SLOTH 'ZINE DIGITIZATION PROJECT

ISSUE #5

Introductory Notes

Coming almost literally on the heels of its predecessor, the fifth issue of Sloth was just a slim 24-page affair because I wanted to have something fresh to distribute when I and my old Lumbricosis drummer Sean Heelen attended the Milwaukee Metalfest in July of 1998.

Soon after getting back to my parents' house in Virginia after my first year of college, I found myself working 2 summer jobs (early morning bagel slinger at Einstein Bros. and weekend doorman at the Kennedy Center of all places), as well as playing tennis with old high school friends—but this simply wasn't enough! That old Sloth itch, which the recently released issue #4 should have temporarily soothed, was only exacerbated by my plans for Milwaukee.

And as a shocking testament to just how committed I was to this zine, rather than risk missing the publication deadline I actually passed up on a trip to London my family took to cheer on my sister's elite high school rowing team. Utterly insane as that may be, I will never forget the thrill of passing out copies of Sloth #5 to the hundreds of die-hard metal fans wrapped around the block waiting to get into the venue on that first day of the festival.

This issue employed the same cover layout as #4 but most of the interviews were written as actual articles instead of the traditional Q&A. Due to space limitations a large percentage of the album reviews were positive, and I shaved the demo section to one page highlighting bands with promise. Paid ads and the lower page count allowed me to jump up to 7500 newsprint copies, the majority of which again were distributed by various metal mail-order labels.

Overall a pretty slick and pro little mag, issue #5 does still see some of my classic annoying brashness rip through here and there, but I had just turned 19 so what the hell!

Interesting tidbits:
-Later that fall back in Miami I got free tickets from VAST's label to attend the Halloweenie Roast put on by the local rock station ZTA. It was a big outdoor concert which featured such national acts as Fuel and Lenny Kravitz. I brought a copy of Sloth #5 and after VAST's set I approached a security guard and asked if he would give it to Jon Crosby. Well, a few minutes later both he and Jon came walking over to me and my friend Aaron, and then we were invited backstage! John was a very mellow guy and even generous enough to let us wear his all-access pass for a few minutes to watch Candlebox from the side of the stage. What an incredible night!

-Late in 1999 as I was backpacking through southern Australia after finishing a semester up in Queensland, I went to a show in Melbourne where Blood Duster was playing. It was fun to blow their minds by telling them who I was as we guzzled glorious Aussie beers. Another band I'd reviewed in a previous issue, Volatile, used a drum machine so they sat a female love doll on the drum stool. They also somehow employed exploding styrofoam heads...crazy times!

-For several issues Forhad Hossain, or Zink as we affectionately call him, was Sloth's go-to reviewer for all the traditional heavy metal and power metal albums. Issue #5 sees him in top form with a number of insightful critiques. He's gone on to play in a several hard rock/progressive metal bands over the years, the latest of which Shumaun is finally generating the praise he has earned and deserves. Congrats, amigo!

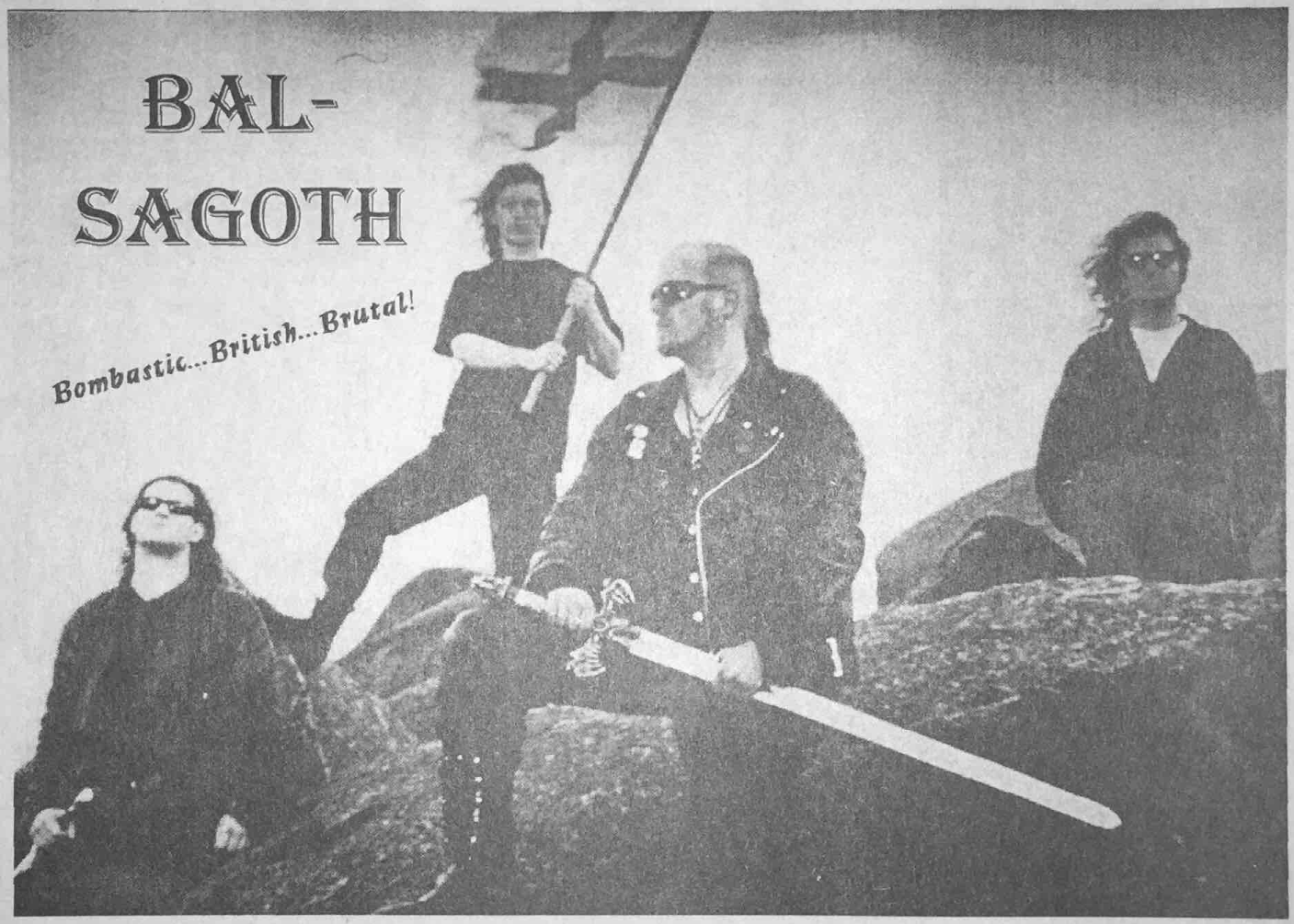
-Dominus later morphed into a band named after the very album we interviewed them about, Volbeat. They've since had a huge career fusing metal, rock n' roll, and rockabilly, and were even nominated for a Grammy in 2014! Many bands Sloth covered went on to have lengthy careers but it's especially nice to see one have real mainstream success.

Well, this trip down memory lane is almost at an end. After this there's only one more issue to revisit and it's back to the 21st century for all of us. Thanks so much for taking the time to remember Sloth zine!

-Phil Alterman
January 25, 2016

SLOTH

Issue #5 Exposing You to the Rest of the Scene! Fall 1998



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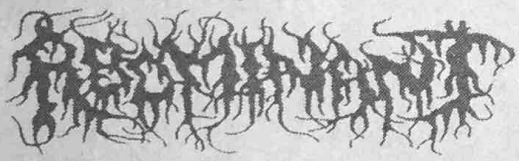
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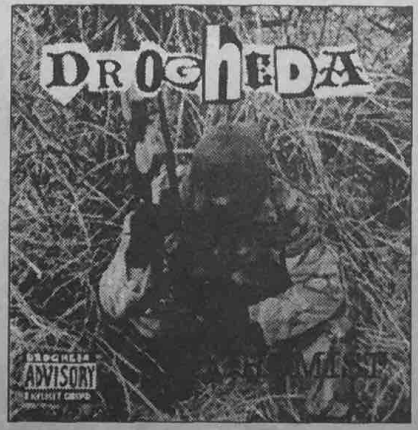


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Thanks: Mom, Dad, Vickie, Cinecom, U Miami friends, etc...You know who you are!

This issue is so compact because I wanted to have a product to distribute at the Milwaukee Metalfest. I honestly did everything in my power to make this as comprehensive as possible despite being a full-time college student, carrying two summer jobs, being the ad rep and layout artist and writer, and trying to have a life involving my other passions, playing tennis and chasing women, for example.

You will notice I have written actual articles this time around. It is more professional and exemplary of writing skills, something way too many zine editors lack. Plus, I noticed Unrestrained! magazine from Canada has employed this tactic with fabulous results. All hail edumakated riting!

I have been accused of not being a true supporter of the underground. I'm told I don't interview enough unsigned bands. There are a ton of American zines that thrive on interviewing the same bands over and over. And I also believe that it is pointless for me to interview Fear Factory, Dark Tranquillity, In Flames, and other such big name acts. I chose to expose you to more obscure signed artists this issue because I know my audience is mostly American and not too keen on the great music coming out in Europe. I'm sure my decision to feature VAST will only anger my detractors further because it is not a metal band at all. Let's look at the facts. I now print 7,500 copies of this magazine; last issue I printed 5,000, and before that I printed 1,000. The bands I feature are getting maximum exposure and my zine and label contact lists inform you, opinion-free, of who else is out there in the underground. I decide everything that enters these pages, from interviews to reviews. I usually include more negative album reviews that serve as warnings, but space limitations have forced me to focus on the better releases of late. My increased displeasure with the majority of unsigned bands, coupled with the increasing number of independent labels worldwide, has convinced me to limit the demo sections to a few potential great bands. Call me what you may, but I built this publication from nothing with undying effort and have helped many unknown bands reach the attention of countless metal fans. Ask Garden of Shadows, Quo Vadis, Old Grandad, The Crown, or Dominus whether I'm a "true" supporter. The hundreds of hours I've spent typing up interviews, cutting flyers, calling record labels, editing text, and working to pay for Sloth magazine were for the love of a music that I hold more dear to my heart than anything else. My spirit is more content because of the albums in my collection, and I feel happy when I listen to them. Sloth is my way of sharing with you my personal favorites, as well as some more objective material. I have made plenty of mistakes in the evolution of this magazine and will surely err again. No apologies, ever.

On June 25, 1998, my grandfather, Richard Henry Horner Bales, passed away. A kind and loving man, he was the conductor of the symphony orchestra at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., for 42 years. He lived to the ripe age of 83, and the tremendous turnout at his memorial service from appreciative friends and family reminded me why striving for excellence in everything is so important and worthwhile. Therefore, I dedicate this issue of *Sloth* to the memory of Richard Bales and to his loving wife of 55 years who passed away last year, Betty Starly Bales.

-Phil Alterman

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

by Pete Merluzzi

The United States, our beloved homeland, is perhaps the trendiest country on the face of the earth. The weak minded youth of the day allow things like MTV to tell them what music they like, and why they should like it. The dirtier you are the more popular you can be. The part that really bothers me though is that these weak minded people have no loyalty to what they model their lives after. If you like a certain kind of music, great; that is your prerogative. People spend years ridiculing others because they have different tastes, but when a new trend hits, those same people turn on everything that they stood for and repeat the idiotic cycle. The music of their past is just a casualty that they will look back on with embarrassment in ten years time.

I have listened to hard rock and heavy metal since I was six years old. MTV thought that metal was cool for a while, then they thought that it was not so cool, but I still listen and enjoy hearing new stuff everyday. What bothers me is how the music of today has become so overwhelmingly depressing. "I hate this one, and you hate that one, I just want to die." Shut up already! What happened to music that had some kind of message whether it be about politics, sex, partying, or telling that jackass boss where to stick it – you know, the fun part of life.

Sadly, popular music is not the only place where we see bitterness and despair in today's world. It is all too often that some pinhead kid decides that they have to go and shoot their classmates or kill their parents. Whatever happened to good parents? It seems that they were just a trend way too few people held on to. Discipline is something that most kids will only read about, while some rot in jail for a murder they committed at the age of thirteen because some girl with braces like piano wire wouldn't go to the big dance with them. What happened to people that made them so angry and hateful?

Aggression has always had its place in music and some of us found that a good angry song helped us channel our anger through the energy and excitement. Now the sentiment appears to be, "Just grab a gun, wrap your lips around it, and pull the trigger." If these fools would think first and take some of their friends with them the world could be a much better place. We do not have room for drugged-out assholes who live to make other people's lives miserable! Somehow they have become a much bigger group in the world today, and they elect their cohorts to be the leaders of our nation and they make people wearing wire rimmed glasses and braces rock stars.



Whatever happened to superstars that were larger than life, like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Kiss, and Led Zeppelin? Even guys like Twisted Sister had an image that everyone felt was unachievable but that did not stop people from trying to attain it. Then Nirvana came along and made any slacker in flannel think, "Hey, I don't really need any talent to be a superstar. I can just keep being a poster child for mediocrity and people will love me." It has become apparent that world standards have sunk to an incredible low and there is very little sign of coming relief.

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In 1996 Bal-Sagoth released *Starfire Burning Upon the Ice-Veiled Throne of Ultima Thule*, a pinnacle of achievement in many regards. Besides featuring the longest metal song titles this side of the Carcass autopsy table, it demonstrated the most bombastic and effective unification of chunky guitar riffs and soaring keys the metal genre had ever called its own. The massive keyboard expertise and pummeling riffs evoke a grandiose feeling in the listener, setting the stage for vocalist Byron Roberts and his epic tales of a vast imaginary, pre-cataclysmic world he has created in which the sagas unfold. His vocals range from demonic rasps to guttural growls to throaty spoken words, further diversifying the self-proclaimed legend that is Bal-Sagoth...



Savagely Picking Your Bones Clean...

Despite the absolute appeasement of tastes both brutal and atmospheric that Bal-Sagoth provides, much of the metal scene has either ignored or looked unfavorably upon the English quartet since its 1994 Cacophonous Records debut, *A Black Moon Broods over Lemuria*, through this year's challenging third offering, *Battle Magic*. "Yes, we confuse and confound a lot of people," Byron admits. "The music press cannot understand us, for we are simply beyond their ken. Imaginative bands like Emperor, for instance, appreciate what we do, but there are plenty more who will not even try to understand our intent." But isn't that discouraging and a bit unnerving? "I anticipated such a response, which is why [I address the listeners] with my message in the [album's] inlay. Basically, only people who are possessed of a certain degree of imagination will admire us. A true fan must have within them that vital spark of passion, and be prepared to accept and embrace something quite different," he proclaims. "People who want generic, recycled nonsense will never like us, for they have no imagination and no comprehension of the true power of avant-garde art. Perhaps they fear us; for we are the heralds of a new age," he adds without hesitation.

