

“ALL THAT COULD HAVE BEEN”

Hello, nerds. Apparently, judging by the e-mails that have been cluttering up my mailbox, I haven't been updating this website as of late. Sorry about that. It's just that-- well, haven't you ever just decided to go wander through the desert for an indefinite amount of time, living solely off various forms of cacti? You see, being a huge, famous star like myself, it can be hard having to deal with the pressures that the elite social status of being "that guy who writes the Meathead Perspective" brings. Plus there's the fact that there hasn't much of goddamn anything to write about lately. It's like squeezing Mountain Dew Code Red from a stone. Oh, and I just recently purchased a Game Boy Advance, so there's that too. Sure, I could always just bitch and make a big deal about how the DVD hasn't been released yet, but I refuse to stoop to that level. In fact, despite the misleading title, I'm not even going to mention the DVD today. Well, besides my mentioning the DVD just now. Okay, after this sentence, no more DVD-mentioning. Damn it. Stupid DVD.

Some of you may have been thinking that I've lost interest in Nine Inch Nails and/or Trent Reznor. This, however, is not the case, due to a curse which was placed on me by an evil shaman many years ago, damning me to a life of constant morbid obsession with everything Nine Inch Nails. Hell, I'll buy anything with a NIN logo on it. Trent could start putting stool samples in little jars, slap a NIN logo and "Halo Whatever" on it, and doubtless I'll end up with one on my shelf. Actually, I've been listening to *The Fragile* quite an obscene amount lately. Well, that and *Volume 1* by the Traveling Wilburys. I listen to it at work, in my car, at home, on planes, on trains, etc. I'm sure it's very unhealthy.



Anyway... what was I talking about? Oh, right, Nine Inch Nails. Well, I was thinking about how some people were being stupid and complaining about how Trent Reznor isn't goth enough anymore. Apparently they would have preferred that Trent make *The Downward Spiral II* instead. They're not Metallica, for Christ's sake. But there has been a significant number of folks who were disappointed with Trent's new mildly-optimistic, non-suicidal outlook on life, as if getting his shit together was the worst thing he could do, aside from marrying Britney Spears.

...I realize that maybe I've let some people down, because [The Fragile] wasn't more extreme, more dark, and excessively evil, and I didn't come out with fangs and wake up in a coffin.'

—Trent Reznor, CDNOW Interview: June 28, 2000

After I thought about this for a while, I went and made myself some Pop-Tarts. I like Pop-Tarts. Especially those cinnamon ones, with the frosting. They're good, especially with a big glass of cold milk. But then, after devouring the delicious toaster pastries, I started to think some more about how *The Fragile* failed to live up to some people's expectations of what a Nine Inch Nails record should sound like. I began to wonder, what if Trent Reznor had, rather than becoming a more emotionally healthy and stable person, instead continued to slip further and further into a world of bitterness and depression. Then I realized that this would be a fantastic idea for the Meathead Perspective (assuming the reader is heavily drugged)!

Way back in late spring of 1999, Rolling Stone magazine published an interview with Trent Reznor that caused Nine Inch Nails fans everywhere to spontaneously squeal with delight. Well, I did, anyway. I don't care what you did. Anyway, this revealing interview gave us our first real glimpse of *The Fragile* after years of near total silence from the NIN posse. It not only mentioned several new song titles, but also showed pictures of Trent with his sporty new haircut. But what if Trent hadn't gotten a sporty new haircut? What if he had become more extreme, more dark, and more excessively evil? Using my mystical powers which defy human comprehension, I will now show you how this interview would have turned out had this been the case. Be glad I'm using my powers for stupidity instead of evil.

**Trent Reznor emerges from two years of doom and gloom with a frightening new album**

Trent Reznor is ready to sing. Bent slightly at the waist, tightly gripping the microphone as if he's about to wring its little metallic neck, Reznor closes his eyes - shutting out the winking lights and splashy computer graphics around him in the main control room at Nothing Studios in Los Angeles - and waits for the music to roll in his headphones.

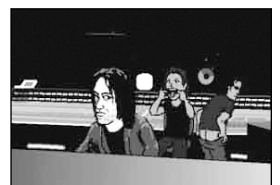
When it does, Reznor sounds like he's really, really, really, really mad. "I hate everything/ Everything makes me want to fucking die/ Everything makes me want to fucking kill you," he rages over the martial crunch of "Everything Makes Me Want To Die," one of more than two dozen songs on Nine Inch Nails' new album, *Painful Fucking Hate*, tentatively set for release in September as a double CD. In fact, Reznor - who is Nine Inch Nails; who has written, produced and played every note on *Painful Fucking Hate* - is angry, depressed and utterly out of control.

Take after take breaks down. Reznor's voice cracks; he hasn't included enough swear words; in midverse, a computer program abruptly quits. Disappointed, Reznor slams some tequila, then tries once again. For nine hours, he plays over a loop of the first verse of "Everything Makes Me Want To Die," zipping through various evil-sounding effects: screams; loud scary drums; overdriven guitar; and more screams.

"Man, fuck this. We're not getting anywhere," he hollers drunkenly at Keith Hillebrandt, an in-house programmer at Nothing, and ex-Skinny Puppy producer Dave Ogilvie, while hurling a half-empty can of warm Coors Light at the wall. "Let's just fuck around and see what comes." When Reznor calls it quits at 5:30 a.m. to attend to other new-album business (he is in the thick of sorting through pictures of decaying animals and insects even though he is still recording), "Everything Makes Me Want To Die" is far from done. Reznor does not have any new, keeper parts - nothing that sounds gothy enough, anyway. But he's got a lot of ideas preserved on hard drive (and backed up on digital tape) for further study. "The important thing is to keep tape rolling," says Hillebrandt, waving a yellow legal pad full of notes detailing what Reznor has just played. "One of the first and foremost things you learn here is that you never, ever stop the tape until Trent either passes out, or specifically says 'stop the tape.' This one time Dave (Ogilvie) accidentally leaned on the stop button after recording Trent singing '99 Bottles of Beer' for over a half-hour. Trent was so pissed, he made us stay up for another 11 hours until he got it 'just right.' He's such an asshole."

