



DOWN

Down III—Over the Under
DOWN RECORDS/ILG/WMG

**The odds are good
that the goods are odd**

My first “uh-oh” moment

with Phil Anselmo came about five songs into Pantera’s 1994 album *Far Beyond Driven*. After two records of tight-fisted, chest-beating, primal, focused rage, my senses were confronted with “Good Friends and a Bottle of Pills,” a noisy, aimless dirge where Phil seemingly went... nuts, for lack of a better word. Since then, almost every Anselmo-related project has been infected with this meandering, stream-of-consciousness vibe

that made even his best work (like Superjoint Ritual’s *A Lethal Dose of American Hatred*) somewhat of a chore to plow through.

Then there’s *Down*, the (all together now!) “metal supergroup featuring members of Pantera, Corrosion of Conformity, Eyehategod and Crowbar.” On their third record, the band, and Phil, has found their groove. Yes, it’s still essentially the first four Sabbath records infused with a dose of Southern rock—thanks to guitarist **Pepper** Keenan, it’s not all that sonically **different from** the last few COC records. But **maybe** the comfort zone of working with **classic sounds**—along with the post-Katrina reality of being a New Orleans-based band and Phil getting sober (thanks for the info, *Decibel* cover story!)—has given these guys **more of** a purpose. “3 Suns and 1 Star” has Phil **channeling** Ozzy (the old, good Ozzy), while the **feedback-laced** “N.O.D.” ups the pace, attacking **at a full-thrash level**. And lo and behold, “On March the Saints” **feels** like a hit, melding the pop of ‘80s metal with some boogie licks and a Metallica-like chant to “march!” If the six- and nine-minute closers **start** to wander a little **bit**, that’s OK. For almost **an hour**, it’s like the **metal word** was set right **again**. —KIRK MILLER

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★★★