



'We have a psychotic  
need to express ourselves  
with James. Someone  
asked me yesterday  
what's our drive? And I  
said personality  
disorders. We all suffer  
from personalities. I just  
need to hit myself on the  
head a few more times!  
Then I'll be all right!'

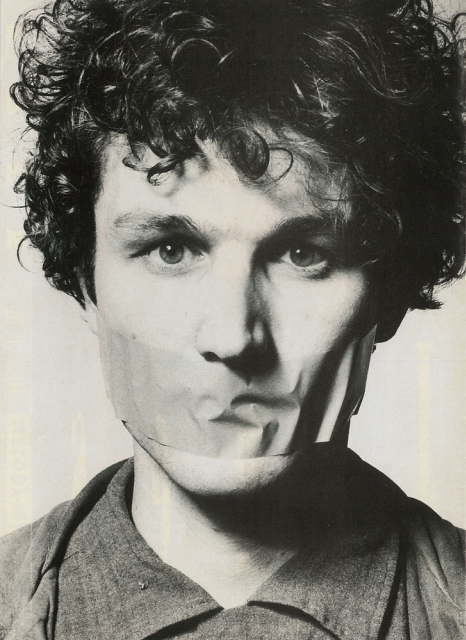
Tim Booth

MELODY-MAKER



J a m e s

F R E E W I T H MELODY-MAKER



ONE

IT took over eight years for the band once dubbed "Manchester's best kept secret" to finally become public property. Eight years in which a combination of bad health, bad drugs, bad judgement and an outrageous amount of bad luck conspired to make James' step from obscurity the longest march in pop history.

James may have thought they were the world's most ill-fated band, but Tim Booth must have always had an inkling he would one day set the world on fire. His earliest memory is playing with matches as a two-year-old. He accidentally struck one and set his family's Christmas tree ablaze. By the time the fire brigade had the flames under control, the Booth living room was burnt to a cinder.

Apart from the occasional incendiarism, Booth's childhood was oddly normal. By the age of 12, he was being bullied and was regarded as an underachiever, so his parents decided to send him to public school (the same school John Peel and Michael Palin attended) the following year.

"They might as well have sent me to concentration camp," Booth later recalled. "Every

hour of the day was programmed: lights off at 10pm, asleep by 10.30 and people with torches patrolling the corridors. We had worse conditions than the local borstal. You had to permanently suppress your emotions."

Until the age of 17, Booth had virtually no interest in music, let alone any desire to be in a band. He'd casually listen to Queen or Cockney Rebel, but seldom paid pop any real attention. That changed the night he was urgently taken out of study class to talk to his mother on the telephone. She told him his father was in hospital and might die that night. Booth was devastated, but couldn't show any emotion because his house master was present. It was too late to travel back home that night, so he was forced to try and sleep at the regimented time of 10.30.

Instead, he snuck downstairs and pressed the play button of the tape-recorder in the common room. The first words he heard were "His father died and left him alone on a New England farm," from Patti Smith's "Horses". Booth freaked at the strange coincidence.

"I'd heard 'Horses' two weeks earlier and thought it was awful," he later explained. "It was just this woman was singing totally out of tune, it





was utterly alien to me until that moment."

Booth's father survived, family life continued as normal, but the singer's world changed forever. He went back home to visit his father. Three days later, he ran away from home and took a bus to Manchester to see Paul Smith play live. That week he also saw Iggy Pop perform, and decided his only ambition was to join a band. Shortly afterwards, he was expelled from school, or, as he put it, "politely asked to leave". He nevertheless got his A Levels and went to Manchester University to study drama.

Around this time, three 17-year-olds got together and decided to form a group. Their leader, guitarist Paul Gilbertson, came up with most of the original ideas: everything should be self-taught, everything should be shared, the band shouldn't be influenced by anyone, there'd be no advertising and absolutely no interviews (James have tried to keep faith with all but the last dictum).

Paul Gilbertson and the other two band members (drummer Gavin Whelan and bassist Jim Glennie) bought instruments on HP and spent the next six months attempting to learn how to play, while hiring and firing a legion of singers. For their first gig, they only knew two chords and one song, which lasted 20 minutes. The landlord threw them out after 18 minutes and the band went back to Paul's flat to regroup and rethink.

A few weeks later, a 21-year-old Tim Booth was dancing at a Manchester University disco while the trio played their usual trick of nipping people's drinks when they were on the dancefloor (they were too broke to buy their own). Booth saw Whelan stealing his ale and confronted him with the usual witty riposte: "Hey you, you've just nicked my f\*\*\*ing pint." Suddenly Jim Glennie and Paul appeared next to Whelan and the cloudy-haired Booth had to choose between fighting the trio and losing, or talking; wisely, he decided to jaw, not war. Whelan had seen him dancing and asked whether he would dance for their band.

