

THE INSIDE TRACK

ENTER THE SNAKEPIT

Not so long ago, it looked like **FRANK CARTER** might not make it here. But with the help of close friend and creative kindred spirit **DEAN RICHARDSON**, he's back on fighting form. We venture inside **THE RATTLESNAKES'** lair to unpack their brotherly bond...

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Take a stroll down an inconspicuous side street in London's Mile End district, and you'll come across a set of frosted glass doors, hidden away from the takeaways, coffee shops and health food stores that litter the capital's East End. You wouldn't know it to look at, but behind these faceless doors lies Frank Carter's art studio and The Rattlesnakes headquarters.

The door opens and Kerrang! are beckoned in by Rattlesnakes guitarist and Frank's business partner, Dean Richardson, who greets us with a handshake and an apologetic grin as he fields a phone call. No sooner do we step inside than we are tripping over books zigzagged across the concrete floor.

"Don't worry about those," explains Frank's manager Matt Greer, "Frank has just been spraying them."

Sure enough, some of these hardback books – a limited-edition run chronicling the making of The Rattlesnakes' third album *End Of Suffering* – have been freshly sprayed in fluorescent

orange and blue. Cardboard boxes of books and records are stacked next to rolled-up paintings along the white walls, while spray cans, every colour of a wizard's fever dreams, sit neatly on a steel shelving unit.

Upstairs is The Rattlesnakes' control centre. On one side lies a jungle of potted plants, sofas and guitars, and on the other is a rough-hewn wooden table surrounded by a handful of young assistants tapping away on laptops. Mingled with the scent of tea and paint is an atmosphere of focus and industrious creativity.

"Since we got this place a year ago it's been a factory of fun," says Frank, as he removes the dust mask covering his mouth and settles into a chair downstairs.

"It's hard to remember how we did anything without it," agrees Dean, who at 28 is Frank's junior by seven years. "We've made more [music] for this album than we made for the other ones, but we've also been busier, and I think that's only been possible by having this space and being able to do things like spray books while we're working on guitar tones."

They tried to hide, but the Rattlesnakes' incessant hissing gave them away

The partners in crime enthuse about how their most ambitious – and for Frank, most deeply personal – album took shape here last summer. For a while, its title was painted above where we sit as a guiding mantra. “Even when we were writing about the heaviest shit, there was hope, because we were here,” explains Frank. “The very idea of writing a song about the lowest part of your life, you have to have been able to live through it. That’s what we were trying to show everybody.”

Both men share a Zen-like sense of calm and confidence today. Yet as the two sole constants in The Rattlesnakes’ ranks – now including Tom Barclay on bass and drummer Gareth Grover – Frank and Dean have shared a long road to get to this point...

Ask Frank when he first met Dean and he will pinpoint the moment quicker than a blink of his steely eyes: “June 21, 2010.” As proof, he fishes out an *End Of Suffering* book from a nearby box and flicks open to a snapshot of Dean’s 2010 diary. “Nailed it!” he says, as the entry on that specified date simply reads: ‘FRANK CARTER TATTOO’.

Dean twists his left arm towards us and points to a large swallow bisected by a dagger in mid-flight, inked just below the elbow. At the time, he was the leading creative force in hardcore unit Heights from Welwyn Garden City, a satellite town similar to Frank’s native Hemel Hempstead. Even before then, though, he was a shrewd operator, who by the age of 14 was designing websites for local businesses. In the case of one big client, a car dealership, Dean was technically too young to legally take the job. Rather than pass it up, however, he sent his older brother to impersonate him, shake hands and collect the fee.

“That story cracks me up,” grins Frank, marvelling at his co-conspirator’s game. “This kid has mad hustle. That’s why we get on – we’re both the same.”

The pair stayed in touch over AOL Messenger, Dean sending song ideas to Frank and the elder punk acting as an agony uncle for problems in Heights. Once the gears were set in motion for The Rattlesnakes in late 2014, the duo’s songwriting partnership bloomed quickly. In the first year, Frank estimates they wrote 35 songs, which would make up 2015’s incendiary opening salvo *Blossom*, plus the bulk of its 2017 follow-up *Modern Ruin*. In each other, they had found a kindred spirit who could push them to their creative limits.

“There’s no ego between us whatsoever,” Frank explains. “If one of us doesn’t like something, it’s okay. In the past I often had a compromised output, because there were lots of people fighting for recognition. For the first time, we’ve both found our space and our freedom to be artists. We respect each other.”

Both men also found that for the first time their creative efforts were being met with unanimous, real-world support. If *Blossom* rudely awoke Britain to Frank’s return, *Modern Ruin*’s mature songwriting and muscular rock saw The Rattlesnakes gain radio play and tours Stateside. The latter album crashed into the Top 10 album charts in the UK, no mean feat for a fiercely independent band.

