

FIREWORKS IN BROOKLYN

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, Happy New Year and all that!” Does Scrooge’s reign extend to New Year’s Eve? Or is it kicked out onto the streets in time to join the Boxing Day sales queues, by which point I become just an ordinary miserable git with no Dickensian relevance? Whichever it is, the well-intended but requisite “Happy New Year!” had me gulping champagne, embarrassed and anti-social on the sofa while my girlfriend and her family stood by the window, oohing and aaahing at the fireworks as they exploded over Manhattan, firing the old year off into space and ushering in the new with a forest of burnt cardboard, touch paper and hospital wards filled with second degree burns.

I’m drinking champagne, I’m in a glamorous city (meaning any city abroad, except Normal, Illinois or Stuttgart) watching fireworks in the company of near and dear but still managing to sulk. Well it’s Christmas, the holiday period, the suicide season, the death of a year, that time, that particular moment when your thoughts are centred on the events of the past versus the hopes for the future. For me, on this New Year, that was a contest on a par with Godzilla versus, well, some other histrionic Japanese guy in a monster suit.

So 1996 takes a colossal swing at our hero, 1997, which takes it in the solar plexus, buckles, then...the screen goes blank.

A brief history of mine

A true Cockney by birth if not by accent, I was born in the City of London just in time for my parents to celebrate the release of “A Hard Days Night” by the Beatles. My first real musical memories are from the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, rainy, south London Sunday afternoons spent indoors, the headache inducing smell of cigars that my father was using to wean himself off smoking, the child-baffling conversation of my parents and their visitors and Beatles albums. Which I hated. Luckily, watching Top of the Pops was an institution in our house (as well as Dr. Who, the episodes of which have since had their terrifying qualities evaporate in BBC vaults) and Gary Glitter, the Osmonds and Slade gave me a new outlook on music: It was something to be exhilarated by, even if I was too young to be wearing the make up. In the case of T Rex, it was something worth miming with fishing

rods to. When my 9th birthday came around, top of my present list was my first single, "Hellraiser" by the Sweet. When it was played at my birthday party, on a sunny summer afternoon, I was so excited I squirmed under a chair. Clearly, I was never going to be much of a dancer.

I played that record endlessly, deciding that the parts sung by the guitarist, not the singer, on TV were "my" parts.

Three months later, my parents wedged my younger brother and I in-between large quantities of peanut butter and vile-tasting dehydrated meals ("at last! A use for dried skunk!") in the back of a Land Rover and headed off in convoy with our South African neighbours towards the Sahara. This was apparently the sort of thing that got arranged in the '70s if your parents went out drinking. The neighbours were returning home and as it was (feasibly) on their way we would drive around the desert with them for 6 weeks or so and then come back. In the early '90s ravers came up with scenes like this while on Ecstasy and pretended they'd forgotten about it the next day, thus sparing us a Sahara filled with desiccated corpses in Tribal Gathering T shirts.

Not everything went as planned in the desert; it rained, once, (my mother to my father, "That's not rain, it's petrol from the cans on the roof, you bloody fool"), I destroyed a Moors fence with my first ever driving lesson and in a freak but nutritious culinary accident the peanut butter containers exploded in the heat. Then we decided to travel the rest of Africa.

While it was an unparalleled experience and a fine excuse for not being at school, at 20 mph there is a lot of the Sahara, the Zairian jungle and all the bits before and after. It was a good thing, therefore, that the Land Rover was fitted with a cassette player and we spent 6 months traversing Africa, singing along with the Beatles, the Stones, Janis Joplin, Simon and Garfunkel and other less luminary stars of the '60s, a hippie musical of a mobile Swiss family Robinson. "All you need is love", we sang as we moved through Algeria, Zaire, Rwanda, Kenya, Mozambique and South Africa, places that would later come to believe otherwise. In fact, just two weeks after driving down the main coastal road in Mozambique it was mined and blown up by guerrillas, a definite over reaction to the family's vocal abilities. But it is nice to know that music really can change the world.

Somewhere on this journey, pretty certainly between dunes in the Grand Erg Occidental, I decided that I wanted to create music like this and my chosen professions of either fireman or footballer were replaced by a new one, one that didn't begin with "f": rock star.

For 18 months my brother and I went to school in Johannesburg while my parents worked to save the money to get home. It was a good arrangement and legal at least. We were going to return home via the same means and with the same soundtrack. As Disco was starting to break, we were driving up through Africa again, taking a sharp right onto a ship bound for India, narrowly avoiding a tornado that caused an on board epidemic of sea sickness (I can reveal that green vomit really can be projected over a distance of many, many feet in real life, fact fans), driving through the sub continent (I can reveal that human s**t also comes in green, fact fans), detouring to Nepal and back then through Asia; Pakistan, where everybody in a car wanted to stop us and talk about their relatives in England, over the Khyber Pass into Afghanistan, where we suffered the heaviest snows there in 10 years, conspiring to make it an even more beautiful country. Iran, so cold the hoarfrost was inches thick around the trees and where my brother fell through ice into the Caspian Sea while my parents fought off eager heroin dealers. Eastern Turkey, where the exuberant natives threw welcoming rocks at us and where, by the Mediterranean, I got to play soldier among the ruins, re-creating scenes from the tales of Greek mythology I'd read way back in the Sahara and discovering that my brother had an Achilles Body when it came to hurled stones and thrust branches.

We returned to London in the spring of 1976, with my greatest concern being that my hair wasn't of the right style, unaware that terrible hair was endemic then. At a friend's house, I investigated what was happening in music, in particular if the Bay City Rollers were actually the new Beatles or whether we'd have to wait for Duran Duran and then Oasis. After 3 years of indoctrination, I felt the Beatles crown rested safe. During that blistering, drought-ridden summer, I was placed at Crown Woods Comprehensive school in Eltham and witnessed the antagonism between that school and the school Boy George was then at, Eltham Green, an antagonism that climaxed when a crack commando from down the hill set fire to our large, sun-browned playing fields. It wasn't Boy George, I know because I asked him years later.

My father couldn't find a job in London and spent the last few months of '76 working in Corsham, Wiltshire (a town once famous for being the most graffiti-ridden in England, although what the inhabitants had so much to write about still baffles me) and we were to follow once my parents had located a house for us. Taking the train to school one frosty December morning, I picked up a discarded Sun newspaper and read the screaming headlines declaiming the Sex Pistols, a band who were bringing civilisation to an end by swearing on early evening TV. Intriguing!

On January the 7th, 1977, I sat in my father's car (after Morocco he always drove) looking at the Victorian edifice of my new school, Fitzmaurice Grammar, Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire, with "Money, money, money" by Abba playing on the radio. If it was to be a prophetic moment I'm very glad they hadn't yet released "Dancing Queen".

El Mariachi de Wiltshire

Three months later, my mother became so irritated by my tuneless and illicit strumming on my father's Spanish guitar (a guitar we'd carried with us over three continents, probably not such a bad idea since it probably displaced more Peanut Butter Explosive) that I was told to stop forever, lose my hands or buy my own. Gathering together a very short life's savings (those grandparental Christmas gifts to the fore), doing a few chores at home and a paper round that instilled a lifelong hatred of dogs in me, I took the latter option and got a cheap, nylon stung guitar from a shop in Bath that now sells cheap, nylon strung carpets. By this time the Sex Pistols were further down the path to world annihilation and I was part of the plot, figuring out the monumental guitar intro to "Pretty Vacant", like "Hellraiser" another single I still own in it's original sleeve. "Go Buddy Go" by the Stranglers was way beyond me¹, even if I had now discovered that the frets were there for a purpose other than decoration. My nascent enthusiasm for Punk was stillborn, though, and I'm not entirely sure why. Partly, I know, it was due to a personality quirk that has by and large directed my life: everyone else was doing it and I didn't want to run with the herd. Soon, even the kids two years younger than me (horror of horrors!) were pogoing to "God Save the Queen" at the school disco and wearing their school ties outside their jumpers (See! The powers that be were right to fear). Punk had said, "Be an individual!" and everyone conformed.

¹ Jesus Jones recorded this song in 1997 as part of an EMI Centenary celebration album

After the full-blooded roar of the Pistols, Punk seemed to lose its musical muscle as the floodgates opened and new bands cascaded in. To me, the first Clash album was a tinny racket by comparison with Never Mind the Bollocks and it took until "London's Burning" for me to rescue any credibility whatsoever for myself. Similarly, the likes of the Adverts, Penetration, X Ray Specs etc. gave me the impression of people who'd looked at a 500cc motorbike and designed a scooter as a result. That pretty much killed the Mod revival for me, too. In search of that same raw guitar power, I fell back on that staple of small towns the Western world over: bad heavy metal! (Or heavy rock, as its adherents would argue vociferously and pointlessly). Not that I fell into it wholeheartedly, I was never one for Iron Maiden or Deep Purple or Black Sabbath or Saxon or Def Leppard. No, AC / DC were more my box of plectra and it helped that their guitar style involved "open" guitar chords, the easiest and first to learn.

Little drummer boy

A year later, 1978, a new boy, Simon Matthews, arrived in our school year and was welcomed with unexceptional schoolboy puerility from a few of his classmates. They would refer to him by any number of derogatory names but his response was invariably the same; "Genital!" So often was this retort used that he became known by it, first as a mild dig, repetition then stripping it of its barb and abbreviation resulting in a permanent nickname: Gen. Not surprisingly he would gloss over this in later years. Sorry, Gen.

There was another guitarist in my class, Richard Miles, and after a tense dispute over the correct key to play Black Sabbath's "Paranoid" in, we'd decided we were going to form a band. Hearing Gen singing along to a Deep Purple album at a party (oh! Wild Youth!), we decided he would be our singer. Fortunately he didn't object. I bought my first electric guitar. We coerced another friend to buy a bass of utterly woeful quality and then to learn how to play it, utterly woefully. We were almost a band and had our first rehearsal in Richard's dad's garage in December 1979. It was a total disaster: Bass Bashing Harris, as he had come to be known, could hardly play, my hands were numb with cold, the neighbours fully justified complaints stopped us after about 30 deafening minutes of musical white-out and Gen, hearing his first ever vocal session (sung through a guitar amp) played back through a tape recorder, decided he'd rather be the drummer.

That was fine by me as we didn't have one yet, but there was a problem in that we had no access to a drum kit. (It's always at this point in a band's career that members get in on the basis of wealth rather than talent and drummers are far more valuable than anyone with just a voice). Already developing my maniacal, over-bearing fervour for organising the band, I seem to remember telling him dismissively that once he got a drum kit he'd be our drummer. He went through Hell and high water to coerce already stressed parents into helping him. We were both lucky it paid off. I was lucky I didn't get a beating

By February we were a band without a singer and our first gig, a classmate's 16th birthday party in a local hall was looming. Richard called in an acquaintance, Mike Palmer, a man with all the right qualifications for the job as far as we were concerned; a glamorous girlfriend, a motorbike, a disqualification for riding that motorbike before he was even legally eligible to and a reputation for being a fighter. He was also one of the funniest people I'd ever met. No one bothered to ask him if he could sing - why trip up the otherwise perfect candidate?

First love

On May the 10th 1980, Gen and I played our first ever gig together. It was every bit as bad as you'd expect but for us it was electrifying, a huge surge of adrenaline with a slow burn off of pleasure. It was addictive, too. Two months before my 16th birthday, just before my 'O' level exams, I had decided my career. And it still wouldn't involve fire or balls.

I stayed on to take 'A' levels, not really because I was interested in further education, certainly not University (that would only get in the way of the band) but because I was terrified of going out and working. Masquerading as an A level student, I wrote songs, soon finding out that I worked best on my own, haggled with local promoters to try and get gigs, usually in vain and rehearsed, either with the band once a week at Mike's house or just playing guitar by myself. We played a few gigs; terrible affairs with no sound system or lights and our cheap equipment constantly breaking down. I played one gig drunk and discovered I wasn't good enough to carry that trick off and with Richard providing occasional evidence that he wasn't either, playing straight became the rule.

During that two year A level course we entered a local music competition, a Battle of the Bands. It seemed like a huge event to us at the time, giving us the chance to play with decent sound systems and on stages, too! To our surprise, we won the first heat. After that we felt we were on to something and the resulting cockiness is, I'm sure, what propelled us to victory. Certainly, it wasn't the music or our ability that could have swung it. Peter Gabriel, the area's resident rock star, was roped in to present our prize. With a smile big enough to match the enormity of the lie, Richard shook his hand and said, "I've got all your albums!" We were both overawed and overwhelmed. By coincidence, Peter Gabriel's manager at the time was Gail Colson, who a few years later, would be Jesus Jones's manager. Thank God she wasn't there then.

Gen stayed at my house that night and we talked about how we were going to be famous. We could see the path to success lying clearly ahead of us. It was frustratingly slow in coming, though, so we bided our time with the trail of local gigs and writing, Mike doing the words, me the music. We recorded demo tapes in a studio magically free of graffiti in Corsham where the sessions were chaotic, run on the sort of democracy where he who shouts loudest or most forcefully wins, meaning me. It helped that I was writing the music and doing the organising, arrogance and bossiness being virtues when directing 5 dissenting opinions. The background, my school life, came briefly to the fore as 'A' level exams approached and for a short while the band was put on hold.

Right after my 18th birthday, school was out of my life and I would never taste lunches like that again until I went to Romania where a lack of dairy products, sugar, meat, salt and fresh vegetables at least gave them an excuse. Now for stardom! Only it was delayed again. We played to diminishing crowds, Mike and I travelled to London to flog tapes around record company A & R departments to no avail (although one guy came to see us play a local gig, only to refuse our phone calls afterwards). Bass Bashing Harris left for garden digging college and I got a job labouring with our new bass player, Graham. I started in summer, getting muscles and a tan along with a wage packet but by winter, breaking the ice on the top of the water barrel to reach inside and grab the immersed tools every morning while Graham's Alsatian puppy ate my lunch in the van, it was less fun. Still, I stuck it out as we were still rehearsing and I was still writing, starting to do the words as well now. The arrangements were getting a little less

basic and Richard and I were doing backing vocals, mostly because my taste for the music we were playing was diminishing and I was trying to pull us in a more modern direction, influenced by the sort of guitar playing and sounds that Andy Summers (The Police), Stuart Adamson (Big Country) and The Edge (U2) were making. Siouxsie and the Banshees, The Cure, Blondie and the Pretenders were favourites by now and not before time. This didn't sit well with the rest of the band but as I had become the main writer, there was little they could do but follow with muttered misgivings and play defiant bum notes. By summer '83 it was too much for all of us and at a rehearsal, I told the rest of the band I was leaving. Richard, always the one for a great quote, just had one burning question about the issue: "Are you gay?"

Soon afterwards, he joined the Navy.

Once more, with feeling

I spent months writing more, made dozens of home recordings playing one tape recorder through a sound mixer whilst adding another instrumental track and an earful of hiss. Somewhat sneakily, I got Gen and Mike to form a new band with me. Singer, drummer and my guitar in place, we needed a bass player and so I asked the local Musicians Union rep for help. His friend ran a Jazz band in Bath and had a son who played bass, a guy about our age - Alan. Al turned up to rehearsal looking like a spitting image of Duran Duran's Jon Taylor. He wore leather trousers. His dyed hair was permed. He played a fretless bass (the connotations of musicianship were not lost on us) through an amp the size of a transistor radio. He was shamelessly exhibitionist, dancing around on the stage of the venue we rehearsed in while the three of us sat down at floor level and played, bemused. He clearly had the musical ability: all he needed was the song's key and he'd just solo his way through the song, playing non-stop and cramming each bar chock full of notes. He was so adept he didn't even stop when we did, he just carried on until we started the next song. He was in.

The plan for this band was to succeed where the last had failed and that meant moving to London. We'd play a few gigs to get the band to gel, then move to where the streets were lined with willing A & R men and ready made contracts. Meanwhile, Mike was getting disillusioned, partly with the music and also with four years lack of success. Two weeks before our first gig, he announced he wasn't prepared to move to London, he was going to stay behind and get married. Two weeks meant two rehearsals (we

couldn't afford more) and that wasn't enough time to find a new singer. The thought of cancelling the gig never occurred to us as they were so hard to come by that they were almost sacred. As I was now writing everything and doing backing vocals in every song, there was an obvious solution: I picked up my guitar, Gen counted us in and I became a singer.

God it was hard! The concentration required to play the guitar lines (no more AC/DC chords now) and sing too, brought me out in an instant sweat. It was a huge jump and one that took me years to complete satisfactorily but with brash self-confidence I was certain I could do it. The people who complained at my singing for those first few gigs I ignored, even when Al tactfully suggested a female singer he knew. I kept ignoring them for years more.

E17

We moved to London in January 1985, into a flat in Walthamstow, E17. The phone there had a short lead but you could use it in every room in the place. Gen got the biggest room by virtue of having to share it with a drum kit. Al's room was little bigger than a cupboard and the small, single bed occupied just about every inch of the floor space. The bathroom wasn't large enough to house a proper bath and so a split-level, half-length tub that you could only sit in was installed. Gen, the band's contortionist could bend himself double in the deep end - it made it look as though his feet were growing out of his shoulders and frankly, I think he was lucky he didn't drown in a ludicrous and embarrassing accident.

That winter was a particularly cold one and of course there was no central heating. I'd found a job half a mile from where I was born, building petrol driven compressors. Working there meant that I had to leave earlier than the other two so it was my job to break the ice in the toilet, although thankfully this was one water receptacle I didn't have to reach into afterwards.

We worked hard at getting gigs with little success as with no local following, no promoter would take us. The gigs we did get were often "pay to play" i.e. we paid something like £50 "for hire of the sound system" already installed. This was usually returnable if you brought in, say, 50 people, a figure way beyond us. Also, it's fair to say that we were terrible. Al and Gen were both very competent but my songwriting and singing were

way off the mark. There was no real direction to the music; it was a mix of ideas and influences with no common theme or spirit, apart from one of desperation. Still, as ever, I kept writing, recording ideas into a Portastudio in my room, the sound of Gen and Al's TV viewing next door coming clearly through the thin wall.

In search of a musical direction, we lured another ex-classmate to stay in our hideous abode and play keyboards with us (Al had come out of the closet and into a friend's house in Walthamstow). In the space of a couple of months it became clear that this wasn't working, usually at the point I began screaming. It wasn't that old corker "musical differences" but a clash of personalities: my brutal, bullying efficiency against his relaxed, lackadaisical aimlessness. On the day he was late for the pick up for a gig, we became a three piece again.

Among the friends we'd made in east London, we found another keyboard player but after a couple of rehearsals in a warehouse in Wapping he, too, created more excitement with the idea of him leaving than staying. This was the time of The Jesus and Mary Chain, REM, the Smiths, the birth of indie as we now think of it, of modern guitar rock. Of course! We needed another guitarist!

"The Irish side"

Soon after Gen and I gladly fled Walthamstow for Willesden, crossing the vast cultural divide between east and north west London, (our downstairs neighbour asked us on the way out, "What you wanna live on the Irish side for?", her attitude pretty much answering her own question) we placed an ad in the Melody Maker for a guitarist under the age of 25. Although there was fleeting mention of ability and possibly musical compatibility, a 26-year-old would definitely have been ruled out. We had two replies and set up two auditions. The first respondent was an overweight guy of Cypriot descent and didn't seem all that interested which was fine by us. The second was a guy of Maltese descent - maybe the Melody Maker was only read by Mediterraneans in those days. At the audition, the sound was as bad as it usually was in the dingy rehearsal room where the mics always smelled of puke and so we couldn't hear a thing that Jerry played. No matter, we needed a guitarist and following in our tradition of useless auditions, he was in. As the months went by he

gradually revealed he'd lied to us about virtually everything asked for in the advert and to this day I'm still confused as to exactly how old he is.

More rehearsals, driving through the clashes of striking print workers and police in Wapping, gigs in Kentish Town where the legendary Jon "Fat" Beast, a man largely (ho ho) responsible for London's music scene in the late '80s would put anyone on stage for 20 minutes and uniquely, wouldn't ask for money in advance. He claims he still has old videos of us "wearing flares way before they were fashionable again" but as sartorially dubious as we often were, this is one claim I refute. Musically, things weren't as grim now either, I'd written a couple of songs that would turn up later on Jesus Jones albums and I had a growing interest in hip hop and sampling.

I'd been a skateboarder at the end of the '70s and started again when we were living in Walthamstow. Skating was very underground then and a good mix of cultures and classes. At Harrow, Chingford or Meanwhile skateparks, there'd often be a ghetto blaster providing a soundtrack and it was that way that I came across the Beastie Boys and the Age of Chance, around 1986. I first heard about Acid House from another skater in '88. That period was also probably the last time the British music press displayed any empathy with the spirit of rock 'n' roll and via that I discovered the likes of Sonic Youth, Big Black and Public Enemy as well as more eclectic sounds such as Les Mystere des Voix Bulgares. Musically, it was a diverse, creative and exciting time, a time that encouraged experimenting. It was also the age of Stock, Aitken and Waterman's factory line hit making so it was by no means a simple, golden era but there was enough originality about to inspire me as I kept writing in my bedroom, aided now by the drum machine that Jerry had borrowed from a friend (who later formed Renegade Sound Wave).

Pandora's digital box

In May 1988 I saw an advert in Loot for a sampler for sale for £80. It turned out to be a glorified echo pedal with just 2 seconds maximum sampling time and no way of saving the input but it was a revelation to me. I sat up until 6 in the morning, triggering parts of my record collection via the drum machine, just as I'd heard on all those hip hop and House records. It felt like Christmas does to a 5-year-old. It was a passport to another world of music and I didn't hesitate for a moment to enter it. For the next few months I experimented with it, using the tape speed control on the

Portastudio to extend the sampling time of my box of joy, twisting the technology to try and get it to do the things I wanted. For a couple of years I'd been an avid taper of radio stations and anytime I collected something good, a sound or a beat, I'd put the sampler to work on it.

There was an extra thrill to making music like this: it was still a new hybrid. The Age of Chance had really jumped the gun and pretty much pioneered the new territory. I'd heard "There is no love between us" by Pop Will Eat Itself on the radio and they clearly had the right idea but the press still had them stalled, temporarily, in the "grebo" dead-end category. The Shamen on the other hand, I'd seen live a few times and felt that they had got it all right - all the sounds of the new technology and unlike the Age of Chance, the tunes to match. I had a good idea why they sounded so good live (which I later learned was totally incorrect) and changed our live set up accordingly, Gen's bass drum being replaced by a form of sequencing so primitive that even London Underground engineers would have sneered. What that gave us was the ability to set up in 10 minutes with a studio perfect bass drum sound, which in a form of music led by that instrument (a concept most in-house engineers couldn't understand at the time) was very important.