Bal-Sagoth really distanced itself from the beaten path with *Battle Magic*, another full-length celebration of all battles bloody, pagan warriors swathed in elder sorcery, and ascension to the throne of immortality through its dark and symphonic extreme metal. Noticeably different are the roles of keyboard and guitar, as the former has moved to the forefront while the latter has taken on a drier, less brutal sound. Seeing a great band forgo its barbarism for orchestration or melody is often a metal fan's greatest fear, and Bal-Sagoth marched unashamedly down this path on *Battle Magic*.

"The evolutionary process of Bal-Sagoth will always favor the keyboards," Byron stresses. Noting the vast difference between *Starfire* and *Battle Magic*, he believes "the core is the same, the essence is unchanged. The same artistic passion forged all three of our albums, and all three are different chapters

> "Some bands may take their plastic teeth out and put their velvet shirts in the laundry once they come off stage, but when I'm not on stage, I'm damn well still polishing my swords!"

of the same great story. So the pulsating creative nucleus of the band will always be the same, remaining as unchanging as stone. It is fair to assume that as time goes on, the guitars will continue to assume a secondary position to the keyboards, as the synths are the mainstay of the music."

But to what end? Could the fierce, warlike aspects of Bal-Sagoth's music be lost if you further phase out the guitars? "If anything, the increased inclusion of keyboards and all the possibilities they offer can only serve to strengthen the warlike aspect of the music," Byron feels. "It can paint a far more fearsome and martial aura than a guitar ever could."

In writing this article, I admit that *Starfire* is easier to listen to than *Battle Magic*. It features the straightforward metal aggression that *Battle Magic* uses sparingly while opting for supreme orchestration and composition. You might say that Bal-Sagoth is a bit scatterbrained with its knack for abrupt leaps from head-chopping speed passages to pompous atmospheres of synthesizer glory in mere seconds. But you can't deny that Bal-Sagoth is accomplishing way more than Deicide has since its qualitative swan song, *Legion*, and in doing so is conducting a Crusade of its own (be it a pagan one). A perfect example of the band's progress into mastering its craft is "Blood Slakes the Sand at the Circus Maximus" from *Battle Magic*, which showcases an unashamed classical composition that aids the lyrics in telling the story behind the title.

"'Circus Maximus' was really my and Jonny's [Maudling, drums and studio keyboards] great experiment. We wanted to know if we could do a very cinematic piece built on a particularly linear and definite narrative, where the music wholly existed to tell the accompanying story in an unreservedly bombastic a way as possible. It seems that we have succeeded, as many people cite that as their favorite track."

A great song indeed, it sticks out like a medieval warrior in downtown London. Speaking of which, that's what Byron does! Sort of...

"I have been associated with many battle re-enactment societies over the years, reveling in donning a huge coat of real chain mail, hefting a yard of tempered steel, and thundering into the fray against other groups and societies," he states proudly. Because Bal-Sagoth as a whole presents such imagery, I ask what he feels about the role of image in today's metal scene. "Indeed, metal is very reliant on imagery, and there are many bands out there who seem to trade exclusively on their image alone," he observes. "Image is rather important to us too, but it's not vital; for instance, I instigated for us a sponsorship deal with a company that distributes replica arms and armor. This is something both for the band's image, but also for myself in everyday life. Some bands may take their plastic teeth out and put their velvet shirts in the laundry once they come off stage, but when I'm not on stage, I'm damn well still polishing my swords!"

Noting his life and lyrical styles, I inquire as to whether Byron longed for the battles of which he speaks. Do the honor, valor, and epic nature of medieval battles fill you with nostalgia, like you were born a few hundred years too late? It seems as if our time is devoid of a grandiose aura, or possibly your weaving of such tales only builds a myth for terrible times. What do you think? Our time lacks romantic qualities because all wars are fought with bombs, gas, or bullets at best. Do you sense true battle glory was lost when men forsake the sword for the rifle?

"Indeed, much of the immediacy and personal honor has been drained from battle in this day and age," he laments. "Dueling a man blade to blade will always be the purest, most skill-taxing form of combat. The passion and power of such combat burns as fire from a warrior's heart, heedless of the great strategic advances such projectile weapons as bows, crossbows, bolt-throwers, and ultimately firearms may have ushered in."

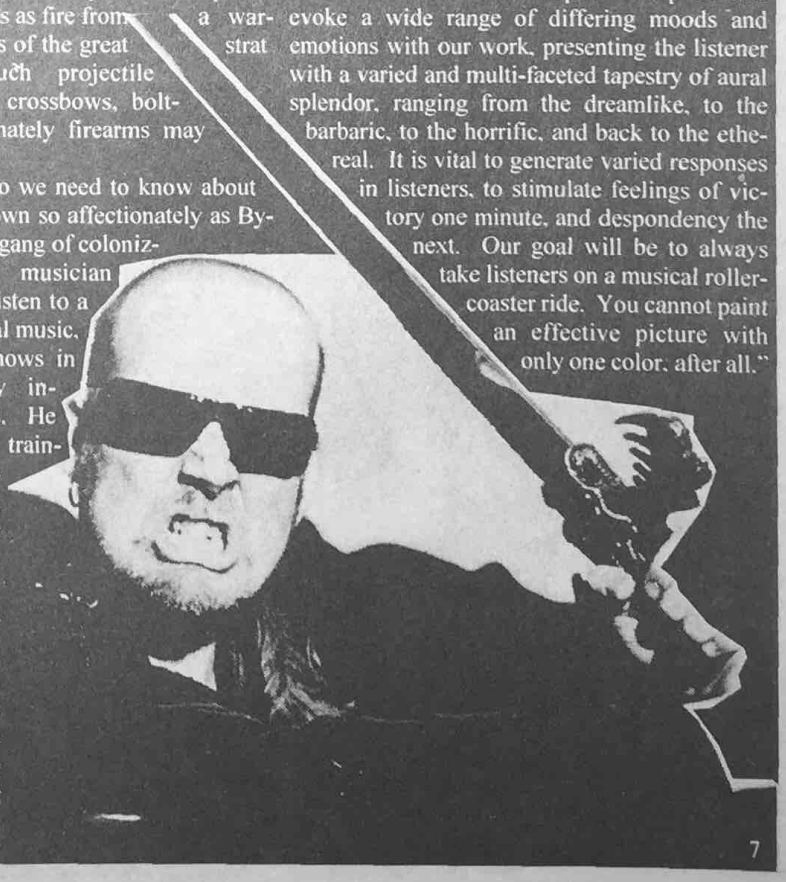
So what else do we need to know about this bloody Brit known so affectionately as Byron Roberts and his gang of colonizing, stamp-taxing musician buddies? "We all listen to a great deal of classical music, and it obviously shows in Jonny's classically inspired compositions. He has classical piano training, as does Christopher [Maudling, guitar], and they both play a wide variety of instruments. [The skin flute? – ed.] The musical prowess of the band is thus of a quite high standard. As a band," he adds, "we are actually rather athletic. I participate in the battle reenactments, and Christopher is into bodybuilding in no small way. We also tend to get into a lot of street-fights, both collectively and individually. Of course, it is my chosen lifestyle to be this way – one moment a renegade drunkard steeped in heroic defiance, the next studying a text on classical mythology or some such."

And are these ancient texts the sources of Byron's lyrical inspiration? "I summon my inspirations from many sources, and the works of R.E. Howard, H.P. Lovecraft, Tolkien, and Moorcock are certainly amongst the most prominent," he says. "There are also many other fantasy/sci-fi authors I admire, as well as films and comic books. All these things and more, such as ancient myths and legends, constitute inspirational material for me. Always I have avoided any kind of pseudo-political standpoints in the lyrics; forever I have labored to keep out the mundane and the commonplace."

It's obviously no easy task to "spin ripping yarns of ancient times and far away places" and protect this poetry from being musically torn to shreds, so what sort of musical input does lyricist Byron have?

"In the early days, I firmly directed much of the composition of much of the music by presenting concepts or specifying what kind of riff the lyrical phrase required. Now the band has evolved to such an extent that there is a perfect creative synergy between the writing members, and Jonny and Chris fully understand the image and concept of the band, and thus they color their riffs and compositions accordingly."

He continues: "We aspire to explore and evoke a wide range of differing moods and emotions with our work, presenting the listener with a varied and multi-faceted tapestry of aural splendor, ranging from the dreamlike, to the barbaric, to the horrific, and back to the ethereal. It is vital to generate varied responses in listeners, to stimulate feelings of victory one minute, and despondency the next. Our goal will be to always take listeners on a musical roller-coaster ride. You cannot paint an effective picture with only one color, after all."



Within Temptation

Often compared to Theatre of Tragedy and The Gathering, Within Temptation is unique and progressive enough to outrun these tags and stand out on its own merit. Hailing from Holland, home of greats such as Gorefest and Phlebotomized, this melodic and bombastic sextet is steadily climbing the ladder to international success through national tours and large promotion from DSFA Records.

Singer Sharon den Adel leads the group, backed by Martijn Westerholt's masterful keys and the solid guitar duo of Michiel Papenhove and male growler Robert Westerholt. Miss Adel is by far the most important aspect of the music, her angelic voice hitting breathtaking highs and full-fledged lows. Her performance on "Restless" and "Grace" practically sell the album *Enter*, which came out last year. Statistics say that 10.000 copies of *Enter* sold within four months, even though the group hadn't toured!

Michiel speaks of Within Temptation's sudden date with success: "We were very surprised about the enormous positive response. We liked the music ourselves of course, but never had the idea it could become such a big thing in such a small time. I think what makes it accessible is that our music is melodic. Melodic female vocals and melodic synthesizers versus metal – that's what our music is about. So if you want melody, you're in the right place, but if you want the music to be 'tough,' you're also in the right place."



This contrast between the light and the heavy is important because it demonstrates how the band transcends traditional doom metal with accessible lead vocals, gruff backing vocals, crunchy guitars, and orchestral synthesizers. Interestingly enough, Michiel says he and the others aren't really aware of the competition.

"Please don't hold it against us but we're not really into the existing metal scenes," he confesses. "We try to do our thing, make our music and play for our audience, but we don't really interest ourselves in the rest of the metal scene. To be honest, I don't even like metal, which goes for more (but not all) members of Within Temptation. We like our music because it's a mixture of metal and melody, which makes the music nice to listen to, but you can also go crazy on it. That's the cool thing about Within Temptation's music. Metal is very often endless repeating of non-melodic riffs with the intention to create aggression. Well, it seems to work for loads of people, but not for me. And that's why we don't pay much attention to the death/black metal scene."

"Black metal is even worse because of the fact that I'm an atheist. There's nothing worse than mixing your music with religion, in my humble opinion. Black metal is usually based upon some hilarious image – corpse paint and stuff, you know what I mean – where you have to be cool, evil, and very hostile against non-satanic influences. Fuck that."

Despite Within Temptation's lack of interest in listening to metal bands, playing with them is another story. Among the band's credits are gigs with countrymen Orphanage and last year's Dynamo Open Air Festival. [illegible] performance was so successful that they've been invited back to play on the main stage. Obviously the group does something right, but many bands these days prefer [illegible]

"I consider us to be a [illegible]" states Michiel. "I personally [illegible] album because of the [illegible] time stress that comes with every recording session. [illegible] to have an album when you're finished, but it's much better to play the songs live in front of an audience that responds immediately. I'll go for the live band anytime."

Speaking of other rumor has it that Within Temptation has just released one. "It's not a new album, but a maxi-single called *Dance*. We hope to have the new songs ready by early 1999, but we have absolutely no certain dates that I can give you. Let's hope the album will be out next year around June. The current CD only contains three new songs, two re-mixes, and a CD-ROM part. The songs were written around the time we recorded *Enter*, but they weren't ready to be put on the album yet. They had to be edited and made into what they are now. These songs are really an extension of *Enter*, so it's kind of hard to say in what sense they're different. We have tried to make the songs more extreme, adding more diversity between softness and loudness and more changes in, for example, tempo. We think these songs are good, but it's up to the public to decide what they think of the songs, if they're better or not."

And what about the public? Do you mind the constant comparisons to The Gathering and Theatre of Tragedy?

"They will probably keep on comparing us to The Gathering or Theatre of Tragedy, but I don't mind. People need to have reference material and people like to refer us to these bands. Let them, I don't care."

One thing Within Temptation has in its favor is that singer Sharon is as beautiful looking as she sounds. Does Michiel think it is more advantageous to have such an appealing lead than, say, Theatre of Tragedy's slightly "off" Liv Kristine Espenaes?

"Sharon is considered by a lot of people to be very beautiful. I receive love letters by e-mail for her pretty often and it's obvious that she's good looking," Michiel says, which *would* be the smart thing to say since Sharon is the other guitarist's girlfriend!

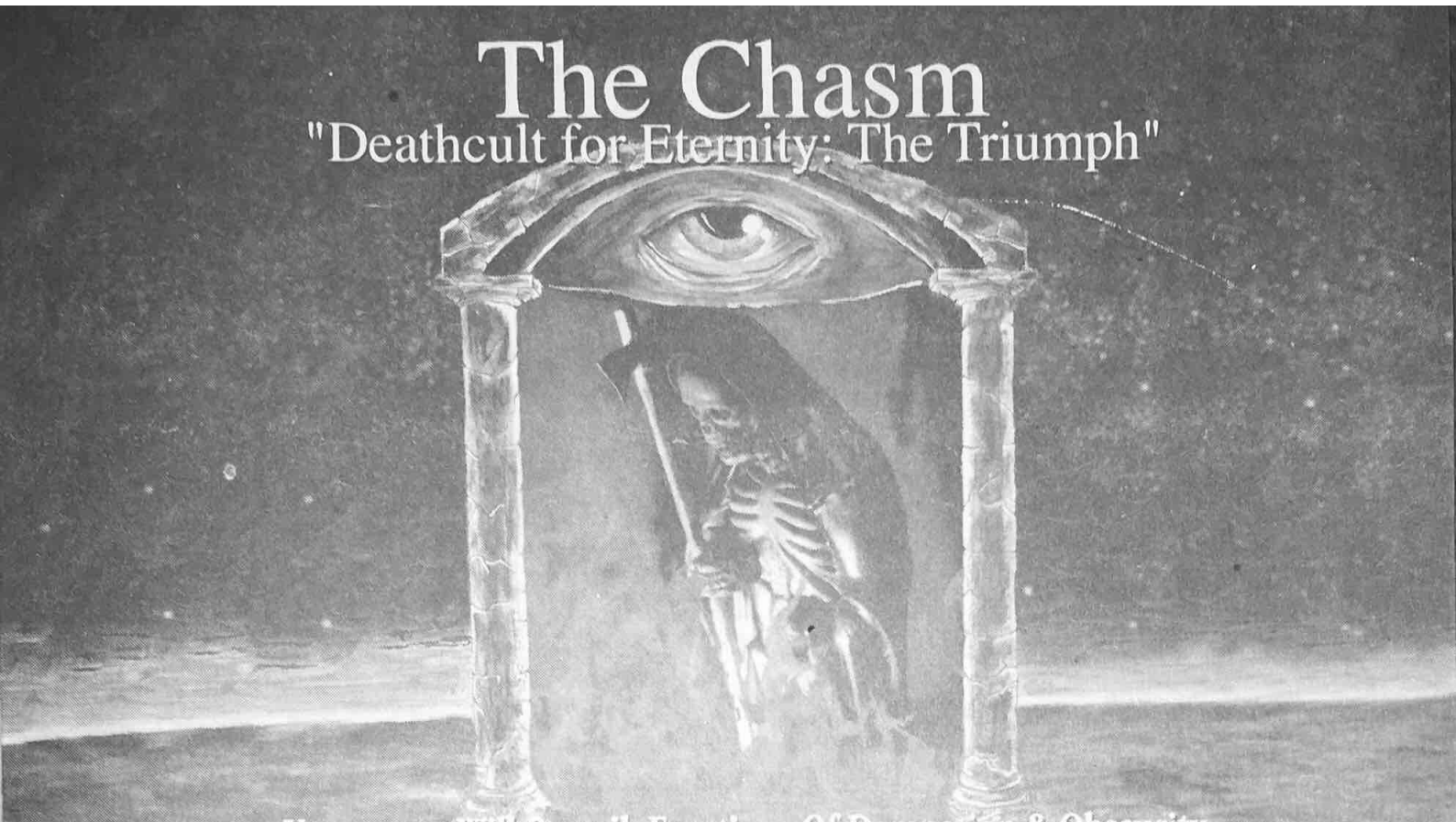
He continues: "It's kind of hard to say if it hurts Theatre of Tragedy [if their singer is not pretty] because I personally haven't seen them on a picture nor at a gig, and because I'm not in the band and can't speak for them. It's kind of sick: if you have a good-looking singer, everything goes smoother. Can the singer for Theatre of Tragedy help it that she hasn't been born with the same looks as Sharon? We all look at the outside and judge by that. That is, I repeat, very sick and I don't agree with it, but the world just works that way. If you're pretty, you're cool and you get a lot more opportunities. Fuck that, too."



