

Rolling Stone

EAGLES

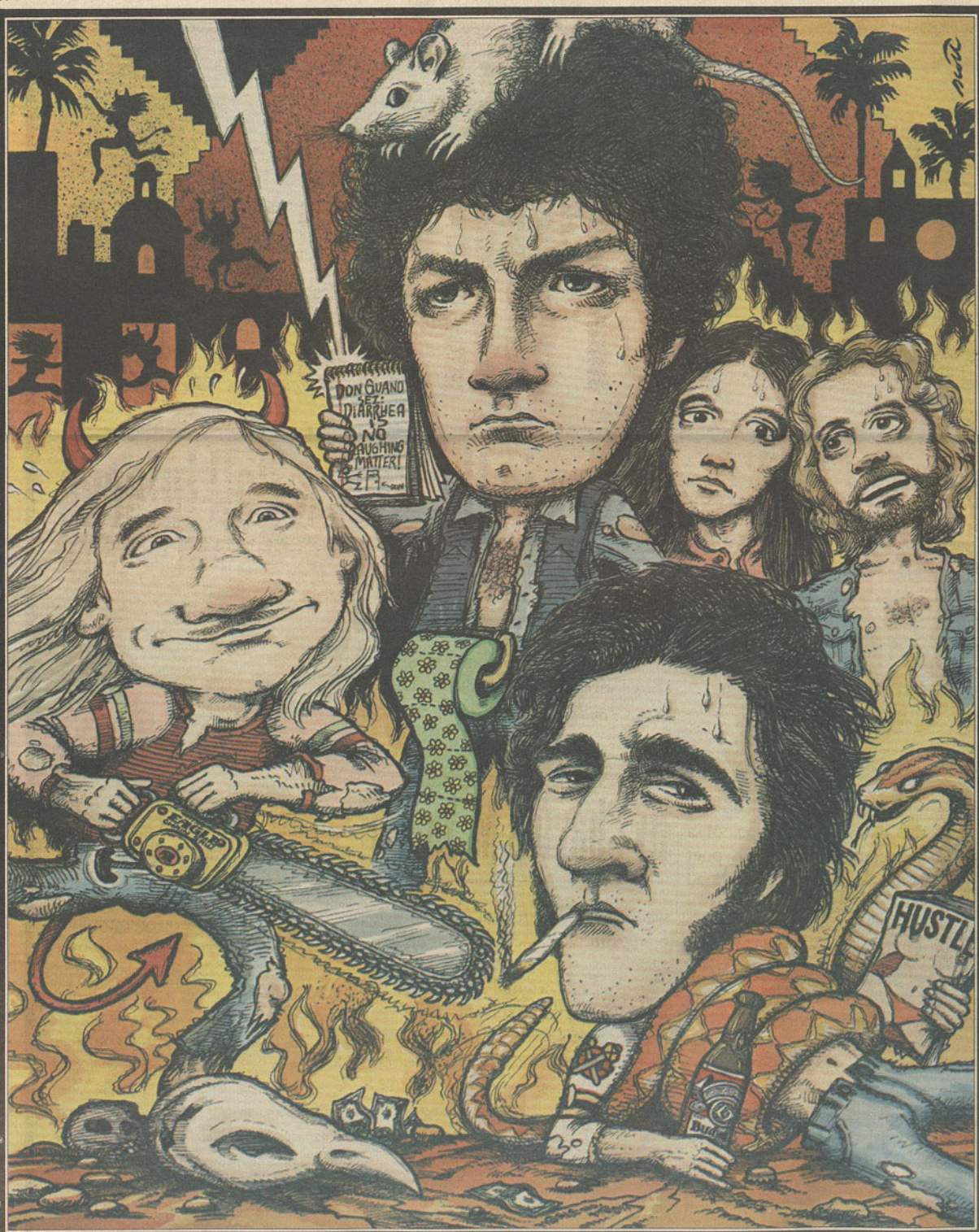
*A Good Year in Hell with
America's Number One Band
By Charles M. Young*

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HELL IS FOR HEROES

The EAGLES' Slow Burn in the Rock & Roll Inferno

Here each of us is a king in a field of corpses.

—ELIAS CANETTI, *'Crowds and Power'*

I know there must be something better
But there's nowhere else in sight

—JOE WALSH and BARRY DEVORZON, *"In the City"*

DON HENLEY HAS the haunted blue eyes of a consumptive Romanian poet who has decided his manhood depends on assassinating Vlad the Impaler. Or maybe it's just the haunted blue eyes of a Texas Calvinist who hasn't quite assimilated the California good life—all that hellfire and brimstone he heard as a kid creeping back like stink from a dead rat under the floorboards to reek, "You don't deserve this massage. The Eagles are about to play in front of 50,000 drunken teenagers in Milwaukee County Stadium for a ridiculous amount of money, therefore God

By Charles M. Young

wants you to be in pain from muscle cramps in your back. You are here to suffer."

Stress, not original sin, however, is Henley's earthly explanation for his malady as an accupressurist manipulates his spine—a nightly ritual so he can play the drums without wincing. "It's the price you pay for being sensitive," says Henley, prostrate and shirtless on a folding table. "You are, of course, going to get the humor in my voice as I said that."

Glenn Frey pops in the door of the trailer and announces, "I just met two wives of the Milwaukee Brewers. One of them was perfect."

"Do you wanna die?" asks Henley.

"No, they gave me an autographed baseball," says Frey, turning it over and mock-reading an inscription: "'Glenn, he's out of town until the Yankee series....'"

A few feet away, Joe Walsh picks at a banquet table piled high with food. "I need some more meatballs," he remarks to no one in particular. "Get some heartburn for the show. I eat everything twice."

The mention of heartburn jars loose another dead rat under Henley's

floorboards, and he describes how Life in the Fast Lane ate a hole in his stomach. "I was actually rather proud of getting an ulcer before the age of thirty," he says.

I tell him I had one before the age of fifteen, and he is quite impressed. We discuss the relative virtues of antacids and speculate about all the horrible things that eating chalk does to your body.

"Who are you guys? The Maalox survivors?" Frey explodes with laughter—no idle figure of speech in Frey's case. Mere chorales of his have been known to kill water buffalo at 500 yards. "You call this rock & roll?"

WELL, YEAH I WOULD call it rock & roll. Just don't ask for a definition. I've stabbed it with my steely knives, but I just can't kill the beast. Another metaphor will have to suffice. We resume our metaphor a half-hour later in the above-described summer tour of 1978.

OUR MOTTO IS PAY NOW, pay more later," says Irving Azoff, head of the aptly-named Front Line Management, which handles the Eagles and several other status acts. "Figure out a fair price, add a third, and that's what we get in our contracts."

Just this side of dwarfism, Azoff surveys the bustling roadies onstage with the calm eyes of a guildless man. I ask if the long-overdue Eagles album, late starting and now six months in the womb, is causing problems for their record company, Elektra Asylum.

"We only hear from them about ten times a month," he giggles. "When they project a \$116 million year because Linda Ronstadt and the Eagles are going to release albums, and then come up \$40 million short from not having an Eagles album, they hurt."