Comfortable

Although I was loving writing music more than ever, I was doing less and less about taking it anywhere. The stress of constantly making a nuisance of myself in order to get gigs that never got reviewed by the press or seen by record companies and sometimes didn't even have audiences had worn me down. Plus, the rest of my life was good, I was getting good money at my job and I was skating in most of my free time. I'd met Iain in a pub, recognised him as a skater by his Vision Street Wear shoes and we'd started visiting skate parks around the country together. At this point, with our future keyboard player around, socially at least, Jesus Jones was born.

Gen saved us. He started taking on the manager role, targeting managers of bands we liked or who were successful at a lower level (and therefore people we thought we'd stand a chance with) and badgering them to take us on. He took over getting us gigs, too. Jerry, meanwhile, had a friend who owned a time share apartment in Spain and suggested we go there for a cheap holiday. He, Gen and I would lie on the beach or get drunk in restaurants or watch Jerry's futile efforts with women and discuss what

was happening, or what wasn't, with the band. Given that Gen and I would drag Jerry's unwilling, hungover form out to the beach most days, where he'd lie face down in the sand, throwing up his breakfast of canned peaches, it's hard to credit his claim that it was him and not me who invented the name "Jesus Jones". However, that was the name that we came up with as part of our plan to totally overhaul the band and give it what I'm sure, subconsciously at least, was one last try. It was also the time when I told them that if they gave me complete control, I knew how to make the best recording we could of some of the new songs. But which songs? Jerry insisted we include a song developed over the last six months, "Info Freako". I was totally against it. Gen must have swung it because when we returned we set about making this last stab recording, with "Info Freako" as the first song.

Three months later, Gen took a half-finished version of the demo from my room. The first I knew about it was when I got a phone call from one Andy Ross, introducing himself as one of the two partners in Dave Balfe Management. He wanted to know if I knew they were also a record company, Food. And would I come in and meet them?

In December we signed the deal, one single with an option on another and an album. A few days later we played a gig in Covent Garden to 6 Swedish au pairs, all of whom were friends of a woman I would marry 8 months later. The gossip within the music industry travelled quickly (possibly 50/50 regarding the band and the au pairs) and the next gig we played, in January 1989 had a queue all the way around the block. A month later, "Info Freako" in its demo form was released as the first Jesus Jones single, played on prime time national radio and hotly tipped in the music press. It was 6 and a half years since I'd left school to become a rock star.

“HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE ONE OF THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE?”

We'd put ourselves in the path of the tornado and when it hit it sucked us up, high above the ground. Since we went on to tear up large sections of America, I'll stick with that metaphor of cyclonic destruction. In retrospect, our ascent was rapid but in the eye of the storm it seemed very different, the more success we had the more of it we could envision and we could envision it happening a damn site faster, too. After years of effort we wanted it all in a few months: we wanted fame like Russians miners want paying and felt just as justified in our demands.

Within weeks of signing the deal we were selling out gigs we'd only have been able to busk outside a short while earlier. Our first reviews in the press appeared, followed by bigger and bigger articles and the strange thrill of photo shoots, which quickly became the usual tedium of photo shoots. In one such session I learnt (but often later forgot) to never act the fool when the camera was around since one brief moment of gurning, performed to ease the boredom when I thought we were between frames ended up as a postcard which then appeared at every meet-the-fans moment, everywhere around the world for the next 6 years. People even brought sketches of that damn card for me to sign.

Although I believed fervently in the music we were playing I couldn't shake the feeling that this whirlwind was really just a huge confidence trick by Food and us and that at any moment the scenery would be dismantled and a voice would say, "Alright lads, you've had your fun, off you go". Unsurprisingly perhaps, I've never felt that much in common with Charles Aznavour but he really hit the mark with "Success is the result of a collective hallucination stimulated by the artist". That feeling increased rather than diminished with time and greater success.

Our sense of unreality was heightened when we had to leave our jobs to do our first tours, supporting two bands we greatly admired; first the Shamen and then The Wonderstuff. We toured on our own with two itineraries; the gigs in the evening, the skateparks in the day. Food released a trio of singles by us, all of which, with unerring accuracy, just missed the

Top 40 (this was in an age when indie bands would be front page music press news if they peaked at #35 for a week). This frustrated me hugely, how dare people not buy our records! Our first album was released a year after Food's first contract had been proffered and it did respectably, entering the Top 40 but many places lower than I felt it belonged. At this time I was maniacal enough to believe that success was our due, that the progress we'd had with tours, press and records was inevitable and the fact that we hadn't had more success by this point was an irritation.

By the end of 1989 we had a manager, I had a publishing deal, Gen had a huge file of press clippings in his diary, some of which were very complimentary, we could get on the guest list of any gig in town, we'd supported our peers on tour and people had started to recognise me when I went out - embarrassing as it is to admit, this was a dream come true. I was becoming famous!

“It's a long way to the top if you wanna rock ‘n’ roll” (AC/DC)

If I was at home I was writing. Even during the recording of the first album I was writing before I went into the studio every day, mostly because Food were releasing songs as fast as I could write and record them. (There is a notion that the second album is the “difficult” one although within the industry that has stretched to the “difficult” third and often fourth. With this work schedule, I feel we had a difficult first album, too). As the first album was released I was writing the songs for the second, some of which were recorded at the start of 1990 just before we toured again, first in Romania, one month after the revolution when the country was still volatile enough for us to require a massive military escort for our last gig and then, in a ludicrously mis-matched tour, with the Cramps as they played to their strictly partisan fans all over Europe. In southern France and Spain we felt as though we were on holiday and the audiences were open-minded and receptive. In the north, the crowds were openly hostile, jeering, spitting and throwing cans and bottles. In Italy, they threw Lire coins which was far more effective than trying to spend that feeble denomination. Every night we knew what was coming but we stuck it out with the certainty that once we got home, the songs that we'd recorded and cut would be hits. And they were.

Our winning streak started in April 1990 and over the next three years we'd rack up 6 Top 40 hits and two Top 10 albums, one of which entered at

#1. Most of Europe ignored us by and large but we had hits in Switzerland, Japan, South Africa, New Zealand, Canada and, rumour has it, Poland. Most importantly, we had a huge hit in the US, a million-selling album and that brought real fame.

By now it was impossible to travel, shop, go out without being embarrassed by the attention I'd receive. Sometimes it was gangs of school kids yelling at me, sometimes it was Japanese tourists bursting into tears because of my presence, and most embarrassing of all, sometimes it was groups of builders singing my songs at me. I should inform the world that the famous are not in fact deaf and blind, although the many people that would point and talk loudly about me clearly assumed so. If you've ever wondered what it's like to be an animal in a zoo, I can tell you, even if my knowledge is limited through never having flung my own dung at spectators or copulated openly in public. My phone number was still listed and I started receiving nuisance calls. Women sent me their underwear in the post (always too small, the fools!). I was constantly doing interviews and photo sessions and my presence in the media was such that one thoughtless, throwaway, derogatory remark about a popular boy band of the time resulted in many months of hate mail, including death threats from an 8 year old in the Seychelles. I didn't get a bodyguard.

You guys rock!

Fame was different in America, partly because of our greater success there and partly because, in my experience, the American attitude towards fame is different from the rest of the world's: it's more admired, certainly more respected than in the UK or Australia where it is the 8th deadly sin, as soul-troubling as lust. The downside to this is that the cause of the fame is largely irrelevant: where else in the world could a serial killer have a fan club? So, while we would do in-store signings with large queues around the block, the queuers would often arrive at our table and with a disinterested glance, mutely proffer a torn till receipt from McDonalds for all five of us to sign, a situation where being "Gen" rather than "Jerry de Borg" was a great advantage. On it's own this was still a great improvement on building petrol driven compressors for a living but in conjunction with the "meet and greets" after every gig, the America-only convention of having the town's music industry come and be introduced to you after the show, thrusting a promo copy of the single at you and saying things like "You're Brian, aren't you? I love that song of yours, what's it called?", bits of my soul were being

chipped away. Other members of the band were enviably pragmatic in dealing with this: take coke and enjoy talking s**t all night.

One particular lowlight for me was getting out of the tour bus in San Francisco, after a few hours of terrible sleep following a gig in Los Angeles, to be confronted by a staggering drunk with a camera pointing at me, shouting “Hey! Asshole! Lemme take your picture”. He summed it up for me: I hate you but wait ‘til my friends see I met a famous guy!

Despite the occasional query as to which one of us was Jesus, this really was the dream come to life. The truth is that on the whole being a famous rock star was just as glamorous as I’d hoped and contained absolutely everything it should have. By which I mean:

Sex...

From almost the first tour, it became apparent that if you wanted it it was easily available. I was married and I didn’t want it but that didn’t stop it coming at me. We’d be backstage in Texas and the security guard would say, “There’s this chick outside says she’s here to blow the band, do I let her in?”. Our sound man would meet us at sound-check and say “Two girls outside bet me \$10 they’d “do that singer tonight”. \$5 each, what an insult! In America, Japan, Australia women would literally throw themselves at us and they wouldn’t always be thrown back. At in-store signings, girls would lift up their shirts and say, “sign these. And do you guys wanna come to a party afterwards?” (Jerry, ever the artist, developed a signature technique for these occasions, the “O” in his surname neatly encircling a nipple). Then there was the woman in a micro dress who strode up to me as I sat back on a dressing room sofa and demanded I sign her breast. Two minutes later she was back to command me to sign

her upper thigh, putting a leg on the sofa arm and hoiking up her dress to reveal that she’d traded her underwear for a backstage pass. In another two minutes she returned, swung her back to me, bent double and insisted I perform one more unsteady squiggle. All of which did us no end of good with the radio station manager sitting next to me.

When the band didn’t take up the offers the crew swept up and there was at least one instance of such depravity that it made me wonder about these women, people who would subject themselves to such humiliation,

acts seemingly not of enjoyment but of desperation. Great acrobatics, though.

...& Drugs

From the first tour, it became apparent that if you wanted them, they were easily available. This isn't really saying much since drugs have been a cornerstone of youth culture as long as youth culture has existed, just in case no one has noticed. And who knows, maybe slightly before, too. But the influence of Acid House made drug taking far more acceptable to much more of the population unless there is a historical precedent for half a million Britons on E every weekend that I'm unaware of. There was no shadowy, evil figure hovering in our background waiting to pervert our innocence, we'd already left home. Instead there were the same sort of people (friends of friends) who'd always dealt to the casual users in the band, only we had more friends around the world now. Instances of free drugs for all were few if memorable, although being offered cocaine at US\$4 a gram in Brazil almost qualifies.

I was still endorsing and enforcing the "only play straight" rule from years back which seems draconian but made a lot of sense for us: playing music that was driven by the mathematically precise rhythms of sequencers meant that any deviation in timing was glaringly obvious and instead of imbuing us with the spirit of jazz it made us sound like an orchestra jumping from a train. Maybe I just don't dig jazz, man. Our exuberance on-stage frequently got the better of us and the truth is that we were never the slickest band around anyhow. Hence no drink or drugs on stage, you'd be fit enough to play properly or you were out, a ruling that had me ridiculed in the press as "The Cliff Richard of indie" (it was the "indie" part that I bridled at), a prejudice reinforced by my not endorsing drugs in print, unlike many contemporaries of ours, some of whom developed a reputation that dwarfed their music. Again, a fear of being hidden in the masses made me kick out at the rigid conformity of repeating tales of narcotic abandon, toeing the subtextual line that insisted drug taking equalled creativity, a notion wholly endorsed by the press until some poor sod O.D'd.

Out of the eye of the press, having slightly better access to narcotics than most of the population, within the band the entire gamut of street drugs were sampled. Some just experimented with, others used more regularly but none of us became drug users to the point where it infringed on the band or

our social lives. There were the inevitable, occasional bad experiences but if there was ever a drug that could have tripped us up, it was alcohol. As a contemporary of ours put it at the time, we were just doing the things that most people our age were doing.

...& Rock 'n' roll

The best bit! We played music we believed in, music that moved us emotionally and physically and we enjoyed the full rock 'n' roll experience; tiny club gigs full of raw energy and noise, blood-covered strings in London and Osaka, guitars rusting from sweat in over-full, inhumanely humid shows in Sydney, New Orleans, Valencia. Frustration and trashed equipment in Minneapolis. Winning the crowd over at festivals in Finland and Denmark. Being the unexpected revelation at the bottom of the bill in Rio de Janeiro and Amsterdam. Selling out 10,000 seats in the US. Playing on while the audience leapt up and down with such force that the PA had to be held down by the stage crew and the floor began to collapse. Amps and samplers blowing up and carrying on however we could. Stage invasions. Dying on stage in Germany. My teeth chipped by fans knocking the mic into my face as they climbed on stage. My left leg shaking uncontrollably as we played to 72,000 people at Wembley stadium - rediscovering stage fright. Hearing an audience drown the band out with their singing. Seeing a sea of clapping hands and smiling faces in front of us on nearly every continent on the planet and being able to control that with a gesture or a word.

There would be times I'd stand back and watch Alan, ever the image of rock god, his head swinging madly over his bass as though it would fly off at any moment, Jerry, eyes closed, head back and legs apart, a Gold Gibson Les Paul in his hands, sweat pouring down his shirtless figure, a girl in the crowd clutching his leg and staring up at him, mouth open. Iain, transformed from the urbane and charming into an eruption of violence and lunacy, trashing his keyboard with such aggression that people frequently insisted (wrongly) that he could only be miming. And then once in a while, I'd look at Gen behind the drum kit and he'd catch my eye. Sometimes it was simultaneous, other times not but we'd be thinking, "We did it! After all this time and we're living the dream, here on this huge rock 'n' roll stage in front of this huge rock 'n' roll audience".

We lived the dream. By 1993 and our third album, we were beginning to wake up.

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU DREAM, IT MAY COME TRUE

“Perverse” was our third album and a title I’d probably been looking for most of my life as a musician. Written at the end of 1991 and early 1992, it was a good opportunity to try and distance us further from the majority of rock bands with whom I felt little empathy. In fashion terms, the idea of mixing rock music with a still growing number of forms of dance music was over (meaning ‘60’s retro rock bands no longer took the advice of their record companies on who should remix them) but in its absence was, to my mind, a vacuum, a non-era that offered a return to the past in one of two choices; Grunge or Britpop. What baffled me was that there were clearly exciting, inventive alternatives around, sounds that invoked the spirit of classic rock ‘n’ roll, as typified by the Prodigy’s first album in 1992.

I couldn’t understand why the rock press, in what I still consider to be its nadir, was incessantly eulogising offensively plagiaristic bands, while many nights of the week I’d be in the centre of a riotous dancefloor hearing exhilarating sounds the like of which I’d never heard before, sounds that were completely and deliberately ignored by the medium I’d always expected to keep me informed. The contrast between the preservers of the status quo and the adventurers made it an embarrassing time to be seen with a guitar in public.

The way I envisaged Jesus Jones riding the dividing line, still our *raison d’être*, was by attempting to make a modern rock album in the way I thought a bedroom Techno musician would approach it. Subsequently, the album was written entirely on computer, instruments played in via keyboards, midi guitars or a midi drum kit. The discs were then handed to our producer who manipulated it further and I sang over the results. I even tried to find a way of producing the songs without any human singing at all - thankfully, laziness got the better of me and I stood in the vocal booth mechanically unaided.

“Perverse” is a very dark-sounding album but I think our finest hour, an opinion shared by many who know and like the band. The tone was dictated by two things; a constant aural diet of minor key Techno, the rampaging doom of Sonic Youth and tapes of traditional Lebanese songs,

staggeringly powerful music but beautiful in the way that diamorphine is useful. The second key ingredient was the depression I'd slumped into at the start of 1991, a state of mind it took me four years to get out of, a reaction to my fame. It's not hard to imagine that always having people looking at you and talking about you within plain view can result in at least a trace of paranoia. More than this was that I was supposed to be enjoying myself and I wasn't: Fame was what I had wanted for most of my life and now I had developed an allergy to it. Or, as I wrote on the album: "The problem with success is you become what you detest". Given that the cardinal social sin of people who have something enviable is to complain about it, I bottled it up and continued telling the world how great life was. Students of psychiatry may wish to place a reference mark here *.

A manifestation of my altered state of mind was that the rest of my life was chaotic and extreme. At one point in '92 I was clubbing every night of the week, drinking heavily, usually amongst the last to leave, all of which seemed entirely normal. Ironically, as my fame was starting to fade I was beginning to live like the rock star of legend but doing less of what that is really about: creating music.

The pressures of being the self-appointed leader and spokesman (meaning I only had myself to blame) were also building up. Whereas in 1989 I could write music all day long, in 1992 half of everyday was spent doing interviews or providing quotes for music papers, magazines and radio stations around the world. I didn't mind this, actually still really enjoyed it, but learning the Korean for "Hello" in front of a DAT recorder while a motorbike courier waited outside didn't help me link a verse to a chorus. And of course all that didn't leave long before the clubs opened. Delegating promotion to other members of the band (those that were prepared to do it) almost worked but once I'd established myself as the accepted spokesman, people came to expect and, occasionally demand, to hear me.

Most crucially, what weighed on my mind were the signs that our popularity was waning; a few gigs expected to sell out that didn't, the standard issue massacring in the press and..well, really just a feeling that somehow the atmosphere had changed. The belief that the fame we received was inevitable became replaced with constant doubts about my abilities and worth.

ME : “Let’s not take things for granted, we shouldn’t expect everything to go our way this time.”

RECORD COMPANY GUY : “No, sure. Our conservative estimate for this album is 3-4 million sales.”

Soon after the release of “Perverse” it was apparent that it wasn’t going to be the success that the previous album was. The tour of the UK that we did pretty much held it’s own but our success now seemed like thin ice in late spring. As speed skaters, that wasn’t good. In the US it was much the same although in the further flung parts of the tour there were some low attendances. The morale on tour seemed OK at the time but having heard from fans who came to shows then, it appears we weren’t the live band we had been either.

We had made an album that defied the fashion of the time and fashion stared us down. Creatively, I felt I had little option but it was a disastrous career move to attempt the unusual in a time of rigid conservatism. U2 attempted the same move at around the same time with “Achtung Baby” and even then, many years and many albums into a far more successful career than ours, they staggered a little before they recovered sometime later. With just one fair-sized

success, we had greasy hands on the slippery ladder to success and what’s more, some b*****d was pouring boiling oil on us. Nowhere was this more obvious than in America, where even the word “techno” had people rolling their eyes, wailing, gnashing teeth, speaking in tongues and writing derogatory articles with the word “Disco” featured in them. If Sonic Youth were to be believed and 1991 really was “the year Punk rock broke”, expecting the next musical revolution to be accepted just 2 years later was more than optimistic.

“Yes, but” you may ask, was the album any good?” Well, once you’ve shown me the empirical device for measuring that, I’ll tell you.

All in all, life, career, marriage, they were all breaking down.

**“Again, again, again, again, again, again, again, again
Why don’t we do it, why don’t we do it again?” Status Quo**

Here's a good ruse, one to remind the wearying reader that life in a rock band is, after all, easy and glamorous: Persuading promotions staff from other EMI branches to invite you to their countries for "work" (i.e. talking about yourself in a 5 star hotel with all expenses paid). By the time the touring for Perverse was finished it was autumn '93 and as a number of south American branches of EMI had happily accepted our suggestion (although not as gleefully as we packed our bags) I got the opportunity to visit Mexico City and Uruguay and return to Argentina and Brazil in their late spring. Our part of the deal was to do interviews, some hasty photo shoots (the best kind) and occasionally the odd mime on TV.

I mean "odd", too - I've seen and appeared on kids TV shows around the world but the strangest are in south America where the band often have to share stage space with cast members who are frequently in some sort of costume. Of course, the band are never told this in advance which can lead to tense moments; I shall never forget being filmed in a studio in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro and turning around at the end of the song to see Jerry wrestling with a midget in a crocodile suit. This had not been what I envisaged as 9 year old.

Returning home with significantly less sun tan than the rest of the band, as ever, I started writing for the fourth album. It's also significant that I remember the birth of my daughter interrupting my clubbing rather than my writing and it pains me to write that. Writing wasn't getting any easier and subconsciously, I know now, I was avoiding it. What I did I was proud of although it had to be wrenched out and for the first time in years, I didn't have a definite direction: rock music was still creatively unambitious and Dance music had paused briefly before the respite with Drum 'n' Bass. After a year of painstaking creation, I presented 12 songs to the record company and management in a meeting at Food's office in Camden. It was there that I first received that well-worn music industry line, "This is fine but where are the singles?" That meant writing more songs, about 16 I reckoned.

Leaving the meeting, by way of lighter conversation, my manager said, "Apparently, the most stressful times in life are moving home, getting divorced and going on holiday". I pondered that, having just moved out from my wife and daughter that morning and about to go to my new home to

pack for a Japanese tour the next day. And with another album to write. The only worse time in my life was returning from that tour.

Six months later, I had 16 new songs OK'd by Food. We tried a demo recording with two producers, Iain Richardson and Nick Coler which, with much impatient pushing from me, was cleared for us to start recording the pick of the 28 songs amassed. It was summer 1995 and things were looking up; the studio sessions were fun and easy, five days a week, 8-10 hours a day, I had started a new relationship and not only could I read of a new club opening and not inexplicably find myself at the bar hours later, but I was getting properly fit riding to and from the studio in preparation for a long mountain bike trip.

The “B” word

I'd started cycling around London in the band's heyday because it was the perfect way of getting everywhere on time whilst avoiding the tube-bound, singing builders embarrassment. I'd also become neurotic with the idea that being fit would help my singing and prevent me losing my voice at gigs, like those well known fitness fanatics Janis Joplin, Billie Holiday, Jim Morrison, Kurt Cobain, Iggy Pop and Robert Plant. Had I known about warming up before a gig I'd be a fat slob with a beautiful voice today. However, I got more and more into mountain biking, going abroad on several biking holidays and at the start of '95 had booked a trip that involved cycling from Lhasa in Tibet to Nepal's capitol, Kathmandu, by way of the base camp at the north face of Everest. It seemed to me that I couldn't get further away from endlessly writing music and compulsive clubbing than shivering in a tent at 18,000 feet in the Himalaya.

