



DAZZLING KILLMEN

face-of-collapse





I
STARING CONTEST
BONE FRAGMENTS
MY LACERATIONS
BLOWN (FACE DOWN)
WINDSHEAR
PAINLESS ONE

+

IN THE FACE OF COLLAPSE
AGITATOR

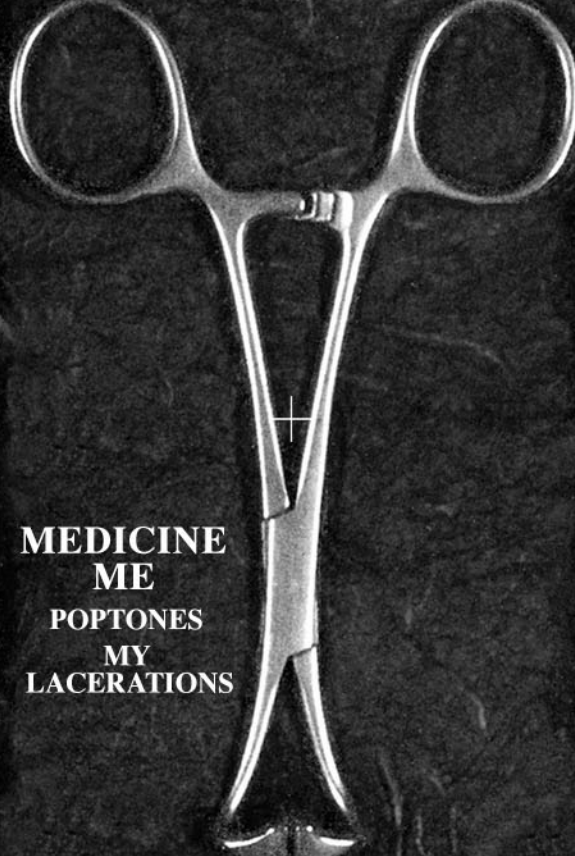
II

BONUS TRACKS

© 1993 *Dazzling Killmen*
Poptones - written by Jah Wobble, Jim Walker,
Johnny Rotten and Keith Levene