At the time, none of the band's songs had proper words (they didn't even have a proper name). The three of them would bury (or pilfer) copies of Melody Maker and NME, pick out words they liked, stick them together and see how they sounded. The three beer-thieves discovered Booth was studying drama, and because they thought anyone who was at university could write, asked him to be the band's lyricist. Booth was smart enough not to disillusion them, although he'd later claim that "intellectuals tend to be people who've got overdeveloped brains and underdeveloped hearts". Paul wrote his phone number on Tim's hand. By the next morning, the number hadn't rubbed off, but the trio's vision had. Tim phoned them up, went to a rehearsal and witnessed the trio's wall of cacophony.

Gradually, Tim started to take up backing vocals for the various singers that came and went. One promising talent had his brief tenure as singer ended by a long stretch in Strangeways and Booth at last arrived centre stage.

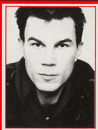
They got drunk before every gig to numb their fear, and for every gig, they'd use another name. Volume Distortion lasted 24 hours; Model Team International (the name came from a hairdressers which had tee-shirts printed that the band wore one night) lasted the 30 minutes they were on stage.

Paul originally thought of the name James, apparently because of his love for Orange Juice guitarist James Kirk, or perhaps admiration for his own bass player Jim Glennie, or simply a fetish for first names. Other first names were tried, but no one liked the sound of Paul. Tim was sounded out as well, and Gavin sounded too heavy metal. In the end, they settled on James because it was amorphous enough to encompass what the band were - amorphous. James were determined to not pigeonhole themselves and to be a constant surprise. Back in 1982, their newfound name had no connotations.

They played as James once and were going to dump it, but changed their minds when they discovered their next gig was at the Hacienda and the Manchester club had already advertised the name. Club DJ Mike Pickering had been sent demos from two new bands; James was one, the unknown Manchester band called The Smiths. Picking those James.

The gig was filmed by Factory, who subsequently released a compilation video, "A Factory Outing", featuring New Order, Sector 25, Duriti Column, and including James playing "Stutter". Tony Wilson signed them on the strength of that one gig and the band began work on their debut EP, "Jimane" (pronounced Jim One).

The relationship between James and Factory went well, until James



delivered the artwork for the EP. Factory always had clean, crisp sophisticated Peter Saville graphics, but James couldn't come up with a good idea. Less than six hours to go before the finished artwork had to be presented, Glennie grabbed a bottle-green and maroon pen and scribbled "Jimone" on a piece of paper and "3 songs by James" on the reverse side. Factory looked at the childlike scrawl with disdain, but their policy of giving bands artistic freedom prevented them from intervening.

"Jimone" was released in November '83 and was made Single Of The Week by all three weekly music papers who waxed lyrical about the absurd rhythms of "Fire So Close" and the gentility of "Folklore". Despite the sudden jolt of critical enthusiasm, it only sold about 1,000 copies, but James had become the overnight Kings Of Quirk. The band had already toured locally with The Fall and around Britain with Orange Juice, but very little was known about them thanks to the band's policy of not giving interviews. Finally they at least agreed to a photo session, but when the photographer arrived, he was told he could only take pictures of the band in silhouette. This was partly through shyness, but mostly because, as Tim Booth later explained, "We had the naive idea that pop was solely about music, not our words, looks, or personality".

James were also naive enough to assume they could temper with an audience's preconceptions of what a rock band actually was. When they first supported The Fall or Orange Juice, Tim would walk on stage and the audience would think he was James (an easy mistake). He'd recite a poem and everyone would think James was a poet (a big mistake). But the band would come out and start playing. By now Booth later claimed, "You go and improvise and they play two songs, and I believe most people know what the rest of the set is like. I think people switch into a state where they're not awake, they just want to hear what they already know. James just wanted to wake people up. That was why we improvised so much onstage; it was a way of scaring ourselves awake as well. A cliché is something that is dead and has no power, and music should always have power".

James' goal was to inject purity and innocence into pop's sordid mire - a noble ambition that almost nobbled them. Their first London shows were at the ICA and the Bloomsbury Theatre, venues that highlighted the band's commitment to take their shows outside the usual rock 'n' roll environment and offer an enchanting alternative. They even played the Pantheater Hall, supported by two Chinese brothers playing flute and ancient Chinese harp, with a non-alcoholic bar. James arrived onstage thinking they'd created a unique teetotal experience for a rock concert and found there was no ambience at all. The gig was conducted in an atmosphere of pleasure and understanding: the audience didn't understand James and James got no pleasure from watching a static audience.

Nevertheless, by the end of '83, James were tipped as the band most likely to kick up dustclouds in the charts.

J a m e s



## TWO

**JUST as everything looked to be going right, Dame Fortune kicked sand in James' face and everything fell apart. James fans waited for a second single, but it would be two years before they'd release anything. The group who should have been on the warpath ended up completely off the reservation.**

"Part of James' great plan to take over the world is as soon as you start to have a little bit of success, pack it in for a while and let everyone forget about you!" guitarist Larry Goff recalled recently with bewilderment.

The 24-month hiatus led to accusations that James were not grown up enough to live in the real world and left people wondering when their space shuttle would finally land. But the gap was mainly caused by Tim Booth becoming seriously ill with a rare liver disease, and increasing problems with Paul. Both difficulties led to rumours that James' rampant hedonism had taken its toll, although Booth claims he'd always had an undiagnosed liver complaint and recurring jaundice (he was always yellow skinned and was nicknamed Chinky at school).