The trip's other purpose as a celebration of finishing the album became less and less likely as the recording stretched on. Completing the recording after four months (twice as long as “Perverse”) I had to be persuaded by Food that mixing the entire album in the few days before I left was not conducive to good results, as if several 24 hour sessions in a row might not work out!

Tibet was perfect. I got saddle sores, sunburn, fatigue, dysentery, “mild” altitude sickness and worst of all, grew a beard. Well, a sort of beard. Once again, I spent 24 hours a day with a small group of people, none of whom killed me or each other, even after a month, although it came close on

a couple of occasions. I rode a 16 mile dirt road climb, starting at 12,000 feet and ending at 15,000, one of the many long roads over high altitude desert passes, sometimes up to 18,000 feet above sea level. But there was always the descent afterwards. We visited the Dalai Lama's palace, the Potala, but the current tenants weren't keen on having anything more than photos of him present, this being "The autonomous region of Tibet, People's Republic of China". Not big on irony, the Chinese government. I got to stand at the foot of Everest, my head exploding with the pain of far too little oxygen, looking 10,000 feet up that wall of black rock and ice and knowing that my ambitions, thank God!, lie elsewhere. (Back at Base Camp, the South Korean team had lost 2 men to the mountain, the Spanish team before them 3 more). We spent a day dropping from the Tibetan plateau at 18,000 feet (I clocked the second fastest speed at 45 mph), across the landslides over the narrow, gorge-side road to the Nepalese valleys where, at 2000 feet with all that unaccustomed oxygen, I felt like the Superman of the knobbly tyred world. The only resurgence of anxiety I felt was when one of our party attempted to put a tape of REM and the Pixies on in the Chinese van we sometimes travelled in. I felt happier on my getaway hearing the driver's tape of Szechwan folk songs, even if they did sound like a tone-deaf village idiot accompanying himself with a rubber band on a stick.

Two weeks after I returned home the album was mixed. Then rejected. Food didn't think the production was "right". After the sense of crushing disappointment, my main feeling was relief at Food's insistence that I didn't need to write any more songs. Even if we had to re-record (and including home demos, this was going to be the third time for me) at least those days staring out of the window, agonising over filling up the blank verses with words I'd hate the next day were over.

The start of 1996 marked the third anniversary of the release of our last album. I stopped worrying about the gap, there didn't seem any point now. What really mattered was just to get the bloody thing done, to have friends and family ask "So, what are you up to now?" without flinching at the reply.

A suggestion came for a trial recording with EMI UK's then managing director. The fact that the suggestion came from EMI UK's then managing director didn't necessarily rule it out, so we tried it. It didn't work. We searched for another producer and I met one suggested by our

manager. We gave him a tape and after a month of unreturned phone calls took that as a “no”. Food and EMI’s suggestions amounted to a very small list and after a few practicalities were discussed, like “No, we haven’t got £2,000,000”, the list couldn’t have gotten any smaller.

What I’d like to describe again as perversity but in this case is stupidity, meant that we’d never used the same producer twice, even in the case of Martyn Phillips who had produced the single that had been #1 on all but one of the USA’s 4 major charts in 1991. When his name made a triumphal return in our minds the self-recriminating slapping of foreheads was thunderous. Even better, he was prepared to do it, after he’d finished his current project: in June!

From Tokyo to Bwcle

It was well beyond time to be a real band again. We rehearsed, briefed our agent and went on a small, unannounced tour of England, with a quick flirtation with Wales. Preparation time was short, the gigs were small, morale was pretty low and there was too much expectation from these tiny gigs, from us and from fans who’d waited years to see us in grander surroundings - I think we were pretty scrappy. We’d made a point of having a road manager but no other crew at all so that we had to lift all our own gear before and after gigs. Our previous tour, 18 months before, had ended with a support slot two nights running at a sold out Tokyo Budokan. It was a game attempt to try and rediscover the fire from our early shows but it didn’t really work and the joy of playing live again soon gave way to the defeat of sitting in traffic jams on English motorways.

Back in the studio, the tour had at least given us a sense of purpose and playing songs for the album live had enabled us to hear the songs in a new light, something we needed by now. My aim had been to record the band live in the studio, a totally different approach from our other albums, but Martyn’s decision was to go for a 50/50 mix of live performance bolted on to electronica; our cyborg approach once more. Choosing him as producer, in my mind, meant allowing him to follow his vision. I didn’t regret the decision as the sessions were turning out very differently from the previous recording a year before and turning out very well. However, it was painstaking work, Martyn’s perfectionism beyond that of anyone I’d worked with before, including myself.

Exit band man

By September, we'd done little in the way of finished songs, getting three quarters of the way through a track and then moving on to another, returning to do a little more in a week or so before moving on again. We entered a different time zone wherein it was possible to end a day's work with not much more than different bass and snare drum sounds. Alan had moved to his wife's home town of Chicago and had to fly over whenever we needed him to play bass, although we were organised enough to ensure his regular, daily commute wasn't a trans-Atlantic one. In the meantime he led a life separate to the band and was in pursuit of the astonishing transformation from the Wild Man of Rock into the Mild Man of D.I.Y. Reassuringly, Jerry would still receive the occasional, semi-coherent and rambling phone call at 5.30AM on a Chicago morning.

Iain and Jerry would come in to the studio often, usually just to see how things were progressing, sometimes for a performance. By 8 at night the lure of the pub or simply the boredom of observing multiple knob twiddling drew them from the building. I was present all day, every day, to make decisions on any changes and sometimes to sing or play guitar.

Gen seemed to feel the time drag more than anyone else. He'd been trying for a couple of years to be more involved in the band and the album, but there just didn't seem to be the right channel for that extra energy. Unless anyone else in the band could write a potential single in its entirety there was just about nothing for them to do before the studio sessions started, and not that much afterwards. Instead he'd directed his efforts elsewhere, played with a couple of other bands, even touring America with one. He became increasingly distant, giving opinions on the recordings rarely and only then under pressure. Both bands he'd played with needed a full-time drummer and Gen, probably the most proficient player in the band, was well worth enticing. No one was surprised when he told us he wanted to leave - he'd had the signpost up for long enough.

Although I knew what was coming and was aware of the enormity of losing 17 years of struggle and success together, I didn't feel able to stop it. So much of my life was wrapped up in getting the album done, so much of my concentration was focussed on making it as good as it could be, not cutting any of the corners that would be unforgivable after all the time between releases. It wasn't that I was constantly in the middle of vocal or

guitar takes, that I had to be manning the mixing console from sun up to sunset, but that after three difficult years it had become an obsession that dominated my mind. All the drum parts for the album were done and Gen no longer needed to be in the studio, but the album was still less than half done and was at the point where I had to present Food with a tape of what we'd done so far to get their approval in order to continue - if they didn't like it we'd be back where we were 2 years previously. It was a crisis point twice over and I couldn't cope with both dilemmas.

I knew it was a huge blow and that it would hit me later but meanwhile the grindstone remained spinning.

What did surprise me was that it was Gen that left first: I'd felt that fuses would be smouldering ever since Food's rejection of the first recordings. The pressure of hanging around, waiting to see if we had a career or not was as bad for the rest of the band as for me, only they didn't have the same power to affect that as I did or the distraction of being deeply involved with the album every day. Whilst I wrote and oversaw the recordings, they had to kill time their own way and with my memories of the dole I can say that after the first month that isn't the fun that it might sound. Gen wasn't the only one who had other opportunities - Alan was starting to get regular gigs in Chicago with his other band, The Waco Brothers, and possibilities seemed to be there for the other two, also. Gen just seemed to reach the end of the line first because his frustration could be soothed away instantaneously, willing arms ready and able to ease the transfer, no change in lifestyle to muddy the pool. I know, too, he wasn't convinced with what was coming out of the studio, something hardly helped by the potential for working on those same songs for the rest of our lives (or until the money ran out). And I have no doubt that it was refreshing to be out of my shadow. Who could blame him? Not us.

We got the go ahead from Food and The Album (now an epic requiring capitals) ground on relentlessly, becoming an insatiable organism that needed most of my time and all of my consciousness to feed it, like a berserk parking meter. I told people it was like the First World War: it'd all be over by Christmas. That rebounded on me like it rebounded on the British Generals only I didn't shoot Gen at dawn for desertion. My daughter turned three and I'd never had an album out in her lifetime. She told her mum my job was working on computers and when she was old enough to

understand that I did something similar to the Spice Girls she'd ask, "Is that you singing?" whenever I put a record on. I think my Prada skirt and high-heeled boots confused her but then it's good to feel glamorous when doing the household chores.

When it became clear that there was no chance of us finishing the album by the end of 1996, I decided to take a couple of weeks off and see in the New Year in New York.

Back to the beginning.

JANUARY 1997

January: The month when the good intent of a boozy Christmas develops mechanical problems and is grounded, sitting on the runway waiting for clearance from reality. I flew back from New York feeling like Mussolini looking at a train timetable and if I had an automobile analogy to complete the trio of transport images I'd show me in the driving seat, careering into 1997, fiercely resolute and defiantly optimistic.

My girlfriend stayed at home in New York. She'd come to the UK on a tourist visa and after 18 months it was getting hard to convince Immigration that there were still sights to be seen. Plus, she'd had enough of the high misery quotient in British people (she lived with me through much of this album, who could blame her?), got disorientated by TV programmes running for more than three minutes without adverts and simply wasn't used to such comparatively low levels of greenhouse gas emission from a nation. Our Dr Pepper tasted inferior, too, and there are some things worth taking a stand on. We didn't break up, we just kept American Airlines in profit for a few years, my girlfriend shouldering the majority of the jet lag.

I went back to doing exactly what I had done before Christmas. Like the rest of the non-turkey population. Not that going back to Martyn's in-house studio was a chore, in fact I enjoyed the routine of cycling in five days a week, swearing at incompetent motorists with righteous fury on the way, being fed exquisite food by Martyn's girlfriend, Owzlem, writing emails incessantly and every so often, being asked to comment on a mix.

All the recording was done and the studio time was spent with Martyn employing his formidable arsenal of sound manipulating computer equipment to create weird aural spectres around the performances the band had made months earlier. Recording at Martyn's house was never the archetypal studio session. Unlike the images of studios from music videos, the majority of space was taken up by the control room, not the performance area. All of the singing or drumming or guitar playing was done individually in a single 10 foot by 10 foot room while Martyn sat behind the mixing desk in an area twice that size. With the recording finished, Martyn stayed in the control room and I spent most of the day at the kitchen table, only entering the studio to check out how the weird sample of the backing

vocals was progressing or what Alan's chopped up bass line now did for the song. The refinements to the songs were getting slighter and slighter so we were obviously getting closer to the end. However, we were definitely working with the maxim that a work of art is never finished, merely abandoned and so a momentous completion was never achieved, just deferred. For example, the song that would be the first single from the album, "The next big thing", while not needing any more recording work, had 24 mixes to choose from.

Say "frozen cheese"

As January gained momentum, rolling into the new year, the machinery behind our re-launch started up. Artwork suggestions came in from the designers. I went to meetings at Food's office to see photographer's portfolios, we met Michelle, our stylist for the last album. By the end of the month we had planned the photo sessions for the album artwork and press photos.

The first session was a location shoot near St. Austell, Cornwall. I hired a car and picked the rest of the band up, noting that first Alan and then Iain had joined me in the freshly dyed blond look. We nodded our blond heads through the five hour drive, listening to Eels, Daft Punk, Blur and bending the doors out of shape with Drum 'n' Bass.

We got to the hotel at about 1 AM. There was no heating in the rooms but then the temperature was still a degree or two above freezing so clearly only soft, dyed-blond jessies from up London way would need that sort of thing. No one slept and we had to give up the pretence of doing so at 6 AM anyway. Inevitably, we rushed through breakfast and getting made up so that we could sit around doing nothing for a couple of hours, Bill Wyman's Law, as it is now known. At least the temperature had risen a couple of degrees with the daylight.

When we did finally leave the hotel things got much worse. The location was a Cornish tin mine, high on a hill above the town with a clear view of the sea. The clear view meant there was nothing to stop the howling wind swooping off the English Channel and tearing up the hill where it savaged the already feeble ambient temperature with a razor-edged wind chill. We were dressed in light summer suits, thin silk shirts with delicate, open jackets. Even above the noise of the gale you could hear Jerry's teeth

chattering. I couldn't move my face muscles properly and my sleep deprived panda eyes allied with my physiognomical rictus would have made Picasso scream in inspired horror. Animal nature came to the fore as we began jostling aggressively to shelter behind each other, only to be ordered by the photographer to spread out again. The make-up woman worked her powders to the tin bottoms, trying to cover up teary eyes and running noses. Looking like a collection of well-styled Quasimodos wasn't really the way we wanted to appear on our great comeback so we moved location, out of the wind a little but still stupidly clad for a typical January. Our saviour was the early fading of light - by 5 o' clock we were driving home with the car heater on full until the other side of Devon, a selection of eerily lit photos of us in Dr. Who scenery in the can.

The next day wasn't a lot better. Working with the same photographer, we met at EMI's Hammersmith office early in the morning. The idea for the shoot was a brilliant one; a van had been hired and decorated like a garish living room, purple walls and green floor. The rear door of the van remained up and the photographer was harnessed inside the van, immediately behind the driver. In this way, we'd drive around west London, sat in our neon living room with a variety of grey suburbs and busy roads as our ever changing backdrop. It looked great but it was still just as cold and we had the same feeble clothes on. Also, we were trying to lounge about looking indifferent while the van swung around corners at 50 mph with the back open. Several times we nearly became a three piece and a solo career was nearly built on three mangled corpses strewn across the A40. That's if hypothermia didn't get them before the traffic did.

5
FEBRUARY

A weekend of being warm (unless you were racing mountain bikes, as I was) and then another shoot with a different photographer. Ah, the warm luxury of a studio shoot! The same formula is used on all studio shoots; the photographer arranges the band (after they've hung around for a couple of hours, of course) and takes a Polaroid to check the lights, positions etc. This shot is the cue for the release of hours of frustration at waiting and a riot of puerile gurning ensues. Iain, in particular, could muster a face-busting gargoyle impression that would have been a far more daunting defence on a mediaeval castle than mere burning oil. Jerry collected as many of these Polaroids as he could and now has a collection that can curdle milk while it's still in the cow.

The next and final day of press and album shots was back in the cold, shooting inside the disused Town Hall in Bethnal Green. The heating did work but the owner wouldn't let us use it - perhaps he was from Cornish hotelier stock. It was colder inside the building than out. By now you'll have the impression that we were entirely used to this sort of irony on photo shoots.

The end! (Nearly)

As I got numb for the camera, Martyn had continued working. He would probably still be working on our album if we hadn't pointed out that soon we'd have the artwork, press shots and release date done without actually having the music. On the 7th of February, 1997, we celebrated the completion of the album in a Soho bar. A few days later we did actually finish.

There it was, over three years of my span on earth preserved on 2-inch tape and an Apple Macintosh hard drive. The bane of my existence but the reason for getting up every day, sometimes a testament to the joy of creating music and sometimes a diary of some of the worst times in my life, captured on such flimsy media and later available for £14 or even less in a sale. What a bargain.

For over a year I'd been communicating with Jesus Jones fans via an Internet site in Australia. Periods of inactivity from the band left little for

the chat group to discuss and so a regular contest of “What should the album be called?” had arisen. “Strawberry” and “Aluminium” were a couple of suggestions but when, at the close of one such bulletin board discussion; “Here’s the damn album already!” cropped up, that was the title for me. (Thanks, Darren). I liked it because it wasn’t the archetypal, one word, meaningful title that we’d had before. I liked the irreverence, too. For about three days it was the official title of the album, until caution and the awareness that it wasn’t going to be that amusing to the world at large caused furrowed brows at the offices of Food and EMI. Back then to an archetypal, one word, meaningful title: “Already”.

On Valentine’s day I began to attempt rekindle my long lost romance with the press. Jerry and I met a journalist hired by Food to interview us and submit a press release from the resulting transcription. I’d always enjoyed interviews, apart from on American Top 40 radio stations where being asked how we got the name (126 times on one 6 week tour) sedated me instantly. I was not from the “the music does the talking, man” school since I discovered that it’s language didn’t always translate accurately and it’s quotes made for short articles. Given a decent cup of coffee or a little provocation (anything with a question mark) I could rattle off for hours. My only problem was remembering anecdotes in front of a tape recorder, in the same way that entering a supermarket immediately clears your mind of the most important item on your shopping list. So I babbled, Jerry supported, EMI paid the cafe bill and soon afterwards a document to re-introduce us to the press was prepared, written in their own style, by an insider. In retrospect I think the money would have been better spent on letter bombs.

“Already” was cut, that is transformed from a recording to a master copy. Cutting engineers are the ultimate hi-fi snobs of the world. They can tell you what green sounds like. They can hear what make of tape you used to record on. They name their kids after brands of amplifiers (probably). I think it’s either a huge con trick by a self-protecting industry or evidence of an unusual branch of human evolution. My approach in the cutting room was mainly to wait until the levels were in the red and then say I liked it.

Martyn was in his element with the engineer and while they discussed levels of kilohertz I looked out of the floor to ceiling window of the second floor cutting room, looking at the trees and the clouds and the traffic of west London and I listened to those songs once again. Sometimes I’d get a little

fizz of excitement, a distant relative of the feeling I'd had been writing the song, thinking, "Yes! It still moves me, even now! ". Some songs would make me feel like our future was golden and guaranteed - how could anyone with a beating heart deny this? A key change, a piece of singing, a bass line could leap out and let me know it had all been worthwhile. Occasionally, I'd hear a song and find it hard to believe I'd written it when it flowed with such accomplishment and unfamiliar movement that it's strangeness refuted any knowledge of me. Sometimes I couldn't wait for a song to finish. Moments of acute discomfort at a phrasing or a verse, hoping no one was really paying attention. What was I thinking with a cheesy guitar line like that? Sometimes I'd wish I'd done more or less or shut up or insisted or compromised or experimented or just scrapped it and started all over again.

It's always that way at the cut.

MARCH

Still the album wouldn't lie down. Martyn, possibly distracted by talk of a particularly interesting frequency with the engineer, decided that it wasn't quite right. The transfer from his computer to the studios had involved a 16-bit process instead of a 20-bit process and, sonically, this just would not do. I didn't stay to examine the 4-bit difference.

I went to work on what would turn out be the best promotion the album got, the Jesus Jones Web site. A friend and I had created a site to rival a couple of existing ones a year or so before, the division of labour split with me doing the majority of the design and him doing the technical stuff. The site was overdue for an overhaul as the talk of the forthcoming album was increasing the number of visitors to the site hugely; up to 35,000 a month, which on the back of a 4 year silence and no existing promotion was encouraging. Throughout "Already"'s promotion, the Web site was often the only way in which fans got to hear the singles, see the videos and read about the band, even in countries where the record was released.

A new record from us was gradually materialising from a distant hope to a tangible article and the preparations for that meant a sequence of events not quite forgotten but excitingly unfamiliar. The chosen singles needed to be sub-contracted out, stripped to their underwear for remixers to operate on and return, surgically enhanced. Back to Martyn's studio, then. The first single, "The Next Big Thing" (a defiantly optimistic choice of title, at least) was cut on my father's birthday which is the only thing I can remember about the day, cutting sessions being as described. The same evening Andy Ross, manager Gail and I met EMI's head of video, Trudy, and her recommendation for director of the first video for the album, Chris Cunningham. We'd already seen Chris's show reel and loved it. He was keen to work with us because of a tenuous connection with the Aphex Twin (who once remixed a song of ours), a musician he much admired. Slight as that may seem, it was an improvement over the usual director's approach of "well, why not?" It was a great meeting, by which I mean that everyone stayed well past the 30 minutes or so they thought it would last and got very drunk, leaving only when ordered to do so by the bar staff.

I did my first, real interview for the album, a “phoner” from Japan, done well in advance as usual for that country’s press. The success we’d had in Japan was thrilling, I’d always enjoyed touring there more than most other places, liked the people and found the interviewers unusually thought provoking. Where British and Australian press has a cynical, accusatory tone and the American suffers from bland goodwill, the Japanese interviewers always gave the impression of having listened hard to your music and tried to provide unusual questions. While sat in my studio at home, answering the questions and looking up and out at the sky, I could remember a couple of years earlier, sitting in the same position looking at the same sky, vexed and frustrated at trying to find another obstinate line for another reluctant verse, over and over.

Open song surgery

With the first single comes a tour to test the water, a kind of musical Expeditionary Force hoping to avoid a Dunkirk. The way I’d always written the songs and recorded them was to provide whatever the song needed - who got to play what live we’d worry about later. It was often pretty easy deciding who’d play the drum parts from the record or who’d recreate Al’s studio parts on stage but with the amount of electronica that was an integral part of our sound there was a lot of overlap. Before the first tour for each new album I’d have to re-organise and allocate, re-sample sounds to make the studio samples compatible with the live samplers, create new sounds to mimic studio parts, invent new guitar lines, decide which, if any parts were too much for human ability and sequence them and generally try and ease the music from one medium to another, from studio to live performance. It was a time consuming job and not that creative; donkey work, basically, and with tour rehearsals imminent I spent the remainder of the month once more up to my elbows in the album’s guts.

March saw my divorce finally come through. There had been little to argue about but the lawyers must have felt left out with the simplicity of our arrangements and so organised a lengthy post mortem. My wife and I had tried hard to remain friends, largely for the sake of our daughter and gradually we accomplished that. In a gesture of defiance at the occasion, we booked a table at a swish restaurant in Mayfair and decided to enjoy the occasion. It nearly worked. As we talked about the last few years I found that you can’t genuinely celebrate a moment of supreme sadness. I thought of the years of success and optimism when we’d been together, the era of

doubt and the years of depression and pressure as I grew away from her, uncomfortable with myself and with everyone else. I remembered the pain I'd caused her and myself and the creeping guilt of having failed my daughter. Not much to celebrate.

APRIL

What more appropriate a month to start the English mountain bike race season than one of the wettest? Thrash, thrash, thrash, little April deluge. A summer of racing bikes on off-road courses throughout the country suggests a light dust on the faces and limbs of cyclists glistening with athletic sweat under a “Phew! What a scorcher!” sky. The reality is mud-caked drowned rats in tears of frustration, kicking and swearing at immobile bikes weighing several times what they did on the start line, machines so clogged in clay and grass that you could bake them and use them for motorway bridge foundations.