Luckily for us all, metal is far enough from the MTV spotlight that it doesn't require a hot girl in the band to be successful. Both Within Temptation and Theatre of Tragedy are great (and Liv isn't *that* bad, Sharon just happens to be so fine!) and well worth your time if you are in the mood for some powerful, soothing music.

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VAST

Electronic samples. Chanting monks. Clean vocals. Why you might not like VAST. Classically trained musicians. Dark atmospheres. Self-loathing lyrics. Why you might like VAST.

As accessible as VAST's music may seem to be – hell, I could see a couple tracks making it onto the radio – it is really a deep, dark listen. Creator Jon Crosby was classically trained as a child and by age 13 had been featured in *Guitar Player* magazine as a young guitarist to watch. He could play all the Joe Satriani and Metallica solos backward and forward. During the next few years he attempted to form a band or two, but was unimpressed by the rising trendiness of punk and ska. Crosby began to explore with electronic beats and sampling, often playing for nonexistent audiences to the chagrin of uninterested club owners.

VAST stands for Visual Audio Sensory Theater. The self-titled debut album is true to form, featuring an 18-piece orchestra, samples from the Bulgarian Female Choir and the Benedictine Monks of the Abby of Saint-Mauer, Cleraux. Each of the album's 11 songs has a unique aura and expresses different emotions, usually melancholic ones.

"Touched" is probably the best VAST song. Even the most narrow-minded metal head has to appreciate Crosby's seamless layering of acoustic guitars, pounding riffs, floating beats, and the aforementioned female choir. The depressed but sing-along vocals on this track are entrancing and haunting. Another track that thrives on powerful vocals over an atmospheric backdrop is "I'm Dying," in which Crosby battles confessing his allegiance to an intangible God. Like all great songs, it hits home aurally and emotionally.

Elements of goth, metal, and industrial mix with electronic and Euro-pop in VAST's diverse fifty-minute debut. Not the kind of music to usually read about in *Sloth*, underground metal magazine extraordinaire, and I spoke with Crosby about the oddity of being featured in these pages, and how I might get punched in the face for it.

"We're not exactly Third Eye Blind, you know!" he exclaims. "And I think what I'm doing is a lot more rebellious and harder to pull of than doing death metal. Death metal has been out there for a while, and I'm trying to do my complete own thing. If you're in a death metal band and want to go out and play a show, there are like 15,000 other bands you can play with. If I want to go play a show there's no one for me to play with. The only people coming to my shows are the ones into VAST. It's not like I'm leeching off of someone else's audience."

Putting a tag on VAST is anything but simple. Far from metal but even farther than radio rock, the band's music is entrancing and great to hear in the dark. Crosby's soulful voice sings of lost love, death, and regret with utter despondency. So how would he classify his style?

"It's not like anything out there, MTV or radio. The shit out there is accessible; it's Semi-Sonic and Third Eye Blind. My influences are old classic rock, goth, and classical. So my whole thing is pretty different. So far I don't really have an audience or fan base. I've noticed that everyone from 11-year-old girls to middle age people to goth people like VAST. The only people who don't seem to like it are those who listen to country music. And I don't think the ska/punk crowd is our place, either.

"As far as getting validated by a metal scene," he continues, "a few months ago Lars Ulrich from Metallica went on MTV and said VAST was his favorite new band. I'd rather have Lars Ulrich say he's into it than a whole bunch of other people. And I think Metallica really started the whole thing, so I felt really validated when he said that."

Crosby's humble beginnings can be traced to Humboldt County, CA, an isolated town of 7,000 that had no places for bands to play. Music took over his life from an early age, with the film Amadeus an inspirational experience that hooked him on classical music. Then came the Beatles, Metallica, the Sex Pistols, and by the time he and his mother had relocated to San Francisco in his early teens, electronic experimentation.

"I started doing electronic music before it was popular, and back then it sounded a lot different. I come from a very small town and a very poor background. I was very poor, I didn't have enough money to do anything and I couldn't find any musicians because everybody wanted to be in ska and punk bands. So I was constantly doing my own thing and it was pretty tough. I haven't been able to go out and play club tours for 15 years – now, I'm not whining, because I think bad things are better for you than good things. If I had had everything handed to me like a lot of other bands in the area, I wouldn't have gotten this far."

Crosby is now signed to Elektra, a major label capable of huge promotion and distribution. He's already reaching new and diverse parties, such as you, and there is the lingering possibility of major radio play.

"I don't want to get too caught up in it all," he says of the attention he's now getting. "I'm just doing it for myself, so I don't want to get caught up in what other people say. I've spent my whole life playing guitar by myself in a room, so I'm obviously not doing it for anybody else. I guess in a weird way I'm not doing it exclusively for myself because I could probably afford to just go buy a house and not do any of this shit. I want to go out and tour and bring it to people – I don't even know, I just do it because I enjoy it."

Does he even care deep down if people enjoy it or not?

"No," he says after a pause. "It's kind of one of those things where if someone's heard it and gotten into it or inspired by it, that makes me feel good."

How does Jon feel about being called a sell-out for signing to a major label though his music is rooted in obscurity?

"Selling out is just doing music differently than you want to in order to make money. If the music that I play naturally is going to make money, then that's cool. But if this record doesn't sell, my next record isn't going to be a fucking ska record!"

He continues: "I'm proud of the record, and I'm not sponsoring anything [to increase sales]. If some company came up and said they were going to give me money if I talked about how great they were, I wouldn't do it for no matter how much money if I didn't believe in what they do. I mean, I know who I am and what I'm capable of doing and not doing. You're not going to see any Budweiser sponsorship here, and I'd be a hypocrite if in two years I did that. But that's fine, because I don't think America's really made up its mind about whether they care about what kind of person the musician is. Let's say there's a band and you're really into their music, if you find out their lead singer is an asshole, how does that make you feel? I don't even know how I feel about that."

Finally, we spoke briefly about how his classical training influences his electronic music, separating it from the ultra-repetitive, musically uncreative, boomp-chee techno that is coming out everywhere these days.

"It's definitely different, because I'm doing it in a totally new way. Like I'll have the sample stay the same but then the choruses and the melodies underneath it will change. That's something the techno guys can't do because they don't know how to play any musical instruments."

Play his instruments is something Jon Crosby sure can do. Superior arrangement also seems easy to this 21-year-old purveyor of musical ingenuity, and it takes numerous listens to grasp all that's there. Or as Lars Ulrich puts it: "One of the best debut albums I've heard in a long, long time. It hits you on so many levels. It's a record I've been listening to over and over."

Look for VAST on the road with a full lineup this year. It just may be the new musical experience you've been waiting for.



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DOMINUS

Forget the Vikings! Screw the Nordic Gods! All Hail Beat! All Hail Booze!

All Hail...Elvis?!

Dominus first hits you with its absolutely huge riffs. Each one builds upon its predecessor, yanking you from your seat into a tumultuous world of crumbling skyscrapers and detonating warheads. By the time this fearsome Danish quartet is through with you, it's as if a mosh pit has passed through your room with the force of a golf ball-sized gallstone.

Dominus started out early this decade with a much different look and style. The group's Diehard Music debut, *View to the Dim* (1995), was epic death metal with a black metal production and featured lyrics written as hymns to ancient Nordic gods. Imagine the press's surprise when *The First 9* came out a year later boasting an unashamed melodic, groovy style of death metal with rock n' roll solos.

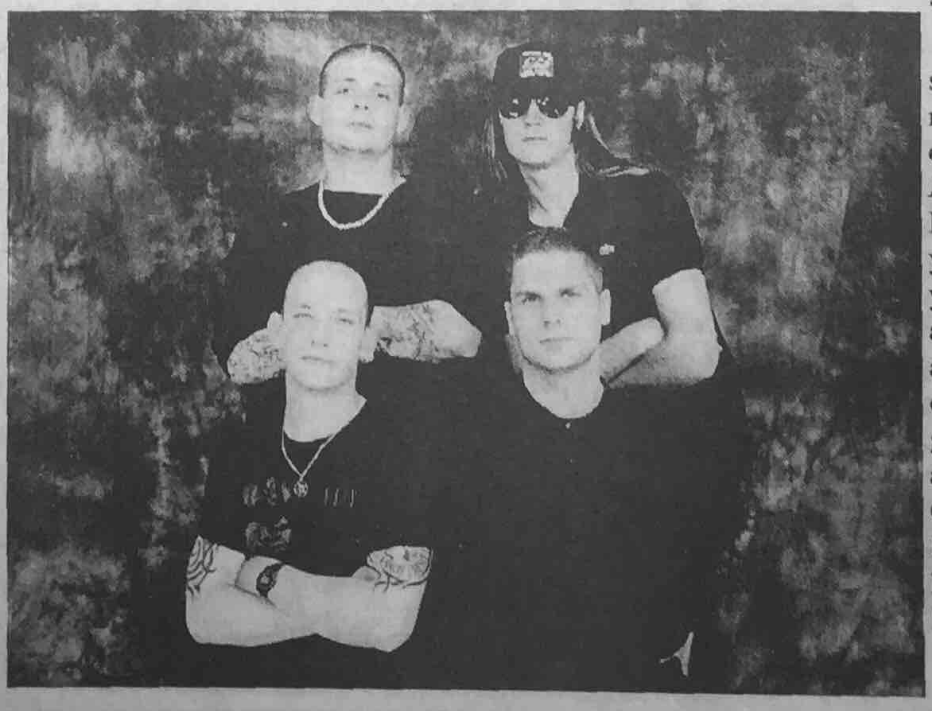


Says singer/guitarist Michael Poulsen, "I like to do something new for each album, and I got pretty bored with the Nordic thing because I'd been doing it a long time."

No matter how different Dominus sounded from album one to two – it *was* aided by a 50% member change – no one could predict what to expect for 1998. What we got was a heavy as hell barrage of catchy riffs that never quit, abrasive sing-along vocals, and live-sounding drum ferocity, all with a rock n' roll sensibility that will get even the most hesitant listener to move. Throw in a heavy Elvis influence and you've got *Vol. Beat*!

Michael explains: "When I began to write the new stuff for *Vol. Beat*, I didn't think about whether it should be more rock n' roll sounding. But when all the writing was through, I said, 'What do we have here that is totally different?' I took this approach because I didn't want to make *The First 9, part 2* or *View to the Dim, part 2*. I set out to do some kind of metal-rock, and when the music was completed I had to write some lyrics that fit to the musical style."

Yes, the lyrics have changed just as drastically as the music, as evidenced by the song titles alone. While *View to the Dim* had a heroic gem like "The Raven's Eye," *Vol. Beat* docks the Viking ships and heads for the local pubs and whorehouses on "Swine for a While, Pigs for a Week" and "Beat, Booze, the Hooker's Loose." The new lyrics are very catchy, and you'll often find yourself shouting the words out like you did back in the '80s.



"I didn't want to sing about the black metal stuff or my dreams like on *The First 9*," says Michael. "When you sing a rock song you have to be aware of the beat, and I found it quite easy to sing about good looking ladies and riding around in Caddies. I really like the new lyrics," he adds with a laugh.



Large, hairy men seem to be the guiding force for Dominus, leading these four men on their mighty quest to success. First it was the Vikings and Nordic gods who led the way; now the torch rests in the hands of the King himself, Elvis Aaron Presley.

"I have listened to him since I was a little child," Michael recounts. "I'm a big collector of his music and videos, and I was inspired by a lot of his work, especially the beats in his music. The rock n' roll sound of that time was the roots, and though it was never really something I thought about, it just came to be that our music now includes some of that feeling, especially of Elvis Presley."

The glamorous success and lifestyle of Elvis is also something the band desires, as Michael explains with a chuckle. "It is one of our dreams that we will be able to cruise around in nice cars everyday and wrap around these women with big hooters and just get laid, you know!"

Of course, Michael realizes that only a special few can live like this, and Dominus has a long way to go. "Dominus is known in many countries but we are still underground. We're not big yet, because a big band earns a lot of money, and even though we don't depend strictly on money, that's part of what a big band is about. I hope that people will recognize Dominus as an upcoming band that will, together with other bands, change the face of metal."

So Dominus is really shooting for the stars? "Yeah! Sometimes I'd like to be just a musician and get rid of all the stuff in my apartment and live in a tour bus. And there are days I'd like to get rid of my band and go with my girlfriend and live on an island. I think that it's good to have dreams, but it's hard work to be a musician and get recognized. To earn good money you almost have to be playing all the time and we wish that we could just quit our jobs and play and play and play."

So Dominus likes to perform live, huh? I've heard some outrageous stories about these guys, but nothing tops what Michael told me with great joy.

"If the crowd's into the beat then we are totally nuts and you will not be sure whether we are human or one big Duracell battery! We have a lot of energy on stage, which always brings out funny things. We leap off the stage and try to be perverted – sometimes Pete Storm, our lead guitar player, will try to fuck one of the audience members in the mouth with his guitar!"

