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songs. Prong: "Rude Awakening" (Epic) - "Rude Awakening" is most likely the last album by the pioneering hard rock band that brought us "Snap Your Fingers, Snap Your Neck" and "Prove You Wrong." The band broke up and was dropped by their label. (Vocalist/guitarist Tommy Victor recently joined Danzig.) The melodic, head-banging "Rude Awakening" is considered be the band's best album.

Clutch: "Clutch" (Atlantic) - Two parts melodic hard rock and two parts humor, the Maryland rock band Clutch should be superstars by now. After wading through throbble drum beats and sultry guitars, you'll find lyrics about Howdy Doody, and a capsizing pirate ship.

Orange 9mm: "Tragic" (Atlantic) - Featuring former Detroit Matthew Cross (Not Barrage), Orange 9mm doesn't sound like anything else out there. The band mixes hard-driving guitars, machine-gun drums, Chaka Malik's no-holds-barred vocals and sometimes even acoustic guitars.

Homegrown favorites

The Verve Pipe: "Villains" (RCA) - The East Lansing quintet effortlessly spills out passionate, intelligent and

witty songs on its third release. From swirling guitars in "Barely (If At All)" to the cascading vocals in "Veneer," "Villains" is a top-notch pop album.

The Suicidé Machines: "Destruction by Definition" (Hollywood Records) - Livonia-based skin-influenced punk mongers The Suicidé Machines jump up and get down on its debut album. The band, with its tales of rebellion and life, is one of the stand-outs on the new wave of punk acts moving into the mainstream.

Charm Farm: "Pervert" (Mercury) - Last year's dance hit "Superstar" is just one of many songs on the record guaranteed to get your feet moving.

Robert Bradley's Blackwater Surprise: "Robert Bradley's Blackwater Surprise" (RCA) - Just off the road with the Dave Matthews Band, the Detroit-based band blends blues, gospel and rock to compliment Bradley's gritty, emotive lyrics.

R&B/Rap/Soul

The Fugees: "The Score" (Ruffhouse/Columbi) - Get past the radio saturation of the remake of Roberta Flack's "Killing Me Softly," and "The Score" continues to shine as one of the most brilliant hip-hop records in years. The title cut, along with "How Many Mics," "Manifest" and "Ready or Now," are standouts on an

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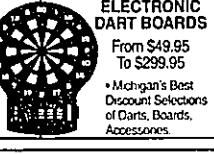
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