills would also be recorded on another separate track. It was extremely time consuming and, in fact, soul destroying! I’d never come across that way of recording, but they were paying my wages, so I said nothing! But that’s how they wanted to do it.”

Following these arduous stints in the studio, Laurence would take a taxi in the wee small hours into Paris in search of food.

“It was usually at an odd time when you can’t find anywhere open, and I was starving. The sessions were hard work, but great fun too. But The Stranglers were really friendly – nice people to work with. But I think recording the way they did caused the songs to lose some of their vibrancy, and I must confess – when the session were over, I was quite relieved!”

Away from all the big studios, East London-based Laurence concentrates his time on his current venture transferring analogue recordings to digital format. I wondered if he ever made that trip to Devon, and if there was a happy ending.

“Oh yes!” He laughed. “Many times – in fact, we’re married with two children!”

Laurence Diana recorded and engineered *Waltzinblack* and *Four Horsemen*.

Waltzinblack, *Four Horsemen* and *Hallow To Our Men*.”

“It was my first time there, but the second time for the band. They recorded *The Raven* with Alan Winstanley the previous June – and the Rolling Stones were next door. A year on, and they were still there on the same album!”

Now with the assistance of engineer Laurence Diana, the modus operandi changed:

“Me and Laurence worked with two Stranglers each – I was with Hugh and Jet, while Jean Jacques and Dave worked with Laurence. It turned out to be a very good system. I remember one night, they were all there together. It was very late... there was a lot of booze around. I had to take a pee. When I came back along the corridor, I could hear them playing this lounge-bar sort of track – I’d never heard it before. As I listened, it came to me – this was a slowed-down, jazzy version of *Bring On The Nubiles*. It was hilarious, but I didn’t let them know I was back in the control room. I quietly sneaked in and recorded it without them knowing – just on two-track. As the song goes on, I manage to reach up and stick on a bit of reverb. I left it till they’d finished and made out I’d just walked back in – and then I played it back to them – they loved it.”

Cocktail Nubiles formed the flip side to the first Stranglers Information Service release that year – *Tomorrow Was The Hereafter*.

The Stranglers slotted in some European concerts, and just as Steve was about to leave for Rome, disaster struck:

“I heard on the news they were being held in prison in Nice for inciting the crowd to riot. I literally was on my way to Rome to record them straight after. So there I was, lugging these 2” reels around

from airport to airport, when the news broke. I didn’t know what to do, where to go. I’m phoning London but there was no answer, but Ian was probably on his way to Nice. But then I got a message to continue to Rome, and wait for them there. When Dave was freed, he joined me in Rome ahead of the rest.”

Out on bail, with the prospect of a 10 year jail sentence still on the horizon pending the hearing, the band hightailed it out of Nice to hook up with Steve and Dave in July.

“Rome was great, I’ll never forget it. One night, we all got drunk, and we jumped into this little Fiat and went out to a restaurant. On the way back, with Jean Jacques driving, we got a bit lost, and ended up going along a one way street – the wrong way. Then the inevitable happened – a set of flashing blue lights appeared and suddenly there are these two armed police quizzing us in Italian. We tried to explain we were lost and on our way to our hotel. But instead of nicking us, you know what happened? The police both laughed, and ended up giving us a police escort back to the hotel! It was incredible. We thought we were going to get nicked! *Top Secret* might have come from Rome session. *Man In White*, too. I remember Hugh taking me to St. Peter’s Square to record the Papal address with a portable tape recorder one day – you can hear that on the record.”

Was it the booze or the pasta fuelling the creative spark – or was it really speed-balls and heroin Hugh and JJ indulged in?

“I really can’t tell you. Y’see, I look at it like this: when you’re in the studio, it’s a bit like being in a submarine. With that sort of thing – what happens there, stays there.”

Forever the honourable Essex Boy.

The Italian Job

Engineer Aldo Bocca leads a quieter life these days, away from music and all the madness of his former life in the biz... Joe Ordinair reports

“I only just got my copy of *The Meninblack*, I found it in a record shop, picked it up, and there on the front cover, was my name.”

Today Aldo Bocca is proud of his part on this Stranglers album:

“It’s terrific – it sounds great. I don’t know why I never got it back then. Maybe sometimes you just forget – by which time you’ve moved on to the next project.”

His sound engineer career now behind him, Aldo recalls those days with affection. In his teens, his Italian father edged him towards a career in catering, but while at college, music took over. A chance meeting between his father and a studio owner lead to Aldo’s first job working in a London recording studio.

“I became the tea-boy in the worst

studio in the world! It closed down eight months later.”

A tape-op post at Novasound, near Oxford Street guided him to becoming an engineer before joining Eden Studios in Chiswick where he became Chief Engineer.

“That’s where I met Jean Jacques – he was a lovely bloke.”

JJ booked a heavily stylised Japanese band called Lizard into Eden in August 1979 to lay down their debut album:

“We went to see them at the Music Machine in Camden. At first, me and JJ didn’t get on. He came across as belligerent. Perhaps it was the drink? But after a while he was alright – we got on really well. We were out nearly every night after that.”

Aldo Bocca recorded and engineered *Just Like Nothing On Earth* and *Turn, The Centuries Turn*.

In his Eden days, Aldo worked with New Wave luminaries such as Elvis Costello and Joe Jackson, as well as Dr. Feelgood, the Damned and the Undertones. One session in March 1980, saw Hugh produce LA outfit, Ouida & the Numbers. The very next day, Hugh lost his possession of drugs appeal.

“Hugh never once mentioned going to prison, so I don’t think he was expecting to get sent down. I remember it was a really long session, right through the night, and we finished around eight in the morning. So maybe he was trying to get it finished – just in case he went down? It was certainly a huge shock to everybody when he did.”

Following on, JJ called Aldo one night at home.

“He said: ‘would you like to work on some new Stranglers songs?’ And I jumped at it.”

Just Like *Nothing On Earth* and *Turn The Centuries*, *Turn* were recorded over two sessions at two separate studios. Worthing’s Pebble Beach Sound Studios near Brighton was the venue for *Just Like Nothing On Earth*. Interestingly, this was the very studio The Stranglers recorded their Glitter Band handclapping demos of *Go Buddy Go* and *Bitching* four years earlier. Meanwhile this backwash studio was the venue for Penetration’s *Don’t Dictate*, The Adverts’ Larry Wallis-produced *Gary Gilmore’s Eyes*, as well as an album by Chris Spedding. Aldo recalls a spartan set-up:

“It was a bit Heath Robinson, shall we

say – Mickey Mouse even! I think it was a 24 track, although half the stuff didn’t work! It had pokey little rooms and a crap mixer – but the control room was good. We were there for something like four days working on two songs, possibly even a third.”

There was a pub across the road that once was a notorious haunt of local Teddy Boys with its weekend rock ‘n’ roll disco nights. Aldo recalls a typical Stranglers session:

“After the studio we’d end up having a lock-in until three or four in the morning over the road. Then we’d go back and carry on from where we left off. I remember the landlord very well – I think he was gay. I was convinced he thought he was in with half a chance with any one of us! Maybe that’s why he let us play pool all night for free?”

In contrast, the session in Berkshire was a more sedate affair. “Startling Studio was weird – there were life-size statues of dinosaurs in the garden! I’ve never seen anything like it, but it was a beautiful place. Ringo Starr owned it – you used to see Zak playing around in the garden.

“There was a lovely heated pool too – I was in it almost every night. The house had a fantastic musical feel, as well as being really comfy. The natural acoustics were great, and there were mic points fitted in the walls of each room I believe from when John Lennon had it.”

Aldo reflected on the excitement of being in the same place Lennon recorded *Imagine*:

“Just standing in the same room was incredible, even though the famous white piano in the film had gone. We used a small cinema in to record *Turn, The Centuries, Turn*.”

With Aldo’s last *Meninblack* session in the can, there was always time for a party:





“Usually at Hugh’s place, and you would always spot a well-known face there... if you’re involved with these people all the time, you don’t take too much notice. But that’s what it was like then... If it was now, I’d be going – hey! See who that is?”

Pretty girls were always a feature at one of these soirées: “Once the whole of Pan’s People were there – or was it Legs and Co?”

Moving on to freelancing, work took Aldo to Japan and the States. But by then, all the excess of the 1980s started to snowball. It was during one studio session Aldo finally came to a big decision:

“I was over in LA when I decided enough was enough. I booked into rehab as soon as I came home. I went into Warlingham – and I packed in music for good. You see, I got to work with some greats; Dave Edmonds... Nick Lowe... I played some guitar on his album too, and so came all the partying. So I succumbed to the famous rock ‘n’ roll lifestyle –

drink and drugs – too much Charlie in particular... It started with Jean Jacques!”

In his 50th year, Aldo is a successful double glazing sales manager, after chasing several ventures, such as managing a music shop and running Croydon’s coolest wine bar:

“L’Apperitif was the only place in the whole of South London where you would get Led Zeppelin blasting out one minute, and The Carpenters the next. It was great. With me out of rehab and teetotal, it was funny watching everyone else getting silly this time.”

When a supermarket in Eastbourne was up for sale, Aldo went in with his father:

“What a mistake. We sold it the day we opened up. We just looked at each other, and said: ‘this isn’t us, is it?’”

“I haven’t seen Jean Jacques for years. When you see him, tell him I wouldn’t mind bumping into him for a beer.”

To The Manor Born

Joe Ordinair investigates Startling Studios

1969: John Lennon and Yoko Ono move into Tittenhurst Park, a Georgian mansion and 72-acre estate in Sunningdale, Berkshire. It’s 18th Century name was Crack’s Hole. Renovations uncover an unexploded incendiary shell from WW2. Lennon installs an eight track studio for private use and christens it Ascot Sounds. Many interior walls are demolished and the entire ground floor interior is painted white. Cannon microphone sockets are installed in each room so that recording can take place all over the house. An upright piano with a brass plate reads: John Lennon wrote *Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds* on this piano in 1967. Two days after the Beatles final recording session (Abbey Road) the house provides the setting for the final photo session. For his 30th birthday, Lennon invites his father – but an argument between the two ensues; Lennon tells him to stay out of his life; Tittenhurst is the last place he sees his father alive. In the hour-long ‘Imagine: The Film’ (EMI, 1972) the whole house and grounds are featured extensively. At the start, John and Yoko walk through the door (literally) where letters in the fanlight display: ‘You are not here’ leading onto the famous scene sitting at the white piano. Cheeky former Wham star George Michael is rumoured to be the current owner of the said Joanna.



When the Lennons leave for the States in 1971, Ringo Starr buys Tittenhurst, upgrades the studio to 24-track and opens it for public hire. Startling Sounds attracts many of the UK’s heavyweight rock bands of the 1970s and early 80s; from Whitesnake to Def Leppard. In 1980, Judas Priest make use of the numerous mike sockets during the recording of *British Steel*, by miking up a large door being slammed (for a thunder sound) and a guitar flight case being whipped on the kitchen table for the song, *Metal Gods*. The smashing glass sound in *Breaking The Law* comes courtesy of Ringo’s empty milk bottles being dropped in the porch way. A few months later, The Stranglers arrive to record tracks for *The Gospel According To The Meninblack* album.

In 1988, Ringo sells Tittenhurst to former United Arab Emirates president Sheik Zayed Al-Nahyan – purely to go to the races at Ascot for two weeks of the year! £55m is spent gutting and rebuilding it, adding a three-metre high perimeter security wall. Many Beatles personal effects and studio ledgers are destroyed in a bonfire. Andrew Nicholson, whose parents worked on the interior refurbishment in the early 90s had this to say: “Anything left in the studio was taken outside and burned – if only I’d got there twenty minutes sooner. Handwritten sheet music and film scripts..... And some instruments too. They would have been worth millions now. My parents salvaged the front door and auctioned it at Christies in the late 90s. I believe it ended up being sawed into pieces to mount some collector’s gold discs of the *Imagine* album. I took a piano, but only the keyboard section was salvageable.”

Oh... and there are reports that the 50-foot high model of a Tyrannosaurus Rex that once stood so majestically on the lawn suffered extinction by bonfire, rather than the Ice Age.

JJ Burnel: And the gods made love

Dom Pilgrim met JJ Burnel in a West London boozier on May Day 2006 to talk about 1980, 1981, the Meninblack and alien colonisation...

The first major event of 1980 is Hugh going to Pentonville. What did you feel when he went down? Everyone seemed to think he would get off.

Well he was definitely made an example of. It was nothing personal. It was just that there was a bit of residual Establishment angst about the Stranglers. Other bands had split up by then, and we were still going. And it's most unusual for someone to be put in prison for just a small amount of drugs, even then.

So it was a shock.

It was a surprise, yeah. Our lawyers had told us not to expect a custodial sentence. Normal people would have been given a fine, and it would stay on the books, but not custodial. So Hugh spent some custodial time and we had to cancel a lot of stuff. Of course it made things really difficult, and basically helped fuck up our North American career, which was just starting to blossom. Cos once you've got a drug record that's it. And in subsequent years we had trouble getting into Canada and the States.

But you toured the States later that year.

We did yeah. Funnily enough in those days the computers weren't all linked up. But the Canadian computers were linked up to the UK. So we tried sneaking into Canada from the US. But the red lights flashed on the Canadian border when Hugh's name came up on passport control

and he wasn't let in. We were meant to be playing in Toronto so we hired an immigration lawyer that day and eventually he got to the gig – a few hours late – by aeroplane. We had driven there, cos we were on tour. So, we managed the gig in Toronto. But even before all that it was a nightmare. We were meant to play in India.

And The Police made a mint out of doing that.

Yeah, they beat us to it in the end. The situation affected us in quite a few ways in the long term. I never resented Hugh for it. I just thought it was a bit silly of him to have it all in his front pocket really, and not hidden.

He says now he hadn't taken heroin before that...

Yes he had.

...and it was only afterwards that he started to take it.

No. Well that's conflicting with what he's written in his own books isn't it. In fact the best way to see the truth is to see the output material: Don't Bring Harry. I think it's safe to say that Hugh introduced me to drugs rather than the other way round. Because he socialised much more than I did. I think it was members of The Tubes who introduced him to heroin. So he knew about heroin way before then.



JJ, W10, 1 May 2006

So the Rainbow gigs you did with a guest line up while he was in prison. How did they come about? Why didn't they get cancelled?

Well, immediately we thought they'd be cancelled, but we got this groundswell of support all of a sudden. And we weren't expecting to get any support from anyone. And we were quite touched by it.

Support from the media or musicians?

Fellow musicians. And Ian Grant [manager], who was always a bit a rabble rouser and a rebel, milked it – in the nicest possible way. Basically up till now The Stranglers had been considered a kind of pariah, no one would touch us, certainly not in our peer group, or the media, and we were quite impressed with that.

So, he organised it and we started having

rehearsals at New Hibernia House. And we had easily enough support to cover all the songs in the set. People would come along and do two or three songs, or just come on for one song as a musician or a singer and we thought, "yeah, we'll carry on with this and it will be a big fingers up. Why not?"

And we pulled it off. It was an event. There was tons of drugs backstage, tons and tons of coke. And I think we were just grateful for the support. Ian Dury was just lovely. People we'd had clashes with before just came along and were really nice.

What do you remember most strongly about it?

I remember meeting Toyah. I remember her husband played, Robert Fripp. I wonder if that's how they met. She's never claimed that, but I'm sure it is. I

remember trying to debag Billy Idol, cos he was trying to be tough and we knew he wasn't. There was Phil Daniels and our friends from Steel Pulse. There's a really good recording of it, *Strangers And Friends*, which really captures it.

But the funniest thing I remember is Kate Bush coming back stage, and she was sweet and naïve and saying: "Can you give me Hugh's phone number?" [laughs] And we were just incredulous: "Well, I dunno if he's got a phone in there Kate!"

Moving on to the *Meninblack* album. The whole thing was done in bits. You'd already started some of it by this time.

Yeah, bits and bobs. *Waltzinblack* was started in Advision studios in the West End somewhere. It was actually while we were doing the *Raven* album and doing the *Meninblack* track. It was then that Martin Rushent didn't understand it, he said: "What are you guys doing?" He wanted only commercial stuff, and there was an empire being built up – his empire and Albion's empire. And we didn't know what was commercial and what wasn't and *Meninblack* obviously wasn't a pop song – it was Two Sunspots slowed down. And it was then we parted company with him in the middle of the recording cos he didn't get it. And we said that we had a vision and we had to carry on. So coming back to the recording of the *Meninblack* album, er, what was the question?

There wasn't one actually. Tell us what you remember about recording the album.

All the *Meninblack* tracks have got six tracks of bass. How I recorded it was really weird, I dunno if anyone's done it

since. I would have, and I still have, three tracks of bass. One track with DI'd sound, that is direct sound, just the sound of the guitar. One track with the sound of the big speakers, 15-inch speakers, and one track of the smaller speakers, the 10-inch speakers. With the combination of those three elements I can mix my sound. But on that album I decided to double track. I played my bass over what I'd already recorded. So it wouldn't be perfectly in sync and it would give a real depth to the sound and a weird sound.

I also remember, and this is amazing really, that we could not afford the hotel in Paris for the month we were there.

When you were at the Pathe Marconi studios.

Yes. And EMI weren't gonna bail us out.

But surely after the success of *The Raven* you were on a commercial high.

We were yes.

So where did the money go?

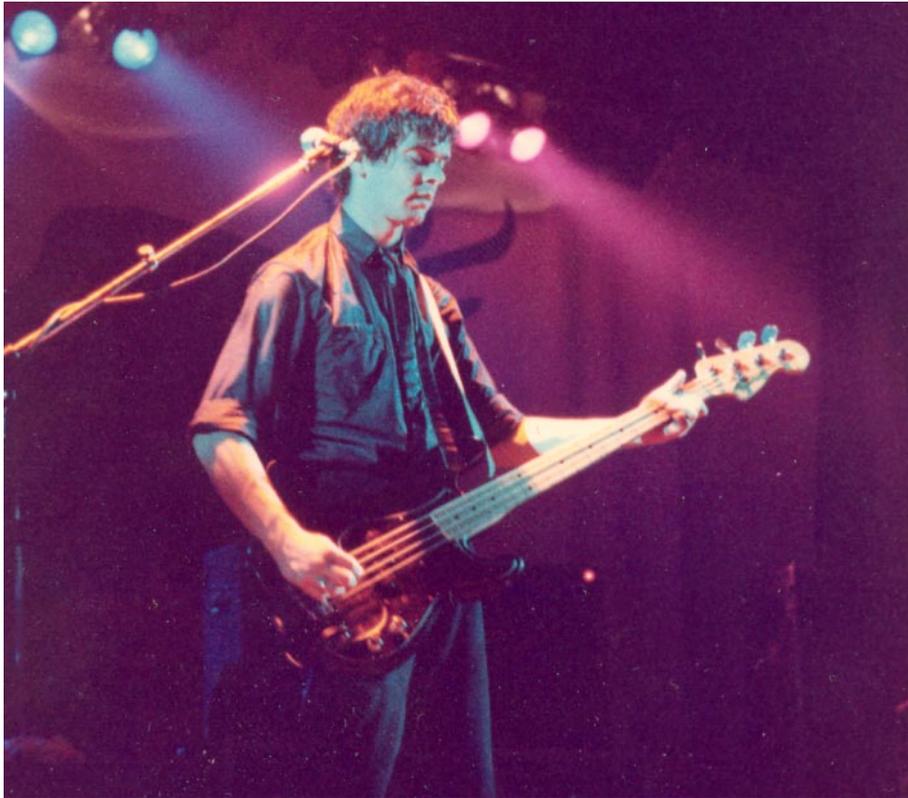
Well most of it went to our management. Not much came our way. We'd bought our houses by then and that was it. It was only years later that we discovered people were taking a cut much more than us.

Tell us about the sound of a song like *Thrown Away*. On the album it's much tamer and more robotic than the heavier version you were playing live.

Was it? I can't remember. It was meant to be a pop song, meant to be a disco track. We recorded it in the home of disco at Musicland, in Munich. And that was were



Hammersmith Odeon, 15 February 1981



Lyceum Ballroom, 27 July 1980

Georgio Morodo and Donna Summer did most of their disco songs and we wanted the same beat that Donna Summer had done, 111 beats per minute or something.

It's one of my favourite songs. The lyrics, mood, singing. It's intrinsic to the MIB mythology on the album.

Yeah, the story is basically about other beings landing on the planet earth and instigating religions so they can fuck themselves up, and which is also a means by which people can organise themselves. And if they landed in the desert they would definitely give a bit of advice on food, for instance: don't eat pork. Now the Semitic and Arab people don't eat

pork, because there's no way of storing it. And milk couldn't be stored, before you had refrigeration. So, wherever you landed you'd give practical information, a 10 Commandments if you want. Laws by which they could thrive. The story is I'm an astronaut, landing on planet earth, I leave religion and I fly off again.

This mythology then, as a band did you believe in it?

Yes we did.

Do you still believe in it?

Yes absolutely. No one's proved to me conclusively otherwise. Well: a) we

haven't found the Missing Link, and, b) I cannot believe that humanity just appeared like that. I believe that we've had some kind of, I wouldn't say divine intervention, but intervention. Though if you were a primitive person you'd consider it divine. I just think there's been a bit of playing around.

It doesn't make sense does it? How can you go from an ape to this, just like that.

I think there are accounts throughout the world of intervention from some kind of being that, to all intents and purposes, would have been considered divine, or godlike. And mathematically I've never been able to accept that we were the only life form in the universe as *we* know it, let alone other forms of life, *not* as we know it. I just think it's a mathematical impossibility, so that leads me to an open verdict at the very least.

We're getting towards to that new buzzword, Intelligent Design here. Looking at the latest theories on the subject they seem to point to genetic engineering of monkey DNA mixed with alien DNA.

Yes. Until they got it right. Until they got something they thought would have legs, so to speak. But throughout oral history, and written history, around the world there is talk of mutations. Demi-gods that weren't quite right, whether they were centaurs or minotaurs; the experiments that went wrong. The gods throughout, not just in Greek mythology, are very human. They fart about, they fuck about, they have infatuations with mortals, and the product of these liaisons are sometimes quite scary.

The whole of Greek mythology is just about one big experiment on mankind, and playing with people, and affecting their destiny and giving them tests and tasks. There are loads of mutations in Greek mythology, let alone in Egyptian mythology and anywhere else.

So the band were fascinated by all this stuff at the time.

Yeah, we were discussing it, reading around it writing about it and we met this guy in America. Funnily enough *Meninblack* was the album the Americans said was a work of genius. Yeah, it charted! But we met this well known writer on the *meninblack* at the time that Jet was in touch with, John Keel. And we met him with the editor of High Times. They were both interested in the Stranglers and they came back to Jet's room one night. A mutual appreciation society.

It is well documented that a lot of dark things were happening at the time. Your Strange Chain of Coincidences article in Strangled is a good record. How do you look back on that now?

