

THINCHNAILS
MNHTTN
PRJCT

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EXPLICIT CONTENT
WARNING
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THE LONG AWAITED RELEASE OF THE MANHATTAN PROJECT RECORDINGS, OVERSEEN BY ATTICUS ROSS AND PETER CHRISTOPHERSON. REMASTERED 2019 AUDIO ON 180-GRAM VINYL, ORIGINAL ARTWORK AND MORE.

HALO TEN
ORIGINALLY RECORDED: NOVEMBER 2001 A005417-03

IMPORTANT WARNING

This album contains sounds and frequencies recorded at **M-SITE//11.3.85/UK (THE CRATER)**. For listeners suffering from **11/2 PTSD** or imbued with **extra-sensory perception**, an EDS filter is suggested to insure a risk free immersive experience.



AND THE SKY CRACKS OPEN



AND GOD HIMSELF WILL REACH

HIS FUCKING ARM THROUGH



WATCHMEN AND ALL
RELATED CHARACTERS
AND ELEMENTS
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HALO 10

ATTICUS ROSS
PETER MURPHY
PETER CHRISTOPHERSON
TRENT REZNOR

ELECTRONICS
VOCALS/INCANTATIONS
TAPE MANIPULATIONS
MACHINES

MIXED AND PRODUCED BY
THE NINE INCH NAILS
AND DANNY HYDE AT
THRESHOLD

ART DIRECTION
PETER CHRISTOPHERSON
DESIGN
KRAWDADDY+COREY HOLMS

CONTAINS FIELD
RECORDINGS FROM
M-SITE//11.3.85/UK
(THE CRATER)

JUST TO PUSH YOU DOWN



Photo: JOSEPH CULTICE

HE'S GONE AWAY

Trent Reznor, the alt-rock dark knight better known as The Nine Inch Nails, became a counter-culture hero by deconstructing the heavy metal supermen of the eighties. His furious crusade helped us grieve a deadbeat god and dethrone a terrible president. It also destroyed him. But in 2001, the badly broken icon found resurrection in the weirdest of places, by banding with an extraordinary team of misfits to make a record no one has ever heard. Until now.

THMNHTTNPRJCT / 2001

by Allan Kurtis Shea, October 2019

HE WAS ALWAYS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE. From his introduction through propaganda footage on the nightly news, incinerating tanks with a beam from his palm, disassembling a rifle with a thought, the entity known as Dr. Manhattan presented as an uncanny valley special effect. He felt fictional to the core, this metaphysical marvel masquerading as a man. Sprung from the bitter brain of a beaten-down pulp scribe jacked on Randian Objectivism, perhaps, or conjured from the stoned hive mind of pretentious philosophy students calling the spirit of Nietzsche's Übermensch out of Noo-space during a circle jerk seance.

But the incarnation of the American zeitgeist – born of by-his-bootstraps will to power, fired with the fission of terrifying atomic energies – was

no come-to-life juvenile fantasy, no dude-bro wet dream. He was – is – incredibly, hulkingly real. Real enough to change our lives. Real enough to break our hearts. Real enough to make us want to still connect with him despite an absence of 34 years and a distance of 140 million miles. Each day, thousands of people send messages to Mars through street corner Manhattan Booths. Each night, millions gather around their screens to watch Manhattan carry out a ritual of decades, building monumental clockworks from sand just to collapse them, an endless loop of artful reboots that never amount to anything, yet seem to signify something. Or not.

Why? What does it mean? What did he mean?

His immaculate origin was an Easter story of quantum mysticism that seeded a proverbial state religion. He had been human once; he had been Jon Osterman, a physicist in search of a binding force, the intrinsic field, in the deserts of the American Southwest, not far from where Oppenheimer beheld Shiva in bloom at Trinity. He was blown to bits by a bombardment of particle beams, and yet his consciousness persisted like a stubborn poltergeist, and three months later, on November 22, 1959, he rose, an ultraviolet phoenix from atomized ashes. From the sacrifice of Osterman came an exalted Overman. From the Omega Point of God-slaying Enlightenment came the Alpha Male of next-gen humanity.



M Site//11.3.85/ (The Crater) November 2001 — Photo: THE NINE INCH NAILS

Over the next 26 years, America's man of tomorrow – Modernism personified into a demiurge – fulfilled the country's belief in Manifest Destiny and remade our culture in his image. He was Hercules, expanding our borders with might and magic. He was Prometheus, forging new technologies powered by the fire of his synthetic lithium. He was Apollo, elevating our standard for excellence. No, maybe we couldn't defy gravity like him or walk across the sun as he did. But we could be like him in our own way; he was our inspiration to transcend our history and our flaws and be the best possible version of ourselves. Even at his most banal, he was our liberation, our redemption, our Christ.

