

Sex, Drugs, Violence, More Sex & Rock & Roll

The 20 wildest GNR moments – from Axl punching David Bowie to Slash's mountain lion to multiple riots



Man's best friend: Slash in L.A., 1986

Guns N' Roses Turn a Los Angeles Alley Into a Den of Sin

Summer 1985

IN THE BAND'S EARLIEST, rawest years, the members of Guns N' Roses slept in a \$400-a-month storage space and threw raucous parties in the alley outside (which the city of Los Angeles designated Lot Number 619). It soon developed a reputation for all kinds of mayhem – muggings, fights, prostitution, bogus drugs and overdoses. “We sold drugs. We sold girls,” guitarist Izzy Stradlin recalled in the 2008 book *Watch You Bleed: The Saga of Guns N' Roses*. “If one of the guys was fucking a girl in our

sleeping loft, we'd ransack the girl's purse while he was doing her.”

Axl Sees Red

March 26th, 1986

AXL ROSE DIDN'T wait to get famous before he started throwing tantrums. On GNR's signing day with Geffen Records, the singer misplaced his contact lenses – and stormed out of his apartment sure someone had stolen them so he couldn't read his contract. Slash and manager Vicky Hamilton found the lenses, then discovered Rose down the street, sitting meditatively cross-legged atop the Whisky a Go Go. “It was kind of the status quo,” Hamilton recalled.



LEATHER MESSIAH
Rose in 1986

No Axl, No Problem?

October 23rd, 1986

WHEN GUNS OPENED for Alice Cooper in 1986, they performed entirely without Rose: He arrived late to the Arlington Theatre in Santa Barbara, California, and was turned away by security. Stradlin took over vocals, improvising lyrics like “elephant dick under my arms” in “Nightrain,” and Slash asked the audience if anyone could come up and sing. “Basically, that set was a drunken jam fit for a bar – except we were in an arena,” Slash recalled. “We were friends with the crowd for a minute, but that quickly changed.”

Say Hi to the New Backup Singer

Spring 1987

IN 1987, ADRIANA SMITH caught her boyfriend – GNR drummer Steven Adler – cheating. So when Rose invited the 19-year-old into the studio to help with some last-minute overdubs on “Rocket Queen,” Smith didn’t mind that her contribution would be to moan as loud as possible while she and the singer had sex. “I didn’t want to be around for recording a girl getting fucked,” mixer Michael Barbiero told *Spin*. “So I set up the mics and had my assistant record it.” Smith, who was drunk at the time, came to regret the incident, saying the “shame and guilt” contributed to a struggle with addiction. She later became a drug and alcohol counselor.

The Cover Controversy

July 21st, 1987

THE ORIGINAL COVER art for *Appetite for Destruction* features a painting of the same name by



Loaded gun: Rose, from the “Lot 619” days in L.A., 1985

artist Robert Williams, which depicted a robot looming over a rape victim before being attacked by a larger predator. “I suggested that they come over to my house and look through some slides and pick something [else] for the cover, because I knew they were gonna get in trouble with it,” the artist told *Revolver*. After multiple retailers refused to carry the product, Williams’ art was eventually moved inside the album’s packaging.

Steven Adler Decks a Streetlight...

December 1987

ONE NIGHT IN 1987, Adler got into a drunken fistfight where he swung, missed, hit a streetlight and broke his hand. To replace him on tour, Guns N’ Roses enlisted Cinderella drummer Fred Coury. “Fred played technically good and steady, but the songs

sounded just awful,” Stradlin told *Musician*. “[Adler’s] sense of swing...gave the songs their feel.”

