

= Year Zero (album) =

Year Zero is the fifth studio album by American industrial rock band Nine Inch Nails , released on April 17 , 2007 , by Interscope Records . Frontman Trent Reznor wrote the album 's music and lyrics while touring in support of the group 's previous release , With Teeth (2005) . In contrast to the introspective style of songwriting Reznor used on previous records , Year Zero is a concept album that criticizes contemporary policies of the United States government by presenting a dystopian vision of the year 2022 . The album is part of a larger Year Zero project which includes a remix album , an alternate reality game , and a potential television or film project . The Year Zero alternate reality game expanded upon the album 's fictional storyline by using media such as websites , pre-recorded phone messages , and murals .

Upon its release in April 2007 , Year Zero sold over 187 ,000 units in its first week , and it reached number two on the Billboard 200 chart . The album also received generally positive reviews , many of which were favorable toward the accompanying alternate reality game . Year Zero produced two singles , " Survivalism " and " Capital G " , the latter released as a promotional single . Disputes arose between Reznor and Universal Music Group , parent company of Interscope Records , over the overseas pricing of the album . Year Zero was the last Nine Inch Nails studio album released on Interscope . In October 2007 , Reznor announced that Nine Inch Nails had fulfilled its contractual commitments to Interscope , effectively ending the band 's relationship with the label .

= = Recording = =

In a 2005 interview with Kerrang ! , Trent Reznor expressed his intentions to write material for a new release while on tour promoting With Teeth . He reportedly began work on the new album by September 2006 . Reznor devised much of the album 's musical direction on his laptop . Reznor told Kerrang ! in a later interview , " When I was on the Live : With Teeth tour , to keep myself busy I just really hunkered down and was working on music the whole time , so this kept me in a creative mode and when I finished the tour I felt like I wasn 't tired and wanted to keep at it . "

The limitations of devising the album 's musical direction on a tour bus forced Reznor to work differently from usual . Reznor said , " I didn 't have guitars around because it was too much hassle ... It was another creative limitation ... If I were in my studio , I would have done things the way I normally do them . But not having the ability to do that forced me into trying some things that were fun to do . "

By the end of the tour , Reznor began work on the album 's lyrical concepts , attempting to break away from his typically introspective approach . Reznor drew inspiration from his concern at the state of affairs in the United States and at what he envisioned as the country 's political , spiritual , and social direction . Year Zero was mixed in January 2007 , and Reznor stated on his blog that the album was finished as of February 5 . The album 's budget was a reported US \$ 2 million , but since Reznor composed most of the album himself on his laptop and in his home studio , much of the budget instead went toward the extensive accompanying promotional campaign .

= = Promotion = =

While work continued on the album , Reznor hinted in an interview that it was " part of a bigger picture of a number of things I 'm working on " . In February 2007 fans discovered that a new Nine Inch Nails tour t-shirt contained highlighted letters that spelled out the words " I am trying to believe " . This phrase was registered as a website URL , and soon several related websites were also discovered in the IP range , all describing a dystopian vision of the fictional " Year 0 " . It was later reported that 42 Entertainment had created these websites to promote Year Zero as part of an alternate reality game .

The Year Zero story takes place in the United States in the year 2022 ; or " Year 0 " according to the American government , being the year that America was reborn . The United States has suffered

several major terrorist attacks , and in response the government has seized absolute control on the country and reverted to a Christian fundamentalist theocracy . The government maintains control of the populace through institutions such as the Bureau of Morality and the First Evangelical Church of Plano , as well as increased surveillance and the secret drugging of tap water with a mild sedative . In response to the increasing oppression of the government , several corporate , government , and subversive websites were transported back in time to the present by a group of scientists working clandestinely against the authoritarian government . The websites @-@ from @-@ the @-@ future were sent to the year 2007 to warn the American people of the impending dystopian future and to prevent it from ever forming in the first place .

The Year Zero game consisted of an expansive series of websites , phone numbers , e @-@ mails , videos , MP3s , murals , and other media that expanded upon the fictional storyline of the album . Each new piece of media contained various hints and clues to discover the next , relying on fan participation to discover each new facet of the expanding game . Rolling Stone described the fan involvement in this promotion as the " marketing team 's dream " . Reznor , however , argued that " marketing " was an inaccurate description of the game , and that it was " not some kind of gimmick to get you to buy a record ? it IS the art form " .

