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introduction

It's 1994, and I'm sitting on the sofa next to my girlfriend Annette. The house is affordably damp, and lord knows we need the money because we spend everything on records and gigs. Sitting in front of the stereo is my housemate and best friend Sleepy Steve. He is holding a demo tape that he swears will change my life. A bit melodramatic, I think, but his enthusiasm is irresistible. I give Annette's hand a little squeeze, and she gives a little squeeze back. In my head I'm going to be The Guy That Changed Music. Life is pretty damned fine.

He plays the demo. Recorded on one side of a cheap C60 cassette, it sounds raw and comes with the thrilling sense of hearing something incredibly new and exciting. We have no idea that the internet will make such means of distributing new music seem quaint in just another decade. For now, tapes are the door into the underground. The future is scrawled in biro on inlay cards, and the inlay card to this tape contains just three words in big, black block capital letters:

CAROLINA CAR CRASH

I am astonished. It's hard to tell how much of the distortion comes from the cassette recording itself and how much is part of the music, but I immediately adore it. I tell Steve this. I tell him that I need to see them. I need to see them RIGHT NOW.

"Don't you know?" asks Steve. "They split up last year."

SHELLAC
TERRAFORM

SLUGGISH
SATURDAY
UPON C

LIVE BANDS
ALSO ART
ACOUSTIC STABLE - OR
ACOUSTIC CASTLE - OR
BOUNCY JUGGLERS
FACE PAINTER - OTHER
GATES OPEN MIDDAY
& LICENSED BAR (SUBJECT TO LICENCE)
FOOD & LICENSED BAR (SUBJECT TO LICENCE)
TO BE GIVEN UP

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Now it's 2013 and I'm The Guy Who Did Nothing With His Life. Carolina Car Crash's split twenty years earlier has become an almost mythological event. On the cusp of recording their first EP they had played to a packed back room in Leicester. As tipped-to-be-first-single 'Sharp Bend' reached its fuzz-drenched climax, lead singer Rob Velocity dived into the crowd and for a short time joined the multi-limbed moshpit beast. However he failed to re-emerge back onto the stage, nor was he seen leaving the room. Somehow, he had disappeared. It has become one of the greatest and simultaneously most obscure legends of modern music, for nobody has seen Rob Velocity since.

This fanzine is my homage to the greatest band you've never heard, and tribute to the lost star Rob Velocity, wherever he may be now. It is also the story of my search for Rob, sifting through the rumours to reach a personally startling conclusion.

interviews with ex-members

The first thing I wanted to do was find out more about the band. I found myself practically back in 1993 as searching the internet proved fruitless. Instead I had to rely on older methods and work through my contacts. I'd fallen out with Sleepy Steve following a heated disagreement over Shellac's 'Terraforming' some years ago so he wasn't my most immediate option.

Instead I phoned my then-girlfriend and now ex-wife Annette. She was still in touch with some people I'd lost contact with over the years. Maybe she could help?

At first she was frustratingly reluctant, suggesting I'd be better off talking to Sleepy Steve (or Steven, as she insisted on calling him). I persisted, and eventually she yielded what she thought was Carolina Car Crash's bass player's phone number.

Being from the '90s it was a landline. I didn't recognise the area code but luckily it still connected.

It rang for a very long time, during which I realised I had no idea what the bass player was called. I could hardly have asked whether 'The Bass Player' was there.

Eventually someone answered. Male, age undetermined. I asked whether he'd ever heard of Carolina Car Crash.

"Where did you get this number?" he demanded.

I explained that I was trying to track down the bass player from Carolina Car Crash, and was given his number.

"Listen," he said, a tremor in his voice. "I was never in Carolina and you can't prove I was."

He hung up. I went back to Annette to ask whether she had any other ideas. The answer was no. Their drummer died, perhaps ironically, in a car crash a few years ago.

"Was it in Carolina?" I asked with a tactless edge of excitement.

