

Into The Black

Chapter 7: Some Kind Of Monster

The floor of a locker room most often occupied by members of the Dallas Cowboys American football team is strewn with balloons in the black and white silver of the Oakland Raiders. Metallica are 17 dates into their Summer Sanitarium Tour, and today, August 3, 2003, is James Hetfield's 40th birthday. In a three room dressing area the size of a basketball court, the band are preparing for a set still hours ahead. From the stage, the thump and whirr of Linkin Park can be heard. Atop a trestle table hard by the locker room's entrance sit two Dallas Cowboys helmets. A note from the front office asks if Metallica would kindly sign these items – a Sharpie has been provided – for inclusion in the Cowboys' museum. This the band do, but not before James Hetfield has scrawled the words 'Go Raiders!' on the piece of paper.

The Summer Sanitarium caravan costs a million dollars a day to keep on the road. The tour operates on a principle best described as 'the leap frog method', and occupies three stadiums at any given time. Yesterday the group played a Saturday night set at the vast and at the time box-fresh Reliant Stadium in Houston. With the band now in Dallas, the platform upon which Metallica performed – itself as long as airport runway – is being lifted from the scaffold that supports it and transported to Salt Lake City for a date at the USANA Amphitheater four nights hence, the steelwork for which is already in place. While this happens the scaffold from Houston will be dismantled and transported to Washington state in preparation for an appearance at Seahawk Stadium on Friday night, upon which the stage that is being used tonight in Dallas will sit. As well as this, Summer Sanitarium has two PA systems, each of which hang above the heads of the crowd like giant satellites. The group also owns two full lighting rigs of such incandescence that when the show begins one wonders if it is to herald the arrival of a metal band or a close encounter of the third kind.

Backstage there is a yoga room. There is a production room in which people sit at computers and respond to the crackle of two-way radios. The tour carries with it a full-time masseuse. The size of the backstage compound is such that for all it matters the dressing room occupied by the support acts might as well be on Mars. In the less exclusive 'guest area' you will find 'the rubber room', a place where those with the required wristbands are able to drink beer. Patrons enter at their own risk; tell the people standing at the bar that you've flown in from London is to be stared at with eyes reminiscent of a heavily tranquilised cat.

In Metallica's dressing area there sits a large orange birthday cake, its top decorated with a picture of Hetfield smiling wildly while leaning out of the window of a high-performance car. Following this evening's show, Metallica will depart the Texas Stadium while fans front of house are still cheering the night's final song. The band will then fly home to San Francisco where they will ride go-karts until dawn in celebration of the first day of their frontman's fifth decade alive.

As afternoon creeps towards evening, James Hetfield sits alone in a Cowboys' treatment room. He speaks on a mobile phone to one of his three children at home in Northern California. Kirk Hammett enters the room and with the kind of gentle intimacy that can only come from 20 years of friendship asks, 'Are we bothering you?' With a graceful shake of the head, the frontman quietly says, "No, not

at all.” Moments earlier Hammett reveals that after a show Metallica ‘always’ shower together, but has declined to reveal which of the group’s members boasts the most enhanced manhood (‘No, I would not care to share that,’ he says). As James Hetfield speaks in a kind and melodious voice to the child on the other end of the phone, Kirk Hammett begins idly kicking at the black and silver balloons that litter the floor. These items are here, he explains, for the purpose of ‘balloon therapy.’ Attempting to keep check on a grin that is threatening to break loose across his face, the lead guitarist tells the English journalist that each day the four members of Metallica ‘swim’ through a sea of balloons in order to ‘find peace with ourselves.’ As soon as he has said this, Kirk Hammett is on his belly, front-crawling his way through an event that might one day comprise a popular draw in the Very Special Olympics. His actions cause the stretched rubber to squeak loudly. ‘It’s therapy!’ he explains, his expensive teeth grinning in total delight, his expensive hair falling over his face. ‘Metallica is into therapy!’

