

FRAME STORY!

THE BIRTH OF A NATION



Memoirs based on true events in the life of
OTIZ F. ANGEL

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To my family & friends,
thanks for always showing
me your love, and for making
my life worth living

- CHAPTER TWO -

Curly Perm Is Cool?



Life can be funny sometimes! It takes just a small spark to burn down a whole fucking forest! Twenty-three people arrested, and me nursing a busted lip, black eye and a bloody nose. My favourite Armani fur coat was ripped to shreds. However, it wasn't always like this. Let me take you back to the mid-1980s...

My name is Otiz F. Angel but everyone calls me Angel. I won't tell you my age, but let's just say back then I was too young to legally be inside any nightclub, let alone drink alcohol – not that I let that stop me, of course.

I looked old enough to fool the door men, and most of my friends were past the age when these things were an issue, so it was easy enough to blend in. I was in a gang which spanned across much of North London, I won't say the name to protect its identity but amongst ourselves, we were called 'The Firm'. The members were a group of Faces from some of the more notorious districts of North and East London; Hackney, Bow, Tottenham, Kilburn and Harlesden. When we went out to parties we were always well-dressed and clean-looking, with a harem of girls in tow but, truth is, we were a long way off from being gentlemen.

First there was Leon, my big, aggressive, bad-tempered older cousin. He was a semi-pro boxer with fists like iron and an attitude to match. Don't get me wrong, he made his fair share of jokes, charmed the ladies and was once known to have cried watching the end of 'The Deer Hunter', but if you crossed him or his family, run, 'cause Leon was a real psycho who didn't give a fuck.

There was Raymond. Mixed-race, with Indian, Jamaican and Irish roots which gave him an off-key sense of humour. He was perpetually cracking jokes, which made it easy to forget that he was a serious fighter, who would take on anybody, no matter who they were, or what size. He was totally fearless.

Billy, Tommy and Danny were real hard cases who lived beneath the Bow Bells of East London. We called them the Cockney Brothers. Their family had emigrated from Ireland a few generations back, but over the years, they'd lost the accent and considered themselves resolutely English.

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Their clan was into all kinds of shady activities – robbery, extortion and more besides. During the day, the brothers helped their dad keep the family business going, but at night their minds, loyalty and muscles belonged to the Firm.

Then there was Mikee from the Broadwater Farm Estate. Mikee's parents were Jamaican although if you looked at what he ate on a daily basis, you'd think he was pure, white cockney: fish and chips, or pie, mash and liquor – Yuck! It used to make my stomach turn. Mikee was big and tough, but his brother, Ronald, was even bigger, and in some people's eyes, more ferocious, but if you asked either of the brothers who they thought would win if ever they came to blows, both agreed that Mikee probably had the edge.

Next was Barry, a real Bruce Lee freak. His older brothers were into Martial Arts, so Barry had been getting off on movies like 'Enter the Dragon' and 'Drunken Master' while most kids his age were watching 'Magic Roundabout'. Every Saturday night before going clubbing you could catch Barry at the Curzon late-night cinema, avidly watching endless sub-titled Kung-Fu movies. He was fanatical to the point that some days he would dress up in the full outfit – Chinese shirts, baggy trousers and slippers, which we thought was kind of weird for a six foot black guy. Sometimes, the rest of the Firm would join him at the Curzon, and after being hyped up by the movies, we would wreak havoc as we walked the streets practising flying kicks, and karate chops on each other, loudly imitating all the sound-effects.

Finally there was Oscar, a stocky white boy of Italian descent. His thing was cars. Stealing them, that is. Or stealing from them – stereos, spare parts, or whatever happened to be in them that might have been of any value. He'd been in and out of jail more times than anyone else I knew. I couldn't work out if it was because he was a prolific thief or simply because he was shit at crime, but you could rely on him to stand firm and watch your back in times of trouble. And if you ever needed a new Blaupunkt or a set of custom rims, Oscar was your man.

Another twenty or so lesser Firm members were just a phone call away, making safety in numbers any time we were out and about. Every one was either a fighter or a cool kid from the neighbourhood who wanted something to belong to.

