

DARK SLIVERS: **SEEING NIRVANA IN THE** **SHARDS OF INCESTICIDE**

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DRY AS A BONE

14.0 DRY AS A BONE

Incesticide was sandwiched between two major studio album releases—Nevermind and In Utero—and with fans also able to go purchase Nirvana’s newly reissued first studio album, Bleach, Incesticide has been judged primarily according to that company. This means it never received due credit as a high quality compilation of genuinely rare and worthwhile songs. Twelve years later, by contrast, long absence turned into high anticipation and praise for the only other critical Nirvana compilation; With the Lights Out. The box set received near universal praise and went on to become the highest selling box set of all time, was certified platinum with over a million in U.S. sales and stands only just being Incesticide in sales. In this chapter I’ll offer two wider counterpoints that I feel emphasize the superior status and cherry-picked excellence of the songs on Incesticide.

Working from the present day, the last key flashpoint in Nirvana fandom was Eric Erlandson’s comments to TV station Fuse in early 2012 regarding unheard songs by Kurt Cobain. Eric stated that Kurt Cobain was “...headed in a direction that was really cool. It would have been his White Album.” Eric is one of the few human beings on the planet in a position to know what Kurt Cobain was doing musically in early 1994. Eric accompanied Kurt in an impromptu recording session in March just a few weeks before Kurt’s demise. Also, supporting an optimistic view of the news, the 2004 release of With the Lights Out did reveal that Kurt had made a habit of working up material at home on acoustic guitar so the scarcity of full band recordings from 1992 onward doesn’t mean we’ve seen it all. Revelations since his death have made clear that Kurt had essentially broken up Nirvana by mid-March 1994 so when Eric stated “that’s really what he was going towards, a solo album but working with different people,” it could indeed have been the next step. My take on the evidence though suggests that, as Butch Vig said in April 2012, anyone believing there’s a vault full of golden

sounds is dreaming.¹

Why so cynical? When Kurt stated in his suicide note that he hadn't "*felt the excitement of listening to as well as creating music...for too many years now*" he was confessing to a simple fact; he had stopped writing music. There were just fourteen original songs written in the thirty months following Nevermind's release, some little more than studio jams.² It doesn't give much cause to believe that in his deepest darkness, Kurt banished his writer's block and rattled out an album's worth of fresh material.

The chronology of that time period also gives little confidence. Nirvana toured until January 8, 1994. Kurt joined them in studio on the thirtieth and they left for Europe two days later with a concert every one to two days until crashing to a halt on March 1. Time is whisked away ever faster after this date—coma before dawn on the fourth, leave hospital on the eighth flying home on the twelve with the police called to a domestic incident that same evening and again on the eighteenth. There was a drug intervention by his friends and family on March 25 (postponed from the Tuesday because Kurt found out and scarpered), he's out buying a gun with Dylan Carlson on March 30 and heads into rehab at the Exodus Recovery Center that same evening, returning home sometime early on April 3. Amid these incidents and the record of reported sightings, meetings and conversations there simply isn't time for more than scrappy recording to have taken place. Keep in mind that even at his peak of creativity in mid-to-late 1991 he'd only written around nine songs over six months so it's unlikely the smattering of free days in early 1994 yielded significant quantities of material.³

But let's be optimistic. Maybe he recorded in hotels on tour; maybe he was doodling away on those twenty-two days in January or the fifteen days of March on which no major activity took place—maybe Cobain had been stockpiling songs during the dead months of 1993. If he was already planning a solo album from January then his decision to not bother turning up to most of

1 April 27, 2012 NME article entitled Nevermind' producer Butch Vig: "Kurt Cobain's solo album was just in his head".

2 Discussed in the chapter The Greatest Gift.

3 For discussion of this see the Over the Edge Chapter.

the studio session that month makes sense; as does the complete absence of new songs in the 1994 concerts; as does the refusal to commit to Lollapalooza—it would suggest he was already cutting Nirvana out of his decisions. Let's at least lay the question of recordings made on tour to rest though. Pat Smear, in a 2002 interview with the Nirvana Fan Club, testified that Kurt *"sometimes asked me to help him write while we were touring Europe, but it was really intimidating for me and it was impossible for us to get acoustic guitars for our rooms."* This doesn't mean there's nothing, but it doesn't sound like much.

