

Overkill (I'm Your Gun) [ft. Tim Patterson] Single

Album Notes

Dedicated to

LYRICS

I was just another rookie with dead-eyed aim
Fell into the orbit of a fox-eyed dame
Joined the army where I never lost a fight
The wars and the conquests never felt right

I learned to treat my life like a tournament of chess
I planned a revolution with no hope of success
Just as well math was the only subject I failed
I wasn't going to stop until a new world prevailed

Overkill's my calling card
A thousand thousand graveyards
The zero after nothing's won
I'm your gun

They stapled medals on my chest and gave me promotions
Never asked questions of my motives or devotion
I penciled in the slaughter for over twenty years
A fool's gold general with a shining career

A war broke out and they gave me a fleet
I set up the bombs, my plans were complete
Betrayed the brass and the soldiers I led
Murdered my army—a million left dead

Overkill's my calling card
A thousand thousand graveyards
The zero after nothing's won
I'm your gun

[instrumental bridge]

Candle-eyed ghosts walk with me everywhere
I torched my honor so I could prepare
Pawn to King Four, ready the advance
Waiting four centuries for my chance

Slam me with a bullet, I no longer drop
I can't be killed, I won't be stopped
Ringing in the deaths until the clock's overcome
When you need a traitor—I'm your gun

Overkill's my calling card
A thousand thousand graveyards
The zero after nothing's won
I'm your gun

The zero after nothing's won
I'm your gun

PERSONAL NOTES

This was originally supposed to be a joke song for my *Machineries of Empire* sci-fi series (*Ninefox Gambit*, *Raven Stratagem*, *Revenant Gun*, and the sequella “Glass Cannon” in *Hexarchate Stories*), similar to “Burn It Down with Math (feat. Liozh Dia)” in my previous album *Banner the Deuce of Gears*. “Burn It Down with Math” was from the viewpoint of soldier-turned-rebel Kel Cheris. “Overkill” (working title “Hellion”) is from the viewpoint of the arch-traitor and mass murderer villain/antihero General Shuos Jedao. A first pass at lyrics featured this (with Eller’s suggestion of rhyming “goose”/“deuce”):

Banner the Deuce of Gears
I am the goose you fear

Yeah.

The project got away from me.

I realized that I did not, in fact, want to do this as The Goose Song, and changed tack.

Also, in case you are side-eyeing the self-serving nature of these lyrics, please remember that Jedao lies like a skunk (in my friend Ursula Whitcher's memorable phrase), can't be trusted with anyone (least of all himself), and is perennially an unreliable narrator. :)

Partly, I'd been wanting to tiptoe into songwriting, which I started with "Burn It Down with Math" in 2022. Prior to that, my forays had involved, uh, extremely wretched classical guitar plus drippy lyrics back in middle school.

For a *Jedao* song, I wanted a country/folk style! People are sometimes surprised when they learn I enjoy country, but I'm from Texas! My dad raised me on Anne Murray and Tchaikovsky, and commented once that "George Strait was like a god in Texas" when he lived there.

I started with this song's lyrics, and found Pat Pattison's book *Writing Better Lyrics* tremendously helpful even if I only read the first twenty pages. (But the first twenty pages are *very good*. I'm sure the rest is too! Just, my attention span is trash.)

One problem with songwriting: I'm not a singer. I can sing *in tune* (I have perfect pitch), but this "breathing from the diaphragm" thing escapes me entirely. (This was diagnosed in contexts as diverse as kung fu, yoga, and equitation.) I'm not a wind player, which doesn't help. I've screwed around with harmonica and soprano recorder, but I'm self-taught in the former and it's not like soprano recorder is an instrument known for requiring stellar lungs. And breathing in harmonica is so weird, because of blow (exhale) vs. draw (inhale) notes, that I'm not convinced it carries over usefully to other wind instruments.

I'm a contralto (functionally, if C4 = middle C, I have a tenor-ish range from B2 to B4, and am most comfortable in C3 to E4), but I couldn't hit the low A2 with any consistency even if I figured out breathing. Someone once tried to convince me that I'm really a mezzo soprano, but I sing...almost a full...octave...lower??? Perhaps I'm not understanding how voice works; my primary background is in *piano and viola*, plus a few summers of classical

guitar lessons. Besides, I am great at singing in tune (perfect pitch), but I have zero expression. I sing like a robot. :p

I could have transposed the piece up from A minor for range reasons, but for *guitar arrangement* reasons I really preferred to stay in A minor / A Dorian, even if it also involved that horrible F chord. So this was always going to involve a singer who isn't me, even if I could DIY everything else. Especially since in my head, anyway, Jedao is a baritone!