How I look back on it is this: We were doing two things that were mutually exclusive, which cancelled each other out. One was trying to have an open mind about religion, for instance, which has always been a bugbear for Jet anyway, and trying to explain religion and the Old Testament, and to a lesser extent the New Testament – the Bible basically – and also explain cultures worldwide and “why do we need to have religion?” That demonstrates quite a *largesse d'espirit*, a willingness to learn, not to be blinkered. On the other hand

you take heroin and your world becomes smaller and smaller. You lose interest in physical things, you lose interest in people. Your frames of reference get narrower and narrower and that's what we found taking heroin. On the one hand we were trying to expand our minds. On the other, our world was getting more and more restricted. It can't work out.

Heroin to me is like the ring in Lord of the Rings. It gives you something. And every time you use it, and derive something from it, ie, sensual pleasure, it takes a bit more of your soul away. So every time you use the ring it corrupts you a little bit more. It's awful. And the more you go down that dark alley – the more negative you become – the more bad luck you attract. It's something we went through, and I'm glad we came out the other end, all of us. It's something that scars you for ever. It's not cool, or anything to be proud of. It's just something that we did.

As an artist you owe it yourself to try everything that can affect your head. In our case, at the end of it, we created the *Meninblack* album. Which has got lots of different layers on it. In the end we didn't care. We were going broke but we were having such an exquisite time in the studio, spending two days to get a snare sound with a cassette recorder microphone. You know those flat recorders with little condenser mikes? We discovered that if we used two of those we could record with those. So on top of the ordinary microphones, we'd use those mikes as well and get a good sound.

When, for you, did the heroin stop?

Very soon after 1980, 1981. The song *Golden Brown* was meant to be on the *Meninblack* album. There are different versions of this story. Now I am sure we were rehearsing at my house in Somersham in Cambridgeshire, and the back room was full of gear. And Hugh and I one day got a bit bored, and we said to Jet and Dave, "Write a song, we're off down the pub."

We came back a couple of hours later and they had about seven pieces of really complicated arrangements between Jet and Dave. I think Dave had been working on things anyway. And eventually we stripped parts of the arrangement out, kept three pieces of this arrangement, Hugh did the lyrics and it was *Golden Brown*. And it was about heroin. And it was written during the *Meninblack* period. But it was too unwieldy as it was, and it surfaced later on the next album. Which we recorded that summer.

I listened to the *Meninblack* album recently on my hi fi and holds up really well, sounds really good.

I think the production has not dated at all. I think it was ahead of its time then, sonically. I think there aren't so many songs on it as usual, as The Stranglers are quite a well known song-writing band. We like to write songs, with a beginning a middle and an end, with sometimes catchiness and a bit of intelligence. But I think the songs were lacking. There were pieces of music but not quite songs. The only songs on it are *Two Sunspots* and *Thrown Away*. The rest are musical landscapes. But that's cool.

Well it was a bold progression wasn't it? A lot of bands wouldn't take that risk.

People didn't understand. The press didn't even like *The Raven*, all these squiggly synthesiser noises, and then 20 years later everyone can do squiggly synthesiser noises.

It reminds me of Radiohead a few years ago, with *Kid A* and I forget the name of the other one ... [*Amnesiac*] there was a similar reaction to their progression after the hugeness of *OK Computer*.

I haven't heard those albums.

It's the difference in style, the way they progressed, which was similar to the shift you made from *The Raven* to *Meninblack*.

Absolutely. And we did it 25 years ago. The problem with the *Meninblack* is if it was another band doing it we might have been hailed as geniuses, but because it was the Stranglers it was not possible to even give us begrudging praise.

What about the European press?

They were less biased. There wasn't the baggage that we had with the British press. No one wanted to do us any favours because we were on the wrong side of the fence. The Clash were the new gods, the Pistols had finished, and the Clash took all the plaudits.

Well they'd released *London Calling* at the beginning of 1980.

Yeah, which is a good album. But everyone was on their side, and no one was going to accept that we were smarter or brighter, or making more interesting stuff than the Clash, or anyone else for that matter. So we were destined to be the bridesmaids one more time. And we still

are till now... It actually helped. I don't know how many other groups could have experimented or been independent musically for so long, because we didn't take anyone's silver.

You were doing a lot of touring in 1980 and 1981 and there was the Nice incident of course. Which is so well documented. But what about the bail for Nice. Is there a story attached to that, about a dispute over £10,000 to get you out?

Yes, well the boss of EMI Cliff Busby had been the boss of United Artists, so had been our only friend at EMI. And I think they weren't very willing to bail us out. They wanted us to suffer in the nick for a while. I think it came through in the end, but I was the one who came off worst,



and got a prison record. And I already had a prison record in France, for desertion, which I don't think was quite resolved at the time. I still have a record in France, I got a year and a day [for the Nice incident] suspended. The others got under a year, which means they don't have a record in France under French law.

So who caused most of the trouble at the gig? I heard a rumour that as a parting shot Jet said "Smash the place up".

No, Jet didn't say that. I was speaking in French, trying to translate what Jet and Hugh were saying, and obviously adding a few things of my own. And all I said was "Look, please respect our equipment"! And this is in a glass amphitheatre, so ... well some people say it gave them licence to smash up everything but our gear.

Did they respect your wishes?

Yeah. Our gear was intact. It was everything else which was smashed up.

Is there a recording of that anywhere?

I dunno.

It's one of the holy grails of bootleg collectors.

It would be wouldn't it. Mind you, the number of people I've met who claimed to have been there. It's like, I didn't realise there were so many people at that gig!

So there were about 50,000 people there?

Yeah, something like that. But it was only about 500 people.

When you came out what do you remember about your first gig, which was Castel S. Angelo in Rome, which was five days later.

That was incredible, absolutely incredible. I've never seen so many people in my life. And of course they started rioting cos they wanted an encore, and we hadn't planned on doing an encore so we had to get out quick, or there was going to be another Nice. Another riot.

We had meant to have played Athens as well. The road crew went to Greece, waited around for us for a few days and then took the ferry back to Italy. We did a bit of recording in Rome as well, at the RCA studios.

The live sets you did then featured *Raven* and *MiB* material, and not much from the first three, what was the method in choosing the set list?

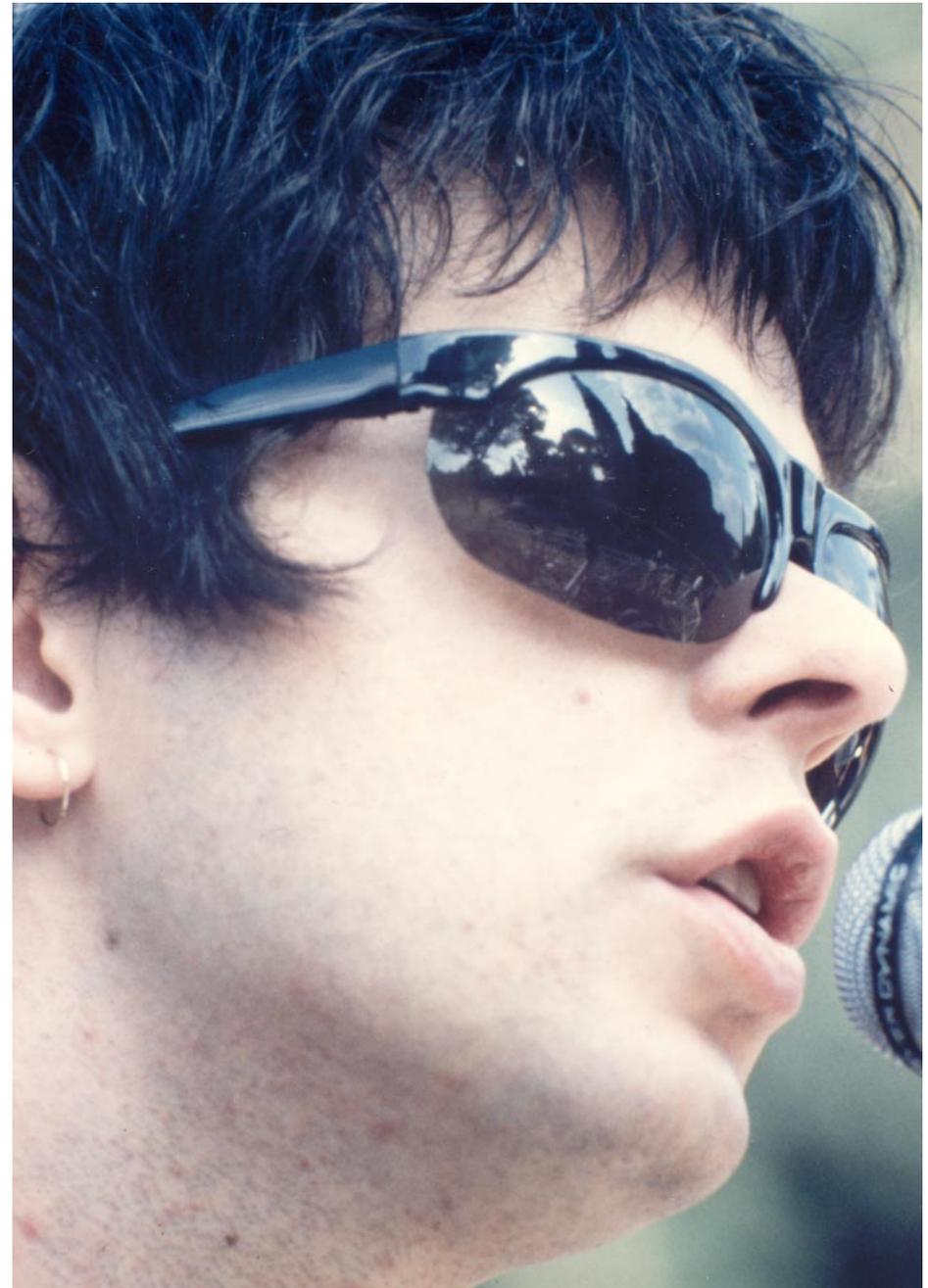
I can't remember the set. I'm sure there are records of the set we were playing at the time.

You opened with *Shah, Ice, Toiler* then *Duchess*...[I could go on]

Yeah, well there's always been a method. Some songs lend themselves to starting a set. The best song now is *Norfolk Coast*. Fantastic to start a set. We sometimes used to start with *Sometimes*, and started with *Down in The Sewer* a few times.

In those days you did *Sewer* in the middle of these set.

Did we? That's weird. Fuck.



Castel S. Angelo, soundcheck, 2 July 1980: five days after being released from jail in Nice

Castel S. Angelo, soundcheck, 2 July 1980.



Is it because you were in a contrary mood at the time?

I can't remember. I can't see it as a middle kind of song. We've done it as an ender as well. But, oh well.

So what are your favourite tracks from the album?

Well, I like *Two Sunspots*. That was meant to be a single.

What happened?

Well, it was either that or *Thrown Away*. And *Thrown Away* was considered more disco-ey.

It got to number 42.

Well there was no way anything from that album was going to be a hit. I used to love *Hallow To Our Men*. I just liked the sonic-ness to it, the build up. The weird times to it.

A classic album closer, with the UFO leaving at the end.

Four of them.

Four?

Yeah, if you listen to the album, at the beginning there are four landing; each representing a member of the band [impersonates four UFOs landing] and then at the end there are four [impersonates four UFOs taking off].

What about the Finchley Boys, it seems to be about this time they stopped following you around everywhere.

Yes. But we were going further afield and it just was not possible. But having said that we played in northern Spain in San Sebastian, in a big sports hall, and suddenly there they were: a few of the Finchley Boys. But they were doing naughty things by then. I think they were involved in gun running or something ...

weird stuff. There were a couple of Finchley Boys who were actually Basques. One of them is the guy naked on stage at Battersea. And a lot of people think that he is me, saying "I've seen a picture of you naked on stage at Battersea," and I'm twice the size of the bloke and it's obviously not me. Louie I think his name is. But nevertheless we bumped into them in Basque territory, and we never knew what they were doing there, and they never quite explained themselves.

Your celebrity was growing all the time during this period though, although you say no one liked you, you were properly famous by this point.

We were famous, yeah.

How did that affect the dynamic of the band.

Nothing really changed in the dynamic of the band. Hugh and I would go off and write songs together. He'd have an idea and I'd look at it and vice versa. And that dynamic only changed four or five years later with *Aural Sculpture*. We didn't spend so much time together by that time. And the advent of portastudios meant you could develop ideas on your own, which was not a good thing, well not for The Stranglers anyway.

***Meninblack* came out in February 1981 and *La Folie* later the same year, even though all of *Meninblack* was finished in 1980.**

Well there was a lot of pressure to release *La Folie*, or something that was less of a turkey. Basically that coincided with United Artists being taken over by EMI and no one at EMI liked us.

***Meninblack* was on the Liberty label wasn't it.**

Yes, which was part of EMI. And it was not a success. They were used to us selling hundreds of thousands of albums.

But it charted at number eight. So all the hardcore fans must have rushed out and bought it.

Yes, but it was of no interest to anyone else. It was a huge failure, and with people cancelling us, what with the Hugh thing and drugs and Nice most pundits thought that was the end of the road for us, finished. Dead in the water. So we made one last effort, with no help from anyone. Funding it was a real problem. In fact our accountant helped us out, and saved our bacon, and we managed to do the *La Folie* album. When we came back [from the last US tour] we had nothing. We were skint. We'd spent all the money on the *Meninblack* album. We obviously had to do another album as quickly as we could write one and record it, otherwise we were just written off. And if we'd sat on it for a normal two-year period we probably wouldn't be here talking about it now. So we immediately went back in the studio in August, I think.

Was it a conscious decision to make the songs more accessible? Or did they come naturally like that?

Kind of. Well, no, they were still weird pop songs. *La Folie* is kind of weird. It's leftfield pop. But that's as commercial as it got for us at the time. And *Golden Brown* saved everyone's bacon. And of course EMI had written us of, and they couldn't believe it. We had to force them

to release the single. So they released it at Christmas, which as most people know is death. You're up against mega whatever, but it just developed legs.

So we did another *La Folie* tour. We had done a La Folie tour before releasing *Golden Brown*, and we weren't really selling them out as quickly as we used to, our star was beginning to wane. You must remember that our audience at the time were mostly teenagers, so some of them hadn't decided to go on our intellectual journey.

I remember at school when *MiB* came out at age 14, I was in to *Madness* and *Specials* at the time, but the hard-core *Stranglers* fans were mortified by the direction the band had taken. Most of them stopped being fans.

They were like: "This is shit, what this all about!" Yeah, I understand that.

A lot of people got into the band later in life, and this is one of the albums that got me hooked for sure.

Well it was that kind of work wasn't it. When you reassess it now you think "Wow, this is way ahead, these guys are way out there". This isn't disposable shit, there was an awful lot of time spent on it and it broke us. Yes, so we did *La Folie* and the rest is history really. But it was touch and go.

Anything else you can remember from the period?

Yeah, I do remember one thing. Oh no, this was during *The Raven* period. Anyway. I tried killing myself a couple of times. And then I woke up with a sore head a couple of days later. I thought it

was a heroic thing to do.

Nowadays though, your music is subtly pervading the collective conscience, you're frequently on *Eastenders* or on *BBC ads* and such like.

Really?

Oh yeah.

Great. I just think now there's a begrudging respect. We're a British institution, whether people like or not. And there's a belated recognition of what we've achieved musically. The rest is bollocks. Your stunts, getting arrested. I mean, when what's-his-name, Pete Doherty, grows up, if he gets a chance to grow up, rather than kill himself, what will be left? It's not his arrests every week for this and that it's the music. And if he hasn't written a good body of music he's just gonna become a joke, a laughing stock. And if he has got a good body of music then he can carry it off, rather than just be another sad causality.

What would happen if you got an award, like a *Brit Award*?

Well, we did get an Ivor Novello award for *Golden Brown*. And we sent Bill Tucky our tour manager to pick it up.

I mean now. Let's say next year.

Oh, we'd have an existentialist crisis. Do we accept it or not?

And who goes along and who accepts it?

I dunno. I dunno what we'd do... We'd have a big discussion about it.



St Peter's Square, Rome, 2 July 1980

Golden Blade and author of 'Punk Rock: An Oral History' **John Robb** takes us on a cosmic journey into the unknown... we are over the moon!



Space Oddity

HERE HAS ALWAYS been a touch of space travel in rock 'n' roll – a sense of musical wonderment at the eternal. A quest to soundtrack the cosmos.

From Joe Meek's amazing *Telstar* to Sun Ra's cosmic freeform jazz to the MC5's interplanetary freak outs, through to Syd Barrett's space trips on his solitary debut Pink Floyd album before he split for his own personal cosmos in the late sixties music was attempting to fast forward to the future.

In the 1960s, space was cutting edge and hip. I remember doing a school project on the moon landings when I was nine and being enthralled by the fuzzy pictures coming back with Neil Armstrong bounding across the bleak landscapes. Pop was modern and so was space – the two were forged in white heat technology. It all went hand in hand, this was the future, a future of space travel and celestial exploration. The very sound of the space missions, the static radio communication sounded like pop music.

And space became a lifetime fascination for many. No amount of trippy drugs could equal the mind-fuck of letting your mind wander into deep, dark space, a personal journey floating out into the beyond, thinking: what the fuck is out there!

Space is weird – the more you think about it the more it fucks your head up.

The sheer size, the sheer scale, those icy planets, those cosmic moons, the endless eternity of it all – the emptiness.

And if that isn't weird enough, you might question if anything really is out there? If Earth is the only planet supporting life as we know it, that would be about as weird as a universe teaming with life – you can't win either way.

As a kid I immersed myself in UFO books, and I still ask the same questions... What were those tantalising marks in the South American desert? Has there been alien interference? Are we some sort of cattle for the aliens? Are they amongst us with their ESP? Is religion a mask for alien visitation? And what with all the folk tales and religions – odd hints at something else, a cosmic mysticism and strange tribal customs alluding to space travel. Cranky costumes seen in deep, dark forests, exploding bushes in the Bible, immaculate conceptions, second comings... Folklore and mythology all mixed up with technology. Had we been visited before? Why are we here? Has there been alien interference? Are we the product of alien meddling? And what are those bright lights in the sky? Was there a cover up? Was there an alien in Roswell? Intriguing, huh?

It's 1981 when I realise I'm not the only one reading this stuff. The *Meninblack* themselves – the mighty Stranglers – are heavily into dark and gloomy drugs, as well

as fascinating alien theories. They veer spectacularly from being the principal tough-edged pop band of their generation into a place that's as dark and weird as one of Jupiter's many moons.

They hinted at this detour with the track *Meninblack* on *The Raven* album – a very strange affair of tapes of 'almost' single *Two Sunspots* being sped up and slowed down as Stranglerified aliens screech 'human flesh is porky meat' over the top. It was enough to piss off their producer Martin Rushent who quit at this point. The single *Who Wants The World?* and its B-side *Meninblack (Waiting For 'Em)* further signpost the band's fixation with UFOs and outer space oddness with a still quirky piece of pop that mysteriously never troubled the Top 10 like it should have done.

When the *Meninblack* album arrives, it's a genuine head-fuck: a difficult, brooding piece of work, with long complex

songs and a really strange dank atmosphere. There is darkness afoot and a collection of lyrics pondering visitations and other weird phenomena. The Bible is alluded to and sinister government cover up agencies. There's a paranoid quark about the album, a strange beast that after repeated listens really grows like some sort of intergalactic slime. The weird time structures seem like mathematical progressions but pretty soon they were making sense as a far superior psychedelic. The band explored their true roots of their late 60s mind-altering era and dragging it bang up to date with an early 80's production via a punk rock gnarledness.

The Stranglers, now completely draped in black, explore some stranger places with a soundtrack to match them. Drugs are, of course, involved: there's hardly a drug that doesn't get taken and it affected their music. Acid gives the psychedelic spook and heroin, the gloomy



"Cinque gelati, per favore!"

cosseted come down. Never again will The Stranglers sound this tripped out. Wilful commercial suicide it may be, but somehow they make innate melodic sense leak out, causing even the darkest pieces to display their catchy hallmark tunes.

As ever they write about stuff that no one else dares to and it's pretty wild to hear your favourite band sing about the UFO stuff that had you enthralled you when you were a book chewing teenager.

The Stranglers dark psychedelic is one of their great strengths. From the start, the punk floyd twist heads with music that's not just fantastically aggressive (in an aggressive time) but was also 3D in its soundscapes – the songs make little pictures in your head, with a weird twist taking you somewhere else. That lysergic streak pulls their songs out of the ordinary.

In 1977 everyone pretends to hate hippies. But as we gobble the magic mushrooms, The Stranglers acid rock makes total sense. Some of the resulting albums are liberally peppered with weird trips (trips in a late 70's have a harsher, more brutal reality to deal with than the idealistic freaks at the UFO club in the mid 60's.) This is 'dole queue Britain' – not the idealistic Swinging London scene. Everything is filthy and everyone is pissed off – nobody wants to trip out on it. *Down In The Sewer* is perfect for this – a bizarre eight-minute long zig-zagging rush of psychedelic that is street cred and tough enough to make total sense in the punk rock era.

Now it's 1981 – The Stranglers, like most of the old punk mob, look for an escape route from the shackles of the scene. *The Raven* – the fans favourite – shows a striking exit. Jet Black devours books on aliens and hooks the rest of the band into the extra terrestrial. Add the prodigious drug intake, and you have

commercial disaster (but still Top 10 in the album charts.)

