

Remnants of Reason

Issue 5

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Mental Home

The Chasm

Angel Dust

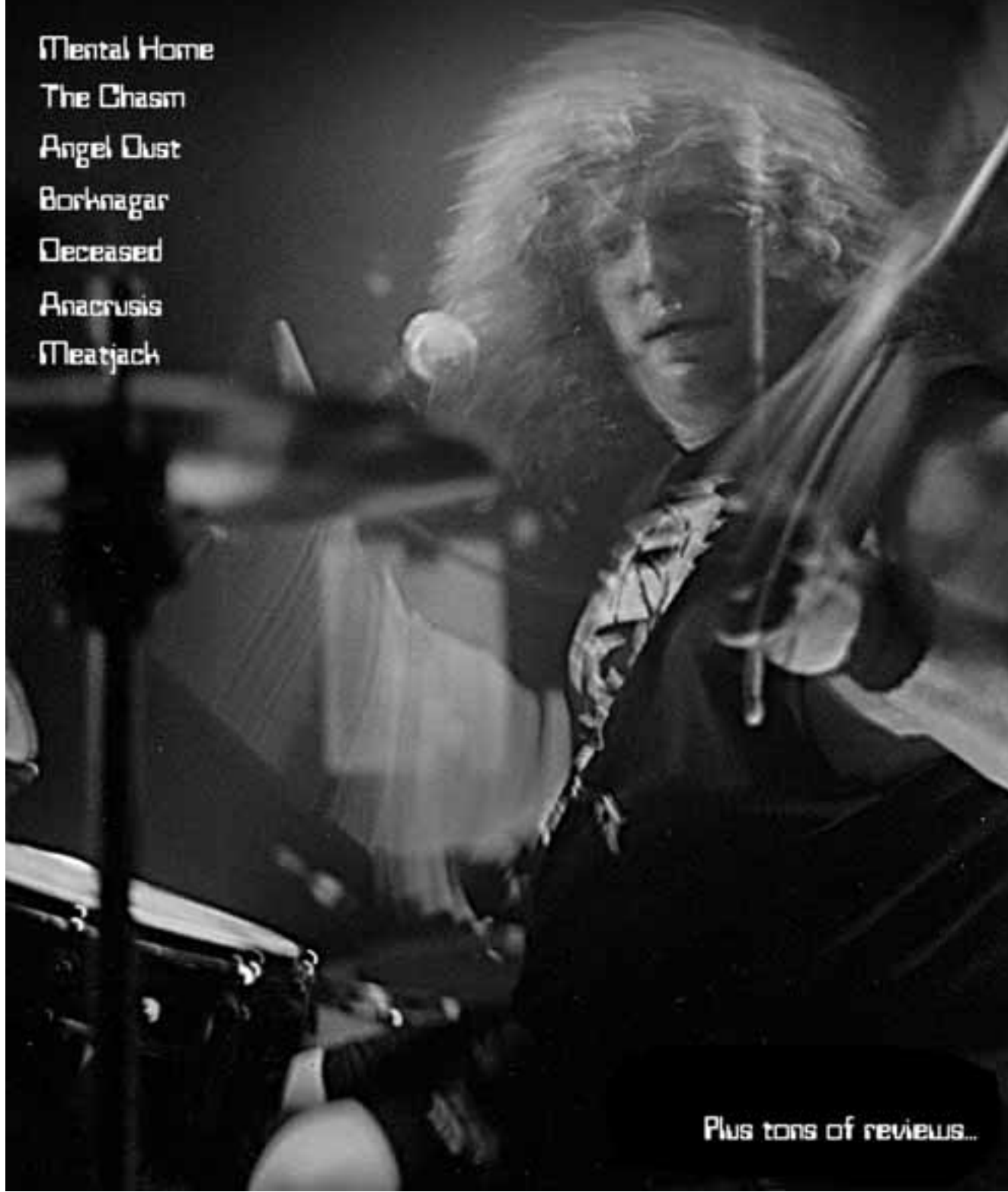
Borknagar

Deceased

Anacrusis

Meatjack

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Remnants of Reason

Issue 5 - September, 2000

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About the cover: The legendary King Fowley from Deceased in a candid shot. The image was provided by Relapse Records, but they didn't know who the photographer who took the shot was. So, if it was you, thanks for the great pic! The image is kindly used by permission of Relapse Records. OK, that ought to save me from being sued...

EDITOR

Evan Howell



reezon@geocities.

Current Spins

Mental Home - Upon the Shores of Inner Seas
 Nile - Black Seeds of Vengeance
 Autopsy - Mental Funeral/Fiend for Blood
 Anacrusis - Screams and Whispers
 Crucible - 2nd Album Advance
 Love History - Anasazi
 Carnage - Dark Recollections Remaster
 Winter - Into Darkness
 Agalloch - Pale Folklore
 Oblivion - Technocarnivore Motormouth
 The Haunted - Made Me Do It

Writers

John Hyttianinen, Matt Parry

Words of Wisdom...

Well, here it is, that time of the issue where I get to write something incredibly witty for all to enjoy. The problem is, I'm so tired, I can't think of anything to say, forget any stabs at wit... I could start by relating all the things that have happened since last issue, I guess that's fair. Let's see, John H. pretty much came on board wholeheartedly to help me tackle the ever-increasing amount of music to review. So if he behaves, look for him to help out in future issues (thanks John!). Right as we went to print last time the Havoc in Hawaii 2 show took place here in Honolulu with Broken Man, Crucible and Crowbar. Probably the heaviest show the island has seen, Crowbar proved why they are the kings of their realm, decimating ears and minds alike with musical oppression. This is where we (Crucible) hooked up with Keith Falgout for the first time, and after the shows, it became immediately apparent that he was the man to produce our next album. Which brings me to why this issue is a little late in coming out. Besides the ever-present delays that are associated with a zine of this caliber (bottom of the barrel), I was in the studio for pretty much a full month working on the new Crucible album. So, I apologize to those who were looking forward to seeing the zine done faster, but there are no second chances in the studio, heh heh... On the local front, Honolulu has to bid farewell to local hometown heroes INFECTION as they move to make their mark on the east coast of the mainland this winter, the whole band relocating to try and get their album distributed. Good luck to you guys and don't forget us back here on the island! And then, as always, there are some people I need to thank who helped me to get this whole thing going... First and foremost, my wife Saori, who's always there to help in whatever way is needed, John for all his help with the reviews and for knowing his metal, Derek and Mike (CRUCIBLE) for everything, Matt and Eric for keeping me sane and helping to schlep drums all over the place, Skinlab for letting me tour the old west with them (look for an account of that on the webpage) and then all the bands and all of the people who I deal with day in and day out (you know who you are!!!). Until next time, stay heavy!!! - Evan

Send anything but explosives to:

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Angel Dust



Angel Dust may not be a household name when it comes to power metal, often being over looked in favor of the other, less worthy flavor of the month bands. But as Germany's best kept secret, and with a new LP on the racks and fifth all together, the incredible "Enlighten the Darkness", it maybe time for Angel Dust to step out of the darkness so to speak. I had the utmost pleasure of talking with on hell of a cool guy, not to mention an incredible guitarist, Bernd Auferman. - Interview by John Hyytiainen

RoR - Well, first off, just me say that I love the new record, Enlighten the Darkness! Its easily your finest!

BA - Well, thank you very much!

RoR - Well, I know you must get this question a awful lot, but for those who aren't familiar with Angel Dust, would you please give us a really short history of the band, in your own words?

BA - Hey, OK, no problem! Um, so Angel Dust was formed back in 1983, like a school member's band! Whoever could hold a guitar was in the band! In 1986, they released their first album called Into the Dark Past, and it was very influenced by the San Francisco bay area stuff like Testament and all the things, and it's a very thrashy and very speedy style album. It sold very well here in Germany, and was album of the month in a few magazines, but that was long ago. The band consisted of Frank Banx, our current bass player and our current drummer Dirk Asmuth. And they had two guitarists, one of whom was the lead singer. After that they got into a little bit of trouble. In 1987 they got a new singer and two different guitarists and then brought out the album, To Dust You Will Decay I believe in 1988, which had a very power metal approach. They went away from the speedy and thrashier stuff (to) a lot more power metal influenced things, and little bit of a singer. He wasn't that good [laughs], but the album was still very successful in Germany. But as things turned out to be, they got trouble with the singer. He got, what do you call it, LSD, what Eddie Van Halen called Lead Singer Disease, and other things! So they fired the two other guitarists, so that was it for the time. They try to figure out other band members who would fit in the band but they didn't find anybody so they met a few guys and did another record, but it was never released and they started to break up and all went to solo directions. Banx basically had a few albums out with a band called Crows(?) with a few members of the current Sodom line up. You know Sodom?

RoR - Yes, in fact, I was just listening to the new

record, Code Red.

BA - Yeah, OK, they were involved, and as I said, they did a record that was not that successful. So they were always looking to rebuild Angel Dust again, but didn't find the right members. I was introduced to Dirk and Frank back in 1993, I think. I was a studio musician looking for some guys who can help me out with a few things I can schedule here so we're in contact. I knew he was a bass player and I knew he was a drummer and there way this band called Angel Dust back in the 80s, OK, a little ancient band! [Laughs] In 1996, 1997 I got a offer from a record company here in Germany to do a guitar record, and Frank's brother Steven was involved in my band as the keyboard player. So we thought about Frank and Dirk joining our band to do the basic tracks in the studio. And we went to the rehearsal studio and played a little bit of things and I saw the look in their eyes and they went hey, what do you think about putting a singer in and lets rebuild Angel Dust once again! So I was hmm, hmm (humming) nobody actually needs a metal guitar record! [laughs] So the rest is history! We found Dirk Thurisch, a singer from our neighbor town, and we were pretty lucky. And that was it. We recorded a demo tape and it was released in a magazine, and Century Media did the best offer so, here we go! Then we released Border of Reality in 1998.

RoR - Well, I have to say that the one thing that got me into Angel Dust was Dirk's vocals. They are more throaty and aggressive and stand out from the crop of Hammerfall type of high fa la la singers! Also, does the band's names have any significant behind meaning to it? Does it stand for anything in particular?

BA - Well thank you very much, I will let him know that! Well, as far as I know it (the name) was taken back in the 80s out from a movie that dealt with this drug thing...

RoR - I was just curious because on the cover, there always seems to be this winged, cloaked figure, and on the new LP there's a photo of a

statue of an angel...

BA - Yes, yes, this is definitely another image or another suggestion we would like to do, this figure called, we call it Angel. And especially on Enlighten the Darkness we forced (it) to become a real angel. On the other hand, we always got this bad demon angel on Border and Bleed. And we weren't satisfied with this art work, it just put us in this true metal direction, and we won't go that way because our music, we won't call ourselves true metal music. So I think this is why we improved the cover art work for Enlighten the Darkness. And I think Steven did it.

RoR - Really? It's definitely a very beautiful statue, looks like it was taken in a cathedral or mausoleum or someplace like that!

BA - Actually it's a picture that he modified a lot. Its taken here in Vienna or in Milan, I don't know for sure. It was taken there and he just made it fit the album cover.

RoR - Well, Bernd, the promo I got from Century Media didn't include a lyric sheet. Could you go over some of the themes on this record? I picked up a lot of things about relationships or love.

BA - Hey, that's pretty cool that you realized it. Actually, we thought about doing a concept album, but we said no, everybody would refer a concept album to Operation: Mindcrime, and you can't do it much better. So we said OK, let's have a global story and let's have 11 short stories that refer to this story. And the global story is a young man lives between the First and Second World War. And he comes back from the first war and he feels like, common, Just Let Me Live, which is the first song. You know, let me live, let me do my own thing, live with my family, I don't want to fight no more, I don't want to do anything but loving! (starts laughing) I mean, not in a physical way. And he promised this, and than he realizes that in 1933, when the Nazis hooked up here in the government, this machinery came over him. Just the propaganda and everything. And he finds himself in this, like a slave to the grind. Everything comes the same

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way, all this bad attitude. So there is this bread and games approach you got back in this old Rome, if you know what I'm talking about (actually, I don't, but I concede and we move on!). This is what the song Enjoy deals with. So he sees himself like a gladiator, standing in a arena, killing each other for the joy of the people, like the way the Nazis did that that. They let Jewish prisoners fight each other to death. And we got this same thing right now in this world again, called this Ultimate Fighting stuff. And we just want to say that "Hey man, something is really wrong, mankind didn't learn."

RoR - I hate to say that the Ultimate Fighting thing is fairly big in Hawaii as well.

BA - Yeah, OK. I mean we got some really bad words from the United States about that because every body is saying "Hey, everybody who is into the Ultimate Fighting knows exactly what they are doing and blah, blah, blah." But anyway, the guys, the people, who look at it and enjoy people killing each other. Well, there must definitely be something wrong. Excuse me, but I have to say that!

RoR - I would agree with you!

BA - Well, back to the story. OK, he sees this machinery coming, and 10 years later in 1943, he finds himself just lying in the front line, just fighting again. You know, the allied forces, in a ditch wearing this gas mask, this is what the song Fly Away deals with. You know this breathing of the gas mask, like Darth Vader, in the verses. He finds himself, he imagines to write a letter to his wife, Still I'm Bleeding is the song. And he imagines his leader, his Fuhrer we say, Adolf Hitler speaking to the masses, we get the song Cross of Hatred, were we did a kind of speech to the public. So here he finds himself lying in this ditch in the frontline, something must be wrong; here I go again, here I am again, in the frontline, thinking that something must be wrong. And he realizes that there must be a much higher force, or power. Not spiritual, but hidden societies and stuff like that, who have a deep interest in putting people or countries back to war just for financial, religious, whatever reasons. So he likes to know if mankind will ever learn, and he is little bit optimistic, and said OK, were at Oceans of Tomorrow. Maybe everything will change, we don't know yet. We would like to stress a few things, there is definitely something wrong, because we have so many troubles here. We have so many things that are pretty bad in social life, like the Ultimate Fighting things. We got a lot of influences from our grandparents, a lot of influences from this movie Saving Private Ryan

RoR - Yes, that was a very powerful movie.

BA - Yes, so this is what the global story is, and every one of the songs refer to this story.

RoR - I have to say, that is a nice change of pace from all the Dungeons and Dragons and

swords type of lyrics so prevalent today!

BA - [laughing] We hate dragon fighting lyrics! [Starts singing mockingly] "The sword of the king!" I can imagine! I would hate to listen to that stuff. I think I heard that stuff 40 to 50 times over the last weeks. [Starts singing again] "The sword of the king!"

RoR - How is the metal scene in Germany like? I'm not sure if it's because of where I'm at (Hawaii), but we tend to hear more about the British/UK scene, the Cradle of Filth and all of that. Or we hear a lot about the American brutal Death Metal scene. Does Germany have a large scene?

BA - We have a very heavy and very strong metal following and a very big metal scene here. But I think the German customs want to put everything in (categories) themselves. They just want to have true metal, they just want to have power metal, uh, just want to have hip-hop rap metal you know. Its like "Oh, you guys like death metal, so you can't listen to true metal, sorry for that!" So Angel Dust is a band that we



sit beneath chairs. Because I don't want to say we're going to do true metal, or I don't want to say we're going to do death metal. I think what we doing some melodic power metal hopefully with some new millennium sound in the approach.

RoR - Could you go over how Angel Dust write their songs? Are the guitar parts written first or are they based on vocal patterns? The songs tend to be very chorus oriented.

BA - Yes, I would agree with that. Basically, we write the songs all together. OK, I play the guitar, and Steven plays the keyboards, the melodic instruments. Of course, we're going to come up with some riffing ideas with some keyboard melodies. Look at the songs like Still I'm Bleeding, you would imagine it would be up to Steve to come up with these things. And when you listen to the songs like Let Me Live, or The One You Are, Come into Resistance, or Enjoy, the more guitar oriented stuff. These are the songs I come up with the riffing and some song structures and some chorus and versus. But definitely, songwriting is really a band attitude and we are all involved in the task. It depends,

sometimes Dirk comes up with a nice vocal line, and says how can we fix this and check it out. Sometimes it can be quite a hassle, but it works out very great for us, so we going to credit all the songs to all five of us.

RoR - How was the studio experience for the new record?

BA - This time, we had some extra time in the studio, and our producer, Siggi Bemm asked us to write the song, you give us the tapes and we are going to discuss them and change a few things. And we were pretty prepared this time, not that we are ever not prepared, but more so than usual. We were supposed to be 25 days in the studio days for recording and mixing, and hey, I should congratulate the guys. Dirk did the drums in two days. Banks did the bass in one and half days. I mean, I have to congratulate myself. I wasn't expecting to do that, but I was through the rhythm guitars in one and half days. I was pretty lucky. I mean the most difficult parts I played very easily on, and the easiest parts I fucked up very badly! Like I can play this bending lick, ha, ha! And we had so many extra time in the studio, that we checked out lots of sounds and lots of mixing versions. And it was a very relaxed atmosphere in the studio. We wanted a much more fuller sound than we got on Bleed, more in your face!

RoR - I guess because of our location, we don't get many tours down here. Does Angel Dust tour a lot? Any big tours or festivals planned?

BA - We are going to tour very often here in Europe; Greece and Spain are very good markets for Angel Dust. We're going to go down South America in I think January of 2001. And hopefully, we got a new manager and booker, and we got some offers from the United States to play a few festivals. I don't know what they're called, but we got a few offers, and hopefully, were going to make this. It depends on the selling rate, if we come to the U.S. to play there. I heard we're supposed to play San Francisco or New York or somewhere in the mid-west. That would be great, I'm really looking forward to that. I heard we have a really strong following in the United States. But Hawaii would be a dream to play. I remember reading a magazine about a band from Hawaii, really, really good guitar player. I can't remember the name, but I was surprised to see some people doing heavy metal from Hawaii! [laughs]. I thought about Sammy Hagar and all the ships. Sammy Hagar lives in Hawaii, right?

RoR - I'm not sure about Sammy Hager, but if I'm not mistaken, Dave Murray lives out here as well! Well, I got out a lot of different influences out of this record. There's some very thrashy stuff, and yet there's some very beautiful ballads on there as well. Who brings what influences to the table? Does Steven bring in a lot of the softer influences to the band seeing as he's the keyboardist?

BA - Actually, not! He's one of the guys who's always blowing his mind with the most brutal metal you could imagine! It depends on his mood! Sometimes, you hear him coming across the studio like RROOAARR (death growl)!! Steven, what's wrong with you? I've just been listening to the latest Sepultura demo man! Actually, we have lots of influences in the band, we have all this Bay Area thrash and speed thing coming from Banx's and Dirk Assmuth. We have all this, I think brutal approach coming from Steven, a little bit of Dirk Thurisch, the singer. We have Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, a little bit of Savatage as well. From my side, you got this kind of hard rock approach, Rainbow, Deep Purple and Triumph. On the other hand, Queen was a big theme. A little bit of Metallica, though I never liked Metallica at all, never did. Although they did have some cool songs back in the 80s and in the beginning 90s, though I still can't deal with Kirk Hammett's guitar playing!

RoR - How do your songs come across in a live situation? I'm asking because your songs are really symphonic with the keyboards and such. I saw a live video with Dimmu Borgir and the sound was atrocious, everything was a washout.

BA - Not that difficult. We're pretty much working on our live performance. When we got some money earned for the latest record, we all put our income to our gear. Right now we're gonna work with a few sequencers. We all sing on stage, well, not all, but Banx and me, and Dirk of course, he sings. And somethings off of artist recording system to bring in kind of noises we have on the record. On the other hand, we're basically a rock and roll band. We love to just fool around and jump around on stage. We have pretty much fun on the stage. The fans say we always have huge amounts of humor and power! And we love to be on stage, it's my world, and we're really looking forward to the next tour. We're gonna tour with Lefay and kick off on the 22th of August to the 21st of September. Then we're going to go on a headlining tour from the 15 of November to the 21st of December here in Europe, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Scandinavia, everywhere.

RoR - Sounds like a busy schedule. What is the average day like for the members of Angel Dust. I know a lot of people think that in this business, you can play in the band and do only that.

BA - Right now, for me, yes. To tell my personal opinion, I can do this right now, and I am very lucky. I am just sitting here in my home studio which I built in my kitchen! I really can cherish now doing music and everything. I was a well booked studio guitarist here in Germany, so equipment is quite in stock here! My house looks like a music store! But I am very fortunate to make the decision and to quite definitely. I was a teacher for mentally handicapped children. I decided to quit that and I am very fortunate and very thankful being a musician and live my dream and earn money with it and spend my life just being a musician. I feel really fortunate

about this.

RoR - With Angel Dust being out of the scene for a while prior to Border of Reality. What do you think of the current music scene with all the death metal and black metal bands and especially the resurgence of power metal? Does Angel Dust feel part of it?

BA - I think the scene has to be cleaned up! Yes, I think because when you look at the magazines, you got such an amount of new releases every month! Like, who the hell should listen to this! [laughs] No really! You are in a, let me say, sad position because you have to listen to all the things to do reviews and such! I wouldn't trade with you! The thing is that so many bands come up with stuff that would be pretty shitty back in the 80s! There are a few bands that I really can't stand definitely, but I won't name names! They are pretty awful! No, I can't deal with it! I prefer to listen to the originals, but on the other hand, I can understand the young kids who love to have new idols, new young people to adore. But OK, when these young musicians just copy



things that were done 15 years before, I have a problem with that. And I think that all these huge amount of new releases definitely have a lack of musicianship, definitely has. So I think the scene should be cleaned up and I think it will clean up itself.

RoR - Definitely, you could open a issue of Terrorizer and see all these ads for all these bands and you're like "wow"! And if you order them, and you actually hear them you're like, "What's this shit!"

BA - Yes! I take every band and in every heavy metal style, I don't care if it's black metal or death metal or what you ever call it style, as long as it's original and have something to say. I have problems with bands that try to copy something, and call themselves the new dimension of music or whatever. That was the thing about Hammerfall, they were from In Flames and they just wanted to do this side project. You know, play some 80's heavy metal for your own, and the record company made them them an offer and it turned out to be very good. Hey, I can deal with that, it's (was only) a joke!

RoR - Being on the road, you guys must hear a lot of new music. Are there any bands that have caught your ear lately?

BA - There's this band from, I think the UK called Anathema. They are doing some Pink Floyd style stuff, and Steve and Dirk are getting into this thing. To be honest, the latest heavy metal record I bought, oh, I can't remember! One thing that I really like is Talisman, the latest Dream Theater I like. Let's see, John Norum from Europe, their guitar player. I got the re-release of a old Impellitteri, Stand in Line. But to be honest, I haven't been listening to a lot of heavy metal music, because when you go out and play every second night, you have to come down with your ears. I prefer some relaxing cool things and guitar music, I guess I got older!

RoR - I can understand that as well, because I work in a music store myself and sometimes, music is the last thing I want to hear!

BA - Yes, I think there are only a few band that have impressed me. Like Spock's Beard, but they are not metal, more like progressive rock. I was a little bit surprised by the way, two weeks ago we played a festival with Slayer. I wasn't that much into Slayer, I knew a few songs, but hey, live, they blew me away! I got all these old CDs, I got Seasons in the Abyss and Reign in Blood, and that's some pretty heavy shit!

RoR - Sounds like an incredible festival!

BA - Oh yes, it was a really huge, incredible festival! We got Cro-Mags, Machine Head, and Slayer headlining. Yes, it was a great day! We had very much fun on the stage, and we played in front of 50,000 people. A very good day indeed!

RoR - Would you prefer to play those large type of festivals or the intimate settings like small clubs?

BA - To be honest, I prefer the clubs. Festivals, everybody is very nervous, everybody is really unsure what's happening next! And you got to set up by the crew, and get set up by the stage managers, and they're like "Hey, this is my stage, get off my stage, you're a little late, you're a little early" and, like what happened? OK, it's a very nice view when you see 10,000 people banging their heads and singing your songs. It's a kinda organization thing. And OK, when you come to Greece, and you play the venues to 4,000 people in Cata City(?), it's the same impressive thing! Its like man! I remember we played Athens, and they were singing Border of Reality, and it was louder than us, and it was like, "Hey Dirk, listen to this!" But yeah, I think we prefer the clubs.

RoR - I'm sure Angel Dust would extremely well in Greece, seeing how Iced Earth went gold with Alive in Athens.

BA - Yes, we played there with them and on

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their headlinig tour and South America as well, it's great!

RoR - Do you have any interesting tour stories you might want to share. Mishaps, pranking, anything stupid? Any favorite places to play?

BA - Oh! Lots of funny things! As far as favorite places, of course, Greece, of course Spain. San Sebastian is a very beautiful city, very beautiful venue, and a real raging crowd. I think one of the very best gigs we've had was in a very fucked up, oh excuse me!, club in the heart of Germany. I can't remember the name though. They didn't have a PA system, just like this cabinet, four of five microphones, an eight channel mixer, and that was it. And we were on tour with Jag Panzer and our tour manager just went berserk. He was yelling, "Hey we need a 32 channel mixing desk, and we need 20 microphones, what the fuck!" They managed to get us two eight channel mixing consoles. So what they did was, the club was sold out, like 250 people. But it was so funny, we sweated badly, but it was really, really awesome! But when it comes to touring, Frank Banx is really the one to blame when it comes to getting punch drunk! When he's retiring to his bunk, some strange things always seem to happen to him. These strange things, he will find somewhere weeks after the tour in the internet on film and all kinds of things (breaks out laughing)! Like just painting his face black or red or putting shaving cream on his face or bubble gum in his eyes, just throwing all the alcohol bottles on him. Or we would put all these porno magazines

on and around him whiles he's sleeping and he's smiling and take a few picture and he realizes nothing because he's sleeping!

