

# Scrap Metal: The Lost Sound of the 90s

## Intro

The 90s were a weird time for music. It was an era where grunge met pop, electronica started booming, and somewhere in the cacophony of boy bands and flannel shirts, there was a rhythm being hammered out that didn't quite fit any playlist. I'm talking about a genre so elusive, it makes Vaporwave look like a Top 50 hit generator.

People who watched my previous video about "The Most Mysterious Song on the Internet" will find in this story many similar theme but this time boosted to a whole genre. A whole piece of musical history lost into the ether. And once again, I can allow myself to do what I would normally never do which is to play a long excerpt without being scared of seeing my whole channel to be shut down from a copyright strike as no one seems to find any trace of the original artists on the internet. If anything, receiving a copyright strike would be a blessing in disguise as it would solve once for all this current Internet Mystery. But without further ado, here is one of my favourite Scrap Metal tune.

[Music] On Target - Scrapyad w/ Lee Clarke (g) & Araki Sakai (org)

I really like the vintage aesthetics of it. It's metal with a very bluesy vibe, mixing the heavy distorted guitars with a clean B3 Hammond, clearly focusing on the improvisational aspect of music. But what exactly is it and where does it come from?

In today's episode of Internet Mysteries I'm going to dwell into everything we know about it so far.

[[[INSERT SPONSOR SEGMENT HERE]]]

## Part I – The hunt for Scrap Metal

I first heard about Scrap Metal when I was contacted by discord user 'fin' who said:



**fin**

Hey Arrows, I don't know if you check your dms on here but I don't know how to contact you otherwise. but I found something that might interest you on reddit. It's a post about a group of people that are trying to find information about a band from the 90s called Scrapyad. Like there's nothing about it on the internet, and doesn't show up in spotify or even discogs, but they found some recordings of it and try to figure it out. So yea, i thought it would be perfect from your series similar to your video about the "Evil Farming Game".

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And then there was a link to a reddit post from 2012 by flabbyfab in which they describe the hunt for Scrap Metal taking place on /r/ScrapMetalMusic:

r/TalesFromTheInternet · flabbyfab ...

## Looking for 90s music genre Scrap Metal

I've been on a musical excavation of sorts lately. I've stumbled upon something unique, something that doesn't quite fit the typical music genres we're all familiar with. It's called 'Scrap Metal.' It's got a distinctive blend of metal, and blues, and pretty much everything they can put together. It's a raw and distorted sound that has an uncanny ability to linger in your mind long after the track ends.

Here's the catch, though. This genre seems to have almost disappeared. It's like it was born and faded away within a decade, leaving behind no trace of its existence. No band names, no album covers, just a handful of unpolished tracks that feel like they've been ripped straight from a pirate radio broadcast.

This has led me to create this subreddit, /r/ScrapMetalMusic. I'm hoping that together, we can dig up some answers about this enigmatic genre. Whether you're a fan of music, a history buff, or just someone who loves a good mystery, I encourage you to join me in the search for Scrap Metal. Every bit of information counts, no matter how insignificant it may seem.

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As I said, this post dates from 2012, and a quick look at flabbyfab's post history reveals a constant and very dedicated search spanning the last decade and a bit.

At the time, information about Scrap Metal was like a ghost - it was there, but it was almost like it didn't want to be found. flabbyfab was in this vast, digital desert with no signposts, no clues. Not even a single name of any musician involved. It felt like they were chasing a phantom, a sound that had vanished into thin air.

When I talked with flabbyfab about it he said:

"When I first started looking into Scrap Metal, I thought it would be a quick dive. I thought we'd find a band or a song, get an answer, and that would be it. But the deeper I dug, the more elusive it became. And the more elusive it became, the more I wanted to find it. It was like the less we knew, the more we had to find out. That's why I decided to write that reddit post. When I wrote that post, I was grasping at straws. It had been over a decade since Scrap Metal seemingly vanished, and all we had to go on was a handful of low quality MP3s. No band names, no photos, no paper trail whatsoever."

He went on to say "I won't lie, those first few years I started to lose hope we'd ever uncover anything substantial. Most of my posts got no engagement, and any leads turned into dead ends.

