



## exalted headband (funkspiel fringe)

The album's title comes from a reference to the Luiseno Indians in a *Sky & Telescope* article about the Milky Way that discusses various cultural interpretations of the galaxy. The Luiseno called the Milky Way *Piiwish Ahuutax*, which roughly translates to "exalted headband," and likened it to a ritual headband. *Exalted Headband* is intended to be a companion piece to 2006's *End of Greatness*, whose title is also a *Sky & Telescope* reference.

*Funkspiel*, whose approximate translation from the German is "radio play," refers to a counter-espionage operation by Germany during WWII in which false messages were transmitted back to the Allies. By 1944, the Allies had uncovered the operation and used it against the Germans. The idea of plays within plays, songs within songs, dreams within dreams, worlds within worlds—and words within words, for that matter—is part of the undercurrent of the record, and the mood of this version of "Exalted Headband" is meant to evoke "spy" themes reminiscent of *the Saint* and *the Prisoner*. "Fringe" is another play on words, one of the three references to hair (in this case, bangs) which, along with the use of parenthetical titles, are a not-so-subtle attempt to link the three "Exalted" variations together in name.

## swimming downhill

This term is sometimes used by swimmers to describe the sensation of, well, swimming downhill, which can, in part, be achieved by being horizontal in the water with eyes focused at the bottom of the pool, allowing the legs to rise. I experienced the sensation once or twice while swimming, before learning of the phrase's use in swimming circles. The tune is the first variation of the "Daylight" theme.



## enigma of the spokes

Percival Lowell, the astronomer who viewed Mars for several years in the early 1900s and argued there were canals built by an intelligent civilization there, also thought he observed structures on Venus which resembled spokes on a wheel. The enigma referred to here is not the spokes themselves, but the fact that no other astronomers had observed these Venus images (whereas other observers had seen the same lines on Mars which Lowell thought to be canals). The mystery was recently explained (again in *Sky & Telescope*) where it was determined that the telescope aperture that Lowell used to observe Venus, the brightest object in the sky, was such that an optical allusion of sorts occurred—the blood vessels of his retina were essentially superimposed on the image viewed through the scope, giving the false appearance of "spokes" on the planet. The song itself is the first variation of the "Lucky Guy" theme, as well as an example of the album's "moods-at-odds" bent.

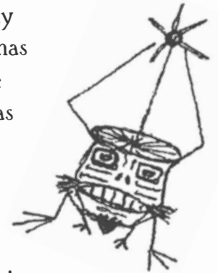


## kairos '77/chronos

The ancient Greeks had two words for time, **chronos** and **kairos**. Chronos refers to chronological time, whereas kairos means a moment of unknown duration in which something unusual or significant happens. Ironically, "Kairos" is the longest piece on the album, but this is not necessarily conflicted, as the word's meaning brings to mind the sensation of one's life passing before one's eyes, as if time has stopped. It also carries along the song-within-a-song concept, with a dirge dropped into what can be loosely called a march. At one point I conceived of these as two separate pieces. "Chronos," on the other hand, is relatively brisk and is written around the synth sound and phrase that introduces the song. I mischievously refer to this as the "Weather Channel" song.

## kung fu sunset

One influence on this record is composer John Barry, especially his James Bond soundtracks *From Russia With Love* and *You Only Live Twice*. The latter's main theme, and in particular the strings of "Mountains and Sunsets," I find especially poignant. "Kung Fu Sunset" feebly tries to emulate them. And as *Twice* has Eastern musical influences, so does "Kung Fu," however the visual image that came to mind during its creation was that of a sun bearing down, as on the tv show *Kung Fu*. Not exactly a sunset, but for the song, the combination stuck.



## fractal dust

The term "fractal dust" was stumbled upon surfing the web. The concept is mostly beyond me, as fractal geometry is at its heart; however, the web content generally revolves around a discussion of the aggregation of dust in nebulae and its relation to planet formation. What caught me immediately was that the phrase sounded like a good name for a song. The title existed before the music, but as it turned out, the phrase became the appropriate description of this piece.

## run to daylight

This is another title-before-the-music concoction. Oddly, the tag comes from the title of a 1963 book by Vince Lombardi, a hardcover of my brother's on a shelf in the bedroom we shared growing up. Having experienced my portion of heavy traffic, the phrase for me has come to mean seeking out, and finding, the open lane on the highway.



## deep & deeper

Featuring a sample from a spoken word vinyl record by hypnotist Russell Burgess (whose trained bird act landed him a gig on the Ed Sullivan Show), the title is a play, perhaps rather moronically itself, on the movie *Dumb and Dumber*.