RoR - Well, that's all I have for you, but I wanted to thank you for your time and a wonderful conversation! I wish Angel Dust the best on tour and much success with the new record, as its definitely a killer disc! Like I said, if you guys ever want to come down here for vacation or something, get in touch with me and we'll drive you around and show you a good time, Hawaiian style!

BA - No, thank you for your interest, maybe we'll meet or talk again for the next record! Who knows, maybe if we get enough money from this tour, we'll come down for our honeymoon (I'm not sure what he meant here!). Yes, I think Hawaii is definitely a place everyone must see! Take care!

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Adjectives such as "poetic", "dramatic", "symphonic", "operatic", "powerful", and of course "epic" will surely be used, while none can accurately pin down, nor do justice to, the flurry of impressive journeys the band travels throughout the record. — *Aversion*

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Love History have with Anasazi made an incredible record, a record which may demand more from the listener initially, but upon time will prove to unveil a wealth of layers and enjoyment through years in one's collection. — *Remnants Of Reason*

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This decade's biggest misnomer, Deceased have proved over their last few albums that they are nowhere near close to a musical demise, if anything, just becoming stronger and more defined with each release. Fearless Undead Machines was the first completely brilliant chapter in this tale, and after many repeated listens, I can assure you that Supernatural Addictions, while not a sequel by any means, successfully carries on the plans laid down last time, yet managing to find more of the band's strengths in sound. This was an interview I both looked forward to and enjoyed doing, mainly because King and I come from the same school of music, and while I might have been unknown to King, Deceased has been a part of my life since the first demos crossed my path back in the 80s. An easy talker and a very outspoken guy is King, going from insightful to inciteful, but always entertaining.

KF - So you like the new record?

RoR - *Yeah, I like it a lot... I was actually kind of nervous, because I was wondering how you were going to top Fearless Undead Machines, but you managed to do it.*

KF - Yeah, some people are like "Ah, I don't like it as much", and then some people are like "Yeah, it kills it", so it's all a matter of taste, I guess. We just didn't want to do the same record again.

RoR - *Well, I don't know, I'm sure you didn't think about it too much, but it was really the best thing, in my opinion. You're not going to make FUM part two, and the album is just different, it has a whole different feel to the whole thing.*

KF - We wanted a little bit of every era of the band because we like everything in different ways. A lot of the early stuff we can't like as much or talk about because the production is so bad that you've outgrown and outplayed it as far as that's concerned. So we still enjoy the records, it's just the production on those that bothers me. But that's what happens, you don't have the money, you don't have the skill, you're young and you're still playing a lot of the older tunes that you wrote when you were 15! I like all of the albums in different ways, but then sometimes I cringe listening to them! ON this one, we definitely wanted to do this right. I've been telling the band over the last few years "These are our epitaphs, these are our gravestones", because when we're gone, these are here. These will never go away, unless of course, every copy in existence goes away, which is something that we hopes happens on a couple of the records [laughs]. Other than that, that's where it stands, you can have a mess up or something and just go, "Ah, that's cool, leave

it", but you have to clean it up because that's the take that people remember. You can play Paranoid like 50 million times by now, but that's the song from the album that people listen to.

RoR - *So you have to remember in the studio that even if you're not on, or you're tired, that you have to give 150% all the time.*

KF - Exactly, and Simon was really good with that, he would go like "Yeah, that's good mate... but you can do better mate."

RoR - *So he was easier to work with than Barnes? [Referring to Jim Barnes, producer on Fearless Undead Machines]*

KF - Barnes was a weirdo, but I tell you man, they were both great in different ways. Barnes was what you would call an evil genius, smart as a whip, but then dumb as a stump, if you know what I mean. It was a Catch-22, he was easy to work with, but also impossible to work with. Simon was basically like "OK, you don't like this? Well, here's what's going to happen if you don't do this", and would lay it on the line. He would scientifically go through it while Barnes would be something like "OK, you don't like it, no problem", but then 10 minutes later be like "This fucking sucks, I demand you do it again!" I liked Barnes, but the problem there was that he was going through a horrible marriage problem at the time, so his head wasn't all there. Which was a shame, because the money was still getting to him, so his head should have been there, you know what I mean? I still like what he did, and he really got us in the right direction on Fearless... in terms of the sound, which improved like tenfold from Blueprints... That improvement came to this album, which really helped us with Simon, so if people say that it sounds even better with Simon, it's the past

work which helped bring it to that. I think these songs were a lot easier to work with because we knew from Fearless, which was also the first album that we could hear what we were doing in the long run, what worked and what didn't work. I'm a big fan of speed, and I like a lot of that, but it sounded like "well, I'm just playing too fucking fast", no one would catch the song at that rate. So I tried to slow down at times, I tried to speed up at times, I tried to play tighter, I tried to get the guys to play more organized leads, get the bass to be heard more. We all worked on it, and Simon knew that, and I was probably the only clashing head with Simon because as you probably know [laughing], I'm a loudmouth and I talk a lot, and I'm really anal about Deceased in general, so you know, he knew what to expect, and I'm sure he's dealt with the "leader" of every band that he's worked with. It all paid off in the long run.

RoR - *Well, this has been your baby for like, shit, 15 years now?*

KF - Yeah, 15, 16 years now. In 1984 we started this thing, and it was basically me and a guy named Doug, who stood the test at an early age, but couldn't ever grow up. He couldn't lay down the drugs, lay down the attitude. I used to think it was just immaturity, and tell the other guys that he'd get away from this, so he never lost his edge, but he lost his professionalism, and that's why we had to let him go. From then it just became my baby, and then we got Mark to come along, and then it's been our baby from then on. So, the whole band is equal, but if someone were to tell you "Oh, King's the spokesperson, he's the one who talks all the shit, you know", it wouldn't be true. I just love metal, music and the underground though, which is such a shame, because the world's just become such a turd...

RoR - Yeah, I wanted to talk to you about that, you've seen the scene almost all the way from the beginning, what happened? It used to be a really pure thing, and just listening to the music and being a part of the scene was all the enjoyment one would need, but now, now...

KF - What I think happened is that there are just too many fuckin' hands in the pot. It became too many bands and not enough fans, it became a jealousy contest, everybody wanted to be number one and there's just not enough room for 100 number ones. Another thing that really sucks is that the musicians have gotten a lot younger, which means that the whole working ethic is a lot different. That's the only reason we've survived, is because basically I've told everyone, "Leave all your fucking problems outside the band room." This band is important, we've been around, put a bunch of money, time and sweat, life and blood into this band, so you have to leave all the shit at the front door and come in and give it your all. When we go to shows, if we've had a rough day, or driven like 500 miles to play to 10 people sometimes, that's just part of it! We've played to as many as 2,000 people or to as little as 2 people, and it doesn't matter to me. You're there, they're there, let's go! The video age took over in the 80s and then the 90s just killed it. You see all these countless, faceless fools up there in their Johnny Bravo shirt, where one day they're rap, then the next day they're thrash, whatever the new trend. It just doesn't make any sense. I know it's hard to find your way in life sometimes, but at the bottom at the barrel you can at least try and keep your respect.

RoR - Well, do you think it's because these bands don't have an identity, or because the record labels kind of hint as what they're looking for...

KF - Yeah, sure, the record labels have a lot to do with that. I was just talking to Relapse about trying to get on tours, and a lot of the booking agencies are like "I don't know, I don't know, this and that..." It's to the point that I'm ready to just book my own tour and call it "Fuck the Industry". I'm in the underground because I want to get away from all the Hollywood hoopla. Well, unfortunately the underground is part of that "clique" now, where the underground has their "sub-par" millionaires, which is what I call people that think that they're big shit, like Morbid Angel for example, and they're really nobody. Put Morbid Angel out with Slayer and Slayer going to get the ego trip that Morbid Angel's working the underground with. And it's a shame, because when you come down to it, we're all the same, we're all trying to achieve the same goal, which is to get heard, and to get some notoriety. And some people just aren't on the same personality level, they're just too egotistical, and that makes me sick! I say a lot of things I say and do a lot of things I do because I'm not going to stand around and watch it. I fight for my family, and the underground is my

family, whether people say "that King Fowley's a loudmouth, he talks a lot of shit" or not. But I don't think I talk a lot of shit, because shit is what you talk when people aren't around. To me, I speak what I believe is the truth, and I speak from the heart. You know, I think before I say, you know the old look before you leap, well I think before I say. I say a lot things that people might not agree with, but tell me when I see you what you think. It's not that I want to fight you or anything, I just want people to be



honest with me. Don't come up to me and say "ah, you're great", and then walk away and tell someone what a shithead I am...

RoR - But in this non-confrontational society most people say a lot of things in private but don't actually do anything.

KF - Sure, and then's when a lot of problems have come up with me, for I'm one of the few people that puts the hammer down. You give me shit, that's fine. You say it as much as you want man to man, we don't have to agree, it doesn't have to make sense, it just makes us different. And then at the end of the day, we're fine, because we both have respect for each other. Say you tell me right now that you think that rap is the greatest music [I start to laugh], I'd say "No, it's not. Rap is shit, to me it's worthless, there's nothing good about rap." That doesn't mean that you're a dickhead or a dummy, or that you're right and I'm wrong, it just means that we have different opinions. But, if you were to then say "Oh yeah, you're right, rap sucks", then I'd think that you were just talking out of your ass, and I wouldn't have any respect for you. It's weird, and I hate getting down to these subchannels of the underground, because music is supposed to be the most important thing to people, and to us it is the most important things. Deceased is one of the few bands that goes out of their way to make a great record, and to go out of our way to do everything the best we can at any given time. Like I said, people have asked me if I'm embarrassed by Luck of the Corpse now, and I say no, that's the best we could do at the time! We gave it our all, you know? We thought back then that was the best that we could do, and it's only through experience that you realize what's better. We're not fitting any subgenre, we're not trying to be retro, or be metal because metal's come back, we're not. The 8, 9, 10 songs we put out each time are what are in our blood or our moods at that time.

RoR - And at the same time you can be proud of the progression that you've made...

KF - Yeah, yeah, I mean, you can put on Angel Rat, and then put on War and Pain. They're both great records made by the same four guys, but just made at different times in their lives. So every album they've ever done has been different, and I have had people come up to me and give me a hard time, saying "Oh, you don't knock Voivod, even though Angel Rat is an alternative album", but I'll knock Slayer because they did a rap song. But I think it's a little different, because Slayer put out a punk record when Green Day was in, and yeah, Voivod did this alternative thing, but it wasn't even in! You know how easy it would have been for Voivod to have just made another Nothingface album? They would have took off, but instead they let the bands that they toured with (Soundgarden, Faith No More) take off, and Voivod just did what they believed in. Of course they didn't make any money, but to me, I still respect them!

RoR - We never actually met back in the late eighties, but we had some common friends from that era. This one guy got me into the Deceased demos, I don't know if you remember Scott Helig...

KF - Scott Helig! Of course, Total Thrash man,

Epileptic Albino Bullfrogs! Scott was like the coolest guy. In Philadelphia, did you know Rennie Resmini (I say yes). Rennie got thrown out of one of the very first out of state shows that we did. Do you remember the place Gee Willikers in N.J.? We played there, and we were halfway through the set, and they tried to throw my friend out (who was Rennie) for breaking up a fight. And they threw him out for stopping the fight! So we quit! We stopped playing, and we got a lot of respect for that. So we go outside, and he's like "You're getting a Sheer Terror shirt for that!", since he knew that I was big Sheer Terror fan. He just felt that no one in any of the bigger bands would do that for someone. I mean, I was almost in tears, and I was like "Dude, I would do that for any friend, I don't care if we ever come back here, I would never let a friend get thrown out for something they were doing that was good, and then not do anything about it!"

RoR - Well, how could you keep playing after watching something like that?

KF - I know, I actually have it on a soundboard somewhere, I told everyone that they just threw my friend out and that we were done, basically that they could eat my shit. Of course they told us we weren't getting paid, but I just didn't care.

RoR - What was cool back then was that you were one of the first few drummer/vocalists back in the day.

KF - The only reason that I ever did that was that I started out on bass, we actually had a great drummer who was about 14 at the time by

the name of Marcell Dissantos (who later went on to join Atheist), and we started playing, but he wanted to do like AC/DC or Iron Maiden, because those are the songs that he had in his head. I thought that was cool, but we were trying to do like Sodom and Slayer, fast shit. You see, that's one thing that people don't understand about us, we've always been about heavy metal, OK, and we love death metal, because back then all that stuff, death, thrash, speed metal was great and it was just taking heavy metal to the extreme, and we were extreme guys. So we wanted to make it as brutal as we could, so we were like Sodom, but then we'd turn around and put on Queensryche The Warning! We were fans of metal music, and people never understood that. Sure we'd have a Maiden part, but then we'd throw in an Antichrist part, and people felt like that was so weird, and that it shouldn't be done. Bullshit! Truth be known, Slayer started off as a speed metal Iron Maiden. Show No Mercy sounds like Iron Maiden on speed (and let's not forget the face paint - Ed.) so when we played like that I was on bass and vocals, ala Tom Araya. So Marcell started giving up, saying he couldn't play like that and just stopped coming to practice. So I felt like it would be a lot easier if I just switched to drums, because you can get by with two guitars and drums, but you really need a drumset in there to keep a beat. So I moved over there and everyone was like "But what about the vocals?" and I was like fuck it, I'll keep singing. I said, if Dan Beehler can do it I can do it, and it just stuck, and ever since then it's been kind of a novelty, some people like it and some people don't, but that's what I do!

RoR - As things got more technical then, has there been more problems bring saddled with both jobs?

KF - Yes. On the new album almost half of the songs are almost impossible to pull off live. It's the first time I've ever gone out of my way to really, really, really challenge myself in the studio to go for vocal melodies that stand apart from the rhythm sections. So in a song like A Very Familiar Stranger or especially Elly's Dementia, they seem like they go together really nicely, but when you try to sing them while you're playing you have to really separate your brain and do a ton of things at once. It's a hard thing to do, and a lot of those songs haven't been played live yet because they're not ready. We do The Premonition, Dark Chilling Heartbeat, Frozen Screams and The Hanging Soldier, those four we play live off the new album. And the other four we've never played live yet. We're hoping to get a couple of them ready if we ever get on tour, but I don't know what to tell you with touring since there's such an underground clique going on now... The new songs really are a lot harder, they really are, and I don't know if I'm going to simplify things for the next album just for the sake of live performing, or if I'm going to make them even more challenging, because I give it my best, and I love a challenge, but it's fucking hard!

RoR - So you don't consciously simplify the drumming?

KF - No, if you're familiar with The Blueprints for Madness you'll know that that's the most technical that Deceased has ever been, and most



likely will ever be. I mean, if you listen to a song like Into the Bizarre, there are 52 riffs in that song, and I wrote all of 'em. That's when I was writing a lot of riffs. The production really blows on that album, but I really like it, because I'm a big fan of all of those changes and stuff, but I simplify in the sake of "Let's make a good song". Rhythm tempos are hard because you have to get in the pocket so to speak, and be able to bang your head, instead of jumping from one part to another so that you can't get into one mood at all! That's kind of a chaotic mood, and sometimes that works, but most of the time it makes a song very unlikable. We kinda got away from that with Fearless... and just went for making a killer thrash/old school death metal album. And it wasn't because all of a sudden Bewitched is cool, or Guillotine, but because we were just doing what we wanted to do. Some people were like "Oh that's cool, Deceased is doing the retro thing too..." No we're not. No, that's just what felt good after Blueprints. Here with this album, I don't know what to hell to call this new album. People ask me how to describe it and I just say that it's death metal. It's dark and morbid and moody, and to me that's death metal! We don't have to sound like Cannibal Corpse or Obituary to be death metal. To me it leaves a darker feeling, a more butterflies in your stomach feeling than anything you'd ever hear on Slowly We Rot, you know? I love a lot of music. I'm a big fan of oldies and classic rock, and I love it because they're good songs, I love a good song. I like it also because they're talented people that write good music, so our thing with this band is that we want good verses and we want great choruses. We want great solo sections and a lot of bands could care less about playing leads that matter! Like, I listen to Slayer and in the early days they cared about their leads, and later, they just became a blur of shit! I love the lead on like Metalstorm, now it just sounds like 10 seconds of white noise. I'll say this as well, if Dave Lombardo hadn't been their drummer I don't think they

would have broke. I'm not a big fan of Reign in Blood, I prefer Show No Mercy. I tell you, have you been to our website? I'm not a big fan of computers, but Mark has got like this huge, detailed history of the band, it's like 300 pages or something. People have said that it's like reading a VH1 Behind the Music episode. I think he's only like up to the early nineties now, but the WHOLE history is up there, and you could read the entire history, there's tons of pictures, sound bites.

RoR - You mentioned trouble with touring before, any confirmed dates, like maybe the Pacific Islands?

KF - We're actually supposed to go to Puerto Rico to play. This guy down there Ray is actually putting out our live CD in a couple of weeks, it's actually Thrash Corner records. He's putting out our live CD which is called Up the Tombstones 2000, we did it a few months back at this club, which actually went out of business, but the show was great! We had a little 8-track digital thing which was nice. We actually do a cover of Krokus's Headhunter there. It's pretty cool, all the old timers came out for this one night of terror.

RoR - Did you mix up a lot of stuff from the older albums?

KF - Yeah, we played stuff from the first demo, Sick Thrash is on there, we got stuff from almost every record, Robotic Village, 13 Frightened Souls, Fearless..., Dark Chilling Heartbeat. We played a lot of songs, but some of them didn't make the final mix because near the end we had some microphone problems. We did Feasting on Skulls, 2 Minutes to Midnight and Wrathchild, but those ones we cut because we had technical problems beyond our control. It's a pretty cool show.

RoR - Then it's really a "live" album? You didn't take it back into the studio and re-do, say the drums, did you [I won't mention the band, NOT Deceased, that just did that on their "live" album].

KF - We did do a couple of overdubs here and there, but it was only because of those technical problems, not because of the performance. It just made it sound more enjoyable, and as I said before, this is part of the epitaph, so we wanted it to be as good as possible. The place was packed, you know, and tons of people were up on stage, screaming into the microphone during the lyrics. So that means either ditch the whole track or redo that vocal line. I don't think anybody can tell where these were done though. And I also say it's live because there are a lot of spots where we went for energy quality over quality.

RoR - People are really mixed over live albums, but I always really liked them for a couple of reasons, one is that if a band has a nice back catalog with different members at different times, you get to hear those old songs interpreted a different way, you know? I mean, I like Clive Burr, but I really want to hear Nicko play those old songs, you know?

KF - Yeah, I know what you mean, I'd like to hear Clive Burr play some of the Nicko stuff, you know, like Where Eagles Dare!

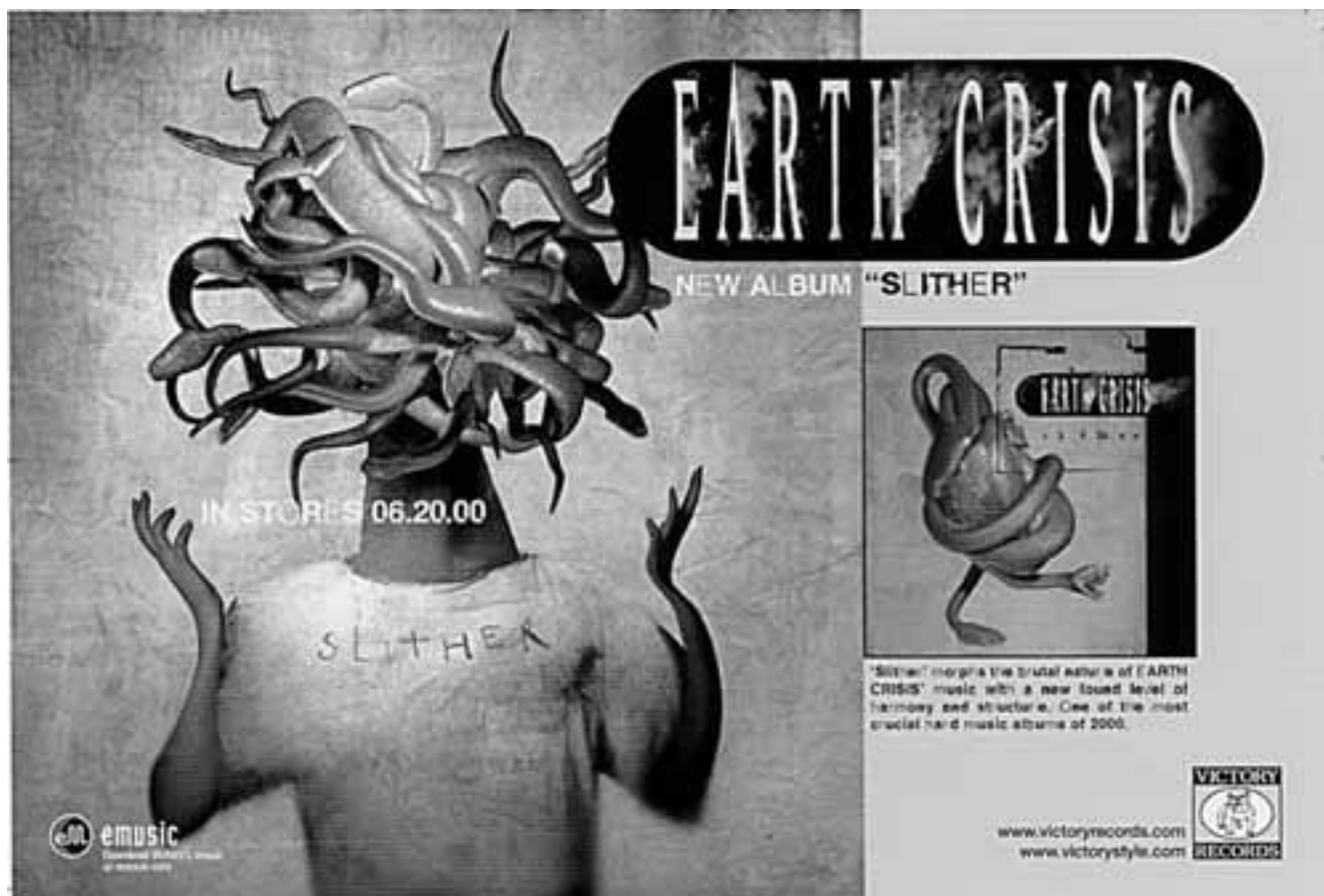
RoR - OK, so who do you prefer, Clive or Nicko?

KF - [sighs], I like Nicko. I love Clive, but Clive was too much of a hihat man, a lot of hihat work. So I like Clive, but goddamn, he just stopped playing beats, just started playing cymbals, and while we're on it, I'm not a big fan of the new Maiden at all [Brave New World]. Everybody's been asking me about that, and I was all psyched for it, but when I got



it, I just felt "Man! This thing couldn't be any mellow, could it?" I totally respect Steve Harris for still not caring about what other people think, and I know he's a big Tull fan, but at the same time if you're playing Iron Maiden it's gotta be ballsy metal. You know, I'm a big fan of all the Iron Maiden albums that everyone else hates. I worship The X Factor, I didn't like Virtual XI, but I love The X Factor a lot. It was a dark album, and I took it as a one off thing, but I see now that they've been in this mellow mode for a while it's throwing me through a loop. I'm also a huge [pronounced huuuuuge] fan of No Prayer for the Dying. I love that record, I would give it a ten plus, and I also love Fear of the Dark, minus Weekend Warrior and maybe one other song... I thought that the new record would have a lot more songs like Be Quick or Be Dead, you know? The only songs that I like on the new record at all are The Nomad, Fallen Angel, The Mercenary and The Wicker Man, but the single version where they have the backup vocals on the chorus. But there's some horrible songs, Out of the Silent Planet, what is that one, Hall of Mirrors? Blood Brothers? Man, there's some bad stuff on there. I call the

album Peter Paul and Maiden [laughs]. I'll be there for the tour though!



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If you ever been interested in the ambient side of extreme music, Meatjack may just be your ticket. Using space as a weapon in their musical structures, this Baltimore band brings to mind the better moments of great bands such as The Swans, Neurosis and others of that ilk. It's fitting to me that John Waters chose to use one of their tracks in his forthcoming movie, for like Waters, Meatjack put on display that which we care to ignore in society, but is inherently linked to as human beings, the dark side of reality.

RoR - Let's go back to the beginning of the band's existence. How did all of this come about, more specifically, what factors came together to give birth to the Meatjack experience? Maybe you could work in how you got the strange and disturbing moniker Meatjack... (yeah, this is the everpresent initial "history" question!)

Brian-I started writing songs with my brother Jason in 1988 and we decided to start a band and make the live show a complete audio & visual assault. MEATJACK came out of the remnants of that band in 1993. There were various lineup changes. Our original drummer Mike came up with the band's name. J.R. (our current filmmaker/projectionist) joined on in December of 1998.