An hour later, the member of the band that is ‘into therapy’ even more than the others sits answering questions. In order to help ease James Hetfield’s passage back into the regimented yet often chaotic routine that is life on the road, Metallica’s live commitments in 2003 are undertaken at a pace that is more relaxed than is the norm, certainly for them. For the duration of the Summer Sanitarium tour, the band will perform on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday evening (occasionally on a Thursday) and fly back to the Bay Area in time to meet the dawn of a Monday morning. This way James Hetfield is able to spend the lion’s share of the working week not working. By immersing himself first into the shallow end of life as a touring musician, the argument went, would mean the frontman would have a better chance of continuing his recovery even in a setting of endless and easy temptation.

‘I could so easily fall back [into the habit of] hanging out with the boys in the strip club,’ he admits, adding that in 2003 he views such carnal pursuits as being ‘a waste of time.’ Instead his energies are invested attempting to repair relationships that had been allowed to wither on the vine, friends who in the past the frontman would call ‘every eight months or so’ and whose resentment in the face of such inattention would be far from mollified by the singer’s defence of ‘Don’t you see how big [Metallica] has become? Do you not see how important I think I am?’

‘You know,’ he says, ‘I spent far too long believing I was God. And, really, I didn’t do a particularly good job, did I?’

Outside in the fetid summer air of the Texan summer, at the gates of the Texas Stadium turnstiles click to the sound of entry. Ticketholders have each paid \$125 to see the Summer Sanitarium tour’s date with Dallas. But here, as in other North American cities, audiences have not flown to Metallica’s flame in quite the numbers either band or concert promoter expected. Today in the Dallas suburb of Irving, somewhere in the region of 40,000 people will convene on this shabby 32 year old park, 25,000 fewer than attended Metallica’s last appearance here three summer’s previously.

At the time of the Summer Sanitarium Tour’s announcement, rumours circulated that concert promoter Live Nation had paid Metallica \$28 million for their services, numbers which come the summer of 2003 might not be adding up. For the most part, the excursion attracted audiences in numbers of between 35,000 and 50,000 people per night. There are exceptions. In Los Angeles, the LA Coliseum reverberated to the roar of 60,000 ticketholders, while a hometown concert at San Francisco’s Candlestick Park on August 10 attracted the attention of a further 10,000 fans.

But one should be wary of regarding the 25,000 vacant seats at the Texas Stadium on August 3 and deducing that Metallica were in rapid decline. St Anger may have attained 'only' double platinum status on the Billboard Hot 200, but Metallica's previous two releases – an album of cover versions and a live CD recorded with an orchestra, remember – each sold more than five million copies in the United States alone. With regard Summer Sanitarium, it is wise to consider the number of attendees rather than the capacity of the stadiums in which these people gathered. In order to accommodate James Hetfield's desire to be broken in slowly, Metallica were faced with two choices: either play multiple nights in arenas or sheds – and on a tour featuring more nights off than on, this would have taken months – or else book themselves into the most enormous of enormodomes.

'We haven't done a tour like this for three fucking years,' says Lars Ulrich, as ever a mixture of hyperactivity and Tourette's. 'And with the greatest respect to a tour like the Ozzfest, this isn't something we view as a franchise. I don't think this is something we will do again for maybe four or five years, or until we feel the time is right.' With regard the matter that in order to undertake this tour in its relatively truncated 20 city form Metallica were forced to hit not the sheds but the stadia, the drummer concurs. 'That's the thing,' he says. 'There's a big leap between 18,000 in a pavilion and a 60,000 capacity stadium. We'd sell out the pavilion two nights over, at least, so this tour is going great.'

As one would expect, Ulrich will neither confirm nor deny that his band have been paid \$28 million for their services atop Summer Sanitarium's bill. He does, though, explain the simple economics of this vast undertaking.

