

## CRYSTALLION

JUNE 2008

**“COME, CRUSADER; LET  
BATTLE COMMENCE!”**

Thomas Strübler of Crystallion talks about the band's new album 'Hattin'.

as well as our keyboardist Manuel [Schallinger] are from the Chiemsee area of Bavaria in Southern Germany on the border with Austria - which is

time. Throughout the next two years the style changed and when I joined in spring 2005 the band had already found their current musical direction, playing straight-forward melodic power metal.” And the unusual name? “It was not that difficult for us to come up with something,” he replies. “It was our drummer Martin who was thinking about band names



Surprise release of the year so far for me is 'Hattin', the second album by German power metal band Crystallion which, according to vocalist Thomas Strübler, is “Just six guys aged between 25 and 31 who come from quite different places... Our bassist Stefan [Gimpl] and drummer Martin [Herzinger]

where I'm from: Salzburg, to be exact. Our two guitarists Florian [Ramsauer] and Patrick [Johász] live in Munich.” As for the band's early days, “I was not in the band at the start, but I have studied our history,” Thomas laughs. “Stefan and Martin founded the band in 2003 but still played hard rock at that

one day and by trying to find a unique one he combined some words to create Crystallion. That's how it was! Easy!” It was an early demo - 'Knights Of The Apocalypse... Nemesis' in 2005 that really started the ball rolling for Crystallion. “That's true,” the singer agrees, “although the band had **1**

already opened for W.A.S.P. some months before. But it was through that demo that we got a deal with a record company so 'Knights...' was kind of a turning point for us, yes."

The deal in question led to their December 2006 debut release 'A Dark Enchanted Crystal Night', the recording of which had its bitter-sweet moments. "Well, the songs came together easily, just because we had had so much time for compos-

But in the end we came out of the studio with a result we could be happy with and new experiences which we luckily didn't forget when the time came to go back in and record. 'Hattin'.

"I think we were quite lucky in that there was no pressure at all on us when we did 'Hattin'," he continues. "The first album was not that successful in terms of sales, so we were not put under pressure by the record

everyone!

'Hattin' is a classy power metal walk-in-the-park in the footsteps of prime-time Helloween or Rhapsody, featuring almost an hour of riffs 'n' anthems overlaid with Thomas's multi-octave vocals. Check out the juggernaut that is 'Under Siege' or, for a more frenetic workout, the wonderfully titled 'The Battle - Higher Than The Sky'. It certainly is a great album, and the band are understandably very pleased with the outcome "Oh yes," nods Thomas. "We think the album represents the band's development over the last few years and also points out the direction we will be going on the next album.

Of course there are always things you would do differently if you had the chance to do it again - well, except on Maiden's 'Piece of Mind', I guess", laughs the Maiden-mad singer - "but the overall result makes us very proud indeed. I think it's more powerful and symphonic than its predecessor. There are more keyboard arrangements and more choirs, and I think all-in-all the album is more melodic than the first one."

'Hattin' is a concept album, the title coming from a Twelfth Century battle in which the Crusaders were roundly stuffed by Saladin and lost Jerusalem and other cities in the process - probably the most significant defeat for the Christians throughout the Crusades. But in answer to the question, 'What is your fascination with the Crusades?' Thomas replies, "First of all, it's a fascination with history in general. In the particular case of 'Hattin' it was Stefan's -he's our main song writer - idea to write about the Crusades since he had already read quite a lot on the subject and already had



ing them; and two songs on the album are songs we had also recorded for the demo, which made it easier as well. But, to be honest, I have to admit that there were also hard times in the studio. It was our first time in a real studio recording a full-length album and we were not as well prepared as we should have been which made the whole thing a bit... well, stressy.

company to come up with a follow-up. And we already knew that we wanted to find another label for the second album so we just took as much time as we needed to write the songs, and the recordings as well. But the songs came together quite fast; Stefan is a quick songwriter, sometimes ideas just seem to be gushing out of him!" There's a mental image for

some ideas as to how the concept should shape up. I wrote half of the lyrics on the album and I'd had to dig into the matter before starting to write, but in times of the internet that is thankfully not too difficult," he laughs.

I wondered if Thomas was worried at all about misinterpretation of the songs, in the light of Saxon being kicked off the Dubai Metalfest bill because of the lyrics - or someone's interpretation of the lyrics - of their anthem 'Crusader'. "Actually, I didn't know about the Saxon incident," he admits, "but I play the song 'Crusader' with my cover band and I am also not very happy with the lyrics; ours are a bit more 'diplomatic', I would say. But of course I know that Saxon's song is written from the Crusaders' point of view and not from Biff's, so it's a bit ridiculous to remove them from the bill, but Islamic countries tend not to be as 'liberal' as we are where these things are concerned. On the other hand black metal bands are sometimes still facing similar problems in Europe so I guess I should be careful when I voice such opinions."

Skipping back a bit, and trying to lighten the mood, I pick up on the fact that Thomas said he wrote half the lyrics on the album. "That's right. The way we've worked up until now is that our bassist Stefan writes all of the songs and I contribute about 50 % of the lyrics. That has worked out well and will probably not change in the near future. I would love to write a complete song but I'm just not that good at it so I concentrate on writing the best lyrics I can and let Stefan do the rest of the stuff."

Despite the carefully constructed songs on the band's two

albums, Crystallion is no studio project. "Oh no," says Thomas. "We are very much a live band. I think that playing live is our biggest strength. We definitely are a live band, we enjoy every moment on stage and we also show that to the audience. Our fans' reactions have been great. We haven't played to many large crowds so far, but I can't wait to get out on a really big stage!"

Before we move away from the album, I asked how much input the band had to their two albums' eye-catching covers. "Well, with the first album, I'd say the band's contribution was more than 50 %, but on the second album it was the artist Ivo Klaus who was responsible for the result and we are very, very happy with that so I guess we will work like that again in the future. Of course we roughly tell the artist what we have in mind, but the main work should be done by someone who really knows how to execute it."

As time's moving on, and I always like to get some trivia from my interviewees, I ask Thomas to share some obscurities about the band, although the question stumps him for a moment. "Oh, that's not easy," he pauses. "What about the fact that our guitarist Paddy, who looks least like it, works at an old people's home. Or how about the fact that I play the recorder quite well?" he offers.

It's time to wrap up, so I ask Thomas what's next for Crystallion "Well, the big breakthrough, hopefully!" he laughs. "No, I'm kidding. Of course we hope that our album will sell, but we will concentrate on our live activities now and try to play as often as possible. Until now we could only arrange concerts in Bavaria but we hope to be playing abroad in autumn.

We would obviously love to play in your country one day," he laughs again: "after all, it is where Maiden come from!" he adds, with a glint in his eye.

'Hattin' was released in May 2008 on Dockyard1

For more information, go to [www.crystallion.net](http://www.crystallion.net)