Steve Miller, the opening act, takes the stage to a big ovation from the Milwaukee teenagers. Azoff, behind a stack of speakers, gives them the finger. "Look at that guy," he spits, indicating Miller's short hair and conservative dress. "He even looks like an accountant. Undoubtedly the cheapest man in rock & roll. You know he gets all his equipment into one truck?"

"If he's so horrible," I ask, "how come you hired him to open for you?"

"He's the least of the worst," says Azoff, still angry because Miller cut his set short the previous night. "Some other act, we'd get a hundred bikers in the front row."

The Eagles take the stage at 9:45 and play two hours of their greatest hits (everything from "Take It Easy" to "Hotel California"), along with four Joe Walsh songs from his period with the James Gang and as a solo artist ("Walk Away," "Turn to Stone," "Life's Been Good" and "Rocky Mountain Way") and one tune by their new bassist, Timothy B. Schmit, from his days with Poco ("Keep on Tryin'").

Their relationship with their audience is the best it has ever been but remains odd. Except for Frey announcing, "We're the Eagles from Los Angeles, California," they do not talk to the people. (Perhaps after setting the tone for their foul relations with East Coast rock critics by denouncing the New York Dolls in New York in 1973, they are afraid that if they open their mouths they will denounce beer in Milwaukee.) Schmit, who obviously enjoys being onstage, is an improvement over his predecessor, Randy Meisner, who loathed performing toward the end of his tenure. Walsh is the only one who moves around, jumping off the risers and doing birdman strums (which occasionally tear off his fingernails). Walsh is also the crowd favorite, generating an ecstatic response with the wonderfully absurd humor of "Life's Been Good."

As pure aural experience, the Eagles are awesome. The Joe Walsh-Don Felder guitar attack could have saved the South at Gettysburg. Alternating between rhythm guitar and keyboards, Frey joins Henley and Schmit in harmonies that are inevitably but accurately described by newspaper headline writers as "soaring." They come inhumanly close to perfection in re-creating their recorded sound. Frey states their concert philosophy: "With so many variables you can't control, you should control everything you can. We make it

so the worst we can possibly be is great." Only a slight brag there. But by eliminating spontaneity—particularly a Walsh-Felder guitar jam—the Eagles sacrifice any chance of creating anew onstage and reaching a higher peak.

The centerpiece of the music, the sound that makes the Eagles unique, the sound that makes you want to weep over your lost youth in "Desperado"—that sound emanates from the throat of a skinny guy wallowed off behind his drum set. Maybe half the audience can see a small part of him. The rest see his cymbals. They are mystified about whom to clap for on the Eagles' best material.

BACKSTAGE THE EAGLES are equally mystifying, but they leave more clues. The names Henley and Frey show up in most of the publishing credits, by themselves and with others. They sing the most songs. In the studio, their ears have the final decision on what sounds good. They run the show. Yet they have never emerged as personalities in their own right. They can walk down any street in the world and not be recognized. The American band of the Seventies, the Eagles remain an anonymous monolith.

The history begins with one Richard Bowden, better known as Balloon Dick, for a high-school locker-room antic best left to the imagination. Something of a legend in the L.A. music scene, Bowden first won fame in Linda Ronstadt's backup band by removing his clothes, covering himself with shaving cream and asking hotel clerks if they knew where he could buy a razor blade. He now plays guitar for Blue Steel (Texas slang for "a hard-on that won't go away") and is Don Henley's oldest friend.

"Joe Walsh came to me just after he joined the Eagles and said, 'You've known him the longest. Tell him to relax,'" recalls Bowden. "I told him to just let Don be tense. He's always been that way. When he solves one problem, he just moves on to something else to worry about."

Bowden, 34, and Henley, 32, were babies together in Linden, the Cass County seat in Northeast Texas, population around 2000. Having little oil to dig up, its citizens tend to commute over the rolling countryside to other burghs for factory jobs and spend their few local tax dollars on football.

"Mrs. Henley was a real fine lady, but she didn't have any control over Don," says Bowden in the soft drawl of the area. "Not that he didn't respect her, he just always did what he wanted. And then his father would have to come down on him. They couldn't get along for years. Don always felt he had to prove something to him."

After Don blew up the family's big, black laundry cauldron with a cherry bomb—thus forcing his father, C.J., to buy a washing machine—Hughlene Henley owed her son a favor. She got the opportunity to repay it when he was fifteen. "He wanted to buy his first set of drums, and we didn't know how his father would react," recalls Mrs. Henley, a retired elementary-school teacher. "So we didn't tell him what we were doing. Don and I drove fifty miles to a music store to buy them and then drove to C.J.'s auto-parts store in Danglefield. When we called him out to look at the drums, he was a bit stunned, but he went along with it. We were afraid he'd disapprove because it cost so much money—a little over \$600."

Failing at football because he was too small and averse to pain, Henley drummed for Bowden's first band, the Four Speeds, which specialized in Ventures-style instrumentals. When they realized vocals were where it's at, nobody would volunteer, so they put their names in a bowl and Henley lost. Later named Felicity, they paid their dues on the rowdy fraternity circuit. Eventually enrolling at Stephen F. Austin University and then North Texas State, Henley was engaged to his high-school sweetheart, by all accounts the prettiest girl in town. "It was very serious—he'd even bought her a ring," says Bowden. "It finally came down to a choice between marrying her and pursuing rock & roll. She gave him an ultimatum. He felt he had to leave. I can apply a lot of his lyrics to that situation."

By 1970, the band was calling itself Shiloh and had made a foray to Los Angeles to record a single, "Jennifer," for now-defunct Amos Records. Back in Linden, they got together one afternoon at a little church they had rented as

a rehearsal hall. Things got loose and the musicians started riding trail bikes around the parking lot. The day was clear, and you could see down the road for miles in either direction. A small blond boy named Jerry Dale Surratt, a champion trumpet player who'd given it up for rock & roll, rode his motorcycle across the road, straight into the path of an oncoming car. With his family and band watching, he was crushed to death on its hood. Shiloh was never the same.

IN THE DRESSING ROOM before a show at the Buffalo Memorial Auditorium, Joe Walsh dances, slaps his thighs and sings an atonal paean to the cosmos because he is the only Eagle not afflicted with stomach flu. Once christened the Play and Wave Tour, with all identification cards stamped pw, the concert series has been renamed Puke and Wipe.

"Throwing up is my least-favorite thing in the world," moans Frey.

"I wish I could throw up," groans Azoff.

"Well, why don't you have Charlie here play you one of his punk-rock cassettes?" suggests Frey, near death but unerring in his instinct for endearing himself to New York rock critics.

"I told you not to brush your teeth. That's how you get sick," remonstrates Walsh in a voice of equal parts rasp, squeak and crack. "This reminds me of the James Gang's first English tour. We were supposed to be the new heavy-metal wonders from the United States, opening for the Who at the London Palladium. Unfortunately, brushing my teeth caught up with me, and halfway through the first song, I threw up and shit at the same time. I had to run behind the drum risers where I kept playing, and the roadies wrapped a towel around my waist so the audience couldn't see the brown spot. The crowd loved it, though—thought it was part of the act."