'Here's how it works,' he says, as if speaking to a child. 'We pay for everything: the other bands, the crew, the stage, everything. So we have a big pile of money coming in and a big pile of money coming out. And at the end, we'll see what's left. The obvious response to this statement is, come this day will Metallica's balance from the tour be written in black ink, or in red? Lars Ulrich considers the question. 'It's gonna be close,' is his answer.

An hour later the drummer is up and about on the balls of his feet. The man who happily undressed before the disbelieving eyes of Kirk Hammett the very first time the two men met, is today gamboling though a dressing room busy with bandmates, employees and a journalist dressed only in black football shorts and trainers. Stage time will soon be upon Metallica, and with a momentum as inevitable as it is purposeful the group are turning their minds to the elevated platform that lies just a short walk up a concrete ramp to the left of their dressing room door. At the opposite end of the room there is an area that has been curtained off, inside which stands a drum kit, two amplifiers, a bass amp, two guitars and one bass. It is here, away from prying eyes, that the band will play one song in preparation for the two hours' worth of music on which they will then embark in front of tonight's paying audience.

Lars enters the space, and immediately exits it. 'There's a fucking photographer in there,' he exclaims, pulling on a black t-shirt and muttering how, anyway, his pooch always looks bigger when he's sitting down (this despite the fact that were one to offer a description of the drummer to the police one of the words employed would be 'thin'). With a tap on the shoulder and a nod of the head, the journalist learns that he will be permitted to watch Metallica privately prepare for their appearance at the Texas Stadium. Lars Ulrich is the first inside, clattering out a beat on his Tama drumkit. Over the course of the next minute, he is joined by his three bandmates. At a sign invisible

to the naked eye, the quartet begins to play in unison. It is to Hetfield's throttled riff that Metallica prepare to lash up the action in Dallas by tearing through 'Battery', a song they will repeat for the benefit of 40,000 people in just five minutes' time. As the dressing door is held open and Metallica are escorted the 100 yards to the stage, already the elegant strains of Ennio Morricone's Ecstasy Of Gold are under threat from the collective roar emanating from 40,000 faces.

Two hours later and James Hetfield stands onstage smeared with the detritus of what seems like several cans worth of crazy-string and the dripping deposits of several custard pies. As he smiles and rubs matter from his eyes, the people he can see in the glare of the Texas Stadium spotlights are wishing him a happy birthday in song. Tonight Metallica have completed 15 songs, and all that is required is for the band to resume 'Enter Sandman' – paused at the point of Hetfield's diaphragm-busting 'oh!' that follows the song's final chorus – before being expedited home to California. As he picks out the notes of the main riff, the band join in before Ulrich stops the song once again. Waiting just a moment, the drummer counts the band back into 'Enter Sandman' once again, and as he does so the black sky overhead is fractured by the sight of exploding pyrotechnics.

Earlier that day James Hetfield had said that 'I think at the moment the band is playing as good as we've ever played: the guitars sound great and everything has just come together in a big way.' It is, he said, 'really something to be a part of this.' As the journalist listened politely to these words, thinking, 'no danger of that quote ever being used again', onstage in Dallas the vibrancy and energy of the group onstage, not to mention the re-affirmation of health and security that the quartet once more represented both to themselves and those who look to them for some kind of reassurance, bestow upon the frontman's words a greater resonance. This thought could easily be distilled down to a more direct summation: 'Really. Metallica are back.'

It is only in the back of a taxi cab an hour later that a thought causes a smile of contentment to be compromised by a frown. You realise that aside from 'Frantic' and 'St Anger' from Metallica's misfiring new album, each of the 14 other songs that comprise the set are at least 12 years old. The band the band decide not to trouble their audience with anything from Load or Reload.

It is aboard a flight back to London the next day that another, more troubling thought begins to slide into view: the notion that Metallica are becoming a physically impacting, emotionally stirring, musically astounding antique.