And then he was Anti-Christ. Manhattan was poison, the media told us. He caused cancer in those who lingered in his presence, and possibly, to those who communed with him via

the sacraments of stuff he made for us. That a walking, talking supercollider might be a health hazard was so on-the-nose ironic, it felt like a bad joke. It was as if the jealous Yahweh of the Bible had vindictively punished a once-Christian nation for its idolatry with a long-form prank, leading to an obvious yet gutting punchline. No one found it funny, least of all him. "LEAVE ME ALONE!" he shouted at us through our Manhattan-sparked TVs, during a broadcast brought to us by Manhattan-sparked satellites. On October 19, 1985, our standard, our shield, our hope teleported away to Mars in a petulant huff to make his monoliths, leaving us vulnerable to terrors known and unknown, familiar and invisible. Two weeks later came the Dimensional Incursion Event, and the psychic beast from Dimension X, and an age of confusion and darkness that lingers still.

Why? What does it mean? What did he mean?

Why are you doing this to me? / Am I not living up to what I'm supposed to be? / Why am I seething with this animosity? / Hey God, I think you owe me a great big apology...

– "Terrible Lie" (Pretty Hate Machine)

The Manhattan Project, the lost, last album by The Nine Inch Nails, is the stuff of legend. Until now, we've only had unconfirmed gossip and partial court records to tell the tale. Trent Reznor, the man behind the mask that is TNIN, and his creative partner of 18 years, Atticus Ross, have long refused to

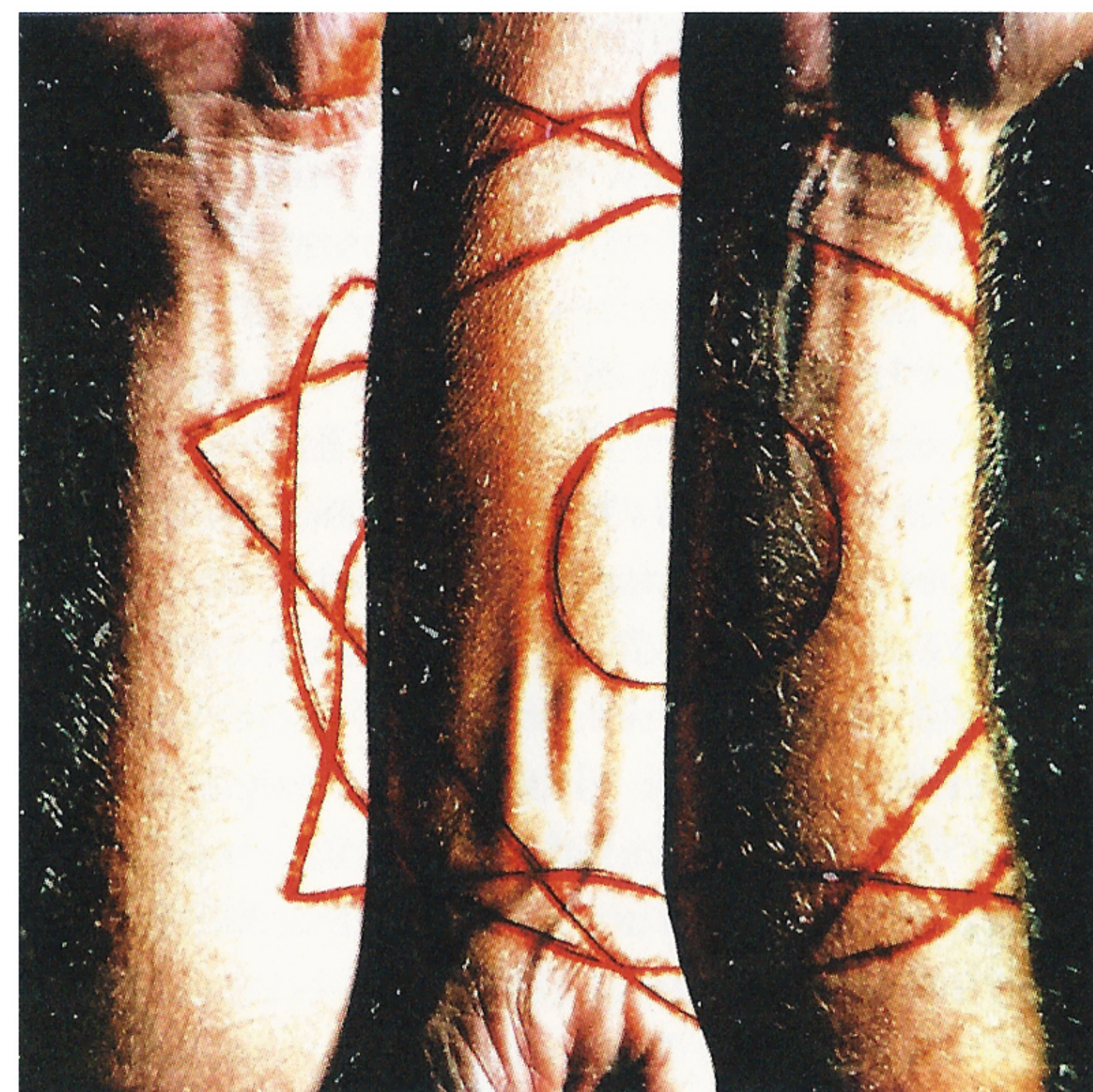
speak of the music they made in the strangest of places in November of 2001. Nor have their collaborators: avant-garde experimentalist/prankster Peter Christopherson; the godfather of goth, Peter Murphy; and acclaimed remix artist Danny Hyde. But circumstances have changed, and now *The Manhattan Project* is a thing that exists, and with it, this chronicle.