Henley stirs himself to moan, "Oh God, he's writing this down."

Walsh shakes his finger at me. "Yeah, we want you to write what comes out of our mouths, not our asses."

Henley sort of rolls his eyes and sinks back into his nausea.

"Don't worry, Don," Walsh comforts. "Tomorrow's gonna be better. Toronto's my lucky city. I met a girl there once that I didn't get the clap from."

T WHATEVER HOTEL THE Eagles nest, they designate one large suite as the "Third Encore" for postconcert parties. Tonight promises to be especially insane because it is the end of this leg of the tour. In attendance are four of five Eagles, their entourage, several professional hockey players, Eddie Money, the Little River Band and a lot of locals. Three floors below, Henley and I settle down for our first interview.

It seems like you crave justice on earth even more than success or artistic accomplishment. That's not achievable, and I wonder if you'll go nuts looking for it.

I figured out a long time ago, when my father got sick and died, that life wasn't fair, but I got mad about it. I used to go around and cuss God all the time, because my father died too early and he suffered. And a lot of my friends from Texas that came to California with me and are real talented but didn't make it when I did—I feel guilty about that too. There's a lot of imbalance, and I like to buck it whenever I can. You're right.

What was your father like?

He saved twenty-five cents a day from the day I was born so that I could go to college. He had to quit in the eighth grade and he wanted me to do better than he did. But he only lived to see "Take It Easy" and a couple of weeks of "Witchy Woman." He literally worked and worried himself to death, and he had a cardiac and he died on July 7th, 1972, after four or five other heart attacks. You don't know what's real until you see your father in the emergency room heaving and gasping for breath and saying, "Oh God! Oh God!" Everything else gets real trite after that. There's

been a lot of death in my family. My only living close relative is my mother.

You spent a long time cursing God after your father died?

Not a long time. A couple of years. It's funny, because right before that I'd taken a bunch of philosophy courses in college and figured out what I considered to be the order of the universe. I really thought there was a power up there and that everything was cool, and suddenly my father was struck down. That kind of destroyed the philosophy stuff. Now I believe in, uh, *something*, but not in the traditional sense. That's another thing I'm pissed about: the Baptists and the Methodists and the Southern hell and purgatory they laid on me when I was a kid and scared the holy fuck out of me so I couldn't sleep at night because I thought I would die and go to hell.

The older I get, the more these things come up from the past. I guess I repressed them for a while, but I'm having real vivid dreams and images every day about my past and how oppressive it was. I'm pissed about that, I'm pissed about current politics, I'm pissed about the nuclear thing, and I'm pissed about my junior-high football coach, that sadistic son of a bitch. I like football but hate the way the macho mentality is shoved down children's throats in Texas. What a fucked education I had, until I went to college, which wasn't that great either, but it saved my ass.

Because of all the money and power you've accumulated, you guys are looked on by some almost as gods....

I refuse to accept that responsibility.

Well, you've got it, whether you want it or not.

If I do have to accept it, I wish people would get the



HENLEY: 'EVEN WHEN I'M ASLEEP, I'M WORRIED ABOUT THE NEXT ALBUM AND HOW IT'S GONNA DO.'

meanings of the songs right. If they don't get it, I don't want to be God. You remember the line, "Her mind is Tiffany twisted, she got the Mercedes bends" in "Hotel California"? I got a letter from a woman telling me I spelled the name of the car wrong. I can't stand it that somebody out there thinks I can't spell. And "Life in the Fast Lane," by God if they didn't turn that into a celebration of exactly what we were trying to warn them about. Everybody's got cocaine now, no matter how shitty it is. I could hardly listen to that song when we were recording it because I was getting high a lot at the time and the song made me ill. We were trying to paint a picture that cocaine wasn't that great. It turns on you. It messed up my back muscles, it messed up my nerves, it messed up my stomach, and it makes you paranoid. I'm not saying I'm an angel or a saint now, because I'm not. But I've slowed down quite a bit.

Music is a lot of hard work, as far as I'm concerned. I've been doing this for seventeen years now and I've worked in dumps and in Louisiana bars where I saw a guy get stabbed and I played "Gloria" thirteen times for some goddamn fraternity at the University of Texas and I've played clubs in the goddamn Valley and in Northridge and I've been criticized and maligned and misunderstood and this is a twenty-four-hour-a-day job, ya know. This is not something you leave at the office. This is something I take around with me all the time. Every minute I'm awake, even when I'm asleep, I'm worried about the next album and what's going to be written on it and how it's going to do and how it's going to be accepted and how my peers are going to react and how we're going to make it better than the last one and how the record company is on our case about hurry-up-we-didn't-get-an-album-from-you-in-1978-and-it's-not-going-to-look-good-on-our-stock-report-and-what-about-the-profit-sharing-plan. Shit like that. I get a little self-righteous sometimes about the whole thing.

LOOKS LIKE YOU HAD A party," says the hotel manager, shell-shocked and knee-deep in Third Encore wreckage the morning after.

"You know we're going to pay for everything," grins Tommy "Life Is One Fuckin' Thing after Another" Nixon, who first got to know Henley on the Texas frat circuit. As road manager, Nixon has thrived after a string of casualties to the Fast Lane, but then, the Fast Lane isn't as fast these days. Serious hotel wrecking is pretty rare now, compared with many major acts and their own past. "It musta been someone else's roadies," he shrugs.

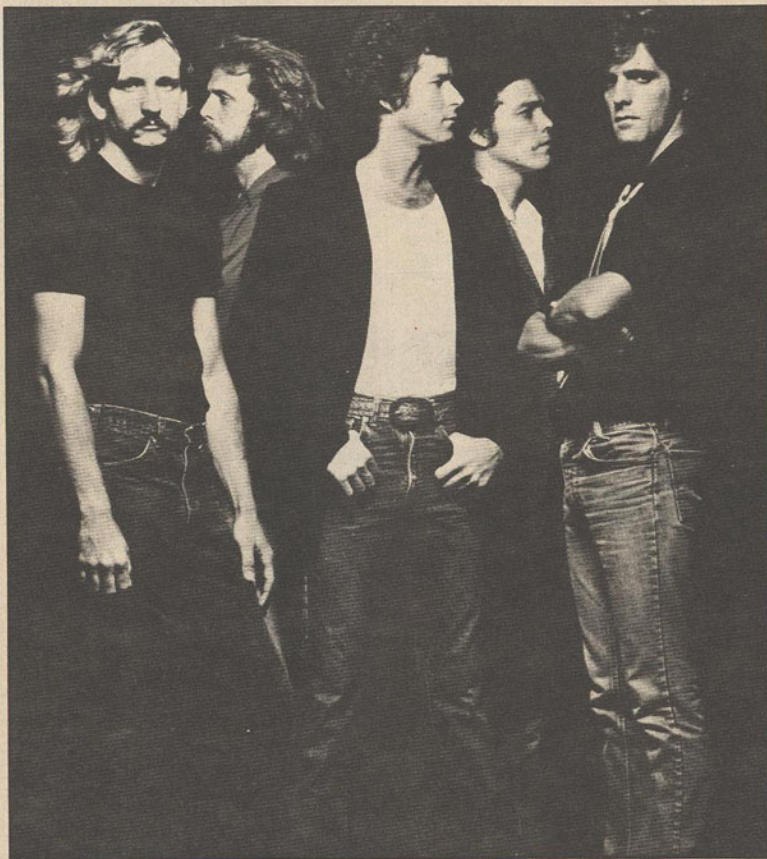
"We had to close the pool," says the hotel manager, glancing at a painting of some sixteenth-century nobleman, on whose face Joe Walsh has scratched, PARTY TIL YA PUKE.