Joe Berlinger is an adherent of what he calls the '15 minute rule'. In order not to squander time precious or otherwise, he refuses to wait for more than a quarter of an hour for anything, whether it be a film, a table at a restaurant or, indeed, a person. After this, he was off into the long grass. There is, though, an exception to every rule, and on the occasion of a business meeting with Metallica Joe Berlinger broke his golden '15 minute rule' 16 times over.

That day, Berlinger was joined by his working partner Bruce Sinofsky. The pair were documentary film-makers who at the time were justly celebrated for their first feature, Paradise Lost: The Child Murders At Robin Hood Hills. The film tells the story of the West Memphis Three, a trio of teenagers who were convicted of the murders of three people in the US state of Arkansas. As the guilty verdicts were returned following a trial that alleged practices of Satanism as well as the testimony of

'expert witnesses' the qualifications of whom were deeply irregular, Damian Echolls was sentenced to death while Jesse Misskelley and Jason Baldwin each received a tariff of life in prison. Convinced that the West Memphis Three were innocent of the crimes for which they had been convicted – as this would prove to be the case, with the three men finally granted release from prison in 2011 – Berlinger and Sinofsky set about committing a most compelling story of injustice, horror and institutionalised ineptitude that soon became a cause celebre. Despite their reputations as a band that would only do something were it for a buck, Metallica permitted Berlinger and Sinofsky to use their music in the film free of charge. This was also the case for the pair's second documentary on the subject, *Paradise Lost 2: Revelations*, released in 2000.

Prior to the release of this second installment, in the summer of 1999 the two documentarians were summoned to New York's Four Seasons hotel on Manhattan's West 57th Street. Seated in the hushed opulence of the lobby, the pair waited, and then waited some more. Every so often, the doors of one of the elevators would disgorge Peter Mensch, Metallica's co-manager, who would explain that their audience with his charges was imminent. But as time slouched by, Berlinger began to wonder if he was waiting for the world's most popular metal band, or Godot. He was, he says, 'seething.'

The meeting was Q-Prime's idea, and as thus concerned more with commerce than creativity. Metallica were about to take the next year off and the band's management desired a stop-gag 'product' that would keep the band in the public eye even though its members were devoting time to their private lives. (The fact that 2000 was the year that Napster blew up in their faces like a package from ACME addressed to Wile E Coyote was of course not yet known.) It was Cliff Burnstein who suggested to Joe Berlinger that he and Sinofsky might direct what was essentially an infomercial by any other name, a film that could 'pay to play' on late night television as a means of shifting old albums via a toll free number. As the authors of a widely acclaimed documentary feature film that ticked the box of 'serious journalism', this was not an idea of which either man was wildly enamoured.

Instead, Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky idea was to suggest to Q-Prime and Metallica that along with footage compiled from Lars Ulrich's predictably compendious collection of Metallica video footage, the band might consent to being filmed in their private environs in order to show what Berlinger describes as their more 'personal' side. When this idea was put to the group in Lars Ulrich's penthouse suite, the group regarded the documentarian as if he'd suggested they might fancy performing in drag. As Kirk Hammett muttered about how he viewed his private time as being just that. James Hetfield simply glowered. As the filmmakers rode an elevator back from whence they came, Berlinger said to his partner that he didn't think their collaboration with Metallica would come to pass.

'No shit,' was Bruce Sinofsky's response.

Just 18 months later Metallica decided that, actually, they were willing to unveil their more 'personal' side to anyone who cared to see. Armed with cameras and boom mics, Berlinger and Sinofsky flew from New York to San Francisco to embark on an adventure that would swallow the next two years of their lives (as well as a further 12 months entangled in post-production work). The pair's brief may at first have been only vaguely defined - as late as February 2003 the notion of editing the footage into six half hour television programmes was still under consideration – but as

the cameras rolled it quickly became obvious that the two men were flies on the wall who could scarcely believe their luck.