The talk of collaborative work is also a chimera. 1992–1994 was a relatively fallow period for Kurt when it came to in-studio collaborations. In total, they consist of a touch of guitar on the Melvins' track Sky Pup in late 1992; January 1993's *Its Closing Soon* recorded with Courtney in Rio de Janeiro; some brief tracks with Courtney Love and Patty Schemel of Hole sometime in early 1993 that were used as jokes to send to magazines; and finally some jamming and backing vocals during Hole's October 1993 album sessions. On April 23, 2012 a minute-long shred of video appeared online—again, it hardly qualifies as a song, it's a Courtney jam on basic chords with barely a few lines of vocals behind which Kurt sighs a brief melody and eventually sings one recognizable line; "stinking of you." This amounts to scraps compared to the extensive work he contributed to other peoples' projects in 1989–1990; The Jury session at which Kurt, Krist Novoselic and two members of Screaming Trees recording four covers of blues legend Lead Belly's songs; some additional work on one Lead Belly cover for Mark Lanegan's solo album; vocals for two songs for Dylan Carlson's band Earth; plus guitar for two songs by The Go Team. Michael Stipe, the only mentioned candidate for the rumored collaborative project in 1994, has stated clearly that he never received any demos from Kurt who simply ignored the plane ticket Michael sent so he could join R.E.M. in Atlanta that March.¹ It's telling that the opportunity for Kurt to move forward with his music, to take a step toward a new future, was squandered; the same way any effort to renew

1 Not Miami, as is sometimes reported. REM were recording their album *Monster* and didn't move the sessions to Miami until April.

the creative partnership with Dave Grohl or Krist Novoselic was allowed to die.

Any recordings seen by Eric had to have been in existence by March 25, 1994—the last time Kurt is known to have jammed on music (with Pat Smear this time.) Let’s call our first witness; the *With the Lights Out* box set suggests there’s just seven minutes of new music in 1994 plus the scraps performed with Nirvana in January. But it gets worse. Nirvana debuted their last new song as a group in Chicago on October 23, 1993 and enthusiasts believe that the acoustic demo of *You Know You’re Right*, labeled on the box set as 1994, was more likely from 1993 based on comparison of audible lyrics. Next, Pat Smear’s response when asked about the early March session during an interview with the Nirvana Fan Club was that it amounted to *“some jamming and some four-tracks made. Kurt played drums and sang, Eric played bass and I played guitar.”*¹ When asked if he recalled any real songs he answered, *“none that I remember.”* Eric too is vague, the only song he specifically mentions is *“one cover...I won’t say what it is.”* Weigh it up. *Do Re Mi*, an unknown cover song, Kurt not even bothering to pick up his guitar, some jams that weren’t worth putting on an otherwise comprehensive box set.

The only other hint at recorded material is the persistent rumor that the 1988 demo *Clean Up Before She Comes* was resurrected. There’s no evidence this is true but strangely the presence of *The Cars’ My Best Friend’s Girl* at Nirvana’s last show is a potential hint. *Clean Up Before She Comes* stands as one of the earliest acoustic recordings Kurt is known to have made. *My Best Friend’s Girl* meanwhile was purportedly one of the first songs he ever learnt on guitar—another piece of his past. A further tie from 1994 to his youth may be the way Kurt ripped the title of his last song, *Do Re Mi*, from a Disney song. This ties into a fetish for kid’s TV that peeked out in his early discography with a mention of *Pepé Le Pew* on *Beeswax*, silly voices incorporated into *Beans* and the well bootlegged splicing of TV audio known as *Montage of Heck*. A final ghoulish piece of supporting evidence that Kurt was gazing backwards was his address in

1 Quoted from an interview conducted by the Internet Nirvana Fan Club in September 2002 and available via their website. With thanks to the website.

his suicide note to an imaginary childhood friend; Boddah. These are hints, not proof. Yet the problem is that the idea of dead songs walking, far from inspiring hope, reinforces the impression that 1994 was a desolate time both musically and spiritually.