Jason-We were, and still are, into bands like Voivod, Butthole Surfers, King Crimson & Black Sabbath and basically dissonant music in general. Voivod & Butthole Surfers had a visual element that we liked.

RoR - Musically, on Trust and the Damad/Meatjack split, you wander some pretty extreme soundscapes, what influences you to create (destroy)? How much of the band's sound is influenced by your environment? What's the process for writing material. I ask because this is not your average riff-based model for songwriting!

Brian - Everything that has ever happened to us influences what we do. The music we like and life's experiences influence us. Baltimore is less than beautiful. The city is falling apart. I'm sure some of that creeps into the songs. Everyone in the band contributes to the song writing. Usually a song starts with a riff and it just builds from there. We'll spend a lot of time playing all of the parts in different ways and trying to trim the fat wherever possible. Lyrics and visuals usually come later as the song develops.

RoR - Trust was your first full length album, with some splits/7" work done before, how has the sound changed (if at all) since the band's inception. Where do you see this leading to in the future? More/less speed, more discordance?

Brian - Our sound has become more focused, aggressive and dynamic. More attention is paid to song writing and tones. The new material on the 10" is the direction that we are going. More experimentation, more emphasis on atmosphere

or mood. There's no conscious effort for speed or dissonance, whatever happens when we write happens.

RoR - What I hear sounds like it this would be just crushing live. I was actually surprised at the brevity of the full length. It's pretty easy to expand songs in this style into epics which can sometimes lose focus. Are songs drawn out more live, or do you stay pretty true to the recordings live? Would you say that your recordings are an accurate representation of the band? I'm only asking because a lot of bands feel that their energy created live will never translate into a recording, that you have to experience their set with all sense to truly appreciate things.

Brian - The CD is a very accurate representation of the musical part of the live show thanks to Jon Smulyan (engineering genius) at TVR. The live show is more of an overall sensory overload. It's short but intense. With the visuals and the music a lot of information is thrown at the audience in the space of a half an hour. Also, nothing ruins a show more than a band that plays too long. We are loud but we know when to shut up.

RoR - And then on that note (if you haven't answered it), what can one expect at a Meatjack show? It's been hinting that there are strong visuals associated with the band.

Brian - The shows are high energy and very loud. The visuals are a combination of 16mm films and slides, some are found images and some are created specifically for the band/song. J.R. does a lot of layering of images using multiple projectors. Sometimes the visuals are sparse and minimal. Other times, a complete barrage of imagery. It varies, shifting with the mood of the songs.

RoR - I noticed on your site that you're advertising for a new drummer. What's the story there? How can be interested people get in touch with you? Is it that hard to find a drummer in the Baltimore area? What kind of person would be the perfect addition to Meatjack?

Brian - Our last drummer decided to move on. There doesn't seem to be too many people locally who are into what we're doing and can make the commitment. What we're looking for is someone who is reliable, hard working, somewhat mentally stable, no excessive drug or alcohol problem, able to tour, has profes-

sional gear, and able to contribute creatively. You can contact us through email at: meatjack@starpower.net or at P.O. Box 4526, Baltimore, MD 21212.

RoR - What is the scene in Baltimore like? Is extreme music received well? Are there many places to play live? I have some friends been relocating their band from here to Annapolis, what can they expect to find (as there is only a few places to play live here) in the local scene around there?

Brian - The Baltimore scene could be better but it's not bad. There's a small but dedicated audience for extreme music here, some good bands, and a few venues that support it. We don't know much about what's going on in Annapolis these days since we haven't played there in a while.

RoR - I also saw that John Waters is using a track of yours in his new movie. I know that he's a Baltimorean, how did you get hooked up with him?

Brian - We found out that John Waters was looking for heavy music for his new film Cecil B. Demented. We sent a CD to his music director and they decided to use the song "Upstart" (Song # 9 on "Trust". It is not listed on the first pressing) for a scene in the film.

RoR - Have you noticed that there seem to be plane crashes, shootings and general mayhem this year? Do you think all this is due to coincidence, overpopulation, or just the media finding a larger audience in shock journalism? Or maybe we're all just going to hell in a handbasket? And as the world ends, what will Meatjack be doing? What does the future hold for you?

Brian - Probably a lot of this is overpopulation, combined with the media and audience's need for sensationalism. If the world doesn't end by the time we're old we'll have to end it personally. As for the future, we'll continue writing and touring because that's what we like to do.

Borknagar are one of those bands that have quickly gone from “project” status to self-sufficient entity. Releasing four strong albums in pretty much as many years, it the prolific genius of one Oystein G. Brun continues to amaze me. With 1998’s *The Archaic Course* being one of my favorites for that year, *Quintessence* proves to be more than a continuation on that well paved road. Heavier and more succinct than its predecessor, the newest entry into the Borknagar catalog showcases the talents of some recent additions, most notably A Spiral Architect’s Asgeir Mickelson on Drums. It’s hard to describe in words what drives one to create music of this magnitude, but even harder is the task of finding the proper questions to unveil these mysteries. What follows is a brief venture into one of the more creative minds in metal today.



RoR - I've gotten the chance to hear the new album a few times so far, and it's sinking in slowly. But that's something that I noticed with *The Archaic Course*, that it took a couple of weeks for that to really sink in, but once it did, it stayed with me for months.

OB - That's good, because I personally think that's the sign of a quality album, when you need more time to consume the whole thing.

RoR - As I always do, I'm start comparing this album to the previous one, and one thing that I noticed immediately is that *Quintessence* seems to be a heavier album?

OB - Yeah, I think it is. *The Archaic Course* was (and is) the most epic album that we were able to do at the time, so it wouldn't make sense to try and copy that or to make another album of that type. We decided to make this album with a little bit more attitude.

RoR - One other thing that I noticed was that the first three albums came out within about a year of each other, but you took more time for this one. Was that because this was the

first time that you toured on an album, lineup changes, or did you just want to take more time to write?

OB - Actually, yeah, it was because of the two tours, and also because we did have the lineup problems, we wanted to take some time to find the right people for this album. I guess we used at least a half of a year to find the people that we wanted to have in the band, and I think in the long run that was the best thing for us, for I feel that we now have the strongest lineup that we've ever had. I've said this before [laughs], but this is the longest lasting lineup so far.

RoR - The people you found now are in other projects as well though, is Borknagar the top priority for everyone? Do you see any touring conflicts arising?

OB - Nah, not really. Simen is involved in Dimmu Borgir, and will have to take some time there, but the guy who organizes our studio time and our tours is also the guy who does that for Dimmu Borgir, so he's organizing that so that Simen can do both. As for the rest of the guys, our drummer and Lars are in bands that are not

really on the level where they can go on tours, so I think that they will not cause any problems.

RoR - So was this last US tour the first time that you were in the United States, how did we treat you?

OB - Oh, it was cool, [laughs] although our first impression wasn't a very good one. We got stopped at customs, I guess because we have long hair and play rock and roll, but they stopped us because we didn't actually know the name of the place that we were going to stay at. So we sat there for about a half an hour while they tried to figure it out, but finally the woman that worked at customs was like "OK, guys, come on, there's no problem..." So, our first impression wasn't that good, but we had some days off where we got to see some places, so that was cool. Jens and I rented a car and we drove up the west coast of the U.S., and that was a really great car drive. I mean, I live in a quite beautiful country, but that car ride was really great. Also the time that we spent in L.A. and Hollywood with the Century Media people was really cool. It was something different than we were used to seeing for sure.

RoR - This trip also found you with a couple new members who were hired just for that tour. One thing I was wondering though, you seemed to find two replacement drummers from England, why was that?

OB - Actually, the thing with Justin Greaves came up because we were offered a chance to go on tour with Cradle of Filth, but we had no official drummer. So we said OK, but you have to find us a drummer, and if you don't find us a drummer you have to take the responsibility, etc... So they couldn't find a drummer in Norway, so the management ended up getting Justin from Nottingham. So we rehearsed for one or two days and then we went on tour. It wasn't the ultimate situation for us, I mean it was a big tour with Cradle and Napalm Death, big audiences and all, but at the end of the day it was pretty cool.

RoR - I only know Justin's work from Iron Monkey. I know that he filled in an Entombed tour, but I was surprised that he would end up in a black/death metal band.

OB - Yeah, it was OK, but he wasn't really into the music that much, I think. He was completely professional, and he was able to do what we wanted him to do, but it wasn't the ultimate situation. So things became quite different when we got Nick Barker because he is such an awesome drummer. He took like a day and then knew the songs just great.

RoR - You couldn't get him to stay though, huh?

OB - Nah, that was not the intention, because we all knew that he was busy with Dimmu Borgir and Lock Up, so I just asked him as a friend if he could help us out with this tour.

RoR - But then you got Asgeir, and he's brought up the drum level another notch since the last album.

OB - Oh yeah, as I said before, we took some time to make sure that we could get really good musicians, and I think that Asgeir is a really good drummer. I would never change him for, well for example, Nick Barker.

RoR - I don't know if you think about this when you're writing the music, but it seems as though either you leave a lot of room for the drums in the arrangements. There are a lot of small fills that really accent things well.

OB [laughing] I don't know, I don't think I do it intentionally, but I do try to think about the song as a complete finished product, and I think that I let the drums and such be as free as they want. It's the same with the vocals, Simen is as free as he wants when it comes to the vocal lines. I write the basic melody lines, but at the end of the day the other guys have a lot of impact on the final songs, so I guess I do leave a lot of space open for input.

RoR - That was another question I had, when you visualize the song, are you building it from the riff up or do you have an idea for a song as a whole in the beginning?

OB - I basically have a couple of riffs, and maybe a basic idea for a song, what kind of song I want. It's quite strange because when I'm thinking of songs I can see a lot of landscapes and colors which describe the song. It's very difficult to explain, really. I have a couple of riffs and then I figure out what kind of song I want, what kind of beats, etc. It's not long, but it's quite a process to come up with the songs, with things maybe changing a little on the way.

RoR - I think that seeing the songs as colors and landscapes would help to add a lot of the emotion, because there's a lot of that present in your material.

OB - Definitely, and I think that the reason that there is so much emotion here is because, at least for my sake, we are totally honest with the music. I don't try to gain any commercial success which would try to change my music, I just do music that I feel totally comfortable with.

RoR - Maybe there's more commercial success with that kind of music in Scandinavia or Europe, but in the states, it's really hard to play epic metal and make a living out of it. In that regard though, I can't imagine that Century Media is putting any constraints on what you can produce musically, are they?

OB - The first album that we did on Century Media, The Olden Domain, was a little difficult. They were always checking up on us, and they wanted a pre-production tape from us. They tried to give us some advice, you know. But we had kind of proved that we do our thing no matter what, and if they tried to make us something that we are not, it would quite much fail. I think that they know that though, and actually on the last album, they didn't ask for a pre-production tape or anything. We just did everything ourselves and they were happy. For us, that's a totally cool situation, because it seems that they respect and trust that we'll give them a quality product.

RoR - What do you attribute the huge growth of the band to? The first album is really primal and raw, with The Archaic Course being this epic affair, to Quintessence's refined attack? It is the musicians, the production, your vision?

OB - [sighs, laughs] If I only had an answer to that. My idea behind making music and the band is to always progress, and then I am comfortable. I've actually written two or three new songs now, and I think that they are the best songs that we have ever done. It's definitely just a matter of progression, and other than that, I don't know.

RoR - Well have you ever felt limited in the

past, like "I have these ideas, but not the right people to play them", or "I don't have the right production..."

OB - Not really, the only thing is that I am a little bit unhappy with the guitar sound on The Olden Domain and The Archaic Course, I think it's a little weak. Actually the production in general, they were not able to produce some of the heavier aspects, like blastbeats. I remember when we were doing The Olden Domain at Woodhouse Studios we were doing one song which kind of opened with a blastbeat, and they were all like "what the hell is this?!" So I kind of realized at that point, that if we were to realize our vision that we would have to change studios for this album. And I felt that Abyss studio was a good option for that, because Peter is completely professional about it, and he's able to get a really heavy sound.

RoR - So do you think that Quintessence is the best representation of your vision to date?

OB - I don't know, I would say that all of the albums that we have done are equal, so to speak. I'm really proud of The Olden Domain, yet I think that some parts of the first album are really killer. I think that The Archaic Course is also great, but then all of the albums are different, so it's really hard for me to tell which of the albums is the best, or my favorite. So maybe they're not all equal in a technical sense, but in that regard they're all getting better in terms of musicianship. I don't claim that this new one is a better album than The Archaic Course, but for us right now it is definitely the most mature.

Update - As of this writing, Simen has left the band to concentrate full time on Dimmu Borgir.



It's not too often that an album comes along and just completely blows me away upon the first listen, but sometimes that's a good thing. Have you ever found that an album you immediately identified with suddenly lost its luster? For me, it's the albums which grow on me slowly over time that become my ultimate favorites, a place where Mental Home now resides. I knew much about this band from reading their reviews, but it wasn't until actually experiencing the new album for myself did I realize what people meant in their admiration for these Russian masters. You can read the review in this issue to see how I tried to explain what I think about this work of art, but really, you just have to hear it for yourself. So here's the interview, one trans-pacific call from Moscow to Honolulu that hopefully sheds some light on what goes on inside the mind of Mental Home's Michael "Maiden" Smirnov.

RoR - You guys have a pretty good internet personality, what I mean is that your website looks pretty good.

Maiden - Yeah, I know. I think that it was the first site about Russian heavy metal. Nowadays there are more but when I started there were no sites at all.

RoR - Well, honestly, for a lot of people you are the only Russian heavy metal band!

Maiden - Sure, but people outside of Russia should know that we have good heavy metal here, not only Vodka and eternal winter [laughs]. Some people do think that white bears are walking down the streets in Moscow.

RoR - Most Americans (hey, I'm there too, I've never been to Russia, yet!) only know Russia from a few movies, like Moscow on the Hudson, it's a pretty closed environment. How has Russia changed though over the course of the band's life. Has it gotten easier to do recordings and play heavy metal or has it been pretty good all through the nineties?

Maiden - Well [pauses] basically everything about the band has changed. We all grew up as people and we got experience in writing music and recording music, you know production and everything else. The recording facilities and studios have bought more expensive equipment, so now we have more possibilities to realize and produce our ideas and what's inside our minds. Musically, we all grew up as well, and our lyrics show this also. Because when you grow up as people you begin to think in a more complicated

way and your lyrics become better. If you compare the lyrics from our first album (which should soon become available on CD) and the last one, it shows that difference very much.

RoR - What you would say that the first album was based more on, more traditional heavy metal?

Maiden - No, not traditional heavy metal, I would say that it's more thrashy and doomy. Before Mental Home there was another band called Werewolf, the members were almost the same, it was the brothers Dmitriev as they play now, with the original guitarist Roman. So they played music more into thrash, and when they decided to play something more doomy they changed the name and changed bass player and keyboard player. On the first album there were some remains of what had been before, you know, some thrash and doomy parts, like a fast doom band! That was Funeral Service (1994), and after that there was Mirrorland, which was also recorded in 1994 but not released until 1995. I think that's still our best selling album, it sold more than 10,000 copies.

RoR - And that didn't have really good distribution worldwide either, did it?

Maiden - No, but things were better for metal in general in those days, so I think that fans were more active and more people were listening to metal. Now we have all this shit music that I personally do not listen to, but young people that are like 15 or 16 are not into metal, they are into pop and what's on MTV now.

RoR - So MTV's pretty big over there?

Maiden - Yeah, we have two channels, you know. Russian MTV and a music TV channel that represents the USA, and they are both almost 24 hours a day.

RoR - Are those channels pretty different then?

Maiden - Nooo, they show American music, but here they mix in Russian bands, and some Russian television shows like Hit Parade. There's no metal here on MTV though, as you may know. I think that it's the same in the United States, except for maybe Metallica or Guns and Roses.

RoR - Yeah, but there used to be...

Maiden I know, I know!!! And in Europe it was very cool, Headbanger's Ball and all. But now there is nothing. I remember Slayer complaining that when they shot their video, there was no place to play it in America, so they sent it to Europe to get played. In their native country the fans did not see their video while in Europe the situation is only so-so.

RoR - It's changed so much that one station here, VH-1, which used to be only for people over 40 now shows more hard music than MTV, while MTV is more talk shows and teen veiled sex shows, it's all pretty retarded.

Maiden - I know the situation, because I've read many interviews with Monsters of Rock, and they were all complaining about MTV becoming more poppy and not playing any more heavy

metal.

RoR - It seems as though people here are really accepting your new album though, so something must be going right.

Maiden - Yes, because with signing with Century Media we get much better distribution around the world, so now I see our album in many on-line music stores, and even here in Moscow there is a very big music store who has a website called Purple Legion [sp?], where I was very surprised to see our new album on-line there for about \$14. I was really surprised and I told the other members, and all of us were like "Wow", because there were no other Russian bands there. Maybe those guys sell the record without knowing that we are from Russia, they might think that we are an American band! I see it in the interviews as well. Since I am the only one who handles all of the interviews I know that we are doing quite a lot more interviews. Sometimes I wake up and I have no idea what I have done and what I have left to do. I wish I could get each one and the I could have a full collection of every interview that I have done now.

RoR - The second half of that last thought is that I think that people are accepting the album well, but it's almost surprising, because to me, as much as people thought that Black Art was a dark album, I thought that this was much more experimental, and a bit more difficult to ingest all at once.

Maiden - Let me just say this also, our next album is going to be very much different than this last one. If you go back and listen to each of our five albums, you will see that the next one is very much different. But so was Black Art from Upon the Shores..., and Vale from Black Art, and so back. On Black Art, we were in a very dark mood, there was a lot of sorrow, listen to it and you will see. Before, when we came to the studio also, we told ourselves, "Well, we can use this instrument, but not this one." Or, "We can't use this riff because it's not accepted in heavy metal music." Now, we just feel like, why not? Why shouldn't we use a new riff or a new instrument? So in that sense we became more experimental and we didn't limit ourselves by certain boundaries, like worrying about whether or not fans will accept our new songs or not understand them. Well, we grow up and we want our fans to grow up as well. I remember Metallica saying in the middle 80s that they had to change because they couldn't make 10 Kill 'Em Alls one after another. All bands are like that though, if you listen to a band like Dark Tranquillity, they are very much like that. They were pretty much like all of the other Gothenburg bands like In Flames, Ceremonial Oath, At the Gates, etc... They were more or less the same, but at some point they changed, and their Projector album was very much different than all of the other In Flames and other albums before that. And their next one Haven is even more different than Projector. So they started to

play music instead of playing in only a certain genre.

RoR - It's hard for me because I loved those old albums, and sometimes bands do lose me. Entombed is a good example of that for me.

Maiden - I know what you mean, a good example of that is Paradise Lost and Tiamat. I love Clouds, I think it is their best album, but I cannot accept at all their last one Skeleton Skeletron or A Deeper Kind of Slumber. I cannot accept it because they changed so much that there is absolutely no trace left of what they were. Also Paradise Lost, because they became so electronic...

RoR - Well, that's the way I felt about Dark Tranquillity. I really love the first two, but Projector threw me through a huge loop...

Maiden - Really?!

RoR - Yeah... I had a lot of trouble with it. Now



Haven I can deal with more, but only because it's less of a departure than Projector was for me.

Maiden - Because they didn't use the clean vocals!

RoR - You're right, I didn't like the clean vocals. But then again, there are bands like Bolt Thrower, who I love, but after a ...For Victory, you know they're not going to change, and probably not top it either.

Maiden - I can assure you that the difference that happened with Dark Tranquillity is completely different than what happened to Paradise Lost, Moonspell and Tiamat [I wonder why Samael wasn't brought up at all?!], because they changed so much they have nothing to do with their old selves. I think they should have changed their names. But we are not following their steps though. The next CD will be more experimental, but it's not intentional that we do this. We just feel differently with years passing by. The point really is that we don't hold back anymore when it comes to songwriting.

RoR - Do you feel more comfortable doing this now because you have built a fan base, and you know that people will support what you do because they want to hear what you create?

Maiden - We always try to explain what we have done and why we are doing this. We would love for our fans to be educated, and their IQ to be high, you know, have fans that are clever guys! I don't want fans that come to the show to just drink beer and to "Bang your head against the stage like you never did before..." I don't like that style. It is good, but if that is all that is there then there is nothing left.

RoR - What's interesting to me is that when I talk to people about the album a lot of people have compared parts of Upon the Shores... to bands like Anacrusis or Voivod. I wondered if you were influenced at all by bands like that or if that's just a coincidence?

Maiden - No no no! I have heard that we started sounding like Nirvana! I have heard it so many times that I started to believe that maybe we are sounding like Nirvana [I assure you, they don't!]. Maybe I missed something there.

RoR - I didn't really like the comparisons there, but maybe because you are doing something that you can't really describe easily [at least, I can't], that those other bands that defy categorization come to mind. So, no hidden Anacrusis albums in your collection?

Maiden - No. No Anacrusis, but is that a band that you would recommend? [And here's where we begin our ten minute discussion on Anacrusis, easily one of the greatest bands to have existed]. I don't like to handle CDs that I don't like, so I like to listen to them first and then only buy CDs that I am proud to own. Me and my younger brother together have a very big CD collection. It is not as big as some maniacs out there have, but together we have about 1,000 CDs. So to some people, that is a lot, but to some people, 5,000 is not a lot! But I think that it enough to listen to good music everyday. Today my playlist includes the new Dark Tranquillity, the new Gathering, the new In Flames and also Anathema's Judgement. I am very proud of that album, I think that it's a good example of tragedy in music.

RoR - You must have heard Katatonia then. They take a very simple approach to the songwriting, but the chords that they choose are very dramatic.

Maiden - Yes, I love them. I've got almost all of their CDs. I know that it is simple, and now they play stuff that is almost grunge metal now. But if you listen to it carefully you will hear that it is sad and tragic. They have changed also though, for if you remember their Dance of December souls, it was like a black and doom metal mixed together. And now they play absolutely different stuff but I still love them.

RoR - I actually heard your album for the first time in Andreas's (cofounder of The End Records) car, and at first I didn't think too much of it, but of course later I had the melodies running through my head and after a few weeks it was all I wanted to listen to! So I guess what I'm saying is that this isn't an "instant gratification" album for me, but once I started to get it, I almost neglected to review anything else people I didn't want to stop listening!

Maiden - Whoa, thanks a lot... You know, the new one coming up is really experimental. When we released *Black Art*, we didn't get any complaints, but now with *Upon the Shores*..., we're getting some complaints, and the reviews are pretty much 50/50. Orthodox fans and some orthodox magazines don't accept any changes. They want a band to play in one certain style over and over again. Maybe they want all of the band's albums to sound like each other. So we got many complaints that we've started playing like Nirvana [What is this?! Maybe I just haven't listened to as much Nirvana as these other reviewers, but I do NOT see the connection!], what are those keyboards, what are those drum machines in the middle of songs, etc.

RoR - Do you think that the keyboards had a larger role on Upon the Shores? You pretty much taught yourself the keyboard right as you joined the band, which was only about only about 6 months before Black Art, right?

Maiden - Not really six months. I joined the band in, let's see, July of 1996, and we entered the studio for *Black Art* in March of 1997

RoR - And in that time you learned most of the keyboard parts, wrote all the lyrics, I mean, it seems like you became a huge presence in the band. That makes me wonder if you added a lot more to Upon the Shores...?

Maiden - Well, I didn't write any tunes maybe, I did mostly help with arrangements. Because when we are in the studio I am not just a keyboard player, I am also a sound engineer and a kind of producer. I work a little at some studios helping guys record good guitar sounds and everything else, so I watch those guys to do everything right. With the new album, *Upon the Shores*..., I had been in a mental hospital in one month, May of 1999 I was there. And the guys were recording vocals while I was in there, and when I came out and I listened to what they had done I told them to record it all over again because it was awful! We sat down and rerecorded again maybe 90% of the tracks. It is always like that because someone needs to watch that.

RoR - It's hard when you're playing the music to step outside and see how the song sounds as a whole instead of just your one piece of it sometimes. So an outside producer is a bonus most of the time.

Maiden - Yeah, and that's why for the next one we've invited the guy who mixed *Upon the Shores*. He will work with us from the very beginning this next time. He's a very famous guy, and he's worked with so many bands from so many genres. So we will work with him from the very beginning so that we can get everything correct, because we are not genius music producers, we're only musicians. In fact, musicians should be musicians, and producers should be producers, and sound engineers should be sound engineers, and their paths



shouldn't cross.

RoR - It sounds to me like the drums were triggered on Black Art and Upon the Shores, did you do that for ease or is it hard to get a good live drum sound in the studio there?

Maiden - I remember that you wrote something in an email about entering the studio, what was that about?

RoR - Yeah, we're going in to record our second album next week, I play drums.

Maiden - Ah, you play drums. What is the band?

RoR - We're called Crucible. The band actually toured near you last year, played a show in Lithuania, Estonia...

Maiden - Lithuania?! Supporting some band?

RoR - Jesus Martyr. Do you know Neglected Fields? They actually went to one of those shows and rode in the van with the band to the next show, which I think was Estonia.