Now is an exciting time for Michael Poulsen and his gang of Danish metallers. They've got an awesome new album that proudly exploits the power of the riff, a serious label in Diehard behind them, and it's got to be fun to sing about booze and sluts. They are currently on a headlining tour of Denmark, and will hook up with Destruction and Uriah Heep for a three-week invasion of the tight jeans capital of the world, Germany. Look out Scorpions, here comes a wind of change that reeks of whisky and cheap whores!

[Incidentally, it was the rock star's lifestyle that left Elvis a bloated slob dead in his bathroom. "I can imagine when I get older I will be a fat pig with sideburns," Michael laughs. And after considering that Denmark is famous for its *hundreds* of beer brands, he assures us, "I will be a big fat swine!"]



CD REVIEWS

ABLAZE MY SORROW
The Plague
1998 No Fashion/ House of Kicks

This Swedish quintet apparently made a big splash with its debut, *If Emotions Still Burn*, and there were high hopes for *The Plague*. I've read descriptions that call **Ablaze My Sorrow** a brutal melodic death metal band, but that's not the whole story. The songs are very aggressive in the Swedish melodic style, with vocalist Fredrik Arnesson going chicken crazy, but there is also a subtle '80s feel. Maybe it's the stripped-down sound of the guitars or the old school tempos on "Mournful Serenade," but *The Plague* is unique from a lot of today's Swedish releases.

With that said, Ablaze My Sorrow has much unfulfilled potential. Too much reliance on their influences keeps these five ruffians from achieving what "The Return of the Mighty Raven" and "As the Dove Falls Torn Apart" only hint at. Silly as it sounds, but Ablaze My Sorrow would be one hell of a catchy, pop death metal band. 𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯 ½

ABYSSOS
Together We Summon the Dark
1998 Cacophonous Records

Being that **Dissection** appears to be a band of the past, fans of the band have had to look elsewhere to satisfy their cravings for this Swedish act's fierce melodic death/black metal. Many inadequate emulators have made their way into the scene, so it's good to know that **Abyssos** is out there a step ahead of the pack.

While not as breathtaking as *Storm of the Light's Bane*, Dissection's apparently last release now that leader Jon Nodveidt is awaiting trial for murder, *Together We Summon the Dark* strives to match such splendor with a fabulous production job and flawless technique. Originality is a bit lacking but the music is far above similar bands, like **Lord Belial**. This means that every diehard Dissection fan should like Abyssos and people not too keen on Nodveidt's crew won't hate the album. 𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯 ½

AMON AMARTH
Once Sent from the Golden Hall
1998 Metal Blade Records

There is no better time for this album. Metal is at such a low point that most people have forgotten it ever existed and large avenues such as MTV and *Rolling Stone* have completely phased out its coverage over the past few years. And now we have **Amon Amarth**, calling Sweden home and playing a strain of melodic death metal. And it is now so taboo to play this style that you may cringe when reading this, but I assure you that it is unfair to just write Amon Amarth off as a generic copycat.

Honestly, some of the songs from *Once Sent from the Golden Hall* send the kind of tingle down my spine that I felt when I bought **Deicide**'s first album. There is this awesome sense of size to the riffs, and the vocalist isn't wailing for the sake of wailing – he's giving his all!

Regarding the punishing effect of Amon Amarth, it is interesting that the overpowering brutality of its music stems from melodic guitars that aim for anything but to soothe the soul. Guitarist Olavi Mikkonen has found an immense source of energy not in his power chords, but in the repetition of key melodic notes that build up and always climax with jaw-dropping intensity. "Abandoned" and the mightiest of all, "Victorious March," clearly demonstrate this.

Some of the more advanced melodic death metal bands are realizing that listeners still want to be pummeled, and if not with devastating riffs, then with a barrage of drums. Amon Amarth is one of these bands, and you'll be pressed to find a more influential performance than the one courtesy of Martin Lopez. His work is key in the aforementioned buildup in songs, and their eventual explosion. Case in point, "The Dragon's Flight Across the Waves," in which both he and singer Johan Hegg create a frenzied climax of emotion as Captain Hegg clamors for his crew to row faster to the shore and attack.

Once Sent from the Golden Hall will be seen as one of the more important metal releases of the past few years. It defies trends while not ignoring their meritorious aspects, beats the listener like a good metal band should, and is progressive enough to please originality seekers such as yours truly. 𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯

ARCH ENEMY
Stigmata
1998 Century Media Records

Well, this band and this album are being hailed as metal's savior, that missing link that will surely send the genre to new heights. With ex-**Carcass** guitarist Michael Amott and a bunch of other seasoned *Swedish* guys, it is plain why **Arch Enemy** would be the focus of such speculation. And for the most part, they deliver. Amott and his brother Chris are masters of the fretboard, their proud leads filling a sore void metal has left these last few years. Death metal fans will simply cream over the rich Swedish riffs blasted through dirty amps, and *Stigmata* would be a classic if not for the awful growls of former **Carnage** and **Furbowl** frontman Johan Liiva. He sounds annoyingly British a la Dave Ingram of **Benediction**, hogging the microphone with drawn out, cotton-mouthed exhalations. The brothers Amott sacrifice much time catering to Liiva's "ball hog" attitude, limiting their creativity by writing standard format songs. **Soilwork** presents a much more effective demonstration at this melodic death/thrash style, and I'd buy that band's CD twenty times before I laid out the cash for *Stigmata*. 𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯 ½

AVENGER
Shadows of the Damned
1998 Breath of Night Records

Coming as a great surprise to the metal world is the pleasant debut from the Czech Republic's **Avenger**. This virtually unknown act has come out with its guns of blasphemy a'blazing on *Shadows of the Damned*, performing seven songs of unique European metal.

The duo of Honza Kapak and Petr Ramus Mecak immediately sets itself apart from most all other young bands that are trying to break into the worldwide scene, this stemming from the pair's style. While most of the competition is establishing its roots in **Cannibal Corpse**, **Marduk**, or **My Dying Bride** for their respective genre, Avenger takes strong influence from the likes of **Edge of Sanity** and **Hypocrisy**. What you get from such a combination is a mid-paced, chugging attack accentuated by knowledgeable lead lines resembling in structure and sound EOS's *Crimson*. Fans of that album will find Avenger irresistible.

Ties can be drawn to *Inferior Devoties*- and *Fourth Dimension*-era Hypocrisy, when that band was breaking free from its old school death roots and experimenting in unknown territories. The primitive progression of these albums shows in Avenger's swirling riffs and lengthy passages.

Being a debut, *Shadows of the Damned* naturally has its faults. These include just-above-average production, instances when a song becomes lethargic because it fails to make a necessary transition, and Honza's rasps would be more effective if contrasted by growls or even singing (this would for sure move Avenger closer to Edge of Sanity). Besides these minor setbacks, the album shines with an original aura not often seen these days. Heed that when considering your next purchase. 𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯 ¾

BETHLEHEM
S.U.i.Z.i.D.
1998 Red Stream Records

So sensational vocalist Landfermann, who made us experience death on *Dictius te Necare*, has been kicked out of **Bethlehem**. (What did he do, write lyrics about clowns and flowers?) In his place are Marco Kehran, who does a decent job screaming and weeping, and the wench Cathrin Campen, whose endless German narratives are about as haunting as a cotton candy party.

Because Landfermann's performance was so emotionally affecting on the last album, perhaps more soul-crushing than any voice metal has ever known, his replacement would naturally not be expected to surpass him. And what Marco lacks vocally is made up for by the sensational guitar talents of Klaus Matton. He has really stepped up the old school riffs into an even more chilling and melodic style of dark metal than on *Dictius te Necare*. The overall compositions are just as hurtful, but reliant less upon atmospheric moods and more upon Matton's versatile talents.

For a while I didn't want to like *S.U.i.Z.i.D.* But after a few listens the music grabbed me and held tight; Landfermann is gone and *Dictius te Necare* shall forever remain the most intense death/black/dark metal album of all time. We must move on and accept the new Bethlehem, which sure slits some wrists with Marco at the mic. 𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯 (For one last glorious demonstration of Landfermann's power, check out the Gummo soundtrack. It hurts to hear his tragic wails.)

BLACKENED
The Black Metal Compilation, Vol. 3
1998 Metal Blade Records

I will tell you why I do not like that this release exists at all. First, do we really need another black metal compilation? Century Media and Nuclear Blast both put out decent platters of the genre, and many of the same bands appear on this double CD. Second, Metal Blade picked up the distribution rights to this and a slew of other black metal bands. Okay, we realize the style is trendy, but please only release quality acts! Sending out crap like **Enthroned** and **Hectate Enthroned** just won't cut it when Century Media has **Old Man's Child** and Nuclear Blast has **Dimmu Borgir**. Stick to **Amon Amarth** and other such quality acts.

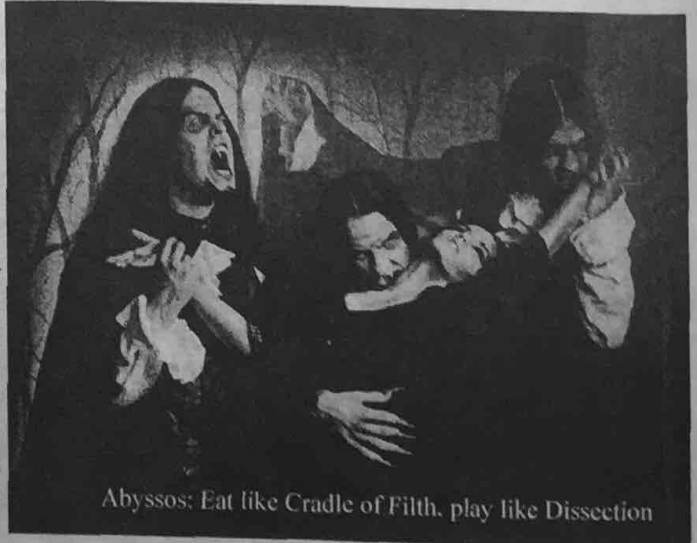
There really are some good songs here. The problem is that we've all heard them all! Who hasn't heard "Thus Spake the Nightspirit" by **Emperor**? And I don't really like Blackened Records for sticking in shit like **Amsvartner** and **Amduscias** because these bands are on the label. They have no right on this so-called "best of" bill of black metal.

The good to be found on this double-CD release that you may not know of includes **Fatal Embrace**, **Diabolical Masquerade**, Blackened's **Prophanity**, and **Thy Serpent**. Ignore this CD; most labels proudly release $2 samplers, not rip-offs that bypass quality like **Arcturus**, **Bethlehem**, or **Satyricon**. 𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯

BLOOD DUSTER
Str8 Outta Northcote
1998 Relapse Records

You'd think that a photograph of a dead woman's rotted head would have been a sufficient gross-out for your album cover, but then you wouldn't be **Blood Duster**. For if you were, you would know that you must take naked band photos and graphically alter them so that each member's genitalia had some sort of medical affliction. There's even a little flap on the booklet that states "Genitals May Offend", but you've just *got* to look. And a very sick sight it is!

Musically, Blood Duster now relies heavily on Southern and blues influences to enhance its groove-ridden death metal barbarism. Listeners will find the catchy riffs hard to resist, as this Aussie quartet is evidently more *musically* mature than ever before. Signs of this growth include a focus on songs as a whole, a real cohesion between drums and



Abyssos: Eat like Cradle of Filth, play like Dissection

guitars, and vocal restraint that puts the guitars at the necessary forefront.

Remnants of the band's grindcore roots appear now and then, with a healthy dose of distortion always dirtying the guitars. The only drawback at this point is that Blood Duster's incorporation of more blues and groove has subtracted from the band's past savagery. This will surely alienate fans of old, but my hunch is that next album will show the group having mastered the art of Southern grind-groove. 👹👹👹¾

BURZUM
Daudi Baldrs
1998 Misanthropy Records

After years of hearing tales about Varg Vikarnes' musical, as well as criminal, contributions to black metal, I decided to fork out the sixteen bucks to purchase his latest effort, *Daudi Baldrs*. One would think that a person confined to a prison cell with nothing else to do but create music could manufacture some rather unique pieces. This is definitely *not* the case with Varg Vikarnes! From opener "Daudi Baldrs" through "Moti Ragnarokum," **Burzum** provides the listener with boring, juvenile, and outright laughable crap! The packaging is ablaze with swastikas alongside of some surprisingly good artwork. Embarrassing packaging aside, this CD makes for an excellent makeshift coaster when unexpected guests decide to drop by for a drink! So, if you've ever wondered what a $100 Radio Shack keyboard sounds like under the influence of Satan, pick up *Daudi Baldrs*! 👹👹 (Sean Heelen)

CANNIBAL CORPSE
Gallery of Suicide
1998 Metal Blade Records

I always knew **Cannibal Corpse** could never top *The Bleeding*, the 1994 opus that showed the band incorporating emotion into its brutal onslaught. Everything clicked, from Chris Barnes's varied vocals to the haunting riffs to the superb production, to make it one of my top 10 albums.

Now, four years and two albums later, Cannibal Corpse seems on disc a feeble remnant of its former self. Gone is the passion of "She Was Asking for It" and "The Pick-Axe Murders," the over-the-top brutality of "Hammer Smashed Face" from *Tomb of the Mutilated*, and the raw destruction caused by the whole goddamn *Butchered at Birth* album. I really have no clue what is going on with *Gallery of Suicide*! Is that Corpsegrinder trying to *rap* on "Headless"? And why is it that drummer Paul Mazurkiewicz, whose complex arrangements were spellbinding on *Tomb*, now uses the same boring 1-2, 1-2 beat on a drum set that must be a fraction of what he used before?

Cannibal Corpse could be so much more. Surely the fans have a great time seeing the band live, but we've got to hold death metal's biggest name to a higher standard! This new album is flooded with endless barking that drowns out the poorly produced guitars, as many memorable moments as a Home Shopping Network program, and a general lack of interest in progression.

Even though the songs are faster than ever on *Gallery of Suicide*, the fire that propelled "Fucked with a Knife" and "I Cum Blood" seems to have burnt to a few withering embers incapable of the great roars of old. It is sad to say that Cannibal Corpse now sounds more like one of its third-rate clones than the innovator that outran them in the past. 👹½

CENOTAPH
Heart and Knife
1998 Stermino Productions

This is a four-song Italian EP of straightforward death metal. But just when you are about to get bored, the guitarist belts out a catchy riff and the drummer answers in kind. Definitely worthy of a quick mention, **Cenotaph** will hold its own among the lowest common denominator of fans, though a bright future could lie ahead. 👹👹👹

CEREBRAL TURBULENCY
As Gravy - 1997

Now this is the kind of grind I like! Fucking cheesy as hell, played with conviction, and chock full of catchy riffs. What kill me are the awesome transitions from one immense riff to the next; they're seamless! Add some great vocal eruptions and shrieks on top of this juggernaut and you've got a massive mess of *As Gravy*.