Winter racing was more fun, the races more low key and the courses drier even if frostbite was an occasional hazard. Having spent the decade adamantly denying I would ever race, the week I was offered a place on two different teams (soon after the confidence boost of discovering an ability to haul myself over 18,000 foot Tibetan passes) I thought I had little to lose and a fair bit of swag to gain. Even in the strictly amateur categories sponsorship is freely available, ranging from a race jersey once a year to free bikes, if you’re very lucky. The team I started to race for, the Mint Sauce Race and Flowers Team was (and still is) guided, in theory, by a cartoon mountain biking sheep that appears in the pages of Mountain Biking UK magazine. The magazine connection meant that sponsorship was most forthcoming and tyres, jerseys, watches, T-shirts and discounts were received with joy.

The ethic of the team, it was explained to me, was to camp out at the race sites, drink a lot the night before the event and not be that bothered with competition. The drinking part was easy enough but my touring derived addiction to hotels meant I didn’t fancy weekends spent ankle deep in mud, sleeping in a leaky tent. Even Glastonbury goes restrict that to just once a year. Where I really tripped up, though, was that I started to do quite well. Racing against around 100 other amateur riders also in their thirties, in series split into northern and southern England, I finished my first couple of races in the top third and then moved into the top 20. It was good to be in the top 20 again.

To my surprise I really enjoyed racing and the wry mutterings about throwing me off the team for getting good results were muted by me being one of the few riders on a large team that actually made all the races. I loved the riding, racing or not. I loved it because it was the best escape from my mind: At 30 mph down a rocky bridlepath there's no room for any thoughts other than "Go left. Miss rock. Jump rut. Don't brake. Lift wheel", and during the interminable writing and recording, days spent pondering verses, bridges, choruses, success, failure, responsibility, the mental signal jamming of thrashing about on a bike in the best scenery in Britain or America was spiritual cleansing. Racing focused this further, not only were there the technical and physical aspects of mastering the course but the mental stimulation of race tactics, figuring out who were the riders to watch, looking for signs that they were flagging, figuring out where they were strong, where their weaknesses lay, whether they tired quickly on the climbs or braked too hard on the descents or faltered over the rocks and tree roots, remembering the details and nature of the course, judging the right moment to attack and be able to keep the lead.

Another factor of racing that improved my mental well being was the inarguable nature of the results. Having hit records doesn't prove that much about you, there are still many people who'll say publicly that you're crap and it's hard to disagree rationally. Quoting sales figures is tantamount to arguing that McDonalds is the best food in the Western world because they sell the most burgers. But in local bike races, finishing regularly in the Top 5, sometimes winning, showed I was good at something, no quibble. After years of music press slagging and personal insults that had become important to to my self-esteem - to be good at something, no argument.

There were parallels with playing live, too, especially at bigger gigs like festivals or stadia. Two minutes before the start the nerves are bad enough that you feel you'd rather be anywhere else - just standing on the start line, waiting, my heart rate can be close to half its maximum. I've read that the levels of adrenaline in a musician immediately before going on-stage, even at just at a pub gig, could be fatal introduced to someone sitting at a desk. Stadium levels would presumably see the corpse jogging around the building a few times and making the coffee.

In both pursuits, the start of the event brings an explosion of the adrenaline for which you know you'll have to pay 10 minutes later. After

that weakening lull you find your feet and get on with enjoying it, still concentrating all the time. If all goes as hoped for, by the finish the sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, not to mention ego gratification, are amongst life's greatest pleasures.

I raced throughout '96 then '97, once a month earlier in the year, up to two a month by April, once a week by June and in August I had a period with three races in 7 days. The level of fitness I gained was not very rock 'n' roll and the perversity of that continued to please me, particularly when the people I raced with initially expected me to have to stop for a spliff and a beer at every lap. "Training" was never a problem, if I needed to get somewhere in London I rode my bike - nearly always quicker than a car and with ideal parking guaranteed, I'd have been an idiot not to. As would most Londoners.

My one gleefully weak concession to rock 'n' roll excess was my bike collection, 5 in all, 3 mountain bikes, one road racer and a 7 foot long, white walled tyre, fire engine red American beach cruiser, a kind of engineless low rider. That bike I bought as my "limo" in preparation for the album's promotion. Whenever that might happen.

"Icebergs ahead!"

While EMI's international department kept up a fresh supply of Japanese, Finnish and Israeli interviewers for me to feast on during April, there was a noticeable lack of British press - bugger all, in fact. Halfway through the month we started rehearsals for our first official UK tour in 4 years. The first single was to be released in early May and the tour kicked off in the first week of that month but there were still no music press interviews being mentioned. I assumed this was all under control, part of the plan.

The first jolt to knock the album off course came in April: EMI moved the single release date. They'd scheduled "The next big thing" for release when Radio 1, still Britain's most influential station, was staging it's own Music Week and, so we were told, not amenable to adding new singles to the playlists. That this should have been foreseen by even the most myopic of planners shows that the band were not kept informed with much accuracy, or truth perhaps.

The new release was for later in May, right after the tour finished. Since the tour couldn't be moved at this late date it became marooned in a sea of inactivity, no press, no radio play, no forceful announcement to the world that we were back. The news on the Web site was bringing people from around the world to the gigs but unless you looked hard in the "tour dates" section of the music press or were used to checking between the gardening section and car boot sale adverts of the local press in the towns we were due to visit, you'd never have found out.

"1-2-3-4-NO! STOP!"

Rehearsals. There was always a pattern to the first few days; day one had us thinking we were the greatest band ever and hadn't lost a thing in the months of not performing. The second day we were so truly dreadful we left depressed. The third day improved just enough for us to realise just how far we had to go to sound like a band who actually got paid to do this sort of thing. Iain would forget which keys played samples and had to re-learn musical parts. Real howlers could end songs abruptly in a fit of giggles or a rebuke from me. Alan and Jerry's backing vocals could tend towards the bovine without careful herding. I forgot lines, usually something crucial like the first of one of our biggest singles. I sometimes did this at shows too, and often mumbled something that I hoped would sound more like a technical error than human failure, like "brzap cabbage dateline fling on".

Some old songs we argued over including in the set but there was only one we were unanimous in our dislike of; our first proper hit, "Real, real, real". Other songs were like old acquaintances that we'd warm to again after a couple of years, some we viewed as the office colleagues we didn't really like but were obliged to be with every day. We had a honeymoon period with the newer songs in earlier rehearsals and we could spend the majority of a day's session working on a couple, alternating them to find a line between forgetting the parts through repetition and forgetting them through lack of attention. Strangely, the least of our problems was our stand-in drummer, Wiff, who'd been our drum roadie for years and had played dates with us before when Gen had taken parental leave from an American tour to be at his daughter's birth. To be fair, Wiff had put in a Herculean effort to smooth over the loss of such a pillar of strength for the band.

What's all this then?

Five days a week we'd rehearse in a room with mirrors along one wall. I'd always hated that and played with my back to it, facing the rest of the band. Iain and I rode bikes in every day but Alan and Jerry were close enough to walk - Al stayed with Jerry for a couple of months, whenever we had rehearsals, promotion or photo shoots to fill them. One fine spring morning, neither of them showed. After about 30 minutes of feeling annoyed at their lateness, the rest of us became intrigued. I rang Jerry's number - no reply. I rang our management to see if they knew what was going on but they expected them to be with us. Hours passed. I got a phone call from Gail: Alan and Jerry had been arrested.

On their way to rehearsal they'd been walking past a house with a security alarm going off. At that very moment a van full of police arrived, stopped and searched them, finding quantities of amphetamine, speed, on each of them. They demanded to be taken to Jerry's house which was then also searched. While Wiff, Iain and I waited at rehearsal, Alan and Jerry were being interviewed separately in Acton police station.

They should have been used to the routine by that point. On a British tour years before, some of the band and crew bought large water pistols in neon colours in Birmingham and acted as a mobile liquid assault team, operating from the windows of the van on the drive to Leeds. An omen of impending doom came when they chose the wrong bystander to squirt and the van was pulled over by a drenched and irate off-duty CID man. Apart from the ignominy of having to stand in a line on the pavement and be asked "What's wrong with you lot? You all look like something out of U2!" (I've since wondered if Bono ever tried brandishing a fake weapon whilst cruising through, say, Sarajevo), we got away with it. Once at the Leeds hotel, though, gunfight at the OK Leisure Baths began again. Across the road, at a bus stop, a squaddie saw a bunch of guys waving guns around. I'm presuming he didn't tell the police they were bright orange and fluorescent green or else they might not have spent 8 hours, surreptitiously sealing off the city centre and putting marksmen on the roofs surrounding the hotel. We found out about it as the doors of the lifts opened, aqua-frolicking long since over and the journey to the gig beginning. Arms reached in, grabbed us and threw us against the reception wall, legs spread and arms stretched out. Descriptions were matched and police station interrogations took place as our support band played the longest set of their

career. Twice, probably. We played the gig hours late and left Leeds the next day with the warning that charges would be pressed only if we went to the papers with the story. I wonder who felt more embarrassed?

My closest brush with prison came on day one of the tour supporting our first album. I'd been in the studio until 2AM the night before, when I'd had a call from the police inquiring about the car I'd sold 3 months earlier - would I come into help them answer a few questions, inquired a pleasant-voiced policewoman. To be able to be back in time for the pick up for the first gig I had to get up at 8 and cycle down to Paddington Green station, admiring the 12 foot high steel doors inside, a courtesy for the IRA suspects interviewed there. I was made to wait for an hour after the arranged time, sitting thinking how late I'd be. Instead of the pleasant voiced policewoman I was expecting, a caricature of a rugby player walked out, looked me up and down once and said "Yeah, you fit the description, I know you did it, I'm arresting you for assault". Not only was this not the way I had imagined my morning going, I hadn't got a clue what he was talking about. Marched upstairs immediately to an interrogation room, I sat down and was told, "Now, you can confess quickly and get it over with, be out of here in two minutes, or you can spend a night in the cell and see a solicitor in the morning. It was 10AM. This, I later discovered, was not quite official procedure. Or even legal. After a very unpleasant half an hour during which I started to question whether I had actually rammed someone whilst in a car I'd sold months earlier and then punched the other driver but just forgotten it, I signed a statement denying involvement. As I left the police station, very late for this crucial first date, I was told with a chummy smile "I knew it wasn't you the moment I saw you".

Maybe police procedure had come under scrutiny in the intervening years since Alan and Jerry's treatment was far better. They were told that since they were obviously not the big boys of illegal narcotics, attempts at leniency would be made. In fact, the arresting officer was so caring that when Jerry explained in the interview that the speed wasn't his, he was just taking it to a friend, he was rapidly told the difference between possession and intent to supply and which he might prefer in court should he care to back track a little. They were released with charges pending and we went back to rehearsing as normal. The only reaction from those around the band was that a little publicity wouldn't go amiss.

“Sorry, hair in the gate. Can we do that again please?”

Chris Cunningham’s video shoot was ready. I cycled to the warehouse in Kings Cross since I knew exactly how long it would take me and didn’t want to have to get up even earlier to accommodate the vagaries of London traffic in a chauffeur driven car, courtesy of the production company. It backfired on me. Approximately 45 minutes before our 8AM call time, the IRA informed the police that bombs were set at most of London’s major rail stations, including Kings Cross. I cycled past the traffic chaos while everyone else sat in it. Some people, like our director, arrived just 30 minutes late, having paid a taxi driver £10 for what would have been a 20-minute walk. Others were much later and some of the camera equipment didn’t arrive until 5 hours after we were due to stand in front of it. I sat in a cold warehouse from 8AM waiting for something to happen. At 10PM, faced with starting an all-night shoot or scheduling a second day, we went home.

The construction of the set was tricky enough to delay shooting for another couple of hours the next morning. Chris’s idea was to film us miming the song inside what looked like a giant, revolving baked bean can. The inside was covered with bright white boards and strip lighting. A remote controlled camera moved along the length of the can on rails. I had to sing to this camera while the entire structure rotated, the camera moving in front and behind me on the rails, the can revolving it through 360 degrees. Fixed to the floor in different positions but equal angles apart were three steel strut-supported harnesses for the rest of the band to be strapped into. This meant that at any one time, at least one of them would be at an angle where the blood would rush to his head and the metal truss and harness straps would begin to cut into his skin.

Video filming takes hours, most of which is spent waiting for technical problems to be sorted out. How long can you hang upside down for? All three band members looked like tomato-headed humans with musical instruments after a few seconds. Minutes passed and complaints started. We’d barely done the fifth take when we reached **“GET ME OUT OF HERE NOW YOU F**KING B*****DS!”**

The heat from the lighting in the can rose quickly and became stifling. I had great difficulty singing the song to camera as most of my time was spent trying not to step on the strip lights. The can began to come apart,

showering bits of wood and foam on me during the takes. The motion and disorientation from running inside a horizon-less sphere made me queasy but at least I wasn't an exploding tomato-head. At the end of every take, the can was revolved so that only one perspiring, swearing person was fully upside down and I would stand with my shoulder supporting that his head to try and ease the pain. We looked like Siamese twins in the Mir space station. It didn't seem like a good point to mention that at least we weren't cold as in the photo shoots and I had a brief, uncharitable memory of looking past Brazilian interviewer # 10 of the day at the rest of the band sitting with drinks in their hands by the side of a sun-dazzled pool.

Two hypothermic photo sessions and the most painful video we'd ever made. This had better be worth it.

Lumps in the coffee creamer

At the end of the month I met Andy Ross in a Camden coffee shop. Yes, the record release delay was unfortunate but probably for the better as it was held back to improve the singles chances. He was confident that the lack of music press coverage was temporary and he had every faith in EMI's press office. I felt the same. But with a week until the first tour date and a single out not long after that, where were the interviews?

8
MAY

The Press

It's difficult to be a British musician, a creator of music, and have much respect for the press at home. Or as this paragraph opened in my first draft: If you call a spade a spade you call a British music journalist a c**t. No doubt they were all once sweet-faced young cherubs but whether it's that guitar or drum kit discarded in failure (a truism self-protectively derided as a cliché) or another twist of the psyche, the style of snide, cynical points scoring with colleagues through the destructive criticism of music and musicians of all levels of success that so exemplifies the British music press becomes the *raison d'être*. Personal insults, libel, even printed death wishes are fair play as long as the result is entertaining. A cheap laugh is the goal and envy coaches the team. Musicians shouldn't complain at this ethical quagmire because they are sometimes well paid and everybody knows that pain cannot be felt in the 40% income tax bracket.

But with the exception of this one, generalisations don't stand up to much scrutiny. There are some music journalists who can write, who are interested in music for its own sake, who can provide an insight that enriches our experience of music. Music journalists don't put words in your mouth after the interview (well, just the once for me). There is a purpose to it and a need and most bands (certainly including us) benefit from it to a large extent.

However, it's very important in Britain to be discovered by journalists and not to happen independently of them, as we did. It was always Andy Ross's contention that this was a major part in the press despisal of us - as an ex-writer for *Sounds*, his opinion seemed valid. Success, particularly in America, is even greater cause for trashing if you haven't been the cause celebre of at least one of the weeklies and the Americans who join the gang when they support an approved band become dumb Yanks when they send a disliked one into their Top 10. In 8 years, we'd gone from playing every indie dive in London to selling millions of albums and had Top Ten singles either side of the Atlantic but had only one NME front cover. A favoured band with one Top 40 single could get three times that every couple of months. But that, like bad reviews, is the nature of the press and we did have many good reviews, particularly in our first couple of months.

There were other factors which made us, particularly me, disliked. It's fair to say that I often presented the press with an unpleasant persona, argumentative, arrogant and pompous (who was I to steal their thunder?). I always felt combative and defensive in interviews but then from very early on the magazine's tone was very GCSE: "Jesus Jones are crap. Discuss". Most of all, I really didn't fit; I was obviously middle class like the large majority of musicians and journalists but refused make the requisite attempt to hide it with an assumed accent, a manner learnt by rote and the adopted thousand yard stare to be interpreted as other worldly, gifted, artistic. I wasn't going to conform to the ironically rigid notion of rock 'n' roll behaviour, I was capable of doing the journalist's job and I was doing what they had always wanted to.

Disliking a band or a record or a gig seemed fair enough but the method of communicating that sometimes didn't. The "Angle" wouldn't allow actuality to interfere and so negatives could be removed from interview transcriptions to prove a point against us, artwork details were overlooked to show how unpleasant I was, hilariously obvious contradictions about a single would be made to illustrate it's worthlessness.

Occasional good reviews began to surprise me but unfortunately left no other impression and from the summer of '89 onwards I felt I was being trailed by an army of pygmies shooting darts at me. You sing in a band partly because you want people to like you and you end up with foaming-mouthed harpies wishing you dead - your idiotic naivety can be depressing.

Above the regular criticism two incidents really stand out;

The NME reviewed us at Reading festival in 1989 giving us one of the first real savagings. I can remember little mention of the music. When Andy Ross wrote a letter to the magazine questioning the reviewers ability to judge a band from a distance of 35 miles, where she'd been when we were on-stage, the letters page editor allowed her to respond that since Andy had been a music journalist he knew the way the system worked and should know better than to complain.

The second incident was well beyond a bad review. At the start of 1993 we were told by our agent that one of the organisers of Glastonbury festival had a sponsorship meeting with Steve Sutherland, an interesting

character who had previously mounted an anti-NME campaign, culminating in calling it “dogs**t” shortly before accepting a better paid job there. Reputedly, Sutherland had said the NME’s sponsorship of Glastonbury (using IPC Magazine’s money) was dependent on Jesus Jones not appearing on the festival bill. Gail sent an indignant letter to the magazine’s editor, Alan Jones, asking if this was official magazine policy and got back a mealy mouthed reply that neither confirmed nor denied. To the chagrin of EMI and Food, I refused to have anything to do with the paper thereafter, no interviews, quotes, free tickets. However desperate we became I didn’t want to have to deal with people like that.

“Shut up, go away, die!”

With a status in the press little above that of child molesters, we weren’t expecting much from the papers. Andy Ross and I had discussed how bad it was going to be before I’d written a note for the album, a similar conversation to the one I had with several music industry people before they’d heard any of the new songs. In May what I didn’t know was that EMI’s press office was frantically trying to get us press, anything at all. And they were being refused: asked to do an interview with the band, they were given a flat out, “No” or, “we’ll see “ (“No” for the gutless).

At the time of writing I have yet to do a single national music press interview for “Already” and I can’t say the chances are improving. As the music press has become less and less interesting, because of or possibly resulting in the death of rock as a potent form of musical rebellion, originality and the unconventional, it’s power has increased within the music industry, like a kind of Chinese government of music, former radicals assuming tyrannical authority. It now also acts as a career springboard into British radio (including the all important Radio 1) and has a larger effect on the playlists than it ever had before. For us, it meant an almost total blockade - no interviews, no play listing (we got a few isolated plays on Radio 1 for this single, none for the next), nearly no public awareness that we were back. I wasn’t being told this as rehearsals started but that was probably best for our morale. Unbeknown to us, a few weeks before the first single’s release, it was all over, the album was stillborn, we’d had it. It had been decided.

My tour diary, written in the van every day, gives an insight into the way we felt at the time. What we didn’t know then was that this small,

unglamorous tour would be the only trip we did that year, a long, dismal way from the days of 9 months a year spent on the road, around the world.

DAY 1 - THE NEXT BIG DISASTER

Thursday 8th May

Some start: straight back from the final rehearsal which went as badly as final rehearsals always do and Gail rings me with the news that the single has been put back by yet another week. Also, it's sounding like the American EMI's approach to the release plan for "Already" is "I dunno, what do you think?"

Off in the van to Jerry's. There I find the promotion has in fact begun: a real slagging of the single in the Melody Maker, starting off as they mean to continue, no doubt. Two minutes later tour manager / drummer Wiff arrives in a van he has just crashed into the back of a truck. Then it starts to rain.

It's Thursday for the rest of England but Liverpool seems to exist in a perennial Sunday. With this many boarded-up shops surely only chipboard sales are booming here.

Sound check is really nervous with lots of really bad mistakes including me messing up the intro to "Wishing it away". If I do that in the set we have to start the song all over again and while the intro's good I could definitely wait until the next night to do it again. We get to meet Grant, our lighting man, for the first time and Justin gets his first attempt at doing our sound in about 7 years. We play about 20 minutes worth of songs to try and out-manoeuvre the Beast of Big Mistake which is lurking malevolently behind the amps somewhere.

After a curry up the road from the venue, it's back to the hotel to sit and wait in a state of marginal anxiety in which you'll watch whatever is on TV as long as it doesn't last more than about 3 minutes. We're due on-stage at 10.45 so we leave the hotel at 10 for me to get half an hours warm up before we play. In the dressing room I play guitar and sing, mostly our songs but also fragments that I remember or work out from Beatles and Eels songs. The rest of the band pace up and down the room, talking rubbish and half-

heartedly warming up. I put the guitar down and talk rubbish with them for the last 10 minutes.

It's strange walking on stage. People are cheering but the atmosphere feels muted as though I'm overcompensating for the nerves earlier (I'm not nervous at all, although with a small, not sold out venue there's not that much to be nervous about). The first half of the set just feels a little polite. We get to the older stuff and begin to loosen up a bit. This sense of abandon is shared by our equipment which begins to take unscheduled breaks and Alan, Jerry and I each get our turn to appreciate what Jesus Jones would sound like without our guitars. Guitar "tech" Phil gets a couple of tours worth of breakdowns in 30 minutes but it serves him right for being nonchalant.

Back soaked in sweat to the dressing room, talking the usual post-gig, hyped up rubbish, mostly about how great we are and "did you hear me when..." Great child-like self indulgence. After an hour of alcohol / juice / water / food, autographs and nattering it's back to the strange Euro-cubicle hotel rooms for further celebration and / or too little sleep.

DAY 2 - MANIA & MISERY

Friday 9th of May

I go for a run around the docks first thing which is OK for the exercise and vista but as an activity, jogging is deeply unpleasant and in my experience is best left for life threatening or preserving occasions. However, the mountain bike race season waits for no debilitating tour schedule and so I'm plodding like a dweeb around the docks, thus setting myself up for a day of tortuous muscle pain.