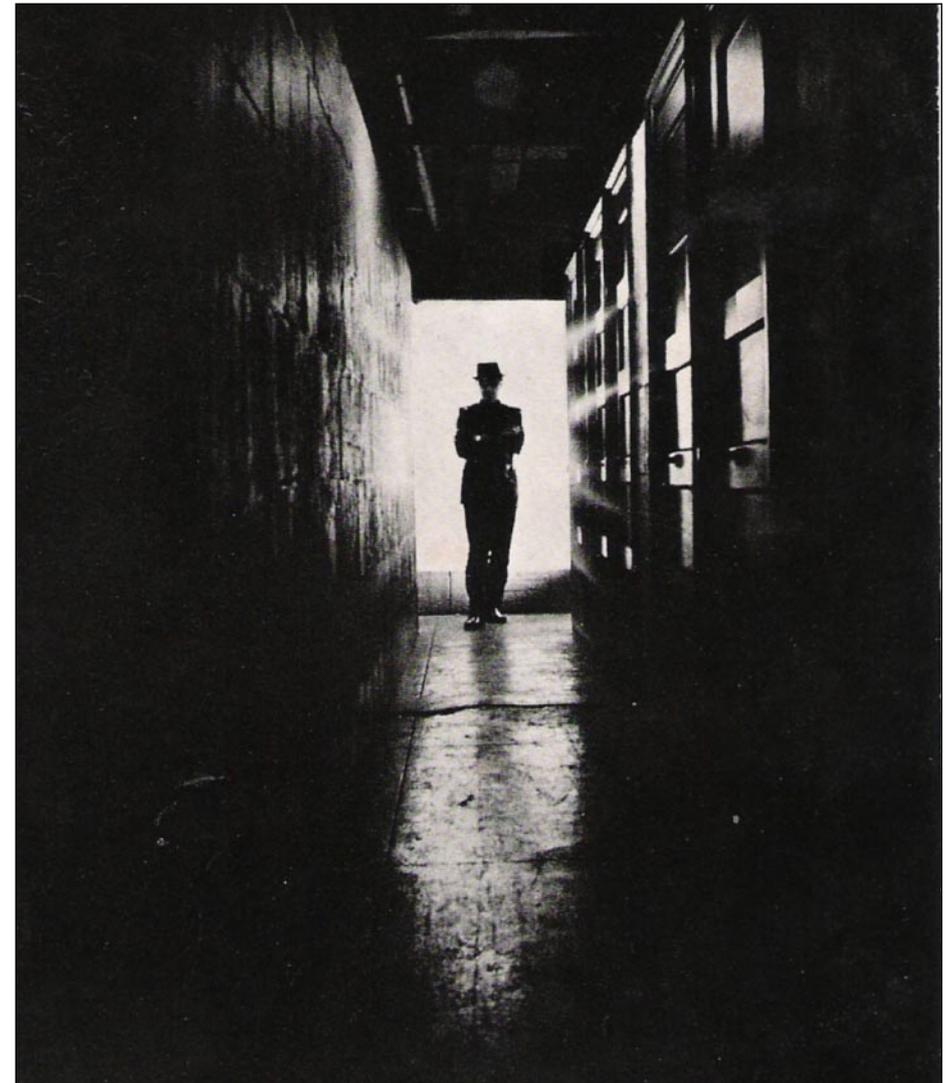
It's their greatest album. It's aged really well. On a dark night up in the moors driving around with this blasting out of the sound system, it makes utter sense. Every listen turns up a new sound, a new texture and still retains a mystery after all these years. The very sound has the spook – the weird twisted psychedelic that made The Stranglers so great. I love its atmosphere and subject matter – its quest to make sense out of the madness of religion and aliens.

And the band's playing is at the peak of its powers. If you loved Hugh Cornwell's Beefheart-splintered guitar licks then this album is stuffed full of them. The gnarled bass sound has returned after having rest on 'The Raven' – the state of the art electronics employed on the album makes it, dynamically, one of the best sounding Stranglers albums.

There are fantastically spooky instrumentals that plod along with a dark eternity – as mysterious as ever and maybe the best tracks on the album – they sprawl outwards like the cold dark universe itself. Fantastic weirdness.

There are sprightly disco pop songs like *Thrown Away*, odd quixotic almost mediaeval melodies like *Just Like Nothing On Earth*, and a newly sung *Waiting For the Meninblack* – as well as the all time Stranglers classic *Waltzinblack* that sets the mood perfectly at the beginning of the album.

Lyrically, Cornwell and Burnel are in great form – there is pessimism and disillusionment, space travel and the Bible, cut up beat poetry and even a good old fashioned Stranglers leer all mashed together here – and it's still great the way Cornwell twists the word "Earth" into weird new shapes on *Just Like Nothing*



MIB promotional postcard

On Earth. Once released, there was no way back for the band. No retreat – they had no choice: they couldn't dwell in such a mind state.

With this temporary chemical imbalance behind them, they were never this weird again.. until *Norfolk Coast*

perhaps? They missed that urgency.

Meninblack is a triumph. Perhaps the true sound of The Stranglers. A daring record to make, it is also thought-provoking and fascinating. It still fucks with your head after all these years – a true psychedelic experience.

'But, time was on our side?'

Mark Tall was distinctly underwhelmed by the follow up to *The Raven*...

A heady year was 1979. *The Raven* had catapulted the Stranglers to a new level of musicianship, enigma, critical acclaim and creativity. The band were making the best music of their career so far – dense, melodic, absorbing songs that showed a broadening of experiences and a blossoming of creative interplay. They had also exchanged speed for power and become a different proposition to 1977. They were to be taken seriously as a band and as a force in music.

People recognized the change, began to expect and were intrigued by how the band might grow further and extend their obvious talent for melody and arrangement.

Intelligence was flooding into and out of their songs. At different times it was challenging, euphoric and breathtaking. The band had made a huge leap since 1977 and many felt that the world was now theirs to take. We waited in anticipation.

1980 opened quietly, but news of two singles in the spring satiated appetites. Word was that the album was well underway.

Bear Cage surprised us with its incessant rhythm, teased us with Burnel's insidious bass line but disappointed us somewhat with its flat, linear delivery and lack of hard hook so prominent in previous Stranglers singles.

Who Wants The World? on the other hand thrilled us with its irresistible chorus, jolly keyboard runs, clever storyline, stop-start bouncing bridge and enthralling break where all band members once again danced around each other leading to the minor chord aside of Greenfield that heralded the rousing finale. This was one of the classic Stranglers singles and bode well for the new LP, which was promised in the autumn – a year to the month after *The Raven*. If this

was the tease single, the rest of the album must be amazing we thought.

September came and went and no album landed. We then heard that the release had been put back to the New Year for US tour reasons. Fair enough, but we started to wonder. Either this LP was so amazing they were busy perfecting the mix or something was wrong. The delay between LPs was now stretching longer than ever before.

During the *Who Wants The World?* tour in July, media interviews had uncovered that the new LP centred solely around the Men in black phenomenon first introduced on *The Raven*. For some fans this seemed odd – to be doing a “concept” album like Genesis so early in their career? How could you possibly write 10 songs about UFOs? What's more, the track *Meninblack* was interesting and fun, but kind of wore out its welcome after a few listens.

The album was finally released on 10 February 1981 – oddly enough to little fanfare or promotion. Sadly, it became clear why as it was a huge disappointment after the majesty of *The Raven*.

It lacked melody and hooks – only *Waltzinblack*, the finale to *Four Horsemen*, the central keyboard motif to *Hallow To Our Men* and *Thrown Away* offered any solace.

It lacked the classic, clever Stranglers intros that peppered and thrilled on *The Raven*. There was a dearth of good “songs” – several seemed weak and underdeveloped – *Two Sunspots*, *Second Coming* and *Hallow To Our Men* to name but three.

Burnel's bass was muddy and dull.

The gatefold sleeve was an exciting idea at first but an immense let down once encountered. There was nothing to it. The

much lauded Last Supper inner sleeve picture was a five-second thrill at best. Compare this album sleeve to the intricacy and texture of the 3-D *Raven* outer shell and its wonderfully entertaining and full inner sleeve.

The song *Waiting For The Meninblack* was a huge disappointment. Not only was it exactly the same mix as the b-side to *Who Wants The World?*, but it sounded better without the lyrics. Why was a b-side on the LP when *Who Wants The World?* was omitted. The latter being every bit as worthy of the storyline as *WFTMIB*, immensely more enjoyable and could have fitted nicely as a “sayonara” conclusion to the story before *Hallow* and off we go back to our planet.

And, speaking of singles, where was the single? *Thrown Away* was alluring, intriguing and exciting on the *Who Wants The World?* tour when Cornwell unleashed his guitar from the second verse and Jet crashed into his drums with enthusiasm. But here the song was morose, mundane and ultimately quite perverse as a choice of single. Once more, it was an idea that had so much potential that went unfulfilled. No wonder it debuted at No.42 and after a dreadful TOTP appearance stayed there, denying the band of more exposure and more interest in, and sales of, the album.

Finally, the classic final song epic we had grown used to with *Sewer*, *School Mam* and *Genetix* had been attempted with *Hallow To Our Men*. But the middle section was bereft of creative direction and meandered into a lost “when are we going back into the main keyboard riff?” plod. Seven and a half minutes that could so easily have been enough in five.

Though a concept album, overall the LP

lacked cohesion. It didn't feel together. *The Raven* had flowed perfectly. *The Gospel* slouched and skipped and flattered to deceive.

The only bright spots were *Just Like Nothing on Earth* with its intense, clever and humorous lyrical approach, pulsating bass and burbling keyboards and the divine *Four Horsemen*. This was the only track that could have graced *The Raven*, the only song of real quality, the only song that fulfilled the promise of these four musicians crafting and gelling together as they had in 1979.

It was disheartening. We had expected so much. Maybe too much?

But there seemed so much burgeoning potential. If *The Raven* could have been achieved in two weeks in Paris, what had they done with all the time in all those studios across Europe through the whole of 1980? Where had the creative spark gone? Where was the melody?

Though the melody returned the following winter with *La Folie*, we can now look back and recognize that the summer of 1979 was arguably the peak of The Stranglers core creativity. Yes, they tried new styles in future years; yes, they remained a force as a live act. But *The Meninblack* was the start of the inexorable slide down. Maybe they were plagued by ill fortune? Maybe there was uncertainty in the band camp given the unsettling run ins with authority of 1980? Maybe taking so much time in such a diversity of places hindered cohesion to the project and the songs? Maybe with a concept at its centre, certain things or songs were over thought and lost their direction? Whatever the truth is, the opportunity of 1980 was, to a large extent, just thrown away.

Art of the cover

John Pasche, graphic designer, and winner of NME Best Sleeve Award in 1979 for The Raven, gives us a brief insight into his art...

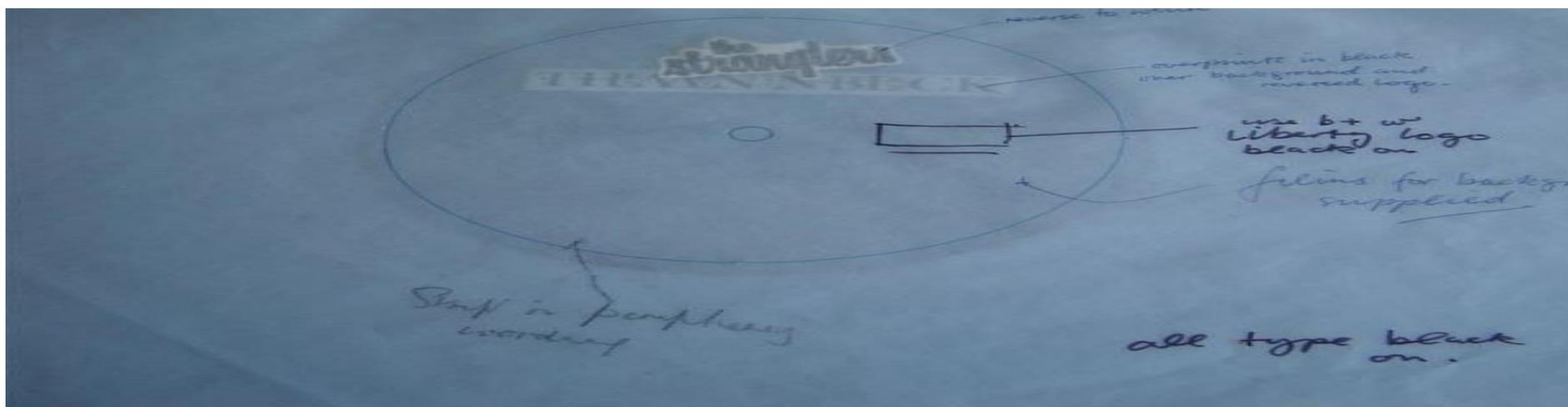
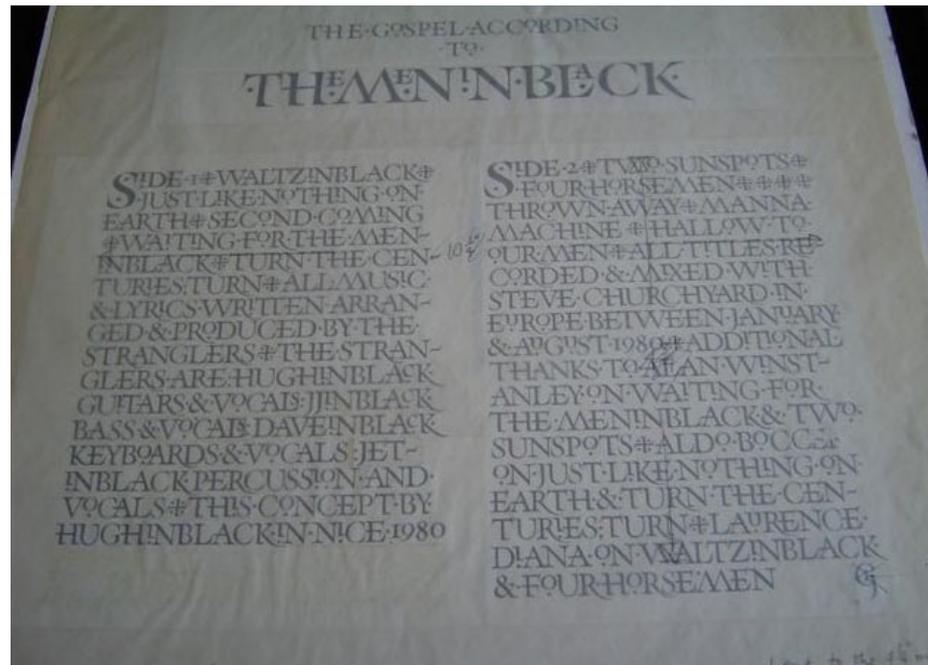
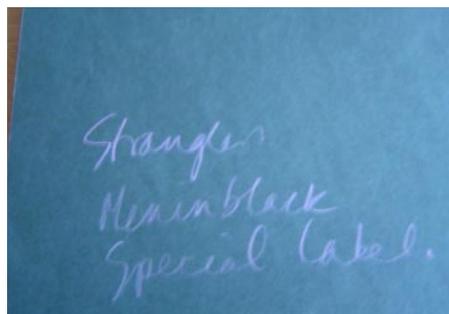
I think the sleeve was interesting because of its "turned inside out" concept with the track listing on the front and the image on the inside. The Last Supper image was great fun to do with the Maninblack retouched into the pose of Judas.

Unfortunately the calligrapher Jim Gibson died some years ago, a deep personal loss as I had known him from our student days at the Royal College of Art where he was awarded an honours degree. He was regarded by many as being one of the talented and creative calligraphers of his time and worked together with myself on many projects.

John Pasche is now a freelance designer working from home still loving what he does and listening to rock 'n' roll.

www.johnpasche.com

Below: The original artwork, images supplied by an anonymous source



Dissecting Dave's organs

The last time Dave Greenfield saw his customised keyboards was after a gig in New York. The hired lorry carrying his, and the band's equipment, roared off into the Manhattan night – never to be seen again. Jamie Godwin takes a look at what Dave had at his fingertips for *The Meninblack* album.

AT THE START of 1980, The Stranglers set to work on their most abstract album ever. *The Gospel According to the Meninblack* dabbles in religion, UFOs and of course, the men in black. For Dave Greenfield, this meant creating an amazing synthesizer soundscape to showcase this, which must have been a labour of love considering his interest in the occult, and all things spooky.

While the keyboard rig didn't vary too much from 1979's *The Raven* era, the *Meninblack* album set-up was stolen during the bands 1980 US Winter Tour. Despite being uninsured – courtesy of an admin oversight – Dave managed to amass most of his keys with newer models by the UK leg in 1981.

The Hammond was more or less resigned to the back seat following *Who Wants The World?!*: its harmonic backwash had been their hallmark; especially in *No More Heroes* and *Hanging Around*, where Dave holds down chords with his left hand whilst embellishing the compositions with his right. For the *Meninblack*, the sound is saturnal, less dynamic. More *spacey*.

Now stripped of goatee, 'tache and windswept hairdo, a clean shaven and trimmed Dave appeared to embrace the electronic era, clearly revelling in the analogue synths of the day – with Lauren



Hammond's antiquated tone wheel giant deemed too anachronistic for a visionary concept album. Perhaps.

Track one, side one, is the bizarre *Waltzinblack*. and here the keyboards form Dave's own eccentric tour de force with the bass end courtesy of the big bold lower notes of his Oberheim with the top end riff from the Wasp. The surreal and eccentric flavour of this song has seen it receive many TV endorsements by the likes of nutty celebrity chef Keith Floyd and the odd bizarre commercial.

The didgeridoo warble of the tiny yellow and black Wasp synth rumbles into life as we launch into *Just Like Nothing On Earth* – Dave holds down a solitary note whilst the sound modulates over and

over creating a feeling of alien suspense. The Obie supplies the poppy monophonic line over the top of the track whilst the CP-30 brings us the chorus chords.

According to Stranglers folklore, Golden Brown came about from a section of *Second Coming* that was thrown away (!) in its earliest life form. This harmonic piece was originally intended to be an extended instrumental break composed by Dave in 13/4 time signature.

A slice of reverb comes in and disappears on zany CP-30 intro lick in *Second Coming*. Interestingly, while the Oberheim features heavily throughout, many sounds are embellished with studio effects, such as flangers and compressors. Tape recorders hung from the ceiling were fed into the mixing desk creating strange and distant tinny drum sounds helping to bring their extra-terrestrial vision to fruition. Backwards guitar was used on *Turn*, *The Centuries Turn* however, there is no evidence that our Dave's talents were used in a similar way, and why should there be? He is quite capable of doing that kind of thing himself!

Taped loops also feature – perhaps this was The Stranglers version of Pet Sounds? Joe Meeks' 1960's space sounding production also receives a welcome nod; amazing considering three years previously, they were one of the UK's seminal punk acts.

Dave's keyboard rig circa 1980 BH*

- Hammond L100 custom with 2 MXR phase 100 and vari-speed
- Yamaha CP30 piano
- Oberheim FUS-1 Polyphonic Moog 4 Voice
- Oberheim FUS-1 Polyphonic Moog 4 Voice and 4 voice extension
- Oberheim sequencer
- Oberheim memory unit
- Mini Moog
- 2 Wasp synths
- Wasp Spider sequencer
- Korg Vocoder
- Kelsey/Morris 20-4-2 desk

Amp rack containing:

- 2 Turner A 500 amps
- 1 Turner A 300 amp
- 1 Pro Audio cross over 3 way
- 1 Stereo 11 band Klark-Technic Graphic

2 JBL cabs with:

- 2 x 15 JBL K140
- 1 x 12 JBL K120
- 1 x 2440 JBL Horn

Source: *Strangled*, May 1980

* Before *Heist*



Thrown Away possesses the simplest Stranglers melody ever and was probably made by the Mini-Moog. For gigs, maybe it was played on the Obie? But the chorus runs came courtesy of the Obie, and there's a hint of a Hammond in the quaver stabs in the choruses.

On *Waiting for the Meninblack* we really get to hear some of the vast array of sounds available on the Obie with dabs of dark bold highlighting from the Mini-Moog. The way Dave uses the sustained chords to create the sublime mood on this track is nothing short of genius in much the same way that the tinkling affect on *Turn, The Centuries Turn* subtly created an astral image in the listeners mind without ever over egging the cake. The Stranglers finally discover how to use the musical understatement however this went largely unnoticed at the time amongst the howls of derision from the music press.

More Obie on *Two Sunspots*, not too dissimilar to the spine-tingling sound used on the breaks in *Genetix*. Dave was obviously having a lot of fun in the studio laying down these great sounds. This track grew from a speeded up *Meninblack* from two years previously, proving the guys were good at recycling waste way back then!

Onstage, Dave would be seen frantically reprogramming his synths whilst finding time in easier moments to swig a gulp of warm lager straight from a tin, as the strategically positioned electric fan blew his flowing hair across his face.

Apart from all the gear going missing, the saddest aspect of *The Meninblack* is that it featured Dave's final vocal outing. *Four Horsemen* is a typically sinister affair with the trademark vocal special effects thrown in (*Korg Vocoder? - Ed.*) to help make him sound contemporary and less 'croony' but what a farewell number it is.



I'm guessing this is a wasp

The instrumental break halfway through is pure genius and once again showcases not only his melodic sensibility but the fantastic warmth and depth. Who said synthesizers are cold-sounding?

Manna Machine, the bands very own tribute to studio effects brings us to the end of the album with Dave using the three analogue synths – Moog, Wasp and ubiquitous Obie to create the pulsating rhythmic push of a song dedicated to the biblical story of the Jews living on honey-like manna from heaven. Abstract aural sculpture meets grizzled punk-rockers – you really couldn't make it up!

The end song: *Hallow To Our Men* dabbles with Middle Eastern motifs that hint at mysterious Egyptian tones from the Obie. Whether this was a conscious attempt by Dave to conjure up images of biblical times is subjective, more likely than not it was an amalgamation of Russian folksong and Eastern ideas born from JJ's eclectic musical interests combined with his wont for sweeping and evocative melodies, like *Toiler On The Sea* and *The Raven*.

The final sounds come courtesy of the marvellous Mini-Moog as the mother ship leaves our skyline. And so ends a most unusual, but quintessentially eccentric, Stranglers album... forever and ever.

Boys on film

Stuart Bolton explores the cinematic potential of *The Meninblack*

‘THE MENINBLACK – THE SOUNDTRACK’

...It's there, isn't it? Right at the top of the album cover's flip side... A wind up? I'm sure The Stranglers could wind up a clapped-out cuckoo clock! Or did they once harbour cinematic aspirations for the album? In *Strangled* in 1981, Hugh reveals: "...there is a soundtrack to the *Meninblack* album we're working on ... the film is taking even longer." Hugh's cinematic interest is evident, with *Nosferatu* inspired by the silent film of the same name – and thoughts of making his own clearly crossed his mind when he said: "every track suggested certain scenarios."

Apocalypse Now... Chariots of Fire... Blade Runner... The Meninblack. Just imagine the hype had Hollywood seen the light in 1981 and made a movie about



2001: A Space Oddity

suppressers of UFO information?! Sales of the coolest movie soundtrack would have topped the album charts. On Top Of The Pops, JJ could have had a couple of star actors-in-black up on the big screen for a mimed rendition of *Thrown Away...* and *Just Like Nothing On Earth* might just nudged the Top 75. Then again, *Second Coming* would have been the transatlantic hit, so it wouldn't really matter anyway – The Stranglers would have been stars! But no, it didn't happen, did it? The closest we got was Hugh and Jet's *Black Documentary* in 1982, although it did feature the album's two instrumentals. Then in 1997, Hollywood released 'Men In Black' and the mysterious aura of *The Meninblack* was shattered forever. The UFO theory was a comedy.