Generally speaking, the worse things are for a protagonist, the better this is for a journalist or documentarian. So while in 2001 and 2002 Metallica wondered if the bell now tolled for them, all Berlinger and Sinofsky could hear (at least in a creative sense) was the sound of trumpets parping in their ears. As was the case with Phil Towle, the two men became part of Metallica's inner circle to the point where the band appeared to forget that they were being filmed at all (which is not uncommon among people who become used to the presence of a camera in their lives).

But Metallica were being filmed, and at extraordinary length. Over two years Berlinger and Sinofsky's cameras were trained on the band for 180 days. When the pair finally said 'that's a wrap', they had shot 1602 hours of footage. The group's voices could be heard on seven miles' of DAT tape. A total of 428 people had posed for Polaroids and signed release forms permitting the documentarians to use their likeness on film. One of this book's authors signed such a form and then watched in dismay as his face failed to grace anything but the cutting room floor.

Metallica may have personally bankrolled Berlinger and Sinofsky's work – and at a cost of millions of dollars – but when it came to compiling the footage the film-makers were left to their own instincts. As the group reviewed the rushes it became increasingly obvious that this was a story that would be best served as a feature film rather than a 'reality' television series in the style of then popular *The Osbournes*, not least because on US television commercial breaks arrive with a frequency that is as disruptive as it is irritating. Lars Ulrich in particular recognised that handled with care Berlinger and Sinofsky's footage might be edited into the kind of film watched by people who didn't buy popcorn when they went to the cinema (as fanciful as this idea might have sounded at the time). Ever true to his own instincts Ulrich lobbied for the footage to be fashioned into a feature film.

The result was *Some Kind Of Monster*, a documentary the clarity and naked authority of which obliterates the story of disunity as told by literally hundreds of journalists in magazine articles published the previous year. For their part, once the band had held open their door to the cameras they did not flinch at the prospect of allowing the world to see the mess they were in. Metallica had spoken of everything captured on film by Berlinger and Sinofsky, from Hetfield's endless telling of his spell in rehab to Lars' frank admission that he feared that the band he loved as much as anything in life had run its natural course. But somehow the words written when Metallica were on the hustings for *St Anger* did not come close to framing the disintegration and decay that had seeped into the band's immune system. Following volcanic word of mouth following a series of screenings at the world's most prestigious film festivals (that included a rapturous response from the opinion-formers at Sundance in Utah in January of 2004) *Some Kind Of Monster* was released on July 31. Metallica fans across the world duly made their way to independent cinemas to watch it: they would emerge two and a half hours later asking one question. How has it come to this?

Some Kind Of Monster is a film that groans with the weight of collective despair, acute anxieties, unchecked resentment and sometimes, grandly amusing examples of personal folly and human fallibility. Equally remarkable, however, is the fact that this was a film that arrived as if from out of nowhere. The default setting of all groups is to present to their public a united front, a façade that their audience is often complicit in accepting as the entire truth, hearing what they want to hear and disregarding the rest. But in private all bands have their cliques and squabbles, their simmering

grievances and pustulating politics. The only difference is that Metallica were the first to edit theirs into a feature film that was then given a limited theatrical release.

The results adhered to the strictest laws of unintended consequences. Some Kind Of Monster did for Metallica what innumerable expensive press and marketing campaigns had failed to manage: it brought the band the attention and respect of people who not only did not like them – or did not believe that they liked them - but who also suspected that the genre the group represented was the least valid of all musical subcultures. Overnight Some Kind Of Monster changed the perception of its subjects in the eyes of strangers. That Metallica represented not just entertainment but also art was finally accepted by people a number of whom had previously only considered the band – if they had considered them at all – with condescension.

There were of course some who viewed Metallica's very public bloodletting as being not only unnecessary but actually somehow axiomatically 'un-metal.' Predictably, this point of view was best surmised by Slayer guitarist Kerry King, who after viewing the film derided its protagonists for being 'fragile old men.' Elsewhere, though, the overwhelming majority of people who viewed Some Kind Of Monster recognised the scale of both the human and creative achievement it represented.