When you pop in a band like **Cerebral Turbulency**, you don't want any guitar heroics, violin lines, or clean singing. But what you do expect is superb execution of this primitive metal, and many bands fail to do so. This youthful Czech trio understands its abilities and limitations, having a firm grasp of the grind genre. So unlike when hearing the melodic Swedish or progressive metal styles, you know what to expect from *As Gravy* and that's not a bad thing. 👹👹👹👹

Michael Cichy
Hviezdoslavova 2
716 00 Ostrava – Radvanice
Czech Republic

CONTRASTIC
Thanatology Rhythms
1998 Shindy Productions

Because of this band I am becoming a huge fan of intense grind. Don't get me wrong, most of that stuff is just a jumbled mess to me, but **Contrastic** is so adept at writing *memorable* music that I can get into *it* again and again. *Thanatology Rhythms* is a split tape with **Ingrowing**, a decent brutal death band that is greatly overshadowed by the sick Contrastic quartet, yet another amazing Czech metal band. Anyone into American insanity a la **A.C.**, **Brutal Truth**, or any of the Illinoize bands will surely learn the true meaning of grind when they pop in Contrastic. Don't ignore this because you haven't heard of the band or that Shindy Productions is a small label. That is not *true* underground support! 👹👹👹👹½


Amon Amarth is Metal Blade's best band

DAMAGED
Token Remedies Research
1998 Rotten Records

Hands down the most brutal hardcore release ever. That's what **Damaged** is. The vocalist barks overwhelmingly and the drummer pounds with tiring speed. Grindcore influences the riffs and song structures, but this is far from anything metal bands are doing today. The guitarist plays an intense start-stop style, which occasionally prevents Damaged from the reaching the ultimate level of insanity with up-tempo riffs that would surely drop some jaws. For now, an overpowering group with a great foundation for the future that must seize the day. 👹👹👹¼

DEPRESY
A Grand Magnificence
1998 Shindy Productions/ Immortal Souls

After one listen I was hooked. Such is the quality of Slovakia's **Depresy**. The music would be described as death metal in the melodic speed metal vein. A **Hypocrisy** influence comes through in the memorable lead lines, and there's even a cover of "Reincarnation" from *The Fourth Dimension* here. Also key is the crisp production, which really outdoes about 95% of Depresy's competition.

Originally scheduled as a four-song EP, a re-mastered version of 1995's *And There Came the Tears of Christ* was added at no extra cost to you. Therefore, this awesome 50 minutes of aggressive and melodic death metal can be yours for only 8 US dollars! Hearing Depresy was a very pleasant surprise for me; definitely treat yourself to *A Grand Magnificence*. 👹👹👹👹¼

DIES IRAE
Etherial
1998 Oz Productions

Space and time limitations forbid me from writing a decent review, in my opinion, because **Dies Irae** plays the great beyond-progressive death metal that I love. Bands like **Novembre** and **Opeth** have obviously been inspirations to this Mexican quartet, as evidenced by the mellow acoustic passages, varied clean and gruff vocals, and epic melodic metal passages. Whatever shortcomings afflict the young band's endeavors, it is the determination to achieve originality and appeal to a wide audience that make *Etherial* (sic) so damn enrapturing. If these musicians stick together long enough, Dies Irae will be a very big name. 👹👹👹👹

ENTHRONED
Towards the Skullthrone of Satan
1998 Metal Blade Records

This is absolutely worthless black metal from the evil shores of Belgium. I was so scared by this CD I pissed my unholy pants. What actually drove me to this fate was the thought of having to endure all 11 blasphemous tracks of furious musical incompetence. Why Metal Blade would go to such lengths to bring this CD to America at an affordable price is as inconceivable as **Enthroned** putting a goat lord on the album's cover and expect it to sell.

EVERGREY
The Dark Discovery
1998 Gothenburg Noiseworks/Black Sun

I don't know what drugs I'm on, but **Everygrey** plays power metal and I fucking love it! I sing along with every line and groove to the brooding, technical guitars. For one, singer/guitarist/keyboard player Tom S. Englund does not hit glass-shattering high notes, instead sounding like the **Whitesnake** singer on "Here I Go Again." In other words, he's got a tempered, smooth delivery that brings back the '80s in listener-friendly packaging.

I played a couple of tracks from *The Dark Discovery* for a friend that's more into the pure metal style than I am, and he kind of laughed at me. Another friend really got into the progressive guitar, which doesn't take center stage or leap off into any whammy-bar roller-coaster insanity. The vocals truly lead Everygrey through each heartfelt song, with my favorites being "As Light is Our Darkness" and "When the River Calls."

There is also a ballad on this album, and I fucking love that too. I don't care that its subject is cheesy – it's about a man calling to his dead lover, who calls back through the strong voice of Carina Kjellberg – because the song, "For Every Tear that Falls," is very sad.

They say that every once in a while you like something totally unexpected. For me it has been **Rammstein**, **VAST**, **Dominus**, and **Fueled**. Add Evergrey to that list. 👹👹👹👹👹

EXMORTEM
Dejected in Obscurity
1998 Euphonious Records

Straight ahead, in your face, and totally unashamed about it, **Exmortem** is just what the world of death metal needs. None of this half-hearted genre-blending shit – either do it right or don't even try it! Well, this Danish quartet is not afraid to play pure death metal, that's for sure, and it's doubtful to find a more lively collection of puncturing riffs without going back about eight years.

Think back to the days of *Eaten Back to Life* and *Altars of Madness*. The driving spirit behind these **Cannibal Corpse** and **Morbid Angel** albums, respectively, was unbridled and extremely inventive. Exmortem soars with its frantic but catchy riffs, often flying into mouth-dropping tangents that make headbanging necessary. It is at these times one is transported back to when he was first subjected to *Eaten Back to Life* – an incredible experience indeed.

Completing *Dejected in Obscurity* is a healthy batch of vocal exclamations ranging from tried-and-true growls to adventurous wails a la Marten van Drunen (ex-**Pestilence**, **Asphyx**, **Comecon**, **Bolt Thrower**). I'll tell you what, for someone who has been drifting from brutal death metal over the past couple of years, I am being won over again by great European acts like Exmortem. 👹👹👹👹½

FACE DOWN
The Twisted Rule the Wicked
1998 Nuclear Blast

Totally intense, aggressive, and uncharacteristically professional metal is the pride of the soon-to-be-huge **Face Down**. This band displays a wicked variety of **Testament** meets **Entombed** meets **Machine Head** in a super-tight manner, leaving this reviewer wowed with a sore neck. When you hear *The Twisted Rule the Wicked*, you immediately see how far superior Face Down is to 90% of the latest death and hardcore metal releases due to the quartet's over-the-top production, originality, and execution. Forget **Soulfly** and **Dismember**, for this is truly wicked! 💣💣💣💣 ¾

FALL OF THE LEAFE
Evanescent, Everfading
1998 Defiled Records

Quickly and to the point: These guys can really play their melodic guitars but are as unfocused as a camera wielded by Ray Charles. The skills are there, but the lack of aim makes **Fall of the Leafe** an impossible listen. The production needs work, too. 💣💣 ¾

GARDENIAN
Two Feet Stand
1997 Listenable Records

There was supposed to be a **Gardenian** interview in this issue, but forces beyond the band's and my control disallowed it. That's how good these guys are, so look for a feature next time.

To all those that are now turning on the anything-but-stagnant Swedish death metal scene, I identify Gardenian to counter their pessimism. This band is so well rounded in all key aspects – production, variety, talent – that it may very well be one of the many high quality acts now piling up that will someday make the world accept metal as a serious form of musical expression. It will not take just one band or album, but perhaps a researched and compiled presentation that ignores the sensationalism and stereotyping while introducing the world to some class acts.

Gardenian is rooted in melodic death metal and many people compare these four Swedes to Finland's **In Flames**, a similarity I don't really see. What is more evident to me is a rock sensibility that channels the songs intelligently through seamless riffs and leads. Songs like "The Downfall," "Awake of Abuse," and "Do Me Now" are absolutely addictive due to their brooding progressions and passionate raspy vocals. Further, the musicians are familiar with each other and it shows in the band's overall control. Channel all this expertise into the extreme genre that is Swedish death metal and you end up with a literally flawless album. *Two Feet Stand* is perfect in every sense. 💣💣💣💣💣

HATEPLOW
Everybody Dies
1998 Pavement Music

We all know that Phil from **Malevolent Creation** and Rob formerly of **Cannibal Corpse** play guitar here, and that drummer Crazy Larry died in a fire. What nobody tells us is what **Hateplow** sounds like. Envision Malevolent Creation's latter day tightness, its *Eternal*-era sound, and none of the invention found on the epics *The Ten Commandments* and *Retribution*. Each song is plagued by endless vocals that reduce the competent guitarists to lethargic chugging.

The Florida sound pulses vibrantly throughout *Everybody Dies*, so aficionados of this lost art will find themselves pleased by "Prison Bitch" and "Challenged." In fact, when the monotone vocalist does occasionally step back from the microphone, Phil and Rob go at it like the world-renowned magicians of the six-string that they are.

Hateplow's downfall is its repetitiveness. If you've heard the first ten riffs then you've heard the next hundred, and surely Kyle doesn't help with his unemotional vocal performance. A few songs are great here, but most fall into an indistinguishable heap. 💣💣💣

IMPALED NAZARENE
Rapture
1998 Osmose Productions

Finland's **Impaled Nazarene** has changed a lot since the primitive black metal assault of *Tol Cormpt Norz Norz Norz* in '92. *Rapture* sees the quartet still blazing at light speed, but shows an even great punk influence than before. What you get is all-out repetition that leaves you pretty annoyed. Sure, the group is tighter than any speedy punk could ever dream to be, but the one-dimensional nature of this album wears thin after three or four songs. Further, the drummer and guitarist both show no growth or ability except in playing one tempo. Impaled Nazarene is a lazy bunch of washed-up scrubs who play in cruise control, whose only hope is to fool the listeners with speed and rasps. Screw 'em! 💣💣

IMPIOUS vs. A CANOROUS QUINTET
Evilized vs. The Only Pure Hate
1998 Black Sun vs. 1998 No Fashion

I did one of these "battles" with **Eternal Hatred** and **Usurper** demos in issue #3 because both bands were alike in practically all aspects, not just musically. Here we have a couple of Swedish bands that recorded with Tomas Skogsberg at Sunlight Studios in December 1997, and I was surprised that not one of the nine men involved had the same –sson last name, though **Impious** has Martin Akesson and **A Canorous Quintet** has Marten Hansen.

So both bands are hailed by their labels as "skull crushing" death metal, and while Impious "will leave death metal fans all over the world evilized for years to come," A Canorous Quintet "will show the world what death metal is all about." I'm glad I could clear that up for you.

So what is my expert opinion? Well, people have been getting overly excited about Impious – this group's debut is *not* a whopper like **Ebony Tears**' *Tortura Insomniae*, also on Black Sun. The band is unfocused in its worship of old **Entombed** as it tries to incorporate the melody of **In Flames** with skills that just aren't there. The product is boring as all hell, and the vocalist realizes that his band is way out of its league and does the natural death metal thing: growls a lot. Only the last few songs show any group cohesion, when a speed metal presence appears out of nowhere.

A Canorous Quintet works in the opposite way; at first the listener isn't that impressed, but after a number of run-throughs, is quite pleased. These five guys are very negative and have taken the **At the Gates** ferocity to the next level. Important are the guitarists' seamless and controlled picking, which make "The Complete Emptiness" and "Land of the Lost" so memorable. I was really swept away by a song I heard from the band's last album, *Silence of the World Beyond*, and from that very positive experience am left wondering if A Canorous Quintet has a lot of unfulfilled potential. Too many riffs and vocal patterns are unoriginal and predictable, hindering the obviously superior technical skills of the guitarists who obviously show no interest in jumping on the melodic bandwagon. Perhaps a stripped-down approach that accentuated the individualizing aspects of this band's music would thrust these hateful men into the international spotlight.

This concludes our Swedish bout, with A Canorous Quintet achieving easy victory over the inexperienced Impious. Analysts say that victory will not be so easy for the Quintet against national pride and ever-skillful **Amon Amarth**. Impious: 💣💣 ¼ A Canorous Quintet: 💣💣💣 ½

IN FLAMES
Whoracle
1997 Nuclear Blast Records

This album arrived on my desk just as the final copy of the last issue was sent off to the printer, but I really wanted to give you my opinion of the album. *Whoracle* is a far cry from the classical worship and methodical melodiousness of the *Subterranean* EP, but **In Flames** still delivers a mean punch of melodic death metal. From the dirty, **At the Gates** *Slaughter of the Soul* guitar chunk, to the subtle lead lines that stick in your head, to the stellar production that keeps drummer and vocalist alike just as in the forefront as the immense riffs, this album never relents. Critics may call it a sell-out or watered down death metal for the masses, but this album will sell a ton of copies because it's damn good! Catchy riffs, diversity, non-alienating vocals, and a rocking sensibility of composition make songs like "Food for the Gods," "Jester Script Transfigured," and "Everything Counts" classics. Don't be a pompous ass and think you're too good for In Flames – it's death metal, not fucking jazz! 💣💣💣💣 ¾

In Flames in a less than fiery pose



KING DIAMOND
Voodoo
1998 Metal Blade Records

Voodoo, the latest release from **King Diamond**, marks the triumphant return of the father of morbid metal tales to the form he hasn't exhibited since *Them*. Lead guitarist and longtime collaborator Andy La Roque is, to put it mildly, awe-inspiring! Fellow axe-slinger Herb Simonsen demonstrates his fret board dexterity throughout this marvelous release. The rhythm section of bassist Chris Estes and drummer John Luke Hebert is nothing short of incredible. And, as always, King Diamond's vocal performance sends chills down the spine of the listener. Finding King's previous two offerings, *The Spider's Lullaby* and *The Graveyard*, downright disappointing, I approached *Voodoo* with utmost caution. I was pleasantly surprised when opener "Louisiana Darkness," an eerie intro in typical King fashion, tore into the first full length song "'LOA' House." From the very first licks of this monstrous metal masterpiece, it is apparent that this band hasn't lost a single ounce of its love for technically proficient power metal! Unlike so many other albums that offer a promising start, only to suffer after a few tracks, *Voodoo* proves consistent throughout. Even Dimebag Darrell of **Pantera** fame offers a tremelo-drenched solo to the title track that would make K.K. Downing proud! Excellent production and awesome packaging (including a map to guide the listener) only add to this album's godliness (or, should I say, godLESS-ness)! Long live the King! 💣💣💣💣 (Sean Heelen)

LACUNA COIL
Self-titled
1998 Century Media Records

I have always found **The Gathering** AD a highly interesting act, with singer Anneke van Giersbergen possessing a strong leading voice. But the albums *Mandylion* and *Nighttime Birds* just never hit me like they affected so many others. Perhaps it was Anneke's odd delivery or the guitarists' distortion detracting from the vocals – no matter what the case, The Gathering is not as great as it could be.