We got a few well-meaning people trying their best to pin down the creators. Speculative or even dubious comparisons like "I swear that guitar tone is identical to Tony Iommi on early Sabbath records or "The

drums are Ben Mochrie for sure, this bass drum doesn't lie". But none of these references ever seemed to fully line up."

According to flabbyfab, a major breakthrough came only two years later, in 2014 when a reddit user named VaviVavi joined the subreddit and revealed they had an old vinyl with one of the track that was shared previously by flabbyfab. "I couldn't believe what I was hearing when they posted a rip of the album. It felt like proof this obscure genre wasn't just some internet hoax, or just the product of my imagination. There really were Scrap Metal bands out there, playing dingy clubs and making tapes and vinyl that barely saw the light of day even back then."

But more importantly, VaviVavi's post included photos of the vinyl. The cover was a grainy picture with faded colours, gritty and grimy, of a seemingly abandoned scrapyard. A dirt road forming around a bunch of discarded items lay haphazardly – fences, metal pipes, petrol pump, a McDonald sign... – creating a scene of organised chaos that encapsulated the sound of the genre – a glorious mess of different sounds and styles welded together. The band's name was boldly printed at the bottom of the cover in a typeface that looked like it had been hastily spray-painted on – SCRAPYARD.



[Music] Answers for the Devil – Scarpard w/ John 'Devil' Caskin (g) & Matt Pearce (g)

SCRAPYARD. The name was a revelation. This wasn't just a band name, it was a lead, a tangible piece of information they could sink their teeth into. This was a name they could search, a name that they hoped would guide them to other bands, other songs, other people who knew about Scrap Metal. It was a treasure map, and SCRAPYARD was the 'X marks the spot'. The search for Scrap Metal didn't feel as hopeless or as desolate as before. The internet's vast, digital desert suddenly seemed to have a few more signposts. Of course, some healthy skepticism was inevitable at first, with some people saying VaviVavi's post was fake, or other people dismissed SCRAPYARD as a one-off anomaly, a blip on the radar, claiming that one vinyl didn't make a whole genre. But this didn't hurt the track. On the contrary, 2014 became a landmark year for the Scrap Metal community. VaviVavi's post had sparked curiosity, and the discovery of the SCRAPYARD vinyl fanned that spark into a flame. The community began to grow as more and more internet sleuths, intrigued by the mystery of Scrap Metal, joined the search. In an effort to better coordinate the search and to foster a sense of community, flabbyfab created a Discord

server. This platform allowed users from all over the globe to share their findings, speculate on leads, and discuss the unique sound of Scrap Metal. It was a virtual hub for all things related to the genre and quickly became the heart of the Scrap Metal community. The Discord server is like an online excavation site where Metalheads and internet sleuths met. Every new member brought with them a new perspective, a new approach to the search. There was a shared sense of camaraderie as we dug through the digital sands together, but also as Scrap Metal was resurrected by the community itself performing covers and original tune in that style. The discovery of SCRAPYARD had been a game changer. It was more than just a name - it was a symbol of hope, a testament to the existence of Scrap Metal. It was a rallying cry for us to continue our search, to uncover the lost sound of the 90s.

## **Part II – Welcome to the Scrapyard**

The tattered cover of the Scrapyard vinyl yielded a trove of new information. Firstly, the main accepted theory is that Scrapyard was indeed the progenitor of the Scrap Metal genre, with this album being labelled as their eponymous debut released in 1994. The drummer was listed as Chester 'Cheshire' Navidson, that we now know to be the founder of the band, and the acclaimed pope of Scrap Metal.

Scrapyard is actually solely the name of the trio of musicians: Cheshire on drums, Lana Palmer on bass, and Greg Keneally-Hills on guitar. Each track also credited two other musicians, different for each tracks, that had contributed to the unique style that defined Scrap Metal. Inside the album also figure a section titled "In the yard", reminiscent of the Zappa's Freak out list, which consists of a list of artists, musicians, writers, and more that we believe to be the influences of the band.