"When I went to university, I started drinking beer, but hardly anything compared to anyone else I knew," he explained later. "I'd try a few drags, but again, not on any grand scale. If your liver isn't working anyway, it can take things like that, so I got really ill and went to hospital where they told me I had a rare liver disease that was incurable. I discharged myself, and went through all the alternative medicines."

This explained Booth's dislike of alcohol, as did his experience working at a brewery during his college holidays. He arrived with four other students, but within three weeks, they'd all left. One got beaten up after work, one had a keg of beer dropped on his foot, breaking every bone and the other fled in fear of his life after his workmates conducted a mock-hanging for him one

lunchtime. Booth rapidly abandoned any artistic pretensions and adopted a blunt Yorkshire accent just to survive the summer. It was, he says, a truly frightening place to work and an experience that eclipsed any subsequent band arguments.

Once out of hospital, the incurable Booth quickly got to a point where he had to find some basic truths in life. His half-hippy New Year's resolution was to either find something solid he could hold on to, or kill himself.

A few days into January, he dreamt he was in a room with Jim Morrison, his hero Nick Cave and Jed Clampett, an Nurse Ratched from "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" handed out a steaming brew that helped artists create. But, as Tim puts it, "the potion also had to help their lives". Booth refused the drink, went into a room by the nurse who then used a massive pair of pliers to pull out an octopus-style alien from inside his throat.

The next day, he woke up with a sore jaw and a complete change of attitude. A Gestalt dream interpreter told him he should work with his right hand, so Booth, together with Jim Glenzie, swiftly moved from meditation and went in search of the master plan.

"I decided I wasn't going to live if I didn't find a good reason why I should," he explained. "I didn't want ballet, I wanted proof. I'd wanted to be in a good band and

[finally] satisfied that, but still wasn't happy. I thought, 'F\*\*\* what consistency is this' and I also felt that the band and I were headed for self-destruction. I tried everything and looked around for a year, until finally I found this group who said they'd show me something that was proof for me, something that would blow my mind. I meditated for two hours every day, 10 hours every weekend and, after six weeks, they showed me this thing that I couldn't tell anyone about and it really did provide me with proof. I also healed my liver disease."

Booth stopped meditating two years ago because he thought he was getting too self-righteous and the constraints of no drugs, no sex and no alcohol were making him too serious to handle (after one five-day meditation binge, Maharishi Booth came close to losing his marbles forever).

The punchline was that we found out the guru of this group was sleeping around, which was why I wrote "God Only Knows," he explained. "When the reviews came out and said, 'Not another attack on evangelicism, it's such an easy target', I just thought, 'Yeah, but it actually happened to me!'"

Booth treated the whole episode with a Zen-like calm, he and a few other sect members went round and beat the shit out of the guru.

By the time Booth and Glenzie had

discovered meditation as a means of self-help, guitarist Gilbertson had discovered even lazier ways of becoming relaxed and reckless. He was constantly suffering from chemical overload and would end up standing catatonic in rehearsal rooms, unable to speak, much less play. He shaved his head the day of their first Smiths support date, and during the concert turned his guitar upside down and tried to play left-handed. At the time, he couldn't tell Jimi Hendrix, much less play like him.

Just before James' second Hacienda show, the band had yet another argument over Gilbertson's extra-curricular drug taking. The god ended unsolicited, so the rest of the band informed their equipment out of Paul's lat and started practising for the gig at a local rehearsal room. On the day of the gig, Paul turned up the Hox to soundcheck. After several unconvincing exchanges, he was told his services (and voice) were no longer required. He was replaced by Larry Goff.

"He had no hair in the '90s," recalled "He used to take on about five people in fights and he was the same when it came to drugs. He was a lovely guy, but I became impossible to work with him. We all reacted against that whole drug and drink scene, having seen what it could do to a close friend. I'd already stopped about a month before, had already started meditating and become off-bate."

Gilbertson was the much talked of "fiend" who got hospitalised and spent some time in Strangeways. It was seeing a close friend destroyed that finally helped James adapt to a more acoustic lifestyle. They shunned rock'n'roll excess and were congenial with attitude. Although they maintained their very sense of humour, their mischiefous side (in "We're going to be bigger than Chubby Checker") was dwarfed by their devout, addaball image.

For the second time in his life, Tim Booth showed his head following a bout of general self-disgust (the first time was after watching a programme on Auschwitz because Booth was by his own admission "very emotional and impressionable as a young man"). The rest of the band jokingly called him Buddha, so James were immediately labelled Buddhists. A couple of the band were vegetarians, so they became known as card-carrying Vegans. Suddenly, James were the weirdest aliens on planet pop. They were certainly the most misunderstood.

BY 1985, Factory wanted an album, but James didn't think they were good enough yet. James also knew that Factory wanted to release "Hymn From A Village", so a compromise was struck: the "James II" EP, which included "Hymn". The EP was released to ferocious acclaim, further inflamed when both EPs were re-released on the "Village Fire" 12-inch. "Hymn From A Village" became an instant classic and led to hyperventilated assertions that James were "pop gods and saviours of rock'n'roll".