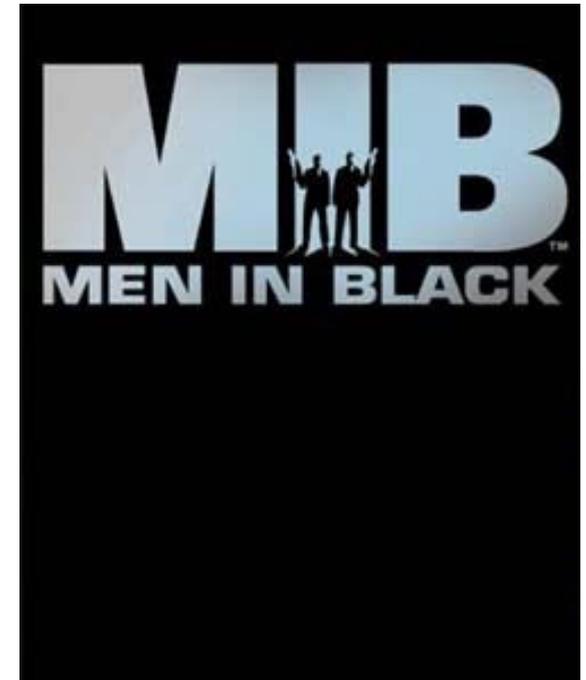
But it's not difficult imagining the album as a soundtrack. The order of tracks suggests a narrative – and could explain why such effort went into the production end. Not only that, the album feels like a soundtrack. *Sinister Waltzinblack* opens... the spaceship lands and we're into *Just Like Nothing On Earth* as engines wind down and occupants familiarise to their new surroundings. The lyrical tongue-twists tell us it's Earth – but not as we know it, and aliens mock earthlings in the chorus, with vocals harking back to *Meninblack* (off *The Raven*) as well as the TV Martians in the "For Mash Get Smash" ads in the 1970s. It's humour, Jim, but not as we know it!

Second Coming speculates on –

surprise, surprise – the second coming of Christ, but who's to say if alien visitors haven't already been here before? Hypnotic and evocative music like *Waiting For the Meninblack* and its instrumental relation, *Meninblack (Waiting For 'Em)* and *Turn, The Centuries Turn* – a song described in *No Mercy* as "begging to be used in a movie soundtrack". (*Incidentally, it was recorded in a film theatre at Startling Studios – Ed*)

The cheeky innuendo of *Two Sunspots* could be slowed in the final bars to become *Meninblack* – questioning our perception of face value. *Four Horsemen* takes us up to the impending doom of the apocalypse, and in total contrast, features some of the most exquisite and beautiful keyboard-playing imaginable as Dave scatters stardust throughout the final refrain. *Thrown Away* is another contrast; poppy, but questioning Man's ability to curate the planet successfully, while the moody *Manna Machine*, ticks and whirrs away with sound effects. Finally, the bleak and barren landscapes are visualised in *Hallow To Our Men* where linear musical passages are interrupted by the MiB Prayer and *Close Encounters*-like finale.

The fact that many of these tracks are not "songs" in the conventional sense again lends itself to the idea that we are listening to a soundtrack – in much the same way that tracks like *Irate Caterpillar* and *Big Bug* were used in *Nosferatu*. Given such evocative imagery, surely film makers would have given their eye tooth to work with a score such as *The Meninblack*. Imagine what Stanley



Kubrick could have conjured up. After all, it was him who made the only film that seriously deals with Man's evolution and his place in the universe in 2001: a *Space Odyssey*. He would surely have been number one choice to turn a concept album into a celluloid reality.

While the album's contrived sound sits uneasily with the bands usual earthiness, after a while it makes sense. It's a semi-techno noise combining science fiction – or faction, even. And sound bites of film dialogue could link the tracks, luring the listener ever more. Is this The Stranglers' best album then, as Hugh Cornwell insists? It's not my favourite cup of tea, but it is a fantastic concept nonetheless. And what a soundtrack it is.

Can somebody get Mr. Kubrick on the line!

MiB Transmission impossible

THE STRANGLERS OBSESSION with all things “in-black” drew to a close with their well researched short film made for BBC West. The Black Documentary was transmitted in March 1982, and provided Hugh and Jet with a forum to explore the polysemic connotations associated with the colour black; they get to mimic the MiB in black suits, drive an old black Cadillac around the southwest England, knock on the doors of supposed UFO witnesses and look menacing. Talking heads come no cleverer than boffin Prof. Gregory of Bristol Uni, here explaining electromagnetic spectrum sound bites. Meanwhile Hugh takes to the streets in search more, with insightful results; he finds a post-punk layman looking for 15 seconds of fame:

Hugh: “What does the colour black mean to you?”

Sid Snot: “I enjoy black cuz it’s a sombre colour... brings out the masochist in me.”

Jet sensibly narrates while the sinister soundtrack of *Turn, the Centuries Turn* and *Waltzinblack* set the eeriness knob to 10.

Producer David Pritchard:

“RPM was a Bristol-based rock magazine-come-arts television series. It featured revues, bands, architecture, fashion and trends – a sort of TV version of The Face. Having recorded some excellent local Stranglers gigs in the early 1980s, we got to know the band quite well – well enough to go out for a beer. At that time, being young and enthusiastic, I thought they were the best band in the whole world – and still do! Hugh and Jet said they wanted to make a film about the colour black for RPM – and being the producer, I said; “why not!” I allocated a talented director to work with them, but it was all Hugh and Jet’s own work – and a very classy bit of film making it was for the time. The thrust of the film was the significance of the colour black – its use in religion, the judiciary, the secret service, the dollar bill, not to mention coal and oilin essence, power. I remember Hugh and Jet saying at the time that something might happen, and the film would never be shown. I didn’t know whether to believe them, however, we did spend an unusual amount of time looking over our shoulders on the way home! I now understand the film has since gone missing... and I shall try to find out if this is the case... I will get in touch with you when I have some news... By the way; because I liked The Stranglers so much, I used *Waltzinblack* for the opening titles for the many series I did with Keith Floyd – and Peaches for the closing credits.”

Director Steve Poole:

“I remember having serious concerns during filming. There were conspiracy theories around at that time, and the topics the documentary covered were very heavy... the design of the dollar bill, for instance... you don’t know who is going to see this. It made us both feel very paranoid – I wouldn’t have been surprised if any one of us had got a knock on the door from a Man In Black! So Hugh and Jet agreed to meet us one Sunday night in a pub not far from Jet’s to discuss our concerns. You see, we were new to this- they weren’t. They just thought we were weird, but we ended up agreeing to carry on filming.”



Who are the men in black?

Andy Helgesen-in-black

The Men In Black – who are they? Over the years, there have been many reports of visitations by the mysterious Men In Black, with many witnesses noting their odd behaviour. Naturally, they are described as being dressed in black suits, black hats, white shirts and black ties, but also with a poor grasp of the English language. They also seem unfamiliar of basic customs. Physically, they appear quite short and thin, with almost Oriental features.

In 1952, horror and sci-fi writer Albert K. Bender formed the International Flying Saucer Bureau in Connecticut USA. One day three mysterious men in dark suits got out of a Cadillac and paid him a visit. After suffering a bout of dizziness he went to his bedroom. As he lay there he became aware of the three shadowy figures joining him. He described them looking like clergymen with hats similar to a Homburg. Under the shade of the brim, their eyes were lit up and focused on Bender. An intolerable pain appeared from around his eyes as they warned him to forget his study on UFOs. They went on to explain the US government was aware of the alien origin of UFOs since 1951 – and the reason why they were here. Bender revealed his encounter a decade on, claiming they were aliens in disguise whose purpose was to extract sea water, having flown him to the Antarctic to scare him into submission.

Another report involves Carlos Rossi and a strange mystery object as he fished on the River Serchio, near San Pietro a

Vico, Italy. Like Bender, he at first kept it quiet, but when he returned a few weeks later, he was approached by a strange man in a dark suit. He had an extremely angular shape, speaking Italian with what sounded like a Scandinavian accent. He questioned Rossi about whether he'd seen anything unusual flying in the area recently. Unnerved by the strangers demeanour, he denied everything. The man offered Rossi a cigarette, and he took it, noticing a peculiar gold mark on it. Upon the first inhalation, he felt nauseous and the man snatched the cigarette away from him and threw it away, before leaving.

In 1964 in Cumbria, UK, fireman Jim Templeton took a photograph of his young daughter out on the marshes overlooking the Solway Firth. He noticed a strange atmosphere, with cows in a nearby field appearing distressed. When the film was processed, a man in a silvery white space suit appeared in the photo behind the girl. The police were informed, and soon Kodak offered free films for life for anyone solving the mystery. However, the police insisted it was a double exposure with one negative accidentally printed on top of another during the processing. But then, a few weeks after the incident, Templeton received a visit from two men in dark suits who got out from a Jaguar. The men referred to each other by number, and took Templeton to where he'd taken the photograph, asking about the weather conditions on the day, the activities of the local bird life in the area, and so on. They then tried to force him to

admit he had photographed an ordinary man. Templeton refused, and they became angry, and drove off leaving him there to find his own way home.

Robert Richardson from Toledo, Ohio was driving in his car on 16th July, 1967. He suddenly collided with a UFO, and turned back to find a piece of metal lying in the road, and he took it to a UFO group. Two Men in Black with an Asian appearance arrived and questioned him about his encounter. The black Cadillac they came in was a 1953 model, but in pristine condition despite being fourteen years old. Richardson wrote down the registration plate, but when it was checked for authenticity, the number did not exist. A week later two different Men In Black paid Richardson a visit, and tried to get him to admit that he had not seen a UFO – and they asked him for the piece of metal he'd picked up from the road. Once he told them where it was, they warned him to get it back – if he wanted his wife to stay pretty.

In May 1967, a man with an olive complexion and pointed face introduced himself to a female UFO witness from Minnesota as Major Richard French, who then complained of an upset stomach. The woman offered him a bowl of jelly, which he picked up and attempted to drink before he was shown how to eat it using a spoon. One week after spotting a UFO, an English housewife heard

a door slam while she was at home. She went to see who was there, and found what she described as a horrible little old man, about 5' tall in a black suit tie and a funny black hat on. His face was strange-looking and his eyes were dark. Suddenly he grinned at her, and she noticed he was wearing lipstick. He took off his hat to reveal a poorly fitted hair piece, black in colour. He told her: "We would ask you to cease your studies," adding, "the lights in the sky always the lights in the sky." He then told her: "Cease and dream easy..." before giving her a long stare, and walking back down the driveway. Right away, she



Hallow To Our Men

Chris Balden

The Gospel According To The Meninblack was made with the aid of drugs. Engineers worked in shifts, and hi-tech drum loops were made from tapes wound round pencils around the studio. They got the sounds right to form one of the best Stranglers albums of the 1980s. It must have been the most advanced too – right from *Waltzinblack* and the space ship's arrival – to the final track, *Hallow To Our Men*, where it exits our planet. At the Glasgow Apollo I stood and watched in awe as this final track came into itself... the winding instrumentation became almost hypnotic in the sweat and the heat. With the album in my hands, I wondered if the Last Supper sleeve bordered blasphemy – or were the band merely making us think? I'm sure the album, particularly this closing track triggered off something within my subconscious, something that made me more receptive, and respectful of the extraordinary.

I speculated about Men In Black, I still do. Are they from this world, or they aliens from another planet or dimension? Reptilian? Greys, Nordics, or Horlocks? Suppressors of UFO eyewitness information? Jet's account of his UFO sighting (*Strangled, Volume 2 Number 3*) made fascinating reading: standing in his kitchen washing up, he noticed this bright light move across the night sky... One night in the winter of 2004, I was standing in my garden observing Saturn when three lights suddenly appeared together, silently and slowly, moving south to north. There were no navigation lights, and I'm convinced this was no satellite. It was a UFO.

There's a book available called 'You Can't Tell The People' of strange sightings at an American-leased RAF air base in Suffolk back around that time. Both the British Government and the RAF suppressed eyewitness reports of suspicious flashing lights and in the aftermath, denied hardcore evidence, such as suspicious marks left on the ground and high levels of radiation. Secret agents visited witnesses to hush them up, and the cover-up is now referred to as Britain's very own Roswell. But why can't you tell the people? Is this why we know so little about Men In Black? They have had the finger pointed at them for the deaths of Munro and Kennedy.... And there are stories of MiBs present at Witches Sabbaths.... witnesses say they have the symbol of the eye of Horus..... perhaps they work for the Nation Of The Third Eye? A powerful symbol linked to Sirius... Within the confines of *The Stranglers* mysterious fifth album, I am still left wondering... and waiting.

Further reading:

<http://www.ufoevidence.org/topics/meninblack.htm>

and also:

You Can't Tell The People, Georgina Bruni.

(Pan Macmillan, 2001. ISBN: 033039021X)

(Sidgwick & Jackson, 2000. ISBN: 0283063580)

<http://www.rendleshamincident.co.uk/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/You_Can%27t_Tell_the_People

<http://www.forteanimes.com/review/rendlesham.shtml#Easton>

felt dizzy and crawled to bed where she slept for three hours, whereupon she woke to find the house smelling of burnt rubber.

In January 1976, a Lancashire woman had a terrifying encounter. After receiving a series of strange phone calls at her parents house, two men arrived – one holding a black box, the other with one arm missing – and quizzed the girl about a UFO sighting in the presence of her parents. It was reported the family felt powerless to act, as if they were under a strange spell.

September 1976 saw a doctor's son encounter a couple who were dressed in black. The woman appeared physically lop-sided, and the man wore lipstick, which was smeared – odd fitting clothes. They asked some inane questions, and added they were running low on energy.

On the evening of September 11th 1976, Dr. Herbert Hopkins from Maine, USA was alone in his house when he received a telephone from someone claiming to be from a UFO group in New Jersey. He asked to come over to discuss a case Hopkins was involved in.

No sooner had he put down the phone, a man appeared at the house. Once more, the visitor was dressed in black, but noticed he had no eyebrows or eyelashes. During the conversation that ensued, the stranger drew his gloved hand across his face, smearing the lipstick that he was wearing. Hopkins realised the make-up had given the impression of having lips. He spoke in monotone throughout, and told Hopkins he had two coins in his pocket, asking him to take one out and place it in the palm of his hand. The coin turned silvery blue and then disappeared altogether. He then told Hopkins the coin will never be seen again, and to destroy all UFO records. The

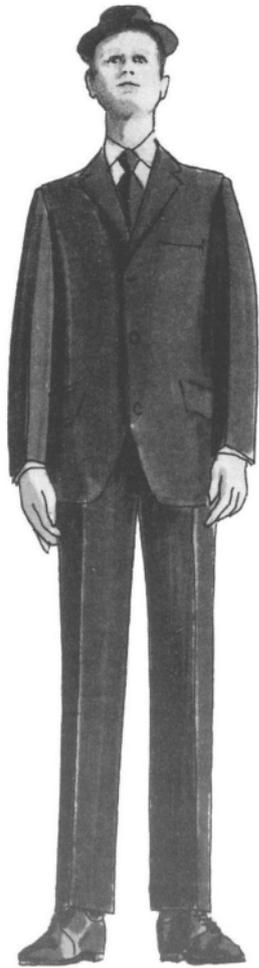
monotone voice then began to slow dramatically, saying his energy was running low. He stood with difficulty and left in an unsteady manner. A flash of blue light appeared and the stranger vanished like the coin. Hopkins family returned later that night to find him sitting in the kitchen with a loaded revolver in his hand.

Another doctor was asked to examine a boy's arm which was marked with an unusual abrasion. He asked the boy how he got them, to which he replied "the space doctors." He went on to explain how he'd followed a low flying plane near his house, and was confronted by a group of strange people who took him hostage, subjecting him to a lot of physical and IQ tests.

Five years on, the same doctor received a visit from two Men In Black, asking questions about the boy.

John Keel is one of the most learned scholars on the subject of the Men In Black. He too has had an encounter, referring to these strange entities as cadavers – people who appear to have died a long time, with their clothes hanging off them and their flesh, pasty white. Even the FBI were not immune from the Men In Black. In January 1953, two tall, emaciated men arrived in Los Angeles. They were given temporary work by the Director of the Attorneys Office, and it was discovered they could trace missing persons in a fraction of the normal time. It was also reported that they possessed strange hands. The bones were different, and there were no joints. One of them had leaned over a steel top filing cabinet, and his hand gave an indentation of about 1 ½".

The men then mysteriously disappeared, and the FBI were left with this damaged filing cabinet. So they



carried out tests on the indentation, and discovered the force that caused it would equate to 2,000 lbs – and contained traces of two dozen unknown elements. The Mysterious Men In Black – inspirational for The Strangers album, The Gospel According To The Meninblack, and the possible link to the strange chain of events that ensued, attracting two years of misfortune. So perhaps if you see a strange object in the sky...

Keep it quiet!

The real Gospel according to the Meninblack... according to the webinblack

Dom Pilgrim runs down the latest oldest theories...

What is the ancient mythology behind this dark album? The Meninblack have been popularised in movies, cartoon books and have been the subject of serious investigation by Ufologists and such like since the 1950s (*see separate feature*).

While the MIB are merely characters in the mythology, the bigger picture goes back a long way... all the way to the beginning according some [theorists](#).

The current consensus seems to place the MIB as a kind of enforcing agency – the CIA of the dark force that really controls the planet: the Illuminati. The MIB are said to represent the Nation of the Third Eye (according to John Keel). The accepted logo of the Illuminati is the Eye in the Pyramid – the very same as seen on the back of a dollar bill. The pyramid symbol takes us to Egypt.

The pyramids of Giza are aligned in a formation that perfectly matches the constellation of Orion, above. The Egyptians' chief god was Osiris, symbolized by this constellation, and his wife by Sirius (the Dog Star). One theory for the function of a pyramid is that it is a vehicle for the Pharaoh, a demi-godlike being, to return "home". Tunnelways and passages lead directly from the burial chamber to the centre of the Orion constellation at specific times of the year (July 1st).

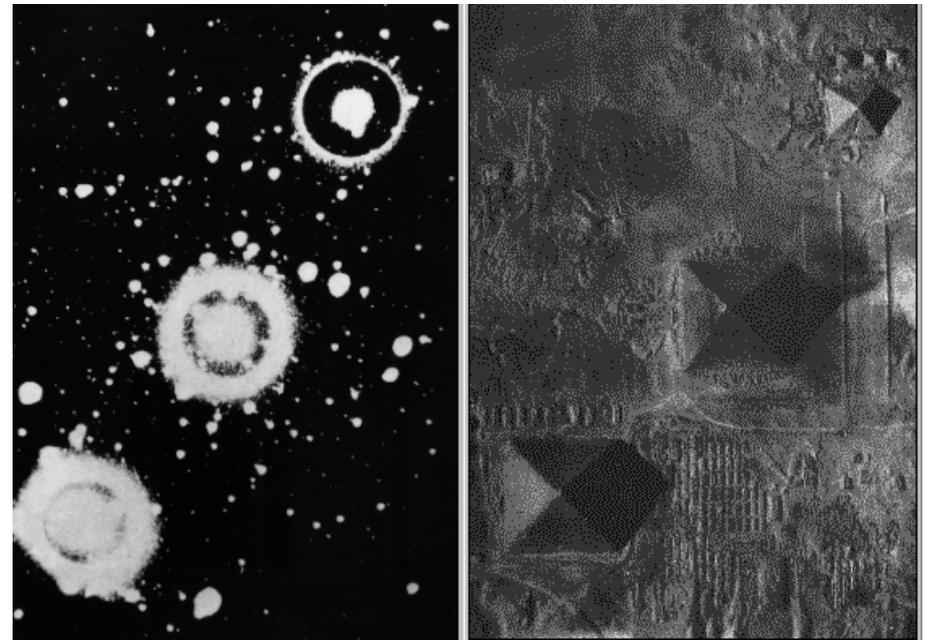
So who's going back? Ancient texts from Sumerian and Hebrew culture (Old Testament) are littered with references to

beings known as "[Anunnaki](#)" (Sumerian: "those who came down from the heavens"; or in Hebrew "Nephilim" ("those who have fallen").

In Sumerian Mythology they were a pantheon of good and evil gods and goddesses who came to Earth to create the human race. Some writers, such as Zeccharia Sitchin, believe that aliens visited earth some 400,000 years ago, purely for our gold. Humans are the result of genetic cross-breeding, possibly cloning techniques between themselves, the Anunnaki, and Homo Erectus, the

then apex of post Neanderthal ape-like creatures. The resulting cross breed Homo Sapiens is us.

This empire of theirs is based on slavery, expanded from its origins in the Indus Valley, Mesopotamia (Iraq) to Egypt, India and beyond... But humans had varying degrees of Anunnaki genes depending on their role. Those with the highest amount being the Illuminated ones, designated local kings, pharoes, heroes... charged with controlling the more animalistic, more human masses. For their number was increasing steadily....



The constellation of Orion, left, pyramids at Giza, right

In Genesis in the Old Testament, once seemingly innocent Bible-speak, can now be seen to be telling us a bit more than maybe we once thought when reading this at school.... From Genesis 6:1-4

When mankind began to increase and spread all over the earth and daughters were born to them...the sons of the gods saw the daughters of men were beautiful; so they took for themselves such women as they chose.

In those days when the sons of the gods had intercourse with the daughters of men and got children by them, the Nephilim were on earth. They were the heroes of old, men of renown

The Bible isn't the only text that hints of other-worldly things... India's Mahabharata, written perhaps as long ago as 3000 BC is said to recount great wars and events that maybe included the Indus Valley civilisations. At several points in the text, the authors describe what are called Virmanas, or 'flying machines'. They are quite clearly described as flying vehicles used for military purposes and are often piloted by Indian gods. One of these is called the Agneya weapon and it appears in one classic passage:

A blazing missile possessed of the radiance of smokeless fire was discharged. A thick gloom suddenly encompassed the hosts. All points of the compass were suddenly enveloped in darkness. Evil bearing winds began to blow. Clouds reared into the higher air, showering blood. The very elements seemed confused. The sun appeared to spin round. The world, scorched by the heat of that weapon, seemed to be in a fever

An early nuclear device?

Eventually, it is likely the original settlers either died out, or moved on... leaving the resulting offspring with the high concentration of alien genetic

material and the knowledge and wisdom they possessed to take care of the planet themselves.

Texts such as the Bible served as a mask to the real story. The idea of an omnipotent god perfectly serves the purposes of social control. Knowingly or not, characters in the Bible, interact with these god/alien beings at regular intervals... Jacob is famous for his ladder. But maybe he is also the first recorded alien abductee

And he [Jacob] dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said.... thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.... And Jacob awaked out of his sleep... And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! (Genesis 28:12-17.)

And Ezekiel also has a few cosmic visions:

And I looked and behold a whirlwind came out of the north. A great cloud and a fire and out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And every one had four faces and every one had four wings. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a Man, and the face of a Lion on the right side, and they four had the face of an Ox on the left side and they four also had the face of an Eagle. Their appearance and their work was as if a wheel within a wheel; as for their rings, they were so

high they were dreadful and their rings were full of eyes, round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went with them for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. (Ezekiel 1; 4-20)

Ezekiel was a prophet working some 500 years BC, comforting and preaching to the Israelites exiled in Babylon. By this time, the gods were communing with their brighter humans, and using these prophets to keep order in the various tribes roaming the planet.

No free will

But what of the MIB? Alien mythologists draw a distinction between two types of entity: The Nordic and the Grey. The Nordics equate to the demigod, direct descendants of the Anunnaki visitors. The Illuminati as described.