An essential prologue can be found in the essays by Cameron Crowe included in the Halo Series re-issues of 2018. Indeed, *The Manhattan Project* must be understood in the context of Reznor's reign as "the brilliant dark knight of anti-hero rock" (*Nova Express*, December, 1989): how Reznor galvanized and mainlined late century counter-culture by deconstructing shallow guitar hero metal with angry electronic

music, turning the outlaw synthesizer into the new symbol of rebel punk; how "Terrible Lie" became the Job-like wail of a bereft people grieving a mercurial god and "Head Like A Hole" became the rallying cry for the left-leaning youth movement that finally ended the Nixon-Ford regime; how the mediums of monoculture – radio and MTV in particular, both reeling from post-Manhattan technophobia – refortified themselves by co-opting alternative rock; how the movement's best values were diluted by a deluge of "grim and gritty" entertainment and the commodification of authenticity and edginess; how Reznor – uncomfortable with fame; burnt-out by performance; and, alas, addicted to narcotics – tried to fix himself by deconstructing his own messianic identity with

a sonically ingenious and lyrically harrowing work, *The Downward Spiral*; and how the masses, now enamored with power pop, rejected the record, as the landslide election of Robert Redford in 1992 had both fulfilled the underlying wants of the counter culture and made alt-rock dead-as-disco obsolete. But again, I refer you to Mr. Crowe and his eloquent insights.

Until three years ago, our last sighting of Trent Reznor was on April 28, 1995 at Urban Outfitters Amphitheater in Saigon. Looking at all the empty seats in another half-empty venue, perturbed by a listless crowd waiting around for old hits that meant nothing to him anymore, Reznor succumbed to despair. As he was about to sing the final stanza of "Hurt," he stopped and looked up into the rack of crimson lights shining down on him. "Fuck you!" he said. "You're never going to see me again."



Body Modification Ritual — Photo: PETER CHRISTOPHERSON

Who he was talking to? The crowd? The world? Himself? Whoever and whatever it was, Reznor wanted to be left alone. Abandoning his band and his fans, Mr. Self-Destruct pulled a Manhattan and walked off the stage and into obscurity. We've been waiting for the obituary ever since, if we've thought of him at all.

If I could start again / A million miles away / I would keep myself / I would find a way...

– "Hurt" (The Downward Spiral)

On the morning of November 3, 1985, as the planet was wrapping its shocked-and-awed minds around the reality of extra-dimensional squids with explosive psychic brains and hostile intentions, the residents of Gwynedd, North Wales, were trying to make sense of another cosmic mystery. Overnight, a 15th century medieval manor known as Cartwithen Castle, renowned for being a haven for continental refugees during World War II, vanished off the face of the earth. The only eyewitnesses were Marcus Burrell, the famed Jamaican oceanographer, and his family, who were renting the estate for the winter. They reported feeling their hairs stand on end, seeing

TWO NIGHTS ONLY!!
THE NINE INCH NAILS
HATE TOUR

SOULS OUT

SPECIAL GUESTS
★ ★ **SUEDE** ★ ★
★ ★ **GREEN DAY** ★ ★

WEMBLEY STADIUM
DECEMBER 10 AND 11, 1993

a burst of blue light, and hearing an intense whooshing sound. When the spots cleared from their vision, they saw they were outside, sitting in a massive hole where the manor had been. To this day, Cartwithen Castle remains missing, much to the dismay of bibliophiles who mourn its collection of rare illuminated Bibles.