Commercially speaking, it defies logic that significant material still exists. The bootleggers have done a stunning job with Nirvana yet despite their comprehensiveness nothing has emerged to shine a light on the Cobain basement in 1994. The presence of *You Know You're Right* on Nirvana in 2002 showed Courtney, Dave Grohl and Krist Novoselic were well aware of the value to sales of having an unreleased track on the album. Yet November 2005's *Sliver* managed just three alternative versions, no fresh originals. Then the much trumpeted 20th Anniversary *Nevermind* editions lacked any unknowns. Holding material back, drip-feeding it to fans, would make good sense commercially, but the post-*With the Lights Out* releases haven't followed that approach, nor do they indicate sharp Machiavellian profiteering. Sales of *Sliver* would have improved no end if something truly new had been featured likewise the *Nevermind* anniversary would have provided deeper thrills and steeper sales if there had been a scrap of fresh ear-candy. What the record of releases since 2002 has shown instead is a near barren archive. With the *Lights Out*'s third CD was a eulogy to a band that had run out of songs; nothing revealed so far suggests that impression is inaccurate.

The last word must go to Kurt Cobain. Talk in Michael Azerrad's 1993 biography *Come as You Are* did reveal a mind considering fresh possibilities; his dozen or so originals after *Nevermind* do show an urge to drag his music back toward more experimental and noisy styles while the 1994 tracks perhaps show the mooted acoustic direction opening up. The lyrics to the last two known home demos say otherwise. Listening to *You Know You're Right* (acoustic) or *Do Re Mi* what's striking are the prominent lyrics that focus on sleeping and dreaming; Kurt's lyrical inspiration barely got these two songs out of bed. When it does though his themes went no further than opiates, medication,

an emotional state that's either numb or cold as ice next to a series of blanket refusals; "I will never," "I could never," "I won't." This isn't a man with many ties left to a world outside his head or one looking forward positively.

The desire to believe that musical icons and heroes left this earth with songs unseen, songs of the power to move us, inspire us the way their defining creations did, is beautiful in some ways. The capacity for hope versus past experience; the occasional gems that do come close to precious imaginings; the unwillingness to be discouraged or to stop believing that miracles can happen—that we might share yet another epiphany in the company of the artists who made magic first time around; it's an irrepressible phenomenon. But most of the time reality is a cold breeze through bare trees; only skeletal remains fall into our hands. Much though I might wish it were otherwise, anyone who believes 1994 saw a creative renaissance in Kurt's work, is shaking dried up leaves from dead branches.¹

To our second deviation, we return to the aftermath of Kurt Cobain's ascent to icon status, his record label initially made only restricted forays into archive releases; 1994's MTV Unplugged in New York was a revelation, though already heavily bootlegged, then we saw the singles box-set in 1995, a decent DVD, a decent live album in 1996. All high quality but not earth-shattering.

With official channels not answering that demand, it was the bootleg market and the budding world of the Internet that sustained the audience between 1994 and 2002. Unofficial sources kept interest in Nirvana bubbling with regular hints at the existence of significant material. This interest then fed-back into the official world with DGC/Universal's post-millennium releases benefitted from the fact that new music had kept the audience's attention during intervening years. Fans who had not been around during Nirvana's

1 One last glimmer of hope is that the trend during the second half of 1993 and first half of 1994 in Kurt Cobain's writing is highly unusual. Examining the pattern shown in both the chapters *The Greatest Gift* and *Over the Edge* perhaps gives hope that Kurt was still writing but concealed it from Nirvana. There's no evidence available at present to support the idea of an archive of demo'd material though so it may simply be that the trend is what it looks like; one of decline.

heyday (and those who had), could actively pursue unheard music and could enjoy finding new songs. The interest in Eric Erlandson's comments in early 1994 partially arose because the Nirvana fan community had been conditioned by close on a decade of knowing that material genuinely was being held back. It means many are now unwilling to believe the cupboard is bare even as Nirvana releases provide diminishing returns.