"No, Redditch." She sighed wearily and hung up.

There were no leads on family members, and given the circumstances (one person dead, another missing) I was reluctant to pursue that avenue of investigation even if I could find a way in.

I needed to cast my net wider.

the rumours

The interest in Carolina Car Crash surrounded the lack of information about them and filled it with rumour and speculation. There's an almost never-ending supply of sightings and conspiracies. Here are some of the more notable ones:

Rob Velocity slipped out of the venue and fled to Scotland, where he now resides, living a simple life away from the crushing realities of the music business.

Rob Velocity saw the internet coming and was one of the founders of YouTube. Consequently he's made much more money than he ever would have merely making music.

Rob Velocity was a CIA spy placed to infiltrate the UK alternative scene. The Russians, who had a spy placed in a well-known shoegaze band, were about to expose Rob. To avoid this, he was extracted and set up with a new identity before the Russians could make their move.

Rob Velocity now runs a car rescue firm in South Carolina. Nuff said.

Carolina Car Crash were removed by an over-enthusiastically enforced editorial directive at Melody Maker.

Rob Velocity runs a bar with Richey Edwards in Bali.

Rob Velocity is hard at work on that 'difficult' first album.

As you can see, the rumours are wild at best, predictable at worst. I needed some help filtering the noise, so using the tools of the 21st Century, I crowd-sourced. By this I mean I started a thread on Drowned in Sound appealing for recollections of Carolina Car Crash. To my delight it was quickly filled with replies from people who were proud to have been at their final gig in Leicester.

The only problem was that many of the stories didn't quite match. The gig was at the Princess Charlotte, or was it at the Magazine? Or was it even at the Poly? Someone even swore blind it had actually been at the Victoria in Derby, but they had the lyrics to a Levellers song in their signature so I could safely disregard them. These were details however. There was clearly still a lot of interest in the band.

Sadly nobody could tell me anything definitive about Rob Velocity's whereabouts, although the popular vote was that he was in Scotland. More specifically on the Isle of Eigg.

I would have to leave the safety of the internet and go to Scotland. I made swift plans to go there immediately. I added my phone number to my forum post in case anyone had any further information while I was away from my laptop. I phoned Annette and left a message telling her I'd be away for a few days. Finally, I prepared a lengthy playlist for the drive to Eigg.



scottish sheep are bastards

Some facts are obvious: water is wet; Shellac's 'Terraforming' is a classic; it's a bloody long way from London to the Inner Hebrides. Getting there involved a frankly exhausting drive followed by a nauseating ferry trip. By the time I arrived I was sick of my playlist and even more sickened by the sea. So it was unsurprising that the first thing I did on dry land after parking was lose my balance and fall face down onto the grass.

After a short time composing myself I decided that Eigg wasn't so bad, and set off to find my guest house. A wrong turn found me in a field of sheep, where I tripped over the uneven grass and fell flat on my face again. This time I thought my only witnesses were the sheep, which should have been less embarrassing, but somehow wasn't.

The sheep looked terribly smug.

"You alright there?" asked a softly Scottish voice. I turned to see a man in a green duffel coat and wellies. I glossed over my wounded pride and assured him that it was just a little stumble. As I approached him, I thought I may as well start my investigations there and then.

"Actually, I was wondering whether you could help me. I'm looking for someone."

"Oh aye? Anyone in particular or is more of a philosophical mission you're on?"

I blinked, and decided to brush his eccentricity aside. I told him I was looking for a man, about, erm, how tall? What colour was his hair? I rambled a list of contradictory attributes.

Duffel Coat smily wryly. "So you're looking for a man who might be tall but maybe not, and his hair could be any colour except maybe grey?"

"Actually he could be grey by now. That was twenty years ago."

I coughed, and scratched the back of my head. Duffel Coat was still smiling at me. Although not exactly AT me. He seemed reluctant to meet my eyes.