Morrissey and Johnny Marr had both received copies of the first single and Moz quickly dubbed James "my favourite band" (The Smiths' version of "What's the World" had already become a live favourite). In retrospect, being touched by the hand of Moz may be as welcome as a dose of anthrax, but in '85 it was the highest accolade.

"At the time, Morrissey was the epitome of style," guitarist Larry Gott explained later. "All of a sudden, everyone wanted to know who the hell we were. We had people from Japan and Australia ringing up to interview us."

The band also had to sign off the date because their names were suddenly all over the music press and they were worried about being busted. They got on their bike and joined Norman Tebbit's Enterprise Allowance for £33 a week.

The good part about supporting The Smiths was that James suddenly went from playing to 300 people to rickrolling in front of 1,500 people. The downside was that the tour prompted immediate comparisons between the two bands that continued for over five years (incidentally, both band's debut singles, "This Charming Man" and "Disorder", were released in the same week). When The Smiths broke big, New Order's manager Rob Gretton told James, "They've stolen your thunder." He was right.

James thought people would go to the gigs and see the differences between the bands. Unfortunately, the vast majority of people didn't go to the gigs and were just left with the impression that both bands were inextricably linked. Morrissey's personal crusade on James' behalf didn't exactly help and the association became even stronger when rumours of James' three-and-a-half-year caligary began to circulate the following year. Morrissey had taken great delight in proclaiming distance and was merely treated as yet another English eccentric. The booth was treated like a leper. In fact, Booth was the only member of the band who was caligary and he'd been foregoing carnal pleasures two years before Mary said declared his sexual reduction.

"I didn't tell anyone at the time because I was worried people would think I was making it up and I was copying Morrissey," the singer claimed later. "We never felt we were doing anything like The Smiths. We've never really been part of any scene, especially at Manchester scene. When the NME did their A-Z of Manchester, all we got was 'bearded, vegan Buddhists'."

While on tour with The Smiths, James would wander into record shops around the country, checking whether their EPs were being sold. Most shops had no copies because, they claimed, there were problems with distribution. The bands were exasperated; they'd only recorded five songs in five years and even this patchy offering often wasn't available.

"We decided the independent world wasn't for us when we saw that people who saw us support The Smiths in a place like Wolverhampton couldn't get hold of our single the next day, or for that matter, the next month," Gott explained. "How were we ever going to get success?"

By the end of 1985, James were halfway there and discovered that it was nowhere at all.



## FOUR

JAMES went hunting for a major record deal and thought their prayers had been answered when Seymour Stein, mogul of US-based Sire records, rode into the frame. The band were singularly impressed with Stein's previous finds, who included Patti Smith, Talking Heads and The Ramones. Booth also admired Sire's art school pedigree. Stein was also friends with Lenny Kaye, Patti Smith's guitarist, who was later chosen to produce their debut album. It was, after all, Patti Smith who'd inspired Booth at the start (the track "Fairground" is about Ms Smith) and as Gott later recalled, "We liked random connections at the time."

During the early to mid-Eighties, Factory acts, particularly New Order, inadvertently attracted a neo-fascist following. James may have worn knitted jumpers and bright yellow and green clothes when everyone else was wearing black; they may have been cast as vegan monks, but James were still on Factory and had to suffer the



James live at the Free Trade Hall - Mazzer looks on.

consequences. In '85 they played Leeds Astoria on the same day as Leeds played Manchester City and the Leeds wrecking crew was out in force. They charged the stage, nicked equipment and bullied a few members of the audience before leaving the gig and turning over every car within a 200-yard radius of the venue.

The next day, James arrived onstage in Wolverhampton to find the same wrecking crew ready and waiting for round two. Within two minutes, the monitors had disappeared and the PA was unorthodox. James played five minutes of mental thrash metal, exited pronto and only returned when some semblance of order had been restored. They then played a low-key gig, full of quiet songs. After the gig, their support band, The Shamen, came backstage and proclaimed James' minutes of madness the most inspired of music they'd ever heard.

In July '86, James finally released their debut album, "Sister", to baffled reviews. The album was full of dextrous doodles - a brilliantly ramshackle mixture of the dark, the drack and the downright drat. Despite the fact it sounded nothing like the provincial jangle of C86 bands, Sire still thought "Sister" was "too English", meaning it was too un-American (Booth's subject matter centred around celebrity and celebrity not Cadillac and C\*\*\*s). In fact, it was just too far gone for the nation's pop-pickers and the album peaked at 68 in the album chart. The band's talk psychosis and raucous guitar rock provided an Awaysday ticket to a charming surety and proved it was possible to create a rock record that was utterly devoid of all rock's swashbuckling.

For the third time in their career, James were hailed as the nearly-men of pop - three steps from heaven and one stumble from oblivion.