The comprehensiveness achieved by the bootlegging community was astounding. Online sources like LiveNirvana or the Nirvana Guide indicate that a majority of Nirvana's live recordings between 1987 and 1994 made it onto tape along with a huge number of covers, alternative versions and unheard originals. The bootleggers' success gave fans a certain faith that if this was what could be done unofficially, then the surviving members of Nirvana, Courtney Love and the record companies must be able to create something legendary. The ethos and hopes of the fans and the more philanthropic bootleggers were summarized by the line on the back of the Outcesticide II: The Needle and the Damage Done bootleg; *"the genius of Kurt Cobain should not be left to rot in record company vaults."*

A mixed blessing was the tendency of bootlegs to mislabel songs. This contributed to further raising fan hopes which kept enthusiasm high, but misled them about the depth of material in the vaults.¹ The impression was gained, thanks to the miscellany of titles scribbled on known set-lists or transcribed incorrectly from muffled recordings, that a goldmine awaited. Kurt Cobain's Journals also listed titles with no indication whether they were ever attached to an actual song or not. With no official arbiter or authoritative source to say otherwise, it was extremely hard to distinguish mislabeled songs.² Various official Nirvana songs simply changed names during their development, further

1 For example, I possessed a disc of remixes (*shudder*) which had Verse Chorus Verse mislabelled as Token Eastern Song and referred to If You Must as Happy Tour.

2 A key example was the song now known as Token Eastern Song. For years it was misidentified as Junkyard (with Token Eastern Song presumed to be a different song altogether) due to a mishearing of the chorus line. Verse Chorus Verse was mislabelled as In His Hands for the same reason.

confusing the situation.¹

The most famous bootleg was Outcesticide; a series eventually stretching to six volumes, all of remarkable quality. The series gave some small insight into the sources who helped get material into the hands of fans; one volume features a thank you on the back *“to Courtney for providing the Rio tape”* while another thanks *“Courtney, Rollins, Anderson and the New York chapter of the Juliette Lewis fan club.”* The ultimate compliment was paid when other companies began bootlegging the original Outcesticide releases. Amusingly Outcesticide’s creators responded by defending the integrity of their rights and their brand placing a note in the Outcesticide IV: Rape of the Vaults release stating *“a rogue ‘Outcesticide IV’ CD is in circulation on a fake Blue Moon label (one of many)...This is a fake of no value to either collector or dealer.”* A further feature was a legal disclaimer circling the edge of each disc asserting the rights of the manufacturer and the owner of the recordings. Though funny on one level, this case does show that the bootleg market wasn’t all ‘Robin Hood’ figures taking from the evil rich corporate barons to give to the Nirvana-starved fans. Individuals realized that there was substantial revenue to be made out of the enthusiasm of Nirvana’s fans. The result was a slew of poor quality, stitched together compilations.

To put the downside of the illegal market in perspective though, the late nineties saw book publishers coming to the same realization regarding the sales potential of Nirvana. The result was that publishers printed a veritable sea of complete junk. Flimsy photo collections, inaccurate recountings of the Nirvana story, skin-deep looks at the music; there were over a dozen cash-in efforts of negligible quality targeting the pockets of Nirvana fans. A space in the market was filled with unofficial releases making use of easily accessed tranches of

1 Michael Azerrad’s *Come as You Are* contains a list featuring “Cracker, Seed and Sad.” These are presumed to refer to Polly, Don’t Want it All and Sappy respectively. Meanwhile Charles Cross’ *Cobain Unseen* features a listing for *In Utero* featuring obvious titles like “I Miss the Comfort” (Frances Farmer) or “What Am I to Be” (All Apologies.) But there are less obvious items; “Frances Farmer” is already on the list, “La La La La” or “Even if You Want to Be” don’t seem to link to an obvious song. Other known renaming took place for *Breed* (originally *Imodium*), *Stay Away* (A.K.A. *Pay to Play*.)

source material—all legal. Given the rapacious attitude of legitimate companies it's understandable that illegal music releases wouldn't always hit the heights. In essence, however, the quality level remained higher in the realm of bootleg recordings than in what people imagine to be the studios and aboveboard world of printed publications.

