

THE STRANGER IN SNIDER

Dee Snider Explains Twisted Sister

On the cover of Twisted Sister's last album, *Stay Hungry*, Dee Snider is about to lunch on a big boneful of raw meat. *Grrraaauughh!* Upstairs at WEA Records in Auckland he has requested a cup of tea. *Two sugars, please!*

So it would seem that Dee Snider without makeup is quite a different person to the man with the painted face ...

"That's what people say and it's true to an extent but they're both part of me. I believe everybody's got a negative side — anger, frustration, hostility ... all the negative emotions make up the negative side of your personality. And when you meet people, hopefully they are nice and straight, as long as you're being nice to them and so forth. And you don't usually see the bad side until you get into an argument with them or whatever.

"If you have a way of expressing the negative side then you're a lot more in control of that part of your personality. It doesn't just come blasting out for the hell of it. Before Twisted Sister it would — the negative part of my personality that appears on stage was like just part of my everyday personality. Now, over the eight years, I've made almost a total separation.

"There is a line of course. If people hassle me or bother me, which happens from time to time, it comes out like *that*, I mean, it's there. But having a form of expression like Twisted Sister makes me quite well adjusted when I'm offstage."

One staff member has barely affirmed to another that no, it's *nota* wig, it *is* all real, before Dee Snider ambles amiably into the office, a blond monster to his wife Suzette's platinum petiteness.

"Oh hi, Russell, I saw your mag today. We're not in it yet!"

I haven't talked to you yet!

"Yeah!"

Hey!

Beneath the quite beautiful mass of hair it's still possible to see Dee Snider as the gawky, awkward kid of a New York immigrant family. His

face is long, coarsely angled — certainly not "the ugliest man in rock 'n' roll" as has been said, but never a male model. The hair hides and softens his face but trailing down from each temple are dark locks curiously reminiscent of the side-curls of orthodox Jews.

And he was the gawky, awkward kid, he explains. Until ...

"When I was 16 I came to the realisation that the trends and the cool people and what was in and what was hip was a bunch of shit. And I resented the fact that for the first 16 years of my life I tried following the trends and I tried being like other people and I wanted desperately to be accepted but because I wasn't attractive in the normal sense and because I didn't have money and I couldn't afford the clothes I was an outcast. Because it didn't naturally come to me to walk to someone else's beat I was an asshole there, just one of those idiots in school. I was a *total* outcast — very few friends. And I met one of those friends recently and we talked about how grossly unpopular we were in school.

"There was a choice at that point. You could go into a life of total introversion, where for the rest of your life you were one of those timid people who tries not to make any waves because he's really popular and everything he does is wrong. You can fall into that kind of life — well I went the other way. It dawned on me: 'Who the fuck are these people to tell me what to do? Who the fuck died and left them fuckin' king?'"

"It became a kind of commitment to prove how cool I was on *my* terms. I'm still on my terms. And now I'm becoming a hero for millions — we sold two million albums — for kids. The most uncool person in high school is now the *hero*. So what *is* cool? Cool is what you decide it is. All you gotta do is feel good about what you're doing. If you don't feel good about it you should do something to change it."

So Dee Snider took off in his own direction, with a chip on his shoulder "the size of New Zealand". He'd walk the streets in makeup, just *daring* anyone to make fun of him ...

The stage situation was similar when he formed Twisted Sister eight years ago. To front up to a heavy metal audience in "any bits of worn-



PHOTO BY WILLIAM WEST

ens' clothing that we could squeeze into or rip up" took *guts*.

"The makeup and the clothes then were just haphazard, anything that would make people go 'Oh God!'. But when I met Suzette she started working with me and showing me stuff and I've realised that over the years the makeup went from being feminine originally to getting more and more grotesque, but it was becoming more my own face accented by the makeup. If I make the faces that I make on stage I realise that the costuming and makeup have come to *represent* when just standing still, the negative side of my personality. The clothes are no longer feminine — I call them Mad Max Meets Walt Disney. They're emotional costumes — when I put it on it helps me tap into that part of my personality.

"I don't feel too friendly when I put it on. I don't feel like I could just sit down and talk like this. That's why I never do interviews with my makeup on — the answers aren't different, they're just a lot more ... *hostile*."

Heavy Metal: State of the Amalgam, Part 1

"I believe heavy metal or heavy rock is a tremendous outlet for hostility. It's the one form of rock 'n' roll — besides punk — that still contains rebellion. Your parents hate it. Spandau Ballet, my parents like. They think Boy George is okay so long as you don't look at him. That's not rock 'n' roll. In its inception, the basis of rock 'n' roll was rebellious, your parents hated it and it was a good time. A lot of heavy metal bands have lost touch with that aspect. They're so into the demons and wizards that they've forgotten that the reason people are there is they wanna have fun. So I want people to see us, I want them to scream, yell, shout, escape and give vent to their emotions and leave happier. *Leave happier* and when I was in the audience I left the concert *exhilarated*. I used to wanna punch someone in the face all day, I wanted to scream at my fuckin' parents, but I couldn't, I held it back.

"Then I went to the show and I threw my fist in the air and I screamed. Just as loud as I woulda screamed at my parents — and I punched just

as hard as I woulda punched someone in the face. The energy was expended but there was no damage, nobody was hurt.

"Heavy metal feeds off negative emotions — but the end result is definitely positive."

State of the Amalgam, Part 2

You talk about non-conformity — yet there's as much, if not more, of a uniform and accepted mode of behaviour in heavy metal as in any other subculture. Does that concern you?

"It doesn't worry me — it's a part of life and the fact is that the great majority of people are gonna be followers and there aren't that many lead-

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