

By CHRISTOPHER P. AUMAN

**M**onster Magnet creates theme music for a world where time and space travel is possible if you can get your head straight. They provide the soundtrack for a real life movie where there's not a lot of action but a whole lot of weird shit goes on, cast with mutants, freaks, and burnouts. They're pagans from another planet, barkers at a cosmic carnival, and

going. "What am I doing this for? This sucks. I bought a guitar and played one finger leads on a four track machine that I bought and I was like, 'This is great, I can play guitar,' so I'm up to three fingers now and I'm producing 48 track records... totally insane."

After Wyndorf picked up a guitar and a fuzz box, it took several years of experimental bands that went nowhere before he hooked up with drummer Joe Calandra, bass player Jon Kleiman, and guitarist Jon McBain, all musicians

# MONSTER MAGNET



(L to R) Dave Wyndorf, Ed Mundell, Jon Kleiman, and Joe Calandra

you're the sucker. Monster Magnet is our guys from New Jersey.

Spawned almost 10 years ago in the working-class suburbia of Red Bank, NJ, the members of Monster Magnet grew up listening to their older siblings' '70s rock records and smoking their dope. They wore army jackets, not letterman jackets. They ditched classes without prejudice and they needed arc cuts.

"I had no interest in school, no interest in sports, no interest in going to college, so basically, I was a total loser." is Wyndorf's recollection. Wyndorf spent his teenage years hanging out with kids who lived in split-level houses (whose

parents were never home), doing "everything in the medicine cabinets." Rock 'n' roll has saved more than a few souls, and luckily for Wyndorf, "music was ways there."

"Teenage drug psychosis" is Wyndorf's term for his adolescence, and has paid off well for Monster Magnet. Their band's major label debut, 1993's *Superjudge* (A&M), was followed by tours in support of Soundgarden, White Zombie, and The Ramones. Their current follow-up disc *Dopes To Infinity*, featuring the hit-bound single "Negasonic Teenage Warhead," is bringing them their biggest success so far.

Long before he even picked up a guitar, Wyndorf tried his hand at being a punk rock singer, a job that entailed getting drunk and howling into a microphone. That early musical project progressed (or regressed) into a power pop band, which led to a revelation of sorts: woke up one day with a hangover

Wyndorf had met in and around local record stores and at the comic book store where he worked. The result was a garage punk/acid rock band - the earliest incarnation of the group. They recorded demos and sent out each one with a different band name (like Heroin Mule, Wrath Of The Bull God, Acid Reich). Eventually the band caught the eye of a German record company,

Circuit Records, who loved the demo with the band name

"Monster Magnet," thus christening the group with a permanent moniker.

Circuit Records released two singles for MM, which led to the release of two records for Germany's Glitterhouse label: a self-

titled EP and the four-song *Tab*. 1991's *Spine Of God* (on Primo Scree Records) was Monster Magnet's first full-length domestic release; it was considered an underground masterpiece by more than a few indie rock hipsters. With its multi-layered guitar and vocal tracks, the album produces a wall of sound that induces an almost intoxicating state; they've done the drugs so you don't have to.

When the first two records sold 10,000 copies in Europe, the band quit their jobs in the States and toured Europe for almost two years. "Everything kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger," Wyndorf remembers. "By the time we got back to the U.S. we had five majors after us." They chose A&M because "they were honest enough to say 'We don't know what you're doin', but why don't you do it over here?'"

They've been doing just that, first with *Superjudge* in 1993, an album perhaps inspired by Wyndorf's comic store

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days. The record also found the band with a new guitarist, Ed Mundell. Wyndorf and original guitarist McBain, who shared many of the songwriting and production credits on *Spine Of God* (both tasks now primarily Wyndorf's), had a falling-out sometime after that album's release and the tours that followed. Wyndorf found replacement Mundell in an unlikely spot: "stocking shelves at a Grocery Town in New Jersey. He was like this mutant kid who played guitar all day and stocked shelves at night." Recruiting Mundell was fairly easy: "I was like, 'Ed, do you want to be in this band?' and he was like, 'Wow, I don't know.' I said, 'You're in this band.' Next thing you know he's walking around a muddy field in Belgium going 'Wow, where am I?'"

Like its predecessor, *Dopes To Infinity* was recorded at the Magic Shop in New York City with Wyndorf producing and engineer Steve Rosenthal assisting. *Dopes* is big and loud and chock full of the Monster Magnet themes of destruction ("All Friends And Kingdom Come"), despair ("Third Alternative"), and cosmic crisis ("Ego, The Living Planet"). With first single "Negasonic Teenage Warhead" gaining radio play (as well as video play on MTV), a larger number of music fans are sure to be enticed into the Monster Magnet dimension.

Categorizing Monster Magnet's sound is nigh on impossible. It's not really metal, or metal as the majority of the

record buying public knows it. "Where is there a place for something like this, that is unashamedly rock, but has a lot more sarcasm and irony than what you'd expect from a heavy metal band?"

Relatively quick success for a band is often a problem; as events in the past years have shown us, not everybody can handle the baggage that comes with fame, and a lot of bands who jump into major label waters with an old school ideology don't make the adjustment - something Wyndorf sees all too often. "The punk rock ethic that launched a lot of these bands has promised something that does not exist. There's a lot of virtue lost in the concept of rock 'n' roll and the practical application of it, and that hurts them, and they freak."

As for the decisions he and his band have made, Wyndorf is confident they were the right ones. "You can't just sit there on some half-assed version of someone else's virtue; life's too short. This time, with this record, is the first time I said 'Guess what? I'll do anything, I don't care.' I want to discover just what it is that all these [bands with major label deals] are complaining about."

Fully immersing yourself in the rock world does have some drawbacks. "I always walk a thin line between being extremely embarrassed by the stereotype and embracing it. A couple of beers and you're that guy you were making fun of an hour ago." These things can be taken in stride, but what is the biggest casualty of rock success? "I look at *Spinal Tap* now," says Wyndorf, "and I don't laugh." It's a tragic loss, but Wyndorf and Monster Magnet seem willing to pay the price. ▼

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