Nixon walks to the balcony and peers down thirty stories at the rubble under the sparkling blue water from the bottles and furniture heaved over the edge a few hours before.

"Well you should," says Nixon. "It's filthy."

ONCE TOLD GLENN HE REMINDS me of a rattlesnake," says Nellie Frey, whose laugh can kill water buffalo at only about a hundred yards, but she is obviously enough the source of the Megadeath Guffaw Chromosome that determines her son's reaction to humor. "A rattlesnake coiled up in the corner ready to strike. If you pass by, you better listen for the rattle. Glenn loves that description. He has the courage to carry through his beliefs. It may be ruthless, but in his business, you can't be a nice guy or you end up like Joe Louis."

Like Henley, Frey was one of the smallest guys in his class. Unlike Henley, he became something of an athletic star in spite of his size, excelling at Little League baseball and football, wrestling in the ninety-five-pound weight



(FROM LEFT): JOE WALSH, DON FELDER, DON HENLEY, TIMOTHY SCHMIT AND GLENN FREY

class in early high school. And anything he lacked in ability, he made up for in mouthing off.

He spent junior high in an experimental, unstructured class for gifted students and became a classic example of the success and failure of those programs. Left to his own devices, he pursued a passionate interest in reading and writing at the expense of everything else. Encouraged by his teachers to argue, he developed an independent mind. Hence, he was wholly unprepared for high school, where teachers with half his IQ just didn't make it after he'd read Jack Kerouac and seen James Dean. Even athletics couldn't hold him when he got his driver's license and was liberated to pursue the two truly abiding interests in his life: rock & roll and females, in that order.

Following graduation in 1966, Nellie wanted to send her son away to college. Glenn wanted to stay in the Detroit area and play music. They compromised at community college near home. She would not, however, leave it at that. Like Hughlene Henley, Nellie Frey had a taste for conspiracy.

"I went to his manager, Punch Andrews [also Bob Seger's manager], and asked him not to give Glenn any bookings unless he got good grades and stopped smoking marijuana," she remembers. "Glenn finally just told us to kiss off and packed up for California. 'Good luck,' I said. 'I can't give you anything now but love.'"

THE WOOD PANELING OF the control room of Bayshore Recording Studio in Coconut Grove, a Miami suburb, is covered with "cut-outs"—clippings from magazines and newspapers. The captions have been rewritten in the Eagles' private language and refer to sexual habits, bad football bets, favorite drugs, national ancestry, musical tastes—nearly any idiosyncrasy they can seize on. Today the most prominent cutout is a Pepto Bismol ad recaptioned to read in big black letters, **DON GUANO SEZ: DIARRHEA IS NO LAUGHING MATTER!**—Guano being one of Henley's many nicknames.

"Your ulcer acting up?" I ask. "Yeah, but this is a good sign," he says, munching on a couple of Mylanta II tablets. "Its last appearance was at the very beginning of *Hotel California*. I estimate we're sixty percent done with this album."

Henley returns to his legal pad and adds some flourishes to the architectural diagrams he and Frey use to keep all the tracks straight. He decides he wants to hear 1-8-13-13-4 in combination for a particular line in "Please Come Home for Christmas," a seasonal single they are offering to Elektra/Asylum in lieu of the unfinished album. Bill Szymczyk, the Eagles' producer, punches "Otto," an Artoo-Detoo-like creature of flashing buttons and digital readouts that controls the master tape, and we hear the line for about the fiftieth time that evening.

Being present at creation with an important band makes a person feel immensely privileged, because if there is anything sacred on earth, it is the artistic process. At the same time, it is so excruciatingly boring that sitting through it becomes a challenge to my masculinity. "I can absorb as much tedium as these guys," I think, but not being an Eagle, I can't. I end up alternating hours in the control room with hours in the rec room, playing darts and trading insults with the equally bored but always efficient road crew. Actually, the Eagles can't take it either. They alternate months in the studio in Miami with months at home in L.A. to polish the writing.

Cut off from any light, sound or people from the outside world, the studio is as inner as a sanitarium can get. Actually, it is impossible for a layman to decipher, because you literally cannot hear what the musicians are hearing. Someone sings the same three syllables over fifteen times—identically, for all you can tell—and then they all listen, leaving you mystified, with notebooks full of comments like, "Give me a little more Rodney in the phones."

Extremely puritanical about the use of any mind-altering substances before a show on the road, the Eagles in the studio play their brains as they play their instruments; they use whatever they need to get the proper effect. "Well," the internal logic seems to go, "I need some energy so I'll drink some Coke for a sugar rush.... That was too much of an edge,



FREY'S MOM: 'GLENN TOLD US TO KISS OFF AND PACKED UP FOR CALIFORNIA.'

so I'll smoke a jay and eat two cheeseburgers and digest for a while.... This is rock & roll! What I really need is a libido charge! Where's that copy of *Hustler*?...Gotta relax for this vocal. I'll drink some tea with lemon.... Hell, it's 4:30 a.m. Nobody expects me to complete my sentences, so I'll do some serious boozing."

One of the legends of Bayshore concerns the night that Henley wrote a long memo to the maid to complain about the toilet paper coming off the bottom instead of the top of the roll (if it were meant to come off the bottom and unroll all over the floor, Henley figured, the little pink flowers would have been printed on the underside of the sheets).

"It was a joke," he says, when I ask about the incident. "But don't you think it *should* come off the top?"

HIS FIRST DAY IN LOS ANGELES, Glenn Frey met his girlfriend's sister's boyfriend, a skinny Texan named J.D. Souther. They hit it off and founded the then unnoticed, now lamented Longbranch Pennywhistle, an acoustic duo that recorded for Amos Records. Amos was not a happening company, so the two spent a lot of time scheming and drinking at the Troubadour nightclub. The real action, they could see, was at Asylum, a new label run by the boy wonder David Geffen, who was assembling an amazing roster of talent almost from scratch: Joni Mitchell, Jackson Browne, Linda Ronstadt, Tom Waits, among others. Geffen was interested only in Souther as a solo, however, so Frey was left to find a band.