MEDICINE
ME
POPTONES
MY
LACERATIONS

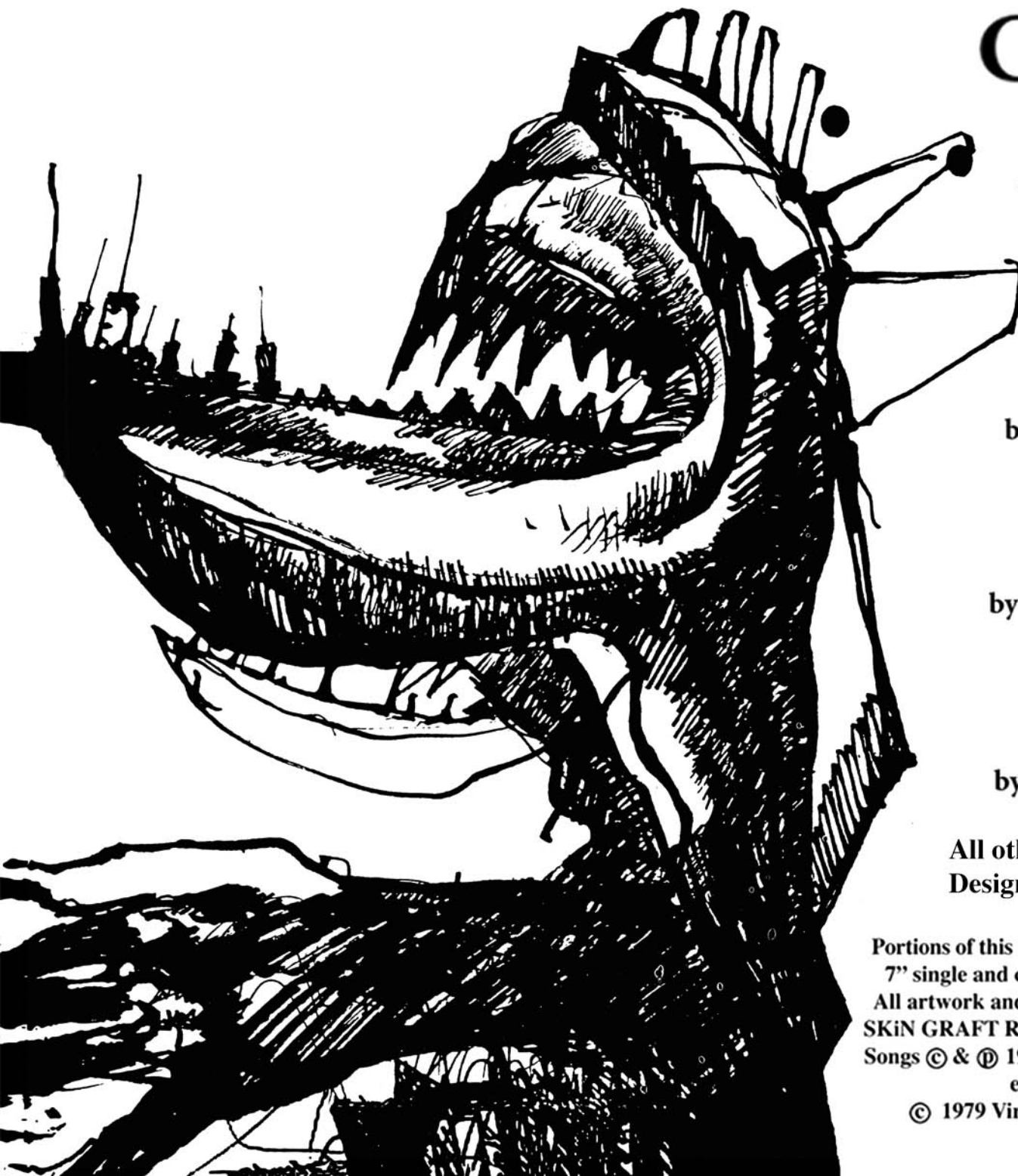


Dazzling Killmen

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Designed by Mark Fischer and Paul Nitsche

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Thank you.

DAZZLING KILLMEN





Dazzling Killmen

Face of Collapse

Foreword by Aaron Burgess

In 1995, I walked into a tattoo shop and spent too much of that week's rent to have Dazzling Killmen's "Reactor" logo driven into my right calf. The band had recently broken up; I was young, impulsive, and bummed at the loss. Recalling the only time I saw them play, I remembered how imposing the symbol looked on bassist Darin Gray's legs. I wanted to look like that, but I really wanted more music to sound like Dazzling Killmen.

I still do.

This sounds quaint today, but in that pre-social-media era, Dazzling Killmen entered my world as an enigma. I picked up the band's 1993 single "Medicine Me" because it was on Skin Graft Records and came bundled with one of that label's trademark absurdist comic books. Free of triviality like lyrics and band photos, the cover art depicted tableaux from at least

three different nightmares. The B-side was a cover of PiL's "Poptones."

How could it not be good?

I was expecting bedlam, depravity, lowbrow Dada humor—all the stuff Skin Graft reveled in at the time. What I heard on that single was different: terror, dread, precision, tension and release. The guitars stacked and ascended in weird, dissonant shapes. The rhythm section's asymmetric calculus of starts and stops turned hardcore and metal traditions on their ear. Vocalist/guitarist Nick Sakes' delivery, while rooted in those same traditions, was unlike anything in either genre. Others merely screamed; he spat and seethed through clenched teeth.

I picked up Dig out the Switch, the Killmen's 1992 debut released on some tiny French label I'd never

heard of, and my curiosity grew. Was this a hardcore band? A metal band? The world's gnarliest progressive-rock quartet?

“Yes” is the easy answer, but only because it's easy to rewind through two decades of genre fragmentation to hear Dazzling Killmen's influence on any number of “math-metal,” “prog-core” and similarly classified bands. At the time, however, this St. Louis quartet occupied a genre of one. When Skin Graft released the Killmen's 1994 sophomore album, *Face of Collapse*, that genre had its touchstone.

I can't predict what your experience will be when you drop the needle on this reissue of *Face of Collapse*. For me, it was as if the orchestrated violence in those songs was already part of my DNA. The upturning and vivisection of standard rock rhythms; the terrifying clashes of silence and dissonance; the athletic bass playing that shot melody through walls of discord. As I struggled to slot the Killmen into categories, the closest analogs were things that sounded nothing like them but rather existed in their own peripheries: the Minutemen's lean, iconoclastic funk-punk; Voivod's dystopian death metal; the gristly “pigfuck” of any band you'd care to name on *Touch and Go* and *Amphetamine Reptile*. Little has changed after hundreds of hours spent with the album.



*photo by Mark Buckheit / pictured left to right:
Blake Fleming, Tim Garrigan, Darin Gray, Nick Sakes*

The sequencing on *Face of Collapse* was—is—perfect. Judicious negative space, both within and around the songs, is as critical as the notes being played. (The best horror, after all, leaves room for menace to build.) “Staring Contest” opens the album with 43 seconds of dread, its gnarled guitar figures inching toward a sustained, screaming climax. “Bone Fragments” explodes in the opposite direction, forcing its way into a hushed, eerie narrative from Sakes that could be about physical violence, but no doubt runs deeper psychologically: “I remember some details better than others” ... “All he

ever said, ‘Looking good today’ ... “And then the door shut.” Then, pushing his vocal cords to their limit, “Hold it down!” With no lyric sheet to guide things, the imagination creates horrors the Killmen probably never intended.

Like I said: perfection.

And so it goes, through the blitzkrieg of “My Lacerations,” the alternately soaring and dive-bombing waltz of “Blown (Face Down)”, the borderline-black-metal, well, windshear of “Windshear” that transitions, not skipping a beat, into the starts, stops and stabs of “Painless One.” “In the Face of Collapse,” as the album’s centerpiece and title track, is a 14-minute journey through hellish peaks and valleys, a climb toward a cataclysm that, by all rights, would be enough to end any album this heavy. But it’s a mere prologue to “Agitator,” a song that, to this day shakes me to my core. I have never heard rage boil over as acutely as in whatever-Nick-is-snarling there, but I’ve felt it. It’s the sound of a panic attack, a descent, a whole history of things-too-dark-to-share-with-strangers that colors the person I’m struggling to be today. But I can put on that record, that song, and not feel alone. I hear it in Nick’s vocals—he’s felt it, too, whatever “it” may be. And the band, guiding him to the brink with sensibilities honed through who knows how many hours of toil and fury, knows where he’s going with it.

