

THE ART OF DARKNESS THE HISTORY OF GOTH

BY JOHN ROBB - *LOUDER THAN WAR BOOKS*

Over 30 years ago, I spent a few wintry weeks listening to nothing but a live Fields of the Nephilim album on a Walkman. My mile-long walk from the bus stop was along dark country roads and Earth Inferno was the perfect accompaniment. I haven't listened to it since but when I got to Chapter 32 (At The Gates of Silent Memory: Fields of the Nephilim) of John Robb's authoritative tome I was transported back to those walks with just Carl McCoy's gravelly vocals as company. Good times.

The Art of Darkness starts in 410AD with the sacking of Rome by the Visigoths. Over 600 pages later we're back to the present day. Goth has gone mainstream, its influence is everywhere: fashion, music, film, TV and Gothic-inspired creators on Instagram and TikTok have millions of followers. In between we get the first truly comprehensive overview of Goth music, its culture and its lasting legacy.

Robb writes that, "the true progenitors of goth first coalesced in 1965, in the sunshine state of California. That summer, four relatively affluent and well-educated dropouts from the American Dream formed The Doors." They were the first band described as Gothic and they would soundtrack the dark underbelly of American youth mirroring, "the inevitable pop culture mood change."

What follows is an in-depth exploration of all the main players (Andrew Eldritch, Killing Joke, Bauhaus, The Banshees, The Cure, Nick Cave and many more) and the many sub genres since the post-punk period. Robb takes diversions to explore the romantic poets, European folk tales, Gothic architecture and painters, the occult and strange imagined beasts (from French werewolves to Irish banshees).

Bands that were just "beyond the classic goth hinterland" also come under his microscope: Echo & The Bunnymen, The Smiths, The Chameleons, The Jesus and Mary Chain, The Sound, and Cocteau Twins. Contemporary artists (including Anna Von Hausswolff, Chelsea Wolfe and Zola Jesus) who share DNA with the goth kids are also discussed. Only Robb could draw fascinating lines from Fields of the Nephilim to post-rock bands like Godspeed! You Black Emperor and Swans. This is an engrossing, thoroughly researched and passionately written book, I loved it. Now where's that Nephilim tape.

MY #GOTH TOP 5



01

Bauhaus -
'Bela Lugosi's Dead'

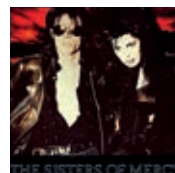
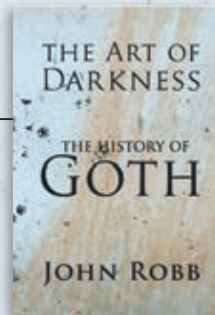
A few weeks after forming, Bauhaus entered a studio and recorded this 9-minute opus in one take. After one of the greatest song intros ever Peter Murphy intones, "White on white translucent black capes, Back on the rack, Bela Lugosi's Dead" and we are away. It still stuns.



02

Siouxsie and the Banshees
'Spellbound'

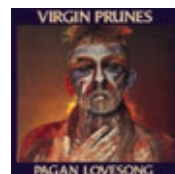
"Following the footsteps, of a rag doll dance, we are entranced." Siouxsie's back on tour this year - get ready to be entranced all over again.



03

The Sisters of Mercy -
'This Corrosion'

A 40-piece choir, producer Jim Steinman, famed session-guitarist Eddie Martinez and a post-apocalyptic video. Eldritch himself described it as, "stupidly over the top bombastic." It is and it's glorious.



04

Virgin Prunes -
'Pagan Lovesong'

Guggi and Gavin's strong images could sometimes overshadow the music, but listen to this 1982 single to hear what an incredible band the Prunes were. "I had a weird dream, watch but don't touch" screams Gavin over the top.



05

Fields of the Nephilim -
'Moonchild'

Named after a 1917 novel by English occultist Aleister Crowley, 'Moonchild' gave them their first big hit. The live version from 1991's Earth Inferno is essential.