Which brings us back to the release of 2004's *With the Lights Out* box-set to universal media praise and much celebration among fans...Until the fan community—their long feasting on unofficial recordings having turned many into connoisseurs on matters of Nirvana quality and interest—provided a counter-blast. They pointed out the simple truth that there wasn't anything featured that matched the revelatory nature of *You Know You're Right*. Leaving aside the useful gathering of compilation tracks, the covers, the different mixes and demos of known songs; the box-set contained little that hadn't seen official release in some version or other. Fans even claimed, rightly that the sound quality of some tracks used was inferior to the sources available as bootlegs.¹ It was a fascinating event; a core of fans had become more knowledgeable custodians of the band's work than the remaining members of the band or their record company. This was the zenith of the Nirvana bootleg age. It revealed how well the fans had done unearthing new material; it revealed the lie that their activities had undermined the commercial opportunities around Nirvana's music and showed how their knowledge and awareness was equal to that of the official sources. Table 25 beginning on the next page will attempt to summarize the significant remainders out there in the bootleg market for those readers who want to investigate further but the list simultaneously indicates the absence of remaining gems.

Where does this leave *Incesticide*? Firstly, it makes clear that *Incesticide* really was the cream of the 1987–1991 rarities and outtakes. Observing what has emerged since there can be debate whether other studio songs could have been added to the album—but it's very clear that the songs that did feature

1 Check the bootleg *The Chosen Rejects* and examine the *Erectum/Moby Dick* track for instance.

really did deserve to be released and were worthy additions to Nirvana’s legacy. Similarly it shows the conscientious work that went into Incesticide—no live songs, no home demos, no scratch vocals or unfinished pieces. Every track on Incesticide was worth listening to, was revealing of some part of Nirvana’s history and was professionally recorded and presented. Incesticide revealed neither With the Lights Out’s unpolished home demos, nor the scattershot world of the bootleggers. It’s unlikely that whatever might still emerge from 1994 can stand alongside Incesticide’s fifteen tracks in terms of quality, imagination, diversity or significance. Incesticide simply never benefitted from the desirability created by long absence or unanswered craving.

Table 19. Nirvana Rarities Available or Known to Exist

Rarity	Description
Fecal Matter (Easter 1986) Illiteracy Will Prevail	Readily available bootlegs and online samples have circulated for a number of years now—an official release may hopefully polish an already acceptable sound quality or add packaging, presentation and detail but otherwise, just go hunting. Listings vary but around a dozen songs are available with the presence of Melvins’ Dale Crover keenly felt in the musical style while Kurt Cobain experiments willfully with his voice. In the main these songs, though by no means genius, are surprisingly polished punk tracks, lucid, entertaining, signposts on an open road.
Unknown Demos (1987)	Mentioned by Gillian G. Gaar in a number of her works on Nirvana there appear to be at least two brief scraps Nirvana were working on in 1987 that have never hit the trading circuit but are confirmed to exist.
Montage of Heck (1988)	A patience testing experience in either the short mono version or the mammoth thirty minute stereo mix—interesting more for the light it sheds on how open Kurt, circa 1988, was to collisions of pop and rock and also how willing he was to experiment. A recording of this length featuring notable juxtapositions (e.g., the Iron Maiden original of Run to the Hills collides with Metallica’s brief parody of the tune ripped from <i>The \$5.98 EP: Garage Days Revisited</i>) and knowing humor not just in selection but in positioning must have taken extensive effort and thought. Though hard to endure it shows a musical sense of humor not just a more visible lyrical one, a structural sense for musical positioning and combination, as well as snippets from unreleased Nirvana ‘songs’ (e.g., “the landlord is a piece of shit from Hell”) which may hint at minor curios from unseen rehearsals.