We leave Liverpool en route for Newcastle at 10 with Phil's eccentric driving to keep us entertained: we overshoot the A1 turn off, nearly mow down a pedestrian on a zebra crossing, brake late for everything, occasionally swerve off to the left and spend 10 minutes at teeth-rattlingly high revs until Phil remembers the van has a 5th gear. For lunch we entertain Iain's romantic notion of finding fine pub food which inevitably turns out to be microwaved, instant sauce mush. Exactly the sort of food that gives England the culinary reputation as the place where they boil pizza

An afternoon of waiting, punctuated for me by a radio interview and then a short drive to the Riverside, a venue we played years ago. The sound is great on-stage - as long as the PA isn't turned on. If the audience are to hear anything the band get swamped with a full sound spectrum roar that obliterates any nuances like musical keys. The bass is particularly bad, making the stage rumble but not providing anything for the singers to pitch to. Not perhaps ideal.

I can never figure out how there can be such a disparity between how well the band thinks the gig goes and how good the audience thinks it is. We have a crap one tonight, less technical problems but as suspected the on-stage sound is diabolical. There is even a loud non-stop bass rumble that continues through songs and breaks - why nothing gets done about it by the local monitor crew defies logic since even deafness couldn't prevent an awareness of the bone-shaking noise. I'm suffering a sore throat that hasn't changed in about 3 weeks and maybe it's that or the string of late nights but my voice is not in good shape and needs careful guiding through a tough set. But by the end of the set, my voice is returning and we've stopped bothering about our music sounding like a plane crash.

Backstage, after the show our agent has a few words of wisdom that will change the set in future. He and his girlfriend really enjoyed the gig, as did a string of people who proceed throughout the damp and smoky dressing room, issuing forth from the standard filthy, sagging sofas.

DAY 3 - Sheffield: the glamour of the north **Saturday 10th May**

More motorway madness as Phil hits the Red Bull early on in our rocket van south to Sheffield and the Leadmill, another venue from our past. Today is a landmark for me as it marks the 17th anniversary of the first gig that Gen and I ever played. Gen's currently in Japan with his wife and soon arriving daughter and I'm tapping away on a Powerbook as northern England goes past the window at 100 mph. We didn't imagine this back then.

Just outside Sheffield the rain starts. Rain doesn't do much for most cities and Sheffield with its vast empire of concrete gets a real visual

drubbing. A good day for staying in the dressing room once we get to the gig.

I eat in the venue, watching the support band, the Peccadilloes, doing their sound check. I like their single "U.S.S.O" and I'm looking forward to their set. Probably more than them as they go on to what looks like about 20 people in a venue which holds many multiples of that. They are good but it must seem pretty pointless to them as they finish to virtually no applause from an embarrassed audience.

By the time we come to go on the venue has filled out, not full by a long way but definitely looking healthy. The on-stage sound is good and my guitar sounds just right. We play well, despite the occurrence of the inevitable horror mistake: the start of "Wishing it away" gets screwed up and we have to do it again. Well, I always liked that bit.

Off stage I'm feeling pretty contemplative again. This isn't the great return we had planned on. The crucial problem is that EMI, by putting the single release date back 3 weeks, have scuppered the promotion for the tour. Radio stations won't be playing the single this far in advance (almost a month for these first few dates) and so to a large extent we're preaching to the converted.

In the van on the way back home I type out a fax to Food, not really achieving anything but venting my frustration at how the band have spent years on this record, much energy and preparation with the Web site and rehearsals and yet we're out on the least promoted tour we've ever done in this country (bar the last, "secret" one). Not a cheering thought at 4.30 AM as I get into my bed at home in London.

DAY 4 - Wailing in Wales

Monday 12th of May

Phil negotiates his terrifying way to the M4 heading for Wales and tonight's gig at the University of Glamorgan.

The student bar below the venue has some of the worst food known to man and Iain suffers badly after it for days. Given that his intestines appear to be wildly out of control normally, this is horrifying. The bar does, however, have the "Time Crisis" arcade game which involves shooting

people a lot and is just dandy by me. And they have "The next big thing" on the jukebox which explains why that song goes down better tonight than on any other.

The gig is great. There's lots of crowd surfing and people yelling unintelligibly, lots of work for the bouncers to do. For the band, the lighting is too dark and as I'm dressed entirely in black, Alan has difficulty seeing me which explains the perilous swings of his guitar near my head and some of the strange chord changes throughout the set. The set keeps changing to try and get the best version but we boob tonight by playing "For a moment" as the encore. After the album comes out, this'll be a good idea I'm sure, but not now.

The backstage scene after the show is chaotic, the band standing about in various stages of dress, still dripping sweat while a stream of mostly uninvited people drift in. Sometimes this is good, sometimes this is bad but the impression I got is that out in here in the semi-wilds of Glamorgan there isn't much to do but drink and drug yourself to babbling incoherence.

DAY 5 - Real coffee at last Tuesday 13th May

Bath being close to Wales and Alan and I having relatives in the area we'd driven back there after the gig. I woke up at my dad's house and went for another ill-advised run. The scenery alongside the Kennet and Avon canal and the Avon river was great but the exercise itself was made even more unpleasant by every fool dog owner and their s**t-pumping, slobbering, out of control animal impeding my sweaty progress. Ill temper versus distemper.

At the venue, Alan does an interview with a bass magazine, I get the guitarists version. It's then time for more student cafe food, served incredibly slowly (this is really only notable because if I eat too close to the gig, the breathing and exertion of singing makes it quite likely I'll witness dinner in reverse).

The gig is even better than last night and twice as hot. Phil is threatening legal action if he has to continue to handle guitars with this

much corrosive sweat on them. During the last song, Idiot Stare, I notice that whenever I fling an arm in the air it's followed by an arc of sweat droplets. That'll be nice for the front row

The after show was chaos, as any after show with a lot of friends and relatives always is: a string of high speed, brief conversations spread over a couple of hours. But what is really irking me is that someone has nicked my post-gig Red Bull. Doh!

Day 6 - Still not sure what tense to write in Wednesday 14th May

Hull doesn't seem to have much going for it - it's a sunny day when we arrive and the city looks ugly. This is the equivalent of putting your best clothes on and still looking a mess. After a riotous radio interview (about 5 people in the control room, all asking questions simultaneously) I try and do some shopping. At 5.25 in Hull, that was a little optimistic as some sort of Yorkshire siesta / early closing is in operation. Instead, I wander to the gig for sound check and a couple of interviews. We play AC/DC's "Gone Shootin'" for the last sound check song. Probably just as well there's no support band tonight.

The hotel is hilarious - what there is of it. It's hard to tell if it is being built up or pulled down. Lots of references to Beirut ensue as we trip over electricity cables, cement bags and tools, making our way up through the debris to the rooms.

We'd been anxious about how this gig was going to go having never played here before and in the light of the first couple of gigs up north but we get to the gig to find it packed out. The first good sign. The second good sign was that the on-stage sound (which is always totally different during the gig than at sound check) was superb. Having had enough gigs now to no longer be making stupid mistakes we combine our good fortune to have a belter of a gig. OK, so we're still having some problems with backing vocals but otherwise the gig is a joyous combination of good playing and enthusiasm, in front of a great crowd. "The next big thing" has started to get a tiny amount of airplay, at least locally, and the difference in its response is noticeable. Another reason to be cheerful.

The heat is incredible. By the third song I'm sweating heavily and by the end I feel as dehydrated as I'd expect to in a summer mountain bike race. The lack of oxygen starts making singing hard and "Idiot stare" doesn't have the long notes live that it has on record as a result.

The only negative part of the evening is that someone has again nicked my post-gig Red Bull. I inform the crew that this is now a sackable offence.

Day 8 - Routine sweating

Friday 16th May

Nottingham traffic, motorway madness, motorway traffic, dreary English towns, open countryside and then, 3 hours later, Middlesbrough. Now, I'm sorry if you live here but this place is where inhabitants of truly ugly cities come to feel better about their hometowns. Flat, grey and hardly a building over two storeys. Strange, also, how all the men sport that military / convict hairstyle with added moustache. And everyone is in a tracksuit.

Routine. It's all settled now. Emails and diary for me in the van on the way from city to city, more of that at the hotel. From there to the sound check, sometimes via an interview. We usually play "Zeroes and ones", "Wishing it away", "The next big thing" and "International bright young thing" at sound check, those songs using the range of technology we have with us as well as the full array of backing vocals. Then back to the hotel.

The gig is good, not great. There's a great crowd but it doesn't seem like there's been any promotion here - "The next big thing" gets virtually no recognition and as it is the third new song in a row, the early part of the set falls a bit flat. My voice is OK, despite this being the fifth night on a row and a late one at that but I go through a period of playing pretty badly and being distracted by what the rest of the band are doing. It's always how you play that really determines how much you enjoy a gig so thankfully I get better by the end of the set, coinciding with a spate of old songs that are what this particular crowd are really here for. It's another sweaty gig - when I come off stage, I can wring streams of sweat out of my shirt.

“Absolutely world fking class!”**

The last three dates of the diary didn't get written up as we got closer to home and the free time that touring provides diminished. We'd played a great gig in Norwich with "A" on cup final day and I got a lift home with a friend in order to be able to get up a few hours later and ride a bike race. Two days later we played another stormer in Exeter, a tiny venue called the Cavern and the size of the venue, the reaction of the crowd and our enthusiasm made it reminiscent of gigs in our very early days. A run of good gigs made us nervous about the last one, the 100 Club in London. As well as friends and family and most of the people who worked with us, there would be press, record companies from around the world and the American EMI had got themselves together enough to bring over some big industry names from press and television. That sort of pressure usually counted against us but on the night we really pulled it off. The confidence had returned, the ability was back and the show was packed out with a superb crowd. Nothing malfunctioned seriously, no one screwed up badly and it felt good to be playing these songs so well. It was one of those gigs that actually was the way I'd always imagined being in a band would be like.

In the tiny dressing room at the back of the club, Dave Balfe who still advised us despite having left Food years earlier stormed in and gushed, "Brilliant! Absolutely world f**king class! It's just a pity you're not a new band."

Adding to that insight, he asked me how the radio play was going. The glare Gail threw at him let me know just how little bad news we were being told.

The last week of May I spent fending off the anti-climax of finishing the tour with days of promotion, nearly all international press and radio and a couple of hours spent hanging around MTV for two brief interviews. Al was with me and he spent the time drinking beer and joining in with my critiquing the bands shown on the TV. There was no one from the record company there, the interviewers were busy elsewhere, apart from the 10 minutes spent briefly quizzing us. Afterwards, we sat in the sunshine outside the MTV canteen, next to the Regents Canal in Camden. The single would be released in a few days but we felt no sense of urgency, no sense of occasion, none of the nervous excitement we'd had in the build up to every other release. We had a good idea of what was about to happen.

The Next Big Thing

Monday, June the 2nd, 1997, the release date for our 11th UK single, “The Next Big Thing”. After a long gap (like four years and four months) it’s a rule with few exceptions that if the first single doesn’t succeed the subsequent singles and album are write-offs. All the favours are called in for this first release, the friends in TV and radio and press get the reminders of that little bit extra the band did for them last time around. Every scrap of promotion you can do is used to fuel the drive back into the spotlight. Once all your “get out of jail free” cards are gone, you’re on your own, either your rejuvenated success fills up the tank, sends you cruising back into the public eye with the follow up singles or you’re on the hard shoulder without an AA card. We already felt like hitchhikers.

In the years between “Perverse” and this release I’d often contemplated what I’d do if the album bombed. The amount of money EMI were contractually obliged to advance us if they wanted another album meant anything less than good sales of “Already” would guarantee us being dropped. Although I could really see myself as a bicycle courier, as the band’s sole writer it would be a while before I needed to run red lights while screaming at taxi drivers (I did it anyway, just for the practice). Of course I wanted to keep making music for as long as possible since I still loved that (despite the last three years) and besides, who’d really want to swap this lifestyle for one with designated hours, less international travel and no-one sending you their sexy underwear occasionally?

Becoming a producer was out of the question: I’d already done some of that and in comparison with the likes of Martyn and “Perverse”’s producer, Warne Livesey, it was obvious to me I didn’t have the ability. In the music industry that doesn’t have to be a consideration but I fancied both paying the bills and living with my conscience. I could revert to being just a guitarist, hide away in another band and let someone else answer “so how did you guys get the name?” but I came to realise that at some point I’d started to enjoy singing as much as playing guitar. Also, I doubted the domineering side of my personality would lie dormant while following someone else’s orders.

The Web site design I was doing in partnership was fun and that I could see leading somewhere. Most of all though, Jesus Jones still had plenty of life left around the world as far as we were concerned and while there still places we could play I was determined to push it as far as it would go.

And why shouldn't we make a comeback? There were others who pulled it off; Texas had emerged at around the same time as us and came back stronger in '97, James were doing OK with a new single after a long gap. So the Stone Roses return didn't go the way they hoped but at least they went down in flames, which is better than just stalling with engine failure.

Death threat of my own

The "mid-week" came in - the estimation of the singles chart position based on comparative sales of all the other records on release. The remote notion that it might all be over suddenly became the icy realisation that we were in real trouble and that the easy life was about to change. We didn't stand a chance of entering the Top 40 unless we suddenly got national radio airplay which was unlikely without some sort of major publicity coup, like me assassinating a head of state. Even then the likes of the presidents of Mali or Tajikstan wouldn't suffice - it was a bullet for Helmut Kohl or a bomb for the single. Call me a woolly liberal if you will but I preferred more artistic than political statements and so we started rehearsals for a gig in Amsterdam at the end of the week - we'd avoid hearing the chart position by driving across Belgium on Sunday afternoon.

The last night stand

Why this single was going down better than any of our others in Belgium and Holland we didn't ask to be explained. We were on radio playlists there and if the record company wanted to fly us to Brussels for all the food and drink we could handle, so much the better. OK, so they wanted two of us to talk to the press for a few hours, we were still getting the infinitely better end of the deal as far as I was concerned. Plus, being slagged off in French isn't so bad, especially if you don't speak it well. Conscious of the plight of the single back home it was time to relish these opportunities and live it up. To be wined and dined by the record company after the interviews would be so much more piquant with the knowledge that it was unlikely we'd be back again soon.

Afterwards, Al and I were driven in a limousine from Brussels to Amsterdam, arguing drunkenly all the way about whether team sports were any good or not (ME : no, AL : yes). For us it just passed the time but we were lucky the driver didn't beat the crap out of us, even if we weren't arguing in Flemish.

At the mini-festival in Amsterdam we were "the old band" according to the Dutch journalists interviewing me beforehand. I told him kids didn't say things like that in my day, they had more respect back then. The Supernaturals, a band also on Food and with a great album out, were on before us, their career just entering the exciting phase back home, having hits, venturing abroad, comparing MacDonald's menus (and you thought Jon Travolta in Pulp Fiction was the first) and being threatened by burly truckers on the Channel ferry. As far as we knew, we were probably going to Japan and, of course, we'd be going back to America, so there'd be plenty more gigs abroad to come for us.

At the time of writing we still have yet to play another gig. I'm pleased then, that it was a bloody good one. It wasn't an easy crowd, more interested in staying on late because they'd paid the money and were too drunk to be able to walk out than in seeing another band but we went down well, surprising the journalists, hopefully with our youthful vigour as well as the odd tune. A week later we received a glowing report from the record company, saying the radio station that transmitted the show live had loved it and overall, the promotion and gig had been a great success. They got some value for their giant restaurant bill, then.

Sure enough, the next day we were gorging Belgian chocolate en route to Calais when Gail got the call about the single's chart position. Once, 6 years previously, she'd rung me as soon as she'd heard to congratulate us on entering the album charts at #1. This time it took a couple of days before she even broached the subject - I was too despondent to ask. I can't now remember the exact position and sticklers for details will have to remain irritated that I'm not bothered about finding it out but it entered somewhere in the 50s and was therefore, our worst chart entry ever. And it didn't improve.

Still, at least we still had America and the record company there had begun to get an encouraging plan together.

Another slight hitch

In June 1997, 180-odd EMI employees in the US woke up one morning to read in the newspapers that they no longer had jobs. One of the big six, multi-national record companies had shut down, an almost unthinkable event. It's a rare decade that sees that - weren't we the lucky ones? The biggest selling artists on the label would be fought over by the two subsidiary labels, the rest of the bands could stay on the Titanic by being band #81 on an overcrowded sister label that hadn't originally signed them, or take to the lifeboats once contractual permission was given - that was our decision.

Getting a new label in America didn't prove hard but sorting out the details, the contracts, the plans turned into an arcane process that would take well over 6 months. As I write, Combustion Records will release "Already" within a few weeks but as far as 1997 goes, America went from being the country of our greatest success and a place we still had high hopes for to being completely out of the picture. No doubt luck had helped us with our early success there but we were clearly overdrawn at Good Fortune Bank Ltd 6 years later. I don't suppose those 180-odd people were too happy, either.

Round 2

Back at home the schedule for the album fell apart with the single's failure. The release date was hastily delayed until August in the hope that the second single might ride in on a pure white steed and save the day. Now there's an appropriate fantasy metaphor. Of course, while there was still even a slim chance it was better than not trying at all. The last minute change of plan meant that review copies of the album had already gone out to press, almost two months before it was available in shops, cocking up that part of the promotion even further. Not that the press held many surprises (you'll be incredulous to find out) although it was interesting to see that the approach and ideas I'd had about music that had kick-started Jesus Jones in 1988 were becoming very fashionable almost a decade later. Certainly the press for the lauded U2 album released that summer ("Pop") often featured references to us, even if it seemed we were only responsible for the worst parts of that style. One magazine gave "Pop" 3 out of 5 stars

and referred to us by replacing the vowels in the band's name with asterisks, as you would a swear word. Pages later "Already" was reviewed as "The new U2 album but with better songs" for which, intriguingly, we got only 2 stars. Not song fans, I took it.

Preparations to make "Chemical # 1" the next single got underway. Food pulled out the stops and got some great remixers to work on the song, amongst the best we'd had. Also above normal were the video treatments, about 9 in total. There were suggestions for shoots in a warehouse in Reading (IRA bombs unlikely there), in and around a house in Brighton, and one that would require 8 days in Namibia. Now, you know where this book is going and I had a good idea then, too: Damn right we were off for a week in Africa!

In the meantime, EMI had requested, with meaningful glances, that we record a song from their catalogue for a centenary celebration album they had planned. I chose that teenage favourite of mine, the Strangler's "Go Buddy go" above Kate Bush's "Wuthering heights" and "Sugar, sugar" by the Archies and began to rewrite it in preparation for a recording session a few days before the Namibia shoot.

The height of summer

It was a miserable summer, wet and cold. I was racing at least once a week now, mostly in a small series in east London (that well-known mountain biking Mecca) and remember shivering on the start line for most of the races there. I raced in Brighton on my 33rd birthday, the day after the summer solstice. It rained like it has no right to in a country without a tropical rain forest. When I could no longer even push my bike through the clay I gave up - it was my birthday, I wanted a bike race, not an Army selection course.

On the last night of June I went to see Gen's new band, Baby Chaos. They, too were having difficulties with their American label, although theirs had the decency to not collapse entirely. They kept being promised all manner of exciting prospects that always had a good reason for never materialising. Watching them do a great show but knowing the behind-the-scenes tribulations made me see the parallels and the arbitrary nature of the music industry, of fashion. Or maybe it was just that Gen and I shared that account at Good Fortune Bank Ltd.

10
JULY

The best that can be said about the recording of our version of “Go Buddy go” was that my Hugh Cornwall impression gave us all a good laugh. Not quite all, since it wasn’t worth Alan flying over for the sake of one bass line and so I played bass, making it two impressions of the members of the Stranglers - half the band, not bad! Otherwise, the lack of a sense of occasion and summer ‘97s standard issue grey sky made for a perfunctory session.

However, we finished in time for me to ride across London for one last race before the flight to Namibia. Future Publishing had asked me to write a piece on the filming of the video and the excerpts are worth including here, even if it’s just to show how we danced while Rome burned;

Chemical # 1 in Namibia

The gun was much heavier than I’d expected. I could see the grooved surface of the percussion cap behind the cocked hammer and the flat explosion as it detonated, kicking the gun hard upwards, dulled my hearing momentarily. The 9mm bullet kicked up a flume of rock and dust a couple of inches away from the pipe that I’d been aiming for and at a distance of about 70 metres that was OK by me.

“Good!” said the Afrikaans policeman, “Now would you like to use the grenade launcher?”

Well, why not?

We’d flown overnight to Windhoek, Namibia’s capital, hired VW “Combi” vans and driven the 400 kilometres to Swakopmund and the Atlantic Ocean, 1200 kilometres north west of Cape Town. To call the place a seaside resort, whilst accurate, would be misleading: this is hardly Benidorm. For a start it’s tiny. Then there’s the location - from Windhoek, we’d travelled west over rolling hills and grassland, the typical southern African *bushveld* the nearer we got to the coast the less the vegetation until 100 kilometres from Swakopmund the Namib desert swept in. Flat, arid, treeless, grassless gravel flats, barren brown isolated “*inselbergen*” mountains and at the end of the journey, sand dunes rising to over 90 metres high. Then Swakopmund, besieged by sand and sea, more of a village than a town, sitting (as linguists will have already ascertained) by the mouth of the

Swakop river, a waterway which only sees surface water once every few years and even then only as a flash flood. Quite why the German settlers of the last century chose to live here is puzzling. That they decided to recreate a Bavarian village in this desolate place is a joyous testament to European colonial's more extreme idiosyncrasies. Here we are then, Swakopmund : Hansel and Gretel meet Lawrence of Arabia.

Back to the weaponry. Our location scout had suggested a long deserted copper mining village 50 kilometres out into the desert. Getting there involved traversing a series of increasingly tricky gravel and sand roads culminating in a "closed" sign before a heavily corrugated, boulder strewn "road" leading to the site. After a journey like that we didn't really want to see the location fuzzing with Namibia's blue uniformed paramilitary police. Presumably bored of their training manoeuvres in the desert and with the subordinate ranks (the black Namibians) off marching for days on end in the sand and heat, the officers (the white Namibians) were more than willing to help us shoot up their country. Would we like some smoke bombs for this shot? Oh, go on then! Would an explosion in the background look good? I think we could fit that in. Have you ever used a handgun before? A grenade launcher? It didn't seem like it would be long before we'd be driving tanks into Swakopmund and loosing a few shells off down Kaiser Wilhelm Strasse as our cheery, moustachioed commandos looked on amiably.

