

## **Explainer: UTOPIOID**

*Utopioid* is our sixth full-length album and 12th release overall since our formation in 2003. It's also our third full-length released independently as a pay-what-you-wish download through Bandcamp. By popular request, people who purchase the album will get an additional set of artwork and a lyric sheet as bonus downloads.

### **What we want you to know about it:**

This album represents the culmination of a shift in our working methods. Rather than each member having a defined creative role and 'territory' (as in the past), all members contributed to the album concept, instrumentation, vocals, lyrics, and production. *Utopioid* is the most democratic piece of work we've ever created, and we believe that its bedrock reliance on collaboration has also made it the strongest. Moreover, it has the deepest and most fully-realized concept of any of our releases, with every dimension of its composition and production serving narrative ends. All of the lyrics are first-person and in-character, though sometimes multiple perspectives are presented in multiple voices. There are four parts—like a symphony, or seasons, or cardinal directions. Each of the four parts intentionally sounds radically different from the other three. Find the best playback system you have access to, and turn it up *loud*.

Another thing: because we believe so strongly in this album, we're making every effort to dramatically increase our touring after releasing it. Many of you have been waiting a very long time for us to come and play your state/country/region. We are doing the best we can to cover more physical ground in this album cycle than any before.

### **Some questions you might have:**

*Why digital-only? Where are the physical editions or pre-orders?*

We self-finance and self-fund every aspect of the band. Digital sales pay the band's bills, and everything we put out is first and primarily a digital self-release. We are wholly dependent on our fans to continue as a band, and every release is a test of our fundamental trust in our relationship with you, the listener. If you like what you hear, please tell others about it. When physical copies happen, they happen later on, once we've been able to recoup our production expenses (which are quite high for a band of our size and profile). We have partnerships with small labels that help us by licensing our music to release on physical media, and it takes time to create and manufacture that additional packaging. But no matter how they're released, physical media do not generate anywhere near the revenue of digital music, so we have to be judicious about how much time and money we put into them. Most of all, it's important to us to get music out as soon as it's ready, with no artificial wait before fans hear it. Physical media simply take longer.

*If you guys are starving and broke and totally dependent on digital sales, why pay-what-you-wish?*

There are both moral and practical sides to this. On one hand, not everyone has the same resources or means. It might help to think of our digital pricing as "pay what you are able." We would never want pricing to impede someone from hearing and enjoying our music. On the other hand, we also recognize that despite the enormous investment of time and money that recorded music requires, it is presently devalued in the market because of the ease with which it is copied and shared. That's just a fancy way of saying that small, independent bands like us get hit hard by 'piracy' even more than big-name artists. You can't charge people what something is worth, you have to charge what people are willing to pay. We are just as opposed to large corporations' usurious pricing and burdensome DRM as anyone, but even though our music is *legitimately obtainable for no money at all*, people still take it and post it in other places where we receive no credit or compensation of any kind (please don't do this!).

*I don't like the production/mixing/mastering/art/vocals/drum sound/clean singing/screaming...[etc].*

That's ok. We can't please everyone and we don't try to. But please don't assume that anything we do is haphazard or accidental—this album, even more than the ones before, is the result of a deliberative decision-making process that deeply involved every member of the band at every stage. We made every creative decision to highlight something that was important to us, and to serve the underlying concept or 'thesis' of the album. As you listen, if something confronts you, we hope you ask why we might have made that choice, rather than dismissing it out of hand. And we hope you can enjoy the music anyway.