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at the table and, as Bob once said: "A hungry mob is an angry mob." Thinking ahead, Dead Flowers' new manager, Manolo Echave of Frontier Touring, has laid on an eye-bulging banquet. The ham steaks are as a thick as a plank. It almost brings tears to my eyes.

The return to the hall is premature and there's a great deal of waiting to be done. But first, it appears there's an introduction to be made.

"Hey, are yous the Dead Flowers... yeah... well... we're pissed cunts. Can you gimmee a light... choice... cunt. Are yous guys from Auckland... yeah... we thought yous was cool... cunts."

It can only get better... but it doesn't for awhile,

Stoned Cold Crazy are on their home turf. They look 16 and nervous. Passable covers of Nirvana, Four Non Blondes and Smashing Pumpkins follow. Then so do Dali. Just when I'm getting annoyed to the point of trauma, the Dead Flowers arrive, and there's every reason to smile. Tonight they are pure punk. The all ages crowd know it too. They pogo like wild things to the fast songs and make no exception for the slow. The version of 'What Do You Take Me For' that's spat out this evening is the best yet. They wrap it up at midnight and sleep comes quickly on the way

The sunset is bright orange the next day, as we pull up outside the Orewa Town Hall. On the poster is Dead Flowers, Ulcer and Xenith. Outside there's several groups of kids enjoying a drink and a smoke and ignoring the first band the wise option, as Xenith are inside bashing out covers of the Breeders, Smashing Pumpkins and Nirvana, without a single nod to substance or

The imminent appearance of three-piece band Ulcer draws the crowd inside. They own a fine set of edgy, semi-hardcore songs, and frontman Evan Short possesses a strong voice. Just this time, there's a great deal more of the Pearl Jam influence present, and that's something they could definitely afford to lose.

Dead Flowers played it low key this evening, not able to match the energy of the previous night. They all looked in dire need of a deep sleep.

It's Friday. That must mean we're back at Mount Maunganui. This is the first date of Supergroove's New Zealand and Australian Tour. For the North Island leg of the trip they're accompanied by Dead Flowers, Thorazine

Shuffle, Mighty Asterix and DJ Stinky Jim. We arrive almost three hours before the doors are due to open at the Sports Stadium, and already the queues are lengthy. Inside, a massive stage has been built at the 'visitors' end of the basketball court, and an enormous Supergroove banner hangs from the wall behind. The remainder of the room will be given over to an expected crowd of 900 superfreaks. No point in hanging round, so burgers at the beach it is.

Essential as it was, this pit stop means we miss Mighty Asterix, Che from Supergroove and Bran Muffin from Wellington band Gifted and Brown, who are just leaving the stage as we step in the back door.

Auckland guitar-pop group Thorazine Shuffle use up a couple of songs while finding each other, but they gel soon after. 'Blame' goes on to kick big butt and lead singer Josh Hetherington adds icing to the cake by jumping in to visit the front row, wagging his guitar behind him.

Dead Flowers are hampered by a bad sound mix, both on stage and out front, but as seasoned pro's do, they delivered.

Meanwhile Supergroove, dressed in their trademark black outfits, are backstage, limbering up, drinking wine and telling dirty jokes. There's no pre-gig band huddle, the smokers just take extra-long drags. The lights go down and then burst back on with the first riff of 'You Freak Me'. It has an explosive effect, virtually smacking the crowd into a frenzy. The energy level doesn't dip below 100 percent for the entire set, and almost doubles when the big hits — 'Scorpio Girls', 'Can't Get Enough', 'You Gotta Know' - are played. After one encore, the frantic 'Five Word Headline', it's over and we're straight back on the road, again.

Saturday, January 7, Is Greg Johnson's birthday. This day could be fun, but I'll have to keep my wits in close proximity. You see, Greg and his Set enjoy the drink. It sits on their shoulder like a vulture, but calls itself a friend.

I arrive at his Ponsonby flat at one o'clock, to be met by the rest of the band and a bottle of red wine with my named carved on it. Alarm bells start ringing, but it would be rude to refuse. As the clock chimes two, we depart - the band, the crew and singer Greg Fleming in the 'Rent-A-Dent' rental van, and Greg, band manager Davind Voot and myself in a sporty hatchback. The destination is once again, the Waihi Beach

'Greg Johnson Set Top Act', it says on the sign outside, we must be here. By five we're killing time in the garden bar, washing down jugs of Lion Red with jugs of Lion Brown. While tanked up and full of bravado, playing a sport seems a good idea. Soccer'll do, any excuse for an after match function. Boredom sneaks its way in two minutes later, so we retreat to a table clutching jugs of beer and tankards of vodka and tonic. The band are due on in an hour, so I've time for a brief lie down. Under the table looks like a com-

Up an' at 'em. Greg Fleming is taking aim under the lights. After half a dozen solo tunes, including a delicate Replacements number, he's joined by Johnny, Chris and John from the GJS, for the glorious 'Codeine Road'.

The Greg Johnson Set come into my line of vision around 10.30pm, but how can they be in two places at once? Anyway, they impress immensely with a new one called 'You Stay Out Of Your Life And I'll Stay Out Of Mine', the new single 'C'Mon', and my old favourite 'Two Feet Off The Ground.'

Later, the bar gets closed early for some, and just briefly the lights are knocked out, but it'll be okay in the morning. Not true. The reality is, it's a rough ride back to Auckland on Sunday, and I get to see my breakfast for the second time. Apparently there are photographs.

Thankfully, there's time for a shower and a change of clothes before the three and a half hour drive to Tutukaka, for the second of the Supergroove shows.

Up in Tutukaka, they do things differently. The first sight I see when walking into the pub is a big bloke with a jug of beer in his right hand, and his very active left hand up the front of his girl's skirt. In turn, she's holding a jug of beer in each hand and is sporting a completely blank look on her face. I'm almost convinced this kind of behaviour isn't acceptable at Squid.

The enclosed outside courtyard of the pub houses the stage, which makes for a very intimate setting. There's more of a barbecue atmosphere than a pub feel. Out the back, members of Supergroove, Dead Flowers and Thorazine Shuffle are playing hackey while Mighty Asterix is on stage. He toasts over beats provided by Stinky Jim's records, then drops a couple of tunes from his forthcoming album.

Thorazine rock even harder than on Friday, due in part to a big dumping of guitars in the mix, and this time they include the brilliant pop gem

The Dead Flowers have their set cut short due to time restrictions, meaning they don't play the hits — a big disappointment to me and, ultimately, the folks who paid to hear them.

Again, Supergroove blast from the darkness with 'You Freak Me', and the effect mirrors that of Friday's show. The audience erupts and the band do their best to out jump them. Jo and Karl dance like they have mighty big ants in their pants and the stage could be a trampoline for all the bouncing that Nic and Tim do. The hits do the most damage, but tunes from Tractor aren't far behind. Another insane show,

One of the Flowers has an early start in the morning, so we point the car towards Auckland and press go.

The diary shines blank for the next four days until Mountain Rock. Although it's been great to get away from the city, I look forward to spending a hassle-free week at home. But that pleasant notion was shot to hell because Greg Johnson has been right all along - people can talk (and show snapshots) in this town.

JOHN RUSSELL