The greys possess no free will, smaller anthropoids with huge black eyes. One Sumerian story describes these creatures as being developed to watch over all the inhabitants of Earth as loyal and unquestioning servants ... the enforcers of the alien will – the MIB. Their strange speech and odd habits, penchant for dark glasses and pallid skin could tally with this theory.

So, after the great Flood of Noah, the Nordics removed themselves from the earth, retiring in to the sky, or the mountains, or secret places. The rulers gave way to the rule of Kings. And passed into mythology; a great example of these yarns being the legends of the Greek gods. Here they clearly describe a distinction between the gods and the heroes and the ordinary man. In Western esotericism, the creation of secret societies, cabals, brotherhoods and cults existed to preserve the knowledge, and pass on the secrets only to the chosen few, in order that social

control be preserved.

To monitor and coach the various leaders and keep an eye on things, the master shape-shifters were never far from the action. It is generally believed by hard core conspiracists that the Three Wise Men visiting Jesus at his birth were MIB in disguise. They weren't following the bright star, that was their ship. Jesus obviously had a high concentration of Anunnaki DNA, and hence a key part of the Illuminated bloodline. And thus, his birth needed a bit of attention. Suffice it to say at this point that the author Dan Brown may have even missed the real conspiracy in his Da Vinci Code book...

The Illuminati have always had one aim, control. In the old days, it was easy, what with the population of the earth being so small... and getting monuments to their greatness built, such as pyramids and such like, was easy. It also seems that they like to leave their mark, offer clues. Such as the arrangement of the pyramids of Giza in the shape of the belt of Orion. Is this their homeland?

Nowadays the Illuminati, (the name has been used in retrospect here) exist to achieve the goal of complete control over the planet: ie, the one-world government. What with population expansion and the creation of nations, countries cultures and the carefully fostered illusion of free will, there is still work to be done. And anyone who threatens this plan, by "proving" the existence of the alien genetic project, is likely to com up against "the boys" or MIB, that most loyal and dispassionate servant...

And what do the MIB make of George Bush and Tony Blair, messing about occupying Iraq..? Well they might be very interested indeed. Iraq is the heart of the Sumerian civilisation... and maybe the keeper of a few a sought-after secrets...

Waving their 'get out of jail free' card in Nice, the band are back in England, airing new material from *The Meninblack*

Being there...

The Lyceum Ballroom, London 27 July 1980, Gary Kent



SHAH SHAH A Go Go kicks off the torrid night with speed and spunk – on the very day the Shah dies, proving Nostradamus ain't the only prophet. Tonight is the hereafter. It's also fucking hot. There's a heatwave in the capital and it's like Kew Gardens in here. Bodies get tugged out the crowd like boiled eggs from a bubbling pot. Fifty weeks of shit weather and suddenly there's a stack of adjectives to chose from; torrid, moist, clammy, close, humid, muggy... your super sizzling, sultry sexy soaraway Sun.

Imagine being a Strangler... Not content with a five stretch (weeks, that is) for drugs possession in March, last month sees Hugh, Jet and Jean Jacques in French jail for inciting a crowd to riot following the aborted gig at Nice University due to the venues intermittent power supply. Then égalité and fraternité went out the window, so to speak, and they lost their liberté – *ou la mort*, in the case of the caged JJ, who wanted to end it all right there in the cell, according to press reports.

Several uninspired 'jailhouse rock' tabloid titles later, The Stranglers IV are bailed and back in Blighty – and back in business on the *Who Wants The World?* tour. With the possibility of a 10 stretch (yes, years this time) hanging in the balance, the future tonight sounded

distinctly and unbelievably bright. But that's The Stranglers for you.

Tonight IS the future. It's the last night – and I witness The Stranglers at full throttle (pun intended) – and how! The crowd go mental: the animated sea of black bomber jackets jostle and sway, the mayhem is engulfing, stifling, yet infectious. But the euphoria soon turns dysphoric and uneasy. They're only one song in and it's pandemonium down the front. I'm trapped. I turn round to my mate, and he's disappeared into the



All pics: Lyceum, 27 July 1980

blackness. The heat is overbearing and oppressive. Bowing out, I shift sideways, backwards, outwards, elbowing, edging away, to a darkened stairwell. Gotta get some air. Up a flight, up another. My lone ascent goes unseen and unchecked but still I claw higher like a panther to lofty echelons with that ludicrously pernicious bass throb charting my path.

A seamless segue way into *Ice* beneath – and I suddenly find myself on a ledge looking down on the manic spectacle. The view is superior from this summit, the air is pure and clean. The marvellous portal I am about to witness is breathtaking – all flashing white lights, all luminescent and wondrous, Here I am, up in the theatre's Gods, safe and sound, and I can see everything; spindly legs-in-black, set lists gaffered onto monitors and amps, shapes of hairy roadies in the shadows, banks of keyboards with tiny red lights glowing, battered snare skins and scattered cymbals and electric fans billowing Jet's face into misshapes and playing havoc with Dave's locks in the songs ice-tingling closing passages. Hagakure with perfume... Finally, a reprieve. Hugh:

"Wotcha London. Erm – I've just been kindly donated a shoe up here which is really good but I unfortunately I've got two feet, so I mean, if you really want to give me clothes, then make sure they come in pairs, cos really they're no use to me just one, right?"

One shoe, three songs – three singers: *Four Horsemen* – a new song, sung by Dave – with an instrumental coda to end on, and die for. Shameless creation here: the future looks brighter and brighter.



Then a familiar bass stab stamps a boot print on the intro to *Toiler On The Sea*. I can see JJ bobbing and weaving his stage domain in front of a hunched up, twitching Jet. Hugh with his collar up snipes at the mic and gnarling guitar before Dave's burbling organ wizardry, magically morphing into a whooshing wave of white noise. Hugh:

"I'd like to take this opportunity to dedicate the gig to someone..."

The Ayatollah...? Malcolm Owen, maybe? The Nashville pub, even?

"... Inspector Clouseau."

Duchess, one year on, gives affirmation and afflux of taste – but now more new: what's this? Bass drum, four to the floor, as the crowd clap in time to a buzzy synth riff, and not unlike a 12" disco mix either! Enter the bass line, and the JJ vocals:

"If ever you had counted..." Delivered in black, menacing Gallic pomp and circumstance, this stinks of a hit song...

"Even though we tried, time wasn't on our side..." JJ dictates with with cool, cool Sparta in his eyes and DMs on his feet. *Hanging Around* contrastingly, sounds fly-blown and bloated in comparison, and then there's The Lord's Prayer...?! Jet's ride cymbal cracks through the ether like

Set list:

Intro; Waltzinblack; Shah Shah A Go Go; Ice; Four Horsemen; Toiler On The Sea; Duchess; Thrown Away; Hanging Around; Hallow To Our Men; Waiting For The Meninblack; Down In The Sewer; Who Wants The World? Princess Of The Streets; Just Like Nothing On Earth; Tank; Nuclear Device; Genetix; Baroque Bordello; The Raven.

a reveille, endorsed by a canon-fire kick drum, futurist synth notes, surf guitar, and a quasi-Raven bi-note bass line. A tumultuous and sinister build goes into a rhomboid jazzy 5/4 shape, meshing the cardinal points into a bewildering maze that trips into a mantra chant: "Forever and ever... Forever and ever..." More Hugh:

"Are you all in mourning or summink? I know the Shah died today but this is getting a bit ridiculous!" There's been a few mutations down the front – they're dropping off like flies.. so who do you think's gonna be next in the old school of going down? John Wayne's already died."

Waiting For The Meninblack – flashing strobe lights, Cardice and smoke mixed with dope; is it me or does Hugh look like a puppet? Hugh halts and cups a hand over his brow. With an arm outstretched, at first, he points right at me, before lowering the angle of his arm:

"Something has struck me about what this bit up here – has anyone seen The Muppets? Just a load of Muppets up there. It's great...If you got strings up there, those guys at the back, can you just go like this with them? Maybe they'll move their arms around? Aah – there you go. There you are, working... thought as much."

Waldorf and Staedtler wouldn't dare interrupt...

"Call out the flying doctor, Dave..." signalling *Nuclear Device*, played at an

incredible rate, with the climactic *Genetix*, *Baroque Bordello*, and magic ends with the swansong of *The Raven*.

Being here tonight,, witnessing four artisans with wings unclipped at the top of their creative tree, liberated and let loose, left no doubt in my mind of their loftiness in the stature department. Who could measure up to The Stranglers? What other band can do what they do – and do it so well?

But now I'm left hollow. I'm empty, like the vacant stage beneath me. Too scared to find the bands dressing room, I retrace my steps in reverse to search out my missing mate as The Cure's *Another Journey By Train* fills the trashed auditorium. He ain't around. Ushered into a chilly Wellington Street, there's no place left to go except Charing Cross station. I step along The Strand in sweaty black shirt and tie mentally reliving my night to myself.

Tube train, brain drain. Key in door, I'm back at home in pensive solitude. The reassuring snore from my parents room fades as I quietly shut off and withdraw into my zone. The post-gig gloom saturates the room in melancholic come down. A soaking Strangled mag comes out from my shirt all fragmented and wet. The little typed letters make little sense as I lie back and relive the event in my mind again and again: a synth riff – JJ bobbing on the spot, pouting at the mic, puffing out his pecs, pouring out a low-baritone drone, draped in black, Precision on pelvis... How did it go...?

"Even though we tried, time wasn't on our side... then there came a day, we threw it all away..."

Blown Away.. Blown Aw – "

Well, that's how it sounded to me. But I'm no Clouseau!



MiBs on tour!

Gary Cook recalls the Lancaster University gig (28 February 1981)

Part of the fun as a Stranglers fan is the expectation a new album brings, and of course, the accompanying tour. Since 1979, the bands set lists had seen them shying away from the singles – 1981's live outings continued in this vein with the bulk of the set drawing upon the *Black And White* and *The Raven* albums interspersed with *The Gospel According To The Meninblack*.

This album may have divided the critics, but as ever, The Stranglers were undeterred and uncompromising.

With the use of dry ice and predominately white stage lighting, the strobes lit up Lancaster in a psychedelic maelstrom on par with the Syd Barrett Floyd at their hallucinatory peak – like in *Just Like Nothing On Earth* – with Hugh's Robertson Gollywog badge standing out on his lapel.

They were still unmistakably Strangleresque... with the surprise addition of *Meninblack*. The segues of *Second Coming* and *Meninblack – Shah Shah A Go Go* and *Hallow To Our Men* and *Nuclear Devise* and *Genetix* left no doubt as to The Stranglers' musical ability and dexterity.

Barry Spooner went to more than one gig...

I was lucky enough to catch the band four times during the Meninblack UK Tour of 1981. The first gig was at Rock City in Nottingham where JJ jumped into the crowd to sort out a punter who had been gobbing at him. Classic! At Manchester, all I can remember is that it was freezing cold, even in the Apollo. We sat there and shivered, and afterwards, ended up roughing it overnight in British Rail waiting rooms with my two mates. Then



onto the De Montford Hall in Leicester where I was caught trying to sneak onstage by JJ. Suddenly I came face to face, almost touching noses with a smiling JJ... I scrambled back into the crowd immediately! Then, the final UK date at London's Rainbow, where I recall someone from the crowd invited up onstage to sing *Hanging Around*. They said he was a their greatest fan. I wonder if he still is? Who was he? Overall, the new material, in my opinion, didn't stand up to the classics of old – and quite often the *MiB* tracks were all over the place live. And I remember long pauses between songs while Dave struggled to get his keyboards right. Perhaps technology let them down?

Things didn't go to schedule for the Cleethorpes gig, as Mitch K reveals

I played the *MiB* album to death from right when I got it – it was a “grower” after I was a bit bemused by it at first! But my anticipation and excitement was building up at the prospect of catching the band play in Cleethorpes. It was almost too much to bear, even though it was a horrible schlepp in the car to get to from Hull; there was no Humber Bridge back then. But I had company for the journey – I gave a friend of a friend a lift in return for petrol money.

We arrived at the venue that afternoon and were instantly surprised to find the front doors wide open. With nobody in sight, we went inside, to find Hugh standing there in the main hall, with a cup of coffee in his hand three feet in front of me! I nearly pissed my pants! I didn't

know what to say, but I was desperate to say something to him. I racked my brain for inspiration. I then recalled one of his onstage retorts to a request for *Peaches*, so I asked him:

“Are we gonna have some Peaches tonight, Hugh, or has it been a bad summer?”

He just smiled – and then he dropped the bombshell. He said the gig might have to be pulled.

I was distraught. I didn't know what to say. Apparently, the stage wasn't big enough, and I could now see half a dozen or so council workers rebuilding the stage under Jet's direction supervision!

But then work suddenly stopped, and everyone disappeared out of the venue. The moment was gone, as quickly as it came, and the gig was indeed pulled. We ended up consoling ourselves in a nearby pub, and a couple of pints later, and lots of table-top pacman, we grabbed a takeaway from the Kentucky Fried Chicken and headed down the M180 for the trip home. What a disaster! But could it get any worse?

My car – a poxy Vauxhall Firenza – was playing up. It wouldn't top 40mph – which was unusual, as I could normally get 55 out of her! On top of that, it was VERY foggy and dangerous, at which point, my passenger threw up his Kentucky in the car – with an hour and a half to drive ahead. Parked up on the hard shoulder, thoughts crossed my mind whether or not I should leave him here. I bet The Stranglers would have! To my eternal regret, I didn't! Not the best of nights.



Hammersmith Odeon, 15 February 1981

I was a teenage 'dead body'

Edinburgh Playhouse – 24/2/81, Donald Mackay



It all started so calmly. Sitting in my room at Pollock Halls, doing anything to avoid revising for my term exams, I flicked through the Sounds Xmas double issue, looking for signs of the dates for the upcoming tour to support the as yet unreleased new LP. This Thursday ritual left me disappointed this time, so I resigned myself to the compensation of the extra features and photos in the special issue. Yes, Debbie Harry was still looking more appealing than Ian Dury or Elvis

Costello!

But wait a minute, near the back of the paper, hidden low down on a page in a little section of its own, I finally spied the all important heading “Stranglers Tour Dates.” This was more like it! I guess the details had been added at the last minute, probably cos the Nice riot court case was only settled late in the year, so the tour announcement must have been delayed. This was the first news of the dates. You can guess that my text books remained firmly shut, as I grabbed my coat and headed out on my half hour march



towards the Playhouse Box Office. A man on a mission.

I thought I’d be in with a chance of getting good seats, so I wanted to see for myself what was available. “I’m looking for tickets for The Stranglers,” I said earnestly. The woman behind the counter happily replied, “You can have any one you like,” and showed me the totally empty seating plan – no seats sold! I couldn’t believe it. I was the first one down there for tickets! (I presume others had also missed the small music press tour dates item). Blimey. What do I do now? I hadn’t even thought who I would get to go with me, and I must have had a bit of a mad turn cos I decided in my excitement to buy nine tickets! I thought front row centre stalls seats would be seriously special (how naïve!). Everyone will want one, I reasoned, so I bought the extra tickets for some of my uni mates who’d never seen the band live before. Yeah, give the guys some decent education!

I eventually got rid of all eight tickets, because The Stranglers were big enough to be of interest to even casual music fans. Of course, I could never understand why these people couldn’t quite see the band’s greatness. I expected them all to be converted by the gig (naivety strikes again!)

We have come to make you function

This was the real deal. A classy 3,000 seater venue, sold out signs, and a sea of



black clad youth converging to see their band; mainly guys, but also several foxy punkettes to fall in love with and dream about later. The merchandise stall was doing a roaring trade as all the new stuff got snapped up. And the real sign that the band was big business: the Scousers were on the pavement with their wash ‘em once only T-shirts and tempting but flimsy posters. They weren’t getting my cash, but good to see them there though!

I was expecting my one and only time in a Row A seat to be something of a privilege, but things didn’t go as smoothly as I had hoped! We were seated comfortably slap-bang in front of the stage, watching the roadies do their gaffer tape thing, waiting for the band’s entrance. The dickie-bowed bouncers were on patrol, making sure you stayed in your seat – what a joke! The first surprise: Waltzinblack came over the speakers and this seemed really unusual to hear a band song before they came on stage. Were they going to join in the playing? In no time the lights went down, a massive cheer



went up and I casually got up and moved to the front, only to be hit by a wall of bodies slamming into my back as every teenage headcase in Edinburgh charged to the front. Mayhem ensued! This was not what I had been expecting!

I was right at the front, crushed against a flimsy wooden barrier, which alarmingly looked like it had very little support, staring down at a 15 foot drop to the concrete floor of the orchestra pit. Aargh! To make things even less pleasant, there was a stream of nutters clambering over me so they could get to the front to jump over the wide gap to the stage (bonkers!) and later dive feet first back.

I was getting really pissed off with this but couldn't move! Stuck with nowhere to go, and trying to avoid getting a boot in the face, it couldn't get any worse...could it?

During the first couple of numbers, I was so distracted that I was hardly noticing what was happening on stage; not really listening! It was hard not to look down at the concrete below, thinking this barrier could go quite easily. Then I noticed some movement down there in the gloom, with a couple of guys running backwards and forwards in and out of view. Eh? What's that all about? Then it started to dawn on me...things were not all hunky dory down there. I realised they were manhandling big objects and trying to prop them up under the floor, the same floor that me and a few hundred pogoing nutters were bouncing around on. Hmmm, not the greatest feeling on OOUARTH!

By this time I was very worried for my safety, and instinctively knew I just had to get out of there, no matter what it took. I had no interest whatever in what was happening on stage! It took all my strength, and two or three songs, to get

out of the madness at the front. Hugh confirmed my thoughts by announcing that the floor had caved in, although he seemed to make this into a joke! I doubt if he knew how serious a situation this was, but I certainly wasn't laughing.

Once I got out of the throng I realised that the bouncers were trying to get everyone away from the front area, as there were now some huge holes in the wooden floor, which made pogoing a bit risky! All in all, the start of this gig was a scary and unpleasant experience, plus I was missing the bleeding performance!

Hugh made a few comments throughout the set about dead bodies down the front, and hoping we'd brought our own ambulances, which weren't too amusing at the time, I can tell you. When I hear the comments now on the bootleg I have mixed feelings. Kind of funny, but pretty serious really!

It is a bit weird how the band just carried on with the set as if nothing was happening, but I suppose they didn't realise what a close call it had been for the sardines at the front. Someone suggested to me that maybe Hugh's apparent ambivalence was chemically induced. Who knows?

Strangely, since this gig, I have never been that keen on getting a front row seat! During the less hectic moments I managed to take a few snaps with my low tech 110 instamatic. One of them shows a fan looking at the cleared area where the holes were, rather than looking at the band!

Mixed reactions

I think this was the gig where one of the stage invaders just didn't look the part at all (green parka and baggy green trousers). JJ let him dance near him for a while but must have thought the same as

us, cos he eventually moved over to the impostor and sideways booted him up the arse, and he went flying across the floor. JJ then adopted the facial expression of the innocent schoolboy prankster. Funny as fuck (as they say). And The Stranglers wonder why they kept losing their fan base!

It was surprising to hear them do the song Meninblack live, and I liked it. Appropriately, hanging over the front of the circle was a banner, with clever MiB LeTtERinG, saying "We have come to make you function." Nice touch.

Not everyone I knew liked the gig. In fact, a couple of my pals walked out half way through! They were expecting something a bit easier on the ear, and the MiB stuff was a bit too much for them on first listen! They weren't the only people who drifted away from the band around this period, as the MiB album put off a lot of people.

The local Student newspaper gave the gig a stinker of a review, saying the music was "dirge, dirge, dirge". The student trendy who wrote it was subjected to my staring hatred every time I saw him. I really felt like punching him for having the audacity to give the lads a poor review!

For me, the overall gig had an electric atmosphere, and though the bootleg confirms that the band were superb that night, playing a fantastically uncompromising set of challenging songs, this gig will always stick in my memory mainly for the off-stage events. Do you think the Meninblack had anything to do with it?

P.S. Next time you listen to this bootleg and think the crowd noise is faint, spare a thought for us Toilers in the mayhem. I'm just glad I got out in one piece!

No it's not just a chance to use up the editors leftover puns! Here, aficionados-in-black say what *The Gospel According To The Meninblack* ...

Means to me!

Turn, the table turn

Jim Drury

The day before I interviewed Hugh for Song By Song for the chapter on MiB I played my vinyl LP. Halfway through side one it stopped for no reason; the needle was still on the record but the record had stopped in its tracks, despite the power supply being on. There was no explanation. Weird.

Turn, the table turn (reprise)

Jamie Radley

I was only six when it came out, so I didn't know much about it, but got the vinyl when I was thirteen: I played it to death on my little Asda record player – it wobbled all over the place and the sound quality left a lot to be desired. My mother came upstairs once, looking very serious. She said: "Dad doesn't like that weird record you keep playing – stop playing it!" MiB was my first CD purchase when CDs came out – and suddenly the guitar cuts right through like a sheet of steel: cold and metallic, and essential with headphones. I met Hugh recently and told him, and he agreed with me.

Techno notice

Davy McLaughlin

It was never a Techno album despite subsequent claims from Mr. Burnel. Sure it was inventive and technically proficient, and most definitely un-punk (and why not?) For me, it was a

groundbreaking, radical departure from the previous, not too unlike Radiohead's output after OK Computer. And no doubt just as alienating (pun intended) for existing fans who couldn't handle the pace. Progressive and hypnotic in places, it could have been a film soundtrack to a drug fuelled UFO abduction. The Men in Black have never sounded blacker, and let's not forget the strange chain of events that almost engulfed the band. While it was bold, creepy, funny and weird, it was ahead of its time. But Techno? No way!

Hear Hugh here

Mitch K

I just listened to MiB for the first time in ages – with headphones and a joint – and now I realise how awesome Cornball's guitar work is! Wow...

No way, sis

Stuart Bolton

I bought MiB the day it came out from 'Mister Sifters', the record shop in Burnage, Manchester immortalised in Shakermaker by Oasis. I sneaked out from school at dinnertime, risking the wrath of headmaster Mr. Marshall and his dreaded strap – knowing that it was probably worth the risk. Back home after several listens, I didn't like what I heard. Where were the catchy riffs? The rousing choruses? The scratchy guitar solos? The established Stranglers sound was not on this album. It was, I concluded in my

naivety, the worst Stranglers LP – and by some distance. But a quarter of a century on, it's one of my favourite albums, behind Black And White. Magnificent, if somewhat flawed.

Tits on the radio

John Hallsworth

I remember tuning in to the Radio One album chart and hearing the rundown for one very special new entry: *The Gospel According To The Meninblack*. Whether it was Peter Powell or Kid Jensen I don't know. But the album was introduced it as *The Gospel According To Theme in Black!* Compounding his mistake, the DJ added: "I think I pronounced that correctly." Needless to say, I was livid – and phoned the BBC to tell them off... but they wouldn't answer the phone. Just as well!

