Ashnikko’s songs are like portals. You’re instantly transported to a hyper, horny, whimsicaluniverse where emotions are dramatised, gender stereotypes are disrupted, and revenge reigns supreme. From the demonic brat rap of early singles like “Halloweenie” and “STUPID (ft. Yung Baby Tate)” to the lurid alt pop of viral hits “Daisy” and “Slumber Party (ft. Princess Nokia)”, an ever-evolving sound is anchored by a cheeky humour and subversive personality that couldn’t belong to anyone else.

Following the acclaimed 2021 mixtape DEMIDEVIL, Ashnikko’s debut album WEEDKILLER pushes their talents for world building even further. It tells the story of a fae civilization occupied and destroyed by killer machines (Weedkillers) that feed on organic matter. The protagonist is a faerie who has her world assailed and wings torn out; a survivor who seeks revenge by becoming part machine. It’s a compelling dystopian fantasy as well as poetic commentary on environmental disaster and the rapid evolution of technology. Not to mention a collection of irresistible songs that perfect the bold, genre-blending sound that’s defined their work to date. As fearless as it is creative, WEEDKILLER reasserts Ashnikko as one of today’s most innovative alt pop artists.

After establishing her reputation with slew of platinum and gold certified hits, writing collaborations with Doja Cat, and a contribution to Lady Gaga’s Chromatica remix album, Ashnikko released DEMIDEVIL in January 2021. Debuting at #1 on the Billboard Heatseekers Albums chart, it’s a thrilling experiment in sonic chaos, whipping sexual empowerment and ultraviolence up into an in-your-face frenzy. Part playful, part cut-throat, they express playful comments on the shortcomings of cis men in one breath and in the next transform into a vigilante who kills rapists and leaves daisies behind as a calling card. Inspired by anti-heroines like Harley Quinn, Tank Girl and Jinx from League of Legends – “small femme, big weapon” as she would categorise them – Ashnikko is a daring and disarming persona. Everything from the music production to the clothes to her vocal delivery, which switches between baby-voiced innocence and pure rage, is exaggerated until she wields a power that far outweighs her size.

“It definitely came from feeling super self-conscious and having no autonomy at all as a teenager. It was a persona to put on so that I at least have it somewhere else,” Ashnikko says. “Like if I have this powerful unapologetic archetype that I can tap into, then maybe it'll be real. And I think it is sometimes. No one’s a constant character, but it definitely became more real for me as I became an adult.”

Growing up a foreigner in a country where she didn’t speak the language, Ashnikko was often socially isolated and alone with her thoughts. They found comfort in high concept video games like Zelda and Skyrim and fantasy novels by authors like Neil Gaiman and Patrick Rothfuss, and got used to crafting their own worlds too, laying the foundations for the immersive method of songwriting they’ve become a master of. They also gravitated towards “powerful”, “loud” and “unapologetic” artists like M.I.A, Björk, Missy Elliot, Gwen Stefani and Paramore’s Hayley Williams, who fed into Ashnikko’s energy and sensibilities. The first song she ever downloaded was M.I.A’s “Bucky Done Gun” – a “complete fuck you” that tapped into her own feelings of anger and limitation. “[Ashnikko] has been really vital to my processing of things, like being assaulted. Instead of actually going to his house and slitting his throat, I’ll say it in a song,” they explain. “It’s been a very important character to tap into. It’s like going into a rage room.” Lacking the freedom to explore their creativity and identity until later in life, it wasn’t until after the release of DEMIDEVIL that Ashnikko came out as genderfluid (using she/her and they/them pronouns) and pansexual – something they’re still working through now.

Combining elements of trap, pop and metal with an almost childlike vocal delivery, you can see how artists like M.I.A. have inspired Ashnikko’s sound. While DEMIDEVIL showcased a more head on approach, directly tackling themes of sexual revolution and revenge, WEEDKILLER is more allegorical. A “half concept” album set in a dystopian future where nature and AI are at war, Ashnikko delves deeper into fantasy to confront real world issues from sexual empowerment to tech warfare and ecological collapse.

Heavy-hitting single “Weedkiller” comes through like an artillery barrage, all thundering beats, gun reload sounds and distorted guitar chugs. “I always knew it would come to this / That I would be the one to eliminate you,” Ashnikko threatens in a battle cry vocal. With arresting pop hooks and the atmosphere of a post-apocalyptic action film, it’s one of their most visual songs to date. “It felt like my Mad Max faerie fantasy!” she says. Similarly, the sun-soaked guitar riff and sardonic lyrics of “Worms” provide the backdrop to Tank Girl-adjacent character rumbling through the desert in a monster truck. “It’s supposed to unfold like a bad acid trip that turns into joyful nihilism,” they add, with the narrator battling everything from a burning wasteland to brain worms.