So we stand around, nancy pop stars miming our silly song as these ex-members of the South African Defence Force, the army that fought Namibia's brutal war of independence on the side of apartheid and colonialism, stare at us through their sunglasses. The next shot involves me driving the Land Rover that contains the band and the sporting paraphernalia relevant to the video - mountain bikes and snow boards - "as fast as you can". There's a 20 minutes wait while the police clear away their booby traps from the area where the camera crew want to film from.

More filming, more driving. Meanwhile, the police are getting bored - not enough firepower is being used and their honeymoon period with us is wearing off. Two of our local crew are talking, a short distance down the hill from the camera crew and the police. One of the men in blue asks us if they are foreigners or locals, presumably because the police assassination of dead locals causes less of an international incident. A shot gets fired at them, a few feet to their left. Then another, to the right. Possibly under the

impression that if they ignore the bullets they'll go away, there's no reaction from either of the crew which turns out to be a mistake as the next round passes about 12 inches from one of the guys' heads. It's time to leave.

As the Swakop river forges through the Namib near the end of its desert sojourn, it forms a stunning canyon vista, a massive array of dark fissures in the earth that stretch for miles into the distance, overlooked sternly by the Rossing mountains. This vast, desolate area is appropriately known as Moon Valley, although the moon has perhaps more vegetation and definitely more water. This is the location for the mountain biking filming, the bit I'm really looking forward to.

However, this is a video shoot and the budget didn't run to hiring a helicopter, Tour de France-style, to trail my progress through a 40 mile stretch of wilderness. Instead we get to ride up and down the steep gullies that make their eventual way to the river, cruising the flat crests of the watersheds and dropping down the loose rock and sand inclines. It should be explained here that the demarcation lines within the band are roughly that I do the energetic and hard work parts and the other three handle the more archetypal rock 'n' roll aspects. They were the first people to eagerly misinterpret the title, "Chemical # 1". In a performance later described as "s**t" by one of the camera crew, Jerry quickly finds his nerve to be in the same condition as his cardio-vascular system and opts to spectate rather than lie panting in the dust with a collapsed Kona on top of him, sand sticking to his profusely sweating face. Alan, whose body has taken this opportunity to remind him of all those late nights and all that vodka, is faring better but facing a crisis of ambition over ability - his were by far the best crashes. Iain, however, has grabbed the bull by the horns, or so it must feel as he plummets swiftly down a trail-less, gravel precipice, following my back wheel and the director's exhortation to take the steepest, most difficult route from top to bottom. We do take after take, sitting so far off the back of the bikes for balance that our chests rest against the back of the saddles, trying to avoid the back brake locking up and sliding the bike out of control, trying to avoid the front brake (aka "the ejector lever") altogether. At the end of an impressively audacious novice performance, Iain comments, "Fear isn't normally something I associate with being on a bike". The penny drops - Chemical # 1, indeed.

All through that night the wind punches the hotel windows and scythes through the palm trees lining the beach outside, bending their fronds to 90 degrees - don't try this at home. Perhaps it's me: my visit to Lanzarote (just off the Saharan coast) where "a couple inches of rain a year is unusual" was a wash out, a long, freak storm in Mediterranean Minorca made an optimistic biking holiday there as muddy as a week in the Lake District and one of my two trips to Australia coincided with floods in New South Wales the size of Western Europe. What my freak weather blighted existence is experiencing this time is the worst sandstorm in Namibia for seven years. My first inkling that all is not well is at the wake up time of 5.30 AM when I stumble groggily into the bathroom and discover a quarter of an inch of sand covering every surface and a fine, sparkling mist of the stuff descending from the skylight. There is sand in my toothbrush, in the soap, in my clothes, in my razor and even more horrifyingly, on the toilet paper: it's the ultimate beach picnic nightmare.

The local crew are refusing to come out as they like the paintwork on their cars the way it is. Later in the week, I see a car that has been out in the sandstorm; the front of the bonnet is beautifully smoothed of all paint so that the bare metal fades in toward the front of the car and the headlights have the appearance of an old piece of glass on the beach. At 8 o' clock, tired of waiting around on "maybe later" I go out to do some shopping. The town is being obliterated by sand and wind, I feel like I've wandered into a documentary about natural disasters. Eerily, visibility is down to about 100 feet with the sun just visible, looking more lunar than solar. Small drifts, parodies of the dunes a few hundred yards away are ganging up at every street corner and snaking across the roads. It's soon apparent why the streets are empty as the wind blows sand into my eyes, ears, nose, mouth and stings any skin it comes into contact with - all this for a tube of toothpaste.

Returning to the hotel, I find evidence of eccentric Namibian service; the bed is perfectly made, the room tidied, the welcome chocolate mint on the pillow and the welcome half inch of sand all over the toilet. Still, several local farmhouses have had their roofs removed in the storm so I expect they have sand in the bathroom, too.

By 10 AM, director Stuart, driven by remorseless artistic frenzy and the knowledge that all the equipment here is hired, decides to brave the elements and so we drive out into the dying storm to film a few shots of us

standing about trying to look cool and iconic whilst being skinned alive. I feel like a butcher's shop carcass wearing sunglasses.

The storm is over by early afternoon and our convoy of vans and Land Rover heads into the sand dune belt that runs parallel to the coast between Swakopmund and Walvis Bay. Some of the dunes here are big enough to be permanent landmarks and "The Matterhorn" at around 90 metres, although far smaller than some of the dunes a few hundred kilometres to the south, juts impressively into the cloudless sky. The first shot here involves climbing over the other side of the Matterhorn to where the uninterrupted view is of a sea of dunes below us stretching majestically to the Atlantic. It's a phenomenal sight, enriched in a sort of stoic way by having to plod half a mile uphill over sand with all the film and sound equipment. OK, so I personally didn't have to do that but dressed for the shoot in a woollen jersey, combat trousers and snowboarding boots, I figured my suffering was at least a token attempt at sympathy with the sand Sherpas of the crew.

It took 2 hours to climb the dune and set the shot up. By this time the fading light that would be gone by 5.30 was introducing a note of anxiety as the last few details were co-ordinated over walkie talkies. And with impeccable timing, here, somewhere to the left of the middle of nowhere, come a large group of tourists. Stuart gawps in mute disbelief as clad in canoe helmets and holding small sheets of chipboard, they stride to the top of the dune and into shot. Then, instructed by a woman whose strident Californian accent scathes the dunes like the storm earlier in the day, one by one they lie on their chipboard toboggans and drop down the dune face first, leaving great trails in the previously unblemished sand for the unforgiving attention of our camera. One of them starts singing the chorus of a six year old hit of ours. I grit my teeth and discover more hidden sand. And an English voice yells out in despair, "F**king TWATS!"

Lucky there was room in the budget for post-production trickery, then.

The next day the Matterhorn was ours alone and we would shoot the sand boarding scenes. Alan, with novices naiveté, discovered the best approach - point the board straight down and go like Hell, thus leaving you to fall off at high speed on the bottom of the slope where the sand is packed

hardest. Standing at the summit of the Matterhorn, much of Namibia below you, the stiff wind blowing sand into your sweat and a very, very steep slope falling down to the seemingly Dinky toy-sized convoy below, it took some commitment to launch yourself strapped to a chunk of wood. But by the time we'd struggled for 15 minutes in 35 degree heat up steep sand there was little else for it. The sweat involved in the climb and the frequent falls on the way down made for some particularly unphotogenic material. Best image from this session was of Alan, whose bald, shaven head at the top had, infomercial style, transformed into a sandy wig at the bottom.

I managed five runs, fifteen minutes uphill and 15 seconds down each, before being called away for lip-synching shots saved my Achilles tendons from permanent damage.

Our last day of filming. This particular shot called for me to drive the Land Rover through a shantytown situated, unfeasibly, 60 desert kilometres from anything human, next to what would have been a river if it contained any water. The local Topnaars, part of the Nama tribes, one of the oldest native Namibian peoples, turned out in force to laugh at the circus come to town. Racially, they're quite different from other Africans, having pale, almost yellow skin, heart-shaped faces and a language that has to be heard to be believed. It's odd enough that it includes "!" as part of it's alphabet, loosely represented by the sound you get from clicking your tongue from the roof of your mouth. The conversation around us popped and clicked, little verbal firecrackers exploding in the streams of otherwise familiar human speech as I thrashed the Land Rover through the village and almost but not quite, over the village chickens.

Then the last shot, the last obstruction before our time here is all our own for the last couple of days. Stuart has decided that I perform better having worked up a sweat and so instructs me to run up the road out of Swakopmund, into the desert while the camera crew make the final preparations. Fifteen minutes later I'm still running, I've definitely worked up more than a little sweat and I'm out on my own in the Namib desert. Briefly, I contemplate doing a Forest Gump, keeping on right across the continent to Mozambique but the crew catch up with me before the practicalities of not carrying my passport do. Close up shots of me lip synching are needed and I must drive the Land Rover while Stuart hangs out of the side of the van running alongside with the camera. This means I have

to use the old dirt road that is corrugated, full of rocks and punctuated with vehicle-deep flash flood channels gouged out of it as it runs parallel with the new tarmac highway at a steady and exact 60 kmh while lip synching. I'm not sure whether the rest of the band trust me implicitly or have no idea that I feel like our last moments on earth will be spent miming as we plough steadily and exactly into a gully, a ludicrous fate finely documented on film. The stock runs out before we bungle off this mortal coil.

On the night to celebrate the end of filming, we drive to Walvis Bay and a place called The Raft, a bar and restaurant built on a jetty in the town's lagoon. The nearby docks employ the local population, many of whom cannot swim and The Raft's opening night was somewhat tarnished by a corpse floating serenely underneath but still in clear view of the revellers. With the quantity of alcohol consumed tonight, it's just a matter of time before one of us ends up drunk in the drink. I eat a jalapeno shark fillet, on the basis that I should eat dangerous animals before they eat me, an approach I've utilised the world over with a variety of toothy fish, crocodile, bear, alligator and kangaroo (OK, not strictly a predator but try and find an Australian animal that isn't lethally poisonous). A very appetising method of self-preservation.

The final adrenaline inducing activity we had planned was one that we weren't able to film and could therefore attempt at full throttle: quad biking. These four-wheel drive, 200 cc motorbikes bring out the delinquent teenager in anyone. Within our first few minutes of what was supposedly a guided tour, Iain was pulling doughnuts in the gravel, Ben from the crew took a flying jump at speed and buried the bike in a minor dune, Stuart had come over all speedway and Jerry was, well, joyfully unravelling the mysteries of piloting a motorised vehicle for the first time.

The guided element of the tour comes into it's own when you head out of the start area by the road and move into the desert. The gravel flats are sensitive ecological areas, tyre marks can be visible for decades afterwards (unlike in the dunes where the next day, our tracks were all but gone) and so the group sticks to existing trails. Not that this is restrictive; in a speed tuck, in 6th gear and at the maximum speed of 90 kmh, racing the rest of the group in a storm of dust, you don't feel particularly nannied. Then it's into the dunes where the manoeuvrability and power of the bikes makes them perfect for the terrain. The speed and G forces involved in

firing up an 80 metre dune on the left side, riding along the crescent edge of the summit and then plummeting down the right hand side to the valley leading to the next dune are exhilarating. Through the sand mountains, tilting at crazy angles to the left then the right, dropping down 45 degree slopes, getting air, wheel spinning through slaloms, climbing impossible-looking faces of sand: Two hours of sand spewing, grit in the eyes, throttle bashing heaven.

A couple of hours of this wasn't enough for me. I came back on our last day, a few hours before the drive back to Windhoek and the flight home and tagged along with a group of Americans, school friends on an extended trip around southern Africa. After the briefing, there is a period of getting to know the controls on the bike, easing your way into the forthcoming ride. Within the first sixty seconds of this warm up, one of the women in the group had hit a couple of ridges at unfamiliar speed, tipped the bike back over front, face planted and had the bike come down on her, breaking her collarbone. The ambulance took half an hour to arrive. Twenty minutes later, having travelled a few short miles at speeds golf cart drivers would sneer at, one of the bikes breaks down with a clutch problem. During the 40 minutes it takes for a replacement to be sent out, one of the riders says of his friend, "I hate to say 'I told you so' but he was saying you don't need to use the clutch on these things". This, I feel, the bike manufacturers would not fully agree with. Two hours and many, many gear changes later, the same rider was asking me how to select neutral. The fact that he purposely chose a manual gearbox when automatics were readily available only heightens the mystery. At about this point the "What do you do?" questions start and their knowledge of an old hit song of mine brings the cameras out again. "Hey! Can you sing the words to the song while I take the picture?" says one of my fellow bikers. Things become tense for a while.

At great delay, my mind on the 400-kilometre drive I should have already started, we are about to reach the halfway point. The guide, with me on his tail, descends the first of the dunes, hits a jump and coasts to a halt on a gravel flat. We turn around to watch the arrival of the first rider behind us, the diplomatic photographer, who hits the jump, lands, turns around to look at it and tips the bike over on it's side, speedily introducing his face to the grittier side of Namibia. Very, very quietly, I can make out the guide saying, "Not ...again!" He has never had a "faller" before. Faller # 2 this morning, but for the presence of ears, looks like he has done 5 rounds with Mike

Tyson, his left eye swollen and bloody and cuts leaking all over his visage. As he is being patched up, the rest of the crew are pootling towards the dune. The last of them, the second woman, attempts the 70 metre high, steep sided lump of sand in a too high gear with low revs and even less speed, if such tender velocity can be referred to as such. It's an interesting approach and an utterly useless one: she stalls, axle-deep, about a third of the way up. With the guide busy staunching Gravel Face's wounds and my flight imminent, I scoot to the bottom of the dune from where I can accelerate away again without getting trapped in the sand myself, walk up the slope and start to haul the immobilised bike out of the sand. Another bike is heading our way, across the gravel then up the dune. "Keep going! KEEP GOING!" I'm screaming to myself but telepathy fails me and the second bike pulls to a stop almost on top of us, oblivious to the slope, the sand and the limitations of both bike and rider. "Hey! What's up?" Well, what's up is I'm digging you lot out of this bloody great dune one at a time while a couple of Air Namibia pilots tap their fingers on the black box and the air hostesses grow steely eyed and spiteful, vengefully awaiting my eventual arrival. Freed, the woman attempts the same dune in the same manner with the same result.

The pattern for the remainder of this epic ride is set. Half of us will hammer up the dunes like the Banana Splits with road rage, reach the top, pause expectantly while looking over our shoulders, then switch the engines off, watch the guide disappear behind us to emerge five minutes later towing a Sunday driver of the future.

And so my exit from Namibia is an over-amped rush, part exhilaration, part panic. The accelerator pedal in the van remains stuck frantically to the floor as desert turns slowly into scrub then bushveld and our snail-like progress is made across the vast landscape. We tear past giraffe, springbok and jackal, our attention is occasionally drawn to traffic police and vice versa. The final surge comes from one last explosive, Technicolor sunset over Windhoek. Then the night fades Namibia out for me, the journey ends and I'm drained of energy, ready for sleep.

Fat chance.

The relative forces of Evil

My brother and his family paid a visit to London not long after I got back. This was terrible news. It's not that I dislike my brother, just that he's the Harbinger of Doom for my career. He left Britain just before things really took off for the band, going to work as a teacher in Zimbabwe (coincidentally a neighbour state to Namibia) and there he met his future wife. Having followed my career erratically on the BBC World Service, they returned suspiciously in time to witness things start to go wrong in the "Perverse" era. Having moved to Barbados (work related, he hadn't made a million teaching in Zimbabwe), they were back on holiday in greater numbers, two children strengthening the Forces of Darkness, just as things got really bad for us. I went round to see them on a rare (and deceptively?) sunny evening, taking the new video with me so that they could get wistfully nostalgic at the southern African scenery and to show the kids that Uncle Mike went to the desert to sit in a deck chair and sing. Only once did a malign undercurrent show itself when my three-year-old nephew got rowdy at not being allowed to go out and get the Indian take-away. To be fair, I would have done the same in his place.

Up that? On this ?

Speaking of the Dark side, I'd been fraternising with the mountain bikers enemy-within-cycling, the road cyclist, and bought a road bike. It was part of the range by ex-Tour de France champion Greg LeMond, the Alpe d'Huez model, named after a bloody great hill in the south of France that he'd had to slog his guts out on for few years running. I would have been more likely to call the bike "Oh Jesus, not that monster again!" In July 1997, the Tour was taking in that climb and one drunken night with some cycling friends (is this genetics at work?) it was decided that we would hire a car, borrow tents, drive hideous hours, watch the Tour go past and I'd get to do a variation on taking coals to Newcastle, up the Alpe d'Huez on an Alpe d'Huez.

And so it was that we left London on an early Thursday evening and drove for 650 miles through the night. By the time we got to Grenoble it was 8AM on Friday, I'd refused to give up the steering wheel even for a moment and was wild-eyed with Red Bull and coffee. Still, I managed a couple of hours sleep before the heat of the sun drove me out of the oven-like tent. Ten minutes later the rain drove me back in again and Nature's little practical joke continued this amusing cycle until we'd all had enough and decided, like true Brits abroad, to go to a bar in the nearby town.

Six months earlier, I'd have expected July to have been a time of touring and interviews, stuck in a tour bus en route to Leicester or Cleveland or Hamburg. Instead, I was sunning myself in southern France, drinking wine, about to witness the biggest, most glamorous bike race in the world. Even in decline, (ex) rock stardom wasn't too shabby.

“Let's ride up the hill”

By midnight we were very relaxed and confident. Cocky, even. And so the clarion call of the weekend was first uttered, “I know, let's ride up the hill”. “The hill” is the toughest climb on the Tour de France, 14 kilometres long, featuring 21 hairpin bends and 5000 feet of altitude gain, one of the few climbs of the tour graded “beyond expectation” which shows how badly it translates from the French since after you've done it once you have all too clear an expectation: Expectation of pain and suffering (why else would all these spectators come?). It is the mountain the riders on the Tour fear most, the ascent all other road climbs are compared to. It's unlikely those supreme athletes would know this but I can assure them and the world that the first three, wall-like hairpins are an extremely effective cure for drunkenness. Two of us struggled up this piece of bravado road building, being cheered on by drunken Danes, Germans, Italians, Dutch, Spanish and French, part of the 5,000,000 spectators who came to watch the race, spewing (sometimes literally) out of high altitude beer tents and singing those hyper-jolly summer Euro-hits, records with that fag-end-of-Techno beat, words of no discernible language and no discernible consonants, repeated until everyone falls down drunk, a cross between a football chant, a beer drinking song and the Teletubbies. I rode through this thinking, “I am Martin Sheen on a bike. This is the remake of Apocalypse Now”. (Never get off the bike, absolutely God damn right!)

Half frozen and exhausted, we careered back down from the top at 2 AM, sliding almost out of control on the freshly painted slogans the fans daubed on the road to spur their tortured heroes on the next day.

“Let's ride up the hill”

Six hours later we did it again, in the heat of the morning and in the midst of an large army of spectators making their way up by car, bike or foot. Despite the blazing sun it wasn't warm enough at the summit for

anything more than a coffee and baguette before zipping down the hill to wait for the arrival of the Tour at the bottom of the climb.

Perched on our rocky corner, 20 feet above the road, we watched the ludicrous cavalcade of sponsors and advertisers vehicles cruise past, the cars dressed up like the products (my favourite was the giant mobile cheese), Barbie Doll women throwing out free promotional tack, more of that lost consonant EuroPop blaring out, two hours of Carnival meets Disney meets Coca Cola. As the race officials' cars, police and support vehicles slowly replaced the procession of kitsch, we heard the helicopter that films the riders coming up the valley. It circled above the town of Le Bourg d'Oisans, the clamour died away and the sense of expectation was palpable.

The false starts of motor bike camera teams and police escorts builds the tension. And then we can see them at the far end of the approach road, the shimmering movement of the riders and the bright colours of bikes and team jerseys making the peleton mirage-like as the teams jockey for position, keeping the pace as high as possible in order to hurl their chosen rider up the start of the hill and break the will of competitors preparing themselves for the ordeal. The speed that the group has as it bears down on us is phenomenal. For a fleeting moment the riders are in front of and below me, rounding the corner and starting the climb, a mass of bodies moving, sweating, bikes clicking and whirring. It's an eerily quiet flash of muscle, sinew, flesh, titanium, aluminium, carbon fibre, plastic, one that fires by like a single, giant organism. At this point - and at this speed - it's just about impossible to make the riders out individually but the look of concentration and anxiety is the same on all the faces. In a second the group passes us and the team support cars bunch behind. In the middle of the cars, a lone rider is trying to fight his way through the traffic to rejoin the main group. He gets the biggest cheer of the day.

The rest of the race we watched in a bar two hundred yards away. The Italian, Marco Pantani won the stage, climbing the Alpe d'Huez in 38 minutes - an average of 18mph. Imagine the steepest hill you know going on for 8 miles and then imagine cycling that at an average of 18mph. Maybe just try doing 18mph on the flat first. Fleas can jump distances in vast multiples of their body length and height due to a phenomenal strength to weight ratio. I suspect Mr Pantani of being bitten by a radioactive flea in his

youth and instead of a life spent fighting crime (well, face it, as “Fleaman” criminals are unlikely to take you seriously) he thrashes up hills on bike for a living. I’d made it up there in an hour. In my favour, Marco Pantani didn’t have to contend with stationery buses and half a million foolhardy pedestrians in the road. In his favour, I hadn’t had to cycle 100 miles up a slow incline before I’d even reached the mountain (does driving 650 count?) on an afternoon under a clear Mediterranean sky. We’ll call it a draw, then.

“Let’s ride up the hill”

Yes, again - the third time in 24 hours. We’d sat outside a restaurant, watching the traffic snaking down the hill for 5 hours after the race finish, the lights marking their long, slow crawl as darkness descended. The ascent was easier in the cool of night but it’s never easy. The gradient taunts you, too steep to require anything other than maximum effort, too long to provide any easing of the pace: it’s all or nothing. We had no lights other than the stars. A traffic cop on duty on the then almost deserted road started to stop us but the sound of our crap French brought on a tone of weary resignation and he looked away, fed up. Sometimes it’s good to be British.

