Polaris – *Fatalism*

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Fear: humanity’s great divider, but also its most potent unifier.

It’s this very notion that lies at the beating core of Polaris’s third album *Fatalism*; arecord shaped by the sense of despair and dystopia that engulfed the world over the past few years, and the overwhelming accompanying sensation that we were powerless to change course.

Equally steeped in angst alongside underlying catharsis, an expanded thematic gaze and heavier sonic terrain, *Fatalism* organically builds on the bleak imagery and hard-hitting soundscapes permeating Polaris’s ARIA Award-nominated 2020 release *The Death of Me*. But rather than wallow or stagnate, *Fatalism* instead powerfully holds up a proverbial mirror while also galvanizing the Sydney five-piece’s trademark blend of melodic metalcore, lush post rock, electronic flourishes and beyond.

“I don’t think many of us have experienced such a period of division in our own lifetimes,” shares drummer and lyricist Daniel Furnari, “and at some point it occurred to me that through all the conflict and debate raging everywhere, maybe the one thing that was universally relatable was that we were all afraid. No matter what side you were on, the potential outcomes looked terrifying.

“I felt a real sense of powerlessness through a lot of that time,” admits Furnari. “That’s a big part of the record – this really frustrating feeling of being unable as one individual to make a significant impact on things, because regardless of the choices I or anyone around me may make, the division on a larger scale was simply too great. There’s a real sense that we as a human collective appear to be heading for total collapse or a major regression if things do not change.”

Across the space of 11 tracks, *Fatalism* wields emphatic relatability and explosive arrangements, from its atmospheric, doom-laden opener *Harbinger* to the foreboding anthem *Nightmare* and the pummeling delights of *The Crossfire*, both dealing in elasticated riffs and the coruscating vocals of Jamie Hails.

Where its 2020 predecessor *The Death Of Me* firmly balanced light and shade, *Fatalism* instead barrels headfirst into much darker and heavier tendencies, showcasing Polaris in a freshly resolved and aggressive light, thanks largely in part to the band’s meticulous approach to crafting the album’s guitarwork and vocals, as well as shaping the surrounding layers to bolster and complement proceedings.

“We always have the same aim to write an album that pushes, challenges and excites us,” explains guitarist Rick Schneider. “But this fact also means it gets harder every time – we can’t retread the steps, we can’t redo that trick, we can’t make the same decision again. But no matter what, we always strive to make something new and creative.”

“We’ll always be a guitar-driven band,” adds Furnari, “but some of the biggest progression in the composition of the record came from the synths and effects layers that are present throughout. It’s something we put more emphasis on this time around than ever before, and Rick was particularly meticulous with that, sinking insane hours into finding and shaping the right sounds to compliment what the guitars were doing, or even to drive the track. I think his knowledge of how to work with those kinds of sounds and instruments took some huge leaps in the making of this record.”

This solidified approach accounts for the break beats and semi-industrial/electro distortion that permeates *Parasite*, one of the album’s fiercest tracks. It also explains the almost deathcore-esque aggression of *Dissipate* and, by contrast, the increased layering of synths, whether overtly in *Overflow* and *Aftertouch*, or in a more textural, wall-of-sound context in *Nightmare* and *The Crossfire*. All were conceived and constructed with that delicate balancing act in mind.

“What we view as the Polaris sound is actually quite a broad stylistic umbrella”, explains Furnari. “Within that sphere we have songs throughout our discography that we categorize as rock songs, straight-up metal songs, alt-pop songs or even some that border on being ballads. But what ties them together is the emotion behind the songs. It always comes from a place of strong, genuine conviction, and that’s something we pride ourselves in.”

Also driving beneath the sharp and affecting emotional fare shines Polaris’s scintillating technicality and an innate flair for crafting melodies and vocals you want to sing and scream along to, with each track across *Fatalism* begging to be heard in a live setting. And, as Furnari elaborates, some of *Fatalism*’s defining moments were found in welcomely unexpected places.

“Three of the earliest songs on *Fatalism* that were solidified were *Parasite*, *Nightmare* and *Fault Line*,” Furnari shares. “Each of those represented us stacking up some of the key building blocks that we knew were eventually gonna be part of this record.”