## FIVE

**THE album's poor sales brought inevitable recriminations. James blamed Sire's lack of interest in the album; Sire blamed the album's lack of interest. Over the next year, James' relationship with their record company chilled, although, the band say, there was never really a relationship to start with. There was one secretary at WEA who dealt with James. She had to telephone New York, who then in turn had to phone LA just to talk to Stein. The result was frustration on James' part and a growing reputation within Sire that the band were trouble-makers. James put it all down to misunderstanding - a word they'd grown accustomed to.**

For three years James had turned down innumerable chances most bands would kill for: from music paper New Year front covers to '85 (which were going to herald them as the next big thing) to The Smiths' tour of America ("We just weren't ready," Tim later recalled. "If we'd have gone with The Smiths, it'd be like a nuclear explosion"). By 1987, opportunity had stopped knocking, or as Booth put it, "My Chance stopped coming. We didn't take it when it was there, so he stopped visiting us."

The band finished their second album, "Strip Mine", but were unhappy with the mixes. Sire seemed unhappy with the whole venture and refused to cough up any extra cash or release the band from their contract. As a result, "Strip Mine" was delayed for over 18 months, during which time, the band also lost their manager, Martina (who has now rejoined the band). They went to see Simply Red's manager, Elliot Rothman, who said he'd take on Seymour Stein, and won them more money. Still Sire refused to release the album and the band couldn't tour because no agent would take them on without an LP to promote. They had only done four gigs in the past two and a half years and they were broke. Whelan and Glenister were even forced to sell cars for a living.

The band were left with two stark choices - vegetate all day in front of the telly, or rehearse every day, even though there was no particular point. The rehearsals at the Manchester Boardwalk turned out to be the band's lifeline. No matter how depressed they were about being dragged under by the corporate machine, they at least knew they could write new songs. "Sit Down" was one of them and the band realised that this was a new beginning. Minutes after they played the song for the first time, the band fell about in hysterics. They knew just what they'd written, even if the rest of the world was oblivious.

"Singles come to us about twice a year," Booth explained. "They descend like the Tooth Fairy. We don't know how to control them, but we know what they look like when they arrive."

"We kept being told nothing was f\*\*\*ing happening," Goff recalled, "we were dying, our press profile had shrivelled to nothing, yet what we were actually doing we knew was f\*\*\*ing great, except no one else did."

With no album, no tour, no money and a music press that proclaimed "no future", most bands would probably have called it a day. James called it "a nightmare", especially when even Rothman gave up and told them to split and start again. Yet the beleaguered band still soldiered on, writing and rehearsing. As Booth later commented, "The reason why we kept going was that we thought it was inevitable that one day we would succeed - even when we were a crap band we had a total conviction that we'd make great music and become successful. Even under severe pressure, we never lost that."

Martina once they mislaid such faith. One day, the band met to discuss ending it all. All four sat around a table, but were too depressed to speak. Finally, drummer Gavan broke the silence: "Did you hear that jols about James," he said belligerently. "They thought they were a pop band." It was tacitly understood that if one other person spoke at that point, the band would have split up. No one piped



J

a

m

e

s

up and, finally, there was a general realisation that they would have to fight back for recognition.

"We decided we weren't going to let some P\*\*\*ing \*\*\*\* in New York break us up when he had absolutely no idea of what we'd just written or how good we really were," Gott concluded.

The band scurried through their contract and found that Sire had to notify the band in writing if they wished to take up the option within six months after the final master tapes had been delivered.

As the six month mark drew nearer, the band would turn up for rehearsals every day and ask if any faxes or telegrams had arrived. The day they were legally released, they sent Stein an official fax, the subtext of which read: "F\*\*\* you pal, we're off the stinking label". The band would have celebrated with champagne, but couldn't afford the bubbly. In fact, they could hardly afford to feed themselves and were all back on the dole, back at square one (they didn't even have enough money to sue Iolo, James over their name). All that kept them from financial ruin was the sales of the now famous James tee-shirt.

A year before, they'd played the Astoria with Happy Mondays supporting and in the audience was a man wearing a tee-shirt with "JA" on the front and "MES" on the back in huge state-of-the-art letters. He was dragged backstage after the show. The band saw it, loved its simplicity and bought the design for £50 (a fee that was later substantially increased).

The tee-shirts sold like hot cakes and, at the time, Tim Booth was only being half facetious when he said, "Our tee-shirts sell better than our records." The long-awaited "Strip Mine" only reached Number 90 in the album charts in September '88 and was roundly dismissed by most critics as being either too straightforward or too insular. Booth claimed the band were "locating out perversities and making them work for us", and it was clear that the band were still exorcising their tiny demons, this time with less effect. Booth would even write deliberately darker lyrics to poppier songs like "What For" (originally his chorus was the mocking "Bonjour boys and girls, bonjour" because he thought it sounded like a Eurovision Song Contest entry).

The much criticised "big pop mix" in fact took just three days. Songs like "Not There" were mixed in under 20 minutes. "People thought that song was a 'Big Mix'," Booth later complained. "It was more like a desperate mix, a no more money mix."

One theory was that Sire only agreed to release the album when they heard that The Smiths had split up and the throne was vacant. The heir apparent failed to sit down on the royal chair and James realised they were in danger of being has-beens before they'd even been. By October '88, they were seriously thinking of changing their name and starting all over again... again.