We lived a life of violence, but there was a code. We weren't mindless thugs who attacked without provocation. We would not tolerate individuals or gangs who would victimise the general public. The Firm was our security,

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and we defended and protected ourselves, our families and those closest to us. Random attacks and muggings were sickening, cowardly acts. God help anyone we caught doing that shit.

This was the heyday of Soul and Funk. The music of bands like Loose Ends, Shalimar, Earth Wind and Fire, the SOS Band and the Jacksons. The style was long, paisley shirts and baggy trousers, topped off with a wet-look curly perm, and a diamond brooch instead of a tie. Back then, going out was all about looking cool.

Forget over-drinking or going nuts in them days. Fuck no! Keep up your one-two step, and always, always, look cool.

Back in those days, Angel and Leon shared the leadership of the Firm as the business had been started by their family. In his spare time, Leon also happened to be on the security team for Camden Palace, which was *the* place to be. From all over the city, Londoners gathered each weekend, dancing to Soul, Funk and everything else groovy. It was Angel's favourite place to chill out and get lost in the music. The ceilings and doorways of the Palace, a former theatre, were adorned with velvet drapes. Greek-style sculptures lined the walls, and there were five levels of seats and balconies where you could make yourself comfortable and still witness the action on the dance floor below.

This was a typical Friday night and as usual, Angel was there, with the Firm. He wasn't much of a drinker; but always found it hard to say no, especially if the beverage offered was Courvoisier brandy. It seemed a lot of people had been paid and were feeling generous that night, and the effects of the drink were starting to kick in a little too hard. Worried he might lose control or make himself look stupid, he made his way to the restroom to sober up. After freshening up, washing his face and checking that his hair and clothes were still immaculate, he made his way back towards the Firm, cruising smoothly through the snazzy suits, silk dresses and high heels. The DJ dropped 'Hanging on a String' by Loose Ends, and the crowd went crazy in unison, busting out the pre-learned formation dance moves of the 1980s. Suddenly, from amongst the silk and satin, something caught his attention. It was then that he saw them for the first time.

A few casual-looking people were standing in a huddle at the side of the dance floor, dressed in T-shirts, some with a smiley face printed on

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them, like your teacher might have drawn in your book in junior school on the rare occasions when you'd done your homework properly. In those days, nobody dressed like that to go to a club! Everybody else looked immaculate, like they'd spent at least five hours in front of the mirror, yet these guys were stood around waiting, dressed like they were going to hang out at the park.

"They must be gypsies, or tramps, or something," thought Angel, surprised they'd even been allowed to enter the club dressed like that. Then he spotted his older cousin Leon, casting a watchful eye over the dance floor, so he paid the strangers no more attention. As they stood together, chatting and watching the crowd, the DJ picked up the microphone for an announcement.

"Bust your moves and feel the grooves! Tonight I've got something special for you, and it's not the foxtrot! It's a new sound from Chicago and it's called ACID HOUSE! Put your feet to the dance floor and give it a try!"

Leon and Angel watched as the first Acid House beat dropped in the club. It wasn't pretty. The majority of the people just walked off the dance floor, visibly disgusted once they'd heard the first four beats. Some even started shouting abuse at the DJ. However, the small group of casually-dressed people Angel had seen earlier, wearing smiley T-shirts, started cheering loudly as they were joined by lots of others dressed in a similar fashion. Their dance moves were erratic and energetic; their eyes were unnaturally wide open and their shouts of approval, "Aciiiiid. Aciiiiid." could be heard over the music from the other side of the dance floor. Angel couldn't take his eyes off these weird newcomers.

"Leon, who the fuck *are* those fools?" Angel asked.

"They call themselves 'Ravers', but I reckon they're just junkies, man, high on pills and shit," he replied.

"They'd have to be! It sounds like the record's got a scratch and is repeating the same bit over and over. There's no way that monotonous shit's ever going to catch on, mate, no way," said Angel.

The look of joy from the wide-eyed strangers as they stomped with a total lack of finesse made the whole thing seem strange and outlandish.

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