“*Aftertouch* also came together really quickly,” Furnari continues, “that was one we hadn't been expecting and kind of came out of the blue in terms of writing. Once we have something that’s a little bit more contrasting and a bit softer to offset the heaviness - that always shows us that we’re going in the right direction to start forming a full record.”

As a whole, *Fatalism* casts its gaze more outwardly than its 2020 predecessor *The Death Of Me,* by contrast a largely introspective record. And while strictly not a pandemic album, it was impossible not to be somewhat impacted and influenced by the events surrounding its making.

“In a broad sense, you can feel in this record that it didn’t just stem from an anxious time for our band, like our other records - it also emerged from an anxious time for the whole world,” Furnari muses. “I noticed a shift in what I felt compelled to talk about, moving away from introspection, self-analysis and mental health as the dominant topic. That will always be a part of my writing because I can't help but think that way, but I had said so much and poured so much of that part of myself into the last record that I didn't really feel like I had as much that needed to be said on those topics this time around - and I didn’t at the time have a better way of saying it than I had said previously.”

“It felt only natural this time to let the record be more outward-facing in its perspective, and look around me for inspiration rather than internally. It was just evolving naturally that way. And once I had realised and acknowledged that, I made a conscious decision to allow that to take me to new places lyrically.”

Having already firmly established their place as a fixture in the Australian heavy landscape via their first two albums, the ARIA-nominated *The Death Of Me* and 2017’s *The Mortal Coil*, which debuted in the Australian Top 10, Polaris – also featuring bassist/clean vocalist Jake Steinhauser and guitarists Rick Schneider and Ryan Siew – could have been forgiven for pushing rinse and repeat on their third album outing. Instead, the group pursued the delicate balance of stretching their musical palette while staying true to the elements that have endeared them to critics and fans globally.

The writing process wasn’t, however, without its challenges. With COVID forcing the band off the road after a headline tour in support of *The Death Of Me*, the Sydney quintet responded the only way they knew how: writing more music, albeit remotely on Zoom. Having thrived on the camaraderie and creativity of in-person collaboration since forming in 2012, the sessions yielded some initial results, but proved equally as frustrating as they were productive. Indeed, it wasn’t until lockdowns eased in 2022 and they relocated to the Blue Mountains for a week of writing that the creative dam finally burst.

“We initially finished off *Nightmare* and then we did another writing trip and wrote *Inhumane* and most of *Overflow*,” says Schneider. “To have two new songs in four or five days was a turning point where we realised that everything was in our grasp again. Because before that it started to feel like we were running into a wall.”

Shortly after returning from an overseas headlining run in 2022 – Polaris’s first chance to tour *The Death Of Me* internationally – Schneider flew to Melbourne to begin tracking guitars with the band’s live sound engineer Lance Prenc (who also co-produced, mixed and mastered *Fatalism*), With the remainder of the band following soon after, the next five months saw the quintet fine-tuning *Fatalism*, with Alpha Wolf guitarist Scottie Simpson on duty recording vocals.

“Jake, Jamie and Daniel were really adamant on getting the strongest vocal takes,” Schneider adds. “Sometimes that meant a whole day’s work getting trashed because there was a little croak in the voice, but it meant we had an awesome result for each song. So, it was time well spent.”

The end result is an album that combines Polaris’s trademark melange of ferocity and melody with new sonic twists and a lyrical focus that, while far from easy listening, is as cathartic for the listener as it is the group.

“For us, fatalism is the resignation to the idea that you have no control over certain things, that some things are almost pre-determined and inevitable” Furnari concludes, “which seems like a negative and almost fearful notion. But one of the reasons I was drawn to it as a concept and as an album title was that there’s almost a freedom in that idea too. Once you can accept that there are certain things you simply can’t control - it’s actually very liberating.

“We want people to feel a sense of connection to something outside of themselves when they hear this album. There’s a certain peace that comes with accepting that there are some things larger than yourself and redirecting that fear.”

*Fatalism* is due out Friday 1 September 2023 via Resist Records.