

# DIGGING DEEPER

**Sitting down with the alien known as Tom Fec, or Black Moth Super Rainbow, or Tobacco... Whatever you call him, on his new album *Manic Meat*, he's digging deeper than ever before.**

**|| by James H. Ewert Jr.**

Just by looking at him, you probably wouldn't think Tom Fec is mentally ill, but listen to his music and you become aware that he's some kind of deranged, alien, serial-murderer from the fifth dimension of an analog future. Given the type of soul-snatching, bone-crushing music Fec plays in both Tobacco and Black Moth Super Rainbow, that description isn't farfetched.

For the past decade, Fec has made a career out of creating the musical equivalent of a Robo-trip, and has produced some of independent music's most twisted and forward-listening sounds. You would never guess it though,

considering the convincingly human personality encountered when *Jettison* caught up with Fec, before Tobacco's sold-out April show at the Empty Bottle in Chicago.

Fec said he's trying to get back into yoga, digging deeper than ever before, and if he had a boat he'd name it Mystic Thickness.

"I felt like Dandelion Gum (his 2007 album under the name Black Moth Super Rainbow) was the best I could do, it was everything I had in me," Fec said staring off at the graffiti-clad walls of the Empty Bottle's basement green room. "Then it took me a few years to really dig



down again and this new record is the first time I really dug down since. But I had to go deeper and there's only so far down you can go before the well is dry."

Since the mid-90s Fec has been specializing in a kind of music that is at best psychedelic-future-acid-nectar for robots, and at worst experimental-hip-hop for the disenfranchised masses. As the front man of BMSR, Fec helped orchestrate a synth-y dystopian dreamscape, with a smorgasbord of distortion

and delayed effects. His vocoded lyrics narrated the wreckage of hip-hop's decaying musical architecture, and served as an eerie analog hope in the midst of a digitized urban environment.

The band assumed a mysterious public persona and regularly concealed or masked their faces during live shows and in photos. They rarely did interviews and deflected attention away from their personalities, focusing it on things like the

band's collaged album art and tripped-out music videos. This enigmatic approach drew a cultish following to BMSR, but often elicited articles and reviews with the typical question: "Who is Black Moth Super Rainbow?" *Rolling Stone* magazine went so far as to describe the band as, "Air + Grateful Dead + CIA = Black Moth Super Rainbow."

In 2008, after releasing a half dozen albums as BMSR and various pseudonyms, Fec dropped *Fucked Up Friends* under the name Tobacco. The record held the same undeniably trippy vibe of BMSR, but Fec took a decidedly hip-hop turn with Tobacco narrowed his sights on accentuating snappier rhythms and more dissonant beats. As Tobacco, Fec is again searching through hip-hop's abandoned corridors, but this time finding that music is merely an approximation of silence, elaborately decorated with moments of tone and more than a hefty spoonful of bass.

To some, the differences between Tobacco and BMSR are negligible. Others consider Tobacco amere side-project. That's a notion Fec hopes to dispel with Tobacco's new album, *Maniac Meat* (Anticon).

"This new record is what everything I've had for the past year and a half has been going into," Fec said. "I feel like I put so much more in this Tobacco stuff than Black Moth. After *Dandelion Gum* I was so worn out on the idea of Black Moth that I let myself run on auto pilot instead of not making another album or trying to be more into it."

Fec admits the obligations to BMSR, and the perpetual record-promote-play cycle of the music industry, have taken a toll on the 29-year-old from Pennsylvania, but he said that while the process becomes more challenging, the music that results is proportionally better.

If Tobacco's first album, *Fucked Up Friends*, was a veer toward hip-hop, *Maniac Meat* is a full yank of the wheel, and it's sent Tobacco careening toward a thick and chewy, murky crunch, a grotesque and tangential funk that electronically sizzles in its own oozing puddle of battery acid. It sounds like the last dying wheeze of a toy keyboard, with the circuits bent in and out. It's just too heady to be called hip hop, but the hooks could make a quadriplegic's head bob. The album's first song, *Constellation Dirtbike Head*, certainly sets a

maniacal pace to the album, with a torrential synthesizer beat that surges through one violent buzz after another, each revving like an engine about to seize.

"I was on a fucking mission to have fun," Fec said about *Maniac Meat*. "It's kind of funny because the album I'm having the most fun on is my darkest and scariest."

With artist Beck making

an appearance on two of the 16 unmerciful tracks, Fec has made something so viciously mesmerizing it's almost obscene.

Yet, despite the heaps of adoration Tobacco has been attracting, Fec probably wouldn't perform live if he didn't have to. Luckily for the hundreds packed into the Empty Bottle, he still does.

