

Alien Weaponry
***Tangaroa* (September 17, 2021 | Napalm Records)**

In the recent history of heavy metal, there have been few emerging bands that have shaken up the scene in the way Alien Weaponry has over the past three years. Since releasing their acclaimed Napalm Records debut *Tū* in 2018, the New Zealand band's kinetic presence and unique sound – combining thrash metal with lyrics in the native indigenous language, te reo Māori — has attracted throngs of fans and media supporters across the globe that have responded to the sheer ruthlessness, untempered passion, and unbelievable noise created by the three-piece.

Starting humbly in the island town of Waipu when brothers Henry (drums) and Lewis de Jong (guitars, vocals) were young children, the three-piece — rounded out by new bassist Tūranga Morgan-Edmonds — have recently been hailed as the “future of metal” by esteemed music bible *Metal Hammer* and voted by *Revolver* fans as “one of the bands most likely to break out in 2021.” With their anticipated sophomore release *Tangaroa*, Alien Weaponry is eager to live up to those titles. Their latest offering coalesces their growing maturation with more patience in the songwriting process (most of which was done during the pandemic lockdown), resulting in more complex and informed material.

“In the last couple of years, we’ve obviously experienced a lot, and it’s not something that everyone gets to experience at such a young age,” says Henry. “So for us it’s been kind of strange adjusting to this new way of being and a lot of our songwriting on this album is a product of that as well as the stamina we took from touring so much over the past few years. There’s a lot of variety on this record.”

Like their gripping 2018 single, “Kai Tangata,” which has amassed more than 10 million views on YouTube and claimed the number-one spot on SiriusXM Liquid Metal’s “Devil’s Dozen” for 13 consecutive weeks, a good portion of *Tangaroa* is immersed in the historical stories and cultural heritage of the Māori people, for whom music has long been a cornerstone. Henry and Lewis are of Ngāti Pikiāo and Ngāti Raukawa descent, while Tūranga’s bloodline is traced to the Ngāti Rarua, Ngāti Wai, and Ngāti Hine tribes.

In addition to lyrics written in the indigenous language, many of the songs are further honed with traditional instruments called taonga puoro that give the tracks their own warrior-like attitude.

“When we first started the band, we were just messing around with that style,” recalls Lewis. “Our friends in school were in a ska-reggae band and entered a song competition and they won for a piece partially in Māori. We were really big fans of it, so when got the idea together for Alien Weaponry, we thought what if we wrote a song in Māori but kept it within the metal style, because no one had really done that before,” he adds. “We didn’t know what to expect, but it just took off from there and became our thing.”

Tangaroa opens with “Titokowaru,” in homage to a famous war chief that challenged the colonial government in New Zealand and led a rebel army, declaring that trespassers on

the land would be eaten, with bones strewn on the sides of the roads they were building. Another of *Tangaroa*'s standout tracks, "Hatupatu," is inspired by a legendary tale of a real person – one of the de Jong's ancestors – who was captured by a forest witch by the name of Kurangaituku and made to be a slave until he bravely escaped. The last part of the song features the sounds of a traditional haka (a traditional Māori war dance) composed by Henry celebrating Hatupatu's victory.

The title track is another important piece. Tangaroa is the Māori god of the sea and describes the water as a living entity – one that is being done irreparable harm from climate change and illegal fishing practices. "That's the main point we wanted to get across with this album, and it's the most pressing point we talk about," says Henry. "It's about the fact that we are killing our ocean and the greed is starting to show on scientific levels. There are a lot of people quite ignorant to what is actually happening. For us, it's like a lot of our other songs, where we want to push people to find out what they can and get a true understanding of what we are writing about."

Many of the stories were passed down to Henry and Lewis by their father when they were younger while others were learned in the brothers' immersion school. "As kids we found it a little boring or a bit tedious, but as we got older, those stories started to make more sense to us and we started to take them on board a bit more," says Lewis. Incorporating the tribal stories has also given all three members the chance to reconnect with their roots. "It's very hard to maintain a baseline upkeep of Māori-dom in the regular everyday world," says Tūranga. "Since joining the band, it's been a great opportunity to rekindle that connection and strengthen that knowledge."

Tangaroa also dabbles in more of the band's personal narratives and experiences, with English language songs like the pensive "Unforgiving" that digs a hole of self-loathing and insecurity. There's also the guttural snarl of "Buried Underground," about the aftershocks of drug abuse; it was inspired by a friend of the band that has suffered from devastating effects of synthetic substances. The more downtempo "Crooked Monsters" is Lewis' reaction to discovering a friend had been sexually abused; as the song picks up momentum, it seethes with his anger for the perpetrators that remain free.

"Some things happened to me that really shaped who I am now. It's real-world things that your average 18-year-old doesn't usually experience," says Lewis. "The songs on the album are relating to those emotions."

Though original bass player Ethan Trembath stepped aside from Alien Weaponry in August of 2020, citing his desire to be closer to home (amid a persistent touring schedule that brought the band to 21 countries in seven months), he is still a key part of the new album, contributing vocals on songs like "Dad" and laying down instrumental tracks. With Tūranga Morgan-Edmonds taking over bass duties, the band says the transition has been "quite easy," as Tūranga had already played with Henry in bands throughout their high school years. In addition to providing a number of the powerful gang-style vocals on the album, Tūranga also contributes a memorable guitar solo on "Unforgiving."

Recently signing with the esteemed Rick Sales Entertainment Group – the agency that manages iconic metal bands including Slayer, Mastodon, and Ghost – has elevated Alien Weaponry even further, particularly in the live space where they dominate with their aggressive tenor and incorporating many traditional Māori performance styles that have been largely dormant in modern culture until now.

In May, the trio linked up with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra for a series of unique performances called “Tu Tapatahi - Stronger Together” that intertwine classical and metal in the vein of Metallica’s *S&M*; it was the first time the NZSO ever collaborated with a metal band. As well, Alien Weaponry will support Gojira on the band’s upcoming 2021 U.S. tour and have several marquee festival appearances this year with more to be announced.

When it comes to the future of Alien Weaponry, anything and everything is possible for this promising young act that’s just getting started. As Henry says, “We are just scraping the surface.”

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