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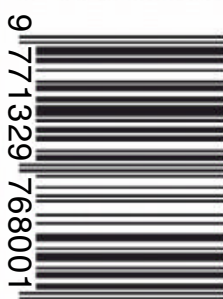
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FEAR & LOATHING IN THE ISLE OF INOCULATION

THEY SAID IT WOULD NEVER HAPPEN. THEY SAID THOSE DAYS WERE LONG GONE, AND ONLY THE FAINT WHISPER OF MAYNARD'S INNER CHAOS REMAINED. WELL, OVER 10 LONG AND BRUTAL YEARS OF BAITED BREATH-HOLDING LATER, *AUSTRALIAN GUITAR* IS PROUD TO SAY IT TOLD YA SO:

TOOL – YES, THE ONE AND MOTHERF*ING ONLY – ARE BACK WITH A NEW ALBUM.**

***FEAR INOCULUM* IS: A) REAL, B) HERE, AND C) AWESOME AS HELL, AND WITH THE HELP OF GUITARIST ADAM JONES, WE'RE TAKING A DEEP, UNFORGIVINGLY OBSESSIVE WADE THROUGH ITS TWISTING AND TOWERING JUNGLE OF SOUNDS.**

WORDS BY ROD YATES.



When Adam Jones answers the phone in Los Angeles, he's still bathing in the glow of the response to Tool's first single in more than a decade: "Fear Inoculum", which was released two days earlier. "It feels great, and the fans have been really respectful," he offers.

Having co-founded Tool in Los Angeles in 1990, Jones is often regarded as the beating creative heart of the unit, co-writing most of the group's material and working with collaborator Alex Grey on all their visuals and artwork. In the case of their new LP, also called *Fear Inoculum*, that artwork extends to a limited edition CD package with a video screen, a 36-page booklet, exclusive artwork and more.

Considering it's been 13 years since the quartet's previous full-length, 2006's *10,000 Days*, it's fitting that they've returned with such a grand package. Musically, *Fear Inoculum* is similarly ambitious, with each of its songs exceeding the ten-minute mark, and the longest – crushing finale "7empest" – weighing in at nearly 16 minutes. The digital version of the record sees each member contributing an interlude, although only drummer Danny Carey's composition, "Chocolate Trip Chip", features on the CD due to the time limitations of the format.

It's a dense, complex, endlessly fascinating record, but one that is very distinctly the work of Tool. Integral to that sound is Jones' guitar work, which switches effortlessly from languid and atmospheric to precise and crushingly heavy throughout.

"I think Adam really pushed himself on this record," says bassist Justin Chancellor, speaking from his property on the outskirts of Los Angeles. "There's some crazy, almost classical guitar kind of playing that we were all like, 'That's amazing!' And at first perhaps he wasn't fully confident, but we heard how incredible it was. I think he really had to push himself just to develop it and become really confident with it. It sounds to me like it's a different level of guitar playing."

Just prior to the release of "Fear Inoculum", the band finally made all of their releases available on streaming services. For Tool, it's all about doing things when the timing feels right.

"Tool's always been like that," says Jones. "It's always been our rules, and it's worked that way. We'll do something when we're ready. The fact that people are so passionate about [us] is a great thing. For the most part, most people have been so supportive of us, and that really helps the process. I think the people that have been very positive can feel like they're a part of the music, part of that drive and that inspiration to get something done."

How did it feel to finally release a new song in "Fear Inoculum", 13 years after *10,000 Days*?

It's exciting. We're back in the saddle and we're a band... The politics of, it's weird. You spend so much time and effort and try to ignore the whole commercial world. You just [try to] remember where you started from and refuel that fire. And once it's done we have to go, "Okay, which song are we going to push, and how are we going to push it?" And all those things start coming up. There's a bit of anxiety, and we're not really a Top 40 band, and radio isn't our best friend. But it feels great.

A lot of the talk in the lead up to the album's release has focused on its lengthy gestation...

It's been hard. The timing hasn't been good, the circumstances, and finally we made this happen. Most of the fans were very vocal about wanting to hear a new record, and a small percentage of them were very rude and demanding, and it gets under your skin a little bit. But you have to ignore that and stay true to what you do and rely on the fans who are being respectful.

How hard is it to shut out those voices, and retain that purity of being a band?

Remembering why you do what you do and why we started as a band [isn't hard]. That fire that's burning in our hearts to do something cool and take it as far as you can, and really not worry about the wicked world and how it's going to be perceived and what did we do last time – we don't do any of that. We just do what we do.

There have been a lot of hurdles. There's been a lot of politics, and a couple of really awful mishaps. So when people are demanding a record and saying, "Why aren't you doing a record?"