The descent was one of the best rides of my life. The full moon illuminated the road so well I’d probably have been worse off with bike lights. I could see the grey of the road in front, the trees on either side and at the end of each hairpin. With no people about, very little traffic and all the paint dried from the day’s sun, there was nothing to stop me. At some point I hit 40 mph, probably overtaking a car on one of the longer straights. By the last few hairpins, the vehicles behind me lit up the road perfectly and the warm air from the valley brought back the feeling to my fingers and toes, a celebratory warmth to match the rush of the descent.

We drove for fourteen hours the next day, going home with the undersides of the bikes covered in a bizarre pattern of different coloured paint from the road. A fine memento.

Oh yes, one other thing...

The second single was imminent, the album release getting close and there was so little for me to do that I might just as well have followed the rest of the Tour. At the end of July I did a Japanese phoner and a short regional press interview. That was the sum of the month’s promotion.

11 AUGUST

Bang!

August started with a bang - two interviews in a single day! One of them was for teletext so that was our TV campaign fully covered (no photographer but then I remembered they'd probably draw a pixel diagram of my face instead).

Whimper

I started a diary to aid my memory since I'd had it suggested that I write a book about the year we were having. It was a crazy idea but it might just work...My entry for Monday the 4th states simply:
"Chemical #1 released - I'd almost forgotten and I'm sure the world doesn't know. Even teletext slagged it..."

The b*****ds! And I bet my face in pixels had the wrong eye colour, too. Being slagged on Teletext is a bit like being beaten up by a granny, it's the sort of thing that shouldn't happen to anyone, least of all grown men. Imagine "Hello" magazine describing one of their subjects as "a rich, tasteless, upper class twat with an obvious genetic disorder" - that's how surprised I was with a teletextual drubbing.

Nothing to see here

In effect, all we were doing was waiting; waiting to see how the American deal turned out, waiting to see if we were going to Japan, waiting for the predictable farce of the album release to be played out at home, waiting to see what happened then. The rest of the band had spent the last four years becoming consummate killers of time and now I had big gaps in my diary for the first time in a decade. It was a strange and uneasy feeling for me - I like to keep every minute of every day full, subconsciously sometimes defeating an occasional will to relax. I followed a couple of leads and started serious work on some Web site designs so that once again I could be back spending long hours in front of a computer, feeling occupied.

My social life improved and I spent most nights of the first week of August either going out or meeting friends at home, friends that worked in journalism or Press Representation - I wasn't the only one surprised at our lack of press.

The big phone call

At the height of our success the phone hardly stopped ringing. Gail would call at least once a day, Food less often but still frequently. They were numbers 1 and 2 on the speed dial function of my phone. On the day of “Chemical #1”’s second, disastrous mid-week (the record industry has decreed that Thursday is also the middle of the week) I got my first call of the month from Gail (I hadn’t heard from Food since June). EMI’s head of A &R had called to ask her if it was worth releasing a third single or “are Jesus Jones played out?” There was an intimation that if that was the case, EMI would still be interested in keeping me. Me, not the band. Gail left them with the consideration that it was only worthwhile releasing a single if they could make it the first one from the album to get serious play on the radio. The song that was being mooted as the potential single was the first track I’d written for the album and one of the songs that had prompted the “great, but where are the singles” comment 3 years before.

Niet!

Sometime in the summer we’d been offered a Russian gig, to be part of the bill at a large festival in a stadium east of Moscow. In our experience and from what we’d heard about eastern Europe it was likely to be a riot of chaos and disorganisation but hey! It was a free trip to Russia, another stamp in the by now technicoloured pages of the passport, another country crossed off the list of places yet to be played. We had agreed to do it despite the lack of details or contract and I’d even done an interview for Russian TV about it.

The interview was every bit as ramshackle as I’d expected. It took place at Abbey Road studios where the headliners, a Russian ensemble well into their forties, were being given the grand tour for the benefit of the camera crew with them. As I arrived, they were emerging onto the steps outside and a raging argument that sounded like it was of the “But I was supposed to sit where Ringo sat!” variety was heating up the studio foyer. The sole English voice was obviously the translator and the guys with the sound and camera equipment, well, I figured that one out, too. Out of the rest of the dozen or so people it was difficult to guess which one was the official interviewer (although a pretty woman with a microphone emerged from the milieu momentarily). For two minutes a crowd that in news reporting would qualify as an angry mob shouted at me in Russian, those

that stuck the backs of their heads in front of each other and the camera I took to be asking questions, those that retorted angrily I took to be answering for me. Once in a while the translator would ask me something in English over the clamour and I looked in vain for the woman with the microphone while quoting from the Prince Charles book of “Speak while baffled by noisy foreigners”, along the lines of “Very much looking forward to...”, “Great opportunity...”, “Who the bloody hell is asking me this?” Suddenly, 4 blokes looking like my uncle stood in a line and put their arms around me while the camera filmed us. That sorted out who the band was. Then the shouting started up again as they all walked back and forth across *that* zebra crossing and I was off on my bike.

It was in August that the festival organisers realised that the event required capital and so cancelled it with less than a month to go.

Patient still alive, prepare funeral

My sinister road cycling fetish increased and I started spending Thursday evenings averaging 26mph, 6 inches behind the wheel of another cyclist on a custom built circuit in west London. Returning, shattered, from one of these sessions, Dave Balfe pulled me over in his flash company car. While it was Andy Ross who’d taken us to Food, it was Dave who’d been leaving the office when he heard the demo of “Info Freako” and had said “Sign them !” once the first chorus accompanied him putting his coat on. The few things Dave and I didn’t see eye to eye on we’d enjoy arguing about. Interestingly for me, Dave’s disenchantment with both music and the industry had happened at the same time as mine but where I’d ground on like a gloomy production line, Dave had left Food to sum up, enjoy the countryside and play Doom 8 hours a day. Now, though, he was back in the fray, heading a department at one of the major labels. He commiserated with “Chemical”’s feeble mid-week and had plenty of advice on my solo career, one I hadn’t even considered by then. His final advice of “Never doubt your talent” may sound glib out of context but at that point it was an eye-opener that bordered on a revelation for me. It took something like that, the right words from the right person at the right time to realise that the last 6 years of doing nothing but doubting my own talent had beaten the crap out of me. Now, with the imminent death of the album, I was freeing myself from that.

The next morning, Gail called to say that the head of A&R and the CEO of EMI UK wanted to take the two of us out to dinner. This was

almost certainly going to be about a solo career since you don't get taken out to dine with the big wigs in South Kensington to be told that you're no longer on the label - think of the doggy bag you'd take home if you did. Our contract was up in October and the intimation was that I'd sign a new deal, although nothing definite was mentioned, no terms discussed. On one hand the chance that, for me, the uncertainty would end and the good life would continue was a relief, on the other knowing the album was written off before release (the funeral arrangements prepared before the death of the patient) and what that would mean for the rest of the band, negated any euphoria at the thought of being offered a new deal.

That night I went out with a group of friends, including Andy Ross. It started as an amiable evening and ended up as an ugly, drunken mess, having to leave a Soho club early before a friend got us all thrown out for crawling over the other clubbers' tables to sit on the edge of a four storey high wall.

Chemical #71

"Chemical # 1" was not a success in its first and final week. Thank God we got a fun video shoot out of it.

The same conversation that delivered that news of the single also featured Gail's opinion that we wouldn't be going to Japan. Gen had been over to Japan for his daughter's birth and had been out with our Toshiba EMI rep. It seemed the company there weren't giving the album much attention; there had been some inter-departmental politicking which didn't help the fact that they weren't happy with the delay of the album. That the Anglophile section of Japanese rock fans had read virtually nothing about us from the usual sources meant even less enthusiasm from Toshiba. We found out via the back door that the album wasn't a priority. As a result, we were being offered one gig in Tokyo, nothing like enough money to even cover the cost of flying there, let alone hotels, wages and rehearsals too.

With the single's plight at home and the US collapse, the one dependable thing, I'd thought, was a tour of Japan. After all, I'd been there for every year of the decade but one, mostly touring but with a couple of DJ stints in '95 and '96. The home situation had been foreseeable, the American one unbelievable and not yet over but for Japan to fall through with such little drama was a crushing blow and still for me one of the two

saddest points in a year of disappointments. Maybe it's the similarity in the national characteristics of the two island nations of England and Japan (the repression, the diffidence, the extreme venting of that), perhaps it's the simultaneously reassuring and thrillingly strange nature of a western culture laid transparently over the top of a radically different one, maybe it's a gadget fiends love of technology, maybe it's an admiration for the single minded determination which so many of my Japanese friends follow their interests. Maybe it's just the shallowness of being treated like a bona fide rock star even if you're there to play to just 150 people. Whatever it was, I'm still deeply saddened at not having been to play "Already" in Japan.

Not at one with modern technology

The World Wide Web was taking over my life. Most of my days in August were spent working on Web sites, eagerly experimenting with graphics software in the same way that I'd toyed with digital music hardware, getting the technology to do the donkey work and being free to discover new imagery or sounds. In the past I'd made songs that didn't feature any musical interments, relying on the natural pitch of whatever I'd sampled to provide the key. Now I was designing unique virtual shapes and objects or creating bits of metal, paper or plastic on the computer screen that didn't exist in the real world. Fun with machinery, once more.

The Jesus Jones Web site received a request for an interview with me from an on-line music and culture magazine. They'd come to the Web site after approaching EMI and being told they couldn't have an interview because EMI had yet to develop a policy on Internet fanzines. In April I'd done a trio of fanzine interviews with readership figures possibly in the hundreds. It's estimated that 4 million people in the UK have Internet access and I've seen estimates of the world-wide figure (and the Internet is, after all, global) at around 160 million. I did the interview.

Rye catcher

Other emails came in to me via the Web site, along with letters from the fan club. Mostly these were from people who'd start off the message by being embarrassed at writing to a favourite musician and apologising for praising me as though compliments would somehow irritate me and demean the sender. This displays an acute misunderstanding of the kind of people who want to become famous in the first place, I feel.

Not all the letters were even-tempered, though. The stranger letters could be funny, like the outlines of a fan's penis drawn in various stages of erection or they could be a little too dark for comfort. I'd been sent a few, long, rambling letters from a fan who felt his relationship with me was far greater than I could see justification for. "Perverse" was a direct message to him, for example, as explained by the numerology involved in the lyrics. He sent a mocking letter in reply to me when (reading from another of Prince Charles's books) I explained that I didn't quite see what he meant but since he'd bought the album he could read into it whatever he liked. The next I heard from him was a series of desperate telegrams sent into the fan club that was unfortunately taking advantage of a slow year by rarely collecting the mail. I got the messages saying he had to resolve the situation (or he didn't know what would happen...) and insisting I meet him when he flew half way around the world to London long after I'd heard from Gail that he'd waited outside her office for many hours, asking for my address.

In August more messages came in. He was coming to London again, penniless, and I had to meet him. This is what is supposed to happen to the likes of John Lennon or Steven Spielberg or Whitney Houston and here I was with two failed singles and a buried-alive album, very far from being a mega star in the public eye. Something was wrong with this picture.

Chinatown

Something was also wrong with my love life but then that was only to be expected with a girlfriend living in New York. Still on first name terms with the Immigration staff at Heathrow, she'd been over to see me in February, April and June, usually for a long weekend each time which she considered less than perfect. I had to agree. To try and even the air miles up, I'd made a decision to go over there regularly and I escaped an education in the numerology of my lyrics by fleeing to New York, four days before the album release. This seems incredible to me now, not that I finally got chivalrous, but that the band's spokesman was free to disappear during the week of the album's release - but then there was absolutely nothing to promote it and it's failure was a foregone conclusion that didn't merit any attention.

In the sweltering heat of Manhattan in August, amidst the stink of Chinatown's open fish markets and through the smoke of the pool halls that my girlfriend cherished as I did bike races, I contemplated the band's last

chance, America, as the album began its steep nose-dive in the shops at home. The money we'd made in record sales had always gone towards our wages and tours, keeping us out of debt with the record company but in the four years since we'd sold any records we'd ploughed our way steadily through that cash. The wages probably wouldn't last the rest of year. The latest estimate for the American release was February, with a tour in March and if the rest of the band had to get jobs, how would we be able to tour? It was hard escaping depressing thoughts that summer, wherever I flew to.

Back in London, Jerry was partly jubilant at getting a year's suspended sentence for his drug charge and partly philosophical at the album's unconvincing encounter with the Top 200. The rest of the band now knew that EMI might be thinking of re-signing me without them. His view was that I should do it since it was better that one of us got something out of it than none. And, as Gail put it, other record companies were hardly beating the door down to sign us. Nothing fails like failure.

Bomb

The album bombed completely, so much so that still British fans write into the fan club asking when "Already" will be released. At the time it had ceased to be important and didn't figure in my day to day life but I think that's because I blocked out thoughts of it. It was humiliating to go out that way and my response was to ignore the situation. As the year went on, the sadness of the defeat crept up on me. Also, the futility of all that effort, the agony and joy and soul searching of writing, the months and months of recording, Martyn's attention to detail, the optimism in the studio. Then the regret of doing so much stuff that seemed like hard work, the inane questions from bored interviewers in tiny radio stations, the interviews on auto pilot. I might just as well have gone biking for half the year, stayed on in Namibia, got around to all those unread books from many Christmases past, taken my daughter on a road trip of the USA, lived with my girlfriend in New York, taken up full contact origami. But then that's the trouble with having a work ethic through me like the bright red writing through a stick of rock, it was never going to happen.

There was confusion, too. In the week of its abysmal first and last chart position, "Already" got a great review in the Times. Was its fate deserved or outrageous? I can see flaws in it; too many mid-paced songs, not enough oomph, too dark, some dodgy lyrics. But then how many Top

Twenty albums don't suffer from most if not all of those flaws? No, I'd done it all to the full; I'd re-written when it was necessary, forcing myself to do the best I could at the time, I'd not been lazy and sloppy in the studio, I'd done all the promotion asked of me and been ready and prepared for much more. I can still listen to that album and enjoy it. "Already" is a good album.

12
SEPTEMBER

Musique, non-stop

I was working on Web stuff full time now, enjoying the days spent being creative without the concerns of rhyming or over-familiar chord changes. Hours manipulating imagery meant that for the first time in years I had large stretches of time to listen to music in a situation where I could concentrate on it, have a part of my mind open to consider, to analyse and revel in it. As ever, I was taping radio shows, two hour DATs of the Kiss Jungle Show, the Evening Session and John Peel from Radio 1, XFM and Speed Garage from pirate radio. Albums by DJ Krust, the Bloodhound Gang, Ed Rush, Soul Coughing, Natasha Atlas, Spearhead, Roni Size, Squarepusher, Aphex Twin, Dead Can Dance, Lamb, a Speed Garage compilation CD and The Songs of Popular Islam filled in the gaps between radio tapes and often had me leaping up from in front of the computer to grab a guitar, figure out an inspiring chord change and jam out a few variations. Ten minutes later I'd have forgotten the improvised bit but it still felt good to be excited by new music again.

If you ever need a guitarist...

I hadn't told the rest of the band about EMI's overtures since there wasn't that much to tell at this point. What little we knew I didn't feel had to be kept secret and Gail had given them what information we had whenever they were in contact. Jerry's attitude was "Good luck to you. And if you ever need a guitar player..." Iain was less ambiguous, ringing me every couple of days to find out the latest and unimpressed with EMI's approach, which I find easy to understand. Al, out in Chicago, I didn't hear from much, his inability with the fax machine and my inability with late night phone calls (swerving around the time difference) cutting down contact. The only answer I had for all of them was that until we'd had a release in what had been our biggest market in the world, Jesus Jones took precedence over anything else for me. As the one who put the most effort, the most of myself into the album I'd be the one to hammer the last nail in the coffin before walking away from it.

End of season transfers

The restaurant Gail and I met Neil and J.F. from EMI in had been, up until a little over a week before, one of Lady Diana's regular haunts. It wasn't an East End Balti House, in case you were wondering. I was allowed to order from the wine list and despite the *faux pas* of ordering a New World red in the presence of a Frenchman, it was a success. It was unlikely that the cellars were stocked with truly dreadful vintages however, so I didn't swell too much at my social prowess.

There is a caricature of record company people as greed-crazed, oleaginous fiends set on the destruction of all that is good in music via their apocalyptically bland, big-selling automation artists, coke habits like Pacino's in Scarface fuelling their evil machinations. When I turn this into a screenplay that will be the case. In the non-dramatised world, you need a politically Machiavellian nature to head a large music corporation but to gain a reputation as "an artist's man", as J.F. has, you need an entirely different sensibility also. Neil had worked with us for years as our record plugger up until his move to EMI a few weeks before and so instead of table slamming, ultimatums, threats, cajolery, Faustian scheming and dialogue straight from "The Bodyguard", the four of us ate and drank and talked about music, France, Diana (dramatically deceased) and, oddly enough, bikes. It took Gail to get steely eyed and say, "So why *are* we here?"

It was a matter of transferring, not dropping, apparently. For me, I'd be transferred from one deal to another - no need to discuss the details now. With the new deal I could do what I wanted, whenever I wanted to do it - no sooner than 6 months, no later than 3 years. This did look to be better than cycle couriering. For the rest of the band it wasn't so jolly and despite the happy talk I felt deeply uneasy. The transfer for them was from on the label to off the label. Part of the deal was that I could work with whomever I liked but the press and radio stand-off made it seem like all the members of Jesus Jones under another name stood about the same chance as Salman Rushdie disguised as an Ayatollah on a literary tour of Iran. "*Plus ca change*", Iain, our Latin degree'd linguistics expert might well have thought, since I was the band's writer and spokesman. However, the gamble that the press might go for the angle of me solo seemed surer than risking any more on the band, no doubt. As a bonus I could stay with Food (now wholly owned by EMI) if I wanted, and for reasons of sentiment, loyalty and belief in Andy Ross's manifesto for the label, I did want to stay.

When Iain called before 10 the next day and Jerry shortly after, I had to explain the brutal reality to them: I had a deal which excluded them. I didn't mention the transfer euphemism, it was bad enough without that. The only way I felt better about it was by repeating that I'd give the album my all in America - if it took off there then EMI would have to reconsider their position here. There was no question of us splitting up just because we no longer had a deal in the UK but it was still a heart-wrenching position to be in. But if I stood steadfastly behind the band, told EMI it was all of us or nothing, well, nothing it would be for all of us - we had no other interest at all and it was Gail's opinion that even on my own other record companies would demand demos from me before considering an offer - I'd be back where I was a decade earlier.

The future of the band became both clearer and bleaker. There was little money left in the band account and with no foreseeable income it was time to wind the business partnership up. Within a month we'd be out of contract and no longer a trading company.

Another partnership that looked to be on the wane was my amorous one. In London, my head was full of things to occupy it every minute of the day, from the band's plight to getting Web site contracts to being a single parent. In New York, my girlfriend was in a job she was beginning to hate and facing the hopelessness of a relationship that in the long term looked to really only benefit American Airlines. Nothing definite was said but I sensed the beginning of a gradual distancing, like ship from shore and felt that familiar sick, adolescent panic. September would be the month to consider decline and finality, as the temperature fell and the days shrank with the years aging. The year, the band, and even the racing - the last big event of the summer featured a crash near the start that two riders required medical assistance to get up from. A hilariously weak quote from my diary says "Some year this is turning out to be". I hope I wrote that one in my sleep.

The last of the morbidity; Dave Balfe rang Gail to say he'd heard we were splitting up and wanted to invite himself to the party. Maybe sometime in the indeterminate future, Dave can have invite #1.

Food farrago

At the end of the month Food held a party to coincide with their “100 singles released” celebratory CD and the band, having made a sizeable chunk of that 100, were invited. Iain had a DJ gig the same night at the Good Mixer in Camden, a pub well known as the Blur / Food hangout shortly before their rise to massive popularity. It was just along the road from the party venue so I’d arranged to stop by there on my way. Inside, Food had posters covering the walls of the pub, celebrating the label and the CD. Waiting for my change at the bar I scanned the posters and checked off the bands: “Blur, yep, Shampoo, Dubstar, Octopus, Grass Show, the Supernaturals, a very hard to make out photo of....Strangelove...and...that’s it”. Where the Hell were we?

It’s an ugly thing to do, to persecute someone in the middle of their celebrations and I didn’t feel happy about being the party pooper but I felt even less happy about the insult of the poster.

“It’s not my fault”, protested Andy.

“So whose is it?”

“Um, well, uh, I suppose it is me who should take ultimate responsibility... I don’t really have an explanation.”

I didn’t actually care whose fault it was. I didn’t care what was said much either. The album had been out for just 5 weeks, we were still on the label, we were on the CD and I was supposed to be signing a new deal with Food soon. What was there to lose by including us? Did we have to be so publicly disowned?

Ten minutes later Jo from Food approached and asked, since Andy and many of the bands on the label were in the immediate area, if I’d join in with the photos. In the light of the situation, I found that a little difficult to swallow.

The rant that followed touched on the notion that if we were not good enough in public, the private photos could go to hell. This, after all, was the label I’d enthused about in so many interviews, explaining that it wasn’t like any other label in the friendliness and approachability. If we’d been signed direct to, say, Polygram in 1988, this would have been a likely eventuality but that’s why we signed to Food: we thought they wouldn’t be just another

cynical corporation. And now, when it came to the crunch it was the big corporation that stood by me while Food couldn't wait to deny their involvement. It would have been more decent to "disappear" us altogether, remove us from the CD, too, take away some of those tracks that financed the new offices, more staff, the new lifestyle, made the EMI buy-out an attractive proposition, erased from history the sleeve note quotes like "1991 was the breakthrough year for Food, internationally, Jesus Jones's second album 'Doubt' not only entered the charts at Number 1 but also sold over a million copies in America".

For many weeks afterwards the snubbing depressed me greatly. It still saddens me now (although I'm unable to hold a grudge), and even greater than not visiting Japan for one last tour, it was the single worst event of that miserable year. If the album bombs, forces outside your control are involved. When a friend stiffes you it just doesn't compare. Not quite the words of Jesus but rumour has it he wasn't that impressed with Judas, if I can throw in some historical weighting.