"Well, good luck finding your man." Duffel Coat turned to leave. "Although I'd say it's definitely more of a philosophical quest,"

He left me alone with the sheep. Did the way he avoided eye contact mean anything? Was it just a personal foible of his, or did it signify a secret he was keeping from me? A secret such as the location of Rob Velocity?

At the guest house my questions were met with the same shifty gaze. Everybody was looking just above my eyeline. Clearly I was onto something. After dinner and a couple of pints, I was emboldened enough to ask the landlord.

"Everyone I ask about Rob Velocity says they know nothing, but you all give me this same peculiar look, like you know something. Do you actually know something? This isn't a big island. I'll find out eventually you know."

The landlord, who had been giving me the same suspicious look as everyone else, dropped his eyes level with mine.

"Son," he said, "I don't know what the blazes you're talking about, but you've got sheep shit on your forehead."

Demoralised but with a thoroughly scrubbed face, the next morning I drove home in silence.

the missing tape

On returning home I managed to get through to Annette. I had lost the revelatory demo tape at some point in the intervening years, probably during one of my many moves around the city. Did she have a copy, I wondered?

She did not, and to my irritation she again suggested I'd be better off talking to Steven. Out of options, I reluctantly agreed, and she gave me his mobile number.

I listened to Ride's first three EPs back-to-back to remind me of our better years, then called him. He was a little frosty at first, but there was a reconciliatory tone to our conversation, even if we avoided the cause of our falling out.

Unfortunately he didn't have a copy of the tape either, but on a personal level the phone call was a success. Occasionally I need to remind myself that there's more to life than just music.

an intriguing lead

A week later I was doing the washing up and listening to Neu! 2.10 I was pondering the injustice of Stereolab receiving so much attention for being directly influenced by them when Carolina Car Crash had been much more subtle in their borrowings. I had considered this long enough for my fingertips to go wrinkly when the phone rang. Not my mobile, but my landline.

"I'm going to give you a phone number," stated a heavily processed, voice. It sounded exactly the way disguised voices do in the movies. "Then I want you to call it from a new pay-as-you go SIM card. Do not call it from your current number, I will not answer."

The voice had said nothing of Rob Velocity but I knew it had to be something in connection with him. The last time my washing up had been interrupted was 9/11. I'd spent the next day locked into a vicious news-cycle, having any truly personal response beaten out of me by image after image after image of the same appalling event.

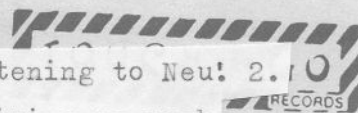
This time my washing up had been interrupted by something I could directly connect to. Pausing only to wipe the suds off my hands with an ATP tea towel, I caught the bus to Tesco to buy a new SIM card.

I was fairly sure I was being pranked, but when I called from the new SIM, I was promptly answered by the same distorted voice.

"I can only tell you this once, so please pay attention. I have taken steps to make this call untraceable but it's purely a one-time thing."

I nodded in agreement, then realised the mystery voice couldn't see me. "Okay."

SHELLAC
TERRAFORM



GRAM
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"I don't know where Rob Velocity is," the voice qualified. "But I do know what happened to him. I can't tell you how I know this but you should be able to deduce that for yourself when I've finished."

He went on to tell me that Rob was in fact a CIA agent. That he had in fact been pulled before he was exposed as a spy by the Russians. And also, most tantalisingly, that he had proof.

He gave me an address in an estate in Hackney. "Meet me around the corner of that building at midnight. I'll be wearing a grey hooded top. I'll bring you all the evidence I have."

And then he hung up before I could say anything. I looked at my phone in astonishment, then looked up a bus route to the rendezvous.

hackney after dark

I'm comfortable with Hackney. I've lived in London for years and know my way around, although by that I largely mean I have a sense of where I should and shouldn't go. So it was against my better senses that I walked from the bus to the arranged meeting place. This was somewhere I'd be cautious walking past, let alone walking into.