... And Then Saves Nikki Sixx’s Life

December 23rd, 1987

SLASH, HIS GIRLFRIEND and Adler were inhaling a mountain of cocaine with Mötley Crüe’s Nikki Sixx at L.A.’s Franklin

Plaza hotel two days before Christmas in 1987. According to Adler’s memoir, *My Appetite for Destruction*, the drummer left the room to shoot up, and when he came back, the door would hardly budge – Sixx’s purple, unconscious body was blocking it. Adler’s hand was still in a cast, but with one arm he dragged Sixx into the shower. When cold water didn’t revive him, Adler smashed the OD’d bassist in the face with his cast. The next day, while laid-up in the hospital, Sixx called Adler, wondering, “Dude, what happened? My face is killing me.”

“One in a Million” Offends Millions

November 1988

PUBLIC FIGURES FROM Tipper Gore to Arsenio Hall lined up to condemn Rose’s acoustic screed “One in a Million” and its use of words like “niggers” and “faggots.” Rose’s attempts to explain the song’s meaning only added to the problem: “Why can black people go up to each other and say ‘nigger,’ but when a white guy does it, all of a sudden it’s a big put-down?” The f-word? “I’ve had some very bad experiences with homosexuals.... [But] I’m not against them doing

what they do as long as they’re not forcing it upon me.”

Axl Won’t Come Out of His Room

December 1988

IN 1988, WHILE ON TOUR in Japan, Rose locked himself in his hotel room for days and refused to speak to anyone. He finally requested a wake-up call, but fired the staffer who delivered it. As Slash told *ROLLING STONE*, “Axl’s craziness drives me crazier than it drives Axl.”

Naked and Afraid

1989

IN HIS MEMOIR, SLASH details “a long and nightmarish obsession with heroin that lasted from 1989 through 1991.” Perhaps the darkest episode of his addiction took place at an Arizona golf resort, when a drug bender devolved into a hallucinatory spree in which he believed he was being pursued by “predators” with “rubbery-looking dreadlocks.” A naked Slash punched through a glass door in order to flee his room, then proceeded to use a hotel maid as a “human shield.” Later, he gave police an account of the predator at-

tack: “I was still high enough that I told the story without a shred of self-consciousness.”

Izzy Stradlin’s Mile-High Mishap

August 27th, 1989

I WAS DRUNK IN THE middle of this bunch of senior-citizen types. I was smoking, and the stewardess came over. I told her to fuck herself,” Stradlin said in *Vox* magazine, recalling a flight from Indianapolis to L.A. “I was drinking so much I had to take a piss. Man, it seemed like I waited an hour. So I pissed in the trash can instead.” The severity of the guitarist’s poor judgment became clear when the plane made a stopover in Phoenix. “Next thing I know, we’ve landed, I’m walking out and I see 10 policemen.... And I remember thinking, ‘Uh-oh! I think I fucked up again.’”

Theatre of Pain

September 6th, 1989

THE BEEF BETWEEN Guns N’ Roses and Mötley Crüe dates to a 1989 incident when Stradlin al-

legedly assaulted the wife of Crüe singer Vince Neil. After GNR’s performance of “Heartbreak Hotel” with Tom Petty at the 1989 VMAs, Neil jumped out of the crowd in an attempt to punch Stradlin in the face. Stradlin walked away with a cut from Neil’s ring, but more beef ensued. Neil challenged the band to a public fight, and Rose bragged in the press, “Vince, whichever way you want it, man: Guns, knives or fists, whatever you want to do. I don’t care.”

Smacked Actor

October 10th, 1989

IN 1989, DAVID BOWIE showed up on the video set of “It’s So Easy,” where he showed a little too much interest in Rose’s girlfriend Erin Everly. Rose handled the situation in the expected fashion, punching the Thin White Duke and throwing him off the set. Bowie quickly apologized, and the two patched up their differences. “We talked and went out to dinner, and then went down to the China Club,” Rose said.

Farm Accident

April 7th, 1990

GUNS N’ ROSES’ performance at the Farm Aid IV benefit concert in Indiana was a train wreck of epic proportions. “Steven [Adler] took a run up to the drum riser, which is a pretty big platform that’s hard to

The party never ends: GNR in L.A., 1985



miss, and took flight," Slash wrote in his memoir. Adler later claimed he wasn't prepared to play Rose's choice of songs – the brand-new "Civil War" and a cover of the U.K. Subs' "Down on the Farm," which he didn't even know. The band soldiered through, however, with Rose bidding the crowd "Good fuckin' night!" on live TV. It would be the final live appearance of the classic GNR lineup.

