

Monsters of Rock

It was the summer of 1988, and there were many great days during that summer, but none more memorable than one hot day in June. Overhead the big blue sky was clear in all directions. And down below in the city of angels – the city held an all day music festival called the *Monsters of Rock*, which would be nostalgically remembered for the near-riot that almost brought down the house at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

On that day this historic national landmark, known locally as *The Coliseum*, acted as if it were a rock ‘n’ roll magnate. It drew in a record crowd of concertgoers from all over Southern California. Fortune rained down on only a chosen few who were blessed enough to hold tickets for this memorable event. But none more so than for two us, who had tickets, and who felt we earned our right to party at this immense arena.

Call us Cheech and Happi. We worked hard, which we felt made us worthy of belonging here. Concerts - moreover, rock 'n' roll concerts - were for us a rite of passage. This was our special day. It was our first open-air stadium concert. We both wore the appropriate attire for the day: concert t-shirts, shorts, and sandals. Not long ago, in my Jeep Cherokee, we finished smoking a fat jay (a big marijuana joint). It lifted our spirits. It was as if the weight of the world had risen off our shoulders; like drinking soma from the gods - we seemingly floated above the concrete sidewalk, and coasted towards *The Coliseum*. This was a big event and concertgoers were everywhere. Around us, trotting towards the colossal venue, were gorgeous girls in their short shorts. I made it a point (if not a goal), that before the end of the show, to at least talk to one of these gorgeous girls.

But for now we were content to follow the crowd, which led us to *The Coliseum* entrance. And almost immediately, Happi wanted to get in line. I, however, sensed something amiss and asked my cousin to wait. I had this intuition; it was something I couldn't easily explain, but I believed it helped me in my journey through life. So we moved off to the side and paused for a few moments. We waited and people watched.

And for a while nothing happened. But then, from behind the crowd, we heard a commotion. It was a group of kids, young skinny scruffy-looking teens, about six of them in all. Strangely, these kids decided to disregard all forms of society norms and began to bulldoze past everyone. I had seen mayhem at concerts before but not like this. Not to this level. Unbelievably, these unruly kids completely ignored everyone's complaints and continued to cave-man their way to the front: they clawed, pushed, and shoved their way to the gate. Security attempted to stop these delinquents from getting in, but they ignored their commands to stop. Two of them even scrambled past security and ran onto *The*

Coliseum grounds; the guards chased them in pursuit. Thankfully, not all made it through: four were caught at the gate. Two complied with security and didn't put a fight. The other two, however, did put up a fight; some of the guards struggled to man-handle them. I could tell these kids were on something. And for a moment it seemed these two berserkers might also break through. That was until a tall police officer stepped in and clubbed the two degenerates on the head. I thought that'll knock some sense into them. The crowd, however, didn't like it - they booed the cop.

I didn't know what to expect next. Were police going to cordon off the area and ask the fans to use another entrance? I feared the worst. "What a tragic scene. We're not in yet, and these juvenile delinquents are getting their heads thumped," I said, and cocked an eye at my cousin.

Happi, who wore dark shades, had long curly hair, smiled and said, "That's rock 'n' roll for you, baby."

The police cuffed two kids; hog tied the other two punks, and removed all of them from the area.

I saw an opportunity to take advantage of the situation. I noticed those in line had backed away from the scuffle; it wasn't much but it was enough for us to position ourselves in front of everybody. The crowd reacted to the scuffle like an accordion - the crowd stepped back to where we stood - and then we moved ahead of the crowd when they decided to press back to the gate. I welcomed the scuffle and thanked my intuition. There was a cute teenage couple who noticed us jump in line, they smiled and didn't say anything. I thought no harm no foul. After this opportune moment we quickly moved to the gate.

We redeemed our tickets and crossed in. Inside, I ogled female eye candy everywhere. Happi, however, had other things on his mind; he motioned to a food shack and mentioned that he was “parched.” We went over to wait in line at the food shack.

At the line I felt stillness in the air. Where’s that cool breeze we had a minute ago? I was getting hot. But not everybody was burning up. I watched fans ramble over to an area, not far from us, with their hand-held (water) mist blowers; some of them even carried mini-fans. They showered each others faces with mists of water, which to me must be the coldest water this side of Las Vegas. I desperately wanted one of them, any of them, to spray water our way; or at the very least, blow air this way. They’re so close yet so far away.