Taking influence from the games and novels they got into as a teen, plus shades of Evangelion, Dune and Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, WEEDKILLER illustrates between two civilisations: the nature-loving fae and the Weedkillers. While all the songs exist in the same world, some go further into the concept. “World Eater”, “Chokehold Cherry Python” and “Supersoaker” are explicit stories about the fae and the Weedkillers. Others – like “You Make Me Sick!”, “Possession Of A Weapon” and “Cheerleader” – tap into the same visual world while being rooted more in Ashnikko’s lived reality.

“It’s all within my faerie dream world – an enchanted magical forest with ancient, all-knowing trees and bioluminescent flowers,” Ashnikko says. The mood of each song depends on whether that world is being protected or destroyed. “We live in a world that consumes and consumes without reciprocity and love for the natural world,” she adds. “I feel like, sometimes, humans are the Weedkillers”.

Elaborating on its fae protagonist, Ashnikko describes her as a “toolmaker” and “nature worshipper” who “communes with trees and plants and digs her hands into the soil to send messages through the mycelium network”. Her wings have been ripped out, so she rebuilds them with Weedkiller parts, making her a cyborg. “She’s deeply connected to the world, but also super wronged,” Ashnikko explains. “She’s had to weather a lot of heartbreak and tragedy. I feel like I tapped into this character. It’s pure rage and vengeance. She’s on a big quest to feel power again”.

The same themes underpin the more direct songs too. “Possession Of A Weapon” is about the overturning of Roe vs Wade in June 2022, which saw reproductive rights thrown under the bus. “It’s just flesh, I can be grotesque / Move my body like chess,” they sing, describing how the body has become politicised, and how people with full lives and private desires are reduced to pawns within the corridors of power.

Elsewhere, Alt rap diss track “You Make Me Sick!” cuts an ex-boyfriend down to size. Over nu-metal inspired distortion and a menacing beat, Ashnikko’s voice breaks into a roar as she makes lyrics like “you fucking loser!” sound like a death sentence. “That one came out a little too easy,” she laughs. “I had bottled up a lot of aggression. My girl was like ‘why don’t you have any songs about your ex on the album, surely that’s a really good energy source to tap into?’ I was like, you are so right. So I dragged him through hot coals.”

“Cheerleader” is a siren song about modern beauty standards, undercutting imagery of a poised, pom-pom waving poster-girl with blades, blood stains and broken faces. Like a funhouse mirror it warps the infamous cheer from the opening scene of *Bring It On* into a critique of our cultural obsession with perfection. “Sexy, cute, popular to boot…” Ashnikko chides. “Cup of Draino, lips turn blue / Filler, snip and glue / Am I fuckable enough for you?”

“It’s twisting this perfect cheerleader into a monstrosity,” they explain. “It’s commentary on the need to be fuckable to be commercially viable, and I really do feel that pressure. It’s so tiring and played out. No matter how much logic I’ve built up in my head, there’s still some carnal part of my brain that says ‘you have to be fuckable to sell this music, bitch!’ It’s draining on my spirit and makes me feel like I have literal car exhaust in my brain.”

On the flipside, “Supersoaker” – which takes place within the universe as the fae protagonist thinks back to better times – is a sexual worship song about being “completely bewitched by someone, getting caught in their faerie circle and dancing until your feet bleed.” With sticky percussion and a minimal beat, you can practically feel the hair sticking to your forehead and the windows steaming up. It’s one of Ashnikko’s softer songs that taps into the life force of her enchanted forest dreamscape. The same goes for country-tinged Ethel Cain collaboration “Dying Star”, which maps escaping an abusive relationship onto a story about leaving a dying planet for a new world.

From start to finish, WEEDKILLERsteers towards liberation as themes of bodily autonomy and oppression, of love and harm – be it psychological or ecological – manifest as a great battle for the ages. Though of course the story isn’t as simple as “good vs evil”, working within the realm of fantasy feels like a “comfortable place” for Ashnikko to process trauma. “There's a lot of stuff on the album that’s indirectly about killing my rapist, but I’ve put it in a fictional world where I’m murderous towards these machines,” they say by way of example. “It’s loads of heartbreak, pain, and stories that I can relate to my own life.” Full of equal parts naked vulnerability and joyful rebellion, WEEDKILLER gives a thundering voice to the oppressed. Fears and anxieties, whether personal or tyrannical, are blown up and then broken down in 13 powerful tracks that refuse to give up the fight. It’s a fun-loving soundtrack to persevering through the dark, and towards the inevitable light.