The piece pivots on an extraordinary scene that sees Lars Ulrich attempting to make sense of the shifting sands on which Metallica now stands. As he speaks, James Hetfield sits and listens. The drummer is hurt and bewildered by Hetfield's rule that work on St Anger must stop the moment the frontman leaves HQ each day at four pm. Seated at the same kitchen table as Hetfield are Kirk Hammett, Bob Rock and Phil Towle. Lars Ulrich, however, is not seated; instead he paces the floor in the manner of a caged and unhappy animal.

'I just think you're fucking self-obsessed,' says the drummer. 'And what makes it worse is that when you talk about me you always talk about control and manipulation. But I think you use control on purpose and I think you control inadvertently. I think you control by the rules you always set. I think you control by how you always judge people. I think you control by your absence. You control all of this even when you're not here.'

As he listens to the man with whom he formed Metallica 20 years earlier, James Hetfield sits impassive. His eyes do not track the drummer's constant movements. The only indication that Hetfield is even listening to what is being said comes with the slow and deliberate exhalation of air through his nose. Perhaps a technique learned in rehab, nonetheless the effect is reminiscent of a gun's safety catch clicking to its off setting.

'I don't understand who you are,'" the drummer continues. 'I don't understand the programme. I don't understand all this stuff.' Ulrich regards the man with whom he used to share hotel rooms, with whom he shared a house, not to mention one of the people with whom he showers after concerts. He utters a sentence so quietly devastating that it appears to slip by almost unnoticed. 'I realise now that I barely knew you before,' he says. 'All these rules and shit, man. This is a fucking rock 'n' roll band. I don't want fucking rules. I understand that you need to leave at four [pm]. I respect it. [But] don't tell me that I can't sit and listen to something with Bob at 4:15 if I want to. What the fuck is that?' But as quickly as it had reared into view the frustration and anger that is coursing through Lars Ulrich's veins suddenly cedes ground to the thing that informed those emotions in the first place, fear. 'I don't want to end up like Jason [Newsted],' he confesses, as if this

were even possible. Here it sounds as if Ulrich is almost pleading. 'Okay? I don't want to be pushed away. I don't want it to happen twice.' But the moment this fear of being marginalised to the point of extinction has been articulated, it is gone. In its place there is a gas-guzzling charge to precipice of the vertiginous cliff that stands at the end of the band's world.'

'If we're going to do it then let's do it full on or [let's] not do it at all,' he says.

In the gravid silence that follows, the very existence of Metallica is suddenly no more secure than a secret in a soap opera. Ulrich continues to pace like an accused man waiting the verdict of a jury of his peers. He can't think of anything more to say, or perhaps there's just too much to say.

'Fuck,' he says, almost in a whisper.

'Fuck,' this time louder.

'Fuck,' louder still.

By now, Lars Ulrich is leaning over the table and has his face just inches from that of James Hetfield. With a sense of frustration that might be about to overwhelm him, the drummer once more says 'Fuck!' As this happens, the frontman does not move, or react in any way. It is a remarkable show of restraint.

'I think my calmness had a lot to do with me just having come out of therapy,' Hetfield will say of his response to an outburst he admits 'had to come out.'

'I also think that being filmed had a lot to do with it too. Afterwards I said [to Lars] "That happens once and I'll accept it. But I don't want you invading my space like that again. It's as simple as that.'

By this point Phil Towle's full-time place of work was the setting at which James Hetfield held down his own part-time job, HQ in San Rafael. Now resident in San Francisco – the city in which he and his wife still live – the Pasadena-born Performance Enhancement Coach sits stoically while the volcano that is Lars Ulrich volleys lava all over the shop. But if Towle is as silent as everyone else in the room bar the Dane, his eyes are far from still. They dart from place to place, measuring the response of each combatant to the words spewing forth from a man whose reserve is now shattered.