That's why **Lacuna Coil** excites me so very much. Here we have a band quite similar in style to the Dutch sextet that crafts its songs to the fullest. Each showcases the immense talents of singer Cristina, whose ability to control and change the music's mood makes her equal if not surpass Ms. Giersbergen. Her compelling performance on the ballad "Falling" made a believer out of me by song's end.

Obviously a band is not bound for stardom with just a great voice, and so Lacuna Coil's other five members make a good case for themselves with a form of dark rock that relies on the smooth guitars a la *Irreligious*-era **Moonspell**. Throw in some unimposing, decipherable male vocals and a solid sense of composition, and you've got yourself a great six-song EP.

Lacuna Coil is one of the lighter bands featured in my collection, filling that void left open by The Gathering. 💣💣💣💣 ½

LAST CHAPTER
The Living Waters
1998 Pavement/Brain Ticket

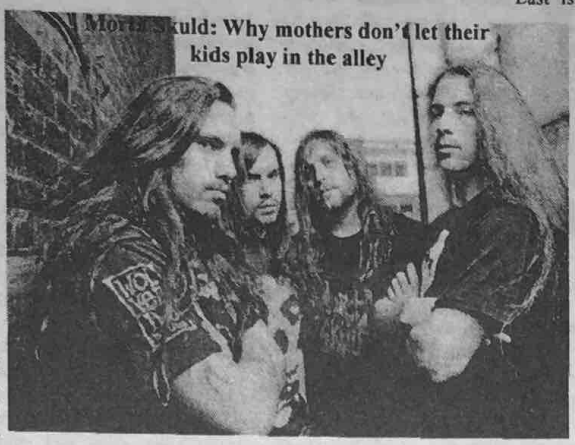
This is very last minute, but I wanted to put it in there as example of a doom band that I *do* like. **Last Chapter** plays a soothing, crystal clear brand of atmospheric Texan doom featuring the talents of **Solitude Aeturnus** vocalist Robert Lowe. My ignorance of this genre forbids me to offer any insight as to why I like this CD, but I will say that *The Living Waters* calms the nerves without inducing sleep. Rock on! 💣💣💣 ¾

MERCURY RISING

Building Rome

1998 Dominion Records

After **Mercury Rising**'s impressive debut album, *Upon Deaf Ears*, I was very eager to hear their second album. The musicianship of the band as I remembered was very technical and the tight guitar playing made me quite curious about how they would sound now. When I stuck the disc in I found that something was different about the album. Not knowing what it was I listened on and I realized that I did not like it that much. When I opened the jacket of the CD I found out that both guitar players, Hal Doliver and Gary Goldsmith, were replaced by Mike Evans and Judd Rizo. The catchy, heavy guitar riffs that got me interested in the band just weren't present on this album. Both guitarists did exceptional jobs but I preferred the old sound much more. "Cathedral" and "Building Rome" were the only ones that got my attention. The solos were not as memorable as they were on the previous album, and though *Building Rome* is not that bad, I just couldn't get into it. One thing that was very annoying was the amount of vibrato vocalist Clarence Osborne used every time he opened his mouth. One of the few vocalists that can get away with using too much vibrato is Bruce Dickinson. The drums and bass did not stand out as much as *Upon Deaf Ears* either. Every song seemed to open the same way, which included clean toned arpeggios. The concept of the album was great, but as far as an overall opinion I thought Mercury Rising could do much better. I will look out for a better attempt from this band in the future. 1/8 (Forhad Hossain)



Morta Skuld: Why mothers don't let their kids play in the alley

MORTA SKULD

Surface

1998 Pavement Music

It took a while, but I finally got my hands on an album that defines generic death metal. You've got the aimless riffs, the momentum-killing time changes, and the faceless vocal barks that show zero ingenuity. The whole group sounds pretty disinterested to me, and even after eight years together these guys aren't sure what they want to do. They certainly don't want to blast you away with speed – the guitarist's incessant false harmonics and grooves ensure this; breaking new ground is also not high on their list – the barks and technical but lethargic riffs demonstrate this; and their confusion shows most when they stumble upon a catchy riff – they get all excited and screw it up by throwing in a quick lead, another riff, or big barks. **Morta Skuld** represents all that is trite about the American death metal scene, avoid at all costs.

NOCTURNAL RITES

Tales of Mystery and Imagination

1998 Century Media Records

Though coming from a death metal origin, Nocturnal Rites decided to recapture the sound of heavy metal that was so commercially viable in the '80s for this record. And by mixing the sound of eighties metal with some classical sounding keyboards, the result is a well-crafted power/progressive metal album. After listening to this album I could only remember the good old days when bands such as Iron Maiden were kings. There are some great power chord progressions contained in this album, but many riffs sounded the same, which made each song sound a little boring as it progressed. The lead guitar playing in this record was very well done with some nice sweep picking, featured in the opening track, "Ring of Steel." Guitar players Nils Norberg and Fredrik Mannberg did an exceptional job on this record. The rhythm section of Ulf Andresson on the drums and Nils Eriksson was enough to get the job done without being too mediocre. The bass playing didn't stand out much, but bass playing rarely did stand out in eighties, did it? (Of course there were some exceptions such as Steve Harris from Iron Maiden.) Anders Zackrisson's vocals were very well done with some catchy choruses and nicely written lyrics. All in all, by uniting progressive metal of the present with that of metal of the 80's, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* is a worthwhile album to have. ¾ (Forhad Hossain)

OBITUARY

Dead

1998 Roadrunner Records

Last issue I really laid into **Obituary**. I mean, I ripped these guys fifty new assholes for their pathetic *Back from the Dead* and a lame live performance I saw. I went so far as to recommend the group break up. And now we have the brand new *Dead*, a live album recorded in Boston last September, and though I do not apologize for anything that I said last time, it is with a sense of relief I report that this CD ain't bad. Besides, Obituary is one of the longstanding big names of death metal, so it does us all good if the band bounces back from last year's piece of shit.

The fire of old burns proudly on *Dead*, blazing through classics like "Chopped in Half" and "Cause of Death" and pumping life into lesser known songs, like "Threatening Skies" and "'Til Death."

The long set of 17 songs will either enrapture or bore you depending on your level of Obituary-addiction, and being that Trevor Peres and Frank Watkins have both gone skater, I find more hardcore weeding its way into the band's sound than the Floridian sound circa 1990. Basically, this CD is the vague pulse coming from an aged legend no one wants to see die without dignity. I pray for either Obituary's magnanimous second coming or a swift, silent disappearance. There can be no other way if anyone is to save face. ¼

OBSCENITY

Human Barbecue

1998 Morbid Records

Coming off of the highly successful *3rd Chapter*, a brutal classic that ruled with great speed and leads and earned the band over 100 interviews, Germany's **Obscenity** had a big challenge in this, its fourth album. My feelings are mixed, though increasingly positive with each listen.

The mechanical precision between guitars and drums is almost unbelievable considering how fast the riffs and transitions are, an ability Obscenity obviously achieved through tons of rehearsal. What lacks is each song's sense of self that is so evident on *3rd Chapter*, so that when you hear it you can immediately say to yourself, 'Yeah, that's track five.' It seems that in Obscenity's eagerness to reach yet another level of brutality, different methods are being used to suck the listener in. Some of the simplest riffs prove to be the most memorable on this album, while the band previously employed technical tactics to achieve the same result – a pleased listener. I bet that more people will like *Human Barbecue* and with more enthusiasm than I do, just because of the special place the last album holds in my collection. Even I can't deny the crushing riffs of "Eternal Life," the epic leads of "Soulripper," the neck-snapping action of "Dress of Skin," or the proud anthem "Obscenity." (Don't forget the cover of "Raining Blood!") So maybe it is all here, and better than before. I certainly couldn't recommend a better brutal death metal release to fans of **Sinister, Cannibal Corpse**, or Obscenity, for that matter.

OXIPLEGATZ

Sidereal Journey

1998 Season of Mist

I am a sucker for progressive death metal – **Disharmonic Orchestra** and **Phlebotomized**, for example – so it should be no surprise that I adore **Oxiplegatz**. The sole member of this band is Alf Svensson, suave Swede known for his immense contributions as guitarist for the young **At the Gates**. He released two other solo projects under the Oxiplegatz monicker, but was totally fed up with all things musical two years ago, and packed his stereo and equipment away. The bug to create once again ate at him as he continued his art career, and 1998 sees the release of *Sidereal Journey*, a unified concept album divided into 33 tracks for easy access. Svensson really outdid himself here, incorporating the fiddling buzz-saw guitars of old with unique synthesizers and odd tempos. Also key are the evenly divided vocals between Svensson and an unnamed female. Both sing with style and purpose. Their contrasting voices throughout the piece, aided by some bombastic keyboards and sound effects, make *Sidereal Journey* flow in an uncanny fashion.

Occasional comparisons can be drawn to the Edge of Sanity epic piece, *Crimson*, but they are so minute that the two albums remain galaxies apart. The underground needs something wacky and original to start a new trend; Oxiplegatz has arrived.

PRIMAL FEAR

Self-titled

1998 Nuclear Blast

Primal Fear is the metal band for all you '80s metal fanatics. It rocks! The drumming of Klaus Sperling is very metal. The guitars sound like true '80s metal. It's great. The band reminds me of the days when **Judas Priest, Krokus, Iron Maiden**, and every other kick ass metal band that was played on MTV. The guitar solos are very well done. The rhythm tracks are also very cool. There are really creative guitar fills over nonstop heavily distorted power chords; this is truly metal. It seems that the kids nowadays think that the meaning of heavy metal is just heavily distorted pounding chords with a guy growling for vocals, and pounding drum lines. Primal Fear is the answer for people who miss melodic metal and shred guitar, which is not prevalent in metal today. Colorful keyboards also add a nice texture. The eighties style vocals are present as well. The high vocals are well done by Ralf Sheepers, who has a great range. This album just makes me feel that the '80s metal scene might be waiting for a comeback. Of course there were many eighties bands that were quite lame, but if Primal Fear came out in the eighties they would not be one of them. They would be up with Maiden, man. This album truly rocks, eighties metal is back, like it or not, and it's "screaming for vengeance." Kick Ass! ¼ (Forhad Hossain)

PUNISHER

Disillusioned

1998 Confusion Records

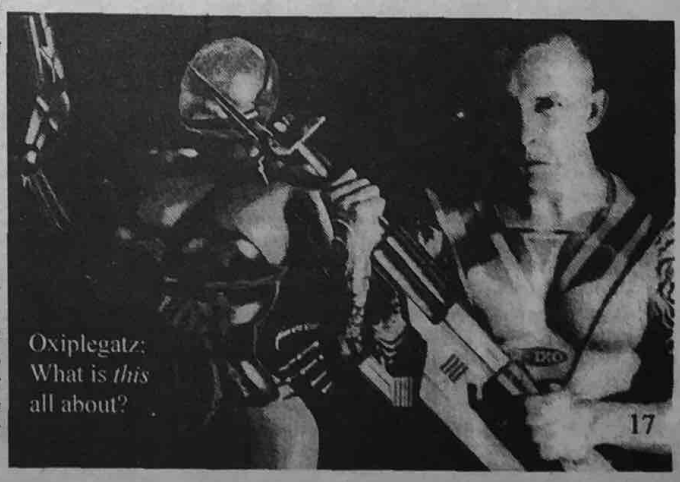
These guys have been playing thrash since last decade and finally released an album. Staying true to form and sound, California's **Punisher** sometimes cranks out awesome headbanging riffs. The album is pretty consistent, with each song touching on old **Megadeth** and some Bay Area thrash. As unique as Punisher may be today, the band does not have enough standout material to draw fans who listen to death and black metal exclusively. Older headbangers may find *Disillusioned* a nice reminder of the good old days.

ROYAL HUNT

Paradox

1998 Magna Carta Records

When I received this album I first noticed that **Royal Hunt** was signed to Magna Carta. I thought that this must be a really good band for it to be signed by this strictly progressive record label, known for releasing the tribute albums for great



Oxiplegatz: What is *this* all about?



Primal Fear: '80s metal never hurt your groin so good!

progressive legends such as **Rush**, **Yes**, **Pink Floyd**, and **Genesis**. Denmark's Royal Hunt did not let me down. *Paradox* being the band's fifth release, they have finally achieved a widespread distribution in the United States. Royal Hunt is a very melodic progressive metal band with classical influences, but can be appreciated by any progressive listener, as well as the average music lover. Andre Anderson's keyboard playing is remarkable, and his guitar playing is just as good. His classical influence shines through greatly on this record. Being the composer of the band, Anderson gains all of my respect. Jacob Kjar's lead guitar playing is also well done. The bass playing of Steen Mogensen is also creatively done. Even though Royal Hunt didn't have an official drummer on this record, Allan Sorensen played the technical drum tracks. D.C Cooper's vocals were well done with some great melodies. He is also the only American in the band. *Paradox* includes some background vocals with the Renaissance style keyboard playing which makes it sound like a great rock opera. Lyrically the album is phenomenal in the conceptual sense. It is about man's acknowledgment of God through time. *Paradox* should take Royal Hunt through a journey that will bring fame and notoriety to them in the progressive metal world. 💣💣💣💣½ (Forhad Hossain)

SADISTIC TORMENT

Unearthly Horrors

1998 Wild Rags

This is a re-release of this band's older stuff, as front man Vinnie Matthews (**Mucus Membrane**, **Autumn Dawn**) hopes to reform his oldest group, **Sadistic Torment**. This band is similar to Florida's **Sickness** for its undying passion for speed. The production is average, and these songs were all recorded quite some time ago. But one thing going for these guys is that their music is instantly recognizable, either due to the unique drums, vocals, or guitar tone. So this is pretty cool, and fans of old school death with lots of twists should take note. 💣💣💣

SADISTIK EXEKUTION

K.A.O.S.

1998 Shock Records

Pure insane chaos is what **Sadistik Exekution** is all about. Satan, killing, explosions, and fire are all that vocalist Rok eloquently discusses in his randomly prepared rasps. It's hard to believe he can repeat each song word for word his delivery is so haphazard. Guitarist Rev. Hades doesn't plays any riffs but a seemingly endless barrage of speed picking that resembles a swarm of angry bees. Not much to be said for bassist Dave Slave or drummer Sloth (hey!), except that they do a good job in keeping the pace frantic and chaotic.

Variation is nonexistent on *K.A.O.S.*, and even the best hyperspeed bands do slow the tempo down once in a while. Sadistik Exekution's blistering Australian attack soon becomes tiresome, with each song sounding just like the other and Rok repeating evil things because he ran out of new catch phrases. At one point he even shouts, "Fuck you, Satan," which didn't make much sense.