Art for art's sake

Barry Spooner

1980 marked the time when The Stranglers became Men-in-black. But who could imagine taking what I consider to be the worst track off *The Raven*, and making it the sole theme for the next couple of years? Post-Raven, it started off business as usual with *Bear Cage*. April's *Rainbow* gigs promised more new material when suddenly, Hugh was forced to eat porridge in Pentonville. Without him they were not a pretty sight, nor sound. *Who Wants The World?* was a return to form, and that summer's UK tour finally showcased new material, like *Waltzinblack*, *Just Like Nothing On Earth*, (or *Just Like Living On Earth* as I heard it!) *Four Horsemen*, *Thrown Away* and *Waiting For The Meninblack*. But it didn't make 'easy listening' – especially after *The Raven*. They then made us wait a further six months to have the new album on our turntables. The best song is

the fantastic *Waltzinblack*. *Just Like Nothing On Earth* and *Second Coming* are acceptable, as are *Thrown Away* and *Two Sunspots* which provide the album with a welcome lift – the latter leaning towards *The Stranglers of old*, although not quite up to scratch. Musically, *Hallow To Our Men* starts off in the vein of *Toiler and Sewer*, but all hope is lost when the vocals come in, while *Waiting For The Meninblack* should have stayed in its instrumental form. *Turn The Centuries*, *Turn* was just not good enough, ditto *Manna Machine*. The album over indulges itself. Perhaps *The Stranglers* had too much artistic freedom? Maybe they took themselves far too seriously? And who really gave a fuck about the UFOs?

Turning Japanese

Simon Kent

I bought MiB on the day of release from Gloucester's HMV Records, along with *The Stranglers IV* US import – the selected bits off *The Raven*... But how could they follow up *The Raven* – their finest album? First introduced to the subject of *Men In Black* then, and here's an entire album on it. Highlights are *Four Horsemen* and *Thrown Away* – their best single ever, closely followed by *Second Coming* and *Waltzinblack*. I still get a shiver down my spine when the lights go down at gigs and you hear the PA booming it out. Not long back I tried to get my company, *Mitsubishi Cars*, to use *Just Like Nothing On Earth* for their TV ads, but unfortunately, it they chose not to.

Career opportunities

John Cochrane

I so desperately wanted to get MiB the morning it was released – only I had my very first job interview, at 9.30 that

morning. So I phoned the company and fobbed them off with a forgotten dental appointment – and they gave me a new time – 2.30 (tooth-hurty? Surely not – Ed.) I now had the chance to buy it, take it home and give it a good listen. First off, I didn't like it, but after a few more plays, I got into it. I think it prepared me well for the interview because I remember feeling very relaxed sitting there that afternoon. I got the job! Listening to the album nowadays, I think it has stood the test of time.

Savage breast Gary Binnie

The MiB album was quite poignant for me as I was heavily into UFOs at the time and I thought I'd seen one then. I still recall how spooky it made me feel – just like the album did when it came out! The first thing that struck me was the superb Last Supper gatefold sleeve, and I knew I was in for a real treat. I loved Four Horsemen with its stop/start, pulsating errie-ness, and Two Sunspots is a good catchy number too... but I never knew it was about nipples until I read Hugh's book! Manna Machine and Hallow To Our Men... Mmm. What were they all about? Waltzinblack is still a very clever piece of work, and played before each gig. How did Hugh manage to squeeze in all those words into Just Like Nothing On Earth? From this album on, we all wore black, and copied the band by calling each other Pete-in-black and Dave-in-black.

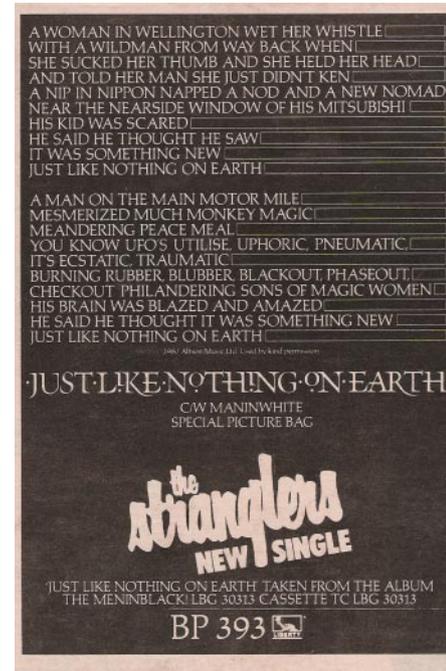
Manna the earth Stephen Howard

The MiB album sat amongst the pre-orders in the record shop – but I couldn't get hold of it. I was laid up in bed, off school, too ill to pick it up. Mum went off to the shops and I sat there waiting

for her to bring it back. Thrown Away had already set the tone, and I was looking forward to a Dave Greenfield-fest. Press reviews described Waltzinblack as a macabre carousel ride. Intrigued, I could hardly wait. As soon as I got it, Waltzinblack filled my bedroom with swirling keyboards and menace-in-black. But after that, I wondered where all those catchy choruses and pogo-able melodies had gone? I was stunned, and yes – disappointed. I played it again, and again. Quirkiness was being taken to the extreme, and soon I could detect those melodies, those bass lines, and sheer inventiveness within the layers. The first three tracks are gems, but it slumps with Turn The Centuries, Turn and Waiting For The Meninblack. It was better left as an instrumental on the back of the single Who Wants The World? Side two more than makes up, though – particularly Two Sunspots – the single that never was, and Four Horsemen – with Manna Machine sounding ten years ahead of its time. Suddenly all thoughts of my illness disappeared, but while it may not be my favourite Stranglers album, it contains some great moments: an occasional airing is still rewarding. Almost a quarter of a century on, and my thoughts on MiB album remain the same. It was no wonder record producer Pete Waterman once declared there had only been two great British bands, the Beatles and The Stranglers. The hits may not have been there on MiB, but like The Beatles, they successfully explored new sounds and stretched sonic boundaries.

Hallow hurray! What a nice day Karen Parfitt

MiB didn't fit with what I'd heard so far from The Stranglers – I was just getting



into them – although Thrown Away was an immediate hit with me. I still love it just as much. When I play it today it takes me right back to playing it at my youth club in the early 80s, and hearing JJ's deep monotone voice. When I think of how long ago this was and how fresh the song still sounds, I'm amazed. Just Like Nothing On Earth and Waltzinblack are also my favourites. No gig would be complete without hearing the latter, along with seeing the lights go down, the huge cheer and that rush of adrenaline. While other albums sat on my turntable more often, The MiB is a grower. Second Coming, Waiting For The Meninblack (love JJ's voice on here – sounds very young) and Four Horsemen; Dave has a great voice and I wish he sang the lead after this, but he didn't. The rest of the tracks are a bit repetitive, especially

Hallow To Our Men, in spite of the intro being one of their finest before it falls down in the verses. However, I admit to being spooked by the mysterious Men In Black connection, and as I type, a funeral cortege has just entered our close... as Hallow To Our Men provides the morbid Lord's Prayer soundtrack. Weird?

Manna -tovani Lol Cole

When I got my copy from Portobello Road market, I got home to find the record inside was not Meninblack, – but Mantovani! Argh!

Synth you went away Gary Kent

The Stranglers – specifically Dave Greenfield – made me buy a synthesizer in 1980. I plugged in my little Yamaha CS-5 into dad's rarely used Selmer-Elka Partita organ where I conjured up the Burnel bass and Greenfield organ sound – left hand on the bass synth – right hand on the Hammond vamps: the absolute Stranglers hallmark. I wasted away too many nights like this playing Stranglers songs... and then MiB came out! Greenfield's nursery rhyme Thrown Away riff... Four Horsemen... Waiting For The Meninblack... the Just Like Nothing On Earth intro – sample and hold saw tooth wave – it was the same! As soon as my parents went out for the night, I'd fill the house with a continuous didgeridoo-ing loop of JLNOE – all in glorious analogue – although the album itself missed the mark slightly – somewhere between production and song writing ...drugs? ? Greenfield's keyboards saved the album, and captured a little of what was happening with all the fantastic electronic stuff around that time of its release in February 1981.

Boots, boots, boots: the Meninblack era

Boots. We are talking bootlegs here, not boots of the Doc Martens variety!

The Stranglers, in the 12 month period from June 1980 to June 1981, played somewhere in the region of 120 gigs. Today, there are more than 30 bootlegs from these gigs in circulation; mainly audience recordings made by enthusiastic

fans (of varying quality) but also one or two other gems straight from the mixing desk and even the odd radio broadcast.

Over the years I have been lucky enough to get my hands on most of these recordings and this has enabled me to put together the following "rough guide" to bootlegs from the period. Should you have

any other recordings in your possession the editors would, of course, be very pleased to hear from you!

This is amongst my favourite periods as the band were probably at their darkest and menacing best. The live sets, although somewhat repetitive in 1981, were generally big departures from the years of

1977 to 1979 and some of Hugh's patter, especially with the North American audiences (more of that later) is rich and highly entertaining.

There have been no official live releases from this period and demand for decent live material consequently remains high.

Icecube



A typical Stranglers fan bootleg collection on the carpet of a typical Stranglers fan

The bootleg list...

Rouen 12/06/80

A very decent audience recording. The band is somewhat rusty and out of sorts as *Who Wants The World?* is stopped and restarted. An interesting set with an emphasis on stuff from *The Raven*.

Thrown Away and *Waiting For The Meninblack* make their first appearance on a bootleg, some 8 months before their eventual release on *The Gospel According To The Meninblack*. JJ engages the audience in French throughout "this is one of our first gigs in France since our guitarist was released from prison". (See track list over page)

Recommended **

Courneuve Festival Paris 14/06/80

An identical set to Rouen.

The quality of this audience recording is not so good. *Who Wants The World?* is again stopped and restarted, they were obviously struggling with this despite it having just been released as a single in the UK.

Sound quality deteriorates quite noticeably for the final six tracks and these tracks play far too fast on my tape, probably as a result of "fast dubbing".

Worthwhile * but only just

Castel St Angelo Rome**02/07/80**

The first gig after release from jail in Nice. A poorish audience recording which is rather hissy and with some chatter from the audience. Hugh is surprised by the size of the crowd and compliments the Italians on their hospitality (both comments obviously relate to the Nice experience). He also talks about his visit to see the Pope and later informs the audience they are not the first people to have been “strangled” in Rome.

The set was extended with additional tracks: Threatened and Peaches are included and *Hallow To Our Men* makes its first bootleg appearance.

Average but of some historical interest.

Palasport Parma**03/07/80**

Also an audience recording with plenty of hiss and some chatter. A similar set to the gigs in June but also with *Hallow To Our Men* and finishing with an excellent 5 *Minutes*. Hugh informs the audience “mine is very small” a reference to his grasp of Italian. *Down In The Sewer finishes* with a chorus of “heys”.

Average to good

Rainbow London**08/07/80**

Audience recording of reasonable quality. Hugh is obviously pleased to be home and back at the Rainbow, “it’s great to be

Strike Rate

The number of bootlegs available as a percentage of the total number of gigs played. The *Meninblack* period has a strike rate of 28%.

here” he announces before the start of *Shah Shah a Go Go*. The set includes *Waiting For The Meninblack* and *Thrown Away* (but not *Hallow To Our Men*). These two new songs are well received. Not much chatter from Hugh. The quality of my recording gets worse for the final few tracks; becoming too fast and rather fuzzy. By the final track, *Genetix*, it’s awful.

Worthwhile* (but only just)

Leisure Centre Crawley**10/07/80**

An audience recording of very average quality and rather distorted right from the start. *Waltzinblack* is played through the PA as an intro. I have only the first 10 tracks on my tape with *Thrown Away* (cut) being the final track. Hugh tells the audience the story surrounding The Stranglers first gig in Crawley at The White Knight pub.

There is a recording of several fans talking to the band on the other side of the tape but I have never sat through and listened to this, personally I would have preferred the whole gig!

Average

Colston Hall Bristol**11/07/80**

An audience recording with the *Waltzinblack* intro. *Waiting For The Meninblack*, *Thrown Away* and *Hallow To Our Men* are included in the set. Average quality, my copy plays rather fast and *Down In The Sewer* is cut as is the final track *Nuclear Device*. Hugh mentions his University days to the crowd but overall this is not a terribly exciting boot I’m afraid.

Average

Track Lists 1980

Rouen 12/6/80 : Shah Shah a Go Go, Ice, Toiler On The Sea, Duchess, Hanging Around, Baroque Bordello, Waiting For The Meninblack, Down In The Sewer, Who Wants The World, Thrown Away, I Feel Like A Wog, Tank, Nuclear Device, Genetix, The Raven.

Bath Pavillion 18/8/80: *Waltzinblack* (intro), Shah a Go Go, Ice, Toiler On The Sea, Four Horsemen, Duchess, Hanging Around, Thrown Away, Down In The Sewer, Who Wants The World, Baroque Bordello, Just Like Nothing On Earth, Tank, Nuclear Device, Genetix, The Raven.

Rockstage (Theatre Royal Nottingham) 19/8/80: Shah Shah a Go Go, Ice, Who Wants The World, Toiler On The Sea, Thrown Away, Tank, Nuclear Device, Genetix.

Bilzen Festival Summer 1980: Shah Shah a Go Go, Ice, Toiler On The Sea, Duchess, Hanging Around, Four Horsemen, Waiting For The Meninblack, Down In The Sewer, Who Wants The World, Baroque Bordello, Just Like Nothing On Earth, Tank.

NB: The track lists were not necessarily the complete set lists

Corby Northants**23/07/80**

An audience tape (of pretty good quality) and probably the best from the British *Who Wants The World?* tour to be reviewed so far. This was a benefit gig and Hugh thanked everyone that had helped out. *Hallow To Our Men*, *Waiting For The Meninblack* (cut) and *Just Like Nothing On Earth* are included in the set. Just before *Hanging Around* Hugh has a go at the people at the front....I can’t quite hear why.

Worthwhile *

Lyceum Ballroom London**27/07/80**

An audience recording which was recently made available as a web download having been “remastered”. Good quality. A full set with a total of 18 tracks. *Waltzinblack* is used as an intro. There are four tracks from *The Meninblack* featured; *Four Horsemen*, *Thrown Away*, *Hallow To Our Men*, *Waiting For The Meninblack* and *Just Like Nothing On Earth*. Perhaps a little lacking in atmosphere but that is hardly a criticism.

Recommended **

Pavillion Bath**18/08/80**

Audience recording of fair quality but there is a little noise from the audience and some annoying distortion to the bass. *Waltzinblack* is used as an intro. *Down In The Sewer* is stopped (but not restarted) to cheers from the crowd for no apparent reason. A standard set which also includes *Four Horsemen*. (See track listings)

Worthwhile/Average *

Theatre Royal Nottingham**19/08/80**

The Rockstage performance from the television broadcast. This is now easily available as a web download and is excellent having been “remastered”. Shame about the brevity of the set and the rather savage track breaks but I’m not really complaining!

Essential ***

Bilzen Festival**Summer80**

Not sure but this is probably an audience recording. The quality is very good. Superb drumming on the opening track *Shah Shah*

a Go Go and crisp vocals throughout. *Toiler* is stopped “we’re not the Ramones, that’s why we stopped ‘cos we’re out of tune...” Hugh then explains that JJ is not going to translate due to the Nice problems. He then sees a guy with a tape recorder and asks if he’s making a nice recording of the concert, super stuff! Includes *Four Horsemen* and *Just Like Nothing On Earth*. This is listed with several different dates, including 5/7/80 and 17/8/80, take your pick. From Belgium, in case you wondered. (See *track listings*)

Recommended **

Emerald City New Jersey 10/10/80

The opening night of the US tour. A very good recording (possibly an audience recording but I can’t be sure) but with only eight tracks on my tape. Opens with *Thrown Away* and it seems that JJ is trying hard to sing this with an exaggerated English accent. Great version of *Threatened* too. Not much chatter from Hugh but this is unlikely to have been the full set. Finishes with *5 Minutes* and *The Raven*. This is one for the JJ fans.

Recommended ** (short but good)

The Channel Boston 14/10/80

An audience recording, a bit fuzzy round the edges but very worthwhile. Hugh asks “Is this the bean town?...I hope you haven’t had any beans otherwise you’re going to be farting all over the place”. Hugh apologises for coming late onto stage, apparently “the BBC were due to record the gig but they couldn’t get a gas supply for the tape recorder” later he refuses to piss on a member of the audience as he doesn’t know him well

enough! Then we get the crackerjack pencil gag, Hugh was on top form that night. Out of the blue we also get a “fuck you too, buddy” from Jet. 16 tracks in the set, all good stuff.

Worthwhile * (close to being recommended for the banter alone)

Aldo’s Hideaway, NJ 16/10/80

An audience recording that has only been “released” recently and which must therefore be considered to be fairly rare. Decent quality but rather spoiled by more hoopin’ and hollerin’ from the enthusiastic audience with continuous requests for *I Feel Like A Wog*. Unfortunately it’s difficult to pick out everything that Hugh says but the band were in good form. JJ persists with his heavy “English” accent, especially on *Thrown Away* and Dave seems to forget to turn off the alarm clock at the end of *Ice*. The gig finishes on a high with *5 Minutes* and then *The Raven*.

Recommended (only just) **

Ritz Club New York 21/10/80

A radio broadcast of the US BBC Rock Hour show, also available (if you can find it) on transcription disc 148. Superb quality and the band were on great form. The commentary and commercial breaks detract little from the atmosphere of the gig. Some funny remarks too from Hugh and an American with a very large mouth in the audience. There are plenty of highlights including the opening track *Hallow To Our Men* with some amazing work on the bass. There are 10 tracks in total and all of these sound great!

Essential ***

New Orleans

26/10/80

An audience recording of very average quality. The band were now using hired equipment as all of their gear had been stolen in New York following the Ritz Club gig on 21st October. In the circumstances a pretty decent performance shame about the quality of the bootleg. There is some chatter from Hugh but it’s difficult to hear what he’s saying. *Hanging Around* turns into an impromptu jam as the guitar stops and Hugh then complains about the equipment. The opening notes of *Nuclear Device* sound very limp and Dave is obviously using some “shitty” gear too. JJ sings the last couple of lines of *The Raven* in French.

Average

Whisky A Go Go, LA 08/11/80

An audience recording of pretty good quality. *Waltzinblack* is used as an intro. *Toiler On The Sea* is the opening track and this is stopped within moments of starting, JJ and Jet want the coloured lights turned off; “this is not a showbiz extravaganza” and you immediately get the feeling this is going to be a great bootleg. “You’re in Dead Loss Angeles” says Hugh. *Who Wants The World?* is again dedicated to “Ronnie Boy” although this track is cut on my tape as is *Genetix*. Great version of *Threatened* and, of course, *Dead Loss Angeles*.

Worthwhile *

Keystone Berkeley 13/11/80

A radio broadcast that has only very recently surfaced. Available on the web. Superb sound quality. The keys are high in

Track Lists 1980-1981

Keystone Berkley 13/11/80 (radio broadcast):

Toiler On The Sea, *Duchess*, *Baroque Bordello*, *Hanging Around*, *Down In The Sewer*, *Who Wants The World*, *Threatened*, *Just Like Nothing On Earth*, *Tank*, *Nuclear Device*, *Genetix*, *Dead Loss Angeles*, *The Raven*.

Toronto 26/11/80 (radio broadcast):

Duchess, *Hanging Around*, *Baroque Bordello*, *Down In The Sewer*, *Who Wants The World*, *Threatened*, *Bring On The Nubiles*, *Tank*, *Nuclear Device*, *Genetix*, *Dead Loss Angeles*, *The Raven*, *I Feel Like A Wog*.

Locarno Bristol 9/2/81:

Threatened, *The Raven*, *Toiler On The Sea*, *Just Like Nothing On Earth*, *Thrown Away*, *Who Wants The World*, *Don’t Bring Harry*, *Four Horsemen*, *Second Coming*, *Hallow To Our Men*, *Nuclear Device*, *Genetix*, *Duchess*, *Hanging Around*, *Down In The Sewer*.

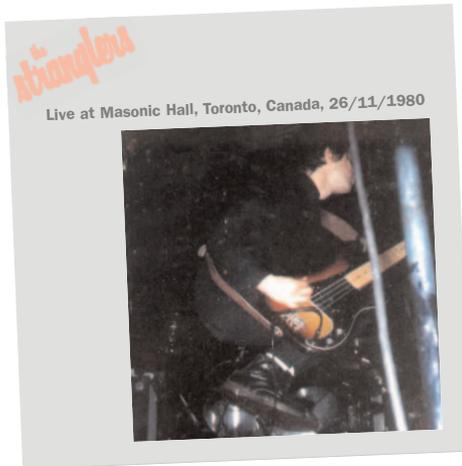
Palo Alto 8/5/81:

Threatened, *The Raven*, *Toiler On The Sea*, *Just Like Nothing On Earth*, *Thrown Away*, *Who Wants The World*, *Baroque Bordello*, *Second Coming*, *Meninblack*, *Tank*, *Shah Shah a Go Go*, *Hallow To Our Men*, *Nuclear Device*, *Genetix*, *Down In The Sewer*.

NB: The track lists were not necessarily the complete set lists

the mix and very clear, thumping bass and drums too. Not the full gig (13 tracks) but a very worthwhile and welcome addition. A bit of banter from Hugh “I’m sorry I don’t understand American” adds to a great atmosphere. Interesting backing vocals on *Nuclear Device* and also on one or two others.

Essential ***



Keystone Palo Alto

14/11/80

Probably just about the best audience recording from this US tour and almost certainly the full set with 15 tracks. Not too much chatter from Hugh. The band were in top form, even with hired gear. Some great stuff here including, for example, *Hanging Around* and a blinding *Down In The Sewer* which sadly is cut. *Just Like Nothing On Earth* sounds rather weird and we even get the same plug (as 13th November) from Hugh for Ronnie Reagan's forthcoming films on TV. *Dead Loss Angeles* is superb with thumping bass guitars.

Recommended **

Toronto

26/11/80

A near perfect FM broadcast from CFNY radio in glorious stereo. 13 tracks in total. Get a low generation copy if you can find one. *Down In The Sewer* is drastically cut (probably for the radio broadcast). Lots of highlights, *I Feel Like A Wog*, the final track, is superb.

Essential ***

Locarno Bristol

09/02/81

An audience recording from the opening night of the UK tour. Pretty ropey quality but a very interesting set. The band often used an experimental set on the opening night and this is no exception as *Don't Bring Harry* was featured. It was subsequently dropped from the rest of the tour and has only made (to my knowledge) only one subsequent live appearance (in 1995). A vocorder is used to address the crowd but it is very difficult to make any of this out. *Waiting For The Meninblack* starts but is immediately cut on my tape and this track is not therefore included on the track listing. Quite a few tracks are otherwise featured from the new album; *Just Like Nothing On Earth*, *Thrown Away*, *Four Horsemen*, *Second Coming* and *Hallow To Our Men*.