Part of this promotional campaign involved USB drives that were left in concert venues for fans to find during Nine Inch Nails ' 2007 European tour . During a concert in Lisbon , Portugal , a USB flash drive was found in a bathroom stall containing a high @-@ quality MP3 of the track " My Violent Heart " , a song from the then @-@ unreleased album . Another USB drive was found at a concert in Barcelona , Spain , containing the track " Me , I 'm Not " . Messages found on the drives and tour clothing led to additional websites and images from the game , and the early release of several unheard songs from the album . Following the discovery of the USB drives , the high @-@ quality audio files quickly circulated the internet . Owners of websites hosting the files soon received cease and desist orders from the Recording Industry Association of America , despite Interscope having sanctioned the viral campaign and the early release of the tracks . Reznor told The Guardian :

On February 22 , 2007 a teaser trailer was released through the official Year Zero website . It featured a quick glimpse of a blue road sign that said " I AM TRYING TO BELIEVE " , as well as a distorted glimpse of " The Presence " from the album cover . One frame in the teaser led fans to a URL containing the complete album cover . In March , the multitrack audio files of Year Zero 's first single , " Survivalism " , were released in GarageBand format for fan remixing . The multitrack files for " Capital G " , " My Violent Heart " and " Me , I 'm Not " were released the following month , and files for " The Beginning of the End " , " Vessel " and " God Given " were released on the month after that . In response to an early leak of the album , the entire album became available for streaming on Nine Inch Nails ' MySpace page a week before the album 's official release .

= = Performance 2007 tour = = =

After taking a break from touring to complete work on Year Zero , the Nine Inch Nails live band embarked on a world @-@ tour in 2007 dubbed Performance 2007 . The tour included the band 's first performance in China . Reznor continued to tour with the same band he concluded the previous tour with : Aaron North , Jeordie White , Josh Freese , and Alessandro Cortini . The tour spanned 91 dates across Europe , Asia , Australia , and Hawaii .

Between tour legs Nine Inch Nails gave a performance as part of the Year Zero game . A small group of fans received fictional in @-@ game telephone @-@ calls that invited them to a " resistance meeting " in a Los Angeles parking lot . Those who arrived were given " resistance kits " , some of which contained cellphones that would later inform the participants of further details . After receiving instructions from the cellphones , fans who attended a fictional Art is Resistance meeting in Los Angeles were rewarded with an unannounced performance by Nine Inch Nails . The concert was cut short as the meeting was raided by a fictional SWAT team and the audience was rushed out of the building .

= = Themes = =

Nine Inch Nails ' 2006 tour merchandise designs featured overt references to the United States military , which Reznor said " reflect [ed] future directions " . Reznor later described Year Zero as " the soundtrack to a movie that doesn 't exist " . The album criticizes the American government 's policies , and " could be about the end of the world " . Reznor specifically cited what he labeled as the " erosion of freedoms " and " the way that we treat the rest of the world and our own citizens " . Reznor had previously called the results of the 2004 US election " one step closer to the end of the world . "

Even though the fictional story begins in January 2007 , the timeline of the album and alternate reality game mentions historical events , such as the September 11 attacks and the Iraq War . From there , fictional events lead to worldwide chaos , including bioterrorism attacks , the United States engaging in nuclear war with Iran , and the elimination of American civil liberties at the hands of the fictional government agency The Bureau of Morality . Regardless of being fictional , a columnist of The Hartford Courant commented , " What 's scary is that this doesn 't seem as far @-@ fetched as it should , given recent revelations about the FBI 's abuse of the Patriot Act and the dissent @-@ equals @-@ disloyalty double @-@ speak coming out of Washington in recent years . "

= = Music = =

Reznor called Year Zero a " shift in direction " in that it " doesn 't sound like With Teeth " . He also said that when he finishes a new album , he has to " go into battle with the people whose job it is to figure out how to sell the record . The only time that didn 't happen was [for] With Teeth . This time , however , [he was] expecting an epic struggle . [Year Zero] is not a particularly friendly record and it certainly doesn 't sound like anything else out there right now . "

