

Keyboards & Programming, Bass Guitars, Guitars and Vocals by **David Vector**

Written, recorded and mixed by **David Vector** from early 2017 to early 2020 at Vector Laboratories (except "Cone of Silence" recorded in November 2009 at The Blue Room)

Mastered by **Justin Weis**, Trakworx - South San Francisco, CA 3D artwork renderings by **David Vector**

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How to Build a Fire

THE STORY OF CHASING FIRE

by David Vector

I never *dreamed*, when I released my last album back at the start of 2007, that it would be almost *fourteen years* until the next one saw the light of day. At that point, I had put out three albums within a span of five years and fully expected to, as the saying goes, keep 'em coming.

Granted, those first three albums, in various ways, represented very flawed efforts, as I came to know after time afforded me more objectivity. I guess the realization that very little of what I had thus far put out there for public scrutiny quite measured up to my ambitions was the start of a more self-critical mind set – which, over time, led to a lot of hesitation and second guessing. I didn't want to release anything else that would, even to a small degree, start to feel like an embarrassment to me later on. I had to do better.

That self-imposed imperative to "do better" kind of did my head in at times. I found myself wavering between very different styles of music in an effort to figure out which one really suited me and would enable me to do my best work. I recorded some very synth-driven music, some progressive rock here and there, and even several piano-driven songs that were almost like a more prog rock-influenced version of Bruce Hornsby. Every few months, I'd shift again, throwing many of the songs I'd recorded on the reject pile, unable to focus on one particular style and hammer out a solid, full album's worth of it. I was still enjoying making music most of the time, but the indecisiveness was also breeding anxiety and making me feel like I was firing off a hail of sparks that never quite set anything ablaze.



More than just my own indecision came into play during the long years since my last album, mind you. Life started testing us as I arrived at my forties, from the declining health and eventual passing of my father to waking up in the middle of the night with our house on fire eight years ago. (As opposed to metaphorical creative fire, having your

home destroyed by

the literal kind is

really, really bad, for those fortunate enough not to have experienced it). Without the ultra-resilient constitution and naive, defiant optimism of youth, things like this (and more I won't go into) can sometimes drag you further down emotionally and even physically. But rare indeed is the person whose life is completely free of sadness and strife, eh? Not much we can do but weather the tough times and try not to entirely lose our good humor!

Finally, by late 2015, the more serious crises in my and my partner's little world were getting sorted out and it felt like maybe that long, dark shadow had finally passed over...like it might be safe to look forward again with a sense of hopeful expectation instead of dread. Around that time, I seemed to finally be finding my musical stride and starting to write better material. I don't believe that was entirely coincidence. I think my creative efforts had suffered while worries were weighing so heavily and continually on my mind, and it was only when I had some mental tranquility again that I could really focus. Drama may be a necessary driving force in movies and song lyrics, but I can only take so much of it in my own life. To paraphrase Jeff Bridges from *Tron: Legacy*, it messes with my Zen thing, man!

Having touched on a more difficult period of our lives, I do have to mention the good as well. 2016 saw the most amazing thing happen, something I didn't expect would ever be in the cards for me when I was young...I got married. Scott and I had been together since the year 2000 and, on the anniversary of the day we first met, with family and friends gathered in our back yard,

we were finally able to make it all legal and official on

July 15, 2016. I try



to hold onto that day I never thought I would see as a reminder that, even when things are going wrong and despair is creeping in, better days may be just around the corner.

So, in a more calm and positive frame of mind than I'd inhabited for quite a long time, I got down to more serious work. From what I recall, "Wake From Sleep" was the first song recorded that made it onto this album...around the end of 2016/beginning of 2017. A bit of a strange start, I suppose, since that song almost borders

on danceable club music (but is prevented from quite going there by sections that suddenly downshift, one of which even has a fretless bass solo, hehe), whereas the rest of the songs on *Chasing Fire*, while very synth-heavy, would definitely not be at home in any dance club. Next up was "Casino Prestidigitato", where I returned to bass guitar (instead of synth bass) for the bass line, as with most of the other songs.

