

back of their beat up van, using my haphazard haircut as credible proof that I could be the next Cameron Crowe.

Pen and paper in hand, Red Bull flowing through my veins, I dubbed myself a cultural archaeologist and observed Dispatch's descent into underground pop-rock. Along the way, I weathered a few awkward moments—band fights over set-lists and the shaky, unpredictable engine on that raggedy old van—and received a series of special treats, including the chance to help the trio determine a song list on my old Hebrew School notebook. They mistook my awful penmanship for the archaic Hebrew alphabet.

Just like the young Cameron in *Almost Famous*, I was quickly mesmerized by the band's budding celebrity charm. I watched each band member blossom into their own celebrity persona.

There was Chad, the humble hippie/activist, Brad, the in-the-shadows businessman, and, of course, Pete. The potential, and slightly arrogant, pop star.

Five shows into their next tour, Dispatch arrived again on my collegiate front door in time to play my radio show and throw me my first backstage pass (even though our stage was, really, just a raised platform).

In a moment of sheer laminated glory, I became accustomed

to walking straight past the line of well-groomed girls hoping for a peep backstage. Backstage, the guys handed me a request: "Next time, give us your gym. The bar is way too crowded."

For a while, I thought Dispatch's comments a sign of their cementing professionalism. Yet after selling out their last show at New York City's hippie-rock womb, the Wetlands, Dispatch jumped the shark, slicing their jams into polished pop songs and disrupting their shows' flow with cheesy rock-star commentary.

I took the stylistic change as a reassurance of mission: proof that this band would one day realize their true radio-rock potential. But the band quickly grew out of favor with my usual concert crew.

As a journalist, the group's newfound success further enticed me, but, shortly after the spring of my senior year, something unexpected happened. Dispatch broke up.

Well. That's not completely true. In our post-millennium pop-culture, jam-bands tend to favor extended hiatuses in lieu of rock-star break-ups. Still, given Dispatch's gradual rise and polished spark, I found this hiatus a bit out of character. Unlike Metallica-style jock-rockers, Dispatch seemed rooted in real rock and roll, albeit coated with an extra layer of pop-infused polish. While a careful surf around the web revealed any number of potential breakup theo-

ries, the three normal Behind the Music Clichés remained unuttered anywhere. Sex. Drugs. And rock and roll. Dispatch cut their chops on the college frat circuit, not in years of incessant roadwork.

After my college emancipation, I struck out looking for work and landed a gig writing band reviews that would pay for my concert addiction. In one of my first professional solo assignments, I found myself shipped off to Boston to review a concert by a "random" recently reunited trio.

Co-opting Nantucket Nectar's annual Boston jam-band gathering as their swan song, Dispatch had decided to reunite for one final performance, timed just right for the summer festival season.

So, in an unexpected twist of fate, I found myself once again backstage at a Dispatch show, surrounded by many of the same groupies, journalists, and band jockeys that had filled up the band's laminate list back when I was in college.

Standing side-stage, I watched Dispatch wade through their catalogue, nodding to the overcrowded audience members hanging from a bundle of nearby trees during "Bars in the Belfry," and cautioning a team of fans to "take it easy" after a few water bottles went flying a little too close.

The group preached about independent music, voting rights, and

grass roots activism, but it all got lost in the suburban hiss. As the evening's energy peaked during "Even," the group lost control of their crowd, succumbing to another water bottle war. One bottle hit the sound board and subsequently marred the group's best song. Looking out into the sea of Abercrombie shirts, Dispatch remained, after all their success and four year hiatus, the sound track to any number of Saturday activities.

Returning to work the following Monday, I received a press release from the group's publicist.

"Dispatch stuns 110,000" the email blitz shouted. Quickly checking with a few blue and gold onlookers, I found this assessment a bit overstated—in fact, about double the concert's actual attendance. But it seemed fitting for a band that squawked about playing the gym as soon as people started paying attention to them at the bar. And, if Dispatch is at all a symbol of college rock's potential professionalism, this group unfortunately missed the class on time and patience.

At times I wonder how a band with so much potential could implode before their popularity truly exploded. Perhaps it's my inner anthropologist talking, but to me, Dispatch symbolizes a generation of jam-bands who cut their chops in college, not in the streets of Haight-Asbury. Either way, at least Dispatch's recorded remains will provide scholars like