Over the years, as a journalist interviewing Nick about his subsequent bands, I’ve prodded for clues into the

Killmen’s sound. Some hints emerged: the clang of Keith Levene’s guitar on those early PiL records; the dub-informed distortion vortex that was fellow St. Louis noisemakers Blind Idiot God; the chops former jazz students Gray, drummer Blake Fleming and guitarist Tim Garrigan brought to Sakes’ self-taught sturm und drang. When we talked about lyrics, though, Nick tended to change the subject—and, after a while, I realized I didn’t really want to know. The relationship between the band, this record, and me had long since been imprinted in my head, and, quite literally, onto my body.

Although less formidable today, where it spends most days hidden beneath corporate-casual wear, my Dazzling Killmen tattoo has yet to outlive its welcome. I like to think it’s turned on a few strangers to this strange, magnificent band who lived only a few years, but who knows. More recently, my tattoo has guided conversations with my kids, who, still poking the world to determine their own tastes, are doing that thing kids do. “Who’s your favorite band, Dad?” “Well, it’s hard to pick one, but you know that circle-X symbol on my leg...?”

Here’s hoping this reissue leaves a similar mark on you.

Aaron Burgess, Austin, TX
February 2016



The night is the fisherman to the tackle-box of my head.

It opens it up and takes a thought-casting it out to roam about, bobbing for something meaningful to take hold. Looking for the Whopper, but getting stuck with the boot. My life is the one that got away. — Every Night I Sink deeper...



Once in a while I would manage to pull myself up and out from the bottom of the river to try and look at my reflection in the water's glassy surface... But I could never see it. Before I could get a clear look, a fish pops its head up through the water & Stares back at me.



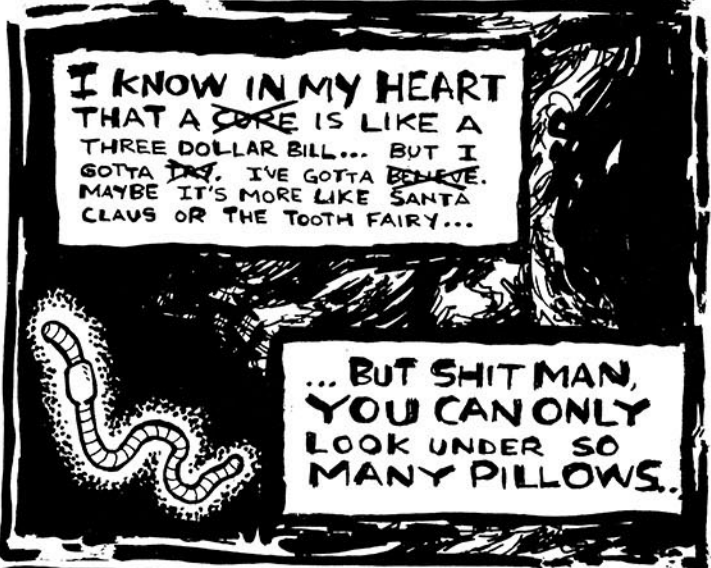
After this happened a couple of times, it occurred to me that maybe I was the fish. Maybe I was ~~like~~...





A needle in the arm
is worth two in the bush.

I've been told it's
too late for pre-
ventative medicine
but what the fuck?
I've got a lawn and
when I've gotta, I
mow it... Sometimes
after it's overgrown
and outta control,
but I give it the
old College try.
'Course that
doesn't always
cut it, but if at
first you don't
succeed; try, try,
again... And again,
and again, and again,
and again, and...



I KNOW IN MY HEART
THAT A ~~CORE~~ IS LIKE A
THREE DOLLAR BILL... BUT I
GOTTA ~~TRY~~. I'VE GOTTA ~~BELIEVE~~.
MAYBE IT'S MORE LIKE SANTA
CLAUS OR THE TOOTH FAIRY...

... BUT SHIT MAN,
YOU CAN ONLY
LOOK UNDER SO
MANY PILLOWS.



Is that a sardine
in your pants...

...Or are you
just happy to
see me?



I guess everybody comes to the point where they realize that you can't teach an old dog new tricks. Me, I've never seen anybody train a fish to do anything. After awhile, ya gotta come to grips with the way things are and just run with it.



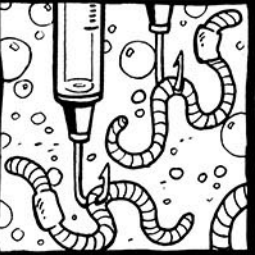
gency, Recat Ur



reat cat

How does the canopener feel after it's opened a can of starkist? Nobody cares. I am that tuna. When you breathe me in, I'm all that you smell. You don't smell the can-opener. It's as good as non-existent.

I don't want to open a whole other can of worms...