One might think it was just a string of synth-driven music from then on to the finish line once I found that groove with the first two songs. But no, I went off on another tangent for several months in 2017, recording some more guitar/bass/drums-driven conceptual rock. By the beginning of 2018, I was back to working on more electronic music again, but once

every few months, it seemed I'd get the itch to do something more guitardriven again and record another prog-rock piece. So I was really working on two albums at once, which is why it took over three years to finish *Chasing Fire*. The upside is that, as of this writing, I'm probably more than 80% done with that other, more guitar-heavy album that could very possibly be released in 2021. Which is good...I have a hell of a lot of lost time to make up for!

During 2018, various songs came together: "Fringe Case", "The King of Shade", "Ghost Network" and "Activate the Window". If I had to try and describe how the new material was shaping up, I'd say most of the songs were an exercise in genre blending...combining progressive rock-influenced song structures and somewhat cerebral, introspective lyrics with the slick, complex arrangements of modern electronic music as well as a dash of early '80s synth pop. I had attempted something similar with a track or three from my previous album, Go, but whereas back then the stylistic crossovers came across as rather forced (in a "dumping mint chocolate chips on a cheeseburger" sort of way), it felt like this time it was...at least for the most part...actually working.

At the end of 2018, I decided to pull forward four electronic tracks I had recorded between 2008 and 2010 to round out the collection and call the lineup complete. I landed on "Fringe Case" as the opening track, since it seemed to be the song that was most accessible and had



the most immediate impact. I even shot some of the footage that would end up in the video. But I found myself dragging my feet on getting more work done on the video, as well as designing album graphics; it felt like just a little of that self-doubt from years past had returned.

and I wanted to let the album simmer for a little bit, just to try and get some distance and make sure I was really satisfied with it.

Of course, I can't stay idle for long. More musical ideas were coming to me, so I continued recording new songs, figuring I



was getting a head start on the *next* album. "A **State of Space**" seemed like an interesting stylistic divergence that might point the way towards something new to explore on a future release...downtempo electronica with fretless bass meanderings and a more laid-back, dusky vocal...it was almost like space-age lounge music. I liked it and decided to put it on the current album instead of back-burnering it, kicking one of the "legacy" tracks off to make room.

Following that, I had musical bits coming together that would eventually coalesce into "Chasing Fire". I had already decided on Chasing Fire as the album's title, but now I had a lyrical idea for an actual title track to go with the new music. It became another extended, conceptual rock sort of piece like "Activate the Window" and "Ghost Network" and I figured the album could use another of those. So, another 2008-2010 era track got axed from the lineup in favor of the new piece.

And then, more indecisiveness. I had ideas for guitar-driven songs again and recorded two more in that vein. Both turned out well, and I went through a bout of wondering if I should push to get a full album's worth of that kind of music done and release *that* instead. I guess it's becoming very clear why it continued to take longer than it should have to get any album at all out, eh?

Eventually, sanity prevailed again and I said to myself, "Follow through



on what you intended to do and just get that collection of synth-driven music out...for the love of God, release something."

So finally, at the beginning of 2020, I resolved to stop waffling

and do it. I had started messing around with a piano-based song I'd recorded in late 2015 called "Up in the Air" the previous year, with a view towards re-arranging it around synth sounds instead. I gave myself permission to finish that one last thing and put it on the album if it solidified into something good, but either way, that would be it. Ultimately, I wrote completely new lyrics for it and changed almost everything about it except the choruses...it was almost like tearing down a house, leaving one wall intact, and then building a new one around it. From that renovation project emerged "Sky Why". In hindsight, I'm glad I did "just one more", as I think it's one of the album's stronger tracks.

I jettisoned one more of those decade-old pieces to make room for that last-minute recording, which left "Cone of Silence", an instrumental recorded in 2009, as the only older piece from the vaults remaining on the track list. *Enough, stop,* I told myself. *We're done now.* I got back to work on the album graphics design I had started over a year prior,

and began trying to assemble footage I'd shot for "Fringe Case" in late 2018 and mid-2019 into some sort of music video, thinking I'd have the album ready to release by late spring 2020.