Maiden - Jesus Martyr! I know that show! I did not go there, but I remember when that show happened, and I started to listening to Jesus Martyr right before they came there, because I read that they were coming and I wanted to know what they sounded like. *Neglected Fields* are very good friends of mine. Wow! OK though, getting back to recording, I can tell you how we recorded the drums for the last three albums. It is a conventional drumkit, but instead of microphones, there are sensors [triggers], and

then everything is recorded down into MIDI into Cakewalk or Cubase. So then for mixing we just play those files through a drum module like the Alesis DM-5 or D4. It is very hard to record a good live drum sound, and it is even harder to correct any errors when you play, you know mistakes. So when you record this way through MIDI, you can record drums slower than they will be in the final mix, and after recording you can move some notes here and there. So it's easier. We don't quantize though [when a program automatically moves the notes to the closest time subdivision, say an eighth or quarter note] because then it starts to sound like a fucking drum machine. You lose all the dynamics then as well. For the next one we should record live drums into analog, probably 24 track reel to reel tape because we want to get some really killer sounds. We chose the digital though because sometimes it's really hard to get a good live sound, that's why we did 50/50. Even with the guitars we used some tube amplifiers, but then we took and ESP guitar with EMG

pickups, you know, everything active. We did everything that we could, but with drums, there was nothing we could do.

RoR - On thing that I have to mention is that the bass playing really stands out for me, I'm glad that you let him through in the mix. He's not doing anything incredibly flashy, but he really comes across, he accents things well.

Maiden - Our player is a fantastic guy. I've talked about this many times, but if we had to replace him, I don't think that we could find someone to do it, because he has his own style.

RoR - To kind of go back to talking about being a band from Russia, what's the furthest from Russia that you've played so far?

Maiden - We haven't actually played outside of the ex-USSR. We just cannot go places and

ask people to take us inside their set list, there should be some invitation and promotion. In Europe, we've gotten some invitations, but I think that maybe they were amateurs, because they were unsure about covering all expenses, and they also tried to invite us to big festivals with thousands of bands. It was not so good to go there and play without knowing what would happen!

RoR - Is The End Records hooking up anything in the US for you? [hint, hint Andreas...]

Maiden - Last year we were supposed to have a mini-tour in the United States, and to play in the Milwaukee Metal Festival, then play some show supporting The Gathering. We had some Visa troubles though, and the whole thing failed. All the advertisements were all done, and everything was set except the Visas. At the moment we don't have any plans to play outside of Russia, but if Century Media would send us then we'd be glad to go, because we're ready to kick some ass, and we've also gotten thousands of requests from fans to come over. We are ready day and night, we just need someone to invite us! Century Media should watch our sales, and if they feel that we are a worthy band, then they should send us for a tour.

RoR - In my mind, Russia seems very bleak, very cold, something that is definitely reflected in your music. Do you think that if you were living somewhere else that Mental Home would have the same sound, or does environment shape the band quite a bit?

Maiden - No, I think that we would not be what we are. If we lived in another country we would not play this, it would not be Mental Home music. Maybe as good as we play now, but everything matters, the geographical location, what nation we are, what condition we live... So if you change any part the music will change also.

RoR - And it's as you said, if you change as a person, and say, you get happier, or less depressed, it will reflect in the songs.

Maiden - [laughs] No, I don't think we'll be happier, because some guys have certain personalities, they are just sad no matter where they live. Most of my life I lived in Japan [Maiden Japan], I lived there for ten years, and I had money, I had everything, there was no need at all, but I am probably the darkest guy in the band.

RoR - Well, to try and wrap this thing up cleanly, tell me again about the new record before you go?

Maiden - We plan to record in winter I think, and we will record in different studios, I think. All 5 previous albums were recorded in the same studio. Now, we will use different studios for different instruments. For example, drums will be in one studio, vocals in another... We

will find the best studio for each part. Much of the writing is done, we've written 5 songs, and we're ready to write five more soon.

Mental Home on the net:
<http://www.rusmetal.ru/mentalhome/>

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Known to me as the band which Daniel Corchado came from and then departed back to after a more than passing position in Incantation, The Chasm was a band of which I knew, but had not heard. Man, was I living in ignorance, The Chasm being one of the best metal bands out there today. Procession to the Infraworld reigns supreme,, with really not that much more to say. Do yourself a favor and look for this over any of the other "new" releases you may be seeking your next buying session, you won't regret it.

RoR - I was introduced to The Chasm after reading reviews for Deathcult, and I was familiar with your work on Diabolical Conquest, but Procession... was the first time I actually heard the band. Needless to say, what I heard was like nothing that I had expected. I can't even describe what the sounds I hear are, all I want to do is bang my head and listen some more. What forces come together to make an album this intense, this emotional?

DC - Since the conception of the band at the beginning of 1993, I have Always wanted to create a different and more experimental form of death metal. The influence to create our songs comes straight from our minds and souls, the primal urge to recreate the turmoil that I feel inside through music is a priority for The Chasm. Our style is not very usual, and I have to say that this has given us some problems in getting a better record deal in the past years. We are not for the masses, The Chasm is a unique and unstoppable force of heavy metal of death that is not for everybody.

RoR - It not exactly "news" anymore that you relocated to Chicago for the band, but I wanted to know how you felt about the decision now. Chicago is also now touted as the "city of metal" in the U.S. now, do you see it that way? What is the local scene like to you in terms of support for a now hometown metal band? You had mentioned that The Chasm didn't actually have a huge Mexican fanbase while you were living there, has that changed at all? Now that you're in the U.S. are you more popular back in Mexico?

DC - I think that the decision to move here has been one of the best we have made in a long time. Things are turning out much better for us here than in Mexico, we don't have any regrets, we do not miss our country. The Chicago underground metal community has treated us great. The support and response from people over here has been excellent, the scene here is good. It could be better, but that happens everywhere, but also I have to say that [Chicago] is one of the best [scenes] in the USA, no doubt.

When we were in Mexico the support wasn't really there as I mentioned. Our style was really advanced for those times and people couldn't handle it. Right now I don't really know our status/situation in Mexico, but for what I've heard from some friends a lot of people are praising "Procession..." which kinda surprised me. I guess we are more popular now there,



since all the things we have done here have never been done before by any Mexican band.

RoR - Most album intros do the exact opposite of what they should and detract from the work as a whole, making them kind of a risky venture sometimes. You chose to use one here, but not only does it make perfect sense, it does exactly what it was supposed to do and elevates the mood of the album. Was that track written to be an intro/lead track initially, or are you going to tell me that "It's not really an intro"? Because for me, it really sets the tone for the entire album.

DC - Yes it's a fuckin' intro, but it's a complete and destructive song at the same time that prepares you to the utter decay and destruction that is about to begin. We created that song

specially to start the album. We did the same thing in "Deathcult...", maybe not as oppressive and dark as "Spectral Sons..." but still it gives you a warning for things to come; that the listener better gets ready for something different and still heavy, extreme and dark as hell. Once again, we are against the rules of what are called "intros" today: stupid keyboards or just plain movie samples. Fuck that, the creativity in the Necrocult can do more than that, just like the old masters did. Remember "Hell Awaits", "Nightfall" or "The Upcoming Terror"? Classics!!!

RoR - There are some of the most killer guitar work and solos that I have heard in a long time here, obviously creativity is key, but what else influences playing like this? Why is this element missing in so many bands today? You also manage to put longer songs together that are incredibly technical with numerous tempo changes, yet flow together seamlessly. Are these songs that are so thoroughly practiced that you can play them in your sleep, or recorded with more of a "jam" feel to keep spontaneity in the studio? What do you feed Antonio, and could I get some?

DC - You said the word, creativity. There's no point in playin' a certain style or maybe riff that has been done already! The mind, ideas and feelings that flow in our gray spirit are immense. We take the inspiration from the golden era, the 80s, and we mix 'em with our identity and personal

touch. We compose the songs with pure riffs that gives chills and fill our souls, then when we feel they are ready we just practice 'em as much as possible to have them ready when we go to the studio. It's hard shit to play, and it has to be as tight as possible. Sometimes there are one or two mistakes in the studio, but if the feeling is strong enough we say fuck it and just leave it like that. We are not fuckin' machines. Unfortunately we are human beings and that has to show in the recording, metal played by individuals with emotion and hunger for victory and death. The thing with Antonio is that he never took any lesson, nor did anybody in the band, he just grows and improves his style along with the band. His style is really unique. I can tell, and some people can out there too. He's the master of doom and he has been a very important piece in the building of our own style.

RoR - What is the secret formula to all of this? Some bands have one central figure who is the "visionary", leading others along the path, while other bands have four leaders that pull in four different directions... Are you all on the same page in terms of musical vision, or do all of you have separate ideas that meld into what becomes the final sound of The Chasm?

DC - In the past I wrote all the music and did the arrangements with Antonio. "Procession..." was written mostly by me, but Julio had a great input in the songs. The new album is going to be more like a 50/50 of cooperation between Julio and me. We came from the same days and we have the same musical tastes and we both know what we really want to create with our music. We are working together so fuckin' good... I mean, Antonio and myself are the founders of The Chasm, but Julio has been playing even a little bit longer than me! He started Tormentor around '87, which later became Shub Niggurath. He's a pioneer in the death metal scene in Mexico. I started Cenotaph in 88, and we are like the only people from that first generation of death metal in Mexico that are still active. Since those years we were friends, and after all this time we finally got the chance to play and compose metal together. Believe me, it has been the best line up for the cult, and that shows in "procession..." I think.

RoR - Taking myself as an example as someone who had yet to hear The Chasm due to a combination of my location (Hawaii) and somewhat limited availability of your past albums, how would one get a hold of these past works, and what could one expect if they were looking for more music based on what they'd heard on Procession...? For older albums that may be out of print, are there plans to re-release them, or is all energy being put towards the future for The Chasm?

DC - Well, I think there's a lot of past The Chasm elements in "Procession...". The real problem with those albums is the production, they were really weak and empty... Of course there are some totally different aspects in those CD's that you can't hear on "Procession..." For example, our first CD "Procreation of the Inner Temple" is a grotesque piece of progressive death metal, really, really unique, but the sound there is the worst we ever had. I'm proud of all our past recordings, but I think we're going to concentrate in the present and future of the band, to become a more destructive and original (always keeping in mind and respecting the rules of true heavy metal) every time we compose something. No plans for re-releases.

RoR - Along these lines, how has the move to Dwell records been so far? There must be more promotion and tour opportunities now? Who are you planning to blow off the stage this year? I just have to say that it would be just criminal if this album didn't get into the hands of every metalhead in the world, what can we do to make

this album as well known as it should be?

DC - Thanx for those comments and support. Well, Dwell is doing a great job with the promotion and distribution, I just wish they could give us a little more of a tour support, that would be killer. People that have experienced our live attack know of the potential that we have. We are going to do our best to tour, if that doesn't happen, well, it will suck, but we will continue with our crusade.

RoR - One negative to promos is that lyrics aren't included. I usually don't care, but here titles appear to keep away from the Lucifer/gore areas, making me more interested in what you have to say here. What's the main lyrical focus for The Chasm? Are the lyrics (or songs as a whole) inspired by what you see, what you read, what you live through daily?

DC - The lyrical concept of The Chasm is a pure gathering of my more inmost feelings, a wide spectrum of ideas and thought that flow in my inner self. I'm not inspired by anything else but myself and my inner temple, utter victory, hatred, depression and death, a philosophical way of seeing my life, past, present and future, in this world and mainly in the other.

RoR - You are said to be incredibly active in the underground scene, and a dedicated metal-head. Through time, how do you think that the underground scene has changed with regards to technology (e.g. the internet)? How important do you think that the festivals in the states are to the underground. Do they accomplish what they're supposed to do, or is everything mud-died in the politics of the whole thing?

DC - I just do what I feel [like] doing, metal is the meaning of my existence. This music has give me a lot, it has help me pass through hard and dark times. I'm part of an elite, the elite of real warriors of metal of death and defenders of the traditional and majestic power of heavy metal. Times has changed a lot in this so called 'scene'. I think everything is worse now, there is a lot of bullshit goin' on. New bands have to worry about playing from their hearts instead of trying to sound like their 'heroes'. The only hero I praise right now is the album of the same title by "Cutty Sark", hail!!!! The festivals have good intentions to help metal, but when 100 bands are playing in 2 days things kinda got out of control. I don't care really, as long as we can play for the real followers of the Necro cult we'll do it in a festival or in a basement.

RoR - Why do think that the mainstream seems to pick up on certain metal bands at different times (like every seven years)? How long do you think this current trend of heavier music being popular will last, or is this a sign of increasing tension and anger in the world? Ultimately, does the ludicrous popularity of a band like Slipknot help or hurt the entire metal scene, in your opinion?

DC - All those so called 'metal bands' are just a pathetic sign of how stupid people can be. That is supposed to be the metal of the year 2000? I puke in that garbage. I'd rather stay in the old years, taking strength and inspiration from those warriors, and create a devastating form of real metal of death for this times. I do not care about success or fame or money, obviously, after all this year of non stop fighting it's pretty clear that we are playing music for ourselves, and then for those interested and hunger for something authentic and fresh attached to the real metal rules. Hopefully death metal will be unpopular really soon, and only those that really feel and understand this music will stay standing and proud, living in the underground, like it was supposed to be...

RoR - Here at the end of this interview, what have we missed? What else does the metal populace need to know about The Chasm? Any last thoughts?

DC - I think this interview was really, really good. We appreciate your support Evan. Good luck with the 'zine, just spread the word about "Procession..." The real deathmongers will pick it up and comprehend it. We don't care about anybody else, just those that believe and feel the total power of real death metal!

Check out the official Chasm website at:
<http://www.naomediga.com/thechasm/guia.htm>



Part 4 of 4 of the history of Anacrusis as written by musical mastermind Kenn Nardi, 1999

We spent the summer of 1991 rehearsing the Manic material and waiting for the chance to play the new songs live. I must admit, there was quite a challenge in playing and singing some of these songs. In the past, most of my vocal parts were written guitar-in-hand. This was not the case with Manic. In fact, I had made a conscience effort not to approach the arrangements this way, rather recording demos of the music and singing along to the tapes later. If you listen to the first two albums, you will notice the vocal parts usually follow the guitar riffs pretty closely. I thought by doing them individually, it would give the effect of a separate vocalist, and generally make the arrangements more varied and interesting.

In early autumn we spent two months on the road with Overkill. They were touring in support of their Horrorscope album and we, and the Galactic Cowboys, opened 38 shows over a seven-week period. The only disappointing aspect was that, as the opening band, we only allowed a 30-minute set each night. With three albums under our belt, and longer than average songs, this severely limited the amount of material we were able to play. We opted to do just songs from Manic. The usual set list was six songs: Still Black, Something Real, Explained Away, Paint A Picture, I Love The World and sometimes Dream Again. This was a bit of a letdown to many fans that had waited since Suffering Hour to see us live. This is just the way it goes for every band until they get the opportunity to tour as the headliner. One thing this trip did accomplish was to tighten up our playing as



a unit. After returning home, we could play the songs backwards in our sleep and although we had maintained a consistent practice schedule (5 nights a week) since the very beginning, there is something about facing the challenge of a new club and a new crowd each night that matures a band like only touring can.

It was also at this time that we were given the opportunity to open several shows for Megadeth. They had just finished a run on the Monsters of Rock tour and had scheduled a few shows to work their way back home from New York to Los Angeles. One of the cities was our hometown of St. Louis and the rest were around the mid-West and the mid-South. We opened a total of eight shows, the largest of which was near New Orleans, in front of a crowd of over three thousand. The overall reaction from



audiences was good, for the most part, although due to the poor distribution of the album, most people had never heard of us and were not even aware that we would be playing instead of Alice in Chains, who were originally billed as the openers.

After returning home from this short mini-tour we immediately began to write material for the next album. I believe the first songs written were Sound the Alarm, Release, Grateful, and a slightly revamped version of Tools of Separation. We then began tossing around ideas at rehearsal that would later become Driven, Too Many Prophets, My Soul's Affliction, and A Screaming Breath. In usual fashion, I later took tapes containing riffs we were working on and



began arranging them into finished songs.

One significant difference in the arrangements on Screams and Whispers is the use of "orchestral" keyboard parts in a few of the songs. This was something that I had wanted to try for quite a while. Into the Pandemonium by Celtic Frost had been one of my favorite Metal albums ever, and one of the things that I loved most was the combination of very heavy riffs and orchestral instruments. There was something about it that made the music appear huge and ominous. People had often described our music as pseudo-classical, due to the fact that the songs often contained multilayered arrangement where each instrument was given a very different place in the musical "picture" which resulted in more interplay than was usually found within our genre. Our goal was to combine elements used by Celtic Frost on Pandemonium with more of an emphasis on melody.

The first thing I did was an arrangement of a piece of music I had been playing around with since I was about fourteen or fifteen. It was a fairly typical sounding little piece of "clean" guitar that was basically just a couple of minor chords with individually picked notes running up their relative scale. But when played on the keyboard, along with pulsing, underlying quarter notes, it was given completely new life. I quickly added a few transitional sections and what would later become Brotherhood? was born. Then next thing I did was program a few patterns on the drum machine and run it through

tons of compression. The combination of this simple chord progression and straight-time drumming created what I thought was something very unique. I knew it was something we could use to broaden the sound of the band, and although this particular demo would not be used for some months, it was what inspired Grateful and Too Many Prophets.

It was during this time that tensions began to grow between the members of the band mostly due to a universal dissatisfaction with our record label and what we perceived as a lackluster approach in their support of the previous albums. The biggest division was between our drummer, Chad and the other three members. Chad was increasingly unhappy with our inability to earn money from either record sales or touring. He was married and, with a young daughter as well, was finding it more and more difficult to support his family while devoting all his time to a band which was not generating any money. He had always been quite capable of earning a living playing the local bar scene and though I believe he truly respected what we were trying to accomplish musically, he began to criticize our timid approach to dealing with the business side of the industry. When he began to hint about joining a local cover-band to earn a few bucks, we were insulted and began to question the stability of the band which including a drummer who we felt might “jump ship” at any moment. We had spent several years trying to build the following we had, and were concerned that Chad’s more hard-nosed approach to dealing with our label might have resulted in us throwing the relationship we had built with them right out the window. Remember, we were in St. Louis, and in St. Louis record contract definitely did not grow on trees. So after much deliberation, Kevin, John, and I decided Chad would probably be happier somewhere else and we would be happier with a drummer more committed to Anacrusis. Sadly, we informed Chad that we were going to begin looking for a new drummer. By this time we had written most of the songs for the next album, and had set up a couple of local shows to try out some of the new material. Chad agreed to stay with us long enough to do these last two shows. The remainder of the album was written over the next couple of months using mostly ideas the four of us had worked on together, so even though Chad did not appear on the album, his contribution to the drum arrangements was very significant.

Next came the not-too-fun task of replacing Chad. This position would, of course, be filled by Paul Miles. Paul had been playing in local band around the St. Louis area for a number of years and we had actually seen him perform a couple of times. I think Chad may have actually recommended that we consider getting in touch with him. So, after contacting him and asking him to learn a couple of songs from Manic, we had him over for an audition. After running through Paint A Picture and Something Real it was clear that Paul definitely had the musi-

cal ability we were looking for. One thing we liked about him was that besides possessing the musicianship needed to play the newer material, he also had more of the “looseness” and “rawness” that had been lacking since Mike Owen’s departure.

By the time Paul joined the band, practically all of the new material was already written, and with studio time already booked, he pretty much just learned the songs as they appeared on demos recorded using a drum machine and drum parts arranged by either Chad or myself. Although Paul added a few things here and there, I sure he was more than a little disappointed by his level of input. Regardless, he understood the amount of time we had put into making this album our strongest yet. So after rehearsing with Paul for a couple of months we prepared to enter the studio again.

The one thing that we were all in agreement about was that we felt it would be a more relaxed environment if we recorded in St. Louis this time. We figured this would make it more convenient for band members to continue working at their respective jobs while the album was



being recorded. The other thing we agreed on was to hire Dave “Fuzzy” Dvornak to engineer the recording. “Fuzzy” had been an engineer at Royal Recorders during the recording of Manic and although not officially an engineer on the album, he had lent much of his time to try and help salvage the album. During the time since then he had become a friend of the band and his easygoing personality made him enjoyable to work with. We decided to use a 24-track studio built in the basement of a sound engineer we had worked with a few times at earlier local shows. The studio seemed to have everything we would need to do the initial recording and the price was definitely right. For about the amount we paid for two weeks at Royal Recorders we were able to block out two months this time. Of course, the equipment was not of the same caliber, but we felt that much of what Royal had to offer was unnecessary for our purposes. We also wanted to take our time and make sure we could feel more relaxed during the recording.

We began with the initial drum tracks, this time with John and me accompanying Paul. We thought this approach would give the songs more of a “loose” feel, as opposed to what

many people had described as the “mechanical” feel of Manic. In many ways, at the time, I think we knew that this album was what would either make or break the band. We knew that if we didn’t receive the much needed support of our label there might not be another Anacrusis album. With this in mind we set out to make an album that would fully define our sound by incorporating all of the elements used on our previous efforts along with the broadened sound of songs like Grateful and Brotherhood?

It didn’t take long to feel a degree of tension between our new drummer and the rest of the band. Kevin, John and myself had been together since the beginning of Anacrusis and felt a strong sense of family. We also felt as though Anacrusis was our creation and were very protective of it when it came to any outside input. In retrospect, Paul was in a very difficult position, whereas even though Chad had not been with us from the beginning, his relationship with me and the band was a long one. Paul, though familiar with Anacrusis when he joined, had never even heard our first two albums and didn’t seem to have much appreciation or respect for what we had accomplished up to this point. Paul often felt like an outsider, which is very common for a new member in any band with a few years behind it. We had a lot of work ahead of us and the last thing we wanted to deal with at this point was personality problems. So, without too many problems we carried on with the recording. Another problem was the relatively short time Paul had to learn the material. There was one song in particular that we had written with Chad that featured several very intricate double bass drum patterns that Paul had a really tough time with. Before entering the studio we had expressed a concern that Paul may have some difficulty playing it and offered to change a few parts if it would make the song more comfortable for him. He insisted that he just needed to practice it and it would not be a problem. This is not to cut down Paul’s ability but it was just one of those things that may feel natural to one player and extremely difficult to another player of equal ability. Another concern was the song contained many pieces contributed by Kevin and we didn’t want the song to be cut from the finished album, thus greatly diminishing Kevin’s input to the songwriting. Well, as things often go, when the time came to record it, and only a couple of attempts at the first few bars it was put on hold until later in the session and eventually dropped all together. The only other incident involved the song Brotherhood?

As I said before the bulk of the instrumental sections were written months before and the heavier sections containing the verses were actually taken from an old song from our first demo called Vultures Prey. This was another Heaven’s Flame leftover that we had never recorded. I had always liked the melody and chord progression and since it had a similar tempo and feel as the other new pieces I had come up with, I decided to combine them into

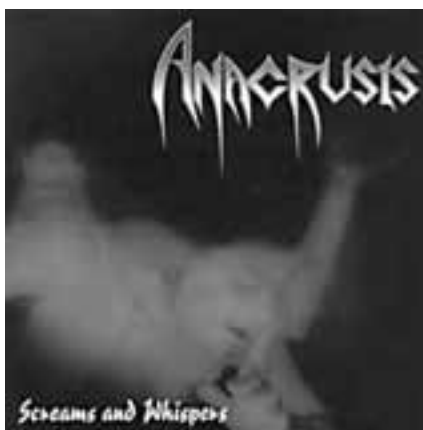
one song. I completely rewrote the lyrics and recorded a demo of it for the guys to hear. I'm not sure how popular it was with Kevin and John but I insisted that it was important that it was included on the album in order to "round out" the new element of orchestral sounds on several of the songs. I decided to place it as the last song on the album, this way if it was hated by the listener it was easy to just stop at the track before it rather than having to skip over a seven-minute song featuring "stupid keyboards". For some reason Paul seemed to keep putting off learning this song, and in the studio, ended up playing along to the demo tape one section at a time, figuring out the parts as we went along.

The rhythm guitar was the next obstacle we had to face. We seemed to have no problem getting a decent guitar sound in the basement or on stage, but for whatever reason as soon as we went into a studio it became a major challenge. As with "Manic" this time was no exception. One problem was due to the fact that we tuned extremely low, which always presented intonation and tuning problems. After struggling through most of the original tracks we actually went back and completely rerecorded all of the guitar parts. The bass tracks went the smoothest with John feeling much less rushed than the albums before. On Manic Kevin and John were constantly teasing each other about who would finish their parts the in the shorter amount of time. John had always suffered from "red-light" syndrome. This is a common condition in which a musician can play a song flawlessly, fifty times in a row, and then as soon as the record light comes on, he suddenly and completely forgets how to play his instrument. This time Kevin was ordered to remain outside the control room while John was tracking. Another difference this time was that we were able to commit more time to guitar solos. We put a little less emphasis on speed and a little more on melody and phrasing. We all particularly liked how Kevin's solo turned out on Driven, as I usually did the more melodic solos.