Yet if their musical fortunes were on the rise, behind the scenes Frank’s personal life was entering a downward spiral. The relentless campaign of touring and promoting two albums back to back had taken a toll on both his mental health and his marriage, with he and his wife formally separating in 2017. Tour dates in America and Europe were cancelled as Frank began to take emotional stock and adjust to the reality of co-parenting his young daughter, Mercy. Compounding all of this was



Dean and Frank: ‘Snakes, on a plain’

kept asking me, and I was honest,” Frank says. “He knows everything about me. The way we write, talk and the reason we’re friends is because there’s an absolute honesty between us. There always has been and always will be.”

Which brings us to *End Of Suffering* and the studio in which we find ourselves today. Among the late-night writing sessions and creativity here, Frank began facing his personal demons and shortcomings as honestly as he could.

“It was about the last two years of my life, but I tried to take myself on for the first time,” he explains of the process. “I used to write a lot about war – in relationships, in real life – and instead I was writing about the war within myself.”

The album crackles with the emotional charge of that internal conflict. Though Frank felt safe enough to be vulnerable with Dean about his innermost struggles – anxiety, lust, fears of failing as a father – some songs were still hard to swallow. Slap-bang in the centre of the record is *Angel Wings*, a pulsing heart of darkness, which Frank sings from the bottom of a pill bottle, ‘swaying like a gorilla on the loose, head in the noose’.

“It’s about the worst moment of my life where I felt like I didn’t want to fucking be alive any more,” Frank says without self-pity. “So I bring that to my best mate and I start singing it in front of him and at the end he’s like, ‘We need to talk about this, and have a fucking hug and a cup of tea.’”

“I’m always here for you, Frank, but I’ll also ask you for help with my problems,” Dean interjects, emphasising that this friendship is a two-way street. “Frank is probably better support than I am, because he’s better at processing things. It’s just that people don’t get to read what’s going on inside my head.”

And what would that be?

“Not dissimilar problems. I deal with my own anxieties, stresses, what it means to be a man and what I was told it was to be a man,” he says, quite comfortable in laying out his problems in front of his friend. “We’re different people, but we’ve grown up in the same world and been affected by it. That’s why people will relate to this. It’s two close friends, helping each other through hard times.”

As the album’s title dictates, *End Of Suffering* has seen them come out the other side and a busy year of opportunity awaits. A calendar on the wall houses a Sharpie scribble of tour dates and travel plans, with Frank’s days with his daughter inked with equal importance. It’s full steam ahead in The Rattlesnakes world.

“The reality,” says the vocalist, “is that when we’re really engaged, we’re unstoppable.”

He smiles as a thought occurs to him and adds, “We’ll take over next door and in 10 years we’ll have the street!”

Both Frank and Dean can afford to dream bigger, because *End Of Suffering* and their enduring bond will take them much further. Don’t believe us? Watch this space... **K!**

FRANK CARTER AND THE RATTLESNAKES’ NEW ALBUM *END OF SUFFERING* IS OUT NOW ON INTERNATIONAL DEATH CULT

“THERE’S NO EGO BETWEEN US... WE’RE BOTH THE SAME”

FRANK CARTER

a potentially career-defining, sold-out show at London’s O2 Brixton Academy in December.

“The life that I had worked hard to create was falling to pieces, and a lot of it was my own doing. I had guilt and shame around my behaviour, and dealing with the repercussions of that,” Frank says today, matter-of-factly as he fiddles with the spray mask in his hands. “But the one thing I had, the one thing I needed more than anything, was that show – to walk out on that stage and recognise our achievements, because it’s not just about me.”

In the end, the show was a triumph, which Dean attributes to taking care of home first.

“My thing was recognising that maybe at this point, I’m the person that needs to step in and say, ‘We should cancel this,’ ‘cause it’s hard to talk about stuff and say, ‘I can’t do this.’”

“I didn’t want to be a burden, but he just

THE DEVIL MAKES WORK FOR IDLE HANDS

Want to keep the demons at bay? Stay busy. **FRANK CARTER** knows this all too well...

“I’m always tattooing, but I’m taking a backseat on that for a while. I’ve been taking a lot of photos, working on a few portraits and stuff for an exhibition down the line. But my paintings are the big thing at the minute.”

“I took the past year to work on these big paintings and push myself to see if I can find anywhere to exhibit and sell them. They’re abstract and I’ve been trying a new process.”

“They become these weird demented landscapes where you see everything and nothing all at once; things that you can and can’t recognise, and it makes new shapes. It’s all about the chaos in life and chaos in the

mind, and what I was trying to do is realise this idea that life is made up of singular moments. Every second is so important.

“I was trying to imagine a human being and every single moment of their life on a sliding scale pushed to 30 per cent. If you could see all those frozen moments in a single moment, you would have everything that had gone before to make their entire history.”

“We’re made up of every interaction we’ve had with everyone we’ve ever met. The minute you try to comprehend that... it gets complicated! I’m proud of these paintings, but the next big step is finishing them!”

Frank Carter: like butter wouldn’t melt...