



The Paper Chase: *Now You Are One of Us* (Kill Rock Stars)

Dallas' The Paper Chase return with *Now You Are One of Us*, a beast of an album with a theme immediately conveyed by its cover art: an image of a body from the waist down, apparently hanging (or floating?) in a nearly empty room.

Cue the dissonant strings (of which there are plenty): the theme is enhanced by samples of various people or characters discussing paranormal encounters and lyrics uninhibitedly exploring death and humanity's darker side. The album traps you in a paranoid claustrophobia. You feel as if you're walking down some dark hallway, steps away from some sort of ghastly encounter.

If you've heard The Paper Chase's previous albums, you've got a basic idea of what to expect. The band continues its trade in thoughtful avant-garde anthems with Bonzo drumming backbones accompanied by bass, piano, and guitar, variously augmented with strings, samples, and sheer studio expertise. Mastermind, guitarist, singer, and producer (among other credits) John Congleton knows his way around a mixing board and each album is more exciting than the last from a production standpoint. Giant drum sounds will suddenly squash into an electronic beat, vocal sounds change and shift constantly, and strange effects punctuate each moment. Each song is a huge, caustic, dissonant, and challenging statement—and one you can sing along with.

Congleton doesn't have a typical rock voice, landing somewhere near the geeky verbosity and timbre of the Mountain Goats' John Darnielle. He belts it out with just as much confidence and lack of self-consciousness, but with an acerbic and sadistic edge. His guitar playing is equally singular, with fantastically weird snaky lines, chimes, and harmonics wrapping their way around the rhythm section.

All of this has a dramatic effect, to be sure. It's exhausting even. A buzzing fly sample on the bands' previous album for Kill Rock Stars, *God Bless Your Black Heart*, aptly illustrated their mode of attack: They creep into your consciousness, buzzing and blasting, poking at your preconceptions, demanding a certain suspension of disbelief with their earnestness, madcap metaphors, and theatricality. And you have no choice but to oblige. (www.thepaperchaseband.com)

7 Blips out of 10

By J. Pace

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