Most significantly, the vinyl label revealed the name "Navidson Records". This independent label, created by Cheshire, appears to be the original publisher not just of Scrapyard's music, but other seminal Scrap Metal acts. The name felt like a major breakthrough at the time - a specific lead to follow in uncovering more lost albums and artists. Alas, this name was also a double edge sword as it is shared with a popular manuscript<sup>1</sup> making any search pointlessly complicated.

But the search was not in vain. Finding Chester name quickly revealed a few other proof of the existence of Scrap Metal as a genre, like for instance the participation of Cheshire to a panel discussion on

<sup>1</sup> Zampanò (1994), "The Matter of Why", in *LA Weekly*.

Daniel Bowler (1995), Resurrection on Ash Tree Lane: Elvis, Christmas Past, and Other Non Entities, in *The House* (New York: Little Brown), p. 167-244.

Martin Gardner (1961), "The Vanishing Area Paradox", in *Scientific America*.

John Hollander (1981), *The Figure of the Echo* (Berkeley: University of California).

Aramis Garcia Pineda (1996), "More Than Meets the Eye", in *Field and Stream*, v.100, p.39-47.

W.H. Matthews (1970), *Mazes and Labyrinths* (New York: Dover Publications).

Taggart Chiclitz (1972), *The Minotaur* (Hey Zeus Theatre by The Seattle Repertory Company).

Carlos Avital (1994), *Acoustic Intervention* (Boston: Berklee College of Music)

Otto Fenichel (1951), On the *Psychology of Boredom*.

Florent Champy (2001), *Sociologie de l'architecture. La Découverte*.

Alfred Korzybski (1994), *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*. Institute of General Semantics.

Paul Lafague (1883), *Le Droit à la Paresse*. (Paris: Keuk Djian)

Samuel Johnson (1760), "The Idler", *Universal Chronicle*.

Jacques Derrida (1992), *Points de suspension*, Entretiens (Paris: Galilée)

Emerging Sounds: New Styles and Modes of Musical Expression**Day 3 — July 29:**

9:00 AM — 10:15 AM | Keynote Presentation: "The Role of Women in the Modern Music Movement"

- \* Speaker: Prof. Linda Saunders-Hart

10:30 AM — 11:45 AM | Session 6:

- \* "The Role of Music Festivals in Shaping New Trends" — Thomas Gray
- \* "The Rise of Teen Pop and Boy Bands" — Dr. Sandy Read
- \* "Grunge Realities: The Impact of Seattle's Sound" — Dr. Aleksander Kobos

11:45AM — 1:30 PM | Lunch Break

1:30 PM — 2:45 PM | Special Session: "The MTV Generation: Music Videos as Cultural Texts"

- \* Presenter: Prof. Gregorio Gutiérrez

3:00 PM — 4:30 PM | Round Table: "Alternative Rock and Metal: Subgenres and Their Cultural Impact"

- \* Moderator: Dr. Elaine Carter
- \* Panelists: Prof. Linda Saunders- Hart, Dr. Michael Cook, Dr. Phillip M. Cole, Chester Navidson, Rob Gretton.

4:30 PM — 5:00 PM | Closing Remarks

- \* Speaker: Dr. Sonia Clarke

July 27-29, 1998

Portsmouth, UK

"Alternative Rock and Metal Subgenres" at a British musicology conference in 1998, for which sadly no recording exists.

And only a couple of months after the discovery of the vinyl, discord user WM1Pqk1rNBB1THM (... why are you doing this to me?) found what appears to be the original website of the record label, providing us with a lot of valuable information. This website is now not accessible anymore, although the source code of the page had been scraped (no pun intended) through the wayback machine by WM1..., that guy.

[Music] Heptalude - Scrapyard w/ Lee Clarke (g) & Araki Sakai (org)

That's all great, but at this point you might be wondering "Alex, it's all great but what are you talking about? What is Scrap Metal? How does it work?"

Note that everything that I am about to say can't be guaranteed as absolute truth. This is the result of the decade of research and although a lot is still left to speculation, most of it comes from enough argumentation. I'd like to thanks in particular AmenDelay and LionResearch, actual musicologists from the Scrap Metal discord server, and flabbyfab who helped me a lot in making sense of everything.

