

THE GOLD STOPS US

RECORD STORE DAY 2017

> Article and photos by Colin Smith

This is the story of one man's desperate search for Marillion's contribution to this year's Record Store Day; a gold vinyl copy of F E A R... *read on, if you dare!*

I've never considered myself as obsessed with Marillion as how I consider some of the people I've met over the years to be, more of an average type who follows the band, their music and their live performances really, but maybe 'the gold' made me reconsider that opinion.

To the outside world, those around me who aren't interested in Marillion would, as I'm sure most subscribers to the Web can certify, consider us to be really obsessed with the band, maybe we are, we're just at different degrees of obsession I suppose.

On learning of the news that there would be a special record store day release of last year's album *F E A R* on gold vinyl simply sent me into a mode of "I have to have one of these" and I went into my usual habit of texting and messaging friends to see if they'd heard the news yet? How many copies would be available? Where it might possibly be purchased from? etc, etc.

This frenzy of excitement immediately took me back to the announcement of the Royal Albert Hall show due to take place in October 2017 and how that 'obsession' gripped me: the sickness and *F E A R* of failure in that quest; the organisation that went into it; the booking of a hotel prior to applying for tickets to make sure I had somewhere to stay after the show on "our so-called golden streets" of London; joining the box office mailing list for any hope of first hand news on ticket sales; taking a holiday from work on ticket sale day to ensure not missing out; the swapping of bank transfer account numbers; the three-way 'phone calls when the ticket sales went live; the absolute desire and obsession that was in this case of tickets: the gold. A long-distance friend and myself managed to actually obtain a total of 11 tickets for that 'must be at' gig and after our celebratory virtual high fives, back slaps and jolly well done, mission complete team, that mind-numbing comedown.

So, it came to be that Record Store Day was to be held on Saturday 22nd April. The obsession had already got hold of me; I started to follow the official Record Store Day Facebook and Twitter accounts with the intention of giving myself any advantage possible over not just genuine Marillion fans who would be interested, but also those out there in the big bad world, chasing their own gold, trying to make a bit of cash in their own unscrupulous way, but hey, greed is good, right?

I'm feeling like one of the new kings by now, I've even contacted my three favourite local record shops, one in my hometown of Halifax, one in nearby Hebden Bridge and one in neighbouring Huddersfield. I've 'liked' their social media outlets, I'm literally on my own little gold-rush, the news that there would only be 1,000 copies

issued in the UK got me doing mental mathematics: I have three shops I can try, but how many copies will each shop receive, if any? Why am I being like this? What is wrong with me? I'm not even obsessed with this band like other people are. Or am I? I then read online that there will be 200 copies held back to sell online from Racket records, this is becoming ridiculous, only 800 copies to be distributed across UK record shops, the verse...

We're too big to fall
We're too big to fail
We're too big to fall
We're too big to fail
And when we do...
It's down to you!

...is becoming real-life drama in my mind, maybe I am obsessed after all.

I construct a plan, just as we had done for the Royal Albert Hall. A plan that will give me a better chance of getting my hands on the gold. I contact my good Marillion buddy Mark Ashton who lives in Huddersfield, I'm thinking he could try the Huddersfield shop while I try the Halifax and Hebden Bridge shops, that way we would both have a chance, he's also wanting a copy, desperately! Disaster strikes my well thought-out plan when he declares himself unavailable for duty after committing to family business at the same time the shops are due to open, so I'm back to just myself again.

The list of Record Store Day special issues is released to the public on March 21st and that piece of gold is there, this time in plain black ink on white paper so the excitement starts all over again. I'm 52 years old not some teenager with their paper round money, I should have grown out of this by now, but obviously I haven't. I take my plan into battle mode, I begin telephoning all of the shops on my hit-list, making enquiries, how many copies will you be receiving? Each time I pick up my 'phone my wife gives me that look again and I know exactly what she's thinking, but those few lines...

I'm becoming harder to live with
But you can't see into my head
You can't see into my head
You can't see into my head!

...are on my mind again.

Eventually, two days prior to Record Store Day, Vinyl Tap in Huddersfield inform me they have 10 copies, but they haven't arrived yet! Revo records in Halifax assure me they have only 3 copies coming? They haven't been delivered yet either. I make the decision to go try the

Vinyl Tap option; they have a huge event planned the day before when 6 Music will host their Lauren Laverne show live from the store amid loads of promo and glitz. I set my alarm clock for 04:30. It isn't needed, I'm wide awake, alert and ready to chase the gold. I set off in my car the 8 or 9 miles, park up at a well-known supermarket and walk to the shop to queue up. On arrival, I estimate roughly 50 people in front of me. It is only 05:25am and I'm asking myself: have these people nothing better to do with their lives?