Another nice thing about having so much time was when I came to doing vocals. I was used to recording demos at home, where I am controlling the recorder and can quickly shuttle back and forth between sections in order to listen to or redo parts that aren't quite right. In a studio situation you are usually stuck in a booth outside the control room with the engineer working the control. This makes communication difficult and if you are off-key you have to wait for the tape to roll back to the right part and instead of jumping right back in and fixing it, you often stand there for a minute or two waiting for the song to come back to the right part. This was another big problem on Manic, with each line usually taking approximately five million takes. This time I usually went into the studio alone and with a microphone set up right in front of the mixing console, I could record just as I usually did at home. It made things much easier for me and boring enough for anyone else who happened to be there that they would usually

go away before too long. People love to make fun of the vocalist in the studio because the is nothing that sounds worse than your dry, unprocessed voice when they can't hear the music you are singing to. This is of course known as "walkman-sing-along" syndrome.

I think we spent about five weeks recording everything and the last few mixing. We had been concerned about the fact that the studio had no automation for mixing (this allows you to "write" volume changes or mute and unmute channels or effects and then "save" those changes to a computer which then performs those tasks each time you play back the tape). Where the board at Royal Recorders was fully automated, this time we had a dozen arms reaching in each direction trying to remember when to turn things up or down or when to mute something, etc. This is always a big restriction in mixing, mainly because if one person forgets to do something at the right time, you have to go back and do the whole thing over again or live with the mistake, depending on whether it's the third or four-hundredth time you have tried to get it right. Needless to say, with the amount of different guitar layers, and especially on the



songs containing "orchestration", the final result was less than fabulous. After we had completed mixing everything with less-than-satisfying results, we were convinced that the biggest problem was that we didn't have the right equipment to get the most out of what we considered our best recordings. After a couple of weeks we convinced the record label that we should go back to Royal Recorders and remix everything. They suggested that we hire Bill Metoyer to help out. Bill was well known for his work with Slayer, Trouble, and C.O.C. to name just a few. What we ended up with was an album that we were very happy with. No recording is without its flaws, but I think we were finally able to present our music as we had imagined it to sound. This is still the only one of our four albums that I personally like the sound of. For the most part it was very well received by those who were familiar with Anacrusis. Some said the keyboard parts were a little pretentious, but this was to be expected. If there had been a fifth album I can almost guarantee it would have been in the vein of the more "orchestral" songs.

There will always be those who prefer the raw speed of Suffering Hour, the dark moodiness of Reason or the technical iciness of Manic Impressions. It is always a matter of taste. I think as our swan song I am very proud of Screams and Whispers as I think it succeeded in summing up all aspects of what we were trying to say both lyrically and musically up to that time. It contains some of my favorite Anacrusis songs (Driven, Sound The Alarm, and Release) and, I feel, was a natural progression from where Manic left off. And with the number of bands in recent years who have incorporated "orchestral" elements in their recordings and performances (Metallica's S & M to name a very recent one), I'd like to think that, though we were certainly not the first, we were nonetheless at least a little ahead of the pack.

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REVIEWS

Adversam - Animadverte

2000 *Scarlet/SPV*

The black metal scene can be compared to the early eighties thrash movement and its big 5 bands. Like the thrash scene, you have your top bands such as Emperor, Cradle of Filth (yes, Cradle of Filth are black metal), Dimmu Borgir (no they didn't sell out), Immortal, Marduk, Mayhem and the ever growing legion of second tier bands like Gehenna, Catamenia, Naglfar, and so and so forth. Now, unless you're a "die hard must have every BM release stay at home worshipping the mystical trees" kind of guy/girl, than there really is no reason to buy this release. In a nut shell, Adversam share the same keyboard laden, cold and flat guitar tone and those crazy drum blasts that Emperor made their calling card on the "Nightside..." LP. Throw in a little Immortal and Dark Funeral, and a dash of Gehenna, and there you have it, Adversam! Not that its a bad thing, because Adversam have fashioned their sound (derivative as it is though) after the brightest (blackest?) in Black Metal, and Animadverte is a enjoyable listen. Clocking in at 36 minutes, it is one of the shorter LPs other there. Starting with the standard keyboard intro, they blast into some pretty decent stuff, though the songs get very monotonous after about 5 minutes and start to get a bit samey sounding. You know the feeling, a blast section here, screeching vocals there, a wash of keyboards here. To their credit, they pull this off much more effectively than a majority of their Black Metal brethren, and the keys that are added to the mix are at times, simply beautiful. In fact, it was the synths that kept my interest over repeated listens, as they can get pretty adventurous at times. If this were another 'zine, than this would automatically get a 9 fucking skulls sort of rating, but as good as this is, it's hardly an essential listening. If you want quality Black metal, than you can do no wrong with any of the bigger bands, if you must have something else, try Naglfar or Catamenia. - Review by John H.

Agalloch - Pale Folklore

1999 *The End Records*

Remember how, for a time, you were perfectly safe to buy anything off a certain label, for you just knew that the bands were quality? Earache was like that in the late 80s/early 90s, Roadrunner kinda picking up where they left off during the great death metal surge. Well, now we have The End Records. My only problem is really that I can't pigeon hole this label into something as concrete as others can be categorized. I guess I can just say that with The End, expect the unexpected in terms of genre-twisting, but whatever this label has put out, I've come to love. No exception then is Agalloch's Pale Folklore. It's funny, just as Epoch of Unlight makes me yearn for Caress of Steel-era Rush, Agalloch reminds of (if anything), Animals-

era Pink Floyd. And that is not said lightly, Animals easily being one of my favorite albums of all time, period. There's a lot of heavy delay guitar (ala The Edge), but everything is just so steeped in sadness, it's almost unbearable at times. I'm not even going to dare pulling out the old "drums sound great, fills abound" or "guitar riffs from hell here!" to try and describe this, for that would be an insult. Maybe think Opheth for the breadth of scope and heaviness in emotion, but Agalloch really transcend a lot of traditional restrictions here. Simply put, it's just a killer album that demands to be listened to as a whole body of work. No, there's no hit song, and you probably won't throw this in to start the day, but when you want an album to remove you from the confines of your everyday existence, this is the one. Highly recommended.

Agent Steel - Omega Conspiracy

2000 *Candlelight/Metal Blade Records*

Having heard of but never hearing (I know, I live under a rock) Agent Steel till now, I wasn't sure what to expect. Least to say, I am left floored by what has scarred my hearing! Agent Steel, while being pegged as a power metal band, owe a lot more sound wise to the great halcyon days of the 80's thrash movement and LP's like The Legacy and Twisted into Form, (you should know who those LP's are by!). Vocalist Bruce Hall has a powerful voice, at time not unlike a cross between Bruce Dickinson and Ripper Owens, with a touch of Heathen in there, but Bruce possesses an identity all his own, never wailing needlessly. Musically, this is choice prime cut thrash, played by musicians who know how it's done, and done well. Full of galloping rhythms, spot on drumming and some truly awe inspiring lead work courtesy of guitarist Juan Garcia and Bernie Versailles. Some of these songs really hark back to those denim jackets days. Tracks like Know your Master or Destroy the Hush would not be all that out of place on a Forbidden or an Exodus disc. Mention should be made of the production handled superbly by guitarist Bernie, giving every instrument room to kill without making everything sound like mud. Thrash dead? Fuck no! With this record, last year's The Gathering from Testament, and Code Red by Sodom, thrash could become seriously become the next big thing again, absolutely brilliant! - Review by John H.

Allan - Demo 2.0

2000 *Fartvirus Productions*

Fucking killer, man... It definitely took me a few spins to get into this, but let me tell you, there is some serious angst flying around these here songs. With a penchant for bizarre poly-rhythms, Allan (what a name!) come across to me as some weird hybrid of all that is hardcore mixed with the best of Voivod, Die Kreuzen and some old school industrial mayhem. I do hear some Deftones stylings at times, but those Cali boys have nothing on what these Pittsburgh locals are issuing forth. The best thing for

me here is the band's knack for commanding through odd-timings while grasping what the concept of dynamics is all about. Better than half the records of this particular flavor of metal than I receive, I expect and demand great things from this band in the not too distant future... For their full length, send \$10 to: Bobby Spell, 1465 Kelton Ave. Pittsburgh, PA 15216.

Altar - In the Name of the Father

2000 *Pavement Records*

For some reason I had a really bad preconception of what Altar was going to sound like. Always seeing their previous albums around, yet never hearing anything by them, In the Name of the Father was a serious kick in the ass, and like nothing that I could have imagined. At the disadvantage that I can't compare this to their previous works, I can at least say that this is some seriously heavy death metal. The guitars are just crushing, and the onslaught tempos range from above mid to all out war for the entire 50 minute play time. Not sure why, but this at times reminds me of Gorefest (might be the vocals) time 2, the whole thing having that awesome vibe, but just cranked in speed without the loss of heaviness. I can see where this sort of beast was born from early Stockholm-era sounds, but there's that unmistakable Florida imprint in there as well. All I can say is that with albums like this literally falling into my lap, I am one happy metalhead, Altar being the much needed fuel to churn this engine forth, and a hearty horns up from me on this one. Bonus track The Trooper is the icing on the cake for this album which manages to fill what was an unrecognizable void for me as of late, listening-wise.

Angel Dust - Enlighten the Darkness

2000 *Century Media Records*

The ever prolific Angel Dust once again graces these ears with another masterpiece of emotive, powerful metal. Enlighten... follows the same ground treaded on Bleed, but builds on that foundation with some very imaginative synth work and vocalist Dirk Thurisch strongest performance yet. Combining a more Euro-thrash flavored approach to the standard power metal formula, Angel Dust has crafted 11 tracks of very catchy, riff heavy power metal. Keyboardist Steven Banz pulls all the stops here, layering each song with the right accents, perfectly balancing the need to either create atmosphere or play up front with the guitars. Speaking of which, guitarist Bernd Aufermann piles on the power, never making the riffs to complicated for their own good. Smack in the middle of the album, lies Beneath the Surface and Still Bleeding, two of the most gut wrenchingly emotional ballads I have heard in a long time. Not to say that this album gets soft on you, though it does lose some of its momentum toward the end. Never the less, this is a stellar release from a incredible band that I can only pray will get the recognition that this level of song writing truly deserves After disbanding in 1988 and reform-

ing 10 years later, here's hoping that this time around garners them the fan base and acclaim they deserve. If your looking for something unique that stands out from the run of the mill Hammerfall clones, Angel Dust come highly recommended! - John H.

Ashes to Ashes - Shapes of Spirits

2000 Independent Release

I'm not quite sure if this is a demo or a full album (as everything comes on CD now), but whatever it's meant to be, it's done right! Smatterings of true Gothic Metal here, but successfully avoiding cheese syndrome. The keyboards are present, but unobtrusive, adding the necessary flavor. Overall, just gives me the feeling that these guys hang around a lot of castles where the sun doesn't shine (but in a good way!). Songs average around the ten minute mark, leaving lots of room for moods to build, and with this perfect production, build they do! Thanks go out to various members of Dimmu Borgir, but don't let that fool you into thinking that these guys are ripping black metal, for they're not. A much better than average release, especially since I'm very hard to please when it comes to this style of music. Info: Ashes to Ashes, PO Box 2038, N-0505, Oslo, Norway (<http://www.atoa.net>)

Avulsed - Stabwound Orgasm

1999 Repulse Records

There are a couple of sure fire signs that Avulsed are a gore band just by the above titles, right? For one, Dave Rotten named his label Repulse Records, there's one hint. Another one this time around? Stabwound Orgasm... You can't really go too far out of the gore zone with a title like Stabwound Orgasm, "Hey, is that Stabwound Orgasm? Well then turn... it...up!" But leave it to Avulsed to go balls out with a title such as this (unfortunately, Gorgasm came out with a similar title around the same time), but then really spice up a stagnated paradigm with some just totally killer "melodic but deathly" guitar work. I'm serious, there were times when I had to pull out the disc to make sure I was listening to Avulsed, for these guys still have that whole Cannibal/Immolation thing going, but there are moments of almost Tales from the Thousand Lakes era Amorphis thrown about (Compulsive Hater comes to mind). Rotten's vocals are still in the Floridian Death vein, what some would dub "cookie monster vocals", but because there is more experimentation in the music, this dichotomy is interesting. For me, this all becomes the best of both worlds, for I get the heaviness of my beloved death metal, but also those melodious leads that stay in the memory banks. Be sure to stick around for the "hidden" 13th track which lands smack in some otherworldly goth zone where keyboards rule the world. Twisted stuff, but I wouldn't have it any other way, and an admirable body of work for these guys after their daring Cybergore project.

Borknagar - Quintessence

2000 Century Media Records

When a band names their latest album "Quintessence", you can be sure that they're pretty confident in their abilities, and after 1998's stunning Archaic Course, Borknagar no longer have anything to prove. To us, anyway, as the band has gone through yet another roster change, with a new keysmith and drummer in the ranks, with the latter maybe having some big shoes to fill after the stopgap entry of Nick Barker on tour. And this is where I digress on the percussive aspects of the record, noticing some intricacies upon the first few spins, but only really hearing them after discovering the out of control Spiral Architect CD. This guy is an amazing drummer, not in terms of fills per second, but in the simple fact that he plays exactly what is needed here. After hearing his previous work, I know what this guy is capable of, and the restraint used here saves the day for me, because this is just the foundation for that soon to be classic Borknagar sound. Brun has said that he sees these compositions in terms of colors, and while I may abstain from the magic mushrooms, I can see the idea behind this. Equating the colors with layers of sound, you can either mix everything in small doses to create something from the impressionist era, or pollute everything into a nice muddy brown design. Again, restraint appears to be a factor, for there is tons going on here, but all so appropriate, it's obvious that the goal was known and agreed upon before the first riffs were penned. Truth be told, I was a bit disappointed upon the first few listens, for there's so much to grasp, and some of the more grandiose elements from The Archaic Course are absent. As time progressed though, this is rapidly becoming THE Borknagar release for me, the exchange of Woodhouse's pristine yet somewhat light production for that mammoth Abyssal sound increasing the heaviness factor in the relevant places. Excellent performances from some of the more known names in the Scandinavian scene, this may indeed be the quintessential document for all parties concerned, and a very logical step onwards from the band's outstanding previous collected works.

Boulder - Ravage and Savage

2000 Tee-Pee Records

What a shame, really. On Ohio's Boulder's second release, you have a record you're either going to love (judging by a majority of the reviews posted on their site) or hate. I unfortunately, I sit somewhere nearer to the later. With a sound more akin to COC, Eyehategod, and their ilk, Boulder are not a bad band mind you. Their guitarist can really play when he wants to, showing off some tasty, very bluesy sounding leads. But what really kills this for me is that god-awful racket they call vocals, which really renders this all impossible to listen for me. It really renders this from a good, crusty, liqueured up Motorhead type of band to something closer to A.C. when they actually try to play. I'm sure these songs come across much more effectively live, but on disc, sound plain weak. Maybe this

is just going over my head, but I just can't get into this type of hillbilly rock (that's Billy-core, boy! - Ed.) posing as a metal band. Sorry guys, but lose the vocalist, really. - Review by John H.

Brainstorm - Ambiguity

2000 Metal Blade Records

Having never heard of Brainstorm and judging by the somewhat cheesy album cover (I'm a big proponent of packaging), I wasn't expecting much more than your average, run of the mill power metal band. Well, surprise, surprise, as Brainstorm do indeed fit in the power metal spectrum (barely), but are so much more! Unlike their swords and dragons, Hammerfall cloning brethren, Brainstorm take a far more thrashy approach to their compositions, with riffs that bring to mind such thrash luminaries as Forbidden, Exodus (check out track 4, Arena), as well as the modern warriors of death like Nevermore and Lefay (opener Crush Depth). Adding to that is vocalist Andy Franck who is one part Dirk Thuriisch (Angel Dust) colored with some Bruce Dickinson (Ironfucking-Maiden) and you have one hell of a record here. As I can not begin to express my contempt for the ever increasing onslaught of PM vocalist whose main goal is to sound like a prepubescent Rob Halford, Andy's throaty delivery perfectly compliment the riff on hand. What also makes Brainstorm stand out from the pack is guitarist Torsten Ihlenfeld, who's not only one hell of a riff master, but is also credited for the keyboard parts, and has a knack for making them sound almost symphonic as opposed to the typical one note per song sound many bands who employee keyboards use. Think S&M, but much more restrained. Most songs build in momentum early on to only end in either pure speed or a thrashy gallop Maiden would be proud of. Only the acoustic ballad Far Away, which is a touching song about loss takes away from this feeling, but only marginally. After hearing one to many Hammerfall clones (not that there's anything wrong with Hammerfall mind you), Brainstorm was such a breath of fresh air. If you fancy bands such as the ones mentioned above (Exodus, Forbidden, Angel Dust, etc...), or just want to hear something that doesn't sound like Hammerfall, than you absolutely can do no wrong by getting this disc. Mind you, if your looking for something totally original, you'll be disappointed (than again, what is right?), but Brainstorm are a hell of a lot more interesting, not to mention a ton heavier, than the rest of the power metal pack. - Review by John H.

Breach - Venom

2000 Relapse Records

A Swedish band that chooses the aural landscapes of bands such as Neurosis and Sonic Youth over the bands of Gothenburg? Hard to believe, but then again, northern Sweden has always seemed to produce bands which were a little different, Meshuggah being a prime example there. It must be pretty cold and dreary up where these boys live, for Venom is exactly that,

a poisonous, percussive journey of nothing but pain and despair. The minimalist artwork on the cover really manages to represent what the band is trying to accomplish (to me, at least), forcing all instruments to become one malignant entity, rather than attempting to showcase a particular performance. Not as deadly as their Bay Area idols, Breach nonetheless have watched and noticed, delivering an album which may not rival something as awesome as say, Through Silver in Blood, but comes damn close, adding more aggression to the cacophony. To clarify the Sonic Youth reference, Lee and the guys (and girl), are the perennial masters of the discordant anti-riff, and hearing the interplay of strings here brings back definite feelings which remind me of albums such as *Evol*, the epitome of an uncomfortable yet unforgettable soundscape. For all that I could compare it to, *Venom* remains for now a welcome listen, not only for the fact that they are not choosing to replay the obvious, but because Breach have created a vision of terror using layers of guitar instead of blastbeats and gurgles. Music to create and destroy by.

Carnival in Coal - French Cancan

2000 Season of Mist Records

What a truly strange record. Evidently this release follows another highly experimental opus, one that I've yet to hear, but if French Cancan is any indication of this band's predilection for the weird, it has to be as strange as they claim it is. Consisting of 9 tracks, 6 of them apparently covers, FC spans the gamut from the incessantly heavy to the truly bizarre, "covering" songs by dissection and rebuilding them from the ground up, usually in some Frankensteinian fashion, making them almost indistinguishable from the original versions. Check out the metallized version of Baker Street (a childhood favorite of mine, this updated version much better than that note for note rendition recently played on FM), or the Faith No More/Mr Bungle Casio reggae version of *Fucking Hostile* (truly hilarious!). Like I said, I've never even heard of the band before, but if *Out of Misery* is par for the course, then *Carnival in Coal* can also get down and dirty when the need calls for it, hence why they can pull off a halfway decent version of *Morbid Angel's Fall from Grace*. To me, this is a true novelty record, not something that I would ever seek out (I really don't need to own every version of Michael Sembello's *Maniac*), but fun to listen to. I can see myself sitting someone down and saying "You've GOT to hear this band cover *Mama!*". The cover art's pretty disturbing as well, all signs pointing to an interesting group of (or) individual(s), making some truly fucked up noise.

Cephalic Carnage - Exploiting Dysfunction

2000 Relapse Records

Freeeaky... Yup, that's the best way to describe Cephalic Carnage, or I guess I could throw out "Mr. Bungle on crack!". Not quite sure how they managed to pull this cacophony together,

but I'm sure that Keith Falgout's production was a large "glue factor" here. Seriously though, with as much as is going on here things are at every moment threatening to careen off in every direction at warp nine (hence the Mr. Bungle on crack reference). Anyone who prefers a solid headbanging groove is gonna run for the exit when the "Rocky Mountain Hydro Grind" comes to town, ladies and gentlemen. The bio boasts that this particular album contains the fastest blast beats ever recorded. Uh, I don't think so, but they damn well may just be the most chaotic blasts I've heard so far. Riffs start, then abruptly end. A rhythm grows, then splits off on some wild tangent, only to return to the original paradigm at quadruple speed, all the while vocalist Lenzig can be heard barfing up a long for over an hour straight. Don't get me wrong though, I think the whole thing is great, experimentation at it's best, and I can take doses of this jazz infused mayhem at a time, but to ingest this whole puppy at once takes some nerves of steel, or some serious recreational aids. Overall, not something I'll throw on first thing in the morning, or maybe I will as I fight my way through the hordes of children on their way to school. Lookout suckers!

Chasm, The - Procession to the Infraworld

2000 Dwell Records

The Chasm... A band that I had heard plenty about, but had yet to discover... Having read plenty about this band, and knowing Daniel Corchado from his stellar work on *Incantation's Diabolical Conquest*, I really expected *Procession* to be nothing but balls out North American style death metal, and boy was I in for a shock. While I can get into the brutal NY/Fla sound plenty, it's the lack of melody (or memorable factors) that limit the amount of listens through time. Containing more depth in their opening intro than most copycat death metal bands can amass during their entire albums, *The Chasm* has, for me, created a truly remarkable album. The process of reviewing as of late has become pretty easy, with most bands choosing a particular style (or band) to model themselves after, sometimes delivering the goods, but mostly just rehashing the previous works of other groups, not really adding anything of value besides a 40 minute diversion. So, while you may hear snatches of influence here and there (Slayer, Kreator, Pink Floyd!), it's the logical culmination of all the music from the past 20 years that has formed *Procession*, this being a wall of sound with each brick discernible, yet necessary to the whole. Brutal and melodic, these are the words being thrown around to describe this, and I don't care to dispute, but there's something more, something indescribable that you can only sense or feel when listening to something such as this. *Eucharist* had it, *Dissection* had it, just an overall idea that the pain and rage expressed here is real, not something on loan for the recording. It's an element that can't be produced or manufactured, an element which sets one album apart from another, and here *The Chasm* have it. A true surprise and an excellent

record.

Coffin Texts - Gods of Death, Creation and Afterlife

2000 Dwell Records

[Booming Charlton Heston voice] And on the 1st day, he begat *Morbid Angel*, and from that seed that was planted, Nile was born, and from those branches, *Coffin Texts* exist. Apart from my opening monologue, *Coffin Texts* have some definite promise, the album is heavy as hell, and the songs pack a wallop, but (and I hate to say this) the band lies a little too close to their influences. The only other problem is that their cover of *Slayer's Crypts of Eternity* is TOO fucking good. It's so killer, it pushes the other material down a bit, partially because this track is mastered louder than the previous tracks. It's actually the first track I want to hear when throwing this in, admirable, but probably not what the band has in mind for the long run. Keep your eyes on these guys, for I think they'll go somewhere, and I'm not saying that this first album was just a stepping stone, for it's not, but I just feel that their best material is yet to come.

Corporation 187 - Subliminal Fear

2000 Wicked World Records

While the world waits for the next opus from *The Haunted*, the boys in *Corporation 187* have been so kind as to produce a more than worthy feel good thrash album to hold us over. I make the reference not only due to both bands having that AtG Slaughter-era feel, but due to the common *Slayer* influence. Much like another WW release, last year's *BloTorch*, things can get a bit repetitious, but overall, one of the better thrash albums to cross this desk for issue 5, a joy to listen to and quite painless to write about. I might not carry any deep emotional feelings away from this, but much like a really good action or horror movie, the ride is intense and visceral during the experience, which is where the fun is. A real safe bet, for nothing new dashing around, and not quite as godly as say, *Carnal Forge's Who's Gonna Burn*, but close, really close.

Crown, The - Deathrace King

2000 Metal Blade Records

Not long after making mucho waves with their *Hell is Here* opus, *The Crown* are back with another supercharged masterpiece of metal. Loud, raucous, out of control and basically addicting as a motherf&*cker, *Deathrace King* exemplifies the core sound that *The Crown* has created, a mixture of metal, old punk and feel good classic rock. Not much more has been added since last time, although maybe things are a little more kickass and less experimental than before. A sweet ass Studio Fredman recording job doesn't hurt anything here, allowing the 240 bpm 32nd notes coming from the limbs of Janne (human drum machine) Saarenpaa to really shine through here. In all my description though, I have to mention the fact that this album just feels so instantly familiar, ready to be

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blasted as you scream around in your car for the duration of the summer. I could go through and pick apart each song, but what's the point? The album kills, try something new and pick up The Crown, one million fans can't be wrong!

Dark Tranquillity - Haven

2000 Century Media Records

I've had some time now to come to terms with my disappointment with last year's less than heavy Projector, preparing me somewhat for Haven. What this really means is that, to me, anything heavier than Projector will suffice, for I know that the days of Skydancer or The Gallery are loooong gone. Here's also where I will draw a timeline comparison to In Flames, for both bands have progressed at roughly the same pace, with both bands also pushing out releases for this year which are more comfortable in their changes, and a notch heavier than their 1999 albums. Which does not mean that I am now a converted fan of post Mind's I DT, I'm not, but Haven is definitely more of a return to form for these guys, one that is appreciated by me. Wanna know the weirdest thing though? I prefer Mikael Stanne's earlier, more abrasive vocal work (in IF and DT) than what we've been hearing on the last two albums, and these Depeche Mode aural stylings (again, see In Flames) leave me cold. In fact, there's a whole "electronica" thing going on here, and call me one of the older fans now alienated by a band's change in direction, because I don't get into it here, almost annoyed at times by the cybernetic rhythms. The most frustrating thing here is that there are some really serious moments of Dark Tranquillity here, but these flashes are easily overshadowed by the newfound love of all that is digital. For all the negative I find though, the band can still create (maybe even more so now) an incredible sense of atmosphere, and while I prefer the earlier material for all of its intricacies, one could argue that Dark Tranquillity now makes better songs. At the end of the day (or review), I'm really riding the fence on this one, finding more to love than last time, but still frustrated by the electronic intervention.