Close to me a female voice yelled, “Hello, how about some water over here?” And without giving attention to who yelled, I followed suit, “Yeah, how about some water over here?” We eyed each other. She was a young pretty girl, someone I’d call a *hottie*. She was ahead of me waiting in line with her friend. I tried my best line, or, rather, the first thing to come to mind.

“They’re being greedy with the water.” I said.

“Yes, they are.” She said.

With this kind of encouragement, I shouted above the crowd toward a tall young beauty, “You there, hit us with your water canon.” She heard me then sprayed all four of us with her water bottle. We were relieved, if just for a moment. We thanked her. Then she left down a corridor with her water friends.

I wiped water off my face and focused on the young pretty girl. I said, “That was nice of her.”

“Yes, it was.” She said and wiped water off her face.

“My name is Cheech.”

“Cheech?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, my name is Debbie.” She straightened her hair. “This is my friend Trish.”

“This is my friend Happi.” We shook hands with Debbie and Trish.

“Aren’t we full of delightful names?” Debbie said and smiled.

“This is how we roll.”

“This is how you roll. You guys are funny.”

I thought that one probably won’t win any pick-up line awards. A slight pause set in. We looked at each other. Maybe she said it out of courtesy; I began to doubt myself. Nevertheless, I pondered, be persistent; think of something probing, penetrating – profound. “Where are you guys from?”

“Venice. Where are you guys from?”

“Hawthorne.”

“Where?”

“Hawthorne, next to Redondo, Hermosa and Manhattan Beach,” I said.

“Oh, OK.”

She sounded like she understood, didn’t she? “Do you guys go to concerts a lot?” I asked. I’m an idiot; you’re killing yourself, stop referring to them as “guys” and focus. Maybe her response won’t be so bad.

Unfortunately, by now these girls had reached the front of the line and the register lady was asking them what they wanted. Debbie and Trish excused themselves to

converse about what to get. Happi, nudged me to let me know he wanted in on the action. I nodded. Meanwhile, I pondered on what else to say to Debbie (and maybe help out my cousin). Two birds with one stone, right? I snuck a peak at Debbie's friend, Trish; she's hot herself, how lucky can two guys get? The register lady handed the girls their soft drinks, and without a word to say to us, the girls walked away. I wanted to stare as they left but I didn't want to look like a creep, instead, I ordered two soft drinks: one for Happi and one for me. In a moment, our soft drinks appeared on the counter - we paid, walked away, and sucked on our straws – the taste was refreshing.

Debbie and Trish stood near a concession stand that sold concert items, sucking on their own straws. The girls could have kept walking but they didn't. Maybe they did want to continue our conversation, only one way to find out. We were nervous; nonetheless, we smiled and approached. Debbie and Trish whispered something to each other and returned our smiles.

“Where are you guys sitting?”

“We're over by gate four,” Debbie said. She pointed towards *The Coliseum*.

“We're over by gate eight. We'll walk you over to your seats.”

Debbie checked with Trish for approval; her face lit up in the affirmative. Debbie eyed me and said, “OK.”

“OK, lets go.” I thought so far so good.

Together, the four of us strolled around *The Coliseum* until we arrived at their tunnel gate. We proceeded through the tunnel. Inside *The Coliseum*, we stopped to marvel at the grandeur of the place. “Wow, this place is huge,” Debbie said. Facing west lay the enormous stage; it appeared placed over one of the end zones. Seats, tarps, and

black carpet covered the large field. Earlier in the day I'd heard someone announce, over the radio, that this show was a sell out. I gazed up at the nosebleed seats to watch a raven land at the very top seat; I thought fans will fill those seats too.

Debbie pointed to their seats. "After you," I said. Debbie mentioned how excited she was to be here; she had never been to a concert before and wasn't sure what to expect. We reassured her and Trish that this was going to be a good show, even though we weren't sure what to expect ourselves. They searched for their seats, found them, and sat down. We stood next to them, waiting to be asked to sit. The girls giggled. They quietly whispered something to each other. I read Happi's face; he appeared dethroned. An awkward and quiet moment ensued. So I did what I thought was best, I erred on the side of humility, and we excused ourselves.

On our way down, Happi scratched his head and said, "What happened, why didn't we stay?"