But still, fear is mostly perception and the prize in this case was worth the risk. Also, I wouldn't be alone for long so from a rational standpoint it was safe enough.

But still, stepping out of the streetlights made a few prehistoric instincts sing a song which promised an unpleasant chorus followed by a disturbing bass solo. As if there were any other kind.

I found my spot, around the side of a flat with reassuringly well-maintained paintwork on its windows. Of course it was fine, I told myself, then retreated a little to the partial cover of a nearby tree. Just in case.

Midnight came, as did a fox. Midnight went but the fox continued for another twenty three minutes. There was still no sign of my contact. I decided to give him another ten minutes, particularly as waiting was now a bit more pleasant without the infantile screaming of foxes fucking in the bushes.



After six minutes someone walked around the corner of the flat, wearing the prearranged grey hooded top. I waved at him. "Psst!" I said. I would have made a brilliant spy, no doubt about it.

my contact froze. I couldn't quite make out his face in the dark and with the hood, but it seemed to me he was looking at me with a degree of uncertainty.

I wanted to reassure him, so drawing on a subconscious repository of similar scenes in television programmes and films I'd seen, I said, "Don't worry." Then I said, and believe me this sounded just as ridiculous when I heard myself say it: "I'm unarmed."

My contact walked towards me quite directly, as though a straight line was not direct enough for him. When he was just a few feet away he stopped. "You fuckin' what?"

I had of course made a terrible mistake. This was not my contact, it was a random youth who ably demonstrated a more direct line than a straight one, which was the line of implied violence he used to relieve me of my phone and my wallet.

These were losses I could tolerate as my real loss that evening was the raised hope of uncovering the secret of Rob Velocity's disappearance. That, and my trousers, which my mugger also stole for reasons that worry me less now than they did in the moment. The moment where I began to wonder whether there was anything in the idea of a remake of Deliverance set around the less explored postcodes of London.

Luckily, if the absence of bad luck is the same as good luck, all he wanted from my trousers was my humiliation in a more innocent sense. He fled the scene laughing to himself, although as far as I was concerned the world was laughing with him. I had made quite the fool of myself.

My humiliation wasn't complete. Have you ever tried to catch the bus home without any trousers? There's only two sorts of attention you get. That attention from the Transport Police is the most welcome of the two speaks clearly enough, I hope.

Some hours later I returned home. I rang the phone number I had been told not to ring again from my land line. It went straight to voicemail. The recorded message was that of a Chinese restaurant. I could even hear the clatter and clang of a busy kitchen in the background.

Tired and mentally defeated, I went to bed without wanting to know what any of the day's events meant.

back to the start

Leicester. I've been there before but not for a long time. I think the last time was to see My Bloody Valentine at Leicester Poly sometime in the early '90s. I don't want to judge the place on relatively little experience, but the fact I haven't returned since says enough on that subject.

Until now.

With the Terraforming debacle thankfully forgotten, I met with Steven at a cafe in Archway. He looked older and balder than the last time I'd seen him ten years ago, and I sensed a mirrored thought on his part. We each diplomatically ignored our obvious descent into middle age, just as I ignored the copy of The Times he placed next to the ketchup bottle. Even though that was EXACTLY the sort of political bent I expected from someone who'd criticise Shellac's opus so flippantly.

"The Princess Charlotte," he said as he sat down. He waited for my reply, evidently pleased with what he considered a striking entrance.

That's where he was positive Carolina Car Crash's last gig had taken place. The Princess Charlotte. Then a pub with a sweaty backroom and a fixture on the busy toilet circuit, now closed for several years.

"Although," Steven added, drumming his fingertips on the chipped Formica table surface. "Although it could have been The Magazine, round the corner from there."