Your Illusion I and II: "Fuck you, St. Louis!"

Oh, Canada

August 8th, 1992

SOMETHING WICKED must have been in the air on this hot August night in Montreal. First, James Hetfield, of opening act Metallica, suffered a pyrotechnics accident, forcing

in Los Angeles and filled it with venomous snakes, lizards, eight cats and a mountain lion cub named Curtis. "I installed a full-on reptile zoo over there," he recounts in his autobiography. "Just a gazillion snakes and all kinds of stuff." When an earthquake hit California in 1994, his home was severely damaged, but all his animals survived. Slash then retreated to the Marina del Rey Four Seasons

could watch porn while recording, a proclivity Rose reportedly found offensive.

Guns N' Roses' Very Special Christmas Riot

December 6th, 2002

BOLSTERED BY SUCCESSFUL comeback gigs in Las Vegas and Brazil's Rock in Rio, Rose set out on a North American tour in 2002. But the trek crashed and burned in Philadelphia, when Rose pulled one of his infamous no-shows and fans rioted. As rumors swirled throughout the arena that Rose was in New York watching a Knicks game, debris began to fly toward the stage – from seat cushions to metal chairs. In 2012, Rose would half-apologize during a redemptive show at Philly's Electric Factory: "I got really sick; it had nothing to do with fur coats or basketball games," he said, adding, "I'm not saying I'm innocent."

Axl Branches Out Into Fashion

May 18th, 2006

IN PERHAPS THE SILLIEST punch-up in Rose's combative career, the singer got whomped by Tommy Hilfiger – a fashion designer 11 years his senior – at the Plumm nightclub in New York, during a birthday party for actress Rosario Dawson. Angered that Rose had moved his girlfriend's drink without asking, Hilfiger decided the best defense was a good offense, and pummeled Rose before security intervened. "He had a huge ring on," Hilfiger recalled in 2010. "He wears all this jewelry. [I'm thinking], 'If I get hit, it's over. No teeth, no eye.' So I hit him before he hit me. It was self-protection. Now we're friends."



Adler and Slash snuggle down.

St. Louis Blues

July 2nd, 1991

DURING A SHOW AT ST. Louis' Riverport Amphitheatre, Rose became enraged when he spied an unauthorized photographer in the front row – and grew more apoplectic when security guards failed to confiscate his camera. Rose dived into the crowd and rained blows upon the photographer before returning to the stage. "Thanks to the lame-ass security, I'm going home!" he announced before permanently exiting the stage. Dozens of fans were injured in the ensuing melee. Rose offered his response in the liner notes of *Use*

the band to truncate its set. Given the opportunity to save the show, Guns waited for more than three hours to take the stage, then bailed due to sound problems – and Rose's sore throat – after nine songs. A riot quickly broke out, in which more than 2,000 fans caused \$400,000 in damages to the stadium, then continued to wreak havoc in the area outside the arena.

Welcome to the Jungle

January 1994

IN THE EARLY NINETIES, Slash worked on kicking his drug habit and trying to adapt to a quieter domestic life. He bought a new home

where he secretly holed up with Curtis.

Avoid the New Guy

2000

IN 2000, ROSE HIRED Brian Patrick Carroll – a.k.a. Buckethead – to fill the band's vacant lead-guitar spot. Buckethead, who wears a KFC container on his noggin, insisted on recording his parts in a specially built chicken coop decorated with rubber chicken parts. When Rose's pet wolf puppy pooped in the cage, the guitarist refused to let anyone clean it, claiming that he loved the scent. For a while, Buckethead also kept a TV monitor in his coop so he



YOU'RE HIRED
Rose with Pamela Manning in L.A., 1986

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