"Screw them. They didn't want us to stay and I'm not brutish enough to sit down uninvited."

"Fuck it; we should have sat down anyway."

"Forget them. We'll move on to the next set of girls."

"To shame, to shame. Those hotties were bodacious."

On our way through the tunnel we whizzed by a young couple making out like there was no tomorrow; we sighed and moved on. Once out of the tunnel we quickened our pace, keeping an eye out for what we felt deserved most of our attention - the shapely and the available.

We found much that pleased our eyes but we kept going, eventually finding our seats and sitting down. Just in time to hear the first band, Kingdom Come, take the stage. This band was dreadfully far away - so far away they might as well be ants. I was disappointed. They sounded fine but I couldn't see them. There's got to be something we can do. I spotted someone with binoculars. I wanted to go over to him and ask to borrow them to glass the stage. Unfortunately, this guy with the binoculars appeared affected with bipolar disorder type 1; he'd grit his teeth and made wry faces. I continued to look around. A row ahead of us sat someone else with a pair of binoculars. He seemed chill. But then he popped the cap off one of the lens and took a swig of what ever was inside them - he had snuck in a flask made to look like binoculars. Scratch that idea - what luck - and what happened to my intuition?

Not knowing what else to do, I sat and lowered my head. The disappointment now felt heavier. Disappointed we sat so far away, disappointed we couldn't see much of anything, and disappointed we didn't get to talk more with Debbie and Trish. It felt like a big letdown.

"This band sucks balls," Happi said. Then he spat on the ground.

I concurred. Then I remembered something. I reached into my pocket and brought out a jay. This cheered Happi up. But I realized I had a small problem; I left my lighter back in the car. Happi said, "I left mine back home." I took a gander. Next to me sat a stoner-looking-guy. I asked, "Do you have a light?" The stoner-looking-guy said, "Yes, indeedy." He lit our jay. I took a puff then offered the stoner-looking-guy a hit for his kindness. The guy puffed away and handed it back to me. I of course took another drag before passing it on to Happi. We continued to pass it around until there was nothing but

a roach. I put the roach away and relaxed in my chair. Happi did the same. We ignored the band and people watched. People watching had its merits: there were lots of young people here, most of them in their twenties but this included teenagers and a few older folk in their thirties and forties. But more importantly, were did all the hotties go? The band finished their set as I pondered this. A tinkle of fans applauded. Next on the list came the most anticipated group of the day - Metallica.

To say we were huge fans of Metallica was an understatement. It was my first time seeing them. This was our biggest reason for being here. The only thing missing were closer seats; goodness, I had a burning desire to get closer. Oh well, what could I do.

While we sat in our far away seats during the break, the tour roadies made their needed adjustments and preparations. And once they were done - Metallica took the stage. *The Coliseum* erupted! By now, this venue had filled to the brim with fans; masses of people - 91,000 of them were here at *The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum* for the Monsters of Rock festival. The promoter must have made a killing.

Metallica opened up with "Creeping Death," one of my favorite songs. We stood on their feet, everybody stood on their feet. This band was hot; they had the whole arena cheering wildly for them. The music was thunderous. We had turned the corner and stepped onto a higher rock 'n' roll plateau. I was elated. I raised my fist in the air; my eyes met a blonde female rocker in the crowd. The blonde female rocker saw me. She shook her fist in the air and joyfully screamed. The atmosphere in here was skyrocketed, and it would get even higher.

The music got louder. Was it me, or did someone turn up the dial on the amps? Thunder had made its presence; now lightning would strike.

At the far end of *The Coliseum* and near the stage – restless fans gathered. They had left their seats and steamrolled down the aisle to mass near the field. Their only separation from the field was a thin chain linked fence. And with covetous eyes they conspired to make their move. The security guards stood behind the chain link fence to hold the peace. But they were no match for this legion of rock ‘n’ roll fans. In a show of force unlike anything I have ever witnessed, before or since: this legion of rock ‘n’ roll fans pushed down the chain link fence, plowed over it, went through security like a mad horde and stormed the field. A roar rose from the crowd. It was the start of a fan inspired spontaneous combustion. I sensed it - the air had become electrified and it was contagious.