'I was scared because without question that was a pivotal moment,' says Phil Towle today. 'That could so easily have been the point where James said, 'That's it, it's all over...' here he was back with a band that he loved deeply, but at a time when he was fractured and was trying to put himself back together. And the band was a constant reminder of the things that had caused him to fall apart. So he's trying to adjust, and he's back with his mates that he hasn't seen for a long time. But since then he now has a different agenda, and it is an agenda that is colliding with the agenda of the guys who have been waiting patiently for him to come back. So they're feeling resentful about this, as well as about a lot of other things as well.'

'When this collision in the kitchen occurs it does so in a very, very dramatic way,' he continues. 'But you have to remember that this was Lars' first opportunity to share with James directly just how angry he was, about this and other things too. While James was away in a secure place, he and Kirk had put their professional work on hold for him. They didn't know even if they had a band any more. So you have a tremendous amount of anxiety being channeled through Lars. And his point of view

was, “We waited for you and now you’re dictating terms to us. You were the one who had to go to rehab. You are the one who fucked up.” Kirk’s not really the kind of person to confront James like that, and Bob [Rock’s] relationship to the band is slightly different, so it’s not really his place to address the issue. So it’s down to Lars. But it was scary to him, and to them, and to me as well, actually. “What is going to become of us?” Watching all of this unfold, I realised that my strategy had to be to let it all play out. Because had I tried to intervene before the feelings had been expressed then they would have gone underground again, and then who knows how long it would be before they returned to the surface? What happened that day was both a breaking point and a breaking-through point. It was one of those moments that come along in life when you just have to, as I say, trust the process. And out of that came some really good stuff. It didn’t come all out once, but that was the catalyst. It was definitely their “Come to Jesus” moment.’

Phil Towle understands that while the viewer sees a story of the techniques used to bring Metallica back together as one, he or she does not witness the story in anything like its entirety. ‘There is so much work that we did that just isn’t in there,’ he says, and sounds like he understands why. The mind boggles at the scenes of collective lunacy and corrective therapy that are now gathering dust on shelves and in film canisters at locations unknown. Scenes like the occasion of Kirk Hammett’s birthday, where the lead guitarist’s friends and colleagues celebrated the start of the lead guitarist’s fifth decade by arriving at HQ dressed in Hawaiian shirts. All, that is, except Lars Ulrich, who had not been told about this. As a civilised but happy gathering cut a cake on which can be seen a likeness of Hammett on a surfboard, outside sits a drummer, sulking.

‘No one ever does anything for me,’ he pouts. At first it is Bob Rock who attempts to mollify the Dane – ‘Your birthday is the day after Christmas!’ he reasons - before, inevitably, Phil Towle steps once more into the breach.

‘I’m the only one who didn’t know!’ exclaims the drummer.

Towle, himself dressed in a Hawaiian shirt, regards Lars with silence, knowing that this is a field of play onto which he can only enter once the storm clouds overhead have dispersed.

‘I wish someone would have fucking let me know,’ he says. ‘How do you think it feels showing up here and being the only one who doesn’t have a Hawaiian shirt on? People go, Oh it’s because he’s so rebellious... [but] I’m permanently ambushed with this fucking shit...’

In a mellifluous and measured voice, Phil Towle points out to Ulrich that ‘the moment you got here you could have joined the festivities but you chose not to. And as you distanced yourself you felt worse.’ These words are spoken as if Towle is the Dane’s father.

Lars Ulrich knows this to be true. But as trifling as the matter may appear – 39 year old man sulks over party dress code – at its core the Dane’s irritation and feelings of exclusion are justified. This, too, he knows, and for the time being this is propelling his anger onward. ‘Life is an eternal birthday party for somebody else, with an occasional five minute work spurt,’ he observes, his annoyance dispersing into other areas of discontent.