Fifteen original tracks were considered for inclusion on the album , which Reznor described as " Highly conceptual . Quite noisy . Fucking cool . " Reznor also described the album as a " collage of sound type of thing " , citing musical inspiration from early Public Enemy records , specifically the production techniques of The Bomb Squad . Most of Year Zero 's musical elements were created by Reznor solely on his laptop , as opposed to the instrument @-@ heavy With Teeth . Allmusic 's review described the album 's laptop @-@ mixed sound : " guitars squall against glitches , beeps , pops , and blotches of blurry sonic attacks . Percussion looms large , distorted , organic , looped , screwed , spindled and broken . " Many reviews of the album compared the album 's electronic sound to earlier Nine Inch Nails releases such as The Downward Spiral and The Fragile , while contrasting its heavily modified sounds to the more " organic " approach of With Teeth . Many critics also commented on the album 's overall tone , including descriptions such as " lots of silver and grey ambience [sic] " and reference to the album 's " oblique tone " . The New York Times review described the album 's sound by saying " Hard beats are softened with distortion , static cushions the tantrums , sneaky bass lines float beneath the surface . " The article went on to describe individual tracks : " And as usual the music is packed with details : " Meet Your Master " goes through at least three cycles of decay and rebirth ; part of the fun of " The Warning " is tracking the ever @-@ mutating timbres . "

Many of the songs on the album feature an extended instrumental ending , which encompasses the entire second half of the three @-@ minute long " The Great Destroyer " . The album was co @-@ produced by Reznor and Atticus Ross , mixed by long @-@ time collaborator Alan Moulder , and mastered by Brian Gardner . The album features instrumental contributions by live band member Josh Freese and vocals by Saul Williams .

= = Artwork = =

All of the artwork for Year Zero was created by Rob Sheridan , art director for Nine Inch Nails , who is also credited for artwork on With Teeth , among other Nine Inch Nails releases since 2000 . The album features a thermo @-@ chrome heat @-@ sensitive CD face which appears black when first opened , but reveals a black binary code on a white background when heat is generated from the

album being played . The binary sequence translates to " external.net " , the address of a website involved in the alternate reality game . Reznor displayed displeasure at the extra \$ 10 added to the CD 's price in Australia for the thermo @-@ coating , saying it only cost an extra 83 ¢ per CD and that the extra cost came from his pocket .

Included with the album is a small insert that is a warning from the fictional United States Bureau of Morality (USBM) , with a phone number to report people who have " engaged in subversive acts " . When the number is called , a recording from the USBM is played , claiming " By calling this number , you and your family are implicitly pleading guilty to the consumption of anti @-@ American media and have been flagged as potential militants . "

It was named one of the best album covers of 2007 by Rolling Stone Magazine .

= = Release and reception = =

Upon its release in April 2007 , Year Zero sold over 187 @, @ 000 in its first week . The album reached number two on the Billboard 200 and peaked in the top 10 in six other countries , including Australia , Canada and the United Kingdom . The album 's first single , " Survivalism " peaked at number 68 on the Billboard Hot 100 , and topped the Modern Rock and Canadian singles charts . The " Capital G " promotional single reached number six on the Modern Rock chart .

In a post on the official Nine Inch Nails website , Reznor condemned Universal Music Group ? the parent company of Interscope Records ? for its pricing and distribution plans for Year Zero . He wrote that he hated Interscope for setting the price of the album higher than usual , humorously labeling the company 's retail pricing of Year Zero in Australia as " ABSURD " , [sic] and concluding that " as a reward for being a ' true fan ' you get ripped off . " Reznor went on to say in later years the " climate " of record labels may have an increasingly ambivalent impact on consumers who buy music . Reznor 's post , specifically his criticism of the recording industry at large , elicited considerable media attention . Reznor continued his attack on Universal Music Group during a September 2007 concert in Australia , where he urged fans to " steal " his music online instead of purchasing it legally . Reznor went on to encourage the crowd to " steal and steal and steal some more and give it to all your friends and keep on stealin ' . " Although Universal never replied publicly to the criticism , a spokesperson for the Australian Music Retailers Association said " It is the same price in Australia as it is in the US because of the extra packaging . " Due to the pricing dispute , plans to release a " Capital G " maxi @-@ single in Europe were scrapped . The track was instead released as a promotional single , without a " Halo number " , unlike most official Nine Inch Nails releases .

Year Zero was the last Nine Inch Nails studio album released on Interscope . Reznor announced in October 2007 that Nine Inch Nails had fulfilled its contractual commitments to Interscope and could proceed " free of any recording contract with any label " , effectively ending the band 's relationship with its record label .