## SH

**FED up with record companies and chart chicanery, the band decided that they could produce a live album on their own label for £10,000 and if it only sold half as much as "Strip Mine", it would still make a profit. James visited their bank manager at the Royal Bank Of Scotland, who was none too impressed with the idea of funding a pop venture, despite booming tee-shirt sales (in one week in Leeds, over £2,000-worth of James merchandise was sold). They took him to a gig, he saw the elated reaction and agreed on the spot.**

"One Man Clapping" was distributed by Rough Trade and went straight to Number One in the indie charts, and further proved that James gigs were becoming more like vast celebrations. At times Tim Booth would be so exhausted after the show, he'd have to inhale oxygen. He certainly had to take several deep breaths when the band received a fax from Sire demanding to know why they'd released an album without informing the company. For three years, Sire hadn't taken any notice of the band when they were signed, why should they notice that James had left the label four months previously?

Squabbles between members of the band dragged James down to another low tide mark, which was compounded when Booth tore a cartilage in his knee while rehearsing a new song, ironically about a god who gets his wings clipped. The singer couldn't walk, but refused to take pain killers: "I hate looking so only take drugs, including pain killers, if I want to discover something", so he spent three days lying in agony on a settee watching "The Singing Detective".

"I was watching a programme about a bloke in hospital who refused to take pain-killers," he recalled. "It was all quite surreal and I was in so much agony, yet I was so happy something that weird was a success. Suddenly I thought, 'F\*\*\* it, if this can gain acceptance into the mainstream, I don't see why James shouldn't!'"

Booth's cartilage healed, but the rifts in the band didn't. In November, the band arrived at a college ball gig outside Sackler House in the Student Union hall made a hash of the PA, the stage and the security. Tempers ran high before the band even got onstage and by the time they'd finished their third number, people in the crowd were being crushed against the inadequate crash barriers in front of the stage. Whelan got wound up and started playing his drums like a man possessed, which caused the crowd to surge forward even more. The rest of the band turned around and told him to shut up which annoyed the drummer even more. Later in the set, Tim Booth wanted to get things moving again so signalled to Govan, who the girl Booth was taking him to speed up. The drums with their sticks across the stage and eased stage left, then thought twice about it and walked back onstage, grabbed Booth by the throat and started strangling him. Booth eventually broke free and, in front of the mike, the two began a furious verbal assault on each other.

"Sadly there are no tapes of the incident," Gott later joked. "It would have been like the legendary Tragos tapes."

Whelan wanted to stay with them, but all three other members had already had separate run-ins with the drummer and they decided they couldn't give him one more chance and leave him in the invidiously weakened position: "One more mistake and you're out."

James played another college gig with a drum machine and an inexperienced keyboard player. The band and their friends now admit this was the nadir of James' live career. They were supposed to be shooting stars, but James once again managed to shoot themselves in the foot instead.

## SEVEN

**THE band may have been from Manchester, but they were never part of the '89 Madchester movement. They saw their former support bands Happy Mondays and The Stone Roses speed off in pop's fast lane while James were still in the lay-by. The Manc wave did, however, have a ripple effect on James, who began to loosen their screws of puritanism and widen the scope musically.**

"The image of James is becoming a bit of a bummer," Booth said at the time. "We're being presented as Cliff Richard types: ecological, monastic, non drug-taking. Kind of the anti-matter of the Happy Mondays - and it's not true."

James got 150 replies to their advert for a drummer, but none fitted the job. The band had David Boyton-Powell's number, but the drummer refused to audition, fearing rejection. After three days of constant phone calls, he finally acquiesced. A few weeks later violinist Saul Davies joined after being spotted by Larry Gott jamming in a busker's den with 15 guitarists who virtually drowned him out. The new seven-piece, wide-

screen line-up was completed by former Pale Fountains trumpeter Andy Diagram and keyboard player Mark Hunter.

"We weren't pissed off at the success of other Manchester bands because we were playing 2,000-capacity places," Booth claimed at the time. "The only difference is that we haven't got a record contract."

With no contract, the band had accrued personal debts of over £50,000. Finally, their run of bad luck broke [sic], when they met promoter Simon Moran, who began his career by promoting gigs at Warrington Rugby Club and was soon setting up nationwide tours for The Stone Roses and Inspiral Carpets. Moran took on James despite the lack of a new album and, sure enough, their gig sales confounded their record sales.

Their third album, "Gold Mother", was recorded with Rough Trade's money, but the band soon got a feeling of déjà vu when their first single, "Sit Down", bombed through lack of promotion. Sire had ignored them, Rough Trade just didn't have the money.

"We knew it was a hit even then," said Gott. "And when nothing happened we asked Geoff Travis why. He said we were really good musicians, but we were too eclectic to reach a wide audience. Then they [sic] set up again when they released 'Come Home'."

Booth claimed that the only thing that kept James going at the time was the ecstatic audience reaction at their staggering concerts. As their audience increased, so did the size of their tours and once

again, a buzz started to surround the band. Suddenly A&R men started turning up to satellite gigs, but no one could understand why a band who could draw such a huge following could still be unsigned. With their optimism rekindled, the tours took on a compelling momentum, culminating in a triumphant gig at the Town & Country Club in London.