When the opportunity arose to back Linda Ronstadt on tour, Frey remembered another Texan—this one so shy and pent-up that he could hardly talk—named Don Henley, whom he had seen around Amos and talked to briefly at the Troubadour. He offered Henley the spot drumming for Ronstadt. Henley agonized over leaving his childhood friends in Shiloh but finally opted for Frey and regular money. The chemistry clicked immediately, and the two were soon plotting their own band. They looked no further than the rest of Ronstadt's backup group and found Bernie Leadon, an excellent bluegrass picker not wholly comfortable with rock & roll, and Randy Meisner, the highest-singing bass player around. It became clear the group had a sound but no direction. After the third rehearsal, Henley turned to Frey as they were driving home and declared,

"You and me are going to have to run things." Naturally, they didn't inform Leadon or Meisner of the decision.

It was hell from the start. Leadon and Meisner both resented the united front of Henley and Frey but couldn't get together in their opposition. Hardly a day passed that someone wasn't sulking. They called themselves the Eagles, which pleased Frey because he thought it sounded like a street gang. Born of Henley's torment and Frey's ambition, the Eagles released their first single on May 1st, 1972; it was a song destined to become a classic of soft rock, the immortal milestone of mellow: "Take It Easy."

"We called them the odd couple in those days, particularly when they were living in the same house," recalls Jackson Browne, coauthor of "Take It Easy." "Glenn always went around messing things up, and Don always followed him around cleaning things up."

Encouraged by Frey, Souther and Browne, Henley gained confidence and flowered in his writing and singing. He and Frey were at the same time chasing women as compulsively as they were pursuing success. The result was a series of albums unsurpassed for sheer aural beauty and a collection of lyrics that did a brutal job depicting the walking wounded from the great sexual wars of this decade. They sang of self-imposed psychological prisons, of regret for making all the wrong choices as one gets older, of vengeance against rejecting lovers, of the inability to hide yer lyn' eyes in the bleak aftermath. The album artwork had one recurring theme—death: a scarlet cactus flower surrounded by thorns on the sleeve of *Eagles* (1972), the band as slain outlaws in the gutter on *Desperado* (1973), an eagle flying off with a snake in its beak on *On the Border* (1974), a cow skull on *One of These Nights* (1975), an eagle skull on *Eagles: Their Greatest Hits 1971-1975* and a culture dying of sleaze on *Hotel California* (1976). The band's photographs revealed its basic schizophrenia: Henley and Frey glared at the camera; Meisner and Leadon, unable or unwilling to go along with the concept, generally did not.

Critical reaction was equally split. Some writers saw the Eagles as a new version of the Beach Boys singing the praises of California hedonism. Others saw them as ersatz cowboys and viciously sexist for the enormous anger in their lyrics. Still others found them sharp social analysts who made their conclusions palatable with harmonies. Whatever, the Eagles' records sold phenomenally well, 25 million to date, with 11 million on *Hotel California* alone. And they wrote a song that contributed a catch phrase to the language: "Life in the Fast Lane."

Turmoil within the band got worse. Unable to get along musically or personally, they parted ways with Glyn Johns, producer of their first two albums, during the making of *On the Border*. Disliking the Eagles' turn to harder rock & roll, Leadon split in 1975. Wanting to spend more time with his family, Meisner left in 1977. Both released barely noticed solo albums and disappeared into the bowels of Topanga Canyon and Nebraska, respectively. Meisner, who is keeping quiet about the Eagles these days, recently signed a contract with Portrait. Leadon is surfing and recording demo tapes.

"I kept asking, 'Are we going to rest next month?' and we never did," recalls Leadon of his days with the band. "I wanted to get in shape before the age of thirty so I would have a chance at the rest of my life. I was afraid something inside me was dying. Leaving was an act of survival."

I WAS BLOWN AWAY THAT A great band like the Eagles would ask me to join," recalls Don "Fingers" Felder, who bears the distinction of being the least-known Eagle, during a break at Bayshore. "This is terrific," I was thinking, and then I got to the studio for *On the Border*. Bernie was bouncing off the wall, and Randy was threatening to quit every week. I thought, 'What have I done? I just joined a band that's breaking up!' It was like walking around with a keg of dynamite on your back with the fuse lit, but you don't know how long the fuse is."

Like the Allman Brothers, Tom Petty, Stephen Stills and Bernie Leadon, Felder is a product of the Northern Florida music scene. Graduated from high school in Gainesville in



WALSH: 'I'M GOING TO BE THE FIRST PERSON TO PUT A CHIPMUNK INTO ORBIT!'

1965, he gigged around town for a while and finally joined a jazz band, Flow, which recorded one album for CTI. After learning record production in New York and Boston, he moved to L.A. and took a job backing up David Blue (yet another client of David Geffen's), and later Crosby and Nash. He played one guest session for the Eagles on "Good Day in Hell," and they asked him to join the next day. Over the years he's contributed some of the Eagles' best licks: the haunting bass line of "One of These Nights," and the guitar progressions and some of the solos on "Hotel California" and "Victim of Love," among others.

"I enjoy being anonymous," he says. "I spend my spare time with my wife and three kids. Don and Glenn have no anchors like that, and they handle being rock stars well. Everybody in the band is a different piece of the puzzle. I'm a musical catalyst. I can't worry or be political, so back when Randy quit and everything was real insecure, I just recorded a lot of tracks in my home studio and gave Glenn and Don each a ninety-minute cassette to work with. No vocals, just music, because they sometimes need a scene to paint their lyrics on. That was the start of this album. I see myself as an offensive lineman who has to take out the middle linebacker so Don and Glenn can make the big play."

"Making an album can be real boring and sterile, but it's wonderful when you can find a new sound. Remember how you felt when you first heard Ringo's tom-toms on *Revolver*? Or Keith Richards' fuzz tone on 'Satisfaction'? When there's nothing to do in the control room, Joe and I burn out amps and destroy equipment to discover new sounds. That's our pastime."

IT HAS BEEN NEARLY FIFTEEN months since the Eagles cut the first track ("I Can Tell You Why" on March 9th, 1978) of the new album. Down the hall at One Step Up Recording in Los Angeles, Don Henley has spent the last five hours overdubbing some thumps from a big bass drum on the rhythm track of "Heartache Tonight," thus ascending new and heretofore unsuspected pinnacles of craftsmanly tedium. I am playing Risk, a board game of world conquest, with the drunken road crew. Joe Walsh is discussing his new, six-foot, three-stage rocket.

"I'm going to be the first person to put a chipmunk into orbit," he explains. "Too bad it's too late to train him to save Skylab."

"What kind of fuel do you use?" I ask, launching a blitzkrieg against North Africa. Tommy Nix, a master of subtle Texas humor, threatens to throw off my head and shit in my neck.

"It's solid fuel with a built fuse," says Walsh. "You buy it in rocket stores. It's also great for launching telephones and lamps off hotel balconies."

As bored with bass-drum thumps as the rest of us, Walsh takes off on a busman's holiday to help a friend, drummer Joe Vitale, on his solo album. Henley and Frey emerge from the control room a little before midnight (six hours early by their standards) and announce it is monster time. To monster, in Eaglese, is to ingest mind-altering substances and behave like a beast. The Eagles measure monsterdom in quarters, as in, "I was only three-quarters monstered last night." A combination of bass-drum thumps and long-neck Budweisers (short-necks don't make it) have already pushed Henley and Frey to the half-monster mark. It is decided we will go to the Troubadour, where they haven't been in five years, for some heavy-duty reminiscing.