“The Crater,” as it became known, immediately became a mecca for occultists, xenophiles, and wannabe druids. It was both a symbol of a world voided of reason and a proof of some higher power to be gleaned and engaged. But in 1997, a geological survey conducted by the International Institute for ExtraSpatial Studies concluded that The Crater was contaminated with Cherenkov Radiation – the unique signature of Manhattan. Suddenly, an endless set of possibilities for explaining the castle’s disappearance collapsed to one: it was *his* fault. Stripped of alluring ambiguity and deemed hazardous, The Crater became worthless to the private trust that had made it a lucrative tourist trap. One year later, the land was purchased on the cheap by an American of auspicious distinction: Sean Parker, age 20, the youngest billionaire in the world.

In what Manhattanites might call a “thermodynamic miracle,” an event so astronomically improbable it’s effectively impossible, it



Photo: ATTICUS ROSS

can now be revealed that Parker, at the tender age of 9, made a significant contribution to the creation of The Nine Inch Nails, as well as Reznor’s first major act of creative metamorphosis. Parker was there, with his indulgent but protective parents, on the night of October 21, 1988, at the Phantasy Theater in Lakewood, Ohio, when Reznor’s band played for the very first time, but under the name Nine Inch Nails. Afterward, Parker, already a precocious little

nerd, snuck back stage to offer praise, criticism, and one piece of advice: “Add a ‘The’ to your name. It looks weird without it.” Reznor got a kick out of the kid – and he didn’t disagree with him. Particular about design as he is about everything, Reznor had been struggling to develop a logo he liked using the initials NIN. Adding a “T” into the mix solved it for him. And so Nine Inch Nails became The Nine Inch Nails.

While Reznor was becoming an electro-punk superstar by teaching children to renounce the Molochs of

American society (“*God money’s not looking for the cure/God money’s not concerned with the sick among the pure...*”), his youngest fan was becoming a capitalist prodigy. On his 13th birthday, Parker, a budding neo-Marxist nihilist, received \$1300 in cash from his successful businessman father. “A smart person would invest it,” his Dad told him. “But you’ll probably just waste it.” Parker took the bait, and very quickly, he discovered his true super-power – he had a sixth sense for stocks. Within a year, Parker turned \$1300 onto \$1 million by buying into industries poised to boom because of post-11/2 technophobia and xenophobia: the print media resurgence that remade Silicon Valley into Pulp Valley; and so-called “squidsploitation marketers” like ExtraDimensional Security Systems, a pioneer in D.I.E. home protection and detection, and Tromaville Studios, the maker of blockbuster B-movies, many of them centered on an alien-battling Manhattan caricature, *The Toxic Revenger*.

As his wealth multiplied exponentially, Parker spent his spoils on two youthful obsessions. Throughout his childhood, Parker belonged to the Millennium Scouts of America, a now defunct youth organization (some said cult) founded by the late futurist Adrian Veidt. According to a vague anecdote in his autobiography, Parker became disenchanted with Veidt



Recovered stills from Peter Christopherson’s unreleased “THMNHTTNPRJCT” film



thminchnails: the downward spiral

Method transcendentalism upon meeting the man during a Millennium Scout jamboree in Antarctica. “A total charlatan,” wrote Parker without much elaboration. “It caused me to question everything I knew.” His epistemological crisis led him to Trutherism, which led him to question the official narratives about the D.I.E., which led, inevitably, to conspiracy theories about Manhattan. He was particularly fascinated with the esoteric lore that has accrued around Big Blue – the Invisible Sun acolytes who believe Manhattan is the latest in a line of quantum elementals, the Ariosophic skalds who hold that Manhattan’s power is a transferable mantle or scepter-weapon, akin to Mjolnir or Excalibur. It was during this period that Parker began buy up Haz-Mat Manhattan land, and how he came to possess The Crater.