"We were so f\*\*\*ing good that night," Gott claimed. "We were signed within two weeks. Then we did Glastonbury and played a stormer. All the people at Glastonbury had already made up their mind that we'd missed the boat and we blew all that shit away. All those days we were rehearsing with nowhere to go, we always knew we had something special and this was the fruition of that."

The band signed to Fontana (Phonogram) in March 1990, but even then, James' luck didn't change overnight. Their first Fontana single, "How Was It For You", entered the charts at 35 and despite the fact that a week before, a band at Number 39 had appeared on "Top Of The Pops", James were told they'd have to wait another week. Then the Beeb wouldn't air the video, claiming that scenes of Tim Booth singing

underwater might lead to kiddies attempting the same stunt and literally drowning by numbers.

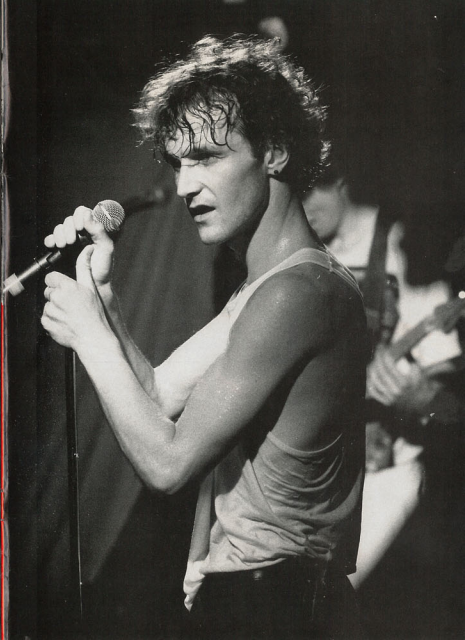
The original "Sit Down" video (directed by genius and part-time wood collector Edward Barton) was also banned by the Musicians' Union and couldn't be shown on "The Chart Show" because it featured bassist Jim Glennie beating a log, which was deemed to be a drummer's job. The video also contained scenes with Tim Booth singing to a sheep laying in his lap. The sheep gazed thoughtfully into the singer's eyes throughout the first take and it was only when Booth stood up that everyone realised the sheep had urinated over him. James were not only pissed off, but pissed on.

The single, "Come Home", should have been a "breaker", but "TOTP" changed their policy that week and ran an album chart instead. After seven years, the only sign of James on "TOTP" was their tee-shirt, worn by one of Beats International, and they fared little better on radio.

"We thought for sure we'd be on the A list, or at least the B list," claimed Gott. "What the f\*\*\*'s the D List? Things just seemed stacked against us. When you've got a wave, all things fall in your path, but we'd missed everything and had to struggle just to stop being drowned."

"Gold Mother" was released in June '90 and the album's earnest protest anthems about Government conspiracy ("Government Walls"), the suppression of rave culture ("Bring A Gun"), sexual guilt and childbirth were welcomed with tepid reviews (Time Out concluded that the album "ultimately sinks into the empty posturing of Booth's stylised internal dialogue and the band's 'Sixties retro growl'). James' search for a childlike (not childish) innocence was replaced by a more outward-looking approach and their crooked logic had been sharpened.

Just as the album's bristling guitars and anthemic songs appeared to highlight James' journey from wimps to warriors, so their World Cup tour in the summer of '90 (where matches were screened before the gig) proved the band could fill the role of maverick pop stars. James were no longer an off-centre, out-of-kilter indie band, but a fully-fledged stadium rock band.





## EIGHT

ON January 30, 1991, James played five numbers on top of Manchester's Piccadilly Hotel. Even though the event was only announced at eight o'clock that morning, it attracted 5,000 fans, blocking town centre traffic and sending the truancy rate in schools to record levels.

"Sit Down" was taking off in the clubs and at the end of year, the band performed two nights at G-Mex, playing to 17,000 people. The band filmed the mayhem and sent clips to TV and radio producers who suddenly saw a stadium band from Manchester they'd never heard of and had never been played on the air. So suddenly even "Moggin" wanted them. Radio 1 wanted them, and by April a re-released "Sit Down" went to Number Two. After eight years of false starts and full stops, James had finally come good.

"We developed a theory," said Tim Booth, "that the longer it took, the bigger we'd be. It took us a long time to get here and now we won't bloody leave."

Suddenly at gigs, people would leap onstage at gigs and instead of running riot and stealing equipment, they'd sit down. Then the entire audience would sit down. At Liverpool Royal Court, the band ended the set with "Sit Down" and left, only to find the crowd singing the entire song over again. At the end of April, James released the live "Come Home" video to much acclaim and all things looked fine in the band's rose garden, but James still hadn't filed their divorce with controversy.