I don't have to tell you what wrench got tossed into the gears at that point, since everyone in the world knows all too well: the COVID-19 pandemic. Seemingly overnight, everyone's lives were thrust into fear and uncertainty and, for many, terrible tragedy. It was pretty hard to get excited about releasing



an album in the midst of all that. Between worrying about whether any older or otherwise vulnerable loved ones might contract the virus, being concerned how deeply the pandemic might impact me financially, and also genuinely wondering how many people would even be able to care about an album release in such times, the timing just felt really bad. So, again, I put things on hold.

For the spring and summer, I mostly hunkered down and worked on some additional new music (having reached an



understanding with myself that *Chasing Fire* was DONE and anything more I came up with would be saved for a future release). And also spent a fair amount of time feeling kind of stressed and shell-shocked over this surreal, unheard-of-in-our-lifetime change in our everyday world...just like everyone else.

As summer started giving way to autumn, I'd had enough of circling the airport. Regardless of the situation in the world, it was time to see *something* constructive and more positive happen and finally, at long last, get this album out. I sat down and got serious about wrapping things up. I finished the graphic design, got the songs professionally mastered, and debuted the "Fringe Case" video on Facebook. In early November, for the first time in fourteen years, I had boxes full of CD's – a new album solidified in physical form – being dropped off at my door.

As a side note, I'm all too aware of the decline in physical album sales. There's a decent chance a large number of the CD's will end up left in those boxes unsold as listeners opt for downloads instead. Call me a relic of a bygone era, but I still find getting a new album to be a more special event when I get something tangible, complete with artwork and liner notes to

look at while I listen that first time...the way a lot more people used to in the '70s and even the '80s. But obviously, I'll be deeply appreciative of everyone who chooses to buy a copy and support my efforts, whether they opt for a shiny disc in a deluxe Digipak or a collection of digital files.

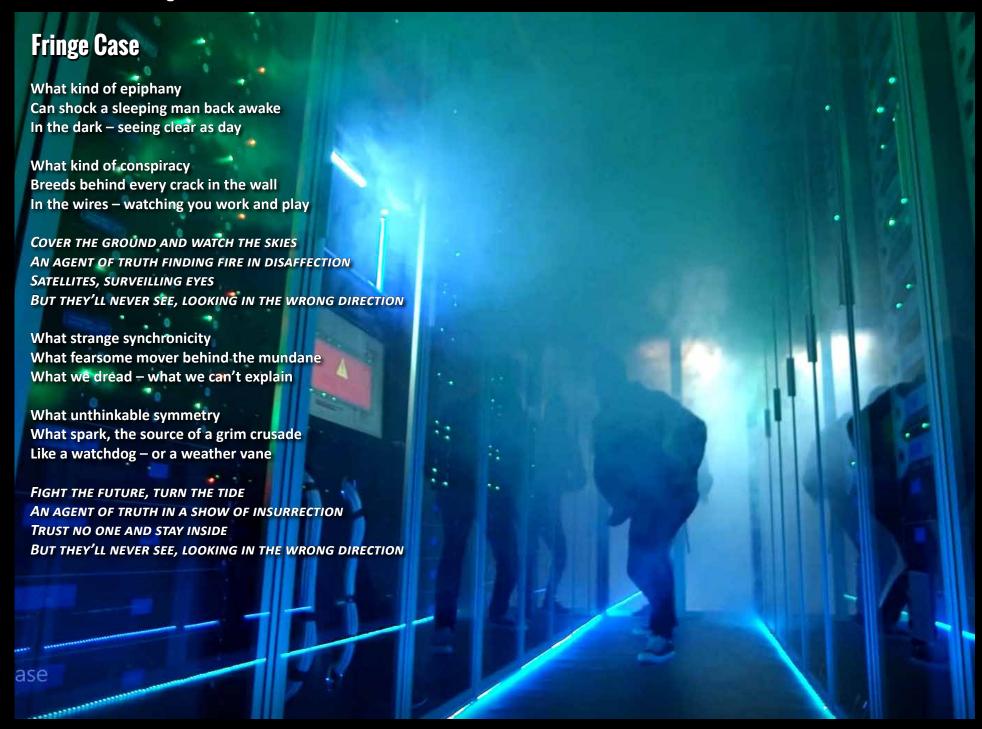
So, to recap, I finally made a new album, it took way longer to arrive than I would have liked, it cost me a lot in terms of hard work and money and (sometimes) stress, but now it's out and I don't regret all that it took to make it happen. To borrow a quote from the lyrics of Neil Peart, whose passing was one of the first sad events in a difficult year, "If the music stops/There's only the sound of the rain/All the hope and glory/All the sacrifice in vain". That's it, I guess. We have to keep the music going... keep doing our best at trying to create good things and putting them out there in the hopes that our little points of fire might help make the world a slightly warmer, brighter place.