Rarity	Description
Escalator to Hell (1988)	Another experimental piece, Cobain toyed with the then prevalent Religious Right hysteria over backwards vocals disguising band's satanic messages by recording a sentence backwards that simply announces "she's selling the escalator to Hell." The song further reinforces the sense of a man playing with musical potential, the rest of the track being dedicated to overdriven noise experimentation of the kind that would be tempered and deployed within conventional forms.
Bambi Slaughter A.K.A. Bambi Kill, A.K.A. Creation (at latest 1988)	An unnamed song allied in tone and feel to the " <i>mellow 4-track shit</i> " tagged on the end of a playlist featured in Michael Azerrad's <i>Come as you Are</i> . While Kurt's electric work entered a period of relative rigidity from mid-1988 his acoustic work, if indeed this is from 1988, was the forum for vocal experimentation whether <i>Clean Up Before She Comes</i> double-tracking, <i>Seed/Sad/Cracker's</i> Gothicism or this track's lilting rise and fall coupled with glum sounding "hey, hey, hey" chorus line—nowhere close to <i>Lithium's</i> up tempo roar.
Sifting Instrumental (1988) Unknown Acoustic Instrumental A.K.A. Black and White Blues (1988)	A curio in the Nirvana catalog in that intentionally instrumental takes are extremely rare—the bootleg market offers up instrumental takes on <i>Oh The Guilt</i> , <i>Token Eastern Song</i> and a brief acoustic snippet that goes by various names (and is taken to be either a Leadbelly song or a homage to him) sit alongside <i>With The Lights Out's</i> Greg Goose and early take on <i>Scentless Apprentice</i> . That's the pool and none were intended for release. Charles R. Cross records, in <i>Heavier Than Heaven</i> , that Cobain reacted angrily to his guitar playing being complimented after the MTV <i>Unplugged in New York</i> show—his refusal to contemplate full instrumental work for release seems to play into this embarrassment regarding his musical skills, even <i>Endless Nameless</i> received vocals.
Untitled (1991)	Recorded for Nirvana's final radio session (Hilversum Holland, Nov 1991) there's one unreleased improvisation during which Kurt and Dave Grohl switched instruments leaving Krist to hang it all together with a stable bass rhythm as the other two improvised moans, spindly lines of guitar notes and minimal development until the cry of "I stand horrified" provokes a brief rattling tin-can explosion on all instruments. It's a neat corrective to the idea that Nirvana's genuinely impressive chemistry meant they always created gold dust or at least passably listenable material or that every jam yielded an <i>Endless Nameless</i> .

Rarity	Description
Untitled plus Old Age and Low Rider (1992)	<p>A well worthy triptych found on recent bootlegs and a rarity in that, outside of the With the Lights Out box set, few of Kurt's post-Nevermind home demos have emerged. The first 45 seconds concisely shows Kurt still willing to spout random yelps onto cassettes long after Fecal Matter, to substitute "hey, hey" for lyrical inspiration—again, a seemingly long running default when words were lacking—and finally looking to the future with voice-breaking high notes that subsequently decorated 1994's Do-Re-Mi.</p> <p>After retuning Kurt breaks into a far more fully formed Old Age than the edition from the previous year. There's an intro section now featured whose melody is matched closely on Hole's later version, the verse/chorus structure meanwhile has acceptably complete lyrics though Courtney Love would revise them entirely and turn the introduction into a beautifully multi-tracked vocal piece. The final treat is a tagged on 25 seconds of Kurt, accompanying himself with hand percussion presumably on guitar body, running through 1970s' funk band War's Low Rider (with vocalized melody line). It's special simply because it sounds like a man still having fun with music, an antidote to the overall portrait.</p>
Closing Time (1993) Stinking of You (1993) <i>Lemonade Nation/</i> <i>Twister/ Hello Kitty</i> (1993)	<p>Clustered together, these are the known products of collaboration between various combinations of Cobain, Courtney Love and assorted Hole compatriots. The former track circulated for years, mumbling matched to minimal riff complexity, Stinking of You only recently saw the light of day and again is barely worth calling a song if the shred that featured on a 2012 documentary is all there is to see of it. The latter three songs featured unknown participation from Kurt being primarily a collaboration between Courtney and Patty Schemel known as Nighty Nite that has never emerged onto the bootleg circuit. Their inclusion here serves two rhetorical purposes; one being to emphasize the demise of Kurt's creativity in 1993–1994, the other being to give hope that at least whatever scratch recordings were made with Eric Erlandson and/or Pat Smear in 1994 must at least have more to offer than these shreds. Probably best avoiding Cobain's improvised contributions to later hole recordings, a version of song <i>Live Through This</i> is readily available to no great end.</p>