= = = Critical reception = = =

Year Zero received generally favourable reviews from music critics , with an average rating of 76 % based on 28 reviews on review aggregator Metacritic . Robert Christgau described Year Zero as Reznor 's " most songful album " , while Thomas Inskeep of Stylus magazine praised it as " one of the most forward @-@ thinking ' rock ' albums to come down the pike in some time " . Rob Sheffield of Rolling Stone called the album Reznor 's " strongest , weirdest and most complex record since The Downward Spiral " , and concluded that " he 's got his bravado back . " Rolling Stone ranked it at number 21 on its " Top 50 Albums of 2007 " list .

Several reviewers also commented on the accompanying alternate reality game . Ann Powers of The Los Angeles Times , praised the album and game concept as " a total marriage of the pop and gamer aesthetics that unlocks the rusty cages of the music industry and solves some key problems facing rock music as its cultural dominance dissolves into dust . " In relation to the declining music industry , Joseph Jaffe of Brandweek commented that such " mysterious marketing measures [...]

are what 's desperately needed to gain attention in this uncertain era of distribution dilemmas and sagging sales " , also commending acts such as Nine Inch Nails and Radiohead for being " more innovative than marketers " . Entertainment Weekly gave the album a B + , comparing it to The X @-@ Files and calling it " A sci @-@ fi concept album whose end @-@ of @-@ days , paranoia @-@ drenched story line has been disseminated via the Internet " . It also stated : " Amid its carefully calibrated sonic assaults , Year Zero has a number of tracks that will stop you in yours . Sometimes , it 's a matter of dropping the volume [...] Even his use of electronics has shifted to a new level [...] Is the truth in here ? Dunno , but Reznor 's claim that ' I got my violence in high def ultra @-@ realism ' sounds like gospel to us . "

On the fictional world depicted in the album and promotional campaign , The Cleveland Free Times commented that the album 's fictionalized world and characters " often seemed heavy @-@ handed and forced " , but also conceded that " its clotted claustrophobia suited its subject matter " . Ann Powers added , " The songs on ' Year Zero , ' each from the perspective of a character or characters already existent in the ARG , draw a connection between the music fan 's passionate identification with songs and the gamer 's experience of becoming someone else online . " In 2008 , 42 Entertainment won two Webby Awards for its work on the Year Zero game , in the categories of " Integrated Campaigns " and " Other Advertising : Branded Content " .

= = Related projects = =

A remix album , titled Year Zero Remixed , was released in November 2007 . Due to the expiration of his contract with Interscope Records , the album 's release , marketing , and promotion were completely in Reznor 's control . The album features remixes from artists including The Faint , Ladytron , Bill Laswell , Saul Williams , Olof Dreijer of The Knife , and Sam Fogarino of Interpol . Reznor himself strongly supports fan @-@ made remixes of songs from the album , as evidenced by his decision to upload every song in multi @-@ track form to the then @-@ newly launched Nine Inch Nails remix website . Instrumental versions of the songs on Year Zero are available at the site for download in multiple formats , including MP3 , WAV , GarageBand , and Ableton Live formats .

A planned film adaption of Year Zero became a television project . Reznor met with various writers and pitched the idea to television networks . The 2007 ? 2008 Writers Guild of America strike affected the pre @-@ production stage . Despite this , Reznor has commented the project is " still churning along " , and that he has begun working with American film producer Lawrence Bender . In 2010 , Reznor started developing the Year Zero miniseries with HBO and BBC Worldwide Productions . Reznor and Bender collaborated with Carnivàle writer Daniel Knauf to create the science fiction epic . Although , in August 2013 , it was stated in an article by the NME that HBO had rejected the series .

= = Track listing = =

All songs written and composed by Trent Reznor .

= = Personnel = =

Trent Reznor ? vocals , guitar , bass , drums , keyboards , programming , production
William Artope ? trumpet (7)
Matt Demeritt ? tenor sax (7)
Josh Freese ? drums (1 , 7)
Jeff / Geoff Gallegos ? brass / winds musical arrangement , baritone sax (7)
Brian Gardner ? mastering
Elizabeth Lea ? trombone (7)
Alan Moulder ? mix engineering
Atticus Ross ? production , sound design
Doug Trantow ? recording engineering

Saul Williams ? backing vocals (3 , 6)

= = Chart positions = =