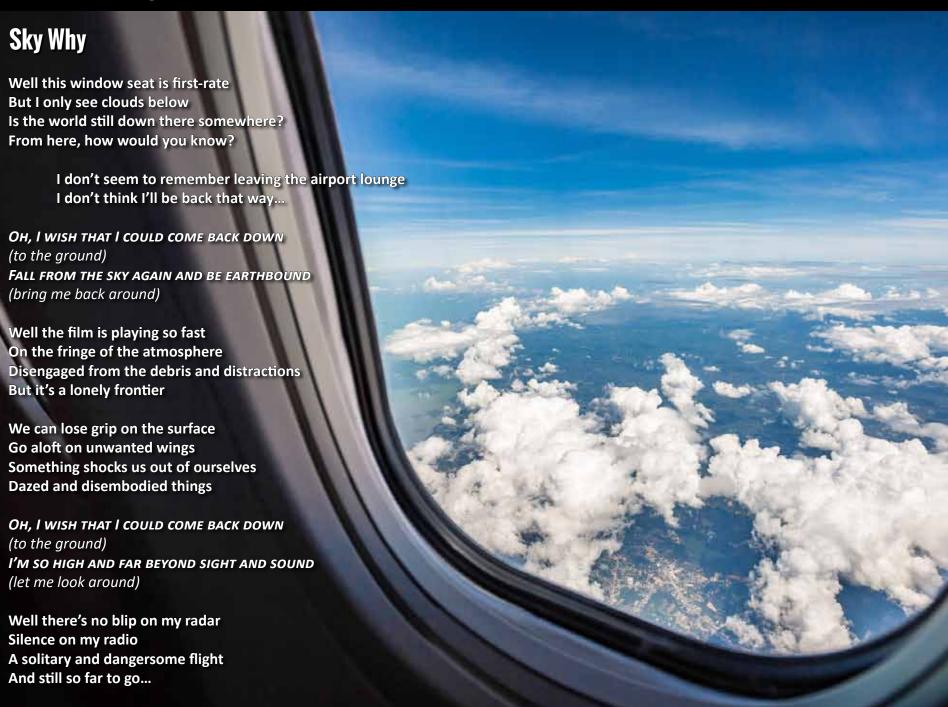
That's what us creative types are always doing, I suppose–chasing fire. Hopefully, every now and then, we actually manage to catch hold of some.

- DV











Chasing Fire

You stand in a sea of black umbrellas Mourning the misunderstood Every day a calamitous novella You'd rewrite if you could

It feels like the sun is getting tired Like the world is winding down We dream in the past, so uninspired Stalking shadows or playing the clown

SIFTING THE ASHES
OF WHAT WAS ONCE ABLAZE
THE DRAGONS HAVE ALL BEEN SLAIN
IN BYGONE, BETTER DAYS
YOU'VE COME ALONG TOO LATE
THE LEGENDS LEFT THE STAGE
WE'RE ALL LEFT CHASING FIRE
THE GHOST OF FORGOTTEN RAGE

We stand in the afterglow of glory

THE LEGENDS LEFT THE STAGE

Having barely brushed its heat

We're all Left Chasing fire

Seeking sparks to ignite another story

TO WRITE ANOTHER PERFECT PAGE

Obsolete or incomplete?