This band could be a lot better. Capable of the cohesion so many speed bands lack, Sadistik Exekution is in a good position to take the next step into writing whole, memorable songs rather than 5,000 swirling tornado riffs that tumble every which way. 💣💣¼

SOILWORK

Steel Bath Suicide

1998 Listenable Records

If you think **Arch Enemy** is good, immediately buy *Steel Bath Suicide*, for it is the perfect substitution for that band's off-the-mark *Stigmata* album. **Soilwork** effectively take its **Carcass**, **At the Gates**, and '80s thrash/heavy metal influences, and mold them into a whipping session of '90s Swedish metal that will also appeal to the fans **In Flames** alienated. I was convinced after just one listen, and hopefully you trust my opinion since I don't play political games with my reviews.. 💣💣💣¼

STUCK MOJO

Rising

1998 Century Media Records

Just wanted to mention that **Stuck Mojo** continues to wow diverse audiences, with me having been a fan since the phenomenal *Pigwalk* of two years ago. And while that album holds a very special place in my heart, *Rising* is vintage Bonz and the boyz doing their nasty southern blend of metal and rap. Much more singing appears this time around, so more timid metal fans should be able to enjoy the band more than ever. Good job, guys. 💣💣💣💣

THUBAN

Zeitgeist

1998 Northern Darkness Records

I'm not a big fan of black metal, especially the kind that is very pure and doesn't cater to a wide range of people. For example, I like **Dimmu Borgir** but dislike **Dark Funeral**. **Thuban** resides in the more accessible category that I prefer. Perhaps the medium tempos, thorough incorporation of clean guitar, and strong but not abrasive vocals are what make *Zeitgeist* the unpredictable listen that it is, because even a couple of tracks take influence from latter day **Anathema**.

The Viking spirit gallops through the more traditional riffs, bringing a **Hades** feel to the music and ensuring purists won't be alienated by the progressive elements. This really is a quick listen and never gets repetitive like so many fifty- or sixty-minute black metal albums that come out these days. For such an obscure and young band, Thuban really hits the mark with a quality, well-produced album of light black metal. 💣💣💣💣

TWILIGHT OPERA

Shadows Embrace the Dark

1998 Cacophonous Records

This album wastes no time in submerging the listener into atmospheric of symphonic melodic metal. Immediate parallels can be drawn to a more accessible **Septic Flesh** because of the mouthy growls and swirling melodies. Adding depth to top-notch guitar playing are skilled keyboards that always keep pace with the hopping drums. This is essential to **Twilight Opera**'s success, because these days keys are quite trendy.

Although not at all chaotic or frantic, Twilight Opera is occasionally similar to **Cradle of Filth** in arrangement, but keep in mind **Dark Tranquillity** and early **Paradise Lost** are also admitted influences.

What I like best about this album is it liveliness. Guitarists Toni and Mikko play excitedly, synth man Timo is not afraid to take center stage, and Anu's occasional, deep female vocals always enhance the music. Further, an instrumental unity exists that challenges the fact that this band is less than two years old. Watch out, people, Twilight Opera could be big! 💣💣💣¼

VADER

Black to the Blind

1998 Pavement Music

I am finally convinced! On **Vader**'s first album, *The Ultimate Incantation*, these dudes could not stop stroking their whammy bars; over the past few releases, this Polish quartet has polished its aggressive, speedy death metal style and given the old false harmonic addiction up. I saw them play last week and was mightily impressed by the tight performance, especially that of drummer Doc. Guitarist Mauser was pretty cool too, because he would pose and look at an audience member and then bang his head for a while.

Black to the Blind is just another great chapter in Vader's career, highlighted by flawless execution and catchy variety. And for those of you who have noticed that fast death metal bands just aren't in sync like the professionals they claim to be, you'll find relief in the stop-on-a-dime precision attained on all ten songs. Highlights are "Carnal," "Fractal Light," and the title track. 💣💣💣¾

VARIOUS COOL BLACK METAL

These are some cool black metal bands that I didn't want to exclude from this issue due to space limitations. **Handful of Hate** (*Qliphohic Supremacy* on Northern Darkness Records) plays soaring black metal with a dry production that aids the guitars in not being damn annoying like so many Norwegian bands. These dudes are Italian and really go wild with the costumes. The raspy vocals and deep growls are not too far apart, enabling their coupling to be a joyously blasphemous occasion. Next is Germany's **Aeba** (*Im Schattenreich* on Last Episode Productions) and its rendition of **Cradle of Filth**. The band is much rawer and more aggressive, with this savage attack led by the Australian-sounding guitars, which are as wild and crazy as Yahoo Serious himself. A number of pointless eerie tracks detract from what could be a great album. "Dragonstorm" is a hell of a song. Play it loud! **Mystic Circle** (*Drachenblut* also on Last Episode) will appeal to fans of **Dimmu Borgir** thanks to the large keyboard influence and guitar sound found on *Enthrone Darkness Triumphant*. The band is not as great as the Norwegian quintet, but this German group sure can wear more chains and metal garter belts.

PRIMEVAL

epic black/death metal group

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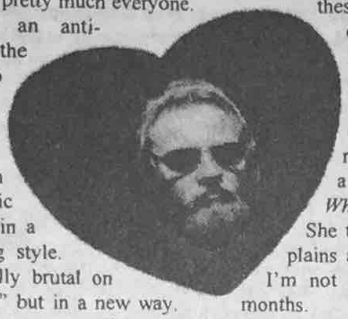
TRADES WELCOME!!!

Infernal Torment

The band photos are violent and very frightening. The music is blistering and brutal. The lyrics are hateful and anti-social. Then why is Infernal Torment's guitarist Poul Winther so damn friendly?!

Infernal Torment has been causing quite a ruckus since its ferocious debut in 1996, *Man's True Nature*. It featured offensive cover art, a million caustic riffs, and obscene lyrics. There was hate mail from American religious groups and censorship efforts in Europe, but CDs were selling and the band ended up headlining a tour through its native Denmark.

Come 1997, this quintet was itching for another bout with controversy. *Birthrate Zero* was just what society's watchdogs were afraid of, an album that reached out and tried to offend pretty much everyone. There are suicide hymns, an anti-Greenpeace song in "Fuck the Whales," and a constant call to eliminate all of Mankind's mistakes by eliminating Mankind.



Musically, the album strays from the band's frantic roots with fewer riffs, played in a catchy, rather than pummeling style. Infernal Torment remains totally brutal on "The Razor Twist" and "Race," but in a new way. "Product of Society" is a prime example of the band's maturity into a worldwide contender; it starts with one of the catchiest riffs I've ever heard, what Six Feet Under might play if it were capable of anything more than stroking its ego. The song leaps smoothly from riff to riff, building in excitement and demonstrating the band's overlooked musical prowess with complicated leads. Scott Jensen's gruff vocals resemble Sylvain from old Kataklysm, and the guitars have a knack for melodic leads that flow perfectly over the chugging rhythms. Listeners are treated to *Birthrate Zero's* flawless execution and crystal clear production, and if that weren't enough, a cover of Iron Maiden's "Seventh Son of a Seventh Son" finishes the album off.

So I was chatting with Poul about all things Infernal Torment and was confused that he wasn't speaking angrily despite how violent his lyrics are. What fuels the lyrics then?

"Mainly it's our kind of sick humor. A lot of people who are not into metal think we mean these things and are totally perverted and twisted." Do you care? "No...maybe we care but we just think that's great that we can piss someone off. I think that we are unique because a lot of bands with funny lyrics play funny music. But our music is very serious though our lyrics are not."

If you were to write serious lyrics about things that were important to you, what would you talk about?

I guess that's why we don't write that way, because what the fuck would we talk about? It's just all been done! I can't think of what we'd say.

Would you write sonnets to your lover?

I hope not. Actually, I think when a lot of death metal bands put down people who write love songs, it's because they're too weak to do something like that themselves. But then again, it's been done millions of times. And I want to keep those sorts of emotions to myself. A lot of guys who say they are into black metal also say they don't like love songs for the same reason. They're afraid to show those kinds of emotions.

Since you keep thoughts like to yourself, "Fuck the Whales" is the natural alternative? Yeah!

In the US, people are fanatical about whales and otters.

We have people like that in Denmark, but I think it's more fanatical in the US. I haven't met many Americans, though; I've just encountered the Hollywood lifestyle and I don't know how much of that is true.

What sort of Hollywood stereotypes?

So many on the afternoon shows, like Friends and Melrose Place and other kinds of crap.

Can you believe Baywatch is the most popular show in the world?

It's crazy, it has something like a billion viewers.

I only wish all the women in America looked like the Baywatch babes.

One guy I knew went to Florida and expected to see all these hot babes, and when he got there, not one person was under 250 pounds.

How are the Danish and European women?

They're sweet! I don't know if there's any difference between what America and Europe have. Actually, I'm getting married to a woman that's gorgeous.

What does she think of the band?

She thinks it's all very funny. All she complains about is when I'm touring too much and I'm not home, like every weekend for several months.

When is the wedding date?

A couple of weeks: June 13th.

Is it going to be a typical wedding or obnoxious with brews and a live band?

I think it will be a pretty usual kind of wedding. That's what a girl has always wished for, the day to be a princess. I just follow, because I don't mind making her happy.

What do her parents think?

Her mother pretty much understands the humor. When we talk about the older generation, I think things are a lot different. My parents don't mind the stuff that I'm doing. Actually, we were playing a gig pretty close to where they live and they were upset with me that I didn't tell them because they wanted to see the show!

So not only is Poul friendly, he's getting married! I became discouraged that the interview was not covering any profound topics, but we continued...

When will you record the next CD?

Not many plans for that right now, because we don't have any new songs. Both Jacob [Hansen, guitar] and I have a number of guitar riffs, but we haven't really had time to structure them because we've been on this long tour in support of Illdisposed. And before that we had to find replacements for our singer Scott and bassist Steffan. Steffan had a daughter, so we got Morten Reiberg, former guitarist of the black metal band Withering Surface. Scott went to England to study English, so we got Frozen Sun vocalist Kenny. He's got a wider range and I really look forward to going into the studio with him because he can do a lot more than Scott.



Say something brutal! Something brutal?

I was expecting a brutal interview here, and it's not been brutal, but calm and friendly. I'm looking to be brutalized!

Ha! I guess you're talking to the wrong guy, because I ain't all that brutal! Except when I get on stage.

What's an Infernal Torment show like? You know, I never saw it...

I heard they were pretty good... I was always somewhere else, pulling my hair out of someone's bass guitar because it was stuck.

You guys play on small stages?

Being from Denmark, there aren't that many large cities. We play mostly small club stages, so we can't expect to see more than 200 hundred people, and when you've got five guys running around, that's too little space, man!

So have you guys played any festivals, like Dynamo [a huge annual festival in Holland]?

No. We would love to, but how the fuck do you get there? I guess you have to know someone who knows someone, or just know Satan himself.

What does Satan have to do with playing that festival?

Maybe he could help out! He's got connections, I think.

That's what you should do, take up a new image. Go to Norway and get an education on the ways of blackness.

What, and burn down some old wooden churches?

Have you guys considered wearing any spikes? No, not at all.

Well there's your problem right there! (we laugh stupidly)

I guess you've got a point. We're just not dangerous enough!

What time is it where you are? Half past six in the evening.

Got any evil plans?

My plan for tonight is to lift some weights, eat some raw eggs, and I guess drink half a bottle of whisky and watch TV or rehearse.

You won't go out to the pub?

It's too cold this time of year, so maybe I'll just go riding my motorbike.

What's up with the raw eggs? How many do you eat?

Not too many at once, but you need to get some protein when you're a tiny little shit like me.

Well, maybe you'll be taller in the next life. Maybe.

Do you believe in reincarnation?

Not really. I think you just fuck up and then you're gone.

So you're taking advantage of this life by eating raw eggs and drinking whisky?

Yeah, and taking advantage of a virgin. No, wait, that's not legal!

No, that's evil! You just said something evil!

I've said something evil; maybe I'll make it someday!

GOOD DEMOS

I really hate demos. And whoever said that showing true underground support is by fostering a hundred mediocre death metal bands from the Midwest can take all the stacks of worthless tapes I've acquired and review them himself. I'm through, man! And if I can't stand these bands when I get their tapes for free, just think how of a reader feels when he pays five bucks for these pieces of garbage? Further, some musicians feel that demo reviewers giving honest opinions is hurtful to the sacred cause of their bands, and therefore wrong. I actually received a phone call from a distressed band member, and though the ensuing conversation was quite funny, it's territory I wish to avoid in the future. The last thing I need is some drunken drummer knocking me on my ass because I said what I felt. Perhaps I need some liberal sensitivity training to help me understand that telling all bands they are good is necessary because it boosts their self-esteem.

Because there *are* some exciting unsigned bands out there, I have not scrapped the entire demo section. The following bands are good, some on the level of signed artists, others showing great potential. Remember that this is only what I believe. Just because I print 7,500 magazines doesn't automatically make what I say more credible than another zine writer's opinion. So quit yer whining!

CARDIOVASCULAR SUB-HYPOTHERMIA

Pulmonary Descent – 1998

Preface: I hate industrial! With that said, I love **Cardiovascular Sub-Hypothermia**! What has always killed industrial metal for me is that the incessant samples and drill clanking that fill the songs always seem to drag the bands down. With CSH, the electronic additions are forced to *keep up* with the pounding rhythms and wide array of aggressive shouts. I'll even say that this is brutal, plenty more so than a slew of death metal demos I've heard this year. The brooding, hardcore metal guitars are wicked in their driving intensity and relentlessness, kicking out some grating riffs. Hints of **Circle of Dust** and **Meat Hook Seed** interestingly affect this American trio, bringing hints of Britain and even Sweden into the mix. I will probably continue to despise industrial metal, but if bands like CSH keep putting soul over sample on their priority lists, I just may eat my words.

Write for price to:
1813 Reatta Lane
Fernandina Beach, FL 32034

FLESHTIZED

Demo 12/97

These boys must have lost a bet, because not even the cheesiest death metal band would impose this name upon itself. Further, the music they play is more like mechanized old **Megadeth** with dirty **DRI** vocals than anything else, though this is hardly a great description of their style. **Fleshtized** isn't a top-notch band yet, but their songs are aggressive and interesting enough to warrant repeat listens. Curious parties who haven't seen any other demos of interest here might want to get in touch. I think that time will prove advantageous to the Fleshtized cause, as well as a commitment to keeping the name no matter how many people pressure them to change it. I can't think of a more ridiculous name without using about 15 syllables. 'Fleshtized', what a great word!

Write for price to:
P.O. Box 7011
Huntsville, AL 35807

FORTY DAYS LONGING

Demo '98

At last the European metal craze hits American shores (notice how it took a few years for black metal to penetrate through to California), and **Forty Days Longing** embraces the electric violin as its differentiating factor. I may be wrong in drawing this Euro-relation, because Suvo the violinist sounds a lot like he played for **Seraph**, an ill-fated thrash project of the middle '90s. Anyway, FDL is a very young group with lots of potential. The production is rough and the guitars are thin, but "Sympathetic Variance" and "Holding Back Tears" shine with memorable rhythms, appealing growls and rasps, and the strong lead violin lines. Also important is the smooth pace each song follows, not blazing but never lethargic. Forty Days Longing has great potential to forge its own style!