'Course, Once a guy like me accepts what he is, there's always gonna be someone out to put him away. Nobody digs the smell of tuna after its been out too long.

It's such a drag. There's always a catch...



So now the pond has dried up. There's no current for me to swim against, much less with.

I just sit here immobile...

...an anxious sperm stuck with a limp dick.



But even though I may be outta com for now, take heart After all...

There's ~~things!~~ something fishy goin on...



FALL DOWN STAND UP

SOMETHING LIKE THAT

I SWARE off telephones
every time I end a
relationship



Dick
Skarrod
Called


I FEEL LIKE
MY SURROUNDINGS
ARE TOTALLY
BEYOND MY
CONTROL

I turn to you
for help. I should
know better



This game is very
tiring. I can't
help but **LOOSE**

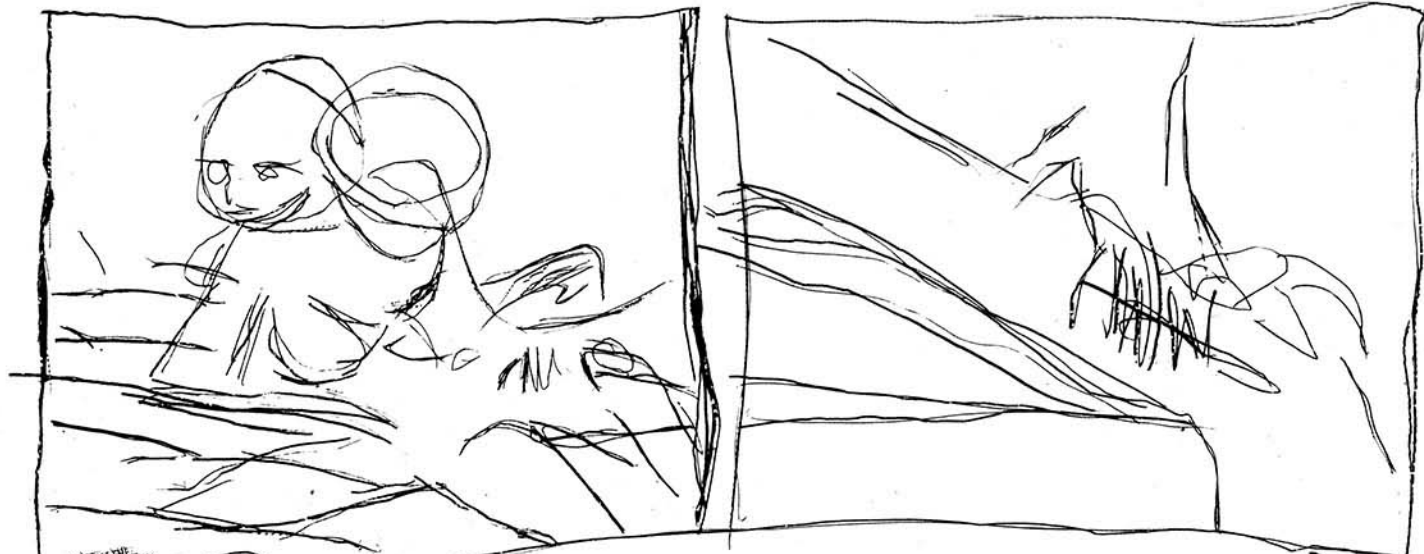
∴ complesso di castrazione.





Remember it felt
 I WANT to remember A SICK WAY
 Like drowning
 I SAY I DREAM about it I have
 trouble getting to sleep I had a
 cigarette burn on my back. I couldn't really
 FEEL it. FEEL it I
 ignor it burn it felt like
 sun burn she asked me
 the only things I
 Remember ARE burn things.