At 7:00am some of the shop staff arrive then shortly after, the owner, all kitted out in Record Store Day t-shirts. A local shop feeds the queue with bacon butties and coffee, which all feels rather civil, but I'm only here for my piece of gold. The others in the queue around me are friendly and chatty, but everyone is secretive about what is on their own list of must-haves, deadly secretive! My mate Cocky telephones me; he's at the Halifax shop and he's 11th in the queue! We agree to try and purchase each other's targeted records, that way, we increase our chances, so we text our lists to each other so as not to alert those standing within earshot.

The shop is due to open at 8:00am but 30 minutes before that, the doors open and the punters are invited in out of the cold outside. It was at this moment that I appreciated what a decent plan looks like, and credit to the shop and its staff for putting it together, well organised and executed to perfection. Each person entering was issued with a list of all releases and a pen, each list is individually numbered, I was given number 33, that meant 32 people were ahead of me in the queue, this was real now. The idea was to tick the box next to each of your desired picks, each item showing the price and how many copies had been manufactured and when your number was called, you hand your list over and the staff go away to check stock levels and availability, simple plan, just far too many people in front of number 33! I texted Cocky with a progress; update, he's still stood outside at this point. I found myself a nice unpopulated spot to peruse and ink my list, I then realised I'd forgotten to bring my recently acquired reading glasses, how could I be so under-prepared for

such a life event? I managed, just, and waited patiently for 8 o'clock, that bit isn't true, I was getting nervous now. People are trying to borrow my pen, chat to me and all I want to do is get my hands on that gold.

Number 1 hands over his list, a long wait and £826 later he turns around triumphantly to exit the shop and loudly announce, "This lot will be on e-bay by lunch time if you'd like to buy it!" Not only was I gobsmacked but those around me were appalled and told him so. His response was that he'd queued up since early the previous day.



I felt sick at the thought of missing out because of this. Number 2 gets served and misses out on one item. Seemingly, Mr. Greedy in front of him had snaffled the only copy. The mental torture increases for me when a chap tells me, "If I can get £60 for the Marillion album it will cover my outlay on the other stuff I bought." I'm thinking to myself all sorts of rude and offensive names for this man, how can people do this! Cocky calls to tell me that all three copies have sold out before he gets served at the Halifax shop, I console myself that at least I'm still in the game by choosing to go to the Huddersfield shop instead, maybe good fortune is with me, maybe.

A couple of folk who were behind me in the queue (numbers 34 and 35 I presume) were watching the shop Tweet which items they'd sold out of on their mobiles. Aha, I'll do that too, just to raise the tension even higher! I also had a watchful eye on the items other customers were being presented with prior to paying and the records being put into special Record Store Day carrier bags, the distinctive gold album cover was a big give

away, but looking back, not many were going out of the door.

Just before my turn arrives, these two chaps are about to leave as they missed out on Rush's Cygnus re-issue, I tell them what I've targeted and how I enjoyed their conversation in the queue, we'd agreed earlier on how poor we rated some of the greed of fellow punters that morning, I explained in basic terms what the *FEAR* album was about and immediately, one of the gents asked me if I knew anyone who might want a copy if he ticked the box on his list for me, to make sure the gold was falling into the right hands. Wow I thought, what a nice thing to do, I quickly handed over £21 to him as number 33 was called out. Bingo! Everything on my relatively small list (Stevie Nicks and The War On Drugs for me and Kasabian for a work colleague) were still in stock. I was asked if I still wished to purchase them all and I confirmed, but all the time, I had my eyes fixed on that thing of golden wonder. My mate, number 34 gave me a knowing smile and handed his list over. Now, my mate Jesterfromfev (as many of the readers might know him as) was also going to be blessed with the gold.

As we parted ways, numbers 34 and 35 were intrigued and said they hadn't listened to Marillion for years and were going upstairs to the cd section to buy a copy rather than on the special edition vinyl. I thanked them for their generosity, wished them well and went on my way. As I went back into the outside world feeling like I'd actually won gold rather than bought it, I took my phone out of my pocket to let Mr Ashton know he'd been successful, I noticed the display said 10 o'clock but it felt like 10 o'clock at night; I was emotionally shattered but happy and relieved at the same time.

On the opening track, *El Dorado*, he sang:

The gold stops us
The gold always did

I reckon he got it bang on, and my personal quest to grab a copy made me look at myself a little closer with regards to this obsession thing. I had already been through the pre-order of *FEAR* process and purchased the deluxe cd and standard vinyl versions, maybe I am, just a little, BUT, the whole experience also made me realise that friends old and new were prepared to help out in my quest. The gold theme doesn't end there though as my good friend Cocky has got some gold of his own and made many sacrifices to achieve it. His daughter is a para-Olympian multiple gold medal winner, the gold didn't stop her... ●



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