Write for price to:
Greg Schwan
7011 Mathew St.
Greenbelt, MD 20770
daysandcounting@hotmail.com

INTENSE HAMMER RAGE

Massive Sphinkta Release – 1997

Sick Aussie death/grind. That says it all for **Intense Hammer Rage**. These koala killers have been bruising for five years now, and *Massive Sphinkta Release* is the product of intense writing and countless live performances. On this tape you get crazy sound clips, pit-inducing riffs, wretched vocal pukes, and the crazy drumming characteristic to grind. The raw production reduces the ferocity at times, so look for the next IHR release to be top notch all around.

$5 Australia / $6 world to:
Van Diemen Management
P.O. Box 319
Burnie Tasmania, Australia 7320

LATHEBRA

Angels' Twilight Odes – 1998

Here's an aspiring atmospheric black metal band from Italy. There are some really long songs on the tape, with many minutes of ambient acoustics or keys creating a floating aura. The guitar riffs take a large folk influence and are easy listening. Besides the occasional female singing, most of the vocals are male rasps or chants. **Lathebra** is a band I'm counting on for improvement in the future, for this demo is laying some adventurous groundwork without a lot of past experience. So this band is good, but not as important to its respective genre as say, **Cardiovascular Sub-Hypothermia**.

$6 everywhere to:
Palumbo Francesco
Via San Clemente 106
I-84015 Nocera Superiore (SA), Italy

PROFANITY

Shadows to Fall – 1998

Okay, here's one for all you brutality freaks. Germany's **Profanity** plays intense death metal inspired by **Cannibal Corpse** and country mates **Obscenity**. What I like best on this full-length release is the chunky, speedy riffing of vocalist/guitarist Tom – it really brings out the German metal quality, as do bass player Daniel's tight jeans. This trio obviously needs to tighten things up if it realistically expects to get signed, but fans starving for death metal insanity might like Profanity and its bad self.

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SPINESHANK

Demo 1/98

It's weird that a band like this would appeal to me so much. This Californian quartet plays more accessible '90s metal, taking influences from **Korn**, **Sepultura**, and **Tool**, but I have always liked Korn, and the three songs featured on this demo are catchy with memorable lyrics that don't rip off any band too much. Some *Demanufacture*-era **Fear Factory** vocals add to the addictive flavor that is **SpineShank**, and I can only hope that this group sustains its power more effectively from one release to the next than the disappointing **Coal Chamber**. They're some real pussies...

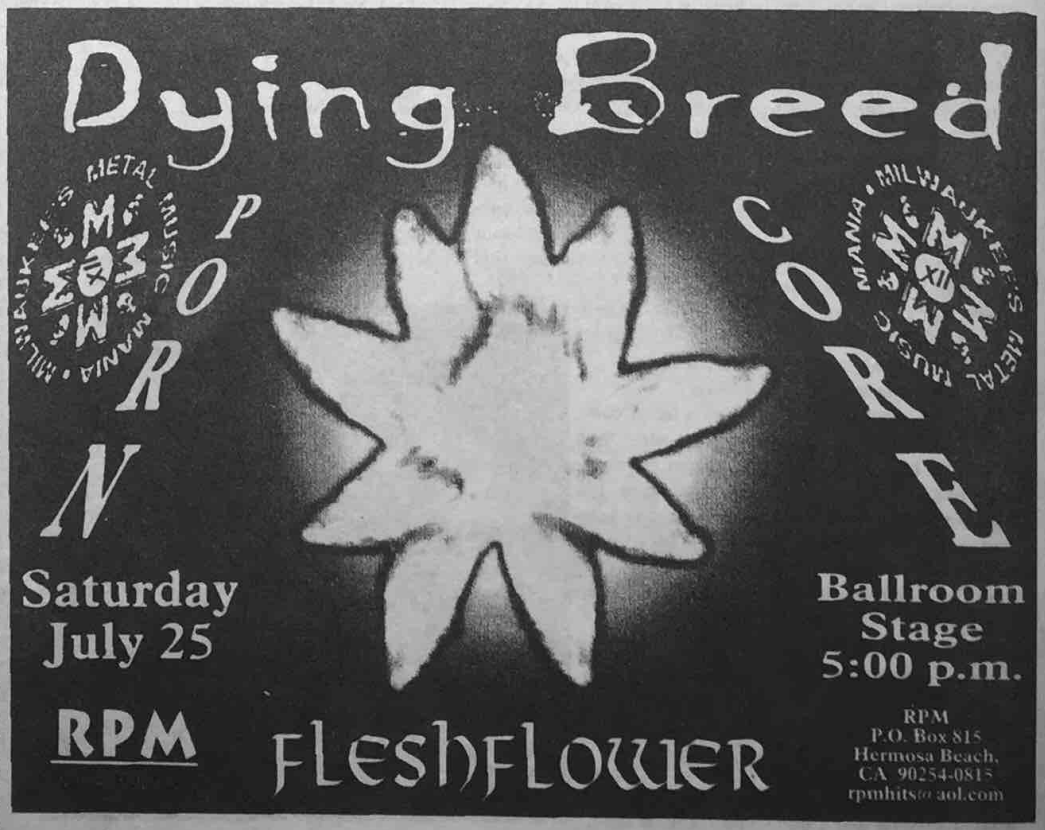
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UNJUST

Promo '97

For a death metal man, I was blown away by **Machine Head**'s *Burn My Eyes*. The band's sophomore release, *The More Things Change*, was totally lame and as lethargic as everything else Roadrunner has put out over the past few years. So you'll understand how happy I was when the **Unjust** CD came my way – it's got hard-hitting riffs, soulful wails, and a great production to ensure repeat listens. I bang my head, sing along, and leap around like a fool as the quick five songs emit from my abused speakers, leaving me sweaty and felling silly. I don't know what I will do when these guys release a full-length album and I can't think of enough derogatory names to call someone who does not buy this demo.

$5 US / $7 world to:
Eric Wong
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You'd Better Czech Yo'self!

KRABATHOR

Interview with Christopher

Readers of this magazine know that I'm not much of a brutal death metal fan anymore. Bands like Pyrexia, Cryptopsy, and Infernal Torment surely strike my fancy, but for the most part, I shy away from the whole Mortician-Illinoize-Deeds of Flesh thing. Therefore you may be surprised to see the Czech trio Krabathor featured here, considering the band's consistently brutal nature and distance from all things melodic. But my respect for Krabathor, both personally and musically, stems from their struggle for freedom in pre-republic Czechoslovakia to their infiltration of a saturated metal scene from such an isolated locale. This group's rise to the top has been anything but orthodox...

On January 1, 1993, Czechoslovakia peacefully divided into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Communism had gripped the country since 1948 until the sweeping governmental changes throughout Eastern Europe in 1989 rendered Czechoslovakia free. Just as it had been in the Soviet Union and Romania, communism left its citizens a restricted people. The efforts over the past nine years to counter communism's negative effects have been as difficult as they are rewarding, as 40 years of oppression are hard to easily forget.

Guitarist/vocalist Christopher is Krabathor's main man. His passion to play metal spurred him to start the band back in 1984, five years before the first signs of freedom. A few demos appeared over the next few years, but it took until 1992 for a full-length album to hit the streets. Christopher explains the atmosphere during these early years.

"During the communistic totality it was hard for brutal bands because they didn't have much of a chance to play or release CDs. This kind of music was a little bit forbidden because the government felt it was dangerous. Every suppressed band had a dream of releasing something. We were controlled for more than 40 years and of course when everything fell down it was great because we finally had freedom. As a band it was good because we could play everywhere we liked, and now have released a lot of CDs and played in many countries."

Furthermore, Christopher feels that it is best to move beyond the past and look ahead. "I guess that everything is better now, but I don't like to talk so much about life in the past – something was forbidden and we didn't have possibility to change it. We can't to do anything for it now because it wasn't our mistake. Freedom is freedom and we are happy!"

Another obstacle Christopher and his comrades – drummer Skull and bassist Bruno – had to overcome to bring the world its pummeling attack is one Poland's Vader surely can relate to. This was to propel your band from infinite obscurity into the laps of fans who normally turned to the likes of Sweden, America, and Germany for their metal cravings. With the help of the German label Morbid Records, Krabathor did just that.

"Maybe we have had to work harder than bands from America or Sweden," Christopher ponders. "Even so, we like to do everything for our cause and life within the band. Of course Morbid Records has helped us greatly, because with this label we made the step up into more of the underground world. But we aren't sleeping now; we are still working so much and the label's help only makes everything better."

Out for 1998 is Krabathor's fourth album, *Orthodox*. It showcases some of death metal's finest riffing and most pummeling skin pounding. Key to the album's success is the razor-sharp production that was actually handled by the band itself.

"We don't know if another producer can capture the same meaning of our music," Christopher explains. "On the other side, there are a lot of good producers who have done good work for death metal bands, so maybe some time we'll try it."

Comparisons to the Krabathor sound can be drawn to *Diabolical Summoning*-era Sinister, demo-era Deeds of Flesh, and some latter day Deicide. Of course, a sense of individuality emits from the speakers while *Orthodox* is blasting, and one cannot deny Christopher's conviction on his volcanic roars.

"You know," he proclaims, "death metal has some frontiers you have to respect. There are places where some bands can be similar. We don't want to look like imitators – we want everything to come from us, to take inspiration from ourselves – but sometimes you can't control everything and you certainly can't listen to everything to make sure you sound different from every other band."

Metal aficionados worldwide have found this hot trio unique enough for their tastes, with the last album, *Lies*, selling over 15,000 copies worldwide and *Orthodox* expected to do just as well. Many notable acts have found Krabathor worthy of sharing a stage, and by the time you read this, the band will have just completed a European tour with Cannibal Corpse. This is by far the band's crowning achievement, and it surely has propelled the Krabathor name to a hardly imaginable level of respect a few years ago. Christopher, Skull, and Bruno have risen from the ashes of communist oppression to the door of an underground breakthrough via hard work, a unified vision, and little bit of luck. All hail these purveyors of pure old school death metal!



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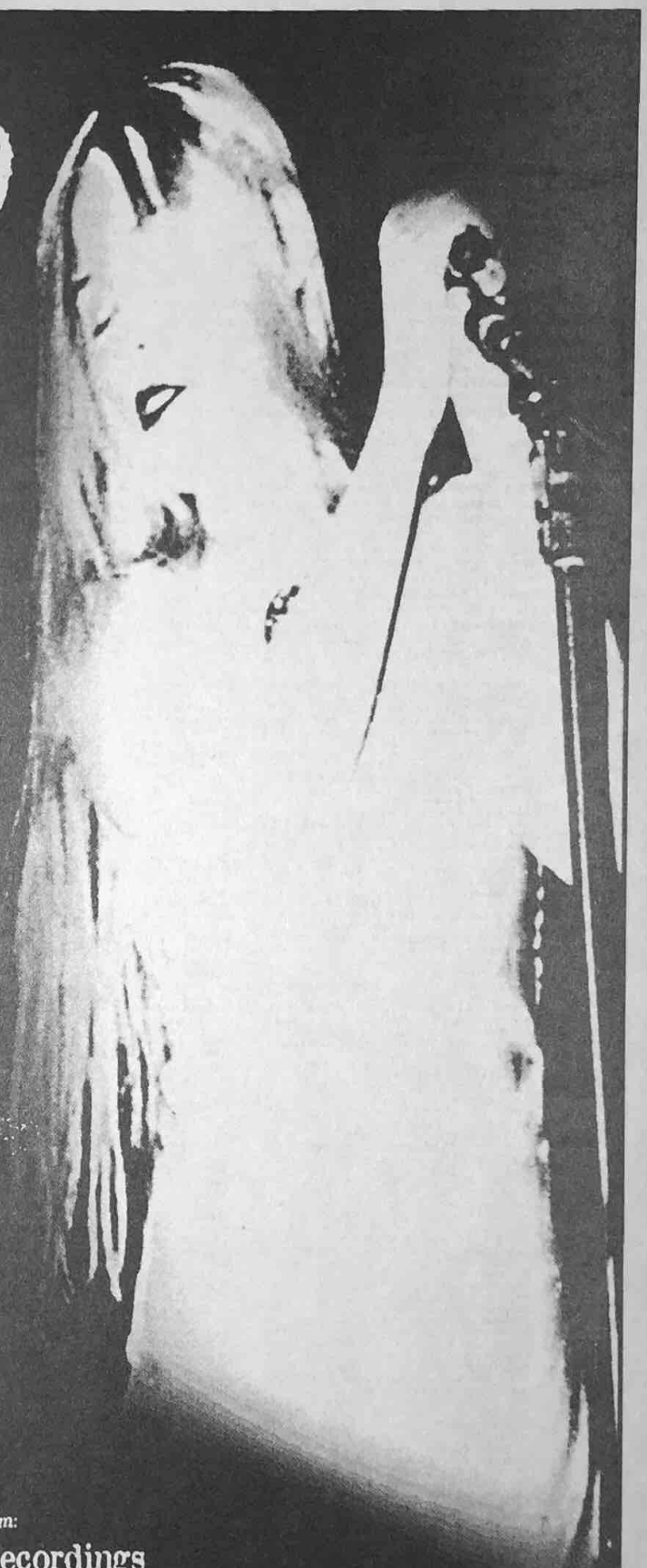


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EXHUMATION - SEAS OF ETERNAL SILENCE (CD $12)
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GODSEND - AS THE SHADOWS FALL (CD $12)
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GROPE - DESERT STORM (CD $12)
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LAKE OF TEARS - A CRIMSON COSMOS (CD $12)
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LEGENDA - AUTUMNAL (CD $12)
LETHAL - YOUR FAVORITE GOD EP +1 (CD $11)
LETHAL - POISON SEED (CD $11)
LEVIATHAN - SCORING THE CHAPTERS (CD $12)
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LIMBONIC ART - IN ABHORRENCE... (CD $12)
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MEMENTO MORI - SONG FOR APOCALYPSE(CD $12)
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MIDVINTER-SIGHT OF APOCALYPSE DRAGON (CD $12)
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NECROPHAGIA - SEASON OF THE DEAD (CD $11)
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NEPTUNE TOWERS-TRANSMISSIONS...ALGOL(CD $12)
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NORDIC METAL - EURONYMOUS TRIBUTE (CD $11)
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PSYCHOTIC WALTZ - MOSQUITO (CD $11)
PSYCHOTIC WALTZ - BLEEDING (CD $11; PICLP $15)
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RAGE - THE MISSING LINK (CD $12)
RAGE - TEN YEARS OF RAGE (CD $12)
REVELATION - YET SO FAR (CD $12)
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RUNNING WILD - DEATH OR GLORY +2 TRX (CD $12)
RUNNING WILD - MASQUERADE (CD $12)
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SABBAT (U.K.) - DREAMWEAVER (CD $12)
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SACRILEGE - THE FIFTH SEASON (CD $12)
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V/A - BEAUTY IN DARKNESS VOL. 1 (CD $11)
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V/A - BLACKEND VOL. 2 (2CD $12)
V/A - GODS OF DARKNESS [BLACK METAL] (CD $11)
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