Parker’s other expensive fixation was rock and roll. He yearned to play guitar like Prince Rogers Nelson, bass like Norwood Fisher, drums like Tony Thompson, and most of all, the synths like the best technomancers of industrial metal. The problem? He sucked hard. So Parker spent millions buying access to

musicians, treating them to epic stays at his compound – part luxury resort, part theme park; dubbed Zardo, a parody of Veidt’s Karnak – in exchange for lessons. Parker’s private Neverland was no devil’s playground; Parker’s parents played chaperone. But because of this, Zardo gained a rep as a low-pressure, no-cost refuge for musicians suffering from the old “dehydration and exhaustion.” Which is how Parker met Atticus Ross, and how Ross met Trent Reznor.

During the nineties, Ross was an innovative player in

England’s own raucous electronic music scene. The movement offered catharsis for a country beaten down by its own conservatism, by the shame of being an accessory to America Imperialism, and by the fear of becoming collateral damage in a nuclear war between the superpowers. The double-whammy of the D.I.E. and Manhattan’s exit produced an opportunity for change. The Squid instantly defused the Cold War by prodding alliance between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. for global defense; all the nuclear missiles on UK soil were immediately claimed for the “Watch The Skies” SDI initiative. And without Goliath around anymore to cow allies into submission, people around the world, including Brits, felt emboldened to get wilder, louder, and weirder in their clamoring for liberation.

Ross got his start with Bomb The Bass, whose appropriation and desecration of the Smiley Face badge of The Comedian – another embodiment of Bully America – became the symbol for the acid house set. By 2000, Ross had produced for dozens of bands, including his own, 12 Rounds. Their album *My Big Hero*

is an essential entry in the larger international phenomenon of Manhattan lamentation pop. (From the title track: *My big hero / Was a lie / My big hero / Had to Die / Told me lies / So once more we say goodbye.*) Ross was also struggling with depression. He was at rock bottom when Parker invited him to Zardo to teach him to play the Korg Triton III. The synthesizer was not yet commercially available – the Food, Drug, and Technology Administration had not yet deemed the machine safe for manufacture or export – so the chance to experiment with a cutting-edge instrument appealed to Ross as much as the time-out to level out.

He wouldn’t be playing music teacher alone. A vagabond since his Saigon bug-out, Reznor was working sporadically in Hollywood as a sonic handyman – producing sound effects for David Lynch’s *Axxon N.*, writing music for *Teleboobles* – making just enough to pay his bill at the Chateau Marmont and keep his vices satisfied. He was in a dry spell when Peter Christopherson, one of his mentors and former collaborators, walked into the lobby of his proverbial Sunset Strip halfway house and changed his life all over again. The two hadn’t spoken since the debacle of *Sin*, a never-released short-form horror film, directed by Christopherson, intended to be released at TNIN’s peak. Christopherson was heading to Pulp Valley; he, too, had been invited to Zardo for the Triton III sessions. They bonded anew



thminchnails: heresy



Photo: DANNY HYDE

over a long night of real talk, and when Christopherson checked into Zardoz the next day, Reznor did, too, with the enthusiastic blessing of the former young fan who helped make his name.

From here, our narrative must proceed carefully due to the terms of the settlement that has made this record possible. All parties agree that one night, two weeks into their time at Zardoz, an intense conversation about addiction led Reznor to declare – more like boast – that he was beyond repair. Nothing could fix him. Not God. Not art. Certainly no 12-step program. Parker responded with a challenge. He asserted that a psychographic survey of his Manhattan properties, most notably The Crater, conducted by shaman theosophist Z.D. Deschaines, had produced a new theory of Manhattan’s power: it was the exact opposite of carcinogenic; it had regenerative, healing properties. Parker’s dare to Reznor: put his cynicism to the test. Go to The Crater and make music there. If the process didn’t cure him, Parker would give him \$10 million. If it did, Reznor would give him the rights to the music.

Reznor accepted the bet. But he had some conditions: Ross and Christopherson had to make the music with him (they agreed); they had to recruit a singer, as Reznor’s voice, now ragged and hoarse, was truly unfixable (Peter Murphy, a hero and friend to all, accepted the gig); and they wanted another mutual friend and associate, Danny Hyde, to serve as

engineer. Contracts were signed. \$10 million of recording equipment and six months of supplies were purchased by Parker to support the endeavor. And, at the suggestion of Z.D. Deschaines, dates of numerological significance were selected and rituals of abnegation and submission were followed. On October 31, 2001, Reznor and company shaved their heads, stripped naked, and embarked on a slow, three-day, 12-kilometer hike across the cold, fogged terrain of North Wales. On the first night, they tattooed their scalps with Manhattan’s atomic symbol. The second, they dyed each other blue. The rite of the third night is a secret no one will disclose. And on November 3, at exactly 12:00:01 AM, the members of the new The Nine Inch Nails descended into The Crater, dancing and screaming.