Decapitated - Winds of Creation

2000 Wicked World/Earache Records

"Absolutely vicious" comes to mind when listening to Winds of Creation, the debut LP from Polish killing crew Decapitated. Imagine if you will, what a band could sound like if you took the best elements of Cannibal Corpse and Death's super tight and technical guitar work, a vocalist molded in the style of Craig Pilard (ex-Incantation), the speed and style of Slayer and Vader, and a drummer as fluid and talented as Sean Reinert. Lets elaborate on just the last part, to give you an idea of the immense talent here. Vitek (gotta love those names!) easily lays to waste his peers, effortlessly pulling all the stops here; hyper speed kick drum runs, Suffo-style inverted blast beats, drums rolls (the un)god would be proud of. But, I have never heard a drummer shift gears from a already

fast kick drum run to hyper fast run more times in one song than on entire albums. Last time I heard that was on the awesome work of Sean on the Human LP. Let's not forget the always over looked bass guitarist either, because even though bassist Martin is no Tony Choy, you know he's there, you feel his presence all over the place. And those vocals, god, how the hell do they get them that low?! The bass is louder than Sauron's vocals! Special mention has to be made of the crystal clear, brick to the face production courtesy of Vader's own Peter Wiwczarek. There are very few recordings with this kind of production in this genre, or any other for that matter. And with an average age of 17, Decapitated seemingly raised the bar for the whole death metal movement, surpassing their peers while paying homage their influences. As Devin of SYL would say, OHMYFUCKING GOD! Bonus points for an absolutely devastating cover of Mandatory Suicide! - Review by John H.

Deceased - Supernatural Addiction

2000 Relapse Records

They've done it again. After stunning the world with 1997's Fearless Undead Machines, these metal diehards are set to conquer once more. Being the brilliant opus that FUM was, it had to be difficult to even start and create something which would be set to follow in it's footsteps. Wisely, the band has chosen to move slightly away from the epic arena that Fearless dwelt in, yet maintaining the same degree of superiority which catapulted their last album into the halls of metal history. One surprise last time around was just the progression that the band underwent in the guitar/songwriting department. Granted, the chance isn't as dramatic here, but there is noticeable growth in all departments, with King still having one of my favorite metal voices, rough, but completely decipherable. His drumming has even gotten tighter, still holding on to the mania that is always present, yet a little more focused and direct. I give credit to the rhythm section here out of respect, for while the job is admirable, it's the guitars that rule the world here. Twin axework, killer solos and varying dynamics make for some of the best and most memorable songs (again!) for me. Honestly, it's hard to review anything else at this point, because this is all I want to hear. Voivod are still thanked profusely, and there are some nods in the spacier sections, but these guys are masters of their own thrash domain, alone in the universe, it almost seems. The bottom line is that this album is almost immediately accessible, with the subtle nuances becoming apparent after repeated listens and while now on the same level for me as Fearless Undead..., Supernatural Addictions may even boast more hooks and "YES!" moments than it's predecessor. Lyrically, not the tome of yesterday, but instead based on classic horror/ghost stories from various referenced stories. The whole thing is completely kick ass, and a total joy to review. The first band to ever sign to Relapse Records, and certainly one of the best that fine

label has to offer.

December - Praying, Hoping, Nothing

1999 Inzane Records

Boy, this one is sure a grower. At first glance, December come across as nothing but noise, full of disjointed riffs that make no sense. Maybe I just didn't get it then. But upon repeated listens, you begin to hear just where the hell they're coming from. December dishes out a pretty potent mix of Brutal Truth style grind/mayhem mixed with some choice Pantera/Machine Head (pre-Burning Red) and hardcore style riffs. Performance wise, these guys are spot on, nailing everything with precision. Jason Thomas is particularly lethal on the kit, hitting anything and everything in site. While vocalist Mark Moots proves to be quite the vocal acrobat, though at times sounds too much like Phil Anselmo. Song wise, well, its pretty chaotic. Forget about catchy choruses, because that's not what December is about. This is nothing but a brutal beating to the senses, though the songs tend to be somewhat interchangeable. December are smart enough to know 33 minutes of non stop blasting can get boring really fast and break up the songs with some groovy parts, parts that are sure to get the pit going. While not as technical as Dillinger, December are nonetheless impressive, though if your in a good mood, avoid this, because your going to be in quite a pissor 30 minutes later. - Review by John H.

Destruction - All Hell Breaks Loose

2000 Nuclear Blast Records

The reunion that everyone was waiting for, and I'm happy to say that Destruction have wisely not followed the path that other Teutonic thrash legends have taken of late, and have proceeded to make one killer thrash album. Not that Sodom's Code Red wasn't a throwback to the good old days in its own right, but All Hell Breaks Loose is so tight, so heavy that it blows most everything away. What's so cool about this is not only the super job that mega-fan Peter Tagtgren gave this thing, but also the obvious veteran ability that this band has in terms of writing ability. There are some moments that show that this album may have been put together a tad quickly, mainly in the lyric department, or in a track or two being a re-do or not as strongly put together, but overall, this thing just redlines along from start to finish, one headbanging 3/4 of an hour of fist banging mania. Schmier's vocals, which were oddly the main reason that I never held Destruction with the same reverence as Sodom or Kreator back in '86, are in excellent form here, and much to my surprise, one of the true highlights of the album. What does that tell me? Not much besides the fact that I need to dig out my ancient copy of Eternal Devestation and try to figure out what the hell I was thinking back then. In any regard, in case you were wondering if the hype was justified on this one, I'm here to tell you that it is, Destruction making THE thrash album for the summer, just in time for a festival appearances,

now ain't that a coinky dink! Extra "secret" version of Whiplash from Kill 'Em All sneaks in on track 13, which is an odd choice for a cover song in my opinion (but like you fucking care at this point!).

Domine - Dragonlord (Tales of the Noble Steel)

2000 Metal Blade Records

Any record that starts off with a sample from possibly the greatest science fiction novel of all time (Dune) had better be good. And as power metal records go, Domine is very good at their craft. The band is tight and spot on. Domine have a superb drummer and a vocalist that could shatter glass at fifty yards, not to mention a guitarist that can shred with the best of them. Does that mean that Dragonlord is a genre defining record? Well, no. As competent as Domine are, and by the sounds of it, have been plugging away at their craft for sometime, Dragonlord is filled with every power metal cliché there possibly is. From the swords and dragons filled lyrics, to the pompous choruses, all the way down to the horribly rendered Elf Quest album cover, it's all here. Every cliché imaginable. That in itself wouldn't such a bad thing (Cradle of Filth have made a nice living by being a total cliché themselves) if the songs were stellar, but alas, they're far from it. For the most part, a majority of the songs on Dragon are derivative, sounding like every other power metal band hawking their wares in this day and age. Vocalists Morby's mostly one pitched, stuck in elf octave shriek doesn't help matters. Where Domine do start to shine is in the latter half of the record (track 7 and on) where they break up the speeds to incorporate some rather chunky mid-tempo riffs rather than try to emulate Hammerfall. With Dragonlord, Domine has produced a rather competent, if very mediocre record that really doesn't stand out from the pack. Shame really, because if this was released just a few years earlier, we may have had actually held this record as a bench mark of some sorts. What has Hammerfall done? - John H.

Earth Crisis - Slither

2000 Victory Records

OK, I admit it, I've never been the biggest Earth Crisis fan, like, at all really. Even less impressed by their performance at last year's metalfest, I wasn't expecting too much from Slither, meaning that I was pleasantly surprised to hear the band's legendary level of aggression matched with melodic vocal lines and a good sense of groove. I wouldn't be surprised to hear cries of "Sell out!" from longtime fans, but to me it seems like the band has matured. Not being an expert in the back catalog won't let me compare this to past releases, but as a first time listener, I'm suitably impressed. Crystal clear sound allows every straight-edged, vegan note to ring true, and there are some killer moments to be heard here.

Eternal Suffering - Drowning in Suffering

2000 Extremities/Repulse Productions

According to an ad in PIT magazine from Eternal Suffering's record label, they will only release uncompromising, brutal death metal. And with Drowning in Suffering, it's safe to say they hit the nail on the head. No sissy keyboards here, nor any of those pansy female vocals everyone is doing nowadays. Nothing but blast beats, double bass drumming, super detuned to the point of flapping string syndrome chugga guitars and a vocalist who spews the venom with the best of belchers. Got to give points to any band that opens their disc with one of the most hilarious intros ever—a sample of good ol' Mr. Rogers talking about anger! In fact, there are some damn fine and funny samples all over this thing. Drummer Chad Connell firmly holds everything in place with some pretty tight and intricate drumming, belting out the appropriate blast beat when needed (and its needed, a lot!). Mention must be made of their choice of lyrical content, not your average "her gash I must slash" stuff, but still directed toward the other sex, and most of its angry stuff, though their almost poetic in form to a point. Ah, guys, did we just break up with someone? Wanna talk about it? More thought out than most on the whole. Too bad you'll never pick up a word of it with out the lyrics, as vocalist Wayne renders them almost completely unintelligible, ala the Broken Hope muffled barking dog technique. Normally, I dig this type of brutal DM, my only complaint being a certain overwhelming similarity to a certain Metal Blade artist that in an attempt to avoid naming, we'll just call CC. A lot of the rhythms and song structures in Drowning... could have come of any of CC's earlier work. Also, a lot of the drumming patterns mimic the style in CC's works as well, as well as the super fast hammer on/pull off guitar parts that CC use (think Tomb of the Mutilated, hint, hint) almost as a trade mark. The songs also lack variation between them. Blast here, grind here, slow part there, it's all pretty formulaic. After listening to this over 6 times, I'm still hard pressed to tell what song I'm on without looking at the track listing. But on a whole, it's a good listen to, and the hidden track is a grind version of the Rocky Theme! I shit you not, caught me totally by surprise. If your looking for some brutal, uncompromising deathfuckingmetal, played by one very tight band, you found your thing right here, baby. This is music to drive to work during rush our traffic, pure adrenaline music. Cynic fans need not apply. - John H.

Fleshcrawl - As Blood Rains...

2000 Metal Blade Records

With a sound that could strip varnish from 50 paces, Fleshcrawl have made one hell of a death metal record. Only by checking the liner notes was I informed that this was recorded at Studio Fredman, As Blood Rains... being the epitome of the Sunlight Sound of the early 1990s. And much as those early Stockholm albums did rock, this kicks major ass. Akin to Dismember's Like

an Ever Flowing Stream and their return to form Death Metal, Fleshcrawl present a no frills, no holds barred tour de force of metal. Mixing my metal metaphors? You betcha, my mind all confused and reeling from the full frontal attack. Boy it's nice to hear an album like this after 6 power metal discs, my adrenaline pumping my fists in to the air. If you miss old Entombed, buy this.

Fury of Five - This Time It's Personal

2000 Victory Records

Evidently the Swan Song for this legendary N.J. band, FoF deliver the goods in the shape of a viscous metalcore attack. Known for their violence both off and on the stage, you can pretty much feel the pain here, something missing in many of their "contemporaries" past releases. Whirlwind drumming stays true to the school of hardcore yet throws in some good double bass work when necessary. Really good use of guitar harmonics also varies the crunching brutality, but where Fury of Five make their mark is in the use of vocal melodies. Call it the sensitive side of the street, for make no mistake, James may show his softer side, if only to lure you closer to the aluminum bat he's got behind his back. Solid sense of groove here, thanks to the group dynamics that always propel forward as one dangerous wall of sound. And for all that is expressed here on CD, you just know that this levels city blocks live. In the end though, much as it tore the Cro-Mags apart, Fury of Five's own energy seems to have dissolved the band, a loss for all us that had experienced the intensity here.

Himinbjorg - In the Raven's Shadow

2000 Red Stream Records

Well, here a sure fire case of what you see is what you get, or, Yes Dorothy, you can judge a book by it's cover. In the Raven's Shadow (at least the promo copy) comes equipped in demon black, with an unreadable logo and a nice pagan emblem smack in the middle. This all screams to me "old-school black metal (man, I love saying that), and that's sure what I would call it, even if it is from France. France, you say? Yeah, which is enough to up the diss factor for many "true blooded" black metallers, but ItRS succeeds exactly where it needs to, upping the ante on Stormblast-era Dimmu Borgir, maybe forsaking a bit of the overall atmosphere for speed, but still providing a convincing display of darkness. Vocally we've got the clean/dirty combo that's become the standard paradigm, which you know, always alternates between an evil muppet and some bard all tweaked out on mead singing at the top of his lungs in the forest. You get the picture. The guitar tone is where ItRS really excels for me, just having this constant layer of buzz (black metal fuzz?) underneath everything. Kind of like a droning swarm of bees, I guess. Requisite double bass/blasting madness carries the whole thing along, and I must say that no matter where they're from, Himinbjorg have created a Norwegian al-

bum that would make mother proud. Perfect for those rainy Sunday winter twilight hours, when all seems lost, and life is full of despair.

Impaled - The Dead Shall Remain Dead
2000 *Necropolis Records*

First off, Impaled not only worship at the many altars of Carcass, they come dangerously close to existing as a Carcass tribute band. You know what? I don't care, because as much as I love to rip this to shreds, I can't, because the album fucking rules. Impaled have studied the texts, performed the autopsy and digested the results, for *The Dead Shall Remain Dead* out performs anything that Carcass has done. Now, granted, this is only possible due to the past existence of said entity, and standing on the shoulders of giants is no mean feat in and of itself, but to stand and deliver a living monstrosity such as this? I think this year's Steer Award will definitely be a landslide victory. Faster than greased lightning, Impaled have a youthful energy combined with a twisted imaginations which can only result in total sickness expressed through speedy mathematical riffs and bone-crushing drumming. The Steer/Walker dual vocal assault is in place here, but what I appreciate is the total Sunlight Sound gutted guitar tone that the band went for, grafting a two-headed Richardson/Skogsberg beast capable of Massive Killing Capacity. Okay, enough mixed metaphors, the bottom line is, if you miss the glory days of depravity, Impaled deliver the goods, a tad short on ingenuity, but presented in such perfection that it's easy to overlook the small trespasses although the intro almost puts this way in the plagiarists zone.

In Extremo - Verehrt und Angespien
2000 *Metal Blade*

Sure, everybody has their own opinion, but I think that many people will agree with me that having a band like In Extremo release as many albums as say, the mighty Anacrusis, something is not right with the world. Yeah, both bands were pioneers of a modern sound, but I'd much rather hear Kenn Nardi's cathartic songs of pure human emotion than 3 Dudelsacks playing in unison. There are a few sections scattered within that hint to me as to why these guys are even allowed to exist, but really, the whole concept just pisses me off. FOLK metal? OK, before I belie my true opinions, I'll stop. Evidently these guys are just great live, but supposedly, so is Stomp, and I refuse to see that percussive folly also. Not as repellent as the last offering, but still way too much Ren Fair stuff going on. Out there, but In Extremo? I don't think so. Also, is it me, or do all of these guys seem to have this weird half smile? Must be the wind blowing up those German kilts. As I track these nutty Berliners more and more, it seems as though the world is finally ready to embrace a band of this persuasion. Hey, we loved Menudo also, and don't forget about Musical Youth!

In Flames - Clayman
2000 *Nuclear Blast Records*

Time does pass by quickly, for while it may seem as though Colony just appeared at my doorstep, it's been over a year, time enough for these ever prolific Swedes to have prepared and released another stunning album. It really is hard to just sit down and review an In Flames album, for the band exists on another plane apart from their contemporaries in my view. With The Jester Race still one of my favorite records of all time, each successive IF album is (unfairly) subjected to that snapshot of the band's career, with Whoracle and Colony not able to capture the emotion and spirit that TJR held. Linked in many ways to fellow countrymen Dark Tranquillity, In Flames have gone through some core personnel changes and core sound changes in the past few years. Whoracle slowed things down and split ideas into separate songs (where The Jester Race flowed as one complete boy of work to me), and Colony found the band experimenting more with a somewhat "alternative" flavor. Not my favorite direction, and a choice of covering Depeche Mode some albums back gave a slight hint as to the current influences. But as I've always felt, the best bands refuse to stagnate, and to hear TJR book 4 at this point would have not only been unwelcome, but would have effectively diluted the power of that album as well. And all this banter leads to one truth, that being that I'm finally ready to accept Clayman. Had this album come out at another time, believe me, you would feel my disappointment, but now, in the summer of 2000, I can accept the Depeche Mode-isms, the higher register vocals, the almost more accessible sounds of a once genre defining band. The move of Bjorn Gelotte from drums to lead guitar really didn't have as profound of an effect on Colony as it does here, Daniel Svensson able to really stretch out his performances, shining through on several spots on the album. The infamous twin axe attack is still here, and as the album begins, my first thoughts are of the overall heaviness in tone here. No, the angst and darkness of the first two albums has long since vanished, but I've come to terms with the new In Flames, and while I may not embrace the new sound with open arms (the track Only for the Weak is aptly named), there's a certain feeling of something akin to levity that I find uplifting, all coming together to make Clayman an overall more enjoyable release for me than last year's Colony.

Incantation - The Infernal Storm
2000 *Relapse Records*

Try calling this one "The Perfect Storm" instead, for Incantation have once again thrown down the gauntlet for others to challenge. Evil riffs, guttural vocals from the bowels of hell, and another explosive performance by the percussive chameleon Dave Culross. But what really elevates this work to classic level is the just brutally heavy way that this album is produced, guitar tone having this drone-like buzz of unstoppable metal, yet still allowing those Incantation signature dissident notes to stand out. The whole idea of this is pretty amazing really,

for everyone felt that Diabolical Conquest was THE album for Incantation, and I'm diggin this one ten times more. Similar in scope to works of Immolation, both bands having a firm grasp on the devilish side of American Death Metal. I'm also impressed with the bass work here, as several times little runs captured my attention, something which is not (apart from Steve Di-Georgio) readily apparent in this god-forsaken genre. Totally fucking extreme and totally fucking kick ass, The Infernal Storm continues the ongoing legacy that Incantation are building as one of the finest death metal bands of our time.

Iron Fire - Thunderstorm
2000 *Noise Records*

Supposedly, this was the band that won on the Noise "sign the next band!" website competition. If this is the case, then I can only sigh in discontent as I receive another young impressionable band's take on a sound that they were barely alive to experience the first time around. The cover is basically a replica of Hammerfall's Glory to the Brave, and I think that just about says it all. I feel bad just totally slamming this power metal fest (dripping with guitar melodies, double bass drums and metal sirens aplenty), but I get the feeling that these guys are emulating the emulators, not the originators, if you know what I mean, which is even more ridiculous. There is an interesting breakdown in "Rise of the Rainbow", but it's short-lived, and then we're back to basics, and man, I am really starting to hate power metal. This must have been what it was like to be a zine editor during the Cannibal Corpse Clone days. Enough already, stop the madness! If you have to have every Halloween spinoff, then buy this, otherwise, just get one of the other 6,000 albums out there and you'll be just fine, trust me. Better than Sacred Steel, but not by much.

Jacob's Dream - S/T
2000 *Metal Blade Records*

Last time I checked a new CD can cost up to \$18. Now, that's a lot of money by anyone standards, and unless you got money coming out of your ears, you tend to shop CDs with caution. Had I not had a chance to hear this as a demo, I would likely have not bought this. Why? Because Jacob's Dream are not the worst power metal band I've heard (that honor belongs to Sacred Steel), they just lack that certain X-factor to put them above the thousands of other PM metal bands that sprouted up recently. With a cover that looks like a bad demo and a sound not far removed from mid eighties Queensryche, Jacob's Dream sound to derivative for my taste. Now I mentioned Queensryche as they owe more to them in the vocal than music department as vocalist David Taylor can mimic good 'ol Geoff Tate rather good, but lacks both his power and range; seemingly stuck in mid scream. Music wise, its more or less a hodgepodge of metal styles. You get the feeling that they were playing it safe when writing this record. Now that's a shame because I really

wanted to like this as I read a ton of promising things about this band. The ironic thing is that in a genre more or less known for its band's vocals prowess, Jacobs Dreams best track is an instrumental. Track seven (The Black Witch) boasts some extremely tasty Maiden licks and some of the best 80's era lead guitar shredding I have had the pleasure hearing in a long time. Add to that some top notch drumming, and I'm left wondering what went wrong with the other 11 tracks? - John H.

Jag Panzer - Thane to the Throne

2000 Century Media Records

I can really see why these guys were and still are considered metal legends. A concept album based on the story of Macbeth, TtT showcases some killer axework and the siren vocals of Harry "The Tyrant" Conklin overtop what is truly a "power metal" base. By now you know the score with Jag Panzer, they always deliver top notch stuff, and here is no exception, with over an hour of melodic riffs and plenty of galloping crunch to please fans of the genre. As I sit here attempting to dissect and describe, one thing that really captures my attention is the amount of complexity in every track, and how all of this technicality weaves together to create real songs, not layers of wank. Pat Jim Morris on the back for delivering another stellar power metal production, but the real credit must go to the band, for it's obvious that this record was incredibly thought out and practiced to perfection, for there's no room for error. A very epic album, and one that redeems the hundreds of other cheeseball power metal albums that have been released since the Hammerfall renaissance of 1997.

Kamelot - The Fourth Legacy

2000 Noise Records

The funny thing about power metal, I know it was supposed to be really big way back when, and how this resurgence harkens to the "true roots of metal", but I don't remember it that way. Maybe it was all over by '86, but the true roots for me include more of a thrash/death element, like Celtic Frost, Voivod, Death, Sepultura and Bathory, you know what I mean? Even those classifications are wrong but I know for a FACT that I wouldn't listen to anything with high pitched "power vocals" for a long time. So I don't remember this plethora of power metal like everyone else, I suppose, outside of say, Helloween and Running Wild. So this is why I'm completely perplexed by this sudden wave of "real metal". Well, if there were there this many bands such as this floating around back then (and I'm sure there were), then I'm glad I was in the dark back then as opposed to today when every release passes through my ear canals. A bit unfair to Kamelot that I begin their review with this diatribe, but the amount of material being released is just ridiculous to me. Above and beyond my prejudices, The Fourth Legacy is actually a good album, standing out of the pack as Crimson Glory's Transcendence

did back in that bygone era. Still very cheesy and epically contrived, TFL does manage to pack a punch in its delivery, weaving the tales of mystery and imagination with the choral voicings of Khan (Bloodsucker!), a sane voice of reason in this realm of vocal egos and over the top performances. His work does remind me of Geoff Tate on occasion, but for the most part, he holds his own, accenting the music without taking over the entire show. Excellent musicianship also highlights this opus, with the drumming really standing out for me with subtle nuances that hint to a huge degree of underplaying. Nice to hear, for it's this mastery and confidence which pushes The Fourth Legacy above and beyond. I STILL won't play it much, still preferring the darker, more brutal sounds, but I can at least appreciate this more in my twilight years, and for what it wants to achieve, this album is a success. One note, a red flag was raised upon seeing the "studio" drumming employed, but evidently they were used because their drummer got especially sick during the recording phase.

Kataklysm - The Prophecy

2000 Nuclear Blast Records

I think that I'm the only one left who hasn't fell under the spell of Kataklysm's take on "the Northern Hyperblast". Fellow Canadian's Cryptopsy have mastered the art of the speed-beat, but to me albums such as The Temple of Knowledge fall flat to my ears. Kataklysm's last offering did nothing to win me over, yet The Prophecy looks to be the beginning of a wonderful relationship between me and the hyper-rhythms of this monstrous band. Opening impressions were grim, as the promo packaging paints a really lackluster picture, the cover artwork being just hideous to my eyes. Lead off track 1999:6661:2000 is also my least favorite on the album, this all leading up to a totally dreadful listen. But have patience on this one, because before you know it, the albums takes off, sloughing the mediocrity and morphing into a total powerhouse of fused chaos, vaguely resembling the work of human beings. I guarantee that you'll be reading (or have read) a slew of albums that claim that the "hyperblast is back", and I agree, but also will be quick to point out that this is by far the most elevated and enjoyable Kataklysm I've encountered yet, prompting me to return back to the archives and figure out if either I had cotton in my ears or this band has excelled beyond their past works this time around. Full of frenzy, The Prophecy hints at the future of metal, and judging from this, we're in for full on mayhem in the coming millennium.