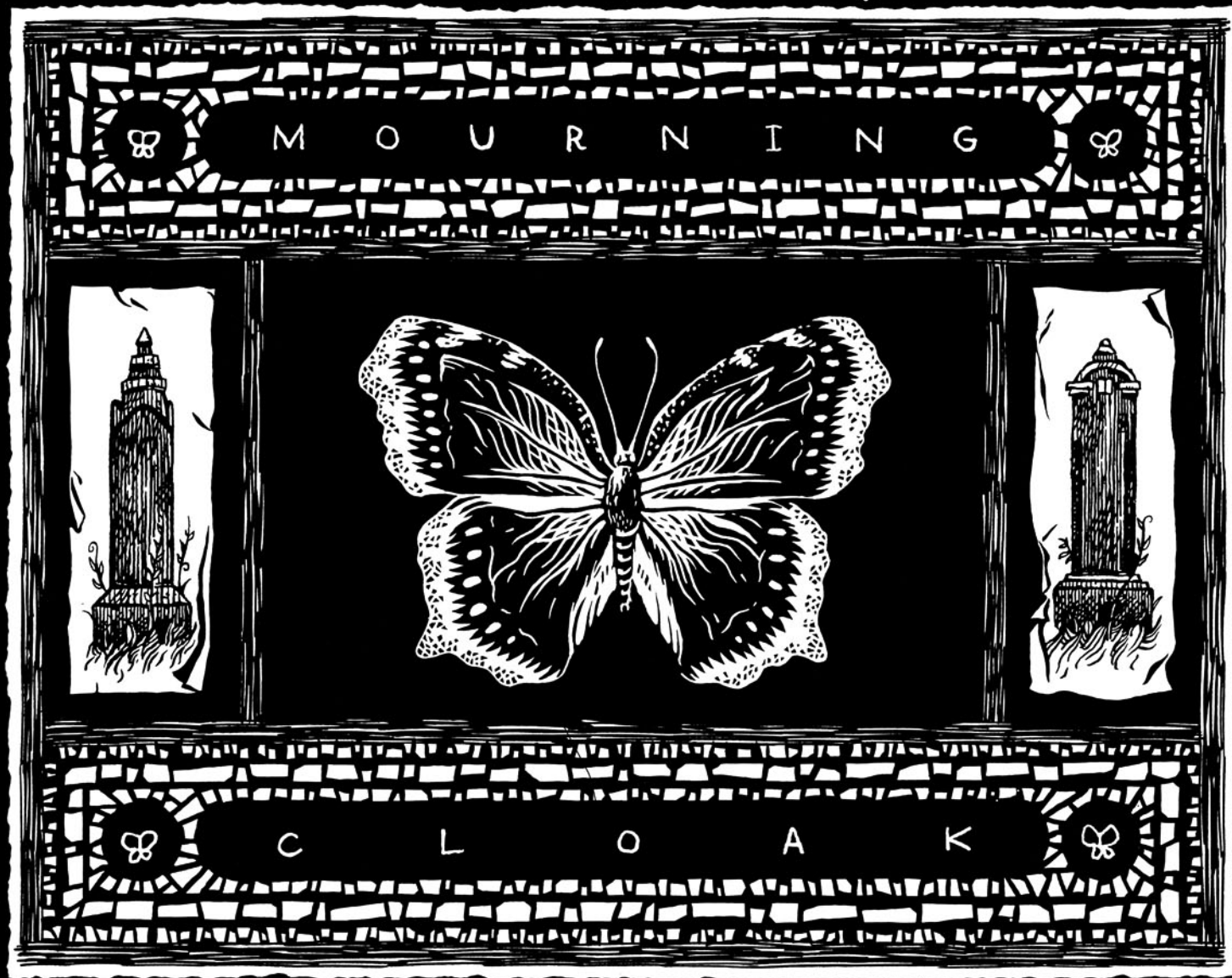
I don't know what it is they see in me
But I think it's something they can definitely steal

to all the girls I've loved before
There is no honor among thieves.

I don't know what he is or see in me but
Rob Sykes 92 © I can defend still it's what got I



*Velvet wings silently disperse the powdered flesh ...
Labial palpus penetrates, carefully tasting its worth ...*



Take to the sky, the wasted are to be sown ...



An Oral History

by Hank Shteamer

Nick Sakes, Darin Gray and Blake Fleming formed Dazzling Killmen in the St. Louis, Missouri, area in 1990. They released several singles in 1990 and '91, and in April 1992, they recorded their debut album, “Dig Out the Switch”. Shortly afterward, **Tim Garrigan** joined the group, and the quartet began writing and refining material for what would become the second Dazzling Killmen full-length, “Face of Collapse”. In early 2016, I spoke with the band members about the making of the album. - **Hank Shteamer**

BACKGROUND

Nick Sakes: I think maybe *Face of Collapse* might have been a reaction to how disappointed we were with how that first album came out.

Darin Gray: *Dig Out the Switch* was a totally unsatisfactory experience. We recorded and mixed that record in one day, and that's not very long. We worked really hard to make that record good, and it's no reflection on anybody that we worked with; we just didn't like the way it sounded.

Really, to me, the obvious difference between those two records is Tim. Tim and Blake and I all went to school

together, and so we were practicing a lot during the day at school. We were practicing Dazzling Killmen music; we were playing all kinds of stuff. So that was super important to [*Face of Collapse*]. Tim's guitar-work is all over that record. It just opened the floodgates, really.

Tim Garrigan: I met Blake first at summer jazz camp, the summer before our senior year in high school, at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. So Blake and I became friends, and then it wasn't until sophomore year in college that Darin came into the music department. I remember

walking down the hall and hearing [him] in the combo room playing, I was like, "Who is that bass player? Holy shit!"

We started playing together in an electric jazz trio. That opened the door to Darin inviting me to be a guest artist on "Poptones" and "Medicine Me" [Ed. note: Both songs were recorded in August 1992 and released the following year on a Skin Graft 7-inch].

The cool thing with those guys was, they didn't really tell me how to play. It was fun for me to add just subtle elements. Like, "What would it be like if I take a weird chord and move it on top of that pattern so it creates another layer of movement?"

DG: Tim and I were roommates around this time too. So a lot of those haunting guitar melody sections where it's just guitar and bass, a lot of that stuff, we came up with in our apartment, just bouncing [ideas] back and forth.

TG: Darin and I shared a little house together, I guess that was from late '92 to late '93, and that was a great woodshedding time. Darin had a ton of records, and we just spent a lot of time talking and thinking about music. And then I started writing some stuff. Darin encouraged me to contribute, and that's something that I'm grateful for.