We disagreed over the quality of our respective English breakfasts rather than disagree over anything we could seriously fall out over, then went our separate ways. Him, to a copy shop where he would run off flyers for a tedious-sounding gig he was promoting. Me, to Leicester.

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leicester's the best-uh

cassette-fan

213 replies 19:02 Aug

I was surprised to find the Princess Charlotte was still there, albeit resolutely closed. Of The Magazine, there was no trace. In its place were some smart but anonymous looking new build flats.

I think the final gig was at the Princess Charlotte in Leicester, around 1993.

Finding nothing of use at the site where The Magazine once stood, I wandered back to the Charlotte and tried to invoke the ghosts of gigs past. The crowds outside on hot summers' nights, drenched in sweat that had rained down from the grimy ceiling. Nothing much was forthcoming. Not even Moose on a rainy Tuesday.

Yes! I was there! They were half way through that song I can't remember the name of when I

I had to wonder what I was hoping to achieve. I'd caught the train to Leicester when I really needed a railway to the past. I wasn't even finding ghosts where I'd been going.

incident. Amazing

5 Aug '13, 22:02 | "

I wasn't actually there myself. Don't suppose you saw Rob leave the room or anything like

I found a pub nearby that was still open and after ordering an acceptable pint of Landlord phoned Annette.

5 Aug '13, 23:27 | "

weren't they just like a shitter lush?

On this occasion she was bluntly unhelpful. She reminded me how we'd been divorced for nearly ten years. "If you really want someone to talk to about your ridiculous musical nostalgia trip, talk to Steven. I'm not asking you two to be friends again, but if you could at least be civil it'd make all our lives easier."

5 Aug '13, 22:57 | "

The diplomacy of a guilty conscience.

They were absolutely fucking incredible. If Rob hadn't gone missing I'm convinced they'd ha

There was no point in dwelling on the past, I mused, and that included my obsession with Rob Velocity. The answers, if there were any, get further away with every passing second. There is no railway to the past. I needed to live in the present, and began that new journey by ordering a second pint.

now. What a horrible wast

5 Aug '13, 23:44 | "

air last song. By the tin

halt. Anyway I didn't

er, he's probably still there, below the piss-line.

gold_soundx 16 Aug '13, 00:43 | "

The guy behind the bar looked about the same age as me, and looked like he may have been to a few gigs in his time.

It's in my top 10 best gigs. Hell, top 5 even. I've never seen anything like them since, alas.

JohnnyAlpha 16 Aug '13, 00:57 | "

"Did you ever go to the Charlotte back in the day?" I asked as casually as I could manage. I was trying not to seem too keen, but was surprised by how tired I sounded.

"Not much since the early '90s," he replied while pulling another pint of Landlord laboriously by hand.

I tried to leave a nonchalant pause before replying and left so long that my follow up question made me cringe as I spoke it.

"Did you ever see a band called Carolina Car Crash?"

He smiled, perhaps amused by my awkwardness. "No." He placed my pint on a bar towel. "That'll be three pound twenty."

I dug into my pocket, accepting at last that my fool's quest had failed.

"We've got one of their flyers on the wall though," he added, and pointed to the wall next to the door, which was densely pasted with a collage of old gig flyers.

There amongst a sea of up-and-comings and also-rans was a flyer which simply stated in big, black capital letters:

CAROLINA CAR CRASH
SUNDAY 8TH AUGUST
PRINCESS CHARLOTTE

"Funny thing about that flyer," said the barman. "I went to see a mate's band at the Charlotte that night. Just a fuck-up at the printers, I reckoned, but a few weeks later - and this is why it sticks in my mind - people started asking about them."

The hairs on my neck bristled. "What were they asking?"

"The same as you. Whether I'd seen them. Whoever they were, they managed to make a hell of an impression despite not actually having played the gig everyone was talking about."



no show

So what was going on? I pondered this question on the train home from Leicester while slumming it with the NME. I flicked through the gigs section, half-expecting Carolina Car Crash to be listed, but it seems my obsession still had little to back it up in the realworld.