‘You have to understand Lars’ role in the band,’ says Phil Towle today. ‘The musical creator is James. [In relation] to that, Lars is the baseline. He can organise. He can co-produce. He’s great with Pro Tools, and he was in the studio for everything that needed doing. Lars was the grounding force for

everything that Metallica have ever done. He was the outside promoter, the guy who risked himself [taking on] Napster. And to Lars that role of grounding is very natural; from a young age he's learned to be independent. Lars is very careful, he anticipates things and manages expectations. But when he is blindsided by something, - and it doesn't matter what it is, it wasn't about the shirts at all – at that point he feels threatened and insecure. He came in that day and discovered that it was Hawaiian shirt day and [said] "I didn't know!" And this is a big problem for Lars. Suddenly he's thinking, I didn't know about this and because I didn't know about it then bad things can happen! I've been blindsided and this freaks me out.'

In one sense *Some Kind Of Monster* can be viewed as an exercise in taking a side: Team Ulrich or Team Hetfield. But this battle royale of common human struggle takes place in an environment different from that in which almost every member of the audience lives their lives. This is a donnybrook on Multi-Millionaires' Row. Peace breaks out only after the soothing balm of therapy has been applied. While the viewers themselves are not part of this therapy, nonetheless they are bombarded with its terminology. The temptation is to dismiss this as being nothing more than the kind of mumbo jumbo one might find inside a fortune cookie. Faced with a narrative that toward the end of the film begins to drift toward the kind of spiritual mumbo jumbo one might find in a fortune cookie. That all of this makes sense to a band now two years into their process of reparation was exactly as it should be. But that audiences should view this transition with a measure of mockery is also understandable.

Inevitably, it was Phil Towle who found himself in the barrel. Even to moderate and conciliatory eyes, the notion that Towle is *Some Of Kind Of Monster's* oddest component is a difficult one to shift. Eleven years removed from his time with Metallica, interviewed for this book the performance enhancement coach is an immediately likeable, approachable and generous figure; a stranger on the end of a phone line who is uncommonly helpful and quietly charismatic. It should also be remembered that of all the people that appear on screen in Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky's masterpiece, Phil Towle is the only one not used to having a camera trained upon him. Neither was his cause aided by the band clambering aboard their repaired juggernaut and deciding unilaterally that his presence was no longer required. The trio's mutterings about their fears of how the man who has nursed them back to health seems now to believe himself to be an actual member of Metallica are disrespectful. The decision to present him with his redundancy papers not as part of a negotiation but as a fair accomplishment is, at best, unkind. Suddenly it is Phil Towle's turn to be blindsided, and the finality of Metallica's news causes him to shed a tear on camera the memory of which tugs at his sleeve to this day.

"I was wounded, legitimately wounded, by my own expectations," he says. "That's not [the group's] problem, that's my problem. But I would love to redo that part of our work.... My expectation was that my work was going to continue on for a little longer than it did. This was predicated by an agreement I had with at least one member of the band who asked me to continue. But then they had a meeting on their own, which they're certainly entitled to do, and decided differently. But the person I had the agreement with was pretty solid that there was work still to be done, which was something I concurred with. So I was disappointed and I was trying to figure out on the spot how to handle that. And I handled it poorly. The group came to an agreement that was the decision of the three of them. I would have liked to have been a part of that, but I wasn't. But I didn't want to expose these differences on camera. So I did a good job of taking the hit but I did a bad job of

processing what I was hearing. So I did not like that that became the centrepiece of how I left, and that people who were watching the movie might think that I was just trying to selfishly hang on for my own reasons.'

Either way, as Metallica prepared to begin the hard sell of their new album the three musicians slowed their juggernaut long enough only to drop Phil Towle off at an exit ramp. The therapist did accompany the band on a number of early dates of their 2003 tour, and he has had personal contact with the group in the intervening years, as well a professional association with one unnamed member for a further year. But in terms of working with Metallica as a band, 2003 was the end of the line.

But while this exit may have been less than seamless, Phil Towle can, and should, be consoled by the fact that more than anyone else he is the one person that can take credit for allowing this strangest of monsters to live.