Average

Hammersmith Odeon

15/02/81

An audience recording of average standard for the sixth night of the UK tour. By this stage the set had "settled" and was pretty much the same for the rest of the tour. Sound quality is rather fuzzy and it occasionally drops to a single channel but this boot is pretty enjoyable all the same. *Meninblack* is added and *Waiting For The Meninblack* is dropped from the set. Hugh recalls the last gig at Hammersmith Odeon with Patti Smith and also passes on a message from the GLC!

Worthwhile *

University Durham

23/02/81

An awful quality audience recording, the

worst one here by some considerable distance, with terrible sound quality. I could not sit through all of this I'm afraid, it really is that bad.

Worthless

Playhouse Edinburgh

24/02/81

Mixing Desk. **THE** definitive Stranglers bootleg which, like a bloody good woman, has just about everything in exactly the right proportions. The "remastered" version (which is readily available on the web) is almost certainly at official release standards. 16 tracks in total, including *Meninblack*. The set became somewhat shorter as the tour progressed and by this stage, *Down In The Sewer*, which was used to finish at Bristol and Hammersmith Odeon, had been dropped.

Essential ***

Rainbow London

07/03/81

An audience recording of a reasonable/average standard that is very similar to the Hammersmith Odeon boot of 15th February. Unfortunately, there are several cuts and breaks that are really annoying, *Second Coming* and *Hallow To Our Men* are badly affected. Hugh is very chatty but it is quite difficult at times to make out exactly what he's saying; some remarks are directed at the people spitting in the audience. Hugh messes up with the lyrics on *Hanging Around* (nothing new there then). Overall a decent enough bootleg.

Worthwhile *

Creations Club, NJ, USA

07/04/81

Audience recording. Good quality. Only 12 tracks so this is almost certainly not



Hammersmith Odeon, 15 February 1981

the full gig. Plenty of loud Americans hoopin' and holerin' in the crowd, Hugh advises them to drink some more as they are still coherent! Some funny comments, also from Hugh, after *Toiler On The Sea*, as the gig was obviously close to getting pulled "there wasn't a stage here this afternoon". Enough of this frivolity.... A cut on *Nuclear Device* towards the end of the gig is rather annoying.

Worthwhile *

Emerald City, New Jersey 11/04/81

Mixing Desk. Good quality and recommended. Recently remastered and made available on the web. 15 tracks in total, excellent stuff from start to finish. Some funny stuff from Hugh too, including the premature ejaculation routine before *Second Coming*.

Recommended **

Ole Man Rivers New Orleans 20/04/81

Audience recording. Good quality. Good gig.

Essential ***

Palo Alto, CA 08/05/81

An audience recording of very good quality. 15 tracks in total. Hugh informs the audience that Palo Alto is "a skinny tree with no leaves on it" and we then get the scrumpy reference before the band launch into *Just Like Nothing On Earth*. JJ does *Thrown Away* in his best (exaggerated) English accent. Fantastic version of *Hallow To Our Men*.

Excellent stuff but why are most of the decent 1981 boots from the good ol' US

of A, didn't we invent the tape recorder?

Recommended **

The Stone San Francisco 09/05/81

Yet another very good quality audience recording. 16 tracks in total. Great version of *Thrown Away*. Some funny stuff from Hugh who has by now finely tuned his "stand up" routine although the jokes and wisecracks are getting rather predictable. There is some stuff about Prince Charles and Diana's forthcoming nuptials (and a reference to a goat!) before *Duchess*. Finishes with a superb *Hanging Around*.

Recommended **

The Palms Milwaukee 24/05/81

An audience recording of good quality (but not quite as good as some of the other audience recordings from this tour). Pretty much the standard set with 17 tracks in total. "We don't need any cheerleaders" Hugh tells the crowd and then "I hear this is a bit of a drinking town" before *Just Like Nothing On Earth*. Two people in the audience put their hand up when Hugh asks if anyone suffers from premature ejaculation, he then prescribes *Second Coming* two times a day! *Bring On The Nubiles* is included in the set after a few comments from Hugh about Prince Charles.

Recommended **

Toronto 30/05/81

An audience recording of very good quality. The North American tour is

drawing to a close (there were only a handful of dates played after this show) and this is quite a long set with 18 tracks in total. The delivery of the "bring me a piece of my mummy" line in *Threatened* is a long drawn out affair. Hugh is quite chatty and even manages a joke at Ronald Reagan's expense. Hugh then warns the audience about flash photography "if we see one more flash that's the end of the music". Great version of *Meninblack* and some ad lib stuff from JJ at the end of *Ice*. *Bring on The Nubiles* is included here too but on this occasion it starts with the cocktail version.

Recommended **

Bonds New York 20/6/81

This has only recently surfaced and was the source of an interesting debate on the Burning Up Time message boards. It was previously assumed that the US tour finished at Le Club Montreal on 3rd June and several people (including me!) questioned this boot assuming that a gig on 20th June had never taken place. It took a post from our man in New York (who had been to one of the shows at Bonds) to convince the doubters. A scan of his ticket (which was subsequently incorporated into the artwork!) helped matters too.

In the gig Hugh refers to the "nappynee" performance so I think it is reasonable to assume that this boot is from the matinee performance on 20th June. There are two versions available (both are of equivalent quality) one with six tracks and the other with nine tracks. Get the longer version if you can, the three extra tracks are *Thrown Away*, *Who Wants The World* and *Second Coming*. Overall a decent quality audience

recording but by no means the best from this tour. Contains a couple of "odd" tracks (*5 Minutes* and *I Feel Like A Wog*) but perhaps it was necessary for the band to mix things up a bit as they almost certainly played a second set later that same day.

Recommended **

Top Picks

If you were to select only half a dozen boots from this period you could not, in my opinion, do any better than the following:

- Rockstage 19/8/80
- Ritz Club 21/10/80
- Berkley 13/11/80
- Toronto 26/11/80
- Edinburgh 24/2/81
- New Orleans 20/4/81

However, all of the boots marked as Recommended ** are excellent quality recordings and they should be on the wish list of all serious collectors.

The ratings given for all of these boots are based entirely on the material reviewed for this article. Lower of higher generation copies of the same boots would obviously attract different ratings. Shop around before you trade and get the lowest generation boots that you can get yer mits on!

My Dessert Island Boot (1980 – 81)

A bootleg from the Nice gig (20/6/80) when the band were arrested would certainly be something of a landmark for collectors, just like RGTC from Surrey University in October 1978, dream on!

Writer Chris Twomey exclusively reveals to The Burning Up Times how penning the first Stranglers biog left him with a sour taste – and almost broke him in the process.

Mean Two-mey



A FEW months ago a friend sent me some information about an item selling on eBay. It was a copy of *The Men They Love To Hate* by none other than moi – which would normally cost you the price of the *Old Testament* CD box set, the only place you can get it. Good luck to the person who eventually paid £12 for the book, they got a bargain... or did they?

I was flattered by the seller's accompanying description of *The Men They Love To Hate* as "a well written and researched effort – a must for any fan". It's probably all those things, but to me it's an inconsequential legacy for the four years I spent working on it. Yes, four years, resulting in a book that was barely 110 pages long and that no one could actually buy from a book shop – the normal place for these things – or indeed buy as a separate item at all (until matey on eBay flogged his copy). I've always wondered how many

hundred, if nor thousands, of Stranglers fans felt compelled to buy the *Old Testament* over the years simply because it contained the one thing they didn't already have – a book.

Of course *The Men They Love To Hate* wasn't the book I'd set out to write almost 10 years earlier, in 1982. If things had gone to plan, that would have been one of those thick tomes that could double as a bar-bell. In the end we got an odd-shaped thing that wouldn't give a spider backache. The original manuscript is never likely to see the light of day, although I occasionally trip over it in my attic. I've never had a chance to explain why it's up there gathering dust instead of being read by the people it was written for – Stranglers fans – so after all these years I think it's time to spill the beans...

My relationship with The Stranglers was probably a heartening example of how, if you want something badly enough, you can get it. Certainly when I was 17-18, no one else inspired me the way they did. They seemed to me the embodiment of everything I was feeling – angry and energised, but their nihilism was wrapped with a hint of irony and humour unlike many of their peers. Their music was edgy and uplifting, in an ugly-beautiful sort of way, and they looked cool as fuck. They seemed to be a more grounded, grown-up version of the punk bands us rebels in Devon (!) had heard so much about, and as such were easier to respect. When I saw the cover of *Rattus* for the first time I was hooked. I analysed it in forensic detail, usually while playing the album on my shitty old turntable. I was intrigued, on the way to becoming obsessed.

I soon discovered a fringe benefit of my new obsession. The best looking girl in my sixth form, Mary, was also a Stranglers fan. As a way of ensuring we'd be an item for longer than two weeks I promised her that one day soon we'd meet the band. And I gave as good as my word.

At some point during the spring of 1979 we showed up at a small venue in Bristol, whose name I have long forgotten, just as JJ's Euroman tour rolled into town. Posing as two contributors to a West Country punk fanzine, we somehow managed to persuade the tour manager to fix it for us to interview JJ back stage before the gig. We nervously stuttered through the encounter and watched the gig in the smug knowledge that we'd been invited to the after show (which, just to increase our awe, was attended by Jet and his then partner Suze.)

When we got back to Okehampton Comprehensive a couple of days later, our street cred had gone through the roof. More importantly, I'd leant the power of polite persuasion.

The next time I met a Strangler was early 1980, by which time I was a trainee radio journalist based in Falmouth, Cornwall. As we had to end our course by compiling a radio documentary on a subject close to our hearts, I chose – guess what. Again there was an element of bullshit in my pitch to Ian Grant, who was handling most of the day-to-day managerial duties. I told him I was compiling a half-hour anthology of the band's career so far (true) and that it was going to be broadcast on Plymouth Sound radio, and possibly other ILR stations (turned out to be true, but I certainly wasn't commissioned in advance). He invited me to bring my cumbersome Uher reel-to-reel tape machine up to London to interview Hugh.

I caught Hugh on a good day – looking back he should have been glum as hell as he was a few weeks from a possible prison sentence at the time. His misplaced confidence at winning an appeal must have been sky high. Not only was Hugh charming and witty, afterwards he offered me a lift from central London to West Hampstead, where I was staying with friends. It just got better and better – on the way he stuck head phones on both of us, and turned on this weird little cassette machine he'd recently bought in Japan. It was called a Walkman or something.

Anyway, what he played me were several completed tracks from the early *Meninblack* sessions. I certainly remember hearing *Two Sunspots* (something about the song tickled Hugh because he chuckled a few times while it was playing), *Bear Cage* and *Waiting For The Meninblack*. He may have played me another track or two, but I'm not sure what. The half-hour or so journey was a bizarre and wondrous white knuckle ride. On the one hand I was mesmerised by this amazing, other-worldly music that was filling up my head (the sound quality this Walkman thingy produced was amazing.) On the other hand I was counting the seconds I had to live as Hugh periodically turned around to change the cassette, taking his eyes off the road for what seemed like obituary-inviting minutes at a time.

A couple of months later, Hugh's incarceration in Pentonville for that infamous drugs bust was a big enough story to make the national press. I was stunned by the news, but I couldn't help noticing the kudos I acquired overnight amongst my fellow radio journalists at Falmouth, and especially the course tutor. They all knew how recently I'd cosied up to this jailbird rock star, which not only showed them how fearless I was (!) but how I had a nose for a breaking story. It was a complete fluke of course, but I didn't tell them that. The publicity surrounding Hugh's prison sentence also made it easy for me to sell my humble little documentary to independent radio stations. Within a few weeks, it was being broadcast everywhere from Aberdeen to Brighton.

Crucially, Hugh liked what he heard (when he finally got out of jail.) I instantly acquired "Trusted Journalist" status – making me part of a very rare breed. My next interview with

Hugh sold to Record Mirror, thus opening up another door, and to increase my trustworthiness and familiarity I started contributing to Strangled.

From there it was just a short skip and a hop before I was pestering the band to let me write their official biography. At first they declined – JJ’s common refrain was “Why don’t you wait until we’ve split up?” (Just as well I didn’t, eh JJ?) But the whole mood in the camp suddenly changed dramatically with the success of *Golden Brown*. It was as if the band suddenly recognised a more urgent need to get someone researching their story. After all, they were obviously going to last a bit longer than everyone thought. I was still a relatively inexperienced journalist, but that didn’t matter – the right man in the right place at the right time nearly always gets the job.

Unfortunately, getting this far was the easy bit. The deal I struck with the band would virtually guarantee the project’s long-term failure. Instead of taking what I now know to be the conventional route – finding a literary agent to represent us, or negotiating a book deal directly with a publisher – the band insisted a contract was drawn up between me and them. In other words, I would get their full co-operation only if I agreed to them having the final say on the book’s content. They would be responsible for finding the publisher and would retain copyright. They would pay my expenses while I was researching and writing the book, but the author’s royalty would be split five ways – between me and all of them!

No writer with any sense would ever agree to such terms – and I did try, unsuccessfully, to re-negotiate – but ultimately I needed them more than they needed me. I knew that if the book came out and did well, it could be the making of me. I went ahead and signed the contract in their lawyer’s London office. They were all present too – I can’t remember exactly why, although *Strange Little Girl* had just reached the Top 10, and I think they were off to do a TV appearance somewhere.

Deal signed, I got started. Jet had already been through his address book and made up an exhaustive contacts list. It contained the phone numbers of virtually everyone of any significance who might have a story to tell about The Stranglers – including, bizarrely, Diana Ross and Kate Bush (I can’t recall why!) When I cold-called these people and told them I was writing a book about The Stranglers, doors seemed to fly open. Not everyone would see me, but within weeks I was having coffee with Harvey Goldsmith and Cliff Busby (former head of EMI Records), lunch with Martin Rushent at his wonderful pad somewhere beyond Reading (Human League were recording at his studio at the time), and afternoon tea with George Melly at his place just off Ladbroke Grove. I’d have piss ups with the likes of Johnny Rubbish and Brian James – I remember meeting him and his current band The Lords Of The New Church at his favourite pub in the Portobello Road.

Then there were the endless ex-employees, ex-girlfriends, managers, accountants, lawyers, roadies, security men, early fans and Finchley Boys... I met them all (incidentally, Garry Coward-Williams, aka photographer and one-time Stranglers roadie Chiswick Charlie, now editor of Amateur Photographer magazine, is a regular drinking buddy of mine. Many of Garry’s excellent early photos of the band were used in *The Men They Love To Hate*, although sadly he went uncredited.) Sometimes I’d travel hundreds of miles just to fish an anecdote out of a lunatic pyrotechnical who’d once adorned their stage with fireworks.

Then of course, there were the countless hook-ups with band members. I’d tend to work through a couple of years of their history (Jet also loaned me his numerous volumes of press cuttings) and then do a round of interviews with each of them, preferably at their homes.

They were always very obliging. On a couple of occasions I stayed overnight. One of the strangest experiences of my life was getting very pissed and stoned at JJ’s one night, only to wake up in a spare room with my host crouching over me. It was actually a life-sized cardboard cut-out from the *Black And White* sleeve shot, but in my monstrosly hung-over state it took a few seconds to process this information.

Then there were the tours. I was invited to follow the whole of the 1983 autumn French tour, and the 1985 British tour, staying in the same hotels as they band – living pretty much the way they did for each four-week duration. In order to pay my way, I’d work on the SIS merchandise stall at all the shows, which I actually quite enjoyed. I have particularly fond memories of the French tour – there was something thrilling about arriving in France just as they were riding a wave. In September 83, *Feline* was one of the biggest selling foreign albums in France, and The Stranglers were on the cover of every music magazine that mattered.

That mid-80s era was undeniably a buzz – at times I couldn’t believe my luck. The longer I was around, the more I was accepted as “family” by the band. Thanks to them, I even made my own pathetic attempt at pop stardom – adding my anaemic vocals to a Jet-produced version of *My Young Dreams*. The single sold 4,000-plus copies via SIS (probably enough to get you into the Top 40 these days!) and has since ended up on a couple of CD compilations, including, to my intense irritation and embarrassment, EMI’s Stranglers compilation *Rarities*.

I was having a ball... but inevitably it all went sour. Alarm bells started ringing around the *Dreamtime* period, when I realised that each member of the band had their own theories about when and how the book should be published. As far as I was concerned, as soon as I caught up with the present, my task was complete. I’d reached that point. I wanted the band to secure a publisher and get the thing into print (I wasn’t the only one – hardly a week went by without someone writing into SIS and asking when the bloody book was going to come out). We could always do updates in the future.

Eventually Jet – who was always the most supportive of the book project – agreed that we should start fishing for a deal. But there was a catch. The band wanted their lawyer to seek out a deal, which made my heart sink. I had no idea how much, if anything, he knew about the book publishing world, but I did know that even the biggest advance a rock biographer could negotiate wouldn’t pay for a hot shot lawyer’s lunch. What incentive would he have to shove his A list clients aside for a couple of minutes and secure a deal for my poxy book? The answer, *quelle surprise*, was none.

Month after month dragged by without any news about how my manuscript was being received in the publishing world. So of course I started to push – at first meekly, and eventually aggressively. Then we started to get the first bunch of rejections. Trouble was, there was no feedback from anyone. Why were publishers rejecting? Was the book too long, too short, too this, too that? Was the lawyer putting unrealistic demands on the table? Or was he simply biking my manuscript over to someone and passively waiting for them to make a decision?

One thing I knew for sure – he wasn’t doing a hard-sell because he hadn’t read the book. He didn’t have a clue what was in it.

A few more months went by and I eventually got the band (well, Jet) to see reason. I argued we should get a literary agent – book publishing is their world, after all, and how would any of us recognise a good deal? We soon got one of the best agents in the business to represent us – a



guy called Tony Peake at the prestigious London Management on Regent's Street.

We decided to give Tony a chance and within a couple of weeks he'd found an interested publisher – Blandford Press, who were based in Dorset. The publisher thought the book was too long and wanted one of his editors to re-shape it a bit, but essentially they were happy with the contents, including the hilarious Steve Beaumont illustrations that the band had commissioned. The financial side of the offer was okay, pretty standard for a rock biog, and after Jet and I travelled to the publisher's offices in Poole to discuss the finer points of the deal, I thought we were at last getting somewhere. But I reckoned without the biggest stumbling block of all – what the book should be called.

I'd already suggested *The Men They Love To Hate* as an obvious title, and everyone agreed it said it all, but it was the tag line that was causing the problems. Blandford Press

wanted to market the book as "The Official Biography" and wanted to enlist the band's help in promoting it – perhaps by attending a couple of signings and giving a few interviews. But at this crucial point in the process, The Stranglers distanced themselves from the project. Even though I was contractually bound to give them copy approval on everything I wrote, and they each stood to earn as much from the book as me, they categorically refused to allow it to be called "authorised" or "official", or enter into any promotional agreements. I think they were afraid that the book would look like a subjective account of their history – even though that's exactly what it was.

For a while the publishers tried to find a compromise but when the band refused to allow the book to be called "The Definitive biography", they lost faith. As soon as the deal was called off, the agent also got cold feet and pulled out. We weren't just back to the beginning, we were seriously adrift. As far as I was concerned, the band appeared to be asking the impossible of any publisher – full editorial and copyright control, but without any guarantee of demonstrable support. It wasn't going to happen. I instinctively knew the book was fucked.

While I waited and prayed for a change of heart, I started to go a bit mad. One of my less wise ventures was to record a couple of Purple Helmets gigs on my brand new Recording Walkman, get loads of cassette copies duped and flog them at subsequent Purple Helmets gigs for £5 a throw. It was reckless and, guess what, I got caught. I remember finally coming before a perplexed-looking JJ wondering whether he was going to thump me or forgive me. (He sort of forgave me.)

Not long after that, I sold and gave away all my possessions and bugged off around the world for several months. In retrospect I'd so obviously lost the plot and the book experience undeniably played a big part in that. Before anyone accuses me of being a delicate little

flower, just ask yourself how you'd feel if you spent four years working on something you were passionate about, only to realise you'd been wasting your time.

Not long after I got back from that trip, another offer was put to me. Encouraged by the massive success of *Greatest Hits 1977-1990* – and with lots of encouragement from Nik Yeomans, who ran SIS following Paul Duffy's long tenure – EMI decided to revitalise the back catalogue. As Nik was a friend and ex-flatmate of mine, he told the project manager Tim Chacksfield about my unpublished book and suggested it might be a perfect accompaniment to a possible box set. Tim, not surprisingly, saw the huge marketing potential of a free book to slot in with a four-CD set, and when the band agreed to the idea I got down to work.

It took me six weeks to write a heavily abridged version of *The Men They Love To Hate*, using my original manuscript as the only source of reference. EMI, incidentally, paid me a nominal one-off sum to cover my costs, but I didn't care – I had something to show for all my exhaustive research at last.

What surprised me was how well *The Men They Love To Hate* went down with fans and critics. Jet was also chuffed to see something in print at last. He called me a few times to discuss the possibility of re-vitalising the book project, but in all honesty my heart wasn't in it any more. One day he phoned – this must have been 1994/95 – and I said that without a publishing deal I couldn't afford to write another word. He said, "I'm cool with that" – which I assumed meant "let's look for a publisher" – and that was the last time we spoke.

I didn't hear another mention of Stranglers book projects until a couple of months before David Buckley's biography *No Mercy* was published. It came as a huge shock. At first I felt very angry and betrayed. But then I became curious to see what my rival had pulled off that I never could.

When I finally read *No Mercy* I was more than quietly envious. I know David's book has been subjected to the usual microscopic critical scrutiny by hard-core fans – a few of whom found it wanting in one way or another – but, trust me, I don't know how he did it. Although I gather a lot got taken out, what's left is far more personal and revealing of the band as people – rather than Stranglers as a rock 'n' roll machine – than anything I was ever able to do. I'm not being disingenuous, I think he did a really good job – it must have been one hell of a balancing act with so many awkward sods to please.

These days I reflect on my time with The Stranglers and I think a couple of things: Firstly, of course, what a bummer it ended like it did. I still have a lot of affection for them and a lot of fond memories. I also have to give that extremely difficult apprenticeship some credit – on the back of it I got to write the official XTC biography and co-author a book on Crowded House, and now earn a pretty good living writing and editing, and previewing TV for magazines.

But the other thing I think – and this is hugely ironic – is thank god my book never came out. If it had I would have been crucified by critics for being embarrassingly sycophantic. Fans would have discovered that I was good at recounting the funny stories, the action, the accomplishments and the chronology, but balked at giving any sort of critique of the band's work, or any insight into them as human beings (they wouldn't even entertain the idea of talking about their personal lives when I was involved with them).

My failure to stand my ground and get the band to agree to certain reasonable demands is why the project ultimately collapsed. But let's be pragmatic about this: nobody who makes demands of The Stranglers stays in their company for very long. Get my meaning?