"It's been madness," Reznor admits, earlier in the day, of the nearly two years he has taken to make *Painful Fucking Hate*. "I don't remember most of it, but judging from what the others have told me, I can be a real asshole when I'm drinking." He gestures at the armory of guitars and keyboards to one side of the control room, at the more than seventy effects pedals and broken beer bottles strewn across the floor here in the nerve center of Nothing Studios, a former funeral home in Los Angeles that Reznor purchased in April 1995. "Ninety-five percent of this record was written in this room," he says. "Which is not the way to quickly make albums. Of course, that suits me just fine, since I'm Trent Reznor."

Reznor, who recently turned thirty-four, really doesn't look so good. He is unshaven, his jet-black hair longer than ever. In a black leather jacket, black pants and black combat boots, he seems pale, gaunt, and unhealthy in general. "This record," he says, "has been about being really angry



(continued)

“ALL THAT COULD HAVE BEEN” (continued)

and filled with hate - about hating myself, about hating other people, and hating you. The next song picks up where that left off, and gets even angrier." To illustrate his point, he plays the final mix of the album's initial single, "My Life Is Constant Agony." One part has massed, Black Sabbath-like guitars suspended in echo with heavy electronics. Another section has massed, Black Sabbath-like guitars suspended in echo with heavy drums and screaming. Even compared with the violent density of Nine Inch Nails' 1992 EP, *Broken*, and the '94 smash *The Downward Spiral*, "My Life Is Constant Agony" is extremely loud and disturbing - with no optimism whatsoever. And plenty of massed, Black Sabbath-like guitars.

Reznor plays a couple more electrometal bruisers - "Fuck Off" and "Die," the latter the B side of "My Life Is Constant Agony" - that are viciously, unmistakably Nine Inch Nails. But he seems proudest of, and most nervous about, songs like "Heresy" and "I Still Do Not Want This." "Heresy" is the same song as on *The Downward Spiral*, but Reznor liked it so much that he included it on this album as well. "I hope the fans don't think that was a stupid idea," says Reznor. "But if they do, fuck 'em. It's my album."

"It's real hard for me to have any degree of objectivity," Reznor says of *Painful Fucking Hate*. "People say, 'What's it sound like?' What the hell do you think it sounds like? I mean, come on, it's Nine Inch Nails. It appears to be one of those records that jumps out of the speakers, that announces it's at the top of the charts, right from the first song. And it was intended to be that." Reznor's intentions for *Painful Fucking Hate* - the first Nine Inch Nails studio album in five years - underwent several seismic shifts before he formally set to work in September 1997. Reznor briefly entertained the notion of recording with an actual band before reverting to his one-man-band ways. (There are no guest contributors to *Painful Fucking Hate*.) "When I get ideas, I'll get twenty of them at once," Reznor says. "It's hard for me, playing all the music by myself. But I can't let other musicians come in and taint my masterpiece."

"There was time-wasting involved in this whole thing; I won't lie to you," Reznor concedes. Nor will he deny that he blew a lot of time on a crisis of confidence, and a near total loss of touch with reality due to the popular video game *Quake*. And, Reznor adds pointedly, "my friend turned on me." Asked who this "friend" was, he replies, "This guy who writes a stupid web page, which I spent some time reading, and even laughed at occasionally, and his name starts with the letter M" - a thinly veiled reference to humor columnist and raving lunatic Meathead.



Leo Herrera, a bum who frequently hangs around outside Nothing Studios and occasionally is allowed to come in and play with the equipment, attests to the volatile mix of ambition and insecurity in Reznor's working methods: "He gets frustrated with himself - if he's got an idea and he can't play it on guitar as well as he wants. He gets really mad and starts hitting people. That's usually when I leave. But he likes setting himself big tasks. He'll never back down from a challenge. The best thing that could happen to a song is, I'd say, 'That part of the song sucks.' He will punch me in the head and then be determined to make it work." Reznor says Nine Inch Nails will definitely tour in support of the new record: "Not like we did before, but a lot louder and angrier this time. I think we kinda passed out last time." He estimates he'll need about 700 spare guitars and keyboards, "because I really like to break stuff."

Another example of the overwhelming moodiness Reznor exhibits on *Painful Fucking Hate* comes near the end of "Foaming Rage," a vigorous stomp with spooky, choral vocals, Arabic-flavored guitar and, near the end, what sounds like a groaning, dying elephant. "It shouldn't have taken place," Reznor says sheepishly. "The track was done. But at the end, I said, 'There's something missing in this goddamn song. What would it sound like if there was a dying animal of some sort in it?' A week later" - he nods in the direction of one of the studio's king-size Macintosh computers - "there's a dying elephant in the song. It's all on synthesizer."

Los Angeles, of course, is a city full of dying elephants. "It would have been easier to get an elephant than it was to do it the way I did," Reznor admits. "And it started with, 'Don't tell me how to fucking create my music.' If I ever say that, stay the hell away from me, because you've obviously pissed me off."

Disclaimer: For the purpose of lame satire, his fake article borrows heavily from an article written by David Fricke for *Rolling Stone*. Please don't sue me, because I have connections, and I can have your legs broken in the blink of an eye without so much as a second thought. Seriously, don't mess with me, man.