According to the fragments we've uncovered, Scrap Metal was created in the early 90s by drummer Chester Navidson as a reaction against the increasing technicality and abstraction of heavy metal at the time. Despite his background playing drums during European tours for acclaimed

metal bands, Cheshire felt the genre had lost touch with its roots in blues, rock n' roll, and African-American musical traditions in general. He set out to create a rawer, more spontaneous form of metal centred on musical expression and interplay, rather than individual virtuosity. Cheshire saw metal becoming less about the music and more about the image. He felt that the emphasis had shifted from the soulful roots and live performances of music, to the over-produced, studio-centric albums. This vision of things is not a surprise considering that Cheshire himself had an impressive musical pedigree across many genres. Before pioneering Scrap Metal, he drummed for acclaimed jazz, blues, R&B, and rock bands. In particular, we can cite musicians and bands like Jack McDuff, Weather Reports, Pentagram and even Frank Zappa.

This diverse background shaped his vision for fusing metal aggression with the improvisational spirit of those styles. The very name 'Scrap Metal' suggests melting down musical elements and hammering them into something cruder but more vital.

This was not a mere nostalgic yearning for the past, but a radical step towards the future. Cheshire did not just want to recycle old styles, he wanted to forge a new path, a new genre that would take the best elements from the past and fuse them with a new, raw energy and creativity.

Scrap Metal, in its essence, is a pirate form of music, heavily influenced by the concept of John Oswald's Plunderphonics. Now, if you're familiar with Plunderphonics, you'd know that it involves manipulating or 'plundering' existing audio recordings, often beyond recognition. However, Scrap Metal takes a different approach. Instead of directly using samples from existing copyrighted material, the music is replayed and reinterpreted, creating something wholly original yet eerily familiar.

## **"Plunderphonics, or Audio Piracy as a Compositional Prerogative"**

- as presented by John Oswald to the Wired Society Electro-Acoustic Conference in Toronto in 1985.

So, how does one 'do' Scrap Metal? Well, the process starts with what we could call a rhythm section, such as our friends from SCRAPYARD. These musicians form the backbone of the production, providing a steady beat and harmonic foundation. They are the ones you'll see on the album cover, the anchoring force of the music.

The next step involves inviting two or three lead musicians. These musicians bring with them 'scraps' - elements or fragments from existing copyrighted material. These could be a memorable guitar riff, a distinctive bass line, or a catchy drum beat. It's important to note that these are not direct samples, but rather reinterpretations, reimaged in the unique style of the contributing musician.

These scraps are then mixed into a backing track, 'the yard', by the rhythm section. The rhythm section would take these scraps and work them into the instrumental backing tracks. The catch is that the guest musicians would not know exactly how their borrowed ideas were integrated or have any idea what the other musicians have brought, adding an element of surprise and unpredictability to the process. It's akin to building a sonic playground, with the different elements forming a complex soundscape.

Now, here's where the magic really happens. The invited musicians are then challenged to duel through improvisation over this backing track. They are thrown into this yard of reinterpreted musical fragments and are tasked with navigating it in real time, adding their own spin, their own interpretation. The result is a vibrant, dynamic piece of music that is

as unpredictable as it is captivating, a true testament to the spirit of Scrap Metal.

This approach to music-making is not just about creating new sounds, but also about challenging the status quo, and pushing the boundaries of what is considered 'original' music. It's about celebrating the practice of music and the joy of improvisation, rather than the polished product of studio recording. That, my friends, is the essence of Scrap Metal. At least, we think it is.

The evolution of Scrap Metal as a musical tradition is after that difficult to pinpoint exactly, but the practice is believed to have spread through word-of-mouth and collaboration between open-minded musicians. It likely started organically when creative souls like the members of Scrapyard started inviting guests to contribute ideas and challenge each other through improvisation. These sessions would produce such exhilarating and unexpected results that those involved were compelled to take the scrap metal philosophy back to their own projects. The Navidson records website features an extensive list of Scrap Metal albums from the decade, with eclectic names like 'The Buzzard's Nest', 'Heat Seeking Missile', or 'Jurassic Scrap'. The same group of musicians sometimes playing behind several different names. It seems the guest musicians were more focused on the spontaneous creative process than establishing any kind of brand.