Blake Fleming: Bringing [Tim] into the band, there was an obvious shift. We were a three-piece, and we're

playing more punk-rock-oriented things. It was more of a proggy Black Flag, or something, in the beginning, or still deriving [from] the Minutemen, but on *Face of Collapse*, we had finally really come into our own. And it was a combination of all those things. It was the musical rebelliousness that we all kind of shared from a lot of our peers that we were around in high school and college and stuff, and the music we were getting into.

Me, Tim and Darin at that point, we were all listening heavily to everything from This Heat's first record to Stockhausen to all the Naked City stuff to Cecil Taylor to Satie. And Nick was a huge music head also. We were all heavily geeking out into all that kind of stuff. The most rock & roll-oriented stuff that we listened to maybe at that point would've been [Captain Beefheart's] *Lick My Decals Off, Baby*. We were just gravitating toward all this stuff that seemed to be outside—the more abstract, the more avant-garde, the more underground, the more obtuse—because we felt like that's where we were.

Everybody was just kind of growing and evolving at the same time, and it was the fact that Tim had joined the band that opened up the palette of what we could do tonally more. Like in the song "In the Face of Collapse," the more jangly, strummy chords, you can hear that the tonality is evolving with the band, and I think Tim had a lot to do with that, and that was coming from what we were all listening to at that time.

NS: I really didn't know what I was being dragged into

Illustration by Paul Nitsche © 1994, 2016
originally drawn for a poster promoting
the Neurosis / Dazzling Killmen show
at The Other World in St. Louis,
October 8th, 1994



on that album. In fact, I was hanging on for dear life so much just practicing that thing, that we never even really practiced with vocals, because I couldn't imagine singing and playing this stuff. And they didn't really know anything about what I was going to be singing. To be honest, I wrote a lot of those lyrics at [Steve] Albini's house the day before I recorded them. I was kind of scared. I felt like one of those nightmares where you're in a class and it's finals, and you're like, "Oh, shit, I didn't go to class all year, and I have to take this test." It worked out.

SONGS

DG: Really, none of us wrote that music; we all wrote that music.

On [songs like "Blown (Face Down)" and "Agitator"],

I made up those parts in my house and we assembled them together, so everyone is reacting off of my bass line

for those songs. But I never looked at it like that. I always looked at it more like we were all the same. To me, we were the best when it was this big, ominous wall of sound.

At that time, in the circles we were swimming in, there certainly were very few drummers like Blake.

I personally don't think there were any. He's profoundly great. And if my bass lines sound good, they would not sound good at all without his drumming. Because Blake's drumming could swing, it doesn't necessarily sound like I'm playing a bunch of crap, or playing all over the place just to play all over the place. It sounds like, yeah, this was intended, and I think that's because of the framing of it.

BF: [Darin and Tim] would come in and show us parts, and like most bands, we would just jam on these little ideas that they had. Sometimes, Darin might come in and have two minutes of a song like "Agitator" already arranged. So we'd be learning this crazy section of numbers, like six of this and seven of that and then there's a half of this one on the fourth time—mathy, proggy kind of stuff. And then other times, it would just be a little seed of an idea that we would all jam on, and then we would see how to expand it within the group naturally through improvisation.

TG: I imagined Sonny Rollins playing [the main verse riff of "In the Face of Collapse"]. I'm not saying it sounds like Sonny Rollins—but like a tenor sax playing that line. And then Darin suggested [sings staccato accents in verse breaks]. So Darin and I worked out the whole thing together.

DG: We had a song called "Code Blue" that was sort of the version of ["In the Face of Collapse"] on [Dig Out the Switch]. I don't remember consciously thinking that we had to do something like that and top that, but I

think maybe, subconsciously, we felt like we had to. "In the Face of Collapse" does have all the elements of what we did, but it also has a lot of newer stuff too, because a lot of the guitarwork in there, that's some great, haunting guitar stuff. That song is to me a great example of Tim really stepping up and just nailing it, and coming up with something that Nick and Blake and I certainly couldn't have done back without him.

["In the Face of Collapse"] is sort of the magnum opus of the band, if you will. But I do think "Agitator" weirdly represents us a little bit more. That song took a year to write. Probably more than that. Just the level and amount of work that went into something like that was extreme. For me, "Agitator" is a great example of shifting rhythms and shifting time and moving time and being in control of time.

BF: A song like "Windshear" was basically coming from an influence of bands like Napalm Death and Carcass. We were doing kind of our own version of grindcore.

[Nick and Darin] would do this hand gesture when they wanted me to do this certain [beat]. What they would do is they would act like they were chopping steak really fast, so if you can imagine, like, in a cartoon, "Choppin' steaks, choppin' steaks, choppin' steaks." Like, "Hey, man, come on, chop some steak." So I'm doing the choppin'-steak part, which essentially became the blast-beat. There's sustained notes and then [the song] gets really busy. We thrived on tension and release.

NS: A lot of the lyrics, that album came after a couple of friends died. You just feel like the world's kind of unstable and you never know what's gonna happen, but then you still have to wake up and go to work, and you still have to pay bills, and you still have to do all this crap.