I panned my view and saw more fans streaming down another aisle. These fans were opposite of us, located somewhere around the 50 yard line. And given the inspiration from their fellow fans as to what can be done; they too pushed down their chain link fence and stormed the field. Again, a legion of fans rushed the field, and again the roar. Neither security nor police could stop them. It was bedlam. All the rules of order had gone out the door. In my bones, I sensed the electricity in the air was near.

I jabbed my cousin Happi and motioned to our aisle; both of us jumped into the fray. Quickly we began to make our way down the aisle steps. In front of us were eager fans rushing to the fence and behind us more fans pushed us to the inevitable. But in our way, and beyond the chain linked fence, stood two police officers guarding the field. One of the officers pulled out his aluminum baton, and for a moment I thought I was going to get clubbed by the LAPD. Fortunately, his partner saw the folly in this pre-meditated action - he grabbed his buddies arm and shook his head - letting him know there’s no way

to stop this legion of determined rock 'n' roll fans. In a heart beat, both police officers peeled rooster out of the scene. I thought dangerous is a horde massed with a deftness of purpose.

And then the inevitable happened - the top of the chain link fence folded down and the fans trampled over it like locusts - we followed their lead and hopped over it as well. Once more, the crowd roared. The sensation of it was such that I wondered if this is what soldiers feel when they storm a battlefield during war. To my right, a fluffy-size-guy (large and round) tripped and rolled onto the field. In my excitement, I laughed and pointed at him; the fluffy-size-guy returned the laugh and gave me the proud bird.

Grinning and laughing, we hurtled down the field. We had never rushed the field before; to us this felt awesome. Happi pulled on me to enter a row of seats; I shook his head and said, "Let's keep going." Farther we ran. It was then that I realized just how long this football field really was. Once more, Happi pulled on me to enter a row of seats. I responded, "Let's get closer." And as we got closer, I beheld in front of the stage, a mosh pit full of wild rock 'n' roll fans - there must have been ten thousand in there, which was too much for me. "Let's go in here," I said to Happi. We turned left and entered the last of the field chairs. I was surprised that no one was sitting in any of them. Did these fans rush the stage? No matter, we continued down the row of seats until we found two, which lined up with the center of the stage. I thought, excellent this will do.

Immediately, we took ownership of the two abandoned seats and stood on them; it was here, at field level, that all the fans stood on their seats, rockin' n' rollin.' Directly in front of us were only four rows of seats with fans jumping up and down on them. They were destroying them. The rows of seats, one after the other, were collapsing by the

onslaught of these crazed fans. I worried that we may have gotten too close and might lose our seats to rabid fans. I looked beyond these fans to see more mayhem: an enormous agitated, bristling, and seething sea of people; above them stood the stage with Metallica tearing it up.

A pause in the music allowed a wicked laugh to emanate from the lead singer, James Hetfield. The crowd roared back in response. The thunder music continued unabated. Around our cluster of seats, more streams of fans plowed in from the back and rushed forward. The next day, journalists wrote in the papers: “15,000 fans rushed the stage at *The Coliseum!*” There seemed no end to the mayhem.

But then, and without warning, the unthinkable happened - the music stopped. The promoter pulled the plug. The crowd booed. Happi gave the proud bird and yelled, “Fuck you.” I wondered, what’s going to happen now? I took in my surrounding. The crowd began to get quite and settle down. Toward the front, where the stage stood, a limp body was lifted above the crowd and moved over the security wall. It appeared to be women in a bikini top and shorts. Then, another limp and unconscious person, possibly another female, was handed over to security. In all, four people were lifted above the crowd, moved over the wall, and handed to security. What happened to these people? Did they get crushed by the force of the crowd? Were they were trampled?

After this, and maybe because of this, the crowd began to pick up fallen debris and broken chairs. They lifted them above their heads then paraded them forward, toward the security wall, which stood in front of the stage. Metal barriers were also lifted up and moved over the crowd’s heads; they were moved them toward the security wall, where

security personnel stood behind the wall to receive the fallen debris. I watched the spectacle in amazement.

Three of the band members sat on the drum platform, also taking stock of the spectacle. I could only wonder what Lars, Kirk, and Jason were saying to each other at that moment in time and point of space. Years later, I read somewhere that James Hetfield argued with the Promoter, behind the stage, not to shut down the event. The Promoter feared more destruction would ensue; James argued that shutting down the show would only inflame the situation and then things would really get out of control. In the end the lead singer got his way. Thank you James!