We were meant to be extraordinary...

You missed the big game show You'll never take the prize We're all left chasing fire That once filled younger eyes Gather all your wasted talents
And blow them at the moon
Break the sky and level the landscape
Play the song out of tune
We lapsed into so much less than
what we'd wanted
But sometimes the day peaks long
after noon

You stand in the wreckage of an eon A flame we thought would never die Nothing left but the names in faded neon Across a burnt and black sky

SIFTING THE ASHES
OF WHAT WAS ONCE ALIGHT
THE BEST YEARS ARE ALL BUT SPENT
FIGHTING THAT GOOD FIGHT
YOU'VE COME ALONG TOO LATE
THE LEGENDS LEFT THE STAGE
WE'RE ALL LEFT CHASING FIRE
TO WRITE ANOTHER PERFECT PAGE

The King of Shade

I'm the thin end of the wedge
Burrowed deep where you don't dare dredge
I'm the weaver of the thread
The whisper that starts an echo in your head

I'm what you can't quantify
Half-seen from the corner of your eye
I'm the hitcher in your brain
Keeping you in line with your pain

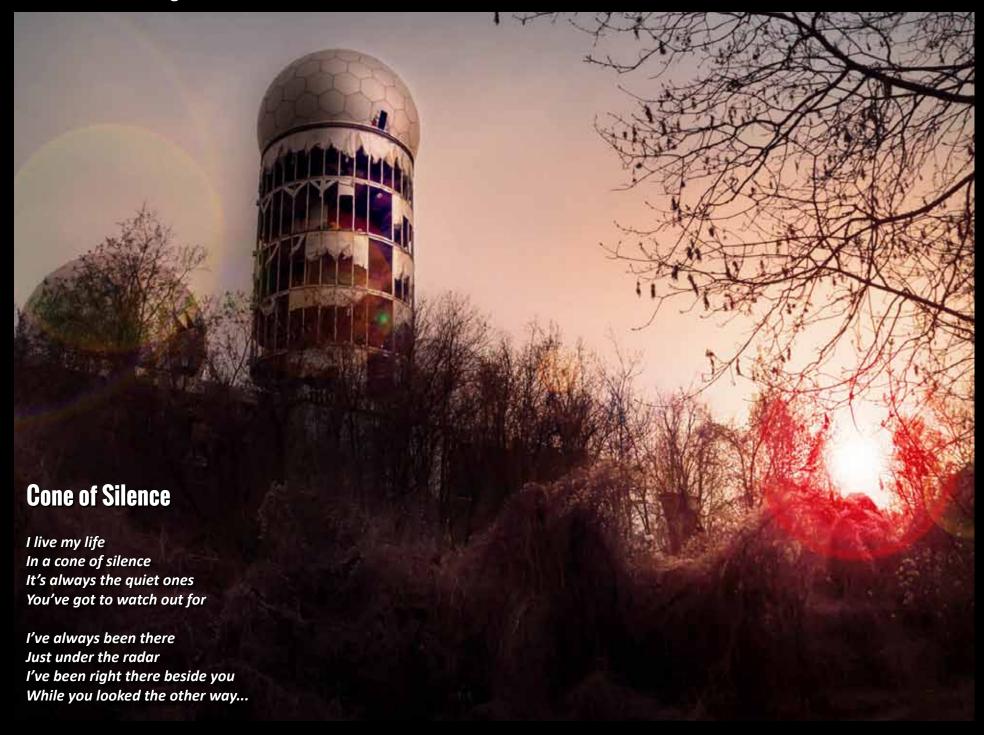
I'M THE KING OF SHADE
I'M THE KING OF SHADE
I'M THE KING OF SHADE
AND ALL THAT YOU ARE WILL FADE...