I must have said "face of collapse," or "everything is collapsing," or something, and you still have to do the little minutiae that you have to do anyway. It seemed kind of absurd. That's a lot of the theme. It was where the title came from, just getting on with daily life in the face of collapse, I guess. When shit hits the fan so much that you think, "God, this is ridiculous. I really do have to go the laundromat right now. This seems insane."

[Laughs] But yeah, after people you love die, you have to go wash clothes.

A lot of the album was, "What are you going to do with this wreckage? Am I gonna make some sort of meaning out of this mess that life always throws at you?"

["Agitator"] was kind of real. I guess I just let it go. It was a little bit of a primal scream. Maybe I was more disturbed than I thought. I just remember thinking I'm just gonna go for it and let it explode, just let the cathartic mess out and see what happens. I think I just went nuts a little bit. That's a very honest song for me. I was pretty angry.

RECORDING

NS: It was at [Steve Albini's] house. He recorded in the basement, that was the live room. It was just a regular basement. Concrete floor and a workbench and just stuff in his basement, and he'd have the drum kit against the wall in this echoey concrete basement. And he had this isolation room that was maybe 20 feet long by eight feet wide that sort of ran along one of the walls. The drummer was outside of this long, padded room, and it was kind of awkward because you had to line up, and it wasn't like you were in a circle or how you normally play at your practice space. Whoever would be at the very end couldn't really see the drummer very well, because Blake was all the way down this room and outside of the door. And we were thinking, "God, this is really awkward..."

TG: It was definitely a marathon day, but we had practiced a lot. I don't think we did second takes. I could be mistaken, but how could you do another take of "In the Face of Collapse," anyway?

DG: I remember us playing pretty well. We were ready to make that record. For the most part, the guitar, bass and drums on that record are first takes, or very, very close to first takes. I know that I didn't punch in any bass; I know there weren't any drums punched in; there was none of that. We could've done that, and it wasn't even so much, "Oh, that's cheating," or something. It was more like, we just didn't have to.

I definitely remember, when [Nick] got done with those vocals... The recording booth was upstairs, and then up another floor kind of to an attic [was where the mixing board was]. So Tim and Blake and I would be up in the attic and there was a talkback mic. And I remember all of us being very excited when we heard those vocals. Very excited. Just knowing that it was the thing that was gonna take this and push it way over the top.

When you hear him sing, when you hear him scream, when you hear him talk, there's something about it that's just compelling, and mixed with the lyrics... I think he's a great lyricist, but even when you can't understand what Nick's saying, his voice is so compelling that you can even use your own interpretation of what he's saying and still get something out of it.

NS: We got a break on our recording costs because we helped make those Shellac 7-inch covers [for "The Rude Gesture: A Pictorial History"]. We'd fold them and stamp "Shellac" on them and "The Rude Gesture," and then take a sponge and dip it into root-beer flavoring, so slop it with this sponge, and you could write stuff on it, kind of do whatever you wanted, and each cover was unique in that way. But I remember when somebody was doing a track or something, everyone else was in the living room watching TV, folding all these Shellac 7-inches.

TG: I remember a funny side anecdote: We were there when the first copies of *In Utero* came to Steve's door.

DG: While we're making that record in two days, we're assembling the 7-inches and he gets that *In Utero* thing, and I think that's when he realized... He didn't know prior to that that they didn't use his mix, until he got that test pressing—that day, while we were making our record. You can imagine... [laughs]

SUMMATION

NS: After we finished the album, we took the cassette tape over to [Skin Graft founder] Mark Fischer's house and listened to it, and it was with him and John Forbes from Mount Shasta, and I think maybe another person from Mount Shasta. And it was fun to see their reactions, like, "Oh, my God, you guys really did something here." It was a good feeling.

That was a new experience for me. It was really the first time I'd felt that in my life, like, "Wow, I did something." It was a big moment; I remember playing that album for other people was one of my best memories.

TG: I feel like that record is the alchemy of all four of us. They were a really cool band and they would've been a really cool band without my joining it, but I just think the four elements created something nice. It's hard but it's also musical. There's almost a romantic element. And Nick's voice is incredible, and his way with words. You can't really distinguish the words

from the voice, and the stories that he evokes, which are kind of abstract. Darin and Blake's musicianship is amazing. I like the sound of the record. It doesn't sound too adorned.

It just has a strong sense of conviction throughout. I just feel like you never questioned the realness of it.

I'm grateful to have been a part of that.

BF: Not necessarily particular songs, but just the overall scope and the overall arc of the record, I've been really appreciating that a lot more. And just what a unique document it is: how it stands up against what bands were doing at that time, and what bands are doing currently.

I think that Dazzling Killmen, with that record especially, was a very unique band. People would probably try to put us in a certain category just because of the screaming vocals or it being mathy or proggy, but it wasn't just any one of those things. When I listen to the record and I try to remove myself from it and not be completely self-deprecating or self-critical, I think it's a pretty incredible, unique album.



DG: If I may, I think the reason that music has lasted is because it was real. We were really that. We weren't putting on airs, that's for sure. And anything I say, I'm not saying against another band; there were plenty of bands that were doing that. I'm just specifically speaking about that band.