Over time, this scrap metal approach was adopted by an ever-widening network of musicians who embraced the culture of spontaneity, fragmentation, and rebuilding. They would share shards and fragments of existing songs, mashing together reference points from across genres. It was about celebrating the practice of music itself rather than pursuing perfect polished productions. The tradition was advanced by musicians like Cheshire and Scrapyard welcoming unexpected collaborators, some well-established and others just starting out. These guests would then carry the scrap metal torch, inviting their own creative connections to sit in on sessions. There was no centralized effort or formal rules - just an organic, grassroots movement held together by a common ethos.

Now curiously enough, a few things seems to stay consistent throughout the tradition. For instance, while scropyard and its successors placed no restrictions on including vocals, most scrap metal recordings through the years have been instrumental. This seems to have emerged organically from the dense, dynamic nature of the music itself. The interplay between the musicians and flowing evolution of the backing tracks left little space for lyrics. The music was commanding enough without needing to compete with a vocalist. But this was not by mandate - just a byproduct of the creative direction the improvisations tended to take.

So, we've talked about the birth and spread of Scrap Metal. But what about its sudden disappearance? This is where the story takes a turn for the mysterious. How could a musical tradition that involved so many musicians, that had such a unique and innovative approach, simply vanish? Not only from the practice rooms and vinyl shelves, but also from the collective memory? It seems almost unthinkable that a genre like this would need to be uncovered, like a lost artefact, two decades later.

A few hypotheses have been proposed within the Scrap Metal community. Some suggest that the genre simply fell out of favour as musical tastes changed. Others argue that Scrap Metal was always destined to be a fleeting moment in music history, its very nature too chaotic and unpredictable to sustain in the long run.

But the most compelling theory centres on Cheshire and an alleged run-in with the law over copyright issues. As the story goes, Cheshire's production studio were raided by the police after he was accused of

copyright infringement. What followed was a scene straight out of a mystery novel: an empty house, two abandoned police cars, and no trace of either Cheshire or the police officers. They had seemingly vanished into thin air, erased from reality.

Many believe that this event marked the beginning of the end for Scrap Metal. Without Cheshire, the driving force behind the movement, the genre seemed to lose its momentum. Bands disbanded, musicians moved on to other projects, and slowly but surely, Scrap Metal faded into obscurity. An even more speculative idea is that the musicians involved are still there, staying silent of fear of suffering the same fate as Cheshire. Yet, the question remains: What truly happened to Cheshire, and why did Scrap Metal disappear so abruptly? The answers to these questions are still shrouded in mystery, making the story of Scrap Metal as intriguing and enigmatic as the music itself. Perhaps one day, we'll uncover the truth. But until then, all we can do is speculate and mourn the death of Scrap Metal...

[Fake out end of the video]

### **Part III – Many yards apart**

But is it really dead? Of course, any of Scrap Metal's 90s session constituent have vanished, and it seems that Scrap Metal had been relegated to the dusty shelves of musical history. The search for Scrap Metal didn't just unearth old tracks; it sparked a movement. The newfound Scrap Metal community is there, and they're not just passively listening.

The discord channel, have become the virtual yards of today, where enthusiasts have literally spent hours, days, and months, dissecting old tracks, exchanging ideas, collaborating in ways that echo the original spirit of the genre, or making covers of the original scrap tunes.

[Music] On Target (cover) - Mug Moment

The Discord server has become a breeding ground for the revival of Scrap Metal. What started as a collection of individuals on a prowl for an elusive genre, evolved into sharing rare tracks and discussing the intricacies of their favourite Scrap Metal albums, and now has yet again evolved into a hub of active creation.

Inspired fans started experimenting with scrap metal techniques, inviting friends to improvise sessions with unconventional instruments and found sounds. New scrap metal bands began emerging, with names like "Rust", "K I L L J E S T E R", and "All That Junk", which shared their tracks on a dedicated channel.