The re-release of "Gold Mother", with two different tracks, caused a massive furor and prompted accusations that the band were selling their fans down the river. The band jumped at the chance to ditch what they saw as the album's two weakest tracks, "Hang On" and "Crescendo", and wanted to include "Loose Control", but they were initially wary about ripping off their fans in Britain. They turned the offer down, but the album was already available on import at vastly inflated prices, so in the end, both band and record company came up with a compromise: fans were told they could trade in their old copy of "Gold Mother" at any Our Price no matter what the condition and receive the new album. The re-released album went straight in at Number Two in the album charts.

"Everything is much bigger now," said guitarist Gott, "and we haven't got time to control everything. We could go bankrupt tomorrow and we wouldn't even know it. Three years ago we were bankrupt and knew all about it."

DESPITE their new-found status as a headlining act, James were still determined to "stay awake" and to keep to their original doctrine of tipping over pop's apple-cart, with a few surprises. In Paris, they played an entire set of new numbers, leaving the French audience bruised and bemused. This summer James also played at a two-day Swedish festival along with Ride, The Wonder Stuff, Transvision Vamp and headliners Status Quo. Most bands arrived on the same plane and were greeted by over 100 fans and film cameras on the runway. Booth thought this was rather gratifying, until he was told that the runway was actually 40-foot too short for the size of the bands' plane and the people had actually come to witness a plane crash.

James' set on the B-stage on Friday night was curtailed to 30 minutes because of power failure and all their equipment plus trumpet player Diagram were flown home the next day. Twenty-four hours later, Francis Rossi came down with a migraine just before the Quo were due on stage and the organisers asked James to appear instead.

"We said, 'Sure we'll back without our equipment in front of 20,000 Status Quo fans,'" Booth said. They pulled it off, which was both a triumph and a cause for concern. James walk a fine line between innovative mass appeal and empty stadium gestures. Booth is well aware of the minuscule difference between Simple Minds and the simple minded. As he said last year: "I'm impressed by longevity and keeping standards up for years. I worry about that a lot because my favourite bands always burn out after about two albums. None of them

have lasted as long as us. We're frightened that we're going to lose this level of creativity and intensity, that one day we'll wake up and it will have gone like a cloud, and suddenly we're as bland as Cliff Richard, Phil Collins or Eric Clapton - hollow men."

Manchester's best kept secret is now well and truly out of the bag and with a new single due out this autumn, James look likely to scale new heights without stubbling into the pitfalls that have dogged their entire career. "I don't think it's arrogance," Booth said last month, "but we've always known this would happen eventually. We just knew our time would come. It's the same as we know there's something we have to do at some point. We don't know what it is, but we'll know when it happens. There's more to come, but I don't know what it is... yet." Time, if not Tim, will tell.



#### DISCOGRAPHY

##### SINGLES

- "SMOKE" EP: "What's The World?"/"Fire So Close"/"Talkers" (Factory) November '84
- "JAMES" EP: "Hymn From A Village"/"If Things Were Perfect" (Factory) February '85
- "VILLAGE FIRE": "What's The World?"/"Fire So Close"/"Talkers"/"Hymn From A Village"/"If Things Were Perfect" (Factory) June '85
- "CHAIN MAIL": "Map Spring" (Sire) January '86
- "SIT DOWN" EP: "Chain Mail"/"Map Spring"/"Uprising" (Sire) January '86
- "SO MANY WAYS?"/"Withdrawn" (Sire) July '86
- "WINDTORN"/"Island Swing" (Sire) March '88
- "LIFT" EP: "Wingspread" (Sire) September '88
- "SIT DOWN"/"She Is Falling" (Rough Trade) June '89
- "COME HOME": "Promised Land"/"Bough Trade" November '89
- "HOW WAS I FOR YOU?"/"Whisper" (Fontana) May '90
- "COME HOME": "Dreaming Up Tomorrow" (Fontana) June '90
- "LOSE CONTROL"/"Sunday Morning" (Fontana) November '90
- "SIT DOWN"/"Sit Down (Live)" (Fontana) March 1991

##### ALBUMS

- "STUTTER" (Sire) July '86
- Skulduggery
- Scorecrow
- So Many Ways
- Just Hip
- Johnny Yen
- Summer Song
- Really Hard
- Billy's Shirts
- Why So Close
- Withdrawn
- Black Hole
- "GOLD MOTHER" (Fontana) June '90
- Come Home
- Lose Control
- Government Walls
- God Only Knows
- You Can't Tell How Much Suffering (On A Face That's Always Smiling)
- Crescendo
- How Was It For You
- Hang On
- Walking The Ghost
- Gold Mother
- Top Of The World
- "Hang On" and "Crescendo" replaced by "Lose Control" and "Sit Down" for the re-release

##### "STRIP MINE" (Sire)

- September '88
- What For
- Charlie Dance
- Fairground
- Are You Ready
- Medieval
- Not There
- Yo Ho
- Riders
- Vulture
- Strip Mining
- Retrain

##### "ONE MAN CLAPPING" (Rough Trade) March '89

- Chain Mail
- Sandman
- Whoops
- Riders
- Leaking
- Why So Close
- Yo Ho
- Johnny Yen
- Scorecrow
- Are You Ready
- Really Hard
- Burned
- Stutter



J a m e s

Written By Ted Nico

Design By Brett Lewis