The reason why it's still around is because it's real. It's a real thing. What you hear is real. Nick's voice is real. What's behind that is a very real thing. And I just have to believe that's why it's lasted, because people can feel that and people can hear that.

And it was important to us that they could.

This album was recorded in a basement in Chicago during four September days of 1993. The recording and balance engineer was Steve Albini. All art, design and layout © 1993 Paul Nitsche. Cover art photographed by Todd Harris. Orchestrated by Mark Fischer. Thanks: Mark Fischer and all at the Skin Graft compound, everyone at Touch and Go, John, Jim, Chuck, Jens and Matt at Vintage



Vinyl east, Dede Schofield and Critical Mass TV, Phoebe Love, Mark Buckheit, Joshua Malcom Gray, Kevin and Todd at Rave, Cicero's, K.K. Null and ZeniGeva, Shorty, Mount Shasta, Dave Stone, Mark Rubin and the Bad Livens, Space Streakings, Crow, Mother, Poster Children, and a huge thanks to our families and friends for all of your tolerance and support.

*The symbol associated with Dazzling Killmen was designed by Miles Rutten, whose memory
still fuels us.*

*Nick Sakes-vocals, guitar ~ Darin Gray-Electric Bass
Blake Fleming-Drums ~ Tim Garigan-guitar*



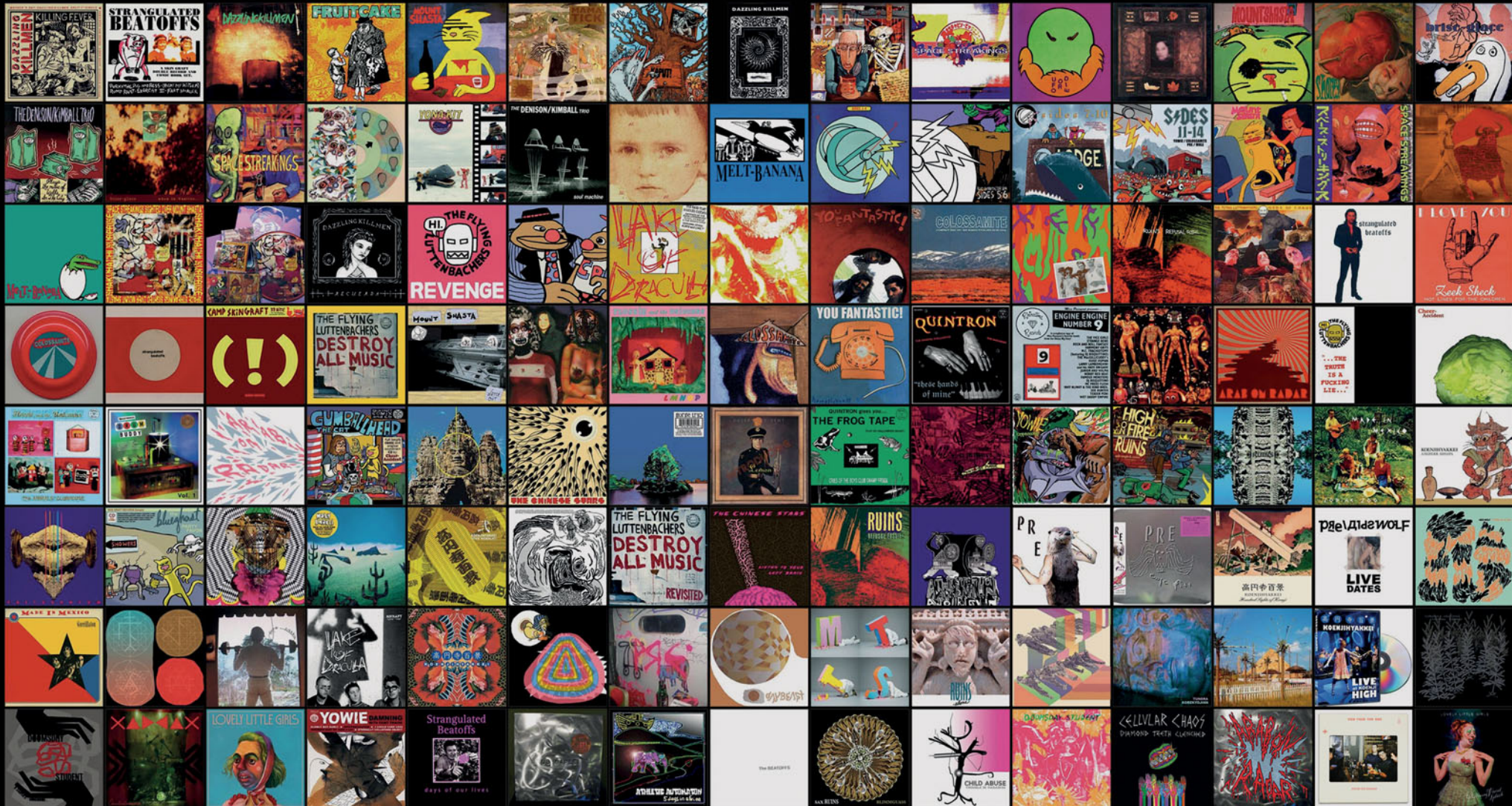
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