Well, we'd like to do a record; it's just not the time. And also, we're older guys now and everyone's got their own lives and their own projects and their own things they want to do. Hitting that starting point is really hard. But look, we don't ever have to make another record again, people don't have to listen to us, people don't have to download our music or choose to buy our CD or try to find it for free or come see us. It just is what it is. It's a journey, but you don't dwell on the past, you just keep going with the future and enjoy it.

When you've been working on an album for so long, how do you know when it's done? Is it hard to walk away?

It's not hard to walk away. It's hard to get there. The three of us write the music and then Maynard [James Keenan, vocals] comes in at the last minute and puts vocals down, and maybe there's a little bit of adjusting this to that or his to ours or my guitar part to this, so that's the hardest part. So we just write like it's a soundtrack. It's always basically been this way, just not this extreme. And I think that's a big reason why it works.

We've always been a band, we've always been four parts and looked at it that way. And there's a lot of discipline and honour in our band, and part of that discipline and honour of collaborating is letting the other person be who they are and approach music the way they want to. It's not just like, "Okay, f*** everything, the four of us are going in a room." It's, this person takes a little longer, or this person has to work like this or in this kind of area or these kinds of conditions. So, that's the biggest thing and that's to me the payoff.

It's rewarding – there's a sense of satisfaction and a sense of self... It's also a grueling, painful, cursed process where you go, "This sucks!" But as soon as you're done you go, "Let's do another one!"

How did the vision for the album change over the years?

Speaking for myself, I just wanted to do a great job. It's just experimenting and collaboration and jamming, and you take it down these weird paths and try to do something as best you can. I don't know if I really think about where it's going to end, because that's not the process. The process is the four of us kind of come up with how it turns out.

I have a saying; it's not good when it's done, it's done when it's good. That has always been the motto. If you want to apply that to other bands it doesn't work. Yes, there's a commodity aspect, you have responsibilities, you have timing, you have budgets, you have contracts, you want to get your album out by blah blah blah, but that's just not how this band ever worked. So, contractually we were supposed to deliver a record a long time ago, but it has to be the right conditions so that we can do something good and not just crank something out and move on to the next thing. It's not really like a job where you've got to file paperwork or dig this ditch so they can pour concrete in it, it's more like... this thing that we share and we're going to nurture it until it comes out and we're happy and we walk away from it.

It's a weird process. I talk to other bands all the time and they don't understand our process – I don't even know if I understand it. It's its own thing, and I think that's why people really appreciate it. It's a reflective kind of process where you just see or hear something and go, "God, this is good because people worked on this really hard." You feel the tension of what went on in a room to get this done, and that's what people want. You don't want cardboard, you want titanium lightweight carbon fibre craftsmanship.

In some ways, the interludes on the album make it feel like it's divided into suites...

The songs are like movements. There are songs within songs. We didn't worry about the length, and when you jam stuff it can transcend into something else that's good and you go, "Well, we could just end it or we could keep going into this thing," and that's what we did. All the songs are songs within songs, or parts of songs. Maynard calls it like a movement and I thought that was really cool.

Are there any songs in particular where you really pushed yourself as a player?

I always push myself. There are so many people who are better than me, and I try to take my style and approach to playing and just



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keep challenging it. I always want to do what's best for the song and not be like, "Okay, well a guitar part needs to be heavy and then needs to be lighter here and needs a screaming, crazy, 30-second arpeggio or crazy lead going on." It's never like that. It's "What is the feeling here and what does it need to get to the next thing?" That's how I look at it. And I just try to do something that I never did before and grow as a player.

If I can talk to someone I admire or someone who does something really cool I always go, "What kind of thing do you do on a daily basis that keeps that going?" I [asked that of Metallica guitarist] Kirk Hammett and he goes, "Oh, I do this exercise, or I warm up with this." And he showed me. And so I do that. So that's how I try to grow as a guitar player. Take a little bit of basic technique that someone uses to make themselves better, but not necessarily [try to] sound like them. That's how I try to improve my playing from record to record. Instead of just going, I'm going to be like Michelangelo and I'm going to learn every pentatonic scale and set a metronome to the fastest time, that's not what it is. It's just trying to improve my rhythm guitar playing. I don't know.

That extended solo in "7empest" is quite something...

I'm proud of all of the songs. Seriously. Like "Fear Inoculum", I was doing swells - a swell is where you turn down your volume, you hit the string and then you slowly raise the volume so that it fades in almost like bowing on a violin - and then Justin and I started playing against each other, and that's how those intros started on the beginning of that song. I'm on the beat, he's off the beat, call-and-answer kind of thing. And it's really cool. It's just having fun with techniques and trying different stuff and playing in different time signatures. It's just what you do and we're having fun. I don't know! [Laughs] You can't explain it.

You've always been very involved in Tool's visuals. How did the packaging for the new album - in particular the video element - come about?

