

REM 1984
Reckoning [25th Anniversary Deluxe Edition]

UNIVERSAL

★★★★★

REM's best? The jangle that launched a thousand bands

The inscrutable elegance of *Murmur*, an affable open-heartedness to fans and bands alike, and countless miles of hard touring, had by 1984 turned REM into darlings of the American underground. *Reckoning*, remarkably, deepened the band's mythology, projecting a kind of existential restlessness wrapped in webs of gorgeous guitar arpeggio and interweaving vocal textures. The band's range broadens here, incorporating everything from Velvets-style drone to a touch of honky-tonk, as singer Michael Stipe, swathed in Southern twang, shades the would-be fatalism of "(Don't Go Back to) Rockville" with layers of melancholy. There's nary a stumble; the glorious harmony-and-jangle rush of "Harborcoat" and the pounding dirge "So. Central Rain" remain career highlights. Too bad Universal couldn't assemble a *Reckoning Sessions* set, though, considering the quality of attendant outtakes; a fine live tape from Chicago 1984 that captures the group's scruffy stage persona comprises the bonus disc. **LUKE TORN**