"Look at that: the buns of doom," says Frey, ogling an attractive female walking down Santa Monica outside the club. "Ya know, the great thing about being thirty is there are so many more available women. The young ones look younger and the old ones don't look nearly as old."

Inside we take a table in the corner next to Little Fear's Paul Barrère, alone, silent, holding a private wake for Lowell George, whose death from a drug overdose was announced this morning. "I saw Joplin in here about three days before she died," says Henley. "She looked like a wounded animal. She was another one who wanted real bad to show the people back home."

with armadillos. They square off briefly, but the punk slinks away when he sees Frey and me.

We drive to Henley's mansion and become full monsters until the next afternoon, commiserating that it is pointless to spend all this time making a record when vinyl is so lousy that your music ends up sounding as if it were being played under a bowl of Rice Krispies.

YEAH, WE HURT WHEN WE didn't get an Eagles album last year," admits Joe Smith, chairman of the board of Elektra/Asylum Records. "You fall \$15 million short in your projections, you hurt. We all need that record now, but there's no guarantee how it will do. The business is soft these days. A lot of new bands have come out since the Eagles last released an album. I am very curious to see how deep this album will penetrate."

"What's it like dealing with Irving Azoff?" I ask. "He seems to have this morality right out of *Beowulf*, where you are loyal to your own people and fuck everybody else. A lot of rock managers don't even know enough not to fuck their own clients."

"I don't think this business should be run on the basis of everyone fucking each other," says Smith. "Irving, along with some other successful managers, uses terror and high volume to achieve his goals. It's not unusual and oftentimes very effective. He makes it work well and therefore it works for his clients. He's a dedicated personal manager and our relationship is excellent."

WHEN TIMOTHY B. SCHMIT joined the Eagles in 1977, his first nickname was Woodstock (after the festival, not the bird). His long, black hair and gentle manner indeed seem an ancient throwback to the region of the hippie, but appearances are deceiving, as I discovered when ROLLING STONE played the Eagles in a softball game last year. Schmit was first up and I figured, "Easy out," and he hit a line drive so hard it took off the third baseman's glove.

"I feel real blessed," says Schmit, sitting on the carpet in the living room of his enormous rented house in L.A. "I've never done anything but what I love to do to make money. I've never been a box boy or a waiter, just a musician. Now I could become independently wealthy soon. The Eagles could have offered me a salary and kept me out of the corporation, but that's not the way they wanted to do it. Nobody in the Eagles is any bigger or smaller financially, excluding the publishing, because that varies according to who wrote the song. On everything else, I was offered one-fifth of the pie. It's an incredibly smooth-operating band now, the closest to a band I've ever worked with. We have a good time without any major arguments."

Schmit is very much his father's son. He spent his first ten years living in a trailer, following his dad from town to town, where the man would play violin and stand-up bass at night in small clubs and sell vacuum cleaners during the day. The family finally settled down in Sacramento, where the elder

Reminiscing proves to be difficult because of the decibel level of the Rubber City Rebels, an Akron band doing—is it possible?—oldies from the Golden Age of Punk.

"In '72, the punks had long hair and wore cowboy boots," yells Henley over the Rebel's version of "Sonic Reducer" by the Dead Boys.

"They don't look so tough. They look like dorks," shouts Frey over "God Save the Queen" by the Sex Pistols.

Henley throws down a couple more beers and makes a game attempt at nostalgia. "The first time I saw Linda Ronstadt, she was standing right there, scratching her ass," he says, but something else is obviously fevering his brow. He drains another brew and announces, "I think any Flying Burrito Brother could whip any Rubber City Rebel."

When the set ends, Henley strides over to one of the spiky-haired Rebels. I can hear only bits of the conversation, but Henley appears to be implying rather strongly that punks are less than masculine, can't sing harmony, don't care we're all dying of radiation leakage, and their mothers do it

ALREADY GONE: EAGLES, 1972 (FROM LEFT): HENLEY, LEADON, MEISNER, FREY



Schmit became a full-time musician and worked the same club for twelve years. Son Timmy started playing bass and singing lead for the New Breed ("Green-Eyed Woman") in 1964 and got hooked on performing. Renamed Glad by ABC Records, they recorded one album in 1968 but were making no money. Richie Furay invited Schmit to try out for Poco, and feeling guilty about leaving his boyhood friends, he came to a couple of practices. Schmit lost out, however, to this other high-singing bass player named Randy Meisner. A year later, Meisner quit. Eighteen credits shorts of a degree in psychology, Schmit dropped out of college and replaced Meisner. Poco became one of the more intriguing mysteries of modern music. They were great but never had a hit until this year. When Glenn Frey called with a gig for a high-singing bass player—Glenn Frey, who used to open for Poco when he was in Longbranch Pennywhistle—Schmit was ready to move.

"My father was so proud that I was following in his footsteps," says Schmit. "I remember one night before a concert in high school I was all dressed up like a Beatle, and he could see I was gonna go for it. I gotta tell you two things," he said. "The first is: don't get upset by press criticism—the only thing that matters is that you're important enough to be written about. The second is: never trust anyone in the business."

IRVING AZOFF SHOUTS INSULTS into his phone at Front Line Management for a few minutes and finally hangs up after a successful "kill."

"I never fucked a record company," he says. "I light a fire under them to do the job the Eagles deserve. Elektra is no longer the small family it once was. Sometimes the guy who yells the loudest gets the best job done. I enjoy doing business with Joe [Smith], but he's not the guy who carries the album to a radio station in Charlotte, North Carolina. There's a method behind our madness in dealing with record companies. It's all preplanned."

"There's a lot of outright fraud in the music business—ticket scalping for example. If you have a \$200,000 gross at the L.A. Forum, I would guess that about \$400,000 changes hands. At the Eagles' next date there, we are considering selling the thousand best seats direct to the scalpers for twenty dollars apiece and giving the extra \$9.50 a seat to charity. I've tried everything else to beat them."

Azoff is legendary for his flamboyant bargaining techniques. He admitted in a *ROLLING STONE* profile (RS 267) that he occasionally lies, describing it as "tinting" and "negotiating theatrics." I ask him to elaborate on when he feels dishonesty is okay.

"It's permissible to lie to the press, but not to your clients," he says. "With all the big acts in the sweepstakes to see who can make reporters believe the most outrageous lie about their sales figures and concert attendance, why should I tell the truth if it makes us look like schmucks in comparison to a liar? I lie only to correct the perspective. What am I supposed to do? Go to 8000 people in entertainment and say, 'Be honest'? There are more important causes in the world. I didn't write the rules. I just live by them."

GLENN FREY SLOUCHES IN AN armchair in the \$2300-a-week mansion serving as the Eagles' Miami headquarters during their recording. Nicknamed "Roach" for his love of marijuana, Frey is smoking a joint. Also nicknamed "Sporticus" for his obsession with football and hockey, he is surrounded by sports pages from a dozen cities around the country to aid in his betting. His accent and intonations are exactly the same as Jack Nicholson's.

