

## # 3 Guarded by Monkeys

### Guarded By Monkeys by Cracker from 2002 Forever Album

Still using the random song selection process. The song *Shameless* came up as the next track. But i realized that i had to go back to *Guarded By Monkeys* to put the story for *Shameless* into the proper context. (*Shameless* will be tomorrow's track).

*Guarded By Monkeys* was to be the title track of the album that was to be the 5th Cracker studio album. At the last minute the title was changed to *Forever*. In retrospect this was an unwise choice. But at the time it didn't matter to me that much. It was an easy compromise to make with management and the record label. Someone had decided that *Forever* would be the song worked to radio (it wasn't). It was argued that *Guarded by Monkeys* is really kind of a weird title for an album. Meh... maybe. At the time Johnny liked the song *Forever* best of all the songs on the album. Since he liked *Forever* so much it didn't seem like a big deal to change the title.

In 2000 we renegotiated our deal with Virgin Records. They were paying us a lot of money for making albums that were not selling platinum or gold anymore\*. In exchange for a lump sum buyout we agreed to make our records on the cheap. We Began producing them ourselves in our own studio under the watchful eye of engineer John Morand.

Personally i feel the lack of sales had more to do with a change in the corporate culture at Virgin records than the lack of "hits" on our records. But every artist with dwindling sales says things like this. At Virgin USA, the rock friendly President (and decent human being) Phil Quartararo had been replaced by the decidedly pop oriented (and hapless) Englishmen, Ray Cooper and Ashley Newton. Cooper and Newton were closely attached to the success of The Spice Girls, the highly overrated Massive Attack and sundry English pop drivel. They definitely did not understand Cracker. (or America) But that was fair. We didn't understand them either.

When Cooper showed up at the mixing sessions for *Gentleman's Blues* we immediately thought of Austin Powers. Right down to the weird teeth. From that day forward we simply referred to him as Austin Powers. Ashley Newton was for some reason dubbed "The Football Hooligan". I'm not sure exactly why. I think it was because he was very much not a football hooligan. We only met him once.

Other record labels were doing just fine marketing rock to the masses. Not Virgin. Under the tutelage of Austin Powers and The Football Hooligan Virgin went off in a very pop direction. By 2000 it was pretty much suicidal to drop a song that rocked like this to the new pop oriented Virgin Records. (So back to my original point) It's entirely possible that we *would* have had hits from *Gentleman's Blues* or *Forever* if we'd been on a different label. I've always felt like this track would have done well at rock radio if it had been given a promotional push with that format.

Then there is the matter that throughout the album *Forever* the phrase "guarded by monkeys" is repeatedly used. Four different songs (once in spanish). This started as an inside joke between Mark Linkous and I. We often wondered how we would fake a *The Madcap Laughs* (Syd Barrett) or a *Hi, How Are You* (Daniel Johnston). It was decided that one would go about writing and recording the songs as usual but in every song a monkey would be mentioned.

I had this quirky bit of music and one day i discovered you could sing the phrase "You are so beautiful you should be guarded by monkeys" to it. Previously i had used a similar line in the song *Brides of Neptune*: "that mysterious cargo is still guarded by monkeys". The words stuck. Also it should be noted certain Hindu temples in Indonesia are guarded by hordes of monkeys. I don't know where i came up with this fact but it stuck in my head and the metaphor works in both songs.

A note on the guitar riff. On most Cracker songs the parts you hear Johnny Hickman play are the parts he has written. This song is an exception because that riff that starts the song is from my demo. It's my riff. Not only is it my riff but i unconsciously and accidentally lifted it from an old song of mine. It's a slowed down version of my riff in *I'm Gonna Eat You Up* by Box O' Laffs. Regardless johnny plays the shit out of the riff. And his solo goes beyond inspired to disturbed. (even Mariah Carey is inspired. True artists go beyond that to *disturbed*)

The story in the song is less interesting. A man is obsessed with a woman. Or alternately it is an object that he so desires it as if he is obsessed with a beautiful woman. The man is apparently adept at cryptography and computer hacking. The object of his desire may also be adept at both of these as well. Songs sometimes don't have linear and specific narratives, that is why they are songs and not short stories. Elements remain unformed and ambiguous, and that is what makes a song interesting. Songs can have multiple parallel meanings and they can all be true. They are quantum in that way.

The video for this song was filmed while we were on tour in Alaska. This the underground tunnel that connects the two wings of the Holiday Inn in Anchorage. The man who comes down the steps and looks into the camera was the coffee vender from the lobby. He was curious as to what we were doing. This is completely unstaged.

\* My view on record deals. If the record company gives you more money than you recoup on record sales THAT is a bet that the artist has won. Nothing of which to be ashamed. I am happy to say cracker won it's bet with virgin. The fact they bought our deal out and then gave us another smaller deal was also a win. Because right about the time we got the smaller deal widespread file sharing decimated CD sales. For derivatives traders cracker sold two: out-of-the-money calls to the record label.