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## Is Jacko really *Invincible*?

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What do Pepsi, Ronald Reagan, vitiligo and under-aged naughty bits have in common? If you are thinking of a nude and drunk Andy Rooney watching "The Voice of the Turtle" (a.k.a. "One for the Book"), then you would be wrong. Two further hints should make clear the correct answer - Quincy Jones and Neverland Ranch. For the uninitiated, the common bond between these things is the one and only star of Francis Ford Coppola's Disney masterpiece Captain EO, Michael Jackson.

Unlike his blonde, red-lipped buddy, Macaulay (the Godfather of MJ's children), Michael is the rare case of a child star remaining in the spotlight his entire life. Does such exposure do weird things to a person? Is it possible for an afro-sporting black child to grow up and become a straight-haired white woman / alien? Really, the answer is still somewhere to be found. Regardless of his past controversies, his surgery, or his forever-questioned skin disease, Jackson has always been able to capture the hearts of his fans (and the world's children, let us never forget the children). Whether it is through his music, short films, live performances or video games featuring a 16-bit color Joe Pesci, MJ has always managed to make this particular music-lover scream, sweat, cry, and faint like a Czechoslovakian girl at one of his overseas stadium-filled concerts.

It is with this that I express the excitement I felt when discovering that (insert clichéd Michael Jackson nickname here) had once again entered the American spotlight, albeit



in the most undesirable of ways (i.e. dancing alongside boy bands).

This year Jackson's fear-provoking mug began to make regular appearances at places where the cameras would obviously find him—he started a new "Heal the Kids" charity with Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, he spoke at Oxford about his childhood, he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, he appeared at the MTV Video Music Awards, a tribute concert was held for him at Madison Square Garden and the list continues. Jackson, for the time being, appears to be back. Why? Well, his latest album has finally been released, along with re-releases of his past classics (*Off the Wall*, *Thriller*, *Bad*, *Dangerous*). All the mystery behind whether or not the six years of wait and millions of dollars spent in production would yield

yet another groundbreaking pop album was finally solved on Oct. 19, 2001, when his album, *Invincible*, officially went public on the web in streaming audio format from [www.michaeljackson.com](http://www.michaeljackson.com).

Is the damn thing any good? Is it worth picking up all four limited edition covers? And why the hell is his left eye pixelated like that?

Honestly, the short of it is that this album is a mixed bag. Much of it is over-produced and its shining moments are few. The album starts off with a great tune, "Unbreakable." The track is clean, catchy, bass-heavy, and features a rap from the late Christopher Wallace. It is one of the finer moments on the album; comparable to what may have appeared on *Dangerous* or *HIStory* (which also featured a track with the Notorious one himself, along with the phrases "endo smoke" and "my

nigga Mike").

The second track, "Heartbreaker", is the first of two major mistakes made on this album. The track is simply over-produced. The music is too busy for its own good, and sounds better fit for a Missy Elliott album. Michael's vocals are not the focus of the track, and the beats grow repetitious and annoying quickly. This track, along with the title track, features a rap by Fats, a wholly inoffensive, bubblegum rapper. However, "Invincible" is not nearly the crap sandwich that "Heartbreaker" is. The second large mistake on the album is the number of schmaltzy ballads. Jackson is known for belting out a solid ballad and he does so just fine here.

"Butterflies" is a beautiful little number that sticks out from the other seven slow and sappy songs. The tracks that do not work manage to hinder the album just a bit and a feel a bit disorganized and poorly distributed amongst the other songs. A few sound too similar to songs released by lesser R&B artists. Did R. Kelly and Babyface's involvement have anything to do with this? Perhaps.

While some of the tracks sound like standard MTV R&B nonsense, the track "2000 Watts" is just indescribable. Again, over production rears its ugly head, this time sounding like music made for a Backstreet Boys album, if not a little rougher around the edges. Combine this with Mike's new vocal range and constant DMX-esque "Watt!"s being shouted in the background and you have a completely silly, but oddly novel track. New vocal range? Let's just say that the MJ Barbie doll of old is no longer

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neutered and there's a bit of bass to his often girly voice.

The current single, "You Rock My World," is one of the better tracks on the album, once the opening dialogue has been cut out and replaced with the sound of Brando expiring over a bucket of chili cheese fries. "Privacy" is a harsher, colder track (like much of *HIStory* is), dealing with the hassles of the Pavarotti and being a celebrity. The music consists of camera noises and flashes, and when Jacko calls for Slash to rip a few riffs off for old time's sake, you can rest assured that it is one of the more interesting tracks.

The last track worth mentioning features a Carlos Santa cameo more impressive than any of the Santana cameos on his album, *Supernatural*. "Whatever Happens" is probably the finest song out of the total 16. It is a Latin-based melody that is exceptional on all fronts, vocally, musically, and lyrically. It is a shame that overall, there weren't many moments like this. Instead, we must face the fact that MJ is trying to sell records to the current market. Some of it sounds digestible for teenyboppers, yet, they will not listen to a man in his 40s sing about lost love. And some of it sounds like bad R&B, which has an audience that may or may not pick up this album anyway. Diehard Jackson fans should pick it up (especially if, like yours truly, you own "Blood on the Dancefloor" and a bootlegged VHS of the Jackson/Winston/King mini-film "Ghosts" imported from Japan) and enjoy the six or seven solid tunes. Others should be warned, nothing on this album is as orgasmic as "Dirty Diana" followed by "Smooth Criminal", or "Who Is It?" followed by "Give In To Me."

Furthermore, tread lightly when you decide to name your pet monkey Bubbles Presley the way I did.