The first culmination point of this online movement was maybe the release of the first community-created Scrap Metal album, aptly titled "Reclamation". The album lives up to its chaotic branding and is a patchwork of the community's efforts, featuring tracks from various server members around the world, each bringing their own flavour to the genre. For instance, Junkbot 5000 brought a retro-futuristic sheen with robotic vocals and laser beam synth lines. K I L L J E S T E R took a more aggressive approach with chainsaw guitar riffs and distorted slap bass. Other personal highlights included Rust's saxophone metallic sound and Mary Mekong's haunting distorted piano.

While an eclectic patchwork, the album held together thanks to the artists' shared ethos of spontaneity and discovery in the recycling of musical ideas. It built progressively from tamer experiments to outright assaultive salvos of avant-garde noise. The eponymous closing track "Reclamation" brought together contributors in one grand collaborative finale, a dense wall of sound melding junk percussion, distorted horns,

warped vocals, and alien sound effects. Reclamation was scrap metal fully revived - less a polished album than a celebration of the genre's anarchic creative spirit. It marked a rallying cry for a movement that refused to let the unconventional genre rust away.



As the community grew, so did the ambition of its members. The server organised virtual Scrap sessions, where musicians would stream live improvisations, inviting others to join in. These digital jam sessions captured the essence of the original Scrap Metal scene—unpredictable, raw, and unapologetically rough around the edges. These sessions didn't just mimic the past; they pushed the genre into new territories, incorporating modern electronic elements and production techniques that were not available in the 90s.

Perhaps the most telling sign of the genre's revival is the now annual server's virtual festival, "ScrapFest." This online music festival brought together scrap metal artists and fans from around the world for a weekend-long celebration of the genre.

Using a VR multiplayer online platform, attendees could explore a virtual venue made up of post-apocalyptic junkyard environments. Avatars designed from scrap parts roamed the grounds, with the ability to chat, watch live performances, and explore post-modern collage art installations made of digital waste materials. The whole event also being broadcasted on a pirate radio ran by members of the server.

ScrapFest also featured workshops hosted by veteran musicians to share the creative ideas and techniques, from tips for improvisation to instrumental techniques. The virtual festival even concluded with an open "Scrap Jam" session, prepared by "KILLER", from the scrap sent by the server users, and where all attendees could join a massive online improvisation session by contributing whatever bizarre sounds their computers could produce.

The inventive event showed how an online community had formed around scrap metal, able to wholly embrace the genre's spirit virtually. It marked a new era for the genre - one where scrap metal could once again be celebrated at scale beyond just isolated recording sessions. A festival born entirely of recycled refuse had brought new life to the lost art of musical reuse.

[Music] KILLER - KILLER

Scrap Metal is not dead... and it never smelled as fresh. Thanks to the dedication of a few curious individuals, Scrap Metal, in all its chaotic glory has defied the very notion of death. The genre's revival matched

with its essence of the transformation of the forgotten, the discarded, and the overlooked into something vibrant and new.

As we've seen, music morphs and adapts. It might hibernate in the shadows or burst forth in unexpected places, but as long as there are even one Necrodancer, it never truly dies. It now resonates in a new generation of artists and fans who have discovered its power. It's a reminder that the music we love never really leaves us; it simply waits for the right moment to be reclaimed and reborn.

Let me know if you are interested in my keeping you updated about the future of Scrap Metal, until then thanks for watching and if you like this video you'll probably also like my video about Max Headroom. I'm out of here.

### **In the yard:**

Steve Aoki, Chester Navidson, Sam Elbertson, Joey Varghund, flabbyfab, AmenDelay, LionResearch, /r/ScrapMetalMusic, Neil Gaiman, Terry Pratchett, Tommy Roulette, Chris Cerulli, Mike Keneally, Edgar Wright, Chills, Internet Historian, Shawn Crahan, Donnie Steele, the SCP Foundation, Dostoevsky, David Lynch, Adrian Lyne, Hiroyuki Owaku, Inezh, Erik Helwig, Tim & Eric, /r/CursedImages, John Oswald, James Joyce, Alex Webster, Junji Ito, Terry Gilliam, Fred Firth, Marc Ribot, Stephen King, Alan Wake, Aphex Twin, Tom Waits, /r/LiminalSpace, 12tone, Fredrik Knudsen...