Was 'Hotel California' anticocaine?

It was anti-excess cocaine. We haven't always practiced everything in moderation, but we were figuring out the slow burn, the long run. If you use cocaine like the Indians use it—when you have to, but not all the time—you don't get toxic. I thank God I have enough close friends who would tell me if I were messing up my life. Thank God for the love and support I've received from them. But if there's a night to party, like tonight, you go right afuckinhead.

It's 5:30 right now.

I could care either. I still feel lucid. Ask some questions. I got a lot of truth serum in me.

What's it like writing with Henley?

It's hard to be friends when every time you're together, you're expected to come up with something brilliant. There are no innocent dinners. Sometimes I'm real active, and sometimes I'm just the guy who holds the fan in the emperor's court. It sounds weird, but he's my longest successful romance—almost eight years now. The trick is to be able to disagree and go on. We've tried writing with other guys, but the only one who's worked out is J.D. I get a lot of satisfaction from having conspirators. It's great to go to your buddies after the song's a hit and say, "We didn't know it, but we knew it, didn't we?"

I count three songs—"Witchy Woman," "Good Day in Hell" and "One of These Nights"—where the Eagles equate women with the Devil. Has your perception of women changed over the years?

I constantly ask myself what I think of women. Lately I've been feeling less physical. I'm through my playmate period, ya know, where you meet a real pretty girl and immediately attach all these great qualities to her. But women are objects for men, whether or not sex objects. They're a goal—that's the way we're brought up. Maybe there's something

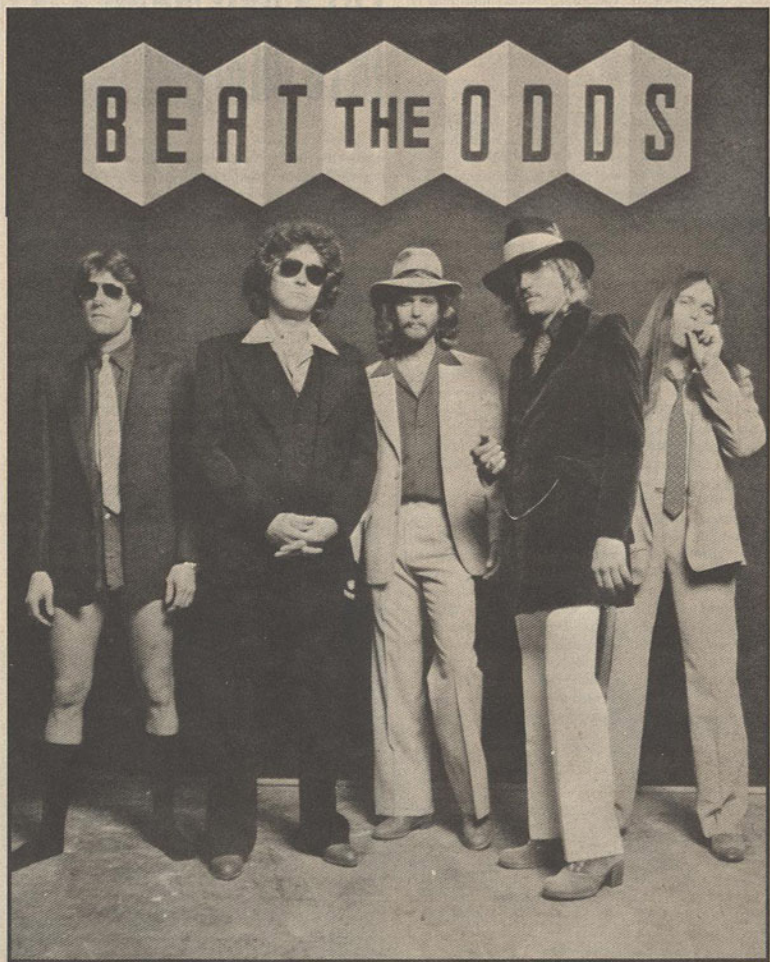
wrong with that. The Devil imagery was just a way of describing a seductive look.

But the Devil is evil. Aren't you equating sex with evil?

Yeah, well, we're speaking to America.

HAVE YOU EVER FALLEN IN love with a woman who wasn't incredibly beautiful?" I ask Henley as we drive to his home in the Hollywood hills in his BMW sedan. Actually, "home" is not the word for his historically accurate hacienda, worthy of a tasteful conquistador with about 20,000 Aztec slaves at his command (he also owns estates in Malibu and Aspen). "Sometimes sexual relationships are a commodity exchange—my status for your beauty."

"No, I haven't," says Henley, negotiating a hairpin turn. Both he and Frey have discovered the joys of monogamy in the past year—Henley with actress Lois Chiles and Frey with a woman from New Mexico. "But that's because I like beauty. I like beautiful women. I like beautiful cars. I like beautiful trees. I like beautiful landscapes. It's not a sin to appreciate beauty, but that isn't enough. I want someone with some fuckin' brains, too. If you can get the whole thing, why not go for it? It wasn't a commodity exchange with Lois. She didn't even know who I was when I met her."



Henley has insisted in the past that the characters in his songs, while drawn from his experience, are composites. I insist that I get a strong sense of personal vengeance from "You Never Cry Like a Lover" from *On the Border* back in 1974.

"J.D. started that song. I just wrote some of the verses," he says. "Well, I guess my part of the song was pretty specific. I don't know who he had in mind."

"It's one of the angriest songs I've heard this side of Johnny Rotten," I say.

"Really?" Henley exclaims. "I thought it was sympathetic—at the end there where it says somebody must have put some pain on her because she can't cry."

"But it's so bitter about her not being able to respond."

"It's about repressed emotions."

"It's about frigidity."

"I never thought of it as being about frigidity," Henley insists. "Crying is not sexual."

"Where you sing that she can't 'sigh-ay-yay' when it feels real good—that's not about sex?"

"Oh yeah, that part," says Henley. "She just didn't want to do it with the lights on."

"Does she know it's about her?"

"I don't know. I never asked her."

We drive on in silence for a moment until Henley suddenly guns his BMW through a stop sign, swerves and narrowly misses a honking Mercedes coming into the T intersection.

"Uh, Don," I say. "Not to criticize your driving or anything, but I think the other guy had the right of way. That was a stop sign."

"I know," he replies. "I drive this road all the time."

Pause.

"You make a habit of ignoring stop signs?"


"Only that one. The sign used to be facing the other direction until they used the other road for a detour and it got busier. I was using this road first, without the stop sign." Henley smiles grimly. "That car had no right to be there."