During this recording period, I was experimenting heavily with samples, both musical and spoken. The EP *Drops the Pop Off*, on which "Deeper" first appeared, includes many sample-driven songs featuring the likes of Gentle Giant, the Sweet, and Edvard Grieg, not to mention air traffic control terminology and famous astronaut quotes.



## theme from lucky guy

Speaking of which, the title of this song came to me before I ever thought to bury Neil Armstrong's immortal words in the mix to simulate radio chatter. The concept of a theme for a fictional entity probably was spurred by Marshall Crenshaw's "Theme from 'Flaregun,'" and in keeping with one of *Headband's* subplots, the backdrop for the song was another tv theme genre—the crime drama populated by the likes of *Mannix* or *Harry-O*. Of course, using lucky guy Armstrong as a source of chatter coincidentally made a whole lot of sense.

## balloon bazooka

This song is sort of a bridge between the two upbeat variations of the main theme, "Daylight" and "Swimming," and the slowed-down "Floaters"; the piece itself is a combination of the two modes, albeit in reverse. The title is meant to be a bit of a conundrum: a bazooka made out of a balloon, a bazooka that uses balloons as ammunition, a bazooka that shoots down balloons. In the end all four song variations on the "Daylight" theme are meant to impart a sense of movement as the titles imply.

## rebreather

This word refers to a breathing apparatus which recycles exhaled gas, is lighter and more compact than typical "open circuit" scuba gear, and is used in mines and in space in addition to underwater. While the term originally insinuated itself as just another good title for a song, for me the label fit—the sinewy, insect-like synth the song is built around reminds me of the helium-voiced divers from a *Jacque Cousteau* adventure. This song represents another twist on the record's ongoing gag of melding two seemingly disparate moods within a piece.



## towhead's lament (loose chaconne)

The title continues the hair-related reference tying together the variations of the "Exalted Headband" theme. The connection came to me as I was working on another version of the title track, referred to as "Blonde Mix", which is a reference to the band *Hitchcock Blonde*, whose singer sounds uncannily like me (not that you would know from an instrumental record). In any case, the song is in triple time, which led me to take liberties with the musical term "chaconne." The song feels to me like a mournful dance, or a hopeful dirge.



## children of the teeth

Another title-came-first tune, this one comes from a chapter on the DVD of *Jason and the Argonauts*, the scene where King Aëtes scatters the teeth of the slain Hydra like seeds, yielding an army of skeleton soldiers. The scene has fascinated me since childhood, as have many others by Ray

Harryhausen. This is the only post-*Drops the Pop Off* tune to sport a "hand-made" sample, that of dialogue from the movie which has been buried in the mix.



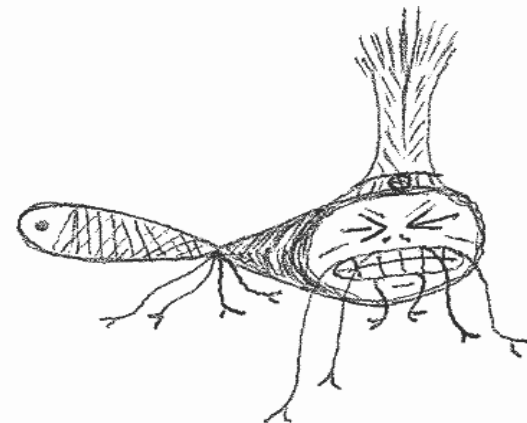
## braids at blue hour (zero time)

This song is one of the last pieces written for the record and was brought about by another web search. In the process of googling the article that spawned the album's title, I came across an electronic duo called TONTO's Expanding Headband. From the time I had first found the title-song-related astronomy article online, approximately 2004, until searching it again this year, a seemingly forgotten band from the '70s had re-discovered the light of day via the web. They created music with the world's first "multitimbral polyphonic analog synthesizer," and surprisingly I had missed them in my youth. I felt somehow obliged to tip my hat to a fellow "headbender" and came up with this variation on "Exalted" which parenthetically references TONTO's first record. The proper title tugs on the hair-reference again, this time with an added allusion to twilight.

## floaters

The title refers to a medical term for what seem like "cobwebs" floating in your field of vision, usually brought on by age due to the shrinking of the vitreous. I have my share of these and sometimes find it easy to "stare" at them as if they occupied a parallel world. The staring is difficult as the floaters tend to dart away when attempting to look directly at them—sort of like trying to see the 3D image in a Magic Eye poster. The result, I hope, acts as a kind of epilogue, a last attempt to capture the spirit of *Exalted Headband* as a mostly wordless, chimeric version of the universe of its antecedent, *End of Greatness*.

~kowitz



KP