I saw something ten years ago and the technology was just not there. But I always checked in on it and thought, we should do something like this, we should put something out like this. And I think the technology is [now] way beyond things you can imagine. And I think it was the first time the record company didn't go, "Wait, what? You want to do what? Oh I don't know, that might cost a lot of money." They were like, "Oh yeah, let's do that, that'd be great."

CD sales are down, people don't even want to buy a CD unless it's offering first a digital download, and secondly there's just something unique about it. So it was really fun to take this to a point where it's got a hefty price tag and it's a limited thing, they didn't make that many. It's really fun to push the limits and do something that hasn't been done before, or hasn't been done in that way or that style.

One of the benefits of the time it took to make Fear Inoculum is that it presumably gave you a chance to experience other facets of life, such as becoming a father. Do you hear those experiences in the album?

Sure, sure. All that always ties in. Inspiration, good or bad, is your friend in the process. But the good is amazing, of course it does. It's a big part of it.

And you can hear that in the record?

Of course I can. There's confidence. Alex Grey told me that experiences are like dropping a rock into still water and you have these ripples, and sometimes the ripples hit each other and form a different kind of energy that goes in a different direction. What is resonating from these experiences, and what is driving you? Yeah, I hear it in the music. But the thing you've really got to understand about people who excel or have drive in what they do, which all four members in our band do, we try to go above and beyond.

But here's the point: the guy writing poetry or the guy who's painting - someone who's doing something artistic, who excel at what they do - there's always something opposite about their personality. It's like the painter who's really good but he can't talk in a social situation, or the guy who writes the most beautiful stories

and is a raging alcoholic.

It's almost like one big therapy session. The good experiences help that, but the music is a part of it too. It's all one side, but you have to have these things that are not good, or balanced, to kind of drive that stuff. Which is what our world does. Nothing's perfect.

In the past, Tool have used mathematic principles as inspiration for songwriting - most famously in the title track of 2001's Lateralus, which draws on the Fibonacci sequence. Did that way of thinking play into the writing process for Fear Inoculum?

We take math, we take geometry, and we take different kinds of concepts and try and apply it to music and see if it has some kind of harmonic result that would be exciting or rewarding. So yeah, there's a whole bunch of that in the new record. I always tell people, we're not wizards, we're not sitting in light or these great thinkers, we're just kids going, "Oh wow, I've got this riff and it kind of has this thing and there's this concept", and it leads to something else.

The biggest thing I can think of on the new record is how these 7 beats were coming up over and over and over. I've never purposely written a riff in 7 ever in my life. I just write riffs and bring them in and Justin writes riffs and brings them in and Danny and Justin and I all jam to it, but 7 kept coming up. It was just kind of mind-blowing.

Towards the end it was like, it started getting weird in a coincidental way. There are seven songs we came up with, but then we have the bonus material we did later. It's our seventh release. And then Maynard started talking about stuff in 7 and it's like, "Woah, what is going on?" And we worked with Alex Grey and Alex was talking about 7. So of course I wanted to call the record *Volume 7*, and we want back and forth with tons of titles, and we just finally decided on *Fear Inoculum* because it felt the best without dissecting it under a magnifying glass like that.

The last song you hear ["7empest"] is three rounds of 7. It's 21. I don't try to count it I just try to feel it. But if I have to count it I count it in three rounds of 7. And it's weird and it's challenging to make something work over a riff in 21 and... they're the things I get excited about. But there was no planning. It's fun, it's challenging, it sucks at the same time because everyone's going in a different direction with it and you've got to figure out what's best about it and commit and move onto the next thing.

Nearly 30 years in, Tool has somehow managed to maintain a sense of mystique - a remarkable feat in this age of social media. Are you aware of that mystique?

You get the wacky people who think we're all taking acid every day. And then there are people who really think we're a lot deeper than we are and go above and beyond. We're just normal guys, but we try to challenge ourselves and our minds and our bodies and our playing ability and our thinking, with something that goes beyond what it is. It's like a mathematician who looks at the stars. You're trying to figure out stuff and discover new things, and it was the same with music. You're not just reading sheet music or sticking with the rules of you play 4/4 and he plays 4/4, it's just like, where can we sound all different, where can we sound all the same?

Hopefully we'll see Tool back in Australia before long. What can you remember about your first ever tour here, way back in 1995?

I remember it like the back of my hand. We played this festival [Alternative Nation], it was f***ing raining, and the band Live, they were going on before us and the whole audience threw mud at them the entire time. And they came offstage like, "F***!" And they were cleaning mud out of their skins and pickups, and I remember saying to our old bass player [Paul D'Amour], "Hey, let's just jump in the mud right now and go onstage so we can kinda be like, 'Hey, f*** you guys we're ready for ya!'" And he went, "No, let's see how it goes." And not one person threw mud at us. And I was just floored. And that's how I've always looked at coming to Australia. The people there really get us - they're very passionate and they're very respectful. They're people who [realise we're] really trying to make a difference and not just be some cookie-cutter radio band. 