Rarity	Description
You Know You're Right (Live at the Aragon Ballroom, October 1993)	A mishearing of Dave Grohl announcing " <i>this is our last song, it's called All Apologies</i> " led to the song being entitled 'On the Mountain' or 'Autopilot' on first emergence in the bootleg record. The song is intriguing (to me) because with the vocals less in evidence compared to either January 1994's studio take or the acoustic 1993/1994 home demo it's possible to focus on the motorik rumble of the intro and verse—this genuinely is a new style for Nirvana, there's no big flash chords, simply the head-nodding repetition, rock meditation rolling forward into the chorus. The later studio version conceals this more rhythmic skeleton, reverting it to a classic Nirvana formula...A shame in a way, road grit suited this song.
Jam/Jam After Dinner (Jan 30, 1994)	A snippet of the former is audible on a number of the DVD menus on <i>With the Lights Out</i> —on full power Nirvana were gifted improvisers, their ability to mesh instruments and to never stray too far from song form, usually steered by the bass and drums, gave their jams a rock style that could be engaging regardless of how much static n' amp hiss a segment might end up drenched in. As known components of the final recordings Krist Novoselic, Dave Grohl and Krist Novoselic did together there's a simple desire to hear the whole finale for better or worse.
Live Covers 1987–1994	There's great fun to be had with Nirvana covers...So long as one doesn't expect too much. Set-lists seemed to suggest the band tossing off cover songs almost nightly yet listening to the actual bootlegs there were few full songs attempted. Recommendations in this case can only be personal; Krist skewering of The Doors' <i>The End</i> (1991) is superb, a superior version of Smack's <i>Run Rabbit Run</i> (1988) exists on bootleg and is worth checking, while Nirvana's last show yielded a rendition of Cars' <i>My Best Friend's Girl</i> (1994) which maintains the illusion of a band still enjoying life live. Most live renditions were scraps, shreds and snippets—my earnest advice would be to self-compile and treat them as a medley, as a compendium they can be very enjoyable, I retain a soft spot for 1994's <i>My Sharona</i> efforts.
Alternative Live Versions 1987–1994	These fall, generally, into two categories; firstly fully alternative lyrics, secondly, ad-libs and re-phrasings. School in particular seems to have lent itself to the latter approach with rewritings including "you're in... College/an asshole/polytechnic/med school/cow's sperm/football... again." Some ad-libs would survive across a couple of gigs, flavor of the week, as another means of livening up Cobain's performance experience. The full alternative versions meanwhile are interesting mainly to see Kurt's writing proceeding not by incremental steps but often by a leap or a bound to a new version. It suggests furious rewriting of inadequate or out-of-favor verses/songs rather than word-by-word tweaking and self-editing.

Rarity	Description
Home Demos (1992–1993)	My suspicion is that while I'd deeply enjoying hearing a set of Kurt Cobain home demos it would also reveal limited lyrical rewrites, tweaks to known music with maybe the occasional spare riff in search of a song. The lack of new Nirvana songs after the set on In Utero, the long origins of half of In Utero itself, suggests to me a serious writer's block and little in reserve.
Home Demos (1994)	Holy Grail territory, heart's desire of Nirvana fans everywhere (including my own) and still my candidate for most likely (eventual) disappointment.

Think you know Nirvana?

Think again...

In 1992, fresh from the colossal success of Nevermind, Nirvana released Incesticide. To some this odd little album was just a loose collection of B-sides and outtakes cobbled together to cash in on the band's newfound fame. But to many others it offered a truer reflection of Nirvana — a glimpse into the dark soul of a band reclaiming its punk roots.

This isn't another biography of Kurt Cobain or a story book about how a band from Seattle changed music in the 1990s. Instead, through the dark slivers of Incesticide, Nirvana's most neglected release, this work penetrates the surface drama of the band's career to dissect the tightly bound ideas that unite their songs.

On the twentieth anniversary of Incesticide's release, this extraordinary book reveals the hidden structures and meanings threaded through some of the most important rock music ever made.

Graphics, Artwork and Design by Maureen Johnson. Photograph by NAS.
www.nirvana-legacy.com
Running Water Publications