King Diamond - House of God

2000 Metal Blade Records

There's no denying that King Diamond releases some evil music, whether it's with his solo group or the more powerful Mercyful Fate, you can always be sure that the King will provide more than an ample share of darkness through

song. In looking back over the last few releases from both camps, I find that I prefer Voodoo over Dead Again, but 9 far surpasses what I've ingested off of House of God. Granted, these are complex albums which take more than a few cursory listens to properly "hear" the album, but after living with House of God (and the almost unsurpassable 9 before it), I'm just not as impressed as I thought I should be. Things seemed to have slowed down a few notched, no burners such as The LOA House to open HOG up, the album content to stay in the mid-pace zone, highlighting Diamond's vocal variations over the always stellar LaRocquian riffs. And, as always, the storyline is quite awesome, building a tale around the idea that Christ was saved and given sanctuary from all those that would do him harm, but of course, nothing is as it seems on the surface, and this is but a snippet of the tale Diamond tells. Very dark, very sinister, but very... ordinary. Fans of the King won't be disappointed, but will this draw others to the dark side? Eh, I'm not sure, myself feeling a tad let down by almost ALL of the new releases I've been hearing lately, HOG just one of them.

Lefay - SOS

2000 Noise Records

Where as most bands seem fit to release one album every two to three years, Lefay have been on the warpath lately, giving us three albums in little over a year, it seems. Of course, this could mean one of two things, that these are artists incredibly prolific in nature, or that what we're given is a half baked album released as quickly as possible. Well, in hearing this a few times, I'd be more apt to say that the latter is the cause, SOS being one, a concept album, and two, very well put together. I'm reminded of both Queensryche's Operation Mindcrime (oh what an intuitive leap!) and the first Nevermore album. Nevermore because many of the songs are based on midpaced double bass patterns with some interesting stops thrown in. The first few tracks at first listen were the strongest to me, opener Save our Souls really being the one to surprise me, as I was expecting something a little different from these guys based on past perception and packaging (tools of evil, I know...). In any regard, the bio description calls Lefay a bit of Pantera, Metallica and Machine Head all rolled into one. OK, I'll give 'em that, but what the bio can't dictate though is the intense repeatability factor here, S.O.S. finding it's way back into the player just too many times to ignore the obvious hooks strewn all over this thing. I've heard some people profess to prefer the earlier works, but of the mind that here Lefay have finally realized their lofty goals and delivered an entire album of quality metal.

Lobotomy - Born in Hell

1999 No Fashion/Metal Blade Records

Ah, this is more like it! For those of you who lament the passing of the Entombed we all knew and loved when they released Same Difference, fear not, as Lobotomy are in the running for their throne! With a sound that can only be

2000: Year of The Hammer

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described as the “classic Swedish” sound, ala Clandestine/Ever Flowing Stream/Sunlight Studio era mixed with the finer points of Wolverine Blues, Born in Hell beckons to you like a long, lost friend. All the goodies are here, including all those melodies that are intertwined within all those de-tuned, sub-chugga chugga riffs. You’ve got your solid drumming that is never to showy for their own good, with some impressive kick drum action going on, especially on Painreleaser. And don’t forget a vocalist ranks up there with all the L.G.’s and Matti Karki’s of the world. Derivative? Well, maybe, but I would rather call it an old friend than that! Lobotomy sure are not breaking any new ground, but that’s just not the point now is it!? A very solid release from this Swedish bunch (that we can finally get our hands on stateside with buying as a costly import) that deserves to sit among the genre’s finest. - Review by John H.

Love History - Anasazi
2000 *The End Records*

When I begin this review by making the statement that Love History have redefined music as we know it, you may think that I have finally lost my mind. Please, be patient and bear with me, for all will be explained shortly. I guess in order to fully understand my reverence for this particular CD, one would have to understand my disdain for those frilly grey overtones in metal known to the children of the night as “gothic” tendencies. Whatever. Contrived through forced depression, most of these “dark” releases contaminate my ears and build a prejudice against future releases such as Anasazi, reason enough for forced extermination, no? But I digress, and this is truly Love History’s moment, and my task is the difficult one of putting into words the thousands of expressions, melodies and emotions that are felt during the duration of this disc. To many of you out there, you already know exactly what I mean when I describe my difficulty in accurately dissecting and boxing in this album, for just like any other release on The End Records, this is not an opus which can be absorbed in less than 5 separate listens. Of course, this is a label built on the foundation of experimentation, something taboo in the underground world of chains and leather. But this is a step much, much further. We’re not talking some funky keyboards, or the avant-garde use of a horn section over some power chords, this is probably the only true metal opera that I can ever see wanting, no, craving to hear repeatedly. No other band comes to mind who can so effortlessly blend a multitude of styles into one song structure without brute force. The trend lately is to trace one’s roots and incorporate the traditional music from a particular region into the standard paradigm. Amorphis did it well, but for many albums, it’s a stretch to make it work. Which is the absolute beauty here, for Love History have not merely written tracks of basic metal and thrown in some pan flutes, it’s all one basic model which weaves together to produce solid, memorable songs. OK, that may sound a bit anticlimactic, but how many “songs”

must we suffer through as listeners remarking on an awkward change, a faulty transition, an introduction of acoustic guitar 3 db too loud in the mix? I can’t speak for others, but the cringe factor here is low, an amazing feat considering the number of tracks each individual song must require. “But how is all this redefining music as I know it?” OK, we’re almost there, trust me, this diatribe of mine has a purpose, even if it’s unknown to even me at the moment. But let’s first step back a moment to my rapid dismissal of the entire gothic metal movement. All the positives that one could gather from the more melancholy of the metal brethren are present here, the darkness, the sad and morbid vocals, songs written in D minor (the saddest of all chords), yet Anasazi always manages to remain heavy. Not power chords tuned to A heavy, just heavy due in combination to a choice of riffs and structure which always manages to hit their molten stride at the perfect opportunity after a brief period of reprieve. There are certain tracks which certain die-hards would never call “metal!”, and maybe I would agree. Because this is all something more expansive than the norm, yet an album that I would deem extreme, and also one that I would be proud to say is formed from the forefathers of heavy metal. “But there’s operatic voice harmonies! And what about that flamenco guitar!” What about them? Were they noticed because they don’t fit, or because we’re trained as metalheads to instantly seek out and destroy any infiltration into the core structures built by Sabbath and Maiden? It all works, believe me. And if you’re still having trouble, then just some more, and focus on the growling vocals and double kicks which are just as prevalent here as anything else. Which brings me back to my initial claim that Love History have managed to redefine music, not by adding pieces of progressive rock to the metal genre, for that’s been done many times before. It is also not the addition of traditional music to the table, that also is almost overdone now. If anything, Love History have allowed us to transcend boundaries and listen to the songs for the musical appeal which, in reality, should be the only deciding factor in an album’s worth. There may be many claims that certain artists have successfully bridged the evolution of metal from its very inception in bombastic art rock to the recent inclusions of trip hop and street beats into our precious metal stew, but never have I heard a group do this so real, so right. In the end, all that remains is the simple fact that Love History have with Anasazi made an incredible record which may demand more from the listener initially, but upon time will prove to provide a wealth of enjoyment over years in one’s collection.

Luddite Clone - The Arsonist and the Architect
2000 *Relapse Records*

Serious grind here along the lines of rabid Dillinger or Solient Green, but having an overall open atmosphere, with lots of space to breathe and move around. At this point, there

does seem to be a formula to all of this, psycho drums, ambient drone guitars completely dissonant, and vocally spewed hate. Which means that bands have to either do something novel, or just excel at the game to be really noticed. So, is Luddite Clone worth picking up? I think so, for while the music isn’t something that’s memorable, the visceral charge I get from listening is a good one, and at under 15 minutes, the timing is almost perfect. Get in, fuck shit up, get out, I like it. Also sounds like a Zelda Rubinstein sample in there (Anguish?) which is always a plus in my book. Dichotomous from the title to the loud/quiet interludes, Luddite Clone are onto something here, and if they follow Dillinger’s example set by that band’s E.P. to L.P transformation, things are gonna be pretty damn serious soon.

Machetazo - Carne de Cemeterio
2000 *Razorback Records*

Miss the days of yore? When two man bands such as this ruled the earth instead of corporate metal where you have to have a \$30,000 production job to score a full page ad? More and more lately I do, for while everything about this seems primitive on the outside, closer inspection reveals a cavalcade of killer riffs that know no boundaries. No, Andy Sneap isn’t behind the board, nor is Colin Richardson, and Dopi Dr. Beltran handles 3/4 of the operations here (must be a bitch live), but the agenda is also gone, the overall feeling being to just make music, not worrying about the record deal, or what color shirt to wear on day 4 of the tour. So, nothingly screamingly fantastic here, but that’s the point, Machetazo just putting together an enjoyable old school album, and their choice of covers (S.O.B. and Abscess) is testament to their intentions. Intros are standard horror clips, or are they?! When “Torso” opens up with “From the man who brought you Dr. Zhivago [pause], Torso!”, it’s pretty damn funny. I’m hoping here that this isn’t taken too seriously, otherwise I think we’re all in trouble.

Malevolent Creation - Manifestation
2000 *Pavement Records*

Billed as a “Best of...” from Malevolent, I can only curse the label politics which kept all but one track from the first two albums off of this release. In reality, how can you have a MC greatest hits album and not have Thou Shalt Kill on there?! I understand that this is a Pavement thing, and I get the idea that the band may have just wanted to fulfill some contractual obligation with this L.P., but to me, it’s a good album, but not a best of. I guess part of this is due to the “fast as hell/Jason B.” era of malevolent, where things are incredibly speedy, but the monotone death metal vocals just bug the crap out of me. So, while it’s not bad, the definite highlights are The Fine Art of Murder tracks and the killer demo version of Impaled Existence. A solid release from a band that has recently returned to form, but of particular interest to those that have wanted to sample both Eternal and In

Cold Blood without purchasing those albums, as most of the 20 tracks (16 that I received in my promo) are culled from those two albums. Of course, in seeing the 4 tracks I DON'T get, those are the older material that I complained about not getting. Oh well, such is my luck, I still feel that the album focuses on the later material.

Mental Home - Upon the Shores of Inner Seas

2000 The End Records

At this point, I don't think that anything that I write could do this album justice. In a nutshell, Mental Home here have atoned for every pompous entry into the annals of classically based metal. Which is where the true irony enters into play here, for by every account, I should find Upon the Shores... an overblown affair laden with cheap keyboard sounds and triggered drums, yet instead I have found an album with which I can easily connect to. Having all of the ingredients does not necessitate fine cuisine, something necessary needed to add the extra spark required to make the average superior. Call it what you will, but in this regard Mental Home excel, and as I've tried to say simply in the last 5 sentences, the album is amazing. I curse my ineptitude and blocky writing, for what this album truly deserves is something poetically written to explain the incredible use of melody, but with me as your guide through this, you'll have to accept my words. "Reviewing" this is difficult, partially because I'm constantly hearing something new, but also because this is a body of work better left undissected and experienced as a whole. I mentioned classically based, and this may be an ignorant statement, but the arrangements here remind me of works that I have heard (albeit in limited quantity), seamlessly put together, allowing complex structures to ebb and flow, part of what makes this album so necessary. There are human flaws, a forced drum fill here, some iffy production there, but this all becomes a part of the album, and when one of the many guitar solos comes through your speakers, demanding your attention, any small marks are instantly forgotten. To me, comparable to Dissection in that the album transcends anything else in terms of the degree of emotional content. Highly, highly recommended to any and all that find "beauty in darkness".

Metal Church - Metal Church Live

2000 Nuclear Blast Records

Ah, the eighties. When bands like Laaz Rocket, Death Angel, and Rigor Mortis roamed supreme. When being a 'tallica and 'deth fan was something to be proud of. When the only band with corpse paint was King Diamond. When the fashion statement for bands was white high tops and skintight jeans ripped at the knees. When bands like Metal Church were taken seriously. Metal Churches first two albums, the S/T and 'In the Dark' were raging slabs of pure 80's thrash, with songs like 'Beyond the Black' and

'Merciless Onslaught' able to rip your ears to shreds. Unfortunately, Metal Church never broke out of their second tier status, which really makes Metal Church Live a strictly for the devout fans only release. For a live recording, it does possess a fairly solid sound, though I swear I never really noticed till now how much vocalist David Wayne could sound like Blitz Elsworth as times. To be completely honest, your better off just buying Metal Churches first two LPs, as every song on ...Live is culled from those LPs, plus you'll get a disc with a cleaner sound (albeit with the typical 80's production values). You could probably find the two LP's at bargain prices and pay the same amount if you were just buying Live. ...Live is a decent document of a band in their prime during the era when Metallica reigned supreme, but I couldn't see this appealing to anyone else but the most diehard fan. - Review by John H.

Mortification - 10 years Live not Dead

2000 Metal Blade Records

"Who wants to hear some Jesus Christ metal?" Uh, not me, thanks. Once more (it seems like I review a Mortification release in EVERY issue), Steve Rowe and his cult of bible believers deliver forth a sermon of metal for all of us sheep. Now, this isn't bad, per se, but again, everything about this screams mediocrity, from the muddy mix to the incredibly freaky artwork. I don't know what psychotic persona paints these portraits of Steve, but I would never show them to my kids. I know this guy almost died and was "saved", but do we still need to see pencil drawings of the guy walking around with a bible in one hand and an IV cart in the other? Musically, one new track and plenty of old ones, which means either you're on board or your not. Just remember, executive producer is none other than Jesus Christ, which I believe makes Steve a Jesus Christ Superstar!

Motive - Damned if you Do...

2000 Independent Release

Wow, this album takes me back a few years, back to a time when the term "metalcore" meant something a bit different than today. I guess there's some serious leanings to the grand ol' days of when Bay Area Thrash was king, yet there is that undeniable hardcore element in the sense of groove and in the vocals. Drums are mixed in there way up front with a pretty good live sound, something which really helps to propel this disc forward. Overall, a strong independent release from these guys, and after some touring and more exposure, look for Motive to be rippin' shit up in the future. Pretty cool old school metal artwork helps with the album's character as well. Motive - 3721 W. Cambridge Ave #17, Phoenix, AZ 85009 (<http://motive1.homestead.com/index.html>)

Nasum - Human 2.0

2000 Relapse Records

These guys rule the grindcore scene; one listen

and you'll know why they do. Personally, I think that the band excels when they release the tension from the blasting into the midpaced zone, but it's all good here. 25 tracks in 40 minutes, but still the band manages to throw in a zillion riffs to every song. A little more variation and experimentation this time around, which helps me to remain attentive throughout the album. It's killer stuff for what it is, but man, things are so over the top here that it limits the listenability factor some. "Because you're an old man!!!" you scream. Exactly, but I also lived and died by old Napalm, Heresy and Concrete Sox, which is why I can understand the immense appeal of this band. If the likes of Rotten Sound or (dare I say) Brutal Truth tickle your fancy, this is a "buy or die". Otherwise, hey, give it a shot, what's the worst that could happen, besides being addicted to Relapse Releases? Load, Play, Explode.

Neck - Should My Fist Eye

2000 Cho'sin Records

Strange name, strange title, eclectic music here as Neck slap together the better elements of hard, death and alterno-metal into a heavy, yet melodic, independent album of high value. There's a fair bit of this new Meshuggah-inspired hardcore feel here (think calm moments of Dillinger Escape Plan among others), which relies on the bass drum beats matching staccato guitar, offsetting nicely the deep grooves which Neck can throw down, a dichotomy also noticed in the vocal department, with the dual edged attack of scream/singing balanced nicely here. There some strong musicianship and songwriting here, with enough variation to keep my interest throughout the playing time of the album. Part of this may be the production, which accents the higher registers (some extra bass tones could have added to the heaviness here), but I will say that the songs do indeed vary, with different moods expressed, something that may have been hindered by dark production. Definitely slanted in the world of alterno-metal, yet not yearning for "acceptability at any cost" in the least. Overall, I'm really impressed with Should My Fist Eye, but still having trouble telling everyone I'm listening to the new Neck album...

Old Man's Child - Revelation 666

2000 Century Media Records

There have always been similarities between OMC and Dimmu Borgir, one of which being that sometimes skinsman Tjodalv manned the drum throne for Dimmu, but also due to the thrashy black riff/keyboard attack present on both band's early albums. Take that as you will, for Revelation 666 closes the gap between these two larger than life groups even more. After the last opus, which was basically a two man project between Galder and Gene Hoglan, a full band is enlisted again, with actually not one, but two capable drummers in tow, with Tjodalv handling the blastier material (which is blindingly fast) and the new recruit laying down a really

solid foundation on the more mid-paced material. I still hold *The Pagan Prosperity* as my favorite for this band so far, *Revelation* almost being a little too reminiscent of *Spiritual Black Dimensions*, but that's not to say this is a wholly unenjoyable listen! There's so much here to appease the stalwart fans, and while this may be a tad too pristine for the true black metallers, the minions draped in dark fabrics and holding gothic tendencies will eat this up, I guarantee you. For myself, yeah, I like the album, really appreciating the craft that went into this, but honestly, at this point it's a pretty forgettable listen, nothing really catching on or hooking in as TPP did. In the end, I'm left with another more than competent release from a strong group, but left a little cold by the icy perfectionist feel.

Opprobrium - Discerning Forces

2000 Nuclear Blast Records

Total blast from the past here, as the band that gave us the classic *Serpent Temptation* is now back in their full thrash glory. It's kind of a doubled-edged sword here, as on one hand you could totally be cynical about this whole thing and claim that these guys are just back because thrash is back, or you can just forget your biases and listen to this thing, because it kicks serious ass. Opening cut *Digitrap* is probably my fav here, just because of the incredible degree of technicality in the guitarwork. There are tons of riff changes, but everything flows, and many of the changes are due to note placement, which instantly changes the entire feel of the song. Whoa! But then I can't headbang properly, where do I find that groove? Don't worry, it's there, but don't expect to find any riffs run into the ground here, for the Howard brothers are here to party on your grave, uh, so to speak. Considering this is the first I've heard from these guys in over ten years, things don't seem all that different. I remember *Incubus* being a solid metal band back then, and that's how I see them now. The intensity isn't captured throughout the entire album, but there's enough there to say that the album as a whole works, and in this age of everyone rediscovering the best parts of the thrash movement (but realizing that poor production was a liability), *Discerning Forces* stands strong in the pack.

Pandemia - Spreading the Message

2000 Lost Disciple Records

Lump *Pandemia* in with *Defleshed* and all of the other "fast as hell" adrenaline pumping bands that have discovered the need for speed and have acted upon these desires. From that, you know right now where *Spreading the Message* will sit with you, for if too fast is never enough, *Pandemia* have the cure, but if you'd rather crack a beer and contemplate your spreading midsection while some mid-paced metal kicks around in the shadows, this is not for you. Nor is this for those with any type of heart condition whatsoever. Sure, the drums sound a bit processed at times, but at 240 bpm, everything

just becomes a little flurry of limbs anyway, necessitating the use of digitals to amplify and differentiate the noises. 13 tracks, 29 minutes, get the picture? An all out assault on the senses, this album never lets up, the work of four crazy Czech's ready to tear you apart. So, avoiding any cliches, look to *Pandemia* to be decimating the ear drums of some of the biggest heads in the biz, it's that extreme. Will I remember it in two weeks? No idea, but for now, I'll just be content to get sucked in and enjoy the ride, wherever it may take me.

Pegazus - Breaking the Chains

1999 Nuclear Blast Records

Not that I like to judge an album by its cover, but *Pegazus* here really leave me no choice! OK, what have we got, two scantily clad women and a winged horse painted in that classic power metal style. The album's called *Breaking the Chains* (heard that one before) and sports tracks like *Metal Forever*, *Bastards of War* and *Chariots of the Gods*. C'mon, with all of these hints, I already KNOW what this is going to sound like. Normally I would just stay the hell away from this, but to be fair, I spin it the requisite times to formulate an "unbiased" opinion (impossible). Well, yeah, it's power metal, done pretty much exactly the way everyone else does it, absolutely nothing new to my ears. Not that we need every band to break new ground, but to have your own sound? Yes, that's imperative to me. So, *Pegazus* don't score high on the originality scale, and make up a little in execution of material (as bland as it is to me). All I can really say at the end is that *Breaking the Chains* is heavy metal, probably connected more to the "true roots" than a lot of other things one could argue, but as we've progressed so far in the last ten years, why bury yourself in the past? And those vocals... Again we are reminded that there will only ever be one Bruce Dickinson. Caaaaaveaaaaa Emptooooooor!

Primordial - Spirit the Earth Aflame

2000 Hammerheart Records

Sometimes it hurts more than helps when I get the whole "press package", mainly because when I see beforehand that this band is the next big thing in Celtic Metal, I shudder. Well, being the kind of guy that listens as he reviews, I hear for myself that *Primordial* have a knack for atmosphere. Whether or not there really are audible folkish influences, I don't know, but I do know that tracks here are given a lot of space to breathe and grow. This of course means that you have to be in a certain type of mood to listen to this type of work. Some guitar melodies hint at things like say, *Opeth*, which is a huge positive for the band. I dig the varied vocal approach, except for me the clean tracks border on cheese every so often. There is a certain rawness at times which catches my attention, and overall, *Primordial* deliver the goods, no matter what the music is to be labeled.

Project Hate, The - Cybersonic Superchrist

2000 Pavement Records

Not sure if this is really on *Pavement*, but as they were so kind as to send it to me, here goes... *Cybersonic* hits the mark here a lot closer than *Project Hate*, as this isn't the angriest music in the world to me, but as for cybernetic overtones, just the keyboards alone attest to the need for machinery here. Lots of programming/sequencing underneath some fairly standard yet somewhat catchy riffage, topped off with the *Sandstrom* (he of *Grave* days, sounds just like *Dan Swano*)/*Stahl* (the female antithesis) vocal dichotomy which is meant to work against each other. I understand the idea behind this, but don't really think that the lighter, artier female vocals really help all too much here, and I think I would have just preferred the total death growls throughout. Not quite as off the freakin' wall as *Limbonic Art*, but there are moments that do hit the roof, as there are moments that have me cringe, such as the requisite drum 'n' bass sections. Overall, fairly enjoyable in its experimentalism, and surprising to me how much more I like this from the first couple spins.

Rain Fell Within - Believe

2000 Dark Symphonies Records

To some, maybe many, the idea of fusing operatic vocals to mournful music is a perfect match, the lush sopranic tones balancing the low undertones. Simply stated, I'm not one of those people. Granted, *Rain Fell Within* (what a po-ET-ic name!) have managed to create a soundscape of misery, but the vocals are too dominant for me, seriously detracting from what could have been a very depressing listen. To remove myself emotionally from the album (which is against the whole idea, right?), I can see that the band has spent some time getting the songs together, yet they're really putting all their chickens in one coop with "*Dawn*". Epic, Grandious, Pompous, all these come to mind, and while I can say "OK, it's not THAT bad" most of the time, I never really think it's all that good either. Another album with potential just stretched too far over the boundaries of reasonability.

Raise Hell - Not Dead Yet

2000 Nuclear Blast Records

Setting themselves up for all kinds of ridiculous slander opportunities with the combination of that inane title and even more juvenile album cover, *Raise Hell* appear to be aiming for the cock rock spotlight here. Unfortunately, they're still too fast to be accepted in that arena, *Not Dead Yet* still being more of a thrash experience than anything else. There are some promising moments here, the band remembering their old *Kreator* records and dishing out an updated version, but things start to get a tad annoying after a few tracks. I guess there's not much else to say except that I don't recommend this, but I am curious as to know where the band wanted to be heading with this release.

Rotten Sound - Drain*1999 Repulse Records*

This one's a little older, but I actually just got it from Repulse so... If you're not familiar with the Rotten Sound, I can just say this: Sunlight grind... Imagine that thick yet gutted old Entombed guitar tone frantically keeping pace to a highly talented, energetic young drummer who has mastered the blastbeat and then some. Reminiscent of old Heresy and Concrete Sox in some aspects, but this is light years tighter (not the proper units, but you get the idea). With the average track's duration being around two minutes, and an album length of a scant half hour, this is indeed in the grind paradigm, but as is the case when you start with fresh beans, this grind is mighty fine. No acidic aftertaste here, the adrenaline rush being completely undiluted and unoxidised. Inane coffee references aside, Drain just runs rampant through your livingroom, the hyperactive child that refuses to sit still, yet is so entertaining, you refrain from using the back of your hand on 'em. Newly signed to Necropolis Records, expect big things from these Finnish upstarts in the near future. For now, spend the remainder of these summer days with Drain pumping through your car speakers, fueling the road rage along those baking asphalt highways.

Sacred Steel - Bloodlust*2000 Metal Blade Records*

Sacred Steel, with their third LP "Blood Lust" (uh guys, Cannibal Corpse may have a problem with the similarities in album title) have created an album you will either scream with delight or hate to high hell. I unfortunately, feel both, and I'll tell you why. First off, this record has almost everything I love about metal, music wise that is. Drummer Mathias Straub can belt out the tastiest rolls and fastest double bass runs as anybody. Guitarist Jorg and Oliver have composed some of the tastiest, heaviest riffs I've heard on a power metal record in a long time. For Example, the album opens up with a riff reminiscent of Grip Inc. finest, then proceeds into a verse that sounds like latter day Misfits (no kidding!). The Oath of Blood starts with a near Death Metal growl. Blood on my Steel could have come off of Ride the Lightning. So what's the problem than, huh? It's the vocals. It's those god awful vocals. I've heard bad, but this takes the cake, entree, the whole damn meal, then proceeds to shit it out all over the music. It is so damn awful, awful to the point that I couldn't even listen to this record straight through. Not only does Gerrit Mutz lack any sort of range, he possesses a tone that is something akin to nails on a chalkboard. It wouldn't sound so bad if he made the most of his limited vocal range, but he doesn't, in fact, through out the record, he takes such a laid back, don't give two shits, not even going to try approach, its pathetic. Normally, I have a pretty high tolerance when it comes to vocals, heck, I think I'm the only one who likes Tim Aymar's (Control Denied) vocals, but this, whoa, stop the train, I want off. It's things like

this that ruins it for all the power metal bands. Horrible choruses and cheesy lyrics abound. Hell, they even shout "Die, Die" ala Creeping death during "StormHammer". Cliff is turning as we speak. A plea to all current and future power metal bands: Please, please, knock off the ridiculous vocals! Enough is enough! A worthy purchase for the music alone, but you need to be a braver soul than I to sit through those vocals. - Review by John H.