16 Record Mirror, February 7, 1981

THE STRANGLERS: 'The Meninblack'
(Liberty LBG 30313)
By Chas de Whalley

THE STRANGLERS HAVE never sounded better than they do on 'The Meninblack'. Which isn't to say that this album is their best ever. In fact it is not quite the match of their stunning debut 'Rattus' or the excellent 'Raven' collection. Not in terms of snappy three minute songs anyway. But then I don't reckon 'The Meninblack' is about songs as such really. It's more an album of mysteriously swirling sound pictures and in that respect Messrs Burnel, Cornwell, Greenfield and Black have surpassed all their previous efforts.

Mind you, the first time through 'The Meninblack' sounds deceptively slight. After all that pre-match publicity which promised living proof of extra-terrestrial intervention in the lives of men you might expect something a little more momentous. Instead the Stranglers serve up something very close to European Muzak.

'The Meninblack' you see is a very smooth album, excellently produced by the band and engineer Steve Churchyard, featuring fine separation, spinning stereo effects and Jet Black's impressive impersonation of a rhythm machine. But once below the surface 'The Meninblack' grows increasingly narcotic, a veritable whirlpool of backward guitars, seductive waltzes and subliminal synthesizers with echoes of the early Pink Floyd, Captain Beefheart and Terry Riley's 'Rainbow In Curved Air' ringing in the ears.

'The Meninblack' is a proudly psychedelic album, easily the most psychedelic yet from a band whose roots were always closer to the Doors and Love than to Iggy Pop or the New York Dolls. If they made movies like 'Midnight Cowboy' or 'Easy Rider' now they would be playing during



Dave Greenfield tries out his face without a moustache.

PIPER AT THE GATES OF FLOYD

the heavy drug sequences, weaving mandalas of sound in slow motion, underwater fashion.

But what of the 'Meninblack' theory itself? Sadly there is no lyric sheet available with the album and since the vocals don't always take pride of place in the mix it is hard to tell whether the Stranglers — and Hugh Cornwell in particular who is given an unusually special credit — have added anything extra to the writings of cosmic archeologists like Erich Von Daniken.

Certain phrases jump out with the characteristic Cornwell cinematic vision but by and large the Stranglers' usual internal coherence

is lacking. I suspect that is because they have bitten off more than they can chew. How to describe events outside the range of human experience when by definition there are no words in the language to do it.

Nevertheless they do manage to evoke a simultaneous sense of wonder, awe, ecstasy and terror which is not at all unlike the closing sequences of 'Close Encounters'. It's all there in the sound of the songs rather than in the songs themselves. And like I said the Stranglers have never sounded better than they do on 'The Meninblack'. + + +

THE STRANGLERS/ HEADLINE
Rainbow, London

Recharged and free again.

TIME was when The Stranglers were a joke on the periphery of punk, with all the right packaging and none of the punch. Their pompous sound couldn't match the rebel image and they flopped the "Rattus Norvegicus" formula to death, parodying any power that they once possessed.

The less they played, the better they were, angry putting the plugs early to leave the kids with a riot to remember or, better still, getting incarcerated, missing the show and keeping the myth unscathed.

Well not anymore. They stroll onstage to a heroes' welcome, snatched from the grip of Frog officialdom and raring to go badly-gone. Gone are the gigs where Dave Greenfield's effects were all that stood between The Stranglers and monotony. They are recharged and revitalized, the flash keyboards meshing with Hugh Cornwell's counter-chromatic, creating deceptively straightforward rock with a hint of Talking Heads. Predictably, Jean Jacques Burnel won't be upstaged and he straws sound crackles, thumping gut-shaking bass.

The sound is so full that Jet Black goes unnoticed, perched on a pedestal, making it down. One second's lapse in his no-nonsense beat and the

whole show would up-anchor and sail off into the straits.

The band democratically share vocals on the new numbers; JJ impersonates Lou Reed alongside Hugh's familiar growl, and Dave Greenfield adds light, serene harmonies. These songs, from the forthcoming 'Meninblack' album, can't yet compete with the old chestnuts "Peaches" and "Hanging Around", the current single "Who Wants The World" or the criminally neglected "Duchess", but they suggest a new flexibility in approach that demands further listening.

The Stranglers have thrown away the crutches that they used to fall back on, avoiding the temptation to trade on recent legal sensations and choosing a heavier, more precarious route, letting the music speak for itself. It's a gamble that works and it puts them up there with the Clash and the Jam as bona-fide survivors.

Headline. Virgin's latest tip for the top, are five sartorially elegant, shaven-headed blacks and a bearded white. Unfortunately, they look far better than they



JJ impersonates Reed.

STEVE SUTHERLAND.

DANGER!

DON'T GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY...

the **stranglers**
NEW SINGLE
HAS BEEN RELEASED

"BEAR CAGE"



C/W
"SHAH SHAH A GO GO"

TAKEN FROM THE ALBUM "THE RAVEN" UAG 30262 CASSETTE TCK 30262

IN CUDDLY PICTURE BAG

BP344
LIBERTY RECORDS

THE STRANGLERS
CATALOGUE

"Stranglers IV
(Rattus Norvegicus)"

UAG 30045/TCK 30045

"No More Heroes"

UAG 30200/TCK 30200

"Black and White"

UAG 30222/TCK 30222

"[X certs]"

UAG 30224/TCK 30224

"The Raven"

UAG 30262/TCK 30262

J. J. Burnel

"Euroman Commeth"

UAG 30214/TCK 30214

Hugh Cornwell
and Robert Williams

"Nosferatu"

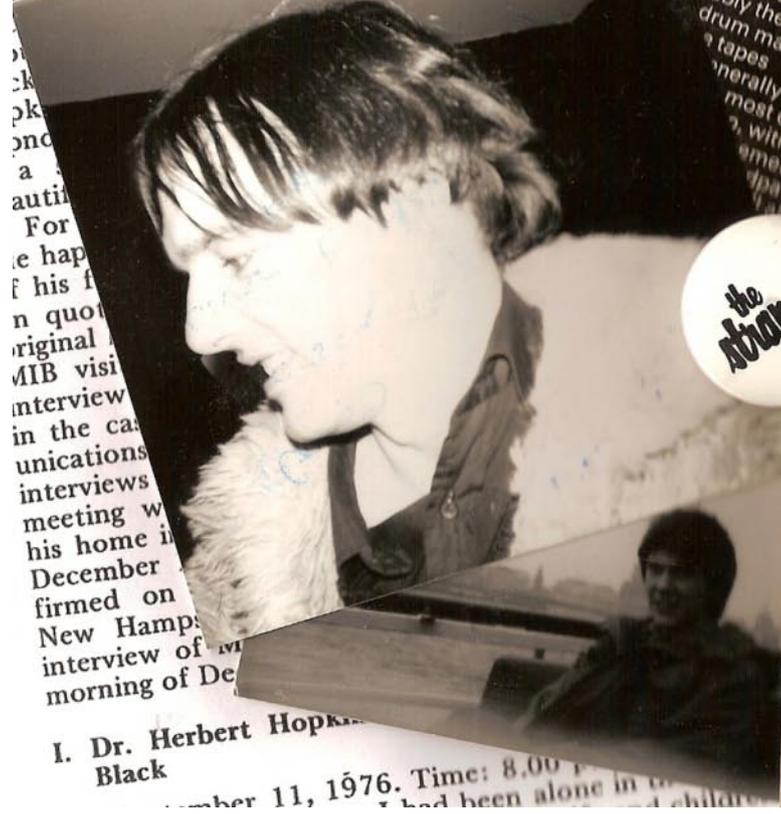
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By arrangement with TBA International

THE MENENBECK

the stranglers

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Has Hugh Cornwell got [unclear] in his pocket?

HUGH CORNWELL

A GUILDFORD STRANGLER RETURNS TO THE SCENE OF HIS CRIMES

By NEIL
Photos (here) by



Page 14 SOUNDS April 5, 1980

COCKY SAINT JACQUES

THE BEST-KNOWN bassist in Britain squats on a table in a part-converted warehouse not a beet's throw from London Bridge, unmistakably himself; the saggy black mohair jumper connected to his monkey boots by tight, raggedy black pants, his leather jacket strapless on a nearby chair, some giant cockroach-things freshly sloughed skin. A surprisingly quiet, reflective Jean-Jacques; in fact, the word that comes closest to fixing his initial mien is "chastened".

Which in a way he is. Our gathering's principal cause is, of course, the result of Hugh Cornwell's recent imprisonment for two months for a third-time conviction on a menu of drugs charges.

"It's no fun when your best friend's taken away," says Burrell quietly. "I've got no-one to go out with," he adds, an ably bitter grin creating his face.

Other reasons to be chastened are, here, his beleaguered Triumph De over and set on fire by a handful of parka-clad kids not yet in their teens. "I'm not even a grazer!" says Jean-Jacques with the kind of quiet, astonished outrage you'd expect.

Chastened more specifically in that he no longer has a girlfriend, a different woman, every night; is still, after all these years and record sales, a sentry with no box to call his own.

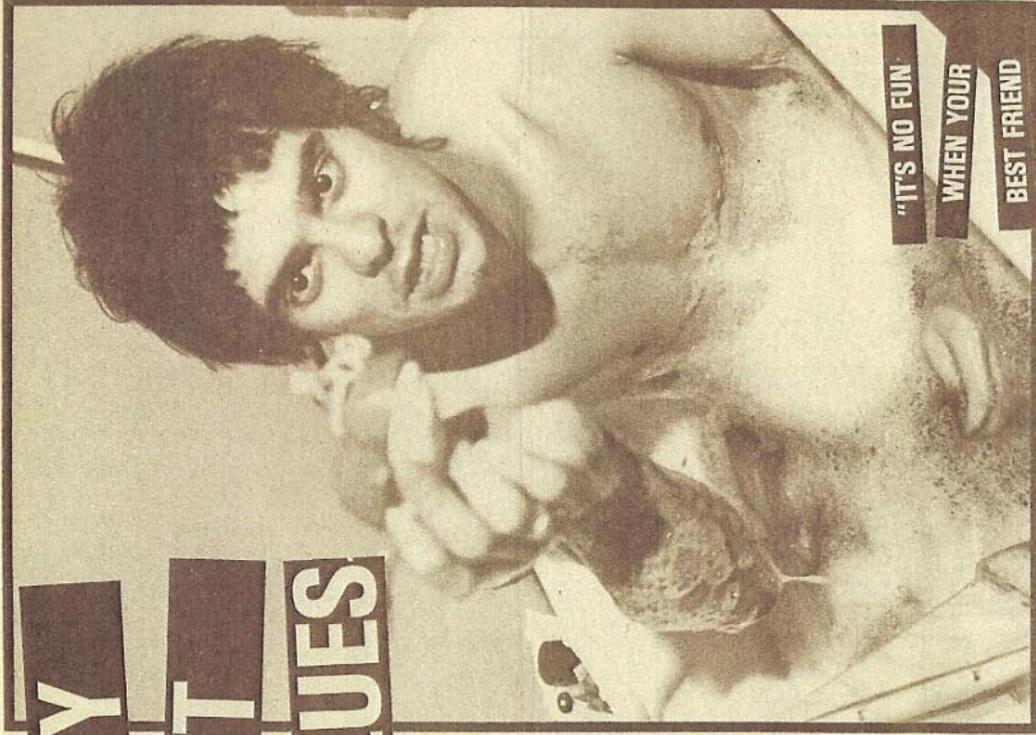
"Believe it or not even that can get boring after a while," says the apparently reformed fastest cock in the land, although he does add a poignant "I've got some's in a woman's bag."

No, The Stranglers are not on the verge of economic or any other kind of collapse as suggested by newspaper quotes attributed to manager Ian Grant after Cornwell's sentence was passed.

"I don't know why he said that," says Burrell, adding a considered "I guess he was being emotive."

Cornwell's delation from the field of action is a pain in the proverbial arse for all that.

"We were going through the next album. We've already started recording it and the idea was to put all these concerts. Still, maybe he'll have a lot of new



pic by Rex Features

"IT'S NO FUN WHEN YOUR BEST FRIEND IS TAKEN AWAY. I'VE GOT NO-ONE TO GO OUT WITH"



STRANGLERS: "It's no fun inside, especially if you're someone like Hugh"

By GIOVANNI DADOMO

Jacques with quiet optimism.

He hasn't seen Cornwell since his imprisonment. "He's only allowed one visitor a week in here's no fun," he says. "It's two a fortnight."

Burrell remarks on the irony of Cornwell's being sent down on the same day as William Whitebaw announced that the government was going to pursue a policy of huge prison reform, "because there were too many people in prisons already."

He says that he and Hugh were actually imprisoned. "I suppose it fucks up going to a lot of countries to play after he gets out," he adds, thinking now in Strangler terms.

Originally, things looked, yes, black. "We were going to cancel the gigs. But fortunately a lot of people wanted to go with us."

"So we can't play the new stuff, we can only play the easier of the numbers. Because a lot of numbers Hugh does weird timings on, which people don't really notice except when they try to play them."

Burrell fills a little of the silence with a dialogue by asking if his interrogator is listening to "Euroman" recently. "Will he be doing

"Not at the moment, there's nothing planned. He's been wanting to move to France for some time, he says, and would like to go there in the next few days."

"Totally French just for France. But it keeps getting delayed. There's a lot of things happening in France."

A healthier climate? A lot more fighting, I mean, not more physical fighting, established and rock 'n' roll isn't as established as it is here. It's suddenly picked us. It's fresher than it is here."

It's a question of attitude from your typical French posers — of which I guess there's more than anywhere else — it's a provincial thing in France.

In fact, the basement's sound is a mix of three months putting together a compilation album consisting of French musics recorded since 1977. He mentions an electronic outfit named C.O.M.A. as typifying what half the LP's like.

"Then on the other side there's more conventional instruments, guitars and drums. The idea is to come out. "The sad thing is that UA are bringing it out because no French company had faith in their own groups," says

Witcox, Hazel O'Connor, Kate Bush, and The Only Ones. "They're all people we've met and who haven't been instantly repulsed." Jean-Jacques smirks knowingly, "and haven't been ashamed to be seen with us."

"I guess he wanted to make an example of Hugh... So we could either have cancelled the gigs, or else do it anyway..." This

of material is necessarily reworked for the album.

"We'll be doing mainly the singles and things like that, stuff we'll be doing for the first time in two years." The judge presumably realised that he was affecting more than his

Cornwell to jail? "Oh, yes, it was all explained to him. He just to say "Appal dismissed!"

"Have you ever been in jail? Jet and I have both spent nights in jail. It's a real pig. I mean, a night is bad enough, so fuck know what it's like to spend months in an institution."

"I'm sure it's no fun inside, especially if you're someone like Hugh. I mean, these guys get real fucked, and if you stand up for yourself against the established hierarchy you get done over."

Cornwell's presumed reasonable well-being whilst behind bars is due to help from something called PRO-P, a prisoner's rights group. The Stranglers did benefit and helped get some publicity for a few years back.

"They brought out a book called 'Who Guards The Guards' by a bloke called Brian Stretton, and no-one would publish it because it was real meaty stuff," a few

of people around who want to know what we're up to, to know what we're doing. He now holds a black belt but didn't, he admits, possibly with some small changes, get it when he lived briefly in Japan. "I got some broken ribs there though," he adds, the result of an encounter with one of his teachers.

"I've been producing a bit. I've been working with a Japanese band called Uizard and I've been doing a few other things, electronic things. European groups — no-one English. Or British," he corrects.

"What else do bands do? I've been writing music, recording... I went to a party last year," he chortles.

"No, I think I went to two parties last year. Nothing really exciting. Did a lot of gigs abroad. Rode my Triumphs all over the world." He may, he says, be doing a TV film in Japan, "riding my Triumph Bonneville around Japan."

"But it'd be a good opportunity to ride around a lot. And on a British machine — which is as good as anything." He sees no discrepancy there, between promoting one

SOME FEW words on other matters, by way of a breather. Burrell's interest in the marital arts continue, despite interruptions aplenty from his band commitments.

"I don't want that to suffer while there's still a lot of people around who want to know what we're doing. He now holds a black belt but didn't, he admits, possibly with some small changes, get it when he lived briefly in Japan. "I got some broken ribs there though," he adds, the result of an encounter with one of his teachers.

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THE STRANGLERS: "The Men In Black" (Liberty LBG 30313).

I KNOW the Stranglers have had a bit of a rough time lately, what with being locked up by the surly gendarmes of Nice, getting suspended prison sentences and then finding that places of learning in the UK won't let them play because they're too rough.

But is that any excuse for releasing an album as drab and joyless as this? It's a prima facie example of the "I've suffered for my art and now it's your turn" school of thought.

To start with, the sleeve warns you that something solemn is waiting to lunge out of the Dansette to wrestle you to the floor and stifle you. The gatefold cover is a pale marbled grey colour, covered with ugly cravat-ecclesiastical lettering giving relevant details.

KITSCH

Inside, there's a colour reproduction of a painting of the Last Supper with a couple of wide boys painted in. "It's kitsch," writes an art expert.

While the title of the album seems to be "The Men In Black", all run together, the front of the sleeve has the words "The Gospel according to" printed above it. Is it a parody of "Life Of Brian"? Is it supposed to be funny at all? With The Stranglers, it's often difficult to tell where seriousness ends and leaden attempts at mirth begin.

In the old days, the band had a much sharper focus. Stuff like "Peaches" or "Nice And Sleazy" may well have been boorish, but it went straight for the throat. If you didn't like it, it at least made you feel like getting up and putting a bloody great boot in Hugh Cornwell's smirking face (though this would have been unwise). Cornwell's vocals used to be nagging and penetrating, working not. Burnel's bass was instantly recognisable too, with its bad tempered buzzing edges whirling out at you like a circular saw chased by a swarm of bees.



Drab men in grey

And now this. It starts off with "Waltz In Black", a fairground theme doodled on synthesizer. It's rather like The Band's "Theme From The Last Waltz". Later on, all kinds of funny sounds are layered over the top, mostly speeded up voices like The Chipmunks used to sound. Aren't The Stranglers a bit young for this sort of thing? The first proper song, "Just Like

Nothing On Earth", is more or less representative of the album's tone. Jet Black's drums thud away remorselessly in the background, abetted by some listless bass from Burnel. A dreary single-string riff on guitar entwines itself with some toytown synthesizer. The vocals (Cornwell, I think) seem vague and almost shy. The cover which arrives with the word

"earth" each time is a pale imitation of its former self. Then there's a bit of wibbly guitar which sounds like the riff of Father Townsend used in "Kelsey". The whole of the first side tries to achieve a sort of streamlined mechanistic feel, but instead it just drifts by in a grey blur.

In tunes like "Second Coming" and "Waiting For The Men In Black", the drums are stripped down to approximate Buzzcock John Maher in the latter piece. Voices are likewise dehumanised, with harmonies high and colourless. It's as though the band were aiming a specific sound and mood but missed by a wide enough margin to allow a joke to show. Side one's last track, instrumental called "Turn, The Centuries, Turn", gives initial hints something interesting. Cornwell's guitar is spacious and deliberate over a groaning rhythm pattern, then some thick, chunky organ begins to enstomach. Unfortunately the potential is thrown away, because the track goes on for far too long and fizzles out into scattered fragments of guitar.

The nearest the album comes to being cheerful is in the early part of the second side. It opens with the almost optimistic "Two Suspects", where the air is cleared by fussy drumming and some horsemen, elongated layers of guitar and keyboards fight it out with a bassist which sounds hostile for the first time. It's topped off with some luscious keyboards, which recreate electronic sound of a harpsichord in your own living room!

APATHY

And then there's "Thrown Away", where a tone of kindergarten simplicity is delivered with mechanical sparseness. It could have been a winner, but here it almost everywhere else on "Men In Black", the singing is indifferent to the point of apathy. There's no sense of warmth or purpose, and fun is certainly out of the question. The record closes with "Manna Machine", a stultic dollop of minimalism which barely exists at all, and the largely-instrumental "Hallow To Our Men", which is just depressing. It only remains to pose the question: Why? - ADAM SWEETING

How does Jean-Jacques Burnel (Stranglers bassist, very famous) maintain his uniformly awesome state of excellent health? The mystery is that there is no mystery. If you too would want to be a glowing example of physical fitness, the solution is obvious. Get a small female child to sit on your ass. (A Doctor writes: "This advice is not only medically irresponsible but dangerously sexist. We recommend fifteen hours sleep a night and no drugs.") Pic: Rex Features (whoever he is).



Hugh Cornwell - "Sexist? Mist?"

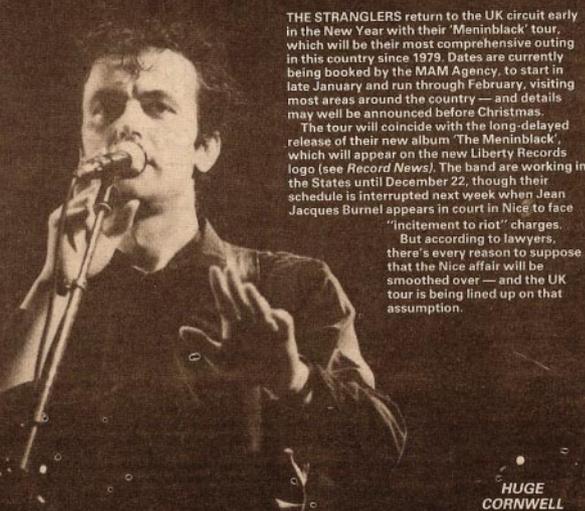
Moan In Black

THE review of the Stranglers' new album "The Men In Black" didn't deserve reviews for the Stranglers' brilliant last album "The Raven" if the Stranglers due for a sleeping off "accident". After Hugh Cornwell's ridiculous prison stretch and the recent Nice pulled through, much to the disapproval of the press. How many other music papers I read of three or four bands (all major artists) splitting up, but still the Stranglers remain intact which must surely gain them some respect from the press/media. No, all that can be said is "Oh yeah, sexism, journalist bashing blah blah". In fact, it's nothing of a journalist happened about three years ago, and the last song which is supposed to degrade women appears on "Black And White", also three years ago. Nobody mentions the amount of time the band channelled into anti-drug songs such as "Don't Bring Harry", "Dagbladet Durr" and others. How's about getting up to date, eh? - FRANK ROYER, Lawn Clives, Air Estate, Oldham.

Men in black rampaging in February

THE STRANGLERS return to the UK circuit early in the New Year with their 'Men in Black' tour, which will be their most comprehensive outing in this country since 1979. Dates are currently being booked by the MAM Agency, to start in late January and run through February, visiting most areas around the country - and details may well be announced before Christmas.

The tour will coincide with the long-delayed release of their new album 'The Men in Black', which will appear on the new Liberty Records logo (see Record News). The band are working in the States until December 22, though their schedule is interrupted next week when Jean Jacques Burnel appears in court in Nice to face "incitement to riot" charges. But according to lawyers, there's every reason to suppose that the Nice affair will be smoothed over - and the UK tour is being lined up on that assumption.



HUGH CORNWELL