The Drowned in Sound thread had eventually been locked when it became clear to most people that nobody knew what they were talking about. If everyone who claimed to have seen the gig had in fact been there, it would have been more than would fit in any of the suggested venues. They would also know where 'there' is with more precision than somewhere in the East Midlands.

How had so many people been swept up into this musical urban legend? Were any of them in the know? Was this all an elaborate hoax, or did it just happen by mistake, a perfect storm of misinformation? These are all good questions, but they'll have to be answered by someone else.

I've decided to live in the moment. I'm at a gig for some band I've never heard of, somewhere in London. The details don't matter. The crowd loves them. People are stage diving and security are pulling punters out of the limb-storm like fishermen landing pike.

I am in the moment. I don't care about Carolina Car Crash and all that complicated business that might have happened in the past. I'm pushing my way into the moshpit, into my uncertain future. I don't care that my wife left me for my best friend, I'm climbing up onto the stage. All my petty anxieties melt away as I look down into the seething audience from the stage's edge.

You know what? I'm not even sure that Shellac album is really that good.

I close my eyes, let it all go, and for a brief moment I am Rob Velocity. I am at the gig that never happened, and this is my transformation into myth. I jump, but nobody catches me.

I crash face-down onto the dirty concrete floor. The music stops and I feel only happiness. From now on I'll always be That Guy Who Couldn't Stagedive. It's better than nothing.

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Carolina Car Crash

cassette-fan

213 replies 19:02 August 5th, 2013

Does anyone remember Carolina Car Crash? Particularly their final gig when Rob Velocity disappeared? I'm trying to find out what hapenned to him and would love to hear any stories or leads as to his whereabouts.

I think the final gig was at the Princess Charlotte in Leicester, around 1993.

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Yes! I was there! They were half way through that song I can't remember the name of when Rob jumped into the crowd. He kicked my mate Phil in the head, but I think it was an accident. Amazing gig though.

bonos_arse | 5 Aug '13, 22:02 | ^ This | Reply

Wish I'd been there

I wasn't actually there myself. Don't suppose you saw Rob leave the room or anything like that?

cassette-fan | 5 Aug '13, 23:27 | ^ This | Reply

maosm this'd this

weren't they just like a shitter lush?

17

eddie_deader | 5 Aug '13, 22:57 | ^ This | Reply

Magazine

Wasnt the gig at the magazine round the corner? I think I saw them there round that time. They were terrific - iirc their singer set someones hair on fire. Although thta mite have been a birthday cake im

Does anyone remember Carolina Car Crash? Particularly their final gig when Rob Velocity disappeared? I'm trying to find out what happened to him and would love to hear any stories or leads as to his whereabouts.



Wasnt the gig at the magazine round the corner? I think I saw them there round that time. They were terrific - iirc their singer set someones hair on fire. Although thta mite have been a birthday cake im thinking of. Did a lot of acid back then.

elle-s-dee | 5 Aug '13, 23:37 | ^ This | Reply

Best gig ever

They were absolutely fucking incredible. If Rob hadn't gone missing I'm convinced they'd have been THE band of the '90s. The musical landscape could be so different now. What a horrible waste.

stevensmells | 5 Aug '13, 23:44 | ^ This | Reply

I went for a piss

I had to relieve myself in the Charlotte's piss-pool of a toilet during their last song. By the time I'd waded my way out Rob had vanished and the gig had ground to a confusing halt. Anyway I didn't see him in the bogs but if he slipped and fell over, he's probably still there, below the piss-line.

gold_soundz | 6 Aug '13, 00:43 | ^ This | Reply

maosm this'd this

Brilliant gig

It's in my top 10 best gigs. Hell, top 5 even. I've never seen anything like them since, alas.

JohnnyAlpha | 6 Aug '13, 00:59 | ^ This | Reply

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HOLD

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