Other than a mute and drunken nuzzling soon after my rant about the photo, Andy made no contact afterwards, despite his (reportedly) anxious request to JF that I stay on Food. I compared the phone calls and meetings with Dave Balfe and JF throughout the summer with Food's silence. I discussed with Gail the lack of interest and the rebuff of the poster. Didn't it seem stupid to remain on Food? She called Andy to let him know that my party pooping was more than a tantrum and could be a bigger event than he appeared to realise. His response, apparently, was "Yes, Gail ", in the manner you use on your mother when she tells you, thirty years on, to wrap up warm and eat well.

13
OCTOBER

Sawtooth Mike E.

I flew out of Gatwick bound once more for New York and into a deceptively innocuous, cloudless sky. The placid weather did nothing to calm my habitual take-off terror which had me inadvertently ripping the armrests away from the seat and leaning with pathetic futility to counteract the suicidal turns the pilot seemed to be putting the aircraft through. Just my luck to get the itchy ex-test pilot. Again. Hadn't he heard of wind shear, been aware of our chances of slipping sideways out of the sky to be at one with the soil of Surrey? It would at least strike an emotive note in the bike press if I descended onto one of my regular race courses below and I found myself considering whether my body, strapped religiously into the seat at all times, would present an interesting technical challenge to the racers of the future.

For a decade I'd lived with a diary that overflowed like a well shaken champagne bottle, when it seemed like I really only had time to tend to life's essentials (including mountain biking), the things seemingly necessary to keep my world turning for another 24 hours. Going to the dentist, that popular pastime for us all, was not high on the list and often inconvenient 4 weeks into an American tour. But wouldn't you know it, my mother's advice returned to haunt me - in the last couple of years, I'd noticed my teeth becoming sensitive, then painful and later, occasionally bloody. However, I was made of stern stuff and stoically ignored the dental danger signs. Inevitably, the decline came and in the summer, one of my eye teeth began to race ahead of the others in its decay, suffering visibly. At the start of summer's collapse into autumn a small part of it came away and although painless, the sharp edge of the break was a constant source of cuts to my tongue which found the exploration of this exciting new dental feature irresistible. I'd realise as I biked through London, usually somewhere very public like Oxford Street, that I'd be pulling grotesque facial contortions as the ceaselessly fascinating tooth snared my tongue over and over.

On this nervy flight to New York I was carrying out a routine inspection of the razor-edged beast when I discovered, like an eager anthropologist unearthing a skull in the Rift Valley, a slight crack. Under attention this widened and kept doing so until, with a sense of bodily horror

well known to Jeff Goldblum in “The Fly”, I realised that a larger piece of the tooth was coming away. That all of this was painless only heightened the sense of horrified unreality - maybe I could pitch this to David Cronenberg.

A recurring dream over the last few years had featured my teeth crumbling in my mouth, painlessly but messily, as though my mouth were full of tiny pieces of smooth gravel that I would spit out. I’d heard this was a typical singer’s dream but this was from another singer, a profession that often believes the more interesting human phenomena are its exclusive property. Whether it signifies anything (other than take your mum’s advice and go to the dentist regularly) I don’t know. The film on the ‘plane was “Austin Powers, international man of mystery”, a British character parodied, in part, for his terrible dentistry.

Escape to New York

It was a good time to get away from home. The Web design work had suffered a big setback when after weeks worth of effort on one major site we discovered a separate part of the company had commissioned other designers, unaware of our efforts. I hope they paid a lot more than we were asking. There were other things to be working on but by and large I felt I was working not for results but just to be busy.

In previous years I would have risked my flesh and the odd collar bone once more on a dusty bike trail somewhere but despite the invitation to tour the Rocky Mountain states of America with friends and bikes, it felt like time to be less frivolous, time to start a new chapter in my life in a determined manner. The Food farrago, my girlfriend’s diplomatic embargo, the album’s failure, the quandary with the band, the Web site disappointment, all this played on my mind and didn’t make the darkening days any jauntier. It felt similar to when I’d been writing the album, waking up feeling fine but soon after breakfast a cloak of gloom and apathy would fall on me as I hammered away at the computer.

What an idiot! I should have gone to Utah, never mind the personal injury potential. Instead, I found New York to be not much cooler than in August and the smell of Chinatown fiercely undiminished. A week of coffee, drinking, cinema and still working on a computer before I came home to find winter’s preparations well underway.

History re-written?

Gail, our illustrious manager, was having her illustriousness recognised and furthered during the International Managers Forum Peter Grant Award held at the Hilton on Park Lane, Mayfair. Despite the title, this wasn't going to be the sort of event where people got to throw TV sets out of the window or make physical threats against business adversaries, although that might have changed if Gail had found out sooner that she had won the award - she'd refused to accept it point blank for a couple of years running. This year she was to be ambushed with it and her coterie of bands were amongst the surprise guests to add to her embarrassment and make the acceptance speech a little more fiery.

The Pretenders were going to be playing there anyhow (at the event, they're not the house band at the Hilton, don't go booking a room there just yet) so them being in the building wouldn't spoil the surprise. The rest of us had to sneak in and hide inside the hotel until the big moment, attempting to look just furtive enough to escape attention but not enough to be ejected from such a grand venue. By either a stroke of luck or with unerring ability I found the Pretenders dressing room just as dinner was being served - Steak Tartare, ho ho.

I followed the band to the backstage area, hidden from dining room guests by the large screen displaying each winner's accomplishments as the super-confident voice-over boomed out the list of credits. When Gail's turn came I was sitting by a pile of guitar cases, next to the guitar tuner, watching the screen from behind. The Oscars-style introduction began, a run down of Gail's achievements band by band, from the early days of Charisma records and Peter Hammill, taking in such luminaries as Peter Gabriel and Chrissie Hynde and incorporating the latest Gailforce protégé, Bernard Butler. Food's month old snub was still flagellating my ego and as the names rang out one by one from the P.A I had a sickening feeling that, somehow, we were going to be excluded from this, too. Suddenly it seemed like we were the lepers of the industry, the untouchables, the homeless on the streets of the big city: a failure's example to look the other way, look over or look through - keep a distance or be similarly cursed.

And that goes to show how paranoid I'd got since we made it onto the randomly selected list, second from last in a long role call. Still, it made me sweat.

The relief of still being publicly connected with at least some of the people we'd had success with probably prompted an even more enthusiastic assault on the free drinks than usual. The rest of the evening was a blur of chat with other bands, industry people and old friends, as if nothing had changed in the last five years. It ended for me when the last few survivors of the evening suggested a trip to one of the West End's celebrated media haunts - I'd had a good run and didn't want to spoil it.

A Canterbury tale

A far more sober evening came near the end of the month. DJ'ing was something I came to with the realisation that all the Techno 12"s I was buying in '92 and '93 I could earn money back on. At that time the band's fame was enough to get me a listen to by club promoters and having proved myself, by '95 I was playing often, usually in London but also across England and in Japan (twice in two years). Iain, who'd DJ'd at university, joined me sometimes and a friend, Joel, played all but the Japanese dates, fair reward for getting the gigs.

My enthusiasm for Techno had been waning since about '94 when it no longer appeared to be the innovative force it had been and Drum 'n' Bass was rising from the ruins to steal the thunder. However, once we were known for playing one sound, we were booked to play it whatever our tastes. OK, so we could have found different clubs to play in but that would have meant another club Mafia to try and infiltrate for months or years on end and I had other things to expend the energy on.

The result, after a few triumphant nights at the likes of Club UK or Sex, Love and Motion at the Soundshaft, was usually the sort of night we had in Canterbury: hiring a car to sit in traffic for an hour or so, belting down a motorway, listening to a tape and trying to remember which sounds connected with which labels then ending up in a small club with a tiny number of half-interested people. We'd try a little Drum 'n' Bass which in the words of a documentary still seemed very much to be "A London T'ing", and then relent and play what people wanted to dance to later. "The bloody public!" as a manager and record label boss friend of mine likes to

say. The pay at the end of the evening never matched the expenses but there would always be a few moments of real joy in every evening, the music fans dream of playing a favourite tune at phenomenal volume through a large P.A. without the neighbours complaining. All in all though, going out to play these nights under the banner of “The Jesus Jones Sound System” added to the sense of finality for the band.

Big little moment

Some time in October, I don't care to know when, Food / EMI's option to renew the contract with Jesus Jones came up and they let it pass. Silently, then, the deal that I'd focused so much of my life on, fixated upon in teenage bands, daydreamed about during work in my twenties, the one that had given EMI one of their bigger successes of the early '90s, slipped into oblivion.

14 NOVEMBER

Normal

Out of a recording contract for the first time in 9 years, my life was a very ordinary one, or so it seemed to me (especially if I disregarded flying to New York once a month). I was at a computer if not 9 to 5 then hours that amounted to that, racing or just riding bikes at the weekends. I was also occupied as a single parent for a week at a time each month, as I had been soon after my daughter's first birthday.

For the first year I found parenthood unbelievably hard, trying to write whilst seldom sleeping more than a few hours and being both provider and entertainer for Hana - she didn't cheer like adult audiences did. As she grew older she could speak and communicate which solved so many simple problems and I came to rely more on the au pairs imported to keep her Swedish heritage in working condition - her ability with the language overtook mine at around the age of 3 - so that it was mostly evenings and weekdays that I spent alone with her, something we were both glad of given my temper, I think.

I'd take Hana to school, her always moaning about how long the walk was (about 300 yards) and commenting on how the autumn was "making the poor trees all naked". On one such November day we brought a stick home, in from the cold, where it was immediately forgotten. Should a stick be for life or is it just for winter? At school I'd chat with the other parents, every day stuff apart from when Hana's daddy's friends were done for possession of amphetamines.

In the evenings Hana would insist I played video games for her pleasure which was my idea of great parenting. On some weekends I'd squash her between friends and we'd drive out to a race, the influence of which soon filtered through (my evil plan came to fruition) as she clamoured to be allowed to compete also, only with the proviso that she should ride a pink bike, wear a dress and sandals and have Barney the Sickeningly Twee, Purple dinosaur stuffed into a basket on the front. The bike snob still wrestles with the proud, supportive father on that issue.

Normality : it wasn't that bad.

Drink

It was a good year for Gail's lustre, she'd been nominated for and won the record industry Woman of the Year award despite our rather image-damaging performance in '97. My girlfriend was in the country, our Cold War period on the wane, the Berlin Wall around her heart reduced to rubble by the Bulldozer of Lurv, and we both dressed up for another swish night at a Mayfair hotel. Compared with the last event Gail's acceptance speech contained disappointingly few obscenities but the location had hardly changed and the scene was much the same; industry types, musicians of all degrees of fame and all the free booze you could drink. That turned out to be quite a lot in my case. Always a happy drunk, I exchanged half-cut pleasantries with Andy Ross which was about all the conversation either of us could muster in that condition.

The band (bar the US, bass playing contingent) were there, invited to this as well as the last event. It was a gesture not lost on me for much of the evening and the taxi journey home, contemplating the good fortune of having a manager who stood by us so staunchly. That had become pretty cherishable in the last 3 months.

Food

Part of the deal my girlfriend struck in coming over was that I had to make a Thanksgiving dinner. Silencing my objection to the importation of this outlandish foul feasting (two in the space of a month! Surely there is no better evidence of a nation lost to decadence and moral despond, never mind the 11-year-olds with guns?) I discovered shops in London that could service the demands of this festivity.

The party at my flat featured a host of friends including Gen and most of "A", part of a growing number of people we'd seen migrate from audience to backstage to our homes and then deservedly on to stages themselves. They were glumly convinced they'd just been dropped from London Records (they turned out to be wrong) and Gen was in similar circumstances. We laughed at the fact that it was a losers party - no one with a record deal would be allowed in. Two months later we could invite the same people and have a winners party, such is the weird world of the music industry.

15
DECEMBER

Cherry, bite 2

Here's a cliché that I have particular pleasure to repeat for you: publishing is where the money is in music. Every so often (supposedly once a year until my deadline dodging wrecked that), EMI Music Publishing would give me a large sum of money thereby commissioning me to write a set number of songs for them. It often surprises people outside the industry that the hits I wrote aren't mine, they belong to the publishers who paid me an advance (an interest free loan, essentially) and then a percentage of the royalties once they had accrued to a sum in excess of that loan. Somewhat confusingly, it's only the actual recordings of those songs that belong to the record company. But that's a digression - my Christmas bonus was coming, it was time to re-negotiate my publishing contract.

Record sales had dwindled and the band no longer had a deal but the songs were still being played on the radio world-wide, covered by other artists and used as the soundtrack for enough commercials that I would soon be recouped on the advances from EMI publishing, a fair incentive for them to want to re-sign me. Inevitably it would be at a lower level than before but once again, it was one of the better outcomes that I had foreseen at the start of the year. If cycle couriering was still looming I'd now be able to choose the appropriate vehicle from a growing fleet of bikes.

Gail, Peter, Sally and I met at the auspicious Ivy restaurant for lunch. Gail's bargaining approach was to get me to shut up for long enough for her to haggle before I undermined her with my sense of injustice at the figures involved for simply writing songs. Since there would be food around at the time, this was no hardship for me. The subject wasn't even broached until dessert. In two mouthfuls of something peachy, the general outline was discussed and agreed. I took another bite. Peter suggested a figure, Gail suggested another, they agreed to settle halfway and I swallowed, having just earned enough to remain a top rate of income tax payer for some while longer. That and the peach made for great, fleeting moment. The speed of that decision making still amazes me.

3D Bass

So, I'd be writing again. But then I'd never really stopped. Maybe I wasn't putting ideas into the computer or strumming chords on the guitar

but very little music passed my ears with out careful analysis of chord sequences, lyrics, beats, bass lines, guitar effects, singing styles, influences and first and foremost, whether it amounted to one great, cathartic surge or not. An overall impression was forming in my mind, scraps of ideas going into an electronic note pad constantly, not as hectically as in previous years but now with more of a sense of enthrallment than duty.

I was going clubbing frequently again, Drum 'n' Bass nights; Metalheadz or Movement, sound systems where the bass carried the rock 'n' roll ethic through to the end of the millennium, huge slabs of low frequency that morphed from the speakers into a three dimensional presence on the dance floor, an exhilarating, awe inspiring force that made your scalp tingle and your bones vibrate. You felt it in the small of the back, in the solar plexus and most firmly, in the soul. This is the music that should have played in the bar in Star Wars, a sound so ahead of it's time and out of place even in modern London that conspiracy theories and dodgy photos can be discarded: alien life is audibly with us. That earthquake bass, allied with the rock steady drums, an intriguingly weird and surprisingly fresh amalgamation of '60's rock patterns and 80's sounds *is* rock 'n' roll at this point in it's genealogy.

Just as it was obvious that the dance revolution of '88 would revolutionise popular music, just as it was clear in '92 that the Prodigy were going to be one of the most exciting and influential bands of the decade, it's apparent that Drum 'n' Bass will be the best thing to happen to rock in over 10 years. It will probably happen as the music press champions a new group with the crippling influences of a couple of bands from 1985.

That's what was in my mind when I signed the new contract.

How long?

One more bike reference. I couldn't find a race for December, the first month that year without at least one. Instead, I was organising one, adding to the idea of being a freelance-whatever-I-want-to-be by designing a course for a 24 hour team race. Which of course I'd take part in. Two cold days in Staffordshire, riding my bike for hours on end and being well paid for it (courier practise?) My, but things were improving.

And in New York things were improving. I flew over for Christmas and discovered the perfect remedy for my flying phobia - 10cl of neat vodka taken immediately before boarding. You may think that after 7 years of international travel I was a little late coming to that antidote but my earlier experiments with pre-flight alcohol had tended towards beer and miserable failure. Being dehydrated, bloated and queasy doesn't ease the nerves, I found. So impressed was I with this major scientific breakthrough (yeah, I know, but the potential of DNA cloning wasn't often on my mind as the wheels left the ground) that I kept up the experiment throughout the flight, discovering that "G.I.Jane" can be considered an acceptable film in certain circumstances and that the dehydrated, bloated and queasy feeling lurks with the patience inevitability lends it. Despite the hangover I passed muster at Immigration although it might not have been the first time my uniformed guardian of America's borders had encountered a red-eyed, hungover Brit in the line of duty.

I arrived in Manhattan, lay prone on a couch for two hours and later fell asleep for 14, the best night's sleep I'd get all winter.

MTV's Christmas season featured their "Top 250 videos of all time". "Right here, right now" was at #187, not bad for a song I'd written almost exactly 8 years before. I mean, I thought we were lucky to even be in there, luckier than most bands will ever be.

Full circle

Christmas flitted by and my girlfriend's siblings hired a house near the Catskill mountains, upstate New York, so that we could all go snowboarding. The build up to New Year's Eve, in a snowbound country house was very different from the year before in Brooklyn. No fireworks, no dutiful sense of occasion, less burning flesh. The Old Year got a good 25 minute getaway before anyone noticed the switch.

During the night I had a vivid and unusually memorable dream. For an unexplained reason I was a soldier, either in training or on active duty. I was part of a group of people acting individually but aiming to meet up at an arranged rendezvous. For another unexplained reason, I had with me a pig that I knew I would be using for food. Holed up for the evening in a hide, I skinned it in preparation for its imminent destruction. At some point I became aware that the pig had transformed into a representation of Hana.

Far from being in any obvious pain, the pig (now assuming the ability to speak with my own daughter's characteristics) was raring to go, urging me on in my mission, unquestioningly keen and blindly devoted to help me in any way she could. I couldn't tell if she understood that the success of the operation she wanted to aid so eagerly relied on her demise. She was so guileless, so vulnerable and so trusting, her innocent enthusiasm stark in the face of my careless, single-minded destruction, my selfish pursuit of "the mission" that to be aware of the scenario's probable outcome was utterly heartbreaking. In the dream, my body was wracked with sobbing, so hard that later I found it hard to believe the tears didn't break through to the real world.

The next day I realised that the pig could also be representative of Gen, Iain, Alan, Jerry, the rest of the band, the people who had always stood so fast behind me as I tried to lead us with equally unyielding stubbornness on our own particular mission.

In the dream, there is something fundamental for me, something that goes direct, laser-guided to the soul, a smart bomb aimed at the psyche. Throughout the first day of the New Year, I was troubled by thoughts that my cynicism, my bitterness, my obsessive tunnel-vision will shape and change my daughter's life against her will, that she won't have the room or the chance to explore on her own, to live a life as I have done, to achieve something out of the ordinary by virtue of encouragement, free will and the joy of creativity. But I should give her more credit than that.

16
JANUARY THE 1ST, 1998

Should auld lyrics be forgot

On the drive out to Hunter Mountain ski resort, "Right Here, Right Now" comes on the radio. While I'm making my uncertain way down the mountain my concentration is further disturbed by the resort DJ who also broadcasts it, blasting it up the mountain from the ski centre, along with the four songs that US radio is currently playing to death. Now, 7 years after "Right Here..." first broke through in America, I am standing in enormous queues of people, waiting for the chance to purchase a lift ticket, rent snowboard boots and a board and finally to ride the lifts to the top of the slope. And while the song that escalated me to a noticeable degree of world-wide fame plays, no-one looks twice at me, no-one shouts "OhmyGaaad!" with that one and a half octave drop that the name of the Lord gets in America, no wide-eyed women stop me for an autograph, no-one calls me an "asshole" while trying to focus an automatic camera. No-one even asks me how we got the name "Jesus Jones".

On the way home, I won't have people pointing at me and gesturing to their friends in the queue for the airline check-in desk. When I sit on the plane, I won't have first one demand (not a request) for an autograph on a torn till receipt, followed by another from the first person's friend, then another from the kid they're sitting next to who wants to know what they're doing, then one from the granny across the aisle who has no idea who I am but feels sure her granddaughter will, and so on and so on until the air hostess intervenes on my behalf and gets me to do one final batch of forty autographs in one go instead.

Nope, I can ride the chair lift swinging my half-frozen feet and just be that guy with the funny accent who always falls off the ski lift at the top. The incompetent snowboarder lying on his back, head down hill, the back of his trousers full of snow but the guy whose song gets played hundreds of times a year across the US, a song that gets wheeled out again, every time there's some sort of minor public celebration, or just because a lot of people here thought that was a good tune and why not hear it again?

I like it like that. But then it is time to start writing again.

AFTERWORD

I'm back once again in New York, back for long enough to not have to leave chalk marks along the streets of Soho (and to know what that acronym means), to have discovered where best to go bike riding within the 5 boroughs of New York City (and to realise they're "boros" here), where to buy the best coffee and to expect to go "postal" with an easily acquired automatic weapon the next time the regular series of untended car alarms goes off at 4 AM. In a couple of weeks "Already" gets its U.S release and the promotion is well underway. I have just returned from a week in Los Angeles, my first time back to that previously triumphal conquest in 5 years. It hasn't changed at all but it seemed like a new city, the way I remember it when the band made our first trip there at the start of the decade, wide-eyed at the opulence, the upliftingly blue sky, the maddeningly endless freeways forever jammed, the palm trees and the lack of a TV set frame around every already familiar vista.

After the year you've just read about, it's been hard to come to grips with the enthusiasm and open-mindedness I've met on this familiar hand-shaking trail. In five days, the press and radio schedule eclipsed the number and quality of interviews we did at home and we've hardly started. "The Next Big Thing" can be heard on the radio across the country and the answer to the most popular question (after "Where have you been?") is that we should be touring in a couple of months time. Dear God, what will we sound like in rehearsal after all this time?

OK, so we're not yet back in the charts, not on the front of Rolling Stone, not the MTV clip people are sick of viewing and there's opposition from the inevitable doubters in high places but there isn't the same sense of hopelessness that returns to me when I re-read these pages. Its no wonder British ex-rock stars pack the bars of Los Angeles, playing tiny solo gigs in the sunny suburbs.

Whatever the fate of "Already" in it's last stand, I hope it gets some recognition as a set of good songs by a good band. I hope it repays the rest of the band for the time and hope lost during the album's creation. I hope it repays some of the faith that the people who worked with us and on the album put in it. I hope it's a vindication for all the fans of the band who write in via the internet, the people who'll never know how gratifying their

appreciation is until they find themselves in the same situation as I have done, the people who buy the records and videos, come to the shows and fund this adolescent dream world of mine.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a phoner to do.

“Well, we got the name...”

Mike Edwards, New York, April 1998

<http://www.jesusjones.com>

Addendum – Jesus Jones have a new album “London” out as of Autumn 2001. Buy it at <http://www.mi5recordings.co.uk> or other online stores such as <http://www.cdnw.com> .