Deftones – Ohms (2020)

1 Genesis 5:17 2 Ceremony 3:27 3 Urantia 4:30 4. Error 4:50 5 The Spell Of Mathematics 5:27 6 Pompeji 5:25 7 This Link Is Dead 4:37 8 Radiant City 3:35 9 Headless 4:59 10 Ohms 4:10 Chino Moreno - vocals, guitar Sergio Vega - bass Abe Cunningham - drums Stephen Carpenter - guitars Frank Delgado - keyboards, turntables, samples

For Deftones fans, the relationship between frontman Chino Moreno and guitarist Stephen Carpenter carries mythological importance: two opposing gravitational pulls that keep the band's beautiful and bludgeoning music hovering precariously in between. Carpenter is the proudly unreconstructed metalhead, delivering slabs of distorted low end on 7- and 8-string guitars and publicly airing grievances about songs that aren't heavy enough. Moreno is the sonic experimenter and starry romantic, with a voice that sounds misty and ethereal even when it breaks into a scream—the man whose band gave a generation of angry young rock radio listeners their first exposure to the Cocteau Twins. Moreno and Carpenter's personal relationship is surely more nuanced than that, and Moreno is clearly a metal fan, too. But the push-pull between musical elements is real, and the reason why Deftones albums continue to feel exciting and alive while nearly every other band once labeled nu-metal now looks like self-parodic kitsch.

The Deftones catalog is full of moments that illustrate this fundamental tension, but none satisfies in quite the same way as "Urantia," the third song from their ninth album Ohms. It begins with a jagged one-one riff played with disorienting power, gearing you up for a sustained assault. Instead of attacking, the song veers hard in the other direction: spacious and tender, riding a variation of the lithe, hip-hop-influenced hi-hat groove drummer Abe Cunningham developed around the time of 2000's high-water mark White Pony and has been refining ever since. It's a satisfying reversal, and becomes something greater than that when the riff comes back—as big and loud as it was the first time, but newly seductive and agile, guiding Moreno's airy vocal through a series of pop chord changes toward a chorus that floods the room with

light. Suddenly, the band's two driving instincts are no longer in tension at all, but perfectly natural complements, each lifting and twirling the other like partners in the world's most brutal figure skating routine. For the first time—after years of strife and a hard-fought comeback in 2016's Gore—Deftones are making it look easy.

Moreno signaled in a recent Uproxx interview that Ohms would satisfy fans of Deftones' most intense material, while also giving himself some plausible deniability: "'Heavy' is kind of subjective, you know? The last thing I ever want to do is be quoted saying, 'This is our heaviest record!'" He's right that "heaviest" isn't quite the proper distinction for an album that never wields the unrelenting sledgehammer force of "Elite" or "When Girls Telephone Boys." But it also forgoes the crystalline hush that seems to bother Carpenter so much, never offering respite for more than a minute or two before slamming you again. Instead, Ohms reaches for a plane beyond the simple loud vs. quiet dichotomy, where the band is free to indulge its harshest and most gentle impulses all at once. On "The Spell of Mathematics," an eerie high synthesizer line softens the sludge metal guitars that churn beneath it; against the grinding feedback and noise of "Error," Moreno purrs lovelorn free associations instead of adding his own howls to the fray.
---Andy Cush, pitchfork.com

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