

May 1993

# PAW

“If someone said, ‘you’ve got five minutes, tell me what Paw is about,’” says guitarist and principle music writer Grant Fitch. “I’d play them ‘*Dragline*,’ the title track from our new album. It just encompasses everything I wanted to do with a band, and it’s not contrived or forced. It is to me, the song where I was able to express everything I wanted to do in music.”

It’s not easy to be that definitive about your own achievements. Yet Grant has a right to feel secure about his sentiments. “*Dragline*” is, indeed, a naked preface to the gritty debut of the same name by this Lawrence, Kansas-based quartet. Preceded only by two limited edition seven-inch singles, Paw’s A&M Records debut LP **DRAGLINE**, speaks thunderously for a band that has had few opportunities to speak before. Imagine this album is like your body’s circulatory system, and its songs are like blood: **DRAGLINE** is heavy enough to pump volumes, but as intricate as the network of capillaries that takes its music right to your brain.

Deservingly, though no less jarring, Paw has faced a deluge of attention labelling them the next big thing since CNN. Although not unappreciative, the band will be the first to point out they have more than enough labels in their clothes and on their soup cans to keep them happy. Yet their music has been dubbed as everything from “melodic alternative metal” to “white boy, blue collar, adrenaline music.”

Paw are not followers, latching on to a now-tapped local music scene. Grant, his brother and drummer Peter Fitch, and bassist Charles Bryan grew up in Chicago and have known each other for two dog years. Since their migration to Lawrence, they’ve been playing hard for three years with vocalist and lyricist Mark Hennessy on the main mike. Paw is not the product of a producer’s rolodex or a Julliard directory. Charles bought a bass in eighth grade and learned two scales before quitting lessons and adopting the play-it-by-ear method, and when Peter agreed to relocate to Lawrence with Charles and join the band, his first question was, “What am I going to play?” Paw is the result of motivation, lots of practice, and original ideas. Paw is an answer to the never-ending question, “where is something new?” These boys are natural-born world-shakers. *Paw is the antivenom to the poison of complacency.*

“Our band is different,” explains Grant, “because there’s so many different kinds of music in our songs. Everything from Pantera and Bullet Lavolta, to the Lemonheads and The Allman Brothers. I’ve always tried to be careful when I write music because I like chunky, hard-ass metal riffs with a lot of melody, dynamics and clean guitar tones with a lot of acoustic guitar.”

Also influenced by the Fluid, Smashing Pumpkins and Tad, it makes sense that they chose Smart Studios and engineer/producer Doug Olson, to help capture their talents. The result, **DRAGLINE**, showcases the band’s strengths and, both musically and lyrically, has something to say. That’s not surprising when you consider that, collectively, Paw relishes the grit of Jim Thompson, the flourish of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. and the majesty of Ernest Hemingway.

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Like those authors, Paw are true storytellers. Each track tells a tale, each firmly rooted in life experience. Mark Hennessy is a wordsmith, a man of letters, a *raconteur*. If he learned one thing in his lifetime, he came to understand the sage adage, “write about what you know.”

“I just write down things that happened to me,” Mark explains, “or a story I want to use, or an image that struck me as being particularly vivid. Then next time the music suggests an idea I’ll pull out some things I’ve wanted to use and work them into lyrics.”

Try these on for size: *Cool Hand Luke*—remember George Kennedy’s character, Dragline? (“Anything so innocent and built like that just gotta be named Lucille!”) “The song was called ‘*Dragline*’ first,” Mark explains. “It’s kind of a father-son song, and that was a movie my dad and I always watched together. When it came time to name the album, everyone liked the sound of Dragline, so it stuck.”

Movies and family aren’t Mark’s only inspirations. Peter’s teenage brush with death (*Sleeping Bag*), the tragedy of a mother hammerhead shark (*Couldn’t Know*), crime photos and suicide (*Pansy*), sex, violence, and the duality of relationships (*Lolita*), and “a juvenile love song for a cartoon character” (*Veronica*—“I don’t know when the last time you’ve looked at a copy of Archie was,” says Mark, “but Veronica wasn’t drawn that way for children!”) were all seeds planted in Mark’s mind and fertilized by the world around him.

“*Jessie*,” the first single from **DRAGLINE**, is about a man and his dog. “When I was about 16,” Mark explains, “I ran away from home. I got a mile from my house and turned around and saw the family dog, Jessie, following me. I couldn’t take the dog back, so I was standing there in the street saying, “You gotta go home!” I couldn’t get the dog to go home, so finally I just walked away. It turned out he never went back and home and we haven’t seen him since.”

Grant, too, is affected by his environment. “There are few places that are prettier than the midwest,” he adds, “and that’s definitely an inspiration for my writing. I grab my acoustic guitar and go into the kitchen and look out at the neighborhood and the trees and just feel like playing.”

The full spectrum of emotions is perhaps the most significant common denominator that ran through the creating of **DRAGLINE**. “Recording this album was definitely the most difficult and most rewarding thing I’ve ever done,” Grant claims. “It taught us how to interact with each other. I understand much better now, the weaknesses of the band and the weaknesses I bring to the band.” “It made us emotionally stronger,” adds Peter. “We learned how to hate each other and get over it—to remember that the music is the most important thing.”

I think this album has 12 really strong moments,” Grant insists. “For me there’s no such thing as a perfect record or song, but there are perfect moments in songs. I think there’s a perfect moment in every one of these songs, which is probably the aspect of the record I’m most proud of.”

“Now it’s time to tour,” Charles concludes. “Making this record was very satisfying, but now we want people to hear it.”

## DISCOGRAPHY

“ <i>Lolita</i> ”	7”	Nasty Pope	1992
“ <i>Sleeping Bag</i> ”	7”	Nasty Pope	1992
<b>DRAGLINE</b>	LP	A&M	1993