Alice's Million Dollar Maybes
by John Knott

**Billion Dollar Babies — Alice Cooper**
(Warner Bros.)

I've always been fascinated by album covers. Over the years Alice rock 'n' roll became an economic entity, somebody has put a huge amount of time and ingenuity into the art, photography, and design which faces us as we thumbed through the bins. I think the turning point must have been *Sgt. Pepper*; after that magnificent package, a lot of musicians demanded a hand in the look of the cardboard surrounding their wares. Some even copied that trendsetter — the Mothers and Ike & Tina Turner, for instance.

Yet I can't recall a more amazing package job than Alice Cooper's *Billion Dollar Babies*. Verily, it defies description, though I'll give it a try.

The outside is a wallet, a Jolly Green Giant-sized alligator-skin wallet. A gold medallion is glued/welded/bolted to it, portraying a purposeless wealthy cherub in Cooper's famous eye-makeup, and listing, on the flip side, the cuts the Brothers Warner apparently thought would be most popular. Yet there's more. Open it up.

Inside is a billion dollar bill, hilariously Cooper-ized with little pictorial references to Aliceiland/Amerika all over it. The dust jacket confirms a six-month-old rumor; the boys pulled a cool million out of their bank for a photo session with a dozen white rabbits and one screaming baby. What else can you ask?

You had to ask... The Alice Cooper Bubblegum Card, autographed and perforated, that's what. Nonetheless, the central question here is whether or not this baby will top Alice's best, *Killer*. As it turns out (once I found the record among all the other stuff, which wasn't easy) Baby marks Alice out from the million Dollar Babies who've long since run out of steam; the concept is in a vogue. Side One opens up with "Hello Hurray," a four-year-old tune with a dozen white rabbits and one screaming baby. What else can you ask?

The Alice Cooper of *School's Out* is neither the long, intricate, minor-mode fantasy nor the short, tight, classic rocker single, both of which characterized *Killer*. It's an indecipherable in-between...forced to an uncomfortable point by the lyrics that take too long to make a point... That Alice must tell us anything directly is a letdown after the incredibly effective imagery of "(Halo of Flies)" or "(Doo-wop...)", and in forcing the words they've let us out of the picture loosed up a bit too much. The result is very entertaining, but not very marvelous.

Not only a bundle of a rocker, but one fine study of political behavior. "Unfinished Sweet" is also a fine production job, complete with whining dental drills and monumental affirmative choirs as the offending tools give way. The words vividly recall the intense, childish paranoia associated with a sojourn in the dentist's office. "Nice Guy," "Generation Landslide," and the title cut are all effective, though none of these feature both the lyrical quality and fine arrangements of those first two.

"Why, though?" "Stick Things," "Mary-Anns," and "I Love the Dead" dropped in favor of some fine instrumental breaks; Alice Cooper used to do? Perhaps that's the talent Alice traded in for a package designer; I should hasten to add that Alice's voice is as grinning, powerful, and versatile as ever, and the group's instrumental work is fine, given what they have to work with. Simply stated, Alice has abandoned the fine balance of *Killer*, for the sound of Babies is neither the long, intricate, minor-mode fantasy nor the short, tight, classic rocker single, both of which characterized *Killer*. It's an indecipherable in-between...forced to an uncomfortable point by the lyrics that take too long to make a point... That Alice must tell us anything directly is a letdown after the incredibly effective imagery of "(Halo of Flies)" or "(Doo-wop...)", and in forcing the words they've let us out of the picture loosed up a bit too much. The result is very entertaining, but not very marvelous.

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