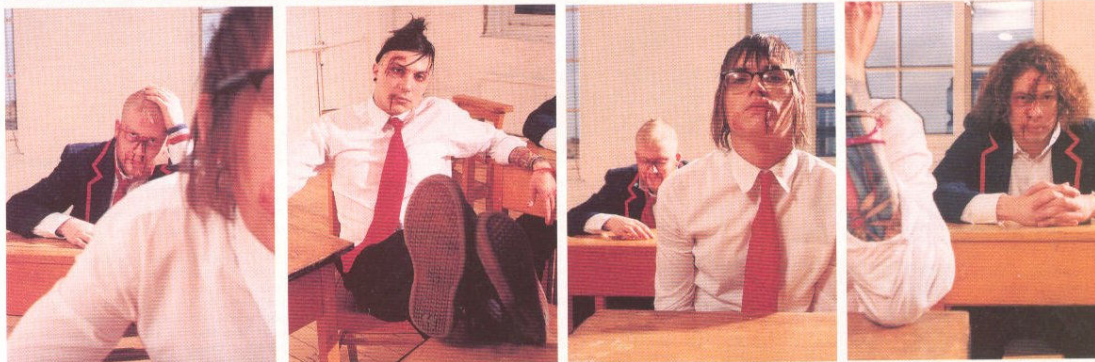


Figure 7



My Chemical Romance:
cruel bastards



had this extreme confidence where I felt like nothing could touch us. Nothing anyone said could hurt me when I was in this band. It was as though I was always the person I was onstage. I had created that onstage character and no-one could break that... until I stopped drinking."

THEIR HOMETOWN of New Jersey was never somewhere they loved. They spent years looking at the lives they could lead there, the lives that meant living for Friday and Saturday nights. Of getting smashed out of your skull simply because it dulled the mundanity of the working week. It's a large place, but small-town in mind-set; everyone knows who you are and what you do there. So the band fought against it, became part of the underground punk scene – a scene that Lero describes as elitist but very caring and helpful. Then they played anywhere they could.

"We played basements, legion halls, anywhere, as often as we could," says Lero. "I even played a hot-dog stand once. We'd play anywhere 'cause it's all we had."

When he's speaking, Lero has a calm but icy exterior. There's a real toughness about him. His words are softly spoken but full of considered grit. As much as Gerard Way is the frontman and the voice of the band, Lero is its heartbeat and its blood. He lives this band as his life because he has nothing else, has never wanted to do anything else and can't see what else he might do. When he whirls around the stage, he gives his all for his band.

"I need to have given my all," he says. "I need to know that I'll be left on the floor and that I'm

completely done after a show. I need to have nothing left. I need to feel dangerous; I need to not leave anyone standing. I want to kill the audiences."

It's what they feel onstage: them versus the world. "You have to think of your fans as opposition," says Lero. "No-one stands in your way and the five of you are there to destroy every person in that room. That's how we go onstage every night. We go there to kill people."

"I still need to go out there and fucking kill," says Gerard Way. "But now the kids are there for us. It's not so much us against them anymore. Now it's all of us together against something much larger. That's the best fucking feeling in the world. When a thousand kids are throwing their fists in the air and screaming along to a song, that's a fucking victory."

This pugnacious attitude saw them rise to the top of their local scene, break out and move on. Then a strange thing happened. They all realised how proud they were of New Jersey. How proud they were of themselves for having broken out.

"We wanted to show people we were different," says Gerard Way. "We went out to represent Jersey, to prove to them all that we weren't just drunk, shithead, Mafia children. I'm very proud of where I'm from now, despite its faults."

IT'S **THEIR** outcast attitude that means they've become heroes to all the lonely people. It's not something they asked for but they are seen as kindred spirits to all those people who stand in the corners.

"We never set ourselves up to be marauding for the

underdogs," says Lero. "We were never trying to be superheroes or role models. But, to think that we're looking out for kids who don't have anyone else feels good. But we're kids too. We don't have answers."

"That sort of thing frightens me a little," says Gerard Way. "I guess it's that old superhero thing – with great power comes great responsibility. We do have a power now and some people are looking at us as saviours in a way. It's an incredible weight on our shoulders."

That responsibility is something that has been pressing on Gerard Way particularly. But then helping or trying to make a difference has always been the point of the band, whether it's helping themselves or helping other people.

"At first this was group therapy for ourselves," says Gerard. "Then it went to group therapy for a room of people. Then, with the records, it was group therapy for anyone who bought it. I hope we're helping people but that doesn't mean I'm going to go to people's houses because they wrote me a suicide note. That's not going to happen."

Receiving suicide notes, however, is something that happens. It's partly a symptom of being the kind of band they are, of looking like the gang that has stood up to the bullies and haters. It means people associate with them for that very reason. It also means they're worried they're becoming the sort of band whose fans feel they have to be fucked to understand the music.

"I think some do think that and it's really heavy," says Gerard. "It can be threatening, a little dangerous." It's something he already knows is a problem. Anyone who saw the band on their recent tour would