At this point I decided to hire a singer! I'm so grateful to Tim Patterson (a singer/songwriter from Central Florida) for his fabulous performance and for being a pleasure to work with. I hope he was as amused as I was when we discussed range considerations—after listening to my scratch vocals, he told me he'd have to drop the vocals down an octave and I said that's fine, I'm singing up here in a higher octave because I'm an alto so I literally can't do baritone range!

This wasn't completed or released with *Banner the Deuce of Gears* for the technical reason that my ten-year-old desktop computer had a fatal hard drive failure before I got around to it. I called it good, released what I had, and put the rest of the tracks (like this one) on the back burner.

From a composition standpoint, I was fortunate in that pop/rock song structure is straightforward. This is standard verse/chorus/bridge stuff. I started with the lyrics and wrote the music around them. Berklee's *The Songwriter's Workshop: Melody* by Jimmy Kachulis was especially helpful, even though (again) I only read the first twenty pages...What can I say, my attention span remains shot, mainly due to health stuff.

I get melody/harmony at the same time, so that was also straightforward. That said, my initial piano sketches involved waaaaay too much random vamping and the song ran five minutes, which, no, so I ended up trimming a lot. That's fine: brainstorming/ideating is always going to generate material that doesn't make it into the final draft.

The chords are also straightforward. A Roman numeral analysis of this would be pretty boring. My trial-by-fire *introduction* to Roman numeral analysis was being assigned to do one of the first movement of Mozart's Symphony No. 41 "Jupiter" in high school. I was so stressed, but it was a valuable experience! I'm especially fond of minor sevenths and major sevenths, but used that kind of thing sparingly here.

The meter is mostly common time, with recurring bits in 2/4.

On sheet music: I'd used Finale back in the 1990s (yeah) and had an unfortunate experience with a show-stopping bug. I'd written an orchestral suite; attempting to extract parts for the orchestra resulted in the entire file being so badly corrupted that I gave up and wrote out the parts by hand. I assume things are better now!

In the interim, I'd been using LilyPond (the LaTeX of engraving, I guess) and, for light work, Notion on my iPad. But I'd heard a lot about Sibelius and was curious, so I gave the free/lite version a try. It took a bit of getting used to, but I really enjoyed the experience! I almost cried in relief at how easy (a) triplets, (b) slurs, and (c) melismas were to notate. And the lyrics editor is so intuitive, it's a delight. I'm still going to be That Person who does my composition work with pen and staff paper, in fake tablature on the back of an envelope, or (usually) sketching at the piano while recording into my iPhone, but this was a lovely experience.

I set the tempo to 120 bpm (except the final ritardando) for Reasons that I may someday tell you about, although I experimented with a couple other tempi.

The sheet music for voice/piano is Oh So Very Easy Piano. Sorry! I didn't have the energy for a more elaborate arrangement. But it wouldn't be hard to improv yourself something more satisfying.

Meanwhile, for those of you who care, yes, that's Jedao's two-note motif from "Ninefox March" that shows up now and again. :)

An aside: bringing this song to fruition was a comfort—as I write this, I am on the novelist equivalent of medical leave, having been sick since October 2022. (The details aren't worth going into here.) Anyway, it turns out that keeping a whole novel in my head or working on it is only intermittently possible right now, even with the aid of an outline; but a three-minute song, most of whose details I worked out during weekends last year? Sure.

TECHNICAL NOTES

I used Cubase 12 Pro, Cockos Reaper, and a Yeti mic.

Basic sheet music for the vocals: Sibelius.