I'm the keeper of the flame Who'll burn the world with your face and name I've kept you strung out and sedate Talking to ghosts until it's too late

I'm the passenger unseen
Waiting for that light to turn green
I'm the dream just south of sane
The coming storm that you can't contain







Ghost Network

Programs learn to dream (as we turn to phantoms)
A synthetic boy in love with a hologram
Castaways in the stream

Things which should not be (except in a nightmare)
A plane of perfection – of airbrushed illusions
We thought would set us free

We are avatars – carved from what we desire Projections of all we can't be, crossing paths through a wire - Always chasing fire...

Replicated heat (leaving us so cold)
A spark of excitement that can't ever touch you
Because the twain never meet

Lives become roles played (can we tell the difference?)
We hide in the shadows, where worse things are waiting
Than what made us afraid

We are revenants – whose eyes have not seen the grave Wishing we still could feel and wondering what's left to save - What's left to deprave...

Programs learn to dream (as we turn to phantoms)
We forsake our filters in places ephemeral
Go to every extreme

Masks become our face (who knows the real one?) So many skins worn, we lose where we came from In the digital space





Casino Prestidigitato

Watch me pull this rabbit from my hat That deformed thing's gonna scare the soul out of you I guarantee you that

Watch me spin this wheel of rigged circumstance
The odds are ten times worse than to stake your life
On flat-out random chance

WE PLAY THESE GAMES WITH WEIGHTED DICE ROCK THIS FOOL'S PARADISE FORGETTING WHAT WE USED TO KNOW AT THE CASINO PRESTIDIGITATO

Watch me make your fondest wish disappear
A wave of the wand and you see behind the mirage
The show of smoke and dark mirrors

Watch me deal this deck of dreams and despair Do you really think we'd let you take center stage If we didn't put you there?

Misdirection, sleight of hand
Nightmares made of hopes so grand
You can't seize the day if you play it their way
Presto change, pledge to prestige
Perform your own tricks as you please
You might not headline, but you won't be a cliché

WE PLAY THESE GAMES WITH WEIGHTED DICE ROCK THIS FOOL'S PARADISE FORGETTING WHAT WE USED TO KNOW...

WE PRAY FOR MAGIC IN OUR LIVES
AND LOSE OUR NERVE WHEN IT ARRIVES
PLAY OUT THIS DISILLUSION SHOW
AT THE CASINO PRESTIDIGITATO



Activate the Window

There is a light at the edge of my world Blinking away in the distance

Reminding me with faint persistence
That I'm not from here

There is a crack at the core of my world A point of worn resistance
The fringe of our frayed existence
The fractured frontier

We are not where we belong Quantum janitors can't straighten out what's wrong This time...

There is a hole at the heart of my world A history they erased A different life designed to displace The truth we once knew

There is a path in and out of my world
That I forgot and can't find
It's hard to hold such things in a sane mind
The view can change you

We are not who we appear...

ACTIVATE THE WINDOW — REVEAL THE OTHER SIDE
SHOW ME WHAT I LEFT BEHIND
WHEN SOMETHING MADE TWO WORLDS COLLIDE
ACTIVATE THE WINDOW AND POWER UP THE SCREEN
SHOW ME WHAT I MIGHT HAVE BEEN
IF I WASN'T CAUGHT IN THE SPACE BETWEEN

There's more – than one
Of everything
But not me – I have no counterpart
I'm an airship with no mooring string...



Gathering Sparks

FOR THE TECH HEADS...



And here we come to the "gear geek" section, for the musicians in the house (and for those who aren't but are still intrigued by the behind-the-scenes stuff). I'll say up front that the tools I used to make this album are decidedly modest compared to what you'll find in any major recording studio. But really, it's not the gear so much that leads to good recordings...it's lots of experience and learning from your mistakes. And God knows, I made plenty of *those* in the past!

As you'd imagine, in the fourteen years since my last release, the setup went through many changes. I recall really getting into softsynths from 2007 onward, adding some of the then-newer synths like u-he Zebra and NI Massive to the lineup. And then I went through a hardware period around 2009/2010, starting with a Moog Little Phatty, followed by a Waldorf Microwave 1, a Roland Juno 60 and a Chroma Polaris. After

a little while, I somehow lost interest and sold most of them. Now, of course, I kick myself for having sold the Juno 60 and the Microwave, as both of them have quadrupled in price on the used market since. (I still have the Polaris, but it's been needing service for years - it was just used as a prop in the "Fringe Case" video.)