After a few minutes, James spoke into the microphone and ordered security off the stage. The crowd cheered. He said the band would be playing again in five minutes; they were in back in three. The crowd erupted! It was back to rockin' n' rollin' in the free world. The atmosphere in *The Coliseum* had mellowed, yet we were still elated. It wasn't long ago that we sat far away in miserable seats, but now through fortune and circumstance had great seats. We loved it. We were so close I could make out the faces of the band, even the whites of their eyes.

The thunder music continued to rumble and reverberate from the band. I waited for the mayhem to return but it didn't. Those that wanted to be closer to the action got it, and those that didn't stayed in their seats, and that was that. Eventually, Metallica finished their set. They received a loud and boisterous applause. Both the band and the crowd delivered a great performance.

And then it was over, it was break time. The tour roadies made preparations for the next band. I remembered I had things to do too; my goal for the day. I began

searching the masses for shapely female eye candy. Discouragement befell on me as I realized how hard this was going to be. Then it all changed. I riveted my attention on these two *hotties* who were walking down our row. These two girls appeared to be the same ones we escorted to their seats. The girls looked up and saw me, they smiled. I jabbed Happi. These are the same girls we met earlier. I wondered, what are the odds for this? Great, things are definitely looking up.

“Hey guys.” Again with this guy thing, what’s with me today?

“Hello.” Debbie said, in the most beautiful voice I thought I heard all day.

“You guys made it down here. Was that something or what?” I said, stepping off my chair as did Happi.

“Yes. I was scared.” Debbie said, straightening her hair. Trish agreed as well. I heard Happi concur with Trish.

“Nice to see you again.” I said, feeling my heart pound.

“Nice to see you again.”

“That was brave of you to run down the aisle like that.”

“I’ll be honest. That was the craziest thing I’ve ever done in my life. You only get to live once, so I grabbed Trish and said ‘let’s go.’ My first time at a concert and here I am rushing the stage.”

“You’re crazy.”

“You did the same.”

“Yeah, but we’re guys.”

“Girls can have fun too.”

“Just teasing.”

Our conversation continued with what we did and where we lived. Debbie explained to me that she went to Santa Monica College and lived at home with her parents; school was out and she wanted to do something exciting. I in turn told her that I installed carpet and that I too lived with my parents and liked going to concerts. But then the stage loudspeakers squealed to life, it interrupted our conversation.

Dokken was up and playing. They were a disappointment, nobody remembered them. Unfortunately for this band they had followed one hell of an act. Who was the promoter for this event, how could anyone put Metallica before Dokken? I didn't remember any of Dokken's songs. All that I remembered was that, every now and then, Debbie and I would steal looks at each other. I tried to talk to her, but we were too close to the stage, and it was deafening. Why won't this band finish already?

Eventually, they did finish. It was then that I got my chance to chat with Debbie again. Our bodies touched; goodness she had soft skin. I leaned in close to talk to her - her scent was like ambrosia, which aroused me even more. But before we knew it - intermission came and went - and the next band was up.

The Scorpions took the stage in a lightening and entertaining fashion. This band was a crowd favorite. All the fans stood up on their seats. Everybody loved the Scorpions; they we're killer. At the end of their set they too received a loud applause.

Debbie and I applauded and then held hands. I contemplated on what to do next. In between the bands we talked. To my surprise, and without asking, she gave me her number. I didn't have a pen or paper; thus I memorized it. It worked. We went out the following day.

Next, however, was the last band of the day - Van Halen. They put on a great show. Sammy Hagar went *loco* and climbed the stage scaffolding (used to support the lights and speakers). He must have gone up 100 feet above the crowd – that crazy red rocker. Their show ended to a thunderous applause from the crowd. The four of us (Cheech, Debbie, Happi, and Trish) exited *The Coliseum*. I noticed Trish and Happi also held hands. Debbie and Trish ended up giving us a ride to my Jeep Cherokee. When they dropped us off, I came over to Debbie's window (where she sat). I summoned up courage, pointed to my cheek and said, "Kiss." She did.

Then the girls drove away. And after the girls turned the corner, Happi and I triumphantly gave each other high fives. The two of us entered my Jeep, warmed up the engine, and jubilantly smoked our last jay. Then we drove towards the nearest freeway onramp to go home.

The End