The arrangement includes the following VSTs:

- 8dio Empirium (choir)
- Chris Hein Solo Cello (alternate placeholder for the melody reference)
- Cinesamples Apocalyptica (electric cello)
- Cinesamples Taylor Davis (violin)
- Heavyocity Damage Drums (I mean, look, I was always going to use something called *Damage* for a Jedao project, although I also considered Impact Soundworks Tokyo Scoring Drums)
- Native Instruments East Asia (가야금 or gayageum, a traditional Korean zither)
- Native Instruments Kontakt Factory Library 2 (placeholder grand piano for the melody reference)
- Orchestral Tools Berlin Brass (trumpet 2)
- Soundiron High School Drum Corps
- Spitfire Albion Solstice (gut circle, which as far as I can tell is some kind of multiple/hybrid dulcimer/zither instrument)
- Spitfire BBC Orchestra Core (tubular bells)

I am so grateful that a number of modern VST hosts let you download *only* the one or two instruments you need at a given time, if that's what you want to do, rather than having to nursemaid a fourteen-hour download of a giant library when you just want That One Instrument. (Yes, somebody also needs to clear out some HD space.) Orchestral Tools' SINE is especially nice in this regard. (Guess who had to emergency-download some trumpet patches mid-project.)

And for actual physical instruments:

- an East German chord zither (6/4) modified by monks at the Abbaye d'En Calcat with modulators (enabling much easier switching between major/minor chords, including *on the fly* if you don't go too fast) sold to me by GrantsEmporium on Etsy (A++, highly recommended if you have the budget). My friend Eller's discussion of chord zithers was so tantalizing that I couldn't resist picking one up for myself. I've only seen one other in person, which belonged to my husband's late Oma and was shown to me by my parents-in-law, but was not in playable condition anymore.
- a Lucero classical guitar. So the story is that last year (2022) I was in the market for a new classical guitar (the old one was a 2016 flood casualty). I showed up at the local Guitar Center and the helpful store guy was very bemused that anyone was even *asking* for a classical guitar. As it so happened, I had exactly two choices: a 3/4 guitar or a full-

sized one. My previous classical guitar had been a 3/4 and I'd never been satisfied with the tone quality. Guitar Center's full-sized instrument was on sale, partly because...no one is interested in classical guitar, at least where I live. I tried playing it a bit, found the tone pretty good for a student instrument in this price range, and bought it on the spot.

Thanks to Tom_Kaszuba (freesound.org) for the Old Clock Pendulum recording (Creative Commons 0 License). What would hexarchate music be without clock sounds? I considered hitting up a thrift store for a junky old clock and recording myself smashing it with a hammer for Foley purposes, but my husband would have objected. Also, with my luck, I would have smashed my *thumb*.

Honorable mention to my Yamaha Arius YDP-103 digital piano, a Lee Oskar Major Diatonic in C (harmonica), a Hohner Special 20 in G (harmonica), and a Moeck 4203 Rottenburgh soprano recorder (Baroque fingering), which don't appear in the final arrangement but with which I did some initial sketches and noodling.

I am especially happy that commercial gayageum VSTs exist now. I'd wanted to include one in my 2020 orchestral piece "Ninefox March," but at the time none were available. Now there are at least three on the market (Native Instruments [East Asia](#), Xtant Audio's [Gayageum](#), and Icebreaker Audio's [Sanjo Gayageum](#)). In "Ninefox March," I ended up substituting Orchestral Tools Phoenix Orchestra's guzheng, since the timbres are very similar, but you know, sometimes a Korean-American has desires. :)

Inspirations and references for the arrangement/orchestration include:

- [Blackmore's Night](#) in general, especially "Under a Violet Moon" from *Under a Violet Moon*
- [Jace Everett](#), "Bad Things" (yes, I was hooked on *True Blood*, why do you ask?)
- [Antti Martikainen](#), *Hymn of the High Seas*, "Wild Iron"

THANKS & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Robert Murphy for teaching me about contour, among other things, when we were in high school music class together, and for being such an inspiration. I am still haunted, in a wonderful way, by your pentatonic arrangement of Pachelbel's Canon.

Special thanks to Sean Barrett for the rock drum tutorial you gave me in 2010. Yes, I have been looking at that over and over all these years! I have backups saved everywhere, it's that valuable. I promise I have been listening to percussion parts in the interim to learn from them.

Special thanks to Eller for advice and encouragement on vocals, chord zithers, and musical trolling in general. ;)

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Honorable mention to my needy catten Cloud, who liked to block my access to the keyboard, jump on the piano, and loaf next to the chord zither and its bag. Clearly, an aleatory composition for catten + piano should be next!

If you have any feedback or comments, I'd love to hear from you! You can reach me at deuceofgearsart@gmail.com. <3

Yours in calendrical heresy,
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My tortie catten Cloud cozying up to an unsuspecting 6/4 chord zither.