In the last decade, I went all software for a while, and then started working a bit of hardware into the mix again about four years ago. I picked up a used **Virus TI Keyboard** first, which ended up being used quite a bit on this album. Actually, every single synth sound on "Casino Prestidigitato" came from it – that song is sort of a Virus TI showcase. There's a lot of it on "Chasing Fire" and "Wake From Sleep", too.

In the later part of the recording, I added a **Behringer D** (their super-affordable Minimoog recreation) and used it for synth bass and a few leads on "Ghost Network". The D also produced most of the sounds in the chilled-out section at the middle of that song...it was basically several tracks of me just working the knobs in realtime doing filter sweeps and effects. Also joining the lineup later on was a **Behringer Neutron**, which was only used on "A State of Space"...the arpeggiated motif that appears just before the first verse and again later on was the Neutron, as well as some other parts.

As far as softsynths go, the list of them appearing on this album is fairly long. **Spectrasonics Omnisphere** features heavily, especially on "Activate the Window", where it provided probably 75% of the sounds. When **NI Massive X** was released in mid-2019, I gave it a good workout doing most of the synth textures for "Sky Why". Various other synths

used on *Chasing Fire* include u-he Zebra, Diva, ACE and Hive2; Synapse Audio Dune 3; Reveal Sound Spire; and Tone2 Icarus.

In the bass department, I had so many basses coming and going for a few years –





Spector Euros, Steinbergers XQ's, Music Man Bongos, a Fender or three, a few models from Ibanez and Schecter, etc. Seeking that elusive "something". Eventually, I settled on a handful that were working for me and tired of the hassle of buying and selling.

But which ones saw use on this album? An **Ibanez SRT900DX** (sort of Ibanez' take on a Spector Euro) on "Chasing Fire", "The King of Shade" and "Casino Prestidigitato". A **Lakland Skyline JO4** (Jazz Bass equivalent) on "Fringe Case", "Sky Why" and "Ghost Network". An

Ibanez ATK on "Cone of Silence". Fretless basses used here and there included an **Ibanez ATK fretless** and a **Schecter Stiletto Session fretless**.

Oh, and lest I forget, the **Steinberger XL-2** I had for a while in 2018. I'd been fascinated with the original composite-construction Steinbergers ever since artists like Rush's Geddy Lee and Tears for Fears' Curt Smith used them in the mid-'80s but, for whatever reason, had never tried one myself. I found it pretty novel having one around and it was the initial inspiration for "Fringe Case" – I had decided it would be fun to do a song that almost sounded like it could have come from the year that bass was made (1985), with the analog synth melodies, gated snare, huge Lexicon reverbs, etc. I recorded the song and shot the footage for the music video with the XL-2.

But later on, when I went to edit the video, I decided I wasn't really happy with the way the Steinberger sounded on that track. Consequently, I ended up re-recording the bass part with the Lakland JO4. So the bass you see in the video is actually not the one you're hearing. I ultimately decided the XL-2 wasn't the best fit for me and sold it along so that someone else could enjoy that piece of '80s music history. I will note

though, that the Steinberger does appear on "Activate the Window". I liked how its sound worked on that track better, and figured it would be a shame to not have at least one song on an album to document the fact that I had finally owned one, however briefly.

Regarding other gear, the guitar parts (sparse though they are on this album) were done with a Music Man SUB1 with Dimarzio replacement pickups that I snagged really cheap on eBay a long time ago, run through the S-Gear amp sim. I tracked vocals mostly with an Audio-Technica 4047, except for "A State of Space", on which I used a GAP R1 ribbon mic.

I guess that covers it, and I'd probably start to bore both you *and* me by going on any longer, so...that's a wrap! Now I need some coffee...

- DV





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