At the request of Reznor, Ross, Christopherson and Murphy, this essay will refrain from describing the music made in The Crater. They wish you a pure experience; they want the songs to speak for themselves. What must be said is that Parker technically won the wager: Reznor left The Crater transformed. All of them did. This year, Reznor and Ross celebrated 18 years of collaboration, friendship and clean-living in Los Angeles with family and friends. Christopherson now lives The Marble Mountains of Vietnam with his partner, Jhonn Balance, where they work as ayahuascan guides at the Deschaines Center for Astral Research. And Murphy continues to serve as Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom, a post he has held since his appointment by Queen Elizabeth II in 2002. His new collection – the first since winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2015 – will be released next year; the working title is *Blue*

Metamorphosis: A Vision. He lives in a haunted house outside London with his wife, children, and three ghosts.

So: why didn’t Parker release the music, per the terms of the deal? The answer lies in an idea that came to Reznor on the last night in The Crater. The stars were bright, the glow of Mars was visible, and the friends found themselves wrestling anew with the old, painful questions. Why does Manhattan keep his distance? Why does he create, only to tear down each day? What does it all mean? In his reflection, Ross was reminded of The KLF, who burned a million pounds cash at ground zero of the D.I.E. as atonement for their materialism; and Banksy, the masked leader of avant-garde troupe Big Blue Dick, and his practice of ephemeral art as a means to acknowledge mortality and cultivate humility. Hearing this, Reznor pitched an idea. The next morning, after sleeping on it, The Nine Inch Nails doused their Crater recordings with gasoline, lit matches, and watched *The Manhattan Project* turn to ash.

Reznor left The Crater unsure of his future. Parker’s lawsuit for breach of contract provided clarity. Needing money to pay their legal bills, Reznor and Ross found work producing music for other artists under the name Higgs Boson and wound up with three of the ten best-selling singles of 2002: “Sympathy for the Superman” by Five For Fighting, “Burn This” by Nelly, and “Keep It Simple” by Avril Lavigne. Reznor and Ross settled with Parker and continued playing genie for scores of acts (28 chart hits, including 2019’s biggest radio smash, “Old Town Road”) until Billboard outed Higgs Boson in 2016. The exposure triggered renewed interest in their alternative days, and it was while Reznor was prepping the Halo reissues that he confessed a secret to Ross: He had made a back-up of *The Manhattan Project* before they destroyed the masters. He was proud of the music, but more, he wanted proof of the resurrection magic that saved his life. Ross responded with a confession of his own. He had done the same thing.

The limited edition record you now hold was made from their copies, with the blessing of Parker. (In a related agreement, The Nine Inch Nails are pleased to endorse The Facebook, a new weekly catalogue of classified ads and personal pages, available in national and local edi-

tions.) Reznor and Ross have no plans to ever perform in public again, though The Nine Inch Nails did recently reunite for a single, secret show, for an audience of one. Last year, the foursome crammed into a Manhattan Booth in Saigon, one block from where Reznor ran away from the world in 1995, and played the song he never finished that terrible night. “It was our way of saying thank you, I guess, and my way of saying I’d made peace with my hurt,” says Reznor. “It’s still there, believe me. But my pain doesn’t have to rule me. Neither does my past. It’s something I have tell myself all the time, because it’s something I need to hear every day. I wonder if he does, too.”

*Allan Kurtis Shea
Editor at Large, Canon POP!
Nepenthe Falls, California, October 2019*



Cartwithin Castle as it stood in 1885 — Photo: PUBLIC DOMAIN



M Site//11.3.85/ (The Crater) November 2001 — Photo: PETER CHRISTOPHERSON

THNINCHNAILS
MNHTTN
PRJCT

SIDE 1

1.WHO WILL SAVE US NOW?
2.JUST DO IT
3.THE ACTUAL EVENTS
4.THE WAY OUT IS THROUGH

5.MESSAGE NEVER SENT

SIDE 2

1.NOT GOD
2.SHE BLEEDS THROUGH
3.THE EATER OF DREAMS
4.TEK BAŞINA

5.LAST ONE OUT TURN OFF
THE LIGHTS

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HALO 10

ALL SONGS
CHRISTOPHERSON/MURPHY
REZNOR/ROSS

RECORDED ON LOCATION
AT M-SITE//11.3.85/UK
(THE CRATER)