WICKNAMED 'PRINCE

Roving Hand" for his habit of goosing the other Eagles. Joe Walsh joined the band after Leadon's departure. To outsiders, he seemed an odd choice, personally and musically, but the Eagles knew what they were doing. Azzoff had managed Walsh since just before his second solo album, *The Smoker You Drink, the Player You Get*, in 1973. He had jammed with the Eagles at several concerts and they, in turn, had sung backup on four songs on Walsh's *So What*. When Henley and Frey wanted a harder sound, they figured Walsh, with his heavy-metal roots, was the only guy who could go fifteen rounds with Don Felder. But over the years, he has carved out an equally important role as court jester. In the guise of Metalhead, a grotesque character with features of molded aluminum foil, Walsh periodically terrorizes parties and fancy restaurants. He is so efficient at wrecking hotel rooms that he carries his own chain saw (a Christmas gift from Azzoff) on the road, though he claims he hasn't found the right occasion to use it. Yet where Henley's eyes are windows to a haunted house and Frey's eyes kilns of ambition, Walsh's eyes are opaquely sad.

"Joe is the hardest person I ever met to feel like you're close to," says Bill Szymczyk, who discovered Walsh for ABC Records in 1970 when Walsh was gigging around Ohio with the James Gang. When the Eagles were unhappy with the soft sounds that Glyn Johns was getting for the first version of *On the Border*, Azzoff played them a tape of *The Smoker You Drink*. They hired him immediately for the rerecording. Also known as "Coach" and "the Monster Superior," Szymczyk remains so highly regarded by the Eagles that they commute to Miami ("Steam City") to work with him. "People erect walls between themselves and the world," Szymczyk continues. "Then depending on how the chemistry works between them and their friends, the walls come down. Joe uses his humor to keep them in place. There's been a lot of chaos in his life that he doesn't want people to be aware of. I know him better than anyone, and I don't know him."

Right now, in his L.A. hotel room (he lives up the coast



IT'S TIME NOW TO RETURN TO THE 'DECADENCE FESTIVAL' OF THE ROAD, AS FREY TERMS IT.

in Santa Barbara), Walsh is in a thoughtful mood and says he doesn't want to look like an idiot again in the press. He is running for president these days on a platform of "Free Gas for Everybody," but eventually wants to get into some serious issues to express his disgust with current politicians. He has prepared an outline of the subjects he wants to cover and pretty much conducts the interview himself.

"I realized I didn't have to be paranoid of you the other night at dinner when you said in a serious way that you had noticed that kids were getting dumber. That's the first thing I want to talk about on my outline. Now when I was in high school in Montclair, New Jersey, I was triple naive. I didn't know anything about drugs or pussy, and I got along great with everybody. The only thing I was aware of was the Beatles. I'm glad that, because if they'd had drugs when I was in high school, I'd still be in high school."

"I got out in '65, and when my brother got out in '69, there was drugs all over the place. Chicks were getting knocked up. There was racial conflicts. That was just in four years, and it's getting worse. Kids are getting aware of shit earlier and earlier."

"All right. The next category on my list is how hard it is to be a solo artist. Before I joined the Eagles, I was the boss and everybody thought I knew what I was doing. No way. It completely fried every brain cell I had just to finish an album, and then I'd have to go on the road. I would tell the musicians that I wanted them to get off and back me up. They would want me to show them how to do everything, and then they'd go down the hall and talk about me because I'm the boss. It was overwhelming. It was not music. So that is why solo artists have a hard time. Or they are pricks."

"The last thing I'm gonna talk about is the dilemma of the contemporary artist in society. For the first time in history, the artist is realizing financial success in his lifetime. For instance, after Mozart died, they found his music and everyone went, 'Holy shit!' and they couldn't even find his grave. So then he gets his royalties. A lot of good it does him. But now artists are getting money when they're young. The Eagles are a good example of that. Bob Dylan, too. Dylan was so fuckin' heavy. Laid out all this shit, broke his neck and became a millionaire."

"I'm starting to feel guilty about all the money I make. I never did before because everybody fucked me out of the

money I had coming, and I'm immensely grateful to Irving, because I'm starting to get my share. But I'm also starting to feel guilty. You gotta suffer to create. Your suffering directly determines the quality of your statement. I wanna write symphonies, but I may be too rich at this point. How can you suffer when you've got all this money?"

HENLEY CALLS ME UP TO say they're going to finish the album, now definitely titled *The Long Run*, in a couple of days. I fly from New York to Miami to witness the historic moment. A week later, Henley is still fiddling with the last few syllables of "Disco Strangler." The roadies wander around with these weird stunned expressions, as if they have been struck from on high by bolts of boredom. There are no cutouts on the wall; only a few more boxes of antacids have been added to the decor. Groaning with a hangover, Henley sits hunched over his legal pad on the soundboard in the control room.

"Let's finish this son of a bitch so I can go home and throw up some more," he says.

"Yeah," says Frey, "you had a couple of singing waterfalls today."

"Barking at ants," says Henley.

"The technicolor yawn," says Frey.

"Tune in tomorrow," modulates Timmy Schmit in the voice of an AM DJ. "Will Don Henley marry the board?"

"He lost his wife, he lost his children, he lost his home, he lost his car," Henley picks it up. "Tune in tomorrow to see if he can lose all hope."

Frey washes down a handful of vitamins with a gulp of Coca-Cola. "I HATE THIS SONG! I HATE THIS ALBUM! GOD HELP ME! I'M BUMMING!"

A lot of friends from Los Angeles and Miami have arrived for a promised playback party. At three a.m., with Henley, Frey and Szymczyk still hassling out the number of beats between songs on the record, the suspicion is strong that the party is not a happening thing.

"I'm tired and I'm rich and I can do what I want," says Azzoff. "I'm going home to sleep."

"If I can stay up," says Henley, "you can stay up."

"Yeah, but you're tougher than I am," says Azzoff.

"You can stay up," says Henley.

Azzoff stays up.

At 5:46 a.m., September 1st, 1979, they make the announcement: *The Long Run* is complete. The bleary-eyed guests file into the control room to hear it in final form for the first time.

Parts of it I have heard not at all, other parts I have heard so often they are permanently engraved on my brain. Strange, almost mystical, to hear it in one piece. The album amounts to a long meditation on survival sung over a symphony of different guitar sounds. The Eagles aren't the first rock & roll artists to look around and figure out, "Hey, I'm alive and he's dead. I must be special," and then be overwhelmed with triumph ("The Long Run" opening the album) and guilt ("The Sad Cafe" closing it). But they do say it is the best. There are, after all, no new themes, only different amp settings to play them through. Ancient ghosts from Henley's past keep popping out of the speakers. "We thought we could change this world/With words like love and freedom," Henley sings in "The Sad Cafe," a reminiscence of his early days at the Troubadour. I have to smile, wondering if he ever believed that, seeing a ghost of my own night at the Troubadour when he almost trashed a punk. "Now I look at the years gone by/And wonder at the powers that be/I don't know why fortune smiles on some/And lets the rest go free."

Bone tired, the Eagles accept everyone's congratulations. It is not a moment of victory. They are just relieved to have it over. Time now to return to the "decadence festival" of the road, as Frey terms it.

"So tell me, Don," I say. "Why do you want to survive?"

Henley ponders a moment. "I'd like to stick around for the Apocalypse," he says. "That's showbiz."