

# SO HAUNTED

Comparing his band's previous output to their latest and third release *Hollow*, vocalist/guitarist Nick Finch explains to Nick Argyriou, "It's now like Graveyard Train on steroids and you'd be hard-pressed to call a lot of the songs on the record 'country' anymore."



Nick Finch has risen from his post-Old Bar-shift slumber and can be heard annihilating his first coffee of the day. Currently in between gigs to promote the band's latest record *Hollow*, Graveyard Train's third, Finch is hoarse and expectedly so. For those who have ever caught a Graveyard set, this comes as no surprise since the band hit it harder than most. Recording for the first time at Atlantis Studio with Loki Lockwood, the plan for the record was, like for many a band these days, a basic desire to record almost entirely live to tape and capture the fierce verve and righteousness of the real-time performance.

"We attempted to begin recording the album about a year ago and went in and did like two or three songs, but they didn't come out right," informs Finch as he continues to sip harder and harder at the caffeine. "And because it was the first time with this band in a big proper recording studio, with glass walls and everything mic'd up, it was all very fucking *Pugwall's Last Summer* or something," he laughs.

Returning for round two earlier this year, Finch further explains that the band had all treated the experience the same as their previous records: stripping it all back, playing alongside each other in the one room with Lockwood overseeing the action and acting as chief facilitator of sound: "It was all the same, like we used to do it, but [this time] with fancy mics and fancy mixing desks and the fancy engineer, but it suited the live approach." True to Graveyard Train's 'go nuts' mentality, the band opened up and let it all hang in the Atlantis hallways, for this is no chain gang to tinker, craft or overly finesse a soundscape — they just are what they are and to mess with an already-working formula would no doubt make them squander their animated live allure.

Four or so of *Hollow*'s 11 tunes were written in the past six months, and Finch believes the multi-layered songwriting talent that exists within the organisation assists in crafting the alarming themes. Here we have stories that continue to be dominated by ideas of death and destruction. This

is horror country after all, but, as Finch informs, *Hollow* has now found a more mature terror edge. "We have all these different singers and writers so it keeps it interesting, and the definite themes for my songs are death... but I guess with the album as a whole, we've kind of lost that schlocky monster stuff — like, [singing about] mummies and vampires — and it's more about the horror of being human and the human condition," Finch declares.

Lyrical, this wasn't a particularly conscious move on Finch's part, but certain life-changing moments of the past 12 months seem to have had some influence. "My dad actually died last year and maybe subconsciously, not that I actually believe in the subconscious, but maybe some [more of the] death stuff came from that. Graveyard Train are a kind of horror-country band and I guess I just came across this realisation that the most horrific thing of all is the idea that all the good stuff is going to go and disappear. Hopefully next time I'll be a bit more cheery," he laughs.

With Finch's father passing at the age of 86, the 31-year-old Finch reflects on a large family with multiple siblings. No matter what the age or circumstance, the awareness of death continues to plague his thought process. "Death is always there and it's like the weight on everybody's shoulders — it's the great inevitability," he informs.

"[And] I've got a degree in philosophy, I guess, and have focused more on existential stuff and there's lots of ideas about the absurdity of life and the fact that this absurd thing [life] just ends, which makes it even more absurdist, and things like that just really stick with you!"

We further discuss the father figure and the strong image they hold in a child's life versus the foreseeable period when we view the patriarch as old and frail. This is another point of interest and intrigue for Finch: how our feelings evolve over time about those closest to us. "It's something we face, but I guess this stuff is now more for a psychiatrist's office than anything else," he jests. Musically, Finch explains that *Hollow* has been further informed by banjo

player Joshua Crawley's shift from banjo to electric guitar, which has led to Graveyard Train "fucking around with big space jams", while additional drums have continued to advance the sonic spread. "It's now like Graveyard Train on steroids and you'd be hard-pressed to call a lot of the songs on the record 'country' anymore," he explains. "I don't know what it is, this thing — it just is what it is!"

The artwork on the front cover of *Hollow* was drawn by Little John and Saint Jude's Brooks Penrose and features *The NeverEnding Story* Rock Biter-type figure cupping a battered city in his hands. The artistic style guide afforded to Penrose was direct: it needed to represent the headspace of Graveyard Train at the time of recording. "We told him that the album was called *Hollow* and that a lot of the songs are about hollowness [in terms of] being human and having no soul and stuff, and it worked. But at the end of the day, it's just a record cover and the main thing is that it had to look cool."

Explaining that Graveyard Train have slightly moved on from being "a bunch of drunk dudes having fun", professionalism and a dedication to their art has now taken precedence. "Somehow now we pay taxes and stuff but are still broke and will never make any money because there's so many of us in the band, but it's funny that we've become a business in a way," Finch observes. "Now we have a publicist and agent and these people that are, like, you know, 'trying to make money from us' and [there's] record label interest. So it's interesting when a band makes that transformation. But at the heart of it all we are still a bunch of mates who drink booze and stomp our feet and play stupid music," he assures.

**WHO:** Graveyard Train

**WHAT:** *Hollow* (Spooky Records)

**WHEN & WHERE:** Friday 1 and Saturday 2 June, Hi-Fi Bar; Thursday 28, Bended Elbow, Geelong