Sanctus - Aeon Sky*2000 Metal Blade Records*

Not sure how to really describe this, except to say that it sounds a lot like Hecate Enthroned during their Cradle of Filth days, except I kinda like that band back then. The production's better here, but the whole thing amounts pretty much to a Cradlish band, so... If you like the way that sounds, this should be a real treat, but, if you're like me, and don't, then this album is waaay toooo loooong, songs averaging around 7 minutes each. Not totally reprehensible (like Sacred Steel is...), but I kinda wish sometimes Metal Blade would take more chances like they did in the 80s to early 90s...

Sculptured - Apollo Ends*1999 The End Records*

Experimentalism at its best, Apollo Ends is a shining example of how imagination and no sense of boundaries can result in an album of immense value. When I think of how to describe the overall feel of this opus, a definite sense of opposing forces, or a push-pull effect comes to mind. What I mean is that the use of noise versus silence works well here, never reaching the infinite extremes (total noise or total absence of sound), but the dynamic that is created by the limits in either direction is incredibly effective. Sculptured's use of unorthodox "metal" sounds, such as television bytes or trumpets may distract from some people's experience, but for me, it only serves to fill the silences yet buffer the other noise. To further try and describe this alt-metal masterpiece, I can also pull the old "sounds like..." references into play here, an old and weathered trick perhaps, but read on, for you may be surprised as to who I am reminded by. Try mellow John Zorn, or instrumental Zappa, mixed with the creative genius of Throbbing Gristle with some Opeth style clean vocals. Quite a mix, I know, but that's where Sculptured shine, for they can't be genre-trapped. Jazz leanings and the refusal to play anything "standard" or follow conventional rock songwriting norms tends to send many I know howling for the exits, but I wouldn't have it any other way. Honestly, listening to Apollo Ends make me think of rainy Sundays in Antioch's Birch Hall, a run down dormitory perfect for wasting hours listening to music which elicits feelings of complete melancholy. Not gothic style "I'm soooo sad, I wear black" melancholy, but that overall oppressing feeling of slight dread that only comes when you realize that this may just be the best that it's going to get. Not a

pretty thought, and not a pretty album, but one that is beautiful in the eyes of the beholder, not the majority view. As with almost everything that The End has to offer, Sculptured needs some time to fully absorb, but for those who have the patience, the reward is priceless.

Soilwork - The Chainheart Machine*2000 Century Media Records*

Finished almost a year ago, The Chainheart Machine is here to once again prove the worth of these 6 young Swedes. Averaging an age of 18 when they released Steel Bath Suicide, initial comparisons were drawn to other Scandinavian groups such as At the Gates (vocally) and Arch Enemy (musically). Well, the similar sounds may have been there, but let me tell you, I played SBS into the ground, and The Chainheart Machine is rapidly following course. Both CDs are instantly recognizable and likable, no doubt due to the similarities between albums released before. To my ears though, Soilwork manage to add their own signature, injecting a shot of speed and fury into one of my favorite brands of metal. A couple changes in the Soilwork camp since the last album have also helped the band define more of a trademark, with things noticeable improved in the drum department. Reading the last statement, you'd think I had some problem with Jimmy Persson's playing on Steel Bath. I'll clarify things a bit... The percussive work on SBS was top notch, creative yet solid, impressing me quite a bit, yet there's no comparison to Henry Ranta's explosive job here. From all angles, things are pushed up a notch due to the energy he's throwing around here, actively trying to run circles around some of the best dual guitar licks this side of the Amott brothers. And while I'm in this vicinity, I'll acknowledge the Arch Enemy references, but I hear more of the common bond references between these two bands, such as Accept or other late 70s, early 80s guitar hero metal. It's not over the top, just technical enough to pique interest without becoming a detriment. There also appears to be somewhat of a blues influence here, especially in some of the leads. To end this, I'll just say that Soilwork are definitely one of my top new bands as of late, and with The Chainheart Machine, easily avoided the "sophomore slump" that plagues many groups. Add in to the equation that these guys are barely of drinking age in the states, and I can almost guarantee that we'll be hearing quite tons more from them in the future. I, for one, will be waiting...

Soul Reaper - Written in Blood*2000 Nuclear Blast Records*

This will probably piss the guys in the band off, but here's yet another that'll start off along the lines of "After the breakup of the legendary Dissection..." Here we have Johan Norman from Storm-era , and Tobias Kjellgren from post-Storm Dissection, which gives a little more reason to why this entity is titled Soul Reaper. Norman was credited for co-writing many of

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caroline

the better tracks off of SotLB, and the idea that another band could appear to try and carry on the Dissection legacy is more than welcome in my home. Well, forget that, for Soul Reaper are content to rehash the brutality of Morbid Angel all... day... long... We do get a snippet of the past here and there, but for the most part, you've got Sweden in my Floridian metal, no, you've got Florida in my Swedish metal! It's OK, but nothing all that special or especially memorable, besides the fact that Tobias can play the drums really, really fast. This would be like a six if I was rating it, for while it's nice and brutal, I've heard it all before, and this unfortunately isn't the type of album that stands heads and shoulders above the rest, just begging to be noticed. I just can't ever imagine myself going "Dude, throw that Soul Reaper in!"

Steel Prophet - Messiah
2000 Nuclear Blast Records

Well, here I was all set to totally blow this thing apart, citing past reviews as fuel to my raging hate against the uprising of power metal when the force of something divine stepped in and set me straight. Whatever angelic hand guided my finger towards the play button again and again? My mechanical messiah, ah-aahhhhhh! No, but seriously, I could easily rip this apart, from the Bruce Dickinson/Geoff Tate combo vocals, to the by the numbers songcrafting, but simply put, the album's not bad! Yeah, it's power with a capital Powwwerahhhh!, but as compared to some of the other cheeseball things out there, it's not so ba-aahhhh-d! Getting annoyed by my cheese metal screams through almost every word? Then you have a fucking inkling as to how much I hate them in my music. But side-stepping my apparent dislike for the operatic (when done so unconvincingly, I may add), Steel Prophet show their age in terms of experience, Messiah being a solid release primed for what could be deemed radio airplay. C'mon, I can see it, there's almost a Jet City Woowooooh-man! in here. The Ides of Maaarch! The only thing saving this from the rubbish bin are the numerous hooks which actually had me singing along in my headphones (much to the dismay of my co-workers). Love those blastbeats!

Stratovarius - Infinite
2000 Nuclear Blast Records

It doesn't matter if this band's from Sweden, or America, or in this case, Finland, it just all sounds so damn German to me. Heavy, heavy keyboard influence here, more so than I remember before, the synthy sounds just overpowering the guitar and almost the stadium-ready vocals when they kick in. Musically, it's just too tight, the band obvious masters of their realms, the album produced to a sickly sweet perfection, minus of course, the keyboard victories. But, much like (hopefully), you don't sit around eating Oreos and milk all day, after a track or two, I'm done. Not to fault the album, as there are a few really killer tracks (musically) placed in the track list, but as a whole, it's too much for

one sitting. A prime example is on track four, at time 4:24-4:30 (no, I'm kidding!!!!). Just take my word for it, if uplifting power metal is your particular vice, Stratovarius have a handle on their craft without spreading on too much cheese, although these pseudo ballads did make me bust out cryin' on the keyboard more than once. It sounds just like the cover looks, glossy and hi tech, just a tad bit sterile, and I guess comparisons could be drawn to DT's famous Images and Words on that matter. Who knows, maybe this will grow on me like that album, but when I've got Deceased's latest masterpiece vying for air time, I doubt it.

Stuck Mojo - Revolution of a Headhunter
2000 Century Media Records

Opus 5 for the mojo family has actually turned into the first SM album that not only can I listen to all the way through, but has succeeded in setting in some deep hooks. Revolution may lose some of the more die hard "rap-core" fans (watch me weep for those unlucky individuals who have to select another mall offering), as new co-vocalist Dan Dryden unleashes a pop induced voice which at times reminds me of King's X! Pretty interesting, but that's not the only change, Rich Ward beginning to expand his guitar assault to include melodies and solos (most notably on The Ward is my Shepherd). Some pretty "radical" slanderings towards liberal and democratic views here, which may incite some more PC individuals, but just seem a bit silly to me. So, more pop hooks, less of Bonz's manic psychotic madness, and some catchy songs lead to what could possibly be the most popular Mojo yet, if we can all forget about that big old assault rifle on the cover that is, heh heh. A good listen for the moment, but I really, really doubt that this will stand the test of time, say, two weeks.

Summon - Baptized By Fire
2000 Baphomet/Necropolis Records

Necropolis Records describes Summon as a devastating Black Metal from Michigan in the most violent vein possible! No frills or keyboards, just high caliber violence and unrelenting hatred! Alright, dude! Buy American! No, in all seriousness, that's also a pretty accurate description of what's on offer here with their "Baptized by Fire" LP. What they didn't mention is that although its really well played, its also really boring. Don't get me wrong, the songs slay, yes they do! No keyboards, just oodles and oodles of blast beats, double bass mayhem, troll with nuts stuck in a vise vocals, (if you can't figure out how they sound just by that, well, Odin damn thee!) and some really cool, retro sounding Slayer leads! What brings the record down (besides the ridiculously fuzzy guitar tone) is that as good as it can get at some points, there are so many bands playing the same songs with the same sound that nothing makes this stand out from the pack. Using the same cover (albeit the whole painting as opposed to a small section) as Hate Eternal (and

Blackend Vol. 3 - Ed.) just doesn't help either. Just as the whole Death Metal movement had its second tier bands, so does the Black Metal genre. Does anybody remember Resurrection, who released on album on Nuclear Blast? Or Incubus (now Opprobrium)? How's about Benediction's earlier output? Or just about every other band on their roster, circa 1991-93? No. And the reason is because as good as those bands were, there was nothing that made them stand out. Maybe its not so much Summon's fault, but I personally can't see any reason why someone would plunk down their hard earned cash to pick this up instead of any other Black Metal album being sold. An extremely competent, with an ultimately generic sound/package. - Review by John H.

Therion - Deggial
2000 Nuclear Blast Records

One positive thing to having someone explore uncharted waters before you is that you won't hit the same pitfalls that they did. For example, had Celtic Frost NOT released into the Pandemonium, when (and if) Therion had released Theli, they might have been dealt the same harsh criticism that the mighty Frost were at the time. But, it's all hypothetical, as CF DID create ITP in 1987, allowing Therion to exist from the beginning, even when they sounded like standard death metal. Theli was quite an achievement, something that indeed seemed novel at the time, Vovin, the follow-up, was for me a lackluster affair, highlighted by one track, The Wild Hunt, but otherwise, disappointing. Well, Deggial doesn't do much for me either, but it has more hook to it than Vovin. The Therion system seems a bit auto-piloted now, and not that Christopher needs to reinvent the band every album, but I don't exactly look forward to another choirly enhanced album, you know? There are some flashes of brilliance here though, euphoric moments where you just go "Yes, that works!", the album opener and the ending of the title track being prime examples. Not enough here though to satisfy me, Deggial being a truly beautiful album, no, really, but Theli was brilliant to me because it was so different. The one big chance is that Johnsson has given up the last of his death metal voicings, allowing the choir full breadth. Well, at least they didn't have to make a Cold Lake!

Thornspawn - Blood of the Holy, Taint thy Steel
2000 Baphomet Records

Not to judge a book by it's cover, but from the very beginning this just screams bad news. Artwork is from the first-album Bolt Thrower school of drawing, something I haven't seen since the homemade cheap tape demo days. Yeah, that's just the cover, and the music could save everything, but there's absolutely no hope of that here. Unless your a blackmetal fan that must have every crappy recording, stay away. A basic synopsis? Standard black metal riffs mixed way down under standard blastbeats,

complete with requisite black vomit screams. Sounds like everyone else that has heard a little too much Darkthrone. The bottom line is that this just doesn't do anything for me, and I'm damn glad to be able to shut this off. Reminds me of how I feel every time I review an Enthroned album.

Throne of Chaos - Menace and Prayer
2000 *Spikefarm Records*

Here's another one for the golden clone awards. We've got a young Finnish band that sounds exactly like another Finnish band, Children of Bodom. I know by now that I have to realize that there will always be innovators and followers. I don't know which camp I actually exist in, but I sure know what I would like to be, and that's not a follower. I never really understand why some bands are content to just "borrow" not only riffs, but a complete image from another band. The cover art is really different here, but looking at the band photo, to the coloring of the album (red), to the lyrical content, it reminds me all too well of COB's *Something Wild*. Yeah, Hatebreeder was anything but spectacular, so maybe the throne is considered vacant, but while Throne of Ecstasy have the act down, they'll need something (I won't say wild here) to elevate them higher. Who knows the real reason (label pressure, heavy debts) for this doppleganger, but for whatever it's worth, they have the sound down cold, which, may just be a good thing for you if you can't get enough. Rapid double bass drumming, frantic single note riffing, creature double feature keyboarding (I just "borrowed" that from another review) may give you an idea of what to expect. And don't get me wrong, I really like that sound, but I just find myself stuck on the fact that I've heard this all before, really recently in fact, and done better by the originals. I guess that's the key, if you take a motif, at least improve on it. Keep the name in mind though, because I do get the feeling that next album (if they still exist), these Finns may be able to incorporate more of their own personalities into the songwriting.

To/Die/For - All Eternity
2000 *Nuclear Blast Records*

Not being the biggest nor most knowledgeable fan of gothic music, I found myself greatly enjoying the debut release from Finnish goth-metalers To/Die/For. At times sounding not too far removed from Draconian era Paradise Lost, latter day Sentenced, or a heavier version of Sundown (ex-Cemetery), TDF has mastered the art of writing some very catchy, albeit melancholic songs, while embellishing them with a very 80's (both new wave and Glam) flair. Fret not though, ye die hard metalhead, because I'm not saying this is all black mascara and nail polish, as TDF are clearly rooted in metal, being much heavier than their contemporaries, and proving that when needed, they can shred with some very tasty leads courtesy of guitarist Jonas and J.P. One listen to this LP is all it will take and before you know, you'll be humming songs

like Sea of Sin, Live in You, or Farewell with those hooks and melodic chorus firmly latched in your brain. Vocalist Jape Peratalo possesses a melancholic croon not too dissimilar from Robert Smith (Cure) while Tonmi Lillmann lays the beats in a fairly easy going fashion, saving the double bass to accent the right parts. Even Kim Goss from Synergy pops up here and there (The Bitch is Back! - Ed.) adding to the feel of the LP. I can see why the Europeans eat this type of music up, and with an open mind, even say, a Metallica or Marilyn Manson fan would enjoy this. With 'All Eternity', To/Die/For have created an impressively heavy gothic metal hybrid that undoubtedly will win them both acclaim and success, and I look forward to hearing future material from them. Fear not, those who need a new Paradise Lost (since they now think they're called Depress Mode), TDF will surely take their place. Rabid Marduk fans need not apply. - Review by John H.

Tourniquet - Microscopic View of a Tele-scopic Realm
2000 *Metal Blade Records*

Now here's a real surprise for me, this album having grown on me substantially in the last few listens. My first reactions to this veteran Christian metal band were pretty dismal, but days later I found myself singing lines from the first track, a sure sign that the album was stuck in my head. I still have some problems with this less than perfect release, most notable Luke Easter's combination Offspring/Skate punk vocals, but overall, MVoATR tends to succeed, although this is one incredibly tough release to absorb in one sitting. Overtechnical progressive metal would be the best call, the music having a very chaotic classical feel (Bach is a professed influence), but the musicianship is superb, blending a lot of the riffs together nicely. Most tracks are penned by drummer Ted Kirkpatrick, which is immediately apparent due to the strong rhythmic interplay between the drums and guitar. Overall, not a great release, for ambition is a little higher than what the finished product offers, but it is a strong release, featuring many impressive moments, most especially on the guitar runs and in listening to the percussive batterings. I must say though, yet another hideous Metal Blade album cover, what is up with that?!

U.P. - Absorbed
1999 *Verdict Entertainment*

Comprised of three tracks from the Mindfailure sessions and two songs written from the early days of the band but recently recorded, Absorbed is a strong display in one man's vision of progressive metal. Basically conceived by guitarist Ken Jacobsen, Unleashed Power (or U.P., as they are known now) blends various tempos and styles into a powerball of metal which reminds one of bands such as Iced Earth, Fates Warning and other stalwarts of the genre without leaning too heavily on their sound. All five tracks are strong, but I definitely prefer the

middle material in terms of their technicality and in performance. Good tracking as well, with ultimate scorcher Perpetrator of Dreams lying in the dead center of the E.P., the apex of the album in my humble opinion. This is basically a taster for old fans and for those of us (such as myself) who had never heard U.P. before. Very impressive material from an obviously talented group of musicians. Trivia note, this is the same Jorg Michael who has graced both Stratovarius and Mekong Delta albums, something which can hint as to what lies within this encoded disc.

Usurper - Visions from the Gods
2000 *Necropolis Records*

Taking some time to complete their next opus, Usurper have decided to fill the gap by releasing a "rare and unreleased" album which contains tracks from their 1994 demo along with other songs which have not seen much exposure. The question most asked when a band does this is "Do we care?" Here, I'd say yeah, hell yeah actually, as Visions allows us to see back into the band's history, exposing the inner core of what made this retro band so Celtic Frostily retro. The overall sound isn't much different from today, save perhaps for the tracks off Skeletal Season having a more pounding flavor to them. We get a couple of versions of Soulstalker here, a cool idea which allows us to see the growth (or non-growth) of the song. Content to stay in the early 80s in terms of their immediate influences, Usurper do a good job with what they attempt, mainly because I think that they never really left that era, still enthralled with the "new" black metal sound ala Venom and the first Bathory albums. You want to hear some quality retro? Then look no further than Usurper's new collectible. And while you're at the store, pick up Skeletal Season if you don't already have it and see how a band can progress and regress at the same time. Cool stuff.

Various Artists - Heavy Metal 2000 Soundtrack
2000 *Restless Records*

Like many of you I have been eagerly awaiting the follow up release to both the original movie Heavy Metal, and the soundtrack. As is always the case my expectations were so high as to be unattainable and the first time I listened to Heavy Metal 2000 I was sorely disappointed. After listening to tepid tracks from the bands I was most excited to hear from (Pantera, Coal Chamber, and Bauhaus) I went back through the whole album and gave it a second chance. The album is actually pretty light up until the 11th track, Machine Head's *Alcoholocaust*, after which it starts to get a bit of an edge to it. Full Devil Jacket's *Green Iron Fist* is a simple grinding song which contributes some much needed weight to the album. Track 14 is Puya doing a song called *Tirale*. Maybe I am getting a bit complacent but I got through about 3 minutes of the 5:34 long song before I realized the lyrics were all in Spanish. I gotta hand it to them, it is

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probably the best song on the sound track! As a random aside, Billy Idol throws his hat into the ring with *Buried Alive*, which is pretty marginal. All in all the sound track is a lukewarm mix of techno/metal and rock. I am probably being overly critical but this sound track just didn't appeal to me as a stand alone album. I can envision it being good coupled with the images of the movie, and providing an audio backdrop to the visual action, but the music itself left me wanting. - Review by Matt Parry

Various Artists - Identity 6: Behold Another World

2000 Century Media Records

If you like me, the average working Joe, than checking out new bands can be a exciting, yet extremely expensive proposition. Mostly dependent on reviews and ads, more often than not you end up paying up to 20 bucks only to find out that you hate the very disc you just bought! Which is why, from day one, I have loved Century Media's Identity Compilations, which can be had for only 2 bucks via mail order/online! That's cheaper than an extra value meal! Now on its 6th volume, for those who are not familiar with the CM roster, this is the perfect "how do you do" to their acts. Starting off with one of CM's more successful bands, Stuck Mojo and "Hatebreed". "Hatebreed" sees Stuck Mojo moving toward a more mainstream (if that's possible) direction, seemingly putting a rein on rapper Bonz's delivery. Sounding more in the vein of Machine Head than ever before, I wouldn't be surprised if this isn't a hit. Next is Skinlab and "Second Skin", an excellent and grove filled slab of heaviness from their second LP, "Disembody: The New Flesh". These guys recently tore a hole in Hawaii with Pissing Razors. Third are Moonspell and "Lustmord", which deceptively, is one of about only 3 tracks on their Butterfly Effect LP that is worth listening to. Afraid to say, in 2000, this is as heavy as they get now days. Sentenced offer "No More Beating as One", and to be honest, it's just more of the same from their last two records. As successful as they have gotten (and more power to them!), I yearn for the days of "North from Here". Yet, their version of Euro-Metallica is a hell of a lot better than Metallica itself nowadays. Decent stuff, similar to the last Amorphis outing. Shadows Fall comes barging in with a total hodgepodge of styles with "The First Noble Truth". Two things ruin this song for me, one is the thin production, and two, it just sounds messy and disjointed. Maybe a few more (dozen?) spins will do it! Krisiun follow that with the ultra tight "Soul Devourer", showing us just what would have happened if Deicide came from Brazil. Dark Tranquillity offers up "Dobermann", showing us just how far the Gothenburg sound has evolved. Effective use of harmony and clean vocals with the expected growls and metal chugga chugga riffs. Jag Panzer hangs onto their tail with "King at a Price" offering us their take on the whole power metal sound. Don't expect anything mind-blowing though. Samael take stage next and wipe the floor clean

with everyone at this point. Samael are so damn ahead of everyone else sound wise, its not even funny anymore, and "Supra Karma"'s mixture of classical synths, discordant guitars, guttural vocals, and programmed drumming, Samael do it like its no one's business. Worship Him indeed! Tiamat hopelessly follow that with "For her pleasure", and I don't know about anyone else, but they lost me after the Astral Sleep and Clouds LPs. Utterly boring to these ears. Soilwork follow that a proceed to wipe any memory of that Tiamat track with the utterly vicious "The Chainheart Machine". This is the gem here, and if you don't have this or weren't even thinking about purchasing this, well, than you better hit yourself silly with a blunt object, because Soilwork is rewriting the brutality book here. Think Gothenburg on speed, with effective use of synths. Absolutely mandatory! Winter's Bane follows that with an excellent track of epic power metal that shows you just why Ripper was chosen for Priestly duty (and if you didn't know that this was his old band, than shame on you.) If Rob Halford were dead (no career jokes mentioning Two OK?) than Ripper would indeed be Halford reincarnated! Mental Home proceeded to then confuse the shit out of me, but after repeated listens, actually became a favorite of mine on this disc. Haven't a clue on how to describe them, their sound being an amalgam of black metal, atmospheric keyboards, gothic clean vocals, lots of Voivod, even bits of Anacrusis here and there (check out the break at the 1:33 point to see what I mean). Interesting track, all in all. Merauder brings "Find my Way" as an offering to this scribe, and well, if you have their Master Killer LP, than you know what you're getting. Essentially metalcore at its finest. Arch Enemy holds down track 15, and proves just why Carcass never went away (at least spiritually). Some of the most tasteful riffs and leads since, well, Heartwork. In at spot number 16(66) is Old Man's Child, and besides being a candidate for stupidest band name, serves up a dose of Dimmu-ish black metal. At least it's the best track from their Revelation 666 disc. Almost to the end and you'll find Angel Dust, arguably one of the most underrated German powermetal bands out there. Angel Dust combines some of the catchiest riffs and keyboards accents to make some of the most truly memorable songs out there. Put back the Hammerfall LP and pick this up instead. And lastly, we get a track from the recently reformed kings of sludge, Eyehategod (now that's a band name!). Never having been their biggest fan, Eyehategod show why they rule the fuzz drenched, feedbacked and fucked up, Sabbathly, on the floor drunk throne with "Story of the Eye". And there you have it. Eighteen tracks, all for \$2 from Century Media. Nothing is more effective to get turned on to bands by than a cheap label compilation except getting the stuff for free! - Review by John H.

Vermin - Millennium Ride

1998 No Fashion Records

The release may be a couple years old, but

Metal Blade has so kindly decided to release this in the states, and I for one am glad that they did. Drawing very, very heavily from Wolverine Blues-era Entombed, Millennium Ride has that thick as pudding Skogsberg Sound that so many metalheads were drooling over for years. It's also a good thing that some time has passed since WB, for (to me), Vermin don't come across as a carbon copy, but a band enamored by a sound and striving to make one heavy as hell metal album, and also one that has carved it's way into my player and refuses to come out. I guess we can use the old "ranges from mid-paced to a tad above" tag, but honestly, if you get into the whole Death-n-Roll sound, this is a worthy entry into the books. Hell, having an old school COC shirt on helps win me over any day of the week as well!

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